

**‘Who does the talking that matters?’¹: Language, Politics, Identity in Scottish
Vernacular Theatre 1970-2000**

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In 1993, Alex Salmond, Convener for the SNP, issued the following address:

The 1993 yeirlie Convene stands at the hinner end o a spell o eftir election stievemakkin for the SNP an the oncoe o twa vital walin campaigns for Scotland.

I the time since the walin the SNP has throcht a fair pairt o the rebiggin wi regaird til organisation an siller needful ti allou us ti bear the gree agin our Unionist faes.

[. . .]

The key matter I the incoming year will be the forrit-luikin leet o cheynges that anerlie Unthirldom be Europe can bring hame til the folk o Scotland.

Alex Salmond MP

National Convener

Scottis National Pairtie (Reprinted in Corbett 1997, pp.14-15)

By 1993 Scots has become a powerful artistic medium to express independence of culture and identity in line with the need for independence of state. Salmond appropriates Scotland’s ‘tripartite linguistic model’² (Gardiner 2006, pp. 205-6) to legitimise Scots *and* the SNP’s own understanding of it (along with, by extension, the hopes of those who speak it). Since the 1970s, the SNP’s manifestos have shown awareness of linguistic ties to cultural and national identity and the specificity of language in Scotland. Their 1974 general election manifesto promised to make Gaelic the official language of Scotland alongside English, though their literature in the run up to 1979’s Devolution does not make Scots a specific point of political-linguistic importance. That Scots becomes (however glibly) a medium of their public correspondence, is in part due to theatre’s reassessment of the possibilities and socially emotive power of Scots.

John Corbett notes that Scots in its usage and revivals up until the twentieth century has traditionally been ‘often rural in setting, nationalist in sentiment, sentimental in its nationalism and saturated in nostalgia’ (1997, p.10). Scots-language

plays in the twentieth century give voice to an underrepresented populace and link the language and its environment of production, to classical and world literatures and modes of cultural thought. As one critic has recorded, '[a] significant development [for Scots literature] dating from the 1940s has been the translation of drama' (Findlay 2004, p.4). Language and voice in twentieth-century drama attempt to build on its populist historical focus and deal with the question Miriam Schröder poses: 'after the romanticising tendencies [of] the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, can the Scottish people actually rely on the accounts given of their own history?' (2008, p.116) Or, more accurately, how far we can say those accounts are of the people's 'own' history. Scottish theatre's interest in the past has been rooted in an attempt to give voice to untold stories. Its use of vernacular addresses how those voices sound and what uses they can be put to. Stefanie Lehner makes a persuasive case for the application of 'a subaltern aesthetics'³ in evaluating modern Scottish literature. Her approach rejects the 'postcolonialism which centres its analysis around the monolithic terminology of the colonial divide and maintains the teleological discourse of the nation as the main and only level [of] relevance.' (2005, p.2) Instead, she incorporates the concerns of 'class and gender [which] permit the establishment of affiliations between writers that circumvent the naïve equation of nations as already agreed concepts.' (2005, p.1)

The question of who speaks for whom, how the negotiation of voice through various strata of influence and authority shapes and conveys identities can offer a more rewarding response than 'language is a marker of nation' (or class, or trustworthiness, or any number of theatrical shorthands). It also provides a useful meeting point for discussion of the concurrent political approach to (or co-option of) linguistic concepts of identity and status in Scotland. Language can represent identities within Scotland, and, as the century progresses, the world at large, with specificity, realism and allusive weight. Scottish Theatre post-1970 develops into a tradition that can use vernacular and 'Synthetic' Scots, as well as global patois to explore abiding questions of identity, representation and voice.

Edwin Morgan (1990) claims that

concern with what people actually say, as opposed to what they are taught to say, or what they think they themselves are saying, is [to understand] that to sweep speech under the carpet is to academize, and indeed tarmacadamize, systems of stasis and control that are perpetually in need of re-examination (p.328).

Scottish theatre explores the physical and psychological processes of nation-building in order to challenge these same systems. It also looks to nationalities outside of the Scottish-English nation state dichotomy; after Scotland gains a devolved parliament, there is a renewed focus on how systems of representation and inclusion work within other linguistic models or national settings. By the early twenty-first century, Scottish playwrights have broken new ground in terms of the way language is received and utilised on stage. If we see a move from vernacular as 'authentic' to 'authenticated' in the years 1970-2000, the linguistic, cultural and social claims language makes within Scottish drama over the century are key to this progression.

Articulating an idea concurrent to one's own ideological and cultural mode of experience and expression, and achieving a meaningful challenge to the status quo is politicised by drama in the twentieth century, providing a means by which 'the Scots [learn] to speak again in their own voices, a fundamental prologue to being able to vote again for their own values' (Brown and Ramage 2001, p.48). Theatre is interrogating these agendas and legitimising variant registers long before politics ratifies these experiences constitutionally.

Much of the history of Scots-language writing in theatre is that of charting conflicts, both political/social, and academic, about what can and should be on stage. The revival of works by Ena Lamont Stewart and Joe Corrie in 7:84's 1982 Clydebuilt season not only served to bring back into focus earlier vernacular and political works of theatre and expose a tradition of such writing in Scotland, but also shed renewed light on internal community dynamics in Scotland. Speaking at IASH⁴ in 2012, Peter Arnott claimed Stewart inspired him to write in Scots after *Men Should Weep* showed him it was not 'just for comedy, [the language of the working class, which] couldn't be taken seriously'. Language as a class judgement in this way, he

says, made implicit the lack of credibility given to working-class experiences and their communication. It is arguable that such a challenge being proffered by a female playwright further highlighted the various strata of privilege and representation facing the Scottish working class, and society in general. After 1970, more playwrights feel able to explore the scope and impact (potentially political) of Scots writing. David MacLellan, speaking at the same panel discussion, agrees, and acknowledges *Oh! What a Lovely War!* as the inspiration for 7:84 (Scotland)'s cabaret form in *Cheviot* and cites its use of 'working class accents' as 'polemical' and the use of 'hidden history' (2012, n.p.) as key to informing how 7:84 approached their first play. As Peter Arnott replies: 'you're always dramatizing the conflict', as there is no such thing as 'a canon where this leads naturally into this', (2012, n.p.) so that much of the history of Scots-language writing in theatre is that of charting conflicts, both political/social, and academic, about what can and should be on stage.

By forging a link between two periods of dramatic production and political vocalisation in drama, 7:84's 'Clydebuilt' season (which staged shows such as Joe Corrie's *In Time o Strife*) helped to unearth a previously suppressed tradition (Arnott *et al.* 2012). By resurrecting these plays, Scottish theatre-makers mend a rift in an already shakily-plotted canon and reposition working-class Scottish experience and expression in a way that can be 'taken seriously' in dramatic and political terms. By charting the tradition of politically-aware and Scottish-focused drama pre-1970 as one with its own contemporary aims, it emphasised the democratising and problematizing of vernacular representations of, about and for the Scottish people. The ensuing theatrical vocabulary that Scottish drama develops not only challenges Scotland's linguistic-political status quo, but encompasses global registers and voices to continually engage with ideas of voice, power and status in the twentieth century.

Donald Campbell's 1976 play *The Jesuit* provides a fine example of how 1970s drama politicised the vernacular. There is something to be said for the 'instinctive' dislike of missionary John Ogilvie that seems to permeate the play's early portions. His demeanour, voice and vocation mark him out as a member of the British elite and in many ways as a cultural aggressor. In a theatre that realigns Scots dialect for the stage and for historical purposes to give weight to an argument for Scottish cultural inheritance, he stands as the literal voice of an oppressive

literary/cultural paradigm. He sees himself however as part of Scotland, claiming ‘Scotland, after all, is my native land-I am no foreigner here!’ (Campbell 1976, p.235) The irony is that at this point both his language and his religion mark him out and make him ‘foreign’ to the dominant Scottish sense of culture and identity as it stands within Edinburgh, his fanaticism doubly so. Ogilvie’s understanding ‘of the sufferings o Scotland’ is questioned, since he ‘kens nocht of flesh and blood!’ (Campbell 1976, p.242) His distance from Scotland, physically, ideologically and linguistically, marks him as other (indeed Spottiswoode asks him outright why he has returned, since he ‘canna even speak the language!’ [Campbell 1976, p.254]), and as antagonistic to the ‘progress’ the Protestant Establishment seeks for Scotland. However, Ogilvie’s rhetoric allies him unexpectedly with the political and cultural debates Scotland found itself dealing with in the 1970s. He rejects the Protestant Church for the same reasons Scotland rejected England’s kings and, in contemporary dramatic-allegorical terms, the British government; it is consistently Establishment voices that are at odds with the speakers of vernacular. That this is being debated in the vernacular at all further adds to the emotive and social power of this text in performance. As Arnott has previously identified, this legitimising of experience and register on stage, a traditionally middle-class milieu, makes the script doubly powerful in performance; *what* is being said, *how* those on stage speak it, and *who* speaks in the registers of local or demotic language are in play.

For example, Campbell’s soldiers speak broad Scots; Spottiswoode, as a representative of contemporary nationhood in the Kirk of Scotland, speaks Scots-accented English, with occasional Scots words. Ogilvie, a Catholic with views outwith the social and religious make-up of Scotland speaks Standard English. Campbell modulates language throughout *The Jesuit* and uses the vernacular to share moments of moral and political ambivalence:

WILL: Ach, whit wey dae they hae tae torture him, onyway? [. .
 .]
 ANDREW: Politics, Wullie. I’ve tellt ye afore. Naethin tae dae wi us
 [. . .] Politics.

(Campbell 1976,
 p.223-4)

Placing such a shrewd observation into the mouth of Andrew gives him legitimacy on an extra-diegetic level; however within the confines of the play he remains marginalised. Campbell privileges the speech of the soldiers but also makes them complicit in Ogilvie's torture. Andrew and Will see themselves apart from the systems of control in the play, although Spottiswoode, as the voice of the Establishment in Scotland, is as trapped by 'politics' as the soldiers, and as disenchanted. Paradoxically, Ogilvie's fanaticism is the most confident engagement with the political. He does not see it in those terms, though Spottiswoode recognises its potential political implications, telling Lady Spottiswoode 'Ogilvie can change reality-and it is reality that is important, no dreams! That is a lesson we maun learn in Scotland!' (Campbell 1976, p.244)

The reality of Scotland is linguistically and politically divided. It is not a simple case of 'us and them', 'good and bad', 'patriotism and inferiority'. Nationalist sentiment in Scotland is high in 1976, but in theatre there is a tempering of political rhetoric with an artistic rethinking of what it will mean to be independent. The dream-state can be no more than a constitutionally represented Scotland, and that representation must be multivalent. Drama consistently uses these multiple Scottish voices to re-open the debate; to popularise it as accessible and relevant, and to offer nuanced views.

As a consistent supporter of theatre for of and by the working-class, John McGrath's plays in production inhabit both the physical and linguistic spaces of their audience. McGrath's 1976 play *Out of Our Heads* takes frustrated activism, alcoholism and working-class apathy in Scotland as central themes. Davey, longstanding trade union leader and activist, bemoans his colleagues' lack of engagement and its resultant social crisis:

who does the talking that matters? Sober men with no names and no faces, in Zurich, and the City of London, and Wall Street and Washington: Christ, we need a few pints, to make us feel important.
(McGrath 1996, p.345)

Davey's frustration centres on the taboo of the 'political' in working-class culture: at one point, Davey's friend Harry says to him, 'That's politics you're talkin' [. . .] it's rubbish—class war, smash the bosses, down wi' capitalists' (McGrath 1996, p.380).

By using the vernacular to articulate pressing socio-political divides *within* Scotland and the Union, drama takes the focus of Scottish Literature away from the problematic postcolonialism that Lehner discusses above. 'Colonisation' in 1970s Scotland is tied to issues of economic disparity and political disjuncture, and to the creations of underclasses within what is agreed upon as 'polite and productive society'. Language is central to this split:

GUS: We've learned that our jokes are rubbish.

ALEX: That all we know about life is irrelevant—

HARRY: Because they belong to us

DAVEY: And real wit and wisdom belong to someone else.

(McGrath 1996, p.349)

In education and later work, the social hierarchy is linguistically, culturally and institutionally established and stigmatised. Billy Kay claims:

Educationalists often refer to the Inarticulate Scot, as if it were a hereditary disease, instead of the effect of shackling people with one language, when they are much more articulate in another. [. . .] In 1979 when I began the series of interviews of working-class Scots [. . .], a B.B.C. report on my progress in the Corporation praised my ability in making inarticulate people talk. (1986, p.20)

Kay's project of tracing vernacular oral histories begins in the same year that Scotland votes in its first devolution referendum. The desire to hear 'real voices' is tied to a time when the 'voice of the people' is being used as rhetoric for political and constitutional change but it is still perceived within many of those political and social institutions as 'inarticulate' or inferior. McGrath uses Scottish voices onstage to communicate the disjuncture between language as it is felt and articulated. His study of alcohol dependency and political disengagement is tied to explorations of

inarticulacy and impotence. Alcohol is the socially-acceptable crutch that allows for articulacy between (overwhelmingly) men of a class whose inability to communicate in 'wider society' has been repeatedly drummed into them. Political engagement does not mitigate the social engagement denied by Scottish working-class culture, and dismissed by a middle-class Anglo-British state identity:

DAVEY: What's wrong wi' me? I spend my life doin' battle with the capitalists on behalf of the workers, tryin' to organise for a better life for myself, for my kids and for everybody else: and where is everybody else? In the boozier. They don't even want to know. (McGrath 1996, p.335)

By speaking *to* the audience, and as they themselves might talk, McGrath hope audiences will engage and decide whether Davey et al speak *for* them or not. The 'realism' of demotic speech also works as a counter current to the often non-naturalistic staging of 7:84's productions to maintain a connection with the audience that taps into lived experience. The internal divisions and hypocrisies that inhibit activism, the need to broaden the focus of nationalist politics and the problems of social engagement are all issues that McGrath wants to present as part of his audiences' own experience and responsibility, beyond a merely national(ist) paradigm. Davey attempts to force a re-examination of Scottish cultural life, especially amongst the men of the working classes, and to challenge those assumptions that have been ingrained:

HARRY: Davey- what you're saying: See: I think that's just human nature.

DAVEY: Oh no! Once upon a time, it was human nature to own slaves. It was human nature to buy your wife from her father. [. . .] No, Harry- it's no' human nature. It's capitalism. (McGrath 1996, p.370)

Davy's outburst is a reaction against the ideology that seeks to make itself invisible (Barthes 1993) against complacency. In letting the characters 'speak for themselves', McGrath also supports a populist, subaltern reading of Scottish identity

at the time, which seeks to act as a local, vernacular and specific challenge to more universal issues of government and representation within contemporary Scotland.

Bill Bryden's *Willie Rough* (1973) revisits 1910s Red Clydeside and engages with 'disempowerments, contradictions, questions of identity and representations related to issues of class and gender on a sectional level' (Lehner 2005, p.12). Willie is consistently articulate and cognisant of the conflicting interests of the trade unions and their management; 'they're usin us, Jake [. . .] to betray [our] fellow workers' (Bryden 1973, p.33). He is often able to enlighten and mobilise fellow workers, and though he is frustrated by the play's close, maintains a sense of identity and integrity that is wholly tied to the politics he has espoused previously. Willie is also willing to express the emotional connection to political action that McGrath's Davey cites as so necessary. He frequently returns to the hill above Greenock to articulate his aspirations, and to mediate the myth of the noble peasant that often features in the class systems of parochial or pastoral versions of nationalism:

WILLIE: It must been great here afore the cranns came, and all this mechanisation. Can you imagine a wee farm up here [. . .] Great times.

Mebbie. Mebbie no. Even smells different up here. And it's quiet.

PAT: You're a romancer, Willie. Come on tae fuck! (Bryden 1973, p.37)

Willie is able to mitigate the vision of a rural idyll, noting that it was 'mebbie no' so great, and tacitly acknowledging that mechanisation is not the sole means by which the working classes have had it worse off; he is also able in this space to express romantic leanings, without the need for social crutches such as alcohol. Pat's response is typically irreverent and serves to bring him back to the realities of life in Greenock in the early twentieth century.

Thematically and semantically McGrath and Bryden are in dialogue with one another. Both dramatise (failed) working-class Scottish engagement with the political and use the vernacular to express and legitimise this experience. Scottish drama is consistently working to break down assumptions about vernacular speech, to return viability and culpability to the Scottish language and the issue of Scotland's political

status and co-option. Theatre ties up ideas of Scotland's dual psyche, tripartite linguistic cultural schemas, and political unthirldom, and expands these arguments to demand populist, authentic representations in the Scots' own terms and language. For the writers of the 1970s, this language is familiar, local and demotic.

Post-1980, there is a move from realist, politicised working-class setting and vernacular representation, to explore international, analogous and imaginative outlooks. Morgan observes that

since 1970, plays in the Glasgow dialect [though we could apply this point to urban demotic, and even more widely vernacular or working-class Scots plays] have regularly appeared, been popular, and built up a tradition. Because of the language, the tradition has been mainly realist, and working-class, and often political; strong on humour and pathos, on veracity, on the pleasures of recognition, less strong on imagination, on shock, on analogies. (1990, p.321)

There is an increased use of language within settings that allow for more imagination than plays (often necessarily) confined to the accurate representation of community in order to spark recognition and encourage action. As Maria DiCenzo notes, groups like 7:84 'were concerned with encouraging collective action, so the effort lay in building a positive, communicative relationship with their audiences' (1996, p.23).

By the end of the 1980s this 'collective' putatively exists. Lindsay Paterson notes for example, that:

[the] convention that betrayal of Scotland can be symbolised in a linguistic betrayal has become now utterly standard in Scottish drama, as in Scottish culture generally. But an interesting shift has taken place, reflecting greater subtlety by means of a wider range of linguistic registers (1996, p.77).

This can be linked to a subaltern methodology applied to Scottish drama which does not seek a national catch-all of identity and expression. It also allows for a greater playfulness of register and language to indicate attitudes of time and place, providing the opportunity to draw parallels with European and world theatres not merely to legitimise Scots. The vernacular is a recognisable means of cultural exchange and meaning that advertises and satires ‘Scottishness’. Lochhead’s *Mary Queen of Scots got her Head Chopped off*, for example, opens with a speech in Scots, delivered by ‘La Corbie’:

‘Scotland. Whit like is it?

It’s a peatbog, it’s a daurk forest.

It’s a cauldron o’ lye, a saltpan, or a coal mine.

If you’re gey lucky it’s a bricht bere meadow or a park o’ kye’ (1989, p.11)

This (demotic) introduction calls up the images of romantic Scotland and acknowledges its pragmatic, industrial truths. Following from her introduction to the multiplicities of Scotland, Lochhead’s Corbie offers a continual point of contact for the audience to negotiate and critique these multiplicities. She tells us ‘there are two queens in one island, both o’ the wan language— mair or less’ (1989, p.15), demonstrating not only Scots’ ability to denote place and identity but its capability to convey a tone of dry, ironic humour. Lochhead’s Corbie encapsulates much of Scottish theatre’s success in the last decade and a half in working to popularise dramatic and political engagement. She communicates to the audience the nuances of Scottishness and its relations to England, and shows the ways theatre in Scotland can look beyond the dichotomy of nation and state, even as this dichotomy has shaped it.

Lochhead is also keen to examine the internal structures of contemporary Scotland via its historic counterpart on stage; Mary’s language marks her out doubly as an outsider, her ‘Scots [. . .] heavily accented with French’ (Paterson 1996, p.78). As Lochhead’s stage direction notes, Mary is ‘*a Frenchwoman speaking Scots, not English, with, at the beginning of the play, getting subtly less as it proceeds, quite a*

French accent' (Lochhead 1989, p.13). Accent is a marker of identity as much as language— Mary's 'French-ness' is always present, though she speaks Scots, the language of her kingdom (and one linked to French). This accented Scots is a nod to the pluralistic roots of linguistic development in Scotland and therefore an appropriate language for a monarch who represents a more pan-European identity than Lochhead's Elizabeth.

As previously, the linguistic paradigm of Scots/vernacular as representative and Standard English as detrimental is not easily applied, however, since

some of the most vigorous Scots in the play comes from John Knox, whose religious fanaticism would align him as a dramatic character (though not theologically) with Campbell's John Ogilvie. [Knox] also admires Elizabeth as a "good Protestant". Who then speaks for Scotland? (Paterson 1996, p.78).

Lochhead acknowledges language is not necessarily a straightforward marker of ideology or allegiance. Power struggles are drawn along national, regional, gender and religious lines, all of which are mirrored by the play's closing scene of children at play, when an ideologically disparate chorus come together to chant in 'one voice', 'Mary Queen of Scots got her head chopped off!' (Lochhead 1989, p.66) The characters are united linguistically only to convey Scotland's enduring political and social disparity. Language is about more than politicised verisimilitude, and the translations and demotic plays of the late twentieth century show this.

Kay notes that historically,

taking a classical theme and improving the telling of it was one of the ideals of medieval writers [so for writers like Henryson or Douglas] their aim was not simply direct translation [. . .] but rather a vigorous creative recreation [of the original work] in a recognisably Scottish environment (1986, p.44).

This 'creative recreation' is certainly present within the Scots theatrical translations of the later twentieth century. Olga Taxidou observes that in Scottish

theatre, ‘local popular tradition [. . .] also leads into international tradition. [. . .] Scottish theatrical tradition [. . .] has a parallel’ (Arnott *et al.* 2012 n.p.). Translations and plays that focus on international relationships and settings provide alternate views of Scottish cultural identity and its relationship to a global set of artistic perspectives. Liz Lochhead notes that her 1985 translation of Molière’s *Tartuffe* ‘was set in the early 1920s [. . .] among a small-town bourgeoisie. Therefore the play is vigorously and unashamedly in the kind of Scots that might well need a glossary for the non-Scots reader’ (2002, p.177). In a sense, the tension of ‘local-universal’ and ‘political-dramatic’ are replaced with the dialogue between internal class and generational divisions:

ELMIRE: Only nice to be nice, and on the contrary, / As my mother-in-law you’re at least due civility. / But why so het up mither, where’s the hurry?

PERNELLE: Have to let this rammy a’ go by me and no worry? / The way you clan cairry oan is far from wyce

(Lochhead 2002, p.88)

Scots is an endemic, natural form of speech amongst Pernelle’s generation, whilst within the younger generations it is modulated. Elmire speaks in Scottish English, but for ‘mither’, versus Pernelle’s far more specifically Scots lexis. Scots is also spoken by the maid, Dorine, who serves as a class/generational marker. Also, as Paterson notes, ‘Dorine, [. . .] speaking Scots throughout, inherits the earlier association of Scots with honesty’ (1996, p.79). Paterson also observes that Lochhead often has a female ‘truth-teller’, as with La Corbie in *Mary Queen of Scots*. Dorine—working-class, female, intelligent—becomes the figure of theatrical authenticity and linguistic accessibility; the linguistic vivacity and possibility of Scots is celebrated. *Tartuffe* removes English as the best possible medium of linguistic comparison. Lochhead speaks to a European comedic tradition, and by having Scots represent all the registers within the play, displays a linguistic self-confidence that allows for Scots to stand for hypocrisy, foolishness and, for example when Tartuffe attempts to seduce Elmire, the grotesque. It can be all registers and all traits within its own theatre and

need no longer stand as the ‘other’ to English, no matter what it is being used to represent.

Growing cultural confidence in the face of a weakened state identity extend the appeal and the potential of vernacular writing. Scots is no longer ‘for local effect, to show the provincial, the rustic, the fool.’ (Corbett 1999, p. 94) nor does ‘large-scale translation into Scots [remain] inconceivable’ (p. 94). By 1985, Scots has been used for immediate, familiar effect, for social commentary, for veracity and polemic. In translation, Scots becomes a tool to connect Scottish experience with world experience, and in doing so find political and cultural links that provide validation outside of an Eng Lit/Scot Lit paradigm, and which further support the theory that is the broadly populist yet intellectually engaged nature of Scottish drama that has marked it out in the later twentieth century.

At IASH (2012) Peter Arnott, David MacLellan and Olga Taxidou responded to the question of whether they saw within Scotland’s theatrical tradition ‘indigenous theatrical vocabulary [. . .] forms, frames, that are clearly marked as Scottish’ Their response details an approach that stresses the openness and internationalism of the plays examined above:

DAVID MACLELLAN: I certainly do [. . .] I think it’s rooted in variety.
[. . .] that Scottish love of quote “change”. Of going from something that is hellish fun to brutally sad, to gay and musical to serious.[. . .]

PETER ARNOTT: And I think variety also applies to language. The fact that people have different registers: English, Scots, Scots English, and that you could slide between them [and] everyone would *understand* what that register of voice would mean. [. . .] That again applies to [world theatre.] In Nigerian theatre, [. . .] you have a sliding scale between Yoruba and English [. . .] that strikes me as excitingly similar. [. . .] I don’t know if these are things that are particular to Scotland [. . .]

OLGA TAXIDOU: I think, as a non-Scot [. . .] maybe they are, but maybe they're not [. . .] the ability to switch between [. . .] a hegemonical language and a non-hegemonical language [. . .] those forms [. . .] translate, [as does] the relationship between the local and the international.' (n.p.)

Translation in Scottish theatre forms links between international societies and theatrical traditions that also explore aspects of class, gender and community on a universal level. That ideas of register, translation and language apply outside of their immediate country of production (Scots translations of international plays and translation from Scots into other languages, such as John McGrath's *Cheviot* being produced in Mandarin) supports the notion that Scottish theatre promotes a populist, international-looking, socially-engaged theatre that takes the national as a characteristic, but is constantly aware of how other societal factors are at work within the nation itself.

Bill Findlay and Martin Bowman's translations of Michel Tremblay's *Joual*⁵ plays combine socio-political focus with an internationalism and burgeoning global consciousness of Scots-language work. Their 1991 translation *The Guid Sisters* opens with Germaine Lauzon having just won a million Green Shield Stamps calling her neighbours to help her stick them into books so that she can claim her rewards, and witness their jealousy at the same time. This acts as the catalyst to explore issues of community, marginalisation and class solidarity. One neighbour, Marie-Ange, complains:

A mull-yin stamps! Thon's a whole hooseful. If I dinnae stop thinkin about it I'm gaunnae go off ma skull. [. . .]What's thon Mme. Lauzon ever done tae deserve all this? Nothin. [. . .]Ma life is nothing. Nothin. I havnae got two cents tae rub thegither. I'm sick ta death ae this empy, scunnerin life. (1991, p.6)

This translation focuses on the power and vitality of working-class dialect, the realities of domestic life for women within working-class households, and the social

hangover of religious institutions (the Catholic and Calvinist Churches respectively); when Marie-Ange complains ‘what’s thon [. . .] ever done to deserve all this?’ (ibid.), the Calvinist ideas of ‘good deeds’ and ‘the elect’ provide a pertinent parallel for the play’s original Catholic focus on guilt, piety and worthiness, and expose the hypocrisies inherent within both. Like *Lochhead* before, Findlay and Bowman are able to use Scots as social barometer, a language able to explore hypocrisy, community anxiety and emotion. The wry humour present in previous vernacular translations is also at work here. Rose suggests a game of Monopoly, and flippantly introduces a powerfully symbolic exchange to the play. Its focus is democratising, humanising and cognisant of the mechanisms of late capitalist society:

GABRIELLE: Mono-poly?

ROSE: Aye, ye know, that game where the rich buy up everything an rook the rest ae us... (1991, p.20)

Germaine’s stamp win could be seen as a chance to ‘play the game’, to win even. But, she is defeated by her own friends’ and family’s (and by extension class’) internalisation of that game’s rules within their own realities (which are filtered through Conservative systems of capital) as her guests steal stamps throughout the evening. The realities of poverty do not allow for a game where those on the bottom play fair when nor do those at the top.

Lisette, who has spent time in Europe, represents the desire to escape local or class associations. She sees the continent as representative of Culture, History, Art, Society. She claims

Everyone [in Europe] is so well brought up. [. . .] In Paris [. . .] they speak proper French... No like here... I hate all of them. [. . .] These people are inferior. [. . .] keelies. [. . .] We managed to pull ourselves up out of this and we will make sure we never sink to their level again (Bowman and Findlay 1991, p.31).

Standard English (or ‘French’) marks her out as a betrayer of class and more broadly nation; however, Lisette’s revulsion stems from bourgeois condemnation of

an 'inferior' social order, hence her derogatory term 'keelies'. Her insecurity stems from knowing that the systems of power operate outside of the spheres in which she is currently moving. Europe is a potential land of enlightenment, and an Old World bastion of social structure and control and is marked by its establishment or standardised language. Lisette's ambivalence speaks to early 1990s political approaches to European involvement⁶ and to drama's more outward-looking stance. That *The Guid Sisters* is a translation between American and European traditions speaks to a desire to globalise outlooks and find common, rather than distinct, linguistic and socio-political ground.

Post-devolution, this openness to internationalism, and the confidence in Scots as an autonomous medium increases. Edwin Morgan's *Phaedra* (2000), attempts a doubly significant translation; he is taking Racine's play in the European tradition, itself a reworking of Classical drama, and filtering it through Scots sensibilities and linguistic registers. In this way, he links Scots as a medium for translation to its more historic roots and places it as part of an outward-looking European tradition. Having previously translated Rostand's *Cyrano de Bergerac*, Morgan had demonstrated the power of Scots to reach poetic and romantic heights, and deliver pathos alongside comedy. *Phaedra* offers a chance to expand on these achievements with renewed confidence. As mentioned above, 7:84 also utilised non-naturalistic staging with more 'natural' vernacular dialogue to blur dramatic and political traditions. However Morgan moves Scots demotic away from realist social drama; his source material is tied to a tradition of non-naturalistic Ancient Drama, his point of translation to a high-literary French style. He himself states that his aims were to deny the plays a specifically national setting:

I [did not want to] remove the characters or the action from the original locale to some other place- that's what's been done very successfully by people like Bill Findlay, Liz Lochhead [. . .], so that the characters not only speak Scots, but they also look like Scots persons. [. . .] I decided [. . .] not to make an adaptation but a translation [. . .] I didn't know how it would work, because it's very largely a demotic kind of language; it has working class rather than middle-class or aristocratic roots and I didn't know how it would work with characters who were [. . .] aristocratic

characters with the weight of history and legend⁷ attaching to them. (2000, p.205)

Morgan also notes that ‘the demotic Scots had sprinkled into it [. . .] French, German, bits of Shakespeare and Robert Burns’ (p. 205). The interplay of linguistic and poetic prestige elements present within the original text and language can, via a translation not an adaptation, be allied with Scots to close the gap between its perceived status and that of the medium of its translation. Morgan’s Scots is certainly able to convey the visceral and tragic elements of the play such as Phaedra’s heartfelt plea to Hippolytus: ‘Here’s ma hert: luft yir haun tae it noo./ [. . .] Ma hert gaes oot tae feel it, earn it, thole it’ (2000, p.36); or Theremanes’ account of Hippolytus’ untimely death: ‘They rin; they rin; his boady’s jist wan wound/We’re cryin oot tae the echein carse’ (Morgan 2000, p.68). This combination of high style, formal quality and tragic pathos is married with a demotic that combines colloquial and literary Scots, proving that in translation, there is much to ally Scotland’s drama to the traditions of Europe (and beyond), and that the language of the people is one that is literary as well as representative. European issues and traditions can strengthen a Scots culture that embraces this idea.

The focus on European and global issues does not merely extend to borrowings from the canon. Politically and socially, increased globalisation provides writers with new vernaculars by which to examine Scotland as a nation especially in the run up to and wake of devolution. For example, Zinnie Harris’s play, *Further than the Furthest Thing* examines the evacuation of the inhabitants of Tristan de Cuhna to Southampton in the 1960s. Harris deals with global economic expansion and attitudes to social and racial difference. The residents of the island are marked by their patois, such as ‘pinnawin’ (Harris 2000, p.15) for penguin, and the use of ‘I is’ (Harris 2000, p.13) for I am. This language works in a similar way to Scots when set against the Standard English of Mr Hansen, the factory owner:

MR HANSEN: It’s a very beautiful island Mr Lavarello.

BILL: We’s knowing it. (Harris 2000, p.29)

The community's exposure to outside influences, and the debate over whether to open Mr Hansen's factory on the island mirror similar discussions in previous plays about the institutionalisation of knowledge, systems of power, and the need for engagement with social change. All of this is debated in the vernacular, albeit one removed from the urban Scots of the 1970s. Francis, Bill Lavarello's nephew, chastises his uncle for having 'taught us things, read us things, told us stories, all those stories, on Sundays, about the Bible/ did you ask any of us?' (Harris, 2000, 54) Bill's response emphasises the ways in which ideologies are imposed on societies by way of necessity: 'Is you ever seen a dog eat a man Francis? Seen bodies is strewn like. . . Of course you isn't. [. . .] but I is seen it. [. . .] we was needing a church but we isn't needing a factory' (Harris 2000, p. 55). Spiritual and cultural succour is offered as an alternative to the modernising forces of capital that Bill allies with the same unknowable forces that make 'war [. . .] country against country/ Is to do with armies' (p. 55). This exchange also mirrors Will and Andrew's in *The Jesuit*; Francis questions the status quo only to be told that outside forces, of 'politics', or 'war', have shaped the world views of those people at the heads of their respective communities. In *Further*, Harris moves focus outside of Scotland, to examine in more abstract terms the way that, as a devolved nation, Scotland must continue to negotiate these issues. It also alludes to issues of independence and representation on a global scale, as Tristan de Cunha, inspiration for the play's setting was itself a British-owned province; following the granting of independence to several ex-British states throughout the 1970s and 1980s, Harris fictively aligns Scottish cultural experience to the examination of this continuum, and in moving the action outside of Scotland, suggests that as a nation this rhetoric is perhaps disingenuous, implicitly moving to the sort of subaltern approach previously proposed by Lehner. As such, dynamics of capital, community and family are explored and tested, and language acts, as in previous generations, to represent those communities it engages with in their own voice apart from socio-political institutions, and to challenge the complicity of the theatre audience with these institutions.

The twentieth century has seen Scots drama grow in confidence and scope. It has constantly maintained a sense of inquiry, perspective and populism that is, if not at odds with the political status quo, ready to examine and unpack it. Responding to

political changes in Scotland 1970-2000, theatre has created a cultural identity in meaningful and frequently demotic dialogue with the country's political makeup. Responsive not reactionary, living and insistent, vernacular language has given theatre a unique voice that has provided a counterpoint for Scottish arts (and identity) within a global framework. Political rhetoric, in form and intent, can only ever play catch-up. Theatre has offered a uniquely Scottish, but never parochially un-English, or non-global voice on the last thirty years in twentieth-century Scotland.

Endnotes.

¹ McGrath, J., 1980. *Out of Our Heads*.

² This model sees English, Scottish and Gaelic as the three languages spoken and represented in Scottish literature and therefore indicative of how Scotland figures its cultural and linguistic identity. According to Gardiner, this is a potentially limiting viewpoint. For a fuller explanation see Gardiner, M., 2006. *From Trocchi to Trainspotting*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh.

³ See Lehner, S., 2005. 'Towards a subaltern aesthetics: Reassessing Postcolonial Criticism for contemporary Northern Irish and Scottish Literatures. James Kelman and Robert McLiam Wilson's Rewriting of National Paradigms', *eSharp Issue 5 Borders and Boundaries*, pp.1-14. <http://www.gla.ac.uk/media/media_41167_en.pdf >

⁴ *Institute for Advanced Studies in the Humanities*, University of Edinburgh.

⁵ *Joual* is a French-Canadian working-class dialect, and the language of Tremblay's childhood neighbourhood, spoken in Montreal, Quebec, and named for the way that native speakers pronounce the French 'cheval' (horse).

⁶ See Tarditi, V., 2010. 'The Scottish National Party's changing Attitude towards the European Union', *EPERN*, Sussex European Institute. Tarditi sees the SNP's stance as a Pro-European party within the UK, at a time when the Conservative Government was less so, as a decision motivated less by external agreement (i.e. a wish to be involved in the international politics of the EU) than domestic opposition: to be seen as the party different in every way from the Unionist, English, Conservatives. This offers a critical dimension to the various conceptions of representation 'for' Scotland within Politics and Culture.

⁷ Arguably by 2000, Scots carries its own weight of 'history and legend' politically and literarily.

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