

## RENAISSANCE RE-EXAMINED: THE DIVERSIFICATION OF SCOTTISH PLAYWRITING 1970-2000

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### ABSTRACT

The renaissance of theatre and playwriting in Scotland since 1970 is not to be seen as a single undifferentiated phenomenon and has important antecedents which should not be neglected. In the seventies, the dominant modes focussed either on West Scotland urban working class topics or historical themes revisited and interrogated anew. The emergence of women playwrights in the eighties marked a new diversification of theatrical perspective which led thereafter to a general thematic and dramaturgical variety which reflects and reinforced a perception, developed since 1970, of the variousness of “Scotland” and Scottish identities.

Much recent writing on Scottish theatre suggests that the work of Scottish theatres since 1970 represents a renaissance of particular effectiveness. This is so whether the work is more academic as in Stevenson and Wallace’s 1996 text, *Scottish Theatre since the Seventies*,<sup>1</sup> or journalistic as in Joyce Macmillan’s end-of-century essay in *The Scotsman* reviewing twentieth-century Scottish theatre, “How Scottish Theatre Won the Hundred Years War.”<sup>2</sup> While Macmillan’s title might suggest triumphalism, there is hard evidence that the vitality of this theatrical renaissance is recognised internationally. This may be in the form of the publication in 1999 of Ian Brown’s *Antologija Suvremene Škotske Drame*,<sup>3</sup> the first anthology of contemporary Scottish drama in Croatian, or in 2000 by Unicopli in Milan of *A Mirror up to Scotland*,<sup>4</sup> the first Italian critical study of twentieth-century Scottish theatre. It may also be demonstrated by the widespread international production of new Scottish drama whether toured by Scottish companies, as Sue Glover’s *Bondagers* (1991) was by the Traverse to London, Toronto and Budapest in 1996, or produced by overseas companies. Two examples of the latter from 1999 alone are David Harrower’s *Knives in Hens* (1997),

presented in Cologne, and John Clifford's *Ines de Castro* (1989), produced on Croatian radio. In the light of this, it may be recognised that the case for a dramatic renaissance is well made. Such a perception should not, however, be allowed to leave the impression that all was bleak before 1970, nor that all was unified seamless richness after. This article, therefore, seeks, having reviewed the precursors of the "renaissance," to go beyond this recognition of renaissance and to explore the proposition that Scottish theatre since the seventies is not adequately described by such a single term. It seeks to identify specific strands of work within that umbrella term and to address significant strands within the broad upsurge of theatrical writing and performance of the last thirty years. The diversity of these developments may be seen to reflect a growing diversification of response to the nature of contemporary Scottish society, including social, gender and regional issues and identities, and the dramatic concerns of Scottish playwrights. In this analysis, the article may be seen to imply that the range of achievement in Scottish theatre writing is now such that a clearer discrimination of the elements which underlie and make up that achievement would be timely.

This discussion, of course, does not stand apart from the wider debate concerning contemporary Scottish writing. It has become a commonplace that there has been a renaissance in Scottish letters in recent years. So common has this assertion become that Allan Massie, in a 1999 essay in *The Scotsman*,<sup>5</sup> took serious issue with the whole conception of a current renaissance. Here he argued that such a conception did injustice to the depth and range of Scottish writing and writers in the early part of the twentieth century and concluded:

To point out that there is no contemporary Scottish Renaissance because there was no death is not to dismiss today's writers. But it is to say that ignorance of what has gone before may often prompt excessive praise, and it is, more importantly, to draw attention to the complacency and sometimes unearned self-satisfaction that are now as evident in Scottish cultural life as in our politics.

Of such an argument there is rarely any satisfactory simple resolution, and it is no part of this essay's purpose to address such a large question as a putative current general Scottish literary renaissance. Nevertheless, there is an understandable emphasis on recent achievement in some recent writing on Scottish literature and Massie's point is surely sound: such an emphasis should not be allowed to obscure the great work of earlier writers. In the specific genre of theatre, due credit must be paid to the work of such playwrights as Joe Corrie, Robert McLellan, James Bridie, Ena Lamont Stewart, Robert Kemp and Alexander Reid. This is arguably so since especially McLellan and Reid saw their work trivialised later in their careers. It is almost as if for the next generation of writers, those identified as of the renaissance, a rejection of the previous generation was a necessary process for their contemporary concerns to establish themselves. The exceptions were Ena Lamont Stewart, who was a key figure in the foundation of the Scottish Society of Playwrights in 1973, and later McLellan who was made the first Honorary President of the Society in the late seventies. It is as if there were a general need for the renaissance generation to let go the work of their predecessors in order to revisit their achievements in, for example, the use of language with a new vigour and quite different focus.

With regard to a possible recent Scottish theatrical renaissance, then, landmark events can be identified in the decade between 1963, when the first Traverse building was opened, and 1973, when the Scottish Society of Playwrights was founded, which mark a sea-change in Scottish theatre and theatre writing. This period includes, for example, the launches in 1966 of Clive Perry's regime at the Lyceum which brought to the fore Richard Eyre and Bill Bryden and in 1969 of the regime of Giles Havergal and, soon after, his co-directors, Philip Prowse and Robert David Macdonald, at the Citizens'. It includes the experimental work of Max Stafford-Clark's Traverse Workshop Company, launched in 1969, which gave birth in 1974 to Joint Stock Theatre Company in England, and the 1972 production of the musical, popular and formally innovative *Great Northern Welly Boot Show* (1972). Out of the latter, many developments flowed, including the almost immediate foundation of 7:84 (Scotland) to complement the more formally orthodox 7:84 (England). In this decade alone, the first plays were produced of Bill Bryden, Ian Brown, Tom Buchan, George Byatt, Stewart Conn, Stanley Eveling, Tom Gallagher, John McGrath, Hector Macmillan and W. Gordon Smith, to name but a representative, and representatively male, sample. In the history of artistic movements, dates and the identity of movements themselves can be arbitrary. It seems clear, however, that, while one might dispute the validity of individual dates as marking the launch of the renaissance of modern Scottish theatre, the decade from 1963 to 1973 is particularly clearly defined as marking its beginning. Indeed, it contains an even wider range than present space allows of historic events that make the claim for that renaissance sustainable. In general, as that decade progressed and the cumulative effect of the elements within it had an impact, so their synergetic relationship led to the upsurge of creative energy that can with some security be described as the Scottish theatrical renaissance of the last three decades of the twentieth century.

Any renaissance emerges from a long period of gestation, rising in a variety of ways from a natural, but not always expected, development out of earlier work and in other ways as a reaction against what has gone before. In understanding the diversity of writing and writers in the last thirty years, therefore, it is necessary to consider the foundation on which the renaissance was built. In this it is necessary to recognise a key strand in recent Scottish theatrical scholarship, whether Donald Campbell's *Playing for Scotland*,<sup>6</sup> Bill Findlay's *A History of Scottish Theatre*,<sup>7</sup> or the work of Alasdair Cameron, *passim*.<sup>8</sup> This has been the emphasis on understanding the role of performance and performers rather than, or beside, that of texts and writers in the history of Scottish theatre. The roots of modern Scottish playwriting are not only found in the work of such playwrights of the mid-twentieth century as Corrie, McLellan, Lamont Stewart, Bridie, Kemp and Reid. They are also found in response, however second hand, to the work of the Scottish National Players between the world wars (1921-47),<sup>9</sup> the widespread influence of the Scottish Community Drama Association (SCDA, founded 1926) from the twenties on, the experiments of Glasgow Unity (formed 1941) in the forties, the influence of the Edinburgh International Festival from 1947 and the creativity of the Gateway Company between 1953 and 1965.

In broad terms, the work of the Scottish National Players and the related SCDA movement tended to be focussed on a rather idealised rural and romantic view of Scotland, although within the SCDA movement it was possible to find work more

focussed on contemporary issues. It was, however, the Glasgow Unity, comprising one professional and three amateur companies, whose professional company in particular explored contemporary life in the West of Scotland. Meantime the influence of the Edinburgh Festival brought to Scotland contemporary world drama from many traditions. Within that international context, it presented, though somewhat intermittently, Scottish drama, whether, as in 1948 and subsequently, Kemp's version of Lindsay's *Ane Satire of the Thrie Estaitis*, or such new drama as, in 1960, Sidney Goodsir Smith's *The Wallace*. Meantime the Gateway Theatre Company in Edinburgh developed a focus on new writing, with an emphasis on writing in Scots. All these phenomena by the nineteen-sixties had contributed to thinking about the potential of theatre in Scottish culture.

Of the authors mentioned, much of the work of McLellan, Kemp and Reid seemed to engage with the romantic myths of history in one way or another. Their work explored historic themes and, in the case of Kemp, also set into Scots contexts classic plays by Molière. It may well be that they were providing, in a sense, a historic drama that did not exist in textual form for Scottish theatre. McLellan, for example, explores in *The Flouers o Edinburgh* (1948), such themes as the historic cultural conflict between the Scottish Enlightenment and new Anglo-Scottish, "British," Imperialism and the conflict between the Scots and English languages at the time of David Hume, who famously wished to extirpate "scotticisms" from his texts, but himself spoke Scots. Certainly Katja Lenz has observed that a motivation for this type of historical drama "may lie in its usability as a vehicle for asserting the national culture, for marking it off from the English or the joint British one, by demonstrating the existence of a separate history."<sup>10</sup> Such plays as the early *Toom Byres* (1936) and *Jamie the Saxt* (1937) and even the later *The Flouers o Edinburgh* can be seen to fit such a practice. Further, it can be argued that Kemp's translations of Molière have become classic for the modern Scottish stage, *Let Wives Tak Tent* (1947) in particular, revived in 1981 in its first season by the Scottish Theatre Company in its aspiration to become a national theatre company for Scotland. What these plays did not in general represent, however, is an attempt to address directly the contemporary problems of the industrialised Scotland of the first half of the twentieth century. Alexander Reid may be seen to be conscious of this when he makes his famous statement about Scots language and the stage, and foresees the stage use of contemporary urban Scots:

The return to Scots is a return to meaning and sincerity. We can only grow from our own roots and our roots are not English [...] If we are to fulfil our hope that Scotland may some day make a contribution to World Drama [...] we can only do so by cherishing, not repressing our national peculiarities (including our language), though whether a Scottish national drama, if it comes to birth, will be written in Braid Scots or the speech, redeemed for literary purposes, of Argyle Street, Glasgow, or the Kirkgate, Leith, is anyone's guess.<sup>11</sup>

In this context, the work of Corrie and Lamont Stewart, who was writing for Glasgow Unity, can be seen as significant alternatives to historical and romantic drama. Corrie's work of the twenties was concerned with such issues as workplace conflict, as in *In Time o Strife* (1927). While much of Corrie's later work became focussed on

lighter one-act plays for the SCDA market, his pioneering attempts to deal with contemporary industrial and social issues remain significant. As Alasdair Cameron notes, *Dawn* (1923) “[was] banned [by the censor] at the start of the Second World War” (Cameron 152). When the Glasgow Unity Theatre’s professional company after the war presented such work as Lamont Stewart’s *Men Should Weep* (1947), George Munro’s *Gold in His Boots* (1947) or Robert McLeish’s *The Gorbals Story* (1948), they returned to his topic of industrial Scotland and its problems and opportunities. This time, however, for them there was a particular and natural focus on the West Coast and specifically urban Glaswegian contexts.

Bridie’s work at this time was seen by many, whether justly or not, as standing outside this, as a particular inflection of romantic or even Gothic drama, as in such plays as *Mr Bolfray* (1943), or focussed in part on the West End, his *Daphne Laureola* (1949) being a token of this. Alasdair Cameron comments the “notion of the well-made play [...] was to be such a burden for James Bridie in his attempts to please the West End” (Cameron 151). This may be too harsh a summary of Bridie’s work. He was driven by his personal experiences during the First World War when, as a doctor, he went to deal with casualties of that extraordinary conflict. As a man of letters and inquisitor of social values, he was certainly shocked by the inhumanity of humanity. His plays appear motivated by a doctor’s interest in understanding human psychology and, particularly, what might be meant by “Scottishness.” His plays reflect a fascination with psychology when the term was only a few decades old, examining human nature within the context of a new, and then undeveloped, branch of medicine, particularly Jung’s analysis of human behaviour. Bridie’s approach is seen in many of his plays, the *Baikie Charivari* (1952), for example, being imbued with Jungian psychology. This may not have made his plays any more successful theatrically, but it may explain the individuality of Bridie’s dramatic aspirations.

Leaving aside the special case of Bridie, however, as the renaissance got under way, earlier playwriting on Scottish topics had displayed a dichotomy. This was between, on the one hand, romantic and historic drama which, however imprecisely, is seen to include the work of McLellan and his colleagues and, on the other, contemporary, usually Glasgow-based, drama, West Coast, industrial and urbanised realist. Outside this paradigm sits Bridie whose work is now somewhat neglected: only two plays by him, for example, were presented in Scottish professional theatres in the nineties;<sup>12</sup> it may be that the time for a re-assessment of his work is due.

At the beginning of the seventies, there seemed two ways forward: one was to adopt the progressive urban approach, using the demotic of the cities as foreshadowed by Reid; the other was to reclaim the problematics of Scottish history. In this process, two plays provide an initial paradigm for this dichotomy. They are Stewart Conn’s *The Burning* (1971) and *The Great Northern Welly Boot Show* (1972), written by a team of writers including John McGrath, Tom Buchan and George Byatt, with songs by Billy Connolly. The former was presented by Perry’s Royal Lyceum in 1971; the latter by a scratch company which included such performers as Bill Paterson, Kenny Ireland, Alex Norton, John Bett and Connolly himself, with design by John Byrne and Tom McGrath as musical director, in 1972 in both Glasgow and Edinburgh. The former was a dramatic exploration of the North Berwick witch trials, exploring issues of tolerance and realpolitik in the context of the reign of James VI.

Written largely in Scots, it presented a cross section of society. It may be seen as foreshadowing a genre of Scottish playwrights' use of history as a means of examining issues of identity and present concern with liberty and oppression which have been examined in some detail by Brown elsewhere.<sup>13</sup> Where their predecessors used history as a discourse in which to present a comic or epic vision of Scotland's past which rarely questioned the nature of the ideologies implicit in these versions, or their received values, the genre of post-1970 playwriting on Scottish historical themes is typified by a questioning of the myths and values embodied in traditional versions of Scottish history, and so of Scottish identity. Plays within this broad, though diverse, genre move far beyond the simply historical as represented in the earlier works, of say McLellan, and include much work of the seventies such as C. P. Taylor's *Columba* (1973), Brown's *Carnegie* (1973) and *Mary* (1977), Conn's *Thistlewood* (1975) and Donald Campbell's *The Jesuit* (1976). As the first four of the five plays mentioned demonstrate, however, there often accompanied this re-examination of history — some might argue necessarily — a re-examination and free experimentation in theatrical mode and dramaturgical construction. This line of productions continues, although it has become more complex and problematised as Brown and Bell have sought to show.<sup>14</sup> *The Great Northern Welly Boot Show* marks, however, a new development with some links to the work of Unity. It combines dramatic scenes, song and direct audience address to satirise the discredited business processes that had led to the crisis of Upper Clyde Shipbuilders at that time. It presented in comic form the workers' occupation of the yard transmuted in the show to the Great Northern Welly (Wellington) Boot factory. It celebrated the possibility of direct action and demotic language and was immensely popular, selling out on its Edinburgh run. In addressing contemporary socio-political and industrial issues, it marked and foreshadowed a new vitality in the seventies.

This vitality may be seen in Bill Bryden's *Willie Rough* (1972), *Benny Lynch* (1974) and *Civilians* (1981), Roddy Macmillan's *The Bevellers* (1973), Hector Macmillan's *The Sash* (1974), John McGrath's *The Game's a Bogey* (1974) and *Little Red Hen* (1975), Billy Connolly's *An Me wi a Bad Leg tae* (1976), George Byatt's *Kong Lives* (1976) and Tom McGrath's *The Hard Man* (1977). The West Coast focus of this work dealing with contemporary or recent events is clear. It formed the perception commonly held in the seventies that Edinburgh theatres, specifically the Royal Lyceum and the Traverse, were producing Glasgow's plays, while the Citizens' was dealing in other dramatic experiments not to do with the playwriting of its home city. What this work did seem, however, also to demonstrate was that Alexander Reid's hope had been fulfilled. Even if the dominant voice was more Glaswegian, of Sauchiehall Street rather than the Kirkgate, Leith, that voice was strongly to the fore. Indeed, critical discussion has since focussed on this phenomenon as representing a new sentimentalisation of Scottish experience, often industrial, political or workplace, to complement such general, and sometimes abused, terms as *the kailyard* or *tartanry*.

This phenomenon has been called *Clydesideism* and has been characterised by a number of observers. John Caughie argues that Clydesideism is "based on working class experiences which, since the twenties, have seemed to offer the only real and consistent basis for a Scottish national culture."<sup>15</sup> The term describes a school of writing concerned with Clydeside male working class behaviour wrapped up in macho

West of Scotland traditions. Angus Calder describes it as “the boast of prideful men, owners and workers alike, that the burly male Scot made best whatever heavy objects the world might require for large-scale slaughter.”<sup>16</sup> While it would be harsh to describe all these plays as falling into that category, it would be fair to say that, despite the bleakness and violence of such plays as McGrath’s *The Hard Man*, many do not escape flirtation with its neo-romantic working class attractions. Joyce McMillan, commenting on such plays at the Traverse in the seventies described them as showing, “a whole area of male working-class experience.”<sup>17</sup>

Even the historical drama of the period showed a working class interest on the whole. Macmillan’s *The Rising* (1972) is a *locus classicus* of this, revisiting and re-viewing historical events from the perspective of working people, and perhaps risking sentimentalising that perspective. Only McGrath’s *The Cheviot, the Stag and the Black Black Oil* (1973) escaped the topicality of the Central Belt and, yet, is still very concerned with the fate of working people and their living environment. As Brown has observed (“Plugged” 85), this approach is very much in line with the historiography of revealing hidden history to be seen in the work of such figures as Christopher Hill or E.P. Thompson. The present authors would add that it reflects also the revitalisation of post-war Scottish historical studies under such figures as Geoffrey Barrow, Gordon Donaldson and Archie Duncan. In short, whether the plays in the first decade of the renaissance fall into the historic or urban industrialised paradigm, they tend on balance to focus on working class urban experience and to use Scots. And they are all written by men.

This might suggest that the first phase of the renaissance can be seen to focus not inclusively on the wide range of Scottish experience, but narrowly on either West Coast urban experience or the re-examination of historical themes. The redefining of hidden history in theatrically experimental ways to examine issues of political liberty and national identity or the use of more traditional dramaturgical forms to explore a relatively narrow thematic range concerned with male, working class West Coast issues implies a narrow theatrical and dramaturgic palette. If this were all, of course, the renaissance might arguably be seen as conservative. To leave the matter at this would, however, travesty a complex situation.

While the dominant mode of new writing during the seventies may reasonably be defined as already outlined, other strands of work were discernible in that decade. The work of Stanley Eveling, Tom Gallagher and C.P. Taylor explored aspects of the nature of ethical truth and idealism in a manner that followed an almost Shavian and, for Gallagher particularly, an Ibsenite concern with the nature of truth. In general, while other writers occasionally experimented with form, Eveling, Gallagher and, to some extent, Taylor chose established dramaturgic modes to explore complex issues of personal ethics and belief in a manner recognisably part of the discourse of serious post-war drama on either side of the Atlantic. When they experimented most boldly with form, it was often in response to a specific theatrical stimulus: Eveling with the workshop-derived *Our Sunday Times* (1973), for example, for Stafford-Clark’s Traverse Workshop Company, Gallagher in writing the musical *Stage Door Canteen* (1978) for Joan Knight’s Perth Theatre, Taylor at the Traverse with the dance-choreographed *Columba* (1973) under Mike Ockrent’s directorship and the epic *Walter* (1977) under Chris Parr’s. In Taylor’s case, of course, this work culminated in *Good* (1981) for the

Royal Shakespeare Company. This play's dramaturgy presents a gradual intrusion of the world of music as an escapism which allows the steady, but unperceived, usurpation by Nazism of the life and mind of a "good man." Others already mentioned worked across a broader band of concerns than their colleagues did in the seventies. Tom McGrath's *Laurel and Hardy* (1976), for example, explored the relationship of the great cinema clowns, while his *Animal* (1979) explored human and primate relationships with stunning theatrical originality and a vision not entirely favouring the human version. Ian Brown's *The Fork* (1976), presented by Gay Sweatshop in London and Edinburgh, explored issues of gender politics and sexuality a decade before other Scottish playwrights dealt directly with these issues. John Morris's *How Mad Tulloch Was Taken Away* (1976) examined class conflict in the army. Howard Purdie's *A Fistful of East Wind* (1977) explored the pretensions of middle class Edinburgh. Stewart Conn's *Play Donkey* (1977), while focussed on a working class Leith mercenary caught up in the Angolan War, shows a concern with larger political, racial and international issues which his later work would follow up.<sup>18</sup> These individual plays, however, tend to be apart from the mainstream of the renaissance of the seventies. Nevertheless, they demonstrate that although there were two dominant modes then, they were not all pervasive and indeed that certain playwrights, such as Brown and Conn, were able to write in the dominant modes and still explore, in other plays, individual avenues.

The confidence generated among practitioners by the end of the seventies that Scottish theatre writing was developing a new found assurance and range was supported, then, by two apparently paradoxical, but actually interdependent, factors. One was that many new plays had been welcomed in the seventies which were written within either a West Coast male, urban, working class or a revisionist historical mode. These two dominant modes allowed the development of a sophistication of approach to their sometimes limited material which sustained general confidence and matured dramatic skills among Scottish playwrights. The other was that two further strands of work complemented the energy of these dominant developments. One of these was the work of individualist playwrights like Eveling, Gallagher and Taylor who followed their own separate ways of writing. The other was the writing of those capable of working in one or other of the dominant modes, but also of exploring more diverse aspects of Scottish life, whether focussing on East Coast life, on other class groups, or exploring other moralities and sexualities. The self-assurance of these developments was so well established that a new surge of activity could emerge in the early eighties and continue, as we shall see, during the nineties. In those two decades, a new breadth and range of dramatic material was explored by Scottish playwrights, not losing the main modes developed in the seventies, but complementing them with a far greater variety of modes of dramatic expression. Nevertheless, it is true that this first decade of the renaissance was dominated by the male, the heterosexual, the Central Belt, the urban, the industrialised and, with the exception of the Traverse Workshop Company and 7:84 in its early years, the building-based company. It also paid little attention, except for episodes in McGrath's *The Cheviot, the Stag and the Black Black Oil*, to Scotland's third language, Gaelic, although, in 1978, a Gaelic theatre company, Fir Chlis, was established, only to collapse within three years. Arguably the key development in the renaissance in the eighties was the enlargement of the scope



and themes of the seventies to diversify into those aspects of Scottish experience not foregrounded by the dominations of the seventies.

One clear example of the widening of the scope of Scottish theatre was the emergence of new plays by women. In fact, Ena Lamont Stewart had been one of the initiators of the foundation of the Scottish Society of Playwrights in 1973 and her new plays, *Walkies Time for a Black Poodle* and *Towards Evening* were presented in 1975 as part of the Scottish Society of Playwrights Netherbow season. This production of new plays by a woman was nevertheless a rare event in the professional Scottish Theatre until the eighties.

Sue Glover's plays are often on historical themes, a woman appropriating a seventies male mode. They include *An Island in Largo* (1980) which deals with the history of the original of Robinson Crusoe, a Scottish sailor, Alexander Selkirk, from Largo in Fife and the subsequent use of his history by Daniel Defoe. Through the latter figure, she hints at the role of the playwright in using, adapting and reinterpreting history through her own imagination. Glover here achieves a dramatic sense of the very texture of daily living, which she develops further in her two subsequent historical plays, *The Straw Chair* (1988) and *Bondagers* (1991). Set on St Kilda, the former deals with questions of male power and political corruption in eighteenth century Scotland and of the mutual incomprehension and confrontation of cultures, whether between a middle class Edinburgh minister and his wife and a noble lady or between the world view of the Edinburgh folk and the Gaelic universe of Oona, startled by the existence of trees on her one visit to Skye. Her happy union of animism and Christianity and her very language mark her as of another world. Glover's capacity to combine the realisation of difference, female versus male and class versus class, comes to high fruition in *Bondagers* which follows the cycle of the agricultural year from one February Hiring Fair to the next. The play addresses directly the ways in which male systems of power, whether economic, political or sexual, oppress women and deprive them of a freedom of action and untrammelled integrity. Glover's invention combines historical re-creation and contemporary comment with skilful understatement and remarkable directness. It finds a poetic creativity in its derivation of a theatrical Scots based not simply on a specific dialect, although she drew heavily on Borders dialect.

Liz Lochhead has explored a variety of issues concerned with the place of women in modern society in her plays. Her most famous is *Mary Queen of Scots Got Her Head Chopped Off* (1987), which deals, with great theatrical invention, with the myths of the conflicts of Mary and her English cousin, Elizabeth I. This play draws on music, poetry and dance to deconstruct the myths both of womanhood and of religion and nationality in contemporary Britain. She has also contributed a highly successful translation into Scots of *Tartuffe* (1986) demonstrating a point often made that Molière's French, which is regularly translated badly into English, works very well when put into Scots. Her earlier *Blood and Ice* (1982) and *Dracula* (1985), both theatrically explore women's sexuality and power in a world of male hegemony. Her *Britannia Rules* (1998) explores class and gender differences in Scotland immediately after the Second World War as a metaphor of contemporary divides. *Perfect Days* (1998) presents with lively comic insight the quandary of the successful professional woman faced with the vagaries of love, lust and the desire, after a life of self concern, to have a child before her biological time-clock makes it too late.

The developing cultural diversity within Scottish culture is strikingly represented by two further women playwrights, both from the Italian-Scottish community. Marcella Evaristi in, for example, *Commedia* (1982) has as lively and satiric stance, perhaps one to be understood as a likely product of the experience of a member of relatively new group within a community, who lives within two cultures and observes both with a wry eye. Anne-Marie di Mambro, meantime, has written a wide range of plays on contemporary Scottish society including *Tally's Blood* (1990) which explores the interaction both pre- and post-war of the Italian tradition within Scottish families ("Tally" is the Scots familiar word for "Italian") and *Brothers of Thunder* (1994) which presented the moral conflict between a Catholic priest and a young homosexual student.

Sharman Macdonald has had most of her work premiered in London where she lives. Her first major play, *When I Was a Girl I Used To Scream and Shout* (1984), explores the tensions, fears and satisfactions lived through by a pubescent girl in a 1950s Scottish seaside town. In this play, she addresses such recurrent themes in her work as the relationship of mothers and daughters and the pain of the ties which hold them and yet prize them apart. These issues recur in her more recent work, including *The Winter Guest* (1995), which is now also a film.

It is clear that one of the renaissances within the theatrical renaissance, following the earlier work of such as Ena Lamont Stewart, Joan Ure and Ada F. Kay, is that of women playwrights. Their concerns have provided dramatic works that, while sometimes still using historical material, are clearly not male-dominated. Nor are their plays especially centred on the Central Belt and, although Rona Munro, for one, has written about working women, they are absolutely not based in industrial mythology or Clydesideism. Their variety has enriched and extended the range of Scottish theatre far beyond the apparent potential of the seventies. It may even be argued that the emergence of women playwrights and the opening of perspectives they have brought to Scottish theatre have allowed playwrights in general to be more open, to escape older categories and to explore more freely a wider range of topics and theatrical methods. Certainly, their work may be seen to have fed and enlarged the imagination, dramatic methods and sympathies of Scottish theatre.

New men writers with such new perspectives, then, have come through in the last twenty years as well. Peter Arnott's revisiting of a topic of Bryden's in *The Boxer Benny Lynch* (1984) illustrates a broader social vision and less macho view of the world than Bryden's. A particularly important example of a broader, less Clydeside focussed imagination has been John Clifford, an adopted, or civic, Scot, like Stanley Eveling and John McGrath, who rose to prominence with his *Losing Venice* (1985). This was the hit of the Edinburgh Festival of that year as it explored, through an episode in Spanish-Italian history, current issues of power, authority and political domination with a stunning theatricality and a pared down, almost poetic, use of language. The play seems to use history in the manner of the seventies, but now does so no longer by simply revisiting an episode of Scottish history. Alongside his *Ines de Castro* (1989), *Losing Venice* demonstrates Clifford's fierce commitment to the exploration of the corruption of power and the desperate search for the freedom of human identity faced by the potential of powerful institutions to oppress, torture and suppress the human spirit. While these plays deal with these topics using historical material, Clifford's later work explores these themes in a variety of contexts. He him-

self has described his use of historical material as a “kind of science fiction backwards”<sup>19</sup> and the critic Sarah Rutherford has noted that, in Clifford’s plays, “as in good science fiction, the audience is transported to another place and time to look at the world from a different angle.”<sup>20</sup>

Meantime, such new playwrights as Iain Heggie and Simon Donald have written highly provocative plays on contemporary themes making use of contemporary Scots language. Heggie’s *A Wholly Healthy Glasgow* (1987), for example, deals with a chaotic afternoon in a health club and the relationship between the homosexual older attendant and his younger colleague. The play is full of a sly wit and situational humour. A more direct play in this mode is Donald’s *The Life of Stuff* (1992), a play about rave parties, drugs and manic capitalistic business manoeuvres in the Scottish Central Belt. In both these cases, the vitality of language derived from urban usage is combined with a directness of expression, a poetic use of swearing and direct look at those on the brink of the underclass in contemporary society.

Of the younger generation of women, one of the most lively is Rona Munro, whose exploration of a variety of contemporary issues including, in *Saturday at the Commodore* (1989), issues of female sexuality and lesbianism, has marked her out as one of the more probing and interesting of the present generation of writers for the stage. Her *Bold Girls* (1990) is, as the German critic Peter Zenzinger has noted, “about different reactions to women suffering as a result of male savagery. Set against the background of the Belfast Troubles, the play views politically motivated violence as an extension of domestic violence, with women as the ultimate victims.”<sup>21</sup> While this might make the play seem somehow rooted in cliché, in fact it deals, with humour and fresh passion, with issues of contemporary importance relating particularly to the then overwhelming conflict in Northern Ireland. Her *Maiden Stone* (1995), set in North East Scotland, also deals with aspects of, in Zenzinger’s phrase, “solidarity among women” (129). It presents us with a number of mysteries of being, the mystery of the pursuit of art, the strangeness of the non-urban pre-industrial for a society now urbanised and post-industrial. Here two charismatic women, the strolling player and the Highland wet nurse, come together to find a community of feeling in a world in which the desires and experience of women are demonised, as in the legend of the Maiden Stone itself.

Into the nineties a new generation of exciting younger playwrights emerged. David Greig is one such lively and thought-provoking younger playwright, exploring the experience of young European-minded Scots. His *One Way Street* (1995) explores mainland European experience, while *The Architect* (1996) examines the pressures on a young Edinburgh man. Here, his successful architect father strives to build better apartment blocks and a materially successful, if emotionally sterile, life, while he rebels against the emotionally numbing life and architecture of his father. Greig’s *Caledonia Dreaming* (1997) was being written as the event it conveyed, the 1997 General Election, was under way and his *The Speculator* (1999) returns to historical topics to explore the events surrounding the adventurist career of the Scots banker visionary and fraud, John Law. John Binnie in such plays as *Accustomed to Her Face* (1993) explores the excitements, rewards, sorrows and dignity of same sex love and the traumas of growth to emotional and sexual maturity. David Harrower in *Knives in Hens* (1997) presents the complex politics of male/female love in a primal rural con-

text. Chris Hannan in his earlier *Elizabeth Gordon Quinn* (1985) and later *Shining Souls* (1996), the first set in the First World War, the latter contemporary, explores from a particular women-focussed view the delusions and aspirations of working class Glaswegians. Stephen Greenhorn's *Passing Places* (1997) has brought a new perspective, fresh humour and zesty vitality to writing for the Scottish stage. His heroes, in their Scottish theatrical version of the international road movie form, make a pilgrimage away from the post-industrial Central Belt, the location of *Willie Rough*, through the Highlands and around the country and nation. They carry with them a surfboard, a symbol of free and easy escapist life, until that false symbol is destroyed. Then, one is ready to travel further, expanding his identity outwards, while the other returns home, enlarged by his experience and ready to participate in a renewed and redefined Scotland.

This expansion of identity has taken place within the structure of Scottish theatre too. After the building-based dominance of provision of the seventies, the eighties and nineties have seen a flowering of touring companies, both Scottish Arts Council funded and not. From *Borderline*, with its remit to serve mainly Ayrshire, and *Wildcat*, an offshoot of 7:84, both founded in the latter part of the seventies, through such lively companies of the eighties and beyond as *Communicado* and *Clyde Unity* to such experimental companies of the nineties as *Boilerhouse*, the women's company *Stellar Quines*, and the new Gaelic company, *Tosg*, the variety of provision has been very great.

The journey travelled within this theatrical renaissance may be marked by the response of the leading newspaper critic and cultural and political commentator, Joyce Macmillan to Bill Bryden's *The Big Picnic* (1994). This play, produced in the Govan Harland and Wolff Engine Shed where his *The Ship* was produced in 1990, may be seen to mark a reiteration of many of Bryden's themes. It deals with mythically and ideologically fraught topics, of which the First World War, Scots maleness, Caledonian militarism, and Glaswegian comradeship are only four. His concern with the individual emotional journey is seen again, as is his concern to address major events in the folk history of Scotland. Macmillan's review makes it clear how much has developed since Bryden wrote his great success *Willie Rough*, in which broadly similar topics can be discerned:

love him or hate him, Bryden reaches parts of the Scottish public other theatre directors cannot touch, and that achievement demands recognition. But [...] I have to say that I find the powerful public response to Bryden's work more depressing than encouraging: for his *The Big Picnic* [...] strikes me as one of the most shallow and inadequate accounts of (the First World War) I have ever seen. [...] war is a much uglier thing than Bryden conjures up here, more serious, more profound, more filthy, more terrible, and far, far more wrong.<sup>22</sup>

Her reaction may be seen as a reflection not only of the critical distance travelled since the premiere of *Willie Rough* in 1972, but the theatrical diversification now well established.

Yet, if one play were to be chosen to represent much of the drama of the seventies, the first decade of this Scottish theatrical renaissance, it would surely be *Willie*

*Rough*, set in the West of Scotland, male-dominated, industrialised and urbanised, seeking to explore historical and political questions in an intense way, but one which defined Scottish concerns. As the eighties and nineties emerge, such themes are still developed, but the renaissance is greatly widened and enriched. Clifford's *Ines de Castro*, for example, marks the new internationalism of the eighties, a recognition that Scotland is still the strongly European culture it was and that its links are as much with the rest of the world as within the post-imperial British state. *Mary Queen of Scots Got Her Head Chopped Off* reflects this opening of perspective in another way as it enjoys the potential and variety of theatrical form and marks the development of self-confidence of a new generation of women playwrights. *The Maiden Stone*, following pioneering work by Sue Glover, opens up a wider Scotland, rural, non-industrialised, yet part of the larger modern conception of a vibrant and inclusive Scotland. Following the work of McGrath, Brown, Conn and others in the seventies, an interest in theatrical deconstruction to vibrant effect is to be found in work by Lochhead, Greig and a variety of company writers working for Wildcat. An interest in issues and politics of sexuality and gender is to be found in work of Munro and Binnie. Younger writers like Greig with his *The Speculator* and older writers like Brown, with his most recent play *Margaret* (2000) about the eponymous saint and queen, continue to explore the political and cultural ramifications of historical topics while avoiding the romanticism found earlier in the twentieth century. These are only a few examples of the enlargement and diversification of the theatrical discourse which represents an empowerment of the many cultural identities to be found within the Scottish theatrical ecology and modern Scotland itself. *Passing Places*, with its road movie format, its celebration of a range of Scotlands within and beyond the Central Belt, full of ironic surprises, from the English incomers who love and protect the Highlands to the drug stash in the surf board, symbol of healthy outdoor activity, may be seen to epitomise, but not summarise or exhaust, the potential and variety of these developments and diversities.

Peter Zenzinger, made the point in 1996, about new Scottish plays that while they "are informed by an artistic vision that is distinctly Scottish, they have largely moved beyond the self-conscious Scottishness of the earlier dramatic tradition, which often hampered its artistic realisation and limited its appeal outside Scotland" (125). The vitality of contemporary Scottish theatre can be seen to be a key expression, and now arguably a determinant, of national cultural identity, or to be more precise, identities, male and female, both beyond and within the Central Belt, heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, and transsexual, Scots, English and Gaelic language based. This is a remarkable achievement. What is more the cultural identities expressed are more and more clearly based on a modern international world-view which sees Scottish themes and concerns as part and parcel of, and engaged in creative interaction with, the international stage and human experience world-wide. Alex Reid hoped in 1958 "that Scotland may some day make a contribution to World Drama" (xiii). Such as that contribution is, it is based on a wide-ranging set of identities arising out of the theatrical renaissance of the last thirty years, a diversified renaissance ready for deeper and more complex analysis than has been possible here.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Randall Stevenson and Gavin Wallace eds., *Scottish Theatre since the Seventies* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1996).
- <sup>2</sup> Joyce Macmillan, "How Scottish Theatre Won the Hundred Years War," *The Scotsman* 22 Dec. 1999: 17.
- <sup>3</sup> Ian Brown, ed., *Antologija Suvremene Škotske Drame* [An Anthology of Contemporary Scottish Drama] (Zagreb: Hrvatski Centar, ITI, 1999).
- <sup>4</sup> Valentina Poggi, Maggie Rose, and Emanuela Rossini, eds., *A Mirror Up to Scotland: A Collection of Essays on Twentieth Century Scottish Theatre* (Milan: Unicopli, 2000).
- <sup>5</sup> Allan Massie, "The Cosy-club Renaissance," *The Scotsman* 17 Aug. 1999: 17.
- <sup>6</sup> Donald Campbell, *Playing for Scotland* (Edinburgh: Mercat, 1996).
- <sup>7</sup> Bill Findlay, *A History of Scottish Theatre* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1998).
- <sup>8</sup> For example, Alasdair Cameron, "Theatre in Scotland: 1214 to the Present," *Scotland: A Concise Cultural History*, ed. Paul H. Scott (Edinburgh: Mainstream, 1993) 145-158.
- <sup>9</sup> Following their failure to revive their activities fully after the Second World War and their last performance, in Lanark, in 1947, the Scottish National Players wound themselves up in 1950.
- <sup>10</sup> Katja Lenz, "Modern Scottish Drama: Snakes in Iceland — Drama in Scotland?," *Zeitschrift für Anglistik und Amerikanistik* XLIV.4 (1996): 309.
- <sup>11</sup> Alexander Reid, "Foreword," *Two Scots Plays* (London: Collins, 1958) xii-xiii.
- <sup>12</sup> *Mr Bolfray*, Pitlochry Festival Theatre, 1996, and *The Anatomist*, Royal Lyceum Theatre, Edinburgh, 1999, represent the only two such productions the authors have been able to trace.
- <sup>13</sup> Ian Brown, "Plugged into History: The Sense of the Past in Scottish Theatre," *Scottish Theatre since the Seventies*, ed. Stevenson and Wallace (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1996).
- <sup>14</sup> Ian Brown and Barbara Bell, "A Duty to History: Contemporary Approaches to History and Cultural Identities in Scottish Theatre," *A Mirror Up to Scotland: A Collection of Essays on Twentieth Century Scottish Theatre*, ed. Valentina Poggi, Maggie Rose, and Emanuela Rossini (Milan: Unicopli, 2000). [Forthcoming]
- <sup>15</sup> Quoted in David McCrone et al., "Scotch Reels," *Scotland: The Brand* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1995) 66.
- <sup>16</sup> Angus Calder, *Revolving Culture* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1994) 9.
- <sup>17</sup> Joyce McMillan, *The Traverse Theatre Story* (London: Methuen, 1988) 79-80. The authors are grateful to Denis Agnew for reminding them of this comment and the previous two references.
- <sup>18</sup> This play, besides Purdie's *Fistful of East Wind* and Brown's *Mary*, was presented during a particularly creative period at the Royal Lyceum under Stephen Macdonald's artistic direction (1976-79). Then, according to Macdonald, he more than achieved his policy of having at least a third of his programme comprise new or recent Scottish plays, whether home-produced or touring productions enabled by his company. He suggests that by this measure over twenty new plays were presented in three years at Edinburgh's major repertory producing house. Conversation with Macdonald, Edinburgh, 25 March 2000.
- <sup>19</sup> John Clifford, "Author's postscript," *Made in Scotland*, ed. Ian Brown and Mark Fisher (London: Methuen, 1995) 55.
- <sup>20</sup> Sarah C. Rutherford, "Fantasists and Philosophers," *Scottish Theatre since the Seventies*, ed. Stevenson and Wallace (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1996) 121.

<sup>21</sup> Peter Zenzinger, "The New Wave," *Scottish Theatre since the Seventies*, ed. Randall Stevenson and Gavin Wallace (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1996) 129.

<sup>22</sup> *Scotland on Sunday* 25 Sep. 1994: 12.