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Raking over the *Asylum*: the television drama of Donna Franceschild

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Introduction

American-born dramatist Donna Franceschild is a notably important creative figure within contemporary Scottish screen cultures. She was possibly the most prolific television writer working consistently with Scottish subject matter and from a Scottish production base during the 1990s and early 2000s. Franceschild wrote no fewer than three standalone dramas – *Bobbin' and Weavin'* (1991), *And the Cow Jumped Over the Moon* (1991), *Donovan Quick* (2000) – and four multipart serials – *Takin' Over the Asylum* (1994), *A Mug's Game* (1996), *Eureka Street* (1999), *The Key* (2003) – during the period in question. Much of that work attracted substantial critical acclaim when first broadcast. *Takin' Over the Asylum* won the 1995 BAFTA award for Best Drama Serial, and Franceschild also secured that year's Royal Television Society Writer's Award for the same work; *Donovan Quick* was nominated for the Best Single Drama BAFTA award six years later (IMDb 2017). Some 1990s press commentators accordingly lauded Franceschild as 'one of the real television discoveries of the decade' (Clarke 1996), a judgement that endured into the new century. *The Key* was included in the British Film Institute's May 2010 *Second Coming: the Rebirth of TV Drama* retrospective season of recent British television writing as an example of 'the kind of ambitious, radical work long assumed dead on British television' (Duguid 2010a: 53; see also Duguid 2010b).

Moreover, Franceschild's screenwriting constitutes only one strand of her creative practice. Since first establishing a sustained physical and cultural connection with Scotland via a short-term appointment as Creative Writing Fellow at the Universities of Glasgow and Strathclyde in 1983 (McGinty 1994; Summers 1995), she has also written and seen produced 8 theatre plays and 14 radio dramas. Like her television work, these components of Franceschild's oeuvre have attracted significant acclaim. A substantially rewritten 2013 stage version of *Takin' Over the Asylum* - 'the intention is that it works as a stage play for those who never saw the telly version' (Donaldson 2013) - was co-developed by Edinburgh's Lyceum and Glasgow's Citizens theatres and staged at both. Elsewhere, her 2012 radio adaptation of

John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* won a Silver Award for Best Radio Drama in the Sony Radio Academy Awards (Alan Broadie n.d.; Dollee n.d.; Franceschild n.d.).

If the impressive scale and success of Franceschild's output is important to acknowledge, so too, are the sources of inspiration that have driven and directed it. Franceschild consistently foregrounds her deep interest in various aspects of Scottish cultural history, sensibility and society as a central catalyst for her work. She also self-identifies as a Scottish artist by adoption, noting, for example, of her 1983 arrival in Glasgow that: 'I was in an identity crisis... a foreigner and alien in this country [Franceschild first moved to the UK in 1975] but I just loved the way Scottish people spoke. It was music to me, poetic, robust, and totally unsentimental' (McGinty 1994). Franceschild sees her first Scottish sojourn as 'a watershed for me' (Summers 1995) because: 'In Scotland I found a voice; or, rather, I found that the kind of voice I wanted to write in sounded fine when it came from Scottish mouths' (Brown 1996). For all these reasons, she ought to be seen and studied as an unusually prolific, prominent and platform-spanning contemporary Scottish artist.

Yet Franceschild is also a paradoxically marginal figure within contemporary Scottish cultural studies: extant scholarly considerations of her work are all short and can be counted on one hand. Duncan Petrie praises a television writer whose work 'suggest[s] alternative ways of representing contemporary female experience' through a 'commitment... to a political and a social understanding of women's lives and history' (Petrie 2004: 79; 82). A few others echo this sense of a writer concerned to depict and interrogate the complex intersections between distinctive forms of gender, communitarian and national identity politics within modern Scotland. Adrienne Scullion aligns Franceschild with better-discussed contemporaries such as Liz Lochhead, Rona Munro, Sue Glover and A. L. Kennedy. All, she argues, desire 'to produce a revisionist account of ourselves and our culture', one within which 'the unity of female communit[ies]' suggests 'more egalitarian' forms of collective organisation and co-existence than existing models defined by 'the hierarchical structures which connote masculinity.' (Scullion 2000: 95; 102). Similarly, Jane Sillars and Myra Macdonald (2008) touch on *A Mug's Game* as part of a wider examination of moving image culture's contribution to emergent, often non- or anti-patriarchal, identity formations within contemporary Scotland. These suggestive summary insights aside, however, Franceschild's work remains critically untouched to date.

Franceschild's position in this regard reflects a wider absence within the study of contemporary Scottish culture – namely, a relative lack of engagement with television drama's contribution to the national sphere in recent decades. Cinema's status as an important part of Scottish cultural production (and/or cultural production about Scotland) has been securely acknowledged since the publication of the pioneering *Scotch Reels* anthology (McArthur 1982), and four monographs on Scottish cinema have been published since 2000 (Petrie 2000; Martin-Jones 2009; Meir 2015; Murray 2015). But Scottish television drama remains far less explored, a 'critically neglected' (Petrie 2004: 208) tradition compared with modern literature and film. That imbalance is perplexing as well as unfortunate. After all, indigenous television drama production has a substantially earlier point of historical origin (late 1950s/early 1960s) than its cinematic counterpart (late 1970s/early 1980s) (Cook 2008). Moreover, the history of Scottish television drama is also fuller (in terms of historical production levels) than that of Scottish cinema. The logical conclusion might seem to be that television drama thus 'offers a more encouraging example of a viable mass for critical discussion than cinema' (Blain 2009: 773). Yet the long-term progression and priorities of Scottish cultural studies tell a different story.

This essay therefore seeks to argue the case for a substantially expanded critical engagement with Scottish television drama by exploring the work of an individual Scottish television dramatist whose work is unusually interesting in both formal and ideological terms (Petrie 2004: 208). Standalone analyses of Franceschild's five best-known Scottish television dramas – *And the Cow Jumped Over the Moon*, *Takin' Over the Asylum*, *A Mug's Game*, *Donovan Quick* and *The Key* – demonstrate that her work is distinctive and consistent in its engagement with a clear set of central preoccupations. The first relates to an expansive exploration of Scottish female identities and experiences. Franceschild's presentation of *And the Cow Jumped Over the Moon* as 'about things that have been eating women up for many years' (Johnson 1991) is also applicable to most of her subsequent television writing. Secondly, there is her advocacy-inclined interest in non-normative modes of human perception and behaviour, often directly linked to mental health conditions. The form of empathetic, open-minded audience engagement Franceschild describes trying to facilitate when writing *Takin' Over the Asylum* – 'I really wanted to get across... that these are people like us... these people *are* us' (Ogle 1994) – defines all her television work. Finally, Franceschild's oeuvre is also distinctive for its ambitious attempt to develop radical forms of political address and observation within popular television drama formats. *Takin' Over the Asylum* and *A Mug's Game*, for example, both make extensive use of popular musical traditions: classic Rock in the former, traditional Scottish music in the latter. In these works,

music's frequent presence simultaneously entertains audiences *and* encourages them to engage with ideologically topical and/or controversial issues, such as systemic under-funding of social services and corporate asset stripping practices. These dramaturgical strategies align Franceschild's televisual work with prominent, and comparably populist-cum-proselytising, strains of post-1970 Scottish theatre – most obviously, the work of radical companies such as 7:84 and Wildcat (see, for example, DiCenzo 1996; Reid 2013: 31-49). More generally, recurring topical questions tackled within Franceschild's small-screen work include: patriarchal attitudes towards mental, physical and social suffering; the increasing privatisation of the contemporary Scottish and British public spheres; and the dangers of unconstrained free market capitalism. These facets of her work reflect the thinking of a writer who has argued that: 'contemporary drama... is the impoverished cousin of the entire TV scene and needs encouragement' (Summers 1995).

And the Cow Jumped Over the Moon

Originally performed at the Traverse Theatre, Edinburgh, in 1990 (Morrice 1990), *And the Cow Jumped Over the Moon* was broadcast as part of BBC1's *Play on One* strand the following August. Studio- (and largely single set-) bound, the narrative centres on the experiences of, and relationships between, four women receiving treatment in a Glasgow Oncology ward. Andrea (Phyllis Logan) is a thirty-something professional singer increasingly antagonised by the hospital's refusal to complete her treatment and discharge her. Mary (Anne Downie) is a self-effacing, middle-aged mother who hides news of her impending surgery from her family in order not to disrupt her daughter's wedding celebrations. Octogenarian Gladys (Ida Schuster) dreams of a new life in Hawaii. Twenty-something Eloise (Elaine Collins) initially refuses any interaction with the others, so traumatised is she by both her condition and its clinical treatment. The women's unenviable situation is worsened by hospital DJ Eddie (Andy Gray), a tactless, thoughtless male presence who repeatedly fails to honour the quartet's requests for particular records to be played on his radio show.

At first sight, *Cow* looks like a work primarily concerned with cancer. The oncological setting is constantly underscored in terms both logical – ill health confines characters to hospital – and logistical – budgetary constraints dictate heavy reliance on a single hospital ward set. Moreover, Franceschild also noted *Cow's* roots in the experience of witnessing her

sister's breast cancer treatment (Johnson 1991). But she also argued that she approached cancer as 'just a manifestation' (Ibid.) of a variety of sociological, as opposed to medical, difficulties and discomforts modern women faced. Key collaborators certainly seemed to understand *Cow* in those latter terms. Producer Aileen Forsyth argued that the play 'explores the very basis of how women view their bodies and themselves' (BBC 1991); lead actor Phyllis Logan proposed that 'for all the seriousness of the subject,' *Cow* was 'mostly about the characters and how they cope in different ways' (Soave 1991: 18). Much popular press response also understood medical subject matter as a vehicle through which gender-related themes were engaged with. Seeing *Cow* as 'more about women than disease' (Johnson 1991; see also Anon. 1991; Francis 1991) still has much to recommend it three decades on.

Indeed, *Cow* presents itself in just such terms from its outset, opening with a knowing (albeit diegetically plausible) act in which female non-conformity is both literally and figuratively uncovered. A nurse forcibly removes Andrea's bedsheets, but the patient refuses to behave in an institutionally prescribed way: 'I have no intention of rising and shining.' Similar small-scale female rebellions punctuate the subsequent narrative. Gladys refuses to recognise the rules of chess for socialistic reasons (she believes all pieces should have the same rights of movement). Mary disguises herself as a doctor to infiltrate a staff mess and prepare her own food. The final scene sees Eloise break into Eddie's radio studio in order to play records she and her sisters actually want to hear. Yet Franceschild's play is as concerned with divining what represses women as it is with depicting the rebellions they undertake as a result. *Cow*'s medical setting is thus used to develop a symbolically pointed focus on various forms (social and psychological) of female entrapment. Andrea's promised chemotherapy and subsequent discharge never arrive. Mary withholds knowledge of her illness from her family in case she becomes (in her own mind) an undue burden to them: 'I just said it was women's trouble... naebody ever asks for the details.' Early on, Eloise is self-imprisoned in her hospital gown and personal stereo headphones because unable to countenance the appearance of her sick and scarred body: 'it's ugly, don't look... all scars and inside it's growing all over me.'

Most fundamentally of all, however, *Cow* posits that contemporary femininity *per se* is always a potentially or actually entrapped human state. Franceschild uses her hospital setting in order to suggest the extent to which multiple forms of ostensibly non-gendered institutional authority are in fact profoundly gendered (because patriarchal) phenomena. The seemingly sympathetic male consultant doctor lies to Andrea about her terminal diagnosis (she thinks she is being treated for pneumonia), systematically disempowering her as a result. The

ostensibly buffoonish Eddie consistently overrides or ignores the women's requests for songs to be played on his radio show. The choices he suggests instead tend to be religiose – 'The Old Rugged Cross', 'One Day at a Time, Lord' – or the exclusive preserve of male artists – Andy Williams, Perry Como, Jim Reeves, Neil Diamond. The cumulative weight of these male-driven indignities and impositions makes licenced professional medical control over female bodies seem less like an extraordinary event (not all women develop cancer, thus the central quartet are 'unlucky') and more like an unusually formalised exemplar of patriarchal social functioning more generally. Profound individual alienation from the female body – not least because men constantly seek to exert control over its resources and capabilities – is the result. Mary's relative ability to accept her illness stems from the conviction that a post-maternal body no longer truly needs breasts: 'my weans are all grown up now: they get their milk from the dairy cow, not the silly cow.' Andrea is profoundly conflicted about a 15-year-old cassette tape documenting a live music performance that she can no longer understand to have emanated from, or belong in any way to, the woman she is now: 'it was a long time ago... I still sing but I don't howl.' Ultimately, then, *Cow* argues that patriarchal social oppression attains power by assuming seemingly innocuous everyday forms. That conviction in turn dictates the ideological necessity of the story's flagrantly comic, carnivalesque final scene. The latter celebrates in quite literal terms the idea of airing previously suppressed or depressed female voices. Eloise breaks into Eddie's studio and broadcasts the tape of a now-dead Andrea singing live years before. The previously shared state of oppression within which the women were routinely talked at by male voices – doctors, crooners, amateur broadcasters – is replaced by a temporarily liberated one in which they assert their right to listen to themselves and be heard by others.

Takin' Over the Asylum

Given *Cow's* feminist politics, it seems surprising that the peripheral male character of hospital DJ Eddie directly inspired Franceschild's next television work, 1994's six-part series *Takin' Over the Asylum*. She notes that David Blair, a BBC Scotland producer at the time of *Cow* but subsequently the director of all but one of her subsequent television projects, 'suggested I... make [Eddie] the centre of a drama series... I asked if I could set the drama in a mental hospital' (Franceschild 2008; see also Joseph 1999). Accordingly, 'Ready' Eddie McKenna (Ken Stott) is a thirty-something amateur DJ with troubles to spare. A professional radio career eludes him; a double-glazing sales job at Twin View Windows, overseen by profit-obsessed boss Mr Griffin (Roy Hanlon), provokes misery and misgiving; an overbearing

grandmother (Elizabeth Spriggs) ceaselessly bemoans his failure to marry and have children. Eddie is asked to revive the long-defunct radio station at St Jude's, a local psychiatric hospital. Four patients – manic depressive Campbell (David Tennant), schizophrenic Fergus (Angus Macfadyen), child abuse survivor Francine (Katie Murphy), and obsessive-compulsive Rosalie (Ruth McCabe) – help him resurrect the station. The narrative's optimistic first half is then complicated, however. The station is shut down again because, patients are told, of financial pressures in the NHS. The main protagonists' respective individual fortunes diverge markedly. Campbell and Rosalie are both discharged: he takes employment at BBC Radio Scotland and she reengages with her estranged husband. Fergus, however, commits suicide after a patronising doctor refuses to provide a supporting reference for a job application. Regular institutionalisation appears to have rendered Francine's condition chronic. Eddie's nascent alcoholism escalates when he fails to emulate Campbell's success and sees how people like Fergus and Francine are arguably harmed by state-sanctioned mental healthcare.

Asylum flips many of *Cow*'s dramatic strategies and priorities. Instead of using a given medical condition as a platform from which to explore wider socio-political issues, *Asylum* figures its chosen condition as a pressing socio-political issue in itself (Smith 1994). In 1994, Franceschild noted that 'Eddie starts out with the prejudices most of [us] have about mental health' (Barnard 1994) and hoped that 'my journey through research [is] quite a lot like the route... the audience will take' (Garner 1994). In 2013, she argued that 'people with mental health problems are still stigmatised,' and cautioned against seeing *Asylum* as 'a period piece about a problem which used to exist but doesn't anymore' (Hendry 2013). Similarly, where *Cow* privileged gender-related themes over medical equivalents, *Asylum* reverses those priorities. Duncan Petrie reads *Asylum* in primarily feminist terms, arguing, 'Franceschild... draws a crucial distinction between the aggressive, hyper-masculine values of... Twin View and the feminised, caring ethos of St Judes' (Petrie 2004: 80). But this seems questionable: *Cow*'s ensemble of comparably oppressed women gives way to a more heterogeneous female cast in *Asylum*. Self-consciously nurturing and oppressed women – Francine, Rosalie – rub shoulders with unconsciously authoritarian, oppressive counterparts – Eddie's grandmother, Fergus's doctor. Moreover, *Asylum* explores the architectural possibilities of serial drama by building its narrative arc around a network of pointed structural echoes. By the serial's conclusion, St Jude's and Twin View come to seem like disturbingly congruent, not reassuringly divergent, locations.

Asylum looks to recuperate mental illness from taboo and extend respect to those who live with it. Among other ways, it does so via its soundtrack's strategic quotation of no fewer than 43 classic pop songs dating between the 1950s and early 1970s: those tracks all emanate from either Eddie or the hospital station's respective record collections. Campbell at one point asks: 'Have you ever noticed how much mental illness imagery there is in pop music?' Here, he verbalises an idea that the music's mere omnipresence already articulates: heightened states of human emotion and suffering are the stuff of everyday life, rather than the aberrant and isolated preserve of people and places like St Jude's and its patients. More formally subtle, however, is Franceschild's alignment of particular songs with particular protagonists in order to challenge the binarism that underpins social ostracising of the mentally unwell. Eddie, the central protagonist who initially seems (relatively speaking) the serial's sanest, ultimately comes to seem like one of its most unwell. Although each of the four main St Jude's patients have occasional songs aligned with their sensibility ('Ain't No Mountain High Enough', for example, celebrates Fergus's effortless skill in escaping repeatedly from the secure ward), none of them comes close to Eddie in this regard. No fewer than 14 of the 43 songs used are directly aligned with his developing situation and psyche. While *Asylum*'s musical soundtrack performs multiple functions, the connection between what viewers hear and their consequent ability to better understand Eddie is what is showcased first of all. The very first song *Asylum* quotes ('I'm Gonna Sit Right Down and Write Myself a Letter') is played by Eddie himself as a way of poking fun at his own position when no listeners contact a request show he hosts. An identical use of song as synecdoche also structures the serial's final scene. Here, the 'words of wisdom' that Eddie whispers – 'I'm an alcoholic' – are accompanied by Aretha Franklin's version of 'Let it Be'.

In these ways, *Asylum*'s strategic use of popular song works to a cumulative end. Who and what viewers are initially inclined to see as pathological (the patients) become normalised; who and what is at first associated with normalcy (Eddie) becomes pathologised instead. Such strategically fostered reversals of popular assumption and convention allow Franceschild to advance a progressive agenda towards mental illness and the mentally ill, a preoccupation that reappears subsequently in both *A Mug's Game* and *Donovan Quick*. Moreover, those latter works become even more explicit and insistent than *Takin' Over the Asylum* in understanding their characters' mental health problems as a matter of overarching socio-political inequality and hypocrisy, rather than one of aberrant individual biology and/or psychology. In this, a large proportion of Franceschild's 1990s television drama anticipates the work of twenty-first-century radical critical theorists such as Mark Fisher, who argues that: 'the 'mental health plague' in capitalist societies would suggest that... capitalism is inherently

dysfunctional, and that the cost of it appearing to work is very high' (Fisher 2009: 19). As we shall see, for example, the extent to which Fisher's argument offers a pithily effective précis of the ideological contention at the heart of Franceschild's *Donovan Quick* is striking.

In addition, such ingeniously engineered reversals allow *Asylum* to develop a sceptical critique of the consumerist values characterising the post-Thatcher public sphere – a critique that subsequently became perhaps *the* keynote concern of Franceschild's subsequent television work. *Asylum* explores ideological possibilities associated with serial dramatic forms by regularly cross-cutting between plotlines and character clusters associated with St Jude's (the station's survival, relationships between patients and staff) and Twin View (Eddie's struggle to save his job, the dysfunctional working culture Griffin propagates) respectively. Numerous structural echoes present within all six episodes work cumulatively to suggest that a free market business enterprise potentially houses as many forms of human danger and damage as does a closed psychiatric ward. In this way, a 'Scottish *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* became a tragicomic indictment of Margaret Thatcher's claim that social responsibility rests in the hand of the free market' (Brown 1996). Both St Jude's and Twin View possess sympathetic female gatekeepers – ward nurse Isobel, Twin View's receptionist – who discreetly support Eddie because they worry about their respective workplace cultures. Both institutions are stalked by subordinate male bullies – ward nurse Steve, star salesman McAteer – who actively wish Eddie ill. Both spaces are associated with symbolically loaded ideas and images relating to glass. Twin View sells that material as a quasi-talismanic form of physical and psychological protection from the rigours of the outside world; St Jude's uses it to rigorously protect the outside world from the people incarcerated in its wards (shots of Eddie and others in distressed states and trapped behind glass abound). Both institutions are run by authoritarian figures with a self-aggrandising penchant for rhetorical questions. Griffin's favourite directive sees employees forced to 'guess' the answers to his nonsensical questions, often asked in an office suite and balcony area set above the general workplace. Similarly, consultation sessions with the St Jude's doctors unfold in roomy, wood-panelled office spaces set apart from the shabby, crowded ward space. Recalling Griffin's managerial sadism, the doctors' loftily patronising rhetorical questions – 'Do you know why you are here?' – remind underlings (the patients) of the rigid forms of authority and hierarchy which the latter are compelled to accept.

Most importantly of all, however, both spaces witness the regular invocation of fiscal rhetoric as a tool to divide people and rationalise inhumane institutional decisions and

priorities. At Twin View, Griffin reifies profit motive into monomania: 'you should be out seven nights a week if you have to – and weekends and weekdays.' St Jude's management rationalise their decision to close the radio station in terms of inarguable prudence ('there is a cash crisis in the health service') rather than acknowledging the discomfort that the station's anti-authoritarian ethos and effects has caused them. Ultimately, *Asylum's* twin structuring elisions are as follows. Music blurs received boundaries between apparent sanity and its opposite. Structural echoes drawn between central narrative locations call into question the long-term viability of any not-for-profit institution or ideology within a free market economy. The deliberate effect of all this an overarching suggestion on Franceschild's part that any society structured by unchecked capitalist values and priorities is one within which all inhabitants will eventually become vulnerable inmates of a madhouse to some degree or other.

A Mug's Game

Takin' Over the Asylum established key authorial preoccupations (and inter-relationships between these) that subsequently dominated much of Franceschild's later screenwriting. Mental health, for example, features again in *A Mug's Game*: central character Kathy (Michelle Fairley) regularly takes antidepressants. *Asylum's* idea of contemporary free market capitalism as incipient madhouse, the underlying malady that makes people mentally unwell, is also preserved and extended. Kathy's reliance on medication stems from her selfless courage in confronting the twin pressures of financial insecurity and familial dysfunction in an economically depressed rural Scottish fishing community. Franceschild argued that 'for fishing, you can read steel, coal, ship-building' (Summers 1995), and thus presented her latest work as a dismayed commentary on Thatcherism's socioeconomic consequences: 'a morality play' (Mullen 1996) through which 'I wanted to show how dangerous it is to say that there is no such thing as society' (Clarke 1996). These authorial terms of reference are echoed within the limited scholarly response to *A Mug's Game*. Duncan Petrie emphasises key themes of 'self-sacrifice and community... the corrosive effect of capitalism' (Petrie 2004: 81). Jane Sillars and Myra Macdonald argue that the work shows how 'movements of global capital impact powerfully on 'peripheral' communities, rupturing relationships and traditional gendered roles' (Sillars and Macdonald 2008: 191). While Franceschild has sometimes proved resistant to attempts to reduce her drama to a core set of political ideas and affiliations – 'I'm not a campaigner. That for me makes the worst kind of drama' (McGinty 1994) – her desire to articulate a leftist analysis of post-Thatcher Scottish and British social experience became

increasingly explicit within her practice from *A Mug's Game* on. As such, that consideration marks an appropriate place to begin discussion of this series.

Kathy is a clinically depressed woman struggling to survive in an economically depressed Argyllshire fishing town. Her family woes abound: a deceased father, uncommunicative husband, Kenny (Ewan Stewart), resentful mother, hapless brother, and vulnerable children. Kathy finds little respite at work, despite her affectionate camaraderie with fellow fish-gutters Denise (Katy Murphy) and Agnes (June Watson). The failing fish farm the women work for is taken over by multinational company Seaqueen, and a new manager, McCaffrey (Ken Stott), is parachuted in from overseas to turn the business around. It soon becomes clear, however, that he intends to downsize it into the ground as a pretext for full closure. While a union recruitment campaign escalates, Kathy and her colleagues are far more preoccupied by their respective familial (Agnes) and romantic (Denise) difficulties. Kathy's main source of distraction is her unexpected entanglement in a nascent love triangle with McCaffrey (who Kathy reminds of his dead wife) and Con (Sean Harris), McCaffrey's charismatic but unscrupulous petty criminal nephew. The narrative ends with the plant closed (despite a now full-blown union campaign involving most of the workers), McCaffrey departed for his next asset-stripping assignment, and Kathy and Con on the verge of a romantic relationship.

This plot summary already suggests the extent to which topical political debates were assuming increasing prominence within Franceschild's writing. Some contemporary press reviewers regretted accordingly the alleged spectacle of a writer moving from the idiosyncratic towards the didactic, complaining that 'the overall effect is not subtle' (Mullen 1996; see also Jeffries 1996). But considerable subtlety is in fact discernible in Franceschild and director David Blair's collaborative approach to depicting ideologically resonant subject matter. The carefully constructed place of fish within *A Mug's Game's* symbolic economy, for example, suggests the extent to which multinational capitalism processes workers just as unfeelingly as it does the dead fish which those employees imbue with exchange value. Rather than working simply as a sign of conventional social realist intent (Sillars and Macdonald 2008: 191), the contemporarily much-commented-on 'relentless gutting of fish [that] accompanies much of the action' (White 1996; see also Bell 1996; Mullen 1996; Sutcliffe 1996) visualises the fact that Kathy and her colleagues are, without fully realising it, seeing their lives brutally filleted by the externally located corporate interests that control their workplace. Episodes 1 to 3 of *A Mug's Game* all feature scenes during which close-up images of dead fish being processed are

accompanied by the sound of female processors dissecting the inadequacies of various men in their lives. While the most immediately obvious effect may be earthily comic, the cumulative, overarching one is markedly more serious. The final episode sees Kathy cast off her habitual self-effacement, illegally freeing thousands of caged salmon after recalling the trauma of her first day at work gutting fish: 'There were so many of them – endless corpses. It was like a holocaust. But I got used to it... you get used to anything.' The unavoidable ideological inference here is twofold. Firstly, the free market social model is – indeed, must be – capable of naturalising, and thus neutralising, the widespread social suffering and inequality it routinely causes. Perpetrator-in-chief McCaffrey is, as Con notes, a man who has successfully conditioned himself to see no preventative inconsistency in 'put[ting] money in the poor box for folk you make poor in the first place.' Secondly, once individuals or communities become aware of that naturalising effect, direct, disruptive grassroots action represents the most realistic means by which the free market social model's life-destroying fallout can start to be reversed.

A Mug's Game's seemingly ostentatious and unlikely climax is, therefore, carefully grounded in, and works as a logical extension of, microcosmic human and social details of the narrative and diegesis as Franceschild conceives and develops these over the serial's entire running time. While she has sometimes worried that she is 'good at characters, rubbish at plots' (Brown 1996; see also Clarke 1996), the evidence of *A Mug's Game* suggests something different. Franceschild's plots attain optimum narratological and ideological persuasiveness when she manages to render them organic extensions of, rather than dramaturgical impositions upon, the social sensibility and situation of the people and places they represent. Another illustrative example of this in *A Mug's Game* involves the twofold way in which the work defines and depicts trade union politics. Granted, one can argue that previously apolitical Agnes and Denise's ultimate conversion to the workerist cause offers a 'rather utopian image of solidarity... motivated more by the need for dramatic closure than a realistic assessment of the community and its future' (Petrie 2004: 81). Alternatively, however, one can instead emphasise the women's previously and extensively depicted interest in the politics and practices of erotic, as opposed to employment-based, forms of union between people possessed of a complex mix of common and divergent personal interests and aspirations. The persistently flagged presence of romantic subplots throughout the series works to suggest that women like Denise and Kathy possess the potential, in suitably supportive circumstances, to extend their existing private interests, priorities and abilities into the public sphere. It is not the case, therefore, that they magically and conveniently develop political consciousness overnight simply so *A Mug's Game* may conclude on an idealised workerist note. Denise, for

example, consistently displays an acute understanding of negotiation as a strategic and sustained process of masquerade and manipulation: she deliberately appears to turn down offers of dates that she in fact wishes to accept, as a means of enhancing her bargaining power. She also has an innate comprehension of the principle of collective bargaining, recruiting Kathy and Agnes as supporting partners on her romantic nights out, long before the union recruitment campaign comes to full fruition in the story's closing moments.

A Mug's Game takes many of its creator's existing thematic interests – contemporary gender politics and identities, the relationship between mental health and modern-day capitalism, the life-giving nature of grassroots resistance to institutionalised authority – and both entrenches and explores them in new ways. Just as significantly, *A Mug's Game* also aimed to consolidate robust screenwriting strategies capable of vocalising Franceschild's distinctive authorial identity while simultaneously negotiating the generic conventions of a range of mainstream film and television generic traditions: workplace drama, regional comedy, romantic melodrama, and screen image of Scotland. Taking the latter consideration as an illustrative example of Franceschild's increasing professional self-awareness as a screenwriter, the extent to which popular critics saw far more 'Scottishness' within *A Mug's Game* – 'the sort of thing that Bill Forsyth might knock off in a quiet moment' (Bond 1996) – than in any of her other screen works is striking. Many reviewers of the series called to mind 'the rules of Scottish television drama' (Day-Lewis 1996) or 'a formula to dramas set in remote Gaelic parts' (Viner 1996) precisely because its creators were aware of those representational precedents also. There seems no other way to explain, for example, the otherwise redundant close-up (at the very start of episode 1) of the 'Thistle' brand name and visual logo that adorns a passing milk van. While that company is never heard of again, the brief sight of its corporate identity works to brand *A Mug's Game* in culturally specific terms right from the outset. Many of the main conventions of Scottish-themed screen fiction are present across the series in either classical or modified form. A remote rural community (Kathy, her family and colleagues) attempts to protect a traditional way of life (local reliance on fishing) from an uncomprehending or unsympathetic incomer (McCaffrey) who personifies modern values and attitudes (free market economics) that are anathema to the locals. A comparably fleeting close-up image associated with a sub-plot depicting unemployed Kenny's obsessive cinephilia works to similar effect. Video copies of *Whisky Galore!* (1949) and *Local Hero* (1982) are shown lying among his viewing collection. Like those celebrated movies, *A Mug's Game* adopts/adapts the quintessential 'Scottish' screen fiction plot outlined above. As part of that project, it (like them) also uses a ceilidh set-piece scene in order to communicate and celebrate the essence of the native culture that the locals try to protect from outside attack. In all of these ways, *A Mug's*

Game can therefore be viewed as the work of an increasingly experienced screenwriter, one looking to formalise the defining terms of what by that point in time had started to look like a potentially extended television career. Perhaps for this reason, several of the issues and working methods that characterised Franceschild's third major television project went on to reappear again in her fourth, 2000's feature-length single drama, *Donovan Quick*.

Donovan Quick

Donovan Quick continued Franceschild's experiments with popular television drama as a means to intervene progressively within vexed socio-political debates of the day. At a story-specific level, she presented her new work as one about 'rail privatisation and bus deregulation... the aspect of the Thatcher legacy [people] are most pissed off about' (Rampton 2000). Much contemporary press response thus read *Donovan Quick* as 'a keen, funny and moving exposé of monopoly capitalism' (McLean 2000; see also Anon. 2000b; Walton 2000). However, Franceschild also saw privatisation as symptomatic of a wider ideological truth: 'capitalism isn't designed to be fair... I wanted to examine the lack of humanity in that system. I didn't want to write about bus deregulation as such, but create a situation where a little guy stands up to capitalism at its most voracious' (Rampton 2000). Some commentators therefore viewed *Donovan Quick* in more abstract terms: 'a pleasing David-and-Goliath story... [a] Scotland-set fable' (Nesselson 2000; see also Collins 2000) But the most productive approach of all combines both perspectives. 'An unusual... blend of reportage, fantasy and polemic' (Hoggart 2000) commingles realist and fantastical elements to both topical and fabular ends. Late-twentieth-century Scottish characters and culturally specific elements encounter, and are transformed by, counterparts drawn from early-seventeenth-century Spain.

Mysterious, charismatic and wealthy Donovan Quick (Colin Firth) arrives without explanation in a small Clyde valley town and changes the lives of several of its downtrodden inhabitants. Lucy Pannick (Katy Murphy) has been driven into functioning alcoholism by the pressures of caring for her learning disabled brother, Sandy (David Brown), and other vulnerable family members. Her situation is not improved by a long-term relationship with fellow alcoholic Clive (David O'Hara), an abusive unemployed oil industry diver. Donovan transforms matters when he and Sandy form a one-vehicle bus company, Quick and Pannick, in protest at local public transport service changes imposed by multinational conglomerate

Windmill, who have just taken over the regional franchise for train and bus services. Scruple-free Windmill executive Mackie (David Westhead) runs a disproportionate, underhand campaign to force Donovan and Sandy out of business. Donovan is then belatedly revealed to be Daniel Quinn, a former Windmill executive. Quinn developed hypomania as a result of a striking worker's death at another company facility: Quinn ordered picket lines to be forcibly breached and the victim was run over as result. After escaping from the medical facility where he was sectioned subsequently, and inspired by reading Miguel de Cervantes' *Don Quixote* (1605-15), Quinn came to Scotland in order to pursue an expiatory campaign against Windmill's corporate culture and actions.

Like its immediate predecessors, *Donovan Quick* is at pains to foreground contemporary free market capitalism's human cost. But perhaps as a consequence of its much shorter running time as a one-off drama (Perry 2001), it is more emphatic (because swift) in establishing this central concern. It does so by immediately presenting its two main narrative pivots – Windmill's takeover, Donovan's breakdown – as actions already accomplished before narrative commencement. The work's opening image (a green light flashing to indicate a live radio broadcast's start) thus reflects both the story's public transportation theme *and* the idea of a clear imperative for immediate movement in pursuit of personal goals – whether Franceschild's or her characters'. This scene and immediate successors briskly sketch the lineaments of a contemporary society in which wholesale privatisation of the public sphere is a widely actioned and accepted fact of life. Mackie smoothly assures listeners that Windmill will solve existing transport timetabling issues; a subsequent unveiling ceremony for the new franchise sees him feted by local dignitaries; Windmill branding is visible emblazoned newly, crudely and extensively across the physical fabric of formerly public space.

Having rapidly established the dominant ideology governing its narrative setting, *Donovan Quick* is equally peremptory in underscoring that ideology's human fallout. Mackie's triumphal procession is cross-cut with images (at this stage, unexplained) of Donovan's tortured memories of his implication in another man's death. Mackie's on-air mention of his CEO's surname (Gorman) is suggestive of a corporate entity and culture capable of destroying human life; later, Gorman's favoured motto is revealed to be: 'It's not enough to succeed – other must be seen to fail.' Lastly (and most obviously and persistently), the immediate suggestion of Donovan's already-suffered mental trauma provides supporting motivation for the unusually rhetorical and radical nature of most of what he says and does throughout the narrative. His first utterance involves describing a nondescript local train station as 'the belly

of the beast,' a high-flown register maintained in his later articulations of a heartfelt anti-corporate agenda: 'we're about to embark on... a great quest to fight the mighty Windmill. There are no people in their equations, only customers, labour units who exist on paper, not in flesh and blood.'

The fact that Donovan's words and actions are firmly rooted in his hypomania establishes another line of continuity between *Donovan Quick* and its two immediate predecessors. Like them, it displays an empathetic, even celebratory, approach to the depiction of characters living with mental health conditions. Again, however, *Donovan Quick* is noticeably more explicit and direct in articulating a tripartite analysis of structural links between present-day experiences of free market capitalism and those of mental disorder. Firstly, Franceschild argues that free market capitalism is a psychically harmful, because unbalanced, phenomenon. It thus provokes widespread psychic imbalance and harm within individual members of a free market capitalist society. While Donovan's personal distress may be extreme, it is not isolated. Lucy and Clive are significant protagonists here. While both repeatedly denigrate Donovan as (in Clive's words) 'a lunatic', their alcoholism, like his hypomania, is the result of experiencing significant socioeconomic inequality and injustice: Clive's long-term unemployment, Lucy's unremitting burden of caring for a family without adequate social service support. The intensity of Clive and Lucy's bewilderment at Donovan's worldview and actions lets them refuse to see that their experience of contemporary capitalism has also made them ill, albeit in a different way.

Secondly, *Donovan Quick* posits that free market capitalism legitimates its psychically destructive elements and effects by normalising these at the level of everyday social discourse and intercourse. Individual attempts to question or contest capitalistic interests and institutions will thus always be misrepresented as a form of psychological aberrance, regardless of the relative state of any given individual actor's mental health or ability. Sandy is an especially important character in this regard. His on-screen introduction sees a bigoted departing lodger from Lucy's house brand him 'a loony,' because Sandy's learning condition causes him not to respect conventional distinctions between public and private space as different forms of human possession. Sandy cannot see why he should not enter lodgers' rooms, given that he and they share the same house. Similarly, while Donovan wants to mount a resistance campaign against Windmill he recognises that Sandy's 'genius' is what furnishes the specific plan to do so: suggesting they buy a bus in order to revive a discontinued public transport route, floating the idea of a flat fare for all journeys, and so on. Moreover, just as Donovan is

not the only character to experience mental illness, so Sandy is not the only one to endure infantilising forms of social prejudice and pressure. Lucy's belittlement of him ('the laughing stock of the neighbourhood') reappears in related forms and in relation to other protagonists. Indeed, infantilisation as a signature form of dehumanising discourse within free market capitalism becomes a running thread. Clive self-deludingly complains that his unemployment is a result of the oil industry inexplicably 'hiring wee guys in their nappies.' Later, when he tries to sell information to Mackie about Donovan and Sandy's business plans, the Windmill executive tosses an infantilising job offer back in his face: 'as you've got experience with water, I could get you a job washing buses.' Similarly, Mackie caricatures Donovan and Sandy's business as 'a couple of lunatics and the play school bus.' All these utterances demonstrate how seeing someone else as a 'little human' necessitates seeing them as a little less human – and thus provides a convenient justification for trampling over their social rights and interests. Or, as Donovan eventually remembers his earlier life as Daniel Quinn, 'he was a businessman and his business was destroying lives... he wouldn't have thought of himself that way... he was too busy making money for himself and his company.'

Finally, *Donovan Quick* suggests that free market capitalism's success in discursively normalising and materially entrenching its authority dictates that any given attempt to resist or roll this back is by definition a lunatic act: there exists no prospect of immediate or comprehensive success. But short-term lunacy may facilitate longer-term rationality. In Franceschild's reasoning, 'honourable failure' (Rampton 2000) now creates the preconditions for meaningful change later. Arguing that the Blair government's early years had proved that 'Labour have turned out to be Tories, Mark II,' she predicted that 'when true opposition comes back, it will be because of a few lunatics who are never going to win but who make us think that things can be different' (Ibid.). This paradox, wherein Donovan's personal madness makes him politically sane while Daniel's personal sanity made him politically mad, perhaps lies at the root of actor Colin Firth's publicly professed uncertainty as to how to portray the titular protagonist: 'Is he mad or is he sane? Is this a flight of sanity or a flight of lunacy? I don't know' (Anon. 2000a). Whatever the case, an explicitly hostile perspective on the post-Thatcherite social settlement and an ambitious attempt to achieve agitprop ends within mainstream television drama formats by now clearly dominated Franceschild's screenwriting. Those preoccupations found their most programmatic and politically ambitious expression of all in her last major television work to date, 2003's three-part historical drama, *The Key*.

The Key

The Key represented a self-consciously ambitious attempt to combine and amplify most of the main authorial concerns of Franceschild's screenwriting to date. For example, the script's pronounced focus on the female members of three generations of a socialist Glaswegian family recalled *And the Cow Jumped Over the Moon* and *A Mug's Game* in its concern with gendered forms of socio-political oppression and resistance. Franceschild noted how 'epic dramas like *The Key* usually have 60 or 70 percent male characters. I just thought it would be nice to skew it the other way' (Anon. 2003). *The Key* also replays (on a much broader historical canvas) the celebratory portrayal of grassroots forms of political organisation and consciousness-building present in all of its creator's earlier Scottish television work. In promotional interviews, Franceschild stressed how in 'my perspective on politics... I'm trying to show how really important movements in history have been ones that have come up from the grassroots' (Nightingale 2003). Finally, like *A Mug's Game* and *Donovan Quick*, *The Key* understands governmental outsourcing of central planks of economic and social policy to unelected multinational capital to be an especially telling symptom of present-day Scottish and British socio-political malaise. The Blair government's enthusiasm for Private Finance Initiative (PFI) funding of social services had, Franceschild argued, created a disabling sense that 'politics has become something that is done to us... not a process that we participate in' (Stewart 2003). Celebrating the historical presence and potency of various forms of twentieth-century progressive popular political thought and organisation, *The Key* argues that alternatives to neoliberal economics and social values are both possible and imperative.

The Key interweaves the personal and political lives of three generations of a socialist Glaswegian family between WWI and the 1997 election of the first Blair government. The radical political consciousness of Mary (played as a young woman by Dawn Steele and as a mature one by June Watson) is formed during a romantic relationship with Duncan (Kevin McKidd), a Highland union activist subsequently killed in action during WWI. Mary's daughter, Helen (Ann Louise Ross), and one of her granddaughters, Maggie (Ronnie Ancona), try to follow in her footsteps. Helen marries a Communist shipyard worker and becomes a committed trade union member and organiser. Maggie's successful academic career allows her to become (in chronological order): an employment rights lawyer, a senior member of Glasgow City Council, and the Labour Party candidate for the local constituency in the 1997 General Election. But Mary seems closest of all to her seemingly apolitical and self-effacing grandchild, Jessie (Frances Grey). A frustrated novelist, Jessie's workplace conditions in a

1990s call centre recall those her grandmother railed against in a WWI cotton mill. *The Key* divides its three-part, three-hour running time in relation to a range of seminal events in twentieth-century British labour history. Crosscutting intensively between the family members' lives during different decades, the series outlines an essentially bifurcated historical analysis: the period between the 1910s and 1950s witnessed a series of hard-won political victories for the British urban working class; the period from the late 1970s on saw many of those advances reversed.

The Key's decision to frame its historical analysis primarily via the experiences of, and relationships between, a core group of female relatives (Mary, Helen, Jessie, Maggie) encourages interpretation of the series as a profoundly gendered work, despite Franceschild's protests – 'It isn't a 'women's piece'' (Anon 2003) – and those of producer Barbara McKissack – 'an exclusively women's piece... it definitely isn't' (BBC 2003). But critical perspectives that discern 'a serious engagement with the historical role of women in the public sphere' (Petrie 2004: 82), one within which 'male characters take a background role' (Beard 2015), are convincing for several reasons. Firstly, all three series episodes are structured by a female character's voiceover narration. Secondly, that narration's source is the autobiographical novel about her family and its intersection with Scottish labour history that Jessie struggles for decades to write. In this way, *The Key* both acknowledges and amplifies its preferred identity and approach as a work of historical fiction. A female-authored and -focused interpretative account of the recent past takes its narrative structure and key terms of reference from an imagined (but highly analogous) work of female-authored fiction contained within the text itself. Thirdly, central female characters are constructed as historical/ideological archetypes. Episode 1's opening moments, for example, present elderly Mary's frame as a symbolic embodiment of a diseased contemporary national body politic. Her stroke and the nation's experience of successive neoliberal Westminster governments since 1979 see each losing the ability to use their respective left sides. The pointed choice of most of the central women's Christian names also works towards archetypal ends. A practicing Catholic, Mary's name frames her as a self-sacrificing, benevolent maternal paradigm. Maggie's name suggests that she is, despite her self-conscious protestations and good intentions, a purveyor of Thatcherite values repackaged in Blairite form. Apolitical, unsure Jessie's name is also a Scots noun designating an overly soft, timid and/or cowardly person.

Lastly, there is also the telling fact that, despite their considerable differences in personality and political opinion, each of *The Key's* central women is constrained by

patriarchal authority figures at key junctures in their personal and/or public lives. Mary endures marriage to an abusive alcoholic; Helen is slapped down by a union boss eager to avoid public conflict with the Labour Party; Jessie is exploited by an unscrupulous call-centre boss; Maggie's election campaign is run by an overly controlling London Labour HQ spin doctor. Part of the case for approaching *The Key* as an example of radical 'herstory', therefore, relates to the ambition of the series' social and chronological sweep compared to Franceschild's earlier work. Although neither *And the Cow Jumped Over the Moon* nor *A Mug's Game* actively encourage such an interpretation, it would be possible to view the oppressed female character groupings at their respective hearts as unlucky collectives: victims of *that* particularly patrician hospital, *that* particularly unscrupulous employer, and so on. In developing and crosscutting between multiple protagonist- and period-based plotlines, however, *The Key* attempts to leave its viewer in doubt that misogyny, as well as monetarism, underpins the various forms of neoliberal ideology that Franceschild's writing depicts as a defining characteristic of late-twentieth-century Scottish experience.

The Key renders its central women as extensive condensations of national- and class-based historical experience and analysis for several reasons. The first relates to the widely perceived disjunction between the series' century-spanning historical and political remit and the limitations of its three-part, three-hour narrative structure, 'an impossible compression that partly excuses... 2-D characterisation' (Dugdale and Stewart 2003; see also Billen 2003; Beard 2015; Petrie 2004: 82; Smith 2003). More positively, however, making all her central protagonists female also allows Franceschild scope to underscore her long-term preoccupation with the power and potential of grassroots organisation. This is because *The Key's* women occupy a consistently complex relationship to an enduringly patriarchal public sphere, their ability to act authoritatively (because officially) within in it at different junctures consistently qualified (Helen, Mary), precariously licenced (Maggie), or minimised (Jessie). Franceschild's earlier protagonists also become grassroots activists because they too occupy disadvantaged positions within their respective social hierarchies. But unlike *The Key's* women, those activist predecessors endure social disadvantage for a variety of reasons, both conditional and systemic. The former might never have applied with better luck and/or may change in future: illnesses physical (*Cow*), mental (*Ayslum*, *Mug's Game*, *Donovan Quick*), and addiction-related (*Ayslum*, *Mug's Game*) can all be recovered from. By contrast, the central obstacle *The Key's* successive female generations face is more exclusively systemic in nature: gender consigns the women to second-class status within social institutions capitalistic and leftist, past and present alike. That consideration perhaps represents the major way in which, for Franceschild, 'by intercutting the past experiences of the grandmother with

the present experiences of her daughter and her grandchildren... you can always find parallels between the ages' (BBC, 2003). In *The Key's* overarching historical analysis, patriarchy and neoliberalism are mutually enabling ideological phenomena.

For this reason, the intensity and scale of *The Key's* championing of grassroots agitation as the true motor for social change distinguish this work from Franceschild's previous Scottish-set screen dramas. Although the latter are always at pains to acknowledge the influence of wider contemporary socio-political debates and contexts within their respective narratives, the motivation driving the grassroots campaigns they celebrate could be read in part as exceptional and time-bound in nature: the need to save *this* threatened radio station, *this* threatened important rural employer, *this* threatened public transport route. What *The Key* does instead is to present grassroots defence of ordinary peoples' social rights and interests as a socially pervasive and historically cyclical process. It is in this sense that Franceschild understands the series to demonstrate that it cannot 'be possible for us to know where we are going if we don't know where we came from' (Anon 2003). WWI rent protests, the 1980s Miners' Strike, late-1990s protests against PFI's rollout: *The Key* figures all as both historically distinct campaigns *and* successive reiterations of a permanent conflict between capital and labour's respective interests.

Such considerations help explain the degree of narrative prominence that *The Key's* PFI-related subplot assumes. Firstly, its topicality renders it the series' most pressing example of capitalism's depredations. After all, PFI represented an issue that Franceschild could encourage her audience to actively contest; its historical precursors, by contrast, could only be better comprehended. Secondly, PFI's structuring logic, transferring responsibility for welfare provision out of the hands of communities and their elected representatives, is the antithesis of the socially rooted, collectivist worldview that Franceschild's television drama characteristically champions. While still working for Glasgow City Council, Blairite Maggie signs a PFI deal to move the running of a local care home from public hands over to those of Sogard, the multinational company that also owns the call centre in which Jessie works. In an unapologetically symbolic series climax, Mary falls physical victim to that deal. Rehomed in the recently privatised care home because of her stroke, she dies while under the supervision of an untrained, underpaid contract worker. This event confirms Jessie's belated attainment of political consciousness and confidence. She steals Sogard documents which show the company's intention to use the PFI deal to redevelop previously public land and buildings as private luxury accommodation. *The Key* ends with a rhetorical contrast between Maggie and

Jessie's respective situations and choices. The former achieves political prominence, winning the seat she contests in the 1997 election. The latter, however, attains political principle, publicly embarrassing her sister and honouring her grandmother's activist values and legacy.

Conclusion

This essay has tried to identify Donna Franceschild as one of the most important television dramatists in Scottish culture during the 1990s and very early 2000s. Given both the scale and evolving sophistication of Franceschild's screenwriting during that period, it is both disappointing and perplexing that no new work by her has been seen on television over the fourteen years that have elapsed since *The Key*. When the latter was first broadcast, a senior BBC executive claimed that the Corporation 'were likely to commission whatever Donna offered us' because she had succeeded in establishing herself as 'writing in the great tradition of 'authored voices' at the BBC' (Stewart 2003). Yet while Franceschild's work has regularly found a home on radio during the 2000s, the same has not proved true of television. Perhaps that individual absence can be partially explained with reference to a much wider national-cultural equivalent. In 2013, Franceschild herself argued that, in television drama terms, 'Scotland nationwide is always under-represented and it continues to be under-represented... I feel like as a writer not from Scotland... it was important to write [my material] based in Scotland because there needs to be Scottish drama that has an impact on the rest of the UK' (Anon 2013). Granted, academic criticism is unlikely to restore a politically courageous, socially observant and creatively enterprising Scottish writer to the homes of present-day British television audiences anytime soon. But what criticism *can* do, however, is to accord an important living and working artist a much more prominent place within our collective writing of the history of late-twentieth and early-twenty-first-century Scottish culture than she has enjoyed to date. In doing so, moreover, we would also begin to rectify television drama's glaring long-term absence as a priority within the field of Scottish Cultural Studies. This special issue of the *International Journal of Scottish Theatre and Screen* represents an important preliminary step in that regard. But the comparative critical neglect of a Scottish screenwriting career as significant as that of Donna Franceschild is also a salutary reminder of just how ground remains to be made up if we are to comprehensively understand the full range of creative traditions and media forms that both direct and reflect contemporary Scottish society and identity.

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