

**A WEAVER IN WARTIME:  
A BIOGRAPHICAL STUDY AND THE LETTERS  
OF PAISLEY WEAVER-POET  
ROBERT TANNAHILL  
(1774-1810)**

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis is a critical biography of Robert Tannahill (1774-1810). As a work of recovery its aim is to lay out the details of the life and in so doing to make the case for Tannahill as a distinctive figure in Scottish literary history. Part One covers the main events in Tannahill's life, and analyses his poetry, songs and play, *The Soldier's Return*, drawing heavily on his extant correspondence throughout. Part Two of the thesis gives all of Tannahill's extant correspondence.

The received critical opinion of Tannahill in the nineteenth century was that his true talent lay in the writing of Scottish pastoral songs. In accordance with this perception the other aspects of his work have, generally, been treated as marginal by previous critics. This thesis aims to broaden the critical understanding of Tannahill as a writer working in the first decade of the 1800s by taking into consideration his social and political milieu, the writers he was influenced by and his response to particular events in his life and in the world. I argue that Tannahill was not party political, but had sympathy for Whig causes such as abolition of the death penalty and of slavery. He also opposed cock-fighting and animal cruelty. Key to understanding much of Tannahill's output was his attitude to the wars with Revolutionary and Napoleonic France (1793-1815). Fear of French invasion of the British Isles was something that exercised Tannahill a good deal. His attitude to war was that it was pointless human folly, but his dislike of all imperialism, including British and French, makes his position complex and the complexity of his response to war is a recurring theme throughout.

Tannahill's upbringing in Paisley and his position as an artisan weaver had a profound effect on his writing, as did the influence of Robert Burns. Tannahill was fiercely independent, despised literary patronage and inherited wealth and power. There is an attempt to explain and understand how and why Tannahill came to hold these points of view and to point out where they find expression in his work.

Chapter 1 looks at Tannahill's upbringing and life in Paisley. Chapter 2 deals with the 'Critical Reception' of his work from 1815 to the present. Chapter 3 looks in depth at his attitudes to war and the threat of French invasion. Chapter 4 concentrates on Tannahill's play *The Soldier's Return* and considers how it fits into the pastoral tradition. Chapter 5 looks at the content and some formal aspects of his poetry and Chapter 6 deals with the range of his lyrics and songs.

Part Two is a project of retrieval, sub-titled *The Letters of Robert Tannahill*, it presents in chronological order eighty-two letters, the vast majority of which were written by Tannahill to friends and acquaintances between the years 1802 and 1810. It has been compiled from holograph manuscript sources found in the University of Glasgow Library, the National Library of Scotland, University of Edinburgh Library and Paisley Central Library. In addition, letters previously published in the David Semple edition of Tannahill's *Poems, Songs and Correspondence* (1876) have been inserted to give the most comprehensive collection of Tannahill correspondence to date. These letters give a fascinating insight into Tannahill's life and work. The guiding editorial principle for transcription from holograph has been: to provide as accurately as possible a text free from editorial interference.

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# A WEAVER IN WARTIME

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## **Part 1. - Introduction**

One Tannahill song became so popular that, indeed, when a Paisley teacher of what is now known as 'religious instruction' inquired of her class who Jesse was, the answer came 'Please Sir, "Jessie, the Flower o' Dunblane"'.<sup>1</sup>

### **A WEAVER IN WARTIME: CONTEXTS AND SCOPE**

Robert Tannahill spent most of his life in Paisley. Born there on 3<sup>rd</sup> June 1774, Tannahill died there on 17<sup>th</sup> May 1810, just 17 days before his thirty-sixth birthday. Tannahill is not nearly as popular now as he was in the second half of the nineteenth century, when arguably only Burns was more revered as a songwriter in Scotland.

The statue of Tannahill that stands beside the statue of poet and ornithologist Alexander Wilson (1766-1813) outside Paisley Abbey is perhaps the most impressive memorial to Tannahill outwith his writing.<sup>2</sup> Sculpted by D. W. Stevenson R.S.A.,<sup>3</sup> it was erected in 1883 at a cost of around £1200, paid for from funds raised through annual open-air concerts at 'The Glen' park, on the edge of the Gleniffer Braes near Paisley.<sup>4</sup> These memorials indicate the popularity of Tannahill over a hundred years after his birth. Even in 1925 Tannahill was still remembered fondly in Paisley. The annual concert held at the Glen Park that year was led by a 'Dr. Williams', who 'conducted a choir of six hundred voices in songs by Tannahill, Burns, Lady Nairne, and other Scots lyricists'.<sup>5</sup> However, by the 1950s and 1960s Tannahill was often seen as a Burns impersonator and a writer of 'insipid but well liked song'.<sup>6</sup> His perceived concern with the natural world as against economic and social issues was unfashionable with the left; his anti-war, anti-imperialist sentiments and religious liberalism often ignored by those on the right of the political spectrum in Scotland.

George Douglas, writing in 1899, observed that Tannahill was as much a part of the eighteenth century as the nineteenth. Douglas is critical of Tannahill's 'stiff Eighteenth

century manner', though in comparison with the earlier James Thomson, whom Tannahill admired, his approach to both register and diction is more focussed on actually spoken language.<sup>7</sup> Lauchlan MacLean Watt described Paisley as a 'Parnassus', drawing our attention to the fact that Tannahill was one poet among many, living in a highly literate, politically and socially aware community. According to McLean Watt:

Paisley has been the Scottish Parnassus... Tannahill was, of course, the greatest of that town's singers... We forget the agony of his nerve-stricken life and his wretched suicide, in the beauty and freshness of his verse... Still he sent his cry into the nineteenth century and we cannot ignore his... lyrics which sometimes, through their artless freedom, are attributed by the common mind to Burns himself.<sup>8</sup>

For Tannahill and his circle of poets and musician friends, Burns was a pivotal figure. In a time of turbulence in all spheres of life Burns provided both an anchor in traditional Scottish values and a guide to action for these men as musical and literary artists.

The Industrial Revolution was a work-in-progress and Tannahill's formative years were the 1780s and 1790s rather than the 1800s. The 'working class' was incipient, nascent and what Marxists would call 'uneven'.<sup>9</sup> Tannahill's world was essentially that of the artisan weaver. Noel Thompson, writing in 1998, argued that:

the independence and autonomy of the artisan was being eroded, and with it the power and/or inclination to adhere, or ensure adherence, to customary practices, prices and rewards. As one commentator has written: 'capitalism in the early nineteenth century made progress less by machines and factories than by the increasing control of small workshops by capitalist middlemen, through their power over credit, supply and distribution'.<sup>10</sup>

Tannahill was resistant to this process of erosion. To some extent his writing can be seen as an act of resistance to the newly forming economic structures; an artistic attempt to preserve his artisan community from the threat of fragmentation posed by the expansion of capitalism.

The economic policies which financed the wars with Revolutionary and Napoleonic

France, labelled by William Cobbett as 'Old Corruption', were apparent to Tannahill, as was the destruction of 'nature' that industrial processes brought in their wake.<sup>11</sup> The economy was particularly sensitive to conditions pertaining to the war with France, with regard to blockade, government spending and taxation. Tannahill understood the inter-relationship between the war economy and social conditions, writing disapprovingly of the war and its economic consequences on numerous occasions. In writing about the war with France Tannahill chose to concentrate on the abstract problem of conflict rather than openly take sides. Nevertheless, there is enough evidence in his extant writing to suggest he opposed the war, even if that opposition was expressed in a muted and circumscribed manner, whereby he avoided the charge of traitor and the disapproval of 'worthies' both local and national: 'To oppose the war was to subject oneself to accusations of treason and the violence of "Church and King" mobs'.<sup>12</sup> This does not mean that Tannahill did not write approvingly of the British war effort on occasion, although he did so in response to the politics and psychology of the threat of French invasion of the British Isles, rather than as a patriotic supporter of Britain's war effort overseas. He wrote with feeling and sympathy about the plight of the soldier in his song lyric 'The Worn Soldier', anthologised by Betty Bennett in *British War Poetry in the Age of Romanticism: 1793-1815* (1976):

The Queensferry boatie rows light,  
And light is the heart that it bears,  
For it brings the poor soldier safe back to his home,  
From many long toilsome years.

...

But fled are his visions of bliss,  
All his transports but 'rose to deceive,  
For he found the dear cottage a tenantless waste,  
And his kindred all sunk in the grave.

Tannahill, *from* 'The Worn Soldier'.<sup>13</sup>

The content of Tannahill's writing tends to support Whiggish causes (abolitionist, critical of the war with France and increased taxation, critical of patronage and public floggings, though such views were not exclusively Whig) and this outlook is often expressed in a style strongly influenced by both Augustan poetics, and the poetics of Scottish Vernacular Revival associated with Allan Ramsay (1686-1758) and Robert Fergusson (1750-1774), reaching its pinnacle in the work of Robert Burns.

Unsurprisingly, the twentieth century was not particularly kind to Tannahill. His work does not fit easily with class certainties, technological progress and conspicuous consumption. His general opposition to war has been almost completely overlooked as a central theme of his work; not outspoken enough for the left, but quiet enough for the right to ignore under the light of his pastoral verse and song. The height of Tannahill's popularity was probably the mid-Victorian 1870s and 1880s, though as John Clare noted, 'Jessie, the Flo'er o' Dunblane' was already very popular in 1825:

Tannahill's song of 'Jessey' has met with more popularity among the common people here, than all the songs English and Scottish put together.<sup>14</sup>

While Tannahill did not have a conception of class politics as it would be understood in Scotland today - or in the recent past - he held firm opinions on wealth and poverty, on state power, and on the distribution of property and privilege. His rejection of strict Presbyterianism ironically illustrates a modernity reflected in the right of the individual to protest on grounds of conscience. He had an idea of human nature based upon a moral outlook that took as its starting point respect and esteem for persons and nature. His morality was derived from tenets of Presbyterian Christianity and aspects of Scottish Enlightenment philosophy, yet he was travelling towards humanism and ecological awareness while the



world around him was moving headlong towards the exploitation of people and natural resources for profit.

Tannahill was concerned with conceptions of 'nature' and 'human nature' that did not sit happily with the growth of capitalism and the perpetual war with France, which were the dominant features of his time. According to Alexander Reekie:

The Revolution settlement was the last word in British politics, and any amendment of its supposed imperfections implied chaos and the wild inferno of French revolutionary reforms. From all this Tannahill stood aloof; it was not his temperament to meddle with such matters.<sup>15</sup>

Reekie's assessment of Tannahill is not entirely satisfactory. In his treatment of the subject of war, Tannahill almost always wrote from the perspective of those at the lower end of the social spectrum; making an implicit statement that common people were important and worth writing about. By focussing on poor and powerless characters in war conditions, he makes a political point which suggests, with subtlety, that the 'Revolution settlement' of 1688 was not satisfactory at all. He wrote not about 'great men' such as Nelson or Sir John Moore, but rather of 'The gallant soldier, robb'd of fame' who had faced death on the instructions of politicians and statesmen.<sup>16</sup>

A picture of humanity<sup>17</sup> emerges in Tannahill's poems and song lyrics that is *rational*, *emotional* and *moral*: these are the elements that make up 'the positive trinity' of his work, rather than 'friendship, trust and acceptance of one's lot'.<sup>18</sup> Tannahill depicted qualities of human nature and behaviour that would help to keep life civilised, tolerable and happy, in line with John Struthers's view that he (Tannahill) opposed 'oppression, which of all kinds, he held the deepest abhorrence'.<sup>19</sup> The political content of his work is not generally overt but an implicit expression of these values. However, with regard to the issues of slavery, war and animal welfare he makes occasional overt poetic statements of his political position. Human

beings are moral when living in harmony with nature; to desecrate nature meant inviting sadness and mental torment:

I mind, still well, when but a trifling boy,  
My young heart fluttered with a savage joy,  
As with my sire I wander'd thro' the wood,  
And found the mavis' clump-lodg'd callow brood,  
I tore them thence, exulting o'er my prize.  
My father bade me list the mother's cries:  
"So thine would wail," he said, "if reft of thee."—  
It was a lesson of humanity.  
HUMANITY! Thou'rt glory's brightest star,  
Out-shining all the conqueror's trophies far!<sup>20</sup>

Another idea which was important for Tannahill, as it was for Wordsworth and other Romantics, was that of the beneficial effects of 'solitude'. In this Tannahill was influenced by J. G. Zimmerman, a Swiss doctor and some-time physician to George III. As Secretary to the Paisley Burns Club in 1805, Tannahill wrote:

That Man is the only creature capable of enjoying an eminent degree of felicity, is a Truth so evident and so generally admitted, that, it were foolish to labour its proof.<sup>21</sup>

This echoes Zimmerman's use of language in his copious writings on 'Solitude'.

Zimmerman's aim was to 'enlighten the minds of his fellow creatures upon a subject of infinite importance to them, the attainment of true felicity'.<sup>22</sup> Conceptions of 'solitude' appear frequently in Tannahill's songs and poems as having the capacity to nourish the spirit and the imagination, in contrast to the diversions of town and city.

The central concern or purpose of this thesis is to give a narrative of Tannahill's life and work, that is to offer a critical biography as part of a process of recovery of a neglected figure in Scottish letters. Aesthetic considerations and analysis of Tannahill's poetics have therefore been less to the fore than might have been the case, had the need not been so pressing for a narrative arc of both the life and the work. Those readers aware of varieties of

Scottish verse will notice Tannahill's use of forms such as the Standard Habby, the quatorzain Montgomery Stanza, and elements of the Christis Kirk Stanza. Those with an ear for Scottish regional language use will notice Tannahill's wide ranging use of Scottish words and phrases and his joy in experiment and word play between Scots from different regions and, indeed, what is termed 'standard' English. I have given as much of the narrative as possible in Tannahill's own words, both poetic and epistolary, providing mediation and commentary primarily in connection with the narrative arcs of the life and the work, rather than in terms of aesthetic judgement; the commentary and analysis are chiefly biographical and historical. As for aesthetic considerations, while I have no doubt as to Tannahill's aesthetic merits, particularly in his adept use of rhythm throughout his work, they have mostly been left for the reader to experience directly through the encounter with Tannahill's texts and/or to future scholars.

Part 1 of this thesis is a critical biography: it approaches Tannahill's literary output in terms of content and theme, relates it to prevailing ideas and events in his life, and to ideas and events which were competing for Tannahill's attention at various gradations of 'geographical' distance; the local, the Scottish, the British and the imperial. This fulfils the primary premise of my original thesis proposal:

To research the life, work and correspondence of Robert Tannahill (weaver and poet: 1774-1810) and produce a biography of this writer taking into account the social, literary, religious, and political context of the period 1770 to 1820 in Scotland.

The first chapter, 'Paisley: Life and Place', is perhaps the most 'applied' in that it covers the history of Paisley and the main biographical events of Tannahill's life. Chapter 2, 'William Motherwell and Receptions of Tannahill's Work', surveys much of the literature that has been written on Tannahill and evaluates what past critics have thought of his writing, providing a

cumulative account of how critics have treated the work over time. It is argued that all three aspects of his literary output - poetry, drama and song - are worthy of critical attention. The third chapter, 'War and the Threat of Invasion', discusses the effects of the French Revolution and wars with France on Tannahill's writing and analyses how the war and militarism are dealt with in his work. Chapter 4 presents an analysis of Tannahill's play, *The Soldier's Return*, looking at its Pastoral context and relationship with two major Scottish works, Burns's *Jolly Beggars* and Allan Ramsays's *Gentle Shepherd*. The fifth chapter, 'Epistles and Rhymes', looks at Tannahill's poetry, concentrating on the way in which he organised and published the first (1807) edition of his work: consideration is given to his use of the epistolary form, the themes of 'admiration and imitation', and his ideas on landscape and animals. In Chapter 6, 'Lyricism, Music and Song', Tannahill as a songwriter and lyricist is discussed. Consideration is given to how some of his songs have been transmitted to the present day through the work of collectors, performers, writers and publishers. His foray into Irish song is also explored.

In Part 2 of this thesis, a compilation of all Tannahill correspondence that could be traced is presented. The letters, numbering eighty-two in total, are a considerable expansion on those offered by David Semple in 1876.<sup>23</sup> Semple gives a total of sixty-one letters: thirty-six in full and twenty-five excerpts. Of the eighty-two letters given in this thesis, seventy-four are complete; eight are excerpts; sixty-three are written by Tannahill; ten are addressed to Tannahill; and nine refer to him.

The most important sources for this thesis have been the 1876 edition of Tannahill's *Poems, Songs and Correspondence* (Paisley) edited by David Semple, and Tannahill's own letters, of which many can be found in bound form in the Special Collections Department at

Glasgow University Library under the call number MS Robertson 1. With regard to referencing, for all quotations, I have used a simple system of endnotes which give the author's name, title of work, place of publication, year of publication and page number. All publications cited in endnotes can be found in the alphabetical bibliography which is divided into the categories of unpublished sources, published sources, web-site sources and compact disc sources. In taking quotations from Tannahill's printed work I have generally used either Semple's 1876 edition or Tannahill's own 1807 edition, this has been dependent on context, and there is some variation between the texts of these editions with regard to spelling, italicisation and punctuation. The text quoted in this thesis and sourced in the endnote should be consistent with the text in the particular edition of Tannahill's work cited.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Maurice Lindsay, *History of Scottish Literature* (London, 1977), p. 227.

<sup>2</sup> Statue of Alexander Wilson erected 1874.

<sup>3</sup> D. W. Stevenson (1842-1904) was well known for his sculpture of William Wallace at the Wallace Memorial, Stirling. His work adorns the fountain at Alexandra Park in Glasgow's East End and the Scott Monument, Edinburgh. See Peter J. M. McEwan, *Dictionary of Scottish Art and Architecture* (Ballater, 2004). The first known bust of Tannahill was in stone and unveiled at the Scott monument on 15<sup>th</sup> August 1846. On the same day busts of Burns, Robert Fergusson, Byron, James Thomson, James Hogg and Allan Ramsay, among others, were also unveiled.

<sup>4</sup> For information on Tannahill memorials, statues and portraits see, *The Poems, Songs and Correspondence of Robert Tannahill*, David Semple, ed. (Paisley, 1876), 'Appendix', pp. 474-477. The 1883 unveiling was also covered in *The Illustrated London News* (17<sup>th</sup> November, 1883), though the article there contained numerous errors.

<sup>5</sup> *The Musical Times*, Vol. 66, No. 989 (1<sup>st</sup> July, 1925), p. 646. These annual concerts were run under the auspices of the Tannahill Club, inaugurated on May 25<sup>th</sup> 1858 at the Globe Hotel on Paisley's High Street. Semple states: 'The special object of which shall be to commemorate in all time coming the birthday of Robert Tannahill', Semple, ed. (Paisley, 1876), p. 496. See pp. 496-511 for details of the Club's history.

<sup>6</sup> David Craig, *Scottish Literature and the Scottish People* (London, 1961), p. 141.

<sup>7</sup> Sir George Douglas, *James Hogg: Contains also brief notices of Robert Tannahill, William Motherwell, and William Thom* (Edinburgh, 1899), p. 127. While George Douglas may have seen this eighteenth-century manner as 'stiff', James Thomson was a highly fluid poet whose diction was rather more high-flown than Tannahill's.

<sup>8</sup> Lauchlan MacLean Watt, *Scottish Life and Poetry* (London, 1912), p. 452.

<sup>9</sup> While 'the separation of the town and country' was a rapidly ongoing process, and it was to some extent the case that this represented 'the division of the population into two great classes', 'big industry' had not quite penetrated Scotland sufficiently to give rise to a fully fledged 'proletariat'. See Karl Marx,

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'Intercourse and Productive Forces', *The German Ideology*, in Robert C. Tucker, ed., *A Marx-Engels Reader* (London, 1978), pp. 176-186.

<sup>10</sup> Noel Thompson, *The Real Rights of Man* (London, 1998), p. 31. Citation, P. Joyce, 'Work', *The Cambridge Social History of Britain, People and Their Environment*, Vol. 2, F. M. L. Thompson, ed. (Cambridge, 1990), p. 155.

<sup>11</sup> For an explanation of 'Old Corruption' see Thomson, *The Real Rights of Man*, pp. 24-26. There was good deal of 'bleaching' and dyeing work going on in and around Paisley during Tannahill's lifetime, which heavily polluted the river Cart.

<sup>12</sup> Betty Bennett, ed., *British War Poetry in the Age of Romanticism: 1793-1815* (New York, 1976), p. 23.

<sup>13</sup> Robert Tannahill, 'The Worn Soldier', *Poems, Songs and Correspondence*, p. 257-58; Betty Bennett, ed., *British War Poetry in the Age of Romanticism: 1793-1815* (New York, 1976), p. 382.

<sup>14</sup> John Clare, 'Popularity in Authorship', *The European Magazine*, New Series, Vol. I, No 3 (London, November, 1825), p. 301.

<sup>15</sup> Reekie, ed., 'The Life and Times of Robert Tannahill', *The Songs and Poems of Robert Tannahill*, (Paisley, 1911), p. xxxviii.

<sup>16</sup> Robert Tannahill, MS holograph song (GUL, Spec. Colls., MS Robertson 1/51).

<sup>17</sup> I mean by 'humanity' here 'a set of human characteristics or attributes' and in Tannahill's usage this is conflated with 'human self-development' towards the courteous, the civilized and the compassionate. See Raymond Williams, *Keywords* (London, 1983), p. 149.

<sup>18</sup> Mary Ellen Brown, 'Robert Tannahill as a Local Poet', *The Paisley Poets*, Stuart James and Gordon McCrae, eds. (Paisley, 1993), p. 33.

<sup>19</sup> John Struthers, ed., 'Essay on Scottish Songwriters', *The Harp of Caledonia*, Vol. II (Glasgow, 1821), p. 415. This remark by Struthers refers specifically to Tannahill.

<sup>20</sup> Robert Tannahill, 'Epistle to Alexander Borland', *The Soldier's Return*, (Paisley, 1807), p. 66.

<sup>21</sup> Robert Tannahill, *Paisley Burns Clubs*, p. 38. See also 'Second Epistle to J. Scadlock' where Tannahill writes: 'Yon mentor, Geordie Zimmerman,/ Agrees exactly with our plan,/ That parial hours of Solitude/ Exalt the soul of man.' (Paisley, 1807) pp. 97-98.

<sup>22</sup> J. G. Zimmerman, *Solitude* (Halifax, 1852), p. V. Zimmerman's work 'On Solitude' was widely published in the 1790s.

<sup>23</sup> Robert Tannahill, *Poems, Songs and Correspondence of Robert Tannahill*, pp. 365-452.

## 1. Paisley: Life and Place

Sweet Ferguslie, hail, thou'rt the dear sacred grove  
Where first my young muse spread her wing;  
Here nature first waked me to rapture and love,  
And taught me her beauties to sing.

Robert Tannahill, *Song*, September 1807<sup>1</sup>

### A TOWN OF WEAVERS

The town of Paisley is located to the south west of Glasgow about nine miles from the city centre. Before the industrial revolution and the development of modern communications, Paisley served as one of the main market towns in Renfrewshire and to some extent Ayrshire, owing to the difficulties of travelling to Glasgow over land from the west coast. By the early eighteenth century Paisley was known for two kinds of manufacture and trade - shoes and woven cloth. Packmen, or pedlars, carried these products around the country and to Ireland and England. The cloth was carried in bales known as bengals and the connections made by these travelling salesmen contributed to the rapid economic growth of Paisley as the industrial revolution progressed. The routes used by the packmen were also used by 1790s radicals, such as poet and ornithologist, Alexander Wilson (1766-1813), for the transmission of information and propaganda.

By the middle of the eighteenth century, handloom weavers were the largest occupational group in Paisley. The Act of Union of 1707 which eventually made trade easier, and the introduction in the 1720s of Christian Shaw's 'Bargarran Thread' with a ready local market in the weavers, meant that the Paisley thread industry was quickly successful. The enterprising merchants, or 'Corks', of Paisley exploited the situation by supplying thread to the weavers then buying the finished textiles and selling them on.<sup>2</sup> The expansion in weaving drew weavers from other areas into the town. Agricultural improvements and enclosures were also significant factors in the shift of population from rural, feudal conditions, towards the

towns. One such weaver who migrated to Paisley was James Tannahill. Born near Kilmarnock on 9<sup>th</sup> May 1733, he was the son of Thomas Tannahill, a weaver, and Mary Bunten who had married on 21<sup>st</sup> July 1730. James Tannahill was the second of seven children, three girls and four boys.

In 1756 at the age of 23, James Tannahill and his three brothers left Kilmarnock for Paisley. According to David Semple, '[t]he population of Paisley at that time did not exceed 4,297, so that the town was a very small place indeed'.<sup>3</sup> The following year, the Reverend John Witherspoon arrived in Paisley to take up the ministry in the Low Parish.

### **WRITERS AND PRINTERS**

Reverend Witherspoon, notable as a signatory of the American Declaration of Independence, was an outspoken supporter of the Popular wing of the Church of Scotland. He didn't like dancing or theatre - for him, these activities embodied wickedness and loose morals.

Witherspoon published his own sermons and ideas about religious matters, and in this respect fitted into a well established practice amongst Paisley clergy of publishing sermons and theological texts.

Patrick Adamson was appointed first Protestant Minister at Paisley Abbey in 1572, two years later 'he turned Calvin's Catechism into Latin heroics'.<sup>4</sup> This was one of the first published books to originate from Paisley and from that time forward a large body of clerical writing grew, much of it polemical. Thomas Blackwell's *Schema Sacrum* (1712) was printed in Paisley in 1769 by Weir and M'Lean, who opened the first commercial print shop in the town, in spite of (or perhaps because of) Blackwell's notoriety as Paisley's foremost witch-finder. The first book they printed was *An Essay on Christ's Cross and Crown* (1769) by the Reverend George Muir. Some clerics also wrote poetry. One such poet-preacher was Robert



Boog who arrived at the Abbey in 1774. Boog took an interest in books and Tannahill occasionally attended his sermons. Later, Boog would have a hand in forming Paisley's library for gentlemen. Other clerical publications around this time, included the writings of Reverend James Baine whose 1770 publication was titled *The Theatre Licentious and Perverted*, and Robert Burns, DD whose 1817 publication, printed in Paisley, was called *Distinctive Characteristics of Protestantism and Popery—a letter to Dr. Chalmers*.<sup>5</sup> With clericalism came anti-clericalism, and many other kinds of book: tales of battles, collections of poems, comic yarns, biographies, novels and instruction manuals were coming onto the market. Many of these, hawked by chapmen, were considered sensationalist and contrasted sharply with the Presbyterian clerical polemics. Much of the writing produced by the weaver-poets was of a different character to both popular chapbooks and clerical publications; less about sensationalism or proscription and more about social observation. In writing a play in 1803, Robert Tannahill dissociated himself from the anti-theatrical stance of clergymen like John Witherspoon and James Baine.

The Sempill family are worthy of note in the history of Paisley's literature. Lord Robert Sempill, the elder, produced works of anti-Catholic vigour as did Alexander Cunningham, Earl of Glencairn, who played a major role in the destruction of Paisley Abbey. William Motherwell allowed his antiquarianism to overrule his Orangeism when he stated of Glencairn:

As a keen and insatiate destroyer of stone images and other church ornaments he was almost unrivalled in his day; and, with the exception of his leader ...John Knox, and Edward of England, the monastic architecture of our country hath no good to curse anyone more than him.<sup>6</sup>

Lord Sempill's cousin was Sir James Sempill of Beltrees (1565-1626), author of the

*Packman's Pater Noster*, and Sir James's son, Robert Sempill the younger of Beltrees (c.1594-c.1668) was the author of *Habby Simpson the Piper of Kilbarchan*. Other notable Paisley poets from this early period include Alexander Montgomery, Robert Crawford, William Walkinshaw of that Ilk and Jean Adam. Adam's work moves us into the eighteenth century, when the work of James Maxwell (1720-1800) - the self-styled 'Student of Divine Poetry' who despised Robert Burns - was becoming known in the town. In Maxwell's remarkable life of 80 years he had a prolific output of poems:

The last eighteen years of his life he sold his pamphlets of his own prolific verse in Paisley... Much of Maxwell's rhyming couplets are moral and religious; the rest includes topical and personal material such as a verse autobiography, a description of Paisley, descriptions of the manufacture of cotton and of paper, verses on the usefulness of the Forth and Clyde Canal, and a celebration of Nelson's victory at the Battle of the Nile.<sup>7</sup>

This is a very brief list of the main practitioners of poetry in Paisley from the early sixteenth century to the late eighteenth century, by which time Burns was reaching an over-arching dominance in much of Scotland. The most important printers in the town were now John Neilson and the Youngs, with poets such as Alexander Wilson, John Robertson and Ebenezer Picken beginning to make an impact.<sup>8</sup> This illustrates that there was a lively tradition of literature, or a literary culture in the town, with its own history and influence over the generation of locally based writers to which Tannahill belonged.

#### **TANNAHILL'S UPBRINGING**

Robert Tannahill was twelve years old when Robert Burns's 'Kilmarnock Edition' was published in 1786. At this time, Tannahill would have been leaving school and taking up as an apprentice weaver to his father, James. Tannahill's father appears to have fitted into that category of weavers described by William Jolly in his biography of the weaver and botanist John Duncan:

Weavers then formed as a whole a remarkable class of men ...intelligent ...strongly if wildly radical if not tainted with revolutionary sentiments ...intensely theological, often religious, well versed in the intricacies of Calvinism ...in a word, general guardians of the church, reformers of the state, and proud patrons of learning and the schoolmaster...<sup>9</sup>

James Tannahill was Boxmaster of the Paisley Weavers Society, a highly trusted position. It was the Boxmaster's responsibility to administer the insurance scheme the Society operated to guard against unemployment, illness and hard times. Each week, every member of the Incorporation of Paisley Weavers contributed money to the Box. When and if they needed, they could draw subsistence money. The entry for Paisley in the *Statistical Account of Scotland 1791-99*, describes the practice:

There are, indeed, large sums of money distributed yearly by the several trades from their boxes, as they are called, among those of their number who are disabled from working... ...the person who receives supply, only draws out the money which he had formerly put in, along with part, perhaps, of the contributions of his brethren, which they all cheerfully give, in order to be assured of the same comfortable provision.<sup>10</sup>

James Tannahill had two other roles in public life; he was a Director of Paisley Hospital and a Director of the local Dispensary. The hospital was managed by fifteen directors, nine of whom were elected from the community. James Tannahill was elected a Hospital Director in 1786 and subsequently re-elected five years running. He took up his position at the Dispensary on 1<sup>st</sup> June 1788.<sup>11</sup>

Robert Tannahill's maternal grandparents were Matthew Pollock of Boghall and Janet Brodie of Lochwinnoch. Janet Brodie's brother was Hugh Brodie, 'poet-laureate of Lochwinnoch'.<sup>12</sup> Matthew and Janet had one son and seven daughters. Their second child and first daughter was Janet Pollock, Robert Tannahill's mother:

In 1763, James Tannahill... was married to Janet Pollock... At that time she was domiciled in the house of her uncle, Hugh Brodie, farmer, Langcraft, in the Parish of Lochwinnoch. The bans of the proposed marriage were

proclaimed in the Laigh Church of Paisley, and the Parish Church of Lochwinnoch, on Sundays 21<sup>st</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup>; and the marriage was celebrated at Lochwinnoch on Monday, the 29<sup>th</sup> August, 1763. The wedding festivities were held at the same place; and after the conclusion of the days enjoyments, the company, according to the usual custom, sang the 127<sup>th</sup> Psalm.<sup>13</sup>

Psalm 127 refers to the happiness granted by God to those who with good grace build a house and have children. James and Janet Tannahill were to do just that, but first, James, with his younger brother Robert as journeyman, entered the Paisley Weavers' Society on March 2<sup>nd</sup> 1764. The two other Tannahill brothers Thomas (master-weaver) and John (journeyman) had entered the Society in November the previous year. At this time, James Tannahill and his family lived in the area of Castle Street in the west end of the town; an area popular with weavers and other migrant workers, it was still under-developed in respect of housing. Incoming migrants mainly from surrounding counties, the West Highlands and Ireland, tended to settle in this area which was, and still is, known as Maxwelton.

In 1775, when the population of Paisley had grown to 11,700, James Tannahill acquired a steading in Queen Street where he had a cottage built. The cost of building the cottage was £60 16/ 4d. It was a one-storey thatch-roofed building, split into two areas by a central corridor. One section was used as living quarters and the other a weaving shop. It has a fairly low roof, certainly less than 2 meters at its lowest point, a smallish door and small windows. It was therefore fortunate that 'James Tannahill was about 5 feet 4 inches in height and of slender make'.<sup>14</sup> By this time Janet and James had four children. The fourth, Robert, born at Castle Street would have been around one year old when the family moved into the new Queen Street cottage.

James Tannahill's interest in public health and his public spirit might lie in his Presbyterian outlook or devotion to Christian duty, but there were also specific events in his

life which help explain his activities:

Their son Thomas was born August 2<sup>nd</sup>, betwixt the hours of nine and ten of the clock forenoon, 1764. Died September 27<sup>th</sup>, 1765.<sup>15</sup>

Robert Tannahill was a somewhat sickly child who was susceptible to chest infections and had a congenital deformity of the right leg and foot. Given that his first son had died at just over 13 months and that his fourth did not enjoy good health, it is not surprising that James took an interest in health issues. So far as is known, the other Tannahill children were healthy, although the poet's eldest brother, also named Thomas, died in 1795 at the age of twenty-nine.<sup>16</sup>

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Through the first two-thirds of the eighteenth century the quality of weaving in Paisley had not yet progressed to that seen in the delicate Shawl or Paisley Pattern, but consisted of rough linen of the kind referred to by Burns in 'Tam o' Shanter' when he mentions:

Her cutty sark, o' Paisley harn,  
That while a lassie she had worn.<sup>17</sup>

From the 1770s until 1795, Edinburgh had been the centre of intricate shawl-making in Scotland. 1795 was the year of Paisley's first major economic downturn since weaving had begun to expand. In this difficult period, some Paisley weavers moved to Edinburgh to learn new skills and escape the worst of the economic blight. They returned having learnt what was 'virtually a new trade'.<sup>18</sup> These new skills supported by Paisley's existing infrastructure for the manufacturing and dyeing of cloth (silk weaving was first introduced at Maxwelton in 1759), gave rise to rapid development of shawl-making and other delicates.

By 1802, when the population of Paisley stood at 24,800, incoming weavers were moving to the opposite end of the town from Maxwelton; they moved eastwards and settled at

what was then the separate settlement of Williamsburgh. Paisley town centre was extremely cramped, consisting of narrow wynds built up on either side with three-storey tenements. For many, living conditions were poor with a detrimental impact on health - as industrial and mercantile activity increased, so too did the risk of disease associated with overcrowding propelled by the unfettered development of capitalism. Rapid expansion of the town and the living conditions it produced gave Tannahill first hand experience of the negative effects of the processes of economic expansion: demand for cloth for soldiers' uniforms and for the growing merchant and middle classes meant that weavers were still being attracted into the town.

Both the weavers and the Presbyterian clergy showed interest in education for the children of Paisley. The charter for the Grammar School was granted in 1576, one of its signatories being George Buchanan of Crosraguel, the political philosopher and historian. However, this school was intended to prepare those who were likely to be going on to university and had a classical curriculum. Many weavers educated their children at home using the Bible and/or chapbooks as text-books.<sup>19</sup> The rest had to make do with penny-a-week schools, which ranged from the encouraging to the appalling, depending on the talents and inclinations of the individual teacher, or no education. Paisley had several such schools when Robert Tannahill was a child, including a school for young ladies attended by his sister Janet.

According to William McLaren<sup>20</sup>, Robert Tannahill was educated at the English School. After Tannahill left school in 1786, a new English School was opened in School Wynd in 1788. The teacher at the new school was a Mr James Peddie, appointed upon its opening.<sup>21</sup> Before the new school opened, the English School had been housed in the attic of the hospital. However, according to David Semple, James Tannahill, Robert's father, was

friendly with schoolmaster James Andrew, who carefully educated the children in the hospital in 1786.<sup>22</sup> From these sources, it can therefore be inferred that Robert Tannahill attended an English School in the attic of the hospital taught by James Andrew between the years 1780-1786, and partook of the standard curriculum of reading, writing, reckoning and religion.<sup>23</sup> Tannahill appears to have been an average student, though he amused his class mates with rhymes and riddles such as:

My colour's brown, my shapes uncouth,  
On ilka side I hae a mouth;  
And strange to tell, I will devour  
My bulk of meat in half an hour.<sup>24</sup>

Robert Tannahill's formal education was probably of less significance than the education he received at home. As John Parkhill states:

In the house of Mr. [James] Tannahill books of interest and instruction, and amusement, were always readily accessible to the family, and laid, as it were, in their way, inducing thereby a thirst for knowledge and information among the youthful inmates.<sup>25</sup>

In 1781, an extraordinary character arrived in Paisley in the form of Peter Burnet. An escaped black slave, Burnet became an intimate of the Paisley Tannahills having been put in contact with them by their relatives in Kilmarnock. In his biography of Peter Burnet, John Parkhill provides some insight into the Tannahills and their household. This is how Parkhill records Burnet's first arrival at the Tannahill home in Queen Street:

we cannot introduce him [Burnet] better than by giving an extract of a letter from one of Mr Tannahill's sons— "When I saw him first, I imagined him to be Black Prince, of Kilmarnock, that young man being in the service of a cousin of my father. I had been sent on some errand, and when I returned home Peter was sitting in my father's armchair, with all the family gathered round him, laughing at stories of witches which he asserted appeared and frightened him, and he was laughing as freely and heartily as any of them, and in the course of an hour or two he seemed to be quite at home." And truly to a great extent it did become his home.<sup>26</sup>

'Black Peter', as Burnet came to be known, had an amazing life. Having escaped slavery, he made his way to Scotland via working in New York for Glasgow merchants; through his association with the Tannahills he became a weaver. Eventually, he adopted High Tory politics and married three times, though towards the end of his life he is said to have been quite poor. He died in 1847 at the age of about eighty-three. Paisley poet John Campbell (1814-85) wrote a poem about Burnet. The following extract describes Burnet's life sometime after the death of his first wife Peggy:

To tell all Peter's rigs and loves would take a whole night's chatter,  
For after this he married twice, 'twas all for love, no matter;  
And now, alas! for Peter, he's grown old and poor also,  
But he's still a fine old fellow, as ever you saw go.<sup>27</sup>

Burnet's experience of slavery and his lively independent character made an impression on the Tannahill family. The anti-slavery sentiments in Robert Tannahill's writing gain extra credibility in the light of this friendship.

Tannahill's mother and father had an important influence on his later development. A sense of civic duty comes through in Tannahill's poems which may be attributable to his father's public activities. James Tannahill's interest in literature and reading certainly rubbed off on Robert. Of course, Tannahill becoming a weaver was almost wholly determined by the fact that he was born into a family of weavers. Weaving offered a degree of economic independence and the social status of artisans remained relatively high during the early period of Robert Tannahill's life. The fact that Tannahill's father had sufficient income to buy a steading and build a house on it indicates that the economic position of weavers in the early part of Robert Tannahill's life was far better than in 1807 when printers were reluctant to print Tannahill's volume of poems because he was poor.<sup>28</sup>



Tannahill's literary development was also influenced by his mother's family, and when as a youth Robert spent time in Lochwinnoch he was aware that the poet, Hugh Brodie of Langcraft, was one of his relatives. In terms of familial influences, access to books was encouraged and Tannahill was not hindered in his writing of poetry and song. A suggestion that he had a better than average library is given in the actor and poet William Livingstone's letter to him of November 1804:

I should have answered your kind favour of the 1st ult., but that I waited in the expectation of some books from Edinburgh which our people had written for in the failure of which I had some thoughts of troubling you about them. They are still expected, but as we leave this town soon, I could not longer delay the writing you.<sup>29</sup>

With no inventory of Tannahill's library, precisely what he read is impossible to tell.

However, from references in his work to poets such as Dryden, Thomson, Shakespeare, Shenstone and Pope, it can be inferred that he possessed a book like Samuel Johnson's *Lives of the English Poets*: 'There Shenstone and Thomson I'll read'.<sup>30</sup> He was also aware of John Howard (1726-90) the prison reformer, and of the classics. Lines like, 'An Alexander sinks beside a Howard' suggest he had some knowledge of recent history.<sup>31</sup> While he had almost no Latin or Greek he was aware of classical narratives, characters and their significance, including the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice. As in his 'Epistle to J. Barr':

When Orpheus charmed his wife frae h—ll,  
'Twas nae Scotch tune he play'd sae well;  
Else had the worthy auld wire scraper  
Been keepet for his d—lship's piper.<sup>32</sup>

Tannahill is suggesting, humorously, that Scottish music is so good that had it been played by Orpheus he would have been kept in the underworld to entertain the devil. Tannahill, the 'unlettered Mechanic' was not afraid of using elements from the repertoire of 'colleg'd'

Bards' to make his point.<sup>33</sup> While his main interest was poetry, there is no doubt that he was well read, and there is no sense of either peasant or proletarian anti-intellectualism in his work. Indeed, he was culturally sophisticated. His poem 'The Haunted Wud', in imitation of John Barbour (c.1320-c.1395) suggests that Tannahill may have read Barbour's *The Bruce* published in 1737 at Glasgow, and in 1790 at London.<sup>34</sup> Tannahill was also familiar with the *Edinburgh Review* and other periodical publications such as the *Scots Magazine*, *The Bee* and *The Poetical Magazine* published in London by 'a Society of Gentlemen'.<sup>35</sup>

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Before 1795, the Tannahills appear to have been doing rather well economically. Weavers could earn enough to live quite comfortably on a four-and-a-half day working week, from Tuesday to Saturday morning. However, after 1800, life became more difficult for Robert Tannahill. When in Bolton his living was basic: on his return to Paisley (late 1801 or early 1802) his father died, and in 1803 his sister died. Though by no means amongst the poorest, in that the Tannahills owned their house and had looms to work, Robert Tannahill was far from wealthy. As an artisan he had the luxury of being able to determine his own working day up to a point - a flexibility which gave him time to study, write, socialise locally, go to the theatre in Paisley and Glasgow, visit friends furth of Paisley at Kilbarchan, Neilston, Fereneze (Barrhead), Lochwinnoch, Beith and Edinburgh, and walk in the local countryside. Overall, Tannahill was brought up in an economically stable and loving family, where education and public spirit were fostered.

#### **ADULTHOOD AND ATTITUDES**

In this section, events from both the public and private spheres that were influential on Tannahill from his late teens onwards are interwoven. War, economic uncertainty and the

death of Robert Burns were major public matters that had an impact on the direction of his life and writing. Privately, his response to death - and to the death of his father in particular - will be shown to have been a key factor that galvanised him into becoming a serious writer, setting the trajectory for the last decade of his life.

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In the year 1791, on ending his apprenticeship, Tannahill and some friends made a six-week tour of Ayrshire on foot. Upon his return from Ayrshire, Tannahill informed his brother Matthew that he had visited what was to become the tourist attraction of Alloway Kirk, 'was well pleased with the jaunt',<sup>36</sup> and had written two songs, 'The Soldiers Adieu', and 'My Ain Kind Dearie, O'. The influence of Burns's 'The Lea Rig' is readily apparent in Tannahill's 'My Ain Kind Dearie, O', although Tannahill himself did not think much of it and did not publish it during his lifetime:

But now an I hae won till Ayr  
Although I'm gae an weary, O,  
I'll tak a glass into my han,  
An drink tae you, my dearie, O.  
Cheer up your heart, my bonnie lass,  
An see you dinna wearie, O ;  
In twice three ooks, gin I be spared,  
I'se come again an see thee, O,

An row thee up, an row thee down,  
An row till I wearie, O,  
An row thee o'er the lea rig,  
My ain kind dearie, O !<sup>37</sup>

In his *Book of Scottish Song* (1844), Alexander Whitelaw notes that 'My Ain Kind Dearie, O' and 'The Soldiers Adieu' were given to him by Tannahill's brother Matthew. According to Whitelaw, Matthew stated they had been written when Robert was aged 'about sixteen or seventeen'.<sup>38</sup> However, according to Semple 'The Soldiers Adieu' was first published in a

Glasgow newspaper of September 1808 without the chorus contained in the version passed to Whitelaw by Matthew Tannahill.<sup>39</sup> In Ramsay's 1838 edition of Tannahill's work, he gives only the first verse as a fragment and leaves it without comment. Therefore, the date of composition of this song remains in dispute; Semple argues for the 1808 date as the spouse of one of Tannahill's neighbours, for whom he asserts the song was written, told him she remembered it was written for her husband.

From an early age, Tannahill's interest in Robert Burns was strong. Within five years of the publication of Burns's Kilmarnock Edition, Tannahill had undertaken what might be termed a pilgrimage to the 'Land o' Burns'. Around the same time Tannahill was in Ayrshire, Alexander Wilson had corresponded with Burns (7<sup>th</sup> September 1791) on his review of 'Tam o' Shanter', which Burns didn't much like.<sup>40</sup> While there is no hard evidence that Tannahill and Wilson were acquainted, it is coincidental that around the time Wilson had written to Burns, Tannahill was in Ayrshire. An anonymous biography of Tannahill published in 1860 states:

After his [Tannahill's] apprenticeship had expired, he removed to Lochwinnoch ... Alexander Wilson, the poet and future American ornithologist, was at this time also weaving in the same village. He was by some years the senior of Tannahill; and the latter, being then unknown to fame, had not the fortitude to seek his acquaintance, although he greatly admired the pieces by which Wilson had already distinguished himself.<sup>41</sup>

William McLaren suggests that one of the first pieces Tannahill had published was on 'Wilson's emigration':

If memory may be trusted, the first of his poetical productions that occupied the hands of a printer, were his verses on the emigration of a brother bard to America... Alexander Wilson was the gentleman on whom they were wrote...<sup>42</sup>

It is not known in what periodical, where, or when, this poem first appeared in print. Indeed, many of Tannahill's early songs and poems are difficult to date. Besides the fact they have been collected in various editions of his work from 1807 onwards, the establishment of an exact chronology for his output of poetry and song during the 1790s and early 1800s is a difficult, if not impossible task: David Semple made some attempt but was not wholly successful. Also, there are no known extant letters of Tannahill's from the 1790s to give clues to the chronology of his output. However, it is known that Alexander Wilson arrived in America on the 14<sup>th</sup> of July 1794. As Tannahill stated: 'Since now he's [Wilson] gane, an Burns is deid,/ Ah! wha will tune the Scottish reed?'.<sup>43</sup> Burns died in 1796 and in 1804, Tannahill had poems published in *The Poetical Magazine*<sup>44</sup> (though 'Wilson's Emigration' was not among them). Additionally, McLaren and Tannahill became friends in 1803. The best one can conjecture is that between 1796 and 1803 Tannahill penned 'Wilson's Emigration'.

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During his teens Tannahill studied both music and poetry. He taught himself to read and write music and to play the German flute at which he was to become proficient:

Persons like TANNAHILL, desirous of acquiring knowledge, sought to improve their minds by reading and study. [...] The qualifications to which he directed his attention were those treating of poetry and music. The songs of the bards were his delight, and his favourite musical instrument the German flute.<sup>45</sup>

In order to write whilst weaving, he set up a desk and ink-pot at his loom: a practice which Fred Freeman suggests gave his songs a characteristic rhythmical quality.<sup>46</sup>

Although Tannahill's older brother, Thomas, had died in 1795, there was some happiness in 1796 when two other brothers married and in April 1797 Robert was best man at his cousin and namesake's wedding. The years of 1799 and 1800 were particularly harsh for the people of Paisley. There was crop failure in 1799 and trade had still not significantly picked up since

1795. In addition, the town was awash with recruitment bands as Britain was in need of troops to fight the French and quell Irish unrest:

The Irish Rebellion still caused recruiting to be continued; [...] recruiting was carried on to greater extent than that which occurred during the years 1793-4-5-6 and 7.<sup>47</sup>

Economic hardship meant rich pickings for recruitment parties in Paisley:

it was considered a proper time to send recruiting parties to Paisley to enlist the young men in depressed circumstances. Party after party came to Paisley until there was as many as twenty different recruiting parties in the town at one time.<sup>48</sup>

Times were hard. In January 1800 a public meeting was called to discuss ‘means to alleviate the distress’ and soup kitchens were set up.<sup>49</sup> Indeed, many of those who were disinclined towards military service, were feeling the financial pinch, or both, left town. Tannahill and his younger brother Hugh were among those who moved. Whether motivated by ‘draft dodging’ or economic necessity, they first went to Preston in Lancashire where Hugh remained while Robert went on to find work in Bolton. It was there he struck up a friendship with William Kibble, who originated from Paisley, and helped Tannahill settle in.

Tannahill wrote two poems about his experiences in Bolton - ‘LINES on a Country Justice in the South’, and ‘A Lesson’. The latter gives some indication as to Tannahill’s thinking about language with regard to regional accents, illustrated by bold contrasts of phonetic representation on the page:

### **A Lesson**

Quoth gobbin Tom of Lancashire,  
To northern Jock, a lowland drover,  
“Those are foin kaise thai’rt driving there,  
They’ve zure been fed on English clover.”  
“Foin Kaise!” quoth Jock, “ye bleth’rin hash,

Deil draw your nose as lang's a sow's!  
That tauk o yours is queer like trash ;  
Foin kaise ! poor gowk !—their names are koose.”  
The very fault which I in others see,  
Like kind, or worse, perhaps is seen in me.<sup>50</sup>

This poem, in three voices, has a sense of performance or drama about it. It is for voices and about the sound of voices; about dialects and dialogue. It is resonant today as it raises questions about the qualities of vocal sounds that have strong political implications in terms of race, class, exile, migration, nationality and identity. The subject of conversation, ‘koose’ (cows), lends an element of humour and absurdity to the poem. However, serious points are being made about language prejudice and snobbery. Tannahill presents a standard English voice, and two non-standard voices which are Lancashire and Lowland Scots. The narrator, or standard English speaker, ultimately realises that there is a profound difference between writing in standard English and the sound of his own voice. As a result of living in England, Tannahill raises questions about class, region, nation and identity and berates himself for the fault of ‘koose’ while recognising that ‘kaise’ is no different.

It is possible that Tannahill’s awareness of accent and class, as demonstrated in ‘A Lesson’, was one of the contributing factors to his apparent avoidance of wealthy and powerful people:

He found it required a disagreeable effort to meet a stranger, if in a station superior to his own. He had no favour to ask; he disliked servility, and from seldom associating with his superiors he had contracted a fear and awe of their presence. Intercourse would have removed this uneasiness, but the opportunities of brushing off diffidence were not sufficiently frequent, and perhaps, considering his period of life and confirmed habits, it was rather fortunate for his own happiness that he shunned every occasion of being admitted to the tables of the wealthy.<sup>51</sup>

Whether or not Tannahill was in ‘awe’ of ‘his superiors’ would appear to be a matter of conjecture. His dislike of oppression and snobbery might as easily have been the major factor

in his shunning ‘the tables of the wealthy’, and in the poem above he embraces difference with irony and humour.

A different insight into Tannahill’s personality is provided by John Struthers, which helps explain his aversion to the wealthy and dispel the generally accepted notion of his acute shyness:

No man enjoyed company with a higher relish; and though he spoke little [...] his company was often deeply interesting. When he did speak, it was in praise of depressed merit; to mitigate the censures which the world is always liberal in bestowing upon the unfortunate; against chicanery and oppression, which of all kinds, he held the deepest abhorrence.<sup>52</sup>

In his poetry Tannahill implicated those with wealth and power as oppressors. Indeed, his use of the phrase ‘haughty despot’ in the following quotation connects the British ruling class with Napoleon in what could be considered a form of class-based internationalism:

When wealth with arrogance exalts his brow,  
And reckons Poverty a wretch most low,  
Let good intentions dignify thy soul,  
And conscious rectitude will crown the whole.  
Hence indigence will independence own,  
And soar above the haughty despot’s frown.<sup>53</sup>

This extract from ‘Epistle to A. Borland’ asserts that in spite of Borland being poor he is dignified regardless of what the rich might think of him; he is in thrall to no one, free to think as he pleases, and in his freedom soars ‘above the haughty despot’s frown’. From a slightly different perspective the extract can be interpreted as saying that it does not matter if the rich treat us with disdain, we are intelligent, independent human beings and as such, worth as much as they are. This is a strong statement illuminating the value of equality with regard to power, wealth and human worth. Such poetic moments place Tannahill within the radical tradition of Paisley weaver-poets fostered by Alexander Wilson and John Robertson, rooting



Tannahill's verse in a local tradition that is not solely derived from values and attitudes popularised in the poetry of Robert Burns.

For a man who relished company, who was often in public houses and at the theatre, who was friendly with musicians and actors, it is debatable that he would have been intimidated by folk in 'socially superior' positions. While it is possible that he may have been shy and enjoyed solitude, he had a wide circle of friends. Indeed, his 'shyness' was probably over-emphasised by nineteenth century biographers. According to Semple: 'During his childhood he was shy in the meeting of strangers, and that bashfulness continued more or less during his whole life'.<sup>54</sup> Yet, from the evidence of his social activity, his poetry and his correspondence, this shyness of character is contradicted. He was a founder member and first Clerk of the Paisley Burns' Club (1805), and along with Alexander McNaught, was influential in the formation of the Paisley Trades Library (1805-6).<sup>55</sup> He also attended the Paisley Literary, Poetical and Musical Club and a similar club in Kilbarchan. His closest theatrical acquaintances were the actors Archibald Pollok and William Livingstone. Indeed, Livingstone wrote to him from Kirkcudbright in 1804 to say how much he enjoyed the company of Tannahill and his friends:

I rejoice to hear that you are still much in the old way. Long may your friendly few, alike removed from ignorance and pedantry, from foppish ceremony and rude vulgarity, enjoy their manly, social, friendly intercourse. And in your hours of relaxation from the fatigues of honest bodily labour or mental exertion, may good sense, good humour, and good cheer crown the chosen circle, in which I spent so many happy hours.<sup>56</sup>

Tannahill displays affection for social intercourse in the poem 'Allan's Ale' written in 1799.

It is about beer brewed in Paisley and the pleasures of its effects:

Whether a friendly, social meetin',  
Or politician's thrang debatin',  
Or benders blest your wizzens weetin,

Mark well my tale,  
Ye'll fin' nae drink ha'f worth your getting',  
Like Allan's Ale.

...

Let selfish wights impose their notions,  
And d — n the man wont tak' their lessons,  
I scorn their threats, I scorn their cautions,  
Say what they will;  
Let friendship crown our best devotions  
Wi' Allan's Ale.<sup>57</sup>  
Stanzas, 5 & 8.

If 'Allan's Ale' reflects Tannahill's behaviour at the age of twenty-five, then he was a man who enjoyed social drinking and visits to the pub. In the following poem, also written in the Habby form, he has this to say on the subject of drinking and its relationship to literary creativity:

### **Scotch Drink**

Let ither bards exhaust their stock  
O heav'nly names on heav'nly folk  
An god an goddesses invoke  
Tae guide the pen,  
While, just as well, a barbers block  
Woud ser their en.

Nae muse hae I, like guid Scotch drink,  
It mak's the dormant saul to think,  
Gars wit an rhyme thegither clink  
In canty measure,  
An, even tho half fou we wink,  
Inspires wi pleasure.<sup>58</sup>  
Stanzas 1 & 2.

This poem was originally titled 'Stanzas On Invocation' in the 1807 edition. However, it was changed to 'Scotch Drink' by David Semple possibly to highlight the Burns connection and enhance Tannahill's credibility as Burns's natural successor.<sup>59</sup> While 'Allan's Ale' is a highly local poem, specifically dealing with existing people, in contrast 'Stanzas On Invocation' (or

‘Scotch Drink’) is a more abstract piece. The latter was almost certainly influenced by Burns’s poem ‘Scotch Drink’ which was published in ‘The Kilmarnock Edition’ of 1786. However, Tannahill’s own experience of drinking and writing must have had some relevance to the composition of ‘Stanzas On Invocation’, rather than it being merely a literary exercise in the Burnsian style.<sup>60</sup>

Tannahill liked drinking, disliked over-indulgence, hated hangovers and suffered badly from them. This is illustrated in his letter to Alexander Borland written in 1810, where he complains that the writing of rhymes and songs had got him into the:

habit of being oftener in a public house than can be good for any body— altho’ I go there as seldom as possible - yet how often have I sat to within my last shilling, and unlike some of our friends who are better circumstanced, had to return to my loom sick and feverish— This often makes me appear sullen in the company, for if I indulge to the extent we have both seen in others I am in hell for two or three days afterwards.<sup>61</sup>

In a letter Tannahill received from his friend, James Clark, billeted in Aberdeen in 1807, there is no indication that Tannahill is the type of person who does not enjoy drinking and socialising:

There are a number of free-and-easy clubs here, and three good tap-rooms, which are very well attended, which by going to sometimes a stranger gets acquainted with the natives. I have the honour to be president now of a very respectable club. I have sung I don’t know how often your glorious song “The Coggie” here, which of all your songs is my favourite. (I hope in God the author of it nor his friends will never want one.) It is a great favourite here. I have never seen Mr. Ross but once since I came here, and then it was by chance he was in town. He keeps no music shop, and teaches but little. He has made his fortune some years ago—keeps a town and country house, elegantly furnished. He is a strange genius for a musician—keeps no company, and never enjoyed his bottle. He sent up a letter to me for you, with his compliments to me, wishing me to forward it, which I did as soon as possible. I hope you received it safe from David Dickie. I am playing in the orchestra at the theatre here.<sup>62</sup>

Clark is rather amazed that John Ross the composer does not, apparently, drink and expresses

this quite openly to Tannahill. While in his ‘Epistle to A Borland, Feb 1806’ Tannahill praises ‘Temperance’ for its sense of balance in social life of the everything-in-moderation kind, he also states:

The heart-enlivening, friendly, social bowl,  
To rapturous ecstasy exalts the soul;  
But when to midnight hour we keep it up,  
Next morning feels the poison of the cup.<sup>63</sup>

The fourth stanza from ‘Stanzas on Invocation’ (or ‘Scotch Drink’), probably gives an accurate reflection of how Tannahill felt about drinking:

O would the gods but grant my wish!  
My *constant pray’r* would be for this,  
That love sincere, with health an’ peace  
My lot they’d clink in,  
With now-an’-then the social joys  
O’ friendly drinkin’.<sup>64</sup>

This poem is about more than just drinking, it is about sources of inspiration and living well. Further, embedded within the poem is a contradiction in that there is a kind of knowing humour in its overall tone, as though Tannahill is aware that he is making fun of serious abstainers and the idea of temperance.

Tannahill wrote about both the miseries and the joys of drinking and understood the difficulties of living in a culture where alcohol consumption was part of the fabric of daily life. In the poems ‘Parody. On seeing Mr Thomas Willoughby, Tragedian, rather below himself’ and ‘On seeing a Once Worthy Character lying in a state of inebriation in the street’, the miseries and misfortunes of alcoholism are dealt with in a way which shows Tannahill’s sympathy for alcoholics:

If loss of worth may draw a pitying tear,  
Stop, passenger, and pay that tribute here—  
...  
Now lost in folly, all his virtues sleep, —

Let's mind his former worth, and o'er his frailties weep.<sup>65</sup>

In summary, Tannahill was a sociable man with a circumspect attitude to alcohol. He recommended temperance and balance but did drink himself, occasionally to excess. Though he strove towards happiness and social drinking he empathised with those unfortunate enough to become miserable, depressed or alcoholic. For Tannahill, there was a social responsibility upon us all to help those in dire circumstances regardless of how they got there. In contrast to his often critical attitude towards the wealthy, with regard to poverty, his attitude was not one of condemnation of the poor for being poor. Nowhere in his work does he make a distinction between 'honest poverty' and what might be termed self-inflicted poverty due to alcoholism or any other foibles; though he does condemn those men who drink and gamble, leaving their wives and weans impoverished at home.

\*

Summoned back from England to Paisley in December 1801, the Tannahill brothers arrived home in either late December or early January 1802, reportedly in time to see their father before he died. After the funeral, they did not return to England but remained in Paisley. Tannahill's biographer Philip Ramsay gives the following extract from a letter written to William Kibble on March 14<sup>th</sup> 1802 which illustrates the impact of his father's death:

Alek, poor Alek is gone to his long home ! It was to me like an electric shock. Well, he was a good man; but his memory shall be dear and his worth had in remembrance by all who knew him. Death, like a thief, nips off our friends, kindred, and acquaintances, one by one, till the natural chain is broken, link after link, and leaves us scarce a wish to stop behind them. My brother Hugh and I are all that now remain at home with our old mother, bending under age and frailty, and but seven years back nine of us used to sit down at dinner together, (I still moralise sometimes). I cannot but remember that such things were and those most dear to me.<sup>66</sup>

According to Semple the 'Alek' referred to was a friend of Tannahill's from Bolton.<sup>67</sup> It is easy to understand Tannahill's decision to remain in Paisley. His mother probably needed and appreciated the company, the worst of the bleak year of 1800 was over, and they had their own house and looms to work on. The death of his father was a life-changing event. Before 1802 Tannahill was an occasional versifier and songwriter. Now, after his father's death, the whole business took on a deeper and more serious complexion. He had resolved to live with his mother and follow his instincts in poetry and song. In 1802 he wrote the poem 'The Filial Vow':

### **The Filial Vow**

Why heaves my mother oft the deep drawn sigh?  
Why starts the big tear glistening in her eye?  
Why oft retire to hide her bursting grief?  
Why seeks she not, nor seems she wish relief?  
'Tis for my Father, mouldering with the dead  
My Brother, in bold manhood lowly laid,  
And for the pains which age is doomed to bear,  
She heaves a deep drawn sigh, and drops a silent tear.  
Yes, partly these her gloomy thoughts employ;  
But mostly this o'erclouds her ev'ry joy—  
She grieves to think she may be burthensome,  
Now feeble, old and tottering to the tomb.

Oh, hear me Heav'n, and record my Vow,  
Its non-performance let thy wrath pursue!  
I swear— Of what Thy providence may give,  
My mother shall her due maintenance have.  
'Twas hers to guide me thro Life's early day,  
To point out Virtue's path, and lead the way;  
Now, while her pow'rs in frigid langour sleep,  
'Tis mine to hand her down Life's rugged steep,  
With all her little weaknesses to bear  
Attentive, kind, to soothe her ev'ry care.  
'Tis Nature bids, and truest pleasure flows  
From lessening an aged parent's woes.<sup>68</sup>

This shows an acute awareness of duty, care and grief, and this understanding of 'gloomy'

psychological states often informs both his poetry and song. 'The Filial Vow' offers a good explanation of why Tannahill did not return to Bolton. It also shows his familiarity with grief in the mourning of his father and brother. It is both a plea and declaration of intent: a statement of his love for his mother and for his family; recognition of the effort his mother has put into making him the man he is and his resolve to repay her by looking after her in her time of grief and through her final years and days. The seriousness of the author's intent is reflected in the decasyllabic lines and in opening the poem with four solemn questions, all *Whys*. The first responses to the questions relate simply to grief (lines 5-8), the next response concerns his mother's state of health but finally the answer is that she fears being a burden to others (lines 11-12). In the second stanza Tannahill vows that his mother will have 'her due maintenance' 'while her pow'rs in frigid languor sleep'. In the final couplet Tannahill again expresses that aspect of his philosophy which recurs throughout his writing, that the strong should help the weak; that both 'Nature' as in, all that is, and human nature, teach us that in the social act of helping others we can find fulfilment, or, as Tannahill puts it here, it is in soothing the cares of his mother in her suffering that the 'truest pleasure flows'. As Gaffer says in Tannahill's drama *The Soldier's Return*, echoing Cicero, '*Virtue ever is its own reward*'.<sup>69</sup>

\*

In Tannahill's work selflessness is illustrative of a virtuous human nature. In this Tannahill is operating within a broad Presbyterian and Scottish intellectual/cultural tradition in which nature and human nature are fundamentally virtuous. These aspects of Tannahill's writing and attitudes were undoubtedly influenced by the general currency within Scottish culture of the republican-leaning discourses of George Buchanan and by the philosophical discourses of

Francis Hutcheson. The Scottish Presbyterian New Licht's insistence on individual autonomy or the 'subjection of all authority to the tribunal of individual reason' resulted in an 'equation of virtue with public spirit [which] could be employed to destabilise traditional notions of social leadership: the truly great man is no longer the prince or the earl; it is the virtuous, public-spirited man of whatever station who alone is truly noble'.<sup>70</sup> And this outlook is one which permeates Tannahill's work. Burns's 'The Holy Fair', in which he satirises Auld and New Lichts, and John Witherspoon's, *A Letter from a Blacksmith to the Ministers and Elders of the Church of Scotland* (1759)<sup>71</sup> and his anti-theatrical tract, *A serious enquiry into the nature and effects of the stage* (1757) are part of this Presbyterian discourse. Burns's poetic humour and sensuality bring a sense of joy that is somewhat lacking in the clerical prose manifestations of the discourse:

But now the L—d's ain trumpet touts,  
 Till a' the hills are rairan,  
 An' echoes back, return the shouts,  
 Black \*\*\*\*\* is na spairan:  
 His peircin words, like highland swords,  
 Divide the joints an' marrow;  
 His talk o' H-ll, whare devil's dwell,  
 Our vera 'Sauls does harrow'  
 Wi' fright that day.

...

How monie hearts this day converts,  
 O' Sinners and o' Lassies!  
 Their hearts o' stane, gin night are gane  
 As saft as ony flesh is.  
 There's some are fou o' *love divine*;  
 There's some are fou o' *brandy*;  
 An' monie jobs that day begin,  
 May end in *Houghmagandie*  
 Some ither day.<sup>72</sup>

Tannahill makes his own contribution to this discourse on numerous occasions, where he was also capable of humour, irony and satire. The following is a fairly typical example:



The *zealot* thinks he'll go to heav'n direct,  
Adhering to the tenets of his sect,  
E'en tho' his practice lie in this alone,  
To rail at all persuasions but his own.  
from, 'Epistle to A. Borland, Feb 1806'<sup>73</sup>

Moderate, or New Light, Presbyterianism is extremely important in understanding Burns, Tannahill and eighteenth-century Scotland. It is illustrative of the deeply fractious nature of Scottish Presbyterianism which developed partly as a response to the Patronage Act of 1712. Throughout the 1700s, and even before, Protestants were in no sense unified. Some Presbyterians held that Episcopalians were worse than Papists.<sup>74</sup> Others saw no distinction between Catholics and Anglicans. The Moderates in peace-time felt they were at liberty to express differences of conscience from brother Presbyterians as there was no longer any need to present an anti-papist, anti-Jacobite united front. On the patronage question, the Moderates were less democratic than their name might imply. In 1752 they banded together to form an effective party which took control of the General Assembly and sought to enforce patronage against the wishes of elders and congregations. The ethos of New Light Presbyterianism stretched back into the seventeenth century and had a broad cultural impact beyond the Edinburgh hierarchy of the Church of Scotland. Its intellectual roots lay in the cross-fertilisation of Irish and Scottish Presbyterian thinking embodied in the ideas of Francis Hutcheson who, though he opposed patronage, influenced New Light thinking in many other areas, especially the doctrine of the power of individual reason to determine one's actions.<sup>75</sup> Tannahill, whether aware of it or not, takes a similar position to Hutcheson: disagreeing with patronage (though in a slightly different form) but agreeing with individual autonomy, for example, that one should be free to write a play and have it performed in a theatre.

Tannahill would not have had to read books or study these matters of religion to have a grasp of them - they were an integral part of social intercourse. He would merely have had

to talk with and listen to those around him to understand the essentials of these religious and philosophical disputes. Paisley had a Gaelic Church, Burghers and anti-Burghers (of the New and Auld Licht variety), Relievers, Cameronians and mainstream Church of Scotland worshippers. All manner of Presbyterians lived there and, no doubt, they socialised, debated, intermarried and worked together. In 'Epistle to A. Borland, Feb. 1806' there are lines which reflect the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) and this sense of taking action when confronted with injustice is part of Tannahill's morality; with its roots in a Presbyterian cultural background:

When suppliant Misery greets thy wand'ring eye  
Altho' in public, pass not heedless by;<sup>76</sup>

However, for Tannahill it was important to 'pass not heedless by' for the right reasons of conscience and not for one's own glorification or a show of wealth. In the lines that follow he suggests that a rich person who ostentatiously helps the poor is less likely to attain 'peace of mind' than the poor person who gives a 'pittance' out of solidarity with suffering humanity.

In the case of a poor person:

So conscience will a rich reward impart,  
And finer feelings play around thy heart.<sup>77</sup>

The sentiments in this piece of verse reflect the thrice told story in the New Testament in which Jesus Christ stresses that 'it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God'.<sup>78</sup> This element of New Testament doctrine is reflected in Tannahill's negative attitudes towards the rich and those who put wealth before the well being of others. Though in this poem the reward is 'finer feelings' rather than infinite joy in the afterlife.

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In the summer of 1805 Tannahill took a jaunt as far as the East Neuk of Fife, a fair journey for the time by means of foot, coach and boat. The following long letter (of which only the paragraph in curly brackets (p. 51) has previously been published) tells the story. This letter gives an excellent insight into Tannahill's character and attitudes. It reveals his views on the nature of Scottish song, his interest in Irish music, his joy at travelling and meeting people, his interest in Burns, and his great enthusiasm for writing, theatre and music:

To James Clark, Musician,  
Argyle-Shire Malitia Band,  
in the Castle  
Edinburgh.

— August 31st 1805

Dear Friend,

Everything was so novel to me in Edinburgh, that I never spent three days with greater happiness in my life, but meeting you and Buchanan would have made me happy any where. I regreted at parting that we had not another day or two with you. Paterson and I parted with our brother-tourists at Kinghorn, proceeded up the Forth thro Burntisland, aberdour, Inverkiething &<sup>c</sup> to Queensferry, where we again crossed and took up our lodgings for the night. Next morning we 'rose by four o'clock, proceeded thro Borastones and Falkirk to Grangemouth, thinking to get down in the dray-boat to Glasgow, but were disappointed, as none went on that day. We then went on to Cumbernauld-house thinking to get the Mail-coach or a return-[phaise], but again our hopes beguil'd us. But what signifies this dry detail to you, or any body.<sup>79</sup>

We reach Glasgow about 7 o'clock. God knows tired enough. There we learned from an acquaintance of Mr Struthers that poor Archie Pollock died in Carlisle, (not in Glasgow as you were inform'd) about two weeks before, and that Mrs Pollock was come to Glasgow, he likewise knew that our worthy friend Livingston was in Ireland but did not know in what part of it. I intend, the first time I go in to enquire out old Shaw, on purpose to know if he has got any word of them of late. We saw some Playbills posted up in Falkirk as we passed thro', a Mr Davies seemed to be at the head of the Party. I dont recollect any others of the names save Bond and a Mr Ward— I delivered your message to Will<sup>m</sup> Stewart, he seemed particularly happy to hear from you, and said, he and your friend R. Smith would positively go to Kilbarchan on next Saturday afternoon.

{I am much obliged to you for fitting me with an air suitable to the stanza which I formerly sent you, and tho' it answers the words, as well as ever tune did any, yet I am doubtful that the verses will not do to sing at all, owing to the repetition of the same two lines at the hinder-end of every stanza, which two lines being repeated twice (to the music) will be intolerably insipid, however I will give you the whole of it. So that you may judge}

### Dirge

Let grief forever cloud the day  
That saw our Bard borne to the clay  
Let joy be banish'd every eye  
And nature weeping seem to cry  
"he's gone, he's gone! he's frae us torn!  
The ae best fellow e'er was born."

Let Sol resign his wonted powers  
Let chilling north winds blast the flowers  
That each may drop its withering head  
And seem tae mourn our Poet dead  
"he's gone, he's gone! he's frae us torn!  
The ae best fellow e'er was born."

Let shepherds from the mountains steep  
Look down on widow'd Nith and weep  
Let rustic swains their labours leave  
And sighing murmur o'er his grave  
"he's gone, he's gone! he's frae us torn!  
The ae best fellow e'er was born."

Let every bird that haunts the grove  
That day forget its notes of love  
Unto the rugged rocks complain  
And plaintive chirp the doleful strain  
"he's gone, he's gone! he's frae us torn!  
The ae best fellow e'er was born."

Let bonny Doon and winding Ayr  
Their bushy banks in anguish tear  
While many a tributary stream  
Pours down its griefs to swell the theme  
"he's gone, he's gone! he's frae us torn!  
The ae best fellow e'er was born."

All dismal let the nicht descend

Let whirling storms the forest rend  
Let furious tempests sweep the sky  
And dreary howling caverns cry-  
“he’s gone, he’s gone! he’s frae us torn!  
The ae best fellow e’er was born.”<sup>80</sup>

With respect to the Irish air with which you favoured me, upon the whole I am highly delighted with it, but don’t you think the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> lines of it bear some resemblance to the “Scottish Kail Brose.” Mr Hamilton’s stanza is admirably suited to it, in my opinion his lines possess, in an eminent degree, that beautiful, natural simplicity which characterises our best Scottish songs, I have attempted to add a verse to it but fear you will think it a frigid production. the original one is so compleat in itself, that he who tries another to it, labours under the disadvantage of not knowing what to say further on the Subject, however I will give you all I could make of it.

### Song

Now winter is gane, and the clouds flee away,  
Yon bonnie blue sky how delightful to see,  
Now linties and black birds sing on ilka spray  
That flourish round Woodhouselee.  
The hawthorn is blooming,  
The soft breeze perfuming,  
O come, my dear lassie the season is gay,  
And naething mair lovely can be;  
The primrose and the lily  
We’ll pu’ in the valley  
And lean, when we like, on some gowany brae  
That rises beside Woodhouselee.

Ye mind whan the snaw lay sae deep on the hill,  
Whan cauld icy cranreuchhung white on the tree,  
Whan bushes war leafless, an mournfully still  
War the wee birds o sweet Woodhouselee:  
Whan snow showers were fa’ing  
An wintry win’s blawing,  
Loud whistling o’er mountain an meadow sae chill,  
We markt it wi sorrowin ee;  
But now since the flowers  
Again busk the bowers,  
O come, my dear lassie, wi smilin goodwill,  
An wander around Woodhouselee.

---

Our friend R. Smith has set me an appropriate wild plaintive air to the following, let me know how the words please you.

### The Maniac's Song

Hark! tis the poor Maniac's song  
She sits on yon wild craggy steep  
And while the winds mournfully whistle along  
She wistfully looks o'er the deep  
And ay she sings lullaby, lullaby, lullaby,  
To hush the rude billows asleep.

She looks to yon rocks far at sea  
And thinks it her lover's white sail  
The warm tear of joy glads her wild glist'ning eye,  
As she beckons his vessel to hail  
And aye she sings, lullaby, lullaby, lullaby,  
And frets at the boistering gale.

Poor Susan was gentle and fair  
Till the seas rob'd her heart of its joy  
Then her reason was lost in the gloom of despair  
And her charms then did wither and die  
And now her sad lullaby, lullaby, lullaby,  
Oft wakes the lone passenger's sigh.

---

You may thank your stars that my paper is done, it is that alone bids me notice what a devil o' a long letter I have been writting to you Will<sup>m</sup> McCutchon is pretty well, he was enquiring after you and intends having a jaunt to Embro' soon, and if any bit nice, pleasant, simple beautiful (stop) melody I will thank you to send a set of it.

I am yours most truely  
Rob<sup>t</sup> Tannahill.<sup>81</sup>

While Tannahill's work contains much that is local in character, it also expresses a world view which includes strands of Presbyterianism, tenets of radicalism and Enlightenment humanism, Scottish nationalism, British nationalism, and elements from both Whig and Tory ideologies. The Tory component is the idea that industrialisation represents a historical discontinuity. Seen from the perspective of Tories it is an attack on rural, feudal relationships

which have given social certainty founded on a hierarchical, land-based economy controlled by the aristocracy. While Tannahill's view that industrialisation and the rise of a new merchant class is a negative development coincides with Tory ideology, he holds with his point of view because, agricultural failure, trade instability, war and blockades made life extremely difficult economically for weavers and not out of sympathy with a hierarchical system of landownership and patronage. John Parkhill, writing in 1857, identifies one historical factor that had an impact on the trajectory of Tannahill's life:

The great dearth of 1799 and 1800 had a great effect on the industrious classes. Oatmeal had risen to 3s and 9d. and even 4s. the peck, and was even difficult to obtain. When meal arrived at a dealer's shop, there would be a crowd about the door in an instant of a hundred or two.<sup>82</sup>

The capitalist market did not function as a mechanism for either social or economic justice but hurt the poorest hardest. Tannahill recognised this aspect of the new economics in 'The Poor Bowlman's Remonstrance', a poem written from the point of view of someone existing at the economic margin making an appeal to the theology of a levelling Almighty depicted metaphorically as a 'potter':

The potter moulds the passive clay  
To all the forms you see,  
And that same Pow'r that formed you  
Hath likewise fashion'd me.  
Then, O let pity sway your souls!—  
Though needy, poor as poor can be,  
I stoop not to your charity,  
But cry my plates and bowls.<sup>83</sup>

In their opposition to industrial 'progress,' both artisans and aristocrats had, in some aspects, a common enemy in the incipient bourgeoisie. Although, that does not mean that my enemy's enemy is my friend. The radical aspect of Tannahill's poetry is the recognition of equality of human worth, which derived from the French Revolution as well as Presbyterian radicalism.

As Alexander Wilson noted in his protest poem against the banning of the *Rights of Man*, entitled *An Address to the Synod of G\*\*\*\*\*w and A\*r*, and published under the pseudonym of Lawrie Nettle:

The Rights of Man is now weel kenned,  
And red by mony a hunder;  
For Tammy Paine the buik has penned,  
And lent the court a lounder.

Wilson also criticises patronage in this poem even though he had sought it himself from William McDowal, the Member of Parliament for Paisley, for the 1791 edition of his *Poems and Songs*:

The kirk shou'd a' your time mortgage,  
For weel she pays the cost;  
And royalty and patronage  
Eternally's your toast  
Baith night and day.<sup>84</sup>

Tannahill's friends James Scadlock and William McLaren (b.1772) were supposedly 'at the forefront of agitation' with Alexander Wilson in Paisley during 1792, although McLaren was not to become close friends with Tannahill until 1803.<sup>85</sup> Such support for Paineite ideas and agitation were abhorrent to Tories and the aristocracy. However, in principle, an overlap exists between this radicalism, democratic Presbyterian traditions expressed in the work of George Buchanan and Francis Hutcheson, and the insistence of Dissenters in defiance of the Patronage Act that they select their own ministers.<sup>86</sup> This overlap is most obvious in the idea espoused by Paine's supporters and by radical leaning Presbyterians that hierarchical social structures could be legitimately challenged. Tannahill's opposition to literary patronage is in harmony with arguments for the legitimate challenging of hierarchies. With regard to religion, however, Tannahill seems to have been highly sceptical of most branches of Presbyterianism and expressed outright support for none.



\*

Most of Tannahill's biographers paint an unconvincing picture of his love life. It generally goes along the lines that he was scorned by the object of his desires, Jenny Tennant, and vowed to remain single for the rest of his days, and this has become something of a myth as there is no evidence that Tannahill ever made such a vow. David Semple and Alexander Reekie are somewhat perplexed by the story but do not actually disagree with it. Reekie, writing in 1911, states:

It is doubtful that Tannahill was ever in love; there are various legends to that effect, but none of these are very conclusive. Certainly he was no gallant.<sup>87</sup>

Reekie then goes on to give the details of Tannahill's relationship with Jenny Tennant, much as Semple has given them, which almost dovetails with the myth, in that Ms Tennant appears to have dropped Tannahill for someone else, whom she married in 1798. Tannahill wrote two songs with Jenny Tennant in mind - 'The Fareweel' and 'Jessie the Flower o' Dumblane'. There certainly seems to be some credence in the story that he courted Jenny Tennant, yet, he was not so heartbroken that he remained without female company for the rest of his days. In what seems the most credible piece of information regarding Tannahill's relationships with women, Charles Rogers writing in 1856 tells us that he:

paid court to two females of his own rank. The first of these was Jean King, sister of his friend John King... His next sweetheart was Mary Allan, sister of the poet Robert Allan. This estimable woman was a sad mourner on the poet's death, and for many years wept aloud when her deceased lover was made the subject of conversation in her presence.<sup>88</sup>

When Rogers wrote the above, Mary Allan was living in America. He further informs us that: '[s]ome verses addressed to her by the poet she continues to retain with the fondest affection'.<sup>89</sup> It appears that Tannahill was romantically close to at least three women in his

lifetime. It is perhaps unusual that he did not marry as most of his friends did so, but for long stretches of his adult life he believed he was close to death due to frequent chest infections and bouts of ill health. Muir informs us that: ‘In one of the suppressed poems, dated 1804, we have the following explicit and striking acknowledgement.’<sup>90</sup>

But ere a few short summers gae,  
Your friend will mix his kindred clay,  
For fell Disease tugs at my breast  
To hurry me away.’<sup>91</sup>

In addition to this, Tannahill in morbid mood (and prescient with regard to his suicide) writes in ‘Prayer, Under Affliction’:

Almighty pow’r, who wings the storm,  
And calms the raging wind,  
Restore to health my wasted form,  
And tranquillize my mind.

...

But should thy sacred law of Right,  
Seek life, a sacrifice,  
O! haste that awful, solemn night,  
When death shall veil mine eyes.<sup>92</sup>

1<sup>st</sup> & last stanzas.

This poem resembles Burns’s poem ‘A Winter Night’, but it has a rather different feel due to its first person narration and lyrical rather than rhetorical tone. However, it is undeniable that Tannahill’s values are similar to those Burns espouses in ‘A Winter Night’. Though Burns’s emphatic statement in the last two lines of his poem that ‘The heart benevolent and kind/ The most resembles God’,<sup>93</sup> differs from Tannahill’s general outlook which can be stated as – *The heart benevolent and kind/ The most resembles man in his true nature*. While the difference is subtle, it is significant that Tannahill rarely uses the word God in such a context or manner. Generally he uses other words where God could just as easily appear, as in ‘Prayer, Under Affliction’ where, somewhat pantheistically, he gives us an ‘Almighty pow’r, who wings the

storm’.

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By 1806 the population of Paisley had grown to around 27,000, and on July 12<sup>th</sup> of that year, the Paisley Police Act was passed. Tannahill thought this would lead to an increase in taxation and was doubtful that the proposed building of a prison (Bridewell) was warranted at all. His attitude to taxation was sceptical as previous taxes imposed by the London government had been primarily to raise money to finance the war with France. In August he wrote to James King with these and other issues in mind:

Friend James

I have little doubt that after my long unwarranted silence that this will be but coldly received, but, “Hand your nine-tailed cat over, till once you’ve heard my story.” — The truth is I received your last in due time and would have answered immediatly, but having an appointment with Mr Borland to meet him at 3 mile house on Sunday-eight-days following, I deferred writing till then — unhappily that day rained and stormed so tremendously that our meeting did not take place - I have not seen him since but am informed that he and family are all well and that he intends to be in Paisley on St James-day Friday. Which is Friday eight days – I would then have written but hearing it confidently reported that your Reg<sup>t</sup> had got the Rout for Scotland and that you were positively on your way home, I thought there would be little chance of my letter finding its way to you, therefore dropt all thoughts of writing until I could hear something more of you — I am just now informed that you are still at Dover and hope you will receive this, but fearing failure, will defer writing any rhymes until my next — I called on your mother, She and your sister were both extremely pleased to hear of your being well again, they are both in health and I assure you I never saw them look better than at present, your mother bade me inform you that R. Rowan (The Laird’s son) had died of consumption in Ireland —

You remember bidding me enquire for Miss C-- W-- . I was assured by some blades who said they knew her that she was actually one of the [frail] sisterhood, I understand that she is out at service, but dont know where, or with whom — now for the Poetics of the Day – a George M’Indoe, Glasgow, lately pub. a volume of poems by subscription. Price 2/6. Wretcheder stuff never came from the press — a Thomas Smith of Bridge-town near Glasgow is just now going thro’ with proposals for Pub<sup>s</sup> his poems in 4 numbers 1<sup>d</sup> each, I dont know how they may turn out, his specimen on the proposal is tolerable – Did you know Arch<sup>d</sup> Fyfe, reed-maker Causeyside, he is dead lately and has left a widow and 5 small children, his well-wishers have opened a subscription

for the Publication of his poems for the benefit of his family, a great number of the first rank in Paisley are warmly interesting themselves in promoting the subscription, indeed such a laudable Zeal says much for the human heart. Arch<sup>d</sup> was a fine fellow and is much regretted by all who knew him - With regard to the Russian Soldier I esteem it as amongst the first of yours that I have seen, in general it pleases me highly, but I think the last verse would do honour to our best poets. I have shewn it to several of my acquaintances whose taste I confide in, and they all gave it their decided approbation, I have used the liberty of sending it to the Song-book which I mention'd formerly to you, it will be printed in the course of a fortnight

I hear that the Lanarkshire are on their way home - it is hard to say what we may expect from the present negotiations not knowing whether they wish peace at all, or if it is some political shuffle.

Our magistrates have obtained an act of Parliament for the better regulating of the police of the town, paving and lighting the streets, the building of a Bridewell &c. - but as the assessments will be very heavy on the inhabitants, it is rather an unpopular measure, it is believed that the expense of the Bridewell will amount to more in one year than the loss sustained in Paisley by "Pick-pocks and Pick-locks," since the days of King Blearie, but our black-coated Gentry, who generally, "bring their purposes to bear" insist that the horrid wickedness of the present evil generation calls aloud, yea, cries vehemently for such an undertaking. Wonderful Wisdom ! ! £2000 shall be laid out in building a large house for the confinement of J. M'D---d and J. W----m and two or three others such like —

— I will be glad to see the poetry which you mentioned in your last. Please write soon owning the receipt of this and let me know when, or whither you have any prospects of ~~being~~ returning to Scotland. In my next I will study to send you something or other - I sometimes see Serg<sup>t</sup> Boyd, his leg is mended, he weaves at the loom, and appears well and hearty. Two poor infatuated mortals belonging to Inchinan Parish were condemned at Edin<sup>g</sup> last Wednesday for wilful setting fire to, and burning a farm house in the same parish about 4 months ago, they are to be executed at Edin<sup>g</sup>.

I will expect yours soon and bids you farewell for the present, excuse appearance of haste, my pen, Yours &<sup>c</sup> Robt. Tannahill<sup>94</sup>

This letter reveals the thirty-two year old Tannahill as an opinionated man capable of clear, critical thought. A person sure of his feelings and attitudes.

### **THE PAISLEY BURNS CLUB**

There is observable throughout the writings of Robert Tannahill a strong resemblance to the style of Burns. This, however, is not to be wondered at, as Burns and Tannahill were contemporaries.<sup>95</sup>

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No man of judgement will hazard a comparison between Tannahill and Burns.<sup>96</sup>

While the War with France was ongoing, in late 1804 Tannahill and his friends embarked on a project of a different nature which has had important effects as a Scottish cultural phenomenon since January 1805. Tannahill's friend William Wylie was married to James Scadlock's sister Elizabeth and this is indicative of the close-knit nature of a circle of friends and acquaintances, connected by various social ties such as occupation, interests, locality, and family. This circle formed a loose community of artists in and around Paisley, working independently of one another, sharing ideas, and occasionally collaborating. The most concrete institutional manifestation of this particular community of largely Paisley-born literary and musical artists was the formation of the Paisley Burns Club at its inaugural meeting on January 29<sup>th</sup> 1805.

The foundation of the Burns Club was a means of sharing ideas, getting their work to a wider public and at the same time remembering 'The Bard' as more or less one of their own. That Burns was not one of the 'rich' whom Tannahill is so fond of disparaging is significant for them. If a farmer's son can become a celebrated poet then why not a weaver, or to stretch the point a little further, why not anyone regardless of their background? Poets from poorer backgrounds often had to publish themselves by means of subscription. Those with patrons could be sponsored and those who were 'professionals' could sell their copyrights to publishers. Obviously the poorer you were the less chance you had of access to good education and career prospects, which meant it was to some extent economically determined as to whether or not your work was published in book form.

Nevertheless, people like Burns, Hogg and Tannahill managed to break through the barriers

to differing extents and many others published in newspapers or periodicals with more limited degrees of success. For Tannahill the support of his local community of writers and musicians was an important factor in his development and perseverance as an artist. In a short note written to Robert A. Smith we see how Tannahill, who must have been short of ready cash and quite depressed, expresses his appreciation of his friend James Barr who has sent him a 'packet' through the post:

Dear S.

I have just received this packet from J.B. – “I'm ten times doubly over his debtor”  
- Excuse my not coming over with them, for my beard's lang, an' my bauchles will hardly stay on my feet.<sup>97</sup>

Tannahill had a high opinion of Barr and often asked him for advice. While Smith was later to become nationally renowned for his ecclesiastical music, Tannahill also saw Barr as very able musically and this was an important factor in their friendship. In essence, just as the French National Assembly had attempted to democratise politics - 'Men are born and remain free and equal in rights'<sup>98</sup> - the circle of artists to which Tannahill belonged formed part of a movement attempting to democratise literature. Tannahill had great antipathy to the idea that money could be a bar to getting one's work published, yet through struggle and perseverance most of Tannahill's circle did manage to get work published in some form, although they came from fairly humble weaving backgrounds.<sup>99</sup> This is not to say that such a process of democratisation follows a linear path of ever expanding opportunities for the lower classes and the poor. However, the intermingling of so-called 'high' and 'low' cultures in eighteenth-century Scotland made it harder to exclude poorer authors, as did the existence of autonomous groups of artists such as Tannahill and his associates. Of course it wasn't too long before the Paisley Burns Club became the preserve of MPs and local worthies but in its

initial formation its democratic impulse and lack of exclusivity cannot be denied.

All that was required to be present at the first meeting was an interest in Burns's poetry and even that was not compulsory. At this first meeting, according to Robert Brown, 'there were nearly seventy persons present, yet no names are given, except the fifteen who were "appointed to conduct the business for the following year"'.<sup>100</sup> This fifteen included Tannahill, James Scadlock, William Wylie, R. A. Smith, William McLaren and Tannahill's brother James (b. 1771), 'a man of sterling ability and integrity, [who] had, during the ferment, been blamed for holding revolutionary principles'.<sup>101</sup> Here Robert Tannahill is in the company of people in sympathy with the general principles of Paineite reform, including his own brother James. For a man described as timid, shy and an apolitical poet of the sweet lyrics of nature, he appears to have kept the company of folk who had something of a radical political outlook.

William McLaren, who was President of the Paisley Burns Club in 1805, expressed thoroughly Scottish nationalist sentiments in his opening address to the January meeting. It was a speech fully imbued with radical passion. With reference to Ossian and Burns he stated:

Roll on, ye winged times, and, in your proud career, smile at the ruin of the great and the fall of the mighty; but weak the efforts of the tyrannic arm to erase from the memory of a grateful people the virtues of those men who have raised our country to a proud pre-eminence among the nations of the world. For me, departed bards, when my heart ceases to thrill with rapture to the melodies of your songs, may the haggard hand of misery wring my flinty bosom; may the soft tears of sympathy never wet my sallow cheeks, but may I sneak through life, scorned by the world and hated by myself.<sup>102</sup>

McLaren strongly endorses anti-tyrannical Presbyterian principle, mixing it with a smattering of classicism in which 'ye winged times' 'Roll on', perhaps towards an as yet unrealised Celtic Eden. Scottish 'departed bards' are worth remembering, while we are to 'smile at the

ruin of the great and the fall of the mighty'. McLaren's style is admirable, his phrasing colourful and his content tends towards the radical politically, though he does avoid any direct attack on the British government. Tannahill, in his role as Club Secretary, set out the ethos of the club in a rare piece of essay-like prose:

That Man is the only creature capable of enjoying an eminent degree of felicity, is a Truth so evident and so generally admitted, that, it were foolish to labour its proof. An indulgent Nature, ever attentive to the happenings of her off-spring, has enriched the world with men of superior intellect, who, by the splendour of their Genius, and the fascinating charms of their writings, have, like the Sun, which dissipates the vapours of night, dispers'd the dark clouds of Ignorance; have taught the vacant hours of Life to steal on with uninterrupted felicity; and thus in a eminent degree, contributed to the happiness of Mankind. Shall we then suffer such characters to pass unnoticed? No. Ye illustrious Benefactors of the world, we will cherish, we will celebrate your memories; your Virtues are already graven on our hearts, and the tears of honest gratitude shall bedew your tombs: Posterity will imitate and applaud the dead, and, your proud names shall roll thro an eternity of years. Animated by these reflections, a number of the admirers of Robert Burns met on the 29<sup>th</sup> Jan 1805 in the Star Inn Paisley, to celebrate his memory, where a beautiful, transparent bust of the Bard, painted by an eminent artist, was exhibited from the window. The company, amounting to near to seventy, sat down to Supper, after which, the President (William McLaren) addressed the company [...]<sup>103</sup>

This statement is a mixture of Enlightenment and romantic values; from the Enlightenment we get the notion that humanity is to be freed from 'the dark clouds of Ignorance' by men who have been created by 'Nature' to bring us 'happiness'. It is the 'Genius' of these men as writers and poets that brings us into a world 'which dissipates the vapours of night'. 'Nature' has brought us men who must be celebrated otherwise humanity will be in state of discord with its creator, 'An indulgent Nature, ever attentive to the happenings of her off-spring'. The idea of memory is also important, somehow the act of remembering will bring us 'happiness'; 'Posterity will imitate and applaud the dead', and this suggests that at some point in the future the values held dear by dead Scottish poets will again be those of the Scottish people. The



assertion that the values of the past will be rediscovered and help create a better (or a happy) world in the future is a feature of romantic-pastoralism, as is its presentation alongside an almost pantheistic sense of 'Nature' and the natural world.

William McLaren began his 1805 address with:

Gentlemen, — It is with infinite pleasure that I see, at this moment, so many men of taste, so many fond and enthusiastic lovers of Scottish song, met on this evening to celebrate the birth of our immortal bard. Let those whom fortune has placed in a more elevated situation in life, basking in the sunshine of prosperity, bind the fading laurel round the brow of the hero, who returns to his native land, rich with the spoils of a ravaged country, and clotted with the blood of an innocent people; be it ours to give the night to festivity and joy, on which Nature, partial to cold Scotia, gave her a Burns.<sup>104</sup>

In a clear anti-imperialist statement, McLaren is saying; forget foreign wars and conquest, it is beneath us, what is important is poetry and song. It is an extraordinary declaration. A Freemason McLaren might have been, but one construes he had little in common with 'the Prince of Wales (later George IV), who was Scottish Grand Master Mason from 1805-20'.<sup>105</sup> It is difficult to imagine the Prince Regent smiling 'at the ruin of the great and the fall of the mighty'.

In this context Tannahill's poem 'Lines, to W. McLaren, To attend a meeting of the Burns' Anniversary Society', takes on a clarity of meaning that is altogether more radical than that of a simply humorous ditty:

KING GEORDIE issues out his summons,  
To ca' his bairns, the Lairds an' Commons,  
To creesh the nation's moolie-heels,  
An' butter commerce' rusty wheels,  
An' see what new, what untried tax,  
Will lie the easiest on our backs.

The priest convenes his scandal-court,  
To ken what houghmagandie sport,  
Has gaun on within the parish,  
Since last they met, their funds to cherish.

But I, the servant of Apollo,  
Whose mandates I am proud to follow,  
He bids me warn you as the friend  
Of Burns's fame, that ye'll attend,  
Neist Friday e'en, in Lucky Wright's,  
To spend the best, the wale o' nights;  
Sae, under pain o' half-a-mark,  
Ye'll come, as signed by me, the CLERK.<sup>106</sup>

Tannahill's verse echoes McLaren's views as expressed in the latter's address. Describing himself as a 'servant of Apollo', Tannahill invites McLaren to the meeting but before doing so attacks both royalty and church, two of the most powerful institutions in Britain. In his scorning of religion Tannahill uses the word 'priest' which was often used to imply Anglican and Episcopalian Protestantism rather than, or as well as, Catholicism, and would exclude some, but not all, forms of Presbyterianism. Here, one encounters in Tannahill something that appears on the surface to be slight, but analysis and understanding of context show him to be a writer with a lightness of touch while dealing with serious political and moral questions. In this poem Tannahill is saying that he is 'proud to follow' the 'mandates' of Apollo in preference to the King or the church. This is a radical view even if presented in a gentle and humorous manner. Both McLaren and Tannahill are agreed that poetry and song or 'festivity and joy' are preferable alternatives to trade-wars, hierarchies and empires.

Another friend of Tannahill's present at the first meeting of the Paisley Burns Club was John King, who sang a song of his own composition and according to Robert Brown proposed the following toast, 'May the genius of Scotland be as conspicuous as her mountains'. The other toasts noted by Tannahill in the minute book were, 'May Burns be admired while a thistle grows in Caledonia,' and 'May Scotia never want the Sword of a Wallace nor the pen of a Burns'; a perfect illustration of 'the Patriot and the Patriot-Bard'.<sup>107</sup> John King, however, was

better known in Paisley for his later radical poem ‘The Deil’s Address to the Plunkin Corks’, which like Tannahill’s and Gavin Dalziel’s<sup>108</sup> earlier pieces, attacks the sharp business practice of Corks by suggesting that the ‘witches’ of Bargarran and the ‘Deil himsel’ are less schooled than Paisley Corks in the ways of fraud and deceit. King has the Deil addressing the Corks thus:

Ne’er suffer conscience to intrude—  
Be aye to poor folk harsh and rude,  
Nor listen to the voice of reason  
Against me devilship— that’s treason!  
Screw hard the weaver till he curses!  
That charms my ear and fills your purses.  
The profits frae sic schemes arising  
Hae long been great— indeed surprising.  
But what! my friends, I needna preach,  
Ye far exceed what I can teach;  
Wi’ satisfaction, I can see  
Ye’re even fit to counsel me.<sup>109</sup>

Robert Brown’s attitude to King’s use of the word ‘Cork’ is betrayed in a footnote: “‘Cork’ was the vulgar term or slang name given to the master manufacturers in Paisley. ‘Causeyside Corks’ was a common expression at one time, but it has very properly become obsolete.”<sup>110</sup>

The second meeting of the Paisley Burns Club, January 29<sup>th</sup> 1806 was attended by Tannahill’s friend and author of *The Poor Man’s Sabbath*, John Struthers. Tannahill had been acquainted with Struthers for some time before this. It was the publication in 1804 of *The Poor Man’s Sabbath* that brought Struthers to public attention. How he and Tannahill actually met is not known but it is likely that Struthers was working as a shoemaker in the Gorbals when they became acquainted.

In a letter to James Clark, Tannahill describes the Paisley ‘Burns’ Night’ of 1807:

My Dear Friend,

I received in due time your very welcome letter. Your intention of reciting my Ode pleased me highly. I am sure you could do it justice. I hope the meeting succeeded to your wishes. Ours went on gloriously. Eighty four sat at supper; after which, Mr. Blaikie addressed us in a neat speech calculated for the occasion, concluding with a toast—"To the Memory of Burns." The Ode which you gave the first spur to the writing of was well done. The plan was something novel. Mr. M'Laren spoke the recitative parts very well; and Messrs. Smith, Stewart, and Blaikie, sung the songs, harmonised in glees by Smith, in their best styles. In the course of the night were toasted the Kilbarchan meeting and yours. We had a number of original pieces. Smith sung an appropriate song by the author of "The Poor Man's Sabbath," who was out from Glasgow joining us. Not one disagreeable occurrence happened; all was harmony, enthusiasm, and goodwill. We had two rounds of toasts,—one of sentiments and one of authors. We broke up about one, and were well pleased and happy. I am sorry to inform you of the death of William Stewart's mother. She died on last Friday. I called on him for a tune which he had, and he told me she had just then expired. She was interred today.<sup>111</sup>

Tannahill was well enough acquainted with John Struthers to invite him to write an ode for the Paisley Burns night in 1808. Struthers had attended their 1806 and 1807 meetings and from the tone of Tannahill's letter of September 1807 the two appear to have been close:

there was a meeting of the Burns' Society here two weeks ago, and, altho' I was not there, I understand they are relying solely on you [Struthers] for an ODE at the next Anniversary, therefor, you will much disappoint us all if you do not furnish us with one. for my own part I have no thoughts of attempting one more line on the subject, having done what I reckon sufficient for one hand already.

This indicates that Tannahill was aware of the influence of Burns upon his own writing and that he did not want to continue writing poems of hero-worship for performance at Burns' nights. The letter continues with Tannahill talking to Struthers about poetry:

— You recollect my advising you to try something in the Sonnet style, I send you a little M.S. volume for your perusal, I think its content in general very pretty — they are the productions of M<sup>r</sup> Paterson, now minister of the Burgher congregation, [Anan], the originals fell by chance into my hand, and I thought them worthy of copying — there are a few incorrect lines in them, which you will notice, and which the author can easily amend — you may keep them till I see you. — Enclosed is a copy of the first Sonnet I ever tried, it appeared some time ago in the Caledonian,<sup>112</sup>

Tannahill and Struthers appear to have had a good deal in common, though Tannahill died in 1810 whereas Struthers lived into his seventies, dying in 1853 after working for a considerable time as librarian at Stirling's Library, Glasgow. And while we know little of Tannahill's views on extending the electoral franchise, Struthers, in later life, came down firmly against burdening the ordinary tradesman with such political minutiae.<sup>113</sup> Struthers was, however, capable of radical thought and anticipated Shelley's assertion that, 'Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world' when he wrote:

It has even been suggested, that were this same simple ballad making properly attended to it might supersede the necessity of laws altogether.<sup>114</sup>

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Five poems by Tannahill in honour of Burns's memory remain extant. Four of these were published in his 1807 volume; of the four poems appearing in that volume, three were in connection with the Paisley Burns' Club, the first being 'Lines to W. McLaren, to Attend a Meeting of the Burns' Anniversary Society'; the second, 'Burns' Anniversary Meeting,' was recited on January 29th 1805<sup>115</sup> at what is thought to be the first official 'Burns's night' in the town; the third poem was similarly for a 'Burns' Anniversary Meeting', and was recited in Paisley on January 29th 1807. The other poem about Burns, having no connection with the Society, is 'Dirge, Written on Reading an Account of Robert Burns' Funeral'.<sup>116</sup> As early as September 1807 Tannahill felt he had exhausted his ideas on Burns and wasn't particularly keen to compose a piece for the 1810 Burns' Anniversary Meeting. Nevertheless, he did so and ironically enough it is, arguably, the best of his three Anniversary poems in honour of Burns's memory.<sup>117</sup>

The Paisley Burns Club can be viewed in much the same way many people view

Burns' nights today, as an excuse to forget the troubles of the world and have a party. There is an element of truth to this but it is a partial view. At a deeper level this early Burnsian activity reflects disillusionment with politics, leaders and the war, and asserts that true patriotism resides in the work of writers and poets from which a sense of national 'happiness' can be derived, rather than in the 'political shuffle' of politicians. The Burns Club was one of the few public spaces where crowds could gather and assert their Scottish identity without fear of the authorities intervening; and where people of different social strata could mingle. Its proceedings also give us some insight into how Tannahill viewed Burns as a 'Genius' to whom he felt emotionally close. His reflection on why they had decided to found a Burns' Club shows how he felt about Burns, the power of poets and of poetry:

Ye illustrious Benefactors of the world, we will cherish, we will celebrate your memories; your Virtues are already graven on our hearts, and the tears of honest gratitude shall bedew your tombs.

Tannahill sees literature as being of huge benefit to 'Mankind' in its ability to bestow a deep sense of contentment or 'felicity' which comes from the understanding and insight gained in reading great work. Burns is, for Tannahill, a writer whose work provides this and Tannahill's emotional attachment to this viewpoint is clearly expressed above.

Tannahill wrote to James Barr in July 1806 concerning his song 'The Lament', and we find that not only is Burns one of the 'illustrious Benefactors of the world', but so is Thomas Campbell:

The Battle of Falkirk was Wallace's last, in which he was defeated with almost the loss of his whole Army.  
I am sensible that to give words suitable for the poignancy of his grief on such a trying reverse of fortune, would require all the fire and soul-melting energy of a Campbell or a Burns.<sup>118</sup>

When James King suggests to Tannahill that some of his songs are as good as Burns's he

does not take King entirely seriously:

I am happy that the songs in my volume please you, but when you mention them as equaling Burns's, I am afraid that the partiality of friendship weighs a good deal in that decision.<sup>119</sup>

However, the importance of Burns in relation to Tannahill, aside from his 'Virtues' and literary virtuosity, lies in his social status. Not only is Burns a genius, he is a Scottish genius and not only is he a Scottish genius, he is a man of humble origins. For someone like Tannahill, born to work the loom but with a passion for poetry and song, Burns is a heaven sent ploughman. It was almost as if with one stroke, the publication of the Kilmarnock edition in 1786, Burns swept away the snobberies and importance of literary coteries and patronage, opening up literature in a decisive way to the Scottish masses like no one before him.

Tannahill would probably have written songs and rhymes had Burns never existed but the confidence to publish his 1807 edition, to go forward and publish as a literate working man, came from the example of writers such as Burns and Alexander Wilson. In describing himself in the foreword to his 1807 edition as an 'unlettered mechanic', Tannahill pays homage to the Bards of his country who have similarly humble origins. This is the real importance of Burns in relation to Tannahill, not whether or not Tannahill imitated him, was overwhelmed by him or, like most Scottish poets of this period, suffered for living under his shadow. Burns showed that it really was possible to be a great writer regardless of social status and this, I suggest, is the most important lesson Tannahill and many others learned from him. Tannahill's key role in organising the first 'Burns's Night' in Paisley on January 29<sup>th</sup> 1805 - a night imbued with anti-imperialist spirit - is in itself a significant contribution to Scottish culture.

## CONCLUSION

Robert Tannahill is seen as 'The Paisley Poet', but he is far from the only poet of this period from Paisley who was talented and worth reading. Among his immediate friends, James Scadlock, William McLaren, James King, John King and Robert Allan were not inconsiderable as poets. There were numerous others, including George McIndoe (criticised by Tannahill in a letter to James King above, p. 47), John MacGregor, James Yool, John Mitchell, William Finlayson and Thomas Crichton: and, if what a reader demands from poetry is 'truth', or honesty of voice, presented with skill and passion, then all of the above qualify as worth reading.<sup>120</sup>

His 'accident of birth' in Paisley, Scotland, in 1774, had a profound effect on the writer Tannahill turned out to be. Presbyterianism, sympathy for a Painite outlook, access to the countryside, the effects of the Napoleonic Wars, Scottishness and Britishness, the Industrial Revolution, the influences of Allan Ramsay, Burns and Alexander Wilson, and national and local myth, all combined to impinge upon the population of Paisley in some way, and were important in determining the growth and development of Tannahill and his work. The work contains aspects of the political, religious, literary, economic and social realities of his time and place. These things, as with friendship, drinking and grief, were not just matters of book learning, but living. Nevertheless, his outlook also stems from his fierce sense of independence as well as of community - his personality and will are just as strongly imprinted on his work as are the effects of the environment in which he lived. His contempt for patronage, which can be linked to his dislike of 'servility', is expressed in the poem 'Epistle to J Buchanan Aug. 1806':

I ne'er, as yet, hae found a patron,  
For, scorn be till't! I hate a' flatt'rin',



Besides, I never had an itchin'  
To slake about a great man's kitchen,  
An' like a spaniel, lick his dishes,  
An' come an' gang just to his wishes;<sup>121</sup>

The attitudes Tannahill attributes to patrons here were deeply disappointing to him: a patron expecting to be flattered was, for Tannahill, disrespectful and inane; in suggesting that they thought they held power over others by virtue of their wealth and in his articulation of a desire to avoid that situation, he is expressing his sense of independence and of social justice. However, there is a political dimension to dislike of the patronage system in Scotland which was reflected in the work of writers such as James Thomson Callender and James 'Balloon' Tytler and their 1790s radicalism. Callender's *The Political Progress of Britain*, 'a pungent critique of imperialism, war and corruption', argues of the Constitutional Settlement of 1688 that: 'In practice, it is altogether, A CONSPIRACY OF THE RICH AGAINST THE POOR'.<sup>122</sup> This combined with the figure of the excise-man as the embodiment of a corrupt government, an unfair political system and with the popularity and influence of Paine's *Rights of Man*, Part 2, meant there was a strand of thought developing in Scotland, especially among the literate and artistic lower-orders, that patronage was anathema.<sup>123</sup> This puts Robert Burns in a somewhat awkward position. According to J. Walter McGinty writing in 2003 Burns's:

apparent support of Patronage in the ecclesiastical sphere is in accordance with his subsequent seeking of Patronage in the matter of his Excise appointments. His apparent mocking of people being able to choose for themselves resulting in calamitous consequences is consonant with his opinion of the poor judgement of the ordinary people who made up the membership of the Monkland Friendly Society in their choice of literature. (Contrast his oft-cited egalitarianism.)<sup>124</sup>

This would appear to be the patriotic British Burns of 'The Dumfries Volunteers' rather than the radical Burns of 'A Man's a Man', and perhaps goes some way to explaining the thinking

behind Tannahill's poem 'The Parnassiad', in which he deals with issues of literary fame and failure, literary courage, patronage, town versus country, and social status as they relate to himself and to his nascent sense of class consciousness. The poem is a cautionary tale in which a series of poets attempt to mount and fly on Pegasus but only 'Yon *Bard of Nature*', 'rich clad in native worth' is raised up 'In fame's ambrosial bowers'. The convoluted nature of the conceptual arguments in the poem could be attributed to Tannahill's awareness of Burns's contradictory positions of excise-man and egalitarian poet. However, they may also be seen as a representation of the contradictory feelings and doubts Tannahill had about his own talent. Nevertheless, he maintains his position of disapproval of patronage:

Now, see another vent'rer rise,  
 Deep-fraught with fulsome eulogies  
 To win his patron's favour —  
 One of those adulating things  
 That, dangling in the train of k—s,  
 Give guilt a splendid cover;  
 He mounts, well prefac'd by *my Lord*,  
 Inflicts the spur's sharp wound;  
*Pegasus* spurns the *great man's* word,  
 And won't move from the ground;  
 Now, mark his face, flush'd with disgrace,  
 Thro' future life to grieve on;  
 His wishes cross'd, his hopes all lost,  
 He sinks into *oblivion*.<sup>125</sup>

The phrase 'well prefac'd by *my Lord*', is interesting because Tannahill wrote his own preface for his 1807 volume, and dedicated it not to a patron but to his, and Alexander Wilson's, friend William McLaren. Further, there is no evidence that Tannahill ever sought a patron, unlike Alexander Wilson and William Finlayson who were more openly radical, politically, in their writing, but saw no way of avoiding patronage as a vehicle towards publication.

Local Paisley myths and facts of witchcraft are interesting in connection with his

reading of John Barbour and Scottish myth. At the end of the poem, 'The Hauntit Wud in Imitation of John Barbour', Tannahill concludes:

Twas sae dark ignorance dyd ween,  
Inne wilyart fancy's reign  
But now philosophyis brycht sunne  
Beamis owr the claudit brayne.<sup>126</sup>

This statement of Enlightenment values is not the writing of a person who is overwhelmed with fear, myth or superstition. On the contrary, no longer was the darkness of superstition to cloud humanity's thought, but philosophy was capable of liberating us from 'dark ignorance'. While Tannahill held to Enlightenment values in relation to superstition, he did not hold with the libertarian capitalist views of the newly emerging merchant/industrial class which were also part of the values of the Enlightenment. His poetry tells us that he found their 'revolutionary' struggle for wealth, and the subsequent shift of power to the growing industrial cities, disagreeable and was wont to hark back to somewhat more 'pastoral' values. This is the point in 'The Parnassiad' where Tannahill satirises the urban writer:

Yon *city-scribbler* thinks to scale  
The cliffs of fame with *Pastoral*,  
...  
Choice epithets in store he gets  
From *Virgil*, *Shenstone*, *Pope*,  
With tailor-art tacks part to part,  
And makes his Past'ral up.<sup>127</sup>

One problem with this piece of writing is that Tannahill could well be criticising himself here. He did admire Shenstone and Pope and from the evidence of the drama *The Soldier's Return*, had a good grasp of the theory and practice of Pastoral.<sup>128</sup> This verse places the writer in the city, but goes on to suggest that the raw materials an urban writer has to work with are those of a debased and unnatural environment of 'dirt and slime'. Read in this way these lines can

be seen as an attack on urban and industrial squalor. At the same time, however, it also makes sense to interpret the above verse as a critique of insincerity rather than simply an attack on the city itself, yet the insincerity is that of the 'city' where the inhabitants, including writers, never:

...beheld a flock of sheep,  
Save those driv'n by the butcher;  
Nor ever mark'd the gurgling stream,  
Except the common sew'r  
On rainy days, when dirt and slime  
Pour'd turbid past his door.<sup>129</sup>

This poem demonstrates a negative view of cities and of the process of industrialisation which was beginning to happen throughout Britain: a theme that probably finds its pinnacle of expression in James (B.V.) Thomson's poem, written in the early 1870s, *The City of Dreadful Night*, in which city dwellers are: 'The saddest and the weariest men on earth'.<sup>130</sup> Of course for Thomson the 'city' represents ravaged and tormented states physically, psychologically and spiritually. However, it is entirely possible that an analogous spirit of sadness and utter dejection - so vividly described by Thomson - did affect Tannahill when he drowned himself.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Robert Tannahill, Letter to James Clark, 20th September, 1807 (Glasgow University Library, Special Collections, MS Robertson 1/9).
- <sup>2</sup> 'Corks' were merchants who supplied raw materials to master weavers, bought the finished cloth then sold it on at a profit. Effectively controlling the non-factory sector of the weaving industry in the early 1800s, they were the business men who ran multiple weaving shops, perhaps the modern equivalent would be those people who control franchising or contracting out. The word itself has a derivation from these merchants being known as lightweights. They were either lightweight in that they were without substance in a commercial sense (i.e. they were *chancers*), or because they did not pay the weaver for the full weight of the cloth, a practice for which they were often derided in verse.
- <sup>3</sup> David Semple, 'Life of Tannahill', *Poems, Songs and Correspondence of Robert Tannahill*, Semple, ed. (Paisley, 1876), p. xxvi. Semple obviously means Paisley was small in comparison to its size in 1876. In 1756 a population of over 4,000 signified a fairly large settlement by comparison with other places in Scotland at the time.
- <sup>4</sup> W. M. Metcalfe, *A History of Paisley* (Paisley, 1909), p. 426.

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- <sup>5</sup> Burns's theological MS was printed by James Young of Paisley who also printed Tannahill's 1807 volume, *The Soldier's Return*.
- <sup>6</sup> William Motherwell, ed., *The Harp of Renfrewshire* (Glasgow, 1819), p.XIV.
- <sup>7</sup> Tom Leonard, ed., *Radical Renfrew* (Edinburgh, 1990), p. 1. See also the introductory essay to William Motherwell's *The Harp of Renfrewshire* and Robert Brown's *Paisley Poets*, 2 Vols. (Paisley, 1889-1890).
- <sup>8</sup> For details of printing and publishing in Paisley at this time see Ronald L. Crawford, *Literary Activity in Paisley in the Early Nineteenth Century* (thesis [2638], GUL, 1965).
- <sup>9</sup> William Jolly, *John Duncan, Weaver and Botanist* (London, 1883), p.23.
- <sup>10</sup> *Statistical Account of Scotland 1791-99*, Vol. 7, 'Lanarkshire and Renfrewshire', facsimile reprint (1973), p. 71. The principles underlying the operation of the Box are taken and merged with the biblical principle of the tithe by Thomas Paine in his pamphlet *Agrarian Justice*, written in 1795-96, to argue for a universal entitlement to a social wage. Paine, *Common Sense* with 'Agrarian Justice', appended (London, 2004).
- <sup>11</sup> David Semple, 'Life of Tannahill', *The Poems and Songs of Robert Tannahill*, Semple, ed. (Paisley, n.d.), pp. 31-32.
- <sup>12</sup> Semple, 'Life of Tannahill', *The Poems and Songs of Robert Tannahill*, p. 25. Brodie penned a locally popular long poem on the positive qualities of the potato.
- <sup>13</sup> Semple, 'Life of Tannahill', *The Poems and Songs of Robert Tannahill*, p. 23.

### **Psalm 127**

Except the Lord do build the house,  
 the builders lose their pain:  
 Except the Lord the city keep,  
 the watchmen watch in vain.

'Tis vain for you to rise betimes,  
 or late from rest to keep,  
 To feed on sorrows' bread; so gives  
 he his beloved sleep.

Lo, children are God's heritage,  
 the womb's fruit his reward.  
 The sons of youth as arrows are,  
 for strong men's hands prepared.

O happy is the man that hath  
 his quiver filled with those;  
 They unashamed in the gate  
 shall speak unto their foes.

From *The Scottish Hymnary/Psalter*, approved by the Church of Scotland.

- <sup>14</sup> Semple, 'Life of Tannahill', *The Poems and Songs of Robert Tannahill*, p. 29.
- <sup>15</sup> Semple, 'Life of Tannahill', *The Poems and Songs of Robert Tannahill*, p. 30. Semple states that he had access to Tannahill's father's 'private memorandum book'. Its whereabouts is now unknown.
- <sup>16</sup> According to the *Glasgow Herald* (4<sup>th</sup> June, 1874), the cause of death was 'consumption'.
- <sup>17</sup> Robert Burns, *The Poems and Songs of Robert Burns*, Vol. II., James Kinsley, ed. (Oxford, 1968), p. 562, lines 171-2.
- <sup>18</sup> Mary McCarthy, *A Social Geography of Paisley* (Paisley, 1969), p. 70.
- <sup>19</sup> See John Parkhill, *History of Paisley* (Paisley, 1857).
- <sup>20</sup> William McLaren, *The Life of Robert Tannahill the Renfrewshire Bard* (Paisley, 1815), p. 3.
- <sup>21</sup> A short biography of Peddie is given in, Robert Brown, *Paisley Burns Clubs* (Paisley, 1893), p. 151.
- <sup>22</sup> Semple, 'Life of Tannahill', *Poems, Songs and Correspondence of Robert Tannahill*, p. xliv, gives some

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details of Janet and Robert Tannahill's education.

- <sup>23</sup> The suggestion that James Andrew was Tannahill's school teacher is just that, a suggestion. There were other teachers in Paisley at that time such as the schoolmaster and poet Thomas Crichton (1761-1844).
- <sup>24</sup> This one example of Tannahill's riddles is given by James J. Lamb in his introduction to the 1873 reprint of the 1807 edition of Tannahill's, *The Soldier's Return: A Scottish Interlude in two Acts; with other Poems and Songs, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect*, Lamb, ed. (Paisley, 1873), p.xiii. The answer is the big nose of a man who takes snuff.
- <sup>25</sup> John Parkhill, *The Life of Peter Burnet* (Paisley, 1841), p. 15.
- <sup>26</sup> Parkhill, *The Life of Peter Burnet*, pp. 14-15.
- <sup>27</sup> John Campbell, 'Peter Burnet; Or, Black Peter', *Paisley Poets*, Brown, ed., Vol. 2 (Paisley, 1890), p. 40.
- <sup>28</sup> See Robert Tannahill, Letter to William Kibble, 11<sup>th</sup> April, 1807, in *Poems, Songs and Correspondence*, p. 387.
- <sup>29</sup> William Livingstone, Letter to Robert Tannahill, 18<sup>th</sup> November, 1804, in *Poems, Songs and Correspondence*, p. 366.
- <sup>30</sup> Robert Tannahill, 'The Choice', *The Soldier's Return: A Scottish Interlude in two Acts; with other Poems and Songs, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect* (Paisley, 1807), p. 64.
- <sup>31</sup> Robert Tannahill, 'Epistle to A. Borland', *The Soldier's Return*, p. 66.
- <sup>32</sup> Robert Tannahill, 'Epistle to J. Barr', *The Soldier's Return*, p. 94.
- <sup>33</sup> Robert Tannahill, *The Soldier's Return*, p. 7, 83. Tannahill describes himself as an 'unlettered mechanic' in the preface (or 'Advertisement') to his 1807 edition , p. 7. The phrase 'colleg'd bards' appears in the poem 'Epistle to J. Scadlock, April 1803', p. 83.
- <sup>34</sup> The bibliographical details for this are: John Barbour, *The Bruce, or, The history of Robert I, King of Scotland: written in Scottish verse by John Barbour; the first genuine edition, published from a MS. dated 1489; with notes and a glossary by J. Pinkerton* (London, 1790).
- <sup>35</sup> Tannahill's poems appear in *The Poetical Magazine, or Temple of the Muses*, Vol. II. (London, 1804), p. 111, 242. The two poems Tannahill published here were 'Lines on the Death of a Lady' (more commonly known as 'Responsive ye Woods') dated 'Paisley, 14<sup>th</sup> May, 1804', and 'The Portrait of Guilt: In imitation of Lewis', dated 'Paisley, 7<sup>th</sup> July, 1804'. At least six of his lyrics were published in the *Scots Magazine*, in 1807-08. David Semple, in relation to the song lyric 'The Harper o' Mull', states that Tannahill had the remarkable and wide ranging Edinburgh periodical 'the *Bee* in his library', Semple, ed. *Poems, Songs and Correspondence*, p. 264n. 'The Harper o' Mull', was based on a piece entitled, 'The Harper of Mull', *The Bee*, Vol. III (Edinburgh, June 15<sup>th</sup>, 1791), p. 233. Dr James Anderson (1739-1808) edited *The Bee or literary weekly intelligencer*, from December 1790 to 1794. He was a farmer and an autodidact of some vision. He wrote mainly on scientific and agricultural subjects, often used the pen name 'Agricola' and was extremely interested in agricultural improvement and economics. To his credit he refused to give up to the government the names of contributors to *The Bee* whose political articles written under pseudonyms were seen as suspect or seditious. One issue of *The Bee* contains a fascinating essay on an attempt to introduce silk worms and silk making into Scotland. It also carried lengthy articles on foreign policy, which were usually the first pieces in each issue. As an economist Anderson is credited with devising the differential theory of rent later taken up by Malthus and Ricardo.
- <sup>36</sup> Matthew Tannahill, cited by Alexander Whitelaw, *The Book of Scottish Song*, Whitelaw, ed. (Glasgow, 1844) p. 16n.
- <sup>37</sup> Robert Tannahill, 'My Ain Kind Dearie, O', *Poems, Songs and Correspondence*, p. 346. Also in *The Book of Scottish Song*, Alexander Whitelaw, ed., p. 16.
- <sup>38</sup> Alexander Whitelaw, ed., *The Book of Scottish Song*, p. 15n.
- <sup>39</sup> David Semple, *Poems, Songs and Correspondence*, p. 250n.
- <sup>40</sup> See, Clark Hunter, *The Life and Letters of Alexander Wilson* (Philadelphia, 1983), p. 42.
- <sup>41</sup> Anon, 'Life of Robert Tannahill' in, *The Poetical Works of Burns and Tannahill* (Glasgow, 1860), p. vi. This biography appears to be an amalgam of Muir's, McLaren's, Motherwell's and Ramsay's previous efforts. Some of the extracts from Tannahill's letters used by Ramsay appear here as well as paragraphs lifted verbatim from Muir's, McLaren's and Motherwell's biographies. There are also some original sections and others in which information already known is rephrased. Sadly, the anonymous compiler of this biography remains just that. It ends with the poem 'To the Memory of Robert Tannahill' which was composed by Robert Allan of Kilbarchan in 1810.
- <sup>42</sup> McLaren, *The Life of Robert Tannahill*, p. 7.

- <sup>43</sup> Robert Tannahill, 'Emigration of Alexander Wilson To America', *Poems, Songs and Correspondence*, p. 64.
- <sup>44</sup> *The Poetical Magazine or Temple of the Muses*, p. 111, 242.
- <sup>45</sup> David Semple, 'Life of Tannahill', Semple, ed. (Paisley, 1876), p. xlix.
- <sup>46</sup> See F. W. Freeman, notes to c.d., *The Complete Songs of Robert Tannahill*, Vol. 1, Brechin Records, Ref: CDBAR003. Producer, Freeman, nineteen tracks including various artists, 2006.
- <sup>47</sup> John Parkhill, *History of Paisley* (Paisley, 1857), p. 37.
- <sup>48</sup> David Semple, 'Note on 'The Soldier's Return'', *Poems and Songs* (Paisley, n.d.), p. 92.
- <sup>49</sup> David Semple, 'Life of Tannahill', *Poems, Songs and Correspondence*, p. lii. The details of a similar meeting held in 1816 were printed by John Neilson as a pamphlet entitled: *Report of the Meeting, held in the Relief Church, Paisley, On Saturday 5<sup>th</sup> October, 1816, To consider the present Distresses of the County, their Causes, and probable Remedies* (Paisley, 1816).
- <sup>50</sup> Robert Tannahill, 'A Lesson', *Poems and Songs*, Semple, ed. (Paisley, n.d.), p. 162.
- <sup>51</sup> James Muir, 'Notice', *Robert Tannahill, Poems and Songs - Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect*, James Muir ed. (Paisley, 1815), p. xii.
- <sup>52</sup> John Struthers, 'Essay on Scottish Songwriters', *The Harp of Caledonia*, Vol II, Struthers, ed. (Glasgow, 1821), p. 415.
- <sup>53</sup> Robert Tannahill, 'Epistle to A. Borland, Feb 1806' *The Soldier's Return*, p. 69.
- <sup>54</sup> Semple, 'Life of Tannahill', *Poems, Songs and Correspondence*, p. xliii.
- <sup>55</sup> For brief details on the formation of the 'Trades Library', see Semple, 'Life of Tannahill', *Poems, Songs and Correspondence*, p. lxx.
- <sup>56</sup> William Livingstone, Letter To Robert Tannahill, 18<sup>th</sup> November, 1804, *Poems, Songs and Correspondence*, p. 366.
- <sup>57</sup> Robert Tannahill, *The Soldier's Return*, pp. 81-82.
- <sup>58</sup> Robert Tannahill, *Poems, Songs and Correspondence*, p. 166.
- <sup>59</sup> Robert Burns, 'Scotch Drink', *The Poems and Songs of Robert Burns*, Vol. I., James Kinsley, ed. (Oxford, 1968), p. 173.
- <sup>60</sup> Robert Tannahill, 'Stanzas on Invocation', *The Soldier's Return*, p. 48.
- <sup>61</sup> Robert Tannahill, Letter to Alexander Borland, May 1810 (GUL, Spec. Colls., MS Robertson 1/38).
- <sup>62</sup> Letter from James Clark, to Robert Tannahill, 16th November, 1807, *Poems, Songs and Correspondence*, p. 403.
- <sup>63</sup> Robert Tannahill, 'Epistle to A Borland, Feb 1806', *The Soldier's Return*, p. 67.
- <sup>64</sup> Robert Tannahill, 'On Invocation', *The Soldier's Return*, p. 49.
- <sup>65</sup> Robert Tannahill, 'On seeing a Once Worthy Character lying in a state of inebriation in the street', *The Soldier's Return*, p. 143.
- <sup>66</sup> Robert Tannahill, Letter to William Kibble, 14<sup>th</sup> March 1802, *Tannahill's Works*, P. A. Ramsay, ed. (London, 1838), p.xviii. Interestingly, Cowper uses the lines 'When I first heard the news it gave me a shock, / Much like what they call an electrical knock' in his 1788 poem, 'Sweet Meat has Sour Sauce, or The Slave-Trader in the Dumps', in Duncan Wu, ed., *Romanticism: An Anthology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Oxford, 1998), p. 12. First published 1994.
- <sup>67</sup> See David Semple, ed., *Poems, Songs and Correspondence*, p. 365, n.
- <sup>68</sup> Robert Tannahill, 'The Filial Vow', *The Soldier's Return*, p. 71.
- <sup>69</sup> Robert Tannahill, 'The Soldier's Return', *The Soldier's Return*, p. 36.
- <sup>70</sup> Liam McIlvanney, *Burns the Radical: Poetry and Politics in Late 18<sup>th</sup> Century Scotland* (East Linton, 2002), p. 7, 22.
- <sup>71</sup> Rev. John Witherspoon, sometime minister at Paisley is named in the GUL catalogue as the author of this pamphlet.
- <sup>72</sup> Robert Burns, 'The Holy Fair', *The Poems and Songs of Robert Burns*, Vol. I., James Kinsley, ed. (Oxford, 1968), p. 135, 137.
- <sup>73</sup> Robert Tannahill, 'Epistle to A. Borland. Feb 1806', *The Soldier's Return*, p. 68.
- <sup>74</sup> See Murray Pittock, *Poetry and Jacobite Politics* (Cambridge, 1994), p. 2.
- <sup>75</sup> While the New Lights were quite radical in accepting notions of individual inquiry and freedom of expression they were politically conservative and opposed the American Revolution. John Witherspoon (an Auld Licht), one time minister at Paisley, supported the American Revolution, signed the Declaration of Independence but was socially conservative: he believed that enforcing the Patronage Act was driving Church of Scotland members into the arms of dissenters. See, Pittock, 'Jacobite Literature and National

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Identities' in *British Identities and English Renaissance Literature*, Baker & Maley, eds. (Cambridge, 2002), pp. 226-242; McIlvanney, *Burns the Radical*, East Linton, 2002, pp. 123-144; Callum G. Brown, 'Protestant Churches and Working Classes' in *Sermons and Battle Hymns*, Graham Walker and Tom Gallagher, eds. (Edinburgh, 1990), pp. 73-79; E. W. McFarland, *Ireland and Scotland in the Age of Revolution* (Edinburgh, 1994), p. 15.

<sup>76</sup> Robert Tannahill, 'Epistle to A. Borland. Feb 1806', *The Soldier's Return*, p. 69.

<sup>77</sup> Robert Tannahill, 'Epistle to A. Borland. Feb 1806', *The Soldier's Return*, p. 69.

<sup>78</sup> 'New Testament', *The Bible*, Matthew 19:24, Mark 10:25, Luke 18:25.

<sup>79</sup> The sentence, 'But what signifies this dry detail to you, or any body', gives an indication of Tannahill's reflexivity, a self-consciousness that comes through in both his poetry and his letters suggesting that he is aware of the problems that publishing such writing might entail. Opening oneself up to the scrutiny of critics and readers, Tannahill sensed, was a precarious practice that could be dangerous to his mental well-being. This self-consciousness might also help explain his reluctance to take an open stand against the Napoleonic Wars as he was worried about the negative implications for himself as a songwriter who desired publication.

<sup>80</sup> This 'Dirge' – which Tannahill states was, 'Written on Reading an Account of Robert Burns' Funeral' and had stanzas two and four removed for publication in 1807 – is somewhat reminiscent of Alexander Wilson's poem, 'ODE, For the Birthday of our immortal Scottish Poet', in that it uses the same technique of a repeated refrain at the end of each stanza. Wilson's refrain was, 'the rare ROBIN BURNS'. Alexander Wilson, 'ODE', *Poems and Songs*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Paisley, 1791), p. 23.

<sup>81</sup> Robert Tannahill, Letter to James Clark, August 31<sup>st</sup> 1805 (GUL, Spec. Colls., MS Roberson 1/4). Section in curly brackets also in, Semple, ed. (Paisley, 1876), p.372.

<sup>82</sup> John Parkhill, *History of Paisley* (Paisley, 1857), p. 38.

<sup>83</sup> Robert Tannahill *The Soldier's Return*, p. 114.

<sup>84</sup> Alexander Wilson, *Address to the Synod of Glasgow and Ayr* (n. p., n. d.), p. 5, 4. (GUL, Spec. Colls., [Bh13-a.23](#)). 'Lounder' means a beating or to deal heavy blows on.

<sup>85</sup> Michael Durey, *Transatlantic Radicals and the Early American Republic* (Kansas, 1997), p. 68. Semple, 'Life of Tannahill', *Poems, Song and Correspondence of Robert Tannahill*, p. lix, states: 'he [McLaren] had only know him [Tannahill] intimately for the last seven years of his life'. This does not necessarily mean that they did not know each other at all before 1803. It is possible they knew each other but were not particularly close.

<sup>86</sup> 'After 1766, a second denomination appeared for the same purpose, called the Relief Church (so-called because it offered 'relief to Christians oppressed in their liberty')'. This purpose was the relief of the oppression over the grievance of patronage question, whereby local dignitaries could recommend the minister rather than a minister being called to the church by the will of the Presbytery as a whole. Callum G. Brown, 'Protestant Churches and Working Classes', *Sermons and Battle Hymns*, Walker and Gallagher, eds. (Edinburgh, 1990), pp. 74-75.

<sup>87</sup> Reekie, 'The Life and Times of Robert Tannahill', *Songs and Poems of Robert Tannahill*, p. xx.

<sup>88</sup> Charles Rogers, *The Modern Scottish Minstrel*, Rogers, ed., Vol. II. (Edinburgh, 1856), p. 135.

<sup>89</sup> Rogers, *The Modern Scottish Minstrel*, Vol. II., p. 135.

<sup>90</sup> James Muir, 'Notice', *Poems and Songs: Chiefly in the Scots Dialect*, James Muir, ed. (Paisley, 1815), p. xviii.

<sup>91</sup> Robert Tannahill, 'Notice', Muir, ed., *Poems and Songs*, p. xviii..

<sup>92</sup> Robert Tannahill, 'Prayer Under Affliction', *The Soldier's Return*, p. 75.

<sup>93</sup> Robert Burns, *The Poems and Songs of Robert Burns*, Vol. I., James Kinsley, ed. (Oxford, 1968), p. 305.

<sup>94</sup> Robert Tannahill, holograph Letter to James King, 3<sup>rd</sup> August, 1806 (NLS, MS 582 fol. 681).

<sup>95</sup> J.C.S., 'The Poets of Renfrewshire', in *Centenary of Tannahill*, 2 Vols., unpublished collection of cuttings and articles on Tannahill by various authors, David Semple, ed. (1880, Paisley Central Library Archive).

<sup>96</sup> *Glasgow Herald* (Thursday 4th June, 1874).

<sup>97</sup> Robert Tannahill, undated note to R. A. Smith (NLS, MS 2524.84.).

<sup>98</sup> *Declaration of the Rights of Man*, Approved by the National Assembly of France (August 26, 1789).

<sup>99</sup> See, Robert Tannahill, extract from a Letter to William Kibble, April 11<sup>th</sup>, 1807, *Poems Songs and Correspondence*, p. 387.

<sup>100</sup> Robert Brown, *Paisley Burns Clubs* (Paisley, 1893), p. 44.

<sup>101</sup> John Parkhill, *The Life and Opinions of Arthur Sneddon* (Paisley, 1860), p. 36.



- <sup>102</sup> William McLaren, 'Address delivered at the celebration of the birth of Burns in the year 1805', cited in Brown, ed., *Paisley Burns Clubs*, p. 41.
- <sup>103</sup> Robert Tannahill, cited in Brown, *Paisley Burns Clubs*, p.38.
- <sup>104</sup> William McLaren, cited in Brown, *Paisley Burns Clubs*, p. 41.
- <sup>105</sup> Gerry P. T. Finn, 'Freemasonry', *Sermons and Battle Hymns*, Gallagher and Walker, eds. (Edinburgh, 1990), p. 167.
- <sup>106</sup> Robert Tannahill, 'Lines, to W. McLaren, To attend a meeting of the Burns' Anniversary Society', *The Soldier's Return*, pp. 108-109.
- <sup>107</sup> Robert Tannahill, cited in Brown, *Paisley Burns Clubs*, pp. 42-43. The phrase 'the Patriot and the Patriot-Bard' occurs in Tannahill's 1807 'Ode' for Burns's birthday and in Burns's own 'The Cotter's Saturday Night'. Robert Tannahill, 'Ode', *Poems, Songs and Correspondence*, p. 54. Robert Burns, 'The Cotter's Saturday Night', *The Poems and Songs of Robert Burns*, Vol. I., James Kinsley, ed. (Oxford, 1968), p. 152.
- <sup>108</sup> Gavin Dalziel, 'The Gauze Bord', *The Poetical Magazine* (Paisley, 1815), p. 4. In his poem 'The Gauze Bord', Dalziel says of the Corks:

Impress'd as we are by our fate,  
Condemn'd to drudge baith air and late,  
At once of Corks the stay and hate,  
  What matters it,  
We'll maybe wi' some after feat,  
  Cause clatters yet.

For details of Dalziel see Robert Brown, ed., *Paisley Poets* Vol. I (Paisley, 1889), p. 233.

- <sup>109</sup> John King, 'The Deil's Address to the Plunkin Corks', Brown, ed., *Paisley Poets*, Vol. 1, p. 138.
- <sup>110</sup> Brown, *Paisley Poets*, Vol. 1., p. 138, n.
- <sup>111</sup> Robert Tannahill, Letter to James Clark, 2<sup>nd</sup> February, 1807, *Poems, Songs and Correspondence*, p. 382.
- <sup>112</sup> Robert Tannahill, Letter to John Struthers, 26<sup>th</sup> September 1807 (NLS, The Coulter Burns Collection, MS 23150).
- <sup>113</sup> See, John Struthers, 'Autobiography', *Poetical Works, with Autobiography*, Vol. 1 (London, 1850).
- <sup>114</sup> John Struthers, 'Preface', *The Harp of Caledonia*, Vol. I (Glasgow, 1819), p. i. Struthers's 'Preface' to *The Harp of Caledonia*, dated 29<sup>th</sup> September 1818, was both written and published before Shelley's *A Defence of Poetry*, though the idea of music, song and poetry taking precedence over politics was put forward by Tannahill's friend William McLaren in his 'Address delivered at the celebration of the birth of Burns in the year 1805'. In suggesting that 'were this same simple ballad making properly attended to it might supersede the necessity of laws altogether', Struthers's position is possibly more radical as well as being in advance of Percy Shelley. What also makes it interesting is that it infers the idea that balladry, rather than revolution or political struggle, might achieve the withering away of the state: an extremely radical claim for the power of song. Percy Bysshe Shelley, 'A Defence of Poetry', *Romanticism: An Anthology*, Duncan Wu ed., (Oxford, 1998) pp. 944-956, p. 956. Also, 'A Defence of Poetry', *Shelley's Critical Prose*, Bruce R. McElderry, ed., (Lincoln, USA, 1967), pp 3-37, p. 36.
- <sup>115</sup> At this time it was believed Burns was born on January 29<sup>th</sup> 1759. It was not until 1819 that the 25<sup>th</sup> of January became accepted as the 'true' date.
- <sup>116</sup> See Robert Tannahill, Letter to James Clark, August 31<sup>st</sup> 1805 (GUL, Spec. Colls., MS Roberson 1/4).
- <sup>117</sup> Tannahill's 'Burns Anniversary' poems are discussed in detail in Chapter 5, pp. 179-186, this thesis.
- <sup>118</sup> Robert Tannahill, Letter to James Barr, 19<sup>th</sup> July, 1806 (GUL, Spec. Colls., MS Robertson 1/5).
- <sup>119</sup> Robert Tannahill, Letter to James King, 2<sup>nd</sup> Nov, 1807 (GUL, Spec. Colls., MS Robertson 1/10).
- <sup>120</sup> John MacGregor, James Yool, John Mitchell and William Finlayson all had sympathies towards radicalism of varying degrees. Yool was very much involved with the Paisley Literary and Convivial Association (LCA) which was formed around 1813. His politics are made clear in his long poem, *The Rise and Progress of Oppression, or the weaver's struggle for their prices* (Paisley, 1813). For details of the lives and works of these authors see Robert Brown, ed., *Paisley Poets*, 2 Vols. Tom Leonard, ed., *Radical Renfrew*.
- <sup>121</sup> Robert Tannahill, 'Epistle to J Buchanan Aug. 1806', *The Soldier's Return*, p. 106.

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- <sup>122</sup> Durey, *Transatlantic Radicals*, p. 72. James Thomson Callender, 'The Political Progress of Britain', *The Bee*, Feb. 29 (1792), p. 307, cited by Durey, p. 72
- <sup>123</sup> For full details of this argument see Durey, *Transatlantic Radicals*, pp. 50-79.
- <sup>124</sup> J. Walter McGinty, *Robert Burns and Religion* (Aldershot, 2003), p. 47.
- <sup>125</sup> Robert Tannahill, 'The Parnassiad', *The Soldier's Return*, pp. 51-52. This poem is written in the form of the Montgomerie Stanza.
- <sup>126</sup> Robert Tannahill, 'The Hauntit Wud', from holograph unpublished version (NLS, MS 10335).
- <sup>127</sup> Robert Tannahill, 'The Parnassiad', *The Soldier's Return*, p. 52.
- <sup>128</sup> See Chapter 4 this thesis.
- <sup>129</sup> Robert Tannahill, 'The Parnassiad' *The Soldier's Return*, p. 52
- <sup>130</sup> James Thomson B.V. (1834-1882), in *Poems and Some Letters of James Thomson*, A. Ridler, ed. (London, 1963), p. 192.

## 2. William Motherwell and the Reception of Tannahill's Work

“What, — spice!” said the Printer, “what good do you think,  
Can arise from the mixing up spice with my ink?”  
“— Why Sir,” said the Poet, “the thought galls my soul!  
Should they wipe with my book, it would —— —— .”  
Robert Tannahill, Epigram.<sup>1</sup>

Detailed criticism and evaluation of the form and content of Robert Tannahill's poetry is somewhat scant but there have been some important interventions. Most recently, Gerard Carruthers published a paper, 'Robert Tannahill – Scottish Poet After Burns' (2005) in which he seeks to establish 'Tannahill's place in the tradition of Scottish poetry' through analysis of a selection of poems and songs, and consideration of the author's character.<sup>2</sup> Carruthers sheds light on the political and literary climate Tannahill operated within and analyses some of Tannahill's literary responses. There are two other fairly recent papers that make some gestures towards this but they are chiefly concerned with Tannahill as a songwriter in comparison with Robert Burns, with the social and political geography of the Paisley he inhabited, and with notions of what constitutes a 'Scottish Tradition', in terms of literary theory (Sweeney-Turner) and in song-writing practise (McCrae). Neither Gordon McCrae's, 'Tannahill's Landscapes'<sup>3</sup> (1997) nor Steve Sweeney-Turner's, 'Pagan Airs: Reading Critical Perspectives on the Songs of Burns and Tannahill'<sup>4</sup> (1998), address as their central concern the general moral questions arising in Tannahill's work which derive from his humanist leaning and non-sectarian but Presbyterian influenced outlook. None of the three papers here-mentioned deviate greatly from the early nineteenth century critical assessments of Tannahill as having a split literary personality: on the one hand a rather poor poet, on the other an accomplished song lyricist.

## MCLAREN, MUIR AND VEITCH

The first two major assessments of Tannahill's life and work, one written by James Muir and the other by William McLaren, were published in 1815. McLaren worked as weaver, poet, prose writer and publican. His *Life of Robert Tannahill the Renfrewshire Bard* was published as a pamphlet with the powerful 'Address delivered at the celebration of the birth of Burns in the year 1805' appended.<sup>5</sup> Tannahill had been dead for five years and McLaren's publication coincided with James Muir's new edition of Tannahill's *Poems and Songs, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect* which was prefixed by a 'Notice Respecting the Life and Writings of Robert Tannahill'.<sup>6</sup> Muir's new edition of Tannahill's works must have sold rather well as towards the end of 1815 a new 'Third Edition' was published.

In their biographies both Muir and McLaren concentrate more on Tannahill's character rather than on his abilities as a poet and songwriter. Muir's 'Notice' is more critical and 'objective' than McLaren's 'Life'. McLaren gives an emotive and impressionistic description of Tannahill perhaps more guided by feelings of friendship than by reason and analysis. For instance, he states that: 'In the ardour of youthful imagination, the enraptured Bard pictured the joys of other times'.<sup>7</sup> This is fairly typical of McLaren's style. He describes Tannahill's obtaining employment in Bolton in 1800 as follows:

Who ever care[d] for the miseries that are past? The Bard, now merry and contented, laughed at the capriciousness of fortune, who, from starving misery permitted him to eat roast beef upon Sundays.<sup>8</sup>

Muir by contrast states:

He used to paint in pretty strong colours, the inconveniences which he felt on settling for two years in Bolton, the only period he was absent from his native place.<sup>9</sup>

While dealing with the same factual events, each account uses quite different language to

describe them. Muir's rather matter of fact emphasis is on the suggestion of Tannahill feeling homesick. McLaren implies no such thing but gives a contrary opinion of Tannahill being well settled after some initial hardship. However, there is a broad measure of agreement between McLaren and Muir with regard to Tannahill's poetic and song-writing talents. These are abilities which both biographers see as deriving from 'character', 'disposition' and temperament; arising from qualities such as 'independence' and 'modesty'. Indeed, according to Muir, 'Humanity adorned his character'<sup>10</sup> and McLaren states:

Such was the extreme modesty of his nature, that though the qualities of his mind had ripened into superior excellence, it was with difficulty that his friends could persuade him to offer any of his early pieces for publication.<sup>11</sup>

Central to their appraisal of Tannahill as a song-writer and poet is a correlation between his 'character' or 'nature' and the content of his creative output: providing an organic link between the work and author, and so emphasising the more organic process of Folk creativity, rather than seeing the work as a product of deliberate artistic activity or manufacture. The idea of a close reading of the text as a wholly independent entity from the author would have made little sense to them. The poems and songs were wedded to the heart and sentiment of the author and so could not lend themselves to anything like line by line analysis or what Brecht has called 'picking poems to pieces'.<sup>12</sup> The closest Muir comes to 'picking' Tannahill 'to pieces' is when he writes:

He wrote too little in each species of versification, and tried too many. Some of the kinds which he tried would have required exclusive culture. By labour he might have attained dexterity, and the improved structure of his verse would have partly compensated for some imperfections. No sooner did the work [1807 edition] make its appearance than the songs were hailed with admiration, sung with applause, and obtained general currency.<sup>13</sup>

Muir considers Tannahill's poems imperfect, 'mostly occasional',<sup>14</sup> and in no way comparable with the songs in which he 'surveyed nature' with 'fidelity, elegance and grace'.<sup>15</sup> In one of the earliest assessments of Tannahill's work, Muir gives the reader the impression that Tannahill's poetry is poorer than his song and that where his songs really come to life is in the depiction of scenes from nature: 'Under his [Tannahill's] management nature is always amiable' and not only is nature presented as 'amiable' but as presented by Tannahill it 'cannot fail to excite a kindred feeling in every breast alive to rural scenery'.<sup>16</sup> The question arises as to exactly what kind of 'rural scenery' Muir is referring? It is not on the face of it working farms, bleaching fields, mines, or distilleries. Tannahill's character was therefore attuned to the natural world he encountered and observed on his walks on the Gleniffer Braes and elsewhere in the countryside, and through exercising his literary skill or sensitivity he could reproduce that which 'He surveyed... with the eye of a poet,'<sup>17</sup> as song. Rather than giving a 'realistic' description of the landscape, Tannahill's landscape is to a large extent an imagined one.<sup>18</sup> By 1815, the poetry, where Tannahill confronts daily reality more directly than in his songs, is not accepted into the Tannahill canon with ease. And, if his poetry is only allowed into collections with reluctance, then how is it to enter the stream of Scottish poetry dominated by Hogg, Scott and above all the archetypal Robert Burns?

According to Muir, Tannahill's poems addressed 'topics... such as presented themselves in the course of his humble life, and he hoped to give them importance by the charms of rhyme'.<sup>19</sup> Of these 'topics' Muir asserts that 'We are less interested', but for the twenty-first century reader these 'humble' topics are of considerable interest, though Tannahill's subject matter is not nearly as humble as Muir implies. Tannahill takes us into the world as he saw it in the first decade of the nineteenth century and much of his poetry can be

viewed from the perspective of ‘parochial concerns writ large’.<sup>20</sup>

Professor John Veitch of Glasgow writing in 1887 gives an excellent description of the relationship between the natural world and the psychological in Tannahill’s work. He was also the first critic after David Semple to recognise the breadth of content in the work:

We find fused with natural scenery the love of home, kindred, and locality, patriotism, the feeling of exile, of retrospect in middle life and old age, local and national associations, pathos, grief, hope and despair... Man and nature are for the time fused in one great unity of heart and feeling; the objective stands out in the light of the subjective emotion, and the otherwise invisible element of feeling becomes incarnate and vivid in the forms, colours, and sounds of outward nature. The emotion lives in the outer world and this in turn is etherealised by the emotion.<sup>21</sup>

The process where ‘Man’ and ‘nature’ are ‘fused’ occurs more frequently in Tannahill’s song lyrics, while his poems tend towards a more realistic use of language based on social observation. Veitch classifies Tannahill as belonging to ‘the period which we may call the most modern, and which is now going on’.<sup>22</sup> Of course, by this time Tannahill had been dead for over seventy years, and thus, on Veitch’s analysis he can be seen as being influential if not wholly original in his approach to ‘Man and nature’ in Scottish poetry.

#### **WILLIAM MOTHERWELL**

In common with Muir, William Motherwell writing in 1819 gives a similar assessment of Tannahill in his introductory essay to the *Harp of Renfrewshire*.<sup>23</sup> Where Muir left the possibility of Tannahill’s poetry being open to improvement, Motherwell was yet more keen to concentrate exclusively on the songs:

the genius of Tannahill could not, as one of his biographers [Muir] would insinuate, be equally suited to other species of poetical composition besides those which his inclination at first led him to prefer, and habit at length had rendered easy. His strength lay in song-writing, and to it he, for the most part, judiciously confined himself.<sup>24</sup>

Tannahill's extant work shows that he was keen on both drama and poetry as well as song-writing. His 1807 edition gives clear representation to all three aspects of his work without implying any should take precedence over the other. In Motherwell's opinion his 'dramatic composition', *The Soldier's Return*, was 'without success' and 'wisely omitted'<sup>25</sup> from the Muir editions of Tannahill's *Poems and Songs*. Yet the dramatic Interlude together with his poetry makes up nearly half of his work so it cannot be true that 'he, for the most part, judiciously confined himself' to song-writing. It should be stressed that from Motherwell's viewpoint, the songs were both well-executed and popular, and it is probable that he did not want the poems or the dramatic Interlude to get in their way, addressing as they do difficult and ambiguous questions about war, religious doubt, and the treatment of animals and the poor. Also, for Motherwell, there was the question of taste: Tannahill's poetry was likely to contain that which 'disgusted us so much in the ballad-mongery lately in vogue, but now happily rooted out and despised'.<sup>26</sup> The songs on the other hand swept 'the Scottish lyre with so delicate and so artless a touch' that they alone contained Tannahill's valuable artistic output.<sup>27</sup> The use of the term 'artless' is interesting as Tannahill was formally aware, craft-confident and highly deliberate in much of his poetry and song. Indeed, quite the opposite of 'artless'; perhaps the trick was to appear artless while using artistry and this is possibly what the term 'delicate' alludes to, though it is more likely it refers to content and vocabulary. Muir came to the same conclusion as Motherwell with regard to the songs, owning that the question of their taste and 'delicacy' was not in doubt: 'in no case does he overstep the limits of delicacy, or express a sentiment offensive to the ear of modesty'.<sup>28</sup> (Unlike the epigram which opens this chapter). Tannahill's work, especially in song, was being made to fit an aesthetic outlook which valued a depoliticised-pastoral over the 'realistic', while his poems were seen



to hold less of either interest or value. Muirs's and Motherwell's assessment of Tannahill, however, became the orthodoxy upon which almost all subsequent commentary was based.

Motherwell was thirteen years old when Tannahill died. He later became very well acquainted with Tannahill's musical collaborator Robert A. Smith. Mary Ellen Brown writing in 2001 suggests that Smith may have encouraged Tannahill's 'shift from weaving to music' but no such 'shift' took place.<sup>29</sup> Tannahill was a weaver from the time he was apprenticed to his father on the 7<sup>th</sup> December 1786 until his death. It was Smith who sought out the company of Tannahill after hearing the latter's song, 'Blythe was the time', performed at a Paisley musical evening in January 1804. Indeed, Tannahill's use of quite complex rhythmic patterns in his songs and the varied rhythms of his poems might be seen as reflecting the rhythm of the loom, and rather than making a 'shift from weaving to music', the 'music' of the loom itself became part of his rhythmic vocabulary.<sup>30</sup>

As Sheriff-Clerk Depute, Motherwell was not averse to 'handling a truncheon in defence of the public peace on the streets of Paisley'.<sup>31</sup> He managed through his own efforts to establish himself in moderately powerful circles and became something of an arbiter of both literary and political opinion during the 1820s and 30s. In politics he was an Orangeman and a Tory.<sup>32</sup> He arrived in Paisley around 1812 and left for Glasgow in 1830 to become the editor of the Orange-Tory paper, the *Glasgow Courier*. Scotland by this time is recognisable as imperial in that its armed forces were thoroughly integrated into the British state as was taxation, economic and foreign policy, and it was in this climate that Motherwell set the tone for most subsequent interpretations of Tannahill's life and work. In the aftermath of the Napoleonic wars there was again a growth in radical ideas amongst working people. This was anathema to Motherwell and there are clearly parallels between his unsympathetic view of

those contemporary radicals and his dismissive attitude towards Alexander Wilson's politics.

While Motherwell expressed a kind of cultural Scottish nationalism in his literary work, his politics were definitely Unionist, hierarchical and against expansion of the electoral franchise. Motherwell represented a section within the West of Scotland middle classes of his time, who had a veneer of Presbyterian respectability but were anti-Catholic, anti-working class, pro-monarchist and capitalist in outlook. Such anti-reform and anti-Catholic sentiments are not present in Tannahill's work, though attitudes to the work have to a great extent been coloured by Motherwell's assessment of it. His appraisal depoliticises Tannahill's work overall by concentrating on the pastoral characteristics of the songs and relegating the drama and poetry - where Tannahill expresses solidarity with the poor, rejects patronage and hierarchy, and questions the War with France - to an inferior status. (Although, this is not to suggest that pastoral, read and written in a certain way, is incapable of carrying radical sentiments). It is in Motherwell's *use* of Tannahill's pastoralism as a means to depoliticise him that the problem lies, not in Tannahill's use of pastoral itself. Motherwell had a political agenda that was wholly anti-radical and was to the right of Tannahill's views. As Elaine McFarland argued in 1994:

Orange officials such as the poet and journalist William Motherwell joined the Order with high political ambitions, wishing to make the lodges the nucleus of a new ultra-Tory grouping to counter reform initiatives in Scotland.<sup>33</sup>

While Motherwell was attacked by the 'mob', Tannahill on the occasion of an earlier riot was somewhat more sympathetic to the rioters than those trying to control them. On Tuesday 18<sup>th</sup> July 1809<sup>34</sup> Tannahill wrote to James King:

We have had sad commotion in the town these some days past. Our County Militia is divided into three Batalions Col. Muir commands one. that of the Greenock district, by Southbar, but McKerrel is the Hero of our Paisley lads - The latter have been on duty here these fourteen days, and have been so severely discipled that last Thursday

night on dismissal they demanded some money which they said was due to them the officers drew their Swords- a number of men fix'd bayonets, and a fine caper took place- a Captain Hart had his sword broken Willy clove one of the mens hats with his sword- they succeeded in sending a number of men to the guard-house- all was quiet until Sunday night when the light Comp<sup>y</sup> after parade- marched in order to the guard- demanded the prisoners with fix'd bayonets- the officers pacified them and got them dismissed by assuring them that the men would be released on Monday- instead of which the Colonel went to Glasgow- and on this morning 700 of the Stirling Militia has arrived- We dont know what will turn out of it but the public thinks Willy will not dare flogg any of them-

They have been scandalously ill used- One Tassie from your Reg<sup>t</sup> is their sergeant Major -a wicked, little soul'd wretch is not out of the pit- McKerrel's best heroics are nothing to him- Dont spread these matters as from me, you will soon hear how it goes from letters to others in the Reg<sup>t</sup> —

Before sending the letter, Tannahill added the following:

Friday Morning - 21<sup>st</sup> Three of our lads have been punished on this morning- The first got 300- the 2<sup>d</sup> 100- and the 3<sup>d</sup> 25 40— The Stirlings and part of the 71<sup>st</sup> from Glasgow guarded the business. The town was in a riot all day. The officers were stoned home by the mob- McKerrel in going down the street yesterday had his coach windows broken - My letter is too soon full. - Sunday -  
N.B. Write Immediately.

The values of Orangeism are, on the face of it, quite deeply at odds with Motherwell's literary activities. He was in favour of the preservation and use of the Scots language in literature, something that militates against the inherent Britishness of Orange ideology. However, there was to be no new organic or developing Scots language. For Motherwell it was an historic artefact and his artistic endeavours can be seen as appropriating Scottish language and history, and making of them an antique amusement for Britishers. This way of viewing the world was applied to Robert Tannahill and has had implications for the subsequent reception of his work. Tannahill's criticisms of the dourness of some Presbyterians and of their religious doctrines had to be ignored because from the British perspective they lay beyond the central British concern with the permanence of the 1688 constitutional settlement; a settlement seen by many as the defining moment of British nationhood which was not be

muddied by Jacobite or Jacobin tendencies nor by Covenanting protestant martyrs. Jacobitism was better redefined as a presently unthreatening exotic strand of romanticism, or relegated to the irrelevant, antique and dead, because it did not coincide with the central priorities and cultural concerns of Britain as a nation but was part of peripheral Scottish narratives better forgotten about. Viewed from this perspective, Motherwell's suggestion that Muir was right to omit *The Soldier's Return* from his 1815 edition of Tannahill's work begins to look like collusion in a strategic rewriting of Tannahill's personal history and by extension of the history of Scottish literature itself, as substantial portions of a writer's work, in this case Tannahill's, could simply be ignored. Tannahill's love songs such as 'Jessie the Flower o Dunblane', or songs of moods and seasons like 'Gloomy Winter's Now Awa'', were seen as exquisite, delicate, ideal for drawing-room entertainment, without too much attention being paid to their elements of psychological darkness. Ultimately, we are given a Tannahill of birds and flowers, green-fields and genteel feelings, robbed of around half of his literary output and much of his intellectual force.

Tannahill's interests in social justice, philosophy and aesthetics were underplayed by Motherwell. Hence Tannahill becomes a good song-writer and bad poet, who lived, died and was classified in 'the half-century after the American war,' during which according to Linda Colley:

there would emerge in Great Britain a far more consciously and officially constructed patriotism which stressed attachment to the monarchy, the importance of empire, the value of military and naval achievement, and the desirability of strong, stable government by a virtuous, able and authentically British elite.<sup>35</sup>

This British elite fostered and encouraged the culture of the gentility of the drawing-room and many of Tannahill's poems largely lie outwith this area of taste, though many his songs do

not. (According to Veitch, Tannahill's 'lyrics are well known, though we do not hear them sung so often in our drawing-rooms as we ought to do').<sup>36</sup> In content, the poems and drama are his points of greatest resistance not only to the particular type of British identity defined in the quotation above but also to Bernard de Mandeville's notorious remark criticised by Marx in *Capital* and by Raymond Williams in *The Country and the City*:

as Mandeville had expressed it, in a dominant attitude that lasted well into the nineteenth century.

To make the society happy, and people easy under the meanest circumstances, it is requisite that great numbers of them should be ignorant as well as poor.<sup>37</sup>

These are sentiments with which Tannahill profoundly disagreed. Even if his songs were popular with some people who did not care much for the poor, he did. William Harvey writing in 1903 about chapbook publication, lamented this growth in drawing-room culture, a market to which Tannahill's songs appealed:

With the later twenties of the nineteenth century, however... Societies and publishers set themselves to issue series little calculated to offend public taste.<sup>38</sup>

The *Harp of Renfrewshire* is an important book. Although its compilation was already in progress when Motherwell began working on it, his editorial policy and introductory essay are not without merit. He seeks to understand a locale and its history through the study of the poetry and song of the place itself. The *Harp* includes writers on the basis of geography and literary merit and not along sectarian or class divides:

No classification of the materials has been attempted, as they [the editors] considered this would have been a disadvantage rather than the contrary.<sup>39</sup>

Motherwell shows an understanding of literature as both historical process and individual creative process. He demonstrates that language is not static but evolves and that

political forces influence such evolution. A reasonably sophisticated level of literary/cultural politics and argument is displayed, but it is often couched in language where the tone makes history appear neutral, a pursuit shot-through with objectivity in the way science might be naively viewed. A description of one aspect of his contemporary world in comparison with the feudal is worth noting: 'Education then was not, as is the case now, diffused through every rank and condition of society but confined exclusively to the higher classes or professional orders'. While the spread of education was not something to be totally regretted, Motherwell does lament the profusion of 'whimpering and whiffling manufacturers of rhymes' who had sprung up in Scotland in the thirty years before *The Harp* was published.<sup>40</sup> However, Motherwell's main aim in *The Harp of Renfrewshire* was, ostensibly, to fill what he saw as a gap in Scottish literary culture:

The poets of Renfrewshire have neither been few in numbers, nor contemptible in regard to merit... As yet nothing like a compendious account, not even so much as a bare catalogue of these *Makers* has been given, albeit the same is much wanted to fill up some little chasms in the history as well as of our ancient, as our modern, stock of national biography and literature.<sup>41</sup>

At the time Motherwell edited *The Harp*, Paisley was again experiencing a general rise in radical sentiment and clamours for political reform. There is little doubt that he saw poetry as being far removed from direct political expression. He argues quite clearly:

all political revolutions are at least for a time inimical to the growth and culture of poetic genius[...] Poetry is not suited to a life of action, uproar and confusion, where the passions and prejudices of men are excited to their highest pitch, and war against each other with fellest and most rooted rancour. It may look afar upon such commotions and strifes, but it shrinks to participate in the active workings and energies of their elements.<sup>42</sup>

For Motherwell, with knowledge of local history and his work as Sheriff Depute, the radicalism he was experiencing is likely to have had intellectual reverberations of the 1790s

and the imprisonment of Alexander Wilson, by his predecessor Sheriff Substitute James Orr. Motherwell's Paisley Sheriff's Depute job brought him 'into the thick of military suppression of the Radical risings and civil disturbances around 1820; in 1818 he was knocked unconscious by an angry crowd and narrowly escaped being thrown in the River Cart'.<sup>43</sup> Yet, he was sympathetic towards both Tannahill and the radical poet Alexander Wilson (1766-1813), possibly because he saw their lives and politics as a separate entity from their poetry and song. In his introduction to *The Harp of Renfrewshire* Motherwell states:

The brilliant era—the golden age of Renfrewshire song, now opens upon us in the persons of Wilson and Tannahill. Both have contributed not a little to our stock of native lyric poetry; and while our language lasts, and music hath any charm, their names will be remembered with enthusiasm, and transmitted to ages more remote with the accumulated applauses of time.<sup>44</sup>

Through his advocacy, Motherwell had further enhanced the reputations of both Tannahill and Wilson. Wilson's work and life in America was little known in Scotland until Motherwell pointed out that 'every lover of science and natural history will have cause to rejoice at the happy fruits that resulted' from his emigration.<sup>45</sup> Motherwell's essay in *The Harp* worked as a piece of propaganda or promotion in that it was the beginning of the anthologising of Tannahill's work and brought him into the 'canon' as one of the brightest stars of the so-called 'minor' Scottish poets. Wilson was more difficult to handle owing to the more explicit radicalism in his work, but Motherwell, to his credit, set his own politics somewhat to one side and gave Wilson some of the recognition he deserved.

#### **ALEXANDER WILSON, WILLIAM THOM AND WEAVER'S LITERATURE<sup>46</sup>**

[Weavers were] extraordinary men with firm radical and Calvinist convictions. Many of them, particularly about Paisley, were lyric poets, and they had a joyous enthusiasm for the arts and sciences.<sup>47</sup>

While Motherwell showed some generosity of spirit toward Wilson, he put a very interesting spin on Wilson's radicalism, suggesting that his politics were 'waking visions':

Political sentiments likewise had their share in adding to his [Wilson's] unhappiness. Enthusiastic in his love of liberty at a time when all were somewhat fanatic on the same subject, the fervour of the poet's imagination distorted and magnified the visible shape of national events beyond their true and just proportions. [...] These waking visions are the sources of many bitternesses and much uneasiness to those in whom they are engendered, and by whom they are fostered maugre their ultimate pernicious effects. So were they no doubt to Wilson.<sup>48</sup>

Motherwell explicitly refuses any connection between Wilson's 'poverty haunted threshold' and his political outlook.<sup>49</sup> As is shown above, Wilson's politics were for Motherwell a kind of delusional response brought on by the 'poet's imagination'. Both Wilson and Tannahill are entitled to 'entire forgiveness' for their 'errings, waywardness, and misfortunes' which 'in themselves are to be reprobated and condemned' but ultimately 'soothed, modified and rendered out of place'<sup>50</sup> given consideration of the work they produced and the tragic trajectories of their lives. In this way, and in distinction from both Muir and McLaren, Motherwell is moving towards a separation between the life and the work because Wilson's radicalism and Tannahill's suicide, do not (for Motherwell) sit easily beside their 'genius' as writers.

Motherwell makes only one direct comparison of Wilson with Tannahill:

In the matter of song-writing, his townsman Tannahill has evident superiority, but in other respects is confessedly his inferior.<sup>51</sup>

Indeed, Motherwell may be correct in his assessment that Wilson was a better poet than Tannahill. Where poetry is concerned Wilson's work is generally more robust, committed and lively than Tannahill's, but they are poets with different though overlapping voices and it is



ultimately a matter of taste which author one might prefer as a poet. However, Tannahill is referred to as a song-writer only. The words *poet* and *poetry* don't get onto the page, instead Motherwell gives the vague term 'other respects' by which the reader is supposed to enter into a secret pact of agreement with the editor around the meaning of the unstated conceit that Tannahill's poetry is indeed of the 'inferior' kind, a proposition that analysis of Tannahill's poetry shows to be far from the case. (See Chapter 5).

While Wilson was writing radical poetry and declarations, an anonymous pamphlet was published in Paisley arguing why the political status quo should be maintained and revolutionary French ideas rejected. *The Paisley Weaver's Letter to his Neighbours and Fellow Tradesmen*, dated, '20<sup>th</sup> Dec. 1792' is a remarkable document. The author of *The Paisley Weaver's Letter* states:

I can only impute this one thing; a rule which I fortunately laid down for myself and have stuck to, "To mind my own business, and not to meddle with matters in which I had no concern." I believe my employers saw this and I have not fared the worse for it.<sup>52</sup>

On the topic of asking other weavers what they think is the matter with their present lives the author states:

The most common answers I get are, that our taxes are heavy; that there is great inequality in our situation; and that a reform of Parliament is necessary.<sup>53</sup>

The arguments presented are designed to combat the influence of the French Revolution and of the writings of Thomas Paine. Wilson was deeply influenced by the writing of Thomas Paine – who debunks the argument about minding one's own business in *Common Sense* – and met him in 1808 while trying to obtain subscriptions for his *Birds of America*.<sup>54</sup> Wilson was also friendly with members of the Paisley Reform Club, one of whom was named John Tannahill, possibly the half-brother of the poet.<sup>55</sup>

A person named John Tannahill from Paisley was a delegate to the convention of the Friends of the People held in Edinburgh between Tuesday 30<sup>th</sup> April and the 3<sup>rd</sup> of May 1793, as was James Mitchell, an acquaintance Alexander Wilson's.<sup>56</sup> Wilson was gaoled that same year for circulating his poem, 'The Shark', about local Mill owner William Sharp, then, allegedly, trying to get Sharp to pay for the suppression of the poem. He was again in gaol in January 1794 when it was alleged that he had written articles in support of reformers: given the political climate Wilson was probably wise to emigrate. People were being severely punished in the 1790s for supporting universal suffrage and liberty. In December 1793 leading delegates to the third Friends of the People convention, including William Skirving, were arrested. Thomas Muir had already been arrested on the 24<sup>th</sup> of August 1793, when he returned to Scotland after an abortive attempt to dissuade the French from executing Louis XVI. One of the charges against Thomas Muir was that he had circulated the work of Thomas Paine, *A Declaration of Rights*, to the Friends of Reform in Paisley. Muir was sentenced to fourteen years transportation in Australia. It was, therefore, highly likely that had Wilson remained in Paisley he would have received a stiff sentence for his activism as he would have been a repeat offender.

Another anonymous pamphlet which circulated in Paisley around this time, but has no date of publication, was titled *An Address to the People of Scotland on the Present State of Public Affairs*. This is a more generalised version of *The Paisley Weaver's Letter to his Neighbours*, and the copy in Paisley Central Library has the annotation 'in the pay of Government'<sup>57</sup> written in handwriting under the printed claim of authorship which admits only, 'signed a FELLOW SUBJECT'. This 'fellow subject' states:

Are the reformers of France fit objects of our *pious* imitation. Shall we, like them, deprive our clergymen of their rank and means of subsistence, abolish

Sunday, Baptism, and Marriage Vows? for in France all this has happened. No! the British nation shall never suffer their good principles and good sense to be so fatally and grossly perverted.<sup>58</sup>

This calls into question Motherwell's implication that Wilson's politics had anything of the delusional or 'poet's imagination' about them. It would suggest that, in fact, a real and serious political debate was taking place and that Wilson had taken a conscious part in it. Not because he had a 'poet's imagination' but because of his political views. Motherwell's suggestion that Wilson was somehow duped into his political beliefs and activities because of his poetic temperament, is rather a romantic fabrication on Motherwell's part: a fabrication that, arguably, stems from Motherwell's determination to separate poetry and politics and to depoliticise poetry.

Interest in the natural world was extremely significant for both Wilson and Tannahill. Wilson published a volume of poems titled *The Foresters* in 1805, which described a journey through the wilderness to Niagara Falls, but his life in America was mainly dedicated to the study of ornithology and it was supposedly in this pursuit he met his death by contracting dysentery when 'swimming after a wounded plover'.<sup>59</sup> He died on August 23<sup>rd</sup> 1813. His *Birds of America* is an important work with exquisite hand-drawn illustrations, and descriptions of the birds native to North America. Tannahill's observations of the natural world are expressed in lyric songs and poems where his use of language is often beautiful and adept:

Far ben thy dark green plantin's shade,  
The cushat croodles am'rously,  
The mavis, doun thy buched glade  
Gars echo ring frae ev'ry tree

Awa, ye thochtless, murd'rin gang,  
Wha tear the nestlin's ere they flee!  
They'll sing you yet a cantie sang,

Then, oh! in pity let them be!  
From 'Bonnie Wood o' Criagielee'.<sup>60</sup>

What would appear obvious though is that Tannahill and Wilson had more in common with each other than with William Motherwell: they both had acquaintances who were active in the Friends of the People and had a shared background as Paisley weavers. Motherwell, on the other hand, never worked as a weaver and moved in somewhat more right-wing circles. Class war existed more openly by 1819 than it had in Wilson's and Tannahill's time, and Motherwell's assessment of them has to be understood in that context. The end of the Napoleonic wars in 1815 brought with it a time of great uncertainty and protest and it was in this climate that Motherwell was editing *The Harp*. This wider social unrest, which was strongly supported by many Paisley weavers, must be seen as colouring Motherwell's opinion on Wilson's politics. Notwithstanding this, there is a radical thread running through the poetry of Paisley weavers from the 1790s until the Great Reform Act of 1832, continuing through Chartism, and until the Paisley weavers were no more. Wilson and his friend, the teacher Ebenezer Picken, were two of the poets who had brought this thread into being. One important poem written during this time was William Finlayson's, 'Weavers Lament: On the Failure of the Celebrated Strike of Weaving, for a Minimum of Wages in 1812' (1815). The third last stanza illustrates something similar to the contemptuous attitude towards the poor expressed above by Mandeville but from the opposite point of view. Mandeville's opinion was that ignorance would keep the lower-orders 'easier', but now that the lower-orders could read and write their 'betters' ridiculed them as being over-educated for their station in life:

In correspondence wi' our betters,  
Respecting sundry money-matters,  
They aften ca' us 'Men o' Letters',  
By way o' jeering;

Few wad believe how muckle debtors  
Are daily bearing.<sup>61</sup>

Not all Paisley's weaver-poets were radical but the quotation given at the beginning of this section (p. 83) does largely hold true for this period, if not precisely in the minds of those 'betters' described by Finlayson.

While Tannahill's songs did have a drawing-room audience they were also popular with the rural and urban working classes. This is confirmed by William Thom (1799?-1848), the Aberdonian weaver and poet, who unlike Tannahill, suffered all the worst aspects of industrialisation: starvation, homelessness, long working hours, low pay and unemployment.

In his *Rhymes and Recollections of a Handloom Weaver* (1844) Thom states:

Nearer and dearer to hearts like ours was the Ettrick Shepherd, then in his full tide of song and story; but nearer and dearer still than he, or any living songster--to us dearer--was our ill-fated fellow-craftsman, Tannahill, who had just then taken himself from a neglecting world, while yet that world waxed mellow in his lay. Poor weaver chiel! What we owe to thee! Your 'Braes o' Balquidder,' and 'Yon Burnside,' and 'Gloomy Winter,' and the 'Minstrel's' wailing ditty, and the noble 'Gleniffer.' Oh! how they did ring above the rattling of a hundred shuttles! Let me again proclaim the debt we owe to those Song Spirits, as they walked in melody from loom to loom, ministering to the low-hearted; [... ...] Poets were indeed our Priests. But for those, the last relic of our moral existence would have surely passed away!<sup>62</sup>

Thom, who worked as a weaver in factories in Aberdeenshire from 1814 to 1831, met with some success on the publication of *Rhymes and Recollections* which was re-printed numerous times. However, his personal experience of weaving was a bitter one and he had this to say of the factory system:

It is a duty, do it who may – and it shall be done – to expose the factory system of that day as it stood in our “moral North.” Fairly to put the knife into the dead monster, lay bare its dark core, dissect it in broad day, that the world may see who had the fat and who had the famine of that heartless trading. Then weep the folly of seeking beyond the ocean for that sin and slavery we had so ripe at home.<sup>63</sup>

Thom's comments provide good evidence that in a harsh factory system Tannahill's songs helped people through their days of drudgery and kept their spirits from being utterly crushed. The reason they identified with Tannahill more so than with Hogg was because they saw Tannahill – 'poor weaver chiel' – as one of their own who had died in tragic circumstances, rather than because he wrote songs with a pastoral flavour. No doubt, as Thom suggests, Tannahill's songs of the beauties of nature were more socially and spiritually necessary for mill workers than for mill owners, since for the workers there was no escape into drawing-room entertainments. Given Tannahill's dislike of oppression and exploitation it is fitting that his songs were popular with workers in the weaving mills of Aberdeenshire. More cheerfully, in a letter written to James King on September 10<sup>th</sup> 1809, Tannahill himself provides some evidence of the popularity of his songs:

Some of my songs which I esteem'd the best before being printed I find are entirely overlooked. While others which had been held in hesitating consideration over the fire are sung frequently— a fine air does a great deal for a song— and is often the vehicle for very silly words— Perhaps the highest pleasure I ever deriv'd from these things has been in hearing as I walk'd down the pavement at night, a girl within doors ranting away at some of them.<sup>64</sup>

Here Tannahill derives great satisfaction from the knowledge that his songs have an audience and are being sung. However, William Thom's relishing of Tannahill's songs stems from a very different motivation to that of William Motherwell. Thom recognises Tannahill's ability to empathise with the poor and the marginalised, and Tannahill in his unequivocal rejection of slavery is ultimately more radical than the radical poet Alexander Wilson on that particular issue.

**JOHN STRUTHERS, R. A. SMITH, JOHN CLARE AND DAVID SEMPLE**

After Motherwell there are numerous appraisals of Tannahill's life and work, mostly pieced

together from McLaren's, Muir's and Motherwell's assessments. These begin with that of John Struthers in 1819/21 and conclude – for the purposes of the present study – with Gerard Carruthers's 2005 paper 'Robert Tannahill - Scottish Poet After Burns'. In P. A. Ramsay's 1838 biography, more thorough background material on Tannahill's life is given, but Ramsay provides very little that is new in terms of critical engagement with the work. Over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries there are various general critical surveys of Scottish literature in which Tannahill is mentioned, sometimes positively and at other times less so; and there are some general books that omit him completely. Tannahill's work also makes its way into general anthologies of Scottish poetry and song in much the same way as he makes it into the critical surveys. For Alexander Whitelaw, Tannahill comes behind only Ramsay and Burns in the number of song lyrics included in *The Book of Scottish Song* (1844).<sup>65</sup> Nevertheless, with the exception of Sweeney-Turner's more theoretical engagement, and to a lesser extent Gerard Carruthers's and Gordon McCrae's deeper discussion, there is almost never any doubt cast on William Motherwell's assessment of Tannahill: John Struthers and David Semple make some variations on Muir's and Motherwell's theme, though there is little by way of detailed critical engagement with the work in terms of its content outwith the pastoral of the songs, except in the case of Carruthers. There is no published critical reading in existence of Tannahill's dramatic interlude *The Soldier's Return* within this time frame, and as I have already demonstrated no one has looked closely at his poetry as distinct from (but in relationship with) the songs, other than to suggest ultimately that the poetry looks rather bad in comparison. Indeed, this judgement remains the case with Carruthers, as he insists: 'The fact is that Tannahill's best "poetry" is apparent in his songs'.<sup>66</sup>

However, the case of John Struthers's critical assessment is, indeed, a strange one.

While agreeing with Motherwell about the inferior nature of the poetry, he then goes on to say the songs have equally as little merit whilst publishing a selection of them! *The Harp of Caledonia*, edited by Struthers, was first published in three volumes in 1819. It was revised and reprinted in two volumes in 1821. The 1821 edition contains an ‘Essay on Scottish Songwriters’ and an introduction in which Struthers further outlines his philosophy of music and theory of the evolution of Scottish song. This is the second major anthology in which Tannahill’s work is featured and the 1821 ‘Essay’ gives us another critical assessment of his life and work. As Struthers and Tannahill were friends with similar interests it is perhaps not too surprising that Struthers would include him, but in a more definite way than in the *Harp of Renfrewshire*, Tannahill’s reputation was further boosted in that he was given a place beside Burns, Hogg, Ramsay and others who were considered to represent the pinnacle of Scottish song-writing. So for the first time in a major publication, eleven years after his death, Tannahill was included with past and contemporary Scottish writers for whom he had the greatest admiration. The biographical notes on Tannahill’s life and character are fairly generous and positive, but the comments on his work are perplexing, and contradictory:

Of his [Tannahill’s] works it is unnecessary to say much... His poems have little in them either of strong conception or brilliant diction; yet they contain maxims of morality sometimes happily expressed, and specimens of natural and easy versification which may be perused with a considerable degree of pleasure.

Here, Struthers gives much the same opinion as Motherwell with regard to Tannahill’s poetry, but continues:

His songs partake very much of the same character. They discover neither brilliancy of imagination nor intensity of passion; but they are *natural* and neat, and, in many instances, *though not uniformly, easy* [my italics]. In short, their great excellence consists in giving a happy expression to that mediocrity of feeling which, fortunately for themselves, taking mankind on the average, characterises ninety-nine out of a hundred. They will, of course, always be



popular with the many.<sup>67</sup>

At face value Struthers is suggesting that ‘in many instances’ though not always, Tannahill’s songs are pleasant and so are his poems. The songs are not perhaps as good as William Motherwell thinks them but neither is the poetry as bad. Ultimately this is a critical levelling of the poetry and songs which marks Tannahill as unremittingly average in both. However, Struthers gives a clear recognition of a connection between the poetry and the songs, if not the dramatic Interlude, by describing them as being ‘of the same character’ which is a move away from Muir’s, Motherwell’s and John Clare’s<sup>68</sup> insistence on their separation.

Tannahill’s poetry was the arena in which he tried to work through the contradictions he faced in life and his ‘mediocrity of feeling’ perhaps derives from his attempt to find a middle ground, and a language through which he could express his feelings without causing offence morally or politically. Even though he writes occasionally, in a way that, as Gerard Carruthers argues:

involves the transfixing influence of Burns where Burnsian phraseology is parroted as though representing a sacred text and a grossly simplified Robert Burns of suffusing sentimental and rather nebulous feeling is venerated.<sup>69</sup>

Alas, ‘nebulous feeling’ was not confined to Tannahill’s writing, nor to Scotland. Whig playwright Sheridan’s *Pizarro* was ‘nebulous’ enough to be approved of by George III<sup>70</sup> and the sentiment contained in much of Thomas Moore’s work was so nebulous that it was rarely seen as a statement of Irish nationalism or political radicalism. As Emer Nolan confirms of Moore (and the same can be said of Tannahill):

The tone of Moore’s works – poems, prose and satires in several modes – varies considerably, and his writing exhibits mixed and maybe even contradictory political opinions.<sup>71</sup>

Such ‘nebulous feeling’ on the parts of Sheridan, Moore and Tannahill are very possibly

related to contemporary political imperatives in a Britain at war with Napoleon, where political expression could be dangerous, rather than - specifically in Tannahill's case - having anything to do with seeing Robert Burns as some kind of deity. Whether or not Tannahill's poems are judged as inferior to his songs, this is no argument for their wholesale critical dismissal. This 'nebulous feeling' (Carruthers), 'mediocrity of feeling' (Struthers) or emotional ambivalence and unwillingness to commit absolutely to one side or the other in the poems can be viewed as Tannahill's honest attempt to work through difficult and contradictory personal and political problems in a political climate where it was difficult to judge how far one could publicly declare a view without incurring the wrath of State or literary authorities. Further, Tannahill worried a good deal about his reputation and this worry rather than any misunderstanding of, or seeking to simplify and deify Robert Burns can also be seen as one of the factors contributing to Tannahill's use of 'Burnsian phraseology', much of which had a place in Scottish culture before Burns appeared in print: and the use of which Tannahill may well have employed as a means of placing himself beyond political controversy and criticism, due to the fact that many establishment figures had already recognised the genius of Burns, even if his radical leanings were not immediately apparent to a London audience.

Around the same time as John Struthers published his second edition of the *Harp of Caledonia*, Robert A. Smith began publishing his 6 volumes of *The Scottish Minstrel* (1821-24) which was 'a very popular collection' and 'brought Tannahill's work to a much wider audience'.<sup>72</sup> This was followed by Smith's *Irish Minstrel* in 1825, which again included Tannahill and was, 'Encouraged by the flattering manner in which the SCOTTISH MINSTREL has been received'.<sup>73</sup> The preface to *The Irish Minstrel* confines itself to discussion of a general

theory of song and music, making no comment on the life and work of the individual contributors. Charles Rogers, however, in the *Modern Scottish Minstrel* (1856) bluntly states of Tannahill: 'His poems are much inferior to his songs'.<sup>74</sup>

When R. A. Smith was working on his Scottish and Irish song collections, the English poet John Clare made the following note in his journal on Thursday 14<sup>th</sup> October 1824:

Read some passages in the Poems of Tannahill some of his songs are beautiful particularly 'Loudon's Bonny woods and braes' 'We'll meet beside the dusky glen' and 'Jessey' his poems are poor and appear as if they were written by another — The Scotch Poets excel in song writing because they take their images from common life where nature exists without affectation<sup>75</sup>

Clare's assessment of Tannahill is perhaps the strongest and clearest demarcation of the idea that Tannahill's songs are superior to his poems. Indeed, Clare sees the songwriter and the poet as two different individuals although he is repeating more emphatically Muir's and Motherwell's assessment of Tannahill – it was Muir's 1817 fourth edition of Tannahill's *Poems and Songs*, that Clare had in his library.<sup>76</sup> However, Clare's sonnet 'from about 1840', 'The Gipsy Camp' (or 'Gipsies'), in which he is 'not interested in judging the gypsies', has a remarkable parallel with Tannahill's poem 'The Storm', in which Tannahill is also extremely reluctant to pass moral judgement on gypsies.<sup>77</sup> 'The Storm', the fourth poem in the Muir edition, very much like Clare's 'Gipsy Camp', stands in complete opposition to the view of Coleridge (when attacking Wordsworth), 'that gypsies were not a fit subject for poetry'.<sup>78</sup> It can be argued that while in 1824 Clare found Tannahill's poems 'poor' he went on in 1840 to write something with strong parallels to Tannahill's 'The Storm'. Clare in the instance of 'The Gipsy Camp', does appear to be taking something from the other Tannahill, Tannahill the poet and not Tannahill the 'Scotch' songwriter. While there is no evidence to tell us exactly what Clare thought of Tannahill in 1840, it is entirely possible that he found the

poems more to his liking by that time and that images from 'The Storm' had lodged in his mind. Tannahill uses the lines, 'Ah! who would not feel for yon poor gipsy race' and 'May fall unprotected, unpitied, unknown'. Clare ends his sonnet with the line, 'A quiet, pilfering, unprotected race'.<sup>79</sup> Although there are technical differences and thoroughly distinct narratives, the two poems share common elements of outlook, setting, vocabulary and symbolism: Clare with his 'aloof' dog, Tannahill his 'poor patient horse', and both poems set in adverse, wintry weather.

David Semple's 1876 edition of Tannahill's *Poems, Songs and Correspondence* is the most thorough publication concerning Tannahill's life and work though it is not without errors. Both Davidson Cook in the *Scots Magazine* of February 1941 and Ronald L. Crawford in *Notes and Queries* of May 1966, have pointed out some of Semple's mistakes.<sup>80</sup> It has also been noted that 'most subsequent writers on Tannahill have reproduced Semple's views'.<sup>81</sup> As far as critical analysis is concerned Semple takes us only a little further forward from the position that Tannahill is a better songwriter than he is a poet. In addition, Semple's opinion that the poems and songs do have a relationship with one another, is not dissimilar to the opinion of John Struthers. Semple is most sympathetic to the viewpoint of seeing Tannahill as one writer who wrote in various forms: poet, songwriter, dramatist and letter-writer. Another step forward made by Semple was to assert of the drama, *The Soldier's Return*, that 'we are inclined to entertain it favourably[...] we read the Interlude once, and were pleased with it; we read it a second time, and were better pleased with it'. As an editor, Semple allows almost the whole of Tannahill's extant work (and a little more) to stand as valid. However, he again reminds the reader that the 'path of the author [Tannahill] was lyrical writing and not dramatic composition', by implication putting a higher value on the songs, and explicitly:

The six beautiful songs in the first class of lyric poetry introduced by the author into the dialogue, were of such a redeeming quality that they should have saved the whole [Interlude] from unjust condemnation.<sup>82</sup>

Again this parallels Motherwell's assessment that the songs have 'evident superiority' over his other 'confessedly inferior' work. Regardless of these judgements, in 1876 Semple at least presented the fullest range of Tannahill's work he could and this opens the opportunity for critical engagement, less coloured by the ideas, fashions or tastes of that time.

### CONCLUSION

Tannahill's other biographers, Philip A. Ramsay, James J. Lamb, Sir George Douglas and Alexander Reekie have all contributed in their way to bringing the biographical details of his life into the light, but Semple's 1876 'Life of Tannahill' remains the most comprehensive. Yet, in terms of understanding what Tannahill had to say in the entirety of his work, little has progressed from the generalities given by McLaren, Muir, Motherwell and Struthers. By 1822 the view of Tannahill - as far as critical engagement has been concerned - was fixed: and writing that is a complex manifestation of Presbyterian, Augustan, eighteenth-century radical, Scottish Enlightenment and Jacobite influences, grounded in the local, or 'parochial concerns writ large', consisting of a dramatic-pastoral Interlude and sixty-nine poems, has been denied serious critical review and discussion. The received critical view of *unremarkable poet, admirable writer of a handful of Scottish songs and let us just leave it at that*, has obscured the work of a significant talent who had opinions on the issues of his time and wrote with passion, intelligence, honesty, ironic wit and flashes of brilliance. It also sets up a distinction between poetry and song that is not easily sustained.

Gerard Carruthers does investigate some aspects of the problems of war and religion in the work in his paper, 'Robert Tannahill – Scottish Poet After Burns'. With regard to the

war Carruthers argues that Tannahill, 'overplays native British virtue and overdoes the barbarism of the French'. This is convincing with regard to the 'Ode' for the 1807 Burns anniversary meeting but when Tannahill says elsewhere of the war, 'And what is't for? for nought in faith!', he condemns the British and the French equally.<sup>83</sup> Carruthers is persuasive, therefore, when he suggests that: 'We are left with a confusing portrait of a man who [can be] infuriatingly vague about his times' but less so when he states that for Tannahill, 'the French are simply and solely to blame for the current war'.<sup>84</sup>

Tannahill's voice as a writer and his use of technique can be seen as deriving from a written vernacular tradition largely popularised and revived by Allan Ramsay, Robert Fergusson, Burns and others - but not without English influences from Augustan authors such as Pope and Gray - in a Scotland where:

By 1785-6, when Burns came on the scene, all the various strands of the common medium, folk and 'national', broadside and 'art', Scots and English, were being used in Scotland.<sup>85</sup>

In this sense Scotland did have a socially broad and vigorous poetic language and heritage that Burns could deploy and he did so superbly. Tannahill was not a great formal innovator, however, he took and used these 'various strands' along with inspiration from Burns, Ramsay and others, to write in a more muscular Scots (or Scots-English) than he is given credit for.

Tannahill and his Paisley contemporaries did rather well in their dedication to producing poems and songs and in the getting them out into the world. This is emphatically the case if Raymond Williams's view is taken into account that:

What was imposed on the labourer-poets [around 1800] was a definition of learning and cultivation, and more critically a definition of poetry, which, as it happened, was as mediocre as it was arrogant.<sup>86</sup>

This too must be considered a factor in their identification with Robert Burns whose humane

ideals, poetic dexterity and broad-minded content reinforced the notion that working men and artisans could be literary artists and write about whatever subjects interested them. Burns had given them a more democratic notion of literature than the ‘mediocre’ model described above by Raymond Williams but as Carruthers argues, Tannahill did write some ‘abstract, platitudinous poems of emotion’.<sup>87</sup> In his efforts to experiment, Tannahill attempted forms he never had the time to fully develop his craft in, so that some of his efforts inevitably appear as apprentice work.

Tannahill and his circle lived in a world which had undergone an agrarian revolution and was beginning to undergo an industrial one: a world of the enemy without - the French - and the enemy within, which included almost anyone with anti-government or Painite sentiments, however mild. As Betty Bennett argued: ‘it is well to remember that “Jacobins” were as often Whigs as republicans’, so it wasn’t necessary to be extreme to be labelled a traitor, even moderate Whig supporters could be labelled ‘Jacobins’.<sup>88</sup> M. O. Grenby in his critique of *The Anti-Jacobin Novel* (2001) confirms this view:

Jacobinism could also be used as a stick to beat any and all movements for reform, of whatever complexion, and ultra-reactionaries had no hesitation in doing so. Anyone from the followers of Fox and the Society of the Friends of the People to the enemies of the slave trade or those who, like Hannah More herself, sought to establish Sunday schools, could be labelled as Jacobins, and frequently were by the *Anti-Jacobin Review*, the individuals who made up its staff and many others of like mind. They too were able to do this because Jacobinism had no fixed meaning.<sup>89</sup>

The place that Tannahill lived was both Scotland and Britain. His work is a representation of the dualities of Scottish nationhood and British statehood. It is worthy of critical attention as poetry, song-lyric, drama and letter. Although often critically dismissed, there was no decade of the nineteenth century in which the poetry was not published.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Robert Tannahill, 'Epigram', *The Soldier's Return: A Scottish Interlude in two Acts; with other Poems and Songs, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect* (Paisley, 1807), p. 143. This epigram has been suppressed in every subsequent edition of Tannahill's work with the exception of James J. Lamb ed., *The Soldier's Return* (Paisley, 1873). Reprint of 1807 edition.
- <sup>2</sup> Gerard Carruthers, 'Robert Tannahill – Scottish Poet After Burns', in *The Renfrewshire Local History Forum Journal*, Vol. 13 2005/06 (Paisley, 2005), pp. 21-30.
- <sup>3</sup> Gordon McCrae, 'Tannahill's Landscapes' in *Renfrewshire Studies 2: Proceedings Of A One Day Local Studies Conference Held In The University Of Paisley*, Stuart James And Gordon McCrae, eds. (Paisley, c.1997), pp. 81-123.
- <sup>4</sup> Steve Sweeney-Turner 'Pagan Airs: Reading Critical Perspectives on the Songs of Burns and Tannahill' in *Critical Essays on Robert Burns*, McGuirk, ed. (London, 1998), pp. 182-207.
- <sup>5</sup> William McLaren, *The Life of Robert Tannahill: The Renfrewshire Bard* (Paisley, 1815).
- <sup>6</sup> James Muir, 'Notice Respecting the Life and Work Robert Tannahill', *Robert Tannahill, Poems and Songs, Chiefly in Scottish Dialect*, Muir, ed. (Paisley, 1815). For biographical details of James Muir see Brown, ed., *Paisley Poets Vol. I* (Paisley, 1889), p. 102.
- <sup>7</sup> McLaren, *The Life of Robert Tannahill*, p. 9.
- <sup>8</sup> McLaren, *The Life of Robert Tannahill*, p. 15.
- <sup>9</sup> Muir, 'Notice', *Robert Tannahill, Poems and Songs*, p. vi.
- <sup>10</sup> Muir, 'Notice', *Robert Tannahill, Poems and Songs*, p. viii.
- <sup>11</sup> McLaren, *The Life of Robert Tannahill*, p. 6.
- <sup>12</sup> Bertolt Brecht, *Poems 1913-1956*, Willett and Manheim, eds. (London, 1987), p. 481.
- <sup>13</sup> Muir, 'Notice', *Robert Tannahill, Poems and Songs*, pp. xxiv-xxv.
- <sup>14</sup> Muir, 'Notice', *Robert Tannahill, Poems and Songs*, p. xxiii.
- <sup>15</sup> Muir, 'Notice', *Robert Tannahill, Poems and Songs*, p. xxvii.
- <sup>16</sup> Muir, 'Notice', *Robert Tannahill, Poems and Songs*, p. xxvii.
- <sup>17</sup> Muir, 'Notice', *Robert Tannahill, Poems and Songs*, p. xxvii.
- <sup>18</sup> See Gordon McCrae, 'Tannahill's Landscapes' in *Renfrewshire Studies 2: Proceedings Of A One Day Local Studies Conference Held In The University Of Paisley*, Stuart James And Gordon McCrae, eds. (Paisley, c.1997), pp. 89-91. As McCrae notes: 'The countryside is as much a result of industry as the town. Areas are cleared, flooded, planted, enclosed and all but the least accessible parts clearly bear the marks of human activity [...] Tannahill's countryside was in fact in the course of vigorous economic development'.
- <sup>19</sup> Muir, 'Notice', *Robert Tannahill, Poems and Songs*, p. xxviii.
- <sup>20</sup> Lisa Jardine, *Erasmus Man of Letters* (New Jersey, 1993), p. 20. The Irish poet Patrick Kavanagh gives insight into this concept of 'the parochial writ large' in the following: 'Parochialism and provincialism are opposites. The provincial has no mind of his own; he does not trust what his eyes see until he has heard what the metropolis –towards which his eyes are turned– has to say on any subject. This runs through all his activities. The parochial mentality on the other hand is never any doubt about the social and artistic validity of his parish. All great civilisations are based on parochialism – Greek, Israelite, English. Parochialism is universal; it deals with fundamentals. To know fully even one field or lane is a lifetime's experience. In the world of poetic experience it is depth that counts, not width. A gap in a hedge, a smooth rock surfacing a narrow lane, a view of a woody meadow, the stream at the junction of four small fields – these are as much as a man can fully experience.' From *The Penguin Book of Contemporary Irish Poetry*, Fallon and Mahon, eds. (Harmondsworth, 1990), p. xviii.
- There is reluctance on Tannahill's part to make any great pronouncements on the social and political issues of his time and so he is not a public or political poet in the sense that Shelley was in a poem like 'The Mask of Anarchy' on the Peterloo Massacre.
- <sup>21</sup> Professor John Veitch, *The Feeling for Nature in Scottish Poetry*, Vol. 2 (Edinburgh, 1887), pp. 314-315. Semple's edition of Tannahill's *Poems, Songs and Correspondence* (Paisley, 1876), has thorough footnotes that indicate the breadth of Tannahill's reading.
- <sup>22</sup> Veitch, *The Feeling for Nature in Scottish Poetry*, Vol. 2, p. 314.



- <sup>23</sup> William Motherwell, ed., *The Harp of Renfrewshire* (Glasgow, 1819). For biographical details of Motherwell, see Mary Ellen Brown, *The Cultural Politics of William Motherwell* (Kentucky, 2001). James M'Conechy, 'Memoir', *The Poetical Works of William Motherwell, with memoir by J. M'Conechny* (Paisley, 1881).
- <sup>24</sup> William Motherwell, 'Essay on the Poets of Renfrewshire', *The Harp of Renfrewshire*, p. XLL.
- <sup>25</sup> William Motherwell, 'Essay on the Poets of Renfrewshire', p. XLL.
- <sup>26</sup> William Motherwell, 'Essay on the Poets of Renfrewshire', p. XLL.
- <sup>27</sup> William Motherwell, 'Essay on the Poets of Renfrewshire', p. XLIL.
- <sup>28</sup> Muir, ed., 'Notice', *Robert Tannahill's Poems and Songs*, p. xxvii.
- <sup>29</sup> Brown, *The Cultural Politics of William Motherwell*, p. 240.
- <sup>30</sup> For discussion of the relationship between Tannahill's use of rhythm and the rhythm of the loom see Fred Freeman's notes in the c.d., *The Complete Songs of Robert Tannahill*, Vol. 1, Brechin Records, Ref: CDBAR003. Producer, Freeman, nineteen tracks by various artists (2006).
- <sup>31</sup> James M'Conechy, ed., 'Memoir', *The Poetical Works of William Motherwell, with memoir by J. M'Conechny* (Paisley, 1881), p. xxvii.
- <sup>32</sup> For a history of Orangeism and its origins see, Kevin Haddick-Flynn, *Orangeism: the making of a tradition* (Dublin, 1999).
- <sup>33</sup> Elaine McFarland, 'A Mere Irish Faction', in *Scotland and Ulster*, I. S. Wood, ed. (Edinburgh, 1994), p. 74.
- <sup>34</sup> Robert Tannahill, Letter to James King, Tuesday, 18<sup>th</sup> July, 1809 (Glasgow University Library, Special Collections, MS Robertson 1/27).
- <sup>35</sup> Linda Colley, *Britons: forging the nation, 1707-1837* (London, 1992), p. 145.
- <sup>36</sup> Veitch, *The Feeling for Nature in Scottish Poetry*, Vol. 2, p. 315.
- <sup>37</sup> Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (London, 1973), p. 135. Bernard de Mandeville, 'An Essay on Charity and Charity Schools', *The Fable of the Bees*, (London, 1795), p. 179.
- <sup>38</sup> William Harvey, *Scottish Chapbook Literature* (Paisley, 1903), pp. 25-26.
- This tendency is also illustrated in the attitude of Tannahill's musical collaborator R. A. Smith who after Tannahill's death became very concerned with writing music and songs suitable for the parlour or drawing room and for the church.
- <sup>39</sup> William Motherwell, 'Essay on the Poets of Renfrewshire', p. IX.
- <sup>40</sup> Motherwell, 'Essay on the Poets of Renfrewshire', p. XIX, XXIX.
- <sup>41</sup> Motherwell, 'Essay on the Poets of Renfrewshire', p. VIII.
- <sup>42</sup> Motherwell, 'Essay on the Poets of Renfrewshire', p. XIII.
- <sup>43</sup> Tom Leonard, ed., *Radical Renfrew* (Edinburgh, 1990), p. 110.
- <sup>44</sup> Motherwell, 'Essay on the Poets of Renfrewshire', p. XXVII.
- <sup>45</sup> Motherwell, 'Essay on the Poets of Renfrewshire', p. XXXI. Motherwell is referring to Wilson's work as an ornithologist.
- <sup>46</sup> For discussion of William Thom and William Motherwell in relation to Tannahill and 'the local' see, William Findlay, 'Reclaiming Local Literature', in *The History of Scottish Literature, Vol. 3: the nineteenth century*, Craig and Gifford, eds. (Aberdeen, 1988), pp. 353-376.
- <sup>47</sup> John Prebble, *The Lion in the North* (London, 1971), p.317.
- <sup>48</sup> William Motherwell, 'Essay on the Poets of Renfrewshire', p. XXIX.
- <sup>49</sup> Motherwell, 'Essay on the Poets of Renfrewshire', p. XXVIII.
- <sup>50</sup> Motherwell, 'Essay on the Poets of Renfrewshire', p. XXXII.
- <sup>51</sup> Motherwell, 'Essay on the Poets of Renfrewshire', p. XXX.
- <sup>52</sup> Anon., *The Paisley Weaver's Letter to his Neighbours and Fellow Tradesmen* (Paisley [?], 20<sup>th</sup> Dec., 1792), p. 2. Pamphlet held in Paisley Central Library Archives.
- <sup>53</sup> Anon., *The Paisley Weaver's Letter to his Neighbours and Fellow Tradesmen* (Paisley [?], 20<sup>th</sup> Dec., 1792), p. 2. Pamphlet held in Paisley Central Library Archives.
- <sup>54</sup> See Robert Cantwell, *Alexander Wilson: Naturalist and Pioneer* (Philadelphia, 1961), p. 162. Thomas Paine opens *Common Sense* by suggesting that: 'Society is in every state a blessing [which] promotes our happiness by *positively* uniting our affections', while on the contrary: 'government in its best state is but a necessary evil [which acts] *negatively* by restraining our vices'. He then goes on to argue that the main defects of the English Constitution are monarchy and the hereditary principle. Of the constitutional settlement of 1688 he argues that: 'though we have been wise enough to shut and lock a door against absolute monarchy, we at the same time have been foolish enough to put the crown in possession of the key'.

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For Paine there is such a thing as ‘society’ and governments ought to be made up of persons who take a free and full part in the life of that society. Thomas Paine, *Common Sense*, first published 1776 (London, 2004), p. 5, 11.

- <sup>55</sup> Clark Hunter, *The Life and Letters of Alexander Wilson* (Philadelphia, 1983), p. 84. Hunter suggests that this John Tannahill was Robert Tannahill’s uncle. However, Tannahill’s uncles John and Robert had probably emigrated for America before this date. Nevertheless it is probable that the John Tannahill mentioned by Hunter was a relative of Robert Tannahill, perhaps his half-brother. In a letter of 19<sup>th</sup> May 1824, Matthew Tannahill, the poet’s brother states: ‘We have a half brother. He is the son our father but not of our mother. His name is John. He is about 66 years of age. He has five sons. Three of them are married and have children. They all are weavers. Our father was a weaver till within a few years of his death and taught all his sons the same trade’. This would put John Tannahill, half-brother of the poet, in Paisley and aged 35 or 36 when the Friends of the People were meeting in Edinburgh in 1793-94. According to the typescript copy of a letter written by Robert Tannahill’s brother James the uncles emigrated when he was about 3 years old. James Tannahill was born on 17<sup>th</sup> September 1771 so this would put the emigration of John Tannahill (uncle) at a date sometime in the mid-1770s. Letter from James Tannahill to his relatives in USA. Paisley, 5th April, 1824 (Paisley Central Library, PC TAN/Letters).
- <sup>56</sup> See Durey, *Transatlantic Radicals*, pp. 75-79.
- <sup>57</sup> *An Address to the People of Scotland on the Present State of Public Affairs* (n. p., c. 1792). Pamphlet in Paisley Central Library Archives. The author and date of the annotation are not known.
- <sup>58</sup> Anon., *An Address to the People of Scotland on the Present State of Public Affairs* (n. p., c. 1792), p. 3. Pamphlet in Paisley Central Library Archives.
- <sup>59</sup> Robert Cantwell, *Alexander Wilson*, p. 257.
- <sup>60</sup> Robert Tannahill, *Poems, Songs and Correspondence*, David Semple, ed. (Paisley, 1876) p. 193-4.
- <sup>61</sup> William Finlayson, *Simple Scottish Rhymes* (Paisley, 1815), p. 37.
- <sup>62</sup> William Thom, *Rhymes and Recollections of a Handloom Weaver*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (London, 1847), pp. 14-15.
- <sup>63</sup> Thom, *Rhymes and Recollections of a Handloom Weaver*, p. 8.
- <sup>64</sup> Robert Tannahill, Letter to James King, 10<sup>th</sup> September, 1809 (GUL, Spec Colls., MS Robertson 1/28).
- <sup>65</sup> Alexander Whitelaw, ed., *The Book of Scottish Song* (Glasgow, 1844). Whitelaw anthologised over thirty of Tannahill’s lyrics, with some useful (and highly positive) notes.
- <sup>66</sup> Gerard Carruthers, ‘Robert Tannahill – Scottish Poet After Burns’, *The Renfrewshire Local History Forum Journal*, Vol. 13 2005/06 (Paisley, 2005), p. 26.
- <sup>67</sup> John Struthers, ed., *The Harp of Caledonia*, Vol. II (Glasgow, 1821), p. 415.
- <sup>68</sup> See John Clare, *John Clare by Himself*, Robinson and Powell, eds. (Northumberland, 1996), p. 185.
- <sup>69</sup> Carruthers, ‘Robert Tannahill – Scottish Poet After Burns’, p. 21.
- <sup>70</sup> See Gillian Russell, *The Theatres of War: Performance, Politics and Society 1793-1815* (Oxford, 1995), p. 54, where she also states that Sheridan’s *Pizarro* was: ‘first performed in May 1799. Although it has subsequently been neglected by both directors and critics, *Pizarro* was Sheridan’s greatest commercial success and a cultural phenomenon of major significance’. The fact that John Ross of Aberdeen – composer of music to Tannahill lyrics – set Sheridan’s lyric, *Be merciless thou tempest dire, a favourite song from the drama of Pizarro*, to music, indirectly connects Tannahill with the play. John Ross, *Be merciless thou tempest dire, a favourite song from the drama of Pizarro, with an accompaniment for the piano-forte, written by R. B. Sheridan Esqr.; composed and respectfully dedicated to Miss Dr. Grant, by John Ross* (Edinburgh, ca. 1800). Printed and sold by J. Hamilton.
- <sup>71</sup> Emer Nolan, ‘Irish Melodies and Discordant Politics’, *Field Day Review*, 2 (2006), p. 43.
- <sup>72</sup> Stuart James and Gordon McCrae, ‘A Short Guide to the Sources of Information about the Paisley Poets’, in *The Paisley Poets: A critical reappraisal of their work*, Stuart James and Gordon McCrae, eds. (Paisley, 1993), p. 89.
- <sup>73</sup> R. A. Smith, ed., *The Irish Minstrel* (Edinburgh, 1825), p. i.
- <sup>74</sup> Charles Rogers, ed., *The Modern Scottish Minstrel* (Edinburgh, 1856), p. 135.
- <sup>75</sup> John Clare, *John Clare by Himself*, p. 185. It is interesting that Clare should see Tannahill the poet and Tannahill the songwriter as two different people given the mental fragmentation that overcame him later in life when Clare was wont to see himself as Lord Byron.
- <sup>76</sup> See, Robert Tannahill, *Poems and Songs*, James Muir, ed., 4<sup>th</sup> edition (London, 1817).
- <sup>77</sup> Alan D. Vardy, *John Clare: Politics and Poetry* (Basingstoke, 2003), p. 26.

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- <sup>78</sup> Vardy, *John Clare: Politics and Poetry*, p. 27. Vardy discusses chapter XXII of Coleridge's, *Biographia Literaria* (London, 1817), 2 Vols., and argues: 'What then would Coleridge have made of 'The Gypsy Camp'? Would he have commended its fierce resistance to the moralising weakness of Wordsworth's poem [Gipsies']? It is impossible to say, but it is important to remember that the defence of the gypsies was not Coleridge's motive for writing. Furthermore, the 'lowness' of Clare's subject concerned Coleridge as much as his famous rival Francis Jeffrey, and the conclusion he drew from his attack on Wordsworth's 'Gipsies' was not that Wordsworth had failed to truthfully represent the gypsies, although that was undoubtedly so, but that gypsies were not a fit subject for poetry. As a subject they violated a 'fundamental distinction', made by Coleridge earlier in chapter 22, between the correct objects for art and for philosophy. In that passage, Coleridge objected to Wordsworth's use of rustic characters, even as he admitted that we should consider all persons as equals regardless of their various stations in life; he nonetheless objected because they were, what he called, 'immediate objects', and, as such, better suited to treatment in 'sermons or moral essays.'
- <sup>79</sup> Robert Tannahill, 'The Storm', *The Soldier's Return*, p. 40. John Clare, 'The Gypsy Camp', *The later poems of John Clare, 1837-1864*, Vol. 1, Robinson and Powell eds., (Oxford, 1984), p. 29.
- <sup>80</sup> D. Cook 'Not Tannahill's: Spurious songs included in his works', *Scots Magazine*, 34 (1941), pp. 393-396. Ronald L. Crawford 'New Light on Robert Tannahill, the Weaver-Poet of Paisley', *Notes and Queries*, 211 (1966), pp. 184-189.
- <sup>81</sup> Stuart James and Gordon McCrae, 'A Short Guide to the Sources of Information about the Paisley Poets', *The Paisley Poets: A critical reappraisal of their work*, p. 88.
- <sup>82</sup> Semple, ed., *Poems, Songs and Correspondence*, (Paisley, 1876), p. 2.
- <sup>83</sup> Robert Tannahill, Letter to Robert Allan, 14<sup>th</sup> March, 1808 (in verse) (GUL, Spec. Colls., MS Robertson 1/13).
- <sup>84</sup> Gerard Carruthers, 'Robert Tannahill – Scottish Poet After Burns', p. 28, 21. Tannahill's attitude to the war with France is discussed in Chapter 3 of this thesis.
- <sup>85</sup> Tom Crawford, *Society and the Lyric: a study of the song culture of eighteenth-century Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1979), p. 181.
- <sup>86</sup> Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (London, 1973), p. 135.
- <sup>87</sup> Gerard Carruthers, 'Robert Tannahill – Scottish Poet After Burns', p. 27.
- <sup>88</sup> Betty Bennett, ed., *British War Poetry in the Age of Romanticism* (New York, 1976), p. 21.
- <sup>89</sup> M. O. Grenby, *The Anti-Jacobin Novel: British Conservatism and the French Revolution* (Cambridge, 2001), pp. 7-8.

### 3. War and the Threat of Invasion

#### AN INTERNATIONAL DEBATE

Most of Europe was directly involved in the revolutionary wars in which republican France confronted the older monarchies between 1793 and 1815. But, although the political revolution and subsequent war are the most obvious symptoms of upheaval, they are not the only ones. The same period saw a growth in the population of Western Europe, an expansion of trade and industry, and a quickening pace of social change, so that the idea conveyed by the phrase 'industrial revolution' is as important as the cultural change.<sup>1</sup>

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the central period of the Industrial Revolution - 1793 to 1815 - was occupied by European Wars on a scale never before known. It would hardly be too much to say that Britain entered these wars an agricultural and emerged an industrial country.<sup>2</sup>

The French Revolution of 1789 sparked one of the great debates of global politics between Edmund Burke and Thomas Paine. Not only that, the Revolution itself was one of the most ideologically driven political upheavals in history that brought a new regime into existence. Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790) and Paine's reply to it, *The Rights of Man*, (Part 1, 1791) became vital political texts that influenced both thought and action. In the early 1790s British Prime Minister William Pitt the Younger took steps to stem the spread of French revolutionary ideas. Paine's text was banned, radical organisations such as The Friends of the People were suppressed, and in 1794 Habeas Corpus was suspended for eight years.<sup>3</sup> When the French invaded Belgium, Britain felt its interests under threat and entered the war in 1793 in an alliance with Austria, Prussia and Spain, against republican France. Following on the trauma for the British ruling elite of the

American Revolution, this upheaval caused much panic and severely split the Whig Party with many of them joining Pitt and the Tories. The remaining Whigs, gathered around Charles James Fox, were generally a minority in Parliament who argued for reform during the war years.

The Enlightenment of the mid-eighteenth century had popularised political, social, historical and scientific inquiry in Scotland, and ideas connected to the historical debates over the Militia Question - where political and constitutional questions were discussed within the framework of the relationship between organised armed forces and civil society – had some correlation with those of Paine and revolutionary France.<sup>4</sup> These Militia debates remained fresh in peoples' minds when the recruitment parties came out in ever increasing numbers throughout the 1790s. By 1799 Napoleon had taken power and the French Revolution was in some senses at an end, so Britain's role in the war could be characterised as opposition to French imperialism rather than anti-republicanism. In five short years Napoleon would be crowned Emperor, but the war continued until Bonaparte's ultimate defeat in 1815. Paine, in his introduction to the English edition of *The Rights of Man*, argued that Burke had attempted to whip up support for war against the French and was in favour of an almost perpetual state of war between Britain and France. According to Paine, Burke 'immediately began sowing the seeds of a new inveteracy, as if he were afraid that England and France would cease to be enemies'.<sup>5</sup> Tannahill, like Paine, was antipathetic to the idea of 'endless war'.<sup>6</sup>

### **WICKED ENDLESS WAR**

Tannahill's clearest statement on the Napoleonic wars is probably that given in his 'Epistle' of 14<sup>th</sup> March 1808, addressed to the radical leaning poet and weaver Robert

Allan of Kilbarchan. Though Tannahill did not openly express Painite radicalism, he was by this time cynical about the war and was sceptical about the validity of war as a policy in the conduct of international relations:

How fares my worthy friend, the Bard?  
Be peace and honour his reward,  
May every ill that gars us fyke,  
Ill webs, toom pouches and sic like,  
And ought that would his spirit bend,  
Be ten miles distant from my friend.  
Alas! this wicked endless War,  
Rul'd by some vile, malignant star,  
Has sunk poor Britain low indeed,  
Has robb'd Industry o' her bread,  
And dash'd the sair-won cog o' crowdy,  
Frae mony an honest eident body,  
While genius dying thro' neglect,  
Sinks down amidst the general wreck.  
Just like twa cats tied tail to tail,  
They worry at it tooth and nail,  
They girn, they bite in deadly wrath,  
And what is't for? for nought in faith!  
Tannahill, *from* 'Epistle to Robert Allan'<sup>7</sup>

The 'wicked endless war' has been going on much too long for no good cause and the best that can be done is to live as peacefully as one can at a personal level. The war has for Tannahill become driven by the imperial ambitions of France and Britain, and is of no benefit to anyone but those in positions of power. Remarkably, as he continues his 'Epistle' from the line 'And what is't for? for nought in faith!', Tannahill argues that Britain faces the prospect of defeat by Napoleon and would be better withdrawing its forces from Europe:

But Lourie's [France is] raised to sic degree,  
John [Britain] would be wise to let him be;  
Else aiblins, as he's wearin' aul',  
Frank yet may tear him spawl fae spawl,  
For wi' the mony chirts he's gotten,  
I fear his *constitution's* rotten.

The final couplet above is ambiguous. It is not entirely clear whether this is referring to Britain's (John Bull's) unwritten constitution as defined in 1688 or to the French Civil Code (Napoleonic Code). 'Chirts' could mean charts or government charters, which would suggest Tannahill is referring to the Napoleonic Code. Alternatively, it could mean hugs, squeezes or being squirted upon. If 'Chirts' means squeezes then it suggests that France has squeezed Britain so hard that the British constitutional settlement is worthless, and this would chime somewhat with the use of the phrase 'spawl frae spawl' (limb from limb) as an extended metaphor regarding the physical state of John Bull's body. The following short stanza is then given, where Tannahill makes no distinction between any of the warring parties in Europe and it must be assumed that Britain is one of these parties:

But while the bullying blades o' Europe  
Are boxing ither to a syrup,  
Let's mind oursel's as weel's we can,  
An live in peace, like man and man,  
An' no cast out and fecht like brutes,  
Without a cause for our disputes.<sup>8</sup>

The implication of these stanzas is that Tannahill saw the British and French ruling classes as subjecting Europe's people to 'bullying' and misery by carrying on a war with no just cause.

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Two of Tannahill's closest friends with whom he corresponded regularly, James Clark and James King, were members of Scottish Militia Regiments. In letters to these two friends sent over a period of six years (1805-1810) there are references to other Paisley men, friends, neighbours and relatives, who were also in the militias. From his letters we see that Tannahill worried about the fact that so many 'Paisley lads' were recruited into militia

regiments and that the reasons for joining were primarily economic. As he expressed to James Clark on December 18<sup>th</sup> 1807:

Trade is at present d–d dull with us - the number of our clever young men who will soon join your Reg<sup>t</sup> is mellancholy proof of it.<sup>9</sup>

In 1809 Tannahill wrote to his friend the Renfrewshire Militiaman, James King:

We had it current here that your Reg<sup>t</sup> was on its way for Scotland— your letter showed it to be without foundation— The Argyle Shire, now in Aberdeen, have got the route for Glasgow— There is I believe a hundred Paisley lads in it— I am concerned that you are poorly in your health— and so uneasy in your mind.— I sympathise with you but can administer little consolation— I see no end of this war system— however, this much to ballance your present situation— The people in Paisley have been so hard-[forc'd] for some years past, that you would not, even here, find all the happiness that you perhaps imagine— I was going to give you a very gloomy picture— but complaint is unpleasant - and we'll lay it aside—<sup>10</sup>

The fact that the people of Paisley had 'been so hard-[forc'd] for some years past' was a factor that encouraged lads and men to join the armed forces in the hope of finding better prospects than the meagre pickings – 'Ill webs, toom pouches' – to be had at home. It is over six years since the collapse of the Peace of Amiens and one can detect in Tannahill's letter an underlying sense of despair, '— I see no end of this war system—'.

Tannahill's use of the word 'system' is interesting as he is using it to critique war. There is a 'war system' which is to be condemned. Yet, as Clifford Siskin writing in 1998 argues, the concept of a system, any system, was fairly new and supposedly seen as the preserve of radicals for use in attacking conservatism.<sup>11</sup> Systems were rational and therefore superior to superstition and Tannahill appears to be using the concept in the radical way. This is similar to William Thom's later use of 'system' to criticise barbaric working conditions in the factories of Aberdeenshire in *Rhymes and Recollections of a Handloom Weaver* (1844).



Tannahill is anti-war, but he sees the imperial ambitions of Napoleonic France as being the root cause of a conflict imperilling his friends, townspeople and country, and therefore France is a suitable target for his pen. He does not, however, like the anonymous author of *New Songs on the West Lowland Fencibles*, openly attack the principles of the French Revolution.<sup>12</sup> The war wrenched two of his closest friends from him, Clark and King, as well as many of Paisley's 'clever young men'.<sup>13</sup> This represents the extension into the early nineteenth century of Gillian Russell's argument that:

The idea of war as occurring outside the ambit of most people's lives in the eighteenth century is a mistaken one: a considerable section of the population experienced military service, if not directly as participants, then indirectly as the relatives and dependants of soldiers and sailors.<sup>14</sup>

With regard to France Tannahill adopts a position of self-defence rather than one of out-and-out pacifism, though he does come close to pacifist principles in 'Epistle to Robert Allan'. To be against war in principle but retain the right to self-defence is as far as Tannahill would go in his work with respect to the Napoleonic wars, and this is the position he most consistently adopts. Indeed, a line from the 'Ode' written for Robert Burns's birthday in 1805 sums it up: those 'Who, *hating conquest*, guard their *native land*', are to be praised.<sup>15</sup> Tannahill's deliberate use of italics militates in favour of a universal reading as he is indicating there is more to these phrases than simply that if you hate being conquered, resist. He is deliberately introducing ambiguity into the meaning of the line so that it becomes a case of neither trespassing nor being trespassed against. This echoes William Godwin, who in 1793 wrote: 'No war is justifiable but a war purely defensive'.<sup>16</sup> Tannahill's anti-imperialist and anti-war positions locate him in the radical camp but his susceptibility to the politics of fear of French invasion can be seen to contradict this.

## THE THREAT OF INVASION

'Tis pretended, we are in hazard of being invaded by a powerful enemy<sup>17</sup>  
Andrew Fletcher of Saltoun

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during this period of the invasion crisis, from 1797 to 1804, as many as one in six, or even one in five, of all adult males was involved in the armed forces.<sup>18</sup>

Tannahill's epigram 'French Invasion' also gives an impression of how he felt about war with Napoleonic France but requires some interpretation:

### French Invasion

"FRENCH threats of invasion let Britons defy,  
And spike the proud frogs if our coast they should crawl on."  
Yes, statesmen know well our spirits are high,  
The financier has rais'd them two shillings per gallon.<sup>19</sup>

From Tannahill's perspective, the British government has had to increase taxation to pay for the war against the 'frogs' but by an amount greater than is really necessary to finance it and are using the war as an excuse to over-tax. He suggests in his 'Summons to Attend a Meeting of the Burns' Anniversary Society' of 1805 that the government is not be trusted with regard to tax:

An' see what new, what untried tax,  
Will lie the easiest on our backs.<sup>20</sup>

Interpreted in this way this epigram is altogether less patriotic than it first appears and suggests an ironic intelligence at work. While the French are described as 'frogs' they are also described as 'proud', though in this context proud probably means 'haughty' as in Burns's use of 'haughty Gaul' in 'The Dumfries Volunteers'.<sup>21</sup> A problem of interpretation can be seen to arise with the two words 'frogs' and 'proud' but as they lie within

Tannahill's quotation marks both can be treated as ironic. His use of anti-French language within the quotation marks does not invalidate the argument that the epigram is primarily about the war being used by the British establishment as a mechanism for extorting higher taxes from their own population, rather than a statement of hatred towards the French. The speaker or voice being quoted is representative of the British government – a statesman or 'financier'. While it may be read as anti-French, it is also a thinly veiled criticism of the British government which is seen as exploiting the conflict for its own ends. Tannahill had a healthy cynicism towards politicians and government. For example, writing to James King in August 1806 he observed:

it is hard to say what we may expect from the present negotiations not knowing whether they wish peace at all, or if it is some political shuffle.<sup>22</sup>

Tannahill was aware of the machinations of politicians and favoured peace but it is the tone of the phrasing in 'not knowing whether they wish peace at all' that suggests anti-war sentiment. He is, however, extremely careful in the language he uses, clothing his anti-war sentiment in words that would make it difficult to label him unpatriotic. 'French Invasion' has echoes of an anonymous piece published in the anti-war provincial newspaper the *Cambridge Intelligencer* in 1794:

A Sure Way to Prevent  
The Threatened Invasion by the French

If we fight and tax on—for a year or two more,  
The French I dare say will ne'er touch on our shore,  
For fear of the charge of *maintaining the poor!*<sup>23</sup>

While Tannahill's epigram is ironic and sarcastic, this piece has a harder and clearer cynical edge to it, making the same point about taxation with brevity and wit. The *Cambridge Intelligencer* was described in the *Anti-Jacobin* as 'devoted to the cause of

Anarchy and Blood'.<sup>24</sup> The first two lines of Tannahill's epigram, which he subjects to ridicule, could quite easily have come from the *Anti-Jacobin* and given that Tannahill is ridiculing this kind of language he does come out as a writer more sympathetic to the anti-war than the pro-war cause.

Tannahill's attitude to British party politics is not made explicit but there is no reason to suggest it differs from his well documented mistrust of authority, whether in the form of the mercantile class, the King, the church or patrons. Indeed, his position with regard to patronage was one of the few cases where he was unambiguously clear and consistent in his rejection of it:

Rich Gripus pretends he's my patron and friend,  
That at all times to serve me he's willing,  
But he looks down so sour on the suppliant poor,  
That I'd starve ere I'd ask him one shilling.<sup>25</sup>

Tannahill's general political attitude and preferred topics of conversation were described by John Struthers as follows:

Though I have said that his powers of conversation were not shining, no man enjoyed company with a higher relish; and though he spoke little, from that sympathy that was manifested in all that was said, his company was often deeply interesting. When he did speak it was in praise of depressed merit; to mitigate the censures which the world is always liberal in bestowing upon the unfortunate; against chicanery and oppression, which of all kinds, he held the deepest abhorrence; or against faithlessness in friendship, of which he never spoke but with the keenness of one whose heart had been deeply wounded.<sup>26</sup>

From a different perspective Tannahill can be seen as a rather British poet - the last (7th) verse in the song 'Pat Mulligan', shows him in a less than radical light. The song is included in a letter to James King of September 15th 1808,<sup>27</sup>:

Dear James,

Notwithstanding trade being so very flat with us

improvement is going rapidly in this place. I am just now returned from a walk to the Canal Aquaduct which they are carrying over the Cart betwixt Black-ha' House and Auchentorly, they have already got well on with it and 'twill be finished before Winter. There is likewise an elegant new Coffee-Room with several other fine buildings erecting at the cross. Our principal streets are mostly now furnished with neat pathways and upon the whole I now think our [last] Police Act may be of considerable Utility. The Canal is going forward very briskly, it will likely be open for conveyance betwixt Johnston and Glasgow in the course of two years. I told you in my last how trade at present stands with us I again assure that my account was not exaggerated— Your Mother was here 'tother day bidding me tell you that she was much concerned on account of your thinking to come home and matters so unfavorable— however, since fate denies us seeing one another- I hope you will write me frequently and above all things remember your Mother— I cannot express how happy she is on hearing from you. the last song I sent you was incomplete I have considerably altered it. I wish you not to give away any copies of these things as I have sometimes sent you my first rough sketches, you are sensible how a much a piece may be improved by lying past some time— Have you ever tried any songs to Irish Airs? Some of which I think very beautiful. I would be truly obliged if you'll try to procure two or three of the best Irish Airs among your musical acquaintances, I mean those that you may judge fitting for songs, and not much known— D Polson might write them for you —of these things in your next— I think I have heard some beautiful, slow Irish Airs play'd at Roll-Call but dont know them by name— I notice the Russian Soldier printed into a song book [... ..] it has been copied from the Nightingale, [... ..].

I have strung up a long jingle of verses to one of Paddy's liltis but I much doubt if they be anything superior to those we generally find in farthing Ballads, tell me what you think of them

Pat Mulligan

Air—Sir John Scott's favorite

1.

Dear Judy when we first got married  
 Our fortune was indeed but small  
 For save the light hearts that we carried  
 Our riches were nothing at all  
 I sung while I reared up the cabin  
 Ye pow'rs give me [labour] and health  
 And a truce to all sighing and sobbing  
 For love is Pat Mulligan's wealth

2.

Thro' summer, and winter so dreary

I Cheerily toiled at the farm  
Nor ever once dream'd growing weary  
For love gave my labour its charm  
And now, tho' 'tis weak to be vaunty  
Yet here let us gratefully own  
We live amidst pleasure and plenty  
As happy's the king on the throne

3<sup>d</sup>

We've Murdoch, and Patrick and Connor  
As fine little lads as you'll see  
And Kitty, sweet girl on my honour!  
She's just the dear picture of thee  
Tho' some folks may still under-rate us  
Ah! why should we mind them a fig  
We've a large swinging field of potatoes  
To fatten ourselves and the pig

4<sup>th</sup>

Dear Judy I've taken a thinking  
The children their letters must learn  
We'll send for old Father O'Jenkin  
To teach them three months in the barn  
For learning's the way to promotion  
As culture brings fruit from the sod  
And books give a fellow a notion  
How matters are doing abroad

---

Confound it I have paddy-like begun my song where I ought to have ended it—

[Tannahill started writing this page at the top of a new sheet of paper rather than on the reverse of the first page.]

5<sup>th</sup>

Tho' father neglected my reading  
Kind saul, sire his spirit's in rest  
For the very first part of his breeding  
Was still to relieve the distress  
And late when the trav'ler benighted  
Besought hospitality's claim  
We lodged him till morning delighted  
Because 'twas a lesson to them

6<sup>th</sup>

The man who wont feel for another

Is just like a colt on the moor  
He lives without knowing a brother  
To frighten bad luck from his door  
But he that's kind-hearted and steady  
Tho' wintry misfortune should come  
Will still find some friend who is ready  
To scare the old witch from his home

7th

Success to old Ireland forever!  
'Tis just the dear land to my mind  
Her lads are warm-hearted and clever  
Her girls are all handsome and kind  
And he who her name would bespatter  
By wishing the French safely o'er  
May the Devil blow him over the water  
And make him cook frogs for the core

---

I have not seen our good friend Borland this long time I suspect the same course keeps us both at home— however I must be in Glasgow soon mainly on purpose to have two hours with him— I will make a point of calling on Leslie first time I am in— I forgot to tell you that it is much in agitation with the Weavers in Scotland at present to join with those in the south in Petitioning Government for an Act to regulate (at least in some degree) their wages to the price of provisions - but fear much it wont do - Our figured work varies so much - and it is so often changed that it would be very difficult to specify exactly what should be for all the different kinds.

I remain yours

[Signature missing due to damage]

write soon)

In stanza two of 'Pat Mulligan' we are even given the line 'As happy's the king on the throne' which can be viewed as approval of the British colonisation of Ireland, though this may be to over-emphasise the significance of the simile. The last four lines in stanza seven suggest that the Irish are better off under British rule than allying themselves with the French to escape it:

And he who her name would bespatter

By wishing the French safely o'er  
May the Devil blow him over the water  
And make him cook frogs for the core

However, given the positive references to 'Father O'Jenkin', and 'Success to old Ireland forever!' it is hardly on a par with the work of the Ulster poet – known as 'The Orange Minstrel' – William Blacker:

And Derry's sons alike defy  
Pope, traitor or pretender  
And peal to heaven their 'prentice cry  
Their patriot, 'No Surrender'<sup>28</sup>

On the contrary, in Tannahill's lyric there is a plea for empathy not conflict. Tannahill's fifth stanza suggests the benefits of being welcoming and open to strangers:

For the very first part of his breeding  
Was still to relieve the distress  
And late when the trav'ler benighted  
Besought hospitality's claim  
We lodged him till morning delighted  
Because 'twas a lesson to them

- and the theme of understanding others is continued into stanza six with the lines:

The man who wont feel for another  
Is just like a colt on the moor  
He lives without knowing a brother  
To frighten bad luck from his door

'Pat Mulligan' was never published in Tannahill's lifetime and he thought it little better than a farthing ballad, yet he adopts an anti-French posture which in logic would put him in the pro-British camp. There is an important underlying political point here in relation to Britishness which contradicts the sense of the lyric. A parallel can be seen between the position of Scotland and that of Ireland in relation to Britain. Certain stereotypical Scottish characteristics such as the value of education and reading, and friendly sociability are presented as Irish, emphasising the similarities between the two countries. In spite of an



acceptance within the lyric of the existence of Britain as a 'state', it is implied that like Scotland, Ireland has lost its independence and 'Pat Mulligan' viewed in this way could become a veiled form of nationalist protest against British rule; and a muted approval of the cause of Catholic Emancipation. It is interesting to note that 'Pat Mulligan' embodies a strange political duality - also present in the work of Thomas Moore<sup>29</sup> - which somehow merges a form of British nationalism with a form of Irish nationalism. This presents us with a Tannahill writing in a way that is analogous with Moore the purveyor of drawing-room ballads who is radically contradicted by Moore the memoirist of *Captain Rock*.<sup>30</sup> Tannahill within one lyric tries to combine a safe form of Irish nationalism with a British nationalism and removes any controversy surrounding his Irish nationalist sentiment by making it anti-French. While Tannahill may have been sympathetic to Catholic emancipation, the politics of fear of French invasion play a role in producing what must ultimately be seen as an anti-French and therefore pro-British song.

Tannahill's song 'The Defeat', first published in 1806, two years before he wrote his 'Epistle to Robert Allan', is similarly British in outlook. It concerns the imagined invasion of Britain by Bonaparte's forces. Using quite standard vocabulary that occurs in numerous songs of the period 1793-1815, 'The Defeat' stands in contradiction to Tannahill's views in the 'Epistle' to Allan. However, it is nothing like Charles Dibdin's 'Song' published in *The Morning Chronicle* of November 8<sup>th</sup> 1806. Dibdin's 'Song' is noteworthy for its domestic political intricacy, linking Admiral Nelson with Charles James Fox, who had died only two months previously while holding the office of Foreign Secretary under the short tenure of Whig Prime Minister, Lord Grenville. It was Fox who was Foreign Secretary when Tannahill wondered if the peace negotiations weren't just a

'political shuffle', and given the content of Didbin's 'Song' one can see why Tannahill was suspicious of the peace talks:

It depends on yourselves that no hypocrite rob  
This land of its rights by the threats of the mob;  
You ne'er will give way to the bluster and noise  
Of Imposters who CALL themselves Liberty Boys!

What more can I say your good will to inspire,  
Towards those who both burn with true freedom's best fire?  
I don't mean the man who your suffrages mocks,  
But the friends and companions of NELSON and FOX!

Then fill up your glasses, my lads, while I sing  
The Navy, HOOD, SHERIDAN, and our good KING;  
May Englishmen never with nonsense be cramm'd,  
And BONY'S supporters all die and be damned.

Dibdin, 'Song', Stanzas 2, 5 & 6 of 6.<sup>31</sup>

Dibdin's message appears to be that you're safe in Whig hands, even though they have been involved in peace negotiations they are not sympathisers with either Bonaparte or Painite republican sentiments of 'hypocrite' 'Liberty Boys'. They certainly aren't going to give in to 'the threats of the mob' with regard to electoral reform. Dibdin played the anti-Jacobin card to rally support for the Grenville government and was able to do so 'because Jacobinism had no fixed meaning'.<sup>32</sup> The 'Song' also works at a deeper psychological level by suggesting that while Britain lives in fear of French invasion there are people similar to Nelson and Fox who are prepared to fight to the death to resist it. Nelson and Samuel Hood symbolise the potential to take the fight abroad, while by identification, Fox, Richard Sheridan, as navy treasurer rather than playwright, and the King will keep us safe at home. None of the machinations of this daily politics or interest in the holders of specific offices is present in Tannahill's writing. Tannahill refers to very few famous British military figures even though 'Nelson's victory and death at Trafalgar in 1805 stimulated a huge outpouring of verses'.<sup>33</sup> Even when at his most British in 'The Defeat',

Tannahill does not celebrate Trafalgar or any other battle except the imagined one in the lyric which takes place on British soil. As the French land on the British coast:

From hill to hill the bugles sound  
The soul-arousing strain;  
The war-bred coursers paw the ground,  
And, foaming, champ the rein;  
Their steel-clad riders bound on high,  
A bold defensive host,  
With valour fir'd, away they fly,  
Like light'ning, to the coast.<sup>34</sup>

This stanza attempts to imbue Britain's defenders with as much dignity as possible; they are a 'bold defensive host' mounted on reliable 'war-bred' horses. They 'fly' towards the battlefield 'valour fir'd' at 'light'ning' speed. All is order in the picture described and the tension is controlled as the horses 'champ the rein' in the tightly structured rhythmic snap of the lines. The scene is painted with such confidence that it seems unthinkable that the British would react in any other way when the French invade than determinedly moving to repel them. This differs entirely from Dibdin's use of the conception of French invasion (or fear of the French). No political points about who would be best to lead the British are made but rather the sound of the bugle heralds the immediate, almost spontaneous, formation of an organised and formidable fighting force. This is a highly idealised picture of British martial organisation; nothing deflects the 'bold defensive host' from its coast-bound journey. It is also politically idealistic in that the defenders appear to act as a single unit undifferentiated by any notions of class, social status or national identity in terms of being Scots, Irish, English or Welsh. This is a Britain highly idealised, though it is a Britain without any King and a military organisation without leaders. The whole conception of Tannahill's first stanza is also opposite in style to the first stanzas of Scottish

poet John Mayne's (1759-1836) broadside, 'English, Scots and Irishmen. A Patriotic Address to the Inhabitants of the United Kingdom, July 1803', which opens with:

ENGLISH, SCOTS, and IRISHMEN,  
All that are in VALOUR'S ken!  
Shield your KING: and flock agen  
Where his sacred Banners fly!  
Now's the day, and now's the hour,  
Frenchmen would the Land devour—  
Will ye wait till they come o'er  
To give ye Chains and Slavery?

Who would be a Frenchman's slave?  
Who would truckle to the Knave?  
Who would shun a glorious grave  
For worse than death, for—infamy?  
To see your Liberties expire—  
Your Temples smoke, your Fleets on fire!  
That's a Frenchman's sole desire—  
That's your fate, or Liberty!<sup>35</sup>

Tannahill presents an idealised snapshot of an undifferentiated Britain, while Dibdin and Mayne, in slightly different ways, deploy the concept 'liberty' in support of their anti-French arguments. Both assert that British (in Dibdin's case English) 'liberty' is better than the French idea of it. Mayne blatantly invokes the Burns of 'Scots, wha hae wi' Wallace bled', while Tannahill, to his credit, invokes Burns with a great deal more subtlety in the final stanza of 'The Defeat'. Tannahill's lyric though is not concerned with 'liberty' per se but, in an almost sealed arrangement of British nationhood, with having the liberty to determine what your liberty means, though he prefers the phrase 'native rights'. Mayne immediately deploys the figurehead of the King for the disparate nations of Britain to unite around. Unlike Mayne, Tannahill is completely uninterested in shielding the King or any individual, nor is he interested in the fact that Britain is made up of four nations. Rather, his is a vision of an all encompassing Britain, an abstract 'native' land, and he is in the

business of defining some general rules for the conduct of battle, while asserting the basic right to defend the 'native' land against an 'invading foe', but anti-French sentiment makes its appearance in the second stanza:

And now they view the widespread lines  
Of the invading foe;  
Now skill with British bravery joins,  
To strike one final blow,  
Now on they rush with giant stroke,  
Ten thousand victims bleed:  
They trample on the iron yoke  
Which France for us decreed.<sup>36</sup>

The brave and skilful 'British' throw off the 'iron yoke' of France with one 'giant stroke' inflicting terrible injuries as 'Ten thousand victims bleed'. It all feels utterly unreal because this is not a poem about the rough and tumult of battle but about the principles of self-defence, self-determination and being generous in victory. In its execution 'The Defeat' is part of what Gerard Carruthers terms 'Tannahill's usually all too abstract approach to poetry' but Tannahill is making serious points with regard to political philosophy and battlefield conduct, and political philosophy and the principles of battlefield conduct are abstract by definition.<sup>37</sup>

Now, while Humanity's warm glow,  
Half weeps the guilty slain,  
Let conquest gladden every brow,  
And god-like mercy reign.<sup>38</sup>

Once the invaders have been defeated it is time for 'god-like mercy', implying that the bodies of the dead, the wounded and prisoners of war, must be treated with respect; these lines also imply that the fighting stops, the British do not respond with further aggression, the invaders have been repelled and that is the end of the conflict. The victors are seen to 'half weep' over the suffering they have inflicted on the 'guilty', 'slain' French. However,

while it is definitely pro-British and anti-French, it can also be read as anti-imperialist in that the only justification for any nation to take up arms is for its 'native rights to save'.

The emotional response Tannahill generally attempted to evoke with regard to soldiers was one of sympathy for their suffering, unlike Wellington who as Gillian Russell points out, 'at one time described the ordinary soldiers who had fought for him in the Peninsula as "the scum of the earth"'.<sup>39</sup> Looking at 'The Defeat' in its entirety, what we have is a mildly anti-French lyric concerned with the morality of the victorious in their battlefield conduct, and the right to defend one's country against invasion. There is a sense that 'The Defeat' of the title represents not just the defeat of the French invaders, but a defeat or failure of European humanity, in that the dreadful day has come whereby 'Britain's sons, in stern array' are forced regrettably, yet justifiably and bravely, into battle against a European aggressor. And while it is an abstract lyric it does present a logical political position, by suggesting that if Britain must defend itself then it must do so on its own soil with a ruthless efficiency in battle and compassion in victory. Another interesting aspect of 'The Defeat' is its use of euphemism as a retreat from the grimmer realities of the battlefield. There are no bodies hacked to bits, no graphic descriptions of the sights, smells and sounds of killing. Instead, it gives us an idealised sketch of a battle that is abstracted into principles. In this way Tannahill shields both himself and the reader from the truly atrocious nature of war.

\*

Tannahill was capable of declaring anti-French sentiments, and does so again in his 1807 poem, 'Ode for Burns' Anniversary Meeting' but he is never as virulently patriotic as John

Mayne or Dibdin in his Foxite-Whig 'Song'. (All three of Tannahill's 'Odes' for Burns' nights can be seen as rather elaborate party pieces or performance poems). In the 1807 piece there are four earlier works Tannahill has borrowed from: the structure of 'Recitative' and 'Song' from 'The Jolly Beggars', the opening from Amwell's 'The Drum', and much of the content and argument of the second half of the piece is influenced by Burns's 'The Cotter's Saturday Night' and 'The Dumfries Volunteers'. This is perhaps the least successful of his 'Odes' for the Paisley Burns' Society and opens with the phrase 'While Gallia's chief', specifically referring to Napoleon, so making a distinction between the French government and people. Then in an echo of the vocabulary of John Scott of Amwell's anti-war song 'The Drum'<sup>40</sup> - an echo which should not be underestimated in its importance given the ubiquity of Scott of Amwell's song and its identification with anti-war opinion - he says of the war with France:

While Gallia's chief, with cruel conquests vain,  
 Bids clanging trumpets rend the skies,  
 The widow's, orphan's and the father's sighs,  
 Breathe hissing through the guilty strain;  
 Mild Pity hears the harrowing tones,  
 Mixed with shrieks and dying groans;  
 While warm Humanity, afar,  
 Weeps o'er the ravages of war,  
 And shudd'ring, hears Ambition's servile train  
 Rejoicing o'er their thousands slain.

Tannahill, from 'Burns' Anniversary Meeting, 1807'<sup>41</sup>

Having reported on the current state of war in the world, in the second part of his opening stanza Tannahill suggests that these concerns be put to one side and the gathering enjoy themselves in the appreciation of poetry and song. Within this first stanza there is a sense that 'Gallia's chief' is a metaphor for the warrior leader (as is Alexander the Great elsewhere in Tannahill's poetry)<sup>42</sup> whose 'worth' is not great when compared with that of the poet, in this case Robert Burns. Further, in his weeping the narrator still finds time to

reflect upon the consequences of the war. The lines, 'While warm Humanity, afar,/ Weeps o'er the ravages of war,/ And shudd'ring, hears Ambition's servile train/ Rejoicing o'er their thousands slain', reveal a position very close to pacifism. These lines can be regarded as Tannahill's version of Scott of Amwell's famous song, a kind of early nineteenth-century sampling, and all that really distinguishes it from 'The Drum' are technical and structural variations. By saying 'warm Humanity afar' the voice suggests that where the 'shrieks and dying groans' of war are located is on a battlefield inhabited by men who have somehow lost their humanity when compared to those who are living in peace: the soldiers in battle have lost the positive aspects of their 'nature' as embodied in someone like Alexander Wilson and his 'warm descriptive pen'.<sup>43</sup> Human beings are corrupted and debased on the battlefield. One of the causes of war pinpointed is 'Ambition' (a quality also seen as negative by Pope in his 'Essay on Man'). Not simply the personal ambition of individuals but specifically the 'Ambition' of those in positions of leadership. Tannahill then moves to consider a generalised 'Humanity', and views the war from the moral perspective of the price in lives and misery generated: 'Mild Pity hears the harrowing tones,/ Mixed with shrieks and dying groans'. He contrasts this with the 'Rejoicing' of 'Ambition's servile train'. That is, all that can be gained from war is the glorification of leaders and their imperial ambitions at the cost of death and destruction to powerless individuals and families. Tannahill's view chimes with that of Shelley, who, according J. R. Watson, thought that 'all kings [...] were responsible for war'.<sup>44</sup> While Napoleon was an emperor and not strictly a king, both authors considered him as equivalent in his pursuit of empire through military adventure. Interestingly, the vocabulary of Scott of Amwell's 'The Drum' also entered into William Godwin's prose:



The plain is strewn with death in all its forms. Anguish and wounds display the diversified modes in which they can torment the human frame. Towns are burned; ships are blown up in the air, while the mangled limbs descend on every side; the fields are laid desolate; the wives of the inhabitants are exposed to brutal insult; and their children driven forth to hunger and nakedness.<sup>45</sup>

Tannahill was not alone in borrowing from 'The Drum' and in doing so he was aligning himself with an entire raft of anti-war writers and texts. Fear of French invasion had an impact on Tannahill's poems and songs. So while he loathed the war, he also loathed the thought of French invasion and fear of it spurred him towards the patriotic.

Another level of sophistication in the opening of the 1807 'Ode' lies in the use of metaphors concerning the qualities of sounds and music. Perception of and sensitivity to the conduct of war are related to hearing and noise [sound], and it is when the 'song [sound] to worth is given' and written 'to humanize the soul' that it is worthy of real humanity, and Burns is depicted as the embodiment of this worthy humanity. Once the opening stanza is finished the singing commences to an air composed by R. A. Smith:

Tho dark scowling Winter, in dismal array,  
Re-marshals his storms on the bleak hoary hill,  
With joy we assemble to hail the great day  
That gave birth to the Bard who ennobles our isle.  
Then loud to his merits the song let us raise,  
Let each true Caledonian exult in his praise;  
For the glory of genius, its dearest reward,  
Is the laurel entwin'd by his country's regard.<sup>46</sup>

The piece now moves away from concern with present problems and enters into uncritical lauding of Burns before ending with a final recitative stanza where Burns is celebrated as a patriotic guardian of 'native' Scottish rights:

Yes, Caledonians! to our country true,  
Which Danes or Romans never could subdue,

Firmly resolved our native rights to guard,  
Let's toast, "The Patriot and the Patriot Bard."<sup>47</sup>

There is a problem, however, related to the use of the concept of patriotism in this 'Ode'. This arises due to the conflation of different *patriotisms*. There is the kind of patriotism Burns espouses in 'The Cotter's Saturday Night', Scotland as a humble but brave nation that stands against tyranny; a British patriotism related to the war with France; and a new patriotism invoked through the figure of Burns himself as a bard of genius who allows Scotland entry into the world of great literary nations in the Radian sense that:

Greece has its Homer and Rome its Vergil; England its Shakespeare and France its Racine; Italy its Dante and Germany its Goethe.<sup>48</sup>

Burns in the 'Cotter's Saturday Night', gives us 'Wallace' as an example of the ideal patriot. While here, in 1807, Tannahill is carrying out what might be termed Burns's instructions to 'the *Patriot* and the *Patriot-bard*,/ In bright succession raise'.<sup>49</sup> Tannahill's 'Patriot' is the Scottish warrior who has resisted Agricola, Hadrian and Rome, the Danes, and up to a point the English; and is now ready to resist Bonaparte. However, the Scottish patriot resisting French invasion is in fact part of a British political narrative regardless of how Scottish this patriot feels. This historically defined military-patriotic-hero is however slightly less worthy than the 'Patriot Bard'. In opening the verse Tannahill is specifically talking about Napoleon, 'Gallia's chief'; but towards the end of the piece there is ambiguity with regard to national identity, Britishness creeps in as Tannahill taking his cue from Burns's 'The Dumfries Volunteers', writes 'Haughty Gallia threatens our coast'; as Tannahill's opening conception of Napoleonic imperialism or 'Gallia's chief, with cruel conquests vain' is generalised into stereotypical French arrogance, and the words are to be

sung to ‘Marsh’s National Air, “Britons who for freedom bled”’. The ideas of Scotland as a martial nation - ‘Ye taught your sons to fight, yet feel/ The dictates of humanity’<sup>-50</sup> and resistance to invasion combine to oppose Napoleon, though this is tempered by ideas of an undefined Scottish humanitarianism and the right of Scots, in this context the Scots as part of Britain, to live freely according to their customs in their own country. Tannahill does emphasise ‘Caledonians’ who are ‘Firmly resolved our native rights to guard’, so while there is a creeping Britishness, it is more about resistance and the preservation of something identifiably Scottish than it is about attack, expansionism and empire.

## CONCLUSION

Tannahill shows little enthusiasm for war. Fear of French invasion and a dislike of Napoleon pricked him into support for the principle of national self-defence and in this he was clearly influenced by Burns’s ‘The Dumfries Volunteers’. In ‘The Defeat’ we encounter Tannahill at his furthest outpost of British patriotism, but even here, this is patriotism conceived in ‘gloom’ and mitigated by ‘mercy’. Another factor to be taken into account when considering ‘The Defeat’ is the sheer popularity and number of such poems. As Simon Bainbridge points out:

the *Gentleman’s Magazine*’s own poetry section published well over sixty patriotic invasion poems during the six months from July to December 1803.<sup>51</sup>

The February 1805 edition of the *Gentleman’s Magazine* comments that in prose as well as poetry ‘the universal object of patriotic Britons is, to pursue and expose the Invader of the rights of human kind’.<sup>52</sup> ‘The Defeat’ almost conforms to this ideologically driven literary project and it is at the same time consistent with the Burns of the ‘The Dumfries

Volunteers'. Further, the *Gentleman's Magazine* can be seen as indulging in a piece of sophisticated ideological argument or propaganda through which people who held a rather neutral position on the war but feared French invasion - and held to the view that 'No war is justifiable but a war purely defensive' - could be brought on board with those of a more patriotic, imperialistic British outlook by suggesting that those who were prepared to fight in self-defence were ultimately in the same boat as those British patriots who supported the prosecution of the war outside the islands of Britain. However, nowhere in his writing does Tannahill express enthusiastic approval for the British fighting abroad and while 'The Defeat' can be seen in isolation as dovetailing with the ideology of the *Gentleman's Magazine*, his work overall shows resistance to this conflation of war overseas with self-defence under the umbrella of British patriotism. 'The Defeat' attempts to detach British patriotism from British imperialist ideology and wars overseas, and Tannahill is portraying the true British patriot as one who does not invade foreign lands but only takes up arms to defend 'native rights' against an 'invading foe'. These are subtle but important distinctions, especially when Tannahill argues in 'Epistle to Robert Allan' that the war in Europe is in reality being fought over 'nought in faith'. However, that argument is somewhat contradicted by poems and songs that celebrate a British national identity responsive to the spectre of French invasion.

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Although in Scotland today we rarely see the deployment of troops on the streets, nor do we expect one in five adult males to be in military service, for Robert Tannahill these factors were immediate and real. It does appear that he had contradictory attitudes of support for Britain on the one hand but opposition to war on the other, and perhaps it was

in an attempt to escape such contradictions that he chose to write about nature. Bainbridge reminds us that ‘many texts of the period testify to the extent to which British society was militarised during these years, and especially during periods of invasion crisis’.<sup>53</sup> Much of Tannahill’s work is a commentary on the war situation; it constituted a huge part of his social world and a substantial part of his literary output. Tannahill saw war as a ‘system’ to be opposed. He expressed a view of History as ‘endless war’. This constant warring he considered lamentable; even if at the same time the courage and sacrifice of individual soldiers was admirable, this admiration remained tainted with a deep sense of sadness and grief. The influence of the war on his writing is also illustrated in his dramatic Interlude, *The Soldier’s Return*, to which we now turn.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Marylin Butler, *Romantics, Rebels and Reactionaries* (Oxford, 1981), p. 4.
- <sup>2</sup> A. L. Morton, *A People's History of England* (London, 1938), p. 335.
- <sup>3</sup> Suspension of Habeas Corpus meant that people could be imprisoned without knowing the charges and a Habeas Corpus writ for their release could not be served on the imprisoning authority. While this remains a principle today in Britain, it has been superseded by Police and Criminal Evidence Acts and other anti-terror legislation. However, the principle of Habeas Corpus, that if the state is not going to charge someone they must produce the body, that is release them back into the community, is vitally important in preventing state authorities from making people disappear.
- <sup>4</sup> For discussion of the history of the 'Militia Debates' see John Robertson, *The Scottish Enlightenment and the Militia Issue* (Edinburgh, 1985).
- <sup>5</sup> Thomas Paine, 'The Author's Preface to the English Edition', *The Rights of Man*, first published 1791, The Avalon Project, Yale Law School, website, <http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/paine/prpre.htm> (Accessed, 17/09/2005).
- <sup>6</sup> Robert Tannahill, Letter to Robert Allan, 14<sup>th</sup> March, 1808 (in verse) (Glasgow University Library, Special Collections, MS Robertson 1/13).
- <sup>7</sup> Robert Tannahill, Letter to Robert Allan, 14<sup>th</sup> March, 1808 (GUL, Spec Colls., MS Robertson 1/13).
- <sup>8</sup> Robert Tannahill, Letter to Robert Allan, 14<sup>th</sup> March, 1808 (GUL, Spec Colls., MS Robertson 1/13).
- <sup>9</sup> Robert Tannahill, Letter to James Clark, 18<sup>th</sup> December, 1807 (GUL, Spec Colls., MS Robertson 1/11).
- <sup>10</sup> Robert Tannahill, Letter to James King, 4<sup>th</sup> June 1809 (GUL, Spec. Colls., MS Robertson 1/24).
- <sup>11</sup> See Clifford Siskin, 'The Year of the System', *1798 The Year of The Lyrical Ballads*, Cronin, ed. (London, 1998), pp. 9-31, in which he discusses the vogue for the word system and its usage amongst radicals at this time. For discussion of literary criticism and the problem of war with an emphasis on the Freudian viewpoint that we see in the enemy that part of ourselves we despise and wish subconsciously to destroy see, Jacqueline Rose, *Why War* (Oxford, 1993), pp. 17-40.
- <sup>12</sup> Anonymous, stanza two from, 'God bless King George an' our royal queen' in *New Songs on the West Lowland Fencibles* (Paisley, 1793). Paisley Central Library Archive, Paisley Miscellany 080 P.C. 2003:
- For killing of your Christian King,  
The heathen gods this way they sing,  
The Pope on you will vengeance bring,  
Ten times a day he's praying  
To George who wears the English crown,  
To rise and smash the traitors down,
- <sup>13</sup> Robert Tannahill, Letter to James Clark, 18<sup>th</sup> December, 1807 (GUL, Spec Colls., MS Robertson 1/11).
- <sup>14</sup> Gillian Russell, *Theatres of War: Performances, Politics and Society 1793-1815*, (Oxford, 1995), pp. 1-2.
- <sup>15</sup> Robert Tannahill, 'Ode, for Burns' Birthday, 1805', *The Soldier's Return* (Paisley, 1807), p. 55.
- <sup>16</sup> William Godwin, *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*, Isaac Kramnick, ed. (Harmondsworth, 1985), p. 517.
- <sup>17</sup> Andrew Fletcher of Saltoun, 'Discourse of Government with relation to Militias', *Political Works*, John Robertson, ed. (Cambridge, 1997), p. 19.
- <sup>18</sup> Simon Bainbridge, *British Poetry and the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars* (Oxford, 2003), p. 6.
- <sup>19</sup> Robert Tannahill, *Poems, Songs and Correspondence*, David Semple, ed. (Paisley, 1876), p. 175. The title 'French Invasion' is not Tannahill's but has been added by David Semple. In the 1807 edition the lines appear (p. 142) as the third in a series of four 'EPIGRAMS' and are printed as follows, without a title:
- 'FRENCH threats of invasion let Britons defy,  
And spike the proud frogs if our coast they should crawl on.'  
Yes, statesmen know well our *spirits* are high,  
The financier has rais'd them *two shillings per gallon*.

- The use of italics in the original connecting the words ‘*spirits*’ and ‘*two shillings per gallon*’ suggest the poem is an attack on the taxation policies of the British government, rather than a piece of anti-French jingoism.
- <sup>20</sup> Robert Tannahill, ‘Lines, to W. McLaren, To attend a meeting of the Burns’ Anniversary Society’, *The Soldier’s Return*, (Paisley, 1807), p. 108.
- <sup>21</sup> For discussion of Burns’s use of the phrase ‘haughty Gaul’ and Tannahill’s use of ‘haughty Gallia’ in his Burns’ Anniversary ‘Ode’ of 1807, see Gerard Carruthers, ‘Robert Tannahill – Scottish Poet After Burns’, *The Renfrewshire Local History Forum Journal*, Vol. 13 2005/06 (Paisley, 2005), p. 22.
- <sup>22</sup> Robert Tannahill, Letter to James King, 3<sup>rd</sup> August 1806 (NLS, MS 582, folio. 681).
- <sup>23</sup> Anon., *The Cambridge Intelligencer* (1<sup>st</sup> Feb., 1794). Cited in Betty Bennett, ed., *British War Poetry in the Age of Romanticism: 1793-1815*, (New York, 1976), p. 107.
- <sup>24</sup> *The Anti-Jacobin* (7<sup>th</sup> May, 1798). Cited in Bennett, ed., *British War Poetry in the Age of Romanticism*, p. 20.
- <sup>25</sup> Robert Tannahill, ‘Lines’, *The Soldier’s Return*, p. 139.
- <sup>26</sup> John Struthers, ‘Essay on Scottish Songwriters’, *The Harp of Caledonia*, Vol II, Struthers, ed. (Glasgow, 1821), p. 415.
- <sup>27</sup> Robert Tannahill, Letter to James King, 15<sup>th</sup> September, 1808 (GUL, Spec. Colls., MS Robertson 1/21).
- <sup>28</sup> William Blacker (1777-1855). Cited in, Kevin Haddick-Flynn, *Orangeism: the making of a tradition* (Dublin, 1999), p. 51.
- <sup>29</sup> For discussion of this duality or ‘synthesis’ in Moore’s work see Matthew Campbell, ‘Thomas Moore’s Wild Song: The 1821 *Irish Melodies*’, *Bullán: An Irish Studies Journal*, 4, 2 (1999), pp. 83-103.
- <sup>30</sup> See Emer Nolan, ‘Irish Melodies and Discordant Politics: Thomas Moore’s memoirs of Captain Rock’, *Field Day Review*, 2 (2006), p. 43.
- <sup>31</sup> Charles Dibdin, ‘Song’, in Bennett, ed., *British War Poetry in the Age of Romanticism*, p. 364.
- <sup>32</sup> M. O. Grenby, *The Anti-Jacobin Novel: British Conservatism and the French Revolution* (Cambridge, 2001), p. 8.
- <sup>33</sup> Bainbridge, *British Poetry and the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars*, p. 4.
- <sup>34</sup> Robert Tannahill, ‘The Defeat’, *The Soldier’s Return*, (Paisley, 1807), p. 155. This piece was first published in the *Glasgow Nightingale*, (Gallowgate, Glasgow, 1806).
- <sup>35</sup> John Mayne, cited Bennett, ed., *British War Poetry in the Age of Romanticism*, pp. 311-312.
- <sup>36</sup> Robert Tannahill, ‘The Defeat’, *The Works of Robert Tannahill*, p. 57.
- <sup>37</sup> Gerard Carruthers, ‘Robert Tannahill – Scottish Poet After Burns’, *The Renfrewshire Local History Forum Journal*, Vol. 13 2005/06 (Paisley, 2005), p. 25.
- <sup>38</sup> Robert Tannahill, ‘The Defeat’, *The Soldier’s Return*, (Paisley, 1807), p. 156.
- <sup>39</sup> Russell, *The Theatres of War*, p. 11. Russell argues that ordinary soldiers and sailors were rarely portrayed positively in literature, more often they were seen as dangerous, anti-social or verging on the criminal. An obvious sympathetic portrayal by Tannahill is his song ‘The Worn Soldier’.
- <sup>40</sup> Scott’s ‘The Drum’ does appear anonymously among some of Tannahill’s poems in *The Selector* (Glasgow, 1805-06). The other Tannahill poems are also anonymous or signed Modestus, a pseudonym given to Tannahill by the editor which he did not care for. Tannahill himself used the pseudonym ‘Philo Poeticus’ but only occasionally in letters and not in any published songs or poems. ‘The Drum’ was anthologized by Betty Bennett in *British War Poetry in the Age of Romanticism: 1793-1815*, Betty Bennett, ed. (New York, 1976), p. 80. It was published as an ‘Ode’ in, John Scott, *The Poetical Works of John Scott* (London, 1782), p. 201.
- <sup>41</sup> Robert Tannahill, *The Soldier’s Return*, p. 109.
- <sup>42</sup> Tannahill writes: ‘Ev’n let the blood-stain’d ruffians call me coward./ An Alexander sinks beside a Howard.’ Robert Tannahill, ‘Epistle to Alex. Borland, Feb. 1806’, *Poems Songs and Correspondence*, p. 109.
- <sup>43</sup> Robert Tannahill, ‘Stanzas on Wilson’s Emigration’, *Poems Songs and Correspondence*, p. 64.
- <sup>44</sup> See J. R. Watson, *Romanticism and War* (Basingstoke, 2003), p. 35.
- <sup>45</sup> Godwin, *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*, Isaac Kramnick, ed. (Harmondsworth, 1985), p. 510.
- <sup>46</sup> Robert Tannahill, *The Soldier’s Return*, p. 110.
- <sup>47</sup> Robert Tannahill, *The Soldier’s Return*, p. 112.
- <sup>48</sup> Herbert Read, ‘American Bards and British Reviewers’, *Selected Writings* (London, 1963), p. 198.
- <sup>49</sup> Robert Burns, ‘The Cotter’s Saturday Night’, *The Poems and Songs of Robert Burns*, Vol. I., James

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Kinsley, ed. (Oxford, 1968), p. 152.

<sup>50</sup> Robert Tannahill, *The Soldier's Return*, p. 112.

<sup>51</sup> Simon Bainbridge, *British Poetry and the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars* (Oxford, 2004), p. 4.

<sup>52</sup> *Gentleman's Magazine* (February, 1805), cited in Bainbridge, *British Poetry and the Revolutionary and Napoleonic*, p. 4.

<sup>53</sup> Bainbridge, *British Poetry and the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars*, p. 6.



#### 4. The Soldier's Return: A Pastoral Drama

'The Soldier's Return' is dramatic, and I hope having the pleasure of yet seeing you perform a part in it. 'Tis a Scottish Interlude, in two acts. Alas! it was poor Pollock who is now in his grave, with our most worth friend, Livingstone, who set me first to it.

Robert Tannahill, from a letter to James Clark, 2nd February, 1807.<sup>1</sup>

##### *THE SOLDIER'S RETURN: A READING*

Tannahill's poem, 'PROLOGUE to THE GENTLE SHEPHERD'<sup>2</sup>, could as appropriately be recited as a prologue to his own drama, *The Soldier's Return*. In his references to Allan Ramsay, Pope, Burns and Dryden, considerable clues are given to the influences that were operating on Tannahill in the composition of his pastoral drama. With regard to Ramsay, it is probable that Tannahill saw *The Gentle Shepherd* (first published 1725) as a Scottish pastoral form distinct from but related to Alexander Pope's and other English, and European, variations of pastoral.<sup>3</sup> The poem ends with quotations from Burns and Pope:

"Aiblins tho' we winna' stand the test,  
"Wink hard an' say, The folks hae done their best."  
An' keep this gen'rous maxim still in min',  
"To err is human, to forgive divine!"<sup>4</sup>

The lines of Burns come from his 'Scots Prologue, For Mrs Sutherland's Benefit Night, Spoken at the Theatre, Dumfries'<sup>5</sup>, in which he laments the lack of a Scottish Shakespeare. Pope's line is from 'An Essay on Criticism', in which his condemnation of '*Lust of Praise*' accords with Tannahill's general mistrust of critics and 'Ambition'.<sup>6</sup> Pope's 'Three Theatrical Pieces' may also be seen as having some influence on Tannahill's 'Prologue to The Gentle Shepherd'. In particular, his 'Prologue to Mr Addison's Tragedy of Cato', where Pope appeals to 'a *British* ear',<sup>7</sup> has a parallel in Tannahill's appeal to a sense of Scottishness, whereby the actors are to be given a certain latitude with regard to the professionalism of their performance by an audience who are admonished to take into

account that the play is their 'ain auld "Gentle Shepherd"'.<sup>8</sup> Tannahill's quotation of Pope suggests that he was aware of the Jacobite tendencies within the pastoral tradition, as does his lauding of Ramsay. In 'A Discourse on Pastorals', Pope gives a clear definition of the pastoral, to which the metaphors of retreat and return can be seen as an addition:

A Pastoral is an imitation of the action of a shepherd, or one considered under that character. The form of this imitation is dramatic, or narrative, or mix'd of both; the fable simple, the manners not too polite nor too rustic: The thoughts are plain yet admit a little quickness and passion,... ..In short, the fable, manners, thoughts and expressions, are full of the greatest simplicity in nature.<sup>9</sup>

In *The Soldier's Return* Tannahill conforms to the spirit of Pope's definition if not the letter. Allan Ramsay applies Pope's principles in the context of a Scottish vernacular dramatic opera with some success. Indeed, *The Gentle Shepherd* has not one but four shepherds; Symon, Glaud, Roger and Patie, 'The Gentle Shepherd in love with Peggy'.<sup>10</sup> There is more narrative than drama, though his addition of extra songs in 1728 'when the play was changed into a ballad-opera for the pupils of Haddington Grammar School... helped keep it alive and popular.'<sup>11</sup>

The loss of the Stuarts to Scotland is signified in *The Gentle Shepherd* by Laird Worthy's absence and his return sees the world put back to rights and thus is revealed the underlying, or allegorical, message - calling for a return to a Golden Age of Stuart rule in which clan-based social relations would be the natural order:

The Jacobite notes in *The Gentle Shepherd* are sounded in a minor key: but the play makes it clear that only the return of Scotland's legitimate king can restore order, release possibility, and confirm the *status quo ante* so necessary to the timeless ideology of pastoral.<sup>12</sup>

Ramsay's emphasis on the parentage and family lineage of the rustic characters, strengthens the clannish nature of the piece, demonstrating his sympathies with the Clan

system itself and therefore, though at one step removed, with Jacobite Scots:

If Ramsay makes use of the image of the Highlander as patriot, he also seems alert to the Jacobite topos of retreat, giving a codified account of pastoral made manifest in his famous play *The Gentle Shepherd*.<sup>13</sup>

There are also references in Ramsay's text which underscore, from Tannahill's perspective, the Scottish Presbyterian notion of the value of education, whilst addressing the question of literacy, and the place of reading and learning within the social order:

Like the rough diamond, as it leaves the mine,  
Only in little breakings shews its light,  
Till artfu' polishing made it shine:  
Thus education makes the genius bright.<sup>14</sup>  
Act 3, Scene IV.

The question of literacy lies easily within the context of the religious, political and social divisions of early eighteenth-century Scotland. Ramsay's emphasis is suggestive of the Jacobite enthusiasm for poetry, music, song and artistic expression:

But ye maun keep the flute, ye best deserv't  
Now tak it out, and gie's a bonny spring,  
For I'm in tift to hear you play and sing.<sup>15</sup>  
Act 1, Scene I.

From a Jacobite perspective, the political necessity to marry 'high' and 'folk' art to help keep alive an ideology which was losing its metropolitan currency and was under attack, meant a progressive outlook towards education and literacy was just as important as it was for Presbyterians. Maybe more so, as for Jacobites it was about the survival of their culture, ideas and political influence:

high cultural Scots... found a link with folk culture as a necessary defence mechanism.<sup>16</sup>

For Jacobite sympathisers it made sense to connect with artisans, agricultural workers and those who were not of property through the use of drama, poetry and song. Communicating the merits of Jacobite patriotism was seen as desirable at all social levels:

Because of the conflation of Jacobite and patriotic feeling, high and low culture were brought together.<sup>17</sup>

In writing *The Gentle Shepherd*, Ramsay was taking an active part in this process, as

Murray Pittock argues:

Ramsay did much to secure a connexion between the high ground of mediaeval Scots and current speech.<sup>18</sup>

Ramsay's opera-based drama enjoyed popularity and success over a considerable period of time. Burns's 'Jolly Beggars' - another important influence in the composition of *The Soldier's Return* - remains quite popular today, while Tannahill's drama is little known and has not been performed often, if at all in its entirety since 1804, when it was written.<sup>19</sup> Like Ramsay's *Gentle Shepherd*, 'The Jolly Beggars' has more ribaldry than *The Soldier's Return*. Burns showed courage in writing of everyday life where the piety of the subject matter and of himself may have been called into question. His description of the Soldier and his lover or 'doxy' in 'The Jolly Beggars' is vivid and daring:

His doxy lay within his arm;  
Wi' USQUEBAE an' blankets warm,  
She blinket on her Sodger:  
An' ay he gies the tozie drab  
The tither skelpin kiss,  
While she held up her greedy gab,  
Just like an aumous dish:  
Ilk smack still, did crack still,  
Like ony cadger's whip;  
Then staggering, an' swaggering.  
He roar'd this ditty up—<sup>20</sup>

Neither in his 'Prologue', nor in his drama, does Tannahill reach the intensity of 'Jolly Beggars', although joy is expressed in the 'Prologue' with regard to the Scottish authorship and content of *The Gentle Shepherd* and the fact that it has remained popular after three quarters of a century:

We come this night wi' nae new-fangl'd story  
O' knave's deceit, or fop's vain blust'ring glory,  
Nor harlequine's wild pranks, wi' skin like leopard,—  
We're come to gie your ain auld "Gentle Shepherd:"  
Whilk ay will charm, an' will be read, an acket,  
Till Time himsel' turn auld, an' kick the bucket.  
I mind, langsyne, when I was just a callan,  
That a' the kintra rang in praise o' Allan;  
Ilk rising generation toots his fame,  
And, hun'er years to come, 'twill be the same:<sup>21</sup>

Tannahill then gives his opinion of the characters involved and cleverly inserts a quotation from John Dryden's *Alexander's Feast*<sup>22</sup>, which he gently Scotticises. Dryden's line is subtly changed from 'None but the brave deserves the fair,' to 'For, "Nane, except the brave, deserve the fair"'. Tannahill disrupts the rhythm of the original line and transforms it into something more suited to the Scottish voice and ear. While this may be no more than a token gesture by Tannahill regarding the Anglicisation of Scots, he has chosen a very powerful line of English verse to disrupt, indicating confidence in his own voice and culture. Dryden's slightly altered line sits perfectly well in the context of Tannahill's poem and while it highlights the question of Anglicisation of Scots, it also recognises a shared linguistic and literary heritage between lowland Scots and English.<sup>23</sup>

In *The Soldier's Return*, a combination of Jacobite and Presbyterian sensibilities are brought together with contemporary concerns of the French war, and, the principle of people before money. Tannahill can possibly be seen as anti-Jacobin in that his sympathies appear to lie more with the British than the French, yet this is all indicative of the complexity of being alive in, and writing about, Scotland in 1804. However, in choosing to write *The Soldier's Return* as a pastoral in the style of Ramsay, Tannahill subtly invokes Jacobite symbolism and the myth of the Highlander as patriotic warrior; connecting these

with the role of Britain at war with France.

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On the 18<sup>th</sup> of November 1804, the actor William Livingstone, then in Kirkcudbright, wrote to Robert Tannahill:

Your love ballad pleased me extremely, and I am impatient for the 'Sodger's Return.' I hope you will send me it, and whatever else you can, with the first carrier.<sup>24</sup>

This gives an idea of the period during which the piece was written, and just before its publication in 1807, Tannahill remained excited about its prospects. He wrote to his friend James Clark anxious to know what he thought of it:

I will take it very kind if you will write as soon as you see the proposals, and let me know how you relish the specimen of the Scottish Interlude, and how affairs are going on in Edinburgh.<sup>25</sup>

In the preface to his 1807 edition, which Tannahill calls an 'ADVERTISEMENT', he states of

*The Soldier's Return:*

The INTERLUDE was undertaken by the desire of the late Mr. Archibald Pollock, Comedian; but, alas! ere it was well begun, his last ACT was played. He was a worthy man and died deeply regretted by all who knew him.<sup>26</sup>

The dramatic forms of both interlude and pastoral traditionally contain supernatural elements. At the court of Henry VIII, interludes, or short anti-Catholic farces, were performed for amusement in gaps between longer, serious religious or devotional ceremonies. Tannahill's drama has elements of both pastoral and interlude, though it is not based on the traditional eclogue, its supernatural element is ridiculously farcical and involves Muirland Willie, owing to his bad eyesight, mistaking Harry for a Dragon. The supernatural, while rooted in folk-tale, is also a feature of French baroque pastorals: foundlings too have something of the supernatural or fantastic about them, as does

Tannahill's notion of the divine and redemptive qualities of a humanity freed from the material corruption of money and war. Yet Harry's tenuous foundling status has no real relationship to the supernatural; the fact that he is a Highlander and therefore naturally adept in the arts of war is what his paralleling of the foundling convention in pastoral as a genre is designed to signify. Harry's return from war (the soldier's return of the title) is a form of redemption allowing him to re-enter a Scottish agrarian idyll. Harry sings:

We'll meet beside the dusky glen, on yon burn side,  
 Whar bushes form a cozie den, on yon burn side,  
   Tho the broomy knowes be green  
   Yet, there we may be seen,  
 But we'll meet — we'll meet at e'en, down by yon burn side.<sup>27</sup>

Although Tannahill takes Ramsay's pastoral as a model for *The Soldier's Return*, there are important differences between the two. Both settings are agricultural but none of Tannahill's characters are necessarily shepherds, though Harry 'deftly hel the pleugh' and looked after livestock including sheep before being recruited into the Laird's 'Scotch Regiment'.<sup>28</sup> In terms of Pope's definition of a pastoral, Harry's work on the farm at Glenfeoch qualifies him not as a shepherd but as 'one who can be considered under that character'. However, Harry is not only a shepherd of a kind but also a soldier and it is his enforced absence due to soldiering, rather than the fact that he happened to work with livestock, that is really of importance. The centrality of a genuine soldier of humble origin is a departure from Ramsay's *Gentle Shepherd*, where the title character turns out to be the Laird's son. In this sense, *The Soldier's Return* does develop the form of Scots pastoral in a new way, where the Laird is secondary to an ordinary soldier, a development that owes much to Burns and his 'Jolly Beggars'.

The returned soldier is very much to the fore in 'The Jolly Beggars'. We see him

deformed, yet defiant. For Tannahill, the return of Harry sees the birth of a new age of peace in which the returned soldier is rewarded for his military service with a rural life free of want or care. For Burns, the return of the soldier has no such meaning, there is no happy end to the war system, life goes on in all its frail and uncertain glory. What Tannahill owes specifically to Burns's 'Jolly Beggars' is the central character of the returned soldier who is not from a wealthy background. Beyond that, Tannahill uses pastoral Jacobite symbolism borrowed from Ramsay - or 'the topos of the retreat' to use Pittock's phrase<sup>29</sup> - to envisage a world in which the prize is not the restoration of Stuart rule, but one where peace itself occupies the throne.

Harry's journey in the play, takes him from bachelor agricultural worker, to soldier, to married agricultural worker. There is a sense in which he can be seen as having performed a ritualised leaving of, and returning to, the community that has nurtured him. He leaves a youth, lives through the horrors of war, and returns a man. His absence causes great heartache for Jean, as Mirren (her mother) expresses: 'An now she [Jean] sits a day, sae dowf an blearie,/An sings luvè sangs about her Heilan Harry'. With regard to Harry's absence Jean says, 'Och! a's gane wrang since Harry gaed awa''.<sup>30</sup> Harry's return parallels that of Ramsay's Laird Worthy, whereby there is an end to the grief and social fragmentation that has been present during their absence.

The Laird in *The Soldier's Return* is 'Colonel of a Scotch Regiment.' – and the other characters are given as follows:

MEN.

GAFFER, the LAIRD'S Tenant.

MUURLAND WILLIE, an old rich dotard.

HARRY, in love with Jean.



WOMEN.

MIRREN, GAFFER'S Wife, a foolish old woman.

JEAN, Daughter of GAFFER and MIRREN, beloved by WILLIE  
but in love with HARRY. (p. 10)

Consisting of two acts *The Soldier's Return* is about one third as long as *The Gentle Shepherd* though it has a similar romantic plot and uses a variation of the foundling motif with regard to Harry:

*Harry.* While I was yet a boy, my parents died,  
And left me poor and friendless, wand'ring wide,  
Your goodness found me, 'neath your fost'ring care,  
I learn'd those precepts which I'll still revere. (p. 36.)

The character of Muirland Willie is not unlike Ramsay's Bauldy, both being auld men with a roving eye for a young woman who is in love with someone else; both Willie and Bauldy are unconscious dupes in episodes of supernatural spoof. In each piece, the Lairds are benevolent, depicted as arbiters of justice promoting the common good, reflecting the old Scottish Tory viewpoint of harmony between Laird and tenants. Tannahill's older woman, Mirren, differs considerably from Ramsay's women who are altogether more humorous and mischievous. Nevertheless, Mirren's character flaws are not entirely rigid and by the end of the play, her view has changed from one of cynicism and avarice to one inclined towards an understanding and acceptance that human beings have value beyond the material and monetary.

Mirren's lines which open the play let us know that she is a woman of strong views, who sees Gaffer, her husband, as a romantic dreamer without the sense to guide their daughter in the right direction. According to Mirren, Gaffer should strongly advise Jean to marry the auld dotard Muirland Willie, the only locally available man who happens to have

some spare cash:

Love should be free! — My trowth, but ye craw crouse,  
You a Gudeman, an' canna' rule your house!  
Had I a father's pow'r, I'd let her see,  
Wi' vengeance, whether or no that love be free.  
She kens right well Muirland has ilk thing ready,  
An's fit to keep her basket like a lady: (p. 11.)

To begin with Mirren is thoroughly convinced that happiness can be bought and wants Jean to marry old Muirland Willie for wealth rather than love. Jean, on the other hand, is in love with Harry who is closer to her own age. An important moral and philosophical concern of the play is how human social virtues take precedence over wealth. The dialogue returns to this point again and again. In Harry's opening lines the principle is presented as a specifically Scottish virtue:

Tir'd with the painful sight of human ills,  
Hail Caledonia! hail my native hills!  
Here exiled virtue rears her humble cell,  
With nature's jocund, honest sons to dwell;  
And hospitality, with open door,  
Invites the stranger and the wand'ring poor;  
Tho' winter scowls along our northern sky,  
In hardships rear'd we learn humanity: (p. 15)

Mirren's journey from money-grubber to realising the true benefits of social virtue over wealth (something Gaffer knows intuitively from the start), is the dramatic pivot for her in the play. The following quotations illustrate Gaffer's and Mirren's difference in outlook at the beginning of the piece:

[*Gaf.*] ...But Muirland's up in years, an' shame to tell,  
He's ne'er been married, though as auld's mysel'; [...]  
Sooner shall roses in December blaw,  
Sooner shall tulips flourish i' the snaw,  
Sooner the woods shall bud wi' winter's cauld  
Than lasses quit a young man for an auld: (p. 12)

\*

*Mir.* Dochter, come here;— noo let us reason civil.  
Isn't siller maks oor ladies gang sae braw?  
Isn't siller buys their clueks an' bonnets a' ?  
Isn't siller busks them up wi' silks an' satins,  
Wi' umbellas, muffs, claeth-shoon, an patons?  
Our Lady,— what is it gars us curtsey till her,  
An ca' her *Mam*? why, just cause she has siller;  
Isn't siller mak's oor gentles fair an' sappy?  
Whilk lets us see, it's siller maks fouks happy. (p. 13)

Gaffer has more sympathy for his daughter's predicament than for his wife's scheme to marry her off to Willie, whereby Jean would attain material wealth but moral bankruptcy and unhappiness. Gaffer's intuitive disapproval of a match between Willie and Jean is later given explicit expression and authority by the Laird when he says, in an example of classless rural wisdom, 'Money is no equivalent for *life*' (p. 32). Nevertheless, Mirren's intelligence lies in her observation, 'what is it gars us curtsey till her,/ An ca' her *Mam*? why, just cause she has siller'. But it is her attempt to become like the rich rather than adhere to the principle of equality of worth that leads her to take the wrong course of action concerning Jean. When she recognises her earlier miscalculation Mirren becomes - rather annoyingly in comparison to her earlier sharp tongue - an obedient wife, and in a state of regret at her own misjudgement with regard to Jean's matrimony, she says to Gaffer:

Gudewives shou'd ay be *subject* to their men ;  
I'll never speak contrar to your will again. (p. 35)

Gaffer is rather pleased with Mirren's newfound obedience but his ultimate pleasure resides in the apparent universality of the maxim 'That "*Virtue ever is its own reward*"' (p. 36). Mirren's pleasure and obedience can also be seen to arise from the fact that the Laird is very pleased with the match between Jean and Harry, rewarding them both morally and

materially. Jean's material and moral wellbeing have been safeguarded by her betrothal to Harry. Mirren has learned that if one does the right thing for the right reasons then rewards will come, whereas at the beginning of the play in attempting to secure her daughter's financial future she was doing the wrong thing for the wrong reason.

The denouement is ultimately determined by Harry's skills as a soldier when he saves the Laird's life, and Gaffer's stoical, solid faith that to do the right thing for the right reason is its own reward. Jean and Harry are presented as having a morality by virtue of their youth that has let them remain unsullied by the world. This makes Mirren's earlier injunction to her daughter 'Peace, wardless slut—O, whan will youth be wise!' (p. 14) ring cynical and hollow as Jean is far from 'a wardless slut' but a young woman with the good sense to trust her instincts, deriving from her own youthful, innocent wisdom. Gaffer's intuitive sense of moral virtue, a quality he has kept since childhood, is also unsullied. He has remained true to his values throughout and his real reward is to see his daughter happy and wife content. The reason for Mirren's contentment is not an issue for Gaffer. It is sufficient in itself:

[*Gaf.* ...] And what we give to succour the distress,  
Calls down from Heav'n a blessing on the rest. (p. 36)

Philosophically, Tannahill's narrative is driven by at least three underlying principles; that everyone is of worth regardless of their station or wealth; that people are fundamentally social and have responsibility for the welfare of each other; and that there is a contract between governors and the governed whereby the power of the governors is conditional upon their virtue, or governance for the common good.

These philosophical considerations are placed side by side with questions of war in its real historical manifestation at the Battle of Aboukir, where French cannon fired on

disembarking British troops on March 8<sup>th</sup> 1801, the day on which Harry saved the Laird's life. When Harry is alone, or alone with Jean, he expresses a horror of the acts of war and of the homesickness of the soldier abroad:

[*Harry*] When fate and adverse fortune bore me far,  
O'er field and flood to join the din of war,  
My young heart sicken'd, gloomy was my mind,  
My love, my friends, my country all behind.  
But whether tost upon the briny flood,  
Or drag'd to combat in the scene of blood,  
HOPE, like an angel, charm'd my cares away,  
And pointed forward to this happy day. (p. 16)

Yet when reunited with Gaffer in the presence of the Laird, Harry's horror of war is toned down, indeed Gaffer's welcoming words allow Harry to avoid the subject altogether:

[*Gaf.*] ... Thrice welcome, lad, here— gie's a shake o' your paw!  
Ye've mended hugely since ye gaed awa'.

*Harry.* Yes, sodg'ring brushes up a person's frame,  
But at the heart, I hope I'm still the same. (p. 30)

All Harry is prepared to comment on is the fact that he hopes he has not been changed for the worse by his experiences of fighting the French in Egypt. No mention of 'combat in the scene of blood,' which Harry may be reluctant to comment upon as such talk might upset the Laird, placing in jeopardy the financing of his wedding to Jean. Further, the reunion is an occasion for rejoicing and talk of blood and war at this point would militate against the sense of the scene. As Gaffer says, 'Fair fa' your worth, my brave young sodger lad,/ To see you safe *return'd* my heart is glad;' (p. 31). Which is in effect, the practical, topical point of the play – the return. The soldiering itself takes place off-stage, while the audience encounter an Edenic Scottish landscape where the young women are in a state of mourning over the absence of the young men forced abroad to fight, while older men like Muirland

Willie take advantage of that absence. Jean sings:

My bonnie lad was forc'd away,  
Tost on the raging billow,  
Perhaps he's fa'n in bludy war,  
Or wreck'd on rocky shallow.  
Yet, ay I hope for his return,  
As round our wonted haunts I mourn,  
And often by the woodland burn  
I pu' the weeping willow. (p. 23)

In the absence of concrete evidence one can only speculate on Tannahill's motivation for writing the Interlude: his admiration for Ramsay and Burns and his desire to emulate them; the dramatic form gave him an opportunity to indulge his interests in poetry, song and theatre; the encouragement and memory of his friend Archibald Pollock who had died after giving him the initial impetus to write a piece for the stage; the chance to explore the themes of war, wealth, happiness and peace; the hope of making his mark as a writer and living up to Burns's admonition, 'Is there nae Poet, burning keen for Fame/ Will bauldly try to gie us Plays at hame?'<sup>31</sup> To Tannahill's credit, he tackles serious concerns with humour and a lightness of touch that we tend to associate with romantic comedy. However, darker concerns lie beneath the surface.

'The Jolly Beggars' is much more raucous than *The Soldier's Return* - they are very different kinds of text. Tannahill is slightly more genteel than Ramsay and both pieces are far less bawdy and drink-soaked than Burns's. The characters Burns lets loose in Poesie Nancy's public house are involved in a euphoric, alcohol-fuelled night of energy and freedom - bursting with music, song and sexual expression. Gone is necessity of the marriage bed to bestow respectability upon the lusty proceedings. There is love but it is not romanticised. The characters are desperate to wring all the joy they can from their night of revelry because life for them is full of poverty and hardship. None of Tannahill's or

Ramsay's characters are 'outsiders' in the way Burns's are: there are no pickpockets or beggars but both Burns and Tannahill have a 'sodger' returned from the war. Burns's sodger does not however return from war unscathed. He has one arm, one leg and has become a beggar. There is no happy pastoral future here although the soldier has a female lover, 'his doxy' who 'once was a maid' but has herself a past life of misery and emotional pain due to unfulfilled romantic longings. Tannahill's Willie makes a series of veiled sexual references and is encouraged in this by Mirren but all of these remain within the context of the marriage bed or stop at kissing. Burns on the other hand implies that the sodger's doxy has been molested by a Kirk Minister, far more sexually explicit than anything in Tannahill's or Ramsay's dramas. The romantic yearnings of Burns's doxy and of Tannahill's Jean are not really that different. Doxy's song tells of past romantic disappointments. Jean sees her future with Willie as similarly soul destroying. Tannahill stresses the emotional level upon which Jean is bereft without her farmhand/soldier. Burns describes the sodger's doxy's emotional distress and loss of self-respect due to the actions of a corrupt Minister. She sings:

But the godly old Chaplain left him in the lurch,  
The sword I forsook for the sake of the church;  
He ventur'd the SOUL, and I risked the BODY,  
'Twas then I proved false to my SODGER LADDIE.

Full soon I grew sick of my sanctified *Sot*,  
The Regiment AT LARGE for a HUSBAND I got;  
From the gilded SPONTOON to the FIFE I was ready;  
I asked no more but a SODGER LADDIE.<sup>32</sup>

While Tannahill, like Ramsay, portrays the Laird in a positive light, he subtly undermines the Laird's benevolence by having Jean blame him for her unhappiness because he has recruited Harry into a British army regiment. If not for that then Harry would be there at

home enabling her to fend off the approaches of Willie - if Willie would have dared approach with Harry present - and the scheming of Mirren. Nevertheless, the Laird redeems himself in Jean's eyes by bringing Harry home safe - although in truth it is Harry who has brought the Laird home safe by saving his life in battle - and by providing the young couple with money. Money, according to Tannahill's view of Presbyterian doctrine, is the very thing that should play no part in honest relationships between human beings so the Laird's role is again made ambiguous. He is both a generous benefactor and a materialistic sinner in the '*siller* stands for *sense*' mould.<sup>33</sup>

There is a kind of melancholy mourning which haunts *The Soldier's Return* even though on the surface everything would appear to be ending happily and to the good. It is this strange irony regarding the role of money, suffused with the extreme emotions produced by war, that gives rise to pervasive poignancy expressed most clearly in Jean's songs. This is a truly ironic point within *The Soldier's Return* which is brought subtly and quietly into the light, unlike Burns who makes his irony obvious in 'The Jolly Beggars' with use of traditional verse structures and classical allusion when he says he has no knowledge or need of them. Structurally 'The Jolly Beggars' contains 'Montgomerie's Stanza, Ballad Royal, Standard Habbie [...] trochaic metre'<sup>34</sup> and while the Bard of the piece says, 'I never drank the muses STANK,/ Castalia's burn an a' that,'<sup>35</sup> it is quite clear that the opposite is the case for the writer of the cantata who has a working knowledge of 'the muses;' their place of abode, Mount 'Helicon,' and 'Mars' the God of War. Tannahill keeps his irony as low-key as possible. In fact there is a pervading sense of the low-key throughout *The Soldier's Return* – an attempt to remain as rational as possible, of neither the writer nor the characters getting too carried away, neither black melancholic, nor



golden euphoric. The writer would somehow like to be as abandoned as Burns in ‘The Jolly Beggars’ which puts a gloss of pride and cheerful acceptance on essentially miserable lives, but there is something holding Tannahill back which produces an altogether more contained performance, in which he very quietly shouts, war and greed are both immoral and irrational. It’s almost as if Tannahill is saying, well here’s a wee happy story but actually life isn’t like this at all, underneath it is darker. It is ‘siller maks fouks happy;’ war splits lovers apart and it is the wealthy and powerful who are responsible for this. Jean sings:

My heart sank wi’ wae on the wearifu’ day,  
When torn from my bosom they march’d him awa’,  
He bade me farewell, he cried “O be leel.”  
An’ his red cheeks war’ wet wi’ the tears that did fa’. (p. 14)  
*from, Our Bonnie Scots Lads*

Tannahill presents us with these dark issues in the form of a mild pastoral comedy and that is another reason why his placing of the returning soldier in Ramsay’s pastoral setting has significance. Whether deliberate or not, and I suggest that it is, Tannahill has used Jacobite discourse and symbolism just at the point in history when the cause of the Jacobites may be seen as utterly lost, and the symbols contained in that discourse, especially that of return, are harnessed in a different way to express the possibility of escape from (and by implication resistance to) war itself.

Conceptually, Tannahill almost does the opposite to what Burns does in ‘The Jolly Beggars’. Tannahill takes ostensibly wholesome characters and highlights a more subtle underlying moral bankruptcy within society, which lurks there and deranges folk from social virtue with its money and wars. By contrast, Burns takes ostensibly degenerate characters, then shows how powerful institutions are responsible for that degeneracy, while his characters who are in reality good, proud, humane people, have been put into a state of

social deprivation by the depravity of their social superiors. Both writers are saying that there are social and political institutions with the potential to damage people but both have starting points and means of arriving that are wildly different. In opting for the pastoral, Tannahill largely operates within the constraints of the tradition, in that his characters are rural and wholesome. Burns on the other hand, chooses to fly more freely in terms of the content of his cantata, while employing traditional verse structure and classical allusion. Tannahill allows the philosophical questions directly arising from war and conflict as given expression by the characters to remain ambiguous within the drama. Though perhaps ultimately, and elsewhere in his writing, he was more inclined to blame Bonaparte rather than the British for the war, he doesn't attribute blame in the Interlude itself, other than suggesting by association, a vague relationship between wealth, power and war. Where he does attribute blame it is through Jean's insistence that Scotland's young men are forced abroad to fight by powerful Britishers who can make these things happen.

There are six songs which punctuate *The Soldiers Return*; 'Our Bonny Scots Lads,' sung by Jean; 'O lassie Will ye tak a Man,' sung by Muirland Willie; 'Blythe was the Time,' and 'Langsyne Beside the Woodlan Burn,' both sung by Jean; 'We'll Meet Beside the Dusky Glen,' and 'From the Rude Bustling Camp,' both sung by Harry. Some of these songs have music composed for them by John Ross of Aberdeen, others are to existing airs. Some in fact have ended up with two or three tunes, one traditional, one composed by Ross and yet another composed by Robert A. Smith. Song was a central part of Tannahill's artistic activity and the songs of *The Soldier's Return* are integral to the piece. While using structures and influences both Jacobite and Presbyterian, Tannahill presents songs not simply as set-pieces to punctuate the drama with light relief, but to give further depth of

understanding as to what the characters think and feel. In this way he offers an extra dimension to the experience of the reader/viewer/listener, through the emotional impact of lyric and music.

All of Tannahill's song lyrics are original, but some are set to existing airs and others are to original airs. That is, some are completely new songs formed from the essence of older ideas, while others are old tunes with new words. The characters of Muirland Willie and Harry, taken from Burns's songs - 'Muirland Willie' and 'The Sodger's Return' - are developed into fully formed personalities and placed in a new context, war with Napoleon. Yet by using Ramsay's pastoral as a model, this new context in which the characters are set, is framed within a historically traditional form infused with Jacobite ideology. The tradition of the pastoral itself as a means through which political statements are made allegorically and by the use of codified word-symbols is something Tannahill retains. Muirland Willie parallels Ramsay's Bauldy but, even though the foundling motif applies to Harry there is no real equivalent for him in *The Gentle Shepherd*. The reason being that the Laird's return (central for Ramsay) is not central for Tannahill; Harry takes precedence over the Laird and therefore has a new significance as the returning soldier. As the common-man without wealth or inherited familial status he has taken centre stage and this too echoes Burns, who places beggars and outcasts centre stage.

The Jacobite ideology which sustains and gives meaning to code and symbol in Ramsay's play is beginning to break down. This is not to say that such symbols do not retain a place within Scottish nationalist sentiment, but the meaning of the return is focussed primarily, by Tannahill, on one of the mass of soldiers recruited into the British army. In this, Tannahill is close to Burns's practice in 'The Jolly Beggars', mixing and

matching form and content around the life of a soldier returned from conflict abroad.

Tannahill has therefore moved on from the pastoral of *The Gentle Shepherd*. Of course the Laird is still present as an arbiter of social good who shares a certain outlook with his rural underlings, so the link has not been totally severed, however, the emphasis on Harry is indicative of a nascent politics of class.

As a drama, and in its execution as a piece of writing, *The Soldier's Return* stands up extremely well beside *The Gentle Shepherd*. It has philosophical depth, a faster and more compact plot and a number of songs which became popular in their own right - as popular as Ramsay's - outwith their existence in the Interlude. Tannahill moves from a local to a broad vision. There is more going on in *The Soldier's Return* than most critics have ever given Tannahill credit for.

It is perhaps, ironically, its strength as a 'local' piece that has led to its neglect. David Semple places *The Soldier's Return* in a real location and identifies the characters, Jean, Mirren and Gaffer as being based on the Dewar family who lived at High Dykes, Criagenfeoch, a short distance north-west of Peesweep on the Gleniffer Braes. He also suggests the British Regiment in which Harry and the Laird served was the '79<sup>th</sup> Regiment or Cameron Highlanders'.<sup>36</sup>

An important reason for the neglect of *The Soldier's Return* after Tannahill's death is that those who edited and published editions of his work failed to include it. This omission or suppression meant that most readers of Tannahill would have been unaware of the interlude until it was re-published in an 1860 edition of the works of Burns and Tannahill.<sup>37</sup> Indeed, in the 1838 edition of Tannahill's work edited by P. A. Ramsay, he states:

We allude to ‘The Soldier’s Return, a Scottish Interlude, in two Acts,’ which was published in the first edition of his Poems, but was omitted in most of the subsequent ones; neither has it been inserted in the present. The moral of the piece was good, but the plot was commonplace, and execution indifferent.<sup>38</sup>

Both James J. Lamb in 1873 and David Semple in 1874 (and 1876) also rectified this problem.<sup>39</sup> The nine hundred copies of the 1807 edition were no doubt rather rare after sixty-seven years and Lamb had it reprinted in 1873, while the following year Semple produced the centenary edition of Tannahill’s work which also included the play.

### CONCLUSION

Tom Crawford suggests that ‘The Jolly Beggars’ is ‘the highest single achievement of popular song culture of the eighteenth-century.’ I would make no such grandiose claims for *The Soldier’s Return*, though the songs are of a high quality. Crawford further states that ‘The Jolly Beggars’ ‘makes a satisfying work of art out of the contradictions within any country or civilisation that has as its social ideal... “let every man soap his own beard”’.<sup>40</sup> It is in this sense I suggest, and hopefully have demonstrated, that *The Soldier’s Return* can stand comparison with Burns’s masterpiece. Both pieces engage with the ‘consciousness... of the real society’. And ‘the social character’ of both pieces critically comments on the Scotland in which the authors lived. Indeed, *The Soldier’s Return* does make ‘a satisfying work of art out of the contradictions’<sup>41</sup> that Tannahill lived with during the Napoleonic wars. While cognizant with the history of the genre, Tannahill moves the pastoral away from its ‘timeless ideology’ and into Scotland, as a part of Britain, engaged in war.

With *The Soldier’s Return* Tannahill attempted to enter more fully the intensely social world of musical theatre. However, in his attempt to enter this theatrical world he was disappointed, as he expresses at the end of a letter to James King in November 1807:

You have never mentioned the Interlude; I suspect that in general it is reckon'd not much worth— I will now finish with some rhymes to you-<sup>42</sup>

However, he did not give up hope and wrote to Thomas Stewart, the Greenock bookseller, in March 1810:

The *Interlude* in its published state, I am quite ashamed of, and have almost entirely new-modelled it. I am confident of its being altered to considerable advantage.<sup>43</sup>

His interest in drama stands in opposition to his desire to wander the braes in solitude with only a book for company. Yet these contradictory drives helped give us a play that would perhaps stand up as well in performance today as Ramsay's rather more widely known *Gentle Shepherd*. Unfortunately, the 'new-modelled' version is no longer extant so it will never be known whether it was 'altered to considerable advantage' or not.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Robert Tannahill, Letter to James Clark, 2<sup>nd</sup> February, 1807, *Poems, Songs and Correspondence*, David Semple, ed. (Paisley, 1876), p. 384.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Tannahill, 'PROLOGUE to THE GENTLE SHEPHERD', *The Soldier's Return: A Scottish Interlude, in Two Acts; with other poems and songs, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect* (Paisley, 1807), p. 87.

<sup>3</sup> See Allan Ramsay, 'The Gentle Shepherd', *Poems by Allan Ramsay and Robert Fergusson*, Kinghorn & Law, eds. (Edinburgh, 1985). Although *The Gentle Shepherd* was first published in 1725, Kinghorn and Law give the text of Ramsay's 1728 version which had additional songs.

<sup>4</sup> Robert Tannahill, 'PROLOGUE to THE GENTLE SHEPHERD', *The Soldier's Return*, p. 88. For a good general introduction to pastoral as a 'genre' see Terry Gifford, *Pastoral* (London, 1999).

<sup>5</sup> Robert Burns, 'Scots Prologue, For Mrs Sutherland's Benefit Night, Spoken at the Theatre Dumfries', *The Poems and Songs of Robert Burns*, Vol. II., James Kinsley, ed. (Oxford, 1968), p. 544.

<sup>6</sup> Alexander Pope, 'An Essay on Criticism', *The Poems of Alexander Pope*, John Butt, ed. (London, 1963), p. 160. These are lines 520-525:

To what base Ends, and by what abject Ways,  
Are Mortals urg'd thro' *Sacred Lust of praise!*  
Ah ne'er so *dire a Thirst of Glory* boast,  
Nor in the *Critick* let the Man be lost!  
*Good-Nature* and *Good-Sense* must ever join;

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To err is *Humane*; to Forgive, *Divine*.

- <sup>7</sup> Pope, 'Three Theatrical Pieces: 'Prologue to Mr Addison's Tragedy of Cato'', *The Poems of Alexander Pope*, p. 212.
- <sup>8</sup> Robert Tannahill, 'PROLOGUE to THE GENTLE SHEPHERD' *The Soldier's Return*, p. 87.
- <sup>9</sup> Alexander Pope, 'A Discourse on Pastorals', *The Poems of Alexander Pope*, John Butt, ed. (London, 1963), p. 121.
- <sup>10</sup> Ramsay, 'The Gentle Shepherd', *Poems by Allan Ramsay and Robert Fergusson*, p. 42.
- <sup>11</sup> David Daiches, 'Eighteenth-Century Vernacular Poetry', *Scottish Poetry: A Critical Survey*, James Kinsley, ed. (London, 1955), p. 163. The year 1728 is significant as that was the year Gay's *Beggar's Opera* was first performed. Daiches argues that the success of *Beggar's Opera* encouraged Ramsay to add more songs to *The Gentle Shepherd*.
- <sup>12</sup> Murray Pittock, *Poetry and Jacobite Politics* (Cambridge, 1994), p. 160.
- <sup>13</sup> Pittock, *Poetry and Jacobite Politics*, p. 158.
- <sup>14</sup> Ramsay, 'The Gentle Shepherd', *Poems by Allan Ramsay and Robert Fergusson*, p. 79.
- <sup>15</sup> Ramsay, 'The Gentle Shepherd', *Poems by Allan Ramsay and Robert Fergusson*, p. 47.
- <sup>16</sup> Murray Pittock, *Poetry and Jacobite Politics* (Cambridge, 1994), p. 152.
- <sup>17</sup> Pittock, *Poetry and Jacobite Politics*, p. 153.
- <sup>18</sup> Pittock, *Poetry and Jacobite Politics*, p. 153.
- <sup>19</sup> The Interlude was given a reading illustrated with several living tableaux at the Theatre Royal, Paisley, on 3<sup>rd</sup> June, 1874 as part of the Tannahill centenary celebrations.
- <sup>20</sup> Robert Burns, 'Love and Liberty', *The Poems and Songs of Robert Burns*, Vol. I., James Kinsley, ed. (Oxford, 1968), p. 195, lines 18-28.
- <sup>21</sup> Robert Tannahill, 'Prologue to the Gentle Shepherd', *The Soldier's Return*, p. 87.
- <sup>22</sup> John Dryden (1631-1700), *Alexander's Feast: an ode on Saint Cecilia's day, the words by Dryden; the musick composed in the year 1736 by G. F. Handel*, (London, 1790). John Dryden, 'Alexander's Feast', *The Poems of John Dryden*, Vol 3., James Kinsley ed., (Oxford, 1958), p. 1428, lines 13-15. St Cecilia is the patron saint of music and celebrated each year on November 22<sup>nd</sup>. Dryden was a Catholic and a Tory unlike Joseph Addison (1672-1719) who was a Real Whig and also wrote an Ode for St. Cecilia's Day which was performed at Oxford in 1699 with musical accompaniment composed by Daniel Purcell. Numerous editions of Dryden's 'Alexander's Feast' were published throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, mainly to music by Handel.
- <sup>23</sup> It is easy to understand Tannahill's interest in the Dryden poem. It concerns the musician Timotheus, who uses the power of music to transform mood and contains imagery Tannahill used in his own work – weeping over the dead and the Bacchanalian. In fact Tannahill's own poem 'The Bacchanalians', [Semple, ed. (Paisley, 1876), p. 167] would have made rather a good piece for the celebration of St. Cecilia's day.
- <sup>24</sup> William Livingstone, Letter from William Livingstone to Robert Tannahill, 18<sup>th</sup> November, 1804, *Poems, Songs and Correspondence*, David Semple, ed. (Paisley, 1876), p. 366.
- <sup>25</sup> Robert Tannahill, Letter to James Clark, 2<sup>nd</sup> February, 1807, *Poems, Songs and Correspondence*, p. 385.
- <sup>26</sup> Robert Tannahill, *The Soldier's Return*, p. 5.
- <sup>27</sup> Robert Tannahill, *The Soldier's Return*, p. 26.
- <sup>28</sup> Robert Tannahill, *The Soldier's Return*, p. 12.
- <sup>29</sup> Pittock, *Poetry and Jacobite Politics*, p. 158
- <sup>30</sup> Robert Tannahill, *The Soldier's Return*, p. 12, p. 13. Further references from the play's dialogue given as page numbers within the text and are from Robert Tannahill, 'The Soldier's Return' (Paisley, 1807).
- <sup>31</sup> Robert Burns, 'Scots Prologue, For Mrs Sutherland's Benefit Night, Spoken at the Theatre Dumfries', *The Poems and Songs of Robert Burns*, Vol. II., James Kinsley, ed. (Oxford, 1968), p. 543. lines 5-6..
- <sup>32</sup> Robert Burns, 'Love and Liberty', *The Poems and Songs of Robert Burns*, Vol. I., James Kinsley, ed. (Oxford, 1968), p. 198, lines 65-72.
- <sup>33</sup> See Tannahill's poem, 'Lines on a Country Justice in the South', which also deals with the theme of wealth versus human worth. Robert Tannahill, *The Soldier's Return*, p. 137.
- <sup>34</sup> Douglas Dunn, 'Burns Native Metric', *Burns And Cultural Authority*, Robert Crawford, ed. (Edinburgh, 1997), p. 79.
- <sup>35</sup> Robert Burns, 'Love and Liberty', *The Poems and Songs of Robert Burns*, Vol. I., James Kinsley, ed. (Oxford, 1968), p. 206, lines 216-17.

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- <sup>36</sup> See David Semple, ed., *Poems, Songs and Correspondence*, pp. 4-6, 11.
- <sup>37</sup> Burns and Tannahill, *Poetical Works*, (Glasgow, 1860).
- <sup>38</sup> P. A. Ramsay, ed., *Works of Robert Tannahill* (Edinburgh, 1838), p. xl.
- <sup>39</sup> Robert Tannahill, *The Soldier's Return: A Scottish Interlude in two Acts; with other Poems and Songs, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect, with Life and Notes by James J. Lamb*, James J. Lamb, ed., re-print of 1807 edition (Paisley, 1873). Robert Tannahill, *Poems and Songs*, David Semple, ed., Centenary Edition (Paisley, 1874). Robert Tannahill, *Poems, Songs and Correspondence*, David Semple, ed. (Paisley, 1876).
- <sup>40</sup> Thomas Crawford, *Burns: A Study of the Poems and Songs*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Edinburgh, 1979), pp. 209-10. First published 1960.
- <sup>41</sup> Crawford, *Burns: A Study of the Poems and Songs*, pp. 209-10.
- <sup>42</sup> Robert Tannahill, Letter to James King, 2<sup>nd</sup> November, 1807 (GUL, Spec. Colls., MS Robertson 1/10).
- <sup>43</sup> Robert Tannahill, Letter to Thomas Stewart, 1<sup>st</sup> March, 1810, David Semple, ed. (Paisley, 1876,) p. 435.



## 5. Epistles and Rhymes

### 1807 EDITION

With two important exceptions – ‘Epistle to Robert Allan’ and ‘Ode for Burns’ Anniversary, 1810’ – almost all of the extant poetry of Robert Tannahill is included in the edition that he published by subscription in May 1807.

Tannahill felt publication by subscription was difficult for a variety of reasons: he had to chase people for money, which led to a great sense of disappointment when they didn’t pay what they owed; the time consuming business of running what was in effect a mail order company, involving postage and a good deal of letter writing irritated him; depending on other people located in England and elsewhere to act as agents did not sit well with Tannahill as a person who disliked reliance upon others; finally, there was perhaps the niggling doubt that his work was not good enough to stand at the same level as ‘professional’ writers and that publication by subscription amounted to a form of ‘vanity publishing’. Some elements of these feelings were expressed by Tannahill in a letter to William Kibble written on April 11<sup>th</sup> 1807:

I hate dependence on printers, paper-folks, or anybody. On inquiry, they found I was poor. Nothing could be done without I found security. That was easily procured: *then*, they were most happy to serve me in anything I wanted. ’Tis the way of the world! Self-interest is the ruling passion. Merit might pine in obscurity for ever, if Pride, or Interest, for their own gratification, were not to hand the lone sufferer into public notice.<sup>1</sup>

Over a year later, in July 1808, matters relating to the publication of the 1807 edition were still ongoing. Kibble wrote to Tannahill:

That you are chagrined at not receiving any account from me in the book affair, I am not in the least surprised, for if the case had been mine I should have been downright angry, indeed I have been ashamed to write my friend. I have been exceedingly unfortunate in your business. I shall state the matter to

you. It is now about nine months ago since an acquaintance of mine, whose name is John Livingston, called on me and informed me that he was going to Scotland, that he had a brother of the name of Peter Livingston, who was at that time in Paisley, a stone mason, and that he intended to take the way to Paisley on his way home, which is nigh Stirling, in order to see his brother, as he was a person whom I could trust, being acquainted with him for some years past. I gave him what money I had collected for your books, which amounted to £2 18s, two guineas and a half in gold, five shillings and sixpence in silver, and a letter for you. Receiving no answer from you, and being unsatisfied in my mind concerning the money, I wrote over to Bury to the man with whom he had lived, and he informed me that he had received a letter from him in Edinburgh, and that he not been in Paisley, but intended to be there by September next, yet never mentioned anything of my affair in his letter, which has made me more uneasy. I have seen his comrade whom he wrought with, and he told me that he would write him in the course of a few days, and would mention my business to him and procure all the information in his power. He gives Livingston a good character; but I am satisfied it was his duty to have written me, turn out which way it will. Misfortune comes not single-handed. I gave five copies of your book to Robert Blair, who you know lived in Preston at the time you lived in that place, and who was employed in the pedlar business for this some time past. I am informed he died in Bradford in Yorkshire, of a fever. I have not received one penny for them, although they were delivered and the money drawn for them. The Bolton people paid me except two copies, which it is doubtful if ever I shall receive, and two more at Stockport, which I think are safe.<sup>2</sup>

Despite the difficulties Tannahill found in publishing by subscription, on July 10<sup>th</sup> 1807 he deposited twenty pounds in the Paisley Union Bank which remained there until May 14<sup>th</sup> 1810, three days before his death. According to David Semple this money was the profit from *The Soldier's Return, with other Poems and Songs*.<sup>3</sup>

The 1807 edition contained sixty-four poems and thirty-two songs. Indeed, the success of the songs encouraged Tannahill to continue in that direction, and afterwards he wrote very little verse that was not set to music. Considering the poems from this perspective, although he was not thoroughly satisfied with them, they do represent a very accurate picture of his work where poetry is concerned. With regard to song lyrics, the 1807 edition must be seen as wholly inadequate for proper critical engagement as it contains only a third of his output.

## EPISTLES

Many details of the characteristics of Tannahill's friendships and of his 'social creed' are given expression in his sequence of 'Epistles'.<sup>4</sup> There are at least twelve extant poetic epistles relating to Tannahill, nine from him to various friends, two addressed to Tannahill from James Scadlock, and one from William Finlayson to which he replied by letter on 5<sup>th</sup> March 1808. 'Epistle to Robert Allan' dated March 14<sup>th</sup> 1808 is extant in the original but appears in later editions of Tannahill's work under the title 'Epistle to Robert Allan, Kilbarchan 1807'.<sup>5</sup> Eight of Tannahill's epistles were published in the 1807 edition:

<u>Addressee</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Pg. 1807 ed.</u>
Alexander Borland	Feb 1806	64
James King	May 1802	76
James Scadlock	Apr 1803	83
William Wylie	Jan 1806	89
James Barr	Mar 1804	91
James Scadlock	Jun 1804	96
William Thomson	Jun 1805	101
James Buchanan	Aug 1806	103

From the above table it can be seen that Tannahill did not publish his epistles in strict chronological order. The epistolary spine provides a thematic (and semi-chronological) core around which he organised the, generally, far shorter pieces in the collection.

'Epistle to Alexander Borland, Feb 1806' is a long, complex poem dealing with intricacies of personal and public morality, memory, mortality and maturity. Tannahill would have been thirty-one years old when he wrote:

We see the slave of av'rice grind the poor,  
His thirst for gold increasing with his store;  
...  
On Pleasure's flow'r-deck'd barge away he's borne,  
Supine, till ev'ry flow'r starts up a thorn.  
Then all his pleasures fly, like air-blown bubbles;  
He ruin'd, sinks, "amidst a sea of troubles."<sup>6</sup>

This epistle could almost be given the alternative title of ‘Robert Tannahill’s Guide to Decent Living’. As he brings us into the world of alcohol, the balance between temperance, over-indulgence and all things in moderation are key to the attitude expressed: the reader is left in no doubt that Tannahill has himself suffered for occasional over-indulgence and that moderation is the ideal, but an ideal that requires effort to maintain. Which is best between temperance and moderation is left for the reader to judge, but the description of the effects of excessive drinking is deadly accurate. In this epistle, Tannahill appears as full of regret for youthful folly, in particular, regret regarding the mistreatment of animal life, and for drinking too much. The mistreatment of animals is a problem that can be solved with the wisdom of fatherly guidance and emotional maturity. The drink question is somewhat more complex, it cannot simply be solved but has to be struggled with. The sense of self-loathing experienced in the aftermath of an alcohol binge is described from what seems to be the point of view of one who has been there:

Here lone I sit, in musing melancholy,  
Resolv’d for aye to shun the court of folly;  
For, from whole years’ experience in her train,  
One hour of joy brings twenty hours of pain.  
Now since I’m on the would-be-better key,  
The muse soft whispers me to write to thee,  
Not that she means a self-debasing letter,  
But merely show there’s hopes I may turn better;  
That what stands bad to my account of ill,  
You may set down to passion, not to will.<sup>7</sup>

It is not merely with regard to drink that Tannahill recommends moderation but throughout the poem he almost preaches to Borland that in the struggle for contentment, moderation in all things is essential, as is the avoidance of envy, and the special nature of maintaining trust in friendship. Indeed, Tannahill’s equation of spontaneous poetic creativity, ‘The muse soft

whispers me to write to thee', with friendship can be seen as having a direct relationship with the ideas expressed in Burns's epistles. As Liam McIlvanney argues in *Burns the Radical* (2002):

The claim to aesthetic spontaneity must be understood as part of a wider concern with moral spontaneity in the epistles. The celebration of benevolent impulse and spontaneous fellow-feeling is crucial to a genre whose 'central purpose... is to display friendship.'<sup>8</sup>

Tannahill's rather obsessive concern with the special nature of friendship can be seen as deriving from Burns's epistles 'to Davie' and 'to J. Lapraik'.<sup>9</sup>

The next epistle, addressed to 'James King, May 1802', is primarily concerned with grief.<sup>10</sup> It is immediately preceded by the poem 'Prayer Under Affliction', a gloomy piece dealing with depression of the spirit, and is followed by 'On Alex. Wilson's Emigration to America', which opens with the lines 'O Death it's no thy deed I mourn,/ Tho' oft my heartstrings thou has torn'. Starting from 'The Filial Vow' (p. 71) through to the poem on Wilson (p. 78), there is an engagement with grief, depression, death and old age. These pages are, with a sense of good style, sandwiched between 'The Bacchanalians' (p. 70-1) and 'Allan's Ale' (p. 80). 'Bacchanalians' ends on a note of black humour, 'Great Jove, quite mad to see such fun,/ At Bacchus 'gan to curse,/ And to remind they were but men,/ Sent down the fiend REMORSE,' to give an indication of the hangover to come. 'Epistle to James King' is encountered as one pillar in a hall of grief and gloom, bounded by booze on either side. This is not perhaps too surprising as both 'The Filial Vow' and the epistle were written when Tannahill was dealing with his father's death. The poems in this part of the 1807 edition are arranged in such a way as to take cognisance of how life was when they were written five years earlier.

He writes to King:

— Wherefore should we grieve and sigh,  
'Cause we know that we must die?  
Death's a debt requir'd by nature,  
To be paid by every creature;  
Rich and poor, and high and low,  
Fall by death's impartial blow —<sup>11</sup>  
From, 'Epistle to James King'

This is an expression of an attempt to overcome grief and accept death. There is a problem though as 'Passion' leads the writer where it will, leaving this rational approach 'not worth a straw'. Tannahill then adopts a fall-back position, '— Then, let's ever cheery live,/ Do our best, an never grieve,' which amounts to saying, there's nothing to be done about it, you have to make the best of a bad lot, and even that has a caveat: 'But resolves, laid down to-day,/ Ere tomorrow, 're done away'.<sup>12</sup> Will power is not always sufficient to attain happiness, and while there is a deliberate rationalised cheerfulness to which one can aspire, pitted against the difficult to control emotion of grief, it might not be enough to prevent one from sinking into oblivion:

—Life's a dream, and man's a bubble,  
'Compass'd round with care and trouble,  
Like a ship in tempest tossed;  
Soon o'erwhelm'd, for ever lost;  
Like the short-liv'd passion-flow'r,  
Blooming, dying, in an hour;  
Like the tuneful bird that sings,  
Flutt'ring high on sportive wings,  
Till the fowler's subtle art  
Drives Death's message to its heart,  
While, perhaps, Death aims his blow  
For to lay the wretch as low.<sup>13</sup>  
From, 'Epistle to James King'

People are like ships unable to master the sea, life is short like that of flowers which bloom and die, and no matter what people do, they die like birds that sing and soar but are hunted out of the sky. In the dream that is life, no matter how beautiful, how amazing, there is Death,

and Death upon Death: the fowler brings Death to the bird but while he's about it Death is at the selfsame time aiming to lay the fowler just as low. Tannahill's affinity for the natural world comes close to misanthropy here. The fowler is quite happy to hunt and kill wild birds, yet there is no escape from death for the fowler either. Death is in pursuit of the 'wretch'. While considering his own experiences of grief, Tannahill makes the language of this theme move conceptually towards a view that begins to question notions of hierarchy of species. Death is presented as the mechanism by which all creatures are made equal in the face of their existence 'on this unfeeling ball'.<sup>14</sup> There is a slight roughness to the octosyllabic lines, not every word in the composition hits exactly the right note, but the movement of ideas is engaging. It is possible to interpret the underlying theme of the epistle as an attempt to come to terms with the problem of permanence versus transience. There are different levels of permanence. Permanence in friendship can be achieved if people are open and honest with one another and do not gossip, that is, if trust is the foundation and the ongoing basis for friendship. Death makes existence transient for individuals but 'Time' is the permanent force which brings death, change and transience, though time itself is not static, it flies and somehow defies definition:

- Like the rocks, which storms divide,  
Thund'ring down the mountain side,  
So strides Time, with rapid force,  
Round his unobstructed course;  
Like a flood upon its way,  
Sweeping downward to the sea:  
But what figure so sublime  
As describe the flight of time?<sup>15</sup>  
From, 'Epistle to James King'

All conceptions of human thought and of life are presented in the poem as ultimately deficient, or contingent, resting on some mysterious combination of 'Fate's decree' and 'resolves' or free will. The epistle leaves us with the unknowable:

God, perhaps, in kindness, will,  
Snatch us from some coming ill;  
Death may kindly waft us o'er  
To a milder, happier shore.<sup>16</sup>

The key words above are 'perhaps' and 'may'. Even the afterlife is in question. There is only uncertainty. And this epistle written just over a year after the death of his father shows a poet who has given up on certainty. What he has found are two ideas, which he ties together to give life meaning. In the final quatrain the oars of friendship and poetry become tools with which to navigate uncertainty:

Still let Friendship's warmest tie  
A' deficiencies supply,  
And, while favour'd by the Nine,  
I your laurels will entwine.<sup>17</sup>

Without parody, Tannahill somehow manages to verge on the tone that James Hogg was wont to indulge in when making parodies of Wordsworth in *The Poetic Mirror* (1816).<sup>18</sup> However, this quatrain expresses clearly the connection between friendship and literary art, as entwined sources of strength, to help carry one through life. This is a principle central to Tannahill's understanding of how to live in the world and is what informed the ethos of the Paisley Burns Club three years later, where poetry, song and sociability take precedence over conventional political activity. When everything else appears beyond the control of common men, this much they can and must do: these men can and must be poets; they can and must be friends. 'Epistle to James King' illuminates how Tannahill came to this view through his experience of grief.



Along the low-road to Ayrshire, south of Barrhead, there stands on the left the Neilston threadmill, and across the road on the right over the Levern burn lies the Killoch Glen. Near to where James Scadlock lived at Fereneze, the Killoch and Levern burns merge before flowing into the River Cart. Glen Killoch is a small beauty spot with a waterfall, steep banked trees, a tranquil widening called the Silver Pool where the water is clear and still. James Scadlock wrote about these places and in April 1803 Tannahill wrote his 'Epistle to J. Scadlock, On receiving from him a small MS. volume of Original Scottish Poems'. Tannahill opens his epistle to Scadlock with a mixture of the classical and Scots vernacular:

While colleg'd bards bestride Pegassus,  
An' try to gallop up Parnassus,  
By dint o' meikle lear,  
The lowe o' friendship fires my saul,  
To write you this poetic scrawl,—  
Prosaic dull, I fear!  
But weel I ken, your gen'rous heart  
Will overlook its failings,  
An' whare the Poet has come short,  
Let friendship cure his ailings  
'Tis kin', man, divine, man,  
To hide the faut we see,  
Or try to men't, as far's we ken't,  
Wi' true sincerity.

This last observe, brings't i' my head  
To tell you here my social creed—<sup>19</sup>

This is confirmation of Tannahill's intention that the epistles should stand as an explanation of his outlook on life in general or 'social creed'. He expresses, again, the necessity of loyalty and sincerity in friendship and voices disgust at the hypocrisy and gossip of narrow-minded church-goers who think themselves superior to their neighbours:

In judging, let us be right hooly;  
I've heard some fouks descant sae freely,  
On ither people's matters,

As if themsel's war' real perfection,  
When they had stood a fair inspection,  
The abus'd war' far their betters:<sup>20</sup>

Here, Tannahill comes to a similar conclusion to that expressed by Gaffer in *The Soldier's*

*Return:*

That, *Goodness pays itsel'*.  
The joys, man, that rise, man  
To ane frae doing weel,  
Are siccan joys that harden'd vice  
Can seldom ever feel.<sup>21</sup>  
From, Epistle to J. Scadlock, 1803.

The content and ideas in this are far less interesting than in the epistle to James King. In terms of form and rhythm, though, it is deft and musical. The fourteen line stanzas with their rhythmic syncopation show, Tannahill's technical skill in a better light than in the epistle to King, and that in spite of his trying various different verse forms he did have the skill to succeed well as a technician even if the content can at times be rather abstract.

The significance of the dates of these two epistles ('Epistle to King', May 1802 and 'Epistle to Scadlock', April 1803) cannot be overlooked. Both were written during the Peace of Amiens, a breathing space in the war with France which stretched from 25<sup>th</sup> March 1802 to 18<sup>th</sup> May 1803, and contain almost no mention of the war. However, referring back to the first epistle, that to Borland in 1806, it is possible to detect a difference in attitude. After the collapse of the Peace of Amiens, Tannahill becomes more anti-Napoleonic, and, it could be argued, pro-British but he still attacks war leaders in general and leaves it open as to whether he is attacking the French or the British leadership:

One individual act of generous pity  
Is nobler far than ravaging a city.  
Ev'n let the blood-stained ruffians call me coward,  
An Alexander sinks beside a Howard.  
From, Epistle to A. Borland, Feb 1806.

The 1803 epistle to James Scadlock is also noteworthy in its mention of Livingston, Anderson, Scadlock and King, who Tannahill saw as keeping Burns's memory alive in their songs. The invocation of Burns to validate the work of poets and songsters who were certainly less talented, but no less valid, was in the incipient phase of its becoming a national sport. Ironically, the development of Burns as archetype left less room in the Scottish literary world for many of those responsible for bringing the process into being, including Tannahill and his circle of friends. Although on numerous occasions Tannahill expressed great sadness over the death of Burns, he clearly believed that his friends could move forward as Scottish poets after Burns:

Yet, though he's [Burns is] dead, the Scottish reed,  
This mony a day may ring,  
In Livingston, in Anderson,  
In Scadlock, an in King.<sup>22</sup>

From, Epistle to James Scadlock, April 1803.

These four men were of humble origins and Tannahill is suggesting that it is no longer necessary to be a 'colleg'd bard' to be a poet. The *phenomenon* of Burns had shown them that snobbery and status should be irrelevant in the world of Scottish literature and Tannahill was a poet who wished to champion that democratic literary cause.

'Epistle to William Wylie. Jan. 1806' consists of eight four line stanzas in a loose ABCB rhyme scheme. It is fairly unremarkable except that it solely concerns friendship and loyalty; there is no manifesto for living and no other philosophical questions or relationships are considered. It praises Wylie's character and declares Tannahill's loyalty to him as a friend. Wylie was born around 1774 and lived and worked as a weaver at Abbey Close, Paisley. He was known as a good 'reciter' of poems and was President of the Paisley Burns

Club in 1810. Of the eight stanzas in the epistle there are two which hit the mark with considerable force and honesty of emotion:

If grief e'er make thee her pack horse,  
Her leaden-load to carry't,  
Shove half the burthen on my back,  
I'll do my best to bear it.

...

And shouldst thou live to see thy friend,  
Borne lifeless on the bier,  
I ask of thee, for epitaph,  
One kind, elegiac tear.<sup>23</sup>

'Epistle to William Wylie. Jan. 1806', stanzas 5 & 8.

This hints at Tannahill's sense of his own mortality, which was also expressed in the epistle to James King two years earlier, 'God perhaps in kindness will,/ Snatch us from some coming ill;' and these are two occasions in his poetry that refer to his own death as a near welcome release from being in the world. Such lines only come to the reader with any force-unfortunate after the fact of Tannahill's suicide. Seen in this light the epistle to Wylie does illustrate how deeply Tannahill believed in friendship and trust as life affirming.

James Barr, to whom the next epistle in the 1807 edition is addressed, was born at Tarbolton in Ayrshire then removed to Kilbarchan, where he took up weaving as apprentice to the antiquarian and naturalist James Buchanan to whom the last epistle (1807 edition) is addressed. Barr corresponded frequently with Tannahill, played the fiddle and flute, and provided traditional airs for Tannahill to match with lyrics of his own. A few years after Tannahill's death, Barr became a music teacher in Glasgow. This epistle is generous in its praise of Barr's musical skill and knowledge of Scottish song. It lists numerous Scottish song titles including 'The Garb of Gaul,' 'Ettrick Banks' and 'Tullochgorum,' suggesting that Barr

was capable of playing rousing and melancholy tunes imbued with Scottish nationalistic sentiments:

Or are ye gane, as there are few sic,  
For reachin' o' a band o' music?  
O, hear auld Scotland's fervent pray'rs,  
And teach her genuine native airs!  
Whilk simply play'd, devoid o' art,  
Thrill through the senses to the heart.  
Play, when ye'd rouse the patriots saul,  
True valour's tune, "The Garb of Gaul;"<sup>24</sup>  
From, 'Epistle to J. Barr, March 1804'

Here we have Tannahill advocating the same sense of organic creativity 'devoid o' art' as John Clare with his writing 'from Nature in Original'<sup>25</sup>, which for Tannahill, bypasses reason and goes straight through the senses to the emotions or the heart; and Tannahill admires Barr for his ability to do this as a musician. The epistle opens with Tannahill's speculations on where Barr might be, hence the sub-title 'Wherever he may be found':

GUDE Pibrocharian, jorum-jirger,  
Say, hae ye turn'd an Antiburgher?  
Or lang-fac'd Presbyterian El'er?  
Deep read in wiles o' gath'rin' siller?  
Or cauld, splenetic solitair,  
Resolv'd to herd wi' man nae mair?<sup>26</sup>

Tannahill conveys jokingly his worry that Barr has taken to religion, rather than continuing on his life's journey of music, poetry and song. Quite literally 'jorum-jirger' can be translated as 'rowing-song squelcher' - 'jorum' suggesting Barr's enjoyment of travel and the style of tune he likes to play, and 'jirger' illustrating the squeeze of the pipes under his arm and rhythm of his body. This is a fine use of Scots language and the first line suggests that what follows with regard to religion and reclusivity are barbed but friendly jibes. The epistle ends affectionately with a request that Barr get in contact soon:

In gude's name write!—tak up your pen,

A' how ye're doin' let me ken.  
Sae, hoping quickly your epistle,  
Adieu! thou genuine son of song an' whistle.<sup>27</sup>

In this epistle, Tannahill again expresses the value of honest friendship and the joy of communication through music, poetry and song. For Tannahill, these are human qualities that enhance life, and are best when considered as primarily emotional rather than mediated through reason.

The second epistle to Scadlock (June 1804) is also on the theme of friendship. Tannahill wrote this when Scadlock was resident in Perth. It refers to walks they had taken in the countryside surrounding Paisley and expresses the hope that bringing these rambles to Scadlock's attention will provoke fond thoughts of home. The structure is of four line stanzas in an AABA rhyme scheme. Images are drawn from the weather and hills to represent states of mind:

All nature sadden'd at our parting hour,  
Winds plaintive howl'd, clouds, weeping dropt a show'r,  
Our fields look'd dead — as if they'd said,  
“We ne'er shall see him more.”<sup>28</sup>

Tannahill's lyric expression is extremely poignant here. It shows friendship and parting to be matters of life and death, indeed their parting is depicted as a living death.

Two epistles by Scadlock addressed to Tannahill were published in the former's *Posthumous Works*, edited and introduced by William McLaren in 1818, the year of Scadlock's death.

Both epistles are titled 'Epistle to Mr Robert Tannahill';<sup>29</sup> the first appears to be a response of sorts to Tannahill's 1804 epistle to Scadlock, and quite a large proportion in the middle section is given over to discussion of Thomas Campbell's *Pleasures of Hope*, which conceivably is why Tannahill's epistle to Scadlock in the 1807 edition is followed immediately by 'Lines on *The Pleasures of Hope*'.<sup>30</sup> Scadlock gives a positive opinion of *The*

*Pleasures of Hope*, having opened his epistle with an appreciation of local landscape, and the hold of the poetic muse upon youth:

On Lavern's banks, beneath the moss-grown trees,  
Whose withered foliage tremble in the breeze;  
Retired I rest, and view the wintry scene,  
The ice-fringed streamlet, and the faded green,  
Dismantled woods, and hoary mist-clad hills,  
Scenes which the poet's soul with rapture fills.<sup>31</sup>  
James Scadlock, from 'Epistle to Mr Robert Tannahill'

Here we see the interlocking of Tannahill's and Scadlock's outlooks - the idea of contemplation of a natural landscape to fill 'the poet's soul with rapture' is one they share. In this case, mutual admiration and pride in their locality are sources of inspiration that help attain a sense of mental wellbeing. These epistolary interchanges represent a communion of place, personalities and beliefs and are a statement of, and a memorial to, the lives of these men who shared a common landscape, a common philosophy and a life affirming bond of friendship. Scadlock's final section verifies this by highlighting their shared values, attacking critics and lauding Tannahill for his honesty and independence:

I love your creed — I love your honest way,  
To walk upright, nor mind what others say;  
Lure modest worth out from her humble cell,  
Press harmony and peace with us to dwell;  
Yes, kindred bard, thy friendship I will share,  
Nurse each fine feeling with a miser care,  
Court every passion, try each winning art  
That opes the tender sluices to the heart;-  
Warm in affection's smiles, we'll shun the height  
Where malice and the dry-eyed critic wait,  
With poisonous breath to blast the poet's name,  
And tear the laurels from the hand of fame,  
Mark rising genius with vindictive eye,  
Obscure his beauties and his faults decry.<sup>32</sup>

This is a protest against being misunderstood in the centres of power, 'we'll shun the height'.

They expect their work to meet with criticism, but strength in friendship and a cherished

confidence in the beauty of their locality, will see them grow and continue regardless. As a public exchange, it is evidence of the social solidarity and mutual support that existed between these literary artists.

Scadlock's second epistle also concerns nature and friendship, although it has the tone of a poem that has been written to cheer the recipient. The final stanza could not be more emphatic in its declaration of friendship:

Be't mine, my friend, where'er I stray,  
By flow'ry bank or broomy brae,  
To bid the flame of friendship burn,  
Till earth enwraps me in her urn.<sup>33</sup>

'Epistle to William Thomson, June 1805', invokes a somewhat romantic view of rural life. It illustrates Tannahill's way of looking at the world as a set, or sets, of dualities; recognising that his love of the countryside arises from his experience of life in the town. However, the pastoral-romanticism in the epistle can also be considered a metaphor for the kind of person William Thomson is: to a man whose singing is presented as a beautiful, rural, Scottish landscape, Tannahill says:

A country life I've oft envied,  
Where love, an' truth, an' peace preside;  
Without temptations to allure,  
Your days glide on, unstain'd an' pure;  
Nae midnight revels waste your health,  
Nor greedy landlord drains your wealth,  
Ye're never fash't wi' whisky fever,  
Nor dizzy pow, nor dulness ever,  
But breathe the halesome caller air,  
Remote from aught that genders care.  
I needna tell how much I lang  
To hear your rural Scottish sang;  
....  
In town we scarce can fin occasion  
To note the beauties o' creation,  
But study mankind's diff'rent dealings,  
Their virtues, vices, merits, failings.<sup>34</sup>



William Thomson was a weaver from Ferguslie who removed to Overton near Beith, and it was Thomson's new, rural life, that Tannahill 'envied'. What unites these men in friendship is a mutual love of music, song and nature, and the detailed description of the natural world works well in this epistle. Friendship together with positive images from nature are combined to create happiness, 'unpleasing' town life is contrasted with:

[...] the blithesome morn,  
When dew-draps pearl every thorn;  
When larks pour forth the early sang,  
An' lintwhites chant the whins amang,  
An' pyats hap frae tree to tree,  
Teachin' their young anes how to flee  
While frae the mavis tae the wren  
A' warble sweet in bush an glen.<sup>35</sup>

Here, Tannahill's rural world is partly real but for the most part imagined, where peace and love preside and there is no bitter winter or backbreaking work: the town has too many distractions to allow one to take notice of nature but from Tannahill's perspective, being a town dweller allows one the opportunity to perceive nature with fresh eyes and acute sensitivity. Tannahill presents a contrast between town and country, the town has its 'virtues' as well as its 'vices', so while he clearly enjoyed writing about nature and rural scenes he is not entirely negative about town life: although town life is far from his rural ideal it offers opportunity to 'study mankind's diff'rent dealings', even if most of the 'dealings' - greedy landlords, whisky fever and bad air - are portrayed as lacking in positive qualities.

The first stanza in the 'Epistle to James Buchanan, August 1806', contains the lines:

Yet, thanks is but a draff-cheap phrase  
O' little value now-a-days;  
....  
The sodger, too, for a' his troubles,  
His hungry wames, and bluidy hubbles,  
His agues, rheumatisms, cramps,

Receiv'd in plashy winter camps,  
O blest reward! at last he gains  
His sov'reign's *thanks* for a' his pains.

And continues:

'Twas wisely said by "Queer Sir John"  
That "Honour wudna buy a scone."  
Say ane, of thanks, may get a million,  
Yet live as poor's a porter's scullion:  
Indeed, they're just (but, beg your pardon,)  
Priest-blessing like, no' worth a fardin'.<sup>36</sup>

These are realistic lines about soldiering that also attack religion and the king. There is no escape to any romanticised rural ideal, nor turn to the sentimental for comfort. This verse shows a commitment to peace and stands against the exploitation of the soldier as cannon-fodder. In this poetic moment, Tannahill returns to themes of militarism and peace - just in case in the intervening poems the reader had forgotten that these were themes of great importance. This is the final epistle in the 1807 edition; it is a sequence that begins and ends with epistles written in 1806, but in between, covers the years 1802 to 1805 (see table, p. 159), where Tannahill explains his philosophy of the unity of friendship and art as a means for living well. Starting with the epistle to King in 1802, which presents grief and uncertainty, and ending with the epistle to Thomson in 1805 with its idealised rural life and happiness in friendship, this is a somewhat lengthy and uneven poetic journey. However, there is the wonderful humour of the opening lines of the epistle to James Barr, 'Gude pibrocharian, jorum-jirger'. And, a clear sense of a community of writers with common bonds of humanity and locality, for whom Burns represented a break with patronage and social status, is brought to the reader through the epistolary sequence. In the final 1806 epistle of the sequence there is sympathy for soldiers caught up in the war with France, but for Tannahill trust in friendship,

and a commitment to egalitarian values in life, poetry, music and song is a manifesto for survival in the face of war and social uncertainty.<sup>37</sup>

Although not in the 1807 edition, 'Epistle to Robert Allan' continues on the theme of the war in Europe, but aside from this serious subject matter, Tannahill's tenor is upbeat and relaxed. He is pleased to have received correspondence from Allan and writes the epistle in reply. Allan had radical leanings, was the same age as Tannahill and became Kilbarchan's best known weaver poet.<sup>38</sup> One cannot tell if Tannahill wrote this epistle in 1808 with a view to publication, but it is a confident and assured piece of verse. He has no difficulty in describing how he goes about writing or, in being gently self-critical:

For me — I seldom choose a subject,  
My rhymes are aft without an object,  
I let the Muse e'en tak her win',  
And dash awa' thro' thick and thin:  
For Method's sic a servile creature,  
She spurns the wilds o' simple nature,  
And paces on, wi easy airt,  
A lang days journey frae the heart —  
Sae what comes uppermost you'll get it  
Be't good or ill, for you I write it.

...  
...

My sangs are now afore the warl,  
And some may sing, and some may snarl,  
They ha'e their faults, yet I can tell  
Nane sees them clearer than mysel',  
But still I think they too inherit,  
Amang the dross some sparks o' merit.<sup>39</sup>

This epistle asserts the principle of writing from 'simple nature' or going with 'the Muse', rather than attempting to impose 'Method' or manufacture: every poet knows the feeling of writing poems that seem to arrive from nowhere or without conscious thought, yet from Tannahill's attention to structure and technique, it is clear that he consciously framed the flow of his thoughts in predetermined literary structures. So while Hogg and Clare also argued in

favour of the 'simple nature' position, it only makes sense with regard to the content of the poetry and not its structural arrangement. This piece reiterates the view that the central bond of friendship combined with poetry gives life deeper meaning - a permanence in friendship offering people a sense of shared interests and social solidarity. In this context, friendship represents an almost *here and now eternity* (paradoxically), acting as a bulwark against the ravages of Time and Death. Tannahill ends the epistle with words of encouragement for Allan:

Sae Robin, briskly ply the Muse  
She warms our hearts, expands our views,  
Gars ev'ry sordid passion flee,  
And waukens ev'ry sympathy.

Now wishing Fate may never tax you,  
Wi cross nor loss, to thraw and vex you  
But keep you hale till ninety nine,  
Till you and yours in honour shine,  
Shall ever be my earnest pray'r,  
While I've ae friendly wish to spare.<sup>40</sup>

Allan's songs were sung at the Anniversary Meeting of the Paisley Burns Club in January 1815.<sup>41</sup> The recipients of Tannahill's epistles connect him to a network of poets who tended towards the radical, including both Scadlock and Allan who were known to hold radical views. In addition, the authors Tannahill chose to 'imitate' had a radical or controversial edge to their work from the point of view of many respectable Georgians.

### **IMITATION AND ADMIRATION**

It was out of his interest in writers such as Matthew G. Lewis (1773-1818), Peter Pindar (1738-1819) and John Barbour (b. early 1300s), that Tannahill quite openly attempted to base poems on their work. He wrote one poem in 'imitation' of each, and each poem explores the

contradiction between the power of literary imagination, or ‘fancy’, over us - ‘A similie winds up a mental spring’ - and what clear thinking, rational folk should know from the evidence of their senses.<sup>42</sup> The paradox (and fun) of these pieces is that they are appeals to the imagination in order to lay bare its power to delude. However, in execution, Tannahill’s imitations are far from his best work. ‘Portrait of Guilt, In imitation of Lewis’ is rather disappointing and concludes with the stock ending: ‘And the Murd’rer woke — ’*Twas a dream!*’<sup>43</sup> More interesting, is the ‘Ode. In imitation of Pindar’, in its game-playing with the concept of the ‘similie’, self-deprecation and punning on the word ‘cork’. Perhaps the pun would have resonance only for Paisley locals who were aware of the epithet ‘Causeyside Cork’:

Ah! kind heaven  
 For a defence,  
 Allowed me half the brazen confidence  
 That she to many a *cork-brain’d fool* hath given.<sup>44</sup>  
 From, ‘Ode. In imitation of Pindar’

The two examples of ‘similies’ that Tannahill gives in the ‘Ode’ are, ‘the fall of man’ likened to a ‘pig’ and used to criticise a lack of clear thinking among churchmen, and a directionless, bobbing ‘cork’ which is likened to the meagre intellectual abilities of a ‘fop,/ Tost in wit’s blanket’, whereby the rich are criticised for their ‘brazen confidence’.<sup>45</sup> In each case, the function of the simile is to highlight the narrator’s astonishment at the capacity of human beings to willingly suspend disbelief and wallow in delusion: the general delusion being that churchmen and the wealthy have innate superiority over the rest of us.

‘The Haunted Wud. In imitation of John Barbour, an old Scotch Poet’, is one of the few Tannahill poems William Motherwell discusses in his introductory essay to the *Harp of Renfrewshire* (1819), the other being ‘Connel and Flora. A Scottish Legend’.<sup>46</sup> It is used to

illustrate Tannahill's lack of poetic skill, although Motherwell thought of it purely as a literary exercise and makes no mention of its point with regard to enlightenment values and the dispelling of superstition. It is lively and shows a good grasp of the Gothic genre before dismissing superstition as bunkum in the final stanza. Though the final stanza in the published version:-

'Twas thus dark ignorance did ween,  
In fancy's wizard reign,  
When minstrel-fiction won belief  
O'er Scotland's wide domain.<sup>47</sup>

- does not have the same clarity nor use of old Scots as the MS version in the National Library of Scotland:

Twas sae dark ignorance dyd ween,  
Inne wilyart fancy's reign  
But now philosophyis brycht sunne  
Beamis owr the claudit brayne.<sup>48</sup>

Tannahill's attempt at fourteenth-century Scots is adventurous. It has a strong flavour of the language in Barbour's epic poem 'The Brus' and some of the vocabulary is accurate such as, 'syne', 'dyd' and 'quhat'.<sup>49</sup> Of course Tannahill makes no attempt to pretend that he is writing in 'real' fourteenth-century Scots, although his use of 'is' for 's' in plural word endings, and 'quh' for 'wh', shows familiarity with the general principles of spelling from that time. Subtling the piece 'In imitation of John Barbour, an old Scotch Poet', is a clear message that he is not trying to recreate fourteenth-century verse but doing something quite different. That something is to highlight a progression away from superstition and towards material explanations for sense perceptions. It is not necessary to be afraid of ghostly screams

- 'yellis and screichis wylde' - in the night as they are, in reality, figments of the imagination or fancy.<sup>50</sup> This is how Tannahill opens the piece:

Quhy screim the crowis owr yonder wud,  
Witth loude and clamouryng dynne,  
Haf deifenyng the torrentis roare,  
Quhilk dashis owr yon linne?<sup>51</sup>

From, 'The Haunted Wud. In imitation of John Barbour, an old Scotch Poet'

However, according to William Motherwell:

Tannahill had neither leisure, education, nor means, to qualify himself for the perusal of Barbour and other venerable *makers*, much less to imitate their productions. Yet though he has been unsuccessful, we cannot help loving him for thus showing that he was acquainted with the name, if not with the language, of one of the oldest of our epic poets.<sup>52</sup>

It is not known by what 'means' Motherwell, expert on Scottish antiquities as he was, gained a thorough insight into Tannahill's 'means, to qualify himself for the perusal of Barbour and other venerable *makers*'.

Both 'The Haunted Wud. In imitation of John Barbour, an old Scotch Poet' and 'Portrait of Guilt, In imitation of Lewis' have a flavour of the Gothic about them. What is also interesting about these 'imitations' is their quality of performance. Not only can they be read aloud and performed, but Tannahill himself gives a performance in the stylistic guise of other authors. 'The Haunted Wud' has a political dimension by bringing back to notice, through performance, John Barbour - a writer who celebrated the life of Scottish national hero Robert the Bruce; yet at the same time, Tannahill argues for progress away from the darkness of myth and superstition towards the rational. It is paradoxical (though clever) to invoke, albeit at one step removed, a Scottish nationalistic figure of mythic proportions to celebrate the transcendence of myth by philosophical reason. The performance aspect of these poems is something William Motherwell failed to take notice of. They are a form of poetic game-playing with the idea that our dreams, our imaginations and even received opinions have the

ability to frighten or dupe us – not only in themselves, but also through the vehicle of literary artifice – in our waking hours. (Witness Tannahill’s tendency to be seduced by the politics of fear of French invasion.) They are interesting commentaries on our capacity to delude ourselves, whether through dream, imagination or literary suggestion. Even when *philosophy’s bright sun beams over the clouded brain* our willing suspension of disbelief remains possible. By presenting these examples of literary performance and at the same time, throwing suspicion on our ability to disentangle fact from fiction, real from imaginary, and dreams from waking-consciousness, within the performances themselves Tannahill is pointing towards Hume’s paradox - casting doubt upon doubt, but without wholly entering a solipsistic abyss as at the end of each poem there is a depiction of *a waking up* into a real and present world.

All three imitations suggest that this world is unreliable and when we awake, it is into a tenuous relationship with reality. They illustrate Tannahill’s awareness of how difficult discerning truth can be - by contrast, his epistles appealing to the local and communal allied to trust in friendship, can be seen as a safeguard against forms of deception and self-deception in a world where the false is myriad, not total. With an acute sense of irony, he also appears to be aware that ‘poets needs must’ contribute to the building of illusions, and, that his sequence of ‘imitations’ can work in that way.<sup>53</sup>

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Tannahill wrote many poems of admiration for other writers. Foremost among these is Burns, but also of importance is Glaswegian poet Thomas Campbell (1777-1844). Tannahill’s five poems on Burns form a substantial sequence of work. There is, perhaps, a case for suggesting that the two shorter pieces ‘Dirge. On reading an account of Robert Burns’ Funeral’, and



'Lines, To W. M'Laren', are more immediate, direct and engaging than the three longer 'Odes' written for recitation at the Paisley Burns anniversary meetings of 1805, 1807 and 1810.<sup>54</sup> Of the three 'Odes,' the first (1805) is undoubtedly the strangest. It involves a visitation to 'heaven' by a Scotsman who manages to secure a meeting with the gods who are already gathered together: 'Once on a time, almighty Jove/ Invited all the minor gods above,/ To spend one day in *social festive pleasure*.' The gods are busy toasting:

"Universal peace 'twixt man and man."  
Their godships' eyes beam'd gladness with the wish,  
And Mars half-reddened with a guilty blush;  
Jove swore he'd hurl each rascal to perdition,  
Who'd dare deface his works with wild ambition.<sup>55</sup>

After this scene setting, the Scots stranger, who is 'the guardian of that far-fam'd land/ Named Caledonia,' is introduced to the gods by the messenger 'Mercury':

Loud, thund'ring plaudits shook the bright abodes,  
Till Merc'ry, solemn-voic'd assailed their ears,  
Informing that a *stranger*, all in tears,  
Weeping, implored an audience of the gods.

Jove's attitude to the Scottish stranger is one of benevolent tolerance:

Jove, ever prone to succour the distress,  
A swell redressive glow'd within his breast,  
He pitied much the stranger's sad condition,  
And ordered his immediate admission.

The visitor, invited by Jove to 'unfold' the cause of his 'woe', then makes a plea that the gods grant Scotland 'one true *Patriotic Bard*'. The gods agree with the Scotsman's plea and we are in due time given Robert Burns: 'in regard of Wallace and his worth,/ Jove honoured Coila with his [Burns's] birth.'<sup>56</sup> There is however a caveat:

And Fame, on tiptoe, fain would blown her horn,  
But Fate forbade the blast, too premature,  
Till worth should sanction it beyond the critic's pow'r.

In other words, for Burns, fame would have to wait until his genius was beyond attack from critics. And the narrative almost concludes there, but for Tannahill's 'trembling doubts' about his own talent:

His [Burns's] merits proven— Fame her blast hath blown;  
Now Scotia's Bard o'er all the world is known;—  
But trembling doubts here check my unpolished lays,  
What can they add to a whole world's praise;  
Yet, while revolving time this day returns,  
Let Scotchmen glory in the name of Burns.

The second last line is an adept use of language to describe the passing of time. It implies, besides the movement of planets and clocks, that as long as time exists, Burns should be celebrated on his birthday: the combination of consonant and vowel sounds, and comma in the phrase 'Yet, while revolving time', suggest a slow steady passing of the years – with each new year Burns's birthday arrives to be celebrated by Scots. Gerard Carruthers accurately states that the 'Ode' is: 'drenched in the phraseology of Burns and genuflects particularly towards his [poem] "The Vision"'.<sup>57</sup> What is interesting, is that Tannahill's 'Ode' presents a prequel to 'The Vision' in which he re-states 'a patriotism compatible with internationalism, for it merges with "the dignity of Man"'. Further, it illustrates Tannahill's 'intellectual awareness of historical process' by suggesting that Burns is a symbol through which Scottish identity and history can be kept alive: 'Scotia's Bard o'er all the world is known', whether or not Scotland is part of Britain.<sup>58</sup>

The idea of Scotland having only 'one true *Patriotic Bard*' is troubling. Tannahill seems to present 1759 as a 'year zero' for Scottish literature, which militates against his description of Scotland as an idyllic nation 'great in arts and arms'. However, this 'year zero' idea must be seen in the context of the fanciful, (or visionary) nature of the entire poem, in

which it is used as a device to highlight Tannahill's view that Burns is the greatest Scottish poet of all time. Yet, as Tannahill read a host of other Scottish poets - such as Barbour, Ramsay, Beattie and James Thomson - clearly the idea of 1759 being the starting point of Scottish poetry is not to be taken literally; it is a metaphor for illustrating the genius of Burns, in comparison with which other poets fade away. However, it is a metaphor with as many problems as merits.

Tannahill's 1807 'Ode' for Burns is immediately interesting for the structure it adopts. It is divided into 'recitative' and 'song' sections as is Burns's 'Jolly Beggars'. This piece is a score for performance. The first recitative section uses a metaphor based on the merits of different kinds of music: the music of war represents cruel, worthless, earthly pursuits and is opposed to music of 'worth' which, in the songs of Burns, moves towards the sublime, 'And melts to ecstasy the list'ning gods'. This latter form of music journeys to heaven and back to earth where 'all nature re-echoes the lay!' Effectively, Burns is connected with heaven, earth, and 'all nature,' and he is seen to represent all human virtue. This 'recitative' section is then followed by a song, 'Tho' dark scowling Winter, in dismal array'. A lyric that was set to music by R. A. Smith which uses images of weather, time and permanence, and, darkness and light:

For the genius of Scotia, in ages unborn,  
Will light up her torch with the blaze of his fame.  
When the dark mist of ages lies turbid between,  
Still his star of renown through the gloom shall be seen,

The second recitative section is a direct address to Burns which continues the theme of time and permanence from the song, and celebrates the idea that Burns's contribution to Scottish song 'shall live for ever'. The second song prepares the company for the toast to Burns's memory and is, therefore, rather rousing. It consists of three stanzas, to the tune of 'Marsh's

National Air', and was 'harmonized as a glee by Mr. Smith'. The patriotic flavour of the song is dual - both Scottish and British - and is highlighted in the second stanza:

Fathers of our country's weal,  
Sternly virtuous, bold and free!  
Ye taught your sons to fight, yet feel  
The dictates of humanity:  
But chiefly, Burns, above the rest,  
We dedicate this night to thee;  
Engraved in every Scotsman's breast,  
Thy name, thy worth, shall ever be!

Two rhyming couplets finish the piece, the last line being: 'Let's toast, "The Patriot and the Patriot Bard"'.<sup>59</sup> This piece is highly choreographed with thematic interactions between song-lyrics, music and poetry. However, it is arguably the poorest of Tannahill's odes for Burns as far as use of language is concerned, yet shows technical skill and a little adventure. It is probable that in 1807 an audience of Paisley Burnsians would have found it highly entertaining.

Tannahill's 'Ode' for the 1810 meeting of the Paisley Burns Club was written at the request of that year's President, William Wylie. In a letter to James Clark dated 17<sup>th</sup> December, 1809, Tannahill gives some details of its genesis:

There is not a man in the world whom I would rather wish to oblige before yourself, and am sorry that I cannot comply with your flattering proposition of my writing an Ode for your ensuing Anniversary. A few days prior to the receipt of yours, Wylie was chosen for our next years President, and in a moment of enthusiasm I came under a promise to furnish him with something of that kind for what he calls his Night. I shall attempt something— however, I tremble when I think of it. To do justice to the subject would require the abilities of a Campbell or a Scott, and almost despair of being able to produce anything half so good as what has already been, by different hands, given to the public; besides, I know that the Society are determined to have a blazing account of our meeting sent to some of the newspapers; of course my rhymes are designed to be attached as a train to the dazzling Luminary: or as a long wigl-waglin tail to a Callan's Dragon. We have clever fellows in the society men of genius and College-bred, but there seems to be a jealousy subsisting among them, or a fear of one another, which has prevented any account worthy

of our former meetings from being given in print. I hope our next will be better. I should ere now have acknowledged yours of the 30th ult<sup>c</sup>, but we have been all very busy on this week.<sup>60</sup>

Despite Tannahill's reservations about writing it, the 1810 'Ode' is the best of the three. Gone are the classical allusions and appeals to Jove in the kingdom of the gods. Instead, Tannahill writes an epistle to Burns and Scotland, based on the climate, landscape, character and history of Scotland. Once these have been described in a general sense, the focus moves to a scene of folk sitting round a fireside, telling stories and singing songs to 'charm the weary winter night'. Written almost entirely in rhyming couplets, this is an excellent performance - Tannahill's artistry in pace, phrasing, and rhythm, flows rapid and accurate, like the galloping of Tam's horse Meg, in 'Tam o' Shanter':

Weel mounted on his gray mare, *Meg*,  
A better never lifted leg,  
*Tam* skelpit on thro' dub and mire,  
Despising wind, and rain, and fire.  
Robert Burns, 'Tam o' Shanter,' lines 79-83.<sup>61</sup>

Tannahill then describes songs and stories told at a fireside gathering. This reflects 'Tam o' Shanter' and illustrates simple social bonds; John Parkhill writing in 1841, tells how Black Peter Burnet entertained Tannahill and his siblings with ghost stories, and something of this experience might well be coming through, making this a piece of poetry with roots in books and reading, and in Tannahill's actual life:<sup>62</sup>

...many a song and jest goes round,  
With tales of ghosts and rites profound,  
Perform'd in dreary wizard-glen,  
By wrinkled hags and warlike men,  
Or of the hell-fee'd crew combined,  
Carousing on the midnight wind,  
On some infernal errand bent,  
While darkness shrouds their black intent;  
But chiefly, Burns, thy songs delight  
To charm the weary winter night.<sup>63</sup>

This is a fine poem for loud recital. It works well as a tribute to Burns the poet, Burns the songster, and to Scotland. After the opening quatrain:

Again the happy day returns,  
A day to Scotchmen ever dear,  
Tho' bleakest of the changful year  
It blest us with a Burns.

A vivid description of Scottish January weather is then given in the second stanza:

Fierce the whirling blast may blow,  
Drifting wide the crispy snow;  
Rude the ruthless storms may sweep,  
Howling round our mountains steep;  
While the heavy lashing rains,  
Swell our rivers, drench our plains,  
And the angry ocean roars  
Round our broken craggy shores;  
But mindful of our poet's worth,  
We hail the honoured day that gave him birth.<sup>64</sup>

However, at the end of the 'Ode' Scottish society comes under attack for not fully appreciating Burns as a poet and as a person when he was alive:

Himself the while with sick'ning woes opprest,  
Fast hast'ning on to where the weary rest—  
For this let Scotia's bitter tears atone,  
She reck'd not half his worth till he was gone.<sup>65</sup>

Here, it is possible that Tannahill may have been writing as much about himself as about Burns.

These Odes were written for performance, and from that perspective are successful, but for impact, immediacy, and skill in both rhythm and expression, the last ode is by far the best. Nevertheless, without the others for comparison its impact would probably be lessened rather than intensified. The 1810 'Ode' is better than the other two because real people are doing real things, the weather and the landscape are recognisable, 'And the angry ocean roars/ Round our broken craggy shores'. The contrast between sitting at home in warmth listening to

ghost stories with the fierce cold Scottish winter outdoors, adds to the impact of the descriptive passages. It is altogether less 'abstract' and less 'nebulous', to use Carruthers's terms, than the 1805 and 1807 odes.<sup>66</sup> The rhythm is tightly controlled and the pace that of a gallop. The influence of 'Tam o' Shanter' is obvious, but Tannahill does not stultify the piece with over use of abstraction or hero worship. The depiction of folk sitting round listening to stories 'of ghosts and rites profound' is as real as the suggestion that the 'story' they are listening to is that of Tam riding through the night on Meg. The more immediate metaphors of weather and of family and social ties, to suggest Burns is a poet who warms people's hearts, are far superior to those of the gods in heaven (1805 Ode), or of an underlying fear of French invasion (1807 Ode).

What is worrisome, is that these odes may represent an unhealthily obsessive attitude towards Burns within the society that helped bring the odes themselves into being. Whether this has been positive for Scottish literature in the long term remains open to question. As Robert Crawford argues:

The prominence of Burns among icons of Scottishness has ensured that, in vague terms at least, poetry has been viewed as important to Scotland's cultural identity. On the other hand, a smattering of Burns has been used by a lot of folk inside and outside Scotland as an excuse for ignoring all the rest of Scottish poetry. For too many people Scotland is allowed only one poet.<sup>67</sup>

Crawford puts his finger on a very important Scottish cultural dichotomy, a dichotomy which regrettably, can present a view that Scotland has produced one great poet, Robert Burns, and hundreds of very minor poets since the death of Burns in 1796.

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Glasgow poet Thomas Campbell was deeply concerned with the plight of Poland, the right of Polish people to self-determination, and with other Whig causes. He was criticised for his

long, didactic poems and *The Pleasures of Hope* is certainly long, but it was a poem which made both an impression and his reputation:

“The rapture of April, 1799,” says a writer in the *Quarterly Review*, “on the first appearance of *The Pleasures of Hope*, was very natural. Burns had lately died. Cowper was sunk in hopeless insanity, soon to be released. [...] The moment was fortunate.”<sup>68</sup>

Tannahill admired his contemporary and fellow ardent pipe smoker, Campbell, a bookish Glaswegian poet, honoured now by a statue that stands in Glasgow city centre at George Square. Campbell’s statue is less than ten minutes walk from his birthplace in High Street, though like Alexander Wilson, he was a man with itchy feet who travelled far beyond his native city. He was installed as Lord Rector of the University of Glasgow on Thursday, April 12th 1827, a largely ceremonial position. Tannahill wrote an appreciation of Campbell’s *Pleasures of Hope* in 1805. In stark contrast to Campbell’s epic, Tannahill’s poem runs to only eighteen lines:

**Lines,  
on the “PLEASURES OF HOPE”**

How seldom ’tis the Poet’s happy lot  
T’ inspire his readers with the fire he wrote;  
To strike those chords that wake the latent thrill,  
And wind the willing passions to his will.  
Yes, Campbell, sure that happy lot is thine,  
With fit expression, rich from Nature’s mine,  
Like old Timotheus, skilful plac’d on high,  
To rouse revenge, or soothe to sympathy.  
Blest Bard! who chose no paltry, local theme,  
Kind Hope through wide creation is the same;  
Yes, Afric’s sons shall one day burst their chains,  
Will read thy lines and bless thee for thy pains;  
Fame yet shall waft thy name to India’s shore,  
Where, next to Brahma, thee they will adore;  
And Hist’ry’s page, exulting in thy praise,  
Will proudly hand thee down to future days:  
Detraction foil’d, reluctant quits her grip,



And carping Envy silent bites her lip.<sup>69</sup>

What we see in Tannahill's 'Lines' is not only an admirer, but someone with a mind receptive to radical ideas. He strongly approved of the general humanitarian principles and internationalism of outlook to which Campbell gave voice. It is noteworthy that Tannahill penned his 'Lines, On The Pleasures of Hope' in 1805, the same year that his friend William McLaren made an impassioned, anti-imperialist speech at the first meeting of the Paisley Burns Club. Campbell is a 'Blest Bard! who chose no paltry, local theme', similar to McLaren, who, in his address to the Paisley Burns Club portrayed imperialists as 'rich with the spoils of a ravaged country, and clotted with the blood of an innocent people'.<sup>70</sup> So while the Paisley Burns Club was a 'local' organisation, McLaren made clear its commitment to a Burnsian conception of mankind being brothers the world over.

Tannahill's sentiments in 'Lines', accord with the ideological outlook expressed in *The Pleasures of Hope*. His vision that 'Afric's sons shall one day burst their chains', complements Campbell's view that European imperialism in Africa and India has dire consequences for the indigenous inhabitants. Campbell singles out the Congo as a location of particularly shameful acts, and even today this country is robbed of its resources and many of its people enslaved.<sup>71</sup> Both Campbell and Tannahill are making bold political statements, there is nothing 'muted' here.<sup>72</sup> In this light, it is little wonder that William Motherwell was not keen on Tannahill's poetry. As Campbell states:

Did peace descend, to triumph and to save,  
When freeborn Britons crossed the Indian wave?  
Ah, no! — to more than Rome's ambition true,  
The Nurse of Freedom gave it not to you!  
She the bold route of Europe's guilt began,  
And, in the march of nations, led the van!<sup>73</sup>

While in *The Pleasures of Hope* Campbell employs the concept of the 'noble savage' in his

depiction of those at the mercy of Empire building, he also argues that as educated and cultured Europeans, we should have known better than to traverse the globe behaving as ignoble savages. The reader is challenged by Campbell to answer the question: whose behaviour is wild and uncivilised? A challenge responded to by Tannahill in his 'Lines', by siding with the oppressed rather than imperialist ideology.

The lines 'And Hist'ry's page, exulting in thy praise/ Will proudly hand thee down to future days', are of considerable significance. They highlight the fact that in the second half of the poem (lines 11-18) Tannahill's visualizes a 'future' free from British imperialism for both Africa and India. To argue for such a future, at a time when the historical trajectory of British capitalism was to expand the Empire and seek replacements for the lost American colonies, is a serious criticism of British government policy. Subsequent key elements of British identity were formed from early nineteenth-century colonial experience; and for Tannahill, to challenge the future of the British Empire was to challenge that historical pathway. Regardless of how circumspect Tannahill may have been in using Campbell as a figure through which to envisage a future free of imperialism, this in itself was a bold and radical act of imagination and poetic expression. Sentimental disapproval of the African slave-trade was common in the poetry of the time, but here Tannahill's argument (echoing Campbell) moves beyond that: connecting the circumstances of Africa and India and suggesting that these continents run their own affairs free of external interference.

The line 'Yes, Afric's sons shall one day burst their chains' is highly significant for a poet who has become known as an intensely local writer. It recognises that human beings in one locality are entitled to the same rights as those in another. His statement that 'Hope through wide creation is the same' confirms this and embodies perfectly Lisa Jardine's notion

of 'parochial concerns writ large'.<sup>74</sup> Tannahill saw 'Hope' as a positive force equally distributed throughout humanity. Regardless of whether one lived in Africa, India, Europe or the Americas, 'Hope' could lead to social change; 'Kind Hope' could help folk in India and Africa, indeed, those enslaved anywhere could conceive of a different and better future, just as Campbell and Tannahill did. Although in 1778, the Court of Session in Scotland had ruled slave-owning illegal, slave-trading was legal when Tannahill wrote 'Lines on The Pleasures of Hope' in 1805. And while the Act to abolish slave-trading in Britain was passed in 1807, the struggle for the ultimate abolition of slavery continues. Today, Campbell and Tannahill's 'Hope' remains resonant as a precious emotional and spiritual resource that challenges us to 'burst' such 'chains'.

### **SOCIAL-POLITICAL POEMS**

Just as hunting had been valued because it stimulated warfare, so cock-fighting and bear-baiting had been esteemed as representations of private combat. The cock was a symbol of masculine fortitude and sexual prowess.<sup>75</sup>

During the period of the Napoleonic wars, cock-fighting was seen by some people as essential to the maintenance of a masculine culture proficient in producing fighting men and sustaining Empire. Cock-fighting was not made illegal until 1849, although cock-pits were outlawed in 1835. Opponents of Parliamentary reform for the regulation, or abolition, of hunting, cock-fighting and bull-baiting, frequently complained that such measures would result in the effeminisation of British manhood, as well as deprive the poor of their pleasures: 'in 1802 the politician William Wyndham, speaking in Parliament, defended bull-baiting as a preferable alternative to Jacobinism'.<sup>76</sup> From this perspective cock-fights fostered a martial spirit, particularly necessary in a Britain at war with France. Almost no one at this time (around 1800) was seriously proposing that animal life had the same value as human life, but there

was debate about whether human beings had the right to be cruel to animals and this debate was undermining the idea that animals were human playthings. Species hierarchy was beginning to be called into question and this is echoed in Tannahill's poetry. His poem, 'The Cock-Pit', is an unmasked and earnest attack on the 'sport' of cock-fighting. Written in the present tense, the lines are short and jagged, the stanzas are four lined with lines two and four rhyming. It has a short paragraph of prose by way of introduction:

*The barbarian-like amusement of seeing two animals instinctively destroy each other certainly affords sufficient for the pen of the Satirist; the author thought he could not do it more effectually than by giving a picture of the cock-pit, and describing a few of the characters who generally may be seen at such glorious contests.*<sup>77</sup> [Tannahill's italics]

Tannahill goes into some detail in his description of the crowd attending the fight, 'All gamblers, swindlers, ragamuffins,/ Vot'ries of the stoup'. He focuses on a series of particular individuals and their reactions to the fight after they have placed their bets. Those in attendance are described as 'gamblers, swindlers, ragamuffins', but are not necessarily from poverty stricken backgrounds:

But see yon fellow all in black,  
His looks speak inward joy;  
Mad-happy since his father's death,  
Sporting his legacy.

Even members of the same family argue over what the outcome of the fight might be:

See, here's a father 'gainst a son,  
A brither 'gainst a brither,  
Wha, e'en wi' mair than common spite,  
Bark hard at ane anither.

The depiction of the crowd is important as it reflects some complex ideological contradictions described by D. B. Davis, writing in 1975, who argued that campaigns against animal cruelty gave:

legitimacy to an emerging British ruling class by incorporating “benevolence” into its ideology, while at the same time carefully limiting the scope of that benevolence so that it could not threaten class hegemony.<sup>78</sup>

‘The Cock-Pit’ illustrates that those who gamble on cock-fights are debased:

Here bawls another vent’rous soul,  
Who risks his every farthing;  
What d—l’s the matter though at home  
His wife an’ brats are starving.

Gambling is condemned as a strong causal factor in relation to cock-fighting’s popularity.

There is no doubt that these crowd scenes are designed to bespeak moral bankruptcy and monetary ruin, but there is no clear indication of cause and effect with regard to whether cock-fighting leads to moral bankruptcy, or moral bankruptcy leads to cock-fighting. What seems clear from the prose introduction is that Tannahill’s intention was to expose the ‘barbarian-like’ character of the ‘amusement’, ‘by giving a picture of the cock-pit, and describing a few of the characters’. Stanza three concentrates on the practice of dangling overweight cocks from a rope so that the bird flutters until it has lost an appropriate amount of weight. This was generally thought to weaken the bird and those aware that the bird had been ‘swung’ did not bet on it:

Here comes the “feeder” with his charge;  
’Mong friends ’tis whispered straight,  
How long he swung him on a string,  
To bring him to his weight.

Some wealthier people opposed cock-fighting because it was a gathering place for the poor and they feared gatherings of potentially unruly mobs. Tannahill to some extent exploits the stereotype of the unruly mob to condemn cock-fighting, even if his unruly mob does not consist solely of the poor. He also satirises head-on, one argument in favour of the ‘sport’ that to ban it would deprive the poor of their pleasure:

But why of *it*, thus lightly speak?  
The poor man's ae best frien'—  
When fortune's sky lours dark an' grim,  
It clears the drumly scene.

Tannahill treats the poor man's pleasure argument with contempt. In the next stanza we see a gambler who is not at all cheered by, or taking any pleasure in, the fight:

Here sits a wretch with meagre face,  
And sullen, drowsy eye;  
Nor speaks he much — last night at cards  
A gamester drained him dry.

What happens in this poem is that we are presented with two instances of cruelty to the birds before the fight has started; the enforced weight loss and fact that the cocks are 'bereft of Nature's garb'. When the fight commences the action shifts to the crowd and a panoramic view is given: 'Now cast a serious eye around', followed by the dismissal of the poor man's pleasure argument. Next, we see the characters close-up and Tannahill deploys a series of arguments that suggest cock-fighting, and the gambling associated with it, are damaging to familial relationships: a father spends the housekeeping money, brother argues with brother, and an heir celebrates his 'legacy' rather than mourning his father's death. Then, last seen in close-up, is an alcoholic who can't afford a bet and here the fight comes to an end with 'loud huzzas'; at this point the narrator notes 'what deep dejection sits/ On every *losers* face'. So Tannahill is pointing out that the pleasure is derived as much from the gambling as from the fight, but moreover, the real '*losers*' are the cocks.

There is something of a parallel between 'The Cock-Pit' and John Clare's 'Badger Sonnets', Clare would have no doubt read 'The Cock-Pit', but what he thought of it is unknown. Tannahill writes in 'The Cock-Pit':

No fancied muse will I invoke,  
To grace my humble strain,

But sing my song in homely phrase,  
Inspir'd by what I've seen.<sup>79</sup>

And, indeed, this echoes Burns, the 'heaven-taught ploughman' and Clare, the 'unlettered rustic'. Clare presents some rather grim detail in the 'Badger Sonnets' as does Tannahill in 'The Cock-Pit':<sup>80</sup>

Now mark what deep dejection sits  
On every *loser's* face.

Observe the *owner* — frantic man,  
With imprecations dread,  
He grasps his vanquish'd idol-god,  
And twirls off his head.

The poem might have been better had Tannahill left there, finishing on a note of shock. Instead, he adds a final moralizing stanza, insisting that cock-fighting itself is not manly, thus attacking the argument that the 'sport' wards off the effeminisation of the British male:

But, bliss attend their feeling souls,  
Wha nae sic deeds delight in!  
Brutes are but brutes, let men be *men*,  
Nor pleasure in COCK-FIGHTING.

Ideologically, opposition to cock-fighting was double-edged in that its discouragement also formed part of a programme against general idleness and disorder. By highlighting its relationship with debauched and undisciplined characters, Tannahill was taking something from the arguments of those in authority who wanted people to behave more respectably, or feared the mob. However, he also adopts arguments from 'humane' progressive reformers who opposed cock-fighting on the grounds of its cruelty.

Tannahill's overall depiction of 'The Cock-Pit' shows us that in debasing nature, human beings become debased. Human debasement is illustrated with images of fractures in familial relationships, though these fractures are brought about by gambling rather than the

cock-fight itself. Also of interest is that the scene Tannahill chooses to show us concentrates on the people at the fight, on the audience rather than on the actors (the birds). He turns away from showing us the cruelty of the fight itself: the mood is serious but our eyes are averted from the brutality of the fight until it is over, and the shock of twirling off of the bird's head is presented.

George Crabbe's stanza on cock-fighting from the first part of *The Parish Register* published in October 1807, shows more of the actual cock-fight than Tannahill's poem.

Crabbe, unlike Tannahill, is not diverted by socio-political arguments about cock-fighting:

Here his poor bird th' inhuman Cocker brings,  
Arms his hard heel and clips his golden wings;  
With spicy food th' impatient spirit feeds,  
And shouts and curses as the battle bleeds.  
Struck through the brain, deprived of both his eyes,  
The vanquished bird must combat till he dies;  
Must faintly peck at his victorious foe,  
And reel and stagger at each feeble blow:  
When fallen, the savage grasps his dabbled plumes,  
His blood-stain'd arms, for other deaths assumes;  
And damns the craven-fowl, that lost his stake,  
And only bled and perished for his sake.<sup>81</sup>

In fairness to Tannahill, he covers everything dealt with in Crabbe's first four lines and last four lines, and with almost equal aplomb. But, when the four central lines in Crabbe's stanza lay bare the truly cruel nature of the fight, the narrator in Tannahill's poem turns away to the audience where Crabbe focuses on the fight:

Struck through the brain, deprived of both his eyes,  
The vanquished bird must combat till he dies;  
Must faintly peck at his victorious foe,  
And reel and stagger at each feeble blow:

Tannahill tells us that cock-fighting debases human beings but omits much detail of the fight. One can venture that Tannahill's sense of Augustan politeness or sensitivity restrains him, he



shifts his focus to the abstract, discussing principles of human debasement and the humane treatment of animals rather than allowing images of the actual fight speak directly to the reader. Crabbe's lines on the other hand, bypass reason and go straight from image to emotion, whereas, Tannahill tries to appeal as much to our reason – denoting the destructive aspects of gambling – as to our emotion. Whilst Tannahill presents a more sophisticated poetic argument than Crabbe, Tannahill's invocation of the rational blunts some of the emotional potential in the poem. 'The Cock-Pit' is, nevertheless, a powerful and thought-provoking piece: although it contains a technical ambiguity, it is unambiguous in its opposition to cock-fighting.

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Tannahill's poem 'The Trifler's Sabbath Day', falls into the category of a humorous social commentary concentrating on aspects of daily life. It is the summing up of a lazy Sunday, describing the feeling of wanting to stay warm in bed in the morning rather than getting up and facing the day. The choice of a Sunday as the day for the action (or lack of it) adds a religious dimension, giving the poem an underlying seriousness. Like 'The Cock-Pit', this is a poem of social observation combined with political debate, but also has a strong element of humour:

LOUD sounds the deep-mouth'd parish bell,  
Religion kirkward hies,  
*John* lies in bed and counts each knell,  
And thinks 'tis time to rise.

But, O how weak are man's resolves!  
His projects ill to keep,  
*John* thrusts his nose beneath the clothes,  
And doses o'er asleep.

Now fairy-fancy plays her freaks  
Upon his sleep-swell'd brain;

He dreams — he starts — he mutt'ring speaks,  
And waukens wi' a grane.<sup>82</sup>

By mid-day the pangs of hunger force John out of bed. He spends the rest of the Sabbath smoking, catching a mouse and telling stories until he is (paradoxically) tired with doing so little. Passing time is signalled by the ever present clock chiming the hour, though John in his reverie notices only every second hour. The poem communicates that strange feeling of time moving quickly at some points in the day and slowly at others, until suddenly the day is over:

He rubs his e'en — the clock strikes TWELVE —  
Impelled by hunger's grup,  
One mighty effort backs resolve —  
He's up — at last he's up!

Hunger appeas'd — his cutty pipe  
Employs his time till TWO, —  
And now he saunters round the house,  
And knows not what to do.

He baits the trap — catches a mouse —  
He sports it round the floor —  
He swims it in a water tub —  
Gets *glorious* fun till FOUR!

And now of cats, and mice, and rats,  
He tells a thousand tricks,  
Till even dullness tires herself,  
For hark — the clock strikes SIX!

Now view him in his easy chair  
Recline his pond'rous head,  
'Tis EIGHT — now Bessie raiks the fire,  
And *John* must go to bed!<sup>83</sup>

This poem has a quiet humour rather than that of the belly-laugh. It is as if John has been taken over by 'fairy-fancy', and having been summoned by the church bell into a dream world of his own, spends the day with his pipe and 'cats, and mice, and rats' for company. The seriousness of the first stanza adds to the effect, making John's subsequent actions all the

more trivial and humorous. ‘Loud sounds the deep-mouth’d parish bell’, impresses the authority of the church and the grave import of the Minister’s sermon (had John got out of bed to attend the service). The use of assonance in the first stanza is excellent, suggesting that the whole town is under the spell of the bell: with the ‘loud’ ‘sounds’ of its mouth, it has the whole parish in its thrall. But the bell has had the opposite effect upon John to that intended. Rather than rousing John to go to church, in stanza two, ‘*John thrusts his nose beneath the clothes,/And doses o’er asleep*’. The power of the church bell has lost its authoritative meaning for John. He does not have any sense of guilt or regret at not attending church and the attitude of the narrator is one of mild amusement at John’s antics rather than condemnation. ‘Religion kirkward hies’, is a key line in this piece which directs the reader to Tannahill’s view in ‘The Resolve’, that people should be free on Sundays:

Tae gang as best may please oursel’s—  
 Some tae the kirk some tae the fiel’s’,  
 I’ve wander’d out, wi serious leuk,  
 Tae read twa page on Nature’s beuk;  
 For lang I’ve thocht, as little harm in  
 Hearin a lively out-fiel sermon,  
 Even tho rowtet by a stirk,  
 As that aft bawl’d in crowded kirk<sup>84</sup>

And while we might laugh at John, at least he has chosen to please himself rather than follow the crowd to church. The concept of blind obedience is also satirised by Tannahill in ‘Mode for Attaining a Character’:

Look grave, demure as any owl—  
 A cheerful look might damn the whole,  
 Gang rigid to the kirk on Sunday,  
 With face as lang’s a gothic window;  
 But from these maxims should’st thou sever,  
 Poor profligate! thou’rt lost for ever.<sup>85</sup>

Blind obedience to church authority was obviously not for Tannahill. The irony in the last couplet above suggests that people should form their opinions on points of theology free from coercion. From the perspective of the narrator of 'Mode for Attaining a Character', the idea that the church can decide to damn your soul if you disagree with its way of doing things is ridiculous. Tannahill illustrates with wit and realism in 'The Trifler's Sabbath Day', that the only thing that will happen to you if you don't go to church is, at the end of the Sabbath day you 'must go to bed'. You will not be 'lost for ever' in eternal damnation.

Tannahill appears uncritical of John when he 'swims' the mouse in the water tub. The activity is presented as mindless, yet harmless, amusement. We are not told what John does with the mouse after he finishes. Quite possibly he just sets it free. Gerard Carruthers argues that John drowns the mouse, however, this is an 'off the page' inference, there is no evidence in the text that reveals the ultimate fate of the mouse. Carruthers states that this is a 'grotesque portrait of a man drowning a mouse in a tub', referring to the lines:<sup>86</sup>

He baits the trap — catches a mouse —  
He sports it round the floor —  
He swims it in a water tub —  
Gets *glorious* fun till four!

The truth is, he 'swims' the mouse in the tub and that is as much as we know of its fate. What the stanza does suggest is that John is indulging in a rather senseless 'sport'; while *seriously sensible* folk have been at church, John is having '*glorious* fun'. Whether or not John drowns the mouse, the use of '*glorious*' infers John's activities have a parallel with the '*glorious* fun' of going to church. There is a further complication however, in that the sarcastic use of '*glorious*' draws our attention to John's inhumane treatment of the mouse. This verse can be seen as a metaphor that equates the swimming of the mouse in the tub with church attendance, finally representing both activities as mindless and potentially, inhumane. Apart

from in his treatment of the mouse, John is presented sympathetically and humorously: his 'Sabbath day' is not shown as a total waste of time in comparison with those who have spent the day in religious devotion. Therefore, in a poem offered as humorous social observation a serious point is made with subtlety and wit, about unthinking obedience both to personal whims and religious authority; and if we are to laugh at personal whims, we are surely being invited to laugh at, and perhaps call into question, religious authority.

## CONCLUSION

Tannahill's is a moral poetry: he attempts to place humanity at its centre and explore with honesty what makes human beings good and bad, while seeking to create an awareness of the need to strive to make the world better. He is insistent in his beliefs, promulgating sympathy for those suffering injustice and oppression. Where he is political, it is generally with a small 'p' and this is indicative of the influence of Burns's epistles. Indeed, Liam McIlvanney's view of the epistles of Burns, might as easily apply to Tannahill's epistles:

They do not raise questions of government corruption... but they remain political on a different level. They show the civic virtue of a community far removed from the metropolitan world of status and power and wealth. They assert the efficacy of non-material values – good-fellowship, fraternity, sympathy – against the corrupt self-seeking of the governing class. And in their celebration of friendship there is a radicalism, a politicised sociability.<sup>87</sup>

Where Tannahill differs from Burns, is in his more deeply held antipathy to patronage.

Tannahill frequently attacks patronage and hierarchy, and it is here that radicalism finds expression in his poetry. One such attack occurs in 'Epistle to James Buchanan, Aug. 1806':

I ne'er, as yet, hae found a patron,  
For, scorn be till't! I hate aw flatt'rin',  
Besides, I never had an itchin'  
To slake about a great man's kitchen,  
An' like a spaniel, lick his dishes,

An' come an' gang just to his wishes;<sup>88</sup>

The extremely short, 'Lines, On a country Justice on the South', which calls into question the assumed wisdom and authority of judges, is also an attack on hierarchy:

LINES

On a country Justice in the South.

What gars yon gentry gang wi' Jock,  
An' ca' him Sir and Master?  
The greatest dunce, the biggest block,  
That ever Nature cuist her;  
Yet see, they've plac'd this human stock  
Strict justice to dispense:  
Which plainly shows yon meikle folk  
Think *siller* stands for *sense*.<sup>89</sup>

Here, Tannahill attacks the notions that authority and intellect derive from wealth. Whilst on one hand, this has roots in Burnsian egalitarianism, on the other, Tannahill is far less susceptible than Burns to the power of patronage. Tannahill's poetry expresses a desire for emancipation from the dual tyrannies of irrational authority and superstition.

There are a number of notable features in Tannahill's epistles. They hark back to the Augustan, both formally and in some of their language and phraseology, and are also informed by a notion of popular enlightenment, allowing critical analysis of conceptions of friendship and social habit. Tannahill reveals aspects of his personal and public morality, and this duality (personal versus public) is emphasised by the nature of epistolarity itself, which accommodates oscillations between private and public worlds within a single poetic space. Tannahill's epistles are a public space where he worked out his opinions, ideas, personal and social morality. It is also arguable that they show an effort to resist his own negative emotional states. He engages in positive discourse with a community of his contemporaries, yet, at the same time, in daily life we find him the victim of morbid thoughts. In a letter to

Alexander Borland he writes: 'I am not so ill neither— have no thoughts of dying yet. Tho' that appears at present to me to be a matter of indifference come when it will'.<sup>90</sup> Ironically, Tannahill appears to have suffered from the 'mind's aloneness' described by William C. Dowling in 1991, as a feature of the epistolary itself:

distance, separation, and absence are figures of the mind's aloneness in the world, and an epistolarity that so unperplexedly overcomes them also represents an evident resource for meeting and vanquishing solipsism on its own ground.

Yet epistolary solitude poses its own threat to any such gesture towards community, for in a scene of writing where nothing exists but the blank page the possibility always lurks that audience or community are themselves mere figments of discourse.<sup>91</sup>

For Tannahill, 'solitude' and 'community' were intimately linked. He was aware of the dangers of becoming a 'cauld, splenetic solitair', but his epistolary community was real.<sup>92</sup>

Tannahill and his friends did exchange verse epistles and letters, they met and socialised with each other. His epistles, in a sense, indicate his desire to be sociable, to engage with acquaintances and the wider public. However, in light of Tannahill's view of himself as an undervalued writer, ignored, lonely and obscure, a parallel can be drawn with Dowling's theoretical 'threat' posed by 'epistolary solitude' and Tannahill's attempts to engage with his community and a wider readership; attempts which possibly reflect a psychological strategy to resist personal fragmentation.

Epistolary descriptions of experience in moments of solitary contemplation place Tannahill within both Augustan and Romantic sensibilities. However, Tannahill's poetry overall can be seen through the lenses of two relatively recent critical currents, that of the 'pastoral' in the work of Terry Gifford and of the 'romantic' in the work of Sayre and Lowy.<sup>93</sup> According to Gifford:

To the extent that the pastoral represents an idealisation it must also imply a better future conceived in the language of the present. Just as the country location enables a direct or indirect critique of the town, and the evocation of a Golden Age has implications for the present, so this must also have implications for an ideal notion of the future. If this were not the case, the pastoral would lose its oppositional potential.<sup>94</sup>

Sayre and Lowy argue along similar lines with regard to the idea of ‘oppositional potential’ as a component of ‘romanticism’:

the unifying element in the romantic movement in its principal manifestations throughout the key European countries (Germany, England, France, Russia) [is]: *opposition to capitalism in the name of precapitalist values*.<sup>95</sup>

The Augustan and the pastoral in Tannahill’s poetry represent a notion of ‘precapitalist values’ in which ‘siller’ did not stand for sense. Concerning the period in which Tannahill was writing, Sayre and Lowy further argued that:

In this period we often find a subtle admixture of classic Enlightenment attitudes, along with something quite new and different that later comes to be called romanticism; and in certain cases the two elements do not exist in contradictory juxtaposition, but rather the second represents a kind of radicalization from within the Enlightenment nucleus [...] as a whole romanticism cannot be defined as the antithesis of Enlightenment.<sup>96</sup>

It must be remembered that ‘romanticism’ is itself a highly contentious term with meanings that can be seen as shifting. It is perhaps more useful to think of ‘romanticisms’ *plural*, rather than any single set of ideas or ideology. As Michael O’Neill argues; ‘if it has to have an essence, that essence involves a fundamental bias in favour of doubleness, multiplicity, tension and division’.<sup>97</sup> Nevertheless, Tannahill’s romanticism accords with Sayre’s and Lowy’s definition in that he subscribes to a Presbyterian sense of ‘precapitalist values’ deriving from the biblical idea in the Book of Timothy that ‘the love of money is the root of all evil’. This theme arises in the poem ‘Antipathy’, a satire on sycophancy and what Tannahill sees as the stupidity and hypocrisy of both those who worship money and those



who bow to authority:

I SCORN the selfish purse-proud —,  
Who piques himself on being rich  
With twoscore pounds, late legacied,  
Sav'd by his half-starv'd father's greed—  
To former neighbours not one word!  
He bows obsequious to my Lord.  
In public see him — how he capers!  
Looks big — stops short — pulls out his papers,  
And from a silly, puppish dance,  
Commences the great man at once.<sup>98</sup>

This anti-hierarchical, satirical treatment of life in the town corresponds with the theoretical position outlined above, that Tannahill's poetry contains interactions between Enlightenment, Augustan and pastoral influences. (The anti-hierarchical stance drawn from Enlightenment egalitarianism, the satirical tone from Augustan literature, and the ridiculing of an urban scene from the pastoral). These combine with the influence of Burns, and Tannahill's expression of the local in his poetry, to give what can be termed as *a particular type of Scottish romanticism*, although this romanticism is expressed more clearly in his song lyrics.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Robert Tannahill, Letter to William Kibble, 11<sup>th</sup> April, 1807, *Poems, Songs and Correspondence of Robert Tannahill*, David Semple, ed. (Paisley, 1876), p. 387.

<sup>2</sup> William Kibble, Letter to Robert Tannahill, 23<sup>rd</sup> July, 1808, David Semple, ed. (Paisley, 1876), p. 416-17.

<sup>3</sup> See David Semple, 'Life of Tannahill', *Poems, Songs and Correspondence of Robert Tannahill*, David Semple, ed. (Paisley, 1876), p. lxxv. Robert Tannahill, *The Soldier's Return, with other Poems and Songs* (Paisley, 1807).

<sup>4</sup> This has a connection with Robert Burns's first two epistles to John Lapraik in which Burns outlines his poetic creed and other matters relating to personal his beliefs. 'Creed' was a word Burns was rather fond of using. 'Social creed', Robert Tannahill, 'Epistle to James Scadlock, April 1803', *The Soldier's Return, with other Poems and Songs* (Paisley, 1807), p. 83.

<sup>5</sup> Robert Tannahill, Letter to Robert Allan, in verse (Glasgow University Library, Special Collections, MS Robertson 1/13). William Finlayson's 'Epistle to Robert Tannahill, Pollokshaws, Feb 1808', appears in William Finlayson, *Simple Scottish Rhymes* (Paisley, 1815), p. 84, and in *Poems, Songs and Correspondence*, ed., Semple, p. 448. Tannahill's wrongly dated [by Semple] 'Epistle to Robert Allan, Kilbarchan, 1807' can also be found in *Poems, Songs and Correspondence*, p. 122, this is a published version of the MS, Letter to Robert Allan, in verse (Glasgow University Library, Special Collections., MS Robertson 1/13).

<sup>6</sup> Robert Tannahill, 'Epistle to A. Borland, Feb 1806', *The Soldier's Return*, p. 67.

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<sup>7</sup> Tannahill, 'Epistle to A. Borland, Feb 1806', *The Soldier's Return*, p. 65.

<sup>8</sup> Liam McIlvanney, *Burns the Radical* (East Linton, 2002), p. 116. Citation, John C. Weston, 'Robert Burns' Use of the Scots Verse-Epistle Form', *Philological Quarterly*, 49 (1970), pp. 188-210, p. 190.

<sup>9</sup> For discussion of Burns's epistles and of the special nature of friendship therein see, Liam McIlvanney, *Burns the Radical* (East Linton, 2002), pp. 106-120.

<sup>10</sup> Robert Tannahill, 'Epistle to James King, May 1802', *The Soldier's Return*, p. 76.

<sup>11</sup> Tannahill, 'Epistle to James King, May 1802', *The Soldier's Return*, p. 77.

<sup>12</sup> Tannahill, 'Epistle to James King, May 1802', *The Soldier's Return*, p. 78.

<sup>13</sup> Tannahill, 'Epistle to James King, May 1802', *The Soldier's Return*, p. 76-7.

<sup>14</sup> Tannahill, 'Why unite to banish care', MS song lyric (GUL, Spec. Colls., MS Robertson 1/51).

<sup>15</sup> Tannahill, 'Epistle to James King, May 1802', *The Soldier's Return*, p. 76.

<sup>16</sup> Tannahill, 'Epistle to James King, May 1802', *The Soldier's Return*, p. 77-8.

<sup>17</sup> Tannahill, 'Epistle to James King, May 1802', *The Soldier's Return*, p. 78.

<sup>18</sup> See Gillian Hughes, 'I think I shall soon be qualified to be my own editor': Peasant Poets and the Control of Literary Production', *John Clare Society Journal*, 22 (2003), p. 11. Hughes states: 'Hogg's parodies of Wordsworth are particularly fine. In 'The Flying Tailor', for example, the Wordsworthian narrative poet reflects  
A pair

Of breeches to his philosophic eye  
Were not what unto other folks they seem,  
Mere simple breeches, but in them he saw  
The symbol of the soul—mysterious, high'

This has a relationship to Tannahill's song lyric 'Rob Roryson's Bonnet', in which Rob thought his bonnet somehow imparted great wit, wisdom and style upon himself.

<sup>19</sup> Robert Tannahill, 'Epistle to James Scadlock, April 1803', *The Soldier's Return*, p. 83. The form of his epistle is based on the structure of the Montgomerie Stanza.

<sup>20</sup> Tannahill, 'Epistle to James Scadlock, April 1803', *The Soldier's Return*, p. 84.

<sup>21</sup> Tannahill, 'Epistle to James Scadlock, April 1803', *The Soldier's Return*, p. 84.

<sup>22</sup> Tannahill, 'Epistle to James Scadlock, April 1803', *The Soldier's Return*, p. 85.

For biographical sketches of Livingston, Anderson, Scadlock and King, see *Poems, Songs and Correspondence*, p. 88.

<sup>23</sup> Robert Tannahill, 'Epistle to William Wylie', *The Soldier's Return*, pp. 89-90.

<sup>24</sup> Robert Tannahill, 'Epistle to James Barr', *The Soldier's Return*, p. 93.

<sup>25</sup> John Clare, *The Letters of John Clare*, Mark Storey, ed. (Oxford, 1985), p. 8. Cited by Gillian Hughes, in 'I think I shall soon be qualified to be my own editor': Peasant Poets and the Control of Literary Production'. *John Clare Society Journal*, 22: 2003, p. 6-16. Hughes argues in her paper that: 'Both Clare and Hogg refer to originality in similar terms to [Edward] Young, Clare enquiring, for example, whether a new poet 'puts on the Spectacles of Books becomes an Imitator or writes from Nature in Original'. Similarly Hogg in his *Lay Sermons* gives the following advice to young men of imagination:

Take the simplicity of Moses, the splendour of Job, David, and Isaiah. Take Homer, and, if you like, Hesiod, Pindar, and Ossian; and by all means William Shakespeare. In short, borrow the fire and vigour of an early period of society, when a nation is verging from barbarism into civilisation; and then you will imbibe the force of genius from its original source.' (p. 6)

<sup>26</sup> Robert Tannahill, 'Epistle to James Barr', *The Soldier's Return*, p. 91.

<sup>27</sup> Tannahill, 'Epistle to James Barr', *The Soldier's Return*, p. 95.

<sup>28</sup> Tannahill, 'Epistle to James Scadlock, June 1804', *The Soldier's Return*, p. 96.

<sup>29</sup> *The Posthumous Works of James Scadlock, with a sketch of his life*, McLaren, ed. (Paisley, 1818), p. 9, 45.

<sup>30</sup> Robert Tannahill, 'Lines on THE PLEASURES OF HOPE', *The Soldier's Return*, p. 99.

<sup>31</sup> Scadlock, *The Posthumous Works of James Scadlock*, p. 9.

<sup>32</sup> Scadlock, *The Posthumous Works of James Scadlock*, pp. 14-15.

<sup>33</sup> Scadlock, *The Posthumous Works of James Scadlock*, p. 46.

- <sup>34</sup> Robert Tannahill, 'Epistle to William Thomson, June 1805', *The Soldier's Return*, pp. 101-102.
- <sup>35</sup> Tannahill, 'Epistle to William Thomson, June 1805', *The Soldier's Return*, p. 102.
- <sup>36</sup> Robert Tannahill, 'Epistle to James Buchanan, Aug. 1806', *The Soldier's Return*, pp. 103-104.
- <sup>37</sup> With the end of the Peace of Amiens the war with France took on a greater ferocity. Both James King and John Parkhill enlisted in local regiments in 1803. Parkhill, later the author of short biographies of Paisley men, was under drill for a considerable time at Paisley, Greenock and Saltcoats. During the Radical Years (1816-20), Parkhill, like his fellow townsman Alexander Wilson during the ferment of 1789-94, thought it safer to flee for America after a stint as Commissary-General in the 'revolutionary party'. Parkhill returned to Paisley when a general amnesty was declared. Parkhill published an autobiography, *The Life and Opinions of Arthur Sneddon* (Paisley, 1860).
- <sup>38</sup> For a short biography of Robert Allan see *Poems, Songs and Correspondence*, p. 122. Interestingly, Allan was one of the founders of the Kilbarchan Library in 1818. According to Semple (p. 122): 'Robert [Allan], in his youth imbibed what were then considered extreme political views, and he was ready to advocate them on all occasions. He spoke at the Great Reform meeting held in the Relief Church in 1817, and took a prominent part in the Radical proceedings in 1819 and 1820'. He died, six days after arriving in New York to start a new life, on 7<sup>th</sup> June 1841, aged 66. His collection, *Evening Hours: Poems and Songs* was published in Glasgow in 1836.
- <sup>39</sup> Robert Tannahill, Letter to Robert Allan, 14<sup>th</sup> March, 1808, in verse (GUL, Spec. Colls., MS Robertson 1/13).
- <sup>40</sup> Robert Tannahill, Letter to Robert Allan, 14<sup>th</sup> March, 1808, in verse (GUL, Spec. Colls., MS Robertson 1/13).
- <sup>41</sup> See Robert Brown, *Paisley Burns Clubs* (Paisley, 1893), pp. 86-89.
- <sup>42</sup> Robert Tannahill, 'Ode. In imitation of Pindar', *The Soldier's Return*, p. 59.
- <sup>43</sup> Tannahill, 'Portrait of Guilt, In imitation of Lewis', *The Soldier's Return*, p. 61. Matthew G. Lewis, was the author of rather racy gothic pieces - most notably the novel *The Monk* (London, 1796) - and thought by some to be a 'dangerous' figure. Tannahill was clearly aware of his work and must have approved of it in some way or he wouldn't have written a piece citing Lewis as an influence.
- <sup>44</sup> Robert Tannahill, 'Ode. In imitation of Pindar', *The Soldier's Return*, p. 60. Peter Pindar (Dr John Wolcott) was an extremely popular English satirist during the 1790s and 1800s, he was particularly well known for lampooning George III.
- <sup>45</sup> Robert Tannahill, 'Ode. In imitation of Pindar' (Paisley, 1807), pp. 59-60.
- <sup>46</sup> Tannahill, 'Connel and Flora', *The Soldier's Return*, p. 132.
- <sup>47</sup> Tannahill, 'The Haunted Wud', *The Soldier's Return*, p. 63.
- <sup>48</sup> Tannahill, 'The Hauntit Wud', from holograph unpublished version (NLS, MS 10335).
- <sup>49</sup> John Barbour, *The Bruce, or, The history of Robert I, King of Scotland: written in Scottish verse by John Barbour*; the first genuine edition, published from a MS dated 1489; with notes and a glossary by J. Pinkerton (London, 1790).
- <sup>50</sup> Tannahill, 'The Haunted Wud', *The Soldier's Return*, p. 63.
- <sup>51</sup> Tannahill, 'The Haunted Wud', *The Soldier's Return*, p. 61.
- <sup>52</sup> William Motherwell, ed., *The Harp of Renfrewshire* (Glasgow, 1819), pp. XLI-II.
- <sup>53</sup> Tannahill, 'Ode. In imitation of Pindar' (Paisley, 1807), p. 59.
- <sup>54</sup> David Semple in his 1876 edition of Tannahill's work presents these poems on Burns as a sequence in chronological order. See, *Poems, Songs and Correspondence*, pp. 41-59.
- <sup>55</sup> Robert Tannahill, 'Ode, for Burns' birthday 1805', *The Soldier's Return*, p. 55.
- <sup>56</sup> Robert Tannahill, 'Ode, for Burns' birthday 1805', *The Soldier's Return*, pp. 56-58.
- <sup>57</sup> Gerard Carruthers, 'Robert Tannahill, – Scottish Poet After Burns', *The Renfrewshire Local History Forum Journal*, Vol. 13 2005/06 (Paisley, 2005), pp. 21-30, 21.
- <sup>58</sup> Tom Crawford, *Burns: A study of the Poems and Songs* (Edinburgh, 1994), p. 190, 192. First published 1960. Tannahill, 'Ode, for Burns' birthday 1805', *The Soldier's Return*, p. 58.
- <sup>59</sup> Tannahill, 'Ode, for Burns' birthday 1807', *The Soldier's Return*, pp 109-112.
- <sup>60</sup> Robert Tannahill, Letter to James Clark, 17<sup>th</sup> December, 1809 (GUL, Spec. Colls., MS Robertson 1/33).
- <sup>61</sup> Robert Burns, *The Poems and Songs of Robert Burns*, Vol. II., James Kinsley, ed. (Oxford, 1968), p. 559.
- <sup>62</sup> See John Parkhill, *The Life of Peter Burnet* (Paisley, 1841), p. 15.
- <sup>63</sup> Robert Tannahill, 'Burns Anniversary Meeting, 1810', *Poems, Songs and Correspondence*, pp. 58-59.
- <sup>64</sup> Robert Tannahill, 'Burns Anniversary Meeting, 1810', *Poems, Songs and Correspondence*, pp. 54-56.
- <sup>65</sup> Robert Tannahill, 'Burns Anniversary Meeting, 1810', *Poems, Songs and Correspondence*, p. 59.
- <sup>66</sup> See, Gerard Carruthers, 'Robert Tannahill, – Scottish Poet After Burns', pp. 21-30.
- <sup>67</sup> Robert Crawford, 'The Bard: Ossian, Burns and the Shaping of Shakespeare', in *Shakespeare and Scotland*,

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Maley and Murphy, eds. (Manchester, 2004), p. 133.

<sup>68</sup> Epes Sargent, 'Life of Campbell', *The Complete Poetic Works of Thomas Campbell*, Epes Sargent, ed. (Boston, 1859), p. 24.

<sup>69</sup> Robert Tannahill, 'Lines, on the 'PLEASURES OF HOPE'' *The Soldier's Return*, p. 99.

<sup>70</sup> William McLaren, cited in Robert Brown, *Paisley Burns Clubs* (Paisley, 1893), p. 39.

<sup>71</sup> The mining of Coltan, a mineral which is essential for the electronics industry, has caused massive environmental damage and human misery in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The wealth accumulated from Coltan mining has been used to fund armies of whatever kind, and brought slavery to the fore as an everyday practice. See United Nations and Amnesty reports from mid 1990s to the present. Amnesty 'Democratic Republic of the Congo', website: [web.amnesty.org/library/index/engaf620102003](http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engaf620102003) (Accessed 23/1/06).

<sup>72</sup> Mary Ellen Brown in her essay, 'Tannahill as a Local Poet', argues that in most of Tannahill's poetry 'Other references to the times are more muted'. However, there are occasions when the mute comes off, 'Lines, on The Pleasures of Hope' being one example. See M. E. Brown, 'Tannahill as a Local Poet', *Paisley Poets: a critical reappraisal*, James & McCrae, eds. (Paisley, 1993), p. 32.

<sup>73</sup> Thomas Campbell, 'The Pleasures of Hope', *The Complete Poetic Works of Thomas Campbell*, Epes Sargent, ed. (Boston, 1859), p. 120.

<sup>74</sup> See Lisa Jardine, *Erasmus Man of Letters* (New Jersey, 1993), p. 20.

<sup>75</sup> Keith Thomas, *Man and the Natural World* (London, 1983), p. 183.

<sup>76</sup> Keith Thomas, *Man and the Natural World*, p. 185. For details of these arguments see pp. 181-191.

<sup>77</sup> Robert Tannahill, 'The Cock-Pit', *The Soldier's Return*, p. 120, (pp. 120-123). Specifically in regard to line length this poem borrows from the traditional 'Kristis Kirk' Scottish verse structure. This verse structure was traditionally employed to describe gala days and public gatherings and Tannahill retains this functionality.

<sup>78</sup> Keith Thomas, *Man and the Natural World*, (London, 1983), p. 187. See D. B. Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1779-1823*, (Ithaca, 1975). See also G. M. Frederickson, 'The Uses of Antislavery', *The New York Review of Books*, xxii (16 Oct. 1975).

<sup>79</sup> Tannahill, 'The Cock-Pit', *The Soldier's Return*, p. 121.

<sup>80</sup> For discussion of Clare's 'Badger Sonnets' see David Perkins, *Romanticism and Animal Rights* (Cambridge, 2003), pp. 89-103.

<sup>81</sup> George Crabbe, from *The Parish Register*, first published 1807, cited in Keith Thomas, *Man and the Natural World*, p. 160. Also, George Crabbe, *The Poetical Works of George Crabbe, Complete in One Volume*, (Paris, 1829), pp. 11-12.

<sup>82</sup> Robert Tannahill, 'The Trifler's Sabbath Day', *The Soldier's Return*, p. 43, (pp. 43-44).

<sup>83</sup> Tannahill, 'The Trifler's Sabbath Day', *The Soldier's Return*, pp. 43-44.

<sup>84</sup> Tannahill, 'The Resolve', *Poems, Songs and Correspondence*, p. 133.

<sup>85</sup> Tannahill, 'Mode for Attaining a Character', *Poems, Songs and Correspondence*, p. 160.

<sup>86</sup> Gerard Carruthers, 'Robert Tannahill, – Scottish Poet After Burns', p. 25.

<sup>87</sup> Liam McIlvanney, *Burns the Radical* (East Linton, 2002), p. 119.

<sup>88</sup> Robert Tannahill, 'Epistle to James Buchanan, Aug. 1806', *The Soldier's Return*, p. 106.

<sup>89</sup> Tannahill, 'LINES On a country Justice in the South', *The Soldier's Return*, p. 136-37.

<sup>90</sup> Tannahill, Letter to Alexander Borland, [May 1810] (GUL, Spec. Colls., MS Robertson, 1/38).

<sup>91</sup> William C. Dowling, *The Epistolary Moment* (Princeton, 1991), p. 27.

<sup>92</sup> Robert Tannahill, 'Epistle to James Barr', *The Soldier's Return*, p. 91.

<sup>93</sup> Terry Gifford, *Pastoral* (London, 1999). Robert Sayre and Michael Lowy, 'Figures of Romantic Anticapitalism', *Spirits of Fire: English Romantic Writers and Contemporary Historical Methods*, Rosso and Watkins, eds. (New Jersey, 1990).

<sup>94</sup> Gifford, *Pastoral*, p. 36.

<sup>95</sup> Robert Sayre and Michael Lowy, 'Figures of Romantic Anticapitalism', p. 26.

<sup>96</sup> Robert Sayre and Michael Lowy, 'Figures of Romantic Anticapitalism', pp. 32-33.

<sup>97</sup> Michael O'Neill, 'Introduction: Romantic Doubleness', *Romantic Poetry: An Annotated Anthology* (Oxford, 2008), p. xxi.

<sup>98</sup> Robert Tannahill, 'Antipathy', *The Soldier's Return*, p. 140.

## 6. Lyricism, Music and Song

### HUMILITY AND EMPATHY

Tannahill's song lyrics often address many of the same Whiggish concerns as his poetry and play but are infused with a greater emotional intensity, with regard to the themes of love and loss, than is present in his poems and epistles. The emphasis on nature and love in his song lyrics can be read as a healthy critical response to the interconnected processes of the growth of the industrial and the demise of the artisan.<sup>1</sup> Rather than reading his pastoral mode of song as a retreat from the political into social conservatism, Tannahill's songs can be seen as a defence of his own way of life, and that of other artisans, from attack by the new economics of the industrial and free-market capitalism. There is an implicit assertion of the 'right to roam' in the songs, for example, in 'Contentment', he makes a clear connection between happiness and the idea of an unencumbered freedom which involves not only an implicit right to roam but also a disavowal of social hierarchy, wealth seeking and ambition:

I care not for honour, preferment, nor wealth,  
Nor the titles that affluence yields,  
While blythely I roam, in the heyday of health,  
'Midst the charms of my dear native fields.<sup>2</sup>

Here again there is an unambiguous rejection of the idea that '*siller* stands for sense', and an implicit assertion that freedom, health and sense of local identity are more important than rank and status.<sup>3</sup> Freedom to roam and enjoy the local countryside was of profound importance because it represented an escape from the stoury air and hunched posture of the loom-shop. This gives Tannahill's lyric appreciation of the outdoors a genuine material basis in addition to his understanding of the pastoral as a Scottish and British literary

tradition. And this material basis is still more emphatic if his tendency to chest illness is taken into account. Walking in the fresh air must have had considerable health benefits for Tannahill and given what appears to have been a temperamental more than an openly political dislike of the powerful and wealthy it is no surprise that he should assert his view of himself that: 'Though humble my lot, not ignoble's my state', and so he might 'blythely roam' wherever he wants in his 'dear native fields'.<sup>4</sup> This theme is re-stated in the song lyric 'Mine Ain Dear Somebody', where romantic love, love of locality and of nature are presented as preferable to war, fame, ambition and the heroic:

WHAN gloamin treads the heels o day,  
An birds sits courin on the spray,  
Along the flow'ry hedge I stray  
Tae meet mine ain dear somebody.

The scented brier, the fragrant bean,  
The clover bloom, the dewy green,  
A charm me, as I rove at e'en,  
Tae meet mine ain dear somebody.

Let warriors prize the hero's name,  
Let mad ambition tow'r for fame,  
I'm happier in my lowly hame,  
Obscurely blest wi somebody.<sup>5</sup>

In his letters he expressed disquiet about his rate of pay and having to work long hours at the loom. There is often a suggestion that poverty, though not quite totally upon him, is not far away. So while Tannahill emphasised humility, his empathy for the poor and attacks on the rich had a basis in the economic reality of his life experience:

I would not write to you on this ugly tea-paper, but 'tis Sunday and I can procure no other— Have you ever felt what our great folks call ennui? I know it only by name; pushing hard through the week to keep poverty at a respectful distance. Keeps the dull, weary, [gaunting] Goddess far from my door.<sup>6</sup>

On another occasion he complained in a note to R. A. Smith that:

my beard's lang, an' my bauchles will hardly stay on my feet. Please come down at edge of dark<sup>7</sup>

The implication of this being that as he has not shaved and doesn't have any decent footwear he will not go out in the day time. In a letter to James King dated 17<sup>th</sup> July, 1808, he writes:

Trade is yet but very low with us, and I cannot say it is yet any better on account of Spain being partly open to us, indeed, manufacturers would be mad to risk their goods there when returns would be so precarious— Sweden seems to have taken the drunt [huff], and that will likely flatten us further. as things are - it is very hard with many a poor family, but with me, the world is passing pretty smoothly - I can just about as much as keep day and way clear— however even to attain that takes hard enough work - but let us drop every-day cracks and have a ten minutes habble on our poetical hobby——<sup>8</sup>

Tannahill clearly saw the war with France as part of the cause of international instability and economic problems. His personal economic circumstances and independence as an artisan were being undermined by both the war and the increasing dominance of market economics. The letter to King continues with two song lyrics; the first to a 'Welch' air and the second to an Irish. The first lyric is 'The Wandering Bard', and while it may be coincidence that this lyric follows on from a discussion of economics, the lyric itself tells the story of a traveller who is walking across a bleak, wintry moor but refuses to enter an isolated inn because he recalls the cruelty of the innkeeper towards a 'wandering bard' on an earlier occasion. It is a vivid description of a 'bard' suffering from economic hardship:

#### The Wandering Bard

##### Written to a favorite Welch air

Chill the wintry winds were blowing  
Foul the murky night was snowing  
Through the storm the minstrel bowing

Sought the Inn on yonder moor  
All within was warm and cheery  
All without was cold and dreary  
There the wand'rer, worn and weary  
Thought to pass a night secure.

Softly rose his mournful ditty  
Suiting to his tale of pity  
But the master scoffing witty,  
Check'd his strain with scornful jeer  
"Hoary vagrant— frequent comer  
"Can'st thou save thy gains of summer  
"No, then old intruding thrummer  
Thou can'st have no lodging here."

Slow the bard departed sighing,  
Wounded worth forbade replying,  
One last feeble effort trying  
Faint he sunk no more to rise  
Through his harp the breeze sharp ringing  
Wild his dying dirge was singing  
While his soul from insult springing  
Sought its mansion in the skies.

Now tho' the wintry winds be blowing  
Night be foul with raining, snowing,  
Still the traveller that way going,  
Shuns the Inn upon the moor  
Tho' within 'tis warm and cheery  
While without 'tis cold and dreary  
Still he minds the minstrel weary  
Spurn'd from that unfriendly door.<sup>9</sup>

The fact that the innkeeper answers his own question, 'Can'st thou save thy gains of summer' with an emphatic 'No, then old intruding thrummer/ Thou can'st have no lodging here', tells us that he sees the bard as a feckless, worthless, 'vagrant'. The traveller, by contrast, will brave the winter elements rather than engage in an economic or social relationship with the innkeeper who has no sympathy for a poor artist. This depiction of a principled traveller refusing to enter premises where a misuse of power has occurred does,



I suggest, carry within it echoes of Tannahill's real life reluctance to enter houses of the rich. It also highlights the idea that Tannahill has internalised the traditional view of weavers as men of culture and learning, and therefore art and artists deserve respect. The narrator leaves us in no doubt that our sympathies should be with the bard and that the traveller has made correct decision in by-passing the inn in spite of its 'warm and cheery' atmosphere. The warmth and cheerfulness are tainted by the misery and death of the bard, inflicted upon him by the innkeeper. The lyric is an analysis of power-relations; the innkeeper can be seen as a patron and the bard a patronised artist who ultimately is destroyed on the patron's whim. Although the plight of the 'bard' in this particular situation is dictated by the 'unfriendly' 'master' of the inn, there is an implied background narrative of the hard life of the 'bard' which is not directly described but happens off the page. The fact that the 'bard' dies indicates that at his time of arrival at the inn he was already in a feeble and fragile state. The reasons for his debility are not given but it would be safer to assume a general economic downturn rather than fecklessness or acts of individual unkindness as the ultimate cause of the bard's demise. The bard is still trying to honestly ply his minstrelsy. The innkeeper is to be scorned for his lack of philanthropy but there is an implied, generalised, socio-political lack of philanthropic virtue that has caused the bard to be so enfeebled even before he ever reaches the inn. The two characters - the bard and the traveller - who are outside the inn are forced to pay a price for their choice of lifestyle and principle, while the comfort of those inside the inn remains undisturbed, a situation which contains within itself the critique that the comfort of some is bought at the expense of others. Further, the lyric does not argue for meek acceptance of the situation, the traveller in his 'consumer-boycott' of the inn is taking action to express his disapproval

of what has happened there. Just as important as the boycott is the act of remembering what has happened, ‘Still he minds the minstrel weary/ Spurn’d from that unfriendly door’, without which the location of an act of injustice cannot be brought to the attention of others and the traveller’s action has no real meaning. Tannahill’s narrative is telling us that artists have a role in recording events and that how the narrative is presented can be a guide to thought and action. In this case a traveller protests against an innkeeper for what he sees as a just cause, but from this particular, the general conclusion that protesting against injustice is both valid and admirable begins to arise. This is a rather muted political message, nevertheless a political message it is. So while Tannahill advocates humility he does not advocate blind acceptance of things as they are.

Tannahill’s criticisms of the mores of his time are tempered by the ‘good things’ of the Industrial Age in the form of cultural activities, such as regular plays and concerts that became possible through the development and expansion of the capitalist economy. Adam Smith asserted that: ‘Arts, manufactures and commerce [are] the industry of towns... agriculture the industry of the country’.<sup>10</sup> Tannahill, who lived physically on the border between the rural and the industrial was ideally placed to witness the process of separation of town from country. With regard to financial hardship, in a letter to James Clark written in June 1808, Tannahill again makes the same point about ‘trade’ being difficult as he did in his letter to King incorporating the lyric to ‘The Wandering Bard’:

I have scarcely as much leisure time to say God bless you— In these hard times the man who would live on anything like honourable terms with the world must toil hard to attain it: you must be sensible of this and will excuse me.<sup>11</sup>

Earlier that year he had written to Clark:

Has Mr Stuart yet written you? He was here at Mr Smith’s concert about six

weeks ago— he said he would write as soon as he returned to Greenock. Our friend S. had a most noble concert, all the big Nobs an' wee Nobs of the Town attended, and all seemed to be highly pleased— Our Trade being so low few working people were at it.<sup>12</sup>

Perhaps what is most significant here are the phrases 'Our Trade' and 'working people'. This shows quite definitely that Tannahill thought of himself as a working person even after the sale of nine hundred copies of *The Soldier's Return* and the publication of songs in sheet music form beginning to spread his name as a songwriter as far as London. There is also a sense of regret at the fact that 'few working people' could attend Smith's concert owing to the fact that they were not earning enough money to do so. Tannahill did not seem to think the fact that he was a poet and songwriter removed him from his social reality. He had no great crisis about being a weaver that can be pinpointed with accuracy from his extant writings other than the financial worries that would have been experienced by most artisan tradesmen such as cobblers and tailors as well as weavers. In fact Tannahill was more worried about being a writer than a weaver. Literature caused him more anguish than the loom. As he commented to James King in July 1808, regarding the suicide of another poet from Paisley: 'I believe the poetical mind to be more subject to these awful depressions than any other - the justice of a line of Burns has often occurred to me "They soar in heaven or turn in vaulted hell."'<sup>13</sup> His gently sarcastic sense of humour is expressed in the phrase, 'all the big Nobs an' wee Nobs', and he clearly sees himself as neither of these but a worker or artisan who is also a poet and songwriter. What he is aware of, however, is economic inequality, social status and his own rather low place in the pecking order. Strangely, this low place appears not to have upset him nearly as much as the arrogance and self-aggrandisement of those who had wealth and flaunted it. Even when trade was low and the economics of life difficult Tannahill was a man who found a form of

comfort in songs, poetry and theatre. After complaining to Clark about hard times in June 1808 he then goes on to say: 'I have seen Mr Kemble play Falstaff, it was a glorious treat'.<sup>14</sup>

Both the urban and the rural (town and country) acted as spaces for compositional thought for Tannahill. It is obvious that the content of his song lyrics was strongly determined by his experience of walking through the landscape around Paisley. However, his experience of the dance-hall, the tavern, the theatre and the street also gave him access to an enormous number of tunes and the richness of this musical culture should not be underestimated. Tannahill was perhaps the kind of person for whom poetry and music were a form of nourishment. There is no question that he had a voracious appetite for finding tunes or airs to set his own lyrics to, as he wrote to James Barr in May 1806:

The number of airs which you promise me, far surpasses what I could even hope for, the writing of so many must be a laborious undertaking. They will be a treasure to me, and, by Jove! If ever I write a verse to any of them you shall have the first copy.<sup>15</sup>

It was Tannahill's ambition to publish a volume of his songs accompanied by the music though lack of money was to thwart this aspiration:

An engraver in this town has made me a very indulgent offer, he will purchase plates and paper, and execute the whole at his own expense Without seeking a sixpence till raised from the work when finished— In this I can run no risk -but the expense will be so high, that the necessary price of the book, I believe, would be reckoned by the public exorbitant— A number of the songs are to fine Airs not much known, and songs are doubly attractive when joined to the airs for which they were expressly written - they might be cheaply printed without the music, but wanting it they would have little chance of ever being sung. I now see that these things must lie over for a time: perhaps forever.<sup>16</sup>

This extract from a letter written to James King on November 12<sup>th</sup> 1809, illustrates Tannahill's innate understanding of the fact that lyrics without the air do not constitute a

song. Rather more ominous is his suggestion that they might never be sung, and the associated implication of the misery this might cause him. In the next paragraph Tannahill wrote:

From your last, poor R—n’s mind must have been in a deplorable state. When any one of a delicate habit and keen sensibility, flies to the bottle to drown disagreeable thought, the oblivious hour is soon past, and every care rises doubly formidable to his tortured recollection— I am afraid this was the case with him, and that he saw nothing but a world of misery before him, with scarcely one ray of happiness in view to induce him to live for it. I hardly ever in my life began a fuddle voluntarily, but, when I have at any time been led into it (at least to the lengths that I have sometimes been) I never felt so unhappy— so truly miserable in all my life—<sup>17</sup>

This was Tannahill’s response to the suicide of the weaver, soldier and poet John Robertson. It is a remarkable coincidence that the consideration of suicide and the possible rejection of his song book should appear as part of the same line of thought; one in which Tannahill appears to empathise easily with the deceased.

### **LOVE AND LOSS**

Tannahill wrote numerous love songs and his most famous during the first half of the nineteenth century was probably ‘Jessie, the Flower o Dunblane’. Its popularity was illustrated by a January 1816 review article in the *European Magazine and London Review*. This publication was then under the editorship of James Asperne, a keen Freemason. It shared some values with the *Poetical Magazine* in which Tannahill’s work appeared in 1804: both publications were not party political but, while being ‘unswervingly loyal to Church, King, and Constitution’,<sup>18</sup> the *European* published work by Thomas Campbell and others who held strong anti-slavery as well as Whiggish views. The existence of such a review does indicate the beginnings of the move away from the public house and dance-hall towards the parlour and drawing-room, and shows the British

bourgeoisie attempting to appropriate traditional Scottish song, including Tannahill's songs.

The review was copied down by R. A. Smith and makes no mention of Tannahill but bears the title 'Jessie the flower O' Dumblane, a favorite Scottish song by R. A. Smith. 4<sup>th</sup> Edition'. There is not much comment on the lyric, the review is mainly concerned with the technical aspects of the music, and Smith's compositional skill comes in for high praise indeed:

This air has attained more popularity than any other that has appeared for a considerable time; and its already having run through editions, is a proof of its extensive circulation. We have not met with the name of Mr R. A. Smith as a musical composer, but the present specimen of his talent for good melody would incline us to hope that some other production of similar merit may in future follow it... and the cadence, at the words "the flow'r o' Dumblane" is remarkably beautiful and happy. It is singular that a similar fall of the 4<sup>th</sup> rising thence into the tonic chord is to be found at the commencement of a [lyric] by the immortal Mozart, which it is very unlikely our author should have known, being in manuscript and very scarce.<sup>19</sup>

Smith was a highly accomplished and talented musician and he may well have been familiar with the Mozart piece the reviewer mentions. It can be inferred from the above that the song had become popular well beyond both Paisley and Scotland.

Samuel Woodworth set his song 'The Old Oaken Bucket', first published 'in the *Republican Chronicle* (New York) on June 3<sup>rd</sup> 1818' to the tune of 'Jessie'.<sup>20</sup> Not only had the song transcended class barriers but it had moved a great distance geographically. Interestingly, Charles Dickens wrote a parody of 'Jessie' entitled 'The Turtle Dove' which was published on the front page of the *True Sun* for March 13<sup>th</sup> 1832:

to be sung, the subheading in the newspaper announces, to the tune of "Jessie, the Flower o' Dunblane". This was a popular Scots ballad, whose narrator's repeated endeavour "to muse on sweet Jessie, the flower o' Dunblane" is triumphantly subverted in Dickens's version by the

balladeer's determination to muse on his boots.<sup>21</sup>

One wonders whether or not Tannahill would have approved of Dickens's ridiculing of his balladeer's sincerity, but for a man who despaired that many of his songs would never be sung this development would perhaps have met with a certain wry satisfaction if not approval.

The lyric for 'Jessie' was first published in the *Scots Magazine* of March 1808.

According to P. A Ramsay writing in 1838:

'Jessie the Flow'r o' Dumblane,' was first ushered into the world in 1808 and since that time no Scottish song has enjoyed among all classes greater popularity. For this it is indebted at once to the beauty of the words and the appropriateness of the music composed for them by the poet's friend.<sup>22</sup>

The singer and comedian Jack Shaw who played in Paisley, Glasgow and London during the first decade of the nineteenth century apparently tried to copyright the song for himself.

An account of this is given by James Barr in a letter of September 1859 addressed to

William Porteous:

Smith very obligingly gave him [Jack Shaw] the song, with an accompaniment for two violins and bass. Jack of course set it agoing in Paisley; but merrily as things might be going on, Jack left them, came to Glasgow, and was a short time with the circus company. In the meantime the celebrated Braham had made his first appearance in the Theatre Royal, Queen Street. Jack again found his way to an engagement in the Glasgow company, taking his manuscript with him of course. He was not long there till he made bold with Braham for an engagement on the boards in London. Braham, considering on it, thought he might be a good set off in different ways, as being a good *native* Scotch comedian (a rarish article), and to take part in duets and glees he might be useful. *Mr. Shaw* being now installed on the London boards, he hoisted up "Jessie," and when the audiences had taken a good view, he thought she might travel a little further, so he enterprisingly applied to a music publisher, with the copyright in the author's own handwriting, to have her shown off in a broadsheet, which was accordingly done; but it so happened that previous to this Mr. Steven in Glasgow had his sheet in motion, with an accompaniment for the pianoforte by Mr. Smith, and the full authority of Mr. Steven's holding the copyright was established at Stationers' Hall. Mr. Shaw, supporting the London publisher by boasting of the copy being in the hand writing of the

author, threatened a tug at law, which Mr. Smith decided by declaring that, although he obligingly gave a copy to Mr. Shaw for his individual singing, he gave no authority for him otherwise to publish it. The London publisher, now looking at *pro* and *con*, and discomfit, gave up to Mr. Steven the plate, &c., rather than go to *law war* with the Glasgowites. “Jessie” was, however, by this time doing for herself. “The Flow’r o’ Dunblane” consequently got popular, and became a favourite, principally by this introduction to the public.<sup>23</sup>

Barr appears to have wholly revealed the mechanism by which the song became popular as far afield as London and it obviously remained a ‘favourite’ in 1816 when it was reviewed in the *European Magazine*. The fact that it was well enough known in America in 1818 to inspire a new and subsequently popular American song and that it remained popular enough in England in 1832 for Dickens to parody it in a boot-polish advertisement does show that ‘Jessie’ was incredibly popular. Had Tannahill lived beyond 1810 it may well have earned him some decent money. Interestingly, with regard to the lyric, R. A. Smith asserts in the *Harp of Renfrewshire* that Tannahill added a third stanza at a later date, which Smith refers to as a ‘clog’. It would appear that Tannahill insisted that the third stanza be included, though according to Smith: ‘it would have been more to the author’s credit had such an addition never been made’. And he continued: ‘however, I feel confident that every singer of taste will discard it as a useless appendage’.<sup>24</sup> Unfortunately for Smith, Sam Monaghan recorded the song in 2000 with the ‘useless appendage’ intact.<sup>25</sup> I would suggest that the song would have been rather too short to make a real impression without the final stanza, though obviously an earlier stanza could be repeated. However, with regard to the aesthetics of the lyric Smith may well have had a point; the use of language in the final stanza is less imaginative, less abstract, and less metaphorical than in the first two stanzas, but in its thrust of meaning the presence of the final stanza connects the song to the body of Tannahill’s thought in relation to the ideas he expressed about the



city and the country, and love and wealth, elsewhere in his work:

How lost were my days till I met wi my Jessie,  
The sports o the city seemed foolish and vain;

...

Tho mine were the station o loftiest grandeur,  
Amidst its profusion I'd languish in pain,  
And reckon as naething the heicht o its splendour  
If wantin sweet Jessie, the flower o Dunblane.

Jessie, the flower o Dumblane, 3<sup>rd</sup> stanza.

Here we find similar sentiments about the futility of life in the city to those in the poem 'The Choice': 'And barter the peace of his mind,/ For the follies and fashions of town',<sup>26</sup> and the same disdain for wealth devoid of love and morality that is a major theme of *The Soldier's Return*. This third stanza is also a distillation of these same two particular principles of Tannahill's philosophy for living given repeatedly in his Epistles. He does show quite remarkable philosophical consistency with regard to content across forms and formal variations. Overall 'Jessie' benefits greatly from the third stanza. Indeed, it defines the song as precisely one where the lyric expresses the essential elements of Tannahill's poetic voice, whereby he tries to forge a unity between the romantic idealism of the imagination where the world takes form and is shaped by the 'mind', and the practical reality of the pre-existing everyday material world. Philosophically, this can be seen as an attempt to fuse, or bridge, the duality between idealism and materialism – or put more simply, between what *ought* and what *is* – in a standard love song. I suggest, however, that this is a side-effect of Tannahill's simply writing a love song in which both the imagination and the material world have their part to play in his attempt to give an honest account of reality: a reality in which both the imagination and the material are seen as linked, joined, or even symbiotic; where through the act of singing the duality is negated, both form and content merge into one action of artistic expression, the song. In effect there is a movement

in the lyric from idealised ‘romantic’ reverie in stanzas one and two to something more attuned to external realities in the final stanza; which by the act of singing, or performing the song, become a unified whole:

How lost were my days till I met wi my Jessie,  
The sports o the city seemed foolish and vain;  
I ne’er saw a nymph I would ca my dear lassie,  
Till charmed wi sweet Jessie, the flower o Dunblane.  
Tho mine were the station o loftiest grandeur,  
Amidst its profusion I’d languish in pain,  
And reckon as naething the heicht o its splendour  
If wantin sweet Jessie, the flower o Dunblane.  
Final (3<sup>rd</sup>) stanza.

In contrast with the more obvious and matter of fact ideas expressed in the above stanza, the metaphor in the first four lines of stanza two is more subtle. The lines give an insight into both the narrator’s opinion of Jessie, and Jessie’s character:

She’s modest as ony, and blythe as she’s bonnie,  
For guileless simplicity marks her its ain;  
An far be the villain, divested o feelin,  
Wha’d blight in its bloom the sweet flower o Dunblane.<sup>27</sup>  
1<sup>st</sup> four lines of 2<sup>nd</sup> stanza.

‘Guileless simplicity’, like ‘artless’, is a term that might have been applied by critics to Tannahill himself. It was also the kind of phrase that those adopting a more bourgeois attitude towards song - such as George Thomson and R. A. Smith in his Edinburgh years - would use to characterise songs in which a rural idyll that was devoid of social conflict, poverty and struggle was presented.

Tannahill makes good use of alliteration and assonance in the lyric to give it a flowing feeling – ‘modest’, ‘ony’, ‘blythe’, ‘bonnie’, ‘villain’, ‘divested’, ‘feelin’, ‘blight’, and ‘bloom’, all work to make the song *sing* – and this is no doubt what John Struthers was referring to when he described Tannahill’s songs as ‘easy’.<sup>28</sup> When the lyric is married with Smith’s tune the song does have a rather ethereal quality; a dream-like other-

worldliness which the more practical everyday standpoint of the final stanza actually militates against. This means that overall the lyric is portraying a narrator carried away by romance in the first two stanzas but in the final stanza – Smith’s ‘clog’ – he tries to pull himself out of the reverie to consider as far as possible his real situation, and ultimately fails to do so. Not because he misunderstands the material world, but because he understands that love is a state of mind that somehow blinds us to aspects of it. The lyric has tension within it and it is in the last stanza that we get a stronger hint of the potential ‘pain’ of love, after the ‘sweeter’ and more ‘charming’ lyricism of stanzas one and two. The relationship between love itself and the pain that love can cause forms the emotional pivot of the lyric, making ‘Jessie’ not simply a love song but a song which contains the seeds of emotional suffering. It has the potentiality to be read as a lyric of pain and it is this emotional tension that gives the lyric slightly more depth than might be expected in a simple love lyric. Part of what happens in the lyric is a shift from almost blind love towards the realisation of a harsher reality of a life stripped of meaning upon the demise of that romantic love. In this sense the lyric has transformed the song from a love song into something else – a miniature tragedy, as well as a love song.

Further, it is possible to read ‘Jessie’ as a plea for respect for nature and a criticism of the wealthy who ‘blight’ the natural world with the activities of economic progress. This becomes apparent if we see ‘Jessie’ as representing the natural world and ‘the villain’ representing industrialisation in these lines:

She’s modest as ony, an blythe as she’s bonnie,  
For guileless simplicity marks her its ain;  
An far be the villain, divested o feelin,  
Wha’d blight in its bloom the sweet flower o Dunblane.

The phrase ‘blight in **its** bloom’ does lend some support to this interpretation as Jessie is

completely depersonalised here and wholly transformed into ‘the sweet flower’. Had Tannahill used the phrase ‘blight in **her** bloom’ then the metaphor between Jessie and the flower remains in the realm of the human but by using ‘it’ the metaphor moves completely into the material world of nature: if this depersonalisation is associated with the ‘sports o the city’ and those in the ‘station o loftiest grandeur’ in the next (3<sup>rd</sup>) stanza, the result of which is to ‘languish in pain’, then an interpretation of the song as a defence of nature against the encroachment of villainous industry and man comes clearly into view.<sup>29</sup>

There is also a trifle with regard to the basic structure of the lyric in several of the published versions of ‘Jessie’. The version given by Ramsay in 1838, of three eight-line stanzas, appears to conform to Tannahill’s intention; some later editions give the structure as six four-line stanzas which would seem to run counter to the author’s wishes.

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Throughout the nineteenth century Tannahill’s song-writing came in for very little negative criticism. It was more or less accepted as a commonplace that it was as a songster he would endure, that this was where his greatest talent lay. As Peter Ross stated in 1870:

It is as a song-writer that he will be loved and remembered, and principally for the songs in praise of the scenery and objects surrounding his native town.<sup>30</sup>

This comment is another in the process that carried on throughout the nineteenth century - with the exception of David Semple - of critics narrowing Tannahill’s range as a writer, a process that would see him defined primarily as a writer of songs purely about the scenery around Paisley. This view would have us overlook his poems, his play and even his most famous song in modern times ‘The Braes o Balquhither’, along with other songs about battles, soldiers and the effects of war, and those about lost love, grief and death that do

not contain much about 'the scenery and objects surrounding his native town' and have very little to do with Paisley in the sense of Paisley and the scenery around it being the primary concern of the song lyrics. This narrowing arises from confusing Tannahill's use of his local experience as a grounding through which to express his views and feelings, with the views and feelings he is actually expressing. For example, in the lyric 'Gloomy Winter's Noo Awa' he mentions at least three locations around Paisley - Stanely Shaw, Glenkilloch and Newton Woods - but it is in reality a complex lyric about love and depression, and passing away and renewal; for people who have visited any of the locations the lyric certainly becomes more vivid but the locations are not the central message of the lyrical content, they serve to heighten the reality of a complex emotional state described by the language. And the language is used in such a way that the listener/reader can render this emotional state into an imagined reality. However, it is in fact a song about the madness of love, about being unable to feel happy or alive except in the presence of your lover; about the great joy of having such a lover and the great despondency when your lover is absent. The positive side of this feeling is presented as a joyous harmony with nature in the first five stanzas which is then completely obliterated in the final stanza. This obliteration encourages the reader to go back to the beginning to see why this state of love and harmony with nature should suddenly be impossible. And upon closer inspection the lyric opens up to the interpretation that it is about someone who has in fact lost their lover and is living in the 'gloomy winter' of the title, rather than experiencing the joy and harmony expressed in the first five stanzas. The song is an appeal to the listener/reader to understand love and loss, at the same time recognising that people can feel these intense emotions and that it is natural (though sometimes difficult) to do so:

### **Gloomy Winter's Now Awa**

Gloomy winter's now awa,  
Saft the westlan breezes blaw;  
Mang the birks o Stanely shaw  
The mavis sings fu cheerie, O;

Sweet the crawflower's early bell  
Deck's Gleniffer's dewy dell,  
Blooming like thy bonnie sel,  
My young, my artless dearie, O.

Come, my lassie, let us stray  
O'er Glenkilloch's sunny brae,  
Blythely spend the gowden day  
Midst joys that never weary, O.

Tow'ring o'er the Newton wuds,  
Lav'rocks fan the snaw-white cluds,  
Siller saughs, wi downy buds,  
Adorn the banks sae briery, O.

Roun the sylvan fairy nooks  
Feathery breckans fringe the rocks  
'Neath the brae the burnie jouks,  
An ilka thing is cheerie, O

Trees may bud, and birds may sing,  
Flowers may bloom, and verdure spring,  
Joy to me they canna bring,  
Unless wi thee, my dearie, O.

Indeed, much the same argument regarding location and content can be made about the song 'The Braes O' Gleniffer', the setting is the Gleniffer Braes but it is a lyric about love and loss. The narrative is from the perspective of a young woman whose lover has been recruited into the British army to fight the French:

How changed frae the time when I met wi my lover  
Amang the brume bushes by Stanely green shaw;  
The wild flowers o simmer were spread a sae bonnie,  
The mavis sang sweet frae the green birken tree;

But far to the camp they hae march'd my dear Johnnie,  
An now it is winter wi nature an me.<sup>31</sup>

Tannahill, in the main, wrote lyrics to existing or traditional tunes over which the only real control he exercised was that of the choice of which particular tune to fit with his lyrics, or fit his lyrics to. It does appear that, like Burns, he was rather good at fitting his lyrics to existing tunes, and that the tunes themselves were already popular may be one reason for the popularity of his songs. As David Daiches argued:

It is important to remember that 'the musical air' was the more significant element in most of these songs; indeed, it is impossible to get any proper idea of this phase of Scottish literature without taking the music into consideration and treating the songs as songs and not as poems which happen to have been set to music.<sup>32</sup>

Tannahill had a habit of ending his song lyrics in a way that subverted what had gone before, whether, as in the case of 'Rob Roryson's Bonnet' where he moves from a very particular narrative to a generalised moral conclusion, or in the cases of 'Gloomy Winter', 'The Braes o' Gleniffer' or 'Jessie', where at the end of the love song we are forced to question the nature of romantic love itself because of the pain with which it can be suffused. These love songs are as much about suffering as they are love, they are about love and an opposition to love which is pain rather than hate; though in 'Jessie' the 'villain divested o feelin' could be seen as a figure of hate as well as a force for the destruction of love and nature.

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The song 'Woodland Burn' with its two tunes, first person female narration, theme of the absent lover, abundance of nature references, and the centrality of war to its narrative, contains almost all of the key elements to be found in Tannahill lyrics and song. It is also an example of a song that is not tune-driven, though it is impossible to tell whether or not

Tannahill had a tune in his mind when he composed the lyric: the song we encounter with the music by either Ross or Smith is one where the words were written to be fitted to a new tune at the hands of a composer. This is a totally different practice from that of fitting new words to existing tunes in the way Burns did. ‘Woodland Burn’ is a lyric-driven song and by working in this way Tannahill is again showing his independence of mind and determination to be his own man, not simply following the tried and tested practice of Burns. Particularly in the case of ‘Woodland Burn’, David Semple was right when he suggested that the songs in the play ‘sparkle[d] with such brilliancy’.<sup>33</sup> Tannahill’s imagery beautifully depicts Jean’s sense of heartbreak over the absence of her ‘lad’ forced overseas to fight in the British army:

Lang syne beside the woodland burn,  
 Amang the broom sae yellow,  
 I lean’d me ’neath the milk-white thorn,  
 On nature’s mossy pillow;  
 A’ round my seat the flow’rs were strew’d,  
 That frae the wild wood I had pu’d,  
 To weave mysel’ a simmer snood,  
 To pleasure my dear fellow.

I twin’d the woodbine round the rose,  
 Its richer hues to mellow,  
 Green sprigs of fragrant birk I chose,  
 To busk the sedge sae yellow.  
 The crow-flow’r blue, an’ meadow-pink  
 I wove in primrose-braided link;  
 But little, little did I think  
 I should have wove the willow.

My bonnie lad was forc’d away,  
 Tost on the raging billow;  
 Perhaps he’s fa’n in bludy war,  
 Or wreck’d on rocky shallow.  
 Yet, ay I hope for his return,  
 As round our wonted haunts I mourn,  
 And often by the woodland burn  
 I pu’ the weeping willow.<sup>34</sup>



It seems fitting that this song was composed as lyric first and tune second because the lyric is suffused with Jean's strength of feeling to the extent that it is easy to see why a musician would want to compose a new tune for it. Tannahill has peppered the lyric with just enough Scots to let the singer/reader/audience know where the song comes from. This is a universal song in its romantic treatment of the absent soldier, but there is sufficient 'bludy war' to keep the lyric from drowning in sentimentality. There is a similar structure here to that in 'Jessie', two very dream-like stanzas, negated by an injection of social reality in the third (final) stanza. The notion of 'weaving' together flowers and twigs to make herself beautiful is cleverly linked with mourning: 'But little, little did I think/ I should have wove the willow'. The repetition of 'little' with a pause after the first, helps give the next line the chill of death. The most heart breaking idea in the lyric is that of lack of closure, of not knowing what has actually happened to her lover, or when or if he will return. Of course in *The Soldier's Return* itself this presentation of Jean's sense of being in limbo does make Harry's return all the more powerful and joyful.

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The song 'The Negro Girl' again deals with issues of love and loss but is also the second of Tannahill's overt anti-slavery statements, while in 'Lines on the Pleasures of Hope', he makes general political points by wishing for change and a better future where there is no longer imperialism or slavery, in this song he focuses on the plight of an individual African girl. 'The Negro Girl' has greater significance than merely being a song in a particular style that deploys certain tropes such as lost love and a 'dear native shore': it is a metaphor in which lost love stands for the degradation that slavery brings upon us all. Tannahill's lyric for 'The Negro Girl' was set to music by John Ross of Aberdeen:

## The Negro Girl

Yon poor Negro girl, an exotic plant,  
Was torn from her dear native soil,  
Reluctantly borne o'er the raging Atlant,  
Then brought to Britannia's Isle.  
Though Fatima's mistress be loving and kind,  
Poor Fatima still must deplore:  
She thinks on her parents, left weeping behind,  
And sighs for her dear native shore.

She thinks on her Zadi, the youth of her heart,  
Who from childhood was loving and true,  
How he cried on the beach, when the ship did depart!  
'Twas a sad everlasting adieu.  
The shell-woven gift which he bound round her arm,  
The rude seaman unfeelingly tore,  
Nor left one sad relic her sorrows to charm,  
When far from her dear native shore.

And now, all dejected, she wanders apart,  
No friend, save retirement, she seeks;  
The sigh of despondency bursts from her heart,  
And tears dew her thin sable cheeks.  
Poor hard-fated girl, long, long she may mourn!  
Life's pleasures to her are all o'er,  
Far fled ev'ry hope that she e'er shall return  
To revisit her dear native shore.<sup>35</sup>

This is a song driven by the lyric rather than the tune but when the content is considered Tannahill manages to hit a note that still strikes a chord with the modern reader. His choice of third person narrative voice shows an implicit recognition of cultural difference, while his attention to detail shows a recognition of the 'worth' and 'merit' of Fatima's culture and certain demerits within his own: 'The shell-woven gift which he bound round her arm,/ The rude seaman unfeelingly tore'. Tannahill tries to communicate the pain of exile and the repetition of the phrase 'dear native shore' reinforces this in language that Scottish and British people would have easily grasped because of their experience of military

campaigns abroad. Also, it echoes Tannahill's sympathetic understanding of the exiled Irish and of 'outsiders' such as Gypsies, packmen and wandering minstrels. What is clever about it is that the 'dear native shore' he refers to is not British at all but African and this move by Tannahill gives the lyric a subversive quality. Of course there is a patrician-sentimental element to the lyric but Tannahill does try to resist this. When he writes, 'Though Fatima's mistress be loving and kind,/ Poor Fatima still must deplore', he is saying that no matter how kindly or humanely a slave is treated the fact that they are a slave at all is deplorable. He is saying that Fatima herself (and by implication every slave) is right to believe that her situation is wholly unjust and if 'Britannia's' people are really against slavery then they, like the slaves, should deplore slavery no matter what arguments about kindness and a better life here might be used to justify the practice.

Another point in the lyric which is commendable on Tannahill's part is his determination to bring the topic onto British soil. He does not deal with the United States, France or the West Indies but brings the controversy home to Britain; it is to 'Britannia's isle' that she is 'Reluctantly borne o'er'. This seems entirely sensible as it is the political jurisdiction Tannahill himself inhabits. Rather than decrying the practice of slavery elsewhere, which might have been an easier option, he decries it both within the British state and universally.

Tannahill's printer Stephen Young (1807 edition), printed an anti-slavery tract in 1804. Written by Reformed Presbyterian Pastor Alexander M'Leod, resident in New York, it is unequivocally anti-slavery but engages in arcane theological and some humanist philosophical arguments.<sup>36</sup> I do not think this approach could have held the popular imagination in anything like the way a song or poem can, and like 'Peter Pindar' (Dr

Wolcot) and Cowper, Tannahill put his lyric forward in a forthright manner in the cause of human progress. 'The Negro Girl' was first published (words only) in the Glasgow *Selector* of 1805 under the pseudonym 'Modestus', an epithet attributed to Tannahill by that periodical's editor, William Maver.<sup>37</sup>

By this time a fairly large body of anti-slavery poetry and song had been written and published. Cowper's popular and powerful 'The Negro's Complaint' had been in circulation for almost twenty years: 'with his other anti-slavery ballads it was set to music and sung in the streets'.<sup>38</sup> Pindar's 'Azid' was published in the *Scots Magazine* of August 1795 and is written in a quasi-Creole style. It would be extremely surprising if Tannahill was not aware of these works. In 1800 Mary Robinson published a poem in her *Lyrical Tales* also entitled 'The Negro Girl', which could be taken as a model for Tannahill's song.<sup>39</sup> Yet Tannahill does not give us a 'Fatima' who escapes into spiritual freedom or oblivion through suicide as Mary Robinson's 'Zelma' does; in this case Tannahill's 'Fatima' has more in common with Yeats's eternally 'Wandering Aengus', and though 'all dejected, she wanders apart', she remains a feature of the British social landscape. A reminder of the evil that slavery is and of the hope that, 'Yes, Afric's sons shall one day burst their chains'.<sup>40</sup>

Burns, Wordsworth, James Thompson, William Shenstone, Thomas Moore and numerous others have contributed lines of poetry and song in the anti-slavery cause. Anti-slavery poetry is 'a diverse, complex and nuanced body of work [...] certain themes, images, character types, and narrative trajectories do recur again and again'<sup>41</sup> and in that sense Tannahill's poem is far from wholly original. It has much in common with Mary Robinson's earlier 'Negro Girl'. However, it stands up well to comparison with

Wordsworth's sonnet dated September 1<sup>st</sup> 1802, 'We had a fellow-Passenger', which also takes an African woman as its subject.<sup>42</sup> Marcus Wood's criticism of Wordsworth's sonnet indicates some of the traps in writing about slavery that Tannahill in his lyric largely manages to avoid. Wood argues that Wordsworth's poem:

defines new limits for the creative disempowerment of the colonial subject. The poem ends as an attack on the 'Ordinances' of Napoleonic France... The black woman can state the facts of what has happened to her, but cannot even 'murmur' her anger, or despair.<sup>43</sup>

Fatima, Tannahill's 'colonial subject', remains alone and apart from society, deploring her 'mistress', symbolising a form of resistance and unwillingness to forget her homeland in spite of not possessing 'one sad relic' by which to remember it. The narrative voice remains thoroughly and consistently empathetic, whereas in Wordsworth's sonnet the 'objection to racist French policy is reserved for the poet' himself.<sup>44</sup>

### **IRISH AND JACOBITE SONG**

After Tannahill's death there were a fairly large number of poems and songs written to commemorate him. In 1815 Alexander Gilmour published a song lyric in Paisley's *Poetical Magazine* titled 'To the Memory of Robert Tannahill' which was set to the tune 'Erin go Brach'.<sup>45</sup> So Gilmour as early as 1815 recognised Tannahill's interest in Irish music and song. This is in sharp distinction to David Semple, Tannahill's most thorough biographer, who wrote in his 'Life of Tannahill' (1876):

[...] it was quite out of the question to suppose that a sedate Scotsman like Tannahill was capable of writing verses to suit the wild airs of Hibernia.<sup>46</sup>

This was something of a strange thing for Semple to write because Tannahill had a strong interest in Irish music from as early as 1805 and was particularly fond of Thomas Moore's

early work.

Tannahill never visited Ireland. He had a second-hand knowledge of the country through reading and acquaintanceships. Tannahill's close friend William McLaren was apparently chased out of Ireland for holding extreme political views, though exactly what these views were has never been made clear.<sup>47</sup> Tannahill's friend the actor William Livingstone also spent some time in Ireland and wrote to him from Killyleagh, Co. Down, in March 1807:

You will, I believe, be surprised when I inform you that I have begun to weave in this town. The truth is, I had of late entered rather too deeply into Irish conviviality, and was almost in danger of losing my health, and with it every comfort. I therefore resolved to endeavour to balance myself a little, and as I could not properly come to Scotland till at once I contrived to get a web here (a 1000 Mall  $4\frac{1}{8}$ ), which, though but trifling, will suffice for a little, for living is pretty moderate, and I have been kindly and hospitably treated.<sup>48</sup>

Livingstone had been 'strolling' with a company of actors in Ireland for the previous ten months. Tannahill also liked a young Irish poet who published poems in the *Glasgow Selector* (Vol. 2, 1805) signing himself 'W. D. H. M.' of 'Glasgow College'.<sup>49</sup>

David Semple's attitude to Tannahill's interest in Irish song gives a somewhat false impression. I want to take issue with Semple's note on page 125 of Tannahill's *Poems, Songs and Correspondence* where he states:

Although Tannahill wrote several songs to Irish airs he had collected, he never referred to or imitated the Irish Melodist [Moore] in his array of poets and authors.<sup>50</sup>

The evidence in a letter to James Clark, 20<sup>th</sup> September 1807, contradicts Semple's view.

Tannahill wrote:

You recollect the song- "When time who steals our Years away." It is not Thos Campbell's as was supposed- it is written by a Thomas Moore, whom

I esteem as the Anacreon of the age I have seen a volume of his in which was the song alluded to - like old Dibdin he usually composes Music to his own words - the Edin<sup>b</sup> reviewers have endeavour'd to cut him up for being too loose in his subjects - I will write you one Epigram

Your Mother says, my little venus!  
There's something not correct between us,  
And you're in fault as much as I;  
Now, on my soul, my little venus!  
I think 'twould not be right between us  
To let your mother tell a lie<sup>51</sup>

The song and the 'Epigram' are from Moore's *The poetical Works of the Late Thomas Little Esq.* (1801), though when Tannahill wrote this letter Moore had three other books in print, *Odes of Anacreon* (1799), *Odes and Epistles* (1806) and the first volume of *Irish Melodies* (1807). At the first Burns Anniversary meeting in Paisley in 1805, Tannahill's friend John King mentions Moore during the toasts as a writer worthy of note along with Campbell, Scott, Pope, Thomson and Shakespeare.<sup>52</sup>

Moore's friendship with and biography of Byron secures his place in Western literary history, but in 1807, when Tannahill thought Moore 'the Anacreon of the age', Moore and Byron had not yet met each other. Tannahill, like Moore, tended to support Whig causes but at the same time 'was no believer in poetic manifestoes or "systems"'.<sup>53</sup> In his early work Moore, perhaps more so than Tannahill, wrote for an 'establishment' audience and with this in mind Moore viewed 'each poem as a... masquerade or performance'<sup>54</sup> and Tannahill also wrote with the idea of 'performance' in mind.

Regarding Moore Jeffery W. Vail wrote:

Moore was a man deeply concerned with British and Irish politics from his youth at college to his old age, but he knew that with the failed Irish rebellion of 1798 and the Act of Union still fresh in the minds of his English readers, the last thing they wanted to hear from him was anything smacking

of Irish nationalism. An imaginative escape from events such as the Irish troubles, the harsh repression of domestic dissent, and the war with Napoleon was what upper-class English consumers of poetry wanted, and it was what Moore chose to provide.<sup>55</sup>

This desire for ‘imaginative escape’ is also apparent in Tannahill’s work: in his desire to escape from what he saw as the ‘war system’, to escape the loom and become a professional writer, and to live in harmony with nature outwith the bounds of predetermined social and religious constraints, his life and work has residual echoes with Moore’s. Moore, the supporter of Whig causes and Irish independence, did not express himself in an openly radical way in his early poems and songs and like Tannahill adopted a conventional approach to literature even when expressing rather less than conventional views. Taking these factors into account it is no surprise that Tannahill admired Moore. The fact that Tannahill could remember Moore’s epigram, ‘my little Venus’ by heart, illustrates the latter’s influence on the former and Tannahill’s activity as a collector of Irish airs has to be seen as having some relationship to his admiration for Moore. Tannahill wrote ‘Anacreontics’ as did Moore and two pieces by Tannahill contain similar vocabulary and ideas to those expressed by Moore in ‘When time who steals our years away’. These pieces ‘Fill, Fill, the Merry Bowl’ and ‘Away, Gloomy Care’ were placed side by side in the 1876 edition of Tannahill’s work.<sup>56</sup> One of the prevailing ideas in all three pieces is the subversion of sorrow through ‘the bowl’. There is also a concern for the passing of time and what ‘time’ itself actually means – is it an escape from painful past experiences or a loss of ‘loving life’? – ‘How like this bowl of wine my fair,/ Our loving life shall fleet’ (Moore).<sup>57</sup> In the end each piece leaves us with a sense of determined optimism that time and pain can be tempered by ‘Hope’ and drink. Tannahill opens ‘Fill, Fill, the Merry



Bowl' with:

Fill, fill, the merry bowl,  
Drown corrosive care and sorrow,  
Why, why, clog the soul,  
By caring for to-morrow?

Moore ends 'When Time who steals our years away' with:

Then fill the cup—away with gloom!  
Our joys shall always last;  
For Hope will brighten days to come,  
And mem'ry gild the past.

All three pieces are dedicated to the banishment of sorrow and pain. 'Away, gloomy care, there's no place for thee here', as Tannahill writes,<sup>58</sup> is again an insistence on the need for 'imaginative escape' which was so much a part of the work and lives of both authors.

Tannahill's song 'I mark'd a gem of pearly dew', written around August 1807, contains the same idea of the dew representing weeping and despair that occurs in Moore's famous lyric on the death of Robert Emmett (1778-1803), 'Oh Breathe not his Name'. It is not beyond the bounds of possibility that Tannahill read the first edition of *Irish Melodies* in 1807 as it was also around August or September of that year that he began to make consistent references to Irish places and characters in his song lyrics. Although it must be kept in mind that Tannahill had started collecting Irish airs two years before the publication of *Irish Melodies*, Moore's Irish lyrics might well have been the catalyst that spurred him on to submit Irish songs to George Thomson and to continue along the path of being a Scotsman who wrote Irish songs until his death in 1810.

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Tannahill's correspondence with George Thomson makes for interesting reading. We see from it that he was capable of writing melodies in musical notation and also that Thomson, who scribbled notes on the letters he received, was not too disenchanted with the melodies and lyrics Tannahill sent. Most of the tunes Tannahill submitted were of Irish origin, in June 1808 he sent a version of "The green wood of Traugh":

Song

Air— The green woods of Treugh

Adieu! ye cheerful native plains,  
Dungeon glooms receive me,  
Nothing new for me remains  
Of all the joys ye gave me,  
All are flown!  
Far from thy shores sweet Erin  
I through life must toil despairing  
Lost and unknown

Howl ye winds around my cell,  
Nothing now can wound me,  
Mingling with your dreary swell,  
Prison-groans surround me,  
Bodings wild-  
Treachery, thy ruthless doing  
Long I'll mourn in hopeless ruin  
Lost and exil'd.

Dear Sir,

The above little air pleased me so much that I could not help trying a verse to it, I believe it has never been published. It was taken down from an old Irish woman's singing a native song to it which, she said, when rendered into English, was in praise of the green woods of Treugh. 'Tis in such a wild measure I could think of no other form of stanza to suit. I shall be happy to hear whether you have before now seen it—<sup>59</sup>

The lyric has a strange quality of understanding with regard to exile, imprisonment and the history of Ireland. Though the 'treachery' mentioned is of an unspecified nature, Tannahill

seems to have a certain grasp of elements of 'Irishness' without ever having gone there. This probably derived somewhat from listening to Irish songs but may also be related to the flight from Ireland of those displaced after the 1798 Rebellion. While the lyric is rather vague and generalised it is quite similar in sentiment to Thomas Moore's 'Tho' the Last Glimpse of Erin with Sorrow I See'<sup>60</sup>; and although the emotions and the predicament of the narrator are quite generalised it is still possible to engage emotionally with the lonely prisoner.

Tannahill sent at least seven songs to George Thomson in which he used Irish tunes and set his own lyrics to them. In his correspondence with Thomson, Tannahill comes across at times as rather snobbish and overly well-mannered. This posturing might be explained by his intense desire to be published by Thomson, as expressed by Tannahill in a letter to James Clark written in May 1808:

I am now going to beg of you a very particular favour, that, you would send me as soon as you can, any fine Irish Airs of the singing kind which you may chance to know; I dont mean those already common, such as The Lakes of Killarney, Shannon's flow'ry banks &<sup>c</sup> What makes me so importunate with you is, that, if I can accomplish songs worthy of being attached to them, I shall have the pleasure of seeing them printed into, perhaps, the most respectable work of the kind that ever has been published in Britain.

Now, Dear Jamie, as this is placing me on my very soul's Hobby, do try to oblige me; however, should you favour me with any, they must be real natives of the Dear Country, for I believe there are many imitations composed on this side of the water.

By July 1809, Tannahill writes to Thomson:

I have gleaned the three preceding Airs for you. You may depend on their being genuine Hibernians—I had them taken down from the voice. The songs usually sung to them are as low, bawdy stuff as can be. I am firmly of the opinion that the very popular Air of Paddy O'Rafferty is worthy of being adopted into the singing class providing a good song can be found for it. I shall be glad to know your mind of it and how my verses please you. "The lass that wears green," is surely a fine little Air my song to it and the one

following are just warm from the Parnassain mint; I cannot as yet guess how they stand. With regard to the latter, “Gamby Ora” I take to be a form of self-congratulation synonymous with the Scottish, Leez me! and Weels me! as such I retained it in the chorus; however, in this I may be wrong.

Here Tannahill is very enthusiastic with regard to the collecting of ‘genuine Hibernian’ airs, but we find him pandering to Thomson’s prejudices about what makes an acceptable lyric and a good song. Thomson was interested in selling song books and the market for his books tended to be amongst the better off rather than the working classes. So we find Tannahill, a working weaver, adopting the tone of those who were becoming the arbiters of ‘good taste’ and defenders of the parlour and drawing-room from any encroachment of the ‘low’ and the ‘bawdy’. Yet regardless of Thomson’s rejection he continued to collect Irish airs and write lyrics to them. Of the songs he sent to Thomson, ‘Peggy O’Rafferty’ and ‘Gamby Ora’ (Tannahill’s title was ‘Ye Golden Stars’) are particularly optimistic though Thomson didn’t much like them. In fact the lyric for the latter rattles along joyously:

Ye golden stars that rule the night,  
And hail my glad return,  
Ye never shone so sweetly bright,  
Since gay St. Patrick’s morning.  
My life a burthen on my mind,  
Despair sat brooding o’er me,  
Now all my cares are far behind,  
And joy is full before me;  
Chor - Gamby ora, gamby ora,  
How my heart approves me!  
Gamby ora, gamby ora,  
Kathleen owns she loves me!

Were all the flow’ry pastures mine,  
That deck fair Limerick county,  
That wealth dear Kathleen should be thine,  
And all should share our bounty;  
But Fortune’s gifts I value not,  
Nor granduer’s highest station,  
I would not change my happy lot  
For all the Irish nation.

Gamby ora, gamby ora,  
How my heart approves me!  
Gamby ora, gamby ora,  
Kathleen owns she loves me!<sup>61</sup>

According to P. A. Ramsay, 'Gamby Ora' is Irish Gaelic for 'I will sing'.<sup>62</sup> Tannahill thought it meant 'Weels me' and yet it works well even when he didn't know the correct meaning – a happy accident indeed.

Tannahill's first extant mention of Irish airs was in a letter to James Clark written in August 1805:

With respect to the Irish air with which you favoured me, upon the whole I am highly delighted with it, but don't you think the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> lines of it bear some resemblance to the 'Scottish Kail Brose'.<sup>63</sup>

Tannahill makes numerous requests for Irish airs from his friends in correspondence from this point until close to his death. He also expresses on various occasions his love of Irish music though apparently he did not like 'that blackguard song "There was a gentle Lady/ And she lov'd a tinker man"'. As he wrote to George Thomson in July 1809:

I think this is a very pleasant sprightly Air, but it has such a long rambling unmeasured chorus that it will be hard to fit the middle part with anything like [a] rhyme. In Ireland it is universally sung to their set of that blackguard song

'There was a gentle Lady  
And she lov'd a tinker man.'<sup>64</sup>

Tannahill's statements to Thomson might not necessarily reflect what Tannahill really thought but rather what he believed Thomson wanted to hear. The following extract from a letter to James King – September 1808 – gives a less ambiguous picture of Tannahill's appreciation of Irish music:

Have you ever tried any songs to Irish Airls? Some of which I think very beautiful. I would be truly obliged if you'll try to procure two or three of the best Irish Airls among your musical acquaintances, I mean those that you

may judge fitting for songs, and not much known—<sup>65</sup>

One reason for doubting the veracity of Tannahill's opinions as expressed to George Thomson is that he had nothing like the problems Francis Jeffrey had with Moore's *Odes and Epistles*. In fact he did rather relish *Thomas Little's* 'my little Venus', and showed no sense of aversion to Moore's work, although the *Edinburgh Review*<sup>66</sup> had 'endeavour'd to cut him up for being too loose in his subjects'. Tannahill had written to James Clark in April 1809, expressing no comment on the words of 'Tinker Man' but keen for the tune:

When you can get leisure to write me the air of the Tinker Man I expect you to send it: Please give me the first verse and chorus along with it, as they will help me to its crank measure—<sup>67</sup>

Only when he wrote to Thomson in July did he express any disapproval of 'The Jolly Tinker'.

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In 1825 R. A. Smith published his volume, *The Irish Minstrel*. The odd thing about this book of Irish song is the large number of Scottish writers included in it, Burns, Tannahill, Hogg, Ebenezer Picken, Alexander Rogers and Byron are all there. This project was quite clearly a result of the absorption of Ireland into the British Union but it would be a mistake to think that Tannahill himself was wholly a unionist. He was capable of writing lines with strong Jacobite sympathies: 'Caledonia, great in arts and arms' and 'To-morrow we'll vanquish these ravaging English', for example.<sup>68</sup>

He set two lyrics to the air 'Maids of Arrocher', 'Weep Not, My Love'<sup>69</sup> and 'Lament of Wallace after the Battle of Falkirk'.<sup>70</sup> Like Burns in 'The Cotter's Saturday

Night' and 'Scots Wha Hae', Tannahill writes approvingly of William Wallace and both lyrics can be seen as having some relevance to him, though 'Weep Not, My Love' is about the 1746 Battle of Falkirk in which the Jacobites were victorious, and 'The Lament' about the 1298 battle won by the English. It was very probably the fact that 1806 marked the sixtieth anniversary of the 1746 battle that set Tannahill to writing these two songs. He appears to have started with the events of 1746 and then - with both battles taking place in the same geographical area - worked back in time to Wallace in 1298. The verses were written over a period of about six weeks in early summer of 1806. However, 'The Lament' contains despair over the death of Wallace and the dashing of Scottish hopes, with none of the derring-do or call to arms we get in 'Scots Wha Hae'. 'Weep Not, My Love' celebrates the Jacobite victory, 'The conflict was glorious, our clans were victorious', then immediately immerses the singer (reader/listener) in melancholy as:

Yet sad was the Bard the dark herald to be,—  
Ah! poor weeping Flora, thy dear promised Morar  
Will never return to thy baby and thee.

These lines are a reflection on the death of a Jacobite clansman who is represented by the 'I' voice in the first stanza, 'O weep not, my love, though I go to war', but more than that they signify the death of the Jacobite cause in the year of 1746. A cause portrayed as utterly defeated, it 'Will never return'. The lyric recognises the real tragedy of the Jacobites, the end of their way of life and absorption into the British state. The first stanza though presents a different picture, one filled with hope for Jacobite victory and a return to an independent Scotland free of English 'oppression':

O weep not, my love, though I go to war,  
For soon I'll return rich with honours to thee;  
The soul rousing pibroch is sounding afar,  
And clans are assembling in Morar-Glenlee;

Our flocks are plunder'd, our herdsmen are murder'd,  
And fir'd with oppression, aveng'd we shall be;  
To-morrow we'll vanquish these ravaging English,  
And then I'll return to thy baby and thee.

This stanza does present a fairly positive view of the power of arms but the second stanza dissolves this view into one where despite victory in battle the war is lost and we descend into 'sad', 'dark' 'weeping' having lost something that 'Will never return'. Of course the first stanza does also suggest that even although Scotland has been defeated there is some room for a comeback, but it can never be the same.

In 'The Lament' we are given more of Scotland as a 'poor weeping country'. This time we meet Wallace as the first person narrator and Tannahill shows us a Wallace in the full flow of lamentation. The level of self-pity and dejection is almost lamentable in itself; again in spite of the brave efforts of men at arms very little good has come of battle as (Tannahill's) Wallace says of himself:

But I, a poor outcast, in exile must wander,  
Perhaps, like a traitor, ignobly must die!  
On thy wrongs, O my country! indignant I ponder ——  
Ah! woe to the hour when thy Wallace must fly!

All is lost, but a residual indignation remains over the ill treatment Scotland has received at the hands of the English. 'Ah! woe to the hour when thy Wallace must fly!' does suggest that someone like Wallace is required to put the wrongs right but Tannahill has entered into a view of Scotland's situation as near to hopeless, 'freedom beholds her best warriors laid low'. Scotland is not free now and perhaps never will be. It is trapped in an imperialist Union, one that entails 'endless war', such as that with its old ally, France. These history lessons in song suggest that the best that can be done is a grudging acceptance of Scotland's present position in the world. The past is a place where violence has been tried



and failed and the present is also a world of violence about which little can be done.

In Tannahill's presentation of these two moments in history Scotland has no 'Golden Age' or pre-capitalist utopia to return to, the past is a dystopia where freedom has been lost and the present is not much better. Though the first stanza of 'Weep Not, My Love' does suggest hope and a fighting spirit of resistance, 'And fir'd with oppression, aveng'd we shall be'. The Wallace of Tannahill's 'Lament' has entered almost too convincingly into the spirit of the defeated and if the poem is read as a study of the psychology of defeat it is very successful. Wallace is unabashed in his dismal lamentation. Both lyrics are depictions of a Scotland that has lost its freedom. In both cases it is immersed in violence and war. It is a nation steeped in sadness and regret, 'sad was the Bard the dark herald to be',<sup>71</sup> but there is the memory of (and faith in) freedom, bravery and nationhood, 'your names be enrolled with the sons of the brave'.<sup>72</sup> The cherishing of this memory keeps alive the possibility that Scotland can rediscover its freedom and its peace (peace of mind even). Tannahill can be seen as pointing back to historical catastrophes in order to point forward to the possibility of a peaceful Scotland in which freedom has been rediscovered.

## CONCLUSION

Tannahill's songs have clearly travelled across class barriers, time and place, and this is one reason why they are still worthy of attention. Intriguingly, Tannahill, who borrowed from Irish song did have an influence there after his death. It was not only around Paisley that a community of weaver-poets developed. In his *Rhyming Weavers* (1974), John Hewitt gives an excellent account of a similar community that existed (slightly later than Tannahill's circle) in the Irish counties of Antrim and Down during the first half of the nineteenth

century. There were clearly some parallels and connections between these communities, particularly in their interest in self-education. As Hewitt states, Tannahill did not go unnoticed:

Usually, however, in adult years the weaver-bard had become a well-read man, more particularly in English and Scots poetry. There is hardly an English poet of repute from Alexander Pope to William Cowper who does not find mention in their books; while Ramsay, Fergusson, Burns and James Hogg were popular, even lesser Scots such as Hector McNeill and Robert Tannahill, had their admirers.<sup>73</sup>

Burns was an inspiration for Tannahill and many others but Tannahill's Scots language has its own Renfrewshire rather than Ayrshire sound. Tannahill's use of Scots in his songs is lively and strong, and does not give credence to David Craig's observation of 1961 that:

Apart from slight work – such as that of the weaver poet Wilson, Dougal Graham, the most popular chapbook writer, and Robert Tannahill of Paisley, who wrote insipid but well liked song – this new culture in the area of Glasgow, Paisley, Renfrew threw up no notable literature.<sup>74</sup>

Not even Thomas Campbell appears to qualify as 'notable' but there were numerous writers worthy of note from Alexander Wilson and Ebenezer Picken to George McIndoe and Edward Polin. Whether it is 'insipid' or 'well liked' Tannahill's song 'The Braes o Balquhither', is one of his most popular and enduring. It has mutated over the years into 'The Wild Mountain Thyme' having 'passed through the hands' of other singers and collectors – Tannahill's opening lines are 'Let us go, lassie go/ Tae the Braes o' Balquhither' and his final stanza contains the phrase 'wild mountain thyme'. It became 'Will ye go Lassie go' or 'The Wild Mountain Thyme' at the hands of Francis McPeake of Belfast and was recorded by his family in the 1950s. It is in the McPeake incarnation that the song is currently popular and that it remains so is a reflection of the strength of Tannahill's version with Smith's music. There is a lyric (identical to Tannahill's except in

structure) that was collected by John C. French and published by Henry Shoemaker in his *Mountain Minstrelsy of Pennsylvania* (1931), with the following note attached:

This very ancient ballad was furnished by Mr. Myron Hill, 70 years old. It was sung to my grandfather when a child, soon after the War of Revolution, by veterans of that war, and he sang it to me in 1876, in memory of our family soldiers of 100 years before.- John C. French, 1919.<sup>75</sup>

This would place the song earlier than the Tannahill's lyric. An earlier incarnation of the tune 'The Breas O' Bowether' dates back to at least 1740, the lyric given by Shoemaker is clearly Tannahill's and in spite of John C. French's note on the song made in 1919, above the song's title Shoemaker states: 'This version sung and played on the piano by Mrs J. W. Quiggle, (1828-1914), Clinton County, Pa.'<sup>76</sup> Given that the locality the song lyric refers to is the burial place of Rob Roy McGregor (1671-1734), it is possible that the tune goes back some time before 1740. Tannahill's lines are suggestive of McGregor's life, so it is possible Tannahill had him in mind when he wrote the lyric:

I will range thro the wilds,  
And the deep glens sae dreary,  
An return wi their spoils,  
Tae the bow'r o my deary.<sup>77</sup>

According to the Scottish folk song collector Jack Campin an earlier lyric, very different from Tannahill's, was published by John Hamilton in *24 Scots Songs* in 1796.<sup>78</sup> Burns put the lyric 'Peggy Allison' to the tune and later R. A. Smith modified the tune in the light of Tannahill's lyric. Burns's and Tannahill's lyrics have absolutely nothing in common. Tannahill's lyric has also been set to the tune, 'The Three Carles o Buchanan'. The later lyrics – those subsequent to Tannahill's – are derived from Tannahill's 'Braes o Balquhither', while the later tunes also appear to derive from Smith's recasting of the tune 'Braes o Balquhither'. Tannahill's lyric with Smith's tune is a major point of arrival and

departure, leading back to and forward from the original dance tune. This is one of the few examples where the popular version of the song that has come down to us today has taken its route through Tannahill rather than Burns, though this is in no small measure due to the efforts of McPeake. Nevertheless, in the late twentieth century it has been performed by The Tannahill Weavers, Pete Seeger, The Silencers and Rod Stewart among others.

According to Hamish Henderson:

‘The Braes o’ Balquhiddie’ is Tannahill’s contribution to a well-established genre in European folk-song. It is the call of the town-bred boy to his girl to have a country holiday, and enjoy sex and scenery ‘where glad innocence reigns’. The best of these songs have a wonderful and often poignant lyric freshness - especially those composed at the time the Industrial Revolution was turning many of our towns into smoky hell-holes.<sup>79</sup>

It is worth bearing in mind that a version of this tune has survived from pre-industrial times to the present. This would suggest that it has the ability to transcend both time and ideology; it was popular as a dance tune before the advent of specialisation and the separation of art from everyday entertainment in peoples’ daily lives, and it remains a popular song despite all the other forms of art and entertainment that new technologies have brought in their wake. This is a tune and a lyric that have been constantly re-invented; the central reason for its success must be that it has an appeal to a large audience across both time and place. One of the most interesting comparisons that can be made is between the lyric of Francis McPeake and that of Tannahill. This is Tannahill’s second stanza:

I will twine thee a bow’r,  
By the clear siller fountain,  
And I’ll cover it o’er  
Wi the flowers o the mountain;  
I will range through the wilds,  
And the deep glens sae dreary,  
And return wi their spoils,

To the bower o' my deary.<sup>80</sup>

And this is Francis McPeake's written in 1947:

I will build my love a tower  
Near yon cool crystal fountain;  
And on it I will place  
All the flowers of the mountain.  
Will ye go lassie go?  
And we'll all go together,  
To pluck wild mountain thyme  
All around the bloomin' heather.  
Will ye go lassie go?<sup>81</sup>

The similarities are striking and leave no doubt that the McPeake version is a direct descendent of Tannahill's version. This represents a 'folk' tradition that is internationalist and progressive, alive because of its humanity and its ability to make people feel, at whatever point in history some songster or other decides to take up the mantle of the song and bring it to a new audience. Tannahill was prepared to try different forms and styles when it came to song-writing; to break away from earlier tune driven practices and write lyrics for which he was happy to have other musicians provide new tunes.

Lyricaly, he could be quite 'standard' and fairly predicible at times, yet he was technically gifted, robust in the use of his language and of his intellect and above all humane and progressive in the ideas he expressed through his lyrics. His technical skill, use of intellect and support for the humane and progressive is extremely well illustrated by the song 'Companion of my youthful sports'. The lyric is set to the well known tune of 'Gilderoy'<sup>82</sup> and was written by Tannahill in response to the death of a friend at the Battle of Corunna, in Spain on January 16<sup>th</sup> 1809. It is a song that reeks of gloom as indeed have many versions of 'Gilderoy' though there is a parallel between Tannahill's 'Companion'

and Thomas Campbell's version of 'Gilderoy' in that both involve 'mouldering' in the 'clay' some considerable time before 'John Brown's body'.<sup>83</sup> However, Tannahill's use of 'mouldering' probably derives from Thomas Gray's use of it in 'Elegy Written in a Country Church Yard': 'Where heaves the turf in many a mouldering heap'. In relation to 'Gilderoy' Tannahill quite cleverly uses the lines: 'A victim to the pride of courts, / Thy early death I mourn'. Gilderoy was portrayed in the broadside ballad (c. 1700) as being a victim of unjust English laws applied in the law courts of Scotland, though Tannahill uses 'courts' in a different sense, both Gilderoy and Tannahill's friend died young because of what can be viewed as the arbitrary actions of government. Wordsworth and De Quincey were of the opinion regarding Corunna that 'the only way to understand what had happened was to blame the government'.<sup>84</sup> In fact the view was widely held that the British government had made serious errors of judgement in Spain and that ministers were to blame for the death of the Glaswegian commander of the British troops Sir John Moore, who died on the beach at Corunna. A poem (or song), 'The Disastrous Administration', illustrating this view of British ministerial incompetence during the Spanish campaign appeared in *The Morning Chronicle* of February 19<sup>th</sup> 1810, with the refrain:

Oh! for disasters, JOHN BULL loves disasters,  
 Without them he'd never be mellow,  
 Then grant us disasters, and very bad masters,  
 To make him a fine happy fellow.<sup>85</sup>

By choosing the tune of 'Gilderoy' Tannahill quite cleverly draws attention to the deadly impact of the actions of states on powerless individuals:

COMPANION of my youthful sports,  
 From love and friendship torn,  
 A victim to the pride of courts,  
 Thy early death I mourn.

Unshrouded on a foreign shore,  
Thou'rt mould'ring in the clay,  
While here thy weeping friends deplore  
Corunna's fatal day.

How glows the youthful warrior's mind  
With thoughts of laurels won,  
But ruthless Ruin lurks behind,  
"And marks him for her own."  
How soon the meteor ray is shed,  
"That lures him to his doom,"  
And dark Oblivion veils his head  
In everlasting gloom!<sup>86</sup>

The line 'And marks him for her own' is a slightly inaccurate quotation from the first stanza of 'The Epitaph' from Thomas Gray's 'Elegy written in a Country Churchyard' (1751) and it is particularly appropriate in the circumstances. These are Gray's lines:

Here rests his head upon the lap of Earth  
A youth to Fortune and to Fame unknown.  
Fair Science frown'd not on his humble birth,  
And Melancholy mark'd him for her own.<sup>87</sup>

Tannahill has written a sophisticated and multi-layered lyric on the theme of the waste of young life. His choice of tune and quotations reinforce the sense of loss and mourning; marrying a Scottish tune with quotations from Augustan poets and shifting the focus of the lyric onto the fate of the ordinary soldier, shows a keen intelligence at work. The lines 'How glows the youthful warrior's mind' and 'How soon the meteor ray is shed' are memorable, arresting and pointed. This song is intellectually robust and emotionally tender. Tannahill has remembered his reading, experienced his feelings, and brought them onto the page with skill and dignity. He has taken the time to think about what was happening elsewhere in the world, 'While here thy weeping friends deplore/ Corunna's fatal day'. Although there was much poetry written about General Sir John Moore,

Tannahill makes no reference to him, rather, he concentrates on the fact that the British barely had time to bury their dead, on the sadness of war and the 'everlasting gloom'.<sup>88</sup> This is as tender and mournful an anti-war lyric as has ever been written. There are no heroes, the first four lines of the second stanza reflect rather more tenderly, Scott of Amwell's line about war and the recruiting service drum: 'To thoughtless youth it pleasure yields' (first published in 1782).<sup>89</sup>

Tannahill's concern for nature shows him to be part of the movement in European thought which involved James Hutton, Wordsworth, Ruskin and William Morris. His thematic reference points of 'solitaries', 'outcast poets', 'ideal community' and 'fraternity' are described by Michael Ferber as 'typical themes' of romanticism as is the 'interaction between mind and nature'.<sup>90</sup> And in this sense Tannahill can be defined as a Scottish Romantic. It should not come as a surprise to find that a German edition of his poems and songs was published in 1841. Nor should it be strange that an American edition was published by R. W. Mackie in New York in 1820, nor that it was re-printed in 1990.

Tannahill's songs have a different texture from Burns's and Lady Nairne's: less jaunty than Burns's but more intense than Nairne's. They fill the gap between the bar-room and the drawing-room. They were written for everyone to enjoy, though for some Tannahill was too close to the tavern, and for others too close to the drawing-room. This is not a surprise as Tannahill was writing at a time when those like George Thomson, and later R. A. Smith, were building and exploiting the middle-class market at the expense of original street tunes and 'folk' lyrics. The development in the late eighteenth century of a mass market for popular songs was also driven by printers and publishers of sheet music. Lyrics now had identifiable authors, as did tunes. Art as a product of the work of



individuals and named groups was taking over almost completely from earlier anonymous collectivist forms. The economic, social and technological developments of the Industrial Revolution were changing irreversibly the nature of the society, and methods of song composition and transmission were changing too. In Tannahill's song-writing practices it is possible to detect a combination of the pre-industrial and the industrial. Like Robert Fergusson he looks both backwards and forwards.<sup>91</sup> The content of his lyrics also reflect a sense of dismay with the processes of the Industrial Revolution, yet without that revolution it is unlikely Tannahill's songs would have travelled so widely across time and place.<sup>92</sup>

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The last piece Tannahill is known to have written was 'Why Unite to Banish Care'. On Thursday 15<sup>th</sup> May 1810, he left a copy at the house of R. A. Smith:

Two days before his death he showed me several poetical pieces of a most strange texture, and in the afternoon of the same day he called on me again, requesting me to return him a song that had been left for my perusal. I had laid it past in a music book and was unable to find it at the time. It was his last production and he seemed to be much disappointed when, after a long search, I could not procure it for him.<sup>93</sup>

### **Original Song**

Air - - "Sons of Momus"

Why unite to banish Care?  
Let him come our joys to share;  
Doubly blest our cup shall flow,  
When it soothes a brother's wo;  
'Twas for this the pow'rs divine  
Crown'd our board with generous wine.

Far be hence the sordid elf

Who'd claim enjoyment for himself;  
Come the hardy seaman, lame,  
The gallant soldier, robb'd of fame;  
Welcome all who bear the woes  
Of various kind, that merit knows

Patriot heroes, doom'd to sigh,  
Idle 'neath Corruption's eye;  
Honest tradesmen, credit-worn,  
Pining under fortune's scorn;  
Wanting wealth, or lacking fame,  
Welcome all that worth can claim

Come, the hoary-headed sage,  
Suff'ring more from want than age;  
Come, the proud, though needy Bard,  
Starving 'midst a world's regard:  
Welcome, welcome, one and all  
That feel, on this unfeeling ball.<sup>94</sup>

It is significant that Tannahill was buried in the cemetery of Paisley's West Relief Church.

He was not all that keen on church attendance and from the evidence given in a letter to James Barr written on Christmas Eve 1809, had a personal preference for the sermons of his acquaintance and minister at the Abbey, Robert Boog:

save to hear Mr Boog preach I consider it only an unbecoming passing of time to go to any other of our— no - I have gone rather far, and will stop.<sup>95</sup>

The Abbey represented the centre of power of the mainstream Kirk (Church of Scotland) in Paisley, and given Tannahill's satirical treatment of Kirk Elders and Anti-Burghers in his work, his attendance at these sermons more than likely reflects his personal knowledge of and respect for Boog as a poet and man of books and learning, rather than a specific adherence to any particular Presbyterian sect. However, the West Relief Church was a venue for radical discussion: in 1817 Tannahill's friend Robert Allan 'spoke at the great Reform Meeting held in the Relief Church'.<sup>96</sup> A year earlier they did 'Welcome, welcome, one and all', when a large meeting was held to discuss the 'present Distresses of the

County, their Causes, and probable remedies'.<sup>97</sup> At this meeting a Mr J. Wilkinson gave the first speech in a debate that was couched in highly Paineite terms:

Let us, my fellow Countrymen, instruct our children in their rights; let us inspire them with the love of sacred liberty— Let us teach them that all privilege is founded on exclusion; that government originates from, and its nature ought to be subservient, to the welfare and happiness of the people.

In the same speech Wilkinson lambasted the British press - using a paraphrase from Pope's 'Dunciad' - for its pro-monarchist obsession and anti-Bonaparte bias:

[W]e hear now from the venal scribblers of the British press only about the divine right of kings, the liberty of Europe (meaning the freedom from the more generous thralldom of Napoleon,) and their "right divine to govern mankind wrong" Legitimate succession, social order,...

Of course Wilkinson made this speech after the war with France had ended, in period when there was strong state repression of demands for reform, rumblings amongst the masses were far more notable post-war than in the period 1800-1815. It can be argued that for writers such as Tannahill the war acted as a barrier to the expression of overtly political views critical of the British government. From December 1792 with the publication of the anti-French and anti-radical pamphlet, *The Paisley Weaver's Letter to his Neighbours and Fellow Tradesmen*, there was a concerted campaign in the British press which conflated the French Revolution with Jacobinism, atheism and treason.<sup>99</sup> Indeed, that same month Isaac Cruikshank (1756-1811) produced his cartoon, *Wha Wants Me?*, in which Thomas Paine is depicted as a font of 'atheism', 'treachery', 'misery', 'famine', 'treason' and other apparently undesirable social phenomena.<sup>100</sup> Both Paine and Thomas Muir were often labelled 'Jacobins' and traitors in the British press although in fact they sided with the Girondins against the Jacobins in their opposition to the death sentence imposed on Louis XVI.

From the early 1790s until as late as the 1830s, British government propaganda and much of the British press denounced as a ‘Jacobin’ almost anyone who took even a mildly anti-government stance (though the end of war with France saw far more open protests develop). Throughout Tannahill’s adult life those who supported such views as ‘the sovereignty of the people’, electoral reform, lower-taxes, or higher wages for tradesmen, were often labelled as dangerous radicals and traitors in publications such as *The Anti-Jacobin* and *The Glasgow Courier*.<sup>101</sup>

Tannahill’s gentle mocking of judges, the king, the uncharitable, the wealthy and the church in his poetry, and his persistence in writing about (and from the viewpoint of) working people, ordinary soldiers and sailors, women and the poor in his songs does put him on the side of a progressive, humane political outlook. His absolute insistence that wealth does not confer on any individual greater value as a human being than anybody else and that poverty does not diminish the value of a human being is, for the particular time he was writing, a radical insistence upon the principle of equality of human worth. Whether his perseverance with this principle stems from the influence of writers such as Ramsay, Burns, Pope and Moore; from Presbyterian radicalism, Scottish Enlightenment philosophy, Painite republicanism, or some combination of these traditions - does not really matter. It is an argument for the dignity, human rights and respect for the humanity of all who live on this ‘unfeeling ball’. For Tannahill to argue consistently in favour of the principle of equality in his poetry and song and at a time when that principle was under enormous attack from the British state highlights his integrity as a human being and as an artist.

It is fitting, given his anti-imperialist sympathies, that he was buried in May 1810, in the churchyard where six years later, Mr J. Wilkinson made his long forgotten radical

speech in support of the welfare of the poor and 'sovereignty of the people'. Whether or not Tannahill's political expressions were circumspect due to historical circumstances or to temperament, he appears to have been something of a reticent radical. He remains, however, a fine songwriter and poet.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> See, Michael Ferber, 'Romantic Anticapitalism: A Response to Sayre and Lowy', *Spirits of Fire*, Rosso and Watkins, eds. (New Jersey, 1990), p. 75, for some interesting general discussion on the new industrial capitalism and romantic period poetic responses to it. Ferber states: 'Buying and selling, getting and spending, are targets of much of the moral and religious literature of the West since ancient times, and it would be interesting to trace the connections between this tradition and romanticism, with its less specific target, the social consequences of the unleashed market'.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Tannahill, 'Contentment', *Poems, Songs and Correspondence of Robert Tannahill*, David Semple ed. (Paisley, 1876), p. 294.

<sup>3</sup> Robert Tannahill, 'LINES On a country Justice in the South', *The Soldier's Return* (Paisley, 1807), p. 137.

<sup>4</sup> Robert Tannahill, 'Contentment', *Poems, Songs and Correspondence*, p. 294.

<sup>5</sup> Tannahill, 'Mine Ain Dear Somebody', *Poems, Songs and Correspondence*, p. 287.

<sup>6</sup> Tannahill, Letter to James Barr, 24<sup>th</sup> December 1809 (GUL, Spec. Colls., MS Robertson 1/34).

<sup>7</sup> Tannahill, Letter to Mr R. A. Smith, n.d. (National Library of Scotland, MS 2524.84).

<sup>8</sup> Tannahill, Letter to James King, 17<sup>th</sup> July 1808 (GUL, Spec. Colls., MS Robertson 1/19).

<sup>9</sup> Tannahill, Letter to James King, 17<sup>th</sup> July 1808 (GUL, Spec. Colls., MS Robertson 1/19).

<sup>10</sup> Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, Vol. 1 (Oxford, 1904), p. 3.

<sup>11</sup> Robert Tannahill, Letter to James Clark, 10<sup>th</sup> June 1808 (GUL, Spec. Colls., MS Robertson 1/17).

<sup>12</sup> Tannahill, Letter to James Clark, 27<sup>th</sup> February 1808 (GUL, Spec. Colls., MS Robertson 1/12).

<sup>13</sup> Tannahill, Letter to James King, 17<sup>th</sup> July 1808 (GUL, Spec. Colls., MS Robertson 1/19). The line of Burns's 'By turns in soaring heaven, or vaulted hell' appears in 'Second Epistle to Robert Graham Esq.' (1791), *The Poems and Songs of Robert Burns*, Vol. II., James Kinsley, ed. (Oxford, 1968), p. 589, l. 75.

<sup>14</sup> Tannahill, Letter to James Clark, 10<sup>th</sup> June 1808 (GUL, Spec. Colls., MS Robertson 1/17). Tannahill saw Stephen Kemble (1758-1822) the actor and sometime theatre manager at Edinburgh who was known to play Falstaff without padding owing to his portly build. For discussion of the Kemble family and their influence on Georgian theatre see, Gillian Russell, *Theatres of War: Performances, Politics and Society 1793-1815* (Oxford, 1995).

<sup>15</sup> Robert Tannahill, Letter to James Barr, 23<sup>rd</sup> May 1806, *Poems, Songs and Correspondence*, p. 380.

<sup>16</sup> Robert Tannahill, Letter to James King, 12<sup>th</sup> November 1809 (GUL, Spec. Colls., MS Robertson 1/29).

<sup>17</sup> Robert Tannahill, Letter to James King, 12<sup>th</sup> November 1809 (GUL, Spec. Colls., MS Robertson 1/29). For brief details of John Robertson's life see Robert Brown, ed. *Paisley Poets*, Vol. 1. (Paisley, 1889), pp. 59-61. See also, Tom Leonard, ed. *Radical Renfrew* (Edinburgh, 1990), p. 5.

<sup>18</sup> Emily Lorraine de Montluzin, website, 'Attributions of Authorship in the European Magazine, 1782-1826': <http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/bsuva/euromag/1EM.html>, p. 1. (Accessed 12/6/06).

<sup>19</sup> Anonymous, copied from the *European Magazine* (January 1816), by R. A. Smith (GUL, Spec. Colls., MS Robertson 12/9).

<sup>20</sup> See Kendal B. Taft, "'Scenes of my Childhood': a comment", *American Literature*, Vol. 13, No.4 (Jan., 1942), p. 410.

<sup>21</sup> John Drew, 'A twist in the tale', *The Guardian* (Saturday, November 1, 2003).

<sup>22</sup> P. A. Ramsay, ed., *Works of Tannahill* (Edinburgh, 1838), p. 4.

<sup>23</sup> James Barr, Letter to William Porteous, September 28<sup>th</sup> 1859, *Poems, Songs and Correspondence*, pp. 445-446.

<sup>24</sup> R. A. Smith, in *The Harp of Renfrewshire*, William Motherwell, ed. (Glasgow, 1819), pp. XXXVI-XXXVII.

<sup>25</sup> Sam Monaghan, *The Tannahill Songbook* (c.d., Corban Music, Ref: CBNCD028, 2000).

<sup>26</sup> Robert Tannahill, 'The Choice', *The Soldier's Return*, p. 64.

<sup>27</sup> Robert Tannahill, 'Jessie, the flower o' Dunblane', *Poems, Songs and Correspondence*, David Semple, ed., pp. 208-213.

<sup>28</sup> John Struthers, ed., *The Harp of Caledonia*, Vol. II (Glasgow, 1821), p. 415.

<sup>29</sup> This is an illustration of the view of Tannahill expressed by John Veitch, as detailed in this thesis p. 75.

<sup>30</sup> Peter Ross, *The Songs of Scotland*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (Paisley, 1893), p. 312. First published 1870.

<sup>31</sup> Robert Tannahill, 'Gloomy Winter's Now Awa', 'The Braes o' Gleniffer', *Poems, Songs and Correspondence*, pp. 198-201, 195-196.

- <sup>32</sup> David Daiches, 'Eighteenth-Century Vernacular Poetry', *Scottish Poetry: A critical survey*, James Kinsey, ed. (London, 1955), p. 160.
- <sup>33</sup> David Semple, ed. *Poems, Songs and Correspondence*, p. 20n.
- <sup>34</sup> Robert Tannahill, 'Woodland Burn' *The Soldier's Return*, p. 22.
- <sup>35</sup> Robert Tannahill, 'The Negro Girl', *The Soldier's Return*, pp. 171-72.
- <sup>36</sup> Alexander M'Leod, *Negro Slavery - Unjustifiable* (Glasgow, 1804).
- <sup>37</sup> Details of Tannahill's publication in periodicals while he was alive can be found in *Poems, Songs and Correspondence*, pp. lxvi-lxix. However, Semple's citation of the *Goldfinch* as a place of publication on page lxx is disputed by Davidson Cook in 'Not Tannahill's: Spurious songs included in his works', *Scots Magazine*, 34 (1941), pp. 393-6.
- <sup>38</sup> Alan Richardson, ed., *Slavery, Abolition and Emancipation*, Vol. 4 (London, 1999), p. 74.
- <sup>39</sup> Mary Robinson, 'The Negro Girl', *The Poetry of Slavery: An Anglo-American Anthology 1764-1865*, Marcus Wood, ed. (Oxford, 2003), pp. 48-53.
- <sup>40</sup> W. B. Yeats, 'The Song of Wandering Aengus', *The Major Works*, Edward Larrissy, ed., (Oxford, 1997), p. 29. Robert Tannahill, 'Lines, on the 'PLEASURES OF HOPE'', *The Soldier's Return*, p. 99.
- <sup>41</sup> Alan Richardson, ed., *Slavery, Abolition and Emancipation*, Vol. 4 (London, 1999), p. x. See also Debbie Lee, *Slavery and the Romantic Imagination* (Philadelphia, 2002), pp. 196-221.
- <sup>42</sup> William Wordsworth, 'We had a fellow-Passenger', *Romanticism: An Anthology*, Duncan Wu, ed. (Oxford, 1998), p. 373. Also in, *Poems in Two Volumes, and other Poems, 1800-1807*, Jared Curtis ed. (Cornell University Press: New York, 1983), pp. 161-162.
- <sup>43</sup> Wood, *The Poetry of Slavery*, pp. 231-234.
- <sup>44</sup> Wood, *The Poetry of Slavery*, p. 232.
- <sup>45</sup> Alexander Gilmour, 'To The Memory of Robert Tannahill', *The Poetical Magazine* (Paisley, 1815), p. 29.
- <sup>46</sup> David Semple, 'Life of Tannahill', *Poems, Songs and Correspondence*, p. lxxvi.
- <sup>47</sup> David Semple, ed., *Poems, Songs and Correspondence*, p. 483n., states of McLaren: 'He went to Ireland and commenced business there, but his Scotch liberalism brought him into trouble, and he returned to Paisley'.
- <sup>48</sup> William Livingstone, Letter to Robert Tannahill, 7<sup>th</sup> March 1806, *Poems, Songs and Correspondence*, p. 373.
- <sup>49</sup> See, Robert Tannahill, Letter to James Barr, 1<sup>st</sup> May 1806, *Poems, Songs and Correspondence*, David Semple, ed. (Paisley, 1876), p. 379.
- <sup>50</sup> David Semple, ed., *Poems, Songs and Correspondence*, p. 125n.
- <sup>51</sup> Robert Tannahill, Letter to James Clark, 20<sup>th</sup> September 1807 (GUL, Spec. Colls., MS Robertson, 1/9).
- <sup>52</sup> Semple ed. *Poems, Songs and Correspondence*, p. 49n., where Semple cites King as mentioning: 'the brilliant flashes of Moore'.
- <sup>53</sup> Jeffery W. Vail, *The Literary Relationship of Lord Byron and Thomas Moore* (Baltimore, 2001), p. 23.
- <sup>54</sup> Vail, *The Literary Relationship of Lord Byron and Thomas Moore*, p. 23.
- <sup>55</sup> Vail, *The Literary Relationship of Lord Byron and Thomas Moore*, pp. 16-17.
- <sup>56</sup> Thomas Moore, 'When Time, who Steals our Years Away', *The Poetical Works of Moore*, Godley, ed. (Oxford, 1915), p. 40. Robert Tannahill, 'Fill, Fill the Merry Bowl', 'Away Gloomy Care', David Semple, ed. (Paisley, 1876), pp. 324-25.
- <sup>57</sup> Moore, 'When Time, who Steals our Years Away', *The Poetical Works of Moore*, p. 40.
- <sup>58</sup> Robert Tannahill, 'Away Gloomy Care', *Poems, Songs and Correspondence*, p. 325.
- <sup>59</sup> Robert Tannahill, Letter to George Thomson, 6<sup>th</sup> June 1808 (GUL, Spec. Colls., MS Robertson 1/18). It is worthy of note that there is another version of 'Adieu, ye Cheerful Native Plains' in which the concept of 'exile' is much more strongly expressed, this is given in manuscript (GUL, Spec. Colls., MS Robertson 1/43) as follows:

Air— The green woods of Treugh

Adieu! ye cheerful native plains,  
 Dungeon glooms receive me,  
 Naught, alas! for me remains  
 Of all the joys ye gave me;  
 Poor exile!

---

Banished from thy shores sweet Erin  
I through life must toil despairing  
    Poor lost exile!

Howl ye horrors round my cell,  
    Nothing now can wound me,  
Mingling with your dismal swell,  
    Prison-groans surround me,  
        Poor exile!  
Naught can further injure me  
Condemned by ruthless perjury  
    A poor exile.

<sup>60</sup> Thomas Moore, 'Tho' the Last Glimpse of Erin with Sorrow I See', *The Poetical Works of Thomas Moore*, Godley, ed. (Oxford, 1915), p. 183.

<sup>61</sup> Robert Tannahill, Letter to George Thomson, 3<sup>rd</sup> July 1809 (GUL, Spec. Colls., MS Robertson 1/26).

<sup>62</sup> Ramsay's note cited in Semple, ed. (Paisley, 1876), p. 327n: 'Note by Ramsay. — 'Gambay Ora, literally *Gabhaidh mi oran*, means — I will sing.'

<sup>63</sup> Robert Tannahill, Letter to James Clark, 31<sup>st</sup> August 1805 (GUL, Spec. Colls., MS Robertson 1/4).

<sup>64</sup> Robert Tannahill, Letter to George Thomson, 2<sup>nd</sup> July 1809 (GUL, Spec. Colls., MS Robertson 1/26). This song would appear to be an early version of the Irish folksong 'The Jolly Tinker'. Today it generally begins with lines like: 'I am a jolly tinker,/ At a door I chanced to knock/ And said: 'Have you any kettles/ Or some rusty holes to block?'

<sup>65</sup> Robert Tannahill, Letter to James King, 15<sup>th</sup> September, 1808 (GUL, Spec. Colls., MS Robertson 1/21).

<sup>66</sup> A review of Thomas Moore's *Epistles, Odes and Other Poems* (1806) by Francis Jeffrey in the *Edinburgh Review*, 8 (1806), pp. 456-465, denounced him as: 'the most licentious of modern versifiers'.

<sup>67</sup> Robert Tannahill, Letter to James Clark, 4<sup>th</sup> April, 1809, (Laing Collection, Edinburgh University Library Special Collections, Shelfmark: MS La.IV.6 Tan. 2).

<sup>68</sup> Tannahill, 'Ode for Robert Burns, 29<sup>th</sup> January 1805' (Paisley, 1807), p. 57. 'Weep Not, My Love', *Poems, Songs and Correspondence*, p. 251.

<sup>69</sup> Robert Tannahill, 'Weep Not, My Love', *Poems, Songs and Correspondence*, p. 251.

<sup>70</sup> Robert Tannahill, Letter to James Barr, 19<sup>th</sup> July 1806 (GUL, Spec., Colls., MS Robertson 1/5). Song given under the title of 'The Lament'.

<sup>71</sup> Robert Tannahill, 'Weep Not, My Love', *Poems, Songs and Correspondence*, p. 251.

<sup>72</sup> Robert Tannahill, 'The Lament', Letter to James Barr, 19<sup>th</sup> July 1806 (GUL, Spec., Colls., MS Robertson 1/5).

<sup>73</sup> John Hewitt, *Rhyming Weavers & other country poets of Antrim and Down*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Belfast, 2004), p. 45. First published 1974.

<sup>74</sup> David Craig, *Scottish Literature and the Scottish People* (London, 1961), p. 141.

<sup>75</sup> John C. French, *Mountain Minstrelsy of Pennsylvania*, Henry W. Shoemaker, ed. (Philadelphia, 1931), p. 101.

<sup>76</sup> Henry W. Shoemaker, ed., *Mountain Minstrelsy of Pennsylvania*, p. 101n.

<sup>77</sup> Robert Tannahill, 'The Braes o' Balquhither', *Poems, Songs and Correspondence*, p. 238.

<sup>78</sup> Jack Campin, *More Scarce Songs*, website:

<http://www.csufresno.edu/folklore/Olson/SONGTX2.HTM#BRAESBAL>

(Accessed, 17/9/05). Lyric as published in 1796 given on Campin's website as follows:

The Braes o' Bowhether.

Now the day's growin' lang lass,  
an' sweet shines the weather,  
an' we'll owre a' the hills,  
to the Braes o' Bowhether.  
Amang the Glens an' Rashy dens,  
I'll prize thee without measure,



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Within my arms, wi' a' thy charms,  
I'll clasp my lovely treasure,  
In sweetest Love, our time will move,  
wi' mair than earthly pleasure;  
By the little limpid streams,  
On the Braes o' Bowhether.

An' I'll ay loe thee dearly,  
Ilk day wes' forgather,  
Syne we'll row on the fog,  
By the Braes o' Bowhether;  
To Pipe or Flute, when time will suit,  
We'll dance like ony feather,  
An', skip the knowes where Claver grows,  
or stray amang the Heather;  
Ay free frae strife in sic a life,  
There, weary shall we never,  
By the limpid little streams,  
On the Braes o' Bowhether.

<sup>79</sup> Hamish Henderson, *Alias MacAlias* (Edinburgh, 1992), p. 281.

<sup>80</sup> Robert Tannahill, 'The Braes o Balquhither', *Poems, Songs and Correspondence*, p. 238

<sup>81</sup> This version of the McPeake lyric and some notes on the history of the song can be found at the *Cantaria/Chivalry Music*, 'Wild Mountain Thyme', website:  
<http://www.chivalry.com/cantaria/lyrics/wildmt.html>. (Accessed, 17/3/07).

<sup>82</sup> 'Gilderoy' is a Scottish ballad with a long and complex history. It is about a robber who was hung in the first half of the seventeenth century supposedly due to the imposition in Scotland of unjust English laws.

<sup>83</sup> Thomas Campbell, 'Gilderoy', *The Complete Poetic Works of Thomas Campbell*, Epes Sargent, ed. (Boston, 1859), p. 268.

<sup>84</sup> J. R. Watson, *Romanticism and War* (Basingstoke, 2003), p. 134. See Wordsworth's tract on the *Convention of Cintra: (published 1809) with two letters of Wordsworth written in the year 1811*, introduction by A. V. Dicey (London, 1915).

<sup>85</sup> Anonymous, 'The Disastrous Administration', Betty Bennett, ed., *British War Poetry in the Age of Romanticism: 1793-1815*, (New York, 1976), pp. 421-22.

<sup>86</sup> Robert Tannahill, 'Companion of my Youthful Sports', *Poems, Songs and Correspondence*, pp. 252-53. The lines in quotation marks are from Gray's 'Elegy in a Country Churchyard' and Oliver Goldsmith's 'The Hermit', also know as, 'Edwin and Angela, a Ballad'.

<sup>87</sup> Thomas Gray, 'Elegy written in a Country Churchyard', *Poems Published in 1768*, A. F. Bell, ed. (Oxford, 1915), p. 119.

<sup>88</sup> Probably the most famous poem about Sir John Moore's death is Charles Wolfe's (1791-1823), 'The Burial of Sir John Moore after Corunna'.

<sup>89</sup> John Scott of Amwell, 'The Drum', cited in *British War Poetry in the Age of Romanticism*, p. 80. First published in John Scott, *The Poetical Works of John Scott* (London, 1782), p. 201.

<sup>90</sup> Michael Ferber, 'Romantic Anticapitalism: A Response to Sayre and Lowy', *Spirits of Fire*, Rosso and Watkins, eds. (New Jersey, 1990), p. 73.

<sup>91</sup> See F. W. Freeman, *Robert Fergusson and the Scots Humanist Compromise* (Edinburgh, 1984), p. 1, and his general argument about Fergusson and Scottish humanism.

<sup>92</sup> It also worth noting that Tannahill's song 'The Soldier's Adieu' [see David Semple, ed. (Paisley, 1876), p. 249] travelled to Canada where it mutated into 'Farewell to Nova Scotia'.

<sup>93</sup> R. A. Smith, in *The Harp of Renfrewshire*, William Motherwell, ed. (Glasgow, 1819), p. XL.

<sup>94</sup> Robert Tannahill, 'Original Song' (GUL, Spec. Colls., MS Robertson 1/51).

<sup>95</sup> Robert Tannahill, Letter to James Barr, 24<sup>th</sup> December 1809 (GUL, Spec Colls., MS Robertson 1/34).

<sup>96</sup> David Semple, ed., *Poems, Songs and Correspondence*, p. 122n. Semple states: 'He [Allan] spoke at the great Reform Meeting held in the Relief Church in 1817, and took a prominent part in the Radical proceedings in 1819 and 1820'.

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<sup>97</sup> See *Report of the Meeting, Held in the Relief Church, Paisley, On Saturday 5<sup>th</sup> October, 1816, To consider the present Distresses of the County, their causes and probable Remedies* (Paisley, 1816).

<sup>98</sup> J. Wilkinson, in *Report of the Meeting, Held in the Relief Church, Paisley, On Saturday 5<sup>th</sup> October, 1816, To consider the present Distresses of the County, their causes and probable Remedies*, Paisley, 1816, pp. 6-7. This pamphlet was printed by John Neilson and a copy can be found at GUL, Spec Colls. Bf66-b.3 (Robertson).

<sup>99</sup> *The Paisley Weaver's Letter to his Neighbours and Fellow Tradesmen* ([Paisley?], 20<sup>th</sup> Dec. 1792). Pamphlet in Paisley Central Library Archive.

<sup>100</sup> Cruikshank's cartoon is reproduced on the front cover of *The Thomas Paine Reader*, Foot and Kramnick, eds. (London, 1987).

<sup>101</sup> J. Wilkinson, *Report of the Meeting, Held in the Relief Church*, (Paisley, 1816), p. 6. *The Glasgow Courier*, founded in 1791, was later edited by William Motherwell, it was an extremely pro-monarchist and anti-reform newspaper. The *Anti-Jacobin* appeared weekly from 20th November 1797 to 7th July 1798 under the editorship of William Gifford. Its founder was George Canning, a colleague of Pitt the Younger.