

‘Only of Scottish Interest’: 7:84’s Devolution Trilogy**Deana Nichols, Indiana University**

From 1997 to 2000, Scotland achieved an unprecedented constitutional shift: the people of Scotland witnessed a vote of ‘Yes Yes’¹ on the devolution referendum, elections of the first Members of the Scottish Parliament, the opening of the Scottish Parliament with the words, ‘the Scottish Parliament which adjourned on 25 March in the year 1707 is hereby reconvened’ (Taylor 2002, p. 7), and the passage of the Scottish Parliament’s first Acts. Meanwhile, the audiences of theatre company 7:84 (Scotland) witnessed productions commissioned by Artistic Director Iain Reekie from three of Scotland’s most prominent dramatists: David Greig’s *Caledonia Dreaming*, Stephen Greenhorn’s *Dissent*, and Peter Arnott’s *A Little Rain*. Taken together, these three plays form a devolution trilogy, an exploration of political Scotland that spans the early devolution years. Greig’s 1997 work is unashamedly optimistic about the possibilities inherent in devolution, looking ahead to a day when Scots can ‘hold that word [Yes] in my mouth for once’ (1997, p. 18)²; Greenhorn’s 1998 play paints a picture of post-referendum let-down in which idealist politicians are made to compromise their values in the scramble for power; and Arnott’s 2000 work is a post-apocalyptic vision of a drowning Scotland in which there is no longer anyone else to blame for the nation’s woes, existential and otherwise. While these three plays have never been produced or published together (and, indeed, *Dissent* is the only one of the three to have been published in its entirety³), they serve as an excellent site of inquiry for the scholar of contemporary Scottish theatre. For they each serve as both hallmarks of their time – providing three distinct perspectives from three distinct moments in the devolution process – and as reference points for the theatre being

made today and in the coming months, theatre that responds to the Independence Referendum that will occur in September 2014.

David Greig's *Caledonia Dreaming* was devised as a direct response to the devolution referendum, by Greig and a company of 7:84 actors in May 1997. It was then toured throughout Scotland in the months leading up to the September referendum. The play is set in 'some kind of Edinburgh, on a summer night, at some recent time' (p. 3), and it concerns itself primarily with five onstage characters, whose eponymous dreams lead them eventually to congregate on the Heart of Midlothian. Darren, a young man from Oxfords, dreams of being literally helicoptered out of his class-bound life by his hero, Sean Connery. Eppie, a wealthy Edinburgh socialite, self-identifies as 'the woman Edinburgh was made for' (p. 11), yet spends her time vomiting in her toilet as her maid cleans the house. Lauren, an English sex worker, dreams of a simple life in the country and home ownership. Jerry, a porter at the Caledonian Hotel, dreams of becoming a celebrity singing sensation. And Stuart, a Member of the European Parliament, is determined to bring the Olympic Games to Edinburgh. As the play progresses, the audience observes these seemingly disparate characters' lives intersect as they pursue their varying dreams, and it is this interconnectedness, the play's conclusion implies, that makes the continued pursuit and even realization of their dreams possible. This is interconnectedness, it should also be noted, which is based not on any ethnic sense of 'Scottishness': the characters' commonality stems from the fact that they simply share the space that is Scotland in this particular moment, reflecting the country's focus on civic rather than ethnic citizenship.

The play is rife with references to characters' dreams and visions. Lawrence, a taxi driver who interacts with each character and yet is never actually seen or heard during the play – the text being limited to characters' responses to Lawrence – provides the pro-Olympics politician Stuart with the ideal slogan for Edinburgh: 'the Dream City' (p. 16). Stuart refers to Old Labour as 'the dream spoilers. The ones who say we can't' (p. 40) and claims that 'people have got to believe. Take action. / We need visionaries' (p. 16) – visionaries, of course, such as him. Jerry repeatedly sings the lyrics, 'You've got to have a dream. / If you don't have a dream. / How you gonna have a dream come true?' (p. 22). When Eppie the socialite accidentally hits Darren with her car, she explains that 'I was dreaming. / I was somewhere else' (p. 32). And Darren narrates his dream directly, a dream of becoming Sean Connery's personal assistant, expertly arranging Connery's luggage and being praised for his work when Connery 'puts his hand on my shoulder. / He says. / "Good work Son. Good work". / His hand on my shoulder' (p. 19).

Attendant to the repeated references to dreams are references to the imagination required to chase and realize such dreams. Stuart declares that 'we should stop teaching the three R's in this country and start teaching the three Is / Imagination / Inspiration and the most important I of all . . . / I can. / I can' (p. 6). In attempting to teach a girl how to golf, Darren shares the key element of his own golfing technique: imagination. 'Focus', he instructs. 'Imagine the fairway, you're in Palm Springs. / The galleries are quiet' (p. 14). One scene consists entirely of Jerry singing in front of a mirror, imagining himself as 'the uncrowned king of Scottish crooners' (p. 42). Further, when Stuart procures Lauren's services for the purpose of eliciting her help in blackmailing his opposition, he begins by literally paying her to imagine: 'I want you to imagine something for me. / Please. / Here's fifty pounds. / Sit there. Close

your eyes. Imagine' (p. 53). The image that he pays her to imagine is his dream of the Olympics opening ceremony:

Stuart: And down from the sky come flowers . . . /Hundreds of thousands of flowers . . . /The Flowers of Scotland!/Each one representing the people who're coming home./ From the clearances, Culloden, the war, all the people who've went to London or America or Newfoundland . . . / D'you see . . . / The flower of Scotland is coming home. (p. 54)

In sharp contrast to the utopian dreams of the play's characters is Greig's depiction of the darker side of then-contemporary Edinburgh. Eppie is an elitist who complains that Scotland's politician's 'have no balls. What we need is a dictator. / Labour camps. / That'd wake us all up' (p. 9). A group of men attack Jerry because his 'skin's the wrong colour' (p. 48), following the attack by philosophizing on the benefits of physical violence: 'I love to see the expression on their face. / The shock when the punch connects. / I love it. / The moment they understand. / Communication' (p. 49). And Stuart not only endeavors to exploit Lauren in his attempt to blackmail his anti-Olympics opposition, but demonstrates a thorough disconnect between his vision of an ideal Scotland and the actual people with whom he interacts. He asserts that Irvine Welsh has 'made himself wealthy on our ugliness' (p. 41) but also spends much of his time verbally spitting on his fellow Scots, writing off those who do not immediately conform to his utopian vision as 'repulsive', 'disgusting', and 'utter waste' (pp. 31, 31, 15). Greig's inclusion of these seedier aspects of characters' lives, contrasting as they do with the idealism to be found in the play overall, is helpful in keeping the play just short of precious as it acknowledges that some dreams – and dreamers – can be harmful.

Despite these rather unattractive depictive moments, however, the picture Greig paints is in the end unabashedly optimistic. For each of the play's dreamers, even those whose dreams are rather divorced from reality, achieve some measure of fulfillment by the play's end. Stuart sees his dream of an Edinburgh Olympics come true, complete with an opening ceremony featuring the dropping of the Flowers of Scotland he has previously envisioned with Lauren. And for the remaining four characters, the resolution to continue dreaming arrives via relationships with each other: Darren and Eppie have forged an unlikely friendship through their common fascination with Sean Connery, while Jerry and Lauren find in each other at least the possibility for realizing dreams they did not know they possessed. Indeed, Jerry has earlier articulated his feelings for Lauren as follows: 'I want to be something I'm not. / But you see. I sing what I feel. / And you liked it. / So maybe I am what I'm not' (p. 81). This articulation of a dream realized via communion with another person gives the play a marked sense of hopefulness and the likelihood of change to be found in both the lives of individual Scots and in the life of the nation on the eve of devolution.

As one can discern from the above, *Caledonia Dreaming* is nothing like as polemical as the work for which 7:84 is most well-known, John McGrath's 1973 play *The Cheviot, the Stag and the Black, Black Oil*⁴. In fact, the clearest references to be found in the play regarding the turning-point at which Scotland stood in 1997 are not to be found in the narrative through-line but in the choral passages that periodically punctuate the action. These scenes feature titles that Greig terms 'riffs on current political phrases' (2012) including *The Yes Yes Campaign*, *The West Lothian Question*, and *Scottish Conservatives*. Most pointed in its reference to the devolution referendum is *The Yes Yes Campaign*, in which the speaker describes:

For years we've had to say . . . No. No way. No way Jose. Stop. Hold on. Don't do that. But not now. We're the yes yes campaign. We demand new questions. Questions whose answer is . . . Yes Yes. Just to hold that word in my mouth for once. Yes. Would make it worth the wait. (p. 18)

However, even this speech, arguably the most politically pointed in the play, refuses outright polemics in that it is a rumination on the word 'Yes' rather than a call to political action – a rumination that includes not only the optimism to be found in the word, but also the word's use when the police come to a mother's door to give her 'bad news', the sentiment expressed when a quiz answer is recalled correctly, and a reference to those who would use the word thoughtlessly: 'Bob says yuh. / Yuh. Yuh. Yuh. / Uh huh. / If you could answer uh huh. / In a referendum on anything. / Bob would. / Even if the referendum was to abolish Bob' (p. 17).

The play's overall ambivalence in terms of polemics stems, as Greig describes, from his desire 'to connect with John McGrath-era 7:84 and produce something that was celebratory and funny' (Donald 1997), but also from his feeling that, at this point in the political and theatrical history of Scotland, a greater subtlety should be employed. He explains, '[Artistic Director] Iain Reekie had inherited a mantle of a very political-with-a-big-P company. But he was a young director interested in new writing, and at times it felt that they required a different approach to politics at that point'. Greig agreed, believing that 'we should talk about politics but that I was less interested in a kind of, "You should do this, you shouldn't do that; this is bad, this is good"' (2012). The result was a play that, as Mark Fisher described,

... throws out a load of ideas about people, cities and nations, independence, devolution and union, not to mention a cultural icon who is half-milkman, half-James Bond, and leaves the audience to take what it wants. (1997a)

The play's refusal to participate in heavy-handed argument perplexed some spectators – the most extreme response being that of Johnny Rodger, who called the play 'bourgeois agit-prop' (1997)⁵ – others saw in the production a piece of theatre that exemplified Greig's belief that 'political theatre has at its very heart the possibility of change' (Edgar 1999, p. 66). And in the case of *Caledonia Dreaming*, the possibilities of change were unmistakably optimistic.⁶

While *Caledonia Dreaming* reflects the optimism stemming from the possibility of devolution, Stephen Greenhorn's 1998 play *Dissent* has been referred to by Greenhorn himself as 'Caledonia waking up with a hangover' (2005, p. 1). The play reflects the disillusionment experienced by Greenhorn and other Scots following the success of the referendum and during the process of selecting Members of the Scottish Parliament. Paul, the play's protagonist and an MSP hopeful, finds that he must compromise his ideals and even betray those for whom he most cares in order to make his Old Labour self acceptable to New Labour expectations. Thus, while he is ultimately successful in his bid for a position in Parliament, the victory at play's end rings decidedly less positive than that portrayed in *Caledonia Dreaming*.

Paul's ideals for himself and his fellow Scots are just what any Old Labour politician's should be: 'A better world – where opportunity isn't dependent on wealth or position. Where my children have more hope than my parents ever had. Where the

helpless are helped, the homeless are housed and the hungry are fed' (2005, p. 97)⁷. Paul's daughter Sheena, born in 1979 just as Margaret Thatcher came to power, talks of having grown up with parents Paul and Pat taking her to the miners' strike, poll tax rallies, and CND die-ins. However, Paul has since the days of the CND die-ins discovered that policy without power yields little change. While he privately refers to New Labour as 'the bland leading the bland' (p. 99), he sees the potential power to be had in the Scottish Parliament as an end that justifies the means demanded by New Labour, even if those means include making cuts to Pat's Community Education program and reporting on an illegal rave, actions that amount to a betrayal of both those constituents whom he so wishes to help and those closest to him: Pat, Sheena, and his close friend Derek.

The play features many pointed references to the contrast between Old and New Labour and the state of Scottish politics and politicians overall. Paul and Callum, Paul's friend and Westminster MP, describe Tony Blair as 'a wind of change gently wafting' and his manifesto as more akin to Richard and Judy than to Marx and Engels (p. 12). New Labour's obsession with appearances over substance is likewise given ample mockery. When planning his responses to the questions to be put to him by the MSP selection committee, Paul first gives his honest answer to the question of the government's major mistakes:

Paul: Well . . . cutting single-parent benefit, not scrapping the millennium dome, the public fall-out between the Prime Minister and the Chancellor, importing Georgian nuclear waste to Dounreay, centralising power away from the Scottish party at the same time as decentralising power to the

Scottish parliament . . . oh and refusing Sean Connery's knighthood
(pp. 100-101)

He then revises his answer to appeal to his New Labour auditors, choosing to focus on the one mistake to which Blair has already admitted: the handling of the Bernie Ecclestone controversy. Not content to simply give the answer he knows is most safe, he further concedes to the privileging of appearances by saying that 'I'm not suggesting there was any actual impropriety. The big mistake was creating circumstances which allowed that impression to exist. Right?' (p. 103). And right he is, at least as far as the nomination committee is concerned. The audience, on the other hand, glimpses a first-hand view of the ways in which the political system forces duplicity and banality on even the most well-meaning public servants.

Perhaps the most damning jabs at contemporary politics to be found in the play, and at the same time the most humorous, come from Derek, a former footballer turned nightclub-manager who provides many of the play's most astute observations. He teaches Paul to play a game in which the two compare politicians to Scottish football managers, providing in the process very succinct analyses of Scotland's political figures. Elsewhere Derek assesses New Labour as a whole:

Derek: Always seemed a very English thing to me, New Labour. Like the Anglicans. [. . .] Only the English could invent a church where belief in God was optional. Like only they could have a Labour party where socialism was a dirty word. (p. 25)

But Derek reserves his most damning criticism for later in the play. Paul has reported an illegal rave, which has led to a raid in which both Derek and Sheena's activist friend Avril are arrested. Avril is jailed for holding drugs that she was picking up for Sheena, and Derek loses his job as nightclub manager. Derek, as he is packing up his belongings, provides Paul with the first true educational experience he has had during the course of the play, when he explains that this nightclub, with its licenses and officialdom, is far more riddled with drugs than the illegal rave that Paul had singled out for reporting. He summarizes Paul's new position:

Derek: Either you're a complete cunt, or . . . and this is your best hope . . .
You. Know. Nothing. (p. 82)

Paul is ultimately successful in his nomination bid, and he to a certain extent saves face by conspiring with his would-be nemesis Avril to defeat a greater enemy. Yet Derek's statement serves as a stinging indictment of both the character Paul and the political system he represents that haunts the remainder of the play's action, to my mind even surpassing Sheena's final exhortation to Paul as he embarks upon his newly high-profile political career: 'Just don't fuck it up' (p. 127).

The impetus for such a stinging indictment lay in Greenhorn's and Reekie's desire to create a play that was as politically timely as possible, given the constraints of funding and programming timelines. Greenhorn recalls:

Iain was saying the one thing we do know is that if we get a Scottish Parliament there will be elections for the Scottish Parliament, and we

know when they will be. So we can apply for funding to produce a show at that time. But we don't need to write it until close to it. So it was an experiment to see about whether you could put together a theatrical response to an event, even though you had applied for the funding and programmed it way before. (2013)

As with *Caledonia Dreaming* and later with *A Little Rain*, *Dissent* was revised continually during the course of rehearsals: the daily process involved Greenhorn bringing pages of the script to rehearsal in the mornings, Reekie working through the text with the actors and returning to Greenhorn with the results of their work, Reekie and Greenhorn discussing revisions over dinner and Greenhorn completing revisions overnight, repeating the process the following day. Though Greenhorn acknowledges that the resulting text's immediacy came 'at the expense of a certain dramatic sophistication', he cites spectators' vocal reactions of recognition – for example, to the moment in which Callum asks Paul if he plans to arrive before the selection committee 'wearing a boiler-suit and whistling *The Internationale*', and Paul retorts, 'Would anybody on the panel recognise the tune?' (p. 100) – as evidence of the play's success in capturing the essence of the political moment (2013).

And the essence of that moment was anger. Attending meetings held by both the major political parties and smaller grass-roots groups, Greenhorn saw a 'sense of frustration and disillusionment and anger' resulting from the

London Thatcherite agenda trying to control the Scottish Labour party, the Scottish Left generally, who had waited years, decades for this chance to

be in power again’, only to be ‘thwarted by this management from Westminster. (2013)

Some critics saw the anger expounded by *Dissent* to be premature or simplistic. Joyce McMillan wrote:

All in all, I began to think we might have had a more informative and amusing time – given the age of some of the anti-New Labour jokes on offer – if Greenhorn and director Iain Reekie had simply hung a placard saying “New Labour politician” round an actor’s neck, issued us with bags of rotten tomatoes, and invited us to get pelting. (1998)

Mark Fisher, however, referred to the production as ‘a funny, thought-provoking, and gripping state-of-the-nation thriller that dares us to put the passion back into politics’, though also acknowledging the play’s tendency to expound rather than dramatize its themes (1998). These differing opinions, this dissent, are the essence of the play’s purpose for Greenhorn, for whom the function of the political playwright is to challenge the audience, to engender debate: ‘You’re supposed to be encouraging things where people argue with you, not blanding everything out: that’s the whole fucking point. That’s the point of politics and the point of theatre’ (2013).

If *Dissent* points to the chasm between the devolutionary possibilities conjured in *Caledonia Dreaming* and the reality of post-referendum political scrambling, Peter Arnott’s 2000 play *A Little Rain* is positively apocalyptic in its assessment of devolved Scotland. For at the start of the play, the Chorus informs the audience that ‘for forty days and nights / It has been raining like a bastard’ (2000, p. 1)⁸. The

downpour has resulted in a Glasgow in which ‘at last, above the watery waste, / nothing beside remains, / save only the Twin Peaks of the University bell Tower / and the Red Road Flats’ (p. 2). The play’s characters seek shelter from the flood in a pub, bringing with them their and the nation’s existential woes. Michael and Phil are lifelong friends reuniting now that Michael has become a successful journalist and Phil has quit university for the third time. Eventually Danni, Michael’s trophy girlfriend, arrives on the scene, intensifying the struggle for supremacy between the two men. Meanwhile Morag and Annie are a pair of prostitutes who make an aborted attempt at friendship while their client, the newly widowed Andy, mourns philosophically in the men’s room.

The play is rife with soliloquies and ‘silent’ speeches – the convention being that the speeches are spoken aloud but not heard by the remaining characters – and the dominant thematic strain of these speeches is that of meaninglessness and apathy. Michael and Phil, before entering the pub, stand in the rain while Michael pontificates:

Yer philosophy, yer understanding, yer reason, yer science, yer artistic endeavour, yer business and commerce, yer industry and yer progress, production distribution and exchange, even slate repair and the renewal of Scottish nationhood, all of this is thht! my friend . . . it’s all just thht! (p. 7)

Andy, in the men’s room, physicalizes the same sentiment of everything amounting to ‘thht’ as he ruminates on how ‘the question before us is of universal constraint, the limits of freedom . . . the boundaries of tolerance’, before his speech is

cut short by the realization that he has urinated on his trousers, the question of how badly his clothing will now smell taking the place of such questions as the boundaries of tolerance. He ends the scene summarizing his theory: 'It's not about what things mean . . . finally . . . It's about whether it's possible that anything means anything at all' (pp. 15-16). Further, Danni challenges Phil's study of medieval philosophy at university with a speech that sums up the apathy she sees in the world:

Danni: I mean if nobody really gives a shit about what anybody thinks about anything anyway, then why spend all that time finding out that nobody really gives a shit about anything, given that you don't really give a shit about anythin anyway, and all you're gonnae find out is that nobody gives a shit about what you think about anythin any more than they give a shit about anythin that anyone thinks about anythin. I mean, who gives a shit? (p. 19)

Despite the characters' extended expressions of futility and apathy, however, the play correlates with the interconnectedness of the *Caledonia Dreaming* characters in that the text contains indications that the world and those who people it do in fact have meaning, if only in relation to one another. Both Michael and Phil, and Morag and Annie, demonstrate that their definitions of self exist largely in relation to one another. Michael's assessment of Phil, whether it be in reference to Phil's lack of success in academics, his accent, or his unimpressive patter, hinge significantly on the ways in which Phil reflects on Michael himself. Michael tells Phil (silently):

You've been slipping down the social scale, accent wise, since you got off the train talking like Farquar McFarquar. [. . .] I can feel you clinging

to what you call integrity, my lad, because you've got nothing more to hang onto. One of us has changed. I hope it's me. (p. 12)

Elsewhere he tells Phil (aloud) that

You and me were gonnae be the BOYS, weren't we . . . we were gonnae be the ones to SHAKE this country. And now you. [. . .] Ye reflect badly on yourself. Ye don't do yourself justice. Yer lettin me down'. (p. 35)

Phil likewise tells Michael silently that Michael, the successful journalist, is 'modest now, calm':

A by line, a tax code, a salary, yer picture soon, eh? Like nails. Like yer modestly bangin nails into my coffin. [. . .] It's like I'm talking to my DAD. You make me ashamed. I'm ashamed. I'm ashamed that I'm ashamed. (p. 12)

Similarly, Morag and Annie also use each other as a mirror by which to judge themselves: Annie is terrified of becoming the 'schemie' she sees in Morag, while Morag judges Annie's pretense at being above Morag and the neighborhood they share. Also, being part of the same profession, they inevitably challenge each other's skills in their trade, Morag attempting to instruct the comparatively inexperienced Annie in the art and then concluding that 'Whorin's like bein a movie star, doll . . . ye've either got it or ye havenae' (p. 34).

In a play that is, in Arnott's words, an attempt to 'ponder what it all meant in the extraordinarily understated aftermath' (2012) of devolution, it is perhaps no

surprise that intimately connected with the characters' practice of self-identifying in reference to each other is the practice of self-identifying as a nation in terms of the Other that is England. Phil chides Michael for his elation over England being defeated in football by which ever team they happen to be playing: 'This anti English thing is just neurosis, it's defining your identity by negative transference . . . have we not grown above that kind of thing'. Upon further prodding, however, Phil admits that he too has been guilty of responding to England's losses with 'yesss . . . ya English fuckers', though he felt ashamed after doing so (p. 22). But the larger dilemma, particularly as expressed by Michael, is the task of national self-definition in a post-devolution Scotland: how does Scotland define itself if not in relation to England? Michael's answer is to examine the legislative actions of what he terms 'the new Scotland. With new dreams' (p. 13)⁹. So what, according to Michael, has been the product of the devolutionary dream? Referencing the Clause 28 debate over whether localities can promote homosexuality, Michael declares that 'the principle achievement of Scottish democracy to date is the declaration before the world that we're none too fond of poofs, and will have no buggery being encouraged in our class rooms' (p. 29). He later proclaims:

We don't want any fucking asylum seekers, thank you, and given half a chance, we'll bring back hanging for lassies who have an abortion. [. . .]
This is a new Scotland, no longer protected from itself by the interventions of Westminster. We are ourselves again. And this is who we are. Cunts. (p. 30)

Despite such vitriolic statements, however, the play as a whole reflects a distinct bewilderment in post-devolution Scotland and is far more exploratory than

polemical. The play's structure is rather meandering – Arnott himself refers to the play's 'out of controlness' (2012) – many questions are raised but no answers provided. Phil reflects a parallel narrative approach when he defends his own story-telling technique to Michael:

What I'm sayin . . . is that not every story . . . can have a punchline . . . not every narrative . . . can fall into the three acts required by Hollywood . . . where you can time plot development with a stop watch . . . there has to be room somewhere . . . for travelling without maps . . . for finding new territory . . . for coming across the truth by accident. There has to be more . . . there must be places where delicate difficult things can be brought to light undistorted by formulae, hesitantly, tentatively . . . suggested . . . without fanfare . . . but with good faith . . . and integrity. (p. 28-29)¹⁰

Because of the play's focus on 'coming across the truth by accident', many critics found *A Little Rain* to be disappointing as a conclusion for the state-of-the-nation trilogy. Thom Dibdin declared that the play 'quite simply does not' adequately complete the trilogy (2000), while Joyce McMillan held that the play was 'mis-sold to me, as something both more and less than it is': the play, McMillan wrote, was 'supposed to be a state-of-Scotland play' but was 'not really a play about Scotland at all' (2000). McMillan's notion of the play being 'both more and less than' a satisfactory conclusion to a trilogy focused on devolution, bears further consideration. For, on the one hand, *A Little Rain* encompasses ideas of existential angst and apathy that extend its themes well beyond the geographical or temporal bounds marked out by the trilogy, which makes the play the distinct thematic outlier of the three plays.

However, if one focuses on the most temporally-bound, overtly political elements of the play, as I have done above¹¹, the resulting depiction of post-devolution Scotland is ambivalent at best.

Gordon Laird, who directed the play as his first production as Artistic Director of 7:84, provided this same focus in his Director's Note in the programme, in which he echoed Michael's sentiments by stating that 'for me, devolution has brought a recognition that Scotland can no longer turn to Westminster for all the answers. [. . .] Now that the flood of anticipation has settled what do we recognise as the new Scotland?' However, he also indicated an optimism that the play itself noticeably lacks, explaining that 'for a time it seemed that an equal and inclusive society was just Caledonia dreaming after all. However, I remain optimistic that given time the parliament will deliver a diverse, tolerant Scotland that we can be proud of' (2000)¹². Arnott, meanwhile, describes the play as the trilogy's "'What was that? Did something just happen?'" kind of play' (2013). This sentiment is expressed in the play's contrast between stormy backdrop and pub setting; for, regardless of the biblical proportions of the rain outside, the characters continue the pub tradition: talking and drinking, drinking and talking. In that sense, the play's lack of a definitive political viewpoint that extends beyond disillusionment can be seen as reflecting the apathy that can result following a great constitutional shift that does not appear to have affected citizens' daily lives.

The title of this essay, 'Only of Scottish interest', derives from a statement given to David Greig by his then-publishers, Methuen, concerning their reasoning for deciding not to publish *Caledonia Dreaming* (2012). While Methuen used the phrase to indicate a potential lack of marketability for the play, I would like, briefly, to take

the statement more broadly, and at the same time more seriously. As I hope these brief forays into the plays indicate, the idea that any of these three plays is ‘only of Scottish interest’, is narrow-minded in the extreme. First in my objections to the phrase is the fact that I am an American scholar who finds contemporary Scottish theatre in general and these plays in particular to be incredibly fruitful fields of inquiry. They are fascinating from a strictly ‘political-theatre’ standpoint, and anyone in search of tangible examples of the intersection of theatre and politics would do well to study them. Additionally, the word ‘only’ at the start of the phrase implies that Scottish interest is in some way insufficient reason to provide the plays with the recognition they deserve. And surely the plays have since their initial production never been more ‘interesting’ than now, given the fact that a year from now an even greater constitutional shift in Scotland is possible.

I write this essay¹³ on the back end of Edinburgh’s month of Festivals, a month that this year engendered much dialogue concerning whether the 2014 Independence Referendum would and/or should be examined directly by Scotland’s theatre artists. In his review of Tim Price’s *I’m With the Band*, Paul Vallely claimed that the scarcity of current productions directly addressing the independence question indicated that ‘most Scots seem startlingly indifferent’ to the issue (2013), while Joyce McMillan highlighted the fact that the Fringe productions of both *I’m With the Band* and *The Bloody Great Border Ballad Project* originated outside of Scotland (2013).¹⁴ Meanwhile, Edinburgh International Festival director Jonathan Mills sparked controversy when he declared that the 2014 Festival, occurring mere weeks before the vote, will be politics-free (Small 2013). The question of whether the current debate should be addressed as directly as in *Caledonia Dreaming* and *Dissent*, less directly as in the case of *A Little Rain*, or via entirely different forms, is being

decided and will be decided by today's theatre artists; though I am determinedly not attempting to argue here that the devolution trilogy should be used as either a theatrical or a political model by today's artists, I do believe that the conversation cannot but be enhanced by looking back to these three plays. In 1994 David Greig argued that 'a nation which represents itself imaginatively will never feel happy, or at ease, or important, self-knowledge is often unpleasant, but it will be a less haphazard nation, a less embarrassing nation in which to live' (p. 10). He, Greenhorn and Arnott provided that imaginative representation in the writing of these three plays, and theirs are works that are very much 'of Scottish interest', but not 'only'.

¹ The referendum asked voters to agree/disagree with two separate issues: whether there should be a Scottish parliament, and whether that parliament should have tax-varying powers.

² All quotations from *Caledonia Dreaming* are taken from Greig 1997.

³ An excerpt from *Caledonia Dreaming* was published in April 2013 in *Edinburgh Review* 137 (142-156).

⁴ Greig says that, in addition to being a response to devolution, *Caledonia Dreaming* was 'also a direct dialogue with particularly *The Cheviot, the Stag and the Black, Black Oil*. . . . It was a 7:84 show doing a highland tour. That whole thing had been invented by *The Cheviot the Stag*. And so I felt very much that we were trying to do a Scottish political theatre for the 1990s that would try and respond' to the contemporary political question of devolution (2012).

⁵ Mark Fisher responded to Rodger's statements, arguing that *Caledonia Dreaming* 'was political not in sense that it was pushing a specific line of propaganda – it wasn't like it questioned the debate itself – but in the sense that it allowed no-one to rest easy with too simplistic a set of opinions. If it was arguing for anything, it was for a more sophisticated discussion about nationalism, devolution, and the rest, and there is nothing which is implicitly bourgeois about that' (1997b).

⁶ In 1999, 7:84 restaged the play for the Edinburgh Festival Fringe. For this production Greig revised the 1997 script, the most significant (in that they reflected the new political context) changes being the replacement of The Yes Yes Campaign with a choral section titled Scottish Labour and the elimination of another choral section, Self Determination (1999). Critics' responses to the revival pointed to the fact that much had changed between 1997 and 1999. Mark Fisher wrote that 'the context has changed, and the joke is no longer apparent' (1999). Neil Cooper concurred, warning that 'the shift in perspective is initially disarming' but also arguing that, 'however false the optimism of the long-promised new dawn may have proved, *Caledonia Dreaming* suggests that some kind of coming together is more than mere possibility' (1999).

⁷ All quotations from *Dissent* are taken from Greenhorn 2005. *Dissent*.

⁸ All quotations from *A Little Rain* are taken from Arnott 2000.

⁹ This descriptor is, in the context of this paper, eerie in its parallel to the emphasis on dreams found in *Caledonia Dreaming*.

¹⁰ This speech also reflects Arnott's then-recent experience in writing for the screen, the genre's formulaic demands frustrating him to the point that 'I normally work in a structured way but I wanted to escape from all that' in the writing of *A Little Rain* (Bruce 2000).

¹¹ An analysis of the play could just as easily focus on Andy, who is mentioned only briefly in this paper and yet who is arguably the play's protagonist. His ruminations on futility stem from the very concrete experience of having lost his wife.

¹² See also Bell 2000, in which Laird claims that the play concludes 'on quite a hopeful note: that change is still happening, and change is good', and that 'what we are saying with this play is that we have to look forward, and not backward. We have to look to the future, and be hopeful and positive about that'.

¹³ An earlier draft of this paper was presented in April 2013 at Haggis Hunting: Fifty Years of New Playwriting in Scotland, Edinburgh.

¹⁴ McMillan argued in the same article that the lack of Scottish plays addressing independence stemmed from the fact that 'the day after the referendum, regardless of the result, Scottish society will still face the same intractable issues of economic recession, structural unemployment, environmental stress, shameful inequality and routine abuse of power that plague governments across the planet, in our time; constitutional change means, at best, a positive adjustment in our ability to deal with those problems, which remain as pressing as ever' (McMillan 2013).

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