

'Ah hink it's time for suttin blue n a BAILEYS!' Subverting

Scottish Male Identities in *Gary: Tank Commander*¹

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Introduction: Who is Gary?

Actor and writer Greg McHugh's popular Scottish comedy character Corporal Gary McLintoch, commander in the 104th Royal Tank Regiment, originated in McHugh's stand-up performance of the character at the 2006 Edinburgh Fringe festival. In 2008, E4 commissioned a one-off pilot *Gary's War*, starring the character, which subsequently won a Scottish BAFTA. In 2009, the BBC in Scotland produced the situation comedy *Gary: Tank Commander* based on McHugh's character which chronicled the daily working lives and experiences (home and abroad) of Gary and the rest of the regiment. The live stage show *Gary: Tank Commander - Mission Quite Possible* (2016) was performed in Glasgow's SSE Hydro concert venue. Indeed, Gary as a character has achieved significant cultural resonance for Scots. He was chosen to interrogate the leaders of the Scottish political parties on behalf of the nation ahead of the 2015 Holyrood election in a comedy special *Gary: Tank Commander - Election Special* (BBC 2016).

As well as being a professional soldier who has successfully served tours of duty in Afghanistan and Iraq, Gary loves to dance to Scandinavian bubblegum pop one-hit wonder 'Barbie Girl'; he has 1980s pop duo sisters Mel and Kim's smash hit 'Respectable' as his ringtone and is always partial to some cheesy pasta or a wee Baileys. McHugh's playful, self-confident and exuberant creation works consistently to contradict, challenge and subvert established representations of Scottish men and masculinity that have previously and currently been offered in Scottish TV comedy. Theatricality, artifice and camp permeate the series, from McHugh's central performance, to Gary's extratextual, nonsensical interviews to camera, to the use of interstitial parodies of famous music videos by stars such as Beyoncé and Lady Gaga in which Gary leads his platoon. Situated within a critical framework that builds on Judith Butler's scholarship on gender and performance, Susan Sontag's work on camp and the concept of disidentification as explored by José Muñoz in his *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*, this article considers McHugh's performance of Gary's masculinity focusing on why he is such a singular character within Scottish television

comedy. Concurrently considering extant scholarship on Scottish moving image representations, the article interrogates hidden or frequently absent cultural discourses which Gary as a Scottish soldier and a Scottish man both challenges and embodies.²

Gary and Scottish TV Comedy

To understand fully Gary's significance and the knowing and multifaceted television performance of him that McHugh delivers, it is necessary first to locate Gary and McHugh within the broader context of the Scottish television situation comedy. This is notably a culture of urban working-class masculinity located in and around the city of Glasgow which is the setting for the most popular and influential series. One of the very few exceptions to this is BBC2's send up of aircrew life, *The High Life*, which will be considered later in the article. The dominant character archetype for Scottish TV comedy is categorised from here on as *The Glaswegian Man*. To understand this tradition and its development, it is necessary first to consider the most successful and influential iterations of funny Scottishness and how *Gary: Tank Commander* engages with them. While it is neither the purpose of this article, nor within its scope, to offer any fully realised historical narratives of Scottish television comedy this article proposes critically and popularly acclaimed TV performances of Billy Connolly as one of the most important of these iterations and as a point of origin and influence for post-war representations and readings of the Scottish funny man, and this figure's understood ethnicity as a broadly working-class man from Glasgow.

Writing in Blain and Hutchison's *The Media in Scotland* (2008), which considers Scotland on the small screen, Mowatt makes specific reference to discourses around Connolly as having 'played a crucial part in other people's perceptions of Scotland' (137). Mowatt chronicles the tough, deprived background from which Connolly emerged. Born in the working-class Anderston district of Glasgow, Connolly was abandoned by his mother and molested and beaten by his father. He served a five-year apprenticeship as a welder in the upper Clyde shipyards, (Ibid). Connolly has subsequently achieved worldwide success and Mowatt describes him, along with Harry Lauder as 'two of the best, internationally known comics of the 20th century'. (Ibid)³ Connolly's act and persona evolved and broadened to be understood and enjoyed internationally, nevertheless it is as a distinctively Scottish outspoken alpha-male presence that he is best known. Connolly in full flow is simultaneously verbally dexterous, highly inventive, confident and so much in control of his audience and material that he can

laugh at his own jokes while delivering them. At the same time there is no doubt of the toughness and intent of Connolly's character. His richly creative stream of consciousness and impressive command of ideas, images and idioms is underpinned by the implicit hard man forged by the shipyards and the streets of impoverished early post-war Glasgow. The concept of the 'hard man' encapsulates an entrenched stereotype of working class Scottish masculinity built on physical strength and fearlessness frequently accompanied by a ferociously sarcastic sense of the absurd.

Subsequently, a range of the most popular and successful Scottish TV comedies have built on the legacy of Connolly's performance of the funny Glaswegian hard man developing and augmenting this archetype into the understood representation of what Scottish humour is. In *The Glasgow Smile - An A-Z of the Funniest City on Earth* Brown claims that 'there is no Scottish comedy that is not Glaswegian, when people speak of the Scottish sense of humour what they mean is the Glaswegian sense of humour' (Brown 2013: 2). Integral to this tradition and central to any narratives around Scottish TV comedy is the significance of The Comedy Unit in the creation, development, support and broadcast of Scottish TV comedy. Located in Glasgow The Comedy Unit was originally set up in 1993 as an in-house BBC department by Glaswegian TV producer and creative director Colin Gilbert, and has since then, been the production house for the hit comedies driven by a masculine Glaswegian culture and sensibility that have since come to represent Scottish comedy.⁴ What then are the comedies that have carried on this heritage telling stories from the perspective of the male working class Glaswegian?

One of the most enduring comic creations which works with the TV comedy template created by Connolly is actor Gregor Fisher's portrayal of *Rab C. Nesbitt*, self-appointed spokesperson for life in Glasgow's impoverished Govan district in the eponymous series. (BBC 1988-2008). Irwin writes of Nesbitt that, 'he offered a dark, nuanced reading of the bogeyman figure of the uncouth, workshy, untameable Glaswegian' (2015: 94). Moreover, 'Nesbitt, as street philosopher, revelled in his unconditional and unadulterated 'two fingers up to the world' stance, displaying at the same time a fierce reflective intelligence shot through with acute, mordant humour' (Ibid). Nesbitt has much in common with the persona and the delivery which is associated with Connolly. Worthy of note is that the shipyards in which Connolly spent those highly significant early years were located in the self-same Govan, which is the setting for Nesbitt's experiences.

More recently one of the big BBC Scotland comedy TV successes is the long running and recently revived series *Still Game* (BBC Scotland, 2002-2016). Written and performed alongside an ensemble cast by Scottish actors and comedians Greg Hemphill and Ford Kiernan, *Still Game* also draws on Glaswegian working-class communities for inspiration, this time set on the post-war overspill new built estates and schemes that served to rehouse the inhabitants of Glasgow's overcrowded and rundown inner city. In this instance, the protagonists of the comedy are pensioners making the best of their lot on the Craighlang housing estate. As with Nesbitt, protagonists Jack Jarvis (Kiernan) and Victor McDaid (Hemphill) are no-nonsense, working class Scotsmen whose constant aggrieved irritation about the travails of life in Craighlang is underpinned by a darkly incisive sense of humour. At the same time, as with Nesbitt and Connolly, there is also a vibrant verbal creativity to their humour and a keen observational eye continually at work. *Still Game* itself is based on a sketch in Hemphill and Kiernan's equally popular earlier show *Chewin' the Fat* (1999-2005). *Chewin' The Fat* works with a robust line up of predominantly male Glaswegian characterisations. Once again the stand-out characters are most frequently robust, implicitly heterosexual, recognisably Glaswegian archetypes. These include 'The Big Man', a belligerent gangster and fixer whose response to sorting out clients' problems is invariably brutal, retributive violence which he will administer; 'Rab McGlinchy', a hard faced, lager swilling tough who 'interprets the evening news bulletins for the neds': that is, translates the headlines into vernacular Glaswegian for the local thugs; and 'the Dixons Boys': motor-mouthed electronics shop assistants, a pair of badgering, cajoling up-sellers desperate to make sure no-one leaves the premises with only what they came in for.

Another significant show that recycles these same archetypes is *Burnistoun* (BBC Scotland 2009-2012), a sketch show set in a fictional town on the outskirts of Glasgow, written and performed by Glaswegians Rab Florence and Iain Connell. The series builds on *Chewin' the Fat's* format of a sketch show based around local characters and the closely observed fictional Glaswegian community of Craighlang in *Still Game*. Indeed Connell wrote for *Chewin' the Fat's* Hogmanay (New Year's Eve) 2000 special. As with Hemphill and Kiernan's work the focus in *Burnistoun* is on opinionated, often quick-tempered Glaswegian men. Beginning the same year, *Limmy's Show* (BBC Two Scotland 2009 -), a series of sketches written and performed by Brian Limond, has a dark, surrealistic aesthetic and moves beyond the observational social realism of the earlier comedies, often breaking the fourth wall to talk directly to audiences, nevertheless at heart it too is driven by a distinctly male and Glaswegian sensibility.

While a handful of characters such as *Chewin' the Fat's* 'Big Man' are clearly parodic versions of the most exaggerated of Glasgow stereotypes, in the main the characters presented sit within a fairly narrow range of implicitly heterosexual west of Scotland men. In fact, working through the group of characters and situations that populate Scottish TV comedy the construct of The Glaswegian Man comes into sharper focus. That is, this is an assertively male, working-class figure whose scathing, dark sense of humour is quick-fire and frequently aggressive. It is useful here to draw upon the parallels in Sarah Neely's work on cultural representations of Scottish men with which the Glasgow man of Scottish comedy shares much ground: 'In critical work on representations of Scottish masculinity much consideration is given to the dominance of the myth of Clydesidism: the glorification of the working class Scottish male' (Neely 2008: 152). Fiona Douglas further specifies characteristics of Clydesidism as 'working class, male, a skilled worker, a hero, coupled with associations of oppressor, violence, alcoholism and socialism' (Douglas 2009: 25). As will be explored presently, there is also in The Glaswegian Man, an underlying critically unexamined sense of implicit and unacknowledged homophobia.

Gary, Comedy, Clowning and Camp

Yet despite 'substantial recent scholarship on film and television representations of Scottish and Glaswegian identity' (Irwin 2015: 92), the dominant representations of Scottish men have gone largely unnoticed and unchallenged. In contrast to The Glaswegian Man, McHugh's incarnation of his character of Gary, while explicitly Scottish, simultaneously clashes constantly with all the expectations and assumptions which have crystallised to exemplify onscreen Scottish comedy and masculinity. Gary presents a confident and uninhibitedly camp sensibility, in opposition to the 'conventional' Scottish masculinity considered so far in this article. In *Notes on Camp* Sontag writes, 'Neither can anything be camp that does not seem to spring from an irrepressible, a virtually uncontrolled sensibility' (2009: 284). Such is the camp style that underpins Gary's bold, mischief-making demeanour. Sontag's work also articulates the impact of Gary's highly irreverent and contrary attitude to the usual seriousness of the discourses afforded the military and men who serve. As Sontag writes, 'The whole point of Camp is to dethrone the serious. Camp is playfully anti-serious. More precisely, Camp involves a new more complex relation to 'the serious'. One can be serious about the frivolous, frivolous about the serious'. (2009: 288). This is very much the type of provocative play that McHugh's Gary makes with the notion of military service and the

gravitas surrounding it throughout the series. Gary also has little interest in or knowledge of current affairs or the politics which run the army to which he belongs. For him it is always referred to simply as 'the work', as if he were serving in a shop or answering the phone in a call centre. Sontag writes that 'It goes without saying that the Camp sensibility is disengaged, depoliticized – or at least apolitical' (2009: 277).

In the character of Gary, McHugh interrogates and questions the synthesised construct of both the conventionally macho, militarily engaged figure of the soldier and the Scottish man. José Muñoz's interpretation of the disidentificatory stance further clarifies what such a performance of soldiering represents:

Disidentification is about recycling and rethinking encoded meaning. The process of disidentification scrambles and reconstructs the encoded message of a cultural text in a fashion that both exposes the encoded messages universalising and exclusionary machinations and recircuits its workings to account for include and empower minority identities and identifications. This disidentification is a step further than cracking open the code of the majority; it proceeds to use this code as raw material for representing a disempowered politics or positionality that has been rendered unthinkable by the dominant power (Muñoz 1999).

Gary, by the very unlikeliness of his serving in the army, forces reconsideration of the unexamined codifications of what it does and by extension *does not* mean to be a soldier. He lacks the physical prowess of a soldier and his self-presentation is diametrically at odds with the conventional, hard-bodied, unfussy masculinity assumed of the military. Underlying this is the additional cultural layer of an unequivocally hard-edged masculinity which, as this article has demonstrated, is celebrated in Scottish cultural representations of itself. Gary comprehensively 'fails to conform to the gendered norms of cultural intelligibility by which personas are defined' (Butler 2010). Notably, from his impeccable tan and ultra-white teeth, to the perfectly coiffed, frosted tips in his hair, Gary's well-groomed presentation of the male body signals an aesthetic that mixes a well-groomed *metrosexuality* with a nudge towards the territory of the recently coined notion of *spornosexuality*.⁵ That said, the uber-masculinity of the figure of the male soldier, and in particular the focus on the physicality of the military body

also connotes its own fetishistic performance of masculinity, as much of a performance of gender as the persona Gary presents.

Gary's negotiation of discourses of masculinity and soldiering is tellingly encapsulated in the series' opening titles. An unidentifiable figure (presumably Gary) is seen dressing for combat. In the background, three identically dressed soldiers stand to attention as someone calls the command, 'Attention!' The soldier in the foreground, now recognised as Gary, stands in the front and centre. As he runs in from the left, it is obvious that he is the least athletic or able of the four men and his arms are shown to be flailing on either side of him, in a manner of a child. On the calling of the command, he breaks character and his facial expression changes into a full-toothed grin, while slightly cocking his head to the side. In being singled out alone and in front of the other three, Gary is noticeably the leader. However, his slowness to react, his somewhat plump form, as well as his ostentatious display of his uniform subverts many of the conventional understandings of army life, as well the stereotypes of army commanders, their physiques and their overall masculinity.

The action of Gary dressing and 'putting on' military clothing and uniform creates a space wherein it could be likened to an act of dragging up: uniform as a performance of masculinity. As Butler says, 'the effect of gender is produced through the stylisation of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and styles of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self' (Butler 2010). While the other three men could quite feasibly be working soldiers in the army, the way in which Gary is presented seems to question this – undermining his position, and sending up the idea of his character as the commander of a troop. During the opening titles, Gary is the only character to show an awareness, both of himself and of a potential audience, as he breaks the fourth wall and grins directly into the camera. In blurring the lines of the hyper-masculine military 'day-job', with the emerging cheeky interaction seen in McHugh's performance, the character of Gary is framed as one with subversive agency. At the same time in Gary's particular performance of the soldier, 'parody can serve to reengage and reconsolidate the very distinction between a privileged and naturalised gender configuration and one that appears as derived, phantasmatic and mimetic - a failed copy as it were' (Butler 2010).

Gary and his tank crew's interstitial reworking of *Queen's* anthemic track 'We Will Rock You' presents another illustrative example of the interrogation of Scottish military machismo offered by the series and McHugh's performance. *Queen*, as a group who embodied the lush

extravagances of 1970s glam rock, most especially in the persona of lead singer Freddie Mercury, sits well within the choice of flamboyant, colourful music videos which the series recreates. Yet, the version of the song used is a cover version created by the Celtic rock band, *The Red Hot Chilli Pipers*, known for their traditional Scottish pipe and drum style with a contemporary flair. The soldiers in the scene perform nominally as the guitarists and drummer of *Queen's* original, but this is *Queen* recreated as a group of proud Scottish warriors responding to the traditional battle cry that is the Highland bagpipes. In contrast, McHugh presents the character of Gary as a luxuriantly moustached Freddie, delivering a high camp performance of over-the-top exuberance and knowing self-confidence. As with Mercury in his classic *Queen* performances, Gary's parodic uber-macho appearance and delivery act simultaneously to underscore and expose the performative nature of supposedly natural or normal masculinity.

At the same time Gary is almost a pre-pubescent figure with his soft, round, innocent features, his childish demeanour, adeptness for pranks and acting the fool. He responds to calls on his mobile frequently with nonsensical greetings such as, 'Hello, Democratic Republic of Congo' or 'Hello, Burger King' using heightened facial expressions accompanied by a singsong exaggeration of his speaking voice to undercut or challenge authority. Andrew Stott writes, 'foolishness is not the same as idiocy, but rather the expression of the ambiguous, doubled, and inverted ideas of wisdom and folly that existed in the medieval period.' (Stott 2014: 47). Gary is the childlike figure who often lights upon truths or sees through artifice in ways that more conventional characters can or will not.

For Sontag, camp 'sees everything in quotation marks,' and it is to 'understand Being-as-Playing-a-Role'. (2009: 280) McHugh's performance across all three series of *Gary: Tank Commander* frames itself around aspects and aesthetics of camp. Such qualities exist in tandem with a more disruptive use of parody as a process for forming humour. Parody as a device allows McHugh free play with other texts and contemporary popular culture in the deployment of which what is amusing and inherently funny about Gary reveals itself. His day-to-day interactions are closely allied with tropes of camp, clowning and buffoonery. For Dan Harries, 'one of the distinct features of camp is centred on the viewer's awareness of certain moments of excess [...] and the reading of it in a specific way to accentuate that excess' (Harries 2000: 7).

While the article has given much consideration to qualities of and affinities with camp in the character of Gary, his fit within any spectrum of sexuality is more problematic. He displays complete ignorance about sex and sexual relationships. In the overtly heterosexual atmosphere of the sexually charged banter of the regiment Gary's naivety is unexpected and makes for a laugh-out-loud comedy of incongruity.

Gary's trip to the pub and a lap dancing bar with the tank crew and a sexually voracious visiting American general exemplifies this. Bruce Bennett writes of Gary that he, 'is presented in defiantly camp terms throughout [...] He is a sexual innocent [...] and fails continually to understand the crude innuendo that is the lingua franca of cinematic soldiers in his conversations with his three friends' (Bennett 2015). Collectively, there is a distinctly Scottish machismo to the performance underlining this scene, given the focus on bars and sexual proclivity. As the group walk into a quiet, deadened pub with an older male clientele that could be likened to the old fashioned, spit-and-sawdust *Clansman* in *Still Game*, Gary immediately sets himself aside as different from the other men by not drinking the same as them. Instead of having a beer with the rest, Gary asks for 'suttin' blue and a Baileys'.⁶ Although this is not questioned by the others, it is unusual in terms of taste, but also choice, given that it might be something that would be considered an alcopop for the underage drinker. The following bar and club scene sets up Gary's sexual ambivalence, innocence and overall lack of sexual interest or appetite, suggesting that he might operate in a more fluid or neutral asexual space. When Gary, and the rest of the 'lads' find themselves in a strip club as per the wishes of the General, the small talk in which Gary engages the lap-dancer speaks to wider categorisations of gender and sex, but also to the absurdity of his situation.

Chris Brickell writes that, 'the suggestion that male heterosexuality relies on the exclusion of its homosexual other for its existence.' (2005: 33). The whole scene encapsulates the comic dexterity and sophisticated multi-layered subversiveness that is Gary's hallmark. While Gary is neither defined neatly as hetero- or homosexual, given that he fits within neither role, the nature of his character (and the situation) signposts him as a displaced male in an environment where he is actively subverting the social structure of the scene. As the lap-dancer continues to grind on his lap, he audibly shouts, 'The music here's brilliant, like! Do you dae food?' Parallels can again be drawn here with Sontag's notes on camp. For Gary, strip clubs are as 'Stag movies seen without lust' (2009: 278). Making Gary effectively asexual is however a potentially problematic choice. While the scope of this article does not allow for lengthy consideration of the nuances of Gary's sexuality, in presenting in Gary a character

who could be said to infantilise male queerness, the series fits into the typos of camp comedy where a non-threatening gay masculinity acts as a form of erasure of overtly gay and sexually assertive male leads. Would Gary played as an openly gay man move beyond the familiarity and societally acceptable comedy of camp to demonstrate a far more challenging and provocative take on Scottish masculinity and sexuality potentially beyond some audiences' comfort zones? Would this have made for an edgier comedy that would be a far harder popular and commercial sell? McHugh is working, however, within the constraints of a commercial television context and is engaged in making popular, accessible comedy. Thus, to move this far beyond popular screen conventions might well have meant his work would not have been picked up for production and broadcast.

Scottish TV Comedy, Gender and Sexuality

Discussions then of the range of issues around gender, sexuality and camp prompted by an exploration of the character of Gary, and the ways that he deals with life in the military, highlight and reinforce that the tradition of the Scottish comedy TV series discussed here offers little or no space for men to be anything other than straight and stereotypically masculine. Equally, there is no point in which men, masculinity and relationships, both with other men and women, are represented as anything other than heteronormative. In fact, the notion of being anything other than a straight, straightforward Scottish male is not only never challenged but in fact is frequently presented as laughable or even ridiculous. It is instructive that one of the most recognised of the sketches which form part of the *Chewin' the Fat* canon and one of the very few to deviate from the template of comic masculinity outlined above features 'the Banter Boys'. The 'boys', James and Gary, delight in discourses and situations which evoke the grittiest most authentic aspects of Glasgow life, for example working-class Glasgow speech - the so called 'banter'. James and Gary themselves are two stereotypically camp men complete with parodic accents which typify the manner and vocabulary of Glaswegians trying to sound refined and well spoken. In appearance James and Gary are strikingly reminiscent of the type of flamboyant queerness hinted at but never quite articulated to be found in the stylings and self-presentation of British television comedians of the 1970s such as John Inman or Larry Grayson. James and Gary mobilise behaviours and discourses around the notion of the stereotypical queen or closeted homosexual, all the while presented to an audience as comic objects of ridicule. Their excessive, over-enunciated tones, elaborate vocabulary and taste for teashops and antiques are frequently contrasted with the talk and behaviour of everyday working-class Glaswegian characters. The gap between the James and Gary's presentation

of self and 'normal' masculine Glaswegian behaviour is the standing joke. What is evident, certainly in *Chewin' The Fat's* treatment of these figures, is that any show of effeminacy is inherently funny or a ridiculous other to dominant modes of heterosexual and normative male presentation of self.

Most surprising is the continuation of this implicit othering of any contrasting type of male presentation also offered by *Burnistoun* and *Limmy's Show*. Both *Burnistoun* and *Limmy* are satirical knowing takes on Scottish life as offered by innovative writers and performers. At the same time, the reservations around what might be categorised as non-masculine behaviours as presented by Hemphill and Kiernan, who in their late forties and fifties are at a pinch of a generation who might conceivably hold less enlightened attitudes toward understandings of how masculinity might be performed and understood remain. For the writers of *Limmy* and *Burnistoun*, both born in the mid 1970s, such attitudes are rather more surprising. In *Burnistoun* a recurrent sketch 'Up Eh Road!' deals with circumstances and situations in which two self-proclaimed working-class Glaswegian men demonstrate their lack of ease in situations not convergent with their understanding of where men like them would be comfortable. Implicit in these encounters is constant fear and anxiety around class, affectation, and anything that might be construed as having any connotations of effeminacy, unmanliness or implicitly any underlying homosexuality. The situations that cause anxiety are variously: a café frequented by students who are seen to be ordering 'fancy' coffees; a café with a foreign name, and finding that they have put the same large bar of chocolate into their basket as the young woman ahead of them in the queue in the shop. They refer to this with horror as 'lassies' chocolate'.

While Limond does 'drag up' in *Limmy's Show!* as for example Tina Turner and the character of former drug addict Jacqueline McCafferty, both are very obvious examples in physical stance and body language of a man dressing up as a woman and making it crystal clear that there is a man underneath the costume and makeup. There is little that is unexpected or subversive in Limond's performance of gender. Dragging up has been a long-time staple of British TV comedy, such as for example the 1970s comedians Les Dawson and Roy Barraclough's performances as female grotesques Cissie and Ada, deployed to parody unattractive, unacceptable or excessive femininities. Limond's Turner and McCafferty work within this paradigm.

One notable exception to this as mentioned earlier is the now almost forgotten and rarely rebroadcast *The High Life* (BBC Two 1994). Starring actor Alan Cumming and his then comedy writing partner Forbes Masson, this series is the one Scottish TV comedy to share common ground with the style, aesthetic and performativity to be found in *Gary: Tank Commander*. *The High Life* features Cumming and Masson as Sebastian Flight and Steve McCracken, two workshy, irreverent air stewards flying with the fictional airline Air Scotia. The series is shot through with surrealism and features theatrical song and dance numbers. Cumming's character in particular is markedly and knowingly camp, obviously and unproblematically gay and in his performance it is his character who is in control: unlike *Chewin' The Fat's* Banter Boys he is the both the director and object of the gaze. The sensibility which inhabits the series is, as in elements of *Gary*, one of parody, play and artifice. This contrasts with the essentially naturalistic quality of even the most parodic of the sketches to be found in *Chewin' The Fat* or *Limmy*. That *The High Life* has not situated itself more firmly within the memory of Scottish comedy television may be more to do with circumstances than any specific attempt to write it out. Cumming's growing reputation meant that a proposed second series, which according to popular accounts was written, did not get made. That said, *The High Life* did not emerge from or have any connections with The Comedy Unit being one the pilots for the BBC's 1990s *Comic Asides* anthology. Its lack of comfortable fit with the dominant traditions and expectations of Scottish TV comedy may also have led to its non-appearance in the historical TV canon.

Gary and other 'Scottishnesses'

This article has concentrated on the way in which *Gary Tank Commander*, most obviously, in the persona of its main character Gary stands apart from the established tradition of Scottish TV comedy. That is, a generally naturalistic presentation of predominantly urban working class, male straight life in Glasgow. Yet, this 'Glaswegian-ness' is also significant when exploring Gary's singularity in the world of Scottish comedy not only in terms of performances of gender and masculinity but where in Scotland Gary is from. An interview in the independent arts and culture magazine *The Skinny* about the 2016 *Gary: Tank Commander* stage show commented that 'In the world of television, Caledonian comedy successes, for the most part, have focussed on Greater Glasgow. McHugh offers that Gary was a rare example of a "Scottish east coast character getting a voice on TV"'. Discussing the second series of *Gary: Tank Commander* on the BBC Scotland website, McHugh commented,

In past decades the west coast has dominated Scottish television comedy. It's certainly time to explore other parts of the country' and 'Gary is very much east coast. To be precise he is a "Fifer from Dalgety Bay'. (Angus 2016)

McHugh's very precise delineation of Gary's origins here allow for a fuller and richer read on the type of world and culture that the character comes from. He is from a small coastal community across the Firth of Forth from Edinburgh – a very different environment to the omnipresent tenements and housing schemes of Glasgow comedy and indeed, a world quite different to the affluent, middle-class Edinburgh district of Morningside from which McHugh himself hails. Dalgety Bay and central Edinburgh are significantly less than an hour distant from each other. McHugh in interview with Edie Stark on BBC Radio Scotland's *Stark Talk* has spoken at length about overhearing conversations on buses from people who are from backgrounds like Gary's and using what he has heard in the creation of Gary⁷. Such specificity adds yet another layer to Gary's character: he is a naïve, good natured 'small town boy' whose optimistic outlook is distinct from the world-weary cynicism of the Glaswegian funny man.

Most importantly, Gary's distinctive accent and frame of reference counter monocultural representations of Scottishness in which synecdochally one identity becomes synonymous with the whole. That lack of representation stands in contrast to English TV comedy which has successfully presented life onscreen from a range of geographical and class perspectives. This has included working-class life in Manchester with *The Royle Family* (2008-2012) and Newcastle with *The Likely Lads* and its later incarnation (1964-74), to the staunchly middle-class London suburbia of *The Good Life* (1975-78). Once again, *Gary: Tank Commander* stands by itself not only for its own achievements but in turning attention on the absences and hegemonies which come to light when comparing the series to other extant comedy representations of Scotland. If the work of The Comedy Unit presents consistent orthodoxies of gender, sexuality and geography, a series like *Gary: Tank Commander* opens the door to work that demonstrates how little current TV comedy represents the variety that is Scotland.

The glaring absence that this article has not covered is that of Scottish women. Aside from wives, girlfriends and sidekicks such as for example Rab C. Nesbitt's wife Mary or Gary's friend Julie, women have played a very minor part in Scottish TV comedy. There are no comedy strands where women play the lead. The same might be said of Scots of other ethnicities, where only Scots Asian writer and actor Sanjeev Kohli who plays shopkeeper Navid in *Still Game* stands for something of the ethnic diversity to be found in 21st century

Scotland. Such findings point to the need for substantial critical work on why women and Scots of other ethnicities have played so little part in Scottish TV comedy to date, and if things within the industry are showing any signs of change.

Conclusion

Gary: Tank Commander stands by itself in comparison with the established cultures of Scottish TV comedy. In selecting the least likely of characters in Dalgety Bay-born Corporal Gary McLintoch to lead a tank unit Greg McHugh satirises, send up and interrogates the conventions of and assumptions about Scottish masculinity which have dominated popular Scottish television. Moreover, in developing a comedy series format using a performance which makes full use of theatricality, parody and camp, McHugh opens the doors on what a Scottish TV comedy series might look like outside of a seemingly default setting of a group of heterosexual working class men drinking and bemoaning their lot in rundown Glasgow pubs. Given the huge popular appetite for the series and the follow up stage show, plus Gary's adoption into the mainstream of Scottish life as in his *Scottish Election Special* mentioned earlier, audiences are clearly extremely receptive to McHugh's creation and the idiosyncratic take it offers on life in the military and the cultures of Scotland it affectionately sends up. As this article highlights, the study of McHugh's work also raises fundamental questions about the narrowness of Scottish TV comedy and lack of connection with the pluralism of Scottish life with which it has up to now mostly failed to engage. First Minister Nicola Sturgeon, in a *Guardian* article of 2016 in the aftermath of the Brexit referendum, spoke to reassure foreign nationals, 'those who do us the honour of wanting to live here,' that they are still welcome in Scotland'.⁸ In the type of contemporary progressive country that Scotland would aspire to be, where Scottishness is not defined by gender, ethnicity, sexual preference or the part of the country you live in, McHugh's comedy creation points the way to a new and more inclusive model Scottish comedy in which all Scottish voices would have a chance to be heard.

REFERENCE LIST.

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Endnotes.

¹ 'I think it's time for something blue and a Baileys!'

² Disidentification seeks to explain the way in which a subject works with and against a culture to which they simultaneously do and do not belong. As Muñoz has it 'Disidentification charts the ways in which identity is enacted by minority subjects who must work with / resist the conditions of (im) possibility that dominant culture generates'. (Muñoz, 328:1999). In the performance of Gary we see enacted the constant oscillation between his own flamboyantly exuberant persona and tastes and the straight laced unbending conventional heteronormative masculinity of life in the Scottish military.

³ Harry Lauder was an internationally famous Scottish music hall star and comedian (1870-1950)

⁴ While Gary Tank Commander was picked up by The Comedy Unit and subsequently broadcast by them it was brought to them by McHugh as a fully formed character and idea

⁵ See Mark Simpson cultural commentator who coined term metrosexual in 'The metrosexual is dead. Long live the 'spornosexual' 'This new wave puts the "sexual" into metrosexuality. In fact, a new term is needed to describe them, these pumped-up offspring of those Ronaldo and Beckham lunch-box ads, where sport got into bed with porn while Mr Armani took pictures.

Let's call them "spornosexuals". (The Daily Telegraph, 10/6/14: Simpson

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/men/fashion-and-style/10881682/The-metrosexual-is-dead.-Long-live-the-spornosexual.html> . (last accessed 1/5/17)

⁶ This adds to a sense of silliness in Gary's decisions, but also reading as a humorous 'in-joke' for those that recognise the double nature of the bad tasting beverage. The particular use of the Scottish dialect and colloquialism can also be noted in Gary's preferred drink of choice when he frequents any bar or pub. Gary confidently requests a 'Baileys and Coke', or, in his own eclectic portmanteau of the two – 'a boke'. This is of course, the onomatopoeic Scots word meaning 'to vomit'.

⁷ Stark Talk 1/12/20912

⁸ Tracey McVeigh 'Europeans will always be Welcome in Scotland' Guardian 26/6/16

<https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/jun/25/view-scotland-leaving-eu-democratically-unacceptable> (last accessed 30/1/2018)