

"NAE THING IS PRUVEN" or, me Garioch — you Jane.

"But that's not relevant to poetry, that's only life" said Robert Garioch. So what is relevant? "Oh, well... you can't analyse...."

I'll never know what can't be analysed, because at that moment a glass of Belhaven arrived, and with evident relief one rather bored poet launched into a meandering tale of Real Ale, CAMRA and maturing in wood. Robert Garioch doesn't like answering questions. He likes saying what comes into his head. Which means that within four minutes he's changed the conversation (or do I mean monologue?) from Radio Forth to ping-pong machines to Hugh McDiarmid.

His conversation wandered in the same way his poetry reading had. During this he had been surrounded by tatty old books, pulling sheaves of handwritten poems from large envelopes and apparently reading whatever came to hand first. His brain evidently works on a similar system.

His eyes wander as well, rather disconcertingly. And they glint. Relevant or nor, Garioch obviously finds students as daft in real life as they are in his poems.

Considering he taught English for thirty years, that's not too surprising. He looks like a retired teacher, with an Edinburgh accent. Only his eyes and his conversational style fit in with the image of a wild Scottish poet.

What is surprising is that he hated teaching and still did it for thirty years. I asked why and was rewarded with the previously quoted profundity about the relevance of poetry and life. Plus, a little later, something about pensions always being awarded after thirty years.

It's also surprising that he taught English considering that he started writing in Scots dialect as "...a reaction against my course at Edinburgh University, which was then called Rhetoric and English Literature" (It's now called English Literature and English Language, and I didn't have the heart to enlighten him. I'm not sure he would have cared.)



One of Garioch's poems, *Doktor Faust in Rose Street*, screams: "Nae thing is pruvén, naething pruvable"

and Mr. Garioch in CCII does his best to live up to that dictum. He'll make an idealistic statement, finish it with something cynically realistic and look delighted when I'm thrown into confusion. "Are you sure you've asked enough questions, You've hardly taken any notes. You'll never get a thousand words out of that"

Either old teaching habits die hard or he's got an evil sense of humour. I think it's the latter. Why did he first publish his poetry?

"Oh, it never bothered me; just as long as you're writing, that's the main thing, you know. I wasn't anxious to publish at all. Well, that's not quite true. In fact when I first published I had to set up a press at my own expense and print it myself.... one letter at a time, I suppose I was quite anxious. I like to be noticed...."

He shouldn't have said that. A very English person flounced up and said in a very English voice that the BBC had used the word "havering" to mean "swithering", ignoring the proper meaning of the word, and did Mr. Garioch not agree... Yes, Mr. Garioch agreed. Yes it was terrible. And he does poetry readings for fun? Something like that.

Eventually the English person flounced off. Mr. Garioch watched him move away. His expression was somewhere between stoical acceptance and total unbelief.

There was a silence. Then he decided to finish me off completely:

"I'm sick in the head you know."

Ghostly silence. And it was just a bit too long before I smiled unconvincingly and said I hadn't noticed.

"It might not show, but it's there"

And he drifted off into some anecdote about his picture being in the Radio Times. I put my notes away and he started interviewing me.

"What are you writing this for?"

"Brig"

"What?"

"Er well, it's a sort of student newspaper"

Robert Garioch gave a strategic sigh,

"I'm so battered and blase, it must be nice not to be, to be involved..."

Exit Robert Garioch, leaving nothing proved or provable. But he was right, I didn't get a thousand words.

Interview by Jane Webster.

HELP! by Barbara Peterson. (Penguin, price £1)

This is a brand new book in the Penguin series "For People with No Initiative". It has elements of both the Blue Peter Annual and Alternative London (in a much respectabilised way), and purports to be a "practical reference book for anyone starting out to live on their own away from home". Handy tips are offered on activities as diverse as ironing shirts and love-making. Unfortunately the latter are not empirical, and when you turn to the sections on sex you are confronted with italicised slogans leaping out of the page: *Many are dissatisfied with material values; people are less ready to do things just because they are told; etc.* Six sentences are devoted to an in-depth discussion of

homosexuality, and these conclude with the suggestion that "if it bothers you, you should talk it over with a doctor". The address of the Campaign for Homosexual Equality is also included, whether by mistake or out of a half-baked liberalism I cannot decide.

On the whole, the trite hints in such areas as mending fuses, buying meat etc., are inoffensive if unnecessary. The diagrams offered in illustration of the difficult bits (e.g. "put two halves of plug together and replace screws") are good for a laugh as well. More serious shortcomings are to be found under the more serious headings. Legal advice is wishy-washy. The birth control information is tedious and somewhat reproachful.

The drugs information isn't information at all; proclaiming connections between drugs and crime, failing to make distinctions between quite different drugs, and, of course bleating *cannabis leads on to other things.*

A brief glimpse through this book will, in fact, put you off alcohol, nicotine, drugs, squatting and "too much" sex. Or try to. A thoroughly noxious piece of work, which offers a much worse guide to being alive than either *The Bible* or *Being and Nothingness*. For "Jackie" readers only.

Nicholas Young.