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**John Prebble. The Highland Clearances. London. Secker & Warburg. 1963. 35 shillings.**

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## REVIEWS

Herein is the way to a richer understanding of the poem—by means of a thorough analysis of its tragic rhythm, going beyond the Euripidean model even, and taking into account the enaction of tragic rituals which call on the deepest levels of our response to mimesis. The *prologue* strikes the right portentous note, from the reference to hail showers in April, with its hint of cosmological discord, to the dramatic irony of the welcome of the priest of Venus to a daughter who has sinned against Venus: "Thow art full deir ane gest" (l.105). The *agon* of Cresseid's angry crying out on the gods follows. The *climax* is provided by the *parliament* of the gods, while the *peripety* is to be found in the sentence passed on Cresseid by Saturn and Cynthia, and the *recognition* comes when Cresseid looks in the glass after her dream, and again when Calchas is admitted to her presence. The *pathos* or *sparagmos* of Cresseid's suffering among the leper-folk runs its course until her encounter with Troilus. This gives rise to the *epiphany*, when Cresseid perceives what she really is, and offers herself as "mirrour" and "exempill" to those who will survive her, sharing with them the knowledge she has gained at such terrible cost. As *nemesis* overtakes *hybris*, Cresseid appears to us as a tragic protagonist, incorporating elements of the *alazon* and the *pharmakos*, the self-deceiver who becomes a scapegoat and promotes in onlookers the authentic *purgation* of pity and fear. [For a commentary on the terms used in this discussion, see Francis Ferguson, *The Idea of a Theatre* (1949), and Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957).]

Though Mr. Elliott might not sanction such an interpretation, he is certainly responsible for making us think again about Henryson by providing so admirable a text. The poet is indeed fortunate in his editor; both are true sons of Mercurius, who most assuredly can "in brief sermone ane pregnant sentence wryte."

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John Prebble. *The Highland Clearances*. London. Secker & Warburg. 1963. 35 shillings.

In this moving account of the diaspora of the clansmen of the North and of the Isles, Mr. Prebble has closed, it would appear, his tragic chronicles of the Scottish Highlands. In his *Culloden*, he recounted the sacrifices made in '45 by the clansmen at the summons of their chiefs; in *The Highland Clearances*, he has laid bare the shameful and ironic and tragic

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consequences, not only of Lowland and English policy, but of the chieftains', the clan-fathers', betrayal of their own loyal children. For tragic any chronicle of the "clearances" must be, in the strictest classical and Aristotelian sense: one of deeds committed callously or ignorantly, out of greed or blind pride, by fathers upon children, upon those who were, or should have been, "near or dear" to them. Whatever inaccuracies other historians may find in Mr. Prebble's relation, whatever callous responses may be made by latter-day Malthusians or defenders of utilitarian "improvements" (*vide*, e.g., Thomas Crawford, *Burns*, pp. 160-164), no humane reader and certainly no true son of the North or of the Isles can gainsay that the primal sanctities, the archetypal ties of chieftain and clan-children, were cruelly and repeatedly violated during the long agony of the century of the brutally but rightly named "clearances." With restrained yet just wrath and in the saddest cadences, Mr. Prebble tells us of the time when men and women and children bearing the proud ancestral names were burned out like vermin or bracken from lands their chiefs and lairds had set apart for sheep and deer, and then driven perforce to death or exile upon or beyond the Atlantic roar. During the closing decades of this same century (1762-1856), continentals and Irishmen fled famine and foreign oppressors; their stories are pitiful enough; but at least they had not been betrayed and expelled by their own race and blood, nor do their ancestral lands remain largely unpeopled today by kinsmen of their names.

This, almost the latest of Scotland's tragic centuries, has found then in Mr. Prebble its Holinshed, one indeed more faithful to history and more eloquent than the chroniclers who inspired *Macbeth* and *Henry VI*. Whether some new Demodocus or Barbour will in time to come put in moving numbers these "old, unhappy, [not too] far-off things," we cannot know. The lyric *planctus* of the *Canadian Boat Song* is destined, it may be, not to be matched—surely it is not to be surpassed—in the grander genres.

Less proleptic questions must concern sons of Scotland in our generation. Issues of retribution and reparation still confront us; their resolution Mr. Prebble has not attempted, nor is this the time and place to weigh such grave matters. Yet the students of Scottish literature composed since 1745 may yet inquire with what fidelity to the truth, with what insight and compassion, with what sureness of dramatic and ethical judgment, have the "burnings of the North and the Isles" been reflected in latter-day Scottish poetry and fiction and drama. A Samuel Maclean can make a proud answer for the bards of the Gael. Have the bards of the Gall shown a like insight and compassion or even awareness? Mr.

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Prebble has pointed in his account of the crucial and classical instance of Glengarry, Alistair Ranaldson, chief of Clan Macdonell, to the varying degrees of understanding and ignorance manifested by Burns and by Scott. Detailed and all-inclusive accounts of the treatment of the "burnings" in Scottish literature, whether Gaelic or non-Gaelic, remain still to be written. Mr. Prebble is perhaps himself best qualified to describe the relevant but embarrassingly limited non-Gaelic literature. Nor, should he undertake such an account, need he be too sober and detached and passionless: the grave and ironic and shameful truths of this history can never be grasped by Malthusian or Benthamite theorist dead to human ties or by some scribbling gillie of a late twentieth century heir to Glengarry or Sutherland.

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*The Scottish National Dictionary. Designed partly on regional lines and partly on historical principles, and containing all the Scottish words known to be in use or to have been in use since c. 1700.* Edited by William Grant, M.A., LL.D. (1929-46) and David D. Murison, M.A., B.A. (1946-). Edinburgh. The Scottish National Dictionary Association Ltd.

The *Scottish National Dictionary* goes back to a suggestion of Sir William A. Craigie, made as long ago as 1907, and is the modern counterpart to Craigie's *Dictionary of the Older Scottish Tongue*. Publication started in 1929 at King's College, Aberdeen, but *SND* has in the meantime moved to Edinburgh, where it is now under the auspices of the School of Scottish Studies of Edinburgh University.

For *SND*, a total length of 10 volumes is envisaged. The earlier volumes had four fascicules of 80 pages each, but in recent years the length has grown and the latest half dozen parts had 128 pp., making volumes of 512 pp. The pre-war subscription price was £20, payable in four yearly instalments; some ten years ago the price was raised to £30, and more recently to £40. But even so, *SND* may be the best bargain to be had anywhere on the book market: a volume of 512 pp. in Royal 4<sup>o</sup> for £4, or roughly \$11! This unbelievable price can only be maintained by substantial donations, especially from the Carnegie Trust for the Uni-