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STUDIES IN SCOTTISH LITERATURE

Ian S. Munro. *Leslie Mitchell: Lewis Grassie Gibbon*.
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Leslie Mitchell's early death, wrote J. B. Priestley, "was probably the greatest loss sustained by Scots letters this century." But Ian S. Munro adds to this: "One could live twice as long and leave so much less."

For Scots letters the fruit of Mitchell's genius lies in his *Scots Quair* trilogy, which emanated from his own country and his own Scottish experience and which he wrote under his pen name Lewis Grassie Gibbon. The rest of his production, both fiction and non-fiction, remains a phenomenon because of its sheer bulk. It is on the quantity of his work and on the quality of some of his output that speculations are made. The extent of his activity might, on the one hand, have burned him out creatively, but on the other hand, his *Quair* did appear at a time when it could be a burning and a shining light in the modern revival of Scottish literature.

In reading Mitchell's life story, one is reminded of Edwin Muir's rise to renown through his own industry rather than through formal education or Scottish approval of creative activity. Since Burns and before, the story is not an uncommon one, nor is genius nipped unusual in Scotland. That is an irony which always lends interest and speculation to Scottish literature.

Munro tells Mitchell's story completely within 222 pages. Research has been thorough, and the biographer gives all the essential facts of Mitchell's life and more. It is the rare biographer who can interpret the heart of his subject — but perhaps a novelist does that for himself. Munro discusses the major works, devoting most space to *A Scots Quair*. He best covers characters and scene, which he can do well within the scope of his work; he does not analyze structure or give time to other critical considerations. Munro's book, however, is an important contribution to the assessment of the revival of Scottish letters in our century.

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