

Completion and distribution of Scottish Screen-funded films

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In April 2000 Scottish Screen, Scotland's then national screen agency, took over responsibility of administering Lottery funding for film from the Scottish Arts Council. The organisation continued to carry out this task until 2010 when it merged, along with the Scottish Arts Council, into Creative Scotland. During this period, Scottish Screen's funding application and guidelines, guided by Policy Directions laid down by the Scottish Government, changed significantly and on more than one occasion.¹ Despite these alterations however, two consistent features can be seen throughout the various versions of the application form. First applicants are required to provide evidence that their project will be completed, and second that it will secure distribution. Drawing on funding awards made by Scottish Screen during the 2000s, this article will consider these criteria as they relate to films that received Scottish Lottery funding.² It will begin by considering projects that were never made, despite receiving Lottery finance from Scottish Screen, before moving on to examine the distribution of films that were completed. In so doing, it will draw attention to the extent to which films that were completed attracted funding from beyond Scotland.

The advent of National Lottery funding for film in 1996, along with the establishment of Scottish Screen the following year, and other infrastructural and funding developments in the 1990s (see Duncan Petrie, 2000 and Jonathan Murray, 2007), created a filmmaking environment in Scotland inconceivable just a decade before. Writing in 2000, Duncan Petrie stated,

The latter half of the 1990s has witnessed unprecedented levels of production in Scotland, providing opportunities for Scottish film-makers to learn and practice their craft in their native country rather than accepting the inevitable move to London or Los Angeles. (172)

The films and careers of Lynne Ramsay, Peter Mullan and to a lesser extent David Mackenzie are frequently cited as examples of this. Not all directors fared as advantageously, however. After winning a BAFTA (British Academy of Film and Television Arts) award in 1998 for her short film *Home*, over ten years passed before Morag McKinnon released her first feature film, *Donkeys* (2010). Between 1998 and 2010, McKinnon and writing partner Colin McLaren developed a total of ten feature films, nine of which remain unmade.

Morag McKinnon: controversial themes and unmade projects

One of their unmade projects, *Barking & Shaking*, received development finance from Scottish Screen; however its application for production finance was later rejected. According to McKinnon, after the film was refused production finance, 'a couple of members of the funding committee (internationally renowned producers)' informed her that while 'the majority of the panel had loved the script, two influential members of the committee had vetoed the project, stating that they never wanted to see films 'like that' made in Scotland' (personal communication, January 12, 2012).³ She continued, 'I think there are quite a few good scripts out there that will never see the light of day as people play safe and are either too afraid or too dull to take risks'. The script of *Barking & Shaking* centres on a father, who after the suicide of his son takes his family to live in isolation, blaming society for his son's death. McKinnon outlines,

One day their isolation is broken by the arrival of a scientist testing soil samples. The children, who thought they were the only ones in the world, are intrigued by the stranger – especially the teenage daughter whose awakening sexuality is aroused by the man. The father does his best to get rid of him and to reduce his influence; however the stranger has an effect on everyone and gradually breaks down the cohesion of the family - which takes place in a completely surreal way. As the fabric of their reality breaks down, the wife appears to evolve backwards, turning into a chimpanzee (which I imagine is where the members of the committee who vetoed the script had a problem) and their house is taken over by nature. The children try to escape the captivity of their father as his grip becomes more intense and gradually the family falls apart, ending with the stranger helping the children escape from their crazed father. (personal communication, January 23, 2012)

As McKinnon notes, the idea of a woman de-evolving, so to speak, into a chimpanzee as a result of her husband's actions is likely what members of the funding committee, perhaps understandably, objected to. The director also described the film as a 'magical realist piece', and this along with the overview above, draws parallels with completed and critically acclaimed films.

The narrative of *Barking & Shaking*, a family living in isolation from society, recalls Giorgos Lanthimos' 2009 film *Kynodontas/Dogtooth*, which won Cannes Film Festival's Prix Un Certain Regard and Prix de la Jeunesse, and was nominated for Best Foreign Language Film at the 83rd Academy Awards. There are also echoes of Lars von Trier's films in *Barking & Shaking*, particularly in relation to the often controversial roles assigned to woman in his films. However despite this controversy, von Trier's films, and the performances of leading actresses in these, frequently receive critical acclaim: Emily Watson was nominated for an Academy Award for her role as Bess in *Breaking the Waves* (1996), while Björk (*Dancer in the Dark* (2000)), Charlotte Gainsbourg (*Antichrist* (2009)) and Kirsten Dunst (*Melancholia* (2011)) all won the Best Actress award at Cannes for their respective von Trier films. While the success of these films does not necessarily indicate that *Barking & Shaking* would have secured similar accolades, their realisation and acclaim does suggest that there is a market for films of a similar controversial nature.

Not all of McKinnon and McLaren's projects were met with resistance from Scottish Screen. In 2003, Scottish Screen awarded £250,000 in production finance to their project *Freak*, which was to be produced by Carolynne Sinclair Kidd (*The Acid House* (Paul McGuigan)) and *Solid Air* (May Miles Thomas, 2003)) and David Muir (*The Acid House* and *Skagerrak* (Søren Kragh-Jacobsen, 2003)). The project, billed as a psychological thriller, centres on a female character, Anwyn, whose sister has recently gone missing (Stuart Kemp, 2003). Anwyn learns that her sister was working as a prostitute and comes to believe a taxi driver is responsible for her disappearance. With the aim of proving her suspicions, she takes up the role of a prostitute. While it is apparent that *Freak* also contains what might be considered controversial issues, prostitution (and the problematic gender roles associated with this), abduction and murder, such subject matter is more readily featured in mainstream cinema and thus is not associated with the same level of taboo as that of *Barking & Shaking*. Furthermore, the billing of the film as a psychological thriller, a genre popular in both art cinema and the mainstream, alludes to a more conventional approach to the issues being tackled. Yet despite this, *Freak* never entered into production. While McKinnon and McLaren's gravitation towards controversial subject matter provides some explanation as to why their projects have struggled to raise production finance, it would be too easy simply to assign their lack of success to their subject matter: proposed projects more in keeping with recognised traditions within Scottish cinema have also failed to enter into production.

Literary adaptations

Reflecting on the decade that followed the release of *Trainspotting* (Danny Boyle, 1996), 1996-2006, Jonathan Murray notes a 'Lottery-led push to turn Scotland into a minor player in the international Anglophone mainstream', citing 'a slew of literary adaptations and/or projects written by literacy celebrities' (2007: 82) as evidence of this: *The Slab Boys* (John Byrne, 1997), *Regeneration* (Gillies MacKinnon, 1997), *The Winter Guest* (Alan Rickman, 1998), *The Life of Stuff* (Simon Donald, 1998), *The Acid House, My Life So Far* (Hugh Hudson, 1999), *Complicity* (Gavin Millar, 2000) and *House of Mirth* (Terence Davies, 2000). While Scottish Screen continued to fund literary adaptations and/or projects by literary celebrities into the 2000s, many of these failed to enter into production.

After the release of Terence Davies' *House of Mirth* in 2000, he and producer Bob Last set about developing an adaptation of Lewis Grassie Gibbon's 1932 novel *Sunset Song*. Shortly after, Peter Barber-Fleming's Saltire Film and Television Productions began developing *The Cone Gatherers*, based on Robin Jenkin's 1955 novel of the same name. Both films required substantial budgets: £7-10 million in the case of *Sunset Song* (Ian Johnston, 2003) and £5 million in the instance of *The Cone Gatherers* (Scottish Screen, 2008a: 4). While Scottish Screen awarded each project £500,000, significant sums were required from elsewhere. Such budgets are in keeping with those films identified by Murray as being geared towards the Anglophone mainstream. He compares the budgets of *Regeneration* (£3.9 million), *The Winter Guest* (£5 million) and *Complicity* (£4.9 million) (Dyja, 1997: 22, 26; Dyja, 2001:24, cited in Murray, 2007: 82), to the £0.9 million budget of *Shallow Grave* (Danny Boyle, 1995) and £1.7 million of *Trainspotting* (Murray, 2007: 82). However, in relation to *Sunset Song*, Robert Jones, former head of the UK Film Council's Premiere Fund, believed the commercial appeal necessitated by this market was lacking (Simon Hattenstone, 2006). Davis publicly conveyed his anger at Jones and the UK Film Council after the organisation, which had looked set to fund the film, pulled out at the last minute. Such behaviour by the UK Film Council seemingly indicates a foregrounding of commercial interests, an accusation that Christopher Meir (2009: 195) has outlined was also levied at the organisation in relation to *Young Adam*. *Sunset Song*'s arguably difficult subject matter, along with the novel's heavy use of Scots, probably raised concerns at the UK Film Council as to the commercial viability of the project. Indeed, Davis cites Jones as denying the project funding on the basis that it 'won't travel' (cited in Hattenstone, 2006).

Nonetheless in February of 2012, it was reported that *Sunset Song* would finally go into production in late 2012, or early 2013, over a decade after it was first developed (Adam Dawtrey, 2012). The film is to be produced by Bob Last (*House of Mirth*) along with Solon Papadopoulos and Roy Boulter of Liverpool-based Hurricane films, who produced Davis' documentary *Of Time and the City* (2008), and Christer Nilson of Swedish production company Götafilm. As a result of the film's co-production status, filming is to take place in Scotland and Sweden (Sarah Cooper, 2012). At Cannes in May of 2012, it was announced that Amsterdam-based Fortissimo Films has acquired the international rights to *Sunset Song*, which has Peter Mullan and Agyness Deyn attached as cast (Andrew Pulver, 2012).

Completion strategies

Various strategies have been devised by filmmakers in an attempt to increase the likelihood that their project will be completed. Several productions have moved their setting and shoot to Scotland, or more specially Glasgow, after initially intending to use an alternative location. John Hill (2009: 88-90) partly attributes the Glasgow setting of Ken Loach's loosely grouped West of Scotland trilogy (*My Name is Joe* (1998), *Sweet Sixteen* (2002) and *Ae Fond Kiss* (2004)) to the advent and availability of National Lottery revenue in Scotland. He argues in Loach's films, 'Glasgow came to function as a kind of surrogate location... a sort of Liverpool-in-disguise' (90). In another example, the location of Gaby Dellal's *On a Clear Day* (2005) was also moved to Glasgow, this time from Newcastle, so that Peter Mullan could play the

role of lead character Frank (David Martin-Jones, 2009: 188). Scottish Screen awarded the film £157,809 in production finance in the 2003/04 financial year and invested a supplementary £15,000 the following year. Moreover, Mette Hjort (2010: 52) has noted that the location of Lone Scherfig's *Wilbur (Wants to Kill Himself)* (2002), a film initially intended for the same cast as her 2000 award winning box office hit *Italiensk for begyndere/Italian for Beginners*, was moved from Denmark to Glasgow after the proposed cast demanded higher salaries than she or production company Zentropa could afford. The film was moved to Scotland in order to capitalise on Zentropa's growing relationship with Sigma Films. Following this location change, Scottish Screen invested in the film.

Such a location change however, has also featured in reverse, and productions intended to have a Scottish setting and shoot have moved elsewhere, or attempted to move elsewhere, in order to raise production finance. For instance, writer Sergio Casci's *The Caller* (Matthew Parkhill, 2011), a film described in its production notes as 'a supernatural thriller[...]about a young troubled divorcee that is being violently harassed via telephone by a mad woman whom [sic] insists she is calling from the past' (Bankside Films, 2012), was first written with a Glasgow setting, however when Casci was unable to find a Scottish production company willing to take the project on, he switched the Glasgow setting for New York (Casci, 2011 in Rona Dougall, 2011). This attracted the interest of a London-based production company, who were then able to secure co-producers in North America. Ultimately, the film's location and shoot was later moved to Puerto Rico to capitalise the territory's advantageous tax breaks.

A similar strategy was adopted by Black Camel Pictures in an effort to secure further production finance for their project *Breathe*. In 2005/06 Scottish Screen awarded the project £12,500 in development finance and the following year contributed £375,000 towards the film's £2.5 million production budget (Scottish Screen, 2008a). A synopsis of the film provided by Scottish Screen in 2008 reads: '*Breathe* is a fast paced and lean thriller which places a female policewoman in its lead as she transports a criminal across the Scottish Highlands' (2008a: 3). However, the synopsis featured on Black Camel Pictures' website at the time of writing (May 2012) is as follows,

Playing out on the broad cinematic canvas of the Canadian Rocky Mountains, *Breathe* is a thrilling, action-packed chase movie that follows Molly, a determined police officer, and her desperate attempts to get a high profile prisoner back into protective custody. All the time evading the well-connected crime syndicate that are [sic] ruthlessly hunting them down.

As might be expected, Black Camel Pictures' website now also reports that a Canadian production company, Brightlight Pictures, are now partners on the project. However, to date *Breathe* has not been released and at present there is no word on when, or if, the project will go ahead.

Another completion strategy that warrants consideration is crowd funding, whereby individuals are invited to each contribute a small amount to a film's budget. The producers of *Burns*, a project based on the life of Robert Burns that was awarded £500,000 by Scottish Screen, attempted a variation of this technique in an effort to raise the remainder of its production budget. In 2009, at an event celebrating the 250th anniversary of the birth of Burns, Scotland's First Minister Alex Salmond announced that the producers of *Burns* intended to recruit 250 subscribers to the project, the same number that came together in 1786 to bring out the Kilmarnock edition of Burns poems. To date however, the film has yet to materialise. At the time of writing, Glasgow-based Synchronicity Films recently completed a crowd funding campaign in an endeavour to raise \$50,000; the remaining money they need in order to complete their latest project, *Not Another Happy Ending* (John McKay, forthcoming). The production company set up a page on the international crowd funding

website www.indiegogo.com allowing individuals to financially contribute to the film in return for certain 'perks'. These incentives range from a digital postcard given to those who contribute \$10, to a production credit costing \$1,000. The campaign raised a total of \$22,600, a little less than half of its target, and it remains to be seen whether or not its production, scheduled to take place in the summer of 2012, will go ahead.

Included on Synchronicity Films' crowd funding webpage is a message from the production company, which contains the following,

We live in Scotland, we were born here, and we want to make a movie that shows Scotland as we see it. Maybe we could have attracted millions of pounds of finance if we were making another *Braveheart* or *Trainspotting*. But we are not. (2012)

Similarly, writer Sergio Casci has argued that the success of Scottish-set films either about 'shooting up or shooting grouse' (2011 in Rona Dougall, 2011; personal communication, May 09, 2012) has resulted in the widespread expectation that films about Scotland should be in keeping with one of these categories. However as Sarah Neely (2008) has cautioned, the complexities and contradictions present in many Scottish films of the 2000s are in danger of being overlooked when such a rigid classification is employed. Indeed, the films of Synchronicity (*Crying with Laughter* (Justin Molotnikov, 2010)) and Casci (*American Cousins* (Don Coutts, 2003)) in many ways defy the categories they both put forth. Nevertheless, it is evident from their views that their experiences of making, or attempting to make, films in Scotland have led them to conclude that certain types of films, either the 'shooting up' of *Trainspotting* or 'shooting grouse' of *Braveheart* (Mel Gibson, 1995), are easier to raise production finance for than those that defy either classification.

From this overview of some of the projects that have remained unmade, despite receiving funding from Scottish Screen, it is evident that production finance from this organisation was not sufficient to ensure a project's completion. Nonetheless, as administrator of the only sizable source of funding in Scotland, in many ways Scottish Screen acted as a gatekeeper to those wishing to make films in Scotland. It would be exceedingly difficult for a producer to convincingly make a case to funders elsewhere if their project had not secured production finance in its native country. In this respect, the organisation wielded considerable power, a position that its successor Creative Scotland currently holds. Although it has been outwith the scope of this article to consider in depth the transition from Scottish Screen to Creative Scotland, one point to note is that at present Creative Scotland requires those applying for production finance to have 30-50% of their budget in place (Creative Scotland, 2012).

Theatrical distribution of Scottish Screen-funded films

After a film is completed, in order to reach an audience, it must of course receive some manner of distribution. Overall, the distribution of Scottish Lottery-funded films was characterised by fragmentation, a feature symptomatic of independent cinema more generally. Independent distributors typically operate on a territory-by-territory basis, acquiring the rights to distribute a film only in their market. In the UK, the virtual dearth of distributors based in Scotland requires producers to look elsewhere, typically London, in order to find a distribution deal for their film. Independent distributors that released Scottish Lottery-funded films in the UK ranged from the likes of Icon, Momentum and Pathé, distributors whose annual market share in the 2000s was typically between one and three percent, to smaller companies such as Verve Pictures and Soda Pictures, and the even smaller CinéFile and Guerilla Films that release just a few titles a year. On occasion, the UK distribution arm of a Hollywood major acquired the rights to a Scottish Screen-funded film. Given the fragmented nature of the distribution of Scottish Screen-funded films, film festivals and markets played a pivotal role in facilitating the buying and selling of film rights.

Premier film festival launch to the art cinema circuit

Cannes and to a lesser extent Berlin are particularly important festivals in this respect as both have associated markets running alongside their festival. Several films premiered at one of these festivals: *Morvern Callar* (Lynne Ramsay, 2002), *Sweet Sixteen*, *Young Adam* (David Mackenzie, 2003) and *Red Road* (Andrea Arnold, 2006) at Cannes and, *Ae Fond Kiss* and *Hallam Foe* (David Mackenzie, 2007) at Berlin. The importance of film festivals in facilitating the acquisition of film rights is perhaps best exemplified by Andrea Arnold's *Red Road*.

Post-production on *Red Road*, co-produced by Glasgow-based Sigma Films and Denmark's Zentropa, was fast-tracked in order to meet the submission deadline for Cannes in 2006. The film was accepted and, in a noteworthy accomplishment for a first time director, was shown In Competition, where it went on to win the festival's Prix du Jury. The then sales branch of Zentropa, Trust Film Sales, handled *Red Road's* international sales. Prior to Cannes, UK rights were sold to London-based Verve Pictures in October of 2005, however the bulk of sales occurred after the film's screening at Cannes (Natja Rosner, Trust Film Sales Executive, cited in Charlene Sweeney, 2006).⁴ Territories in which the film was acquired include: Brazil, France, Spain, Greece, Israel, Australia, Scandinavia, the Benelux countries and the US. In an interview with the author conducted in 2011, Verve cofounder Julia Short noted that Trust Film Sales considered the UK a key market for *Red Road* and as such, it was believed important that the marketing materials developed were appropriate for this market. As I have noted elsewhere ('Author', forthcoming), Verve Pictures and Trust Film Sales shared the cost of developing key marketing materials on the condition that these were later made available to distributors in other territories. As is evident from Figure 1, the UK was indeed a key market for *Red Road*. The film performed significantly better in this territory than in any of the others listed; 65,196 admissions were recorded in the UK, while the second largest showing was in France where just 25,163 were recorded.

	<i>Morvern Callar</i>	<i>Sweet Sixteen</i>	<i>Young Adam</i>	<i>Ae Fond Kiss</i>	<i>Red Road</i>	<i>Hallam Foe</i>
Belgium	Not available	32,091	11,126	59,828	6,138	3,978
Germany	Not available	16,901	22,438	132,379	2,207	82,559
Denmark	Not available	15,937	2,307	99,514	6,961	4,151
Spain	Not available	135,967	28,112	210,282	6,801	Not available
France	16,836	351,288	9,351	423,011	25,163	59,237
GB	84,102	178,485	174,616	101,639	65,196	84,050
Italy	Not available	128,050	26,116	335,629	10,330	Not available
Netherlands	1,709	2,884	15,884	26,733	9,677	6,681
Sweden	11,127	6,919	4,735	10,971	3,075	594
US (estimate)	44,600	52,500	123,600	4,800	22,500	8,400

Figure 1: Cinema admissions by territory. Source: European Audiovisual Observatory/Box Office Mojo.

While Cannes proved vital to securing international distribution for *Red Road*, when *Young Adam* premiered at the festival in May of 2003, the project had already been sold to multiple distributors at the MIFED film market in 2001, before principal photography had commenced on the film (Adam Dawtrey, Liza Foreman and John Hopewell, 2001). Vertigo had acquired rights to the film in Spain, Mikado in Italy, Odeon in Greece, LNK in Portugal, 3 Line Pictures in the Benelux countries and Noah in Israel. From Cannes in 2003, Adam Dawtrey reported that *Young Adam* had sold everywhere except North America and Germany, prior to its screening in Cannes' Un Certain Regard sidebar. Sony Pictures Classics later picked up the film for North America, while the German rights were purchased by Alamode Film.⁵ As is evident from Figure 1, the United States proved an important market for *Young Adam*.

Unlike *Red Road*, which had in its leads relatively unknown actors, *Young Adam* starred the high profile actors Ewan McGregor and Tilda Swinton. McGregor, who in the years prior to *Young Adam*'s release starred as Obi-Wan Kenobi in the *Star Wars* prequels and alongside Nicole Kidman in the Academy Award winning *Moulin Rouge!* (Baz Luhrmann, 2001), enhanced the commercial appeal of the film, while Swinton, known foremost at this time for her art cinema work, in particular her roles in the films of Derek Jarman and for starring as Orlando in Sally Potter's film of the same name, strengthened the film's art cinema credentials. In the UK, *Young Adam* enjoyed a wider release than the others shown in Figure 2, below. The film was distributed in this territory by Warner Brothers and during its opening weekend played at 133 sites, a figure three-and-a-half times that of *Red Road* and almost eight times that of *Morvern Callar*. *Hallam Foe* is the only other film in this table to have been distributed by a Hollywood major. The film was released in the UK by Disney owned Buena Vista and opened at 98 sites, the second widest launch of those films shown in Figure 2. However, while *Young Adam* and *Hallam Foe* received a wider release, their opening weekend average gross per site was just £1,719 in the case of *Young Adam* and £1,357 in that of *Hallam Foe*, figures considerably less than the £2,158 of *Red Road* and £4,824 of *Morvern Callar*.

Film	Distributor	Gross	Number of sites	Average gross per site
<i>Morvern Callar</i>	Momentum	£82,014	17	£4,824
<i>Sweet Sixteen</i>	Icon	£144,388	66	£2,188
<i>Young Adam</i>	Warner Brothers	£228,692	133	£1,719
<i>Ae Fond Kiss</i>	Icon	£106,366	62	£1,716
<i>Red Road</i>	Verve Pictures	£81,992	38	£2,158
<i>Hallam Foe</i>	Buena Vista	£132,972	98	£1,357

Figure 2: UK opening weekend. Source: British Film Institute.

In contrast to Arnold and Mackenzie who were relatively unknown directors when distribution deals were being sought for *Red Road* and *Young Adam*, Ken Loach had a long established reputation that proved influential in securing sales for his Scottish Screen-funded films, *Sweet Sixteen* and *Ae Fond Kiss*. In relation to *Ae Fond Kiss*, Stephan De Potter (2006, cited in Europa Distribution, 2006) of Belgian distributor Cinéart notes that as the distributor had released a number of Loach's films prior to this, the rights to this film were negotiated directly between the distributor and producer. A similarly lengthy relationship with Loach's films is described by Antonio Medici (2006, cited in Europa Distribution, 2006) of Italian distributor Bim Distribuzione. In order to reaffirm his reputation, however, it is vital that

Loach's films premiere at a top festival (typically this has been Cannes). The positioning of his films as 'quality' is enhanced through the nomination and allocation of prizes at these festivals.

Further towards the Anglophone mainstream

While the films discussed thus far received a theatrical release in the US, this market proved more lucrative for films such as *The Last King of Scotland* (Kevin Macdonald, 2006), *The Magdalene Sisters* (Peter Mullan, 2002) and *Dear Frankie* (Shona Auerbach, 2005), which were more consciously geared towards the mainstream. In relation to *The Last King of Scotland*, it is important to note the involvement of Fox Searchlight Pictures, the arm of 20th Century Fox that specialises in the production and distribution of independent cinema. The studio was involved with the film from its production stage and later went on to distribute it in multiple territories. Indeed, in comparison with other Scottish Lottery-funded films, the distribution of *The Last King of Scotland* was remarkably less fragmented. Territories in which the film was released by Fox include: Austria, Belgium, Switzerland, Germany, France, Italy, Norway, the Netherlands, the UK and the US.

In spite of 20th Century Fox's involvement, premiering at a high profile festival was crucial to the success of the film. *The Last King of Scotland* held its official world premiere at the Toronto International Film Festival, a festival whose reputation has gone from strength to strength in recent years. As Catherine Shoard observes,

In 1998, *Variety* wrote that Tiff was 'second only to Cannes in terms of high-profile pics, stars and market activity'. A decade on and *Time Magazine* went one better, reporting that Tiff had grown into 'the most influential film festival, period'. (2012)

In part, Shoard attributes the festival's growth to its close relationship with the Academy Awards, noting that many films included in its programme in September later go on to Academy Award success in February. This was the case with *The Last King of Scotland*, which saw Forest Whitaker win the Best Actor award for his portrayal of Ugandan dictator Idi Amin. The film's successful Oscar campaign increased the profile of the film and substantially bolstered its box office takings. While it went on limited release in the US in September of 2006, this was widened in the month leading up to the Academy Awards, and it was during this period that the film saw its box office takings spike (Box Office Mojo, 2012). Ultimately, *The Last King of Scotland* grossed almost \$18 million at the US box office, recouping its £4 million production budget several times over in this market alone (Andrea Calderwood cited Scottish Screen, 2007a: 14-15).

While screening at Toronto increased the profile of *The Last King of Scotland*, due to Fox's involvement in its production, inclusion in the festival was not needed to secure distribution. In the instance of Peter Mullan's second feature film, *The Magdalene Sisters*, it was during this festival that a North American distribution deal was struck with Miramax (Mike Goodridge, 2002). The film premiered at the Venice International Film Festival in August of 2002 where it won the festival's prestigious Golden Lion award, and less than two weeks later, it screened at Toronto. In an interview at Venice, Mark Ordesky, president of Fine Line Pictures, one of the distributors interested in acquiring the film for the US market, stated his intention to hold off bidding on the film until Toronto, reasoning that increasingly he viewed the purpose of Venice as being to bring to his attention films for further consideration (cited in Frank Bruni, 2002). Several weeks later, Miramax Films held off competition from Fine Line Pictures and Sony Pictures Classic and acquired the rights to *The Magdalene Sisters* for \$600,000 (Goodridge, 2002). The film received over 800,000 admissions in the US, which proved to be an important market for the film (Box Office Mojo, 2012). It also performed well in Europe, recording 760,845 admissions in Italy, 562,782 in

France, 443,305 in the UK, 191,420 in Ireland, 131,946 in Germany and 122,510 in Spain (European Audio Observatory, 2012).

Shona Auerbach's *Dear Frankie* was also acquired by Miramax for the US market. The film, made on a budget of £2 million, was purchased at the MIFED in November of 2003 (Ian Mohr, 2004). After this acquisition the film's premiere, which was originally scheduled to take place at the Sundance Film Festival in January, was moved to the Tribeca Film Festival in May (Jeremy Kay, 2004). The film received a largely positive response from critics in the US and a total of 209,256 cinema admissions were recorded in this market (European Audio Observatory, 2012). *Dear Frankie* was also included as a last minute edition to the Un Certain Regard sidebar at Cannes where Hannah McGill and Phil Miller (2004) note it was met with hostility from several British journalists in attendance. Critics in the UK were decisively less impressed by the film than their American counterparts. Writing for *The Guardian*, Peter Bradshaw gave the film just one out of five stars describing it as 'mawkish and fundamentally unconvincing' (2004). Pathé, who had also contributed to the film's production finance, released the film in the UK, where it failed to make an impact at the box office. The film grossed just £132,541, performing better in Germany and Spain than in the UK.

Little or No Distribution

Despite *Dear Frankie's* poor performance at the UK box office, its distribution was remarkably more favourable than that of many Scottish Screen-funded films. Prominent amongst such titles is *True North* (Steve Hudson, 2007), a thriller about three fishermen played by Martin Compston, Peter Mullan and Gary Lewis, who attempt to smuggle illegal Chinese immigrants across the North Sea. The film premiered at Toronto in 2006, however it was not until 2007 that Edinburgh-based CinéFile – a small distribution company that initially specialised in the release of French language titles, but which has since broadened its interests to include 'challenging films from around the globe' (CinéFile, 2012) – acquired *True North* for the UK market. The film opened at just three cinemas, grossing £2,255 during its opening weekend (British Film Institute, 2012). Since its release, *True North* has recorded just 1,049 admissions in this market and to date the film has not been released on DVD. Those in the UK wishing to purchase the film are required to import the DVD from the Netherlands.

Films that likewise received a limited theatrical release in the UK include the Guerilla Films titles *Blinded* (Eleanor Yule, 2005; 1,536 recorded admissions) and *Gamerz* (Robbie Fraser, 2008; 809 recorded admissions), and Soda Pictures' *AfterLife* (Alison Peebles, 2003; 4,410 recorded admissions) and Gaelic language *Seachd – The Inaccessible Pinnacle* (Simon Miller, 2007; 2,049 recorded admissions). However, unlike *True North*, these films have all been released on DVD in the UK. *Afterlife*, *Blinded* and *Seachd – The Inaccessible Pinnacle* all held their world premiere at the Edinburgh International Film Festival, the market activity at which is minimal in comparison to the festivals discussed thus far.

Nevertheless, a limited theatrical distribution is preferable to no theatrical distribution. *Yasmin* (Kenneth Glenaan, 2005), a film about a Muslim community in a town in West Yorkshire dealing with the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, which received £300,000 from Scottish Screen, was not released in UK cinemas. The film was scripted by Simon Beaufoy, whose work to date includes *The Full Monty* (Peter Cattaneo, 1997) and *Slumdog Millionaire* (Danny Boyle, 2009), and stars Archie Panjabi in the title role of Yasmin, a woman leading a conflicted double life as she attempts to please both her traditional Pakistani family and her Western colleagues. While, as Stuart Jeffries notes, the subject matter is similar to that of Panjabi's previous films *East is East* (Damien O'Donnell, 1999) and *Bend It Like Beckham* (Gurinder Chadha, 2002), the tone of *Yasmin* is remarkably less upbeat, reducing its commercial appeal. Indeed, as previously noted, the film was not released theatrically in the UK, and instead premiered on Channel 4. Producer Sally Hibbin notes that after *Yasmin* was

awarded the Audience Award at the Dinard British Film Festival in France, Verve Pictures offered to distribute the film in the UK. However Hibbin's outlines,

The problem was, they couldn't find an opening at cinemas for a long while. And that wasn't good enough for us, because the film is clearly very topical and any delay would weaken its impact. So we went to Channel 4. I think there is a nervousness about how this kind of film will play at the British box office. (Cited in Jeffries, 2005)

Although the film was met with apprehension by distributors in the UK, it was theatrically released elsewhere, in territories including France, Germany, Brazil and Switzerland (Jeffries, 2005).

Do-it-yourself distribution

When Margaret Matheson's Bard Entertainment concluded that they could not find a UK distribution deal for their 2003 film *American Cousins* that the production company could not better itself, it opted to take charge of the film's distribution (Matheson, personal communication, May 22, 2012). The film received a limited release in the UK and generated around £24,000 at the box office (British Film Institute, 2012). The UK home entertainment and television rights were acquired by Momentum, who later licensed the film to the BBC. Internationally, *American Cousins* sold in the following markets: Australia, New Zealand, Czech Republic, the former Yugoslavia, Greece, Cyprus, Iceland, Indonesia, Israel, Latin America, the Middle East, Portugal, Romania, Russia and the Commonwealth of Independent States, Scandinavia, South Korea, Taiwan, the US and Canada (Matheson, 2012).

Similarly, production company Sigma Films opted to theatrically release their 2010 film *Donkeys*, directed by Morag McKinnon. Soda Pictures have since purchased the home entertainment rights and *Donkeys* was released on DVD in 2012. Although the film was theatrically released in October of 2010, principal photography took place two-and-a-half years earlier in February of 2008. McKinnon (2010) has explained that after an initial cut of the film was sent out to distributors and film festival programmers, the general consensus was that the film should be recut. Following this, Scottish Screen awarded Sigma Films £45,000 towards the cost of a re-edit and in June of 2010, *Donkeys* premiered at the Edinburgh International Film Festival. Attending the film festival was Cineworld film buyer Paul Sweeney, who after viewing the film, wanted to purchase it for showings at Scottish Cineworld cinemas. Sweeney has stated that it took him several days to track McKinnon down and enquire about purchasing the film, further suggesting the festival's lack of market presence (Sweeney, 2010 cited in STV, 2010). Ultimately *Donkeys* played at Cineworld cinemas in Glasgow, Aberdeen, Edinburgh, Falkirk and Dundee, as well as the following independent cinemas: Glasgow Film Theatre, Perth Playhouse, Edinburgh Filmhouse, Dundee Contemporary Arts, Robert Burns Centre in Dumfries and Eden Court in Inverness. This list highlights the extent to which screenings of the film in parts of the UK outside of Scotland were extremely limited; *Donkeys* was shown at the Press Play Film Festival in Newcastle and London's East End Film Festival.

Since the release of *Donkeys* in 2010, Sigma Films has established Sigma Releasing, a distribution arm of the company that enables it to co-release their films with other UK distributors. In May of 2011, Scottish Screen's successor Creative Scotland (2011) announced that it was investing £250,000 in Sigma Releasing, allowing the company to co-release two of David Mackenzie's films, *You Instead* (2011) and *Perfect Sense* (2011), with Icon and Arrow respectively. By co-releasing their titles, Sigma Films is able, in theory at least, to reinvest revenue generated through their distribution into future projects. However, neither *You Instead* nor *Perfect Sense* performed well at the box office. Although *You Instead* opened at an impressive 82 cinemas, it grossed just £6,770 during its opening

weekend, generating a poor site average of £83 (British Film Institute, 2012). *Perfect Sense* performed little better. The film opened at 59 cinemas, but grossed just £21,875, a site average of £387. These figures can be usefully compared to those shown in Figure 2.

Confining the release of *Donkeys* to Scotland was probably practical for the Glasgow-based company, however it also raises the question as to whether films about Scotland perform better in Scotland relative to the rest of the UK. A major obstacle encountered when thinking about the distribution of films in Scotland is that published box office statistics relate to the UK as a whole and are not broken down by region or nation. One useful study in this respect is J. Ron Inglis, Sue Todd and Steve Westbrook's (2005) report on film exhibition in Scotland, which was commissioned by Scottish Screen. Based on statistics relating to ten Scottish Screen-funded films, the authors conclude, 'The portion of the UK box office income attributable to screenings at Scottish cinemas averages 32%, three times the proportion that would be expected on a pro-rata population basis' (59). They go on to write, 'Films with a clearly identifiable Scottish subject or location perform very much more strongly in Scotland than the rest of the UK – a pattern which is found in Ireland and Wales as well as most Nordic and European countries' (59). As their study takes into consideration just ten feature films, this is perhaps a rather bold conclusion to draw. Moreover, while Inglis, Todd and Westbrook usefully position Scottish box office takings relative to that of the rest of the UK, their observations do not take into consideration the international circulation of the films in question. As a means of addressing this, Figure 3 illustrates admission figures for *Wilbur (Wants to Kill Himself)* relating to territories for which this information was available. These figures are displayed as a percentage of the total cinema admissions recorded in each territory during the year the film was released.

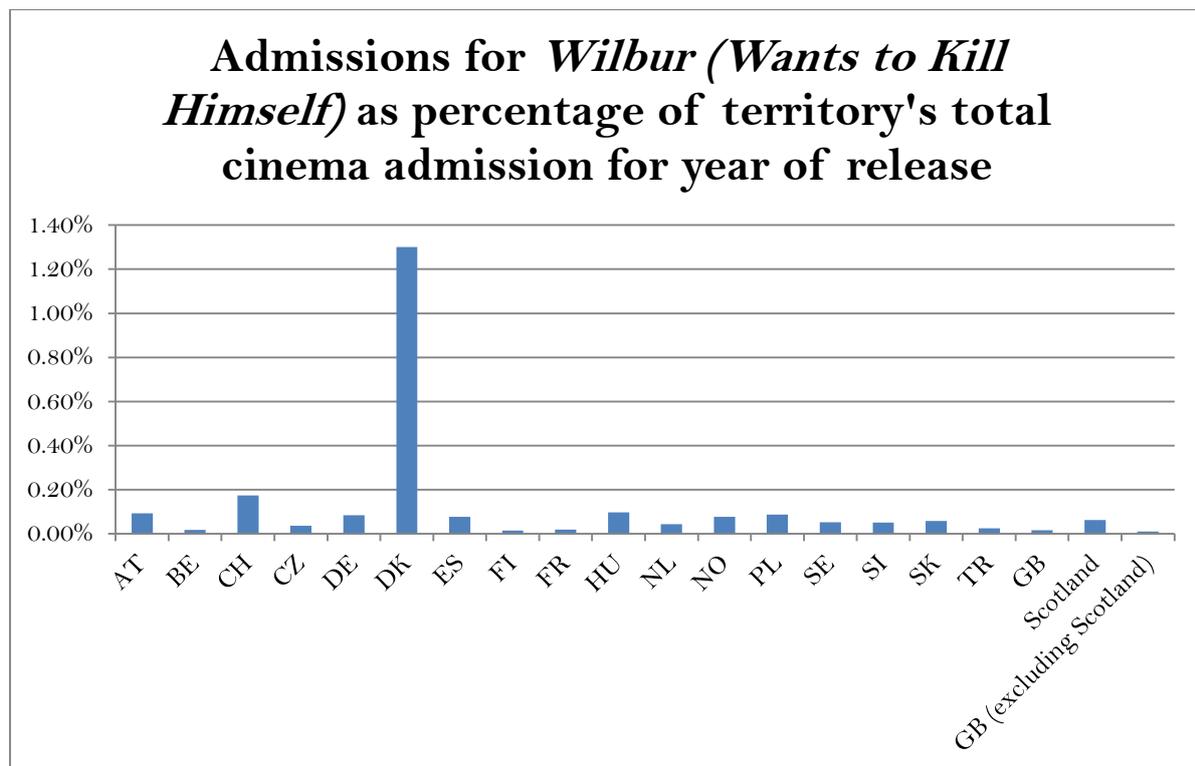


Figure 3: *Wilbur (Wants to Kill Himself)* admissions. Source: European Audiovisual Observatory/Inglis, Todd and Westbrook, 2005.

As is apparent from this graph, *Wilbur (Wants to Kill Himself)* recorded the greatest success, measured in terms of recorded admissions as a percentage of total cinema admission, in Denmark. The Danish involvement with the film outlined earlier goes a long way towards accounting for the film's success in this territory. Indeed, the popularity of the film in Denmark sheds new light on its performance in Scotland. Although *Wilbur (Wants to Kill Himself)* accounted for 0.06% of cinema admissions in Scotland during the year of its release, a figure six times that relating to elsewhere in the UK, in Denmark, 1.3% of cinema admissions were attributable to the film; a figure 22 times that of the Scottish equivalent. Furthermore, the film recorded stronger showings in Austria (0.09%), Switzerland (0.17%), Germany (0.08%), Spain (0.08%), Hungary (0.10%), Norway (0.08%) and Poland (0.09%) than it did in Scotland. When framed in these terms, Scotland's affinity for films with a Scottish subject matter appears less significant. As this analysis relates to just one film, this conclusion cannot be extended to Scottish films more generally. However, these results do point to the need to develop a greater understanding of cinema distribution and exhibition in Scotland.

Conclusion

During the 2000s, Scottish Screen consistently foregrounded the importance of project completion and distribution in its funding criteria. These are two basic steps a film must go through if it is to stand any chance of reaching an audience and recouping its costs. As with securing additional production finance, finding a distribution deal typically requires producers to look to companies outwith Scotland. Although this means the financial risk involved in film distribution is not incurred by Scottish filmmaking companies, most of which are in a precarious financial state, it also means that any profits earned by a distributor end up elsewhere, and consequently, are not available for direct reinvestment into future projects. In a sense, this has increased dependence on National Lottery funding at the level of production.

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Notes

¹ Prior to 2007, the Scottish Government was termed the Scottish Executive.

² Figures relating to investments made by Scottish Screen cited in this article have been taken from Scottish Screen's annual reports.

³ I have made a FOI request to Creative Scotland for the minutes of the meeting in which it was decided that *Barking & Shaking* would not be awarded production finance.

⁴ Verve Pictures later sold the UK television rights to the BBC.

⁵ Mongrel Media distributed *Young Adam* in Canada, as they have done with Sony Pictures Classics' films since 2001.

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