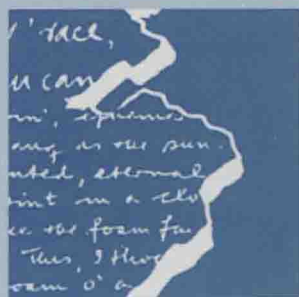
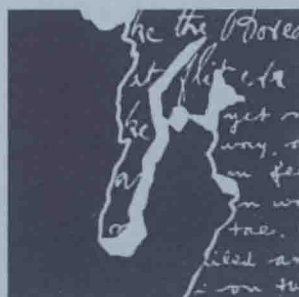
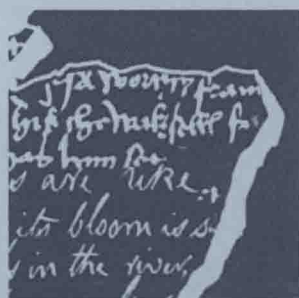
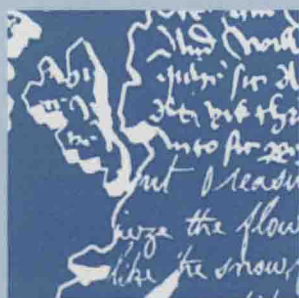


Representing Scotland in Literature, Popular Culture and Iconography

*The Masks of the
Modern Nation*



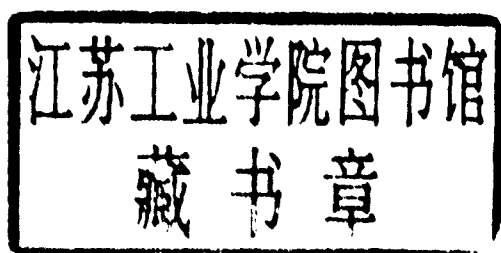
Alan Riach



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The Masks of the Modern Nation

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I expect at least nine-tenths of today's crop – an estimate from past averages – to embarrass me tomorrow, and I know that a still higher percentage will not survive my 'better judgement' for as long as a month. Whereas the relatively weatherable leftovers are largely concerned with matters of negligible consequence, moreover, the loudest howlers ('Beethoven lacks melody'; 'Falstaff is corrupted by Wagnerism'), following the bad-penny principle, are impossible to lose. Then why bother, when silence can keep me from being wrong and foolish? Because the mistakes and embarrassments do not count compared to even a single minor accident of truth, provisional and hypothetical as it would have to be, that could occur.

– Igor Stravinsky, Themes and Conclusions

Preface: The Representation of the People

It neither was the words nor yet the tune ...

It was the singing.

It was the human sweetness in that yellow,
the unpredicted voices of our kind.

– Iain Crichton Smith, 1992

This is a book about cultural change and continuities, underpinned by the sense that because of a particular national history, the cultural production of Scotland has been weighted gravitationally towards a democratic idea of what ‘the popular’ – and what people – might be.

This might be described in these terms: There is general tendency in Scotland to accept specialisms as open to serious approach, rather than closed off by the hermetic jargon of the specialists themselves and other more physical exclusiveness. Aspects of this tendency can be found in ‘Common Sense’ philosophy and are rooted in the contradictions and complementarities of the Enlightenment and the Romantic era in Scottish culture. Their working-out and further developments in the generalist principles of Scotland’s tertiary education in the nineteenth century are elaborated in George Davie’s seminal book, *The Democratic Intellect* (1961). It’s worth noting the significance of the title Davie gave to the sequel, about Scottish universities in the twentieth century – *The Crisis of the Democratic Intellect* (1986), in which he considers the increasing pressure to move away from the generalist, democratic base.¹ This general cultural tendency connects all specialisms with a social world of egalitarian possibility.

While this generalisation might be described as mythic it also reflects a deep idealism that might pull gravitationally towards attitudes reflected in cultural production in a variety of ways. Myth, desire and actuality are never entirely several. Hugh MacDiarmid sketches the implications lightly and clearly:

*I never set een on a lad or a lass
But I wonder gin he or she
Wi’ a word or a deed ’ll suddenly dae
An’ impossibility.²*

But there is another side to this manger-faith, typical of a crude, reductive irony, such as the once-popular Scots saying, ‘I kent his faither’ (implying, ‘I knew the boy’s father and he amounted to nothing, so I can assure you

that the child won't amount to anything either'); or, as Alexander Scott puts it in his two-line poem 'Scotch Equality':

Kaa the feet frae
Thon big bastard.³

The tendency to democratic ideals rests on a crucial respect for education as a birthright and a sympathy with the common human needs and the unpredictable potential any individual has. This sense is what rescues Iain Crichton Smith's poem, 'Two Girls Singing' from which my epigraph is taken, from merely offering thankful recognition of familiar 'voices of our kind'. The voices he hears are not only recognisably akin to his – and by non-exclusive extension, our own – but also 'unpredicted'. Their surprise is a distinction as important as their affinity. That is what the poem challenges us to feel kinship with: a kind of unpredictability.

The political context in which these poems are written and on which they comment is continual. It involves daily and pragmatic politics as well as speculation about potential and the enactment of unpredicted possibility. Its tension is in the conflict or balance between, on the one hand, a recognised need for change – sometimes radical change, in social, material and psychological terms – and, on the other hand, the desire to preserve and foster continuities through comprehension and regeneration.

Crucially, this requires popular understanding being geared towards an immediate recognition of certain symbols or cultural icons which offer the comfort of stability and the reassurance of conservative continuities across time and especially through times of political upheaval. These icons can serve more than one political purpose, from reactionary conservatism to progressive futurism, and Scotland is peculiarly rich in them.

The Nigerian writer Ben Okri once described a visit to Scotland in terms which might lead one to wonder how profitably his own nightmarish visions in the short stories of *Incidents at the Shrine*, in his novel *The Famished Road* and elsewhere might be read through lenses made in Scotland. In a 'Diary' column for the British periodical *New Statesman* in 1986, Okri described a visit to Scotland in these terms:

It is another country. The air is sharper. The hills, stark in their solidity, sheer out in the lights. It is a country in which history breathes from the landscapes. My first impression of Edinburgh was of staircases which seemed to have been carved on boulders and cobbled streets which reminded me of secret courtyards in Paris and the South of France. It is a city of the imagination in which dwelled another city of frustrated yearnings. It is impossible to miss the contrast between the architecture of the castles, magnificent and incantatory, and the strange restrained air of the people. I couldn't perceive the connection between the spirits of those

who built the castles and those who reside in the city... It is the only city I know where the old resides so solidly in the new, where the music of the place blasts out its ancient lore amid the living spaces of the inhabitants.

Okri concluded that while culture, 'during a time of political impotence, can become kitsch, it can also function as continual declaration and resistance'.⁴

Okri's volume of short stories, *Stars of the New Curfew* (1988) opens with an epigraph by Christopher Okigbo which resonates as powerfully in Scotland as in Nigeria:

We carry in our worlds that flourish
our worlds that have failed⁵

This truth might apply to popular culture and mass media productions as well as to more specialised art forms, and the energy it describes is perhaps the deepest resource of all the arts. Those 'frustrated yearnings' Ben Okri notes are motivational forces in all art, across media, geography and time, just as Okri's visions of social squalor and human degradation, whether in post-Civil War Nigeria or the Britain of the 1980s, where a ruthless Conservative government oversaw urban and industrial collapse, might be considered as imaginative cousins of the fictions of Alasdair Gray and James Kelman, which came to prominence in the same period. Okri's understanding that while culture in a period of political impotence might become kitsch, it can also function as resistance is crucial, and we shall return to it.

Kitsch may be an advantage but it is also a liability. The advantage is that there are instant and reliable icons and codes of recognition, both within the country and internationally. Teaching Scottish literature in New Zealand, as I did for fourteen years, students' answers to the question, 'What do you think of when you think of Scotland?', were always dependable: tartan, haggis, whisky, heather, wild mountain scenery and bad weather. Robbie Burns, Billy Connolly and the television series *Taggart* would come up regularly. There was comfort and humour in the familiarity of these answers but there was also a sense that such stereotypical images and icons were constricting. They can severely limit understanding. Yet they might be approached in certain ways and contextualised with purpose. This need not deny the pleasure they afford, but it should help us to remember that by itself, pleasure can serve any political principle.

The representation of Scotland in popular terms has its own pleasures and tediums. Much of it derives ultimately from the literary representation of the country in popular versions of Burns – the 'ploughman poet' as he was described by Henry Mackenzie – and Scott, whose writings helped activate the spectacle of Scotland as landscape. To consider this leads from literary production to popular reception and international accommodation of it,

and to the reconfiguring or refashioning of literary work in other forms – painting and music (the landscapes of Horatio McCulloch or the orchestral or operatic works of Hamish MacCunn and the tone poems of William Wallace and John Blackwood McEwen, for example). Since the 1950s, many of the iconic representations of Scotland have been conveyed through the technologies of other media: postcards, audio recordings, radio, television and film. *Representing Scotland* is predominantly a book of literary study, but in following a chronological trajectory, we cannot but remark on the technological changes which have made storytelling possible in different ways.

Part I begins by discussing the terms, if not defining them: masks, popular culture, iconography, modernity and nationality. I want to use these terms to approach my subjects, not to extrapolate floating theories, and the central focus of the book is on literary texts. There are chapters specifically on canonical works such as Walter Scott's *The Heart of Midlothian* and Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island*. But there is a larger context for these close studies.

The opening thesis is that the foundations of modern Scottish literature are to be found in the changes that happen in the period between the work of Burns and that of Scott, and that these changes are crystallised in understanding what the word 'popular' means from the late eighteenth to the early nineteenth centuries.

Burns's songs, satires and poems were popular among farmers' labourers, illiterate people, men and women; they were also popular with the highly educated literati, first in Edinburgh, where Burns was lionised, caricatured and almost smothered by the Establishment, and then internationally. They were – and continue to be – memorised and carried in the minds and on the voices of people who quote or recite them or, most importantly, sing them for pleasure, for themselves, among company and to others. Something changes, however, between the act of singing for one's own pleasure, alone or in the shared pleasure of company, and the performance of a song which is addressed and projected to other listeners. A different focus concentrates and directs particular effort. There is a transition between Burns's works as popular property and the value of the printed versions of them. Such differences continue to co-exist. People still sing the songs while first printings of the Kilmarnock edition are auctioned and locked up.

After Burns's death, the increasingly popular appeal among the print-reading public was shifting from long narrative poems to the novel. The burning trajectory of Byron goes down beneath the galvanising accumulations of prose heaped up by Walter Scott. Scott's novels, while they redefine genre expectations and deepen narrative structures that remain foundational, are a vast attempt to accommodate everything their author could detail. Their effort is towards immense inclusiveness, both in narrative accommodation and in the amassment of antiquarian detail. And yet it is clear that the deep

structures are often easily described and memorably simple. They activate familiar conventions. Let me offer a few examples.

There is the convention of doubled heroes. Scott's are familiarly passive/active, Hanoverian/Jacobite, politically futurist/politically doomed, practical/romantic and so on; but once activated, the convention evolves. Later examples after Scott range from Long John Silver and Jim Hawkins to Sherlock Holmes and Doctor Watson. The prototype may have been Don Quixote and Sancho Panza but Scott's elaborations were crucial.

Then there is the convention of panoramic landscapes, inviting spectacle, ownership, land-speculation, property, tourism, subjection of native populations and the privileging of class over clan. This convention travels in cultural terms from novel to film. Could John Ford's Monument Valley landscapes be read as an interpretation of the relationship between people and landscape that derives specifically from Scott? Scott's forests, precipices and waterfalls become Ford's desert plains and high escarpments, dwarfing people and their cultural differences with their geological scale. (We shall consider the relation between Scott and the western genre in Chapter 8.)

Scotland also makes its particular contribution to the universal convention of the journey, hurried yet often pedestrian, like the long march of Waverley or Jeanie Deans's southward trek to the seat of earthly authority in London. This convention has its dynamic legacies through David Balfour and Alan Breck Stewart in Stevenson's *Kidnapped* to Richard Hannay in John Buchan's *The Thirty-Nine Steps*, to Ian Fleming's James Bond's international secret missions, and the endless number of films predicated on the breathless spectacle of the chase. (The most perfectly balanced example is the film version of Fleming's *On Her Majesty's Secret Service*, where Bond spends the first half of the movie tracking down his arch-enemy Blofeld, then the second half running away from him.) Of course, the degree of self-consciousness and irony we might discern in these later representations is variable.

The structures may be clear – and universal enough not to be limited to a specifically Scottish source – but the popular international readership for Scott was phenomenal and the influence of his activation of these cultural conventions remains incalculable. More than that, however, his accumulating *oeuvre* continued throughout his life in an attempt not only to honourably discharge commercial debt but also to bring into his world of fiction the broadest possible spectrum of human beings his culture would allow him to contemplate and treat. For generations of young readers, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Scott's comprehensive understanding of humanity was considered parallel with Shakespeare's – and when big, broadly sweeping novels were more attractive than knottily plotted, linguistically voracious, chunkily laid-out narrative plays, Scott was often preferable. Of course, critical as well as social conventions have changed that, and there is more than fashion involved in these changes.

At the axis of the era of Burns and Scott were the French and American Revolutions. The relation of the English Romantic poets to the revolution in Europe has been studied in depth, but much remains to be understood about those Scots writers who, through upbringing, society and recent history, were brought into a different relationship with these moments of radical social change, with all their democratic ideals and bloody realities. The shift in the weight of meaning in the word 'popular' through the crisis of 1789 is axial. This book will only indicate a little of that. What I would like to highlight here, though, is the critical importance of the conflicts, contradictions and tensions in this era and its consequences for modern Scottish literature. (Space does not permit me to do more than note that there are significant parallels and contrasts with the development of Irish literature over the same period, although much more work has been done with Irish than with Scottish literature.)

The importance of this shift in the idea of the 'popular' can be seen in the ways some of the icons and characteristic aspects of Scotland – Scotland's masks – have been deployed, developed and transformed through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Therefore the book tells a chronological story, but it slips from one location to another, from one genre to another, and from writing intended for a mass readership to more esoteric work of specialist interest which nevertheless clearly bears out the characteristic aspect of human commonality and 'the democratic intellect'. It is concerned with works of Scottish literature and Scottish cultural production both in their own right and in their inter-action with non-Scottish works.

Before we begin that, however, it is important to go back to an earlier moment, the first crucial moment in the creation of modern Scotland and modern Britain: 1603.

This is a convenient date but of course its convenience may be misleading: the Reformation in Scotland, especially from the 1560s, began to establish principles of egalitarianism which underpinned the development of Renaissance individualism and might be connected further back to the ideals of representative authority signalled in the Declaration of Arbroath in 1320. Yet 1603 is a pivotal year in any description of the development of modernity.

Shakespeare's centrality and quality in literary history seem crucially dependent on three concurrent dynamics: the centrality of London as city and economic crux, the function and action of the theatre in that city, and the radical transition from the late medieval to the early modern world, a transition marked by the end of the Elizabethan and the beginning of the Jacobean age, literally the death of Elizabeth I and the accession of James VI as James I to the rather abruptly united kingdom or, more precisely, kingdoms. (It is worth noting that in *King Lear*, 'the division of the kingdom' in the Folio text is 'the division of the kingdoms' in the Quarto.) The effects these three things had on Shakespeare's writing range from banal intentionality,

as *Macbeth* is pitched as flattery and (most importantly) legitimization, to subtle enquiry, for example, into the question of what Britain is, in *Cymbeline*. The accession of James also permits Shakespeare to explore tragedy to its fullest extent in public. Would Queen Elizabeth have allowed the great tragedies such public provenance?

An opening chapter on 'Shakespeare and Scotland' begins with a consideration of Shakespeare's representation of Scots characters in the history plays; it then notes how 'The Scottish Play' – which, because of its disregard for the internal dynamics of Scottish national history and commitment to its own moment, may be more accurately termed 'The English Play' – is central in the tragedies' depiction of human potential at its worst; but it is most concerned with the late plays. How is Shakespeare's re-visioning of the matter of Britain in *Cymbeline* intended to resolve national conflicts within the newly united kingdom? And more intimately perhaps, in *The Tempest*, if Prospero recovers imperial authority and asserts dynastic succession as the central arbiter of power and justice in terms of his own position as head of family and state, what of that other gauge of the limits of human identity in which Prospero is centred, between Caliban and Ariel? Caliban is on the extremest edge of servility and Ariel on the furthest limit before freedom, one inseparable from nativity and earth, the other always urging towards flight and sky, one surly and rebellious, the other complicit and collaborative with Prospero's central authority. As we shall see, Willy Maley has suggested that Caliban and Ariel are representations of, respectively, Ireland and Scotland. As caricatures they may well have been increasingly recognisable as what they represented became distorted and established for later generations than Shakespeare's. I think one problem Shakespeare's play poses now is how far we can trust the centralising structure of the relationships between Prospero, Ariel and Caliban. How far must we acquiesce to the centrality of Prospero's authority? The chapter concludes by looking at a number of twentieth-century poems, most famously Rilke's 'The Spirit Ariel' but then also poems by Norman MacCaig and Edwin Morgan, which address this problem and resolve it in more fully human terms, beyond the reach of caricature.

Having suggested the ways in which the terms of iconographic representation of Scots (and Irish) national types are foreshadowed in Shakespeare's plays, we can discuss the foundational texts of modern Scottish literature in the era of Enlightenment and Romanticism with this 'long perspective' in mind. Conventional chronology separates these movements in sequence, but the Scottish example tells a more complex story, exemplified in the multiple contradictions between James Macpherson, David Hume, Robert Fergusson, Samuel Johnson, Henry Mackenzie, Robert Burns and Walter Scott.

Part I of the book, then, is an exploration of the historical forces that helped give rise to modern Scottish literature and the complex arguments

that lie within it. Part II follows a more conventional form, beginning with a case-study of Scott's great novel *The Heart of Midlothian*, centred on the strange exclusiveness which haunts the comprehensive vision of this romantic-individualist man of enlightenment. This is the story of The Whistler, who is finally sent by Scott to the wilds of America, a piece of 'surplus population' like Mary Shelley's Frankenstein's monster, with whom he is associated.

Perhaps the most exceptional canonical author in the mainstream tradition is Robert Louis Stevenson: unmistakably Scottish yet coloured and flamboyant by Francophile flair, and given to international voyaging, across America and into the Pacific. My chapter on Stevenson focuses on *Treasure Island* as a text whose responsibility to childhood is seen in its subversive, pleasurable enactment of adult recognition and stability coming through the child's sense of appetite, movement and quickness. The understanding it offers is deeper than fixed or static images allow: Long John Silver is slippery, quick-silvery, attractive but murderous, and Jim is a wee boy who has to grow up. Imperial certainties and childhood's prerogative to remake the world, to make it new, are in a wonderfully packed conflict of energies in *Treasure Island*. The resolutions affect our sense of what children's literature has been and might be, and of what 'adult literature' must not forget and should never abandon or maroon.

Children's literature as a genre is a crucial axis at the end of the nineteenth century as so much Scottish (and American) writing seems appropriate to it: Stevenson, but also Melville, Scott, Fenimore Cooper, R.M. Ballantyne, J.M. Barrie and Andrew Lang. The close relation of Scottish and American literature at this point seems partly to do with the assumption of adult adjudication by the authority of English literature and English literary judgement (Prospero's books once again). I would like to suggest a way to bridge the distance between the pre-World War I era of late British imperialism and the post-colonial era after the Second World War, from Conan Doyle's *The Lost World* of 1912 to Amos Tutuola's *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* of 1952, a stunning little book quickly recognised as a herald of new writing in indigenous adaptations of the English language from formerly colonised countries. Dylan Thomas and Hugh MacDiarmid both leapt to praise it in the 1950s.

Conan Doyle's book emerges from a world demonstrably racist, sexist and imperialist. He was in 1912 very much the grand old man of empire whose benevolence grew strongly out of imperial history. What redeems his writing from pathological imperialist absolutism or from being merely symptomatic of imperialist presumption is a quality of vision and a recognition of imaginative continuity which, I will argue, links him with Tutuola and 'post-colonial' writers. Through a habitation of the exotic-imaginary worlds of childhood and dream we might invigorate our sense of what is possible in reality. Doyle is masterful in this exercise of the imaginary and Tutuola

pushes us forward with it, into the later twentieth century, where this capacity for regeneration and continuity is increasingly desperately needed. The fiction of Wilson Harris and especially his Scottish novel *Black Marsden* suggests the ways in which the Scottish imagination and a post-imperial world of multiple and seemingly discordant identities can be co-ordinated.

Part III begins by returning to Scotland in the wake of the First World War with the writers, artists and intellectuals who began to work coherently towards a political and cultural revival and reassertion of Scotland in the international theatre of the arts. They arrived from the theatre of war and wilfully entered a cultural arena in which matters of value had to be sifted from the establishment's sanctioned sentimentalism and jingoism.

The attempt had been begun in the 1890s and early twentieth century, with writers such as Stevenson, John Davidson and James Thomson addressing Scotland's darker aspects seriously. A cultural revival had been announced by Patrick Geddes in terms of a 'Scottish Renaissance' [sic]. In music and painting as well as literature, important work was redressing the easy clichés. The benevolent ministrations of the Kailyard writers – Ian Maclaren and S.R. Crockett – were confronted by the vicious commercialism of small-town Scotland depicted in John Macdougall Hay's *Gillespie* and George Douglas Brown's *The House with the Green Shutters*. In the latter, the merciful God who benignly presides over small-town Scotland in J.M. Barrie's *Thrums* or Maclaren's *Drumtochty*, is confronted by John Gourlay's dying widow, handing back her ticket: 'Mrs Gourlay raised her arms, like a gaunt sibyl, and spoke to her Maker quietly, as if He were a man before her in the room. "Ruin and murder," she said slowly, "and madness; and death at my nipple like a child! When will Ye be satisfied?"'⁶

The work of painters, composers, artists of various kinds was also pushing deeply towards new forms of expression. However, it was not until after the First World War that the attempt to create an artistic Renaissance in Scottish literature, music and art developed effectively in a coherent and politically dynamic way. Pre-eminently active in this campaign was Christopher Murray Grieve, journalist, polemicist and poet, whose writing as Hugh MacDiarmid became notorious by the 1930s. In the 1920s, his attack on the establishment heralded this Scottish Renaissance, an activation of national cultural awareness – what he called a 'propaganda of ideas'. It was an attempt to demolish the weight of convention suffocating creativity in the adoration of Burns, political obsequy to outmoded Anglocentrism and moral piety. His association with the popular novelist Compton Mackenzie, the painters and sculptors William McCance and William Johnstone, and the composers F.G. Scott and Ronald Stevenson suggests the marshalling of energy across all the arts. From the first, it involved pragmatic politics. Liberationist and radical in intent, he was, in Norman MacCaig's words, 'a torchlight procession of one' – creating an army of pseudonyms, many of whom fell for the cause.

It is attractive to see MacDiarmid as unique, but in the longer view of this book, I would like to emphasise that his work draws on important initiatives of the late nineteenth century, in painting and music as well as literature, and how in its openness to all forms of cultural expression, it points forward to the increasing diversity of technological opportunities for cultural production available in the twenty-first century. Moreover, in an increasingly international (or 'globalised') context, Scotland's masks are made not only by exiles from the country, but also by visitors to the country, bringing fresh vision and new perspectives. The chapter on Scotland and the Modern Movement therefore focuses on the significant internationalism the Scottish Renaissance emphasised and discusses a number of international writers: exiles, travellers and visitors.

In 1964, in the Kinross and West Perthshire constituency, MacDiarmid fought against the then Prime Minister, Sir Alec Douglas Home, in the general election. Douglas Home, Conservative, was returned with 16,659 votes. MacDiarmid, Communist, got 127. Douglas Home was then taken to court on the grounds that the election was invalid since broadcasting time on radio and television had not been shared equally between the big parties and the smaller ones. MacDiarmid gave his opinion that if he had been allowed to broadcast and put the Communist case he would have secured more votes. He lost the case, but the essential question of the extent to which public broadcasting media were 'keyed to the requirements of the Establishment' and 'deliberately intended to hamper the activities and prospects of minor parties' remains. In his petition, MacDiarmid accused Douglas Home of "corrupt and illegal practices" under the Representation of the People Act, 1949'.⁷

In consequence of this, the variety of technological languages available after the Second World War might be seen coherently or, at least, interconnectedly. *Representing Scotland* comes forward to a conclusion with studies of generically popular forms charting the post-war American influence and the ways native writers have 'colonised in reverse' assumptions of cultural superiority with increasing confidence and wit. In Bud Neill's cartoon comic strip 'Lobey Dosser' serialised in the *Glasgow Evening Times* in the 1940s and 1950s, the conventions of contemporary cowboy movies are transmuted into the social mores and habits of a West of Scotland community with hilarious consequences. (The Lobey Dosser statue was erected in Glasgow by public subscription on 1 May 1992 in memory of Neill, and remains the only known two-legged equestrian statue in the world.) Neill's example is singular, but the James Bond story running from the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s through to the twenty-first century is an international phenomenon, in which the Scottish identity of the hero is quintessentially important in the 1960s. The comic-books or 'graphic novels' serialised as *The Bogey Man* in the 1990s thoroughly revise American models from the native perspective. Their premise is an immediately sympathetic recognition of

the mental derangement of Francis Forbes Clunie, who escapes from an asylum near Glasgow convinced that he is in fact a series of characters played by Humphrey Bogart in films of the 1940s and 1950s. Everyone who has seen a Hollywood film will recognise the attractiveness of the proposition of identifying with the hero and structuring the world imaginatively from given premises supplied by American certainties. Alan Grant, the author of *The Bogey Man*, exploits the pleasures of the milieu, but subversively redresses assumptions of cultural authority implicit in previous examples of them.

A similar story of cultural reappropriation can be seen in other media. In cinema and television, depictions of Scotland appear in different guises – Jacobite romance, urban cityscape, the documentary tradition – all embodying the counterpoint, dialogue or conflict between realism and the exotic imaginary: from Clydeside shipbuilders to *Brigadoon*, from *The Cheviot, the Stag and the Black, Black Oil* to *Edge of Darkness*, from *Braveheart* to *Trainspotting*. The iconography of comic books is brought into focus again with visits made to Scotland by the secret agent Nick Fury and two of the West's most popular superheroes, Spider-Man in 1990 and Batman in 1997 and 1998.

The cultural energies that animate the masks of Scotland are vividly palpable in the post-war world. In a nation whose statehood has become imaginable again for the first time in 300 years, this book is intended to remind ourselves that what is wanted is an economy that allows us to sustain those energies and give forms to their animation, and to help ourselves speak more clearly in what Wilson Harris calls 'a theatre of infinity'.⁸

The concluding discussion brings us back to questions about change and the canon, language and voice, continuities, cultural colonisation and forms of resistance, closing with a consideration of visual imagery in a series of depictions of Scottish figures – from Sir Edwin Landseer's *The Monarch of the Glen* to Peter Howson's *Heroic Dosser*, a defiant symbol of individual self-determination in the viciously antisocial world of Thatcherite homelessness. But the argument follows through to question whether, from the kitsch of Victorian tartanry to contemporary manifestations of the same iconography, the seeds of insight and ideological disruption might be found even within worlds that seem utterly foreclosed.

Notes

1. George Davie, *The Democratic Intellect* (Edinburgh University Press, 1961); *The Crisis of the Democratic Intellect* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1986).
2. Hugh MacDiarmid, *Complete Poems*, 2 vols, eds Michael Grieve and W.R. Aitken (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 1993–1994), Vol. 1, p. 258.
3. Alexander Scott, 'Scotched', in *The Collected Poems*, ed. David S. Robb (Edinburgh: The Mercat Press, 1994), pp. 229–233 (p. 230).
4. Ben Okri, 'Diary', *New Statesman*, Vol. 112, No. 2889 (8 August 1986), p. 16.

5. Ben Okri, *Stars of the New Curfew* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1988), p. vii. The source is Christopher Okigbo, 'Lament of the Silent Sisters', III, in *Labyrinths with Path of Thunder* (London: Heinemann, 1977), p. 41.
6. George Douglas Brown, *The House with the Green Shutters*, ed. Dorothy Porter (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1985), p. 234 (Chapter xxvi).
7. Hugh MacDiarmid, 'My Election Contest', *Selected Prose*, ed. Alan Riach (Manchester: Carcanet, 1992), pp. 239–253.
8. Wilson Harris, *Black Marsden: A Tabula Rasa Comedy* (London: Faber & Faber, 1972).