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Francis R. Hart
University of Virginia

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FRANCIS R. HART

Reviewing Hay’s Gillespie:

Modern Scottish Fiction and the Critic’s Plight

The obvious, superficial things to be said about J. MacDougall Hay’s *Gillespie* (1914; reprinted 1963) as a novel are quickly said. It is powerful, violent, prooccupied with avarice and lust—in short, “realistic.” Its titular figure is a shrewd and brutal entrepreneur in a small fishing port of the Scottish West Highlands. Its shape is the shape of his world and his wyrd. We look forward, with righteous indignation, to the day when his many enemies—strong and weak, noble and ignoble—will succeed, through his drunken, nymphomaniac wife, and his weak, hypersensitive son, in destroying him. We are asked, when that time arrives, to feel pity and terror at the spectacle of his fall. Meanwhile, we marvel at the human vividness and variety of the Argyllshire fishing village world unfolded piece by organic piece as we pursue Gillespie’s fortune. We are intensely aware of the pressure of concrete circumstance on this village world: the natural circumstance of season, locale, act of God; the historical circumstance of economic cycle and political change. Such are the superficial things to be said. *Gillespie* is obviously a remarkable, and just as obviously a very confused book—confused mimetically and rhetorically. But almost as obvious is the woeful fact that we, as critical readers, are theoretically unequipped to treat of the book, in its greatness or in its confusion.

Influential voices in Scottish criticism might find the cause of our plight in the deficiency of modern Scottish literary tradition in the novel. Having saluted Scots poetry and drama, Sydney Goodsir Smith, in 1951, predicted that “the novel should be the next citadel to fall.”* In 1962, still awaiting the trumpet blast, Edwin Morgan pronounced the novel “the most backward literary form in Scotland.”* The indefatigable David

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1 London, G. Duckworth & Co., with a Preface by Robert Kemp.
3 “The Novel Today” (Programme and Notes to the International Writers Conference, Edinburgh Festival, 1962), p. 36. It should be noted that Morgan, properly aware of the plight of “The Young Writer in Scotland,” blames the novelists themselves for timidity, but finds the lamentable “backwardness” inevitable, given the views of such despotic influences as “Hugh MacDiarmid,” Scotland’s literary commissar, that “prose” is “non-creative” (p. 36n.).
Craig, whose uncompromising supremacy among Scottish literary theorists one admires as much as one deplores the narrowing effect on his taste of a Socialist-realist-Leavisite bias toward the "metropolitan" and "timely," still (January, 1964, SSL) finds "very few pieces of lasting value" in Scottish prose fiction. His reasoning is predictably at once profoundly suggestive and rigidly closed. "The modern novel is a town form"; the modern Scottish "town" is urban industrial Scotland from Glasgow to Dundee; Scottish fiction remains "rooted in the countryside," its genuine potential lost to emigration before the industrial town had been "absorbed into the British imagination." One recalls in rebuttal Ortega on "the Novel as 'Provincial Life': "The author must see to it that the reader is cut off from his real horizon . . . . He must make a 'villager' of him . . . ." And when Craig laments the absence from Scottish fiction of "town novels" in the English or Russian sense, one thinks gratefully of Edwin Morgan's refusal to ask "Robin Jenkins to write like Robbe-Grillet or Iain Crichton Smith to write like Ginsberg." For Craig seems as yet unwilling to study the possibility of a legitimate Scottish variant of prose fiction mimetically and rhetorically distinct or distinguishable from English and Russian "town novels"—a variant perhaps less "novelistic," perhaps both "provincial" in Ortega's sense and "romantic" in Northrop Frye's sense, perhaps even demanding the "laborious

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4 SSL, Vol. I, No. 3, pp. 164-165; "The Novel Today," pp. 27-28; Scottish Literature and the Scottish People (London, 1961), especially pp. 291-293. Craig's own "Foreword" should be quoted in application to his own position (SSL, p. 9): "Hugh MacDiarmid and Mr John Spies are mentioned in this book mainly in disagreement. But we owe it to Mr MacDiarmid that Scottish literary culture in the 20th century exists at all; and Mr Spies's The Scots Literary Tradition is the only book I know which shows a modern literary mind at work on Scottish literature." We no longer need Spies's sketch; it may be argued that MacDiarmid's inspiring force has become an unbenevolent despotism. But with Craig's criticism, the theory of Scottish literature has come of age. Maturing never allows for moderation, to be sure. Though Craig in his Leavisite lack of graciousness would deny it, we also need the corrective to Craig supplied by Wittig in the pioneering theoretic passion of The Scottish Tradition In Literature (Edinburgh, 1978). See Craig's characteristic condemnation of Wittig in SSL, p. 310, n.7. "Forced Scoticising" may "run amok" in Wittig; the Leavisite Craig reaction, as less ardent devotees of "Dr and Mrs F. R. Leavis" may suppose, has its comparable exaggerations. But the net advantage to Scottish literary culture of such a reinvigorated critical atmosphere can only be tremendous.

5 Notes on the Novel, included with The Dehumanization of Art (Garden City, N.Y., 1916), p. 83.

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naivete and solemnities" which, for Craig's presently limited vision, are merely "wordy, strained, gauchely melodramatic."

Meanwhile, some wait with Sydney Goodsr Smith for the "one first-class novel in Scots . . . to prove that the thing can be done." Others follow Edwin Muir, and, afflicted with one *dreich* cultural determinism or another, prophesy Scots culture is too narrow or too uncentered to produce the one book. Scottish literature's two most illuminating theorists stand at opposite poles: Wittig understandably, but prejudicially, excited by the imaginative peculiarities of a Scottish tradition; Craig justifiably, but exaggeratedly, hostile to all who associate the presence of an eccentric nationality with the reality of aesthetic value. And so we have no appropriate theoretic framework for the criticism of Gillespie.

The only materials at hand for building one are the numerous rather hasty remarks associating Gillespie with other notable landmarks in early modern Scottish fiction. Let us assume that a few such landmarks make an incipient tradition, and, by associating them one by one with Gillespie, seek to construct a useful, appropriate framework.

Robert Kemp's 1963 preface urgently proposes that Hay had no great debt to his alleged model, George Douglas Brown's *The House with the Green Shutters* (1900). Kemp's case could be even stronger: the themes, the motifs, that he asserts the books share differ profoundly in their distinct contexts. But comparison elucidates some of Gillespie's characteristic aspirations and confusions. Again, Wittig naturally compares Hay with his friend Neil Munro; Hay, writes Wittig, deals more honestly with Highland life. Mimesis is clearly far more complex a thing than "honesty"—whether cultural, psychological, or moral. But once again, comparison in mimetic terms proves useful; and, for reasons which should become apparent, I shall use *Gillian the Dreamer* (1905) to carry it forward. Finally, every assessment of a 20th Century Scottish novel must sometime confront the orthodoxy that Scotland's one undeniably great modern fiction is "Lewis Grassic Gibbon"'s trilogy. Thus, consideration of Gillespie's rhetorical peculiarities as fiction can find

1 The reference is specifically to Gunn (in SSL, No. 3, p. 161). The terms may be accurate when applied to some of the parts of some of Gunn's novels; the terms may be equally applicable to Conrad and Lawrence. Craig has consistently failed to see the greatness of Gunn. See the present writer's essay in SSL, No. 1.


3 *The Scottish Tradition in Literature*, p. 273: "it is a more courageous effort to deal with contemporary life in the West."

suitable perspective through comparison with "Gibbon"'s "burgh" novel, *Cloud Howe*. Perhaps this network of kinships and comparisons can be made to evolve into a reasonably philosophical notion of the generic mixtures and modulations, the mimetic kinds and degrees, the rhetorical problems and peculiarities which constitute a definable "nature" for modern Scottish fiction. Or at least, the effort may suggest how to deal with this remarkable, confused book in itself.

*The House with the Green Shutters* is superficially a Scottish exile's ruthless delineation of the "unspeakable Scot," as the narrator's frequent reflections on "Scottish character" suggest. More centrally, it is "tragedy of Character" in the sense Hardy's *Mayor of Casterbridge* is: the man of brute force, energetic courage, and little shrewdness is set against more efficient "modern" forces of commercial manipulation—Hardy's Farfrae, Brown's Wilson—or social prudence. One's awful respect goes to the heroic anchormom, though one's affections have never gone to him, in his violence, pride, inhumanity. Already an essential difference in *Gillespie* is apparent: for here, we are asked for tragic pity on behalf, instead, of the Wilson-Farfrae figure, when his own inflexible meanness speeds his downfall.

*The House* is concerned throughout with variants of cruelty, brutality—and, in the midst of them, memorable, though unlovely, images of human strength and endurance. What is peculiar—i.e., unEnglish or unHardyesque—i.e., perhaps "Scottish"—is the almost perverse complication of judgment of Gourlay the man: one admires his strength, fears his pride, pities his fall in the eyes of petty envy, and hates his cruelty to weakness. He is stupid enough, demonic enough, "big" enough to be tragic in the archaic sense. The superstitious fatalism with which his decline is viewed is almost perfectly dramatized, psychologized in the "town," a chorus both Greek and folkloristic (in this fusion once again Hardyesque, but reminiscent of Hardy's antecedent in *The Bride of Lammermoor*). Gourlay's "fall" is not a Scottish problem; his fate is not economic or social—*pace* Craig—but moral. Wilson may be the necessary instrument, like Farfrae; but Gourlay's fate is of his House, his infatuation, his Character, and is not of the limitations of his economic or historic position. In these terms, this Scottish *Mayor of Casterbridge* is, paradoxically, less "regional" than Hardy's, and even more truly the tragedy of a man of "Character."

Whatever reviewers may have said about the "character" of Gillespie, the first question raised by this comparison is, can the central figure of Hay's novel be treated as a "character" at all? If he is a "hero," certainly,
it is purely on the "ironic" level or in a purely satiric "mythos." In "himself," there is only commercial ruthlessness and ingenuity, the "humor" of avarice: a Grandet who can never truly suffer; a Dombey who can never really awaken, because his creator provides no consistent psychology for such events. As a "character," he is, true, motivated somewhat on both natural and historic levels: he is by "nature" avaricious as a George Eliot protagonist may be by "nature" "common"; he is the spirit—or he has in some mysterious way imbibed the spirit—of a new, more enterprising and less insular mercantilism. However, in the terms of "nature," he remains a ludicrous "humors" figure of automatic response, prudent only when provoked by avarice. And in terms of "history," it is easier to see Gillespie not as a character" but as a force, a scourge or agent of Fate or History. From his townsmen's point of view he becomes the personification of natural and economic forces which, in conflict with their puny gestures, make of their lives an heroic struggle against impossible odds. When they burn Gillespie's fleet, the destroyers merely unloose uncontrollable forces against themselves. He seems beyond human resistance: arbitrary, inscrutable, a folk-Calvinist's village God. Thus, those who try to resist—Mrs. Galbraith, Lonend—become self-destroyers, judged for their reckless folly in opposing a fatal force.

How is Gillespie delineated as a "force"? The book opens in a vaguely booming atmosphere of Highland fatalism. There is the dire threat of cultural intermarriage between utilitarian, entrepreneurial Lowlander and superstitious, traditional Highlander, the urgent, dangerous problem of cultural fusion or conciliation given as a central theme to Scottish fiction by Scott. Gillespie's mother senses a doom on the house; his father is guilty of Lowland arrogance in marrying into the family, and the sign over the door of the very "Gothic" homestead, "The Ghost," a dagger pointed downwards, is not removed until the end, when it signals Gillespie's fall. Gillespie's lurid career confirms his mother's fears—to what end? To the end that t'rawen Sassenach should not marry fey Gael? Her son is the punishment of the impious, the infatuated; the house and its sign prophesy the ultimate hideous triumph of some fatal rhythm. Gillespie must play his role in a mythic cycle, a cyclical family doom. Once again a son will murder his mother and in turn father a son to be murdered by a mother in his turn. Inevitability,

11 Devotees of Northrop Frye will need no annotation here; others are invited to overlook the terms, or trace their present usage to Anatomy of Criticism (Princeton, N.J., 1957), pp. 34, 42, 223-239.

12 Such, at least, is one familiar and, I believe, sound definition of the "idea" of the Waverley Novels. See, e.g., Karl Kroeber in Romantic Narrative Art.
ballad-like in its taste for the grisly, is mythic. This is clearly far more than the tragedy of Character in History achieved in *The House with the Green Shutters*; in its "metaphysical" ambitiousness—and this should *not* prejudge it—it seems instead to provide the connecting link between "Fiona MacLeod" and Neil Gunn. But the Gunn anticipation illuminates the confusion in *Gillespie*. Hay's characters are neither fully individual nor truly archetypal; they are culturally or regionally representative, that is all. Hence, they have no reality in a rhythm of mythic fatality. Gunn, on the other hand, at his best—at times "Gibbon," too—most perfectly fuses the individual, the regional-historical, and the archetypal, so that the "action" in which each character is caught up may be defined simultaneously in all three sets of terms. Perhaps, then, the comparative analysis of "character" in *Gillespie* implies a conception of characterization peculiar to, if not definitive of, recent Scottish fiction.

The machinery of Gillespie's downfall is also dependent on "character," where "character" is too narrowly or too abstractly motivated to support the book's pretensions to mythic fatality. One recalls Pritchett on "bad" Conrad, where Destiny is a word shouted repeatedly by a Narrator, or Hardy's less successful attempts to achieve credibility for a mythic Fatality without surrendering the assumptions of a basic Naturalism. The chief character in the machinery is Gillespie's wife, whose deterioration takes up much of our attention in the book without our ever becoming convinced that Hay could dramatize the degradation of a love-starved woman. Adequate terms are present: her father's mean collaboration, then his mean warfare, with Gillespie; Gillespie's lack of sexual passion; his lack of education or refinement enough to appreciate the needs of his wife. The initial hint that she is oversexed makes us wonder at her aggressive choice of Gillespie, for the impression of him already established is of meanness, cunning, not power. Evidently, Hay was not free, perhaps not willing, to delineate the full spectacle of outraged and ultimately depraved feminine sexuality. We get only veiled hints. The stress in her degeneration is placed instead on her drunkenness, her lunatic violence. The student of American "Gothic" is accustomed to this substitution; but even he may find the drawn-out horror of Mrs. Strang's razor-murder of her son, the particularizing of the boy's horrified final moments, more than enough to dissolve all moral scrutiny of Gillespie's doom in sheer horror. However violent the finale of *The House with the Green Shutters*, the precise moral inevitability of the catastrophe is never lost in sheer spectacle.

\[13\textit{The Living Novel} (London, 1949), p. 141.\]

\[14\textit{See, e.g., Leslie Fiedler, Love and Death in the American Novel.}\]
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In both books, too, the machinery of the father’s destruction depends on the sullen, yet defiant failure of an intensely sensitive, even visionary son, on whom the proud continuance of the house is to depend. Indeed, the visionary academic son as his proud, brutal, narrow father’s destroyer reappears often enough in recent Scottish fiction to warrant a more general word in connection with the Scottish “reality” delineated. Moreover, the son’s peculiar visionary sensibility often earns him the role of central consciousness, or at least of an essential point of view, in the rhetoric of such fiction. Hence, some notice of Gillespie’s Eoghan must wait, too, for our final rhetorical considerations of the book in connection with Chris and Ewan of Cloud Howe.

But turn first to the mimetic problem, and to the second of our associated novelists—Hay’s friend Neil Munro, who dealt, we hear, less honestly with Highland life. Gillian the Dreamer is historically distanced, but this does not interfere with proper comparison, for, as Pritchett has said of Scott, 18 history is simply the engine of Munro’s purpose—the means of imposing an order and infusing it with a characteristic and, I would argue, persuasively significant nostalgia. The entire novel is focused on the titular youth, the doomed Cinderella-hero, for whose aspirations and visionary intensities there is no adequate place in any historic world. It begins and ends a coronach, a lament for the lost, the stunted, the unrealized. Gillian, related evidently to that Marius the Epicurean so influential in the “Celtic Twilight,” is the youthful dreamer for whom all realities are inward. But his is only the problem in its most lyric form. Surrounding and condemning him are old men—Black Duncan, the Campbells—who dream, too, of lost glory, lost youth. Their maiden sister Mary had watched long ago from a window as love and youth passed by; her friend, though winning the lost suitor, had died. The historic particularity of the post-Napoleonic setting is accidental; it provides the Old Soldiers with a particular past glory to lament, far on the ringing plains of any windy Troy. Gillian is the “Boy from the Glen,” seen by the town as “John Hiilanman,” cursed with a visionary passivity. Actually, this Julien Sorel of the Celtic Twilight is motivated neither by history nor by culture; no attempt is made to do what David Craig so deplores—to see Gillian’s plight in general terms simply as “the Highland problem,” any more than the plight of most of Gunn’s passive visionaries is seen merely in ecological or ethnic terms. Indeed, Gillian is not a “social” novel at all—thus, for Craig, perhaps not a

18 The Living Novel, p. 44.
19 The general fact of Marius’s influence in this quarter was first called to my attention by Mr. John Firth, then of the Dept. of English, University of Virginia.

[25]
"novel." Its social structure of the burgh simply articulates, in the medium of the "town novelist," the lineaments of an elegaic state of mind, in and of history, but not historically unique. The delineation is stylized; but actually the treatment and the consequences are never falsified by sentimentality. How, then, is it possible to say that in terms of fictive "truth" this is a less honest picture of Scottish life than Hay's or Brown's? Its "truth" is this: at once, it provides an adequate "objective correlative" in "novelistic" terms for the Scottish mood whose prevalence sustains the pre-eminence of the "Canadian Boat Song"; and, in Arnoldian terms, it subjects that persistent elegiaism to an authentic "criticism of life."

The "truth" or "honesty" of Gillespie is clearly much more complex and far less attractive—or less evocative of pathos. This fact in itself guarantees neither more "honesty" nor greater art. But were this particular kind of mimetic complexity to be demonstrably "Scottish,"

and were it to be adequately realized and controlled, the result would have to be termed a better Scottish "novel." The elements in the complexity should be defined first. Wittig calls the book symphonic in structure, a book of many consciousnesses. But the kinds of consciousness are three. Gillespie's own, I have suggested, is too "humorous," too univalent and at the same time too impersonal as a "force," to serve as a consciousness. But first, there is the typical consciousness of the townsmen, or the "folk"—traditional, bluntly heroic, both naive and shrewd. Topael Janet, Hay's favorite character, is the masterpiece of this "kind." Second, there is the kind of consciousness shared by those who know Gillespie in sufficient depth and with enough sophistication to will his destruction; and this kind is mixed. Mrs. Galbraith (widow of a man Gillespie ruined), Gillespie's wife, his son—all combine urbane (college-bred or college-infected) intelligence with a strongly mythic or ritualistic sense of their roles in some archaic tragedy of moral poison and retribution. The narrator's is a third kind of consciousness, clearly that of the "literary," liberal minister Hay himself, who combines his own sense of the archaic grandeur with a strong post-Romantic sense of Nature (Ruskin), a secular Calvinist's obsession with moral Law ( Carlyle), and the Clydeside Socialist's sense of economic and ideological determinism.

Such a complex of consciousnesses is a "truth" variously rendered in Scottish fiction since the Enlightenment—and it is evidently true to post-Enlightenment Scottish culture, the culture that helped produce such curiously unEnglish Victorians as Carlyle, Mill, Ruskin, and Davidson. Such a "truth" can evidently be effectively rendered, as Hardy and

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Wittig, pp. 273-274.
George Eliot had shown English fiction, within the explosive confines of a provincial or "burgh" setting. Moreover, the mixing of "rationalist" shrewdness, "Romantic" pastoralism, the prophetic fervor of a secularized Kirk, and the persistent superstition of the "folk" mind marvelously particularizes the still vital tradition of violently anomalous "character" celebrated or belabored as the "Caledonian antiszygy." The spectacle of a dour, heroic, yet often gay traditional community, confronting in naive futility the ruthless hostility of historic and economic "Law" is also "true"—true in a sense deeper and more particular than the mere Naturalist's "truth" of the unpleasant or anti-sentimental. And if Americans still find "truth" in the county of Faulkner or the dwindling or vanished village cultures of Frost, then the Scottish "truth" of *Gillespie* must still be recognizable to the modern Scottish experience. Specifically, the mixing in "community" of heroic but unlovely fisherfolk, with the megalomaniac entrepreneur, and with the participant but self-consciously neo-primitive or rusticated college-bred is also still a fact of Scottish community.

But mimesis is not harmony. Just as an unintegrated complexity of motivational levels and consciousnesses threatens to disintegrate the book's huge "reality," so a mixture of voices or points of view leaves it rhetorically confused. And here, clearly, the undeniable masterpiece, the touchstone, in the rhetoric of modern Scottish fiction is Lewis Grassic Gibbon's trilogy as manipulation of the Scottish experience, individual, historic, and mythic. Neil Gunn's latest experiments with point of view, at once communal-archaic and urbanely-distanced—*The Silver Bough, The Well at the World's End, The Other Landscape*—might also serve. But let us grant, for the sake of an already available critical orientation for *Gillespie*, that these remain to be assessed as experiments, and fall back on *Cloud Howe* (1933).

We are concerned here only with its remarkable rhetorical solution to the problem of presenting a reality demanding a potentially chaotic multiplicity of voice. No single passage will illustrate the method; the success is achieved in large and gradual manipulations. To describe briefly, the history of Chris Guthrie Colquhoun—Mearn's farmer's daughter, widow of the war-dead "Highland tink" Tavendale, wife and soon widow to the burgh's liberal minister—is rendered in successive tragic retrospects, each focused in terms of, but not limited to, her point of view. Each phase of her experience—and the collective historic and mythic experience hers particularizes—is "finished," realized in elegiac memory, inevitable and appropriate in its pervasive and sometimes
bitter nostalgia—again *pace* Craig. The narrative is of a single style, an Anglicized lyric Scots, at once incantatory and palpably colloquial, and slipping easily between third and second person—third for externality, second for the dramatization of a single or collective point of view or consciousness:

They saw not a soul as they passed the Mains, then they swung out into the road that led south; and so as they went Chris turned and looked back at Kinraddie, that last time there in the sun, the moors that smoothed to the upland parks Chae Strachan had ploughed in the days gone by, the Knapp with no woods to shelter it now, Uperhill set high in a shimmer of heat, Cuddiescorn, Netherhill—last of them all, high and still in the hill-clear weather, Blawarie up on its ancient brae, silent and left and ended for you; and suddenly, daft, you could see a thing.  

The style easily becomes the pharisaical voice of the burgh, collective yet in “character”: “And that was just daft, if Ake spoke true—that Mr. Colquhoun could mean it of folk, real coarse of him to speak that way of decent people that had done him no harm. It just showed you the kind of tink that he was, him and his Labour and socialism and all” [p. 97]. It serves the other collective voice of the proletarian, the weaver, the “tink.” At times it is the dramatically neutral, yet lyrically engaged omniscient narrator’s voice, a colloquial “burgh” Tiresias. And of course, for the most part, it is the voice of Chris herself, as heroine, as “Scotland,” as normative point of view. Her consciousness, distinguished subtly from the narrator’s own, is limited and dynamic. It sustains the book’s organizing symbolism of clouds—hence, provides a poetic voice:

She had found in the moor and the sun and the sea her surety unshaken, but maybe herself, but she followed no cloud, be it named or unnamed . . . . Once he’d gloowered as though he would like to gut you, and thundered his politics, and you’d felt kistled up . . . . But this Sunday he blethered away in the clouds . . . . [p. 128].

It gradually acquires a sense of history, adequately but not undramatically philosophical, a folk feminized version of the historic sense of the Socialist-Humanist narrator: “But she thought, as often, we saw more than that—the end forever of creeds and of faiths, hopes and

For Craig (SLSP, pp. 292-3), the later two of the trilogy suffer from the “terrible nostalgia” of the émigré (cf. “The Novel Today,” p. 27). Gibbon “hands over to his nostalgia, lies back and lets it carry him along. Such emotion unifies an artist to make sense of his experience even as it moves him to get it down on paper.” Such is Craig’s characteristically extravagant exclusiveness. It is obviously the “handing over” and not the nature of the emotion itself which does the damage, and, while this is obviously not the place to attempt it, I would argue that the “handing over” is not characteristic of *Cloud Howe.*

*Cloud Howe* (in *A Scots Quair*, London, 1959), pp. 21-26; subsequent refs. are given in the text.
beliefs men followed and loved: religion and God, socialism, nationalism—
Clouds that sailed darkling into the night” [p. 138]. Thus, it provides
an historic voice. Finally, it frames poetry and history in Chris’s archaic
vision of her own experience as a reenactment of the primordial in
earthly experience:

from the earth’s beginning you yourself had been here, a blowing of motes
in the world’s prime, earth, roots and the wings of an insect long since in
the days when the dragons still ranged the world . . . . And it seemed to
Chris it was not Cis alone, her tale—but all tales that she darkened to
then . . . [pp. 41-2, 126].

It provides, too, then, a mythic voice, in style and perspective assimilated
to the poetic and historic, and harmonized with the narrator’s own lyric-
dramatic voice, and set against the related voice of a divided community.

The solution of this central rhetorical problem of modern Scottish
fiction demands the co-persistence of a mythic and an historic vision
with the colloquial dramatization of “character”. The artist as interpreter
of this complex Scottish reality inherits the tradition of colloquial “charac-
ter” and anecdote, and confronts on the one hand the tyranny of the
archaic, and on the other that other determinism of the historic. The
result in style and rhetorical “voicing” is bound not to be simple. Amid
the resonant stylization of Gurr’s The Silver Darlings, or the Helleno-
Calvinistic fatalism of Gillespie, or the lyric neo-paganism of Cloud
Hove, the sacrificial hero or heroine finds an identity in historic inevit-
ability and at the same time a doom in mythic precedent.

The “voicing” of Gillespie is an early groping for these truths, and
thus, is at once more confused and more uniquely promising for later
Scottish fiction than The House with the Green Shutters (let alone Gil-
lian and other Munro). Yet it falls far short of Cloud Hove. It has
the possibility of a central consciousness like Chris’s in both Mrs. Gal-
braith and Gillespie’s wife—both college-sophisticated, both reintegrated
into the agrarian community, both possessed at once of historic intelligence
and archaizing vision. But the characterization of Mrs. Galbraith remains
abstract, peripheral; and, for reasons already noted, that of Mrs. Strang
can be neither honest nor stable enough to serve.

There is a further possibility, also incompletely realized. All four
books we have discussed ultimately become or provide portraits of the
anti-bourgeois Scottish artist as young man—and all four young men
are akin as sacrificial heroes to Paul Morel and Stephen Dedalus. All
four are cursed with a literalism of the imagination—“that extraordinary
vividness in the speech of the Scotch peasantry . . . . It comes from a
power of seeing things vividly inside your mind . . . .” Young Gourlay’s
"mind began to visualize of its own accord, independent of his will"— and the result is paralysis of will, destructive fatalism, a knowing "fear of his own nature." As in Sons and Lovers, so in The House, sympathies divide between naïve, heroic father and artist-weakling son; in The House theirs is the ultimate, tragic battle. Gilian's curse is the same, and it involves him in pathetic, but ironic, battle with the more masculine fancies of his adopted fathers. Cloud Howe needs no such artist-hero; the evolution and exile of Ewan belong to Grey Granite, the last of Gibbon's trilogy. In Gillespie, the son's vision speeds his destruction, and his is the destruction that annihilates his father's dynastic hopes. His visionary strangeness is evident: "Old Sandy was about to take the line from Eoghan's hand when the expression on the lad's face stayed him. Out of the dreamland beyond Time and Space that face was growing again into his vision . . . Eoghan shook like the column of water on a fall. The Spirit of the Unseen passed as breathing upon the face of the night . . . ." [pp. 320, 316]. His failure at the university is speeded by his visionary nature: "Eoghan lived in part in a vertigo of waking, in part in that dream state with which he had been familiar in boyhood . . . ." [p. 370]. In him, then, the book finally finds its appropriate central sensibility.

It is too late. We have been given too many—and deprived of too many—other possibilities. For much of the book, after all, it is Gillespie himself who is the son, betrayer of his naïve, impious father. And Gillespie's ultimate struggles are with his wife, Mrs. Galbraith, and Lonend. Moreover—and here is the glaring rhetorical difference between Cloud Howe and Gillespie—Hay as narrator is never willing to relinquish his own right to the center of the novel, to dramatize or subdue his own voice. His own narrative voice or style, at times Lawrenceian in the good sense, is too often a fusion of obscure Conradesque heroics, the poetic verbosity of the post-Romantic Wordsworthian, and the prophetic verbosity of the secularized Calvinist preacher. The narrator is so wholly under the sway of the author's compulsive and confused, though powerful, imagination, that he cannot wait upon the demands of careful characterization or dramatization. And ultimately, no other consciousness can survive for the reader. Briefly, Hay finds a dramatic spokesman in the

"The House with the Green Shutters (London, 1929), pp. 163, 214, 221. My point here is obviously an application of Wittig's general thesis concerning the definitive peculiarities of the Scottish poetic imagination, a general thesis I am not qualified to judge. But the recurrence in Scottish fiction of a potent, yet humorous fascination with involuntary visionary power—whether in whiskey or Second Sight—has made the Scottish young artist as hero an easily definable type."
old schoolmaster, writing a life-book, "an epic of the obscure dead," looking down on the town below his garden:

He imagined the people beneath projected on the face of the sky as if from a gigantic magic-lantern. The figures capered grotesquely upon the clouds, their antic gestures inspired and controlled by some passionless conjurer. "Umbræ summa," he would mutter sadly, "my book will never be finished;" and the relentless clock, the unerring pilot of Time, would solemnly boom out on the hill that another hour had passed away into eternity [p. 291].

But this dramatization is brief. And there remains the same post-Romantic Virgilian pretentiousness in the narrator himself throughout his "epic of the obscure dead."

All of which is to say that, measured in any "novelistic" terms, Gillette is an overwhelming and remarkable, a highly confused and imperfect book. But measured in terms derived from its association with other modern Scottish fiction, its imperfections may be both defined and explained, and its tremendous promise appreciated.

UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA