

## Theatricality, bilingualism and metatheatricality in Archibald Maclaren's *The Highland Drover*

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The drama of Archibald Maclaren (1755-1826), mainly one-act plays and other shorter pieces, has until recently been largely neglected. His prolific output received very little critical attention until, in 1998, Barbara Bell discussed his work in her chapter on nineteenth-century theatre in Bill Findlay's magisterial *A History of Scottish Theatre*. Later, Gioia Angeletti in 2010, Ian Brown in 2011 and 2013 and both jointly in 2015, and Michelle Macleod in 2014 also began to address his neglect. This began soon after his death. An anonymous *Memoir*, perhaps written by a Mr Field, published in Edinburgh in 1835, recognised how quickly his reputation had been neglected after he died. The *Memoir*, nonetheless, implies that his plays did have some reputation to lose:

[Maclaren] perpetrated diverse works in the shape of drama and poems to the extent of nearly one hundred, [... but] his name lives not in the memory beyond the select and aristocratic circle of dramatic antiquaries; and this must ever be a matter of surprise, as his dramas in particular possess a cleverness and an originality which we may seek for in vain in the works of more popular authors; many of them exhibit a knowledge of stage effect, and have been repeatedly performed in London and elsewhere with applause. (Anon 1835: 2)

Maclaren's playwriting, at least to the author of the *Memoir*, appeared 'clever', 'original' and dramatically effective – exhibiting 'knowledge of stage effect' – and Bell, Angeletti, Brown and Macleod have continued to argue this case on his behalf. This article further considers these claims of cleverness, originality and dramatic effectiveness specifically with regard to Maclaren's use of Gaelic, theatricality and a form of metatheatricality, discussed below, in the play *The Highland Drover*, published in 1790. Maclaren played that title role himself.

Before this discussion, however, it may help to offer some biographical context for Maclaren's life and work. According to the 1835 *Memoir*, he was born in the Highlands in 1755. His exact birthplace is nowhere reported. Maclaren clan lands are centred in Strathearn in Perthshire, although a branch of the Maclarens was based in the eighteenth century in Appin in Argyll, fighting at Culloden. Domhnall Uilleam Stiùbhart has suggested in a personal communication that connection to patrons in Argyll and service in the Dunbartonshire Highlanders might possibly suggest his roots, whatever the clan's original territory, lay in the eastern part of what is now known as Argyll and Bute. In any case, like many post-Culloden Highlanders, Maclaren was recruited into the new Highland regiments in which he served under Generals Howe and Clinton in the American War of Independence (1776-83). The *Memoir* says that, before that War was concluded, he had returned with his regiment on recruiting duty in Scotland. His publication and theatrical record suggest that he was in the Dundee area by 1781. Even before he left the army, what appears to be his first play, *The Conjurer; or, the Scotsman in London* (1781), was performed. According to Terence Tobin, this features regional types and a cunning Scot. It was printed in Dundee and was performed in Edinburgh in 1783, although it may well have earlier been played on tour in other towns, like Montrose, which formed part of a touring circuit out of Aberdeen and Edinburgh. (Tobin 1974: 64)

The *Memoir* notes it was ‘through the interest of Captain Walker, his officer, his farce of the “Coup de Main” was performed by Mr Jackson’s company at Edinburgh in 1783’. (Anon: 2) John Jackson was, of course, manager of the Edinburgh Theatre Royal. This play employed ‘the dialect comics, disguises, a letter and other devices [Maclaren] uses continually’, (Tobin 1974: 61) opened in Dundee, and was printed in Perth in 1784. His career as a playwright having begun while he was a serving soldier, it is not clear what rank Maclaren reached before joining the theatre company, but the fact he re-enlisted later as a sergeant might suggest he could have achieved that rank when he left to act on the Scottish circuit. His departure is described in the *Memoir*.

At the conclusion of the war [1783] he obtained his discharge and proceeded to Dundee, where the Edinburgh *corps dramatique* happened to be, and Mr McLaren was prevailed upon by Mr Sutherland, one of the performers, to accompany him to join Mr Ward’s itinerant troop at Montrose, where he was allowed some merit in the performance of Scotch, Irish and French characters; but his own ‘Highland Drover’ was the part in which he was inimitable. (*Memoir*: 2)

This passage explicitly suggests that, besides being a prolific playwright, Maclaren was recognised as a proficient actor in character roles. He clearly had acting, as well as writing, talent, and no doubt that assisted him in becoming part of Henry Ward’s company in Montrose, north of Dundee. Ward himself had performed in Jackson’s company at the Theatre Royal, Edinburgh. Maclaren, therefore, was linked to the major professional company of the time in Scotland and, at least when casting allowed, he acted with some of its stars like Ward and Sutherland. The fact he was performing alongside actors of such quality is not conclusive evidence he was himself a fine actor, even if only in specific roles, but it suggests that he was appreciated as a performer by them, not just by his memoirist.

Whatever his exact birthplace, Maclaren was surely a fluent Gaelic-speaker, writing, as he did, some drama in that language. The play under discussion, for example, *The Highland Drover*, contains substantial Gaelic dialogue. Maclaren, nonetheless, wrote in Scots and, even more, in English. Himself a displaced Highlander, some of his plays reflect the wandering lives of, and the alienation inflicted on, many of his post-Culloden Highland peers. In these plays he creates Gaelic-speaking or recognisably Highland characters who are represented as transient in some way: a drover in *The Highland Drover* (1790) or a colonist in the West Indies, McSympathy, in *The Negro Slaves* (1799). While the former speaks only Gaelic, the latter speaks Scots, differentiated from the English spoken by the English slave-owner Captain Racoon. Although Maclaren’s Highlanders may be far from home, they represent positive values. In both these plays, the Highlander is represented as embodying common sense and (however many Scots, including Highlanders, may in fact have engaged in aspects of the slave trade) compassionate humanity. His Highlanders also, to an extent, embody problem-solving cunning. In the case of the Highland drover, this is despite the fact that his Gaelic speech is incomprehensible to all but two other characters – though, presumably, not to the bulk of the probable audience (otherwise the plays would not have made artistic or economic sense to managements). It is the drover, the apparently marginalised monolingual Gael, who, despite his evident incomprehensibility to most other characters in the play, resolves the quandary facing the monolingual English-speaking characters central to the plot, the two lovers trying to elope.

The role in which, according to the *Memoir*, Maclaren was 'inimitable' is – to the modern theatre-goer – striking in the fact of all the role's lines being in Gaelic. Indeed, two of Maclaren's plays employ Gaelic dialogue. *The Humours of Greenock Fair* (1788) makes limited use of Gaelic, which is – presumably to assist audience comprehension – almost at once translated either by repetition in English or in the response of interlocutors. This may be, in effect, a (presumably successful) artistic experiment in theatrical use of Gaelic dialogue that led to the second. The second, *The Highland Drover* (1790), which is set in the liminal 'Border' town of Carlisle, is the one in which the *Memoir* tells us Maclaren played the monoglot Gaelic-speaking lead character Domhnul Dubh. Domhnul, the drover of the title, speaks substantial Gaelic dialogue. Although this is translated in the published text of 1790, the author of the *Memoir*, as we have seen, considered Maclaren to 'exhibit a knowledge of stage effect'; hence, it is more than likely on practical theatrical grounds alone that it cannot have been translated in performance. If it were, not only would the action have been held up unconscionably by repetition of his speeches in translation, but the rapid-fire interlingual 'puns' which give rise to much comedy, discussed later in this article, would simply have been lost. Indeed, part of the play's comedy, and no doubt its audience impact, is derived from dialogue whose comic effect depends on a bilingual audience's understanding in Gaelic what an English-speaking monoglot does not.

The play opens as we hear Domhnul Dubh offstage referring to 'an tarbh dubh' ['the black bull']. He is thus, before we see him, introduced to us as a man – perhaps something of a black-haired bullish person himself – who works as a drover. He enters with 'his man', Duncan, the play's second, and other monoglot, Gaelic-speaker. His first speech begins less than cheerfully, however:

Droch co 'dhail air a bhaille mhosach so, a Dhonachi, cho n'eil ach Bearla, Bearla, aig gach biast a tha tachairt orm; ach coma leatsa a laochain bithidh sinne ag an tìghe fhas't far an tuig aid sin, ach bi falbh agus thoir an' airre air a chrobh [...]  
(A bad meeting to this ugly town, Duncan, there is nothing but English, English, with every trifling fellow I meet with; but, never mind my good fellow, we'll be at home yet, where they'll understand every word we speak; but, never mind my good fellow, we'll be at home yet, where'll they'll understand every word we speak; but go you lad and take care of the cattle [...]). (6-7)<sup>1</sup>

We might note that while this is the English translation provided in the 1790 edition of the play, Dwelly's Gaelic dictionary has the following: 'droch chòmhdhail ort! *bad luck to you!* the wish conveyed is that one may meet a person or animal that it was considered unlucky to meet'. Therefore, 'a bad meeting to this ugly town' may in Gaelic reflect this usage involving bad luck. Although Domhnul had hoped to meet his nephew Callum in Carlisle, he has so far failed and, liminal as the city may be, the fact is that no-one he and his man have met can speak Gaelic. This is the reason that meeting this town has been so 'bad' and that the town is 'ugly' or, as one might now translate the word 'mosach', miserable or mean: there is nothing to be heard here but English. At once, any Gaelic-speaking audience members are introduced to two of the play's themes, the difficulty for Gaelic-speakers of communication in a society where Gaelic is being marginalised, and the significance of home for the nomad. The only hope for full human contact for the two men appears to be finding Callum, who seems to be bilingual. This would mean that he can act as a communication bridge to help them sell their cattle. Then, after entering a financial, but not a personal, relationship with English-speakers, they could return home where 'every word we speak' will be fully understood.

Duncan is sent off to look after the precious cattle, leaving Domhnul to sing a song of longing, 'A rìgh nach robh mi ann a Muille leat' ('I wish I were in Mull with you'), highlighting the sense he has of dislocation and alienation. (7) This song echoes, and may even be a version of, a song not by Domhnul Dubh (Black Donald), but another Macdonald, Dòmhnall Donn (Brown Donald). The leading character's name may, therefore, contain an intertextual reference, perhaps even as a knowing joke. Dòmhnall Donn had attempted to elope with a Grant heiress and been betrayed. Before his execution in 1691 his song of longing includes the lines ' 'S truagh a Rìgh, mo nighean donn, / Nach robh mi thall am Muille leat' ('A pity, oh Lord, my brown maiden, / that I were not over in Mull with you'). Whether or not Domhnul Dubh is singing Dòmhnall Donn's song, what he does sing is likely to have been recognisable in its tone and content to urban Gaelic-speakers of Maclaren's period in communicating a longing for home territory.<sup>2</sup> If the song is indeed a version of Dòmhnall Donn's, its intertextual reference foreshadows the play's later flirtation with elopement, here more successful than that which gave rise to the song.

Ramble then enters, played initially by Sutherland who had recruited Maclaren to the acting company, and comes upon Domhnul. Ramble is about to try to assist his friend Hartley in Hartley's attempt to elope with his lover, Lydia, who is under the control of her tyrannical uncle, Dr Hog. For Ramble, the drover is an obstruction and he tries to get rid of him. The monoglot Domhnul, of course, can speak only Gaelic to the monoglot anglophone. In the dialogue of the uncomprehending twosome, mutual misunderstanding gives rise to many interlingual jokes, examples of the cleverness, originality and dramatic skill with which Maclaren was credited. He creates a form of metatheatrical communication, especially in these theatrical jokes, by the use of untranslated Gaelic dialogue in houses which would have contained many monoglot English speakers who would not be able to participate in the laughter of bilingual audience members. Thus, he creates a sense of the theatricality of the theatre occasion, a consciousness of being at a theatre event in which different theatrical communities within the audience participate in different ways. Communication bridges are built between Gaelic and English for bilingual audience members, while confusion and uncertainty are all that are available to monolingual listeners, something they as an audience share with the two main monolingual characters in the play. That the effectiveness of Maclaren's dramaturgical skill still has impact was demonstrated when such a scene of mutual monolingual incomprehension from the play was performed at Sabhal Mòr Ostaig in Skye by Domhnall Uilleam Stiùbhart and the present author on Friday, 8 June 2012. There, it was clear that the Gaelic-speaking bilingual members of the audience were laughing at jokes, particularly the interlingual ones, that were not available to the monoglot English-speakers present.

Maclaren quickly gets into his stride with such jokes based on mutual incomprehension. In doing so, he establishes and develops a lively and amusing scene based on the alienated non-communication between Ramble and Domhnul. (7-8) This begins with Ramble's expressing bemusement and a desire to find an interpreter: '[...] if I thought he had a comrade that did [understand me], I would call him.' Ramble's pronunciation of the English 'call him' sounds to Domhnul like the name of his missing nephew, Callum. He responds enthusiastically: 'Callum! an aithne dhuit sa Callum? (Callum! Do you know Callum?)'. He concludes his line in an act of friendship saying to Ramble, '[...] thoir dhomh do lamh (give me your hand)'. The pronunciation of Gaelic 'lamh' to Ramble sounds like 'law' in English and he angrily responds 'You want to go to law!' Confusion prevails: Domhnul decides that Ramble must be Callum, and says 'tha mi creidsin gu'n do chail e a ghaelic' ('I believe he has lost all his Gaelic') and so Domhnul,

trying to communicate, uses two of the few words he has picked up without a wider understanding in English: 'yes' and 'no'. In trying to be helpful, Domhnul proceeds to answer questions put by Ramble with 'Yes' and 'No' in turn, apparently fluently, but actually arbitrarily and with no idea at all as to what he is responding or what his answers imply. This leads to more misunderstood nonsensical communication, amusing to a bilingual audience, but frustrating to Ramble.

An example of how Domhnul's very small amount of English suggests understanding which does not exist is found in the following exchanges. In the first, Domhnul's apparently fluent response to Ramble, actually masks incomprehension, marked in a Gaelic aside to those in the audience who can comprehend what is going on onstage. The drover seems to assert he is indeed trying to affront Ramble, when, in his positive desire to communicate, that is really the last thing he intends:

Ramble	Hang me if ever I saw such a fellow, he seems to understand me perfectly [...] do you mean to affront me?
Domhnul	To be sure, - donnas focal tuille bearla tha agam (To be sure, devil another word English I have).

Domhnul is as frustrated as Ramble and, as frustration in later exchanges begins to increase the sense of alienation and consequent aggression resulting from mistaken intentions, he concludes a speech 'a maddadh glas Sas'nach' ('the grey English dog' – it is not clear if this a reference to the actor Sutherland's hair colour or costume). At this, interlingual mishearing and failure in intercultural communication again takes place. Ramble, beginning to give up hope of a successful elopement, responds: 'What do you say? You want a glass of arsenick? [...] I see we must drop our design, and in the morning send the lady a card', to which Domhnul ripostes 'Ceard! dam ort a bheil thu aig radh gur ceard mise [...]' ('Tinker! damn you, do you say that I'm a tinker [...]'). (9-10) This sequence of misunderstandings is compounded when, as they continue to try, and fail, to make sense of one another and the fact of their arrival on the same scene at the same time, confusion is worse confounded: Ramble decides Domhnul is planning to rob the Doctor's house, while Domhnul decides Ramble is planning to steal his cattle. At this point Ramble pushes Domhnul and Domhnul collars Ramble. The failure in seeking to reach out amicably to one another is leading to outright violence, however comically presented.

The knock-about chaos begins to be resolved only when Betty, the third Gaelic-speaker in the play, a bilingual servant, enters. Betty, as a speaker of both languages, provides the linguistic expertise that at last allows communication between Domhnul and Ramble. In this, she defuses a potentially disastrous misunderstanding between two essentially good-hearted men who only wish to understand one another. Domhnul is delighted he can be understood, although interestingly the short opening section of dialogue between them is not translated in the published text, reinforcing the view that the Gaelic dialogue was not translated in performance and allowing a liminal transitional moment for the reader when Gaelic maintains its role in binding its speakers together in an alien community. When Domhnul asks Betty if she speaks Gaelic, she replies in Gaelic 'beagan' ('a little') and, in response to his queries about where she comes from, that she is from Inverary, near the area from which we presume Maclaren himself to come:

Domhnul	A bheil Gaelic agad?
Betty	Ha beagan
Domhnul	[...] ca d'ass a thanic thu?

Betty                    Hanic mi a Ineraora.  
 Betty                    [of Ramble] Tha ainm fhein Sass'nach ach bha mhathair Gaelich  
 (He bears an English name himself, but his mother was a Highland  
 woman.). (12)

It is clear from this unexpected piece of information that a subtext of this play is the process of language loss and confusion within a multilingual, but now politically united, island of Britain: one of the participants in the chaos that precedes Betty's arrival would, if his maternal linguistic heritage had been maintained, be able to understand Domhnul. Betty, meanwhile, has been away from Inverary for some time. Her Gaelic is out of practice and Michelle Macleod suggests that Maclaren, in a playwright's device, marks the rustiness of Betty's Gaelic by its faultiness in the first lines of dialogue he writes for her: (Macleod 2014: 12) what should be spelled 'Tha' is, for example, in the exchange above printed as 'Ha' and 'Thanic' as 'Hanic'. Maclaren's sensitivity to the cues his writing offers his actors, another aspect of his dramatic skill, is marked further by the way that – rather than these errors being misprints as might at first appear – as Betty becomes attuned again to speaking Gaelic, her later lines are correctly spelled.

Another hint of sensitivity to socio-cultural context, and also a wry sense of humour, in the playwright is found with regard to attitudes to clanship exposed when Betty says she is a Campbell. Domhnul bursts out:

A bheil fios agad Ban-charraid dhomhsa thu? tha odha brathair mo shean-athair, posda air bean chinidh dhuit, lan mor mac lan, 'ic Dhughail, 'ic Dhomnul, 'ic Dhonachi, 'ic Alastair 'ic Shemus, 'ic Eoin bhig mhic lan duin (do you know that you're a relation of mine, the grandson of my great-grandfather's brother, who was married to a namesake of yours, big John the son of John, the son of Dugald, the son of Donald, the son of Duncan, the son of Alexander, the son of James, the son of little Hugh whose father was brown John). (12-13)

Surely here Maclaren is having fun with – even sending up – the importance of genealogy and family descent in Gaelic-speaking culture. Another related exchange, slightly later in the play, further highlights differences between Gaelic- and English-speaking cultural attitudes to such family links, genealogy and clanship. Then, Betty, explaining to Domhnul the situation of the star-crossed lovers and the virtuousness of Ramble's role in trying to help them, Gaelicises the obstructive uncle's surname, calling Dr Hog 'Mac na muic' ('son of the pig'). Domhnul asks if Hog has a chief, clearly for him a social and familial necessity, and, on being told he has not, responds, as translated, '[...] what sort of man is it that has no chief [...]'. (15) Parallel issues to those of interlinguistic incomprehension in a kingdom united politically, but not linguistically, already raised in the dialogue of Domhnul and Ramble, are reflected here in incomprehension of socio-cultural differences.

The complexity of these socio-cultural differences is marked by the fact that Ramble, while anglophone, has a Gaelic-speaking mother and so, by implication, somewhere a chief, while Hog is alien to such social structures. Yet, Hog's comic social disadvantage is only understood by the Gaelic-speakers in the audience. This is a group which is in process within the Union of finding its language marginalised in society and disempowered and yet is privileged by this play's performed text in the theatre by the very linguistic expertise that outside the theatre is being devalued. And in the play's action it is the monolingual Gaelic-speaker who effects positive results. Domhnul shows kindly humanity and assists Ramble to help Hartley, who is clearly presented as a sincere man

rather than an exploitative abductor. When Betty, another Gaelic-speaker, in turn brings out Lydia, Hartley and his love elope. It is the Gaelic-speakers who are most effective in assisting the elopement. Maclaren within his dramatic and metatheatrical framework represents complex shifts and subtleties of power relationships, sometimes ironically, between the capacity for agency of speakers of different languages, not just within the play script, but within his audience among which only bilingual speakers understand all that is going on.

The action then comes to its comic conclusion. Domhnul *'puts himself in a posture of defence, as if he expected a pursuit from the house'* and sings 'Agus ho mhorag, horo na horo &c', translated as 'And oh my pretty Sally'. The '&c' suggests this is a well-known song that is being sung and the most likely one, with the chorus 'Agus hò Mhòrag' is attributed to Alasdair mac Mhaighstir Alasdair. If it is indeed this song to 'Mòrag' that is meant in the play, then it raises another intertextual and intercultural reference, this time with a wider political dimension. Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair is seen to have sometimes used 'Mòrag' as a way to talk about Bonnie Prince Charlie and so here we may potentially have in 1790 a coded Jacobite song. The song talks about Mòrag having gone overseas and the first line is 'A Mhòrag chiatach a chùil dualaich' ('O beautiful Morag of the braided hair') and the refrain is 'Agus hò Mhòrag'.<sup>3</sup>

This song brings Dr Hog to the window, and more uncomprehending dialogue is exchanged. Hog then realises what has happened: 'Oh she's gone! She's gone! you scoundrel you're a party concern'd, what a damn'd blockhead was I to be detained with your heathenish jargon; oh you rogue'. (16) He emerges from the house with two or three servants; knockabout conflict and comic fighting business with a staff ensue; the Doctor then retreats. At this, Ramble offers Domhnul money, but Domhnul says: 'cha n'fhaca thu riabh mac gael nach cuideachadh a charraid a n'am feim gun argoid agus gun orr' (you never saw a true Highlander but would assist his friend in the time of need, without either bribe or reward). (17) In the end, far from home, alienated from a value system he does not find attractive or even understand, Domhnul's Gaelic language, his 'heathenish jargon' in Hog's words, may seem to exclude him from the discourse of the language of ostensible contemporary authority. He is, nevertheless, a powerful agent of benevolence and precipitates harmonious change for the better in this play. In this play at least, the Gaelic universe of discourse is one of power regained and of the obligations of honourable friendship, while the universe of English is the discourse of the baffled, whether initially Ramble or latterly Hog, or the monoglot English-speaking members of the audience throughout. Without the input of the Gael, the universe of English is impotent for it is the Gaelic-speaker who triggers positive change and the happy denouement. It is, however, bilingualism that is most effective. Domhnul cannot achieve his impact until Betty comes on the scene. What both the play and its performance in theatre, its metatheatrical significance, underlines is the importance of dialogue between languages and mutual comprehension.

In the play's final scene, Ramble and Domhnul drink together, Duncan rejoins the drover and Domhnul has Duncan – as Betty explains in English – 'bring out the doctor, for he [Domhnul] says that though he [Hog] would not give his consent to the marriage, he'll be forced to dance at the wedding'. (18) The last stage direction marks the brutal triumph of true love over the brutality of wardship, of the apparently marginalised and alienated far-from-home nomad over the domineering bully in his own home, Gaeldom over the world of Beurla: the final stage direction reads 'Duncan pulls out doctor Hog by the breast, then a Scots reel, they force the old fellow through the dance, drop the curtain'.

This resolution, while theatrically justified and logical, can, nonetheless, be seen to represent a kind of wish-fulfilment. The power structures of society still require accommodation from Gaelic to English. Betty can certainly link both worlds, but she is still a servant, far from home herself, the only place where in Domhnul's earlier words 'they'll understand every word we speak'. The bilingual, but invisible Callum offers a potential alternative bridge between the two worlds, but one that is absent and without power to help, in effect impotent. Betty does, as Brown and Angeletti have argued 'embody a solution to the fracture between the two (or three) languages and cultures [... inhabiting] the contact zone between Gaelic, Scots and English, thus becoming the mouthpiece of a counter-hegemonic discourse whereby they can coexist and interact rather than dominate one another'. (Brown and Angeletti 2015: 51) This may be, as they tentatively propose, 'a plausible message in the happy denouement of the play', but it can equally be argued that the conclusion represents only a temporary resolution that will in the end leave the monolingual Hogs of this world in power. The loving elopement which the collaboration of monoglot Domhnul and monoglot Ramble brings off is counter-hegemonic, but the structures of society that make elopement an occasional necessity generally control and suppress agency among young lovers and hold women, like the Gaelic language itself, in thrall. The final reel may be joyous, but Hog is unwillingly forced into it. It does not represent potential for lasting collaboration of two cultures, but instead embodies a continuing conflict, only temporarily resolved.

Despite this, Maclaren in this play creates a sense of the vibrancy of the Gaelic language in making his hero so effective. And the stage life of the play represents, at least up to a point, another token of resistance to the suppression and marginalisation of Gaelic. The first edition of the play asserts on its title page that it 'was repeatedly performed at Inverness, Aberdeen, Perth, Dundee and Greenock, with universal approbation'. All of these venues are close to or in the Gàidhealtachd, in areas where a Gaelic population, either permanent or visiting for work reasons, would offer theatre managers the opportunity of a house which would understand the languages, linguistic politics and interlingual games with which Maclaren engages in this play. Further, such an audience would have the alertness and fluency to pick up the interlingual jokes which in performance must be swiftly understood as they flash by.

Whatever theatrical themes Maclaren engages with – issues of communication within the Union state; alienation; failure in one-to-one communication; the importance of 'home' and its nurturing culture; conflicts between languages, cultural attitudes and cultural values; the difficulties of monolingual people in a multilingual, at least for a time, polity; the infringement on freedoms of individuals including young lovers – the play itself engages in a metatheatrical relationship with Gaelic-speaking members of its audience. It is, in itself and for its time, an assertion of the vitality of their native language, and the potential for agency embodied in it. For Maclaren as playwright and his contemporaries in the audience the play resists appropriation by an English-speaking majority. Although the printed version of the text does include translation of the Gaelic dialogue, the performed text, on the practical grounds outlined above, could not. The dialogue in performance refuses to be translated. It is, rather, by maintaining the linguistic differences amidst which Maclaren and his contemporaries lived that it has its effect.

This is a key aspect of the metatheatricality of *The Highland Drover* as performance. The orality of the stage version keeps Maclaren's native language alive through dialogue against the hegemonic standardising impact of English-language textual

literacy and, certainly, his dramaturgy in this respect works on the surface to comic theatrical and metatheatrical effect. It surely, however, has deeper significance. As an experienced playwright, he must have fully intended a dramatic purpose behind the incommunicability of the performed Gaelic text for a monoglot English-speaking audience. At this deeper level his exclusively Gaelic dialogue lines may have been intended to suggest a feeling of linguistic alienation. Further, it may be that he sought by the agency of those lines to convey the need to sustain Gaelic and resist marginalisation and even the would-be culturally genocidal impact of post-Culloden oppression.<sup>4</sup> Gioia Angeletti has further suggested that in *The Highland Drover* Maclaren's dialogue embeds the idea of a society that depends, to be effective, on multilingualism and that thus he portrays 'an image of Scotland – as he saw it [as he wrote] and as [for him] it had always been – set against preponderant Anglicisation'.<sup>5</sup> The metatheatrical point is that, if some of the audience, whether speaking only English or only Gaelic, did not understand the dialogue, then no doubt the superficial physical comedy of the plot would reach them, but the verbal and intellectual content of the play would have remained elusive to those who had not achieved the accommodation of bilingualism. The metatheatricality of Maclaren's play bestows substantial power not only on theatrical performance, but on the political and ideological underpinning of his representation of the value of such bilingualism. Only that accommodation would imply full participation in a bilingual society which could deliver understanding and agency. Meantime, in the specific context of a theatre production only bilingualism had the power in the moment of the performance of allowing understanding of the very play one was attending. In this author's experience, even in modern theatre such metatheatrical creation of linguistic community and empowerment between stage and privileged members of the audience can be found in twentieth and twenty-first century Scots-language use in plays, some of whose dialogue may remain opaque to contemporary English speakers who do not understand Scots. This community creates a pact of solidarity between the Scots-speaking actors on stage (and ultimately the author) and Scots-speaking audience members.

Even such a metatheatrical resolution as *The Highland Drover* offers seems, however, for Maclaren himself temporary. He never again wrote such a play, one so dependent on Gaelic-language understanding. About four years after its production, in or around 1794, he rejoined the army as a sergeant in the Dumbartonshire Highlanders. He served in Guernsey for two years, before serving two more years in Ireland. In both places he continued to have some involvement and success in the theatre, but in 1798 he left the army and moved to London. There he settled for the rest of his theatrical working life. Indeed, in 1805 he produced another version of the play, but, while that retained the central role, its plot, language, action and dramatis personae – with Cockney, Irish and 'Scotch' stereotypes now included – are so different from the 1790 play as to be in effect another play under the same title. Though Maclaren benefitted on occasion from the London Scottish establishment's patronage, he did not prosper in London, even writing a play about troubles with landladies, entitled *The Ways of London; or Honesty is the Best Policy* (1815), another metatheatrical *jeu d'esprit*, however sardonic. He died in poverty, but his deprivation was not just economic. In London he had no access to a substantial audience with the kind of Gaelic-language competence with which he could explore his themes of linguistic alienation or the need to find communication links between languages and cultures in the different communities of the Union. However much his 'cleverness [...] originality [...] and] a knowledge of stage effect' remained, without such an audience he certainly could not explore, toy with, celebrate and enjoy the particular kind of sophisticated metatheatricality *The Highland Drover* engages and embodies.

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<sup>1</sup> Page references are to Archibald Maclaren, *The Highland Drover* (Greenock: Thos Murray, 1790). The translations of dialogue used in this article are those provided in the text published by Murray. Maclaren appears to have published different versions of some of his plays, often apparently as a result of either opportunistic changes in production scripts or changes arising from the demands of particular productions. This article follows the principle of adhering to the first available edition.

<sup>2</sup> Here I draw on helpful suggestions from one of the article's blind reviewers and Dr Sìmh Innes, to both of whom I am grateful.

<sup>3</sup> The text is to be found at <http://digital.nls.uk/early-gaelic-book-collections/pageturner.cfm?id=81368881&mode=transcription> (page 64). I am grateful to Dr Innes again for drawing my attention to this text and to its wider significance.

<sup>4</sup> I am grateful to Professor Gioia Angeletti for drawing this aspect of Maclaren's use of theatricality to my attention and in general for her comments on the draft of this article.

<sup>5</sup> Email correspondence, 26 August 2015.