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Maurice Lindsay. *Burns: The Man, his Work, the Legend*. New York. Hillary House. 1968. 356 pp. \$10.

Maurice Lindsay, who is well known not only as a poet but also as a champion of the Lallans Makars and the Scottish Renaissance in general, has overhauled and considerably expanded his book on Robert Burns, first published in 1954. Since much new information about Scotland's greatest poet and many critical analyses concerning him have appeared since that first edition, Mr. Lindsay has wisely striven to bring his synthesis up to date. Relying particularly upon such notable research scholars as Franklyn Bliss Snyder, J. DeLancey Ferguson, and Hans Hecht for biographical material, he has produced a pleasantly readable account of Burns's controversial life. By drawing on distinguished critical analyses like those of David Daiches, Thomas Crawford, and Christina Keith, he has also managed to enrich his own judgments on the poetry with illuminating observations of others. Moreover, from intimate knowledge of Scotland and its history he has portrayed the poet and his work as products of a unique environment. The result is a lively commentary reflecting the author's consuming dedication to Burns's role in Scottish culture.

The general reading public should welcome a Burns study of this kind. Especially adept at conveying the local color of his subject, Mr. Lindsay possesses an extraordinary knack for depicting physical and intellectual backgrounds. Though the character of Jean Armour unfortunately remains somewhat nebulous, most of the people who figure prominently in the poet's life are admirably revived. Often Mr. Lindsay succinctly conjures up the sights, sounds, and smells encountered by Burns and comments on changes that a modern visitor might observe in specific localities. While such information may be superfluous for some British readers, it will certainly be welcome to admirers of Burns who are unacquainted with the Scottish scene. The author has often spiced his vivid prose with occasional Scotticisms that, however much they may jar reviewers in the upper and lower extremities of the Thames, further contribute an authentic flavor. Nor does the narrative movement ever lag. Mr. Lindsay has accurately judged the temper of our time in assuming that contemporary readers are no longer restrained by false modesty toward Burns's uninhibited verse. Indeed no one who can sit through poetry readings of Robert Creeley or Allen Ginsberg without flinching should blush at anything Burns wrote. Hence Mr. Lindsay's unabashedly frank commentaries on poems celebrating sexual delight are more honest

and direct than preceding ones have often been. With befitting candor Mr. Lindsay has approached the amatory legends of the poet's life and dispelled by hard-nosed reappraisal much sentimentality that has clouded the intimate relations with a number of women. The affair with Mary Campbell, for instance, is searchingly examined through acceptable evidence, questionable hearsay, and poetical assertions. Admittedly, one may feel a slight pang at reading about her as "merely another peasant-girl beguiled into lifting her skirts by the force of Robert's personality and the urgency of his desire," no matter how generous she may have been with her favors. But Mr. Lindsay is obviously concerned with pruning, as well as cultivating, the legend.

Such matters inevitably force one to consider the perplexing difficulties confronting any biographical critic compelled to grapple with unverifiable anecdotes. Whereas the factually oriented historian can dismiss apocryphal tales, the guardian of a legend often cannot banish the doubtful legacies quite so easily. Many an invented story, after all, has been created by someone who knew a great writer personally and incorporated (very much in the fashion of ancient myth-makers) essential truths disguised or embellished in fictitious yarns never meant to be taken literally. Is it not likely that tales which may be factually unacceptable convey aspects about a man in ways that countless statistics would never illustrate? Is it not possible that Mary Campbell, whatever her previous experiences, could have loved Burns with a devotion as pure and true as any novice might have offered? Closely connected with this problem is the dilemma that any biographer of Burns encounters in striving to understand sexual promiscuity as the poet himself regarded it, for there is always danger that Burns may appear as an incorrigible philanderer rather than a real lover. Need one conclude, for example, that the lugubrious account of a ruined maiden in "The Cotter's Saturday Night" is hypocritical or, as Mr. Lindsay suggests, that it probably constitutes "one of the silliest stanzas ever written by a great poet"? Is it not possible that amatory constancy could have been for the poet an ideal "devoutly to be wished" but never successfully achieved? Since each emotional relationship admits of radical alteration, its progress (except in Mary Campbell's case, where death embalmed her image against deterioration) is often totally incongruous with its poetic celebration. Yet how can the critic concerned with both a poet and his literary productions treat this phenomenon of mutability in relatively short space? Is the song of the nightingale or *la belle dame* illusory because it cannot be sustained? Is a night among the corn rigs to be treated as ephemeral

pleasure or as the inspiration of an undying work of art? When one considers these vexing questions, he realizes what a challengingly ambitious task Mr. Lindsay has actually taken unto himself. Despite a few questionable allegations of fact and some interpretations of Burns's relationships that cannot meet with unanimous approval, the achievement of this work is in general highly commendable.

Unfortunately typographical errors detract from an otherwise handsomely printed, well-illustrated volume. It may be picayune to carp at quotations, but the nagging fact remains that minor liberties have sometimes been taken with capitalization, spelling, and punctuation in the accepted texts of Burns's poems and letters. Ordinarily these deviations from authoritative readings are so slight as to produce virtually no alteration in meaning. In others, however, they convey absolutely no sense as they stand. For example, "feet that fy'd his shins" in "The Holy Fair" or "brousing at the nappy" in "Tam O' Shanter" defy comprehension simply because they misrepresent what Burns wrote. The song referred to as "O Ye were Dead, Gudeman" has omitted a crucial word from the authentic title, and "Prayer in Prospect of Death" illustrates another titular contraction. Similar omissions of words in Mr. Lindsay's text, as well as typographical errors like "*in meditatione fugare*," might have been eradicated by more careful checking and proofreading.

Even so, these errors do not obliterate Mr. Lindsay's very real contributions in the book. In addition to an interesting amalgamation and evaluation of what scholarly critics have already adduced, he has added some highly perceptive, though usually brief, insights of his own. In view of his astute poetic and musical judgment, it seems regrettable that he did not make more elaborate use of his particular talents. In these days when prominent critics such as Richard Wilbur have pondered the inability of modern analytical techniques to wring stimulating explication out of a Burns song, Mr. Lindsay would seem to be precisely the man who might contribute extensively to our understanding of fragile lyrics and their complementary music. American readers may not be highly moved by the author's plea for revival of the Scots literary tradition or the reading of Scottish literature in schools since in most localities both are lost causes. Indeed this partial eclipse is one against which Dr. John Moore warned Burns on 23 May 1787 since a provincial dialect inevitably limits the appreciative admirers to those at least moderately at ease with it. Ultimately, I suppose, the survival of Burns will depend (like that of Chaucer) upon his ability to communicate what enlightens and pleases the world, irrespective of linguistic impediments or any sense of quaintness;

and one might well assume that Burns's forthright views on human relations would be more acceptable in our day than they have been at any time in the past. Of course, there will always be those who love him for the wrong reasons, and as Mr. Lindsay has elsewhere expressed it,

Ay Burns, but whit hae ye dune tae deserve
sic a fate frae the least o your fellow men,
whan the day o your birth ilk year maun serve
as excuse tae display hoo little they ken?

This book should do much to correct that situation and may well become required reading for Burns Club members throughout the world. It will certainly make the haggis, the John Barleycorn, and other aspects of that ritualistic orgy celebrated every 25th of January more meaningful.

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D. M. Lloyd (ed.). *Reader's Guide to Scotland: A Bibliography*. London. The National Book League. 1968. 127 pp. 21 shillings.

Colin Smith and Robert S. Walker (eds.). *Library Resources in Scotland*. Glasgow. Scottish Library Association. 1968. viii, 107 pp. 50 shillings.

There is a burgeoning demand for reference books and bibliographies today, but the very existence of such a good market has produced a rather mixed bag, particularly among works which have been issued by reprint houses. Too frequently little research has been done on these volumes before they are offered to the public, with the result that not a few reference books which have been completely superseded are suddenly made available. Of course scholars and librarians are free not to purchase these—*caveat emptor*—but unfortunately the publication of an inferior work may preclude the republication of a much more useful one. Then, too, reprinting without updating a work may finally be a disservice to users since there will then be little likelihood that the work will be updated. A recent example: the facsimile reprint of J. B. Reid's *Concordance to the Poems and Songs of Robert Burns* (originally pub-