

Introduction: Scottish Television

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In his article for this volume, Jonathan Murray warns of the necessity to 'rectify television drama's glaring long-term absence as a priority within the field of Scottish Cultural Studies.' (Murray 2018) Murray's statement is significant since he is, along with many others, one of the major contributors to the expanding academic field of Scottish film studies. Monographs such as Murray's own *The New Scottish Cinema* (2015), Duncan Petrie's *Screening Scotland* (2000) and David Martin-Jones' *Scotland: Global Cinema: Genres Modes and Identities* (2009) (to name but a very few) as well as a growing number of articles, journal issues, edited collections, PhDs and academic conferences have expanded the territory first mapped out in Colin McArthur's legendary *Scotch Reels* (1982) by responding to the ebb and flow of the fortunes of Scottish films and filmmakers in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century.

Yet there has been little by way of a corresponding increase in the study of Scottish television, even though the field of television studies has seen significant growth, particularly since 2000. As with the development of film studies as a discipline in the 1960s, much of the new work on television has focussed primarily on the United States, through explorations of paradigm-shifting shows from the 1990s and beyond including *The X-Files* (1993-2001, 2016-2017), *Twin Peaks* (1990-1991, 2017) and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003), TV auteurs like Joss Whedon, or pioneering networks like HBO, Showtime and AMC. Recent moves towards the study of genre, cult TV, and TV fandom have shifted the focus beyond America to include more diverse programming, with a notable focus for example on the dark and chilly dramas that make up Scandi-Noir, and the rebooted UK series *Doctor Who* (2005-). Such work has seen significant progress in forwarding an understanding of TV's formal aesthetics, narrative structures, industrial practices, of key concepts such as cult and quality TV, of the roles of the showrunners, writers and directors, and of the importance of fan cultures in the interactive, multi-channel universe of the modern TV landscape.

However, the contemporary rise in television studies has not as yet turned its attention towards the connection between television and nationhood, particularly in relationship to what one might call, to paraphrase Mette Hjort and Duncan Petrie, 'the television of small nations.' (2008) There are of course many important works on British television, recent examples including Lez Cooke's *British Television Drama: A History* (2015), Ed Buscombe's *British Television: A Reader* (2000), Jonathan Bignell and Stephen Lacey's *British Television Drama:*

Past Present and Future (2016) and Juergen Kamm and Birgit Neumann's *British TV Comedies: Cultural Concepts, Contexts and Controversies* (2015). The key word in these titles, as any scholars of Scottish film will understand, is 'British,' and in terms of Scottish-specific titles the field narrows considerably to include the likes of Petrie's *Contemporary Scottish Fictions – Film, Television and the Novel* (2004) and Neil Blain and David Hutchinson's *The Media in Scotland* (2008), and in both cases television is considered alongside other media.

In the case of Scottish film, one of the contributing factors to the relative scarcity of critical writing, both before and even after McArthur's important edited collection in 1982, was the equal shortage of Scottish film product. It is no accident that the most substantial growth in Scottish film studies occurred in the late 1990s after the arrival of New Scottish Cinema in the form of revelatory commercial films such as *Shallow Grave* (1995) and *Trainspotting* (1996), followed by the art-cinema inspired *Ratcatcher* (1999) and *Orphans* (1999). In the case of Scottish television there is no such corresponding lack of material to analyse. As both Diane McLean and Alistair Scott explain in this volume, there is a long history of both Scottish specific and Scots Gaelic broadcasting, albeit one that is not necessarily consistent nor indeed particularly prominent. The first Gaelic radio programme was broadcast by the BBC in 1923, while the regional Scottish TV channel STV began in 1957, two years after ITV was first launched in London. In neither case can it be said that specifically Scottish cultural programming was a matter of priority. The first Gaelic broadcast was a sermon, while the first programme on STV was a Tartanry-inspired cliché ridden (if jolly) light entertainment show *This is Scotland*. From there STV operated like many ITV franchises, interspersing national (and in the case of some American imports, international) programmes with some regional content, while Gaelic programming struggled to find a home on the BBC. Yet for all Scottish-made and Scottish centric programming occupied a relatively minor place on the weekly TV schedules in Scotland, the combined volume of programming in diverse genres such as documentary, sport, light entertainment, news and current affairs, comedy and drama offers a deep reservoir of historical material, and more than justifies McArthur's claim in 1982 that television can be 'a key site of debate and struggle in Scottish culture.' (1982: 4)

This special issue of the *International Journal of Scottish Theatre and Screen*, coming just a year after an issue of *Visual Culture in Britain* dedicated to Scottish TV drama, aims to begin to shine a spotlight on the as yet under-explored history and significance of Scottish television to Scottish cultural life. As such the articles herein offer a variety of approaches and emphases, from broader historical contextualisation to detailed analysis of specific programmes and writers.

Diane McLean and Alistair Scott begin the issue by discussing respectively the history of Gaelic broadcasting and of Scottish Television (STV). Each of them identifies a story of struggle and survival against legislative prejudice, cultural hegemony and limited audiences. Using interviews conducted with key figures involved in the campaign to fund Gaelic broadcasting, McLean examines the tenuous hold that Gaelic had in the Scottish TV market, the programmes that were produced, and the developments that led to the arrival of BBC Alba in 2008. She also analyses the role that Gaelic language programming has to play within Scottish cultural life, and the challenges ahead for BBC Alba in promoting Scots Gaelic.

In his article, Scott examines the history of STV through four key phases. He first concentrates upon the early years of expansion after the formation of the channel in 1957, and then a period in the late 1960s and early 1970s when STV faced accusations of a lack of quality programming and had to fight for its survival. The third phase, from the 1980s to the mid 2000s, saw STV grow in confidence, resulting in strong national programming and an ambitious expansion, which inevitably led to a more recent period of retrenchment and restructuring. Ending with the arrival in 2017 of STV2, Scott's article highlights the richness and diversity of STV's programming and the significance of its contribution to Scottish TV culture.

It is towards the consideration of specific programmes that the next three articles turn. Mary Irwin and Gabrielle Smith examine the way in which traditional images of Scottish masculinity, particularly those circulating in Scottish TV comedy, have been subverted by Greg McHugh's successful comic creation *Gary: Tank Commander* (2009-2012). Drawing upon many contemporary Scottish comedy series and shows, they argue that Gary's particular emphasis upon camp and clowning is part of a movement that undermines the traditional image of the comic Glaswegian Hard Man successfully presented by the likes of Billy Connolly and Gregor Fisher.

While *Gary: Tank Commander* is an example of a genuine home-grown hit, arguably the most internationally successful Scottish TV drama currently in production is the American time-travel drama *Outlander* (2014-). Funded by the US Starz network and set during the Jacobite rebellion, *Outlander* is an adaptation of a series of novels by American author Diana Gabaldon. In his article James Cateridge draws upon primary research among *Outlander* fan communities to examine the impact that the series has had on Scottish tourism, and upon a desire for connecting with Scottish roots amongst a world-wide diaspora of *Outlander* fans.

From two high profile successes, this section concludes with James Downs' analysis of a forgotten masterpiece, BBC Scotland's 1983 drama, *The Mad Death* by Nigel Slater. Drawing upon a trend in 'fear of nature' pulp paperback fiction in the 1970s, *The Mad Death* tells the story of an outbreak of rabies in Scotland. Arriving from Europe carried by a cat smuggled aboard an airplane by a wealthy French woman, the outbreak articulates not only anxieties about nature, but also of the influence of the foreign Others that are Europe and, of course, Scotland's neighbour to the South. Prescient in terms of Scotland's relationship with Europe in 1983, and equally so in the era of Scottish Independence and Brexit, Downs' discussion of the drama not only draws attention to a largely unknown classic, it also highlights its relevance to contemporary concerns.

The final two pieces examine the work of two of Scotland's most significant writers of TV drama. Paul Elliot examines the representation of Scotland in the works of dramatist and artist John Byrne, creator of *The Slab Boys* (1979), *Your Cheatin' Heart* (1990) and most famously *Tutti Frutti* (1987). Focussing primarily on these three key works, Elliot considers the interplay of the absence of presence of Scotland in Byrne's writing, examining his use of language and Scottish vernacular to create identity, along with Byrne's fascination with, and appropriation of, American culture.

To conclude the issue, Jonathan Murray explores the influence of the American-born, Scottish-based writer Donna Franceschild, whose many TV dramas, including *Takin' Over the Asylum* (1994), *A Mug's Game* (1996) and *Donovan Quick* (2000), engage with important political and cultural issues including privatisation, mental health and a particular exploration of Scottish female identity. Using Franceschild as a case study for examining the relevance of Scottish TV drama to debates around Scottish cultural identity, Murray's article both foregrounds and concludes the aim of this special issue, which is to expand the focus of Scottish screen studies to encompass Scottish TV drama and Scottish TV more generally, investigating as yet under-explored and even forgotten dramas and dramatists and considering the impact of this substantial body of cultural output, beamed directly into Scottish homes every day of the year. In this issue therefore the focus lies once more mainly in the field of drama, and while drama is undeniably a key site for the negotiation of cultural identity on both big and small screens, there is an argument to be made, not just in Scottish TV studies but in TV studies more generally, for a broader focus on a wider range of programming, all of which, regardless of relatively quality, make a contribution to the national life.

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