A Century of Scottish Creative Writing: Three Essays

Maurice Lindsay
Scottish fiction was dominated throughout most of the nineteenth century by the gigantic genius of Sir Walter Scott, who revived and spread an interest in Scotland's past, just as Robert Burns had revived an interest and awareness of the Scots tongue a generation or so before. By the beginning of the twentieth century, however, the novel of social concern had been cultivated for some years by Scottish writers.

But there was a carry-over of the Scott tradition early in the century by two novelists, Neil Munro (1884-1930) and John Buchan, Baron Tweedsmuir (1875-1940).

Inverary-born Munro published his best-loved novels in the first decade of the twentieth century. *Doom Castle* came out in 1901, followed by the various collections of short stories that won him popular fame, *The Vital Spark* (1906), *The Daft Days* (1907), and *Ayrshire Idylls* (1912). They tend to portray the simple Scott as a figure of fun, though there is no malice in Munro's tales. He became a Glasgow newspaper editor.

Buchan's range was wider, though he perhaps lacked Munro's artistic conscience. Buchan's novels fall into several categories. He began as an historical novelist with *John Burnet of Barns* (1898), a tale set in his native Border country. He followed up with *The Path of the King* (1921) and, best of all, *Midwinter* (1923), set in Oxfordshire, a fascinating attempt to fill in the "missing" years in Boswell's knowledge of Dr. Johnson's life, 1745-46. Buchan's own favorite was *Witch Wood* (1927), a study of religious intolerance in which Montrose makes an appearance.
Buchan achieved his widest fame with his adventure stories, in “shockers,” as he called them. The best-known include the escapades of Richard Hannay—_The Thirty-Nine Steps_ (1915), _Greenmantle_ (1916), _Mr Standfast_ (1919), and _The Island of Sheep_ (1936). _Huntingtower_ (1922) became the most popular of them all. Buchan, a barrister who became politician, statesman, and finally Governor General of Canada, also wrote an autobiography, _Memory Hold-The-Door_ (1940), which sheds more light on the public man than on the private. He also wrote two perceptive biographies, _Montrose_ (1928) and _Sir Walter Scott_ (1932).

The fiction of J. M. Barrie (1860-1937) belongs to the nineteenth century, but one story, “Farewell Miss Julie Logan,” dates from 1931, though it still smacks of the Kailyard. The anti-Kailyard novel that marked the beginning of a new way was the one novel of George Douglas Brown (1869-1902), _The House With The Green Shutters_ (1901), a study of Calvinism gone sour.

It influences the best novel of J. MacDougal Hay (1881-1919), _Gillespie_, which deals with the rise and fall of Gillespie Strang, a trapper of rabbits whose ruthless determination leads him on to become shop-owner, farmer, fishing fleet owner and local tycoon, but also led to his destroying his wife and two sons. Drink, whoredom and disintegration gave it a realism at that time startling, and it remains an astonishing achievement for a minister of the Church of Scotland.

Surely the most colorful writer of Scottish fiction was Compton Mackenzie (1883-1974), a remote descendant of John Mackenzie of Kintail. The author’s father was an actor, Edward Compton, who had decided to drop his Scottish surname for professional reasons, thus giving rise to the mistaken view that his son was not really a Scot, especially since he had been born in West Hartlepool, County Durham. His education was certainly English—St. Paul’s School and Magdalen College, Oxford. He began Latin at the age of four and Greek when he was nine. During the 1914-18 war, he served in the Dardanelles Expedition and became Director of the Aegean Intelligence Service. In 1932, he was successfully prosecuted and fined one hundred pounds for a technical violation of the Official Secrets Act.

Mackenzie first tried his hand, unsuccessfully, with poems and plays; in 1908, he “abandoned play-writing and sat down one afternoon...to write the ideal performance of my first play...which, over two years later after being refused by a dozen publishers, was published in 1911 as _The Passionate Elopement._” _Carnival_ which followed in 1912, and was also based on a play, was his first major success and the precursor of over a hundred books. _Sinister Street_ (1913-14) brought him international recognition. During the 'Twenties, incidentally, Mackenzie became one of the founding members of the Scottish National Party.

Later books included _The Far Winds of Love_ (1937-45) and the series of light-hearted Highland novels, _The Monarch of the Glen_ (1941), _Keep the Home Guard Turning_ (1943) and _Whisky Galore_ (1947; _Tight Little Island_ in
Maurice Lindsay

From his old age came one last novel of importance, *Thin Ice* (1954), a reflective study of the public and private disaster that could at the time befall a homosexual. He also wrote several volumes of an entertaining autobiography.

In old age, bedridden but due to give an address to the Nomads Club in Glasgow (of which he knew my father had been a founding member), I received a summons to call upon him. I duly attended, expecting to be given the typescript of his speech for me to deliver, but I came away with only a piece of advice:

> Do you know how I have lived to be in my nineties?” he asked. “No,” I admitted, a little apprehensively. “I’ll tell you the golden rule. Never stand up if you can sit down. And never sit down if you can lie down. Observe that rule and mebbe you’ll also live to be ninety!”

Probably equally popular was the Orkney-born novelist Eric Linklater (1899-1974). Born in South Wales, Linklater had been educated at Aberdeen Grammar School and then at the city’s University. He served as a private in the Black Watch in 1917-18 and in the 1939-45 War, was commander of the Orkney Fortress Royal Engineers and then on the staff of the Directorate of Public Relations in the War Office. For much of his life he lived at Dounby, Orkney. I first met him in the 'Thirties, when he was the black-robed narrator in a spectacular pageant of Orkney history staged at Kirkwall. Subsequent meetings included a chance morning encounter with Linklater and Neil Gunn, when Linklater invited us to drink champagne with him in the bar of The Aperitif restaurant, remarking as we toasted each other, that 10 o’clock in the morning at the vineyard was really the only time and place to do so.

I have always regarded him as a kind of twentieth-century Smollet, a picaresque writer with a similarly engaging swagger. *White Man’s Saga* (1924) in which, like its author, students “played chess with words for queens and bishops as ideas for common pawns,” a humorous tale the central incident of which deals with a premarital custom to ensure a male issue and was common to many Scottish farming communities. It was followed by *Poets’ Pub* (1930), an uproariously stylish farce, and *Juan in America* (1931), surely one of the most accomplished pieces of fictional gaiety ever to be produced, and its sequel, *Juan in China* (1937). Both use the device of foreign travel to hold up a mirror to some of the oddities of the British way of life.

In between came *The Men of Ness: The Saga of Thorlief Corbiter’s Son* (1932), reminding us of the importance Linklater placed upon his Norse descent. *Magnus Merriman* (1934), its prose punctuated by amusingly bawdy verse, was yet another new departure matching matter with manner—in this case the comic aspects of Scotland’s revival. It will surely remain for Scottish readers one of the funniest books in their literature.
Adaptation of an Aristophanes comedy is the starting point of The Impregnable Women (1838), localized fantasy for Laxdale Hall (1951). Private Angelo (1946), in some ways the funniest of all his novels, its hero symbolically representative of soldiers everywhere, gives plain enough evidence of Linklater's hatred of war, a fact which may surprise those who undervalue him, misunderstanding his general interest in soldiers of all ranks.

His skill in handling plot and character is shown in the collected Short Stories of Eric Linklater (1968).

Though as a dramatist he was perhaps less successful, both Love in Albania (1949) and Breakspear in Gascony (1958), though staged at the Edinburgh Festival, seem over-contrived. His autobiography The Man On My Back (1949), contains a vivid portrait of his friend Compton Mackenzie at work by night on Borra to the sound of the gramophone, an invaluable record of their times, much warmer and livelier than formal histories of this period.

Linklater's knowledge of, and affection for, the Norse islands of Scotland, is reflected in Orkney and Shetland: An Historical, Geographical, Social and Scenic Survey (1965) and is unlikely to be surpassed.

Conviviality of a less picaresque kind is also to be found in the novels of Bruce Marshall (1899-1987), an Edinburgh-born writer who lost a leg in the 1914-18 War, qualified as a chartered accountant and who latterly lived in France. His best novels are The Uncertain Glory (1935) and, particularly, Father Malachy's Miracle (1935), in which the good Father, sent from his Highland monastery to Edinburgh to tighten up plain-chant in worship, and who persuades God to transplant a palais de dance, The Garden of Eden, to the top of the Bass Rock, soon discovers that practical miracles are not wanted where official religion actually depended on them in past time. Marshall’s gallery of religious and secular characters is wittily drawn, priests, Anglican clergymen, tycoons and newspapermen being gently satirized, though the real target is human hypocrisy.

The novels of Robert Kemp (1908-67) indulge in gentle comedy, the best of them satirizing Edinburgh's upper-middle-class culture vultures in The Maestro (1936) and the then still operative marriage laws of Scotland in Gretna Green (1961).

The novels of Cliff Hanley (1922-99) include a study of adolescence in Glasgow, A Taste of Too Much (1966); The Hard Mouth (1967) a distant relation of Mackenzie's Highland fantasies, and The Redhaired Bitch (1969), demonstrating the absurdity of producing a musical comedy on the life of Mary, Queen of Scots, though it also deals with the hot-house feelings rampant in the egocentric world of theatre.

One of the most important novelists of the early Scottish Renaissance years was Lewis Grassic Gibbon, the pen-name of J. Leslie Mitchell (1901-35), the third son of John Mitchell, who with his wife, Lilias, farmed Hillhead of Seggat, near Auchterless, in Aberdeenshire. When the future novelist was eight, the lease ran out and the family moved to Aberdeen, but they soon re-
turned to farming, this time at Bloomfield, Kincardineshire, in the heart of the Mearns country, which was to provide the background to the best of Grassic Gibbon’s work.

From Arbuthnott school, the boy moved to Mackie Academy, Stonehaven, where he was so deeply unhappy that eventually he walked out of it and became a junior reporter on the Aberdeen Journal. In February 1919 he moved to Hill Street, Glasgow, where he wrote for the Scottish Farmer from which he was dismissed for falsifying his expense account. After a failed attempt at suicide, he returned home to face his unsympathetic parents. Lacking a referee, journalism was closed to him, so he joined the Royal Army Service Corps in August 1919, with which he remained until March 1923, serving in Central Asia, Persia and Egypt. Although he saw no actual fighting, he claimed that the experience left him with “a keen distaste for the snarling cry of a machine gun which sends a man clawing earthwards.” Five months service as an R. A. F. Orderly Clerk followed. He was married by the time of his release in 1929.

Between then and his death six years later, he wrote sixteen books and a number of short stories. The books included non-fictional works such as Hanno; Or The Future of Exploration (1928), Nine Against the Unknown (1934) and, with Hugh MacDiarmid, the provocative Scottish Scene (1934). Under his own name he also produced a series of novels which included Spartacus (1933), a study that has not lost its forceful quality.

His masterpiece, written as Lewis Grassic Gibbon, is, of course, A Scots Quair, a trilogy which at one level tells the story of Chris Guthrie, a crofter’s daughter divided in her passionate loyalties and attachments, but finally settling for the rigors of the Scottish land, but at another level the work also takes full account of social history.

In Sunset Song (1932), the first part, Gibbon uses as background the breakup of the crofting pattern under the impact of the 1914-18 war. In the second part, Claud Howe (1933), he is much concerned with the disintegration of small-town society, somewhat unconvincingly attributed to a lack of understanding between the crofters and the urban workers. One gradually becomes aware that Gibbon’s personal dogma is beginning to over-assert itself outwith the life of his characters, a process that dominates the third part of the trilogy, Gray Granite (1934), where he depicts the restless urban discontent out of which communism grows.

In the end, Gibbon propounds a cycle, of which nothing is ultimately enduring but the land. Romanticism runs riot as he envies the hunters who had “roamed these hills, naked and bright, in a Golden Age, without fear or hope or hate or love, living high in the race of the wind and the ease of life, mating as simply as beasts or birds, dying with a little keen simpleness.” Lyrical as is the ring of Gibbon’s prose, the reality probably was that the life on the land of such people was probably short, brutal and uncomfortable.
While *Sunset Song* remains a strong characterization of the dour North-East farm folk, bred to the harshness of the climate and the land and, in the words of Neil Munro “possesses something of the quality of an impressionist painting or a tone poem,” Mitchell’s growing obsession with Marxism, anthropology and plain old-fashioned Celtic-twilight mysticism results in its remaining a flawed near-masterpiece. The attempts by some later writers to turn Chris Guthrie into “Chris Caledonia,” a kind of Scottish Kathleen na Houlan, is really unsustainable. Some of Gibbon’s finest writing is to be found in his collected essays and stories in *A Scots Hairst* (1969).

Gibbon’s most able follower was surely Fred Urquhartt (1912-2002), whose collections of short stories *The Dying Stallion* (1967) and *The Ploughing Match* (1968) reflect the earthy vigor of the generation of Chris Guthrie’s grandchildren. His only novel, *Time Will Knit* (1938), depicts an Edinburgh adolescence.

While nineteenth-century fiction is outwith the scope of this survey, mention must be made of one novel by the long-neglected George Macdonald (1814-1905), for his masterpiece *Lilith* (1895), which W. H. Auden claimed was “equal if not superior to Poe,” if only because he greatly influenced the equally neglected but recently rehabilitated masterpiece of David Lindsay (1876?-1945), *A Voyage to Arcturus* (1920).

His father, Alexander, was a Scot, his mother, Bessie, English. He himself was educated at Lewisham Grammar School and became a clerk with a firm of London insurance brokers, with whom he worked from 1895 to 1916, when he joined the Grenadier Guards, remaining in the army until the end of the war. He married Jacqueline Silver in 1916. On demobilization they settled in Cornwall, where he devoted himself to his writing.

Commercial success eluded him. However *A Voyage to Arcturus* —“the study of an individual against the false values of modern society and the longing for spiritual transcendence,” according to an anonymous critic in the *St James Guide to Science Fiction*—has become recognized as “one of the masterworks of 20th century fantasy.” He dabbled in the occult. Though “burdened by clumsy plotting and wooden dialogue,” yet fired by a “fiercely judgemental idealism and tortured desire to believe in a transcendent reality” that would give meaning to life, his work is nevertheless “infused with genius.” C. S. Lewis was one of his admirers, as was Colin Wilson, who wrote an Introduction to *The Violet Apple* and *The Witch* in 1976 when they were re-published. J. B. Pick provided an Introduction to the 1992 reissue of *Arcturus. The Sphinx* of 1923 reappeared in 1980, *The Devil’s Tor* of 1932 in 1978.

He had also a strong American following. Harold Bloom, writing in a New York magazine, declared: “Nothing else in English since Blake and Shelley that I know of, has found its way back so surely to that early romance world where gods and men meet and struggle as equals, or near equals” as *Bridges of Fantasy.*
Lindsay never surpassed Arcturus. At one level it is a tale of science fiction in which Maskull, a human, finds himself propelled by rocket to another planet, Tormance, whose people have physical characteristics additional to those with which we are equipped. The quasi-philosophizing Maskull and the creatures of Tormance may not be to every reader’s taste, but the book shakes the senses, as also does The Haunted Woman (1922), which, incidentally, reveals Lindsay’s abnormal reaction against sexual relations. None of Lindsay’s books were successful in his lifetime. The revival of Scottish interest in them has been entirely a late twentieth-century phenomenon, led by the paperback cult status which Arcturus achieved in the seventies.

An outstanding Scottish novelist of the earlier part of the twentieth century was undoubtedly Edinburgh-born Naomi Mitchison (1897-1999), sister of the scientist J. B. S. Haldane. She uses the history of her Haldane forebears as material for her Jacobite novel The Bull Calves (1947), thus essaying an actuality view of the aftermath of the great events of the ‘45 as they might have seemed through the eyes of Gleneagles folk in 1747.

Her output included verse and children’s books, notably The Big House (1950), a tale in which the magic of childhood, the attractions of the supernatural and the forces of history are combined to produce an impressive statement of a coherent life-style in a Scottish setting. Her modern folk-parable Five Men and a Swan (1958) is a condemnation of human stupidity and cupidity.

Her masterpiece, however, is generally reckoned to be The Corn King and the Spring Queen (1931), a powerful tale that moves from Marob to Sparta, and to the cruel Egypt of Ptolemy and shows a huge compassion for the recurring nature of human ills and the brief glory of the flesh. From 1937 she made her home in Carradale, Kintyre, from where she pursued her international interests, being awarded the Palmes de l’Académie Française and adopted as tribal Adviser and “Mother” to the Bagota of Botswana.

One of the most important Scottish novelists, reflecting in so many aspects life in the Highlands, was Neil M. Gunn (1891-1974), born at Dumbeath, Caithness, the son of a fishing-vessel skipper and the seventh of nine children. Gunn left his parents when he was thirteen, going to live with his elder sister, Mary, in Galloway. Although he apparently struggled with his schooling, he took the Civil Service examination to qualify as a boy clerk, and when fifteen, was assigned to a post in London.

In J. B. Pick’s Directory of Literary Biographies, Gunn recalls as a teenager sitting by a river eating nuts. “And then within this amplitude the self as it were became aware of seeing itself, not as an ‘I’ or an ‘ego’, but rather as a stranger had come upon and was even a little shy of.” “The Second Self,” as he later referred to it, was “an awakening for Gunn to freedom, objectivity and delight.” In London, Gunn began reading political economy, studied Darwin and took to socialism. He returned to Edinburgh and took the higher examination that led to a decade of service as an unattached officer, when he became friendly with the Irish novelist Maurice Walsh (once especially renowned for
A Century of Scottish Creative Writing

The Key Above the Door (1926). Together they traveled Scotland. Gunn spent World War One at Kinlochleven, where he camped in a tent on the mountainside. Two of his older brothers were killed in that conflict.

The Grey Coast appeared in 1926, when The Boston Transcript advised slow reading, “tasting the flavour of its well-turned sentences even when used upon the most ordinary everyday matters and sensing to the full every changing emotion of the widely different human souls.” Hidden Doors (1929), which followed, was not a success, but Morning Tide (1931), the first of his great novels was “Excellent conceived and beautifully written,” declared the New York Times, “a book worth reading, and what is more, a book worth remembering.” Ostensibly about Hugh and his reaction to the skill and bravery of his brother and father at sea, it is also a kind of threnody for the social defeat that emigration implies. The Lost Glen (1932) is, in the words of one critic, “a fierce tale filled with personal bitterness about the Highlanders’ loss of pride amidst their decaying society.”

Sun Circle (1933), which came next, is a passionate portrayal of the Viking invasion of Caithness and of the relationship between paganism and Christianity. Another novel about the Clearances, Butcher’s Broom came out in 1934 and then in 1937 Highland River, which was given the James Tait Black Memorial Prize. To the alarm of some of his friends, the success of this book led him to resign from the Civil Service, thus forfeiting a pension for want of a few more years in official harness. In many ways it is his finest book, the TLS commenting that its scenes were “projected” with “crystal clarity sharply defined, with an odd double quality of intense immediacy and a sort of enclosed detachment like objects seen in a slightly diminishing river.”

Off in a Boat (1938), an account of a voyage of exploration round Scotland, came next; then The Silver Darlings (1941) recalls the early fishing industry in Caithness and was a huge success with public and critics alike. Something of himself is said to be found in his portrait of Finn, who knows not only the trade of fishing, but also that of story-telling.

The Green Isle of the Great Deep (1944) was a response to the skepticism which a series of articles Gunn had been asked to write for Chambers Journal, called Young Art and Old Hector, was thought to smack of escapism into the “second self,” redeemable only through continuing development into inner realities (the self of The Key of the Chest, 1945).

With The Drinking Well (1946), The Shadow (1948), and The Silver Bough (1948), Gunn’s reputation reached its peak, and he received an Honorary Doctorate from Edinburgh University. Gunn’s book The Atom of Delight (1956) seems to celebrate just that, though it only began to gather admirers after its author’s death. By the end of the 1940’s, Gunn’s life began to fall apart. The Lost Chart (1949), his Cold War novel, was thought by some to leave the major points it raised unresolved. There was his wife, Daisy’s, failing health and financial difficulties, which he responded to by writing stories for the Saturday Evening Post and articles for Holiday magazine.
Although his reputation perhaps dipped after his death, Gunn is now recognized as by far the finest novelist the checkered history of the folk of the Highlands has produced, and he has been the subject of two fine studies, *The Novels of Neil M. Gunn* (1984) by Marjory McCulloch and *A Highland Life* (1981) by F. R. Hart.

Gunn was involved in the founding of the Scottish National Party and was unsparing in supporting the cause of Scotland whenever he thought such support would be helpful, his contribution to discussions once being defined as "articulate, subtle, and above all, diplomatic in all endeavours." I myself recall the enthusiasm of his hospitality at his last two Highland homes and the encouragement he unfailingly gave to young writers.

Some viewed with dismay his latter-day interest in Zen-Buddhism and the theories propounded in Ouspensky's *In Search of the Miraculous*. But as I wrote in my *History of Scottish Literature*: "His deep awareness of man's oldest instincts, his feeling for the strength of man's primitive roots, his poetry of language and his ceaseless search for human wholeness through the interaction on each other of closely-observed characters, are the preoccupations and achievements of a major artist."

Two urban novelists who seem still to be passing through their period of posthumous neglect are George Blake (1893-1961) and Guy F. McCrone (1899-1977).

Blake was born in Greenock, read law at Glasgow University, was wounded at Gallipoli in the 1914-18 war and was invalided out of the army. After a spell on Neil Munro's Glasgow *Evening News*, Blake went to London in 1924 to edit the popular literary magazine *John O' London's Weekly* and in 1928 took over editorship of the *Strand* magazine. In 1930, he became a director of the publishing house of Faber, which incorporated the Porpoise Press and published Gunn's first novels. In 1932 Blake returned to Scotland, settling in Helensburgh until the 1939-45 war took him back to London and the Ministry of Information. His last years were spent in Glasgow.

*The Shipbuilders* (1935), a brilliant depiction of the desolation that all but overcame red Clydeside before and after the Slump, showed an acute understanding of the social distinctions, real or imagined, which separated men and women into classes. A writer who chronicles so powerfully as Blake does the hopes and loves and fears of those generations and social classes who made Carval (his Greenock) a microcosm of the wider industrial world from the end of the eighteenth century to the 1940 blitz on Clydeside, as he does in *The Constant Star* (1845) and its sequel *The Westering Sun* (1946), deserves our admiration, while *The Valiant Heart* (1948) admirably chronicling the impact of the 1914-18 war on a small community, is no less moving.

Guy F. McCrone's trilogy *Wax Fruit* (1947), most readability captures, if perhaps at surface level, the ups and downs of middle-class Glasgow life from mid-Victorian times into the twentieth century. His work, so to say, counterpoints the picture of working-class Gorbals life achieved, with the aid of a
ghostwriter by the unsuccessful journalist Alexander McArthus (1901-44) in *No Mean City*.

Although his output was small, an important novelist and historian was Fionn MacColla, the pen-name of Thomas Douglas MacDonald (1906-75), born in Montrose and who died in Edinburgh. On leaving school he trained in Aberdeen as a teacher and taught briefly in Wester Ross before accepting a lectureship in the Scots College at Safad, Palestine. He returned to Scotland in 1929 intending to go to University. His first novel, *The Albannach*, was published in 1932 and quickly acclaimed. It tells the story of Murdo Anderson, who, as William Geddes puts it, "experiences the spiritual, social and economic ills of contemporary Scotland, before finding a sort of salvation through returning to his home village and rekindling community spirit and local traditions there. In *And the Cock Crew* (1945) MacColla takes the story back a stage, to the time of the Highland clearances, where again, the opposition between the teachers of the Presbyterian Church and the spirit of community is an important axis."

He did not live to complete what would have been his major achievement, but two chapters appeared entitled respectively "Scottish Noel" and "Ane Try-all of Heretics." Gillies comments that "they show tremendous awareness in handling the past, both in historical accuracy and in realism." More widely read was the work of James Barke (1905-58), whose best novel *The Land O' the Leal* (1939) was followed by a series of novels on the life of Burns that salaciously over-focused on the sexual ongoings of the poet.

Worthy of mention is another Glasgow novel, *Dance of the Apprentices* (1948) by Edmund Gaitens (1897-1966), dealing with the lives of the Macdonnell family in the "dispiriting background of the Gorbals."

Gedde, the updated form of Garvel, was the name given to his birth place of Grennock by Alan Sharp (b. 1934), in his proposed trilogy, of which only *A Green Tree in Gedde* (1965) and *The Wind Shifts* (1967) were produced.

William McIlvanney (b. 1936) achieved considerable success with his *Docherty* (1975) and even more so with the detective novel *Laidlaw* (1977), though to this reader at least, the clever author's voice seems sometimes to sound through the dialogue of his characters. *The Kiln* (1996) is his finest achievement so far, the work of an assured story-teller.

Of the other post-second-world-war novelists, the most lauded has surely been Robin Jenkins (1912-2005), born in Cambuslang, which was then a Lanarkshire suburb of Glasgow but in which it is now incorporated. Educated at Hamilton Academy and Glasgow University, he became a teacher at Dunoon Grammar school, though he has taught abroad at places as far apart as Barcelona and Kabul. *So Gaily Sings the Lark* (1951) immediately established Jenkins as a writer with something to say. He regards it as the duty of the Scottish novelist to portray Scottish peculiarities. As the old madam tells the hopeful youngster in *So Gaily Sings the Lark*: "A man kens in his heart that this is an unfinished sort of place, not perfect like heaven; and when he sees something
that he thinks is complete he looks around, without meaning to, for the disappointment.” The Cone-Gatherers (1955) probes the themes of vulnerability and the hollowness of privilege from different angles; Guests of War (1952) the confrontation of middle-class country folk with deprived war-torn awareness of city children. The Changeling (1958), in my view Jenkins’ best novel, looks at the situation in reverse. Dust on the Paw (1961) is set in Afghanistan. There is also a story collection, Far Cry from Bowmore (1973), of which “Bonny Chung,” a wry portrait of a Chinese immigrant on the make in a racially mixed society, is particularly telling.

Two poet novelists must be mentioned. George Mackay Brown (b. 1921) is perhaps best known as a poet, but has also published novels and story collections. In the latter category A Calendar of Love (1967) and A Time to Keep (1969) characters are shown relating their loneliness, not only to present-day concerns, but, in an odd way, to the traditions of those from whom they have descended. Greenvoe (1972), his first novel, is really a collection of acute, but never unkindly, portraits centered on a single community. Brown converted to Roman Catholicism in 1961. His second novel, Magnus (1974), deals with the treacherous murder of Earl Magnus by Earl Hakon on the Island of Egilsay in 1106, an event which made Magnus the patron saint of Orkney. As in all his prose, Brown, in An Orkney Tapestry (1969), conveys the feel and speak of Orkney as no other author has done.

The versatile Iain Crichton Smith (1928-1998) is concerned with the sheer difficulties of communication between one person and another in his first collection of stories, Survival Without Error (1970). Consider the Lilies (1968) views the Clearances through the eyes of his grandparents’ generation in evocative Highland-sounding prose, though perhaps it partially fails insofar as it does not deal with the social and economic currents that created the conditions which, however inhumanely and shamefully, made the Duke of Sutherland’s actions at least intelligible. The Last Summer (1969) and My Last Duchess (1971) both have something of an autobiographical ring. This enormously gifted and charmingly witty man also wrote poems and fiction in Gaelic.

There is another category of Scottish novelist who writes, so to say, outside looking in. One such was Robert Bontine Cunningham Graham (1852-1936), variously Receiver General in Jamaica, Rector of Glasgow University and author of the lyric “If doughty deeds my lady please.” The son of a Scottish laird, but born in London and educated at Harrow, he married a Chilean poetess. Nevertheless, when he inherited the Perthshire family estate of Gartmore, he settled there, though finding it burdened with debt, he soon had to sell it. He was for six years a Scottish Member of Parliament, co-founder with Keir Hardie of the Scottish Labour Party and in 1928 the first President of the Scottish National Party. His story-telling is vivid, whether against a South American background as in his travel-books Mogreb-el-Acksa (1898) and El Río de la Plata (1914) or a Scottish one, as in Faith (1909), Hope (1911) and
Charity (1912). “Beatock for Moffat,” from Scottish Stories (1914) is justly widely anthologized.

A disgracefully neglected Scottish novelist—no doubt because he eventually settled in British Columbia—is Frederick Niven (1878-1944), the son of a Glasgow manufacturer of “sewed muslins” and grandson of a Glasgow librarian. Though born in Valparaiso, Chile, Niven came to Scotland in early childhood and was educated at Hutcheson’s Grammar School and the Glasgow School of Art, where he found that he had not enough talent to become a painter, as he had planned. Niven rebelled against working in his father’s store, so emigrated to Canada at the age of twenty. There he worked in lumber and railway camps in the far west. He also traveled old Indian trails into the hills, providing material for his final novel, The Transplanted (1944).

Then followed a period of journalizing in Glasgow, Edinburgh, Dundee and London. He revisited Canada in 1912. Back again in London, he discovered that he had a heart condition, so had a desk job with the Ministry of Food and Information during the 1914-18 war. Soon after its ending, he left Britain for good, settling in British Columbia, where he died. He drew on his own life-experience for most of his novels. In Coloured Spectacles (1938) he writes warmly of the city that became his second home.

George Blake described Justice of the Peace (1914) as “a more than worthy picture of conditions in a Glasgow warehouse in a bourgeois society in the still expanding city.” The Staff at Simson’s (1937) gives a no doubt realistic account of the working of John Simson, of Cochrane Street, manufacturers of shirtings, wincies, flannelettes and fancy goods for customers who were still clad in the remnants of Edwardian snobbery. The love story of Robert Barclay for a girl from the marmalade factory in The Three Marys (1930) is handled with remarkable frankness for the time in which it was written. After reading A Tale That is Told (1921), Rebecca West hailed Niven as “a Scottish Chekov... No-one before Niven has ever dealt with Scotland’s grey floridity, its pulpit theatricality, its extravagance that breaks out in the very places one would have thought were committed to primness.”

Trumpeter (1934), set partly in South America and partly in Scotland, deals with the career of a Scottish music-master whose prickliness brings him into conflict with the conventions of overseas English behavior. Some novels are set in Canada. The Transplanted (1944) deals with the fortunes of Robert Wallace and Jack Galbraith, the latter a Gorbals man who becomes Wallace’s foreman and saves his boss’s life on the mountains and in turn has his own life saved when Galbraith gets implicated in the murder of one of those violent cheats whom virgin lands seemed to attract. Niven’s evocations of the Scots qualities of character against the background of physical hardship facing those who, like John Galt, emigrated to tame Canada’s lonely places, worthily celebrates that often ambiguously motivated figure, the Scot abroad.

Edinburgh-born Muriel Spark (1918-2006) achieved wide recognition with The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie (1961), especially after the appearance of
the screen version. While the book is, at one level, extremely funny, at another it handles with tact and sympathy a spinster-teacher's downfall as she strives to sublimate her unfulfillment by cultivating "progressive" notions with her pupils. Although The Ballad of Peckam Rye (1960) features a Scottish eccentric, Muriel Spark's fine later novels perhaps ornament the literature of England rather than that of Scotland.

One of the curious features of some lady novelists of the 'twenties and 'thirties was their reluctance to disclose the year of their birth in reference books. This is the case with both Nancy Brysson Morrison and her sister, Margaret Mackie Morrison (d. 1973) who wrote under the pseudonymous March Cost. Nancy Brysson Morrison (1907-1986) was educated at Park School, Glasgow, and at Harrington College, London. Her first novel, The Breakers, appeared in 1930. She wrote some ten novels and True Minds: The Marriage of Thomas and Jane Carlyle (1974), a sensitive study of these two Victorians.

The Gowk Storm (1933), like The Hidden Fairing (1951) and Thea (1963) were also translated into the visual media. The other novels were When the Wind Blows (1937), These are My Friends (1946) and The Other Traveller (1957). The Winnowing Years (1956), in my view her finest novel, won the Frederick Niven Award. Mary, Queen of Scots (1966) won the Literary Guild Award of the USA and another highly enjoyable biography followed in 1969, The Lives of the Brontës. Perhaps because she was part of a group of writers and artists who lived in Glasgow's Hillhead, and I met her on several occasions, her novels made more of an impact on me than those of her sister, whose many tales include After the Festival (1966), Bespoken Mile (1950), By the Angel, Islington, Cosy Chair Stories (1926) and The Countess (1963), a novel based on the life of Sarah, Countess Rumford, Dark Glass (1974), The Hour Awaits, a novel based on the life of Princess Babenberg (1952), Jubilee of a Ghost (1908), Veiled Sultan (1969) and Two Guests from Swedborg (1971).

Though Margaret Mackie Morrison was regarded as the better novelist in her day, The Gowk Storm and The Winnowing Years by her sister perhaps show signs of weathering better the passing literary fashion.

Dot Allan (1892-1964) was born near Bannockburn, Stirlingshire. She was educated locally and at Glasgow University, after which she worked as a freelance journalist, interviewing, among others, Caruso and Arnold Bennett. During the 1939-45 War she served as a nurse. She published nine novels, beginning with The Syrens (1921) and ending with The Deans (1929). Others were Deepening River (1932), Hunger March (1934), Virgin Fire (1935), John Matthew, Papermaker (1948)—her family on her mother's side had been pa-

\[1\text{Fortunately an excellent book has managed to discover many of these dates. See Douglas Gifford and Dorothy McMillan, eds., A History of Scottish Women's Writing (Edinburgh, 1997).}\]
A Century of Scottish Creative Writing

permakers—Mother of Millions (1953), of which Dame Sybil Thorndike declared: “anyone who loves Scotland must find charm and romantic interest in this delicious novel,” The Passionate Sisters (1955), and Charity Begins at Home (1958). She also wrote articles under the name of Wickham Steed. She was a friend of my first violin teacher, Elsie MacLaurin, and I remember as a schoolboy being taken to tea with Dot Allan, making her the first author I had ever met and launching me on a reading of her agreeable stories.

A loss to Scottish literature was the early death in a car accident of James Kennaway (1928-68), whose Tunes of Glory (1956) was memorably filmed. His posthumously published short novel The Cost of Living Like This (1969) suggested greater things to come.

While personally I have never been much of a devotee of the post-Sir Walter Scott historical novel, Nigel Tranter (1907-2000), a Glaswegian, scored a considerable popular success with a long series of such works. Trained as an accountant, he began by making a contribution to Scottish popular learning with The Fortalices and Early Mansions of Southern Scotland (1936). His long series of historical novels, many of them written at this home in Aberfeldy, included the trilogy on the life of King Robert the Bruce, comprising The Steps to the Empty Throne, The Path of the Hero King and The King’s Peace, which appeared between 1969 and 1971.

In all, Tranter wrote over one hundred and thirty books, including Black Douglas (1968) and Wallace (1975). The historian John Prebble said of him: “I admired his work, not only for the totality of it but the ease with which he could turn history into fiction,” while Magnus Linklater claimed that he “did more to popularize Scottish history than almost any other Scottish writer I can think of.”

Tranter found time, too, for other activities. He was an Honorary President of the Saltire Society and BBC Scot of the Year in 1989. Under the pseudonym Nye Tredgold, he also wrote westerns. He was Knight Commander of the Order of St. Lazarus.

Clifford Hanley (1922-1999) worked as a journalist and broadcaster in Glasgow for forty years or so, and wrote numerous novels and plays, staged usually in Glasgow. He was at one time President of the Scottish branch of P.E.N. Dancing in the Streets (1958) deservedly achieved considerable fame, as to a lesser extent did The Taste of Too Much (1960). I also thought highly of a later novel, The Red-Haired Bitch (1960), when I first read it.

Glasgow-born Frederick Lindsay (b. 1933), the son of a plumber and a school teacher, was educated at the Universities of Glasgow and Edinburgh, becoming, first a teacher at Annan Academy and then in 1979 lecturer in English and applied linguistics at Hamilton College of Education, living at Pennicuik. He began with a book of poems, And Be The Nation Again in 1975. He published Brond, a novel, in 1975, Jill Rips and Charm Against Drowning in 1988, After the Stranger Came in 1992 and In the Belly of the Whore in 1995. “For me,” he is on record as saying, “the novel continues of all literary forms
the most rewarding: financially, though, doing film scripts buys time to write books. Despite common sense and most of the evidence, I cling to the hope that there may actually be a posterity for which it's worth writing as well as one can.”

In the TLS, Gerald Mangan wrote: “Lindsay's first novel opens and proceeds very much in the manner of a cryptic, fast-cutting thriller,” but has “an undercurrent of political allegory hidden within the suspense of the story.” *Brond* is set in Glasgow and dramatizes the plight of a university student who witnesses a murder. The murderer, the student comes to realize, is Brond, a respected figure in the academic arena. The student faces danger, uncertainty and fear as Brond sets out to destroy him as well. Nick Kimberley, writing in the *New Statesman*, observed that “the Glasgow location has much to offer in the way of tenebrous location.”

*Charm Against Drowning* tells the story of George Campbell, a teacher with a mentally unstable wife and a ten-year-old daughter addicted to heroin, who is taken by her father to a remote island to get her out of reach of drug-pushers; but with the arrival of one, Ramsay, on the island, violence erupts and Campbell comes to fear not only for his daughter's safety, but also for his own. *After the Stranger Came*, based on the life of a criminal hypnotist in Hitler's Germany, is concerned with extreme emotions and family relationships, and was said to be well-paced and convincing.

The Glasgow that James Kelman (b. 1946) writes about is the Glasgow of the unemployed and the people on the run, the drifters and layabouts and punters, the petty con artists. It includes the old lady in *Lean Tales* (1985) who sits under a bridge over the Kelvin smoking Capstan full-strength cigarettes and blowing “Maxwelton Braes are Bonny” on a mouth organ to passersby, and the many who feel betrayed but are not sure how or by whom. James Campbell, writing in *The Times Literary Supplement*, thought that Kelman conveys to the reader, as no other writers does, the feeling of Glasgow: “The smell and sight and sound of pubs and betting shops, working men's cafes, the texture of the streets.”

When Kelman won the Booker Prize for *How Late It Was, How Late* in 1996, Julia Newberger, one of the judges, objected, regarding it as “unacceptable that a serious novel should use the word 'fuck' four thousand times.” Kelman responded with a refusal to engage in what he regards as the censorship of the Glasgow working-class language, out of which he writes, by the suppression of its use of swearwords. Middle-class people do not always realize how frequently men with a small word-range use the adjectival form of the word relating to what is presumably their most pleasurable activity. During the fifties, I used to travel from Balloch to Glasgow in the late afternoon to review a concert or write a leader for *The Bulletin* newspaper. At Dumbarton the train filled up with workers from Denny's shipyard and “fucking this” and “fucking that” filled the loud-voiced compartment. It was a revelation to me, making Kelman's language seem perfectly realistic.
More sympathetic was Janet H. Porter, who, in the 2nd April 1994 number of *The Independent* newspaper, wrote: “This, in a nutshell, is the astounding achievement of Kelman’s latest novel that you are stuck, for 374 pages, inside the befuddled hung-over mind and the unshaven none-too-clean skin of a blind drunk who achieves nothing in a week beyond the fact of surviving, but you are never bored.” But Julia Newberger had her supporters, notably Simon Jenkins in *The Times* of 15th October 1994, who declared Kelman “totally obsessed with the word [fuck]. He sometimes writes it over and over again when he can’t think of anything else with which to fill a line.” An even more furious attack came from Gerald Warner in *The Sunday Times* of 25th September, 1994:

The basic premise of the modern Scottish ‘serious’ novel is that the section of the population which really matters, the ‘working class,’ has been victimized and deprived of its authentic ‘culture’ by the combined forces of The English, Toryism and American influence.

It is this sinister axis which has deprived the Scottish proletariat of its birthright: the privilege of breaking sweat daily in some sweat-bucket industry.... Add to this an obsession with violence and poverty, complemented by disdain for any aspect of history or contemporary life that smacks of tartan and romance, and you have the ground rules laid down by the cosy coteries of socialist nostalgia freaks who form the mutual-admiration society that is the Scottish literary set.

Even more versatile is Alastair Gray (b. 1934), who achieved resounding success with his novel *Lanark: A Life in Four Books* (1981). Gray once described himself as “a fat old asthmatic Glaswegian who lives by painting and writing,” but he is, in fact, a gifted artist and graduate of the Glasgow School of Art as well as a writer. Douglas Gifford claims quite simply:

*Lanark...will undoubtedly stand as one of the greatest of Scottish novels, as well as bearing comparison with the best of great surrealist and dystopian fiction throughout the world. Gray has made his picture of Glasgow and the west of Scotland in decline his *Waste Land*—with its exaggerated images of sterility and decay thus becoming the images of the decline of the bigger West; the barren city failures of Europe and the world beyond.*

The critic Eric Korn observed that in *Lanark*, “Glasgow is turned into the sunless phantasmagoric city of Unthank and the hero in this huge, exciting and intermittently inspired novel is a citizen of both... Gray is admirable in his evocation of the drear society of Unthank...where the citizens are consumed by strange desires, the outward manifestation of inward disorders.”

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Janine (1989), which followed, revolves around the thoughts, memories and sadomasochistic fantasies of protagonist Jack MacLeish, the violent nature of which generated some controversy when the book first came out. Fellow novelist David Lodge, however, argues that Gray is "continually deconstructing the discourse of pornography, by parody, metafictional commentary and...the dissonance of confessions, which eventually dominate the book." On the other hand, less sympathetically, another reviewer, Lewis Jones, writing in volume 152 of The Spectator, observes: "Mr Gray shows pornography to be dead and then attempts to bring it to life. One cannot expect miracles." "Satire at its best" was how The Fall of Kelvin Walker (1985) was hailed by Kate Fullarton in British Book News in June 1985. But Hermione Lee, writing in The Observer in March of that year thought that "the satire on the Calvinist drive for power, though a jolly jeu d'esprit, doesn't allow [Gray] the big scope his themes are."

Unpredictable, even erratic, as he sometimes may appear to be, Gray will always command attention. His Scottish National views are to be found in Why Scots Should Rule Scotland (1992). Gray has worked as a theater scenery and mural painter and has been commissioned to paint portraits of local dignitaries, some of them now in Glasgow's People's Palace Museum.

Jeff Torrington (b. 1935) came to wide recognition comparatively late in his career with his novel Swing, Hammer, Swing (1993), which, he tells us, took some thirty years to write, but he had already written an earlier novel of considerable power, The Devil's Carousel (1990) as well as numerous short stories and articles. Before becoming a writer, we learn, he had worked as a banana warehouseman and car-plant laborer as well as in a whisky bonded warehouse.

The Devil's Carousel (1994), inspired no doubt by his time working in the Linwood car plant, had, on the whole an enthusiastic reception in this country and in America. Said one critic, "this sharp, sardonic novel brilliantly shows...a perfect working model of an automobile production plant." Said another:

Working Stiffs might have been the title of this novel, which is a wicked send-up of life in a Scottish auto factory, a 'multi-nat' in the parlance of its tough, irreverent crew of characters. Nothing is sacred and nothing is spared in Torrington's merciless if humorous gaze.

Another reviewer thought the novel "pure, raunchy satire"; its author "not immune from resorting to bathroom humour to score laughs that is ambitious if a bit uneven."

He has had his adverse criticisms. Stephen Aminda, writing in the Sunday Times book section in April 1996, claimed:

Torrington often seems at a loss as to how to bring the book's various strands together. His perspective shifts uneasily between the closely personal and the lofty
A Century of Scottish Creative Writing 235

satirical. And the conceit of using the factory’s underground newsletter as a bridge
between the chapters proves more mystifying than illuminating. Then again, the
fragmentation might be just what the author had in mind.

On the other hand, I agree with Sarah Macguire, who wrote in *The Independent*
of 28 September 1996, that the book was “far more than a collection of linked
short stories. Its coherence lies in its analysis of assembly-line production, and
the manner in which his deft probing of his characters welds into an indictment
of the system itself” or, as Alan Bold put it, *The Devil’s Carousel* adds up to “a
damned good book that demonises the worshippers of cars as a collective curse
on society.”

*Swing, Hammer, Swing* recounts the story of Tom Clay, a struggling
writer. A critic in the *Christian Science Monitor* called it “a bumbling and
bloated... novel which it’s best just to sit back and like,” while another referred
to its “rich Scotch broth of language,” the writing “as varied as it is vivid.”
Torrington, who grew up in Glasgow’s Gorbals, worked for a time for the BBC
in London, but had a play staged at the Glasgow Citizens Theatre as long ago
as 1978.

It isn’t always the case that detective novels can be regarded as literature,
but by general agreement those of Ian Rankin (b. 1960) can. Born in Fife and
educated at the local comprehensive and Edinburgh University, the character
associated with his name is Inspector John Rebus, who first appeared in *Knots
and Crosses* (1987), and has featured in all twelve novels which, according to
critic Allan Laing:

transcend their genre. They are more than just ‘tartan noir’ crime stories. They are
powerful and disturbing glimpses of the human soul; the world seen clearly through
the whisky glass of the author’s Edinburgh-based detective John Rebus. Rankin’s
strength... is that he seems to know that writing fiction is a perpetual learning
curve... and with each novel he gets better and better, [steadfastly maintaining] a
sense of honour and probity.

Heather O’Donoghue, in the *TLS* of 25th February 2000, called him “the
leading male crime writer in Britain,” when reviewing the eleventh novel, *Set
in Darkness*, and described Rankin’s “evocation of the Edinburgh which lies
behind the elegant tourist façade: the city of Irvine Welsh’s *Trainspotting*, a
place of violence, drugs and organized crime, and, ever present below the
surface, that deep sectarian divide.” A *Herald* reviewer of the same book
claimed the Rebus “effectively chronicled a social history of his native
country.”

One anxious reader asked Rankin if he meant to pension off Rebus, to
which enquiry his creator replied: “I don’t want to spend the rest of my life
writing about this guy, you know, but I haven’t thought what I’ll do with him.
It’ll just depend on how I feel on the day when I get to the final pages of the
final book.” Meanwhile, “Rankin never lets up,” as another critic put it, “and
Rebus and Edinburgh are irretrievably intertwined through the city’s dark and shadowy places."

Without doubt the most popular contemporary Scottish novelist is Irvine Welsh (b. 1960), a Leith man who now spends his time in London and Amsterdam. Educated at the City and Guilds School, he took an MSc in computing in London and an MBH at Heriot Watt University, Edinburgh. He has been a TV repairman, a council employee, a property speculator, a columnist and a D.J. Born on a working-class housing estate in Muirhouse, he grew up in the depressing realities of a jobless area and left school at sixteen. He left Edinburgh in 1977 and followed the rock scene to London, doing various jobs and following the fortunes of his favorite pop group, the Sex Pistols. Welsh moved back to Edinburgh and began writing while he was also studying computer science. He took seriously to writing, however, while on a back-packing holiday in America, and thereafter published some short stories in the little magazine Rebel Inc, dealing with the lives and problems of the Edinburgh underclass when that city became known as the heroin capital of Europe.

His stories were eventually collected in The Acid House (1994). Trainspotting appeared in 1993 and became a best seller as the critic Burham Wazir observes, establishing him as a literary cult figure. It reached the final group in the Booker Prize run-up. Chronicling the despair of Scottish drug addicts, “the helplessness of an unemployed and politically disenfranchised generation,” as Wazir so aptly puts it. The colloquial nature of its forceful language necessitated subtitles when the film made of it—featuring Ewan McGregor and Robert Carlisle—reached America. He is known to be fond of drinks and drugs, taking part in an unsuccessful campaign to legalize cannabis.

His next novel Marabou Stark Nightmares, the thoughts of a soccer hooligan visualized while hospitalized, was greeted with less acclaim, but was followed quickly by a collection of stories, Ecstasy (1996), even less acclaimed, as was its successor about a corrupt policeman, Filth (1998). Glue, which appeared in 2001, marked a new departure, being the story of four childhood friends from an Edinburgh housing estate. Porno (2002) returns to the territory of Trainspotting, leading to some critical suggestions that his inventive powers had deserted him.

Meanwhile, in August 2002, Welsh launched a fierce attack on the city of Edinburgh, alleging that it was suffering from an influx of artists and middle-class professionals. As the seat of Scottish government and the headquarters of the Church of Scotland and the Scottish Law system, it could hardly be otherwise! “Social problems,” Welsh alleged, “go unchecked, and people don’t get the opportunity they deserve simply because they are not deemed to exist in this paradise;” which drew from the Lord Provost the rejoinder: “To say that Edinburgh is a cultural desert outside the Festival is arrant nonsense.”

There are those who claim Welsh as the leader of the current school of realism in Scottish fiction. A similar claim could, however, be made for Alan Spence (b. 1947), who came to notice with his collection of stories The
Colours They Are Fine in 1977, a book in three parts dealing with boyhood, observed adult life and "one in which the author's personal grown-up voice is heard." Allan Massie, reviewing the book in The Scotsman in August 1977, described Spence's Glasgow (and by implication his own) as:

A city and culture of enormous individuality and gusto, that grew up in a surge of energy and began to decay almost before it reached its peak; with a language of remarkable vitality and a style of wit that is unmistakable; the city riven by a deep chasm of religious and social hostility, divided too by extremes of wealth and poverty and a solid entrenched bourgeois; a city notorious for slums and violence and famous for warmth; and, as if this was not enough, a city whose bosses have eviscerated it in the last quarter of a century in the name of progress.

The stories deal with various aspects of this particular analysis (which not every Glaswegian would accept as fair), "The Palace" and "Greensleeves" for example, showing what Glasgow is alleged to have done to some of its people, leading them to various failures. "Mr Spence," Massie declares, "has achieved a variety; a piece of writing as warming as a Cézanne or a Matisse."

Thirteen years after the appearance of this justly-acclaimed collection, Spence followed it with a novel, The Magic Flute (1990). It revisits some of the scenes and episodes in the earlier stories, tracing the courses the various lives therein have since taken. It is carefully structured, contains convincing sketches of time and place, but, in the words of Ian A. Bell in Contemporary Novelists, though "a powerful and searching book, serious and humane in its treatment of participants, with a high sense of purpose and intelligence [also] sprawls and drifts too much." Furthermore, the flute symbol, referring to Mozart's opera libretto, does not really work, a conclusion I also reached. The novel was short-listed for the McVittie Prize.

Something of the original brilliance of his first story collection rekindles in Spence's second collection, Stone Garden and Other Stories (1993), characterized by imagery which is tellingly accurate and moments of epiphany, all couched in a compelling narrative style. Writing in Cencrastus No. 56 (1997), John Burns said that it was "Spence's genius...to be able to write with insight and compassion about...broken lives, to acknowledge the suffering and humanity of his characters without sentimentalising or romanticising them."

He is also, incidentally, wearing his poet's hat, a master of the haiku of which this is part of one sequence:

sweeping at these flies
i could kill them all!
the hot sticky afternoon

hesitating
to strike the fly
that lands on the picture”
of buddha

plump pear, just hanging
wet with dew—
spider moving
slowly over it

Another writer from the second half of the twentieth century is Kilwinning-born Janice Galloway (b. 1956), who attracted immediate attention with her collection of stories *The Trick is to Keep Breathing* (1989), followed by a second collection, *Blood* in 1991 and *Clara* (2002), a sympathetic study of the life and times of Clara Schumann, the long-lived pianist widow of the composer Robert Schumann, who died in an asylum in 1856, two years after attempting suicide by throwing himself into the Rhine. Of *Clara*, Harriet Gilbert in *The Listener* found the narrative of the heroine “freshly disturbing and strange,” but the novel “hums with intelligence, clarity, wit; and, as its heroine struggles for order and meaning, seduces our minds, exposes how close we all are to insanity.”

“I write because I hate having a boss,” Galloway says, “so it’s an invaluable source of personal and economic freedom.” She won both the Allan Lane Book of the Year Award and the Scottish Arts Council Award in 1991.

It is yet another woman writer, J. K. Rowling (b. 1965), who has achieved the most astonishing success of any recent Scottish writer. She was born at Chipping Sodbury and educated at Tuthill Primary School, near Chepstow, Wisdean Comprehensive and Exeter University, becoming first, Secretary of Amnesty International and then a teacher of English as a foreign language in Portugal. *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone* (1998)—which won no fewer than seven awards—*Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* (1999), and *Harry Potter and the River of Azkban* (1999) have broken all selling records for children’s books, one being the $100,000 paid in the USA for a first novel by a children’s writer. One critic, Rayne Turton, thus analyzes the appeal of the Harry Potter books: “The language is witty, the plotting light, the imagination soars. It’s fun,” while another observes “Rowling has an unerring sense of what it means to be 11.... Hogwart’s School of Witchcraft and Wizardry certainly found its place on the map of childhood.”

In many ways the most powerful of Scotland’s current clutch of women writers is Dundee-born Alison L. Kennedy (b. 1965) who now lives in Glasgow. Her first book was a collection of stories, *Night Geometry and the Garscadden Trains* (1990), which a writer in the TLS described as “stories that act as a memorial for the silent majority who live their lives in the best way they can and still leave nothing behind.”

*Looking for the Possible Dance* followed in 1993, preoccupied with the ugliness of modern city life—“rotten ceilings, rotten windows, dog shite and
needles all up your close. Rats.” According to Julian Lorne in the London Review of Books, “Kennedy portrays effectively a listless, apathetic modern generation, lacking a clear direction in life. Many of the characters use drugs simply to reach an inner peace.” While there is plenty of evidence around to show beyond doubt that this is an accurate diagnosis, it is one which must seem strange to many of my generation who grew up in the virtual certainty that what awaited our adulthood was a World War from which survival would at least be problematical. But there we are.

Sarah Smith, in the New Statesman and Nation, calls Kennedy’s work “writing that answers back; sharp, satirical and eloquent in the anatomy of the disillusion of a generation,” while Lorna Sage, in the TLS, tells us that “the middle road is Kennedy’s idea of hell and her detached prose is her way of avoiding the middle road, which, to her, is the equivalent to...human despair.” So I Am Glad (1995) retains the seamier side of life, but introduces an element of magic, too. Later works include Where You Find It (1996), published, also in America, in 2002. She has collaborated with the composer Sally Beamish in, among other works, the libretto for an opera, Monster, first performed in Glasgow in 2002.

It is perhaps strange that while what the Frenchman Dennis Saurat dubbed “The Scottish Renaissance” should, in the ’Twenties and ’Thirties, have been poetry and drama-based, or what Eric Linklater called its “Second Wind Phase” during the 1939-45 war and for a decade or so after. The turn-of-the-century phase, currently still in full swing, should now be firmly based on the novel. The important thing is, of course, through whichever branch of the literary media it speaks, Scotland still has a distinctive voice.

Scottish Theater 1900-2000

“The history of the Scottish Theatre, unlike that of its English counterpart, cannot be told in terms of institutions, dramatists or even plays. It is a story in which considerable difficulty, intermittent prosperity and occasional triumph are viewed within a continual, sometimes desperate, always determined, struggle.” So wrote Donald Campbell in 1996 in his Playing for Scotland: A His-
Nevertheless, in spite of which daunting words, we must try to produce a brief survey. Campbell goes on to say that “With only rare exceptions—the poet Alan Ramsay, the playwrights Joe Corrie and James Bridie” (Campbell, p. xi)—most of the people who wrote for the stage were actors.

Another such exception was the courtier-poet Sir David Lyndsay of the Mount in Fife (1486-1555). There must have been much more pre-Reformation drama in Scotland, but the only play to survive is, in fact, Lyndsay’s Ane Satyre of the Thrie Estaits, staged before the Scottish Court at Linlithgow on the feast of Epiphany, 6th January 1540. It deals with the errors into which the Catholic Church had fallen and led the king to urge the Church to mend its ways. That original version has not survived, but the play was again presented on 7th June 1552, at Cupar, Fife, and a third performance was given before the Queen Regent on 12th August 1554 at the Greenside, Edinburgh, on the lower slopes of the Calton Hill before “an exceeding great number of people,” according to Henrie Charteris; and that text was published by Robert Charteris in 1602. Probably belonging to the 1590s, Philotus was derived in part from a work by Barnabe Rich, and from an Italian comedy Gli Ingannati. It is usually considered to be anonymous and survives in two copies, one printed by Robert Charteris in 1603, the other by Andro Hart in 1612. Then there is a long silence, the Church vehemently opposing profane stage plays.

Allan Ramsay’s pastoral The Gentle Shepherd appeared in 1725. It was modeled on John Gray’s Beggars’ Opera, which had scored a huge success against the cult of imported Italian opera in London, some of its melodious numbers surviving the premiere as songs on their own. But in spite of a certain facile charm, it is pretty thin stuff, as a twentieth-century revival by Robert Kemp for the Edinburgh International Festival showed.

Even more disastrous was the Agamemnon staged in Edinburgh by James Thomson, the poet of The Seasons, in 1738. Nor were Thomson’s ensuing Edward and Eleanora, Tancred and Sigismundo or Coriolanus any more successful.

John Home (1722-1808), the son of the Town Clerk of Leith, had a succès d’estime with his Douglas (1756), when a gallery enthusiast in Edinburgh leapt to his feet crying: “Whaur’s yer Wullie Shakespeare noo?” Home became private secretary to the Earl of Butte and thereafter tutor to the Prince of Wales, who, on his succession to the throne as George III, granted his former teacher an annual pension of £300. Not even David Garrick could make any of Home’s later pseudo-Shakespearian plays—The Siege of Aquileia (1760), The Fatal Discovery (1769), Alonzo (1773) and Alfred (1778) succeed on the London stage. Today, he is remembered by Jacobite historians for his History of

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the Rebellion of 1745 (1802) and by history-minded claret drinkers for his amusing protest when a heavy duty was imposed on that wine!

Bold and erect the Caledonian stood,
Old was his mutton and his claret good;
Let him drink port, the English statesman cried—
He drank the poison, and his spirit died.

In the nineteenth century there was a revival of interest in the theater, the intervening gap being filled to some extent by the "Penny Geggies," itinerant players who set up stalls where there were markets, constantly moving from place to place.

There was, however, a need for the workers who had flooded into the towns, particularly Glasgow, from the Scottish Highlands and from Ireland, in response to the growing demand for labor to meet the needs of expanding industry, to be entertained. Campbell again: "Crammed as they were into overcrowded slums, they had a positive incentive to go out in the evening" (Campbell, p. 87). As the century wore on, this requirement began to be met by the "free and easies," rooms or music halls established at first in public houses, then moving into theaters, thus founding the Scottish variety theater tradition that lasted well into the twentieth century.

The regular theater was initially supported by the rich, but later, if the Glasgow Dramatic Review of 1846 is to be believed, "the respectable portion of the inhabitants, those who were most able financially to support the theater, may virtually be said to have gone," since "ladies cannot be taken to the Adelphi, at Dunlop Street, they are certain to be disgusted by the unlicensed tongue, or the exhibition of buffoonery or imbecility, save when a 'star' appears; and even then the gratification is so qualified that the desire to return is never felt."

Suspicions of the theater survived in Scotland, even amongst people not noticeably religious, into the 'thirties of the twentieth century; my own mother, otherwise of a liberal disposition, regarding members of the acting profession, particularly the women, as being of loose moral character. But there is, perhaps, a deep-seated reason for this ancient hostility other than inherited subconscious religious intolerance. It is not without significance that the arts in which the Scots openly excelled—literature and painting—can be presented and enjoyed, so to say, anonymously, neither provider nor consumer involved in public show (shades of John Knox!), whereas music and the theater necessitate a greater degree of public exposure.

The impulse to create a modern Scottish theater, when it eventually came, was the result of Irish stimulation. In the summer of 1907, the Abbey Theatre of Dublin brought to Glasgow W. B. Yeats' Cathleen ni Houlihan and J. M. Synge's The Well of the Saints. The effect of these two plays on Graham Moffat (1866-1951), the son of an elocution teacher all of whose six children chose the stage as their career, was stimulative. As a young man Moffat taught elo-
Maurice Lindsay

...cution to divinity students at St Andrews University. He married Maggie, a suffragette who in 1906 was jailed for two weeks for attending an illegal meeting in support of her cause. She helped her husband get together a company, prophetically called The Scottish National Players, to stage a comedy, *Till the Bells Ring*, followed by a tragedy based on the story of Annie Laurie. Although neither was a success, Moffat was not discouraged, following them with *The Concealed Bed*, *A Scrape o' the Pen*, *Causey Saints* and a failed play re-titled *Bunty Pulls the Strings*, which then brought him the success he sought, not only in London but throughout most of the English-speaking world. The 1914-18 war, however, brought an end to Scottish Playgoers, as the Moffat company was called. Moffat himself retired to South Africa in 1936 and died there in 1955, a convert to spiritualism.

It was among the amateurs that, for a time at least, drama flourished. The Scottish Community Drama Association (better known as S.C.D.A.D.) was founded in 1926 and soon had over thirty amateur companies taking part in its festivals. Interest in drama had been rekindled and in 1921 the St Andrews Society of Glasgow, using the residual funds it heired from the defunct Glasgow Repertory Company, founded what eventually became the Scottish National Players, run, first, by A. P. Wilson of the Abbey Theatre, and later, more successfully, by Tyrone Guthrie, then at the beginning of a career that brought him a knighthood and a theater dedicated to his memory in Canada.

There was a shortage of native material, so plays were written for the Scottish National Players by John Brandane (1869-1947), the pen name of Dr. John MacIntyre, notably *The Glen is Mine* (1925), which features, but does not explore in any great depth, the problem of the romantic Highland past set against the industrial present, contrasting "the old weary labour in all sorts of weather amidst the healthy heather and the deer, with the drudgery amidst slumdom resulting from emigration to a job in Glasgow." All Brandane's plays had a Highland setting.

Joe Corrie (1894-1968), on the other hand, began his working life as a miner from Slamannan, was self-educated and grew up in a coal-mining district of Fife. His first venture into literature was a volume of poems, *Image o' God* (1928). Much influenced by the touring "penny-geggie" show of the Thomas Family, Corrie joined the Auchterderran Dramatic Club and appeared in several of their shows, being noted for his "quaint, pawky manner." Soon, he began writing one-act plays, initially to raise money for soup-kitchens during the 1926 General Strike. With his sister and two brothers, he formed the Bowhill Players and toured Fife with his play *Hogmanay*.

His first full-length play was *In Time of Strife* (1929) which, however, was turned down by the Scottish National Players. Convinced of the play's worth, Corrie produced it with his own company and it was a resounding success, in 1928 being toured to many Scottish towns and cities. There followed a furious row between Corrie and the Reading Committee, of the official company, which consisted of Brandane, the poet and journalist William Jeffrey and...
James Bridie, of whom more in a moment. Corrie alleged that his socialist play had been rejected on political grounds in favor of Neil M. Gunn's *The Ancient Fire*, which had failed disastrously. Years later Bridie was to make amends when the Reading Committee of the Glasgow Citizens Theatre rejected Corrie's *A Master of Men*, Bridie, the major begetter of the Citizens, simply ordering the play into production.

Corrie's company failed. The Scottish National Players ended their existence in 1934, though some of the players struggled on as an amateur club until 1947. Corrie himself held fast to his belief that plays should give the working classes hope, writing in the *Scottish Stage* in 1933: "Cannot the tragedy of life be shown, not to show us how hopeless a proposition Man is, but to show us that by conquering—not lying down to—life's difficulties and sorrows we may emerge to something greater."

Drama, mostly by such English playwrights as Somerset Maugham, J. B. Priestley, John Drinkwater and Frederick Lonsdale, was provided on a seasonal basis in Glasgow, Edinburgh and Aberdeen, first by the company formed by Jevan Brandon Thomas (who became involved in a sexual scandal which, in Mrs. Patrick Campbell's words, "scared the horses") and then by Wilson Barrett's company which took over. Though London orientated, it produced an occasional play by a Scots author, including Moray MacLaren's *Heather on Fire*. It did, however, give invaluable experience to such future famous thespians as Walter Carr, Bryden Murdoch, Edith MacArthur, Lennox Milne, Robert Urquhart and many others.

David Steuart and Marjorie Dence bought the theater in Perth High Street, which had been built in 1899, and in 1935 made it the home of the Perth Repertory Theatre, while in 1939 Dundee Repertory Company came into being. In St Andrews, A. B. Paterson founded the Byre Theatre Company, leasing a barn on a disused farm. It differs from other companies in that its stage features were worked by both amateurs and professionals. It now has its own premises in the town itself.

The name of R. F. Pollock (1885-1938) may not mean a great deal to many readers. A Vale of Leven man, he became fascinated by developments in Sound Theatre and formed a company of amateur actors, many of whom later became brilliant professionals, including Molly Urquhart, Grace Ballantyne, Paul Vincent Carroll and, probably most notable, John Duncan Macrae. Pollock deserves to be remembered by Scottish theater-goers, especially as his protégés always loudly sang his praises.

At this point it is necessary to draw attention to the curious omission by many writers on the Scottish Theatre of Sir James Matthew Barrie, O. M. (1860-1937). The ninth child of a handloom weaver, he was born in Kirrie-

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4 Gunn's play was published retitled as a novella in 1930 and staged at the Edinburgh Festival in 1950.
muir, the "Thrums" of his novels, and educated at Glasgow Academy, Dumfries Academy and Edinburgh University. Even as a boy he was determined to be a writer. His first job was on the staff of the Nottingham Journal. What first brought him fame was Auld Licht Idylls (1888). By the writers of the Scottish Renaissance in the mid-twentieth century he was regarded as the leading upholder of the Kailyard school, combining Scots dialogue with whimsy, the make-believe fantasy of evasion, and sentimentality. It was literary fare for which there was a ready market, for he left a fortune of £173,000 on his death.

As a playwright, however, he could exercise a command over the language of the theater such as he rarely displayed in handling it in its more inert fictional role. He was also an expert sticker together of plots in an era when an audience expected a play to have a beginning, a middle and an end and not simply reveal the ragged seams of life; which audiences today more readily accept, both in the theater and on the television screen.

Quality Street (1901)—its title a street name in Leith—set in the Napoleonic wars, deals with two spinster sisters, one of whom has a romance with an army Captain who fails to "declare himself"; so Miss Phoebe dons spectacles, a muslin cap and the attitude then thought becoming for an old maid. Some years later, back comes the Captain, and invites Miss Phoebe to a ball. But he has to be content instead with her "niece," who, needless to say, turns out to be Miss Phoebe herself; and the Captain, delighted with the deception, at last declares himself. The Admirable Crichton (1902), perhaps the most durable of Barrie's plays, amusingly portrays the super-butler who, when the family and domestic staff are ship-wrecked on an island, becomes a virtual dictator by virtue of his inherent abilities, only to retreat to butlerdom again once rescue has been achieved.

The most celebrated of Barrie's adult plays that followed, What Every Woman Knows (1908), propounds the theory that behind every successful man is a staunch little woman; Dear Brutus (1917) a witty exploration of the theory that the thing which everyone carries within him (or her) are the seeds of his own destiny, and given a second chance, a person would come up with basically similar characteristics and answers. Most sickly of all the later plays is Mary Rose (1920) in which a disappeared "mother-ghost" returns to see how her children are faring, only to find that her son, now a grown man, feels no connection with her at all. Shall We Join the Ladies? (1921) is an overt murder story, while Barrie's last play, The Boy David (1926), was what proved to be an ill-advised excursion into religious drama.

Most famous of all, of course, is Peter Pan or the Boy Who Never Grew Up (1904), which has been much subjected to Freudian analysis and other variants of psychological dissection. Today, we may smile at the sexual overtones of its stage directions, but the play still chimes a chord with children and is frequently revived.
Once the Barrie magic packed not only Scotland’s theaters but also those in London’s West End. Unlike Ramsay and Home, he drew in sophisticated audiences, without which theater can have no life. He might therefore be considered the father of modern drama.

It was from Shaw rather than from Barrie, however, that his much greater successor, James Bridie (Dr. O. H. Mavor) (1888-1951), learned his stagecraft; as with Shaw, he holds his audience with the witty unraveling of ideas. Bridie, a Glasgow man, qualified as a medical doctor at Glasgow University—where certain jovial lines, but notably that chilly satire on West-End wooing “The West End Perk,” are still gratefully remembered—practiced in Glasgow until 1938, serving during the 1939-45 war in the Royal Army Medical Corps.

He first became known as a dramatist in Scotland with The Sunlight Sonata (1928) and What it is to be Young (1929), both of which showed a talent for crisp wit and clever character drawing. But his eyes were set on London and in 1930 he secured a huge success with the long-running Tobias and the Angel. There followed, among others, The Anatomist (1930), Jonah and the Whale (1932), The Sleeping Clergyman (1933), Susannah and the Elders (1937), The Foreign Reef (1944)—a fantasy that proved too strong for London audiences—Dr Angelus (1947), The Baikie Charivari (1945) and, posthumously, Daphne Laureola (1952).

Bridie, like Shaw, uses conversation to get his theme across. Like Shaw, too, his point de départ is often a Biblical or classical legend reinterpreted in modern terms. There the resemblance ends. While Bridie is at his best dealing with the problems of the individual in a conformist society, he does not indulge in dogma. Shaw always offers us witty dogmatic answers, whereas Bridie, rather in the manner of Brecht, is usually content to tease out the questions and leave the audience to provide its own answers.

For all his sophistication, as a Lowland Scot, Bridie was much exercised by the conundrums of good against evil, sin opposed to righteousness, dignity contrasted with ludicrousness. As Edwin Morgan put it, this “awareness of how thoroughly mixed good and evil are in the world implies that Bridie was no social reformer... His peculiar quality is to suggest, though not to insist upon a certain trust in human adaptability and continuance.” His attitude to his own work was certainly down to earth.

Bridie, the shy somewhat unapproachable man—who once remarked “Only God could write the perfect Third Act, and he hasn’t done it yet”—may not have thought his method of communication all that important, but he did value wit, the continuing attempt to keep alive an awareness of life’s ambiguities and the dour drollery of his Scots inheritance. He is undoubtedly the essential cornerstone of whatever national theater, so long sought after, future generations of Scots may manage to bring into being.

But there were others whose role was important but whose fame was less widespread. John Duncan Grahame Macrae, one of R. F. Pollock’s protégés, became an influential figure in Scottish theater. Macrae, a policeman’s son,
born in 1905, studied engineering, worked in a Glasgow shipyard, and enrolled at Jordanhill Training College as a student teacher, where his interest in drama was stimulated and where he was taught voice production. In 1932, through an amateur production of Chekov’s *The Three Sisters*, Macrae came to the notice of Pollock. The following year, however, Pollock’s Glasgow interests came to grief and he moved to Dumbarton, founding the Scottish People’s Theatre, one of the finest of Scotland’s amateur dramatic clubs. Macrae formed his own short-lived company before, in 1933, setting up at 13 Woodside Terrace, with other ex-Tron performers, the Curtain Theatre, which, after various vicissitudes, eventually moved to a tent, then to a purpose-built theater in Pitlochry, where it flourished as the Pitlochry Festival Theatre.

The Curtain Theatre attracted the interest of a number of dramatists, including Robert McLellan (1907-85) who, after writing several one-act plays, produced in 1936 his first full-length play, *Toom Byres*. This was followed a year later by his masterpiece *Jamie the Saxt*, first seen in Glasgow’s Lyric Theatre with Macrae in the title role.

Meanwhile, the actress Molly Urquhart, fresh from a spell with an English company, had moved back to Scotland to found her own company in Rutherglen, known as M.S.U. her middle name being Sinclair. After some hesitation, Macrae played leading roles for her, including three plays by Bridie.

Between 1928 and 1951 Bridie wrote, in all, forty-three stage plays, wide-ranging in their scope. He had resigned in disgust from the board of the Scottish National Players in 1931, thereafter achieving London successes with *The Sleeping Clergyman* in 1933 and *Susannah and the Elders* in 1937. Macrae was the understudy of Alastair Sim for the London production, Bridie having promised Macrae a place in the company he was shortly proposing to found in Glasgow. That company, the Citizens Theatre, was founded in 1943 by Bridie, the Director of Glasgow’s Art Galleries, Tom Honeyman, and cinema owner George Singleton. It flourishes to this day with its own theater in the Gorbals. The first of the Bridie plays to be staged there was *The Forrigan Reel* (1949), with Macrae playing the role of the son of a Highland crofter. Wittily turned, it won for both author and leading actor enthusiastic plaudits. The Bridie play which probably brought Macrae most acclaim was *Gog and Magog*, originally produced in London under another title in 1948, but with Macrae at the Citizens in 1949, scoring its first success there, a success repeated five years later when it was given at the Edinburgh Festival.

Perhaps the most noticed playwright in Scotland in the post-Bridie years has been John McGrath (1935-2002). Born in Birkenhead, Cheshire, he first came to notice in 1958 while still a student at Oxford University with his play, *A Man Has Two Fathers*. *Why the Chicken* was performed at the Edinburgh International Festival by the Oxford University Dramatic Society, and it brought him to the notice of a wider public. In both these plays McGrath was making his first explorations of the relationship between aggressiveness and
self-destruction, a recurring theme which featured again in *Events While Guarding the Bofors Gun* (1966).

There followed a series of five plays written for the Everyman Theatre in Liverpool, produced in 1971 under the title *Unruly Elements*. This was also the year in which McGrath founded his band of touring players, the 7.84 Theatre Company, with the object of raising the consciousness, primarily of the working-class and its proletarian allies. "There are many ways of working for socialism," McGrath declared in *Theatre Quarterly*, "ours is simply to go around providing entertainment, theatre, that raises the issues that the media ignore but which the working class recognises as the real issues."

The McGrath play which achieved the greatest notoriety was *The Cheviot, the Stag and the Black, Black Oil* (1973), which ran for several months, playing in the North of Scotland, the Orkneys, the Hebrides, Glasgow and the West of Ireland. It illustrates what Ronald Hayman calls McGrath's intention to contribute as much as possible towards the destruction of capitalism. Both amusing and polemical its evil landlords however were rather obviously paste-board caricatures, to the extent that in the end only those who shared the author's convictions could see it as drama rather than political propaganda. Later plays have included *The Game's a Bogey* (1974) and *Yobbo Nowt* (1975) and his own classic statement *A Good Night Out* (1981), an important explanation of his manifold aims.

It is impossible in a survey of this nature to deal with every playwright who may have scored a passing success with a single play or list every company that flourished, briefly or otherwise. From the between-the-wars period, when Bridie's productivity was at its height, the most important were Paul Vincent Carroll (1900-68), George Malcolm Thomson (1899-1996) and much the most significant, Robert McLellan (1907-85). McLellan grew up on a farm where Scots was generally spoken and which he himself therefore used in his childhood. Consequently, his Lallans plays are generally regarded as more convincing—and were certainly more successful—than the plays he was persuaded to write in English.

The problem of using Scots (as opposed to a mere dialect variant of English) as if it were still a living speech, is that plays in it have really always to be set in the past. So it is with McLellan, who sets his work in the eighteenth-century Borders, or in the sixteenth- or seventeenth-century courts of Mary, Queen of Scots, or James the Sixth.

McLellan's justification for his concentration on Scots is broader than simply a matter of linguistics, as David Hutchison says:

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He prefers to write about the past because he feels that in writing about the present day the dramatist is liable to become bogged down in its trivia that his work dates very quickly, whereas if plays are set in a historical period, the dramatist is freed from the deadening weight of such details.\(^6\)

Despite MacDiarmid's Lallans revival contemporaneous with many of McLellan's plays, he resolved never to resort to words with which he was not familiar, commenting that he has noticed himself on occasion using words which cannot be found in John Jamieson's *Etymological Dictionary of the Scottish Language*, but which he is nonetheless sure he has heard used in the past.

His plays include *The Changeling* (1934), which deals with the fatal consequences of a sheep-stealing incident; *Jedart Justice* (1934), in which one of Sir Gideon Murray's daughter's is refused recompense for a similar incident; *Torwatletie* (1946), which presents us with a clutch of scheming brothers; *Young Auchinleck* (1960), where we meet an unmasked James Boswell, venereal disease and all; *The Hypocrite* (1967), a study in bigotry; and, most famous of all, *Jamie the Saxt* (1937), where that wily king is shown to survive only by being even more devious than the lords who surround him; and *The Flouers o' Edinburgh* (1948), in which the alleged barbarous nature of the Scots tongue in the eyes of the Edinburgh eighteenth-century gentry provides a good measure of fun.

Hutchison complains of McLellan's inability to find very many important themes authoritative enough to engage his talents and skills, adding that his language is ultimately an insurmountable barrier between himself and the modern world and indeed a defense against the world. I myself encountered this very defensiveness during a long recorded interview I had with him toward the end of his life at his final home in Corrie, on the island of Arran.

In the McLellan tradition, so to say, was Alexander Reid (1914-82) with *The Lass wi' the Muckle Mou* (1950) and *The World's Wonder* (1953), both set in the Borders toward the close of the Middle Ages; and *King Dod o' Fife* by poet and teacher at Glasgow University of a generation of Scottish writers, Alexander Scott (1920-89).

George Munro (1901-68), of Christian Brethern stock, satirizes the harsh world of competitive football where players are bought and sold like carcasses—even harsher and more expensive today! *Gold in his Boots* (1947) depicted the claustrophobic world of the Brethern. Bigotry was also the theme of his last play, *Mark but this Flea* (1976), left unfinished at his death but completed by another hand. There are some who highly regard his *Gay Lombardy* (1958), which portrays the Gascoyne family united by a hatred caused not by external circumstance but shown to be congenital.

Mention has already been made of Lyndsay's *Ane Satyre of the Thrie Estaitis*. For its 1948 revival at the Edinburgh International Festival, it was given a new lease on life by playwright and BBC feature producer Robert Kemp (1908-67). Kemp, a fine craftsman, brought the compass of the original five-hour play down to modern requirements and while modernizing the text where dead words made this necessary (one cannot resort to a glossary in the theater), kept the feel and pace of the original.

Kemp had another considerable success with his Scots version of Molière's *L'Ecole des femmes* (*Let Wives tak Tent*, 1948), and *The Laird o' Grippy* (1958), after Molière's *L'Avare*. He also founded the Gateway Theatre in Edinburgh's Leith Walk, now the Edinburgh studios of Scottish Television.

The Englishman Stanley Eveling (b. 1925) enjoyed considerable post-war popularity among Scottish theatergoers with *Come and be Killed* (1967). He is sometimes coupled with the Scot Cecil C. P. Taylor (1929-81) who had a close association with Edinburgh's Traverse Theatre, founded in 1963. A Glasgow Jew, Taylor has suffered neglect in his native country in recent years, though Scotland features strongly in his plays, which often center round what he perceived to be the failure of Socialism. *Allergy* (1966) powerfully satirizes the ineffectiveness and plain silliness of the Left, while *Bread and Butter* (1960) variates on a similar theme.

Stewart Conn (b. 1936), poet and former Head of Drama with BBC Scotland, views Scotland's past somewhat bloodily in *The Burning* (1971), set in the same period as McLellan's *Jamie the Saxt*.

A play which made a remarkable and lasting impact was *The Gorbals Story* (1946) by Robert McLeish (b. 1912), the son of a shipyard worker. The future playwright left school at fourteen; a fellow classmate was the future boxing champion, Benny Lynch. Young McLeish was a heating apprentice, but became unemployed. He was, however, a talented artist, and when I knew him, he was drawing political cartoons for the daily paper *The Bulletin* (of which I was then Music Critic) and, occasionally, also for *The Daily Worker*.

McLeish's play remains a milestone in Scottish drama, reporting working-class life and experience with unique veracity. Peggie, one of the characters in the play, sums up its message when, in Linda McKenny's words: "she regrets the kind of Scottish National pride which she sees represented by yon pictures they paint on boxes of shortbread—big blue hills and coos that need a hair cut. *The Gorbals Story* sought...to expose the social consequences of homelessness and overcrowding." It "also emphasises its working-class characters' sense of humour and their ability to laugh in the face of appalling tragedy."

McLeish—who had written ten more or less unsuccessful plays in preparation for *The Gorbals Story*—followed it up with a light-hearted piece, *A Piece of Milarky* which the Glasgow Unity Company billed as "Glasgow's Hellsapoppin," but which was as resounding a failure as *The Gorbals Story* was a success.
Tom Wright (1923-2002) achieved fame in the 1980s for his long-running television series *Take the High Road*; but he had already won a name for himself with the one-man play on the life and work of Robert Burns, *There was a Man*, described in the *Glasgow Herald* as “a glorious work”; “a brilliant piece by a brilliant writer” by the *Daily Express* and “beautifully written” by the *Daily Record*. He also had a success with another one-man play *Talk of the Devil*, which in the mid-eighties won him an Edinburgh Festival Award.

Ewan MacColl (1915-89)—born Jimmie Mills—known as the author of one of the best-known post-war plays, *Uranium 235* (1948), wrote eight plays in all. To many, however, he was best known as a folk-singer with his third wife, Peggy Seeger. They were together for more than twenty-five years. Seeger says that they formed “a complementary twosome of folk-songs,” presenting “a united front and with other stalwarts, conducted guerilla warfare in a culture where the musical dictatorship seems to be unassailable.” In his posthumously-published autobiography *Journeyman* (1990), MacColl reveals that in his childhood, his family were dirt poor, singing and politics being the great passions of his father’s life.

MacColl wrote and performed over three hundred songs, including “The First Time Ever I Saw Your Face.” His attitude to this side of his activity reveals in a recorded interview something of his approach to life:

> Writing songs sounds a bit grand. Making up songs in my head would be a more accurate description... I find writing songs as easy as talking into this microphone. Schubert wrote songs... To wander is the miller’s joy, to wander, to wander. Why? Why should the miller be more fond of wandering than the nightsoil collector?

> The municipal nightsoil collector loves to walk at night
> Pondering great thoughts and adding to his store of shite.

Not the kind of lines for which *lieder* are created. And yet, why should the miller love to wander, to wander? How can he find time to wander? Is his milling so inferior that his customers have taken their business to a more competitive miller who spends his time milling instead of wandering, wandering?

A performance of *Uranium 235* in a Glasgow theater normally devoted to popular music-hall turns illustrated one of the dangers of political stage rhetoric. At the end of one of the acts, Lord Krash, Lady Phosphate and the upper-class “baddies” face the audience and ask: “And where do we go from here?” At that, a music-hall habitué, seated immediately in front of me, leapt to his feet with a loud clatter and, pushing his way from mid-row called out: “Hame—as soon as ah can git oot o’ here!”

Probably the most acclaimed of the younger Scottish playwrights is Glasewegian Iain Heggie (b. 1953). He has been employed in a variety of jobs including a Glasgow health club, where he was trained as a PT instructor, though he says he was “a working salesman really.” He joined London’s Royal Court
writers group in 1986, producing for them a number of short plays, including *The Cake*, then the winner of the 1985 Mobil Playwrights’ competition, and *A Wholly Healthy Glasgow*, which was produced at the Royal Exchange, Manchester, before becoming a hit at the 1987 Edinburgh International Festival, where the critic of *The Observer* dubbed it “the funniest and best new British play either in the Festival or the Fringe.” It was revived in London’s Royal Court Theatre in October 1987. *American Bagpipes* (1988) was also first produced at the Royal Exchange.

Heggie left Glasgow’s Kings Park, where he had been brought up, when he was nineteen. He took a degree at Wolverhampton, then trained as a teacher in drama at London. Returning to Glasgow in 1989, he described the difficulties he now found in the place to a *Scotland on Sunday* interviewer.

It's a lot less couthy and cheeky-cheery and now more a standard urban 20th century city. You used to see trains and buses full of men wearing blacks and flat caps to work at Hillington Estate or Clydebank. They’ve gone. Now the streets are lined with cars. Even in Dennistoun you can’t find a space... Multi-national companies have so much power they can take over our senses, transforming our need for faith, hope and belief with the crede that says if you buy that your life will be transformed.

Poet Liz Lochhead (b. 1947) has won acclaim with several plays, but particularly with *Mary Queen of Scots Got Her Head Chopped Off* (1987), which uses the Elizabeth versus Mary situation to explore the nature of Scottishness. Notably, too, were Rona Munro’s (b. 1959) play *The Maiden Stone* (1995) and *The Hard Man* (1999), Tom McGrath’s play on the life of the notorious criminal Jimmy Boyle.

Apart from Kemp’s plays, already mentioned, other re-creative “translations” have been outstanding. Douglas Young’s Aristophanes versions into Scots of *The Puddocks* (1957), and *The Burdies* (1959); Hector Macmillan’s *The Barber Figaro* (1991), a version of Beaumarchais’ *Barbier de Séville*; and Edwin Morgan’s *Cyrano de Bergerac* (1992). Molière was also the favored starting-point for *A Wee Touch of Class* by “Rabaith.”

Morgan (b. 1920), possibly Scotland’s best twentieth-century poet after MacDiarmid and certainly its most versatile, scored an enthusiastic reception in Glasgow for his *A. D. A Trilogy of Plays on the Life of Jesus* (2002).
Voices of Our Kind
(A Personal Recollection)

The title I have chosen, which comes from Iain Crichton Smith’s poem “Two Girls Singing,” gives me leave, I hope, to recall the movement, dubbed somewhat grandiosely by Professor Denis Saurat, “The Scottish Renaissance,” as well as my own involvement with it as part of what Eric Linklater, in *Poetry Scotland*, called its “second wind”—in the belief that such recollection may have some future reference value.

Like many of my generation who went through their adolescence during the Thirties, I was as captivated by the impeccable technique and musical melancholy of A. E. Houseman’s *Shropshire Lad* (1896) as I was excited by the new modern perspectives being opened up by the “Macspaunday” poets (some later wag’s reference to MacNeice, Spender, Auden and Day-Lewis). Ours was a generation that knew it was growing up for war, the swelling Hitler menace never far from our newspaper headlines or our consciences; which, perhaps indeed, explains our continuing fascination with the war-colored angst of the *Shropshire Lad*, by then several decades old.

I had begun writing while still at the Glasgow Academy, and when called up as a Territorial Army Officer in 1939, continued to experiment with verse of various kinds in what little free time there was. Having further injured a wrist already damaged in a pre-war fall, I found myself medically downgraded and in due course dispatched to the Junior Staff College, prior to being appointed to a London job in the War Office, where I remained until 1946.

Before I arrived at Camberley, someone gave me a copy of a publication called *The Voice of Scotland*, edited by one Hugh MacDiarmid, in which the Editor’s own work was well represented. The Glasgow publisher William MacLellan, for whom I had begun reading manuscripts, told me that Christopher Murray Grieve, alias the poet Hugh MacDiarmid, was then living in Glasgow and MacLellan effected an introduction. Grieve’s wife, Valda, was at that time working in Lyon’s Bookshop, in Sauchiehall Street, Glasgow. There I discovered first editions of MacDiarmid’s three masterpieces, *Sangschaw* (1923), *Penny Wheep* (1926) and *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle* (1926), selling for one shilling and sixpence each (7 1/2 pence today). Their contents were a revelation.

Here, indeed, as in “Wheesht, Wheesht,” was lyric genius of the first order:

Wheesht, wheesht, my foolish hert
For weel ye ken
I widna ha’e ye stert
Auld ploys again.
It's guid to see her lie
Sae snod an' cool,
A' lust o' lovin' by—
_Wheesht, wheesht, ye fule._

It was a quality, I soon discovered, less obvious in what the poet was then producing. Yet around MacDiarmid, in _The Voice of Scotland_, there had clustered poets writing in a wide variety of styles, in English, Scots and Gaelic; work, which indeed seemed to me to reflect a new awareness of Scotland and Scottishness, in a forcefully positive way. Quite bowled over by it, I felt, however, that it might make more of a collective impact if it were anthologized, the buying public for anthologies being considerably larger than that for cult publications or slim volumes. I therefore decided to try to produce a representative anthology of the new and recent Scottish work embracing all schools of prejudice or language. I also decided to try to initiate a periodical which would continue to reflect this Scottish development.

To further the anthology idea, I wrote to T. S. Eliot, then the literary luminary behind Faber and Faber, at that time the most important London poetry publisher. To my delight I was invited to meet him. Over tea and cucumber sandwiches in the house in Russell Square where Faber had their office, Eliot listened to my proposals, surveyed what I had submitted and invited me to go ahead, objecting to only one poem of my own—since discarded—in which I referred to John Knox as one who "broke churches and burnt figures" (which, however, he did!). The result was _Modern Scottish Poetry: An Anthology of the Scottish Renaissance_, which first appeared in 1946 and has subsequently run through four editions, though latterly with different publishers.

In addition, I won the interest and enthusiastic support of William MacLellan, who had added a publishing venture to the family printing business—cynics observed that the address was in Glasgow's Hope Street! He agreed to publish not only _Poetry Scotland_, which was originally meant to appear annually but in fact came out sporadically, but also a series of "slim volumes"—the Poetry Scotland Series—by some of the poets represented in the anthology's pages. In the process of organizing all these, I thus became friendly with most of the Scottish poets of the day.

First, there was George Bruce, to whom my future wife, Joyce, introduced herself when he came to St Andrews University to give a talk while she was a war-time student there, and who subsequently became one of our closest friends. In later years, I worked regularly for him when he left school teaching to become a BBC Scotland producer, first in Aberdeen, then in Edinburgh. In his earlier days George's poetry evoked the feel of the North East of Scotland.

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and its strong fishing tradition as no one before him had done; or indeed, has
done since.

Then there was the tall, ebullient Douglas Young, who would almost cer­
tainly have been refused for military service on account of his eyesight, but
who chose to object to his conscription on the grounds that the British Par­
tliament under the Act of Union had no legal right to exercise such powers over
the Scots; an unsustainable belief he elaborated in an amusing pamphlet. A
strong and active supporter of the Scottish National Party, he was a classical
scholar, a linguist and a poet and translator, finally becoming a University
lecturer abroad. No twentieth century Scottish anthology can be complete
without his “Last Lauch”:

The Minister said it would dee,
the cypress buss I plantit
But the buss grew till a tree
Naething dauntit.

It’s growan, stark and heich
dark and straucht and sinister,
kirkyairdie-like and dreich.
But whaur’s the Minister?8

His wit, however, is evinced at greater length in such deft pieces as “The Bal­
lant o’ the Laird’s Bath.” Douglas was a frequent guest at our earlier homes,
often arriving in the early afternoon and retiring to bed for a few hours “in or­
der to get two days out of one,” as he put it.

Sydney Goodsir Smith, the son of an Edinburgh University Professor, in
Under the Eildon Tree, wrote what has always seemed to me one of the wittiest
of Scottish masterpieces. A New Zealander by birth, his Scots was more of a
contrived literary lingo than Young’s; but I find it difficult to understand the
current absence of enthusiasm for that original major work. Here is a snatch
from the beginning of “Elegy XIII.”

I got her i the Black Bull
(The Black Bull o Norroway),
Gin I mynd richt, in Leith Street,
Doun the stair at the corner forenent
The Fun Fair and Museum o Monstrosities,
The Tyke-faced Loun, the Cunyiars Den
And siclike.
I tine her name the nou, and cognomen for that—
Aiblins it was Deirdre, Ariadne, Calliope,

8In Maurice Lindsay, ed., Modern Scottish Poetry: An Anthology of the Scottish
Gaby, Jacquette, Katerina, Sandra,
Or sunkots; exotic, I expeck.
A wee bit piece
O' what our faithers maist unaptlie
But romantically designatit 'Fluff'.
My certie! Nae muckle 0 Fluff
About the hures o Reekie!
Dour as stane 9

Sydney's geniality sometimes overflowed into bibulousness, no doubt
trying at times to those around him. I remember one occasion when Sydney,
the actor Ian Stewart and I had been taking part in a late-night broadcast, pro-
duced by novelist and playwright Robert Kemp. We were subsequently in-
vited by Sydney back to his house for a drink. No sooner had he served us all
than down the stairs swept his first wife, Marion, wrapped in a dressing-gown
and high dudgeon, soundly berating us for having "led Sydney astray!" To me,
Edinburgh was a poorer place after his untimely death.

W. S. Graham, in some respects a Scottish disciple of Dylan Thomas, I
came to know in London, while I was at the War Office. One afternoon we
agreed to give a joint reading to the Poetry Society, where, in their handsome
West End headquarters, an audience made up mostly of highly respectable
ladies in bird's-nest hats had assembled. Dressed in my Cameronian Officer's
uniform, I was asked to read first and was well enough received. Then Sydney,
wearing an open-neck shirt and stained baggy flannel trousers, got to his
feet, and between readings from his early poems, not always easy to appreciate
at a single hearing, set out to shock the bird-hats, who thereupon took flight
from the room in increasing numbers. A few weeks later, at a similar gather-
ing in Glasgow, where again we shared a reading, Sydney was asked by a
member of the audience what work he was doing. "Picking Violets in Corn-
wall," came the reply, to which he added "Actually I’ve just finished taking the
glass roof off St Enoch Station," a war-time safety measure. "Then I wish
you’d put it back," retorted one lady in the audience. "We got awfully wet
without it."

At one stage during the war years I found myself loosely associated with a
group, led by Henry Treece and the Scot, I. F. Hendry, calling itself "The New
Apocalypse." The charming Treece went on to write several interesting his-
torical novels, the much dourer Hendry, a single, though particularly good
Scottish one.

In many ways the most interesting poet to come out of the confused ro-
manticism of the New Apocalypse—and he was, indeed, during the war years,

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heavily immersed in it—was Norman MacCaig, who emerged from it with a clarity of imagination buttressed by an easy flow of effective imagery.

The delightful G. S. Fraser, whose easy-going social verse I greatly enjoyed, was also associated with, but not of, the New Apocalypse group. His comparatively early death while a lecturer at Leicester University extinguished a kind of personal graciousness from Scottish letters. Was ever there a more touching celebration of the sadness of departure than “The Traveller Has Regrets”?

Night with its many stars
Can warn travellers
There’s only time to kill
And nothing much to say:
But the blue lights on the hill,
The white lights in the bay
Told us the meal was laid
And that the bed was made
And that we could not stay (Lindsay, p. 117).

There were, of course, others on the scene whom I also knew, if less well: W. D. Cocker, mostly a purveyor of fairly routine kailyairdery, but who, in “The Deluge” gave us a vividly effective poem about Noah; schoolmaster Robert Garioch, doughty champion of a witty colloquial unsentimental Scots; Sydney Tremayne, a delicate painter of images of place; the Gaelic poet—indeed, the great Gaelic poet, according to those who have the language—Sorley Maclean—whom personally I found inordinately touchy; George Campbell Hay, whose creative years were unfortunately cut short by increasing illness; the multi-talented Iain Crichton Smith, who reflects, in “Luss Village” on

A world so long departed! In the churchyard
the tilted tombs still, gossip, and the leaves
of stony testaments are read by Richard
Jean and Carol pert among the sheaves
of un scythed shadows, while the noon day hums
with bees and water and the ghosts of psalms.10

There were, too, the gentle and unassuming Edwin Muir, widely enjoyed furth of Scotland, and the professorial Sir Alexander Gray, who supplemented his own poems with the deftly assuming colonizing into Scots of Danish and other ballads. Once, my wife and I were due to call on Sir Alexander at his Edinburgh home. Opening his front door wrapped in needless confusion, he ex-

plained that we had caught him having an afternoon nap on the rug in front of the fire in his study.

Lastly, but by no means least, Alexander Scott, who, when still a post-war mature student at Aberdeen University, invited me to address the University’s Literary Society, thereby initiating a close friendship that was only broken by his death.

From 1946, when I came out of the Army, until 1961, I was for a year drama critic of the newly-established Scottish Daily Mail, then for a further fifteen years music critic of The Herald’s now defunct sister paper The Bulletin. During this period, I was also heavily involved in broadcasting, first on radio and then also on television after it came to Scotland in 1954. While I was mainly concerned with news and current affairs, I took every opportunity to feature Scottish poetry, until I left for Carlisle in 1961 to become Border Television’s first Programme Controller (latterly its Chief Interviewer, since I had little interest in returning north—proposing to remain on the creative side of things). This relocation necessarily made personal contact with the Scottish poets more difficult, although George Bruce and I—sometimes with a third editor—did manage to produce eight issues of the sporadic anthology Scottish Poetry during these years.

In 1967 I returned to Scotland as the first Director of the newly-formed environmental organization, the Scottish Civic Trust. I was thus back in the thick of things again, but by about 1975, it now seemed to me, the Scottish Renaissance had more or less run its course. Edwin Morgan, surely the most versatile Scottish poet after MacDiarmid, established a new internationalism, while a succession of younger writers, notably James Aitchison, also a singularly open-minded critic (not a common Scottish species), represented younger voices in which the note of nationalism was not really discernible. Nor by that time was there need for it, the nationalist emphasis being so clear, especially after the restitution of the Scottish Parliament, functioning within the United Kingdom framework.

Taking it over from the late historian R. L. Mackie, its founding editor, I was asked in 1964 by the Oxford University Press to update his 1934 anthology A Book of Scottish Verse, the fourth updated edition of which has recently appeared in paperback from Robert Hale Limited (appropriately enough, at the beginning of the new century).

A more extensive coverage of the period 1900-2000, a period which, of course, encompasses the Scottish Renaissance, is provided by another anthology from The Scottish Cultural Press in Stirling, Scottish Poetry 1900 to 2000, in which my fellow compiler was the poetry editor of The Herald, Lesley Duncan, herself also a poet. The many younger writers it includes certainly suggests that Scottish poetry is indeed still in good heart.

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