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### **‘I may claim thee for my ain’: the Scottish voice in First World War Poetry**

*This chapter considers the extent to which there was a distinctive Scottish voice in the poetry of the First World War. Starting from the assertion of a generic British popular culture before the war, it examines the ways in which Scottish poets negotiated that culture: often working within its conventions and constraints, but in some cases, particularly those of Joseph Lee and Roderick Watson Kerr, deploying irony and dialect to construct a poetry distanced from English poetry and helping lay the ground for what would become the Scottish Renaissance.*

The First World War was from its outset politically, militarily, and culturally a ‘British’ war; a war on which the United Kingdom’s constituent nations embarked in a spirit of shared defence of the union’s imperial and other international interests. This attitude maintained in Scotland throughout the hostilities, in spite of the tensions created by England’s domination of the union and the example of Ireland’s increasing dissidence and eventual separation. The war had begun, ostensibly at least, out of an impulse to defend the independence of small states such as Belgium and Serbia, and concluded with a peace that guaranteed the right to self-determination of small nation states. But it seemed to occur to few in Scotland that such arguments applied at home. In spite of the events just across the Irish Sea and the successful second reading of a Home Rule Bill in 1913, there was no deep or widespread enthusiasm for devolution, never mind full independence during the war or for some considerable time after.

It was also a ‘British’ war in military and cultural terms. The popular culture that Scottish combatants, both soldiers and civilians, experienced was, broadly speaking, similar to that of their British and Dominion counterparts. The literature they read and referred to in their letters was British – whether that was classics like *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, popular novels of the Nat Gould variety, or newspapers – even Scottish-produced newspapers like the *People’s Journal*, which had by 1914 effectively become, like Glasgow’s *Herald* or Edinburgh’s *The Scotsman*, successful British provincial newspapers. The songs were also largely British – mainly from a drama and a music hall that had, as Barbara Bell and Paul Maloney have shown, for some time been run as a British-wide circulation network (Bell 1998; Maloney 2003). There remained a strong Scottish inflection in this, with popular, though now long-

forgotten, Scottish novelists such as Maude Crawford, Agnes C. Mitchell, May Morison, Charles Procter, and Annie S. Swan, using Scottish settings for their otherwise generically British romances; or comedians like W.F. Frame and Harry Lauder playing on native song traditions and character stereotypes (Cameron and Scullion 1996; Goldie 2006); or pawky Scots narratives such as those of Ian Farquhar's 'Pickletillie Sketches' in the *People's Friend*. But this was British entertainment with a Scottish accent. Similarly, the new entertainment phenomenon attracting increasing numbers of Scottish consumers, the cinema, was, from the start, an international medium, and though Scottish stories might figure in it – for example in several movie reinterpretations of *Rob Roy* and the story of Mary Queen of Scots – these were very rarely generated from within Scotland itself (Griffiths 2012). The war, in fact, helped cement the global domination of American cinema, seen most clearly perhaps in what seemed like the universal acclaim for Charlie Chaplin that was a feature of the second half of the war.

Militarily, many Scots sought to maintain a strong visible identity through the markers of the Scottish martial tradition, especially if they belonged to a highland regiment. But significant numbers of Scots didn't serve in kilted, nor even Scottish, regiments but in British formations such as the Royal Navy, the flying corps that became the RAF, the Royal Artillery, Royal Engineers, or the Army Service Corps. Added to this, there were – increasingly as the war went on, and as a consequence of attrition and conscription – substantial numbers of Englishmen in Scottish regiments. Ian Beckett concluded his exhaustive account of the archive of official documents of the First World War, by observing the homogenising nature of British war service, which make it 'difficult to identify any specific Scottish [or Welsh] service "experience" substantially different from that of the remainder of the army' (Beckett 2002, 123).

This predominantly British identity is reflected in much of the poetry written by Scots during the war. Many of the soldier poets were, like their English counterparts, junior officers fresh from public school and university, and the majority of the published volumes of Scottish war poetry were by writers from that Anglo-Scottish elite. Many were of Oxbridge formation, including Charles Hamilton Sorley, W. S. S. Lyon, Robert Sterling, Alexander Robertson and Ewart Alan Mackintosh, while others like Hamish Mann, John Stewart, and Archibald Allan Bowman were products of the Scottish universities. Each of these writers was, as their education

might suggest, technically accomplished and steeped in the classics and the traditions of English-language poetry: Sterling had, for example, in 1914 been the winner of the Newdigate Prize at Oxford (also won by John Buchan in 1898) with a poem in the high diction of English classicism, 'The Burial of Sophocles' (Sterling 1915, 5-12). Many of them appeared, alongside other elite Scots such as C. K. Scott Moncrieff and Edward Wyndham Tennant, in E. A. Osborn's influential anthology of British war poets, *The Muse in Arms* (1917).

Though these poets sometimes ventured into dialect and occasionally dealt with ostensibly Scottish highland and martial themes – for example, in Mackintosh's 'Mallaig Bay' or 'Cha Till MacCruimein' – there is very little to distinguish their work from that of their peers across the United Kingdom, locked as it is into many of the prevailing orthodoxies of British public-school and university verse. A case in point, is Alexander Robertson's 'Survivors', which in both speech and subject matters evinces the close aesthetic and sentimental affinities between a Scottish writer and the English literary and rural traditions, echoing as it does the 'blessed plot' of Shakespeare's John of Gaunt and the 'quiet cornfield' of John Masefield's totemic 'August, 1914':

We are survivors. We have reached the day,  
Desired for so long, scarce hoped for. We could pray  
For naught more blessed than this blessed hour,  
For see! The welcoming cliffs of England tower,  
White, radiant from the waves. Crowded we stand,  
With eyes insatiate towards that lovely land;  
Her homes appear and o'er the downs the roads  
Climb, white and tortuous, to unseen abodes,  
While, from the distance seen, her fields of corn  
Stand motionless on this unrivalled morn...

(Robertson 1916, 31)

Popular poetry was similarly driven by a predominantly British form and content. Newspaper poetry of the war, for example, of which there was a great deal – belonged almost exclusively to the British imperial school, as practiced by Rudyard Kipling, Alfred Austin and Henry Newbolt, and by the poetry of imperial adventure

exemplified, among others, by the Scots Canadian Robert Service, and, in the Scottish wartime context, by R. W. Campbell.

Service can be seen as an illustrative example of the homogenising tendencies of British imperial poetry. Born in Preston to a Scottish father and English mother, Service spent his formative years in Kilwinning and Glasgow, writing nostalgically of his kilted youth in the autobiography of *Ploughman of the Moon* (1945) and the fiction of *The Trail of '98* (1910) (Klinck 1976, 1-16). Service's early reading was diverse, and typical of many young Scots: he revered Burns and read Shakespeare and Tennyson, alongside the adventures of Stevenson and Rider Haggard, before venturing into verse with poems in the Glasgow *Herald*, *Scottish Nights*, and the *People's Friend*. Following his emigration, he earned his nickname 'the Canadian Kipling' by writing poems of the Yukon which fused subject matter reminiscent of Bret Harte and Jack London with the style popularized by Kipling in his *Barrack-Room Ballads* (1892), most notably in the stirring account of 'The Shooting of Dan McGrew' and the humorous narrative of 'The Cremation of Sam McGee'. Such poems, however, also sit, in his first collection, *Songs of a Sourdough* (1907), alongside others such as 'Fighting Mac', which offers a sympathetic treatment of the notorious suicide of the Scottish general Sir Hector MacDonald in the context of a celebration of the highland martial tradition from which he came. Service, however, shows the composite nature of imperial identity in this poem, meditating on Scottish themes in impeccable literary English and seeing no contradiction in viewing this son of 'the Fiery Cross' and 'clansman true / Sworn kinsman of Rob Roy and Roderick Dhu' as a warrior 'who holds aloft the shield of England's fame' (Service 1978, 57-9).

Such double-mindedness can also be seen in work of R. W. Campbell, who sees no contradiction in applying British colonial and martial tropes to his descriptions of the Scottish war experience: having, for example, his speaker in 'The Border Breed', 'crave for the style of Kipling, the touch that Tennyson made, / To write of the border gallants who served in a Scots Brigade' (Goldie and Watson 2014, 13). This absence of concern for national boundaries in poetry extended, too, to much of the wartime poetry written by non-combatants. The major newspapers, like their equivalents south of the border, printed much more verse in the early years of the war than they had before, or would after. Such poetry occasionally dwelt on Scottish particularities, but was generally content to work within the conventional thematic

parameters of British imperial poetry. A poem published by *The Scotsman* on its editorial page a week and a half into the war, ‘British Bugles’, is perhaps typical in its assurances of Scottish adherence to British imperial unity in the face of German aggression:

Every island, every last stretch,  
Where the ancient banner flies,  
Hears the braying of the bugles,  
And with one accord replies —

Answers straightaway, ‘we are ready,  
We are with you, Motherland. . .

(‘A. B.’1914, 10)

*The People’s Journal*, the Dundee-based weekly paper with the largest readership in Scotland, took a similar line in its published poetry – marking the extent to which the paper had moved in recent years away from its original localism and its vernacular roots (Donaldson 1986) to a more blandly assimilated British imperial identity. One of its ‘Poems from our People: War Verses by our Readers’ published at Christmas 1914, offers an example, with its easy assurances of a unified war-effort reeled off in the regular tetrameters and AABB quatrains typical of popular imperial poetry:

The Scots and English, side by side  
With Welsh and Irish stem the tide,  
And French and Indians closely vie  
For roll of honour — do or die!

(McDonald 1914)

There were, of course, exceptions to this – some of the poetry in the few radical newspapers, such as the Glasgow independent socialist paper *Forward*, edited by Thomas Johnston, occasionally attempted to squeeze out of this mould. William Cameron’s poem ‘Speak not to me of War!’ appeared in *Forward* less than two weeks after the war began, at a time when recruiting fever was at its highest pitch, and offered an impassioned alternative view to the predominating war enthusiasm of

popular poetry. Although rather conservative formally and linguistically, the poem is bold in challenging the euphemism that was quickly gathering around martial topics, anticipating some of the more thoughtful poetry of the later part of the war in it attempts to state bluntly the truths about war that belie the rhetoric of those who would glorify it:

See yonder bloody corpse-strewn plain,  
Where man has butchered man;  
Then write upon your scroll of fame:  
Write 'glorious' if you can!

(Goldie and Watson 2014, 17)

But the overwhelming majority of the popular poetry written during the war in Scotland remained, as it did across the rest of the United Kingdom, content to work within the formal and thematic constraints of Edwardian poetry – as if the war was exercising a centripetal force in forcing the periphery closer to the centre.

Even where emulation of a particularly Scottish model was concerned, as, for example, in the writing that showed the influence of Robert Burns, the results were generally a poetry that emphasized British homogeneity over Scottish particularity. Burns's 'Scots Wha Hae' was probably the most emulated and pastiched single poem in Scotland during the war, with versions of it appearing in every type of publication from anthologies and national newspapers to factory journals and pamphlets (Goldie 2010). The tenor of this work, in spite of its invocation of Bruce, Wallace, and Bannockburn, was almost without exception unionist and pro-war: downplaying both Burns's rich dialect and the song's potentially dissonant meaning in favour of a generalised (and Anglicised) celebration of Scottish military prowess within a modern united kingdom. A striking, but by no means isolated, example of this can be seen in a version of 'Scots Wha Hae' that appeared in Glasgow's *Evening Times* just over a month into the war:

Scottish sons of gallant sires  
Britain's King your aid requires,  
To fight for all that love inspires,  
And for liberty.

(Bell 1914, 2)

The ease with which such a potentially problematic role-model as Burns might be co-opted to the war effort illustrates the power of British cultural imperialism, or at any rate the complaisance of many Scots in its operation. A detailed examination of the work of the war poet Joseph Lee illustrates another way in which war and its imperative to support the union loosened the bonds between Scottish writers and the Burns tradition and fastened them more closely to British imperial models.

Lee had established himself before the war as the ‘People’s poet’ of Dundee, very much in the Burns tradition of radical, popular local poetry. His 1910 collection, *Poems: Tales o’ our Town*, shows strongly the influence of Burns and the Scottish folk tradition. A poem such as ‘The Durance of Dick Drouth’ manifests this influence in its subject (it is a humorous tale of drunken imprisonment), its form (the use of the Standard Habbie stanza), and in its dialect:

Men in their cups are curious chieils,  
Wi' some the head, wi' some the heels  
There's Tammas raves, while Geordie reels,  
    But a' seem jolly;  
Though, on the morn, mony ane feels  
    Fell melancholy.

(Lee 1910, 52)

This first collection of Lee’s tends to follow a standard pattern in the Scottish popular verse of the time, employing Scots dialect and folk forms for its swathes of comedy and sentiment and reserving English for serious historical poems (‘The Greys at Waterloo’), meditations on character formation (the Newboltesque ‘The Old School’), and elegies such as ‘In Memoriam: David Macrae’, whose first stanza reads, ‘The clarion voice is still,/ Fallen the noble crest, / The lion heart and valiant will / Have rest’ (Lee 1910, 142). But the overriding influence of *Tales o’ our Town* remains that of Robert Burns: the comedic, reputation-scoring, civil, sometimes political Burns that dominated much nineteenth-century popular literature and politics (McIlvanney 2002; Whatley 2011). This influence is announced in Lee’s illustration of ‘The White-washin’ o’ Robbie Burns’ that faces the book’s title page and continues through to its

concluding poem, 'What Tho' we're Puir' in Burn's 'honest poverty' style:

What tho' we're puir, what tho' we're puir !  
The day is coming slow but sure,  
When man for man shall slave nae mair,  
But a' shall serve an' a' shall share,  
An' a' be brethren everywhere.

(Lee 1910, 159)

Lee enlisted in 1914 and served throughout the war, latterly as a prisoner of war, publishing two wartime collections of poems *Ballads of Battle* (1916) and *Work-a-Day Warriors* (1917) along the way. Perhaps the most significant feature of these books is their shift away from Burns and, more generally, their movement away from vernacular Scots altogether. English influences that had been peripheral in the earlier poems now take centre-stage – particularly the types of nautical and military poetry of Henry Newbolt (especially his 1897 collection *Admirals All*) and, even more markedly, the poetry of military life and comradeship exemplified by Rudyard Kipling in his *Barrack-Room Ballads* (1892). Lee retains a Burnsian exuberance and inclusivity, but this is articulated in a voice that appears to owe more to Bow Bells than Dundee's Bowbridge. While there remain a very small number of poems in Scots, or partly in Scots – such as 'The Green Grass' which uses a Scots voice to add pathos to a dialogue between a dead English and dead Scottish soldier – the voice that characterises Lee's wartime collections is the Kiplingesque cockney of the cheery, grumbling 'The Penitent' and 'Carrying-Party' or the admiring, affectionate 'Piou Piou', which follows Kipling's 'Gunga Din' in turning a potential figure of fun, in this case the generic French Poilu, into one who is honoured for his integrity and courage:

Your trousers is a funny red,  
Your tunic is a funny blue,  
Your cap sets curious on your 'ead  
And yet, by Gawd, your 'eart sits true,  
Piou-piou !

(Lee 1916, 84)



In this way Lee's wartime poetry comes to resemble not just the English poetry of the war, but the poetry of popular Scottish writers such as R. W. Campbell (Campbell 1916), Scots-Irish writers like Patrick MacGill (MacGill 1917), and Scots-Canadians like Robert Service – Service's *Rhymes of a Red Cross Man* (1916) similarly focuses on an English, sometimes English cockney voice, as in poems such as 'The Odyssey of 'Erbert 'Iggins', but features the occasional poem in a broad Scots vernacular, such as 'The Haggis of Private McPhee' (Service 1978, 306-15). Lee's poetry also reflects a more general tendency in Scottish wartime newspaper poetry to prefer English voices to Scottish ones: illustrated in Hilda Spear and Bruce Pandrich's collection of poems from the Dundee newspapers of 1915, *Sword and Pen* (1989), in which only nine of the one hundred poems printed use dialect in any sustained way.

This attitude of wariness to Scots-language poetry is less surprising when one looks at the literary critical attitudes of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries that extended into the war years. T. S. Eliot's subsequently notorious presumption in asking, in an essay of 1919 'Was there a Scottish Literature?' (Eliot 1919), was manifestly not simply the disdain of a distant Anglo-American, but rather an accurate reflection of the issues raised in the book he was reviewing, G. Gregory Smith's *Scottish Literature: Character and Influence* (1919). It was Gregory Smith as much as Eliot who insisted on the appropriateness of the past tense in describing the phenomenon of Scottish literature. According to Gregory Smith,

Modern conditions seem to put the thesis of a well-defined and sustained Scotticism to a very severe test, if not to make it preposterous for any time after the eighteenth century, when the Scot encouraged himself to forget the differences as best he could. The literary historian finds, as he passes from Hume to Sir Walter, that it is increasingly difficult to segregate his 'Scottish' writer, and that he has often no better excuse for a label than the accident of birth or residence, or the choice of subject or dialect. The public to-day, whether of London or Edinburgh, does not trouble itself about the matter, except when, roused by the accent of Drumtochty, it convinces itself that it hears the 'true Scottish note.

(Gregory Smith 1919, 276)

Gregory Smith was far from being alone in this belief of the obsolescence of Scottish literature and in the effective redundancy of the vernacular tradition. At least two literary histories written before the First World War make effectively the same point. The first is T. F. Henderson's *Scottish Vernacular Literature: A Succinct History* (1898), a work that sees very little merit in any Scots-language poetry after Burns, and which closes on a particularly gloomy note concerning the prospects for that poetry in the future. 'As regards vernacular poetry,' Henderson contends, Burns's 'death was really the setting of the sun; the twilight deepened very quickly; and such twinkling lights as from time to time appear only serve to disclose the darkness of the all-encompassing night (Henderson 1898, 458). J. H. Millar, makes a broadly similar argument in his *Literary History of Scotland* (1903), arguing that the resources of what he calls 'literary Doric' verse, 'appear to be exhausted, and all its conventions have been worn to a thread. Everything has the air of a more or less—and generally a less—skilful imitation of Burns':

The plain truth is that the language in which [Burns] wrote has ceased to be a literary vehicle for intense and genuine emotion. And thus, while his cheaper and more sentimental pieces provide congenial models for those whose feelings have always an infusion of the self-conscious and the second-hand, we may suspect that any modern compatriot with a true lyrical gift would seek some other mode of displaying it than the methods which Burns has made immortal.

(Millar 1903, 680)

Such arguments were amplified immediately after the war by G. R. Blake, who, like Gregory Smith, posed the question in his *Scotland of the Scots* (1918), 'Is there a modern Scottish literature?' and answered it largely in the negative (Blake 1918, 69). As far as Blake was concerned,

The literary product of Scotsmen is merged utterly into the mass of English literature, and the vernacular is practically moribund as a vehicle of thought: education and commerce have seen to that. There can only be one Burns, and the age of miracles of that description is past.

Blake's meditations on the state of Scottish literature at the end of the war were pessimistic, but they did, at least, close on the faint hope 'that out of the ashes of the conflagration will arise a spirit that will bring new life to the silent muse of Scotland' (Blake 1918, 99).

There would be much to encourage and surprise Blake in the next two decades as Scotland's 'silent muse' began to rediscover its voice, but even in the output of wartime there were still elements of strength in Scottish poetry that belied his prognosis. Lee's poetry, for example, might have lost its Scots vernacular edge, but gained, in poems such as 'The Bullet', a powerful terseness reminiscent of the contemporary Imagists or of Kipling's Epigraphs of the war. Lee was also able on occasion to take the cockney voice beyond pastiche and exploit its harder, less comic, elements. His 'Glad That I Killed Yer' may not be as powerful or deep as Wilfred Owen's 'Strange Meeting' but it shares with that poem a bewildered fascination with the strange kinship that bonds men who are forced to do violence to one another. Subtitled 'A modern song of Lamech' it takes as its text Lamech's plea, in Genesis 4, 23 to, 'hearken unto my speech: for I have slain a man to my wounding, and a young man to my hurt'. This reference, with its own remembering of the sin of Cain, sets the tone for a poem that is by turns bluff and meditative, and pragmatic and tender about the self-identification of a murderer with his victim:

Glad that I killed yer –  
It was you or me:  
Our bayonets locked,  
And then I pulled mine free;  
My heart beat like to burst;  
But Gawd, I got in first-  
Glad that I killed yer !

Glad that I killed yer,  
Though you are so young:  
How still you lie  
With both your arms outflung:  
There's red blood on your hair—

Well, what the Hell I care ?—  
Glad that I killed yer!

[ . . . ]

Glad that I killed yer—  
That's the game o' war;  
But for my luck  
I'd lie just like you are;  
Your blood is on my hand—  
Surely you understand  
I *had* to kill yer ?

Glad that I killed yer—  
Yet I can't forget  
The look you gave me  
When we turned—and met—  
Why do you follow me with staring eye?  
Was it so difficult a thing to die—  
Gawd ! when I killed yer?

(Lee 1917, 12-14)

Lee is not alone in adapting models from English poetry to powerful effect. Paul Fussell identified irony as perhaps the most significant response of soldiers, and soldier poets, to their experiences of the First World War (Fussell 1975), and just as Lee was able on occasion to transcend pastiche with an ironic reworking of his sources, so too other Scottish writers who worked within distinctively English traditions were able to produce a distinctive, dissenting poetry through the deployment of ironic voice in their poems. Roderick Watson Kerr was perhaps one of more significant Scottish poets of the war, writing in poems such as 'From the Line' and 'Standing By', moving evocations of war experience and powerful ripostes to the more thoughtless celebrations of war. His poem 'Denial' exhibits the power of his

irony, in firstly identifying with and then distancing itself from Rupert Brooke's iconic sonnet, 'The Soldier'. Brooke's sonnet, published very widely after his death in 1915, begins famously with the invocation, 'If I should die, think only this of me; / That there's some corner of a foreign field / That is for ever England', before talking of his body as a 'richer dust concealed' in the rich earth of a foreign land. Kerr slyly undercuts these images, bringing Brooke's lofty diction down to earth with a bump and applying the corrective of a canny Scottish pragmatism to Brooke's high-pitched idealism – Brooke's 'think only this of me' is transformed into Kerr's 'chatter only this', his subtle ABAB rhymes turn into abrupt couplets, and his 'richer dust' becomes simply 'dung':

If I should die—chatter only this:—  
'A bullet flew by that did not miss!'  
I did not give life up because of a friend;  
That bullet came thro', and that was the end!

Don't put up a cross where my dung will be laid,  
But scatter some wheat—and bread will be made;  
Don't say I'm a hero because I was shot;  
A bullet won't make one what one is not.

(Kerr 1919, 33)

Scotland's 'silent muse' was also heard, in spite of Blake's worries, in the relatively small number of vernacular poems that did appear in the war. Some of these poems were simply Scots-voiced versions of British-imperial recruiting enthusiasm, as seen in Charles Murray's 'Wha bares a blade for Scotland?' ('Wha bares a blade for Scotland? she 's needin' ye sairly noo, / What will ye dae for Scotland for a' she has dane for you?') or George Abel's 'Mair Men' (Men are wintet fae the Northlan', / Men wi' shanks to weer the kilt, / Men wi' Bannockburn's memory, / Men 'at winna warp nor wilt) (Murray 1917, 15; Abel 1916, 76). Others, though, were poems by civilians who were able to use the dialect's traditional strengths in the direct expression of feeling and in satiric comedy to make effective and affecting interpretations of the broader war experience.

Some of the most powerful examples of this come from the poets associated

with the Doric revival, a movement that was beginning to gather momentum in the war years and that would flourish after it (Milton 1995). The revival is not without its issues, not the least of which are that the class position and exilic nature of many of its participants leave it open to being seen as a poetry dominated by the distancing nostalgia of exile. However, the elegies of Marion Angus ('Remembrance Day'), Violet Jacob ('The Field by the Lirk o' the Hill', 'The Road to Marykirk'), and John Buchan ('Fisher Jamie'), all gain an audible benefit from the use of an understated plain Scots voice in the expressions of their naked grief. So too, in the masterly self-incriminating dramatic monologue of 'Dockens Afore his Peers', does Charles Murray convict, with appropriate drollery, out of his own mouth the crafty self-serving farmer, John Watt of Dockenhill, as he seeks to protect himself and his own from having to make any sacrifice at all for the war effort.

Joseph Lee, too, shows in his increasingly rare wartime forays into Scots a quality quite distinct from his earlier Burnsian rumbustiousness. His poem 'The Carrion Crow' looks forward perhaps to the character of La Corbie in Liz Lochhead's *Mary Queen of Scots Got Her Head Chopped Off* (1987) in the way it employs dialect for sardonic, choral effect, mocking the presumption of men from the point of view of a sceptical, hard-edged nature:

A crow sat on a crooked tree,  
And first it cawed, then glowered at me.

Quoth I, 'Thou hoary, hooded crow,  
Why do ye glower upon me so?'

'I look upon thee live,' it said,  
'That I may better ken thee dead;

'That I may claim thee for my ain  
When ye are smooored among the slain.'

(Lee 1917, 54)

Luckily, the crow never did claim Lee, or his speaker, for his ain, as he survived the war and lived a long life. But the claim of his dialect voice was one that would be

heard with increasing regularity and force in the years immediately after the war: tentatively in C. M. Grieve's three series of *Northern Numbers* (1920-22) (the first of which featured Lee and Kerr) and John Buchan's *The Northern Muse* (1924), and then more insistently once Grieve had adopted the persona of Hugh MacDiarmid through which he would lead the Scottish Literary Renaissance. It is salutary that within ten years of a war in which Scottish poetry had struggled (or perhaps more properly failed to struggle hard enough) to break free from the dominating and often restrictive voice of British imperial poetry, that it was being written with the confidence that would place an indelible mark on the interwar period, and which would make the Scottish poetry of the Second World War quite a different, and perhaps more diverse and interesting, body of work than much of the poetry produced in the First World War.

Perhaps Henderson, Millar, Gregory Smith, and Blake were right – that Scottish poetry had effectively become moribund before the war. But death is a necessary precondition of re-birth, and perhaps it took the First World War to convince poets of the crying need for a Renaissance. The Scottish voice in poetry may not have won out in the war, but it had perhaps by the end of the 1920s at least started the slow process of winning the peace.

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