

STAGING A TRANSFORMING GREAT BRITAIN: TAMLANE, THE SOCIAL TURN, AND THE 2014 REFERENDUM

Stephe Harrop
Liverpool Hope University

This chapter is born out of the energies and aspirations of the years running up to the Scottish Independence Referendum of 2014, and focuses on a series of theatre works which adapted, appropriated and transformed Scotland and England's traditional ballads and songs: *The Strange Undoing of Prudencia Hart* (David Greig, 2011), *The Bloody Great Border Ballad Project* (Northern Stage, 2013) and *Ranin* (Kieran Hurley, 2013). It takes as one point of departure Irish Reid's discussions of contemporary Scottish theatre, and particularly her observation that '[t]he popular continues to be a vital medium through which the Scottish nation performs itself to itself' (2013: 49). It also draws upon Jen Harvie's assertion (in her 2005 volume *Staging the UK*) that 'national identities are neither biologically nor territorially given; rather, they are creatively produced or staged', and that cultural activities are one of the means by which 'people will imagine their communities' (2007: 2-3; see also Frith 2007: 296). The chapter considers points of intersection between traditional balladry and contemporary theatre, contending that for some British theatre-makers and performers in the years leading up to the 2014 Referendum the staging of traditional music became a key means of exploring urgent questions about identity, nation, and collective transformation. The discussion which

frontier between the mundane world and other, enchanted realms. The ballad of Tamlane (or Tam Lin, or Tambling) is one of the oldest Border ballads, and its history is profoundly entangled with changing relationships between Scotland and England (its first mention in print was in 1549, in a miscellany of stories, songs, and legends entitled the *Complaynt of Scotland*, produced in opposition to Henry VIII's attempts at military annexation). This song tells the eerie tale of an earthly man stolen or seduced into supernatural captivity, and of the mortal woman who strives to redeem the father of her unborn child from a hellish fate, clinging to Tamlane through a long Halloween night as he undergoes a series of magical metamorphoses.

The present discussion adopts the mythic figure of Tamlane to reflect upon the uses of traditional song within a transforming Great Britain. Shape-shifting, multi-form, and elusive, Tamlane is an apt symbol for the narrative song traditions of Scotland and England, particularly (in this discussion) the ballads of the Borders region, through which national identities have been asserted, subverted, and re-made across the centuries. Harvie observes that 'if national identities are creatively staged, that means they are dynamic' (2005: 3), and the ballad's comparably protean form (see Partie 2016: 28, 30) makes it an apt medium for asserting and challenging notions of identity at times of social anxiety and cultural change. Beginning with a brief consideration of Walter Scott's *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* (1802-3), this chapter traces the uses of traditional songs both to endorse notions of a unified Great Britain, and as a means of revisiting British, Scottish and English identities in a twenty-first century context, through modern theatre-makers' contestations and re-makings of ballad narratives and texts, and their explorations of ballad-inspired or 'ceilidh-play' dramaturgies.

BORDER BALLADS, SCOTT'S *MINSTRELSY*, AND THE BIRTH OF GREAT BRITAIN

The *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* was first published in 1802-3. It is an antiquarian collection of ballads, complete with extensive scholarly commentaries, which attempted to 'attract the attention of persons of taste and culture' to the old songs of the Borders (Scott

follows addresses productions which explicitly sought to activate the convivial, participatory performance interactions associated with the popular performance of Scotland and England's traditional songs, its analysis drawing on Mairi McFadyen's phenomenological readings of ballad performance (2013), and notions of 'the social turn' in the contemporary arts, defined by Harvie as 'the recent proliferation of performance and art practices that engage audiences *socially*—by inviting those audiences to participate, act, work and create together; observe one another; or simply be together' (2013: 1). It identifies several recurring themes and tropes in the works explored, including a passionate localism which nonetheless positions itself within a global context, an emphasis upon song's capacity to dissolve boundaries, and an appeal to the utopian potentials of live co-presence, participatory performance, and shared imaginative activity. In this way, the chapter highlights the value of traditional ballads and songs for politically engaged performance-makers (in both England and Scotland) during a turbulent, uncertain, and ebullient historical moment.

A ballad may be defined as belonging to 'a genre of narrative verse and melody, of largely (or effectively) anonymous origin, examples of which have been in existence in one form or another since at least the fifteenth century'. David Atkinson additionally comments that, for some scholars, 'the quality of being "traditional", as opposed to "literary" or even "fabricated"' is a critical distinguishing feature of the ballad (Atkinson 2014: 1). For the purposes of this discussion, a key feature of traditional ballad practice is that these narrative songs, informally shared and freely re-made by musicians and singers across a variety of changing contexts, can be appropriated by popular performers/audiences to engage with the key concerns of their own time and place. Within the British ballad tradition, a particular corpus of songs emerges from the borderlands between England and Scotland. These are known as 'Border ballads': a series of extended sung narratives concerning cattle thieves, border warlords or supernatural terrors, often characterized by a bleak delight in violence, tragedy and horror (a legacy of the region's prolonged history of violence and instability, resulting from repeated attempts to forcibly unify the diverse territories of what is, presently, Great Britain). The borderlands evoked in these songs are not only the meeting point between warring kingdoms and families, but also the

proposals that the great epics of Greece emerged from popular, orally-composed ballads or 'lays', and that Homer himself might not have been a single poetic genius, but rather a composite figure drawn from many singers operating within a traditional framework of heroic songs. Scott borrowed from the Homeric 'primitivists' a sense that an ancient, oral poetry could function as 'national verse', expressing the character of an entire people (1902: vol. 1, 3), implicitly proposing the right of the balladry of the Borders to be considered the equivalent of archaic Greek epic. However, Scott distances himself from the potentially radical inference that any singer of old songs might potentially be a maker of national verse. He insists that the qualities necessary for composing such poems are not the portion of every man in the tribe' (1902: vol. 1, 3). The creation of a national poetry, he argues, is 'dependent upon the rise of some highly gifted individual, possessing in a pre-eminent and uncommon degree the powers demanded, whose talents influence the taste of a whole nation' (1902: vol. 1, 5). In consequence, it has been argued, Scott transforms songs which had previously engaged singers and listeners in active participation across a range of social settings into antiquarian artefacts under the editorial control of a single, literary authority, imposing his own political and cultural vision upon the texts he collects in the service of 'a wider British patriotism' (Dentith 2006: 42). These ballads' 'traditionalist sentiment' (appropriately edited) will now be 'supportive of a cohesive British union and empire' (Oliver 2005: 67-8). The Scott evoked in such analyses might be likened to the heroine of the song he titled 'The Young Tamlane' (1902: vol.2, 388-407), wresting the Borders' ballads out of shape-shifting orality—or, at least, the vulgarity and textual variability of the popular ballad press (Atkinson 2014: 69-88; McDowell 2010; Perry 2010; and Sorensen 2007)—into polite, literary conformity, in order to give the infant Britain a respectable poetic genealogy.

However, in recent years, critics of Scott's novelistic oeuvre (which began with the publication of the sensationally successful *Waverley* in 1814) have identified a more subversive spirit operating beneath the surface of his canonical fictions. According to such readings, Scott's dizzying range of authorial and editorial alter-egos reveals a conscious appreciation of the range of competing voices that would seek to define Scottish identity, and to fix the kingdom's place within an emerg-

1902: vol. 1, xviii). This project was significantly informed by Walter Scott's conservative politics, and by the emerging literary nationalisms (Anderson 2006) which his career would come to exemplify. Formal union between England and Scotland had been enacted in 1707, although violent resistance to this had continued until the middle of the eighteenth century. Thereafter, the closing decades of the century had been alarmed by new fears that revolutionary ideas from France might radicalize disaffected groups within Scotland. Scott (a lowland Presbyterian, a lawyer by profession, and a lifelong Tory, who would in 1820 become the first Baronet of Abbotsford) was equally unsympathetic to both Jacobite and Jacobin influences. He desired to see Scotland 'take complete advantage of the 1707 Act of Union by playing its full part in the newly united political entity of Britain' (Crawford 1992: 18), entering enthusiastically into new marketplaces, economic networks, and intellectual discourses.

Scott's project of collecting and editing Border ballads has been located within an international quest for national poetries during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, which placed a new value on the fragmentary relics of traditional, popular poetry or song:

Such traditional balladry became in effect the 'national song' of the peoples to whom it was attributed. This is a relatively clear process in the very differing national contexts of France, Germany, Spain, Finland or even the United States: the *Chanson de Roland*, the *Nibelungenlied*, the ballad of the *Cid*, the *Kalevala* and, in imitation, Longfellow's *Hiawatha*, were all advanced as expressions of the national spirit. (Dentith 2006: 11).

During the same period, the success of James Macpherson's publication of Ossian's *Fingal*, a cycle of heroic songs purportedly translated from an ancient Gaelic manuscript, testified to a comparable hunger for a British 'national epic' (Dentith 2006: 23-5; Kelly 2010: 24-9). In response, Scott used his own passion for ballad collecting to re-define the troubled Borders region as the wellspring of a 'National Muse' for an emerging Great Britain (Scott 1902: vol.1, 7).

In a later 'Introductory Essay on Popular Poetry' (1830), Scott positioned his own researches in relation to the fashionable intellectual ferment surrounding the 'Homeric Controversy', rooted in historicist

ing Great Britain. From this perspective, Walter Scott still (in Caroline McCracken-Flesher's phrase) 'stands central to the cultural work that is Scotland' (2005: 4), but rather than figuring as the authorial fixer of a fantasy of romantic nationhood he becomes the maker of a multi-authored Scotland that 'stands always in formation' (2005: 164). Comparably, Herbert Tucker locates Scott's early poetic output (particularly *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*, 1805) as 'uniquely close to the means of balladry's dissemination', meaning that the professional, literary author nonetheless retains a deep sense of the 'performance values' associated with traditional narrative and song (2008: 122). Scott, Tucker argues, experiments with new modes of poetic 'conviviality', soliciting a sympathetic hearing for his minstrel's song through the pleasures of 'vocal performance' (124-6). Such arguments begin to figure Scott as operating in a debatable land between oral and literary cultures, aware of his own implication in 'the act of inscriptive violence whereby orality yields to literacy' (126), yet also conscious of the transformative potential associated with the popular vocalisation of nation-shaping narratives, and fascinatedly ventriloquising such voices in his literary works. This version of Scott has affinities with Tamlane himself, shape-shifting and subtle, an inhabitant of multiple worlds, cannily negotiating between traditional Borders orality and the new print marketplaces of an emergent Great Britain. Little wonder that McCracken-Flesher describes Scott, and his works, as a potent 'site of contestation producing the nation today' (2005: 5). In this sense, the artists considered in this chapter are fitting heirs to Scott's enterprise, their works activating a series of Scott-ish collisions between traditional song and contemporary theatre practices to explore how Scottish, English, and British identities might be contested and transformed in a twenty-first century context.

The Strange Undoing of Prudencia Hart (2011)

David Greig's ballad-inspired play *The Strange Undoing of Prudencia Hart* (2011) begins with a vociferous wrangle about Walter Scott's status as poetic artificer and nation-builder. At an academic conference in the Scottish Borders, traditionalist scholar Prudencia is infuriated by postmodern arguments interpreting Scott's ballad collection

as 'a political act' with the aim creating a "Scottish" identity every bit as artificial as Lady Gaga's' (2011: 12). This violent disagreement between Prudencia and her irreverent colleague is tellingly entangled with the emotive appeal of nation (it's his use of air quotes around the word 'Scottish' which finally makes her long to 'punch him in the throat') (12). But Greig's acknowledgement of Scott's appropriation of traditional songs in order to endorse a particular, conservative brand of poetic nationalism sets the tone for the drama's playful exploration of a contemporary Scotland in which global (and globalized) celebrity culture offers a more familiar set of icons than the old ballads of the Borders, and in which inherited pieties of nation and/or union have given way to a significantly more complex range of identities and debates. Meanwhile, the locations and performance practices associated with ballad singing are re-appropriated to facilitate audiences' 'social engagement' (Harvie 2013: 5), with spectators immersed in a pub-like setting where they're invited to eat, drink, make a noise, and get personally involved in the theatrical re-telling of a transformative tale.

The play's closing section is structured around a dramatic revision of the ballad of Tamlane, in which the swaggering, Scott-bashing Colin Syme must rescue Prudencia from the clutches of a folk-loving devil, an epic battle fought out in a snowy ASDA car park. In the build-up to this sequence, Colin's unlikely heroism is encoded through a plethora of pop-culture signifiers. He is compared to 'Jay-Z' and 'Darth Vader' (2011: 71), 'Ronaldo', 'Elvis' (2011: 72) 'Hercules', 'Finn Macchull', 'Samuel L. Jackson', 'Jackie Chan' and 'a beer-bellied ninja', his manhood cradled in 'proud Calvin Kleins', his insides warmed by a mixture of 'Jack Daniels and Diet Coke' (2011: 74). This ramshackle conglomeration of heroic types and tropes, promiscuously borrowed from a range of international cultures (often by way of Hollywood or multinational corporations), is wrapped up in a musical theme that owes less to the Borders than to the football terraces. As the play's narrating ensemble explain, 'The Ballad of Co-Lin' is 'not exactly a ballad it's mair a / Football chant to the tune of "Guantanamera"' (2011: 71), a Cuban song regularly sung by UK football fans. Perhaps tellingly, this is the first moment at which the play's audiences are explicitly invited to lend their own voices to the developing narrative (2011: 71).

As well as being uproarious good fun, this shared music-making has a political value. In his 2007 essay 'rough theatre', Greig argues that:

The very form of theatre is all about people coming together in a local physical space—one of the few remaining public spaces—and experiencing something together. [...] So even before a word has been spoken on stage, the theatre has already offered a grain of resistance to the frictionless movement of capital. It cannot efface its humanity. It cannot erode its locality (Greig 2007: 219).

This analysis chimes strongly with Mairi McFadyen's recent writings on the effect (and affect) of live ballad performance, in which she fuses insights from ethnomusicology and phenomenology in order to argue that the 'potential power of the song experience depends on the physical presence of the members of a group and involves their collective participative energies' (2013: 160). For Greig, the co-creation and co-creation demanded by the performance event is part of the political radicalism offered by live theatre, potentially igniting new shared energies among each unique, collectively imagining, audience. This is, in Dan Rebellato's phrase, 'political theatre for a globalising world' (2002: xxi), stressing the ineradicable localism of live performance, and placing a positive value on what might be termed 'particularity in general' (2016: 17). Since 2011, *The Strange Undoing of Prudencia Hart* has toured not only across Scotland, England, and Ireland, but also to the United States, Canada, Brazil, Australia and New Zealand, stressing the possibility that the kinds of temporary, convivial communities evoked by the play's unorthodox approximations of traditional ballad performance might be activated in a cosmopolitan range of locales and contexts. Greig's ballad-inspired dramaturgy is self-consciously subversive of the kinds of nation-building myths associated with nineteenth-century ballad collecting, while being unashamedly idealist in its invitation to each unique audience to experience the pleasures (and, perhaps, radical potentials) of singing, joking, and imagining together. As Prudencia gradually comes to realize (Greig 2011: 65-7), fantastical ballads are not just literary/historical artefacts, but unpredictable and shape-shifting imaginative territories, in which personal and collective identities can be subverted, challenged and potentially transformed (Harrop 2017).

Previously, audiences have listened to traditional ballads and songs performed by the company (2011: 3, 43), the show's dramaturgy operating upon the assumption that present-day theatregoers aren't confident participants in traditional music-making. Still, the cheeky modernity of 'The Ballad of Co-Lin' doesn't stop it from functioning in some of the same ways as a traditional ballad, using collective vocalisation to punctuate and structure an emerging supernatural story, and seducing the play's co-present audience into becoming the collective co-creators of an extravagantly fantastic narrative. Simultaneously, Greig's choice of melody re-positions the magical transformations of Tamlane within a contemporary Scotland which is itself shaped by an ongoing interplay between local and global identities. In this way, participants in the drama find themselves vocally engaged in creating a shared imaginative territory which is (as David Pattie argues), like contemporary Scotland itself, 'an infinitely variable landscape', potentially containing 'an infinity of experiences' (2016: 30).

The drama's cosmopolitan sensibilities (see Rebellato 2009: 71-84) are evident too, in the song which Prudencia chooses to sing at the play's close. We first encounter the play's protagonist as a ballad-scholar who is prudishly unwilling to risk her own sense of self by singing but transformed as a result of her supernatural adventures, she finally approaches the mic in the play's closing moments. Greig's stage directions state that 'The song she sings is full of yearning and loss, the song she sings is a love song' (2011: 83), and yet her chosen tune is not a ballad in the conventional sense. Instead, Greig's heroine, who has formerly fumed at Colin for the crassness of his Kylie Minogue ringtone (21-2), sings the international commercial pop hit (possessed of an infernally catchy chorus) 'I Can't Get You Out Of My Head' (83). This is an important moment for the play's exploration of the ballad form, and its potential efficacy within contemporary contexts. For Greig, it appears that a ballad is not defined by its historical provenance, nor by meticulous antiquarian editing, but by the fact that it's a song which ordinary people can sing together, in a collective voicing expressive of the triumphs and travails of shared experience. While Scott, in the *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*, turns songs into literary texts, Greig's play turns pop songs into ballads, explicitly inviting spectators to become participants in his play's inclusive music-making.

The Bloody Great Border Ballad Project (2013)

The Strange Undoing of Prudencia Hart was only the first of a series of high-profile theatre projects, during the run-up to the Scottish Independence Referendum, to return to traditional ballads as a medium for exploring changing identities within a post-devolution Great Britain. In particular, theatre-makers seem to have been attracted to the popular performance dynamics associated with the traditional ballad as a means of encouraging active, social interactions between different artists, between performers and audiences, and between audience members. *The Bloody Great Border Ballad Project* was one such project, developed by an English arts organization (the Newcastle-based Northern Stage) but created and performed in Scotland (at the Edinburgh Fringe in 2013). Speaking at the opening of Northern Stage's residency at St. Stephen's, the company's Edinburgh-born artistic director Lorne Campbell spoke of the city's festival as a place for audiences and artists 'of every race, colour and creed [...] to meet, to barter themselves, to change and be changed', celebrating this as 'a space in which we are invited to imagine and experience ourselves in new liberating and terrifying ways' (Campbell 2013). *The Bloody Great Border Ballad Project* responded to this challenge by inviting both artists and audiences to participate in the creation of a new ballad, giving voice to a wide range of views surrounding questions of national identity, and to a mood of mixed anxiety and anticipation in relation to the 2014 Referendum.

At each performance, two of a core company of six artists (Kieran Hurley, Chris Thorpe, Cora Bissett, Alex Kelly, Lucy Ellinson and Daniel Bye) would share their own new 'ballads'. Few of these were literally ballads—the artists' offerings including songs, stories, a politically-inflected variant upon the Japanese game *Hyakumonogatari Kaidankai* ('Gathering of One Hundred Supernatural Tales'), and something that resembled an astrophysics lecture (Love 2013)—though all articulated distinctive points of view on themes of identity, division, and independence. This was followed by a performance from one of a series of guest artists, each of whom was invited to add their own verse to a new ballad, which grew and evolved incrementally over the course of Northern Stage's Edinburgh residency. This collectively-authored ballad began with a verse written by Aly Macrae (musician, singer, actor,

and stalwart of multiple revivals of *The Strange Undoing of Prudencia Hart*), set in the near future. Macrae's narrative imagines a baby, born on the same night that Scotland declares its independence from the United Kingdom, discovered floating in a basket down the river Tweed (which has historically acted as an English/Scottish borderline). This initial offering also included a chorus which was sung before and after each new verse, incorporating the traditional ballad device of a repeating line: 'Let's see what the foundling does now' (Part 1).

From this initial scenario, each subsequent contributor added a chapter to the adventurous life of this waterborne infant, tracking her development from artist to activist, from fugitive to figurehead, as mother and grandmother, through transformations even more various than Tamlane's. The sequential authoring and sharing of these successive verses meant that each development was a surprise, each new contributing voice potentially taking the foundling's story somewhere unprecedented, within a framework that explicitly invited such imaginative flexibility. Company member Kieran Hurley recalls that:

[...] the rehearsals in themselves were like a céilidh ... everyone had their bit that they did and we knew the bit that the community had brought to the table, and then we'd welcome in a new guest into the 'living room' where our céilidh was happening and everyone would hush and turn to the new guest because the new guest was going to do a 'turn'. (Hutton 2013).

Hurley's comparison between the inclusive dramaturgy of *The Bloody Great Border Ballad Project* and the traditional céilidh (an informal social gathering, usually including a combination of music, singing, and storytelling) stresses the fact that not only does each new voice have the potential to transform the song being sung, but that each also potentially transforms the community of performers they become part of. As a result, the song/story of the foundling becomes a catalyst for the creation of a new community of balladeers, a group of collaborating artists patching together an imagined future from whatever materials come to hand.

The story of the foundling begins in the geopolitical context of a split between Scotland and England, but soon begins to engage with a much wider range of potential identities, not only for the

Jemma McDonnell similarly cautions that: 'Bricks and stone, fences and barbed wire, borders are erected all over the world' (Part 9). 'Free! / *Is she Fuck*: sing Ross Sutherland's pissed immigration thugs, parodying the optimism of the ballad-in-progress' own chorus as they clamp down on refugees from an England swamped by rising sea-levels, and attempt to violently silence the foundling's protests. Yet Sutherland's verse also ends on a note of (muted) hope, with subversive words ('Fuck England. Fuck Scotland.!) filtering through walls (Part 11). As McFadyen (adapting the theories of Jean-Luc Nancy) argues, the aural experience of ballad singing/listening acts to dissolve boundaries between co-present individuals: 'to hear a sound is to share or actually *participate* in the source of that sound' (2013: 161). So it's entirely fitting that the verses of *the Bloody Great Border Ballad Project* frequently critique and subvert fixed borders and binaries. As Andy Field's verse concludes, love (like McFadyen's account of participating in traditional song):

is not knowing if you are
one thing
Or two
things
Or
everything. (Part 10)

The new ballad's foundling, floating (Moses-like) in her basket, is the prophet of a future which is unstable, incoherent, potentially terrifying, but also insistently plural and hopeful. And she is born out of the creative activities of an oral/aural community (however temporary) which actively seeks to transcend barriers of associated with national identity or political affiliation, resulting in the opening up of an expansive, inclusive imaginative space which 'is not defined by [...] material walls' (McFadyen 2013: 161).

In this way, *The Bloody Great Border Ballad Project* constitutes an idealistic gesture towards a future envisaged as an ongoing act of collective creation, rooted in collaborative imagining. Not only the multi-authored ballad, but also the context(s) of its creation, activate a utopian sense that positive change might emerge out of a process of convivial exchange. The performance itself is low-tech, with the ballad's chorus hand-written and shared via the appealingly outdated technology of

baby in the basket, but also for the nations she floats between. Alan McKendrick's contribution envisages the infant receiving her early education in a Scottish school run 'by pro-European cosmopolitanism', acquiring linguistic skills in German and Danish as well as English (Part 1), while Yusra Warsama's verse reminds the foundling that 'your first bones rest patiently in the lands of Abyssinia' (Part 5). Later, in the context of environmental change and an abandonment of the Central Belt, Jenna Watt's protagonist will pass through 'the bustling international part of John O Groats', en route to a new constellation of northern European powers: 'Orkney, Shetland, the Faroe Islands, Norway, Iceland, Svalbard / or Newcastle' (Part 8). Andy Field contributes a police WANTED notice for the woman whose 'rootlessness / Could unshackle continents' (Part 10), and one of the recurring preoccupations of this self-consciously shape-shifting ballad is the possibility that a future Scotland might re-locate itself, turning away from its southern border in order to become a northern European nation among its historic, seafaring neighbours, like the ballad's protagonist exploring 'all the world will allow' (Part 1). But with this international perspective comes anxiety, too. Will an English-bred girl be a 'mixed-race' interloper in a new Scotland (Part 4)? Will the foundling's grandchild speak with 'that strange American accent all the young people share', a globalized 'British yankee chat' that marks the effective end of all local identities (Part 13)? The ballad offers no firm or fixed answers. Instead, it gives impassioned, inclusive voice to a cross-section of the insistent (and perhaps unanswerable) questions which fuelled pre-Referendum debates both in Scotland, and beyond.

Another recurring theme in *The Bloody Great Border Ballad Project's* collective creation is a resistance to man-made, exclusionary borders-lines. The heroine of Selma Dimitrijević's verse passionately rejects the Scotland/England binary presented to her, refusing to decide between 'her countries' (Part 6). However, Warsama warns the growing young woman that:

The Berlin Wall sits and fits sweetly in Palestine, also dwelling elsewhere and this land, you live, forming barriers that are now made to divide cousins, borders that form hard backs and keep people up against a wall. (Part 5)

its audiences in a gig-like atmosphere, in which the acting company are also the show's live band, and in which theatregoers' vocal participation is repeatedly invited. As Hurley assures potential audiences in a trailer for the show, 'singing along is warmly welcomed' (National Theatre of Scotland 2014). Drawing on the term used by John McGrath to describe the ground-breaking, folk-fuelled agitprop of *The Cheviot, the Stag, and the Black Black Oil* (7:84 Scotland, 1973), Hurley describes this work as a 'ceilidh-play' (2014: 309), and writes in his introductory note to the play's published text that the audience is 'a vital part of the event', 'sharing the same space' as the show's performers in the inclusive 'spirit of a ceilidh' (2014: 309). Hurley's discussion of the politics of such aesthetic choices also echoes key elements of Greig's 'rough theatre' essay, rooted in a belief that 'getting together as a polity, being together as a group of people, is always in itself a really important political response to the way the world is' (Hutton 2013).

Rantín begins with the band setting up the space, chatting with their gathering audience, encouraging drinks-buying, and introducing themselves. They explain that the show consists of a 'collection of fragments', with each song or story being 'like a turn, or a track in a set list at a gig' (Hurley 2014: 312), a preamble which helpfully translates the traditional ceilidh 'turn' in terms accessible to a contemporary theatre/gig audience. They play a version of 'MacPherson's Rant', a traditional song most often performed with lyrics by Robert Burns, here re-written by Drew Wright and Gav Prentice in order to set the defiant music-making of the song's protagonist against a backdrop of recent Scottish losses; coal mining, the steel industry, and ship building are all name-checked, casualties of a modern globalized economy (311). This opening sets the tone for a show in which familiar songs are repeatedly re-purposed to address the complex, multiple identities which make up contemporary Scotland, a nation whose story (as Drew explains in a line which explicitly nods to *The Cheviot, the Stag, and the Black Black Oil*) 'has multiple beginnings, an abundance of middles, and no clear end' (312). The show satirizes de-politicized readings of traditional music, commenting that the Gaelic lament 'Criogal Cridhe sounds lovely 'if you imagine it's all about hills' (328), while gleefully incorporating a version of the twentieth-century novelty song 'Donald Where's Your Troosers' performed in defiance of US billionaire Donald

the overhead projector (the resulting vibe halfway between an open-mic pub night and a primary school assembly). Guest balladeers take centre-stage diffidently, stepping back to stand alongside others as they sing the ballad's chorus. Some introduce their own collaborators, like Catherine Bennett (Bryony Kimmings) whose verse was composed with the help of two nine year olds, their recorded comments (including a shared enthusiasm for flying cars) punctuating her performance (Part 4). This laid-back aesthetic also acted as an invitation to wider participation, with audience members singing along, tapping feet and swaying in time to the music. Audiences were additionally invited to engage in communication with others who have been/will be in the same space, listening to a song recorded by their forerunners, and then recording their own musical offering for the strangers who would later be taking part in creating the same emergent story (Love 2013). The combination of silliness, care, and generosity evident in this device is characteristic of *The Bloody Great Border Ballad Project*, a work which celebrated shared anxieties, uncertainties, and fantasies, rather than insisting on singular answers and exclusive national identities, and which used the model of the traditional Borders ballad in order to facilitate a rich, various and generous conversation between artists and spectators belonging to any political/national identity, and those identifying with none. For the makers of *The Bloody Great Border Ballad Project*, traditional practices of singing (and making songs) together offered a means of achieving small-scale social interactions which (in line with 'the social turn' as defined by Harvie) 'do not propose to save the world', but which potentially 'model shared participation, engagement, community, and responsibility-taking' (2013: 40) in self-deprecating, inclusive and good-humoured ways.

Rantín (2013)

This deliberate mood of laid-back conviviality was central to another project developed by one of the show's core company members, Kieran Hurley. Like both *The Bloody Great Border Ballad Project* and *The Strange Undoing of Prudencia Hart*, *Rantín* (created by Hurley, together with Liam Hurley, Gav Prentice, Julia Taudevin and Drew Wright, in collaboration with the National Theatre of Scotland, in 2013) immers-

'two and a half thousand miles away in Ramallah', she now finds herself riding on a number 61 bus through drizzly Clydebank (Hurley 2014: 323), alienated by the misery and isolation of her fellow travellers, finding partial refuge in music (323). From the privacy of her headphones, Miriam wonders what would happen if she were to play her music out loud to her fellow passengers:

What if they all heard this music, with their heavy duty faces? Maybe all the bus would sing, along? [...] All looking somewhere else. How strange. All wishing the other wasn't here. None of us with more belongings than the next one. Each of us just here. What if we all decided to be here? To look at each other, just here. (344-45)

For Miriam, music represents not only a way of establishing at-home-ness in a strange, grey country, but also a possible means of engendering a sense of co-presence between her uncommunicative fellow passengers. In conscious defiance of local customs, Miriam 'turns the volume right up loud' so that 'noise blares from her open headphones':

The woman opposite shoots her a sharp, angry look, affronted. But this time Miriam catches her eye, and holds it. [...] bemused, surprised, disgruntled faces turn to her, and with a glint in her eyes, she meets them. And as the bus trundles along through this cold strange place a warm smile glows across her cheeks. (345)

Miriam's music becomes a catalyst for a heightened sense of shared awareness between travellers, provoking moments of contact each of which has the potential to spark new conversations, new relationships, new ways of experiencing a mundane bus ride on a grey Scottish morning. Miriam's sharing of her music is a disruptive act, but also one which might represent what McFadyen calls 'the pathway to a kind of interpersonal social communion' (2013: 161) within a contemporary Scotland whose inhabitants' aural heritages extend far beyond the plaintive strains of (to many, incomprehensible) local laments.

Towards the end of the drama, *Rantini's* company offer several definitions of the show's title:

Rant: verb; to frolic, romp, revel [...] Noun; a merrymaking, rough frolic, a lively song of joy [...] Rant: verb; to sew a seam across

Trump's attempts to build a luxury golf course in Aberdeenshire—the song's new refrain (with which the audience are encouraged to sing along) proclaims: 'Donald you're a loser!' (320-21). In this way, *Rantini* reclaims popular traditions of collective song as a potential site for political engagement, and for generating a mood of inclusive solidarity (though not necessarily unanimity or uniformity), within a rapidly changing Scotland.

In one of the many stories dramatized within *Rantini*, 'Asjad, eight years old, runs through Govanhill in Glasgow, singing a song they learned at school today' (319). Asjad is especially delighted that he now knows 'the real version, like from the olden days', the child's artless phrasing evoking romantic notions of Scottish identity which are quickly punctured when the audience realizes that the song he has learned is 'Ah'm No Hairy Mary Ah'm Yer Maw', a working-class playground refrain familiar to generations of Glasgow kids (*Rantini's* stage directions helpfully note that this is sung to the same tune as 'You Cannae Shove Your Grannie Off The Bus'). And yet, the magic that Asjad discovers in his newly-learned song is none the less potent for subverting conventionally sentimental visions of Scottish traditional music:

So now he runs, skipping and hopping past the fruit stalls, the halal butchers, the Irish pubs, away from his mum shouting after him in Urdu, past the bookies, past the old blue rinse ladies, past the Romani kids playing football [...] past all this, schoolbag swinging, at the top of his voice singing. (319)

Asjad's belted-out song may lack the hazy romance of a half-understood Gaelic lament, but its vigour and demotic inclusivity acts as a potent aural thread within *Rantini's* multiple narratives, a vernacular song potentially binding together the diverse inhabitants of today's globalized Glasgow. Neither Asjad's newly-learned 'olden days' song nor 'Donald Where's Your Troosers' may be a ballad in the strict sense, but within *Rantini* both function like ballads, appealing to an audience's shared aural memories, evoking a potent mix of laughter, nostalgia, and political discontent, and inviting collective vocalisation.

The kinds of musically-based community experience evoked in Asjad's narrative is more overtly addressed in the story of Miriam. Born

TRADITIONAL SONG AND THE SOCIAL TURN: VOICING CHANGING NATIONS

It's important not to overstate the radicalism, or the potential efficacy, of such theatre practices. As Helen Freshwater observes in *Theatre and Audience*, audience activity does not automatically equate to political transformation: 'participation does not necessarily amount to empowerment' (2009: 62). Claire Bishop similarly cautions that 'models of democracy in art do not have an intrinsic relationship to models of democracy in society' (2012: 279). However, all three performances explored here were all created during, and in response to, a period characterized by a resurgence of faith in the possibility that democratic participation might fundamentally re-make both Scotland, and Great Britain. Even though the Referendum of September 2014 returned a 'No' vote, and formal Scottish independence (the outcome explicitly sought by some, though not all, of the artists discussed in this chapter) remains unachieved, the energies and aspirations of the pre-Referendum years inspired a mood of possibility, and of creatively vocal debate, both among the Scottish electorate, and beyond (Greig 2013). As Bissell and Overend, drawing on Nicolas Bourriaud's notion of 'relational aesthetics' (2002: 43, 112), argue: 'the performances of the Referendum had a particular value in creating autonomous relational spaces for participants to rehearse and formulate their individual politics' (2015: 250).

For all of the works under discussion, the participatory performance dynamics associated with traditional practices of popular song, together with the numinous territories and fantastical transformations evoked in the supernatural ballads of Scotland and England's borders, inspired a range of innovative strategies aimed at promoting audiences' active, imaginative, and vocal engagement with issues surrounding nation, identity, and the rapidly changing communities of contemporary Great Britain. Many of the strategies employed by the makers of *The Strange Undoing of Prudencia Hart*, *The Bloody Great Border Ballad Project*, and *Rantlin* have their roots in Scottish traditions of the socially-engaged 'ceilidh-play', which frequently employed traditional song (along with storytelling, joke-telling, dancing, drinking) in order to critique the political or economic status quo within local

roughly, to darn coarsely, to join, to attempt to reconcile statements which do not tally. (Hurley 2014: 351)

Rantlin embodies all these senses of the term, at once 'a noisy mirth, a celebration' (353), and a stitching together of traditional and contemporary songs to present an aural snapshot of the lives and aspirations of people living in Scotland today. In a 2013 interview with Dan Hutton, Hurley described the drama as being 'about trying to create a botched, incomplete, fragmented patchwork of a nation and the impossibility of there being a single idea of what nationhood is' (Hutton 2013). The play's structure gives (disillusioned, disgruntled, occasionally joyous) voice to a diverse array of speakers and singers, and includes its audience in the unfolding narratives through its irreverent re-making of traditional ballads and songs. *Rantlin's* ceilidh-inspired dramaturgy is deliberately designed to promote the 'integration of accessible social elements' which (in another of the play's story-strands) high-tech 'connectivity' schemes signally fail to deliver (Hurley 2014: 240). The show celebrates the idea that a boy running singing through the streets of Glasgow, startled bus travellers sharing a moment of aural connection, or a group of curious theatre-goers gathered The Arches, drinking pints while watching a show packed with old songs (343), can become emblematic of a new kind of national community, within in which multiple musics and heritages mingle and interact, both reflective of, and actively shaping, a new Scotland, a land both globally connected and determinedly local in its music-making. If Scott's *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* authoritatively edited and fixed the traditional songs it collected, then *Rantlin* (by contrast) offers the vision of national identity as a flexible, negotiable 'set list' of songs (312), permanently and fluidly developing as the result of new experiences, and new encounters. Here, perhaps, Scotland itself takes on Tamlane-ish qualities, changing its shape and nature each time the songs of tradition are re-written, re-purposed and re-sung by new combinations of local and global voices. And here again, contemporary artists engaged with issues of nation, identity address these urgent debates using dramaturgical and musical forms which can be identified as belonging to a 'social turn', explicitly inciting performers and audience members 'to interact socially with each other' (Harvie 2013: 5).

community settings (Reid 2013: 10–13). This heritage undoubtedly offered a valuable resource for theatre-makers engaging with the politics and potentials of the pre-Referendum years, but reading their works in terms of a more recent ‘social turn’ also allows such performances to be located within a broader, international movement in the contemporary arts. Rather than embracing old-style agitprop didacticism (Neilson 2013: x), the new works discussed in this chapter developed a variety of laid-back, convivial, and self-deprecating dramaturgies, repeatedly inviting spectators/participants to engage in creating ‘everyday micro-utopias’ (Bourriaud 2002: 31) within which a plurality of views and voices might be encountered, and playfully explored.

All three of the theatrical works examined here privileged small-scale, local imaginings, and multi-vocal re-negotiations of collective and individual identities, over official national mythologies. Their re-appropriations of traditional songs reflected and (in some cases) aspired to shape new political realities, engaging with a variety of global and local possibilities for the changing nations of Great Britain. The plays and performances discussed here did not aim to produce consensus, but rather to contribute to and extend conversations and debates which were already taking place across Scotland and Great Britain, using ballads and popular song traditions to endorse if not critical dissent (see Harvie 2013: 8–10), then at least a raucous polyvocality, while retaining the conviviality associated with informal practices of song-sharing. For all three, traditional ballads and songs became a ‘social interstice’, within which ‘new “life possibilities” might be discovered (Bourriaud 2002: 45). As this chapter has contended, they used the ‘co-existential act’ (McFadyen 2013: 154) of re-voicing old songs to heighten audiences’ awareness of their own imaginative and vocal potency in relation to wider narratives of nation, place, and belonging. *The Strange Undoing of Prudencia Hart*, *The Bloody Great Border Ballad Project*, and *Rantín* all invited their audiences to engage with an expansive, fluid, and playful sense of what nation and identity might mean in a twenty-first-century global context, re-making and re-performing of old songs to give collective, disunited voice to potentially radical new imaginings of community, locality, and nation.

BRIAN FRIEL: THE SHAMAN, THE ARTIST AND THE TRICKSTER IN THE NORTHERN IRELAND OF THE TROUBLES

María Gaviña Costero
Universitat de València

Brian Friel (1929–2015) can be considered Ireland’s leading playwright of the second half of the twentieth century. His writing career began with his short stories, which he gave up after the 1966 collection, and represent the seeds of much of his later drama production. Friel’s use of archetypal characters can be traced back to some of his short stories and is a constant in his plays. For example, in ‘The Diviner’ (1962) Friel makes use, for the first time, of a shaman figure to represent the artist and portrays a man with an uncanny power to uncover what is hidden in the deep waters of a lake—the main archetype of the unconscious. This is a powerful metaphor for the writer, whose mission is to reveal the inner soul of human beings, to discover the hidden truth in human exchanges. Through this extremely prosaic man, ‘reeking of whiskey’ (Friel 1982: 28), we get a glimpse of the true nature of the lives of a community, despite the façade of respectability strenuously built to protect them from the bitter truth. More importantly, he also reveals the numinous, the mysterious. The artist is therefore someone partaking in the divine even though this does not imply a denial of his mundane humanity. Bertha and Morse point out the importance of the shaman in Irish culture ever since the ancient Gaelic civilisation: