

Kirkie Dobie died in January 1999 at the age of 91. *The Dark Horse* is proud that it printed the first ever consideration of his poetry, plus a generous selection of eight pages of poems, in our launch issue in 1995. About nine months after his death Ann Karkalas, always one of his staunchest advocates, submitted a selection of work previously unprinted for consideration. We print a number of those poems here.

Kirkie Dobie was buried with his manual typewriter (the vicissitudes of using which frequently receive comic mention in his letters), perhaps to be fully prepared for when inspiration strikes, in whatever realm.

KIRKPATRICK DOBIE was that increasingly rare thing: a poet who remained all his life in one area, and wrote from that perspective. Born in 1908 in Dumfries, with the exception of a few years in Hawick as a bank clerk in the early thirties, he never lived elsewhere. In the 1930s, after the sudden death of his brother, he took over the family grain business in the town. An impressively well-read autodidact — Shakespeare and the Romantic Poets were special favourites — with a subtly polemical and argumentative nature, he wrote verse which shares something of the unfoolable tone and scepticism of the astute grain merchant he was. Coupled with his sure grasp of craft, this gives his best poems an authority taken direct from experience.

Yet he did not begin writing seriously until middle age. He was a founder member of Dumfries Writers' Workshop in 1967, and self-published locally a number of pamphlet collections, which usually sold out. He never courted publication in magazines, unless requested to submit work. When I commented about his being unfairly 'overlooked', he shot back: "I've been overlooked because I never sent magazines anything. I felt it would be a waste of time." In his private literary judgements on other poets he brought the breadth of his literary knowledge and long perspective to bear; consequently, he was a stringent critic.

It wasn't until the publication of his *Selected Poems*, in 1992, by Cornwall's Peterloo Poets press, that he came to the attention of a wider public. Ann Karkalas, of Glasgow University's Department of Continuing Education, was instrumental in the book's publication. Kirk, or Kirkie, as his friends knew him, was then 84. The book deserved wider attention than it received. Its poems are rigorously made, engaging, and wholly individual. Writing about some of them in *The Dark Horse*, Ann Karkalas noted that they "make the familiar seem strange, but not at all as a deliberate shock-effect. The strangeness belongs to the world."

Kirkie never lost a sense of the world's strangeness, refracted as it often was through his lifelong debate with Christianity. He had an individual cast of

mind which was diverting and unpredictable. He retained a gift for following, confidently, the complexities of his own intellect. Yet there was nothing arid about this. The whole man was always engaged.

Near the end of his life, in a letter to me, he reflected: "...of my parents and the shop and store and the gamekeepers — 'Manly men, servants but not servile' — the only thing left — precariously — is what I've set down in verse." Mixing craft with the grain of an individual voice, some 10-15 of his poems could surely hold their own in any anthology of the best Scottish poetry this century. In an age of hype and inflated reputations, that is no small claim.

GERRY CAMBRIDGE

The above obituary is reprinted from *The Herald*.