

ANGUS McINTOSH LECTURE

7 January, 2008

'Revisiting the makars'

Angus McIntosh was, as you have heard, president of the Scottish Text Society for twelve years from 1977 to 1989, and honorary president thereafter. Although of Scots parentage, as you can tell from his name, he wasn't a Scot but was born, as he used to say, in the old kingdom of Deira, south of the Tyne, or perhaps Bernicia, depending on where you think the boundary lay. The Society was extraordinarily lucky to secure the services of such an immensely distinguished scholar. As Forbes Professor of English Language here at Edinburgh, he led what was surely the greatest department of English language in the world. 1986 saw the publication of the four-volume *Linguistic Atlas of Later Medieval English*, the huge project which he had masterminded since its inception in 1952. During his years as President of the STS he was also working tirelessly to sustain the Dictionary of the Older Scottish Tongue as chair of its Joint Council, a position he held for thirty years.

The Scottish Text Society in the late seventies and eighties, when Angus was president, had an eminent Council, which included among others Jack Aitken, who was the backbone of the Dictionary of the Older Scottish Tongue, and his successor, Jim Stevenson; Tom Crawford and Matthew McDiarmid, from Aberdeen; David Daiches, Ronnie Jack, Emily Lyle and Jack MacQueen from Edinburgh; Rod Lyall and Alex Scott from Glasgow. Those were the days when

the teaching of older Scots literature and language flourished in the Scottish universities. I was at Stirling and had the privilege of being the Society's Secretary for five years from 1983 to 1988, taking over from Winifred MacQueen, and so I worked closely with Angus. They were not easy times for the Society – when were they ever? – and he was a courteous, sharp-witted, far-sighted chair, and, as everyone who knew him will testify, a most lovable man. It is a great privilege, of which I am certainly unworthy, to have been asked by the Society to give this lecture in honour of his memory.

I am particularly unworthy because I have a kind of Rip van Winkle relationship with medieval Scots poetry. For those of you who don't know the Washington Irving story, Rip van Winkle fell asleep in 1766 and when he woke up twenty years later he found that the American War of Independence had taken place. I'm in much the same position. My intellectual focus has mostly been elsewhere for the last twenty years or so, since I left Scotland, and from 2000 on it has mostly not been on medieval things at all. But as it happens, I have been asked to write a chapter for the *New Cambridge History of English Poetry* on Henryson, Dunbar and Douglas. So in responding to the kind invitation of the Scottish Text Society to give this lecture, I thought I might start from my Rip van Winkle experience of waking up and not just finding a Scottish government in place but revisiting the makars.

One striking difference from 1988 is the amount of new work that has been done: the completion of the Dictionary of the Older Scottish Tongue in 2002 and its miraculous publication, along with the Scottish National Dictionary, in electronic format in 2004; the new editions – a flow of Scottish Text Society publications, of course, including *The Buik of Alexander the Conquerour*, never previously printed (in the old days you had to read a handwritten transcript of the manuscript which was kept in a cupboard in the DOST offices); Priscilla Bawcutt's superlative edition of Dunbar, published in 1998, and her monograph, *Dunbar the Makar*; the new anthologies and collections aimed at wider readerships, including the online electronic editions of Henryson and Dunbar for undergraduates, published by TEAMS, which make word-searchable texts available for the first time; the regular volumes of conference proceedings, with more projected; the new *Edinburgh History of Scottish Literature* and the one-volume overviews of Scottish literature, the most recent being Robert Crawford's prize-winning *Scotland's Books*.

There is also, of course, new historical research: biographies of James III and IV, and of bishop Elphinstone; studies of towns, women, chivalry; and new general and political histories, including the ongoing multi-volume *Edinburgh History of Scotland*. Scottish medieval research is also part of the wider shift towards the provision of electronic research resources in many fields. The

digitization of medieval manuscripts and books includes Scottish psalters and books of hours, making it possible for us to study the most widely-read forms of domestic devotion before the era of print, while Early English Books Online, despite its name, includes the productions of the early Scottish presses.

So the scholarly scene has been transformed since I last looked. I was, I confess, a little nervous that when I returned to Henryson, Dunbar and Douglas I wouldn't enjoy them as much as I had done in the past when I used to teach Scottish literature to undergraduates at Stirling. I did wonder if I would struggle to reread them, but in fact what struck me most was the extraordinary pleasure and excitement that these late fifteenth and early sixteenth-century poets offer to the twenty-first century reader. By this I mean of course the pleasure and excitement of the experience of reading them disinterestedly, as it were, without any clear agenda, just to see what they are like, in the way in which one reads an entirely new poem in the *Times Literary Supplement*, for example. You may, or may not, finish it: it has to do its work on you and not just you your work on it. Reading in order directly to prepare for teaching or research, I realized, is different. It is an instrumental process; there is another end in view, there are obligations (to finish reading a particular work, for example), there are questions to be formulated, points to be made. I suppose at some level I must have been

thinking What on earth am I going to say? but at the top of my mind was simply
 What is this poetry like to read?

The first thing that struck me on revisiting the makars is the sheer
 brilliance of that period of fifty years or so from around 1460 to 1513. My cut-off
 point of course is the date of Flodden and the end of the reign of James IV, but
 that's not the reason I've chosen it. 1513 suggests itself because in the summer of
 that year Gavin Douglas, then provost of St Giles, Edinburgh, finished the
Eneados, his translation into Scots of Virgil's *Aeneid*. He wrote no more poetry, as
 far as we know, before his early death nine years later in 1522. And 1513 is also
 the last year in which Dunbar is mentioned in any official records so far
 discovered. The *Treasurer's Accounts* are missing for 1513-1515, but he doesn't
 appear thereafter. This means that we can't be certain, given how difficult it is to
 date most of his poems, whether he continued to write after 1513 either. (It's
 worth noting that Priscilla Bawcutt doesn't believe that Dunbar wrote the poem
 sometimes attributed to him which refers to the absence of Albany from Scotland
 between 1517 and 1522. She does, however, point out that one poem definitely
 by Dunbar – 'Thow that in hevin for our salvation' – sounds as if it could have
 been written in the febrile years after Flodden). By 1513 Henryson, the oldest of
 the three, had certainly been dead for perhaps ten or twelve years. His birth date
 is unknown, but he was probably writing at least from the 1460s when Dunbar

was still a child and before Douglas was born. We know he was dead by 1505, the date of the so-called 'Lament for the makars'. The two younger poets – Dunbar was about fifteen years older than Douglas – thus came to maturity at the end of the fifteenth century and the beginning of the sixteenth in a literary milieu in which Henryson had been the great innovator of the previous generation, as they were to be the great innovators of theirs. All this is completely familiar to many of you, but perhaps not all, which is why I am rehearsing it.

In order to understand the originality of the makars, we need to understand the history of Scottish poetry in the first two-thirds of the fifteenth century, which of course included Henryson's own youth. It is itself a history of experiment and innovation. Much of the scholarly work that has been done over the last quarter of a century has helped us to fill in the blanks in this period. The older dominant Scots narrative mode established in the fourteenth century and extending into the fifteenth – chronicle, saint's life, heroic legend -- exemplified in Barbour's *Bruce*, the Scots legendary, the *Troy* fragments, the *Buik of Alexander*, all in four-stress couplets, had been radically extended: the *Kingis Quair*, the first Scots philosophical dream-vision; Holland's *Buke of the Howlat*, the first *chanson d'aventure* and also the earliest extended alliterative poem in Scots; Hay's *Buik of Alexander the Conquerour*, the first Scots poem in the five-stress couplets that

Chaucer invented for *The Canterbury Tales* and that Lydgate had used in *The Troy Book* and *The Siege of Thebes*. I remember Angus McIntosh saying that a very interesting thing to do would be to collect up all the evidence to show how, when and by what routes knowledge of Chaucer's writings moved northwards from London in the course of the fifteenth century before the print era. It wouldn't, he pointed out, have been like the seepage of a stain, but would have gone by leaps, as books moved from place to place with travellers, passed among friends, or were sold to customers. I don't think this has yet been done systematically, though we are now in a better position to do it. And of course Henryson's contemporaries writing in the last part of the fifteenth century, including the unknown authors of *Lancelot of the Laik*, *Rauf Coilyear*, and *Golagros and Gawane*, as well as the almost unknown Blind Harry, author of the *Wallace*, were also taking poetry in new directions.

Another Angus-ism I recall, by the way, is his reckoning that only about ten percent of the manuscripts made in the later Middle Ages have survived. I can't remember how he arrived at this figure, but I am sure that we have lost a lot of early Scots poetry among that ninety percent, not only because the 'Lament for the makars' includes the names of poets we know nothing about, but also because I simply don't believe that everyone wrote in four-stress couplets until the *Kingis Quair*, or that the sophistication and command of *The*

Buke of the Howlat, composed in the late 1440s, simply sprang from nowhere. But the formal experimentation of other fifteenth-century poets is, I think, just that; the originality of Henryson, Dunbar and Douglas is of a different order. They are all highly educated men, in a period in which education was valued (and some of their fellow-poets were, of course, highly educated as well). They all have a hugely ambitious imaginative reach. They push at the boundaries of the human: gods and men, living and dead. And so they can all deal with hallucinatory, dreamed-of, phantasmagorical experiences, with other worlds. I think this makes them particularly in tune with the twenty-first century: we may have lost Virgil and Aesop but our electronic culture is utterly familiar with other worlds, with animals that talk, space journeys, visitations from the past or from the dead.

The issue that my revisiting the makars has raised for me is this: what kind of critical approach or method can do justice to, or answer to, the experience of reading them? In fixing on what they are like to read I am not only aligning myself with critical approaches that focus on reader response, a by now very familiar methodology which I'll say more about later. I am also responding to what I think is the current state of criticism of older Scots poetry, which I have been trying to catch up with. I can discern several strands: one is a mode of close reading of poems, paying special attention to linguistic and formal features, which rests, implicitly or explicitly, on the distinction between form and content

that was fundamental to the New Criticism. Another, less common than one might perhaps expect, is theorized readings of various kinds that demonstrate more modern agendas from that of New Criticism – feminist, semiotic, whatever – but which are still, nevertheless, equally *parti-pris*. A third approach entails a kind of paraphrase, in which poems are discussed in terms of what they say, often very knowledgeably and intelligently, but with little or no attention being paid to how they say it. This is quite a common mode which often includes contextual or historical approaches and it's another version of the separation of form from content. (As an aside, one of the things that strikes me on waking from my Rip van Winkle sleep is that literary criticism of older Scots poetry, insofar as it is historicized, seems to make much more extensive use of political history than any other kind -- social, economic, religious and intellectual – although these would no doubt provide extremely fruitful approaches, as people writing on other medieval literatures have found). A fourth approach treats poetry as the object of empirical historical research. This is the least 'literary' approach of all, but it has a certain standing as scholarship. These approaches can and do blur into one another, of course, and, as Cresseid said, 'Nane but my self as now I will accuse': I have written in all these modes, which is of course why I recognize them. What I think needs to be done is to integrate these approaches in a criticism that is literary (of which I'll say more shortly), theoretically aware, that

pays attention to both to form and content, language and meaning, without separating them, and which also integrates the kinds of knowledge produced in the last twenty years to which I referred earlier.

Let me say a little more about the literary. Many of us, myself included, have become accustomed to thinking of poems not as some separate category called literature but as texts that are not different from other kinds of texts and so we put them alongside one another, applying to them all the sophisticated understandings that have been developed about the nature of textuality. The idea that there isn't a readily definable separate category of the literary now seems to be pretty engrained, even in places that are apparently dedicated to the notion of literature: the general editor of the new *Oxford History of English Literature*, for example, states in his preface that

The word 'literature' is often taken to refer to poems, plays and novels, but historically a much wider range of writing may be considered as 'literary' or as belonging within the realm of what used to be called 'letters'.

And so he allows his volume editors latitude in defining the boundaries of the literary in any one period. The 2007 *Edinburgh History of Scottish Literature*, goes further: volume I, *From Columba to the Union*, includes chapters on history, historiography, geography, languages, theology, philosophy, legal writings, art and architecture. One of the surprising things about this volume is in fact how

comparatively little space is actually devoted to literature, narrowly understood. I don't mean this as a criticism but simply as an observation and I don't want to exaggerate it, but it is noticeably different from the much more restricted focus of the first volume of the Aberdeen *History of Scottish Literature*, published twenty years ago.

So in suggesting that we find a way of approaching the makers that answers to the experience of reading them, I'm not simply calling for a return to the aesthetic approach, to what is sometimes called 'literature as literature'. New Critical method paid particularly close attention to form, understood as a verbal patterning and organization that are analytically, at least, separable from content. Since poems are not paraphrasable (this was axiomatic) it seemed to follow that what they say is less important than how. The New Critical conception of literature as literature isolated the poem as an autonomous linguistic object from the rest of culture, from history, geography, languages, theology, law and all the rest of things that I think quite properly concern the editors of the Edinburgh *History of Scottish Literature*.

The integrated criticism I am calling for involves finding a way of locating the literary in the kinds of inter- or multidisciplinary assumed by the *Edinburgh History*, and at the same time of using the resources that are provided by the *Dictionary of the Older Scottish Tongue*, the *Middle English Dictionary* and by the

superb editions of the last quarter of a century. All this should contribute, not to a discussion of the poems, so much as a discussion of reading the poems, which is different. Reading is, after all, where we are; it's where we start from. It is the poem as we know it; our only access to it is by reading. Reading is a collaboration with the writer: it realizes, makes actual, the potential interplay of meaning and feeling, shaped by written words in a particular order. In thinking about all this I have been much helped by the recent work of my York colleague Derek Attridge (who was, as it happens, head of English at Strathclyde many years ago). Attridge has written extremely interestingly and accessibly about these issues in a prize-winning book, *The Singularity of Literature*, published in 2005.

Attridge describes the process of literary creativity as an engagement with what he calls 'otherness', an overused word that he analyses with great care, using the concept to talk both about the creative process – what is going on when the writer writes -- and creative reading – what is going when the critic reads.

Both of these entail experiences of the other, which he defines as follows:

Verbal creation is the handling of language whereby something we might all 'otherness' or 'alterity' or 'the other' is made or allowed to impact upon the existing configurations on an individual's mental world. ... Otherness is that which is, at a given moment, outside the horizon provided by the culture for thinking, understanding, imagining, feeling, perceiving' (19).

He goes on to say that

The other does not have a prior and independent existence that happens to be masked from me; it ... does not come from outer space but arises from the possibilities and impossibilities inherent in the culture as embodied in a subject or a group of subjects. (These possibilities and impossibilities arise ... from the fact that the culture ... is not whole, stable, or homogeneous, that it depends on certain exclusions and marginalizations). ... We can specify the relation between the same and the other a little more fully by thinking of it in terms of that which the existing cultural order has to occlude in order to maintain its capacities and configurations, its value systems and hierarchies of importance; that which it cannot afford to acknowledge if it is to continue without change. (p. 30)

The engagement with the other is possible because culture – all the multifarious ‘practices, institutions, norms and beliefs that characterize a particular place and time’ -- is not monolithic but complex, riven and subject to change. The creation of the other – which is both a creation of and by the other -- is at the same time an active struggle, a ‘breaking down of the familiar,’ and a more passive welcoming of disruption, of the destabilisation of the cultural field. Attridge quotes an observation of the novelist J. M. Coetzee on writing:

It is naïve to think that writing is a simple two-stage process: first you decide what you want to say, then you say it. As all of us know, you write because you don’t know what you want to say. Writing reveals to you what you wanted to say in the first place. In fact, writing sometimes constructs what you want or wanted to say (23).

What I like about this understanding of the other is that it reminds us what literary creativity is like: how difficult it is, at what cost it comes, what peculiar kinds of responsiveness it requires. It is not just a matter of thinking

what you want to say and saying it, but of struggling at the boundaries of what has never been said. It is something over which the poet does not have full control. The danger and weakness of regarding poetry as simply another species of text is that this approach forgets or ignores what poetry is like to read. The experience of reading a truly creative poem and of reading, for example, a will are simply not the same.

So I'm arguing for a way of reading that arises from a creative act that can be described as an engagement with 'the other'. Let me sidetrack slightly before going further with this. One of the things that struck me on reading Lesley J Macfarlane's illuminating biography of William Elphinstone was that Henryson's biography – what little we know of it -- looks in some ways like bishop Elphinstone's. They were possibly around the same age, though perhaps Henryson was a bit older than Elphinstone; they both took degrees abroad; they both incorporated into Glasgow University around the same time; they may even have known each other. But whereas Elphinstone had a distinguished public career, no doubt assisted by family connections as well as his own talents, Henryson, who seems to have come from nowhere, apparently made his living as a notary public in Dunfermline and when he wasn't doing that, or teaching Latin to boys, he read Latin and vernacular poetry and wrote poetry himself. The difference between these two learned and travelled men is not that one was a

bishop and the other a schoolmaster, but that one was a bishop and the other a poet. Henryson didn't just turn his readings of Chaucer, Boethius and the Latin and French fable traditions, into modern versions, 'moralized most aptly to this present time', as Richard Smith said of his anglicized modernisation of Henryson's *Moral Fables*, printed in London in 1577. We need to ask: why are the *Fables* written as complex poems, and not just as straightforward retellings, even in prose? Nothing, one might imagine, would have been easier in a culture that was hooching with people telling each other what to do. And, of course, it's certainly true that moralizing about human conduct is part of the cultural bric-à-brac that the *Fables* draw on. Seamus Heaney, in the introduction to his recent modernization of *The Testament of Cresseid*, remarks that

Available to him all along is a rhetoric of condemnation, the trope of woman as daughter of Eve, temptress, snare, Jezebel. But while this is the given cultural norm, Henryson never succumbs to it. The preacher's tone is changed to a poet's. Instinctive sympathy rather than high-toned castigation, the pared down truth of heartbreak rather than the high tone of the pulpit.

Henryson's great poems are the products of an engagement with his own reading and his own culture in an almost military sense – a struggle, a locking together in combat. What is so remarkable about reading all three poets now in the twenty-first century -- including Douglas's translation of the *Aeneid* -- is the urgency, the pressure, the complexity of feeling that are part of the reading

experience. Something is at stake other than edification or reward; something, you might say, quite outside of Elphinstone's range.

Reading Dunbar's poem 'In to thir dirk and drublie dayis' gives us access to a kind of experience that is relevant to what I am trying to say. The first three stanzas talk about creativity as a form of 'curage' (desire – including sexual desire -- or inclination), an internal activity that engages the 'spreit' and the 'hairt'. It is also a mysterious gift of what the poem's 'I' calls Nature, which is inexplicably withheld. The internal dialogue that follows, with the voices Despair, Patience, Prudence, Age and Death, is about the forward movement of time, distractions that cannot distract, about feelings of powerlessness and waste and the fear of death, the uncreative life. It can be read alongside Dunbar's poem on his head-ache, which also records the failure or withdrawal of creativity. Although the speaker is kept awake because of a pounding headache, his 'curage sleiping lyis'. The second stanza speaks about trying to start writing, but

The sentence lay full evill till find
 Unsleipit in my heid behind
 Dullit in dullness and distress.

The 'sentence' – what one is trying to say – is hidden in an unreachable space in the back of his head, and the speaker, 'unsleipit', is as a consequence 'dullit in dullness and distress', in a state of utter, tormenting inanition. Dunbar is often seen as a writer whose commonplace thinking is meliorated by his extraordinary

verbal dexterity, but this is to separate form from content. His frequent complaints about needing a benefice are only a starting-point for some profounder sense of stasis, of the pointlessness of things. We should see him, I believe, as the great poet of the commonplace – those truths whose power we cannot avoid as we grow older, that life is short, death is inevitable, pleasure doesn't last – and, in a different way from Henryson, the elegist of loss.

Dunbar's way of talking about 'sangis, ballattis and playis' – about the creative life – is very different from the instrumental ways in which literary composition is discussed by Henryson in the Prologue to the *Fables* or by Douglas in the prologue to the *Eneados*. These instrumental reasons are located in their other lives, the public lives of sociability and patronage. They describe the occasions for the poems and the theories of composition that justify them, but not the pressure, the struggle, the painful attempt to find what is hiding in the back of your head, which are of course all there in the language and become part of the experience they provide to the engaged reader. As Attridge says:

To read creatively in an attempt to respond fully and responsibly to the alterity and singularity of the text is to work against the mind's tendency to assimilate the other to the same, attending to that which can barely be heard, registering what is unique about the shaping of language thought and feeling in this particular work. It involves a suspension of habits, a willingness to rethink old positions in order to apprehend the work's inaugural power. (p. 80).

I think that Henryson's *Testament* can be approached fruitfully on Attridge's terms. The *Testament* arises out of what *Troilus and Criseyde* cannot say; what is occluded in late-fourteenth-century aristocratic culture; the huge gap or hole in a poem that creates a loving but faithless woman and then towards the end of the poem, abandons her. She goes to the Greek camp and simply doesn't come back. She is the disappeared; the untraceable; the one who vanishes; the last time her voice is heard in the poem is in a letter in which she tells Troilus she cannot say why she cannot come or when she will return:

`Comen I wol, but yet in swich disioynte
I stonde as now, that what yeer or what day
That this shal be, that can I not apoynte.' V.1618-20

There isn't duplicity here: that's not how, at this moment, the words represent her: she doesn't know herself because there is nothing to know. "And fynaly he woot now, out of doute, /That al is lost that he hath ben aboute." 1644-5. By the time Troilus realises he has lost her, she is already lost. This loss can be seen as the 'other' of Henryson's poem, to which many critics have testified: what that loss is, is what the poem struggles, not to explain and not to learn from or teach about, except in the most superficial way, but to feel its way through. The painfulness, the uncertainties, the contradictions of the poem, its combination of simplifying moral judgements and feelings that are at odds with these, are not weaknesses, though some critics have thought them so. They arise from the

struggle to write when you don't know what you want to say. And they arise too, from the poet's responsiveness to shifts or fissures or contradictions, usually obscured, in his own culture – in relation, I would conjecture, to women, to religion, to learning, to civil society, to personal and social relationships, including sexuality, charity and friendship, whatever – and to all these things seen as activities and not as static abstractions. The reason we need to locate the literary in inter and multidisciplinary is precisely because, as I've said, poems are not cut off from the cultural field. We need to be informed, not so much so that we can put poems into contexts, as in order to recognize the contexts as elements that go into the shaping of the poem. We shan't read Dunbar as evidence for court of James IV, but the court of James IV will be a facet of the reader's experience of reading the poem. It is there in the language. We won't set gender as an agenda but will be aware of gender relations as constitutive of language choice and organization. And we won't read poems as totally assimilated wholes like God's view of time, but as experienced sequentially, temporally, as process. Offering experience means that a poem is a collaboration between writer and reader, as I have already said: the experience of feeling, thinking, understanding, recognising is created by words.

Look at how the two poems start. This is *Troilus and Criseyde*:

The double sorwe of Troilus to tellen,
That was the king Priamus sone of Troye,

In lovinge, how his adventures fellen
 Fro wo to wele, and after out of Ioye,
 My purpos is, er that I parte fro ye.
 Thesiphone, thou help me for t'endyte
 These woful vers, that wepen as I wryte! I. 1-8

What a stagey opening; what an extravagant performance of distraught composition, as the speaker addresses first us, the readers -- who seem to be made physically present by our reading, or rather we conjure him up as we read -- and then turns to his muse, Tisiphone, goddess of torment, echoing the baroque opening of Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy* with the verses that weep as the poet writes them. The proem goes on to develop this sociable, hyperbolic, catching-your-eye presence, casting us readers as lovers who can be pressed into praying -- 'if any drop of pite in yow be' -- for other lovers who, like Troilus, may be less fortunate than ourselves.

The beginning of the *Testament* is wholly different. Nobody is addressed; there is no 'ye' to whom the 'I' is speaking. The voice of the opening lines is reflective, generalizing, backward-looking (the occasion being described is in the past, not Chaucer's present), studiously low-key, a trifle pedantic:

Ane doolie sessoun to ane cairfull dyte
 Suld correspond and be equivalent:
 Richt sa it wes quhen I began to wryte
 This tragedie; the wedder richt fervent,
 Quhen Aries, in middis of the Lent,
 Schouris of haill gart fra the north descend,
 That scantlie fra the cauld I micht defend. 1-8

That 'suld' in line 2 is the academic's or professional's dry respect for small rules (seasons should match dytes). It goes with the slight formality and precision of 'dyte', 'correspond' and 'be equivalent'. 'Doolie' isn't recorded before Henryson, though he uses it quite often; it must derive from, or be connected with the common word 'dole', meaning 'grief', 'sorrow', 'mourning'. (It is Dunbar's 'dule spreit'). 'Cairful' is 'painful'. If Chaucer's proem is a staging of extravagant sympathy, this is a staging of much more buttoned-up feelings, and of course the retrospection is part of this. The voice is that of a solitary bookish old man recording, and reflecting on, a particular, strangely chill, evening sometime in the past and the painful books he read that night. The poem is, until the very last stanza, an introspective story about private reading. It is in this sense a more modern poem than *Troilus and Criseyde*, which could be appropriately illustrated, even a generation after it was written, as issuing out of a fantasy world of aristocratic public reading. The most famous manuscript of the poem, Corpus Christi Cambridge 61, made between 1415 and 1420, depicts the poet reading to an audience of lovers draped about in a garden. I don't want to say that the *Testament* truly belongs to the era of print but it does locate itself in an inward world of private reading, with all its potential for challenge, dissent and refusal, in Heaney's terms, to succumb to the given cultural norm.

Douglas's *Eneados* is, of course, also a reading of an old poem. The 'other' of the *Eneados*, to use Attridge's term, is not the Latin book itself, but Douglas's experience of reading that book and then of expressing that in his own language. His concern with translation theory – the merits of translation as word for word or sense for sense, or whether Scots has the resources of Latin, or even his outrage at what Caxton had inflicted on the world in the name of Virgil – these surely cannot sum up his experience of reading the *Aeneid* and the extraordinary power of his engagement with it. I am not sure how we can get at this but we need to start, as readers and critics, by 'attending to what can barely be heard'. I think it might include the terror and exposedness of the huge range of the undertaking. I would want to put it alongside the *Bruce*, the *Troy* fragments, the *Buik of Alexander the Conquerour*, the *Wallace* – those other, lesser Scots narratives of the breaking and making of nations. I would want to pay attention to its mixture of intimacy and publicness; its profound sense of the end-directed life, and its steady gaze on death; many of those things that Dunbar, whom Douglas surely knew, despaired of.

I don't know how to do all things that I have been talking about. It requires, I think, a collective project, and now is the time at which it can be done. The study of earlier Scots is international and there are many young scholars working alongside those with longer experience. I would take as a kindly patron

saint for this endeavour Angus McIntosh, not himself a literary critic but a poet, a man of great intellectual openness and wisdom, and a great collaborator. And of course he was above all also a maker -- a man who made things happen.