Uys Krige in the Grey North

bi T.S. Law

(TSL's original contents list missing here)

21.6.1995
Incidentals

This is the 21st of June in 1995, and I note that date down upon the page so that I may begin to keep track of what I do when I do it, though even as this paragraph may be altered more than once, the dating is merely a guide of first intention, because I change it again today that happens to be the 19th of November in 1995.

In naming this complete screed *Uys Krige in the Gray North,* I hope to say as much about the latter as I do the former, as well as plenty about myself.

Writing about him, I have to explain for the benefit of those who do not know how to pronounce his name, that the forename sounds rather like "Ace", while the surname is disyllabic, the Afrikaans "g" in it like the "ch" in Scots words such as "nicht" or "loch", the "i" rather like a double "e", and the final "e" is spoken shortly like the "i" in "it". Thus, near enough phonetically, the full name has this value: "Ace Kreechi".

He was born in 1910 at Swellendam in the Cape Province of South Africa, and died in the same area at a place called Onrust on the 10th of August in 1987.

Literary archives know him principally as a poet, a playwright, a translator and as a major figure in the establishment of Afrikaans, while generally, in person, he was a shortish, square-made figure of lively countenance and speak, renowned for his loquacity. Mentally, however, he was always into the elevation of the commanding stature of his mind. His manner was as friendly as registered memorably in my mind, and if sometimes in company he had a faraway look in his eyes, in no way was that a sign of inattention: rather, it indicated that he was as all-eyes as all-ears.

As to his physical make-up, his was not at all the typical Afrikaner figure. Judge you how Lady Anne Barnard saw his forebears, as she described them in a letter from the Castle, Cape of Good Hope in August 10th, 1797.

"...They are very fine men; their height is enormous; most of them are six feet high and upwards, and I do not know how many feet across; I hear that five or six hundred miles distant they may even reach each seven feet..."

Lady Anne Barnard, before marriage, Lady Anne Lindsay, and the author of the Scots song *Auld Robin Gray,* made to the original very old air *The Bridegroom grat when the Sun gaed doun.* I cannot vouch for it, but my information is that that old air "...is now discarded for the very beautiful one composed by the Reverend William Leeves, rector of Wrington, in Somersetshire." For what it is worth as another bit of incidental information, *The Scotsman* newspaper of the 30th of October in 1967 printed a picture with this note: "Auld Robin Gray's cottage that stands at the corner of the Cairnie cross roads near Colinsburgh, Fife, is to be restored at a cost of £2500, The cottage, which is to be restored by Lord Balneil, was made famous in the ballad by Lady Anne Lindsay."

Growing into my eild nowadays, which I realise is the beginning of my growing into the ground-level that everyone attains, I am conscious that I am not now, nor was I

ever, very much at all above the stature of Uys Krige as I knew him. I must say, though, that I did consider him somewhat less tall than myself – as we all know, no matter how short a man may truly be, if at such a time he is weel at hissel, as we say, he does imagine his companions are not as tall as truly they are, but if they should be so, perhaps may be lacking the pith he is sure his own deportment advertises.

I have no intention here to make a character sketch of Uys, for I am conscious that what we think and say about others is not as important as what we think about ourselves but never disclose. Therefore, all I add about Uys is that the only approach to inordinate mirth I discovered in him happened once when we went to see a certain film, and he was greatly taken with Humphrey Bogart saying "Never kill a cop!" Uys put his head back and laughed, repeating the phrase as he did so.

19.8.1995

No doubt what I have said above is far short of the physical and mental mark of the man, but this account of my time with him in Scotland, during his stay with my wife Peggy and myself in Dunfermline, for about a couple of months from about the 29th of July in 1952, does not attempt to be anything other than "for the record", as the going phrase has it.

There are many bits and pieces concerning him and his work in South Africa that I have heard about but which I have never read, and I may say that I have no intention of padding these words with excessive back-up from what I have indeed seen and read. It is to be hoped that when I have finished writing here what I have in mind about him, I shall have made a contribution that will be of some interest to the people of his country.

Many years ago, having been introduced to his Afrikaans poetry by Peggy, probably because I had shown an interest in Afrikaans in general, I made Scots translations of two of his poems, the originals, curiously, being Afrikaans translations made by Krige of a couple of Spanish poems made by Garcia Lorca, or truthfully, made "after" Lorca. One of those works, *Kitaar*, became *Guitar* in my Scots, and the other, *Die Ballade van die Waters van die See,* became *The Ballat o the Watters o the Sea.*I translated both of those poems on the 20th of April in 1947.

Later on in this account, it will be shown that I also translated another seven of his poems into Scots. Those were *Die Soldaat, Die Pad deur die Woestyn, Die Einde van die Pad, Blomme van die Boland, Ballade, Die Seemeeu (I)* and *Die Seemeeu(II)*, those being entitled conveniently in Scots *The Sodger, The Desert Pad, The End o the Pad, Flooers in the Boland, Ballat, The Sea-Maw (I), and The Sea-Maw (II)*, the latter being made *"Efter the Afrikaans o Uys Krige"*. Respectively, those were translated on the 22nd of January in 1949, the 1st of February in 1969, the 16th of February in 1969, the 7th of December in 1986, the 20th of April in 1951, the first of the *Seemeeu* poems on the 3rd of December in 1968, and the latter on the 9th of December in 1986.

In another bit of a screed called *Wilderness*,written earlier than this one, my translations of those poems are to be found.

Perhaps I should say that though I did translate a short Afrikaans poem *'N Sanger* by A.D.Keet into Scots on the 5th of December in 1968, making the character in the poem the definite article creature by calling it *The Makar,* the only other exercise in such translation that I had done previously was in an adaptation of *Oktobermaand* by C.Louis Leipoldt on the 16th of December in 1946: again conveniently, it became *Octobermonth.*Why those varied times I have now no idea, but as I write, recall may make a something out of very little the here and there.

27.9.1995

It was from my wife Peggy's copy of *Rooidag,* Krige's book of verse that was published in Pretoria in 1940 by J.L.VAN SCHAIK, BPK., that I translated *Die Seemeeu I, Kitaar,* and *Die Ballade van die Waters van die See*.What a difference of mental appreciation there is in translating the Spanish of Garcia Lorca by way of the Afrikaans of Uys Krige and the memory of Davie MacPhail, a fruiterer in the Newarthill of my boyhood, where he used to advertise some of his juicier comestibles by a street cry that chanted "Sweet Sevi'le honey oranges!" Only the other day I did a something about that old street cry in a poem, and I give it you below, mentioning here, though, that the George in the poem is George Todd.

FROM SPAIN TO AUCHTERARDER

George visiting us here just yesterday
with Santi his wife, her name the shortened version
of what the Spanish is, though I forget.
But never mind, she brought the Spanish weather
like memory of my own golden youth
when sunshine neighboured summer holidays.

She speaks no English, George the go-between,
his sound of voice the relevance of Spanish
as brown of tone as skin of browny-bronze
is relevance that makes the Spanish summer
another way of life unlike our own,
except within the thought that warms the heart.

At lunch, I say to George: "Tell Santi this:
some here say *Se*ville, some Se*ville.* What is it?"
I learn the name in Spanish ends with "a"
that I could well have guessed, had I been questioned,
because habitually, English makes
anew in order to remain the same.

The name is redolent of oranges
as zest is oranges in very essence,
and that is said like "tasty", English word,
becoming on the old Scots tongue our "lavrie"
that makes teeth water at the thought of it,
remembering the hungers of our youth.

"Say this to Santi," I to George. "When I
was young as never realised I listened,
I heard street-trader chant of fruit he sold,
like this: "Sweet S'vil'e honey oranges!" Imagine
the difficulty Santi must have had
in understanding nuance such as that.
Later, the dishes redd away, look there,
Santi and Peggy, action like translation,
up to the wrists deep in the kitchen sink.

"Two women washing dishes need no language,"
I say to George. "Tell Santi that. "He did.
Syne cheerio, like so much yet to say.

Alas, all gone, all gone those days of street cries, gone like the fresh herring from Loch Fyne that we used to recognise as become lavrie available in Newarthill when we heard the fishman call "Loch Fyne culler herrin! Loch Fyne culler herrin!" as we ran out clutching a plate and a few pence for a pound of the lovely silver darlings, as they were to be known. Nobody minded going those messages, and how they were appreciated when served with new Ayrshire potatoes! Nowadays, if the Loch Fyne herring have suffered a sea-change, the new Ayrshires have suffered a fertiliser-change. Really alas, all gone, all gone, what once was gourmet fodder, those herring are now as unobtainable as those potatoes are uneatable.

Even as my language skills were to improve with the years, so was Davie MacPhail's entrepreneurial expertise to increase, for he became a bus operator in the middle 1920's and eventually sold out adventageously to a larger company. That was a long way forward from the early days when he first sold apples from a humble barrow, as my mother used to relate in village gossip. Strangely, time has seen fit to remould the old MacPhail bus image, for only a year or two ago what did I see standing in Auchterarder High Street but a new and resplendent bus with the legend *Scott MacPhail* on it, done in a fine script, as was the place of origin – *Newarthill.* Scott was Davie's son and had attended Newarthill Public School at the same time as myself, though a year or so younger than I.

Lest it be thought by the socially miseducated that that school was one of the so-called public schools of English fancy, which are private, our establishment was indeed as truly public as plebeianly and democratically for the common people. It was well-built too, for it had to stand the weather as well as the waens. I mention this in case anyone think me deficient in education, for I am only too conscious of having been so fortunate in not having had bad tuition foisted upon my tender years. As once was as colloquial as trip the lip, "as sure as guns are iron" we were always made aware that language was rifely in communication with song and syllable.

But back to the auld claes and purritch of this particular screed, my later translations of *Die Soldaat, Die Pad deur die Woestyn, Die Ende van die Pad* and *Blomme van die Boland* were made from his volume *Die Einde van die Pad*, a copy of which Uys sent to me in March 1948. His short Afrikaans inscription to me on the flyleaf of the copy ends by quoting from my translation of his *Ballade van die Waters van die See,*

,
"whyte teeth o faem,
waan lips o the luft..."

Originally, I recall in writing to him that I had said something about my translations being from "the gray North", and he uses the Afrikaans for those three words in his inscription.

As I cannot put my hands on what I may have written to Uys in those days, nor on what he may have written in reply to them, the best I can do is to quote from an air letter of his that was sent to me from 20 Scholtz Street on Johannesburg, dated the 10th of August in 1947. He writes (I use the present tense to keep it immediate):

Dear Mr. Law,

You must forgive me my long delay in answering your letter dated 22 April – but I have been terribly busy, loaded down with work etc.

And I 'm only now beginning to plough through a mass of correspondence. Your letter was most interesting – and I was "thrilled" to find myself translated into Scots (even tho' it was a translation of a translation of mine – but perhaps both poems are more "interpretations" than translations – have you seen Spender's literal version of *Guitarra*?)

Your rendering looks fascinating. I shall have it read to me by a Scottish friend – to get the sound of it – and also to get my friend's reactions. You may do with your translations what you will. Publish them by all means. But if they are published, could you let me have a copy of the paper they appear in? How did you learn Afrikaans? Only thru your wife – or were you here during the war? What books of mine do you know? Only *Rooidag*? Or have you seen *Oorlogs Verse*? I am preparing a new edition of the latter – and if you remind me in about 2 or 3 months' time, I 'll send you a copy. I consider it my best work (which sounds very pedantic, I 'm sorry) Most of my verse has not yet been published. I 'm like an iceberg – the greater portion of me is invisible. Last year they published in England my book on my life with the Italian peasants and partisans. It is called *The Way Out* and the publishers are Collins of London. I am about to bring out a book on Spain (in Afrikaans), SOL y SOMBRA, and three long one-act plays. I 've hardly written a line of verse since breaking from that p.o.w. camp in Italy in September '43. I think I 'll have to get myself into clink again! I cannot place Miss Dorothy Henry at the moment – I 've been away from S.A. so often and so long. Is she living in Pretoria? Did you get the four copies of our paper *Vandag* I sent you? Greetings – and hoping to hear from you.

Uys Krige

In a box drawn opposite his address, he wrote:

Please send me your version of Kitaar. Are you a writer by profession? Are you perhaps interested in the theatre?

At this date, as I indicated above, I have no notion how I replied to that letter of his, but I am sure that anyone who reads it now, and who knew Uys, will recognise from the many questions posed that he was a man whose mind was alive to everything around him, attentive to details and desirous of answers.

Also, as may be guessed from the letter, in company and out of it, he was not the sort of man who was as quiet as a half-shut day, for the business of his life was always ongoing. He was very much alive, as interesting as interested, even although at times his eyes seemed to be at some remove or other, as I indicated earlier, yes, into some mild preoccupation.

But then, why should those things call for further extravaganza in language, for do not all of us whiles have a faraway looksee at matters that are as private as the business of no one other than ourselves?

28.9.1995

And as far as I am concerned, all I am going to say now by way of reply to matters raised in that letter of his after all the years since he wrote it, is that my Afrikaans was and is very much a matter of recourse to the *Groot Woordeboek* of the language, plus what I absorbed in a minor way during a few years of war service in South Africa, plus help with a word here and there from my wife. Also, I know that the Miss Dorothy

Henry mentioned in his letter was a friend of my wife, but now I have no idea why I mentioned her to Uys.

Those things are said in order to let the reader be as fankled in mind as I am nowadays when I let my thoughts roam as hither as thither as neither here nor yonder but where I am what I am because my time is that of no one other than myself. And surely, that means nothing other than

We maun mak dae
wi whit we hae,

which is to say in unrhymed English, "We must make do with what we have," or again,

Aa folk aye are
lik here no faur,

which is to say in English unrhymed, "All people are fashioned as readily seen here and not as seen very far away at all."

If that state of mind may be thought to be as imponderable as inconsequential, then I think I must tell you how mixter-maxterie was my day-to-day contact with Afrikaans all those years ago in The Old Transvaal. As you see, I do not know if I should say "Die Ou Transvaal" or "Die Ou(d) Transvaal". And if I have written somewhere else about what follows, and if I should err now in memory of it, please indulge me as time lets me indulge myself now and then.

Before I say much more, I should like to let the reader know that although I do like a good malt whisky, I am not a drinker, and that anything I say below should not be taken to mean that I advertise anything but the word about the dram. And if I am well aware that there must be many names for the drunken state, here in Scotland we are well into librarianship in the matter.

Of course, we know all about intoxication and inebriation, about being half-cut and half-seas-over as well as many other English bits of such nomenclature, but as well as being full, which we know better as "fou", we can be "roarin' fou", "fou as a puggie", "weel-on", "steamin'", "fleein'" "fair stoatin'", "stoatious", "puggled" (the latter probably English also), not to mention "blootert", a word that can mean not only the state of deep drunkenness, but many states of physical and mental ravagement, both in personal terms and in matters as material as about the household in particular and around the universe in general.

But have another look at "stoatin'". To stoat means to bounce.Now, there is a very good Afrikaans word, *pronk,* which describes the wonderful bouncing leap of the springbok, a right wee stoater of a buck, that has become the great South African symbol in the sports field. Peculiarly, I have heard that bouncing motion called "stonk", on television.Usually, "stonk" has to do with artillery bombardment.

Do not forget either that in Scotland it is quite a common compliment to say of a well-made young girl that she is "a richt wee stoater", though while that has a lot to say about "bounce", it has nothing at all to do with lowping as in pronking. How strange it is that of all men everywhere all over this bonnie world, only Scotsmen are truly appreciatively *au fait* with the wonder of womankind that is so encapsulated in that phrase "a richt wee stoater." It should be noted, however that such generosity of

appreciation is never accorded to "a richt big stoater" or "a richt muckle stoater", such proportions being so far outwith phantasy as only too real.

And here is a curiosity: although many years ago I knew the "bounce" meaning of *pronk,* that word is not given in my *Groot Woordeboek* as the state-of-the-art leaping bounce of the springbok. Oh, yes, there is everthing about show, pride, display, ostentatiousness and so on in that dictionary, but not a cheep about the classical lowp of the buck. Here let me say that *pronk* might not fit in too well with the symbol picture, so let the springbok remain as the logo.

I can tell you that there is a wee touch of the old "heidarum-hodarum" about the meaning of that logo, even as I now recall *Ons is* was the motto of the South African tank regiment force in the Second World War. In an anthology of poems called *Homage to John MacLean,* which I edited with my good friend Thurso Berwick in 1973, I described heidarum-hodarum as "the braggart mores of the Scottish military establishments, specially so of the Highland regiments."

For those who do not recognise *Ons is,* those Afrikaans words mean "We are". Football enthusiasts in Scotland, however, will recognise an echo there of the terracing chant, "We are the people!" Sometimes, that chant is spoken of in a minor corruption in jocular Glasgowese as "Wee Arra people". Who knoweth not may now take thought that in common Glasgow speak the definite article is often sounded rather like "ra". Who knoweth best may think the rest that "arrow" in common Glasgow speak is sounded rather like "arra".

Such small-time matters do make for the benmaist cultural urgencies, do indeed make for the deeper manifestations of a people's singularity in a world of great populations as mixter-maxtered as all Jock Tamson's waens, and not at all at least, manage the silent emotions of those best qualified to be managed by them. Or, as the psychiatrist might rather say it, "...most or worst qualified to be managed by them."

In extrapolation of what has been said already about drunkenness, there is an old folk-song in Afrikaans which describes what is known in Scotland as being "miroclous", another word we have for the state of a man under the influence of drink taken as unwisely as too well. Presumably, "miroclous" is a variant of "miraculous", of the genre stoatious or stoating. Now, in the Afrikaans song, the fellow in the said state is known as Jan Pierewiet, but I must say that in our catch-as-catch-can method of approach to Afrikaans, we tended to pronounce the last syllable of his surname in this fashion "...veitch". For those who may like to know a little more about the name, *The Dictionary of South African English* says that *Janpierewiet* is *"Malaconotus zeylonus,* the *bokmakierie,* the shrike, and 2. The title of a well-known Afrikaans folk-song." The song repeats

"Jan Pierewiet,
Jan Pierewiet,
Jan Pierewiet,
staan stil."

and goes on repeating the injunction, as kindly as we might say in Scots "Caw gyan caunnie, Johnnie." to one as miroclous as Jan.

Now, there is a similarly kindly dialogue in an Afrikaans as eminently singable as recitable, which goes:

Goeie more, my vrou,

hoe gaan dit met jou?

and is answered by

Goeie more, my man,
daar is koffie in die kan.

Now, imagine you the first three syllables of each line of the first couplet repeated three times, then the three times repetition of the first line of the second couplet, followed by a single utterance of the last line, and you have the singing scheme of the song.

Why do I go on like that about a simple song? This to say about it, that I knew the tune of the song when I was a bairn in Newarthill in Lanarkshire, but it was repetitious in the following manner. As will be seen, this ongoing account is not at all going to be as outgoing as though it were *ware Afrikaner* material!

Can ye no dae,
can ye no dae,
can ye no dae *La Va*?

Can ye no dae,
can ye no dae,
can ye no dae *La Va*?

Can ye no dae *La Va*?
Can ye no dae *La Va*?
Can ye no dae *La Va*?
Can ye no dae *La Va*?

Surely you can see the feet gliding over the dance-floor, the waltz the preoccupation of the dancers?

But that was not quite the end of that auld sang, for I have heard a version of the tune sung to a song in a Western film featuring John Wayne. The scene was a dance in a fort in Red Indian country, and if I remember correctly, the first words were "You put your little foot right out", as a lady in the scene obliged.

Yes, and in the film *Duel in the Sun,* starring Gregory Peck, Joseph Cotten and Jennifer Jones, there was the same tune again, obviously a Hollywood staple, and in another dance at that. The common adage has it that "If something is worth doing, it is worth doing well," so if something is worth saying, singing or dancing, then say it, sing it or dance it as often as circumstances warrant such repetition.

Little did the movie moguls and their dancing ladies imagine that they were going to trip that sort of light fantastic on this particular page in Auchterarder, so far from Pretoria and Hollywood, if not too far from the Newarthill of my bairnlie days! And dear to goodness me, the famous people and the long years that have been involved in that dance-tune we sang to the words *Can ye no dae La Va?*

But wait a bit (wag-n-bietjie, as the Afrikaans has it), or as we might say in Scots, byde-a-wee, or haud-on-ye, or caw-gy-caunnie, I learn now on this bonnie Sunday morning of the 22nd of December in 1996, from a wireless programme called *The Reel Blend*, which is run by Robbie Shepherd, that the tune *La Va* is also known in Ireland's

Donegal as *Shoeing the Donkey.* Now is not that well-worth insertion here? And there is more today (19.1.1997), for I learn from the same *Reel Blend* programme, that certain Scandinavians were also into the tune.

Mind you, though, when I consider the musical notes behind the songs *Can ye no dae La Va?* and *Jan Pierewiet,* my thoughts tend to chime in with the subtly wayward fiddle measures of Neil Gow's *Farewell to Whisky.* I say nothing about his complementary melody, *Welcome Whisky Back Again.* Thoughts like those are like the fullness of "power" in "powerfulness".

Of such things is the memory plagued or pleasured throughout life, sometimes as minimal as nothing to make a song about, but sometimes as shown above, enough to indicate a stretch of time a hundred years and more in the making and a score or so of thousands of miles the here to there and back again: not to mention a persistence of melody through two-three languages and customs.

But divergence now like halfway round a run return to base, as I can call to mind the high-jinks chuckle of appreciation from Morris Blythman when long, long ago I expatiated about those same *Can ye no dae* folk-songs while having a kindly dram of a decent malt in his company. As will be apparent later, Uys Krige was to come to know and like Morris.

Similarly, I remember how tickled Uys was to learn that R.A.F. servicemen in South Africa in the early 1940's made a communal linguistic *mélange* after hearing only two words used so often that they served to indicate all sorts of approval. The first word was the Afrikaans *dankie*, meaning Thank you, but which has an undertone like the sound of the English word "donkey". The second word was "bioscope", by that time long lost to English, but still used in South Africa to mean a cinema.

Now, the R.A.F. was a service that had a tendency to carry a sort of private language around the world with it, so after a while, it was nothing strange to hear aircraftsmen say approvingly or by way of thanks, "Donkey bioscope." You see, since *Baie dankie* means Thanks very much, or Many thanks, you can well understand the permutation. Of course, the pedant will offer you the information that the Afrikaans *baie*, meaning "much" or "many", is also found in such a Scots usage as "byordnar", meaning "extraordinary", never mind whatever else.

Considering the way the R.A.F. used the prefix, as might have been said by those involved, the Service had been doing that sort of thing since Pontius was Duty Pilot.

Surely, speculation, like enquiry, is paramount in life: if we are persistently as negative as always saying "Leave well alone", in time it may become as ill alone as our own thrawn refusal to enquire or speculate. Ideas should always be allowed to rub along with each other.

From long, personal, if colloquial adherence to a certain mode of speech, it has been my wont to say of something by way of disparagement, "From the sublime to the gorblimey". The other day, while going the messages to Perth, our local town, we decided to buy a new kettle there to use on our gas cooker. Offered one that was priced at £25, I demurred though Peg did not, for she does not suffer, as I do, from that pound-in-your-pocket syndrome associated with the memory of pre-decimalisation currrency.

Shopping around, we discovered a kettle priced at £4.99, and bought it. Later on, while fiddle-faddling about with the damned article, Peg said in exasperation twinned with disparagement, "From the sublime to the ridiculous!", even though, unlike the expensive other, the cheaper kettle does whistle.

And there it is, the mind speculated, enquired of experience, and made the comment suitable to the occasion.

Sometimes it may seem that one can do no wrong, no matter how wrong one may seem to be doing, but that is where experience should be more paramount than enquiry or speculation. Much that we do can never be recovered, good advice or bad available or not, even as, for instance, my old Newarthill of childhood is irrecoverable, unless I think how once a local speak made this injunction: "Mynd you yer tongue! It 's no ootsyde ye're in!"

Thinking such a thing, I am sure that many people must have read certain memoirs that can only have made each reader glad to have been as lucky as to have been outwith the company and consideration of the certain writer of them. Such a reaction is not brought about simply because one has been spared the obvious maliciousness of that writer, but because one would have been in despair for having been the cause of the spleen of the writer. Of course, it may be more difficult to find decent bodies in literary life than in workaday circles. Maliciousness to anyone will not be found within these pages, if only because it would be my ownself that would feel the effect of such malice the more, even as it is usually the satirist whose spleen on others satirises himself.

23.10.95

Taking Another Thought

How old do we have to become to be suddenly as young as we used to be? I say that because the thought occurred to me this morning on re-reading some of my previous comments on old songs and old phrases, and where else better to say a something else along those lines than right here.

We are all into our past as deeply as into no other place, and the further away from it we seem to go, the deeper our penetration of it seems to be. How else can we account for the well-known phenomenon of age that makes us forget why we have just climbed the stairs to do what we meant to do, while what happened when we were bairns remains as clear in the memory today as when it happened?

Over the years, no one kept prigging at me like some old dominie to remember some daft wee song to sing, or some daft wee bit rhyme or other to mutter, though truth to tell, I have a very peculiar repertoire of odd songs and rhymes that have never astonished academe as far as I know, and will not, as far as I am concerned. Since my earliest childhood and youth, my ears have always been always as pricked to hear as my mind to store such treasures.

Somewhere in youth there was a silence of mind that enabled me to enclose bits of information into that privacy as though they were of inestimable value not only to me but to the tone-deaf world at large. For, as you may well imagine, why else would I recount such things as I do, even if, in fact, they turn out to be of little worth at all to the great big world that knows nothing more about anything other than how to keep on birling, which all of us know is the really worthwhile thing for it to do.

Not long after Peggy came to Scotland, we happened to be travelling on the front seat of the top deck of a bus from Carlton Place in Glasgow to Newarthill in Lanarkshire. Again, you will notice that I am particular. This is done because, if "the truth will out", as the phrase has it, ye 'll ken that I am tellin ye nae lee. As the bus approached the sharp right turn that makes the cross of New Stevenston a letter T cross, a foolish pedestrian attempted to run across the road.

As quick on the tongue as six thousand miles away effective as a warning, Peg exclaimed loudly (and I guess to the wonderment of the other passengers) – "Pas op!" That is the Afrikaans for "Look out!" At that moment, she was as young as she used to be, and though she is twice as old now as she was then, I know she remembers that incident as well as I do.

And if that pedestrian had been a dog, I am sure she would have exclaimed "Voetsek!" instead. As is attested in South Africa, there is an old canard saying that every dog in that country is called by that name.

Now, that mention of a dog takes me into another old memory that at this date is as hoary-headed as almost threescore years and ten, but serves to illustrate how memory serves us so well in eild.

As it happens, from my school-days when I learned somewhat elementary French, an iambic pentameter line persisted in my mind. Why, I have no idea, and why it should suddenly resurrect itself into utterance I cannot tell, but this I can advise, that I divided it into three parts, even as Caesar said of the France that was ancient Gaul in his day, and as I learned in my first elementary Latin class.

All will become clear below in the following poem which was made by me at a place called The Marlage in Lanarkshire quite a few years ago before I retired to Auchterarder where these words are being written.

WALKIN THE DUAG

Walkin the duag,
as you ken fyne,
can be
an awfie kynd
o trauchlie darg
o wark,
duag snyterin
tae snoofle here
an thare,

his byde-yer-wheesht
lik "Daenae pou
that leash!"
I tent ma tyme
as tyme taks tent
o me
an gars me think
o schuil as I
staun thare.

I myn ma French!
Yon Jean de la
Fontaine?
Were his the wurds,
yince Aesop's ain
I mynd?

I grup the leash.
"Vit aux dépens!"
I say.

He snoofles ben
the mervie wheech
the mair.

I tak the strain: "de celui qui!"
I warn

He boories ben,
then as I yowl
"l'écoute!"
and yank the leash,
he lowps awo,

at yin
wi French and Greek,
de la Fontaine
as weel
as Aesop and,
as you may add,
wi me.

Mynd you,
whyles I wuid say
"Vit aux dépens!"

de celui!"
qui l'écoute!" but that
fits-nane the verse.

The duag,
bilinguist tae,
lowpt juist the same.

Note: For folk that daenae ken it or cannae caa 't til myn
Vit aux dépens de celui qui l'écoute is the fifteenth
lyne o Jean de la Fontaine's *Le Corbeau et le Renard.*
Until the-day, I coodnae hae telt ye whye thae wurds,
an thaem alane o aa the lave, hae cooried ben ma myn
sin I was twal year auld.Lukin thru the haill aichteen
lynes o the wark noo in ma hauns, I 'm thinkin the soond
o yon lyne is abuin them aa.

However, if that does not do anything other than underscore what is retained in memory generally, it does not do anything for the Afrikaans connection that this exercise is concerned about as particularly as primarily. More recently, in fact on the eleventh of September in this year 1995, as will be revealed colloquially below, I did suffer a continental-change as well as a sea-change of mind. The following poem explains. As is seen above as well as below, Scots verse often tends to the macaronic in some form or another.

Perhaps I should explain also that in Scotland we do have a grammatical persistence of using the definite article *ad lib,* as it were, the word "to" also suffering a like change semantic.

THE-MORRA IS THE NANE-EXISTENT

I ken thare is a *More is ook 'n dag,*
but the yin I furst kent was *More is nog 'n dag*,
chaise you yer chyce lik read the furst yin yonner
as "To-morrow will do just as well", as says
the Afrikaans *Groot Woordeboek*, in fact;
"To-morrow is another day", the seacont,

a wee bit lyke yon Spanish wurd "Manyana".

The aulder we become, the mair we finnd
oor dearest ettlement is lyke tae be
neebort in a fankle wi switheratioun
that haes the mair adae wi whit we are
nor whit we 'd lyke tae be gif no oorsels,
sae deem noo you the whit I 'm gaun tae tell ye
as suddentlyke as yon Greek wurd "Eureka".

The wy I furstlins heard yon Afrikaans,
wi *nog* intil it, gart me think o "nocht"
oor wurd in Scots that bydes as hamelie ben us
gars you ken fyne means "naething", naethingness
athin it gyan lyke an aathing aagaets.
Oor ain wurd for "To-morrow", ken, is "Morra",
the daefinite aurticle aye thare fornent it.

Hearin thon Afrikaans, then, you 'll jalouse
The-morra is the nane-existent, seemed
the wy the saw was said, and it was soond as
was philosphicallie faurben wi 't,
ootwith the boonds o paradox, at that.
Profoonditie was ben ma aucht wi yon speak,
an gin ye think ont, you tae will be intilt.

On Papa Westray monie years sinsyne,
I mynd o seein, somewhoere thereaboots,
Primula Scotica, the Scottish Primrose,
as bonnie wee ruid flooers, an gowden-eed,
as eever spraicklt daintilyke on gerss.
Ye ken a fairie-ring? Thae primroses
were growein lik that, a yaird or sae the braidlik.

The wy I saw thae flooers was magic as
the wy I heard *More is nog 'n dag*,
but listen, this the-day, eleeven Septemmer
in nyneteen hunder an nynetie-five, is whit
the-morra cannae be, because it is
as magical as myndit thae smaa flooers
an saw *More is nog 'n dag* athin them.

Perhaps the general reader should be made aware, as all South Africans know very well, that the letter "g" in words such as *nog* and *dag* is pronounced like our Scots "ch" in words such as "nicht" and "loch", however difficult it is for many English speakers to sound words containing it.
29.9.1995
Having taken care of such major (!) linguistic matters, it is time now to say that I have less than a dozen letters from Uys, most of them being from the 1952/53 years and

therefore dealing with his projected and subsequent stay with us in Dunfermline. While those letters may be of interest to someone who will in time do the most thorough research into his life and works, I do not propose to copy them into this account of his stay in Scotland.

Preparatory to that time, however, he wrote to me on 11/5/48 from 1 Ninth Avenue, Parktown North, Joh-burg (as he put it), and I give it below because it is both personal and ranging. However, I shall leave it as it is, making no comment on what he wrote except that I must mention I did not receive the three short plays that he said he sent to me.

Also, if the truth be told like daenae tell a lee in case it finnd ye oot, I want to leave myself alone to say what I have to say and not merely to comment on his letters, for again, that would be an exercise absolutely outwith the scope of what is necessary.

Here then is his letter dated 11/5/48.

Dear T.S.Law,

You must forgive me my rudeness, but really I have had a very busy time what with *Vandag* going bankrupt etc. I 'm still about 60 letters behind in my correspondence

Many thanks for your most interesting letter – and for those 3 periodicals. Have read them with great interest. Scottish Art & Letters is a most attractive publication. I read your long poem several times, it fascinated me, but I want to read it again a few times before I can give you a considered judgement. I liked Hay's article *Poetry in the World and Out of it.* I couldn't agree with him more.

Recently I have spoken in public – lectures, radio talks etc – much in the same strain.

Scottish Art is a most stimulating revue. And I am astonished by certain similarities in your literary movement & ours. I had previously read some short stories by Fred Urquhart. I particularly remember the very moving one about Spain, the children at school, the schoolmaster & then the clouds & the bombers.

Hugh Macdiarmid I know, of course. He is a most impressive figure. When I was living with Roy Campbell in the South of France in 1933, I used to laugh at the vendetta he was waging with Hugh. It didn't seem at all necessary. When Roy took Franco's side, I didn't communicate with him for 10 years. In 1945 I met him again in London, and I thought he was a sadder and wiser man. He has many fine qualities as a man – one must not take him too seriously as a political being – & I think *Adamastor* and *Flowering Rifle* contain some magnificent poetry.

I regret not being able to get the full value of your Scottish poetry. But reading your version of Lorca's ballad, I was struck by its musical quality. You use some beautiful sounding words, & the rhymes seem to chime. Was there any reaction to the poem?

You must please write to me again. In my next letter I shall give you my other impressions of the three periodicals you set to me. Did you get my first three short plays? The midddle one, *Die Skaapwagters van Bethlehem* is also a radio play.

I am interested to hear your reactions to *Die Einde van die Pad.*

A book on Spain, another book of one-act plays, and a new book of verse are to appear shortly.

Greetings, Uys Krige

30.9.1995

As I sit in front of my computer screen this morning, to begin today's addition to my account of langsyne almost fifty years ago, I notice that I made mention of Roy Campbell a few paragraphs above here, and I am suddenly minded how Laurie Lee, in his *As I walked out One Midsummer Morning*, said that Roy Campbell "...loved the Afrikaans language and described its primitive vigour." At that time, Laurie Lee was staying with the Campbells in Spain.

I was pleased to read also how that South African poet sang *"Scots Wha Hae* and *The Bonnie Earl of Murray".* The latter song, however, is sometimes better known to us as *The Bonnie Earl o Moray*. Of course, *"Moray"* is pronounced *"Murray",* though mind you, whiles you will find "Moray" pronounced more like "Mawry". Scottish people have always taken their English learning more literally than literarily. If only some of our would-be teachers would remember that. It does not "go without saying", for I am going to tell you that sometimes in Scotland, the better that people are educated, the more they are likely to say in their best ignorant manner that "Moray" is pronounced "Mawry". __

The village of Doune, which figures in the song about the bonnie Earl o Moray, is situated a few miles from Auchterarder where I am writing this screed, and I have visited Doune Castle or "Castle Doune" as mentioned in the ballad, and have stood on its ramparts. Thinking over it, I wonder how Campbell sung the magnificent last stanza of the song. Did he sing it as it is sometimes given in the rubbishy Anglicised version of it such as is given in a book in my possession, where it is noted as coming from *Tea-Table Miscellany:* 1724-37? Imagine the following nonsense!

O lang will his Lady
Look o'er the Castle Down,
Eer she see the Earl of Murray
Come sounding thro the town.

Truly, the above stanza must be written in something like the following.

O lang may his Lady
Look frae the Castle Doune,
Eer she see the Earl o Moray
Come soondin thru the toun.

Unless full access is given to the double "o" sounds in the words "Look", "Doune", "soondin", "thru", and "toun", the magnificence of those vowels is lost, and the song is emasculated. Those sorry people (and there were many of them) who in the past adopted English spelling for the Scots language did it a dreadful disservice; and those who persist with that practice (and they are not few) not only obliterate its difference, but express their ignorance not only of meaning but of the sound of it, and strangely, not only of sound but of the meaning of it. It is very necessary to spell out the distances between the differences apparent in the related Scots and English tongues.

Depend upon it, the half-educated person and the ignorant singer will persist in reading and singing Scots in the manner of the English spelling of it, for the "power of the printed word" is still as paramount as the inbuilt ignorance not only of the educated, but of the miseducated. Intractable daichiness of utterance is always there or thereabouts on the tongues of the doughheids amongst us.

Think you, though, how that stanza quoted above echoes the powerful three concluding stanzas of the wonderful ballad *Sir Patrick Spens*, than which there can be few the better, where many, many others are as bad as might better have been left to dree the more decent weerd of non-existence.

Oh, what a stoond of tone there is, and what a picture in those words singing "Eer she see the Earl o Moray/ Come soondin thru the toon." Stand you on the ramparts of Doune Castle as I have done, and sooch over the words of the ballad and you will come to realise their weight in the understanding.

Mind you, though, there are stoonds and stoonds. Imagine sounds like accentuations as guldersomely stupefying in the ears as that insult on the senses experienced when listening to ongoing organ music! How different people can be, how strange our preferences!

I remember, once upon a wheesht that became almost like a hideous stertorousness of malevolent sound, a friend of mine playing a record of organ music as loudly as an assault of artillery, and how he enjoyed it while I sat there, devastated mentally and beyond succour of anything other than envelopment in profound silence.

Later, he told me how he had first heard that music played in a church, and had been captured by it and induced into a state of mind that he could not quite explain. Nor could I explain to him how tortured I had become under the relentlessness of that drubbing of decibels. What can I say about our respective reactions but that there must have been a kind of tonal disparateness in our natures, no matter how well we jelled together mentally otherwise.

As you must know, however, and as I am always intent on reminding myself, it is the word that makes order out of chaos, that renews itself continually into action, and that is utterly dependent upon meaning, not upon noise which ultimately may make for that other kind of silence, the quiet of deafened sense, leaving the mind outwith understanding.

Thus, you may well understand, that if an old fellow like myself has fairly good recall, has had a long life of much mental pleasure with many friends in memorable places, and along with those benefits to enjoyment, has a certain narrative proficiency, how fortunate I am in my still being able to sit down in physical and mental comfort before my word processor that will eventually put my thoughts on paper the every time I so direct it. This is like being in two places at once, where the incident and person were, and where they become renewed in the words describing them, even though whiles they may seem to be made over slightly because of the lapse of time and variance of memory.

What I may do in such a writing may not be to the liking or memory of others who may have been in the like situation, but it will always remain as true to me as my sensibility closes upon it and is enclosed by it, this my state of being in the book and writing it.

Ah, but wait a bit! Not to forget ballads! *Wag-'n-bietjie* till I jag your mind! Elsewhere I have been concerned with the old ballad *Sir Patrick Spens*, and have written much about it. But there is another ballad that opens as imperatively for attention as *Sir Patrick Spens* does so exclamatorily. I am thinking of the verses about the death of that great soldier, Montrose, the great Graham, that I must leave to you to find and to enjoy as I did. I do say so because I cannot name the poet who made it (does the name *Aytoun* say something?), and I can remember only a few lines of it, the opening lines. An older person, I think, is speaking to a younger. Here are those lines.

"Come hither, Ewan Cameron.
Come sit beside my knee.
I hear the river roaring down
Toward the mighty sea..."

But how false is my memory! The poem, of course, is called *The Execution of Montrose*, and the poet was William Edmonstoun Aytoun (1813–65). I have just found it in Palgrave's *Golden Treasury of Songs and Lyrics.* And the words should read:

"Come hither, Ewan Cameron!
Come, stand beside my knee —
I hear the river roaring down
Towards the wintry sea.

Oh, how sore of mind it is to remember the odd line of verse the here and there, only to address once more that old hiatus of thought that is a stopper! No more consecutive lines occur, merely the odd memorable one here and there. But it does occur to me that I have a brother and two nephews who bear the given names James Graham, like the great Marquis himself. And the middle name of one of my late sisters was Graham. And peculiarly, I live a few miles away from the burial ground of the ancient Grahams in Aberuthven. And again for proximity to history, from my living room window I can see the trees in Kincardine Glen that was the environment of the home of the great Marquis which was destroyed during the Civil War on 16.3.1646 by the Cromwellian soldier, Major-General John Middleton. The street where I live in Auchterarder is called after the name of the River Ruthven which flows at the foot of our road, as it runs from Kincardine Glen past the ruins of the old Graham castle. Only a gable remains, the remainder buried below the debris that had been pounded by Middleton's guns. Not all the remainder, however, for the people of Auchterarder later carted fallen stones from the ruined castle to help build the local kirk.

Perhaps what is left of that old kirk should now have a plaque upon it to commemorate The Graham, the greatest local soldier, because some of those stones that built it once housed that man.

Och, yes, Scotland may be a wee country, but the people in it do have their emotions birl about consensually in triumph or disaster. Although the great, such as James Graham, the Marquis of Montrose, may be physically remote from those of us who share the surname, spiritually, because of that, we are at one with him in his victories or defeats: our partiality is our truth.

Well, now, into history again: there is a certain monument to Prince Charles, The Young Pretender; it is to be found at the head of Loch Shiel, the place where Prince Charlie stood awaiting the coming of the Clan Cameron to his banner. Once again, I have forgotten the name of the poet who made the lines. (Was there a "Sir" in front of his name?). And again, I have no memory of the bulk of the poem, apart from the following.

"...The mist on Loch Shiel rises eerie and chill,
But the ghost of Prince Charlie still looks up Glenfinnan
For the Cameron Clan to come over the hill...."

The first time I stood beside that monument, what else could I do but look up to the hill and think of those few lines?

Och, well, everybody knows how we are plagued by old songs, old phrases, old words, especially when we are grown old ourselves! Youth and young maturity does take us over at times. I must remark that nowadays, after a bout of "doityourselfery" or gardening chores, I do admit to saying that I am *uit en gedaan*, or as we say here, I am *fair forfochen*. Colloquially, we do love our alliteration! Ay, even as we do like our tartan, despite the wee sniftery attitudes against it by the nebs uplifted against their own wheech. Tartan, after all, advertises not only Scottishness but clannishness and family loyalty, not only in the length and breadth of Scotland itself, but all over the world.

Why, despite the ancient Anglian (not English) provenance of my own name, Law, with its predominance atop the many, many hills adjoining the Border and elsewhere, I do not take exception to the claims by Clan Campbell and Clan MacLaren that the Law people are among the septs of each of those clans. I am quite happy to wear either tartan as a tie around my neck. Also, since entrepreneurially, tartan is available in either Hunting or Dress sett, I can vary the colours as occasion demands. Again, since, like all other Scots, I count many other tartanised names among my related families, I am fully at ease with many other setts. Thus, while I may have as many notional enemies as I have notional friends, all of them are united in their recognisable Scottishness. My sons can add their mother's Macphail tartan to the lave at their disposal, and their children even more. Of course, as we claim that "we are all Jock Tamson's bairns", some contermashious folk may claim that Clan Jamphrie among all of us is the most homogeneous of all the Scottish clans.

?-9-1995
Alive in Mind as into Dunfermline

The upshot of continued correspondence, and advice from Uys that he was going to visit Britain and would be taking in something of the Edinburgh Festival, prompted me to invite him to stay for a while with us in Dunfermline. Also, it seemed that he was busily engaged in finishing a new book which he was to call *The Dream and the Desert*. It was to be published by Collins, and did in fact appear in 1953.

As the attic of our house had been converted by myself into a kind of study containing a desk and most of my books, I was able to offer him not only sleeping accommodation there, but an environment suitable for his writing. In addition, I organised as a typist for him, a good neighbour of ours called Betty Chalmers. She saw to the proper management of his manuscripts while he completed that book of his during his stay with us.

I was not the only one aware of Uys's coming to Britain, for I received one of Morris Blythman's infrequent letters, which I see I have dated 19.5.52. It was sent from 109 Balgrayhill Rd., Glasgow N, and was written in his typical predominantly lower-case script, but this time in red pencil, and reads as follows.

Dear Tom,

Did you notice in the 'Observer' (one of the columnists) that *Uys Krige* has arrived in *London* this week on a travelling bursary from some Capetown literary trust? Maybe you want to contact him? I would like to meet him. If he came up here he could stay a week or so with us in Glasgow, or with you (if suitable) or turnabout, say. How to contact him? Write as soon as you can and let me know. I add below revision of *Winterset.* Does it come off this time?

Yours
Rob

That signature is unusual, for he was known best by his middle name, Morris. Perhaps he used his home name because those were early days of our friendship, and because Peggy and I knew and had visited his mother locally in Inverkeithing. She was a fine old womanbodie who spoke of her son as "Rob" or "Robbie", and Peg was especially fond of visiting her and having the bit crack. *Winterset*, by the way, was one of Morris's poems that we had been discussing.

1.10.1995

Somehow we got round to the idea of giving Uys a kind of welcome to Scotland by inviting him to travel with me to Glasgow and spend the night at Morris's place in Springburn. To that end I had arranged to publish a bit of verse which I would dedicate to Uys. It is called *Voortrekker Monument* and was to appear in the *Scots Independent* of that period about the time we would be going to Glasgow. The piece had been written by me in Pretoria on 20 April 1951 while Peg and I had been on

holiday in South Africa. Unfortunately, so far I have been unable to find a copy of the *Scots Independent* which I had thought I had retained.

I may say here that two days later in Pretoria I had made a translation of Uys Krige's *Ballade* after having purchased his *Harte sonder Hawe* in that same town. My first version of the translation was made alongside his printed Afrikaans in my copy of that volume of his that I had purchased in Pretoria, and fortunately that book is now in front of me. It was published in 1949.

Once back home in Dunfermline, I copied both of those poems into my notebook of that period, so even though I do not have the newsprint that carried the poem, I am able to transcribe it, dedicated to Uys Krige as follows.

VOORTREKKER MONUMENT

For Uys Krige

Here aa Pretoria liggs roond, ruid ruif
an tropic trees the buskin on the breists
o ilka lang koppie sperfelt i the sun.

Here aince busswagons gaed, lik clertie auld bauchles
aye wachlin on wi rowe an rax an yove,
speirin efter poorts in the koppie nyucks, speirin North,
aye North an on bi whaur clean sheenin whyte
syne black wi ilka scadda birlin roond its waas,
atap Voortrekkerhoogte the blint memorial
tae the auld fowk staunds.

Voortrekkers they were caad.
Voortrekkers! ay, bi aa accoonts gy tyuch
an raucle chiels, an whyles, for the waant o watter,
clertie enyuch; but big enyuch forby tae haud on
gainss aa mischaunce tho certes there was nocht
else for it – an nocht else forrit aither for them!

They were thrawn an sterk an dour, an sib wi a deevil
Scotsmen dinnae gang faur tae be acquent wi, a releegioun
that 's fasht Afrikaner an Scot as Afrikaner
has fasht Africa an Scotsman the wurld,
tho the bane o truith an the marra o eydent speirin 's
that the Scot himsel 's been mair nor hauf-fasht bi the wurld.
The Afrikaner trekked on an syne – *bidd still.*
The Scotsman? Trekked? Naw! deil the fear o't. *Traiked* 's
the wurd – an we 're traikin yit. An nane but Scots
can tell the differ atween thae twaa sib wurds.

An the end ot aa? The Afrikaner at hame
in his ain place sib wi nane but the deil and himsel.

An the Scot? Sib naewhaur i the haill braid wurld

cep mibbe at Ecclefechan (guid for a grin),
At "Dark Culloden" (guid for a greet, romantic),
or at Lassodie (guid for naething avaa
sin it 's gane lang syne an the fowk in Fyfe thirsel
are no richt shair juist whaur awo it 's gane til).

If only I could sustain the sharpness of mind that I had at that time in my lively maturity! Nowadays, though, if I know that where I have to begin to say something is here, often how to begin it is a something other, like having fingers and thumbs all pinkies in manipulating processing keys. Sometimes, mentally, it seems as if I were stoating up and down, over the knowes and ben the howes of life, like one of those poor unfortunates who have little talent and less opportunity to practise what they have of it, or what they imagine they have of it.

Thinking like this today as I read over what I have written, how I envy the ootlins of mind that Uys Krige had in such abundance, but just the same (which means look out for the difference), perhaps set beside him like this, it may be that my own diminishment may make for the measure of the greatness of his shadow over me.

4.10.1995

The arrangement I had made with Morris Blythman to give Uys a kind of ceilidh welcome to Scotland was that his house in Balgrayhill Road in Springburn was rather more fit for the job, our Dunfermline one being rather small for such an occasion. As always, Marian Blythman his wife, was at one with the idea of hospitality, for that was the forte of that fine couple over the years, as many more than myself can testify. Morris had seen fit to invite a few Scots poets there, enough anyway as would have swamped our facilities.

Among those I remember, the names that come to mind are Hugh MacDiarmid; Morris Blythman himself who wrote under the name Thurso Berwick; John Kincaid, a near neighbour to Morris; George Todd, who now lives with his wife Santi in Spain, and who is in correspondence with me even now, after both of them visited us here in Auchterarder; and Freddy Anderson, a native of Ireland, who happens to come from the same airt there as did my paternal grandfather – you see, in Scotland as in Ireland, there is no escape from ourselves. The latter four had published a book called *Fowrsome Reel*, covering some of their poems written around that time. Yet now I am not too sure that George Todd and Freddy Anderson were there with us: take what I say as definite sometimes as it is indefinite whiles.

Other poets present were Norman MacCaig and Hamish Henderson, but I am not at all sure that Sydney Goodsir Smith was there. I do remember that while some of their wives had managed to be there, Peg had had to remain in Dunfermline to look after our son, John, who was then a baby.

However, there were two others present. Their names lowp out at me on rereading the above some time after its initial typing. They were Calum Campbell and his brother Kenny, who at that time were the printers of MacDiarmid's magazine *The Voice of Scotland* at their premises in 793 Argyle Street in Glasgow where they ran their Caledonian Press. At that time, I think they also printed the *Scots Independent* there.

Now there's a think with a real thunk in it to thwack the memory! Their Caledonian Press was trying to find subscribers to enable MacDiarmid's *In Memoriam James Joyce* to be published from Argyle Street, but as it turned out, of course, that volume was published finally by William MacLellan from 240 Hope Street in that same city. Somewhere among my papers (if I could rout it out) there is a note advising me that I

was the only one who had subscribed to their projected publication, and therewith my 21/- (twenty-one shillings) was returned.

What follows at the back of my mind from that? Some sort of sour dissatisfaction, I suppose, if nothing else!

Later, when the next subscription list was opened, I happened to be in foreign parts (England), and thus was ignorant of its existence, my sour dissatisfaction being doubled.

Apart from those mentioned above as having been at our ceilidh for Uys, there were others whose names now escape me, but who are not at all soured in my memory so much as amalgamated, for they will out sometime even before I realise I am thinking of them: that is one of the mysteries of growing as old as unable mentally to be in more than one place at a time.

Dear, O, dear, those days of my forgetfulness are more than forty years ago, and many of those people whom I fail to remember now must be as lost in time as in my memory, distinguished now by little more than the sorrowful "the late". While death is the great eternal, the regret that follows it in us who yet survive does in some way take us with it into a kind of sad semblance of its quiet eternity: but there is no joy there. If I cannot set down here all that happened that I saw, and all that was said that I heard during that evening and the following morning at Morris's place in Springburn, blame you time elapsed since 1952 as well as my faulted memories.

Preparatory to arriving at the Blythman place, Uys and I took a turn out to the Glasgow Art Gallery, for he was as into art as into literature, and had spoken to me of his desire to see some pictures.

After all, his brother François was an artist, and Uys seemed to have an eye upon art that was as knowledgeable as particular. Anyway, apart from the many pictures that met his approval as we wandered around the gallery, I was struck by his immediate disapproval of the well-known Salvador Dali painting called either *Christ of Saint John of the Cross* or *Christ of the Cross of Saint John* – I can never remember which.

Uys was interested to discover that Glasgow had paid about £8000 for the original, and even then, by the sale of framed prints of it of all sizes, had recouped much more than the original outlay: as the American phrase has it, "and then some".

As far as I was concerned in looking at the picture, whatever it was that Uys disliked about it, I did think that it was remarkable for its draughtsmanship, and as yet, I have not altered that opinion of mine. As far as I can see elsewhere, draughtsmanship is an artistic quality that is sadly lacking in many who might have benefited greatly from having it.

Of greater interest to him, though, was when he found a certain second-hand book in old James Glen's bookshop in Parliamentary Road: illustrated, his find dealt with the region of Italy where Uys had escaped from German captivity during the war and had wandered about with the resistance people. I can still see the serendipitous pleasure and surprised astonishment on his face as he showed the book to me and told me what it meant to him.

As he turned over the pages of the volume while old James Glen looked on with his customary kindly interest, I could see that Uys was into that sort of bookmanship that has to do with the made book and not the making of the book that he was already well-acquaint with anyway. He was as pleased with his find as he would have been had he written it himself!

Ah, Glen's second-hand bookshop! How many times over the years had I browsed among the old volumes there! How many treasures I had found there! It was from that

bookshop that I had obtained my invaluable copy of *Fingal* that had been published in London in M DCC LXII, and which has been the source of so much delight to me since it came into my hands.

That copy of mine had once been in the original proud possession of Anne Jemima Hope Johnstone whose name in her own now fading hand of write appears on the title page above the following legend, which is given below as something the like enough.

F I N G A L
AN
ANCIENT EPIC POEM
In SIX BOOKS
Together with several other Poems, composed by
OSSIAN the Son of FINGAL.
Translated from the GALIC LANGUAGE
By JAMES MACPHERSON,
Fortia facta patrum. VIRGIL

The third, sixth and eighth lines of the above are printed in red as shown.

I fancy I had done as well for myself as Uys had done for himself. Many years later, in *The Scotsman* of the 24th of July in 1985, there was a report that "A Scottish landowner, Mr Patrick Hope-Johnstone, learned he had become Earl of Annandale and Hartfell."

Among many other details about it and about, it was stated that "...Lord Keith of Kinkel, said the committee agreed the title granted in 1662 proved that Mr Hope-Johnstone was the male heir of Lady Anne Hope-Johnstone, daughter of the third earl." If the title "went wrong in 1792" as "a delighted Lord Annandale" said in the article, that was about thirty years after the publication of my copy of Fingal. I wonder how the Anne Jemima Hope Johnstone of the signature in my copy had been related to him. Was Lord Annandale's ancester Lady Anne my Lady Anne Jemima of the hand of write in my copy of James MacPherson's *Fingal*?

That copy of mine is a handsome volume, bound in good green leather, with fine gilt tooling ornamentation on the covers and spine, the closed page-edges also in heavy gilt setting off the closed book.

How like actors all of us are! You know, any actor might well imagine "What I have is mine alone, and that I can never lose, even though what I do is part of another person who will always be as unaware of me as I am well-aware of him or her in this kind of one-sided symbiosis". It does not matter what sort of actor James MacPherson may have thought he was while writing his *Fingal,* or what sort of reaction he may have thought his audience might well have in front of it, but I must say that over the years I have enjoyed the superb general cadency of MacPherson's somewhat Biblical-style English in that book of his, the tone of which reminds us so strongly of the James I (and VI) translation of the scriptures.

And mischievously enough, I must admit I have wondered sometimes what sort of Gaelic translation could be made of it by a superlatively-able Gaelic writer, but more especially so if it were to be done into the sort of poetry that that language can muster, for their lack of that old tongue is the continuing regret of many Scots poets.

But wait a wee minute! Never mind that *Fingal,* for it was only one of the many treasures that I found in James Glen's bookshop over the years. One of them was a copy of an old edition of the complete poems of Robert Fergusson that was printed in

Perth long, long ago. I cannot put my hands on it just now, for I can tell you that my books have never been in the sort of order that I desire since I first organised them in the attic of that house in Dunfermline where Uys Krige stayed with us.

In front of me, however, are two books that anyone at all interested in Scots history and literature would love to have. The first is a leather-bound copy of *The Political Works of Andrew Fletcher, Esq; of Saltoun,* dated M DCC XLIX, that title page also underscored *Glasgow: Printed by Robert Urie, for G. Hamilton and J. Balfour, Booksellers, opposite to the Parliament Close, Edinburgh.* Some of the "s" lower-case letters, of course, are in the old-fashioned type.

The second is a volume bound in leather, the tops of the pages being gilt, but since purchase by myself, it has suffered by detachment of the front batter at the spine. It contains the poems of the auld makar, Alexander Scott, and was edited by David Laing, dated at Edinburgh, 12th Octr, 1821. The poems were taken *From a Manuscript written in the Year* MDLXVIII.

The edition in hand was printed in Edinburgh by Balfour and Clarke in MDCCCXXI. There are two plates in it, one stuck on the back of the detached batter and the other on the facing end-paper. The latter is an Ex Libris containing the name Allan D. MacDonald, and the former an escutcheon plate with the name Napier beneath it and the macaronic motto Sans Tache + Ready Aye Ready in a scroll around the inner symbols.

And how about these two other treasures I found in James Glen's bookshop: Vols. I and II of David Hume's *Essays and Treatises on Several Subjects,* published in M DCC LXVII in London, and printed for A.Millar, in the Strand; and A.Kincaid, and A.Donaldson, at Edinburgh. Those volumes are complete with bookplates identifying Patrick Scott of Rossie. Scrawled in pencil on the back of the front cover is "2 Vols with the price below, "7/6", that is, seven shillings and sixpence. Offers today? Over ?

By the way, I have a notion that the James Glen already mentioned was the author of a book about the Clydesdale horse that should be among my books here, but I just cannot lay my hands upon it. If I do, I must confirm that statement.

As a footnote here to Uys Krige's artistic appreciation which I have mentioned already, later, in Edinburgh, when I took him around a couple of galleries at his request, unerringly he stopped at paintings made by Anne Redpath and exclaimed at their quality. He had never heard of her before seeing her work. While what it is to know may be as fantastic as what it is not to know, the former state of mind is the docken, the latter not worth the such a plant.

Knowing a little about what is now known about Anne Redpath, and reading what is written now and then about her work, how pleasant it would be were I able to describe her paintings that were so valued by Uys Krige.

5.10.1995

During the evening of the ceilidh welcome at Balgrayhill Road, after hearing the sooching of a song or two, and the recitation of a poem or two, Uys had some conversation with Hugh MacDiarmid. The name of Mary Morison Webster, the South African poet of Edinburgh birth, cropped up, probably at Uys's instigation. In *The Penguin Book of South African Verse,* where she is represented by six poems, it is stated that "In an essay, Uys Krige has said of her: "She is our finest elegaic poet....'" All of those poems are well-done, though, as may be imagined from his remark about her work, done well darkly.

MacDiarmid expressed interest as he had not heard of her. Anyway, the upshot of it was that Krige was to organise her sending, through me, copies of her work to

MacDiarmid. Eventually, I did receive a large parcel of typescripts, and sent them on to MacDiarmid, but I never did find out what he thought of them or what he did with them. All I know is that I did not read them, as they were for him, though I did have some correspondence with Mary. Perhaps those scripts eventually ended up in the archives of the National Library of Scotland in Edinburgh where most of his papers were to find their long home.

Och, well, I suppose all of us have our very good reasons for action or inaction. Saying something whiles may do a nothing, even as our saying nothing sometimes does a something. Choose your choice.

Along with her own papers that I was to pass on to MacDiarmid, Mary sent me a copy of the novel *Expiring Frog,* by Elizabeth Charlotte Webster, her young sister, kindly annotating it on the flyleaf *To T.S.Law from Mary Morison Webster.* If I remember rightly, Elizabeth was deceased by that time. Reading her book, and reflecting on this and that in it, I was to note that the author's middle name was Charlotte and that one of the male characters in her book was called "Teàrlach", the Gaelic "Charles".

Later, I was to know (and also hear Norman MacCaig repeat) that MacDiarmid had said that in his opinion the best line that Robert Burns had written (in its context) was the last one in the second stanza of his song *Mary Morison;* and because Mary Morison Webster had almost certainly been given her first two names from that same song, I have no hesitation now in typing below here that stanza from the song that contains the line remarked upon by MacDiarmid, for the last line of it that had been so praised by MacDiarmid has always been a favourite of my own. How easy it is to see Robert Burns in that dance-hall! How manifest his comparisons!

Yestreen, when to the trembling string,
The dance gaed through the lighted ha',
To thee my fancy took its wing —
I sat, but neither heard nor saw:
Though this was fair and that was braw,
And yon the toast o a' the town,
I sigh'd, and said amang them a'.
"Ye are na Mary Morison."

Mind you, though, when I heard that song sung in the Newarthill of my youth, I have to report that the singer paid not the slightest bit of attention to its Englished orthographic extravaganza so exercised by Robert Burns that it almost destroys his work. The singer knew fine that to sing some of the words in their English fashion was as ludicrous as absolutely out of order. I am sure he did not want his singing to be a kind of talk o the toon, if not a toast o the toon.

Imagine using the word "trembling" instead of its Scots equivalent "trimmlin"! Similarly, "lighted" should be "lichtit", "neither" should be "naither", "took" should be "taen", "town" should be "toon", and each "to" should be "tae". Apart from "took", that was the way I heard them, and if Robert Burns had had the similar pleasure, he would have altered every line accordingly, for I am sure that was the way he said or sang the song himself.

Also, with certain words italicised for effect below, look at the marvellous distancing but all-encompassing effect Burns was able to make in the following two lines in the stanza.

Though *this* was fair, and *that* was braw,
And *yon* the toast of a' the town...

A long time ago, on the 14th of March in 1987, in fact, I made a critical note about a few matters contained in Elizabeth Charlotte Webster's *Expiring Frog.* Some of what I have said above was also in the note, but now before I destroy the bit paper concerned, I shall excerpt some of it. The other information on it is irrelevant here. Whoever may read her book in the future may like or lump what I found in it. Because her sister Mary thought so highly of her, I am glad that she was never to see the following, though some of it is as much part of my own personal innate understanding and personal prejudices as the book must have been of the author's prejudices, and, as far as I am concerned, her lack of understanding.

The book, by the way, was published in 1946 by A.P.B.Bookstore, 75, Loveday Street, Johannesburg.

Expiring Frog is paralleled with the Christ story, but only the author could satisfy my curiosity and lack of appreciation about certain references and their relation to that story.

Also, I neither understand nor appreciate the relevance of the unsubtle anti-Jewish comments spattered throughout the first two-thirds of the book. Those minor needles will be found in Pages 32, 38, 56, 91,130 and 171. To me, those things reveal a degree of mental immaturity in the social sense, along with ignorance in historical and theological matters. Perhaps kindness is an over-rated quality in a novel. Maybe it verges too easily into the sentimental.

Och, I mind the time in my younger hooching years when a wheen of kindly young fellows used to see to it in a certain village dance-hall that one of the females there, who was not at all as young and pretty as the lave, was never left to wither like a wallflower. Besides, she was a very good dancer, one of those who seemed almost so to float above the floor as never to require manipulation, but always appeared to be in free-floating retreat that is the mark of the true dancing partner to any man, like the sort of advance and retreat that epitomises the relations of man and woman. There was a kindness among us in those days that would have graced the pages of any novel.

Two examples of tightly-made fine writing occur in *Expiring Frog*, the first on Page 15 concerning ambiance, and the second on Page 219 concerning colours, the latter a preoccupation seen often in Scots writing, almost like a subconscious exercise. Here and there throughout the book, the author lifts and lays small colour references. In the Page 15 piece, examples of such colour tipping will be found.

But here is a fly comment! On Page 249 will be seen "He took the match box from his pocket, savagely struck a match, and lit a cigarette." Why prefix the match box with that definite article I do not know, but what I am concerned with is that if the matches were anything like the ones I knew in South Africa in the early 1940's, it was impossible to strike them savagely. The lighted tip was bound to break off under such treatment. Even a gentle strike towards the body, in the male manner, was dangerous to shirt front – or skin if the shirt front were open.

Accordingly, for safety's sake, we learned to strike the match away from the body, in the female manner, and gently at that. Teàrlach, the character who strikes the match savagely, does most other things in that fashion, and seems to be in the story merely to make possible a certain situation and to provide irrelevant wherewithal for certain

people. Just what his sort of being is meant to imply, I do not know, because for someone overdone, he is half-baked.

However, one thing is certain about the author; she had a something going for her that might have become more rounded than her story *Expiring Frog*. I do not know what else she wrote, nor when she died, nor how old she was at that time. After this bit of work is done, and reflecting what I have said about her book, I shall probably return to it and see what else, if anything, I can make of it.

Curiously, over the years after receiving those papers from Mary Morison Webster, I never thought to enquire of Hugh MacDiarmid what he thought of them, nor did he ever offer a word about them. Thus it is we tend to compartmentalise ourselves, as though what we are is never but where we are, and that as private as never as faraway as elsewhere at any time other than instantly. Time coddles the sense of our own importance, unless what is done or is not done to others makes much of us and little of those others.

6.10.1995

In 1955, Hugh MacDiarmid's astonishingly erudite *In Memoriam James Joyce* was "Published on behalf of the Subscribers by William MacLellan 240 Hope Street Glasgow" as printed at the press of that publisher, and as already mentioned above.

Among the many, many names mentioned in the book, that of Uys Krige is to be found on Page 84 in the section of it called *The World of Words*. I am sure that arose out of MacDiarmid's meeting with Uys at the home of Morris Blythman during the ceilidh we had there, for our fine Scots poet was as fond of a strange name as he was of a strange person, fact, fable or story. If that Page 84 mention of Uys was made before the date of our ceilidh, I should be very surprised.

Uys knew about the mention, as is apparent in a letter-card he wrote to me on 7.1.71, which I give below. I remember I sent a copy of it to Hugh MacDiarmid for his records. Like Mary Morison Webster's typescripts, that copy of it may be found deep in the archives of the National Library of Scotland in Edinburgh, for it was MacDiarmid's custom, I believe, never to throw away any correspondence. Somewhere or another he made such a statement.

P.O. BOX 25; ONRUST; (C.P.) 7/1/71

My dear Tom – This is just a life-line I am throwing out quickly – I mean a life-line to save my own good repute as a true friend & correspondent. During the Xmas and New Year season I've been thinking of all my old friends with a deep affection. These, of course, include the two of you. You must forgive me my long silence, but I just simply can't cope with my correspondence. But I am trying to cope now. And as soon as I hear from you, you'll hear from me again. I shall definitely keep our correspondence going. And I want to send you a book or two of mine. Many thanks for the *Akros* which I found fascinating. Does it still exist? If so, I'd like to subscribe to it. Duncan Glen sounds a fine chap. Is that volume of Scots translations out yet? I'd very much like to have a copy. Your translation of my Malelaan ballad sounds as beautiful as ever. Everybody who has read it, likes it. I must tell you again how much I appreciate your translating all those poems of mine. Do you still read Afrikaans? I have been wanting to write to Hugh MacDiarmid (your great poet) who was so kind to me for years now. Twice now he has paid me the great compliment of mentioning me, first in a poem & then in his very lively autobiography. If you see him, please give him my very best regards.

My love to you and Peggy

Along the edge of this letter-card, Uys wrote: "How are the children? And your own poetry? Have now published 34 books – about seven in English. And your books?"

The volume of Scots translations that Uys mentions above turned out to be as notional as never published. Elsewhere he had asked me what I thought of the *Einde van die Pad* book of his poems that he had sent to me. Perhaps he knew by that time, for many of the poems I had translated had come from that volume. However, that is not all that is to be said that is conjured out of that book.

There are people and there are folk, and while some of us are concerned generally with both, others, like myself, are concerned particularly with the words they use. Think you on this: the sound of "pad" in Afrikaans has an undertone somewhat like "pot". As you know, the English word "path" is the equivalent of the Afrikaans "pad", but here is the wee complication – the word "path" in English becomes "pad" with a hard "d" in Scots, perhaps because the "th" sound was lost (it has been said) to our native Gaelic in the eleventh century: thus, it may be that our native Scots tongue was influenced. Of course, "pots and pans" are "pats an pans" as said here more colloquially. Think though, where a "footpad" in English is a "highwayman on foot", our equivalent "fuitpad" is a footpath. Our kindly Scots term from such a source meaning "to walk" becomes the colloquial, if ambiguous, "pad the hoof".

As has been mentioned earlier, the Afrikaans poem *Die Einde van die Pad* has become *The End o the Pad* in Scots.

Much ado about very little? Just the same, if philologists do not attend to the small, they will never be as Dalzielian as in the *summa-petenda* class. "Candy" may be truly "toffee" to us, but Americans may well talk about "taffy candy" as Kip S. Thorne does in his wonderful *Black Holes and Time Warps: Einstein's Outrageous Legacy.* That reference is to be found in his Prologue to the book.

Och well, how semantically erudite it is to know that the difference between "path" and "pad" , or between "toffee" and "taffy" is at one with "pot" and "pat", but also that "candy" in our language if not in the American version, is as tautologically inexact and irrelevant as "tell me no more". "Tell me more", however, is the sort of injunction that makes for the information contained in the above book on relativity.

Ach but, since above here I have been into Scots, Afrikaans and American English, prosaically, as it were, perhaps this is the place to put into verse a little more of my preoccupations with langauge, for after all, it is the word multiplied that makes the expressiveness that comes only with order generally, but more so only with the sort of order in the particularity that makes a poem.

THE-MORRA IS THE NANE-EXISTENT

I ken thare is a *More is ook 'n dag,*
but the yin I furst kent was *More is nog 'n dag,*
chaise you yer chyce lik read the furst yin yonner
as "To-morrow will do just as well", as says
the Afrikaans *Groot Woordeboek*, in fact;
"To-morrow is another day", the saecont,
a wee bit like yon Spanish wurd "Manyana".

The aulder we become, the mair we finnd
oor dearest ettlement is lyke tae be
neebort in a fankle wi switheratioun
that haes the mair adae wi whit we are
nor whit we 'd lyke tae be gif no oorsels,
sae deem noo you the whit I 'm gaun tae tell ye
as suddentlyke as yon Greek speak "Eureka!"

The wy I furstlins heard yon Afrikaans
wi *nog* intil it, gart me think o "nocht",
oor wurd in Scots that bydes as hamelie ben us
gars you ken fyne means "naething", naethingness
athin it gyan lyke an aathing aagaets.
Oor ain wurd for "To-morrow", ken, is "Morra",
the daefinite aurticle aye thare fornent it.
Hearin thon Afrikaans, then, you 'll jalouse
__*The-morra is the nane-existent*, seemed
the wy the saw was said, and it was soond as
was philosophicallie faurben wi 't,
ootwith the boonds o paradox, at that.
Profoonditie was ben ma aucht wi yon speak,
an gin ye think ont, you tae will be intilt.

On Papa Westray monie years sinsyne,
I mynd o seein, somewhoere thareaboots,
Primula Scotia, the Scottish Primrose,
as bonnie wee ruid flooers, an gowden-eed,
as eever spraicklt daintilyke on gerss.
Ye ken a fairie-ring? Thae primroses
were growein lik that, a yaird or sae the braidlik.
The wy I saw thae flooers was magic as
the wy I heard *More is nog 'n dag*,
but listen, this the-day, eleeven Septemmer
in nyneteen hunder an nynetie-five, is whit
the morra cannae be, because it is
as magical as myndit thae smaa flooers
an saw *More is nog 'n dag* athin them.

23.11.1995

A long footnote now to the episode of the ceilidh at Morris's house in Balgrayhill Street of Springburn in Glasgow.

While a long life is a mental diary of experience that may be written out of the person either by what should be, but seldom is the truthfulness of autobiography, or by the artifice of contrived fiction based on that experience, there is nothing more certain than this, that wherever you are on this world, you can do nothing other than go with the birl of it, doing what may be done within the flow as easily as swim with the current, direction made only as linearly as the flow allows. Therefore, though there is no doubt that the singularities of memory in others who enjoyed that gathering in Glasgow to welcome Uys Krige would have been able to amplify what little I recall, the most of

those concerned have gone into the depths of their flow of time, leaving my meagre memories to suffice.

If I do remember casual things, such as what so-and-so said or did, most of those incidentals are of little importance, hardly worth recall, and though this person or that one who, like myself, does survive, may recall something as important as momentously of literary wonder, I must confess my main impression was, and is, one of quiet interest and companionship, a general kindliness among people in an environment where there was very small memorability of action or word.

I do know that I remained awake all night through to morning, long after others who had come from afar had gone to bed or had gone home locally in Glasgow, and that I had conversation with a few characters as wide-awake as myself, conversation of as little burthen as unweighty in my thought then or since.One curious speak, however, does still puzzle me, for I can neither remember what occasioned it nor what it really meant.

Early after breakfast, breakfast itself as early as surprised me to realise that the night had gone, Hugh MacDiarmid approached me, his remarkable head of hair still newly shed with the glister of water from the comb still visible, and suggested that we take a wake-up walk in the bonnie morning. We did do just that, towards Springburn Park, and as we walked and talked, he made a strange remark that still baffles me. He said, apropos of what(?) – "We have to get at them through the unions." If it does not say much for me because I cannot elaborate, it does remind us how that great poet was as much into politics as poetry.

When he made that statement, it may be that I was into the state of mind that needs sleep, for I must repeat that I still have no notion at all about the general flow of the conversation.Wait, though, I think now that Norman MacCaig had joined us as we left for our constitutional. Perhaps he may know for certain what the speak was about.

Well, the whole truth is never the real truth, for the real truth is always so far into phantasy as to be almost unbelievable: let us say as much of the truth as we can thole reasonably, or maybe as little of it as we think the reasonable reader can thole.

17.10.1995

A Bit Keek at Some Poetry

Not much to do now but to go back to Dunfermline and prepare to take Uys to Edinburgh to visit some of the ongoings there, before taking as fond a farewell of the man as mind the way he was that would mean he would remain that way, with nothing of the loss that is inevitable in all of us as time goes on.

That said, it is strange how much that must have been important at the time is now gone into that relegation of mind that is as selective as only memory can be. What is left in that selectiveness is sometimes strangely as worthless as bother nobody with it, far less the exercise of putting it down on paper merely to fill a page. Often, though, I was aware of the silence of early awakening to go to work, and afterwards, on coming home, the ongoing of discussion on literary matters like a quiet sussuration in the house.

I know I did add to that ease of words by discussing the worth of two of his poems, and I am sure he was pleased. Once, though not in the house, I spoke to him about the economy of the old ballads, instancing that quality in the opening lines of one of my favourites, *Sir Patrick Spens.* To put you in the picture, I was minded of it one day when I took him into Pittencrieff Glen and stood with him in the ruins of what may well have been the old original royal castle on that site. "Here, in effect," I said, "was the sort of place the anonymous poet must have had in mind when he wrote the first four lines of the ballad." Those lines state simply that the king sat in Dunfermline town where he drank some blood-red wine and said casually that he wondered where he might find a skipper skilful enough to sail a new ship of his. To say what I have just said is to blootcher the ballad speak, and as those lines are so well known, I do not print them as they really are. Being a playwright as well as a poet, Uys appreciated the drama quality of them.

The point I was making was that his own *Ballade*, which he referred to somewhere in his correspondence with me as his "Malelaan ballad" because of the place name quoted in it, showed the same economy of utterance that so distinguishes *Sir Patrick Spens*. I was at pains to stress that that work of his was greatly at odds with many of his other poems that are distinguished by their word play! He was amused to hear that, though understanding what I said was a sort of two-way compliment.

Essentially, of course, economy is what poetry is all about, for even voluminous epic or descriptive poetry makes much of little where it is most successful, and is better served by being made over into prose when it is obviously unsuccessful as poetry.

Later, in our Thistle Street house, Uys asked me to recite the "Malelaan ballad", and afterwards he made a comment about it that very many years later was to be the source of the following comment about it that I was to include in a series of memory poems called *Conversaziones* that is being added to as time goes by.

18.10.1995

I said above that "I was to include", but the truth is that I had taken another thought about it, and had excluded the lines from that collection because I had come to think of it merely as a kind of "diary" item that did less than disclose or not disclose source.

Having had an awful job in finding the whereabouts of the mislaid copy, I have been rooting about in all sorts of paper, and suddenly, a couple of minutes ago , there it was where it could have been no place other! And here it is included, as it will be again among its companion pieces in *Conversaziones.*

TRANSLATION

If he did say,
"Your version is,
yes, better than
my original,"
that would have been
one for the record,
if there had been
competent witness.

If that were said
like just-suppose,
no, if was said
like not-perhaps,
it would have been
as gratifying
as fancy-that
for truth, not fable!

And if as true
as might-have-been
more probable
than never-was,
then scan you this
somewhat resembling
the original,
for your decision.

All I can do now is to tell the (maybe) sceptical reader to turn the pages and take a swaatch at the "Malelaan ballad" that will be found under *Wilderness* towards the end of this screed. He will also note my threefold repetition of "ower Malelaan" at the end of the ballad that does not occur in the original, but which is nane the waur o that, though my inclusion of the repetition makes my translation all the better for it. Perhaps the Scots tongue was asserting its own interpretation of regret threefold, as it were.

The only other poem that Uys and I discussed at any great length was his *Die Soldaat*, which later he saw fit to translate into English and include in *The Penguin Book of South African Verse* which was "Edited with an Introduction by Jack Cope and Uys Krige" in 1968. While I do not want to make a pound of one and a penny of the other, nor, for that matter a pound of one and an ounce of the other, in my opinion there is a great difference between his Afrikaans original and his English translation. In fact, that translation of his own poem did not come anywhere near the value of even my Scots translation of the original, though naturally I say that as a very prejudiced person.

Of course, it was his to lift and lay at will, but why he left out fourteen lines in his translation I cannot imagine. This is one fine poem, structurally and rhythmically it is, as might be said, a "one-off", and exhibits a measure of dramatic skill that we might expect from one who was innately a dramatist and not a mere poeter. When I spoke to him about the poem, I made great emphasis about the structure of it, telling him how the heart of the poem, which describes the abundance centred on the oasis of Fort Wajier, makes such a contrast with the preceding and following lines that centre on the single lonely figure of the soldier of the title of the poem. Those comments did please Uys, and I do remember how he relished my translation of these three lines of his that occur towards the end of the poem.

Vas en strak en swart en dreigend
val die skaduwee van die soldaat
wyd oor die wêreld.

His own English for those lines were

Rigid and firm, black, stark in its threat
the soldier's shadow falls
wide over the world.

And although you will come across them later under the text of *Wilderness*, I have no scruples in printing them below here for your interest, by way of comparison.

Stievelik an sterklik an black wi aa dreedour,
ower the haill wurld
faas the sodger's black scadda.

To say what I have said above about the English translation done by Uys is probably enough, but I must mention how amused I was to see how he had to use "trudges" and "trudging" so often, in order to bring out the weariness of the soldier beneath the stars on his way across the desert. Quite comfortably, I was able to use the Scots word "traiks" in my translation, because that word, so sib to the Afrikaans "trek", is just as sib to the weariness of the gait of the soldier.

Och now, but isn't that the something that 's only the half of what it might have been, for I didn't think to mention my use of the word "traik" to Uys, and its relationship to the Afrikaans "trek". Mind you, as I am sure you will if your brochtupness is anything like my own, when we said *raison d'être* in schoolboy French, sometimes we were not sure whether the first syllable *rai* should correspond to the acute *e* or the grave *e.* On the whole, though, we tended to agree with the French acute, probably because of our local prejudices.

19.10.1995

In that *Die Soldaat* poem, there is at once a massive preoccupation of the idea of nature, of man against nature, of man at one with nature, but finally, with man's place in nature's great desertic conditions. While writing *Wilderness* earlier, it was obvious how my mind had become preoccupied with the desert idea, *Die Soldaat* being a good centre of extrapolation. No matter what the lone soldier of the poem does, no matter

who or what he is, no matter where he is or how he came to be where he is, nature is into his every action even as he is into nature, let or hindrance notwithstanding.

His desert is everywhere, on land or sea or air, made and remade over the centuries, despite one's private desire for betterment, or public confusion like a malevolent haterent that makes any privacy unobtainable, whether it may be desirable or not. When I think of "the wide, low sea", as it is described in the song *The Sailor's Grave,* that my father use to sing when I was a boy, I also think of the desert as "the wide, low desert."

In speaking to Uys about our appreciation of his *Die Soldaat,* Morris Blythman and I both weighed in with comment that pleasured the South African poet, for we knew very well how the droothieness of the ground of the desert had been a sea of experience in the mind of the man: observation had become poetry, the art of words imitating actuality.

A Song in the Festival

Uys's time at Dunfermline with us was not spent entirely on poetic discussion with me, or at his desk writing *The Dream and the Desert*. Like so much of my records, "somewhere among my papers", there is a photograph of Uys and Peggy standing in Pittencrieff Glen, and others taken in our garden at 7 Thistle Street where he is to be seen with either Peggy or myself or with our young son, John, on his shoulders. Those are merely indicators of other things to do and other places to be, probably of no great importance to anyone but ourselves, but mentally relishsome enough at that.

One pleasurable diversion to both of us was a chance visit by an old R.A.F.comrade of mine while he was passing through Dunfermline on his way to Lossiemouth. His name was Con Murphy, who had been born a Welshman, though obviously of Irish stock as well as Welsh. At that time, he had either just become time-expired from the service or was approaching that period of his life.

Uys was regaled with reminiscences from both of us that took him back into his war years, and he did enjoy the camaradarie of the change of atmosphere that was created by us, though his own war experiences had been in the deserts of East and North Africa as well as Italy, while some of ours had been in the bush and mangrove country of West Africa and then in western Europe.

Since both Uys Krige and Con Murphy are now deceased and thus are now into part of that great regret that in time becomes known to many of us, what is left for me to say but how I wish Con could have read this account of mine about Uys, and complementarily, how I wish Uys could have read what I have written about Con in a bit of companion screed called *Refuel and Rearm Unit* that I completed here on April 1994.

So many others are gone now, Morris Blythman among them, and he was a man of song as well as poetry, whereas Con was into poetry only. In the way that true friendship is none the worse for being honoured, I am pleased to include Con here along with Uys and Morris, and you may take it from me that he is the critic mentioned in the following poem. If that information means nothing to you, at the time of the making of the poem, it meant something to Con and myself.

I take it from the pile of typescript that is gathered together to make the ongoing collection called *Conversaziones.*

20.10.1995

If friends and foes, as well as fools and follies of all sorts are to be found there, I suppose that must be put down to the way of the world and not to the way I see the world, nor to the way the world sees me. All of us are as we must be, because that is how environment and heredity has made us, though such a condition does not excuse badness in us any more than it need overpraise our goodness.

CRITIC SILENT

I never was one given to wondering
how kindly might a critic write about me
lik scurrivaigin faur on Pegasus,
no, nor did I imagine any critic
abusing what I wrote to put me on
a jackass, clownish as obstreporous,
yet judge you how I gave a friend a file ../
of poems chosen for his gift, alone,
to wait his comments on them with impatience.
Waited, then on the telephone, he said
a nothingness about them. "Now, haud on ye,"
said I, "Have you not had that file of verse
I promised?" Well, long story like a hiccup
in the telling of it. This suffice to say,
Post Office staff, it seems, had been remiss.
Intelligence on hold. Make enquiries,
like ferreting within a warren. Look,
there is the rabbit file. Now, pounce upon it!

He phoned. "I 've got the file. Thanks very much.
I 'll read the poems, then I 'm going to tell you,
as carefully as though they were my own,
how I react to all the years within them
when both of us were part of what we were,
even as where we were has come to be
part of the both of us for evermore."
Those were his words, or near enough at that
as neednae say the ocht the mair anent them.

His critical essay was not to be,
for tyme taen ower, haudin athin its silence
his comments on our joint experience,
as though where we had been had not existed,
or was the fanciful, not factual;
or fictional, beyond reality
as fairy tales the bairnies like to hear,
and having heard them, think them wondrouslike
but never more than just "Tell me a story."

"Life is like literature," you may say,
but I tell you, were all my verses letters,
they could not show you sights we saw and sang,
verisimilitude always awanting,
so much of life and living, I may say,
being beyond my expertise to make
lifelike upon the paper. Maybe time,
that taen ma freend intil its aucht, kent weel
his silence criticised my curn of verses.

A little later on herein, to make a good notion the better for the taking of another thought, I shall include one about Morris. At this stage of my life of observing and commenting on what I have seen and heard, it would be surprising if I did not have an appropriate poem to hand on this or that other happening, or on that or this other person.

Unlike Morris and myself, Uys was not at all into song sharply, no matter how acutely-edged his mind may have been with words. Perhaps his word-attack was mostly of a dramatic nature. After all, as a playwright he was to be thoroughly at home in translating Shakespeare's *King Lear* and *Twelfth Night* into Afrikaans, never mind all his poetry translations from Spain, France, Italy and Brazil.

As it happens, Morris Blythman, though a song man, a singing man, was also into dramatic translation, for it should not be forgotten that he set Molière's *Don Juan* into a brand of Scots that could have been made by no one but Morris.That translation has not yet found a stage any more than it has found print.

However, it should also be remembered that as a side-effect of his delight in song, Morris picked up a melody in Brittany whilst on holiday there one summer, and immediately realised that it was a perfect vehicle for our fine old anonymously-made Scots poem *The Twa Corbies,* which, as far as I know, had never had a suitable tune at all to make it so surely a song the like none other is. Perhaps that incident is honoured better by the following poem than by the mere prosing of the story, so as promised above, here is the poem I made about him, and it too is contained in *Conversaziones.*

VOICE FROM THE PAST

Hearing a voice speak verse on radio,
with manner such as never used on wireless,
I listened in amazement, comprehension
full stop because the speak was like a signal
to make me think of all the mystery
contained in that old verse. I thought, "Consider
the ultimate of all consideration
in such a scansion, made as marvellous
in song as chanced upon a tune to sing it!"

The verses told the ancient ballad tale
The Twa Corbies, made so as to delight us
for far more years than seen by that young person
misquoting in a fashion made for wonder
like an astonishment that lifts the hands
in disbelief how schooling teaches reading,
or life explains how we must listen.
"The wuin sall blaw on you lik shed yer hair!"
I said. Now I forget the misquotation.

Probably, it was not important as
all that, for though I made a note about it,
my real thought was on how Morris Blythman
had found the Breton tune to sing that ballad,
as though it long had waited there in France

for word and phrase in measure of idea
to make the melody alive in token
of what once was would live again in song,
like people with the centuries conjoining.

If we may say, "Alas!" in old-fashioned sorrow, do not forget that, colloquially, we can say in a measure of exasperation: "My, it's a lad!" At this date, I cannot remember whether it was a lass or a lad who made for the exasperation expressed in the above lines, but I do say that if singers are the best able to keep the best of our song available through the ages, then they have a duty to see to it that not only do they know what they are singing about, but that they undersand what the song is saying. Too many of them seem to think they know better than the words themselves say, ay, and far better than the original poet knew. The same applies to reciters.

How satisfying it would be were I to stand fornent the such a performer and say to him: "Thank you for your singing of that fine old song. I happen to be a collector of travesties of song. Thank you again for your having provided me with such a prime example the rubbishing of melody and meaning." I write that I would "say to him", but naturally, if it were a lass who had sung the song so badly, I could not bring myself to utter a mutter to her. Even in the appreciation of the arts, chivalry is not dead.

Looking again at the above poem, it occurs to me that I should gloss the line

"The wuin sall blaw on you like shed yer air!"

not only because it echoes two lines from *The Twa Corbies* that say, in better Scots than is usually given in the anthologies

"Ower his whyte banes whuin they are bare,
The wuin sall blaw for evermair"

but because I should point out to those who do not know, that when we talk about "shedding our hair" in Scots, we mean that we are parting it and generally making it suitable for our normal public appearance. Naturally, however, when I wrote the line, I was aware of the pun, but thought to leave it there for the reader to chaise the chyce, our way of saying "to choose the choice".

9.11.1995
To rhyme now

So off you go and on you go
like where to go if you don't know

is not really appropriate, because at this stage, reminiscence airts us to Edinburgh and something of its Festival, not to forget a bit traik around a few galleries to let Uys see what was then on the go in the art world, as well as had been in the now long gone. You see, the weather was fine, and Edinburgh was not living up to its other byname encapsulated in the common phrase "East-windy, West-endy."

Arriving there as early as in good time to see a tremendous parade of bagpipers along Princes Street, Uys opted first of all to parade alongside and enjoy the marches as we made our way from the Waverley Station end of the street towards the old Caledonian

Railway Station hotel at the far end. There he had arranged to meet a South African friend of his who, like himself, was on holiday in Scotland. Once again, memory says "No names, no packdrill", but I can say he was a decent enough bodie at that and was enjoying himself.

Of no importance to Uys and our time then in Auld Reekie, being in that Station reminded me that although the engines of the trains using that place throughout my youth had been distinguished by the chocolate livery of the LMS (the London, Midland and Scottish Railway), in my childhood it had been the bonnie blue of the Caledonian Railway, known for short as the "Caley". Even today, I do not think of a railway sleeper as such, but as a Caley sleeper. I can still see the engines peching heavily up the long brae that rises through the cutting between Holytown Station and Cleland Station, on the way to Edinburgh. At that time, though, Cleland Station was known as Omoa Station. Details like those are now becoming as esoteric to all but the railway enthusiast, as are the astrological references in the poetry of Robert Henryson to all but the pedantic savant.

Without them, though, we could never have been what we have become, materially and intellectually, nor would you be what you have now become since I have informed you. All you have to do now to make me something of what you are is to tell me as much about yourself as I have told you of myself.

Apart from a few comments by Uys concerning what he saw that day and the next, my memory is fragmentary. But I can tell you that he was astonished by the sight of the memorial to Sir Walter Scott in Princes Street, where it sits in all the glory (or perhaps should I say in all the "glaury") of its shades of industrial pollution. Artistically, I think he was puzzled by but not entirely enamoured of its truncated style. Another monument that gave him some pause of thought was the mounted figure of a Scots Greys soldier, not for any artistic reason, but because of its Boer War connection, I should imagine. However, I could not enlighten him about the actions in that war that had involved the Scots Greys, nor would I had I been able.

Mind you, I could have told him, but I did not, that there was a pipe Retreat March called *The Highland Brigade at Magersfontein,* that place where the regiments lay under the sun that blistered the back of their knees, their kilts no protection, because they could not assault through the barbed-wire defences there the Boer commandos who held the koppie in front of the Brigade and mauled those kilted regiments with fire from Mauser rifles.

In the Great War of 1914-18, some of those same Scots soldiers would remember Magersfontein as they faced the barbed wire and Mauser rifles of the Germans, and know that their old campaign in South Africa had given them a foretaste of Flanders, the second time round, though in the latter place, with cold mud beneath them. The difference was a gurrie in the cold Flanders glaur, instead of a grovel on the sandy, grushie, sparsely-grassed overburden that makes the warm surface of the veld under the sun. .

And I did not tell him, though I could have done so, that there was another March, that he might have heard when he walked with me along Princes Street with the pipe bands: it is called *The 93rd at Modder River.* I am sure he knew that river as well as he knew Magersfontein. Both of those Marches had to do with the same Boer War that had seen the Scots Greys in action.

One march that he had heard that day was the march past of the Gordon Highlanders, better known as *The Cock o' the North,* but again, although I could have told him I did not do so, because it might have led me into reminiscence of childhood days that had

heard children like myself sing to that tune words that would have been of little interest to him.Song itself is never sacrosanct in Scotland, for we do with it what we will, often to the very destruction of it, iconoclasm in Scotland being directed as often at the word as at the image. Maybe the reader who knows them will recognise the example of the process as given below.

"I 'll eat nae mair,
I 'll eat nae mair,
I 'll eat nae mair o yer cheese.
The last I got,
it stuck in ma throat,
an gied me the hert's disease."

As always, Scots bairns were into the delight of good word-smithery as in engineering their fathers have been renowned for their metal-smithery, those childer no more put out by recalcitrant rhyme than their elders by thrawn metal. If the malady of heartburn could not be doctored to rhyme with "cheese", then "hert's disease" had to suffice.

Later, between look-see and eat-so, we must have met Norman MacCaig, probably in some pub where we had gone for a dram. I say this because I can find no other reason why the evening found us sitting together somewhere with many others, listening to a few songs. Nothing we can do about time prevents time doing what it will with us. Only the other day I had to reply to a letter from Joy Hendry, the editor of the magazine *Chapman,* to inform me that there was to be "An 85th Birthday Celebration" for Norman MacCaig on the 22nd of November 1995, and that she was to present him with "... a little booklet of poems or *very short* prose pieces for the occasion." Like all the others involved, I was invited to produce a something suitable for it. Now you must understand why I made the above remark about time, for as this part of these reminiscences shows, I was almost into what I had thought to mention about the meeting Uys Krige and myself had had with Norman back in 1952. Therefore, not to make a mixter-maxter of what I wrote to Joy Hendry as my reaction to her request, it is probably best merely to repeat what I sent to her. If she finds it suitable to her purpose, the following (unless further edited) is what will appear in her commemoration booklet. And it did, as later I now note.

A SONG IN THE FESTIVAL

Sitting in some hall or another in Edinburgh as I awaited an evening of song, alongside Norman MacCaig and another poet, Uys Krige, whose poems, plays and translations in his native Afrikaans had made him a kenspeckle figure in South Africa, Norman mentioned to me that he knew one of the singers. Whether her name was Kitty or Marietta MacLeod, I cannot remember. I think the latter, but Norman will know for certain.

During conversation, I suggested to him that since Uys had had no experience of Gaelic song, it might be a good idea if he could hear something unusual in that language, say, some old lament.

Nothing loath, Norman went backstage and speired at the singer might she sing the such a song, giving her the reason for the request. She sang just the sort of song reqired, *Griogal Cridhe,* as she stood above us on the stage, addressing the words and music of it to Uys. I can tell you, I took great pleasure in the accents of the song sung

so especially for him, and mentally I still thank Norman as well as the singer for the memory.

A score or so of years later, as I stood beside the five great larch trees in Glenlyon that mark the place where the Gregor MacGregor of the song lowped over the River Lyon to foil his pursuers, again I thought pleasantly of the song that Norman MacCaig had had Marietta MacLeod sing, even as another forty-three years on, the same memory pleasures me.

Imagine you now a MacCaig, who makes poetry in English, speiring at a MacLeod to sing in Gaelic a song made by a Marion Campbell about the latter's husband, a MacGregor, and to sing that so-special song especially for a poet who made his poetry in Afrikaans, and you may well realise how deeply you are into history and literature!

Literature, like history, has a long memory, especially when combined, and even more so when mated with music into song, for then it ignores the centuries and becomes subsumed in the mind, often to the despair of conquerors whose only reply is usually as unmelodious as the cacophony of execration their names inspire. Naither wunner tyrants hate makars, for makars mell wurds wi music; naither wunner makars mell wi freedom, for makars mell freedom wi wurds an music.

That River Lyon already mentioned above can be a violent, churning kind of water at times, as is shown by the odd, naturally-sculptured forms of sandstone that it makes in its churning, stones that have been lifted out of it, as may be seen here and there where they are used as ornaments upon gate-posts alongside the roadway leading through the glen.

And how strange that it was that in Glenlyon, once upon an unfortunate day, when I stayed there on holiday, I was astounded to find that the landlady (an incomer, as it happened, and therefore probably a little ignorant of our auld-farrant customs), had had the temerity to fill a vase in one of the rooms with a bunch of white hawthorn florish. It is our old superstition that such a decoration in a house will lead to the death of a child therein. Had Gregor MacGregor's mother ever done such a thing when he had been a child? Legend is as silent on the matter as Gregor himself was to become when his eventual beheading took him into the uttermost stoond of eternal quiet.

Imagine you again, though, that once before, as I passed along the road in Glenlyon in a motor-car, beside the wild river that rowes through that glen, I took a notion to stick my head out of the window as we ran between those five great larches, and yelloch "Grigalach!" in salute to the memory of Marion Campbell's MacGregor husband who had lowped the river there, for Sir Walter Scott had sung that salute in his song that told of the Gathering of the MacGregors.

Once now you have imagined, and twice have you imagined, so three times over, imagine now you walk in Glenstrae beside another Tom Law, a man who was my father's cousin and who was the schoolmaster of the village school in Holytown in Lanarkshire. He was a singer and a poet both, and as he walked there, in salute to the Clan MacGregor, he sang that same song, because of the stanza in it that laments

"Glenorchy's proud mountains, Calchuirn and her towers,
Glenstrae, and Glenlyon, no longer are ours –
We 're landless, landless, landless, Grigalach!"

"MacGregor", of course, is the Sunday form of the name. The commonality of the Lowland Scots have always clung to the original Highland Gaelic form, "MacGreegor"

being as hamely on the tongue as our delight in the prose character called "Wee MacGreegor", and in a popular song of our childhood remembered chiefly in the line "Doctor MacGreegor and his wee black bag", alliteration as apparent as tickling the taste in word-order.

Little did Uys Krige know about those things in Scottish history and song as he listened to the melody of *Griogal Cridhe*, and nothing of it concerning Sir Walter Scott's share of it did I tell him, for I remembered his somewhat disparaging astonishment at his first sight of the memorial monument to Sir Walter. And, in any case, as far as my other MacGregor connections before and since that time are concerned, why, surely matters such as those are peculiarly our own and unsharable with the stranger. After all, there are things ye cannae tell a stranger, even though mibbes ye'd write them for him to read, since that sort of action would give him time to consider them and perhaps understand them.

Now, before you say, "There he goes, digressing again!" I must say it for you as I ask you once more to imagine yourself in a seaside town doon the watter, say, in Rothesay, and ask you to see that same Tom Law (of Holytown, as we called him by way of distinction), looking at a busker singing to the crowds as though, as the word has it, singing were merely a matter of opening the mouth and letting the belly rumble. His singing fairly hurt the face as well as the ears to listen to it, and the singer was having no cash return for his work.

Stepping up to the chiel, Tom said to him: "Here, I'll sing. You pass the hat around." They did those things together, and the cash flowed in: some things are done for experience, while others are performed with experience. As you see, digression is nothing if not applied persistently, even as our family tradition about the MacGregors, like our other prejudices, is an example of persistent prejudice.

10.11.1995

Ever since childhood, I have been into song and the singing of it (by other people, I hasten to add), so I was delighted to listen to Marietta MacLeod that evening and to savour the sound, for like so many Scots, I am unable to speak Gaelic, though again, like most of us, I am aware of the heritage of song that has been given to all of us by the old tongue. Is it not a curiosity that our national ignorance should retain such inbuilt knowledge and appreciation of a language so few of us can speak, and at that simply because of musical notes that make that language rhythmical? There is a thrawn bit in all of us here that just will not listen to any disparagement of either our place or our people. Of course, to say that is not to imply that literary criticism belongs there, for we are into that as quickly as sooch two words together.

Och now, I know we can listen to songs in other unknown languages and appreciate them somewhat too, but Gaelic is something other, something that conceals its identity within us, yet lets us recognise it in the hearing as we see and hear no other language.For that reason, it is sometimes difficult to have to listen at times to so much blattering noise of instruments used in recording that both the music and the words are blootchered unmercifully. That is what is known as "getting in on the act", but I must not name names or list appliances in case I be sued. The use of such noise, however, is an astonishing sort of tone-deafness for singers to condone.

Needless to say (but I do say it), there was no noisy, instrumental accompaniment as Marietta MacLeod sang *Griogal Cridhe* for Uys: the song came to us in all the simplicity of its native sound, the generosity of the voice alone gracing us by the roundness of its tone accompanying the flavour of the Gaelic language.

At times, in fact, it seems that Nineveh and Babylon, and all that ever was in the Fertile Crescent of the Middle East, along with ancient Egypt and the mysteries of Crete and Greece, hide in their histories a something that lingers in the Gaelic. After all, is it not an old, old speak that Gaelic was the language of the Garden of Eden? And how can anyone who has ever listened to Gaelic psalm-singing doubt that the sound of the vocables must be recognisable to the racial memories of many of the peoples from Cairo to India? And who is to say that Scota, who gave us our name in legend, was not the daughter of a Pharaoh of Egypt and brought the original *Lia Fail* or Stone of Destiny that became the Coronation Stone (that some say was the Pillow of Moses) to Ireland and Scotland long, long before the sandstone version of it in Scone was stolen by that malevolent thief, Edward I of England.

This I can say, though, that the man who translated our freedom charter, *The Declaratioun o Arbroath* from its Latin of the year 1320 into his version of the Scots tongue of today, was my son, John Law, who had been the child left with his mother in Dunfermline when Uys Krige went with me to that welcoming ceilidh we had organised in Glasgow for the South African. In that translation, John recounts how those ancient Scots

"...hae aye wan monie a brave nem for thairsels; that thay cam frae Greater Scythia bi wey o the Sea o Tuscanie an the Pillars o Hercules, an steyed in aboot Spain amang geyan fierce tribes for monie a lang year, bit that thay cuidna be subjugatit oniewhaur bi onie ither fowk, nae maiter hou raucle; that efter comin awa frae thon airt, mair nor twal hunner yeir efter the Israelis crossed the Rid Sea, the Scots taen bi monie victories an muckle darg thir mairches in the Wast that thay haud yit, efter thay haed first caaed awa the Britons an syne owerhailit the Picts aathegither, eien tho the Norwegians, Danes an Inglis aften yokit on them; an that they hae aye hauden thir mairches free frae aa thirldom, as auld-time historians depone. In this kinrik, a hunner an thirteen kings haes ringit, aa frae oor ain ryal dynastie, athooten onie fremmit incomin...
...An for as lang as ae hunner o us ar leivin yit, we niver sall gie consent in onie wey ti bein thirled til the ryk o the Inglis. We arna fechtin for glore nor honours, but fur freedom alane, that nae guid man will lat lowss binna wi life itsel..."

24.11.1995

Now and then, whenever I happen to look at those words, *Greater Scythia,* in the above passage from *The Declaratioun o Arbroath* of 1320, strangely, I am minded of my having sailed to South Africa at the beginning of 1941 on a troopship called the *H.M.T. H9*, which was an old tripper steamer from the pre-war South American trade, then better known as the *S.S. Scythia*. And strangely again, in the way that time has the habit of underscoring experience, one day while I was staying in Dunfermline, I chanced to see the *Scythia* at Inverkeithing on the River Forth when it arrived there to be broken up. That revived old memories of that wartime journey, for while stationed at Wonderboom, near Pretoria in the Transvaal, I wrote somewhat facetiously of that sailing in a ballad, saying, among other things,

It was the steamer *Scythia,*
the *H.M.T. H9,*
as fair a ship as ever sailed
upon the salty brine.

and also, from somewhere in the ballad, there is another fragment still alive in my memory where all the rest is dead,

...where trippers tripped, there trooping trooped
sprog airmen, drunk or boozing...

In case the reader think that enough of that is more than enough for this reminiscence, I must add here that the preoccupation with the ocean and its effect on a ship that is dealt with in the earlier *Wilderness* as described in its sub-section called *Kennin* was made with my experience on the *Scythia* in mind. After all, if what is written is not made from what the writer knows, the reader will be the less aware of the truth of what is written.

10.11.1995
But back to where I was before I voyaged once more south to the Old Transvaal, it is worthwhile repeating that so many of us know so many Gaelic songs so intently that it is difficult to imagine that they do not know us: we subsume them into our ignorance of their language in such a manner that though they become as one with us as our identity of person, they remain as sacrosanct in privacy as to resemble the most ancient of texts made in those signs long gone into history like the dust of the letters originally scribed in clay or stone, or like ink fading upon the surface of papyrus.
That is why it is possible for us to think, "Now, that is as fine an Irish song as ever came out of Scotland", or again, "Now, that is as Scots a tune as ever came out of Ireland", for we tend to be as partial to one as the other. At times it is difficult to domicile either: anciently, this was particularly so. As is well-known, we march to their tunes, we diddle them, we plagiarise them, we chant them, we make them over like turn a tune make a phrase: no matter what, we are always into delight with them.
How time involves us in its delightful chaos when we meet up with one of its occurrences such as the singing of a song called *Griogal Cridhe* during a festival in a place called Edinburgh that once was Dunedin, properly Din Eidyn of the Strathclyde British. Shades of the men described in the old poem called *The Gododdin* who went from thereabouts to Catraeth in what is now Northern England to fight the invaders who gave us this new language. "Catraeth" is now "Catterick", and is still into military order, as many who were trained for warfare there will attest.
But let us remember that Gaelic is a language that enshrines song and story, history and lineage as memorably as persistently attractively, even in translation. Let us hope that it does not become a place of entombment for those accounts of an old way of life at once as legendary as glorified by melody so common in the cadency of its music. Can there posssibly be any music elsewhere that carries such sadness as do the slow measures in that song of what in Scots is called the "owercome"? Here, the common English words "chorus" and "refrain" are inappropriate.

"Obhan, obhan, obhan, iri,
Obhan iri o!
Obhan, obhan, iri!
'S mor mo mhulad 's mor."

Remembering Marietta's singing of the song, surely we were among the marvellous, and think you, if such things are not noted and wondered at ben the intelligence by way

of the eyes and ears, we are into a somewhat twinly unsighted tone-deafness that leaves us not only outwith the comforting warmth of kindly astonishment, but icicled emotionally, the whole being "enicicled", as it were.

How dreadful to be the like of that, for when mental life is little more than a misery, no amount of amelioration of a physical or material nature can make any difference. Better to be appreciative of life, where what we feel like doing is what we know is best to do, because it seems that what is well-done as we are enabled so to do is something as important as well-worthwhile to self if not to anyone else, though, of course, of no harm to anyone either.

11.11.1995

There is one thing about your being ignorant of the innards of the Gaelic language – you can enjoy it without having to go through the annoyance that niggles away at you when listening to the duff efforts of characters trying to sing in the good old Scots tongue, as they mangle meaning and adulterate text. What polfitoorals they are, those singers who elect to do such a thing!

If the mark of the great politican is to coerce other people into doing the dirty work, the stigma of the bad singer of Scots song is ability to do the dirty work personally.

As the common saying has it, "From the sublime to the gorblimey!" After that session of song in Edinburgh, I cannot recall very much about where we went and what we did, except that late in the evening, Uys and I ran into Alan Riddell, the then editor of the Edinburgh poetry magazine *Lines (*since become *Lines Review),* and at his suggestion accompanied him to a howff somewhere, and passed the night there. Wherever that howff was, we listened to a song or six in the company there, though of all we heard I recall only a yae yin that was sung by a young womanbodie.

The big feck of people in Scotland will recognise that ballad from the following immortal owercome that distinguishes it.

"And it 's oh, dear me, whit will I dae
If I dee an auld maid in a garret."

But how at all can I leave-a-be that meeting with Alan Riddell and the memory of it, now that he has gone, as have so many of my old acquaintances of younger days. On the 24th of August in 1955, I took a thought about the Edinburgh Festival and the atmosphere of the place then, and using what I had seen and heard, no doubt some of it from the 1952 incursion described above, I wrote the following lines. Sometime later, I sent them on to him as a souvenir of our auld lang syne through an address I had obtained, but whether he had passed on by then or not, I am afraid I did not hear from him.

FESTIVAL

In the huddle an guddle o auld Embro
whaur the causey glisters fae the skliffin o feet,
an the padyane o the ancien great gars semmle
the smachrie o thon smaa nyafferie o the élite,
whaur the toonsfolk are thrang as sklaters alow the hie waas
o the auld hooses as the pipers blaw
a kittlin o the air alang the nerra closes

whan the sodgers coontermairch for thur brose
on the Castle esplanade, up and awaa
wi ye tae the wastren isles o the bruch whaur aa
the gallus chiels goave at this ither padyane, this fairheid,
this pulchritude stravaigin aboot and attour
Princes Street, wi the bonnie een glimmerin for a taer,
a reeshle in the walk, and a rowth o pooer
i the whaur-awaa-here-am-I o the shoogle o the shoothers
— ootwith festival an fame
here's the haill wurld at hame.

At that time, there was a light of mind among us that shone like a golden wash of colour upon the faces of the people as well as upon the face of the countryside, a time that was into a minor miraculousness of vision in the eyes as well as into a swiftly-eager spiritedness in everyone's manner. Edinburgh was as young as we were.

12.11.1995

Surely, we are what we were the where we were in a mixter-maxterie of where we now are, like co-existence with the succeeding continua, that we can always call to mind a somewhere that lets us see ourselves in an environment forever with us no matter how long since it is that we first knew it. It is the such a thought that takes us into time where none but ourselves can be so truly at one with such a place.

Perhaps that is what I was trying to show Alan Riddell when I took a thought to let him see the above picture of Edinburgh at festival time.While it may be of no odds nowadays that he may never have seen it, it is still all the odds in the world to me that I made it and can still see it.

Beyond, beyond, though, further back than younger maturity that never thought to look but despite that, always saw; even more distant than youthfulness that seldom saw what it was looking at; and into far childhood that knew how closely to look at people so as to see them for what they were and not like what they fancied themselves to be, there, once upon an eyeful, we were into such clarity of seeing places and people, that the memory was thoroughly in particularity of area of ground, of cover of woodland, and of burnside so vivid that it would remain far clearer than any artist can possibly imagine in delineation, or any photograph can possibly image upon plate or paper.

In such clarity, we used to see a blade of grass an acreage become a prairie, a leaf upon a tree become a forest above the tundra, the water of a burn an ocean across half of the world, and a star a keek at creation somewhere at the heart of the universe.

Sometimes, those things may become like little annoyances in the mind, and can be pursued to become poems, or, if not sufficiently important, may be nudged to become little bits of verse that are too short to be dignified by the name "screeds".

A screed, it must be understood, is a wide-armed area of coverage, unlike the art of the miniaturist, but rather like an attack of paint-work on a great canvas, the large gesture rather than the nit-picking appropriate to myopia that is so often the mark of the makar.

13.11.1995

Haud on ye, though! I have just been having a bit swaatch at that bit of verse *Festiva*l above, and it strikes me as being true enough, for just the other day I heard a radio announcer mention that a certain song *The Deil 's awa wi the Exciseman* was "...words

by Robert Burns, sung by — — " but the announcer did not say, as he should have said, "pronounced by — —"

You see, throughout, the singer rhymed the "ise" in "Excisemen" as the latter word is spoken in the modern fashion, and not with the sharper "y" sound with its Germanic bite. In the song, though Burns used the same English orthography, it is perfectly clear that in his day the rhymes used the "y" sound. In the song, he pairs Exciseman successively with "the prize, man", with "rejoice, man", and with "strathspeys, man". While it may sound a little strange to modern Scots ears, the song should be sung so that the "y" sound should intrude into the singing of "Exciseman", "prize", "rejoice" and "strathspeys". "Pryze", and "strathspye" may still be heard commonly, "Excyseman" seldom, and "rejyce" very seldom.

In this sort of redd-up of my own text, never mind the editing of that of Robert Burns, I take advantage of take a thought, and title this section of these memoirs the same as I did that prose piece about hearing that song *Griogal Cridhe* that Norman MacCaig had Marietta MacLeod sing for the benefit of Uys Krige. At first I had thought to end this part of the spiel under the sub-title *Festival Visit and Farewell,* but as usual, it is not so much the hand that writes that dictates, as it is the writing itself that dictates the hand.

However, some reader or another may well think that the whole screed should be called *By Way of Digression,* and just to prove it, I must say "Oh, dear me, what it is to be a stranger in a strange land, even as Uys Krige and I were when we went into a house I didn't know in a street I didn't know, where we heard a wommanbodie I didn't know sing that song that tells the story of one who laments her 'Oh, dear me' about dying as an auld maid in a garret." It is almost as if, while I am into the writing of this account, I am become like Edwin Muir into his poetry, for I find that I have so much to say of the 'strange' that rhymes with 'change' that such digressions seems to be as important as the story.

Totsiens, Uys! Hamba kahle!

As it happens, *Totsiens,* which is the Afrikaans word meaning "So long", was not to be casual and as indicative of expected reunion as it implies, for we were never to see each other again after Uys left Dunfermline, and there was not a great deal of communication between us by letter after 1952.

The use of *Hamba kahle* above in that sub-title takes us once more into the macaronic of expression, for those two words are from Nguni (the Zulu, Xhosa, and Swazi languages), and mean something like "Go sweetly" or "Go well" the translation usually given in English for them.They are familiar throughout South Africa, and are used by all races there. Language is as selective to us as we are selective to language, history showing how legislation is seldom triumphant when it seeks to interfere with communication between peoples.

To illustrate that, and still be mindful of Uys, at his instigation, and soon after he left us, a younger relative of his visited us and stayed with us for a while in Dunfermline. One day, near our house in Thistle Street there, he and I went for a short walk accompanied by my son, John, still a toddler at that time. Now, as we walked together, with the boy between us, we happened to pass a row of small corrugated-iron sheds which were ten-a-penny survivors of World War Two, and were well-known as Anderson Shelters, invented to prepare for the expected bombing. Sir John Anderson, who had been Home Secretary from 1939-1940, had had his name appropriated to describe them thus. They were all.over the place after the war, and I had used one of them myself to make a coal-cellar behind the family house in Newarthill.

As we walked past that row of Shelters in Dunfermline, our visitor happened to remark to John by way of encouragement, *"Hamba kahle",* and on we went.

A year or so later, Peggy, John and I flitted to London and settled for a while in Richmond. Judge you now, how one day thereabouts, as John and I sat in a bus and happened to pass a group of those same shelters, the bairn suddenly said *"Hamba kahle!*" and pointed to those survivors. Philologists are into confusion, as was the bairn, for what he said sounded more like *"Hamba gashly,"* As noted in *A Dictionary of South African English* by Jean Brandford, "Kahle... corrupted in kitchen kaffir to 'gaashly'. FitzPatrick *Jock of the Bushveld* 1907." Seemingly, John was into that same corruption. No need for me to seek *Jock of the Bushveld* on my shelves and check what Jean Brandford noted was written about it, for that was how I knew it myself all those years ago.

And now I come into difficulty, because I have to look through the few letters that I received from Uys, and I can tell you that though he did say in one of them that he had trouble reading my hand of write, I find his own handwriting a terrible trauchle to read at times.

First of all, however, because I used my translations of his poems as part of my earlier *Wilderness* bit of writing concerning Uys, I feel I must say that in a letter to me dated 10 August '47, he did write, "You may do with your translations what you will. Publish them by all means." Most of the other excerpts from his letters that I shall make here will be more of parochial than international interest.

Therefore, I do not intend to repeat all that he said in his letters, though I am sure that here and there he made comments that must be of interest to anyone among his own people who wants to add to what is already known of his character. That will be for such a person to decide, once these few of his letters to me are made available generally.

In his next letter, dated 20/6/52, written prior to his visiting us in Dunfermline, he mentions "Thurso Berwick" (Morris Blythman), telling me to thank him, and "It was thoughtful of him — and such spontaneity is heart-warming." My letter to Uys must have said something about our plans to give him a bit of a welcoming ceilidh.

In replying to a letter I sent to him on the 21st of June, when it seems I must have sent him a copy of *Ballat,* my translation of his *Ballade* (that is, the "Malelaan" poem), and my *Voortrekker Monument* poem that I dedicated to him, he thanked me for them, saying of the former: "Have read your *Ballat* several times aloud to myself – and it sounds pretty good to me. It is one of my favourite poems – and I was a little disappointed when one of my best friends (and a sound critic) said it was "ghastly". Several official S.A. critics have, however, liked it. Am looking forward to your reading it to me. And also to an audition of *Voortrekker Monument.* I appreciate the honour you have done me by dedicating this poem to me. That I have been recorded in Scots is also most gratifying."

14.11.1995

As will be noticed above, there is a tantalising doubt about the identity of the poem that was "ghastly"! Is it his own poem or my translation of it? Since his reply to my letter is dated 15/7/52, we may imagine that if my version is the "ghastly" one, then Uys must have been going the rounds among the critics between the 21st of June and the 12th of July!

At the risk of becoming boring, however, I must again write at length about that poem of his and my translation of it, if only to highlight how critical acumen in one person's mind and upon paper can also be a kind of critical doughheadedness in the mind and upon the tongue of another. Literary kitchen can really be as deeply into tastelessness as into toothsomeness.

I must say, at one time I thought to keep one of Uys's Afrikaans words in my Scots version of that "Malelaan" ballad, chiefly because of the convenient alliteration. Two particular lines of his mention (in the singular) the bird called the *kiewiét*, known to us as the lapwing, or more usually in Scots as the peeweep, or peewee, or peewit, or peaseweep, even "peaser", whatever else. In the Afrikaans, his lines are

Droef uit die verte
roep 'n kiewiét...

and I first thought to translate as

Dowf i the boond
kiewietjies caa...

but changed the latter line to "the peeweeps caa", pluralising it, as you see. Also, as at that time I happened to be working in a Fife coal-pit (Lumphinnans No. 11) nicknamed *The Peeweep*, I thought to preserve the association.

I can imagine nothing more enjoyable than to listen to that *Ballade* spoken well in its Afrikaans, and then to recite my own *Ballat* translation of it in juxtaposition, as it were!

And as to that, I may say here that I did make just that sort of juxtaposition when the original and my Scots version of it became part of an article that I wrote for the magazine *Chapman* some years ago. I realise now that I should have sent Uys a copy of the magazine at the time, but as it happened, by then I had lost touch with him. I used his poem as an illustration of the dichotomy that had become apparent between the English-speaking and Afrikaans-speaking South Africans, and not, as in the poem, an account of the relationship between a man and a woman

The heart of the article dealt with the imprisonment of Barbara Hogan, Peggy's niece, for "treason" during apartheid. Latter, she was released about the same time as Nelson Mandela. She is now a Member of Parliament in South Africa.

But now, to say a something more about the "Malelaan ballad", to put it as gently upon the page as might the hand go gently into a *wag-n-bietjie* bush on the veld, I am going to quote a couple of stanzas in their original Uys Krige Afrikaans, followed by my Scots version. A *wag-n-bietjie* bush is paticularly jaggy, by the way, as its name suggests, "wait-a- little", or haud-on-ye. Here are the stanzas.

"Ja, alles sterwe wat
die mens verruk,
hoop en verwagting
en die geluk

– haas ongemerk,
stil, langsaam aan
soos die waters gaan,
die waters gaan..."

And here are the Scots versions.

"Ay, aa man maks
aye mells wi daith
as esperance
an blytheheid baith

aye struissle wi
waanhowp an dool,
as rinnin watter
meets the pool..."

You see how strange it is that rhyme in Scots poetry may be in conflict with reality, or, you might say, "How often phantasy is in conflict with reality." If you disagree, look carefully at the works of Robert Burns, among others.

Therefore, do not be surprised if it is news to you that the "pool" used in that translation should be "pown". Mind you, our word "dowie" means "dool" also, but I was into the "dool" too deeply to conform. It is true that certain English people use an "ow" sound in place of the normal "ol". Thus Bolton in England is well-known as "Bowton", even as Tarbolton is equally well-known in Ayrshire as "Tarbowton." Also, a knoll is a "knowe" to us, even as a troll is a "trow". Why, even the humble morning roll is sometimes known as a "rowe". Perhaps there are a few more, but they are not forefront in my mind today.

23.11.95

In a letter to me dated Saturday 19/7/52 from London House, Guildford Street, London, Uys said, among other things, "...We'll have an "orgy" of poetry – which will probably bring me back to the fold. Have strayed a long way from the paths of poetry." As will be seen from what I have written above and elsewhere about his poetry, obviously we did have a bittock of such an orgy.

In another "London House" letter, dated 29/9/52, but curiously on paper headed with a musical logo above EDINBURGH INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL and sub-titled *of Music and Drama,* Uys thanked us, saying "You gave me one of the most wonderful holidays I have ever had. It was not an ordinary holiday. It was a festival, voyage of discovery, education, feast of the heart & several other things all rolled into one. I'll never forget it. I've surprised London with my bouncing vitality. Everyone says: "If that's what Scotland does for one, we'd better all go to Scotland."

That letter was full of happy comment, even an unimaginable "I miss you all, & London House is so drab compared with 7 Thistle Street." That comment followed a few typical crowded questions, so like Uys. "How are you all? Tom's eye? And little John." I must say I cannot remember what had distressed my eye.

Still addressed from London House, but minus a date, I have to depend on the envelope that tells me the next letter was date-stamped in London at 10.30 PM on 3 Dec 1952, the notepaper this time headed PROVINCIAL ADMINISTRATION OF THE CAPE OF GOOD HOPE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION.

Apart from all else of importance in this letter, I have to say here that it was a kind of pot-calling-the-kettle-black letter, as judge you this: "You have such a peculiar handwriting, I can't quite make out some of your sentences however hard I try."

There are many things of interest to South African literature in this letter, but as far as Scotland is concerned Uys said, "Now I'm taking up my correspondence again. And one by one all my neglected friends will hear from me. I shall write soon to Morris and Hugh MacDiarmid – something I should have done months ago. Have you seen them again? Please give them all my best regards – including Norman McGabe. (I seem to have my spelling of Scottish names all wrong this morning) And tell them I'll not easily forget the warmth of their welcome."

As the reader will recognise, Uys meant "MacCaig" in the above extract.

25.11.1995

While writing like this, which means that one must be as attentive to the past as to the present, sometimes it seems that one is into a kind of disparateness of thought, wondering if what one says is as true as fiction realised or as false as the realisation of fiction personalised.

At such a time, although clarity of thought seems not at all as amber-hued as a burn in spate, it seems that another eye in discrimination would be as valuable as

ambidextrousness used to be prime in a coal-trimmer during bunkering. Mind you, though, I happen to be as ambidextrous as that myself, nae bother with handling a Number Six shovel, though never in the hold of a ship, though once upon a whiff of the making of whisky in my youth, I did fire a boiler. I am not certain of the shovel number size on that occasion.

Is what is seen today of long ago as true of what it really was? The judge of that is the reader as well as the writer, with this difference, that the latter is always conscious of it. Occurrences are only as true as the essential within them makes them other than themselves, like the realisation of a world within a world, though neither of those worlds ever really at odds with the other.

Each of them is an exercise as ongoing as take a thought, scribble a poem, and as to their importance, I mind the day when a wallet had a division allocated to the importance of a 10/- (ten-shilling) note.

OCCURRENCES

Och well, now, and remembering
is every bit as clear, and like
the impressions made in Auchterarder
this very morning as I went
up Ruiven Street and on, stravaiging
in High Street, nineteen ninety-five,
the air as soft as warm, November
the twenty-fifth, not cold as might be.

See thon paer bodie, eyes downbent
upon the ground aye in retreat
as though the inner mind behind them
were into every passing thought
that might well be imponderable,
as muckle as the movement made
by Earth itself, not just in birling
around, but timed with sun's own guidance.

See yon roch bodie in an eatery,
as gutsy as can shovel grub
in gobbets ben the gub, then slurping
down liquids equally with greed,
so that those gobbets slither over
the thrapple smoothly, easily
as salmon parr above the pebbles
of native grush, down the river.

28.11.1995

In autobiographical writing, "Not to say" often means "What to say?" even as "What is said" is often enough not "Take it as read" but often rather more like "Take not as read." Those considerations are meaningless in honesty of writing which is as true as a picture in the eyes is lumination of the mind, even as lumination of the mind may be pictured on the page.

But how shockingly dreadful it is when a reading of the page discloses character of creator the very match of a photograph of the same that discloses eyes and set of features that can gar us say, "Yae luk at yon puhss tells us whit kinna bodie yon yin is." And how pleasant it is to write about people who always made for us the kind of day that was never to be nighted, but was always to remain as warm as their characters matched the varied characteristic aspects of their faces. Coming to these concluding paragraphs of what to some may seem to be, perhaps, minor memoirs, I realise how lucky I have been throughout most of my life, and particularly so during the times remembered here with the people who made them memorable to me.

There are only two letters of the old batch available here to me, one of them dated 27.2.52 in Paris, but 27. 2.52 date-stamped, and the other from 1971 already quoted. I think to leave them abee for better days and nae bother, because what is left to say is merely what was left of my last attempt to contact Uys just before he died.

29.11.1995

Towards the end of the year 1986, I began the composition *Wilderness,* which is concerned with the desert, particularly as represented by a passage from Charles M. Doughty's *Travels in Arabia Deserta* and by some of the desert ambience in the Afrikaans poetry of Uys Krige. During that period, on the 7th of December of that year, I added to the general "dry" environment by translating Uys's *Blomme van die Boland,* calling it *_Flooers in the Boland,* and including it in *Wilderness* with the others.

30.11.1995

Having heard from South African sources that Uys was beginning to be a little distant in manner because of his age, as naturally most of us do become, I thought to reintroduce myself, as it were, since I wanted to send him a copy of the exercise I had done with Doughty's work and Uys's own Afrikaans. Therefore, on the 12th of April in 1987, I wrote to him from Auchterarder, addressing the letter to Uys at Protea Road, Onrust, near Hermanus, Cape Province.

Dear Uys,

After all those years, here now first of all to wish you well and to let you know that Peg and I still think back with great pleasure to those days in Dunfermline when you stayed with us. Of course, we are feeling our years now, and that is the way of things, but we now have two granddaughters and one grandson to take up where one day we shall leave off!

However, I am not going to say very much in this letter as it is by way of being an exploratory one, for I am trying to ascertain if you do indeed dwell at the address above. If you do, or if a relative of yours does, perhaps I could be informed so that I may write again and send you some material which may interest you. It is a collection of translations into Scots verse of some of Charles Doughty's prose from his *Arabia Deserta* along with accompanying comment, and topped-off with translations of mine of your own Afrikaans poems into Scots.

If this letter reaches you, please let me know, and I shall send the material on along with further comment and information, for it really should be in your own hands or with your literary executors.

I type this rather than give you my hand of write because I prefer that you should read it easily and not be bothered with deciphering.

With the very best wishes that Peg and I can send,
and hoping you keep well.

Tom.

As will be seen from his reply, Uys had indeed become confused in memory, as I can well understand nowadays each time I think and rethink, while trying to recall the important among the trivial when even the trivial becomes an exercise in memory,. especially, say, when I walk upstairs for a something and forget what that something can possibly be.

Dated 14/5/87, from P.O. Onrust River, 7201, his reply indicated that my surmises had been correct. His typed letter is signed in his own hand, "Your old friend, Uys Krige," and the last sentence of his PS, which refers to the name "Auchterarder", says "It sounds very German. Like my own name." and is again signed. Here is the letter.

My Dear Tom,

Many thanks for your short but pregnant letter dated April 12th. I should have answered earlier but I have been more or less confined to my bed for almost a month. It is nothing serious, however.

Where did we meet? In Cape Town? Clifton? I have been to so many places as a journalist, etc, etc. And I'm beginning to forget and forget and forget... Yes, Sir, I just sommer never forget to forget . But I hear younger people than I start developing this same trait.

Were you born in South Africa?

When did I stay with you in Dunfermline? Were your translations from Charles Doughty's *Arabia Deserta* published at all? And if they were, was it in book or magazine form?

And my nine poems you translated... what are their titles? I am fascinated.

Yes, thanks for typing your letter. I have much trouble in deciphering the scrawls of quite a number of my correspondents. And there's nothing wrong with my eyesight. During the war officers and soldiers at times remarked on my good eyesight.

"You seem to see things clearly which to us seem very vague in the distance," they said.

I must end now. I'll write a better letter next time.

My love to you and Peg.

Your old friend,
Uys Krige

PS.What is the Auchterarder which you have included in your address? It sounds very German. Like my own name...

Uys Krige

Look at the delightful Afrikaans intrusion and its ambiguity in the phrase above "...I just sommer never forget to forget." the word "sommer" means "just" or "for no reason" according to the dictionary. Uys was reverting to type a wee bit, but you can see that it 's naither wunner he was a man of language, slipping in a word of Afrikaans among his English. Is it not strange that I must tell you, if you are not Scots, that is, that "naither wunner" means "neither wonder", that is, "no wonder"? After all, most of us do revert to type now and then. I know that on the approach to winter, I am drawn to hibernation, by way closing the blinds, beiking myself fornent the fire, enjoying the early darkening of the light, so that in thinking of the great beyond into which Uys has gone, I tend to retreat like that in language and think of the immensity of eternity in the following manner.

Ayont the aathing, yit faurben anaa
thon aagaets made the ocht creatioun saw,
inbye the great nae mair, nae mair, nae mair,
in paradox no thare, no thare, no thare.

As will be seen in the above letter, though Uys was suffering from memory lapse as I had gathered from my South African informants, the essential man was still to the fore, questions as ever tell me, tell me, tell me, in tone.I determined I was going to answer those questions as fully as necessary, for they represented to me, as they must to him, considering our ages, something like "the end of an auld sang." Here is my letter to him, dated 7 June 1987.

My dear Uys,

Thank you for your letter of 14.5.87, and with it the confirmation that I do have your address correctly.

Knowing that like myself you are beginning to be forgetful, please bear with me if I give you a few pointers about the past. Your questions first.

Where did we meet? First of all by correspondence after I had translated one or two of your poems into Scots. Peg had put me on to your work. Then you came to Scotland to stay with us in Dunfermline for a few months in 1952 while you were finishing your book *The Dream and the Desert* which was published in 1953.

No, I was not born in South Africa, but in Scotland, but I did serve with the RAF in South Africa before going on to West Africa and Europe.

No, the *Arabia Deserta* piece has not yet been published and was made only recently.The nine poems of yours, which I juxtapose to my translation of the English of Doughty about his desert beasts, are, as you will see in the enclosed typescript, as follows:

Die Soldaat
Die Pad deur die Woestyn
Die Ende van die Pad
Blomme van die Boland

Kitaar
Die Ballade van die Waters van die See
Ballade
Die Seemeeu (I)
Die Seemeeu (II)

I did not really translate *Die Seemeeu (II)* as it stood, but took the liberty of using its substance, extrapolating from it, but ensuring that your own version of the thought runs through my own extrapolation: perhaps like the sound of the sea-maw itself!

Of course, were there to be publication of the *Wilderness* as a whole, the ideal shape of it would also include your nine Afrikaans poems in the same manner as I have seen fit to include the Doughty English. Would that meet with your approval?

Last question, last answer! Auchterarder is a small town between Stirling and Perth. The name is not Germanic as you may have thought it sounded. It is Scots Gaelic, the meaning given variously as "upland of high water" (shades of 'Witwatersrand'), or something like "high summit land" or "field on the high ground". The main street of the town is a long declivity, on one side the land sloping down to a great, broad strath, and the other to a river (the Ruthven) at the foot of the Ochil Hills, making the ridge anciently a kind of boundary between the incoming Scots Gaels from the west and the resident Pictish (or Strathclyde British) in the east, The old Pictish capital, called Forteviot, is not far from here. The name "Ochil" is Welsh for "high" and does not occur in Gaelic, though the latter must surely hold some of it in "Auchter".

My dear old friend, I hope I do not bore you with such outpourings. But let me tell you this, between friends, that I tend to write as furiously and at large as I remember you used to talk, a manner I also descry in your poetry which delights me.

And now I am to say two things more. One, do you remember my taking you to a "Welcome to Scotland" ceilidh (a kind of party) we gave for you at Morris Blythman's house in Glasgow? Among the company there with Morris, was Hugh MacDiarmid, Hamish Henderson and Norman MacCaig. The latter two are still to the fore, but MacDiarmid and my good friend Morris Blythman are both dead.

And the second and last thing, Uys: please do not think you should try to write at length to me. I do not want you to be troubled. Just keep well and look to your physical and mental comforts. And remember this: your desert poems are superb, and your *Ballade,* which I always think of as *The Malelaan Poem,* is received very well in its Scots translation, and that must say a great deal for the original.

Please forgive this delay in writing. I have been waiting for copies of the four snaps enclosed, and they have just arrived this morning. The child in your arms there is now a 35 year old bearded man, and lives near enough for us to look after his daughter Anna whenever needed. We have another son, Andrew, whom you did not know, and he has given us another granddaughter, Sheonagh, and a grandson, David.

Peg sends her love as I do, and says you must take care of yourself. We do not grow any younger!

In eild, which is old age, totsiens may often be
not so long but too long, even as our sore-felt cri
de coeur then for the-morra that is in "more
is nog 'n dag" is of but outwith our own story.

Yet despite that, Uys, here are our best wishes from Peg and me for you this day, this summer day.

Tom.

1.12.1995

When I wrote above that Uys's desert poems were superb, perhaps I should have extrapolated. After all, like Uys, I was familiar with the dry veld around Wonderboom in the Transvaal beneath the hills around the airfield north of Pretoria, and also across the wide morgen areas (acreages) around Pietersburg in the Northern Transvaal.

I suppose northern people like ourselves here in Scotland, who are very familiar with ongoing wet weather, or the promise of it, like today's gray skies, are fascinated with the droothie desert type of environment in areas of countries like South Africa: hence my appreciation of the desert aspects of Uys Krige's poetry. By way of comparison, witness the preoccupation in southern people with the wet of rain, river, flood and foam. Considering the lack of water in vast areas of, say, Australia, it is amazing how many of its common calendars bear illustrations showing water in some form or another.

Concerning the innards of some of the information about the material I sent to Uys, as described in that letter, here below I excerpt a passage from another which I sent on the 26th of August 1987 to my sister-in-law, Mrs Sheila Clogg, where she was living in the Cape Province.

"...About the death of Uys Krige now. Not very long ago I wrote to him and had a letter in reply which, of course, made it obvious he was becoming a little forgetful. However, I wanted him or his literary executors to see a composition I had made of some of his poems translated into Scots, combined with another exercise which took into account the desert prose of Charles M. Doughty. Anyway, I sent him a folder copy recently, but whether it arrived safely or not, and whether he saw it or not, I have no way of knowing. Time alone will tell, for I do not know any of his family or relatives, and in any case, do not want to intrude..."

Afterwards, in various letters and cuttings from South Africa, I did learn much about Uys that was new to me, but none of it really related to what I wanted to write about him here. What is important in one's relationship with others is not so much in being able to answer questions about them that may be of interest to others, but in posing questions about one's self that are of no interest to anyone but one's self. Perhaps such an inability to pose questions is to dislike one's self, but that is neither here nor there, because this account of Uys Krige in the gray north is made to present him as he was and to hope that in doing so I have been able to see myself a little more clearly.

June to December 1995
in Auchterarder.

UYS KRIGE IN THE GRAY NORTH

by

T.S.Law

In this copy, the dates given now and then within the text are left there merely to indicate when most of the underlying words were written. Subsequently, much was added, but left undated.

C O N T E N T S

FOREWORD

This is an account of a brief visit to Dunfermline in Scotland that was made by Uys Krige in 1952, and is one of a series of short compilations that I have written concerning certain people and places that have been of some past and continuing importance to me. If this, and indeed, those other extrapolations of experience, should be seen as indulgences, let the reader bear with me while considering self-interest important or otherwise. It is said that there are books in everyone: this minor screed is one of mine, and if it is faulted, the sort of hitches involved are natural to me alone. No matter how our worlds are made naturally, we tend to remake them in our own images.

As this is the twenty-sixth day of September in the year nineteen hundred and ninety-six, about nine months since I completed the lave of this work, it will be realised how eild may well have the quaint notion that time is ultimately accommodating! And that may well be true, for in thinking over these reminiscences, I find myself back into a very satisfying maturity, regretful only in not having made more of their early actualities while time was at one with them.

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26 September 1996

Dear Barend Toerien,

Looking at your letter, and seeing it dated 10 September 1996, I must apologise for my dilatoriness in not replying sooner, especially as I note that you are looking for information concerning dates (which may be important to you in your work concerning Uys).

First of all, then, *Wilderness* itself has not been published, though a few of the poems in it have appeared here and there in a magazine or an anthology. And now, having said that, I can tell you that I have been awash in a sea of paper and books looking for relevant publications. Of the nine Uys Krige poems that I made into Scots, I can say that his *Die Soldaat, Kitaar, Die Ballade van die Waters van die See* and *Ballade* were published here, but I can put my hand on only one magazine and one anthology to prove that.

Details, then: my version *The Ballat o the Watters o the Sea* appeared in Hugh MacDiarmid's magazine, *The Voice of Scotland,* Vol.IV, No. 1 September 1947.

I think my *Guitar* also was published in another edition of that magazine, but I cannot find a copy of it among my papers.

The Sodger is in the anthology *The New Makars*, published in 1991 by James Thin, The Mercat Press, Edinburgh, on Pages 31,32,33. Of no interest as far as Uys Krige's work is concerned, that anthology also printed on Page 36 my *The Makar* that was made from the Afrikaans of A.D.Keet.

Uys's *Ballade* (that he called his Malelaan poem), appeared in the Edinburgh magazine *Chapman,* as part of an article I wrote, but I am afraid, once more I cannot find a copy of it among my regrettably-jumbled records.

By way of apology for my failure to give you completely definitive information, you will find below this letter a copy of a memoir of mine called *Uys Krige in the Gray*

North. Perhaps you will find enough there to help you put a something from me into your studies of that fine Afrikaans poet.

On this day that is as sunny as South Africa, but a little windy,
here are my best wishes for the success of your work, but signed
more companionably than by my initials.

Tom Law