ISSN 1753-2396 (Print)
ISSN 2753-328X (Online)

Journal of
Irish and Scottish Studies

Articles

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Volume 2, Issue 1
Pp: 123-137
2008
Published on: 1st Jan 2008

1495
ABERDEEN
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Holland and France: Prototype and Paradigm for Nineteenth-Century Scottish Art

John Morrison

In early August 1866 the twenty-four year old Scottish landscape and figure painter George Reid (1841–1913) arrived in the Netherlands. He had travelled from Aberdeen to study with Gerrit Alexander Mollinger (1836–67) at Utrecht having already been a student in Edinburgh at both the 'Trustees Academy' and at the Royal Scottish Academy (R.S.A.) Life School. In 1866 Reid was viewed by senior figures in the R.S.A. as a promising landscape painter in the late Romantic manner of Horatio McCulloch (1805–67). Indeed Reid had come directly to McCulloch's attention immediately before setting off for Europe when the older artist, unbidden, had 'corrected' the painting of the sky in one of Reid's landscapes as it hung on the walls of the R.S.A. annual exhibition. There was mild disquiet among R.S.A members at Reid's decision to leave Scotland and study with Mollinger. More conservative taste found the Dutchman's emerging Realism unpalatable and Reid was warned against contaminating his Scottish sensibilities with foreign fare.[1] When Reid returned from Holland, having abandoned his images of castles, storms and mountains, and embraced Mollinger's Realist subject matter of rural genre, field labour and agricultural landscape, along with the Dutchman's penchant for heavy dragged paint and overtly emotional handling, there was genuine anger. Reid was vilified in the press, then summoned by Sir George Harvey (1806–76), the President of the R.S.A., and castigated for 'looking at nature through Mollinger's eyes'.[2]

In truth however Reid was simply conforming to a pattern of European travel and study that was, by the mid nineteenth century, very well established indeed. For some hundreds of years that study had predominantly taken place in the Low Countries. By the time Reid travelled to the Netherlands, Scotland had had strong economic and intellectual ties with the region for over 400 years. Since 1407 Scots merchant burgesses had traded through the 'staple' port, which was sometimes Bruges, sometimes Middleburg, and from 1541, Campvere in Zealand. This meant that whichever of these towns in the

[1] George Reid to Alexander Walker, 30 August 1866, George Reid Archive. The George Reid Archive is in the Aberdeen Art Gallery.

[2] George Reid to J.F. White, 20 February 1867, Reid Archive.

Low Countries held the staple granted Scots customs and docking privileges and had a large Scottish community. All Scottish exports went through the Netherlands. Cultural ties paralleled the economic links so that when he wished to commission a major altarpiece for the Collegiate Church of the Holy Trinity in Edinburgh in the late 1470s, Edward Bonkil turned to Hugo van der Goes in Bruges. When seeking images of Old Testament subjects to form the basis of a government commission in 1650, the Scottish parliament looked to Rubens and to illustrated bibles from Antwerp to provide models.[3] In the eighteenth century, Allan Ramsay (1713–84), Gavin Hamilton (1723–98) and a host of lesser lights may have flocked to Rome. Yet, David Wilkie's (1785–1841) early and spectacular success was founded on a reworking of seventeenth-century Dutch genre painting. By the nineteenth century, Scottish artists were again turning to the northern part of the European mainland for inspiration, with France gaining precedence over the Netherlands.

Popular perceptions of the 'auld alliance' notwithstanding, the Low Countries had been the focus of Scottish artistic links to Europe for hundreds of years. It was only as Paris developed as the hub of progressive visual culture in the nineteenth century that Scottish focus appears to have shifted to the French capital. Evidence in the form of the Glasgow School, their frequenting of Parisian ateliers and their summers on the Loing at Grez, followed by the Colourists and their various residencies and sojourns in Montparnasse, Paris Plage and Colliure, has been extensively examined elsewhere.[4] This identification of Paris as the source of Scottish modernism, along with the desire to both hitch Scottish painting to the coat-tails of the undisputed superpower of modernist culture while simultaneously asserting the independence and uniquely valuable contribution made by the Scots, has produced some intricate and not wholly convincing apologetics. James Guthrie (1859–1930) has thus been acknowledged as sharing an aesthetic with the progressive Frenchman Jules Bastien-Lepage (1848–84) but is ultimately deemed to be more profoundly influenced by his fellow Scot Arthur Melville (1855–1904).[5] J.D. Fergusson's (1874–1961) *Les Eus*, though recognised as having strong parallels to Matisse (1869–1964), 'is also a reflection of both

[3] See John Morrison and Mary Pryor, 'Caught in the Springe of the Kirke – For Covenant and King: Charles II 1650–51' in Peter Davidson and Jill Bepler (eds), *Triumphs of the Defeated. Early Modern Festivals and Messages of Legitimacy* (Weisbaden, 2007), 191–226.

[4] See Roger Billcliffe, *The Glasgow Boys. The Glasgow School of Painting 1875–1895* (London, 1985) and idem, *The Scottish Colourists. Cadell, Fergusson, Hunter, Peploe* (London, 1989).

[5] Duncan Macmillan, *Scottish Art 1460–1990* (Edinburgh, 1990), 261.

his own independence of mind and of the strength of the Scottish tradition."[6] This ambiguous binary ambition has obscured a more nuanced understanding of the role of France in the development of Scottish painting in the nineteenth century. A closer examination of the European travel and study undertaken by George Reid reveals a more complex picture than the undeniable centrality of Holland would at first suggest.

Reid is associated with the very beginnings of Scottish interest in contemporary Dutch art. Throughout his career Reid's main patron, and one of his closest friends, was the collector and fellow Aberdonian John Forbes White (1831–1904). It was White who bought the first modern Dutch work to come to Scotland, the landscape *Drenthe* by Mollinger, acquired from the 1862 International Exhibition in London. Likewise it was White who introduced the work of Jozef Israels (1824–1911) to Scotland, acquiring among others *The Departure* and *The Errand*, bought during the collector's first visit to Mollinger in Holland in 1863. Reid and White were close. There are over 500 surviving letters between the two men and, particularly in the early stages of Reid's career, White was a significant figure for Reid. He bought numerous works from him, wrote art criticism with him, travelled abroad with him, stayed in his house, sought his advice, helped him to learn French and not infrequently lent him money. Reid knew White's extensive collection of paintings intimately and he saw and studied the Mollinger landscape and the work by Israels as soon as they arrived in Aberdeen. The immediate consequences of White's Dutch enthusiasms and of Reid's introduction to them was Reid's work with Mollinger.

White made the arrangements for Reid's visit and, given Mollinger's considerable financial success in Scotland following White's initial purchase, his willingness to accept Reid as a pupil is understandable. Scottish culture and the contemporary Scottish art world were not unknown quantities to the Dutchman. Surviving letters document a close, if not unproblematic relationship between master and pupil. Ten days after Reid's arrival Mollinger wrote to fellow painter D.A.C. Artz (1837–1890), then working in Paris: 'I am saddled at the moment with a pupil whose pupil I have become, dear Reid is a Scot from Aberdeen who speaks nothing but English and this forces me to learn English. This takes up much time, because I have to help him with everything just like a child'.[7]

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[6] Duncan Macmillan, *Scottish Art in the Twentieth Century* (Edinburgh, 1994), 37.

[7] G.A. Mollinger to D.A.C. Artz, 12 August 1866, Haags Gemeentearchief (The Hague Municipal Archives), Mollinger Collection. 'Hierbij komt dat ik tegenwoordig ere

In spite of problems in communication, the change in Reid's work over the ten weeks of close study in Holland was enormous. On arrival Reid had, in Mollinger's words, 'a special preference for castles, churches and everything that is in ruins, which he decorates with thunderous effect such as rainbows and setting suns.'[8] Reid's early exhibits at the R.S.A. support Mollinger's assessment. In the years from 1862, when Reid first exhibited, until 1866, seven out of thirteen pictures were paintings of castles, churches, towers or ruins. He took two Scottish landscapes out to Holland to work on. One was a church, *Cowie Kirk*, and one a castle, *Dunottar*. Shortly after his return to Britain, Reid produced his first major painting of field labour, *The Peat Gatherers*, a faithful recording of the costume, tools and methods of a characteristic mundane Scottish routine.[9]

The break with the prevailing Scottish Romantic tradition is sudden and absolute and the catalyst for the change appears securely Dutch. However, Utrecht in 1866 was not George Reid's introduction to progressive continental painting and thought. In addition to familiarity with the European works bought by J.F. White, Reid had a considerable experience of contemporary art criticism, specifically that on French art or by French critics. In 1865 the library of the R.S.A. changed its operating structure and allowed students access during times of the year when classes were in session. Reid was a student from 1863 and was thus eligible for admission. From early in his career he assiduously read contemporary art criticism and had a wide range of periodical literature available to him. Letters to the wealthy Aberdeen lawyer Alexander Walker from 1863 onwards record the painter borrowing and returning contemporary London-based periodicals from Walker's extensive and ever-growing collection on a very regular basis. It is likely therefore that when the R.S.A. library became available to Reid he availed himself of the opportunities it afforded.

The library housed various publications of relevance to this discussion,

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en_leerling op na houû, en van de weêromstuit ook leerling ben geworden, want Zed. is een Scotsman uit Aberdeen, die niets als engelsch spreekt en mij dus dwingt van engelsch te leren. Dat kost mij veem tijd, want ik moet hem in alles helpen al seen kind, daar hij met niemand praten kan … In den beginnen van zijn verblijf alhier maakte hij het mij zoo druk en lasting, dat ik s'anonds groen en geel voor mijn oogen zag'.

[8] G.A. Mollinger to D.A.C. Artz, 12 August 1866, Haags Gemeentearchief (The Hague Municipal Archives), Mollinger Collection.

[9] Baldwin Brown, 'Sir George Reid, P.R.S.A.', *The Magazine of Art*, (1892), 196–203. Writing with Reid's cooperation Brown asserted that the painting was completed 'shortly after his sojourn with Mollinger'. The work is now lost.

including *The Fine Art Quarterly Review* and, most significantly, a complete run of the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* from its inception in 1859. In that journal in 1865 Paul Mantz wrote a highly favourable review of the Realist painter Jules Breton (1827–1906):

> I would not wish to upset the painters of history, religious subjects, legends and mythology, but I would merely like to tell them that there is a simple genre picture in the Salon which has more character and style than their most dramatic statements or their wisest inventions. This picture is 'The End of the Day' by M. Breton: it is by no means a complex work and it needs no knowledge of the classics to understand it. But these humble scenes of rural life have sometimes a serenity which resembles grandeur. M. Breton, whose talent we greatly admire and who, by good fortune, has always deserved his success, excels at painting these tranquil scenes and almost noble work in the open air. In mixing poetry and reality, he achieves results which are a joy to see and feel, and even so he never departs from the humble world of rustic labourers, and the fields of Pas-de-Calais are his complete horizon … The effect is absolutely correct, the values, scarcely felt, of shade and of light so delicately noted, that one can feel oneself breathing more easily in front of this picture and believe one smells the fresh smell of new mown hay. The figures are drawn surely and grandly with a sort of virile elegance and a severe charm; they are part of the countryside and the countryside is part of them. All is harmony and serenity in this picture, and 'The End of the Day' is perhaps the most complete and in its evident calm, the most moving, of the works M. Breton has exhibited until now.[10]

In the early 1860s Reid wrote reviews of the R.S.A. annual exhibitions. It is instructive to trace the changes in his writing in the period after he was exposed to contemporary French views. Prior to his access to the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* Reid wrote in praise of the historical paintings of James Drummond (1816–77):

> Mr James Drummond this year exhibits two pictures – no. 429 – 'George Wishart and John Knox' and no. 582 'King James VI publicly

[10] Paul Mantz, 'Le Salon de 1865' (Premier Article), *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, 18 (1865), 518.

> returning thanks after the Gowrie Conspiracy'. Both these works are of great merit, and characterised by the most scrupulous attention to accuracy in the costumes and detail … 'King James returning thanks' is a composition full of small figures, cleverly grouped and arranged, and painted with great care and delicacy – qualities however, which all Mr Drummond's works are possessed of, but never we think so strongly and favourably seen as this year.[11]

After exposure to contemporary French views his opinion was altogether different. Drummond was now attacked for his lack of truth to nature. His painting was judged not on its composition or historical accuracy, but on its creation of a believable sense of light and air, in Mantz' words its 'effect', its 'values'. In discussing Drummond's medievalist *Sunday Morning* in 1868 Reid observed:

> Here the colour is dull, dingy and cheerless, the execution laboured and hard … Look for instance, at the snow, how false in tone and colour, and in its effect of light and shadow; unless sullied and defiled the colour of snow, be it in sunshine or shade, is of marvellous tenderness, and thus it has ever been the emblem of purity. Mr Drummond fails to see this, representing it as a dull dingy white, or if in shadow, as an impure and unwholesome green.[12]

It is not necessary to attribute the shift in Reid's position to the Mantz article specifically. The *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* offered regular examples of Realist criticism, both of current French painting and of the London exhibitions of the Royal Academy. The central issue is that Reid was aware of current debates in advance of his study in Holland and that this knowledge arguably came from France.

The latter extract given above is drawn from a large critical essay Reid published in 1868 in collaboration with J.F. White. The 25,000-word polemic used the R.S.A. exhibition of 1868 as a platform from which to attack current Scottish art and taste and to promote Realist ideology. *Thoughts on Art and Notes on the Exhibition of the Royal Scottish Academy of 1868* pointedly attacked

[11] George Reid, 'Exhibition of the Royal Scottish Academy (Second Notice)', *Montrose Standard and Angus and Mearns Leader*, 19 February 1864, 4.

[12] Veri Vindex (G. Reid & J.F. White), *Thoughts on Art and Notes on the Exhibition of the Royal Scottish Academy of 1868* (Edinburgh, 1868), 29.

the Scottish Romantic tradition and the spurious nature of Scottish national identity in painting. In their place it promoted an internationalist vision. It is here that the straightforward identification of Holland as the isolated cause of Reid's new style entirely breaks down. The Realist visual language adopted by Reid from Holland was international and generally acknowledged to be closely linked to developments in France. Six years before Reid travelled to Holland, the Dutch landscape painter A.G. Bilders (1838–65) had written to a patron explaining:

> I have seen pictures such as I never dreamed of. I found all that my heart's desires in them and that I almost always miss in the Dutch painters. Tryon, Courbet, Diaz, Dupre, Robert Fleury, Breton have made a deep impression on me. So I am now thoroughly French … just by being thoroughly French I am thoroughly Dutch because the great Frenchmen of today and the great Dutchmen of former times have much in common … This luxuriant manner came originally from Holland.[13]

Bilders saw the absurdity of attributing discrete character to painting on the basis of national boundaries. Dutch and French painting had much in common in the 1860s, including a shared admiration for the landscape painting of the Low Countries in the seventeenth century.

Artz, the painter to whom Mollinger wrote regarding his problematic pupil, was studying in Paris in 1866 because by then the links between Dutch and French Realism were already well established. The text of *Thoughts on Art* is replete with the promotion of Dutch painting practices validated by contemporary French art theory and criticism. By 1868 Reid was well versed in both practice and theory and recognised the importance of Paris. For Reid, although his painting method came primarily from Holland, France acted as both fountainhead of new ideas and as the facilitator of cultural exchange. Having discovered the Frenchmen Breton, Millet and Diaz, via the Dutchmen Mollinger, Israels and Artz, the Scot went on to examine the well-spring at first hand and to engage in the evolving Realist debate then playing out across Europe. *Thoughts on Art* drew heavily on the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* and on other French writing and in addition Reid visited the World's Fair exhibition in Paris in 1867 and returned to study in Adolphe Yvon's (1817–93) studio in the city in 1869.

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[13] A.G. Bilders to J. Kneppellhout, 10 July 1860. Quoted in G.H. Marius, *Dutch Painters of the 19th Century* (London, 1983), 124.

Thoughts on Art caused a sensation when it appeared under the nom-de-plume 'Veri Vindex' shortly after the opening of the R.S.A exhibition of 1868. In the painter's own words it 'exploded like a shell in Edinburgh'.[14] It attacked both scions of the Scottish art establishment such as Reid's would be mentor Horatio McCulloch who was dismissed as 'conventional', 'superficial' and as having 'little feeling for colour', and Scottish cultural conservatism in general.[15]

> We … north of the Tweed are not given to change, and, in our traditions are conservative to a degree … We measure ourselves by ourselves, and compare ourselves among ourselves, refusing obstinately to believe that anything better is discoverable than our own narrow provincial views.[16]

The solution offered was to open up Scotland to outside influence, in particular the influence of France. Repeatedly Scots are exhorted to 'learn of that which our French and Belgian neighbours know' or praised for showing 'evident traces of French influence in their work'.[17] In addition to the oft-voiced endorsement of French practice the essay displays extensive knowledge of recent French theory and criticism.

In an open letter published in the *Courrier du Dimanche* Gustave Courbet (1819–77) set out the principles of Realist art. While it is unlikely that Reid would have had access to this original publication, the critic Castagnary reprinted the letter in *Les Libres Propos* in 1864. Since the Scot was in Paris just three years later, and had an avowed interest in Realism following his studies in Utrecht, it is possible that he saw the volume. The 1867 Paris visit was taken in company with Mollinger who took Reid to visit various Realist linked painters' studios making the encountering of Courbet's text even more likely. Courbet wrote:

> I hold the artists of one century basically incapable of reproducing the aspect of a past or future century. It is in this sense that I deny the possibility of historical art applied to the past. Historical art is by nature contemporary. Each epoch must have its artists who express it and reproduce it for the future.[18]

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[14] George Reid to J.F. White, c.14 May 1868, Reid Archive.

[15] Veri Vindex, *Thoughts on Art*, 40.

[16] Ibid., 54.

[17] Ibid., 53.

[18] Courbet's original letter was published on 25 December 1861 at the prompting of the critic Jules Castagnary whom he had met in 1860. The open letter set out Courbet's beliefs about art for any young artists potentially interested in joining the teaching

In 1868 Reid wrote:

> We believe the time will yet come when artists will see that the only true historical painting, and the only kind that is valuable and enduring, is that of contemporary events … There is another consideration in favour of the painting of contemporary history. The artist is able to get at the absolute relative truth of things which compose his picture.[19]

An echo of Champfleury is likewise found in *Thoughts on Art*. Commenting on contemporary subject matter, the Frenchman wrote that '[t]he serious representation of present-day personalities, the derbies, the black dress-coats, the polished shoes or the peasants sabots, had a far greater interest than the frivolous knick-knacks of the past.'[20] Reid attacked the discipline of history painting in similar terms:

> The crude and ill-digested reading of history and historical romance aided by their own puerile fancies and the spurious antiquities of Wardour Street, can never make even approximation to the truth of things as they existed centuries since. It is painful to think of the amount of misdirected labour that is annually expended in seeking to realise the life of the past, while there is still so much room left for recording that of the present.[21]

The language used by Reid in his writing is certainly revealing of his knowledge and assimilation of contemporary French criticism. His R.S.A. exhibition review of 1867 contains the sentence: 'Our nineteenth-century art, as a rule, is sadly wanting in earnestness and purpose – wanting in what the French call *motif*.'[22]

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studio he was about to open. The translation from the French is here taken from Linda Nochlin, *Realism and Tradition in Art 1848-1900. Sources and Documents* (New Jersey, 1966), 34, drawing in turn upon Jules Castagnary, 'Courbet, son atelier, ses théories' in *Les Libres Propos* (Paris, 1864), 179–84.

[19] Veri Vindex, *Thoughts on Art*, 26.

[20] Champfleury (Jules François Félix Husson) to Georges Sand (Amandine Aurore Lucile Dupin) September 1855. The translation from the French is here taken from Linda Nochlin, *Realism and Tradition in Art 1848–1900. Sources and Documents* (New Jersey, 1966), 40, drawing in turn upon Champfleury, 'Sur M. Courbet: Lettre à Madame Sand' in *Le Réalisme* (Paris, 1857), 270–85.

[21] Veri Vindex, *Thoughts on Art*, 23.

[22] George Reid, 'Notes in the Royal Scottish Academy's Exhibition', *Montrose Standard and Angus and Mearns Leader*, 8 March 1867, 4.

This is the first example of Reid using an un-translated French technical or critical term. It was a practice that rapidly became very common in his writing.

The central technical change that Reid adopted from his studies with Mollinger was the use of tonal painting. Whenever he was required to give details of this approach he habitually used the French word '*tonalité*'. Writing in 1873, he explained:

> In speaking of the *tonalité* of a picture it is not its tone, but its scale of what is called 'tonic values' that is meant, as in music, where a certain key may be high or low, major or minor. A picture may be high in tone or low as the artist sees fit, and as his subject demands; but high or low, major or minor, this key must be scrupulously adhered to till melody or picture is completed.[23]

The use of these terms was not mere affectation. Reid had internalised the methods of Holland and the critical language of France that underlay them. In his private correspondence there is as marked a change in language as in his published work. While the use of 'effect' first occurs in his letters in March 1867, the major change occurred in the immediate aftermath of writing *Thoughts on Art*. In the letter that Reid wrote to J.F. White describing the reception of the piece in Edinburgh he also discussed his own current painting. 'I was rather taken with the look of the peat moss at the back of it [a house at Auchlunies] and on Saturday I made a *tonalité* study of some women among the peats which I think will perhaps be the making of a picture.'[24] By July 1868 he was writing of *tonalité* regularly. In a letter to A. Walker from London Reid criticised the watercolours at the Royal Academy for their want of *tonalité*.[25] In August in a letter from Peterhead he wrote of making a *tonalité* study of a fisher-boy at Buchanhaven.[26] Both method and linguistic usage passed into Reid's regular painted and written vocabulary. The practical examples upon which Reid's new method was based may have been Dutch, but the theoretical underpinnings of the work were French and acknowledged as such.

Beyond the appropriation of language and the general adoption of Realist principles to attack James Drummond and to promote tonal landscape painting

[23] George Reid, 'The Arts Exhibition', *Aberdeen Journal*, 13 August 1873, 8.
[24] George Reid to J.F. White, c.14 May 1868, Reid Archive.
[25] George Reid to A. Walker, 21 July 1868, Reid Archive.
[26] George Reid to A. Walker, 16 August 1868, Reid Archive.

there are more specific adaptations of French theory. The French promotion of popular songs and verse as a source of Realist imagery reappeared in Scottish guise in *Thoughts on Art*. Champfleury, for example, was opposed to poetry as a medium of expression on the grounds that it sacrificed the thought to the form. The only exception to this belief was his support for vernacular verse where the sentiment was not inhibited in any way by rules of poetic construction.[27] In response to such views A.T. Ribot (1823–91) painted pictures based on popular ballads. *The Little Milkmaid* of c.1865 is based on the folk song *Il était une Bergère*.[28] Songs by writers such as Pierre Dupont, written for popular performance and often revolving around peasant life and work, were well known to painters and to Realist critics. Popular and folk culture was an accepted source of Realist imagery. While literature was in advance of painting in utilising popular sources there was nevertheless considerable support for the proposition in Realist circles.[29]

Initially it appears as if Reid adopted this proposal in its entirety and simply restated the proposition in Scottish terms:

> There is no part of the literature of a country that shows the national bent of a people better than its Songs. 'Give me the making of the songs of a country, and I care not who may write its laws', is the trite but true saying of Fletcher of Saltoun. The songs are the outcome of the feelings of a nation, revealing its tastes, sympathies and aspirations. They are the glass in which we see mirrored the whole character of the people. The wealth of Scottish song makes it an easy task to decipher the national characteristics, for there is no country in which there is a greater outpouring of feeling in regard to the domestic affection, the incidents of simple everyday life, with its pleasures and sorrows, and the cheerful influence of the cottage fireside.[30]

The argument rapidly developed into a plea for Scottish artists to turn to the writings of Robert Burns and Walter Scott. These were seen as sources which expressed the true nature of Scotland. Almost inevitably Burns was linked to the 'truth to nature' argument used to attack Drummond and history painting.

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[27] See M. Crouzet, *Un méconnu du Réalisme: Duranty (1833–1880)* (Paris, 1964), 55–6.

[28] The painting is now in The Cleveland Museum of Art.

[29] See G.P. Weisberg, 'Théodule Ribot: Popular Imagery and The Little Milkmaid', *Bulletin of the Cleveland Museum of Art*, (October 1976), 253–63.

[30] Veri Vindex, *Thoughts on Art*, 55.

Thoughts on Art continued:

> (Nothing can) … bind us with hidden words more closely to nature than the songs of Burns … With what pathos does he indicate the harmony that must exist between the human heart and the face of nature as he plaintively sings
>
> 'Ye banks and braes o' bonnie Doon,
> How can ye bloom sae fresh and fair?'
> …
>
> Or, again
>
> 'Ayr, gurgling, kissed his pebbled shore,
> O'erhung with wild woods, thickening green;
> The fragrant birch, and hawthorn hoar,
> Twin'd am'rous round the raptured scene;'
>
> In these love songs nature seems to become part of the poet, responsive to every shade of feeling. But, in addition to this poetic power of making himself one with nature, Burns depicted her beauties with consummate skill. From the conditions of his verse, as lyric poetry, elaborate description seldom finds a place, for the mood is too tame for him. More frequently his touches are like lightning flashes, rapid but far-gleaming. When he does condescend to the descriptive, how rich and true, as well as powerful are the tones. Witness the 'Birks of Aberfeldy':
>
> 'Now simmer blinks on flowery braes,
> And o'er the crystal streamlet plays,
> Come, let us spend the lightsome days
> In the Birks of Aberfeldy.'
> …
>
> 'The scene is beautiful' says Allan Cunningham, himself a painter, 'and the song rivals in truth and effect the landscape' [Bohn's *Burns*, 65]. Or take his 'Bruar Water':
>
> 'Here foaming down the shelving rocks,
> In twisting strength I rin;
> Then high my boiling torrent smokes,
> Wild roaring o'er a linn:'
>
> which is as vivid and vigorous as a Highland Spate by Peter Graham. But it is as a painter of Scottish character and manners that Burns is best known, and it is in this direction that his influence on Scottish art has been greatest. He threw a halo round the simple cottage life, which

> has made it, and every representation of it, dear to the heart of the people … Burns gave insight into the very heart of nature.[31]

An idea stemming originally from French Realist theory was thus adapted to suit local conditions and to create an original manifesto for the progress of painting in Scotland, with Champfleury's prohibition on poetic form leading to a justification of Burns as a source on the grounds of popularity and simplicity.[32]

The alterations made to French ideas were not simply expedient. *Thoughts on Art* reflects Reid's relationship with France as a library of new ideas to be explored, adapted and amended as appropriate, rather than as an authoritative textbook to be followed without question. On occasion, clearly expressed French opinion was directly contradicted by the Scot. Paul Mantz' view of the English school at the International Exhibition of 1867 was critical of W.Q. Orchardson (1832–1910), and regarding his work *The Challenge* Mantz wrote:

> It is impossible for us to take M. Orchardson for a colourist, for the tones which he uses do not relate to each other in an ordered harmony. Moreover his method of working is most unusual. This scratched out method, which patiently puts little strokes side by side, looks more like embroidery than painting. Metsu would have been astonished by this method; van Ostade would have been profoundly upset.[33]

A year later Reid singled out Orchardson for praise on precisely the grounds that Mantz decried:

> Many of the most promising of the young painters including Calderon, Orchardson, G.D. Leslie, Mason, Yeames and Wells, shew evident traces of French influences in their work and greatly, we think to its advantage … (They) have infused into it many of the best qualities of

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[31] Ibid., 55–7. Peter Graham's (1836–1921) 'Highland Spate' is a reference to *A Spate in the Highlands*, a hugely successful painting exhibited at the Royal Academy exhibition in 1866 and now in Manchester Art Gallery.

[32] There is precedent for French Realist recourse to Burns as a source in the form of a letter from J.F. Millet extolling the poet's virtues. The letter was unpublished in 1868 and it is unlikely Reid and White were aware of Millet's views. See Etienne Moreau-Nélaton, *Millet raconté par lui-même* (3 vols, Paris, 1921), II, 145.

[33] P. Mantz, 'Les Beaux-Arts à l'Exposition Universelle: VII Angleterre', *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, 23 (1867), 216.

> French art, and, notably the important element of *tonalité*. The later works of Orchardson … 'The Challenge', and 'Talbot and the Countess of Auvergne' … may be cited as examples.[34]

In 1869, the year after writing *Thoughts on Art*, Reid returned to Paris for a second visit, this time to enrol in an atelier. Unlike his study with Mollinger in 1866 he had made no firm arrangements before leaving Scotland and hoped to use Parisian contacts to make the necessary arrangements. The Scottish painter John Dun (fl.1863–1908) and Mollinger's Dutch colleague D.A.C. Artz were both in the city and Reid turned to them for assistance. He was to be disappointed as neither of the principal Barbizon painters with whom he wished to study, C.F. Daubigny (1817–78) and J. Breton, kept ateliers or accepted pupils. Reid had to be satisfied with joining the students in the atelier of the battle painter Adolphe Yvon. He did so on the grounds that there was a life model available to him and that for much of the time Yvon himself was not there. Reid wrote rather defensively to J.F. White 'I don't know if I have acted wisely in rushing into it so but at all events one has nature pure and simple, and Yvon only twice a week so no great harm can come of it.'[35]

During those times when he was not in the studio Reid continued his study of Realism at a distance through the publicly available paintings of his chosen mentor Breton. He visited the Luxembourg gallery regularly and made what he referred to as 'tone studies' based on Breton's 1859 painting *The Recall of the Gleaners*. He continued making efforts to meet Breton in person but wrote finally on the eve of his departure, 'Jules Breton does not live in Paris so there is no getting at him – he stays away down at Courrières, Pas de Calais. I believe he has a large farm there.'[36]

Reid's direct experiences of Paris were different in kind from those in Holland. He worked directly under the tutelage of Mollinger in 1866 and was to return to The Netherlands in 1871 to do likewise with Josef Israels. In Paris he studied at a distance. He entertained thoughts of working under renowned French painters but accepted their inaccessibility and rather than direct instruction sought general principles on which to base his work. He studied life drawing intensively with Yvon. He studied tone by working from Breton's example. He visited galleries and examined contemporary French Realist art. Together with his embrace and espousal of French critical theory,

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[34] Veri Vindex, *Thoughts on Art*, 53-4.

[35] George Reid to J.F. White, 10 February 1869, Reid Archive.

[36] George Reid to J.F. White, 9 May 1869, Reid Archive.

his activities in Paris offer an alternative understanding of the Scottish artistic relationship with the city to that usually advanced.

Paris was the hub of artistic development in the nineteenth century and as such Scots, in common with artists from across the Western cultural world, were aware of and interested in developments there. Paris did not function in a uniform manner for all, however, and frequently was not the source of direct instruction. France provided the intellectual core of contemporary experience. It offered a point of reference for painters which, were they to consider themselves progressive, they could not ignore. It was not necessarily the direct source of individual acts of change. Paris oversaw, underwrote and sanctioned change in Scotland; it did not automatically provide the commonplace education.

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