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Alexander Scott  
*University of Glasgow*

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ALEXANDER SCOTT

## Scottish Poetry in 1971

This has been a "consolidation" year, with two of the leading poets who write in English presenting selections of their work, a volume of *Collected Poems* put forward by a prominent member of the Anglo-Scottish *avant garde*, and another issued by an octogenarian whose best work has been in Scots. There has also been a continuation of the cataracts of slim volumes of new work pouring from the presses.

Norman MacCaig (b. 1910), with his *Selected Poems* (The Hogarth Press, London), establishes his position — already widely recognized — as the most distinguished poet writing in English to emerge in Scotland since the war. Yet this selection gives only a partial picture of his development, being confined (says the fly-leaf) to "poems . . . chosen by the author from the eight volumes he has published since 1955." For although the same source describes MacCaig's *Riding Lights* of that year as "his first book," he had earlier published two volumes indicating his association with the so-called Apocalyptic School of the forties, *Far Cry* (1943) and *The Inward Eye* (1946), and the reader can gain greater insight into the later work if he is aware of the immense personal concern which led MacCaig into the Apocalyptic attempt to build an individual world of private images.

That concern is still present in the poems of the last twenty years, although MacCaig has developed, since the early fifties, an increasing ability to link his individual world with the world in general through the illuminating use of images which he makes appear no longer private but common to us all — *A Common Grace*, in the words of the title of his 1960 volume. Moreover, while MacCaig's appreciation of the world of the senses has become even richer and finer with the years — a remarkable phenomenon in itself — it has been a vital part of his poetical personality from the beginning, and at least twelve years earlier than *Riding Lights* it was already true to say, as has been said since, that "some of his most beautiful poems are descriptions of a landscape or a seascape . . . evoking their sensuous qualities with an unflinching accuracy."<sup>1</sup>

Discussing *Riding Lights*, *The Sinai Sort* (1957), and *A Common Grace* — which are represented in the selection by twelve, five and

1. John Press, *Rule and Energy* (London, 1963).

nine poems respectively — John Press has praised them for "their alert Metaphysical wit, their sensuous energy, the closeness of their texture and the elegance of their pattern" and commended "the melodic ease, the rhythmical subtlety."<sup>2</sup> In the best of these poems, speculation on "the self in its relation with one other individual; the self in its perception of the visible world and in its consciousness of the universe"<sup>3</sup> emerges with a deceptive appearance of ease from MacCaig's profound appreciation and apprehension of natural objects — as in "Double Life," where the question of whether the individual can ever be objective arises out of the experience of travelling through Edinburgh ("Trundling my forty years to the pier of Leith") on an October day. In at least one of the *Riding Lights* poems, "You Went Away," MacCaig also shows himself capable of the kind of naked passion, free from even the slightest trace of rhetorical ornament, which has been so notable a feature of his most recent work.

The poems in *A Round of Applause* (1962) contain all the qualities praised by Mr. Press in the three preceding books, not least the apparently-effortless creation of evocative metaphors, but in *Measures* (1965) there is a certain lack of rhythmical variety and energy, a reliance on iambic pentameter and quatrain, unusual in a metrist remarkable for his earlier subtle originalities, and while the images in the many poems on trout-fishing or mountain-climbing or bird-watching in the Highlands are often ingenious, the emotion is lowkeyed. A visit to Italy seems to have provided MacCaig with the opportunity to rise out of what might have become a rather folksy rut, and *Surroundings* (1966) shows him enlarging his territory, exploring outwards. The new scene appears to have stimulated a novel feeling for other people, as in "Assisi," a moving expression of pity for a complete stranger, where the image of the deformed dwarf who sits outside "the three tiers of churches built/ In honour of St. Francis" presents an unanswerable dilemma to all charity, human or divine. The seeming simplicity of the writing here is understatement at its most devastating.

Expressing new themes, MacCaig has abandoned the regular metrical forms of his earlier poems and adopted free verse. Yet, while expanding his range — and the inclusion of only ten poems from this volume does much less than justice to that expansion — he has also recovered, or perhaps even increased, his involvement with the Highland landscape and with love. In "Go-Between," where those themes are compellingly combined, the brief free-verse lines possess a rhythmical force and sensuous immediacy which enhance the passion from which the poem

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

has sprung, and in "Sounds of the Day" the appeal to the auditory imagination in the opening lines reinforces the sense of shock when the lover finds himself deserted ("you left me/ Besides the quietest fire in the world"). This poem, again, has one of MacCaig's most surprising, effective, brutal and exact conclusions, an image of superb tactile expressiveness.

The territory gained by MacCaig in *Surroundings* has been both consolidated and extended in his most recent volumes. In *Rings on a Tree* (1968), with some scintillating poems on New York, he counterpoints a strikingly sensuous simplicity of style against the proliferating confusion of the environment. In *A Man in My Position* (1969) he has essayed the extended poem, and "No End, No Beginning" is perhaps his most remarkable work to date, combining his subtle perception of natural beauty and his delighted appreciation of the enlivening qualities of love with a profound visionary insight into the fundamental unity of all modes of being.

Visionary insight is also a quality possessed by George Mackay Brown (b. 1921), whose *Poems New and Selected* (The Hogarth Press, London) contains most of the work from two previous volumes, together with fourteen other pieces. As in the case of the MacCaig book, however, this selection fails to give an adequate view of the whole of the writer's career, since it overlooks his first collection, *The Storm* (The Orkney Press, Kirkwall, 1954), some of the poems in which reappear in the earliest of his volumes issued by the Hogarth Press, *Loaves and Fishes* (1959). Born and bred in the Orkney islands, where he still lives, and a convert (since 1961) to Roman Catholicism, Mackay Brown has always expressed his insight into the social customs and the individual characters of his local community, as well as his appreciation of the significance and power of religious myth and symbol. In *The Storm*, those themes were treated separately, but in many of the best of his later poems he contrives to combine them and thereby to enhance both.

While most of his work is intensely local, he neither sees nor presents his characters as provincial oddities — as queer fish in an island backwater — but always as individual souls enshrined in the flesh of Orkney fishermen and farmers, and the implications of their dreams and deeds, pursuits and passions, have width as well as depth of relevance. Again, his fascination with Orkney's patron saint, Magnus, martyred there in the twelfth century, has led to a concern with the whole of island history and a consequent enrichment of his poems through the interplay of past and present. His themes, perhaps inevitably with a religious poet living in a small community in close contact

with the fields and the fishing-grounds, are the fundamental ones of work and worship, growth and decay, death by land and water, the interweaving of love and lust between man and woman, and — increasingly — under and above and through them all, the divine mercy.

His emotional range is considerable, not only from poem to poem but also within a single creation, ranging from religious ecstasy to wry realisation of human weakness in "Our Lady of the Waves," from melancholy acceptance of the inevitability of death to grateful appreciation of the inexhaustible richness of life in the title-poem of *The Year of the Whale* (1965). Many of the poems are dramatic, and such is his sensitivity to the feelings of others that he can speak through the mouth of Harold, the agnostic ale-drinking shepherd, with as much sympathetic understanding as when he wears the mask of a medieval abbot, while "Ikey on the People of Hellya" is as comically revealing about the character of the speaker, a thieving tramp, as about those of the people whom he plunders. At its best, Mackay Brown's style is superbly simple, combining conciseness with clarity in phrases which are both functional and fine.

Of the items listed as "New Poems," the first, "The Five Voyages of Arnor," appeared in Norman MacCaig's anthology, *Honour'd Shade* (Chambers, Edinburgh), as long ago as 1959, and a number of the others have also been in print elsewhere for some time. In this section, while the scene occasionally moves outside Orkney, the balance between past and present which was a notable feature of the earlier Hogarth Press volumes has swung decisively towards the historical, and many of the poems seem to emanate from a kind of medieval religious dream, beautiful and delicate, but remote from any actuality experienced by the reader, while others express a Viking paganism equally distant from contemporary feeling. One regrets the absence from the selection of Mackay Brown's finest uncollected poem, "Unlucky Boat" (also in *Honour'd Shade*) with its incisive near-vernacular comment on the perils of Orkney life to-day.

In the same writer's "poem cycle," *Fishermen with Ploughs* (The Hogarth Press, London), there is evidence that the other balance in his work, between ritual and reality, is also in danger of tipping over into what begins to appear as an obsessional concern with mystical irrationalism. This sequence is a kind of "mythical" history of Orkney, past, present and to come, developed from the "Rackwick" chapter in his essays on the islands, *Orkney Tapestry*<sup>4</sup> (Gollancz, London, 1969). A number of the poems in that chapter appear in the present sequence,

4. See "Scottish Poetry in 1969," *SSL*, Vol. VII, No. 4, pp. 211-220.

as do others which have also been published individually elsewhere, and in the new versions the ritual elements have usually been "written up" in such a way as to blunt the cutting edge of the factual quality of the originals.

Some of Mackay Brown's "history" seems extremely dubious — the presentation of the first Norse settlers in Rackwick as nomad hunters and fishermen unused to the practice of agriculture appears to be designed, quite arbitrarily, to balance the return to a hunting and fishing economy after the destruction of twentieth-century civilisation by "The Black Pentecost" (The Bomb) in the concluding section. Again, the identification of the Reformed Kirk with witch-burning — which Mackay Brown has made twice before, in his dramatic dialogue story "Witch" (*A Calendar of Love*, The Hogarth Press, London, 1967) and in his much less persuasive play *A Spell for Green Corn* (The Hogarth Press, London, 1970)<sup>5</sup> — begins to look deliberately slanted towards an all-too-easy insistence on Presbyterian fanaticism at its worst.

Even the best poems in the cycle, written as they are with as much cunning of evocation as ever, spring from the same old ground (or ancient ocean) as the finest of their predecessors, and this repetitiveness is still more apparent in those verses which, possessing less than his usual individuality of image and cadence, hint at a certain almost-mechanical recurrence of well-worked themes. The last section, in which refugees return to Rackwick from a bomb-blasted world beyond, consists of a series of prose monologues written at a level of high-pitched passion, but at least one admiring reader remains unpersuaded that the reversion to pagan religion would be either as swift or as savage as it is presented here. Up to the present, because of his comprehension of everyday individuals and events, Mackay Brown has retained the imaginative sympathy of non-Catholic readers, even when denied their intellectual assent, but if his work were to continue to be increasingly overloaded with what they might well come to regard as ritualistic rigmarole, it is by no means unlikely that such sympathy may wane.

Where Mackay Brown is rooted in a local community, George MacBeth (b. 1932) appears in his work as the rootless cosmopolitan intellectual, and his *Collected Poems* (Macmillan, London) bear out the view expressed here earlier, that whereas in his first volumes "his bizarre imagination, considerable technical skill, emotional power and intellectual ruthlessness have combined to create some splendid poems on his own childhood, on his relationship with his dead father, and on mythological themes," in his later verse "imagination has dwindled

5. See "Scottish Poetry in 1970," *SSL*, Vol. VIII, No. 4, p.



into fancy, emotion has atrophied, the intellect has turned inward, and the bizarre has become the byzantine, with 'sound-poems' and 'found sound-poems' which are not creations but constructions."<sup>6</sup> MacBeth seems to have come to believe that life is absurd and that art should reflect that condition, but when absurdity is deliberately contrived — as in such works as "The Ski Murders" and "Fin du Globe," which are poems only by courtesy — the contradiction in terms is so immediately evident that the reader finds it even more absurd to consider continuing to read. In other poems (such as "The Auschwitz Rag") which present the world as hell, the deliberate attempts to shock are so painstakingly conscientious in their brutal obscenity as to divert disgust from the subject-matter to the work itself.

The year's other *Collected Poems* (Reprographia, Edinburgh), by Helen B. Cruickshank (b. 1886), reissues the contents of her last-published volume, *The Ponnage Pool* (M. Macdonald, Edinburgh, 1968)<sup>7</sup>, with the addition of a few pieces from her apprentice days. While Miss Cruickshank is a minor writer, and unequal, she is the author of at least two poems in Scots, "In Glenskenno Woods" and "The Ponnage Pool," which have ensured her an enduring place in the Scottish verse tradition, and her elegy in English for Lewis Grassie Gibbon, "Spring in the Mearns," is one of the better poems in that language written by a Scottish poet in the thirties. Two other literary veterans, Alice V. Stuart (b. 1899) and Joseph Macleod (b. 1902), also remind the reader of the past. Miss Stuart's *The Unquiet Tide* (The Ramsay Head Press, Edinburgh) might have been published a century ago, while Macleod's *The Old Olive Tree* (M. Macdonald, Edinburgh), weak in emotion, droops monumentally over the grave of "Adam Drinan"—the pseudonym under which this variously-endowed poet attracted attention in the forties.

That decade also saw the emergence of Maurice Lindsay (b. 1918). After thirty years of poetical practice his most recent work, *Comings and Goings* (Akros Publications, Preston, Lancashire), demonstrates the continuing liveliness of his talent in exploring new directions. The best of these poems combine a greater freedom of form than he has ever achieved before with a stricter starkness of style, and in "Two Generations" and "Feeling Small" the fusion of agony and pity is at once piercing and controlled, without the slightest suspicion of posturing or playing for sympathy. The elegy for his father, in a mode notoriously difficult, is so completely successful that it would be triumphant were it not for the beautifully-balanced understatement with which this

6. See "Scottish Poetry in 1968," *SSL*, Vol. VI, No. 4, p.206.

7. *Ibid*, pp.212-3.

lifetime's triumph over adversity is expressed. Some other poems show old failings — the splashing on of colour with too heavy a hand, the over-tight packing of detail — but the cool sureness of many of the verses here is as noteworthy as it is novel.

Two new collections by the editor of *Lines Review*, Robin Fulton (b. 1937), *The Spaces Between the Stones* (New Rivers Press, New York) and *The Man with the Surbahar* (M. Macdonald, Edinburgh), leave the unfortunate impression of having witnessed a poet with a fine gift for evoking sensuous impressions indulging the illusion that his own mental processes are of more interest. The first of these volumes contains some studies of Highland scenes which are as vibrant as they are incisive, but many of the other poems are too intent on conjuring with ideas — or private notions — to make any considerable emotional impact. The second volume, consisting of five different sequences, is even more hermetic, even more self-involved. One moving — indeed, horrifying — poem of terrified despair, "Don't touch the trees," where Fulton for once succeeds in releasing a direct emotional cry, would seem to indicate that his present retreat inside the confines of his own mind is the result of a practically total loss of confidence in the world outside it. In our present circumstances, such a reaction is all too understandable, while at the same time making understanding a difficult endeavour.

Fulton has also written the introduction to *Trio: New Poets from Edinburgh* (New Rivers Press, New York), in which two of the contributors, Roderick Watson (b. 1943) and Valerie Simmons (b. 1948), are Scottish. In praising these poets "for their ability to think on the page, to think in poetry," Fulton links Watson with the greatest living poet in Scots, Hugh MacDiarmid, and Miss Simmons with the greatest living poet in Gaelic, Sorley Maclean. In the work of Miss Simmons, who is just beginning to be a beginner in poetry, the present writer can find little thought other than age-old sentiments about love's young dream (and/or nightmare), and to saddle Maclean with responsibility for these is like finding a resemblance between Shakespeare and Elizabeth Barrett Browning because both wrote love-sonnets. Watson, who has written a doctoral thesis on the ideas behind MacDiarmid's poetry, differs from him entirely in his techniques and also in many of his attitudes. Most of the work by Watson in this selection has already appeared in his *Poems*, (Akros Publications, Preston, Lancashire, 1970), and the best of these pieces "have a singular angularity of vision, a kind of macabre grace encompassing both horror and beauty."<sup>8</sup> Collected for the first time is "The New Newgate Calendar," a savagely ironical study

8. See "Scottish Poetry in 1970," *SSL*, Vol. VIII, No. 4, p.



of crime and punishment, murder and execution, in the nineteenth-century Australian bush, which remains grimly relevant to the reality of human violence, and man's inhumanity to man, to-day and everywhere. Among Scottish poets still under thirty, Watson — who has written in Scots as well as in the English by which he is represented here — is already a notable figure.

Sharing the same birth-year as Watson, Alan Bold has produced a pamphlet, *He will be Greatly Missed* (Turret Books, London), which is "over-blunt, over-explicit, and lacking in sensitive poetic re-creation,"<sup>9</sup> while he plumbs new depths of plodding pedestrianism in *A Pint of Bitter* (Chatto and Windus and The Hogarth Press, London). Sharing the same publisher as Bold's bitter brew, *Sounds Before Sleep* by James Aitchison (b. 1938) contains some delicately deft verses on domestic themes, although the language is generally so restrained that the subdued glow of the writing seldom blazes up into poetry.

That blaze is at its brightest in Iain Crichton Smith's English verse translations of Sorley Maclean's great Gaelic sequence, *Dain do Eimhir*, some of which were commended here when they appeared in *Scottish Poetry* 3 (Edinburgh University Press, 1968)<sup>10</sup> and in *Lines Review* No. 28<sup>11</sup>. These and others have now been collected and published as *Poems to Eimhir* (hardback, Gollancz, London; paperback, Northern House, Newcastle-upon-Tyne). As Crichton Smith remarks in a perceptive introduction, "By general consensus of opinion, Sorley Maclean (b. 1911) is considered to be the most original poet we have had in Gaelic this century," and these love poems constitute his finest work. It is sufficient indication of the publication difficulties faced by the twentieth-century Scottish poet who writes in a language other than English that the Gaelic text of *Dain do Eimhir*, an acknowledged masterpiece, has never been reprinted since its first appearance in 1943.

For a view of his poems in English, *Greek Fire. A Sequence* (Akros Publications, Preston, Lancashire), the present writer (b. 1920) is indebted to George Bruce, Creative Writing Fellow in the University of Glasgow, who has also celebrated this work in one of his own poems, "Catch."<sup>12</sup>

The poems came at me with vividness, clarity and intelligence. I have, by long habit, a critical approach to new poems, and when I meet such words as "terrible" and "inspiration" on the page I am very suspicious. In *Greek Fire* they work so effectively it is as

9. Douglas Gifford, *Knowe*, No. 2, p. 7.

10. See "Scottish Poetry in 1968," *SSL*, Vol. VI, No. 4, p. 218.

11. See "Scottish Poetry in 1969," *SSL*, Vol. VII, No. 4, pp. 211-12.

12. *Scottish Poetry* 6 (E. U. P., 1972).

if they had got a new life. The correctness of the form of the poem, the isolation of the words "truth" and "art" and their balancing each other, has made them good. I think the whole book is a rare formal achievement. For me, this is the final achievement. Suddenly—not without labour and trouble—this has happened, so that a great variety of attitudes to life and language has found its place in the sequence. The poems give a new perspective to Alexander Scott's work in Scots. I do not find them at odds with this. In both modes he puts me in touch directly with experience. In both there is a concentration of effect, but in the Greek experience there is a refinement of the sharp edge, something of the "purifying" to which I refer in "Catch," which I am now convinced is a just and exact tribute.

Bilingual in English and Scots, the author of *Greek Fire* speaks in the latter tongue in his extended "poem for voices," *Killer Crusade* (*Akros*, No. 16), a narrative-dramatic-lyrical account of a Viking voyage from Orkney to Jerusalem and Byzantium. Of this, Professor John C. Weston, the distinguished American editor of Burns and MacDiarmid, has been good enough to write, "I liked it immensely, finding it successful in dramatizing a heroic world but with a clear moral point of view implicit in the handling. I thought the love scenes sexy and beautiful, the descriptions of weather and the sea sharply evocative — as good as Gavin Douglas." Although this work was broadcast as long ago as 1950, it has never before appeared in print — another indication, perhaps, of the publishing problem of the Scottish poet who writes in a language other than "standard."

Robert Garioch (b. 1909) has three poems in English and thirteen in Scots in *The Big Music* (Caithness Books, Thurso, Caithness). The English pieces attempt comedy in the manner of the most entertaining Scots contributions to his *Selected Poems* (M. Macdonald, Edinburgh, 1966), but their laboured flatness only serves to show how much of the success of the earlier humorous work in Scots was due to the author's command of the vernacular style in that language. Unfortunately, there is not much of that style in the Scots verses of the present collection, which tend to repeat, at a lower level of intensity, the attitudes of the previous book. Hence "Rullion Green Tercentenary, Edinburgh Sonnet 21," which is reminiscent of "At Robert Fergusson's Grave, Edinburgh Sonnet 14," and "A Wee Local Scandal" — a title which, applied here to a sonnet on the alleged misnaming of the university's David Hume Tower, is equally descriptive of most of the earlier examples of this genre. Elsewhere, as in "Bingo! Saith the Lord," Garioch retreats from the contemporary into the Kailyard, presenting — or misrepresenting — a Scotland of Free Kirk ministers defending parish-pump standards against "London brick and blasphemy."

In yet other poems, he retreats still further, into the idiom of the medieval makars, which makes his Scots versions of Pindar and the Anglo-Saxon elegy, "The Wanderer," more remarkable as *tours de force* than as living re-creations of their originals, while in "The Muir," a poem where "the atomic passages are the outcome of [his] attempt to understand the 1953 Reith Lectures on *Science and the Common Understanding*," the dichotomy between modern content and medieval style is mind-splitting. Whenever Garioch attempts high seriousness in an extended work, as here and in the title poem, his writing slumps into "dull solemnity . . . leaden in movement and pedestrian in style, [which] is a far cry from the idiomatic liveliness and rhythmical dexterity of much of his comic verse."<sup>13</sup> When he writes briefly, he is on much surer ground, and this book contains two of his best short poems in Scots on profound imaginative themes, "My Faither Sees Me," a searching study of the clash between ancestry and contemporary environment, and "Brither Worm," a beast-fable of unusual depth of sympathetic understanding. The version of Apollinaire's "Merveille de la Guerre," in a twentieth-century Scots befitting theme and subject, is as moving as it is exactly controlled.

Also bilingual is Stephen Mulrine (b. 1938), with his pamphlet of ten poems, six in English and four in Scots, *Parklands Poets No. 10* (Akros Publications, Preston, Lancashire). Already well-known in Scotland for his children's gang-chant in Glasgow patois, "The Coming of the Wee Malkies," Mulrine attempts to write on more adult themes in the same idiom — but achieves less ease. Some of his poems in English discover a promising vein of macabre comedy. In No. 9 of the same series, by Donald Campbell (b. 1940), all the poems are in Scots, and their energy and contemporary concern suggest better work to come when those qualities are combined with greater self-criticism and technical care. There is evidence of love of the Scots language in the sequence which is No. 11 of the series, *Deidre* by "Patrick MacCrimmon," a prentice poet who has time enough to deal with more vital themes than the downfall of the Fians.

The best poems in another Scots sequence, *In Appearances* (Akros Publications, Preston, Lancashire), by Duncan Glen (b. 1933), are both vital and contemporary. Considered as a whole, however, this extended work in six sections (and forty parts) is flawed by having been written over a period of at least six years, during which Glen's command of his medium has markedly increased and he has stripped to the bone a style which possessed some loose gristle in his earlier period. Consequently, the juxtaposition of early and late poems in some

13. See "Scottish Poetry in 1970," *SSL*, Vol. VIII. No. 4, p. 236.

of the sections has an upsetting effect, like tripping on a knot while balancing on the slenderest of tight-ropes. A further difficulty is inherent in the autobiographical nature of the work, whose theme might be described as "What it is like to be the poet Duncan Glen," and which discusses his environment, his parentage, his upbringing, his education, his poetical, artistic and intellectual concerns, and the movement of his own mind and imagination, for there are more than a few occasions when experiences which may be clear enough to the writer remain opaque, or are only intermittently transparent, to the reader. Yet it is still a distinction for a poet to hit the inner, on occasion, rather than the bull, if the target he has set himself is among the highest that can be aimed at. There are fine poems, not all of them late, in every section of the work — "The Nature o' Things" and "My Faither," which also appeared in Glen's earlier collection, *Kythings* (Caithness Books, Thurso, Caithness, 1969),<sup>14</sup> are beautifully balanced elegies, their apparent simplicity the play of light over subtle depths of feeling, and the concluding summation, "John Atman," on the interplay of reality and imagination in the development of a poet's mind, provides "a new and creatively positive handling of the Scots tradition."<sup>15</sup>

Some of the most recent poems of all — "Wee Boxes" and "Dress to Kill," on the all-too-contemporary theme of the thinness of our veneer of civilisation — have a starkness of stabbing impact which strikes with the clean certainty of a surgical incision. Later poems still, in Glen's pamphlet *Feres* (Akros Publications, Preston, Lancashire), possess a cutting edge even more finely honed, and their range, from the concerns of philosophers and astronauts to those of small-town labourers and apprentices, is as wide as it is humane. Sometimes, however, the cutting edge is honed completely away — a danger inevitable in so bare a style, which gets rid of so much that it has nothing left to reveal but a state of nature (not always a fetching sight).

There is nothing in the least fetching about *The Auld Symie* (Akros Publications, Preston, Lancashire) by a pseudonymous "Jake Flower." This poet, who shows little feeling for language when he writes in English under his own name (Alan Bold), has even less in Scots. A preface about "a sudden impulse to explore the sensuous qualities of the Scots vocabulary" fails to conceal a Bold attempt to emulate the early MacDiarmid in creating poems out of words drawn from a Scots dictionary. But — unlike MacDiarmid — Bold is not a native speaker of Scots, and his Flower pieces reveal an ignorance of the idiom of the

14. See "Scottish Poetry in 1969," *SSL*, Vol. VII., No. 4, p. 226.

15. Roderick Watson, *Catalyst*. Vol. III, No. 1, p. 35.



language which would set the teeth on edge if they contained anything of significance to chew upon.

While the 1971 volume of the annual collection, *Scottish Poetry* (Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh), failed to appear, the twelve-month saw the publication of two modern Scottish verse anthologies designed for use in the upper classes of schools. *Voices of Our Kind* (The Saltire Society, Edinburgh), chosen by a committee of Glasgow schoolteachers, with Maurice Lindsay as consultant editor, contrives to make room for sixty-nine poems by twenty-nine authors, from Edwin Muir (d. 1959 *aetate* 71) to Jean Milton, who is in her twenties now. The book compels speculation on whether it is their middle-class background which has led the Glasgow teachers to include a mere fourteen poems in Scots, with only Mulrine's "Wee Malkies" to represent the younger generation, while no less than twelve younger English-writing poets are given space. The allocation of that space displays a regrettable parochialism, with three poems on Glasgow by Edwin Morgan (b. 1920) — who also has another poem on Scotland in general — given as many pages as are allowed either Muir or MacDiarmid in their entirety. In the light of the relative achievement of those three writers, this must be regarded as a nonsense even by admirers of Morgan's best work, however much the appeal that his Glasgow poems may make to that city's schoolchildren. Of other established poets in the selection, MacCaig fares best, with five poems, while Sydney Goodsir Smith — often considered the finest Scots makar since MacDiarmid — and Garioch come off worst, with only two each. Most of the others, including Lindsay, Mackay Brown, Crichton Smith and the present writer, have four apiece. The absence of anything by W. S. Graham, a difficult but rewarding poet in English, is inexplicable.

So is his absence from *Twelve Modern Scottish Poets* (University of London Press, London), edited by an Edinburgh schoolmaster, Charles King, with the assistance of a committee from that city's branch of the English Association. Five of the poets — Muir, Bruce, MacCaig, Mackay Brown and Crichton Smith — write in English, two — Goodsir Smith, and Tom Scott — in Scots, and five — MacDiarmid, William Soutar (1898-1943), Garioch, Morgan and the present writer — are bilingual. The eldest (Muir) was born in 1887, the youngest (Crichton Smith) in 1928, a span of some forty years. As the greatest living Scottish poet, MacDiarmid rightly receives the largest allocation of space, fifteen poems in eighteen pages, but most of the others are represented by at least ten poems each, and some by considerably more. Tom Scott (b. 1918) fares worst, with only six poems, and William Soutar best, with seventeen. Whatever one's opinion of Mr. King's choice of this particular

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muse's dozen, the justification of his anthology is that it allows a view in depth of the fortunate twelve. There are also introductory essays on each poet, and notes on the more recondite poems which students will find useful.

Of our two poetry magazines, *Lines Review* and *Akros*, the former seems to have given up even attempting to publish a representative selection of the best current Scottish work. No. 36 mainly consists of poems translated into English by the magazine's editor, Robin Fulton, from Russian, Swedish and French originals, and then turned into Scots by Robert Garioch and Roderick Watson as exercises in ingenuity. No. 38 is devoted to prose and verse by the English writer, Robert Nye; and No. 39 is again concerned with translation — this time of sixty-seven Gaelic poems by Derick Thomson (b. 1921), done into English by the poet himself. While glad to see these fine versions of poems which must be superb in their original language, one feels that their proper place would be alongside the Gaelic texts in the volumes where those were first published — and ten of them, indeed, have already occupied that position. Poetry magazines have a different function to fulfill.

Although only two issues of *Akros* appeared in the course of the year, they contained some seventy original poems — one of them an extended work — by eleven Scottish poets writing in Scots and/or English, and the authors spanned the generations between J. K. Annand (b. 1908) and Tom Leonard (b. 1944). The editor-publisher, Duncan Glen, while an enthusiast for work in Scots, remains catholic in his attitude towards verse in both the Lowland languages, and in this he has earned the gratitude of all Scotsmen who wish to see space found for every talent, irrespective of the medium in which it expresses itself.

*University of Glasgow*