

SCOTTISH CULTURAL REVITALISATION

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The term 'culture' is an extremely broad one, and can include almost all aspects of daily life. In this presentation, my focus will be quite narrow. I shall look at certain institutions and media of particular importance which support cultural creativity and the transmission and presentation of that cultural creativity. I shall not be looking at recent cultural output itself, although in terms of cultural activity and the quality of that output, there is evidence of revitalisation. This is partly due to the limited time I have available. It is also partly due to a lack of any particular qualifications. I do have considerable expertise in relation to Scottish Gaelic literature and culture, but only strong opinions about other aspects of Scotland's culture, and I do not think that I need to bore you with those! Even if I had the broad expertise to comment on all aspects of Scottish culture, I would still hesitate to say too much, as there is no easy way of measuring the vitality of any culture, and any conclusions are therefore likely to be heavily value-laden and highly subjective.

I think that it is enough evidence to say that there is a basis for claiming that Scotland is enjoying something of a cultural revitalisation. Scottish writing, for example, seems to be in a pretty healthy state. Writers such as Alasdair Gray, Irving Welsh, James Kelman, AL Kennedy, Janice Galloway, Jackie Kay, Ali Smith, and Andrew O'Hagan have won considerable critical acclaim, and some, like Ian Rankin, through his 'Inspector Rebus' novels, Alexander McCall-Smith, through his 'No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency' series and other novels, and Ian Banks through his science fiction novels, have a huge international audience. While the Gaelic language is continuing to weaken, Gaelic writing is undergoing something of a renaissance. Scottish pop singers continue to win acclaim and international

audiences, and there is, as I shall discuss below, a remarkable renewal of interest in various forms of Scottish traditional music right now, with artists such as Capercaillie, Runrig and new talents such as Julie Fowlis and Kathleen MacInnes bringing Scottish music, and especially Gaelic music, to international audiences. While, as we shall see, Scottish film-making is in an uncertain period, a number of Scottish actors have become international superstars, including Ewan McGregor and the apparently ageless Sean Connery, and many recent big budget films, including *Rob Roy* and *Braveheart*, as well as British-made films such as *Trainspotting* and *The Last King of Scotland*, have been based on Scottish themes and stories and have won an international audience. There is much current activity in visual arts and performing arts which is encouraging. However, for the reasons I gave a moment ago, I shall not say any more about actual artistic activity.

As I have noted, my focus here will be more on the institutions and media which are supporting this activity. Of course, one of the most significant recent changes in Scottish life has been the creation of the Scottish Parliament and Scottish Government in 1999, to which very significant powers, including powers over major areas of Scotland's cultural life, were devolved by the United Kingdom, or UK, government in London. This devolution of power was itself both a manifestation and a result of a Scottish political revitalisation that has been going on for about thirty years, triggered by the failure in 1979 to gain devolved government and the strong resistance which emerged in Scotland to many of Mrs. Thatcher's policies in the 1980s. At various places in this presentation, and especially at the end, I would like to consider how devolution has contributed to any cultural revitalisation, and, in some cases, how integration in wider UK structures contributes to, or perhaps frustrates, that revitalisation.

'Public' Institutions: Universities, Galleries and Museums

The separate identity of Scotland's education system, and particularly of its universities, has often been considered to be a marker of and contributor to Scotland's distinct cultural identity. There are now fourteen universities in Scotland, and several other institutions of higher education. In terms of quality,

Edinburgh, Glasgow, Saint Andrews, and Aberdeen continually rank amongst the world's elite universities, suggesting considerable vitality. Scottish universities are distinct in many ways from those in England. For example, undergraduate degrees are generally four years in length, rather than three. In keeping with its democratic educational traditions which have historically sought to ensure that talented students of modest means can also succeed, Scotland has resisted the introduction of tuition fees; in England, by contrast, they may soon be as high as £9,000 per year.

However, like universities everywhere, Scottish universities face a number of challenges. In an increasingly competitive international market in higher education, there is the danger that disciplines with a Scottish focus may be marginalised as Scottish universities respond to the market. Also, although the devolved institutions both regulate and fund Scottish universities, each university's share of core funding, and most additional research funding, is generally based on assessments of research quality made by UK-wide bodies. There is a suspicion among some Scottish academics that such assessments may have a metropolitan bias, and that research relating to purely Scottish matters, such as Scotland's indigenous languages, literatures and cultures, may be undervalued. As with market pressures, this may result in a marginalisation of what is distinctively Scottish. Finally, the introduction of tuition fees in England may be creating a funding gap, and if Scotland, in line with its educational traditions, continues to resist such fees, a 'brain drain' could result, with talented academics moving to England.

One significant recent positive development, though, is the creation of a new University of the Highlands and Islands, the UHI, of which the Skye-based Gaelic college, Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, is a part. Begun in the 1990s, it is expected that the UHI will get full university status this year. The Highlands and Islands of Scotland have never had a university, and many generations of Highland students have had to go elsewhere for a university education. The UHI will be a very important part of the cultural and intellectual revitalisation of the north of Scotland.

Scotland's status as a nation within the United Kingdom means that it benefits from a number of 'national' cultural institutions, all of which provide Scotland with a remarkable cultural infrastructure of a sort seldom enjoyed by sub-state regions. The National Library of Scotland, in Edinburgh, is a good example. It was given national library status under the British Copyright Act of 1710, meaning

that it, along with only four other libraries in Britain and Ireland, has the legal right to receive a copy of every book published in the United Kingdom. It holds about seven million books, about 14 million printed items, and about two million maps, and is obviously of great and continuing cultural and intellectual importance.

The Museum of Scotland, one of the National Museums of Scotland, was opened in 1998 in a striking new building in Edinburgh's Old Town. In 2004, the National Gallery of Scotland and its neighbour the Royal Scottish Academy Building were significantly remodelled and given an underground link, another major architectural project.

Mass Media: Radio and Television

Like most places in the twenty-first century, new technology has ensured that people in Scotland have a great deal of choice about what they watch and listen to. However, older media, especially television, still have a huge cultural impact. To what extent, though, do television and other modern communications media make a specifically Scottish contribution to Scotland's cultural and intellectual life? Here, the picture is more mixed.

The British Broadcasting Corporation, the 'BBC', plays a central role in the provision of Scottish-based television and radio programming and, indeed, new media output. The BBC is specifically required to represent the UK's nations, which it seeks to do through BBC Scotland, a separate but constituent division of the BBC. BBC Scotland is based at a newly-built, state-of-the-art broadcasting facility in Glasgow, yet another architectural project of major importance. However, BBC Scotland does not operate a separate Scottish BBC channel. Rather, it provides some programming which is broadcast to Scottish audiences on the main UK-wide BBC television channels, BBC One and BBC Two. Most of the programming on these two channels, though, comes from other parts of the UK for a UK-wide audience. In addition to providing news and current affairs programming which focus largely on Scottish matters, there is also some programming which focuses on various aspects of Scottish culture, and a small amount of Gaelic-language programming. I shall return to Gaelic television in a moment. Only one of the other three major UK television channels has a Scottish operation, STV, which is part of

the UK ITV network. As with the BBC channels, however, most of the programme content on STV is UK-wide programming from ITV.

With regard to radio, the BBC radio service in Scotland, Radio Scotland, comes closer to being a proper Scottish radio station. It broadcasts from 6:00 a.m. until 1:00 a.m., and unlike BBC television, all Radio Scotland programming originates in Scotland and is for a Scottish audience. There is also a BBC Gaelic language radio service, Radio nan Gàidheal, which broadcasts about 92 hours per week of Gaelic programming, a very impressive amount for a relatively small linguistic minority.

In spite of the Scottish content on the two BBC channels and on STV, there is frequent criticism, especially from Scottish nationalists, about the perceived lack of sufficient Scottish content on television. There has been a long-standing demand for a Scottish dinner-time news, in which Scottish-based journalists cover not only Scottish, but also UK-wide and international news, and in that way, bringing a Scottish perspective to all news stories. In its 2007 election campaign for the Scottish Parliament, the Scottish National Party (SNP) made the claim that 'Scotland needs a dedicated news service and more quality programming made in Scotland', and that spending by the BBC on programming making in Scotland does not match the amount of revenue raised from license fee payers in Scotland, further stimulating a 'brain drain' of talented Scottish broadcasting professionals to England.

When the SNP came to power in 2007, they launched a Scottish Broadcasting Commission to investigate the current state of television production and broadcasting in Scotland and to identify ways of advancing the industry. One of its key recommendations was the creation of a new Scottish Network, a recommendation that was given all-party support in the Scottish Parliament. Like the SNP, the Commission noted a relative under-expenditure on programme-making in Scotland. The BBC has since acknowledged that under-expenditure in Scotland is a problem, and said that it would address this. The situation of radio and television broadcasting in Scotland is, however, one that the Scottish Parliament has no power to change, as broadcasting is a policy area that is, under Scottish devolution, reserved to the UK government alone. There is no guarantee, then, that in spite of the commission's report, much will change.

A major recent positive development, though, is the creation in 2008 of a

new Gaelic-language digital television service, BBC ALBA. It broadcasts about six and a half hours per day, in the late afternoons and evenings. Until now, it has only been available to viewers with a satellite dish, who are a minority. In December, 2010, however, it was decided that BBC ALBA will be available to virtually all viewers in Scotland this year, a major cultural development. Through the use of subtitles, it attracts a much wider audience than simply the 95,000 people in Scotland who can speak or at least understand Gaelic, and this shows that there is an audience for distinctive Scottish programming made in Scotland and with a Scottish perspective.

Arts and Literary Festivals, Performing Arts

Scotland has a varied and quite vibrant network of arts and literary festivals. In recent years, the numbers and size of these festivals has generally been growing. Whether this is a sign of 'revitalisation' or simply continuing vitality is not important; the point is that Scotland's festival scene is generally healthy. The Edinburgh Festival, which is in fact made up of several festivals, is a good example. The Edinburgh Festival Fringe, one of these festivals, is now the world's largest arts festival. Another of the festivals, the Edinburgh International Book Festival, has also grown in recent years to become the largest in the world. While it attracts many of the greatest contemporary writers from around the world, it also has provided a valuable platform for Scottish writers.

The healthy state of book culture in Scotland right now is also evident in the growth of other literary festivals in other parts of Scotland, such as the Word Festival, founded in Aberdeen in 1999, the 'AyeWrite!' Festival, founded in Glasgow in 2005, and several excellent local literary festivals which have recently appeared in small towns in relatively remote parts of Scotland, including the Ullapool Book Festival, in the west Highlands, the Islands Book Festival, in the Outer Hebrides, the Wigtown Book Festival, and the Borders Book Festival.

What about other performing arts? Scotland, again by virtue of its status as a nation within Britain, has several national performing arts companies, such as Scottish Opera, the Royal Scottish National Orchestra, and the Scottish Chamber Orchestra, as well as the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra. Scottish Ballet,

which is also very healthy in artistic terms, recently moved to a new, purpose-built venue in Glasgow, the Tramway International Arts Centre.

At the end of my presentation, I shall discuss briefly and summarise some of the contributions of the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Government to cultural policy in Scotland. However, in August, 2000, the Scottish Executive, as the Scottish Government was then called, published a National Cultural Strategy. One of the key proposals was the creation of a National Theatre company. In 2006, the National Theatre of Scotland was launched. It has no permanent home, but tours to venues all across Scotland, and abroad.

Finally, some reference should be made to the Scottish traditional music scene. Since 1892, Gaelic music, especially Gaelic song, has been celebrated at The Royal National Mod, held in different venues, mostly in the Highlands, each October. There has, however, been a remarkable rebirth of interest in Scottish traditional music in recent years, and in perhaps no other area has a sense of cultural revitalisation been more evident. This growth has been supported by the work of a number of grass-roots organisations which, with some government support, have provided instruction in traditional music to thousands of young Scottish musicians. Particularly important has been the Gaelic 'feisean' movement. The first 'feis', or music festival, was held in the Hebridean Island of Barra, in 1981. There are now 43 such festivals, mainly but not exclusively in the Highlands.

The recent creation of specialist secondary schools, such as the National Centre of Excellence in Traditional Music at Plockton High School in the west Highlands, has made a significant contribution not only to traditional music but also other performing arts. These schools are another product of the 2000 National Cultural Strategy. Since the 1990s, the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama, a conservatory training young people in the 'high' arts of classical music, drama and dance, has offered degrees in Scottish traditional music. This is another indicator of the growth in interest in and respect for such music.

Traditional music has also benefited from the creation of events at which it can be showcased. Examples include the Celtic Connections festival, founded in Glasgow in 1994, which has become one of the world's largest festivals of traditional and world music, and the Hebridean Celtic Music Festival, founded in 1996. The National Piping Centre was opened in Glasgow, also in 1996, and it is

now home to The Museum of Piping. Like other aspects of traditional music, interest in the bagpipe, Scotland's most recognisable traditional instrument, is enjoying a revitalisation.

Film, Sound Recording, and Publishing

In spite of the international popularity of Scottish actors Scottish stories, referred to at the beginning of my presentation, Scotland does not have a particularly strong domestic film industry. It has been almost thirty years, for example, since the Scottish director Bill Forsyth had international success with *Gregory's Girl* and *The Local Hero*. In 1997, Scottish Screen was formed out of the amalgamation of several public agencies to support various aspects of film and television production in Scotland, and it has now been subsumed by Creative Scotland, a new agency which I shall discuss at the end of the presentation. Scottish film faces many of the same challenges as the film industry of other nations, such as the lack of major domestic sources of investment and a small domestic market to support films of local interest. As the Scottish Parliament has no real control over tax policy, it is not possible to use tax incentives of the sort that are common in some states.

The sound recording industry faces similar challenges. Generally, most Scottish record labels have been small and, frequently, short-lived. Some small operations have, however, had some success by carving out a place in a niche market. The revival of interest in Scottish traditional music has created favourable conditions for labels focusing on that niche. Good examples include Greentrax Records, founded in 1986, which specialises in Scottish and Celtic music, and the Isle of Skye-based Macmeanmna, founded in 1989, which specialises in Gaelic music.

Publishing also faces similar challenges. There is, however, a fairly vibrant publishing sector in Scotland composed mainly of small operations focusing on niche markets. Edinburgh-based Birlinn Limited, founded in 1992, has had success by publishing books of Scottish interest, and it has performed a great service by reprinting rare and important Scottish books. While most Scottish university presses have disappeared, Edinburgh University Press retains international prominence. Another success story is Canongate Books. Originally a small but esteemed

operation focusing on books of Scottish interest, since 1994 it has published books of more general interest to an international readership. It has had, for example, considerable success with books such as *Life of Pi*, by the Canadian author Yann Martel.

Language and other Aspects of Intangible Cultural Heritage

The dominant language in Scotland is English, although it is usually spoken with distinctively Scottish accents, and is frequently sprinkled with words, expressions and phrases taken from Scots, one of Scotland's two indigenous minority languages.

Until very recently, both Scots and Gaelic have suffered from state policies of neglect and even hostility. Those with power and influence in Britain and in Scotland itself generally viewed both languages with contempt, and Scots is still thought by many simply to be a dialect, and a form of 'bad' English, rather than a language with a considerable and rich literature, both oral and written. Both languages have been largely excluded from the education system. It is not surprising, then, that numbers of speakers of Gaelic have declined over the centuries. From about 250,000 in 1891, there are now only about 58,000 Gaelic-speakers in Scotland. There has never been a question about Scots on the UK census, so we do not know how many people speak it, although it is believed that perhaps 1.5 million people use at least some Scots. In 2011, however, there will for the first time be a question on the UK census on Scots.

Over the last twenty-five years, policy towards Gaelic has been changing, and more recently, there has been some indication of a willingness to reconsider policy on Scots as well. Gaelic-medium primary education was first introduced in 1985, and there are now sixty primary schools in Scotland where such education is available, including two fully Gaelic schools, one in Glasgow and one in Inverness. In total, 2,256 pupils are enrolled in Gaelic-medium education in Scotland. As I discussed earlier, there is now a Gaelic television channel and a good radio service. In 1999, the UK signed up to the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, an important Council of Europe treaty which creates obligations in

respect of Gaelic and Scots. Most recently, the Scottish Parliament passed the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act in 2005. This law created a language board, Bòrd na Gàidhlig, and gave it the power to require public bodies to prepare Gaelic language plans. In these plans, bodies are required to state how they will provide services through the medium of Gaelic and otherwise support the language.

There have been no similar developments for Scots. However, the Scottish National Party government which came to power in the Scottish Parliament in 2007 has shown some interest in exploring how Scots can be better protected and promoted. In 2009 the Scottish Government published an *Audit of Current Scots Language Provision in Scotland*, and in 2010 a study on *Public Attitudes towards the Scots Language*. A working group on the Scots language established by the Scottish Government published its report on 30 November of last year. It is not clear how the Scottish Government will take this forward, but there does seem to be renewed interest in developing a policy on Scots, and it is likely that the outcome of the 2011 census will add to the momentum for action.

To conclude, while the demographic situation of Scotland's indigenous languages is probably worse than at any time in their history, there has been a clear change of government policy towards them, and in this we do indeed appear to have a very good example of cultural revitalisation.

Finally, I want to provide a brief comment on Scotland's intangible cultural heritage. Scotland has one of the richest folkloric and folk song traditions in all of Europe. Thanks to the work of the School of Scottish Studies, founded at the University of Edinburgh in 1951 to record songs, oral history, folklore and other similar material in both Gaelic and Scots, and other institutions, including the BBC, a significant amount of this heritage has been preserved. Under the Tobar an Dualchais/Kist O Riches project, established in the 1990s, the most important of these collections have been digitised and are now available on a website which was launched last November, making them available to a world-wide audience. It is important to note that these great cultural resources have played a big part in the recent revitalisation of traditional music, as many young musicians have turned to them for material and inspiration. Thanks to new technology, these sources will be more easily put to use in schools and other institutions of learning and training.

Concluding Observations

Based on this survey of certain select aspects of contemporary Scottish culture, there seems to be at least some evidence of vitality, and to some extent, perhaps, of cultural revitalisation. This seems to have taken place at a time of renewed political vigour, as marked by the long campaign for Scottish devolution and the establishment of the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Government. However, it is difficult to determine the extent to which there has been a causal relationship between the two. It is possible that it was actually the perceived tightening grip of England that is responsible. Many Scots felt during the Thatcher era that a London-centred agenda with little feeling for Scottish sensibilities was being imposed. It could be that this has contributed to a greater sense of Scottish assertiveness, leading to greater cultural and political vitality.

The extent to which the devolved institutions themselves have contributed to any cultural revitalisation is debatable. They have to some extent been hampered by the fact that, as we have seen, they do not have control of some important areas of policy, especially broadcasting. As we have also seen, even in areas where they do have power, such as the university sector, choices may be restricted by wider contexts. There has, however, been clear progress with respect to Scotland's languages under devolution, particularly Gaelic. As discussed earlier, the Scottish Executive's National Cultural Strategy in the year 2000 led to some important results. Beyond this, however, the record is less clear, and there has generally been more talk than action.

There has, for example, been a committee with responsibility for culture since the creation of the Scottish Parliament, and it has produced a number of significant reports on a variety of cultural issues. Few of these have led to new policies or legislation. In 2004, the then-Scottish Executive established a Cultural Commission to review how the government should deliver and sustain its cultural services. The Commission's final report, delivered in 2005, was an extremely lengthy and wide-ranging document. In response to it, the Scottish Executive announced in 2006 a new cultural policy, *Scotland's Culture*, and later in that year began consultation on a Culture (Scotland) Bill which was intended to implement

aspects of the new strategy. Ultimately no Bill was ever introduced, and the only part of the consultation that has found its way into Scottish Parliamentary legislation was the amalgamation of Scottish Screen, referred to earlier, and the Scottish Arts Council, a public body which funds many of the organisations and activities described in this presentation, to form a new body, Creative Scotland. Established in 2010, Creative Scotland has an energetic and visionary chief executive, Andrew Dixon. It remains to be seen, however, what contribution it will make to Scotland's cultural life. Given other developments described here, though, there are generally many reasons to be optimistic about the future of Scotland's culture. Thank you.