

**The interaction of politics, music and dramaturgy in three Scottish musical plays, *The Great Northern Welly Boot Show* (1972), *The Cheviot, the Stag and the Black Black Oil* (1973) and *Carnegie* (1973)**

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This paper considers the use of music in three radical plays from the early 1970s. It briefly touches on Tom Buchan and company's *The Great Northern Welly Boot Show* (1972) before looking in more detail at two examples, John McGrath's *The Cheviot, the Stag and the Black Black Oil* (1973) and the present author's *Carnegie* (1973). These are not the only political plays employing music and song of the period. Hector MacMillan's *The Rising* (1973) and *The Royal Visit* (1974), for example, both use traditional songs (or songs contemporary with the historical period in which they are set) to reinforce and complement their action and themes. The three plays now under discussion, however, all involve original song-texts that either derive their musical accompaniment from existing traditional or popular airs or require newly composed music, so in one way or the other creating new songs. It is the process of creation of those songs and their dramaturgical function that the following pages address.

*The Great Northern Welly Boot Show* was a dramatic response to the 1971 work-in by workers at Upper Clyde Shipbuilders which was then faced with closure. The men refused to accept this outcome and occupied the shipyards. Their work-in inspired widespread support for their cause and they prevented specific yards being closed, including, for a time, what had been John Brown's where the *Queen Mary* and the *Queen Elizabeth* were built. The show metamorphosed the workplace under threat from a shipyard to a Wellington boot factory. First presented at the 1972 Clyde Fair International, a Glasgow festival, it transferred to the Waverley Market in Edinburgh during that year's Edinburgh festivals. One factor that helped make this show a popular success was that as the union leader it starred a former shipyard worker, Billy Connolly, who at this time was not only a highly popular folk-singer but on the brink of becoming a major stand-up comedian. His experience as a folk-singer influenced the music of the show, as did the experience of the playwright

and jazz musician Tom McGrath who was its musical director. From the involvement of these two artists the *Welly Boot Show* derived a popular music format which dealt with its political themes through comedy and music to make a radical point, but one made without solemnity. At one point, for example, Connolly borrowed the music and verbal structure of a well-known radical folksong, 'The Wark o the Weavers', celebrating the pride of weavers in their craft:

Where aw met thegither here to sit and to crack  
Wi oor glasses in oor hand and oor wark upon oor back  
And there's no a trade among them that can either mend or mak  
Gin it wisnae for the wark o the weavers

Gin it wisnae for the weavers whit wid we do  
We wadnae hae claith made o oor woo  
We widnae hae a coat, neither black or blue  
If it wisnae for the wark o the weavers

There's oor sojers and the sailors, we ken they're aw bauld  
Bit if they hadnae claes, faith, they couldnae fecht for cauld  
The high, the low, the rich, the puir, awbody young and auld  
They widnae want the wark o the weavers

This song becomes in Connolly's treatment, and fitted into the plot of the *Welly Boot Show*, a celebration of the value of the work of the shipbuilders, disguised as the welly boot makers:

Wellies they are wonderful, oh wellies they are swell,  
Cause they keep oot the water, an they keep in the smell,  
An when yer sittin in a room, you can always tell,  
When some bugger takes off his wellies.

If it wasnae for your wellies where would you be?  
You'd be in the hospital or infirmary,  
Cause you would have a dose of flu or even pleurisy,  
If you didnae have your feet in your wellies!

There's fishermen and firemen, there's farmers an aw,  
Men oot digging ditches an working in the snaw;  
This country it would grind tae a halt and no a thing would graw  
If it wasnae for the workers in their wellies.

### *Chorus*

Noo Edward Heath and Wilson, they havnae made a hit,  
They're ruining this country, mair than just a bit,  
If they keep on the way they're goin, we'll all be in the shit,  
So you'd better get your feet in your wellies.

Where the original concerns weaving's basic necessity for everyone, the derivative song addresses the need for wet-weather foot protection, although with some popular, not to say childish, humour concerning the smell of feet that have too long hidden in rubber boots or their value when one must walk through ordure. And as is clear from the final verse the song is pointed at current politics, Heath and Wilson being then leaders of the Tory and Labour parties respectively, and Heath, then Prime Minister, being a particular target of the shipyard workers' wrath. In summary, this song's analysis suggests the show can be seen to have achieved a significant part of its strongly political impact by taking a well-known folk song and applying its tune and the form of its word structure to the specific politically focused topic of the *Welby Boot Show*.

John McGrath employs in *The Cheviot, the Stag and the Black, Black Oil* this device of adopting well-known popular tunes with new words to political purpose, one which in Scotland goes back beyond the English *The Beggars' Opera* (1728) to at least 1725 and Allan Ramsay's *The Gentle Shepherd*. The contemporary influence is perfectly clear. According to Elizabeth McLennan, McGrath's widow, speaking at a 2002 Royal Holloway conference on McGrath's work, they were both looking to set up a Scottish company when they attended the *Welby Boot Show*. There, they saw a means of developing their vision of political drama, influenced by McGrath's earlier involvement with Liverpool Everyman Theatre and its radical use of music theatre.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, in establishing 7:84 (Scotland) the next year, they recruited some of the *Welby Boot Show* cast, including Alex Norton and Bill Paterson who were leading performers in *The Cheviot*. This play uses music in a way parallel to the use by the *Welby Boot Show* of 'The Wark o the Weavers'. *The Cheviot* begins after some preliminary interaction with the audience with the cast singing James' Copeland's 'These are my mountains':

For these are my mountains  
And this is my glen

The braes of my childhood  
Will see me again  
No land's ever claimed me  
Though far I did roam  
For these are my mountains  
And I'm coming home  
  
For fame and for fortune  
I've wandered the earth  
But now I've come back to  
The land of my birth  
I've gathered life's treasures  
But only to find  
They're less than the pleasures  
I first left behind (pp. 141-2).<sup>2</sup>

Copeland, a successful actor, and father of another, James Cosmo, was also a comic poet and songwriter. This song, however, seems to be intended seriously, though within a music hall/variety tradition, and embodies a range of sentimental motifs about Scotland, its seemingly romantic mountains and the sense of exile of the Scottish diaspora, or at least the wandering Scot. The song itself is, or at the time of the production was, highly popular being sung among others by the Alexander Brothers, a variety act who specialised in tartanised sentimentality. Immediately after this kitsch, falsely emotional song, the Gaelic singer in the company, Dolina McLennan quietly begins to sing a classic Gaelic song written by a woman whose husband had been killed at Culloden. In this she mourns her loss: nothing can replace him and Prince Charlie has stolen her heart from her. While the full impact of the juxtaposition is only to be appreciated by those understanding the Gaelic text, the impact of the falsely sentimental against Highland music of true grief and loss marks a theme that runs through the play. Spurious and invasive versions of Highland culture are set against genuine expressions of the people living in the region.

Copeland's original text exploits not only a wanderer's sense of belonging in coming home (in Gaelic, 'dùthchas'), but one based on emotional attachment to, and a vision of, his homeland. His song recurs in various adapted versions throughout the play. After we learn of the

Clearances where people were driven off the land under the economic principle of 'Improvement', four 'sheep' enter and sing the song; they have taken over the mountains from the people who cultivated them (p. 159). Later, when highlanders are driven to seek a livelihood in the Canadian wilderness, hunting and trading furs, they are accosted by a French North West Trader and his native American allies who threaten them with a tweaked quotation from the song: 'These – are my mountains, and you're going home'. When we see Queen Victoria arrive bringing with her Balmorality and the conversion of the Highlands into a rich person's hunting reserve – the 'Stag' of the title – she sings a new version of the song, replacing 'my' with the royal plural, 'our':

These are our mountains  
And this is our glen  
The braes of your childhood  
Are English again  
Though wide is our Empire  
Balmoral is best  
Yes these are our mountains  
And we are impressed (p. 169).

The sequence in which first the sheep and then anglicised nobility appropriate the Highlands is completed in the play when Texas Jim the oilman sings his version of the song:

For these are my mountains  
And this is my glen  
Yes, these are my mountains  
I'll tell you again –  
No land's ever claimed me  
Though far I did roam  
Yes these are my mountains  
And I – have come home. (p. 186)

Texas Jim, representing the take-over by international oil interests concludes his song by, according to a stage direction, firing a pistol as '*oils rigs appear on the mountains*' which make up the background.

Throughout the play recourse is made to well-known tunes to accompany satirical songs where a large part of the effect is in the disjunction between the tune's normal referents and the new words. When Loch and Sellar begin the process of clearing the people from the land they sing a song entitled 'High Industry' to the tune of 'Bonnie Dundee'. This begins:

As the rain on the hillside comes in from the sea  
All the blessings of life fall in showers from me  
So if you'll abandon your old misery –  
I will teach you the secrets of high industry:

Your barbarous customs, though they may be old  
To civilised people hold horrors untold –  
What value a culture that cannot be sold?  
The price of a culture is counted in gold. (p. 146)

The upbeat, defiant tune of a well-known song about a royalist defending the Stuart monarchy's rights in 1688 becomes musical setting for words describing the economic and cultural despoliation of the Highlands at the beginning of the nineteenth century to make way for sheep walks. As before this song is followed at once by a Gaelic song, this time 'Mo Dhachaid' (My home) which sings of the attraction of one's own hearth and homeland meaning more to the singer than a castle.

Elsewhere recognisable tunes are used to add significance to text. With its imperialist and economically colonising resonances, 'Land of Hope and Glory' is hummed, to ironic and sardonic purpose, as background to the mockery of a trial of Patrick Sellar, which acquitted him of killing people by his methods in driving them off their land (p. 157). The traditional folk-tune of a heroic ballad about the 1411 Battle of Harlaw between Highland forces and those of the north-eastern nobility is used for a song about the 1882 Battle of the Braes (p. 166-8). There, when distant landlords threatened local crofting tenants with eviction, the tenants withheld rent and released sheep onto the land. When the local Sheriff Officer came with eviction papers, the crofters forced him to burn them. When fifty policemen were brought in from Glasgow to enforce eviction, the women of Skye drove them away. Out of this and subsequent uprisings, reform to crofting law came about. Here, the use

of an original tune is not, for once, in ironic counterpoint to the text but draws on a previous heroic conflict between Highland and Lowland authority to celebrate the Battle of the Braes. But the conflict continues and is not won permanently. It is straight after this song that Victoria sings her version of 'These are our mountains'. To the more generic sound of a hoe-down, Texas Jim sings of the exploitation of the region by the oil industry:

Take your oil rigs by the score,  
Drill a little well just a little off-shore,  
Pipe that oil in from the sea,  
Pipe those profits – home to me. (p. 186)

And Texas Jim and Whitehall, representing the interests of Westminster and international banking, return to using the tune of 'Bonnie Dundee', used before by Loch and Sellar when clearing the land. This time they transform the words first used to a '*souped-up version*' of the tune:

As the rain on the hillside comes in from the sea  
All the blessings of life fall in showers from me  
So if you'd abandon your old misery –  
Then you'll open your doors to the oil industry.

After a backing chorus of oil company names,

Conoco, Amoco, Shell-Esso,  
Texaco. British Petroleum, yum, yum, yum,

Texas Jim sings the second verse:

There 's many a barrel of oil in the sea  
All waiting for drilling and piping to me  
I'll refine it in Texas, you'll get it, you'll see  
At four times the price that you sold it to me (pp. 189-90).

Original Gaelic songs, sardonic new words for well-known settings and musical celebrations of what victories for Highland culture there were ensure that music drives the themes of *The Cheviot*. These include the conflict of Highland and other cultures, recurring economic exploitation of the Highlands and the impact of that exploitation. The play concludes with the singing of two verses of one of the songs of Mary MacPherson, Màiri Mhòr nan Òran ('Great Mary of the Songs'), whose family was cleared from Skye with an intervening translation into English:

Remember you are a people and fight for your rights  
[...]  
By the strength of your hands and the hardness of your fists  
[...] the exploiter will be driven out (p. 199).  
English, Scots and Gaelic text unites in this final song of defiance.

Clearly both the plays discussed responded to specific politico-economic challenges: in the first case, the UCS work-in, the danger of job-loss and industrial collapse; in the second, the discovery and exploitation of North Sea oil in a region that had over centuries suffered various kinds of economic depredation. Much music accompanying songs in both employs familiar tunes to draw the audience into the revised words, creating surprise and reflection by emphasising the changes made to the original wording. This dramaturgical method allowed the ironic and subversive use of tunes to encourage alternative readings of both the music and the politics that underlay it. This model was attractive to McGrath in his later work for 7:84 (Scotland) and David McLennan and David Anderson in its offshoot Wildcat. The tendency in this strand of theatre-making is to use popular songs and forms. This approach was, however, not the only one employed at the time.

In writing *Carnegie* my own sources of inspiration were different. For the use of music, the first was quite specifically Peter Weiss's *Song of the Lusitanian Bogey* presented by the Negro Ensemble Company as part of Peter Daubeny's 1969 World Theatre Season at London's Aldwych Theatre. In this Weiss explores European and specifically Portuguese colonialism and its effects in Africa. The second was dramatic exploration I had earlier engaged in, seeking ways to deal with levels of dramatic discourse and emotional involvement in plays concerned with the interaction of individuals and larger economic and political pressures. The first of these was *Blood on the Coal* (1967) exploring the pain of the 1966 Aberfan disaster when the catastrophic collapse of a pit spoil-tip as a result of managerial neglect and irresponsibility in a Welsh village killed 116 children and 28 adults. This juxtaposed factual excerpts from press reports with a series of songs whose words I had written set to traditional folk-tunes. The other was a version of *Antigone* based both on Sophocles and Jean Anouilh's versions presented by Strathclyde Theatre Group in 1969. In the latter I had separated the action of choruses

further than is usual from the dramatic scenes, using them less to reflect reaction to the emotion of the characters and more to move into objective observation of the narrative by which they were uncomprehendingly grasped. In addition I added four 'Laments' in which named characters commented on their emotional response to the action in which they were involved. In other words, when I came to research and write *Carnegie*, I was interested in the refraction of emotions and ideas when people are engaged in large events, the alienation of the individual from larger forces at work, multiplicity of viewpoints and ways of expressing those viewpoints.

This manifold approach seemed appropriate for a play about Andrew Carnegie. Seen then (1969-73) in Scotland simply as a heroic philanthropist, my own and others' research showed him as far more complicated, not just a beneficent donor, but a nineteenth-century US Robber Baron and an extraordinary political and economic manipulator. In fact, to deal with these levels of reality, I wrote the play with four kinds of action:

- There were dramatic scenes that outlined Carnegie's family and business relationships, the development of his career and his changes of mind about philanthropy.
- These were interspersed with a series of excerpts from Carnegie's own speeches setting out his attitudes to work and charity, with in some cases new speeches I wrote in Carnegie's style of speechmaking.
- Thirdly, in Act One Uncle Sam intervened regularly, exposing the tricks by which Carnegie legally cheated his way to his fortune; these interludes were followed by similar sardonic interventions in Act Two by business colleagues and workers.
- Finally, the play used songs to explore the experience of the people who worked for Carnegie.

Rather than making use of the music of well-known songs as an external referent with new words ironically contrasting with the original, in *Carnegie* the process was to seek to juxtapose the different kinds of action, of which song is one. Original tunes were then specifically composed to fit those words for the première at the Royal Lyceum

Theatre Edinburgh and again for later productions. This methodology is here discussed through six sequences from the play.

In the first sequence under discussion, the play's opening, we find Carnegie making a speech:

*Scene 1*

Andrew        I believe absolutely in the dignity of labour. I pity the son of the idle rich for he has money but has not earned it. And that way lies destruction. We all have heard of the primrose path of dalliance and if anyone can tell me of a way more certain to lead youth to that path than the superfluity of money and the freedom of time consequent on not having to earn it, I should be astounded. Contrast, I say, the life of the poor but honest worker.

*Song*

The furnace flares its flaming heat as the men throw in the coal.

*The furnace pours its white-hot steel as the men work in the hole.*

*The doors are opened again and again and the flares flash out to the sky*

*And the men shade their eyes from the flaring heat.*

Andrew He rises thriftily early in the morning, knowing that he will work to earn his keep and to keep his family. He owes no living to any man. What he earns is within his own control and that of no man else. He is free from the fear of losing his money through the intransigence of others, or the fluctuations of the fickle stock market. He is his own man. There are none greater than he.

*Song (continued)*

And the next jumps down to the furnace door to puddle the burning steel

And the searing fires and the clashing iron melt men so they can't feel

And the fires flame up and the steel flows on white hot and a blinding flare

And the man jumps down to the furnace door

And the man jumps down to the puddling fire

And there is no air but the scorching smoke

And the fresh light is lost in a flickering roar

And the heat scorches on till it's burnt through the men

And left them

Can't care can't feel can't hear can't walk

Can't think can't speak can't decide what to do, how to act

Can't remember who they are

Here Carnegie claims to 'believe absolutely in the dignity of labour [...] to pity the son of the idle rich for he has money but has not earned it'. Carnegie contrasts with this 'son of the idle rich' the figure he claims to admire the 'poor but honest worker'. The music interrupts this sentimental idealisation of the workers he exploits as employees with a song about the physical demands laid on such 'poor but honest' workers. Carnegie continues to idealise and sentimentalise the labour of the poor man: 'He rises thriftily early in the morning, knowing that he will work to earn his keep and to keep his family. He owes no living to any man. [...] There are none greater than he.' And the song concludes with the frenzy of labour in the steelworks amid fire, heat, noise and smoke until the men:

Can't care can't feel can't hear can't walk  
Can't think can't speak can't decide what to do, how to act  
Can't remember who they are

Rather than using the caricaturing methodology of the *Welby Boot Show*, Carnegie focuses directly on the contrast between Carnegie's platitudes about the clichéd 'poor but honest worker' and the realities of the work men carry out for him. Song here acts as a reality check for the rhetoric of Carnegie's speech and its sentimentality and political duplicity.

The second sequence follows a similar technique of following Carnegie's apparently humane and reasonable speech in Scene 6 with a song, Scene 7, drawing attention to the reality behind his speech:

*Scene 6*

Andrew: Gentlemen, I have always believed that it is a false economy to attempt savings by reducing the wages of labour. After all, among the measures I have brought into operation at the works of the firms with which I have the honour to be connected, I can include the establishment of co-operative societies for the men of the works where they may buy goods at a reasonable price. We allow each man to buy at cost the coal he requires from the store at the works, thereby allowing him benefit of our preferential buying price, although, of course, we do make a small surcharge for administrative expenses. In this way and by measures of such a kind, we receive a fair return for our outlay, we make our men more secure and happy, for the benefit of all three of the great industrial trinity, Labour, Capital and Business Ability. We establish a mutual trust and respect as between our men and our management. We maintain our

high profits. Further, in fact, in order to heighten a sense of community, we pay our men on a sliding scale based on the current market price of iron, so that they may, in all fairness, benefit within reason from our good times in the market and share our hard times, too. It is, I repeat, a false economy to attempt to achieve savings by reducing the wages of labour.

*Scene 7 Song*

*Andrew made a sliding scale  
For the wives of his working men.  
When the works were rich we managed to live  
And poor profits meant a struggle again.  
  
The streets of our town have no paving stones.  
The kids harm their feet and not enough meat.  
No milk to drink, but all watered down  
By the store with Andy's franchise*

Again song acts as contrast and critique of what Carnegie claims. He suggests that he is entirely reasonable in providing a company store where he controls prices and the quality of goods and in setting a sliding scale of payment linked to market conditions, bringing together what he calls 'all three of the great industrial trinity, Labour, Capital and Business Ability'. The song marks the reality of both sliding scale – *When the works were rich we managed to live/And poor profits meant a struggle again* – and the company store – *No milk to drink, but all watered down/By the store with Andy's franchise*. Not only do the words of the song reveal a different underlying truth to Carnegie's version of reality, but the fact that its words are embodied in music means their impact is aurally as – or even more – contrastive as their meaning.

The third sequence shows this process of ironic juxtaposition and critical contrast at work in a different, but related way:

*End of Scene 12*

Andrew: They're talking of using the Bessemer process in Chicago. We've tried all sorts of processes to improve our rails. They haven't worked. I want to try out steel. No big investment. Just find out.  
Phipps: O.K. Andrew, bring us the facts.  
Andrew: I'll do more, We're entering the age of steel, gentlemen.

*Scene 13 Song*

*Bessemer steel is a beautiful thing  
When the crucible's turned and the sparks fly up  
Impurities and waste burn out*

*The pig iron grinds its grinding way  
To the filth and the dirt of the fire  
Where the fumes float off  
And the lungs are filled  
With cancer dust  
With poisoned fumes  
With anything but air*

*Bessemer steel is a beautiful thing  
As it flows from the lip of the crucible white  
And scorches along the glittering sand  
Where the fumes float off  
And the lungs are filled  
With cancer dust  
With poison fumes  
With anything but air*

We are not listening now to Carnegie making statements about his sentimentalised philosophy nor about his public relations version of his method of paying his men. Instead, we are at the end of a scene in which he has been persuading his partners to move from the making of iron to that of steel by using the newfangled Bessemer process. Here a matter-of-fact business discussion is at once contrasted musically with the consequences of that decision. This song begins with the undoubted sense that the actual making of steel in the Bessemer process involves a form of industrial beauty, reminding one of de Louthembourg's paintings of the glare and yet glory of the industrial revolution in such paintings as *Coalbrookdale at Night* (1801). But despite its almost lilting, dactylic opening

*Bessemer steel is a beautiful thing  
When the crucible's turned and the sparks fly up  
Impurities and waste burn out*

– the song quickly moves to suggest the sheer physical effort and filth the process involves and the inevitable consequence of industrial illness:

*The pig iron grinds its grinding way  
To the filth and the dirt of the fire*

*Where the fumes float off  
And the lungs are filled  
With cancer dust  
With poisoned fumes  
With anything but air*

The fourth sequence takes this device further, combining onstage speeches by Carnegie and the union leader, McLuckie, with intervening songs by members of his workforce and their wives:

*Scene 18 Song  
Once my man was a gentle soul who treated me so kind  
His hands were warm as he looked at me  
Now his eyes are blind*

(McLuckie enters on side of stage)

McLuckie     Andrew Carnegie must not get away with this sliding scale any longer. It's imposed from above with no word given to us as to what we may want, no care taken of our needs. We have to accept it. I can read, boys. And I read the papers and I see what Carnegie talks about when he goes round Europe on the money sweated from us. He has holidays all the time and when was the last time any of us had a holiday?

We must be prepared to join together to work for better conditions. You know me. I work with you. If you don't join, you can hope for nothing but the reduced rate. And then, if you don't take it and you're alone, you know what company policy is for those who disagree openly. They see the door as they fly past it.

*Song  
We tramp our way to the mills in the morning tramp to the heavy tread  
And our heads start to echo as we go in the mill  
And soon our heads are dead*

(Andrew enters on other side of stage)

Andrew:     It has always been my faith that the men should be given some feeling of belonging to the firm. Any man who works well can rise to an executive position, and in that position is likely to be awarded a share in the stock of the company. By this method he becomes a part of the company and has security. He is not working for us. He is working for himself. This is the fruit of democracy. Privilege is abandoned and merit rewarded.

*Song*

*My child has gone to work in the mills a little boy is he  
If he comes through the fire and the deafening beat  
A monster he will be*

McLuckie: Which of us has not lost a friend or relative in the works or seen him maimed? Which of us has not staggered home exhausted to the point of collapse along rotten streets? Which of us benefits from a sliding scale? Can we remain quiet any longer? I say no.

Andrew: This is America, land of liberty, land of the free. This is the land with no privileges, no nobles, no kings, but of democracy, of equality.

McLuckie: Are we to suffer any more from the theft and tyranny of an uncontrolled so-called free employment system? We are unfree. We must join together. We must struggle. We must live.

*Song*

*I started to slave when I was young in Andrew Carnegie's mills  
And when I retire in a few years more  
I'll be a slave still*

In this longer sequence, we begin with a woman lamenting the loss of her husband's gentleness through the impact of his work:

*Once my man was a gentle soul who treated me so kind  
His hands were warm as he looked at me  
Now his eyes are blind*

McLuckie addresses the audience as if it was made up of workers in a union meeting, who might be this woman's husband, asking them to fight against the conditions Carnegie sets. The song continues with the men's sense of their working destiny and its seemingly inevitable result:

*We tramp our way to the mills in the morning tramp to the heavy tread  
And our heads start to echo as we go in the mill  
And soon our heads are dead*

Andrew then enters on other side of stage and speaks to the audience as if they were a convention of business people, claiming to seek, as an article of personal 'faith', to give the 'some feeling of belonging to the firm'. A mother sets that privileged, and for the wider community unlikely, vision against the reality for her son:

*My child has gone to work in the mills a little boy is he  
If he comes through the fire and the deafening heat  
A monster he will be*

The scene concludes as McLuckie argues for better conditions and Carnegie offers his version of liberty: 'This is America, land of liberty, land of the free. This is the land with no privileges, no nobles, no kings, but of democracy, of equality.' McLuckie ends with his different vision of freedom, seamlessly continuing and yet undermining Carnegie's generalised, abstract one: 'Are we to suffer any more from the theft and tyranny of an uncontrolled so-called free employment system? We are unfree. We must join together. We must struggle. We must live.' And the song concludes with the witness of a worker as to what the 'land of liberty' and 'freedom' means for him:

*I started to slave when I was young in Andrew Carnegie's mills  
And when I retire in a few years more  
I'll be a slave still*

The fifth sequence takes place at the end of Uncle Sam's series of lessons in how to succeed in business the Andrew Carnegie way. He has just been describing how Carnegie established his Iron Clad Agreement which bound partners into the firm and retained all control in the hand of major shareholders, chiefly himself. We move at once from this exploration of the machinations of big business to the situation of the poor working in Pittsburgh, their need to make the best of what they have and cope with poverty and death:

### ***End of Scene 20***

Uncle Sam [...] Folks, it's been a real pleasure having you here. Always remember folks, enterprise, initiative, competition and MONOPOLY CONSOLIDATION.

### ***Scene 21***

*It is cold in a Pittsburgh winter  
When the icicles hang from the sky  
And the snow floats by the icy streets  
And thirty per cent of kids die.*

*It is cold when the market's dipping,  
When the fire burns out in our grates,*

*When the food we eat is old and hard  
 And the kids hold out empty plates.  
 Squeeze the child into a ball and fill him  
 Full of air;  
 Shoe's aren't needed in the best of company,  
 You bear.  
 If steel is going down in price,  
 All the food can do is go down in quantity  
 And all the clothes can do is grow more holes.  
 If the child is ill, he may die  
 And it's one less mouth to feed.*

The monopoly capitalism Uncle Sam advocates is a system that anticipates what Calvin Coolidge, US President (1923-29), proclaimed:

After all, the chief business of the American people is business. They are profoundly concerned with producing, buying, selling, investing and prospering in the world.<sup>3</sup>

Coolidge did go on to say later in the same speech, 'Of course the accumulation of wealth cannot be justified as the chief end of existence'. Nevertheless, it is clear in the age of the Robber Barons like Carnegie – and in later ages – that American capitalism places great emphasis on the accumulation of wealth whatever the cost to the people who earn it – or the conditions they live under. The bombast of Uncle Sam's lessons in business, emphasising 'enterprise, initiative, competition and MONOPOLY CONSOLIDATION', is here contrastively juxtaposed with the lessons' human cost, expressed in song.

The last sequence to be discussed takes the by-now established method of layering, juxtaposing and segueing kinds of action to underline the differing visions of reality as felt by Carnegie, his workers, the union leaders, and the workers' wives and children:

### ***End of Scene 31***

Andrew: I'll be at Kinloch Rannoch, unfortunately, out of easy touch of telegraph and letter. You know what you've got to do. If they won't do as we need, break the unions.  
 FRICK: I know all that.  
 Andrew Let the grass ...

FRICK: ... grow over you, yes, I know. Listen, you're not walking out on us, are you? You're not gonna disclaim us if there's any comeback.

Andrew I just don't want any trouble. It's not civilised.

FRICK Well. At least we can settle it in our way without you talking your damn head off to the newspapers.

### ***Scene 32 Song***

*Young Bill is the youngest of ten.*

*As fine as the gold in his hair.*

*He's labouring now though he's only fourteen*

*And he'll slog till his skull is bare.*

*It's hard to bear the burnt-off toes,*

*The crushed up arms and the pain.*

*It is worse to see them go out each day*

*To die each day again*

### ***Scene 33***

McLuckie: You realise, I can't officially join this?

O'Donnell: You'll be doing your bit as Mayor, won't you?

Worker 1: Anyway, we've solid support.

McLuckie: I never thought Carnegie would let it go as far as this without coming in to settle. He's always talking about co-operation.

O'Donnell: So long as it's to his benefit. Carnegie's a three-faced bugger.

[...]

Here song follows the scene where Carnegie and his partner Clay Frick plan to provoke and face down what is now known as the Homestead Strike. In this, violence between strikers and strike-breakers led to deaths, while Carnegie was advisedly out of contact on holiday in Scotland, letting his partners take the blame, something for which, even in the Republican press, he was excoriated. The song focuses again on the realities against which the men are struggling. It tells first of a young man, using language drawn from the Border ballads – 'As fine as the gold in his hair' – and then of the pain he and those who watch, and presumably love, workers whose bodies are destroyed by their labour experience:

*Young Bill is the youngest of ten.*

*As fine as the gold in his hair.*

*He's labouring now though he's only fourteen  
And he'll slog till his skull is bare.*

*It's hard to bear the burnt-off toes,  
The crushed up arms and the pain.  
It is worse to see them go out each day  
To die each day again*

And this song segues straight into a meeting where the strike is planned and McLuckie, by now elected Mayor of Homestead, sets out the limitations of what he can now do, however radical his own views, compromised by his official position. Carnegie and Frick as owners, the individual workers and the workers' union leaders all have differing perspectives, the difference of the workers' suffering highlighted in the music and in the text of the song. The multi-levelled and multi-dimensional approach of the play – the complexity of its vision of Carnegie and his capitalist operations and, in turn, their relation to his claims to being humane and his later philanthropy – are highlighted and reinforced by the use of music and song contrasting with and reflecting on the content of the scenes between which it occurs.

Each of the plays under discussion adopts its own musical and dramaturgical strategies in critiquing inhumane economic development. *Carnegie* addresses the complexities of political, historical and social context and the nuances within radical and conservative politics in a way neither of the other plays with their tendency to agit-prop seeks. Its use of song employs original words that require fresh composition to mark music-and-text's force in the overall context of a given production. Indeed, as already noted, later productions, like the 1976 US première in Pittsburgh, had different, specific music composed for them to match their social and intellectual contexts, rather than using the Edinburgh première's music. This contrasts with the use of found tunes and the rewriting of their words as in the *Welly Boot Show* and *The Cheviot*. It is not that one or other approach is correct, but that each offers different strengths. In fact, later 7:84 productions included more original songs, as did those of Wildcat, though still within a more agit-prop mode. In fact, what seemed in experiments in 1972-3 to be two separate and distinct techniques for the use of music in the development of dramaturgy with political aims came to work together in Scottish theatre. They came to

feed off and into one another as the use of original composition gathered momentum in Scottish political drama after 1973. What one can say is that the adaptation mode permits the writer to use the original tune and its association as a referent to strengthen or ironise political implications, while the music itself acts as an emotional and aural springboard. On the other hand, original song demands that the new song and its tune themselves embody the emotional and political impact and sustain it in its own immediate terms. Meantime, all three plays under discussion use sardonic juxtaposition to underline and undermine the falsity of easy political and business attitudinising.

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### **Notes :**

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<sup>1</sup> On this aspect of McGrath's career see Ros Merkin (2005, 25-38)

<sup>2</sup> Quotations are from John McGrath (1996)

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.calvin-coolidge.org/html/the\\_business\\_of\\_america\\_is\\_bus.html](http://www.calvin-coolidge.org/html/the_business_of_america_is_bus.html)  
(accessed 2 January 2011)