

IAN BROWN, Kingston upon Thames

"Arts first; politics later:" Scottish Theatre as a Recurrent Crucible of Cultural Change

It is becoming a cliché to observe that there has been a renaissance in Scottish theatre since the 1970s (Brown 2007, 283). It is certainly true that many of the crosscurrents in contemporary Scottish culture have found expression in a revitalised drama sector. This has explored a variety of lively issues, not least the use of Scots language, the revitalisation and reshaping of Gaelic-language drama, radical political themes in the 1970s, the foregrounding, particularly since 1980, when Marcella Evaristi's *Mouth-pieces* and *Hard to Get* and Sue Glover's *The Seal Wife* were premièred, of the writing of women and, since the 1990s, radical formal experiments. All these creative impulses can be seen to underlie the launch of Scotland's first National Theatre in 2006. Arguably, this vitality is linked to major recent changes in the culture and indeed the political settlement in Scotland. The quotation in the title – "Arts first; politics later" – is from the Scottish Parliament's second Presiding Officer, the SNP politician George Reid,¹ who thus asserts that the momentum towards the re-establishment of the Scottish Parliament, and all that this has led to politically and culturally, was powerfully led by the arts sector. This view is also that of the unionist Sam Galbraith, first Minister for the Arts for Scotland, whom the present author witnessed saying so in 1999 at the Edinburgh Festival Arts Seminar. This essay, however, also suggests that the importance of the arts – and for present purposes particularly theatre – is not new; there have been significant earlier periods when theatre was just as important to the ways in which Scotland understood its changing cultures. A key argument of this essay is that it is not only in recent years that theatre has provided a forum, a crucible, in which ideas can be contested, celebrated and remoulded. It has regularly explored the potential (and even the need) for change both in religion and church and in social and class structures. Recognition of the earlier importance of theatre as a crucible of cultural change has arisen partly from the development of studies in Scottish drama and theatre following the foundation of the first Chair of Drama in Scotland at Glasgow University in 1965. Following this, in recent years, proper attention has been paid to performative aspects of theatre in Scottish society. This has clarified drama and theatre's importance, somewhat neglected when, in a tradition of text-based literary criticism, study of drama was confused with literary study of dramatic texts.

The significance of earlier phases of Scottish theatre has often been further obscured by a misunderstanding – even among theatre students and practitioners of the highest distinction – that somehow it was, largely as a result of the protestant Reformation, suppressed for long periods. In 2008, even Scotland's Makar, Liz Lochhead, a major theatre practitioner and an artist of the highest calibre, said, "Certainly, our Reformation, early and thorough, stamped out all drama and dramatic writing for centuries" (Lochhead 2008, 7). Yet the historical evidence contradicts this widespread canard:

¹ Reid said this in an interview with Dolina McLennan in *Dolina*, broadcast by BBC Alba, 1 January 2012.

Drama, the doing of theatre, was never stamped out [...]. Theatre, the watching of drama, certainly occasionally suffered suppression, in the 17th century until 1660, for example, in the absence of a royal court in Edinburgh and for about three decades after William III's Dutch invasion when Whigs took over. In the 1720s, though, Anthony Aston and Allan Ramsay began a theatrical fightback. (Brown 2011a, 1)

Recent research by, *inter alia*, John McGavin (2007), Sarah Carpenter (2011) and Margo Todd (2002) shows that before, during and after the 1560 Reformation, Scots were used to seeing theatre and theatricality as a means of challenging establishment views and exploring social, political and religious change. These impulses might have been to an extent appropriated by the reformed Church of Scotland, the Kirk, when it attacked their earlier manifestations, often perceived as heretical, but drama was never quite successfully suppressed. Theatricality and drama in general had been important before the Reformation and became key means of the Kirk's seeking to stamp its authority post-Reformation on the larger culture of the community.

John McGavin offers an earlier example of how theatricality might be used subversively in pre-Reformation Scotland against the church's hierarchical power even after the savage 1527 example of the burning of Patrick Hamilton for heresy (McGavin 2007, 20-22). As McGavin says:

The problem for those who would employ theatrical modes to stage their own power in public is that, like any drama, the communal nature of such a performance makes it sensitive to the local circumstances obtaining at the time. (McGavin 2007, 20)

He cites the case of Sandie Furrou who, on returning from imprisonment in England, "discovered that a local cleric, John Dingwall, had been sleeping with his wife and using up his money and possessions." His public complaints led to his being accused of heresy and brought to trial. Then, "He lapp up mearely upon the scaffold, and casting a gawmound [capering], said 'Whair ar the rest of the playaris?'," so making explicit "the theatrical nature of the event." Furrou proceeded to subvert his examination by "repeatedly referr[ing] to the immediate environment of the stage [...]" rather than being drawn into theological discussion" and diverting replies into comments on the immoral behaviour of local clerics, naming the "menis wyffis with whome thei had medled," causing public laughter. Thus he avoided the danger of being burned and shamed the clerics into giving him money to replace his loss and depart (McGavin 2007, 21). As McGavin observes:

Furrou, though no literary playwright, was a master of social dramaturgy and particularly of the spectatorship upon which it depended. He understood where theatre and reality intersected [...] and he knew which [theatrical] identity would work in this extreme context. (McGavin 2007, 22)

What McGavin sensitises the scholar to is that it is anachronistic to think of theatre or drama in the medieval and early modern period as defined simply by performance on stage, whether at court or in publicly performed religious drama. Bill Findlay notes:

The earliest recorded example of a rudimentary court masque in Britain took place in 1285 as part of the marriage banquet of King Alexander III in Jedburgh Abbey. Dancers and musicians fell hushed as the figure of Death [...] interrupted the celebrations as a potent reminder of human mortality. (Findlay 1998, 32)

Nonetheless, as Findlay points out, there was by then a wide range of folk and religious drama, while the earliest Scottish performer/actor whose name we know is "Peter the Fool," Robert the Bruce's jester (Maloney 2006, 142).

A recurrent feature of Scottish theatre is the centrality of performers as opposed to playwrights. Such a focus on performativity allows, indeed, encourages, the modern continuity prevailing between legitimate and popular performance domains, marked in the prominent careers since the mid-20th century of actor-entertainers like Duncan Macrae, Russell Hunter, Una Maclean or Elaine C. Smith, all celebrated on both classical and variety or pantomime stages. In other words, when the National Theatre of Scotland held as part of its *Staging the Nation* series a session on "Panto, Variety and the Scottish People" (26 November 2011, King's Theatre, Glasgow) led by Alan Cumming, much contemporary drama, owing dramaturgical debts to popular theatre, was presented. Then on stage were such figures as Johnnie Beattie, Maureen Beattie and Greg Hemphill, representing a performance tradition spanning popular and classical that, arguably, traces its roots back to the Bruce's jester. Cumming, addressing what he sees as specifically Scottish theatrical performance conventions, has observed:

Being away from Scotland makes you question what it is that makes you Scottish, and when it comes to acting I realise that my performance style is very different to my colleagues' elsewhere in the world. Our whole way of breaking through the fourth wall, indeed never even countenancing its existence, is all derived from our culture that is steeped in variety and music hall and panto. (Anon. 2011)

In fact, the continuity of performativity and performer traditions across theatrical genres – as opposed to the largely text-based focus often seen in English literature's drama studies, embodied in most Shakespeare criticism, with its tight focus on play-text – is a specific feature of Scottish dramatic traditions. This continuity may mark historically an actual benefit of James VI's move to London in 1603 and the removal of royal patronage thereby. Certainly, James was a keen supporter of theatre and when in London he and Anna, his queen, adopted the two leading companies and supported dramatic developments, including the masque, far more dynamically than had his predecessor, Elizabeth. The long-term impact of this has arguably supported the court- and London-centred evolution of forms of and attitudes to theatre that still prevail in England, while Scottish theatre escaped this particular destiny.

Scottish theatre traditions avoided the centralising focus on controlled text that came to characterise the English theatre tradition generally, maintaining a more diffuse drama such as deeply-rooted folk drama in Gaelic, much neglected until recently, as Michael Newton has reminded us (Newton, 2011, 41-46). There was, by 1662, a post-Restoration theatre in the grounds of Holyrood House, the Tennis Court Theatre, which seems to have served nobility, gentry and richer merchant classes for around thirty years. Within that period, during the Duke of York's 1679-82 residence, there was certainly royal court theatre in Edinburgh, but Scotland largely avoided England's experience of royally patronised theatre. In fact, the expense of attending professional theatre at Holyrood, not to mention its general identification with an Episcopalian or Catholic party, seen then as anti-populist, helped make that form of theatre exclusive and unpopular, more reason for theatre to be opposed when drama was not. The range of drama, then, included, but was not coterminous with, Scottish theatre, let alone

Scottish theatricality. This is not, of course, to neglect the occasional importance of playtexts, but rather to place that importance in a wider context.

Carpenter has identified in the late medieval and early modern period at least four major spheres of political and cultural life in which drama and plays served an important function: religion, the town, the court and politics (Carpenter, 2011, 6-21). Certainly the landmark production of David Lindsay's *Ane Satyre of the Thrie Estaitis* (in 1540 as an interlude at court and in 1552/1554 as public performance) draws on a wide range of popular forms and tropes in satirising the corruption of the pre-Reformation church. While its 1540 Linlithgow performance was under James V's protection, its later public performances on the playfields of Cupar and Edinburgh took place after his death and during the regency of Mary of Guise. The potential of drama to address controversial public issues robustly was recognised and apparently accepted even in a Scotland engaged in pre-Reformation spiritual, intellectual and political turmoil. Lindsay's play's production history and themes illustrate clearly Carpenter's four major spheres: religion, town, court and politics. Here, in an almost contemporary way, theatre was a crucible for cultural change and so it continued. While part of the puritan opposition to theatre north and south of the Border was because it involved "telling lies," in Scotland opposition was surely also based on recognition of the power of theatre over ideas.

For drama to serve such a radical function implies that it was embedded in popular consciousness. The very presence of playfields like Cupar's and Edinburgh's in many other towns highlights drama's existence as a regular feature of Scottish civic life. Further, the example already given of Sandie Furrou's performance, not to mention the other cases discussed by McGavin, suggests a society in which expression of potentially subversive (and sometimes conservative) attitudes and ideas through theatricality was well-established. A necessary counterpoint to this is that it might also be retained conservatively in a time of rapidly changing ideas. Where Kirk Sessions record insistence that drama, whether folk, rural, or in the texts of pre-reformation religious plays, be suppressed, McGavin points out that the recurrence of these admonitions, which by implication of their reiteration were not being entirely seriously observed, is telling evidence for the continuance of theatrical manifestations in post-Reformation Scotland. In the summer of 1583, for example, "Iohnne wod & Iohne broun schulmaistiris at ye kirkis of Mwthill & strogayth [Muthill and Strageath, now in Perth and Kinross]" were arraigned before the Stirling Presbytery, accused of "playing of clark playis on ye sabboth day yairby."² Both repented, but the issue was not simply the playing, but the fact it was on the sabbath and that it was a 'clark' play. The Presbytery minutes make it clear the ministers wanted to examine the script employed, presumably to check if it was in their eyes heretical. Given the time of year, McGavin suggests it may even have been a May performance.³ In other words, the Kirk was concerned to control drama.

McGavin, however, has observed that the early 17th-century presbytery in Haddington failed to suppress annual local plays in the nearby villages of Samuelston and Salton. Repeated attempts are made to suppress plays that, if such attempts were successful, would be redundant. Instead, he observes a pattern of movement

² Stirling Presbytery Minutes 1581-89/90 NAS CH2/722/1 Microfilm, Unfol. 21 May 1583.

³ Email: 10 February 2012.

from urban to rural drama [...] [and] from unthinking pleasures to pleasures pointedly enjoyed in opposition to the kirk. [...] [The Presbytery's] flurries of activity against rural drama, our only evidence that such drama took place, were all it could manage in the circumstances. By contrast, instances of adultery and fornication were frequently recorded. (McGavin 1997, 156-157)

The vibrancy of this theatrical tradition as opposed to the relative unpopularity of professional playhouse theatre – for reasons already identified, but also for linguistic and political reasons we shall come to – has been remarked on by Edwin Morgan. Even in Reformation, Restoration and Enlightenment Scotland 'drama' manifested itself in a wide range. Morgan identifies part of that range:

[P]opular kinds of dramatic or semi-dramatic entertainment, shows and spectacles, communal celebrations don't die out, even if they have to watch their step or go underground in oppressive or authoritarian or anti-hedonistic times, and they are always ready to be thawed out again, like cryogenic Lords of Misrule, whenever society gives them a chance. [...] Lyndsay's *Satyre of the Thrie Estaitis* did not come out of a vacuum. If it seems unique, this is because other plays and playwrights that we know about from the medieval period have left no trace except their names or titles. [...] And everywhere there were folk-plays and folk-revels on May Day, at Midsummer and New Year. Guisers with their faces blacked up would dance through the churchyard, men dressed as women and women as men. [...] So it won't do to say that the Scots are by nature undramatic or untheatrical. (Morgan E. 1999)

In fact, Todd provides extensive evidence of the Kirk's difficulty in managing, let alone suppressing, such activities, especially as they related to older rituals surrounding marriage, death or seasonal celebrations at May, midsummer or Christmas (Todd 2002, 213-221). As she says, "The elders were no fools; they chose their battles carefully, and with the priorities of the larger church and community in mind" (Todd, 2002, 185-186). From such subtler, less constantly oppressive approaches than conventional scholarship tended to suggest until recently, she observes:

The evidence suggests instead that protestantism may have succeeded in part *because* the sessions enforced their legislation against festivity lightly, flexibly and sporadically. Where a heavy hand might have strengthened the opposition to Reformed doctrine as well as discipline, the elders' sense of the inutility of quashing the useful and harmless allowed for a more gradual but secure cultural reconstruction. [...] session minutes reveal them gradually subsuming old traditions into a new kind of festivity, with new ways of demonstrating individual and corporate status and communal cohesion in the face of both the linear and cyclical passage of time. (Todd 2002, 221-222)

Janet Sorensen reinforces the case for the importance of popular theatricalised forms in questioning the status quo and encouraging communal awareness:

[E]xamining the wide range of public performance, broadly conceived to include not only theatre but also ballad singing, street performance and even sermons, also reveals an expansive diversity of articulations of Scottishness, often in conflict. Oral performance of ballads, for instance, could invigorate subterranean Jacobite sympathies, instil a sense of connection to a larger Scots past or define an emerging, enlightened literate Scotland in contrast to a residual oral culture. Theatre might draw polite spectators into imagined networks of national feeling or arouse depraved drives, creating a community of sinners. (Sorensen 2007, 133)

To such essentially dramatic performances as ballad-singing, which would come to include the overtly political singing and enacting of Jacobite ballads in the streets (Sorensen 2007, 135), one might add the long, quasi-theatrical Scottish tradition of story-telling.

Within the framework of theatricality as a crucible of change, the Kirk itself employed theatre as a means of propagandising its worldview on appropriate personal relationships and responsibilities. Todd talks, for example, of the Kirk's highly theatrical enactments of repentance, social responsibility and forgiveness where, the minister's role included those of "drama coach and director" (Todd 2002, 127):

Penance was staged and choreographed, with penitents assuming carefully prescribed positions and moving from one place to another in procession within the church, and through particular doors when entering and exiting the building. It was scripted, with allowances for both prescribed, formulaic utterance and *ex tempore* speech, the whole inserted into the larger script of sermon-centred worship. (Todd 2002, 129)

Todd describes such techniques, including specific penitents' costumes, as helping "as in any dramatic performance [...] to communicate the themes of the play [...] on the penitential stage" (Todd 2002, 149).

Meantime dramas were written, often with explicit religio-political intent. Perhaps most famous of these is Archibald Pitcairne's (1652-1713) *The Assembly* (1692). Circulating in manuscript and unpublished until 1722, the play attacks the General Assembly's pedantry and the obscurantism of both Williamite and Jacobite political sectarianism. It mocks presbyterian hypocrisy in a subplot remarkable in its frankness about perceived ministerial lechery: Solomon Cherrytrees, an Assembly member, in a parodic hidden reference to *Song of Solomon*, counsels Laura:

[T]hese two fair Breasts of yours evidently prove Parity in the Church-Members [...]. Thus and thus they have in brotherly Love and Concord together. Do not imagine that the natural Body there is thus orderly, and that the Wise should suffer such a Blemish in the Mystical (Handling her breasts). (Pitcairne 1722, 50)

Laura responds, "Good Mr Parson ye must fetch your *Similies* elsewhere, I'll assure you I'll be neither Parable nor Metaphor to your Kirk-Government." Solomon is shameless, rather waxing indignant at the use of the "Antichristian name of Parson" as "prelatic" (50). Pitcairne's main plot plods, while his satirical subplot of Presbyterian hypocrisy and love triumphant flows, but both embody anti-Kirk polemic.

As I have noted elsewhere (Brown 2011b, 22-40), an important additional element in late 17th- and 18th-century Scottish drama provision was drama in schools. Throughout more or less the length and breadth of Scotland not only were ministers supporting drama, but required it as part of the curriculum. Even Lundie, a small village in the Carse of Gowrie, produced its play, though in 1688 the Dunkeld Presbytery suspended the master, William Bouok, for "acting a comoedie wherein he made a mock of religious duties and ordinances" (McKenzie 1955, 106), a more pointed offence to the Kirk than that of the Muthill schoolmasters mentioned earlier. It was not the provision of drama that was a problem for the Kirk; it was its possible ideological purpose. As J. McKenzie observes, after the Reformation,

Kirk Sessions and Presbyteries exercised a stricter control, banning Sunday performances, censoring plays, and restricting the choice of subject. School plays were [how-

ever] [...] used [...] for imparting religious instruction or for revealing the errors of the Roman Catholic faith. (McKenzie 1955, 103)

There was certainly for some a prudish desire to contain the impact of drama; H. G. Graham notes the purpose was to further learning, and "not to pander to any sinful love of playing; and indeed, the pieces selected were admirably gifted to extinguish utterly all fondness for the stage in juvenile breasts throughout their natural life" (Graham 1937, 439).

But the role in the development of 18th-century professional theatre in Scotland, of lawyers, teachers and ministers, those professions that would most have depended on the skills developed through drama in schools, is suggestive. It appears as if in fact school drama actually succeeded in "pander[ing] to the sinful love of playing" and did not "extinguish utterly all fondness for the stage in juvenile breasts throughout their natural life." Let us take only two examples: John Home, author of *Douglas* (1756), was the socially well-connected minister at Athelstaneford and, when the conservative Evangelicals in the Kirk tried to discipline him for writing a play, he simply left his charge and went to write for the London stage, while, according to Adrienne Scullion, as a young lawyer, James Boswell is credited with *A View of the Edinburgh Theatre during the Summer Season, 1759*, a faithful thrice-weekly report on and critique of the plays produced across that summer season (Scullion 1998, 107-108). From such fruitful ground, new Scottish plays like *Patriotism* (1763), a political farce in support of Prime Minister Bute by advocate John (James?) Baillie, emerged. Meantime, earlier in the century, interrelations within theatre as cultural crucible are seen in the development of a major play, Allan Ramsay's *The Gentle Shepherd*. McGavin, as already noted, has pointed to Haddington's dramatic vitality in earlier centuries: its schoolmaster from 1720 until 1731 was John Leslie, a friend of Allan Ramsay's. Through Leslie and Ramsay, the potential links between school drama, and professional playwriting and theatre become clear. *The Gentle Shepherd*, published first in 1725, was revised as a ballad-opera for Haddington Grammar School pupils' performance. This took place on 22 January 1729 in what was then Edinburgh's venue for professional theatre performance: Taylor's Hall. Such a clear link between different forms of drama, and also the continuity or re-emergence of drama in particular institutions and locales,⁴ here between school and professional, suggests a complex and interactive sense of theatre in Scotland. Further, while plays in schools might be secular (though on classical subjects) – as early as 1600, Terence was played in Elgin under the auspices of the Master of the Grammar School – it is clear that by the 1730s plays performed by scholars might be not just secular, but contemporary. When in 1731 Leslie became Dalkeith's schoolmaster, Vanbrugh's *The Provok'd Husband* was performed there, only three years after its Drury Lane première. This is a more rapid move from West End to regional performance than is seen in much UK professional regional theatre today. As Morgan observed, "it won't do to say that the Scots are by nature undramatic or untheatrical" (Morgan E. 1999).

Despite Morgan's observation, however, it is true to say that after 1707 there was further cause for many Scots to suspect the role of professional theatre beyond its identification with expense and anti-Presbyterian values. When, very soon after the

4 I am grateful to Professor John McGavin for drawing my attention to this point and the following point about the production of Terence in Elgin. I owe him thanks for his most helpful comments on a late draft of this paper, as I do to Dr Trish Reid.

Union, learning to speak English became the fashion, a key part of the process, especially for the Edinburgh middle classes, was the speech training and teaching of Anglicised pronunciation offered by actors from the English stage. The professional theatre in Scotland was for many years part of a conscious process of post-Union de-scotticisation, which I have called "The (Rule) Britannia Project" (Brown 2012, 4-5). This did not necessarily reconcile many Scots to the value of professional theatre; rather it made professional theatre an alien form. Leaving aside Ramsay's work, almost all the professional theatre texts, even on Scottish topics, until very late in the 18th century, were in English, still then largely an alien language in an alien artform. Even as late as 1821, in his novel *Annals of the Parish*, John Galt finds it possible to observe and gently satirise an attitude which he dates in his fiction to 1789:

the elderly people thought his language rather too Englified, which I thought likewise, for I could never abide that the plain auld Kirk of Scotland, with her sober presbyterian simplicity, should borrow, either in word or deed, from the language of the prelatie hierarchy of England. (Galt 2001, 102-103)

Theatre was not only a crucible of change intellectually and politically; it might also provide a means of changing speech and language behaviour. And theatre was then employing "prelatic" language.

Despite some 18th-century reservations about the art form, one of the most famous moments in Scottish religio-political and cultural history was theatrical. Home's *Douglas*, already referred to, opened in Edinburgh's Canongate Theatre on 14 December 1756. Home was a member of the Kirk's relatively cosmopolitan Moderate wing, which included such leading church, university and Enlightenment figures as William Robertson, Hugh Blair, Adam Ferguson and Alexander "Jupiter" Carlyle. Ian Clark observes:

The driving force in Moderatism was a mood of cultural liberation and optimism which made the Moderate clergy aspire to play not merely a national but a European role [...] [they] had no desire to see the Church of Scotland drawn aside by a narrow and sectarian spirit from the mainstream of Scottish life [...]. (Clark 1970, 204)

Already at the 1756 General Assembly, the Moderates had defeated an Evangelical attempt to excommunicate David Hume. They sought, in effect, the cultural liberation of Scotland: Robertson, university Principal, was a leading revisionist historian; Blair effectively invented the study of English Literature, holding the first Chair of its kind, Rhetoric and Belles-Lettres at Edinburgh, from 1762; Ferguson is the father of social sciences. All participated with Hume, who played Glenalvon, in a rehearsal of *Douglas*, Robertson reading Randolph, Carlyle Old Norval, Home himself Douglas, Adam Ferguson Lady Randolph and Hugh Blair Anna. Of that cast only Hume was not a minister. A decade after Culloden, *Douglas* explores the tragic results of civil conflict and hidden identity, but it has importance beyond theatre in marking a crucial challenge, seeking to change older ways of thinking. The local Presbytery responded, as was its wont, by censuring ministers, including Carlyle, who attended the play and approving on 5 January 1757 an *Admonition and Exhortation* declaring playhouses immoral. But it seems that by then the Kirk's rejection of theatre was losing force. Those censured mostly apologised, but stayed in post, generally seen in a sympathetic light; the *Admonition* itself had little or no practical impact. The Evangelicals were in retreat, while Home, as already

noted, resigned his charge in June, heading off any discipline he faced and south to London where Garrick presented *Douglas* to great acclaim (see also Morgan M. 2012). The professional playhouse theatre had now established itself alongside other dramatic forms as a locus for challenge of existing ideas.

There remained, however, a variety of communal dramatic forms besides folk drama. Interestingly, as professional stage and text-based drama developed a more popular profile, one finds local plays like John Finlayson's *The Marches Day* (1771). Set in Linlithgow, and featuring the burgh's trades, vivid Scots dialogue, much banter and local references, it celebrates the town's annual festival (which still takes place) and may represent a pulling together of traditions of communal, folk and school plays. In another case, identified by Barbara Bell, we find "overt and immediate communal ownership of the localised source material as in the case of 'John O' Arnha'" (Bell 2001, 54).⁵ This play adapted a short poem by George Beattie, a Montrose lawyer, featuring his contemporary, John Finlay, a burgh officer celebrated for tall tales. John, after a day's drinking at a fair and fighting another local worthy, meets supernatural beings on the way home. Local scenery for the performance included a central scene of Montrose High Street on the day of the Rood Fair. Such local drama complemented the National Drama about which Bell has written extensively (cf. Bell 2001). This form was highly successful in 19th-century Scotland, largely based on adaptations of Scott's novels, which for most of that century provided a locus of debate about, and examination of, Scottish cultural and political identities.

As railway travel became commonplace and industrial forms of touring out of London and Edinburgh took over from local companies, by the latter part of the 19th century both local and national drama were in decline on main stages. Scottish playwrights who wanted to develop their art, by and large, found themselves working within the structures of commercial theatre with its Mecca in London's West End. Popular drama continued, not least with the establishment of the Scottish Community Drama Association in 1926, but much of that amateur theatre came to reflect a cosier version of professional theatre rather than a distinct strand of theatre concerned with cultural change. There were exceptions like Joe Corrie's Bowhill Players, which presented some of his socially radical plays of the 1920s, before he succumbed to the need to write for the SCDA market, and the radical productions of Glasgow Unity Theatre in the 1940s. Nonetheless, it seemed that theatre in Scotland had become a branch of a more centralised professional theatre. Leading Scottish playwrights like J. M. Barrie and, to an extent, James Bridie seemed to mark a way forward through the West End for a Scottish theatre whose focus was less cultural change and more commercial success. Yet, the Unity experiment provided a seedbed that developed a range of performers like Russell Hunter, Andrew Keir, Roddy McMillan and Marjorie Thomson and playwrights like Ena Lamont Stewart and, again, McMillan (although both of those writers had difficulties being accepted on Scotland's main stages until the 'renaissance' arrived). It took time for their impact and that of their colleagues to work through the more centralised theatre systems of the first two-thirds of the 20th century, even when such companies as Glasgow Citizens (1943-) and Edinburgh's Gateway (1953-65) and Royal Lyceum (1965-) were established. Nonetheless, work through they did. It behoves us to remember the deep underlying Scottish theatre traditions that fed their energy. Given those traditions and this article's analysis of the

5 For a more detailed discussion, see Bell (2011, 54-57).

historic role of drama and theatricality in Scottish cultures, one should recognise that the recent 'renaissance' is less a surprising efflorescence and more a logical evolution from preceding, but not always legitimate, dramatic and theatrical traditions. These for a time had gone into apparent abeyance, but only it seems to erupt into vibrant activity with all the more force and politico-cultural impact in recent years.

It is a flaw of much recent writing about Scottish theatre that it has not properly taken account of the longer-term theatrical and dramatic traditions of Scotland, reaching back more or less continuously over seven hundred recorded years – and no doubt many more unrecorded – and their role in cultural change. Clare Wallace says:

As work by Randall Stevenson, Ian Brown, Mark Fisher among others attests, with regard to theatre it is not until after World War II, and in particular the 1970s, that a radical and socially committed Scottish theatre begins to actively distinguish itself and to assert its own value and specificity. (Wallace 2011, 200)

I recognise this characterisation of a substantial part of my recent work on contemporary Scottish theatre and its renaissance. I do not repudiate the vitality of that renaissance nor the arguments I have set out for its cultural importance and impact. But I plead guilty to fostering an impression that "it is not until after World War II, and in particular the 1970s, that a radical and socially committed Scottish theatre begins to actively distinguish itself and to assert its own value and specificity." As this essay has made clear, radical Scottish theatre, "a crucible for cultural change," has a far longer, wider and deeper pedigree: "Arts first; politics later."

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