History as Theatrical Metaphor

History, Myth and National Identities in Modern Scottish Drama

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For Gavin

Introduction

'The great virtue of history is that it is adaptable'—so Peter Ustinov has the President of Concordia, 'the Smallest Country in Europe', say in *Romanoff and Juliet* (1956).[1] Ustinov's President aims to reinterpret and, thus, manipulate 'history' to bring about the marriage of a Russian man and an American woman so that his small state can hold a Cold War balance. For him, history is a living diplomatic and political resource. Its potential for continual adaptability is also suggested in Brian Friel's *Making History* (1989) when Peter Lombard observes to Hugh O'Neill, Earl of Tyrone:

> I don't believe that a period of history […] contains within it one 'true' interpretation just waiting to be mined. But I do believe that it may contain within it several possible narratives: the life of Hugh O'Neill can be told in many different ways. And those ways are determined by the needs and the demands and the expectations of different people and different eras. […] I simply fulfil the needs, satisfy the expectations—don't I?[2]

Needs and expectations will call constantly for revisions: Stephanie Preuss has suggested, regarding recent Scottish plays on historical topics, '[dramatic] revisions of history are almost always openly political'.[3] The varying ways 'revisions of history' can and do take place in different playwrights' practice will be a recurrent theme of this book as it explores what 'openly political'—and what covert—forms such revisions take. Its later chapters examine the implications and underlying complexity of Ustinov's term, 'adaptability', in Scottish history plays, particularly since the 1930s, and it

is taken as given that history is regularly presented and reinterpreted for 'political' purposes, however broadly defined.

This book emerges from academic interest in Scottish theatre history, the study and teaching of dramaturgy, commitment to historical study and, inescapably, my professional playwriting practice. Its inspiration is a perception of history as not only based in factual research, but in a series of tropes and even myths. Even in employing postmodern methodologies, history cannot be ignored or simply played with: the playwright will explore and rethink, through non-naturalistic means, what Steve Cramer calls 'ideological imperatives in the semiotics of historical iconography'[4] and, one might add, mythopoeia. Cramer suggests that there is no 'real' story to be discovered, but that some form of truth, however tenuous and problematic, may be found by exploring the interstices between, and identifying the ideological praxis behind, various versions of historical 'truth'. In this process, Gil Hochberg's claim that 'works of art not only reflect historical and sociopolitical realities but further compete with them, introducing alternative actualities, which might find expression only at the level of cultural imagination'[5] is highly relevant. Often, unless one is a trained historian, and even then outside of one's 'period' not entirely, one's perceptions of 'what happened' depend on whatever creative narrative—play, novel, television or film—shaped one's version of 'what happened'. Historical narrative, whether creative or academic, is inevitably partisan. This book seeks to expose the processes of partisan shaping of history and myth in Scottish history plays, especially since 1930.

In doing this, its chapters address not just ways Scottish playwrights have treated historical material—which for current purposes is defined broadly as material relating to events until the end of the Second World War—but also how they have used language and dramatic structure to achieve particular theatrical and ideological ends. In most, if not all, cases, it appears that those ideological ends consciously, but sometimes perhaps unconsciously, have embedded particular attitudes to conceptions of 'Scotland', its society and its relationship to national and international identities. The argument being developed suggests, without much fear of controversy, that any form of national identity depends on what Benedict Anderson famously calls 'imagined communities'[6] where that sense of community is supported, indeed developed, by means of shared mythologies, some often passed off as 'history'. Yet, as Chapter Two examines, there are questions that arise as to how far 'history' itself depends on mythologizing historic material, in ways akin to, although distinct from, the ways a dramatist may

do. Both playwrights—like writers in other literary forms—and historians contribute to the construction of popular perceptions of history, mythology and national communities. The first three chapters of this volume, then, explore questions of theatre, history, mythology and national communities from various perspectives. The other chapters aim to cast light on the dramaturgical practice of selected Scottish playwrights writing in Scots and English and address both their use of history as a theme on stage and differences in their practice over decades. Recent work by Angus MacLeod and by Susan Ross on early twentieth-century Gaelic-language playwriting has drawn attention to parallel developments in drama in that language.[7]

Scottish playwrights are, of course, hardly unique in engaging with historical material, often in order to address current political and moral issues. As Chapter 1 demonstrates, this practice has been widespread in European drama (not to mention other cultures, whether oriental or transatlantic). Meantime, however, it is helpful here to set a contemporary context by drawing attention to the many Scottish dramatists from the 1930s into the present day who have written plays on historical themes, most famously in recent times, David Greig's *Dunsinane* (2010) and Rona Munro's *The James Plays* (2014), both discussed in Chapter 8. These plays alone mark the range of dramaturgical methods by which Scottish history has been, and is, treated on stage by modern playwrights. Such contemporary variety, however, admirable as it is, only reflects and depends on the lessons of earlier recent work like John McGrath's ceilidh-based *The Cheviot, the Stag and the Black Black Oil* (1973) or the deconstructed and self-consciously theatricalized dramaturgy of Liz Lochhead's *Mary Queen of Scots Got her Head Chopped Off* (1987). All these plays, each in their own way, represent the reciprocal influences and constructions of past and present, as the past is presented as influencing the present and contemporary writers imagine and create anew the past or, rather, a 'past'.

Modern Scottish playwrights considered later in this volume who make use of history for a variety of reasons range in time from Robert McLellan, beginning in the 1930s (the earliest dealt with in detail), through—beside such leading current figures as Greig, Lochhead and Munro—Peter Arnott, Bill Bryden, Donald Campbell, Jo (formerly John) Clifford, Stewart Conn, Sue Glover, Robert Kemp, John McGrath, Hector MacMillan, Alexander Reid, and W. Gordon Smith. This is an extensive list and by no means comprehensive. Other Scottish playwrights have written plays on historical topics, some several. These include not just members of an older generation like James Bridie, George Byatt, Ada

Kay, Jack Ronder, R. S. Silver, Sydney Goodsir Smith, C. P. Taylor, or Bill Watson, but current writers like Tim Barrow, Alistair Beaton, Gregory Burke, Chris Dolan, George Gunn, Chris Hannan, Zinnie Harris, David Harrower, James Kelman, Nicola McCartney, John and Willy Maley, Anne Marie di Mambro, Allan Massie, Douglas Maxwell, Robert Nye, Aileen Ritchie, Tony Roper, George Rosie, Raymond Ross, Judy Steel, Alan Wilkins, and the present author. And this list includes only those writing in Scots or English. In Gaelic, Donald Sinclair (*Dòmhnall Mac na Ceàrdaich*, 1885–1932) wrote both *Fearann a Shinnsir* (*The Land of his Forebears*, 1913), focused on the Highland Clearances, and *Crois-Tàra!* (*The Fiery Cross*, 1914), based on the events of the 1745–6 Jacobite Rising,[8] while Susan Ross provides details of other Gaelic-language history plays. These include Allan MacDonald of Eriskay's *An Sithean Ruadh* (*The Red Fairy-hill*, 1906) and Catrìona NicIlleBhàin Ghrannd's *Dùsgadh na Fèinne* (*The Waking of the Fianna*, 1908) on folkloric themes, Iain N. MacLeòid's plays based on the Jacobite Risings and the Highland Clearances and Iain Macalasdair Moffatt-Pender's on Jacobite themes including the Glencoe Massacre.[9] Other early twentieth-century Gaelic-language playwrights whose history plays Ross draws attention to, and whose dramaturgic and thematic treatment of historical themes, like that of Ghrannd, MacDonald and Sinclair, strikingly parallels that in Scots and English discussed in Chapter 4 include Iain MacCormaig and Gilleasbuig MacCulloch. Later in the century the list of Gaelic-language historical playwrights would include Iain Crichton Smith and Ike Isakson. The former deals with Christ's betrayal in *An Coileach* (*The Cockerel*, 1966) or the Clearances and human conscience in *A' Chùirt* (*The Court*, 1966) and the latter revises an Anglocentric view of the conflict of Macbeth and Malcolm in *An Gaisgeach—The Hero* (1995). Beyond that list there is devised work including Theatre Hebrides's *Roghainn nan Daoine—The People's Choice* (2010), which in the company's own words, 'follow[s] one young Island woman's life and her growth of belief and resilience in a culture ravaged by landlord oppression, the potato famine and forced displacement of people in favour of sheep'[10] and its earlier production of Dermot Healy's partly English-language *Metagama* (2004), dealing with a specific 1923 large-scale emigration from Stornoway.

Even allowing for the fact that Scotland has always been a highly theatricalized nation, despite some of the myths of theatrical suppression addressed in the relevant chapters of Bill Findlay's *A History of Scottish Theatre* (1998), and my *The Edinburgh Companion to Scottish Drama*

(2011) and *Scottish Theatre; Diversity, Language Continuity* (2013), this is an impressive and impressively long, but still incomplete, list of playwrights who have in some way or other sought to deal on stage with the matter of Scottish history. When Rona Munro in 2014 talked of 'so few contemporary history plays',[11] one needs only to consider the length of this list. What is clear is that in Scottish theatre, while intensity of interest may vary from generation to generation and period to period, history is a dominant creative theme. Adrienne Scullion, talking of the impact of David Greig's *The Speculator*, suggested that '[…] one might argue that in the past the hegemony of the history play constrained and deformed both the development and appeal of modern Scottish drama'.[12] Yet, history plays have been a significant part of Scottish drama, not only in the modern era, but at least since 1603 and William Alexander's *Monarchicke Tragedies*, often for clear reasons this book revisits. It is a matter of judgement how far such 'hegemony of the history play' may 'constrain' or 'deform'—arguably these verbs are the necessary converse of 'construct' and 'shape'—but the desire to work with history on the Scottish stage has certainly produced a rich and extensive collection of plays. This book seeks to explore possible reasons for that creative desire.

Despite a recent assertion by the leading critic Mark Brown, repeating the myth of long-term successful Calvinist prohibition, that there is 'very little (Scottish) theatrical history to speak of prior to the twentieth and twenty-first centuries',[13] the canon is extensive. The selection of playwrights whose work is especially considered in this volume is, therefore, to an extent arbitrary. Playwrights are grouped in chapters that discuss both individual and shared factors in their history plays and how they may embody key ways and period approaches to history's use on the modern Scottish stage. Chapter titles like 'The Creation of a "Missing" Tradition', 'Revealing Hidden Histories' or 'Alternative Visions' make clear such thematic intent. Indeed, because of the richness and variety of material available, other playwrights and their plays are also touched on as appropriate. Before, however, the chapters discussing selected modern writers, it is contextually important to consider briefly how and why Scottish playwrights before the 1930s handled history over the centuries. It is also important—to provide a wider context to our study—to address examples from other cultures and theatres where playwrights have for particular reasons visited and revisited their history. The first chapter, therefore, focuses on the relationship of playwrights to history in earlier periods of the Scottish stage and then on relevant examples of the treatment of history from other

European cultures. In doing so, it notes that playwrights often seek to use specific details of historical events to construct their plays; at other times they create imaginary characters whose actions are set in historic times, and sometimes they engage historical figures with their own created characters. Later chapters examine examples of all of these approaches. For current purposes, all three categories are discussed as a whole.

Notes

1. Peter Ustinov, *Romanoff and Juliet, in Five Plays* (London: Heinemann, 1965), 55.
2. Brian Friel, *Making History* (London: Faber, 1989), 15–16.
3. Stephanie Preuss, '"Metaphors for the Scots Today": History and National Identity in Scottish Drama after 1945', in Gabriele Rippl et al. (eds.), *Haunted Narratives: Life Writing in an Age of Trauma* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013), 175.
4. Steve Cramer, 'History, Ideology and Performance in Ian Brown's *Mary* and *A Great Reckonin*', *International Journal of Scottish Theatre* 3:2 (2002), 1, at http://journals.qmu.ac.uk/index.php/IJoST/article/view/89 (accessed 26 October 2015).
5. Gil Hochberg, *In Spite of Partition: Jews, Arabs, and the Limits of Separatist Imagination* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 3.
6. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (new edn.) (London: Verso, 2006 [1983]).
7. Angus MacLeod, 'The Historical Plays of Donald Sinclair', and Susan Ross, 'Identity in Gaelic Drama 1900–1949', *International Journal of Scottish Theatre and Screen*, Vol. 9 (2016), forthcoming.
8. For more detail on Sinclair's playwriting, see Macleod, 'The Historical Plays'.
9. For more detail of these plays, see Ross, 'Identity in Gaelic Drama'.
10. http://www.theatrehebrides.com/na-daoine.html (accessed 1 July 2010). This play is discussed in detail in Emma Dymock, 'Pulling down the Pulpit to make way for the Stage: An Exploration of *Anna Chaimbeul* and *Roghainn Nan Daoine*', *International Journal of Scottish Theatre and Screen*, Vol. 9 (2016), forthcoming.
11. Quoted in Andrew Burnet, 'Stories for modern times', in *The James Plays* programme, Edinburgh International Festival 2014, n.p.
12. Adrienne Scullion, 'Devolution and Drama: Imagining the Possible', in Berthold Schoene (ed.), *The Edinburgh Companion to Contemporary Scottish Literature* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 68–9.
13. Mark Brown, 'A play of its time that continues to resonate', *Sunday Herald Life*, 13 October 2015, 12.

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Contents

CHAPTER 1

Playwrights and History

This chapter and the next consider how both playwrights and historians may fulfil an audience or readership's needs and expectations at a given time in a given context. They consider differences between the relationships of the two types of writers to their audiences and readership and, in doing that, suggest that the 'simply' is misleading in the line Brian Friel gives Peter Lombard: 'I simply fulfil the needs, satisfy the expectations—don't I?'[1] In fact, complex historiographical and dramaturgical processes are involved. History's 'great virtue', in Peter Ustinov's words, of adaptability engages questions of ideology, mythology, linguistics, politics, propaganda, and the interaction in different eras of all of these.

History as Eighteenth-Century Politics and Nineteenth-Century National Drama

During the first great wave of Scottish playwriting in the eighteenth century, there was interest in history as a theme. Then, partly as a long-term result of the Court's 1603 move to London, when a theatre-loving royal patron went south to support Shakespeare and his contemporaries and to develop the English court masque under Inigo Jones and Ben Jonson, the Scottish playwright had two clear career lines. One was to head south and work for the London stage, close to the Court with several theatre outlets, even allowing for the restrictive impact of court officials and then the Patent Theatre system and Lord Chamberlain's censorship introduced by

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the 1737 Licensing Act. The other was to work in Scotland. There, after a period when professional theatre, mainly centred in Edinburgh, had been under attack by the Evangelical wing of the Kirk in the early 1600s and was under intermittent pressure from the 1660 Restoration until the 1720s, professional theatre increasingly asserted itself. Alasdair Cameron has observed that in 1662 professional playhouse theatre

> in Scotland was limited to short seasons at the Tennis Court Theatre in Edinburgh; it was patronised only by the aristocracy, dominated by English plays and players, and under frequent attack from the Church. By 1800, there were nine permanent theatres [Aberdeen, Ayr, Dumfries, Dundee, Edinburgh (2), Glasgow, Greenock, Paisley] spread throughout Scotland, the theatre was becoming the most popular form of organised entertainment in the country and there were the beginnings of an indigenous tradition of playwriting, acting and management, which paved the way for the 'National Theatre' at the Theatre Royal Edinburgh in the early nineteenth century.[2]

Further, as I have discussed elsewhere,[3] this playhouse development took place in a rich seventeenth- and eighteenth-century theatrical context which included school, amateur, closet, folk and touring professional drama in more than one language.

One of the earliest history plays with clear contemporary implications was *Marciano, or The Discovery* (1663) by the advocate William Clark or Clerke (*fl.* 1663–99?), the first post-Restoration play written in Scotland. Clark's preface talks of 'hell-hounds, assassinats of our liberties [who] snatch'd the very reins of Government [… and voted] down all Scenick Playes [… to suffer] in the same sentence with Monarchy'.[4] He links here royal and theatrical Restoration after hellish rebellion, presumably Cromwellian in nature. The play's plot focuses on Barbaro's fictional rebellion against Cleon, Duke of Florence, whose general—Marciano—Barbaro's forces capture. Arabella, his beloved, wishes the restoration of the 'lawfull Prince'[5] and effects Marciano's escape. She, though, is captured and condemned. However, Barbaro dies, Cleon is restored and Marciano and Arabella marry. This post-Restoration play's themes address betrayal, loyalty and the need for order: Marciano says 'When men begin to quarrel with their Prince, / No wonder if they crush their fellow Subjects'.[6] Strictly, this is not a historical play, though set in historical times, a distinction already made to which we will return, but it is an early Scottish example of the use of historical themes to address current

political issues in a 'history play'. Of course, Shakespeare, and his contemporaries, developed the use of drama for political nation-building and hidden political references, notably in his History Plays, and continued, but more discreetly, after the 1601 Essex rebellion; then the rebels watched scenes from *Richard II* on the eve of their rising. When directly political plays from English history were no longer likely to be approved for performance, Shakespeare moved to classical political material in, for example, *Julius Caesar* (?1599/1601) and *Coriolanus* (?1605/8), which deal with issues of power and the common good through historic *exempla* rather than recent history, while his colleagues more often worked with *exempla* from the history of Mediterranean countries. *Marciano* is not in any sense as developed as the works in that oeuvre, but it is a relatively early Scottish example of a historic period being used as the setting for an exploration of contemporary political concerns. It marks the earliest work of that kind written specifically for a Scottish stage, a forerunner of a canon that would lift off with a more Scottish focus in the next century.

Despite an active theatre scene in Edinburgh, the first substantial post-Restoration Scottish dramatists were presented in London. This may perhaps be because of the post-Restoration Edinburgh theatre's class and ideological limitations, associated as it was with Stuart courts and the 'prelatic' Restoration Episcopalian settlement for the Scottish Kirk. Certainly, there was after 1688 Williamite reaction in Scotland against theatre, while Adrienne Scullion[7] identifies the first significant play of Catherine Trotter (1679–1749), born in London of Scots parents and later resident in Aberdeen, as performed in London. *Agnes de Castro* was probably played in 1695 and explores themes later developed by Jo Clifford in *Ines de Castro* (1989), although she writes a Restoration verse tragedy of misplaced love, jealousy, and betrayal and includes characters quite distinct from those Clifford later engages with. This was followed by non-historical plays, a verse tragedy *Fatal Friendship* (1698), a comedy *Love at a Loss* (1700) and another verse tragedy, *The Unhappy Penitent* (1701), before *The Revolution in Sweden* (1706). As its title implies, this explores the politics of revolution, but at a safe distance from any possible Scoto-British parallels. Other Scottish playwrights of the period like David Crawford (1665–1726) and Newburgh Hamilton (1691–1761) wrote Restoration comedies for theatres like Drury Lane and Lincoln's Inn Fields, while Hamilton later wrote lyrics for Handel, including *Samson* (1743). Perhaps at this time—just before and after the 1707 Treaty of Union as the two branches of the Stuarts were still claiming the British

throne—political caution seemed advisable. In any case, these Scottish playwrights were integrated into London theatrical practice. The next generation of Scottish playwrights, however, expatriate or Edinburgh-based, was more ready to engage with historical topics related to clear, and current, political concerns. These writers, who also wrote in other literary genres, included London-based James Thomson, David Mallet (Malloch), and Tobias Smollett, and Edinburgh-based Allan Ramsay.

It is easy to forget that Allan Ramsay's *The Gentle Shepherd* (1725–9) is itself a historical drama. Famous as it is as a popular and much-produced pastoral ballad-opera whose events are fictional, their context is firmly rooted in specific historical fact. Concerned with true love in a pastoral context, it also explores issues of disguise, duty, and the re-establishment of order after social disruption. The play has a pro-Jacobite and anti-Calvinist inclination, but expresses that through its sense that, as with the restoration of the kingdom in the person of Charles II (and perhaps, potentially, the exiled Stuarts of Ramsay's time), proper social order and hierarchy must be maintained. Sir William Worthy returns incognito after the Stuart Restoration and finds that his disguised son, the shepherd Patie, wants to marry Peggy. He announces he is Patie's father, insisting his son's choice is socially inappropriate. The lovers seem on the brink of final separation when, in the last act, it is revealed that Peggy is daughter to Sir William's sister: the marriage will not disturb, but instead reinforce, social order, and Sir William re-establishes his seigneurial role by restoring 'his father's hearty table'.[8] Unlike his expatriate contemporaries, Ramsay's political focus is clearly on Scotland's post-Restoration, post-Union settlement: the play's concern with exile and return, secret loyalties, revelation of incognito, discovery of hidden relationships and the need to preserve political order resonates with Scotland's confused loyalties between two major Jacobite risings. And he uses Scots as a stage language, a topic whose ideological force Chap. 3 considers and is featured as a theme in some of Robert McLellan's plays, discussed in Chap. 4.

By contrast, Thomson's first play *Sophonisba* (1730), dedicated to Queen Caroline, is read by Terence Tobin and Adrienne Scullion[9] as contemporary political allegory in a British context: Tobin notes the 'heroine's dominant passion is to prevent her native Carthage (Britain) from becoming subservient to tyrannic Rome (France)'.[10] Its baroque bravura was satirized: the line 'Oh! Sophonisba! Sophonisba! Oh!' became the subject of much hilarity, but the play is important as a major example, after *Marciano* and Trotter's two history plays, of a London-Scottish playwright

addressing current political and ideological considerations through representation of historical events on stage. Drawing material from the classical period, specifically the Second Punic War (218–201 BC), is certainly some distance from using Scottish historical events for exploration of themes of particular importance to Scottish society and culture. Equally, however, it is clear that Thomson, working within the context of a newly conjoined Scotland and England, deals with a vision of British national unity faced with foreign danger, a theme resonating throughout the eighteenth century for Hanoverian supporters like him. Further, the education of any young Scot of this period was so imbued with classical study that a case can be made that classical history was in a real sense as much part of that educated Scot's everyday understanding as the home community's history.

Indeed, when Thomson returned to the stage, it was with *Agamemnon* (1738).[11] Dedicated to the Princess of Wales now rather than Queen Caroline, the play's meaning in contemporary political discourse is evident. The Prime Minister, Robert Walpole, was perceived as the Queen's agent in opposing Frederick, Prince of Wales, and his resistance to his father George II's policies. The drama identifies Orestes, the true champion of his father's memory, with Frederick, the vengeful Clytemnestra with Caroline, and the scheming Aegisthus with Walpole. It is surprising this play escaped censure under the new powers of the Lord Chamberlain. Thomson's next play did not. *Edward and Leonora* (1739), dedicated to Frederick, after rehearsal at Covent Garden began, was banned for its implied references to the royal family's civil war, though it was published. Thomson went on to achieve European fame with his greatest dramatic success: *Tancred and Sigismunda* (1745), a story of love and betrayal set in Sicily and dealing with a favourite theme of Thomson, conflict between public duty and private emotion.

David Malloch/Mallet's *Eurydice* (1731) followed the practice of employing classical material to make contemporary points. Even within its classical cover, Mallet's play was accused of coded Jacobite support. Certainly Malloch/Mallet's Perthshire family background was of Catholicism and Jacobite sympathy. His name-change may, besides avoiding the '-och' ending difficult for his English colleagues, have sought to mask this connection. However that may be, his next play *Mustapha* (1739) attacked by implication, in the same vein as Thomson's *Agamemnon*, Walpole's encouragement of George II's hostility to Frederick, despite the potential for the Lord Chamberlain to have blocked it. It seems likely that Walpole was aware of the thrust of the plays' meaning: Sandro Jung

suggests the prime minister's propagandists may lie behind the rumour of Mallet's family Jacobitism.[12] In any case, by the mid-1700s Mallet was seen, in Jung's words, 'as a writer of the Patriot Opposition',[13] which saw Frederick as political paragon of patriotic 'non-partisan' government.

While Jacobitism and Hanoverian court politics threatened British political stability, expatriate Scottish playwrights continued to revisit themes of loyalty and betrayal. Thomson and Mallet left classical and Mediterranean *exempla* for a version of English history in their collaboration, *The Masque of Alfred* (1740). In this play premiered at the Prince of Wales's country home Cliveden, the Anglo-Saxon hero emerges from disguise to drive out the Danes and the play concludes with Thomson's aspirational and unionist 'Rule Britannia'. It represents Alfred as another patriotic paragon and combines, in Tobin's words, 'belligerent patriotism, music, spectacle and romance'.[14] Their younger contemporary, Tobias George Smollett (1721–1771), whose middle name, given six years after the 1715 Rising, marks his family's Hanoverian sympathies, arrived in London in 1739 with one of the first plays on a Scottish historical theme in his luggage. This was *The Regicide*, a play about the death of James I, a topic returned to in the last two decades by both the present author (*A Great Reckonin*, 2000) and Rona Munro (*The James Plays*, 2014). Smollett failed to place this script with a theatre (it may be questioned how popular such an explicitly Scottish topic might have been on the sometimes Scotophobic London stage at that time, although Munro's 2014 return to this theme took London by storm). After success as a novelist with *Roderick Random* (1748), however, he published the script in 1749.

Following Ramsay's pioneering work, not just as a playwright but as a theatrical entrepreneur, and in particular his successors' establishment of a regular theatrical venue in the city at the Canongate Concert Hall (later Theatre) in 1747, Edinburgh theatre became firmly established. In 1756, with the support of the moderate wing of the Kirk and much of the legal establishment, another history play was at the centre of that process. John Home's *Douglas*, like Smollett's *The Regicide*, had been turned down for a London production. Its successful Edinburgh premiere, however, culminated a year in which the moderate wing of the Kirk had seen off the more fundamentalist Evangelicals who at that year's General Assembly had vainly sought to excommunicate Home's relative, the philosopher David Hume. Like *The Gentle Shepherd*, with which it vies as the most popular Scottish play of the century, but in a tragic mode, *Douglas* explores a historical period, this time unspecified, but based on the events of the ballad Gil Morice, through fictional characters. Again like Ramsay's play it presents

issues of political betrayal, family honour, and duty, hidden identity and secret loyalties that resonated strongly, given the conflicted condition of Scottish society in the run-up to and follow-up of the 1745–6 Jacobite Rising. Theatre, by now, had become a settled fact of elite lives. Rising young intellectuals and lawyers supported it. James Boswell is credited with *A View of the Edinburgh Theatre during the Summer Season*, *1759*,[15] reviewing three performances a week of two plays, a main and a one-act play, from late June to late August. The playhouse had joined the several other established forms of Scottish theatrical activity already mentioned.

From this lively theatrical culture new Scottish dramas grew. These covered a significant range of topics. John (James?) Baillie's *Patriotism* (1763), a farce, related to contemporary politics, supporting the Prime Minister, Bute. Some were simple entertainment like *She's Not Him, and He's Not Her* (1764) by Andrew Erskine, a love story involving cross-dressing. Others explored Scottish history. John Wilson in *Earl Douglas; or, Generosity Betray'd* (1764) featured the 1440 Black Dinner. There, in the minority of James II, his advisers/captors, Chancellor Crichton and Regent Livingston, assassinated the sixth Earl of Douglas and his brother, who were under safe-conduct, another incident later picked up by Munro. Wilson represents James as innocent in the case, like the Douglases, victimized by political opportunism: nobles who embody Scotland's liberties are opposed by Crichton and Livingston. The timing of this production, like that of Baillie's *Patriotism*, is of interest. Just before this premiere, Ian Jack reminds us, anti-Scottish hostility in London was general:

> In 1762, James Boswell was present at a Covent Garden theatre when two Highland officers turned up and the audience turned on them with shouts of 'No Scots! No Scots! Out with them!' and pelted them with apples. (Boswell recorded that he momentarily 'hated the English; I wished from my soul that the union was broke and we might give them another battle of Bannockburn.')[16]

In the same year, John Jackson's sensational debut performance as Young Norval in Edinburgh led to an invitation from David Garrick to reprise that role in London. By the time Jackson arrived to do so in 1763, however, Garrick offered him other parts, but decided it was not judicious to play such a Scottish role at Drury Lane that season.[17] Jackson identifies the reason as Scotophobic feeling arising from antipathy to the Bute ministry fuelled by John Wilkes's anti-Scottish propaganda. Wilkes of 'Wilkes

and Liberty', given his hostile attitude not just to Scots, but to Europeans in general, can be seen here as a xenophobic little Englander. Like John Baillie, Wilson, whose play's title incorporates that of Home's temporarily suppressed one, may be writing from antipathy to such Scotophobic attitudes. His writing a Scottish historical play asserts the history and, arguably, the continuing role within the Union—the play is written in English as is Home's—of Scotland's 'imagined communities'.

Such late eighteenth-century plays represent development from the earlier politico-historical dramas of Clark, Trotter, Thomson, and Mallet. Now plays embody directly Scottish historical themes and relate to contemporary ideological and political conflict. From the 1760s on, more plays dealing with aspects of Scottish history began to be performed. Some featured key figures like Mary Queen of Scots, exemplifying a conflicted, and in some versions betrayed, Scottish identity, and William Wallace, a heroicized example of Scottish identity and independence and eighteenth-century campaigns for 'Liberty'. Around these flourished other historical or classical plays by Scots, some, in the new fashion, featuring leading characters from the mythic Ossianic age. Some were closet dramas not intended for public performance, but rather for reading in private company. Indeed, Tobin observes that there tended at this time to be a 'melodramatic morass of closet drama'. But he also argues that some closet plays rose above that morass. Of John Wood's *The Duke of Rothsay* (1780), dealing with the Duke of Albany's killing of Robert III's eldest son, he asserts: 'It is a sophisticated dramatic achievement. The characters' motivation is psychologically oriented and remarkably complex.'[18] By the eighteenth century's close, almost in parallel with the work of antiquarians like Walter Scott, Scottish history was being rediscovered, reassessed and dramatized as part of a process of asserting Scottish identities within the Union sealed at that century's beginning. Scottish historical drama of the period addressed contemporary political concerns, including the assertion of national history and identity in a Union the nature of which in the lifetime of a cross-section of the audience had been challenged by a serious armed Rising, however 'safe' that topic may seem in the twenty-first century. Archibald Maclaren (1755–1826) continued to assert national identity in much of his output, evoking Highland history and legends in such plays as *Bessy Bell and Mary Gray, or Love in the Highlands* (1808), *Private Theatre or the Highland Funeral* (1809), *The Highland Chiefs; or the Castle of Dunstaffnage* (1815), *Highland Robbers; or, Such Things Were* (1817), and *Wallace the Brave; or, The Siege of Perth* (1819).

In 1798, Joanna Baillie's first volume of plays, often seen as closet drama, though several were to be produced, was published. It included *Count Basil*, about the eponymous early modern Count's conflict between love and military duty, whereby his succumbing at the wrong time to love meant he betrayed his colleagues, prompting his suicide. The plot of *De Montfort* (1800) develops from the hatred of the Byronic De Monfort for his schoolmate, Rezenvelt. After losing a duel to him, De Monfort's hatred is unceasing; a Romantic tragedy ensues. Scullion describes the play as 'a somewhat stilted heroic verse-tragedy'.[19] In both these plays, Baillie's practice follows continental contemporaries like Schiller in visiting early-modern history to explore themes of loyalty, duty, love, and honour. In *The Family Legend* (1810), by contrast, Baillie explores early modern Scottish 'clan rivalry, deceit, revenge and retribution, lost loves, innocence at risk, concealed identity and espionage […] but little by way of mature character development or sophisticated denouement'.[20] Baillie's interest in character and motivation is swamped in the tale of historic feuding between Macleans of Mull and Campbell Earls of Argyll. Baillie nonetheless returned to Scottish themes: for example, she left behind the Highlands in *Witchcraft* (1836). Here, Grizeld—not a witch, but distracted after her husband's execution in Inverness for murder—leads a deluded coven in Paisley. Baillie's plays have recently been re-evaluated positively by scholars like Scullion and Barbara Bell.[21] Scullion also reminds us of another Scottish woman playwright, Frances Wright, whose work was produced after she migrated to the United States. There *Altdorf* (1819) was produced in New York, a post-Schiller tragedy of Swiss resistance to Austrian invasion which no doubt resonated for its audience with their recent resistance to British imperialism.

Plays by Joanna Baillie and Maclaren precede and prepare the way for a key element in nineteenth-century Scottish historical drama. That was the so-called 'National Drama'. This is generally seen as based on adaptations of Walter Scott's novels, but, although these were very important, it was more than that. Barbara Bell offers an explanation for the significance of this form of drama as further assertion of a national identity which had been under some pressure since the Jacobite Risings. She argues that theatre was coming to be seen as a safe place where audiences might find their history and culture represented: 'The general success of Scott adaptations in Scotland cast a mantle of respectability over the National Drama as a whole, gradually allowing some relaxation in censorship. Potentially political comment became more readily accepted.'[22] She cites the example of

Gilderoy (1827) by W. H. Murray (1790–1852) which dealt with the history of Montrose's campaign against the parliamentary army in the Wars of the Three Kingdoms 'seen through the trials of one family of small farmers'.[23] Here, Walter Logan, facing a firing squad, declares 'Scotland may be the friend of England, but will never be her slave!' (II, iii). Such plays often began in minor houses before being picked up by Patent Theatres, but the popularity of the genre lasted throughout the century, though latterly tending to be found in popular theatres like the penny geggies. Nonetheless, it was still possible at the end of the century, and even into the early twentieth century, to find legitimate theatres presenting works from the National Drama. Graham Moffat (1866–1951), the actor and playwright, notes in his memoirs,

> In the days of my youth […] our two enterprising actor-managers of old-time, Messrs. Howard and Wyndham, [presented] some delightful revivals and original productions of the stage versions of some of Sir Walter Scott's novels and poems. The more popular of these have been revived time and again, and I am a wee thing prood o' masel' as having taken part in three of these in the Scott centenary performances in Glasgow and Edinburgh [in 1932].[24]

Brown and Bell suggest that this drama infiltrated audiences' collective minds, and that

> rooted in popular and folk memory, [… National Dramas] had embedded themselves deep into the national theatre and psyche, providing emblems for the decoration of theatres for the remainder of the [nineteenth] century and aspirations for a national drama, truly independent of southern influence, which was still very evident as the century came to a close.[25]

They argue that this impact reflects the National Drama's deep penetration into the Scottish imagination and expression of cultural identity.

There is no doubt, then, as Bell demonstrates, that the focus and force of the National Drama grew in the nineteenth century under the impact of two major developments. One was the wider extension by 1800 of playhouse outlets already referred to by Alasdair Cameron, which continued throughout the nineteenth century. The second was the impact of stage versions of Scott's work. Bell is rightly careful to point out that Scott adaptations do not comprise the whole of that drama. Nonetheless, Scott was important. He himself argued strongly for a separate and distinct

Scottish identity within the Union. Quite beyond poetry, novels and his own plays, he was a leading supporter of playhouse drama, an antiquarian researcher, a traditional song collector, a successful campaigner on such issues as the 1826 retention of Scottish bank notes and a promoter of the drama of state. This might be on the intimate, but highly publicized, scale of the stage management of the 'discovery' of the Scottish Crown Jewels in 1818 or the vainglorious orchestration of the 1822 Royal Visit of George IV. In every case, his focus was to reassert Scottish cultural identity dramatically. It is, of course, easy to mock aspects of his cultural campaign and satirize his approach to the king's visit, whether on stage as Hector MacMillan does in his play *The Royal Visit* (1974) discussed in Chap. 5 or John Prebble in his account *The King's Jaunt* (1988).[26] In a real sense, however, Scott's interest in Scottish history and culture reflected that of the eighteenth-century Scottish historical dramatists who preceded him and whose interest lay in using historical themes to explore contemporary issues and, latterly, to sustain Scottish identities within a would-be centralizing unionist state. If that meant recreating, or in a sense rewriting, history, then so be it. Part of Scott's own worldwide popularity lay in his cultural activism and, as the next section makes clear, such activism has parallels in other eighteenth- and nineteenth-century European theatre traditions.

History in Other European Theatres

Joyce McMillan argues for the interaction of theatre and assertions of national identity:

> Of all the art forms, theatre is traditionally the one most closely associated with ideas about nations and nationhood. At its simplest, theatre is a public arena where people who live in the same place, and usually speak the same language, can come together to share experience; to recognise dilemmas, identify conflicts, laugh at enemies, celebrate achievements or mourn great losses.[27]

Thomson, Mallet, and later Scottish playwrights employed classical and historical figures around whom to write plays which had contemporary implications for the meaning of nation and nationhood for Scotland. By the end of the eighteenth century they were reclaiming Scottish history as a means of asserting the continuing interest of that history, and

so communal memory and shared identity. Similarly, playwrights in other cultures used historical events and characters to explore such issues for their culture and time. A strong element in mainland European dramaturgy from the eighteenth century on, and particularly in the nineteenth, was the writing of plays which sought to promote through exploration of national history, or parallel histories of other nations, a sense of nationhood. In these cases the 'nation' is substantially created and sustained through the construction of narratives and 'staging' of histories. To use Anderson's terminology again, playwrights 'imagined communities', often reacting to imperial hegemonies as part of wider political nation-building movements of the kind Anderson discusses.

Friedrich Schiller (1759–1805) actually turned to Scottish material for his *Mary Stuart* (1800), a recurrent figure in previous and later Scottish historical drama, but Schiller was not alone in Germany in using historical material for dramatic purposes. Gotthold Lessing (1729–81), though his work is chiefly now considered as pioneering bourgeois drama, draws for his *Nathan the Wise* (1779) on the third tale of the first day of Boccaccio's *Decameron*. In the context of the Third Crusade he explores with regard to Judaism, Islam, and Christianity the impossibility of a single religious 'truth' partly through the character of Nathan, who represents a plea for mutual understanding and toleration within the framework of Enlightenment scepticism. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832), who became in time a friend of Schiller's, had also reworked historical material before Lessing. His *Goetz von Berlichingen* (1773) uses the historical career of his eponymous hero to present him as a model of libertarianism and individual freedom, a free spirit who stands against deceit and effete over-civilisation. In the end, however, he must succumb to his society's versions of justice and law, in effect a sacrifice. In Goethe's play he dies young as against the historical original who was a mercenary, dying aged around 80. Goethe's other important historical drama was *Egmont* (1788). This he based on the life of Lamoral, Count of Egmont, executed by the Governor of the Spanish Netherlands, the Duke of Alba, for his perceived disloyalty in 1568 as part of a campaign of unsuccessful repression that led to the Netherlands achieving independence over the next twelve years. The play establishes Egmont as an advocate of liberty who seeks justice against the despotism of Alba and fulfils his destiny as a heroic martyr in his nation's struggle for freedom.

Like his older contemporaries, Schiller uses his versions of historical events to explore issues of individual freedom, hierarchies of power, and authoritarianism versus democratic rights. His first major historical drama,

Fiesco's Conspiracy at Genoa (1783), concerns the attempted 1547 rising of the Genoese against the dictatorial powers of Andrea Doria and his arrogant nephew Gianettino. It explores, as do his later history plays, the ambiguities of power and freedom, politic calculation, and individual and national liberty. The year before Goethe's *Egmont*, Schiller had approached the same Spanish historical territory in *Don Carlos* (1787). The heir (1545–68) to the Spanish throne died in the prison to which his father Philip II sent him, perhaps because he was unstable and, perhaps because in this instability, he had made contact with the Netherlands rebels of whom Goethe was to write. In Schiller's version Don Carlos becomes a spokesman for national freedom and individual liberty against the authoritarian despotism of the Spanish regime. Schiller continued to use historical material to explore issues of duty, libertarian opposition to autocratic power, and political machination and duplicity. His *Wallenstein* trilogy (1798–9) used the events surrounding the death of the imperial general during the Thirty Years War to explore loyalty to ordinary people as opposed to the demands of imperial authority. In a dramatic device to enhance the emotional resonance of these plays he provides Wallenstein's nemesis Piccolomini with a son, Max—who never existed in historical fact—who falls in love with Wallenstein's daughter Thekla, who did exist. Famously, in *Mary Stuart* (1800), Schiller takes a similar liberty with history when he has Elizabeth I meet Mary, as she did not in life. He draws on the drama of Mary's final year of imprisonment and the conflict of two queens who will not submit either to the other to mark the hypocrisy of power that wishes an opponent's downfall, but behaves ambiguously and ambivalently to evade responsibility for the fatal act. *The Maid of Orleans* (1801) returns to the ideal of a representative of the people opposing their oppression, again with a variation from historical fact. In this case, his Joan of Arc escapes from prison and so avoids being burned at the stake, instead dying in battle. What he has done by this variation is to ensure that, rather than his heroine being overwhelmed and submissive in her death, she becomes active—still dying, but doing so in a moment of heroic struggle rather than passive suffering. *William Tell* (1804) returns to the theme of a people resisting the domination of external powers, in this case that of fourteenth-century Swiss resistance to attempted Hapsburg rule.

In Schiller's creation of non-existent historical characters like Max Piccolomini or non-existent historical events like Elizabeth and Mary's meeting or Joan of Arc's escape to die in battle, let alone the improbability of the historic Don Carlos being a revolutionary leader, his dramaturgical

method raises questions that underlie the treatment of history in historical plays already discussed. They are questions that will recur throughout this volume. How far is historical drama about history, and in what sense is it based on historical fact? Indeed, as the next chapter will begin to ask, what is history and, as later chapters will ask, how can drama be—how in practice is drama—based on it? What one can say with some clarity at this point is that for Schiller in *Don Carlos*, as to an extent for Goethe with *Egmont*, recording versions of sixteenth-century Dutch resistance to Spanish occupation allowed the writer to address key contemporary questions. These included those of personal freedom, resistance to dictatorial power and censorship, and the idea of emerging communal and national identity in the face of hegemonic imperial power. And their versions allowed them to do so indirectly in the face of their own societies' governments and civil authorities, when a direct approach would have been politically and legally dangerous, if not impossible. However relatively unconcealed the political messages of their plays, their representation of the issues, as distanced by geography and period, permitted them to address live issues of oppression in their own societies. While it cannot be argued that twentieth-century Scottish playwrights needed to use distant history to mask their political themes, Jo Clifford (*Losing Venice*, 1985, and *Ines de Castro*, 1989), Chris Hannan (*The Baby*, 1990) and Alan Wilkins (*Carthage Must Be Destroyed*, 2007) have used European early modern or classical loci for some of their plays. Mostly, however, in interrogating the very ideas of history and identity, and hegemonic assumptions embedded in both, as these German exemplars have done, Scottish plays have focused on recovering and reinterpreting Scottish historical events.

In this, they follow the pattern of the second group of theatre cultures considered in this section. These belong to national groupings within larger hegemonic entities. After the eighteenth-century Central European examples of Lessing, Goethe and Schiller, playwrights in other communities in the region, particularly in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, rediscovered and developed theatre as a means of expressing a sense of community identity and shared history. Since 1102 Croatia had been united with Hungary and as the idea of nationalism developed in Europe after the Napoleonic Wars, in the face of the desire of Hungary to Magyarize the areas over which it ruled, Croats developed the Illyrian Movement, seeking to develop their own cultural and linguistic identity. Within the multinational Austro-Hungarian framework, the first Croatian National Theatre was established in Marko's Square in the upper city of Zagreb in 1831. As

in other national communities within that empire, theatre became a means of exploring and asserting cultural identity within a diverse and complex polity. As Boris Senker describes it:

> The artistic, political, national, cultural, and educational role of the Croatian National Theatre, and indirectly the place of drama within this complex matrix, were determined by the economic, political and legal position of Croatia, and its social, cultural, and linguistic situation in the course of the forties, fifties, and sixties of the [nineteenth] century.[28]

In effect, the theatre in Croatia, as in other Central European nations contained within larger empires, became part of the process of identity-creation and nation-building.

In 1860 two related events took place. First, on 24 August the Croatian Parliament formally, in Senker's words, 'took under its protection "the institution of the theatre as a national possession"'.[29] Secondly, on 24 November students in the audience howled down the use of German on stage and applauded the use of Croatian. Chapter 3 discusses the interaction of language, ideology, and identity, but it is clear that one of the imperial languages had become unwelcome in the cultural expression of an aspiring community, (re-)imagining itself into a form of reality. Although there had been a lively sixteenth-century Dubrovnik-based theatre tradition, which produced a repertoire of substance, the Illyrian movement tended to forget that past as for some time twentieth-century Scottish theatrical practitioners also forgot their own earlier canon. Yet, the nineteenth-century playwrights had a clear ideological motivation. Stanley Hochman explains:

> The plays were for the most part romantically nationalistic, taking for their themes events and characters from Croatian history. The most outstanding playwright was Dimitrije Demetar [*sic*] (1811–72), whose best play *Queen Teuta* (*Teuta*, 1844), goes back to the distant past of Illyria, bemoaning the lack of unity among its leaders.[30]

For the Croatian National Theatre, according to Senker, Demeter 'directed and supervised all the activities of the theatre until his retirement in 1867'.[31] Here, theatre in general and Demeter the dramatist in particular were explicitly integrated with a community's perceptions of the nature of its political, cultural, and linguistic identity, and its manifestation in political and cultural action. Demeter's own most admired play is clearly to be seen

within the context of the larger Illyrian movement that drove a burgeoning sense of cultural and linguistic identity and resistance to imperialism. In this, his drama and that of his contemporaries parallels artistically the imagined political stance of Schiller's character 'Don Carlos' and Goethe's 'Egmont'—and the actual stance of the historical Egmont—with regard to a community's national self-determination. The historical play and history is here potentially interrelated, the play drawing on 'history' and in turn affecting 'history', that is, a community's historical development.

While the nineteenth-century position of Norway was distinct from that of Croatia, contained within the power structures of a major multi-ethnic European empire, its position as a society that found its ability to determine its own future in its own terms difficult embodied some parallels. Until the Napoleonic wars Denmark had been hegemonic in the kingdom of 'Denmark' which included Norway, Iceland, the Faroes, and Greenland. When Sweden lost Finland to Russia during those wars and joined the anti-Napoleonic alliance it placed itself in a position—which was concluded by the Treaty of Kiel in 1814—to appropriate Norway. This country moved from a subservient position to Denmark, which established the prestige language for Norway as Danish, to a similar position, although with certain national safeguards, to Sweden. Henrik Ibsen (1828–1906), before he wrote the socially challenging dramas for which he is now celebrated, wrote a number of early plays which contributed to national debates by referring to its history or drawing on its legends. *Lady Inger of Oestraat* (1854), for example, is set in the period in Norwegian history between the collapse of the Scandinavian union when in 1523 Sweden established its independence and the creation in 1536 of the early modern Denmark, which had hegemony over Norway. The play is clearly anti-Danish and asserts the rights of the Norwegians to self-determination. He returned to historical material over the next three years with *The Feast at Solhaug* (1855), *Olaf Liliekrans* (1856) and *The Vikings at Helgeland* (1857). While in 1864 Ibsen moved abroad and the direction of his playwriting changed, his early work showed interest in exploring Norway's history and literary mythologies in a way related to the dynamic controversies inherent in Norway's constitutional position. His historical dramas, like those of his Croatian contemporaries, represent a model widely found in nineteenth-century European theatre, often influenced by the German examples already discussed. These saw drama as a means of exploring and reshaping community consciousness in societies where, under the pressures of modern industrialization and colonialism, former hierarchical assumptions

were being challenged, democratic movements growing in strength and the concept of self-determination for perceived 'national' groupings within another state to which they felt no affinity being championed.

While the Croatian theatre made a point of using a national language, the Irish theatre of the nineteenth century opted to work in English rather than Irish, as it developed the strand of writing that led to the foundation of the Abbey Theatre and its long-term position as a national theatre company. There are a number of context-specific reasons for this. Already in such figures as Sheridan, there was tradition of writing plays in English which had become staples of the British stage, especially in its metropolitan centre, London. Daniel O'Connell, the leading Irish nationalist of the early part of the century, had advocated the use of English rather than Irish, of which he was a native speaker, for political and economic purposes.[32] Within this practice, an Irish playwright like Dion Boucicault (1820–90) wrote popular melodramas which drew on stereotypes often of Irish life, but in such examples as *The Shaughraun* (1874) asserted the vitality of Irish culture and defended the Fenian cause against corrupt authorities. The cultural case for Irish identity was made, too, later by W. B. Yeats (1865–1939) and colleagues like J. M. Synge (1871–1909).

It is hard to be precise as to the impact of such dramatists on the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Irish independence movement. What, however, is clear is that playwrights were an important part of a cultural shift. This saw them explore Irish legend, history and contemporary social life to establish a vision of Ireland—in Irish-inflected English—which formed a significant part of a cultural agenda supporting the conception of a distinct Irish theatre, itself part of a larger Irish cultural, and so national, identity. Yeats's plays within this movement draw largely on Irish myth and legend, but also employ historical themes. In *The Countess Cathleen* (1894) the countess sells her soul to the devil so that she can save her tenants from famine and damnation. Leading characters in *The Land of Heart's Desire* (1894) are torn between the everyday and the fairy otherworld. Written with Lady Gregory, *Cathleen ni Houlihan* (1902) nationalistically ends with a call for young men to sacrifice their lives for an independent Ireland embodied in 'Cathleen'. Later Yeats plays, *On Baile's Strand* (1904) and *Deirdre* (1907), explore Irish myth and legend while even later work moved into a form of expressionism, but still within a Celtic cultural context. The Scottish dramatist, William Sharp ('Fiona Macleod', 1855–1905), participated, with Yeats's encouragement, in this Celtic cultural movement in such plays as *The House of Usna* (1900) and *The Immortal*

Hour, now better remembered in its 1914 operatic form. Meantime, while Synge largely wrote plays with contemporary, though rural, references such as *The Playboy of the Western World* (1907), which led to riots on its premiere as it challenged assumptions about the nature of Irish society and its social attitudes, he too employed characters from Irish myth and legend in *Deirdre of the Sorrows* (1910). Irish drama of this period offered Scottish colleagues an example, quite distinct from the declining National Drama, of a theatre explicitly engaged in nation-building through the use of both mythic and nationally determined material.

We should not think of theatre as alone in this process of nation-building. Cairns Craig reminds us, after referring to the 'rage for national origins inspired largely by Macpherson's *Ossian*', that 'in the work of the historical novelists of the nineteenth century what was being created was a national imagination: an imagining of the nation as both the fundamental context of individual life and the real subject of history'.[33] This imagining offers a powerful means of reinforcing a sense of collective identity. Yet theatre, complementing such processes in poetry and the novel, has—as Joyce McMillan, quoted earlier, argues—a particular impact and role with regard to 'nations and nationhood'. Stuart Hall has observed, 'National cultures are composed not only of cultural institutions, but of symbols and representations. A national culture is a *discourse*—a way of constructing meanings which influences and organizes both our actions and our conception of ourselves.'[34] Hall goes on to argue that 'national cultures construct identities by producing meanings about "the nation" with which we can identify; these are contained in the stories which are told about it, memories which connect its present with its past, and images which are constructed of it.'[35] We can see, then, that the national theatre cultures discussed in this section have served this function of 'construct[ing] identities by producing meanings' in theatrical discourses. As Stephanie Preuss says, in an observation that reinforces McMillan's reasoning, 'the collective aspect of a theatre performance makes it a relevant medium of collective remembrance and shared group identities'.[36]

History Plays in Late Twentieth-Century England and Ireland

Clearly, within the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century discourses of Scottish theatre, history was used as a dramatic means of exploring issues of politics, national self-conception, and mediation of versions of

collective remembrance about—and celebration of—'imagined communities' of Scotland. Further, in parallel, the theatre and the plays of a number of European cultures were turning, following in many ways the example of Shakespeare's treatment of history, to their own history and myths, either to explore progressive and radical politics, as with Schiller, or the roots of national identity, as with Norwegian, Croatian, or Irish theatre, or, indeed, both progressive politics and national identity formation at once. Certainly, the previous sections illustrate two things. One is the centuries-long presence of deep Scottish dramaturgical interest in historical topics as a means of addressing national identity and contemporary political issues. The other is the ways in which the theatre of other European nations broadly similar in scale or constitutional status to Scotland addressed specific national histories in the context of developing ideas of liberty and identity within, often, predatory imperialist states. There is, however, another more recent perspective on the interaction of playwrights and history nearby. That is the use by a group of English and Irish playwrights in the last half-century or so of historical material in order to shape their plays for particular theatrical, social, and political purposes.

A leading dramatist interested in recent history, as in his *Licking Hitler* (1978), who also came to work with verbatim theatre is David Hare. He said, in his seminal King's College, Cambridge, lecture of 5 March 1978:

> For five years I have been writing history plays. I try to show the English their history. I write tribal pieces […] Reading Angus Calder's *The People's War* changed all my thinking as a writer; an account of the second World War through the eyes of ordinary people, it attempts a complete alternative history to the phoney and corrupting history I was taught at school.[37]

Here the playwright recognizes that versions of history retold are a result of choice. He recognizes that there is 'a complete alternative history' as opposed to an institutionally validated 'phoney and corrupting history'. His 'thinking as a writer', his ideological framework, is changed entirely by recognizing that alternative histories exist. He argues, in effect, that the ways in which 'historical evidence', or even what is seen as constituting historical evidence, is regarded, is affected by a historian's view of the nature of society and its power structures; whether, for example, it is seen through the 'eyes of ordinary people'. In this, he is goes beyond the well-understood dialectics of Whig historical traditions and their opponents to something more, a view that it is somehow possible to

break through a phoney history to one that is somehow not 'corrupting'. Yet, this Damascene revelation carries within it an ideological judgement based on the premise that history 'through the eyes of ordinary people' is 'complete' and not 'phoney' or 'corrupting'. In the next chapter we will consider issues of ideological bias in historiography and, so, how far any single formulation can avoid corruption. Here, however, we may note that Hare's views are consonant with the development of historiography at the time he was writing and relate them to dramaturgical practice in history plays in England and Ireland since the 1960s.

Calder himself, and pre-eminently Christopher Hill and E. P. Thompson, built on the work of an earlier generation to explore what was sometimes called 'hidden history'. At the time Hare was beginning to write plays, Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class* (first published by Gollancz in 1963) was being reissued by Penguin (from 1968 on). Hare, writing from a theatrical and dramaturgical perspective, can be seen to be responding to insights that for him arose from recognition of the ideological basis of historical interpretation. He continues, 'I became a writer by default, to fill in the gaps, to work on areas of the fresco which were simply ignored, or appropriated for the shallowest purposes: rock music, black propaganda, gun-selling, diplomacy.'[38] One of the concerns of this study is to explore ways in which the intention to 'fill the gaps' carries with it the requirement that the playwright develop means of communicating dramaturgically, through the process of shaping the dramatic text, the significance of the existence of those gaps. The gaps the playwright is filling may differ from those Hill, Thompson, or Calder sought to fill, but they are nonetheless perceived. While the work of Bill Bryden or Hector MacMillan discussed in Chap. 5, for example, can be seen in many ways to follow the class-focused ethos of the work of Calder, Hill, and Thompson, that of Scottish women playwrights examined in Chap. 6 embodies a complementary intention to fill in gaps in the representation of women in history on Scottish stages.

Hare, meanwhile, explicitly links his playwriting practice to the work of 'alternative' historians, through his reference to Calder. This has an impact on his perception of his practice, making his view of dramaturgy and historiography tentative: 'Historically it is hard for a serious playwright to be confident. History has not behaved in the way that was asked of it; and the medium itself in which we work has chronic doubts about its own audibility.'[39] The playwright, in shaping a text of 'history', must derive in his or her practice a structure, style, and convention for each play; it will

be argued later that the historian goes through analogous steps in shaping the historic text, the narratives, and myths of the 'facts of history'. The dramatist's practice contains its own signification, not only embodying the 'historical' action presented by the plot of the play, but also highlighting the methods by, or at least the extent to, which the existence of the gaps has been hidden or preserved and implicitly commenting on historical interpretation.

Hare's formulation that 'History has not behaved in the way that was asked of it' foreshadows the title of a 2003 article by the historian Keith Jenkins, 'On Disobedient Histories'. There Jenkins argues that

> What is really excellent about historians' representations is that they always fail. There is no possibility that any historicization of 'the past' can ever be literally true, objective, fair, non-figural, non-positioned and so on, all of which opens up that which has happened 'before now' to interminable readings and rereading.[40]

Jenkins goes on to remark that 'this inability to secure what are effectively interpretive *closures* [… is] ethically, morally and politically desirable'. Both playwright and historian here are attracted by the complexity and elusiveness of 'history' and 'histories'. They draw attention to historiographical, dramaturgical and, ultimately, ideological problems which will be directly addressed in the next chapter and then explicitly and implicitly throughout the rest of this study.

Hare's immediate predecessors and contemporaries offer a range of twentieth-century responses to their dramaturgical problems in representing historical material. Robert Bolt, in *A Man for all Seasons* (1960), develops a characterization of Thomas More which enables him to present a sympathetic and essentially modern private man to counterpoint the public conflict he outlines, a figure and personality arguably anachronistic and certainly different from Hilary Mantel's imagining in her more recent novels *Wolf Hall* (2009) and *Bring up the Bodies* (2012), quickly adapted for stage for the Royal Shakespeare Company (2013) and for BBC television (2015). Peter Shaffer, at the end of *The Royal Hunt of the Sun* (1965), develops a motivation for Pizarro's killing of Atahuallpa with no clear foundation in what historians can discover, but achieving a melodramatically direct emotional appeal. This softens for a modern audience the barbarity of the imperialist and colonialist actions of the Spaniard by suggesting that, if only the Incas had been able to live up to

Pizzaro's expectations of their own values and beliefs, then they would not have been pillaged.

These examples of anachronistic adaptation of historical mindsets which exculpate doubtful 'heroes' are paralleled by examples where flawed cultural figures are mythicized as somehow heroic as in Brecht's *Galileo* (1945) or, indeed, Shaffer's *Amadeus* (1979) and in older times in Shakespeare's or, indeed, Aeschylus's practice. These brief examples demonstrate part of the range of methods for shaping and modifying historical exactitude playwrights have used to meet dramaturgic and thematic needs. That range includes Bolt's representation of 'history' as an eternal present where modern ideas of psychological motivation prevail, through Shaffer's tendency to make events fit his recurrent interest in alternative consciousnesses, to other examples like the technically convenient speeding up of events as when Brian Friel in *Making History* (1989) elides action separated by ten years into one. These examples also demonstrate dramaturgical solutions in which implicit ideological choices often seem casual or even arbitrary: for example Shaffer in *Royal Hunt of the Sun* in focusing on what intrigues him in what he imagines of the personal relationship of Pizarro and Atahuallpa does not choose deeply to explore issues of colonial exploitation.

Other twentieth-century British and American examples, however, show that modification of historical exactitude primarily for ideological reasons is often in no sense arbitrary. Harold Hobson objected strongly, on the first production of *The Wallace* (1960), to what he saw as Sydney Goodsir Smith's Anglophobia in attributing a line to Edward I, as Wallace is taken to execution: '[…] Let it be slow, very slow, / And beautiful'.[41] The adaptation by Barbara Garson of *Macbeth* to *Macbird!* (1967) used serious parody in satirizing Democratic politics at the time of John Kennedy's assassination to refocus recent historical events to ideological purpose. Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* (1953), while drawing on the historical record, reflects critically on McCarthyism. Shaw's presentation of St Joan in 1923, as in his terminology a 'Protestant' and 'Nationalist', just three years after her canonisation, allows him to adapt her story to the ideological needs of his view of twentieth-century processes of political change and reaction. Shaw was particularly adept at this technique. Michael Holroyd notes of Britannus in *Caesar and Cleopatra* (1901), for example, 'Shaw never wrote costume drama for its own sake: his plays were always addressed to the present. The figure of Britannus keeps the audience imaginatively half in the present—which was one of the ways

Shaw became a model for Brecht.'[42] Here we can discern the use of a semi-anachronism, talking about or representing an element of the historical present in terms that the future will talk about it, but which would not have been recognizable to the original's contemporaries. In short, there are examples in a variety of contexts, such as Shaw's or Goodsir Smith's, of the dramaturgical manipulation of historical fact primarily to achieve ideological or political effect.

There are also examples of dramaturgical manipulation for theatrical impact, say by Friel or Schiller—with his meeting of Elizabeth and Mary—in order to cope with difficulties of plot structure or the development of stage action. And there are many cases where the choice made for a playwright's own explicit thematic purposes contains within it implicit ideological significance, as in the examples here from Bolt and Shaffer. Indeed, in more recent historical plays by leading English playwrights similar concerns with underlying lifelong dramaturgical themes can be seen to be presented through chosen historical material. Howard Brenton's *Anne Boleyn* (2010) can be read as a further illustration of Brenton's concern found in, for example, *Romans in Britain* (1980) with power and power's corruption. David Edgar's *Written on the Heart* (2011), concerning the development of the text of the King James Bible, explores political machinations, shifts in power, and the force and meaningful pedantries of words, in the way his plays on recent history like *The Shape of the Table* (1990), concerning post-perestroika Europe, do or indeed, as does *Entertaining Strangers* (1985), which explores the details of local politics and personality conflict regarding the Dorchester brewing industry. In these cases, the historical play offers the writers another means of exploring themes and ideas to be found in their contemporary work.

Theatre, Re-Imagining Communities, and Historical Themes

Theatre scholars have recently considered, with regard to Scotland, ways in which theatre makers have contributed to the imagining of Anderson's communities. Before addressing their arguments it is worth asking now, because the question will have implications for later chapters, the extent to which the timescale Anderson offers is confounded by the way in which as early as the 1320 Declaration of Arbroath Scotland is indentified as a nation. Such an identification is a process Anderson himself tends to see as developing as late as the end of the eighteenth century. Neal Ascherson

offers an insight on the Declaration and its interpretation which has implications for such a timescale:

> The parchment, however, is 'real'. Its pedigree back to 1320 is verifiable. In short, it is the deconstructors, not the Declaration, who have a credibility problem. The 'primordialists' may overstate their case about the antiquity of nationalism, but it is difficult to deny that recognizable ideas about a relationship between national and individual liberty were around in medieval Scotland. Was this a freakishly 'precocious' understanding of freedom? The answer is that it was only precocious if medieval England or France are taken as the norm. Too many British historians still unconsciously see Scotland in the period through an English lens.[43]

The implication of Ascherson's introducing the issue of the British historians seeing 'through an English lens' raises the question of Anderson's seeing nationalism through an American lens in arriving at the timescale he does. His conception of imagined communities, nonetheless—whatever issues there may be about his historical dating—remains of interest in considering national identity-formation.

Jen Harvie helpfully takes forward Anderson's conception of nations as imagined communities by defining 'at least three very important implications for understanding the functioning of national identities and attending to their effects of power'.[44] She argues:

> First, if national identities are creatively imagined, that means they are dynamic. […] Second, if national identities are dynamic, they can be changed, and such change might contribute to social improvement—or decline. […] Third, if national identities are creatively imagined by numerous people and not just by legislators, authority is necessarily dispersed from the formal centres of state power.[45]

Clearly Harvie's three 'implications' suggest that the dynamic of creative imagination results in fluidity in national identity and—she appears to suggest—resistance to formally centralized and centralizing conceptions of such identities. Certainly, those implications can be seen to apply to the ways in which, in our examples, both from earlier centuries in Scotland and in other European countries, the creative conception of national identities has developed and changed. In fact, the process of imagining national identity in Germany, Norway, Croatia and Ireland formed part of a process of national political self-identification and self-determination. For Scotland,

the negotiations between different conceptions of national identity on either side of the 1707 Union, while not resulting in a single final resolution of what is 'Scotland' and what the 'United Kingdom'—surely an impossible outcome—have given rise to a long-term, and continuing, debate, a discourse, a conversation with the imagined community in Scotland, about its very nature. Certainly that discourse underlies the achievement of devolution, the partial re-establishment of the Scottish Parliament in 1999, and Scottish playwriting since that year and in the half century before.

Steve Blandford, writing in 2007 and comparing Scotland then with other UK nations since the 1997–9 devolution processes, discusses the ways identities in that period had developed. Indeed, he uses the term 'conversation' employed in the previous paragraph for the process since at least 1707, but in his case with specific reference to the period since 1999. Nonetheless, one might reasonably argue that the current more contemporary conversations he identifies for Scotland are simply more recent manifestations of a debate that, as in many other imagined national groupings of the modern era, has been taking place for many years. Blandford, with regard to current conceptions of national identity as expressed through theatre, observes that, if anything,

> the level of reluctance to accept any attempt to 'fix' a new post-devolutionary identity is stronger in Scotland. Again and again in the work of both theatre makers themselves and those that write about theatre practice, the recurrent sense is of a 'conversation' [in which what constitutes the nation is re-imagined] and virtually always that conversation uses the plural 'identities' rather than 'identity'.[46]

Both Blandford and Harvie suggest, in complementary ways, how recent Scottish theatre making has had the ideological function of deconstructing the historical narrative of a continuing UK state. Blandford in particular identifies this as of special significance in Scottish identity-formation. While one would not quibble with what either have to say, one of the underlying themes of this chapter has been to read back the implications and conversations they discuss to earlier periods, and from Chap. 4 onward we will examine them in Scottish historical plays written since the 1930s.

In this examination, use will be made of a matrix of purposes for the kinds of reimagining to which Blandford refers. This I have previously developed with helpful early input from Randall Stevenson. It offers a framework for evaluating the ways in which playwrights have used historical

material to reshape 'history' and reflect on their imagining of Scottish identities. In presenting history on stage, the following functions may be discerned, although most plays will engage in more than one function and some of these, for example the *consolatory* and the *consolidatory*, may overlap. Indeed, engagement with only one or two functions may be a sign of over-simplification resulting in pageant or agitprop rather than drama, while the more matrical functions a play fulfils may mark its greater dramaturgical and ideological complexity. The matrix includes the following:

celebratory, celebrating, reinforcing or asserting the existence of specific communities;

consolatory, revisiting the past to comfort the audience;

consolidatory, revisiting the past to coalesce a sense of nationhood or common humanity;

deconstructive, about how historical myths are made, why, and how they 'deceive'.[47]

implicative, showing risings, for example, or their suppression, in the hope of another;

pictorial, recreating historical events often spectacularly;

progressive, focusing the past as an incentive for present political action;

psychological, viewing historical material as a source of exemplars to explore past and present human psychological attitudes;

socio-political, drawing on historical material as evidence for past and present human social and economic-political attitudes;

Before employing this matrix in the final chapter, it will be necessary, before discussing individual plays, to consider in Chap. 2 aspects of the relationship of historiography, mythology, and the ways in which events are re-presented; and in Chap. 3 relationships of ideology, language, and identity. As a cautionary preliminary to the next chapters, I conclude this chapter with another extract from Friel's *Making History*. Here, Hugh O'Neill, Earl of Tyrone, talks with his chronicler, Peter Lombard:

Lombard: I'm no historian, Hugh. I'm not even sure I know what the historian's function is—not to talk of his method.

O'Neill: But you'll tell the truth?

Lombard: If you're asking me will my story be as accurate as possible—of course it will. But are truth and falsity the proper criteria? I don't know. Maybe when the time comes my first responsibility will be to tell the best possible narrative. Isn't that what history is, a kind of story-telling?

O'Neill: Is it?

Lombard: Imposing a pattern on events that were mostly casual and haphazard and shaping them into a narrative that is logical and interesting. Oh, yes, I think so.
O'Neill: And where does truth come into all this?
Lombard: I'm not sure that 'truth' is a primary ingredient—is that a shocking thing to say? Maybe when the time comes, imagination will be as important as information. But one thing I will promise you: nothing will be put down on paper for years and years. History has to be made—before it's remade.[48]

Notes

1. Brian Friel, *Making History* (London: Faber, 1989), 15–16.
2. Alasdair Cameron, 'Theatre in Scotland 1660–1800', in Andrew Hook (ed.), *The History of Scottish Literature*, vol. 2, 1660–1800 (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1987), 191.
3. See, for example, *Scottish Theatre: Diversity, Language, Continuity* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2013).
4. William Clark, *Marciano; or, The Discovery*, ed. W. H. Logan (Edinburgh: privately published, 1871 [1663]) 'Preface', 5–6.
5. Ibid., 52.
6. Ibid., 41.
7. See Adrienne Scullion, 'The Eighteenth Century', in Bill Findlay (ed.), *A History of Scottish Theatre* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1998), 81–6.
8. Allan Ramsay, *The Gentle Shepherd* (Edinburgh, 1880 [1729]), 149.
9. Terence Tobin, *Plays by Scots 1660–1800* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1974), 134–5; Scullion, 'The Eighteenth Century', 109.
10. Tobin, *Plays by Scots*, 134.
11. Quoted in Tobin, *Plays by Scots*, 135.
12. Sandro Jung, *David Mallet, Anglo-Scot: Poetry, Patronage and Politics in the Age of Union* (Newark: Delaware University Press, 2008), 17–23, 72–4.
13. Jung, *David Mallet*, 15.
14. Tobin, *Plays by Scots*, 140.
15. James Boswell, *A View of the Edinburgh Theatre During the Summer Season, 1759*, intro. David W. Tarbet (Los Angeles: William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, University of California, 1976 [1760]).
16. Ian Jack, 'Grand alliance', *The Guardian*, Thursday 8 February 2007, http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2007/feb/08/britishidentity.constitution (accessed 28 July 2015).
17. John Jackson, *The History of the Scottish Stage* (Edinburgh: Peter Hill, 1793), 372.
18. Tobin, *Plays by Scots*, 61.
19. Adrienne Scullion, 'Women of the Nineteenth-century Theatre; Joanna

Baillie, Frances Wright and Helen MacGregor', in Douglas Gifford and Dorothy McMillan (eds.), *A History of Scottish Women's Writing* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997), 160.
20. Ibid., 161.
21. For example Barbara Bell, 'The Nineteenth Century', in Findlay (ed.), 137–207, *passim*.
22. Barbara Bell, 'The National Drama and the Nineteenth Century', in Ian Brown (ed.), *The Edinburgh Companion to Scottish Drama* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), 51.
23. Ian Brown and Barbara Bell, 'A Duty to History: History and Cultural Identities in Scottish Theatre', in Valentina Poggi and Margaret Rose (eds.), *A Theatre that Matters; Twentieth Century Scottish Drama and Theatre* (Milan: Edizioni Unicopli, 2000), 27.
24. Graham Moffat, *Join Me in Remembering: The Life and Reminiscences of the Author of 'Bunty Pulls the Strings'* (Camps Bay: Winifred L. Moffat, 1955), 36.
25. Brown and Bell, 'A Duty to History', 27.
26. John Prebble, *The King's Jaunt* (London: Collins, 1988).
27. Joyce McMillan, 'Flying the Flag', *On Tour* (London: British Council, 2003), 4.
28. Boris Senker, 'Drama', in Asja Petrović (ed.), *Zagreb Croatian National Theatre 1860–1985* (Zagreb: Hrvatsko Narodno Kazalište u Zagreb/Školska Knjiga, 1985), 61.
29. Ibid.
30. Stanley Hochman, 'Yugoslav Theatre', *McGraw-Hill Encyclopedia of World Drama* (2nd edn.) (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1984), 197.
31. Senker, 'Drama', 72.
32. Henry Boylan, *A Dictionary of Irish Biography* (3rd edn.) (Dublin: Gill and MacMillan, 1998), 306.
33. Cairns Craig, *The Modern Scottish Novel: Narrative and the National Imagination* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), 9.
34. Stuart Hall, 'The Question of Cultural Identity', in David Held Hall and Tony McGrew (eds.), *Modernity and Its Futures* (Cambridge: Polity, 1993), 292.
35. Ibid., 293.
36. Stephanie Preuss, '"Metaphors for the Scots Today": History and National Identity in Scottish Drama after 1945', in Gabriele Rippl et al. (eds), *Haunted Narratives: Life Writing in an Age of Trauma* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013), 161.
37. David Hare, 'A Lecture given at King's College, Cambridge, March 5 1978', *Licking Hitler* (London: Faber, 1978), 66.
38. Hare, 'A Lecture', 68.

39. Hare, 'A Lecture', 65.
40. Keith Jenkins, 'On Disobedient Histories', *Rethinking History* 7:3 (Winter 2003), 367.
41. Sydney Goodsir Smith, *The Wallace* (London: John Calder, 1960), 173.
42. Michael Holroyd, *Bernard Shaw, Vol. II (1898–1918): The Pursuit of Power* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1989), 19.
43. Neal Ascherson, *Stone Voices: The Search for Scotland* (rev. edn.) (London: Granta, 2003), 269.
44. Jen Harvie, *Staging the UK* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), 3.
45. Ibid.
46. Steve Blandford, *Film, Drama and the Break-Up of Britain* (Bristol: Intellect, 2007), 146.
47. This matrix was outlined in an earlier form in Brown and Bell, 'A Duty to History', 39.
48. Friel, *Making History*, 8–9.

CHAPTER 2

History, Mythology, and 'Re-Presentation' of Events

Stephen Greenblatt famously begins his study of Shakespeare's drama by observing, 'I began with the desire to speak with the dead'.[1] By the end of his first chapter he has expanded on this:

> I had dreamed of speaking with the dead, and even now I do not abandon this dream. But the mistake was to imagine that I would hear a single voice, the voice of the other. If I wanted to hear one, I had to hear many voices of the dead. And if I wanted to hear the voice of the other, I had to hear my own voice. The speech of the dead, like my own speech, is not private property.[2]

American scholar Greenblatt's critical observation is uncannily echoed in the opening speech the Scottish playwright Donald Campbell gives the bereaved leading character Hector Sutherland in *The Ould Fella* (1993):

> How do ye live with the dead? When the end comes a door locks fast and there is never a road back til the living. (*Nods*) We know that much in our cradles! (*Rises*) The trouble is—there are so many doors! How do we find one and other afterwards? How do we live with the dead?[3]

Whatever the extent to which the critic exploring works from history may find herself 'hearing' the voices of the dead—and her own voice in that process—it may be said that the dramatist writing on historical themes has a parallel, but distinct challenge. She must not only find means of

I. Brown, *History as Theatrical Metaphor*,
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'hearing' dead voices, but means of giving those voices theatrical life when 'there are so many doors' and, in a further step, has to do so in her own dramatic 'voice'. In this the dramatist 'interprets' history and speaks for it in contemporary theatrical terms. The line quoted at the end of the last chapter—'History has to be made—before it's remade'—is spoken both by a character who is engaged in recording—making history—and by a playwright whose play has as its title *Making History* and has as one theme the ways history is made, while offering its own version of O'Neill resistance to the Elizabethan settlement in Ireland. This chapter seeks to set out a framework for understanding strategies, tactics, and methods of making—and remaking—history. It examines the ways in which the writing of history, including critical history, mythopoeia and historical drama sometimes parallel, sometimes reflect and sometimes diverge from one another.

Jürgen Pieters remarks that 'Literary texts give a voice to the past; they enable us to listen to its absent representatives and, more extraordinarily, to converse with them.'[4] His insight into the relationship between the reader, the text, and the absent past to which texts give voice does not apply only to 'Literary texts': the dramatist and the historian both in their different ways explicitly articulate that voice. In saying this, no claim to a startling new insight is made. The purpose of this chapter is rather to review a complex debate in order to throw light in later chapters on the ways Scottish dramatists have used historical material. Given this, as this book explores the process of dramatization of history, and does so in the specific context of Scottish theatre and its representation of history since the middle of the twentieth century, this chapter explores the role of the historian in shaping what we call history, a role debated since classical times. Cicero, for example, argues,

> As history, which bears witness to the passing of the ages, sheds light upon reality, gives life to recollection and guidance to human existence, and brings tidings of ancient days, whose voice, but the orator's, can entrust her to immortality?[5]

This ancient conception that history should shed light on reality—however that may be defined—enliven recollection of past events, and offer both *exempla* for current life choices and news of the past makes a case for its (Cicero's personified 'her') having practical functions and contemporary impact. It is clear, however, that any such impact will be affected by what is seen by any given historian as 'reality', what 'recollections'

are possible—and on what ground they are invoked (that is to say, on the ideological basis of the historian's method)—and what life choices and what 'past' are considered currently significant. The fluidity of the variables contained in what may seem a lucid Ciceronian aphorism is further highlighted by his description of the art of the historians as oratory. This chapter reviews aspects of the 'oratory' of history and the 'oratorical' treatment of historical material.

Poetics of History

Greenblatt's view in 1988—'If I wanted to hear one, I had to hear many voices of the dead. And if I wanted to hear the voice of the other, I had to hear my own voice'—is complemented by an earlier 1978 observation of Hayden White's, discussing 'Interpretation in History'. White suggested that the great nineteenth-century historians believed 'that different interpretations of the same set of events were functions of ideological distortions or of inadequate factual data'.[6] By contrast, while not denying the impact of 'ideological distortions or of inadequate factual data', White considers, in trying to deal with past events, that 'the facts do not speak for themselves, but that the historian speaks for them […]'. He continues, 'Novelists might be dealing only with imaginary events whereas historians are dealing with real ones, but the process of fusing events, whether imaginary or real, into a comprehensible totality capable of serving as the *object* [original emphasis] of a representation is a poetic process'.[7] And it might be added that both historical novelist and historical dramatist will often work with 'real' as well as 'imaginary' events in creating a narrative. When White notes, therefore, that a historical narrative is 'necessarily a mixture of adequately and inadequately explained events, […] of established and inferred facts, at once a representation that is an interpretation, and an interpretation that passes for an explanation of the whole process mirrored in the narrative',[8] his observation applies as much to the creative writer as the historian.

This is not, of course, to conflate both functions, but it is to recognize their relationship, a central theme of this book, and that history engages in White's 'poetic process'. Indeed, many historiographers, philosophers and cultural theorists have argued that history is a constructive and potentially creative discipline. Hannah Arendt, for example, has remarked that 'Every selection of material in a sense interferes with history, and all criteria for selection put the historical course of events under certain man-made conditions.'[9] Arendt places her critique in a Marxist framework: '[since Marx]

we have seen historians freely imposing upon the maze of past facts almost any pattern they wish [and calling that pattern 'meaning']'.[10] White, meanwhile, reaches before Marx to argue in his study of such key figures in history's own history as Michelet, von Ranke, Tocqueville, and Burckhardt that

> [historical work is manifestly] a verbal structure in the form of a narrative prose discourse. Histories […] contain a deep structural content which is generally poetic, and specifically linguistic, in nature, and which serves as the precritically accepted paradigm of what a distinctively 'historical' explanation should be.[11]

If history for Arendt is a means of reconciling humankind with Hegelian 'reality',[12] White also sees a poetic, structural, linguistic paradigm shaping history. And that paradigm is embedded in the contemporary. As Mary Fulbrook observes:

> The processes of historical investigation and representation are about making sense of the past. Making sense is of course an activity in the present; and it is an active practice, not a matter of passive reception and reflection of what has gone before [… but] imbuing the past with meaning.[13]

Her stance, implying a creative, even imaginative, approach to 'making sense of the past' is echoed and extended by Alan Munslow when he argues 'history is entirely and exclusively about understanding (a past) reality through the creation of (a present) representation'.[14] A central concern of this study is the way Scottish playwrights have sought and 'imbued the past with meaning' in their plays since the 1930s as they seek to offer an understanding of '(a past) reality though the creation of (a present) representation'. Later chapters will consider the ways in which they have worked with, and against, underlying paradigms of 'history', 'Scotland' and 'Scottish history' in shaping their plays. Yet, in carrying out their dramaturgical role, it will be seen that they faced the problems of articulating events that mark the historian's discipline.

This is, to repeat, not to suggest that historical dramatists and historians are simply two sides of the same coin. But it is to observe that there are respects in which both historians and playwrights engage in the process of, each in her own way, discovering and reshaping the collective memory of the communities for which they are writing. This is not an engagement found only in a Scottish context. Alistair Thomson considers this question in relation to what he calls the 'Anzac legend':

> In one sense we compose or *construct* [original emphasis] our memories. From the moment we experience an event we use the meanings of our culture to make sense of it. Over time we *re*-member [original emphasis] our experiences, as those public meanings change. […] In another sense, we 'compose' memories which help us to feel relatively comfortable […] Some memories are contradictory, painful and 'unsafe'. […] we deal with these memories by repressing them, or remaking them so they are less painful or perhaps by attempting to understand and resolve the difficulty.[15]

Thomson appears to see the historian as acting for the larger community and responding in that role to shape communal memory as the individual does in shaping individual 'memory'. In this, of course, the historian, as does the playwright, fulfils a social function. The absence of reference, for example, until recently in the work of serious historians to Scotland's role in the slave trade may mark just such a function, a protecting, even by historians of highest distinction, of the Scottish community from facing its own collective history in that shameful trade. And it can be argued that the process now led by Tom Devine of exposing Scotland's complicity[16] is an example of a historian's changing the narrative, as Scotland's own self-perception as its Parliament is re-established allows it—even requires it—to be responsible for addressing and accepting its own past culpability rather than 'remaking [traumas] so they are less painful' and seeking to evade them under a cloak of wilful amnesia or simply ignoring the deed altogether. Nonetheless, with regard to any such social function, Fulbrook offers a distinction between the historian and the creative artist:

> Perhaps the difference is that in many self-confessedly artistic, aesthetic or entertaining forms of representation, the constructedness is on display, the creativity of the producer explicitly demonstrable, whether for praise or critique […the message] does not necessarily have to be 'right' […] other than in the sense of some sort of artistic authenticity. […] Historical texts usually, however, lay greater emphasis on claims to provide an accurate account.[17]

This distinction between the manifestly artistic and the historical is one that Elizabeth Fox-Genovese highlights:

> We still use history to refer, however imprecisely, to what we like to think really happened in the past and to the ways in which specific authors have written about it. Contemporary critics tend to insist disproportionately on history as the ways in which authors have written about the past at the expense of what actually might have happened, insist that history consists

> primarily of a body of texts and a strategy of reading or interpreting them. Yet history also consists, in a very old-fashioned sense, in a body of knowledge [of …] what did happen in the past […] of which our records offer only imperfect clues.[18]

In other words, to put it crudely, however much there may be a poetics of history, history is not simply a matter of its poetics. Nonetheless, understanding its poetics is critically important in reading and understanding the historian's interpretation of the 'facts'. As Amos Funkenstein expresses it, '"facts" gain their meaning and even their very factuality from the context in which they are embedded, a context reconstructed solely by the historian, whose narrative makes and shapes the fact'.[19]

Later, I will address the implications of such a formulation for the phenomenon that I call a 'fact of history'. For now we may note that the inflection given the facts, the way they are used and emphasized in any given case, is a matter for each historian, as it is for each dramatist. For example, when we come to consider David Greig's *Dunsinane*, we will consider in what ways Malcolm is represented. Whatever his actual positive historical achievements, so far as they can be discerned, Greig represents him as a shifty tribal chief. Yet history is also more complex than inflection of facts. The historian responds to her perception of the demands of the paradigms of historical investigation. As Fulbrook observes, 'Even for those historians focussing on the "same" delimited problem and period, there is not necessarily one single way of "emplotting" and presenting the issues. So: emplotment depends on a lot more than the individual imposition of narrative onto arbitrarily selected bits of "historical debris".'[20]

Plot, Narrative, and 'Counterhistory'

Emplotment and narrative development are actually functions of the interaction of the historian's perceptions of what 'facts' are significant and how they stand in relation to one another and of her perception of the paradigms which frame methods of inquiry and argument. White offers an example of such a paradigm:

> by common consent, it is not enough that an historical account deal in real, rather than merely imaginary, events […]. The events must be not only registered within the chronological framework of their original occurrence but narrated as well, that is to say, revealed as possessing a structure, an order of meaning […].[21]

He also offers a definition of 'plot': 'a structure of relationships by which the events contained in the account are endowed with a meaning by being identified as parts of an integrated whole'.[22] The creation of a historical account, then, is a creative act of organization dealing in White's terminology with 'real, rather than merely imaginary, events'. The question arises, then, in the case of the historical dramatist of what is 'real' and what 'imaginary' in the context of a dramaturgical process that is based on an explicitly imaginative act, the making of a play, from material much of which is in White's sense 'real'. Further the question arises as to how different the processes and functions of the historian and the playwright are when each is charged with revealing 'a structure' defined as 'an order of meaning'. Clearly the theatrical context and constraints for which the dramatist writes partly define her purpose, but every historian faces equal constraints. As Karl Popper observes, talking of the concept of a 'holistic' history, 'Every written history is a history of a certain narrow aspect of this "total" development, and is anyhow a very incomplete history even of the particular incomplete aspect chosen.'[23]

One aspect of dealing with historic individuals and events with which both historian and playwright must engage is the search for facts, for some form of historical truth, an elusive concept as we have seen, for some sense of authenticity. Pieters translates Johan Huizinga on the drive to the past that leads to investigation of historical material:

> This contact with the past, which is accompanied by the absolute conviction of compete authenticity and truth […] is not something that an author, writing in the past, deliberately put down in his work. It is 'behind' and not so much 'inside' the book that the past has sent down to us. The contemporary reader brings it along to his encounter with the author from the past; it is his response to the author's call.[24]

The trigger that leads to the historical discourse or conversation—or the play—may be fleeting or substantial, but it provides a motivation to explore further the historical material to be emplotted into a history or a history play. And very often it may not be the individual or event in itself, but the desire to respond to an earlier representation or interpretation of the event or individual. Harold Bloom offers this insight: 'Like criticism, which is either part of literature or nothing at all, great writing is always at work strongly (or weakly) misreading previous writing. Any stance that anyone takes up towards a metaphorical work will itself be metaphorical.'[25] Bloom's understanding of the interaction of 'great writing' with

previous writing and his description of it as 'misreading' is illuminating for the historian and the dramatist, though not entirely surprising. Bloom himself, as a literary critic, is clearly aware of the relationship of what he argues to historical study: 'Perspectivism, with all its entrapments, dominated "history", as Nietzsche eloquently indicated in his essay on the use and abuse of history for life, one of my starting points for what became *The Anxiety of Influence*.'[26] Contact with the past, speaking with the dead, is a conversation not just with past individuals and events, but with those who have written—and what they have written—about those events and individuals, whether real, or sometimes in literature, and history itself, imaginary (what to make of 'Ned Ludd'?). While the efforts of historical writers seek to clarify in their own terms what is misheard, misread, or even mischievously mistranslated, that clarification may, nevertheless, be elusive or even ultimately unachievable in the light of the present any writer brings to the 'past'.

This process of misreading and mishearing is not simply an individual process. Greenblatt observes of his own work in *Shakespearean Negotiations*: 'This book argues that works of art, however intensely marked by the creative intelligence and private obsessions of individuals, are the products of collective negotiations and exchange.'[27] And it might be said, if this is true of a work of art, it is, *a fortiori*, true of historical works where there is a conscious and explicit process of working within the framework of the collective negotiations and exchanges of the narrative paradigms of academic historical research. Joel Fineman traces these, in principle, to antiquity:

> Thucydides is usually taken to be […] the very early, if not the first, historian who takes a scientific view of history; explicitly and implicitly, […] regularizing, normativizing, essentializing laws of historical causation by reference to which it becomes possible to fit particular events into the intelligible whole of a sequential, framing narrative […].[28]

With regard to the reshaping of such framing narratives in historical study, Catherine Gallagher and Stephen Greenblatt argue for the importance of the specific and anecdotally illuminating, offering an arresting metaphor of damage and re-repair: 'Each explanatory narrative can be summed up in a further anecdote, which makes a new tear and provokes yet another contextualization.'[29] They use the term 'counterhistory' for 'a spectrum of assaults on the *grands récits*' of history:

> Counterhistory opposes itself not only to dominant narratives, but also to prevailing modes of historical thought and methods of research; hence, when successful, it ceases to be 'counter'. The *grands récits* of the nineteenth century themselves began as counterhistories, and Funkenstein claims that history as a discipline has its roots in rebellion against the convenient, self-justifying, official stories of priests and rulers. Counterhistory and history, in this view, are moments in a continuous conflictual process rather than substantial opposing activities with independently distinguishing characteristics.[30]

One has to be careful here to avoid overblown claims. After all, new research and interpretations often challenge long-accepted received wisdom in history; the term 'counterhistory' suggests undermining a single orthodoxy that is never challenged. With this proviso, however, here the historian and the historical dramatist can be seen again as reflections of one another and the term 'counterhistory' is one that applies to the work of several important Scottish playwrights, including Peter Arnott, Sue Glover, and Hector MacMillan, as they address and shape their versions of Scottish history.

Shaping the Past

The shaping of the past by historian and dramatist inevitably involves selection. Keith Jenkins discusses the conscious act of shaping that brings history into being:

> for [the past] to become transformed into history, it is absolutely dependent on somebody making it so: all cultures have a past, not all of them have histories. […] the 'past itself' gives historians no help whatsoever in determining how it would, if only it could, historicise itself […].[31]

The past in other words is not history and versions of communal memory shape what we take history to be. Jackie Bratton, talking specifically of theatrical history, observes, 'My interest remains with the enactment of remembered stories and individualities within the history-making act of the performance […]. The actor telling stories about theatrical moments and imitating colleagues and predecessors is making a shared culture of the community.'[32] History can be seen as an expression of the 'shared culture of the community', but this at once raises the question of which community is meant. It may be a broad national community of the kind discussed in

the previous chapter's examples from German, Norwegian, and Croatian theatre. It may also, or alternatively, be a community within such a community, an issue that will be considered in later chapters on specific playwrights when each may be seen to address and seek to shape her or his own version of a Scottish community. Indeed, Christopher Whyte has suggested that 'the history of a nation is also the story of its historymakers, in the sense of those who struggled to shape a narrative from its past'.[33] He goes on to suggest that accounts should be measured by assessing 'the aims which the writers were pursuing, the tools available to them, and the ideologies powering their efforts'. History, then, is what we choose to make of the past according to what methods we have available, and through a process of ideologically shaped selection involving remembering and, of course, amnesia.

The process of historical thought is one that can be seen to parallel that of dramaturgical thought, the shaping of a narrative, plot and action to develop meaning determined by an author. R. G. Collingwood denies there is a special historical process, but rather asserts the shaping nature of thought:

> There is not, first, a special kind of process, the historical process, and then a special way of knowing this, namely historical thought. The historical process is itself a process of thought, and it exists only in so far as the minds which are parts of it know themselves for parts of it.[34]

The presence of the thinker is critical, in this view, to the process of shaping history: the present is not a neutral way through which we may come to the past and the past itself is not stable. What is proposed here is a dynamic interaction between the 'past', 'the present', 'the present in the past' and 'the past in the present'. It is this dynamic that the dramatist in particular draws on in creating work for the stage. Part of the attraction for a dramatist is that dynamic's liveliness. When a historical topic is selected, already there are ramifications for the culture in which the play is presented that derive from the pre-existing narrative frameworks in which the selected topic is already seen; these may lead to the development of counterhistory on stage.

Greenblatt suggests a reason for the past's attraction to many writers, the motivation to work through and on these pre-existing narrative frameworks, when he observes that the 'past is irreplaceably valuable in affording us insight and knowledge about how we live in the present. Individually and collectively, we draw upon the past to shape our identity and destiny in

the future as well as to apprehend meaning and self-understanding in the present.'[35] Indeed, Collingwood argues that the dynamic interaction of the past and the present is crucial to the development of historical knowledge: 'the re-enactment of past thought is not a pre-condition of historical knowledge, but an integral element in it'.[36] He goes on to describe this dynamic as a bridging across time from both ends: 'The object [of historical knowledge] must be of such a kind that it can revive itself in the historian's mind; the historian's mind must be such as to offer a home for that revival.'[37] In later chapters this volume will consider the results of 're-enactment of past thought' in playwrights' creative minds, but for now it is fair to observe that the historiographical ideas this chapter explores have often raised worries for some historians. White inquires, 'How else can any past, which by definition comprises events, processes, structures and so forth, considered to be no longer perceivable, be represented in either consciousness or discourse except in an "imaginary" way?'[38] Here, he appears to challenge the scientific basis, the very methodology within which many historians are educated and trained as researchers. Arguably this is to misread White, but Perez Zagorin expressed this unease and attacked the relativism in which he saw White's approach entrapping him. He called on two fellow-doubters:

> In questioning White's debilitating relativism, Roger Chartier observes that the complex, demanding operations historians use to investigate the past would be totally pointless if historical and fictional discourses were identical and if 'the reality of the events emplotted' were of no importance for the kind of knowledge history can give. One may guess that nearly all historians, whatever differences there might be among them, would endorse the conviction voiced by Bernard Bailyn that 'the distinction between history and fiction is profound […]; history is an imaginative construction […] but [it] must be […] closely bounded by the documentation—limited by the evidence that has survived, and […] by the obligation to be consistent with what has previously been established. It must somehow fit together with what is already known.'[39]

White, however, is not arguing that fiction and history are identical. Rather he argues that history has poetics as does fiction or drama—and, of course, history has been seen as a literary discourse in many periods, not least in the work of David Hume and William Robertson during the Scottish Enlightenment. Alexander Broadie links such an approach to an earlier Enlightenment philosopher: 'In the course of his account of beauty, Hutcheson discusses the fact that "the taste or relish of [history]

is universal in all nations".[40] […] The beauty of the historical narrative ensures that the narrative captures and holds our interest and attention.'[41] Broadie goes on to argue that

> […] it might well seem that the difference between conjectural history and scientific is the difference in respect of the quantity of significant detail in the two sorts of history. But they do not apparently differ in respect of the rational input. Conjectural history is no more a fairy tale or myth than is scientific history. The conjectural historian cannot write just whatever he wants. The conjecture is tightly controlled by the account of human nature that is deployed, an account that has a scientific basis […] and is tightly controlled also by the rules that permit the historian to reach his conclusions about what happened.[42]

Perhaps it would be more comfortable to 'scientific' thought, when considering the quotation from White cited earlier in the previous paragraph—'How else can any past […] be represented in either consciousness or discourse except in an "imaginary" way'—to use the word 'imaginative' rather than 'imaginary'. But Jenkins in discussing White's importance as a historiographical thinker makes a telling point when he observes, 'For White, one of the things which one can learn from historiography, is that no study of the past is innocent, ideologically or otherwise, whether launched from the political perspective of the left, the right or the centre.'[43] It is this aspect of history that draws the historical dramatist, as it does the historical novelist. Gillian Polack argues that, while the historian has 'a burden of proof and accuracy' the writer has one of credibility, and observes 'At the heart of the relationship between the history presented with a novel and the past as interpreted by an historian are the techniques writers use to build a world that is acceptable to readers of that form of narrative.'[44] Indeed, one might argue that it is through 'proof and accuracy' that a historian must satisfy her own 'burden of credibility'. A converse question will arise at various points in later chapters as to how far a failure in 'proof and accuracy' may undermine historical dramatists' credibility.

Writing 'History': Re-Enactment and Reconstruction

The point is, of course, that the process of making theatre from history presents to the theatre worker similar problems to those faced by the historian in writing 'history'. E. H. Carr in *What is History?* illuminates the issue:

> These so-called basic facts, which are the same for all historians, […] speak only when the historian calls on them: it is he who decides to which facts to give the floor, and in what order or context. It was, I think, one of Pirandello's characters who said that a fact is like a sack—it won't stand up till you've put something in it […]. It is the historian who has decided for his own reasons that Caesar's crossing of that petty stream, the Rubicon, is a fact of history, whereas the crossing of the Rubicon by millions of other people before or since interests nobody at all.[45]

Yet here Carr himself becomes a historian making his own 'fact of history', because, of course, the Rubicon was not just 'a petty stream', but the border of Cisalpine Gaul. When Julius Caesar, having completed his ten years as Proconsul in Gaul, led his army over it, it was not crossing the stream that mattered, but the crossing of that border, a declaration by its very nature of rebellion against Rome. The parallel between the selection process of historical material for dramaturgic processes by the theatre worker, particularly the playwright, and that by the historian is, then, remarkably close. Clearly, a historian in selecting material will do so in relation to a number of criteria, for example verifiability, what Polack calls 'proof and accuracy' which may not, as we saw in discussing work by Bolt, Shaffer, and Friel in the last chapter, necessarily affect the playwright. The latter's criteria will, in contrast, include such elements more or less foreign to the historian as (perhaps) dramatic conflict or (certainly) stageability. Nevertheless, Carr's argument suggests that underlying both processes is the selection of what is significant in conveying ideological meaning, what in making a point is literally for playwrights dramatic and metaphorically for historians 'dramatic'.

Carr's analysis, however, throws up other important points which relate to the historical dramatist's relationship to historical material and to the historian. Carr goes on, for example, to quote J. B. Bury: 'The records of ancient and medieval history are starred with lacunae.'[46] David Hare's 'gaps', referred to in the last chapter, are a modern instance of these, but the lacunae may arise whether in ancient or modern times from the absence of will to retrieve or even initially record as much as from the actual absence of records. Carr discusses an ancient example:

> History has been called an enormous jig-saw with a lot of missing parts. But the main trouble does not consist of the lacunae. Our picture of Greece in the fifth century B.C. is defective, not primarily because so many bits have been accidentally lost, but because it is, by and large, the picture formed by a tiny group of people in the city of Athens […].[47]

He argues that what we now see has been preselected and predetermined 'not so much by accident as by people who were consciously or unconsciously imbued with a particular view and thought the facts which supported that view worth preserving'.[48] Thus, he suggests that ideological and cultural values imbue the selections which cause historical 'fact' to survive so that the very 'facts' embody an ideological emphasis even before they are 'interpreted'. The process of writing history, as with literary criticism or historical dramaturgy, has often been the reformulation of 'real' facts constituted in the pre-given entity of history determined by an earlier dominant ideology.

Carr, indeed, argues, 'By and large the historian will get the kind of facts he wants. History means interpretation.'[49] Christopher Hill enlarges this argument:

> History means two things: first the past as we believe it to have existed, and second, the past as we attempt to reconstruct it in our writings. Cynics say that when historians claim to be describing the past they are really writing contemporary history—or autobiography. This is true to the extent that the new questions which each generation of historians asks inevitably reflect the interests of that generation.[50]

The study of history can be seen in the light of these comments to imply an act of re-creation, re-shaping of 'facts' and, in a telling phrase of R. G. Collingwood's, a 're-enactment in the historian's mind'.[51] Carr's reference to the Pirandellian nature of historical fact is striking. Indeed, following Carr's observation, 'These so called bare facts […] commonly belong to the category of raw materials of the historian rather than of history itself',[52] I shall in future refer to 'Pirandellian' historical facts as 'facts of history'. The implication of what Carr, and before him Collingwood, and after him, Hill, says is that the historian in creating history may, like Hare, the playwright, 'work on areas of the fresco which were simply ignored, or appropriated for the shallowest purposes'. Indeed, historians like Angus Calder, Christopher Hill and E. P. Thompson did so with explicit ideological intent. 'Facts of history' as a term will be used to draw attention to the use of historical data by an interpreter for ideological or mythological purpose. Carr comments:

> the facts of history cannot be purely objective, since they become facts of history only in virtue of the significance attached to them by the historian. Objectivity in history—if we are still to use the conventional term—cannot

> be an objectivity of fact, but only of relation, of the relation between fact and interpretation, between past, present and future.[53]

Here, avoiding the jargon of ideological theory, he highlights the way history is ideologically constructed in a way paralleling and illuminating the process of dramatic treatment of historical material, something we will address in discussing, among others, Bill Bryden's *Willie Rough*, Sue Glover's *The Straw Chair* and *Bondagers*, Robert McLellan's *Jamie the Saxt*, Hector MacMillan's *The Rising*, and Rona Munro's *The James Plays*.

Indeed, when in Chap. 8, David Greig's *Dunsinane* is discussed, one might bear in mind that, especially when the written record is limited, proper scepticism and even iconoclastic challenge to received history are often desiderata and historians themselves can become drawn into considering versions of history which may or may not have mythical qualities. The historical 'facts' concerning the end of Macbeth's reign have been long accepted in the record, following Holinshed: Malcolm, son of deposed Duncan, fled to England where he was received at court and given manorial rights until, in 1054, with Siward of Northumberland, probably his uncle, he attacked Macbeth in his fortress at Dunsinane (now Dunsinnan, near Collace in Perthshire), but did not then depose him. After Siward's death in 1055, with his own forces he again attacked Macbeth and deposed both him in 1057 and his son Lulach in 1058. Recently, however, Archie Duncan, followed by Alex Woolf and Fiona Watson, has argued against this narrative.[54] He suggests that Malcolm fled to Norse-held Orkney[55] where he stayed for seventeen unrecorded years until he attacked Macbeth in 1057, while Siward had supported in 1054 a hitherto unnoticed Malcolm, son of the 'King of Cumberland', a title that Duncan argues was not then, as earlier thought, an honorific of the kings of Scots. He particularly argues this on geographic grounds since the death of King Duncan, actually in battle, took place in the north of Scotland, in Moray, and since Malcolm's first wife was an Orkney woman. It may, however, be fair to say that flight by sea to Orkney, though involving a shorter voyage, would be no easier than one to the English court with which strong diplomatic links existed. Professor Duncan's hypothesis of Malcolm's exile in Orkney does, however, distance him from his relative Siward's attack on Macbeth in 1054 and allows Malcolm's deposition of Macbeth three years later in a raid from the north to be separated from any suggestion of English support, making his success a Scottish one. Yet,

attractive as such a theory may be for some ideologies of Scotland and its independent decision-making, it can only offer an alternative theory, to be judged on balance of probabilities, and requires another Malcolm of Cumberland, so far not mentioned in the record. At this point all one can do is note this theory as proposed by a distinguished historian and reflect somewhat cautiously that in such periods, whatever version of the facts is accepted, Carr's Pirandellian process of shifting perspective may bring even historiography close to mythopoeia.

Whatever the emphasis on primary source material in historical research, indeed, ideological perspectives imbue its interpretation, historical or dramatic. As this chapter has implied throughout, there is a strong case to be made for objectivity being a chimera. From the work of such as Carr emerges a position which in its emphasis on interpretation, gaps of knowledge and the ideological and social bias of the witnesses, may be seen to influence the work of such as E. P. Thompson and other radical historians. It can also be seen to influence revisionist versions of 'established' versions of 'history'. It may also, further, be seen to parallel the questioning of the nature of historical drama by, among other playwrights, David Hare. Just as he talks of 'filling the gaps' so we see, within the discipline of historiography, that historians have been faced with the problems of responding to the lacunae in history referred to by Bury, and their response will embody personal ideological and social biases as much as those of witnesses they cite. As Alexander Broadie expresses it, 'History teaches us about people, not just about this person and that, but about people as human beings, about what we share, our common humanity.'[56] Future chapters will consider how his insight is expressed in the work of individual Scottish playwrights from the 1930s on.

'Facts of History', Explanatory Cells, and the Mini-Myth

Carr's perception of the facts of history becoming 'facts of history only in virtue of the significance attached to them by the historian' and Hare's reference to 'tribal pieces' referred to in the last chapter, find an echo in the study of myth. Levi-Strauss, in *Myth and Meaning*, and specifically in the chapter, 'When Myth becomes History', extends the implications of what Carr and other philosophers of history discussed in this chapter have said about the nature of history. Levi-Strauss poses the question, 'where does mythology end and where does history start?'[57] He goes on:

> What we discover […] is that the opposition—the simple opposition between mythology and history which we are accustomed to make—is not at all a clear cut one, and that there is an intermediary level. Mythology is static, we find the same mythical elements combined over and over again, but they are in a closed system, let us say, in contradistinction with history, which is, of course, an open system. The open character of history is secured by the innumerable ways according to which mythical cells, or explanatory cells which were originally mythical, can be arranged and rearranged.[58]

As Karen Armstrong puts it, 'A myth […] is an event that—in some sense—happened once, but which also happens all the time', a process often expressed by the use of a phrases like 'crossing the Rubicon'.[59] In short, following Levi-Strauss's analysis, one of the prime means of interpretation of history and historical fact lies in the arrangement and rearrangement of 'explanatory cells' whose content he calls 'a kind of mini-myth'. [60] In that rearrangement, at least in part, lies Collingwood's 're-enactment', Carr's 'interpretation', Hare's 'writing history plays [… which are] tribal pieces'. History, in Levi-Strauss's terms, is not myth, nor is myth history, but the structures and functions of history approximate to those of mythology and the role of certain aspects of history is, in effect, to provide a mythology or groups of mini-myths for the culture of which they form part. Such historiographical mini-myths extend to the use of such terms as 'the organic community' or 'the rise of the middle class'. Indeed, Professor Denys Hay used, in his teaching at Edinburgh University in the 1960s, to make fun of the latter term, 'changing' history as he applied it with conviction to several different centuries in the last millennium.

One prominent example of the operation of the historian's use of the closed explanatory cells, myths in Armstrong's specific sense, in the open system of history lies in the historical treatment of Mary, Queen of Scots. The point is illuminated in the opening speech of my own play *Mary* (1977), when Darnley, acting in her role, says,

> Now some people have said I'm a gay queen. And some people have said I'm a romantic queen. And some people have even said I'm the great Catholic martyr. All I can say is that I was born in 1542 […]. I was betrothed at the age of one to Edward, son of Henry VIII of England, and then, at the age of six, to the Dauphin of France. My reputation as precocious and demon lover derived from this double and premature engagement. (p. 1)[61]

The mini-myths, 'gay', 'romantic Queen', 'martyr', 'demon lover', are among several more which may be seen as embodied in an endlessly

changing variety of historical interpretations of the facts of Mary's life and these are also embedded deeply and in great variety in Liz Lochhead's *Mary Queen of Scots Got Her Head Chopped Off* (1987).

To understand further the implications of what Levi-Strauss is saying in regard to the possible relationship of history and mythology, and to do so in relation to the plays to be discussed in later chapters, it is useful to consider what Levi-Strauss sees as the function of myth. In this, it may be simplest to consider Mary Douglas's comments on Levi-Strauss's approach to mythology:

> the function of myth is to portray the contradictions in the basic premises of the culture. The same goes for the relation of the myth to social reality. The myth is a contemplation of the unsatisfactory compromises which, after all, compose social life. In the devious statements of the myth, people can recognise indirectly what it would be difficult to admit openly and yet what is patently clear to all and sundry, that the ideal is not attainable.[62]

While later chapters consider this issue with relation to dramaturgical choices, and the representation of historical characters, it may help now to illustrate this exposition briefly with regard to Andrew Carnegie. The contradictions contained in Carnegie's life, exploitation as against philanthropy, industrial brutalism versus cultural generosity, are mediated in the mini-myths of the 'lad o pairts' and the 'saintly philanthropist'. The former embodies the poor, but talented, boy who rises to positions of power and influence through education and his own unaided efforts. The latter embodies 'Scottish virtues' of community service, free of the stain of corrupt business methods, so hiding elements of his career such as nepotism, insider trading, cronyism, or strike-breaking. The mini-myths of the 'lad o pairts' and 'saintly philanthropist' permit the means of his success and the danger of an accusation against him of hypocrisy to be obscured in the representation of his life as a capitalist success story. The underlying dramaturgy of my play *Carnegie* (1973), discussed in Chap. 5, was designed to expose the contradictions embedded in these mini-myths, which had allowed in a 'safe' manner a mythological dialectic of poverty and success, and the (mis)representation of the impact of nineteenth-century US robber barons on capitalism and society as altruism. The mini-myths the play exposes, when left undisturbed, constitute a device in historical representation that, in the words of Alistair Thomson quoted earlier hides 'memories [which] are contradictory, painful and "unsafe"'. When Armstrong argues that 'Mythology [… is] designed to help […] people find their place in the

world and their true orientation […] Helping us to get beyond the chaotic flux of random events, and glimpse the core of reality',[63] her formulation makes sense as long as one remains alert to the use of the words, 'true' and 'reality' and their relative meanings. Myths create a version of truth and reality that are ideologically determined, so that when Armstrong argues that, if myth 'does not give us new insight into the deeper meaning of life, it has failed. […]. A myth is essentially a guide […]',[64] then we must query what are the versions of life into whose deeper meaning we are being inducted and what values, what ideological systems, we are being guided towards. *Carnegie* sought to expose the mythopoeic transformation and sanctification of a robber baron's career and individual actions.

Roland Barthes, in *Myth Today*, is illuminating on the processes of mediation and opposition involved here, and those of appropriation and deformation which may be seen as underlying them. He argues, 'Ancient or not, mythology can only have an historical foundation, for myth is a type of speech chosen by history: it cannot possibly evolve from the "nature" of things.'[65] He goes on to argue that 'the fundamental character of the mythical concept is to be *appropriated* [original emphasis]'.[66] He argues that 'there is no fixity in mythical concepts: they can come into being, alter, disintegrate, disappear completely. And it is precisely because they are historical that history can very easily suppress them.'[67] His case is that at least part of the process by which alteration, suppression, or other means of appropriation takes place is through the 'relation which unites the concept of the myth to its meaning [and] is essentially a relation of *deformation* [original emphasis]'.[68] He argues that

> the very principle of myth [is] it transforms history into nature. […] the adhomination of the concept can remain manifest without however appearing to have an interest in the matter: what causes mythical speech to be uttered is perfectly explicit, but it is immediately frozen into something natural; it is not read as a motive, but as a reason.[69]

Applying what Barthes says to the historian, we can see that the process of selection of facts of history may be seen to be analogous to the process of deformation and transforming of history into nature. The result of this for history is much as that Barthes describes for myth:

> It thus appears that it is extremely difficult to vanquish myth from the inside: for the very effort one makes in order to escape its stranglehold becomes in its turn the prey of myth: myth can always, as a last resort, signify the

> resistance which is brought to bear against it. Truth to tell, the best weapon against myth is perhaps to mythify it in its turn, and to produce an *artificial myth* [original emphasis]: and this reconstituted myth will in fact be a mythology.[70]

Myths, facts of history, Levi-Strauss's mythical cells, or explanatory cells, become a given, not to be analysed, and so a construct absorbed into discourse as an irreducible element. Once that element is manifest, it provides a means of reifying ideology and evading critical analysis by embedding it in the very text. Terry Eagleton, indeed, argues:

> History, then, certainly 'enters' the text, not least the 'historical' text; but it enters it precisely *as ideology* [original emphasis], as a presence determined and distorted by its measurable absences. This is not to say that real history is present in the text but in a disguised form, so that the task of the critic is then to wrench the mask from its face. It is rather that history is 'present' in the text in the form of a *double-absence* [original emphasis]. […]. Within the text itself, then, ideology becomes a dominant structure, determining the character and disposition of certain 'pseudo-real' constituents.[71]

The discussion so far of the nature of history and historical interpretation, however, has shown how problematic Eagleton's term 'real history' actually is. Indeed, the essence of the plays discussed in this study is that history represented in them is at least as ideologically problematic as theatrical and literary form is to Eagleton. Given this reservation, however, what Eagleton has to say is helpful in clarifying another level of signification in the historical play. Indeed, Eagleton's reference to the 'disposition of "pseudo-real" constituents' parallels the use of mini-myths referred to already which—to use Barthes's terms—in turn 'mythify'. Certainly, the processes of making mini-myths or explanatory cells can be seen to be concerned with Hare's addressing 'gaps' or Carr's 'lacunae', while, Eagleton reminds us, even as such gaps or lacunae are addressed, a new ideological entry takes place as a new text is constructed.

The application of Levi-Strauss's view of mythology to history, or indeed a sceptical application of Armstrong's explanation of myth, provides a means of understanding the processes by which the historian may select Carr's reifying facts of history, which in a new text evade exposure of, in Whyte's terms, 'the aims which the writers were pursuing […] and the ideologies powering their efforts'. The historian will in effect select facts of history, often, in order 'to portray the contradictions in the basic

premises of the culture' and to 'mediate' them in the light of the pursuit of the historian's own 'aims'. Such a process is often linked to the development of new schools of history: the emphases and interpretations of what is a fact of history, and what its significance may be, can be seen to vary in relation to ideological emphasis and value-systems adopted and enacted by different generations of historians in reaction against social ideologies embodied in the history of their culture. We are used to talking of the great Whig historians, as if the matter were simply political. It is that, but it is more, and the example already referred to of Calder, Hill and Thompson and their followers is paralleled and modified in France by that of the Annalistes and in more recent times more generally by the work of the New Historicists. In short, the conception of what is history, fact of history, and interpretation is a deeply ideological decision. What is more it becomes a mythopoeic decision in that it can be seen to provide structures which, like the structures of myth in Douglas's interpretation of Levi-Strauss, are 'dialectical structure[s] in which opposed logical positions are stated, the oppositions mediated by a restatement, which again, when its internal structure becomes clear, gives rise to another kind of opposition, which in turn is mediated or resolved, and so on'.[72] This process of mediation and opposition underlies the dramatic structure of many of the plays to be discussed in later chapters.

When Carr says, as quoted earlier, 'Objectivity in history [is] only of relation, of the relation between fact and interpretation, between past, present, and future', [73] he may be seen to suggest, at least in part, that a key function in the study of history is the analysis of the processes of ideologizing and mythification. The process of writing history can be seen to be related in its method to the development of mythical thought and the structures of playwriting. In this respect, it is worth noting that, whether drama or history does or does not explicitly set out to expose ideology, the process of writing both must embody implicitly an ideological position. Peter Ustinov's insight, quoted at the beginning of the Introduction, that history's 'great virtue' is its adaptability is surely a playwright's recognition of a process which is rooted in the need to define and redefine, appropriate and expropriate, the value-systems, facts of history, mythical cells and mini-myths of given communities or cultures which those processes of definition, redefinition, appropriation and expropriation purport to embody and promote.

The potency of such explanatory mythical cells or mini-myths has been recognized, as we have seen, by some historians just as it has been by

some playwrights. Sellar and Yeatman's *1066 And All That* (1932) with its 'Good Kings' and 'Bad Kings' achieves its humorous effect because it reflects on the way many students of that time, and even now, remember and understand history as made up of mini-myths. The style of history teaching satirized may now, on the whole be passé, but, however we believe modern teaching of history and historiography to have progressed, the mythopoeic function of history remains. What we may call progress is the exposition and exploration of new ideological myths and perspectives, as in Hare's reference to his reaction to Calder's *People's War*, not the transcendence of older ones. Sellar and Yeatman in their sequel, *And Now All This*, have a chapter entitled 'Myth-information' in which they say:

> The truth is, of course, that the importance of Myths cannot be exaggerated (bad luck).
>
> Everyone knows that these splendid old legends of heroic times—the Myths of Hellas, the Tales of Asgard, the Arthurian Cycle—have inspired our Poets, Artists and Statesmen as (and when) nothing else has; and that, as a result, we English have for generations been myth-construed, myth-represented and myth-governed.
>
> Indeed, a stroll round the public square of any large European town is enough to convince the stupidest investigator that all Western Culture is fundamentally myth-guided.[74]

They state with humour a profound insight. This insight will be explored in later chapters with regard to the work of Scottish historical dramatists as we consider ways in which they ideologize and mythify history and re-enact that history in their plays.

Notes

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CHAPTER 3

Language, Ideology, and Identity

A. J. Greimas talks of the relationships we have begun to explore between history, mythology, and ideology: 'Historians have been able to observe the emergence from mythology of presocratic philosophy. It is very interesting to follow the mythologist in his parallel task, to see how the interpretation of myths has given rise to a new "ideological" language […].'[1] Greimas seems to argue, in a way whose simplicity one might beg to query, for an evolutionary process from 'mythology' to 'philosophy', or from 'mythology' to 'ideology'. In fact, such a progression presumes that, to use Levi-Strauss's terminology, 'contradictions in the basic premises of the culture' may be resolved once for all. Rather, Levi-Strauss suggests the processes of historiography and mythology involve a constant arrangement and rearrangement of mythical cells, or explanatory cells, paralleling, as we have argued, what Carr calls facts of history. Nonetheless, what Greimas has to say about the continuum of mythology and ideology is important, provided one understands that the process, far from being evolutionary, involves interaction and interpenetration.

Where Greimas is particularly interesting is in moving beyond Levi-Strauss's structuralist anthropological position to suggest links between mythology, ideology, history, and philosophy. These harmonize with Gramsci's views on philosophy, historicity, and culture when he discusses,

> the fundamental problem facing any conception of the world, any philosophy which has become a cultural movement […] in which the philosophy is contained as an implicit theoretical 'premiss'. One might say 'ideology' here

I. Brown, *History as Theatrical Metaphor*,
DOI 10.1057/978-1-137-47336-3_3

> […] implicitly manifest in art, in law, in economic activity and in all manifestations of individual and collective life. This problem is that of preserving the ideological unity of the entire social bloc which that ideology serves to cement and to unify.[2]

Louis Althusser goes further with particular reference to '"class societies" and their history', suggesting that ideology underlies these, often so inbuilt into perceptions and attitudes that they are in effect invisible, that 'ideology in general, which […] has no history, or, what comes to the same thing, is eternal, i.e. omnipresent in its immutable form throughout history (= the history of social formations containing social classes)'.[3] Indeed, Althusser goes on almost at once to employ a subheading that summarizes much of his argument, which is that 'Ideology is a "Representation" of the Imaginary Relationship of Individuals to their Real Conditions of Existence'.[4] Clearly this summation can be seen to reflect many aspects of the discussion of the role of mythopoeia in the last chapter. It also offers, given that the 'real', however defined, is expressed and perceived through language, a formulation that foregrounds the interrelationship of ideology and language, Greimas's 'ideological language' and, through both, processes of identity-formation which can assert imagined community.

Signs, Ideology, Language, and Literary Identity

It is a contention here that, in the theatre, language or sign systems, 'mythological language' and 'ideological language' embody, often 'invisibly', ideologies which serve 'to cement and to unify' social blocs. We have already in Chap. 1 discussed Hare's concept of 'tribal pieces'. In these, theatrical sign systems and mythological language participate in, to quote Gramsci above, 'a cultural movement […] in which the philosophy is contained as an implicit theoretical premiss'. The embedding of ideology, even the ideological basis itself, may be implicit or forgotten. Such embedding in a play has ideological implications. A specific example is found in the opening of Liz Lochhead's *Mary Queen of Scots Got Her Head Chopped Off* (1987), when La Corbie's opening speech, beginning 'Country. Scotland. Whit like is it?', immediately calls to mind mini-myths of or explanatory cells for Scotland:

> It's a peatbog. It's a daurk forest.
> It's a cauldron o' lye, a saltpan or a coal mine. (p. 467)[5]

Scotland is at once identified by contrasting symbols of wild country and industrial exploitation. Using her mini-myths, Lochhead represents Scotland as full of conflicting visions, but overall as being jaggy and dreich when she concludes her list:

> Ah dinna ken whit like your Scotland is. Here's mines.
> National flower: the thistle.
> National pastime: nostalgia.
> National weather, smirr, haar, drizzle, snow.
> National bird: the crow, the corbie, le corbeau, moi! (p. 467)

This speech time and again (re-)presents Scottishness in both the syntax and lexis of Scots language. Thus, it enhances the dramatic resonance and the signification of the spoken text, through these means recalling and exploiting in a manner that will be discussed in greater detail in Chap. 6 a particular ideology of Scotland and 'Scottishness'. Here, however, is suggested prickliness, dull dampness, and representation as a norm by a scavenger bird with a reputation for violence against vulnerable young animals.

Other examples of the embedding of mini-myths in Scottish drama dealing with historical material are frequently to be found. Both W. Gordon Smith's *Jock* (1972) and Gregory Burke's *Black Watch* (2006), which in their different ways explore the role of militarism in Scottish history and society, conclude by evoking the emotional impact and power of a pipe-band's stirring of the spirits and overwhelming of properly doubtful reservations about war's value. John McGrath in *The Cheviot, the Stag and the Black Black Oil* (1973) makes use of iconic music, including popular tunes and classic Gaelic songs, to highlight cultural and economic conflicts embedded in the play's dialectic. Ike Isakson in *An Gaisgeach*: *The Hero* (1995) represents the conflict of Macbeth and Malcolm by constructing his dialogue in a dialectic of Gaelic and Scots that embodies a further dialectic of Highland and Lowland versions of eleventh-century history. All five examples provide a signal drawn from a system that both binds—'to cement and to unify'—the audience to the action and, having united them in recognition, allows them to establish and yet question a sense of identity with the unifying values communicated. Similar exploitation of established signs and related theatrical conventions abound in the plays to be discussed later. In all five examples, it can be said, though to varying degrees, the different mythological/ideological languages or sign-systems used not only draw attention to what the play says about aspects

of Scottish culture and society, but also to the means by which our knowledge of those aspects is mediated and how that mediation manipulates our perception of them. Dramaturgically the plays mask and distance ideology. In each case, however, an ideological world view, what Gramsci calls 'conception of the world', embedded in theatrical signs, can be decoded.

Gramsci, however, argued it was not possible to separate culture from the history of culture, so that the process of decoding applies as much to the history of culture and its society as to the culture itself. The difficulty here is that of demystifying and making explicit the ideological perspectives and values embedded and embodied in the ways of seeing and saying of a given culture, the ways its mythology is in effect invisible to its members, both in mini-myths and expressive and generic forms. Discussing Saussure, Jonathan Culler throws light on this difficulty. He begins by quoting Saussure:

> Every means of expression used in a society is based, in principle, on a collective norm—in other words, on convention. Signs of politeness, for instance, often have a certain natural expressivity […] but they are nonetheless determined by a rule; and it is this rule which leads one to use them, not their intrinsic value. […] This is why language, the most complex and widespread of systems of expression, is also the most characteristic.[6]

What Saussure says about the arbitrary nature of certain complex sign systems applies very clearly to theatre's conventional languages. The examples in the previous paragraph illustrate this in various ways. Later, in this chapter and others on specific playwrights' linguistic practice, I will describe the use of languages by Scottish playwrights: the ways in which these languages are used is interpenetrated by values, fundamentally ideological, of given cultures within the larger community of Scotland. For the moment, I suggest that when Saussure talks of language in the terms he does, we may also see what he says as applicable to certain conventional theatre languages, including—beside linguistic register—genre, varieties of anti-illusionist staging techniques, and characterization/personification. While many of these theatrical signs are iconic, each of these is 'determined by a rule' and it is this rule which leads one to use them, not their intrinsic value—underlying 'rules' in playwrights' dramaturgy have an impact on their play's meaning.

I would not wish, however, to follow Saussure fully in seeing the *langue* governing specific images as granted a certain universality. Implicit in the

range of playwrights under discussion is a view that the system of rules may be appropriated and meaning subverted. V. N. Volosinov's conception that the system of rules governing signification is rooted in the practice of specific groups seems a more fruitful way of viewing the actual working in Scottish (or any) language of theatre conventions and sign-systems. What Volosinov describes in the following passage can clearly be seen to apply to an audience response to a production:

> *consciousness itself can arise and become a viable fact only in the material embodiment of signs* [original emphasis]. The understanding of a sign is, after all, an act of reference between the sign apprehended and the other, already known signs; in other words, understanding is a response to a sign with signs. And this chain of ideological creativity and understanding, moving from sign and then to a new sign, is perfectly consistent and continuous: from one link of a semiotic nature […] we proceed uninterruptedly to another link of exactly the same nature. And nowhere is there a break in the chain, nowhere does the chain plunge into inner being, nonmaterial in nature and unembodied in signs.[7]

What Volosinov says here relates very clearly to the mini-myths of history discussed in the previous chapter; history's explanatory cells may be seen as being elements within such a chain. In short, the language of myth becomes the language of consciousness, following Volosinov, so that the means by which we understand our culture is precisely the means embodying its dominant ideologies. Indeed, Volosinov goes on to argue that consciousness 'takes shape and being in the material of signs created by an organised group in the process of its social intercourse. The individual consciousness is nurtured on signs […]. The logic of consciousness is the logic of ideological communication, of the semiotic interaction of a social group.'[8] For Volosinov, awareness of meaning is always through the medium of conventional signs; there is no direct access to 'transcendental' truths, nor is there pure, transparent meaning outside a particular social system of signification. This applies to languages and other systems of conveying meaning in theatre. Even as a playwright exposes or, in a Brechtian sense, distances one ideology, she or he embodies another.

For twentieth-century writers in Scots, of course, the use of language has been an important element in addressing the history and ideology of Scottish experience and the nature of Scotland and Scottish history itself. The leading twentieth-century example for this is Hugh MacDiarmid.

When his first book of poems, *Sangschaw*, was published in 1925, it contained a preface by John Buchan, himself capable of fluent writing in Scots, who pointed out MacDiarmid 'would treat Scots as a living language and apply it to matters which had been foreign to it since the sixteenth century'.[9] MacDiarmid, writing in 1962, explained his motivations: 'I wanted to carry forward the reintegration of the Scots language, taking it a good deal farther than Burns had taken it, and at the same time to carry forward the tradition politically.'[10] This seems as clear a statement of the perception of the use of a language as having political and ideological significance as one might find. Edwin Morgan, commenting on this passage, agrees, asserting that MacDiarmid's 'programme includes linguistic, political and cultural elements'.[11] When MacDiarmid uses Scots, he makes, *ipso facto*, an ideological point about the language's value in the face of a centralizing, anglicized cultural hegemony. Many playwrights under discussion took parallel political and ideological stances and, of course, when such stances are taken, reflexively the decision not to use Scots carries its own significations.

In this context, in order to illustrate the point further, it is worth briefly looking at the linguistic usage and techniques of *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle* (1926). These exhibit a twofold method in addressing larger cultural and philosophical matters. When MacDiarmid writes such lines as

> And in the toon that I belang tae
> —What tho'ts Montrose or Nazareth?—
> Helplessly the folk continue
> To lead their livin' death […][12]

or

> And as at sicnae times am I,
> I wad ha'e Scotland to my eye
> Until I saw a timeless flame […]
> And kent that Ecclefechan stood
> As pairt o' an eternal mood,[13]

the two ways in which MacDiarmid is striving to enfranchise the concept of Scotland are clear. One is his deliberate promotion as important sites of universal spiritual significance of Scots phenomena, here place names, often otherwise presented as quaint, rural, and provincially marginalized. Thus, he revalidates the significance of those phenomena, previously reduced in value. The other way is the use of the Scots language itself for a poem of formidable

theoretic and spiritual power and complexity. Doing this, MacDiarmid engages the fundamental political dimension of language, ideologizing the sign-system. In this way, he revitalizes and asserts the competence of Scots as a language capable of dealing with subtle and profound matters. Although at the time he was writing in the mid-1920s, playwrights like Joe Corrie and John Brandane, and poets like Violet Jacob and Marion Angus *inter alia* were writing in Scots to serious purpose, MacDiarmid's view was that dominant English colonialist and imperialist hegemony had led to the marginalization of Scots culture and language. He considered this hegemony reduced Scottish culture to the patronized and patronizing stereotypes of the kailyard and music hall comic routines and he wrote consciously in reaction against this perceived hegemony as did several of the playwrights discussed later, not least, of course, Robert McLellan, discussed in the next chapter.

Language is a profoundly cultural artefact and its definition profoundly political. Terry Eagleton reflects on the process MacDiarmid undertook when he recognizes the importance of the particular language chosen and used in a literary text:

> A literary text is related to GI (general ideology) not only by how it deploys language but by the particular language it deploys. Language, that most innocent and spontaneous of common currencies, is in reality a terrain scattered, fissured and divided by the cataclysms of political history, strewn with the relics of imperialist, nationalist, regionalist and class combat. The linguistic is always at base the *politico*-linguistic [original emphasis] […].[14]

Clearly Eagleton's analysis relates to much nineteenth-century Central European theatre, like the Croatian theatre discussed in Chap. 1. It also fits the case of MacDiarmid; for many other Scots writers following MacDiarmid the choice of language was also a key ideological decision. Although, as we shall see, more contemporary writers perhaps feel freer than their predecessors to move from one discourse and dialect to another and between the languages of Scotland, on the whole they do so to make ideological points or establish particular insights. The relationship of people to their society and culture is often expressed through their language and in an age of nation-states the definition of a linguistic community as speaking a 'dialect' as opposed to a 'language' has carried severe diplomatic, political, and social implications. Indeed, in specific cases, a language might actually be suppressed for political and ideological reasons. This was the case until recently with Kurdish in Turkey, where the

speaking of Kurdish in public or on film or on stage was banned, given the Turkish government sought (and seeks) to maintain what is sees as its territorial integrity against Kurdish attempts to establish a Kurdish state. Speaking Kurdish rather than Turkish was seen as an assertion of an identity contrary to the conception of a unitary Turkish identity developed in Atatürk's post-Ottoman settlement after the First World War.

While this may be an extreme case, it is not unique. It is salutary to remember that in Scotland there have been a number of attempts at language suppression, whether directly as in the 1609 Statutes of Iona by which Highland chiefs were obliged to send their sons away to be educated in English rather than Gaelic, to the indirect outcome of the 1872 Education (Scotland) Act which, in effect, led to the punishment of pupils for speaking Gaelic or Scots in class rather than the imperial language, English. So firmly rooted in the ways of thinking about British culture is thinking of English, especially in the British Isles, as a dominant hegemonic language that it was still possible in the late twentieth century to find linguistic historians such as David Tittensor of Edinburgh University who would beg leave to argue that Middle Scots, despite its syntactic and lexical differences from Middle English—and whatever were the perceptions of early modern Scots and English speakers—was not a separate language. Indeed, there are still individuals who will assert that Scots is 'bad English'. In other words, the pressures of hegemony can be such that the very perception of the existence of a language as a language may be—and generally is—ideologically determined. Hence, the very fact of a writer's language choice may, in circumstances where the language involved is one carrying ideological implications of the kind Eagleton refers to, signify meaning and have ideological implications even before any consideration arises as to how, in his words, the 'literary text […] deploys the language'.[15]

Examples cited in the previous paragraph make it clear that deployment of language can be subversive in intention or impact in more than just literary or theatrical contexts. Indeed, the very definition of a 'national' literature can be as ideologically fraught as was the development of a nineteenth-century Croatian national theatre. A Scottish example is, of course, relevant here. It is again perhaps salutary to remind oneself of how recently an argument for an identifiable Scottish Literature as a topic of study and research might be seen as potentially 'dangerous'. Kurt Wittig prefaces his seminal 1958 text, *The Scottish Tradition in Literature*, with an 'Introduction' whose first words are 'Before we begin, may I assure my readers that in speaking of a Scottish tradition in literature, I have no subversive aims, no

reactionary or revolutionary intentions?'[16] These nervous words show that, as recently as 1958, Wittig felt it necessary to deny any intention, in discussing the existence of 'a Scottish tradition', of 'subversive aims' and 'reactionary or revolutionary intentions' on his part. However over-sensitive Wittig felt he had to be, though, clearly in a Scotland where an independence referendum campaign is a recent memory and the Parliament apparently abandoned in 1707 has to a significant extent been reconstituted, assertions of Scottish cultural identities, entertained openly without Wittig's reservations, carry important political and ideological implications.

Eagleton, in a telling metaphor, discusses how such ideological implications and literature interpenetrate one another:

> The literary text […] produces ideology (itself a production) in a way analogous to the operations of dramatic production on dramatic text. And just as the dramatic production's relation to its text reveals the text's internal relations to its 'world' under the form of its own *constitution* [original emphasis] of them, so the literary text's relation to ideology so institutes that ideology as to reveal something of its relations to history.[17]

The text, then, constitutes ideology in various ways. It may do so, as has been argued in the previous paragraph, by the very fact of its existence against a given historical background. It may do so by the language choices made within it. It may do so, as Eagleton here argues, by the very structure which comprises the work, so that that structure may be seen to inhere in the implicit and explicit value-systems of the text. Eagleton, indeed, suggests that a literary text institutes ideology in such a way as to reveal its relation to history. It is, however, part of the argument here that, while it is possible for a text in part to expose—and resist—ideology and its relations to history, that text must still remain in part as much a manifestation of underlying ideologies as one which does not explicitly expose and resist them. In this, the use of a given language register or discourse becomes a means of expressing and exposing relations between the text and ideologies it embodies.

Scots Language and Ideologies of Identity

If the text's language embodies, visibly or invisibly, its ideology, then some playwriting in the languages of Scotland visibly—that is to say, explicitly or by clear implication— expresses through language choice ideological

attitudes to community identity or identities. Indeed, Alexander Reid summed up his position on the interaction of language and identity in 1958:

> The return to Scots is a return to meaning and sincerity. We can only grow from our own roots and our roots are not English […] If we are to fulfil our hope that Scotland may some day make a contribution to World Drama […] we can only do so by cherishing, not repressing our national peculiarities (including our language), though whether a Scottish National Drama, if it comes to birth, will be written in Braid Scots or the speech, redeemed for literary purposes, of Argyle Street, Glasgow, or the Kirkgate, Leith, is anyone's guess.[18]

While Reid, who is discussed in the next chapter, identifies a twentieth-century issue of language use, ideology, and status, the significance of language choice in Scotland is, of course, longstanding. Murray Pittock for example offers an early modern example: '[…] association of Scots language with the "true" and "traditional" nation can also be found in the arguments of sixteenth-century Catholic apologists like Ninian Winzet: there were some Jacobites as late as 1745 who liked to keep alive the speech of Court Scots […].'[19] I have myself argued that one possible reason for the reaction against playhouse theatre in early eighteenth-century Edinburgh was the fact that actors offered speech training in English, then an alien language and form of pronunciation to many Scots.[20] This continuity of ideological conflict concerning language use and identity over three centuries certainly suggests it is a long-term issue, still seen perhaps in some modern Scots trying to eschew scotticisms.

In 1983 Derrick McClure summarized the position then, reflecting this centuries-old debate: 'The mere fact of writing in a tongue other than the official standard […] implies some conscious decision on the part of the author; and his possible motivation […].'[21] Indeed, a recurring theme in McClure's writing has been the ways creative writers' use of Scots embodies social and political ideologies.[22] In 1988, in a statement reflected in my discussion below of Reid's contemporary Robert McLellan's *The Flouers o Edinburgh* (1948), McClure observes that '[in the eighteenth century] English was considered a more polite language than Scots. To write in Scots, therefore, was an act with overt and inescapable cultural, even political, implications: a deliberate gesture of support for a denigrated tongue.'[23] By 1991 McClure is even more explicit about ideologies of identity and choice when he argues that

> it is certainly true in general of *writers* [original emphasis] of Scots, and most especially in the twentieth century, that the language is used overtly as a badge of national identity: that any piece of writing in Scots is an ideological statement, a proclamation that the writer is refusing to be identified with the politically and culturally dominant English-speaking community.[24]

In 1999 Katja Lenz adopts a parallel stance, this time with specific reference to McLellan's practice, asserting

> The decision to write a play in Scots is still a political step. With some authors, the choice of Scots is clearly a statement of national and cultural politics. In less radical cases, Scots serves to transmit a feeling of specifically Scottish identity.[25]

Both McClure and Lenz argue that employing Scots in literary and dramatic writing is a deliberate act with clear cultural and political inspirations and implications related to identity. McClure talks of 'a badge of national identity' and Lenz of a 'statement of national and cultural politics [… or] feeling of specifically Scottish identity'.

Neither McClure nor Lenz, however, follows through Reid's ideologically loaded vocabulary—his suggestion that somehow only the use of Scots 'is a return to meaning and sincerity'—whatever those terms may mean. In fact, we will consider their potential significance at various points in the discussion of specific plays in later chapters where we will see that in a number of places the use of Scots is indeed represented theatrically as somehow 'sincere', as in, for example, *The Flouers o' Edinburgh*. There, a conflict is presented between a generation, represented by Lady Athelstane, born before the 1707 Union and Enlightenment would-be poets like the Reverend Dowie who attempt to write in English. When the English officer Sidney Simkin says to Dowie, 'I wondered, Doctor, that so many of you should write with such obvious labour in English when so much can be done with your own dialect', [26] Dowie responds 'Oor ain dialect, Captain, is aa richt for a bit sentimental sang, but for the higher purposes of literature it is inadequate'. Dowie in one sentence shifts between Scots and English as McLellan has fun with his character's attempts at English. At the same time, the line he gives Dowie suggests—in the very languages used—that now for Dowie Scots is only good for 'a bit sentimental sang', while English is necessary for 'the higher purposes of literature'. When a few lines later, Lady Athelstane invokes the work of Allan Ramsay—'He wrote in Scots, and he was as guid as ony o ye'—Dowie dismisses Ramsay

as a 'third rate talent', already within four years of his death 'gey nearly forgotten',[27] an ironic judgement, given Ramsay's continued reputation. Thus, McLellan implies the limitations of the understanding engendered by, and ideological attitudes embodied in, the linguistic views of such figures as Dowie represents. Here, the fictional poet's choice is to write in what he sees—though not employing modern terminology—as the culturally dominant hegemonic language: this is presented in this play as both personally and creatively destructive to talent and integrity.

Nonetheless, the idea that it is Scots that is somehow pre-eminent for 'meaning and sincerity' in Scottish drama is highly debateable. It not only asserts that using English, even Scottish Standard English, is not a meaningful or sincere use of language for the Scottish playwright, but it also neglects the older Scottish language, Gaelic. In a statement that Reid seems to see as liberating, one with which McLellan might presumably concur, Reid's assertion drives Gaelic to the periphery. More contemporary ideologies that see Scottish drama and identities as complex and linguistically interactive resist such a simple identification of Scots alone with 'sincerity'. Michelle MacLeod, for example, in a discussion of contemporary Gaelic writing, has noted: 'Sociolinguists and (linguistic) anthropologists have long believed that language is one of the key factors in determining a person's identity.'[28] This leads her to suggest in the same passage, with regard to poetry:

> It is perhaps not surprising, therefore, that issues relating to language—language loyalty, language death, language shift and the relationship between language and identity and language and location—are common in modern Gaelic poetry. At a time of increasing linguistic fragility, Gaelic writers and poets have often been fierce defenders of the language.

Macleod follows through in more recent discussion to assert the importance of Gaelic drama in this process when she writes, 'Curiously Gaelic drama has been a neglected area in Gaelic studies even in spite of the fact that it has been one of the most inclusive art forms reaching out to those who would not otherwise access literary outputs and often being created within communities of practice.'[29] One key motivation for the creative use of Gaelic on stage, as of Scots, is surely resistance to the ideological hegemony of what McClure calls the 'politically and culturally dominant English-speaking community'.

This motivation relates to the use of Gaelic for modern drama, including drama on historical themes. Macleod and Moray Watson identify three

leading late twentieth-century playwrights who were part of the contemporary Gaelic-language drama movement. Two of these were Tormod Calum Dòmhnallach whose *Anna Chaimbeul* (*Ann Campbell*, 1977) they praise for 'its intoxicating use of traditional song, influences of Japanese Noh theatre as portrayed by Yeats, and stagecraft, [which] immediately establishes Dòmhnallach as a playwright achieving his desire to create a (modern) "Gaelic" drama', and Fionnlagh MacLeòid 'whose plays were open to European existential and Absurd influences'.[30] The third is Iain Crichton Smith, not only a great poet and fine novelist in both Gaelic and English, but a playwright whose history plays, already mentioned, include *An Coileach* (*The Cockerel*, 1966) concerning Christ's betrayal and *A' Chùirt* (*The Court*, 1966) which explores the consequences of the violence of the Clearances and resistance to them. He developed the themes of *A' Chùirt* in his English-language novel *Consider the Lilies* (1968), reminding us that 'meaning and sincerity' in Scottish twentieth-century writing might involve crossing linguistic and generic boundaries, so escaping simple ideological identification with any one language or, indeed, genre.

As I have argued elsewhere,[31] this use of Gaelic and Scots is positive, though it has reflexive dangers. It is an act seeking to sustain the perceived integrity of the linguistic and creative identity of two Scottish languages, resisting both the rejection of Gaelic as a vibrant contemporary creative force and the denial of Scots as a 'language' while labelling many of its dialects as substandard English. After all, famously, even educated Glasgow-Scots dialect speakers will sometimes think of their own language as 'slang'. Yet, one of the consequences of such positive resistance to hegemonic disparagement of Scots language usage can be somewhat negative, as Gavin Miller notes: 'In their eagerness to throw off the myth of Scots as substandard, broken English, Scottish writers and critics have tended to substitute a new, and equally inferiorist, mythology—that of Scots as a primitive language which is naturally expressive of feelings, and naturally imitative of things.'[32] One might add to Miller's point that often Scots has been used to suggest sentimentality, comedy, or vulgarity. One can see McLellan satirizing such a viewpoint in the lines, quoted above, he gives Dowie in *The Flouers o Edinburgh*, asserting that Scots is merely 'aa richt for a bit sentimental sang'. It is a point made in later chapters that in contemporary history plays it is sometimes implied that those speaking versions of Scots are somehow uncivilized or uncultured. This is an issue we will consider, for example, when we come to discuss the presentation of the Scottish nobility in Rona Munro's *The James Plays* (2014). Such

use of Scots as, in a sense, to demean the speakers is, of course, not new. Again, McClure contributes to this discussion when he says of the use of Scots in literature throughout the nineteenth and into the early twentieth century:

> […] a non-standard form may have an accepted, if restricted, place in the life of the community, and may be used for literature in a sphere which does not exceed the limitations on the range of social and cultural functions assigned to the tongue itself. […] much poetry, including some of high distinction, was produced in the tongue; but the range of topics, genres and poetic forms had become circumscribed, and the connection of Scots with (at best) an unchanging, unenterprising, tradition-bound mode of life was manifest.[33]

Part of the fascination of late twentieth-century Scottish playwrights' use of Scots for their characters lies in the tension between the use of Scots to mark the 'unenterprising' and 'tradition-bound', in other words the backward, and its use as a flexible forward-looking modern language. Sometimes, in fact, the same playwright may be seen to exploit both ideological significations of the use of Scots, as Donald Campbell, for example, does to achieve a certain post-Brechtian dramatic impact in *The Jesuit* (1976), discussed in Chap. 5.

Another danger of this trend in dramatic (and novelistic) use of Scots is that Scots comes to be represented as interlinked with a particular view of Scottishness. This has the ultimately ambivalent effect, in Carla Sassi's words, of 'closing the horizon of the Scottish (post)nation, as the continuity and transparency of the region is achieved at the cost of excluding those who do not belong to it—socially and ideologically, in most cases, rather than ethnically as is the case with most European nationalisms'.[34] As Sassi goes on to argue, such creative practice risks leading to 'exclusive nationalism' and in many cases 'rigidly connot[ing] Scottish nationhood as male, working-class and, ideologically, as socialist or republican'. In other words, the attempts to recuperate Scots from a disparaged status are not themselves without their own potential for unintended—and even negative in terms of stigmatizing class groups—consequences. Nonetheless, in plays like Bill Bryden's *Willie Rough* (1972), John McGrath's *The Cheviot, The Stag and the Black Black Oil* (1973) and *The Game's a Bogey* (1974), and Hector MacMillan's *The Rising* (1973), the use of Scots can be heard as part of a process of bringing 'real' voices to the stage, ensuring, with democratic and anti-hegemonic ambition, that a multiplicity of voices is

heard. In this context, the desire to write in Scots—or Gaelic—can be understood as seeking to ensure the real voices, the real languages, the vernaculars, of the communities of Scotland are employed on stage. Yet, it is clear that such an aim, admirable as it may on the face of it be, can be problematic to analyse since it involves complicated layers of meaning. As Greimas reminded us at the beginning of this chapter, the analysis of meaning involves the interaction and interrelationship of 'mythological language' and, in his argument, ultimately 'ideological language'.[35] With regard to Scottish playwrights, language choices mark, and sometimes mask, complex ideological—and mythological—underpinnings. As John Corbett puts it with regard to the relationship of vernacular languages and the 'real':

> The main weapon in the armoury of the supporters of vernacular writing, particularly the urban vernaculars, is that it is 'real'—in the often-repeated words, it more accurately represents 'the language of the people'. However, […] constructions of 'the real' are always ideologically predicated, and they imply social, political and cultural positions which are dynamic, and which continue to be negotiated as the Scottish nation evolves.[36]

The fact that language is a key means by which community may be, in Benedict Anderson's terms, 'imagined', assigns to language a key role in identifying communities. As we will see in remaining chapters, playwrights' choice of language is often fundamental to their imagination and to the kinds of communities, versions of Scotlands, the nature and forms of the Scottish nation they imagine.

Notes

1. A. J. Greimas, 'Comparative Mythology' (1963), in Pierre Maranda, ed., *Mythology* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), 162.
2. Antonio Gramsci, in Tony Bennett et al. (eds.), *Culture, Ideology and Social Process* (London: Batsford, 1981), 206.
3. Louis Althusser, 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses' (1970), in *'Lenin and Philosophy' and Other Essays* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971), 34 (at https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/althusser/1970/ideology.htm, accessed 3 August 2015).
4. Ibid.
5. Page references are to Cairns Craig and Randall Stevenson (eds.), *Twentieth-Century Scottish Drama: An Anthology* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2001).

6. F. de Saussure, *Course*, 68; *Cours*, 100–1, quoted in Bennett, *Culture*, 131.
7. V. N. Volosinov, 'The Study of Ideologies and Philosophy of Language', in Bennett, *Culture*, 147.
8. Volosinov, 'The Study of Ideologies', 149.
9. John Buchan, 'Preface', in Hugh MacDiarmid, *Sangschaw* (Edinburgh and London: Blackwood & Son, 1925).
10. Hugh MacDiarmid, 'MacDiarmid on MacDiarmid', *The Manchester Guardian*, 22 February 1962, quoted in Edward Morgan, *Hugh MacDiarmid* (London: Longman, 1976), 6.
11. Morgan, *Hugh MacDiarmid*, 6.
12. Hugh MacDiarmid, *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle* (4th edn.) (Edinburgh: The 200 Burns Club, 1962), 7.
13. Ibid., 70–1.
14. Terry Eagleton, *Criticism and Ideology* (London: Verso, 1976), 54–5.
15. Ibid.
16. Kurt Wittig, *The Scottish Tradition in Literature* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1958), 3.
17. Eagleton, *Criticism and Ideology*, 68–9.
18. Alexander Reid, 'Foreword', *Two Scots Plays* (London: Collins, 1958) xii–xiii.
19. Murray Pittock, 'Scottish Nationality in the Age of Fletcher', in Paul Henderson Scott (ed.), *The Saltoun Papers: Reflections on Andrew Fletcher* (Edinburgh: Saltire Society, 2003), 187.
20. See, for example, Ian Brown, *Scottish Theatre: Diversity, Language, Continuity* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2013), 79–82.
21. J. Derrick McClure, 'Scots in Dialogue: Some Uses and Implications', in J. Derrick McClure (ed.), *Scotland and the Lowland Tongue: Studies in the Language and Literature of Lowland Scotland in Honour of David D. Murison* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1983), 148.
22. Ian Brown, 'Motivation and Politico-cultural Context in the Creation of Scots Language Versions of Greek Tragedies', in John M. Kirk and Iseabail Macleod (eds.), *Scots: Studies in its Literature and Language* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2013), 260ff. Aspects of this chapter have contributed to the writing of this section.
23. J. Derrick McClure, *Why Scots Matters* (Edinburgh: The Saltire Society, 1988), 37.
24. J. D. McClure, 'Is Translation Naturalisation? Some Test Cases from Scots', in J. J. Simon and A. Sinner (eds.), *English Studies 3: Proceedings of the Third Conference on the Literature of Region and Nation, Part 1* (Luxembourg: Publications des Centre Universitaire de Luxembourg, 1991), 195.
25. Katja Lenz, *Die schottische Sprache im modernen Drama* (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 1999), 352.

26. Robert McLellan, *The Flouers o Edinburgh*, in *Robert McLellan: Playing Scotlands Story, Collected Dramatic Works*, ed. Colin Donati (Edinburgh: Luath, 2013), 172.
27. Ibid.
28. Michelle Macleod, 'Language and Identity in Modern Gaelic Verse', in Ian Brown and Alan Riach (eds.), *The Edinburgh Companion to Twentieth-Century Scottish Literature* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 167.
29. Michelle Macleod, 'Three Centuries of Gaelic Language Manipulation on Stage', *Scottish Language* 33 (2014), 9.
30. Michelle Macleod and Moray Watson, 'In the Shadow of the Bard: The Gaelic Short Story, Novel and Drama since the early Twentieth Century', in Ian Brown et al. (eds.), *The Edinburgh History of Scottish Literature* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007) vol. 3, 281.
31. Brown, 'Motivation and Politico-cultural Context', 262.
32. Gavin Miller, '"Persuade without convincing … represent without reasoning": The Inferiorist Mythology of the Scots Language', in Eleanor Bell and Gavin Miller (eds.), *Scotland in Theory: Reflections on Culture and Literature* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2004), 208.
33. J. Derrick McClure, *Language, Poetry and Nationhood: Scots as a Poetic Language from 1878 to the Present* (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 2000), 21–2.
34. Carla Sassi, 'The (B)order in Modern Scottish Literature', in Ian Brown and Alan Riach (eds.), *The Edinburgh Companion to Twentieth-Century Scottish Literature* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 152–3.
35. A. J. Greimas, 'Comparative Mythology' (1963), in Pierre Maranda (ed.), *Mythology* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), 162.
36. John Corbett, *Written in the Language of the Scottish Nation: A History of Literary Translation into Scots* (Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 1999), 180.

CHAPTER 4

The Creation of a 'Missing' Tradition: Robert McLellan and His Contemporaries

Alexander Scott's 1981 assertion that 'Robert McLellan has been dedicated to the aims of the Scottish Renaissance movement in literature inaugurated by Hugh MacDiarmid in the nineteen-twenties' is quite explicit.[1] The four dramatists on whom this chapter mainly focuses—McLellan (1907–85), Robert Kemp (1908–67), Alexander Reid (1914–82) and Sydney Goodsir Smith (1915–75)—were indeed to one extent or another part of the Scottish Literary Renaissance. So was Scott himself and James Bridie (1888–1951), most of whose work does not deal with historical material, although we will touch on examples later including *The Anatomist* (1930). While MacDiarmid was only one of the leaders of the Renaissance, he provides a useful summary of its aims which he defines as being to 'escape from the provincializing of Scottish Literature […] to carry on the independent Scottish literary tradition from the time that Burns died […] to carry forward the reintegration of the Scots language […] and at the same time to carry forward the tradition politically'.[2] Another strand which is not mentioned here, but one much discussed by modern critics,[3] is the interest MacDiarmid and such colleagues as Sorley MacLean showed in modernism. In many ways the title—the Scottish Literary Renaissance—masks the internationalist interest of many of the writers and other artists who made up the movement. Yet, what is striking about playwrights like McLellan is that dramatically they do not appear to have been drawn by modernism. In fact, David Hutchison quotes McLellan as saying that 'he felt that what he was doing was to create the kind of drama which would

I. Brown, *History as Theatrical Metaphor*,
DOI 10.1057/978-1-137-47336-3_4

have been written in previous eras had there been a thriving Scottish theatre then'.[4] Given this, I will argue that for these playwrights escaping 'from the provincializing of Scottish Literature' may be seen as less of a priority than their desire to sustain and develop 'the independent Scottish literary tradition […] the reintegration of the Scots language [… and] the tradition politically'.[5] Part of their difficulty in achieving the first aim may arise from their focus on the other three. In any case, it is helpful to consider not just the aims of their version of the Scottish Literary Renaissance, but the theatrical context within which these playwrights, and McLellan in particular, began. Then one can understand in what particular theatrical sense their work aspired to 'renaissance'.

First Strivings for a Modern Scottish Theatre

Legitimate, non-variety theatre in late nineteenth-century Scotland was dominated by London's metropolitan status and by touring, often based on West End productions. J. M. Barrie (1860–1937) was certainly seen in his time as a dramatist of world importance, but, while occasionally drawn to Scottish material as in *What Every Woman Knows* (1908), he did not, apart from his adaptation of his novel *The Little Minister* (1897), write drama with the avowedly 'Scottish' subject matter of his early quasi-kailyard prose. Barrie as a playwright is better seen as part of a London-based socially concerned proto-modernist dramatic movement alongside his colleagues and friends like Bernard Shaw, Harley Granville Barker, and John Galsworthy. In Scotland when he began to write, while the National Drama still had some impact in leading playhouses as Graham Moffat, quoted in Chap. 1, observed, by the end of the nineteenth century such work tended to appear in popular low-prestige venues. In the meantime, Moffat claims,

> In the days of my youth there were no modern Scottish plays. Our pre-Barrie writers would seem to have been entirely lacking in any sense of the theatre and its possibilities as a channel for realistic expression.[6]

The opportunities for innovative new Scottish writing for the stage towards the end of the nineteenth century were, to say the least, restricted.

This is not to say that there was absolutely no Scottish interest in experimentation in theatre by the start of the twentieth century, but it was limited in scope. As mentioned in the first chapter, Fiona Macleod

(William Sharp) wrote work influenced by the Celtic Revival aspects of the poems and plays of Yeats. Further, in his own person Sharp was elected in 1900 President of the London-based Stage Society, set up in 1899 to promote progressive drama through Sunday evening readings. Sharp, who died only fifty years old, in 1905, was clearly committed to innovative modern drama with a European perspective and plugged into the incipient British experimental repertory movement. As part of this, Alfred Wareing, with several prominent Glaswegians, founded Glasgow Repertory Theatre in 1909. *The Glasgow Herald* of 19 March 1909 described its aims as including

> the encouragement of the initiation and development of purely Scottish drama by providing a stage and acting company which will be peculiarly adapted for the production of plays national in character, written by Scottish men and women of letters.[7]

Its programme also included new European drama, as did older sister companies like Annie Horniman's Abbey Theatre in Dublin (founded 1904) and her Manchester Gaiety (founded 1908). Meanwhile, Moffat, whose plays tended to the kailyard, had established a company around his wife Maggie and himself. This opened on 26 March 1908 at Glasgow's Athenaeum Hall. He called his company the Scottish National Players and claimed it as being an effort

> […] to follow the example of the Irish National Players at the Abbey Theatre, Dublin, and to provide something similar for Scotland. […] In 'Annie Laurie' and 'Till the Bells Ring' [two of his short plays presented on this occasion], the circumstances giving rise to the situations are Scottish, and all the characters speak the Lowland 'Braid Scots'.[8]

In other words, in pre-war Glasgow there was interest with international perspectives in developing Scottish drama 'national in character' and in theatrical use of Scots language. Moffat, however, found himself a West End hit with his Scots-language, but kailyard-inflected *Bunty Pulls the Strings* (1911). This had long runs in the West End and simultaneously on Broadway. Such success seems to have diverted Moffat's energy, while the outbreak of war closed the Glasgow Rep. While visiting repertory companies played for seasons in Edinburgh and Glasgow in the 1930s and into the 1950s, neither city saw established repertory companies until the foundation of Glasgow's Citizens' Theatre in 1943 and Edinburgh's Gateway Company in 1953.

Two 1920s developments provided an immediate context for McLellan's start in playwriting in the 1930s. One was the establishment of the Scottish National Players—quite distinct from Moffat's pre-war company with the same name—in 1921 with the aim of developing 'Scottish national drama through the productions […] of plays of Scottish life and character'.[9] This company had access to remaining funds of the Glasgow Rep. Among its founders was the playwright John MacIntyre who wrote as 'John Brandane' (1869–1947) and whose historical drama set after the 1745 Jacobite Rising, *The Lifting*, the company presented in 1925. This play in a sense retreads concerns of the nineteenth-century National Drama, somewhat sentimental and sensationally plotted, drawing on high-profile events in Scottish history and asserting the honour of Scots and Scotland. The Scottish National Players was an amateur company and, although it toured through Scotland, it never, despite the promptings of playwright board members like Brandane and Bridie, became professional. In the long term, it could not sustain itself on that basis. The other significant post-war contextual development was the establishment of the Scottish Community Drama Association (SCDA) in 1926 to encourage amateur drama nationwide. This lifted off very quickly, and still retains its energy. Its launch offered a market for Scottish plays suitable for local amateur performance, while offering a support network for those who wanted to develop more experimental drama of one kind or another. On the whole, although individual companies in their home bases might produce full-length productions, often of high quality, the focus of much of the SCDA's work nationally was, and is, on one-act play competitions. These, by and large, shaped the writing of much that was produced for them in the 1930s, usually, though not always, tending to favour cosy and comic, rather than experimental, drama. Nonetheless, as part of the wider amateur movement, an important 'Little Theatre', the Curtain, was set up by public subscription and sustained though membership fees in a large house at 15 Woodside Terrace in Glasgow's West End in 1933. There, McLellan's first play, *Jeddart Justice* (1933) was premiered.

McLellan, like other playwrights discussed in this chapter, abandoned the particular popular forms of the National Drama with their dependence on pre-existing literary sources. His practice, rather, effectively revisits and reshapes an older eighteenth-century model of working directly with Scottish historical (or sometimes quasi-historical, folk-historical, or traditional) material to construct a version of the past. A recent collection of his

plays is actually subtitled: *Playing Scotland's Story*.[10] Karen Bassi has asked an important question about such constructions of the 'past':

> Wolfgang Ernst begins a 1999 article by asking, 'Should the past, that fragmented landscape of data, always be described in stories?' […] If we agree […] that the past is constituted in stories, then what is that 'fragmented landscape of data' that […] pre-exists those stories?[11]

This volume asks a complementary question: 'What ideologies of selection of material from the "fragmented landscape of data" shape the stories dramatists wish to tell?' As Bassi continues in the passage already cited:

> In the writing of history, these data occupy what de Certeau has called the 'position of the real', defined as that to which the historian has only mediated access. […] This appeal to the 'real' in conceptualizing the past seems both necessary and unremarkable. But its abstract (or philosophical) character also raises the question of predication: 'real' what?[12]

Cairns Craig and Randall Stevenson have highlighted 'Robert McLellan's conviction that […] a return to the past was necessary in order to create for Scottish history a coherence and significance of the kind long established for England by Shakespeare.'[13] The issue is what version of Scottish history McLellan creates. Just as Shakespeare's versions of English history are ideologically shaped, so, as the previous chapters have argued, must be those of McLellan, or any playwright under discussion. This chapter considers how McLellan's generation shaped their versions of Scotland's variegated story, what their conceptualization of the past was and what reality their plays, written between the beginning of the 1930s and the end of the 1960s, present. In discussing this body of work, an underlying theme will be John Corbett's insight concerning the relationship of vernacular languages and the real, already cited, that 'constructions of "the real" are always ideologically predicated'.[14]

Robert McLellan: Playwriting in Two Arcs

McLellan's *Jeddart Justice* is a one-act play based on a Scottish Borders tale and set 'Early in the seventeenth century'. Its title refers to a system of summary justice reputedly practised in Jeddart—Jedburgh—under which an arrested person is first hanged and then, if deemed necessary,

tried. Dedicated to Brandane, one of the founders of the Scottish National Players, it takes as its theme a variation on the taming of a 'shrew'. Its chauvinist topic is the literal capture of a husband for a 'very plain' daughter, Meg, elder of twins. Her father, Sir Gideon Murray of Elibank, a Borders laird, has just recovered his stolen cattle and, in so doing, captured the leading reiver, Will Scott. He plans to hang Will. As Lady Murray summarises the capture: 'There was a fecht at Ettrick Water and twae o the Scotts were killed. And yer faither poued young Will o the Harden aff his horse whan he was gey near feenishin aff Geordie [a Murray retainer]' (p. 372).[15] Murray is persuaded by his wife that Will would make a suitable husband for Meg who will otherwise remain unwed, an unthinkable position for a young woman, of course, in McLellan's dramatic world, reflecting the society in which the drama is set. Meanwhile, Meg's younger twin Jean finds Will more attractive than the man she is supposed to marry and makes a play for him. Murray is reluctant to abandon the hanging, yet he knows that there has been peace for some years and that hanging Will will cause renewed feuding, when he and the Scotts would more profitably raid the English. He changes his mind, but Will considers he would rather hang than marry 'very plain' Meg. His reaction affronts her and, when Will, on seeing the gallows rope, changes his mind and agrees to marry, she refuses him. Jean then insists she will have him, at which point Meg insists he should hang. Murray tries to break the impasse: 'Look here Harden, the meenister's doun there yet. Grab the ane ye want and fetch her wi ye, supposing ye hae to pou her by the hair o the heid!' (p. 376). Will says he will 'tak the young ane then'; Meg takes up a heavy candlestick, pursues him round the room and tells him he will marry her and regret it 'for the rest o yer days'. The play ends with Jean bursting into tears because she cannot have Will.

It would be easy and perhaps overly harsh to pillory this early work as not only chauvinist, but casually glorifying violence, narrowly nationalist in its passing reference to raiding the English, sexist both in the way it presents women and in what it represents as acceptable treatment of women, emotionally glib and stereotyped in characterization. In a word, the play presents seventeenth-century Borders feuding and raiding as swashbuckling and, by and large, comic. It is undoubtedly dramatically well-constructed within the one-act form, but its implicit attitudes are at some remove from progressive 1930s views. Here, McLellan is concerned instead with a mythic Borders brigandage far removed from the social and political context of twentieth-century Glasgow, and with no hint of contemporary

parallels to the late medieval rapine which is 'softened'—one might even say 'evaded'—in performance by his comic approach to its subject matter. The 'real' conceptualized on stage in McLellan's early work using historical material is, one might suggest, somewhat escapist, very much concerned with offering consolation, revisiting the past to comfort the audience in difficult times, and perhaps seeking through the past to coalesce a sense of nationhood particularly through his use of language. It is very difficult on the basis of *Jeddart Justice* to see his early work as progressive, psychologically insightful, or concerned with contemporary socio-political themes.

Further, leaving to one side the theatrical contexts already discussed, this play's premiere took place in the social and political context of a great industrial city and the Great Depression. Both contexts are addressed within a decade by the Glasgow Unity playwrights, but never appear in McLellan's work, unlike that of many of Scottish Renaissance contemporaries in other genres.

The social context of the production of his plays of the period can also be seen to be limited. Of his nine plays written in the 1930s, seven are identified by Colin Donati as being produced by Curtain in its little theatre in the prosperous West End of Glasgow. Straight after *Jeddart Justice*, he experimented there with contemporary drama in *Tarfessock* (1934) and Celtic legend in *The Flight of Graidhne* (1934) and *Cian and Ethlin* (1935). *The Changeling* (1934) was produced by another Little Theatre, this time in industrial Clydebank, and—set about 1600 in the Debateable Land—again draws for its action on a mythicized Scottish Borders historical period. This one-act play draws on the Wakefield *Second Shepherd's Pageant*, where Mak, a sheep-stealer, pursued by shepherds, hides a stolen sheep in a baby's cradle. In the original, the thief's trick is exposed by the shepherds and he is punished; McLellan's thief, now named Archie Armstrong, escapes punishment. His shepherds, given the Borders surname Elliot, on approaching the cradle, instead of unwrapping the 'baby', see only the horns on its head. They flee, believing the Devil has substituted a changeling. McLellan subverts the original's pious theme, where the sheep's discovery in a cradle and the thief's punishment precedes the shepherds' attending the new-born Christ. Showing an anarchic streak and defying the moralizing plot of the original, McLellan's play ends with Archie's wife, Kate, on being reassured the shepherds who have comically searched the cottage are 'awa, lass', says—almost sacrilegiously—'Oh thank the Lord' (p. 382). Again, McLellan's early approach to period drama uses it for light entertainment, though here sardonically.

McLellan's vision of sixteenth-century Borders life led to a full-length play, *Toom Byres* (1936). McLellan revisits the world of feuding first imagined for *Jeddart Justice*. Again he explores tribulations of courtship where, in a cattle-raiding culture, families are at one another's throats over murders in previous generations. Here, Walter Scott of Hangingshaw seeks the hand in marriage of Peggy Ker whose father, Sir Andrew, will have none of him, although Peggy is not averse to him as a suitor. Walter—'Wat'—was rebuffed when he came courting peacefully. He asserts, 'I cam here to seek ye in silly velvet claes. Yer faither cocked a pistol at my heid. It isnae my faut that I caa this time in reiver's gear' (p. 35). When Wat says this at the end of Act One, it emerges that he and his men have emptied—'toomed'—Ker's byres of cattle so that Ker has gone off in pursuit, allowing Wat and a small group of men to enter his castle clandestinely. The act concludes with Wat abducting Peggy and his man abducting her maid (p. 35). The rest of the play explores attempts to resolve this situation in which Peggy seeks her own agency: 'Shairly, as faur as I'm concerned, I hae some say mysell?' (p. 38) she says to Wat's sisters when held in his house. She is faced, however, by a general acceptance of a more chauvinist attitude to 'wooing' when Wat's sister Mary replies in exculpation of Wat's actions, 'Ay, but yer faither wadnae let him near ye'. Wat's other sister Elspeth then also endorses his actions when she says 'Sae ye see, there was naething else for it [but to abduct you]'. Peggy responds indignantly; 'Naething else for it! Hoo wad ye like yersell to be liftit wi a drove o kye?' The two sisters respond:

Elspeth: I wish there was the chance.
Mary: There arenae mony lads wad hae the spunk to lift a lass like that.

The sisters see no problem in Wat's behaviour and after the peace-making intervention of Sir Robert Scott, keeper of the valley in which the families live, and much friction between Ker and Scott as senior members of their families, an agreement is reached. Wat is to return the stolen cattle and hand over his own herd in a marriage settlement whereby his two brothers also marry Peggy's sisters and peace between the two families is achieved. The play finishes as Wat and Peggy hammer out their courtship's emotional costs and, for Wat, its economic cost. Where in *Jeddart Justice* McLellan presented the potential for women's agency in the form of Meg's threat to be a lifelong torment, here he develops marginally less stereotyped characterization and moves to a conception of male-female relationships as potentially more balanced. Nonetheless, the play ends with Wat kissing an upset Peggy 'almost roughly' (p. 58).

In these early plays McLellan presents history in a mythicized Borders landscape where violence and male chauvinism are sanitized by a jovial dramaturgical tone and vivid use of Scots. The process can only be described as escapist and, to an extent, fantasist. His next play *Jamie the Saxt* (1937), however, works with more specifically researched material—a point made clear by Ian Campbell and Ronald Jack, the editors of the 1970 edition of the play, who are specific about his sources[16]—and approaches greater psychological realism. The play deals with court intrigue and state politics between February 1591 and August 1594, during James VI's reign. What McLellan gains through working with the detailed historical material rather than historic folk or ballad material is specificity of character and action. This provides a basis on which to build his plot, but also a framework against which to explore his characterization. McLellan's king is bedevilled as was the actual James VI in the chosen period by issues of power and control of the state machinery, by obsession with witchcraft and by the desire to ensure that relations with England did not upset his long-term aim of the English succession. McLellan achieves humour and a sense of everyday humanity by avoiding grandiose language and showing his socially elevated characters as motivated by simple desires, like power, money, or both. His characters' humanization is sometimes achieved, apparently simply, by dramatizing the proverb that no man is a hero to his valet.

Act Two begins, for example, with the king in his chamber and nightshirt and very soon, his privacy invaded by rebellious lords led by Bothwell, the stage direction reads 'The King rushes in from his dressing-closet, naked, but carrying his shirt. As he comes round the foot of the bed he sees Bothwell. He halts, hastily wrapping his shirt round his loins' (pp. 70–1). Towards the end of the same act James confronts his rebellious lords: when he is asked to accept Bothwell and his co-conspirators as 'guid and lawfou subjects' (p. 79), he replies, 'Lawfou subjects! God, it's lauchable', and when then other lords protest about Bothwell's crimes and his subversive plots, the dialogue continues:

Bothwell: Gin ye'll juist listen, my lords and gentlemen.
The King: Ay ay, leave me oot I dinna coont!
Bothwell: Oh haud yer tongue! […]. (p. 80)

As Donald Campbell says of a similar response by James, 'Is it really possible King James Sixth spoke like that?'[17] Yet, the play's comic, even sardonic, tone is sustained by the constant sense McLellan generates that James is human, but lacks regal dignity, always being treated with

disrespect by members of his court. McLellan also uses physical comedy to undermine the nobility and gentry's claims to dignified authority. In the middle of Act Three, when Bothwell is again seeking to manage James and maintain his power, he once more intrudes on James's privacy. The king calls for his allies and Ochiltree protests on entering:

Ochiltree: Wha's been fechtin? There's a deid man oot there! I tummlet ower him!

The King: It's that deil Colville lyin drunk! […] Ye'll hae to keep yer freinds in better order, Bothwell!

Bothwell: I'm no my brither's keeper. (p. 88)

Some of the knockabout humour found in the earlier Border reivers' plays is transferred now to one concerned with high policy of state. Here, however, rather than the knockabout being enjoyed for its own sake, while it remains funny in performance, it serves advisedly to undermine and satirize the behaviour of key power brokers. As the play progresses, the figure of Maitland, the Lord Chancellor, the manipulator of power, gains more and more status and authority, as the plotters lose theirs. Meanwhile, by the play's end, James has defeated his opponents by cunning and skilful backstairs politicking. The king and Maitland toast the prospect of Elizabeth I's death and James's accession.

Jamie the Saxt represents something of a breakthrough, but also a break, in McLean's playwriting. He still employs the reductive humour of his earlier plays on historical topics, but now addresses, rather than traditional folk or ballad material, an important phase in Scottish history. He individualizes his historical figures and so subverts any approach to 'great men' versions of historical writing or dramaturgy. Indeed, his James is perhaps over-deflated. James, after all, was a substantial scholar, however odd we now might find his views on witchcraft or divine rights, a statesman who occupies a key place in the history and political configuration of the British Isles and an important patron of the arts. His views on poetry and support for poets and playwrights, including Shakespeare, have been highly significant culturally both north and south of the Border. Nonetheless, in however overstated a way, McLellan embodies in his playwriting a conception of historical figures that, in a post-Shavian way, treats them as comparable in motivation, character, and morality to modern humankind. The effect in this, arguably one of the most successful of his plays in terms of production and public regard, is that he presents a clear version of history, humanizing, if caricaturing, major historical players often seen as lay figures. McLellan's

play marked the beginning of his work reaching a wider audience, not least through the playing of Duncan Macrae as Jamie. Stewart Conn has, however, reservations about McLellan's dialogue in *Jamie the Saxt*:

> too much of the language is, in fact, sentimental cliché. It reduces the struggle between James VI and his cousin, the Earl of Bothwell, to a level of mawkish comedy which precludes any serious analysis of the politics and the threats and the danger of the time.[18]

Nonetheless, the Scottish history play in Scots language in McLellan's treatment became again popular and he established his version of 'real' history, a history which took place a comfortingly long time ago, had clear gender and social structures and relationships and protected the audience from contemporary worries. He represents powerful figures as subject to the same foibles and behaviour as common humanity, as being 'aw Jock Tamson's bairns' and that may partially account for the play's particular impact.

The dramaturgical difficulties resulting from McLellan's achievement, when he was still only thirty, in *Jamie the Saxt* were twofold. On one hand, he seems to have found it hard immediately to maintain the level of dramaturgical accomplishment this play embodies. On another, it was possible, on the model of his work up to and including it, to write historical drama in a somewhat formulaic way. In fact, it was three years before he again wrote a history play, after he had married and moved to live in Arran in 1938. *The Smuggler* (1940) was a return to the one-act form, first performed by the local Whiting Bay Drama Club. The play is full of references to Arran locations like Shiskine ('Shisken' whisky is smuggled from Invercloy near Brodick), for example, or burial on the Holy Isle. The plot involves the fate of Jamie Hamilton who has been caught with others smuggling Arran whisky to the mainland. His father having been already killed in similar activity, his mother, Elspeth, had forbidden him to become involved. When the play begins, she believes him to have gone fishing and is out when he arrives home seriously wounded. His sister, Janet, hides him. There then follows some folksy business about a sick cow (which remains offstage) and wise woman magic. The revenue cutter's mate, who killed Jamie's father and has wounded him, arrives with the local doctor and, after some obstruction by his family, Jamie is found and brought out on a litter. The doctor pronounces him dead from his wounds and Elspeth breaks down. Once the revenue men have left, we discover

Jamie is actually alive, the doctor turning out to be part of the smuggling community. A fake burial is arranged for Jamie, who will recover in a day or two, then emigrate to Canada.

This play, like McLellan's earlier ones, evades some troubling material. While they, written during the industrial depression, romanticized and fantasized Borders warfare, this play, written in wartime, sensationalizes historic smuggling events and yet in a melodramatic turn 'saves' the victim of the authorities from death (or at best transportation). By a trick, what was tragedy becomes comfortable. Although the play is set at a time when 'improvement' or Clearances were going on in Arran, it mentions the driving of people, 'cottars', from their small farms only in passing: the doctor says as he rushes off, having established the plan to save Jamie, 'Blairbeg's to be cleared o hauf its cottars at the tairm. It's to made into twa-three dacent-sized ferms' (p. 391). McLellan, even writing for a local community, avoids a historic local issue like Clearances, going instead for overdramatic and superficial action. This is consolatory history drama.

Although McLellan completed his next play, *Torwatletie*, in 1940, it was premiered only after the war in which he served with the Royal Artillery. Set in the aftermath of the 1715 Jacobite Rising, it features a hidden tunnel, smuggling (again), stern Calvinism imposed on more liberal Episcopalians, the concealment and final escape of a Jacobite fugitive, and more of McLellan's representation of marriage as less than always a meeting of equal minds. In this case, the Jacobite-sympathizing Laird of Torwatletie provides a substantial dowry for his prim sister Mirren to marry the dogmatic Reverend Joshua MacDowell who has been quartered on him as a spy and enforcer of established religion. This full-length play, some of whose scenes include much farcical popping in and out of the secret tunnel by various characters, offers a compassionate argument for the rejection of narrow-minded moralism. Its sanitized and ultimately sentimental version of history, however, draws comparison with *Toom Byres*. Alastair Cording argues that

> *Torwatletie* suffers from the same anti-climactic weakness in that the marriage-solution is known to all some time before the last Act finishes, though there is a greater display of skill in handling the convolutions of the plot. The stock-figures employed are less obvious, and permit a good measure of satirical caricature. It is an unpretentious but lively comedy.[19]

Nonetheless, the fact that *Torwatletie* was produced by the radical Glasgow Unity company marks the extent to which by the time it was produced

McLellan's work might be seen as subverting established conservative values, in however nostalgic a way, and celebrating and promoting the use of Scots on stage. In 1947 when Scottish plays were excluded from the first Edinburgh Festival programme, Unity presented the play alongside Gorky's *The Lower Depths*, helping to establish the Edinburgh Fringe.

In the meantime, in 1946 McLellan completed the last of his one-act historical plays for the stage, *The Cailleach*. Set on Arran during the Cromwellian occupation of Scotland, it again involves cattle theft, this time by English soldiers, witchcraft, and fraught relations between the sexes. The daughter of the household, Janet Kerr, is revealed to have been having an affair with an English sergeant who we learn is actually married. He is killed as he waits for her, having apparently been cursed by a local witch. The witch generates dramatic tension by announcing that a child in the house has lost its father. It appears no father of a child known to be in the house has been killed, but at the very end we recognize, before her parents do, that Janet is pregnant by her affair. The plot is well constructed, but the play as whole appears to fit a McLellan formula. Written after *Torwatletie*, it represents the last of McLellan's stage plays inhabiting a broad-brush version of early modern rural Scotland, set in romanticized and swashbuckling versions of Scottish history and a somewhat fantasized universe of cattle-raiding or smuggling, sanitized by stereotyped or sentimental characterization and overly tidy dramatic resolutions. It marks the point in his writing when this early formula loses its force for him.

In the year of its performance, he produced the experimental, fantastic *Carlin Moth*, a poetic piece initially performed on radio about a Moth which can, according to context, magically become a beautiful or ugly woman. The Moth enchants a 'Lad' and destroys his chance of love with his neighbouring 'Lass'. The play, set in a fishing and farming community, takes place in an indeterminate historical period. Here, McLellan is clearly beginning to explore a different style of playwriting, while maintaining his rich use of Scots. Although he does later, in *Sweet Largie Bay* (1956), return to the poetic form for a radio play, this is not a strand he develops theatrically. His next historical play, however, opens a new phase in his writing, which, even when dealing with fictional characters, is rooted in specific historical contexts in the way only *Jamie the Saxt* earlier achieved, using them to dramatize important contemporary concerns.

The Flouers o Edinburgh (1948), rejected by Bridie's Citizens' Theatre, was premiered by Unity. Here, while McLellan's characters are fictional, unlike the main characters in *Jamie the Saxt*, as in *Jamie* McLellan creates

an atmosphere based on a researched understanding of the ambience in which his characters live, in this case Enlightenment Edinburgh. McLellan, for example, refers to historical institutions like the Select Society and key figures like Principal [William] Robertson, David Hume, and the law lords Monboddo and Kames (p. 147). His fictional minister-poet Dr Dowie, author of 'The Tomb', surely echoes the real-life minister Robert Blair (1699–1746), author of 'The Grave', a blank verse meditation on death, which inspired the eighteenth-century graveyard poetic school and fed the Gothic craze. In other words, this play presents a society far more clearly bedded into a specific period and milieu than those of most of McLellan's earlier works. In fact, Act One's action is dated to 1762, the text referring to Allan Ramsay's having died four years before. McLellan has chosen to develop his concerns with Scottish culture by setting the play in a period just over half a century after the Union, sixteen years after Culloden and in the midst of the intellectual ferment of Enlightenment thinking. In Edinburgh then, key questions arose as to the role of language, English or Scots, as figures like Hume, who spoke Scots, sought to suppress 'scotticisms' in their writing. As Conn says, what

> is particularly interesting [about *The Flouers o Edinburgh*] is not only the use of Scots—at which McLellan himself was adept—but what it chose as its theme. […] it's the variety of the characters that makes the play work: one aspect of this is that Scots is used correctly in the social scale, by way of contrast to the English-aping speech of the two characters that return from England.[20]

Meanwhile, McLellan has his senior judge, Lord Stanebyres, refer to the way the House of Lords in London, where his colleagues' language is ridiculed, has arrogated powers to itself it should not, to his mind, have, by becoming in effect a supreme court. As Stanebyres puts it, 'it riles me to think that oor decisions on maitters o Scots Law suld be turned heid ower heels by a foreign body like the English Hoose o Lords. […] There was nae proveesion made for ony sic procedure in the Treaty o Union' (p. 144). At the same time, a process of assimilation of those who had come out for the Jacobites was under way in attempts to re-establish social and political harmony. Often one of the means of such harmonization was through processes of colonialism as young Scots were offered places in the East India Company, America, or the Caribbean.[21] McLellan has a field day working with themes that were live for his contemporaries: issues of language, the nature of Scottishness and, especially after the foundation of

the Scottish National Party in 1934 and the end of the British Raj in 1947, the place of Scotland in the British polity and the about-to-disintegrate British Empire.

One of the means by which McLellan represents this bubbling up of eighteenth-century change and cultural and linguistic conflict, all with contemporary parallels with the time the play was written, is through intergenerational conflict. Lady Athelstane and the judge Lord Stanebyres represent an older generation to whom Scots is the language they have always used, capable of any demands made on its linguistic expressiveness. While Lady Athelstane's niece Kate Muir maintains her Scots, Stanebyres's son, Charles Gilchrist, has been south, completed the education of a young British man and despises the use of the Scots language. Meanwhile, McLellan satirically presents anxiety as to what language to write in and how. As the last chapter noted, Derrick McClure observes, '[in the eighteenth century] English was considered a more polite language than Scots'.[22] McLellan makes fun of the pressure individuals place on themselves and the affectations they indulge in seeking to be fashionable. Certainly, the fictional Dowie's disregard of the real, but recently deceased, Ramsay, who wrote in Scots, marks a dismissive attitude current in the play's period. McLellan also presents two returners to Scotland. One, Thomas Auchterleckie, is a nabob, a Scot who has made his fortune in India exploiting, as many did, the opportunities for wealth generation through the imperialist East India Company. On his return, he buys a parliamentary seat through his skill in corruption and bribery, outfoxing Charles who wanted that same seat. The nabob is quite clear that his role is to represent East India Company interests in Parliament. The other returner is Lady Athelstane's brother, exiled after the Jacobite Rising, but having seen service as a mercenary General aboard. Now, as international diplomatic battle-lines shift—a Count with a German title resulting from service for a German prince alongside the British Army in Europe—he has been pardoned. Lady Athelstane expected a paragon to return, a hero who fought for her vision of Jacobite Scotland. Instead, when he returns from his war, although he does save the family estate which was confiscated and about to be corruptly sold, she finds a boorish martinet, not the noble-hearted brother she imagined.

The Flouers o Edinburgh is in many ways one of—if not arguably the—most successful of McLellan's plays. This is in part because he achieves a far more precise, more nuanced ambience in which cultural and political values are complex and often compromized. He brings off similar moral and

political complexity in *Jamie the Saxt*, but often in more stiffly represented and caricatured versions of the 'real' than is more sensitively and fluidly achieved in *The Flouers*. Both plays benefit from the detail of the societies he represents and the sense the audience has that it can be confident that here is a version that—like it or not—is based on careful research and thoughtful realization of a possible version of reality. This is in contrast to other earlier McLellan historical plays where the desire to be rumbustious and entertaining is conveyed by sweeping generalization of character and event, without any sense of grounding in a genuine ambience. Compared with *Jamie* and *The Flouers*, although *Torwatletie* deals with matters after the 1715 Rising that might allow exploration of serious themes, it is lost in pursuit of theatrical japery that seems more influenced by Feydeau than substantial concerns. McLellan in *The Flouers* explores, by contrast, complex issues of legality, loyalty to family, and linguistic conflict: cultural and political change is complex, not easily summarized neatly. His young couple, Kate and Charlie fight over the future of Scots. Kate will only accept him if he proposes in Scots, something he abhors, but is obliged in the end to do. Their linguistic conflict is, nonetheless, unresolved.

McLellan's next three historical plays follow very much the pattern of *Jamie the Saxt* in that they are based on the lives of historical figures at key moments in their careers. *Mary Stewart* (1951) covers that part of Mary, Queen of Scots' life between the deaths of Rizzio and then of Darnley, her involvement with Bothwell, and finally her imprisonment in Lochleven Castle. This action all takes place within a period of just over a year, from March 1566 to June 1567. The action's complications rather overwhelm even McLellan's dramaturgical facility. As Alastair Cording puts it,

> The labyrinthine complexity of the period's politics is marshalled with impressive dexterity and confidence, avoiding the more obvious clichés of romantic legend, but as living creations, Mary, Bothwell and the other characters in the play lack depth and complexity, their personalities defined only by their political function.[23]

Cording's judgement is fair: the characters lack the liveliness of those in *Jamie the Saxt*; the play develops into a pageant where political details and plot are carefully outlined, but a sense of any broader context is lacking. The truth is that, in his attempt to do historical justice to Mary, McLellan resorts to clichés, including that of Mary as the weak woman surrounded by the court's brutalities. Presented as part of the 1951 Festival of Britain

by the Citizens' Theatre, the play strikes the modern reader as a laboured attempt to run conscientiously through a series of key events in the downfall of Mary, presented as besieged by rough, tough-speaking Scottish lords and a fickle populace. Mary, constantly seen as betrayed after misplacing her trust, is rarely, if ever, presented as a woman who might have had agency or power herself. The depth of characterization McLellan manages in *The Flouers o Edinburgh* seems to have left him in drafting this piece, perhaps under the strain of what Cording praises, the dextrous marshalling of the 'labyrinthine complexity of the period's politics'. Cording goes on to comment on the play's general lack of dramatic action. There is, of course, the *coup de théâtre* of the offstage exploding of the house of Kirk o Fields, but, as Cording observes,

> These few effects only emphasise the lack of theatrical vitality in the play as a whole. There is altogether too much talk in M*ary Stewart*, too much emphasis on clarifying political motives and plots. Only once does the insistent delving into factual confusion truly have value: in the account of the conflicting intrigues afoot at Kirk o Fields McLellan provides the motive for Mary's continued trust in the suspect Bothwell.[24]

Mary Stewart of all of McLellan's history plays is the one that closest approaches being a historical pageant. As we shall see, some of his contemporaries come closer.

Eight years pass until McLellan returns to a historical topic and he does so again in a biographical mode. *Rab Mossgiel* (1959), written for radio, concerns the love life and conflicts of loyalty felt by Robert Burns between 1785 and 1788. We find the poet flirting and seducing his way between his common law wife, Jean Armour, Betty Paton, the mother of his first child, his potential partner Mary Campbell, 'Highland Mary', and a bourgeois woman neglected by her husband, Agnes Maclehose (Clarinda), whom he never appears to have managed to seduce. McLellan's Burns is emotionally fickle and unreliable. He avoids the cliché of the artist who must be forgiven because he is an artist; rather he shows a man moved by the emotion of the moment while dealing with the hostility of Jean's parents, the temptation to go to work on a Jamaican slave plantation, and the realities and difficulties of publication and sudden success. The play moves swiftly from scene to scene and concludes as we understand Burns to be composing 'Ae fond kiss', his farewell to Clarinda, for which Jean, to whom he has returned after Mary's death and his leaving Edinburgh,

provides the tune. The amoral ironies of Burns's life as McLellan sees them are presented unvarnished. Here McLellan has found a story whose labyrinthine emotional complexity he can communicate through a series of short scenes, each advancing the story of a slightly hapless Burns, at the mercy of events and his emotions, towards the conclusion of life with Jean. Burns can write, McLellan allows, but is no hero. While McLellan does not achieve deep characterization, he manages the structure and events of his play with greater facility than the laboured *Mary Stewart*, and without the overwhelming sense of tumult and sensational action of *Jamie the Saxt*.

After *Rab Mossgiel*, only two more new plays by McLellan were produced on the stage, *Young Auchinleck* (1962) and *The Hypocrite* (1967). The first follows his interest in writing biographical drama, focusing on James Boswell's travails as he copes, or fails to cope, with the outcome of his lustful irresponsibility while seeking a wife and disputing, in English, his way of life with his Scots-speaking father. In the end, after false steps with possible candidates for marriage and much falling into the arms of prostitutes, the play ends with Boswell's marriage to his cousin, Margaret 'Peggy' Montgomerie, a resolution in which we see her having accepted, in a relationship of mutual affection, his waywardness. The linguistic politics explored in *The Flouers o Edinburgh* is a theme running through this play, and forms part of the discord between father and son. McLellan creates comic business out of this conflict, sometimes directly and sometimes by proxy through Boswell's English-speaking servant Thomas, as when Lord Auchinleck takes tea:

Lord A: (*gruffly*) Thank ye.
Thomas: Thank *you*, my lord.
Lord A: (*interpreting this as a pointed criticism of his speech, and rising in such agitation that his cup rattles in his saucer*). Look here, lassies. Dae ye mind if I leave ye wi Jamie? (p. 300)

The social discomfort that arises from this difference over language is represented again later in the same scene:

Lizzie: Ay, thank the lord that man o yours is awa, Jamie. He maks us aa as stiff as stookies.
JB: I think he adds elegance to an occasion, but we can certainly be more intimate without him. (p. 300)

The social and emotional implications of language choice are developed further in this scene when Peggy, whom in the end he will marry, asks him

of a possible wife 'Could ye no mairry her, Jamie, if she didna speak in the new London mainner?' To which, Boswell responds, 'That would depend, of course. Is she beautiful?' (p. 301).

Young Auchinleck develops McLellan's interest in biography as a means of exploring issues of Scottish identity and language during the Enlightenment. It is difficult to argue, however, that in this play he does more to explore such issues than he already had in 1948 in *The Flouers o Edinburgh.* Nonetheless, in *Young Auchinleck* he achieves a deeper sense of individual characterization than he does in any of his earlier specifically biographical plays, even than *Jamie the Saxt*, seen by a critic of such distinction as Ian Campbell as 'without question [his] most successful work'.[25] While *Jamie the Saxt* certainly deals with larger issues of state, it falls, as already noted, into caricature, while *Young Auchinleck* deals with greater success with politico-cultural conflict in terms of the vagaries of intergenerational conflict and human emotion.

McLellan's last play *The Hypocrite* followed the storm in a teacup that accompanied the brief appearance in a 'Happening' of a naked woman during the 1963 Edinburgh Festival Writers' Conference at Edinburgh University's McEwan Hall. McLellan clearly felt, as did many others involved, that the press sensation and the censoriousness of some commentators in Edinburgh at the time masked prurience and hypocrisy. The hypocrite of the play's title, Reverend Skinner, seeks to censor art while hiding his own immoral behaviour. He opposes an exhibition of Old Masters presented, with the support of an Edinburgh lawyer, Simon Adair, by a visiting Italian, Giorgio Barocci, in which, to the Calvinist Skinner's horror, nudes are depicted. As the plot, based on events in the summer of 1735, unfolds, Skinner's campaign closes the exhibition in Edinburgh and prevents its planned openings on tour in Perth and Dundee. Meanwhile, we discover Skinner is a Tartuffe, attempting to seduce young women under his spiritual care, and having an affair with Lady Kilgallon whose husband is an invalid and whose daughter is married to his son. When this affair is on the brink of being exposed by a divorce suit, so ruining Skinner, the invalid husband dies. Skinner remains in command of his church and the moral behaviour of his community. The play ends as he prepares to try to prevent Allan Ramsay from opening his theatre in Carrubber's Close.

The trajectory of McLellan's historical playwriting follows, in broad terms, two arcs. The first runs from *Jeddart Justice* (1933) to *The Cailleach* (1946); the second runs from *The Flouers o Edinburgh* (1948) to *The Hypocrite* (1967), with a forerunner, *Jamie the Saxt* (1937). The first arc,

including four one-act plays and only two full-length, is centred on the Borders or Arran, mainly in the sixteenth century. It depends on sentimentalized versions of warfare, rebellion, and criminality, in which the focus is, with the exception of *The Cailleach*, on comedy, often knockabout, and conventional battles of the sexes. It presents a 'Scotland' swashbuckling, good-hearted but lawless, and entirely rural. The second arc contains six plays, all full-length, and is based, including *The Flouers o Edinburgh* with its fictional characters, on thoughtful historical research. In these, McLellan explores issues of politics, national or domestic, and character. *Jamie the Saxt* and *Mary Stewart*, with varying dramatic success, present a revisionary view of two important late-Stewart sovereigns, the latter, as Donati argues, doing so too informatively. *Rab Mossgiel* and *Young Auchinleck*, though presenting eighteenth-century literary heroes rather than royalty, have similarly revisionary aims as they set out to question the morality and underline the flawed humanity of their leading characters. *The Flouers o Edinburgh* and *The Hypocrite* also deal with the century of the Enlightenment, but both more clearly than other McLellan plays relate to contemporary issues. The first is concerned very much with Scottish political, linguistic, and cultural issues that concerned the Scottish Literary Renaissance, also addressed in *Young Auchinleck*, while *The Hypocrite* concerns oppressive Calvinist attitudes and their potential for hypocrisy, still current in the 1960s.

One might argue that McLellan's more serious work, foreshadowed in the 1930s by *Jamie the Saxt*, emerges after the Second World War and was marked by full-length plays and a sharper eye than earlier for human foibles that were earlier excused by jolly tushery. One can consider McLellan's fulfilment in his historical drama of the aims set out by MacDiarmid for his renaissance: 'escape from the provincializing of Scottish Literature […] to carry on the independent Scottish literary tradition from the time that Burns died […] to carry forward the reintegration of the Scots language […] and at the same time to carry forward the tradition politically'.[26] McLellan does not even really try to meet the first. He is clearly carrying forward the Scottish dramatic tradition in his dramaturgical experiments. He addresses contemporary political issues in his later plays through Stewart/Stuart or Enlightenment settings. Above all, he carries forward the reintegration of the use of Scots into theatrical practice.

The previous chapter concluded by suggesting that language is a key means by which community may be imagined. It proposed that 'playwrights' choice of language is often fundamental to their imagination and

to the kinds of communities, versions of Scotlands, the nature and forms of the "Scottish nation" they imagine'. Time and again, McLellan's importance is expressed in terms of his reclamation of Scots in a fluid and lively manner. McLellan himself observed, in a statement that echoes that of Reid's about the role of Scots in Scottish culture, 'When he speaks English, the Scot loses contact with the national elements of his unconscious.'[27] One does not need to go down such an essentialist road to recognize the importance of the use of Scots for McLellan and his contemporaries and successors. As Craig and Stevenson put it, discussing *Jamie the Saxt*, an interest in Scots language on stage 'encouraged further concentration […] on periods of history before English became the dominant language in Scottish life and affairs'.[28] While Craig and Stevenson highlight one of the reasons for use of Scots in historical drama, Roderick Watson, both scholar and poet, suggests additional reasons for its use by McLellan:

> McLellan's Scots is vividly concrete in its idioms, colloquial, versatile and unstrained—the perfect vehicle for a comedy of character and deflation. Such free and vernacular skill is more than a passing delight in McLellan's plays, for it encapsulates a literary tradition and a habit of mind which in themselves make an indirect critique of affairs of state and fallible human beings, however lordly their dress.[29]

George Gunn, a poet as well as a playwright, reinforces the aesthetic attraction of McLellan's use of language:

> McLellan's language bubbles, flows and blethers like the Arran burns he loved so much. Rarely has the Scots tongue had such a blending of humour and seriousness, light and humanity. Whether for stage or page, it dances, engages, enriches.[30]

McLellan's use of language, then, sets in the minds of these critics and fellow-writers a benchmark of utility and aesthetic impact for the use of Scots, so fulfilling one of the key aims MacDiarmid set for the Scottish Literary Renaissance.

Alexander Reid and Magical Realism

If McLellan's observation, just cited, that 'When he speaks English, the Scot loses contact with the national elements of his unconscious'[31] may be seen to assume an essentialist version of the Scots language and Scottishness,

certainly the contention of Alexander Reid (1914–82) that 'The return to Scots is a return to meaning and sincerity'[32] embodies an essentialist view of language and nationality. Given this, it is striking that, when he came to publish *The Lass wi' the Muckle Mou'* (1950) and *The World's Wonder* (1953) as *Two Scots Plays* in 1958, he did so in anglicized versions. As he says in his 'Foreword', the two plays were 'originally written in Braid Scots with the aim of their performance in the first instance by the bi-lingual players of the Glasgow Citizens Theatre' and were translated for publication, somewhat belatedly, on Ivor Brown's suggestion. He, on reviewing the plays' Citizens' productions, had said that, if put into 'near English', they would find an audience elsewhere. Reid followed this suggestion for his script and claimed in his 'Foreword' that *The Lass wi' the Muckle Mou'* was about to 'reach its fourth continent'.[33] At this distance in time and economic context from 1950s Scottish theatre scene, it is hard to be censorious about Reid's decision. Certainly, when it came in 1932 to publishing *Bunty Pulls the Strings*, whose West End and Broadway performances in 1911 were in Scots, Graham Moffat made a similar decision largely to anglicize his text.[34] Reid in this practice, however, diverged from that of McLellan and other contemporaries like Sydney Goodsir Smith who wrote in Scots.

Reid's three-act *The Lass wi' the Muckle Mou'* follows, by and large, the plot line of McLellan's one-act *Jeddart Justice* though with differently named minor characters and without the jealous younger sister. Reid frames his play with scenes between Thomas the Rhymer and 'The Lady in Green', the queen of Elfland, in a direct reference to the ballad figure of Thomas the Rhymer. The play opens as the Lady returns Thomas to the Borders near Elibank Castle after seven years in Elfland with her. Thomas is required to tell the truth always, at least in any matter affecting his writing of poetry, and proceeds to observe the capture of Willie Scott after he has been reiving from Sir Gideon Murray and the bargaining for Willie's life when he is offered the chance to escape the gallows if he marries Meg Murray, the lass with a supposedly disfiguringly large mouth. As before, Willie resists the idea of marrying what he considers an ugly woman, even if he is offered a dowry as well as his life. In the end he concedes, having wrought a hard bargain for land and livestock. Like McLellan, Reid develops his theme through comedy and, given his play is full-length, he has more space in which to do so.

He provides, for example, a second scene in Act Two in which Willie is visited in his cell in turn by Meg, Thomas the Rhymer, Sir Gideon and his wife Lady Grizel. All take different stances to persuading Willie to marry Meg, Thomas in fact not wishing him to do so at all, because a

tragic death by hanging will enhance the impact of Thomas's poem. The scene demands improbable diving into a pile of straw as new arrivals cause the previous one to hide, until Grizel's arrival breaks the sequence of attempts at Feydeauesque farcical avoidance of discovery. In the end, as in McLellan's play, Willie agrees to marry Meg, who in this case is more open to the idea of marrying him, while he finds she is more attractive than her reputation. Indeed, Reid's treatment of women is less harsh than the young McLellan's. We see diffidence in his Meg, who has been effectively abused by the slander, spread by Thomas the Rhymer's verse before his departure to Elfland, that her large mouth makes her ugly, rather than the presentation of McLellan's misogynistic representation of his 'very plain' Meg as a harridan. The play ends as Thomas returns to Elfland with the Lady who tells him as the play ends this was never 'A world for a poet …' (p. 96).

Although the historical Thomas the Rhymer was a thirteenth-century figure, Reid's play places him in the sixteenth century and Reid emphasizes the fantastic element of his version of the story with his subtitle, *or, Once Upon a Rhyme*. Like McLellan he presents Border warfare as largely a matter of jolly japes, now sadly, for Sir Gideon, restricted by the arrival of law and order. Sir Gideon complains 'The good days are done, Thomas. […] Everything's that centred now with the king in Edinburgh that a man can't hang one of his own tenants on his own gallows without some birkie from the court poking his nose in and asking awkward questions!' (p. 32). Sir Gideon's attendants join him in nostalgia for the old days: 'Do you mind how I jouked under the pike and whacked him over the head with the broken spear-shaft? Man! Yon were the days' (p. 34). Later Lady Grizel supports the idea of 'manly' raiding, saying of Willie's raid on her husband's herd of cattle: '[…] You wouldn't hold that against Willie? This would be but a desert airt of the border if every man here that's lifted a stirk had to face the gallows!' (pp. 52–3). Reid's fantastic approach to the sanitized swashbuckling of the Border lawlessness echoes and extends that of McLellan. While, however, McLellan moves beyond such fantasizing about Scottish history in what I have described as the second arc of his work, Reid remains fixed in his version of the early modern period, without moving to address the more serious political themes McLellan does in his later work.

Reid's other major play within this mode is *The World's Wonder* (1953). Called by Reid a 'Phantasy', set in the fictional town of Dubbity (perhaps a play on 'Dubiety') and written mostly in verse, the play explores Reid's take on the world of Michael Scot. Reid shows no interest in the historical Michael Scot (1175–*c.*1232), a wandering scholar who was highly

regarded in his time and a leading translator of many of the works of Aristotle from the Arabic, preserving them for later European generations. Reid rather focuses on the reputation of Scot as some kind of necromancer, a role in which Dante casts him in the Eighth Circle of Hell in the *Inferno*, the place for astrologers and false prophets. Reid's play introduces his 'Scott' into a small burgh in which the Provost is trying to marry off his daughter Jeanie to an unpleasant local laird in order, as it emerges, to help him cover up his depredation of the public purse. The play is largely in blank verse and involves in the first act's second scene a magical conflict between Scott and 'The False Scott' in which Michael establishes himself as a true wizard. The play demands a large number of theatrical tricks in which, for example, statues come to life and concludes with Scott helping Jeanie escape with her true love, Jock. This last scene takes place in *'The deeps of the sky'* and opens as we see them *'Sailing among the stars is an old sailing boat with a patched lugsail. From the top of the mast flies a pennant with the skull and cross-bones'* (p. 87). Reid's young people escape the corrupt world through the magic of Scott, who says, 'Aye it's a real dream this. We're dreaming true' (p. 87). In his final exchanges, Scott exclaims:

> Farewell the world! Farewell. Mind Michael Scott!
> Cherish all wonder; teach the bairns to dream
> There's no such riches as imagination.
> […]
> I've set a course beyond the last known star.
> If we win through we'll burst the bands of space
> And beach the morn upon Infinity!
> […]
> [*The boat, sailing faster and faster passes out of the light and it lost in the deeps of the sky, while the useless charts flutter and plunge among the stars*]

In both these plays, Reid, while following McLellan's lively use of Scots language in his original staged versions, seems weighed down in the conventions of the first arc of McLellan's work: fey settings and conventional political assumptions, particularly with regard to gender relations. Reid is in no way using historical material to address contemporary issues. Randall Stevenson describes Reid's plays as having 'the sort of benign, distant, half-magical setting beloved of Kailyard writers [whose] result is a slight, often sentimental quality'.[35] Yet, given the magical plot devices of *The World's Wonder*, a case can be made for its poeticism being in some sense a prototype of magical realism, though both Reid's plays can also be seen as simple escapism.

R. S. Silver, Alexander Scott, and Contrasting Poetics

One playwright who set out to use poetry to dramatize Scottish history was R. S. Silver (1913–1997). In his introduction to *The Bruce* (1951), Silver asserts his play's contemporary significance in the aftermath of 'the German occupation of several countries in Europe' and the 'the subsequent launching of the United Nations [which] showed that the concept of national freedom was likely to be fundamental in the post-war world'.[36] In this context, Silver represents the English opposing Bruce as equivalent to Nazi expansionism: his Bishop Wishart even says of them,

> It's like as if a deil posses their souls,
> An evil blins them utterly. The Saracens
> Beset aa Christendom the noo. An yet
> I think as muckle danger threatens her
> Fae England's huge ambitions. (p. 53)

Silver's position is not just of assertion of Scottish national identity but of opposition to imperialism: as Bruce expresses it, 'Only through years o struggle hae there come / Tae us some sense o what we mean […] / O common culture, hame an couthiness. / Tae that an aa we ken it means sae dear / This raxin o an empire's greed is daith' (p. 55). Silver's play is quite expressly nationalistic in an Anglophobic way that now appears not only dated, but overwrought: his Bruce claims 'The warld suld sheen in colours bricht an braw / A rich prood tartan. They wad hae it aa / Ae single greyness spattered ower wi bluid' (p. 57). Silver engages with controversy in suggesting parallels between English behaviour in Bruce's time and wartime German behaviour. His partisanship cannot be doubted. This results in his characterization becoming caricature and his verse, as the quoted examples show, overstrained. His Bruce is hero-worshipped as in Randolph's prose elegy, 'We maun tak example fae himsel, as we aye hae dune. Think hoo he spak last nicht, wi lauchter i his een an pride i his voice' (p. 59). *The Bruce* strives for poetic—and one-sided—impact, but achieves leaden effect.

Alexander Scott's (1920–1989) one published play *Untrue Thomas* (1952)[37] offers a parallel and contrast with the first-arc plays of McLellan and those of Reid. Like both, he picks on a Borders context and, like McLellan, published in Scots. Better known as a poet, Scott explores in vivid poetic dialogue the nature of the artist's demands on his family.

'Untrue Thomas' is Thomas the Rhymer, but, while Reid takes that figure and makes incidental dramatic use of him in *The Lass*, Scott develops the conceit that Thomas may or may not have been to Elfland, but certainly abandoned his family for seven years. We are never clear as to whether this was because he was abducted or simply wandered off in pursuit of his personal vision. Now he has returned and, challenged by his wife about his behaviour, says, 'A makar's love's a fire that burns his freends / As quick's his faes' (p. 16). Scott shows the sense of abandonment felt by Thomas's wife, her sense of his betrayal of her and their child. Meanwhile, rather than the sanitized Borders world of McLellan and Reid, Scott's poet talks of a harsh world of suffering:

> It isna love that birls the warld aboot
> […]
> But wanhope, hate, disgust for my ain sel
> That echoes aa the horrors o the yirth,
> My hert a bedlam skirlan wud wi crimes
> The warld commits and I hae dallied wi […]. (pp. 11–12)

Scott achieves a poetic-dramatic fluency which neither Silver nor, later, Kemp and Goodsir Smith in their plays about to be discussed achieve. His Thomas leaves the family he has so neglected in his pursuit of poetic achievement and, to free them of his presence, appears to commit suicide in a peat bog, returning to the yirth. Scott has surely written a play that looks back to Romantic views of the artist's nature, but at least he uses his literary-historical source to address questions of profound meaning about love and hope and art.

Robert Kemp and James Bridie: The Pageant Versus the Domestic

Robert Kemp (1908–67), a year younger than McLellan and twelve years older than Scott, was remarkably prolific, producing according to the Doollee playwrights database, in the order of one hundred plays—some one-act, some full-length, some for the stage, some for other media—plus five novels, criticism and journalism. He adapted—and bowdlerized in the process—David Lindsay's *Ane Satyre of the Thrie Estaitis* in a famous version first presented at the 1948 Edinburgh Festival and, with Tom Fleming and Lennox Milne, was one of the three founders of the Gateway

Theatre Company, as a permanent Edinburgh-based repertory company in 1953. This, in effect, transmuted into the Royal Lyceum Theatre Company when it closed in 1965 to allow that company, with many of the Gateway's artistic personnel, to be launched. In other words, Kemp was a highly active man of theatre whose impact, not least in founding permanent repertory theatre in Edinburgh, is long-lasting. Much of his own output, often involving light comedy has, however, been forgotten, while arguably his most lasting legacy is his Molière translations, *Let Wives Tak Tent* (1948) and *The Laird o' Grippy* (1955), versions, respectively, of *The School for Wives* and *The Miser*. Much is rightly made of the fluency and theatrical vitality of the Scots Kemp employs in these translations. Bill Findlay and John Corbett suggest that he is happy to use Scots for these translations because, while he sets his versions in the eighteenth rather than Molière's original seventeenth century, nonetheless, this period setting allows his translations to draw 'on the reality of a time when Scots was spoken by the lower and higher classes; hence he can represent Scots as classless and as the natural speech of all the characters, from servant to master.'[38]

Given this, it is striking that, when Kemp comes to write original historical drama, he does so in English, except occasionally for the words of servants. His key plays with historical topics include *A Trump for Jericho* (1947), *The Saxon Saint* (1949), *The King of Scots* (1951), *The Other Dear Charmer* (1951), *Henrietta MD* (1952), and *Master John Knox* (1960). Of these, the first two and the last are on religious topics, the first and last specifically concerned with Church of Scotland issues. Kemp himself was a member of the Church of Scotland and closely allied to its structures. That Church was, for example, landlord of the Gateway Theatre. Talking of *Master John Knox*, Kemp notes that 'The play was written at the request of the Special Committee appointed by the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland to mark the Fourth Centenary of the Reformation. […] I could not write except as a child of the Reformation.'[39]

Kemp's representation of history is often concerned with major moments of church history or issues of moral choice which have a larger social or cultural impact. Where McLellan is concerned in his first arc of plays with exploring a largely romanticized and jollied version of early modern periods and in his second with issues of Scottish politico-cultural identity under pressure from anglicization and socio-political corruption, Kemp rarely addresses such questions. *A Trump for Jericho*, for example, set at the time of the 1843 Disruption of the Church of Scotland on the

issue of the freedom of parishioners to appoint their own minister without interference by local landlords, is subtitled *A Comedy of Intransigence in Three Acts*. Rather than being set in a country parish where such an issue would be a lively matter of local politics, it is a social comedy set in Edinburgh's New Town. Kemp presents two contrasting sisters, Mrs Sawyers and Miss Groundwater, around whose social and religious differences some fun is derived, not least when at one point they divide their drawing room down the middle and refuse to communicate with one another. The play includes a love plot involving two young people and the return of a down-to-earth long-lost cousin who has made a fortune distilling rum in Jamaica. In other words, Kemp domesticates and to an extent trivializes a play concerned with circumstances surrounding the greatest schism in the history of the Presbyterian Church.

This tendency to domesticate history, almost to make it cosy, even when working on a large scale, can be seen in *The Saxon Saint*. This was performed in Dunfermline Abbey and concerns the life of Queen Margaret from her arrival in Scotland following the Norman Conquest of England, through her marriage to King Malcolm and Romanization of the Celtic church and its practices, to her death. Here, Kemp creates not a comedy in an Edinburgh drawing room, but a pageant of Margaret's life designed to make use of the space of the Abbey she founded in the early 1070s and whose present nave was caused to be built by her son David I. The play suffers from the formality with which it communicates information. Malcolm, for example, explains the politico-diplomatic context in which he operates early on:

> The Norsemen are settled in the islands to the west and north of my country, and on the mainland itself. The Danes are on my east. The Northumbrian English threaten my southern flank, and now this new peril has blazed up like a fire in the heather on a hot afternoon […] William of Normandy. (p. 20)[40]

Kemp achieves an occasional wry reversal of hegemonic expectation, as when he has the Queen's attendant Fenella say: 'My nurse was an English slave. It is strange to think that English was once the language of our servants, and now we must all learn to speak it' (p. 38). The irony here is that, while McLellan explores the rise of the influence of English when it took place during the Enlightenment, Kemp leaves here an implication it happened several centuries before it in fact did. The language of Malcolm's court, let alone the society in which it operated, certainly was

not English which 'all' must learn. This play/pageant operates through set pieces, each having a title: 'An Impartial Chairman', for example, presents a summary version of a synod where Fothad, the Celtic Archbishop of St Andrews, and Turgot, who would become his Roman Catholic successor, debate the differences between Celtic and Roman practices while Margaret's Romanized upbringing wins the day. Kemp's generally hagiographic treatment of Margaret is qualified somewhat in a subsequent scene 'The Black Sheep' with her second son Edmund who was very much influenced by Malcolm's younger brother and his support of Celtic customs:

Edmund: […] I love all that comes from the Scots—their old tongue, the airs they sing, the tales they tell over the fire […].
Margaret: Edmund why do you reproach me as if I were a conqueror and a tyrant?
Edmund: Because you are a conqueror and a tyrant! (pp. 76–7)

This is the only time in this play when Kemp's representation of Margaret as a civilizing, Romanizing saint is open to question, and the issue is taken no further. Kemp's approach to representing historical drama is here inclined to one-dimensional presentation of received versions of Margaret.

The King of Scots suffers from the same flat and orthodox presentation of a major historical figure, in this case Robert Bruce. Again, Kemp's play was presented in Dunfermline Abbey, this time an appropriate venue as Robert I's burial place. In the published text of the play's 'Acknowledgement', Kemp reveals his agenda-driven approach to historical material. He notes that when he wrote the play the academic view suggested Bruce was 'a somewhat treacherous figure' and quotes Agnes Mure Mackenzie who had written a popular adulatory biography of Bruce, published in 1934, as having 'fully confirmed the truth of the popular tradition and the falseness of the academic picture'. Kemp goes on to assert that the 'The Hero of popular tradition is a hero still, worthy to take up the mantle of William Wallace.'[41] The hero-worship explicitly expressed in the 'Acknowledgement' is evident in the script. This, largely written in rhyming couplets, often lapses into a form of tushery as in this exchange between Robert, his brother Edward, and the Douglas:

King: Give me your counsel, friends—remember, pray,
My person taken, Scotland in me they slay.
Edward: […] No, Robert, all I've prayed for is to meet
My enemy in the field! I'll not retreat!

> Douglas: Your grace, the Douglas takes your brother's side
> I've hopes our lumbering foe may be defied […]. (p. 64)

The attempt at the heroic tone at times verges on the ludicrous. Later Edward I exclaims:

> God, let not these Scots escape!
> Even in death, I'll bring them fire and rape!
> Where is my son? Gloucester, where is the Prince?
> With what new low-born favourite does he mince,
> Making a mockery of his royal task? (p. 70)

Kemp's conventional approach in this play is echoed by the caricaturing of Edward and the homophobic reference, typical of the age in which he wrote, to the Prince who will become Edward II. As soon as he reaches for a grand style to deal with what he regards, fairly, one might think, as grand material, Kemp's writing loses control. This play, presented as part of the Festival of Britain events which included McLellan's *Mary Stewart*, is laboured, seeking to present a series of scenes to celebrate a man he unquestioningly claims as a hero.

In the same year, in *The Other Dear Charmer*, Kemp again presents a Scottish historical and cultural hero, in this case, Robert Burns. He dramatizes the relationship of Burns and his middle-class admirer, Agnes (Nancie) Maclehose, 'Clarinda' to Burns's 'Sylvander' according to the iconography of their apparently unconsummated flirtation. By now, Kemp seems addicted to linguistic tics that suggest for him period language. For example, when Burns meets one of Clarinda's friends who wants to ask about his poetry she cries, 'Fie, Mary, you must not begin by playing the Grand Inquisitor to poor Mr. Burns! Wait at least until we have revived him with a dish of tea!' (p. 46).[42] The play explores the infatuation of Burns and Nancie as he asserts his contempt for Jean Armour who has borne his children. Burns is, unlike the heroic Bruce, seen as shallow and self-dramatizing, as is Clarinda, although his status as a poet appears to justify the high-flown expression of his 'love'. Talking of Jean with Clarinda, we find the following:

> Robert: […] There I found tasteless insipidity, vulgarity of soul and mercenary fawning, here … oh, here, polished good sense, heaven-born genius, and the most generous, the most delicate, the most tender passion –
> Nancie: Sylvander! [*half protesting*] You are carried out of yourself!

Robert: I have done with her!
Nancie: [*Purring*] Sylvander, I would be a traitress to my sex were I to listen to the scorn you pour on her head … though often, by what I have heard of her myself, I have wondered if she were an angel or a dolt.
Robert: [*Fiercely*] A dolt! (p. 74)

Yet by the end of the play Burns is romanticizing Jean and contrasting her with the urban and urbane Nancie:

> Nancie: […] What does she know about poetry?
> […]
> Robert: She sings sweetly … most sweetly. She can lilt over to me of an evening by the ingle the old airs I love. (p. 101)

The play ends as Nancie smashes drinking glasses given to her by Robert and tears up a poem he gives her. He leaves and she then puts together the torn scraps, reads out 'Ae fond kiss', the song for her they contain, and reflects it is better to have her life as it is in Edinburgh than have children every year in the countryside. Kemp's attempt at grand passion ends in bathos.

In the next year, with *Henrietta MD*, Kemp follows the example of Bridie's *The Anatomist* (1930) in so far as he takes a famous nineteenth-century medical cause célèbre and creates from it drawing-room drama. Where Bridie explores the ethics of medical research through his leading character Robert Knox who used cadavers provided by the murderers Burke and Hare for teaching and research, Kemp addresses the furore in the years 1869–70 surrounding the admission of women to Edinburgh University to study medicine. As did Bridie, Kemp employs a factual basis to develop his deeper theme, in Kemp's case the right of women to higher education and a professional life. He creates a central character, an Edinburgh woman, Henrietta Maitland, who meets the historical Sophia Jex-Blake who gathered together the first group of women to matriculate to study medicine at Edinburgh. Jex-Blake's 'Edinburgh Seven' are, however, not present in Kemp's play. Rather, he invents four women, including Henrietta, to go through the travails Jex-Blake and her companions suffered, including refusal of tutors to teach them, abuse in the streets, and attempts by groups of student physically to prevent them attending class. As with *A Trump for Jericho*, Kemp develops his play by introducing a romantic plot: Henrietta is courted by Cosmo Fullerton. This plot is less of a red herring that in *A Trump for Jericho* because it allows Kemp

to explore his character's quandary when it is not possible for her to continue her studies if they marry. This subplot allows Kemp to develop his proto-feminist theme and Henrietta persuades her lover that he must put off marriage for now to allow her to complete her medical training. Of the Kemp plays on historical themes under discussion, this is arguably the one closest to success as it explores, through credible characters and dialogue, important issues of principle embedded in significant historical events.

Master John Knox, however, returns to the pageant format and lay figures of *The Saxon Saint* and *The King of Scots*. Rather than couplets, Kemp here attempts blank verse. He introduces his text, saying 'Such plays as I know take either Knox or Mary and make the drama personal to them. / But the drama of the Reformation was something vaster than either.'[43] Evidently Kemp sought the grand scale. He also, as we have seen before, has a quite explicit agenda: he talks, without any sense of a possibly nuanced character, of his 'sketching in the tragic destiny of Mary, whose folly, wilfulness, frailty and sheer ill fortune sometimes seem the main instrument in the defeat of the cause which was so dear to her' (p. vi). Kemp is writing to promote his own Kirk's vision of the Reformation, without any sense of possible ambivalence. His Act One begins with the looting of St Giles being seen as a 'good thing', and proceeds to present a scheming Mary of Guise. Act Two, after Mary of Guise's death, continues to show the destructiveness of the Reformation as a positive necessity, while representing the religion of the newly arrived Queen Mary as a threat. Act Three runs from the murders of Rizzio and Darnley and then marriage to Bothwell to end with John Knox's hearing about the 1572 St Bartholomew's Day's massacre of French Protestants. The play is, in fact, as one might anticipate from its commissioned status, a propaganda piece for the Church of Scotland, demonizing its opponents, whether the Catholic Church or the nobles who wished to appropriate the Catholic Church's land.

Kemp again employs English dialogue. While this might make sense for Knox, who spent substantial time abroad and was said to have spoken with an English-inflected accent, it is clear in the following exchange that there is no differentiation between Knox's language and the Scottish Shipmaster's:

> Knox: Who do you say I am?
> Shipmaster: John Knox, or I never set course
> By Arthur Seat or the Bass! (p. 24)

Again Kemp's 'historical' language tends to the inflated and affected:

> Lethington: Knox, I have brought Cecil to it,
> And with him his aloof and politic Queen!
> (*Knox clasps him cordially by the hands*)
> Knox: O gifted Lethington!
> Your subtle policy has carried the day
> Where my blundering intentions beat themselves stupid!
> How did this come to pass? (p. 46)

Meanwhile, Kemp introduces a strand of nostophobia which we will find in some examples of later playwrights' work. Mary's uncle, the Duc D'Aumale, says, for example, 'These Scots beds are devilish hard!' (p. 71). When one of her women, Beaton, asks 'Madame, when will you show us gentle courtiers?', Mary replies,

> No one could call us rich in those!
> Our Scots lords may be happy in the saddle
> Or breaking skulls in the dark High Street wynds –
> In a lady's chamber they are brusque or silent. (p. 87)

Knox later plays expands this trope of Scottish miserabilism when he talks of '[…] this realm / Where every winter marks a famine / And herds of poor / Run wild like starving deer' (p. 94). It appears that in the line of his work that includes *The Saxon Saint*, *The King of Scots* and *Master John Knox*, Kemp never escapes lay figures and wooden dialogue. As Randall Stevenson summarizes their qualities, 'Kemp provides little more than historical accounts of his periods and their people—expository dramatic pageants, tenuous in conflict and characterisation.'[44] It may be that these characteristics arise in the pageant plays partly from the distance in time between him and those about whom he wrote, while he domesticates, particularly in *The Saxon Saint*, but also in the other two plays, his themes emotionally to accommodate a conservative Presbyterian world view, despite the fact that his first two heroes were in no sense Protestant.

In dealing with historical themes and situations generally, Kemp brings his characters into a familiar relationship with the audience, not challenging its values or undermining—except in the case of Burns, who does not conform to conservative Presbyterian values—his iconic characters' un-nuanced 'heroism'. With more recent historical examples—Burns, the Disruption and the Edinburgh Seven—he accommodates his historical

material to the domestic comedy of many of his contemporary plays. Kemp tells us of events, but rarely seeks to understand underlying motivations or political contexts. And his historical plays eschew Scots dialogue. He is very capable of writing fluent and vivid Scots as in his Molière adaptations and in some of his contemporary plays. In *The Penny Wedding* (1958) he even presents a character, Archie Sillar, of whom he makes fun for speaking Lallans in the style of MacDiarmid's poetry to the confusion of his Scots-speaking father. Kemp shows none of this linguistic facility in his historical drama. While he could write sensitively across language varieties, he does not do so when seeking a more grandiose or intellectually aspirational effect in his history plays. This is the more striking since he was perfectly aware of earlier representations of Scottish history on stage. He wrote his own 'Historical Drama' based on Scott's *Rob Roy* in 1959–60 and with Gerard Slevin provided a revised version of Isack Pocock's National Drama version of *Rob Roy* for a royal gala at the Royal Lyceum in 1962.

Kemp's bringing his historical characters into a familiar relationship with the audience, without challenging its values is reflected in James Bridie's practice. Already we have touched on the way he domesticates his context and themes in *The Anatomist* and this domestication is an approach he uses, with some variation, in other history plays. *The Forrigan Reel* (1944), written to be played with musical accompaniment to many scenes, is set in a fantasy eighteenth-century Highlands where the local McAlpin father and son have mysterious healing powers, including the capacity to bring on health by inducing a trance-like state through dance. A London heiress, Clarinda, is brought to see them because of her persistent alienation. Even the McAlpins cannot cure her, but when she is slapped by one of her companions, she recovers. The gender politics of the play are not just patriarchal, but abusive. In an epilogue performed by Mrs Grant of Forrigan we find:

> So cheer us up whenever you've a mind.
> Kiss us or skelp us as you feel inclined;
> But keep in mind that half our camsteeriness
> Is just pure, simple undiluted weariness.[45]

When in *John Knox* (1947) Bridie approaches the topic of Knox's relationship with Mary, he sets the stage action within the frame of the facade of the National Gallery of Scotland. The play opens there with three late-night moderns, Nora Donnelly, a Leith Street walker; Hector

MacGillivray, a divinity student; and Jerry, a street dancer, engaging in banter until a transformation takes place, the historical characters emerging from the façade. Their action is interrupted throughout by the moderns' choric commentary. The play involves a great deal of reported action in an orthodox rendition for the period of Knox and Mary's careers, until there is an improbable final scene of ultimate reconciliation when Mary says, 'John, I love you. We didn't know what that meant did we?' to which Knox responds, 'We knew nothing.'[46] Bridie's simplistic attempt to interrelate modern and historic action fails here, although he tries again with more success in *The Queen's Comedy* (1950). Here, the Trojan War is represented through a Greek front-line casualty station which reflects Bridie's First World War service, while the gods comment on and manipulate the war's progress. They are shown as bored bourgeois, indulging in petty squabbles, while in the final scene we see the soldiers and a nurse we have come to know proceed as shades to Hades. Bridie's play is an angry indictment of the savagery of war and the casualness of those who cause and manage it: the nurse, Hecamede, has been gang-raped by ten Trojans before being killed, an event to which Venus, the instigator of the siege of Troy, with her superficial vision of pleasure and 'love', cannot adequately respond.[47] Bridie's use of history is, as these varied examples show, quixotic and individual, shaped by his tendency to default to mid-century bourgeois values. Although *The Queen's Comedy* is undoubtedly powerful in its impact, he lacks an overarching view of the relationship of historical material to the contemporary, or indeed a vision of the past, a discourse, even when clearly enraged by past actions, he tends overall to exploit whimsically.

Sydney Goodsir Smith, Ada Kay, and Ena Lamont Stewart: Contrasting Histories

In 1960, the same year as Kemp's *Master John Knox*, another Scottish historical drama was staged. This was Sydney Goodsir Smith's *The Wallace*. Broadcast in a radio version in the previous year, this approaches its theme, the career of William Wallace and his final betrayal and execution, very much from a nationalist viewpoint. Although Smith's Scottish characters speak Scots, all the characters are as wooden and superficial as those of Kemp's pageant plays. There are no shadings of character: the English are as wicked as they are in Silver's *The Bruce* and Wallace is the embodiment of all good. The play follows the historical record, employing a loose

blank verse, which has the same stiffness and striving for period rhetoric as Kemp's pageant style. As he prepares for the Battle of Falkirk, for example, Wallace asks:

> MacDuff, will ye spier at
> The Reid Comyn and the Stewart
> To step by? We maun hae counsel on this. (p. 66)[48]

Edward, when confronting Wallace in the final trial scene, accuses him of grasping for martyrdom and in another example of overblown rhetoric says 'This is the very meridian of vanity!' (p. 164). An exchange between Edward and Wallace then takes place in which Edward improbably tries to win Wallace over by offering him a dukedom which Wallace rejects. The exchange continues:

> King Edward: […] How can you refuse?
> Wallace: Honour refuses.
> King Edward: Honour! What honour? Of a rebel,
> Vandal, murderer?
> Wallace: Of a man!
> And of a Scottish man!
> King Edward: Of a fool,
> And of a blind ingrate fool!
> Wallace: Gin a Scottish man was gratefu
> For aa the mercies of Edward,
> Ay, he'd be a fule indeed—and blind.
> King Edward: You speak of Edward's mercy with a mock –
> I'll not be angered […]. (pp. 165–6)

At the end, Edward is melodramatically left alone, improbably abandoned by the Scottish nobles who, in this version of the story, have attended the trial. He hears distant cries of 'Wallace!' Then, Smith has the whole cast re-enter and sing Burns's 'Scots wha hae wi Wallace bled'. While Stevenson recognises that 'Smith's presentation of Wallace's relations with the nobles illustrates some perennial conflicts in Scottish history and politics', he rightly comments that 'much of the rest lacks focus, concision, or effective staging'.[49] *The Wallace* is, in effect, a culmination of an approach to Scottish historical material developed over the 1950s, mainly by Kemp, the representation of scarcely concealed ideological positions through simplified dramaturgy and windy rhetoric.

So far this chapter would suggest that mainstage Scottish history plays since the early 1930s were written only by men and only set in Scotland. There is, however one remarkable exception to this. In 1961 the Gateway Theatre presented *The Man from Thermopylae* by Ada F. Kay (b. 1929), premiered in Rheydt in Germany in 1959. The play is set after the famous battle between Athens and Sparta. Pantites, the only Spartan survivor, returns home, but is not welcome: it was expected he would die for the city-state alongside his companions; his name is already inscribed among those of the dead. The play explores issues of duty, courage, individual freedom, and responsibility in an authoritarian society which subjugates the personal and emotional: it is forbidden, for example, for Pantites and his father, Iolaus, to show emotion on being reunited. His wife, Helena, meanwhile, is carrying another man's baby: in Pantites's absence it remains her duty to produce children for the state. When it seems the only solution to the problem of Pantites's survival is to send him to his death, a priest informs the magistrates that Pantites was saved by divine intervention. At this point, the pariah is acclaimed and has the opportunity to become a dictator. This he rejects. He sees humankind as inevitably corrupted, even when acting with the best intentions and, not believing he can resolve this situation, leaves the city.

In the final scene, Pantites comes upon a baby about, following ancient Greek custom, to be exposed to die. Faced with this, he protests, 'Always it is the war! Or the Government. Or the oracle. Or the army. Or the school we attended … It is never ourselves', and his travelling companion, Geron, a disguised Hermes, responds 'And why do you think we have a social system, if it is not to save ourselves the effort of thinking?' (p. 111).[50] The play concludes with the solitary solider, Pantites, taking responsibility himself for the baby, which 'must be reared and taught and housed […] loved, too, I suppose' (p. 115). The play ends with the god's envoi: as Pantites goes 'wearing honesty like a garland [… he is] the hope of the world' (p. 116). His opposition to a patriarchal society with its oppressive gender stereotyping and rigid militarism leaves him outside an unthinking society, obliged to adopt his own responsibilities. Kay moves away from issues of national identity and into the discourse of a shared European classical heritage to explore issues of state and individual and the corruption of human relationships by state apparatus. Her response depends on individualism rather than any expression of community. In this she stands apart from other dramatists in this chapter and offers the kind of alternative approach found among writers discussed in later chapters, like Peter Arnott, Jo Clifford, Sue Glover, and Liz Lochhead.

The only other woman in this period to have a history play close to mainstage production was the renowned Ena Lamont Stewart, whose *Business in Edinburgh* was given a reading by the Citizens' Theatre in 1970. The play concerns the convoluted 1822 divorce proceedings of William and Sarah Hazlitt. While Sarah's landlady, Mrs Pillans, cannot believe her independent spirit: 'Ye're never goin aboot law business yer lane?' (p. 5),[51] the play vigorously asserts women's rights and ability in a largely misogynistic society. Patronized by her lawyer, Bell, because she lacks legal knowledge, Sarah rebuts him: 'Indeed I do not, as a rule, need any man to guide me' (p. 10). As in *Men Should Weep* (1947), as Ksenija Horvat and Barbara Bell argue, Stewart subverts 'the notion that the domestic milieu is depoliticised and dominated by private discourse'.[52] Nonetheless, Sarah lives in a chauvinist society: Mrs Pillans observes of the justice system, 'And there's lassies comes afore them that's been bairned and left, and hae tried tae dae aw awa wi their wee burdens, and they lords on the bench gies oot "Transportation" wi'oot a blink' (p. 22). Faced with generalizations, Sarah demands she be recognized for her own qualities: '*Women!* I am a *person!*' (p. 37) *Business in Edinburgh* follows through the feminist perspectives of Stewart's earlier plays. Sarah resists being taken for granted when she observes 'And the wives of great men are of no account; we seldom read of *them*. Well, the world has never taken much account of women. Some day it may have to.' At this, Bell, with 'a derisive laugh', replies, 'Nonsense! You have your place in men's hearts, my dear!' (p. 96). This play takes the cause célèbre of the Hazlitts' Scottish divorce (which would leave him free to marry again in England) and becomes something of a *pièce à thèse* while its dialogue lacks the vitality of Stewart's earlier work for Unity Theatre. These factors may explain its failure to proceed to mainstage production. Nonetheless, the history plays of Kay and Stewart mark women's entry into the field of twentieth-century Scottish historical drama, foreshadowing that of Glover and Lochhead discussed in Chap. 6.

Conclusions and New Beginnings

Neither Kay nor Stewart can be regarded, as can the male playwrights we have discussed, to participate in the Scottish Literary Renaissance. As we have seen, they have their own special—and quite individual—achievements. Applying the aims identified earlier for the Literary Renaissance to McLellan and his male contemporaries' playwriting, however, it can be seen that none escaped, in MacDiarmid's term, 'the provincializing

of Scottish Literature', though all sought 'to carry on the independent Scottish literary tradition from the time that Burns died', in two cases actually writing about Burns himself, a typical Literary Renaissance interest. Many of the plays they chose to write on historical themes were about periods which predated the life of Burns; those set after his death were few in number. In an isolated radical case, for example, Ronald Mavor (1925–2007), James Bridie's son, wrote *Muir of Huntershill* (1962), on the revolutionary eighteenth-century lawyer Thomas Muir about whom Peter Arnott would later write. It is questionable, then, how far any of these men, other than McLellan himself, achieved progressive or creative development of the independent Scottish theatrical tradition. This generation's plays are predominantly nostalgic. Even those second-arc plays of McLellan's that seek to explore deeper questions of political motivation and community identity, as in *The Flouers o Edinburgh* or *The Hypocrite*, are masked in a theatrical conservatism that creates the playwrights' version of an older world: there is no hint of twentieth-century Brechtian or post-Shavian distantiation. As for carrying 'forward the tradition politically', all, except Reid, have a clear, political agenda, but not one consistent between them: Kemp uses the tradition in a frankly unquestioning way, celebrating his heroes in pageants or in orthodox domestic contexts; Silver and Smith, a close colleague of MacDiarmid's, offer straightforwardly old-fashioned nationalist tracts, and—more to the modern point—ones that are anti-English in a way contemporary Scottish political nationalism finds unacceptably close to racism. McLellan, alongside Bridie, is the most nuanced as a playwright of his male contemporaries—Reid, Silver, Scott, Kemp, and Smith—not in his first-arc plays, but in those of his second arc, although the forerunner of those, *Jamie the Saxt*, suffers the same naivety of political understanding and tendency to caricature character as the first-arc plays among which it appeared. It is in his later plays, from *The Flouers o Edinburgh* on, that Kemp moves towards greater ambivalence about his characters and a more complex sense of cultural and moral conflict, never truly resolved, whether in the case of the young lovers at the end of *The Flouers*, in the relationship of 'Young Auchinleck' with his father, or the success of the 'Hypocrite' in evading exposure and continuing his secretly libidinous and publicly killjoy campaigns.

What all do succeed in, by and large, however, is in carrying 'forward the reintegration of the Scots language'.[53] While Reid, when it came to publication, resiled from his theatrical achievements with Scots, all discussed here took forward the revitalization of Scots as a theatrical language, although

Kemp did so in his adaptations of Lyndsay and Scott and versions of Molière rather than his own historical work, where, if anyone spoke Scots, they were servants. The difficulty that this success resulted in, however, was that their revitalization of Scots was combined with a rather inward-looking, even solipsist, world view and conservative dramaturgy (with the possible exception of *The World's Wonder* which combined theatrical experiment with feyness), while Ada Kay's and Ena Lamont Stewart's history plays stood apart and were not widely promoted. There was no sense, as there was in mid twentieth-century Scottish poetry, that Scots language was dynamically combined with artistic experiment or the politically progressive, let alone the modernism found in the work of poets in various Scottish languages like W. S. Graham, Sorley MacLean, or MacDiarmid himself. There was, however, towards the end of the period this chapter addresses a Scots-language play performed at Glasgow Citizens that approached the range of impact the others did not overall achieve—and even the first of MacDiarmid's aims of avoiding provincializing. This was written by a younger Englishman, John Arden (1930–2012).

In *Armstrong's Last Goodnight* (1964), Arden fulfils MacDiarmid's aims. Regarding the 'reintegration of the Scots language', Arden, who studied at Edinburgh College of Art, where his first play *All Fall Down* (1955) was performed and he qualified as an architect in 1955, says:

> The language of the play offered certain difficulties. […] The Scots employed by modern poets such as MacDiarmid and Goodsir Smith owes a great deal to Lindsay, Dunbar, Henryson and the other writers of the late Middle Ages and early Renaissance: but it is also a language for the expression of twentieth-century concepts. In the end I have put together a sort of Babylonish dialect that will, I hope, prove practical on the stage and will yet suggest the sixteenth century. My model in this was Arthur Miller's adaptation of early American speech in *The Crucible*.[54]

The linguistic strategy that Arden follows is, in actual fact, that of McLellan, MacDiarmid, and their Scottish Literary Renaissance colleagues, the use of the language of older Scots Makars. In the Scots' case, this is underpinned by their home region's dialect, but in the Englishman's case it is developed only out of the Makars' language—and perhaps his ear, after living for some time in Edinburgh. His use of Scots has a certain advisedly antique quality, but it flows vividly and colloquially, no doubt helped in the original rehearsal development process by the presence in his cast of such fluent Scots-speakers as John Cairney, Iain Cuthbertson,

Brown Derby, Hannah Gordon, Leonard Maguire, and Janet Michael. Meanwhile, his modernist and Brechtian dramaturgical structure locates his practice within wider European and, as his reference to Miller implies, American contemporary practice. His free-flowing action as he moves between Berwick, various Borders locations and the royal palace is marked by a series of choric songs written mainly in the mode of Borders ballads, while his swift changes of short scenes and stylized action allow for a self-consciously theatrical exposition of the play's themes and plot. While this play is a one-off within Arden's oeuvre, it is consciously set by him, as the passage cited make clear, within an 'independent Scottish literary tradition', taking forward interlinguistic Scots and English experiments of the kind Burns employed. Further, Arden brings to his Borders theme not the swashbuckling superficiality of McLellan's first-arc work, abandoned by McLellan when his second-arc plays moved away from the Borders, but a nuanced quizzical approach to politicking, corruption, and the dubious moralities seen as necessary for 'good' government. Where, however, *Jamie the Saxt* or *Mary Stewart* tend to present such politicking as a matter of simple power politics and self-interest—and even an excuse for some knockabout comedy—Arden explores shades of interest, varieties of treachery, and state assassination in a way that, in spy fiction, would be likened to the work of John Le Carré. He demonstrates how the themes of warfare and Border reiving can be linked to profound questions of centralization versus regionalism in power politics, the ethics, or otherwise, of sexual exploitation of women, the ways in which local conflicts influence, and are influenced by, larger international negotiations, and the need for realpolitik in diplomacy within and between nations. The play is subtitled *An Exercise in Diplomacy*. More than any of the other playwrights discussed in this chapter Arden carries 'forward the tradition politically'. Michael Coveney indeed argues that 'Arden is one of the very few twentieth-century dramatists you could mention in the same breath as Shakespeare, Molière and Brecht without the parallels sounding too far-fetched'.[55]

Armstrong's Last Goodnight reflects the fulfilment for the stage of MacDiarmid's four ambitions. It can also be argued this would be inconceivable without, particularly, the pioneering second arc of McLellan's work. It would be easy, but trite, to dismiss now some of failings of the Scottish playwrights discussed in this chapter. Arguably, in the long view Reid's, Silver's, Scott's and Smith's history plays, influential as they were in their time, are of passing importance; Kemp's historical drama is of much

less significance than his adaptations and, especially, his translations; Bridie remains a special case, self-contained and distanced from his contemporaries; and Kay's and Stewart's pioneering would encourage other women only later. Nonetheless, for all of the weaknesses of McLellan's early work and the relative thinness of one or two of his later plays, his achievement is important, *The Fanatic*, for example, being much underestimated. It can, however, be said to have taken the experiment of Arden, drawing on his predecessors' writing of Scottish history plays from the 1930s on, to have shown what their successors might aspire to.

Notes

1. Alexander Scott, 'Introduction', in *Robert McLellan Collected Plays*: *Volume 1* (London: Calder, 1981), vii.
2. Hugh MacDiarmid, 'MacDiarmid on MacDiarmid', *The Manchester Guardian*, 22 February 1962, quoted in Edward Morgan, *Hugh MacDiarmid* (London: Longman, l976), 6.
3. See, for example, Scott Lyall and Margery Palmer McCulloch (eds.), *The Edinburgh Companion to Hugh MacDiarmid* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011).
4. David Hutchison, 'Scottish Drama 1900–1950', in Cairns Craig (ed.), *The History of Scottish Literature*, vol. 4 (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1987), 173.
5. Hugh MacDiarmid, 'MacDiarmid on MacDiarmid', 6.
6. Graham Moffat, *Join me in Remembering: The Life and Reminiscences of the Author of 'Bunty Pulls the Strings'* (Camps Bay: Winifred L. Moffat, 1955), 36.
7. Quoted in David Hutchison, '1900 to 1950', in Bill Findlay (ed.), *A History of Scottish Theatre* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1998), 208–9.
8. Graham Moffat, Pamphlet in 'Miscellaneous Items', 1, in the Graham Moffat Collection, Mitchell Library, Glasgow, SR 225.
9. Quoted in Hutchison, 'Scottish Drama', 221.
10. Robert McLellan, *Robert McLellan: Playing Scotland's Story—Collected Dramatic Works*, ed. Colin Donati (Edinburgh: Luath Press, 2013).
11. Karen Bassi, 'Things of the Past: Objects and Time in Greek Narrative', *Arethusa* 38:1 (Winter 2005), 1.
12. Ibid.
13. Cairns Craig and Randall Stevenson, 'Introduction', in *Twentieth-Century Scottish Drama* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2001), xii.
14. John Corbett, *Written in the Language of the Scottish Nation: A History of Literary Translation into Scots* (Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 1999), 180.

15. Page references for McLellan's plays are to *Robert McLellan: Playing Scotland's Story*.
16. Ian Campbell and Ronald Jack (eds.), *Robert McLellan: Jamie the Saxt* (London: Calder and Boyars, 1970), 134–53.
17. Donald Campbell, 'Robert McLellan: A Sense of Community—An Appreciation', in *Robert McLellan: Playing Scotland's Story*, 23.
18. Ian Brown, 'Cultural Centrality and Dominance: The Creative Writer's View—Conversations with Scottish Poet/Playwrights', *Interface* 3 (Summer 1984), 56, also available in *International Journal of Scottish Theatre and Screen* (4:1, 2011), 31–2, http://journals.qmu.ac.uk/index.php/IJOSTS/issue/view/17/showToc (accessed 17 September 2015).
19. Alastair Cording, 'The Plays of Robert McLellan', in *Robert McLellan: Playing Scotland's Story*, 434.
20. Ian Brown, 'Cultural Centrality and Dominance', 31.
21. One example of a power broker in this process is discussed in George McGilvaray, '"Honest John": The Remarkable Career of John Drummond of Quarrel, MP, (1675–1742)', *History Scotland* 15:5 (September/October 2015), 30–5.
22. J. Derrick McClure, *Why Scots Matters* (Edinburgh: The Saltire Society, 1988), 37.
23. Alastair Cording, 'The Plays of Robert McLellan', 436.
24. Ibid., 437.
25. Ian Campbell, 'Introduction', in *Robert McLellan: Jamie the Saxt*, ed. Ian Campbell and Ronald Jack (London: Calder and Boyars, 1970), 9.
26. Hugh MacDiarmid, 'MacDiarmid on MacDiarmid', 6.
27. McLellan, *Robert McLellan: Playing Scotland's Story*, 26.
28. Cairns Craig and Randall Stevenson, 'Introduction', xii.
29. Roderick Watson, *The Literature of Scotland: The Twentieth Century* (2nd edn.) (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 105.
30. Quoted on cover of McLellan, *Robert McLellan: Playing Scotland's Story*.
31. McLellan, *Robert McLellan*: *Playing Scotland's Story*, 26.
32. Alexander Reid, 'Foreword', *Two Scots Plays* (London: Collins, 1958), xii–xiii.
33. Ibid., ix.
34. For details of this see Ian Brown, 'Scots Language in Theory and Practice in Graham Moffat's Playwriting', *Scottish Language* 33 (2014), 65–81.
35. Randall Stevenson, 'Scottish Theatre 1950–1980', in Craig, *History*, vol. 4, 351.
36. R. S. Silver, *The Bruce* (Edinburgh: Saltire Society, 1986), iii. Page references are to this edition.
37. Alexander Scott, *Untrue Thomas* (Glasgow: Caledonian Press, 1952). Page references are to this edition.

38. John Corbett and Bill Findlay, 'Introduction', in Corbett and Findlay (eds.), *Serving Twa Maisters: Five Classic Plays in Scots Translation* (Glasgow: ASLS, 2005), xii.
39. 'Introduction', *Master John Knox* (Edinburgh: Saint Andrews Press, 1960), v.
40. Page references are to Robert Kemp, *The Saxon Saint* (Glasgow: Brown, Son and Ferguson, 1988).
41. Robert Kemp, *The King of Scots: A Play about Robert the Bruce* (Glasgow: Brown, Son and Ferguson, 1988), 3. Page references are to this edition.
42. Page references are to Robert Kemp, *The Other Dear Charmer* (London: Duckworth, 1957).
43. Robert Kemp, *Master John Knox* (Edinburgh: Saint Andrews Press, 1960), v. Page references are to this edition.
44. Randall Stevenson, 'Re-enter Houghmagandie: Language as Performance in Liz Lochhead's *Tartuffe*', in Robert Crawford and Anne Varty (eds.), *Liz Lochhead's Voices* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1993), 109.
45. James Bridie, *John Knox and Other Plays* (London: Constable, 1949), 320.
46. Ibid., 80.
47. James Bridie, *The Queen's Comedy* (London: Constable, 1950), 76.
48. Page references are to Sydney Goodsir Smith, *The Wallace* (London: Calder, 1985 [1960]).
49. Stevenson, 'Scottish Theatre 1950–1980', 352.
50. Page references are to Ada F. Kay, *The Man from Thermopylae* (Glasgow: Scottish Society of Playwrights, 1981).
51. Page references are to the typescript held by the Scottish Theatre Archive, Glasgow University Library.
52. Ksenija Horvat and Barbara Bell, 'Sue Glover, Rona Munro, Laura Jane Bunting: Echoes and Open Spaces', in Aileen Christianson and Alison Lumsden (eds.), *Contemporary Scottish Women Writers* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), 67.
53. Hugh MacDiarmid, 'MacDiarmid on MacDiarmid', 6.
54. John Arden, 'General Notes', *Armstrong's Last Goodnight* (London: Methuen, 1965), 8.
55. http://www.theguardian.com/stage/2012/mar/30/john-arden (accessed 17 September 2015).

CHAPTER 5

Revealing Hidden Histories: Seven Changing Perspectives

Plays by Stewart Conn, Bill Bryden, Hector MacMillan, John McGrath, Donald Campbell, W. Gordon Smith, and the present author contributed to 1970s and later revisionary approaches to the presentation of Scottish history on stage. These dramatists resisted, revised, revitalized, and reimagined the imperatives underlying the work of McLellan and his contemporaries. All engage in playwriting that in distinct ways subverts the more conventional approaches, both to dramaturgy and history, found in the work of their predecessors. Each in his history plays (all the produced historical playwrights in this decade are men) reacts to varying degrees against their predecessors' practices, explores fresh dramaturgical approaches and initiates new perspectives. In particular, this generation of playwrights used the modes of historical drama to explore radicalized versions of (mainly) Scottish history, interrogating established assumptions. They all exposed and explored hidden history—that is, counterhistories, repressed, invisible, or marginalised—whether social, religious, or political. In this, they raised questions of modern Scottish identity and the robustness of its icons. Their work was underpinned, explicitly or implicitly, by the pioneering work of such post-war historians as Gordon Donaldson and Archie Duncan. These, employing modern historiographical principles, revisited and researched anew the nature of Scottish history, and so its society. Other playwrights represented Scottish history in single plays in that decade, including Jack Ronder (1926–79)—*Cocky* (1970), about

I. Brown, *History as Theatrical Metaphor*,
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Lord Cockburn's Edinburgh, following in form Tom Wright's (1923–2002) *There was a Man* (1965) about Robert Burns—and C. P. Taylor (1929–81)—*Columba* (1973), using dance to explore the spiritual temptations of sainthood—but these dramatists returned to historical topics. Each was individual in use of language and dramaturgical innovation, but all, to varying extents and in different ways, experimented in staging techniques, while several sought a means of writing popular theatre.

Stewart Conn

Stewart Conn (b. 1936) was already an established, progressive playwright when he wrote his first history play, *The Burning* (1971). This deals with witchcraft trials under James VI and the same accusations against the Earl of Bothwell of involvement in subversive activities as does McLellan's *Jamie the Saxt*. We saw in the last chapter how Conn's view is that McLellan's treatment of the topic 'reduces the struggle between James VI and his cousin, the Earl of Bothwell, to a level of mawkish comedy'.[1] Rather than creating another version of McLellan's complex comedic convolutions of court politics and treachery, Conn focuses on the suffering of those without power when great figures of state and authority are in conflict. He says, '*The Burning* did not spring from any predisposition on my part towards Scots historical drama; but from what struck me as the theatrical potential of the theme, and its relevance today.'[2] Rather than McLellan's domesticated opening scene, set in a baillie's house in Edinburgh and introducing the to-and-fro of court gossip and power games, Conn's play opens highly theatrically with a witches' Sabbath in which a creed is intoned backwards, then cuts at once to the matter of suppression of 'Witchcraft, Sorcery and Necromancy' (p. 147). The play certainly deals with political machinations in James VI's court, but it opens out into broader questions of justice, religious and political hysteria, and suppression, indeed torture, of the innocent and naive. While the play can be seen as paralleling, besides McLellan's *Jamie the Saxt*, Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*, it has its own perspective. James is not set up as a simple, but also cunning, clown: here he is a man who understands the need to exercise realpolitik, while having a scholarly interest in issues of right and wrong. When Conn's Bothwell arrives with three hundred supporters to apply pressure to the king to reinstate his powers, he and James dispute the nature of authority, justice, and belief. In the final scene, James accuses Bothwell of guilt for the deaths of those he engaged in witchcraft. Bothwell responds, 'No

more than you, who passed sentence on them, and had them executit.' To James's retort that Bothwell is a force for evil, while James is one for good, Bothwell says 'You delude yourself. You call evil, what it suits you to call evil. There is no such thing as black and white, in these matters' (p. 195). Conn uses historical material not to reclaim the minutiae of sixteenth-century plotting, though he lightly sketches this in, but to explore the ethics of power and complexities of faith, whether orthodox or heretical. He retains a sceptical attitude to his leading characters: his Jester constantly fulfils the traditional role of undermining power's pretentions. Conn also presents the punishment and pain imposed on those who are engaged by—and powerless to resist—the authoritarian force of his court characters' power play, based in absolutist ideologies and beliefs. In *The Burning* it is the 'little' people who are punished, not those with status and three hundred men to back them. After Bothwell leaves his bedchamber, James kneels, as the play concludes, to recite the creed which, chanted backwards, began the play's exploration of humankind's demoniac nature and the practice of authority and 'justice'.

The Burning marked a major refocusing of the potential of Scottish playwriting. While figures like Stanley Eveling and Tom Gallacher had in the 1960s begun the process that would lead to what is commonly thought of as the modern Scottish theatrical renaissance, they did so with plays that were, by and large, domestic and traditional in form, though Eveling's imagination was often more surrealist. What Conn brought was an ability to work in his own mix of English and Scots, a poetic handling of language and a highly theatrical imagination whose dramaturgy moved away from fourth wall representationalism. Here he employed a lightly Scotticized English dialogue and included songs in Scots which set off the action. For example, he adapted a poem of James Hogg's for his song 'The Bauld Winds Blew' (pp. 157–8) to convey the force of the storm, allegedly caused by witchcraft, which delayed James's voyage to marry his Danish queen. He also included traditional witchcraft spells in the play, 'Berwick-Brigge' (p. 167) being taken from the early nineteenth-century antiquarian Robert Hartley Cromek's study of such rhymes.[3] The explicit theatricality of Conn's stagecraft, while not employed to establish Brechtian distantiation, engages its audience by, alongside directly realistic scenes, non-naturalistic dramatization using ritual, song, and brief choric jester interludes. His freshness of approach makes *The Burning* a candidate for the landmark which launched the modern Scottish theatrical renaissance (rather than the often-touted, but significantly later, 1979–82 *Slab Boys* trilogy).

Conn's next history play, *Thistlewood* (1975), carried forward his interest in the manipulation of power. In a script arguably influenced by the explicit theatricality of contemporary European directors like Luca Ronconi and Ariane Mnouchkine, and American practitioners like Ellen Stewart's LaMama, he developed his exploration of ways in which theatricality and theatrical deconstruction could be deployed to express and illustrate how events are publicly represented and understood. Conn was, as he wrote *Thistlewood*, fully au fait with the experiments of his Scottish contemporaries as they also freshly approached historical material. His choric John Bull, for example, carries forward as an iconic 'national' figure the audience's understanding of the action rather as Uncle Sam does in my *Carnegie* (1973), discussed below. Conn's play concerns the fate of Arthur Thistlewood and his companions as they react to the Peterloo massacre with the 1820 Cato Street Conspiracy to murder the Cabinet. He presents their manipulation and betrayal by government spies and agents provocateurs, a practice Hector MacMillan had referenced in *The Rising* (1973), also discussed below. Conn manages original song, his choric John Bull, and a number of other post-Brechtian techniques to mark the characters' manipulation by the authorities and the ways manipulation of knowledge shapes perceptions of historical public events. Lord Sidmouth, the repressive Home Secretary whose officials entrap Thistlewood, in a sense manufacturing the purported threat, reads Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* throughout. A recurring 1970s theme of Conn's is the way public life and politics are directed quasi-theatrically by authoritarian powers through Frankensteinian versions of truth and history.

After an award-winning experiment with biographical one-person drama, *Hugh Miller* (1988), Conn's next historical drama continues to demonstrate his experimental creativity's variousness. *The Dominion of Fancy* (1992) explores the 1825 Glasgow theatrical wars between Alexander and Seymour, rival actor managers, centring on their aesthetic, as much as their economic, conflict. For the most part written in Conn's more naturalistic style, it contains scenes using the stage conventions and techniques of the time as it focuses on the anglicized Irish Seymour's objection to Alexander's 'tartanry'. Towards the play's end, when Alexander has triumphed, his stage manager, McGlynn, worries that historical drama may result in escapist romance:

> You cry yersel the People's Choice: how then are you no doing plays aboot them, and their condeetion, which in this city is waur nur savage—instead of charades frae the past? You'd rather reinvent an antique nation, than fecht fur a new wan.[4]

In the last scene, however, Alexander outlines his own views on Scottish creativity:

> […] that element of the fantastical that is part of our being. And helps distinguish us from those in the south. The dilemma is how to stay true to our heritage, yet break from too narrow a covenant with the past. Our being an island makes it the more essential we do not end up in a prison of our devising, but constitute an imaginative escape.[5]

Conn's history plays represent his engagement with 'history', chiefly of Scotland, but also in *Thistlewood* of England, through which he seeks to break from 'too narrow a covenant with the past'. This he does in the 1970s as he explores aspects of the corruption of power as it dominates weaker members of society. In his later historical drama, *The Dominion of Fancy*, he explores ways in which the very representation of history on stage engages (or fails to engage) with the nature of the society for which the drama is written and where it is performed. McGlynn's down-to-earth assertion that Alexander is more interested in 'charades frae the past', inventing 'an antique nation', than 'doing plays aboot [the People whose condition] in this city is waur nur savage' reflects a criticism made in the last chapter of the relationship of the history plays of McLellan and his contemporaries to the realities of 1930s and 1940s industrial and urban Scotland. Alexander outlines a theatre-maker's function, but particularly a historical dramatist's, as creatively to investigate how to avoid ending up 'in a prison of our devising', but rather 'constitute an imaginative escape', presumably liberating thought and perception.

Bill Bryden

One playwright who sought 'to stay true to our heritage, yet break from too narrow a covenant with the past', to 'constitute an imaginative escape' from 'a prison of our devising' represented by earlier decades' received historical dramatic conventions was Bill Bryden (b. 1942). Bryden directed *The Burning* in his role as Associate Director of the Royal Lyceum, which the year later presented his own first play, *Willie Rough* (1972). *Willie Rough* occupies a historically important place in modern Scottish drama. Predecessors had generally tended to present either action involving public figures, drawing substantially on the record, or dramas set often in mythicized Borders or Highlands; Bryden saw history through urban eyes. His is an ideology that foregrounds the ordinary man caught up in

large historical events in a way also developed by other playwrights of his generation. Willie Rough, a worker in the Greenock shipyards, becomes engaged in political action during the First World War. Leading his colleagues into a strike, he faces the pressures, individual and public, which bore down on those who resisted militarism and economic oppression. Having been jailed for defending workers' rights and the values of freedom he believes in, as the play ends he is unemployed. Faced by bosses' antagonism, he has to support his family. Discussing the need to find a job with his best friend, he shows indomitability:

Willie: […] I've got tae stay, Pat. I've got tae show folk what it's like tae live by somethin' ye believe in. […]
Pat: But ye havenae got a start [on a shipyard job] yet, Willie.
Willie: But I will, Pat. I've got tae.

The horn blasts long and loud. PAT *slowly walks away.* WILLIE *is on his own.*[6]

We have moved far away from the rural, morally simplified, even caricatured world of early McLellan and his contemporaries, and certainly far from the court and its machinations. We are in a modern industrial world where the individual man has to struggle for his values against capitalist forces. Scottish historical drama has become an urgent questioning of the place of the individual in society, no longer removed by centuries or by social status from everyday concerns. As this play and others of Bryden and his contemporaries deal in the manner of Angus Calder with the everyday and commonplace, history offers a means of re-experiencing and understanding anew social and political conflicts through the perspective of earlier generations' travails, whose history had been hidden by stories of kings, courts, diplomacy, and battles. In the 1970s, as playwrights see the emphasis shift in the work of others, there is a sense of their learning each from the other. As we shall see when we come to consider, for example, the work of Hector MacMillan and John McGrath, there is a clear sense that, while playwrights developed their own aesthetic and practice, their contemporaries pushed them further. It is not hard to see Bryden and Conn's concern with common humanity as linked and Conn's progression from *The Burning* to *Thistlewood* as one where the emphasis of the play shifts from the dealings of the great to those of the people. Indeed, *Willie Rough* pays little attention to the world of the great, rather emphasizing from the start the history of those largely exploited and neglected.

Concern with human interaction in Bryden's writing could at times, and certainly in some scenes in *Willie Rough*—even the ending of the play just cited—topple into sentimentality, a quality found in his later work. Perhaps for Bryden such occasional lapses result from a desire to explore the individual in history and emphasize his characters' emotional and social lives. *Benny Lynch* (1974) not only details the rise and fall of the world champion boxer, but does so by placing him in an imaginatively realized social context which makes sense in emotional terms of his downfall. Bryden's early work demonstrates a capacity to develop his vision of the everyday reality of given periods and social groups. The relationship, for example, of Lynch and his manager, the latter managing and manipulating the former, is sharply drawn, showing the operation of financial power and the difficulty for those not used to resisting that power.

Bryden's later historical work, however, seems to lose the precision of social and emotional observation found, if at times over-sentimentalized, in *Willie Rough* and *Benny Lynch*. *Civilians* (1981) has rather sketchy characterization, plotting reduced at times to staged anecdote, and little sense of fully realized context, settling instead for spectacle. The opening scene, showing the Clydebank blitz, foreshadows Bryden's later sensational large-scale dramatic scene-setting. This spectacular dimension appears first in a non-historical play, *The Ship* (1990), which explores the then recent building of the *Queen Elizabeth II* on the Clyde. The play made no real attempt to realize individual depths of character or situation, instead presenting a series of character cameos and a melodramatic inter-religious love story. What Bryden sought and achieved instead was a panoramic view of the epic scale of the effort of conceiving, designing, and building a great ship and the ways in which the industrial activity affected the everyday lives of those working on it, whether labourers or management. The production, with live music and striking *coups de théâtre*, was a popular success. Perhaps sacrifice of psychological detail to sensational scenography was for Bryden a necessary price to pay for epic scale.

This criticism is certainly fair with regard to his next historical drama, *The Big Picnic* (1994). Here, we follow a group of Glaswegians as they are recruited in the First World War into the Army, trained, go overseas, and face fire at Mons. Spectacular effects include hydraulic movement of the audience sideways as it follows the soldiers going over the top into tracer fire, simulated by lasers. Later, the Angel of Mons appears, flying over the battlefield and the bodies of many soldiers we had come to know, now dead or wounded. Within a popular form, the production combined

sentimentalization and celebration of dubious values of chauvinism and militarism with a large-scale theatricality, new in the twentieth-century Scottish scene. His effects camouflaged sentimental and macho treatment of his topics when their complexity needed the greater attention to detail of character and motivation seen in his earliest work. The play, nonetheless, deals with mythically and ideologically fraught topics, the Great War, Scotsmen's machismo, militarism, and West Coast homosocial bonding. Bryden's playwriting has consistently lain between the poles of, on the one hand, populism and love of the personal and demotic and, on the other, over-simplification and emotional indulgence of his material.

The Big Picnic divided critical opinion. Michael Billington in *The Guardian* (19 September 1994), while conceding 'only a handful of the characters spring to dramatic life', concluded, 'In the end, the show's emotional integrity and technical audacity compensate for its dramatic shortcomings.' By contrast, Joyce McMillan in *Scotland on Sunday* (25 September 1994) observed,

> love him or hate him, Bryden reaches parts of the Scottish public other theatre directors cannot touch, and that achievement demands recognition. But […] I find the powerful public response to Bryden's work more depressing than encouraging: [*The Big Picnic*] strikes me as one of the most shallow and inadequate accounts of [the First World War] I have ever seen. […] war is a much uglier thing than Bryden conjures up here, more serious, more profound, more filthy, more terrible, and far, far more wrong.

As Bryden's history plays developed, his focus on the common people led to a softening of the sharp political and social observation found in *Willie Rough* and *Benny Lynch.* His broad-brush approach to historical material came to blur that sharpness of view. Ironically, his delving into the hidden history of west of Scotland working classes ended, in his later history plays, in a new mythification, sentimentalizing and over-generalizing experience on which his earlier plays had largely cast fresh detailed light.

The difficulties of mythification and over-generalization that developed in Bryden's work are also inherent in the work, as it developed over the years, of other dramatists who addressed everyday life using historical topics. Certainly the achievements of the next two playwrights under discussion, Hector MacMillan (b. 1929) and John McGrath (1935–2002) have been great, but aspects of their writing led to a coarseness in their representation of historical topics. While both write from related radical

ideological positions, their plays in many ways in sympathy, their dramaturgical approaches are quite distinct.

Hector MacMillan

MacMillan's key historical dramas, *The Rising* (1973) and *The Royal Visit* (1974), were premiered within a year of one another, having first appeared in radio versions, the former in 1970, the latter in 1972. *The Rising* concerns events in 1820, sometimes called the Radical War or the Scottish Insurrection, a largely neglected event until MacMillan's radio play and a history by Berresford Ellis and Seumas Mac A' Ghobhainn with a foreword by Hugh MacDiarmid both appeared in 1970.[7] In his introductory note to the play, MacMillan describes *The Rising* as 'a story that has been kept alive from generation to generation by a relatively small number of committed Scots [including his own father]'.[8] His desire to open up history which is in some sense 'hidden' is made clear when he continues:

> It was never my intention to produce any kind of conventional stage play. I set out to recreate on stage the essence of a part of our history. I have tried to do so in a manner that will appeal on as many different levels as possible to the people whose forebears created that history in the first place and who are still deprived of full knowledge of it.[9]

It is clear that MacMillan sees his purpose as providing what he considers 'full knowledge' for 'the people' who have been 'deprived'. There is no doubt that Bill Bryden in writing *Willie Rough*, which was based on family stories of work in First World War Greenock shipyards—the hero is named after his grandfather—was concerned to bring out something which was hidden within his family memory, but here MacMillan is going further. His proposition that people were deprived of 'full knowledge' implies some form of suppression of knowledge of the events he dramatizes. While Conn in the 1970s seeks to open up new perspectives on public events that appeared well known and Bryden seeks to reveal individual stories within existing large historical narratives, MacMillan quite explicitly asserts his intention is to inform a wider public of a story 'kept alive from generation to generation'. MacMillan's phrasing implies that in some sense knowledge had been privileged and hidden from the people. Indeed, one might read this passage as MacMillan suggesting his version is somehow more authentic, essential to be known or 'truer' because,

otherwise, why would it have to be smuggled through the generations and now need to be set out 'on stage [as] the essence of a part of our history'. The very use of the word 'our' here asserts the identity of a group—of which MacMillan counts himself part—to whom his play is returning its own history. Meanwhile, he talks of the 'essence of a part of our history', as if there could be any single such thing, rather than yet another ideologically inflected version of 'history'.Yet, having exposed the slipperiness of some of MacMillan's terminology, one might conclude that since all history, let alone history plays, are inflected by ideological considerations, what Macmillan is doing here is seeking to offer a non-conventional and anti-Establishment take on what was at the time a rather obscure event in Scottish history, the small-scale rising of some weavers in a small number of centres in the Scottish Central Belt. The fact his introduction appears to argue that what he is doing is to return history to the people who made it scarcely invalidates what he is doing any more than it validates it. What is certain is that it makes clear that, like any historical narration, bias—in this case populist radical bias—is embedded in the play. While the work of McLellan and his contemporaries tended to show a bias in favour of resisting what they saw as the oppression of Scottish culture, particularly the use of Scots language, MacMillan's generation accepts the use of Scots as a given and proceeds to employ it in revealing fresh aspects of perceived givens of Scottish history. Certainly, after the appearance in the early 1970s of MacMillan's play and Ellis and Mac A' Ghobhainn's history, the profile of 'The Rising' was, and remains, raised.

The Rising, then, presents the events surrounding a post-Peterloo rising for democratic rights as it developed among weavers in the town of Strathaven, led by 67-year-old James Wilson. In Act Two, its action also relates to the rising led by Andrew Hardie and John Baird at Bonniemuir. Dramatic scenes are complemented by occasional direct address by a 'Placeman' and finally by the cast. They are also interspersed with songs and poetry of the period, now often seen as traditional and, so, carrying the supposedly validatory impact of folk music. The play is written in a broadly post-Brechtian style in which songs offer ironic counterpoint or dramatic emphasis to the action. As Conn was to do in *Thistlewood*, produced two years later, MacMillan highlights Lord Sidmouth's role in the oppression of workers seeking the right to vote and his use of spies and agents provocateurs (though Christopher Whatley has, perhaps controversially, argued against agent provocateurs having been used in Scotland in this case[10]). MacMillan's play is not, though, a simple *pièce à thèse*: he introduces

fictional characters like the Fallows, father and daughter, who are seen to argue a case, however self-interested, against the rising's dangers, though later they act as informers. While it has been suggested that Wilson took part in the attempted rising under duress, Macmillan presents him as the willing leader of the group of about 25 men who set out for Glasgow via Cathkin Braes in a futile attempt to overthrow the government. On being warned on the way that they are walking into a trap, Wilson, whose radical reputation dates back through the 1790s, reluctantly returns home. A marked man, he is nonetheless arrested, found guilty of treason, hanged, and beheaded at Glasgow, as at Stirling were Hardie and Baird, about whom James Kelman wrote a 1991 play. MacMillan, writing in the context of post-1968 social protest throughout western Europe and America, is undoubtedly using the hidden history he explores to endorse dramatically a radical case for democratic rights against conservatively oppressive government.

MacMillan's anti-Establishment perspectives are again developed in *The Royal Visit*. This satirizes the stage management of George IV's 1822 royal visit to Edinburgh. Walter Scott is a key figure in this play, his royalism and support for the Union an object of mockery. So is his promotion of tartanry, the subject of a very funny scene as Nicholson, a kilt-maker, finds it hard to get his tape-measure round George's corpulence. MacMillan represents the visit as an attempt to create support for the state after the events of the Rising two years earlier. Scott is opposed, on the one hand, by Castlereagh who wishes to assert the Unionist state's power: when Scott says 'no nation yet has ever agreed to have its record wiped from the pages of history', Castlereagh replies, 'The Scotch nation no longer exists' (p. 1/37).[11] When later Castlereagh says, 'You may have colour, splendour, and warpipes. You may have tradition. What you may not have is history!' and Scott replies '[…] I meant no mischief. It was the vision of a poet', Castlereagh responds, 'Few things are potentially more dangerous' (p. 1/42). As if to reinforce this point, Scott's other opponent is the radical poet Sandy Roger, who is allied to Wilson of *The Rising* and the lover of Scott's maid, Jean. When Scott writes his sycophantic song, 'Carle, now the King's come', Jean lets Sandy know and he produces a scabrous parody, 'Wattie, when the King's come', which includes such lines as 'Kneel and kiss his gracious bum!' Scott is enraged; Jean is sacked. Nonetheless, while Scott has stage-managed an assertion of Scotland which is not just tradition, but his version of its 'history', Sandy has counterpoised his radical subversion of Scott's 'Royal Visit'. We hear Sandy's version being sung

in the streets as the play ends. While MacMillan returns to history with *A Greater Tomorrow* (1997), exploring the Spanish Civil War experiences of Jock Hutchison, the biographical theme and serious tone provide an early twentieth-century ideological parallel to *The Rising* rather than the lighter, but sharper, tone of *The Royal Visit*. MacMillan's satirical use of comedy in *The Royal Visit* parallels the approaches to versions of Scottish history being developed by his younger contemporaries, John McGrath and the present author.

MacMillan's stated intention 'was never […] to produce any kind of conventional stage play'. By this he presumably meant domestic dramas set in private spaces or drawing-room comedies. Nonetheless, his combination of dramatic scenes, songs and, on occasion, direct address accords with the conventions of much progressive dramaturgy in the 1970s, itself often indebted to Brechtian play-shaping. Bryden, of course, stuck to a conventionally ordered, if highly theatrical, scene structure for his 1970s history plays, both of which tended to the more domesticated contexts which suited his focus on individuals in history. By contrast, Conn and MacMillan in the plays discussed adopted post-Brechtian dramaturgical structures, as did McGrath. This work, dealing in larger public events, demanded less domestic setting and more settings reminding the audience it was in a theatrical space watching a dramatic performance. The master of such dramaturgy in 1970s Scotland was, of course, John McGrath.

John McGrath

McGrath is probably best known for his first foray into Scottish history, *The Cheviot, The Stag and the Black Black Oil* (1973). This play famously adopts for its topic, waves of exploitation of the Highlands, a Highland performance mode, the cèilidh. Within this loose dramaturgical format, McGrath can move quirkily among song, scene, satire, poems, and direct address. He populates the play with caricatures of those who sought, and seek, to exploit the area, from Queen Victoria to Andy McChuckemup, a 'Glasgow Property-operator's man' who is planning to set up such tourist features as 'The Crammem Inn, High Rise Motorcroft' and a 'wee ethnic bit, Fingal's Caff'.[12] McGrath employs some Gaelic in dialogue and several Gaelic songs, including some by Mary MacPherson or 'Màiri Mhòr nan Òran' ('Big Mary of the Songs') (1821–98), the land-campaigning songwriter, a native of Skye who migrated to Inverness and Glasgow. Throughout, McGrath uses music to counterpoint his critique

of the historical exploitation of Highlands and Highlanders by landlords and capitalists. Recent analysis by the present author and Sìm Innes has highlighted the various ways McGrath subverts to political and dramatic effect the politico-cultural implications of the music hall, popular, ballad, and Gaelic music he uses.[13]

McGrath's approach to the representation of history in *The Cheviot* is constantly to reinforce the point that the historical background continues to the present day to have impact. Although, as Innes and I point out, the oil industry has little direct impact on the Highlands, rather being focused offshore in the North Sea, such a sleight of hand as McGrath carries out here, in adding oil to the other major engines of exploitation of the Highlands, is effective in carrying forward, through the energy of his playwriting, his theatrical critique of exploitation. There is no question but that the versions of history being represented are intended repeatedly to reinforce perceptions of widespread exploitation, largely by outside capitalists, derived from popular histories of the Highland Clearances. Of course, one might suggest that the Highlands were not alone in being 'cleared': many country areas across Scotland, and indeed most of Europe, were cleared or 'improved' through what is commonly called the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century 'Agricultural Revolution'. Nonetheless, there is no doubt that Highland clearances have a much higher profile than those elsewhere, while the continuing exploitation of cleared land for commercial hunting and tourism provides a powerful exemplar for McGrath's attack on exploitative capitalism.

McGrath continued his experiments in representing Scottish history on stage through the work of the company he set up with colleagues, 7:84 (Scotland) with such shows as *The Game's a Bogey* (1974), *Little Red Hen* (1975) and *Joe's Drum* (1979). In the first two of these, McGrath emphasizes his perception of the continuity of the need for radical political action from his chosen historic examples into the present day. In the first, introduced as the '7:84 John MacLean Show […] a few songs, some acts, some facts about a man who lived fifty years ago, and some facts about the way we live today' (p. 2),[14] his historic example is the early twentieth-century Glasgow Marxist politician. In *Little Red Hen* he contrasts the attitude of an older Red Hen (Henrietta) who reminds the audience of the words and actions—and sometimes failure—of the Red Clydeside politicians and MPs of the generation of James Maxton, Willie Gallacher, Davie Kirkwood, John Wheatley and, again John McLean. In this analysis, Old Hen seeks to inform her granddaughter, Young Hen, of the need to continue and

carry forward the radical campaigns of the Red Clydesiders. Both plays use a loose dramatic structure clearly derived, in its short scenes, use of songs (now original) and satirical direct popular presentation, from the lessons learned in the writing of *The Cheviot*. Indeed, McGrath revives the darkly comic Andy McChuckemup created for *The Cheviot* in *The Game's a Bogey*. Now his Cramemin Investments, Govan, applies its expertise to backstairs politics and commercial exploitation in the city of Glasgow as it still does in Aberdeen and the Highlands. He outlines his plans with eerily acute 1970s foresight of twenty-first century Glasgow:

> the kin' of expertise we's is developing up there, we'll be applying to the Clydeside, where we'll be intent on providing a fun, fun, fun river, where before, formerly, there was hee-haw but industrial gloom. So all along the Broomielaw, south side of Dumbarton Road, north side of Paisley Road West, we's have got wor neo-Georgian, executive, riverside dwellings wi' private slipway and heliport. (p. 34)

McGrath is certainly the most explicit of the other 1970s playwrights considered in this chapter in linking his historical material to contemporary political and social issues. Indeed *Joe's Drum*, the last of his 1970s plays on historic themes, reacts to the disappointment of the 1979 Scottish Assembly referendum and the questionable electoral means by which a slight majority for an Assembly was denied, reminding audiences of the authoritarian Unionist centralism prevalent in eighteenth-century Scottish government. It covers such events as the Porteous riots and the political control system run by Henry Dundas, Pitt the Younger's 'political manager' of Scotland. It sets the necessity of vital popular protest against the power of established authority. McGrath's 1970s historical drama is always written with a clear eye on immediate implications for the contemporary audience.

Just as Bill Bryden moved to a larger scale in 1990, so, a year earlier, did McGrath. In controversial circumstances, he resigned from his 7:84 role in 1988 in protest at what he considered unreasonable Scottish Arts Council requests. His next historical play, *Border Warfare* (1989), was presented by Wildcat, a company set up as an offshoot of 7:84 in 1978 by his brother-in-law, David MacLennan, and their long-time musical collaborator, David Anderson. This sprawling promenade production, performed in the spacious Tramway Theatre, sought to present in three acts the entire history of Scotland. The performance drew together knights

on wooden horseback, trucked effects, dramatic dialogue, largely in verse, prose speeches, often from the record, and recitation and declamation, for example, of Barbour's paean to freedom and the Declaration of Arbroath. The whole is a mosaic of imagination and historical documentation overlaid in a tumultuous evening of comedy, pathos, rhetoric, and spectacle.

The first Act starts with the very first people arriving in Scotland and runs up to the reign of Robert the Bruce. McGrath cuts through any tendency to hero worship in the treatment of Scottish history. For example, his Robert the Bruce says of William Wallace, 'Wallace was a brutal man, third son of a small estate in Ayrshire, a wild man with little finesse but effective' (p. 24).[15] Bruce himself is presented as the cunning, shiftily diplomatic, manager of power that Kemp had denied in his *The King of Scots*: when Bruce is defeated in the battle of Methven early in his campaign, he 'vanishes into the AUDIENCE—or far corners of the hall, or up trees and lighting towers […]' (p. 28). McGrath is not entirely subverting the historical discourse, but he is explicitly selecting his perspective. For example, at the time the play was written there was a suggestion that Wallace, usually thought to have been born in Elderslie near Paisley, was actually from Elderslie in Ayrshire and McGrath has Bruce expound that 'heretical' view, though it is not widely accepted. McGrath tends to exploit his sources in ways that subvert established clichés and challenge easy assumptions about Scottish identity, in particular, as the title implies with regard to its conflictual relationship with its neighbour, England.

The original writing in this palimpsest of a play is largely in a loose blank verse. This is often fast flowing, but with a tendency to bathos. For example, when Edward Balliol invades and reduces Bruce's legacy in the reign of David II, we hear:

> To Edward of England he gave half our nation:
> The border then ran from the Don to Dumbarton.
> Then out went the English to fight against France –
> And out went King Balliol, with a kick in the pants. (p. 37)

One might argue that such bathos reduces the play's serious impact. Against this, however, one can suggest that it has the theatrical effect of undermining any tendency to grandiose pomposity while deflating the status of figures McGrath feels unworthy of respect, like Edward Balliol. Certainly, as might be expected from this playwright, McGrath's

sympathies are rarely with the grand figures of history and more with the common people. When the Stewarts are introduced in a roll call, we find:

> Oh God help the people with such men for their master –
> What is hard for the Lord, for the poor man's disaster. (p. 39)

Such a highly rhythmic mode of delivery is undeniably well suited to expounding rapidly a complex plot and ambitious story. Act One ends with James VI newly arrived in London and both parliaments refusing his proposal that there be a political union of the two countries. Act Two is concerned mainly with the War of the Three Nations and its impact on Scotland, including representation of the Covenanters as proto-democratic proto-nationalists, and the negotiations leading up to the Treaty of Union, ending with Burns's 'Parcel of Rogues'. Act Three then ranges from the '45 Jacobite Rising through the trial of Thomas Muir, the 1822 royal visit, the experience of Empire, the Clearances, the Industrial Revolution, Chartism and its suppression, and addresses the rise of the Labour movement, in which it sets Keir Hardie against the Orange Order. It shows splits in socialism when John McLean, who again appears, finds it cannot prevent the First World War and it presents the recurrent defeat of moves towards Home Rule in terms of a football match. The concluding image is Margaret Thatcher's triumphant entrance on a 'Knoxmobile'.

In many ways this play culminates McGrath's dramaturgical experimentation in his radical approach to Scottish history. He avoids tired clichés. He creates a popular form which draws, as did Conn's *Thistlewood* on a smaller scale, on European promenade drama of the 1970s. He explores continuities between the past and the present. The scale and ambition of *Border Warfare* foreshadows Bryden's directorial experiments in the following year with *The Ship*. McGrath's theatrical radicalism echoes and supports the radicalism of his political scepticism. He does not question the nature of history in itself as a created discourse, but he seeks to present fresh perspectives on periods of history, some forgotten, some refocused by him, to cast light on contemporary political conditions. For him, history is, above all, the ground from which current conditions emerge. It would be easy to label him simply as a Marxist—certainly his political views are influenced by Marxism—but he has a more athletic and supple mind than to be entrapped by ideological dogmatism. His declared support for Scottish independence later in his career marks his mind's openness to

changing political perceptions; his seeming-endless dramatic invention marks his mind's openness to the wide-ranging potential of theatricality.

Ian Brown

In discussing the broad spectrum of 1970s history plays, it is hard to avoid addressing the first history play of another playwright (b. 1945) influenced by Marxist analysis: my *Carnegie*, was premiered in the same month, April 1973, as *The Cheviot*: again influenced by the work of Ronconi and Stewart, and by Grotowski and Weiss, this play seeks directly to deconstruct and subvert not only the myth embodied in contemporary perceptions of Andrew Carnegie as an embodiment of the Scottish 'lad o' pairts' and saintly disinterested philanthropism, but to do so by deconstructing theatrical conventions. The play unfolds through a series of dramatic scenes, songs exposing the working and living conditions of Carnegie's workforce and their families, speeches by, or in the style of, Carnegie and direct address, in Act One, by Uncle Sam who welcomes the audience to his 'school of business' (p. 6)[16] in which the culminating lesson is the celebration of 'enterprise, initiative, competition and MONOPOLY CONSOLIDATION' (p. 35) and, in Act Two, by colleagues and workers whose lives have been ruined by Carnegie's predatory business methods.[17] Juxtaposition undermines any idealized version of the Carnegie myth when, in Susanne Kries's analysis, 'pompous statements are immediately contrasted by songs and choral sequences of Carnegie's exploited workmen, who reshape Carnegie's assertions and mold [*sic*] the audience's understanding of the historical figure'.[18]

Thus, *Carnegie* sets out to inhibit sympathy for Carnegie's position and direct it to examination of the conditions of unbridled capitalism that allow him to operate. He is represented not as the mythic philanthropic self-made hero: while that 'heroism' is included within the discourse of the play, it is compromized by aspects of Carnegie's behaviour which were usually hidden, discounted by the sanitized history that sees, especially in Scotland, only his benefactions. That the play struck a nerve is demonstrated by the fact that when Prospect Theatre Company scheduled it as part of the 1972 official Edinburgh Festival, a prominent Festival Board member, J. B. Rankin, a senior Bank of Scotland figure, made it his business to ensure it was not confirmed in the programme, purportedly on cost grounds and, when it was rescheduled for the next year at the Royal Lyceum Theatre on whose Board he also sat, again tried, though this time unsuccessfully, to prevent its production.[19]

Mary (1977) carries forward this kind of engagement with Scottish history, theatrical experiment and subversion of myth. The multifaceted queen is, according to Randall Stevenson, 'dramatised through a multiplicity of styles, tones and historical points of view [whose] variety communicates unusually successfully the extent of the problem Mary's much-dramatised life has posed for Scottish history and the Scottish imagination'.[20] Here dramaturgical practice develops the deflationary juxtapositional method developed for *Carnegie*, so that, as Cordelia Oliver summarizes it,

> the facts and legend of Mary, Queen of Scots [are put] into a sort of kaleidoscope, all shifts and surprising arrangements—high and low comedy cross cut with bawdy satire and a strong sense of the factual reality which surely underlay the myth […in] meaningful alienation through jump-cut reference to other media.[21]

Mary's escape from Lochleven Castle, often seen as high drama, is presented, for example, as a scene from a kailyard play, in which Knox and Lennox play Jeannie and Aggie, two elderly maids comically delaying rather than expediting her escape. The scene opens with a parody of the opening of McLellan's *Toom Byres*:

LENNOX: Sic a ding ye gied ma pair pulsing hert. Hirpling in there the like of an oossie puddock.

KNOX: Aye, hinnie. It's a dour lift aboon us baith and a queer eldritch nicht the nicht. The birdies and the beasties, Aggie, the birdies and the beasties is ower awfy restless. The hens're ill tae lay and the kye's kicked ower the mune. The hoonds're howling, the hoolets hooting, and, hoots, it's gey eerie the nicht, a nicht for bogles and whigmaleeries. (p. 74)[22]

The undermining of Scottish historical shibboleths is reflected not just in such subversion of McLellanite historical drama, but in the overall comic tone and explicitly performed nature of this play's theatricality and so of the history it contains, as leading characters play other roles so that, as Steve Cramer expresses it, 'the theatrical shaping of versions of Mary is highlighted [… as] leading characters such as Moray or Knox shape their versions of "Mary" to meet their political and ideological ends, just as later historians were to do'.[23] By the end of the play, 'Mary' is signified according to the ideological need of whomsoever summons her manifestation. In their final scene, Morton and Ruthven conclude:

MORTON: Mary? LAUGHS A figment of the imagination. Wha cares aboot her?

RUTHVEN: It's a travesty.
MORTON: Aye, son, it's aw a travesty. (p. 80)

After this exchange, the play ends as Mary says:

> […] the Scots call me whore, the English danger, and the Catholics they already call me a martyr. They call me all these things and I am no-one. Who cares about me? I could be neither public nor private. Myself. I am nothing. All my life is this pain. (p. 81)

Mary has become a historical simulacrum onto which can be read any version of Scottish history one wishes. Her identity is at the mercy of anyone who, like Lennox at the start of Act Two is 'whit ye'd cry an Artistic Embellisher and History Enlivening Operative' (p. 49).

I have written so far only three more history plays, each distinct in its style. *Beatrice* (1989) is a one-person play, orthodox in form, based on the character of Beatrice de Planissoles found in Emmanuel Leroy Ladurie's seminal history of a Cathar village, *Montaillou* (1975). *Margaret* (2000) is a dramaturgically orthodox exposition of the life of Queen/Saint Margaret of Scotland and her relationship with her husband, Malcolm the Great (Ceann mòr). *Beatrice* is written in English, while *Margaret* is in Scots, but the next experimental play is in Scots. *A Great Reckonin* (2000) relates the story of the assassination of James I in Perth in 1437. It does so through the framing device of a company of actors—guisers—visiting to perform for the king. Having been held up, they arrive after the beginning of Lent. This means they cannot perform until Easter has passed, and anyway the king for whom they wish to perform is dead. They need to act to live and, so, with the help of Andra the butler, they begin to construct a play incorporating their versions of key moments in James's life and death. The play operates at several levels. The company of guisers reflect the jealousies and squabbles of a creative company, while the scenes they create highlight different versions of the history of James. Cramer argues that this play engages with ideology, representation, and history, 'more specifically the capacity of art and artists to retell history through the unconscious ideological nuances of their culture […] but their inability to recognise historical and ideological causalities beneath their representation lead once again to the creation of historical myth'.[24] In the sequence from *Carnegie* to *A Great Reckonin*, hidden history and subverted theatrical conventions controvert accepted historical narratives.

Donald Campbell

Donald Campbell (b. 1940), while concerned with versions of ideological standpoint, is more orthodox in his dramaturgy in his history plays. His first play, *The Jesuit* (1976),[25] returns to the reign of James VI about which, from different perspectives, McLellan and Conn had already written, but during the period when James was running Scotland by the pen from London. Where *The Burning* examined the authoritarianism and cruelty of the state in terms of rationalized hysterical belief in witchcraft, Campbell is interested in the processes by which the state, in the form of the established church, deals with the danger to its order represented by the arrival of Jesuit missionaries, or, as they would characterize them in a modern term, Jesuit terrorists. Campbell deals with the capture, imprisonment, torture, and trial of John Ogilvie under the supervision of the quasi-Presbyterian Archbishop Spottiswoode of Glasgow at a time when the Presbyterian church, under the hand of James, practised episcopal governance. Campbell raises profound questions of politico-religious belief, opposing the radically committed Jesuit, himself the representative of an authoritarian theology, against a cleric whose instinct is to find compromise, hoping, vainly, to establish a Church of Scotland which by a middle way can accommodate both extreme Calvinists and those remaining, or staying sympathetic to, Roman Catholicism. The absolute determination of Ogilvie not to accept the supremacy of James means that the apparent willingness of Spottiswoode (and James) simply to exile him for saying mass, if only he will swear an oath of loyalty to James, is defeated by Ogilvie's own sense of what is right, an echo perhaps of Robert Bolt's Thomas More. The high-level and passionate argument between Spottiswoode and Ogilvie drives the play forward with considerable dramatic force in a manner both Shavian and Brechtian, though the play itself does not make use of the post-Brechtian devices other of Campbell's generation use. Campbell works in a more naturalistic style, a mode that would not seem alien to the work of McLellan's generation, although his Scots is demotic (indeed, his soldiers speak Edinburgh dialect).

The argument between the clerics is complemented by the conflict among those soldiers. Four guard Ogilvie and we see a certain typification: Will, young and naive, Andrew and Sandy in different ways old hands, and Wat the brutal old sweat with a craftsman's pleasure in the details of effective torture. Through the progress of their developing attitudes and treatment of Ogilvie we see their journey of faith, even though a

constant refrain from them is of knowing their place, as when Will, asked by a doctor for his view on the trial's outcome, says 'That's no for me to say' (p. 238). This journey is particularly clear in Will's case. Will listens to Ogilvie and worries that, if Ogilvie is right, he cannot marry unless in a Catholic ceremony, especially if 'the papes won like'. To this Andrew responds, 'Wullie, ye're a chynged laddie, dae ye ken that? […] Jist a few short months syne ye were aa for burnin every pape in sicht!' (p. 246). Will reflects the fear of his superiors that the protestant Reformation in Scotland could even in 1614–15, the period of the play's action, be overthrown. To this, Andrew responds,

> The papes arenae comin back because the gentry—Faither Ogilvie's ain kind—'ll never let them [… The reason] the papes got kicked oot of the country in the first place was so's thae buggers could get their hauns on the ferms and the big hooses and aa the property and treisour that belonged tae the Roman Kirk. Ye'll no tell me that they're going tae hand aa that back for a daft-like thing like religion? (246)

Underlying Andrew's cynicism is the ironic possibility raised by Ogilvie and not quite denied by Andrew that his family and he remain at heart committed to Catholicism. Campbell's dramaturgic methods in many ways return to those of a previous generation, but his naturalistic methods achieve greater ethical, philosophical, and political complexity. He combines the interest of MacMillan and McGrath in issues of state control and economic and political establishments' power with a concern with the individual psychopathology and character of those he portrays that is arguably more subtle than theirs. In this, he is closer to Conn and Bryden with their imaginative emphasis on the hidden history of the individual living at a given time. Thus, while we see Ogilvie go, almost as a self-willed martyr, to his death in a way that stirs contemporary echoes of religious fundamentalism, Campbell manages to convey his message without any sense of his preaching a prior and privileged viewpoint.

Campbell's suspicion of those who manipulate others for their own ends is reflected in *Somerville the Soldier* (1978). Here, like Conn, MacMillan, and McGrath, Campbell is drawn to the period of suppression connected with the campaigns for suffrage and political liberty during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century which led into the Chartist movement. This period's attraction is certainly linked to the libertarian movements, both political and cultural, arising from *les évènements* in

Paris in 1968 and the anti-Vietnam War movement. Indeed, McGrath quite explicitly comments on the importance of his own direct experience of visiting Paris during *les évènements* to his developing political philosophies.[26] These plays reflect the worries of many libertarian organizations in the 1970s about, on one hand, police and, on the other, Trotskyite infiltration. Certainly, Campbell explores in *Somerville* ways in which movements can be exploited by campaigners for ulterior purposes. The historical Somerville had written to the papers in Birmingham where he was serving with the Scots Greys to protest about soldiers being used to suppress demonstrations in favour of an enlarged franchise. While this did not constitute an offence, his commanding officer then placed him in a situation where he was seen to disobey orders. He was condemned to 200 lashes with the cat o' nine tails. After 100 lashes, during which Somerville refused to cry out or complain, the punishment was stopped and Somerville discharged.

As in *The Jesuit*, Campbell is very clear about the impact of torture, as this punishment surely was, reminding the audience that each 'tail' of the whip had six knots so that each lash involved 54 individual wounds. The play's action begins after Somerville has won a pardon, been compensated for his maltreatment and become a public figure. A Captain Gillies tempts him to join and lead a group of protesters against the treatment of the Tolpuddle Martyrs and for electoral reform. Gillies actually wants to use this protest not to achieve its supposed aims, but to instigate a process of repression, then revolution. Somerville alerts the protest leaders and defuses a potential bloody conflict. Thus baulked, Gillies bursts out:

> What does it matter if one man is flogged? What does it matter if six illiterate peasants are shipped off to the colonies? How far does that take us down the Revolutionary road? […] We have no room for such vanities as praise or glory or individualistic ambition. All ambition has to serve the Revolution—all praise and glory must go to the collective struggle. (pp. 93–4)[27]

Somerville's ethical response to his own oppression and physical suffering, and his concern for the welfare of those who might be sacrificed to the 'Revolutionary road', is a key theme of this play. Gillies, meanwhile, is seen as no better morally than the spies and agents provocateurs radicals face in both Campbell's play and Conn's, MacMillan's, and McGrath's. Gillies, in effect, is an agent provocateur for the 'Revolution'. Campbell clearly exposes the human costs his tactics might demand.

Campbell's concern for the individual remains in his next history play, *The Widows of Clyth* (1979), but moves from the public arena to the personal. He draws on a fishing disaster in his native Caithness:

> On Wednesday, the twenty-sixth of January, 1876, six men from Clyth, in Caithness, put out to sea. Their names were: David Sutherland, Thomas Sutherland, William Sutherland, Robert Sutherland, Donald Sinclair and William MacKay. The following morning, almost within sight of their own homes, the boat was wrecked and they were all lost. Between them, they left behind five widows and twenty-six children in a state of acute poverty. […] On the one hand, I have tried by gathering together fragments of fact, folklore and oral tradition, to be as accurate as possible in the representation of events: on the other, by reaching for dramatic insights of a more universal application, I have been forced to include some elements of fiction in the narrative.[28]

Act One develops as the body of one of the fishermen is retrieved and it gradually dawns on the widows that there is no hope for the other men. Campbell reveals the quandaries of individual women, for example the pregnancy of Keet who is about to be married to one of the dead men. A Calamity Fund is established, raising a substantial sum. The remaining men assume that the women will leave the village and find roles in the nearby town of Weeck (Wick), unable to survive by their own efforts. Hector, brother of the drowned Sutherlands, says 'Och Annie! Use your noddle, will ye no? It's a hard enough life ye've had here with your men beside ye—without them, it'll just be impossible! Ye'll never manage as ye are, without men to support ye!' (p. 38). Campbell's play is, however, a celebration of the strength of women and their ability to defy oppressive male expectations. By Act Two, which is set ten years later, we find the women have managed. As Helen says,

> When the men were alive, they loved us well enough—and the Lord only knows we loved them!—but there was a man's place and there was a woman's place and ye had always to mind on it! [… When the Fund money came through] they said we'd never manage, did they no? They'd have us all in a sweetie-shop or a boarding-house in Weeck! Well, did we no show them, eh, Keet? (pp. 65–6)

The widows have defied male stereotyping that would have them serving in shops or in domestic and caring roles. Instead, they have brought up

their families with wise use of the Calamity Fund. One, Betsy, even continues to work so her daughter Janie might go to university, entry to which is a difficult challenge for a woman in 1886. Betsy says to the younger Keet, who, having had her illegitimate child, has survived church censure and is to marry Hector, 'Be careful what ye accept, lassie! […] There's times ye have to lay it out for yourself! […] acceptance in a woman is no virtue, Keet, whatever the world says! It's nothing more than a habit—and a bad, bad habit at that!' (p. 71).

Campbell uses his representation of the impact of the Clyth Calamity to demonstrate women's potential for power and managing their own lives. The disaster is certainly tragic, but the women move beyond grief to establish their own autonomy. The last moments of the play see an apparent replay of the opening scene when Hector is brought in seemingly dead after falling into the water and striking his head on rocks. The men present give up, but Keet refuses to let him die. She straddles him, applying artificial respiration while the other four women each take one of his limbs to warm against their breasts. Hector is recovered by female agency. The powerful female leader, Betsy, says to a male bystander that, while Hector's companion Geordie 'went into the sea after him […] We did no more than what women have always had to do—we suffered and struggled and persevered. We persevered, Markie. That's all' (p. 76). In *The Widows of Clyth* Campbell draws again on 1970s politico-cultural concerns, here feminism—not just the rights of women, but their power. He embodies his theme not in an explicit *pièce à these*, but embeds it in the specifics of individuals' actions in a historical context, rather than submerging individual capacity for action in either masculinized social expectation or programmatic political theory.

Campbell's later plays set in historical periods, while often striking, do not extend the ways in which he deals with 'history'. *Blackfriars Wynd* (1980) is a musical concerning the vibrant life in Edinburgh's late nineteenth-century Old Town, its plot exposing police corruption, a squalid criminal context, the false accusation of a Hearts player, and a fictionalised version of Robert Louis Stevenson. *Till All The Seas Run Dry* (1981) follows, broadly speaking, the approach of Burns's plays discussed in the last chapter. *Howard's Revenge* (1985) and the adaptation *Nancy Sleekit* (1995) engage with the one-person form, the first presenting the 'memories' of J. B. Howard, the actor who was a partner in Howard and Wyndham's, in a self-consciously theatrical piece drawing on the National Drama, melodrama, and a quirky lighting plot, the latter exploring the

amusing and lethal experiences of a serial Edinburgh widow. *The Ould Fella* (1993), featuring Hector Sutherland of *The Widows of Clyth* in old age, is a touching drama, bringing us up to date with his life and social context in which he survives another sea accident, but his young fisherman colleague drowns. *An Audience for McGonagall* (1987) is a one-act *jeu d'esprit* involving the great 'Poet and Tragedian', Queen Victoria, and John Brown. *The Sisters of Sciennes* (1996), a radio play, later brought to the stage, is set in James V's reign during a plague, chiefly in a nunnery whose inhabitants are wives and daughters of noblemen killed at Flodden. In summary, Campbell's interest in historical topics continues, but his most innovative history plays, and certainly the most influential, were produced in the 1970s.

W. Gordon Smith

Another playwright fascinated by the role of individual volition and possibility of autonomy in the face of established social attitudes was W. Gordon Smith (1928–1996). Smith's first play set the style of his dramaturgy which preponderantly favoured monodrama. In *Vincent* (1970) Smith, a distinguished art critic, exploits his own knowledge of the art world as his Van Gogh travels from town to town seeking recognition of his painting by others and his own creative nature by himself. Smith artfully shows Vincent's language breaking down, longer speeches of the earlier part giving way to fractured language and discourse, spilling images, often from the paintings. Smith's dramaturgy embodies Van Gogh's inner conflict and developing breakdown of sensibility.

It was his next play, however, that marked his engagement with Scottish history and his developing mastery of the one-person form that would achieve particular rapport with a broad-based audience. *Jock* (1972) explores with wit and often acerbity, Scottish history and mythology. Jock is a retired soldier, keeper of a Scottish military museum, which is effectively Jock's mind and memory of Scottish history and soldiers' war experience. The play opens with Jock addressing the audience, reciting his battle honours—including, with a typical Smith *jeu d'esprit*, the first Edinburgh Tattoo. Then, on a lighting change, he enacts a Northern Ireland patrol under fire. As the play shifts through time and place, it explores mythologies of militarism, questioning the nature of power. Fascinated by ideologies and mythologies of authority and the deflation of power's pretensions, Smith examines authority figures and their effect on

the common man through a variety of lenses, recognizing self-delusion as prevalent, perhaps necessary. The finale remembers the Suez crisis, the end of the Anglo-Scottish imperialist dream. Jock asserts, with typical iconoclasm, that, had there been a 'real call-up', then 'every able-bodied man in the country would have taken to the hills'.[29] At once, the play's paradoxical final image is of Jock, the disaffected common soldier who has seen through history's ironies, marching on the spot in thrall to a regimental band's *Scotland the Brave*: reason and atavism lie side-by-side in Everyman and may be roused despite one's rational scepticism. *Jock* embodies Scots' post-colonial ambivalence, and indeed that of the British in general, to their imperialist past's symbols and myths. Smith contributes theatrically to debate about the problematic deconstruction of myths of 'Britain' and Scotland's 'hidden history'. This debate certainly formed part of the Scottish cultural renaissance that has played a full part in the larger process of constitutional change.

In *Knox* (1974), his next play Smith revisits historical themes and the title suggests another one-person play. Smith, however, always engaged in paradox both thematically and theatrically. His John Knox addresses the audience as if it were a church congregation, his rhetorical flow interrupted by a young man and woman who challenge both his philosophy and 'truths'. The play manages, thus, to achieve the one-person form's interior quality, while breaking its theatrical rules. Smith, as Campbell was later to do, seeks dramatically to humanize Scottish historical figures, and simultaneously explore their legacy of conflict.

His concern with historic religious conflict and the way it might underlie contemporary intolerance is reflected in his next play on a historical theme, *Marie of Scotland* (1978). This explored the divisions between Protestantism and Catholicism, between Knox and Mary, Queen of Scots, from a woman's viewpoint. It was also one of the rare parts Smith wrote for women, much of his work preferring to address an internalized critique of male chauvinistic attitudes. It was nearly a decade before Smith returned to historical themes. *Mr Carnegie's Lantern Lecture* (1985) was an attempt to explore again the complexities of Carnegie, but, where *Carnegie* earlier explored issues of self-deluding self-presentation within a larger economic context and Smith touches on the ambiguities and hypocrisies exposed in that play, Smith's 'lecture', while often self-reflexively amusing, remains a lecture. After this, Smith began to repeat himself with *Vincent by Himself* (1986) and *Mister Jock* (1987). The latter retains Smith's wry sense of humour, but his material did not open fresh avenues.

Other Histories Revealed

Other playwrights developed the dramaturgical lines of the playwrights discussed in this chapter, consolidating their confident use of varieties of Scots, but without necessarily opening new avenues. James Kelman revisited the Scottish Rising with *Hardie and Baird*, already mentioned. George Byatt wrote about another iconic Scottish hero in *The Brus* (1990). George Rosie explored the 'hidden history' of Presbyterian persecution of freedom of thought in *The Blasphemer* (1990) and the corrupted later life of Bonnie Prince Charlie in *Carlucco and the Queen of Hearts* (1991). These playwrights certainly added to the canon of work within the broad frameworks and thematic concerns developed in the 1970s.

Meanwhile, C. P. Taylor chose a European topic for his major history play, *Good* (1981), foreshadowing approaches in the work of Jo Clifford and Peter Arnott. *Good* follows the corruption through his own character weaknesses of a liberal music-loving Frankfurt literature professor, John Halder, as he believes he can deal with the Nazi party and somehow convince it of its errors. Instead, oblivious to the compromises he is making, he rises through the Nazi hierarchy, complicit in such affronts to the civilization in which he believes as book-burning and the night of Broken Glass, before becoming involved in Auschwitz. Throughout, Taylor has us hear the music in Halder's head which comforts him and whose supposed civilizing effect and civilized standards mask his slow, steady *dégringolade*. Halder seems a 'good man', but is morally limited, settling too often for a good life, seduced by Nazi rationalizations he does not choose to see through. His flawed moral compass is demonstrated in the way he justifies what he is doing to his best friend Maurice, a Jew who suffers under the Nazis, and his betrayal of his wife, leaving her for one of his students. Taylor presents a chilling, yet also moving, picture of a well-meaning individual sinking into self-delusion and participating in wicked acts that, before, he would have deprecated. Against this dramaturgically highly varied, but exclusively masculine 1970s background, however, throughout the 1980s a new approach in writing historical drama was being developed by two remarkable women discussed in the next chapter.

Notes

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2. Stewart Conn, 'Author's Original Note', in Bill Findlay (ed.), *Scots Plays of the Seventies* (Dalkeith: Scottish Cultural Press, 2001), 143. Page references are to this edition.
3. Robert Hartley Cromek, *Remains of Nithsdale and Galloway Song* (London: Cadell and Davies, 1810), pp. 276–7.
4. Author's typescript, Act Two, 26.
5. Author's typescript, Act Two, 35.
6. Bill Bryden, *Willie Rough* (Edinburgh: Southside, 1972), 89–90.
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9. Ibid.
10. Christopher Whatley, *Scottish Society: 1707–1830: Beyond Jacobitism, Towards Industrialisation* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 309.
11. Page references are to the typescript copies held in the Scottish Theatre Archive.
12. John McGrath, *The Cheviot, the Stag and the Black, Black Oil*, in *Six-Pack: Plays for Scotland* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1996), 177.
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15. Page references are to *Border Warfare* in John McGrath, *Six-Pack: Plays for Scotland* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1996).
16. Page references are to the author's typescript.
17. A point emphasized by Richard Mennen, '"Carnegie": An Alternative to the Bicentennial Blight', *Pittsburgh New Sun*, 20 May 1976, 9.
18. Susanne Kries, 'Ian Brown', in John Bull (ed.), *British and Irish Dramatists since World War II*, Fourth Series (Farringdon Hills, MI: Thomson Gale, 2005), 44.
19. Private conversations: Bill Thomley, Artistic Assistant, Edinburgh International Festival, May 1972, and Clive Perry, Artistic Director Royal Lyceum Theatre, April 1973.
20. Randall Stevenson, 'Scottish Theatre: 1950–1980', in Cairns Craig (ed.), *The History of Scottish Literature*, vol. 4 (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press), 359.
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22. Page references are to the author's typescript.

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24. Ibid., 6.
25. Page references are to Donald Campbell, *The Jesuit*, in Bill Findlay (ed.), *Scots Plays*.
26. John McGrath, *Naked Thoughts That Roam About: Reflections on Theatre, 1958–2001*, ed. Nadine Holdsworth (London: Nick Hern Books, 2002), 28–9.
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CHAPTER 6

The Re-Visioning of History: Sue Glover and Liz Lochhead

It has often been observed that male domination of Scottish playwriting in the 1970s was challenged only occasionally by figures like Joan Ure and Marcella Evaristi, while established playwrights like Ena Lamont Stewart whose *Business in Edinburgh*, read in 1970 (and discussed in Chap. 4), found difficulty in being fully produced. In that decade, for example, only two one-act plays by her, *Towards Evening* and *Walkies Time for a Black Poodle*, were premiered, in a Scottish Society of Playwrights season at the Netherbow Theatre in 1975. This situation was transformed in the 1980s through the emergence of playwrights like Lara Jane Bunting, Anne-Marie Di Mambro, Anne Downie, Sue Glover, Liz Lochhead (who had earlier collaborated with Evaristi on *Sugar and Spite* (1978), Sharman Macdonald, Rona Munro, Aileen Ritchie and others. Tom Maguire argues that

> the claiming by these women writers of a space for their voices within the theatre as an industry has been matched with a concern to investigate the dimensions of the gendered spaces which might be taken to constitute Scotland. [… Confounding] easy categorisations and fixed definitions of what it might mean to be both woman and Scottish […], they have contributed to the creation of a public sphere where women are better able to define those categories for themselves.[1]

In doing this, they have also opened up women's perspectives on Scottish history. Di Mambro in *Tally's Blood* (1990) and Ritchie in *Juju Girl*

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(1999) incorporated historical material into plays exploring intergenerational differences. Bunting revisited the story of Burns in *Love But Her* (1997), rewriting from Jean Armour's perspective and giving voice, as Ksenija Horvat and Barbara Bell express it, 'to women silenced in a world where honour and status are measured by men's rules'.[2] Of this generation of women playwrights, however, Glover and Lochhead, and later Munro (discussed in Chap. 8), are the ones most clearly to have written history plays. This chapter, then, focuses on the way that Glover and Lochhead each distinctively deal with their historical material, revising and reimagining the ways in which history had been used within a male-focused dramaturgical tradition. Jan McDonald defines the purpose of such 're-visioning' as 'to challenge the received opinions contained in the original text, and for feminist writers, it is to initiate a reinterpretation of the role of women as constructed and marginalised by history, mythology and the literary canon'.[3] Glover and Lochhead re-vision 'history'.

Sue Glover

Glover's *An Island in Largo* (1980), *The Straw Chair* (1988), and *Bondagers* (1991) deal with their historical themes in diverse ways. The first explores, implicitly in its structure and explicitly in its Act Two, the ways in which history itself is used and packaged for personal, commercial, and ideological purposes. The second uses a hitherto largely neglected historical episode to explore issues of power between men and women. The third takes a known, though when the play was written quite forgotten, economic relationship between men and women and the land in nineteenth-century Scotland to explore the interactive dynamics within a group of farm-working women facing prevailing economic and social hierarchies. The first and third plays explore dramaturgical means to disrupt the narrative flow of historical drama in a manner distinct from the post-Brechtian techniques or varieties of performativity employed by some of the male playwrights discussed in the previous chapter. As Audrey Bain observes,

> The centrality of the unspoken histories of women to female playwrights in Scotland has led to the use of various discourses to uncover and articulate areas of women's experience occluded by patriarchal society. Dreaming, neurosis, and the creation of a work of art provide keys to the formation of meaning in Liz Lochhead's *Blood and Ice* (1982). Folkloric elements are also used extensively by a number of Scottish women dramatists to deconstruct

> both historically determined views of women, and the 'eternal feminine': this is a feature of such plays as Sue Glover's *The Seal Wife* (1980) and *Bondagers* (1990) [and] Rona Munro's *The Maiden Stone* (1995).[4]

As we now discuss Glover's and Lochhead's history plays, this is an observation to be borne in mind also when we come to discuss Munro's history plays.

An Island in Largo opens with Alexander Selkirk, the model for Robinson Crusoe and a native of Largo in Fife, in monologue, a device Glover returns to throughout the play. Thus, the play's chronological and historical order is regularly disrupted by the internalized angst of the play's leading character. The dynamic of Selkirk's monologues is based on his experience of living alone on Juan Fernandez Island. As Selkirk puts it, later in conversation with Daniel Defoe, who took Selkirk's experience as a starting point for *Robinson Crusoe*, 'I learned to live alone—with God' (p. 86).[5] Glover's Selkirk begins by being different from his family, seeking to go to sea, after he has seen galleys in the Forth, 'sailing for the Isthmus of Darien' (p. 5). His longing to find a new life and resistance to authority, whether paternal or church, leads to his resistance to his incompetent captain Stradling, who leaves him alone on Juan Fernandez. Again and again her Selkirk finds the everyday and domestic limited, restrictive in some undefined way of his aspirations for a freer kind of life. His time on the island only deepens his sense of isolation from those around him. His monologues, then, belong to another level of life experience: talking to his father Jock, he says 'I lived with God—with only God. Day and night. Four and a half years. What do you think Mr. Magill [the local minister] can tell me of God!' When Jock responds, 'Mr. Magill has studied at St Andrews University!', Selkirk replies 'He has never seen the mountains of Mexico—or the Great South Seas—or been to Juan Fernandez' (p. 57). Jock's sense of the depth of knowledge implied by study at an ancient university is contrasted by Selkirk's vision of a wider experiential and existential world. The narrowness of Jock's sense of profundity is implicitly emphasized by the fact that Largo, where he lives, is only 11 miles from St Andrews.

Selkirk is never clear about what his isolation signifies, only that it exists, while his sense of individuality is emphasized by the fact he has altered for himself his family surname of 'Selcraig'. Jock tells him his name change makes 'us all a laughing stock' (p. 8), while his brother says to him, 'I'm John Selcraig, tanner, of Largo', to which Selkirk replies 'And I am Alexander Selkirk, mariner' (p. 22). Act One concludes with Selkirk's rescue from the

island, the relief of his physical isolation, while Act Two opens in the local church with a reading of the return of the Prodigal Son. Selkirk, however, is not welcomed like the Prodigal, and he cannot abide his family: of his mother, he says, 'Her questions destroy my country … I am sick for my country! […] My own country—in my head—and my own God!' (p. 54). Selkirk's desire to escape the constraint he sees in any situation in which he finds himself leads to his running away with the young daughter of a neighbour, Sophia Bruce. He meets Defoe, whose own name is self-manufactured, from his original family name, 'Foe'. Defoe becomes another, different kind of, foe to Selkirk and his search for identity. A writer of 'pamphlets, satires, histories, panegyrics', he wants to rewrite Selkirk's experience as 'An adventure […] but a moral tale—a Pilgrim's Progress' (p. 84). Defoe continues, 'I have stolen the facts from [people's] lives. But this time—for the first time—I will write my own invention' (p. 85). Selkirk's restlessness lets him abandon Sophia who he has treated as his wife, writing a will in her favour. He then marries a tavern owner in Plymouth, Frances Candis, to whom he also leaves everything he owns, which is, ironically, valuable land at 'home' in Largo. When he dies, Selkirk has not found any resolution of his search for his own life, but his search has left disruption and conflict for those around him, while his 'history', whether expressed through his internal monologues or others' reaction to him in the drama, is appropriated by Defoe. Now when one thinks of Selkirk, the image is not of him, but of Defoe's Crusoe, whose shipwreck, origins in York, and meeting with Man Friday have nothing to do with the realty of Selkirk's experience, but who is seen not only as the archetypal capitalist colonizer, but as the quintessential male adventurer, a key figure in colonial discourse.[6]

Selkirk's focus on his own experience emerges as ambivalent in Glover's play. The disruption of overall plot development achieved by use of monologues and moving backwards and forwards in time in ordering scenes engages the audience in another version of time, consciousness, and so of the perception of Selkirk's history. Just as Defoe steals 'the facts from [people's] lives' to make his own versions, so Glover challenges us to recognize there are many versions of Selkirk/Selcraig's story and of space/time. One version may become 'a moral tale—a Pilgrim's Progress'; another is a tale of rejection of mother, alienation from family, and betrayal of a trusting 16-year-old woman, abandoned in London while he reneges on the legacy that would secure her future. Place, whether 'home' or island, ship or seaport, is elusive, shifting, and unreliable. It might be oversimple to describe Selkirk as only a fantasizing chauvinist, exploiting those around

him, especially women, and dismiss him. Certainly we are invited to see admirable qualities of intellectual integrity in Selkirk's search for his 'God'. He is also a fine sailing master: Stradling's ship founders when Selkirk is left behind. Yet, while the men in his family retain their trades and Defoe has his novel, Selkirk's life finds no anchor and the women in Selkirk's life—especially Sophia who is engaged in her own spatial transformation—are neglected by him. We experience the human cost of Selkirk's vision, 'single-minded' at several levels. The play's subversive structure highlights the sense that Selkirk's self-absorption lacks emotional intelligence or human compassion while he is constantly on the edge of mainland life, a seaman.

Glover's next history play, *The Straw Chair*, set in the late 1730s on St Kilda, is more orthodox dramatically in structure and characterization than *An Island in Largo*. Three of its four characters, at the edge, again, of mainland life—far from the mainly urban settings of the plays discussed in the last chapter—are women. While all the island's inhabitants depend on the sea's fluidity, the 'edge of the sea is an important trope in women's writing and feminist thinking'[7] as Susan Triesman observes, and the play explores feminine resistance and patriarchal power. Rachel, Lady Grange, no matter her high social status, has been abducted and exiled in shocking conditions to the island, remote from her family and home in Edinburgh, because she might expose her husband's treacherous dealings and has made public scenes about his behaviour. This play's society expects women to know their place: even the mild-mannered minister, Aneas, a missionary on the island, says to his wife, Isabel, 'you are the Minister's wife, and will conduct yourself accordingly' (p. 93).[8] The third woman in the play, Oona, is a native islander who cares for Rachel and loves the terrain which in Rachel's eyes is wilderness. She has only once been off the island to Skye, where she was amazed by the strangeness of trees. Aneas finds it hard to relate to, let alone approve of, the islanders' quite distinct, semi-pagan beliefs and world view. Further, for all the authority he claims, he is a stickit minister—one without a parish, something in local gentry's gift. When Isabel is found to have helped Rachel smuggle a letter to a relative who might rescue her, the authorities' displeasure drives the couple from the island, making it likely he will never find a living. His authority over his wife and any parishioners is ultimately contingent on serving social superiors. Social hierarchy is so ingrained that, even in her misery Rachel is still conscious of her social standing over Aneas. The straw chair of the title is frail, but it is the only one on the island, locally made for Rachel who obsessively retains it as a pathetic status symbol even as it is falling apart.

Tom Maguire points out that where 'female characters transgress boundaries of place'—and not only, one might add, physical place, but emotional, social, and political—'they face isolation, exclusion or confinement as prisoners or mad women. Yet in moving into new spaces, female characters are also able to reinvent themselves and the sense of the world they inhabit.'[9] Indeed, Rachel's treatment actually drives her towards madness, but, nonetheless, she represents a more libertarian and life-enhancing way of life. This is symbolized by her quasi-bacchanalian pursuit of strong drink and love of dancing, something Aneas hopes Isabel 'never will' practice (p. 92). Rachel teases, indeed taunts, Isabel about her new-wed virginity as Aneas and Isabel tentatively explore one another's sexual potential. Yet, for all her experience of passionate fulfilment before her husband lost interest as she bore him more children, Rachel sees options for women as limited in range: 'Sweetly seduced? Deliciously debauched? (*Louder*) Or roughly ravished!' (p. 110). None of these options for physical and emotional intimacy implies agency for women and some imply violent abuse. Even when the island women each summer withdraw for a time to Boreray, a respite Rachel breaks away to join, her feet as bare as theirs, on returning they are annually reappropriated and impregnated. Set on an island far into the Atlantic, this play draws on what Jan McDonald identifies as the 'various mythical associations of women with the sea superimpos[ing] on a socially constructed fixed female identity an image of creative fluidity and dangerous instability'.[10]

The Straw Chair powerfully explores painful dynamics of social, cultural, and marital power within the different perspectives of Gaelic-speaking islanders and Lowland Scots. Yet, compared with the innovative form of *An Island in Largo*, it is very much an orthodoxly structured feminist version of the 'hidden history' play discussed in the last chapter. Of its kind it is excellent, but Glover's true dramaturgical follow-up to *An Island in Largo* is surely the dramatic experiment embodied in *Bondagers*.

While *The Straw Chair* drives its plot forward towards a single defining climax, *An Island in Largo* contains a number of plot high points and its structure offers a more subtle series of conclusions. In *Bondagers*, Glover sets in train series after series of actions and events in her characters' lives, in parallel waves of cross-referring implication, all within the overall rhythmic schema of the Scottish Borders agricultural year beginning at the Hiring Fair of February 1860. Again, Glover moves from the urban and central belt to the rural and the liminality of border country. While she again deals with patriarchy and chauvinist treatment of women, she does so here

with an all-woman cast. This frees her, in Horvat and Bell's view, to focus on 'the presenting of the consequences of economic and sexual exploitation of women's labour in the mid-nineteenth-century Borders from a specifically female perspective'.[11] Men's actions are understood through women's perceptions and reactions: women are in command of the play's stories, although as Jan McDonald acutely reminds us 'those who are not present still wield the power'.[12] Glover's remarkable dramaturgical skills present us with her 'story' about female/male relationships while allowing women's voices exclusively to be heard, a reversal of previous dramatic hierarchies in much Scottish historical drama.

The play's opening sets up the overlapping fortunes and interdependence of her characters as the actors' voices cut '*in on each other's phrases*' (p. 5), lyrically establishing the hectic bargaining of the Fair. The women try to establish viable contracts as bondagers, women who work to a 'hind' or male farm servant, as a farmer hires both for a year's work and no 'bondager worth a puckle's left after ten o'clock' (p. 6). Within the rhythm of the opening sequence Glover introduces her characters, including Sara with her learning-disabled daughter Tottie; Liza, determined not to be also child-minder, housemaid, or sexually exploited; and Maggie, whose husband Andra engages Liza to work with him. Within this sequence we learn key facts about bondagers' work. All end up at Blackshiels, the centre of the play's action. There the mistress is Ellen, an ex-bondager who managed to marry Elliott, the master. When they get to the farm, Liza finds out that, despite Andra's promises, she must child-mind, work in the house, and share a bed with the younger children. Already disappointment is in the air. Later, we learn Andra sexually abuses Maggie, who nonetheless becomes jealous of Liza, when in fact Liza is kept safe from his attentions by the very fact she has to sleep with the children. Despite such pressures, the women take pride in their work and their sexuality—'A'body wants the saddler!' (p. 12): Kello, who looks after the horses, is, with his black eyes, an object of general desire. While all are capable of enjoying their sexuality, they are profoundly aware of their dependence on men's sexual behaviours. Consequences arise. Sara must cope with Tottie after a liaison with a worker now in Canada. There, Liza's brother, Steenie, has also emigrated, leaving her to make a living without a possible family co-worker. Ellen has been Steenie's lover: he blubbed 'like I wasn't there at the end'. Now, she 'almost' loves Elliot, glad to offer him just 'a bit dearie. And what do I get? A'thing. I got a'thing' (p. 21). For her, marriage is a bargain, just like the Fair. Her reflection on her good

fortune in having sweet 'wheaten bread, and tea, and cream and sugar and ham! All this for breakfast!' (p. 17) highlights the deprivation felt by other—poorly-paid and hard-worked—women.

As Act One ends, harvest is celebrated with dancing and drinking. Tottie, who has developed a young teenager's interest in sexual matters, follows Kello and others who are rejected by bondagers they thought would have sex with them. At the act's end, we realize Kello has had underage sex with Tottie: 'There's blood on her skirt' (p. 40). In Act Two, although the men begin by ducking Kello and beating him, as time passes they blame the victim. In the meantime, the next Hiring Day approaches and there are no hints of possible new contracts. As the play concludes, Tottie, who has been pestering Kello, who continues to seduce others, causes him to fall to his death. She is taken away in a straitjacket to be detained: as Maggie says, 'Lucky it's not the jail' (p. 71). It emerges that Elliott, who has experimented with widely admired new methods and agitated for better workers' conditions, has disrupted the conservative peace of mind of the 'Great Lord Marquis' (p. 71) and angered him: his lease will not be renewed. The security Maggie had found was only apparent: Elliott will not find another lease anywhere near the Marquis's lands. As the others set off to seek new contracts, Sara recalls the ghosts Tottie claimed to see on the moor. In Act One, her vision was clearly of medieval peasants, in Act Two of modern farming—'Machines without horses' (p. 72). Glover thus sets the play in the larger context of rural life over centuries, rather like Grassic Gibbon in *Sunset Song*. Just, however, as Gibbon resists the kailyard through exposition of harsh conditions of life and work, so does Glover. The play ends with a moment of melancholy politico-cultural transition as Liza, who took such pride in field work, asks Sara if she could teach her to spin, a skill that would allow her to work indoors, but which also represents a defeat in that the domestic/private sphere has been assigned to women while Liza, like her work colleagues, had till this point established herself, however precariously, in the public sphere. The women bond together, but remain in bondage to patriarchal society's expectations.

Liz Lochhead

The narrative elusiveness, personal uncertainty, patriarchal power, and unreliability of individual perspectives or versions of events that recur in Glover's history plays are reflected in Liz Lochhead's quite distinct questioning and dramaturgical exploration of versions of 'reality' in *Blood and*

Ice (1982/4) and *Mary Queen of Scots Got Her Head Chopped Off* (1987), the latter of which in particular has received much critical attention. As Dorothy McMillan says, Lochhead 'is suspicious of any story that is too confident of its explanations, any version of the world that is too neat. For stories are both necessary and deceptive, comforting, yet potentially self-serving and duplicitous.'[13] The shiftiness of neat stories is highlighted in these plays by her exploration and exploitation of duality, a recurring feature more widely in Scottish literature, in not only Hogg's *Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824) and many of Stevenson's novels, including *Kidnapped* (1886) and *The Master of Ballantrae* (1889), besides the most famous example, *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886), but also the work of many later authors.

Her first history play, *Blood and Ice*, explores Lochhead's version of relationships in the circle around Mary and Percy Shelley and Mary's creation of Frankenstein. As Benjamin Poore observes, it 'features a series of shifting and merging dualities, from Byron as Polidori's 'vampire' to Mary Shelley as Dr Frankenstein'.[14] Here, in Ksenija Horvat's words,

> Lochhead's Mary defies the confined gender roles of patriarchal society that renders female artistic creation contradictory and even 'monstrous', because women are assigned to the private/silenced sphere. [Lochhead's] female characters are no longer dutiful, even if sparky, wives and mothers, as in Bill Bryden's *Willie Rough* […].[15]

Her feminist critique of patriarchal values is reflected in her dramaturgical methods in *Blood and Ice*. Like Glover in *An Island in Largo*, Lochhead opens with a monologue by the lead character, taking us into Mary Shelley's interior life. As she reads her own *Frankenstein*, Mary sings the first verse of Byron's 'Oh, we'll go no more a-roving', before segueing into recounting a dream:

> My element. I swim in it and I do not drown. I dream in it. Swimming, dwamming, dreaming … drowning. Sleeping in a dead man's bed. Not yet thirty and I'm sleeping in a dead man's bed. (p. 83)[16]

Soliloquies by Mary frame each act, and so the play itself. Act One ends as, faithfully reflecting Mary's own account of the writing of the first version of the novel after a vivid dream,[17] she says 'I have thought of a story! (*Sits down and begins to write.*) It was on a dreary night in November

…' (p. 102). Act Two begins with Mary's announcing, 'Frankenstein, by Mrs. Shelley … Once upon a time Mary Shelley had a dream and wrote a book' (p. 103), while it ends with her reading from her novel '[…] The ice cannot stop you if your hot hearts say it shall not […]', crying 'Oh, Shelley' and beginning to write again (p. 116). Lochhead uses the phrase 'Once upon a time', of course the classic beginning of a fairy story, again when La Corbie, after her opening cataloguing of her view of the nature of Scotland, introduces the characters of *Mary Queen of Scots…* as a parade of circus animals.

The action of *Blood and Ice*, then, is framed by Mary's creative mind and the story she has 'thought of'. Repeatedly throughout the play Lochhead offers versions of those stories of which McMillan has noted Lochhead's suspicion. Sometimes these are the merest suggestion of a version, as when Byron calls Mary 'Shelley' by her maiden name 'Godwin', alerting us to another aspect of duality and women's patriarchal suppression, the performance of gender roles. At other times it might be more emphatic as in Mary and the maid Elise's different versions, allocating different guilt, as to which of them wrongly felt it safe for the children to travel (pp. 106–7). The dramaturgy of the play shifts between memory, dream, dramatic scene, and solo speech. This reflects the shifting, fluid nature of the expectations of Mary the woman artist and her creation, the very *Frankenstein* Conn has the shape-shifting Sidmouth, once Henry Addington, transformed in name, as is the practice on ennoblement, reading throughout *Thistlewood*. Mary marks the questionable nature of some 'facts of history' when she relates 'Oh [Byron] died of a cold, some say, or the pox … or for love of a beautiful boy who did not love him back, oh, who knows the truth of the matter' (p. 115). Indeed, the very production history of *Blood and Ice* as a script embodies not just duality, but fluidity. Beginning as *Mary and the Monster* at Coventry Belgrade Theatre in 1981 and heavily criticized, not least by Lochhead herself, it opened, rewritten as *Blood and Ice*, at the Traverse in 1982, before a further version was published in 1984. While here I have worked from the latest version, the play itself embodies its own shape-shifting history.

Shape-shifting is a key theme of Lochhead's best known history play, *Mary Queen of Scots Got Her Head Chopped Off*. Horvat succinctly summarizes its dramaturgical vibrancy when she talks of its 'fresh, irreverently non-linear, metaphor-laden form, flowing from that of *Blood and Ice*, playing with the concepts of feminine as object in male gaze, and the virgin-whore dichotomy of earlier romance drama'.[18] She goes on to

suggest that its 'episodic structure is reminiscent of film scripts, fragmentary episodes being tied together by a narrator, La Corbie, who can be seen as cabaret commère, Greek chorus, or Celtic bard'.[19] She reflects widely held opinions when she says that the play is 'about Scottish identity and language, but also about the construction of histories, religion and female identity'.[20] What at once strikes one is Horvat's emphasis, perhaps reinforced by her own playwriting experience, on the interaction of dramaturgy and meaning: 'non-linear form', 'playing with concepts', '[fragmentary] episodic structure' and 'construction of histories, religion and female identity'. Horvat, in common with many others, recognizes that Lochhead's interest in the 'construction of […] female identity' places her within the wider discourse of feminist practice. As Adrienne Scullion notes, 'Lochhead's is certainly a repertoire that places woman or women at the centre of the drama and at the heart of the narrative.'[21] *Mary Queen of Scots…* emphasises in its very theatrical nature, as Randall Stevenson and Cairns Craig put it, 'the constructed, performed nature of both political power and gender role'.[22]

Horvat's observation, however, that *Mary Queen of Scots…* is 'about the construction of histories', while explaining the play's inclusion in this study, appears on the face of it to run counter to Lochhead's own early stance. Anne Varty has noted Lochhead's view at the time the play was first produced: '*Mary Queen of Scots* is emphatically not a history play, but instead, Lochhead insists, it is a "metaphor for the Scots today" (*Time Out*, 16–23 September 1987)'.[23] Horvat, however, argues to the contrary that the play constructs 'histories'. The plural employed by Horvat is crucial, as it has been so far in this study. Lochhead's play is indeed emphatically a history play—what else could it be, given its topic?—but one which does not accept in its structure or themes any one version of history, let alone a male-dominated (his)tory. Part of the freshness to which Horvat refers arises from just this ability of Lochhead's in performance constantly to cast shifting light on events being addressed, so that in the very act of performance what is being presented is problematized.

In fact, Lochhead's disavowal contains a disjunction, which this study would find hard to accept, between a 'history play' and a 'metaphor for the Scots today'. Rather the position taken here derives from an earlier thesis by this author entitled *History as Theatrical Metaphor*,[24] a title adopted for this study as a whole. What one must recognize in decoding this apparent conflict of interpretation is context. As we have seen in previous chapters, when *Mary Queen of Scots…* was written, by far the preponderance

of Scottish history plays were written by men, usually within patriarchal frameworks and with implicit or explicit ideologies that supported chauvinist and largely inward-looking perspectives on political, gender and, indeed, religious visions of Scottish society. While much changed in the 1970s, as the previous chapter has discussed, that change was hardly comprehensive in terms of gender. With the exception of *Mary* and *The Widows of Clyth*, the predominant emphasis, even of the last chapter's innovative playwrights, was masculine. When 'history play' carries such implications, then clearly *Mary Queen of Scots…* is not a 'history play', but equally, like it or not, those previous history plays are metaphors for the 'Scotland' of their day. This topic will be further explored in the conclusion of this study. One key significance of Lochhead's *Mary Queen of Scots…*, indeed, is that she brings her 'shape-shifting' not just to the play and its characters, but to visions of what matters in history, and indeed what history itself and its mythic elements constitute.

When Lochhead interrogates dramaturgically the nature of history, myth, and what matters in both, she is not, of course, as earlier chapters, not to mention the early work of Glover, show, entering new territory. Rather, what she brings is the irreverent freshness which Horvat highlights and a new vitality in her approach to dramaturgical innovation. As Jan McDonald and Jennifer Harvie suggest, 'Lochhead offers the audience not a re-vision of the historical Mary, but a re-vision of the myth that popular culture has built up around her. […] Lochhead, using cross-cutting and role-playing techniques […] investigates the conflicting personal and public demands made on women'.[25] What McDonald and Harvie say here, of course, could be applied to the techniques and thematic approach employed in the dramaturgy of earlier practitioners like Grotowski, Peter Weiss and the Negro Ensemble of New York, and Ellen Stewart and her LaMama companies. Indeed, when MacDonald and Harvie describe Lochhead's method of interrupting 'the linear, naturalising flow of its own narrative and thus the cultural narrative on Mary Stuart, [using] a variety of performance styles, from naturalistic to the heightened theatricality of the songs and dances; a narrator, La Corbie, who provides ironic and disjunctive commentary; and anachronistic detailing […]',[26] what they say could reasonably be applied, *mutatis mutandis*, to Conn's *Thistlewood* or many of McGrath's plays. Adrienne Scullion in effect concurs, setting Lochhead's plays in an even older Scottish context when she observes they affirm 'the popular theatre tropes of Scottish theatre-making—identifying in Lochhead's work a distinctively national

use of cabaret-style, mix of genres, heightened language and direct address […] celebrated as counter-cultural, radical and feminist'.[27] Yet, to recognize such antecedents is not to undermine Lochhead's originality. What it does is offer a counter to an occasional tendency to exceptionalism in discussing *Mary Queen of Scots…*, which is sometimes discussed as if there were no precedents for what Lochhead achieves dramaturgically.

Part of the strength of Lochhead's approach, both in writing this play and her vision of Mary, is that she is drawing on clear precedents and long-developed arguments in the historical literature about the nature of Mary and indeed Elizabeth—and Knox. Margery Palmer McCulloch makes a key point about theatrical provenance when she explains,

> As might be expected as a result of its commissioning by Communicado, a company that performed in a non-naturalistic, Brechtian mode, Lochhead's exploration of Scottish history in her *Mary Queen of Scots* play is itself very different from what one might call an endorsement-of-historical-reality drama [… instead puncturing] any idea that this is an attempt to provide an illusion of historical reality; emphasising instead that it […] is intended to provoke questioning, to involve the audience in re-assessing and re-interpreting historical events as they have traditionally come down to us.[28]

McCulloch's term, 'endorsement-of-historical-reality drama', highlights a distinction which surely underlies Lochhead's assertion quoted earlier that this history play is actually not a 'history play'. There is no 'attempt to provide' a naturalistic illusion of 'historical reality': rather, what is provided is constant foregrounding of the very theatricality and performativity of the occasion, so highlighting by implication the metatheatrical and performative nature of not just political power and gender roles, but of history and myth. Aileen Christianson offers a useful insight into Lochhead's own mythopoeia, particularly powerful given Christianson's critical oeuvre:

> Knox is presented as villain and Mary as martyr-victim. […] Rather than Knox being seen as a radical challenge to the notions of kingship, he is Knox the oppressor, the international Protestant allied with English forces, who has torn out the Virgin Mary 'from out the sky o' Scotland' […] La Corbie's neutrality is in fact a disguise for a conventional position on Mary and Knox.[29]

Christianson argues that the play's nostalgic Mariolatry—for both Virgin and Queen—itself indulges La Corbie's description of Scotland's national

pastime as 'nostalgia'. *Mary Queen of Scots…* in exploring Scottish historical myths leaves some unquestioned and through its conscious theatricality creates its own new mini-myths.

This conscious theatricality is expressed through a variety of methods. A key figure is of course La Corbie, Horvat's 'cabaret commère, Greek chorus, or Celtic bard'. This sardonic mistress of ceremonies opens and closes the play. She is, according to the stage directions, 'an interesting, ragged, ambiguous creature' who utters the play's first words, 'Country: Scotland. Whit like is it?', before her famous rigmarole cataloguing its more negative aspects and concludes the play with the words from the children's skipping rhyme that gives it its title. Like a bard, the bird's role is to remember, recover stories, and to question, as it calls on the audience to question what it sees unfold. Lochhead's own attitude to bardic figures around the time of writing *Mary Queen of Scots…* is clear: when discussing the impact of Hugh MacDiarmid, while recognizing his achievement, she distanced herself, saying 'I think it's because it is so male and bardic in the old priestly kind of didactic tradition.'[30] Yet, McCulloch has convincingly argued that Lochhead, along with her colleague Jackie Kay, has adopted, adapted, subverted, refreshed, and regendered that tradition.[31] La Corbie subverts any romantic narrative of 'Scotland' and its histories in a context of constantly conscious theatricality. Whether it be the moment in Act One Scene Four when Knox is represented through economic stagecraft as simultaneously Calvinist reformer and modern Orangeman, the transitions through which Mary and Elizabeth play not only one another's maids, Marian and Bessie, but Mairn and Leezie, street girls living by their wits, or such scenes as Act Two Scene Five where the murder of Riccio is communicated through a mummers' play nominally performing 'The Mask of Salome' where Mary is forced to play Herod, Lochhead's story of Mary demands the audience participate in a helter-skelter journey of changing perspectives and perceptions. As Varty observes,

> Masculine and feminine, Protestant and Catholic, repressed and oppressed, adult and child, English and Scottish, virgin and whore, imprisoned and free, the binaries of the argument multiply, swop, and converge. Audience perspective is kaleidoscoped and surprised [although we know what happens next and no-one wins].[32]

Horvat earlier described this dramaturgical journey as 'irreverently non-linear'. In fact, if one follows the plot development of Mary's narrative

after La Corbie's opening speech, its progress is quite linear. It is not quite that it is 'non-linear', but that its linearity is constantly diverted, played with, questioned, and modified. Perhaps McDonald and Harvie's formulation that the play interrupts 'the linear, naturalising flow of its own narrative and thus the cultural narrative on Mary Stuart' is more precise. In the end, when the climax might be expected to focus on Mary's death, in the scene entitled 'Jock Thamson's Bairns', the cast enact cruel sectarian and sexualized modern children's games where Marie is taunted as a 'pape' and wee Knoxxy is bullied. Only then do they present their childish version of Mary's execution and the company grab Marie/Mary by her throat in a red-lit tableau before a sudden blackout. Yet again, the linear is diverted and the audience is left to consider, in the light of Lochhead's play, 'Whit like' their Scotland is.

Mary Queen of Scots… explores, with a vivid theatricality fully au fait with progressive dramatic practice of its time, themes of power, religion, prejudice, class, bigotry, national identity, gender relations, self-delusion, and self-knowledge. Jan McDonald and Jennifer Harvie argue that with

> its 'history' highlighted as culturally constructed narrative, *Mary Queen of Scots* again demonstrates how women are culturally constructed, and invites its audience to examine its own practice of narrativising and constructing the present. […] Denied the suspense of not knowing what will happen to Mary, the […] audience is freed to engage actively rather than passively in a critical relationship with the play, freed to ask not *what* will happen to Mary but *how* this will happen, who will control her fate, and so on.[33]

Adrienne Scullion suggests that in this, 'Lochhead adopts a classic feminist strategy of retelling history from women's viewpoints and uses a feminist dramaturgy to reimagine both history and the history play.'[34]

Just as Glover would come to use Scots in *Bondagers*, Lochhead opts in *Mary Queen of Scots…*, as she had done the year before in *Tartuffe*, to move beyond the monolingually hegemonic English of *Blood and Ice*. As Nancy Gish puts it,

> Like Hugh MacDiarmid, Lochhead aims for a language available for all modern purposes and draws on whatever Scots words will work. Unlike MacDiarmid's conception of a return to one national language, hers is a linguistic play across the vast range now present in a country with three languages, one of which is Scots English in varying degrees of mixed vocabulary and accent.[35]

Mary Queen of Scots… is rightly perceived as highly successful experimentation in Scottish theatrical dramaturgy and this has without doubt contributed to its long-term success. An important part of that success is the use of its theatricality and linguistic invention to both express and question versions of Mary's story. In the words of McDonald and Harvie, '[In Lochhead's plays] the process of creating meaning may be more significant than any final stable product'.[36] Their perceptive remark might be applied also to Glover's *Bondagers*. Both Glover and Lochhead in the 1980s reshaped and re-visioned from an explicitly feminist perspective the way in which history was presented and represented on the Scottish stage.

Notes

1. Tom Maguire, 'Women Playwrights from the 1970s and 1980s', in Ian Brown (ed.), *The Edinburgh Companion to Scottish Drama* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), 163–4.
2. Ksenija Horvat and Barbara Bell, 'Sue Glover, Rona Munro, Laura Jane Bunting: Echoes and Open Spaces', in Aileen Christianson and Alison Lumsden (eds.), *Contemporary Scottish Women Writers* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), 76.
3. Jan McDonald, 'Scottish Women Dramatists since 1945', in Douglas Gifford and Dorothy McMillan (eds.), *A History of Scottish Women's Writing* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997), 494–5.
4. Audrey Bain, 'Loose Canons: Identifying a Woman's Tradition in Playwriting', in Randall Stevenson and Gavin Wallace (eds.), *Scottish Theatre since the Seventies* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996), 141.
5. Page references are to the typescript held in the Scottish Theatre Archive, Glasgow University.
6. I am grateful to Professor Carla Sassi for reminding me of this. She draws attention to feminist insights on this in Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes* (2nd edn.) (London: Routledge, 2008).
7. Susan C. Triesman, 'Sharman Macdonald: The Generation of Identity', in Christianson and Lumsden, *Contemporary Scottish*, 54.
8. References for *The Straw Chair* and *Bondagers* are to the joint edition published by Methuen (London, 1997).
9. Maguire, 'Women Playwrights', 161.
10. McDonald, 'Scottish Women Dramatists', 498.
11. Horvat and Bell, 'Sue Glover', 70.
12. McDonald, 'Scottish Women Dramatists', 500.
13. Dorothy McMillan, 'Choices: Poems 1972–2011', in Anne Varty (ed.), *The Edinburgh Companion to Liz Lochhead* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), 31.

14. Benjamin Poore, 'Liz Lochhead and the Gothic', in Varty, *Companion*, 97.
15. Ksenija Horvat, 'Gender Politics in Late Twentieth-Century Drama', in Ian Brown (ed.), *The Edinburgh History of Scottish Literature*, vol. 3 (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 297.
16. Page references are to Liz Lochhead, *Blood and Ice*, in Michelene Wandor (ed.), *Plays by Women*, vol. 4 (London: Methuen, 1985).
17. See, for example, her 'Introduction' to the 1831 edition included in Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*, ed. Johanna M. Smith (Boston: Bedford/St Martins, 2000).
18. Horvat, 'Gender Politics', 297.
19. Ibid.
20. Ibid.
21. Adrienne Scullion, 'A Woman's Voice', in Varty, *Companion*, 117.
22. Randall Stevenson and Cairns Craig (eds.), *Twentieth-Century Scottish Drama*: *An Anthology* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2001), 465.
23. Anne Varty, 'Scripts and Performance', in Robert Crawford and Anne Varty (eds.), *Liz Lochhead's Voices* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1993), 162.
24. Ian Brown, unpublished PhD thesis, Crewe and Alsager College, 1991.
25. Jan McDonald and Jennifer Harvie, 'Putting New Twists to Old Stories: Feminism and Lochhead's Drama', in Crawford and Varty, *Liz Lochhead's Voices*, 134–5.
26. Ibid., 145.
27. Ibid., 121.
28. Margery Palmer McCulloch, 'Bards and Radicals in Contemporary Scottish Poetry: Liz Lochhead, Jackie Kay, and an Evolving Tradition', in Ian Brown and Jean Berton (eds.), *Roots and Fruits*: *Scottish Identities*, *History and Contemporary Literature* (Glasgow: Scottish Literature International, 2014), 56–7.
29. Aileen Christianson, 'Liz Lochhead's Poetry and Drama: Forging Ironies', in Christianson and Lumsden, *Contemporary Scottish*, 50.
30. Ian Brown, 'Cultural Centrality and Dominance: The Creative Writer's View—Conversations with Scottish Poet/Playwrights and Ian Brown' [1984]), *International Journal of Scottish Theatre and Screen* 4:1 (2011), 5.
31. Margery Palmer McCulloch, 'Bards and Radicals', 54–64.
32. Anne Varty, 'The Mirror and the Lamp: Liz Lochhead', in Gifford and McMillan, *A History*, 652.
33. McDonald and Harvie, 'Putting New Twists', 145–6.
34. Scullion, 'A Woman's Voice', 120.
35. Nancy K. Gish, 'Liz Lochhead, Shakespeare and the Invention of Language', in Varty, *Companion*, 53.
36. McDonald and Harvie, 'Putting New Twists', 136.

CHAPTER 7

Alternative Visions

Sue Glover and Liz Lochhead were, of course, not the only dramatists to explore approaches to history alternative to those of the playwrights whose history plays came to prominence in the 1970s. A parallel generation of playwrights emerged in the 1980s with their own approaches to the representation of historical material on the Scottish stage. The two leading members of this generation dealing with historical material are Jo (formerly John) Clifford (b. 1950) and Peter Arnott (b. 1962). Others emerging at the same time, like Chris Hannan (b. 1958), have worked with historical themes, but often with dramaturgical approaches that do not substantially develop the work of the playwrights discussed in Chap. 5. Hannan's history plays, for example, include *Purity* (1984), a short play about early Beethoven; *Klimkov: Life of a Tsarist Agent* (1984), set in the 1905 Russian Revolution; *Elizabeth Gordon Quinn* (1985), a traditionally structured 'serious melodrama', to use the playwright's own subtitle, set in First World War Glasgow, whose dramaturgy is reminiscent of early Bryden or Conn; and *The Baby* (1990), set in late republican Rome, as the struggles that led to imperial Rome developed, a play to which this chapter will return in the context of Clifford's work.

While Hannan's topics are interesting, Clifford and Arnott bring quite fresh perspectives to the writing of history for the Scottish stage. The latter has said that when he began to write plays he was unaware of 1970s innovations and experiments;[1] Clifford, however, has been quite clear about her debt to that generation of dramatists. Indeed, when six of their

I. Brown, *History as Theatrical Metaphor*,
DOI 10.1057/978-1-137-47336-3_7

plays, including *The Rising*, *The Burning* and *The Jesuit*, were launched in 2001 in an anthology edited by Bill Findlay,[2] Clifford paid public tribute to the work of those present, saying collectively to MacMillan, Conn, and Campbell that without their work she would never have become a playwright. Clifford and Arnott, however, for their own history plays move away from the predominantly Scottish-focused material of that influential generation and develop individual dramaturgical approaches.

Jo Clifford

Clifford's first major success was *Losing Venice* (1985), set 'in a stylised "Spain" at some indeterminate time between the Re-conquest and the age of Goya'.[3] Steve Cramer has pointed out, in an illuminating study of this generation's work,[4] that its first presentation as a reading in 1983 and development towards full production took place in the context of the aftermath of the 1982 Falklands War. The play can certainly be seen as a commentary on or parallel for that colonial war, but it is also more, exploring and establishing tropes that Clifford returns to in his next history plays, *Lucy's Play* (1986), *Playing with Fire* (1987), and, perhaps pre-eminently, *Ines de Castro* (1989). Joyce McMillan has argued that a shift in emphasis occurred in the repertoire of the Traverse Theatre in the mid-1980s, where Clifford and her colleagues were launched under Jenny Killick's directorship. McMillan says they 'were obsessed, at different levels, with large, sweeping political and social themes, with parables, allegories, epics and historical parallels'.[5] There is no doubt that all four terms apply to Clifford's history plays. *Losing Venice* deals with a futile and savage act of Spanish imperialism; *Lucy's Play* with lethal power games and spurious Christian sanctification and pagan deification in fourth-century provincial Roman Syracuse; *Playing with Fire* with alchemy and soul-destroying aspiration for scientific knowledge that becomes materialist greed in medieval Paris; and *Ines de Castro* with obsessive love, political and family betrayal, torture, and warfare in early modern Portugal.

In common with Glover's and Lochhead's first history plays, then, Clifford moves away from topics directly derived from Scottish history. Her attention to specific detail is also less tightly focused than earlier Scottish playwrights' plays. It might, of course, be seductive to suggest that this interest in more generalized non-Scottish material results from Clifford's adoption of Scotland and Scottish culture as a civic Scot, rather in the manner of McGrath. McGrath's decision, however, to deal in

almost all his history plays with Scottish topics suggests such an essentialist hypothesis would be overhasty. The next playwright discussed in this chapter, for example, Peter Arnott, was born in Glasgow and, while like McGrath he has explored Scottish historical figures and contexts, he just as often works, like Clifford, with non-Scottish topics.

The attraction of these surely lies, at least in large part, in the separation they allow between exploration of questions of society—authority, political power, gender relations, propaganda, and mythopoeia—and the implicit or explicit engagement of such topics with issues of national identity that Scottish topics are very often taken to demand. In any case, although Clifford does not draw on Scottish topics to deal with her themes, in her plays a Scottish dimension is sometimes hinted at. As Alasdair Cameron notes of the premiere of *Losing Venice*,

> In a play which seemed to have no connection with Scotland whatsoever, Killick was also able to use the Scottish panto tradition to lend weight to the Doges, who were represented as a couple of crotchety old figures speaking in Scots. In a possibly unintentional display of Scottish democracy Clifford also had the Duke's servant Pablo speak in Scots, so having both ends of the social spectrum use the same language.[6]

Indeed, Pablo and his partner Maria seem more sensible and rooted in the everyday than their 'superiors'. The inarticulate Duke summons their master, the poet Quevedo, to speak for him, asking for a poem, which, in a recurring gag, he will discard in his need for a poem on yet another topic. As the Duke says, making a mess of courting his Duchess, 'I need a poet' (p. 47).[7] In *Lucy's Play*, the claims of Max to be an emperor and then to self-deify, while drawn from Roman imperial practices, are played for laughs. When Max says to the about-to-be-sanctified Lucy, 'Your eyes outshine the stars', Lucy deflates the pseudo-poetic, saying 'Piss off' (p. 57),[8] while there is much slapstick humour involving the appearance of sheep in the play.

Indeed, part of Clifford's dramaturgical technique in both *Losing Venice* and *Lucy's Play* is such use of subversive humour, deflating comic gags or bathos. When blindfolded Lucy is supposed to have gouged out the alluring eyes which 'outshine the stars'—she gives Max two sheep's eyes instead of her own. Her sanctity is proved by her fraudulent sacrifice of sight for the sake of her chastity, but when she reveals that she is not blind her sight is supposed to be miraculously restored. Even as she tries

to reveal the truth behind religious hysteria, she is trapped by another version of her 'story' and the need for those in authority to have their 'saint'. The bleakly comic business with her blindfold and eyes satirizes religious mythopoeia. Such subversive use of comedy for serious purpose is hardly new, of course; not only Scottish playwrights, but English playwrights like Peter Nichols and Peter Barnes have regularly employed such techniques as has the LaMama playwright Paul Foster. What Clifford additionally achieves in these early history plays, however, is a particularly stark contrast between the occasionally knockabout, even innocently silly, gags and the horrors with which her plays also deal.

In all four plays, there emerge events which are shocking in their cruelty. These arise from desire for authoritarian power and control, often out of an underlying sense of weakness or inadequacy or from rejection of human compassion. In *Losing Venice*, the Spanish Duke echoes the Thatcher of the Falklands War when he suggests his Spain is losing international power: 'This country we so dearly love, is she admired? She used to be. She used to be great, used to be respected, used to be feared. But now what part do we play in the world?'(p. 58). The attempt to assert continuing 'greatness' leads to a botched invasion of Cyprus rather than Venice as intended. In a long blank verse speech, the Duke describes his activities there: on seeing factions fighting in the streets, he says,

> I assemble an army.
> It is greeted by bullets.
> I return the compliment with cannon.
> Having crushed criminality, I turn to the
> slums. Verminous warrens where vices
> breed like rabbits. I erase them.
> The prisons overflow with human dregs.
> I take up lead, I carry steel, and I
> cleanse them. (p. 83)

He continues, 'I meet a man who has killed four adulterous wives. / I make him Chief of Police [and we] carry through reforms'. His actions can be seen to reflect in an overstated way the impact of some Thatcherite policies at the time, but also read as the price paid over the years by civilians overcome by colonial action or as prophecy of what military aggression to 'restore order' would unleash in Iraq, Libya, and Syria today.

On an individual level in Clifford's plays, besides such social and political violence, as Cramer says of *Losing Venice*,

> characters are alienated by ideology from their own sexualities. While the play ends in a gesture of hope, with the birth of Pedro [actually, Pablo] and Maria's child, for the other characters the pursuit of material values negates their capacity for sexual pleasure. […] Quevedo is rendered equally incapable of emotional fulfilment by his causal association with the pursuit of power: 'Human happiness? Denied / Marital bliss? Ridiculed / The joys of love? Negated. / And in blank verse.' (p. 64)[9]

Even when there is the opportunity of harmony, Clifford remains cautious: when Maria dreams of setting up a bakery where she can make 'lovely food', Pablo warns her she will end up putting 'chalk in the flour […] paint[ing] the crusts brown […] buy[ing] the flour cheap and [….] sell[ing] the bread dear […] driv[ing] beggars from your door with dogs'. When Maria responds, 'Am I that cruel?', Pablo replies, 'It's not you, love. It's the world' (pp. 63–4). As Cramer argues,

> there is awareness of a world beset by false consciousness, where the organic self is inevitably corrupted. Such is the power of the hegemony the language of authority creates that this language's architect, Quevedo, is himself deceived by it. In one of the play's most cogent physical images, he is robbed of his glasses by pirates, only to find he has perfect vision without them.[10]

Clifford regularly explores characters led by false consciousness into short-term responses to profound moral choices, as C. P. Taylor did in *Good*, falling short of their own professed values to betray humanity and themselves. Her history plays powerfully embody mythic conflict.

While such mythic conflict continues in *Playing with Fire*, where characters seek secret knowledge, power, or material possessions and the Devil leads each to individual destruction, this phase of Clifford's playwriting surely culminates in the achievement of *Ines de Castro*. In a preface to her unpublished typescript, Clifford introduces the play:

> This story was first dramatised by Antonio Ferreira (1528–69). It is based on a historical incident that supposedly occurred almost two centuries before: at a time of tension between Spain and Portugal, when the Spanish mistress of the then Crown Prince was murdered because she was considered a threat to the security of the state.[11]

He then cites Luis de Camoens' retelling of the story in part of his epic poem *As Lusiadas* (but not the first version by a Scot, Catherine Trotter's,

which moves away from the original narrative), and goes on, 'In what follows, I have re-invented history; I have taken nothing from the play, and have not attempted to dramatise the poem. But I would be happy if what I have written somehow reflects the spirit of both these works.' Clifford, however, retains the fundamental 'story' of the love of Ines and Pedro—who has rejected his diplomatically approved and childless wife, Blanca—and their persecution by his father and Pacheco, his government adviser. The King and Pacheco, since Portugal and Spain are at war, want rid of Ines and her influence on Pedro. They oblige her to return to Spain at an hour's notice, saying they will look after her children by Pedro. More swiftly than in her earlier history plays, Clifford makes clear not only the oppression he seeks to expose, but suggests more explicitly twentieth-century parallels. He employs a chorus of characters to contextualize and comment on action. After one member of the chorus observes to Ines, 'Sometimes it's safer to be ordinary. / Always do what's easiest. That's what I'd recommend' (p. 18), Ines asks other chorus members, 'Should I really go to Spain?' One replies with a powerful speech about the treatment of Jews in Spain:

> A man from our village went to Spain. […] Just came back the other week. His hair's turned white. He won't sleep. […] 'Brother jews', he shouts, 'Remember Spain!' […] He says when he went to his cousin's village it was gone. All of it. […] He says they'd all been taken to some prison place. A place of cries and screams and thick choking smoke. […] Children too. Children. Who would do such a thing? Not even Spaniards. He says they're all being made to dig their own graves. […] So he walks up and down our houses shouting 'Remember Spain! Remember Spain!'
>
> We had to lock him up. He was disturbing everybody. (p. 19)

The implied reference to Nazi and other death camps is clear and marks one example of the ways in which throughout *Ines de Castro* Clifford, in McMillan's words, creates and explores 'parables, allegories, epics and historical parallels'. The human cruelty, cynical barbarity, and political opportunism embodied in Clifford's play carries implications which resonate across centuries. Despite the King's qualms—he says 'It is hateful to have to do what you know is wrong'—he follows Pacheco's version of realpolitik: 'It is hateful to die. There's something that's more hateful still. / Remember that. Do what must be done' (p. 24). So, Pedro is sent on what his father and Pacheco believe is a suicide mission to resist Spanish invasion. Pacheco then comes to Ines after killing her children:

when she asks him 'How could you do this', he replies, in a brutal, sardonic response reminiscent of some of Clifford's less savage subversive gags in earlier plays, 'With a knife' (p. 37). Ines is then taken by 'An Old Woman' to the death inflicted, at the instance of the King and Pacheco, by 'An ordinary man. A little frightened. Someone who needed the money' (p. 41). The murder of innocents, driven by the perceived imperatives of authoritarian power, depends on the complicity of the powerless and everyday needs of those without agency.

Against the odds, however, Pedro has triumphed and returns. His father denies responsibility for what has happened, talking of the pressure of affairs of state, and Pedro lets him live to die in guilt. Ines's rotten body is exhumed and Pedro carries her around with him treating the corpse with honour as if she were still alive. During a public feast he has Pacheco tortured to a death of which we hear utterly appalling detail, including, *inter alia*, the pouring of boiling lead into each orifice. Pedro says to those his behaviour shocks, 'You laughed & joked while she was being killed. No-one lifted a finger to try & save her' (p. 47). He describes what is happening as a 'love feast', concluding, 'When all the poison we have spilled upon the earth Returns to us & kills us all / […] Then we shall see each other & never be apart again. & remember all of you: this is the work of love. / Love brought all this to be' (p. 48). Finally the ghost of Ines returns. Her message is that

> They'll lie to you. They say I had to die. That love is not enough. That we should not allow ourselves to dream. […] They're very wrong. They'll tell you that they have to kill. That they cannot avoid committing crimes. […] Don't believe them for a moment. Remember there's another way.' (p. 50)

The final image is of Pedro laying flowers on her grave while her ghost calls out to him to turn back and remember her. In this terrifying parable of love oppressed and corrupted we see human nature degraded and love perverted by draconian power, leaving no room for individual volition or genuine emotion.

Chris Hannan

The action of Chris Hannan's *The Baby* (1990) exists in a similarly destructive context, here the aftermath of the Roman dictator Sulla's death in 78 BC. Like Clifford's, Hannan's historical characters use heightened modern

language. The play opens as professional mourners are looting as part of a riot. They are also refusing to participate, a grave insult, in Sulla's funeral because he cut back the public funds available to the poor. The leading character, Macu, has a daughter, Laura, by her husband, who has disappeared after years of abusing both mother and daughter. Where Macu had suggested Laura would 'rather hit boys than play with dolls' (p. 80), her daughter, receiving a looted doll, enthuses, 'Look, she's a beautiful black baby princess […] I'll make her clothes and look after her and everything, because look, she's only a baby and I don't want anything bad to happen to *her*' (p. 81). In a violently disintegrating society, where an unpopular senator may have both hands casually amputated by a crowd, Laura's reaction to her 'baby' is a moment of humanity and loving care. The mourners are, after all, obliged to take part in Sulla's funeral, but their rebellious attitudes lead to the authorities' setting fire to their quarter. Laura dies in the inferno. In Act Two Macu, maddened by her daughter's death, follows warring armies with her companions, as the young Pompey begins his rise to power. Macu now seems pregnant, but in fact, according to a stage direction, 'It's as if in her madness MACU's been compelled to act out whether or not she wanted to have [her partner] WOCKY's baby. So she put a stone down her skirt, which in time became her wanted/unwanted baby' (p. 108). The play ends with Macu slitting her own throat, her blood ritually polluting the new dictator Pompey, although he can claim the blood is a sacrificed animal's and so, paradoxically, purifying. In *The Baby* Hannan achieves something of the freshness of Clifford's approach to historical material, moving far beyond the more staid dramaturgy of *Elizabeth Gordon Quinn*. The play has vibrant dialogue and lively action, suggesting late Republican Rome's anarchic atmosphere as it collapsed towards empire. Hannan strives for a sense of the 'parables, allegories, epics and historical parallels' to which McMillan referred. Whether the abused Laura, the doll Laura manages to love before being burned to death in an act of state terrorism, or the sterile stone of Macu's madness, the 'babies' of Hannan's play are all lost in the violence of civil war, urban riot and generals' power games. Civil conflict overwhelms individual human love and compassion.

Peter Arnott

In the same Traverse year that launched Jo Clifford's playwriting career, Peter Arnott's *White Rose* (1985) was presented. Clifford, as we have seen, when working in the 1980s with historical material, focused on

pre-modern Latin cultures to examine issues of power, obsession, and (ir) responsibility in the interface between the private and public arenas. While Arnott also looked to other cultures in his history plays, unlike Clifford, he also wrote on explicitly Scottish historical themes. Clifford's histories are 'alternative' in the sense that they look to other cultures to highlight their themes in a way none of his predecessors except the outlier Ada Kay had done, to explore history in a mythical, even magical realist, way, most obviously in *Playing with Fire*, and to use heightened language, including at times blank verse. In dramaturgical terms, however, her history plays employ conventional linearity in their structure and plot devices. Arnott, by contrast, offers alternative perspectives, as does Hannan, through the interrelated balance of his use of Scottish and non-Scottish contexts for his history plays, his sometimes hyperrealist representation of events, as in some concentration camp scenes in *The Wire Garden* (1994), and his exploitation of consciously theatrical and metatheatrical techniques in his dramaturgy. Meantime his language, while highly expressive, often achieves this effect through understatement in an almost flat, factual style as opposed to Clifford's often vivid language. Further, rather than Clifford's Latin world, Arnott's non-Scottish work, *White Rose*, *The Wire Garden*, and *Propaganda Swing* (2014), focuses on the Second World War through events on the Eastern Front in the first, and in Nazi Germany in the latter two. The ways Clifford, to an extent Hannan, and Arnott explore alternative histories dramatically do not imply that they jointly comprise a school—certainly Clifford and Arnott each has a distinct style from the other—but rather that in a particular phase in the late 1980s, continuing for Arnott, each in their own way explored new models of seeing and presenting history on the Scottish stage.

The duality of Arnott's interest in Scottish and non-Scottish history is highlighted by the coincidence that his first two contrasting history plays appeared, like delayed buses, close together. In May 1985, *The Boxer Benny Lynch* was premiered at the Tron Theatre, to be followed two weeks later by *White Rose* at the Traverse. These plays established dichotomies in his treatment of historical topics that continue over decades. The former, returning to a topic Bryden had dealt with a decade earlier, is less focused than Bryden tends to be on masculinized perspectives on the play's events. It also focuses less on the peculiarities, not to say eccentricities, of character in the manner in which Bryden's early work indulges. Rather, Arnott presents Lynch within a wider, more generalized context of social and economic conditions than Bryden does, so offering an

arguably more radical and politically grounded dimension to his version of Lynch's rise and downfall. Set against this more radical content, however, where Bryden experimented formally with dramaturgical structure, providing fifteen *Scenes from a short life*, as his subtitle has it, to match the fifteen rounds of boxing championship contests of Lynch's period, *The Boxer Benny Lynch*, although dramaturgically well-executed, is somewhat orthodox in structure. The more radicalized content is not combined with more radical dramaturgical practice. The contrast with *White Rose* is not only that of Scottish as opposed to non-Scottish historical material, but in the dramaturgical framework Arnott employs. The latter play begins to embody a new formal vigour found in Arnott's later work.

The very opening of *White Rose* marks directly Arnott's interest in exposing the shaping of text and the shaping of 'history'. The play begins to the sound of music as its leading character Lily Litvak poses with her engineer and friend, Ina, '*for a propaganda film*' (p. 1).[12] We are at once reminded that within the stage event of the play, we are seeing the staged event of a propaganda film which is intended to shape its audience's perceptions of 'facts of history', just as Arnott's play sets out to shape its audiences perception of 'history'. The dialogue begins by theatrically asserting the staged and manipulated nature of the film and so of the representation of Lily as a war hero:

> LILY: We are the women air fighters of the 586th Division, 73rd Fighter Regiment; the Free Hunters of Stalingrad. We kill lots of Germans!
> DIRECTOR: Again!
> LILY: We are the women air fighters of the 586th Division, 73rd Fighter Regiment; the Free Hunters of Stalingrad. We kill lots of Germans. (to director, angrily) Better?
> DIRECTOR: (impatient) Carry on!
> INA: We engineers salute our pilots. We salute the men and women workers in the factories and our glorious soldiers. We salute our courageous Russian People. We also salute the Comrade General Secretary for his direction and inspiration in the struggle. We promise we will help to drive the fascist beast back into his hole, and come home and breed happy healthy children! (she waves) Dosvedanya! (to director, eagerly) All right?
> *The director enters with a light meter.* (p. 1)

Arnott's play explores the dynamics of the contrast, even conflict, between public image and private emotion. We quickly learn that Lily resents both the distraction the making of the propaganda film represents to her

commitment to the air battle over Stalingrad and the director's intrusively asking her if she has a boyfriend. She does not want to tell him about herself, leaving Ina to answer his questions. The director tells Ina,

> I'm not sure that Comrade Captain Litvak appreciates the role of cinema in the struggle. […] The beautiful huntress of the night … we could do with a little romance … […] Oh, it's not frowned on any more, you know. Nothing much is, so long as it's cheerful. She'll photograph very well. (p. 3)

Straight after this scene, the actor playing the director re-enters as Alexei, the senior pilot with whom, in time, Lily will fall in love. He and Ina step out of character to narrate factual information about the battle of Stalingrad, before Alexei's enacting the briefing of his squadron while Lily and Ina narrate how they came to join the air force, before returning to role to enact their first meeting. Throughout, such transitions between enactment and narrative information are managed with grace and subtlety. The audience is constantly aware of its presence at a dramatic representation of the characters' experience and of the provisionality of 'facts of history', the ways in which their very narration affects the ways in which they are understood. Arnott's combination of rapid shifts between scenes in character and the presentation of background information creates a flitting, fleeting series of snapshots. These gradually build up a vision of Lily as an individual woman fighting alongside Ina for the recognition of women and their rights and capabilities: when she meets a German fighter whom she has defeated in a dogfight, he refuses to believe a woman could have downed him until she shows knowledge of the tactics used that only his opponent could possess. Yet, while these enemies achieve some form of relationship, the obscene nature of the war in the East means that this prisoner will be taken by the secret police and shot out of hand, an event Lily simulates but cannot herself see through. For her, war is still is open, even honest, conflict. As she comes to terms with her feelings, Lily recognizes that she and Alexei are in love, while the public Lily, as a successful fighter ace, becomes increasingly a product of the propaganda war: at one point *Isvestia* reports she is only seventeen, four years younger than her real age (p. 35). Wounded, she returns to duty, each of her 'kills' being signalled by the painting of another white rose on her plane, a symbol of beauty becoming a symbol of someone's death.

As Stalingrad is relieved, and the Germans retreat, the atrocities committed during their invasion of Russia are discovered. Like Clifford,

Arnott sets private life against the intrusion on individual experience of contemporary public horrors. Lily says, 'Our vanguard found pits of bodies, masses of white tormented limbs, tangled in a covering of sweaty, bloody earth. Jews. Like my grandfather. Like me, they would have said' (p. 41). Alexei continues, 'Lily and I went walking in some woods one night. We found the naked, rotting, mutilated carcass of a teenage girl … tied upright to a tree.' Private violation is set against mass atrocity when Ina adds,

> Whole towns and villages had been erased, emptied for slave labour, extermination, reprisals against partisans. We were given fiery, tearful lectures by our commissars. They seemed to relish this moment of moral superiority. Their own crimes were expiated and they shook with hatred and righteousness and terrorised the ones who were to do the actual fighting with calls to greater and greater sacrifice. I felt like they were stealing my war from me. Using it. For themselves. (p. 41)

One side's savagery is used to justify—even expiate—the other's. History is repackaged by the commissars, while Lily, Alexei, and Ina seek to live their lives behind the versions of themselves the authorities' ideologies require. As Ina puts it,

> The war belongs to them, up there … we are fighting a war for them to take the glory, for them to plan the reconstruction. […] they are already up there dreaming it … they are in Washington and London and Moscow … and they are already planning the next war. For fascists to fight and nobody to win. Don't let them tell you lies!' (p. 50)

Ina has by now expressed her love for Lily who, after Alexei's accidental death, herself dies as her plane disappears over the Don estuary. Of the trio, only Ina survives to old age, never having flown, married or joined the party. In *White Rose*, the individual, however dynamic, cannot achieve fulfilment against the power of the party's propaganda and the authorities' versions of 'history'.

The year after his Benny Lynch and Lily Litvak plays, both based on individual lives but set in a broad social and ideological context, Arnott returned to another Scottish historical figure. Although involving events three decades before the Cato Street Conspiracy and the Scottish Rising, or indeed Lochhead's *Blood and Ice* with its different, but complementary, treatment of repression, *Muir* (or *Tom Muir's Voyage to Australia*) (1986)

deals with similar issues to those handled by Conn and MacMillan ten years earlier, not to mention Mavor in 1962. This play concerns events at the beginning of the period of British civic repression in response to the French Revolution which flows through to the events recounted in *Thistlewood* and *The Rising*. Like MacMillan, Arnott uses a vibrant Scots for the dialogue of *Muir*. He manages a free-flowing structure, moving between settings in a way that overlays often ironic versions of actions and motivations in juxtapositions that quickly undermine newly created perceptions and perspectives. The very opening of the play offers a clear example of this technique, something which can be seen to grow out of the way in which in *White Rose* his actors move to and fro between playing in character and presenting reportage and self-reflexive commentary.

Two examples of such transitions may suffice to make the point about Arnott's use of what Cordelia Oliver, discussing my *Mary*, called 'meaningful alienation through jump-cut'. The first concerns the kaleidoscopic way Arnott, when it will reinforce his ironic effect, flits from scene to scene and back and forth in time. The play opens on board the brig that will take Muir to Australia. Arnott sets the stage picture clearly: 'MUIR sits downstage. A SCULPTOR is making a cast of his left profile so that Muir cannot speak. The sculptor is watched by Captain CAMPBELL. Above, a CLERK reads the sentence on MUIR. The rest of the cast as onlookers at a trial' (p. 1).[13] We move at once from a scene where the hero is apparently being immortalized, to a scene earlier in the same year in which the Clerk reads the sentence of transportation passed on Muir for his 'sedition' against the oppressive state. The action then returns in time and place to the brig where the captain asks the sculptor about his representation—his version of the 'truth'—of Muir, 'Does treason show in the features, sculptor? Or is aa the treason washit oot o this yin?' (p. 2). The sculptor goes on to question Muir directly, exploring versions of him:

> I've heard a lot about you, of course. You're terribly well spoken of; for the most part. Of course, there are some would have it you're the very devil. […] There's nothing like murder in your face. Oh, I can read a face the way you might a book. And, confidentially, sir, l think it's a noble face you have, in its way. (p. 2)

This line with its vision of Muir with a 'noble' face segues straight back to two years previously and a court scene where the brutal Lord Braxfield is sentencing a radical, John Lockie, whose advocate is Muir, to

transportation, a process against which Muir protests and which foreshadows Muir's own fate (p. 3). In the second example, from Act Two, we see Muir on board the brig, engaging with attempts to resist the cruelty of the captain, who asserts his absolute authority on board and employs spies to keep control (pp. 26–34). This is followed by a scene in which Muir, a year earlier, walks with Hamilton Rowan of the United Irishmen discussing 'the corruption of the British State'. This, Rowan argues,

> is no aberration from its function. It is corrupt by its very nature. Corruption is its function, and it corrupts us as a matter of policy, with gold, land and religion. […] There will be no freedom for the Irish, the Scots, the English, come to that, without the dissolution of the British Imperial State.' (pp. 34–5)

Arnott's dramaturgical experiments in *Muir* are lively and gripping in their irony.

It would be hard, however, to argue that *Muir* is innovative in terms of dramatizing hidden history. This is so even although, when Arnott wrote, *pace* Mavor, Muir was less well-remembered than he now is, not least because of the attention Arnott's play drew to his career and political importance. What is certainly true, however, is that, in revealing hidden history in a manner very similar to the techniques of the 1970s playwrights discussed in Chap. 5, Arnott employs and develops a lively structural inventiveness found among them only in some of their work. As he moves from scene to scene, setting to setting and time to time, he achieves a freshness that is quite his own, revealing hypocrisies, oppression, and corruption in a highly dramatic flow of action. Through this process he also implies parallels between the action of his history play and the contemporary political situation just as Clifford had done in *Losing Venice* with the Falklands War. In Rowan's speech just cited, in the decade after the flawed and failed 1979 referendum, while the Northern Irish Troubles continued, the reference to constituent nations of 'the British Imperial State' only achieving freedom when that state was dissolved resonated. So did his representation of the corrupt 'justice' that condemned Muir when the forces of 'law and order' were being used to suppress the 1984–5 miners' strike.

Arnott's next history play, *The Wire Garden* (1994), returned to the theme of the war in Europe, this time set in Sachsenhausen-Oranienburg concentration camp. The complex plot involves the family of the commandant, Hohn, a variety of more or less psychotic Nazi guards, officers,

and officials, and a range of prisoners. These include a Jewish gardener, a former university expert, now a forced labourer working for the anti-Semitic Hohn, a group of British prisoners held in special security because of their ostracism by other prisoners of war arising from their behaviour, including collaboration with the Nazis, and a small group of Russian prisoners including Stalin's son. Each prisoner has his own clear context: for example, the gardener is called the Musselmann, meaning, as a note says, 'in this context […] one of the walking dead, a corpse waiting to lie down'. The British traitors object to their more comfortable cell being allocated to the Russians who offer the chance of fruitful negotiations to the Germans and snobbishly object to being forced to move to more basic accommodation. Hohn is committed to the Nazi cause and to militarism, denying human affection, telling his son as he is sent away to school, 'You don't belong to your mother any more. It is your profession now, to comfort German mothers with your strength. Go to your mother and tell her to be brave. Don't kiss me. Don't look back' (p. 5).[14] Repeatedly in violent language, and often violent action when prisoners are beaten up, Arnott presents a world consistent in its own terms, but where moralities have become corrupt. There is some thought that Stalin might exchange his son, Jacob, for senior German officers, but in the end he denies him and leaves him to his death, with which the play concludes. Hohn find himself before this end relieved of his duties, not for torture and murder of prisoners, but because he has been found to have appropriated state property for his own use. Tellingly, in scene thirteen he ignores the sight of Harbin, a Russian officer prisoner of war—'now hanging where Jacob hung in act one, manacled, beaten, naked. A bloody towel has been hung over his face'—but is upset his superiors are charging him with corruption: 'Fuckers. A few scraps of WOOD?' (p. 73). When the British officer Endicott, almost in parody of stiff upper lip officers in post-war prisoner of war films says, 'My men are soldiers …', the Nazi official Echtlinger replies,

> There's no such thing anymore. Before Stalingrad, I too believed in soldiers, I believed that war could be directed, despite everything, towards rational, limited objectives. That soldiers and diplomats like myself could effect between us … a logical alteration in the European balance of power. I have learned … to repent of this vanity. After Stalingrad … this is not a soldiers' war, a politicians' war … this is a people's war, a total war … the dead are already in their tens of millions and there is no reason why it

> should EVER stop. I believed, long ago now, that once the policy … had been accomplished … then the murder would come to an end. But the shades have fallen from my eyes. I can see now (he grabs the Musselmann and holds the bayonet to his back). Murder itself is the policy. […] Let everything die so long as we die, and leave no laws, no icons … unbroken. After Stalingrad … there should only be murder. (He pushes the bayonet into the Musselmann's back.) (pp. 93–4)

Arnott explores a universe which has become no more humane or natural than the 'wire garden' of the title whose 'walking dead' gardener, having sought to nurture some kind of growth within the wire, but who has never been able to communicate with words, is casually killed. Stalin's son dies on the wire of the camp's electrified fence. As scientific advances are thus misapplied and relatives with learning disabilities are scientifically eliminated, the play's universe represents an alternative version of humanity and 'nature'.

This play, although commissioned by the Royal Shakespeare Company, has achieved professional public presentation only in readings. It contains deeply painful material, and while each example of this is arguably no more distressing than that explored by Clifford in *Ines de Castro*, Arnott tends here to pile one on top of the other, rather than dramaturgically managing the material to a clear dramatic effect. Certainly, thus, the play achieves a vivid sense of the bestiality of war and of the Nazi system, but it does so without quite offering a perspective beyond the facts of atrocity. Where *White Rose* also draws on savage historical material, it does so within a context within which we see, for example, the ways in which the propaganda exploitation of Lily and her companions forms part of the processes of war in a context of ideological conflict. We see in her career the human emotions with which wartime love seeks to deal and, so, loving individual stories challenge the larger ideological framework and the emotional impact of the brutality of war against which they are set. In *The Wire Garden*, by contrast, the final image of Jacob falling from the fence when the power is cut off offers a focus for emotions aroused and ideas stimulated by the play, but, because there is so much material in play and its focus is generally so scattered across a range of characters and plot-lines, Jacob's fate, while embodying wartime suffering, is no more critical to the play's meaning than the fate of any others in the play. As a result, the core of the play is hard to find; in the end one is left with no sense of dramatic or thematic resolution. *The Wire Garden*, instead, often overwhelms one

by the brutal treatment of prisoners and their frequently ruthless or selfish behaviour to one another, without Arnott's quite managing to take us behind—or beyond—his sense of the horror of things.

Far more successful is his award-winning *The Breathing House* (2003). While he starts almost as many plot hares in this play as in *The Wire Garden*, here he uses complex dramatic structures and cross-action to investigate issues of political and personal hypocrisy in social management. Arnott has explained the inspiration for this play as follows:

> it was a story I'd been waiting to tell for a very long time. Jeanette Foggo [...] in 1986, had given me a wonderfully illustrated book [...] about Arthur Munby, a pioneer of photography in Victorian London, who had secretly married Hannah Culliwick [*sic*], his servant and favourite model. Munby, in his innocent pre-Freudian way, had been obsessed with physically robust working women, at a time when women of his own class had affected tight lacing and vapours. (p. 1)[15]

Arnott takes the inspiration of this Victorian ménage and applies it to Edinburgh. His leading character, John Cloon, forms an obsession similar to Munby's with his servant Hannah, whose 'strong hands' (p. 7) he admires. He persuades her to be photographed in roles as servant in the manner of Munby's relationship with another Hannah, Cullwick. Hannah has an illegitimate daughter, Sorrow, who lives with her sister Rachel, and does not know Hannah is her mother. They live, despite Rachel's Puritanism, in the Breathing House of the title, an Old Town slum which includes in its environs a brothel. Cloon secretly marries Hannah who has not told him about Sorrow. His friend, Henry Littlejohn, is a social reformer, a doctor who seeks to exterminate cholera in the city. His daughter Elizabeth is married to Gilbert Chanterelle, a medical researcher working with Littlejohn. As the play proceeds, we learn that Chanterelle has seduced and impregnated their maid Agnes. When Elizabeth discovers this, Agnes is cast out, finding refuge in the Breathing House, where, after a period when Chanterelle secretly supports her, she has to prostitute herself to survive. The brothel keeper assigns her to a sadist whom, in resisting his attack, she kills. She is condemned and hanged. By now, Chanterelle has learned his philandering lifestyle has infected him with syphilis; Elizabeth realizes she is probably also fatally infected. Cloon, meantime, learns about Sorrow, feeling deceived by Hannah. After Agnes's execution, Rachel in an episode of religious mania sets fire to the Breathing House. Chanterelle

runs into the burning house and is lost trying to save the inhabitants: Littlejohn, the seeker after purification of society as well as health, seeing him run in, says, 'Burn, damn you. Burn in hell if you want to' (p. 107). Unknown to the others, Hannah does rescue Sorrow and goes to live with her in a mission in Cramond, while Cloon believes her to have died. The play's last two scenes take place twelve years later. Hannah's attempt to free Cloon of his obsession with her has failed and she writes to him from Cramond, whence she has been able to keep an eye on his progress:

> I am truly sorry about deceiving you, and then deceiving you once more, but I thought it best that I should leave and not trouble you again. It is only now that I feel that we are safe, and I have nothing more to fear, that I can write these words.' (p. 108)

He comes to visit her. Her daughter, now—perhaps a little obviously—renamed Grace, brings him in, asking how he should be introduced to her mother. He says, 'I hope you may say … I am her husband.' And the play concludes as 'HANNAH and CLOON look at each other' (p. 110).

As is clear from this unpicking of themes and plotlines *The Breathing House* is highly ambitious in its dramaturgy, thematic complexity and layering of meaning and irony. Transferring the story of Munby to an Edinburgh milieu, Arnott synthesizes a range of themes including the polymorphous nature of Victorian sexuality despite that society's insistence on respectability and the corrupted nature of aspects of that society, not just in terms of sexual attitudes and exploitation of women, but in issues of medical health and moral hygiene. It is no surprise to recognise that Arnott in 1996 had written a *Jekyll and Hyde* adaptation. Where the temptation might be simply to expose social and sexual hypocrisy, Arnott, by working through the relationship of Cloon and Hannah, moves away from simply attacking censoriously the easy target of Victorian double standards. Rather, he works on the Munby/Cullwick motif, using historical material transposed through his imagination, to examine the impact of patriarchal power structures, the drive for social reform and the contradictions these can create. Power relations, specifically those of master/female servant, but also husband/wife, are sexualized on men's terms, not just in the exploitative manner of Chanterelle and Agnes, but in the complex, emotional landscape in which Cloon and Hannah live. Indeed, in Arnott's plot the victimization of Agnes moves beyond its potential to be a post-Hardy melodramatic story of 'good-girl-gone-wrong' into areas

of ambivalence. There her last client's sadistic power games are subverted and overthrown by her act of violence. Her society condemns her to death for this act of resistance, but resistance it nonetheless is. *The Breathing House* deals with a range of issues as complex as *The Wire Garden*. While it does not have the horrifying points of reference—concentration camps and war on the Eastern Front—of the latter, it deals with acts of emotional and physical violence which carry their own fierce impact. Where in the end *The Wire Garden* seems, however, to labour under the weight of its themes and content, *The Breathing House* manages historical material with a control and grace that are in no way showy, but transport the audience to another period the better to understand issues affecting their own.

Arnott's most recent history play, *Propaganda Swing* (2014), returns to some of the themes addressed in *White Rose* and *The Wire Garden*. Set in and around a German Second World War radio station, with the linking device of an American broadcaster, Bill Constant, narrating, it explores how jazz was rejected and yet admired by the Nazi regime and used for propaganda purposes. Indeed, its characters include William Joyce, Lord Haw-Haw. In the opening scene, the Nazi producer, Hinkel, objects that 'This music is not what we agreed' (p. 2).[16] He objects to mention of George Gershwin, 'Whose music our musicians have chosen not to play. Our musicians are contented members of our folk community!' (p. 3). The play explores the ways music can be politicized and made to serve specific ideologies. At the same time Arnott makes use of the vibrant theatricality of wartime swing music, much of which punctuates the play, to counterpoint the Nazi apparatchiks' authoritarian attempts at censorship. The very act of creating studio sound effects on stage makes explicit for the audience the performative nature of versions of music and ideology. Arnott has selected a form of presentation that allows him constantly to remind audiences of a key theme of the play, the manipulation of 'reality' by those in authority.

As with *White Rose*, Arnott takes specific historical figures around whom to develop his themes. Lale Anderson—'Lala' in the play—was a German cabaret singer who came to prominence as the first singer of 'Lili Marlene'. She and her fellow-singer Anita Spada and the bandleader Lutz Templin are followed through the war as they are obliged to comply with (or resist if they can) Nazi demands. In the play Anita is seen as self-serving, while Lala for a time is imprisoned in Ravensbrück concentration camp. Indeed, Goebbels banned Anderson's rendition of 'Lili Marlene' for a time before a version that served his purposes could be provided. In fact, however, Spada seems also to have spent time in Ravensbrück. Arnott,

in developing his plot, chooses to establish clear matrices of degrees of resistance and collaboration that require him to mark one of the women as more compliant than the other without her out-and-out co-operating with the Nazis. Through these matrices, Arnott explores major issues of the role of art in war and, in particular, music's potential to express human nature, whatever that may be. Bill asks towards the end,

> Is the music all that matters? Is the music the thing that makes us all human? Maybe we are both angels and devils. Maybe that's what's so hard about being human … Being free. Always having to improvise … Maybe that's what the music means. Maybe that's jazz. (p. 72)

And he continues with a startling image of the reconciliatory power of music, and perhaps of its ambiguity. He returns to Berlin after the war:

> And one night, I heard Lala Anderson singing … from a little theatre made of canvas in the ruins … and I looked in and there they were. On stage. In the only place where people like Lutz and Lala ever really belong. On stage in front of an audience of American GIs. And of course they were singing that song. (p. 73)

The play concludes with 'Lili Marlene', while Arnott specifies 'As a curtain call, the cast perform a scat version of Artie Shaw's "It ain't right"' (p. 74). In *Propaganda Swing*, Arnott powerfully integrates dramaturgical structure, metatheatricality and theme to allow his play to embody the manufacture of 'facts of history' and make explicit their creation in the onstage act of making radio programmes.

Clifford and Arnott embrace history as subject matter from the very beginning of their playwriting careers. While after *Ines de Castro* in 1989 Clifford has scarcely returned to historical material except in adaptations, Arnott has regularly, if intermittently, returned to history over the decades. Both explore alternative aspects of history to their predecessors' very nearly absolute focus on Scottish history. Their approach in history plays has, to repeat Joyce McMillan's striking description, been 'obsessed, at different levels, with large, sweeping political and social themes, with parables, allegories, and historical parallels'.[17] As is clear from earlier chapters, earlier playwrights have often been concerned with 'sweeping political and social themes' and 'historical parallels'. Clifford and Arnott, complemented by other examples like Hannan's *The Baby*, have in their work additionally emphasized history as parable, allegory, and epic.

Notes

1. Cited in Ian Brown, *Scottish Theatre: Diversity, Language, Continuity* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2013), 240.
2. *Scots Plays of the Seventies* (Dalkeith: Scottish Cultural Press, 2001).
3. Angus Calder, *New Statesman*, cited in Alasdair Cameron (ed.), *Scot Free: New Scottish Plays* (London: Nick Hern, 1990), i.
4. Steve Cramer, 'The Traverse 1985–97', in Ian Brown (ed.), *The Edinburgh Companion to Scottish Drama* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), 165–76.
5. Joyce McMillan, *The Traverse Theatre Story* (London: Methuen, 1988), 92.
6. Alasdair Cameron, 'Introduction', *Scot Free*, xiv.
7. Page references to *Losing Venice* are to Cameron, *Scot Free*.
8. Author's unpublished typescript.
9. Steve Cramer, 'The Traverse 1985–97', 169.
10. Ibid.
11. Author's unpublished typescript to which page references are made.
12. Page references are to the author's unpublished typescript.
13. Page references are to the author's unpublished typescript.
14. Page references are to the author's unpublished typescript.
15. Peter Arnott, 'Introduction', *The Breathing House* (Edinburgh: Fairplay Press, 2007). Page references are to this edition.
16. Page references are to the author's unpublished typescript.
17. Joyce McMillan, *The Traverse Theatre Story* (London: Methuen, 1988), 92.

CHAPTER 8

Re-Constructing the Deconstructed: David Greig and Rona Munro

David Greig and Rona Munro, the two playwrights on whom this chapter concentrates, have followed a different trajectory towards engaging with history to that of Clifford and Arnott. Both took around a decade before writing their first history play, in the case of Munro *The Maiden Stone* (1995) and Greig *The Speculator* (1999). Both, however, in individual ways follow Clifford and Arnott's practice in emphasizing parable, allegory, and the epic in their historical drama. Of *The Speculator*, Greig says, 'This play is not intended to be a true historical record of the events in Paris in 1720, or to reflect accurately the biographies of any of the central characters.'[1] Concerning *The Maiden Stone*, Munro, while taking 'some small liberties' with her material, the 'songs and stories […] I remember from childhood', supposes 'I feel them to be a record of a people and a culture invisible in history but a bedrock I stand on nonetheless.'[2] While these statements might, up to a point, have been made by earlier playwrights writing on Scottish historical topics, Greig and Munro are very explicitly prepared to take 'liberties' with 'history', to deconstruct its elements and use them to construct versions of history embodying new mini-myths. Each, however, does so with differing, though complementary, approaches to the treatment of their historical material and the kind of liberties they take.

I. Brown, *History as Theatrical Metaphor*,
DOI 10.1057/978-1-137-47336-3_8

David Greig

Greig's *The Speculator*, set in Paris in 1720, seems at first sight distant from Scottish history. It explores early eighteenth-century financial manipulation and portrays, in an accelerated timescale, the collapse of the French Mississippi Company, a colonial investment scheme paralleling the more or less contemporaneous London-based South Sea Bubble. The scheme is established by the speculator of the title, the Scot John Law, who famously, as Controller General of Finances in France, developed, much before its time, the concept of using paper money rather than specie as the basis of economic transactions. Law is presented as a somewhat unrealistic visionary, managed in daily life by his mistress Catherine. In a parallel plot, he sponsors a new play for the Italian Company by Pierre Marivaux who, in an unhappy but explicitly business-like marriage with a rich wife, Colombe, is initiating an affair with a company member, Silvia. A second parallel plot concerns the adventures of the naive 16-year-old provincial, Lord Islay, a Scottish lord somewhat at sea on his version of the Grand Tour as he engages with Adelaide, an ex-nun and tavern waitress. In fact, at the time the play is set, the historic Islay was older (born in 1682) and one of the most powerful men in Scotland, a post-Union member of the House of Lords, a Privy Councillor, a senior judge, and about to be first Governor of the Royal Bank of Scotland on its foundation in 1727.

Both of the play's acts open with choruses of 'the Beggars and Whores of Paris'. In Act One, they offer 'advice to a newcomer' to the busy streets around the Rue Quincampoix in central Paris, the site of an early version of a French stock exchange. In Act Two, they react to the execution of a young Belgian nobleman who, after losing everything in the Mississippi crash, has indulged in Bullingdon-style behaviour which concluded at the end of Act One in his murdering a tavern-owner. The play proceeds through a rapid-fire series of scenes, kaleidoscopically portraying the cynical corruption of a great metropolitan city misled by an investment craze fated to collapse as soon as a major investor, here the Prince de Conti, demands his scrip be cashed in for gold, so draining the scheme's reserves. The crowd of investors riots and tries to attack Law, although he is protected by his bodyguard, Philippe. As the action becomes more frantic, it also becomes anachronistically surreal as a Harley Davidson motorcycle, token of an American future beyond the century of the Mississippi Company appears. In the third last scene the various plotlines come together in a frenetic conclusion in which no one achieves what he or

she wants and Philippe is killed, taking a bullet as Catherine tries to shoot Law. The penultimate scene shows the chorus returning to Paris from America where they have laboured to make their fortune and reached the conclusion that 'Never—never in a thousand years of history— / Will there be anything in America. / It's worthless' (p. 118).[3] Finally, Silvia prepares to travel alone, wondering what it would have been like not to have met Marivaux, as he returns to Colombe, and Islay and Adelaide, who throughout the play have been rather comic fringe characters as Islay tried to woo her, are the ones to ride off to the future together on the motorcycle, Adelaide starting it up as they leave the others disillusioned.

This brief summary of the play's lively action can do only slight credit to its gallimaufry of speculative action and inventive incident, all conveying the febrile atmosphere of a society and economy in transformation and meltdown from top to bottom. Indeed, the play, while hinting at the growth of international business that would lead to contemporary globalization, can also be read as a metaphor for recurring economic collapses, whether the actuality of the Mississippi scheme or Norman Lamont's Black Wednesday, still fresh in the public mind when the play was written, or, indeed, the 2008 world banking crisis. As Clare Wallace puts it, 'In *The Speculator* the potential power of global systems of connection, exchange and commodities are powerfully rendered though temporal disjunction and metatheatrical knowingness.'[4] Greig's historical drama, as does his playwriting in general, constantly plays with theatrical possibility, and even apparent impossibility. In a revealing interview, the first director of *The Speculator*, Philip Howard, discusses his reaction to an early draft:

> My mistake was to lose my nerve with David's first draft, which was articulated more in the style of a 'masque' of the period: a company of actors; a play within a play, possibly even a play within a play within a play … ; a very knowing attitude towards the historical setting; not necessarily even trying to be a well-made play.[5]

The Speculator's mixed reception by critics—Paul Taylor of *The Independent* famously sniffed, 'Not a play, you reckon, that is ever going to be a licence to print money'[6]—may be seen to arise from its compromised nature between the first draft and the staged version, the result of the loss of 'nerve' Howard refers to. The genesis of the play outlined by Howard also marks the play as falling within a tradition developed in a variety of ways by several playwrights discussed in Chapter 5 as they

explored not only writing 'history plays', but the nature of 'writing' history for the stage and indeed of 'history' itself. Wallace uses a happy phrase to describe *The Speculator* when she calls it 'a ludic historical drama'.[7] Certainly Greig's playwriting is often ludic, but it is also true that since 1970 several predecessors and contemporaries of Greig have adopted a ludic approach in plays about history and to the nature of history itself, and behind that the myths generated by 'history'. In this, Greig's historical plays sit securely in a post-1970 strand, which, by now, can safely be termed a Scottish historical drama tradition.

Given its setting in Paris and that only two named characters out of over a dozen are Scottish, albeit one of those being the lead, one might question how far this play is 'Scottish' and how far, like Clifford's, it is dealing with geographically and culturally alternative histories. In addressing such a question, one has to bear in mind Greig's comment in an interview with Caridad Svich: 'I rarely write directly or recognizably about Scotland […] But I am always writing from Scotland: Of it? About it? Despite it?'[8] David Pattie makes typically insightful use of this quotation. He notes that the play at several points makes fun of Scots and Scotland, citing the Italian company's reaction when a wit has suggested they are 'All Scots' and they respond in turn, 'Good God', 'That's awful', 'To call us Scots' (p. 88), or the 16-year-old provincially naive Lord Islay's saying, 'the advantage of being Scottish is that there's always somewhere better to go to' (p. 13).[9] Pattie then goes on to remark, 'Greig is not simply Scottish, he exists in a dialogue with the nation, one in which neither Greig nor the nation he identifies with are fixed essences.' Indeed, Pamela McQueen suggests that discourse 'is the defining feature of Greig's reinvention of the Scottish history play'.[10] That discourse becomes one of identity when both

> Law and Islay, as expatriate Scotsmen, are speaking from an émigré position outside the contemporary reality of the historical materialist conditions of an eighteenth-century Scottish citizen. Their relationship is in part one of commercial exchange: Law cheerfully takes Islay's money off him at dice. Yet both share a national affinity of shared cultural references and place memories.[11]

Certainly Law was obliged to come to Paris to implement his ideas: he says, 'I couldn't save the Scots from themselves. […] They've put their imagination in chains' (p. 28). Nonetheless, whatever the Italian company's insults or Law and Islay's nostophobia, the play embodies a discourse

of aspiration and community expressed by both expatriate Scots, not least in the metaphor of their shared engagement with pipe music, dealt with by Greig humorously, but without irony.

While Law's aspiration overreaches, this is not because his ideas are in themselves faulty. They fail because the economic framework that would allow them to be fulfilled does not yet exist. The speculator is, in some sense, a visionary hero, whose heroism may yet be villainous. As Marivaux puts it, when his collaborator Dufresny says playwrights are gamblers, 'Gamblers stake blind. / Speculators imagine a possibility / And have the courage to force it into existence' (p. 85). Yet, the crowd cannot see the true potential of Law's conception of paper money as token of value in goods and land. In contrast, young Islay, naive as he often is, is carried off on the symbol of the future. Greig's stage direction when Adelaide starts the motorcycle engine reads, 'The entire theatre opens up' (p. 119). Somehow, Islay has persuaded Adelaide, having escaped the constraints of the nunnery imposed on her by her father, to leave behind the drudgery of the tavern to which she 'escaped' and join him in a venture—one might say, adventure—into the future and, we deduce, the America that is yet to come. As McQueen puts it, 'Adelaide and Islay, by embracing new values in an unknown, only imagined new world, explore a radical path to an international multicultural Scottish identity in a globalised world.'[12]

The Scottish characters in *The Speculator*, flawed as they are, may be found in a chaotic historical period and place, but Law provides financial innovation, however perilous, and Islay embraces 'new values'. There are no absolutes in Greig's discourse, but in *The Speculator*, through his Scottish characters, his dialogue with Scotland shows avenues forward from a confused and violent way of life. Law may fail, but aspects of his vision will prevail even if that very future success will contain the seeds of its own implosion. Law's speculation may be a way forward, but not a reliable one: the events of *The Speculator* will recur. Islay and Adelaide, meanwhile, open up the universe represented by the 'entire theatre' within which Greig's play has been performed, as in one sense Islay was in historical fact to do as a leading, innovative, and non-corrupt banker. As McQueen puts it, *The Speculator* reveals new possibilities of ways to be Scottish in a post-national globalized world. Cosmopolitanism is the core status of the principal characters offering a new type of social solidarity as a model for devolved Scotland's contract of citizenship.[13] Following McMillan's terminology, Greig, in *The Speculator*, like Clifford—and

perhaps even more—is interested in, if not quite the epic, the fabular and allegorical use of history, the creation of explicit myths from historical material.

Greig's interest in myth creation continues in his next history play, *Dunsinane* (2010), when the epic is certainly foregrounded. Here, following McMillan, the term 'epic' is used to imply a wide range of action, large casts, and ambitious philosophical scope rather than the more technical sense in which it is used when one refers to Brechtian 'Epic Theatre'. It is possible to make a case, as Verónica Rodríguez and Dilek Inan have shown,[14] for *Dunsinane* having aspects which can be seen as 'epic' in the Brechtian sense, but that is not the case being made here. Following his practice in *The Speculator*, Greig uses historical material to create a particular universe of discourse to allow him to use 'facts of history', to create new mini-myths, to allegorize profound contemporary questions of international morality and behaviour. In doing this, Greig engages in a dialogue with the versions of 'Malcolm', 'Lady Macbeth', 'Macduff' and 'Siward' found in *Macbeth*. As he thus questions Shakespeare's version of history, Greig himself creates an explicitly mythical history separate from the record. Hilary Whitney quotes Greig as saying,

> the real King Macbeth […] probably wasn't a tyrant, he was probably quite a good king. He ruled for about 15 years at a time in Scottish history when the turnover in kings was something like one every six months, so he must have been doing something right.[15]

This is a trope of Scottish unruliness repeated when Gruach tells Siward her husband 'was a good king. / He ruled for fifteen years. / Before him were kings and kings and kings but not one of them could rule more than a year or so at most before he would be killed by some chief or other' (p. 32).[16] This suggestion is so far from the historical evidence, it might be intentionally so, although Greig had repeated it in the interview just cited. In fact, between the establishment of the Kingdom of Scots by Kenneth McAlpin in 843 and the deposition of Macbeth in 1057, there were nineteen kings, some reigning for short periods, some for longer, the average length of reign being eleven and a quarter years, while Macbeth reigned for seventeen. To provide a contemporary comparison, from the beginning of Alfred the Great's reign in 871 until the Norman Conquest in 1066, England had seventeen kings, with an average reign of eleven and a half years.

Further, Gruach's characterization of Malcolm in the plays as 'weak and corrupt' (p. 34) has to be seen against the facts of his life. Siward's relationship to Malcolm by marriage—Geoffrey Barrow says he 'may have been King Duncan's brother-in-law',[17] while Archie Duncan suggests he was possibly a cousin[18]—probably implied an avuncular role, similar to the special relationship of the period of uncle to sister's son, called in Anglo-Saxon *sweostersunu*. This would attract Siward's help for Malcolm, in the conventional historical narrative, in driving Macbeth from his castle at Dunsinane/Dunsinnan in 1054. Siward, however, died in 1055 before Malcolm in 1057—whether working with other English allies or, in the more recent proposition by Archie Duncan mentioned in Chapter 2, unaided by any English support and attacking Macbeth from a base in the Norse-held Orkneys—finally defeated and killed Macbeth at Lumphanan. He then deposed Macbeth's son, Lulach, in the next year. When Gruach, Macbeth's widow, meets Siward, whose actual death was two years before Macbeth's, so making such a dialogue historically impossible, she says, 'If I were you I would not be here. I would be at home guarding my own land. Not fighting on behalf of some other man's land. A man too weak and corrupt to hold his own land himself' (p. 34). In fact, Malcolm reigned in his own right, 'holding his own land', without substantial or effective internal or external challenge for thirty-six years until in 1093 he was ambushed and killed in Northumberland to which he had long laid claim and which for a time he annexed. Certainly, there were occasional attempts over the years to resist Malcolm's settlement, but the bulk of those came in the next century. Then Celtic descendants of the offspring of his first marriage tried, but failed, to supplant the stable dynasty he established through the offspring of his second marriage. His dynasty was sustained by the primogeniture and partial feudalism he introduced and lasted through the disputes over succession in the 1290s, if one accepts the claims of Robert Bruce as descended from Malcolm, until the death of Queen Anne in 1714, and even, perhaps to overstate the case, through the Stuart justification for Hanoverian succession, further. Greig has taken the names of historical figures and, rather than using their record to develop his themes, has reacted against their representation in *Macbeth*. This dramaturgical method is complicated by the fact that *Macbeth* itself is a fantastical version of history, whose treatment of Macbeth and Malcolm is intended to flatter James VI and I, Malcolm's descendant. The foundation of *Dunsinane* as a history play is not verifiable fact, not even orthodox 'facts of history'. The play brilliantly creates an epic allegorical mythopoeic fable using the names of historical characters.

In *Dunsinane* Greig challenges the inaccurate characterization in Shakespeare's *Macbeth* with its improbably virtuous, but broadly defensible characterization of Malcolm. While Greig represents Macbeth as no tyrant, a historically grounded viewpoint, he creates his own improbabilities. These include, but are not restricted to, the powerful position given to Gruach, an English (as opposed to Northumbrian-assisted) invasion of Scotland to overthrow Macbeth, a continuing eleventh-century English occupation of Scotland, and guerrilla warfare on a substantial scale against Malcolm's settlement. The play becomes a fabulous allegory about neo-colonial invasion and cultural imperialism which can be read directly across to the Iraq and Afghan wars under way when it was written, and not to Scottish history. Here history has proved a template not for a history play reflecting what happened, or might have happened, but rather one which can be adjusted to provide a version of modern history. As Clare Wallace says, 'While apparently firmly rooted within the borders of Scotland, the play explores the disparities and pitfalls of transnational communication and understanding, as well as the amorphousness of national imagined communities.'[19] Victoria Price clearly identifies the dramatic import of *Dunsinane*, when she says it

> becomes a site for authoritative national self-expression with the Scottish playwright firmly reclaiming the history of Macbeth and Gruach. […] By depicting a strong and able woman who does not conform to the misogynistic stereotypes typically attributed to Lady Macbeth, Greig decentres Shakespeare; reconfiguring the gender politics at work in Shakespeare's tragedy, he in turn contests the traditions of value by which the canonical English playwright has commonly been appropriated.[20]

Although one might wish to change her 'reclaims the history' to 'reconstructs the history', Price is surely accurate when she talks of Greig's methodology of decentring and reconfiguring, and he does so not only with regard to the gender politics she rightly draws attention to, but to wider issues of imperialism, neo-colonialism, and military power.

'Decentring' and 'reconfiguring' are terms that might reasonably be applied to Greig's treatment of globalization in *The Speculator*, while his methods of characterization lend themselves to his interest in subverting the apparently certain. As Charlotte Thompson expresses it,

> A key aspect […] of Greig's dramaturgy is the presentation of unknown and unknowable characters. He frequently offers only fleeting sighting of characters who merge and overlap. In the subjective dislocations such

> work provides, a threshold may be located whereby we may apprehend traces of the other without the attempt to fix them in particular, 'whole' subjectivities.[21]

Indeed, Thompson's formulation might be applied to the ways in which Greig shows Siward and his men relating to the Scotland they seek to control as its culture, languages, and politics leave them no sure footing: for them, 'Where everything that in England was normal— / Summer, land, beer, a house, a bed—for example— / In Scotland—that thing would turn out to be made of water— / This is what you learn here—nothing is solid' (p. 39). The invaders can find no firm locus in what for them is alien territory. Neither can they find a warm reception: they talk of Scotland being so cold that 'You've not felt coldness until you've felt the coldness / Of the air here and the beds and the nights' (p. 39). Greig's recurrent (and, for Scots, often jokey) representation of Scottish weather as always terrible and especially cold, when in truth the oceanic, North Atlantic-influenced, British climate is largely similar across all its nations, marks his ironic understanding of the ways in which the sense of being alien may result from internalized value systems and subjective points of reference. As Gül Kurtuluş says

> By inferiorising Scottish land and food [the invaders] promote their own culture and their own land so that patriotism becomes chauvinist and crypto-racist. Indeed, the English soldiers look down on Gruach, the Scottish Queen, and extend their humiliating behaviour to the Scottish royalty, describing the prince as fragile and feminine, not having faced the troubles a 'real' Englishman would overcome.[22]

In Greig's imagery the very topography of Scotland confuses. As Dan Rebellato puts it, 'there are rich and vivid alternative maps to be drawn of Scotland's imaginary geography, depicting the thick concentrations of historical memory and the flowing urban landscapes of cultural internationalism'.[23] In these 'maps', what is central and what is not are hard to establish: as Wallace observes of *Dunsinane*, 'Simple binary oppositions between centre and periphery, known and unknown, self and other, right and wrong are thus destabilized, forcing an experience of intense contradiction to the fore'.[24]

Greig's playwriting in *Dunsinane*, as in *The Speculator*, refuses simple dichotomies. In *Dunsinane*, Scotland has two official languages, as it now has three. The fact of such linguistic variety resists the apparently absolute authority that monolingual and, so, monopolistic linguistic authority

seeks to assert. Rather than the unilinear, and ultimately unsophisticated, directness of Siward's naive world view, Greig represents a subtler, more complex, more shaded set of world views. Indeed, one might read the more nuanced Scottish polity not as more savage, but as rather superior in its sophistication of political thought to the simplistic, even crude, world view of the English who seek to invade.[25] As David Pattie puts it,

> the image of Scotland that manifests itself throughout [Dunsinane] is one with which Greig has engaged before. […] Scotland is treated as indefinable […]. It exists […] in relations: only seen through the filter of personal and communal identity. It is […] interactions that give the country a shape—not anything inherent in the nature of Scotland itself.[26]

As Gül Kurtuluş observes of Scotland's 'nature' in another sense,

> Nature in Scotland is uncontrollable, and it becomes a refuge and a secret weapon for the Scots, especially for Gruach's son when he is chased by the English soldiers. He hides in the rough and uneven geography of Scotland. The fact that the play is not divided by acts and scenes, but by seasons reinforces the importance of nature in Greig's representation of Scotland.[27]

Of course, 'nature' in this sense is anywhere uncontrollable, but Kurtuluş highlights the poetic and dramaturgical framework Greig employs.

Like Glover in *Bondagers*, Greig does not employ an orthodox act structure, but sets his action within a year, identifying the four stages of the action of his play from spring to winter. In the spring Siward arrives in confident and mistaken hope. In winter he finds he will 'go home in the end. / Beaten and humiliated' (p. 136). The play concludes with his walking off, disappearing into snow, leaving Gruach with the head of her dead son, whose death will put a stop to neither complex politics nor the indeterminate subtlety of, in Pattie's words, 'interactions that give the country a shape'. Such indeterminacy is built into the play's structure. Rodríguez and Inan summarize this:

> We conclude with the destabilising notions of colliding and blurring. By this, we mean that aspects of the epic and aspects of the everyday emerge, fade, reappear and disintegrate, constantly shifting co-ordinates and destabilising any given framework […]. The combination of epic and everyday not only operates theatrically in *Dunsinane* but also […] in [Greig's] understanding of—and thinking about—drama and the world, in the play's content and form and finally in the play's strategies and elements.[28]

Such 'combination of epic and everyday' is also found in Rona Munro's history plays, as is the fascination with theatrical convention, dramatic form, and dramaturgical experiment that have marked the work of so many of her predecessor Scottish playwrights dealing with history, especially Scottish history, on stage.

Rona Munro

Unlike Greig's first history play, all of Munro's, apart from the opening scenes of *The James Plays* (2014), are set in Scotland. *The Maiden Stone* is set very firmly in her own home region, the north-east, while *The Last Witch* (2009) is set in Dornoch in Sutherland. Further, while Greig uses no Scots, although in *Dunsinane* some dialogue is intended to be in Gaelic, Munro in *The Maiden Stone* exploits for local characters largely undiluted Doric, the Scots dialect of the north-east. Further, Munro uses a variety of mythic and folk motifs to embed this play in its region. The legend of the Maiden Stone of the title surrounds a ninth-century Pictish symbol stone near Inverurie:

> The stone is traditionally linked with a daughter of the laird of Balquhain [… who] made a wager with a stranger that she could bake a good supply of bread before he could build a road to the top of Bennachie [the local mountain]. The stranger turned out to be the Devil in disguise. He finished the road before the bread was ready and returned to claim her as his reward. As the maiden fled, the Devil caught her and transformed her into the Maiden Stone.[29]

Bidie, a mother figure, wet nurse, wise woman and, in the Scottish sense, a traveller, retells this legend in the play, with the variation that the woman is transformed as an act of her own will, having prayed for safety from the Devil. Munro uses such folk motifs, songs, and tales throughout, usually through the mouth of Bidie. She comes to represent folk wisdom, grounded in experience, as the affectations and aspirational claims of Harriet, the other main character, a leading actor in a much reduced touring company, for most of the play does not. Bidie is first to be heard as she enters, carrying a baby on her hip and surrounded by children, singing a verse and two choruses of a traditional song. The choruses begin 'And wi' you, and wi' you, / And wi you Johnnie lad, / I'll dance the buckles aff my shoon / Wi' you my Johnnie lad' (p. 1).[30] This song's first lines, well known, but not used in the play, inscribe a demeaning and commercially

exploitative relationship between men and women: 'I bought a wife in Edinburgh for a bawbee / Then I got a farthing back to buy tobacco wi''. Munro's choice of chorus and verse, however, emphasizes female desire and physical strength and energy: the woman 'would follow Johnnie lad, / Although he was a caird [tinker]'. Yet, as we will learn, the following of desire and assertion of agency by women does not come without penalty. When she was seventeen, with the prospect of a wealthy marriage, Harriet says she spied a handsome officer from her window, actually an actor in costume and also called 'John'. Having seen him on stage, she eloped with him, stealing her mother's jewels and 'some of my dresses' (p. 38). Cut off by her family, she made a career with her 'Johnnie lad' on the touring theatre circuit, bearing children on the way, some of whom have survived and travel with her. Now aged forty, her acting powers, or at least her sense of the glamour of the parts she can still play, is fading. Her John has died and her present, slightly younger, partner, Archie, while sexually proficient, is failing to manage what remains of their company, effectively only her family. Arriving in autumn in an Aberdeenshire village, Auchnibeck, she finds he has misled her about the nature of the village—it is far too small to provide much, if any, income from a performance—and anyway he has not made forward arrangements for performance or accommodation. They must sleep in a pigsty. As Harriet says, 'He promised me linen sheets. The sow keeps trying to get back in!' (p. 32). By the end of the play, for her Johnnie, she has not so much danced the buckles of her shoon, as worn out their very soles until they are disintegrating.

The Maiden Stone is structured between the polarities of these women, each in different ways shaping their existence, surrounded by children and enduring fraught relationships with their men. Bidie's sexuality and mothering are represented as embodied forces of nature, while she has a savage relationship with Nick, whose name suggests some diabolic link. At one point offstage in Act Two, it seems she and he fight violently; each seems in awe of the other. They stand as some variation of the bread-maker and the Devil, while Harriet is clearly, whatever happened in her marriage, in charge in her relationship with Archie, despite her sexual dependence on him. When Bidie and Nick enact a battle of sexes, Harriet and Archie engage in a more genteel—and often self-consciously heightened dramatically—verbal and emotional conflict. Harriet needs to aggrandize her status theatrically, pretending to have a carriage when they have a cart, or requiring the pigsty be gentrified by provision of a fine carpet. This Archie obtains from Nick (it emerges that the carpet is stolen from the local laird,

so sabotaging their last hope of an engagement in the village) in exchange for his overcoat. As a result, when snow comes, Archie falls ill and dies. Harriet's drive to perform carries other costs. Her daughter Miriam, for example, whom she wants to go on stage, hates the idea and circumvents it by smashing a heavy stone on her foot so her permanent disability prevents her becoming an actor. Harriet and her ambitions depend on artifice and culture. Meantime, Bidie's children at the end of Act One appear transformed into, not actors, but animals, while Bidie talks of a lover who 'wis the deil' (p. 46). She goes on 'I'm running wi' blood. I'm dripping wi milk. I've a tribe at my back and gin death taks een o' them I'll jist mak anither. I can cheat *death* maister'. Bidie, with her non-stop breast-feeding, fecundity, and down-to-earth matter-of-factness about daily matters, embodies nature.

Munro throughout includes moments of magic realism like the appearance of Bidie's 'tribe' as animals, and constantly, as in the opening song or the play's title, invokes traditional folklore and imagery. As Act One ends, Harriet has heard that there is a garrison at Corgarff Castle in the Cairngorm Mountains, and decides that her troupe should perform there. On arrival, she finds the castle, the site of the atrocity commemorated in the Child Ballad 'Edom o' Gordon', abandoned for the winter and snow all around. There is even less hope of making a living here than Auchnibeck. In the ballad, as part of clan feuding, the Gordons burn the castle and its inhabitants. Lady Forbes, the chatelaine, tries to save her youngest child, lowering the baby from the parapets. Edom impales it. Forbes returns too late to save his family, but in time to exact bloody revenge. As Harriet hammers at the castle gates, Bidie retells this story, counterpointing Harriet's futile ambitions against the futile violence implicit in the castle's history. The dialectic of culture and nature discussed in the previous paragraph does not imply that Bidie's 'nature' has no art. Her art, however, is folkloric and embedded in a place's history, while Harriet's is an elopement from the everyday into the fantastic. The brutal reality of Miriam's smashing of her foot is the way she must find to escape the imposition of Harriet's fantasized world view. Thus, she can fulfil her own desire, becoming a teacher—dressed in severe black rather than the theatrical costumery of her mother—for all the children back in Auchnibeck, where Harriet, taking up Bidie's down-market pipe-smoking, finally settles in a slightly upgraded pig sty. There, Harriet receives a letter from an Edinburgh manager inviting her to return to the stage, but she is beyond that. She has been training a local girl, Mary, with limited success,

to act. Mary has become pregnant by Nick, but Harriet exposes the weak neonate to the cold; when it dies, she says it was stillborn. This frees her to send Mary, with a letter of introduction, to the manager. It is clear that she is casting the girl into dangers. She warns her, for example, 'Do *not* display your legs' (p. 80). Mary may not make it, but she will take the risk of the wide world and somehow follow her dreams, while Miriam, rejecting theatrical dreams, has found fulfilment in rural teaching. Harriet, at the end of the penultimate scene, in another magic realist moment, 'presses herself into [the Maiden Stone]' (p. 83). The stage direction has her smile and cry out once before 'She becomes the stone. / Darkness. The sound of heavy rain.' Tom Maguire finds telling metaphor for this moment, 'So when Harriet clings to and is absorbed within the eponymous Maiden Stone, narrative escapes history to become myth.'[31]

The play's final scene takes place ten or so years later between Bidie and Nick, who has just returned from Edinburgh. Bidie's children are all mostly grown up and gone and she is past being able to '[m]ak anither een' (p. 84). The play ends as she offers Nick transient sexual comfort as they both will be on the 'road the morn' (p. 85). Harriet may have become stone to escape worldly demands and transient aspiration, but Bidie remains. The Scots word 'bide', of course, means 'stay' or 'endure'.

While *The Maiden Stone* addresses the constraints and possibilities of free agency experienced by women as they seek to follow their own lives and ambitions, dealing with issues of fertility, sexuality, desire for a career, and their consequences, *The Last Witch* explores the social pressures women can employ and those imposed as they seek to make their own living in a male-dominated society. In the former, Munro takes elements of folk history and legend and her knowledge of the practice of eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century touring theatre companies to develop her thematic structure and a dramaturgically balanced cast of characters, almost, but not quite, in schematic form. In *The Last Witch* she works from an interpretation of a specific historical event. In 1727, sometimes said to be 1722, Janet Horne and her daughter were accused of witchcraft and tried in Dornoch. Horne was condemned and burned to death, the last 'witch' to suffer so in Britain. Horne is reputed, when she saw the blaze which was to consume her, to have remarked on its welcoming warmth. Munro creates a quirky independent woman with a wry sense of humour whose crime is to be independent and have fallen out with her neighbours, in the play Douglas and Elspeth Begg. Historically and in the play, her daughter had deformed hands and feet; neighbours claim Janet rides on her. The

daughter Helen in Munro's presentation is confused and seems to suggest this actually happens. While this delusion may be communal, Munro offers specific reasons for the accusation to be made. When Janet is questioned by the magistrate, Captain David Ross, at the instigation of Begg, she says 'Call me what names you like, Douglas. I'm just your neighbour, Janet Horne, for all your name-calling.' Ross asks her 'You deny cursing this man's beasts?' and Janet responds 'There's power in me a beetle like him should fear. I'll not deny that' (p. 36).[32] As the play develops we see Janet resisting her neighbours' aspersions on grounds of their hostility to her and to her daughter's disability. It is not just that she has practised forms of folk medicine, using herbs and, perhaps, hypnosis, but that she is somehow 'different', not conforming to their expectation of an elderly woman 'knowing her place' in society. Her reaction, perhaps foolhardy, is to claim powers, even when formally examined by Ross. He challenges her, 'Will you curse me?'; she responds, 'If I did, you'd know its weight when it fell on you' (p. 37). Ross, nonetheless, says to Janet, 'Just a widow tricking scraps of food out of her ignorant neighbours. I don't see much harm in you. Just mean, grasping malice' (p. 38). Munro suggests a back history in which Ross may have had occasional sex with Janet, but also that, when defeated in battle, he saved himself by pretending to be dead and was appalled by the actions of 'hags' scavenging the dead (p. 39).

For whatever reasons, whether misogyny on Ross's part or a combination on the Beggs' part of neighbourly mistrust, misogyny, hatred of disability, and ageism, Janet and Helen are subject to accusations which cannot be defended against because they are embedded in the lethally fanciful charge of 'witchcraft'. As in *The Maiden Stone*, a male character called Nick appears, first seen by Helen when she is calling on the devil to appear, bringing with him a suggestion of diabolic sexual power (pp. 26–9). The dialogue leaves us unclear about his true nature: he leaves doubt whether he is man, devil, or figment of imagination. Later, when Helen seems to be '*up in the sky*' believing herself being ridden by her mother, he again appears, talks her out of her apparent vision and then, in further sexually-charged dialogue, implies more clearly he is the Devil, but also an outcast man (pp. 46–51).

Meanwhile Janet, who does not yet meet Nick, rather than becoming abject before her accusers, stands up to them in a manner both brave and risky. When she says, 'I'll turn myself to a fat hen and shit on [Douglas's] shoes, I'll turn myself to a dancing frog and leap out of his hands, I'll turn myself to smoke and blind and choke him … let him try and put his irons on me then!' (p. 41), her defiance and its rhetorical flow has undoubted

impact, but damages her case. Janet is tortured, kept awake for days on end to make her confess to witchcraft, but all she confesses to is 'just a wee bit magic, just a wee bit help to needy friends' (p. 61). Ross still tries to defuse the situation, calling her 'a sad old woman with dirt under her fingernails from gripping on to a few withered sods of land [for whom] the only way you can feed yourself and your twisted get is to whine and dance and terrify your neighbours into giving you crusts to stop your curses' (p. 63). He calls her a 'thief without the decency to pick pockets' (p. 64). In the face of this abuse, Janet somehow resists the misogynistic pressure applied, but it becomes clear that, whatever she says—and her resistance has prejudiced her case—she will be condemned.

Helen then claims to be a witch herself in the hope she can save Janet by taking responsibility and Janet breaks and confesses. She can outface the bullying of the authorities, but not her daughter's self-incrimination. Towards the end of the play, once she is condemned Nick appears again and Helen, as she escapes, begs him to relieve the pain of her mother, condemned to burn as a witch (p. 79). He then becomes the executioner who lights the fire and then puts Janet out of her agony, stabbing her with a silver knife he has received from her daughter. In the final scene he clears away Janet's burnt remains while Ross is surrounded by hoody crows. Nick says that Ross will see him again 'one day' (p. 86) and the plays ends with the 'beating of a hundred black wings [hiding] Ross from sight' (p. 87). Belief in witchcraft and the power of women, even when the 'witch' is executed, cannot be easily purged.

In the published version of *The Maiden Stone*, Munro includes an epigraph, 'Once upon a time … / In a place like Donside …' (n.p.). The formulation not only places the entire play in a fairy-tale framework of the kind that imbues the play with its legendary, folktale quality, but repeats, consciously or not, a motif Liz Lochhead uses in both *Blood and Ice* and *Mary Queen of Scots…*. Munro clearly uses her historical research to construct (her)stories rather than male-dominated histories. In this, of course, she can be seen to follow the path I have described as 're-visioning' history from a feminist perspective, in the manner of Glover and Lochhead. Yet, Glover's women assert their identities within contexts where they are economically and socially oppressed, while Lochhead focuses on the manipulation of women within larger artistic, social, or political contexts, even when they have royal status. Munro explores ways, rather, in which, however difficult the struggle, her women can assert their autonomy and agency. Harriet, even when her career as an actor is over, can still escape

from the pursuit of male dominance into the Maiden Stone; Bidie can achieve a position where it is 'Time tae let myself get fat wi' food and nae jist human souls. Time tae sleep in the afternoon and tell mair tales' (p. 84). Janet's victory may be Pyrrhic in the manner of John Proctor's in *The Crucible*, but, nonetheless, she retains her own sense of her authority, certainly her moral authority, over Ross and the Beggs, saving her daughter. Munro deconstructs a narrative of male authority and power, which Glover and Lochhead contest, but find hard fully to controvert in their history plays. She reshapes that narrative in *The Maiden Stone* and *The Last Witch*. It is upon such reconstruction of deconstructed narratives of power relations between male and female that Munro's *The James Plays* build.

Before coming to these plays, another aspect of Munro's playwriting relevant to them should be addressed. A striking feature of *The Maiden Stone* is its lively and, in the mouth of Bidie, highly expressive use of Scots. In *The Last Witch*, the dialogue is in English. Of course, the language current in Dornoch at the time of the play's action would have been Gaelic: Horne is said to have shown her guilt partly by a slip in court in reciting the Lord's Prayer in Gaelic.[33] The use of English here might, however, be said to make sense since in some areas of the Highlands and Islands Scots was never native, the transition when Gaelic fell away being directly to English. Munro says in her 'Introduction' to the published text of *The James Plays* that apart 'from Joan and Henry V […] and Margaret […], all characters are speaking Scots' (p. viii).[34] This is not true, however, of the published text where the language is largely a Scottish-inflected English with intermittent Scots words and syntactical structures. This occasional Scots is evident from the start: Balvenie cries to English guards 'I'm no with them!' (p. 3), using the Scots for 'not', but the English 'with'. Two lines later Big James uses the term 'gubbed' for 'thoroughly beaten'. In the second play, words like 'nyaff' (p. 164) and 'glaikit' (p. 167) are used. It has to be said that the impression of the language in performance was often that more Scots was employed than is found in the published text. In any case, Munro's linguistic approach evidently varies from history play to history play, though it is not as simple as using more English when an audience might be deemed likely to have difficulty with Scots—of the premiere of *The Maiden Stone* she observes:

> The language of the piece is the native dialect as I remember it and is in no sense historical but a living language. For the Hampstead production we reproduced this with minimal compromise and I don't think the rhythm or the integrity of the play would survive any attempt at translation.[35]

In fact, the use of words like 'gubbed' and 'nyaff' highlights a particular implication of the linguistic choices made in presenting most of the main characters of *The James Plays*. That is that they employ an urban demotic based on the discourse of street life: Ditto gubbed, for example, is widely used of serious defeats in football matches. Munro's language choices, further, which include a substantial number of sexual expletives, reflect a treatment of her characters apparently designed to undermine any dignity they might possibly have. Indeed, her decision to refer to James, the youngest son of Murdoch, Regent and Duke of Albany, usually called 'James the Fat', as 'Big James' is indeed a literal translation of 'Seamas Mòr', his name in Gaelic. It also makes him sound like a street gang-member. She names his father, usually called in Scots or English 'Murdoch', 'Murdac', when the correct Gaelic name is 'Murchadh'. Murdac is an Anglo-Norman surname; presumably the purpose of using such an eccentric version of Murdoch/Murchadh's first name is in some way to exoticize him. As we come to examine more closely the ideological implications of Munro's treatment of 'facts of history' in *The James Plays*, the force, whether deliberate or not, of such linguistic choices will become clearer.

It may already be evident that, though Munro has in *The Last Witch* stayed close to verifiable fact, while imaginatively developing her characters and their motivations, in *The James Plays*, she has a more cavalier approach to historical accuracy. Although as with *The Maiden Stone*, she says 'some small liberties have been taken with known events in order to serve our stories', she goes on to say certain 'characters represent amalgamations of many characters or stand for political forces within Scotland' (p. vii). The issue that arises when such reasonable dramaturgical choices are made is what impact those choices have on the underlying, or even the explicit, meaning of the plays, their dramatic and ideological impact. Liberties 'taken with known events' are not value-free and, as we have seen in discussing *Dunsinane*, changes in historicity have implications for cultural politics. It is illuminating in considering this with regard to *The James Plays* to begin by noting some examples of liberties with substantial implications, or, as one might put it, inaccuracies, lacunae, or even misrepresentations.

The examples discussed here for convenience sake come mainly from the trilogy's first play, *James I: The Key Will Keep the Lock*. It opens with four Scottish nobles including three Albany Stewarts, sons of Murdac, being guarded after an English victory. Henry V accuses them of committing treason against their king, a prisoner in England whom they have

never met and who is in his entourage, and threatens to execute them. The improbability of Henry's having such a reaction, had nobles fallen into his hands, is palpable: common practice at the time was to take surrendered nobles hostage for substantial ransoms. Anyway, the Stewart brothers were never in France in such a situation, although their relative, the Earl of Buchan, led the Scottish forces allied to France. Further, in the first production, James for this scene wore a tabard with a St George's Cross, like an English soldier. Heraldic practice would have him wearing his own immediately recognizable coat of arms. The episode is presumably based on the events after the 1420 Siege of Melun when James was present as an English hostage. There, Henry showed clemency according to prevailing conventions, to the surrendering French, but hanged their Scottish allies on the grounds they had taken the field against their king. This was seen as breaking the laws of war: the Scots were legitimate allies under the Scottish Regent's authority. It is entirely possible the uncrowned James would have taken the stance Munro ascribes, refusing to condemn the prisoners: doing so, he would have legitimately opposed what was, in modern terms, Henry's war crime. Munro represents James as subservient prisoner, rather than royal hostage—quite another matter, with very different status—and his position on Henry's threats as somehow weak, rather than morally strong. Further, in showing the Stewart brothers ridiculing him as 'prisoner', she neglects the fact their brother had also been a hostage of the English for fourteen years, spending some of that time alongside James in the Tower of London. He was ransomed by his father when James was not. His father—and Murdoch himself when he returned to Scotland in 1416—may have hoped that James would die in exile, since their family line was next to inherit the throne. As a final example of how taking of liberties may result in misrepresentation, Walter Stewart—who remains free in the play through the confrontations as James resumes his powers and land alienated during his exile from the Crown—was not then free. James, so far from being weak, faced by 'Murdac' and his family had Walter arrested before his coronation.

While these and similar variations of what was verifiably the case arguably help develop Munro's dramatic impact, they also, consciously or not, permit—even require—particular readings of her characters and their behaviour. By her choice of linguistic register, referred to above, Munro represents the Scottish nobles as thuggish, speaking a vulgarized demotic. In this way, she seeks no doubt to give life to the conflict of the Albany Stewarts and James, but undermines both their and James's authority,

trivializing their standing and the force of their dynastic rivalry, which is in any case, as we have seen, over-simplified. In other words, 'taking liberties' has implications beyond inflecting known facts for dramatic effect. The impact, intended or not, of such revisionism rather supports a reductionist approach to complexity and in this case tends towards a form of ideological inferiorism, rather than the Scottish superiorism at least hinted at in *Dunsinane*. Certainly, the conduct of politics and relations with territorial magnates in Scotland during the period of *The James Plays* is not so very much better than events in England during the same period. There, the Wars of the Roses involved widespread outbreaks of civil war when, after the deposition and murder of Richard II, three more English kings were murdered as their power was in turn usurped.

Given the violent methods of fifteenth-century power-brokers throughout Europe, one would never wish to suggest that Munro could sanitize some of that century's events in Scotland. Yet, even the rivalry of the Albany Stewarts was not inter-dynastic, leading to civil war, but between close cousins. Once James I had resolved that conflict by 1425, the record shows that conflict around the court never threatened the Jameses' successions. Even after James I's 1437 assassination at Perth, the succession was secure, the murderers quickly executed. Nor was the international standing of the Scottish state or royal family insignificant. Three of James I's daughters were married into French alliances, while James III's wife Margaret, a key figure in the trilogy, not only consolidated by her marriage relations between Scotland and Denmark, but brought within Stewart control Orkney and Shetland and, so, the security of the north of Scotland. None of this registers positively in the narrative developed in *The James Plays*. Indeed, the acquisition of Shetland is slighted. When James dismisses their value, showing no understanding of geopolitics, she responds with a personal jibe 'Shetland is a *jewel* of an island and if you can't shift your lazy arse up north to see that for yourself, don't …' He interrupts, 'Oh, aye, right right, next time I want to watch bloody Danish cast-offs shagging their livestock and knitting socks out of herring, I'll be straight up there' (p. 240). Again, the use of demotic by high-status characters is reductive, while the diplomatic significance of what is involved is reduced to a joke about bestiality and the strange concept of knittable herring as opposed to herringbone knitting stitches. The line raises a laugh in performance and misses the point of the dowry completely, while reinforcing a potential inferiorist discourse: the shift in historicity is not only dramatically effective; it embodies a particular—arguably reductionist—ideological significance.

Such reductionism recurs. In the first play, Joan is embarrassed to have only ale to offer, an unlikely predicament, and Isabella says 'My cleaning wifie drinks ale, I'm on the red. […] You didn't buy any more of the French red? / Couldn't afford it, I suppose' (p. 50). In the third play, *James III: The True Mirror*, meetings of the Parliament, presumably in an attempt to convey complex debates, become shouting matches (e.g. pp. 196–8). Anything that might demonstrate organized resistance to James III's autocratic whimsy is omitted. Despite James's earlier affection for his companion and architect Cochrane, he reports his death casually: when Margaret asks what has happened, he replies, 'Never mind Cochrane' (p. 250). Later in the same scene James talks of his opponents as having 'mouldy family names, […] ugly, bloody, history and fat estates' rather than 'natural beauty and raw talent'. When Margaret remonstrates '[…] they've come very close. They could *destroy* you!', James responds 'Who cares. I'm too ugly to live' (p. 254). Thus, the dynamic collaboration between magnates with negotiated English support, which led to Cochrane's downfall, led by Archibald Douglas, earl of Angus, nicknamed 'Bell-the-cat' for his decisiveness in the face of danger, is elided. Such minimising of key 1482 events evades crucial political and diplomatic dimensions, perhaps because they would undermine Margaret's dramatically effective rhetoric when she addresses Parliament before James's overthrow: 'You know the problem with you lot? You've got fuck-all except attitude. You scream and shout about how you want things done […] and when the chance comes look at you!' (p. 285). In fact, the magnates showed much more than 'attitude' in the alliances and political negotiations leading to James's defeat, misleadingly shown in the play as resulting from a campaign led by his elder son rather than those magnates. James IV's presence on the rebels' side was almost certainly actually unwilling: he wore a penitent's chain, as the play does show, for the rest of his life. The trilogy's omission or misrepresentation of such material runs the risk, as I have suggested, of its narrative bring seen as inferiorist.

The treatment of Scottish nobility and the qualities of the three Jameses should be understood, however, not simply as reductive. Following themes in *The Maiden Stone* and *The Last Witch*, as well as other of her plays, Munro represents women in *The James Plays* as particularly effective and powerful. Isabella, Regent Consort, is, as we have seen, sharp of tongue and manages her sons, presented as unruly, as certainly some were. Joan is introduced as a highly competent domestic manager (pp. 17ff), as would be expected of a high-status woman in her position, taking pride in her

practical ability to gut a fish (p. 66). While arguments between Isabella and Joan are often trivialized, they are both powerful women: one remembers, in events not included in the trilogy's action, that Joan's decisive action on the murder of her husband held the immediate situation together. Both Queens Mary and Margaret in the next two plays are equally decisive. In parallel with her foregrounding of women's power against menfolk's undermined authority, Munro finds, often highly effective, domestic metaphors to make points about cultural difference or interpersonal conflict. The practicality of a Scottish kist for a peripatetic court, as opposed to an English cupboard, is highlighted for Joan by Isabella, however patronisingly (pp. 65–6), while Margaret's self-respecting agency and the humiliation of Daisy, James III's mistress, are brilliantly theatricalized using the 'true' Venetian mirror (pp. 250–4, 262–4). In fact the domestication of the drama embedded in such scenes marks a dramaturgical trajectory over the trilogy in which the emphasis moves from primary concern with larger political issues, however expressed through family feuding, to a growing, though never absolute, emphasis on power relationships in the domestic sphere, seen in some feminist theory as seat of feminine authority. Within the loving, then loveless, marriage of Margaret and James, Margaret is represented as the more powerful. Partly this is developed through her anger at his philandering, though this tack, while dramatically powerful, does lead to one absurdity. Margaret says she is surprised that James may have had sex with the Duke of Buccleuch (p. 217). Her surprise is understandable: the Dukedom was not created until 1663.

There is no doubt that *The James Plays* are dramaturgically well-constructed, fluent, and theatrically effective. The dramatic choices made towards this end do, as we have argued, however, lead to underplaying of positive qualities of Scottish life of the time. We see James I's appearing to define himself chiefly against his English captor, while his status as a very great and cultivated poet is sidelined. Scots nobles are, largely without exception, represented an unpleasant louts, while Scotland is continuously characterized as poor and unimportant. Scots in general are portrayed as boorish and violent. No-one doubts these were indeed violent times, but it is moot how far Scotland was as violent as England, let alone some other European countries of the period. Indeed, Munro's subtitle for the first play, *The key will keep the lock*, paraphrases, neutralizes and weakens the impact of James's powerful assertion of desire for justice at all levels of society in the original: 'I will make the key keep the castle and the bracken bush keep the cow through all Scotland.' Yet, against this narrative is set

the powerful countervailing narrative of female agency and power, inevitably, given the international marriages of the Jameses, embodied mostly but not exclusively, in non-Scots. The theme of feminine agency and power is key to Munro's (her)story plays, offering a counterhistory to one dominated by men and patriarchy.

Both Greig and Munro appear to diverge from an observation made by David Archibald, writing in 2011 about recent historical drama at that time: 'There is, therefore, a tendency for post-dramatic theatre to limit its engagement with the past to relatively recent events, in contrast to the more traditional work of playwrights who draw more widely on the past.'[36] As we have seen, neither Greig nor Munro follows what might be defined as 'traditional' Scottish approaches to writing history plays. The next chapter will explore what this might signify further. For now, one can observe that their history plays do not deal with recent historical events, however much contemporary parallels may be intended; the most recent history plays of each is set firmly in the mid or late medieval periods. Indeed, Munro goes so far as to suggest that *The James Plays* 'are set within a period of Scottish history which is virtually unknown'.[37] It may be that her sense that the period was virtually unknown, though that assertion is surely worthy of further debate, released her to take liberties, to use her term, with known historiography, as does Greig. Both do so avowedly, and not irresponsibly.

What both Greig and Munro feel able to do, perhaps encouraged by the fact that, *pace* Archibald, they are dealing with events that are not recent is to exploit a looser attachment to historical records in creating their own 'facts of history'. While one can see clear links between what is known and the variations on that which Greig explores in *The Speculator*, it is very hard to see any real relationship between historical events and the events of *Dunsinane*. Indeed, there Greig is clearly engaging in an intertextual dialogue with Shakespeare and his *Macbeth* as much as with facts of Malcolm's reign. In Munro's case, *The Maiden Stone* creates fictional characters, represented in historically plausible ways, while *The Last Witch* draws on the record to create characters that also seem plausibly of their period in a way that relates them to ours. Her plays about the Jameses also have some relationship to the record—for example, Walter Bower in his *Scotichronicon* (1440–7) cites the widow tortured by being 'shoed' like a horse—but the ideological agenda that emerges means that Munro must, sometimes by suppressing events, rebalance relationships and characters, whether in the marriages she represents or the dynamics of political

conflict. Her treatment of the more violent aspects of those conflicts—for example, the Black Dinner—given her representation of Scottish nobles' behaviour, which was no way out of line with contemporary practice in the rest of Europe, risks, however, becoming a negative version of Scottish exceptionalism. Both Greig and Munro in their most recent history plays reach back into their own versions of the past to deconstruct facts of history and re-construct their own mini-myths in parables, allegories, and epic discourses which embody subversive and radically debateable versions of Scotland.

Notes

1. David Greig, 'A Note on the Text', *The Speculator* (London: Methuen, 1999), 5. Page references are to this text.
2. Rona Munro, 'Author's Note', *The Maiden Stone* (London: Nick Hern Books, 1995), v. Page references are to this text.
3. Page references are to David Greig, *The Speculator* (London: Methuen, 1999).
4. Clare Wallace, *The Theatre of David Greig* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 133–4.
5. Philip Howard, 'Directors' Cuts', in Wallace, *Theatre of David Greig*, 213.
6. http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/theatre-review-money-matters-1113453.html (accessed 28 November 2015).
7. Wallace, *Theatre of David Greig*, 108.
8. Caridad Svich, 'Physical Poetry: David Greig in Conversation with Caridad Svich', *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art* 29:2 (2007), 55.
9. David Pattie, 'Scotland & Anywhere: The Theatre of David Greig', in Anja Müller and Clare Wallace (eds.), *Cosmotopia*: *Transnational Identities in David Greig's Theatre* (Prague: Litteraria Pragensia, 2011), 50–1.
10. Pamela McQueen, 'Giving Voice to the Global Citizen in *The Speculator* by David Greig', *International Journal of Scottish Theatre and Screen* 6:1 (2013), 82.
11. Ibid., 87.
12. Ibid., 92.
13. Ibid., 97.
14. Verónica Rodríguez and Dilek Inan, 'Combining the Epic with the Everyday: David Greig's *Dunsinane*', *International Journal of Scottish Theatre and Screen* 5:2 (2012), 56–78.
15. Hilary Whitney, 'The Arts Desk Q & A: A Playwright David Greig', *The Arts Desk* Web, 6 February 2010, quoted in Pattie, 203.
16. Page references are to David Greig, *Dunsinane* (London: Faber, 2010).

17. G. W. S. Barrow, *Kingship and Unity: Scotland 1000–1306* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1981), 26.
18. A. A. M. Duncan, *The Kingship of the Scots, 842–1292: Succession and Independence* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2002), 37.
19. Clare Wallace, 'Unfinished Business—Allegories of Otherness in *Dunsinane*', in Müller and Wallace, *Cosmotopia*, 198.
20. Victoria E. Price, '"two kingdoms … compassed with one sea": Reconstructing Kingdoms and Reclaiming Histories in David Greig's *Dunsinane*', *International Journal of Scottish Theatre and Screen* 5:1 (2012), 25.
21. Charlotte Thompson, 'Beyond Borders: David Greig's Transpersonal Dramaturgy', in Müller and Wallace, *Cosmotopia*, 105.
22. Gül Kurtuluş, 'Patriotism and the Spirit of Macbeth's Ambition in *Dunsinane*', *International Journal of Scottish Theatre and Screen*, 7:2 (2014), 69.
23. Dan Rebellato, 'Introduction', in David Greig, *Plays: 1* (London: Methuen, 2002), xi.
24. Clare Wallace, *The Theatre of David Greig*, 97.
25. I am grateful to Peter Arnott for drawing my attention to this thought, a version of Scottish 'superiorism'.
26. David Pattie, '"Who's Scotland?": David Greig, Identity and Scottish Nationhood', in Wallace, *The Theatre of David Greig*, 209–10.
27. Kurtuluş, 'Patriotism', 64.
28. Rodríguez and Inan, 'Combining the Epic', 71.
29. http://www.historic-scotland.gov.uk/propertyresults/propertydetail.htm?PropID=PL_206 (accessed 26 November 2015).
30. Page references are to Rona Munro, *The Maiden Stone* (London: Nick Hern Books, 1995).
31. Tom Maguire, 'Women Playwrights from the 1970s and 1980s', in Ian Brown (ed.), *The Edinburgh Companion to Scottish Drama* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), 163.
32. Page references are to Rona Munro, *The Last Witch* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2009).
33. http://www.ambaile.org.uk/en/item/item_photograph.jsp?item_id=24951 (accessed 5 December 2015).
34. Page references are to Rona Munro, *The James Plays* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2014).
35. 'Author's Note', *The Maiden Stone*, n.p.
36. David Archibald, 'History in Contemporary Scottish Theatre', in Brown, *Companion to Scottish Drama*, 90.
37. Rona Munro, 'Introduction', *The James Plays*, vii.

CHAPTER 9

Conclusion: History as Theatrical Metaphor

In the Introduction, I cited Adrienne Scullion's comment that a past 'hegemony of the history play' could be argued to have 'constrained and deformed both the development and appeal of modern Scottish drama'.[1] It must be clear, by now, that her use of the word hegemony for Scottish historical drama is not overstated, and that what constraint and deformation there may be relates not just to modern drama, but stretches back for at least three centuries. From decade to decade, since Allan Ramsay's *The Gentle Shepherd* in the 1720s, Scottish playwrights have returned again and again to history plays as a genre of choice. This rather suggests they did not feel history plays offered constraint, but rather some form of creative interest, even release. Part of the reason may be discerned in the earliest history play cited in this volume, William Clark's 1663 *Marciano*. That play, as we saw, might apparently address ancient history, but in this guise actually through the safe filter of history deals with Cromwellian revolution and the then recent Restoration. Yet, while embedding themes in a historical frame can sometimes be a means of encoding meaning and avoiding censorship, as it was for James Thomson's 1738 *Agamemnon*, censors still banned his 1739 *Edward and Leonora*. The point, of course, is that, as Chap. 2 explored, history itself is not a neutral field: the 'safe' filter does not imply dispassion. Clark's use of history inflects the play's sympathies toward pro-Stuart royalism and shapes a perception of historical events that excludes a republican reading. The censorship of Thomson's 1739 work is clear indication that history plays have contemporary relevance

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and significance, and may be read by opponents in this way. Scullion's insight might well, indeed, be reversed to suggest that in Scotland the hegemony of Scottish drama has constrained and deformed, if not history, common perceptions of historical events and their significance, what I have frequently implied in this book by framing the word, 'history', with quotation marks.

I proposed in an earlier study that the 'concern with history shown by contemporary Scottish playwrights is absolutely rooted in their concern with the present and developing state of their nation'.[2] That proposition could reasonably, as my examples in Chap. 1 from Europe and other British nations attest, be expanded to cover Scottish playwrights of any period, and indeed any playwright of any cultural background employing history. I propose, in effect, that history and drama in general, and certainly in Scottish practice, exist in symbiotic relationships from which in theory each might resile, but in which both are inextricably engaged. It is not the history play in itself that constrains and deforms; it is the ideological purposes to which history plays have been put by their authors, usually—if not invariably—through the manipulation of mythopoeic version of facts of history, what we have called mini-myths. As Neal Ascherson argues, 'A "myth" is not necessarily untrue. It means […] a historical narrative which is used to support wider assumptions about moral worth or national identity.'[3] As Ian Bell expresses it, '[…] slates are never wiped clean. The past informs the present. The uses made of history, and the uses refused, are what matter.'[4] What the examples discussed in this book demonstrate is how embodiment of historical narratives in plays has over the years supported or modified, challenged, transgressed, transcended, transformed, and reinvented established ideological assumptions and existing hegemonies in audiences' often gendered historical understanding and perception of national identity.

Through this study I have used the terms, 'history play' or 'historical drama', for a range of approaches to playwrights' use of history. Some of the plays discussed have depended on specifically researched material—a point Ian Campbell and Ronald Jack make clear, as cited in Chap. 4, when outlining the sources McLellan researched for *Jamie the Saxt*.[5] At other times, McLellan worked with a looser relationship to verifiable historic actuality, working with traditional or ballad sources. The point is that public perception of history is influenced by a wide range of sources, some, chiefly for professional historians, rigorously identified and tested, but the result in most cases of transmission of versions of events through what we

have called facts of history or mini-myths. By and large, playwrights have felt free, as we have seen, to harvest their topics anywhere on the spectrum of available facts of history they felt would serve their themes, from rigorous research to traditional tales. Ted Cowan is illuminating when he comments, as a leading professor of Scottish History, that Rona Munro's earlier plays, *The Maiden Stone* and *The Last Witch*, lend themselves to a more mythical, even magic realist, approach

> because their subjects are mystical/magical and traditional in the first place. Historians find it difficult to understand the phenomenon of witch belief and so find it a less objectionable subject for dramatic representation. She can draw on traditionary sources and no carping historian will object. I am trying to revive the 19th century term 'traditionary' which means inspired by tradition or resembling traditional material i.e. not necessarily genuine tradition.[6]

Cowan's term 'traditionary' helps one understand the approach of such playwrights of McLellan's generation as Scott and Reid to their material. It even offers some explanation for the ways in which McLellan himself in his first-arc plays represents early-modern Borders life as robust, raucous, and roistering, but basically jolly. Cowan's striking phrase, 'objectionable subject for dramatic representation', relates to a reservation he expresses about approaches to historical topics which are simply inaccurate. In these cases, he argues,

> History [is not seen as] a skill, a discipline or a philosophy but is simply seen as 'things that have, or might have happened in the past'. Writers who wish to be taken seriously (and pretty well all very seriously do) debase history by not extending to the subject the same respect they hope will be given to their own.[7]

Here, the professional historian takes a clear position, demanding that in general the explorer of history, whatever may be her or his perspectives, will seek to ground their interpretations in recognized historiographical disciplines. As Chap. 2 shows, nonetheless, there is very considerable debate about the professional and ideological approaches that may underlie historiography. Playwrights are meanwhile ready to range over the field of history with highly differentiated attitudes to what is accurate or verifiable.

The fascination playwrights show with history has a profound basis. Both history—and history plays on whatever point of the spectrum between the

research-based and outright traditionary—continue to help constitute, with varying success, versions of a communal memory. Memory, of course, is a key factor in identity, whether individual or national. In a real sense, a community's or, as a nation, an imagined community's identity is expressed and conditioned by its vision of its history and literature, including importantly its drama. As Douglas Gifford observes, 'a full and mature national literature would represent, explore and criticise its social and historical contexts, not necessarily celebrating national historical achievement and certainly no longer seeking essential national identity, but rather expressing the uncertainties, dilemmas and challenges of its age'.[8] History plays shape ways in which a community understands who and what it has been and is and how the four interrelate. Dan Rebellato, discussing the work of David Greig, argues this has particular significance for Scottish drama: 'severance from history is particularly important to Scotland where national identity is often linked with defence of cultural memory'.[9] Cultural memory in Scotland is shaped by a problematic complex of cultures inside, alongside, and interacting with other cultures, drawing on three languages and relating to a nation independent for nine hundred years and engaged in a union with another country for a further three hundred, one that is supposed to guarantee its legal, educational, civic, and religious—that is to say its cultural—autonomy. Given that background, Rebellato's linking of history, Scottish national identity, and cultural memory is, to say the least, understandable.

The playwright has an important role in counteracting this possible 'severance from history', articulating the past in the present, with both past and present's implications for the future. This may be attempted successfully, of course, or not, according to the individual playwright's theatrical skill, but as we have seen it is a continuing central strand in Scottish dramaturgy. Sometimes careful research and dramatic ability open new and illuminating perspectives, while lack of either can result in unquestioning repetition of tired clichés. Two recent examples, not yet touched on, demonstrate this potential divergence. Set during the decade of the First World War and the Irish independence civil war, Nicola McCartney's *Heritage* (1998) presents two emigrant families from Northern Ireland, one Protestant Ulster-Scots, the McCraes, who live in 'British North America', the other Catholic Irish-speakers, Donaghues, who live in 'Canada', having arrived originally after the Great Hunger, itself an ideologically charged term for what others call, in an equally ideologically charged manner, the 'Irish Potato Famine'. McCartney explores the ways their heritages, their traditionary memories, shape their contemporary attitudes to one another as

neighbours. When a Protestant girl and a Catholic boy fall in love, each family's resistance to the 'other' reflects conflicting loyalties about war service and the subsequent struggles in Ireland. Here, the past shapes the tragic action of the play and the play highlights conflicts which have shaped contemporary Scottish and Ulster society. Part of the considerable strength of McCartney's play is that, while her characters are fictional, they are finely drawn and complex in their motivations within the social context and economic conditions of the life in Saskatchewan and of the period she has researched.

Other recent plays have opted to work within old stereotypes of Scottish history and a modern equivalent of the tushery discussed in Chap. 4, the trope of Scots and Scotland as rough, ready, uncouth, foul-mouthed, and raucous. Both Alistair Beaton's *Caledonia* (2010), dealing with the Darien scheme, and Tim Barrow's *Union* (2014), dealing with the run-up to the signing of the Treaty, deal in broad-brush caricature. *Caledonia* works rather in the style of McGrath's *The Cheviot…*, but without that play's witty lightness of touch even when hitting hard. Rather it reiterates through sketchy scenes, some amounting to little more than lists of goods or names or to historical exposition, the trope of Scotland as 'too poor. And too small',[10] so quite missing the point of recent research by such figures as Tom Devine that it was precisely the extent to which Scotland was wealthy that allowed it to fund the Darien scheme.[11] Meanwhile, *The Guardian* reviewed *Union* as 'history as dodgy pantomime',[12] while Mark Brown noted 'this busy and scabrous play [… is slowed] down by elucidatory diversions (many of the drama's speeches are thinly veiled historical explications), and […] the production's moments of thrilling boldness are overpowered by its increasingly uneven structure'.[13] There is no doubt that history plays can lead, to use Scullion's word, to constraint and deformation to 'both the development and appeal of modern Scottish drama' and, one might add, to contemporary understandings of Scottish history and identity. What is interesting is that in some cases more historically deformed, even inferiorist, plays may have, judging by box office impact, popular appeal.

This is odd, but should not surprise. Trish Reid admirably summarizes an important aspect of Scottish historical discourse:

> For centuries key figures and events in the nation's past have been circulated, distorted, sentimentalised and mythologised, in a process of representational overload that has, according to some critics, effectively replaced meaningful focus on the present. […] a consensus of sorts exists about the roots

> of the Scots' predilection for highly selective and sentimentalised accounts of their own history. Since the Treaty of Union in 1707, this argument goes, Scotland has lacked real political agency and has turned instead to over-inscribed historical narratives for a sense of cultural identity. Moreover, Scottish culture has become distorted and stunted in the process.[14]

Allowing for such views, when Reid goes on also to observe that many history 'plays [use] historical material with the express aim of holding up a mirror to contemporary Scotland',[15] it is easy to see why the discourses of Scottish drama and history are live and highly contestable in just the way that what Rebellato calls Scotland's 'cultural memory' is, with its complex and contradictory elements. Given that complexity, especially in recent years when major constitutional questions have been and remain to the fore of public debate, the interaction of Scottish history, myth, and drama are at least as complex as they have ever been.

In Chap. 1, I outlined a matrix of functions history plays might serve. At that point I suggested that 'engagement with only one or two functions may be a sign of over-simplification resulting in pageant or agitprop rather than drama, while the more matrical functions a play fulfils may mark its greater dramaturgical and ideological complexity'. The ideological current that underlies the plays of Robert McLellan and his contemporaries, discussed in Chap. 4, is consolatory, consolidatory, and celebratory, but in no way deconstructs historical myths or implies analysis of political progression, although those about Wallace and Bruce may be seen as implicative with regard to independence politics. Some plays like Kemp's pageants in Dunfermline Abbey or Smith's *The Wallace*, performed in the grand Assembly Hall in Edinburgh, achieved pictorial impact, but little psychological or socio-political effect. McLellan's second-arc plays, however, while still, like his first-arc plays, consolatory and consolidatory, are also much more engaged with serving psychological and socio-political functions. The following generation, however, serves a wider and more complex range of functions. Of those playwrights discussed in Chap. 5, only Bryden's plays can be described as straightforwardly consolatory, although it might be paradoxically argued that MacMillan and McGrath in their endorsement of radical action seek to console audiences sympathetic to the necessity and virtue of radical action. While an uncomplicated consolatory function is served by only Bryden, all seven of Bryden, Conn, McGrath, MacMillan, Campbell, Smith and the present author write consolidatory plays, revisiting 'the past' in their specific ways to coalesce a sense of nationhood or

common humanity. Of these, however, only Bryden, McGrath, MacMillan, and Campbell write in a celebratory manner, to reinforce or assert the existence of specific communities, McGrath and MacMillan, in particular, celebrating resistance by communities to political oppression.

Few plays by the seven engage in the pictorial function, recreating historical events, often spectacularly. When Bryden and McGrath do so, they do so in later work; it may be a factor in this that they are both directors who had control of the productions of *Border Warfare*, *The Ship* and *The Big Picnic*. All can be said to write consistently progressively, focusing the past as an incentive for present political action, while MacMillan, McGrath, Conn, and Campbell in specific plays write implicatively, showing risings, for example, or their suppression, in the hope of another. Although all can be said to demonstrate a psychological interest, viewing historical material as a source of exemplars to explore past and present human psychological attitudes, it might fairly be said, given their interest in caricature and typologies, that McGrath and MacMillan's interest is the least forceful and sometimes absent. Inevitably, given their topics, all are interested in the socio-political, although Bryden's interest in this seems the least, as he focuses on individuals and later the pictorial.

Finally, not all seek in their writing to deconstruct theatrical convention or expose how historical myths are made, why, and how they 'deceive'. While for me this is central to my Scottish history plays, others address this only occasionally, MacMillan in passing in *The Royal Visit* and Smith in *Jock*, while McGrath exploits, and so highlights, Highland myth-making in *The Cheviot*. Overall, then, one can say that the range of matrical functions engaged with by this group far exceeds the limited range of McLellan's generation. The latter's focus was much more narrowly on consoling and consolidatory versions of 'history' within the general framework of reasserting Scots as a theatre language. There can be no doubt, however, that playwrights coming to prominence in the 1970s respected and were often inspired by their confident use of varieties of Scots.

When one considers the history plays by Clifford, Arnott, Glover, Lochhead, Greig and Munro discussed in the last three chapters, the complexity developed in the 1970s continues and is developed, as is the avoidance of plays with mainly consolatory or celebratory emphases. All, however, are consolidatory. Where, however, many of their predecessors, with the exception of McGrath and myself, tend to an assertion of the consolidatory in terms of relatively unproblematized conceptions of historiography—allowing for varieties of hidden or counterhistory—or

'nation', those after 1980 discussed in detail all see the 'nation' and 'history' as problematic concepts. Eschewing the pictorial and focusing on the implicative, especially in the case of early Arnott, progressive, psychological, and socio-political, above all they are interested in the deconstructive, about how historical myths are made, why, and how they 'deceive'. An important element in this process of deconstruction is the focus on gender and power especially, but not exclusively, engaged by the women playwrights in this group. Discussing Liz Lochhead, Jan McDonald and Jennifer Harvie comment,

> Although based on historical events, involving 'real' characters, and/or myths that have become part of the common cultural currency, Lochhead's plays do not simply repeat and thus reify 'official' versions of myths and legends or their subversions promulgated, and accepted, by popular culture. Rather, Lochhead's work reconfigures each story, both thematically and structurally, from a feminist standpoint.[16]

Reconfiguration of this kind, though clearly not necessarily from a feminist standpoint, can be found in plays by McGrath, Arnott, Clifford, Glover, Greig, and Munro as well as my own history plays. As Alison Lumsden and Aileen Christianson observe in their 2000 collection, *Contemporary Scottish Women Writers*,

> what is frequently interesting about the women writers discussed here is the way in which their work *cuts across* patriarchal constructions of Scotland to suggest alterative 'imaginings' or constructions of nationhood and their relationship to it than those offered by their male counterparts. Frequently, it is women writers within national cultures who seemingly disrupt homogeneity.[17]

Gruach's prominence in Greig's *Dunsinane* or Lala's in Arnott's *Propaganda Swing* also cut across patriarchal constructions as, above all, in recent Scottish historical drama does the place of women in Munro's *The James Plays*. A homogeneous national culture is the last thing embodied in the history plays of those we have highlighted as developing the deconstructive functions of historical drama. These dramatists offer rich varieties of 'Scotland', 'Scottishness' and 'history'.

McLellan and his contemporaries tended to work either with carefully researched historical material or with a traditionary and mythicized rural history, set either in the Borders or Highlands or in Alexander Reid's magical realist universe. In general, the 1970s generation based their work on revealing 'hidden' history, drawing often on more recent or hitherto

obscure research. Glover and Lochhead in the 1980s also work closely with the historical record, but problematize it in terms of the ways in which women and '(his)tory' are treated. An insight highlighted by David Archibald, while applicable to some 1970s history plays, applies strongly to those of Glover, Lochhead, Clifford, Arnott, and Greig:

> [Hans-Thies] Lehmann […] suggests that the idea of progress in history finds a parallel in classical drama and its basis in the dialectic of conflict and subsequent resolution. He argues, however, that the traumatic events of the twentieth century, not least two world wars and the Holocaust, have problematized the concept of continued historical progress.[18]

History is exposed in the work of the post-1970 playwrights as endlessly—to use Ustinov's resonant adjective—'adaptable'. Its manipulation provides one of the highlights of Gregory Burke's *Black Watch* (2006). David Archibald discusses in detail a key scene:[19]

> the soldiers' stories are collected, ordered and placed within a broader historical narrative, 'The Golden Thread', the regiment's grand-narrative of their own three-hundred-year history. In one scene the soldiers discuss the history that they are taught by the army:
>
> Writer: So the history's important?
> Granty: They drum it intay you fay the first day.
> Rossco: Fucking non-fucking stop.
> Cammy: That's what a regiment is ay? It's history. The Golden Thread. That's what the old timers go on about. It's what connects the past, the present, the future …. (p. 25)[20]
>
> In one beautifully choreographed sequence, a young soldier, Cammy, recites all of the countries to which the regiment toured, yet, there is no mention of the regiment's controversial tours of duty in Ireland. Indeed, the play, perhaps like the Golden Thread, is based on the erasure of the problematic aspects of the regiment's imperial past.

'History' is made national and regimental myth to serve the purposes of the 'They [that] drum it intay you fay the first day'. Archibald, writing in 2011, concludes his analysis with the prescient remark that in

> the long shadow cast by the 2008 economic crisis, and as debates continue over Scotland's constitutional relationship with the UK under a newly-elected right-wing British government, it will be no surprise if Scottish theatre practitioners return to history in increasing number as they attempt to find episodes and stories from the past which resonate in the present.[21]

In fact, the 'return to history' to which Archibald refers has taken place after a very short recent period of defection from the history play. Earlier playwrights often dealt either with traditionary tales or else through iconic figures whose treatment would allow them by proxy to address issues of, say, puritanism or sexual repression through figures like Mary, Queen of Scots, John Knox, James VI, or Robert Burns; or nationalism through figures like St Margaret, William Wallace, or Robert I; and, in the late twentieth century, radical politics through revolutionary figures like Thomas Muir, James Wilson, Andrew Hardie, John Baird, and John McLean. Most recently, however, David Greig and Rona Munro have, especially in *Dunsinane* and *The James Plays*, brought together both methodologies in a way only occasionally found before. While dealing with historical figures available to research, they have treated those figures as if they were traditionary, without paying particular attention to verifiable historical fact. That they have done so with such success marks the continuing importance with which Scottish theatre practitioners and audiences regard the interrelationship and interaction of history and drama, and the ways in which they have done so marks a new stage in addressing Scottish history as fluid, ideologically challenging, illuminating, and potentially subversive. Their choice of dramatic conventions and historical themes and the way they theatrically deconstruct and reconstruct them forms a central part of the dramaturgical process of a continuing process in the Scottish history play of, on the one hand, exploration of issues of communal and national identity and, on the other, ideological subversion and reinvention of 'history'. The use of 'facts of history' and mini-myths, their restatement and their rearrangement, comprises a means of presenting history as theatrical metaphor.

Notes

1. Adrienne Scullion, 'Devolution and Drama: Imagining the Possible', in Berthold Schoene (ed.), *The Edinburgh Companion to Contemporary Scottish Literature* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 68–9.
2. Ian Brown, 'Plugged into History: The Sense of the Past in Scottish Theatre', in Randall Stevenson and Gavin Wallace (eds.), *Scottish Theatre since the Seventies* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996), 98.
3. Neal Ascherson, *Stone Voices: The Search for Scotland* (rev. edn.) (London: Granta, 2003), 185.
4. Ian Bell, 'Iraq: not forgiven, not forgotten', *Sunday Herald*, 18 April 2010, quoted in *Sunday Herald*, 13 December 2015, 9.

5. Ian Campbell and Ronald Jack (eds.), *Robert McLellan: Jamie the Saxt* (London: Calder and Boyars, 1970), 134–53.
6. email communication, 4 December 2015. See also: Edward J Cowan, 'Broadsides, Chapbooks, Popular Periodicals and Newspapers', in Alexander Fenton and Margaret A Mackay (eds.), *An Introduction to Scottish Ethnology* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), 471–7.
7. Ibid.
8. Douglas Gifford, 'From Celtic Revival to Scottish Renaissance?', in Christopher MacLachlan and Ronald W. Renton (eds.), *Gael and Lowlander in Scottish Literature: Cross-currents in Scottish Writing in the Nineteenth Century* (Glasgow: Scottish Literature International, 2015), 228.
9. Dan Rebellato, 'Introduction', in David Greig, *Plays: 1* (London: Methuen, 2002), xiii.
10. Alistair Beaton, *Caledonia*, in Trish Reid (ed.), *Contemporary Scottish Plays* (London: Methuen, 2014), 15.
11. This was a key theme of his 2011 Fletcher of Saltoun Lecture at the Scottish Parliament, 'Darien: A Scottish Disaster Revisited', 15 September 2011.
12. Clare Brennan, *The Guardian* at http://www.theguardian.com/stage/2014/mar/30/union-lyceum-ednburgh-review (accessed 8 December 2015).
13. Mark Brown, *The Daily Telegraph* at http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/theatre/theatre-reviews/10724052/Union-review-brave-and-brazen.html (accessed 8 December 2015).
14. Trish Reid, *Theatre & Scotland* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 6–7.
15. Ibid., 10.
16. Jan McDonald and Jennifer Harvie, 'Putting New Twists to Old Stories: Feminism and Lochhead's Drama', in Robert Crawford and Anne Varty (eds.), *Liz Lochhead's Voices* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1993), 124.
17. Alison Lumsden and Aileen Christianson, 'Introduction', in Aileen Christianson and Alison Lumsden (eds.), *Contemporary Scottish Women Writers* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), 2.
18. David Archibald, 'History in Contemporary Scottish Theatre', in Ian Brown (ed.), *The Edinburgh Companion to Scottish Drama* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), 89.
19. Ibid., 93–4.
20. Gregory Burke, *Black Watch* (London: Faber and Faber, 2007).
21. Archibald, 'History in Contemporary', 94.

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