them to pursue their fascinating researches. Accordingly, the academic is under an obligation to the lay public to explain what he is doing. If the academic considers that this is beneath his dignity and retreats into his ivory tower, he must not be surprised if he starves to death.

The academics who, on Thursday evening in Man, stayed in their ivory towers did their specialisations a grave dis-service. The minority who mixed with the members in the communal mery making did not demean their sholarship. They may even have learned something. It is to the credit of those speakers from the Isle of Man who were present that they mixed with the lay public. In fact, the undoubted success of the Isle of Man Conference was in no small measure due to the scholarship, friendliness and helpfulness of the members and staff of the Manx Museum and National Trust.

A DESCENDING GRACE

Derek Bowman

Erik Frykman: *"Unemphatic Marvels". A Study of Norman MacCaig's Poetry,* Gothenburg Studies in English 35, Göteborg, Sweden, Sw Cr. 50–, 70 pages.

Mr Frykman's study consists of an introduction and six chapters, entitled 1. The Poet and his Art, 2. Landscape and Mind-scape, 3. People, 4. Love, Myth, History, Space and Time, Death, 5. Metaphorical Devices and Patterns, 6. "A Man in Assynt", followed by a list of Norman MacCaig's books of verse to date and an index of poems quoted or referred to. With a quiet carefulness which the critic shares with the poet, Mr. Frykman clearly and judiciously describes the main characteristics of Mr. MacCaig's poetry, wisely omitting the latter's first two collections. In the process Mr. Frykman makes many cogent points, always clinching them with pertinent examples.

First he singles out Mr. MacCaig's modesty, the restraint of his tone, his remaining within certain self-prescribed limits, that "natural decorum" which pervades his work. As the poet

himself says,

> I am growing, as I get older,
> to hate metaphor,
> to love gentleness,
> to fear downpours.
>
> ("No Choice")

Here Mr MacCaig, the product of a classical education, is one with Goethe, who holds that it is in limiting himself that the true master is revealed. Indeed Goethe would go further, maintaining that such adoption of limitation is the law of life itself, whether found in organism or work of art. Certainly Mr. MacCaig seems to go out of his way to celebrate the apparently ordinary in people, animals, inanimate objects, incidents, but in so doing, such is his art, he makes manifest their inherent life, shows them in a new and marvellous light; he makes them sing. The title of Mr. Frykman's study is well chosen.

Mr. MacCaig generally eschews, then, both violence of subject matter and vehemence of style; he reads out his own work quietly, but no less effectively for that. "Prowling the familiar", the poet instinctively shies away from the turbulent, only occasionally describing disturbed states of mind. He prefers the realm of affection; thus he praises a "Four O'clock Blackbird" for

> thoughtfully
> Saying what he thought
> From a hawthorn tree I'm fond of.

The echoing of "thoughtfully" by "thought" here is typical of Mr. MacCaig's playfulness with language. He makes it his business to play tricks with it, repeating, varying, contrasting words and phrases, using paradox such as the "fruitless fruits" brought by a hospital visitor, or taking literally an expression that we have long taken unthinkingly in its figurative sense. All along he is out to tease the reader into new thought, fresh feeling, *insight,* rather as a benign old Zen master will puzzle an initiate into realizing the boundaries of his language and hence his world.

Mr. Frykman goes on to show how Mr. MacCaig's ever-active self-irony, that socratic virtue, forbids any self-indulgence, any sentimentality of his part. The poet, in refusing habitually to give himself or his theme a big build-up, writes all-the-more effectively when he does choose to concentrate on some of the

crueller aspects of modern life, as in his America poems in *Rings on a Tree.* Take "Hotel Room, 12th Floor", where, after an impression of a helicopter landing on top of the Pan-Am Sky-scraper and a sense of hostile midnight, the poet hears

> police cars and ambulances racing
> to the broken bones, the harsh screaming
> from coldwater flats, the blood
> glazed on sidewalks.

Or take "Assisi", where, standing amid all the clever sillinesses of present-day tourist trafficking, the contemplative poet dwells on a crippled beggar. The culture-hungry tourists

> had passed
> The ruined temple outside, whose eyes
> Wept pus, whose back was higher
> Than his head, whose lopsided mouth
> Said *Grazie* in a voice as sweet
> As a child's when she speaks to her mother
> Or a bird's when it spoke
> To St. Francis.

The poet, in contrast, penetrates the essence of Assisi: here, in and through this wretch — or nowhere — the compassionate saint, who (in Thomas of Celano's words) "had made a tongue of his whole body", is humbly addressing the poet and us. This ability to thrust through, to pierce the accidental to the real, whilst never neglecting the full force of the here and now, is the mark of a true poet, a mark which Mr. Frykman unerringly recognizes.

In spite of such foreign forays, Mr. MacCaig is, as Mr. Frykman shows, first and foremost a "local voice". Scottish life is his forte, especially that of the Highlands and his adoptive home, Edinburgh. Similarly he seems to be more at home with a "Country Postman" than a "Brooklyn Cop" (the titles of two of his poems). Not averse to describing urban ways, the poet is particularly drawn to rural and manual activities, admiring skills like shepherding or the handling of boats. As poet he is of course rooted in the natural world. There could be composed from his poems a rich bestiary, from "stoned crows" to

> a bull blaring
> From the sad shores of love,

not to mention "ballet dancer frogs" or the "rats and mice and

such small deer", that his imagination embraces and uses to light up the human condition.

One of the virtues of Mr. Frykman's study is the clarity with which he demonstrates this constant anthropomorphizing movement of Mr. MacCaig's mind. The poet may start with an external scene but in no time at all he is proceeding into himself, investigating his own ego, then back he moves to the outside world again. The inner and the outer world – what is their connection, where why, when, above all *how* do we human beings fit into nature, and how on earth can we speak vividly and convincingly of such matters? Thus in "Treeless Landscape" he opines

> Something to do with time has all to do
> With shape and size.

Man is such a perpetual Narcissus; he sees himself in everything around him. Such dwelling on epistemological problems, such "ideas about the nature of being" – to quote one of the poet's own phrases – are a constant conern. "Metaphysical Me" is symptomatically the first poem of his characteristically named volume, *Surroundings*. And yet, as Mr. Frykman observes, the reader is not put off by any "etallage du moi" on the part of the poet, for Mr. MacCaig usually paints the landscape, however fleeting, with deft brush strokes before standing back and reviewing the situation with his own peculiar mixture of hesitant deference and, at times, rueful irony towards himself and what lies before him, the same attitude indeed with which he treats history, myth, magic and religion. His is the courteous but no less sovereign regard of the confirmed poet. He has a sharp insight into and an easy acceptance of the complexity of the universe we are born into and our failure to tell all that much about its wonders:

> And my feet took me home
>
> And my mind observed to me,
> Or I to it, how ordinary
> Extraordinary things are or
>
> How extraordinary ordinary
> Things are, like the nature of the mind
> And the process of observing.
>
> ("An Ordinary Day")

His is no tragic battle with words or agonized sense of the absurd, but an amused, bemused recognition of this, our rather "ridiculous

world", the odd bounds of human utterance. Thus his metaphysical self, after fawning on objects, breeds ideas

> So that, when, after thirty years
> As an infinite bigamist,
> He grew bored and wanted to divorce the lot,
> He found he couldn't
> For the sake of the children.
>
> ("Metaphysical Me")

Frequently Mr. MacCaig seems to behave like a sophisticated sceptic in the Hume tradition. Where, however, he differs from his great Edinburgh forbear and shows himself to be a Romantic poet, as Mr. Frykman penetratingly observes, is his belief in and, more to the purpose, his demonstration of brief moments of "descending grace". Mystical states one might term them, however much the poet may call himself a "failed mystic".

For, as Mr. Frykman rightly shows, time and time again, Mr. MacCaig is impatient with cant in any shape or form. When it comes to people, he is aware of the tragedy as well as the comedy beneath the surface of us "poor forked animals". Being himself a complex character, amongst his gallery of portraits, he is particularly fond of unsophisticates and eccentrics, whilst reserving his sarcasm for smug preachers and attitudinizing politicians:

> Nobody with such luggage
> Has nothing to declare.
>
> ("Smuggler")

Mr. MacCaig cannot resist a metaphor – the more farfetched, the better, one sometimes feels. Mr. Frykman is correct in speaking of the poet's "obsessive creation of imagery", which is both his strength and occasionally his weakness, for when the force of feeling is not full on, he is liable to succumb to the meretricious attractions of whimsy, of using images to decorate what he has to say, rather that to express is, live it out, enact it. Is, to take but one instance, a "Preenign Swan" really like a washerwoman who

> put on an aristocracy
> as false as any other one
> and, head high, stared at the ridiculous world
> through invisible lorgnettes?

In this connection Mr. Frykman puts his finger on a weaker part of Mr. MacCaig's rich and extensive "oeuvre" – his love-poetry. He castigates the poet for being all-too-often "palpably inventive", for trying to be too clever, to impress us, his readers, rather than steadily concentrating on his beloved. Mr. Frykman rejects the "facile jugglery" of such lines as

> With plenty of time to think of you
> I think of you only
> When I am busiest – that is,
> When I am thinking of you.
>
> ("Two-Part Invention")

In making such strictures Mr. Frykman always scrupulously gives chapter and verse. All along he has been so sensitive to style and content, and, above all, the honesty which speaks through them, that the reader by now trusts him and cannot but respect and agree with his censure here. Mr. Frykman would be the last person to try to score cheaply off his subject.

In the last chapter of his fine study Mr. Frykman centres on one of Mr. MacCaig's longer poems, "A Man in Assynt", which he clearly admires, quoting, to round off the book, a passage from it, the starting-point of which is a church-service:

> . . . The sound of that praise
> escapes from the stone box
> and takes its place in the ordinary communion
> of all sounds, that are
> Being expressing itself – as it does in its continuous,
> its never-ending creation of leaves,
> birds, waves, stone boxes – and beliefs,
> the true and the false.

In these splendid lines with their all-embracing generosity Mr. MacCaig is writing at the top of his bent. No no-nonsense pragmatist he: life is so vast, so miraculous, who are we mere mortals, a very small part of the creation when all is said and done, to try to wrench it this way and that, doggedly insisting on the rightness of certain categories. The richness of Mr. MacCaig, the poet has been echoed in the sympathetic appreciation of Mr. Frykman, the critic.

This is genuine pioneering work on Mr. Frykman's part, introducing to his fellow Swedes an important contemporary poet,

while he is alive and at the height of his powers, thereby promoting that traffic of ideas, of shared experience which is bound to enrich the lives of many. Mr. Frykman has shown himself to be a true exponent of Goethe's conception of "Weltliteratur". To this end the book is a model monograph, being sensitively felt, clearly thought out, well organized and attractively written. If only more academic literary critics would follow his example!

THE OXFORD IBSEN

With Vol. 8 (Little Eyolf, John Gabriel Borkman, When We Dead Awaken) this work has been completed in good time for Ibsen's 150th birthday in March 1978. Warmest congratulations are offered to the General Editor Professor James W. McFarlane and his collaborators on one of the great achievements of European scholarship in our time – scholarship combining accuracy and taste, as the Introduction to the last volume shows yet again. We note with pleasure and pride the award to Professor McFarlane of the Commander's Cross of the Royal Norwegian Order of St Olav for "his fine and sensitive translations and his excellent introductions which make an original contribution to Ibsen research and criticism".

"GOD BLESS YOU, MY DEAR MISS NIGHTINGALE".

Edited by Bertil Johansson.
Stockholm Studies in English. No. 38, 1977.

Emmy Carolina Rappe (1835–96), who wrote these letters between 1867 and 1870, was a pioneer in what was to become the Swedish Red Cross. She had been received by Florence Nightingale soon after her arrival in England in 1866: "It was an unforgettable moment".

The series, printed for the first time from the Nightingale Papers in the British Museum Library, begins from St Thomas's Hospital, London: "A long time has passed away since I wrote to you". It ends from Uppsala: "Farewell". No earlier or later latters have been traced. Florence's replies were probably burnt after Emmy's death.

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The 19 surviving letters are admirably presented by Bertil Johansson. Text and commentary are accompanied by appendices on the Nightingale Institution at St Thomas's and on Emmy's English, and by 8 photographs showing Emmy, her handwriting, and persons and hospitals that she was connected with. The letters are excellent and they have been made into a delightful and informative book.

In the bibliography Lytton Strachey and Edward Cook are to be found, but not Cecil Woodham-Smith.

BROUGH OF BIRSAY, ORKNEY (NGR HY 239285)

C.D. Morris

Excavations and Survey 1976: Interim Report on work by Durham University

Excavations and survey under the direction of C.D. Morris of Durham University took place on this site on behalf of the Department of the Environment (Scotland) and Durham University Excavations Committee, for a period of four weeks, with some post-excavation work immediately following in Durham. The Assistant Director was Sonia Thingstad (now Jeffrey) of Gothenburg University, and other staff and volunteers were recruited through Durham University, with individuals from other institutions. Work by the University of Bradford under the direction of J.R. Hunter is reported separately.

Excavation took place in three areas to the west of the church: an area immediately adjacent to House N, excavated in 1974 and 1975, was examined, and a new phase of excavation began in and around the complex of walls named "House E" and a large area to the north of it, including "House S".

Area Adjacent to House N

The area opened this year investigated the features to the south of the building only partially examined in 1975. A series of gravel spreads and clay layers had been distinguished in 1975, but few of these on excavation proved to be substantial. Two small regularly-shaped pits contained burnt material, but no