



Learmonth, A. and Riach, A. (2016) This 'Brutish' view of the pro-indy side in verse could not be much worse. *National*, 2016, 22 Dec.

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Deposited on: 30 April 2018

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This ‘Brutish’ view of the pro-indy side in verse could not be much worse

YOUR favourite independence supporting newspaper found itself the muse for the most unlikely of poets yesterday. A pro-union lyricist penned a small sonnet about everything he hates on the pro-indy side. We don’t think we’ve ever been the victims of poetry before. We think we understood it, but to truly get to grips we asked regular contributor Alan Riach, Professor of Scottish Literature at the University of Glasgow, to cast his eye over the verse.

Here’s how it went:

STILL BRITISH IN THE MORNING

Here’s Alan’s take:

I read “Still British in the Morning” and immediately thought of David Hutchison’s “The Experience and Contexts of Drama in Scotland” in *The Edinburgh Companion to Scottish Drama*, edited by Ian Brown (Edinburgh University Press, 2011). Hutchison is succinct: “Liveness is of the essence of the theatrical experience.” The problem is that since the days of the music hall, screen media has contested the attractiveness of liveness. Hutchison concludes: “important as radio, television and film are for the understanding and experience of Scottish drama in the twenty-first century, live theatre remains crucial to its existence and success.” The quality of being “live” in precisely this sense is what makes all art vital. Its palpable absence in these lines matches their subject, imagery, form and tone, each aspect of the thing being dead as a nail in a coffin. Presumably someone must have imagined some amusement being prompted but I can’t feel the merest flicker of a twitch of “live” entertainment in any phrase, word or syllable anywhere in it. However, those references to Wallace and Bruce do prompt further reflection on some real poems of lasting value. I’ll spend some time with these in tomorrow’s essay.

One further thought, Hugh MacDiarmid’s little squib “The Difference”:

I am a Scotsman and proud of it.

Never call me British. I’ll tell you why.

It’s too near brutish, having only

The difference between U and I.

Scant difference, you think? Yet

Hell-deep and Heavenhigh!