

The issue of moral principle and ethics in public life is currently subject to lively debate, prompted both by the expenses scandal and controversy surrounding police tactics at the G20 protests in London, and has shown officials in an unflattering light.

Two articles in this issue ask whether an intrinsic moral valance is discernable in visual representation. David Archibald tackles factual, documentary and surveillance images of conflict and protest, whilst James Kloda looks at fictional accounts of factual events in the form of biopics of controversial or ambiguous individuals. The former records acts of confrontation, aggression and escalation where the action may be transparently represented but motivation is opaque. The latter has the potential for more expressionistic psychological insight, but despite the real-life referent the aesthetic is found to be symbolic rather than realist.

Both writers find much of the substantive meaning to be generated by the audience, or mediated for the audience by social commentators and critics. Archibald challenges assertions that such pictures 'speak for themselves', highlighting ways in which they may be consistent with several conflicting accounts, yet are increasingly seen as essential for corroboration for participants' own interpretation of contested events. For Kloda, whilst the construction of the image is a collaborative process between the subject, director and actor, the moral interpretation of character is left to the viewer. However, this is not an essentialist characteristic of the visual medium, but a product of the approach to characterisation – the qualities of representation as a performance of evil, rather than as an enacted psychological portrait of an individual.

The article argues that the demonising discourses present in critics' responses to films such as the central example, *Il Divo*, are culturally motivated, due to the universal accessibility of an aesthetic (rather than political) reading. Dehumanising animal, occult and extra-terrestrial metaphors and similes are the stock in trade for describing morally

othered deviants, as is symbolic reference to societal problems. This has been much remarked upon in relation to news discourses describing criminal or other outsider deviants (as I discuss in my article in relation to drug-dealers, loan sharks and 'anti-social' youths) but is less common in relation to 'princes, queens and presidents' – even in the most critical evaluation the emphasis is on bad deeds rather than intrinsically bad individuals. Perhaps this more personal critique of an aesthetic reading of the real-life/fictionalised characters relates to some journalists' notion of personalisation as apolitical.

In biopics the wrongdoing of public officials was dramatised, whilst in Archibald's examples the alleged infractions – lines crossed in protest and law enforcement – are 'record[ed] and monitor[ed]'. These images do not portray *performed* action, but are equally contestable. However, they are also equally suggestive of a dominant reading, particularly where force appears dominant on one side, and the unevenness of the fight extends to brutality. That is not to say that isolated incidents of police brutality are any more representative than the isolated images of protester violence that used to dominate news coverage of any protest, but the police certainly have more power to attempt to curtail such representation. Use made of Terrorism and Public Order legislation implies that all who oppose police behaviour or question police sympathies oppose the enforcement of the law. Archibald's comparisons with censorship elsewhere in the world are pertinent – they prevent us from being complacent about restrictions on civil liberties at home by demonstrating their significance elsewhere. The point is not how trustworthy or otherwise the people in power are, but the extent and effectiveness (and legitimacy) of our scrutiny of them.

Perhaps what these articles suggest is that too much emphasis is placed on personal characteristics of morality, principle and trust, and not enough on political behaviour and the moral value of its outcome.

JB



Difficult to imagine Thomas Reid astride a powney with a bandido moustache and a gunbelt, terrorising the good burghers who lived too close to the Highland Line. In the Raeburn portrait at any rate, Reid looks more like a thin-lipped auld maid slumped in an armchair after her bath. Yet in 'A Family of Letters' Bud Duane Clark speculates, more or less, on a direct kinship relation between the philosopher and the bandit Rob Roy MacGregor.

But hey, that's the problem with families: you think the gene pool has sprung a leak, that we have reconfigured the body-mind continuum, and have something *really* different here, when –*splash!*– you suddenly realise that, arguably, the Common Sense School is just another intellectualised take on the Scotch Robin Hood trope. For *arguably* what Reid's school of philosophy was doing was robbing the rich to give to the poor. 'In spirit' that is, of course, and 'in metaphysics'. And *arguably* what we have in 'Suns of Scotland IV' is none other than the metaphorically bastard great great grandchildren of the Gregor clan bandidos carrying on the researches of Reid's chums into economics, sociology, social anthropology etc . . . The point is that not only could the word 'arguably' be placed before every statement about Scottish history, but as Clark so neatly demonstrates in his article about the nepotistic nature of the Enlightenment, the word should

also be fixed permanently inside any sentence on the family.

For families *do* argue. Take R D Laing's analysis of the existential banditry that rages non-stop within the average family. They may be mad, the crazy Scotsman tells us, but we can't get away from families. But it's not just a Scots obsession with kinship –take Thomas Keith's analysis here of Tennessee Williams in 'Dark Comedy of Chaos'. Williams seemed to have spent a long unfunny comedy career arguing with himself in the shape of his father. Not only his father, but all those he 'should love, and ought to love' him. –which moral obligations seem to constitute a family of sorts.

And what do families argue about? –apart from economics, sociology, politics and social anthropology– why, religion most of all! Which is why we know that when our guest artist , according to Mitchell Miller, 'craft[s] a narrative even when it is clearly absent' then he may only be waiting desperately for the Blessed Virgin Mother he knows will never come. Yet is his lack of that Mother in any way, as Kierkegaard would say, a 'paltry' thing? No, Stephen Healy steals the light from a tradition of secular romanticism –precisely Rob Roy Country– and brings it home for all his brothers and sisters who are 'poor in spirit'.

JR



In the broadest sense, 'The liberty of adaptation' was for many years, the closest we Scots came to self-determination. They could – if they were a soldier or a banker, or a sawbones – adapt well enough to Empire; they could – if they were lawyers and politicians – adapt a London law into the accents of Edinburgh jurisprudence; they could – if they were poets and writers – adapt to English letters, with a few precious Scotticisms remaining happily outwith the standard canon.

Clearly, we did not need the French to invent postmodernism for us. Like our autonomy and sense of self (no matter what Hume says . . .), a culture of interpretation has thrived in these here parts. And even if you were of meaner stock as Hamish Henderson discovered, you could still while away the long winter nights with a bit of textual de- and re-construction. The calloused and indentured labouring or tinkering classes Henderson courted in the formative years of Scottish ethnology had been freely adapting and interpreting folksongs for centuries, and for Henderson it was this practice, rather than the product, that was most inspiring.

Corey Gibson belies the twee, couthy image of Henderson's quixotic adventures among the Travelling folk to give us instead, an author-killing Barthesian, spooling the utterances of peasants and tinkers into a shared cultural resource that everyone, in theory, could access. Given the ratio of accountants in pullovers to wee guys from the schemes found in the average folk (or that be *volk*?) club, we might question the success of Hendo's windmill-tilt, but Gibson argues that the challenge mounted by Henderson's folklorists and their leathery-faced maestros to MacDiarmid and the literary modernists was one of those significant family arguments that rumbles on forever.

But it was surely more than just a spat between would be bards and would be artists: the fallout from James MacPherson's Ossianic adventures made it risky to credit any

'collector's' insistence that there was no author. Since then, the author – or possibility of one – has been a sinister presence in Scottish culture.

Of course if you didn't believe Henderson, he'd just play the tape to prove what he had heard, thus inviting the rest of the scholarly fraternity to invent media studies and move the debate further from 'what' was heard to how. Jen Birks introduces another group who deny the existence of authors yet seem to pull many strings; Scottish newspaper editors. They also send their investigators, recording devices in hand, to tap into the volk, not to hear them sing but to wail, greet and gnash their teeth. It's called public opinion.

When Birks tells us that the media campaigns that (attempt to) sustain newspaper circulations create 'communities' or at least the sense of them, through collective anger, fear and pity, it is hard not to see the newspaper's antics as a Bizarro-World version of Henderson's mission. The process of collecting oral material, or stirring moral panic create imagined communities of sorts, both tap into the same perceived notion of 'the people' and the collectors are clearly articulate and deliberate in following their agenda. So, given our awareness of media manipulation it, it is as hard for us to trust in the non-existence of an author as it is for Johnson, or MacDiarmid

*Il Divo* himself insisted on his own authorial null value. In the film, Andreotti claims to have no imagination, only a vast archive he memorised and stored for later use. He created nothing but referenced the ultimate text; the true and pure, God-fearing and familiar Italy of his youth threatened by Communists and degenerates. Hendo is no *Il Divo* and nor is the gaffer of the *Daily Record*, but they too respond to perceived threats. There is a corollary between panic and connectedness, fear and sympathy; crimes and misdemeanours arise from dipping too eagerly into the *volk*.

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