Trahison des Clercs or The Anti-Scottish Lobby in Scottish Letters

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"The dogs bark, but the caravan moves on"

In Vol. I, No. 3, of this magazine Dr. David Craig published an article called "A National Literature? Recent Scottish Writing" to which I have been invited to reply. I would not have considered doing this, preferring to let the misbegotten thing be ignored, had it not been presented in an American magazine addressed to a wide and educated public. The article only has nuisance value, but it is a not uncommon type of nuisance and should be exposed.

It is a denigratory article. The author sees little good in his subject and one wonders why he should have chosen to write on it. This sort of thing has been happening such a lot recently in Scotland that I wish to deal with Dr. Craig, not in isolation, as a lone, unpaid hatchet man, slayer of dragons and purifier of muddy waters, but in a wider context as part of a general trend in Scottish life, literature and thought, not only today but for the last 200 years; since the Union of Scotland and England, certainly; 1745 is probably the crux, imaginatively, when the Union became firmly consolidated after the Jacobite defeat.

It is a quisling or collaborationist or simply anti-Scottish sclent of mind and it is by no means a new phenomenon, although in recent years it has had a marvellous revival. The aim is political in essence (which is why I have used those political catchwords to describe it) and seeks to deny the separate identity of the Scottish nation, to merge it in the larger "British" context and so kill its individuality, its soul, in fact: just as the larger "British" context has already throttled Scottish society by impoverishing its industries—as Dr. Craig admits, but without drawing the logical conclusions. This is not a paranoid fantasy, as I shall seek to show. Craig's thought is enslaved by the socialist dream of unity—which is a good dream, too good to have to include the destruction of any national identity of which literature is the voice and the song. Oddly enough, this particular dream of unity does not evidently include the destruction
of other national identities—the Danes, for instance, or the Indians or Africans. Whether it includes the Jews or not probably depends (for Dr. Craig) on whether or not Nasser is supported by the Kremlin. But Scotland must go! In his book *Scottish Literature and the Scottish People 1680-1830*, Craig gives away his prejudices by painfully referring to Scotland as “the Scottish part of Britain” in his efforts to deny its individuality—but he never goes further logically to refer to England as “the English part of Britain.” Why not?

At the start of Hugh MacDiarmid’s career in the 1920s the idea of a Scottish Renaissance, political and cultural, was merely funny to his enemies, the old and the middle-aged. In the ’Thirties just about every considerable Scottish writer of the time was an adherent of the cultural programme (which was largely concerned with the revival and intellectualisation of the Scots and Gaelic languages for poetry) and most of them also supported the political programme, which desired separation from England, the exploiter of Scotland. One or two of those writers, all of them left-wingers, even stood for political office. To the young of those days they were heroes, though still hated by the old. The war and the early postwar years saw the second wave of MacDiarmid’s Renaissance and a great outburst of publishing, both book and periodical, mostly poetry, good, bad and indifferent, as one might expect, and gets, in any period anywhere. The battle, the young poets then thought, was won, or at least winning. As Craig remarks, they even got into the school books and examination papers; they were not just laughable any more.

But in the ’Fifties the Beats began exerting their attraction and the young poets coming up sheered away from the Renaissance banner; it was becoming what they called an Establishment (an Establishment, be it said, whose members found it extremely difficult to get their books published in Scotland. So much for being “established.”) By the ’Sixties this had hardened into positive literary antipathy to the Renaissance or Scottish or National idea. There were even desertions by some of the chief figures of the ’Forties and ’Fifties—Maurice Lindsay in particular—and new champions of the anti-Scottish lobby appeared, among them being our own Dr. David Craig, who gained his Ph.D. from Cambridge University with a fat thesis of over 300 pages devoted, under therose, to hammering his subject which was the above mentioned *Scottish Literature and the Scottish People 1680-1830*. Writers, hitherto friendly if not actually adherents to the cause, openly attacked Scottish, particularly Scots literature, on radio and in print, among these being Norman MacCaig and Walter Keir whom we shall quote later. Craig, however, is not overtly, to use a favorite word of his, against the Scots language—he rightly
ANTI-SCOTTISH LOBBY IN SCOTTISH LETTERS

praises its use in the good second stanza of John Manson's poem and in
those by Hay, Young and Henderson quoted in his article—so much as
against the whole Scottish "thing," the movement, which naturally and
specifically includes the language.

This new anti-Scottish lobby has unconnected supporters in some of
the very latest generation of students writing in university magazines.
One of these, a short-lived kind of post-graduate affair of 1960, even
had an American title, Sidewalk. The position was now that all three
generations were allied in opposition to what might be called the Scottish
Movement: the old (who have never liked it), the middle-aged (who
never like anything), and the young (who generally like the latest thing—
and the Scottish thing was definitely old hat). It is a matter of curious
fact that this three-headed opposition, though extremely vocal in critical
opposition, is not (except for MacCrae) very productive of original, imagi-
native work—I am trying to avoid "creative," which is cant.

This anti-Scottish lobby is such a recurring phenomenon in the his-
tory of Scottish literature that it is really a wonder that the literature
has survived its continual bashing since the 18th century. What is even
more curious is that its enemies consider it worth bashing. There must
be something extremely tough (or even important or significant) about
it for it to occasion such continual crusades and holy wars. The horse,
so the lobby always says, is quite dead, but evidently it refuses to lie down.
So it must be hit again, and again, and again. I shall now give chapter
and verse. Let us observe this unusual phenomenon of a sizable number
of educated men in a country (we must not say nation, it seems), gen-
eration after generation, finding it imperative, or at least desirable, to ex-
pend a good deal of energy (300 pages is a long stint) in attacking its
own past and present achievements (or non-achievements) in life, letters
and the other arts—if any, they would say. But so it is; the curtain
rises.

There is an ancient and popular sport in Scotland which consists in
belittling your neighbour and his achievements, in cutting him down to
size. Local boy, having made good and become a professor or a prime
minister or something, is reduced by the old worthy with the words
"Him? I kent his father!" Which means he is of little account. A lot
of the most characteristic Scottish literature uses this approach positively
and humorously—as in the domestication of great issues to parish pump
level, or in the familiar relationship with the Deity and his Opponent.
Its negative use in literary matters is of respectable antiquity but does
not go back beyond the Union of 1707—which is significant. Dr. Craig's
article will be seen to be treading a pretty well-worn path; his heredity is impeccably bourgeois.

In the early days and for many years the anti-Scottish lobby concentrated on the language issue—for language and poetry is the expression of the soul of a people—but the drive behind their animosity was a political one. By clinging on “with a mad Japanese courage” (to quote Craig) to the Scots language, the poets were preventing complete cultural absorption into the “British” (i.e. English) totality. The lobby tried hard to discourage it.

In 1771, for instance, Dr. James Beattie (they are mostly doctors, you will notice), author of The Minstrel and a great enemy of “the licentious teaching” of David Hume, wrote: “To write in vulgar broad Scotch, and yet to write seriously, is now impossible.” Two years later Robert Ferguson published “The Ghasts,” to which I refer the reader:

Yoke hard the poor, and let the rich chiefs be,
Pamper’d at ease by ither’s industry.

I find, my friend, that ye but little ken,
There’s e’en now on the earth a set o’ men.
Wha, if they get their private pouches list’d,
Gie ma a winnelstrae for a’ mankind;
They’ll sell their country, flae their conscience bare
To gar the weighbaek turn a single hair.

The Government need only bait the line
Wi’ the prevailing flen, the gowden coin,
Then our executors and wise trustees
Will sell them fishes in forbidden seas,
Upo’ their dwindin country ginn in sport,
Laugh i’ their sleeve, and get a place at court.

Serious enough, I would say. How often do you get this kind of passionate, humanitarian, social thought in 1773? Thus was Dr. Beattie exploded. But the polite enemy was not deterred.

In 1786, Henry Mackenzie (the Man of Feeling), reviewing Burns’s poems, advised the poet to write in English, for, he said, “even in Scotland the provincial dialect [my italics] . . . is now read with difficulty; in England it cannot be read at all.” But lo!, as Dr. Craig reminds us in his article, “by 1815 there were at least eight editions of his works published in the North of England and pubs were named after him.” And in the next century John Clare was deeply influenced by Scots poetry. Thus was Mackenzie exploded.

1 It is significant that the writers of the Scots Renaissance show much greater social conscience than their opponents.
ANTI-SCOTTISH LOBBY IN SCOTTISH LETTERS

In 1787, Burns's friend, Dr. John Moore, wrote to him from London saying, "You ought to deal more sparingly, for the future, in the provincial dialect [my italics]. . . . You should also . . . become master of the heathen mythology . . . which in itself is charmingly fanciful." Three years later Burns wrote "Tam O'Shanter" without "heathen mythology," and in the "provincial" dialect. As a matter of simple fact, you will still hear it recited (despite what the Anti-lobby says) amid general social glee in Scottish pubs today over 150 years later. I heard it myself hilariously last summer in a pub in Orkney. Thus was Dr. Moore exploded. But still the polite enemy was not deterred.

Over a hundred years later, in 1898, T. F. Henderson, co-editor with W. E. Henley of the Burns Centenary edition and author of a history of Scottish Vernacular Literature, wrote: "The antecedence of Burns may also be discerned in the work of all the more characteristically Scottish writers from Sir Walter Scott to R. L. Stevenson and J. M. Barrie; but as regards vernacular poetry, his death was really the setting of the sun; the twilight deepened very quickly; and such twinkling lights as from time to time appear only serve to disclose the darkness of the all-encompassing night." Maybe in poetry, but George Douglas Brown's House with the Green Shutters, a key novel in modern Scots literature, appeared (in London) in 1901, three years later. It seemed the horse was not dead. But still they were undeterred.

In 1919 Professor Gregory Smith advised Scottish writers to drop the "masquing gear of Braid Scots," and suggested "a way for the freer expression of nationality in style. It may be described as the delicate colouring of standard English with northern tints." Only three years later, in 1922 in The Scottish Chapbook, Hugh MacDiarmid published his poem, "The Watergaw," in a Scots as rich as Burns's if more self-conscious, literary and mystical in its employment. But he was not alone; he had been preceded by several excellent minor poets, as Violet Jacob, Charles Murray, Marion Angus and Lewis Spence. Academics in their folly despise minor poets, but these are they who often manure the good earth from which the great trees spring.

Even after the dramatic appearance of Hugh MacDiarmid to prove the horse was by no means dead but kicking, the anti-Scots cry was taken up once more, notably by Edwin Muir in his Scott and Scotland (1936). But now a new dimension opened up; the lobby extended its field of denigration to include the whole of Scottish literature. Professor R. L. Mackie in 1934 published an anthology of Scottish poetry in the Oxford

²Who himself, earlier on, had tried and failed to write in Scots.

[75]
World's Classics series. These words are from his somewhat negative short introduction (my italics throughout):

Originality has not been a distinguishing feature of the Scottish poets of any age. They seldom innovate, seldom write poetry as startling and unaccountable as The Shepherd's Calendar or Abulom and Achitophel or The Lyrical Ballads. . . . Of the poems assembled here, the salvage of six centuries, none is conceived on a grand scale. [Not even Barbour’s Bruce or Lyndsay’s Trible Estates?] The Scot does not write odes and epics; he writes songs and ballads [Auld Reikie? Tam O’Shanter? Don Juan? A Drunk Man looks at the Thistle?]; he can achieve perfection only when he works within narrow limits. Even this perfection seems usually to be the result not of conscious art, but of some happy accident. . . . The Scottish poet is seldom subtle or profound; he lives a life of sensation, not of thoughts.

An odd way, this, to recommend your country’s poetry to the public, surely; even if it were true it would have little critical significance. The book, by the way, is still selling happily, for its contents’ sake.

In 1947, Dr. H. Harvey Wood, editor of Robert Henryson and urnquhile lecturer in English Literature at Edinburgh, in Scotland, A Description of Scotland and Scottish Life (edited by H. W. Mackie, then His Majesty’s Historiographer Royal in Scotland, and co-editor of the Penguin Burns and the Penguin Border Ballads), a book aimed at a wide general public, follows Mackie up loyalty. His opening words are equally negative: “No account of the literature of Scotland can begin without making certain apparently damaging admissions.” (Naturally!) He continues: “In many of the qualities that are central in the poetry of England, Spain and Italy, Scots literature is singularly poor. There is little sensuous love of beauty, little mysticism, little philosophy and high imagination. There has been no Scots Blake, no Keats or Shelley, no Traherne, no Wordsworth or Coleridge.”

All of which is perfectly fatuous, for naturally the Spaniards and Italians haven’t got them either, any more than the English or anybody else have a St. John of the Cross or a Dante or whoever Dr. Wood was thinking of—any more than any of them have a Burns or a Scott or a Lyndsay or a Dunbar or a Barbour. Surely there is no competition in any art.

Remember what Henry Mackenzie said about Burns’s language in 1786? The above-quoted Prof. Mackie in that World’s Classics anthology echoed his words in 1934: “The Scots of Burns has become a foreign language to the educated, as to the uneducated Scot.” And on they go. It must surely be getting very foreign indeed by now.

In 1940, still on the same old tack, Dr. John Speirs, a perceptive commentator on the old poets, remarked in his The Scots Literary Tradi-
tion, anent Hugh MacDiarmid, "There cannot be a Scottish poetry in the fullest sense unless there is in the fullest sense a Scottish speech. What survives of such speech among what survives of the peasantry is in its last stages and is even something its speakers have learned to be half ashamed of. That is why there has been no Scottish literature (and indeed no literature in Scotland of any kind) since the 18th century" (my italics). A pretty sweeping but pretty silly statement about the literature, and about the speech too, but this is just how the doctors speak, who never travel by bus or take a drink in a pub. Poor souls, how can they hear the speech in a study, or among their twittering brethren in the Common Room?

Twenty years after this, in 1962 (they don't change much, these prophets of woe), Maurice Lindsay, one of the most active members of the second wave of the Renaissance in the Forties and Fifties, wrote in the preface to Snow Warning, his book of poems in English (as a sort of apologia for deserting Scots): "During the Fifties the Scots tongue receded more rapidly than ever before [it's going some speed now, praise the Law!J] under the impact of television, and has now been reduced to a mere matter of local accent." (Lindsay, who is Programme Controller of Border Television, also never travels by bus.) He continues, "It is utterly unthinkable that this poor wasted and abandoned speech, however rich in theory its poetic potential, can possibly express what there is to be expressed in the Scottish ethos [my italics: note the implied denigration, that there is nothing to express] in the age of the beatnik and the hydrogen bomb... We are all Anglo-Scots now, whether we like it or not." Dr. Craig must be cheering. Do you get the echo from Beattie in 1771: "To write in vulgar broad Scotch, and yet to write seriously, is now impossible"? A long time a-dying, indeed! Is it not amazing?

Well, there are my texts; they could be multiplied. It is a long story which seemingly has no end, for the poets continue with horrible intransigence in their unregenerate ways. Can any country match such a continued belittling of its own literature by its own literary pundits—in the face of the recurrent appearance of artists, some of them geniuses, to prove them asses?

In this procession Dr. Craig takes up his position manfully and confidently; he is going to knock another nail into the sarily battered coffin of the Scottish muse. "Until very recently," he begins his article in the third issue of this magazine, "Scottish writers went on clinging with a mad Japanese courage to the idea of cultural separateness." Four pages later (p. 153), he says in commendation of the novelists Robin Jenkins
and David Lambert, "These men go no further in the national direction than to use some Scottish settings and some Scottish speech. . . . This strikes me as a liberation [my italics]. . . . Today, with the fading of the nationalist mirage, we can see ahead more clearly . . . ." and he talks of "struggles and developments much broader and more real than the private nationalist obsession." It is very real in Scotland, sir; and it is not private.

It is odd, and an index of the confusion of Craig's mind, that later, writing of the poems in Norman MacCaig's anthology *Honour'd Shade* (1919), he says that "the nationalist obsession is gone and with it, evidently, any powerful incentive to imagine and express." Well, what conclusions does he draw from that? Can he mean, adding the two "thoughts" together, that the loss of the nationalist obsession is a liberation from a powerful incentive to the imagination, so that we can now see ahead more clearly? Does he really want to "liberate" artists from incentives to the imagination? That's what he says.

A month after Dr. Craig's article was published he found himself among powerful allies. In February 1964, in a full dress discussion on Scottish literature on the B.B.C. Third Programme, some of the most kenspeckle names in contemporary Scottish literature devoted their time to knocking that literature—presumably always with themselves excluded. If the individual contributors complain (as they do, if taxed) that they spoke to a tape for an hour and only the negative bits of a few minutes duration were actually broadcast, one must assume that the editor, Professor David Daiches, was to blame, or the B.B.C.'s producer, Mr. George Bruce (a poet whom Craig calls "haughtily solemn" and "an owl that fancies itself wise"). Whichever way you look at it, the upshot was a destructive attack on Scottish literature by the assembled hosts of the mostly bourgeois "establishment"—great word, that!

The roll included Professor Daiches and Messrs. Norman MacCaig, Walter Keir, and Edwin Morgan, all of whom hold positions in universities or schools where they instruct the young, presumably, to despise their own literature. Dr. Daiches is professor of English Literature at the new University of Sussex. He is also the author, among others, of an excellent book on Robert Burns (which Dr. Craig considers "dilute and ineffective"—*Limes Review*, No. 20) in which he shows that the Scottish literary tradition is strongest where it is most native. That was in 1950. In 1964, however, he asked: "What are the prospects for the existence of Scottish culture? Indeed, we might go further and ask: Does anything that we can call Scottish culture really exist?" And Walter Keir, who lectures in English Literature at Aberdeen University, chimed in readily with: "I don't think there is such a thing as a Scottish
culture. We have lost our identity, if ever we had one, we had several identities. I don't think they ever cohered or they will ever cohere again.” (How the devil they could ever cohere again if they never cohered before is a bit of a puzzle.) This was the general defeatist tone of the whole discussion.

Norman MacCaig (a poet whom Craig regards as “largely fake”) opined that “there hasn’t been terribly much first-class poetry written by Scots of any sort in Scots.” MacCaig also considered that “the language battle is over,” to which MacDiarmid replied “The language battle can’t be over as long as there’s a poet of quality determined to write in Scots. If he succeeds in writing good poetry in Scots he vindicates the whole linguistic argument. The fact is that he manifests that great poetry can be written in Scots, and that’s all that requires to be manifested.” Which was one of the few sensible things said in this pathetic broadcast.

Other positive remarks came from two Scots, both poets: Alexander Scott of Glasgow University, who holds the only readership in Scottish literature in any of the four Scottish universities, complained of the lowly place that is accorded Scottish literature in Scottish universities. “The only other literature or language that is treated in this way at Glasgow, having an ordinary graduating course and nothing else, is Welsh. I cannot well imagine in Wales that Welsh would be treated in the Welsh university colleges with one ordinary graduating course, no higher course and no honours course . . . the people who run Scottish universities do not seem to be interested in their own activities.” Just before this, Tom Scott had answered a typically “slanted” or provocative question by Dr. David Dihies who had asked him, “Do Scottish universities do anything for Scottish culture? Indeed, should they do so? Is there a Scottish cultural tradition that the universities should pass on to their students?” Tom Scott’s answer was direct enough: “There is no sense in our universities of there being any continuity of the Scottish tradition. The fact is that what they are not doing with Scottish children and Scottish students at Scottish universities is turning them into highly educated Scotsmen . . . They’re turning them into highly educated Englishmen. Instead of our own culture we are being offered the honour of becoming honorary Englishmen; this is pretty well what it amounts to.” And he quoted another Scott, Sir Walter, “If you un-Scotch us you’ll make damned mischievous Englishmen of us.”

You will see from the above that the anti-Scottish lobby are not altogether friendly among themselves. Dr. Craig, in particular, doesn’t seem to approve of anybody, but he will join with “laughable” Bruce,
STUDIES IN SCOTTISH LITERATURE

“fake” MacCaig and “ineffectual” Daiches to rally to the dear old cause of bashing Scottish literature, for the edification of the outside world. These are very sophisticated people.

In his book already quoted Dr. Craig reiterates the old rubbish once more again: “In Scotland the shrinking of distinctive speech has accompanied difficulties in using that speech seriously.” (Shades of Beattie in 1771!) “The shrinking of Scots is clearly a phase [Oh, that long, long phase!] in the development [my italics] throughout the United Kingdom towards a more or less standardised English. We may surmise that it will take acceptance of our language change, put into practice in a realistic fiction—rather than a poetry which attempts to keep Scots as its whole medium—to put Scottish literature on a sound basis again.... To entertain the idea of establishing [my italics] Scots seems no more than a hobby, a piece of wishful thinking, or a substitute for seriously effective political interests.” Hum! Let me tell you a story.

In his article Dr. Craig tells the story of the lorry-driver in the Mearns who liked the broadcast of Grassic Gibbon’s A Scots Quair. This still goes on, this appreciation, and not only in the country districts, though he would not have it so. Scots poets are not so out of touch with what Craig and Henderson rather patronisingly call “the people” as some would make them out to be, for political reasons.

Craig knows his mystical “people” as a lecturer for the W.E.A. speaking to “working class” audiences who wish to better themselves through education so that they will be able to move out of that class into the next one up. I know them as they know me, in the pub, in the street and at home. They know me as a “gent” and as a poet and they don’t think it funny—peculiar any more than I find it funny—peculiar that Bill is a navvy or Jock a night porter or Tom a boilerman whose son is a doctor. “When are we going to get another Wallace, Syd?” If I hear that once I hear it a hundred times. Now this Wallace was a play of mine in Scots verse that was put on at the Assembly Hall during the Edinburgh Festival of 1960. The critics, the academic lobby, say that poetry is dead, the future is with the novel (Craig); they say the Scots language is dead and they love to hang the unfortunate word “synthetic” round its neck, knowing full well the ambiguity in the word; they say the Scots written by the Renaissance poets—or most of them—is “bookish,” not “natural” but merely translated from English (try it some time), and, of course, not understood or even understandable.

“Let them say!” say I. The fact of the matter is that that play of The Wallace packed “them” in in busloads. (I don’t suppose Craig has seen or read it; it is not simply an adventure story). I fought hard to
get the thing put on in the Assembly Hall rather than in an ordinary theatre because the Assembly Hall does not have the class association of an ordinary theatre. In the minds of the non-theatre-going public it is (at Festival time) more like a place for a "show," or a circus or a pantomime; to them it is vaguely associated with the Military Tattoo! The audiences were very mixed indeed—which is what I had intended. I do not like this anglicized habit of class distinction. Dockers and doctors and dukes—let 'em all come! Come they did.

One night in the second week, as I was walking up to the entrance, a coach arrived from Dunfermline in Fife and a gang of rowdy miners and their wives came pouring out, men who would ordinarily have been at the dog-racing or a football match. They were very cheery, having obviously had a few on the road. It was a night out. When I saw this the old heart leaped up. Ah, I thought, I've got through to them; they've heard about it and they've come to see it, the people of Scotland (not the theatre-goers from the suburbs), the ones I wrote the play for, to deliver the message. That busload seemed a justification of my efforts to stage it in that particular big hall, seating about 1500. All during those three weeks I was being surprised by the popular response. (The English and the Anglo-Scottish critics hated it, by the way; they said it was prejudiced and unfair; they were obviously "involved" nevertheless! After all, it is an "engaged" or "committed" work—which is considered admirable in a German communist, like Brecht, but not, evidently, in a left-wing Scottish nationalist, like Smith. Why not?) A lady on the beat approached me once and I thought "Help! What have I done now?" He put out a hand like the proverbial hunk of meat. "It was great!" he said. "Are ye gaun to gie the Bruce next?" That sort of thing.

Yet in the 18th century, in the 19th, and today, just yesterday, the tireless lobby is saying the language is dead, the poets have lost touch with the public and so forth. Evidently not.

I have another quite different story to prove it. A poem of mine in Scots, called "Kynd Kintock's Land," was televised with a series of brilliant photographs by Alan Daches (son of Professor Daches above-mentioned) by the B.B.C. We had worked together on the project. It lasted fifteen minutes. It was about Edinburgh—not the romantic, tourist Edinburgh, but the real Edinburgh, much of it done in the High Street. It was a political poem, it was joky, it was serious, it was sad, etc., etc. I had dreamed up this TV show as a means of breaking through, of getting poetry into the public ear again, by using the eye as a "Trojan horse." Everyone watches TV, but precious few go to "poetry readings"—also, you get paid, of course, as a professional should be.
"Kynd Kittock's Land" took amazingly on all sides. People didn't realize, I suppose, that they were listening to poetry, like M. Jourdain about prose. Even a certain hard-drinking commercial traveller (hardly a literary type!) was "sent" by it; he would not stop telling everyone about it. A bricklayer told me: "Ay, Syd, we want mair o' yon. No' that awfie cowboy things." That's the sort of level. From people who would never dream of reading anything except Racing Form and the evening paper, and certainly not poetry. One chap, a railwayman, was furious about it. "Ye're wrang," he said, with a certain amount of passion, "yon's no' the wery o' t. Yon's no' the answer!" He'd got the message, but was disagreeing. He'd listened to it seriously and he thought I was wrong. But he had listened and he had understood—both language and argument. Once more my heart leapt up.

Now regard the other side of the penny, the academic reaction.

The poem, which is about 350 lines, together with the photographs of peeling walls, children playing, old age pensioners sunning themselves on a bench, unemployed fellows lounging about, interior pub scenes full of rude mechanicals, overdressed ladies at a garden party, empty streets at dawn with a milk float, shop signs, street notices, etc., etc. was offered as a book to a Scottish University Press. By luck, when I was having lunch with the secretary, talking about the projected book, an American agent for the Press was present. He was enthusiastic. "We could sell this," he said, "with no trouble." But the Press turned it down, so it was reported to me, as "not the sort of thing that a University Press should publish. And it would cost too much for the pictures." So, it remains unpublished. Whom does the poet like? The people or the lobby?

To speak from personal experience is best, but I am by no means alone in having known the response to poetry or drama in Scots. The plays of Roddy Macmillan, Robert Kemp, Alexander Reid and Alexander Scott, all written in Scots, are perfectly acceptable, as is Bride's Anatomist, to all classes—though in ordinary theatres you are more apt, certainly, to get a bourgeois audience. This year, 1964, at the Citizens Theatre, Glasgow, we had the première of John Arden's Armstrong's Last Goodnight (based on the Border Ballad of "Johnnie Armstrong") written in Scots. Here was an English playwright of esteem choosing to write a play in what the lobby keep on saying is a dead or dying or shrinking or incomprehensible dialect. These stories are told to show how far out of touch with real life and the real existence of a Scots poet the academic lobbyists can be. Significantly, Edwin Morgan disapproved of Arden using Scots, declaring (for an English public) "We in Scotland have
had too many Scottish historical plays; we want plays in English!” (Encore, July-Aug., 1964).

They are wrong about the language being dead and not understood; they are wrong about the poet’s language being bookish (though of course sometimes it may be intentionally so); they are wrong about poetry being a dead medium; and they are wrong, especially Craig is wrong, about the political feeling in Scotland—which has no relationship to votes cast at elections, for which there are other (i.e. English party) reasons.

Craig subtitles his essay “Recent Scottish Writing,” but he spends most of his time discussing the 1930s (MacDiarmid, Grassie Gibbon, Gunn, Blake, MacColla) and Lindsay’s Faber anthology Modern Scottish Poetry, of 1946. He does mention, only to dismiss, MacCaig’s anthology Honour’d Shade, of 1959, which may be regarded as fairly recent. He then gives a page, and rightly, to Iain Crichton Smith, a bit to a ten-year-old poem by John Manson, a couple of pages to the so-called folk-song revival and Hamish Henderson’s exercises therein (admirable as it well may be, “modern folk-song” is not strictly literature, as Henderson’s Elgines for the Dead in Cyrenaica certainly is), one page to a couple of ditties by Alan Jackson, and ends up with four pages on the novelist Robin Jenkins. Eight pages out of sixteen-and-a-half devoted to the ostensible subject of the subtitle is somewhat short measure. However, there it is.

The thought arises, is Dr. Craig quite qualified to write on such a subject? Has he read the stuff? He tells us that he has spent “more than ten years’ constant reading in the Scottish literary media,” past and present, and we must believe him. But it is curious that so many of the poems he discusses happen to come out of two anthologies. Has he read the works of these authors that lie outwith the said anthologies? Who would form an idea of English literature from Palgrave’s Golden Treasury and Yeats’s Oxford Book of Modern Verse? But seemingly he doesn’t even know all the anthologies. He mentions the fact that MacDiarmid is “totally ignored” in The Faber Book of Modern Verse and the Penguin anthology of Contemporary Verse. But MacDiarmid was included in Yeats’s Oxford Book and also (as were some of his despised followers, mentioned or not mentioned by Dr. Craig) in such collections as Kenneth Rexroth’s New British Poets (New Directions), The Faber Book of 20th Century Verse (1953), A. N. Jeffares’s Seven Centuries of Poetry (Longman, 1955), G. S. Fraser’s Poetry Now (Faber, 1956), and Edith Sitwell’s vast Atlantic Book of British and American Poetry (Boston, 1958), and doubtless many others. Still being personal and apropos, it is an odd
coincidence that the poem of mine which Dr. Craig hammers in his article is the same one that he hammers in his *Scottish Literature and the Scottish People*. It seems that when he finds something he really dislikes he cannot leave it alone. It must be maddening. I don't mind him hammering it at all, but it's funny that he chose the same one twice (out of hundreds published) and it also, incidentally, is in MacCaig's anthology.

Has he read, for instance, two of the finest poets writing in Scotland at this moment, Robert Garioch of an older and George Mackay Brown of a younger generation? Or Kenneth White or Stewart Conn of a younger generation still? If so, he does not mention them even to slam them. Of novelists, he mentions, and rightly, Robin Jenkins, but what about James Kennaway or Alexander Trocchi? He could knock them easily. Has he read Tom Scott's *The Ship and Other Poems*? It should appeal to his socialist principles, anyway, even if he cannot stand the language. He reminds me of a young school teacher I was talking to recently (one of those whom Dr. Craig and his fellow lobbyists have probably influenced over the years). He also hated the "Scottish thing." "And MacDiarmid is a lot of bunk, anyway," he said. I asked him which particular poem he was thinking of. It soon transpired or simply came out that he had never read a single line of MacDiarmid ever. Where did he get his prejudice from? It didn't drop out of the air. Or maybe it did. Or maybe he learnt it at his school or university. I am sure he is continuing the good work—in utter ignorance.

I would ask the lobby, I would ask Dr. Craig, what is their intent? Is it to prevent any Scottish writing or any agitation for Home Rule—because the two things seem to be very bound up together, as was always the aim of MacDiarmid and the Renaissance. Whatever it is, they certainly do have an effect, if a slow one, in some quarters.

Would you like to know the next stage? Having, as they have always hoped since the later 18th century, "liberated" Scottish writers from all so-called national identity, they will then say, "What is this Scottish literature? Show me it! What's so Scottish about it? It's just English really. You haven't got a literature. You've been 'liberated!'" Dr. Craig already in his book refuses to let the Scots claim Byron for their own. ("Efforts to trace Scottish influences on Byron seem never to have found anything tangible"—which is one in the eye for T. S. Eliot!) despite the poet's own affirmation in *Don Juan* ("But I am half-Scot by birth / And bred a whole one." "I scotch'd not kill'd the Scotchman in my blood"). Aldous Huxley called Burns one of the greatest "English" lyric poets; Yeats is another one; and Robert Graves refers to one of the most famous Border Ballads as "English"—whose refrain
ANTI-SCOTTISH LOBBY IN SCOTTISH LETTERS

of "Edinbro', Edinbro' / Stirling for aye / Bonnie St Johnstone stands upon Tay" might have given him a map reference! Why should one object, you say? Why not? In Italy, say, does an Englishman like being called an American? Or an American an Englishman? Does an American like Walt Whitman being claimed as a great English poet? Anyway, doesn't Truth matter?

And what is the purpose of this quisling Scottish lobby? It is a simple political aim to destroy the separate identity (as voiced in their literature and embedded deep in their souls—or "psychology," as Craig would probably call it), clung to for centuries with "a Japanese courage" against most powerful cultural pressures, of the oldest nation in Europe. It is a simple aim, but evidently difficult to achieve.

One effect they have certainly had already; it is very difficult to get a book published in Scotland today unless it is a text book. This was not so even ten years ago. Hugh MacDiarmid has to go to New York for his Collected Poems; Tom Scott has to go to the Oxford University Press for his The Ship; Robert Garioch has never had a book of his poems printed in hard covers; Iain Crichton Smith publishes in London, so does Norman MacCaig, George Mackay Brown, and all the novelists. Kenneth White, whom Craig does not mention, published his first book of poems in Paris—I'll bet if he had offered it in Edinburgh or Glasgow it would have been rejected.

I hasten to say that I am not throwing all this up against poor Dr. Craig, but articles such as the one we are talking about all add another chuckie to the cairn.

Another favourite missile is that Scottish literature does not or cannot concern itself with what are vaguely called "broader issues," as Craig says in his article "broader and more real struggles and developments" and, in the broadcast I mentioned earlier, he said "the real essence of Scottishness is that it loses the habit of confronting the broader human problems." Sometimes the cant phrase "universal themes" is used instead. What are these that Scottish literature has lost the habit of confronting? There is birth and love and death, for instance. Or is that too narrow? There is the struggle of the individual with the community (we all know about that one), the struggle of the rebel against injustice, social or national; there is the conflict between duty and self-interest. There is the cycle of the seasons. There is freedom and tyranny. Has Scottish literature lost the habit of confronting these? Dr. Craig should read a bit more. I can give him a list of books.

But it is not the subject or the theme that makes literature, it is not even the attitude or the morals of the writer; it is how you write it.
though Dr. Craig, as a Marxist, will doubtless disagree. I wish he would pick now on something he likes, to write about. Perhaps English or Russian literature would suit him better. He once said that poetry was finished and that the future lay with the novel. (I love these ex-cathedra pronouncements that critics make, for the world to attend to). Well, then, let him read novels and leave those awful poets alone. They will still be writing, and they will still be writing in Scotland, as they have been doing, despite the Jeremias and the Cassandras, for the last two hundred years and more. If you look into it, you will find—for all those old cornflakes tell you—a fair deal of poetry and prose that cannot be matched, in its kind, in any other literature. Yesterday, today and tomorrow. 3

The dogs bark, but the caravan moves on, saith the Prophet.

EDINBURGH

3 In January 1965, at a Poetry Conference in St. Andrews, Norman MacCaig delivered himself of these thoughts, as reported in The Scotsman of 25th January 1965, “There had been,” he said, “a renaissance in the arts in Scotland in the last forty years, but it was now petering out and unless it changed its direction it would die. I think the future will lie in the development of a poetry in English. If the writers are Scottish it will come out in their writing.” At it again!

[The above note was received as this issue was going to press—February 1965. Editor.]