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**Politics, Pleasures  
and the Popular Imagination:  
Aspects of Scottish Political  
Theatre, 1979-1990.**

**Thomas J. Maguire**

Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at  
the Department of Theatre, Film and Television Studies,  
Glasgow University.

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# SUMMARY

The starting point for the research on which this thesis is based was an investigation of the widening gap between Scots civil society and the British state under Thatcherism, and of how that might be focused through political theatres. This coincided with a concern to locate Scottish theatre within its own context, rather than regarding it as something merely peripheral or subsidiary to the conventional Anglo-centric model. In the light of the existing works on Scottish theatres, it was decided that the most appropriate way to achieve this would be through a series of case studies. This thesis is thus one of the first attempts at a detailed analysis of contemporary theatre in Scotland.

Each case study is divided into two related sections. The first examines the development and scope of the work and working practices of each set of producers. The second section involves an analysis of specific productions which are indicative of certain aspects of the total corpus or which significantly added to that corpus. This analysis seeks to identify the properties of each different theatre in production, rather than through a literary analysis of the playscript. This necessitated the construction of a methodology which would address the elements of the production which were stable from performance to performance. Based on the understanding that the political function of the production would be judged by its social impact and effect, this methodology identified the ways in which each production related to its social context and the audience within that context.



**Plate 1: Margaret Thatcher  
on her first day as Prime Minister, May 1979.**

# 1. INTRODUCTION

## Introduction

As an undergraduate taking a course on Modern British Drama at Edinburgh University, I was made aware of the lack of any extended coherent analysis of contemporary Scottish theatre. This lack was more disturbing given the elision frequently made between 'English' and 'British' theatre, whereby the sum of the former is considered to be the whole of the latter. Such elision was incongruous with my own awareness of Scottish theatre, ignoring the historical and continuing distinctiveness of Scottish culture from the dominant culture in England. Over the period 1979-1990, the sense of being distinct from England itself became more critical for the mass of the Scottish people as they reacted with antagonism to the New Right governments of Margaret Thatcher. The pursuit of her policies, frequently couched in the iconography of English nationalism, widened the disparities between the culture that binds Scots civil society and the institutions which inscribe this society within the British state<sup>1</sup>. This disparity between state and society echoed my own experiences of growing up in the Catholic-Nationalist community in Northern Ireland, yet could be viewed from a position relatively free of the baggage of that background and of the baggage common to those born and bred in Scotland. My interest in theatre meant that it was an obvious area through which to explore these tensions between state and culture in Scotland.

At an early stage of my research it became apparent that the relationship between Scottish theatre and English theatre was not, or at least, not any longer one of subsidiarity. Scottish theatre was becoming increasingly distinguished by separate, though often parallel, institutions, functioning in different ways, at different levels, or to different degrees from their English counterparts. Thus, for example, Scotland has its own Arts Council; its touring theatres are much more central to mainstream theatrical provision than comparable companies in

England; and its local authorities have played a proportionally more substantial and proactive role in arts funding. These factors suggested the possibility of an intersection between the broader political reaction to Thatcherism and the growth of a separate cultural infrastructure at which theatres, particularly political theatres, might be located. It was this intersection that I then chose to explore by examining political theatres between 1979 and 1990.

The wide range of work within the subject area meant that any attempt at an all-inclusive account would provide only the basis of a general survey. That was not felt to be desirable for reasons which are made clear below, although a survey of productions within the scope of the thesis is included as Appendix I. Instead, I have chosen to present detailed case studies of six productions to exemplify the variety of works and ways of working undertaken by producers of political theatres in Scotland over the period. In these, I assess the ways in which political functions are created through productions. This is done from a perspective which locates the theatrical event within its immediate and more general social and political contexts. In this introductory chapter, I will explain the critical background to my work; the terminology being used here; and the methodology that has been adopted.

### **The Critical Background**

As I have said, there has been little critical attention paid to contemporary Scottish theatre. Since the newsletter of the Scottish Society of Playwrights, Scottish Theatre News, ceased publication, there has not even been a sustained record of developments in recent Scottish theatre. Thus, many of its most important innovations and developments have gone unmarked. Exceptionally, Chapman magazine dedicated a special edition to Scottish theatre, Chapman 43-44, published in 1986. While the variety of

subjects and approaches within this collection was welcome, it made an overview impossible. At the same time, there was no critical investigation of the work of specific companies or writers in production. This omission is repeated in almost every available study. It is evident, for example, in the recent histories of two of the most prominent theatre institutions in Scotland, The Traverse and The Citizens. The Traverse Theatre Story 1963-1988 by Scottish critic Joyce MacMillan (1988) details 25 years of developments and changes in that theatre; and Michael Coveney's The Citz: 21 Years of Glasgow Citizens' Theatre (1990) celebrates 21 years of the theatre under Giles Havergal. In presenting broad and sometimes complex histories, both have drawn back from specific analyses of plays in production. Since Elizabeth MacLennan's The Moon Belongs To Everyone: Making Theatre With 7:84 (1990) presents a personal and autobiographical perspective on the Scottish and English wings of that company, it similarly avoids such analysis. John McGrath, the most prominent practitioner of political theatre in Scotland, has written two accounts of his theatre work: A Good Night Out. Popular Theatre: Audience, Class and Form (1980) and The Bone Won't Break (1990) were adapted from two series of lectures which he gave at Cambridge University. Although McGrath does refer to some of the theatre events which he helped to create as a writer and director of the 7:84 Theatre Company in both England and Scotland, he eschews in-depth analysis of particular works in favour of more general theses, in the first case on the proper role for political theatre, and in the second, on the political uses of arts funding.

Moreover, even treatments of the history of Scottish theatre have tended towards particular kinds of study. In David Hutchinson's The Modern Scottish Theatre (1977), Alistair Cording's earlier unpublished thesis, Twentieth Century Scottish Drama (1974), and in subsequent essays by Hutchinson and Randall Stevenson in The History of Scottish Literature Vol. 4 (1987), the emphasis has been much more on

the documentation and description of movements and events within theatres, precluding the possibility of in-depth analysis. Alasdair Cameron's Guide to Scottish Theatre (1989) embraces the possibility of production analysis by focusing questions about historical developments and artistic movements through the examination of key texts. Due to the nature of that work - it is a student's guide - however, it serves to pose questions about analysis rather than engaging in the analysis itself. It should not be thought that I am attempting to denigrate these approaches. They trace and document continuing traditions of Scottish theatres. The importance I attribute to such work is illustrated by the fact that a substantial part of this thesis is given over to just such documentation.

Nonetheless, the pervasiveness of such historically descriptive accounts and the absence of critical attention to works themselves suggests that there is an unease about the actual value and quality of the work of Scottish theatres. Certainly, there are few Scottish plays which could withstand the in-depth textual<sup>2</sup> and literary assessments that have been mounted on the works included within the dominant English dramatic canon, for example. To neglect to analyse Scottish work because of its unsuitability for literary analysis misses the point. For example, the most successful play of the 1980s in Scotland was The Steamie which has few recognisable literary qualities but which proved itself to be theatrically effective. Furthermore, Professor Jan McDonald argues persuasively that even the Citizens' Theatre, often perceived as disconnected from the other Scottish theatres, has a style which

runs counter to the major trend in British theatre. This tends to be rather literary, that is, a 'good' production is one which reproduces as skilfully and as faithfully as possible the dramatist's text, and a 'good' design is one which impinges as little as possible on the projection of that text.

(McDonald 1984: 13)

While the situation described by McDonald in English theatre has arguably changed, both examples, from different extremes of Scottish theatre, suggest that audiences in Scotland are less interested in the literary merit of plays than they are in their efficacy in production. One of the main tasks of this thesis is to study Scottish theatre by using analytical approaches which focus on theatrical rather than literary or dramatic properties.

The argument that the reluctance to analyse Scottish theatrical work is a sign of unease at its quality is supported by one of the few in-depth studies to be undertaken, Patricia Ann Wells' 1983 doctoral thesis, Scottish Drama Comes of Age: An Examination of Three Scottish Plays. Wells' central argument is that precisely because she has been able to find three plays capable of bearing such analysis Scottish drama has transcended its history of parochialism and is ready to enter the universal canons of drama. There are, however, complex controversies surrounding the interplay of such concepts which Wells does not address. Further, the thesis relies for its analysis on a Neo-Aristotelian critique. Thus, while Wells is keen to emphasise that 'no play is complete until it is performed before an audience' (1983: 4), her focus is on the dramatic, that is, on the 'universal' and eternal, rather than on theatrical qualities, which are specific and immediate. The restriction to the former is not able to encompass 'theatre' which Keir Elam describes as 'the complex phenomena associated with the performer-audience transaction: that is, with the production and communication of meaning in the performance and the systems underlying it' (1980: 2). Further, while Wells notes that 'Rather than treating audience response as a separate category, it has been incorporated into each section whenever appropriate' (ibid), in practice her emphasis on the formal qualities of plot, character, thought, diction, music, and spectacle,

minimalises the importance of the audience and performance context.

In contrast to these previous studies, then, this thesis presents in-depth studies of productions. The emphasis is on the qualities of theatre in production; where 'theatre' is understood as an event constructed by performers and audiences. This is a shift away from dramatic and literary critical practices, as well as a break with the dominant treatments of Scottish theatres in histories.

### **Terminology**

In order to avoid confusion, it is necessary to clarify the terms through which I have constructed this study. I have worked within the parameters imposed by specific definitions of 'Scottish', 'political' and 'theatre'. These are defined according to the demands of the particular methodology adopted here, and so there is a certain amount of ground-clearing required to distinguish the use of these terms here from that in previous studies.

### **Scottish**

The most apparently straightforward of these defining elements is 'Scottish'. Nonetheless, this is a complex term, not least because it involves a variety of controversies about the exact status of Scotland and around issues of Scottishness. The definition used here draws important distinctions which might not otherwise be readily apparent. Cameron's Guide To Scottish Theatre sets out the problem in a discussion of what is meant by a 'Scottish' play:

You can begin your definition by saying that a play by a Scot, in Scots, and about Scotland is a Scottish play. Deeper than that you will not easily get. But what purpose does it all serve? If Scottish plays can be written by Englishmen, can be set in Bologna, can discuss aesthetics and not mention Scotland at all, is there any point in trying to define what we mean by a Scottish play?

(Cameron 1989: 176)

The answer to the last question is an emphatic 'yes', because the basis of the distinctions drawn by my definition of Scottish theatre is an acceptance of the fact that Scottish society is separate from that of other parts of Britain, although obviously not hermetically sealed against influence from them. Clear arguments for the treatment of Scotland as a separate society are presented by works such as J. G. Kellas' The Scottish Political System (1984), the journals The Scottish Government Yearbook and Radical Scotland, and the increasing body of separate sociological studies represented by McCrone, Kendrick and Straw's The Making of Scotland: Nation, Culture & Social Change (1989), for example. Not only does Scotland have its own institutions and traditions within the legal, political, religious and educational fields, it also has a culture which is generally recognised as historically distinct. Moreover, its economic, social and demographic make-up sets it apart. What is important then is the recognition that it is a distinct society.

The recognition of this is crucial to the selection of the criteria by which we judge what it is which makes a piece of theatre Scottish. Immediately, one can dismiss the essentialist approach which Cameron discusses. Tom Nairn argues persuasively that Nationalism

is, in its immediate nature, idealistic. It always imagines an ideal 'people'...and it always searches urgently for vital inner, untapped springs of energy both in the individual and in the mass. Such idealism is inseparable from its creative historical function and its historical delusions.

(Nairn 1981: 102-3).

Obviously, Scottish nationalism has indulged itself in such Romantic idealisations. However, by proposing the separateness of its society as the crucial element in defining Scottishness, the debate over Scotland's status and hence its supposedly characteristic national identity is circumvented. Nonetheless, any attempt to describe Scottishness as a set of national stereotypes, ethnic

archetypes, or racial characteristics is rejected for three reasons. Firstly, there is an increasing awareness of the diversity of ethnic groups who constitute modern Scottish society. Secondly, the material reality of living, working and, for artists, creating in Scotland here takes precedence over idealisations as the relevant defining feature of Scottishness. Thirdly, many of the projects within the scope of this thesis have challenged, redefined, or otherwise changed the way in which Scottish people relate to the world around them, often by debunking such myths of Scottish identity; to then attempt to limit this work by proposing another set of national characteristics would then be perverse. This reason is strengthened since there is no longer a debate within even the theatre community about the discovery of a single Scottish form of theatre.

For her part, Wells sets out the following criteria for her selection: 'the plays chosen had to have been written by playwrights born and living in Scotland and not covered in a previous study' (1983: 6). While this is adequate for her purposes, it does not serve as a general guide. It excludes those who have not been born in Scotland but who have decided to live and work here. Its concentration on the origin of the writer excludes the part that is played in the production process by the host of others on the production team. Finally, and most importantly, it excludes the role of the audience and the context of production.

The definition which is used here avoids these problems by referring to the specifically separate Scottish social context in which the work is produced: the study will, in the first instance, be confined to productions that have first been produced in Scotland to engage Scottish audiences<sup>4</sup>. This allows the inclusion of works drawing on a wide range of traditions and cultures, not just those considered to be following in any Scottish dramatic tradition. It rejects categorisation on the basis of any

supposedly Scottish content or setting. Although Cameron does speculate on the possibilities of listing the characteristics of Scottish drama, the main thrust of his argument centres on the fact that much of Scottish contemporary theatre relies on a set of assumptions common to audiences and producers regarding the world around them. This reinforces my emphasis on the necessity of establishing the contexts of production and reception as Scottish in order to correctly identify 'Scottish' theatre.

Concomitantly, there is the exclusion of works which, although they may be by Scottish producers and may deal with Scottish issues in a Scottish setting, are produced outwith Scotland. Primarily, this is because such works (particularly in London productions) allow for the appropriation of Scottishness within the frame of a British region, alongside and similarly to the work of, for example, Liverpudlian writers such as Bleasdale and Russell. They are thus functional within British society and theatre rather than specifically within Scotland. Simultaneously, there is the inclusion of the work of writers who work within Scotland but have not originated here - such as John McGrath and John Clifford - precisely because their work within Scotland emanates from and functions as part of a specifically Scottish social context.

This also excludes revivals of works that have originated in different societies, even where productions may emphasise parallels and connections with Scottish culture and politics. For the same reason the work of British political touring theatres, originating within a different political framework is excluded. This is not to deny that any of these works may well have an influence on Scottish political culture, but rather to acknowledge that the context in which they originated impinges on their production in a way which is different to new works produced originally in Scotland. So, 'Scottish' theatre is, for the

purposes of this thesis, theatre originating from and produced initially in Scotland.

### Political

Regarding the second element - 'political' - the variety of work envisaged to be within the bounds of this thesis made difficult the definition of this as a cover-all term. There is a plethora of epithets for the many kinds of theatre included: 'workers', 'popular', 'committed', 'left-wing', 'radical, and 'political' have all been used. For example, Derek Longhurst's summary of 'Approaches to Political Theatre' describes what he terms 'three main areas of interest: the European tradition, mainly focused on the work of Brecht, Meyerhold and Piscator; 'popular' theatre; and socialist and feminist strategies since the 1960s' (1982: 47). A decade later, the dramatic changes in world politics caused Graham Holderness to note that the term 'political theatre' can 'hardly be expected to remain unaffected by such developments: if a term so much debated could ever have held coherent meaning as a theoretical concept, such meaning can scarcely now remain uninterrogated, undisturbed, unchanged' (Holderness 1992: 2). So, in order to understand the reasons for choosing 'political' and the particular way it is being used here, it is important to distinguish the limitations of the critical approaches that the other terms listed above imply.

In looking at the terms available to describe the area of study, both 'workers' and 'popular' were most easily eliminated from consideration, and for similar reasons. 'Workers' Theatre' is defined by Stourac and McCreery as theatre which

saw the working-class and its organisations as the main historical force for bringing about a radical social change. For this reason they chose to perform mainly for working people on their own ground and focused in their plays on the problems of their audiences in the light of the struggle for change. The workers' theatre movements consciously aligned themselves to this

struggle and became part of it.

(1986: xiv)

As used by Stourac and McCreery, the term is limited to specific historical movements in a variety of countries.

In contrast, 'popular' has a wider and growing currency<sup>5</sup>. Tom Pettit's introduction to Popular Drama in Northern Europe in the later Middle Ages: A Symposium (1988) applies it to

dramatic activities accessible, in both social and linguistic terms, to broad segments of the communities concerned... Emphatically in the research traditions of the English-speaking world, but to a significant degree elsewhere, the study of medieval drama has emerged from originally literary and philological pursuits, and scholarship has been slow to appreciate the physical and contextual aspects vital to the understanding of a performing art.

(Pettit 1988: 11)

He continues

"popular" drama was specified as the topic of the symposium, with the aim of diverting attention towards dramatic activities whose status as literary monuments, if only because of their popular auspices, would be unlikely to provide the main focus of attention, leaving the way free for consideration of the more vital questions involved in the interaction of text and context in performance.

(ibid: 12)

This use of 'popular' certainly allows for the desired emphasis on non-literary analysis and the construction of a canon of work on the basis of the interaction between performance text, audience and context. Also, it coincides with John McGrath's use of the term to cover the activities of the 7:84 Theatre Companies whose work in Scotland initiated the most recent waves of political theatre. McGrath's use of the term implies a theatre concentrating on building a mainly working class audience by invoking as models traditionally popular forms of entertainment.

This last point illustrates the restriction common to both uses of 'popular' and 'workers': the emphasis on

reaching a broad (that is, common or working-class) audience. Since the scope of the thesis title includes productions mounted, for example, at The Tron and The Traverse theatres while they enjoyed 'club' status, a restriction based on social accessibility is too limiting. To exclude certain kinds of productions because they played to small, exclusive or indeed predominantly bourgeois audiences ignores key elements of the ways in which such productions might relate to wider political and social reality. In the first instance, they may illustrate kinds of political thinking within a society which could not be articulated elsewhere. Secondly, and related to this, they may be articulating the views of, or appealing to the small groups of 'opinion-formers' (those working in the media and education, for example), whose influence is disproportionate to their numerical strength. Thirdly, as I shall discuss in Chapter 2, such groups often do effect political change which is not allied to broadly-based support. Minority appeal cannot be equated with unimportance.

In turning to the use of 'committed' to refer to some of the types of work included here, one acknowledges that it has had a longer critical history. In the introduction to his Drama and Commitment. Politics in the American Theatre of the Thirties, Gerald Rabkin (1964) discusses the etymology of the term in criticism. Adopted from the Continental Existentialists, it became current in English after the Second World War, being used as a translation of the French 'engagement'. The English 'commitment' was taken to imply as a motivation for the work some political or social change that would be weighed alongside (or outweigh) purely aesthetic considerations. Eric Bentley, in his essay 'The Theatre of Commitment', writes that the term implies 'that one is involved in politics willy-nilly' and that 'one voluntarily accepts the consequences of a particular political standard' (1968: 196).

The acknowledgement of this has allowed the term to be used pejoratively, implying a diminution of artistic standards of excellence in favour of some non-artistic achievement. In his essay 'The Political in Britain's Two National Theatres', Bernard Crick writes that for the committed playwright 'all the important questions have already been decided: it remains only to dramatise the answers so that people...can understand them better, be proselytised by them or, if the audience are the converted already, kept on heat' (Crick 1979: 170). This is a variation on the usual criticism that commitment diminishes Art: Art and therefore dramatic theatre must not propagandise, as if all drama and theatre does not involve some kind of propaganda. More usually, the levelling of such criticism implies that there are artistic and political spheres of activity that can be separated, something not accepted by the 'committed' or 'political' artist. George H. Szanto's Theatre and Propaganda provides a wide ranging analysis of the various propagandist functions that theatres may fulfil. This analysis is taken here as refuting the possibility of politically neutral art.

The pejorative use of 'committed' aside, there is a problem with the analytical focus that its use entails. Those examining 'committed theatre' scrutinise the politics of the work in terms of the motivations of the theatre producers through recourse to their individual lives and lifestyles. The validity of the work corresponds to the producer's authenticity in living out the views by which he or she is said to be motivated. This emphasis on the motivations of the individual shifts criticism from the work in its context to those recoverable elements of the producer's intentions. This does not allow for an assessment of the ways in which meaning and effects are created socially within the production context. It is this assessment that is crucial to the methodology adopted in this thesis.

For similar reasons, it has been decided not to use the term 'left-wing'. Ira A. Levine employs this 'to refer to the political orientation, aesthetic ideas, or artistic work of individuals affiliated with a radical political party, or supportive of any political program designed to replace capitalism with socialism, or subscribing to the principals of historical materialism' (Levine 1985: xii). This again raises the problems of a focus on the motivation of the producers. The limitations of such an investigation need to be acknowledged before proceeding further. Primarily, it relies on the acknowledgement by the theatre producer of the political forces which shape his or her patterns of work. This is often made to the detriment of a fuller appreciation of the many coincidental and personal influences as well as the exigencies of making theatre which may equally shape the work. Indeed, the understanding that many practitioners have of political theory is intuitive rather than intellectual; rarely is it as fully articulated in their practice as the political theories which such practice is supposed to support. This creates the problem of reducing the totality of a work to a set of pre-existing and identifiable political ideas, ignoring the fact that the work is the only complete expression of itself. In the face of this, the critic is then engaged in imposing retrospectively an interpretative unity on works that themselves may have been journeys towards a particular political understanding and mode of practice.

This raises the vexing question of the intentional fallacy<sup>6</sup>. How much should the evaluation of the theatre work be tied to an understanding of the intention of the producer? Can such intentions ever be really recovered, given the inevitable intervention of post-hoc rationalisation? This is especially problematic when disputes based on particular theories arise between practitioners about their differing practices; the drawn-out debate between John McGrath and Arnold Wesker<sup>7</sup> and the later discussion between the former and David Edgar<sup>8</sup>

are pertinent examples of this. It is impossible to resolve such disputes by reference to the intentions of the parties concerned, or their evaluation of their own practice. One must look beyond this to make an independent assessment of the work.

Levine moves towards this position in introducing the term 'radical drama'. He uses it to describe 'any dramatic work written from a left-wing perspective. In general such works dramatised some facet of the class struggle' (1985: xii); thus he looks at the motivation for the work and then at the work itself. He distinguishes it from 'social drama', which encompasses 'a broader range of plays, liberal-reformist as well as revolutionary, that were written to illuminate and to protest social conditions' (ibid). Levine has shifted the focus to include an assessment of the production itself. In so doing, he opens the way for a more objective evaluation of the work and ideas of the practitioners than can be gained from analyses centred on their own accounts and evaluations.

However, Levine and others make a distinction between drama that is left-wing or revolutionary and that which is liberal-reformist, terming the one radical and the other social. For example, David Ian Rabey describes social drama as 'that which purports to act as an impartial report on social relationships or focuses on specific social problems without attacking fundamental society' (Rabey 1986: 2). Not only is it assumed that the liberal-reformist position is less political, but that the contexts in which these dramas are performed are not in themselves contributory factors in determining the political force with which they are enacted. This relates to distinctions which are made between political drama and political theatre to which I will return in my definition of 'theatre'. Given the severe challenge presented by the rise to power of the New Right in Britain to even the consensus liberal-reformist

politics of the post-war years the political possibilities of social drama should not be dismissed.

Any attempt to do so is further undercut by Graham Murdock's characterisation of 'radical drama'. In 'Radical Drama, Radical Theatre', he sets out four basic characteristics:

First, radical drama sets out to present a critical perspective on the present social order. It aims to lay bare the structures of power and privilege and to show how they permeate everyday life, limiting and curtailing opportunities for self-realisation and social change... The aim is to point up the links between personal experience and political process and to uncover the social and institutional sources of individual misery....

Second, radical drama probes the idealisations and rationalisations that justify the present order. It challenges taken-for-granted assumptions and prises open the gaps between ideological promise and institutional performance....

Third, radical drama investigates the dynamics of social change and transformation and explores the politics of possibility....

And lastly, but certainly not least, radical drama challenges the institutions and practices of conventional theatre. It opposes the cultural stratification which concentrates the theatre-going audience among non-manual groups and reaches out for a working-class audience. It also aims to alter the established relationship between audiences and performances. Where conventional drama fixes the spectator in the role of consumer of other people's problems, radical drama attempts to link sympathy to struggle. As well as prompting people to reflect critically on the present situation, it aims to encourage them to take action to change it.

(Murdock 1980: 151-152).

The characteristics that Murdock identifies do not preclude work which might otherwise be classified as 'social drama'. Additionally, the term has the advantage of looking at what radical drama does rather than just at what it means. It implies an engagement with the context in which the drama takes place, and how that affects the analysis that is brought to bear on it.

However, in applying this critique to certain works within Scotland, one can see that it excludes a crucial element of many important works: the power of celebration of popular culture (or sanitised versions of it) in a way which consolidates rather than challenging it. Scotland's relationship to England has meant that works which appeal to or foster sometimes quite reactionary chauvinism are politically powerful because of the way in which they constitute Scottishness almost as an 'alternative nationality'<sup>9</sup> to that of Thatcherite Britishness. The emphasis on the radical element would mean that such works would have to be excluded. In the same way, the accepted sense of 'radical' seems at odds with some of Murdock's own criteria. Bourgeois liberalism and Labour reformism quite readily accept the notion of improvement and change within the system: the integration of left-wing artists within bourgeois institutions is a clear example of this.

Given the limitations of these other terms the use of 'political' seems apt since what is being discussed is theatre which functions to deny boundaries between art and the political reality in which it is produced. However, this is not as straightforward as it might seem, given the critical heritage of the term. There are certain elements of this heritage which are accepted here and others which are discarded. So, for example, Catherine Itzin's Stages in The Revolution: Political Theatre in Britain since 1968 (1980) uses the term to document certain developments in British theatre. She defines this as theatre produced by people 'who were not, for the most part, just socially committed, but committed to a socialist society....[It] was primarily theatre of political change' (1980: x). In amplifying this, she invokes John McGrath's characterisation of it as theatre

that exists somewhere within the shadow, or at least the penumbra, of the ideas of Marx and Marxists; theatre that has as its base a recognition of capitalism as an economic system that produces classes; that sees the betterment of human life for all people in the abolition of classes and capitalism; that sees that this can only happen through the rise to state

power of the current under-class, the working class, and through democratisation - economic as well as political - of society and its decision-making processes; that sees the establishment of socialism not as the creation of Utopia or the end of the dialectic of history, but as another step towards the realisation of the full potential of every individual human life during the short time that every individual has to live.

(McGrath 1979: 43)

In the article from which this is drawn, McGrath acknowledged both that 'all theatre is political' and that there were many varieties of political theatre. His restriction of the term to socialist theatre, which Itzin accepts, is because they are both concerned with describing the development of a movement which was primarily identifiable through common socialist aspirations. Problematically, such a descriptive definition seems to deny the use of the term to describe theatres produced within anarchist frameworks and works intended to attack the political structure of society without necessarily accepting its class basis: feminist and gay theatres, and theatres whose political function is nationalist rather than socialist, for example. Itzin herself does not stick rigidly to this definition, drawing gay and feminist theatre groups into her account. Common sense dictates that such limitations be removed.

More problematically still, Itzin's use of the term entails a methodology that examines the area of study largely from the point of view of the theatre producers, based on a presentation of their motivations in producing theatre. The work is discussed in terms of the political commitments and intentions of the people who produced it. There are descriptive accounts of the origin and development of companies and evaluations of the ideas of writers (she also includes informative accounts of issues and events). The main focus is therefore on the political inspirations and ideas of the theatre workers as they themselves perceived them. Thus, this use of 'political theatre'

conflates the motivations and ideas of the originators of such theatres with the sum of their political significance.

While the descriptive limitations of Itzin's use of 'political' may be overcome, the term has also been applied in a prescriptive way by certain commentators. Bernard Crick's essay, 'The Political in Britain's Two National Theatres' (1979), is a good example. He advances an argument that politics and drama are similar since

Both involve contrast, clash or conflict of differing viewpoints, values, or characters, often in changing or different circumstances. Both may find or seek some resolution, but the manner of reaching that resolution is what makes a decision political rather than autocratic or arbitrary, or a play a political drama rather than propaganda, or 'triumph', or tableaux vivants

(Crick 1979: 170).

So, while any oppositional piece of theatre will, even at its most 'propagandist', involve a clash between the point of view presented in the theatre and the point of view dominant outside it, Crick demands that the clash take place between viewpoints that are presented with equal force on the stage. This excludes many things that most people would otherwise describe as political theatre. Crick's deliberate exclusion of 'propaganda', 'triumph' or 'tableaux vivants' represents a denial of the ways in which such works have a legitimately political function. The limitations of such an approach cannot be sustained.

In his introduction to The Politics of Theatre and Drama, the editor, Graham Holderness, charts the difficulties which using the term creates for those writing in the 1990s. He considers the relationship between the two terms 'political' and 'theatre'. He describes theatre which is political 'by accident': that is, theatre which addresses issues commonly considered 'political', without attempting to take sides (although of course it will inevitably). He rejects this accidental theatre on the basis that

Politics proper is surely, however, incompatible with a detached, objective perspective: politics is about making choices, taking sides, getting things done in order to re-shape the world along particular lines of development. If 'political theatre' is understood as theatre engaging in a different sort of relationship with politics, that process must entail theatre's becoming partisan, splitting along the lines of party conflict, lining up with one particular political group, or cause, or ideology, and offering articulate opposition to another group, or cause, or ideology.

(Holderness 1992: 2)

Holderness, then, is distinguishing that which 'merely represents the political as an aspect of life' and that which 'is fundamentally shaped by political commitment and conviction' (ibid: 3). He continues to state that according to this distinction

we also have to acknowledge that the politics of a truly political theatre must be a matter of conscious choice and deliberate intention. If a political tendency is only a matter of unconscious predilection or instinctive preference, then that would seem to belong to the symptomatic definition of political theatre, where the realm of the political is merely the object of representation, and does not otherwise form a central or constitutive part of the cultural product itself.

(ibid)

For the purposes of this thesis, it is appropriate to accept both of the distinctions which Holderness makes. Thus, the interest is in work which is political because it engages with political issues in a deliberately partisan way and as a matter of conscious choice. The limitations of research focusing on the producers' intentions are overcome, since the object is not to document these intentions, but to use them as a point from which one can begin to examine the work in context. It excludes the examination of the works of producers who are aesthetically avant-garde but do not address the political functions of their work. It also explains why I am not addressing the politics of dominant theatres (which deny their political functions), or indeed, undertaking an in-depth study of the political structures

within which theatres operate, although there is an outline of these in Chapter Three.

### 'Theatre'

This brings me to the definition of 'theatre' which will be used. There is a range of works which we refer to as 'theatre' which encompasses more than what is commonly referred to as 'drama'. Keir Elam's definition of 'drama' as 'that mode of fiction designed for stage representation and constructed according to particular ('dramatic') conventions' (1980: 2) excludes such things as cabaret, musical theatre and street theatre, for example. As already noted, Elam contrasts this with a view of 'theatre' as 'the complex of phenomena associated with the performer-audience transaction: that is, with the production and communication of meaning in the performance and with the systems underlying it' (ibid). Thus, 'theatre' is a description of the set of relationships between audience and performer. 'Drama' is a particular set of conventions governing this relationship.

Against this, Sandy Craig advances his own qualitative dichotomy between 'political plays' and 'political theatre':

Political plays seek to appeal to, and influence, the middle-class, in particular that section of the middle-class which is influential in moulding 'public opinion'. The implication of this is that society can be reformed and liberalized, where necessary, by the shock troops of the middle-class...But further, political plays in bourgeois theatre implicitly recognize that the middle-class remains the progressive class in society. Political theatre, on the other hand, as embodied in the various political theatre companies, aims...to appeal to, and be an expression of the working class. Its underlying belief is that the working class is the progressive class within society.

(Craig 1980: 30)

Craig's distinction relies on the assumption that the institutional framework sustaining bourgeois theatre practice cannot be challenged sufficiently by individual artists or pieces of work to allow the practices of

'political theatres' to alter the running of such institutions. It does not, indeed could not, take account of developments within Scotland which have created theatres which cannot be neatly divided according to the class alignment of their audiences.

Furthermore, the distinction between 'theatre' referring to the institutional context and 'play' referring to the produced work seems to me to have a misplaced emphasis. Although its use is located within the debates concerning 'strategic penetration'<sup>10</sup>, within a wider context the distinction collapses under closer scrutiny. Since, ultimately, an act of theatre takes place only through the event of performance (in plays and numerous other forms), every performance itself constitutes its own theatre within the context in which it is taking place. Theatre is all that happens in that negotiation between the performance, the audience, and the context. Notably, this negotiation involves more than 'the communication of meaning' to which Elam restricts it. As has been demonstrated in the context of Scottish theatre, it is possible to create within established theatre buildings, theatres that appeal to a much broader audience than that normally attracted to such venues. Theatres which attract such audiences can therefore subvert the dominant institutional practices governing these venues. This definition is important because it allows works which are varied in form and content, which took place in a variety of locations and contexts to be described in the same ways. Moreover, it sites the area of study firmly within the interaction between audience, text and context.

### **Methodology**

This emphasis on the location of the analysis creates a set of considerations as to how the politics of the productions used as case studies might be assessed. Obviously, the meaning of the work will vary according to its context of production. Works do not possess an inherent

political quality present in every production: their political force comes in their performance within specific contexts. Yet frequently, the analysis of the politics of productions has demonstrated an assumption that the political function of the work is immanent in it, waiting to be uncovered. At its worst this has produced mere New Critical literary analysis which is unable to explore fully the substantial differences between the live theatre event and the rendition of a set of themes, theories or ideas as a written text. Such approaches ignore the specificity of the act of theatre and of the influence of context in determining the very particular meanings and experiences which will be constructed by an audience at a specific time.

Such methodologies have been challenged by developments within practice as well as in theory. The post-1968 alternative theatre movements in Britain, and in Europe and the United States, explored a range of practices which defied traditional literary evaluations and analyses. Experiments to attract new theatre audiences immediately displaced any notion that there could be any universal meaning in texts. Differences of interpretation according to the class of audiences in different social settings became immediately apparent. Developments in feminist theory and theatre practice provided a further critique of the idea of the universal interpretation and evaluation of artworks, since frequently what had passed for these were analyses deeply embedded within patriarchal value systems. The idea that differences in audience response could and should be eliminated through education in the best or correct values (in accordance with the Arnoldian tradition) was fractured significantly and the emphasis was switched by radical practitioners to addressing these differences within the work and through new ways of working.

The attempt to reach a new audience was part of a movement to change the experience of theatre which had other broad implications. New inter- and cross-disciplinary

initiatives invoked models from visual art and music as a means of finding new forms of expression. The relationship between audience and performer became the subject of a wide range of experiments that attempted to renegotiate it. Such initiatives led to a reassessment of the place of the written text in the hierarchy of signification, and thus the appropriate location of analysis. In some instances it was displaced completely; in others its use defied any kind of dramatic tradition. Moreover, it opened the way for the reinsertion into the critical paradigm of the role of the audience and context in the making of theatre.

If theatres cannot be evaluated in terms of written text analysis then how can they be talked about meaningfully? Susan Bennett (1990) in Theatre Audiences. A Theory of Production and Reception usefully summarises three different approaches to theatre analysis which address this question. The first is performance theory. A brief account of its methodological basis is given thus:

Theory from non-literary studies - as diverse as Huizinga's writings on the significance of play, Victor Turner's work on social dramas and ritual, Jane Goodall's research on the behavioural patterns of chimpanzees - is investigated in an attempt to replace paradigms for dramatic theory that are seen as outmoded. It is easy to see how such an interdisciplinary approach would open up interest in the field of audience response and, indeed, from the importation of the social sciences, new paradigms are constructed. Among these, the audience emerges as a tangibly active creator of the theatrical event...

(Bennett 1990: 10)

Performance theory, by extending the analysis of theatre to include elements of anthropology, for example, introduces a range of factors concerning the event of theatre that go beyond what Bennett calls 'more traditional concerns about the audience's perception of the play performance' (1990: 12).

The second approach described by Bennett is the development of semiology. Semiology examines the multiple

components of theatre and how they interact in the processes of signification. Its origins in the 1930s and 1940s were with The Prague School, drawing on both Russian Formalist and Saussurean linguistic theory. It was not however, until the late 1960s that semiotics became an important part of theatre studies. Keir Elam's The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama (1980) was used here as an introductory text to the approach. However, as Bennett (cf 1990: p14) points out, semiotics as presently constituted does little to acknowledge the role of the audience. It is relatively easy, nonetheless, to extend the role of semiotic analysis, by asking why signs signify what they do at a given time and place. The answer to this question must involve an acknowledgement of the social setting in which the theatre takes place.

The third approach has been in audience-response and reception theory. These have their roots in the literary theories associated with Hans Robert Jauss, Wolfgang Iser and Stanley Fish (see Bennett 1990: 36-58). In particular, Fish's concept of 'interpretative communities'<sup>11</sup> who share strategies for the interpretation of texts, coincides with the emphasis here on establishing the cultural framework in which a work takes place as the only point of entry into a discussion of its analysis and interpretation. Further, to study the ways in which reader-response to the written text changes through time is much more appropriate in the consideration of the reaction of audiences to the strategies of theatre performances. More generally, the application of such ideas to theatre studies has been through two related approaches: the development of theoretical models and empirical research. These have forced consideration of the audience into the critical paradigm, although as yet there has only been limited development in both areas.

Growing out of all these areas, and underpinning Bennett's own approach, has been the methodology of socio-criticism. Patrice Pavis characterises socio-criticism thus:

'It aims to describe the mechanisms of the specific works it treats, without excluding the rapport that these works have with the social context of their production and reception'(Pavis 1983:8). Bennett herself describes how this might begin to be assessed, using a model which relies on two frames:

The outer frame is concerned with theatre as a cultural construct through the idea of the theatrical event, the selection of material for production, and the audience's definitions and expectations of a performance. The inner frame contains the event itself and, in particular, the spectator's experience of a fictional stage world. This frame encompasses production strategies, ideological overcoming, and the material conditions of performance. It is the intersection of these two frames which forms the spectator's cultural understanding and experience of theatre. Beyond this, the relationship between the frames is always seen as interactive. Cultural assumptions affect performances, and performances rewrite cultural assumptions.

(Bennett 1990: 2)

Certain caveats need to be raised about such an approach, however. Despite its title, socio-criticism does not require the creation of specific mechanisms drawn from or analogous to those of the social sciences by which it might create these frames; nor does it imply empirical research into receptions by actual audiences - it is not intended that it supersede Reception research in this area. The move away from empirical research is motivated by a number of factors. Firstly, there is the difficulty in initially measuring and, for the purposes of this study, recovering actual audience responses outwith specific controlled situations. The findings of studies such as by Tan and Schoenmakers (1984) rely on such controlled situations rather than on the concurrent or post hoc analysis of a conventional theatre event. Secondly, since audiences generally process theatre events according to subconscious mechanisms, answers to direct questioning about why they might have had certain reactions to individual elements within performances do not necessarily shed light

on the underlying or actual mechanisms at work. In this instance, questionnaires about productions which took place almost ten years previously were not felt to be useful, for example. Thirdly, and most significantly, socio-criticism and empirical reception studies have significantly different aims. The latter body of work aims to discover general processes by which audiences relate to all productions by testing theories about such processes against the results of controlled experiments. While the results of these tests may then be used within socio-criticism, they are not in themselves its justification. Instead, socio-criticism provides a critical perspective on the ways in which individual productions work by reference to both the specific strategies of the production and to the factors by which their reception is determined socially. Rather than necessarily assigning values to the productions, the concept of 'working' implies a descriptively adequate analysis of the relationship set up between audiences and event by the production. In a retrospective study such as this, this means relying on the relatively stable elements from performance to performance within productions in the absence of information about specific performances.

For the purposes of this study, this analysis involved two strategies. The first was to establish the cultural context in which the productions took place; hence, the concern to identify key political changes in Scotland over the period (Chapter 2), and to examine the institutional framework in which the theatres were produced (Chapter 3). The interpretation of the ways in which the productions worked was undertaken by reference to experimental and theoretical work on the processing of theatre events and of other contemporaneous media forms, particularly television and film, but also newspapers and popular music. Where available, anecdotal evidence about specific productions has also been included to give a better sense of the live event. This evidence has inevitably been drawn from producers because of their availability and readiness to give such

information, and because of the difficulties in locating audience members with sufficient recollection of the particular performances in question.

One further crucial point to be made is that the politics of productions are not assessed purely in terms of a meaning or message based purely on their ideational content. Ideologies function not only to shape information but to construct the ways in which the world is experienced. For this reason, attention is paid to the ways in which the theatrical events function to organise all the important power relationships which they initiate, not just those within the performance. So there is a focus on pleasure generation and spectatorship, and the relationship between these and the meanings created by the theatrical event.

### **The Thesis Layout**

The way in which this thesis is structured demonstrates how connections are made between the practices of political theatres and their contexts. It is not expected that there will be any direct cause-and-effect relationship between the actual productions of these theatres and these contexts, except perhaps in the motivation for directly agitational work. However, the historical development of these theatres during the Thatcher years is closely tied to the economic and institutional frameworks within which they operated. One important element of the thesis is the documentation of changes in the overall context of production of Scottish theatres. So, Chapter Two sets out the changing political circumstances in Scotland under the various administrations headed by Mrs Thatcher. This is important in constructing the general social setting in which these theatres took place. As a supplement to this, Appendix II gives a brief chronology of major political events of the period. Chapter Three will outline the developments in the institutional framework in which Scottish theatres operated, with a particular emphasis on the relationship between theatres and

central government through the Scottish Arts Council. Additionally, each chapter dealing with the work of a specific group or writer will include a contextualization of their development in relation to the political and theatrical settings.

The second emphasis of the thesis is on developments of practice in terms of actual productions. This is carried out through a series of case studies, tied to each of the discussions of particular groups or writers. I have chosen to examine productions which may be representative in this respect of a body of related works, but which are nonetheless innovative in some respect in relation to previous practice. The case studies are presented according to the chronological order of the productions. This gives some indication of the development, or otherwise, of political theatres over the period. The productions studied are then: Theatre PKF's The Brus (1982); Wildcat's 1982 - later Any Minute Now - (1982/83); John Binnie's Killing Me Softly (1987) produced by Clyde Unity; The Merry Mac Fun Show's cabaret, MacLash (1987); Peter Arnott's Losing Alec (1988), produced at the Tron; and Border Warfare (1989), written by John McGrath and produced by Wildcat at the Tramway.

The choice of productions to be studied has been determined by a number of factors. The most pressing of these has been the recoverability of the performance text. In order to avoid being restricted to dramatic or literary criticism of scripts, there has been a reliance on video and audio tapes, or personal recollection, or, in some cases, revived productions as a means of assessing the production in performance. The productions chosen from those thus made available have not, however, been selected at random. An emphasis on the political impact of such productions on their audiences resulted in the selection of productions which attempted to renegotiate the traditional basis of the performer-audience-context relationship. This

may have been through the exploration of formal production qualities, the introduction of new content, or the use of new contexts. Obviously, this selection is highly subjective and there are a number of works which could have been included but are not; hence, the use of 'aspects' of Scottish political theatre in the title. The selection process has been conditioned by my own response to these works as I first encountered them, and it is not intended that it be used as a canonical guide.

A notable gap is the absence of the treatment of the work of any women producers. The decision to leave such a gap was taken after careful consideration. Few women had controlling access to the means of theatrical production for much of the period in question. Thus their actual levels of representation as producers during this period remained low. Further, the issues surrounding the important and growing role of, for example, women writers, and indeed the influence of feminism within theatres in Scotland requires a substantial and detailed analysis. Indeed, the development of a whole range of feminist critical theories has itself thrown up new questions, considerations and issues, some of which have been drawn on here. Since there is insufficient space within this thesis to undertake an adequate in-depth treatment, I decided that the inclusion of a chapter on a woman producer unable to accommodate such issues would merely be token. It is for this reason that any such work is excluded from the case studies presented. At the time of writing, it is clear that this deficit is being made up through the work of a number of other research students.

Each chapter then will consist of an evaluation of the relevant political and cultural context in which the individual production took place. This is reconstructed by reference to cultural and political commentaries, and to sociological studies where available. Some duplication may be involved since some of the works are engaged in revaluations around similar areas. There is,

for example a marked use of history.<sup>12</sup> The evaluation of the relevant context will also involve a descriptive account of the work of the writer and/or company by whom the work has been produced, assigning them their place within a more general framework. These descriptive accounts are the result of a series of interviews with a number of theatre practitioners, as well as the cooperation of a number of people in granting access to archive material. This establishes the immediate theatrical context in which the work was produced. There is a brief discussion of specific elements of production: the cast, venues, timing, funding, audience figures and critical reception (extensive use is made of reviews where available), for example, which will serve as a preliminary to the central examination of the production. Thus, against the background of an in-depth understanding of the moment in which the production took place, the ways in which the production operated in relation to its audience within that moment will be laid out. This avoids the intentionalism of approaches centred on the motivations of producers and the unrestrained subjectivity of critical judgements which ignore the context of production.

The final chapter of the thesis combines the various strands elucidated through these case studies, drawing general conclusions about the range of practices, particularly in relation to the institutional framework in which they were operating; and drawing conclusions also about the effect and effectiveness of the strategies used within productions to give them a political function as theatre. Both sets of conclusions have a wider relevance than the Scottish context, while at the same time, identifying what it is that is distinct about that context.

## 2. SCOTLAND AND THATCHERISM

### Introduction

As a socio-critical approach to analysis places an emphasis on the context in which political theatres happened, it is necessary to detail some of the major changes in the political climate in Scotland while Mrs Thatcher was Prime Minister. In this chapter I will outline the informing principles of Thatcherism and those of the dominant political culture in Scotland, Labourism; how these two antithetical sets of ideas collided; and how emergent discourses within the political culture inserted themselves into the mainstream of Scottish political life.

### Thatcherism

The coming to power of the Conservatives under Margaret Thatcher in 1979 was a watershed event in British political life: its immediate result was the first significant and successful challenge to the social democratic consensus ('Butskellism') that had dominated British politics since the 1950s. While her successor, John Major, inherited from her a Thatcherite government, he quickly broke with both the style and substance of her leadership, abandoning key policies regarding monetarism and state intervention. Of course, the eleven and a half years which Mrs Thatcher enjoyed as Prime Minister cannot be homogenised into a set of non-dynamic qualities and policies, universally implemented and accepted. There are a number of reasons for this which the following chapter shall explore with particular reference to the relationship set up between Mrs Thatcher's governments and the majority of people in Scotland.

Firstly, then, any party in power is constricted by two overriding concerns: sustaining itself in power and wielding that power according to the variety of interest groups that constitute its support. Secondly, although the first government of Mrs Thatcher came to power in 1979 with

a stronger ideological grounding and a clearer agenda than any party since the Attlee administration of 1945, the development of Thatcherism as a phenomenon was not that of a fully worked out and coherent set of ideas and policies, applied unreservedly in practice. Not only was it drawn from a range of philosophies and assumptions 'which reflected the views of a wide variety of thinkers, politicians and industrialists, sometimes doing little more than disguising personal or institutional prejudices as political beliefs' (Alderman 1989: 123); but indeed much Thatcherite policy was reactive, initiated in response to specific events and situations. Moreover, the development and implementation of policies was in itself uneven. The rhetoric of Thatcherism often outpaced the enactment of the agenda for radical change - there were significant lapses between rhetoric, policy, action, and effect. The bureaucratic weight of the Civil Service, as well as that of various agencies, quangos and civil institutions was not to be swayed easily at the behest of their new mistress. Furthermore, there was a series of confrontations between the left and right wings within the Tory party itself, indeed even within the Cabinet. Milton Friedman, a leading economist of the New Right, commented:

The thing that people do not recognise is that Margaret Thatcher is not in terms of belief a Tory. She is a nineteenth century Liberal. But her party consists largely of Tories. They don't really believe in free markets. They don't believe in free trade. They never have as a party.

(The Observer 29/9/82, quoted Plant 1983: 13)

Throughout Britain there was a further series of battles to be won before Thatcherism was to reach a position of dominance. Perhaps most significantly, although Thatcherism had by the mid-Eighties become a hegemonic political discourse in the government of the United Kingdom, there were many features of the residual corporatist-interventionism embodied in various British institutions and in the separate institutions and dominant national political culture of Scotland. It is the differences between the

dominant national political culture of Scotland and the assumptions embodied in the New Right ideologies of Thatcherism that most concern this thesis and which I shall now draw out.

Although I have suggested that Thatcherism was not a coherent set of ideas and policies in the ways in which it was effected, it did draw its inspiration from the strains of opinion and philosophy identified with the position of the New Right. Deriving from selective interpretations of Adam Smith and David Hume, this was primarily an economic philosophy, articulated most coherently in the works of Milton Friedman and the Chicago School, Frederick Hayek, Robert Nozick, and various economists within the Virginia School. These works cohere in an 'anti-rational'<sup>1</sup>, utilitarian, economic liberalism which promotes the principles of the free market in the economic and political organisation of society. Within Britain, the New Right position was further distinguished by what Nicholas Deakin describes as 'a moralistic position on social policy and a strong commitment to nationality and the nation state' (Deakin 1986: 6-7).

Thatcherism was informed by these strands but defined itself specifically through the personality of Mrs Thatcher and the goals that she set for herself, her government and the country. It centred almost entirely around her person (progressively so as stalwart supporters like John Nott, Keith Joseph, Norman Tebbit, Norman Fowler, Nicholas Ridley, Nigel Lawson and Geoffrey Howe retired or were discarded), and owed much to her own self-belief and arrogance. In one speech in 1982 she asked, 'Do you remember what Queen Victoria said? "Failure - the possibility does not exist"'. It led to the erosion of collective decision-making and the principle of consultation in Cabinet government, and was characterised by the strongly aggressive, domineering and frequently patronising attitudes of the woman herself. Strength of government and singleness of purpose - 'the lady is not for turning' - were made equivalent to the

continuity of her leadership, and demanded unswerving loyalty. Even for the Conservatives, of whom Robert Mackenzie had written, 'When appointed, the Leader leads, and the party follows; except when the party decides not to follow; then the Leader ceases to be Leader'<sup>2</sup>, Mrs Thatcher's government was exceptional in its complete rejection of contrary opinions and challenges to its position from outside. At the time of her election to the party leadership she made, what Philip Whitehead calls, 'a positive defence of middle-class values', writing later that

My kind of Tory Party would make no secret of its belief in individual freedom and individual prosperity, in the maintenance of law and order, in the widespread distribution of private property, in rewards for energy, skill and thrift, in diversity of choice, in the preservation of local rights in local communities.

(quoted Whitehead 1985: 329)

This sense of the individual was defined in terms of Mrs Thatcher's own experience: in a speech in 1989 she said 'There is no such thing as society. There are individual men and women and there are families'. She lectured the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, saying that 'intervention by the state must never become so great that it effectively removes personal responsibility'. In the same speech, the racist tendency of the New Right was exhibited: 'People with other faiths and cultures have always been welcomed in our land. There is absolutely nothing incompatible between this and our desire to maintain the essence of our own identity'. Like almost all Thatcherite policy, the definition of 'our own identity', was Anglo-centric and petit bourgeois. It brooked no differences.

The two key goals for Mrs Thatcher were the implementation of market economics to make Britain 'great' again, and the consolidation of her own position of leadership. Occasionally, this would throw up contradictions or lapses between what Mrs Thatcher and her ministers said and what was actually done. In some areas, for example, her dismantling of the Welfare State, she was unable to shake

off the burdens of a forty year old system largely because of public support for the system. There was always a large degree of assymetry in the hegemonic control that Thatcherism exercised. In other areas, such as the defence of individual liberty, her rhetoric was continually in contradiction with the restrictions on civil liberties that her government imposed. Such contradictions were exacerbated since while the first goal was quite coherently articulated, the second inspired a set of reactive policies, which attacked those whose actions had demonstrated that they were not 'one of us'. Peter Kellner describes the pattern thus:

The Government isolates some person or institution and either exploits existing hostility to them (like Arthur Scargill or the gay community) or tries to make them unpopular (as with the BBC), then decides Something Must Be Done To Stop Them. That 'something' creates a new general curb on liberty, potentially affecting us all.

(Kellner 1989: 27)

Suspicion of all those wielding power other than her own government lead to a number of unprecedented attacks on institutions and groups who had previously enjoyed Establishment status. The New Right economists had promoted the idea that 'utility-maximising'<sup>3</sup> bureaucrats and politicians were incapable of working in the public interest, so Mrs Thatcher hacked away at the 'deadening hand' of bureaucracy within the Welfare State and talked of reducing state interference in the lives of individuals. Significantly, Thatcherism represented something more than an attack on the working classes, although it was that as well; it questioned the fundamental basis of large institutions and groups within the society, including those run by the professional and middle classes (teachers, academics, lawyers, doctors, and civil servants, for example). Thus, while attacking some aspects of the exercise of centralised state control, Mrs Thatcher's governments exhibited a marked tendency towards centralisation in areas where local or semi-autonomous control did not demonstrate the appropriate responses to Thatcherism and the free market. Neal Acherson, in an

article in The Observer Magazine (23/4/89), captures this precisely:

She uses the State only for one purpose: to hold society down while the full blast of market forces plays over its flinching body. In this programme there is not much call for the politics of consent and construction. Instead, there is the resort to authority, while Parliament obediently churns out legislation which strips institutions of political control and replaces it with closer supervision by the courts and the police.

Implicit in this is the onslaught against all centres of political faith and action which - unlike Westminster - show signs of independence.

(Acherson 1989: 43)

### **Scottish Political Culture: Labourism**

In examining the relationship between Scotland and Thatcherism it is important to realise that Scotland was significantly different from the rest of Britain in a number of key respects prior to 1979; which helps to explain the subsequent disparity between attitudes to Thatcherism north and south of the border, as well as the almost instant mutual antipathy that characterised the relationship between Mrs Thatcher's governments and the mass of the Scottish people. One recognises of course, for example, that the Scots enjoy a duality of nationality - demonstrated particularly during the Falklands War and the Gulf campaign. David McCrone, for example, noted that

Above all, the Falklands saga shows just how much we've underestimated the potency of Anglo/British nationalism...the now famous 'effect' is less strong north of the border, but it does remind us of the perceptive comment by the late John Mackintosh that Scots have a 'dual' nationality, Scottish and British, which they adeptly switch when it suits them.

(McCrone 1982, 3)

However, while acknowledging McCrone's point, it is important to see just how the period of the Thatcher government led to a developing reassessment by Scots of Scotland's relationship to Britain, particularly as a result of the growing resentment at the English orientation of

British institutions under Thatcherism. Furthermore, while James G. Kellas' assessment of the country as a separate political system must be qualified, there was in 1979 a different dominant political culture which would set Scotland apart from Thatcher's Britain.

The primary feature of this political culture before Thatcherism was the influence of Labourism within it. This is not to deny the strong tradition of Liberalism in certain areas, of Nationalism in others, or indeed, the range of radical movements in Scottish politics from John MacLean to the Iona Community. Nor should it be thought that it is intended to dismiss the extent to which the Conservative Party in Scotland would swing wholeheartedly behind Mrs Thatcher, providing her with both key ideas and supporters. Nonetheless, the Conservative share of the Scottish vote has been diminishing since 1955. To the extent that parties such as the SNP and the Liberals (and later the Alliance) enjoyed institutional recognition in the media and in government, if not popular support, Scotland during the 1970s and through the 1980s was much more a multi-party state than the rest of the United Kingdom.<sup>4</sup> However, it is Labourism above all else which traditionally dominated Scottish political culture.

Hilary Wainwright (1987) describes the historical development of Labourism within Britain as deriving from the formation of trade unions as a means of negotiating the best deal for the workers from capitalism; which in turn lead to the formation of and commitment to the Labour Party as the workers' political instrument. It generates a strong sense of class-alignment in voting patterns. The continued influence (particularly financial) of the unions in the working of the Labour Party demonstrates a belief in the democratic institutions and a consequent loyalty to the state. Labourism therefore combines as political values trade unionism and parliamentary respectability. This concern for respectability has frequently gone hand-in-hand with a conservatism regarding radically progressive

democratic or egalitarian initiatives, in the treatment of women workers, or, the introduction of constitutional reform, for example. It has resulted in top-down organisation that within the Labour Party has eschewed grass-roots activism. Whereas previously in Scotland the Communist Party provided a radical alternative to the staid respectability of the Labour Party, by 1979 its influence even within the trade unions had diminished, partly because of internal problems and partly because of a failure of faith in the belief that the government could be defeated in confrontations.

Trust in parliamentary democracy and the successes of centralised state planning achieved during World War II and consolidated through the post-war welfare state have also created a strongly interventionist tradition within Labourism: a belief in the duty and power of governments to effectively intervene to ameliorate any number of social ills. This commitment to intervention allied with respect for parliamentary democracy gave rise to an acceptance of the state as a paternalistic provider. The nationalisation of ailing industries is a key example of this. Not only does this tradition run contrary to revolutionary left-wing politics and genuinely participatory democracy (which were the source of a significant challenge in the Sixties and early Seventies in particular), but it also diminished the influence of market forces and consumer choice in the economy of the country.

The continuous domination of the Labourist tradition within Scotland can be accounted for, according to Bochel and Denver (1983), by the traditional distribution of occupations which has favoured the institutions of organised labour. This strong element of class-alignment in voting patterns has remained in Scotland but disappeared in England, where there has been a growth in Conservative voting by skilled manual workers since 1974. Traditionally, Scottish trade unions could rely on wide-spread support from the Scottish work-force, not least of all because of the

country's reliance on heavy industries which under nationalised control guaranteed closed shop arrangements. Moreover, historically Scots had been placed in the vanguard of developments within the labour movement and held a strongly embedded attachment and cultural commitment to it.

In terms of demographics also, social conditions favoured the growth of Labourism. In housing for example, local authorities provided a much larger proportion of rented accommodation than in England and Wales; in 1981 over 50% of Scottish households rented from local authorities, whereas in Britain as a whole the figure was nearer 30%. Additionally, Scotland has in relation to the rest of Britain a disproportionately high concentration of areas of deprivation, formerly inner city slums, now on peripheral housing schemes. The high level of poverty in these areas has meant that there has been a dependency on state provisions for welfare benefits, health-care, education, employment and community activity. Given the high concentrations of unemployment within these and other areas, and the higher than average national levels (1 person in 8 in 1981) it is not surprising that the continued well-being or otherwise of these places, and the country as a whole, was perceived as depending heavily on the continuation of state intervention. The Labour Party has always been identified as the guardian of such provisions. This is not to say that Scotland has been privileged with special treatment within the Welfare State; rather that there had been, as Richard Parry (1985: 138) noted, 'a coincidence of U.K. policy and Scottish circumstances' until the ascendancy of Margaret Thatcher.

The reliance on the Welfare State coincided with a key factor that arose from Scotland's position as a 'subject political culture' (Kellas 1984: 258ff): respect for authority. Kellas ascribes the influence of this to the fact that 'the Scottish political system is heavily weighted towards administrative and legal activities without the underpinning of a legislative body to keep them in check'

the continued provision of employment and heavily influenced by political intervention to encourage economic prosperity. This had eroded Scotland's economic autonomy, making top-down decision the norm: ordinary people are not only denied, but indeed exhibit no great urge to acquire, the opportunity to participate in taking control of governing themselves. Thus political party membership, of even the Labour Party, is disproportionately low, relative to the rest of the United Kingdom. The resistance to participatory forms would seem to be at odds with the supposed democratic impulse that fires many of Scotland's institutions (particularly the Church of Scotland); but as a political phenomenon the democratic impulse is much less in evidence as a force within the political institutions than it is as a widely asserted characteristic.

Over and above these mainly economically derived differences which set Scotland apart from the rest of the United Kingdom, there are also a range of separate Scottish institutions in religion, education and law that have given the country a distinctive cultural history (nurturing in many ways the authoritarianism mentioned above). Even in terms of the mass media, Scotland is regarded as a separate market; it has separate national newspapers (both broadsheet and tabloid); and its own national television and radio services (albeit relying on the larger British networks for much of their programming)<sup>5</sup>. Furthermore, Scotland has always maintained a subjective nationalism - the recognition by Scots that they are a separate nation - which has often been expressed through a set of bi-polar oppositions between Scottishness and Englishness. Perhaps the most distinctive of these oppositions is that regarding equality; there is a widely held belief that Scotland is a more egalitarian society than England. David McCrone (1980) argues that while there are certain a priori arguments in favour of this, it has been more a question of equality of opportunity than equality of achievement: that Scotland is not a classless society but one in which the gap between

favour of this, it has been more a question of equality of opportunity than equality of achievement: that Scotland is not a classless society but one in which the gap between classes is not perceived as important, since through societal encouragement and institutional means anyone with enough talent and determination can cross the class gap. This 'lad-o-pairts' outlook may well have been the substitute for any real institutional democracy.

While Labourism (through attempts at tripartite economic management) and social democracy flourished in Britain as a whole, particularly during the 1970s, then Scotland's position was secure because of these distinctive features - indeed within the Labour governments of the period Scots MPs held a disproportionate influence (the source of much of the concern over the 'English Problem'/'West Lothian question'<sup>6</sup>). However, the effective collapse of the post-war consensus in England in 1979 meant that Scotland would react to Thatcherism in a largely different way to the rest of the United Kingdom, for precisely the same reasons. It was inevitable given both the worsening of actual social and economic conditions in Scotland, and the antithetical positions of the two value systems of the dominant Scottish political culture and Thatcherism.

### **The Clash of Political Cultures**

In the first respect, the negative effects of Thatcherism on Scotland were almost entirely opposite to what were the actual and perceived benefits bestowed on the rest of Britain. Geoffrey Alderman (1989) comments that 'Scottish voters have been able to compile a formidable list of votes stemming from the Conservative government's handling of Scottish issues'. He includes in these the revaluation of property rating values that preceded the despised Poll Tax, the closure of a number of sectors of publicly-owned industries and widespread unemployment. Thus, in the aftermath of the 1987 general election, while one might

agree with Alderman's assessment of the general mood of the British voters:

whatever individual voters felt on individual items of policy, their collective view was that Britain had become more prosperous under Conservative rule, and the best way to guarantee such prosperity in the future was to guarantee Mrs Thatcher another term in office

(Alderman 1989: 22)

the same election's results showed that the Conservative share of the vote in Scotland had fallen by 88,000 since 1983, with only 10 Conservative MPs returned.

The traditional commitment to statism in Scotland clashed with the individualism of the New Right. The taking of the state machinery into the hands of a Conservative government dedicated to the dismantling of many of its functions and cuts in public expenditure was experienced in Scotland as the actions of an uncaring, belligerent and anti-Scots administration. This view was not off-set by the early introduction of the Poll Tax and subsequent subsidies for it, added only when there was an outcry against the introduction of the tax in England and Wales. Even though the 'lad-o-pairts' tradition might seem to be a Thatcherite model, the individualism espoused by Thatcher was perceived as too rugged and uncaring - the commitment to the welfare state was part of a deeply embedded tradition of collectivism and a commitment to corporatist action for the benefit of all. Moreover, for a nation which experienced and expressed itself largely in terms of the social interaction of its people (rather than in separate governmental institutions) the claim that there was no such thing as society was patently invalid. Furthermore, the adoption by the New Right of the iconography of English nationalism collided head on with all the variations of Scottish nationalism and strains of residual anti-English resentment. This was fuelled by the impotence felt by Scots at the continued dominance of Thatcher because of the voting patterns of the English, despite a consistent rejection of her party at the polls in Scotland: the much discussed

'north-south divide' was perceived by many Scots as coinciding with the border. This exacerbated the trend apparent from the late 1950s of a decline in the Conservative vote in Scotland. Mrs Thatcher personally, more than any other individual, became the focus of much of the resentment; partly because so much of what was happening to Scotland was directly identified with the policies initiated under the aegis of her personality cult; but also because of reasons which Tony Dickson characterises

The public persona of Margaret Thatcher appears to many Scots to capture all the worst elements of their caricature of the detested English: uncaring, arrogant, always convinced of her own rightness ('there is no alternative'), possessed of an accent that grates on Scottish ears, and affluent enough to afford a retirement home costing around £500,000. She is also associated with the conspicuously yuppie/affluent South-East, and the City. These are bitter images for Scots...

(Dickson 1989, 65)

Of course, the diachronic relationship between Scotland and Thatcherism was subject to many changes; and it should not be thought that these changes merely represented a widening of the gap between the two political cultures. The immediate diminution of all Scots influence following the 1979 election was only effectively consolidated after the 1983 election, when Mrs Thatcher was able to choose a cabinet for herself and subsequently vanquish the 'one-nation' Tories, the 'wets' and dissenting Scots. The resignations of Tory MP Alick Buchanan-Smith from the Scottish front bench and the defection of Ian Lawson to the SNP over the crisis in the Scottish steel industry can be seen as indicators of the disaffection which even certain Scottish Tories felt at their impotence as Scots in Westminster. With the replacement, in 1986, of George Younger by Malcolm Rifkind as Secretary of State this was even more clearly apparent; because he was personally less influential (as a 'wet') and since he had inherited an office in which the power and will towards interventionism on even the economic level had been whittled away, he could quite easily be ignored. Implementation of central

government policies which took little or no account of Scotland's economic or social situation increased. In part this was due to a curious variation of 'one-nation' Toryism: a reluctance to make allowance for regional differences in the application of central government policy and a rejection in principle (though not entirely in practice) of any peculiarly regional policies. As more and more power became centralised in Westminster, Scots began to experience a sense of stark neglect in how they were governed.

The conflict between Thatcherism and Scottish Labourism was to be most clearly focused in the confrontations between Scottish (predominantly Labour) local authorities and central government, in the person of the Secretary of State. Not only did Lothian Regional Council come into direct conflict with the government in the early 1980s by refusing to implement spending cuts, but the government's legislative programmes eroded the powers of all councils to provide traditional levels of services and to represent their electorate. Until the introduction of the Poll Tax, Scottish local authorities had been financed from three sources: local rates; trading services; and government grants, the most important of which was the Rate Support Grant (RSG). Even prior to 1979, the Callaghan Labour administration had begun an attack on public sector costs. This and the looming recession provided real difficulties for local authorities committed to a continuity in levels of services.

However, the Conservative government progressively empowered the Secretary of State to intervene to effectively limit the capacity of local authorities to sustain these commitments. In 1981, George Younger was given the right to reduce or withdraw a local authority's RSG to curb spending, a particularly effective move since Scottish local authorities were forbidden supplementary rate-levying powers. Through the same legislation local government responsibilities were also redistributed according to the recommendations of the Stodart Report, in an attempt to

prevent duplication of services. Legislation in 1986 restricted the rights of local authorities to issue publicity that might be deemed to be 'political' - a reaction to campaigns run by councils like Lothian Region. In 1988, a further act introduced compulsory competitive tendering, reducing the ability of local authorities to provide services directly. Previously, the Tenant's Rights Act introducing the right to buy for council tenants had begun the process of undermining the concept of widely available low-cost rented accommodation provided by local authorities. All these pieces of legislation were aimed at bringing recalcitrant Labour councils to heel, and in many ways they were successful in forcing councils to become fellow-travellers along the Thatcherite way. An article by Brian James on the renaissance of Glasgow in The Times (13/4/89) contained the following, for example:

"The reality is that the city has entered into a conspiracy with Maggie," said a senior Glasgow city official, who asked, of course, not to be named. "Of course, councillors have to leap up and down in the chamber, go through all the rhetoric of defiance and denial. But the fact is we could not go on as we were - it was a shambles and this new way is best."

Local authorities have thus been forced to adapt to the new economic climate. Some were clever enough to be able to protect their electorate from the worst ravages of Thatcherism and de-industrialisation, engaging in forms of intervention within their own micro-economies. This intervention has been coloured, however, by marketing initiatives and image building to attract new kinds of investment which have few short-term and unquantifiable long-term benefits for those traditionally dependant on council services. The efforts of Strathclyde and Glasgow in particular to undertake forms of urban renewal by council-stimulated growth through projects like The Garden Festival in 1988 and The Year of Culture in 1990 have served as a model for a number of initiatives throughout Scotland. A final verdict on such interventionism cannot be passed while it is still in progress, but there remains a deeply embedded

sceptism about it: a previous Times article by Brian James ('From Despair to Hope' 10/4/89) quoted Professor John Goddard as saying that 'what has been achieved in this time by the agencies and the authorities, must not be denigrated. It has created wealth and a great deal of confidence. But it is a fragile sort of prosperity, and froth that may blow away. It is based too heavily on public-sector wages'.

The 'conspiracy' between local authorities and Thatcherism demonstrated in such measures was cemented through the introduction of the Poll Tax in Scotland in 1989. Advanced by the Fife-based Adam Smith Institute, a right-wing think-tank, it was an immediate favourite of Scottish Tories since it represented the most concerted attack on what they regarded as the excesses of Labour councils. It was implemented two years earlier in Scotland than in England and Wales, ostensibly to save the Tories from the damage that the planned revaluation of property rating values would have brought. Its enactment brought about the desperate spectacle of non-Tory councils being forced to withdraw services in the face of massive non-payment campaigns and evasion; while at the same time pursuing as best they could traditional supporters for non-payment of a tax which they themselves abhorred.

This model of forcing institutions who opposed it to walk, however reluctantly, down the road to Thatcherism through the creation of new contexts of operation and specific legislation was repeated throughout Scottish political life. While most separate Scottish political institutions - often manned by people sharing a liberal-reformist, if not Labourist, outlook - did act as buffers between the worst excesses of Thatcherism, their position was particularly difficult. The changing climate in which they were operating meant that while they were sheltering the country from the direct blasts of Thatcherism, they were at the same time being used to shunt the country's political agenda rightwards. A good example of this is the way in which the

Scottish Arts Council (SAC) was forced to swallow diluted forms of Thatcherite arts policy (like incentive funding and the abandonment of any semblance of a needs-response policy) purely because its grant from central government was continuously reduced in real terms.

Simultaneously, trade unions were undermined at their grass roots through the processes of de-industrialisation and widespread unemployment during the recession of the early 1980s. There is no doubt that the government accepted the mass unemployment of the 1980s as politically tolerable, particularly as it was in areas that were not electorally significant for them, and relished the decrease in the power of the unions as a result. The unions lost a generation of potential organisers due to high levels of youth unemployment; members became reluctant to become identified as militant; and employers were given as a lever the threat of the dole queue to resist workers' demands. Thus at a grass-roots level union membership has been greatly affected: slipping from over a million in 1980 to approximately 830,000 in 1991. After the Miners' Strike of 1984-85 anti-trade union legislation blunted the edge of any future significant industrial challenge, as well as destroying many of the traditional 'rights' of trade unions such as the closed-shop and the right to take solidarity action through secondary picketing. Moreover, both this new legislation which was progressively introduced and existing legislation were applied in a way to transform industrial disputes into questions of law and order. Furthermore, while inward investment by companies who operate completely outwith the traditional framework of industrial relations plays a relatively small part in the Scottish economy, their agenda-setting role has undermined even the welfare and support role of the unions.

As stated above, mass unemployment was perceived as politically tolerable by the Thatcher governments in their drive to cut public spending and curb inflation. The need for industries to become slimmer and fitter took precedence

over the provision of jobs or maintenance of levels of employment for social reasons. While the government in the early 1980s could not be held directly responsible for what was a world-wide economic recession, in its reaction to it and the processes of de-industrialisation that caused it, it was far from blameless. For example, the appointment of Ian MacGregor to British Steel and then British Coal, in each case led to large job-losses with major effects on particular local communities. Ian Dey and Neil Fraser noted that 'Speculation about the so-called "black-economy" and persistent propaganda about social security abuse and voluntary unemployment have shifted the blame for unemployment to the victims themselves. Politicians in both main parties have been as reluctant to accept responsibility for high unemployment as they were eager to claim credit when unemployment was low' (Dey and Fraser 1981: 90), those affected by unemployment did not regard the government as politically or morally innocent.

This feeling was exacerbated by subsequent attacks mounted by the government on the welfare benefits system, fuelled by what Alan Deacon (1978) had previously identified as 'the scrounging controversy', which made it publicly acceptable to launch 'anti-scrounging' initiatives. In the years 1979-1990 there were twelve Acts of Parliament passed amending, restricting or removing the categories of people able to claim a range of welfare benefits. At the same time, changes in other areas, such as the provision of realistic levels of child benefit, restrictions on low-cost public rented accommodation (through limits on the building of council houses and the introduction of the right-to-purchase), and cuts in local authority spending on community resources meant that the unemployed were caught in a poverty trap. Young people in particular suffered directly through changes in their status and ability to claim benefits. Increased homelessness among this group has been one area of significant growth throughout Britain.

**Emergent Political Discourses**

While Thatcherism did not entirely displace the dominant political culture in Scotland, the collision between the two discourses fractured the latter significantly enough to allow the insertion of alternative emergent discourses through a number of spheres. The loss of economic autonomy and the use of state mechanisms to encourage radical free-market capitalism reduced many of the issues of parliamentary politics to secondary importance on the political agenda. The higher places have been occupied by supra-parliamentary issues and extra-parliamentary issues and campaigns. In the first category is constitutional change: the perceived relationship between the Scottish people and the British state was altered by the experience of Thatcherism. Whereas previously Scottish loyalty to the state had been nurtured through its provision of a wide range of benefits and ambivalence about any change (hence the 1979 referendum result), popular dissatisfaction with the way in which the views of a large majority of Scots could be consistently ignored increased enormously. Thus, not only was Labour able to rely on the 'new' middle-class voters - those from working-class backgrounds - but all the opposition parties benefitted from a swing within the more traditional middle-class towards them, and the constitutional changes that they proposed. The SNP gained credibility as an alternative to Labour through Jim Sillars' Govan by-election victory; its own shift towards the left, under the influence of the '79 Group; and its identification with the campaign against the Poll Tax. Although its ability to sustain itself on the 'Independence in Europe' campaign alone remains as yet untested, it was able to regain some of the ground lost through the defeat of the devolution referendum. Moreover, constitutional reform is now high on the political agenda of most of the major political parties. The Scottish Constitutional Convention, although ignored by the Tories, the CBI and the SNP, represents a major shift in

Scottish political life, particularly for the previously ambivalent Labour Party.

Extra-parliamentary politics was raised to a higher position on the agenda also. This led to the mobilisation of large-scale popular campaigns against nuclear weapons and nuclear dumping and a large non-payment campaign against the Poll Tax, as well as specific issue campaigns against factory closures and in support of strikes. Grass-roots activism replaced parliamentary decorum within a number of these campaigns with the result that politics was brought home to people on a local level rather than remaining the prerogative of 'the powers-that-be'. In particular, the perceived failure of the Labour Party to mount an effective resistance within Scotland to the Poll Tax (and its attacks on members of Militant, heavily involved in the anti-Poll Tax Federation) has done much to question the traditions of Labourism, although to what effect is not yet clear.

The fracturing of Labourism opened the way in the early 1980s for a challenge from within the Labour Party and its support. Where intervention from without or above was perceived as failing there were a few experiments in replacing it with participation. The commitment to nationalisation of struggling industries was tempered by initiatives to set-up co-operative forms of enterprise, and community-based initiatives in economic renewal. In part this emphasis on participation was a continuation of the challenge of the Sixties (and the Bennite socialism of the early 1980s) and a reaction to the rightward movement of the Labour Party leadership through the Seventies. The seizure of the British party leadership by the left in the early Eighties (and the infiltration of the party by Militant) opened the way for a manifesto for the 1983 General Election which was in itself a radical challenge to a consensus management of capitalism. While the party in Scotland was slow to accept left-wing ideas, the changes in the running of the GLC under Ken Livingstone in particular, inspired some groups of 'young Turks' in local government north of

border. The West Lothian Labour party became a campaigning party and supported the efforts of the Lothian Regional Council to follow the GLC model. While Stirling District Council also became innovative in many respects the impact of more radical policy initiatives within the Labour Party Scotland-wide has been less marked. Henry Drucker noted that:

The other outstanding feature about Labour in Scotland is the impressive solidity - one might say stolidity - of its vote in the Strathclyde Region...It is noticeable that the more respectable Labour leadership in the West is able to hold its vote while the more tempestuous Lothian Party is not.

(Drucker 1983: 25).

While Drucker's assessment may hold true for the course followed by the Labour Party, it is not necessarily a valid assessment of the wider labour movement in Scotland, particularly the STUC. While its traditions have meant that it has always had a more campaigning and involved character than the TUC, it began through the Eighties to enhance its role in a number of different areas. Its campaigning activities have been extended into more general areas of concern than just pay and conditions. Bill Spiers, Assistant General Secretary at the STUC, says that

The STUC has for a long time consciously sought a broader role than simply being a voice for trade unions on industrial relations issues. ...It's not new; maybe we're just doing it on a more extended scale now...We, in terms of this organisation, look to have something to say on every aspect of Scottish life.

(Maguire 1991b: 13-14)

He exemplifies this through the contribution that the STUC has made to the Constitutional Convention; its campaigns on the health service (and individual campaigns like NALGO's quality of life campaign in 1987); and the high profile of the STUC within the Scottish media. They have been keen to encourage cultural activities through the appointment of an Arts Officer and their support for Mayfest, occasionally linking these with campaigns of their own. Hilary Wainwright makes the point that 'In Scotland...unemployment and

industrial decline has not been followed by a shift to the right in trade-union politics...though there has been a decline in the industrial membership, the public sector unions have maintained the tradition that was dominant in the industrial unions' (1987: 151). As Wainwright also notes, there is a growing role for women within the trade union movement, forcing it out of traditional roles and areas of activities. In part the way has been led by a new generation within the secretariat at the STUC, but new initiatives to make the General Council more representative of its members and responsive to them have met little resistance.

The leading role of the secretariat within the STUC, demonstrates the way in which a number of other discourses have been inserted into the political culture without necessarily springing from grass-roots activism, or corresponding to wide-spread radical changes in attitudes. Small groups within institutions have been able to set agendas for change, perhaps without ever themselves enjoying particular positions of power. The deployment of feminism is a clear example of this. Traditionally, Scotland's had been a male-dominated, and highly chauvinist society (partly as a result of the male domination of the institutions of authority). Once the basis of that domination had been challenged through the dismantling or undermining of such institutions of authority, then, the way was open for women to insert themselves within the structures. Of course, the growth in awareness of the rights and needs of women as a separate constituency and Thatcherism is only chronologically coincidental. The former is the eventual flowering of a movement for equality that had been growing for almost a century; the latter a set of principles that did not address the role of women directly and which in practice did much to undermine their fair and equal treatment.

**Feminism**

Feminism in Scotland has not been focused through any specific Women's Movement, although in its most conscious forms it is informed by the various women's movements in England, Europe and America. It has articulated itself in three main ways. The first of these is in the area of institutional reforms to promote and defend the rights of women. As well as the application of specific legislation and legal rulings (such as on rape within marriage), this includes the establishment of Women's Committees and Officers within Local Authorities and the establishment of progressive models of employment within government and state institutions, for example. Secondly, it involves the networking of interest groups to pressurise for change; which includes organisations coordinating women's conferences, or, promoting a better awareness of specific women's rights and those organising national campaigns, such as on the issue of abortion. Thirdly, it involves more isolated initiatives to address specific and perhaps only local concerns. Thus, the sit-in at the Lee Jeans factory in Greenock to keep the factory open was coordinated and run by women in defence of their jobs. Campaigns in defence of the rights of specific women workers, or in the provision of Rape Crisis Centres or particular Women's Groups, have provided a grass-roots encounter with feminism for many women.

A number of these initiatives are documented in Grit and Diamonds. Women in Scotland Making History 1980-1990, edited by Henderson and Mackay, a book which illustrates the diversity of women's activity over the period. Although not all such groups and people consciously act upon articulated feminist theory, their activism has created a climate in which women are taking much more control within the society. One result of this has been that the proposals debated by the Scottish Constitutional Convention have included measures specifically designed to positively discriminate in favour of women representatives, in order to achieve parity

of representation. Perhaps the responses that have been forced to the demands of women have been no more than a realisation of the necessity of adapting in the face of demographic change (as in the drive to attract women back to work), particularly since they are by no means widespread in their application. However, the gains that have been made will not be easily given up and the possibilities for women remain much wider than ever before, as feminism has become inserted within the processes of political socialisation.

A second breach of the dominant patriarchal culture was made specifically through the amendments to the Criminal Justice (Scotland) Bill in 1982, bringing the law on homosexuality into line with that in England and Wales. Although subsequent legislation (the infamous Clause 28) prevents local authorities from promoting homosexuality, and a number of rights are still denied to homosexuals, as a constituency they have been able to organise more openly and freely than before, often in alliance with elements of feminist activism. There has also been the influence of the development of gender politics throughout the rest of Britain from which Scotland has not remained immune, being affected by changes in British and European legislation and the raised profile of gay issues within the media (though this is frequently a negative profile).

The period of the Thatcher government cannot therefore be accounted for as merely a battle between the ideologies of the left and the right. While there may have been a tendency to revert to certain simplistic oppositions, the 1980s were characterised more by the development of a multi-faceted and much more modern political culture, than had previously been recognised. This development in the face of Thatcherism and the defeat in 1979 seems paradoxical, since it has not been matched by any concomitant developments in the structure of political institutions. Some, like Cairns Craig (1989), have explained this almost as a case of cultural 'substitution': 'the 1980s proved to be one of the most productive and creative decades in Scotland this century - as though the

energy that had failed to be harnessed by the politicians flowed into other channels'<sup>7</sup>. It is because there has been no development in the institutional means of political expression that people have been forced to act in other ways to express their aspirations. Irrespective of whether this is the case or not, developments in political discourse have been lead more by a growing progressive culture than any single political change in the structure of government. This is not intended to imply that culture and politics may be separated, rather that the distortions forced by a lack of accountable democratic government have concentrated the initiation of changes in one area of the political culture.

### **Inferiorisation**

The development of a multi-faceted political culture relates directly to the growing resistance to ideas that Scotland's is a second-rate or deformed culture or what is termed 'inferiorisation'. Although analyses of Scotland's position as one of colonial oppression had been made since the 1970s, the use of the term 'inferiorism' in this context has been most strongly argued for by Craig Beveridge and Ronald Turnbull, firstly, in a 1982 article and then at greater length in The Eclipse of Scottish Culture. Inferiorism and the Intellectuals (Edinburgh 1989). They draw the term from Frantz Fanon's accounts of the role of inferiorisation in national subordination in the Third World. The earlier article gives a brief summary of what an analysis of inferiorism entails:

According to Fanon, a colonised people's understanding of their social world becomes seriously distorted. Central to the process of mystification is a sustained belittling of the colonised culture, which is said to be impoverished, backward, inferior, primitive...In the long-term this constant disparagement undermines the native's self-respect and so weakens national resistance. The native becomes 'inferiorised', finally accepting the superiority of metropolitan ways, and the imperial refrain, which upholds the coloniser as the representative of civilisation, progress, universal human values, etc, etc, is taken up by

the evolues, those natives successfully assimilated to the colonising culture.

(Beveridge & Turnbull 1982: 4)

As is noted in the same piece, this does not necessarily imply the association of merely negative characteristics with the native culture: however, exoticism and even sympathetic portrayals often paint a picture of a culture that is inherently inert. Inferiorisation creates oppositions between the host culture and the colonising culture which denigrate the values of the host culture: it contrasts parochialism with universality; primitivism with civilisation; sophistication with crudeness. The process of denigration works by focusing on (usually negative) stereotypes of the host culture and resists or ignores the development of alternative paradigms and discourses.

Beveridge and Turnbull develop the project to tackle inferiorism in their book through a series of essays which 'question certain images and discourses that profoundly affect the ways in which Scots apprehend themselves and their world. These are not the only available representations of Scotland, but they are especially powerful and pervasive, and of special importance, since they function to reinforce Scotland's political subordination' (1989: 1). The seriousness of such a project can be judged from the fact that at the time of the 1979 devolution referendum the very capacity of the Scots people for self-government was seriously questioned, for example.

The challenges to traditional assumptions about political power expressed through emergent discourses represent one area in which the cultural hegemony of the English white male middle-class, and thus the inferiorist condition, has been overthrown. But the real challenge to such hegemony has grown through the development of indigenous working class forms, and the reorientation of the cultural infrastructure towards the Scottish working class. Cairns Craig points out that

To the extent that much of Scottish middle class society models itself on English values, distinctively Scottish culture has more affinity with the working class than English culture, is more imbued with the sense of a living 'folk' culture.

(Craig 1987: 3)

Thus, the most recent developments in Scottish art, writing, theatre and music have tended to emphasise the importance of addressing the realities of working class (and hence Scottish) lives. The initiatives taken by local authorities in the arts have had to respond to pressures for the provision for the working class as participants and consumers of working class culture - as the various controversies over the programming of the Glasgow 1990 events clearly illustrate. At the same time the demographic make-up of Scotland ensures that any art forms whose success relies on attracting a wide audience have to make an appeal to the substantial working class.

The success of such reorientation is such that while it may seem trite, it is nonetheless true to say that there was a growing sense of confidence<sup>8</sup> in Scottish culture which has contributed to, and in turn been reinforced by, the responses to the changing political situation dominated by Mrs Thatcher throughout the 1980s. This confidence and demands for political change were predicated on assertions of alternative images and discourses through cultural means, rather than on changes in political structures or particular improvements in material conditions. This demonstrates that the changes in Scottish politics are closely tied to the development of a strong indigenous culture. In terms of this thesis it is apt that the developments within Scottish theatre over the time clearly illustrate such cultural developments.

However, the relationship between culture and politics means that in the absence of changes within Scottish political and economic infrastructures to support indigenous cultural developments, such developments are ultimately vulnerable and fragile. In the cold climate following

Glasgow 1990, not only have certain cultural initiatives withered, but there is a hang-over of despondency because so much activity has left the condition of so many unchanged. A second economic recession, growing mass unemployment and cuts in services all undermine the security of the changes wrought during the 1980s. Cultural innovations have ultimately been frustrated, and aspirations regarding the possibility of change have given way to resignation to the status quo. The success of John Major in leading the Conservatives to a fourth consecutive General Election victory in 1992 has only contributed to this despondency.

### **Conclusion.**

The full effects of Thatcherism on Britain have not been confined to the period in office enjoyed by Margaret Thatcher, since it has left a legacy which has redefined the parameters within which politics are conducted. A full assessment of its legacy for the longer term remains to be made. The hegemonic position that Thatcherism occupied in Britain as a whole was slower to take effect in Scotland. The collision between Thatcherism and the residual Scottish Labourist political values did not see the unequivocal triumph of the former at the expense of the latter. Instead, there emerged a range of alternative political discourses, covering both supra- and sub- parliamentary issues, such as feminism and nationalism. The emergence of such discourses was largely predicated on cultural changes, particularly the throwing off of the shackles of inferiorisation. However, Thatcherism radically altered the climate in which such discourses are articulated, threatening the possibilities for future change. It does not seem at this historical juncture in the early 1990s that developments up until the present will be consolidated, and the ground laid for future changes, until Scotland itself takes greater control over the cultural and political infrastructure through which it is governed.

### **3. THE SCOTTISH THEATRE SET-UP**

#### **Introduction**

The previous chapter concluded by expressing doubts over the security of the changes in Scottish political culture in the absence of substantial change in the institutional framework. In this chapter I will exemplify the progress which was made in Scottish culture despite Thatcherism by tracing the developments in theatre over the period, and, correspondingly, illustrating how such developments were ultimately insecure because they were not matched by concomitant institutional changes. In order to do this, it is necessary to construct a paradigm for Scottish theatre which takes account of its distinctiveness from theatre in England. In accordance with the traditional role of the state in Scottish society, this paradigm is dominated by the state institutions through which theatre is funded, in particular the Scottish Arts Council (SAC). It also incorporates the emergence of certain local authorities as pro-active funders of theatre, particularly in the build-up to and over the period of Glasgow's reign as European City of Culture in 1990. So, I will briefly present the developments which make this paradigm distinct, and then analyse the role of the funding institutions, both structurally and in terms of actual practice, examining the range of activities which they have supported.

#### **The Scottish Theatre Paradigm**

We were, at that time, not much more than a rather draughty annexe of English theatre - a stepping stone to the major southern rep. companies and the West End, operated by directors whose ultimate ambitions lay furth of Scotland - a kind of theatrical Siberia.

(Nielson 1986, 16)

Although Sandy Nielson's description is of Scottish theatrical life at the end of the 1960s, most accounts of

'British' theatre since 1968 have continued to regard Scotland as a mere adjunct to a model of English theatre which draws distinctions between three kinds of theatre: commercial, subsidised mainstream, and Fringe or alternative theatre. Such accounts demonstrate the English hegemony within British culture which is the root of the processes of inferiorisation discussed in the previous chapter, since they assume a homogeneity between the cultures, institutions and values of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and those dominant in England. Thus, for example, The British Theatre Directory still categorises Scottish theatres under 'provincial' or 'regional' companies: the theatre in London is the centre, all other theatres are on the periphery. While Scottish theatre may well have fitted into such a model until the early 1970s, there has been since then a whole range of developments which have rendered such a model obsolete.

Firstly, it should be noted that there is very little commercial theatre in Scotland - certainly nothing to compare with London's West End or New York's Broadway. Where it is sporadically present has been in tours by commercial companies from south of the border (typically in musicals and pot-boilers), or in the exploitation of spin-off tours of television shows, in pantomime, in cabaret, and in a much depleted variety circuit. There are still commercial theatres which provide large-scale venues like the Pavilion in Glasgow, or the Playhouse in Edinburgh for touring theatre companies, bands and pantomimes. Many similar sized venues have however, been taken into local authority hands and operate as receiving theatres for a wide variety of entertainment, without any specific programming policies attaching to them. Local authorities also own a number of the theatres used by building-based companies to whom the properties are leased.

However, in looking at the developments since the 1970s, one has to note the inappropriateness of 'subsidised mainstream' as a distinguishing category in the Scottish context. While the SAC Annual Report of 1976 noted that 'Half a dozen regional (alias repertory) theatres remain uppermost in the Council's drama policy, for they are the core of live professional theatre in Scotland' (p12), by the report for 1979-80, it had to acknowledge that 'as can be seen from the list of grants, SAC spending on drama consisted largely of support for drama companies, both resident and touring' (p11). The changes that took place within Scottish theatre during the 1970s meant the throwing off of the 'regional/repertory' tag (for at least some of them) and the development of separate Scottish touring theatres. Almost all professional theatre activity in Scotland falls within the subsidised mainstream, and therefore, a more relevant distinction has to be made between building-based and touring companies - a distinction which does not coincide with a mainstream/fringe dichotomy.

Of the building-based companies, it was the Glasgow Citizens' Theatre under Giles Havergal, the Royal Lyceum under Clive Perry and Bill Bryden and The Traverse under Chris Parr which helped Scotland towards a theatrical independence from London. Throughout the 1970s at the Citizens', Havergal, along with Philip Prowse and Robert David MacDonald, developed experiments in the production of classic plays from the European canon, by-passing the more literary tastes of London. They also encouraged a wider popular audience-base through a low-cost ticket-pricing policy, as well as through inviting popular touring companies to perform there. At the Lyceum, Perry and Bryden's work in the early 1970s became the focus of aspirations for a national theatre, because of their development of a repertoire of Scottish working-class dramas and the fostering of a pool of native Scottish acting

talent. At the Traverse from 1975-1980, Chris Parr fostered a whole new range of Scottish writers.

Yet it was the development and subsequent assimilation into the mainstream of touring theatres which really set Scotland apart. 7:84 (Scotland) pioneered small-scale touring with The Cheviot, The Stag and the Black, Black Oil. That example was soon followed with the creation of small-scale touring companies such as TRYP (Dundee), Borderline (Ayrshire), and Tie-Up (Inverness). By 1976/77, Tie-Up, 7:84 and Borderline were all established as SAC revenue clients. The successes of the new touring theatres drew new audiences to theatre; created circuits of venues; provided new elements within the programme of established theatres - 7:84 played regularly at the Citizens and the Lyceum, for example; created consistent work for home-based actors and technicians; and provided an outlet for new Scottish work. The subsequent success of TAG, and The Other Company in Dundee in becoming revenue clients of the SAC in 1978, and then of Wildcat and Fir Chlis the following year, meant that the revenue-funded touring companies were as much a part of the 'subsidised mainstream' as the building-based traditional repertory theatres. While there were still a number of small-scale touring theatres receiving only project funding, there was no really meaningful distinction to be made between mainstream and fringe. The main components of the Scottish theatre in 1979 are illustrated in Diagram 1.

However, the fiasco over the devolution referendum and the election of the Conservatives to government in 1979 was a body blow to the emerging Scottish cultural revival. The continuing crises of the early 1980s with mass unemployment and the recession were felt as keenly in the arts as elsewhere. A number of the companies that had been active

Diagram 1: The Components of Scottish Theatre in 1979**1) Building-based Companies**

Dundee Rep., Eden Court, Royal Lyceum, Citizens', Perth Rep., Pitlochry Festival Theatre, The Byre (St. Andrews), Theatre Workshop, and the Traverse.

**2) Touring Companies**

Other Company Dundee, TAG, 7:84, Borderline, Fir Chlis, and Wildcat.

**3) Venues****(i) Large-Medium Scale**

His Majesty's Aberdeen, Ayr Civic Theatre, E. Kilbride Village Theatre, Church Hill Theatre (Edinburgh), Kings (Edinburgh), Kings (Glasgow), Pavilion (Glasgow), Theatre Royal (Glasgow), Eden Court (Inverness), Magnum (Irvine), Cumbernauld Theatre, Adam Smith Centre (Kirkcaldy), MacRobert Centre (Stirling), Brunton (Musselburgh).

**(ii) Prominent Small-Scale**

Netherbow (Edinburgh), Dolphin Arts Centre (Glasgow), Glasgow Arts Centre, Harbour Arts Centre (Irvine), Third Eye Centre (Glasgow), Crawford Arts Centre (St. Andrews), Livingston Mews.

during the 1970s became defunct, including Fir Chlis and The Other Company. From the ruins, however, emerged a number of developments that added to and changed this scheme in particular the involvement of local authorities in arts funding. It is to this role of the state funding institutions which I will now turn.

### **Funding Institutions: The Arts Council**

The most prominent single institution within this paradigm is the SAC. The SAC is a sub-committee of the Arts Council of Great Britain (ACGB), from whom it receives an annual grant; there is no similar sub-committee for England. Since 1979 the ACGB has in turn been funded by the Office for Arts and Libraries. Despite this, the independence of the ACGB from government is 'guaranteed' under its Royal Charter, granted in 1967. This charter gives it responsibility

to develop and improve the knowledge, understanding and practice of the arts; to increase the accessibility of the arts to the public throughout Great Britain; and to advise and co-operate with Departments of government, local authorities and other bodies on any matters concerned directly or indirectly with these objects.

Before focussing on the operations of the SAC, it is necessary to outline the structure of the ACGB since the institutional weaknesses of the parent body are replicated in its sub-committees. These weaknesses are discussed in a number of in-depth accounts and critiques of the ACGB which are drawn on and summarised here. In carrying out the duties imposed by its charter, the ACGB traditionally operated according to two broad 'principles': 'arms-length' and 'needs-response'. 'Arms-length' was the phrase coined by Lord Redcliffe-Maude to describe the conventional understanding underpinning government appointments to the ACGB and its operational autonomy: the ACGB was to be considered at one remove from the government as an intermediate agency. As noted by Lord Balfour in his introduction to the SAC Annual Report of 1978, it is generally assumed that ministers will 'resist any temptation to fill the Arts Council with political appointees or people to do their bidding' (p3).

However, as John Pick has pointed out, 'arms-length' 'is not a principle but a series of practices and habits that do not bear examination in any legal or moral sense' (Pick 1980: 14); and, Raymond Williams notes, 'All that is gained by arms length is a certain notion of removal of directly traceable responsibility' (Williams 1979: 159). There is no barrier to protect against direct political interference by government in the way in which the ACGB is run since it is the government who appoints the people in charge and which determines the level of grant that the ACGB receives. Both powers have been openly used since 1979 to determine the ways in which the ACGB has operated. Sir Roy Shaw, former Secretary-General of ACGB, ascribes the appointments of Sir William Rees-Mogg, Lord McAlpine and Luke Rittner to various positions within ACGB (and the dismissal of Richard Hoggart) to political interference from the highest levels of government (see Shaw 1987: 42-43). Since the dependence on central government funding exists, it is also obvious that all Arts Council policy is circumscribed by the budget within which it must implement that policy. One of the first actions of the first Thatcher government Arts Minister, Norman St John-Stevas, was to claw back £1.1 million from the ACGB's grant, which lead directly to the withdrawal of revenue funding from 41 client groups in December 1980.

Related to this is the second principle of 'needs-response'. This implies that the ACGB will be reactive in its funding, answering initiatives already progressed by other people rather than initiating work on its own behalf, as it had done in its earlier years. This principle might perhaps be operated without difficulty provided that resources keep pace with demands and inflation. However, cuts in public expenditure have meant that the ACGB has inevitably been placed in the position of having to choose between art forms and between groups within each art form

competing for a share of its limited resources. Questions of standards, choices between product and process, of social use and artistic merit have then come to assume tremendous importance. Such questions have inevitably been resolved in the favour of high art professional forms.

This said, it should not be thought that that the ACGB had, even prior to 1979, effectively operated a 'needs-response' policy, since the needs that it responded to have inevitably been those that its members have felt most keenly themselves. As Robert Hutchison (1982: Chapter 2) has pointed out, there has always been a bias in the operation of the Arts Council because of the kinds of people who man it. Hutchison traces the small number of people who hold multiple directorships and trusteeships for national galleries and national arts companies, showing that this has in practice been an oligarchical group from whose numbers are then drawn the committees of ACGB. Thus, for example, four of the Chairmen of ACGB have also been directors of the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden. Such people are already convinced of the values of 'high art': these values are defined through what Raymond Williams characterises as 'the selective tradition' (Williams 1973: 9) and it is these shared values rather than conspiracy which secure the pinnacles of the funding hierarchy for high art forms. On reflection, Roy Shaw was forced to agree with Hutchinson's conclusion that ACGB 'is the product of a class and has the loyalties of that class' (quoted Shaw 1987: 57). The ACGB has always favoured professional high art groups, presenting finished products. Non-professional and participatory forms of art practice have not received comparable levels of support. Through decision-making and non-decision making (see Hutchison 1982: Chapter 10) the ACGB has set the agenda for a range of arts practice and institutional

funding, which contradicts any idea of it being merely a reactive body.

The failure of these two principles in practice is underpinned by a fundamental flaw within the ACGB: the failure to be fully representative. Its structure is undemocratic and it is not answerable to the public on whose behalf it acts. In this respect it is not unlike any number of other government agencies and quangos. However, real and substantial criticisms of it can be and are ignored as the inevitable harping of the un- and under-funded. For example, Professor Jan McDonald during her time as Chair of the Drama Panel of the SAC wrote that 'One understands, of course, the dislike and distrust endemic in the relationship between those that give and those that require subsidy; more especially if the patron is no Maecenas, but a mere distributor of insufficient public funds' (McDonald 1986: 1).

Instead of elected or accountable representation, what is accepted is a body of hand-picked, 'gifted' amateurs and certain representatives of arts practitioners. The selection of such people is a matter for the Minister for the Arts or the respective Secretary of State, not any wider body of people. Supporters of this method of appointment hold that there is no other way of guaranteeing the disinterested involvement of appointees<sup>1</sup>. However, Raymond Williams describes the process of appointment and operation thus,

It [ACGB] is politically and administratively appointed, and its members are not drawn from arts practice and administration, but from that vaguer category of "persons of experience and goodwill" which is the State's euphemism for its informal ruling class.

(Williams 1979: 166)

Although these people are invited to serve for 3 years, Williams also argues that there are two classes of members: those who serve for only 3 years and leave, and those who

then stay on as Chairs of advisory panels and advisers. These Chairs are again appointed, rather than being elected by the advisory panels, which may include co-opted artists and arts administrators. This further institutionalizes the way in which people who are appointed are chosen on the basis that they will enhance a 'consensus of goodwill' (Williams 1979: 161) rather than challenging or changing the operation of the Council. When the ACGB has been well-resourced itself and thus well-disposed to innovation, this goodwill has disguised its institutional failings. However, when this goodwill has broken down, even those who are co-opted onto advisory committees or panels are ultimately powerless to enforce their will on the Chair of the committee or the secretariat. David Pattie refers to the resignation of half the members of the ACGB Drama Panel in 1985 because their views were not being heard (Pattie 1990: 75). Challenge is also averted since the Arts Council is even protected by the 'arms-length principle' from detailed parliamentary questioning. While certain changes have been made recently to the ACGB's operations in England<sup>2</sup>, the fact that the system of appointment to it remains unchanged suggests that this weakness is still accepted and functional.

The consequence of the ACGB's lack of representativeness is a hierarchical structure, susceptible to manipulation by the very few who occupy the top and permanent positions (and, as argued above, predisposed to certain art forms). It is not surprising then that even prior to 1979 ACGB had become locked into inert patterns of funding that protected the already successful and did little to encourage or reward innovation or radical practice. Raymond Williams makes a further crucial point that

The British State has been able to delegate some of its official functions to a whole complex of semi-official or nominally independent bodies because it has been able to rely on an unusually compact and organic ruling

money and freedom of decision in some confidence...that they will act as if they were indeed State officials.

(Williams 1979: 165)

During Mrs Thatcher's period in office, this was blatantly apparent in the appointment of prominent right-wingers, such as William Ress-Mogg and Richard Luce, to key positions within ACGB, able to manipulate its structural weaknesses in the manner desired by the government, without having to be told to do so. These people mounted a sustained attack on the principles by which subsidy had been allocated, introducing instead free market business practices and ushering in sponsorship as a major element of arts funding<sup>3</sup>. As with much New Right policy this represented an attack against even many values and institutions taken for granted by the then established cultural elite. However, this elite was able to take advantage of its hierarchical prominence to avoid the worst of the negative effects of the free market in the arts: the consistent awarding of deficit funding and extra funding to opera companies throughout the 1980s is clear evidence of this.

The SAC shares the structural weaknesses of its parent body and was susceptible to the manipulation and changes within it. Such changes from above were retarded in their effect, however. This is because of the relatively small size of the constituencies which the SAC serves and the consequent closeness between the people who run the institution and those who are served by it. There has been a greater homogeneity between the expectations of the role of the SAC and the role which it has occupied than has been the case with the ACGB in England. Partly, this was due to the scarcity of radical arts practice to challenge the institution; and partly, it was due to the way in which the SAC had been receptive to innovation. Its position has also been sheltered from direct central government interference,

since it is placed at one remove from the Minister for the Arts, under the aegis of the Scottish Office. Uncharacteristically, this further bureaucratic level cushioned it from the more blatant political interference in appointments and policy which became apparent in the running of the ACGB during Mrs Thatcher's period in office.

In 1967 the SAC took on the role of what had been the ACGB Scottish Committee in Edinburgh, and its chairman and two other members continue to serve as members of ACGB. According to a conventional formula, it receives around 12% of the ACGB annual grant. It has its own permanent administrative staff, including a director, assisted by directors for each category of art form and various officers. The 22 member council is appointed by the Secretary of State for Scotland, and in turn advised in its activities by various sub-committees or panels including those with responsibility for art, dance and mime, drama, music, combined arts, and literature. These sub-committees are made up of council members and co-opted members. In the absence of more democratic procedures, particularly in terms of appointments, the SAC, like the ACGB, attracts predominantly highly educated upper and middle-class people to these positions. Within Scotland, such people, (whose profiles correspond closely to typical colonial 'cultural evolues') often remain to be convinced of the value of indigenous works and forms, particularly where they draw on working class culture. Scottishness is associated with the parochial, and it is assumed that the popular precludes the preferred universalism of high art.

This is evident in the predisposition within the SAC towards high art forms (in particular classical music) which are already established as 'universal' within the canons of metropolitan culture. For example, until 1984 there had been a sustained commitment to the funding of the five national

companies: Scottish Opera, Scottish Ballet, the Scottish National Orchestra (SNO), the Scottish Chamber Orchestra (SCO) and the Scottish Baroque Ensemble (SBE). These five classical high art companies then received approximately 45% of the Council's total funds<sup>4</sup>. The continued support of companies for classical arts indicates a commitment to projects and activities that command prestige even when this contradicts the commercial criteria by which other clients are judged. Scottish Opera was in almost continual financial crisis in the 1980s. In 1992, the Secretary of State, Ian Lang, personally intervened to allocate some £500,000 of Scottish Office funding towards the company's spiralling deficit.

During the 1970s the imbalances within the SAC's priorities were offset by the availability of resources which were sufficient enough to allow for innovation, and a will to foster indigenous culture according to the spirit of the times. So, for example, the SAC was responsive to a number of developments in Scottish theatre. Between 1975 and 1980, The Traverse Theatre under Chris Parr encouraged a new generation of Scottish writers, breaking with the theatre's previous tradition. Joyce McMillan accounts for this break in terms of changes in the Traverse's funding:

Its main patron was no longer the Traverse membership nor any coalition of wealthy donors and local authority supporters; it was the Scottish Arts Council - now the sole source of more than half of the Traverse's income - and the opinion of the Scottish theatrical world as mediated through the Drama Panel of that Council. The Traverse had therefore reached a point where it had to justify itself not only in terms of the rest of Scottish theatre; it had to find a role within the Scottish scene which would justify its exceptional level of subsidy.

(McMillan 1988: 75).

In outlining the background to Parr's appointment, she also points out that the artistic initiative had passed from the Traverse Committee

into the hands of an Arts Council - under Ronald Mavor's successor Sandy Dunbar and his influential Drama Director, John Faulkner - which saw which way the political wind was blowing, and was increasingly interested not only in distinctively Scottish theatre, but in populist approaches designed to make the arts more accessible, and to broaden the social base of audiences.

(ibid: 71)

Furthermore the SAC granted revenue funding to the Scottish Society of Playwrights, towards its own running costs and those of its newsletter, Scottish Theatre News. The SAC was perceived to be so supportive of Scottish writers that Hector MacMillan in retrospect characterised the period thus:

The Drama Department of the Scottish Arts Council has proved so responsive to the grass-roots upsurge in and writing for Scottish Theatre that we have, for the first time, the possibility of establishing a permanent foundation on which the future can develop.

(MacMillan 1986: 91)

However, during the 1980s both the will and the resources to support further innovation and development in the theatre effectively disappeared. Under the pressure of cuts in the SAC's own grant, the cultural oligarchy who ran it reverted to the protection of classical art forms, institutions and buildings in ad hoc attempts at crisis management. However, between 1979 and 1990, the SAC also embarked on two policy reviews in the face of this funding crisis. These reviews protected the interests of the cultural elite, while succumbing to the drive towards commercialism in the arts. The first of these, 'The Next Five Years' (TFNY), was a response to the failure of central government funding to keep pace with inflation and the inability or refusal of local government to accept the

burden placed on it during the early 1980s. In a discussion document issued to its clients the Council outlined its intention to place increased emphasis on the following:-

- (a) increasing the availability and accessibility of the arts, at the highest possibility standards, throughout Scotland;
- (b) supporting opportunities for the development, performance and presentation of the work of the creative artist in Scotland;
- (c) developing a more broadly-based public for the arts, with particular reference to young people;
- (d) its undertaking a more clearly national role in arts funding while seeking increased involvement from local authorities towards the subsidy of arts events and organisations of predominantly local importance;
- (e) increasing other sources of income for the arts including sales and box-office and sponsorship;
- (f) the use of the SAC subsidy for clearly defined purposes.

(TNFY: 2/3)

This was then an attempt to make the 'arts pound' work harder and to develop a public interest in the arts which might provide a secure basis for continued development. However, it relied on particular conceptions of 'standards' and of 'accessibility'. The former are tied to notions of 'professionalism'<sup>5</sup>, which are contested by a number of commentators (see, for example, John Pick 1980: 12). The latter is determined totally in terms of audience attendance at the expense of community or participatory forms. Its emphasis is on spreading the audience base and on the touring of and exposure to finished products to achieve this. Paradoxically, this might seem to be playing into the hands of those professionals dedicated to achieving a popular political theatre based in the working class. This agenda for political theatres had been established by John McGrath through his theatre work and his book A Good Night Out. But it was a double-edged sword, since the SAC regarded then (and still largely regards now) the SCO,

Scottish Ballet, Scottish Opera and SNO as its major touring companies. Further, theatres attempting to establish new relationships with audiences, rather than just as producers of arts entertainment, would be judged almost entirely on this arts entertainment alone.

In emphasising the importance of box-office returns the SAC is open to charges of advocating a pinging populism, that replaces the bold and experimental with the safe and commercial. The ethos behind this at ACGB level was outlined by Richard Luce, Minister for the Arts 1985-90: 'if it is any good, people will be prepared to pay for it...the only real test of our ability to succeed or not, is whether we can attract enough customers' (Luce 1987: 1; quoted Henderson 1990: 9). This was a major break with the previously evolved bi-partisan approach to subsidy, which saw it as the 'bread' which companies and artists were given to develop and to meet an important social need. While there was much resistance to this break within the SAC's advisory panels, faced with cuts in its own budget over which it had no control, it was forced to adapt to the policies handed down to it.

The shift to commercial viability in the funding formula has been an increasing factor through the range of performing art forms, although it was not as obviously disastrous for theatre in Scotland as it was south of the border during the 1980s. This is not because of, but despite, this emphasis of policy and is the result of the conjunction of a number of quite separate factors (in particular the growth in local authority arts funding). For political theatres the use of box-office income as a criterion for funding has particular implications. The preference for income over attendance figures has meant a squeeze on those groups attempting to reach an audience that might not be able to afford supposedly reasonable ticket

prices. Indeed, in order to establish their own audiences a number of groups have undertaken community tours in small-scale venues for free, or for a contribution to costs, or for nominal admission prices. Such groups rarely expect to recoup their costs let alone make a profit on such tours which are an integral part of the group's political commitment. While both Wildcat and Borderline, for example, have successfully increased their audiences, the fact that they had previously established themselves within the core of revenue funding groups meant that they had already secured the resources to expand their audience bases that smaller companies have subsequently been denied.

As for sponsorship, the SAC had itself noted in its 1979 Annual Report that most business sponsorship concentrated on 'the non-controversial, traditional programmes of the larger and established orchestras and opera companies. Secondly, private sponsorship does not redistribute resources according to social need: indeed rich areas are likely to grow richer and poor areas poorer' (p4). Thus, the imbalance between art forms inherent in the subsidy to resource-intensive forms, is repeated within the market place: theatre is not at the top of either agenda. Moreover, there is only a small group of companies capable of launching major sponsorship initiatives based in Scotland, and thus the national arts companies have a virtual monopoly on major sponsorship: at least 68% of business sponsorship on the records of the Association for Business Sponsorship in the Arts (ABSA) has gone to the national companies, with their emphasis on classical high art forms (see Henderson 1990: 29). In its 'even-handed' approach to art forms, the SAC's approach to sponsorship militates against theatre in general (since there is no national company) and discriminates against political

theatre in particular (because of the emphasis of sponsors on the non-controversial).

The specification that SAC subsidy should now only be used for clearly defined purposes might seem to be eminently sensible: it must be right that companies can account for expenditure in terms of meeting clear objectives. Yet the idea of having defined aims also implies a pre-defined programme of activity. This constriction on the ability of a company to react to events as and when they might happen might be less problematic for larger companies in established performance patterns, but even here the formulation of programmes beforehand must mean the creation of a theatrical 'entertainment' frame which undermines the possibility of direct politically interventionist work<sup>6</sup>. The activity of political theatre companies comes to be seen as just another regular component in the cycle of theatrical entertainment, without an intrinsic link to the changing conditions of political reality.

The implementation of the recommendations of TNFY was reviewed in 1988 in a report entitled 'A Period of Progress'. The key words within the review were 'greater efficiency and effectiveness' in client company organisation: criteria judged largely in terms of business standards. In its discussion of funding provision the report recognised that due to cuts in local government funding the implementation of its 'Towards a New Partnership' document on greater liaison with local authorities had been hampered. The statement that 'evidence of strong commitment from local sources has become an important criterion of SAC's own involvement in arts projects' (p20) shows the degree to which the SAC was forcing its clients and potential clients to rely on sources of funding that were acknowledged to be as limited as SAC subsidy.

In terms of the theatre, 'A Period of Progress' reported that there had been increased emphasis on small-scale touring throughout the country. New work had been encouraged through a number of schemes for commissioning and workshops. The grant to the Scottish Society of Playwrights was withdrawn. The plan was that the money was to be used instead to appoint 7 resident literary directors/dramaturges attached to repertory companies, but in effect it led to the establishment of a national Associate Literary Director, eventually based at the Royal Lyceum in Edinburgh. The post was occupied first by Sean McCarthy, and then Tom McGrath. It is noteworthy that this 'dramaturge system' runs entirely contrary to the impulses of the 1970s developments: it accords with the 'centres of excellence' approach to arts provision, contradicting the belief in self-expression and development open to all. It also takes its inspiration from the Irish model (even to the extent that McCarthy had been literary adviser at the Abbey) rather than acknowledging the need for one unique to Scotland.

The SAC also intimated that it would be attempting to give revenue-funded companies advanced notice of the likely levels of grant for the next three years. Clients themselves had pressed for greater funding stability and it was proposed that this would allow them to plan ahead in the most effective and efficient manner. However, the actual level of grant increases were announced as 4% in the first year, and 2% for each successive year. This was to prove to be far below the actual level of rises in inflation for all three years. There is little stability in poverty. Furthermore, the policy institutionalized the very inflexibility of funding that the Council itself had recognised as problematic. It represented another case of more for those who already had. Even for those companies who got three year funding, there was a problem in that accepting it implied accepting three year planning: it also

committed them to pre-established levels of production. The former is an undesirable constraint on political theatre companies in particular, since it removes their work from its integral relationship to the changing political situation in which it occurs. The latter has done nothing to guarantee a consistent quality in the work of any company.

The sum effect of all these policy changes within the SAC was to suggest that the root of any company's problems has been failures at a managerial level not underfunding. This has deflected attention from the central issue of the lack of government subsidy, increasing bureaucracy for both the SAC and individual organisations. As in every other aspect of government expenditure cuts attempting to ensure efficiency (or at least reduced expenditure), there was no way of rewarding efficiency or penalising inefficiency when it has been protected by powerful vested interests. Within companies the importance of the administrators and company boards (whose members have since 1986 become personally financially liable for their company's debts) was increased in the determination of company policy. Power within the decision-making process shifted from the artistic directors towards administrators. While this may be a justifiable shift in balance, the implications for political theatre are that the basis of decisions would no longer be political/artistic considerations but how well they matched administrative and bureaucratic goals set by the SAC. This is not to reject the need for efficient company administration or the monitoring of the uses to which public subsidy might be put. But it does recognise that these new criteria for funding proscribe all but the most commercially effective models of company organisation. This has affected the production process, and ultimately productions themselves. Companies on project grants with an eye to future revenue funding have abandoned cooperative or

collective schemes of organisation; others have reverted to the status of managements, hiring actors and technicians on short-term show-by-show contracts. This is not a sound basis for the development of the kind of work that takes a real commitment of effort from all involved, and the sustained development of trust between company members. Nor is it a sound basis for the development of experimental or radical work which may take longer to establish itself with audiences.

Rather than enabling new and radical work, the changes in SAC policies, forced under ACGB grant cuts and policy directives, became major obstacles for innovative, political and small-scale theatre companies. This was in marked contrast to the the 1970s when the SAC had responded supportively to a range of innovations: for example, new theatre companies that it began to support then as revenue clients included 7:84, Tie-Up, Borderline, TAG, The Other Company, Fir Chlis and Wildcat. Throughout the 1980s there were only two new additions to the list of revenue clients: The Tron Theatre and the Scottish Theatre Company (STC). The opening of the former was the result of a huge effort by the members of Glasgow Theatre Club, and although the SAC contributed towards the costs (£75,000 over three years from its Housing The Arts Fund), the theatre owed much to its members (who contributed subscriptions and individual effort); to Glasgow District Council who had leased the building for £1; and to the Historic Building Council and departments from the District and Regional Councils who had contributed to the renovations. The operations of the theatre were subsidised by the SAC, but often at a level which from year to year did not keep pace with inflation. For example, the total SAC subsidy of £132,285 for 1986/87 had risen by only 2% to £135,000 for 1989/90. This

contrasts with the rise from £40,000 to £104,000 contributed by local authorities over the same period.

While the Tron was created by its members, STC was more the result of a pro-active initiative by the SAC, in response to the increasing demands stemming from the 1970s for a national theatre company. In 1980, Ewan Hooper instigated a proposal to fund a national company for an inaugural season of three productions. Although the proposal was acted on, the company was never adequately resourced to take on its appointed role. It had no permanent base from which to launch its tours, train its actors, or even build its sets. Secondly as a 'national' company, it was severely underfunded. Cordelia Oliver's history of the company notes that it was tenth in the list of revenue clients, 'lagging behind small touring groups like Borderline, and yet expected to stage productions on a scale to fit the biggest playhouses in the country' (Oliver 1986: 139). Although the company did attract a supportive audience - which peaked at 59, 514 in 1984/85, without sufficient funding its ability to produce or extend a substantial repertoire of Scottish plays proved limited: Jamie the Saxt, The Three Estaitis, and Mr Gillie each received two productions in successive seasons; other productions included Waiting for Godot, Life of Galileo and Macbeth, none of which would seem to require the status of a Scottish national company. Of the two new plays which the company mounted, Marcella Evaristi's Commedia received a 'somewhat muddled production' (ibid), although the company scored a notable success with Tom McGrath's Animal. Lacking artistic impetus and underfunded, STC eventually floundered in 1986.

The failure of the SAC to properly encourage innovation is further exemplified by the case of one of the most exciting companies to emerge in the 1980s, Communicado.

Formed in 1983, the company aimed to give greater emphasis to the role of the actor in the making of theatre. This artistic impulse combined with impoverished circumstances to give the company a reputation for theatre relying on the virtuosity and physical ingenuity of its ensemble performances. The company has enjoyed consistent critical success, winning three Scotsman Fringe First Awards at the Edinburgh Festival. Nonetheless, it received only project funding in the form of guarantees against loss from the SAC until 1990/91. As a project-funded company, its problems exemplified those of a number of other small project-funded companies, like Winged Horse, Focus and United Artists. Unable to guarantee regular work to performers and crew, it had to gear its productions around the availability of those required for each show. Thus, there was a limit on the audience-base that it was able to build through sporadic tours around small-scale venues. Both Focus and United Artists have ceased working. That Comunicado has managed to build such a base is credit worthy, and in 1989/90 its 88 performances, including Jock Tamson's Bairns commissioned for the Tramway by the Glasgow Festivals Unit, attracted over 24,000 people. It is not merely coincidental that its guarantee against loss was raised to £70,000, or that it received substantial assistance from Glasgow District Council. If it had not been for the emergence of certain local authorities as key arts funders, it is doubtful that there would have been any substantial innovation in the theatre in the 1980s.

#### **Funding Institutions: Local Authorities**

While the SAC traditionally carried the bulk of the burden for theatre funding, many local authorities have also been involved in funding theatre, through the provision and maintenance of venues as well as through direct funding to

theatre companies. The set-up of local authority arts funding in Scotland is again distinct from that in England. Prior to 1982, both regional and district local authorities had a statutory responsibility for the arts, although there was a wide variation in the enthusiasm with which each individually responded to this. In 1982, following on the recommendations of the Stoddart Report, the Local Government and Planning (Scotland) Act, was introduced to prevent the duplication of services and functions between tiers of local government. Section 17 of the Act specifically related to the provision of sporting, recreational and cultural activities, and placed the statutory onus for their provision on district authorities. Regional authorities were allowed discretionary power to provide for such activities, but in effect few actually made use of these powers. With the pressures on SAC resources, and the concentration on national companies that eventually followed, the role of local authorities in providing funding became crucial. The 1980s saw two important initiatives by local authorities in the area of arts funding, both of which centred on Glasgow and both of which played a crucial role in the development of the funding for Scottish theatre as a whole.

The first of these was Mayfest. There had been a number of attempts at establishing a Glasgow arts festival before Mayfest was initiated in 1983. Included amongst these, and a direct forerunner of Mayfest, was 7:84's Clydebuilt series of plays in 1982, which had been funded by both Glasgow District and Strathclyde Regional Councils. Although there are many who have claimed to have had a hand in initiating the festival<sup>7</sup> the direct impetus came from two sources: Wildcat Stage Productions and the Trade Union movement. The Wildcat interest was represented by David MacLennan and Ferelith Lean, who proposed a budget for a

two week music and theatre festival to take place in the following May to a meeting of interested parties on 20th May 1982. Alex Clark (Scottish and Northern Ireland Secretary of Equity) had already pushed the STUC's Arts and Entertainments Committee to agree to the setting up of such a festival. Both parties were motivated by the twin desires to establish an arts festival in Glasgow and to celebrate May Day with something more substantial than the annual procession and day of events on Glasgow Green. At the 20th May meeting were a range of representatives from Glasgow District Council, trade unions, the SAC and the British Council, as well as a number of arts workers. They resolved to establish a company with charitable status for the purpose of setting up and running the festival. Ferelith Lean was appointed as Festival Organiser, and it was agreed that approaches should be made to Glasgow District Council, Strathclyde Regional Council, the SAC, and the trade unions for funding. The aims of the festival are summed up as:

1. The expansion of existing audiences for theatre and music through the presentation of a high quality but accessible programme. To this end ticket prices should be kept low.
2. To include a strong element within the programme of international theatre.
3. To celebrate not only May Day but also Scottish working class theatre and popular political theatre from other countries.
4. To take performances and events into non-traditional venues and areas.
5. To help enhance the image of Glasgow in the eyes of both the resident and visitor.

(Mayfest '83 Report: 21-22).

Although the initial budget for the project was limited (total expenditure being just under £80,000) and the organisation was in many ways haphazard, the festival proved such a success that it has been able to grow into one of the largest festivals in Britain. Its inaugural programme

illustrates the range of theatre work that it continues to promote:

Popular/political/working class theatre:

including the Traverse theatre production of John Byrne's The Slab Boys Trilogy; Borderline's production of Fo and Rame's Female Parts, two shows by 7:84 England; a Wildcat production; Soyikwa African Theatre; The Lyric Theatre, Belfast, in The Hidden Curriculum; and Monstrous Regiment.

Foreign Theatre:

including Pupi e Fresedde; the Black Light Theatre of Prague; and Teatar & TD.

Community and Street Events:

performances by Pookiesnackenburg and The Natural Theatre Company.

In this programme and in the aims of the festival can be seen the tension that exists in any attempt to celebrate popular culture without effectively opening such an event to the wider community. Not only was much of the programme based in city centre venues, excluding audiences from peripheral housing schemes, but the community events part of the festival was inadequate. The people whose culture was being celebrated were not being resourced to create something of their own which they might contribute to the festival. These problems have continually dogged Mayfest, being manifested as pressure on funding organisations such as the local authorities and the trade unions to provide more community events, participation and facilities.

What Mayfest has achieved is nonetheless tremendously important. In the first instance, it created a precedent in policy for both Strathclyde Regional and Glasgow District Councils. The pro-active financing of arts projects became an important priority for these authorities and accepted as such by their electorate. Indeed, promoting the city itself became accepted as a desirable project: in 1986 the 'Glasgow's Miles Better' campaign was launched. Its eventual

spin-off is to be seen in the seizing of the initiative by Glasgow District Council to use the arts as the basis for economic renewal of the city, and eventually to the celebration of the status as European City of Culture. The festival itself was a step towards throwing off stereotypical images of Glasgow and of Scotland. It has illustrated Glasgow's international standing as a place receptive to foreign work and as a showcase where indigenous work can be displayed. That it has been able to do so while attempting to be a popular festival has helped to shape arts practice in Scotland away from elitist models (in marked contrast to the Edinburgh Festival, for example), as well as exposing the avant-garde to a wider public. This is to be seen above all in the pricing policies which operate within Mayfest. In comparison to the Edinburgh 'Fringe' or subsidised theatre outside Scotland, pricing policy is much more aligned to the spending power of a popular audience. By making available additional money for specific Mayfest projects, the festival has provided local companies with a boost to their programme. In turn this has also meant the provision of work for arts workers at a time of year when normally work is tailing off, thus enabling them to stay in Scotland on a more permanent basis.

The second initiative in terms of local authority involvement in the arts was the celebration in 1990 of Glasgow as European City of Culture. The background to the submission for the designation of the title lay in the efforts by the local authorities in Glasgow from the mid-Eighties to promote a new image of the city to attract inward investment and to create a new service industry infrastructure to replace the dying manufacturing base on which the city had traditionally been reliant. John Myerscough noted that 'the city, in the face of major problems of urban decay (losing 22 per cent of its population between 1971 and 1981) has made vigorous efforts

to reverse the decline by investing, as one journalist shrewdly observed, in "looks, learning and cultural infrastructure" (Myerscough 1988: 1). Thus, the Year of Culture was only one of a number of initiatives to create Glasgow anew: Mayfest, the 'Glasgow's Miles Better' Campaign in 1986; and the Glasgow Garden Festival in 1988 were all part of an overall strategy. In many ways the Year of Culture had, thus, very little to do with culture: its emphasis was in promoting Glasgow, just as other cities like Sheffield and Manchester had used sport. In the submission document for the UK nomination the major benefits that the title would confer on the city were listed as being to:

- maintain momentum already generated by the image building initiatives which have played a key role in promoting the City's revitalised character, for, example the Glasgow's Miles Better campaign, the activities of the Greater Glasgow Tourist board, and the marketing effort associated with the Scottish Exhibition and Conference Centre and the Glasgow Garden Festival.
- provide a corporate marketing platform for the City's vast range of cultural, historical and artistic institutions, collections and events, and act as a showcase for the existing cultural organisations in the City.
- utilise and build upon the organisational experience and co-operative efforts which have been developed in Glasgow in the context of large-scale events such as the Garden Festival, Mayfest and the Hungarian Arts Exhibition.
- stimulate increased awareness and participation in the arts by Glaswegians, and act as a launching pad for new cultural developments and events which could become permanent features of Glasgow.

(pp 2-3, submission document)

As Gieseckam (1989: 6-7) argues, the clear priority within the document is in the promotion of Glasgow as a major tourist centre, with emphasis on accommodation facilities for visitors, conference facilities and accessibility to those visiting the city. Thus, from the outset the emphasis was on bringing outsiders to Glasgow (and Scotland) on the

basis of a new image: it was not primarily aimed at providing amenities and an infrastructure to directly benefit local people.

The reservations raised by Gieseckam about the submission document were not entirely borne out in the execution of Glasgow 1990 and the activities that served as a prelude to it. Myerscough's report for the Policy Studies Institute (Myerscough 1988) had already endorsed the arts as a major tool of economic renewal. In a different respect, the ways in which the year's activities were coordinated and funded also quelled these reservations. While the original submission had been by the City of Glasgow District Council (GDC), Strathclyde Regional Council (SRC) also became heavily involved (committing around £12 million to Glasgow 1990, as well as contributing to the costs of a number of capital projects). It was this involvement by SRC which helped redress the imbalances within the submission document.<sup>8</sup> Each of the local authorities adopted its own approach to the way in which it would respond, and although there was much co-operation between them, it is in the differences of approach that significance lies.

Once Glasgow received the nomination in 1986, GDC decided that it would establish a separate Festivals Unit to oversee the planning of the event. This came into being in the summer of 1987, with Robert Palmer (former Director of the SAC's Dance and Drama Department) as Director of Festivals and Neil Wallace (formerly of Chapter Arts in Cardiff) as his depute. Three major parameters within which the unit would operate were set at this stage: 'the celebration would last for a whole year...Secondly, the events would include everything that made Glasgow what it is - not just the mainstream arts...and thirdly, that the City would present the 'Cultural Capital of Europe' celebrations in partnership with all interested organisations and

commercial sponsors' (GDC 1991: 1). Three sets of interconnected objectives were set also:

Cultural objectives: to co-ordinate the development of existing facilities and cultural organisations in the city, to provide incentives, encouragement for artists and to extend cultural objectives on an international basis.

Economic objectives: To improve the regional economy by creating employment opportunities, to increase visitor numbers and expand the number of participants and spectators in cultural events.

Social objectives: To provide increased opportunities for participation in cultural activities with the emphasis on groups often ignored by mainstream cultural institutions, and to provide fun and entertainment for the citizens of, and visitors to Glasgow.

(ibid)

Following a strategic plan incorporating these objectives, the Festivals Unit acted as a 'broker of cultural commodities' (ibid: 6), co-ordinating funding bodies and events and companies rather than directly organising these things itself: there were a number of exceptions to this to the extent that certain groups were offered commissions for particular projects. The remit of the Unit was specifically short-term, although Robert Palmer has since been appointed as GDC's first Director of the Department of Performing Arts and Venues; while Neil Wallace now runs the Tramway. In 1988 and 1989 the Unit promoted the 1990 programme with a number of events, including Peter Brook's The Mahabarata, staged at what was to become the Tramway.

Within 1990 itself there were 6 major project categories, which were allocated the following amounts of money:

1. £2.1m Large-scale, city-wide projects, community programmes, neighbourhood and local events.
2. £2.7m Major performing arts events and festivals.
3. £0.9m Major visual arts events, exhibitions and commissions.

4. £7.5m Other major projects.
5. £1.3m Medium and small-scale events, productions and exhibitions.
6. £0.5m Operating costs of the Festivals Unit.

While GDC had had a mandatory duty for arts provision since 1982, SRC's involvement in Glasgow 1990 was not straightforward since it involved a major new initiative beyond its statutory responsibilities. Its approach was to establish a Steering Committee to oversee the Council's response. This was a significant difference from GDC: rather than forming a team of arts specialists, pulled together expressly for Glasgow 1990, it drew upon its internal resources to find the most appropriate response. The mechanisms that were in operation were therefore always those of the Council, providing both a safeguard and established procedures for the manner of operation. It also meant that the SRC had to decide on both long-term and short-term objectives, since the staff would be returning to their original posts after the event. Long-term objectives included:

- (a) the promotion of the local arts and culture industries and the encouragement of the related service sector
- (b) the further development of cultural links in the promotion of trade
- (c) the spreading of arts availability to the widest possible audience across the region
- (d) the examination of the use of Council properties in the promotion of arts across the whole community
- (e) the greater use of arts and culture as an education resource
- (f) the development of arts and culture within the education curriculum
- (g) the establishment of career training structures within the arts discipline to complement the development of the arts and culture industry
- (h) the encouragement of the use of arts and culture as medium of self-development amongst the disabled, the elderly and other special needs groups

- (i) the development of marketing and publicity strategies to make the local and wider audience aware of the Council's activities in this policy area.

(SRC 1991: 2)

Here, the emphasis is not just on one year's celebrations but on defining a whole new approach to culture. Thus, the SRC's involvement in Glasgow 1990, was underpinned by the legacy that the activities funded might create. Of particular note was the way in which the money that SRC made available was in fact disbursed. Again there were a number of different project areas in which the SRC became involved:

- a) the major headline projects in the 1990 programme
- b) local/community based projects
- c) the Education department programme
- d) the Social Work department programme
- e) publicity related activity
- f) investment in the physical fabric of the cultural base.

Thus, while the bulk of the funds for one-off individual projects were spent on the headline events, much more of the SRC's funds were directed at participatory activities and at bridging the gap between 'audiences' and the professional providers of culture. Moreover, even the publicity issued by SRC tended to emphasise the extensiveness and availability of culture rather than any exclusivity or high art context. This was one way of acknowledging that 'culture' is an open and mutable category, rather than a given, to be equated with high arts alone.

The differences between the GDC's and SRC's approach meant that in effect there were two overlapping approaches to the Year of Culture: one representing a professional high-art-based short-term programme; the other with a greater emphasis on participatory forms and non-professional activity, with the possibility of creating a longer-term

legacy. The ability of each tier of the local authorities to respond differently to Glasgow 1990 (and the two sets of resources which that made available) thus created a much more comprehensive programme than might have otherwise been the case. Glasgow 1990 was much more extensive than any previous five cities' celebrations of their Years of Culture: it lasted a whole year and incorporated a much wider cross-section of the community as both audiences for and makers of art. However, while it is certainly true that in the absence of the high art programme, the participatory and community aspects (and any economic benefits accruing from the year) would not have been made available, the imbalances between the funding allocated to each were a replication of the imbalances present within Scottish cultural provision generally.

Notwithstanding this, Glasgow 1990 and the lead up to it did have a substantial and positive effect on the indigenous Scottish arts scene. In the first place, the whole notion of rebuilding a thoroughly modern and cosmopolitan image for Glasgow connected with a resurgence of artistic innovation and talent throughout Scotland which successfully challenged the limited range of cultural possibilities imposed by old stereotypes and long-endured regressive imagery. This coincidence between exploding imaginative possibilities and the possibility of both international recognition and funding allowed a range of developments which would not otherwise have been possible.<sup>9</sup> Secondly, it placed Scottish art in the forefront of British culture, reversing the traditional colonial denigration of peripheral cultures. Thirdly, it opened up the range of companies and artists visiting Scotland, creating the prospect of even more diverse arts practice here. Additionally, it created new venues (The Royal Concert Hall, and the Tramway and Arches theatres, for example) and supported new arts practice, particularly in community arts.

Finally it established a separate source of arts funding by-passing the SAC.<sup>10</sup>

In addition to these two major projects, local authority funding for the arts of a more general kind over the 1980s also saw direct support for both new and established companies and venues. Already, Borderline had been founded in 1974 through an agreement between the SAC and the then Ayr County Council to establish a company providing popular theatre for the communities of Ayrshire. Even after the changes in local authority organisation the company continued to receive funds from Kyle and Carrick and Cunninghame District Councils and Strathclyde Regional Council. In 1985 the Fablevision company began as a venture specialising in making theatre accessible to people of all ages and abilities. Much of their work has been in the area of community arts and has been funded directly and indirectly by local authorities, including Strathclyde and Fife Regional Councils. Established companies such as Wildcat and 7:84 were also beneficiaries of local authority revenue grants, which was crucial as their support from the SAC was effectively diminishing. Wildcat's Clyde Theatre in Clydebank was opened and is run with the help of Clydebank District Council. The opening of such new venues contradicts the dominant trend in England, in which even established mainstream theatre buildings were in a state of crisis, facing 'dark' periods and closure (most notably the Royal Shakespeare Company at the Barbican and Bristol Old Vic). One is forced to agree with Christine Hamilton who, as STUC Arts Officer, remarked that

The crucial role played by local authorities in promoting the arts - and in particular the role of Glasgow District Council and Strathclyde Regional Council - has meant that far from withering in the cold chill of Thatcherism - the arts in Scotland are just about flourishing. Matters cultural have moved up the political agenda. We use culture as promotion and as

resistance.

(Hamilton 1990: 1)

However, the hope of a long-term future for local authority arts funding which the 1990 Year of Culture seemed to both epitomize and promise was almost immediately dashed once the year finished. Where local authorities seemed ready to step into the breach left by the SAC, the sharp decrease in income which they faced because of non-payment of the poll-tax jeopardised all the progress made up to and throughout 1990. David Anderson, assistant director at the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities was quoted in an article by Euan Ferguson as saying

With poll tax non-payment, and the forecast of capping, local authorities are really going to be in financial trouble next year. It is safe to say that that it will be increasingly difficult for local authorities to increase, or even sustain, much of the arts funding they give.

(Scotland on Sunday 22/12/91)

Ferguson himself notes that

It is already understood that the independent report on Glasgow's Year of Culture will cast (or attempt to cast) serious doubts on the viability of arts as an invisible earner - heresy to the 1990 supremos, realpolitik to the company men who loved the Burrell but still base in Sunderland.

(ibid)

The political will to fund the arts will be severely tested if this proves to be the case. Recession in the economy has also hit other potential sources of income, from both sponsorship and at the box-office. Even within Glasgow, Glasgow Arts Centre is threatened with closure, and The Third Eye Centre has closed with debts of £600,000. Thus, the funding bonanza and any renaissance in the West of

Diagram 2: The Components of Scottish Theatre in 1990

**1) Building-based Companies**

The Byre (St. Andrews), Citizens', Dundee Rep., Eden Court, Perth Rep., Pitlochry Festival Theatre,, Royal Lyceum, Theatre Workshop, The Traverse, The Tron\*.

**2) Touring and Small-Scale Companies**

Annexe (Glasgow)\*, The Arches Company (Glasgow)\*, Borderline, Clyde Unity\*, Communicado\*, Fablevision\*, Oxygen House\*, TAG, Theatre Alba\*, Theatre Co-Op\*, 7:84, Wildcat, Winged Horse\*.

**3) Venues**

**(i) Large-Medium Scale**

Adam Smith Centre (Kirkcaldy), Old Atheneum (formerly RSAMD)\*, Ayr Civic Theatre, Brunton (Musselburgh), Church Hill Theatre (Edinburgh), Clyde Theatre (Clydebank)\*, Cumbernauld Theatre, Eden Court (Inverness), E. Kilbride Village Theatre, His Majesty's (Aberdeen), Kings (Edinburgh), Kings (Glasgow), MacRobert Centre (Stirling), Magnum (Irvine),), Pavilion (Glasgow), Theatre Royal (Glasgow), Tramway\*, Tron\*.

**(ii) Prominent Small-Scale**

Arches (Glasgow), Crawford Arts Centre (St. Andrews), Dolphin Arts Centre (Glasgow), Glasgow Arts Centre, Harbour Arts Centre (Irvine), Livingston Mews, RSAMD (New Atheneum and Chandler Studio)\*, Third Eye Centre (Glasgow), .

\* denotes new venue since 1979

Scotland associated with Glasgow's celebrations as European City of Culture are rapidly disintegrating as so much froth on a wind blowing from the south; a wind over which Scots have little control.

### **Conclusion**

Despite the very serious reservations expressed above there were substantial achievements throughout the 1980s which have to be acknowledged. They are perhaps best demonstrated by comparing the major components of the theatre in 1979 with those in 1990: this can be done by comparing Diagram 1 with Diagram 2.

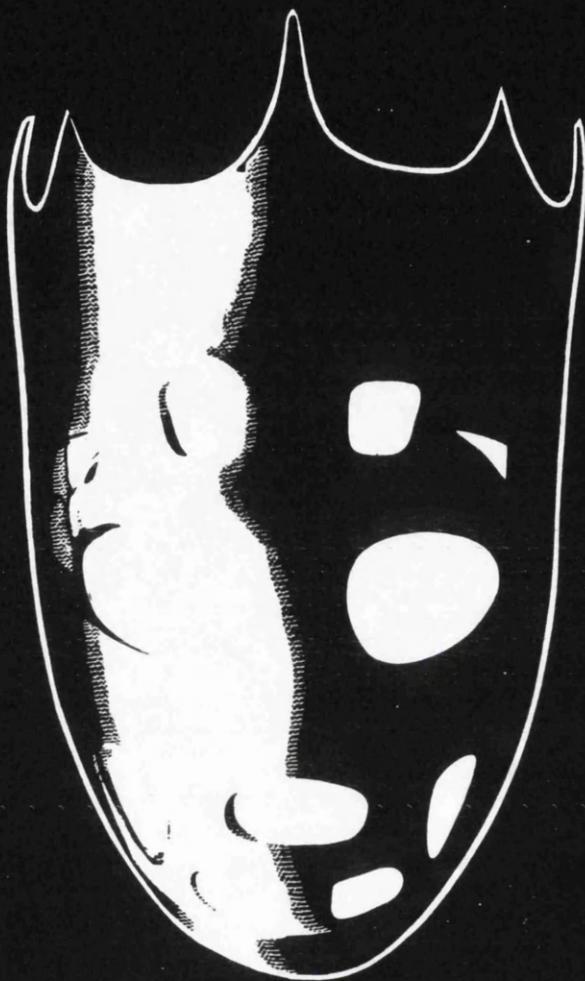
In this chapter I have argued that Scottish theatre is distinct from the dominant theatre in England, since its major components are to be distinguished by a building-based/touring distinction, rather than any divide between commercial, mainstream and fringe. Given the importance of public subsidy in maintaining this theatre, I examined the role of the funding bodies, in particular the SAC and the local authorities for Glasgow. In each case, I found that while resources were plentiful, theatre was relatively well funded and innovation encouraged. However, in the case of the SAC, the 1980s saw it change its funding role in ways that disadvantaged theatre in general and political theatre in particular. Fortunately, local authority involvement in the arts grew to provide the shortfall left by the SAC. Emanating from Labour local authorities, this involvement was often sympathetic to and supportive of both wider community involvement in the arts and towards political theatre companies. By the end of the decade, however, this healthy climate had been overtaken by changes in the financial security of local authorities themselves, jeopardising directly many of the achievements of the 1980s.

In the following chapters I will be examining some of these achievements, by looking in greater detail at the work

of a number of groups and writers, whose work in making political theatre was both indicative of general trends and noteworthy in its own right.

theatre  
**Pkf**

# BRUS



from berwick to bannockburn

EDINBURGH FESTIVAL FRINGE  
FOLLOWED BY SCOTTISH TOUR

a pageant play by george byatt

PKf acknowledges financial assistance from  
The Scottish Arts Council

Plate 2: Publicity Leaflet for the 1982 Production of Brus

## 4. THE BRUS

### Introduction

Given the argument of Chapter 1 that Scottish theatre is distinct because of its emphasis on theatrical rather than literary or dramatic qualities, it may seem perverse to begin the series of case studies with a production centring on a verse text. However, Theatre PKF's 1982 production of Brus (from Berwick to Bannockburn), by George Byatt,<sup>1</sup> demonstrates theatrical qualities in its engagement with the audience which underpin most, if not all, theatre, particularly in its deployment of empathy. The play utilises the historical figure of Robert the Bruce through whom to explore a range of myths prevalent within Scottish culture. Within the performance there is undertaken a deconstructive enterprise which creates a strong interplay between marshalling the shared myths on which it relies and challenging the audience to confront these myths, seizing for itself an autonomous standpoint in relation to them. The production event as a whole included a post-performance discussion, a unique element in Scottish theatre that emphasises the autonomous role of the audience. It is on the ways in which the production explores and encourages this audience autonomy that the following will concentrate.

### Company Background.

Before beginning an analysis of the production some further information about the company will give a sense of its position within the wider theatrical context. Theatre PKF first performed as a company in 1979 in a moved reading of George Byatt's poem-play The Clyde Is Red. This futuristic piece describes the reaction by the government and the media to the discovery by Glaswegians that they can actually walk on the water of the River Clyde. As a radio play, it went on to win a Prix Italia special award for Radio Clyde in 1987. The company's name is taken from this play and stands for 'peace-keeping force' - a play on the numerous 'peace-keeping forces' whose intervention in any number of conflicts has usually heralded an upsurge in the violence.

Theatre PKF has not, however, been a company in an established sense: Byatt describes their way of working as 'guerrilla theatre', a banding together of the members for short periods to conduct 'hit and run campaigns'. While the actualisation of this policy has been far from Boal's concept of 'guerilla theatre' (see Boal 1977), it does indicate something of the group's precarious existence since that first production. Those who have performed in the company have all trained and work as professionals outwith the group, with only some returning to perform on a sporadic basis. In its most recent manifestation in 1990, only two of the company members had worked extensively in the company before - George Byatt and his son Andrew. It is George Byatt, despite his protestations of a commitment to a collective spirit at the heart of the group, who has been the unifying factor in all the company's work.

In the first instance this is because of the company's orientation in producing text-centred theatre<sup>2</sup>: the text is virtually sacrosanct; and most of the texts that the company has worked on have originated with Byatt. These texts have largely been rooted in poetic or ballad forms rather than in dramatic or theatrical traditions. They include dramatisations of Henryson's Fables, and Major Road Ahead, an adaptation of the poetic work of Hugh McDiarmid. A full list of the company's work is included at the end of this chapter. This emphasis on the text is the result of three factors: firstly, the rejection of the function of director which leaves the writer and his text to provide the coherence for the performance; secondly, the association of many of those who have worked in the group with Edinburgh Playwright's Workshop, imbuing them with a sympathetic understanding of the importance of the writer and the text; and thirdly, the conscious location by the group of the written texts that they undertake within a particular version of the Scottish literary tradition (see Kurt Wittig 1958) which focuses on oral poetic traditions. Byatt as the main writer of the group remains its defining force. In

this respect, it should be noted that many of those who first performed with the group in the early 1980s, and who had been part of the Edinburgh Playwright's Workshop, split with Byatt over the decision by him not to present a piece by poet and playwright George Gunn. They mounted the play under the name Theatre PKF, something which has caused a long-standing resentment between them and Byatt.

The second reason for Byatt's pre-eminence is that in those productions which the company has undertaken, he has, in the absence of a director, usually been what he terms 'the outside eye' for the performers in rehearsal. Again while he rejects the notion of 'directing', and invites performers to come out of scenes to assess their efficacy as they are rehearsed, he remains the common link throughout the rehearsal period and production run. A third set of reasons must also be acknowledged: Byatt's lengthy experience as a writer; the breadth of his lived experience - having served as an officer in the Second World War, he has worked in a variety of fields; and the depth and breadth of his reading about politics, theatre and literature. He refuses any simple definition of himself within standard categories, but draws readily upon Buddhism, anarcho-syndicalism, Maoism and a range of literary sources as part of his conversational repertoire. Given such erudition, combined with a personal charm, it is unsurprising that he emerges within any discussion as a dominant figure. This produces a range of conflicts between his professed preferences for working practices (collectivist-syndicalism) and his personal tendency to dominate, whether consciously or unconsciously. Those who have enjoyed working with him regard this as an unfortunate but not irredeemable quality of the man; for others it has become the focus of resentment at what they regard as a manipulative and scheming mind.

In its productions the company has adopted a style of minimalist theatre. Given the centrality of the words of

the text, there is a conscious rejection of most of the conventions and trappings of bourgeois theatre production values, resulting in a performance style which draws consciously on Grotowski and Brecht, producing what Joyce MacMillan (1990) has called in one review 'workshop-type theatre'. This owes much to the fact that much of the work that the company has done has been play readings and workshop performances. Lights are only rarely dimmed; costume is whatever the actors decide to perform in; props are kept to a minimum; and stage make-up is unidentifiable, if used. The emphasis is placed on the actors giving voice to the words - hence giving first readings to new plays, for example, and the use of scripts by the performers in productions of The Clyde Is Red. Of course, it should be noted that the lack of theatrical trappings in performance not only reflects the company's theatrical beliefs, but also the poverty of its resources to produce more lavish sets and costumes. The extent to which this is making a virtue out of necessity may be judged from the fact that the original intention was to stage the Brus as a pageant play, for example, such that the script for the play includes a number of references to lighting effects, props and costumes.

#### **Production Background.**

Although I generally intend to avoid chasing authorial intentions as a means of validating judgements on the productions studied, in the case of the Brus, the close involvement of Byatt in all aspects of the production, his pre-eminence in the company, and the centrality of the written text (and spoken word which it gives rise to), mean that the background to the production requires a more in-depth treatment of the history of the ideas that gave rise to it. This is particularly important given the ways in which Byatt was able to use opportunities outwith the performance (such as in interviews, articles, in meeting the audience beforehand and afterwards in the post-show

discussion) to establish what Wilfried Passow (1981: 237) calls a 'context of convention' within which the audience might interpret the performance. The inspiration for the play came while Byatt worked at the BBC at the time of the Yom Kippur War in 1973. As a worker for the News Service, monitoring world-wide events, Byatt was appalled by the way in which the Israeli propaganda inundated the service, and ensured support and ultimate victory for its campaign by its total domination of the propaganda war. As a writer, Byatt was interested in finding a way to represent this power of narrative and eventually hit upon the metaphor of Robert the Bruce. Much of the text is based on the account given in the Scots epic-poem, Barbour's Brus, written some fifty years after Robert Bruce's death. Initially, it was intended that the idea be translated as a huge pageant during the Edinburgh Festival in a kind of 'anti-Tattoo', but Byatt's outline and application to the Festival Office was never acknowledged. When he returned to Scotland from London in 1978, the text for Brus was started, and Byatt even managed to secure a commission for the play from The Traverse. This was eventually cancelled as the play was considered too long for production and Byatt firmly resisted any cutting of the script.

The play received its first production in 1982, in the first major tour by Theatre PKF. This tour began with what was described as a 'workshop production week' at Napier College during the Edinburgh Festival Fringe; it then continued for four weeks, taking in small-scale venues and theatres from Glasgow to as far north as Uist and Skye. The extent of this tour proved attractive to the SAC who granted the company £15,401 to mount it. The play was revived in 1990 at The Tron for a two week run, and was funded as part of Glasgow 1990.

At its first production, the play proved to be timely. It was in 1982 that the Falklands War broke out and was settled in matter of months. What the heavily censored media

coverage of the war presented was a sharply executed and relatively clean campaign, in which superior technology and courage overcame a raggle-taggle army of conscripts led by fascistic generals. The skill with which the British government manipulated the media (much of which displayed a readiness to accept and exploit this) reinforced Byatt's ideas about the importance of propaganda in any war. Moreover, he was aghast at the ways in which most Scots seemed ready to jettison any struggle for their own identity as they were caught up in 'the Falklands effect' (see Chapter 2). The direct influence of this experience of the Falklands War is illustrated by the accounts of the burial of the Falklands dead in mass graves which preface the written text, but it pervades all of the writing. Much of the production's energy is directed towards exposing the ways in which propaganda and myths are exploited and how they can be undercut.

In choosing the figure of Robert the Bruce (hereafter Brus, following the Scots transcription within the written text) on which to focus, Byatt chose to tackle some of the most pervasive and potent of the myths which were prevalent within Scottish culture. Brus and Wallace (whose life is also covered here) stand pre-eminent in Scots iconography for two reasons: they waged the last successful struggles by the Scots to retain independence from England; and they represent a glorious but lost past. The adoption of 'Flower of Scotland' as a semi-official national anthem in Scotland is a clear illustration of the power that these figures have to mobilise national feeling in specific ways. Moreover, the piece connects with a number of enterprises at that time, including the Grigors' exhibition, 'Scotch Myths', to dispel the myths propelled in the processes of inferiorisation about the state of Scotland prior to the Act of Union. Beveridge and Turnbull (1989) catalogue a range of examples of what they term 'inferiorist historiography', which have sought to portray pre-Union Scotland as a dark barbaric country, saved only by the influence of English

civilisation. In explaining his ideas for the play<sup>3</sup>, Byatt has specifically referred to the work of Frantz Fanon, on whom Beveridge and Turnbull rely heavily for their analysis.

### **Production Analysis.**

The production is divided into two halves, according to the division within the written text between Acts I and II. The first act, 'The Hammer', is prefaced with a prologue in which the audience is welcomed and the subject of the play introduced. It begins with the exile of the Scots king, John Baliol, chosen by England's Edward I, who has been invited by the Scots nobles to settle the disputed matter of the appointment to the Scots throne. After Baliol flees Scotland to seek a treaty with France, Edward I orders that the town of Berwick be razed as a lesson for those who might similarly attempt to resist him. This begins the war between Scotland and England.

Act I proper opens with a long speech from Edward I to the Scots about why he has 'had' to sack Berwick and remove the coronation stone from Scone to Westminster. This is interrupted by a short scene in which two peasants carrying the stone discuss its merits. Edward then continues to explain the reasons for his division of Scotland among English nobles, before calling before him the Scots barons and clergy to swear fealty to him. Except for Malcolm and William Wallace, all the nobility pledge their obedience, including Brus of Annandale and his son, Robert, who seek also to make a play for the Scottish crown. Their petition is not granted. A Joker figure then narrates how Wallace fights back against the English rule, until he is beaten at Falkirk and forced to flee to France. In Wallace's absence the nobles meet to discuss the crown and a brawl breaks out between the Brus faction and the Comyn faction. When this is settled, a scene between Brus and Comyn is played twice in which each in turn offers the other letters of his support should he attempt to take the Scots crown.

This action is broken with a herald announcing a reward for the capture of Wallace. This treacherous capture, by the Earl of Menteith, is then acted out. Then follows a scene showing some itinerant commoners (the 'sma' folk') who live by gathering the dead of the battle fields, sharing out food and wine, before tackling their next job. Amongst their number is Rab, a seemingly deranged and senseless man. As they begin their task, another of them, Meg, discovers the body of her son Jamie who had accompanied Wallace. As she screams in her grief, the scene freezes and Rab relates his experience of the razing of Berwick. When he finishes, the action unfreezes and continues as before, with the poor folk comforting Meg. This scene gives way to the narration by an English soldier of how Wallace was brought to London to be tried. Then Wallace's trial is acted out, after which the soldier comes back to relate the torturing of Wallace and his execution.

In the following scene, Edward I confronts Brus with the letters of support exchanged between him and Comyn, which are sealed with his stamp. He manages to persuade Edward to allow him one day to prove his innocence. During this time he returns to Scotland and meets the Comyn at the Greyfriars Kirk, where he kills him. This is followed by another scene with the group of common people in which Rab now explains his vision, and they discuss war. Brus enters the scene and appeals to the common folk to fight the English. All except Rab are persuaded by his rhetoric, and Brus is then crowned as king. Act I ends with Brus' enthronement.

Act II opens with a prologue in which Meg reads the Declaration of Arbroath, interspersed with comments by the Joker to tell us that in fact the Declaration was made after the action of Act II is complete. The Act begins with a narration of how Brus' army is defeated at Methven by the English and Brus forced to become a fugitive. The scene following shows Brus defeating four of Comyn's men, who are

pursuing him. This gives way to a scene involving the group of 'sma' folk', who have now joined the cause led by Brus. There is a discussion of the role of the common people in history, in which Rab asserts their central role. Brus enters the scene, as he did in Act I, and there is set up a series of contrasts between his vision of what he is doing and Rab's pacifist objections. This is followed by a reprise of the offer to Brus to be king, this time with Meg questioning him about the price that he would pay to achieve his ambition.

The next scene is established with a narration by Brus of how he was challenged by Sir Aymer de Vallance to an open fight. The preparations for what turns out to be the Battle of Loudon Hill are then acted out. A number of soldiers recount the scene leading up to the battle; the battle itself and its aftermath being described in a monologue by one of them. His sergeant interrupts him with orders to take part in a burial detail. The Joker then narrates the reaction of Edward I to the defeat. He is followed by an English baron who describes the possible consequences of Edward I's death and Brus' continued success. Edward I himself then speaks from his funeral byre to the audience, before summoning his son to him and commissioning him to destroy Brus. On his father's death, Edward II assumes the throne and the responsibility with which his father has entrusted him, despite his previous dalliance with affairs beyond the throne. Brus and he confront each other and the battles between their forces are announced. A scene with the 'sma' folk' comes next, in which Rab and Andra argue over the cost in lives of the war. Rab reveals a vision of a future, as described by Mao. Succeeding this, Meg narrates Brus' victories over the English.

The Scots army is laying siege to Stirling Castle and the challenge to the governor, Sir Philip Mowbray, by Brus' brother, Edward, is acted out. Brus rails against Edward because this has given Edward II time to amass a great army

from various corners of his realm to come to the rescue of the English garrison at Stirling. Edward II and Sir Philip discuss this. The various components of the English army are amassed and addressed by Edward II. Meg describes the passage of the army north to Berwick, Edinburgh and so to Stirling. The Scots line up against them, bolstered by numerous 'sma' folk'. Prior to the battle Brus encounters the English baron, Sir Henry de Boon and the two fight each other, with Brus the victor.

As the two armies face each other, they each prepare for battle with a mass. The audience does not see the battle, however. Instead the next scene is of some peasant women at the stream at Bannockburn, preparing to wash clothes. Their washing becomes covered in the blood of the dead and wounded flowing down the stream. Meg narrates the course of the battle in which the English have been defeated. There is then a reprise of the scene between the Scots soldier and the sergeant who is to take him on burial detail. There is a short requiem, followed by chanting for England and Scotland that merges into a single chant for humankind, on which the play ends.

As this plot summary shows the production does not centre wholly on Brus as a mythical hero figure; there is a splitting of the dramatic focus and narrative burden between him and the other characters. This is an essentially Brechtian approach, as can be judged from Anthony Hozier's outline of Brecht's theories:

What Brecht set himself against is that type of play that accumulates sympathy around one character by placing that character at the intersection point of all the play's important events...The essentially class-blinkered partiality of individualism within the bourgeois epoch has ensured that any attempt in the theatre to depict the world has been trapped by that vision. The world is seen as Romantic Agony, domestic trauma, or subjective hallucination. The only consciousness available to an audience is that of the private individual, which compensates for those aspects of alienated reality that it cannot see by supplying

creatures and forces of the imagination.

(Hozier 1983: 17)

In line with the collectivist aims of the company and the writer, there is thus a rejection of the bourgeois tradition of individualism which coincides with the exercise of interrogating the hero status of Brus. This is also a rejection of an enduring characteristic from the bourgeois tradition of the 'piece bien faite' which Hozier describes as

a device for maximising audience excitement and involvement at the expense of all other factors. It prescribes that the audience select one (or two) characters as a sympathetic point of privileged access to the world of the play, providing proportionally greater identification and empathy. The action is structured around the character and accordingly all other characters are arranged hierarchically in relation to the hero(ine) and therefore to our point of view.

(ibid)

Here the distribution of the narrative and dramatic focus between a range of characters disrupts the possibility of reading the role of Brus in purely heroic terms.

There are a number of other devices within the production which further question Brus' hero status, and the central and unambivalent place assigned him in the pantheon of Scottish heroes. (The centrality of this place is emphasised by the treatment of Brus in the production of Border Warfare discussed in Chapter 9). There are two principal and related enterprises involved in the production: the first is the use of 'open' dramaturgy to convey the 'openness' of history; the second, which draws its strength from the first, is the destruction of certain debilitating myths that pervade Scottish culture, such as the myth of a prior English civilisation<sup>4</sup>, and the nobility of the militarist tradition<sup>5</sup>.

While Marco De Marinis (1987) uses the term 'open' to refer to performance texts which require little specific competence in order to be understood, it will be used here

in the context of open dramaturgy to describe a different (though related) relationship between the audience and the performance text which such dramaturgy sets up. In this use, 'open' refutes notions of closure within the narrative frame, and explodes the possibilities for readings rather than narrowing them down or establishing one as more or the most coherent. In this production the creation of an open dramaturgy is achieved through a number of techniques, derived from Brecht or adapted from Grotowski's 'poor theatre'. As mentioned above, the production was staged with the minimal of theatrical props or trappings. This therefore contravenes any reading of the performance as complete, or objectively grounded. As Hozier notes, Brecht believed that theatre 'should provoke and challenge by means of partial, incomplete and disjointed representations of social behaviour to enable an audience to engage its critical awareness, not with fiction, but with reality...For comparison with the real world to be possible, theatre's representation must be incomplete' (Hozier 1983: 14). Moreover, there is a degree of cross-casting, notably in the roles of Brus and Edward, who in both productions of the play by Theatre PKF have been played by women. This emphasises the alienation between character and performer, avoiding the linking of incidental characteristics and psychological details of the performer with those of the character. The performer shows only certain aspects of the character rather than becoming him.

Furthermore, while all theatre relies on synecdoche and metonymy<sup>6</sup> to create the virtual world of the drama within the realm of the actual theatrical stage, in the performance of the Brus the absolute minimalism with which the stage reality is conjured up is significant. For example, the only props allowed the characters were two short sticks, one slightly longer than the other. These sticks were then employed to convey all the props for the action, becoming swords, shields, crosses, bows and arrows, and drinking vessels, for example. Such minimalism has two implications

for the audience's reading. Firstly, Nick Worrall notes of the use of synecdoche, which might equally be applied to metonymic effects, that it

has the effect of converting the spectator into an active participant in the creation of the production's meanings, just as the thesis and antithesis of a filmic montage collision become converted into a higher synthesis in the minds of a cinema audience.

(Worrall 1980: 180).

Gardin and Vendramini comment that the 'superposition of functions to the same sign...is a practice that necessarily enriches it in terms of meanings' (1983: 1639). The sign is enriched and the spectator is actively invited into the construction of its various meanings. The second implication relates to the transformability of the stage objects. The significance of this 'mobility' of stage signs is argued for by Avigal and Rimmon-Kenan:

The child-like game of the Grotowski tradition, this creation of material 'worlds' ex nihilo, also exposes - through the mobility (or the 'dynamics', as Grotowski says) of the objects played with - the intra- and extra- theatrical 'contracts' on which the fixed identity of stage objects is flimsy, relative, changeable. Thus the semantic discrepancies and mobility entailed by them become an instrument for testing 'theatrical reality', which this theatre presents as a 'closed', 'authentic' and valid semiotic system, as well as that of the extra-theatrical 'reality' which is viewed as relative, dynamic, capable of being changed by man.

(1981: 21)

By making explicit what are normal conventions in most theatres, the production encourages the audience to become aware of how and the degree to which these events are mediated and endowed with meaning, and of the part which it plays in accepting or remaking that meaning and significance. This draws on the Russian Formalist notion of 'defamiliarisation' in literature which Brecht would later adapt within his theory of theatre: in this the familiar is made strange, drawing attention to suppressed aspects of the familiar and the processes by which such aspects have been

and are suppressed in 'natural', or everyday readings of them. It is also intended to suggest that the same events might be mediated, experienced and understood in different ways. It is used here to place the emphasis on the events of the stage world by inviting the audience to imaginatively complete it and to become involved in it rather than concerning itself with 'high' production values. As an openly imaginative work, it releases this imaginative side to the audience's engagement with what it sees, in a liberation from the constructed mass media spectacles that pass for and threaten the experience of large-scale or non-immediate reality. Given the extent to which the media intervenes in the presentation of the events of war, this is particularly important.

The imaginative engagement of the audience with the performance connects to a tradition of poetic and symbolist drama, which, although not necessarily inspirational to the writer or company, illustrates further aspects of this kind of staging. In his book on Belfast's Lyric Theatre, Connor O'Malley discusses poetic drama thus:

Poetic drama involves every aspect of stage presentation as well as linguistic form. It is in an actor's gesture, a snatch of music, a moment of stillness, a scenic effect, in everything that enhances the vision of the dramatist at any given time...At all times attention is directed to the imagination...Within the poetic theatre the spoken word still retains pride of place...

(O'Malley 1988: 12)

The underlying concern in poetic theatre is that every element inheres in the structure or meaning of the play as a whole; that there is nothing accidental or incidental; and that all the elements are expressive or symbolic of something beyond themselves, which can only be engaged with imaginatively. The emphasis is on expressing the intention of the writer/poet through the most appropriate stage symbols. In this way then, even the very arbitrariness of the costumes in which the actors chose to perform the Brus

symbolised the thrust of the play towards suggesting its own openness.

Problematically, in terms of the performance conveying this openness, anecdotal evidence<sup>7</sup> suggests that audiences are frequently familiar with such devices through their familiarity with a range of theatrical styles and can, moreover, adjust rapidly to a new style of presentation within any given production, accommodating it within their general theatrical competence without necessarily reaching the conclusions intended for them by the producers. They do not necessarily find any ideological significance in these devices for presenting a familiar story.

This said, the production points up the necessity of engaging with the events it presents as 'open' in a number of other ways which more directly confront the audience's ability to accommodate its devices as an 'ideologically innocent' theatrical style. In the prologue to Act I the two narrators present alternative versions of the same history, the one initially a translation of the other. The Scots

Foolish lik  
they askit  
England's Edwart,  
their Arbritar  
tae be

contrasts with the English version

Wisely they asked  
Edward  
King of England  
Lord of Ireland  
Duke of Aquitaine  
In his wisdom and power  
To aid them  
In their difficult hour.

This is one explicit demonstration of the way in which the events of the play and thus the events of history are changed according to the ideological discourse within which they are narrated. This is repeated over the issue of whether Baliol fled to Scotland to avoid Edward's 'monstrous

Suppression of the North's Rebellion. The ideological position inherent in each use corresponds to the consistent juxtaposition of Received Pronunciation English and Lallans.

It is this role which language plays in embodying ideology which is at the centre of much of the production's questioning of the partiality of versions of history. This has its basis in the primacy of the written text and spoken word in the production. Much of the play relies on the extensive use of narrated incidents with which to describe and piece together the actions which are acted out. In this, the production illustrates the ways in which language can have the same creative powers as actions. Within the production, all words have a power analogous to performative utterances: once they are spoken they call into being the very actions that they have described or states which they have expressed. This relies on a common theatrical convention (see Elam 1980: 98ff) by which we accept statements made about the dramatic world as true unless and until they are contradicted, thus presenting a series of ambiguous accounts between which the audience has to decide. It also points to how language creates the reality of events which we have not experienced ourselves; how much of what we know comes to us through words; and how those words are the products of particular discourses.

So, contradictions within the discourses, particularly that of the English, are pointed up. Thus, Edward I's

war is not what we desire  
For we are Englishmen.  
Thus men of Peace

resonates in sharp contrast to the screeched

Hang and draw!  
Hang and draw!  
All Scotch whatsoever.  
Hang and draw!  
Hang and draw!

of Act II, when he is presented with Scots prisoners. Similarly the description of the torture and execution of

Hang and draw!  
 Hang and draw!

of Act II, when he is presented with Scots prisoners. Similarly the description of the torture and execution of Wallace contrasts with the ideas of justice espoused by those who try him. This questioning is extended to create contradictions between discourses and the material world they describe. This is used, for example, in the treatment of the Stone of Scone. The removal of the Stone to Westminster has been endowed with emotive significance ever since it was removed. In more recent times it was the object of a rescue attempt by SNP supporters, who viewed it as a symbol of Scots independence. Here the discourse surrounding the Stone's worth is investigated by having two commoners carry it on and comment on its actual physical qualities.

Will: Well, eh...Stone of Destiny, on which the kings a' Scots hiv been enthroned since time immemorial. The...eh...inner sacrosanct mystery among the insignia of the Scottish monarchy.

(No comment from Jamie)

Will: ...It's magic...a magic wee stane.

Jamie: Disnae seem that magic tae me.

Will: Naw...don't suppose it is. Must a been a lot of blocks like that in the quarry it cam frae.

Outwith the context of the ceremonial pageantry from which it has been removed, the Stone has no intrinsic meaning. Whatever meaning it has is endowed for a specific purpose within a given discourse.

A further device to open up discourses in general and certain specific actions to questioning, is their repetition in a different way or in a new context. Even the most apparently circumscribed formulas can change function and meaning according to the context in which they are used. The words of the Latin mass take on a sinister significance when used by Kilpatrick prior to his killing of Comyn in the

Greyfriars kirk. In Act II there are passages closely based on a Pauline epistle, and on Churchill's famous 'We will fight them on the beaches' speech. Nothing has a sacrosanct inherent meaning since its context may be changed tendentiously. This has a double edge, commenting on the present use and referring back to the original, casting it in the same tendentious light. The effect of recontextualising an established phrase is played upon further when Brus at the height of his power repeats the same phrases that Edward I had used when Brus came with his father to offer obeisance:

Herald: Sire.

Brus: Sire?

Herald: Majesty.

Brus: Ah - better, better by far.

This reinforces the parallels between Brus and Edward I, and the idea that all wars are 'baron's wars'.

The deconstructive effect of repetition is used also for certain actions. The meeting between Brus and Comyn at which they make a pact is repeated with each of them taking the other's role exactly. This leaves the audience uncertain as to which version to accept. It is used differently when Brus encounters four of Comyn's men and they fight, first in slow motion and then at a more naturalistic pace. Like filmic slow motion, this focuses the audience's attention on the action, breaking it down and emphasising the physical effort required to complete it. This is disguised in the naturalistic version, and removed entirely from mythological discourse. In a similar way, the incident between Brus and Sir Henry de Boon later in Act II is played with the reactions of Sir Henry preceding the action of Brus striking him.

Repetition is further used to create reprises or leitmotifs throughout the play that comment on and are commented on by the different contexts within which they are used. So, although Meg articulates the cost of his ambition to Brus in Act I, it is when, in the second act, that the

questioning sequence of 'Ye wid be king?' is repeated that its full force is achieved. Brus has given a passionate speech committing himself to leading the Scottish people as a kind of Moses to fight their way from bondage. He is happy to accept the full dignity with which Scots myths have historically saddled him. Yet the presence of Comyn's corpse and the repetition of Meg's questioning, joined with key phrases repeated from the murder of Comyn, clouds the clear-cut heroic image with human ambition and desire. This is a moment of great theatrical and dramatic effect, akin to the appearance of Banquo's ghost at Macbeth's feast. Throughout the play Meg and Rab appear in order to question the values of the other characters, particularly the nobles, bringing with them their burdens of grief against which to match these values.

The scene just described (and the one in the first act to which it corresponds) shows a key example whereby the unities of time and place and the linear narrative are interrupted to comment on the actions that have taken place. In this scene what is created is a montage effect, questioning the values of militarism. The main components of the stage scene individually represent separate ideas that contradict each other, creating a totality that is the sum of these contradictions. This is used either to create ambiguity or to undercut one of the ideas by its juxtaposition with others that oppose it. It connects with a similar enterprise mounted during the 'Scotch Myths' exhibition. Colin MacArthur praises the exhibition for the way in which it deconstructs the militarist tradition by setting Romantic and more documentary rhetoric in postcards of the period against blown-up photographs illustrating the carnage of World War I. He notes that one of the ways in which such myths may be deconstructed 'is through the forms of photographic practice that stress photo-montage' (MacArthur 1981: 23). The montage device is used earlier when the Scots barons meet to discuss what to do when Baliol retreats into exile: the event is acted out with a

simultaneous narration of the action according to a report by an English spy.

The possibilities of montage are exploited also in the way in which scenes relate to each other. Since the production does not adhere to the unities of time and space, and thus does not follow any strictly linear pattern of development, the ways in which the production as a whole is understood is as a sum of its scenes, rather than, for example, purely in terms of the chronological narrative that they present. This derives from Brecht's elaboration of Aristotle's concept of plot, by which he emphasised that plotting structures the audience's response to a sequence of events in an ideologically important way. The creation of a monolinear narrative focused through a single character is essentially a bourgeois preoccupation, as noted above. Here, instead of

experiencing the events from one single point of view, the audience undergoes a continual realignment with the characters, as it is presented with shifts of perspective and focus, alternative viewpoints. Such plays are dialectical since our understanding can only proceed forward by 'leaps' as we make unities out of the juxtaposition and contrast of contradictory elements.

(Hozier 1983: 20)

Thus, within the plot there are deliberate incongruities created by the sequential interposing of events drawn from the different dramatic worlds (those of the nobles and that of the 'sma' folk') presented. The first scene of Act I has Edward I in magisterial glory, with an opening gambit that sets the tone for the way in which the English will treat the Scots. When the scene switches to the two Scots discussing the Stone of Scone, which they have been carrying, there is a complete change of register and tone. The contrast works to question the ability and desire of an English ruler to appreciate the conditions of the ordinary Scots people, let alone to act to improve them. But the manner in which the Scots nobles do obeisance to Edward and

their humiliation at his hands in the next scene casts doubt also on their ability to identify with the common people. As the Joker comments, when it comes to separating the idea of Scotland from their own land

Poor souls  
truth tae tell  
they chiels  
couldnae rightly separate  
the wan frae the other.

Later there is an explicit contrast made between the 'pax and caritas' that the English offer, and the standard that Wallace sets:

Ah, Freedom is a noble thing  
Freedom maks men tae hiv liking  
Freedom all solace tae men gives  
He lives at ease that truly lives.

The image offered of Wallace in this speech contrasts with the scene that follows: the disputing Scottish nobles who vie to make as many plots as necessary to preserve or enlarge their own individual power. The sense of the fickleness of the nobility is then increased through the scene between Brus and Comyn. The dispute between Meg and the herald that follows, over how Wallace is to be regarded, resonates in contrast both to the description given by the Joker and to the treacherous dealings of the Scottish nobles. The idea of treachery unequivocally rebounds on the barons who betray Wallace, rather than on Wallace in his actions against the English. This is played out through the parallels between Wallace's betrayal and the betrayal of Christ by Judas.

Placing the scene with the common folk next shifts the focus away from Wallace at a crucial moment. Rather than leading Wallace down his own Via Dolorosa at this point, we have instead the discovery of the dead Jamie by Meg. The Christ parallel is therefore raised and its exploitation postponed. The real and actualised grief of Meg for her son steals the focus and diminishes the priority of this parallel. That this is followed by Rab's account of the

razing of Berwick emphasises this. The contrast between the fate of the individual nobleman, even Wallace, and the fate of the collective mass of the common people is worked to emphasise the plight of those ordinary people. As this brief sequence demonstrates, the plotting of the piece requires a substantial intervention by the audience in order for it to make sense of the dramatic world: it is not laid out before it as a given or commonly understood and shared place. What it sees is composed, like Rab's vision, of 'just bits' from which it must construct a whole. G. H. Szanto's characterisation of 'dialectical propaganda' provides a useful summary of the potential effect of these elements of the play: '[It] attempts to demystify, by depicting separately, interactively and always clearly the basic elements which comprise a confused social or historical situation' (Szanto 1978: 76). It emphasises its own partiality in order to show that reality is far more complex than any individual's view of it: it requires a collective assessment. Further, it demonstrates methods by which human beings can control themselves and their institutions.

Given this, much of what has gone before has been an argument that the production deliberately resists attempts at reading it as a given, and as such, that it is left open to the audience to piece the work together for itself. This is not to deny that within the production certain readings are more appropriate than others to make a coherence of the totality of the piece. The conclusions about the effects of the sequencing in the first act which are given above suggest that there are certain readings which, if not inscribed in the production, are at least prescribed by the possibilities generated within and by the performance. These surround the second of the two enterprises that are engaged with in the production, the deconstruction of certain debilitating myths present within Scots culture. One of these concerns certain inferiorist notions about the

priority and therefore superiority of English culture and its notions of civilization; the central role of Brus in Scots iconography is also questioned; and the traditions of Scots militarism are challenged.

The questioning of traditional English notions of a superior civilisation is at the centre of the treatment given to almost all the English characters in the production. It is focused particularly through questioning the historical function of the English king as the guardian of the values of civilisation; and the legacy which that represents in contemporary society. In the context of the relationship between England and Ireland, Seamus Deane (1985) has identified the power of the dominant English discourse to create a dichotomy between civilised (the English) and barbarian (the Irish) peoples. Within this discourse the former have continuously justified the domination and exploitation of the latter on the grounds of bringing civilisation, law and therefore freedom to them. He quotes Locke's Two Treaties of Government to illustrate the point: 'Law makes men free in the political arena, just as reason makes men free in the universe as a whole'. As Deane persuasively argues, these notions of the English as civilised law bringers have dominated England's relations with other nationalities, countries and races, such that English culture has continually regarded its parliament as the definer of the individual laws of the country and its Commonwealth and of the very notion of Law.

The relationship between the English and the Scots can be characterised in terms of the same dichotomy between the civilised English and the barbarian subject Scots: as previously noted, much historiography grants the Scots civilised values only after the influence of the Union with England. It is interesting to note that the Brus is in many ways similar to Brian Friel's Making History, a play written much more directly under the influence of Deane's analysis, and centring on the making of myths around the hero-figure

of Hugh O'Neill. There Friel examines the use of discourse to formulate 'the most acceptable narrative' for each separate group, and the dichotomy forced by the English in their relationship to the Irish. There is a direct connection between the acceptance of a similar dichotomy and a number of the myths active within Scots society. These can be summarised as follows. The acceptance of their subject 'barbarian' role by Scots has led to a search for a Scots identity to glorify some of the 'barbaric' traits that supposedly existed prior to the Union. Sir Walter Scott, ardent Tory and Unionist, glorified a Romanticised version of Scots 'barbarism', simultaneously endorsing the domination of the Scots by the English, implicitly in his writing and explicitly in the services performed at the time of George IV's visit to Scotland. This Romanticism seeks its definition in opposition to the 'forces of reason' which have supposedly brought civilisation and emphasises the irrational in the subject culture. Hence, the Scots are presented as great fighters, with fiery temperaments that need to be channelled in the service of the civilised and civilising Empire. It is from this that the traditions of militarism derive.

This myth of English superiority has enjoyed a paradoxical status until very recently. It has allowed the creation of an identity for the English which monopolises all 'high' cultural and certain civilised values. This in turn allows for the denigration within both Scots and English cultures of Scots values and the marginalisation of that culture from sources and centres of power. At the same time there continues to be an underlying resentment by Scots at this domination, expressed for example at sporting occasions, but rarely being channelled into decision-making in crucial areas of cultural and political development. So, for example, indifference to the 1979 referendum on devolution can at least partly be attributed to a refusal to entertain the notion of Scots self-government as a realistic

proposition; a refusal based on acceptance of the notion of a lack of capacity for government within the Scots psyche.

The production challenges the very source of these myths by challenging the notions of a superior and prior English civilisation. As already noted, much of the contradictions pointed up within discourses concern the English version of themselves as civilised and just. Edward I's opening speech patronises the Scots:

Everything we do  
is not for England just.  
It is for you, in Christ, our brothers too.  
Order and Law  
Security, prosperity and peace.  
The Royal Peace!  
These things are for all,  
These things are for you.

However, even from the prologue to Act I the English are presented as self-serving. They are characterised as spiritually blind and proud, deprived of any moral justification for their actions. The rationale for the razing of Berwick contrasts with Rab's long and emotive description of what actually took place. The treatment of Wallace is hardly representative of a civilised people, in marked contrast to the Christ-like dignity accorded him in the production. The inability of the English king to distinguish between the reverence due to God and his own desire for acknowledgement is particularly pointed. At his trial Wallace kneels before Edward I, and prior to Bannockburn the Scots army kneels in front of Edward II. On both occasions the monarchs believe that obeisance is being made to them, when as is pointed out, it is before God that the Scots are kneeling. The characterisation of the English nobility centres only on the single facet of their political ambitions rather than any more psychologically complete depiction. Their civilisation is evaluated only in terms of the lengths to which they will go to achieve these ambitions. This picture contrasts with the more human picture of the Scots common folk, and with the civilised

qualities that are attributed to them. In terms of the integrity of this argument within the production, it is important also that it is from the work of the Scot, William Dunbar, that Edward I's deathbed poem, 'Timor Mortis Conturbat Me', is taken. Fortuitously, the destruction of this particular mythology connects with the underlying resentment that most Scots feel at some level with regard to the English. Its power derives from this resentment as much as from any reasoned argument; it can be accommodated easily by a Scots audience as an anti-English polemic. This reading would certainly accord with Tan and Schoenmaker's empirical research into audience reception regarding a 'good guy - bad guy effect'. There they show that the audience split the protagonists in performances which were intended to be balanced along the lines of good and bad. They conjecture that

The search for heroes and villains may be a culturally determined or even universal response to the perception of complex events. It becomes stronger when such events are perceived as fictional, like when reading a book or attending a theatre performance. Introspectively, it seems plausible that, under such circumstances, there is a strong tendency in people to identify with a 'good' character, a character for instance, fighting for a noble cause ....

(Tan and Schoenmakers 1984: 498)

They also speculate that it may in fact be the spectators' attitude prior to a performance which determines both the strength of the effect and who is seen as good and who is bad. The performance therefore offers the pleasures associated with what is best described as the 'Scots wha hae' attitude, which perceives all things Scottish to be morally blessed and all things English as morally reprehensible.

Within the strategies of the performance the possibility for such a reading is, however, crucially tempered. In particular the mythology surrounding Brus is exploded. Myth has created him as a great martial hero who united the Scots people in a fight for their freedom which

was successful against all the odds; here Brus is shown to be a complex mix of the self-serving, ambitious noble and a people's leader: as Tan and Schoenmakers comment 'good' characters are those 'who appear not to act out of self-interest' (1984: 498). The unequivocal endorsement of him as the last great hope of a free Scots people is transferred to Wallace, in deference to the perspective within Barbour's Brus. As a character, Brus is given almost as little in the way of psychological depth as his English counterparts, and it is over his status as icon that the piece raises questions. His treatment is not even that of a conventional dramatic hero. The splitting of the dramatic focus and sharing out of the narrative burden presents a challenge to the orthodox method of establishing this status. Peter Cassirer argues convincingly that the dramatic convention for establishing a 'hero' involves a quantitative evaluation of the centrality of that character: 'The quantitative criterion is a function of the relation between the scope each character has been given in a play and the time dimension of the reality presented' (1979: 855). Thus, Brus cannot be considered as a dramatic hero in the conventional sense, if only on the grounds that he shares so much of the performance with other characters, who equally embody the conflicts that are central to it.

Secondly, there are a set of qualitative evaluations that deny Brus his hero status, set up through the variety of other characters against whom he may be measured. The first of these is Wallace. In the rendition of Wallace in Act I, the piece deliberately emphasises the selflessness and nobility of his refusal to accept Edward I's domination and his determination to fight against it. Moreover, he shares the vernacular of the common people; whereas Brus' vacillation between the Lallans of the common people and the R.P. of the English nobility redounds to his discredit, emphasising his willingness to change sides to his own advantage. Notably, Friel uses a similar device in showing up the complexity of O'Neill, in opposition to Lombard's

glorifying biography. Although there may be an element of development within the characterisation, such that Brus overcomes his personal ambitions in the service of the commonality, there is a large question mark over this because of the degree to which it was personal ambition rather than a sense of injustice which initially inspired him. Moreover, Brus' desire for high position and the ends to which he will go to achieve it are juxtaposed with the counting of the cost of such ambition by other characters. From the individual and private grief of Meg over her dead son, the death of Comyn and through to the horror of the young soldier at the task of burying the dead, Brus' rise to power is presented as a litany of death. Even his triumph at Bannockburn, the single most important victory in terms of the myth, is presented not in terms of martial glory but through the sharply focused domestic scene of women washing clothes. Their talk is normal prattle until they notice that the river has turned red with blood. The contrast between the normalcy of that task and the horrific saturation of the river with blood creates the vision through which that victory is mediated.

This connects with the ways in which the production deconstructs the glories of militarism, through the juxtaposition of supposedly great moments of Scottish victory with the counting of the cost afterwards. Here, the remains of bodies are foregrounded in the repetition of the scene about the burial detail, rather than tidily being forgotten in a celebration of the victory. There is an invitation to empathise with personal horror and grief, concentrating the destruction of the battles through the eyes of individuals, rather than the celebration of victory for an abstract concept. This not only casts doubt over the use of force, but also introduces a complexity into the judgement of the production's own values, as it questions not only the English, but also dominant Scottish myths.

The way in which these myths are examined relies heavily on the deconstructive techniques that are discussed as a means of opening the text to the audience: the creation of ambiguity and contradiction undermines the possibility of accepting the monolinear versions of history offered by myth. However, of all the enterprises undertaken within the production, only one is left untouched by these attempts at deconstruction: the forwarding of the common people, particularly Rab and Meg, as representatives of the positive values in which the writer himself believes. These are never interrogated in the same ways as the values of the nobles, and are directly strengthened through the contrast between the treatment of this group within the production and the treatment given to the noble characters. Although presented as a group, they are each given a character over and above their role in the political history. They are given a more extended physical reality as they are presented eating, drinking, arguing, and working, and the audience is invited to empathise with them on an emotional level, rather than as embodiments of more abstract ideas.

Attention is focussed in particular on the characters of Rab and Meg. In the first act Rab's constant 'Ber, Ber, Ber' seems the meaningless muttering of a man unhinged. Yet when this becomes 'Berwick' and Rab launches into his description the mumbling takes on a significance that was previously hidden: the meaningless becomes meaningful. As a vocalisation of a reaction to events that he describes it is uncannily apt; the audience accepts his previous inarticulacy as a sign of the depth of his reaction. The description of the events of Berwick is given from an entirely subjective viewpoint, but its vividness spurs the imagination to a fuller appreciation of the horror of the event: it is in this sense deeply poetic. The repetition of this 'Ber, Ber, Ber', elsewhere in the play resounds with that horror as a leitmotif. Notably the action of the performance stops for this description: the actor playing Rab is given the full focus of the scene: there are no

interruptions or codas to his monologue from other characters. This gives an authority to what Rab says in the construction of the dramatic world which is denied to almost all the other characters. It also presents Rab as a point of entry for the audience's emotional relationship to the performance. The authority and empathetic character given to Rab at this early stage are later used to validate his more tendentious assertions about pacifism and Maoism in Act II. Thus, for example, the earlier repeated scene of the pact between Brus and Comyn can be re-evaluated as demonstrating the machinations and fickleness of the nobles in pursuit of power, supporting Rab's assertion that all wars are barons' wars. The most coherent reading of the play is therefore as what the reviewer for The Scotsman (27/9/82) called a 'Powerful plea for pacifism'.

This is validated further through the role given to the character of Meg. She is linked directly to Rab since it is the discovery of the body of her son, Jamie, that spurs his great monologue about Berwick. Meg's role is to lend weight to the outlook that Rab espouses by continually reminding the audience of the personal loss that she has suffered. She also articulates a form of feminism, demanding parity of treatment from the others. This coincides both with certain ideas of feminine qualities espoused by strands of feminism and empirical evidence<sup>8</sup> suggesting that women are often less in favour of war than men. The experiences that she and Rab endure are presented as a given, left uninterrogated, and serving as a yardstick against which the actions around them are to be judged. In this way the production disperses the explicit expression of Byatt's beliefs between two complementary character roles. This helps divert attention from an element of lecturing within the production, and at the same time lends dramatic weight to what is preached, since it is evidenced by more than one character.

As Brecht argued, audiences are conditioned by their exposure to conventional bourgeois forms of entertainment to

both expect and respond empathetically to key characters. This response is a crucial pleasure for many theatre audiences. It entails a narrowing of the audience's experience of the events of the stage world from the social to the individual. In deploying the characters of Rab and Meg in this way, Byatt is ensuring that the conjuncture of this pleasure and the values in which he believes within the same characters will ultimately lend support to the perspective which he is proposing. It represents a withdrawal from impartiality and a premature narrowing of the perspective on the stage events.

There is therefore a contradiction between the way in which the dramaturgy suggests that the production is open for the audience to make sense of it, and the way in which it also foregrounds a particular reading that coheres around the principles of pacifism and collectivist/syndicalist views that Byatt holds, and to which is allied the experience of the pleasure of empathy. The contradiction is resolved to some extent by an as yet unexplored part of the production: the post-show discussion. Susan Bennett states that:

in a publicly experienced cultural event, the opportunity to talk about the event afterwards is important socially. Theatre audiences, as has been noted, tend to consist of small groups of friends, family and so on. Reception of a performance can be prolonged by group discussion of all aspects from general appreciation to specific questions to other group members about small details of the production. ...All these acts have the potential to reshape initial decoding of the production.

(Bennett, 1990: 176)

Similarly, Byatt expounds a belief in allowing the audience to complete the play by discussing the issues that it raises afterwards in a 'third act', conducted in the performance space, the bar, or, the foyer. Byatt describes the processes at work as an opportunity for the audience to 'exteriorise' the play: this follows from the interiorisation of the piece by the actors during rehearsal; their exteriorisation of it

during performance; and the audience's interiorisation of the performance as it takes place. In this way, the individual play that each member of the audience has made for her/himself is made explicit and becomes the subject for the discussion. The audience as a collective group can, in theory at least, come to a shared meaning of the experience that they have had together, according to the dynamics of the group that they form. Many of the English political theatre companies in the 1970s had used the post-show discussion for precisely these reasons. It had become a rare practice for even them, however, largely because of the pressure to present 'completed works' as commodities.

The Theatre PKF discussion takes a particular format that is rigidly adhered to in all circumstances in an attempt to avoid the obvious pitfalls of monopolisation by the intelligent, forceful, or articulate. The group, including those of the cast who wish to take part, form a circle, with each person contributing one thing in turn in relation to the performance. Those unwilling to speak are allowed to 'pass' at this stage, and given the opportunity to speak once everyone else has contributed something. This then is allowed to develop into a more open discussion. Although Byatt, or one of the cast, usually chairs the discussion, there has been occasion when someone from the audience has taken over the Chair. Clearly, what is intended is that the audience should be allowed to reach its own conclusions about the history that they have seen and how it relates to the present reality. It should allow the validation of that view within the forum of the theatre, presenting it as co-equal with the version in the performance. It is noteworthy, for example, that at least some audience members at post-show meetings expressed some concern about the 'unfair' characterisation of the English. Others have thanked the company for presenting a history that was lost to them; others still have vehemently rejected it as one-sided and naive.

In practice, the post-show discussion is, of course, limited in the degree to which it opens up the production by the expectations of those who stay behind as to what the discussion will or should involve. Many still defer to the points of view of the playwright or actors, and may even look to them to present a definitive statement of what their enterprise was about. Dave MacLennan, Wildcat's Artistic Director, views this in relation to his own work as fraught with a range of dangers:

we don't audition people for their politics...you employ someone to act and sing and to play a musical instrument because they're damn good at it: that doesn't necessarily make them good public speakers. It doesn't necessarily mean that they are particularly analytical about the subject, or informed even. I think that it would be setting up a false expectation, because if you say to the audience, 'Right, there's the show. That's a Wildcat show: that's what it says' and then you bring a group of people onto the stage for a discussion, there's almost an assumption that everybody up there on that stage contributed to that view. And they don't necessarily. They maybe agree with it, and there'll be shades of agreement and disagreement. They may have coloured it by their performance, but when it comes down to the view that's being expressed, to the point that's being made, that is something really that springs from the writer.

(Maguire 1989b: 14)

Byatt, however, welcomes the possibility of a divergence of opinions amongst the performers since, in his opinion, it creates a further level of ambiguity for the audience to resolve. Nonetheless, what cannot be ignored is that in such discussions it is the forceful and opinionated who do dominate. Given the central role that Byatt himself inevitably plays in such discussions, there is also the danger of his imposing his views or the areas of debate when opening out the discussion. Further, even among those that stay for the discussion, there will be those who need more time to decide on their views of the production. It would also seem to be assumed that spectators do not make up their minds for themselves about what they see anyway. The influence of what Tan and Schoenmakers (1982) term the

audience's own 'mental luggage' would seem to be undermined; although, empirical research undertaken by both Tan and Schoenmakers separately<sup>9</sup> suggests that the audience creates the meaning of the performance according to strategies incorporated within the performance, the effect of which the producers can be relatively sure.

Even given these reservations, this approach to the event of theatre does create an environment where a reading of the performance against the grain<sup>10</sup> can be validated within the context of the production event. Typically such counter-readings would otherwise have to be abandoned as the audience comes to terms with the task of integrating the elements of performance into a coherent whole - or in rejecting the performance as flawed. Here, they are weighed as part of the production meaning alongside opposing views, exploding the possibilities for multiple readings, according to the different perspectives of the spectators. The conclusion about their relative merits is left open.

This examination of Byatt's Brus has shown the way in which the production contains within it certain contradicting impulses surrounding the construction of an open dramaturgy and the articulation of the political views of the writer. The audience is forced to negotiate these contradictions as part of the overall endeavour of the production to have it re-evaluate its attitudes to the subjects that it tackles. While these contradictions may be resolved within a reading which accepts the authorial view prescribed by certain aspects of the production, the availability of a post-performance discussion is here presented as a significant device to encourage the audience to seize for itself autonomy in its judgement of the performance. It creates the possibility of an audience involvement which is critical, creative and enabling.

**Theatre PKF Productions**

- 1979 The Clyde is Red by George Byatt.
- 1980 Why does the Pope not come to Glasgow ? by George Byatt [with Fire Engines - the rock band].
- 1981 Major Road Ahead [MacDiarmid poems dramatised]
- 1982 Brus (from Berwick to Bannockburn) by George Byatt.[SAC Scottish tour]
- 1983 Ten New Plays By Scottish Writers [readings]
- 1984 Trumpets & Raspberries [Dario Fo - moved reading]  
Henryson's Fables [dramatisation]  
Confessions of a Justified Sinner  
[with Win - the rock band]
- 1988 Kamikaze [workshopped by company]
- 1990 Brus (from Berwick to Bannockburn) [revived production]

WILDCAT

**1982**

WARNING: HIGHLY  
FLAMMABLE MATERIAL

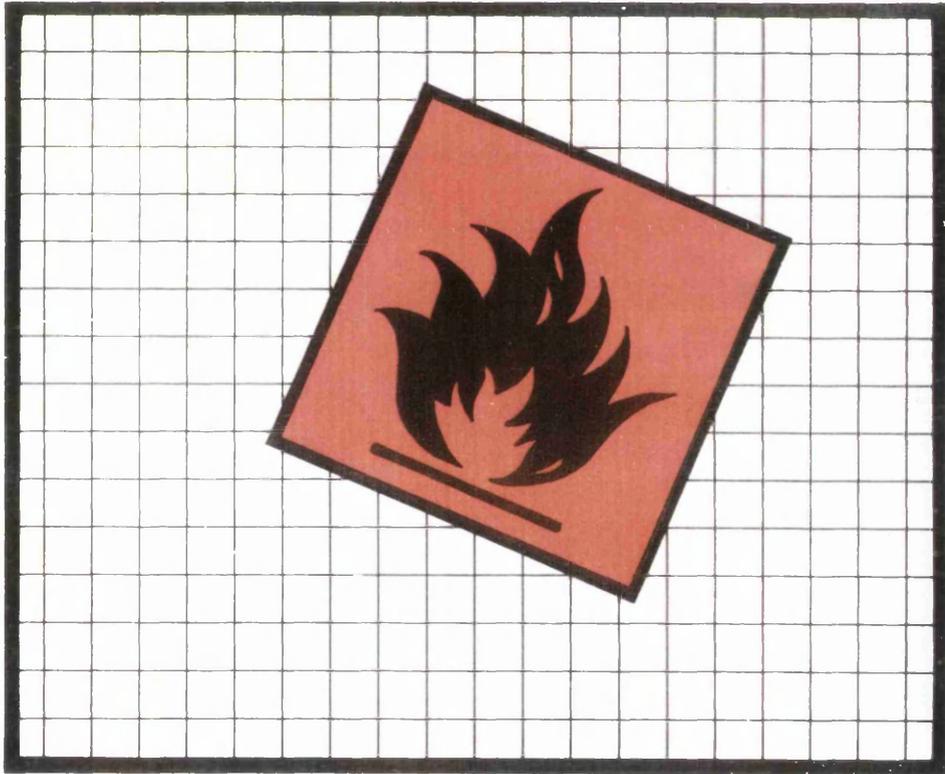


Plate 3: Programme for 1982

## 5. 1982

### Introduction

In the Brus the audience's empathetic relationship to certain character roles was used to inscribe the writer's perspective within the performance. In Wildcat's 1982, this use of empathy is extended in the creation of a single central role as the site of many of the audience's pleasures in watching the performance through the conjunction of the performer's stage presence, her celebrity status, and the jouissance released through the emotional appeal of a powerful singing voice. Such elements have been ingredients in the most successful of Wildcat's musical theatre productions. They are essentially related to the work of the company in performance and, in part, account for the unprecedented growth in the company's audiences: this strengthens the thesis that such essentially theatrical values are of the utmost priority to Scottish theatre audiences. A brief history of the company illustrates its successes.

### Roots.

Since its establishment in 1978 Wildcat Stage Productions has not only emerged from the shadow of its 7:84 (Scotland) progenitor but has gone on to supersede it in becoming the most popular political touring company in Scotland. Wildcat has developed a unique form of musical theatre which cannot be reduced to agit-prop or documentary, or be accounted for in terms of traditional dramaturgy. Nonetheless, the roots of the company can be traced back to the work of its founders - David MacLennan, David Anderson and Ferelith Lean - as part of 7:84 (Scotland), a company which had combined elements of both documentary and agit-prop.

David MacLennan had been involved in 7:84 from its earliest beginnings in England and had moved back to Scotland with the founding of its Scottish wing in 1973. He worked mainly as a stage-manager and occasional actor on the

early shows until, in 1975, he and John Bett collaborated to write a community show in Dumbarton called Capital Follies. David Anderson contributed some of the music for this. MacLennan went on to write Honour Your Partners with Anderson in 1976 and Thought For Today in 1977. For his part, Anderson had previously had extensive experience as a rock musician in Scotland, Canada and England before joining 7:84 (Scotland) for their second show, The Game's A Bogey, to which he also contributed some of the songs. He had been deeply impressed by The Cheviot, The Stag and The Black Black Oil, which he saw while honeymooning on Skye and was a friend of Alex Norton, one of the original performers. Ferelith Lean, to whom MacLennan was then married, had been administrator for the Scottish company from the first tour of The Cheviot in 1973. Although all three played a consistently important role in the activities of the 7:84 company, there developed between 1975 and 1978 certain differences between the kinds of work that MacLennan and Anderson wanted to do and that which was being done with John McGrath. David MacLennan describes the widening gap between the two types of work thus:

David and I were developing a style of work which had bigger musical content than the other style of work done by John McGrath in 7:84, and it became clear that it was difficult for us to have a company that was good at doing what John wanted us to do and good at what David and I wanted to do because we were looking at people with different skills.

(D. MacLennan 1983: 1)

Given Anderson's background in rock music, it is hardly surprising that he should find the folk-based music of much of the 7:84 (Scotland) work less than fulfilling. For him, the true folk music of the people was rock and roll. In 1978 he wrote a show for the company called His Master's Voice, using a rich mixture of rock/punk music, telling the story of how a Castlemilk teenage punk becomes entrapped in the complex and exploitative world of the music business. This show allowed him to write the kind of work in which he

could pursue his personal musical interests, and in it the music was much more central than in McGrath's shows.

This was the last piece with which Anderson and MacLennan were involved as 7:84 members. It was one to which they returned in launching the short-lived 'Brand New Wildcats' for the Edinburgh Fringe and a tour in 1982, and it was subsequently revived in London at the Half Moon, under the direction of Stuart Mungall, and in Perth, Australia. They decided to establish their own company, but the break was by all accounts an amicable one. MacLennan and McGrath are related through actress Elizabeth MacLennan, who describes the reasoning behind the split from 7:84's point of view: 'it became clear that the main people involved should be free to develop their ideas for this 'band theatre'. If they were to stay with 7:84 it would mean that we would have to stop our own development as a company which again seemed not quite right'(E. MacLennan 1990: 85). According to the same source, Wildcat's initial funding came out of money allocated to 7:84 although there is no corroboration of this elsewhere. The companies cooperated later on a touring street theatre show and when, in 1989, McGrath found himself unable to produce Border Warfare within the 7:84 framework, it was to Wildcat that he turned to produce both this and the successive John Brown's Body. Up until December 1989 MacLennan was a board member of 7:84 and returned to direct a number of shows for the company.

The reasoning behind the break was not just a matter of artistic independence. The conditions of the time were such that it seemed extremely likely that the audience that 7:84 had been building would be able and willing to support another political theatre company, as David MacLennan noted,

[W]hat I think is forgotten now is that at that time there was an enormous kind of explosion in the touring circuit. There was room....It was possible to do more work. And in a way it was as much audience-driven as anything else. There was this great appetite growing

for touring theatre and it was an appetite that we wanted to serve. And in different ways.

(D. MacLennan 1989: 2)

MacLennan admits also that the prospect of funding from the Scottish Arts Council was important.

Painted Bird was produced with the help of a Scottish Arts Council project grant. We got the unthinkable sum of £18,000 and then another £30,000 for a further project. I don't think that you would find many project-funded companies getting that nowadays.

(Shields 1987: 3)

The subsequent history of the company can be divided into a number of key periods, which while overlapping are distinguished by significant changes in its operations. These periods are : 1979-83; 1983-87; 1987-1989; and 1989 onwards. I will deal with each in turn.

### 1978-83

It was decided to set up the company with a Glasgow base, and after short spells in offices on Byres Road and Sauchiehall St., the company settled in a cramped garret in Otago Street. This immediately gave it a different orientation from that of the Edinburgh-based 7:84, and the move would later have implications for funding from local authorities. Nonetheless, the tours of the first two shows, The Painted Bird and The Complete History of Rock 'n' Roll, followed an itinerary not dissimilar to that for any 7:84 production, with a variety of mainly one-night gigs in a range of venues throughout the country, ranging as far into the Highlands as Brora in Sutherland and Alness in Ross-shire. These tours were project-funded by the SAC, but the company was able to establish itself as an SAC revenue client in the relatively short time of eighteen months from being founded. A not insignificant part in the company's success has been played by this auspicious beginning, which guaranteed Wildcat a measure of financial security often denied to other new companies. By 1981, for example, the company was in receipt of over £95,000 of SAC funding. This

contrasted with the Arts Council funding patterns in England and Wales at exactly the same time (see Chapter Three).

Although the company's first two shows toured to a wide variety of venues across Scotland, just as 7:84 had done, with following productions it began to concentrate more on central Scotland, with only occasional forays as far north as Aberdeen and Inverness. For the tours of these later shows, the company began to spend longer in each venue: Dummies (Autumn 1979), for example, played for 3 days at Cumbernauld Theatre and for 5 days at both Dundee Rep and Aberdeen Arts Centre; The Barmecide Feast (Winter 1979/80) played for a week at each of a number of venues. By 1982, the tour of the show, 1982, was exceptional for the company both in the extent of its Highland touring and in the number of one-night gigs which it incorporated. However, within the central Scotland tours the company did not yet particularly seek out the urban community audiences with which it was later to be associated since the company followed the 7:84 pattern of using traditional theatre venues like the Royal Lyceum, the Citizens' and Dundee Rep, whenever possible.

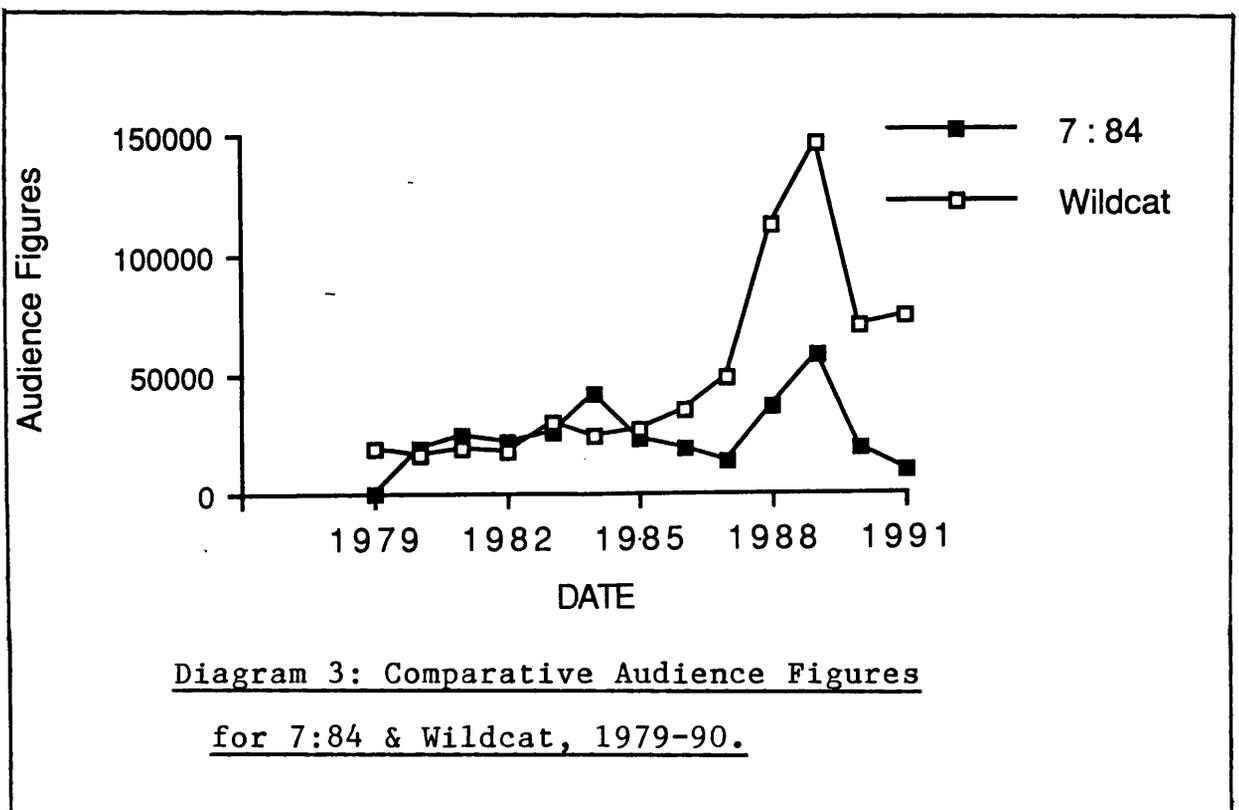
Nonetheless, one significant policy for the company was established in this period: the provision of cheap ticket prices, particularly at small-scale venues. Even when the company moved into these large-scale venues, these cheaper and frequently non-profitable gigs were off-set by higher prices at the top end and bigger audiences for the bigger venues. A pricing policy that takes account of the potential spending power of their particular audiences has guaranteed that the company has been able to maintain most of its support within the working class, with generous concessions for the unemployed and senior citizens. Philip Prowse has described his work at The Citizens' as 'trying to make Socialism work in a practical way. We put on good shows and we balance our books. We employ a lot of good people and we entertain lots of even better ones' (Coveney 1990: 127). The influence of this successful application of

a practical socialism has been a major factor in the continued growth of Wildcat which is acknowledged among other factors in the company's Business Plan:

This policy developed through our experience as a touring company when the majority of our performances were given in community centres in urban areas of considerable deprivation. We discovered that even small ticket price increases led to a swift decline in audience attendances. We were also influenced by the low ticket price policy operated by the Citizens' Theatre in Glasgow, at that time, which was producing consistently good audiences.'

(Wildcat 1990: 5)

Although, in this early period, the company could be said to be reliant on the audience which 7:84 had built up - Diagram 3 illustrates the comparative audience figures for the two companies - Wildcat was able to undertake a number of projects which created a separate profile for itself. The second show, The Complete History of Rock 'n' Roll, was recorded in 1979 for broadcast on Radio Clyde. The company then made a decisive impact on the Edinburgh Festival Fringe



by opening its own venue at the renovated Old Pleasance Theatre in 1980. Here, Wildcat not only presented its own shows but also played host to a number of other acts and companies, some operating from a similar political theatre background, such as Theatre PKF and Monstrous Regiment; others from different areas, like comedienne Victoria Wood and foreign mime troupes. In the following year an l.p. of songs from the shows, Unofficial Action, was launched. When BBC Scotland began its series of 'Afternoon Shows' in January 1981 the company was invited to participate and appeared on almost every one of the seventeen programmes transmitted. Sean Hardie, Director of Light Entertainment at BBC Scotland, later collaborated on A Bunch Of Fives (Spring 1983). In the same year Wildcat regulars performed songs for a BBC 1 network show called Eight Deadly Sins before it was withdrawn after a decision from London (which led to Hardie's resignation).

### 1983-1987

The success of the company's profile-raising efforts can be judged by the influence which it was able to wield in the establishment of Mayfest (discussed in Chapter 3), which proved to be the first major watershed in its development. Ferelith Lean left to take up the position of administrator of the festival, to be replaced by Terry Crichton. Crichton initiated a commitment to urban community touring, so that A Bunch of Fives (Spring 1983) played eight different community centres in a tour that was focused on the Central Belt. The 1984 Spring tour of Bed Pan Alley increased that number to ten. The opportunity offered by Mayfest to take part in a festival of popular culture, plus the strain on the company's administration of running the Pleasance Venue, also led to the decision to discontinue Fringe performances. The company was thus beginning to focus its efforts much more specifically on the urban working class.

Despite the restrictions imposed by community tours to small venues, this second period saw the company build an

audience, distinct from that of 7:84, within this class. This was achieved since the tours to community centres were complemented by performances at large-scale venues, which the company could now reasonably expect to fill. One novel, though unrepeated, way of counteracting any exclusion of their community support from these larger city centre venues was tried with Welcome To Paradise in 1983, when the company offered to arrange transport for groups of over thirty-five people from peripheral estates to the venue at the Mitchell Theatre in Glasgow's centre. Additionally, the distinction between the audiences for 7:84 and Wildcat's urban support was sharpened by Wildcat's withdrawal from Highland touring and its concentration on Central Scotland. In 1985-86 and 1986-87, its audience for 4 shows increased to over 48,000; while in the same period 7:84's audience fell below 13,000. The company consolidated this growth with the first of its Christmas shows in 1986, Peter Arnott's A Wildcat Christmas Carol.

The company's growing audience made it even more attractive to potential sponsors, particularly from within the trade union movement. In May 1983, the collaboration with 7:84 to mount On The Pig's Back as part of The National Association of Local Government Officers' (NALGO) campaign to protest against cuts in the Health Service received over £21,000 in sponsorship. In the season 1983/84, the company was in receipt of £1,000 each from the Musicians' Union and Equity. Then, in mounting Bed-Pan Alley in 1984 the company made a direct appeal to unions for funding and outlined a number of schemes by which trade unions might contribute financially. The show went on to form part of the Scottish Health Service campaign. This kind of mutually beneficial support for front-line activism was most evident during the Miners' Strike of 1984-85. At a time when support for the miners from the official labour movement became increasingly ambivalent the company toured Dead Liberty around the mining communities of Scotland.

Although the company's level of funding from the trade unions was unprecedented, it has been surpassed by local authority funding, which the company began to attract during this second period. Situated within Glasgow District, Wildcat were fortunate to have a district council that was not only staunchly Labour but as the decade progressed extremely keen to support the arts (see Chapters 2 & 3). In 1984, the company received a guarantee against loss of £2,500 from the District Council, inaugurating a long, and for the company fruitful, relationship: the first revenue grant of £5,000 was given in 1986 and was doubled every year from then until by 1989 the company was in receipt of some £40,000.

With increased funding from a variety of sources, the company expanded its productions, with more performers, more equipment and more complex technical requirements: even in its earlier period its work had been described as 'A 3 ton show on a £2 stage' (Banks 1979: 8). This enhanced position led to a growth in its own need for a permanent base in which to run its office, provide rehearsal space, and store equipment. In 1986, after an appeal through the local Evening Times diary column for new premises, the company were offered facilities at Jordanhill College by the then head of the Film and Television Studies Department. For an annual rent of £5,000 they were offered office space, the use of the gymnasium as rehearsal space, a store for props and use of the 400 seat Crawford Theatre. This provided the company with a home base from which to launch its tours and in which they could mount money-spinning Christmas shows. There were some problems with the arrangement, however. The company had no control over the programming of the theatre and hence could not rely on building a consistent audience for it. Nor could they even rely on the theatre being available whenever they wanted it, which proved frustrating since the building was underused for large periods of time. Moreover, situated on a campus within the middle-class

suburb of Jordanhill, the theatre was hardly the ideal base for fostering a counter-culture based on the working-class.

### 1987-1989

If in the second period Wildcat discovered and consolidated its own urban popular audience, it was in the third period that that audience expanded in an unprecedented manner, giving the company a pre-eminent position among the touring theatre companies. This is attributable to one production more than any other: Tony Roper's The Steamie (1987). Originally commissioned by Borderline, but rejected by them and a number of other companies, the play was taken up by Wildcat after one of their performers, Elaine C. Smith, brought it to the attention of Anderson and MacLennan. Anderson added music and the show went on tour to community venues at Mayfest alongside Jotters, with a proposed short tour elsewhere afterwards. However, the production was so successful, playing to almost 17,000, that this initial tour was extended and then revived in the autumn by popular demand, taking in long runs at much larger venues such as the Kings in Edinburgh and Citizens in Glasgow. This second tour played to 44,105 at 64 shows.

That year's returns to the SAC showed that the company's audiences had jumped to 111,641. The play was later filmed for Channel Four. Although then company general manager April Chamberlain pointed out that the tour of The Importance of Being Honest (Spring 1988) played to more people than the original tour of The Steamie (Pattie 1990: 288), since this production immediately followed the second tour this can be taken as attesting to the immediate impact of the production on the company's audience. It was the success of this one play through two successive tours that boosted the company into a position at the heart of Scottish theatre. The play itself entered the mainstream canon with publication in its own right and as part of the Scot Free anthology (Nick Hern Books 1990). While annual audiences never quite reached that level again, the company



**Plate 4: The Steemie**

(Left-Right: Elaine C. Smith, Dorothy Paul, Ray Jeffries, Katy Murphy, Ida Schuster)

Photo: Oscar Marzaroli

were fully established within popular culture, albeit through a play in which the politics presented are at best tangential.

This success in building a widespread working class support was enhanced even further in 1988, when Glasgow Celtic Football Club approached Wildcat with the offer of a commission to mark the club's centenary. The result, The Celtic Story (Summer 1988), played to an audience of 56,772 at 49 shows at Glasgow's Pavillion Theatre. As Greg Gieseckam (1989: 6-7) has pointed out, the conditions of sponsorship offered to the company for this show meant that it was a shrewd business move rather than an altruistic gesture by the club. Yet the fact that the initiative was taken indicates the closeness of identification between Wildcat and the urban working class from which both it and Celtic draw their support. The assessment made in the

company Business Plan of this initiative is not an idle boast:

It was no accident that Celtic Football Club turned to Wildcat to write and produce "The Celtic Story" - Wildcat had created the only vehicle in Scotland which could have successfully mounted that project. Already for years Wildcat had been bringing theatre to people who had not before seen theatre as part of their lives and bringing it in a form that was enjoyable, informative, provocative and above all not patronising.

(Wildcat 1990: 12)

Significantly, the production was promoted using means associated with football (such as supporters clubs, fanzines, football magazines, for example) rather than those associated with the theatre. It did much to attract that non-theatre-going audience which had always been the company's target.

While both productions attracted unprecedented support from audiences, providing valuable box-office income, Wildcat continued to ensure the security of its financial position by expanding its relationships with local authorities. Strathclyde Regional Council initiated support for the company in 1988 when it provided £12,000 funding for a season of performances of the company's Waiting On One (Autumn 1988) for special needs groups at the Crawford Theatre. The timing of the onset of this funding relationship proved to be crucial since in the run up to the events of 1990 the Council decided that 'it would not as a rule take on new revenue clients other than those national clients that it had already funded on an annual basis' and that 'it would develop its arts policy through its Education and Social Work departments' (Wildcat 1990: 77). The company was able to respond positively to these restrictions because of its established relationship with the Region; the social base of its own audience; and the work that it had done to encourage special needs groups. Additionally, in 1989 the company received an additional £25,000 in project funding from Glasgow District Council; and in 1990, boosted by the

celebration of Glasgow as European City of Culture the company was in receipt of a total of £80,000 in project and revenue funding from this source.

### 1989 -

The way in which the company attracted local authority funding was not a matter of chance, as the next stage in its development illustrates. Dissatisfied with the restrictions imposed by the base in Jordanhill, the company had begun to investigate other possible locations. During 1989, negotiations began to secure use of what had been the social club for the Singer sewing machine factory in Clydebank. The building had been given over to the control of Clydebank District Council after the factory had closed down and it included a sizeable auditorium. A Glasgow-based charity, The Scottish Foundation, took over the building on a three-year lease with an option to purchase. The Foundation, whose director John Rafferty had been an advisor to Wildcat on The Painted Bird and who had been a constant supporter in a personal and professional capacity, later serving on the board, then let the building to the company. Before they could move in, however, substantial renovation and modernisation had to be done. The Foundation contributed £259,000 for this and by letting offices on the second floor continues to pay for the lease of the whole building from Clydebank District. At a cost of some £280,000 new flooring was installed, with mobile arena seating, and substantial rewiring and reworking of the lighting rigs to allow for a range of staging/seating configurations. Drapes were added to allow the theatre to be blacked out and much of the backstage area was refurbished. While the company did not have to meet the cost of the modernisation, they were able to oversee the work and are now responsible for the maintenance, capital and revenue costs involved in running it. This now involves employing 14 permanent staff to run the theatre and plan its programme, as well as mounting the touring shows.

This permanent home of their own has distinct advantages for Wildcat. Its geographical location is within a working class community with a strong sense of their own identity and history; it is a community that has always proved very receptive to Wildcat; and its location on Clydeside has an emotive appeal to the whole of the region through its association both with Red Clyde and the glory days of Scotland's industrial heartland. Furthermore, the venue is easily accessible by public transport from both the city of Glasgow and the region as a whole. It can accommodate much bigger audiences than the Crawford Theatre (up to 900), and the extra money from this can now be ploughed back into the touring shows. The company hope to benefit by being able to offer year-round commercial programming that draws a consistent audience to the theatre. The large rehearsal areas offered by the building have also allowed the company to hire these facilities out at a profit to other companies, such as Borderline, Scottish Opera and the Tron. Funding for the home-based programme comes from Clydebank District Council, who committed £25,000 towards it in the first year. The company is also in receipt of funding from Glasgow District Council for its touring programme, thus maintaining a uniquely strong grasp on district authority funds. At a regional level, the company has attracted project funds from Strathclyde Region towards the running and programming of the venue and capital costs. While the SAC contributes nothing directly towards the building (and the company moves away from a reliance on this central funding source) the company still receives a revenue grant towards its touring work. The company's position is not entirely secure, despite this, because of the absence of core funding from any source.<sup>1</sup>

While I have divided the company's development into separate periods, there are a number of consistently central features within it that must also be acknowledged. The first is the stability of the company's administration. From its inception, the company has differed from the earlier

7:84 and the post-1968 English companies in that there has been little attempt to work in a collective way. The company was established with a Board of Directors and a conventional management structure, headed by MacLennan, Anderson and Lean, who then brought in the people required for each show. The founding members of the company were then employees of the Board (as demanded by SAC funding policy), giving the company a life beyond their individual involvement in or commitment to it. Within this arrangement, David MacLennan has described the management structure as one of 'benevolent despotism' (Banks 1979: 9). Collectivism exists within the rehearsal context, almost as an inevitability of doing new work:

There is a process of rehearsal that is consultative, and all kinds of people are involved - actors and musicians and technicians and designers and choreographers and other writers.... - we don't employ marionettes.

(Maguire 1989b: 13)

There is also a principle that all company members are paid on exactly the same basis. By 1990, the company's Business Plan stated that 'although a hierarchy exists, it does not exclude frank exchanges of opinion and a free flow of information between departments' (Wildcat 1990: 35). All office staff attend read-throughs and offer opinions on any production that the company will mount. Throughout the company's development this structure has given it a stability in blatant contrast to, for example, 7:84. This has been achieved through efficient administration: it is perhaps ironic that while John McGrath has castigated the rise of the administrator (see McGrath 1990: 76-116), it is precisely the power given to each administrator at Wildcat which has given it security. Moreover, as each administrator has moved on the company has been able to fill the post from within its own ranks, providing it with vital continuity. The present structure of the company at the Clyde Theatre is illustrated in Diagram 4.



requirements and initiatives (such as the Incentive Funding Scheme) as a matter of expedience, the company made provisions for financial stability through a number of strategies. The aim of this has been to reduce the ratio of SAC funding to other other sources (1:2 in financial year 1989-90), having already reduced it from 5:1.

The most important of these provisions has been the growth of income generated from the box-office. This has not been achieved at the cost of raised ticket prices, as noted above, but through the building of a consistent audience base. With the start of a regular Christmas show in 1986 the company has also been able to draw in a younger audience. Not only does this accord with the SAC's policy to place an increased emphasis on work for young people, but it has provided a source of income in its own right. While some of the work has left the company open to charges of 'tailism' (see Paterson 1982), it guaranteed that the company could not only continue to work but indeed expand its operations. By 1990 box-office income accounted for almost a third of the company's income. This is a remarkable achievement when compared to the inability of many of even the most established building-based companies in England to maintain a full programme and consistent audience support. This growth in box-office has proved even more vital given the difficulties faced by local authorities in meeting their funding commitments in the light of the non-payment campaign against the Poll Tax. Nonetheless, it does not guarantee that the company will continue to be able to undertake community tours by offsetting income from large venues against unprofitable smaller gigs.

Secondly, the company has been consistently able to attract trade union support. Although many political theatre companies had previously attempted to utilise the trade union movement as a network through which to reach the working class, the possibilities of using it as an alternative funding source had rarely been successfully explored. The Centre 42 projects initiated by Arnold Wesker

founded on a lack of resources and poor organisation, for example. Even when the SAC began to attempt to parcel out its funding obligations in the face of its diminishing ratio of resources to demands, it did not perceive the unions as a likely alternative source of funding. Wildcat were foremost in establishing a relationship with them. Thus, in the push for sponsorship, Wildcat has largely avoided the contradictions that big business sponsorship throws up for oppositional theatre. As the company Business Plan points out, the main sponsors for theatre in Scotland have been financial institutions and service companies in the business-to-business sector. These are attracted to organisations like Scottish Opera because they perceive the audience as 'up-market, high net worth individuals' and because these organisations 'offer a prestigious environment for corporate entertainment' (Wildcat 1990: 52). While such potential sponsors perceive Wildcat as a left-wing touring theatre with a working class audience, they are unlikely to offer them high levels of sponsorship. On the other hand, this is frequently the very audience trade unions want to target to raise their own profile or in support of a particular campaign.

This trade union support extends beyond sponsorship; unions provide a network through which audiences are mobilised and tickets sold. Their identification with the company provides each side with mutual support: the company is seen as part of the labour movement and the unions are seen in a positive role, bereft of the demonising images of the picket-line or the smoke-filled room. The company have also benefitted from sponsorship by public sector organisations, like the Post Office - who granted the company the use of a post bus - and the Scottish Cooperative Development Organisation.

The third central feature has been the way Wildcat established a consistent core pool of performers in the company for almost all of its early shows, and through every period since. The original members of the company formed a

fairly tight grouping until 1982 when the tour schedules of 1982 and His Master's Voice overlapped, resulting in the formation of the 'Brand New Wildcats'. Although the company could not, obviously, accommodate two such casts in future shows it introduced new performers to the company, giving it a greater range of talents to use, including Elaine C. Smith and Myra McFadyen. Just as Terry Neason and David Anderson himself were able, these performers attracted a following for the company that was based as much on their own talents as performers as the shows in which they performed. There has been a symbiotic relationship between the fortunes of the company and some of these performers who have gone on to individual success, such as Elaine C. Smith, Terry Neason, David Anderson, Myra McFadyen, David McNiven and Rab Handleigh who have all gone on to enjoy success in theatre and television. Curious corroboration of the fact that the company's success depended as much on the entertainment talents of the individual performers concerned comes from a letter published in Scottish Theatre News in response to an interview with MacLennan. In it the writer asserts that

Your interview with David MacLennan (STN October 1981) indicates that many of Wildcat's fans, like me, love them for the music, not the red-flag rantings. I want to be entertained, of course, but my passion is both for rock music and theatre, not pageants of faith. If I wanted that, I'd go to midday mass on Sunday.

(STN 1981: 13)

This variation on the charge of 'preaching to the converted' shows that for this fan at least it was quite easy to separate the entertainment qualities of the performance from the politics. When Neason and successive performers have left the company, they have always been replaced with new people who have themselves come to be identified with the company's work.

The work that the company has produced on stage has been determined by the combination of these core features and each of the particular historical periods in which the company has found itself. Shows have covered a wide range of topics and issues, in a variety of styles. They might

roughly be divided into the following categories none of which are mutually exclusive: polemical and campaigning productions; productions about aspects of working class culture; productions examining American cultural imperialism; history plays; and 'entertainments'. (This is not to imply that the company does not see its role primarily as being to entertain.)

The company has always held its polemical and campaigning shows in tandem with entertainments: its first show, The Painted Bird was immediately followed by The Complete History of Rock 'n' Roll. However, the number of such hard-hitting shows up until 1985 was much greater than the number since: Dummies (1979) about homelessness; The Barmecide Feast (1980) about world food distribution and shortage; Blooter (1980) about new technology and mass unemployment; 1982/Any Minute Now (1982/83), around the issue of nuclear arms proliferation; Bed Pan Alley (1984) about cuts in the Health Services; and Dead Liberty (1984) on the miners' strike. In the period since 1984/85, Harmony Row (1990) is exceptional in directly addressing a major political issue; it is not insignificant that it was written by Arnott and Mullan rather than Anderson and MacLennan (see Chapter 8 for a further discussion of this). The use of 'outside' writers allowed the company to be critical of the official stance of the labour movement while not jeopardising their relationship to it, with an antagonistic political stance. The relative scarcity of such shows in the most recent periods of the company's history must be seen in the context of changes in the political climate away from issue-based campaigns (the Poll Tax is exceptional), and the concomitant scarcity of funding for campaigning shows.

In the absence of such polemical shows the company has relied much more on productions that have drawn on aspects of working class culture, like The Steamie (1987) set in a Glasgow wash-house of the Fifties; Waiting On One (1988) set in a bingo hall; and The Celtic Story (1988), the

celebration of the club's centenary. The reputation established by The Steamie helped secure the success of such shows. Although there had been attempts to re-evaluate working class culture (specifically sexual stereotyping) previously in shows like Confessin' The Blues (1981) and Same Difference (1984), the critiques implied in these were replaced by a much more celebratory approach to aspects of working class life in later pieces. It is these more celebratory pieces that have drawn criticism from those who feel that the company has gone 'soft', producing anodyne versions of working class life to attract large audiences. Even with a production like Cleaning Up (1990), which directly promoted cooperative working and criticised privatisation and competitive tendering for local authority contracts, the playing by an all-female cast, a capella singing and humour put it much more in the vein of The Steamie than any of their polemical shows.

American culture and cultural imperialism is something to which the company returned in a number of productions like Welcome To Paradise, Hot Burlesque, and Business in The Backyard, up until the mid-1980s. MacLennan had examined it in the second show that he wrote for 7:84 (Scotland), Honour Your Partners, and it seems that it was a recurring preoccupation, relegated later only because of the pressures of other issues and approaches. The epic productions of John McGrath's Border Warfare and John Brown's Body at Glasgow's Tramway are the most obviously historical of the company's works. Nonetheless, many productions included details of the exact historical developments which have created the situation addressed in that production as a means of explaining the contemporary issue.

As stated above, the company have always relied on keeping 'entertainments' in tandem with their other shows, occasionally having to rely on cabaret formats in the absence of sustained plot or writing; at other times combining with outside writers to produce highly successful pieces like Wildnights At The Tron and A Bunch of Fives.

With the introduction of money-spinning Christmas shows with Peter Arnott's A Wildcat Christmas Carol (1986), the company has been able to turn their talents to good profit. The competition offered by city centre pantomimes has allowed Wildcat to pursue a more realistic pricing policy for larger-scale venues. A full list of the company's work (included at the end of this chapter) indicates a diversity that is one of the company's strengths: the common link between the shows is the reliance on music and the fact that they are almost always brand new productions.

Although dependent on other factors, there is a cyclical pattern to the kinds of work which the company has mounted. The pressure to continually produce new work (a by-product of accepting revenue-funding) has sporadically forced the company's in-house writers to look to other means of fulfilling their commitments to produce. Initially this was not apparent as the company had MacLennan, Anderson and David McNiven, all capable of producing full-length shows. McNiven was part of the company from the beginning and he shared the burden of creating new material with Anderson and MacLennan, writing shows like The Complete History of Rock 'n' Roll; The Barmecide Feast; and The Importance of Being Honest on his own, as well as co-writing shows with the two directors. However, the demands of continuously producing new material took their toll and Confessin' The Blues had a cabaret format and material written by the company. The cabaret format has always been a means of respite for the in-house writers and has been sporadically adopted throughout the company's history; either by producing complete cabaret pieces or rehashing previous material with the barest of storylines: A Bunch of Fives (1983); It's A Free Country (1985); Wildnights at The Tron (1985); and Fancy Rappin' (1988).

This resort to cabaret pieces also saw the company initiate work from outsiders like Liz Lochhead, Marcella Evaristi, Peter Arnott and Tom Leonard. Liz Lochhead went on to write Same Difference as a full-length piece. Peter

Arnott has had a long-standing association with the company from these first cabaret pieces and went on to write A Wildcat Christmas Carol (1986) and Harmony Row with Peter Mullan in 1990. These commissioned works again have come at intervals, marking periods when Anderson and MacLennan have been unable to meet the company's production demands. More generally, the company has not had a sustained record of commissioning other writers, despite its avowed aims of providing an outlet for new writing: The Steamie by Tony Roper, Waiting on One by Anne Downie and Cleaning Up by Andy Mackie and Lynn Bains represent the only real excursions beyond the loose grouping of 'company writers'. The productions of John McGrath's epic pieces were very much new departures for the company, but given its background, hardly surprising. It is only in recent years however, that the company has become much more a management instrument for the producing of shows (as the name suggests) than a vehicle for the specific expression of the founders' political and artistic aspirations. This has been due to the pressure of other commitments, following the move to Clydebank and David Anderson's increasing workload outside the company in film, television and as a live performer. It may also be rooted in the fracturing of the initial pool of performers and the increasing range of talents available to the company.

Pressure on the company's writers also forced them to cyclically share creative responsibility with outside directors. Ian Woolridge (1982), Hugh Hodgart (Same Difference), John Haswell (Business in the Backyard), Brian Elsley (Heather Up Your Kilt), Alex Norton (The Steamie), Sandy Neilson (Hot Burlesque), Alan Lyddiard (Fancy Rappin'), Morag Fullarton (The Appointment), Mary McCluskey (Cleaning Up), and John Bett (The Cheviot revival) have guested as directors. Again, many of these people had had some previous connection with the company: Brian Elsley had been an SAC trainee director with Wildcat; and both Alex Norton and John Bett were friends from 7:84 days,

for example.

This use of 'outsiders' as writers and as directors was also a response to criticism that the company was becoming stale. The part that criticism has played in the company's development should not be ignored. The company's Business Plan lists four barometers by which the company judge their work:

- 1) The views of the critics, the academics and the professionals.
- 2) The views of the Company's funding partners.
- 3) The views of the audience.
- 4) The Company's own perspective.

(Wildcat 1990: 10)

Of all these it is perhaps the critics who are best positioned to objectively assess the company's work. Given the high degree of audience loyalty to the company - drawn to see the company in performance not necessarily a particular show - adverse reaction by individual audiences is not necessarily registered in a fall-off in attendances.

#### **Critical Success.**

Significantly, many of the company's productions, particularly the earlier ones, have enjoyed a healthy critical reception. At the outset the company seemed to be offering a new form of theatre which upset traditional notions and was exciting, entertaining and thought-provoking. The following comments give some flavour of the reception given the company:

Given the commitment, the talent, the company's enthusiasm, does the end product live up to expectation? The answer must be an unqualified 'yes'. Wildcat's debut on Thursday on a ramshackle stage before a capacity house in the McLellan Galleries was one of the most hopeful omens for Scotland's theatrical future.

(Glasgow Herald 16/9/78)

[Wildcat] stand together with 7:84 as the most successful professional touring companies in Scotland, and Wildcat's latest show...has emerged over the past

few months as a tremendous popular and critical triumph.

(Sunday Standard 8/8/82)

The extent to which their popular formula might eventually become repetitive was noted in Mary Brennan's review of 1982 (Glasgow Herald 15/2/82): 'the hidden danger in establishing a recognisably different theatrical style is eventual predictability'. It was in the reviews of the fifth show, Blooter, that the first critical reservations about the form began to appear. In a generally positive review in The Guardian (18/8/80), Cordelia Oliver noted 'that the fugal density of the music and the potency of the best songs...are by no means matched by the book which seems pretty thin: this is an area on which Wildcat needs to work'. This division between strong music and a weak book was one to which the critics were to continually return in assessing the company's work. Yet it is a division that David MacLennan has rejected as at best misplaced and at worst arising from a complete misunderstanding of what the company attempts to do.

[V]ery often when Wildcat shows are reviewed they are reviewed in theatrical terms and...the critics view the book as the bits that lie between the songs. In Wildcat shows the songs are absolutely integral to the feel and meaning of the piece and our songs do rather more than songs do in most musical theatre. They advance the narrative, comment on the plot, help to develop the character, carry a lot of political comment...Very often we're criticised for the slimness or weakness of the book when really it calls for a different kind of listening and approach. It's curious criticism when you read that the book is weak and then read paeans of praise about the songs that make up seventy or eighty per cent of the show.

(STN 1981: 5)

While MacLennan's defence has much merit, it is not possible to completely dismiss the charges brought against some of the shows for the imbalances within them. Dialogue has been the occasion of simple lecturing, side-swipes at paper tigers, or aimless digression. The combination of the music and the book has produced in some shows a stop-start

quality that has been criticised. To couch these criticisms purely in terms of a weak book is mistaken, however, since as MacLennan points out there is a much more integral relationship between the songs and the other parts of the piece, than in other kinds of music theatre. In more traditional Western music theatres there is often a greater balance between the non-musical parts and the songs for which they provide a pretext: MacLennan's argument is that the songs do not need these pretexts since they themselves are integrally related to the development of the situations in which they are presented. Where weaknesses occur is in the story-line, the plotting and pacing, the characterisation, and the ways in which these things are developed in both the sung and unsung parts of the show. They are merely more obvious in the unsung parts because they are not supported by high quality music, and cannot rely on the emotional and lyrical compression that is possible in song. Moreover, the 'acting' in non-musical parts has been perceived as flat and wooden.

At the same time some critics do seem to have committed themselves against the company's form of theatre and have been unable to differentiate the qualities that it has from individual shows that do not exhibit them. The fact that the company has done over thirty new shows seems to have bypassed some critics, if not the audiences. It is inevitable that some of them will be poor in quality, if only because it is difficult for any writing team such as Anderson and MacLennan's to produce high quality work, without taking the opportunity to rework past shows.

Further criticisms levelled at the company's performances frequently derive from the fact that the musicians and actors are the same people. At a basic level, it is not always possible to find people capable of actually acting and playing/singing to a high standard. Additionally, this may mean that the sense of dramatic action and theatrical impact is lost because the performers

are constricted by the technical requirements of being within reach of microphones and instruments. The performances can be just too static. This has been less a problem in recent productions with the use of throat mikes and portable hand mikes, and for example in The Tramway productions with the division between the actors/singers and musicians.

Nonetheless, it is not without importance that one of the shows that has been most enthusiastically regarded by the critics is the one in which the non-musical component of the piece is kept to a minimum and the setting facilitates the fixed nature of performing the music. This show was 1982 and it is this piece at which I will now look in much greater detail.

#### **Production Details.**

The production began its tour at the Bonar Hall, Dundee on February 11th 1982 and toured initially throughout Scotland, between venues in places as distant as Stornoway, Dumbarton and Fife. At the Edinburgh Festival Fringe of that year it played alongside His Master's Voice performed by 'The Brand New Wildcats', before touring to the Dublin Theatre Festival and to Sweden. In 1983 it was performed under the title Any Minute Now at the Theatre Royal Stratford East for two weeks as part of the Greater London Council's Peace Year Campaign. Although the total audience for the 1982 tour was given as 18,612 at 75 performances, the response was not uniform. While some venues were filled to over capacity, according to The Northern Times the show at Lairg Community Centre only attracted 22 people and that at Golspie had to be cancelled. In the company's figures for the tour there are 200 people recorded for Golspie and Lairg is omitted all together. Despite this discrepancy, the tour was otherwise successful.

An appreciation of the timing of the production is necessary to understand the impact that it had within its political context. The account here is based on Brian

McNair's Images of the Enemy (1990), a study of the media campaign over the issue of nuclear defence waged in Britain between the government and the peace movement. Throughout Britain there had been since 1979 a renewed interest in and growth of peace movements. In December of that year N.A.T.O. announced that it intended to update its long range nuclear capacity by installing Cruise and Pershing 111 missiles in Britain. Following this, the membership of the Campaign For Nuclear Disarmament grew from its 1979 total of 3,000 to 80,000 by 1983. Defence was at the top of the political agenda as the Conservative government and the military attempted to undermine the anti-nuclear campaign and the Labour Party's policy of unilateral disarmament. The debate was heightened when it was made public that the previous policy of keeping nuclear weapons as a deterrent resting on the understanding of mutually assured destruction in the event of war, had been abandoned by the U.S. in favour of the possibility of limited theatres of war, and the tactical use of nuclear weapons. That Britain might be used therefore as a floating battleship within a European theatre of war now seemed a real possibility. Ironically, the agenda-setting powers of government guaranteed that by raising the profile of the nuclear debate, albeit through a deliberate policy of misinformation and scaremongering about the nature of 'the Soviet threat', the peace movement's profile was raised in the public domain. However, the defeat of Labour at the 1983 'nuclear election' in which defence policy was among the key issues had two effects on the debate. Firstly, it saw Labour's right wing rounding on the left leadership and the eventual abandonment of the unilateralist policy as the recriminations over the election defeat took effect. Secondly, the public perception of the anti-nuclear stance was changed both because of association with Labour's defeat at the polls and because the Tories then dropped the nuclear issue from the agenda. Thus, the tour of 1982 can be seen to have taken place at the high

point of a fiercely-contested debate about the uses of nuclear weapons.

Given this climate it would perhaps have been more surprising if the company had not at some stage decided to mount a show about nuclear arms proliferation, as critic Joyce McMillan acknowledged in her review of the show for Scottish Theatre News:

Nuclear war is hardly an original theme, these days, for a radical theatre group; but the fact that the subject has become fashionable does not diminish its importance, nor does it mean that everything worth saying about it has been said.

(McMillan 1982: 29)

Yet the piece developed by MacLennan and Anderson did not abandon their developing techniques of music theatre in favour of the more direct approach of a straightforwardly agit-prop piece in support of the anti-nuclear campaign. Instead, they produced a piece which was exemplary of the strengths of the kind of theatre that they had been working towards for the previous five years; in which the approach to the core issues of nuclear armaments was more oblique. In this piece, rather than presenting a balanced argument in which both sides are evenly presented, a single central role is created in such a way to allow it to function as the site of many of the audience's key pleasures in the performance and as the basis of the show's polemic.

The show was staged as the trial of Mary McKinley, a working class Glasgow housewife, who has killed her two-year-old son Jamie. This scenario means that the problems of the immobility of the performer/musicians were overcome by Annette Gillies' simple court room setting, in which the fixed layout onstage allowed the performers to remain more or less at their instruments throughout. A projection screen provided a backdrop on which various items of visual information were projected during the show from three projectors. The show itself was almost entirely musical, a

kind of rock opera in which even the few spoken elements were almost all played to accompaniment.

The course of the show follows the procedure of a trial in allowing each side to put its case, with the calling and cross-examination of witnesses. The audience themselves are allocated the role of the jury, explicitly encouraged to decide for themselves on the merits of the case:

'You make your/ Own mind up/ You use your/  
Discrimination.'

There is no dispute over the actual events of the case but on the interpretation that is made of those events. The defence enters a special plea that Mary had been suffering at the time from a temporary psychiatric disorder and had killed the child in order to save him from what she believed to be the impending horrors of a nuclear holocaust. The prosecution's case is that Mary cold-bloodedly killed the child, and that only tangible evidence of a conspiracy to bring about a nuclear war could provide the extenuating circumstances for someone to act as Mary had done. She must be punished for what was an act of murder. Mary herself rejects both versions: she is a visionary messenger, who will be sacrificed only because the consequences of what she says would necessitate a radical change in the public's perception of how the nation's defence policy is operated.

This cleverly links the issues of the possession and use of nuclear armaments to the very specific trial of this woman; focussing the abstract general arguments through a very particular instance. It might seem to provide an occasion for the audience to become Brechtian spectators, sitting in judgement, detached from the characters, but engaging with the events of the piece. Within the plot there is an argument structure in which we can see how the dilemma facing the audience is constructed on a rational or intellectual level. In this argument structure, the horns of the dilemma are not, however, equally sharp since it is weighted heavily in Mary's favour, and does not entirely

follow the procedure of a genuine trial. The argument focuses firstly on the prosecution's case that there is no conspiracy to bring about a nuclear holocaust by the government or institutions of the state. Without evidence of this, Mary's fears with regard to her child's future are to be considered a complete fabrication. The prosecution's case relies on the testimony of three experts and one eye witness to the killing. These experts are an under-secretary of defence, a representative of the arms industry, and a British general.

The first witness is Sir Reginald Anstruther-Gore. Even from his oath we are made aware that his testimony will be partial:

'I swear to tell the facts  
And nothing but the facts  
Except where it conflicts with  
The Official Secrets Acts.'

He is invited to begin by explaining the necessity of defence. The Ministry of Defence (not war) exists to protect the ordinary, peace-loving silent majority from the Russian threat, and internal threats from both the witting and unwitting enemies of the state. This might seem to be a sustainable *raison d'etre* until he defines the witting enemies as 'the extreme left: David Owen, Roy Hattersley and the like', hardly revolutionary left-wingers. Thus, the plausibility of the evidence is entirely undermined. There is no mention made of more plausible internal threats, like the I.R.A. or the extreme left and anarchist groups. The question of how the country might be defended in the absence of such a ministry is not addressed. The unwitting threats come from those military experts who advise against the consequences of using nuclear weapons. The arguments against the position taken up by these people are based only on the premise that they have betrayed their class interests. There is no sense given of any rational opposition to the anti-nuclear lobby. The means by which the M.O.D. keeps a check on national security - phone

tapping, interception of mail and the surveillance of members of C.N.D. is one piece of well-known skulduggery that reinforces the view that the public needs as much to be defended from people such as this as to be protected by them. So, when Sir Reginald endorses the positioning of nuclear weaponry and U.S. military bases on British soil, the audience is supposed to associatively perceive this as threatening not reassuring.

The defence's cross-examination revolves around the exact nature of what exists to 'protect' the population and whether this makes us an offensive rather than defensive battle station, and consequently more prone to attack. The defence produces a list of military establishments throughout Scotland and questions the witness as to their use. Each question is answered merely with a 'That's classified'. This list is indisputable since the establishments are in existence and their uses are easily judged. The point of the list is to prove that the fears of the defendant in fact have a basis in reality. This side of the argument is well-argued with nothing to counter it. It is given a visual force with the projection of a map of Scotland detailing the bases that are situated here. It seems to have been effective, according to Cordelia Oliver's review (The Guardian 1/3/82):

One item though is frightening enough to stick in the mind - the projected map of Scotland seen gradually disappearing under an increasing load of U.S. bases, missile ranges, nuclear installations, and armament factories, revealing the extent to which our small country is being turned into an arsenal and defence post for England as well as the U.S.

The lack of balance between the two cases indicated here is continued through the rest of the examination of this witness and the examination of the other two experts. Each is discredited. The third, the general, like the first gives evidence that is evidently self-serving and tendentious. Just as the M.O.D. spokesman was unable to justify the proliferation of nuclear and other military

installations purely on the grounds of defence, the general is shown as incapable of justifying the government's provision for the general public in the event of a nuclear strike. In both cases the tactics are to use government statistics to condemn government thinking and to contrast government rhetoric with actual policy.

The second witness for the prosecution is Mr. Fink, 'a man with a global overview of the hard realities of international commerce' - a multinational arms dealer. It is his occupation rather than his evidence that is shown to be self-serving. He explains that the relationship between the British government and the multinational arms industry is harmonious rather than conspiratorial: they share an identity of interest. The explanation of how this works shows that rather than there being any crude kind of overt conspiracy between the parties concerned, they create the conditions through which worldwide weapon proliferation is inevitable. The argument that this is a necessary and profitable part of the economy is undermined by the defence's proposition that these multinational deals work primarily in the interests of the multinational arms companies rather than in the interests of individual nation states.

The prosecution's final witness is James Duggan<sup>2</sup>, a labourer who had witnessed the killing. However, in telling the court what he saw, Duggan's testimony is not allowed to linger on the killing of the baby. The physical difficulties in killing anyone, as Hitchcock made a point of showing in a number of his films, require that a great deal of physical effort and emotional strain has to be exerted in order to carry the deed out. That Mary McKinley's actions are so quickly passed over detracts from the prosecution's argument that 'there are no little murders'. The defence does not cross-examine Duggan. The crucial act in the whole case is passed over and the horror of the murder is diminished.

The defence's case begins with the contention that Mary acted with an a unsound mind at the time of the murder. The only witness that is to be called for the defence is Doctor David Brown, Senior Consultant Psychiatrist at the Southern General Hospital. He tells the court that he has diagnosed Mary as having acute anxiety, brought on by her history: she is a victim of her society's violence. Mary's upbringing is then outlined. At school she learns to listen to what others tell her. One such lesson is that God will exact a harsh judgement on the judgement day from those who have sinned against him and that the sins of the fathers will be visited on the children. Another is that history shows that the children are always the forgotten victims of any conflict. This is evidence enough for a susceptible mind that she and her children will be the victims too in any future war. In learning her social role, Mary learns that she must serve and obey her husband. The popular cultural forms which she is influenced by reinforce Mary's conception of herself as a passive victim. So when Mary starts to go out with a boy the path that she follows of pregnancy and marriage seems to be fulfilling all her expectations. Her husband, Bill, starts to drink heavily and she is left on her own to cope. When she cannot, she becomes introverted, attempting to seek comfort in the television. This only reinforces Mary's view that there will be another crisis in which she will be the victim. When her husband comes home and begins to beat her, the coincidence of her expectations of being sacrificed in a global conflict and her personal circumstances convince her that the apocalypse is about to happen. This is given as a plausible explanation of her actions by an expert witness. It is also a set of circumstances that are presented as reality on stage: the scenes are acted out and therefore are given as credible so that the audience itself becomes witness to them through their re-enactment.

The prosecution cross-examines the doctor and challenges his expertise by stating that two equally expert

witnesses for the Crown have given statements that Mary was of sound mind when she committed the killing and that she is fit to plead. Yet we do not hear from these witnesses - their testimony comes as hearsay. Further, the prosecution is not allowed at this stage to undermine the account that the psychiatrist has given by arguing that, while there are many people who have been brought up in environments similar to Mary's, there has not been a spate of child-killings. This is surely where the defence's case is at its weakest since it tries to argue that the ingredients that lead to Mary's expectation of Armageddon are common 'to her class'. At this point Mary bursts out to reject the plea of insanity and the defence case altogether. A timely intervention which obscures the sleight of hand that deals the prosecutor such an unbalanced set of arguments. He is left a sarcastic summation in which he argues that Mary is a liar; that she has killed her child; and only now is he allowed to argue that since we all share the same social conditions (which we plainly don't) Mary's defence would licence everyone to kill their children. The crux is whether the audience believes that the powers-that-be are or are not conspiring to bring about a nuclear holocaust.

Mary's own summation is that she is not mad but that she is a messenger of bad news. She predicts that she will be rejected as 'a prophet in her own land'. Her dreams of Armageddon will be left unheeded as she is sacrificed to save the public from the anxiety of facing reality. There is a conspiracy of silence by the few who know the real consequences of a nuclear war and who have made provision to save themselves. The audience are left to decide the merits of the case for themselves. Their role is to complete the narrative; to close it with a suitable ending. Yet as has been demonstrated, in terms of the argument structure the case is hardly balanced evenly in terms of the evidence presented. What is more important, however, is that an analysis of this argument structure does not provide an exhaustive analysis of the stage presentation. This is not

a detached intellectual presentation of two sides of an equally balanced debate.

There is, for example, an important set of schematic distinctions drawn in the characterisation within the performance. The central character of Mary McKinley is given a much greater psychological depth than every other character, not surprisingly since it is the state of her mind that is under consideration. But in relation to the other witnesses there is a great imbalance. The defence's only witness is the psychiatrist. He is given a realistic name and specific and realistic occupation. His place of work is a real and well-known hospital. His testimony is spoken, not sung in rhyming couplets. Although the testimony he gives is interrupted by scenes that illustrate it, when he speaks there is no background music to offer comment on what he says. It is therefore presented as straightforward, sincere, and above all concerned. He is presented in as authentic and naturalistic a way as possible by a performer who plays only this role. The naturalism of the way in which the part is acted is an invitation to respond to him as a 'person' not just as an informational function.

In comparison, the representation of the prosecution's three expert witnesses is conveyed by David Anderson, using a different hat for each character as the minimum of props by which to designate them. This is indicative of the way in which they are characterised almost entirely in terms of their function within the military system. Anderson is also the clerk of the court. This diminishes any sense we might make of these witnesses as individual characters. Psychological depth is replaced by comic caricature. For example, Sir Reginald Anstruther-Gore is defined through a series of remarks about his background which designate him as a member of the ruling class: he is a titled lord; he lives in Belgrave Square; he is an ex-Grenadier; and an O.B.E.. David Anderson's portrayal indicates the character as a bluff English gentleman, convinced by his own patriotic

rhetoric. It is closer to cartoon than characterisation. Likewise, the general is described only in terms of being a general, representative of the military as a class. The testimony of both is mainly spoken with accompanying background music. For instance, Sir Reginald's outlining of the need for defence is given to a hummed chorus of the theme to the film The Dambusters and then 'Land of Hope and Glory'. This hummed background music provides an ironic comment on what he says, designating it as jingoistic: it is not 'serious' evidence in the way that the psychiatrist's will be, since the commenting humming is a source of humour. Similarly, during the general's testimony there is an ironic chorus of 'He's in the army now'. During his cross-examination by the defence lawyer, a clarinet plays 'Taps' softly in the background, undercutting his arguments with the music to bury one's dead to.

Fink is detailed through the arms deals that he makes: 'from bazookas in Bazoudaland, to grenades in Grenada, armalites in Armagh, blaa, blaa, blaa, blaaa'. This serves to associate Fink with small-time shady deals through which such arms are supplied - the implication being that all multi-national arms deals are as crooked. Although Fink's irresponsible wildness is given a charmingly raffish appeal by Anderson's playing, it does not carry emotional weight: he is bewitched by his own rhetoric, his own jargon, his own music. By having him as an American he is also linked to the pantheon of Wildcat villains, closer to cliché than character. This facet of all three witnesses is further emphasised by David Anderson's wearing of all three hats by the end of this sequence. These are not characters in the sense that the psychiatrist is: they are what Mary Brennan's describes in her review (Glasgow Herald 15/2/82) as 'cameo caricatures'. Anderson's wearing of all three hats is a neat visual metaphor for the conspiracy that the defence is trying to prove. But the metaphor sums up a proposition that is not itself proved from the arguments that have been produced. What has been added however is a

strong emotional imbalance in the way in which the audience responds to the witnesses and the evidence that they bring.

The prosecution's case is further undermined since even the trial is presented from a viewpoint that verifies what Mary says and undermines the credibility of those ranged against her. The opening number, for example, details the way in which the media presents the world as in a state of chaos, preempting a large part of Mary's explanation and the defence's case. The court is presented as a conspiracy in which all except Mary are involved. The prosecution and defence sing together in 'Justice' that they will have to be trusted in their presentation of 'Just facts and history'. Even before we hear the details of the case and see the defendant, they are described:

All around Mary  
 Carrion gather  
 Black-hooded crows  
 Birds of a feather  
 Even the white dove  
 Darkens her plumage  
 Birds of a feather  
 Together.

This court is represented as a game of chess in which Mary is a white pawn surrounded by powerful black pieces. This again foreshadows Mary's rejection of her defence lawyer. It also creates a situation in which the audience's sympathy is invited for Mary even before she appears on stage.

This chorus illustrates a technique that is used throughout this show and one that is frequently used in Wildcat productions. During this song the performers are not singing in character. The situation which they describe becomes a given reality of the dramatic world, in the same way that the voice of a third person omnipresent and omniscient objective narrator in a novel gives the reality of the fictional world. What is verified by performers performing outside character will be taken to have greater truth value for the dramatic world than contradictory statements from characters. The court

therefore is a threatening environment; it is conspiratorial; its affairs will not be conducted in a fair and impartial manner; it will not reach an objective and just conclusion. This is verified in the clerk of court's speech about those considered suitable for jury duty; when the judge congratulates the prosecutor for the clarity and brevity of his summation; and in the directions that the judge gives to the jury/audience about how they should come to their verdict. When Mary flees her house prior to the killing, the chorus give us a commentary on her state of mind, clinching the defence's case that she was emotionally and psychologically upset. Using a similar technique comments made by the performers outwith their characters about other characters are given greater truth value in relation to the dramatic world. So when the chorus comments on the prosecution's witnesses (see above) through music or parody this weighs heavily in the audience's assessment of that witness. However, when Mary is introduced the preface to the charges against her are made within character; showing that the court characters want only to exact retribution for the deed, not justice for the doer.

The court is shown not only as conspiratorial and antagonistic towards Mary but incapable of responding to her as a person, so tied up is it in the bureaucracy of its own procedures. Even the defence lawyer hopes that Mary will understand that she cannot get involved in her tragedy. Her approach is professional and detached. Later, after Mary's detailed and moving account of her fears and vision, she is offered a glass of water. The inadequacy of this is evident and not lessened by the fact that in real court cases of even the most distressing kinds this is the sole aid given to distraught witnesses. The court is not interested in complexity only in what is true or false, the facts. Its inability to respond to the emotional thrust of Mary's character stands against it.

It is within this context that we are presented with Mary. She is introduced as a victim, a 'novice in the game of law'. She almost immediately interrupts the proceedings with an outburst that seems at first to be an incoherent jumble of wild accusations. Its presence stands outside the procedures of a real court. She says that she does not recognise the court, that it is the court that has taken her child and her life away. Her apocalyptic prophesying seems entirely fanciful. It is musically counterpointed with the assertion that this is irrelevant from the court officials. This reassertion of the bureaucratic nature of the law alerts us to the possibility that what Mary is saying may be meaningful in a different context.

The characterisation of Mary is significantly different from that of the other characters. As noted in the previous chapter, the dominant bourgeois tradition in playmaking against which Brecht was reacting was that which 'accumulates sympathy around one character by placing that character at the intersection-point of all the play's important events' (Hozier 1983: 17). Hozier notes that this accumulation of sympathy is achieved 'usually by making him/her more victim than agent, and by making other characters repellent, dangerous or ridiculous in direct proportion to the degree of our identification with the hero(ine)' (ibid). The way in which the prosecution expert witnesses and the court are characterised obviously corresponds to this. Furthermore, the dramatic world is presented in terms that follow directly from this emphasis on the individual: 'The [dramatic] world is seen as Romantic Agony, domestic trauma or subjective hallucination' (ibid). As illustrated above, the dramatic world, as presented by the performers out of character, corresponds to Mary's apocalyptic vision of it.

Crucially, it is the way in which the character of Mary is made a privileged access point for the audience's emotional engagement with, and hence, many of the key

pleasures in, the piece that destroys any sense of balance within the performance. There are two complementary processes at work here. The first connects with the dramaturgical conventions around the characterisation of Mary: the second concerns the identification between the audience and the performer. In terms of the first process, Mary occupies the central 'hero' position according to the quantitative criterion advanced by Peter Cassirer, discussed in the previous chapter. Qualitatively, her characterisation is also distinct. She is allowed to represent herself in the first person directly to the audience/jury. No other character is allowed to do this. The sheer simplicity of what she tries to say, indeed her inarticulateness contrasts to her *advantage* with the rhetorical devices of the prosecution. According to Simon Frith 'Inarticulateness not poetry, is the popular songwriter's sign of sincerity' (1983: 35) and it is important in the context of this case that Mary must be seen to believe what she says. The audience are invited to identify with her and against those who are blind to the kind of environment in which she was brought up: the 'foreign country at your door.' Mary characterises her environment in terms of absences:

No Mercedes in the driveway  
 Rhododendrons round the garden  
 There's no hallway; beg your pardon  
 There's no coffee-table reading  
 There's no spiral staircase leading  
 To an open panorama  
 There's an awful lack of drama  
 Here.

This is a pen-portrait of how 'the other half lives'; the lifestyle of the rich few. At the heart of this is the recognition process through which an audience's response to a performance is excited through the recognition of the familiar. Mary is given a history, and a background with which many of the audience are meant to identify in this way. This recognition adds to the strength of the identification that is invited between the audience and Mary. Through this process the audience identify with Mary

against the Others. These Others are the lawyers and the judge, the psychiatrist - everyone who attempts to categorise Mary as something that she is not. The audience is invited to identify with what she is.

Importantly, this is aided since she is given a psychological depth denied to the other characters. It is her psychological state that is being investigated. Her state of mind is represented to us on stage: she shares her innermost feelings and anxieties. She has suffered a repressive childhood and received the most rudimentary of educations; she lives in a deprived area; she had to get married because she was pregnant; her husband drinks; he beats her; she suffers from acute anxiety and depression. But she is not described to us in this dispassionate way, as the prosecution witnesses are. Much of the show is concerned with showing these details. The key beating that she receives before the killing is even repeated. Where the testimony of characters conflicts, what an audience sees for itself carries more weight than what is merely related by a character. Additionally, the audience shares her vision of the holocaust, accompanied by a bright flash and white noise. Each of the accounts of Hiroshima is given in the third person by the performers out of character creating a sombre dramatic reality for what Mary has witnessed, making the audience witnesses also. Thus, the dramatic world is presented from a perspective that validates Mary's fears.

There is potentially a problem with this qualitative development of Mary's character: a description of it might be read in terms of what one reviewer described as a 'jumble of token social problems and symbolic neuroses' (STN 5/4/82). However, the danger of her becoming a cliché or token is overcome by the casting of Terry Neason in the role and the way in which she played it. This is the second of the processes concerning the ways in which the character is made a privileged point of access for the audience's emotional engagement with the performance. Neason's ability



**Plate 5: Mary's Trial**

(Left-Right: Doreen Cameron, Terry Neason)

Courtesy: Wildcat Stage Productions

as a performer is well attested in reviews of the company's work prior to this. Allen Wright in a review of Dummies in The Scotsman (24/9/79) wrote of her: 'Admiration for the versatility and verve of this company reaches its peak when Terry Neason comes to the fore. Her singing strikes a balance between delicacy and passion, and her acting switches from the comical to the poignant. This is a performance of outstanding quality'. Cordelia Oliver described her in a review of Blooter as 'the big Glaswegian blonde with the outsize personality and an exceptional voice' (The Guardian 18/8/80). Given Neason's tremendous singing ability and her stage presence, the role of Mary is physically realised in the strongest way possible to make her seem real and inviting us to empathise with her. I refer to Joyce McMillan's review of the show again: 'Predictably much of the power of 1982 as theatre radiates from Terry Neason's central performance as Mary. All huge wounded eyes and thrilling voice, she succeeds magnificently in making a real suffering woman out of a character that could have easily have disintegrated into a jumble of token social problems and symbolic neuroses' (STN 5, April 1982).

Thus, the casting of Neason in this central role was crucial in creating an empathetic relationship between the audience and the character of Mary, firstly because of her own abilities in building and sustaining a character. There are two other elements which are added to this. The first is to do with the relationship that Neason had already established with the core Wildcat audience through her work with 7:84 (Scotland), in previous Wildcat shows and as an entertainer in her own right. There is a key element of identification between the audience and the performer and the aims of the performance. Although Michael L. Quinn's article on 'Celebrity and the Semiotics of Acting' (1990) argues that celebrity performances function analogously to the alienating effects of Brecht's theatre, it is important to acknowledge the authority which celebrity acting and the identification between audience and celebrity can give to

any role taken by the celebrity. Quinn writes, 'Celebrity performance represents one case in which the personal expressive function of acting comes into the foreground of perception...The personal qualities of the individual actor dominate the perception of the actor's references to the fictional events' (1990: 155). What Quinn does not address, however, are the ways in which the trust that the celebrity has built up with the audience through previous performances and reputation reflects back on any character that she or he plays. As he says 'The first requisite for celebrity is public notoriety, which is only sometimes achieved through acting. In the context of this public identity there then comes to exist a link between performer and audience, quite apart from the dramatic character (or only in an oblique relation to stage figure and character)' (1990: 156). From this, one can see that the audience is conditioned by experiences of Neason's previous roles, her singing career and publicity information on her upbringing in working class Glasgow, to consider her as one of their own, someone to be trusted. Any character that she plays will be imbued with this same relationship of trust. This further enhances the audience's pleasures of empathising with the central character.

The final point regarding the casting of Neason is to do with the ways in which an audience enjoys a musical performance. It is necessary to outline the background to this argument. Roland Barthes has argued that to interpret music is to deny the pleasure of the text, since this pleasure is taken in the signifier itself not in the signified. It is the surface of the text to which one responds, not the subject or meaning. We get our pleasure in hearing someone sing from the grain of the voice, the 'materiality of the body' in it. It is the voluptuous appeal of the voice itself that gives us pleasure primarily not what is being expressed, not the meaning of what is being sung. Simon Frith draws heavily on Barthes in the chapter of Sound Effects. Youth, Leisure and The Politics

Of Rock which deals with rock music, and I am in turn drawing on what Frith says there. He writes:

The pleasure of rock texts (combinations of words and music) has always derived from the voluptuous presence of voices, and rock fans, unlike high art aestheticians, have always known that music's sensual truth isn't dependent on rules of expression. We respond to the materiality of rock's sounds, and the rock experience is essentially erotic - it involves not the confirmation of self through language (the mode of bourgeois aesthetics, always in control), but the dissolution of the self in jouissance.

(Frith 1983: 164.)

While using Frith's argument I would like to qualify it, at least in reference to the use of rock music within theatre. The distinction between the enjoyment of the materiality of music and the use of music as expressive of an emotional state is a false antithesis. The primary pleasure of listening is most certainly not connected to an interpretation of what a song means. However, a song does not mean an emotion but may create a sense of it or express it in a way that is itself pleasurable irrespective of the banality of the lyrics. This emotional element is constructed in the materiality of the sounds; it becomes a facet of them when they are made in certain combinations according to convention. Why this should be so is not clear; but common sense suggests it to be the case<sup>3</sup>. The pleasure of entering this emotional state still denies the confirmation of the self through language and control: it is in fact a giving over of the self entirely to that emotional state, from which giving over is certainly derived pleasure if not jouissance.

By extending the argument in reference to 1982 it is surely obvious that one of the main pleasures of the show, one of its entertainment values, comes from ~~the~~ ability to enjoy the pleasure of Terry Neason's voice and the emotional qualities that she uses it to express. This is a crucial difference between music theatre and other kinds of theatres, in which the possibilities of reaching this kind

of pleasure are more limited. Music offers a more immediate and wider ranging emotional appeal. The political weight of the whole piece is derived from ~~the~~ ability to enjoy her voice and to be drawn to her character. This is added to because the performance is live and the performer is on the stage before the audience. Her personal charisma, what Mine Kaylan calls 'presence'<sup>4</sup>, attested to in the reviews quoted above, is itself a source of pleasure or 'jouissance'. The symbiotic relationship between this 'presence' (together with the 'jouissance' that it excites) and the empathetic nature of the character, establish the audience's identification with Mary as the primary source of pleasure that it will have during the performance.

Of course, such presence is a quality which other performers will have. For example, Dave Anderson has, like Neason, been credited with a powerful stage manner. In his portrayal of the prosecution witnesses however, it is his personal presence as performer that comes through each cameo; we watch him not the characters in precisely the way which Quinn argues. It is the tension between the qualities associated with Anderson's public celebrity persona and the characteristics which he shows for his characters which alienates his playing from them. They are indicated rather than entered into. What his presence does is to allow the audience to identify with him as performer, and is not transferred into an emotional identification with the characters. It is his skill in undertaking the changes between the three roles that reinforces this presence, and which is antithetical to any emotional engagement with the characters. What this means is that the quality of live performance not only creates its own excitement but in fact was a prerequisite for the emotional weight of the show to be effective. The political importance of the show lay in its live performance.

Whether this means that audiences will make the jump between the enjoyment of the piece as a musical experience

and the thinking through of its political arguments is another matter. As the letter quoted above shows, it is quite possible to enjoy a show for its music and to disregard the politics. As a corollary to this, it can be seen that when Wildcat (or any other political theatre company) are criticised for being too political or propagandist what is usually meant by this is that the show has not offered this jouissance; or that the performers have not offered that element of erotic identification in their performances. Although the measure of what is propaganda depends on the distance of the commentator from the ideological position of the person that is allegedly propagandising, any show that is bereft of the ability to offer its audience this pleasure will be received as failing as entertainment by everyone. In 1982 by successfully creating a scenario in which the ways in which we might actually enjoy a piece of theatre are mobilised to reinforce the polemic of the show the company gives a powerful emotional force to that polemic.

That the production should operate in this way must not be seen as a negative characteristic. Within the programme there is a quotation from a statement by John Foster Dulles made in the early stages of the Cold War: 'We have to create an emotional atmosphere akin to the wartime psychology. We must create the idea of a threat from without'. There is therefore an emotional element to the policies against which the production is campaigning. An understanding of the relevance of this can be gauged from Tan and Schoenmakers' empirical research on audience reception (notably in relation to two shows, one of which was an attempt to create a balanced presentation of the issues surrounding nuclear power) which has already been referred to in the preceding chapter. They concluded that audiences seemed to demonstrate a predilection to resolving complex issues into good guy-bad guy conflicts, irrespective of any attempt at balancing the argument. Moreover, they conclude that

It is, as we have shown, very well conceivable, that performances dealing with controversial subjects may selectively attract people who have more or less the same attitude towards it while, at the same time, repelling potential spectators holding a different opinion. Often titles and short summaries of performances dealing with political issues may create the impression that producers take side with those who have 'made' the issue, that is, the group who first tried to make it public (...the anti-nuclearists in the case of nuclear energy).

(1984: 499)

Thus, one sees that the production was unlikely to be presented to an audience previously neutral on the subject, and that that audience would have come down on Mary's side anyway. It seems that the producers had both a key understanding of who their audience would be, and the strategies by which they might negotiate their reading of the performance by manipulating the emotional appeal of the performance. An astute observation by Richard Mowe illustrates the importance of this emotional manipulation: 'The content of the show is likely to be familiar to anybody who has anti-nuclear sympathies, but Wildcat's strength is not so much in startling revelation, rather in the power and passion with which they mount their attack' (Evening News 10/3/83). The company is not presenting new information to 'the converted', it is giving a more personal and emotional charge to what they may already know. That is a significant contribution to making people care about what might otherwise seem to a set of very abstract issues.

Furthermore, the performance is structured in such a way as to encourage the audience to make the jump between the aesthetic experience and social action. The central issue is not whether nuclear weapons proliferation is good or bad, but in fact the issue around which the court case centres: Mary's action in killing her child once the dangers of nuclear proliferation have been realised. The audience have been given privileged access to her situation. They must now reach a judgement on what she has done. Although the dramaturgy of the performance has hitherto been

described in terms of the 'well-made play', it is crucially different in terms of its ending. Rather than resolving the narrative within the framework of the performance the ending is left open, avoiding a resolution in which order is restored to the stage world. It creates a dilemma which only the audience can resolve. Anthony Hozier's discussion of Brecht's work is directly relevant here:

Brecht does not attempt the transcendence and resolution of the contradictions that the plays pose. He leaves that to the audience to achieve in real material terms in its own world. His plays are open-ended. For him a play should try to bring an audience to the point of awareness that the resolution of the contradictions presented in the play is only possible through practical social action, through social practice.

(Hozier 1983: 20)

The contradiction facing the audience is between the enormity of the crime that Mary has committed and the possibility that this is mitigated by the conditions of the prospective holocaust. Regarding this the company made a significant attempt to reinforce the performance with a hefty programme that presented factual information on the nuclear issue. It included details of 'Operation Square Leg', a dress rehearsal for a nuclear attack; the power of current armaments; the nuclear balance between N.A.T.O. and the Warsaw Pact; and the cost of the nuclear arms race. To resolve the contradictions posed by the performance, the audience must face the question of the likelihood of a nuclear strike and what they might do to prevent it. Since they might already be sympathetic to the anti-nuclear stance, and the performance will have given an additional emotional weight to that sympathy, this creates the link between the performance and social action. There is anecdotal evidence that this was to some extent effective. At almost every performance there was a stall run by C.N.D. giving information and selling membership. Terry Neason was to recall that 'We did an anti-nuclear play years ago called '1982' and people came out and joined C.N.D.. That's just

great when people go to see a play and come out saying "Count me in, boys." '(The List 31/8-13/9 1991).

The company contributed to the anti-nuclear campaign as well by donating the proceeds of one of their shows at the Mitchell Theatre Glasgow to 'Keep N.A.T.O. Out', a Stornoway based group trying to prevent the location of a N.A.T.O base there. It is perhaps mere coincidence that Comhairle nan Eilean refused the company a grant to travel to Stornoway, ostensibly on the basis that local amateur groups already met local theatre needs. Opposition of a more explicitly political kind came from Teddy Taylor M.P. who complained bitterly about the use of public subsidy on what he considered to be political propaganda, when the company played as part of the G.L.C.'s peace campaign. It is not without significance that neither the G.L.C. nor a number of other groups about whom Mr. Taylor has made complaints are in existence any longer due to the withdrawal of government funds. The part that theatres play in mobilising popular support around contentious political issues should not therefore be underestimated.

What I have shown here is that the production of 1982/Any Minute Now did contribute to what was at the time a crucial debate on nuclear arms. Its contribution was not to present a coherent and reasoned argument against nuclear weapons but to marshal the emotional powers evoked through a live performance in favour of the anti-nuclear position, with which its audience would already have had some sympathy. Its success as polemic was therefore crucially linked to the very things that made it good entertainment. This undoubtedly has been the case with the successful productions that Wildcat have mounted throughout the years. By and large they have been fortunate enough to have been continuously blessed with performers of a quality to be able to continue to make this contribution to political life in Scotland. Moreover, the creation of an open ending to the performance offered the possibility of connecting the

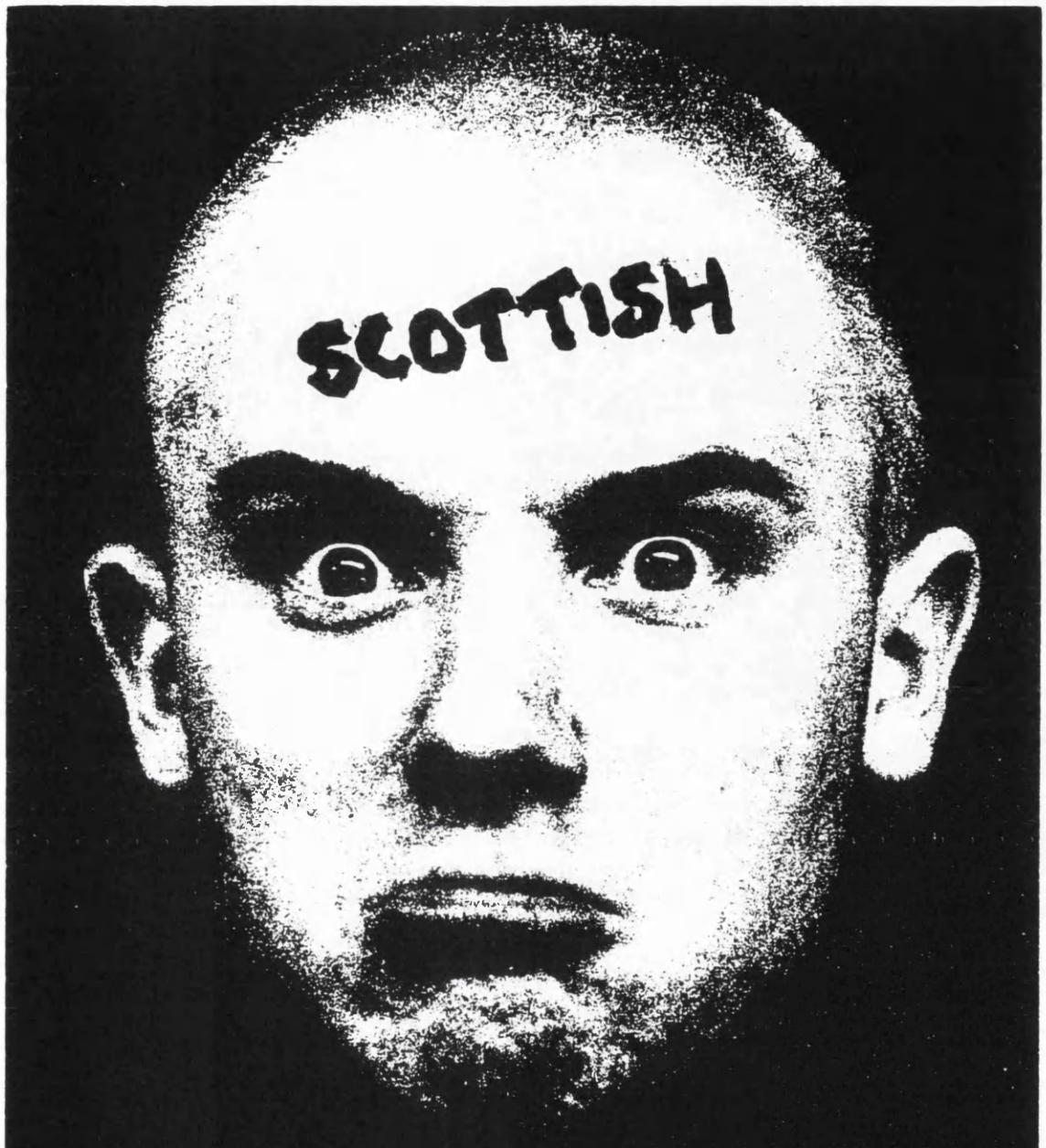
audience's theatrical experience to some sort of social action. By linking the production to support groups for the anti-nuclear campaigns the company demonstrated the possibility of moving beyond a mere entertainment frame, extending the possibility for political theatres as a source of social action.

## Wildcat Productions

- Sept-Nov '78 The Painted Bird David MacLennan & David Anderson.
- Feb-Apr '79 The Complete History of Rock 'N' Roll David McNiven & David Anderson.
- Sept-Nov '79 Dummies David Anderson & David MacLennan.
- Nov '79-  
-Mar '80 The Barmecide Feast David McNiven.
- Aug-Nov '80 Blooter David Anderson & David MacLennan
- Jan-Mar '81 Confessin' The Blues David Anderson & the company.
- Autumn '81 Hot Burlesque David McNiven.
- Feb-Apr & Aug  
& Jan-Feb '83 1982 (later Any Minute Now) David MacLennan & David Anderson, one song by David Hicks.
- Aug-Oct '82 His Master's Voice (a revival by the Brand New Wildcats of the original 7:84 show) David Anderson.
- Jan-Mar '83 A Bunch Of Fives David Anderson, Sean Hardie, Tom Leonard, Liz Lochhead, David MacLennan.
- May '83 On The Pigs Back John McGrath & David MacLennan. A street theatre show co-produced by 7:84 and Wildcat.
- Autumn '83 Welcome To Paradise David Anderson.
- Feb-Mar '84 Bed-Pan Alley David MacLennan Music by the company.
- May-June '84 Same Difference Liz Lochhead Music by David Anderson, Myra McFadyen, Robert Handleigh and Elaine C. Smith.
- Autumn '84 Dead Liberty David MacLennan & David Anderson.
- Feb-Apr '85 The Crack David Anderson & David MacLennan

- Apr-May '85 Business in The Back Yard David MacLennan & David Anderson.
- Oct-Nov '85 It's A Free Country David Anderson, Peter Arnott, Gordon Dougall, Marcella Evaristi, Rab Handleigh, Tom Leonard, Terry Neason, David MacLennan.
- Christmas '85 Wildnights at the Tron David Anderson, Peter Arnott, Tom Leonard, David MacLennan.
- Apr-May '86 The Beggar's Opera Or Peachum's Poorhouse (co-production with Royal Lyceum, Edinburgh) David MacLennan. Score by David McNiven.
- Sept-Oct '86 Heather Up Your Kilt David Anderson & David MacLennan.
- Nov '86 A Wildcat Christmas Carol adapted from Dickens by Peter Arnott. Music by David Anderson and the Company.
- Feb-May '87 Jotters David MacLennan & David Anderson.
- May '87 Roadworks Wildcat in Concert at the Volunteer Centre, Glasgow.
- May-Jun & Sept-Nov '87 The Steamie Tony Roper, songs by David Anderson.
- Christmas '87 The Magic Snowball David Anderson & David MacLennan.
- Apr-May '88 The Importance of Being Honest David McNiven
- May-Jun '88 The Celtic Story David MacLennan & David Anderson.
- Jul-Sept '88 Waiting On One Anne Downie. Songs by David Anderson & David MacLennan.
- Autumn '88 Fancy Rappin' David MacLennan & David Anderson.
- Nov '88 - The Magic Snowball David MacLennan & David

- Jan '89            Anderson.
- Feb-Mar '89        Border Warfare John McGrath. Music by Rab Handleigh.
- Summer '89        Harmony Row Peter Arnott and Peter Mullan. Songs by David Anderson, Craig Armstrong, Gordon Dougall, Alasdair Robertson.
- Aug-Oct '89        The Appointment     David Anderson & David MacLennan.
- Christmas '89     The Greedy Giant     David Anderson & David MacLennan.
- Mar-Apr '90        John Brown's Body John McGrath. Music by Rab Handleigh.
- Summer '90        Cleaning Up Andy Mackie & Lynn Bains.



**SCOTTISH**

**MERRY MAC FUN CO**

**THE MERRY MAC FUN SHOW**

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**'MURDEROUSLY FUNNY' TIME OUT**

**'HILARIOUS' RADIO FORTH**

Plate 6: Publicity Leaflet for MacLash

## 6. MACLASH

### Introduction

In the two previous case studies, the audience's pleasures in the production centred on processes of identification: in The Brus, these took the form of empathy between audience and character; in 1982, this empathy combined with the audience's identification with the performer playing the central role. In The Merry Mac Fun Show's MacLash, the identification was reciprocal between performers and audience, leading to a celebration of the shared community called into being by the production. It was in the creation of this shared community that much of the audience's pleasure in the production was located and which will be examined here<sup>1</sup>. There are two converging factors which need to be addressed before discussing the show, however. The first is the development of the Merry Mac Fun Co. itself, of which the Fun Show was a core element; the second concerns political and social attitudes to unemployment and the unemployed.

### Company Background

The Merry Macs are distinguished by being one of the few political theatre companies to emerge from Scotland's universities during the 1980s. All three founding members of the company, John Mackay, Jes Benstock and Duncan McLean, had been students at Edinburgh University; although Benstock dropped out while the other two completed degrees in English there. Their subsequent work was related to and influenced by developments within this academic environment around the early and mid-1980s: their own battles for recognition in an institution whose cultural life was dominated by English students from public school backgrounds; the academic reassessment of Scottish literature with the recognition of writers like Kelman, Lochhead and Leonard; and exposure to journals on Scottish culture and writing like Chapman, The New Edinburgh Review, and Cencrastus. It also coincided with

the rejuvenation of live comedy and cabaret performances by new Scottish talents such as Gerry Sadowitz and Craig Ferguson. Thus, although the group's was a relatively short existence, they were placed at the moment of convergence of a number of important cultural changes. Their theatrical style was the basis of a successful touring theatre, and although the company originated around Edinburgh University and went on to play successfully at London's Covent Garden and at The Edinburgh Festival Fringe, their significance as political performing artists lies in their development of a community constituency beyond the professional cabaret circuit into which they might easily have fitted.

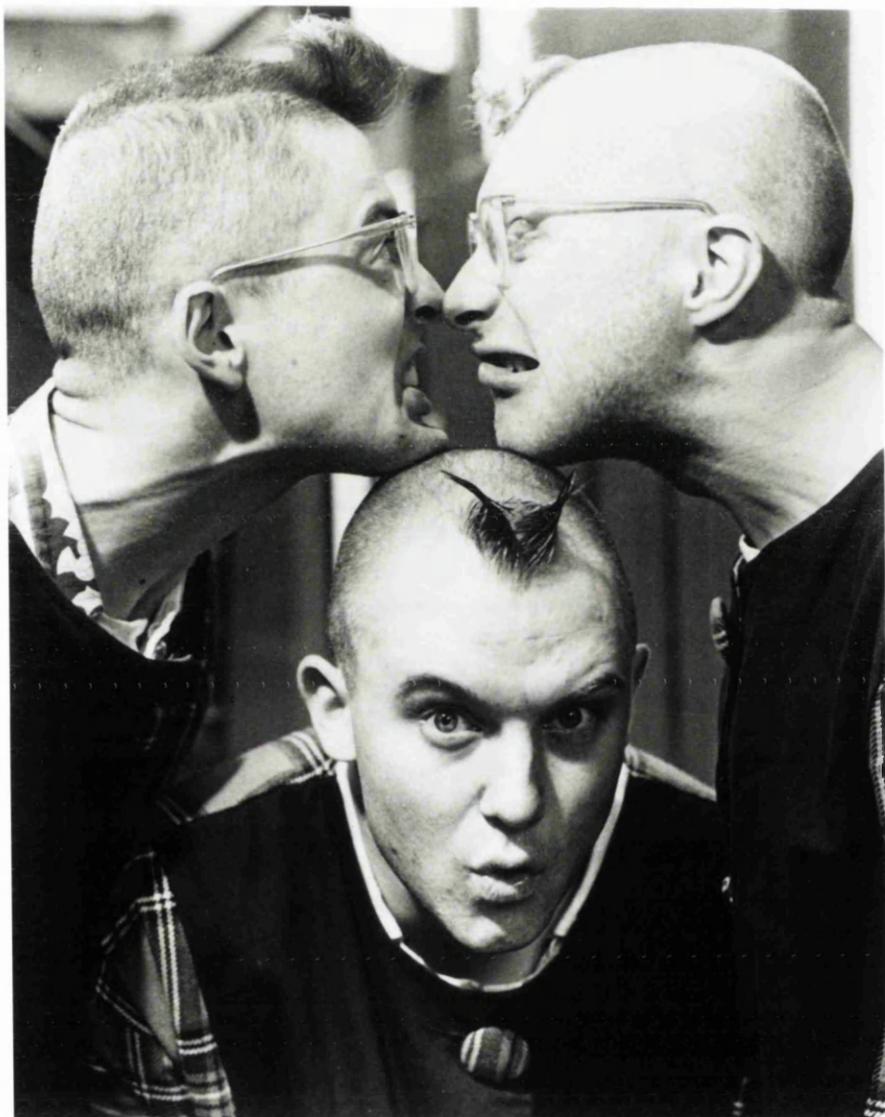
The Merry Mac Fun Show was initiated by John Mackay, who invited McLean and Benstock to join him in writing and mounting a cabaret show at Edinburgh University's student-run Bedlam Theatre for a lunch-time performance in November 1984. Both Mackay and McLean had written and performed as part of the university student theatre company (EUTC), while Benstock was unemployed and performing in the band Buddy Buddy and the Buddy Bud Buds and in a cabaret music act called Miles and Arthur. All three contributed material individually and the show was called The Merry Mac Fun Show, after the title of the joke section of the Sunday Post's children's page. As this title indicates, the various skits, sketches and songs of the show reflected their attitudes to cultural stereotyping (as embodied in that newspaper, for example), as well as engaging in politics and satirising individual figures within the university. Their costumes were whatever elements of tartan they could acquire; and it was this mock-tartantry that became the group's distinctive dress, although it was modified, firstly when these original costumes were stolen in 1985, and later when they had costumes made specially for them. After the success of this show, the trio decided to stay together as the Merry Mac Fun Show, and went on to perform this original material a number

of times at the university and at the Scottish Student Drama Festival at Easter 1985.

The discovery of a distinctive group style came, however, in London at the end of July 1985. Presenting a new version of The Merry Mac Fun Show, they were part of a cabaret in The London International Festival of Theatre, held in Camden. The comparison with other groups offered through this helped them realise some of their strengths and weaknesses. More importantly, the visit gave them their first taste of street performing in Covent Garden. McLean notes, 'If we hadn't performed (and failed) on the street, we would probably have carried on to be a competent but boring, third rate act' (McLean 1989a: 1). This relative failure led them to hone down their material and expand the performance style making their presentation bigger, faster and louder. The visual aspect seemed to be the crucial element in successful street performing, so as well as adapting this exaggerated performance style, the three got outrageous haircuts that were a combination of skinhead and punk styles and put together even more extravagant mock-tartan costumes. They realised also that they needed a more aggressive approach to attract and retain their audience: 'If it couldn't be said in a two and a half minute song then it wasn't worth being said!' They had arrived at their version of punk theatre.

Although they were not conscious imitators of any previous political theatre group, The Merry Macs' evolution echoes that of the Cartoon Archetypal Slogan Theatre (CAST) which had begun working in the 1960s. Their work, recounted by Roland Muldoon in Plays and Players (Jan 1977) and cited at length in Catherine Itzin's Stages in The Revolution (1980), foreshadows both the theatrical style and cultural influences that The Merry Macs would discover for themselves:

The most important thing that CAST did in the history of political theatre was to turn to the audience. At the time, we actually invented looking straight in the



**Plate 7: The Merry Mac Fun Show**

(Left-Right John Mckay, Duncan Mclean, Jes Benstock)

Photo: Douglas Wright.

audience's faces and telling them what we were talking about. We called it 'presentationalism' - sort of here we are entertainers, but theatre as well....We have a style and a philosophy of the style - invented in that pub in Camden Town. Peter Brook used to come and say, 'Where did you get that style from ?' As if I owed him something! And I told him our influences were working class entertainers - and they are. Chuck Berry and Little Richard for instance...We were the first rock 'n' roll theatre group.

(quoted Itzin 1980: 14)

Rather than Chuck Berry and Little Richard, the Merry Macs had been influenced by the punk revolution in popular music, with the aggressive and energetic performance styles of bands like The Undertones. Similarly, CAST's experience of playing in pubs parallels the learning process that the Merry Macs went through on the street:

We were allowed on in the interval. We soon learned that we had to work fast, to get at least a laugh a minute, if we were to stop the bastards going for a beer in the middle of it.

(quoted Itzin 1980: 14)

Prior to the visit to London, the Merry Macs had decided that they would operate their own venue at The Edinburgh Festival Fringe that year. Ben Twist, a fellow student at the university, was invited to act as administrator and on returning from London, The Fun Show took over the University's Hill Place drama studio, which had been let to them for a peppercorn rent. Two shows were performed here, the one they had used in London and a revival of Duncan McLean's The Ran Dan, which had been produced by EUTC in October 1984. The Ran Dan was a melodramatic/realist story of a butcher's boy's night out, and it was revived with the original cast. The Fun Show trio also performed outdoors at The Wireworks Playground, playing before 'Pookiesnackenburger', then acknowledged as masters of street comedy. The group all contributed to the costs of refitting the studio, working on a profit-share basis. They could not afford to hire proper seating banks so both shows were played as promenade performances. This proved to be an

advantage for the Fun Show. Armed with their recent street theatre experience, they leapt around the studio space inviting their audience to follow them. The performance was further energized since they had honed their material to fit it into a one hour slot. Its success was recognised when the Fun Show were announced as runners-up in the Perrier Awards for comedy, the prize for which was a cabaret spot in London's Donmar Warehouse. This in turn led to an appearance on television's Wogan (BBC 1) in October 1985. This recognition on a British level was strange given that the material was still dominated by the sending-up of cultural stereotypes, due to the fact that both the university and the Fringe itself were still perceived by the group as sites of cultural battles in which they were engaged as part of their everyday experience. Nonetheless, when the company played their first community venues around this time, at Leith Gala Day and at the Jack Kane Centre in Craigmillar the reaction was *also favourable*.

As Mackay and McLean were in their final year at university, the group only performed sporadically over the following year. One notable gig was a performance of 'The Fun Show' and The Ran Dan at the Third Eye Centre in November 1985. For the summer of 1986, the trio came together again with plans to launch a larger Merry Mac Fun Co. for the Edinburgh Fringe. They had already been advised in the Spring by SAC Assistant Drama officer, James Runcie, that funds might be made available from the SAC for an autumn tour, and it was decided that they would launch Duncan McLean's play, Sharny Dubs, to play for two weeks at the Hill Place venue before going on tour. The cast was drawn from those who had played in The Ran Dan the previous year. Since Sharny Dubs required one less performer than The Ran Dan, Judith Woods was to perform as one of the Fun Show. SAC funding required that the Fun Co. constitute itself as a formally organised company, with an office and designated administrator (Ben Twist). These structural changes happened largely in the Spring and early Summer in line

with Arts Council schedules and in time to make bookings for the tour.

Beforehand, the Fun Show had returned to Covent Garden, this time winning the theatre category of the Street Performers' Festival Awards. At the Fringe, the Fun Show performed two shows: MacAttack, outdoors in a free show at the Wireworks Playground; and Psychoshanter, at the Hill Place Venue. These shows were the summation of the group's views on Scotland, and they were again announced as runners-up for the Perrier Awards. Following the Fringe, and inspired by John McGrath's A Good Night Out (1981), Sharny Dubs was toured through The Highlands and Islands. The show was generally well-received in the many non-theatre venues in which it played. However, some Arts Centres complained that this was not adequate theatrical provision, and demanded that the SAC fund more conventional theatre. The company never again received SAC funding.

The success of The Sharny Dubs tour convinced the non-Fun Show performers that they had as great a stake in the company as the Fun Show. Their demands for greater say led to the company becoming a collective, in which everyone was invited to share jobs and develop new skills. Regular company meetings were established at which all decisions regarding the company's activities were to be made. As with many collectives theirs worked well when there were easy decisions to be made. However, when crucial core decisions tested the process, the weaknesses of the members involved emerged. Those who wanted to give less than a full commitment to any aspect of the company's activities could hide behind the collective structure, relying on other people to carry them along. Thus the lazy and the late placed strains on the cooperation required for the company to work. The imbalance in the make-up of the company, with The Fun Show performers as the main sources of material and the other members being mainly actors restricted the possibility of equal contributions from everyone. This was

exacerbated since few, if any, of the other performers showed the inclination or the ability to produce material. Further, the company's activities were obviously divided between The Fun Show performers and the others since The Fun Show was performing community tours throughout the year whereas everyone else worked mainly in the Summer and Autumn. At the same time, the full-time administrator, Ben Twist, by virtue of being in the office (increasingly identified as the hub of the company) was accorded a different status from the other members because he was dealing with so much of the day-to-day running.

Over the year, The Fun Show itself developed into a community touring group on a more organised basis than the previous ad hoc policy. It had reverted to the original three members as Judith Woods had gone abroad as part of her university studies. In the winter of 1986, the material was still similar to the Fringe shows. However, the community touring was complemented by the development of material about the experiences of being unemployed which the Fun Show performers were undergoing. In December 1986, the Fun Co. mounted a tour of a Christmas Show, Alien Punks versus Santa, which was a 95% sell out in the community venues to which it toured. Although it was done mainly as a piece of pure fun entertainment, the show contributed to tensions within the company regarding its administration, since it did not appeal to the SAC and as such jeopardised the chances of future funding.

By Spring 1987, the Fun Show had devised enough material for a completely new show, MacLash, which was again toured around community venues in Glasgow and Edinburgh. This reflected much more of the experiences of being unemployed which the company members had been facing between shows. The material was continually amended and added to throughout the tour. When MacLash was performed outdoors at Mayfest, the company won the festival's Street Theatre Award.

For the Fringe, the Fun Co. again ran the Hill Place venue as the Crown Theatre. There they presented John Mackay's I love You Baby, But I've Got To Run, a farce centring on a young Scot, Jimmie Broon, with a love of soul music, who accidentally gets mixed up with some shady characters. The cast included three newcomers to the company. The venue also presented other companies, such as Clyde Unity (who would in turn run it, after the Fun Co. had become defunct). For their part, the Fun Show wanted to distance themselves from the Fringe and only played free shows of MacLash at the Wireworks playground. Judith Woods had returned from Germany and they performed much of the material which had been developed on the previous tours, with the addition of a new Claimant Kid routine and 2 or 3 new songs.

Endorsement of the Fun Show's particular position within an unemployed constituency came in one particular gig during the Fringe period. A Benefit for Benefit was a charity event in support of the campaign against cuts in unemployment and other state benefits. It was mounted on August 23rd in a bus depot, off Edinburgh's Leith Walk. There were a number of acts and the Fun Show were to perform last. This was the ideal gig for the Fun Show and according to McLean they stole the show, as the one group able to excite the audience in that cavernous space. McLean notes:

The Benefit for Benefits was a kind of 'professional' highlight, in that we were seen to be equal to - in fact, (certainly on this night anyway) superior to - our peers in the cabaret world, eg. Gerry Sadowitz and Arnold Brown. Or, rather, the people who would have been our peers if we hadn't opted out of the cabaret circuit to do community shows. After a year of community work...we were pretty sure that we had made the right decision, not to go for fame and fortune, but this confirmed it. We had the technique and talent to be a top cabaret act but also had the moral and political 'superiority' to do community work instead! All this was felt subconsciously by me, John and Jes, I'm sure, not really spoken aloud.

(McLean 1989a: 7)

Problematically, this success illustrated some of the internal problems for the Fun Show. McLean notes that 'The Fun Show didn't take part in the cabaret circuit, nor did we fit into the SAC/arts centres idea of touring theatre. So, we were cut off from both sources of funding - and stability: [there was] no unity of purpose' (ibid). Even as they performed this gig, the original Fun Show trio were preparing to split up, since Jes Benstock had decided he wanted to do a course in film-making. This was looked upon as an opportunity for expanding the range of talents available in the company; The Fun Show would merely be dropped after the Fringe, perhaps to combine at a later stage. The Fun Co. would continue to mount productions using the members of the co-operative: already there were plans to tour Duncan McLean's new play, The Country Doctor, in the autumn.

Following the Fringe, the company mounted the tour of The Country Doctor. However, the tour did not receive Arts Council funding and the members were not paid a wage, receiving instead an allowance of fifty pounds per week. Since most of them had been surviving on social security between shows (rehearsals were not paid for either), further hardship on an extended tour with a shoestring budget exacerbated the personal tensions in the collective. John McKay had already announced that he was going to leave the company to write commercially, and was to take up a commission from the Traverse. This (and his decision to move to London) seemed like a sell-out given the refusal of the collective to have any connections with The Traverse, because of what they perceived as the elitism of its club status. After the tour, Ben Twist left to work for TAG as a trainee director, which left the company without an administrator for three or four months, until a new administrator, Katie Stewart, was appointed.

With only Duncan McLean left of the original initiators and writers, it was thrown on the other company members,

mainly actors, to produce the required material. After a six-week 'writing period' in the Spring of 1988, from which nothing emerged the collective broke up finally, with varying degrees of acrimony among the members.

This short history gives some indication of the Fun Show's importance in a number of respects. They were almost unique in their university background. Despite this beginning, they were one of the few groups who deliberately opted out of an established entertainment frame (as part of the cabaret circuit) in order to live out their political ideas. Finally, they were representative of a number of companies who had attempted to work collectively<sup>2</sup>, and who had been pulled apart by similar tensions. In the following analysis, I will focus on the qualities in performance which were the basis of the group's most successful work.

### **Political Context**

Before doing this, the context in which the company were performing needs to be explained. The company increasingly operated within a constituency which was unified by the shared experience of unemployment. McLean notes

Because literally everybody in the places we played had friends or relatives or neighbours who were unemployed, though they might not all be themselves, we had an immediate shared experience with them: ie some groups...were more prepared to listen to a group of white male skinhead youths than they might otherwise have been.

(McLean 1989b: 1)

For this reason, I will outline the political issues surrounding unemployment to indicate the group's relationship to the political climate.

As outlined in Chapter 2 (p50ff), mass unemployment was tolerated by the Thatcher governments in the drive to cut public spending and to combat inflation. The use of inflation as the most important indicator of economic strength rested, however, on certain ideologically bound assumptions about the unemployed and the causes of

unemployment.<sup>3</sup> Thus, in the mid 1980s in Britain, even when unemployment reached record levels, the government refused to accept responsibility. In comparison, Sweden, for example, had initiated a Royal Commission on long term unemployment when the rate there had reached only 2%. This concluded that 'In a society where unemployment is accepted, great material and social gaps develop, resulting in mutual isolation and alienation of differing groups. Any social order not based on full-employment must imply a restriction of living conditions and a squandering of human resources' (cited Sinfield 1981: 124).

Acceptance of widespread unemployment was reinforced by the successful marginalisation of the unemployed within Britain. This was achieved through a number of processes, the most important of which shifted the blame for unemployment from employers or the government to the unemployed themselves. In the late 1970s, New Right commentators had used the unemployed as scapegoats for Britain's ills. They had fuelled media speculation on the 'scrounging controversy', in which thousands were reported to being paid exorbitant sums from public coffers to remain idle: the Conservative election campaign in 1979 focused on the slogan 'Labour isn't Working'. This speculation took effect in the 1980s with government conducting anti-scrounging campaigns within the benefits system and cutting the categories of people eligible for certain benefits to 'ensure that help went only to those in real need'. Moreover, government presented unemployment as the natural consequence of making industries slimmer and fitter: workers and trade unions had made industries uncompetitive through over-manning and under-production in the past and were having to pay for that in the present. Paradoxically, any improvement in employment prospects may, as Sinfield points out, 'lead the fortunate to assure themselves and their friends that jobs are to be found if only those out of work looked hard enough' (Sinfield 1981: 129).

As the unemployment figures worsened during the recession of the early 1980s, the government further attempted to distance itself from the problems of the unemployed (and hence marginalise them from the political agenda) by addressing unemployment through training rather than job provision. Thus, for example, even though there was public concern over high levels of youth unemployment, the government replaced the Youth Opportunities Programme (YOP) with the Youth Training Scheme (YTS). Although YOP was flawed, it had the merit of addressing the issue as one of job creation. YTS was presented as a way of making young people employable: it disguised the fact that, as David Raffé concludes, 'the main reason for youth unemployment had nothing to do with the competitive strength of the young people and adults, but lay in the labour market processes which made young people vulnerable in a recession. No amount of extra education or training would change these processes' (Raffé 1983: 192).

The position of the unemployed is, even at the best of times, one of deviancy from the normal ways (within the hegemonic ideology) of participating in society. It is made more difficult since unemployment is unevenly distributed through society: its worst and longest lasting effects are on the unskilled working class employees who lack job security. The proportion of such people within Scotland is much higher than in other areas in Britain. In 1992, Scotland had 6 of the the 10 worst areas for long term unemployment in Britain. Added to this is that unskilled working-class people are much more vulnerable to charges of malingering than, for example, white-collar workers. Sinfield reports that 'there seems to be a greater readiness to account for lack of mobility or prolonged unemployment among senior white-collared staff in terms of institutional or employer-determined factors than the personal characteristics that tend to be stressed in accounting for

the experience of low-status and low-skilled unemployed' (Sinfield 1981: 146).

It is crucial to acknowledge these facets of unemployment in order to understand the role that the Merry Macs had in performing within communities where few people remain unaffected by it. The impact of their work directly related to the experiences of their audiences, experiences held in common by both audience and performers alike.

### **Production Analysis**

When they performed at the Rutherglen Centre For The Unemployed on May 15th 1987, The Merry Mac Fun Show formed part of a bill of performances from unemployed and community theatre groups. Although professional in the sense of being highly polished performers by this stage, The Fun Show can be seen as part of the same movement from which the other groups sprang as they had rejected the allure of the professional cabaret circuit in order to play community venues, largely to an unemployed constituency. In this analysis, I will concentrate on the performance by the Fun Show, rather than the evening as a whole.

The performers on this occasion were Jes Benstock, Duncan McLean and John McKay and much of the material, in particular 'The Claimant Kid' part of the show, was new, being tried out in the early stages of this particular tour. This material displayed the influence of Country and Western music much more than in previous Fun Show performances, where it had been sporadically present. At the same time, the concerns of the performers were now much more to address the unemployment they now faced in contrast to their earlier material which had addressed cultural issues. As with all the Fun Show's work, the show was revised throughout the tour, and by the time of the return of Judith Woods, for the outdoor Fringe shows in Edinburgh's Wireworks Playground much of it was altered. This particular

performance was split into two parts which opened and closed the evening's bill.

The performances were prefaced by a member of the centre staff welcoming the audience and visiting groups and attempting to set them at their ease by explaining that they should not be inhibited by any sense of 'correct' theatrical protocol. He then introduced The Fun Show. To applause, the performers entered at a jog from the back of the hall through the audience, humming the tune to 'The Lone Ranger' television show<sup>4</sup>, their hands over their faces as masks. They were costumed in red capes over black shirts, trimmed in cowboy fashion, and knee-length black shorts, together with outlandish hairstyles of skinheads with spikes of hair. These new costumes had been specially made for the tour, and marked a move away from the tartanry in earlier shows. A slick introduction with the group's characteristic interposing of lines between the three performers and witty word-plays set the tone of a fast-moving light-hearted performance. McLean comments that they had been impressed by the Brechtian notion of theatre as a place for sport and fun and of giving an initial 'display of skill' as a means of attracting the audience's attention: 'John was very keen on the phrase 'a display of skill' - [which] could be verbal or musical as well as physical - and reckoned it was a way to gain the audience's attention/awe/admiration' (McLean 1989b: 2).

The performers then used a song to introduce themselves to the audience. Using the conceit of the 'Big Mac' hamburger and a rap technique in which each of the group breaks to introduce himself individually (influenced by rap group Run DMC's 'You be illin'), this song characterises a basic ingredient in the whole performance: the playing off of popular/populist elements of culture (advertisements, Country and Western and pop songs and styles, television programmes) against subverting reworkings of the form to present new subject matter. For example, during the

'instrumental break' of this opening song Jes Benstock sings 'Shake 'n' Mac / Put the freshness back', parodying the television advertisement for Shake 'n' Vac carpet cleaner. By using the 'hook' elements of popular media they were able say what they wanted to say in a way that was both recognisable and memorable for the audience. At the same time, by insinuating different meanings and values into these popular forms they subverted them at the point at which they enter the audience's consciousness.

This is most obvious where a catchy theme tune from, for example, an advertisement is lifted and new words put to it. In 'Down, Down, Down' the tune was that used by the supermarket chain William Low in its television advertisements, which had itself been taken from the film Bugsy Malone. McLean explains the ideas behind the song:

Thatcherism/free market capitalism generally proclaims as its triumph the fact that a greater and greater choice is opening up before me, the consumer...the problem is that while these choices are available for some people, they're only made possible by horrifically restricting the choices on offer to millions of other - equally deserving - people, eg, me, the 'I' of 'Down, Down, Down', the Mac audiences, the populations of Pilton, Rutherglen, etc....

(McLean 1989b: 3)

The song expresses this through the synecdochic experience of a young unemployed person, faced with the range of fine cheeses at the supermarket, but knowing he can only afford bland Scottish cheddar. The last verse poses the question

Why should I eat crummy stuff when  
William Low's has got enough to  
Feed the hungry claimant host who  
Daily dine on beans on toast? And  
Multinational profits soar  
While every day my basket's getting lighter

The last lines in this section' associatively link multinational profiteering and the impoverishment of the unemployed, in a manner that avoids 'preaching'. The final lines of the song play on a familiar Marxist slogan, 'Shoppers of the world, unite/ You've nothing to lose but

your chainstores'. This pun inserts a level of reflexive irony into the presentation, preventing the sloganeering from becoming too serious or po-faced. This kind of reflexive irony was an ingredient in a number of the songs and sketches. It is rooted as a Brechtian alienation device, drawing attention to the theatricality of the performance, and hence to the skills of the performers, a point to which I will return later. That it might undermine the seriousness of the performers' 'message' was not felt to be detrimental since, as McLean acknowledges, the group saw their role as more agitational than educational:

This...reminds me of the hours we spent discussing the old Bolshevik (I think) slogan: Educate, Agitate, Organise...It's a good slogan. Obviously 75% of our role was an agitational one, with a little educational (eg explaining the poll tax before much of the media was paying it any attention at all; explaining the purposes of new forms like the UB671 and how to get round them) and hardly organisational at all, except for vague nods in the direction of collectivism/co-operativeness as made concrete in our own company structure and in the direction of the claimant's union...Presupposing all this, of course, is the 100% commitment to a foundation of entertainment.

(McLean 1989b: 3)

Moreover, the song still has an effect on the audience, since such uses of advertisements undercut the advertisements themselves at the point at which they enter the audience's consciousness. Each subsequent hearing of the advertisement is tempered with the knowledge of the group's reworking, inserting a level of irony into the reception of the advertisement.

Having established themselves with their audience through the introductory song, the performers elaborate the spoken element of the show. Little of the show can be said to be purely verbal since the experience of street performing had resulted in the development of a highly visual mode of presentation where faces are pulled and gestures balloon into grotesque mimes. The constant switching of the speaking role (often mid-sentence) avoids

the monotony of a single narrator, allowing all three performers to be involved equally throughout the performance, and ties in with another of the show's targets, the ideology of the bourgeois individual. By switching the speaking role, the group replaces an individual narrative role as unifying voice with a collective voice to which they all contribute (as they had done in devising the material in the first place). In this spoken introduction the performers state their hostility to the idea of the heroic individual (epitomized by The Lone Ranger), referred to as 'bourgeois individualist crap', preferring to be 'The Collectivist Rangers'. Unfortunately many of the jokes in this section are too weak to support the portentous political phrases that are hung on them. As an introduction this part was dropped from the show fairly early on in the tour. By keeping the tone light through involving the audience in banter about football the performers diminish the deadening effect that this might have had.

The introduction over, the performers set about establishing the Wild West background and theme to be developed in the second half of the performance. To involve the audience and to break with the spoken introduction suggestions are invited from them about the kind of things that they might associate with this Western setting. This pantomime performer technique helps break down the barriers between audience and performers, encouraging the audience to feel that they are contributing to the show and that it is not therefore the sacrosanct property of the performers. Again this echoes Brecht's ideas about making the theatre like a sporting event. Of course, to maintain the structure of the show such involvement needs to be contained within certain boundaries, although here by having a member of the audience decide when this section will come to a conclusion the audience are set as participators in the show rather than passive recipients. The reward for such felicitous participation is a song with which the audience can join in.

The use of song is an essential element in all the company's work and the particular song that follows the introduction, 'Bedsitter Blues', illustrates the strengths of much of the group's sung material. The appeal of the lyrics comes through a concentration on the everyday symptoms of the condition described. Such description is mounted from one individual's clearly identifiable point of view. This song expresses the depression of having no money when the social security money runs out and there is nothing to distract from the poverty of life without work. This comes through details like missing Eastenders because the television has broken down, or, having no money to put in the meter to boil a kettle for tea. Such details display the performers' credibility as people who share the circumstances of their audience. The intertextual references of the performance are to already established popular texts, such as the television soap opera or advertisements, and to the kind of precise details which are instantly recognisable to the audience. Importantly, McLean states:

our tastes in music and comedy/drama were popular/in popular forms, so that's what we produced too...we didn't come home at night and listen to string quartets or go for evenings out to Michael Clark or Pavarotti or the fucking Traverse...

(McLean 1989b: 10)

What is important for the audience is that it is only through such concrete details and intertextuality that this is made apparent, and thus, the perspective of the group becomes respected and trusted.

Formally, although the first verse of 'Bedsitter Blues' starts off as typically melancholic blues number, it soon picks up into a lively pace. McLean describes the structure of the song thus,

The opening verse is meant to be a parody of a blues song, viz the classic blues riff on the guitar, the perversion of the quintessential blues opening like 'I woke up this morning ...my woman done gone/ my head was hanging low, etc.'...we wanted to make a positive statement and not just wallow in misery, so we moved up

a tempo to a kind of rockabilly beat - though still over the same 12 bar blues chord.

(McLean 1989b: 3/4)

The song employs strong simple rhyme schemes, and the lyric emerges (sometimes in harmony) clear and witty over the single acoustic guitar. The style is switched again in Jes Benstock's solo 'scat' piece, imitative of the non-verbal mouth-music used by jazz performers. The ending returns to a parody of a blues song. A typical blues feature is that when the singer is coming to the final words he will sing a semitone lower than the tune calls for and then 'bend' the note up again to its proper place. Here, the performers exaggerate this feature by going down on their knees. This reworking of the formal aspects of a blues number is important for the effect of the song. In the first place, it demonstrates the skills of the performers. They were unemployed and talented - they embodied the point of the song, that unemployed people are not, by virtue of being unemployed, useless. Moreover, by bringing quality entertainment to their audience they demonstrate their commitment to them (they could be successful on a cabaret circuit, but are here), and reinforce their belief that the people who make up this audience deserve nothing less than the best. Richard Seyd makes a further relevant point in discussing the theatre of Red Ladder:

Eventually we realised that the belief that if your ideas are correct then it doesn't matter how well or badly you put them over is false...This belief that skills and the use of entertaining forms is irrelevant is rooted in the argument that as socialist theatre workers we merely happen to be using theatre to communicate political objectives. This disrespect and mechanical relegation of the forms used do a disservice to the ideas being communicated...

(Seyd 1975: 39)

Here, the performers' skills reinforce the ideas because they illustrate how the performers embody the ideas they are proposing; and, because they are entertaining. McLean adds that

I think the way in which we gaily mixed musical forms - blues, rockabilly, jazz; or hip hop and country; or soul and bluegrass; and punk through everything, betraying our roots - was a big reason why our songs were good, memorable, catchy, different and full of musical interest, despite being performed by three untrained voices and a rickety guitar.

(McLean 1989b: 4)

Furthermore as McLean describes above, instead of treating this potentially depressing situation as a cause for passive misery (as a typical blues treatment would have done), the treatment is upbeat, defiant and aggressive. This decision to avoid dwelling on the negative aspects of unemployment connected with the prevailing attitude taken by the members of the Community Arts Network Strathclyde (CANS) who had co-ordinated the evening's performances. Greg Giesekam describes the position of the CANS groups when mounting the Calton Weavers' Project, which had coincidentally taken place not long before this performance:

CANS maintained that the memorial event should not be a standard large-scale history pageant re-enacting the story, but that participating groups should explore their response to the issues involved and equivalent oppressions today. Instead of mournful nostalgia, the best tribute to the Martyrs would be to confront present political crises.

(Giesekam 1988: 11)

The Merry Mac performance is an affirmation that life on the dole does not have to be experienced miserably and passively, that it can be reacted to in other ways. This is continually reinforced. For example, in 'Molotov Cocktail', with which the first half of the performance finishes, the state of mind of the unemployed person is described as a cocktail:

You pour self-hatred unto pity  
 Leave it till it's flat and stale  
 A dashing of hope, and freshly crushed pride  
 That's how you make  
 A big broo cocktail

contrast, his former boss can go into the bar and order whatever he wants. The young man's response is to make a different drink - a Molotov cocktail - with which he can blow up his boss' car and the pub. As in 'Bedsitter Blues' there is a mixture of musical styles, with a country riff in the verses, but a chorus tinged with a harder punk edge.

Between the songs, there were a number of short sketches or skits. These contained the more obviously propagandist elements of the performance, and were tied into details included in the company's programme, The Fun Sheet. Just as tunes for songs were borrowed from advertisements, the sketches often used forms borrowed from other areas. For example, the first follows the pattern of the government's television advertisement for the Restart Scheme. Most of the subversive effect of the skit comes from the caricatured presentation of the two characters who in the advertisement meet and discuss the opportunities offered by the Restart Scheme. Where the advertisement attempts to present positive role models for the young unemployed, here the 'positive' characteristics are rendered ridiculous through caricature. They cease to be real people as the advertisement proposes, and instead are shown as two-dimensional propagandist ideals. At the same time, the conclusion that even these stereotypes arrive at is that the Restart Scheme is insidious and therefore to be rejected. The undercutting of a supposedly persuasive advertising campaign which disguises exploitation of the young unemployed is effective in this context since it is being done before the very people at whom such advertising is aimed.

Similarly, the most directly propagandist part of the show follows in a sketch about the Poll Tax. Again the format includes elements from television commercials, but it also challenges the rhetoric of leaflets circulated by the Conservative Party presenting arguments in favour of the tax

prior to its introduction. The sketch presents the government version through two-dimensional characters: the aged Tory voter with an artificial hip joint courtesy of his private health care, played by John Mackay and five able-bodied wage earners, represented by Duncan McLean, who live in the same kind of house as the old man and pay exactly the same rates. Thus, the falseness of the basic premise behind the tax is illustrated. In the peripheral estates of Scotland's Central Belt it is unlikely that many households have more than one full-time wage earner, let alone five.

The skit is then developed to show that the idea that not everyone pays rates is equally spurious. This presents the transaction of the sum of the rates from the tenants to the landlord to the council. Although the tenant seems to only be paying rent, a 'slow-motion' version of the transaction shows that in fact the rent that he pays includes the value of the rates which the landlord pays to the council. This 'slow motion' version follows the same format as a government information advertisement on television which had warned against pickpockets, and which itself had been based on the replay techniques used for televised football. While the rating system may be unfair the unfairness of the Poll Tax is then illustrated through the situations of landlord and tenant once the tax has been introduced. The landlord, now represented by Duncan McLean as irredeemably mercenary, enhanced by devil horns, is shown to be six hundred pounds better off. His tenant, played as a much more normal young man, is unable to get a reduction in rent to account for the rates that are no longer being paid out of it and has now to pay the same rent and the four hundred pounds community charge as well. The sketch successfully explains the full implications of the Poll Tax in simple visual terms before campaigns to fight it had really begun. It emphasises the injustice of the tax with the slogan 'It's only fair' resounding with irony until one

concludes that it is fair only 'If you're already a rich bastard !'.

Here again the group undermine any idea of the unity of character and performer. In the words of Arthur Sainer, the performers 'absent themselves from character' (Sainer 1975: 14), using a presentational style of performance. Alan Filewod describes this as a way in which actors 'signal the characteristics of the original without losing their individuality' (Filewod 1987: 40). Importantly, the qualities which the performers show, while specific to the character, illustrate not merely personal traits but social and political roles and are therefore characteristic of a whole class. This was one of the few sketches when the Fun Show went in for the crude symbolism associated with agit-prop in using the plastic horns to signify the landlord. However, the use of a prop to signify character role was important for the second part of the show, 'The Claimant Kid', to which I will now turn.

After the other groups had performed their pieces, demonstrating varying degrees of polish and skill, The Fun Show came on for 'The Claimant Kid', which looks at the state of being unemployed through an episodic format and Wild West setting similar to the original television series of The Lone Ranger, for example. This allows the use of a ready-made and reasonably familiar set of stereotypes, but refrains from the cliched stereotyping of top-hatted capitalist versus flat-capped worker. Using stereotypes avoids explanation for the individual characters since they are presented in terms of functions rather than being of interest in themselves. The same applies to original Westerns themselves, of course, and it is possible that in using the Western paradigm in this way it may reflect back in some way on the understanding of the original paradigm. Recognition of the skill with which the model is reworked is undoubtedly part of the enjoyment of the show. Rather than present a sequential analysis of the piece episode by

episode there are a number of general points that can be made about it which will serve to indicate its strength and weaknesses.

The first of these is that the unemployed character functions as hero, the benefit system as something fraught with danger and those that administer it as villains. Thus, identification with the unemployed person is presented as positive, imbued with the heroic appeal of the underdog with right on his side. Simultaneously, the idea of the heroic individual is undercut since in fact the hero is a bumbling naif, who has to be repeatedly rescued by his horse. Further, the roles of each of the characters are taken by each of the performers in turn. In this way the idea of the isolated heroic individual is deconstructed to suggest the wider application of the situations in which he finds himself: what is important is the role which he plays within the system, not his personal characteristics. This fluidity of representation is achieved through the simple device of designating one stetson as the Kid's and another as that of his arch-enemy, Doctor Dole. The Kid's horse needs only a pair of hands serving as ears to designate his character. That the Kid is only finally saved by the collective action of the audience, encouraged by the horse establishes him firmly as a mock-hero.

This fluidity in the representation of character was again an opportunity to demonstrate the skills of the performers, just as their songs had been. Alan Filewod writes of the transformation of objects that

The actor invests the object with significance by usage. This principle of transformation is generally applied to give documentary fact theatrical life, allowing us to witness the creative process of the actor transforming fact into meaning.

(Filewod 1987: 44)

Here, the audience witnesses the transformation of the performer as he takes on each role. By witnessing the creative process, and the ease with which it is implemented,

the audience sees the skill involved in a slick and well-coordinated performance.

This slickness is important since the narrative is broken into a number of episodes, each ending with a parodied cliffhanger, each of which needs to be set up before breaking from the narrative. A signature tune is established, based on a combination of the songs 'Rawhide' and 'Ghostriders in the Sky' and this opens and closes each episode. In between come 'adverts', (or, as one of the group adlibs, each of these is 'more of a subvert really'). This format allowed the blending of Duncan McLean's interest in Country and Western music with the interest in cult television series that the other two shared. During the show the Claimant Kid faces a number of different situations that anyone signing on would face and the show included an informational content as to how these might be dealt with. During the course of the tour contact between the group and unemployed workers' centres and claimants' unions helped the development of this aspect of the show.

The main thrust of The Claimant Kid is to undercut the government promotion of various training schemes for the unemployed by caricaturing the advertisements used to sell them. This connects directly with the political context outlined as a prelude to this analysis. Much of this advertising relies on the connotative power of certain metaphors to associate positive qualities with the schemes: Action For Jobs is presented as a door opening from unemployment back into the 'real' world of work; the shortage of skilled labour is a 'skills gap' which can only be crossed once the unemployed have retrained on the Job Training Scheme. In this series of encounters these metaphors are made literal to accentuate negative connotations for the same images. The Action For Jobs door does not open up new vistas but is a trap which shuts ominously behind the Kid, offering escape only at the price of thirteen weeks benefit (the amount to be withheld for

withdrawing from one of these schemes); the Action For Jobs stairs are an obstacle leading nowhere, rather than a means of advancement. The bridging of the skills gap is not achieved by enabling retraining but by the exploitation of the claimant. The truth behind Action For Jobs is not then the bright new world of the advertisements but a dark dungeon where wage slavery and exploitation are licenced under government training schemes.

This point is made explicitly when the Kid goes to attend his Restart interview. This is presented as a showdown between the Kid and Doctor Dole, who plots to cut down the number of claimants. It is not the enabling process claimed in government rhetoric, but rather a conflict between the individual trying to defend his rights and state bureaucrats zealously administering unjust and ideologically-bound policies. The Kid is subject to various forms of intimidation but by following certain tactics is able to defend himself. He brings a witness; employs time-wasting tactics; refuses to commit himself to anything definite; and maintains his demand for a real job or real training. Despite this, Doctor Dole seems to be about to win the day until the Kid's horse intervenes to reveal that he is not in fact a horse but a representative of the Claimants' Union called C.U. Jimmy<sup>6</sup>. Calling on the audience for help, he overcomes Doctor Dole by uniting them in collective action against him. No individual alone can alter the state system through his or her unique powers which might be emulated. Even the horse is powerless individually and requires the power of collective action in order to bring about change. The group (here the audience) replace the individual as the heroic unit.

While the show was intended to be primarily entertaining, its informational function was emphasised through The Fun Sheet which contained details of organisations which help with benefit problems. This information was punctuated with cartoons and drawings

illustrating the motto of 'fighting back with fun'. Notably, McLean comments that

We were careful to steer away from the assumption that we, being semi-educated thinkers/readers/writers, would know more than our audiences. We didn't feel we were in much of a position to 'Educate' very much. And that would have been condescending anyway and a turn off...

(McLean 1989b: 5)

He continues

'The truth behind...' seems to be one of the key phrases in the Macs. We were always trying to reveal what lay behind the popular media image of the Scot, or, behind the Nuclear Industry's blandishments, or, behind MSC propaganda...we didn't have any privileged information; we didn't claim to know 'THE TRUTH', while everybody else was in the dark. It was more that we were finding out things at the same time as the audience, exploring the dark areas behind the lies; sometimes we came across illuminations from their help as much as the other way round.

(ibid: 7)

Much of the strength of the overall performance came from the professional performance skills of the group, strong material and an enormous amount of energy, deriving from a commitment to the work in hand. These factors were the root of the group's success in a wide variety of venues. However, further factors in their success as a community touring group were the kinds of audience to which they played and the venues in which they performed. Firstly, the content of the material was directly relevant to the audience to which they were playing: there is a concentration on the everyday, concrete, material conditions of unemployment. Just as the social realism of Alan Bleasdale's The Boys From The Black Stuff (BBC) had succeeded because of its attention to the every day conditions of the unemployed, so too here the same attention is used successfully. Recognition is an important element

in the audience's relationship to the material. This is not a random quality, however. The Fun Show were enormously influenced by Scots writers like Jim Kelman with their concentration on the material conditions of ordinary people. In an interview in the Edinburgh Review (no.73, 1986) Kelman provided an inspiration if not a manifesto for the group: 'There is nothing more potentially subversive than gaining a full understanding of how the lives of ordinary people are lived from moment to moment' (p24).

This attention to detail has a second effect in that it validates the experiences which are presented as shared between performers and audience. All the material was recognisable as the product of the performers' own experiences of being on the dole. It was clearly not the product of a patronising attempt to be 'right-on'. McLean recalls

that is what we felt/thought, and I think it was appreciated. A few times in the earlier days we had fallen into the trap of discussing issues because they were 'right-on' - no, not that - we genuinely thought that they were important issues, but our experience/knowledge of them was superficial and this showed through.

(McLean 1989b: 9)

The personal quality of these songs is emphasized by the use of an individual perspective in all of the songs, usually through the use of a first person voice. While the experiences which are related are simultaneously personal to the speaking voice of the lyric, they are shared by the audience, without exhibiting any tailoring to make them politically correct.

The concentration on the everyday details is closely linked to the adaptation of country music within the performance. It was a form by which McLean in particular was heavily influenced. Not only does the form rely on strong tunes with simple melody lines, but there are particular traditions in it which concentrate on strong simple narratives rooted in everyday experiences. Writer John

Byrne said of Country music, 'It's real working-class music. It's got a story to it, but there's nothing phoney and trumped up about the sentiment' (The List 23 Feb-8 Mar 1990, p5). Country has also been described as 'white man's blues', and has attracted a wide following in Scotland. Ellen Kelly ascribes this popularity to the fact 'that it is sung in English, but it isn't 'English' - ie not produced Down There. The vast majority of our favourite C & W tunes are produced by America, a nation with which Scotland has had a long love affair' (1990: 23). She traces within the form 'a powerful expression of individualism. Many C & W performers use almost exclusively their own materials, drawing on their own lives and upbringings. Rarely in C & W is there mention of a wider society, or anything that transcends the immediate circumstances of the singer' (ibid). However, this last point ignores the lyrical quality of the work through which the performer's very individualism invites identification, which may, if it also expresses how the listener feels, make the connection to wider circumstances and hence reflect back on the circumstances of the audience members themselves. Kelly herself makes this point in the same article: 'Everyone can relate to the themes of C & W, everyone can allow their own experience to colour their perception of the songs. Given the national predilection for soggy tartan myths, is it any wonder that C & W, which operates best at the gut level, should find Scots so receptive?' (ibid).

While the community context of the performance meant that the content of the show would be particularly relevant to the audience, it also provided these spectators with particular pleasures. While the performers had successfully used a presentational style of acting to prevent identification with the characters they had represented, the skills involved in this process encouraged identification with the performers themselves. It was they, not a set of central characters, around whom the material centred. However, there was a process of reciprocity involved in this

identification. The care taken by the performers in the production and performance of their material to address the condition of unemployment they shared with their audience, reflects the identification back on the spectators. The distinction between performer and spectator is broken down: it is as if the performers belong to the spectators. This concurs with John McGrath's ideas about the role of the socialist theatre performer:

The basic attitude of socialist performers, as far as I'm concerned, should be that they are on the same level as the audience - they are the same as the audience. Identification should take place between the audience and the performers on a personal level, which is certainly not the case in bourgeois theatre. These performers are there to do things for the audience because it's their job and because they have the skills. They can play the fiddle or sing or show other characters clearly, they can time a gag, they can make an exit, but at the end of that they can be the same again.

(McGrath 1979: 48)

In this performance, it was not so much that the performers returned to being the same again after the performance, as much as that they were engaged in a constant and rapid alternation between asserting their similarity to the audience (in experience and situation) and demonstrating their distinction from them (through their performance skills).

Such a process has been described as distinctive of Scots comedians (inevitably in contrast to the work of their English counterparts):

'I think it's the vulnerability aspect', says [comedian Arnold] Brown, in his unmistakably warm Glasgow rasp. 'Even though Gerry [Sadowitz] is so vitriolic on stage, somehow there's a vulnerability about him and that's marvellous. William McIlvanney said that the difference between Scottish comedians and South of England comedians is that the English say 'I know and you don't know', whereas the Scottish say, 'I don't know and you don't know and don't forget it'.

(Fisher 1992: 12)

In the Rutherglen show, this was validated since a large part of the audience was made up of the other groups who had already performed earlier in the evening. Thus, the performance acted as a focus for a communal feeling of solidarity.

An important element in the creation of the pleasures of this kind of communal feeling came also from the physical aspects of the venue. The performers had shared the same facilities as the audience; meeting them beforehand rather than being closeted away in a green room. Susan Bennett comments that 'The physical arrangement of a theatre as well as the degree of contact between performers and spectators at this stage [ie, prior to performance] may well limit, or even determine, the interpretive strategies adopted by the collective audience' (Bennett 1990: 148). Even before they had performed then, the group had built up an initial contact and rapport with their audience: demonstrating that they did not feel that they as performers were anything different to or separate from the audience. Moreover, the space in which they performed was small enough to allow an intimate proximity between performers and spectators. The room in which the performance took place was the main rectangular hall of the UWC, with the audience seated at tables, leaving a small floor area in which to perform at one end. Even this area was encroached on with children sat on the floor and banners from various of the other groups propped around the back wall. This was a sociopetal use of the space, as a forum in which people would be brought together. Of course, this enhanced the spectators' impression of the performers' commitment, since in such small spaces there is little possibility of giving a half-hearted or pedestrian performance - they could see them working hard, laughing, sweating.

The performance therefore created an occasion of celebration not of the facts of unemployment but of the solidarity within the audience and between the spectators

and the performers. It can be seen in the context of the work of CANS, particularly through the Calton Weavers' Project. Again Gieseckam's account of that work during May Day 1987 is apposite:

The willing tolerance of the audience for the occasional mishaps in performance is not patronizing, but seems, if the applause is anything to go by, to stem not just from a sense of political solidarity but also from a sense of genuine recognition of the courage and imagination displayed by people who are so often marginalized, people for whom and about whom others often speak (left and right alike), denying them a platform for their own voice. Almost all the groups are from 'Areas of Priority Treatment' (Region-speak for the old term 'areas suffering multiple social and economic deprivation') - the places that don't figure in the 'Glasgow's Miles Better' slogan. In the month following, different groups visit each other, to workshop together, perform for each other, discuss their work; territorial barriers, notorious in Glasgow, melt a little as people who for the most part are living in the 'underclass' of Thatcher's Britain gather to share their work together.

(Gieseckam 1987: 11)

The Macs performance is part of this process - not an attempt to speak for the audience but contributing a perspective alongside those which the audience bring themselves. It offers what Terry Lovell has identified as 'pleasures of resistance' which include

pleasures of common experiences identified and celebrated in art, and through this celebration given recognition and validation; pleasures of solidarity to which this sharing may give rise, pleasure in shared and socially defined aspirations and hopes, in a sense of identity and community.

(1981: 95 - cited Tulloch 1990: 15)

Thus, even where there are no other groups performing, by presenting themselves as being on the same level as the audience, solidarity is displayed in a celebration of shared experiences. Such celebration provides a supportive function. It is itself a means of re-establishing the rights of the unemployed to fair treatment in their own minds, despite the erosion of confidence through sustained attacks

and attempts to socialise them as marginalised scroungers. The performance is also supportive in recognising the rights of the unemployed to the same quality of life as the rest of society, of which to be entertained by live theatre is a part. In expressing experiences and feelings which are otherwise presented as peripheral, the performance incidentally gave a voice to the audience which they could recognise as their own. This public expression is a social means of validating the right of that community to speak and to be listened to. Even the fact that the Macs were appearing on the same bill as community groups, something that many 'professional' groups would refuse to do, acknowledges the value of whatever these groups have to say. Moreover, the capacity of the material to subvert elements of the image-culture of the 1980s tackles capitalism at the point between production and consumption - the parasitic world of marketing and advertising on which it relies to reproduce itself. Finally, and most importantly, the performance showed that entertainment can be political and still entertaining<sup>7</sup>.

This does not mean that the performance could not be faulted. Almost all the material was based on the experiences of young educated white males. While the reliance on the Western form gave a reasonable context for this individualist outlook, it is a major gap in the show that the female experience of living in contemporary Scotland is largely unaddressed. This gap looms all the larger when one considers the extent to which the condition of unemployment among women goes largely ignored, since they are often personally deprived of welfare benefits and not counted as part of the unemployment statistics. This gap in the material was filled with the return of Judith Woods for the Fringe performances, for which material on the effect of government legislation on co-habitation and women's rights to claim benefit was developed. Nonetheless, the exclusiveness of the point of view that is presented must be given consideration. Secondly, while the significance of

this performance comes through the relationship between the audience and the performers, the performers might be accused of 'tailism', since they prefer to illuminate the familiar in new ways rather than opening up new areas of experience to the audience. In this context such a criticism must be seen as a moot point, since the illumination of even familiar details is a significant first step in the formation of a spirit of resistance. In this regard the performers were not searching for 'popular' forms to recreate or imitate as much as they were interested in subverting dominant (and therefore the most prevalent) cultural images. The popular success of the show owes much more to the originality in the use of material, the hard lessons learnt through the experience of playing in the street of how to hold an audience, and the experience of playing a series of community venues through a number of tours. The honing of material between the performers through discussion and debate before and during the writing and rehearsal of the show, and revision of it during tours, meant that the experiences that they had were constantly being evaluated and criticised so that only what was considered the best material was presented to an audience. Furthermore this constant revision resulted in the creation of structures that could support the political commitment of the shows: a near perfect marriage of form and content.

This can be considered one of the highlights of The Fun Show's relatively short existence, but it was typical of many performances that they gave during this time. They were the heirs of the mantle created by the early 7:84 in their commitment to the development of a counter-culture based on the working-class, in rejection of the lure of 'professional', commercial and therefore middle-class success. They were a formative part of that culture, not just preservative agents of it as it came under attack.

**Merry Mac Productions****Plays:**

<u>The Ran Dan</u>	Fringe 1985
<u>Sharny Dubs</u>	Fringe & Autumn Tour 1986
<u>Alien Punks Versus Santa.</u>	December Tour 1986
<u>I Love You Baby, But I've Got to Run</u>	Fringe 1986
<u>The Country Doctor.</u>	Autumn Tour 1987

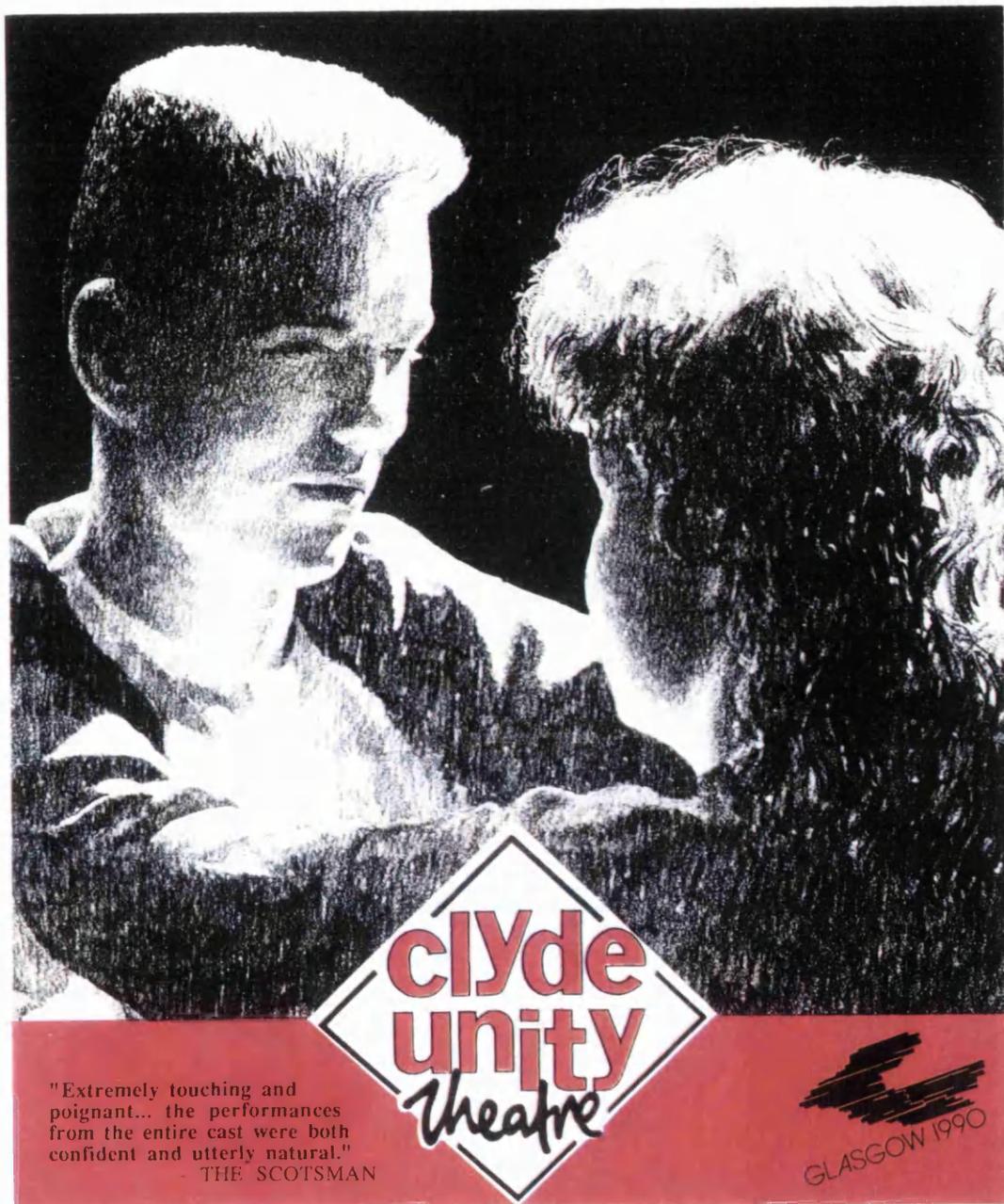
**Shows:**

<u>The Merry Mac Fun Show</u>	October 1985
<u>Psychoshanter</u>	Fringe 1986
<u>MacAttack</u>	Fringe & Autumn Tour 1986
<u>MacLash</u>	Spring Tour & Fringe 1987

CLYDE UNITY THEATRE Presents

# Killing me softly

a play by John Binnie



"Extremely touching and poignant... the performances from the entire cast were both confident and utterly natural."  
- THE SCOTSMAN

clayde  
unity  
Theatre

GLASGOW 1990

Plate 8: Programme for revived tour of Killing Me Softly

# 7. KILLING ME SOFTLY

## Introduction

The Merry Mac Fun Show were not the only political theatre company to emerge from a university background: the initial impetus for Clyde Unity came from the experiences and friendships of the original members as students at Glasgow University. As with The Merry Macs, Clyde Unity's success came through the company's ability to build a theatre audience in community venues in the Central Belt. Although founded originally as a vehicle through which the members might gain entry into the theatre profession, the company soon found its own voices in material produced by both John Binnie and Aileen Ritchie. Although Binnie eschews the term 'gay play'<sup>1</sup>, his material is written from and frequently inscribed with the perspective of a homosexual man; for her part, Ritchie's work most frequently attempts to present a female perspective on working class culture.

The company's first substantial success in community venues came with Killing Me Softly by John Binnie. The success of this piece which centres on the difficulties of a gay man and a straight woman attempting to live out their sexuality with the further complication of the man discovering that he is HIV positive might seem unlikely: in this study I will concentrate on how the play in production created certain resonances with its audiences through which the contentious issues it addresses are mediated in a less challenging way. John Binnie has described the performance at Drumchapel UWC in an article<sup>2</sup> which, together with lengthy conversations with Aileen Ritchie and talks given by the company to the Ordinary Theatre Studies class at Glasgow University in 1989, inform the account here. As with the case study of MacLash, it is assumed that the argument here can be extrapolated to cover most of the performances of the work in community venues, despite being based on one particular performance. In line with previous chapters, I will outline the company's background and the political context before engaging in the analysis.

**Company Background**

The founding members of the company, Aileen Ritchie and John Binnie, met at Glasgow University around 1982 through their interest in theatre and worked together on various productions including productions of Tennessee Williams' plays. In the summer of 1985, they joined with a number of other students to form the Great Western Theatre Co. The life of this venture was curtailed after running Madhatter's Disco as a venue in the Edinburgh Fringe, with a number of the 30 strong company leaving after internal tensions proved too much to continue.

While John Binnie returned to university, Ritchie accepted a job with D. C. Thompson in Dundee, writing, among other things, the horoscopes for The Dundee Courier. They maintained contact and since Ritchie was unhappy in journalism, and they both wanted to work in theatre, they decided to try to form another theatre company. The initial impetus was solely to produce their own theatre as an alternative entry into the profession: Ritchie as an actress and Binnie as a director. Their first play was Benedict Scott's Lambs of God, using as a basis a group of final year students at the university who had revived it there. The play had first been produced by Glasgow Unity in the 1940's, transferring to London's West End, despite the controversial inclusion of a homosexual character. Wanting to maintain the association with the Unity tradition but to form a new identity the company adopted the name Clyde Unity. The money for the production was fronted by Aileen Ritchie who was still working in Dundee. Since the leading man was from Dundee also, rehearsals were split with the principals staying in Dundee and travelling to Glasgow at weekends to rehearse ensemble parts. This was less problematic than it might have been since most of the cast were students or unemployed. The play went on in Spring 1986 in a short tour to The Netherbow in Edinburgh, The Crawford Arts Centre and The Third Eye Centre in Glasgow. Later that year John Binnie's first play Mum, Dad, I've Got Something

To Tell You was produced by Glasgow University Theatre at the Fringe as part of a double bill at The Cafe Royale.

After Lambs of God the company had been approached by Eddie Boyd about a play of his that had previously been done at Cumbernauld Theatre in 1982. The play, Ulrike, was about the terrorist Ulrike Meinhoff. The company subsequently put on the play at The Drama Centre in Glasgow, from 4th-6th December. After discussions with Boyd and among the remaining members of the company an artistic policy emerged to produce plays from The Scottish Theatre Archive, to 'revive the canon'. By this time Aileen Ritchie had moved to Glasgow, although she was still working full-time outwith the theatre.

The first piece to be revived was in fact Binnie's Mum, Dad, I've Got Something To Tell You. It was performed with its cast of 4 at The Garret, an attic theatre in Glasgow's West End from 18th-21st February 1987. Through various contacts a kind of mini tour was shackled together which included Sheffield Crucible and Edinburgh Lesbian & Gay Centre. Importantly, at this time they also came into contact with one of the original Glasgow Unity performers, Ida Schuster, who encouraged them to consider the Unity tradition as a challenge to do work that reflected the reality of contemporary conditions of everyday life. For the Fringe of that year, the company used the venue run by Merry Macs at The Crown Theatre, Hill Place. They staged John Binnie's Killing Me Softly and a specially written play by a fellow-student, Julie Frazer, called Victory Harvest. Killing Me Softly details the relationship between a gay boy, Tim, and his straight friend, Lil; and how that relationship survives and sustains them both during the trauma that follows Tim's discovery that he is H.I.V. positive. After the Fringe the company toured Killing Me Softly on an ad hoc basis, according to the invitations that they received from a variety of community venues.

Almost a year previously, John Binnie had approached community arts workers in Drumchapel with a view towards

putting on Mum, Dad, I've Got Something To Tell You. They had dissuaded him from such an idea on the basis that audiences in Drumchapel would be very hostile to a show about homosexuality. After seeing Killing Me Softly, the same community arts workers invited the company to Drumchapel to stage the show. The success of the company with this and other community audiences was almost instant. The play then toured to a number of other community venues on a semi-professional basis, with the company operating a policy of free or almost free theatre according to the wishes of those running the venues. This was again done on an ad hoc basis since the company had no administrator, and consequently was without funding from the SAC or local authorities.

Their next piece of work came with Aileen Ritchie's Can Ye Sew Cushions?. Although Ritchie's ambitions had hitherto been as an actress, she had so hated the 7:84 production of No Mean City for Mayfest 1988, that she decided to write an antidote to this 'chunk of Glasgow machismo mythology'<sup>3</sup>. The move to take up writing coincided with Ritchie's decision to devote herself full-time to the company, and she gave up her day job. The title of the piece comes from a 1930's folk song about the expectations of marriage and the skills the woman should bring to it. The play itself examines Glasgow's machismo mythology from the point of view of the female victim, while looking at the way in which such mythologies were regarded by those contemporaneous with them. The play opened at the Edinburgh Fringe in 1988, with the possibility of a tour depending on its reception there. Its success led to a tour at the beginning of 1989 around community venues in Glasgow, Edinburgh and Monklands. Coinciding with the end of the traditional panto season the play was able to pick up good audiences and reviews. As with most of the company's tours, there were a number of free shows, the cost of which was offset by box office takings at other venues. Significantly, the play prevented the company from being perceived purely as a gay theatre group. Ritchie's play and

its sequels connected to a tradition of plays about working class women (such as Ena Lamont Stewart's Men Should Weep) and resonated with a largely unacknowledged female audience for theatre. At the time of the tour, Robin Mitchell returned to work with the company as an administrator and set designer, having worked in the publicity and marketing departments of the Crucible Theatre, Sheffield and West Midland Arts in Birmingham.

Following the success of Can Ye Sew Cushions?, Aileen Ritchie got a commission from The Traverse, by then under the directorship of Ian Brown, to write a play for the season of new Scottish plays, Spinning A Line. The result was Asking For It, a play about two function waitresses on a night out. The younger one meets up with an older businessman and all three end up back in his apartment. It was difficult territory since it dealt with the personal problems of sexual exploitation and honesty, exploring the basis of the different attitudes that each of the characters brought. The underlying premise was that men and women start on a different basis when they are making choices, particularly in regard to their sexuality. The commission offered Ritchie the opportunity of being taken seriously as a proper writer, with a degree of real professionalism. However, it naturally caused some resentment in the company which had hitherto worked almost entirely on the strength of John Binnie's writing. Ritchie now appeared as the force behind the company. It also represented the first move by any of the company members to work outside the company. That this did not stop Clyde Unity from progressing together testifies to the strength of the personal loyalties between all involved. The recognition received by Ritchie (which she is able to manipulate adeptly) also raised the profile of the company as a whole.

The company's next works were Binnie's When The World Was Young and Ritchie's Shang-A-Lang for Mayfest 1989. The latter was set in the heady days of Bay City Rollermania. This period was chosen since the teenage fashions and images

were geared towards Cindy-doll passivity, encouraging young girls to idolise and emulate male stars. At the same time in retrospect these fashions could provide much of the play's humour. For those too young to remember the fashions the clothes and actions were themselves ridiculous enough to provide entertainment for a mixed audience. That the whole cult was particularly Scottish and presented a milieu which Ritchie could confidently handle was an added bonus, particularly as she had shared the same kind of close friendship of 'the girls' that the play turns on. Its critical success was marked by the award of the Sunday Times (Scotland) Mayfest Theatre Award. Binnie's When The World was Young did not receive as favourable a reception. It contrasts the lives of four adults of different sexual orientation in a world in which homosexuality is now banned with what their expectations had been as children. Its humour and characterisation is weighed down with a tendency towards didacticism. After Mayfest, both plays were taken to Edinburgh, Cumbernauld and Port Glasgow.

At the Fringe that year the company presented a number of plays, taking over the Crown Theatre in Hill Place for the whole period of the Fringe. Clyde Unity's own productions were Binnie's Beyond The Rainbow; Ritchie's Shang-A-Lang; and a piece commissioned from Andy Lynch, called A Night Out. Beyond the Rainbow looked at the visit to Glasgow of Judy Garland in 1951 and her encounters with a bell boy at her Glasgow hotel. It won a Fringe First Award, marking an increased maturity in Binnie's writing. The award also gave the company a second piece of 'professional' recognition, again serving to raise their profile.

During 1989, the company attempted to turn fully-professional by operating under the Enterprise Allowance Scheme, which guaranteed them a basic allowance of £40 per week each, together with certain tax allowances. This protected the company from the constraints of Arts Council grants which require that companies employ an administrator and hire an office, at the same time committing them to

certain levels of production. By keeping to their limits the company has managed to retain a relative degree of control over when and where they play.

However in 1990, through funding from Glasgow's City Of Culture budget the company managed to extend their activities, with a sequel to Can Ye Sew Cushions?, Will Ye Dance At My Wedding?, opening The Arches Theatre as part of the 'Glasgow's Glasgow' exhibition; revivals of Killing Me Softly (as part of a series of HIV awareness days); and a fully professional production of Lambs of God. Will Ye Dance At My Wedding? follows the fortunes of the central figure from Can Ye Sew Cushions?, now a middle-aged woman, who moves with her family from the Glasgow slums to one of the new peripheral housing schemes. A promotional leaflet described it as 'an evocative and heartwarming tale of one woman's survival against all that fate throws in her way'. Such subjects were to emerge as a major component in the company's work. The revival of Lambs of God represented an expansion for the company, with a number of actors being introduced for the first time. Despite mixed reviews, the production won both the Glasgow Herald 'Spirit of Mayfest' Award and a Scotland on Sunday 'Paper Boat' Award. It was revived as part of the Strathclyde Summer Season at the Citizens'. Although proud of their independent status the effect of this funding increase on the company was that they became able for the first time to pay themselves at Equity rates. When the performers almost simultaneously achieved Equity membership, this was taken as a sign of the company having 'made it' professionally.

In 1991, the company returned to its more usual pattern of community touring with John Binnie's Walking Shadow and Aileen Ritchie's All the Time in The World. Nonetheless, their success with Lambs of God prompted a production of John Binnie's adaptation of the Margaret Thomas Davis' Rag Woman, Rich Woman for Mayfest. In a programme note, John Binnie comments that 'Although epic in scale it is a deeply personal account of one woman's will to survive and to

succeed against the odds. The book has a sexual honesty and emotional power which suits the dramatic style of Clyde Unity Theatre and it seemed ripe for a stage adaptation'. Curiously, this adaptation by Binnie, coincides with that strain in the company's work centering on strong female characters which had hitherto been the prerogative of Aileen Ritchie, the company's other in-house writer. This production again called for an expansion of the company. It attracted support from audiences, and although its critical reception was less favourable, it was revived for the Strathclyde Summer Season at the Citizens'.

Clyde Unity are in some respects the heirs of the original Unity mantle. Their status as committed amateurs who eventually have become fully professional follows the course of the Glasgow Unity troupe's own career. They are a genuinely popular company within the Glasgow area and their community touring places them in the vanguard of the most recent wave of developments in the professional political theatre. The reasons for their success are recognisable in their attempt to address the lives and culture of a constituency audience that they themselves share, since it has not been achieved at the expense of an alienating professional training. Whether the work which is developed from their relationship with their audience is as challenging as it might be is another matter, however. It is through examining one of the company's earliest successes that I hope to address that question.

### **Political Background**

Before doing this I will set the political and social context in which the production first took place. While the period between 1979 and 1990 saw party politics in Scotland become increasingly assimilated into the British mainstream, Scottish society continued to adapt more slowly to the British model in terms of the moral codes exercising control over society. This meant that

developments which took place south of the border in the understanding of the rights of minority, or, less-powerful groups frequently passed Scotland by or took root at a slower pace. Much social interaction within Scotland continued to be mediated through the symbols, motifs and myths of the patriarchal, the labourist and the white, with discrimination implicit in social exchange despite being fought against within formal political arenas<sup>4</sup>. Even within the public arena the inability of certain unrepresented groups to build up enough of a 'head of steam' in order to get their rights recognised and formalised meant that the reform of Scottish legislation lagged behind that of England and Wales.

As James K. Carnie has described in 'Parliament and Scottish Moral Legislation in the 1970s'<sup>5</sup> Scotland was significantly slower than England and Wales to introduce public legislation over key elements of moral law reform, particularly homosexuality. As early as 1957, the Wolfenden Report had argued for the decriminalisation of homosexual acts between consenting adults. However, although in effect the courts operated a 'no-prosecutions' policy it was not until the success of the Sexual Offences Act in 1967 that this move towards decriminalisation was legislatively formalised in England and Wales. Despite the work of the Scottish Minorities Group throughout the 1970s to bring the law in Scotland into line with England and Wales it was not until 1982 that this took place. It is not without significance that the reform of the Scottish law took place thanks to an amendment to a bill that was intended for an almost entirely different purpose: Robin Cook MP had to put a reform clause into the Criminal Justice (Scotland) Bill before the law was changed.

Regardless of this legislative reform, it is apparent that within Scottish civil society there remains a fierce resistance to the equal treatment of homosexuals. This has also been the case in the rest of Britain, despite the legislative advances there. This homophobia underlay much of

the moral fervour of the New Right ideologues and found its expression in the notorious Clause 28 of the Local Government Act for England and Wales which banned local authorities from 'promoting' homosexuality. Fear of recrimination encouraged many local authorities to drop support for gay and lesbian groups and discussing homosexuality in schools for example. Institutional homophobia was fuelled by the 'crisis' of AIDS, which elements within the media, the government and health authorities each addressed in ways which led to the further demonisation of homosexuality and the marginalisation of homosexuals from civil society.

The resignation of the Scottish Law Lord, Lord Devere, in 1990 over allegations that he was a practising homosexual testifies to the potency of anti-homosexual attitudes even within institutions supposedly commissioned to uphold justice and equality. While this example weighs against the simple association of these forces with the working class, it is important to note that while other classes have had available a wider range of cultural references through which homosexuality might be regarded as normal<sup>6</sup>, the predominance of labourist traditions within the working class means that frequently there are few avenues for working class homosexuals to come to terms with their identity in ways which will match the rest of their experience. As women have also experienced to their cost, the predominant labourist traditions have been patriarchal, aggressively masculine and reactionary. Homosexuality has been regarded as outwith the experience of working class males. It is not acknowledged as part of their identity. This is where much of the work of Clyde Unity can be identified as politically potent.

### **Production Background**

John Binnie's Killing Me Softly was the second of his plays to deal with an aspect of life as a young gay working class

man in Scotland. While Mum, Dad, I've Got Something To Tell You dealt with the problems of 'coming out' as a gay male, this play focuses on the effects on a young student of being diagnosed as being HIV Positive. The play was originally produced at the Traverse (downstairs) as part of the Edinburgh Fringe in 1987 but its intervention was most politically resonant when it was toured to community venues around housing schemes in the greater Glasgow area. The initial audacity of such an intervention in this context is in many ways remarkable, but this view must be balanced by a proper appreciation of the ways in which the production was accessible and acceptable to what was, initially at least, a hostile audience.

While Michael Wilcox had explored the seamier side of the gay scene in Edinburgh in Rents and included a homosexual relationship in Accounts, set in a rugby playing community in the Borders, both of which plays were produced at the Traverse, there had been few attempts in the 1980s to address the issues surrounding homosexuality before a working class audience. Indeed, excepting Glasgow Unity's 1948 production of Benedict Scott's Lambs of God, for all that homosexuality is acknowledged in Scottish popular culture one might think that it didn't exist. Where it has been acknowledged, often the purpose has been to betoken certain negative characteristics, or comic campness - in John McGrath's Border Warfare, for example. To the extent that this imbalance is partially redressed by the play, it can be seen as of vital importance, the exact nature of the characterisation notwithstanding. This reservation refers to the key tensions within the play between challenging the audience through the content and the ways in which that content is contained by the form. This is not to indicate the possibility of a neat division between form and content: rather it focuses clearly on the way in which the form and content are intrinsically linked.

**Production Analysis**

The play explores the relationship between Tim, a gay working class student who has not yet 'come out', and Lil, a young middle-class woman unable to find romantic fulfilment and unable to live up to the sexual codes expected of her by her respectable parents. This unlikely pair become friends only to fall out over a boy to whom they are both attracted, but Lil wins over. Then, when Tim finds that he is HIV Positive, he barricades himself in the bathroom of his mother's flat. It is Lil who not only manages to overcome the breach between them but also to convince Tim's younger brother to come to terms with his brother's condition and all that it might entail. Even from this short synopsis it can be seen that in presenting as the two main characters of the story - a gay man and a sexually promiscuous woman - the piece deviates from the dominant representations of both men and women<sup>7</sup> in almost all the available forms of drama in Scotland at that time.

Having said this, the play formally relies on established dramatic and narrative forms. Although I have previously discussed the structure of the traditional 'well-made-play' against which Brechtian theatre reacted, that discussion is extended here in reference to what Annette Kuhn (1982) has identified as 'the classic realist text'. She outlines its characteristics thus:

In the classic realist text, action typically pivots on central characters who are rendered in psychological depth and tend to become objects of identification for readers. These characters are fictional persons whose fate is tied up with the progress of the narrative, indeed on whom may be centred the very disruption that sets the narrative in motion.

(Kuhn 1982: 31)

She also adds that classic realist texts rely on the classic narrative structure of establishing an equilibrium which is then disrupted so that it finally may be restored in some kind of resolution. These core characteristics of the classic realist text may also be identified in Killing Me

Softly. Here, there are two central characters who are drawn in terms of their sexuality. While there are other characteristics associated with them, it is the consequences of their sexual practices that are the source of the two ruptures that occur in the narrative equilibrium: the fight over the boy, Derek, and Tim's diagnosis as HIV Positive. The narrative and the character development are intrinsically linked. This can be seen in the way in which the play develops as a love story which deviates from the traditional model, since neither of the 'lovers' is sexually attracted to the other, and since the traditional male and female roles are reversed (it is Lil who sweeps Tim off his feet, for example). The expectation of a more traditional romance is raised in the opening sequence where Tim and Lil dance to Roberta Flack's song 'Killing Me Softly'. It is only at the end of the second scene that this expectation is overturned by Tim's admission to Lil that he is gay. The relationship seems then to be destined to failure, adding an element of suspense as to how it will proceed. The third scene in which Tim and Lil bump into each other in the park adds to this. From this, their relationship starts again, albeit on a shaky footing. It develops as they discuss their various sexual histories, yet these discussions and the implications of their openness bring them into conflict.

Irrespective of their different class backgrounds, both characters suffer the same problems of being open about their sexuality. This allows the audience to be introduced to Tim's revelations about his sexuality in a number of stages so that his first discussion of a physical relationship comes almost halfway through the play when his character has already been established and some degree of identification with him has taken place. It follows also Tim's reminder to his brother, Michael, about safe sex and what will prove to be an ironic joke about catching AIDS. The discussion is tempered by Tim's attitude that he doesn't really like sexual intercourse. The relationship reaches a high point when Lil and Tim are at a party very much like

the one at which they first met. This time the party serves as an endorsement of the closeness of their relationship when they dance to 'their song' again.

This closeness is broken as soon as Lil spots a boy to be the target of her affections. What is important in this scene is that Lil breaks the picture of a happy couple as she selfishly prepares to make a play for the boy. Tim's obvious awkwardness in being left alone with Derek accentuates Lil's thoughtlessness and at the same time diverts attention from any attraction that Tim might feel towards Derek. In the very next scene, a telephone conversation between Tim and Lil, Tim's rejection of Lil's assumption that Derek is 'hetero' is overshadowed by the bitterness that he feels because of the way Lil betrayed his trust to launch herself at Derek. The suggestion that they take Derek to see Madame Butterfly to find out if he is gay or not comes then less as a way for Tim to make a move for Derek than as a means of warning Lil off and restoring her to Tim. The possibility of Tim and Derek becoming involved together is not raised as strongly as the actuality of Tim's feeling of betrayal. Indeed when Tim and Derek meet in the swimming pool it is Derek who seems to be attempting to initiate a pick-up. Tim seems very uneasy at this prospect.

The element of crisis introduced by the argument between Lil and Tim accelerates even further when Tim visits the doctor for the result of his test for HIV which proves to be positive. The crisis gathers pace when Tim breaks the news to his mother and she reveals that she had realised that he was gay some time before. His feelings of betrayal cause him to lock himself in the bathroom. The situation becomes even worse once Michael finds out that Tim is gay and is HIV Positive. The only relationships that have been revealed within the play are thus broken: Tim's with his mother; Tim's with Lil; and, indeed, Tim's with Michael, where the physicality that they had enjoyed earlier is completely broken down since Michael regards Tim as a leper.

Equilibrium is restored for both disruptions through Lil's actions. She and Derek split up and she attempts to contact Tim. She talks things through with Michael and pushes him to accept Tim. Finally, she removes the barricade from the bathroom door and takes Tim in her arms to dance to 'their song', the 'Killing Me Softly' of the title. The narrative closes with the restoration of the central relationship of Tim and Lil which, in these narrative terms alone, overcomes the potentially disruptive power of his diagnosis. The narrative is fully closed through this final scene since it is a repetition of the same image with which the play opened, giving a very clear representation of a restored equilibrium.

This last section of the play differs from those earlier since there is a telescoping of the focus both spatially, with the setting shifted to Tim's family's flat, and temporally since the final five scenes take place over two days, whereas the previous scenes take place over an extended period of time. Simultaneously, while the vacillations of the relationship between Tim and Lil occupied the focus earlier, here it is taken by Tim's family (with particular emphasis on the position of his mother), making for a much more concentrated series of scenes. The development and resolution of this crisis therefore take place very quickly. The imbalance that this produces will be discussed below.

The privileging of a narrative resolution on a purely emotional level is undoubtedly sentimental. In particular it avoids the difficulties that will face Tim and those around him that are hinted at by his mother in response to the telephone conversation she has with the reporter from the local newspaper. Yet it is an ending that is set up as particularly apt in the earlier parts of the play. Not only do Tim and Lil meet through this song, but they both have a taste for 'schmaltz' and the sentimental. This is epitomised by the ridiculous test that Tim proposes for judging Derek's sexual preferences: to see whether or not he

will cry at a performance of Madame Butterfly. The song itself has become the motif for the relationship between Tim and Lil, their song. The fact that sentimentality is one of the major ways through which popular music achieves its popularity is also felicitous: sentiment is marketed as a means of achieving resolution and closure in one of the dominant cultural forms. John McGrath notes also,

In my experience a working-class audience is more open to emotion on the stage than a middle-class audience who get embarrassed by it. The critics label emotion on stage mawkish, sentimental, etc. Of course, the working-class audiences can also love sentimentality; - in fact, I quite enjoy a dose of it myself, at the right moment, as does everybody - but emotion is more likely to be apologized for in Bromley than in the Rhondda Valley.

(McGrath 1981: 56)

While the play follows the classic narrative pattern, it adheres to the classic realist model by tying the development of the narrative interest directly to identification with the central characters of Tim and Lil. The characters themselves invite the audience to empathise with them by directly appealing to them through revealing asides during their early conversations.

Tim: I hate this...hate it...hate it. I don't know anybody! 'Love is a many splendoured thing.' Stop it hand, come down from the face, there's no mark there. Stop trying to rub away imaginary guilt. Smile that's the boy. Fresh orange - I'm such a man. What a fascinating bit of wallpaper.

Lil: Boring sods, most of them. 'Not tonight thanks'. 'Excuse me please.' (To a boy) 'Don't you dare leave without me !'...Oh, that's a nice head of hair...Oops, it's little gaucherie incorporated. Wonder how he managed to stray in here. Seems to be enjoying himself. Why is he hiding his mouth? My God, there's sensitive, and there is sensitive, but he's a nervous wreck...Em, d'you think we could have a slow one. Thanks...(to Tim) Hi, wallflower - care to dance?

(Scene 1)

Once they have established their sexual preferences, this becomes the central subject of conversation between them, so allowing an elucidation of the difficulties they each face.

Here there is an added facet in the interplay between the individual experience and the representativeness of the characters. In this there is a duality where the characters function as representative and yet at the same time the general group of which the character is representative becomes humanised by the individual representation.

However, there is a key imbalance in the ways in which the characters through whom the narrative develops are drawn which diminishes their challenging aspects. The dynamic force within the narrative is Lil: she initiates the relationship, she is the cause of one of the disruptions, and she brings about the resolution at the end. As the controlling force of the narrative, Lil fits into the tradition of 'strong women' familiar on the Scottish stage, on which both Binnie and the company's other writer, Aileen Ritchie, would subsequently draw again and again. While Lil perhaps differs from this tradition by being a young and sexually promiscuous single woman, there is an element in her of the figure of the 'whore-with-the-heart-of-gold' familiar from Hollywood films and certain Scots plays. There is a difference from this type in that the way in which Lil exercises her sexuality is less a means by which she is condemned or eventually recuperated into a traditional role, than a means by which she can understand the necessary transience of Tim's sexual encounters and the difficulties he has in publicly acknowledging his sexuality. She neither lives to regret her previous promiscuity because it comes between her and marriage; nor is she saved from it by reverting to safer roles within such a marriage; nor is she punished for it by forces of moral righteousness. The problems raised by her sexual practices are raised within the context of her relationship with Tim, and importantly her own attitude to herself. Given that her promiscuity is probably much more typical of her generation than the a-sexuality of the traditional Scottish stage 'strong woman', she is therefore a central location of identification for the audience. While it is unusual, if

not entirely radical, to invert the normal relationships between men and women in order to show women in powerful roles this is counterbalanced by the treatment of Tim as a homosexual male.

Tim lacks confidence and composure; he is presented as passive, both socially and sexually. His vulnerability is the major way in which the audience relates to him. He is the object of their pity because of his crippling self-consciousness. While this might make a perfect counterbalance to Lil, in terms of the narrative, and indeed relates to the semi-autobiographical portrayal that informs the writing, politically it represents a withdrawal from the more challenging aspects of homosexuality which are the focus of much of the homophobia that exists in reality. Despite his opening speech, Tim tells Lil that he shies away from intercourse. Since he is never actually shown engaging in a relationship based on his sexual orientation in the course of the play, his homosexuality is a characteristic that is represented tangentially. Indeed, one of the reasons that Lil advances for Michael to come to terms with Tim's condition is that his homosexuality has never been publicly expressed. Although it would be wrong to consider Tim any less homosexual because he is closet and celibate, what is presented is a syncopated version of homosexuality. This version may show that homosexuals are not necessarily promiscuous and are not perverted maniacs. Yet the fact that Tim as a homosexual character is not allowed to enjoy the same kind of sexual freedom as Lil undermines the applicability of this portrayal of him to other situations.

While Lil is not recuperated within a traditional female role, Tim actually undergoes the kind of recuperation associated with the promiscuous female of the classic Hollywood film. He is finally rehabilitated within the confines of the family structure. While this is within an amended version of the institution (since there is no father figure) it is nonetheless a rebuttal of the charge that

homosexuals represent a threat to family life. Yet this is a double-edged sword. The play actually strengthens the notion of the very institution and its associated values which are frequently invoked in order to attack homosexuals. Lil's difficulties with her parents are only hinted at, and she is allowed a kind of freedom from the family home which Tim never enjoys. It may be that the amended version of the family presented through Tim's mother and brother points up the possibility of the existence of the positive caring values associated with family outwith the 'patriarchal dictatorship' under which it generally exists, yet even more problematically, Tim's position as a passive male dominated by strong women suggests that to be homosexual is to be less than fully masculine.

Furthermore, the accounts of Tim's sexual behaviour are de-eroticised when he discusses them with Lil: they revolve around only certain hinted at aspects of intercourse rather than emotion or passion. Apart from the opening quotation that Tim gives, there is little suggestion of the possibility of homo-eroticism. Indeed this quotation and other aspects of his character allow Tim the kind of licence that associates the homosexual with the artistic:

The artistic sphere has long been claimed by gay men as legitimate territory: in this area the male homosexual has found the means to pass by identifying himself as artistic/romantic rather than simply gay. So the social rejection on the basis of sexuality is refocused by the justification of art.

(Sheldon 1977: 10)

Tim's homosexuality, then, is defused by his artistic and romantic characteristics. Identification with him is not invited on the basis of his homosexuality. He is admirable because of his artistic capabilities, and his sensitivity. Thus, Tim is a diluted version of a homosexual around whom a contradictory subtext emerges which suggests that it is acceptable to be gay as long as there is no open acknowledgement of one's sexuality. This directly contradicts the statements which both Lil and Tim make

about the necessity of living their sexuality openly. The audience is not invited to identify with Tim's perspective of the world but with the perspective that Lil and others offer on him. This is acknowledged through the setting of the play as a narrative over which Lil has control. Tim's opening speech is contextualised immediately within Lil's memory:

Lil: I suppose that is my first memory of him if you were to ask me for it. Go on, ask me for it. I'd recall that stifling classroom, restless pupils, and him standing up in front of us all. Red in the face he was, his hands were sweaty, his tenses all over the place. He was magnificent.

(Scene 1)

Not only does Lil dominate Tim and take control of the situations in which he finds himself, but this opening marks it as Lil's account. This opens the way for a clear, simple and closed narrative that at the same time is marked as subjective. The playwright is able to use the simplest of storytelling devices to allow himself to tell the story in the simplest of terms.

The discussion so far has concentrated on the development of the narrative in terms of the characterisation of the two protagonists, Lil and Tim. However, there is a crucial switch in the focus of the narrative at the moment when the play reaches its most contentious area - the diagnosis of Tim as HIV Positive - which significantly alters any radical reading of the play. Tim's withdrawal to the bathroom at this point clears the focus for the reaction of the other characters and a discussion of their problems and, in so doing, opens a different reading for the audience. This reading is one that follows the conventions for reading certain television soap operas (both episodic and single-programme series)<sup>8</sup> and many US made-for-television 'problem films'. These forms are underpinned by the centrality of the family in the idealized society which they present, and thus they address the crises which they present through the disruptive effects which they have on the family unit.

Inevitably, the crises are deemed to be resolved once family harmony ceases to be threatened by the 'problem' in question. Such problems typically involve disability, drug abuse, unemployment, grief, and (more rarely) issues of racial or sexual equality. The prevalence of these forms as drama on British television have established influential norms for the reading of dramatic presentations.

It is thus notable that the play at this point switches to a domestic setting; to the potential disruption of the family unit which is threatened by Tim's diagnosis; and most significantly to the role of the mother in resolving the conflict between her two sons. Tania Modleski has written of television soap opera that

As a rule only those issues which can be tolerated and ultimately pardoned are introduced in soap operas...An issue like homosexuality, which could explode the family structure rather than temporarily disrupt it, is simply ignored.

(Modleski 1982: 93)

This is equally applicable to the 'problem film'. Here, it is the very way in which the play contains homosexuality within the family structure, the established process of resolution in these television forms, which resolves the tension Modleski refers to. However, the play cannot be said to be 'about' AIDS or being HIV Positive since it does not become an issue until the last section, and there is no direct confrontation of the personal situation of Tim as a sufferer or of the wider issues surrounding such a diagnosis. Indeed, the portrayal of Tim's illness purely in terms of the emotional effect that it has on him and, more importantly, his family, privileges this aspect of the illness over all others. Further, the argument presented through the final scenes is that individual compassion is enough to resolve the problems posed by the AIDS virus. This is surely the strongest element of 'soap' in the play, especially given the concentration on the presentation of the family as united against the world. All issues are

settled through the strength of the bonds of family and friendship.

The audience's empathy is directed to the mother rather than to Tim in this last section. This perhaps has the merit of presenting an audience with a conflict between their empathy with the mother and the reactionary attitudes of Michael, which they may share. By inviting this empathy with the mother, the play is situated within the theatrical tradition of strong women characters. By splitting the conflict at this point between these two perspectives, the possibility is raised of forcing audience members to reconcile contradictions that they themselves might personally face in terms of the resolution of the stage conflict. David Ian Rabey contends that 'political drama is successful when the audience's morality is poised against contemporary society, so that the enforced fluctuation between two ostensibly congruent sets of norms reveals a contradiction' (Rabey 1986: 3). Here, the audience's morality as audience (their empathy with the mother) is poised against the values of the wider society which Michael's views represent. John Binnie's account of the reception of the play in Drumchapel Unemployed Workers' Centre suggests that this has been the case:

Their interpretation of the play was illuminating - instead of being 'a love affair' between a gay boy and a straight girl, they saw it from the wee brother's point of view. He is very straight - and his reaction parallels that of the audiences. From the initial hostility, when Tim comes out, he finally admits 'I'm sorry I called you a poof...I still love you.

(Binnie 1988: 9)

Furthermore, the refusal of the company to be ghettoised as a 'gay theatre company', meant that it was difficult for them to explore the nature of homosexuality from the point of view of the homosexual. Since a majority of their audience was 'mixed' they presented that audience with alternative perspectives through which homosexuality may be perceived, rather than presenting the homosexual as a location of direct identification. This therefore allowed

the audience to come to terms with homosexuality from the point of view of characters with whom they might perhaps have more in common.

However, the objects of the conflict - Tim and his diagnosis - are placed at one remove by this manoeuvre. It becomes less a matter of Tim's diagnosis, than a question of whether or not the family will hold together. Tim and his illness are rehabilitated into the society as it is already constituted, according to the values which it already holds. The only adjustments needed to reform the society are personal and individual rather than structural. The play does not emphasise the publicly political aspects of the personal struggle, articulated in the feminist slogan 'The personal is political'.

It is important to note that what I am arguing is not that the television forms I have discussed are 'trivial' or 'impoverished' according to a dichotomy between 'hard' and 'soft' categories of information (see Tulloch 1990: 43/44). These forms 'draw on the repertoire of skills, values and resistances located in the practical consciousness of people who reproduce the world manageably in their own sphere, in the absence of power in the public sphere' (Tulloch 1990: 46). However, two other related issues must be borne in mind. The first is a question of whether the invitation to identify with the characters as the audience would with characters in television series and films hinders the abstraction of the experiences offered by such identification to wider public issues. At the heart of this is the way in which it personalises them so precisely in terms of the fictional characters. This is the basis of Brecht's rejection of the empathy offered by the 'piece bien faite' as discussed earlier. It is surely the case here. The second related issue is whether the reading of a theatre production in terms of television forms undermines the application of theatrically derived emotions, attitudes and ideas to the rest of social reality, because it confirms these reactions within the same entertainment frame in

which television is received. Televisual entertainment products are presented as completed and self-contained. They are presented for consumption because they are transmitted irrespective of what the viewer is doing. Tulloch himself quotes Robert Dunn who says

As a commodity form, television seeks to organise the viewer's relationship to the cultural meanings according to the dictates of the role of consumer...the viewer is constituted abstractly as a consumer in the larger socioeconomic order of capitalist goods and services; more importantly...television attempts to constitute the spectator as a consumer of television as a cultural commodity

(quoted Tulloch 1990: 63/64)

Both factors, potentially undermine any radical or challenging reading of the play through its intertextual connections with television forms.

Their presence does not diminish the pleasures that an audience might get from reading the play in this way: the spectator is allowed the pleasure of empathizing with characters in a complex emotional situation, secure in the knowledge that all will be saved by the end. There is an added element of self-righteousness in inviting empathy with the mother - the pleasure of being placed on the moral high ground and seeing that moral view triumph. It is by offering these pleasures that the play succeeds in negotiating the difficulties associated with addressing the contentious issues of sexuality and AIDS.

I have used the comparison with televisual forms to suggest that the play's structure avoids the more challenging aspects of homosexuality and the issues surrounding AIDS. There is, of course, a significant difference between television and theatre: the live context. It is this live context which most informs the political intervention which the piece makes. It creates a fruitful dynamic between the control exerted by the play's resolution and the ambiguating circumstances of the performance. This is particularly important since one of the qualities of live theatre is the possibility that it will constitute the

intersection of an entertainment frame and that of public politics because of its nature as an event. In an event the audience is implicated, even involved in the processes that constitute the event: it impinges on their social reality.

In touring to peripheral housing estates the company exceeded the relationship that the production might offer to an audience either via television or in an established theatre (as for example, in the productions of the Michael Wilcox plays or indeed Killing Me Softly itself at the Traverse). It is worthwhile to refer here to John Binnie's account of the performance of the piece at Drumchapel U.W.C. which illustrates this more exactly. Binnie outlines the ways in which certain members of the audience were suspicious and openly hostile to the very idea of the show before it had begun. Rumours abounded about what the show would be like; about what the company would be like; whether all the company were gay or not. At least part of the audience had come prepared to mock and to laugh. The cast were extremely nervous, not to say anxious about how they would be received, and indeed for their personal safety. In retrospect, Binnie comments that

Performing in an established theatre is great - but you often preach to a safe, already converted audience. Their reaction is sometimes jaded. That is not the case in a community or unemployed workers centre. It can be a frightening experience - If an audience doesn't like a show - they won't sit around 'til the end, they'll go, or actually tell you to your face 'This is shite'. It can also be incredibly rewarding - lots of people in Drumchapel admitted liking [it]. 'Killing Me Softly' was the first play that they'd ever sat through.

(ibid: 9)

Here, there was no supportive constituency audience, or polite bourgeois spectators. The spectators were working-class and varied from the very young to the old, male and female: 'The only representatives not there were gays' (ibid: 8). The performers were fully exposed through the close contact between the playing space and the audience:

Imagine a long room with grilled windows - that was our theatre. The cafe table/tennis room had been filled with

about ten rows of chairs - and we performed in a clearing up front. The study lamp focussed on us, rather than on the audience - that was the only difference between them and us.

(ibid)

The playing area was delimited only by the study lamps which the company had brought with them as lighting; the only props were those which they could carry; the music was played on a ghetto blaster, which again the company had brought. It was the audience's space, not the performers': the play 'would be offered to all those who used the centre, and they could take it or leave it as they pleased' (ibid). The performers were ordinary people, who arrived on the local bus, carrying plastic bags. They did not display any exceptional characteristics, or obvious differences. The regular clients of the centre did have some theatrical experience through the work of their own community drama group and visits by professional touring companies and other community groups as part of the CANS project. That Clyde Unity should have more in common with their own community group than with a professional touring company only enhanced the effects described.

It might seem paradoxical, yet these elements of the live performance context actually enhanced the production in ways which directly contrast with the strengths of the Merry Mac Fun Show's performances in similar venues, discussed in the preceding chapter. The lack of a theatre architecture to separate the audience from the performers<sup>9</sup>, the very amateurishness of the lighting, the lack of particular stage make-up or costumes, all emphasised the way in which the the whole performance was vulnerable. Primarily, the etiquette attaching to theatre-viewing in traditional theatres seemed ready to break down: the contract between audience and performers might at any stage be revoked since it was not reinforced by any of the conventional trappings of theatre. The audience and the performers were both aware of this risk. Indeed the degree to which the audience themselves might have contributed to this risk (a much more

intensified version of that which is present at all live theatre performances) was commensurate with the degree of respect earned when the actors achieved their performance. Secondly, and connected to this first element, there was the vulnerability of the performers in performing a play with a gay character, since they were perceived to be part of a 'gay theatre company'. This exposed them all to various manifestations of homophobia. Binnie quotes the reactions of some of the centre's drama group that he spoke to the day before the show, when he explained the poster for the show to them: 'Fuck, he doesn't look like a poof'...'He's too nice looking'...'Some of them can be nice looking, ye know' (ibid). There was therefore an acknowledged risk in bringing a show in which the cast and characters might include the first gay person that most of the audience had ever 'met'. How they would react was not certain. Added to this, there was the vulnerability of the performers as performers. The lack of props meant that everything would rely on their performances: there would be no way in which they could hide behind any theatrical trappings. They were exposing themselves, carrying the performance unaided.

This risk-taking created what was an important element in the success of the production: the identification between the audience and the performers. It came from an appreciation of the difficulties faced by the company in mounting the show and their resolution to overcome them. Echoing John McGrath's comments quoted in the previous chapter, Peter Arnott argues that 'the way in which empathy in the theatre really works is empathy between audience and actors, that the audience feel the actors are doing something worthwhile - rather than empathy with the characters' (Gieseckam 1990: 325/326). The very fact that the company were doing the show, in circumstances that were openly hostile with blatant displays of antagonism prior to the performance showed the degree of their personal commitment to the work. As the show progressed, the performers were able, through its tangential approach, to

develop in the audience an identification with the overall goal of the performance.

This reflected back on the audience's attitude to the characters. The vulnerability of the actors thus became connected with the vulnerability of the characters; the difficulties of doing a play about sexuality connected with the difficulties of acknowledging their sexuality felt by the characters. The interplay between the stage world and reality strengthened the art and the politics. The possibility that the performer playing Tim might really be gay (he wasn't); and that other members of the company might be gay (John Binnie is) created a frisson in which the two kinds of empathy reinforced each other, as characters and performers exposed themselves to public criticism. The performers themselves felt this very clearly as both they and many members of the Drumchapel audience ended up crying as Tim and Lil danced finally to the title song.

That these were 'normal' people who were taking these risks with this audience enhanced this effect. Their very amateurishness (arriving by Corporation bus and laden down with props and costumes in plastic bags) exposed them in a way which is not present for established professional companies - even touring companies - who are protected by virtue of being received within an already agreed theatrical frame. For such companies their professionalism is a given, demanding a certain respect and appreciation. Indeed they can take over new spaces by virtue of the equipment that they use and the technical expertise that they bring. They are protected by the commodification through which their work is promoted, since it establishes in the more formal contract (made through the exchange of money) the ways in which each party expects to behave. Here the company was playing for nothing. The sense of respect that the audience has for actors who are not only entertaining but also giving of themselves in a very real way helped to win a platform on which they could not only perform their show but could openly conduct workshops on the difficulties of being gay

and the dangers of AIDS. Some of these workshops were linked to the work of pre-existing drama groups - in Drumchapel there was a visit both before and after the performance; later tours were linked with other campaigns such as at an HIV Awareness Week. While Killing Me Softly as a script may be read according to the conventions of certain television forms, as live theatre it worked powerfully through the identification that the audience were invited to feel with the characters and the identification that they felt with the actors to draw them into the story that is constructed through them. In this sense the political intervention of the production had almost less to do with the play than it had to do with the fact of the playing. The performance created the context in which the audience accepted the company and their right to say what they wanted to say, and indeed in which some of the audience could as a consequence 'come out'. By providing return visits, discussions and workshops on topics raised by the play the group showed how the production could be used as a pretext for more open and fruitful discussions of sex and sexuality than a performance alone could provide. The political impact of the production lay less in any fact of the production but in the resonances set up by a live performance by a group of committed actors.

**Clyde Unity Productions**

Lambs of God Benedict Scott Spring 1986; May & June 1990  
Ulrike Eddie Boyd Dec 1986  
Mum, Dad, I've Got Something to Tell You John Binnie  
 Feb 1987  
Killing Me Softly John Binnie Fringe 1987/88/89 &  
 subsequent tours  
Can Ye Sew Cushions Aileen Ritchie Fringe 1988 & Tour  
 early 1989  
Victory Harvest Julie Frazer Fringe 1987  
When The World Was Young John Binnie May 1989  
Shang-A- Lang Aileen Ritchie May & Fringe 1989  
Beyond the Rainbow John Binnie Fringe 1989  
A Night Out Andy Lynch Fringe 1989  
Will Ye Dance at My Wedding? Aileen Ritchie Mar/Apr 1990  
Walking Shadow John Binnie Autumn Tour 1990  
All the Time in the World Aileen Ritchie Spring 1991  
Rag Woman, Rich Woman John Binnie May & June 1991

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DIRECTED BY  
MICHAEL BOYD  
DESIGNED BY  
GRAHAM JOHNSTON

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Plate 9: Publicity Leaflet for Losing Alec

## 8. LOSING ALEC

### Introduction

The number of theatre writers in Scotland able to earn a living entirely from their work is small: Peter Arnott, as one of this group (along with writers such as John Clifford and Chris Hannan), thus embodies some of the contradictions that these writers face as they are forced to write from commission to commission. However, Arnott is exceptional in the variety of ways in which he has faced up to and resolved such contradictions by his attempts to engage through a range of work with the social reality of the Scotland in which he grew up and to which he returned after university. Working through a variety of contexts, he has developed his personal politics and his writing abilities, exploring different subject areas and styles for different audiences. Although Losing Alec is not his most successful piece in terms of critical recognition or audience attendances, he regards it as his best work to date. The production it received at the Tron in 1988 demonstrated how director Michael Boyd was able to respond sympathetically through the mise en scene to the intentions of Arnott the writer as embodied in the written script. It demonstrated also how a writer, aware of the context in which the work was to be received, tailored his dramaturgy to challenge his audience. Losing Alec will be examined here from the point of view of the ways in which it mobilises conventional elements within a dramaturgy that explodes the familiar and forces the audience to renegotiate with the recognisable.

### Producers' Background

Although a number of individuals contributed to the production of Losing Alec, the focus will be on Peter Arnott, the writer. This is justifiable not least on the grounds that Arnott himself acknowledges that one of Michael Boyd's qualities as a director is his ability to respond to the written text and the writer's intentions. Further, with the notable exception of Greg Gieseckam's extensive interview

with Arnott - 'Connections With The Audience' (NTQ, 6, 24: 318-324) - little critical attention has been paid to his development as a writer, or to the scripts that he has produced. Moreover, in establishing the artistic context in which the production took place, the focus on Arnott here will be matched by a concentration on the more exact context in which the play was produced as part of the immediate background to the production.

The son of a lawyer, Peter Arnott was born in 1962 into the middle-class of the Glasgow suburb of Bearsden. He went to school at Kelvinside Academy, one of Glasgow's large *private* schools, from whence he proceeded to Cambridge University at the age of 17. The move to Cambridge was motivated in part by a desire to escape what Arnott then considered to be the stultifying atmosphere of Glasgow. Not only did he wish to reject the claustrophobic conditions of his upbringing, but, as he told Greg Gieseckam, Scotland as a whole seemed to offer little: 'That was another reason for leaving Scotland in a way - the failure of the devolution referendum. It was a very doomed period: what was there to look forward to in terms of Scottishness? Here was an opportunity to change things fundamentally and it had been chickened out of' (Gieseckam, 1990: 319). Cambridge, on the other hand, seemed to offer a range of possibilities, particularly in terms of the theatre, in which Arnott was already interested.

At Cambridge, Arnott's interest in the theatre was pursued more as a performer than as a writer. The Cambridge theatre scene offered a point of entry into the professional theatre: among his contemporaries were the directors Jenny Killick and Steve Unwin, both of whom went on to work at The Traverse. As Arnott notes,

The thing about Oxbridge drama and why it is such an effective training for the subsidized theatre is that it works in a very similar way administratively, in that it's all to do with making applications to committees, putting production budgets together to put a show on in a particular place at a particular

time...and again because the Cambridge colleges are quite wealthy and Cambridge has got a reputation, people would come and see things.

(ibid)

Cambridge also provided Arnott learning opportunities as a writer:

It introduced me to Brecht,...to a style of theatre that, although remaining literary, also had a consciousness of what performers do since I was mainly a performer myself. In terms of writing...the first thing that I wrote that worked was done at university. Getting a sense of a live audience was a large part of it.

(Maguire 1991c: 1)

Although this refers to Johnny Calliope, during his final year at Cambridge, Arnott also completed what would turn out to be his first professional success, Benny Lynch. He had come across Lynch's story in a book, finding 'the archetypal Glasgow story' (Gieseckam 1990: 321) in the fall of the Gorbals hero who had become world flyweight champion, only to end up destitute, dying at the age of 33. Later, Arnott described the play as a means of thinking in personal terms about Glasgow, and about coming back to Scotland. One further aspect of his time at Cambridge was the development of his political thinking. He was directly exposed to the rise of the New Right in the openly belligerent contempt of many of his contemporaries for the left-wing values in which he had come to believe. At the same time, he also came into contact with the work of Raymond Williams. He acknowledges Williams' influence thus,<sup>1</sup>

What Williams did for me was to make sense of the slogan 'All history is the history of the class struggle' and to make that a rich and complex human thing rather than a reductive term, because as a reductive way of looking at things... it can be used as a way of avoiding thought; as any ideology, of course, can be used as a way of avoiding thought, in that you find the correct category for something and then you can stop thinking about it.

The influence of these ideas is particularly important in discussing Arnott's work as a dramatist, as I will

demonstrate later in the particular discussion of Losing Alec.

After Cambridge, he spent a short spell in London, in which he completed Elias Sawney. This takes the character through the 'conventions of dying' through the ages as an examination of the history of class politics. It was performed by the Cambridge Mummers at the Edinburgh Festival and later in an extended version at The Traverse. After only six months in London, Arnott returned to Glasgow. Although he describes the motivation for the return as 'Poverty and misery. I came home to mammy' (Maguire 1991c: 1), by the time of this return, he was better prepared to confront the contradictions of his background and his own developing political consciousness. He had discovered that 'because I'd been brought up in Bearsden, which is a posh suburb...it was that that I wanted away from, not Glasgow, because I didn't even know Glasgow'(ibid).

On his return to Glasgow in March 1984, Arnott began to get involved with support groups and benefit gigs for the miners, then in the middle of their protracted strike. This allowed him to see what had been abstract political thinking in terms of actual human struggle, and to become actively involved in that struggle himself. One consequence of the experience was the writing of White Rose, an exploration of the struggles and contradictions faced by Lily Litvak, a female Soviet fighter pilot during the Second World War. The play was commissioned by Peter Lichtenfels at the Traverse, who at that time had Jenny Killick as his assistant. Arnott was aware of the difficulties that writing for such a context at such a time would throw up. The production was to take place in May 1985, the fortieth anniversary of the ending of the Second World War in what was then an almost exclusively bourgeois theatre club. Arnott argues that:

Just because you're getting a working-class audience doesn't mean you're doing progressive theatre, and just because you don't get a working-class audience doesn't mean you're not doing progressive theatre.

(Gieseckam 1990: 323)

With that in mind, he decided that what he would put on the agenda for the 'very small bourgeois audience' whom he realised would see the performance was a 'war play' that dealt with aspects of the war that have been hidden. At that pre-perestroika time, it was innovative to tackle the subject of a dead Soviet female fighter pilot, and through it to explore the same kind of political contradictions that were being thrown up by the miners' strike. The opportunity to experiment as a writer allowed him by the Traverse context was also a welcome one, particularly as he was able to completely redraft his initial script during rehearsals. When the show was produced it received a wide critical acclaim; it was revived for the Traverse's Festival programme, transferring to London's Almeida Theatre. It was later produced in Coventry and overseas in Australia and New York. It was also revived for a tour around Scotland by United Artists (Scotland) in 1987.

Around the central character of fighter pilot, Lily Litvak, Arnott completes a triangle of Ina, Lily's ground mechanic, and Alexei, Lily's lover. Through their vacillating relationships, he explores the consequences of the difficult decisions that each takes to survive in both their personal and their public spheres. To achieve this he attempted, not entirely successfully, to allow each character the same kind of empathic relationship with the audience; what emerged was the central positioning of Ina as the consciousness and emotional centre of the play. This is an important precursor of the way in which Losing Alec is structured.

At the same time as White Rose was being staged in Edinburgh, another of Arnott's works was achieving a different kind of success in Glasgow. The Boxer Benny Lynch was being produced at Glasgow Arts Centre as part of that year's Mayfest. Its subject was much more immediately popular, dealing with a well-known Glaswegian working class

hero; the story had already received a theatrical treatment in a version by Bill Bryden in the early 1970s; and formally it was less obviously experimental than White Rose. What was surprising to Arnott, who had written the play two years before, was the extremely positive response given to it by audiences. United Artists (Scotland) had been specifically formed in November 1984 to perform the show (after a reading of it at Edinburgh Playwrights' Workshop) and the company was able to tour it again the following year to primarily working-class venues on the strength of this response. This company was established with the specific brief to

promote Scottish cultural consciousness through the production of Scottish plays, poetry and music. We believe that audience involvement is vital, both during the production stage and in discussion. We therefore hope to develop this involvement through promoting writing relevant to Scottish people's lives, maintaining an open structure and by regular touring and workshops.

(Programme note for Benny Lynch tour 1986)

The influence of the work of Theatre PKF was important for United Artists (Scotland), since both Lloyd Quinan (actor/director) and Hugh Loughlin (actor) had worked with that company. In terms of a responsiveness to the audience, Arnott himself was to go on to undertake a range of participatory community theatre work after his next major piece, Thomas Muir's Voyage To Australia. He still adheres to the idea of a genuine commitment to the popular audience, with certain reservations:

To go beyond what Wildcat and 7:84 have established, you have fundamentally to alter your practice in terms of how you relate to the audience when you're not there, when the tour and the show aren't on...But you need the people who can do that and you need the money - both rather hard to come by.

(Gieseckam 1990: 324)

Although it had not been written specifically with this popular audience in mind, Benny Lynch made Arnott aware of the possibility of reaching a popular audience, and relating to them through his own imaginative abilities as a writer.

It also brought him recognition as a writer capable of connecting with this audience. Problematically, the relative successes of both works put Arnott under pressure to conform to the demands of very differing contexts and groups of people: from the Oxbridge set at the Traverse and from the kind of young Scots radical theatre workers involved with United Artists and community theatre work.

Arnott was able to resolve some of these contradictory pressures through his next piece of work, particularly because it was a commission for The Tron. Entitled Thomas Muir's Voyage to Australia, this focussed on the transportation of Thomas Muir, the Eighteenth Century radical Scots lawyer, who was convicted for sedition because of his work for constitutional reform. The commission was realised in two forms: an extended three act version for the Tron stage, and a second street theatre version for the Tron Youth Theatre. The three and a half hour stage version interweaves two narrative strands through the first two acts: one dealing with Muir's voyage; the other concerning the events leading up to his conviction. In Act Three, the narrative moves from the present time of the voyage to Muir's trial, and then back again to Muir's meeting with Danton and Saint-Juste, before leaping forward again to Muir's life on a smallholding in Sydney.

Unfortunately, the very length of the piece militated against a favourable critical reception: Frank Kuppner's review for Scottish Theatre News (51: 14-15) described it as 'a case of theatre struggling in the narrow gap between an exciting initial "project" and a disappearing timetable'. Arnott himself described it as 'a lot of good ideas which didn't quite happen theatrically - it's such a complex story, that I think I lost sight of the theatrical side of it for a bit.' (Gieseckam, 1990: 327). Nonetheless, other reviewers saw much merit in the work: Tony Paterson wrote that it was 'a play of considerable stature as well as one of the most imaginative productions and one of the most

striking leading performances seen in Glasgow for quite some time' (Glasgow Herald 5/5/86). With its fluid structure, its complex movement between abstract political ideas and the situation of the individual, and its theatrical possibilities, Muir is potentially an epic comparable to the work of Bond or Arden. It will take subsequent productions through which Arnott might rework it before this is unambiguously achieved.

Arnott's perception of Muir as a failure took a substantial toll on him. He had invested so much time and creative energy in it that he found it difficult to return to writing full-length plays for some time. Instead, he and Peter Mullan, an actor who had already been involved in community drama work, formed a cabaret group, The Redheads, touring around the same community centre circuit as the Merry Macs were then doing. Arnott also became involved in a Community Arts Network Strathclyde (CANS) committee to develop a training course for community arts workers, funded through the European Social Fund. He himself began to take drama groups in a number of centres (at one stage five per week). Since he had also worked with United Artists, this activity inevitably fed into what became the Calton Weavers' Project (mentioned briefly before in connection with the Merry Mac Fun Show). Glasgow District Trades Council had sought to commemorate the bicentennial of the deaths of six weavers from Glasgow's East End who had been shot by the military during a demonstration over wage cuts in 1787. In conjunction with United Artists, CANS responded by initiating a community theatre project involving around twenty community theatre groups, each exploring responses to the anniversary in relation to their own lives. This eventually led to performances at the May Day Rally on Glasgow Green by many of the groups<sup>2</sup>.

The strain of these various activities on Arnott's development as a writer is illustrated in the hiatus that he underwent between the end of the Muir project and Losing

Alec. Although he wrote a Wildcat Christmas Carol for that company's Christmas show in 1986, he produced no other complete work until 1988. Losing Alec was initially developed as one of three short plays, only later being extended as the result of a commission from Michael Boyd at the Tron. He describes it as 'the first play of mine that I felt was wholly mine, that I was happy with' (Maguire 1991c: 2). It was generally successful with audiences and critics: Mary Brennan described it as 'one of Arnott's most accomplished, most searching and rewarding plays to date' (Glasgow Herald 14/11/88). Arnott feels at home in the Tron, although he sees it as 'in many ways a contradictory space' mainly because its core audience is not a popular one. His working relationship with the director, Michael Boyd, is strong and one from which he receives a lot of support. He explained to Greg Gieseckam that he views the Tron as one of the 'few creative spaces where you can take risks, financially, with different types of writing' (Gieseckam 1990: 323) and as a place that challenges him because of the 'flexibility' this allows him.

Following Losing Alec, Arnott began work with Peter Mullan on a second show for Wildcat, this time a directly campaigning piece on the Poll Tax, Harmony Row. It was the first major theatre work on the issue in Scotland and it examined in depth the difficulties that might face a mass non-payment campaign, focussed through the community of Govan's Harmony Row. The play traces the conflict between Sheila, a community worker, trying to help people by drawing in EEC initiatives and support from local businessmen, and Mrs Paterson, a local woman attempting to organise a non-payment campaign against the Poll Tax. Caught in the conflict are Mrs Paterson's daughter Moira, a Labour councillor, and various people from the community. As in White Rose, what is explored is the pressure that political actions and decisions bring to bear on private and public relationships. The difficulties with the production, however, were that this exploration had to be accommodated

within a Wildcat musical format which did not lend itself easily to Arnott's discursive style.

The production attracted large audiences as it toured throughout Central Scotland and was successfully linked to local non-payment campaigns and the work of the Anti-Poll Tax Federation. Despite Wildcat's strong connections with the mainly Labour local authorities and the trade unions, the piece was critical of the official Labour stance. This had three advantages. Firstly, it allowed Wildcat to maintain their relationship with the more radical elements in their audience. Secondly, it distanced the in-house writing team of Anderson and MacLennan from the 'Young Turks', Anderson and Mullan. Thus, for example the poor reception that the production received at the STUC Annual Conference, did not markedly affect the relationship between Wildcat and unions who had already sponsored them. Thirdly, the Wildcat production allowed the writers access to the popular audience which the company had already built up - the show eventually played to around 35,000 people.

Harmony Row was an important milestone for both Wildcat and Arnott. For Wildcat it was the only directly campaigning show which they performed during the mid to late 1980s. It was able to trade on the audience that the company had built up through celebrations of working class life, like The Steamie and The Celtic Story. As such, it was also exceptional within Scottish theatres in general, which while embracing certain aspects of working class culture had become distant from immediate political realities. For Arnott, it was his first attempt at a large-scale campaigning piece, allowing him to put into practice his experiences within the working class communities of Glasgow. It retained Arnott's distinctive mark through its exploration of the difficulties which the campaign would face, rather than engaging in an unequivocal celebration of the fact that the campaign existed.

After Harmony Row, Arnott returned to write for the Tron. As part of that theatre's contribution to Glasgow 1990, he was taken on as writer-in-residence. This allowed him a creative space in which to concentrate on his own work, but he also acted as Script Editor, advising new writers on their development. In August 1990, he contributed to a multi-media piece, Century's End, with Performance, a group who had specifically come together for this production. Arnott's next work was also for the Tron: Salvation. Staged in September 1990, it was one of four pieces by Scottish writers to be staged there in the autumn season. With the exception of Bruce Morton's pantomime, The Treasure of Wookimago, all the works suffered from a lack of development, undoubtedly connected to the pressure of preparing each of them to fit into the same season's schedule. Although Arnott worked continuously on Salvation up to and during the run, he still considers it an unfinished play, relishing the opportunity to rework it through another production. It was described as 'a conspiracy thriller' in the pre-publicity for the show, and is set in the capital city of an imaginary country from the developing world. It uses the unlikely character of Cloon, an ex-government agent, to uncover a web of corruption within the state. As in Losing Alec, there is an attempt to use a multiviewpoint dramaturgy, but the play as presented did not demonstrate that the thriller genre was amenable to such a format.

Since Salvation, Arnott has worked on a number of new projects, including co-writing a television sit-com with Peter Mullan, and the development of a song-writing partnership with Craig Artmstrong. In retrospect, Arnott agrees that his development has been almost that of an archetypal Scots writer with regard to the contradictions with which he has been faced. Living in Glasgow has had advantages and disadvantages for him:

The good side is that it's a very strong context in which to base your work. It's a city, which if you live

in it, you can't avoid...You can't feel hermetically sealed away from it, so you have to negotiate with a city that you are somewhat alien to anyway...There's a firm political context in terms of the political culture here. It's very well defined, so, although it has its difficulties, at least you know where you are with it.

(Maguire 1991c: 5)

Yet, Arnott feels that much of the dynamism in Scottish culture in the early and mid 1980s has now dissipated, leaving a culture that is 'static', and in which life is lived and art created within limited possibilities. The sense of defeat that was so pervasive after 1979 seems to have returned. As a writer in Scotland Arnott is faced with the task of creating theatre out of or despite such a sense.

### **Production Background**

To appreciate the context in which Losing Alec was produced, it is important to understand how the Tron fits into the changing theatrical set-up in Scotland. The Tron sprang from the Glasgow Theatre Club (GTC) which began life at a public meeting in 1978 at the Third Eye Centre. The initiators of the club felt that Glasgow was missing out on both the exciting touring theatre which was visiting Scotland and the developments of new work within Scotland itself. GTC operated for the first years of its existence mainly as a promoter, bringing work to Glasgow, including tremendous commercial successes with transfers of The Slab Boys Trilogy by John Byrne and a revival of Roddy McMillan's The Bevellers to the Pavillion. The club moved its offices into the present building, a disused church, at the invitation of Glasgow District Council, with whose Direct Labour Organisation they initially shared it. By 1981, the building was opened to the public as a bar/theatre, seating sixty, and within the first 18 months had produced about 350 performances of some 70 shows, including 13 productions for the Tron company or devised by it. In November 1982, the present main 200 seat auditorium was opened. It incorporates

a playing space of around 25'x 27', which lends itself both to intimate and more large scale performances.

Originally the programme for the theatre was chosen by a sub-committee of 5 'who choose visiting companies, read submitted scripts, and select directors for the Tron's own productions' (Giesekam 1983: 22). This resulted in a diverse pluralist policy which included work within the broad categories of new Scottish work, socialist/feminist theatre, experimental theatre, and new foreign work. Even with the appointment of Michael Boyd as artistic director in 1984, this diversity remained a consistent feature of the theatre's programme. Although Boyd placed a particular emphasis on the development of new Scottish work, writing in a brochure celebrating GTC's first decade,

The Tron particularly produces and promotes more new Scottish work than any other theatre in the country, employing home-based actors, directors and designers. Our chief goal is to achieve mature work of excellence from indigenous artists; surely a valuable role for us to play in Glasgow over the next three years, and seemingly a policy that works: our box-office receipts are up by well over 300 per cent since 1984.

(GTC 1988: 27)

the theatre has continued to function as a bridge between Scottish theatre and British and foreign work. In recent years it has had notable successes, for example, with translations and adaptations of the work of Quebecquois playwright Michel Tremblay using Scottish performers. At the same time, it retains a regular diet of familiar Scottish performers and writers, connecting it to the more local tastes of its audience.

Although originating in the efforts of the membership of GTC, many of whom had literally had a hand in the theatre's construction and continued running, the Tron has always been able to attract a non-club audience. Giesekam's 1983 article notes that over half of the audience at that time were non-club members. In 1989 the company discarded its club status, opening as a fully public building, more in

recognition of its actual status than as a change in policy. In 1990 the company undertook a survey for two of its productions, Chris Hannan's The Baby and Peter Arnott's Salvation, which reveals more about its audience. The majority of the theatregoers were aged between 26 and 45 (57%), involved in middle-class professions or business (57%), and regular attenders at the theatre at a variety of venues<sup>3</sup>. However, as GTC's early successes with the work of Byrne and McMillan demonstrated, a more popular audience can be attracted for certain shows, subjects, and performers. So, for example, in 1990 Paddy's Market was able to play to full houses at the Tron, and later be mounted as a commercial transfer to the Pavillion on the strength of the reputation of the writer, Tony Roper, who had written The Steamie, the cast, which included Russell Hunter and Una MacLean, and the subject, the street sellers in Glasgow's flea market. Thus, the venue is not fixed rigidly within any particular class context or with any particular reputation.

In this respect it is important to note again the distinction between political theatre and political plays made by Sandy Craig:

the important feature which distinguishes political plays from political theatre is this: political plays seek to appeal to, and influence the middle class, in particular that section of the middle class which is influential in moulding 'public opinion'. The implication of this is that society can be reformed and liberalised, where necessary, by the shock troops of the middle class - and, of course, such people are influential in campaigns for reform. But further, political plays in bourgeois theatre implicitly recognize that the middle class remains the progressive class within society. Political theatre, on the other hand, as embodied in the various political theatre companies, aims - with varying degrees of success - to appeal to, and be an expression of, the working class. Its underlying belief is that the working class is the progressive class within society.

(Craig 1980: 30)

While Craig's distinction points up the contradictions faced by any writer who does not control the production of his or her own work, and must accept opportunities offered within a variety of contexts, it must be tempered by Arnott's view (quoted above) that working class audiences alone do not imply progressive theatre. This is particularly so since Craig's argument could not and does not accommodate the prospect of a genuine bridging of this distinction. In Scotland such bridging has been made possible precisely because of the success of the political theatre companies in building a popular audience for theatre. From the earliest tours by companies like 7:84 and Wildcat, political theatre companies established a pattern of using repertory theatres like the Citizens and the Royal Lyceum as venues to which they brought their own audiences. There has been a concomitant (re-)orientation by certain of these bourgeois institutions towards a popular audience by producing plays that either more directly engage with the social reality of the context in which they are located, or invoke sentimental and nostalgic images from the shared memory of what that social reality has been.

In respect of the audience for Losing Alec, it is important to further contextualise the production within the Tron programme of that season. It had been immediately preceded by Hector MacMillan's The Funeral, the sequel to The Sash (1973). The Sash examined sectarianism in Glasgow through the relationship between Bill McWilliam, a staunch member of the local Orange Lodge, and his son who rejects his father's values. It was one of the most successful plays in Scotland in the 1970s and has been subsequently revived a number of times - the most recent revival was by 7:84, deliberately coinciding with the production of The Funeral. This sequel brings the characters up to date, where they gather together at Bill McWilliam's funeral. It sold out every night of its run at The Tron and later transferred to Cumbernauld Theatre and then Glasgow's Pavillion in a commercial co-production between The Tron and IPB

Productions. Losing Alec and The Funeral were billed in the pre-publicity as 'two Glasgow plays', and it was the face of the main actor from The Funeral, Phil McCall, that was used in the publicity for Losing Alec. McCall's reputation is as a light comic actor and there is little doubt that the pre-publicity for the production - 'Back from the war in '45, on the scrapheap in '79, Alec MacSwiney, now 68 and as spry as paint, gets hit with a Morris Minor' - suggested that this subsequent casting of him in the title role would be as 'hilarious' as his performance in The Funeral. A number of the cast from The Funeral were also to play in Losing Alec. Joyce McMillan's review of the piece connects it with the same popular tradition: 'it recalls popular Glasgow comedy-drama like Hector MacMillan's The Sash and Paul Pender's The Game' (The Guardian 15/11/88).

Thus, although Losing Alec was a new play, it was presented beforehand in terms of a recognisable setting with familiar performers, within a context that suggested that it would function as a good night out in the same tradition as MacMillan's and other popular Glasgow plays. Moreover, it ostensibly deals with very similar subject matter to The Funeral: the death and funeral of a distinctive Glaswegian father and the problems faced by his family and friends as they come to terms with the new reality. It therefore fits in with what Arnott describes as 'a whole tradition of Glasgow realist drama, and plays about the family' (Gieseckam 1990: 330). Given these ingredients, it is not unreasonable that the audience would have been more popular than those suggested by the survey figures for the two new plays mentioned above. Interestingly also, Arnott's final shaping of his work was done during the run of The Funeral, two and a half weeks into the rehearsal for Losing Alec. Although in retrospect he has denied that he was influenced by the MacMillan piece, there is a sense in which this final shaping deliberately plays against the problems thrown up by the earlier piece. Moreover, Arnott must have been influenced by the presence of his close friend, Peter

Mullan, in The Funeral, playing the role of the returning son just as he was to do for Losing Alec.

### **Production Analysis**

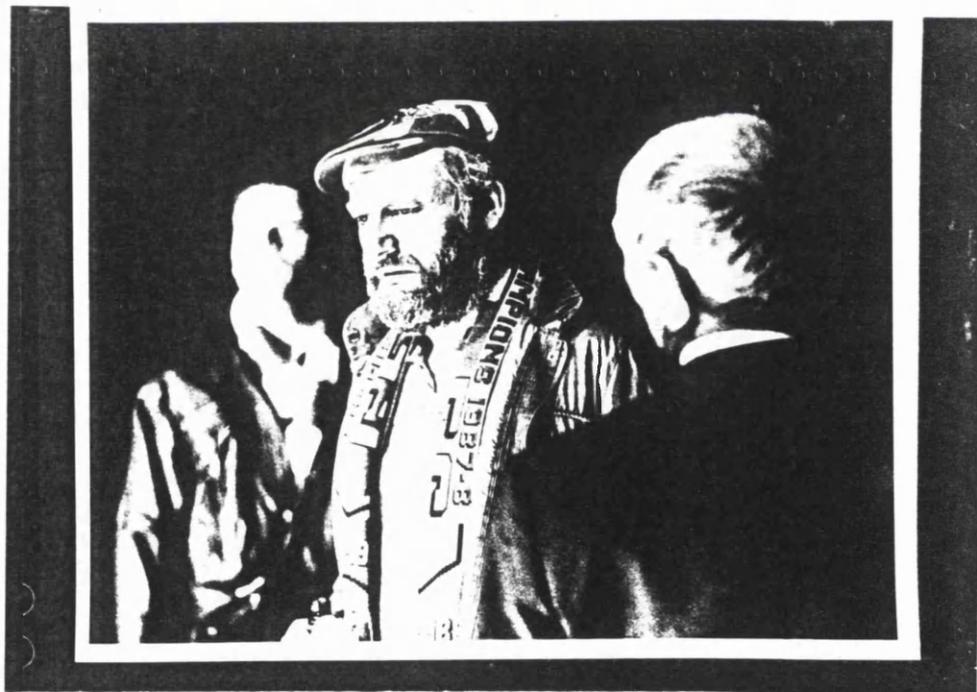
One of the main characteristics of the context for Losing Alec must be acknowledged to be the way in which it located it within a familiar and recognisable frame. It is the argument here that there is a deliberate playing with and against this frame within the production which set up certain resonances for the audience as the performance develops.

The play opens with a burial scene, the MacSwiney family gathered around the graveside of Alec MacSwiney: the widow, the daughter, the son, his ex-girlfriend, Lizzie, and the dead man's best friend. Each of the mourners in turn offers some comment on the dead man. As they leave, there is a marvellous piece of theatricality as the audience is confronted with the coffin lid opening out and the figure of Alec emerging from the dead. He announces that he has come back to bring justice to those he has left behind.

Back in the MacSwiney's house, drinks are distributed in a post-funeral wake. The characters are set up through this scene: Tam, Alec's son, has come back from England for the funeral, and is under pressure to stay. Jeannie, his sister, resents him for leaving in the first place, and is unwilling to forgive him that. Mae, Alec's widow is obviously distressed and Donald, Alec's best friend, attempts to provide support for her and to mediate between Jeannie and Tam. Lizzie and Tam are also attempting to renegotiate their relationship. As these various strands are teased out, Alec hovers in the background, preparing to haunt those of his family he feels have betrayed him and his beliefs. He appears to Mae, the only character who can see him, causing her to collapse. He later threatens to send her mad as his revenge on her because she is attempting to

accommodate the changes that his death has brought. This provides a focus for antagonism between Mae and Jeannie.

The next day, Tam meets Lizzie at the wine bar where she is working. They had stayed together the previous night and this has revived the difficulties which split them up before. They attempt a reconciliation on the basis that they have both changed. Alec hangs over the conversation, chipping in sarcastically on what Tam is doing. At home Mae is attempting to clear out Alec's clothes to sell at the Barras. Jeannie resists this, trying to persuade her mother to take things easy and at the same time to preserve her father's memory. She also hints that Mae might perhaps be



**Plate 10: Alec haunts Tam & Donald**

(Left-Right: Peter Mullan, Stewart Preston, Phil McCall)

Photo: Sean Hudson.

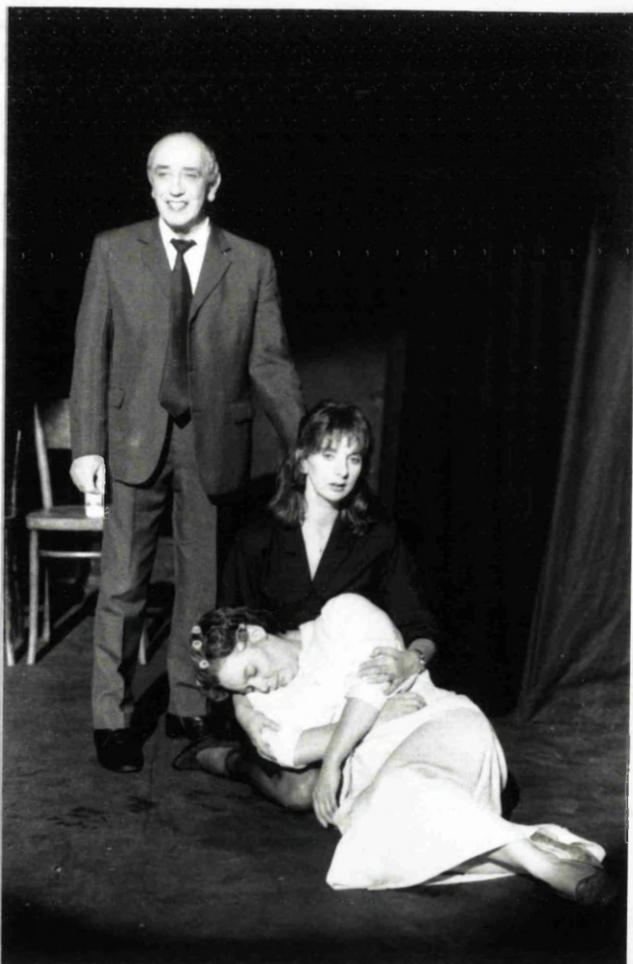
mentally unstable because of the effects of the funeral. They spend time discussing what Alec had been like and it emerges that Jeannie had been married but that the marriage had broken up. Alec enters again to confront Mae. This time she vomits violently. Crucially however, as she gets to her feet she displays a resolve that suggests that she will resist Alec.

The scene switches to a pub where Donald and Tam meet before going off to watch a Celtic game. They discuss Alec also, and he enters to watch over their conversation. When Donald tries to encourage Tam to have respect for his father, Tam tells how he had been terrorised as a child by Alec, and that that was the reason for his leaving. Furious at this, Alec threatens to begin to make the rest of his family die. At home, Mae is preparing to go out to sell Alec's clothes. When he appears to her she confronts and rejects him. The production broke for the interval at this point.

The second half opened with Tam and Donald drunkenly returning from the game, in celebration of a Celtic victory. They stop for a drink at the wine bar where Lizzie works. They discuss the war and the parts that Alec and Donald played. Lizzie tells Tam that his mother has phoned from the Barras to check if he is coming home that evening. He thinks that there must be something wrong and forgoes Lizzie's invitation to go to a party with her that night. Alec has appeared and condemns both Tam and Lizzie. Mae and Lizzie have just returned from the Barras, and while Jeannie unpacks the shopping, Alec appears to Mae and she tells him that she will continue to confront him. Jeannie comes in and tries to get Mae to talk to her about Alec, but Mae refuses. When Donald and Tam reach the house they find that Mae and Jeannie have gone upstairs. Jeannie comes down to explain that they have been at the Barras selling Alec's clothes. When Mae enters they end up sitting together discussing Alec. Mae tells them that she has seen Alec's ghost, and



**Plate 11: Alec's Funeral**  
Left-Right: Peter Mullan,  
Eileen Nicholas, Janette Foggo  
Photo: Sean Hudson



**Plate 12: Mae collapses**  
(Left-Right: Phil McCall,  
Janette Foggo, Eileen Nicholas)

Photo: Sean Hudson

that he wants her dead for turning Tam against him. Tam attempts to confront him but cannot actually see him. Mae rounds on them all. In the aftermath, Tam leaves to call Lizzie at the party, and Jeannie runs off to lock herself in the toilet.

Tam and Lizzie's conversation is erratic, interspersed with Donald and Mae's attempts to get Jeannie to open the door. Jeannie is now trying to overdose herself, with Alec standing beside her. When he sees what she is doing he tries to stop her but can't. Donald and Mae break the door in and as Donald is dispatched to find a doctor, Mae and Alec face each other over Jeannie's inert body. Tam arrives, having been fetched by Donald. He too confronts Alec, refusing to accept that this is his father. The final scene of the play takes place on the third day, the Sunday, with the same people gathered around Alec's grave, as they had been in the opening scene.

This plot summary does not uncover any ostensible political commentary or analysis within the play. Its structure follows the pattern of a classic narrative as discussed in previous chapters (equilibrium, disruption, and restoration of equilibrium). The funeral opening is perhaps ordinarily a strange kind of equilibrium, however, given that the play tells a ghost story it is apposite. As in Killing Me Softly, narrative closure is created through the repetition of the scenic image (here, the family around the coffin) with which the play opens. Similarly, its plot is inextricably tied to the psychological development within its characterisation. It is this level of the play that I will begin by exploring.

Firstly, these characters represent what might almost be seen as a stock family unit, with classically derived family conflicts: most obviously the Oedipal and Electra relationships between the parents and children. Arnott explains that this was not a deliberate attempt to invoke these concepts:

It evolves as the thing goes on. When you're writing any scene between any mother and son, or any father and daughter, then you are aware of precedents, you're aware of the cultural baggage that you're bringing to it...These things are classical because they're recognisable, partly. They're not classical because they exist in texts, but because they are actual....

In a way the schematic element comes into it when you know that you have a certain size of cast to deal with and a certain range of reactions that you have to encompass within that. With Alec as the main figure, the widow, the son and the daughter, the best friend and the son's girlfriend seemed to be organically pleasing.

(Maguire 1991c: 10)

One accepts this, and indeed that the audience may not immediately read the dramatis personae in terms of classic myths. However, it is important to also acknowledge that this kind of family unit is one which is instantly recognisable and familiar to Glasgow audiences from stage representations, even though it is not a model that correlates with the common extended family units of the Glasgow working class, or indeed with the disrupted patterns of the contemporary one parent family. It does therefore have a schematic quality to it as a poetic and imaginative construct, rather than as a replication of actuality.

I have said that the narrative is tied to the psychological development of the characters, but this needs to be qualified. In a very real sense, most of the characters show little actual development for a significant part of the play: much of it is spent in delineating for the audience and for the other characters the characteristics which they have brought as the performance begins. It is an investigation of these characteristics for each of them. This is prepared for by the post-funeral setting, a recognisable time for re-evaluation, for considering endings and new beginnings. As these people are brought back together they attempt to explain to themselves and to those around them who it is that they have become. Very little actually happens until the second part of the performance, when

events accelerate under the pressure of the psychological forces which have been established in the first half. Thus, most of the play is allocated to the characters explaining to one another about themselves, and the interplay of their contesting histories of the family and the dead man. In a preview, Arnott noted that 'At a psychological level, it's about how each member of the family has to lose Alec in his or her own way - including Alec himself' (The List 28 Oct-10 Nov 1988). This level allows for an explanation of the characters' past and their present actions in terms of their individual psychology.

However, it is notable that comparable dramatic space is allocated to each of the characters, developing them each on an almost equal basis. Catherine Itzin's refers to the work of David Haliwell thus:

Haliwell used the story of 'dog bites man'. Haliwell: 'In the multiviewpoint play you show the incident from the point of view of the man, from the point of view of the dog and then from the point of view of the bite.'

(Itzin 1980: 10)

Arnott agrees that this idea of a multiviewpoint play captures what it was he was attempting in Losing Alec. He points to its presence in Shakespeare as the source for it in his own work. Each character is allowed to put their version of the past before the audience as they explain it to another character. The dramatic tensions of the piece derive from the incongruities between these versions and the inability of each of the characters to accept the validity of other versions. They cannot sustain the paradoxes and contradictions thrown up by the past. This breaks substantially with the tradition of classic realist texts (see the previous discussion of Killing Me Softly), precisely because of the interplay of this multiplicity of viewpoints. In classic narrative the concentration is on the psychological development of one or two central characters; here the development of the play is linked to the development of all the characters.

However, the views of all the characters are not treated as equivalent: there are clearly some that are presented as more enabling than others. Nonetheless, there is no simple dichotomy set up between these. While Jeannie reveres Alec's memory and Tam abhors the ways in which it haunts him, they are both faced with the inadequacies of their versions. For Tam this comes as he contemplates suicide early in the play; for Jeannie as she actually attempts suicide towards the end. The acceptance of a total congruity between their versions of Alec and his reality offers only death; the decision to renegotiate these versions in the light of the experiences of others brings life. The versions of Alec that are enabling are those which can sustain, if not reconcile, the contradictions of Alec's life, and move beyond them. Thus, once Mae decides to confront Alec's ghost she is able to exorcise the haunting memory and to come to terms with the past. Tam begins to come to terms with his father's memory precisely because he has undertaken to do just that. Jeannie's suicide attempt comes from her inability to come to terms with the memory of her father now that he is dead, not the invalidity of that memory.

This illustrates the way in which Alec functions as a trope for the psychological states of those around him: they must each come to terms with their memories of him and his physical presence onstage illustrates the various ways in which they each remember him. So, for Tam, Alec is present as an embittered old man taunting his son's attempts to come to terms with those around him. For Mae, Alec is a recriminating Fury, haunting her with her own bad conscience for the failures in their marriage and their family. For Jeannie, Alec is a fondly remembered father who always treated her with kindness. Alec's role can be read as representing the memories with which each of the characters has to contend. In presenting Alec as a character onstage the production validates each of these versions as authentic. Paradoxically, then, the presence of Alec's ghost

as a character enhances the development of the psychological aspects of the other characters, rather than undermining them.

This deepening of the psychological interest of the characters does not diminish the way in which such a multiplicity of viewpoints might have been accommodated by the audience in much the same way as they might read a British television soap opera<sup>4</sup>. This is because this stage play and the British soap opera genre exhibit certain similar conventions, of which this multiplicity is one.<sup>5</sup> Television soap opera is constructed around multiple viewpoints for a number of reasons. Firstly they are a means of creating interest in the various characters; occasionally developing the psychological depth of these characters as they face particular problems and crises. Secondly, they create suspense by postponing the narrative development of each new crisis; thirdly, soaps create dramatic tension precisely by creating conflicting viewpoints for their characters on the crises that they face.

Moreover, soaps (at least British soaps) tend to be socially extensive in ways that few other television dramas are. Their interest is in working class characters, and they predominantly focus on the domestic. As in the latter parts of Killing Me Softly, the action here is contained within one small family grouping and their domestic situation; it is extended to encompass common meeting points in the pub and the wine bar - typical 'other' locations for soaps. Within this setting what is being tested is the authority of the family; again this is a key dynamic of soap opera. As in Killing Me Softly, it is crucially the mother who takes charge of the family in crisis, exerting her 'feminine competency' for managing the personal within the domestic sphere: I refer again to Tania Modleski, who writes of the soap opera mother that her 'sympathy is large enough to encompass the conflicting claims of her family (she identifies with no one character

exclusively)' (Modleski 1982: 92). She is able through a repertoire of common sense skills and values to cope with the crisis and hold the family together.

Moreover, the dominant formal characteristic of soap - its realism - means that the locale and the characters are inextricably linked within the closed setting: John Fiske has described the basis of realism as being that

The senses and experiences of the individual are seen as the prime way of making sense of this universe of phenomena, and if social, moral, religious, or political ideas intrude, they must always be expressed within the forms of the individual experience.

(Fiske 1987: 22)

While the realism of television soap opera is different from that of other genres and media, this is the central point: the emphasis on the individual. The extent to which the audience might read the performance in terms of this 'soap realism', is the extent to which they read it in terms of only the individuals concerned and without wider reference.<sup>6</sup> It is a complete and closed world with which the audience engages vicariously through empathy with the characters: the space left to allow the audience its own role as agent is minimal. That such terms might have been applied to Losing Alec is illustrated by Iain Grant's review of the production for The Sunday Times (13/11/90) which emphasises it as a 'gritty; realistic and down-to-earth' 'family drama'.

The reading of the production according to these conventions and therefore in such personal terms is disrupted, however, by a range of elements, both textual and contextual. Primarily, Alec has a reality of his own for the audience over and above this function of representing the internal states of the other characters. His first two appearances in fact are made on his own: the first when he emerges from the coffin; and the second on the balcony of the flat, just after Tam has decided against suicide. The audience has to square the version of Alec with which they

are presented with the versions that the other characters offer. This is a deliberate tactic on Arnott's part that coincided positively with the casting of Phil McCall in the title role:

the fact that he [McCall] is thought of as a light comedy figure was really helpful - that Alec was going to come out being frightening and funny to begin with and was going to degenerate into just being horrible and frightening by the end of it. And Phil's presence - it was good to have somebody who as it turned out had that Variety feel to them, because he could immediately set up a rapport with the audience, because the audience could then go, 'Oh, I don't want to like him any more', which is obviously really useful.

(Maguire 1991c: 11)

The presence of Alec is therefore a challenge to the audience to make sense of the situation from a perspective which encompasses the views of all the characters, including Alec's presentation of himself to them. It offers them the role of agents in reconstructing the piece on their own terms. The limitations and dangers of creating one single character as a point of entry for an empathetic engagement with the situation were of course available: Arnott comments that, 'A lot of people came up after and said that they knew someone just like him. I had wanted to create a figure who had that immediately recognizable quality' (Giesekam 1990: 332). The multiple viewpoints on Alec and indeed on each of the characters give them a complexity which is established socially rather than through individual empathy with them. The itinerary of empathy which is created through the multiplicity of the viewpoints sets up ambiguity and difficulty that the audience is left to resolve. In soap opera such ambiguity is typically avoided by inviting the audience to identify with one side of the conflict according to their identification with one or other of the characters involved.<sup>7</sup>

Moreover, precisely because of what it is with which Alec identifies, the play confronts issues from the sphere of public politics. The 'patriarchy and a kind of

conservatism' (ibid) which Alec espouses- the Labourist values he holds so dear - take him beyond the psychological and personal. He embodies the kind of Glaswegian masculinity which eschews sensitivity as a sign of weakness. The patriarchal role which such a version of masculinity commands is one that audiences might have recognised because they may have been personally familiar with it; because of the pervasiveness of it culturally; and because they are theatrically familiar with it from a tradition of Glasgow and 'urban kailyard' theatre, the most recent example of which was in fact MacMillan's The Funeral. The audience, in deciding about Alec as an individual character, are therefore forced to consider the political perspectives which he articulates. I will discuss further elements of this perspective in relation to the circumstances in which the production was staged.

It is of interest to note the way in which the situating of the character of Alec in such a patriarchal role gave the production a schematic quality, particularly through the role of Lizzie, Tam's girlfriend. Arnott included this role because

the play needed an outsider...Lizzie has uncertainties of her own, but because they are of a different quality and background to everyone else's hang-ups, that gives her strength within that particular context...She has more ammunition than them because she is not crippled by Alec

(Maguire 1991c: 15)

Making that role into one for a female character allowed Lizzie to challenge Tam in a way no other character is able and contrasted her reactions with those of Mae and Jeannie. Yet, precisely because Alec is such a patriarchal and chauvinist figure, both embodying and representing Glaswegian machismo, Lizzie's role takes on a feminist hue, because she demonstrates the 'feminine' attributes of caring, comforting, and listening. Arnott's reaction to this is that

The fact that it is a bit schematic worries me more than interests me. I think that that is restricting Lizzie and dehumanising her if she is too schematically convenient. There's not necessarily an intrinsic problem with that but there can be if she's not given room to develop as a character in her own right.

(ibid)

The way in which The Funeral attempted to use a black female role in a similar way, for example, points to the dangers to which Arnott refers of invoking such schema. In this case, however, the possibilities of extending the readings of the play enriched rather than diminished it.

The second textual element to disrupt a reading of the production according to the conventions of realism was the way in which it was staged. Arnott describes the stage set as a 'kind of sub-Shakespearian stage shape...a main playing space with a hidden bit at the back and a balcony above as a theatrical machine is pretty much perfect' (Maguire 1991c: 12). Rather than replicating the conditions of a council house, as The Funeral had done, for example, here the stage set is able to accommodate a variety of locations: the graveyard, the living room, two different pubs, a street (played on the balcony), and the party that Lizzie goes to. Thus, the situation is located and at the same time is not controlled by such location since it is not constrained by the material conditions of one particular environment. The decision by Michael Boyd to stage the play in this way had two main effects. One was that it allowed the development of a convincing sense of the real without replicating reality. The second and related effect was that this abstraction away from verisimilitude opened up the possibility for extended metaphorical readings. Sarah Hemming commented that 'Michael Boyd's spare production, with its combination of realism and symbolism, manages the passage from minor to major key beautifully' (The Independent 18/11/88). This possibility again inscribed the audience as co-creative agents in constructing the levels of resonance for the play.

It explodes the possibility of meaning rather than narrowing them down to mere empirical endeavour.

Thirdly, and emphasizing this second point, is the way in which the ending was staged. As the characters leave Alec buried for good, the curtained backdrops were let fall exposing the bare brick of the theatre walls, the scaffolding of the set and the backstage area - a symbol of the throwing off of Alec's suffocating presence. The saxophonist, who has played accompanying music throughout in view of the audience, then descended the stairs on stage right and came into the centre of the stage. He was obviously made-up with a bright red cheeks painted onto a whitened face. As he entered, the house lights were raised and the performance ended with him leaving through the back of the stage area and the audience bathed in light. While the use of light is an obvious device for signalling hope, the combination of light and the exposure of the stage set implicated the audience in the possibility of more extensive meanings. The extension of the lighting effects from the stage to the auditorium included the audience in the metaphor that had been wrought before them.

These textual elements notwithstanding, there were peculiar contextual and circumstantial factors that also contributed to the widening resonances of the production for a Glasgow audience. Glasgow municipal politics was and is dominated by the Labour Party and the Labourist tradition. The measures taken by the then Labour administration to attract new investment to the city through The Garden Festival and the Year of Culture were effected within the context of a debate as to what principles would inform the Labour Party in Britain thenceforth. The divesting of the old ways - the kind of politics articulated by Alec - was of key concern to both left-wing radicals and the centrist moderates of the party precisely because they were under such close interrogation after so many years of the Thatcher governments. Prior to the production, Arnott

declared the kind of intervention in this debate he hoped it would make: 'In a way, Alec is the ghost of Labourism, someone who only wants to be a saviour, who can't face real change. I'm not saying Labourism is dead in Scotland - it's obviously not - but the political future of Scotland has to go far beyond what the Labour Party seems capable of providing' (The List 28 Oct-10 Nov 1988). However, as Arnott noted in retrospect in his interview with Greg Gieseckam many in the audience read the performance as pessimistic because of the way Alec was presented: they were dismayed by the perceived wholesale rejection of these old values, and a failure to honour their historical imperatives.

Furthermore, Arnott later commented that one key factor in the production's reception was the coincidence with the staging of the Govan by-election, in which the Labour Party candidate was challenged successfully by Jim Sillars, a former Labour MP now representing the SNP's left-wing nationalism: 'It never occurred to me that there was a debate between socialism and nationalism going on in the play. I didn't think that there was, but it seemed that its damnation of the Labour establishment through the person of Alec was supportive of Jim Sillars' nationalism' (Maguire 1991c: 16). Sarah Hemming's review of the play for The Independent (18/11/88) drew a similar conclusion: 'Peter Arnott must have been reading the tea leaves. His new play, Losing Alec, which opened in Glasgow the day after the Govan by-election, is largely concerned with the reasons behind the election's result'. What was remarkable about this by-election campaign was the way in which its debates were centred around who should inherit the mantle of the Red Clydesiders, Labour or the Nationalists. Thus, the very disputes of political reality were focused on the legacy of the past in exactly the same way as those of the play. Little wonder then that the audience's readings of the production should be extended to encompass such an obvious case of life imitating art.

What I hope to have thus far established is the tension within the production between the realist conventions that it exhibits on the one hand; and on the other, the ways in which it created more extensive resonances because of certain textual characteristics and contextual circumstances. Realism constructs a closed environment in terms of the individual; it is experienced vicariously through identification with individual characters and circumscribes the agency of the audience. The extended metaphorical levels of the production resist the possibility of such closure by bridging the gap between the specific stage situation and wider social reality. They create resonances between the two that are themselves left ambiguous and open. Joyce McMillan is careful to note in her review that the play does not explicitly draw any direct parallels between the stage world and public politics: '[It] is a clever, subtle, searching tragi-comedy about (I think) the corruption and loss of the city's grand Socialist heritage' (The Guardian 15/11/88). Similarly, Sarah Hemming commented, 'In its recognition of how Alec went wrong, the family learns the distinction between the two ways of thinking. They do so on a personal level; the political dimension of the argument is left to us' (The Independent 18/11/88).

Although from this review and the argument hereto, there may seem to be a distinction between the personal and the political, such a distinction has been used only as an analytical device. These characters not only 'represent' but also 'embody' wider political positions. Joyce McMillan's review captured this exactly:

he [Arnott] is pursuing a serious argument about the precise way in which the tradition of working-class Socialism and Labourism in Glasgow has been tragically undermined by its failure on the personal-political front, by the corrupt foundation of macho fantasies, suppressed personal violence, sexual and emotional illiteracy and domestic non-communication on which it was too often built.

Notably, one of Arnott's goals was to make representative characters 'in a way that doesn't restrict what's emotionally possible. People can represent things without necessarily being too limited as characters by what it is that they represent' (Maguire 1991c: 12). There is an element here of the way in which certain Scottish plays are read as engaging with the state of the nation even though they may be set in a sitting room. Arnott notes that 'We almost anticipate some kind of debate about what Scotland is and where it is and where it is going whenever you go into a theatre' (ibid: 13).

This relates directly to the ways in which the dynamic tension between the elements was reconciled in one of the key pleasures provided by the production: the pleasure of recognition. This connects directly to the frame in which the production was offered, which is discussed earlier. The drawing power of The Funeral identifiable from its pre-publicity was entirely based on how it would offer this pleasure - it would be a revisiting of the issues and characters familiar from The Sash, it would have a local setting, it would involve familiar performers. I refer here to Suanne Kelman's Globe and Mail (2/10/91) article, where she writes of the way in which recognition 'captures part of the tricky relationship between live performances and the audience's sense of community...The shock of shared recognition - hey this is our world! - is the most direct route to an audience's heart'. Again, connected to this are the 'pleasures of resistance' referred to in connection with the Merry Mac Fun Show's MacLash. To reiterate, these are described as

pleasures of common experiences identified and celebrated in art, and through this celebration given recognition and validation; pleasures of solidarity to which this sharing may give rise, pleasure in shared and socially defined aspirations and hopes; in a sense of identity and community.

(quoted Tulloch 1990: 15)

Significantly for this context, these remarks are made in discussion of Coronation Street, the longest running television soap opera in Britain. What is crucial about Losing Alec - in sharp contrast to plays like The Funeral - is that it offers these pleasures, and simultaneously challenges the audience to recover an agency for itself beyond them. Arnott believes that places like the Tron can attract a popular audience

on the basis of recognition. One of the worst things about a Glasgow theatre audience, and also one of the best things, is a tremendous hunger to see themselves - which is a good thing. But there is a tremendous industry at hand to try and show them sanitised versions of themselves...Obviously when you are trying to deal with actors on that kind of scale - particularly with actors like Phil McCall, and Dorothy Paul or David Anderson - they have that potential: they are already familiar, and already part of that cosy texture of Glasgow's vision of itself.

(Maguire 1991c: 8)

By concentrating on the shared reality, Losing Alec allows the audience these pleasures of recognition. Yet, it removes the possibility of its being integrated within the 'cosy texture' by engaging the audience's critical faculties about this shared reality. This gives a further key pleasure, that of the recovery of agency: a confirmation of the possibility and power to make oneself anew. It redeems the self from learnt or imposed identities and opens up the potential for change. It is the pleasure of the imagination unlocked. Fintan O'Toole argues that

There is an intimate connection between the theatrical imagination and the political imagination. Both are concerned with the creation of space within which things can happen, the calling into existence of a place where individuals become, for a time at least, a community sharing the same story, reacting to the same actions, anticipating the same denouement...Nations and theatres both work when they provide space for the imagination and do not crowd it out.

(O'Toole 1991: 18)

Thus, this pleasure of imaginative agency is allied to that of recognition because it binds the audience into a

community; but this community is bound through possibility, rather than through the imperatives of established myth or shared history.

Crucially then, Losing Alec makes no recommendations about what is to be done: it has opened the debate on both the personal and public political levels and does not seek to close it with its own solution: Arnott says that

the idea was also that vanquishing the devils may not be, isn't, salvation. I mean salvation is a big thing with me as you may have gathered: in that I passionately believe that there is no such thing. I think that salvation is a terribly destructive thing. So the banishing of the ghost is not going to save us, but unless we banish the ghosts, we can't start to save ourselves

(Maguire 1991c: 16)

By avoiding the closures of televisual realism, Arnott returns agency to the audience to allow them to decide for themselves about the characters, about the wider political resonances and about how they themselves will resolve the contradictions of the political reality.

I have shown how Losing Alec was offered as a Glasgow play, of a type familiar to its audience. By setting up a dichotomy between the soap opera conventions that the play exhibits on the one hand and certain 'anti-realist' elements within the text and particular contextual circumstances on the other, I have shown how there was a dynamic tension within the production. This tension was fruitful because it coincided with the audience's expectations of the kind of play that they would see and the pleasures of recognition that they expected to enjoy, at the same time forcing them to reconsider those expectations and the social reality to which they returned. Losing Alec is therefore one of the key productions of the period because it successfully negotiated the needs of a popular audience within an established theatre with the goal of exposing the gap between the promises of the patriarchal labourist heritage and the reality of lived experience.

**Peter Arnott Playography**

The Death of Elias Sawney

Cambridge Mummings 1984, Traverse Oct 1985

The Boxer Benny Lynch

United Artists (Scotland) Mayfest 1985, revived tours  
Oct-Nov 1985 & Feb-Apr 1986.

White Rose

Traverse 22-29 May 1985 & 11-20 Aug 1985, transfers to  
Almeida Theatre, London; Belgrade Theatre, Coventry,  
Jan 1987; New Theatre Melbourne, Aug 1987; United  
Artists (Scotland) tour Aug-Sept 1987.

Thomas Muir's Voyage to Australia

Tron May 1986; and street theatre version for Tron  
youth theatre

A Wildcat Christmas Carol

Wildcat Dec 1986

Losing Alec

Tron 10-27 Nov 1988

Harmony Row

Wildcat Tour Apr-Jul 1989

Century's End

Performance at the Tron, Aug 1990

Salvation

Tron 15-30 Sept 1990

Also contributions to Wildcat's It's a Free Country and  
Wildnights in 1986.

# WILDCAT

& FREEWAY present

## BORDER WARFARE

by JOHN McGRATH

Director: JOHN McGRATH  
Designer: PAMELA HOWARD  
Composer: RAB HANDLEIGH  
Lighting: KRIS MISSELBROOK  
Associate Director / Movement:  
STUART HOPPS

# PROGRAMME

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Plate 13: Programme for Border Warfare

## 9. BORDER WARFARE

### Introduction

In terms of longevity and priority alone John McGrath would have to be regarded as one of the foremost practitioners of political theatre in Scotland. He has created a rich legacy as a writer and director, with works including the seminal The Cheviot, The Stag, And The Black, Black Oil. For two decades, his theatre work was inextricably linked with that of the 7:84 Theatre Company, initially in England and then with the Scottish wing from its inception in 1973 until 1988 when he resigned as the company's artistic director. As well as being a prolific writer and director for film and theatre, McGrath is also one of the few practitioners of political theatre in Britain to attempt to give a coherent account of his work and to extend this into a theory for practice. He has published a number of articles and interviews as well as two books on theatre. In 1981 A Good Night Out, a collection of lectures given at Cambridge University, set out the basis of his beliefs about the most effective form of intervention that political theatre could make, relating it to his work in both 7:84 companies. The conclusions of that work underly many of the observations within this thesis. In 1989 his The Bone Won't Break, emerging from a second series of lectures at Cambridge, set out how the 1980s had changed the circumstances in which political theatres operate, serving as an explanation for his resignation as artistic director of 7:84. Although Border Warfare was produced under the auspices of Wildcat and Freeway Films, here the background to the production will focus on McGrath's work with 7:84 (Scotland). This approach has been adopted because of the very particular circumstances in which Border Warfare was staged (in particular McGrath's resignation as Artistic Director of 7:84), and because McGrath's priority as writer, director and co-producer (Freeway Films is his company) links the production most directly to his work with 7:84 (Scotland),

even to the extent that whole sections are drawn from this corpus.

### **Producer's background**

Although John McGrath was still heavily involved in the running of 7:84 (England) until its demise in 1985, it was with the Scottish company that he had had the closer relationship. There are different stages in this relationship, however, which have not been clearly differentiated in the accounts given by McGrath himself and Elizabeth MacLennan (1990), to whom McGrath is married. Three key periods are identified here: 1973-79, 1979-82, and 1982-88. Each will be examined in turn.

McGrath's first major contribution to the rising political ferment in Scotland came with Random Happenings in The Hebrides (1970), directed by Richard Eyre for the Lyceum at the Edinburgh Festival. Although McGrath denies that it is autobiographical, it traces the development of a young man who is educated out of the working class but realises he has to re-root himself within that class if he is to be politically effective. This was followed by a production of Trees in The Wind at the Edinburgh Fringe, which was then toured on an ad hoc basis throughout Britain according to the invitations which the company received from students at universities and colleges. It was from this tour that the original 7:84 sprang. As McGrath told Clive Barker<sup>1</sup>, 'we had as a conscious policy the idea that for a year we would recruit a lot of different people for each show and different directors with the aim of establishing after a year a more permanent company which could stay together' (Barker 1975: 3). When the time came to establish this more permanent company, McGrath, along with Elizabeth MacLennan to whom he is married and Dave MacLennan and his then wife, Ferelith Lean, proposed that they would establish a Scottish wing to act in tandem with the English company.

In looking to Scotland, this initial quartet found precedents for the kind of work which they wanted to mount.

As well as Bryden's work at the Lyceum, including Willie Rough, the most directly influential of these was The Great Northern Welly Boot Show, from which some of The Cheviot cast were to be drawn. Written by Tom Buchan, Billy Connolly and Hamish O'Larch, this was a parable of the 1971 Upper Clyde Shipbuilders occupation told in revue style. It was among the first theatrical expressions of the socialist and nationalist fervour gripping Scotland at the time. When 7:84 (Scotland) was formed around The Cheviot, The Stag and The Black, Black Oil in 1973, it provided a further expression of these twin forces. Through it, McGrath and the company won the loyalty of an audience which had, until that time, been largely alienated from the theatre: firstly, it was aimed at the working class and at Scots as Scots, groups poorly served by the then regional repertory theatres (see Chapter 3); and secondly, it provided theatre outside the traditional institutions, particularly through its Highland touring.

The impulse towards the working class was a feature of much of the post-1968 British alternative theatre: Elizabeth MacLennan's retrospective manifesto does not differentiate the activity of either 7:84 company from any number of British touring groups

We had to get plays written, and take them wherever working people and their support, students, young people would go...The priority was the PLAY and the AUDIENCE, and the rest would follow. We would INVENT the necessary organisation. We would have to work for peanuts, and subsidise it ourselves.'

(MacLennan 1990: 18)

Since this coincided with a growing interest in Scottish working class culture within the regional theatres, 7:84 (Scotland) was never really part of a fringe movement in the way that its English counterparts were; it was part of a more general cultural revival. Yet what made the company's part special was that it was a touring theatre which played working class venues - in miners' welfare halls and community centres, for example, as well as in established

theatres. Moreover, its work took as models popular forms of entertainment rather than the dominant modes of drama:

The theatre which 7:84 has done a great deal to establish is there to present the realities of working class history and life directly to working class audiences, without translating it into the language of the middle class "theatre" that has dominated our stages since the 1890s. It has its roots in the popular traditions of entertainment and it takes the values of the working class very seriously.

(Programme Note for Out of Our Heads)

This approach was underpinned by a commitment to socialism. McGrath described the socialist perspective of the company thus:

The perceptions of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Trotsky, Luxemburg, Gramsci, Mao Tse-Tung and the rich traditions of working class thought and experience in Britain cannot be ignored. They affect the way we phrase our questions and provide the tools for tackling them. Not because we inherit a dogma, but because the dialectical method is the only way to grapple with the realities of living today - and it is the only way that embraces the realities. So we are Marxist.

(McGrath 1975: 54)

While Elizabeth MacLennan noted that 'In the Scottish company the work has always been more practical in a way in that the discussion has arisen out of the desire to get the play together' (Barker 1975: 6), this avowed socialism differentiated the company from almost all the other expressions of the cultural revival.

Within its first two years, the company established an ad hoc pattern of work that was to stay with it throughout the 1970s. Shows for Highland touring were evolved with The Cheviot (1973) and Boom (1974) which made use of traditional Gaelic music; and shows for the Lowland urban audience with The Game's A Bogey (1974) and My Pal And Me (1975) which made more use of rock-based music. Both sets of shows were toured extensively usually only playing for one night at the smaller venues, with longer residences at the Glasgow Citizens or the Royal Lyceum. The Edinburgh Fringe

was later to become the starting point of a number of tours, ensuring that the company achieved exposure within the British framework. Although McGrath was quick to coin the phrase 'ceilidh format' to cover the formal arrangement of The Cheviot, the variety and flexibility of this show was utilised in his subsequent work, and has its origins as much in traditions of variety theatre and pantomime as it does in the ceilidh. It shares many of the features of the agit-prop work of English political theatre companies like CAST and General Will, as well as other kinds of documentary theatres. The polemical productions cohered not around a plot but around the argument which they illustrated. Time-scales could be lengthened or shortened at will; historical jumps became essential; characters could be as fully or sketchily developed as the argument, not Naturalism, required. Not all the work was to be so directly polemical: the company undertook a community project in Dumbarton, David MacLennan and John Bett's Capital Follies (1975), as part of a government 'Quality of Life' experiment. With The Trembling Giant (1977) the company also moved into a purer pantomime format.

Through these first years of activity a more permanent committed company emerged. As well as John McGrath, Elizabeth MacLennan, David MacLennan and Ferilith Lean (as company administrator), a nucleus of performers including Dave Anderson, John Bett, Terry Neason, Allan Ross and Billy Riddoch had formed. Other performers who had worked with the company, such as Bill Paterson and Alex Norton moved on, usually to successful careers within the conventional theatre. The company was to be operated on a collective and democratic basis, with decisions about the company's future being made at company meetings, by everyone concerned. While John McGrath remained the main writer and director for the company, everyone was to contribute to the research and development of the shows<sup>2</sup>. Although it was a condition of Arts Council funding that the company had a board to oversee the running of the company,

at this stage it was comprised of a large circle of friends and supporters of the company, adopting a 'hands-off' approach to the way in which the company was run.

Importantly, the company also managed to secure SAC funding for their work. Despite an initial rejection, The Cheviot tour received £2,000 project funding. Nonetheless, since funding came only project by project during the first three years, activities were very much subsidised by the company members either directly paying for items of expenditure or working without pay. McGrath, in particular, contributed through his income from his film and television work, buying the company's first van, for example. David MacLennan acknowledges that there was an element of political caution about the SAC's attitude:

If they do give us a company [revenue] grant then in a way they are saying 'This company exists.' Therefore if they stop giving us the grant there might be a certain amount of public reaction to allowing a company to die; whereas if they are subsidising each production they can say, 'Well, we subsidised that production and there is no earthly reason why we should subsidise the next one.'

(Barker 1975: 12)

Although this was to prove prophetic for events in 1988, the company did become a revenue client of the SAC in 1976, alongside Borderline, Tie-Up and Mull Little Theatre. That 7:84 thus became one of only 11 revenue-funded clients of the SAC illustrates that the company were not considered to be on the fringe of Scottish theatre. Even when it had only been project funded, its grant was comparable to that for the Byre Theatre in St. Andrews. Although, the company did get support from the trade unions in terms of organisation it did not receive significant funding from them, or from any local authority; it was thus to become solely reliant on the SAC when company members became unable or unwilling to subsidise their own work. This 'grant addiction' was not problematic during this first period for a number of reasons. The company was (after the demise of Tie-Up) one of

only two revenue-funded Scottish small-scale touring theatre companies and its touring circuit made a unique contribution to the activities of the SAC in fulfilling its charter. Since central government funding was to increase throughout the period over and above the level of inflation, the SAC itself was not under pressure to make any cuts in the level of service that it provided and indeed by the end of the decade was looking for ways to expand, as the ease with which Wildcat became a revenue client illustrates. At the same time, the company was producing what was considered to be an acceptably high standard of show, 'largely,' according to John McGrath, 'because we have tried to keep it at a very high literary artistic standard' (Barker 1975: 12).

From this brief summary it can be seen that 7:84 (Scotland) enjoyed a remarkably long honeymoon period during the 1970s. It had been in the unique position of being the only Highland touring theatre company for the first three years of its existence and when it became a revenue client it received substantially more than the two other touring companies who became revenue clients at the same time: 7:84 got £44,785, Borderline received £28,400 and Tie-Up got £22,673. Notably, 7:84 received no money from local authorities, and despite an increasing emphasis by the SAC on this source of funding, it seems to have had no adverse effect on the company's grant or activities. In contrast, the demise of Tie-Up is directly attributable to the removal of local authority funding for the company. During the same period, changes in the regional theatres, notably Bryden's departure from the Lyceum, saw them move away from Scottish new work - the 7 regional theatres had produced between them 24 new Scottish plays in 1972-73 but by 1977-78 only the Traverse demonstrated a real commitment to new Scottish work. Its club status however, meant that its effect on the general population was muted. Thus, the touring companies, of which 7:84 was the longest-established, benefited by fostering new Scottish writing.

At the same time 7:84 (Scotland) had built up its audience base through the length and breadth of Scotland, with a degree of audience loyalty which allowed the company to mount shows critical of the working class, like Out Of Our Heads (1976), and of nationalism, Little Red Hen (1975). Although the latter caused Dolina MacLennan, an SNP supporter, to resign as a performer with the company, it seems to have had little affect on the company's audiences generally. By 1977 the company was playing to some 35,000 people, an audience which grew by a further 2,000 during the next year. McGrath's own personal standing was particularly high. He was, for example, the only artist to contribute to The Red Paper On Scotland (1975), a collection of writings from some of the most influential of the new left-wing thinkers in Scotland. One is forced to agree with Elizabeth MacLennan's estimation of the company's standing at this time:

There's a tremendous public interest in what we do. This has two effects. One, it gives us a tremendously confident base. The other that it gives us a tremendous responsibility, because ever since the first show, The Cheviot, we hurled ourselves into the middle of the political arena and people took us seriously more and more...And from that moment on they wanted to know what we had to say about the current issues.

(Mortimer 1980: 3)

A second mark of the company's impact was the invitation issued to McGrath to deliver a series of lectures at Cambridge University in 1979, published as A Good Night Out (1981). These lectures allowed McGrath to expand on the theoretical implications of the practice in which he had been involved with both 7:84 companies. Problematically, there is a great deal of slippage between practice, commentary and the more programmatic elements within these lectures, which is not always acknowledged. McGrath proposed a model of theatre as 'storytelling' and the belief that political theatre rather than telling stories suitable for the 'well-fed, white, middle-class, sensitive but sophisticated literary critic' (McGrath 1981:2), it must

address the distinctive tastes of the working class to create a truly popular theatre. These entertainment tastes favour what McGrath lists as:

directness

comedy

music

emotion

variety

directness

immediacy

localism (of material)

localism (in a sense of identity with the performer)

As an example of the difference between these tastes and those of the middle-class, he says that the middle-class prefer 'mystery', which he defines as 'playing games with knowledge, and words and facts' (McGrath 1981:3). He guards against merely 'tailing along' behind the working class by handling these tastes critically and by using them as the basis for experiments in developing a new working class theatre. This idea of a popular theatre was derived from the Gramscian concept of a 'cultura nazionale-popolare' in which the concerns of the intellectuals and the working classes would be married to provide new concepts of national identity and culture.

The lectures were used to advance McGrath's side in two specific debates: one in which he had a longstanding role in opposition to Arnold Wesker; the other in which he was then engaged with David Edgar, amongst others. The argument with Wesker centred on Wesker's ideas for the Centre 42 project, which McGrath and others criticised as merely purveying bourgeois culture to the workers in an attempt to educate them 'up' to an appreciation of the best of bourgeois art.<sup>3</sup> The debate with Edgar centred on the issue of whether the working class or the middle class could be in the vanguard of societal change, and hence where theatre workers should apply their work in the service of

change. This argument over entryism led to a polarisation of the arguments, such that, for example, McGrath misrepresents the experience of 7:84 (Scotland) which had played the Citizens and the Lyceum regularly, and the relative homogeneity between the various spheres of theatre in Scotland. Nonetheless, much of what McGrath proposes had been borne out in his work with 7:84, and this practice rather than its articulation as theory was profoundly influential in shaping the development of political theatre in Scotland: its touring role, its Scottish perspective, the importance of recognition, directness through the presentational style of performance, for example.

Towards the end of the 1970s the company passed a number of watersheds which brought it into a second stage of life. The first of these was the setting up of Wildcat. As discussed in Chapter 5, the roots of this new company lay in the work that Dave Anderson and David MacLennan had done firstly on Honour Your Partners (1976) and then on His Master's Voice in 1978. The former had been the first full-scale company show that had been written and directed by someone other than McGrath and the music was rock-based. With His Master's Voice the music played a much more central role than in previous shows: the structure itself was musical and the band integral to all that happened onstage. The company which worked on the production felt that they would be able to work independently; and that they could not continue to work satisfactorily within 7:84. Those left within 7:84 felt that they must let them go their own way in order that 7:84 itself could develop. According to Elizabeth MacLennan's account (which is challenged by David MacLennan) the evolution of Wildcat was a remarkable occurrence:

We were lucky. In a way that could never happen today the band were allowed, with our collusion, to take some of our grant to start themselves up as a new company: Wildcat. Then we were both allowed to continue as

separate companies thereafter and have done so ever since.

(MacLennan 1990: 85)

The departure of this core musical group (Anderson, MacLennan, Neason) and Ferelith Lean had an almost immediate effect on the company: in the following year it went dark. Its high standing with the SAC can be judged by the fact that it still received £11,000 to keep the administration going despite producing no work. Notably, when the company did tour again its audiences had dropped by almost half. Not only was 7:84 deprived of the talents of Dave Anderson and Terry Neason as performers and the writing talents of David MacLennan and Dave Anderson, but it also lost the combined experience and business acumen of Feri Lean and David MacLennan. This meant that the onus for keeping the company going in almost every sense was placed squarely on the shoulders of John McGrath. The central role thrust on McGrath meant that, for example, any new administrator would be in a subordinate position in discussions about finances; that artistic decisions reverted entirely to McGrath and that consequently he was expected to be the sole or main initiator of projects. His presence in the company's office became essential and a yardstick of his commitment to its theatrical well-being: the SAC fired its first salvo about his commitment to the company in 1979 with a warning that the company's grant was in jeopardy. It was at this time that McGrath spent a term in Cambridge, delivering the lectures that would be the basis of A Good Night Out. Where previously his commitments to other projects, like 7:84 (England), were not regarded as problematic, now McGrath was being expected to take responsibility for the Scottish company single-handedly. It should not be thought that this was an unwelcome burden. McGrath's close relationship with the company meant that it was inconceivable for him to be anything other than fully involved in its running; he was perhaps too unwilling in some instances to allow others to take over the reins in a meaningful way. The de facto

centralization of power and responsibility in him was to have far-reaching consequences, as I shall show.

The running of the company was still being overseen by much the same board, adopting a largely advisory 'hands-off' approach. This approach was acceptable to board members and McGrath firstly, because the company did not seem to be in any immediate jeopardy and, secondly, because board members were not personally liable for the consequences of McGrath's artistic decisions. Then board member, and later its Chairman, Bill Speirs notes

There was a real tendency on the part of the Board to - once the artistic decision had been taken - to say that that must be implemented. I can never remember it being articulated, or being spelled out, but I certainly picked up a feeling that it would somehow be reactionary to argue that a particular production could not go ahead with six actors because we could not afford six actors...Artistic values tended to be a bit further up the agenda.

(Maguire 1991b: 6-7)

While it was always argued that the company did not want to sever any links with friends and supporters, this is not an argument for admitting large numbers of these people onto a board with exact and, as was to become the case, very direct responsibility for, among other things, the financial security of the company. Such a policy undermined the board's objectivity in the eyes of outsiders, and was one of the points picked up by the SAC when it notified the company of its intention to withdraw revenue-funded status in 1988. As yet the board was fortunate in not facing difficulties in the running of the company for which they might have to take responsibility. This would change.

In this second period, the establishment of Wildcat provided both the audiences and the funding bodies with a group with which to compare the activities of 7:84. The company had lost its unique position as a touring theatre playing to the working class in working class venues, and using a working class idiom. As Diagram 3 (p143)

illustrates, both companies seemed to share approximately the same audience base for the first years of Wildcat's existence. However, Wildcat soon emerged in its own right and began to build up an audience base of its own, concentrated in the Lowland urban working class. No longer could 7:84 rely on being treated as a separate or special case by the SAC.

All these changes might have had less effect if the political situation had not also changed. The debacle over devolution, during which 7:84 remained dark, saw the nationalist bubble swell and burst. The company's failure (except in retrospect) to decisively comment on the single most contentious issue of the decade pushed it towards the margins of political life. At the same time there was a real fear that Scotland was 'back in the closet'. The first years of the Thatcher government saw radical changes in the funding base for a whole range of public services, including the arts. Although as discussed in Chapter 3, companies in Scotland were placed at one remove from such changes because of the SAC, the climate changed. Few grants were to rise above the level of inflation. The needs-response ideals of ACGB had been effectively abandoned: companies were now competing for funding.

Although McGrath attempts to link almost all of the post-1979 developments within the same strategy 'of asserting the strengths of Scottish popular culture, now and historically, of broadening the perception of popular theatre by pointing out it had a history and world-wide spread, and of laying some foundations for the future' (McGrath 1989: 66-67), I have chosen here to address these developments within the periods outlined above since I consider them to be separate strategies employed for different reasons and at different times. With regard to the final goal of laying some foundations for the future, it is the failure of the second strategy that in particular

initiated a series of crises which precluded any attempt at long-term strategic development.

A further consideration is the setting up by McGrath of an independent film production company, Freeway Films, in 1982. Substantial funding for the company came from the then recently established Channel 4, through a £50,000 commission-cum-development-grant to provide adaptations of the work of 7:84 (Scotland) for the channel. Freeway's productions of Blood Red Roses, There Is a Happy Land and eventually Border Warfare and John Brown's Body for Channel 4 and Lorimar, accorded with the initial aim that it would complement the work of the theatre company. However, it also produced a three programme series, Poets and People, Sweetwater Memories, a comedy/documentary for Channel 4, and the feature film, The Dressmaker. There were plans also for a feature film of the life of Chilean poet-singer, Victor Jara, a six-part series on the life and times of Jean-Paul Sartre, and a series on varying attitudes to children. McGrath's acumen in establishing Freeway at the moment when Channel 4 was beginning to expand into Scotland is indisputable. However, the extent to which his activities with Freeway were taken by many, including some at the SAC, to be detrimental to his work at 7:84, left him open to charges of neglecting the theatre company. Inevitably, they must also have affected his ability to work full-time at 7:84 as he was being required to do in his capacity as artistic director, writer, and sometime chairman of the board.

McGrath ended the 1970s facing two difficulties - how to develop 7:84 without the Wildcat members, and how to respond to the defeat of the devolution proposals for Scotland and the election of the Tory government. Joe's Drum (1979) was his answer to both. The music of the show was provided by members of the folk band, Finn McCuill. The separation between the band and the performers which the Wildcat founders had attempted to overcome was thus

retained. At the same time, McGrath opted to use the folk music idiom, despite the views of Anderson and MacLennan that rock 'n' roll was the 'true music of the people'. While Billy Riddoch in the title role of General Joe, was well-known to the 7:84 audience, other members of the cast were less familiar. With Joe's Drum McGrath also initiated the first publication of a series of playscripts for the company. This promotional measure illustrated the move away from the process of research by the whole company leading to the production of a final script of the collective effort - as The Cheviot had been. Now the performing company was presenting the work of John McGrath, work with which they did not have an intimate connection. In respect of the referendum and the election, McGrath describes the play in his preface to the published edition as 'a response... at a time of confusion and apathy in Scottish politics, and a yawning tedium in Scottish cultural life'. However, the model of the leader of the Edinburgh mob in the 18th Century was not one that was likely to be seized on with any conviction by the play's audiences.

A more developed response to the conditions of the time came with Swings and Roundabouts (1980). Adapting Coward's Private Lives as a model, this abandoned the presentational style of performance, working in a more naturalistic idiom to illustrate the continued existence of the class system, with the argument being couched in metaphor. One of the characters, Rosemary, introduces the metaphor of the buffalo:

they were immensely strong, and very useful - in fact they provided everything that human beings needed to live on...And when they moved together in a stampede nothing could stop them. But on their own each was too kind - and too trusting. A skilled hunter would creep up on a herd, then pick off the leader...A bunch would run off, but he would shoot their leader, and the others would turn back in dismay and swirl around, and the idea was that the hunter could keep them milling around in circles for as long as he liked, just shooting those who tried to start a move away from the

centre...In this way, one man could kill one hundred buffaloes in an hour or two.

(from published edition: 132-133)

The second of McGrath's Two plays for the Eighties, the title under which they were jointly published, Blood Red Roses, picked up on these themes. In this, McGrath looked at the story of a militant - a category by which activists in the workplace, in particular, were demonized - and 'at the whole question of what "fighting" means in the age of the multiple war-head' (from the programme). Focussing on the story of Bessie McGuigan, the play traces her rise as a trade union activist and the struggles that she undergoes to achieve justice both at home and at work. While McGrath attempted to address the costs of activism within the personal and political spheres, the result is too schematic to allow a full development of the emotional aspects of his characters. They retain the schematic aspects of his polemical epic-style work. At the same time, as Lindsay Paterson comments,

by choosing to operate within an overwhelmingly naturalistic style, McGrath is forced back onto metaphors to extend the significance beyond the particular conditions of Bessie as an individual...Instead of a sense of collective struggle...the impression we get is of her as an outstanding paragon: an experience so unique that it has little to offer in the way of example to the generality of her class. This romanticism, in other words, easily becomes an escapist nostalgia for a great fighter or leader: an unfortunately widespread emotion in our society which the play does not sufficiently challenge. Another example, therefore, of tailism.

(Paterson 1982: 6)

While the production used a musical component, again of folk songs, the band was dispensed with in favour of Elizabeth MacLennan's accordion playing as accompaniment. MacLennan also took the lead role of a strong cast which included Phyllis Logan and Laurance Rudic, as well as Billy Riddoch and Joanna Keddie. This illustrated the way in which the company was being forced to move from a core set of

performers to employing most of its casts on a contract basis to perform pre-written scripts.

Nonetheless, for the production of The Catch (1982) a company was established that seemed capable of reproducing the spirit of the original pre-Wildcat company. It adopted something of the approach of The Cheviot, looking at life in the Highlands almost a decade on, with a large component of folk music. Elizabeth MacLennan marks this production 'as the last 7:84 show, apart from Baby and The Bathwater in which the preparation, research, discussion, writing, rewriting, rehearsal, performance, and development of the performance throughout the tour bore the particular imprint of John McGrath's style, his way of working, and our joint experience as part of the group' (MacLennan 1990: 98). Even given the apocalyptic tone, one must grant that this production marked another watershed for the company and John McGrath's relationship to it.

This is demonstrated in the most remarkable change at this time, the decision to mount the Clydebuilt Season of plays. The primary aim of this was to restore some of the lost heritage of Scottish working class theatre by reviving forgotten classics. McGrath explained that 'with Clydebuilt we decided that in this time of defeat, we should broaden the idea of working class culture...to show that working class theatre wasn't just about strikes and wages' (Mortimer 1983: 5). What it also allowed was a period of respite for McGrath as writer and director, removing the onus to produce new work and to mount yet another small-scale tour. The season was to comprise revived productions of four plays, directed by guest directors; public readings and discussions at the Third Eye Centre; and the publication of the scripts of the revived plays. The plays were Gold in His Boots by George Munro, which McGrath directed himself; Joe Corrie's In Time of Strife, directed by Sandy Neilson; Ewan McColl's Johnny Noble (and Harry Trott's short U.A.B. Scotland), directed by David Scase; and Giles Havergal's production of

Men Should Weep, a much changed version by Ena Lamont Stewart of her original Poor Men's Riches. Of all the productions it was only the last that was an unequivocal success, being revived for the Edinburgh Fringe, for a tour of the major theatres in Scotland, and, eventually, for a run at the Theatre Royal, Stratford East. This season demonstrated also that the company had moved decisively away from the local working class venues within the Lowlands.

Structurally, the company also changed. It adopted a more conventional management structure since the relationship with the large number of actors and technicians could not be continued beyond the season, not least because few people were willing to commit beyond the individual production runs. The guest directors on three of the productions each had their individual way of directing which did not necessarily coincide with the collective ideals of the original company. Their commitment to the company was limited to their involvement with the production and they were directing already written texts. For the first time the board intervened to prevent actors and technicians who were with the company taking collective decisions that might influence the company's future development. Although there would still be actor and technician representatives on the board, 'the board was quite clear that for people who came into the company for one show only to decide the company's future plans (which they were not prepared to commit to themselves) would be power without responsibility' (MacLennan 1990: 114).

Although the season was generally considered to be a critical success, the deficit incurred in mounting these productions caused the company to go dark a second time. This again emphasised the pre-eminence of John McGrath as artistic director in the decision-making processes. At the same time, the overheads of running the company's administration were eating into an even larger proportion of

the company's funding. Tolerating this deficit exhibited a confidence in the security of SAC funding.

As a consequence of the success of Men Should Weep, in particular, McGrath changed the company's direction again. Now it seemed appropriate to explore the different forms of the European theatre repertoire, reclaiming classics for the popular audience. The eventual product of this policy, Women in Power was to prove such a disastrous experience artistically, critically, financially and with audiences that it was not pursued further. The production was to have been mounted by a new sister company for 7:84 to be called General Gathering, running alongside 7:84 in much the same way as the two wings of the original 7:84 were to have done had done. Despite McGrath's hopes that General Gathering would inherit the funding marked for the recently defunct Scottish Theatre Company, his application to the SAC was rejected. In a triumph of artistic will, McGrath plunged ahead with the production, although he had to drop the idea of a new group. The play was an adaptation of Aristophanes' Thesmophoriazousae, with music by Thanos Mikroutsikos. The problems associated with this production were numerous. Its rehearsals were dogged by tensions and ill-will within the company, and a lack of trust in McGrath's direction and objectivity. It opened in the Assembly Rooms to an extremely hostile critical reception and poor houses. At a company board meeting the cast slammed both McGrath's writing and his direction. Thus, the board was again prompted to intervene to make a decision on a matter of artistic policy. In order to avoid losing the company any more money it decided to take the show off immediately, and pay the actors to the end of the run. This flop cost the company £3,000.

The consequences of this production were that the company was in a deeper financial crisis than before and its standing with the critics, the SAC and, most importantly of all, with its audiences was diminished. For McGrath

personally, it meant that his ability to direct work in Scotland was severely impaired. While he is said to have vowed never to work with Scottish actors again as a consequence of this experience, the acting community in Scotland was rife with criticisms of his abilities. McGrath's reaction to the failure of this project suggested also that his commitment to the company could not be the same again. The SAC were to continually pick up on this point and remained sceptical of the expansionist plans that McGrath would later announce. With his attempts to solve the crisis that 7:84 (England) was undergoing and his establishment of Freeway Films in 1982, his continued commitment to 7:84 was considered suspect. Doubt had been cast on his commitment and ability to properly coordinate and run productions within the company also; and the board were finding that they had more than an honorary role to play in the running of the company's affairs.

Importantly also in the period after Women In Power the context in which 7:84 was operating changed rapidly. In England the ACGB had issued its policy document, The Glory of the Garden, with the consequence that the English 7:84 and a number of other left-wing companies were cut. In Scotland too the SAC was having to meet increasing demands from a shrinking budget. While 7:84 had outgrown the small-scale touring of its early years, new groups, like United Artists, Theatre PKF, Comunicado and Winged Horse were coming forward to fill the vacuum. The Traverse was renewing its interest in Scottish work and the Tron was beginning to work with new writers. 7:84's contribution to theatrical output was only distinguished by its socialist aspirations, and less and less by the patterns of its work. The SAC was having to question whether or not it was advisable to continue to fund institutions for their own sake while new and interesting work was being ignored. In 1984 it issued its own response to the changed circumstance in which it found itself, The Next Five Years.

As discussed in Chapter 3 (pp74-77), this had severe and direct consequences for all political theatre companies, and 7:84 in particular. The SAC emphasis on increased involvement from local authorities in the funding of non-national companies was not enthusiastically acted on by the company, or many local authorities. Its approaches to Edinburgh District Council did lead to the production of Victorian Values as part of the Springwell House Community Drama Project in 1986, but apart from that there was no direct funding from the district or indeed regional council. McGrath had advanced proposals for a performing arts centre in which the company might be based to Edinburgh District, but it was ignored. The company's eventual move to Glasgow in 1988 was largely precipitated by the possibility of local authority funding in the west in the lead up to Glasgow 1990. The increased emphasis on sponsorship was a further stumbling block for the company. Realistically, it did not seem likely that the company would be attractive to major sponsors; the sponsorship of the Wildcat production of Border Warfare by Beck's Bier in 1989 was a somewhat unique success for a piece of political theatre. Its attractiveness for the sponsor was less to do with the politics than it was to do with Beck's own policy 'to sponsor all things popularly considered to be unsponsorable' (Henderson 1990: 35) in an attempt to reach their consumers whose market profile is biased towards the educated, young, trendy and upmarket. The converted Tramway venue in a reborn Glasgow (plus co-funding from the City of Culture budget), and the Channel 4 screening of the film of the production made it much more attractive than any previous piece of radical work. Again however, the inability of the company itself to harness funds from the labour movement to which it should have had an appeal could be seen as a self-inflicted liability. Regarding this, Bill Speirs commented that 'I am absolutely certain that if 7:84 were to obtain trade union sponsorship, it would be at the expense of Wildcat. There is

not enough trade union money to go around' (Maguire 1991b: 11).

The new emphasis by the SAC on box-office returns as a means of judging audience support meant a squeeze on the company for those tours that did not attract large numbers because of playing in small venues, and for tours to venues with a deliberately low ticket price: this specifically affected the company's Highland touring. The company's social role was no longer to be weighed against its commercial viability. Added to this, the SAC abandoned the practice of offering small venues guarantees against loss to host touring theatre. This change had a direct effect on the possibility of mounting wide-ranging tours, most patently obvious in the company's entrenchment within the Central Belt once McGrath had left. The final area on which the SAC was to place emphasis, 'the use of the SAC subsidy for clearly defined purposes', was again to have a broader effect than the mere accountability for expenditure that it seemed to demand. It meant that accounting and artistic policy would have to march hand-in-hand, a coincidence of considerations not apparent at that stage in the working of 7:84. Indeed for it to be possible meant that the SAC would be expecting the artistic director, in the absence of a company manager or co-equal administrator, to have direct responsibility for the daily financial running of the company. The pull of John McGrath's other commitments and the inability of administrators to take responsibility for financial matters would obviously create a great deal of anxiety for the SAC.

It should not be thought that the implementation of such policies was directly aimed at 7:84 in a political attack. What the company was suffering from was in fact the even-handedness of treatment that the SAC applied. It may have considered itself a special case, but the inflexibility of SAC structures denied it the possibility of acknowledging this, even if it had wanted to. Playwright,

Peter Arnott, who became a board member of 7:84 under the new regime in 1988, comments that

the institutions have the problem - which is an historic problem but seems particularly onerous when there isn't a cultural optimism - of being in thrall to the bureaucrats...The whole patronage system, or non-system rather, is exhausting and enervating. There is the paranoid view that John McGrath has that there is a political agenda behind the squashing of artistic endeavour. I don't think that it's a political agenda; I just think that it's a dullness at the level of the funding bodies, and a lack of concern - a lack of passion.

(Maguire 1991c: 3)

As I shall show, the company's activities would not have justified any special treatment. McGrath describes the moves towards commercialism as Thatcherite 'poisoning the water' for political theatre, which at a British level is certainly justifiable. However, the lack of any effective adaptation by the company to the changes in the funding structure (like securing local authority and/or trade union funding) left it stranded like a dinosaur in what was to prove to be an Ice Age climate.

This changed climate and the Women in Power affair obviously had an effect on McGrath's own confidence, since by June 1985 he had offered his resignation as the company's artistic director. Although he was persuaded at that time to stay on as artistic director he resigned as chairman of the board. The new chairman was Robin Worrall, the bass player for The Cheviot tour, who now ran a small motorcycle business and who had been chairman of the company's finance committee prior to this. In respect of the changing structure of the company, McGrath commented in a policy document<sup>4</sup> that

We are fast becoming an institution almost indistinguishable from most others in the theatre in Scotland in terms of organisation and values - except for what we actually manage to get on the stage - and ironically, the forms of that organisation are now threatening the existence of the actual work on the stage.

This policy document resulted in the appointment of David Hayman as an associate director and John Haswell as an associate artistic director. The company's work was divided between them: McGrath attending to Highland touring, foreign tours and publishing; David Hayman as director of large-scale theatre shows; and John Haswell acting to coordinate the small-scale Lowland and community shows. The decentralisation of power and decision-making within the company that these moves seemed to represent created a tangible change in atmosphere if not in the real wielding of influence. McGrath had abdicated some of his responsibilities but held the ultimate sanction and power: it was still the company that he had founded; he was still artistic director.

The culmination of these factors meant that the third stage in McGrath's relationship with the company was to be the unhappiest and his least productive. The company was forced to rely more on outside writers: Donald Campbell, Sean McCarthy, Matt McGinn, Archie Hind, Ena Lamont Stewart and Alex Norton each wrote one piece for the company. Whereas prior to 1979 all the company's shows had been written in-house, now writers were being commissioned on a one-off basis; without the intimate connection with and commitment to the company which had been present before. None of these outside writers had more than one new production staged by the company in 5 years.

The company began to draw more on pre-established source material for adaptation, with less focus on present-day realities. Of the 18 productions that 7:84 mounted between 1983 and 1988 4 were adaptations of novels (The Albannach was mounted twice) and 5 were revived productions of previous shows. More generally, the company seemed to be delving into past images of Scotland for its inspiration without directly addressing present realities: the reaction to the Miner's Strike of 1984-85 was a revival of Joe Corrie's In Time of Strife; Beneath One Banner dealt

with sectarian strife in 1865, Victorian Values was set in a women's asylum in the 1860s, Mairi Mhor was the life of the great woman from Skye in the 1880s. Politically, this signified the company's increasing marginalisation from the mainstream of Scottish political culture. Concomitantly, the company was moving from the polemical shows of the 1970s towards a softer approach; the programme for The Albannach in 1985 announced that 'Now, and for a while to come, we would like to use all the skills we learnt during the past twelve years, to present a series of plays based more on stories than on argument, more narrative than polemical'. The move into this area put the company into direct competition with other touring companies like Borderline, Communicado and Winged Horse. Each of these was producing new work, some of which was Scottish, including adaptations of novels, and touring to theatre and non-theatre venues, but only Borderline was revenue-funded. Crucially, their work was much more likely to appeal to the traditional standards of drama adopted both by critics and the SAC. While Highland touring was still the prerogative of 7:84 (Fir Chlis, the Gaelic language company became defunct in 1981), the emergence of the Eden Court with touring productions of its own meant that even this area could not be claimed as uniquely 7:84's. The justification for the company retaining its place as a revenue client, let alone as a special case, was increasingly difficult to sustain.

This was not helped by the fact that the company's relationship with its audience was not consistent during this period either. While the four shows that it mounted in 1983-84 (including a piece of street theatre mounted as a co-production with Wildcat) drew an audience of over 41,000 to 230 performances, by 1986-87 attendances had fallen to an all-time low of under 13,000 at 98 performances. Not only was the company failing the SAC hurdle of increased box-office returns, by its own standards it was failing to address its audience. Although The Gorbals Story (1987) and No Mean City (1988) brought in much larger audiences, the

company's ability to increasingly sustain itself on box-office returns was never assured. The fluctuation in attendance figures suggests also that even the core of support that the company had enjoyed throughout the 1970s was itself shrinking - the factor of audience loyalty could no longer be relied on. Thus, the success of The Gorbals Story and No Mean City could be attributed to the fact that these were drawn from the pantheon of Glasgow culture and drew audiences because of this rather than because it was 7:84 who were producing the shows.<sup>5</sup> The claim that 7:84 was uniquely voicing the culture of the working people of Scotland became less and less tenable; the soubriquet 'Scottish People's Theatre' began to echo more and more ironically. In contrast, almost every other theatre was experiencing an expansion in its audience base. Markedly, Wildcat's audiences were experiencing an exponential growth that 7:84 could only envy. Remarkably, this was not one of the factors considered by the SAC as justifying its withdrawal of the company's revenue-funding in 1988.

If the company's artistic approach was less than vibrant, administratively and financially it was heading into deeper trouble. A rapidly changing succession of company administrators included Christine Hamilton (who became STUC Arts Officer in 1987), Mary Picken who stayed for only a matter of months, to be replaced by Robert Sendall who in turn left in June 1987, leaving the administrative burden to John Haswell, the associate artistic director. The SAC grew increasingly unhappy with this state of affairs. As the office staff comprised of only an administrator and Liz Smith, the permanent publicity agent, in the event of the administrator's post being vacant it felt aggrieved that the artistic director was not taking the responsibility for the job. In November 1987 an approach was made to Jo Beddoe, who had experience at the Liverpool Everyman, the Royal Court, Black Theatre Co-operative, and Greater London Arts, to become administrator with promises of expansion in the company's operations; she refused. A

new administrator was then appointed in January but she was unable to take up the post until May (and as it turned out would not have been available until August). Meanwhile, the company was running a deficit of at least £18,000, although the initial figure presented to the SAC was in the region of £30,000. Changes in legislation (The Insolvency Act 1985) which came into effect at the end of 1986 meant that the board of directors could now be held personally liable for the company's financial management. This was one way of concentrating the minds of the twenty or so strong board that something needed to be done about the company's perilous financial state.

The long forecast day-of-reckoning came with a letter to the company on 18th March 1988 from the SAC. Having decided to agree three-year revenue funding in advance for all its revenue clients, the Arts Council was not prepared to accept the continued irregularities in 7:84's administration; its unwieldy board structure; and the varying quality of its artistic output. It would fund the company as a revenue client until the end of the following year only. The board accepted the first two criticisms but voted unanimously to reject any criticism of the artistic policy of the company. That this vote did not reflect a whole-hearted endorsement of the company's artistic output is demonstrated by the comment of board member, Kathryn Burnett, about why the company later dropped the Border Warfare project:

It was a great idea, but it wasn't the right time for it. Who were we trying to kid? We were scraping the money together for a postage stamp. And people were a bit suspect because of the quality of the last few shows.

(Maguire 1991a: 9)

The then chair of the company, Bill Speirs, actually rejected a vote of confidence in the artistic director on the grounds that that would imply that confidence or not in

the artistic director was at stake, which it was not; and importantly, because

It was also my perception that it would have gone to a vote; that there would have been a split vote and we didn't want that.

(Maguire 1991b: 4)

The company was given leave to make an appeal against the cutting of the revenue funding, which was to be heard in October 1989, following the company's next two shows. That there was little furore within the Scottish theatre community over the cut suggests that many sympathised with the SAC's actions. Jo Beddoe, who eventually took over the company's administration in April 1988, expresses annoyance and surprise at this:

I got very sticky about the fact that here we were trying among other things to run a campaign to save 7:84 and there was not one instance of the artistic/theatrical community in Scotland rising up and saying, 'This company must not be cut.'

(Maguire 1990b: 6)

Although some artistic directors did write letters of support for the company, Beddoe contrasts this unfavourably with the efforts to appeal against the cutting of the grant to the Royal Court.

The company's response to the SAC decision was to change the make-up of the board and to seek to appoint a new administrator. The board was restructured and refined and its responsibilities carefully outlined; its approach was to be much more 'hands-on' and interventionist than before. When Jo Beddoe was appointed as General Manager, she insisted that she report directly to the board, not McGrath, the Artistic Director. This meant that there would be two reports on proposals: one from the Artistic Director and one from the General Manager. Contradictions would not and could not be elided in favour of artistic policy and the board would have to face up to them. In the General Manager there was also someone with direct line-management responsibility

for the administration of the company, as well as expertise in office management. Thus the exercising of budgetary controls was given to someone with the power to implement the measures necessary to keep the company going; whereas previously all such decisions were left to John McGrath. The effect of these changes and the pressures of the cut threat on John McGrath were such that in July 1988, he resigned from the position of Artistic Director, alleging political motivation behind the SAC cut. He still retains a position on the board but is critical of his replacements and the directions that the company have since taken. The artistic team of David Hayman and Gerard Kelly were appointed in September 1988 and Jo Beddoe agreed to take up the post of General Manager as a permanent post. The company were then given an additional year in which to justify their revenue funding, which has since been fully restored.<sup>6</sup>

Undoubtedly, John McGrath realised that many of the structural changes in the company would have a direct consequence in the work that the company would mount: particularly in respect of the viability of Highland touring, which he regarded as the company's central plank. The new pragmatism within the company is most evident in the eventual rejection of the project to mount Border Warfare. It had been proposed as a 7:84 project for some time, presented as a sequel to There is a Happy Land, in a trilogy of which John Brown's Body (1990) was eventually to be the final instalment. In the circumstances surrounding the appeal it was proposed that it would follow No Mean City as the autumn production providing a 'head-lining' show which would guarantee the restoration of the grant. McGrath's financial predictions for the show could not however, be accommodated within the precarious position that the 7:84 board felt itself to be in. Furthermore, there was a growing rift between McGrath and the new artistic director, David Hayman. When Jo Beddoe advised the board that it could not go ahead on the basis of the budgets that McGrath had prepared the project was withdrawn. By the time

that Wildcat took it on much more of the money was in place; significantly, following the success of The Steamie and The Celtic Story, they could guarantee the audience needed to make a reasonable return on the show. At the time of John McGrath's leaving, 7:84 could not.

In assessing the work of John McGrath with 7:84 (Scotland) it should not be felt that I wish to diminish the importance of what has been a substantial contribution to theatre. The model of touring theatre that 7:84 initiated in Scotland was keenly taken up and much of the circuit that the company established is still in use by new small-scale companies. The part that the company played in the birth of a thoroughly modern Scottish theatre is also important; and the fact that that theatre has a much larger popular base than any other model in Britain can be credited to the agenda that 7:84 helped to establish and maintain. As a writer and director, John McGrath, at his best, has given voice to the daily concerns of the working class and help in the development of a political consciousness with regard to the uses to which that theatre might be put. McGrath personally has served as a spokesperson for Scottish working class culture when few others could be heard, and he continuously challenges the system that he has chosen to work within. That much of his later work with the company was criticised and is open to criticism is as much a result of the perceived failure of this work to live up to standards that he had himself set. By the time of his resignation from 7:84 many felt that he was creatively exhausted. That he should then go on to write and direct Border Warfare confounded his critics and suggests that his contribution to Scottish political theatre is far from ended.

### **Production Background**

Border Warfare was finally staged at the Tramway in February and March 1989. It was also filmed by Freeway Films for Channel 4, screened as part of their coverage of the

Glasgow 1990 celebrations. It was marked as exceptional among Scottish productions of the time by its sheer scale, and because it was John McGrath's first production since his resignation from 7:84 as artistic director. It was also the first major collaboration between McGrath and Wildcat, the company that had been born out of 7:84 Scotland, ten years previously. The following piece examines the ways in which the production negotiated a new relationship with its audience through both its staging and its content.

The idea behind the show had emerged some ten years earlier at the height of the campaign for a devolved parliament for Scotland.<sup>7</sup> McGrath had discussed with Frank Dunlop, Director of the Edinburgh Festival, the possibility of using the Old Parliament Building in Edinburgh to stage a show as part of the Festival, based on Scotland's relations with England. It was envisaged that the two branches of the 7:84 company would play England and Scotland respectively, each side located at either end of the building and the audience between them. Unfortunately, at that time the building was not made available and the project was dropped. McGrath pursued the issues surrounding the union in a television piece at the time of the referendum in which he restaged the debate in the Scots parliament with commentaries by present day political commentators and interviewers. With the 7:84 company going dark and McGrath taking time out to lecture at Cambridge, the timeliness of the theatre piece was lost with the failure of the devolution referendum. Over the intervening period McGrath was to return to the idea again. He approached the Festival organisers again in discussions about a proposal to revive a version of Theatre du Soleil's 1789, and when that proved impossible, he proposed mounting Border Warfare instead. The proposal was rejected. The idea was also to form the basis of a proposed project for the General Gathering project, but had to be shelved when that collapsed. The legacy of that failure was to make it impossible to do the project at that time. Notably, a promotion package for Freeway Films

launched in 1986 describes Border Warfare as a project in development which 'will be a promenade performance in a working-class part of Edinburgh, with the space coming to resemble high tenements and the wynds of the Old Town, and the company moving among the audience, sometimes using platforms a la Ronconi'.

Following the decision of the 7:84 board that Border Warfare would not be a viable project for them, the proposal for the production was taken to Wildcat's artistic director, David MacLennan, to be mounted as a co-production between Wildcat and Freeway Films; the latter shooting the production for presentation on Channel 4. MacLennan agreed and plans for the production went ahead. It is extremely difficult to disentangle the series of arrangements and budgets that were made in the planning process, since the theatre and the film project were lumped together as one: Susie Brown, Production Assistant at Freeway Films, gives the final cost of the stage show as just over £142,000. Initially the project was to have cost 7:84 a mere £3,000, the rest of the costs to be met by Strathclyde Regional Council, Glasgow District Council and Channel 4 via Freeway. Strathclyde Region refused funding for the project after the Education Convenor read a draft of the script; and Glasgow District's funding through the Festivals Unit was only ultimately secured in February 1989, just as McGrath was about to abandon the whole venture. Even given this and the sponsorship of the stage performance by Beck's Bier (£20,000), the final production in fact cost Wildcat £10,000, with the rest of the overspend of £28,000 that it incurred eventually being met by Channel 4.

Despite the precarious arrangement of the project's funding, its eventual impact was undiminished. It marked Scottish theatre's first contribution to the European programme which the Tramway would offer over 1990. As a major piece of political theatre it illustrated the degree to which the dominant culture in Scotland was a culture of

resistance to the values of Thatcherism. It contrasted sharply to the dispirited mood of defeat within theatres, political and otherwise, south of the border. In 1988, a symposium of theatre practitioners discussed the difficulties faced by political theatre in England in the face of the overwhelming triumph of Thatcherism. John McGrath commented:

Every time I come to England I sense that people are sinking lower and lower, and feeling that everything is absolutely finished forever - that there is no solution to this except going into some sort of vortex, where you're constantly chasing yourself in a kind of ideological purity that has no relationship to what's going on in the rest of the country. Either that, or you give in, which is what an awful lot of people are doing...

The Scottish situation, for the sake of argument, is different. We do have a huge majority of Labour and oppositional forces not only in parliamentary representation but also within local authorities, and certainly the working-class movement is not dead either.

(NTQ 1988: 115)

Border Warfare served as ample demonstration of the extent to which that statement might be true. In Scotland, oppositional theatre was not muzzled but almost part of the official culture - although the degree to which it was personal contacts rather than official sanctioning which allowed the production to go ahead should not be underestimated. Nonetheless, the production marked the way in which political theatre was both vital and confident in Scotland. Moreover, it also showed that Scottish theatre in general could be as epic, colourful and inventive as foreign work, while at the same time attracting a large popular audience. In this respect, Border Warfare was a vindication of McGrath's theories, and his own energy and commitment to theatre work, placing him within the tradition of large-scale European work, and at the forefront of Scottish political theatre.

**The Venue.**

The Tramway had previously been the city's transport museum, but until Peter Brook's company made use of it to stage The Mahabarata in 1987, it had remained derelict once the museum had been moved to the Kelvin Hall site. McGrath had had designs on the space for some time. In the mid-1980s he had attempted to gain use of it as a rehearsal/performance space/workshop centre which 7:84 could use as a base but at that time it was planned that the building would be sold for commercial development. Its eventual conversion to a more permanent theatre venue along the lines of the Bouffes du Nord or Cartoucherie in Paris was never assured, although following the success of Brook's project it was planned that it would be used for performances during the Year of Culture. Once this planning decision had been taken, the Festivals Unit were keen to have the building handselled by a Scottish company, and given the spatial requirements of Border Warfare, there was a happy coincidence between their wishes and the ambitions of John McGrath.

Internally, the building was undergoing an accelerated process of renovation even as the company moved in to begin rehearsals. The major space allowed the production an area of around 100 feet by 80 feet for performance, without the addition of semi-permanent seating, since the performance was to be largely a promenade. The company had to build the lighting rig and secure platforms to support it. The position of being first of the new users of the performance area proved advantageous since the company did not inherit any prior designs for the space, and could from the start of rehearsals use the movable platforms and props. Outside the performance area a bar was established (run by a private catering company and charging up-market prices), with some seating and a large exhibition area in which representatives of various political pressure groups and campaigns displayed banners and ran stalls. The intention was to break down any conception of the building as a traditional theatre,

creating the feel of a market place rather than a foyer. At a number of performances there were staged sword fights and other entertainments in this area prior to the show. It was hoped that this range of activities would also nullify any negative effects of the sponsors' logos, hung in bunting suspended around the bar area. Even by the time that the first audiences arrived the whole building retained much of the air of unfinished renovation and rough work awaiting completion. This may well have facilitated the audience's ease in taking to the whole idea of a promenade performance, a relative novelty in Scotland at that time.

It should be noted, also, that for Glasgow audiences the Tramway at this time did not have the association with avant-garde work that it would gain through the Year of Culture programme, despite having been used by Peter Brook. The building was familiar to many since it had been the museum of transport, and the location (in coincidence with almost every other Glasgow venue) was not particular to any one group or class in terms of prestige or reputation. Much of the pre-publicity for the production stressed that the performance would be concerned with the relationship between England and Scotland; and that it was a co-production between Wildcat and Freeway - thus locating it as a piece of popular rather than avant-garde theatre. The importance of this Wildcat connection cannot be overemphasised. Border Warfare was following The Steamie and The Celtic Story which had enjoyed tremendous success in Glasgow's city centre, drawing in massive popular audiences. This pre-eminent role which Wildcat enjoy within popular theatre, particularly within the main conurbation of Strathclyde, guaranteed a sizeable audience for the performance. That the show played finally to an overall audience of 11,488, 87% of the estimated capacity, is in no small part due to this broad-based audience which Wildcat had already created.

This said, the production was in certain respects a return to the forms of theatre that McGrath had been making

with 7:84 (Scotland): it even included sections taken directly from The Game's A Bogey and Joe's Drum. As an exploration of theatre as 'story-telling', it implements and relies on many of the ideas espoused in A Good Night Out. A whole range of devices are deployed as means of carrying the narrative. The performers act out events in a number of ways; although, in the main they adopt the presentational mode of acting. They signal their characters in a variety of styles from heightened naturalism, through to stylised action, or pure pantomime. Historical situations are recreated through these styles, often with set speeches lifted in direct quotation from their original sources and relayed by the performers, both within and out of character. Other broader passages of time are compressed into short vignettes and cameo performances. The performers also remain in and step out of character to talk directly to the audience about events in both the first and third persons. Songs, particularly ballads, are used on their own to give a compressed version of events, or to comment on or reinforce the performed action. In a device borrowed from Mnouchkine's 1789 there is also use of a mock puppet show in James VII's story of how he was overthrown by William of Orange.

These various modes of narration are deployed to relay the epic time-scale of the production. It moves in and out of very particular scenes and incidents, across large swathes of history and back again to focus on those events that are of particular significance, presenting what Mary Brennan describes as 'telescoped fact' (Glasgow Herald 24/2/89). The sequencing of the events is almost entirely in chronological order, importantly giving the piece a sense of linear development, of 'grand narrative'. This linearity is only partially interrupted: there is a limited use of foreshadowing, whereby, for example, the Irish invaders are dressed as IRA members, and the Angles as peace loving Danes, just out of the sauna. There is also repetition of previous set pieces in the third act, as in the use of John

Knox's pulpit by Mrs Thatcher from which to lecture the Scots. However, these breaks are less to do with plot development than they are with commentary, theatrical shorthand, or pure comic effect.

Although there is a documentary element in this work, particularly in the use of historical records to provide some of the material for the set piece speeches of the play, McGrath's aim is far from documentary. The main interest is less on authenticity for its own sake, than it is on the perspective which the material serves: the argument around which all the material coheres. This is typical of most of McGrath's shows: in an interview with Colin Mortimer, Elizabeth MacLennan, for example, discusses The Game's A Bogey

Liz: And the argument is sustained through the songs as well as the scenes and the jokes.

Colin: So what you're following is not a plot but a political argument?

Liz: Yes, and the need for a Scottish Socialist Republic. The need for that IS the argument. Everything else is showing why it is necessary, then and now. I don't think anyone in the audience would leave without realising that's what we're talking about.

(Quoted MacLennan 1990: 61)

The gist of this argument can be gauged from a programme note:

This is the story of a thousand years of invasion, suppression, massacre, pillage, attempted annihilation, betrayal and treachery - in other words, of Scotland's relations with England...

But now a new and more insidious set of forces is at work to iron out this individuality [i.e. of Scots culture]...The moment is fast approaching when these and the other forces of the 1980s...will if unchecked, make Scotland no more than a loss-making subsidiary of England Ltd.

The main argument of the piece is then, that a belligerent and colonising England has for successive generations exploited and suppressed the Scots for its own benefit; and that Mrs Thatcher is ultimately the latest incarnation of

the English cultural impulse to destroy the uniqueness of Scots culture. A brief outline of the main events and incidents on which the play focuses illustrates the way in which historical events are adduced through the three parts of the show in support of this proposition. In Part I, after a pre-Christian funeral procession, Dave Anderson, as Lord Bon Accord, a kind of Boalian Joker-figure, welcomes the audience with the words:

So gather round and watch and weigh  
 The story that we tell today  
 We don't sell culture, fashion, or, soap,  
 But try to find some cause for hope.  
 There's not been much, truth to tell,  
 The past ten years have been close to hell.  
 Relationships... I've lost the strand...  
 Ah, between this spiky Scottish land  
 And England, smooth and strong and bland.  
 That's our theme, a thousand years long.

It is also to be, the audience is told,

A healthy mix of prejudice and fact  
 No wobbly high-wire balancing act.

The show then depicts the founding of the nation of Scotland, with the various tribes and invaders from whom the people of Scotland evolved meeting in a great comic commotion. Their subsequent history is skated over until the invasion of Scotland by Henry I, and the later rule of the English Kings Edward I and II, and the wars against English domination waged by Wallace and then Bruce. Following the successful resistance of the Scots, the Declaration of Arbroath is announced. Next, the focus is on King Henry VIII and his attempt to use Scotland as a stepping stone for his imperialist ambitions. Having been failed by the Duke of Hamilton, who refuses to barter Scots sovereignty (since Henry will not entertain his suit for the crown), Henry VIII enlists the aid of John Knox to 'seize Scotland for God and then deliver her to me'. Knox delivers the Catholic Mary into the hands of her Protestant cousin, Elizabeth I, and so allows 'the greater to draw the lesser'. This is reversed since the heir to the throne, James the I

of England and VI of Scotland, plans to make one single state of the kingdoms under him, each equally represented. Neither the Scots nor the English parliaments are in favour of the move. The first part of the play ends here.

In the second part, we are told that James is left to rule in peace for some 58 years over two countries which are not united but share a 'unity of purpose'. The next figure to be introduced is Charles I of England, who on a visit to Scotland is confronted by Jenny Geddes 'o' Embra'. She gives a rousing speech in which she tells Charles,

Afore the poor people of Scotland will bend the knee to you or your bishops, we will raise riot in this country like the roarin' o' the gales and you and your breed o' tyrants will be swept awa'.

The focus then moves forward again, this time to the Covenanters. They are used by the English parliamentarians, led by Cromwell, to challenge the power of the King, and have the forces of their own Scots Royalist nobles to contend with at home. Cromwell's army subsequently turns on them for recognising the King's son, and they are destroyed through a lack of leadership and poor judgement. Cromwell makes provision for the 'good government of England .... to be communicated to Scotland'.

After the Restoration, Charles II rules through his bishops and Lord Lauderdale, by-passing the parliament. The last Stuart king, James VII of Scotland, then tells how he was deposed by the English magnates who wanted to replace him with the Protestant William of Orange. For its part, the Scots parliament accepts William, though they have made their own Claim of Right and have been allowed to rule Scotland. However, when Queen Anne fails to produce an heir, English ministers attempt to unify the parliaments in order to force acceptance of their next choice of king, the Hanoverian George IV. This gives way to a set piece debate within the Scottish parliament on the issue of Union with England. (This and the subsequent section about the Edinburgh mob are the parts which rely heavily on Joe's

Drum). Despite a fierce speech from Fletcher of Saltoun, the Scots nobles accept the Treaty of Union, and the bribes that they had been awarded for doing so - McGrath makes a point of prefacing the debate with an account of these. This is the end of Part II.

In Part III, the audience first encounters General Joe Smith and the Edinburgh mob, rioting against local acts of injustice and The Act of Union. Then comes Bonnie Prince Charlie, who 'minces' in and out again in a matter of minutes. In his wake, Henry Dundas and his nephew Robert attempt to impose discipline on the Scots people. Resistance is focussed through the National Convention, inspired by post-Revolutionary France, and led by Thomas Muir. However, following the Napoleonic Wars, the Hanoverian George IV comes to visit Scotland and relations between the two countries settle into a more peaceful routine. Scots are at the forefront of the expanding Empire under Victoria. At home, the Gaels are herded from the Highlands into new factories, and Irish immigrants swell their numbers. From their midst grows up the Chartist movement and the trade unions. There is also the growth of sectarian competition through the founding of the Orange Order and similar organisations.

The coming of World War I splits the workers into those who go off to the front and those that fight against the war, led by John MacLean (around whom The Game's A Bogey centred). After the war the first group of Scottish Labour MPs are sent to Westminster, and from this is launched a metaphorical football match depicting Scotland's fate within the parliamentary system until 1979. Mrs Thatcher then enters to deliver a long tirade against all things Scottish. Against her, the other performers line up and repeat the words of some of the great figures from Scottish history: the show finishes with part of Fletcher of Saltoun's famous speech from the debate over the Union Treaty, 'We are Scotsmen. Let us put our country in order,

and flourish, and add our own independent weight to the world'. This summary gives an indication of the tenor of the argument. However, before addressing the nature of this argument in detail it is essential to examine the way in which the performance was actually staged and performed, since the treatment of the incidents outlined here is inextricably linked to these.

As already mentioned, the performance was played to a promenading audience. Two raised platforms at either end of the hall served as fixed points of reference: one to represent Scotland; the other, England. A fixed platform against one of the walls running between these two ends served to house the band's musical instruments. Between the two end areas a number of flexible stages were introduced at different times using mobile platforms, to which the audience could be drawn, allowing scene changes to take place in other areas. Flexible spotlighting allowed these areas to be closed down through black-out for these purposes. Through minimal scenic designation, the main performance area was transformed into a variety of locations: Stirling Brig, the burn at Bannockburn, or, Edinburgh's Canongate; rough benches aligned together created the Scottish Parliament of 1707 - cleared to one side to expose a carpet of green artificial football turf, they became seats at a football stadium. The transformability of the staging area (and indeed evidenced in the building itself) might thus be felt to coincide with the flexible version of history that would be acted out there (this is discussed in Chapter 4). It was not being presented as a definitive final version, but as a selective and partial argument. McGrath has always argued that audiences appreciate the performers speaking straight to them: 'working-class audiences have minds of their own and they like to hear what your mind really is, not what it might be' (McGrath 1979: 52). Here, the partiality of what

he thinks is emphasised rather than covered up and disguised as natural.

The mutability of the performance area created by the flexible platforms and promenade elements was technically felicitous. It allowed swift interchanges between characters, locations and scenes, analogous to the intercutting effects of film. This allowed for the possibility of montage effects and much sharper juxtapositions than if one were restricted to a single set, on a fixed stage. Through the use of the movable stages, contemporaneous events were able to be displayed, creating a simultaneity of presentation, through which the audience are forced to choose between conflicting foci (cf Webb 1980: 209, for a further discussion of this approach); this is not as developed in the performance as it might have been, particularly given its success when it is used to show an early socialist meeting being pitched against an Orange Lodge rally, with the performers on each platform vying to attract and retain the audience's attention.

The possibilities of such flexible staging had already been explored by a number of foreign artists by whom McGrath was influenced. He had seen the work of Ronconi as early as 1969 in a production for Teatro Libero di Roma of a version of Ariosto's Orlando Furioso at the Haymarket Ice Rink in Edinburgh. He recalls the production thus:

The action happened on free-wheeling platforms zooming around among the audience, with sometimes three or four stories at one time being acted out or declaimed in various parts of the space. It was a very energetic performance, requiring a lot from the audience, but getting it because of the boldness of the actors and the sense that it all generated of too much too fast, but very exciting. There was a great feeling of pageantry and...of amazing spectacle. It relates to the carnival idea, at least to the spectacular element of carnival...

(McGrath 1990: 157-158)

He had encountered the same kind of work undertaken by Ariane Mnouchkine (a contemporary of his at Oxford) in 1971 at the Roundhouse. Of Theatre du Soleil's 1789 he says,

it was the staging that turned it into a carnival event. Taking from medieval theatre the notion of several stages all around the audience, it created a world of action within which the spectator moved and participated by movement; the gathering of the audience around a the stage where the scene was taking place became part of the event taking place, the audience were in the play.

(ibid: 158)

McGrath himself had staged his Trees in The Wind in Edinburgh in 1971, using three separate, though fixed, stages.

Richard Webb has described the assumptions about the conventional role of the spectator underlying these experiments in manipulation of the performance space and audience 'involvement':

In general he [the spectator] takes as understood that the actors express and that he receives (spatially underscored by the conventional theatre architecture: scene/salle, light/dark, moving/sitting). The spectator agrees to give himself up to the performance. Consequently his actions are reactions, not performances. His affective sensibility, his critical intellect, or both, may be appealed to, but in all cases his contribution remains physically and creatively passive (apart, that is, from crying, laughing, applauding, and the like).

(Webb 1980: 206-207)

In an interview in The Morning Star (10/2/90) McGrath explained that he used the staging to overcome this sense of passivity: 'What I wanted to do was to give the audience the feeling of being involved, of making choices, so as to create a kind of dynamics with the audience'. According to reviews of Border Warfare, it succeeded in deploying the techniques and assumptions of these foreign models to overcome this audience passivity. The same article described the show thus: 'Stylistically it resembles a Meyerhold construction, designed in cooperation with Brecht

and a travelling fairground. At every level the audience is forced to become involved in the action'. Randall Stevenson wrote, 'Such constant movement emphatically denies the possibility of perceiving history aloofly or passively. Fleeing from knights on horseback, or invited to gather closer to attend to some passing king, the audience is forced to shape and reshape itself around events, literally compelled by history' (TLS 10/3/89).

Whether this involvement is actually either as liberating or involving as assumed is another matter. Webb's article, for example, explores the limitations of various experiments in audience participation in France, including the work of Mnouchkine and Ronconi. He concludes that generally much audience involvement in performances offers only a spurious liberty and physical co-creativity, since the idea of a performance narrowly prescribes the choice of actions that an audience may take: 'The spectator's choices are limited by earlier directorial decisions' (Webb 1980: 209). He is always kept within 'the global design of the authors' (ibid: 211). Webb prefers the term 'audience inclusion' to describe 'the physical arrangement of the audience when it is conscious of itself, the movement of the audience when this plays a role in the performance, and also its decision-making about the development of the action' (ibid).

Much of the effect of the staging in Border Warfare is therefore to include rather than to physically involve the audience as co-creators. Only once - in the vote within the Scottish Parliament over the Treaty of Union - does the audience have a say in the action. Even here, it is as they leave the auditorium for the interval at the end of Part II that the vote is taken (as if into division lobbies) rather than as something leading to a new action or a change in the course of the play. Moreover, the actual vote has already been enacted, the result declared, and almost all the performers left the hall, when the audience are invited

to make their choice. I therefore take issue with Randall Stevenson's review, which comments that 'seating the audience as members of the parliament which debated the 1707 Act of Union, then counting them as they file out different doors for an interval, ensures the spectator's decisive involvement in their history, past and present'.

Other than this, the audience's participation as a group is limited to witnessing the events of their history/the performance and avoiding its consequences. This is not consistently felicitous in its thematic implications. Given the limited choices with which the audience are faced, the staging reinforces the implication that they are objects of this history/performance, rather than agents within it. They have, for example, to scurry aside to give space to kings, queens and nobles for much of the piece. The duration of the production may have been intended to take the audience through history so that, by the end, performers and audience stand equal on the same level in a shared space, defying Thatcher preaching from above. This is an appropriate spatial metaphor for the potential rise in power of working class Scots acting in solidarity with one another. Yet while this interpretation may be integrated with the argument of the production, the fact is that for all of the performance the audience have been harried from one position to another, forced both by the action and the stewards within the hall to make way for the performance. To interpret this in terms of the argument, as has been done with the changes in height levels, one must acknowledge that movement through the horizontal plane is at odds with this argument. It implies that the spectators are separated from history and that they, as audience, must not intervene in the history/performance: that progress and development are only possible through their passivity<sup>8</sup>. This may seem to be a deliberately precocious counter-reading of the staging, but it is one that is certainly available, as is illustrated

in a review by Raymond Ross in the Edinburgh Evening News (24/2/89):

The audience are forced to stand for most of the four hours and swing their heads Wimbledon style from side to side to watch the action - or to leap backwards and forwards to avoid being crushed by giant hobby horses and trailers which cart the pageant of history up and down the huge hall guarded by a team of manhandling stewards whose ambitions seem to be paramilitary.

A second question over the nature of the audience's involvement comes via a footnote to Anne Ubersfeld's 1980 article, 'Notes sur la denegation theatrale'. Here, she notes that the mobility of the spectator in productions such as 1789 is less an action than an 'itineraire du regard' (itinerary of the focus). This is important because it entirely changes the conception of the way in which the audience relates to the performance. They are no longer part of it as co-creators, equal with the company's performers and musicians. This is a presentation to the audience within a different spatial relationship. The fluidity of the staging does conform to the ideas about the nature of the performance text being 'open' to criticism, rather than being 'an already produced and bounded object which the spectator observes, rather than constructs, from his permanent lookout' (Elam 1980: 63). Here, the notion of construction has less to do with co-creation within or of the performance than it has to do with the spectator's freedom to interpret or construct the meaning of the performance for him/herself.<sup>9</sup>

This is something which McGrath acknowledges when he argues that the staging of the piece had less to do with the implementation of any pre-set schematic notions of audience participation, than it had to do 'with enhancing the audience's imaginative engagement' with the performance. There were certain metaphorical or thematic parts to the way in which the piece was staged - particularly in the relationships set up between the audience and the English nobles (this is discussed later) - but these were concerned

with relationships within the performance. Rather than developing a new role for the audience, the staging is intended to connect with McGrath's concept of a 'new carnival theatre', which would be 'celebratory, public, all-inclusive...instead of saying different things with the same squeaky voice, perhaps we ought to be looking for a whole new vocal range' (1990: 154). The question is whether Border Warfare might actually have been such a theatre.

There are two elements which suggest that it might have been, and which run contrary to the relatively negative assessment of the audience's involvement/inclusion made so far: the audience's relationship to itself; and its relation to the production as a pageant of myths. With regard to the first, the staging of the production created an environment in which the audience's relationship to itself (more than its relationship to the performances) was altered. Rather than sitting in detached isolation from other members of the audience, each person was forced to mingle with everyone else, to share space in a way which traditional theatres inhibit. The space became sociopetal rather than sociofugal. Thus, the reaction of others to the events was as important as the events themselves. McGrath compared the production to a ballad in its logic and argument (see John Fowler in The Glasgow Herald 13/1/89)). In that sense, the audience's own awareness of itself metaphorically 'clapping along', within a single shared space without division between audience members was in itself a creation of the very collective spirit that the production argued was in existence.

In forcing the audience to share the same space and to negotiate the shape that it would take within it, the piece also created an analogy of the processes involved in any collective action. With its spectacle, colour, scale, and virtuoso performances by a number of familiar faces within a strong cast, the performance engendered an environment in which a celebration of this collective spirit might take place. Indeed, even where the thematic use of the space

broke down, the whole busy-ness and bustle of the performance conveyed it with a verve and wit that confounded more reasoned objections. To the degree that the performance therefore initiated a sense of a shared celebration within the audience, it did create some of the aspects of a carnival, although it missed the co-creative element of carnival that destroys the divisions between the performers as creators and audience as receivers.

Given these restrictions on choice and actual physical involvement by the audience a more suitable analysis of the piece might be as spectacle or pageant. Roland Barthes has described the virtue of spectacle as being 'to abolish all motives and all consequences: what matters is not what it [the audience] thinks but what it sees' (1972: 15). This connects both with McGrath's rejection of Brechtian pedagogics (cf McGrath 1981) and certain notions of carnival as abandonment of the rational. What the audience sees is not an attempt at an historically accurate account of history, it is a summary of an attitude to that history; a perspective on it. As Filewod notes,

Properly speaking, polemic drama and pageantry are antithetical: pageantry with its emphasis on iconography, by definition precludes the reasoned argument that is implicit in the idea of polemic drama.

(Filewod 1987: 6)

The characters that are trawled before the audience are not, therefore, characters in any conventional theatrical sense. They are a series of icons, both representing themselves and embodying certain shared attitudes. In this way they fulfil a mythological function. Barthes (1972) describes myth as a 'a second order semiological system'. It relies on a previously shared experience or meaning system from which to conjure its own meaning. For example, in myth, the historical character loses his historical context ('history evaporates'), and yet it is this historical context that gives him/her meaning as an icon. This meaning is 'like an instantaneous reserve of history, a tamed richness, which it

is possible to call and dismiss in a sort of rapid alternation' (Barthes 1972: 118). However, for the myth to have potency, its original meaning will have to undergo a 'deformation', it will have to be alienated from its history. Only one 'meaning' can exist at any given time: mythic (or iconographic) power and historical meaning are mutually exclusive.

The mythic meanings of these characters cohere around a set of oppositions maintained between three groups: the English; the Scots ruling classes; and the Scottish people: indeed the very beginning of the performance is characterised by a lost member of 'Ally's Army'<sup>10</sup>, draped in the kilt and Lion Rampant, chanting football songs - the English are skinhead lager louts who beat up old ladies. These oppositions are drawn consistently through a number of elements in the production: speech/language; costuming; interaction with the audience in terms of both spatial relationships and height levels; and attitude to that audience.

The sharpest distinctions are between the English and the Scots people. The English are portrayed entirely in terms of the English ruling class throughout history. This ruling class is presented as aloof, self-serving, sporadically decadent, greedy and ruthless in pursuit of their imperialist ambitions. In addition to the treatments of individual characters, as a group they exhibit a range of similarities in their habits and tendencies. They speak almost entirely in an exaggerated Received Pronunciation; this may overflow into an effeminate campness, or, alternatively, it betokens a tight-lipped restraint. They are costumed in more elaborate and colourful costumes than the Scots (Cromwell's Puritan battle dress is even much more elaborate than that of the Scots army). They always maintain positions much higher than the audience - on horseback or on the platforms when they come through the audience. Thus, even when they do move, the audience is

forced to concede a large part of the performance space to them. Generally, they appear on their own, or giving orders to those about them, usually servant figures. When they speak to the audience, it is to lecture them or patronise them. The attitude of these rulers to the Scots is one of extreme distaste since they are supremely confident of their own right and duty to bring English civilisation north of the border.

The Scots characters are in sharp contrast. They generally speak a hybrid Scots - neither classically Lallans, nor identifiable with any one area of the country. It is enough that they tend towards the accents and dialects of the audience. Their costumes are generally simple and plain, using darker and more subdued colours. They are shown with more robustness than the English rulers - in contrast to their often delicate effiteness. They share much more of the same space as the audience, often taking up positions within it to watch actions unfolding. They also are presented collectively, in a group with one person acting as a spokesperson, rather than as individuals. This relationship to the audience takes on the added emotional hue of much of the songs, making the Scots characters individually more empathic (as when Mary is sent to the court of Elizabeth I), or creating a strong sense of emotion about the fate of the Scots people in general: the use of Burns' 'Sic. A Parcel of Rogues' as the audience file out in the vote on the Act of Union is a key example of this. The general effect is to portray the Scots as a collective group, driven by a democratic impulse, interested in justice and fairness, rather than in pursuing any narrow class interests. They speak to the audience, inviting them to share in their experiences and history.

The Scots ruling class and leaders vacillate between the two sets. They tend towards the English when they pursue their own self-interest; towards the Scottish when do what is just or right. The treatment varies accordingly:

for example, Bonnie Prince Charlie 'minces' on and off with a fey flourish; Knox is a demagogue on a gigantic pulpit, towering over the people. Wallace, Bruce, and Fletcher, for example, are all presented as being part of the audience and concerned with them. They speak directly to them and share their space. While they may have access to the high platforms and the horses, they are as at ease moving among the audience - Wallace as a guerilla fighter is a perfect illustration of this, literally sheltering among the common people. Fletcher of Saltoun speaks from the benches on which the audience sit in the Union debate; Joe Smith and John MacLean address the audience by taking up a position within the space on their own, drawing the audience around them, rather than lecturing from above.

The effect of what is really then a bi-polar set of oppositions is to set out two sets of national characteristics which distinguish the English and the 'true' Scots (since the measure of the Scottishness of the ruling class is determined by the extent to which they serve the interests of the masses). This presentation is sustainable to the extent that the dominant English culture is the culture of Kings and Queens, whereas Scotland's dominant culture is much more a folk culture (see the chapter on Scotland and Thatcherism). Declan Kiberd has argued in the context of Ireland's relationship to England (see Kiberd 1985), however, that the creation of such oppositions represents a negative impulse to the fictionalisation or mythologisation of a whole nation and its culture, for both sides of the opposition. It is a tribal attitude that allows each to endow the other with characteristics of which it hopes to divest itself. In so doing, each group denies both responsibility for part of its own actions, and the multiplicity and potential of its own community. The impulse to mythological oppositions removes history from the pasts and futures of whole races and nations. While the underlying colonising attitude of English culture is probably much as it is presented here, the portrayal of the

Scots people has less to do with history than with a desirable myth. As Kiberd writes:

Like all colonised people's whose history is a nightmare, the Irish have no choice but to live in the foreglow of a golden future. For them history is a form of science fiction, by which their scribes must rediscover in the endlessly malleable past whatever it is they are hoping for in the future

(Kiberd 1985: 95)

Likewise the portrayal of the Scots people here is much more a way of establishing a preferred future image, rather than of necessarily giving vent to a 'lost' history.<sup>11</sup>

However, since these myths have been evacuated of history, the intention of the piece is not to provide an historical analysis, as Lord Bon Accord forewarned. One of the advantages these myths, however, was that they had a wide currency, and were particularly potent at that time. McGrath's portrayal of the English coincides with what Tony Dickson described as the widespread attitude of Scots to Mrs Thatcher, for example:

The public persona of Margaret Thatcher appears to many Scots to capture all the worst elements of their caricature of the detested English: uncaring, arrogant, always convinced of her own rightness ('there is no alternative'), possessed of an accent that grates on Scots ears, and affluent enough to afford a retirement home costing around £500,000.

(Dickson 1989, 65)

Given that the climax of the show is the entrance of a Thatcher character - the only female part to be played by a man - astride the huge pulpit that Knox had used, lecturing to the audience in a sub-Hitlerian speech about the superiority of the English and their values to those of the Scots, it is little wonder that McGrath's retrospective on the English is characterised in the terms which Mrs Thatcher is perceived as ultimately demonstrating and fulfilling.

McGrath has therefore produced a work which plays off the commonly held (among Scots) myths of what dominates and fires the cultures of England and Scotland. These myths

are assumed as a given, and the production thus celebrates the community holding them. McGrath explains this in the Morning Star article 'In Scotland it's definitely a culture of resistance [to Thatcherism]. What I'm interested in, is theatre giving voice to that culture, giving it power'. This, in one sense, guaranteed the success of the piece; Alan Filewod's remark made in a different context is apposite here: 'the play works best when it reflects the prejudices of its audience' (Filewod 1987: 97). Thus, although the myths of Scottish history may not coincide with historical reality, their value may be measured in other ways precisely because they have a mythical truth. Myth does not only reflect versions of the past: it also incorporates the community's aspirations, helping to define that community. It is patently true that Border Warfare provided one of the great public occasions, for the celebration of the community sharing these myths of its history, outside of a diminishing number of political meetings and rallies. Moreover, if the community begins to use the myth as the basis for its political discourse (and there is evidence from, for example, the Constitutional Convention that this is happening in terms of living up to its 'democratic heritage') then it may in fact be enabling. To the extent that the performance relied for its success on the extent to which the audience shared its perspective, it could therefore be seen as inclusive and in a sense, a 'carnival'.

There are numerous dangers revealed in this, however, some of which are quite willingly accepted in the production. Thus, for example, while there is a willingness to explode the English myths of supremacy and civilisation by showing them as barbaric, ruthless and self-serving, there is no exploration of the gap between the Scottish myths and the lived reality of the audience. However, since what is being celebrated is a culture under attack, it would not do to add weight to that attack. In this way the piece quite willingly embraces an element of 'tailism'. Although McGrath has described this as 'trailing along behind the

tastes of the working-class, debased as they are by capitalism' (McGrath 1981: 59), here, the nationalistic chauvinism of the Scots working-class is accepted as a challenge to capitalism, incarnated in English culture.

The working of the production on a purely mythological level has certain other implications. It places it at one remove from political and historical reality. As such, its analysis cannot be correlated with the actuality of present politics. In some respects the piece is no more than a cartoon of Scottish history. Randall Stevenson's otherwise positive review notes that 'Playing out Scotland's past in this way, sometimes as a succession of comic-strip images, or carnival side-shows, risks offering only quick illustration or caricature, rather than much in the way of analysis' (TLS 10/3/89). Raymond Ross calls it 'little more than a cartoon pantomime history of Scotland' (Edinburgh Evening News 24/2/89). Thus, for example, in the vote on the Act of Union, the audience (including a number of Labour unionist MPs) could quite happily vote against the bill without it indicating their present voting intentions. More importantly, the argument descends into assertion, since it lacks historical authenticity. It denies the material struggle from which history is created and progress made. The myths that it marshalls allocate no role to later immigrant communities to Scotland, who (in the terms of this production) can never take their place as Scots because they have not shared the same historical traditions: this is a very dangerous racist assumption to feed. There is also considerable difficulty in the use of female and gay sexuality to betoken certain mythic characteristics, with the equation of masculine characteristics with strength, honesty and justice, and campness with decadence and weakness. That the myths used are portrayed through such stereotyping (albeit that this is openly acknowledged), sets up a store of 'tailist' problems, which do connect with a wider reality.

In an even more concrete sense, the production superseded the assertion at its heart, through the intervention of sponsorship by a multi-national brewing company. Multi-national companies have taken over from colonial powers the role of persuading or coercing the peoples of countries like Scotland to allow the atrophy of their native culture, to be replaced, not by a superior colonial culture but by an homogenised, mass, consumer culture. Government by the English might be the conduit through which certain ideas are passed, but it could no longer be described as the inspiration of or motivation for those ideas. The insidiousness of such sponsorship in creating the right environment for consumer products that do not recognise national characteristics and boundaries, outpaces anything that governments are visibly capable of.

So, Border Warfare can be seen as a carnival theatre, to the extent that it created a fellow-feeling and awareness of each other between audience members; and in the degree of homogeneity between the myths presented by the performance and those shared by the audience. The use of such myths, however, is problematic, since it involves an element of removal from a political reality in which they might have already been superseded in both currency and potency. This does not detract from the fact that the excitement inspired by the innovation (within Scottish theatre) of a project on the scale of this, combined with its genuine verve and wit, marked a moment of intense celebration and a certain advancement of the possibilities for Scottish culture, created within the context of live theatre. However, the circumstances within which Border Warfare was produced (including the circumstances of McGrath's resignation from 7:84) can be used either to rubbish its assertions about the erosion of Scottish culture, or to support the assertion that there is, or has been, a concerted effort, through history and fulfilled in Mrs Thatcher to destroy the social framework and culture of Scotland. In this way, the production itself embodies the

ever-vigorous debate that surrounds the life and working practices of its writer and director.

**John McGrath & 7:84 (Scotland) Productions**

(All productions by John McGrath excepted where noted otherwise.)

- 1973        The Cheviot, The Stag And the Black Black Oil
- 1974        The Game's A Bogey
- 1975        My Pal And Me  
               Capital Follies David MacLennan & John Bett  
               Little Red Hen
- 1976        Honour Your Partners David MacLennan  
               Out Of Our Heads
- 1977        Thought For Today David MacLennan  
               Trembling Giant  
               His Master's Voice David Anderson
- 1979        Joe's Drum
- 1980        Swings and Roundabouts
- 1980/81    Blood Red Roses
- 1981        The Catch
- 1982        'Clydebuilt Season':  
                   Gold in His Boots George Munro  
                   In Time of Strife Joe Corrie  
                   Johnny Noble Ewan MacColl  
                   Men Should Weep Ena Lamont Stewart  
                   Screw The Bobbin Chris Hannan & the company
- 1982/83    Men Should Weep Ena Lamont Stewart
- 1984        The Ragged Trouser'd Philanthropists an adaptation  
               by Archie Hind of Robert Tressall's novel.  
               The Baby and The Bathwater

- 1985 The Albannach, an adaptation of the novel by Fionn McColla.  
The Baby and The Bathwater  
In Time of Strife Joe Corrie
- 1986 Beneath One Banner Sean McCarthy  
Victorian Values Donald Campbell  
There Is A Happy Land  
The Albannach
- 1986/87 The Incredible Brechin Beechin Bug Matt McGinn
- 1987 High Places Ena Lamont Stewart  
The Gorbals Story Robert McLeish
- 1987/88 The Incredible Brechin Beechin Bug Matt McGinn
- 1988 No Mean City an adaptation by Alex Norton of the novel by A. McArthur and H. Kingsley Long.
- 1989 Border Warfare produced by Wildcat
- 1990 John Brown's Body produced by Wildcat

## 10. CONCLUSION

The starting point for the research on which this thesis is based was an investigation of the widening gap between Scots society and culture and the British state under Thatcherism, and of how that might be focused through political theatres. This coincided with a concern to properly locate Scottish theatre within its own context, rather than regarding it as something merely peripheral or subsidiary to the conventional Anglo-centric model. In the light of existing work on Scottish theatre, it was decided that the most appropriate way to achieve this would be through a series of case studies. These case studies sought to identify the properties of six different theatres in production, rather than through a literary analysis of the playscripts. This necessitated the construction of a methodology which would address the elements of the production which were stable from performance to performance. Based on the understanding that the political function of the production would be judged by its social impact and effect, this methodology identified the ways in which each production related to its social context and the audience within that context. Conclusions about the findings of this research span a number of areas and will be discussed here under the following headings: methodology, Scottish political theatre, political theatre in general, and recommendations for further research.

### **Methodology**

The methodology adopted in undertaking the analysis presented here was motivated by an attempt to avoid a number of limiting practices in theatre analysis. It was hoped it would avoid the pitfalls of a dramatic/literary criticism unable to take account of the theatrical and performative elements at the heart of live presentation. By locating the performance within its social and historical context it would also avoid both entirely subjective critical

judgements and author-centred biographical explanations. The inevitable tendency towards both of these this would be balanced by an appreciation of the ways in which meanings and effects are created socially. This appreciation would be reached, firstly, by an understanding of the intertextual referentiality of the production as a means of locating it within its cultural frame; and secondly, through the application of theories of audience reception and pleasure generation.

There were immediate problems in implementing this methodology. It was almost entirely the case that only the authors and companies who had produced the work retained records of it, and of their own historical developments. Inevitably then, in the absence of external corroboration, I was reliant on their accounts either first hand or through various published sources as explanantions for the patterns of work which they developed. This was particularly problematical given the dearth of alternative critical investigations or even descriptive accounts of all but the Wildcat and 7:84 companies and the work of John McGrath. For both Clyde Unity and Theatre PKF specifically there seemed to have developed a standard account of the company's history beyond which it was impossible to proceed, because of the lack of alternative documentation or criticism. Moreover, it was actually very illuminating to contrast the producers' accounts of their work with the critical judgements which this approach produced. The gap between theory or intention and practice is important, not just because it demonstrates the importance of the controlling conditions of making theatre, but also because it is a gap into which critical observations might fruitfully fit.

Related to this last point is a second set of considerations concerning the results that this critical approach has produced. Given the specificity of the works and their contexts, the case studies undertaken were designed to produce an analysis of the properties of these

productions which would be only descriptively adequate. It was not intended that this descriptive analysis should lead to a comparative evaluation of the specific works treated here or become the basis of a more general list of values for political theatres. It is assumed that comparative evaluations require that one compare like with like, and that such comparison is impossible given the diversity of forms and contexts of these productions. Moreover, it must also be accepted that the assignation of relative values to different works is done according to the use that the valuer wants to make of the works. Such use-value will inevitably be assessed according to different axes depending on who is making the assessment. Academic interest may be assessed differently from political evaluation, which in turn may be assessed differently from entertainment value, for example.

Relatedly, and to reiterate a point made in the introduction, it is not the case that the findings within the case studies can be identified with the actual responses of any audiences for these productions. This is a critical study, not an exercise in audience-response analysis. Nonetheless, because of the attention within the case studies to the contexts in which the works were performed, and given the emphasis on demonstrating the correlation between the ideological implications of the productions and their properties as entertainments, it may be assumed that there is a convergence between the actual responses of most members of most audiences and the interpretations suggested here.

### **Scottish Political Theatres**

The case studies undertaken of producers and productions using this methodology produced findings that may be separated into two interrelated categories: the institutional framework and the practice of producers. Findings regarding the institutional structures governing

theatre production showed that the most crucial element in the development of theatres in Scotland was finance. Over the period of Mrs Thatcher's time as Prime Minister the availability of public funding for the theatre (and the arts in general) was the single most important issue affecting the quality of artistic output. Theatres demonstrated through the growth in their audiences that a wide public was keenly interested in their work; however, audiences could still not sustain work without substantial public subsidy. In the absence of resources to meet these demands, the SAC focused its efforts on the management structures of institutions, diverting attention from the more substantial problem of the paucity of funding. The imbalances within the patterns of funding by the Arts Council continued to affect the artistic output of producers. At a basic level, certain art forms continued to be privileged, and within these forms, only those companies already established as revenue clients were able to retain their proportion of funds. For political theatre companies, the retention of revenue funding was, however, at the cost of greater accountability to the imposed financial and bureaucratic strictures of the SAC which contributed to changes in company identity and accommodation within a conventional theatre frame.

This last feature was not perceived as an issue by many Scottish political companies since, unlike comparable producers in England in the 1970s, their practice was not informed by analytical socialist, or Marxist ideology. Instead, they were characterised by a more liberal humanist approach to politics, married to increasingly pragmatic approaches in their patterns of working. The apotheosis of this pragmatism came in attempts to consolidate working class culture through celebrations which would attract good box-office, and the general abandonment of issue-based productions<sup>1</sup>. Thus, the popular masses were not abandoned as the focus of efforts in Scottish political theatre as (much as) they were in England, for example. However, some attempts at celebration allowed for the folklorisation of

this culture, often rendering it politically anodyne. For some theatres this has meant becoming part of a heritage industry reselling the past as a commodity distinct from and unrelated to the present.

While I have argued that there has been a relative homogeneity within the theatre institutions in Scotland, paradoxically, many producers continue to consider their patterns or areas of work as discrete. The homogeneity which is evident from an external viewpoint does not extend to all areas of work, and is not necessarily apparent to those involved in theatre production: 7:84 were identified with folk music and Highland touring, Wildcat with rock musicals in the Central Belt, The Merry Macs with community cabaret and so on. Such compartmentalization has been fostered by funding bodies, particularly the SAC, with the effect of limiting the possibilities of cross-fertilization, even where producers felt it to be desirable. As a consequence, there is little evidence of the transference of approaches or kinds of work from company to company, the 7:84-McGrath-Wildcat example being a natural and obvious exception. Whole areas of activity have been delegated out to companies, allowing their monopolisation of these areas. With the demise of these companies or changes within them, their achievements are then lost or denigrated. This compartmentalization has created a lack of awareness of historical precedents with the consequence that producers are sometimes engaged in 're-inventing the wheel'. There are certain subjects (particular historical figures or events) and approaches (forwarding Scots national identity as a vehicle for their particular political perspective) to which producers continually return, without any reference to previous works in the area. Moreover, producers are frequently dismissive of each others' work and working practices. Dismissal does not take place along ideological or politically sectarian lines, but seems to be based more

on ignorance without proper evaluation of other people's work.

In terms of practice on stage, the inappropriateness of literary analyses of scripted texts was borne out since few of the performance texts would have sustained such analysis. Instead, they utilised qualities within performances for their potency. One of the features common to all the productions was the importance of identification as a source of pleasure for audiences and as a means of creating political functions for the producers. This identification was entirely reliant on the live performance of the production. It took the form of identification between spectators and characters, as empathy in The Brus, 1982 and Killing Me Softly, for example. Each of these used the audience's empathy with certain characters to humanize political positions favoured by the producers. In Losing Alec the audience was encouraged to identify with a range of characters, allowing for multiple perspectives on the stage events. Although these strategies for identification might be engaged through a reading of the written script, it was in the incarnation of that script on stage that they were most powerful.

Processes of identification were important in other respects. The identification between spectator and performer was a feature of a number of the productions. In 1982, it increased the audience's empathy with the character played by Terry Neason; simultaneously, it allowed for the alienated playing of characters by Dave Anderson, due to the effect of his own stage presence and prior celebrity. In Killing Me Softly, the audience's identification with the performers overtook the formal limitations of the script so that the separation of character and performer was ignored, with the effect of increasing the audience's appreciation of and emotional engagement with the production as a totality. In MacLash, the audience's identification with the performers was reciprocated through the content of the

material, the performance style and the location of the performance to create a sense of community between audience and performers. Finally, within Border Warfare in addition to other of these processes, there was an increasing identification within the audience between spectators, which eventually led to them being united in solidarity against a figure of Mrs Thatcher.

Importantly in terms of the arguments of this thesis, few of the productions studied relied on their ideational content for their efficacy. Instead, their success as theatre came from the ways in which the facets and possibilities of live theatre were exploited both to address certain ideas and to create additional political functions. These functions centred less on analytically developed or intellectually convincing arguments, than on the deployment of theatrical techniques and an often intuitive understanding of the ways in which audiences might relate to productions. In turn, there was a further reliance on the context in which the productions took place for their qualities as theatre and their political functions. These qualities and functions could not be said to be universal, and often were not transferable from context to context. They were determined by the location of the production according to a range of axes: for example, time, geography, demography of the audience, as well as the specific limits of the venue(s) in which the production was staged. This invalidates notions of Art which rely on universality as a defining quality: theatre in production is tied to its specific context. The importance of context creates considerations for companies wishing to foreground certain political functions for their theatres. They must face the variability in the possible responses of audiences according to the axes outlined above when attempting to give their work a political function. It is hoped that the investigation undertaken here will have illuminated some of

the considerations which they might apply, if only by analogy, to other projects.

### Political Theatre

These findings on certain Scottish political theatres have a consequence for the category of political theatre both in criticism and practice. This is clearest when one considers the inadequacy of evaluations of political theatres solely on the basis of their ideas, or the meanings created by the performance. Such evaluation is reductive<sup>2</sup> on a number of counts. The first of these is in the 'excessiveness' of live theatre. Live theatre is 'excessive' in the ways in which it creates elements which do not function as signs, or when they do, as signs which do not form part of a coherent meaning for the whole. Acknowledging this is contrary to the tradition of theatre analysis which Patrice Pavis says 'rests on a belief that performance can be analyzed - that is taken apart - and that it functions as an entity, wherein all the parts join in shaping it and giving it meaning' (Pavis 1985: 210). Excessive elements may be accidental, deliberately playful, the consequence of some functional decision, or a characteristic of the performers, such as their 'presence'. Such elements might not contribute to a coherent meaning, but may add rather to the texture, or to use Barthes' term 'grain', of the piece, that which makes it a unique event. Likewise, they may create an emotional or irrational force which cannot be accounted for in terms of meaning, but which may create a political function, such as a feeling of community or solidarity.

This connects to a second consideration of the inadequacy of the reduction of political theatres to their ideational content: it allows certain political theatres to be dismissed because of the 'weakness' of the political ideas they are said to offer. The arguments are considered weak possibly because they rehearse previously stated positions, or because they contain obvious imbalances, or

for some other reason fail to convince the critic. The producers are then criticized as 'preaching to the converted', since it is assumed that only 'the converted' would accept these arguments as convincing. Of course, where theatre has resorted to the articulation of ideas without consideration of its strengths and weaknesses as theatre, it is badly served both as theatre and as politics; 'preaching' is the cardinal sin of political theatre practitioners where it merely simulates a public lecture. Where 'preaching to the converted' is a useful term is in the way it illuminates other possible functions for theatre than the advancing of new ideas to convert the audience to a particular political position. Just as in church sermons, political theatres invariably attract people sympathetic to their positions. What both do is to consolidate the beliefs of the spectators, allowing them to renew and revitalise their faith within a safe environment in which they are supported by a community of fellow-believers. As events, they may both sustain and develop the community of shared values in which they are located, without necessarily directly addressing issues affecting that community. As the case studies have indicated, the political importance of the theatre event may be in the creation of such functions separate from the ideas conveyed in the performance. Their importance will vary according to context, but this does not invalidate them as examples of effective political theatre.

This is where the tradition within criticism of viewing political theatres just as arenas for the interplay of ideas (bolstered by Brecht's advocacy in theory of such a model) is crucially at its weakest. Firstly, it tends to refuse to accommodate the ways in which the ideational content of productions is actually created within and subject to specific contexts rather than being immanent to or constant features of 'the play'. Secondly, it does not accommodate the spectrum of political functions of which the ideational content is only part. Thirdly, and perhaps most devastatingly, it does not form the basis of an explanation

of the role of theatre within political culture. By focusing only on the ideas within productions, this criticism relegates political theatre to a very limited overtly propagandist role, which it only occasionally fulfils<sup>3</sup>. The relationship between ideas and the theatre might best be characterised by analogy with a mathematical vector, for example. A vector quantity has both direction and magnitude. While the ideational content provides the directional component for political theatre, its force component comes through its successful implementation as theatre. This does not mean that political theatre will be separated from other elements of political activity; rather, that these activities will complement each other, instead of one substituting or representing the other. The role of theatre as a valid political activity in its own right is then upheld.

This leads directly to what is presented as the inevitable problem facing all political theatre producers: how their theatre might make a difference to the way their audience relates to the rest of political life around them. Essentially this is posed as a question of how to bridge the gap between theatrically derived ideas, emotions and political positions and those applied in everyday life. Its resolution requires a breaking of the conventional frame surrounding theatre which presents it as a commodity interchangeable with other entertainment commodities, and as such used by and useful to audiences as a distraction or escape from the 'real' world and its politics outside the theatre. In her article 'In Search of a Radical Discourse for Theatre', Dorrian Lambley quotes Terry Eagleton,

The commodity, as we have seen in the work of Marx, is transgressive, promiscuous, polymorphous; in its sublime self-expansiveness, its levelling passion to exchange with another of its kind, it offers paradoxically to bring low the very finely nuanced superstructure - call it 'culture' - which serves in part to protect and promote it. The commodity is the ruin of all distinctive identity, craftily conserving the

difference of use-value but only by dint of subverting it to that sameness-in-difference which for Walter Benjamin was fashion.

(Lambley, 1992: 42)

Paradoxically, resistance to commoditification requires the foregrounding of theatre as an event, or process, articulating its separate role within the political culture (not its separation from it). If theatre is considered as a political activity in its own right, then it can no longer be considered as a commodity; it is a process with which the audience can engage, not a product which they consume. In this engagement, the audience will inevitably confront the ways in which the hegemonic ideology attempts to organise all their experiences. It is not then a question of how theatrically derived ideas and positions might be applied to everyday life, but rather of seeing theatrical activity as part of that life, contributing to and constituting political culture. How this might precisely happen requires future research: this thesis has only begun the exploration of the possible political functions for theatre.

### **Future Research**

The necessity to continue the exploration of how theatre might make a political intervention as theatre is only one of a number of areas on which additional research is required. In the introduction to this thesis (Chapter 1), I acknowledged the significant gap in it created by the omission of any account of the work of feminist and women producers. While there are a number of research projects already ongoing into such work, there is scope for much more attention to this area. Of particular relevance to such projects would be the predominance of women within audiences. Although there have been only a few audience surveys undertaken, those that have been carried out suggest that women constitute a larger than proportional part of the theatre audience. The assumption of homogeneity within audiences therefore poorly serves important gender

distinctions. The replication of this assumption within this thesis is unavoidable without further audience research.

To complete the picture of political theatre activity a second area for research would be into non-professional and community theatres. While Greg Gieseckam's work on Community Theatre in Strathclyde (1986) presented both a descriptive and analytical account, there remains much to be done on the political implications and possibilities for community theatres in Scotland. This is particularly important given that most political theatre producers have avoided participatory forms of activity. The political possibilities for such interventions might well overcome the restrictive practices governing product-centred work. An agenda for both theatre professionals and the bodies who fund them needs to be set in Scotland. Funding again is a key issue given that funding bodies have failed to encourage participatory projects for all but a few specific clients. Extending this investigation into non-professional activities would allow the exploration of non-professional work as a means of addressing the grant-addiction which conditions the work of professional companies: the impact of companies like the multi-cultural Alien Arts and the feminist Witch Theatre, as well as ad hoc student, youth, and other groups could then be assessed.

Finally, much work remains to be done in developing models for the proper practice of socio-criticism. Of necessity this would require ongoing research to develop models to match the growing sophistication of audiences, exposed to and competent in an increasingly technological society. The links between criticism in television, video, film and theatre also need to be increased to serve such models.

### **Conclusion**

This thesis has attempted to redress something of the imbalance in the critical treatment of Scottish theatre. It has done so, firstly, on the basis of descriptive accounts

of activities hitherto ignored in most accounts of British theatre, which tend to focus on England. Secondly, it has presented the argument that Scottish theatre needs to be addressed as distinctive from other aspects of British theatre, rather than as a subordinate element within it. While this is a firmly academic enterprise, it is hoped that the findings of this work might facilitate the re-evaluation of the practice of political theatre by producers and audiences as a starting point for an ongoing discussion.

# NOTES

## Chapter 1

1. Tom Nairn (1981) describes the way in which such disparity previously widened in the 1960s and 1970s, hastening the rise of what he calls 'neo-nationalism'. He writes that 'The historical 'barrier' to politicized nationalism began to be overcome when, for the first time, something like the classical 'development gap' was thrust upon Scotland' (1981: 175). A similar perceived unevenness in the development of Thatcherite capitalism within Britain hastened a second flowering of this 'neo-nationalism' after 1979.
2. While here 'text' is being used to refer to the written script, in the main body of the thesis it will be used to refer to the performance as a whole.
3. Few Scottish playwrights enjoy the same status as writers in England when it comes to publication. Some, such as Liz Lochhead and Ian Heggie, have had scripts published in their own right; others, such as John McGrath, have relied on their own companies to publish their work and that of others; certain other scripts, for example, The Sash and The Steamie, have been published on a one-off basis because of their popular success in production.
4. The emphasis on 'Scottish audiences' is based on the experience of theatres, such as those at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe, which although located geographically in Scotland, are located firmly within the British London-centred theatre network.
5. For the purposes of this chapter, I have elided any distinction between 'populist' and 'popular'. For example, S. L. Richards' use of 'populist' (1987) to describe theatre 'with a mass appeal which must necessarily build upon some of those aesthetic forms or structural patterns which a mass audience values' (1987: 280) largely coincides with the uses of 'popular' referred to here.
6. See W.K. Wimsatt and M.C. Beardsley (1954) 'The Intentional Fallacy' in W.k. Wimsatt's The Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry .
7. This is documented by Itzin (1980).
8. See for example David Edgar's 'Ten Years of Political Theory' Theatre Quarterly, viii, 32, 1979, and John McGrath's 'The Theory and Practice of Political Theatre' Theatre Quarterly, ix, 35, 1979.
9. The idea of 'alternate nationality' is raised by Paul Thompson in the context of Canada's relationship to both England and the United States. He says:  
I'm not sure we're not an alternate country right now. And if you are a theatre trying to reflect

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your country, then you have to be an alternate theatre in order to reflect the national psyche. Like there is no way that we're going to stop knowing what's happening in the United States. There is no way that we're going to stop being reminded that there's the Royal Shakespeare Company, that there's such a thing as the West End. It's permeated our consciousness to such a point that it's become part of our own definition. We know about the West End and that we are not it. We are something else.

(Wallace 1982: 56)

This concept of an 'alternate country', particularly in the way in which Thompson relates it to theatre, is equally applicable to Scotland's relationship to England. See also Nairn (1981) pp 171-180.

10. 'Strategic penetration' was the term given to the ways in which the post-1968 generation of English political theatre workers, particularly writers, entered into the institutions of the Establishment, both in theatre and television. There was much debate as to whether this represented penetration by them (and their ideas) or assimilation by the institutions. The debate did not accommodate the sporadic use of established theatre institutions by political theatre groups (such as 7:84 at the Citizens in Glasgow or Wildcat at Edinburgh's Royal Lyceum) through which popular working class audiences were drawn to these institutions temporarily. Nor did it acknowledge the relative homogeneity between the established theatres and political theatre groups in many parts of Britain, particularly Scotland.
11. See Fish, S., (1980) Is There A Text in This Class?, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press
12. This reflects a fixation with history within the culture generally, where the past has been used as a playground for the Romantic and the nostalgic; as a tool with which to illuminate the present; or, as a chart on which to trace the nation's aspirations for the future.

## Chapter 2

1. New Right economics are 'anti-rational' (see Barry 1987: 29) to the extent that they seek to replace any (centrally) planned and agreed economic strategy with a free market.
2. Quoted Whitehead 1985, 322.
3. The term 'utility-maximising' describes the way in which bureaucrats make themselves indispensable to the function they are carrying out, rather than promoting more efficient ways of undertaking it.
4. See James G. Kellas The Scottish Political System
5. While, for example, BBC Scotland is not adequately resourced to produce the range of programmes which are produced for the British network as a whole, as a 'national region' it receives substantially more support than an English region like BBC North-West.

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4. See James G. Kellas The Scottish Political System
5. While, for example, BBC Scotland is not adequately resourced to produce the range of programmes which are produced for the British network as a whole, as a 'national region' it receives substantially more support than an English region like BBC North-West. Moreover, its programmes and programming continually address Scottish issues in national terms, for example, reporting statistics on economics and elections for Scotland as a separate country.
6. Bob MacLean (1991) explores the history of this question, which revolves around the issue of the justice or otherwise of Scots MPs at Westminster being able to legislate on English matters, while Scottish affairs would be dealt with only by a Scots parliament, should there ever be any form of devolved government. The question is 'Now labelled "The West Lothian Question" (in deference to arch-unionist Tam Dalyell, then MP for West Lothian)' (MacLean 1991: 11).
7. From the preface to the 'Determinations' series of publications by Polygon.
8. There are certain reservations to be expressed about this 'confidence', particularly in the aftermath of the Glasgow 1990 Year of Culture. Playwright, Peter Arnott, in an interview with the author in 1991, describes this: 'Glasgow 1990 was obviously an example of many things, but one of the things that it was an example of ways of thinking of the arts, not as process but as a commodity...' He contrasts the situation in the mid-1980s with that in 1991:

It [the political culture] feels static...you never have a conversation with anyone any more that isn't about the limited possibilities: you rarely have a speculative conversation.

## Chapter 3

1. In 1977, the Labour Party issued a policy document for the arts, 'The Arts and the People', which supported significant changes in the way in which people would be appointed to the ACGB. It proposed a National Conference for the Arts and Entertainment, to be elected from local authorities, Regional Arts Authorities, trade unions for the arts and entertainments industries, subsidised managements, and other relevant bodies. This conference would elect two-thirds of the ACGB panels, and the remaining third would be appointed by the Minister for the Arts. These panels would in turn elect their own chairs and vice-chairs, the holders of which posts would then constitute the Council itself. This indicates the possibility of alternative ways of appointing

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- 'disinterested' members of the Council, or at least of achieving a balance between interests.
2. The ACGB has recently initiated changes devolving some of its responsibilities to Regional Arts Authorities (RAAs), in particular the funding of local or regional arts activities, while it retains responsibility for national companies. This largely administrative measure does not represent a devolution of power however, since RAAs are not able to exert influence the ways in which national arts policy is decided, but merely on how they marshal resources for their own areas. It does not guarantee wider or more balanced representation either, since the changes do not offer any reform of the ways in which members are appointed to either the RAAs or the ACGB.
  3. As with much Right-wing policy, the attempts to make sponsorship a greater factor in arts funding have not proved a widespread success. The SAC has had to accept that many companies are unable to attract the levels of sponsorship that would significantly match SAC funding.
  4. One recognises that there are certain indivisible high costs associated with these companies, such as the maintenance of complete orchestras, for example. This does not, however, justify the revenue funding of national Scottish companies for these forms - particularly when they spend so much time touring outwith Scotland with few works which might be described as Scottish - rather than the supporting of tours to Scotland from other companies as adequate provision.
  5. The SAC's emphasis on professional high art provision contrasts for example, with the policy of the Sports Council which encourages participation and excellence within amateur sport, and leaves the running of professional sports to individual governing bodies.
  6. Frank Coppieters argues convincingly that 'The traditional theatre is safely framed in a programmed life. It is a cultural and/or entertainment packet or commodity, the contours of which are relatively clear and predictable' (Coppieters 1981: 38). It is assumed here that this frame reduces the political potency of the theatrical event to just another entertainment commodity relatively interchangeable with any other such commodity.
  7. David Pattie comments that 'Mayfest is a curious child: it breeds parents. As it becomes larger, more and more people want to be responsible for it - to grab a piece of the glory' (Pattie 1990: 228).
  8. Central government's direct contribution was a mere £500,000 through the Office of Arts and Libraries. The SAC estimated that it already contributed around £8

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million to the arts in Glasgow through existing clients.

9. It remains to be seen whether this merely offers a point of entry for Glasgow into the circuit for staging interchangeable recognisable high art commodities characteristic of cosmopolitan culture; such that it now can host concerts for Pavarotti, performances by the Bolshoi companies; 'international' theatre and dance, for example. Christie Carson comments of Theatre Repere's Tectonic Plates which was specially commissioned by the Festivals Unit, that 'international celebrity by association can only be a demeaning and destructive process' (1992: 16).

## Chapter 4

1. The analysis here is based on my own experience of the 1990 revived production. Nonetheless, I have verified with both the writer and members of the original cast that there were sufficient similarities between the two productions to validate the arguments advanced here.
2. I use 'text-centred' rather than 'text-based' to emphasise the prominence of the written text over all other elements in the production. The rendition of the text as a *mise en scene* here comes as much from the very fact of live performance by physically present performers, as it does from using the text as a blueprint from which stage and scenic correlations can be drawn.
3. In conversation with the author.
4. The inferiorist complex (as discussed in Chapter 1) relies on the assumption that England has always had a prior and therefore higher civilisation from which Scotland has largely benefited.
5. Scotland provides a disproportionately high number of soldiers in comparison to the rest of the United Kingdom: for example, over a quarter of the soldiers that served in the Gulf campaign in 1991 were Scottish, while Scotland has only an eighth of the British population. Moreover, the recent campaign to save Scots regiments from Army cuts has been based on the premises that Scotland has a better recruiting record than any other part of the United Kingdom, that its people have a high regard for the Army, and that there is a proud tradition of military service in Scotland.
6. Keir Elam (1980) discusses and explains both conventions: metonymy is  
the substitution of cause for effect or of one item for something contiguous to it ... Jakobson argues that this distinction is useful in classifying various modes of artistic representation: 'realism', for instance, is largely metonymic in mode while symbolism is primarily

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metaphoric. The structuralists, including Jakobson, consider the kind of substitution at work here, i.e. of a part for the whole as a species of metonymy, whereas the classic rhetoricians termed it as synecdoche. It is worth insisting on the difference, since in practice synecochic replacement of part for whole is essential to every level of dramatic representation.

(Elam 1980: 28)

7. This anecdotal evidence is taken from the reactions of the audience members who stayed behind to take part in the post-performance discussion for the 1990 revival, and from a discussion between the writer and some of the performers and the Ordinary Theatre Studies Class at Glasgow University, during the 1990 production run.
8. For example, an NOP poll, reported in The Guardian 19/2/91, found that 54% of women, but only 36% of men were against the land war in the Gulf.
9. See Ed Tan (1982), 'Cognitive Processes in Reception' and Henry Schoenmakers (1982), 'The Tacit Majority in Theatre'.
10. It is assumed that audiences attempt to read the performance according to what they perceive to be the producers' intentions, thus, 'along the grain'. Those who read the performance 'across the grain', intentionally ignore the conventions set up or employed within the production, in order to impose their own predisposed reading on it, irrespective of any textual disruption of the possibility for such readings.

## Chapter 5

1. In 1992, the company's future was put under substantial and serious threat when its bank withdrew its overdraft facilities without warning. The bank seized £24,000 of the £36,000 paid by Strathclyde Region to Wildcat for a month's performances before 17,000 children. This action jeopardised the company's financial security both because of the withdrawal of funds and because of the effect on the company's relationship with Strathclyde.
2. In the production of 1982, this eyewitness role was assigned to the character of a policeman. As this analysis is based on an audio tape of Any Minute Now, I shall retain the dramatis personae of that production. this does not undermine the analysis of the argument structure presented here, since it is the same in both versions as I have verified by checking the taped version against the typescript of 1982 lodged in the Scottish Theatre Archive at Glasgow University.
3. Although I agree with Frith's argument that the combination of sounds that make up a piece of music does not of itself have meaning, it should be pointed

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out that such combinations may become endowed with meaning by association. Frith discusses the category of 'cock-rock':

In male music cock-rock performance means an explicit, crude, 'master-ful' expression of sexuality...Cock-rock performers are aggressive, boastful, constantly drawing audience attention to their prowess and control. Their bodies are on display...mikes and guitars are phallic symbols (or else caressed like female bodies) the music is loud, rhythmically insistent, built around techniques of arousal and release.

(p227)

In identifying this set of formal characteristics, Frith is in fact outlining how the music itself and not just the performance can become endowed with meaning by association with that kind of performance and image. Coincidentally, this is used in the show at one stage when there is a deliberate parody of a cock-rock number in 'Will On You'.

4. Mine Kaylan: 'Performance [Act]: The 'Presence' of the Actor or Performer', unpublished paper.

## Chapter 6

1. The source material for this study is slightly different from that used previously. Firstly, the availability of a video tape of a performance of the show at Rutherglen Unemployed Workers' Centre on May 15th 1987 has allowed for more attention to be paid to the specific conditions of that performance. Given that the material for the show was altered through the tour, and largely revised for the Fringe 1987 performances, this means that certain specific observations must be limited to this performance. Nonetheless, more widely applicable general points about the company's position within their constituency may be extrapolated from this performance. Secondly, one of the performers, Duncan McLean, made copious and detailed notes in response to earlier drafts of this chapter, which will be referenced (as 1989a & 1989b) in lieu of formal interview material.
2. Other such groups include Theatre PKF and United Artists, for example.
3. The ideological basis of this tolerance of mass unemployment is highlighted in the different distribution patterns of unemployment in comparable capitalist societies, where there were markedly lower levels of unemployment, and indeed in the response of John Major's government to mass unemployment in Britain in the 1990s.

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4. This itself was taken from Rossini's William Tell Overture.
5. Ironically, in the film the song is concerned with life in a Depression soup kitchen.
6. This is a play on the catchphrase of television comedian Russ Abbott's stereotyped Scotsman character.
7. What is emerging from all the analyses thus far is that it is not a question of performances being political and entertaining, but that often the political functions and effects of performances are inextricably linked with their qualities as entertainment. I shall return to this point in the conclusion.

## Chapter 7

1. Binnie has written 'To define a play as gay is ridiculous. What is one?...A play which sleeps with a play of its own sex?...I'm a gay writer - but that doesn't mean that my work can only be appreciated by a gay audience', (1988: 8)
2. 'I'm Sorry I called You a Poof', Gay Scotland December 1988, pp 8-9.
3. In conversation with the author, 29/1/90.
4. The discussions of the Scottish Constitutional Assembly over the best ways in which to guarantee that women make up a representative proportion of delegates to any assembly, together with the existence of women's committees within local government and at the S.T.U.C., in contrast to the actual status of the majority of women within Scottish society highlights the discrepancies between the politics of the public and the personal.
5. Much of the information and ideas of this section are derived from this article, which can be found in The Scottish Government Yearbook 1985, (ed) D. McCrone, pps 49-69.
6. The liberal bourgeois tradition, particularly within the arts, encompasses many public homosexuals. So, although there may be a privileging of homosexuality with regard to particular professions (that is, that its acceptable if you are an actor or an artist, but less so if you are engaged in other professions ) there is an extent to which the ability to construct one's identity as a homosexual is much easier outwith the working class. While Glasgow Unity did mount the first production of Lambs of God, the very fact that the cast felt the necessity to explain that the man playing the homosexual character was not in fact 'like that' shows that even the most progressive elements within the working class have had difficulty coming to terms with homosexuality. This will be dealt with further in

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regard to the discussion of the production of Killing Me Softly in Drumchapel. Equally the fact that Michael Wilcox's plays Accounts and Rents were produced at The Traverse in Edinburgh relevantly points up the class distinctions in terms of models available to homosexuals more recently.

7. This was to change at least in part due to the inclusion of both a gay man and his quandaries over the AIDS scare and a straight man who is HIV Positive in Eastenders (B.B.C.) in 1988 and 1992 respectively. The handling of the latter situation in particular emphasises the ways in which even British soaps focus their handling of difficult issues in terms of their effects on the family unit; in this instance, the Fowler family.
8. Although the soap opera is characteristically episodic with episodes linked through the continuity of a fairly rigid set of characters, many of its salient features are shared by these 'problem' films. Thus, while acknowledging the distinctions between these forms, I will draw on criticism of the former in particular to identify these features.
9. See the discussion of sociopetal space in the previous chapter regarding this.

## Chapter 8

1. The quotation which follows is taken from a transcript of an interview with Arnott by Greg Gieseckam. It is an edited version of this which appears as 'Connections with the Audience: Writing for a Scottish Theatre'.
2. See Gieseckam (1988) 'Calton to Caterpillar, Muskets to Multinationals', Red Letters, 22, pp9-13
3. Only 8% of the audience attended the theatre 4-6 times per year or less; 35% had been at the Tron once per year and 29% attended the Tron around 2-3 times per year. It should be noted that both works were new plays and neither of them was particularly well-received by the critics. Both were located in non-local settings and with largely unknown casts. These factors may have unduly influenced the audience figures.
4. As discussed in the chapter on Killing Me Softly, 'soap opera' is not being invoked here as a pejorative term to describe formal characteristics. However, as argued there, the reading of a theatre production in terms of television forms undermines the application of theatrically derived ideas, attitudes, and emotions to the wider social reality because it confirms them in a particular position within a closed entertainment frame.
5. Of course, this play as a one-off performance is significantly different from the continuous episodic

## Notes

nature of soap opera. This does not detract from the possibility that the strategies engaged by audiences in the reading of soap operas might be analogous or otherwise similar to those available to them in Losing Alec on the basis of formal similarities.

6. A major exception to this is the extent to which it might offer terms within which the audience member might reconstitute his/her own personal experience.
7. In soaps the multiplicity of perspectives is often achieved by the interweaving of different narrative threads, rather than through the development of a range of perspectives within the one narrative strand. Moreover, where they do, identification with the perspectives of the characters is achieved according to previous engagements with them in previous episodes and according to their generic roles, as, for example, 'the gossip', 'the Jack-the lad', 'the mother' and so on. Thus soaps rarely achieve the same depth or equality in the ways in which they marshal their multiple perspectives as this play does.

## Chapter 9

1. An edited version of this interview, omitting sections from David and Elizabeth MacLennan, appears as 'Better a Bad Night in Bootle', TQ, v, 19, pp39-54. Where the original transcript is referenced, it will be attributed as Barker 1975; where it is the TQ article, references will be to McGrath 1975.
2. Although subsequent publications have attributed the authorship of The Cheviot to John McGrath, the original script published by West Highland Free Press credits John McGrath and the company. This original acknowledges the collaborative way in which the company researched and contributed the material for the show. The latter editions mark the rise of McGrath as auteur and the synonymity between him and the company.
3. See Frank Coppieters, (1975), 'Arnold Wesker's Centre 42' TQ v, 18, pp37-54.
4. From a policy proposal submitted by John McGrath to the company's board in June 1985.
5. The successful revival of The Sash under the new management of Hayman, Kelly and Beddoe provides further evidence of this.
6. See Tom Maguire (1992), 'Under new management: the changing direction of 7:84', TRI, 17, 2, for a discussion of the company's development following McGrath's resignation. The key conclusions of that paper show that the SAC's threat of revenue-funding withdrawal was political in its effect, if not in intention. These conclusions are summarised thus: although the new management had answered the three

## Notes

criticisms levelled by SAC at 7:84 under McGrath, the changes made do not protect the company from the scrutiny of a harsher economic climate. The audience base has again shrunk, with the dual effect of diminishing its box-office income and, more importantly, its position within the cultural life of the working class for whom it makes theatre. Under Hayman, Kelly and Beddoe 7:84 became firmly located within a conventional theatre frame, indistinguishable from any number of other touring companies in its internal organisation and output. While the new management team accepted that they were 'only making theatre', such a frame marginalises the company from the role that it once played in bridging the gap between conventional theatre and politics.

7. An interview took place between the author and John McGrath. However, due to a technical error, no audio tape recording was made of it at the time. All unreferenced remarks attributed to McGrath are drawn from notes made at this interview.
8. Marco De Marinis' 1987 paper, 'Dramaturgy of the Spectator' notes, 'More than just a metaphorical coproducer of the performance, the spectator is a relatively autonomous "maker of meanings" for the performance; its cognitive and emotive effects can only be truly actualized by the audience. Of course, the spectator's "cooperation" does not refer to those rare cases which call for an effective, material contribution from the audience, but rather to the intrinsically active nature which makes up the spectator's reception of the performance'.
9. It is surely to underestimate any audience, and indeed the semiotic processes involved in theatre, to suppose that it will not construct the performance on its own terms in all cases, rather than only in the specialised instance of this kind of of spatial experimentation.
10. The nickname given to the erstwhile Scottish football fans who travelled to the World Cup competition in Argentina in the hope of seeing their team win it.
11. The history that is being presented here has been lost only to the dominant versions of official history in books, but has rarely been challenged within popular consciousness and oral culture, including the contribution made by McGrath in previous 7:84 shows and museums like The People's Palace. There have also been key changes within the use of history as part of the school curriculum, that explore this 'lost' history.

## Chapter 10

1. As the period progressed the possibility and attractiveness of continuing issue-based work seemed to diminish as an inevitable consequence of both a long

## Notes

period in continuous opposition and a the growth of a consensus within Scottish society supporting this opposition. Additionally, the success of the government in setting and implementing its own specific ideological agenda meant that there seemed little possibility of changing its position over any given issue. The victory of the government in many contested areas also contributed to this sense of resignation.

2. All evaluations are necessarily reductive, since only the work itself can express its own totality. Nonetheless, the categorisation of political theatre almost as a subset of the category of 'theatre of ideas' is felt to be too restrictive.
3. This is what George Szanto identifies as 'agitation propaganda'(p10); there are a range of other propaganda functions which he enumerates.

# APPENDIX I

## Chronology of Political Events Affecting Scotland, 1979-90.

### 1979

- MAR** Majority in referendum on Scottish Assembly vote 'yes', but defeated according to the 40% rule introduced by the Cunningham Amendment. In retaliation against Labour's ambivalence in the campaign SNP support a successful Tory motion of 'No Confidence' against the Labour government, which is forced to resign.
- MAY** Conservatives under Margaret Thatcher win the General Election with only 22 of the 71 Scottish seats. George Younger appointed as Secretary of State for Scotland. The Scotland Act repealed in June.

### 1980

- JAN** The Government's second piece of social security legislation of the year prevents the payment of supplementary benefit to people on strike and their families, among a number of other categories.

The right-to-buy with discounts is given to public sector tenants under the Tenants' Rights Etc (Scotland) Act.

The Scottish Joint Action Group is set up by the Scottish Convention of Women to enable them to plan events for the mid-year of the UN's decade for women.

- NOV** Michael Foot becomes leader of the Labour party, with Denis Healey as Deputy Leader.

### 1981

- FEB** Women workers begin successful occupation of Lee Jeans factory at Greenock.
- MAR** SDP launched by the 'Gang of Four'.
- MAY** The People's March for Jobs from Liverpool to London takes place.

## APPENDIX I

**JUN** The Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act. The Secretary of State can now control local authority spending, particularly through use of the Rate Support Grant.

**OCT** British Nationality Act redefines the categories of people entitled to British citizenship. Opponents of the act regard it as inherently biased.

**DEC** Arthur Scargill elected president of NUM.

### 1982

**JAN** Britain's unemployment figures reach 3 million.

**FEB** Local Government & Planning (Scotland) Act. The Secretary of State can reduce the rates set by Local Authorities if he considers them too high. Local Authorities prevented from borrowing to make up the difference without permission from Secretary of State.

Employment Act makes unions liable for civil damages of 'unlawful industrial action'; offers compensation to those who lose their jobs because of closed shop practices.

Law in Scotland on homosexuality brought into line with that in England and Wales thanks to a reform clause in the Government's Criminal Justice (Scotland) Bill inserted as an amendment by Labour MP Robin Cook. This was 13 years after the law was reformed in England and Wales. Homosexual acts between consenting adults over the age of 21 are decriminalised.

SNP expels leaders of left-wing 79 Group interim committee; expulsion overturned on appeal.

**MAR** Roy Jenkins wins Hillhead by-election from Conservatives for Alliance.

Sir William Rees-Mogg appointed as chairman of ACGB.

**APR-JUN** Falklands War.

**AUG** British Steel's smelter at Invergordon closes.

## APPENDIX I

**DEC** First Unemployed Workers Centre set up in Scotland.

### 1983

**MAY** General Election. Conservatives re-elected with a parliamentary majority of 143, but only 28% of the Scottish vote.

**OCT** Neil Kinnock elected as leader of Labour Party, with Roy Hattersley as his deputy.

Youth Opportunities Programme replaced by the Youth Training Scheme.

### 1984

**MAR** Start of Miners' Strike.

In the wake of the Miners' Strike, The Trade Union Act makes compulsory secret ballots for trade union elections. While not making ballots compulsory before official industrial action, the Act removes guarantees for legal immunity in their absence.

### 1985

**JAN** EIS leads teachers in campaign for better pay and conditions.

Marie Kane becomes the first Scottish local government Women's Officer, with her appointment to Stirling District Council.

**MAR** Miner's Strike eventually peters out.

**APR** TSB Scotland floated as a public limited company.

**JUN** Bob Geldoff leads the organisation of Live Aid, a globally televised pop-concert to raise money for the famine victims of Ethiopia and the Sudan.

**DEC** Westland Crisis begins.

### 1986

**JAN** Malcom Rifkind replaces George Younger as Secretary of State, following the Cabinet reshuffle in the wake of

## APPENDIX I

Michael Heseltine's resignation over the Westland affair.

Wapping dispute at News International begins.

**MAR** British Steel closes Gartcosh Steel Mill.

American planes using U.S. bases in Britain bomb Libya.

**JUL** Wages Act limits powers of Wages Councils and withdraws minimum wage protection for workers under 21.

Social Security Act. Supplementary Benefit replaced by Income Support; Family Income support replaced by Family Credit; conditions for eligibility to claim both changed. Single people under 25 suffer a major cut in benefit entitlement. Housing benefit regulations changed so that everyone now has to pay at least 20% of rates. One-off emergency payments are now to be made from the Social Fund, on which prior cash limits are to be set.

### 1987

**MAR** The Local Government Finance Act allows the Secretary of State to 'rate-cap' local authorities.

**JUN** Third Thatcher victory in General Election, Tories reduced to only 10 seats in Scotland; Labour wins 50.

Government abolishes domestic rates in Scotland, to take effect in stages from September 1987.

In the face of mounting public concern about the 'AIDS Crisis' the AIDS (Control) Act requires the submission to the government of regular and consistent reports on matters relating to AIDS and HIV.

**OCT** Lord Mackay is the first member of the Scottish bar to become Lord Chancellor.

On 'Black Friday' The London Stock Market suffers a major collapse.

### 1988

**JAN** Liberal Party and SDP merge.

## APPENDIX I

David Alton's Bill to reduce the legal limit for abortion from 28 to 18 weeks passed.

**FEB** National Union of Seamen launch a national dock strike.

Government uses its 'golden share' to allow the takeover of Britoil by BP.

**MAR** Cecil Parkinson announces plans for the privatisation of electricity.

The latest Social Security Act removes income support for those 16 and 17 year olds not on a government training scheme.

The Local Government Act issues in 'competitive tendering'. Local Authorities now required to undertake certain activities only if they cannot have the activity carried out more cheaply by the private sector.

The Social and Liberal Democratic Party (SLD) is officially launched.

Tony Benn and Eric Heffer challenge for the Labour leadership, but are defeated by Neil Kinnock and Roy Hattersley.

**APR** Poll Tax introduced in Scotland. Its implementation is in the face of a campaign of mass non-payment, and organised resistance by the Anti-Poll Tax Federation.

Mrs Thatcher visits Scotland. She is booed at the Scottish Cup Final and causes controversy with her address to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland: 'The Sermon on The Mound'.

**MAY** Employment Training introduced; by September the unions have withdrawn from the scheme, expressing concerns about the quality of training and rates of pay.

Provision is made for the privatisation of British Steel.

Employment Act puts an end to closed-shop practices by trade unions.

## APPENDIX I

David Steel resigns as leader of SLD, to be replaced by Paddy Ashdown after the subsequent election contest.

**JUL** The Education Reform Bill receives Royal Assent. Its terms include the replacement of the Universities Grants Committee with the Universities Funding Council, and the abolition of academic tenure for new academic staff.

**OCT** Labour launches a purge of Militant in Scotland.

**NOV** Charges for NHS dental check-ups and eye-tests are introduced.

The Housing Corporation and Scottish Special Housing are replaced by Scottish Homes. A new class of tenancy, 'assured tenants' also introduced.

Jim Sillars wins Govan by-election for SNP in landside victory over Labour.

**DEC** Government plan to introduce a top-up loan scheme for students is announced.

Junior Health Minister Edwina Currie resigns after claiming that most British egg production is infected with salmonella.

Government announces further plans to crack down on the 'work-shy' under the Social Security Bill.

### 1989

**JAN** The government publishes its White Paper on a review of the National Health Service. Its proposals include the introduction of budgets for GPs, self-governing hospitals and tax relief for the over 60s taking out private health insurance.

**MAR** Scottish Constitutional Convention meets for the first time in Edinburgh. It is boycotted by the CBI, the Conservatives and the SNP

The first case of a wife accusing her co-habiting husband of rape is successfully brought.

## APPENDIX I

**APR** The abolition of the National Dock Labour Scheme is announced.

Self-Governing Schools (Scotland) Act allows schools to opt out from Regional Authority control.

**JUN** Labour wins the Glasgow Central by-election.

**JUL** The Scottish Transport Group (with the exception of its shipping operations) is privatised.

**SEP** TUC drops commitment to unilateral nuclear disarmament at its annual conference.

**OCT** Labour drops its policy of unilateral nuclear disarmament.

The Guilford Four are released.

**NOV** Nigel Lawson resigns as Chancellor of The Exchequer.

### 1990

**JAN** Glasgow becomes European City of Culture.

**MAY** The closure of Ravenscraig strip mill is announced by British Steel.

**NOV** When Sir Geoffrey Howe resigns over Mrs Thatcher's position on Europe and her style of leadership, the way is opened for a leadership contest within the Conservative Party. Mrs Thatcher beats off the first challenge from Michael Heseltine but is pressurised to withdraw from a second ballot, allowing John Major to succeed her.

**DEC** Britain gets its first new prime minister in 11½ years. John Major announces an immediate review of the Poll Tax, and gives a commitment to European unity. His first cabinet does not contain any women. The Thatcher era comes to an end.

## APPENDIX II

### CHRONOLOGICAL INDEX OF SCOTTISH POLITICAL THEATRE

#### PRODUCTIONS 1979-90

The basic model for this index is the one contained in Catherine Itzin's Stages in the Revolution (1980). However it differs from that in a number of ways. Firstly, it should be noted that this index is intended to be indicative rather than comprehensive: it is a measure of the developing range of Scottish political theatre during this period. While Itzin includes Margaretta D'Arcy in what is a consideration of British theatre (despite D'Arcy's insistence on being treated as Irish and therefore separate) and certain productions at the Edinburgh Fringe and Traverse Theatre, ignoring other Scottish work, the works included here will all have been produced in Scotland. The definition of what constitutes 'political' has been interpreted according to the criteria outlined in the introduction.

#### KEY

The following abbreviations & conventions have been used:

Assmby Rms - Assembly Rooms, Edinburgh

C/nld - Cumbernauld Theatre (& Company).

Dir. - Director

Fringe - Edinburgh Festival Fringe

G.A.C.- Glasgow Arts Centre

M/fest - Mayfest

N/bow - Netherbow Theatre, Edinburgh

Th. Co. - Theatre Company

Trav. - Traverse Theatre, Edinburgh

## APPENDIX II

### 1979

Krassiv Freddy Anderson Easterhouse Festival Society.

Over The Top Tom Buchan Trav.

Joe's Drum John McGrath 7:84 Tour

The Game Paul Pender Cordoba Players Fringe

The Clyde Is Red George Byatt Theatre PKF Fringe, followed by various performances at Glasgow and Edinburgh. Play revived for Fringe 1981 and Mayfest 1988 by the company. It won a Prix Italia for Clyde Radio when broadcast as a radio play in 1987.

Dummies David MacLennan. Music: Dave Anderson. Wildcat Tour

### 1980

Swings & Roundabouts John McGrath 7:84 Tour

The Barmecide Feast David McNiven Wildcat Tour

Hard To Get Marcella Evaristi Trav.

Tea Tent Talk Kate Collingwood Trav.

Blood Red Roses John McGrath 7:84 Tour & Revived production at Citizens for two weeks in Feb. 1981.

Blooter David MacLennan. Music: Dave Anderson. Wildcat Tour

Self Service Irene Coates Ariel Th. Co. Trav.

### 1981

Confessin' The Blues The company Wildcat Tour

Frae Battles Mair Than Ballads Theatre PKF Assembly Rms

Accounts Michael Wilcox Trav.

The Ascent of Wilberforce III Chris Judge-Smith & J. Maxwell-Hutchinson Trav.

The Catch (or, Red Herrings in the Minch) John McGrath  
7:84 Tour.

Hot Burlesque David McNiven Wildcat Fringe Wildcat Theatre & Tour

Major Road Ahead (Dramatisation of the poems of Hugh McDiarmid) George Byatt Theatre PKF Fringe Wildcat Theatre.

Wedding Belles & Green Glasses Marcella Evaristi Trav.

### 1982

Rents Michael Wilcox Trav.

Ulrike Eddie Boyd C/nld. Revived by Clyde Unity 1982.

## APPENDIX II

True Confessions (a revue) Liz Lochhead. Music by Esther Allan Trav. Bar

### 7:84's Clydebuilt Season

Gold in His Boots George Munro

In Time of Strife Joe Corrie

Johny Noble Ewan MacColl & U.A.B. Scotland Harry Trott.

Men Should Weep Ena Lamont Stewart (a rewritten version of her original play for Glasgow Unity, Poor Men's Riches). Revived for Fringe at Church Hill Theatre & Moray House & Tour in Scotland, followed by Theatre Royal, Stratford in 1983.

1982 Dave MacLennan & Dave Anderson Wildcat Tour & Fringe Aug. Continues to tour in 1983 as Any Minute Now.

Blood and Ice Liz Lochhead Trav. Fringe Aug.

Screw The Bobbin Chris Hannan and the Company. 7:84 Tour

His Master's Voice Dave Anderson; revival for 'The Brand New Wildcats' Autumn Tour.

Brus George Byatt Theatre PKF Fringe & Scottish Tour Sept/Oct. Revived by company in 1990.

The Bang and The Whimper

The Salesman Rona Munro . Jointly produced N/bow

### 1983

A Bunch of Fives Dave Anderson, Sean Hardie, Tom Leonard, Liz Lochhead, David MacLennan Wildcat Tour Spring.

On the Pig's Back John McGrath & David MacLennan 7:84 & Wildcat Street Theatre Tour with NALGO campaign bus as part of NALGO campaign against cuts in the health service.

Fugue Rona Munro Trav.

Women in Power (Adapted from Aristophanes' Thesmophoriazousae & Ippes) John McGrath Music: Thanos Mikroutsikos 7:84 / General Gathering Assembly Rms Fringe Aug.

Roughneck George Gunn Theatre PKF N/bow

Maggie's Man Colin Mortimer 7:84 Tour.

### 1984

Going Home Betty Stone Theatre PKF Trav. Feb

Citizen Singh Gurmeet Mattu & Ian Hopkins G.A.C. Mar.

Bed-Pan Alley David MacLennan & Dave Anderson Wildcat Tour Spring 1984

Barry: Personal Statements Frederick Mohr (a.k.a. Donald McKail) Trav. May

Purity Chris Hannan Trav. Apr. Part of '1984: Points of

## APPENDIX II

Departure' triple bill.

The Ragged Trouser'd Philanthropists (from the novel by Robert Tressall) Archie Hind 7:84 Tour

The Baby and The Bathwater John McGrath 7:84 tour; revived for Fringe 1985.

Same Difference Liz Lochhead Wildcat Summer Tour.

Klimkov: The Life of a Tsarist Agent Chris Hannan  
(based on Gorky's 'The Life Of a Useless Man')

The Works Marcella Evaristi Trav. Aug.

Commedia Marcella Evaristi Scottish Th. Co. Tour Oct/Nov.

Dead Liberty David MacLennan & David Anderson Wildcat Tour  
Autumn.

### 1985

The Albannach John McGrath's adaptation of the novel by Fionn McColla. 7:84 Tour.

The Crack Dave Anderson & David MacLennan Wildcat Tour  
Feb/Apr.

White Rose Peter Arnott Trav. Apr. Toured in 1987 by  
United Artists.

In Time Of Strife Joe Corrie Revived by 7:84 for Tour in  
support of Miner's Strike.

Elizabeth Gordon Quinn Chris Hannan Trav. Apr/May.  
Revived by Winged Horse for a tour  
in 1990.

The Boxer Benny Lynch Peter Arnott United Artists G.A.C.  
M/fest

Business in The Backyard David MacLennan & David Anderson  
Wildcat Tour Summer.

Terrestrial Extras Marcella Evaristi Tron Aug.

Losing Venice John Clifford Trav. Aug.

The Randan Duncan Mclean Merry Mac Fun Co. Fringe Aug.

A Short History of The Death of Elias Sawney Peter Arnott  
Trav. Oct/Nov. (1st professional production.)

High Places Ena Lamont Stewart 7:84 Tour

The Nutcracker Suite Andy Arnold & Jimmy Boyle Royal Lyceum  
Oct

The Cry Of Spain Robin Munro Winged Horse Tour Oct.

Tom Paine Live! Vince Foxall Modern Times Theatre Co. Tour  
Oct.

It's A Free Country Dave Anderson, Peter Arnott, Gordon  
Dougall, Marcella Evaristi, Rab  
Handleigh, Tom Leonard, Terry Neason &  
David MacLennan. Wildcat Tour Oct/Nov.

APPENDIX II

- Points of Convergence Ena Lamont Stewart triple bill Prime Productions Tour Oct/Nov.
- The Wummin Disappears G.A.C. Women's Group G.A.C. Nov. Revived by Soor Plums (& cabaret) Feb 1986
- Strikers Donald Campbell Netherbow Nov.
- Losing Venice John Clifford Trav. Nov.
- Every Bloody Sunday Gurmeet Mattu Glasgow Theatre of Fun C/nauld Nov.
- Wildnights At The Tron Dave Anderson, Peter Arnott, Tom Leonard, David MacLennan. Wildcat Tron Dec/Jan.

1986

- Beneath One Banner Sean McCarthy 7:84 Tour Feb/Apr.
- Vita Sigrid Nielsen Focus Theatre Co. Tour Feb/Mar
- Women And Theatre Festival Drama Centre Glasgow Mar.
- If It Had Pleased God Patrick Evans Trav. 19 Mar.
- Victorian Values Donald Campbell 7:84 Community project with Springwell House, Edin. Mar.
- McGrotty and Ludmilla Alasdair Gray Tron Mar/Apr.
- Aida of Leningrad Jenny Robertson Wholemeal Th. Co. N/bow Apr.
- And The Lady Shall Say Her Mind Freely Sue Triesman Drama Centre Apr.
- The Beggars' Opera, or, Peachum's Poorhouse David MacLennan. Music: David Anderson Wildcat/Lyceum Apr/May.
- Emma, Emma, Red and Black George Gunn United Artists, G.A.C. M/fest & Assembly Rms Spring Fling
- Some Way To Go Peter Mullen The Redheads Community Tour M/fest.
- Kicking Against The Pricks The Nippy Sweeties Cabaret at Third Eye & other venues M/fest. Revived as The Complete Alternative History of The World Part One for Spring Fling.
- The Broch The Msfits Cabaret Tron M/fest. Revived sporadically by the company.
- The Life and Adventures of Thomas Muir Peter Arnott Part 1 Tron M/fest. Part 2 Pageant Show Around Glasgow East End Tron Youth Project M/fest.
- To Fetch Her Hame Again Janet Fenton & the company Witch Theatre & Women Live at Spring Fling. May

## APPENDIX II

- Heather Up Your Kilt Dave Anderson & David MacLennan  
Wildcat Tour Summer.
- The Orphans' Comedy Chris Hannan Trav. Jun.
- Kora Tom McGrath Trav. May.
- Lucy's Play John Clifford Trav. Jul. & Edin. Fringe
- Hocus Pocus Anne-Marie Di Mambro
- In Nomine Patris Paula McGee Double bill Annexe Theatre  
Drama Centre Jul/Aug. In Nomine Patris  
wins a Fringe First in Aug.
- Sharny Dubs Duncan Mclean Merry Mac Fun Co. Fringe Aug.
- Psychoshanter Merry Mac Fun Co. Edin. Fringe Aug. & Tour.
- A Syndicalist Song Cycle George Gunn Mandela Theatre
- Lambs Of God Benedict Scott (1st produced by Glasgow Unity  
in 1948.) Clyde Unity Third Eye & other venues  
Sept. The play was revived again for a tour in  
May/Jun. and as part of the Strathclyde Summer  
Season at the Citizens 1990.
- A Big Red One Peter Arnott & Peter Mullen The Redheads  
Cabaret Third Eye Sept.
- Celestial Blue Christopher Haydon Focus Theatre Co. Tour  
Sept.
- Burke and Hare Patrick Evans Theatre Co-op Trav Oct
- There Is A Happy Land John McGrath 7:84 Tour. Later filmed  
by Freeway Fims for Channel 4.
- One Chapati, Two Chapati Howard Purdie Alien Arts Drama  
Centre & N/bow Oct.
- The Crofting Act George Gunn Eden Court Highland Tour  
Oct/Nov.
- The Incredible Brechin Beetle Bug Matt McGinn 7:84 Tour
- A Wildcat Christmas Carol Peter Arnott Wildcat
- Alien Punks Versus Santa Duncan Mclean Merry Mac Fun Co.  
Tour.

### 1987

- The Busker James Kelman Roughcast Th.Co. Jan
- Mum, Dad, I've Got Something To Tell You John Binnie  
Clyde Unity Garret Theatre Feb. & various venues.  
Revived Trav. Oct. 1987 and at various venues since.
- It's Not The End of The World (from George Delf's book  
Humanizing Hell) Jack Klaff & Bob  
Sinfield Theatre Workshop Company  
Theatre Workshop & Scottish Tour  
Mar/May.

APPENDIX II

Wallace, Guardian Of Scotland Patrick Evans Theatre Co-Op  
Tour Apr

Jotters David MacLennan & David Anderson Wildcat Tour  
Spring.

Roadworks David MacLennan & David Anderson Wildcat Tour  
Spring.

The Steamie Tony Roper Songs by Dave Anderson. Wildcat Tour  
M/fest (tour extended & revived in Sept.).  
Revived by the company at the Clyde Theatre  
1990. Also filmed for Channel 4.

Getting Past It Lynn Bains Third Eye M/fest

The Calton Weavers Community Pageant 3rd May Street Theatre  
& procession by 18 community groups,  
coordinated by United Artists.

Able Barebone and The Humble Company Against The Great  
Morality Peter Jukes Trav. May.

The Gorbals Story Robert McLeish 7:84 Tour May-Jun

The Province of the Cat George Gunn United Artists Spring  
Fling Assembly Rms. Revived for M/fest and  
Highland Tour 1988

Out Of Boundaries Janet Fenton & the company Witch Theatre  
N/bow Women Live at Spring Fling.

Playing With Fire John Clifford Trav. Jun/Jul. & Fringe

Noah's Wife Amy Hardie Trav. Jun/Jul. & Fringe.

Killing Me Softly John Binnie Clyde Unity Drama Studio  
Glasgow University Jul. & Fringe Crown  
Theatre Aug. Later tours to community  
venues. Revived for Fringe 1988 & 1989  
and community tours.

I Love You Baby, But I Gotta Run John Mckay Merry Mac Fun  
Co. Fringe Crown Theatre Aug.

A Ghost Story For The Ladies Janet Fenton Witch Theatre  
Finge Aug.

Mary Queen Of Scots Liz Lochhead Communicado Fringe Lyceum  
Studio & Tour Aug.

Mairi Mhor - The Woman From Skye John McGrath 7:84 tour  
Sept/Oct.

The Calton Weavers Freddy Anderson Alien Arts

The Country Doctor Duncan McLean Merry Mac Fun Co. tour  
Sept/Oct.

Joe Ann-Marie Di Mambro. Annexe Oct

Jelly Babies Anne Downie Theatre Co-Op Wilkie House Oct.

In The Night James Kelman Roughcast Th. Co. Oct

Cowboys and Indians Gurmeet Mattu TAG Tour Nov.

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The Magic Snowball David MacLennan. Music by Dave Anderson  
Wildcat Christmas Show Jordanhill Nov/Jan  
1988. Revived Christmas 1988.

How Like An Angel John Clifford Theatre Co-Op Wilkie House  
Dec.

Ms Siah Gurmeet Mattu Drama Centre Dec.

### 1988

The Importance of Being Honest David McNiven Wildcat Tour  
Feb.

Cloth Caps and Petticoats Bessoms Th. Co. Trav. Mar.

The Straw Chair Sue Glover Trav. Mar & Tour by Focus Th. Co.

State Of Confusion David Kane Theatre Workshop Company  
Theatre Workshop & Tour Mar/Apr.

Checking Out Marcella Evaristi C/nld & Tour Mar/Apr.

The Celtic Story David MacLennan & David Anderson Wildcat  
Pavillion May/Jun..

Visiting Company Marcella Evaristi Tron May

No Mean City (adaptation of the McArthur & Kingsley Long  
book) Alex Norton 7:84 Kings for M/fest & Tour  
June. Also at Citizens.

Both Hands Together Paula McGee Trav. May

Sealed With A Loving Kiss The company & Mary McCann Witch  
Theatre Spring Fling Tour Jun.

Can Ye Sew Cushions Aileen Ritchie Clyde Unity Fringe Crown  
Theatre Aug.

Waiting on One Anne Downie. Songs: David MacLennan & Dave  
Anderson. Wildcat Jordanhill Jul. & Tour  
Aug.

Shadowing The Conqueror Peter Jukes Trav.

Fancy Rappin' David MacLennan. Music by Dave Anderson  
Wildcat Tour Sept-Nov.

The Funeral Hector MacMillan Tron Oct & Pavillion.

Losing Alec Peter Arnott Tron Nov.

The Way To Go Home Rona Munro New Breed Productions Tron  
Nov/Dec.

### 1989

Long Story Short Anne-Marie Di Mambro, James Graham, Tom  
Leonard, Gurmeet Mattu, Aonghas McNeacail,  
Rona Munro, Ricky Ross. 7:84 tour Feb-Mar

Border Warfare John McGrath Wildcat/Freeway Tramway Feb-  
Mar. Filmed by Freeway and broadcast on  
Channel 4.

APPENDIX II

Harmony Row Peter Arnott Wildcat Mayfest tour & Citizens  
Strathclyde Summer Season.

Road Jim Cartwright adapted to Glasgow setting 7:84 Kings  
and tour M/fest.

When The World Was Young John Binnie Clyde Unity Tour  
M/fest and May/Jun. tour.

Shang-A-Lang Aileen Ritchie Clyde Unity Tour M/fest;  
May/Jun. tour & Fringe Crown Theatre.

Beyond The Rainbow John Binnie Fringe Clyde Unity Crown  
Theatre Aug. Wins Fringe First

The Appointment Dave Anderson & David MacLennan Wildcat  
Citizens Jul/Aug. & Tour Aug/Oct.

Gold of Kildonan George Gunn Eden Court Tour.

1990

John Brown's Body John McGrath Wildcat/Freeway Tramway Feb-  
Mar

Will Ye Dance At My Wedding Aileen Ritchie Clyde Unity Tour  
Mar/Apr.

Nae Problem Lynn Bains 7:84 tour Mar/Apr.

The Offski Variations Marcella Evaristi Tron M/fest.

Govan Stories 7:84 Arches & Pearce Institute M/fest.

Straight Women Read Alistair McLean Brigid Daniel Witch  
Theatre Spring Fling Tour

Bold Girls Rona Munro 7:84 Tour Sept-Nov.

Cleaning Up Andy Mackie & Lynn Bains Wildcat Clyde Theatre  
Sept/Oct.

The Baby Chris Hannan Tron Sept/Oct

Salvation Peter Arnott Tron Oct.

## APPENDIX III

The following are edited excerpts from a series of interviews conducted as part of the research for this thesis.

### 1. David MacLennan, Artistic Director, Wildcat Stage

Productions 23/8/89

TM: What were the reasons for the split from 7:84?

DM: At the time we divided up there were a number of people working with myself and David [Anderson] who were from a more urban popular music rather than folk background....That was one part of it. But what I think is forgotten now is that at that time there was a tremendous explosion in the touring circuit. There was room. And also that was in '78. Thatcher hadn't been elected and the funding of the Arts Council was going ahead of inflation, which seems incredible nowadays, but was true at the time. It was possible to do more work. And in a way it was as much audience-driven as anything else. There was this great appetite growing for touring theatre and it was this appetite that we wanted to serve, and in different ways. I think also that our kind of political theatre was perhaps - although we're broadly sympathetic with the way they worked in 7:84 and indeed to what they've subsequently done - our approach was different. I think we were more entertainment driven. Certainly I think it was apparent in the work.

TM: When you were setting up Wildcat were there particular lessons from the 7:84 experience as to how the company was organised?

DM: Yes. 7:84 had started in the early '70s when the whole political climate was entirely different. There was a very definite attempt to work in what was a collective way - not always successfully one might add. And very often not successful when the difficult decisions had to be made. And for a number of reasons I think that the climate changed through the '70s, almost anticipating the major political

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changes that were going to happen in the late '70s and through the '80s.

TM: Did it change because you realised it didn't work?

DM: To say it didn't work flatly is not the case. It did work for a number of years and in a number of ways. There was a problem of regenerating it. We were quite pragmatic when we started Wildcat. We realised that there was a smallish number of people who were really quite experienced and that the nature of the business had changed and that there would be a big turnover of actors, technicians and office staff. So, we instituted a more conventional management structure, although we retained aspects of the previous system - equal pay, for example.

TM: Has the subsequent growth in the company's audiences been a problem, forcing you to change the venues that you play?

DM: No, because the basic philosophy has never changed. We would play anywhere which would have us. There was an argument when we first started with 7:84 in the '70s that we should be taking theatre to non-conventional theatre spaces. There was a resistance to the conventional theatre space by working class audiences; they didn't go to the theatre, therefore, we took our shows to them, to working men's clubs, village halls and so forth. I think that there is a major change in the last 20 years in that the theatre now in Scotland is not perceived in the way it was. It is possible now to get a large popular audience in The Pavillion, The Kings, The Citizens', in any theatre.

TM: How does your work fit into the politics of Scotland?

DM: We've always regarded ourselves as part of the labour movement, as part of the struggle, trying to use the area in which we work to extend the struggle, to extend the debate, to float ideas, and to reflect the voice - I think that one

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of the most important things is that it's becoming increasingly difficult to express views publicly which are not Establishment views.

TM: Do you accept John McGrath's aim of unifying the working class to keep a working class identity?

DM: Yes. I think there's a tremendous fashion nowadays to look on the whole concept of class as something that is almost antiquated. Fortunately if you're involved in touring theatre you know that's nonsense, because you are confronted by it every day in life. The working class they still exist. Also, culturally, I think that it's important to reassert the positive cultural values of that class.

TM: How do you distinguish the positive values from the regressive or reactionary?

DM: I suppose in the end of the day, it springs from your own personal convictions, and from your observations of society. We try not to reflect racist or sexist humour, for example.

TM: You don't feel that you've fallen into the trap of merely glorifying working class culture?

DM: It depends what you're celebrating and what you're attacking. It is obvious that from time to time you fall down on side or the other: I'm happier to fall down on the side of celebrating working class culture.

TM: Do you feel that it's been necessary in Scotland to push forward a working class theatre within the institutions of theatre, or has that been easy?

DM: I don't think it's been a problem because the theatre that grew out of the '70s in Scotland was vigorous and exciting and it appealed across the board. We have not met, on the whole, with resistance from the established theatre, because it's been a regenerative process. And indeed a hell of a lot of people who worked with us have 'cross-fertilised'. It's not as if there exists a strict division between the political theatre of Wildcat, 7:84 and other

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groups and A.N. Other kind of theatre that exists in a separate world.

TM: You don't feel that you should open a forum for people to allow them to discuss the show afterwards?

DM: We've done that from time to time. I personally don't like it...Part of the success of theatre, part of the fabric of it, is that it is different; there's something partly magical about it. And I find that the form of a meeting after a show is intensely prosaic. And, on the whole, when it's happened, it seems to me that people who are articulate speak; and people who perhaps not used to speaking in public don't; and people who are still absorbing the show, or are having a more delayed reaction to it, don't. And you tend to get a lot of flashy talk, a lot of glib talk - not always. I'm simplifying. I think it's anti-theatrical, and our principal object in going to a community is to present a theatrical experience. I find that that militates against it. So we seek that correspondance and exchange of views in different ways.

Also there's another thing: we don't audition people for their politics. You employ someone to act and sing and to play a musical instrument because they're damn good at it - that doesn't necessarily make them good public speakers. It doesn't mean that they are necessarily analytical about the subject, or informed, even. I think that would be setting up a false expectation, because if you say to an audience, 'Right, there's the show. That's what a Wildcat show says' and then you bring a group of people onto the stage for a discussion, there's almost an assumption that everybody up there on that stage contributed to that view. And they don't necessarily. There'll be shades of agreement and disagreement. They may have coloured it by their performance, but when it comes down to the view that's being expressed, that is something that springs from the writer.

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TM: Do you feel that it's Wildcat's policy to extend what happens in the theatre to the world outside?

DM: Yes, it's a small part of it. Some shows lend themselves more readily to it than others. When we did the show about the Poll Tax, there was a lot of information in the programme about how to get in touch with anti-Poll Tax groups, the [anti-Poll Tax] Federation, the STUC and so on. We often carry literature, or material of one kind or another, that are connected to the work we are doing.

TM: What kind of results do you hope for as a writer?

DM: I don't know how to answer that. I hope - something we talked about earlier is the disappearing platform for non-establishment views of society and I hope we provide a platform from which people hear views that they want to hear expressed, which I feel are not getting a fair hearing. Sometimes when people subsequently receive information on an issue, it will lead them to question it. [We present] an alternative view and an alternative analysis of information.

TM: While Wildcat tour community venues, they have not been conspicuously involved in community theatre.

DM: I think that it requires different skills from the ones that we have. Whether we're good or bad at it, our skills lie in putting on shows, in writing, directing, acting, playing and so on, I think some of those skills are useful in community theatre, but I don't think they're the principal ones.

### **2. Peter Arnott, Writer 19/8/91**

TM: You seem to be much happier working in The Tron [than the Traverse]?

PA: Yes. Partly because I think that Michael Boyd is the best director for working with me...and also because he

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commissioned the Muir play and I wanted to work in Glasgow. The Traverse was fine but it's such an odd place, Edinburgh's such an odd place too, because it was Oxbridge dominated at the time that I'm talking about. There was a kind of triple schizophrenia: there was the Traverse that was like Cambridge; there was the work that I was doing outside, as well as at the Tron, that started off being terrible and ended up being quite good - the more community aspect, the directly political work; and the Tron itself. And the Tron was the place where the demands that were being made on me weren't threatening to who I thought that I might be.

At the Traverse there was an implicit involvement in a very strong set of cultural values which I didn't feel completely comfortable with but which I didn't have any defined opposition to. I didn't have a defined position which I was secure in...Those first few years were very scary and confusing, dislocating. It's only over the last three or four years - Losing Alec is the first play of mine that I felt was wholly mine, that I was happy with.

TM: In a sense you are the archetypal Scottish writer in having to negotiate these various sets of cultural values. What is life like for you as a theatre writer living and working in Scotland?

PA: There's good sides and bad sides. The good side is that it's is a very strong context in which to base your work. Glasgow's a city which if you live in it you can't avoid it, which I think is slightly different from other places. You can't feel hermetically sealed away from it, so you have to negotiate with it all the time. Even as a middle class Glaswegian you have to negotiate with a city that you are somewhat alien to anyway...That means that there is a constant challenge to how you conduct yourself. There's a very firm political context in terms of the political culture here...In terms of the theatre itself, the theatre in Scotland is probably no worse than theatre anywhere else...In those pre-1990 days there was a feeling of

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something happening, different people were doing interesting things in different places, which I think is a feeling that has dissipated now. I think that it's much more pessimistic.

TM: Because of the way in which Glasgow 1990 blew away as so much froth on the wind?

PA: I think it's partly that. I think it's also a broader question of political culture in that it seems that once more Scottish politics and Scottish political culture have been subsumed to the broader interests of the national [i.e. British] Labour Party; and that that is a deeply unexciting body of people, who have a deeply unexciting view of the world... It seems to me that there is almost a kind of stoicism within the Labour establishment that you just have to accept the way things are; and on the other hand there is, even more than before, a kind of semi-religious 'we are the chosen and we know the truth, but we're not desperately inclined to share it' on the further left; and nationalism at the moment seems to be completely incoherent in what it is saying. In a sense the end of history has come home to roost in Scotland. This could also be me, pushing thirty as opposed to pushing twenty-three.

TM: Is that the negative side of being a writer in Scotland - that you are in a static or paralysed...[culture]?

PA: It feels static. In a sense, the success of the arts scene over the last five or six years in bizarre circumstances, with public subsidy under quite a lot of threat, the whole change in ethos with sponsorship being grabbed onto wholeheartedly in a dour pragmatic way seems to me to have - you never have a conversation with anyone anymore that isn't about the limited possibilities: you rarely have a speculative conversation.

TM: Do you think that that is a problem with the institutions...?

PA: The institutions have the problem - which is a historic problem but seems particularly onerous when there isn't a cultural optimism - of being in thrall to the bureaucrats,

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of being in thrall to the whim of the Arts Council, where if person A doesn't like person B, person B doesn't make a living that year. The whole patronage system, or non-system rather, is exhausting and enervating. There is the paranoid view that John McGrath has that there is a political agenda behind the squashing of artistic endeavour - I don't think that it's a political agenda, I just think that it's a dullness at the level of funding bodies and a lack of concern, a lack of passion.

Glasgow 1990 was obviously an example of many things, but one of the things that it was an example of was of people thinking of the arts not as a process but as a commodity, therefore being blithely unconcerned with the actual cultural climate of Glasgow; in fact being completely unaware of it except as an irritant. All art needs some sort of groundswell of activism and a desire to get things done, but it also needs some kind of space within which to do it which is dependent on money. The irony is that when I started in theatre in the mid-80s there wasn't any particular space in terms of money and opportunity; now there's much more of that but it feels much more closed in, a much more closed world, much more connected to the transnational touring circuits of prestigious expensive shows, which noone really cares if they're any good or not, as long as they are bookable into large-scale arts festivals.

TM: Do you find living from commission to commission limiting?

PA: Very definitely. For one thing it means that almost every play that is on is almost necessarily a first draft and you don't get a chance to do the second one. So virtually everything that I have done I would do again if at all possible. Losing Alec is perhaps the one that came closest...The one play that has been on repeatedly has been White Rose and I have had a chance to rewrite that, and

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that's been very beneficial. I think it's a lot better than when it started.

TM: Do you feel there are any problems as a writer, often writing for a popular audience, in conveying the experience of a class from whom you are separated by a range of background experiences, education and theatre work?

PA: Yes, of course there are. That's the kind of problem that you either allow to drive yourself demented or which you address by putting your faith in imagination, first of all, and some kind of ability to judge what's truthful, which ultimately you have to get from an audience...I suppose when I first started in that early period I was talking about, I would never have dreamed of it...partly through working through community theatre, partly from thinking, 'What are you going to do? Here's a way of life, a way of language that in one way you're very close to, but experientially you're not close to', but you have to address it because that's the mainstream of where you live. Also I don't consciously think of Losing Alec or Harmony Row, both of which are working class in context, as being realistic in having to be faithful to a particular range of experience. They are rather more generalised. I don't think that there is any sense within my work of exposé, of exposing what these conditions of life are like. What it does is to take those conditions as a given and what is interesting is to take people's responses to them and the lives that they invent in response to it. That's what's dramatic anyway because there is no actual dramatic mileage in portraying misery.

I suppose that through some of the community theatre work and stuff - that removed some of my hang-ups about addressing an experience that wasn't mine - as a playwright you have to address experiences that aren't your own - and that ruined the hang-ups of it because in a sense it put me in touch with people in a normal way. And eventually it

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simplified into a decision to write or shut up, and if you're going to keep writing then you have to have a go and see how it's judged. People have said to me that the characters in Losing Alec are too articulate, for example, which on the one hand I take as insulting, not to me, but to the people who are portrayed; and on the other, 'yes', but this is theatre. You're not actually trying to present two hours reproduction of normal speech. Losing Alec is a play in heightened speech. I mean hopefully the truth of the play... is in the situation itself.. of this family in this city at this time...It's not an issue to be accurate; it's an issue to be clear.

TM: What brings the point up are the contradictions pointed to within John McGrath's life - independently wealthy and trying to write for a working class audience...

PA: That sort of criticism has been made of me in an attempt to be destructive...to say that because I am middle class that I have no access to truth or integrity and honesty because I come from the corrupt class - but then the class system corrupts everybody.

TM: Where would you place yourself within the political spectrum?

PA: The words sound so ashen: I still see myself as a socialist, I still think of myself as nationalist in the sense that self-government within Scotland could enhance democracy. I suppose when it comes right down to it I'd like to extend what democracy means. There's the packaged version of democracy; and there's democracy in the work-place, where you live, in terms of the best-informed participatory government on every level. All these things can sound like anarchism or they can sound like liberalism. The kind of Marxism, the Marxist tradition, is not a question of rejecting that, but more of a question of looking at it again as one set of failed experiments on a nineteenth century set of prescriptions.

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TM: How do you feel that your theatre work contributes to your politics or expresses them?

PA: The 'theatre' is not a monolith. As a place of work, you try and behave [in it] in a socially useful way. Bad things happen in this work-place as in any other and you try to take sides with the good. And within the actual context of a theatre as a work place or cultural institution, having done different kinds of work, it's quite a diffuse experience. It's like everything else, you have to deal with the set-up that you find and try and be positive about it and in it. I don't have a formula for that.

TM: What relationship does the writing of plays that express ideas have to your way of [political] thinking?

PA: I suppose I think of different kinds of writing in different ways. An original play is something that you live with for a year, and to an extent it is a kind of diary of what is going on in your head. I have always tried to make each time I've started writing a progression in my own head, in my own way of thinking. Here's something new to think about, a challenge to myself, to work out through the process of writing. That internal dialogue becomes public dialogue with a bit of craft and a broader context thrown in. In that sense, it's trying to keep alert to absolutely everything that's going on. I don't ever feel a final certainty around the corner.

TM: Why do you think it is necessary to work this through in theatre? And what do you think are the implications of that?

PA: I think what attracted me about the theatre is that the ideas have a public which they don't - have a broader public than poetry would do. And that they have a chance to breathe, to be tested much more sharply within a theatrical performance than in any other art form. What a play can be like is a very active and provocative debate that's happening live, and can resonate in a much more immediate way than anything else. In a sense because a film is

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directed through a camera it is much more like a novel, much more one view. Whereas a play - I suppose this is much more the Brechtian bit, I think it's also like Shakespeare - is where you have competing personalities with competing ideas who actually have to fight it out in front of you. And obviously there's an element in which it will be more one-sided than another, but hopefully as little as possible. Losing Alec was hopefully an attempt to oppose a very definite set of views about the world but which were dead...and a much more diffuse uncertain living and to bring one against the other. And in a sense too...you can dramatise the ideological conflict, you can make it much less abstract than it might otherwise be by personalising it. Not personifying it - that's a slightly different thing - but by personalising things that matter to people - they have to matter to people. And that means that you have to test every ideology by making it absolutely credible that it's going to matter to this person enough that they're going to have an argument about it with somebody else. Therefore, it's a discipline on ideas: you can't just talk - it's continually challenge. In that sense the plays are something like a Socratic dialogue, but hopefully without the sense that Socrates is always going to be right.

TM: Howard Brenton said that he writes 'not to convert but to stir things up', what effect do you hope that your writing will have on audiences?

PA: That is partly contextual. In Harmony Row that was a campaign show. That was trying to contribute to a political campaign intelligently, but with room for doubts by reflecting on mistakes. It depends. I have a sort of formula for myself that I never quite stick to, but try to set out with. I think of an area of ideas or experience as an arena within which it is possible for certain things to happen; and that arena of thought or experience is recognisable to an audience; yes, more to shake things up than convert; not to proselytize but to disturb in some ways.

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In some ways there's a straightforward ambition to say that there are types of experience, types of reality that haven't had - that you don't see reflected in the arts: to make people recognise what they aren't used to seeing in plastic representations of their lives. If you are going to write about the way that a relationship breaks up you are going to write about it in a way that is going to shock with recognition...That it should stimulate seeing things through a slightly different perspective...

Interestingly enough, in terms of audience response, Losing Alec is one of the ones where I can quantify that because people came up and talked to me afterwards much more than they ever have about anything else. An awful lot of it was along the lines of 'That man was my father'... I mean people have done the dark side of the Glasgow socialist male before, but you hopefully do something else and that is look for the roots of the darkness. Part of the thing about the arenas is including things in them that are not normally included...It all comes down to trying to be truthful which involves having to be new. I think you have to be new to be truthful. The challenge to yourself is not to repeat what you've ever heard before when you're writing....

TM: Could you describe your relationship to the Tron and what part it has played in your development? What kind of people do you think you play to here?

PA: Working in somewhere like the Tron it is in many ways a contradictory space. It has a core audience that is not popular, but occasionally it has had a large popular audience.

TM: Do you think that they are attracted to specific people...?

PA: People, titles, plays...and its all on the basis of recognition. One of the worst things, and also one of the best things, about a Glasgow theatre audience is a tremendous hunger to see themselves - which is a good thing.

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But there is also a tremendous industry at hand to try and show them sanitised versions of themselves which is one of the bad things. Obviously when you are trying to deal with actors on that kind of scale, particularly with actors like Phil McCall and Dorothy Paul, or David Anderson or any of those people, they have that potential - they are already familiar, and already part of that cosy texture of Glasgow's visions of itself. It is especially then that you try and throw a spanner in the works....

TM: Do you think that there are problems with that, in that your continual interrogation of what you find before you may be seen as knocking what is already there, and that in this day and age what celebrates is what is important?

PA: Well yes, but it's not really me, and it's not really useful.

TM: It seems to be much more the case of political theatres now.

PA: Yes, but what's to celebrate? You can celebrate moments and instances of solidarity. Of course you can celebrate those things but you have to celebrate them usefully. And that, I think, has to mean critically....It does seem that an awful lot of the celebratory stuff seems to be a celebration of what's not true...In our situation there seems to be a pleasure in self-denigration, a pleasure in fatalism which seems to me to express itself through the celebration of what we are not, what we have lost, or what we hope to find. That seems to me to be a good part of the emotional weight that's put behind struggles far away or whatever, rather than an attempt to actually imaginatively engage with the practicalities of a less simple situation.

The theatre feels like a popular event even though it's a very small audience, I mean a huge audience theatrically is tiny for television. Harmony Row played to 35,000 people which is an awful lot in terms of theatre, but is buttons really. A theatre event can have a resonance for people who are there which is important to them for a while, but look

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at the context. If you are working somewhere like the Tron, then you have to challenge, because there's no other point being in the Tron or the Traverse. If you're not going to challenge everything around you then why are you spending public money?

TM: You have said that your process of writing has been a conscious playing with different forms of playwrighting. How much is Losing Alec a development of a specific genre of play?

PA: It wasn't that conscious. In some ways...I didn't read through the Unity plays and think 'O.K. I want to do this'. But it did have lots of influences. There was the ghost story thing, which was the initially exciting bit. The very first scene which I rewrote again and again and again was trying to get a tight language that had a realistic surface to it but which was actually quite poised and precise. Whether the rest of the play lives up to that I'm not quite sure. If I have a kind of method, it's that every time that someone speaks they've made a decision to create a particular effect on the person that they are talking to. Basically they have the intention and the execution, and between the two falls the shadow, or sometimes it doesn't. Every so often at dramatically heightened moments someone says exactly what they've been wanting to for all these years. The line in Losing Alec is when Tam says to his mother, 'You let him', that's it. That attempt to affect other people, to make them notice you or whatever, seems to me to be the basis. I actually got this from Shakespeare - and it is that people are making speeches and speaking to produce an effect and the language is precisely crafted in order to produce that effect. Of course, it's a double thing, because it produces the effect in the audience and the other character simultaneously. In a sense what I've been trying to do - and this is rationalising backwards -

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is to try and do that with different kinds of language and different kinds of contexts.

TM: That doesn't say why precisely a ghost story?

PA: Partly because it struck me. I didn't think of ghost first. What I was thinking of was families, what I was thinking of was fathers and sons...And I got this picture of him coming out of his coffin and where that came from I don't know. But I said 'That's good: theatrically that's good - someone coming out of their coffin to make their entrance in the play'. And that more or less decided it.

TM: In terms of the characters there is a sense in which they are, if not stock, certainly classical - the Oedipal relationship, the Electra relationship. Was that deliberate?

PA: In fact it evolves as the thing goes on. When you're writing any scene between any mother and son, or any father and daughter, then you are aware of precedents, you're aware of the cultural baggage that you're bringing to it. And sometimes you ring one of those bells and you think, 'That's the wrong bell to ring' and sometimes you think, 'Let's ring that bell and see what happens'. These things are classical because they're recognisable, partly. They're not just classical because they exist in texts but because they are actual.

In a way the schematic element comes into it when you know you have a certain size of cast to deal with and a certain range of reactions that you have to encompass within that. With Alec as the main figure, the widow, the son, and the daughter, the best friend and the son's girlfriend seemed to be organically pleasing.

TM: Was that influenced by the knowledge that you would be sharing some of the cast of The Funeral [Hector MacMillan's follow up to The Sash]?

PA: Not in terms of writing the initial idea of it...because actually it's only three of them. In a way two plays about families are bound to have cross-castable people in them.

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That wasn't deliberate as I didn't know who the cast of The Funeral was at the time I was writing the play.

TM: How much was your play influenced by seeing The Funeral and seeing what was done?

PA: Not at all.

TM: The reason why I am asking is that it seems like a perfect antidote to that.

PA: Yes, it is but it's blind coincidence. It was great.

TM: What resonance then did it have to cast Phil McCall as Alec?

PA: I think the resonance worked two ways. For one thing, Phil is Alec to quite a large degree because of his politics, background, and all the rest of it. And the fact that he is thought of as a light comedy figure was really helpful - that Alec was going to come out being frightening and funny to begin with and was going to degenerate into just being horrible and frightening by the end of it. And Phil's presence - it was good to have somebody who, as it turned out - has that Variety feel to them because he could set up an immediate rapport with the audience, and the audience could then go, 'Oh, I don't want to like him any more', which is obviously really useful. But that again...that was a bonus...

TM: Fortuitous rather than deliberate.

PA: Yes, although obviously the character is written as partly a stand-up comic, as someone who is deliberately funny to an audience to get them on his side.

TM: So it then served the purposes of the play to have him. Were you aware that you were going to put Peter Mullan in the son's role.

PA: Well, I wanted him to be in it. I didn't know that it would happen. He hadn't worked here before; Michael [Boyd] auditioned him because he didn't know him. Peter had done community stuff and Wildcat, but that was his first - The

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Funeral and Losing Alec - were his first kind of straight acting parts professionally.

TM: Why did you particularly want him?

PA: Because he has an in-built intensity that makes him watchable as an actor and makes him charismatic as an actor. But also as a foil to Phil McCall: two very different generations and types, and as people. Both socialists, both very Scottish in the way that they think about the world, both working-class Catholic Glasgow, and completely opposite people.

TM: Given that, the play is still incredibly 'naturalistic' for you: in terms of setting almost exclusively in one room, or taking it down to a number of rooms or settings. What was the reason for working in that idiom?

PA: That again evolved. Alec began as one of three short plays that were ideas. Then there was a big scene at Central Station at one point which was about 'Will Tam leave or won't he?' and there was a whole different ending. But as the writing process went on, and as the production got closer it just narrowed and it felt right to narrow where it was happening.

Also the kind of sub-Shakespearian stage shape that the production eventually had was again....well, partly, I really like that. Almost all of my plays, not just since Alec but some of them before that have always had that: a main playing space with a hidden bit at the back and a balcony above as a theatrical machine is pretty much perfect. And as that design took shape I began to write towards that design. In fact those places are less located than you might think. There are within the living room bit, there are also two different pubs and a street; there's a street on the balcony; the balcony; there's a party that Lizzie goes to. There's a lot of places...

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Again obviously with a family play the family house is part of it. There was a lot of criticism at the time of the design which I didn't share, which was that it was too abstract, that the production was too abstract that it should have had kind of more actual resonance of a council house.

TM: Do you think that the abstraction emphasised the allegorical nature of the piece?

PA: Yes, it did, which is partly the closest way that Michael [Boyd] felt that he could relate to it as an allegorical piece. My initial idea was that it was a ghost story within an entirely naturalistic setting, but I think the rightness of the non-naturalistic setting became more and more apparent to me. It was a big learning process for me that for a sense of the real you don't need - I mean I'd always known that theoretically - but that you don't need the pots and pans. I don't think that the audience felt that they weren't engaging with the real world.

TM: But of the levels with which they engage there was definitely the one level where they regarded these characters as people, but also another level where they engaged with them as representatives of ideas; not solely embodiments of them but as representative of them. Was that in the writing or was it something that emerged during rehearsal?

PA: That they were representative? That was there. Again it's trying to do that in a way that doesn't restrict what's emotionally possible. People can represent things without necessarily being too limited as characters by what they can be taken to represent. Part of the whole perspective within the play is that just as Alec at least part of the time is as others see him, so are they also as he sees them; in a sense there is a kind of double perspective going on in the play. He sees them as representatives, but only as representatives of a particular betrayal of a particular way of life and ideas. That is echoed in the way that the

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characters are actually written, at some points slightly more than others. And vice versa, Alec has an independent life at some points, but at some points he's just a presence hanging over Tam's shoulder. Hopefully that remains theatrically agile enough to have that seamlessly serve Alec's character's purpose, but also to theatrically represent Tam's state of mind by having his father's ghost over his shoulder - to do the two things at once. For which again the allegorical setting worked better...

I did want to say something, I suppose, about a generation of Glaswegians and about a legacy which the current generation has to carry; which is partly a legacy of feelings of inadequacy compared to our forefathers which I mentioned before, which I think is loathsome and not useful. And secondly, I suppose, to do a Glasgow play that has resonances of all the Glasgow plays but to - this is less directly allegorical - I didn't want to say something about fathers and sons throughout the ages, for example. This father and son is very specific and very particular in terms of Glasgow, but again hopefully having enough in-built resonance to go wider; not to signpost that formally but just to allow the resonance to happen.

TM: Would it be overloading it to say that it is a state-of-the-nation play set in a sitting room?

PA: No, that's fair enough. But then I think that's partly what a play can do. Funnily enough I haven't thought about this as something peculiar - it has always seemed quite natural to me that that is what a play is. In a sense the context of an arena like the Tron - what is this space at this time with this audience equipped to debate? - and I think that is always going to carry a national resonance, simply because that is part of our culture. We almost anticipate some kind of debate about what Scotland is and where it is and where it is going whenever you go into a theatre virtually.

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TM: In terms of that idea of the play as a debate, in a number of plays previously you seem to have focused this through central figures, they were the location of the conflicts. However, in Losing Alec there seems to be a much more democratic allocation of that..

PA: That was very deliberate. It partly comes from what I learnt as a straightforward theatrical trick when I was writing Muir. The best scene in Muir is the scene where the captain of the ship and the Reverend Palmer, there is a conversation between them which is watched by the marine. And the marine doesn't actually do anything throughout the entire scene, but it clicked that his being there made all the difference. That being able to shift the audience's viewpoint at different moments in the scene is the only technical trick that I think that I've actually learned.

TM: What effect do you think that it has?

PA: I think that it has the effect of keeping the audience awake for one thing. It's theatrically much more exciting. I think it does democratise how you view things. It starts fulfilling some of the potential that theatre has got for multiple viewpoints crisply expressed: whereas in a film you would have to signal it by changing the camera's point of view....

TM: What kind of relationship were you hoping to set up between the audience and the stage?

PA: I was hoping that they would identify with the predicament of all these people, or to elicit a sympathetic response to everyone on stage.

TM: Apart from Alec?

PA: No, Alec included. To the degree that - and this is why that play isn't finished - because that's the thing that it hasn't done yet. I think that it begins to, that you begin to see why Alec is a twisted wee bastard. But what is not dramatised fully in the play is the root of his disappointment, because he's obviously not going to tell you

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the truth about himself. So there has to be another way of finding out his disappointment. Partly that was hoping to be done through using Tam as a kind of ur-Alec, or, as an Alec about to become. Tam was the open wound, whereas Alec was the scab.

TM: Is Tam's salvation then the fact that he has this girlfriend, Lizzie?

PA: It is partly her who forces him to break out because she won't accept him as he is. In order to be accepted by her he has to become more acceptable to himself and in order to do that then he has to do something that Alec never does. If there is a point, and I suppose there is, in my later plays... starting with Alec, that the acceptance of contingency, the acceptance of uncertainty in all things, including politics, is where progress starts. Alec's certainty, which is of course strategically necessary at certain points, is also psychologically crippling.

TM: To that extent Lizzie is the one who most embraces that because when we start the play she is the one who has that, whereas everyone else gains it. Was that a deliberate drawing of her as a kind of proto-feminist Glasgow woman?

PA: I hope not. I think Lizzie had that because Lizzie is outside. In a way, the play needed an outsider. Again its maybe a conceit and one that's not entirely valid, that the outsider is more sussed. But in a sense, Lizzie still - and this is perhaps a further stage of the play - Lizzie has uncertainties of her own, but because they are of a different quality and background to everyone else's hang-ups, that gives her strength within that particular context. She has more ammunition than them because she's not crippled by Alec.

TM: Why is it important then that she is a woman?

PA: It's important that she's a woman partly because of Tam. Any other man would not be able to challenge him in the way that a woman does. Lizzie by contrast to May and Jeannie is

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also important - so maybe she is a Glasgow proto-feminist, but she's important to the other characters because she's female. She's important to the play, I suppose, because there is some sort of tentative way out in terms of finding a way out that is do with finding a source of confidence outwith the traditional male pride which Tam hasn't evolved sufficiently to find for himself. Whether he and Lizzie actually ever get it together I rather doubt.

TM: In terms of character that is important, but schematically it seems very interesting that it is a woman's perspective.

PA: The fact that it is a bit schematic worries me more than interests me. I think that that is restricting Lizzie and dehumanising her if she's too schematically convenient. There's not necessarily an intrinsic problem with that but there can be if she's not given room to develop as a character in her own right. In fact she only really exists in relation to the central family core, which does worry me a bit.

TM: How did you find that the audience reacted when you did get a lot of feedback? What way did that affect the play that you'd thought that you'd written?

PA: There were a few different things, one of which was another coincidence. It was on at the same time as the Govan by-election. I didn't make any particular connection between the fact that Jim Sillars, a 'new possibility in Scottish politics', suddenly seemed to appear, but almost everyone watching the play did, or at least people who talked to me. It never occurred to me that there was a debate going on between nationalism and socialism within the play. I didn't think that there was, but it seemed to me that its damnation of the Labour establishment through the person of Alec, was supportive of Jim Sillars' nationalism.

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TM: I would have thought that it was much more supportive of New Left Labour Party politics or Ken Livingstone.

PA: I don't know. There was no specific internal Labour Party debating point contained within the play. It was taken to be, by people on the Left, particularly people of that generation...There was another criticism that you were criticising this but what are you going to replace it with. I don't know. It's not up to me: it's a democratic process. So in the way that the play ends - the play ends with a recommendation that we endure in as unfucked-up a way as possible, which I don't suppose is a particularly positive message, but I wouldn't have felt anything else to be emotionally true to this moment.

TM: Did people not react to it as a very optimistic play: that we should vanquish the devils, and everything else is possible.

PA: That was part of the idea, but the idea was also that vanquishing the devils may not be, isn't, salvation. I mean salvation is a big thing with me as you may have gathered - in that I passionately believe that there is no such thing. I think that the belief in salvation is a terribly destructive thing. So, the banishing of the ghost is not going to save us, but unless we banish the ghosts we can't start to save ourselves, I suppose, is what it's about. But no-one actually said that to me, that it was a positive play.

TM: I found it a very optimistic play...Nothing is resolved but the possibility of making, not a happy ending, but of making progress, is left open...For me there were parallels in the pulling down of the drapes, a whole range of things that happened: the lights coming up over the auditorium.

PA: Yes, that was the idea that suddenly everything was open.

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**Jo Beddoe, General Manager, 7:84 (Scotland) 22/4/90**

TM: What was the background to John McGrath's resignation?

JB: What happened was that I started in April or May with a show that had just gone into rehearsal, No Mean City. And to cut lots of stories short John had already told me that he was going to hand over to David Hayman, that he felt that that was the way to proceed.

TM: Because of the grant cut or because he felt that it was better for the company?

JB: I think that John wasn't clear why. I respect that. He told me on a plane going to London, after the board meeting that I had come to. And he said, 'I think that I am going to call it a day and obviously want David to take over. I think that will solve the problems. I think that's what they want -the Arts Council - and I think that would be the best.'

Also already I'd picked up the general feeling that that would be a very acceptable decision from the board's point of view - not the board's point of view but the very few people that I'd talked to. Because basically people felt that John was tired, that it was time for him to call it a day, that he should dedicate more time to his writing, or to Freeway or whatever. I was entirely sympathetic and clearly from my point of view I was not in any way worried because the idea of David Hayman taking over 7:84 was terrific for me.

TM: You say that he [John McGrath] wasn't very clear but according to his after the fact rationalisations he became very clear.

JB: You talk to anybody who's thinking of leaving their wife or their husband, it's the same. I mean John had been with that company for 17 years: it was his, it was absolutely his. And that I understood at that time....This was an enormous change, quite an ignominious way to go. Even if it was of his own choosing, it wasn't of his own choosing

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because of the cut. And the last thing that John wanted it to be seen as was that he was capitulating to the Arts Council and quite rightly. I think his first reaction was that that would be the honourable thing to do and that he would be accorded the honour of it; he would be graciously giving it to David and would be the hero of the piece, or you feel that in a dramatic sense. So I listened and in the meantime we were carrying on. I was grappling with last year's accounts, the lack of an annual budget, the lack of a budget for No Mean City, sorting everything out, getting the relationship with the Arts Council on a good footing.

TM: What was your impression then of the Arts Council's actions? Was the cut because of lack of theatrical life in the company?

JB: The position that I was presented with were the facts as discussed with John and the board and everywhere else. They were: despite a number of harsh requests to do something about the deficit, nothing had been done; that the administration of the company - and after all that's all the Arts Council can comment on - that the administration of the company was very lacking as far as they were concerned - we had to make regular box-office returns, we had to do quarterly returns and none of that was being done - it was a mess in terms of the relationship with the Arts Council on an administrative and financial basis...They were not happy with the composition of the board; and what they meant by that was, to put it bluntly, they thought it was full of John's cronies, and there was no independent, overall, objective accountability. The constitution of the board were basically good old 7:84 pals who were in no way going to put checks and balances on John at all. And the Arts Council felt that the board should have a much more objective role in the running of the company.

The last thing was the variable quality of the artistic output. Now the board took a decision to accept the deficit, to accept the administration, to accept the board, but would not and never did accept the artistic criticisms.

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I have nothing to say on that because I never saw any of the old 7:84 shows.

TM: What was the response of Scottish artists to the 7:84 cut?

JB: I got very sticky about the fact that here we were trying among other things to run a campaign to save 7:84 and there was not one instance of the artistic/theatrical community in Scotland rising up and saying, 'This company must not be cut.'...Eric Robinson of S.A.L.V.O. rang me to tell me that they were having a meeting and could I tell him what the update on 7:84 was. So I simply told him and I said, 'Look, there's one thing that S.A.L.V.O. could do and that would be really helpful, and that would be to organise this drive [to get letters of support].' And it never happened at all. And I knew that when the Royal Court - I was at the Playhouse when the Royal Court was cut - and the minute that happened - and I knew nobody at the Royal Court at that time - I immediately rang to find out what the Liverpool Playhouse could do. And the next afternoon Simon Curtis rang Bill Morrison and Chris Bond and a huge letter from all the artistic directors of all the major theatres was published in all the newspapers. So it was something that one would have expected to happen and wasn't happening.

TM: What impression did you get - was it a betrayal of the company, or, was there some other reason that meant it did not happen?

JB: I got the impression from lots of the things that were being said to me that people were finding the whole situation very difficult because they actually basically agreed with the Arts Council. The time had come that John's work was not good; that there was not a general feeling that it was a wonderful thing to be working for 7:84. So I was getting it from performers and stage managers and that sort of thing...You just suddenly became aware that the reality of the situation was that the Arts Council had done the

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right thing. I also managed to make sure myself that there was no question but that the company as it was would be cut; that a company with a difference that was a real difference would get further life; the Arts Council were actually looking for a reason to keep it going but it had to be a good reason. I was quite clear then that it was ok.

[Following the publication of assistant administrator, John Haswell's resignation letter] things got very heavy on the board, very unpleasant. And at the next board meeting July 21st, or whenever it was, John [McGrath] rang David Hayman the night before the board meeting and said I'm going to resign. David Hayman rang me at midnight, I wasn't supposed to know. So John at the board meeting gave in his letter of resignation at the board meeting and resigned; said it had nothing to do with John Haswell's letter. It was accepted and it was agreed that David [Hayman] would be Acting Artistic Director and that the board would talk to David about his nominated deputy/associate.

TM: How did Border Warfare come to be replaced with The Sash as a 7:84 project?

JB: It was agreed that Border Warfare would continue to be a 7:84 production with John...and David would be responsible for the company...Then horrendous things happened with Border Warfare. The costings - John came to me and said that the cost would be escalating by £20,000 and that it was going to be costing 7:84 more money. I breathed a sigh of relief and said to David that it was out. There was absolutely no way. So in August John withdrew Border Warfare. That left us at the end of August with a company to save and no productions and that was when we sat down in the September and... David and Kelly came up with The Sash because they felt that it was ready for another production; there was also a chance that it would pay for itself and hence would solve our financial problem. And we would

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commission ten writers to do a piece about contemporary Scotland.

TM: What is the company's political line [now]?

JB: David's line is humanitarian first, socialist second, and if that's a cop out, then its a cop out. But it's actually true. There is no way we are.. we can be defined as left-wing. There's no way we want to be. As individual people I know that my socialism comes from my humanitarianism which is about my sense of injustice. I am not an ideologically influenced person if you see what I mean, and neither is David or Kelly. I think we are all the same...

The production is a working through [of ideas]... It's no different a process for us in Nae Problem which is about a very fundamental issue that has confronted people in very traumatic ways - there is no blueprint, there is no way that you can have thought out, there is no way that you can have done enough work beforehand, there is no way you could ever have prescribed the influence and input that a company, half of whom are black or Asian (and they are divided by how they preferred to be called)... It's as much an evolution of our politics... We feel that the work that we do has to as much about posing questions as it does answers. If you look at Road, if you look at When The Wind Blows, and if you look at Nae Problem those three plays reflect absolutely what we want for 7:84.'

**Gerard Kelly, Assistant Artistic Director, 7:84 (Scotland)**

**23/5/89**

TM: What kind of relationship does the company have with the funding bodies, particularly the Arts Council?

GK: I think, without getting into a bitching session about previous people who have run the company, I think they feel that the compnay has taken a much more positive step

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forward, is now artistically embracing the mood of the 80s in a way that they weren't doing before. Whereas it was tremendously exciting 17 years ago, somewhere about 4 or 5 years ago, the company began to run out of steam and the only ones that were creating any kind of excitement or box office were the ones that Davy [Hayman] one's fro Mayfest - which is why he was the natural choice to take over the company.

TM: Do you feel that you have become politically more acceptable to the Arts Council?

GK: I'm not convinced that the Arts Council decision was ever political...we did have a deficit, there were appalling administrative defects in the running of the company - we accepted everything that they were saying about that. What we did not accept is that the Arts Council has any right to comment on artistic output, other than whether it is appealing to the audience that you said it was going to appeal to.

TM: Do you feel that you and David Hayman were chosen because you were deemed to be less politically radical than the previous administration?

GK: Not by any manner or means, because the Arts Council didn't choose us. We were chosen by the Chairman and the board...I do not feel that I am less radical than John McGrath. I feel that I, we, are maybe more realistic...I mean we are embracing a new look at how things should be changed...some people talk of what they call Traditionalism which is politically redundant. I would admit though that the Chairman picked us because we are incredibly high profile and certainly it made the Arts Council's job immensely harder to deal with [us]. But in terms of whether we are more radical or not, I would quote that we have 160 people per night walking out of Road because they were so fucking offended and outraged about what we'd done. When did that last happen with 7:84? I mean, it didn't...it played -

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in the last part of John's era - I feel that they played very safe. I don't think that we're being safe at all.

TM: Are there kinds of works that you won't do? Would you do Chekhov or Shakespeare, or even established West End writers?

GK: Of course we would. If we felt that they had a message that was important and relevant and accessible to Scottish working-class people we would do absolutely anybody. You mentioned Shakespeare - it would be fascinating, it's one of our, one of the things that we're kicking about, is to do a reworking of a classic from a working class perspective; rather than constantly having Shakespeare as the property of, you know, the middle classes.

TM: Are there criteria, other than purely theatrical ability involved in choosing an actor, a personal political commitment?

GK: Not for me. I think that's something that Davy would give a different answer. I, at interviews, ask people if they are aware of our political intentions and I ask them if they would have any difficulty working within that framework. And if they answer that they would have no difficulty, that's as much as I want to know. I believe that if you can get a Tory to get the message across better than, you know what I mean - because you're left-wing and cannae act doesn't mean that you're any use to me. What I'm putting on is theatre. Yes, there is a political message, but your personal politics are irrelevant as long as you will give me your heart and soul to sell that message or that play.

TM: Do you find that you are working with much more working class actors?

GK: Yes, because of the nature of the [work]. I mean this is a thing that actors say to me - one actor in particular, a wee middle-class boy who keeps saying 'Blah, blah, 7:84 -

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you's always employ the same kind of actor'. Of course we do because we're doing working class dramas. It's more of an attitude we're looking for. So there is in a way a type - the work dictates that.

TM: Are there problems if actors are doing something that you find is totally contradictory - for example, a work that was either racist or sexist, in another medium even?

GK: I would have to take each of those individually into consideration. If somebody was involved in something racist that I felt had affected the public's perception of that person, it would be impossible for me to put them into a 7:84 show because it would ultimately affect - the audience would arrive with a preconception....but, like The Sash, two of my actors had done Poll Tax adverts which I personally find abhorrent and appalling. They gave me their reasons which were , if you're £4,000 in debt and somebody offers you a job there comes a time when you bite the bullet. In that way yes, I have hired actors in the past who had done things that were utterly against what - but my argument for that was that they are the absolutely best people to do this job, therefore I'll employ them.

TM: What is your attitude to the audience? Are you there to educate them?

GK: That varies from show to show. Hopefully we're going to give them something that they can't get anywhere else. Our foremost job is to entertain them. We are not there to bash them to death with political points. If we don't entertain them we've failed. I don't like the thought that we are ther to educate them.

TM: Well, in a broad sense, to raise consciousness about issues.

GK: Yes. We can maybe raise awareness about issues and in many ways if all we do is to reflect their lives in a way

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that says, 'Have faith. Things'll get better', that to me is a valid political function. In Road I think we are currently challenging their beliefs about poverty, in that it's not all middle-class people who are screaming in foyers, there are a lot of working class people who've been saying 'People do not live like this. It's disgusting'. You think, 'Yes, they do. But obviously what you're used to is the cosy-cosy Gorbals Story life of everybody was nice and the big Ma Broon figure doing this' - so in that way hopefully top enlighten and to challenge their opinions.

TM: You are obviously trying to steer away from passing down information?

GK: I don't think that's a function of us. How do you pass down information without it becoming a boring diatribe. Hopefully we're there to start discussion, to start people talking because ultimately I don't think theatre changes people....I mean when theatre is spoken of as a medium for change, I think we're talking out wur own arse. It's like the changes that rock music's had over the last 15/20 years - say like punk - had an effect, but it was a ripple. But that's all we can do, we can cause wee ripples. But this theory that we can go out and [say], 'By God, here we are' - We're all pishing in the wind. We're pretending to ourselves that our function is much more glamorous and important than it actually is. All that we can do is that we can raise public awareness, we can give people a feeling of solidarity, and hopefully pass something on about, 'Here's what we've got to give you, take what you want from it. Take as much or as little as is useful to you', and then we've fulfilled our political function.

TM: Do you think that the support that the SAC gives to companies like 7:84 to tour is a kind of tokenism, replacing real community theatre provision?

GK: I think that there should be much more investment into communities and I'm not actually sure where I stand on the

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line of us going into the communities. I'm personally on a journey where I have not as yet come to terms with what we're doing. On one level I think it's great and on another level we could be deeply fucking patronising these people. What the fuck are we giving them? We're giving them a piece of theatre. Give them, put some bread on the table, that's of much more use.

Conversations I've had with people in Easterhouse did more to make me question...They might not want or need us. One of them actually said, 'It would be better if you actually bussed us into the city rather than you's all coming out here and doing it in some fucking church hall. Why don't we see the proper show?'. Plus as you say, why don't people like the Scottish Arts Council actively encourage these communities to have a voice of their own, rather than shipping people like us in? I'd be much happier if each community had its own theatre. And we would continue to be a touring compnay, but we wouldn't have this awful position that we have - of like, we're probably one of the only two pieces of theatre that will arrive in Easterhouse this year.

**Bill Spiers, Assistant General Secretary of STUC & Chairman of 7:84 board.**

TM: What were your responsibilities as a board member?

BS: From recollection it was very unclear. No-one ever told me what my responsibilities as a board member of 7:84 were. Certainly there was no indication that you were the director of a company with legal responsibilities. That became quite an important aspect when various financial difficulties came up. I think in general as a board member you were part of a group of people to whom the artistic director, John McGrath, who at that time was also Chairman of the board, reported to...There was also discussion of what kind of initiatives that the company might take...And John would put proposals about things that he'd like to do and the board would discuss them and generally agree.

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TM: Was it a case in which it was the artistic director who would propose things, rather than the board?

BS: It was very much artistic director, very much John McGrath lead. That doesn't mean to say that there weren't good discussions, but certainly the initiatives came from John.

TM: What was the board's attitude to Border Warfare?

BS: I'm absolutely clear in my mind as far as 7:84 was concerned. We wanted to do it. John had been enthusiastic about it; the board had been enthusiastic about it; we wanted it done. But the money had to be there. And weeks were going by, months were going by, meetings were being held and the money still wasn't in place. Particularly in the situation in which we found ourselves, I certainly took the view that until the money was in place we weren't going with the show. It was too big and it was too big a gamble. It eventually ended up that within the time-scale that was required it couldn't be done...

TM: There were very few occasions previously when the board had intervened to change a piece of artistic decision. The board was taking much clearer responsibilities for what was going on.

BS: The board was taking clearer responsibility but they were doing so before the crisis. Border Warfare as a project was in train for a very long time. But the board was quite clear that it was not going to be done until the money was in place. Because we had had the experience, not so much of Women In Power, but of the Clydebuilt Season when the company had to go dark because of the way in which the finances worked out there. Certainly I think that the board was being quite firm, and it became much sharper when it came to the situation where John decided that it would be best if he offered his resignation.

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The board discussed it [John McGrath's resignation] quite maturely. It wasn't simply the case that it would make it easier for the Arts Council money to come back. John had of course offered to resign some years before and I had a meeting with him and David Hayman at John's house in London. He was keen to resign then, but he changed his mind and continued as Artistic Director.

TM: In terms of John's decision to resign a second time...do you feel that there was much justification in the charge that the SAC forced his resignation or that he was pushed?

BS: Certainly the SAC never said that John McGrath going would make a difference to the money coming back or not.

TM: Was it ever implied?

BS: No, I don't think so. There was a point in the midst of it all at a meeting in here when David MacLennan moved that there should be a vote of confidence in the artistic director and I refused to take that.

TM: On what grounds?

BS: From my recollection, on the grounds that to do that would imply that confidence or not in the Artistic Director was the issue. The Arts Council had never raised that as an issue and for us to make it an issue was a tactical error. Which I think was a correct argument. It was also my perception that it would have gone to a vote, that there would have been a split vote and we didn't want that. It was certainly my intention in terms of managing the crisis that one of the things that had to be done was that there should be no split within 7:84: if John was going to be going it should be seen to be done on a voluntary basis, that there should not be seen to be any requirement for him to go, and that any changes that had to be made should be made with the support of the whole board. That was important to retain public confidence in the company.

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TM: In accepting John McGrath's resignation the board was in effect accepting that he wasn't the sum of the company, something that he hadn't accepted up until then. Was that a developing awareness or something that the board had always accepted?

BS: I think that to some extent there had been a change in the board over the years. There is a view around that the board of 7:84 was nothing ever than John McGrath's pals, there to pat him on the back. I think that that is unfair. Certainly it wasn't an interventionist board...but it also included people who had a mind of their own and who had a personal love of theatre, of Scotland, and for socialism... and who weren't there simply to be a fan club or to be detractors. [The crisis] may have focussed tendencies that were there earlier on, but to some extent what happened during and after the crisis was the continuation of a natural process....

In the period of the months and up to a year after the crisis, the board was willing to listen to arguments about how we should go forward, and to be flexible and try and find a way through things. There were some like Linda MacKenney who found John's departure too much to take; she thought that he had been forced out...That his loss made the company not worth continuing with.

TM: That wasn't the generally held view?

BS: No. Everybody else stayed on and no-one that we approached to become a board member turned us down.

TM: Was there not a sense in which the board was responsible for letting things slide, for not ensuring that there was an administrator?

BS: I dare say that some self criticism could have been required but at the time...I don't think that people were minded to be reflective about things like that. And there was a feeling that if you even questioned the artistic policy you were conceding just too much to the SAC... I've got less problems with the artistic output than certain

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other people have, though as I said, it did become a bit stale and a bit woolly.

TM: In retrospect, as someone who was Chair of the Board, do you feel that the justifications for the cut were things that should have been addressed at a much earlier stage?

BS: Yes...Certainly on the administrative side. I don't go along with John's denunciation of previous administrators. I think that 7:84 has had some very good administrators...But there were a couple who just weren't up to it, including in the period leading up to the crisis. But you can always make a mistake in an appointment. Where I think that the board fell down was in never sitting down and putting in place serious financial control procedures and budgeting procedures that would ensure that things wouldn't get out of hand. It was always kind of left up to the office. And the office from the point of view of board members (and maybe John has never been aware of this) tended to include John....From the point of view of the board he was seen as part of that collective grouping that was meant to keep the thing going and keep it right. And also, up until Border Warfare, there was a real tendency on the part of the board to - once the artistic decision had been taken - to say that that must be implemented. I can never remember it being articulated or being spelled out, but I certainly picked up a feeling that it would somehow be reactionary to argue that a particular production should not go on with six actors because we couldn't afford six actors....Artistic values tended to be a bit further up the agenda...I think that the criticism that the board should have been a bit firmer in getting rid of the deficit has some validity to it. In actual fact, the deficit, much has been made of that, wasn't that great a problem and the signals that we had, certainly as reported to us by John, were that the Arts Council weren't that phased about it as long as it didn't get any bigger.

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TM: Do you think that that was a naivety on his part?

BS: Possibly, in that if anyone wanted a stick to beat the company with, it certainly gave them that stick. And there may have been a naivety on the part of the board themselves as well. The argument that the Scottish Arts Council as a collective body were out to get 7:84, I don't think holds. There may have been individuals within it... and certainly some of the reviews of some of the productions that John got so agitated about, and I got very agitated about as well, I thought the tone of them indicated a really patronising and contemptuous attitude towards the audience of 7:84 never mind the company itself. There were certainly people around who never did wish the company well, but I never did believe in the Machiavellian plot theory that Number 10 was directly on the line to Alan Peacock to shut down this team of Bolshies. I think that it was a bit more mundane than that: there were concerns about the administration; there were concerns about the artistic quality; there were concerns that the company seemed to just limp along. I think you see that in the contrast. I think that whatever may be said about what has gone on stage, and that is a matter of judgement, certainly there is a great deal more stability in 7:84 than there was before; which I don't think is a bad thing in a revolutionary, well it's not that revolutionary, leftist theatre company. I don't think you benefit your actors, your technicians or your audience by lurching along from one crisis to another.

TM: Does it not lead to a problem in an inability to respond to the contemporary, to do interventionist or diurectly agitational pieces...?

BS: The problem there, I don't think is a structural one. I'll give you a straight forward example. I wanted us to do a show that related to the Gulf War.. ..I spoke to David [Hayman] about it, I spoke to Jo [Beddoe] about it...It proved not to be possible. But the reasons that David and Jo gave were certainly not to do with the structure of the company; they were to do with the fact that there weren't

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the writers about who were writing that kind of agitational material....If we wanted to do something quickly we have the mechanism to do it, particularly through the way in which we have budgeted. It wouldn't be easy to do but there are ways in which we could find money.

TM: But is it the case now that the budget is in a much more preeminent position in relation to planning than artistic policy?

BS: I think so: things are done within budget projections and I don't see anything wrong with that. We take deliberate decisions as to when we can do big shows and when we can do smaller shows...Personally I feel that we should be doing more stuff that is up to the minute... But I am slightly worried that we might get into a thematic approach in which we decide that the issue of the year is 'X' and plan that that is what we are going to do...I am slightly worried that we don't make enough space for reactive work, like the Gulf War...

TM: How would you characterise the relationship between the company and the labour movement?

BS: I think that a word that's not used very often in analysis is 'friendship'...

I am absolutely certain that if 7:84 were to obtain trade union sponsorship it would be at the expense of Wildcat. There is not enough trade union money to go around.

TM: What effects has the period of Thatcher governments had on trade unions?

BS: I think that most important factor has been unemployment - the loss of entire plants, the loss of entire industries in some cases - which has taken away some of the best organised sections of the workforce. So there has been a

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loss of numbers which has lead to a loss of finance, there has been a loss of organisation. The loss of finance is in many ways the least important. The loss of organisation in engineering and shipbuilding, in the mining industry, have all weakened the movement's confidence. The other side of that is that the levels of unemployment have weakened individual trade union members' confidence. A worry that they could be joining the dole queues reduces the levels of militancy, willingness to take take charge, to get people to volunteer to be shop-stewards; it makes it more difficult to get employers to give time off for people to go on shop stewards' courses, and health and safety courses.

The [trade union] legislation, I would argue didn't make that much difference until pretty recently, because ...much of the damage that was done by the law in relation to the print workers at Warrington and to the miners was actually the common law...It was the laws of contempt and conspiracy and all the rest of it...Where the law has had much more effect in recent years has been in the inability to take solidarity action; that has begun to bite...The legislation is a real problem but it hasn't by and large stopped unions doing the job that they are supposed to do. De-recognition hasn't been anything like the problem that people feared it would be. The unions still play a big part in the industrial life of the country....

Density of union membership in Scotland hasn't fallen by all that much. There is still a reasonable level of organisation in manufacturing, in local government and public services. The areas in which there is a low level of union organisation are the areas in which there has always been a low level of union organisation because they are difficult to organise: catering, hotels, retailing. USDAW the shop-workers' movement have in fact increased their membership.

TM: What is the role of the STUC?

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BS: The STUC has for a long time has consciously sought a broader role than simply being a voice for trade unions on industrial relations issues. The STUC was very much involved in the development of Regional Policy in the 1950s, which resulted in the bringing of Ravenscraig, the Invergordon Smelter, the Linwood car plant...The STUC was also to the fore in the mid-50s in trying to break down the Cold War divisions in the international trade union movement...

It's not new; we're maybe just doing it on a more extended scale now. All the stuff that's done in the arts is pretty much 1976-77, and that has expanded massively. Things like the Day For Scotland - we had never done anything like that before. things like generally having a profile in Scottish life is at a higher level than it has been for decades. On the other hand, the profile of the trade unions on the ground, in the trades councils, is probably at its lowest ebb for decades and there is a problem there...I think that the STUC makes very good use of the Scottish media, television and the press, and maybe we're a bit different from the TUC in that respect. But in terms of having a presence on the ground, in terms of having people to organise things at a local level, or locally organising campaigns like the one for the National Health Service, we're actually quite weak. Trade Union activists have been ground down by the past ten, eleven, twelve years. The older people are older and are tired, and there haven't been as many young people coming through not least because of the disasters of the mid seventies and the mid-eighties when you had colossal levels of youth unemployment. Young people weren't in work, so they weren't in trade unions so there was a whole generation lost in terms of being active and involved in trade unions....

We, in terms of this organisation, look to have something to say on every aspect of Scottish life.

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