Scottish Literature and Visual Art: A Caledonian Synergy

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The 2009 Andrew Tannahill Lecture
This lecture explores the rich relationship between Scottish writing and visual art. This extends from visual responses to Macpherson, Burns and Scott to artists working with Gaelic poetry in our own time. While the focus is on Scottish art the effect of Scottish literature on visual art internationally is also be noted.

I begin with the cover of the first issue of Poetry Scotland, published by William MacLellan of Glasgow in the 1940s. The image is by the artist William Crosbie but until I read Alan Riach’s essay about Andrew Tannahill I was unaware that William Crosbie had been one of Andrew Tannahill’s circle in Glasgow. That link brought Andrew Tannahill alive for me as a cultural presence.

It is a privilege to give this first Andrew Tannahill lecture here at the National Library of Scotland. Tannahill

* Murdo Macdonald, Professor of History of Scottish Art, University of Dundee, presented The Andrew Tannahill Lecture at the National Library of Scotland, 1 October 2009, at 7pm. Professor Macdonald’s most recent publication is Seallach as ur air Ealain na Gàidhealtachd: Rethinking Highland Art (Royal Scottish Academy, 2013).
was a poet of principle who was deeply committed to the understanding of Scottish culture. He stood against ignorance, and so do I. The need for such a position is still all too apparent, for the proper avenues of cultural transmission still do not exist in Scotland.

Indeed, we are still in a state of what I have called ‘eternally recurrent renaissance’. That is to say, however much activity there is at any one time, a few years later it seems as though it has never happened because the knowledge generated has not been integrated into the strategic decisions of, for example, galleries or universities or schools. And, of course, if you are not informed about your own culture you are not just impoverished at a personal level, you are at an international disadvantage.

This evening’s lecture gives me an opportunity to explore the links between two of the key expressions of Scottish culture, namely literature and art. But first I would like to draw attention to the contribution made to this topic by Alexander Moffat and Alan Riach in their recent book, Arts of Resistance, published by Luath. This includes Alexander Moffat’s portrait of Sorley MacLean, one of series of portraits in which Moffat has asserted the significance of Scottish poets.

And it is to Sorley MacLean, in combination with William Crosbie, that I turn for my real starting point this evening. The image I want to consider can be found as a frontispiece in the first edition of Sorley MacLean’s book of Gaelic poems, Dàn do Eimhir, which was published by William MacLellan in 1943. It is a little considered image but it is, to my mind, one of the most significant works made by any Scottish artist of the mid twentieth century. In this image one sees not just a reflection of Sorley MacLean’s poetry but an indication of the place that his poetry occupies in the literature of Scotland. MacLean has his place among the great poets of twentieth-century Europe and at the time Crosbie
worked on *Dàin do Eimhir*, it is quite clear that he, Crosbie, had absorbed the lessons of European modernism also. There is thus a true synergy between artist and poet.

The significance of Crosbie’s image is that he has picked up not just on the poet’s words, but on MacLean’s trajectory as a poet, whether one is to regard him as a representative of the Gaidhealtachd, or as a great European. I cannot look at Crosbie’s image without thinking of MacLean’s work as a whole, including his unfinished sequence, *The Cuillin*, not just because of the presence of the Cuillin ridge in the image, but because Crosbie seems to conjure images from that ridge, which is exactly what MacLean did in his poetry. There have been many outstanding responses to MacLean’s work in more recent years, for example those of Will Maclean or Donald Urquhart, yet this very first response to *Dàin do Eimhir* still holds its own.

Another of Andrew Tannahill’s circle was Sorley MacLean’s fellow poet Douglas Young, and Young played a crucial role in the publication of *Dàin do Eimhir*. In his preface he notes that the publisher was ‘remembering the glorious Celtic tradition of illustration’ and that he ‘wished to have the book embellished by a first-rate leading young Scots artist’. There is much else to say about Crosbie, but I hope that I have convinced you what a good choice he was in this regard. Indeed Douglas Young goes on to say: ‘It may be that five centuries hence [Crosbie’s images] will be rated with the designs in *The Book of Kells*.’ This may seem to put rather a lot of pressure on Crosbie, but what Young writes is important. He is drawing attention the quality of Crosbie’s work by associating it with one of the most significant works of medieval European art, which is at the same time a key early work in the long history of visual responses to literature in Scotland. By mentioning *The Book of Kells*, which was begun in Iona in the early ninth century, he stakes a claim to
that history not just for William Crosbie but for Sorley MacLean and he is, of course, absolutely right to do so.

In the context that Young creates for us, that of reclaiming cultural history, it is worth remarking upon the persistence in Scotland of the type of Celtic design that one finds in *The Book of Kells*. It can be found again in the West Highland School of Sculpture in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and it can be found later still in the decoration of musical instruments and weapons in the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It is then taken up in the nineteenth century by the Celtic Revival, and through that route it comes to us today.

The most distinguished Celtic Revival artist at the time of the publication of Sorley Maclean’s *Dàin do Eimhír* was George Bain, whose highly influential analyses of Celtic art were also published by William MacLellan. Building on the work of scholars like Romilly Allen and artists like John Duncan, Bain engaged in the geometrical analysis of Celtic knotwork, beginning with the interlace on Pictish stones, and proceeding in due course to the great illuminated manuscripts of Iona and Northumbria. He then utilised his knowledge, often for book and magazine covers designed for MacLellan publications. These include the Gaelic and English magazine *Alba*, published in 1948. Bain also made numerous illustrations for Douglas Young’s book of poetry in Scots, a *Braird of Thristles*, published in 1947.

The cover is of particular interest because in its detail one can see Bain making a visual hypothesis about the relationship between Celtic knotwork and tartan. His illumination of Young’s poem in memory of the Perth poet William Souter is also outstanding. It appeared again, printed in a maroon ink, which is how we see it here, in another MacLellan publication, the edition of Scottish Art and Letters which marked the PEN Conference held at the Edinburgh Festival in 1950.
The cover of that special edition of Scottish Art and Letters is by J. D. Fergusson, and one feels that Fergusson is here giving his modernist response to tartan, just as Bain had given his Celtic revival response to tartan in his cover design for Douglas Young. Soon after, Fergusson was to make his unique contribution to this late period of the Celtic Revival through his use of Ogham script and other Celtic references in his decorations for Hugh MacDiarmid’s *In Memoriam James Joyce*, published in 1955, again, of course, by William MacLellan.

This blending of modernism and Celtic revivalism gives me an opportunity to reflect on the relationship between the twentieth-century Scots Renaissance of Hugh MacDiarmid and Sorley MacLean on the one hand and the earlier Celtic Revival of Patrick Geddes and his milieu of the 1890s. These movements are often portrayed as in opposition to one another, the one modernist and the other nostalgic, but what I am sure is already clear is that – at least from the visual perspective – they were continuous and complementary. To symbolise this I complement Fergusson’s collaboration with MacDiarmid from the 1950s with a Celtic revival work by Patrick Geddes’ colleague Helen Hay, a detail of her title page for *Lyra Celtica*, published in 1896. And of course in terms of intellectual continuity, the use of the phrase ‘Scots Renascence’ can be traced back to Patrick Geddes himself for it is the title of one of his essays published in 1895 in his Celtic revival magazine, *The Evergreen*. Not just that but in MacDiarmid’s book of autobiographical essays, *The Company I’ve Kept*, Geddes figures prominently.

But there were, of course, tensions. For example, Sorley MacLean’s contempt for the Celtic Revival Hebridean Love Lirts of Marjory Kennedy-Fraser, is well known. But this draws attention to an interesting issue. As John Purser has pointed out, Kennedy-Fraser’s work was after all just one example of what other composers were doing with folk
material throughout Europe. This was a practice that Scotland had in fact helped to pioneer through George Thomson’s work with Robert Burns a century earlier, not least through Beethoven’s wonderful setting of *The Lass of Inverness*. Thus the problem for Sorley Maclean was not really Kennedy-Fraser’s work as such, but the fact that her songs were one of the very few accepted outlets for Gaelic culture at the time.

So the heart of MacLean’s concern is that to encounter the Gaidhealtachd through Kennedy-Fraser is not really to encounter it at all. This point can, of course, be applied not just to Kennedy-Fraser, but to the way we still encounter so much of Scottish culture in general through stereotype rather than through education. For example, just as to encounter the Gaidhealtachd only through Kennedy-Fraser, is not really to encounter it at all, to encounter Scotland through Landseer’s *Monarch of the Glen*, is, again, not really to encounter it at all, a point explored with panache in John McGrath’s *The Cheviot, the Stag and the Black, Black Oil* in the 1970s. In short both Kennedy-Fraser and Landseer lead easily to stereotyping but stop well short of reality.

But note that stereotyping only becomes a problem when the stereotype is the only source of information available to you. There is nothing wrong with stereotypes in themselves, indeed they are often a useful psychological shorthand. The problem arises only when other sources of information are impoverished or denied. When that is the case stereotypes begin to function in a negative way because they are the only information available. And here I return to the point I made at the beginning. As long as we are ignorant of large parts of our own culture, as long as our universities, schools and galleries treat Scottish culture as tokenistic and subsidiary rather than as central to our international well being, we do not do justice to ourselves.

I can illustrate this point very easily with respect to artists’ responses to the works of Sir Walter Scott. We cannot
blame Edwin Landseer for creating an image that has become the foundation of a stereotype. What we can do is to put Landseer in a wider context. But most of us are presently too ignorant to do that as a matter of course, simply because the information that would enable us to do that, has never been made available to us. We should be able to take it for granted, but we can’t.

You are probably expecting me at this point to make some vague complaint about Landseer being an English artist. Not a bit of it. In fact what I want to do here is to illuminate the inadequacy of the Monarch of the Glen image of Scotland by drawing attention to another artist from south of the Border who responded to the work of Sir Walter Scott in a quite different way from that of Landseer, creating a work that outclassed any other painting of its day. I refer to J. M. W. Turner and his painting, Staffa, Fingal’s Cave, painted in 1832. Turner, like any great artist, leaves one in thoughtful contact with a place rather than in possession of a stereotype. Turner knew Sir Walter Scott and, thanks to Scott’s Edinburgh publisher, Cadell, collaborated closely with him towards the end of the writer’s life, in particular on a new edition of the poetical works. It was as a result of his journeying to illustrate Scott’s Lord of the Isles, that Turner was inspired to paint Staffa. There is much else that could be said about the Turner-Scott relationship. Not least that at the time Turner illustrated Scott’s poetry, he was well aware that Scott’s health was failing and several of the images, such as that of Dryburgh, combine into a moving visual elegy for the author through the places that were significant to him.

This is an extraordinarily powerful moment in the cultural history of Europe, for a writer who has a strong claim to being the greatest European writer of the day was working closely with an artist who has a strong claim to being the greatest European artist of the day. I stress the word ‘European’ for the Monarch of the Glen stereotype limits our...
perception not just of Scotland but of Scott. Turner’s work, by contrast, makes sure that we remember Scott’s role as a European. After Scott’s death Turner continued to work on Scott’s non-fiction prose works and if we see Scott through these images the European dimension is emphatic. So, if we do wish to see Scott through the eyes of an artist from south of the Border let it be primarily through the eyes of a great European like Turner, not an animal painter like Landseer. That is not to demean Landseer, but simply to see his contribution in context.

But to return to Scott’s poetry: as well as his great painting of Staffa, in the early 1830s Turner also made an image of Fingal’s Cave. The perspective is from the interior of the cave and it forms the title page vignette for Scott’s *Lord of the Isles*. The point I want to emphasise here is that Turner’s Staffa works also of course resonate – in their reference to Fingal – with the work of James Macpherson. Macpherson’s *Ossian*, which was published in the 1760s, was not a new interest for Turner, indeed on his first visit to Scotland some 30 years before he had painted a landscape inspired by Maepherson’s work. I therefore think it is reasonable to regard Turner’s Staffa painting from 1832 as owing as much to *Ossian* as to Scott.

I emphasise Turner’s interest in *Ossian* here, for it allows me to introduce a broader issue. It is all too easy for us to take Sir Walter Scott as the literary starting point for the development of an image of Scotland, but to forget James Macpherson would be a great mistake. Yet we still have a habit of forgetting Macpherson. Indeed I would argue that it is a further indication of our ignorance of our own culture that so many of us still find it easy to dismiss *Ossian*. Yet *Ossian* is one of the foundation works of modern European literature.

The success of Macpherson’s project was not only indicated by the popularity of his work in translation throughout Europe, but by the way that it was taken up by
visual artists. That response was both enduring and international. The first systematic visual response was made in the early 1770s, by Alexander Runciman, in the form of a mural scheme for Penicuik House. Unfortunately, Runciman’s mural scheme was destroyed by fire in 1899, but preparatory sketches and some very impressive etchings remain. There is also a fine engraved portrait of Ossian which may well be based on an untraced drawing by Runciman.

Runciman’s training was typical of a good Scottish artist of the day for he studied in Rome. His teacher there, in the 1760s, was the Scottish pioneer of European neoclassical painting, Gavin Hamilton, who distinguished himself with a series of major canvases illustrating *The Iliad*. These include *Achilles Lamenting the Death of Patroclus*, now in the National Gallery of Scotland, painted in the early 1760s. I hesitate to claim Homer as a Scottish author, but the response of Scots not just to Homer but to Virgil is an area of considerable interest in its own right. As early as 1513 Gavin Douglas has translated Virgil’s *Aeneid* into Scots, and in the eighteenth century Thomas Blackwell redefined how Homer was to be understood by Enlightenment thinkers. This is the wider Scottish context into which Hamilton’s visual art fits. In Rome, by 1769, Runciman himself was experimenting with the idea of a Homeric narrative scheme in imitation of Hamilton, but in due course the shift to *Ossian* took place. This classical-Celtic link is underlined when one notes that Thomas Blackwell was James Macpherson’s tutor at the University of Aberdeen. Alexander Runciman was thus a pioneer of the interplay between the Celtic and the classical that became a characteristic of artists’ responses to *Ossian* – throughout Europe – over the next forty years.

This Europeanisation of Macpherson’s vision took place initially through the work of the Danish painter Nicolai Abildgaard in the 1780s. A generation later *Ossian* was a key theme among French artists, among them Gerard, Girodet and
Ingres – all working at the behest of Napoleon. By the 1820s *Ossian* was taken for granted as a cultural reference point across Europe. But by that time the response to *Ossian* in visual art was waning, except in Scotland where it continued with David Scott and into the Celtic revival with John Duncan, indeed an *Ossian* portrait by Duncan was recently discovered in the archives of the Royal Scottish Academy. And in Scotland the response to *Ossian* continues, indeed there has been a strengthening of interest in recent years.

Consider the much more abstract point of view offered in the work of Norman Shaw from about 2003. Shaw’s line drawings conjure up not the image of the bard but a cultural landscape of complex, tightly packed contours that echoes what he calls the ‘sonorous’ nature of Macpherson’s text, the very feature that William Blake was to find so attractive and was to imitate in his own writings. Complementing Norman Shaw’s work from a figurative perspective is the response to *Ossian* by Calum Colvin. In 2002, he revisited the image of *Ossian* attributed to Runciman in an exhibition commissioned by the Scottish National Portrait Gallery. Colvin’s work is remarkable for the manner in which it evokes the fragmentary and incomplete nature of the material Macpherson brought together. This work reinvigorated the public appreciation of *Ossian* through visual art, indeed Colvin’s 2002 exhibition it is now regarded as a key moment in the chronology of *Ossian* studies.

But Calum Colvin’s work also gives me the opportunity to move on to the next writer I want to consider, namely Robert Burns. I want to consider Burns here not just as another key author to whom artists have responded but for his continuities with James Macpherson. From this point of view a particularly interesting response by Colvin is to *The Twa Dogs* for this is one of the poems in which Burns was influenced by Macpherson’s *Ossian*. Colvin gives a distinctly contemporary twist to the characters, which I think would
have delighted the poet. But the *Ossian* point is this: the financially poorer but culturally richer of the dogs, with whom Burns clearly identifies himself, is named Luath, after, to quote Burns’ own footnote in the Kilmarnock edition ‘Cuchullin’s dog in *Ossian*’s Fingal’. An *Ossian* reference occurs again later on in the Kilmarnock edition in *The Vision*, which is divided into what Burns, following Macpherson’s practice, calls ‘duans’. It is easy to forget these Ossianic references in Burns but they are important and in the visual response to his work they can become prominent.

*Ossian* is a pervasive influence as well as a direct reference in Burns, for the poet makes a number of references to Ossian-like bards; these references are often picked up by artists, not least by the multi-talented David Octavius Hill. Hill is better known as a photographer but his images for *The Land of Burns* published in 1840 are important. One of Hill’s compositions for this book is *Scene on the Lugar* in which a bard, standing in for Burns himself, laments the death of the poet’s friend and patron James, Earl of Glencairn. He sings seated by a river that flows though a classicised Scottish landscape. Thus bard and landscape become one. That of, course is the point of Hill’s *Land of Burns* taken as a whole, for the bard of the landscape is Burns himself.

A number of outstanding landscape images were made with respect to Burns as early as 1805, not least in works by his friend and portraitist Alexander Nasmyth and by the little known but highly talented engraver John Greig. D.O. Hill’s *Land of Burns* follows on from such work by bringing together a set of landscape images that relate to both Burns’ poems and to his travels. In *The Land of Burns* Hill asserts Burns’ connection to Scotland not just through the land as ploughed by him, but through the land as perceived by him. *The Land of Burns* is in fact an early expression of what the Finns call ‘national landscape’ – in connection with their own post-*Ossian* epic, *Kalevala*. And such national landscapes are
defined by poets. The memory of the poet literally inhabits the landscape in Hill’s views around Alloway, which always include in the distance the wonderful monument designed, on an Athenian model, in Burns’ honour by Thomas Hamilton.

I should stress here that Hill goes out of his way to reflect Burns’ classical dimension, a dimension that is, of course, fundamental to him as an Enlightenment poet. Thus Hill, just as Runciman had before him with respect to Ossian, brings Celtic and classical together in the context of Burns. From this perspective consider also the title page by John Leighton for George Gillfillan’s National Burns. It was published in 1879, almost 40 years after The Land of Burns, and it takes its cue directly from Burns’ poem The Vision, to which I have already referred in reference to its Ossianic structure. The poet’s portrait dominates the composition, while below him Ossian is balanced by Burns’ classical-Scottish muse, Coila. Just to make sure no one misses the point the names ‘Ossian’ and ‘Coila’ are prominently displayed.

Such continuing reverence for Ossian and related bard figures in visual art responding to Burns begins to provide an insight into the visual roots of the Celtic Revival of the 1890s, which we can now see as, at least in part, a cultural continuity rather than a reaction. Evidence of such continuity can be seen in the fact that in 1892 Patrick Geddes had lines from Burns carved on the exterior of Ramsay Garden and in 1895 Geddes’ close colleague John Duncan explored Ossian in his image Anima Celtica, reproduced in Geddes’ Celtic Revival magazine The Evergreen. So my wider point here is that if one follows the visual account continuities of thinking become evident between the response to Burns in the mid-nineteenth century and the Celtic revival of the late nineteenth century, just as continuities are evident between that Celtic Revival and the mid-twentieth century modernism of William MacLellan’s publications.
If there was a William MacLellan equivalent for the Celtic Revival of the 1890s it was Walter Blaikie, the director of the Edinburgh printers, T. & A. Constable. Blaikie’s achievement is extraordinary, indeed he brings into being many high points of the interaction of Scottish visual art and literature. Not only Geddes’ *Evergreen* but also the *Centenary Burns* – complete with a Celtic Revival cover by John Duncan – and, perhaps most notable of all, the first edition of Alexander Carmichael’s *Carmina Gadelica*.

I want to consider *Carmina Gadelica* a little further here, because its visual dimension is rarely considered, yet it is one of the great examples of integration of word and image in a Scottish book. It was published in 1900 and it is not only a key point of reference for Gaelic scholarship, it is also a masterpiece of Scottish Arts and Crafts book design. Its decorative initials are the work of Alexander Carmichael’s wife Mary. She drew on a number of sources of Celtic illuminated initials, including the tenth-century *Book of Deer*; indeed that work provides some of her most direct visual references. Other sources can be found in manuscripts in the National Library of Scotland. A further influence may well have been the wonderful Celtic Psalter held by the University of Edinburgh.

But the Celtic revival publishing effort of which *Carmina Gadelica* was part finds its echo not just in William MacLellan’s work with Douglas Young, George Bain, William Crosbie and Sorley Maclean, but in publishing today. I refer specifically to one of the more remarkable Scottish publishing events of recent years, *An Leabhar Mòr / The Great Book of Gaelic*, published first in 2002 by Canongate. By frequently referring back to much earlier Celtic material it shares something of its ethos with *Carmina Gadelica*. In it one hundred contemporary artists from Scotland and Ireland responded to one hundred poems in Scottish and Irish Gaelic both ancient and modern; this response was mediated by
typographers and calligraphers. I only have time to note just one work among the wealth of art to be found there. This is by Elizabeth Ogilvie working with the typographer Donald Addison, and in it she is responding to a song by Màiri Nighean Alasdair Ruaidh (Mary Macleod), who was born at Rodel, Harris, in the seventeenth century. At the time of writing Màiri was in exile from the Macleod court at Dunvegan, and she sings of how she would willingly trade the sound of the ocean for the sound of the pipes. This work is a further reminder of the power of visual art that is both completely contemporary and at the same firmly linked into cultural history. That not only links the ethos of An Leabhar Mòr to that of Carmina Gadelica, it also echoes Douglas Young’s association of William Crosbie’s work with The Book of Kells.

But, in the interlinking of the historical and contemporary, The Great Book of Gaelic has an even more direct analogy that I want to explore. That analogy is with a set of portfolios of art and text produced by the Royal Association for the Promotion of Fine Art in Scotland in the mid-nineteenth century. As I begin to conclude, I now turn to these to illuminate another key interaction of Scottish art and literature, in this case driven by the main representative body of artists in Scotland, the Royal Scottish Academy. These print collections, normally numbering eight prints each, were bound up into portfolios that frequently include the complete text to which the prints refer. They are, therefore, often editions of poetry as well as being print portfolios. These were produced from the 1850s to the 1870s and the key author initially was Robert Burns, indeed between 1853 and 1857 prints by John Faed were issued for The Cottar’s Saturday Night, Tam o’ Shanter and The Soldier’s Return. Many of these images have since become standards of Burns’ illustration.
In 1861 a portfolio was issued by several different artists illustrating the songs of Burns. This included Horatio McCulloch’s imaginary landscape *My Heart’s in the Highlands* which, when compared with John Faed’s work demonstrates the variety of responses to Burns’ work from members of the Royal Scottish Academy at the time. Two years earlier George Harvey’s portfolio for *Auld Lang Syne* had been issued. This includes this remarkable maritime image *But seas between us braid hae roar’d*. Such responses to Burns surely deserve to be better known.

It is worth reiterating that these portfolios have their origin in the literary commitment of the professional body representing Scotland’s artists, not in a request by a publisher or an author. Nothing could better illustrate the ‘Caledonian synergy’ between artists and writers that I refer to in my title. The analogy with *An Leabhar Mòr* is strong, for both these portfolios and the *Great Book* enabled – and in the case of the *Great Book* still enable – wide dissemination of contemporary work, indeed a typical print run for the portfolios was over 5000 copies and *The Great Book of Gaelic* is now in its second edition. At the heart of both projects is the effective dissemination of cultural knowledge. That is to say they both strike at the cultural neglect to which I have drawn attention throughout this lecture.

In 1860 came the first portfolio that responded to Sir Walter Scott. But this first response to Scott was not to a novel or a poem, but to one of the Border Ballads he had collected, *The Dowie Dens o’ Yarrow*. It is a remarkable set of images by Joseph Noel Paton and it reminds one of how graphically effective the literary-minded artists of the time could be, indeed I would be inclined to see this sort of work as a precursor of the graphic novels of today. But it is also worth noting that this ballad is in Scots. That is a reminder that the texts I have been referring to this evening have been,
to use Iain Crichton’s Smith’s phrase ‘three voiced’, that is to say in Gaelic, in Scots and in English.

That ‘three-voiced’ consciousness is a constant of Scottish culture and it leads me towards my conclusion by bringing me back to the publications of William MacLellan in the 1940s and 1950s. I want to draw attention to Douglas Young’s *Auntran Blads* that is to say, in Young’s translation ‘Occasional Scraps’. It was published in 1943. The cover is by William Crosbie. The foreword is by Hugh MacDiarmid. The dedication, in Scots and Gaelic, is to two of Young’s fellow poets, Sorley MacLean and George Campbell Hay. The poems themselves are in Scots and occasionally in English, but many of them are translations from Gaelic. A number of those translations are of poems in MacLean’s *Dàin do Eimhir*, which was published the same year largely – as I noted earlier – because of Young’s efforts. Hugh MacDiarmid begins his introduction to Young’s book with the words: ‘This is a significant book.’ A bit obvious perhaps, but he could not be more correct. It is not only a ‘three voiced’ book, at least by implication, but in its cover by William Crosbie it addresses the complementarity of the Celtic and classical traditions that has characterised so much of Scottish cultural life, and to which I have drawn attention with respect to both James Macpherson and Robert Burns.

I began my talk this evening by stressing the significance of William MacLellan’s publications and the involvement of members of Andrew Tannahill’s circle in those publications. I end my discussion of this Caledonian synergy between visual art and writing in the same vein. But I stress in conclusion the importance of the fact that we, the inheritors of Scottish culture, must move away from a situation of eternally recurrent renaissance where we are continually surprised by our past achievements in art and literature, towards a situation in which we can take them for
granted. We must realise the importance of artists like William Crosbie and J.D. Fergusson, and at the same time we must be able to appreciate the real value of external perspectives on Scottish culture such as that of Turner. Again, we must be conscious of the art that James Macpherson’s *Ossian* generated throughout Europe, and we must be able to take for granted that Burns impelled artists not just to make direct illustrations of his poems, but to develop a school of national landscape painting which bears intriguing comparison with the art of cognate nations such as Finland.

Of course there is so much more I have not even been able to mention. What about the brilliant synthesis of word and place in the work of Ian Hamilton Finlay? And again, and by contrast, what about David Allan’s illustrations to Allan Ramsay’s *Gentle Shepherd* first published in 1796? And what about Franz Masereel’s response to *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle* published in 1969? But I will just have to leave all this – and so much else – for another time.

My closing point is this: if you know your own culture then you have an international presence. If don’t know your own culture then, from an international perspective, you don’t exist except, perhaps, as a stereotype. I am sure that Andrew Tannahill understood that. In Scotland we are getting better at recognising the real significance of our own international contribution. We are getting better at moving on from the stereotype. Nevertheless we still have a long way to go before we can genuinely claim that we are not, on the whole, ignorant of our own culture, in particular our visual culture.

Yet we are only ignorant because we do not have the education that we should be able to take for granted. We pay for this education through our taxes. I think it is time for us to get our money’s worth.