

Conférence plénière

A flower among the penguins : self-confidence, tartanry and the escape from inferiorist mindsets
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**A flower among the penguins:
Self-confident tartanry and the escape from inferiorist mindsets**

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The title of this paper comes from a conversation with an English friend, a senior academic who has lived in Scotland for many years. He was going to wear morning dress to his daughter's wedding. Her response to this idea was to tell him to behave himself and wear a kilt like the young ones. He said, 'I'm glad I did or I would have looked like a penguin in a flower garden'. Scotland is not always seen as a flower garden and yet what better metaphor for the flourish of bright colours seen in a group of men in kilts with their multi-hued and multi-varied family patterns? There has been a surge in kilt wearing in recent years and part of that surely arises from a surge in self-confidence in Scottish identity. Set against the more formal black or grey and white of traditional Western male wedding attire, tartan, multi-hued and multi-varied, can be seen as an assertion of the vitality and fun that imbues much of Scottish life, the sheer *joie de vivre*, that can arise when Scots foregather.

Nevertheless, there is another strand to be seen in current Scottish thinking about identity. A recent book by Carol Craig perhaps best represents this. *The Scots' crisis of confidence*¹ argues that a number of factors in Scottish culture, including a perception of egalitarianism as a levelling down process and an emphasis on mistakes as a result of bad faith rather than forgivable human error have led to a disabling self-doubt among Scots. Indeed, with the support of such organisations as Scottish Enterprise, the Glasgow Centre for Population Health, the Hunter Foundation, Strathclyde University, the Clydesdale Bank, Price Waterhouse Coopers, BT in Scotland and the Royal Mail, an independently-established centre has been set up, based in Glasgow and directed by Carol Craig herself. The programme of the 'Centre for Confidence and Well-being' was announced at the Scottish Parliament on 8 March 2005 and it has been allocated funding of £750,000 over three years from the Scottish Executive and the Hunter Foundation.² Its core activities will include 'providing information, networking with interested parties and improving the quality of confidence building approaches and

¹ Carol Craig, *The Scots' crisis of confidence*, Edinburgh, Big Thinking, 2003

² 'Forget dour Scots... the feelgood factor tops the political agenda', *Sunday Herald*, 6 March 2005, p. 4

activities through the provision of workshops and conferences and the dissemination or development of tools for evaluation.'³

In post-devolutionary Scotland, then, while in many ways Scottish identity and self-confidence have been strengthened, a key issue has been defined as the lack of self-confidence among Scots. Part of what produces confidence or positiveness in any civil society - and a key element in the ways people can identify themselves with it - lies with the very sense of what core representations of identity or of sets of identities may be found in that society. And, of course, how people may identify with those representations. This paper will consider some aspects of the ways Scots have identified themselves in the last hundred years. It will do so with particular reference to the phenomena of tartan and tartanry - the 'flowers in the garden' - as they have affected Scots' self-perception and, so, arguably, confidence. It will also consider and interrogate ways in which tartanry has been associated with a discourse of inferiorism.

In 1981 Murray and Barbara Grigor curated an exhibition, *Scotch Myths*, presented at St Andrews and Edinburgh. The exhibition explored tartanry, which it represented as the sentimentalisation of Scottish culture through the manufacture and representation of a false tartanised Scottish identity. Out of the experience of this exhibition a number of articles⁴ and, above all, Colin McArthur's collection of essays, *Scotch Reels*,⁵ was published, the latter a *locus classicus* for the criticism of tartan, tartanry and all its works. McArthur himself observes:

Denied by history [because of the effects of Unionist imperialism and precocious industrialisation] a place in the cadres of the forces of progress [...] and shorn of the role of shaping – through particular works of art and polemic – the ideologies appropriate to a burgeoning nation, Scottish artists and intellectuals, where they did not leave Scotland and function solely within the discourses of other cultures, produced works in or about Scotland which were deformed and 'pathological'. Undoubtedly the most dominating of the 'pathological' discourses are Tartanry and Kailyard, traditionally a source of dismay and aversion to Scottish intellectuals, but regrettably not the object of any sustained analysis.⁶

³ See <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/News/Releases/2004/12/01>

⁴ See, for example, Colin MacArthur [sic], 'Breaking the Signs: "Scotch Myths" as Cultural Struggle', *Cenrastus*, no. 7, Winter 1981-82, p. 21-25; Colin McArthur, "'Scotch Reels and After', Douglas and Ouainé Blair, Gillian Skirrow, 'Woman, Women and Scotland: 'Scotch Reels' and Political Perspectives', Cairns Craig, 'Visitors from the Stars: Scottish Film Culture', all grouped under the heading, 'Scotland : The Reel Image', *Cenrastus*, no. 11, New Year 1983, p. 2-11.

⁵ Colin McArthur (ed), *Scotch Reels: Scotland in Cinema and Television*, London, British Film Institute, 1982.

⁶ Colin McArthur, 'Introduction', in McArthur (ed) p.2.

We can leave for now McArthur's assertion that Scottish artists and intellectuals were 'shorn of the role of shaping – through particular works of art and polemic – the ideologies appropriate to a burgeoning nation'; the forthcoming *Edinburgh History of Scottish Literature* is likely to show such an argument as utterly flawed. For now, let us concentrate on the attack made on Tartanry, that so-called 'pathological' discourse. Cairns Craig then observed:

Tartanry and Kailyard, seemingly so opposite in their [noble Celtic and mundane, parodic lowland] ethos, are the joint creations of an imagination which, in recoil from the apparently featureless integration of Scottish life into an industrial culture whose power and whose identity lies outside Scottish control, acknowledges its own inability to lay hold of contemporary reality by projecting +itself upon images of a society equally impotent before the forces of history.

(A reservation must be entered here: Scottish industry was largely in Scottish hands until after the nationalisation process following the Second World War. The facts do not quite support Craig's hypothesis, therefore. Whatever powerlessness was felt it was not simply grounded in pre-war industrial culture. Later this paper will seek elsewhere a possible source of this sense of 'powerlessness'.) Craig goes on:

This turning of the back on the actuality of modern Scottish life is emblematically conveyed in the figure of Harry Lauder – Kailyard consciousness in tartan exterior – who evacuates from his stage persona, indeed from his whole identity, the world of the Lanarkshire miners from which he began.⁷

Craig clearly identifies in the 'figure [one might say the *bella figura*] of Harry Lauder' the epitome not just, then of tartanry, but of the Kailyard. In this, he follows a long line of criticism famously including Hugh MacDiarmid whose specific response to Lauder will be addressed later in this paper.

Other *Scotch Reels* critics join the attack. Murray Grigor, for example, remarks:

Banned for almost a generation after the '45, the wearing of the tartan was wholly legitimised and appropriated when George IV appeared kilted in Edinburgh in 1822. Tartan gave way to Tartanry in a massive mythicising surge with Maclan's prints [of romanticised Highlanders] [...] offering historically inaccurate but ideologically fulfilling models for Victorian Scots bent on constructing their own personal Scottish past.⁸

John Caughie meantime argues:

⁷ Cairns Craig, 'Myths Against History: Tartanry and Kailyard in 19th-Century Scottish Literature' in McArthur (ed) p.13.

⁸ Murray Grigor, 'From Scott-land to Disneyland' in McArthur (ed), *Scotch Reels*, p.17.

It is precisely the regressiveness of the frozen discourses of Tartanry and Kailyard that [...] can be drawn upon to give the 'flavour of Scotland', a petrified culture with a misty, mythic, and above all, static past.⁹

The overarching theme, then, of both exhibition and articles was to excoriate tartanry, and what was represented as its presentational partner, Kailyard. Yet, the fact is that the exhibition was possible, that for many decades what its critics called 'Tartanry' had been an important definer of aspects of Scottish identity, both at home and abroad. While not all of Scottish identity was bound up in tartanry, tartan and tartanry were - and still are - elements that go to shape perceptions of Scottishness. This is in spite of such assaults as those quoted.

In any case, over the last twenty-five years, views so critical of tartanry have come into serious question. David McCrone, for example, argued in 1992 in *Understanding Scotland: The sociology of a stateless nation*:

Indeed, if our argument is correct that, far from being dependent on or subservient to England since 1707, Scotland has operated with a considerable degree of civil autonomy, then it follows that its cultural formations and expressions reflected that. Those who point out that nineteenth-century Kailyard was not the simple expression of a deformed culture, but one manifestation of a developing international literature, have their analogue in those who attribute the popularity of tartanry to the development of music hall and vaudeville in the twentieth century. In practice, the anti-tartanry, anti-Kailyard obsessions of writers on the 1970s have not only been questioned as historically inaccurate, but many of the symbols themselves have been mobilised as icons of opposition against current political arrangements [this was written when the campaign for the Scottish Parliament was strongly under way].¹⁰

Later, he observes that 'cultural dependency is the result of employing limited discourses'.¹¹ This paper seeks to open up such 'limited discourses'.

It is no intention of this paper, of course, to pillory others. Indeed, to be fair, some of the *Scotch Reels* critics have developed their views since 1982. Cairns Craig wrote then, for example:

The speech of Lowland Scotland, the landscape of the Highlands have become clichés which need to acquire a new historical significance

⁹ John Caughie, Scottish Television: What Would It Look Like?' in McArthur (ed), p.116.

¹⁰ David McCrone, *Understanding Scotland: The sociology of a stateless nation*, London, Routledge, 1992, p.187.

¹¹ McCrone, p.189.

before they can be released into the onward flow of the present from the frozen worlds of their myths of historical irrelevance.¹²

At the time this was written in 1982, there had been at least ten years of important and dynamic drama written in a quite unfrozen, unmythicised and historically relevant way in the speech of Lowland Scotland, which Craig seemed to be ignoring. He has, however, since addressed such writing with great insight, in particular with regard to the work of John Byrne.¹³ Again, with regard to issues of national identity, peripheries and centres, Craig's views have developed importantly since 1982. Then he could say:

The worlds described by Scott and Barrie became the foundation of myths of national identity in a country whose individual identity had been swamped by its incorporation into the United Kingdom. That they should be turned into myths is not surprising. Throughout Europe peripheral cultures were striving to assert the integrity of their own traditions by discovering or manufacturing legends, symbols, heroic figures upon which could be focused the sense of an identity continuing unchanged through all the fluctuations of history. It was the trappings of such an identity that Scott provided – the clans, the tartans, the high nobility of an epic grandeur – but that myth never came to fruition in a cultural nationalism in Scotland such as can be found in Norway or Ireland or many of the areas of the Austro-Hungarian empire. By concentrating its focus on the 1745 Rebellion, the myth had inscribed upon it the inevitable historical defeat of the identity which it offered for the Scots [...] it was an identity lost and irrecoverable.¹⁴

In a series of books and articles in the last fifteen years, however, Craig has argued more complex positions on peripheries and centres and refuted the idea of a Scottish identity being somehow 'lost and irrecoverable'. He has argued in these, for example, the continuity and centrality of Scottish literature despite the 'Englit' industry's attempts to appropriate it and Scotland's political identity's being secured within a Unionist settlement, particularly in the nineteenth century, rather than suppressed or 'swamped'.¹⁵

Meanwhile, on the question of tartanry itself, Murray Pittock has offered important commentaries. He observes, for example:

we may do right if we feel uneasy about the degree of demythologisation which has challenged the kitsch of tartanry in the last quarter of a century, [...] such

¹² Cairns Craig, 'Myths Against History: Tartanry and Kailyard in 19th-Century Scottish Literature' in McArthur (ed) p. 15.

¹³ Cairns Craig, 'Displacemeants - the Theatrical Art of John Byrne', *International Journal of Scottish Theatre*, Vol. 3 no. 1 (June 2002), <http://arts.qmuc.ac.uk/ijost/>

¹⁴ Cairns Craig, 'Myths Against History: Tartanry and Kailyard in 19th-Century Scottish Literature' in McArthur (ed) pp. 9-10.

¹⁵ See, for example, Cairns Craig, *Out of History*, Edinburgh, Polygon, 1996, for the former and 'Constituting Scotland' *The Irish Review*, no 28 (Winter 2001) pp. 1-27, for the latter.

demythologisation is effectively only the creation of a new myth. In Scottish popular history and cultural studies, the exposure of so-called 'myths' to which our cultural identity has been in thrall has become quite an industry. The exposure of 'myths' is held to be of service. I cannot find it so. [...] the destruction of myths is itself a manifestation of the values of a centring 'British' history. The attack on tartanry is only a further attack on self, yet another example of those earlier attacks which themselves were responsible for simultaneously limiting and exaggerating the role of tartan in Scottish identity.¹⁶

Pittock has recently summarised his view on the role of tartan and tartanry as follows:

tartan was not the synthetic production of nationality by WS [Walter Scott], but the badge of 'old Scotland', hence the Jacobite armies were uniformed in it in 1688-1746, irrespective of origin. When it was revitalized in C19, it was not the invention, but the reaccommodation of the national self within a British paradigm which allowed its survival as – well, as theatre – eventually music-hall and the degrading which led us to 1980s Hogmanay programming. To excoriate it for being false Scottishness on those grounds is to deny Britishness any formative role in modern Scottish identity. The reappropriation of it (as in the US) I think more mature than the striving for 'authenticity', especially when that 'authenticity' is, as in the Invention of Tradition accounts of tartan, erroneous & inadequate.¹⁷

In other words distinguished thinkers like McCrone, Craig and Pittock have all – with varying emphases, but a consistent message – argued for an autonomous and assured identity for Scotland within the Union settlement. In the case of McCrone and Pittock at least, tartan and tartanry have a key role in sustaining this identity.

With regard to Scottish popular theatre – and particularly Harry Lauder's predecessor W. F. Frame – Alasdair Cameron and Adrienne Scullion reinforce McCrone and Pittock's points when they observe of the image of the Scotch comic:

we want to suggest that the totemic images of the Scotch comic [...] were approved and even celebrated as symbols of a nationality which, under normal circumstances, audiences were never allowed to express.¹⁸

¹⁶ Murray G. Pittock, *The Myth of the Jacobite Clans*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 1995, p. 117-118.

¹⁷ Murray G. Pittock, personal communication, October 2004. Professor Pittock follows up these insights in 'Patriot Games: Tartan from the Jacobites to Queen Victoria' in Caroline McCracken-Flesher (ed.) *Scottish Culture and the Scottish Parliament* (Bucknell UP) forthcoming.

¹⁸ Alasdair Cameron and Adrienne Scullion, 'W. F. Frame and the Scottish Popular Theatre Tradition' in Alasdair Cameron and Adrienne Scullion (ed), *Scottish Popular Theatre and Entertainment*, Glasgow, Glasgow University Library, 1996, p. 39.

Cameron and Scullion, who revise McCrone's dating of tartanry as a music hall phenomenon back from the twentieth to the nineteenth century, thereby offer further support to Pittock's case for a continuity of such forms from at least the seventeenth century until the present.

Given the positive perceptions of tartanry by such varied critics as the sociologist McCrone, the literary critic and cultural historian Pittock and the theatre historians Cameron and Scullion, where does the antipathy shown by the *Scotch Reels* group arise? Certainly the antipathy to the embodiment of tartanry in Lauder and his theatrical style, sometimes called 'Lauderism', has a pedigree. Hugh MacDiarmid, for one, famously attacked Harry Lauder in poetry and prose. In 'To Circumjack Cencrastus' (1930), for example, we find:

It's no' sae easy as it's payin'
To be a fule like Lauder
[...]
The problems o' the Scottish soul
Are nocht to Harry Lauder.¹⁹

and:

I canna see't; but that's no' odd –
Owre nice for Lauder and for God,
I'm feart lest in the end I'll be
Bored to daith in eternity,
That muckle Hippodrome Hereafter
Whaur a'thing's swallowed up in laughter,
Wi' Lauder's kilt and Chaplin's feet
Supernumary to the Paraclete.²⁰

Later in his 1943 autobiography, *Lucky Poet: A Self-Study in Literature and Political Ideas*, MacDiarmid praises his own 'singleness of mind' to which he claims 'a sense of humour' is enemy, asserting somewhat intemperately:

It is in this connexion [sic] that my furious attacks on Sir Harry Lauder, Will Fyffe, Tommy Morgan, and the other Scotch comedians – and the 'chortling wut', like the offscourings of the patter of these clowns which is so large a constituent of Scottish life on every social level – have been so generally misunderstood.²¹

¹⁹ 'To Circumjack Cencrastus' in *Complete Poems 1920-1976*, Vol. 1, Michael Grieve and W. R. Aitken (ed), London, Martin Brian & O'Keeffe, 1978, p.248.

²⁰ 'To Circumjack Cencrastus' in *Complete Poems 1920-1976*, Vol. 1, Michael Grieve and W. R. Aitken (ed), London, Martin Brian & O'Keeffe, 1978, p.248.

In short, MacDiarmid claims that his antipathy to Lauder and his colleagues arises from a sense of their not addressing the 'Scottish soul' – whatever that may be – and frustrating his 'singleness of mind'. Of course, it may not, in any case, have occurred to any of them that they should have been addressing anyone's soul. Indeed, it is possible MacDiarmid's 'singleness of mind' never crossed *their* minds, far less their being guilty of deliberately frustrating it.

There is, however, perhaps a little more to MacDiarmid's somewhat self-important position than a sense of the comedians' 'chortling wut' being unworthy of serious discourse. In 1928, just before the publication of 'To Circumjack Cencrastus' and therefore near to the time it was being written, he wrote a piece entitled 'Scottish People and "Scotch Comedians"'. There he wrote:

The reason why the Harry Lauder type of things is so popular in England is because it corresponds to the average Englishman's ignorant notion of what the Scot is – or because it gives him a feeling of superiority which he is glad to indulge on any grounds, justified or otherwise, 'Lauderism' has made thousands of Scotsmen so disgusted with their national characteristics that they have gone to the opposite extreme and become, or tried to become, as English as possible; 'Lauderism' is, of course, only the extreme form of those qualities of canniness, pawkiness and religiosity, which have been foisted upon the Scottish people by insidious English propaganda, as a means of destroying Scottish national pride, and of robbing Scots of their true attributes which are the very opposite of those mentioned.

[...]

The present writer has never met a single intelligent Scot, who would be seen at a Lauder performance'.²²

Here MacDiarmid identifies Lauder with popularity in England and, by extension, with an anti-Scottishness. The vehemence of his stance and his desire to separate Lauder from 'the Scottish people' leads MacDiarmid to claim, in the same article, that the reason Lauder's performances in Scotland played to full houses was because

There are plenty of non-Scottish people in Scotland to supply him with the necessary audiences. Besides what proportion of the population of Scotland – or even of the cities in which he appears – do Sir Harry Lauder's audiences constitute? A very small and not necessarily in any way a representative one!²³

²¹ Hugh MacDiarmid, *Lucky Poet: A Self-Study in Literature and Political Ideas*, London, Methuen, 1943, p. 80.

²² Hugh MacDiarmid [identified as 'Special Correspondent'], 'Scottish People and "Scotch Comedians"', *The Stewartry Observer*, 23 August 1928 in Hugh MacDiarmid, *The Raucle Tongue: Hitherto uncollected prose*, vol II, Angus Calder, Glen Murray and Alan Riach (ed), Manchester, Carcanet, 1997, p.114.

²³ MacDiarmid [identified as 'Special Correspondent'], p.114.

We do not appear to have data on audience composition then – nor its representativeness of the population at large, but there is reason to consider variety theatre as a form that attracted most, if not all, sectors of interwar Scottish society. Further, it must be said that the idea of Lauder's filling the largest theatres in Scotland on a regular basis with non-Scottish people (presumably from MacDiarmid's earlier comment mainly the English) in the population seems 'a little far-fetched' as the present author has observed, going on:

Indeed, such an assertion might seem a little like a desperate – and unsustainable – attempt to maintain MacDiarmid's argument that Lauder is not really 'truly' Scottish. (Or it may even be that he considers Scots who attend Lauder's performances as not 'really' Scots, that is, redefining these Scots as 'non-Scots'. If it were this, then the spuriousness of the self-serving legerdemain would seem entirely clear – and threadbare.)²⁴

It may indeed be that 'non-Scottish' means for him Scots who are apologies for Scots because they suffer from English-inspired inferiorism – the cultural cringe. Such blaming of the collective 'English' for Scottish anxieties is now seen, however, as fatuous and, arguably, racist and is certainly widely repudiated in serious discourse. Indeed, the well-attested performative power of Lauder hardly suggests a cringe, rather it suggests the self-confident, even over-confident, assertion of a separate identity. One might not like the form of the identity's representation, but it is hard to deny the impact of its existence. MacDiarmid here binds up tartanry, 'Lauderism' and self-hate in a discourse marred by a strain of anti-Englishness and an absence of evidential logic.

Wrapped up in MacDiarmid's response to Lauder may be other dimensions of prejudice. When he says that he 'has never met a single intelligent Scot, who would be seen at a Lauder performance', one senses a feeling of superiority based in a particular and, arguably, elitist, definition of intelligence. His attitude towards Lauder, in this analysis, can be seen to parallel such derisive attitudes of his as those he held concerning folk song. This latter, of course, gave rise of his disputes in print with Hamish Henderson and may be seen now as somewhat blinkered. Cameron and Scullion in a passage, part of which has already been quoted, view the significance of such figures as Lauder quite differently:

We want to reconsider this image, and with that the other images of Scotland, Scottishness, Scotsmen and Scottish women created for and disseminated by the Scottish popular stage, insisting upon the enormous success and appeal of such images for the audience for whom they were created. Further, we want to suggest that the totemic images of the Scotch comic [...] were approved and even celebrated as symbols of a nationality which, under normal circumstances, audiences were never allowed to express. These images, be they nostalgic, parochial or romantic, were produced and maintained within the entertainment

²⁴ Ian Brown, 'In exile from ourselves?: Tartanry, Scottish popular theatre, Harry Lauder and Tartan Day', *Études Écossaises*, Numéro 10 (2005), p. 126.

ecology of Scotland but were given their universal power and currency by their appeal to the Scottish diaspora of North America and the Empire.²⁵

Meantime, MacDiarmid's somewhat odd attempt to separate Lauder from what seem to be full houses of Scottish people reminds us of Craig Beveridge and Ronald Turnbull's use of the term, 'inferiorism'. Discussing the application of Frantz Fanon's term 'inferiorisation' in describing the cultural dimensions of colonialism, they talk of the role of the 'intelligentsia', including, presumably, critics, as follows:

Drawn to an external culture which is hostile or condescending towards Scotland, the intelligentsia display a marked alienation from their compatriots. A pointed example is to be found in the way intellectuals write about the working class.²⁶

It may seem strange to suggest that MacDiarmid's attacks on Lauder reveal his sense of inferiorism, but it is a conclusion hard to avoid.

There is surely, however, more going on in the responses of MacDiarmid and the *Scotch Reels* group than simple inferiorism, although they are certainly open to that description. Tom Nairn in *After Britain: New Labour and the Return of Scotland* (2000), observes, talking of the effects of the 1707 Union on political consciousness in Scotland:

As a collective identity or 'community', a nation is in fact defined by a complex skein of relationships between 'high' and 'low', and in the case of a small and ancient nation such relationships were close. Their permanent dislocation could not fail to produce an analogous disruption of outlook and judgement, a sundered mentality which henceforth had to function on two levels.²⁷

He goes on to talk of a 'mentality of division or incompleteness' that is 'corrosive and disabling'²⁸ and argues that the Union led to a

suppressed state, rather than to the more normal consequence of an assimilated, subjected (and then renascent) nationality.

[...]

Sometimes people have spoken of 'self-colonization' to account for the Scottish phenomenon. The term is paradoxical, yet in this context unavoidable. After all,

²⁵ Alasdair Cameron and Adrienne Scullion, 'W. F. Frame and the Scottish Popular Theatre Tradition' in Alasdair Cameron and Adrienne Scullion (ed), *Scottish Popular Theatre and Entertainment*, Glasgow, Glasgow University Library, 1996, p. 39.

²⁶ Craig Beveridge and Ronald Turnbull, 'Inferiorism', *Cencrastus*, no. 8, Spring 1982, p. 4.

²⁷ Tom Nairn, *After Britain: New Labour and the Return of Scotland*, London, Granta Books, 2000, p. 97.

²⁸ Tom Nairn, *After Britain: New Labour and the Return of Scotland*, London, Granta Books, 2000, p. 101.

it is possible – and indeed very common – for subjection, marginalization and inferiorization to be self-imposed.²⁹

Nairn observes, however, that within the British settlement, Scottish nationality survived and that this demanded an 'autonomous strategy of identification – it was no longer enough just to manage surviving institutional modes and a backyard culture'. He continues:

It was these changes which added another decisive twist to the 'self-colonization' dilemma: that of *appearing like* a nationality (and preferably an 'ethnic' – easily identifiable – one). Since actually becoming one was self-prohibited, it was all the more necessary to look like one. The answer to this dilemma is something which has become famous, and helps explain the disconcerting contrast of appearance with reality in contemporary Scotland. It was the phenomenon of Gaelicism (or perhaps 'Highlandism'), a style of collective representation deliberately evolved into a mass identity from (approximately) the time of the Napoleonic Wars onwards. Another shorthand for the same thing has been 'tartanry' – the assimilation of all things Scottish to a clannic (hence plaid-clad) origin, and linked by association to ideas of Northern scenery, Celtic speech and artefacts, the battle of Culloden (when clannic society was defeated alongside the Stuart dynasty in 1746), and a twilit Ossianic past. Not possessing a sufficiently distinct majority tongue, the Scots invented a 'language' of assertive display in other modes and forms.

Most Scots had no actual connection with earlier clannic or Gaelic society, and hence no 'folk' or other recollection or tradition upon which Highlandism could easily be grafted. On the contrary, Gaelic culture had often been despised by Lowlanders, and perceived as a badge of backwardness. None the less, the required recollection and 'traditions' were soon synthesized. This was possible because, with all its absurdities and unrealities, the process rested upon something real.³⁰

This 'something real' lies in a synthesis of strands of Scottish identity – or even formerly separate identities – in a new consciousness of identity. This consciousness as Pittock and Craig have shown was strong and often self-confident, but it was also subject to attack in an inferiorist discourse where the insecurities of self-colonising critics, even including MacDiarmid, are perceptible. So, for these critics, the symbols of Scottish identity were dealt with in a non-inclusive cherry-picking process, both tartan and Lauder being 'bad', while preferred exclusive and, often, elitist versions of Scottishness were privileged.

²⁹ Tom Nairn, *After Britain: New Labour and the Return of Scotland*, London, Granta Books, 2000, p. 227.

³⁰ Tom Nairn, *After Britain: New Labour and the Return of Scotland*, London, Granta Books, 2000, pp. 250-1.

The experience of privileged versions of culture and identity in the post-soviet independent countries of the Caucasus is instructive here. In 2000, the Council of Europe noted with regard to culture in the Soviet dispensation:

For more than 70 years, albeit punctuated by spells of “thaw”, culture in the former USSR was entirely at the service of an ideology. In 1922 Lenin wrote that all forms of culture must reflect the spirit of the struggle to achieve the aims of proletarian rule. In practical terms this produced a monolithic political ideology and a corresponding style, known as Socialist Realism. All works of art had to be “socialist realist”, the aim being to show “reality” undergoing revolutionary development as society moved towards communism. Yet despite this strong educational and cultural policy, the goal of producing ideologically trained citizens – of the species *homo sovieticus* that was supposed to emerge from the fusion of different ethnic groups, languages and cultures – was not realised. In peripheral regions, and particularly the Transcaucasus where Russians were never present in very great numbers, the various peoples managed to conserve their languages and traditions.³¹

The soviet dispensation did not simply affect the aesthetic construction of the arts. Cultural 'planning' and the establishment of production quotas were substituted for what would now be recognised as cultural management. Artists who in some sense conformed to the prevailing privileged ideology would find that funding and perquisites were available for them in a way in which they would not be if they did not conform to an approved representation of cultural identity. Indeed, in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, there are still some artists who hanker for the more generous funding position and less managerially demanding regime of old, despite its cost to freedom and creativity. On a 2002 visit to Azerbaijan, for example, the present author learned of writers who regret the post-independence loss of generous funding for Writers' Unions when the 'only' price of that funding in soviet times was conformity to the 'progressivist' state line. In short, a party line had become for such artists – even now – the best form of 'reality'.

Similarly, the classic tradition was appropriated in soviet times to the use of the prevailing ideology. In part, this was in order that the arts that had been available to the privileged in pre-Revolutionary Russia might be available to all. It must, however, also be said that the version of the 'classical' that was adopted was clearly set against the progressive, rather than progressivist, forms in many arts and established a conservative and often repressive framework. This classical conservatism acted in parallel with the aesthetic politics of Socialist Realism to develop sensibilities, supposedly based on 'traditional' values, but actually appropriated to the dominant communist ideology. The result of this was often an appeal to classical practices as the repository of quality and a tradition running back at least in the fine arts to, say, Michaelangelo. Michaelangelo, however, was working in a contemporary and

³¹ Cited by Ian Brown, *A Polyphony of Potential*, Strasbourg, Council of Europe, 2003, p 13.

experimental manner in and for his own time, while the soviet appeal to a classical tradition often was a pretext for a backward looking and overly controlled approach to the arts.

In the 2002 visit, the need to confront the politico-aesthetic assumptions, which even now underlie some aspects of arts and cultural provision in the South Caucasus countries, became clear. In many discussions, senior colleagues talked of the need to change the mentality or mindset current in the arts and the cultural and creative industries. This was seen as requiring a re-visioning of the ways in which the arts are perceived and the contexts in which they are delivered. For some senior practitioners, however, this still is to challenge the very fundamentals of their own training, and often to question and confront the values implicit in the way in which they were taught in the 'classical' tradition. Similarly, the revisiting of Scottishness and the re-understanding of tartan, tartanry and even Harry Lauder demands a re-visioning of an inclusive perception of Scotland and Scottishness, not a 'progressivist' ideologically exclusionist denial of the holistic complexities of Scotland's potential range of identities.

Scottish identity is now seen as a complex and inclusive phenomenon, one the present author has described as not multicultural, but intercultural. As McCrone observes:

... being black, Glaswegian and female can all characterise one person's culture and social inheritance without one aspect of that identification being paramount (except in terms of self-identification). What is on offer in the late twentieth century is what we might call 'pick 'n mix' identity, in which we wear our identities lightly, and change them according to circumstances. Those who would argue for the paramountcy or even the exclusivity of a single identity have a hard time of it in the late twentieth century. The question to ask is not how best do cultural forms actually help to construct and shape identity, or rather identities – for there is less need to reconcile or prioritise these. Hence, national identity does not take precedence over class or gender identities (or, indeed, vice versa) except insofar as these are subjectively ordered. These identities themselves, in turn, cannot be defined except with reference to the cultural forms which give them shape and meaning.³²

This means, in turn, that earlier forms of expression of identity must be re-valued. As McCrone notes:

Socio-cultural developments were rooted in a pluralistic cultural system in [twentieth-century] Scotland: Gaelic, Scots, English. The point is that only rarely do they seek to address the Scottish condition as such, although it is the implicit starting point for much of it. The aim, it seems, is not to identify the unique

³² David McCrone, *Understanding Scotland: The sociology of a stateless nation*, London, Routledge, 1992, p.195.

Scottish experience, but to address the universal condition through day-to-day (Scottish) reality.³³

One might quibble here with the words 'unique', with its assumption that there is a single Scottish experience and be more comfortable with the concept of multiple overlapping specifically Scottish experiences, but the general inclusive point being made is valuable. It is being at ease with the variety of those experiences and related identities that Scots and Scotland can hope to achieve the self-confidence Carol Craig, perhaps a little controversially, has identified as lacking in significant sectors.

Part of these identities is embodied in the use of tartan and tartanry and the celebration of certain personae including those embodied in such variety theatre figures as Harry Lauder. It seems bizarre that some Scots have been or should still be intolerant of these expressions of their identity. One must recognise that they do not and never could constitute an expression of all Scotland's identities, not least because no single representation could carry such a load of complex meaning. Yet, it is certainly clear that, both historically and currently, they serve, within a wide range of Scottish representations of identities, a valuable long-term function. It was the case, for example, that within the framework of the Union, easily identifiable and specifically Scottish symbols were needed that might mark the continuing identity of the equal partner in the Union that Scotland constituted. Tartan and tartanry certainly served such a function and did so in a self-confident manner often expressed through a number of specifically Scottish cultural modalities. Such modalities included the theatre form still known as Scottish variety. Indeed, a number of theatre historians have made the point that the music hall in Scotland is a separate institution from that of England with its own development and traditions. Paul Maloney, for example observes that

the music hall that evolved in Scotland has a special place in the nation's theatrical life: highly influenced by the fairground tradition, it was not, as in England, necessarily seen as a cruder appendage to an aesthetically rich legitimate theatre, but rather as something much closer to the mainstream, and to the Scots vernacular stage which constituted many people's experience of theatre-going.³⁴

Such modalities and forms of expression of identity, then, served to sustain Scottish self-awareness when as Tom Nairn has suggested the Scots were, like the Welsh,

National minorities [...] too big to be simply ignored, yet far too small to count naturally as equals or partners. [...] subordinated through a system of informal hegemony, buttressed externally by empire.³⁵

³³ David McCrone, *Understanding Scotland: The sociology of a stateless nation*, London, Routledge, 1992, p.193.

³⁴ Paul Maloney, *Scotland and the music hall 1850-1914*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2003, p. 8.

³⁵ Tom Nairn, *After Britain: New Labour and the Return of Scotland*, London, Granta Books, 2000, p. 181.

The assertion of Scottish identity through a variety of means including tartan and tartanry worked – and still works – against any sense of subordination and resists this ‘informal hegemony’. Arguably, it is those finding most difficulty in dealing with this apparent hegemony, perhaps afflicted with a sense of inferiorism, who are among those who have most difficulty in accommodating tartan and tartanry in contemporary discourse.

Both tartan and tartanry have served an important function in sustaining a Scottish identity that is capable of being intercultural and inclusive and that has important political implications. Nairn has commented:

The awkward problem they [the Scots] pose to Great Britain does not – contrary to a widely-held and quite natural opinion – lie in their status as a persecuted or unjustly assimilated national minority. Rather it is located in Scotland's status as an imperfectly absorbed *state*.³⁶

This he wrote in 2000, a year after the Scottish Parliament was reconvened. There can be little doubt that part of the process that kept alive the sense of being a state, however imperfectly absorbed into the British settlement, was the retention of representations of specifically Scottish identities including tartan and tartanry. These in the long run sustained and permitted, despite the attacks of ‘progressivist’ – even Stalinist – critics, the progressive frames of mind, the mentalities, that could lead to the re-opening of the Scottish Parliament and even the writing then of a book entitled by Nairn *After Britain*. The power of tartan and tartanry, alongside other powerful representations, have served to sustain against – and resist the insidious effects of – inferiorist thought. Thus, Scotland can still flower.³⁷

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³⁶ Tom Nairn, *After Britain: New Labour and the Return of Scotland*, London, Granta Books, 2000, pp. 11-12.

³⁷ This paper is based on an earlier version, ‘A flower among the penguins: self-confident tartanry and the escape from inferiorist mindsets’ presented at an international seminar at the Centre de Recherche sur des Modes de Représentation Anglophone (CEMRA EA3016) at Université Stendhal Grenoble 3 on March 8 2005.