

1980

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*Douglas Gifford*

## Scottish Fiction 1978



In this year appeared seven novels worthy of serious critical attention as well as three volumes of short stories. Two modern Scottish novels of importance were reissued (one of which, J. F. Hendry's *Ferniebrae*, first published by William McLellan in 1947, seems to me to be a neglected masterpiece), and, though not strictly falling within the remit of this annual article, note should be taken here of Francis Hart's important and ambitious study of Scottish fiction from the beginning to the present in *The Scottish Novel*. There also appeared the usual crop of historical, romantic and thriller fiction.

Many Scottish writers seem to me to fail in receiving their due tribute from what must be admitted is a disinterested and lethargic Scottish public. Our schools and universities, BBC and Arts Council must take some blame in their lack of sustained attention and analysis of the work of twentieth-century fiction writers like Eric Linklater, Naomi Mitchison, Fred Urquhart--and especially, it seems to me, the novelist whose work, running as it does from 1950 to the present, spans the gulf between the novelists of the "Scottish Renaissance" and the new wave of sixties' novelists like Sharp, Crichton Smith, Mackay Brown, McIlvanney. In the relatively fruitless fifties the fiction of Robin Jenkins was outstanding, and it has

continued to be outstanding in its deep moral seriousness, traditional craftsmanship, and sustained quality. From *So Gaily Sings the Lark* (1950) to his latest, *A Would-be Saint*, there have been twenty volumes of fiction. His name and work should be better known and taught in the country he describes and anatomises so fully and compassionately. *A Would-be Saint* takes a frequent Jenkins theme, that of idealistic innocence exposed to reductive cynicism, and carries it further than he's gone so far. Now, instead of qualifying fairly obviously the apparent goodness of his protagonist, as he did with the part-time idealists of say, *The Changeling* or *The Holy Tree*, Jenkins presents the possibility of complete goodness in Gavin Hamilton, who as a child of eight in 1918 "took for granted that all the people in the world existed for his delight." He's clever at school, a brilliant footballer--not just a swot--is attractive to women; he accepts the death of father and mother with dignity and maturity; he helps prostitutes, strangers, friends without distinction--and yet can join in the company of his mates after a football match, though he doesn't laugh as loudly at their dirty jokes. He is trying to be a genuine Christian and eventually the theme develops to the point that he is a latter-day Christ, and the novel shows what complex responses such an appearance would elicit from our society without ducking the difficulties involved. There is no climb-down of Jenkins's part from the suggestion that Gavin may indeed be a superior moral agent; and the effect on us of his virtuous life is akin to that worked by Crichton Smith in his short story "The Hermit." There is a difference of course, in that we never in Smith's story saw into the mind of the hermit, whereas we see fully into Gavin's. But our feeling for both protagonists as scapegoats, as sacrificial figures taking on the deficiencies of the Fallen about them is similar. But the study of Gavin goes further than Smith's study of his hermit. As Gavin goes deeper and deeper into his self-inflicted loneliness, finally staying on as a forester in a deserted cottage after his fellow conscientious objectors have gone home after the war, we are left with ambivalence at the end. Is he Christ, suffering the likely lot of Christ in a modern world, contempt and neglect and disinterest, or is he a prig, and a curious masochist? Has the war of 1914-18, the loss of parents, created a loneliness which has, like Hogg's Justified Sinner's, created its own consolation through spiritual pride and false logic? The end, Gavin's non-commitment of expected and symbolic suicide, is non-conclusive, but artistically successful. Jenkins has set out a stark moral parable; and if at times his style seems *too* inflexible, *too* like Hardy, it is still strangely in keeping with its *too* inflexible protagonist.

No other modern Scottish writer with the possible exception of Crichton Smith, has the necessary fundamentalism--so often confused with naivete--to ask and explore such elemental topics. I look forward to Jenkins's announced next novel from Canongate Press--*Fergus Lamont*--and to the day he receives his rightful evaluation.

Ian Crichton Smith's new novel, *An End to Autumn*, left me slightly disappointed. Having described him as one of our most enquiring of moral novelists, this story of a barren marriage of two teachers in what seems to be Oban, trapped in their bourgeois land of colour supplement character and anti-septic cleanliness, seems too facile, too mechanical in its moral working out. Tom and Vera Mallow are finding their teaching less satisfactory than they used to, and Smith too heavily underweaves a symbolic message based on Eliot's *Waste-land* to tell us why. They so obviously are the hollow people needing regeneration, that Smith makes the mistake of Telling instead of Showing, even down to the Firedance return to primitive intuitions and feelings, when, in a heather fire towards the end Vera breaks through her artificial self-restriction to find herself and her needed pregnancy. The moral is too heavy; deep moral seriousness has for Smith here become a naive instruction to the effect that one's first obligations are to self and future self, while the ties of parents or connections with friends are finally peripheral. The recurrent Smith figure of Aged Bonding Parent takes herself off with dignity, and the intruding outsiders, lesbian teacher and Irish earth-mother stairlady, become redundant. It's all too histrionic and contrived, with that carelessness of expression involving intrusive, short qualifying clauses which characterised *The Village* in 1976.

Elspeth Davie's *Climbers on a Stair* has a certain similarity. Indeed it's true of Jenkins, Smith and Davie that there's a curious flatness in their handling of character which I've concluded is intentional. It's part of their way of seeing the world, a sort of reducing to elements, or simplification in order to make the end picture more stark and morally clear. Their landscapes or interiors are uncluttered, and be they a mining village in Lanarkshire or Oban, or, as here, Edinburgh, the place is not exploited for its own inner feel so much as used as a rather grey but necessary background. Davie's Edinburgh tenement (which provided the stair) isn't bursting with local patois or vivid contrasts of class life; all her characters speak polite Edinburgh English, are middleclass, New Town. But once one catches the quiet rhythm of the story her almost surreal hold on us is assured. Her vivacious Miss Winterfield, aging piano teacher who insists on excellence,

in living as well as playing; her town planner, who avoids talking about his job since he knows everyone hates what town planners are doing to Edinburgh; her Clara Kirk, obsessed with travel books but fearing to travel since her husband's death--these are gentle, slightly unreal drawings. But why should Elspeth Davie's reality be anyone else's but her own? The curious dissected tenement takes on the reality of, say, Muriel Spark's imagined worlds. There is no hint of Spark's grotesquerie or supernatural, but there is the sense of being not quite in this world that *we* know, so much as Davie's own. Where she does differ completely from Spark, however, is in that quality she shares with Jenkins and Smith, which I can best describe as a love of some kind of grace, some kind of redeeming unlooked-for moment of forgiveness or communion between otherwise separate people. Her tenement people do achieve this; Miss Winterfield--her name expressing her stage of life but not her function--gives standards and love of life to all about her. Dying Thomas Baird weaves a message of love into his sun-tapestry. The Jewish Caretaker who's lost his family in concentration camps helps release Clara Kirk from her prison. It's all done with love and quiet skill; the attitude may seem modest but the achievement, along with her other two novels and two books of short stories, is that of one of Scotland's best novelists.

In 1967 Angus Wolfe Murray wrote *The End of Something Nice*, a powerful, understated tale of brother-sister love and separation. It had a unique flavour in its evocation of Scottish aristocratic family and home; rhododendrons and rain, smells of hillsides, feelings of separation and loneliness when the children lost their small country world. Murray has now written his second novel, *Resurrection Shuffle*. It's a very different scene. His protagonist is a rock-musician on the road in the U.S.A., and his experiences are given to us in a stream of consciousness which moves from present love-affair, trouble with police and organisers and fellow-musicians to his childhood in Scotland, in a home obviously related to that of the first novel. It's not just a gimmicky choice of topic, but justified in the effect it achieves of juxtaposing the two worlds which couldn't be further apart, so that the contrasts arouse increased shock, anger, sympathy. As apology for the world of modern pop, the articulate thoughts of his central figure are almost too successful. He seems too gentle, caring, reflective, but his reflection of the harsh brutality of his music world, of groupies and noise and fragmented time and place are excellent, as is the constant opposite evocation of repressive family and hated/wished-for home. It's reminiscent of James Kennaway in *Silence*, as is the author, Murray's, sense

of pain and fear for humanity--a sense that comes over so strongly that one wonders if Murray can objectify the disillusionment he feels sufficiently to make it Art. But that is a fear for the future; this was an impressive novel, if sometimes too heavy in its existential musings.

Equally impressive, and with a finer control of tone and style, was Alan Massie's first novel, *Change and Decay in All Around I see*. This belongs outwith any Scottish tradition that I know, unless Massie's sense of the grotesque counts as such. He admits his debt to Waugh and Powell; his world is modern London, with its trendy vicars and homosexuals, would-be novelists, ineffectual and on-the-make lawyers, bright parties and noisy weddings where everyone has slept with everyone else. But far from being glib or superficial about this world, Massie brings what may be a Scottish sense of moral assessment to bear, and steadily implies, with subtlety and reticence, what's fickle, empty, doomed in modern Britain. Haunting the book is the recurrent, almost subliminally presented, image of a hopeless boy and girl standing beside the sea, who may drown themselves; and the similarly recurrent paranoid agent of destruction, like Conrad's Professor of *The Secret Agent*, the horrific, dark destroyer of crazy morality, Horridge. Seriousness is thus there, but never heavily stressed, always revealing itself obliquely, or through the speeches of wedding guests (the wedding scenes at the end are ridiculously funny and then horrifically explicit about the evils of modern English society). Behind all this there is a kind of a story, as aimless on-the-dole Atwater, lazy, amoral, slightly likeable, ginger-mans his way through aimless events to an aimless marriage, aimlessly failing to understand what seem to be aimless K.G.B. and terrorist plots going on in the background. Aimlessness is Massie's point. He achieves his feeling well, setting a framework in which his hopeless children or his weeping figures stand out all the more clearly. If the book has faults they are faults of over-sophistication, over-contrivance. These are very much the faults of an interesting parody/pastiche of Hogg's *The Justified Sinner*, by John Herdman, called *Pagan's Pilgrimage*. This is really a long short story (eighty pages), and Herdman fails, I feel, because he tries too hard to be clever simultaneously at two opposing points. On one hand it's Hogg-based, and its protagonist is a selfish son of a minister who pursues his selfish ends sneering and cheating as he goes. At this level Herdman pulls off some fine comic effects, but his mastery of Hogg's tone is too often spoiled by a tendency towards almost Goon-show humour, such as the endless drawing out of the slightly funny image of the wrinkle-nosed laundryman who terrified the boy, or the tedious more

than a page given to the endless explication of the joke about the toasted tongue sandwich. Neither joke--and there are many more--relates to the Hogg pastiche in any remote style or tone. And this is true of more than the jokes. The boy's father is at times held up as a laughable ranting Scots dialect-speaking minister; at other times he speaks with straightforward English. Sometimes, too, parody of other Scottish fiction comes in, as when the father torments the boy in the manner of Gourlay senior of *The House with The Green Shutters*. Herdman does not seem to know which style he wishes to follow, and the result is trivialisation of his theme on discordant themes. It transpires that it is eventually that of Herdman's previous short novel, *A Truth Lover*--and a very serious theme it is indeed, that of social redemption and the conquest of selfishness. The effect is as though Hogg's Sinner had made an eleventh-hour and totally unexpected repentance--cloying, confusing, and destructive of any unity the book might have aspired to. Herdman has tried to fuse his own vein of *Clapperton*-short-story humour with his *Truth Lover* seriousness, and the result is an interesting, sometimes very funny, failure.

Three volumes of short stories deserve appreciation. Fred Urquhart and Giles Gordon's selection of *Modern Scottish Short Stories*, the annual Scottish Arts Council/Collins collection, and Eona MacNicol's *The Jail Dancing*. The first is an outstanding collection, all the more creditable to the editors because they have gone out to look for their representative material in the small magazines, to the writers themselves where necessary. The result is a sample of the best of Scottish fiction of the last thirty years, accurately showing how the short story in Scotland is tied closely to the longer novel form, and how the practitioners tend to be the novelists "scaling down" their larger themes--indeed, three of the stories here, by J. F. Hendry, James Kennaway, and Edward Gaitens, were added to and developed into the novels *Ferniebrae*, *Tunes of Glory*, and *The Dance of the Apprentices*, respectively. Here are Neil Gunn, Muriel Spark, George Friel, Naomi Mitchison, Hendry, Linklater, Wolfe Murray, Eona MacNicol, Gaitens, Mackay Brown, Hamilton Finlay, Allan Ford, Fred Urquhart and Giles Gordon, Elspeth Davie, Robin Jenkins, Alan Spence, Iain Crichton Smith, Alan Massie, and many others--and anyone who has made a study of Scottish fiction will realise how comprehensive and illustrative a range that is, combining historical awareness with an eye for the most recent and experimental work as in Alan Jackson's prose-poem comic-sad two-page piece, "The Conspiracy of Arthur." The change of moods and types is frequent and richly contrasting, running from Gordon's, Spark's, and Douglas Dunn's surrealism and speculative fantasies to the

traditional supernatural of Gunn, Mitchison, and MacNicol. Social realism and Scottish comment are strongly represented, rightly so; Ford, Gaitens, Urquhart draw the Scottish scene with compassion and humour in their pictures of prisoners of war reuniting years later, a Glasgow working-class boy about to go to work, and an old buddy's disintegration, respectively. Spence, Crichton Smith and Mackay Brown capture some of the best of their deceptively simple magic in their stories.

This is the best volume of Scottish short stories for years, which unfortunately can't be said for the 1978 *Scottish Short Stories* volume. To be fair, it's an annual volume where the previous book draws on forty years; but even that being said, I repeat my frequent complaint--that this annual collection doesn't *work* hard enough at being representative. It is all very well to argue that the stories are entries to a competitive situation and that if writers don't send stories or come up to the mark, they don't get in--but a volume calling itself by this ambitious title should try to get material from writers who are producing the best of Scottish short fiction. Iain Crichton Smith has *never* been in the volume, which shocks me greatly considering that he has produced several fine books of short stories in the last few years, of which *The Black and the Red* must surely count as one of the finest volumes of short stories written anywhere recently. Mackay Brown isn't in; Fred Urquhart isn't; and writers who would surely respond to invitation include McIlvanney, MacNicol, Ian Niall, Ford, Davie, Jenkins, and many others. I know that some at least would respond, as they did when I edited the first volume in 1973. Let me, however, not be unfair to the new talent which is shown here: Graham Petrie, Campbell Black, Peter Chaloner are fairly recent voices (Black has written two excellent novels) using the bizarre or surreal mode to satirise modern life. Robert Crampsey and Una Flett and Lorn MacIntyre develop steadily in their art, especially MacIntyre, whose Invernevis stories get surer in their search for that elegiac and satiric tone with which to present the Faulknerian decay of the West Highlands. It is a fine, entertaining volume, but unrepresentative. (As footnote, I record my pleasure in reading a volume of short stories to be published in 1979 by one of the contributors here, James Shaw Grant; his "Mother and Daughter" is a strong, beautiful tale of deep Hebridean jealousy, and in the volume-to-come, *Their Children Will See*, he develops his study of his beloved Hebrides into a haunting series of tales from a way of life of dignity, passion, and roots which are soon to vanish.) And to finish my survey of short stories for the year, Eona MacNicol's *The Jail Dancing* tells old and new stories centered on Inverness, frequently with great charm and feeling for

period. Occasionally she nears the Kailyard, as in "Not the Righteous," where a minister of impossible goodness defends himself and a tinker girl against a charge of conceiving an illegitimate child. Sometimes the stories are just sketches of local worthies, but as a whole the volume is unpretentious and pleasing.

I come to the crop of historical romances, family sagas, and thrillers, with which I will be brief, since few of them to my mind aspire to serious creative heights. The best of the historical romances is *Macbeth*, by Nigel Tranter, and it is a thoroughly researched, solidly made and very worthwhile novel. Tranter's strength is in his ability to present true pictures of often misappreciated periods of history, recreating an authentic and convincing atmosphere of an older society. His weakness is characterisation, since rarely do his protagonists live outside the well-worn fictional stereotypes. The real achievement of *Macbeth*, apart from its reversal of the Shakespearian picture, is its sympathetic understanding of the vanished Celtic society which existed before Malcolm Canmore and his wife Margaret began to anglicise Celtic church and state. A massive achievement, unrivalled by any of the others, although Marie Muir takes on a task of comparable size in *The Mermaid Queen*, a vigorous, clear-cut picture of the dualism of place and values in the tragic life of Mary, Queen of Scots. But there's little of Tranter's historical fairness or sense of historical movement. Instead, the French dimension of her life is presented as magical, sympathetic, and liberal, and Scotland is all dour treachery and rough butchery. Knox and Bothwell are not interpreted, but used too obviously as scapegoats to Muir's desire to create the Europe she wants. And a different kind of historical irresponsibility underlies Agnes Short's sequel to her excellent *The Heritors* of 1977, *Clatter Vengeance*. In the first she gave a tough, convincing picture of Old Aberdeen in the days of the Bloodless Revolution. But this "sequel" (in the sense that it's the story of the same place continued into the period of the Hanoverian-Jacobite struggle) is softer, much more in Pamela Hill/Marion Lamont style, with her tomboy heroine Catherine having to learn that romance and handsome young followers of the Pretender are no substitute for the serious love and domestic sense of Hanoverian William. It's almost a novel for adolescents, with its simple morality and emphasis on Catherine's melodramatic excesses--though, to be fair, there is still Short's grip of historical time and place as background, and many of the lesser characters, masons, professors, merchants and wives, are excellently realised. This is the layer or subject matter for future exploration, not the romantic top-soil.

In *Doctors and Bodysnatchers*, Hector Bryson's evocation of the medical Edinburgh of infamous Dr. Knox's time is brisk and very funny indeed, well-researched and dry in tone as it avoids all temptations to medical sentimentality or melodrama. It has a serious theme, rather obscured in the picaresque adventures of young Hector Bryson, medical student, but there, nevertheless. The moral of the theme is that much fancy theorising is indulged in by too many pseudo-illustrious teachers and prominent physicians, and too little unpretentious practice of medicine. I liked this better than the same publishing house's other medical novels by Colin Douglas. Jan Webster's *Saturday City* is a straightforward, highly competent continuation of her story of the mining village Kilgour family, *Collier's Row*. *Saturday City* takes us into Glasgow in Keir Hardie days. Glasgow is seen at the height of its industrial and "cultural" achievement as well as in its dirt and poverty. Its strength is its period flavour; its weakness its typical stories of crossed lovers and well-worn emotional diagnosis. Similarly *Rhanna*, by Christine Marion Fraser, is occasionally delightful in its feel for its invented Hebridean Island, with indeed some real insight into the central characters of motherless child and introspective widower, but eventually the emotional situations are over-handled and dragged out to what is increasingly anticipated as melodramatic happy ending. Strictly this is family saga rather than historical, and takes us to the best of this group, *The Keelie*, by Hugh Munro, passing quickly on the way Pamela Hill's mainly non-Scottish love stories with potboiling historical surrounding action and setting, *Stranger's Forest* and *Daneclere*. Apart from a surprisingly acid and short account of Edinburgh posh schooling in the first, neither pretends to serious fiction or merits discussion here. Munro is a writer with serious intentions, going back about fifteen years to his *The Clydesiders*. He loves Glasgow, describes its people of the working classes well, but here, in his picture of Johnny Muir, often jobless, but of fierce independence and integrity, there seems to me to be *too* much idealised autobiography, as though Munro wished that it had all been like this--not, of course in terms of his description of the conditions of poverty, or the cynicism of councillors, but in Johnny's lonely progress to the point where he discovers that he's a natural writer. Too often Johnny's attitudes are cliches; towards the weaker sex he's rough but manly, he has a post-Burnsian instinctive love of "Poetry," his politics--which come over as Munro speaking propaganda--suspicious of "them" who have anything to do with social organisation, especially when they are Catholics. It's a brave attempt in the McIlvanney mould to explore a definite and valid kind of Glasgow

character, but it fails through wishful thinking.

My discussion of remaining general fiction can be very brief. The best of the rather shallow bunch remaining is Elisabeth Kyle's *The Stark Inheritance*. After twenty-odd novels her strengths and weaknesses are clear to see. Setting and atmosphere are invariably strong, here pictures of Edinburgh and Glasgow are as full as always of a convincing sense of period and elegiac flavour resembling Guy McCrone's. Her plot, of deranged heiress kept out of respectable sight in a home, but slipping out to embarrass and disturb, is welledhoed in the twilights and shadows which surround her bourgeois villas, with a genuine symbolic implication that polite Edinburgh/Glasgow still draw discreet manners as cover over the unpleasant and unwanted. But for all this the weakness is the expected predictability of the love interest, with good heiress Thea having to learn that English Nigel, smooth, handsome and insincere, is not to be preferred to homely, good-natured, ugly Glasgow Johnnie Campbell. It's much more praiseworthy, however, than Cliff Hanley's new novel, *Prissy*, a bitter disappointment. To see one of his undoubted comic talent descend to present the ludicrous and sentimentally coy story of how the Prime Minister's daughter is kidnapped and then precociously turns tables toughly and ruthlessly against her captors is sad. Hanley's indulgence in admiration for precocious children has made him come a cropper here, as does Antonia Fraser's total lack of realism in grappling with the Highlands in *The Wild Island*. This, in its sheer aristocratic escapism, is an offense to those who love and try to understand the Highlands. In its story of love between beautiful female investigator and long-legged silver-browed aristocrats who are involved in keeping the Stewart line alive to the point of having a Red Rose underground army and a shadow Stewart monarch, we depart from this planet to one even more bizarre than Brigadoon or Thrums. Scottish stereotypes are obviously alive and kicking--yet another A. J. Cronin volume of Tannochbrae stories, *Dr. Finlay of Tannochbrae*, appeared, bearing the mark of being written by a slightly jaundiced team of Tannochbrae ghostwriters. In the welter of tear-jerking episodes about crippled children, lost loves, and dedicated doctor Finlay, the only pleasing and recurrent note is that of Janet's nastiness, which emerges midway in the book when she finally gets her come-uppance as an interfering and sanctimonious besom. Beside the saccharin of this, Lilian Beckwith's sketches of her life in the West Highlands appears raw and realistic--which of course it is not, really. *Bruach Blend* is a familiar mixture, reasonably harmless in its gentle, if condescending and anachronistic, fun about local yokels, moody cows, problems of

living in such a remote and strange country. Far more surprising and delightful is Frank Renwick's Shetland gallimaufry, *Noost*. For pure fun this is my favourite fiction of this year. It's a rambling, mad, yet realistic sort of a story in which one-eyed seamen, troglodytes, women with no clothes, seal-hunters who get adopted by the seals, and assorted lunatic bird-watchers and bus drivers cavort in an oil-crazy island which nevertheless is still recognisably Shetland. It has no beginning, middle or end; it has a whiff--and more--of *Tristram Shandy* and the God of Muddle; and it is aptly and humorously illustrated by the versatile author.

Three of the remaining novels are either reissues of previous twentieth-century successes or much older books published for the first time now. The oldest of these "modern" Scottish novels is David Lindsay's *The Violet Apple*. Lindsay's most famous novel, *Voyage to Arcturus* (1920) became in the '60s something of a minor cult fantasy, with Colin Wilson, E. H. Visiak and J. B. Pick publishing a study, *The Strange Genius of David Lindsay*, in 1970. J. B. Pick soldiered on in Lindsay's cause, and this edition of one of the unpublished novels is the result. I'm not particularly keen on Lindsay's fantastic imagination as evinced in *Arcturus*, finding it too insubstantial and misty in outline, with too little convincing local detail. I was interested to find that this novel had a completely naturalistic setting, that of the South of England and the fairly well-off levels of middle-class playwrights and large houses in the country. In fact, this element proved tediously prosaic, enlivened only by rather purple love exchanges, alarms and excursions. All the more surprising was the rare beauty of the central symbol, the violet apple, supposed to be a seed--kept in a green glass serpent--of the original apple of Eden, and brought by way of the Crusades to present-day Britain. The book is an allegory based on the second eating of the apple. But the beauty of the allegory which we glimpse occasionally through the serpent and the apple is lost, finally, in the weight of heavy wooden conversation and moralising which drowns the poetry. An interesting piece for the scholar of Lindsay, but compared to Cowper Powys or Lawrence lacking in depth. Less ambitious, but for me much more successful was Joan Lingard's 1964 success, which Paul Harris has reissued--*The Prevailing Wind*. It's a deceptively simple account of a girl coming home to Edinburgh with her six-year-old daughter, to her disapproving middle-class parents, her housing-estate married sister, and loneliness. Joan Lingard doesn't sentimentalise. Her heroine and daughter find a basement, a bookshop job, and a kind of love--and friends. But the love doesn't last, the friends need her more than she needs

them, and crack up or go off. The parents try to understand, don't, and either die or fade away. Heroine ends up compromising by marrying someone she likes, ignoring chance to make dramatic exit to Italy with person she does love. The quality of the book lies in its humanity, humour and economy. The title, slightly chilling, austere, is the wind of Edinburgh, its moral code, its eventual prevalence over its rebels and misfits. There is love of the city--and beyond it, of Scotland--but that love does not stop Lingard from capturing the deep-seated snobbery, prejudice and hypocrisy of the middle-class Scot in a way Susan Ferrier would have respected. And finally, of my "older" group of novels J. F. Hendry's story of a Glasgow childhood, *Ferniebrae* (reissued by William McLellan, first published 1947). This is the novel from which his short story, "Peep Show," was derived for *Modern Scottish Short Stories*. I confess I hadn't read it before, and I'm ashamed. It is one of the very few important Glasgow novels seeking out the feel of the place even more deeply than Lingard in *The Prevailing Wind*; managing to convey the place through the developing consciousness of the child, adolescent and grown-up David in the same way that Joyce showed us Dublin through the eyes of Stephen Daedalus. Perhaps there's a bit too much of Joyce, in the way scenes change without formal preamble and without much help being given to the reader to understand why David's father has moved his place of employment--or, more importantly, why indeed the novel opens with a rural glimpse of a village once outside Glasgow, moving suddenly to Springburn and the days of the great locomotive works there. But don't be misled, there is a theme which is very much the theme of the great fiction of the Scottish Renaissance and later descendants like Hind in *The Dear Green Place* and Sharp in *A Green Tree in Gedde*. Like the two later novels, *Ferniebrae* is an intensely lyrical and poetic book haunted by memories of green, cleaner, original places, of racial roots. That's why it begins with the Green Knowe and that's why that memory of an airier, lighter possibility follows David throughout the dark days of Springburn.

Finally, the thrillers; the best, and the most "Scottish," is Charles MacHardy's *Blowdown*. At last the possibilities for commercial success of Scottish Oil are being grasped; it's the story of Doug Holden, aging but reliable diver, under extreme stress because of deadlines on the North Sea rigs. Again, well--very well--researched, so that MacHardy manages to give us vast amounts of fascinating technical data on oil exploration very painlessly. It has no aims other than interesting the reader in immediate plot and, possibly the plight of the freelancers in the North Sea, and even though they can earn

more in three weeks than many of us earn in a year, MacHardy does manage to get across a feeling of strain and danger that elicits sympathy. If there's a fault, it is in the depiction of the top-level characters--but it's good. So is Douglas Scott's *The Spoils of War*. Indeed, in the presentation of utterly evil and ruthless American Sergeant Quilley, lurking on board the British transport ship like an evil genius, as he goes after his lost profits from his shore crime organisations, there's something a bit more than melodrama. Scott had a real insight into evil here, and the confrontation between Quilley and Mitchell is in its own way archetypal and symbolic. And Scott can write action better than either MacHardy or Brian Callison, whose *The Judas Ship* was the least satisfying of the three. There was in the foregoing pair of thrillers a complexity of plot, a satisfying thickness of texture, which is absent here. Merchantman "Maya Star" is trapped in a creek of the Amazon Basin, in turn trapping the German ship which, under false colours, had damaged her. The story tells simply of her revenge, without any subtlety of character drawing, with buckets of blood. It's a *noisy* book, and it has no moral or morals in it whatsoever. Nearly everybody dies pointlessly.

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#### NOTES

Below I list the fiction read for the preceding article. I cannot claim that the list is inclusive; it should be checked against the relevant annual bibliographies of Scottish Literature produced by James Kidd and Robert Carnie for *The Bibliothek*.

#### 1978

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- BRYSON, Hector. *Doctors and Bodysnatchers* (Edinburgh, Canon-gate).
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- FITZSIMMONS, Christopher. *Early Warning* (London, Hodder and Stoughton).
- FRASER, Antonia. *The Wild Island* (London, Weidenfeld and Nicholson).
- FRASER, Christine Marion. *Rhanna* (London, Blond and Briggs).
- GAVIN, Catherine. *None Dare Call it Treason* (London, Hodder and Stoughton).
- GORDON, Giles and URQUHART, Fred (eds.). *Modern Scottish Short Stories* (London, Hamish Hamilton).
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- HERDMAN, John. *Pagans Pilgrimage* (Preston, Akros).
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