

**Irvine Welsh and the Adaptation Industry: *Filth*, a case study**

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**Introduction**

The release of *Filth* (Baird 2013), an adaptation of the Irvine Welsh novel of the same name, in the summer of 2013 provides a clear example of the way in which adaptations can be read as indicators of the cultural, social and political discourses of their era. *Filth*, Irvine Welsh's third novel, was published in 1998, a year before a Scottish Parliament reconvened in Edinburgh, and almost three hundred years after the previous one had voted itself out of existence. The adaptation was released in cinemas just a year before Scotland voted in a referendum on independence from the United Kingdom, giving a unique timescale to the adaptation process, which almost completely spans Scotland's contemporary devolutionary period. This article will argue that an examination of the role Irvine Welsh has played within the 'adaptation industry' in Scotland, and his self-awareness of this role, is indicative of some of the ways in which small nations achieve visibility in the global screen marketplace. It also provides an example of how Scottish national identity is negotiated on screen and in print during this quickly evolving (or perhaps devolving) era of national movement in Scotland.

The term 'adaptation industry' is used in the sense initiated by Simone Murray (2012) to define the complex relations between the film, television and book industries and the activities of key personnel who work within, and across, these cultural spheres in order to achieve common purposes and individual goals. Adaptations of Irvine Welsh's work also fit within Murray's Anglophone periphery model (2012), with Scotland undoubtedly a periphery nation in the context of the global flows of film culture, producing on average just six films per year (Creative Scotland 2014). In the context of Scotland's adaptation industry, Scottish literature remains widely utilised by Scotland's filmmakers: over half of Scottish feature films with lottery support (the precursor to Creative Scotland) in the 1990s were adaptations of existing literary material which signalled a 'push to turn Scotland into a minor player in the international Anglophone mainstream' (Murray 2007, p.83). My own research into the number of adaptations funded by Scottish Screen and/or Creative

Scotland since 2000, demonstrates that since the turn of the millennium adaptations have fallen to around a third of all feature films. However, once the figures are broken down further, it is revealed that adaptations account for less than 30% of Scottish feature films between 2000 and 2010, but 42% since 2010. This implies a return to the conservatism seen by Murray (2007) in Scottish Screen's funding record of the 1990s, and further suggests that the viability of established literary sources remains an important strategy in ensuring international screen visibility for a small nation such as Scotland. This article will also explore the specific national identities explored by the book and film of *Filth* in terms of their complex negotiations with Scottishness, its historical connotations and its contemporary appropriations.

### **Simone Murray and the Adaptation Industry**

To anchor this discussion of *Filth*, and its processes of adaptation, it is first necessary to outline a methodological approach to the study of adaptation. The history and trajectory of adaptation studies is too lengthy to discuss here in great detail (for detailed introductions to the history of adaptations studies see: Aragay 2005 and Hutcheon 2006); therefore, this article will focus primarily on the approaches taken by Simone Murray whose influential study *The Adaptation Industry: The Cultural Economy of Contemporary Literary Adaptation* (2012) offers fresh perspectives on the discipline, although its focus on the book industry has not been without its detractors (see Cattrysse 2012). Murray's contention is that adaptation studies has too often focused on the textual analysis of films, novels and the differences between them, rather than assessing the rather central question of how those adapted texts come to be. An investigation of the – to use Bourdieu's (1993) term – 'social agents' involved in the process of adapting a book for the screen can enable theorists to examine why certain material is successfully adapted and, perhaps just as intriguingly, others are not (Murray 2012). Murray's work is particularly interested in those nations outside the dominant US-UK axis of the Anglophone sphere, and states the importance of analysing the ways in which the adaptation industry operates on a macro-level in the following way:

For cultural producers in second-tier or traditionally ‘periphery’ Anglophone nations, it is especially crucial in cultural policy and cultural nationalist terms to understand how content passes through (or bypasses) dominant US and UK cultural networks to gain exposure to global English-language audiences. (2012, p.23)

In this context, Creative Scotland acts as cultural arbitrator whose approval and funding remains essential for the production of film in Scotland, and crucial to their ability to puncture the aforementioned culture networks. There may seem a tension in extending this approach to a consideration of Scotland, which remains part of the United Kingdom. However, Scotland has had a degree of autonomy over its cinema production for quite some time, through agencies such as Scottish Screen and, latterly, Creative Scotland. That is not to lessen the impact that UK-wide funding organisations (BFI, BBC, Channel 4 *et al*) and international producers have had on the production of Scottish film, but the concept of ‘Scottish cinema’, both thematically and from an industry-level is well established in the academy. The industry-led, production-based approach taken by Simone Murray, can be aligned with the approach to the study of national cinemas detailed by Hjort and Petrie, who call for:

[...] the study of national cinemas [to transform] into the study of cinema and its relation to national phenomena, the ultimate goal being to grasp the specificity of various contemporary and historical conjunctures rather than imposing a necessarily reductive or homogenising framework of national identity upon the complexity of particular cultural, spatial and political conjuncture. (2007, p.13)

Rooting the concept of national cinema within frameworks of industry and national cultural policy also remains appropriate according to Higson (2000), who, despite voicing caution over the ways in which national cinema has been theorised, writes

that it would be unwise to completely relinquish the concept when the nation-state, and its cultural manifestations, remain one of the primary ways in which our societies are organised. This examination of *Filth*, and the role of Irvine Welsh in the Scottish context is, however, not only interested in the ‘real-world’ processes of production, which ascribe national indicators, but also concerned with the ways in which this particularly Scottish ‘historical conjuncture’ is engaged with thematically by Scottish cinema production of the era. Jonathan Murray (2008) has also written of the ways in which the articulation of national culture is caught up in the complicated inter-relations of the adaptation industry. In examining the role of national culture, and in this case Scottish national culture, an analysis of both the industrial production of texts, as foregrounded by Murray, and the way in which those texts engage with the societies in which they are produced, as promoted by Stam and Casetti, is an appropriate methodological approach. To this end, returning to Bourdieu’s *Field of Cultural Production*, is worthwhile. Bourdieu calls for researchers to be aware of the ‘mood of the age’ and for sociological approaches to ‘take as its object not only the material production but also the symbolic production of the work’ (1993, p.37). One area in which Murray’s work can be extended in its examination of the adaptation industry is in its recalcitrance towards textual analysis. In order to more fully interrogate the adaptation industry from a Bourdieusian perspective, it is necessary to marry an analysis of the *material production* with the *symbolic production*. In other words, not only to assess the ways in which adaptations are brought to the screen but also how those adaptations can be read in social, cultural and political contexts. Caldwell describes this approach as ‘textual analysis within a sociologically informed cultural studies perspective’ (2009, p.172), which draws not only upon the ‘final’ texts themselves for analysis, but also corollary texts of production and marketing. This multi-perspectival approach allows for a greater consideration of the ways in which *Filth*, as a cultural text, is understood through its engagement with representations of Scottish national identity, and the celebrity persona of Irvine Welsh, who is routinely understood in a global context as a Scottish writer, as overseas press coverage routinely attests (Quill 2012; Holden 2014). Again this can be related to the national cinema approaches foregrounded by Hjort and Petrie (2007), in that it connects

Scottish cinema with the ‘national phenomenon’ of Irvine Welsh, and his publishing career.

### Background context

Since the publication of *Trainspotting* in 1993, Irvine Welsh’s work has become something of a phenomenon in Scotland, Britain and across the globe. Robert Morace (2007) calls Welsh’s work, particularly his debut 1993 novel *Trainspotting*, a ‘signifier’ of the cultural landscape of the 1990s, the influence of which was enhanced by the 1996 film adaptation of the same name. A number of Welsh’s other novels and short stories have since been adapted for the screen, with the most recent, *Filth*, widely regarded as the ‘best’ adaptation since *Trainspotting*, not least by Welsh himself (Baird 2014). The less well regarded *Acid House* (McGuigan 1997), scripted by Welsh, and *Irvine Welsh’s Ecstasy* (Heydon 2011), have also been released, while a long-mooted adaptation of *Trainspotting’s* sequel *Porno* remains a tentative possibility (BBC 2014). Welsh has also written for television, with *Wedding Belles* (Channel 4 2007) featuring a number of his themes, stylistic flourishes and preoccupations. His desire to work across media has been evident during the promotion for *Filth*, with Welsh revealing that he was working on a new screenplay, saying: ‘The way it is these days, you can’t just have a book or film or TV series, you’ve got to have the lot’ (Ford 2013). The script Welsh was working on might have been an adaptation of his latest novel, *The Sex Lives of the Siamese Twins* (2014), as he attested to having written an adapted screenplay for the novel immediately after finishing it (Leadbetter 2014).

The publication of *Trainspotting* in 1993 not only thrust Irvine Welsh into the public eye, it also arrived just a year before James Kelman’s colloquially invective *How Late it Was, How Late* won the Booker Prize amid considerable controversy. Kelman’s novel was declared ‘deeply inaccessible’ by one of the judges due to its stream-of-consciousness use of Scottish vernacular (Winder 1994), while one of the UK’s foremost cultural commentators, Simon Jenkins, wrote in *The Times* that the

award amounted to ‘literary vandalism’ (Lyall 1994). Scottish literature written in a variety of vernacular Scots became seen as a provocation which provided opposition to the British literary establishment. *Trainspotting* was also long-listed for the Booker Prize in 1993, but failed to progress after two judges threatened to resign from the process, due to the novel’s alleged anti-literary merits, forcing the removal of the novel from consideration (Kelly 2005; Morace 2007). While the novel was the subject of consternation for the judges of the Booker Prize, it received widespread praise amongst literary critics and sales ballooned from its initial print run of 3,000 to more than 150,000 copies by the time of the release of the film (Morace 2007, p.36). Petrie (2010, p.43) notes that sales of the novel subsequently rose to around 500,000 copies in the five months after the film’s release. This relationship between the novel’s initial success, the film’s success and the subsequent renewed success of the novel, gives an interesting insight into the workings of the adaptation industry, where the goals of individuals (author, literary agent, publisher, screenwriter, director, producer) align to a common and continuing success across different mediums. On that point, Morace links the success of Irvine Welsh’s subsequent career to the ‘commercially driven aesthetic choices made in the process of adapting from page to screen’ (2007, p.67) in John Hodge and Danny Boyle’s film adaptation. The wider effect of Welsh’s success is described by Squires who writes that ‘Scottish literature became fashionable’ (2007, p121) after *Trainspotting*, while Bernard & Hubbard similarly argue that ‘the stimulus for renewed international interest’ (2007, p.39) in Scottish literature came from both the novel *and* the film, a point also noted by Caughie (2007). Morace adds that the impact of this success was ‘especially seen in British fiction, in what was published and how it was read’ (2007, p.13), with Welsh’s success essential in instigating new cultural trends in both the British publishing and film industries and also, significantly, in promoting Scotland, and Scottish culture, in both literary and cinematic fields.

While Murray’s (2012) examination of the role of literary prizes within the adaptation industry focuses on the canonisation of literature, and subsequently the conferring of established literary cultural capital upon texts, thus giving them

approved status as material for adaptation, it is instructive to see this working subversively in the case of Welsh and *Trainspotting*. *Trainspotting* provides opposition to the cultural associations of the Booker Prize, yet became the recipient of what Bourdieu (1993) would define 'symbolic capital'. That is, Welsh's work was disregarded by a representation of British cultural elitism, as the Booker prize judges denied it cultural worth, but this ultimately helped lead to its recognition in other ways. *Trainspotting* partly becomes desirable as an adaptation not because it was afforded critical prestige by its literary prize-winning credentials, but because it appeared to reject everything that such awards stood for. Welsh has repeatedly attacked the cultural associations of the prize, declaring it a 'highly imperialist-orientated' award which still has an 'anti-Scottishness' problem (*Telegraph* 2012). Much of this counter-culture narrative can be seen in the ways in which Welsh's work is marketed and publicised. The confrontational imagery of *Trainspotting*'s original sleeve cover, with its ghostly skeletal imagery, accompanied by a blurb from Kevin Williamson's Rebel Inc, which claimed that the novel 'deserves to sell more copies than the bible' (Welsh 1993), was aligned with sensationalist media coverage of the book and its status as the 'most shoplifted novel of all time' (Morace 2007). The novel was not publicised as appealing to traditional literary markets, although its apparently scandalous nature appealed to the middle classes too, leading to accusations in some quarters of the novel functioning as a voyeuristic journey into the world of the underclass for an urbane readership. The book has subsequently been seen as a cultural milestone for Britain in the 1990s, appearing on a number of 'best of' and 'top ten' lists, awarded from such literary donors of prestige as *The Times* and the booksellers *Waterstone's* (Morace 2007).

As mentioned previously, the success of *Trainspotting* in literature and on film (and it is worth noting that it was also successfully adapted for the stage by Harry Gibson initially for the aesthetically radical Glasgow Citizens' Theatre under the leadership of Giles Havergal) is then integral to the formation of new paradigms within the publishing industry across the UK. The 'Welshian' brand became a crucial marketing tool with which publishers could appeal to the same young, anti-

establishment markets which Welsh had so successfully mined (Ferrebe 2010). The ways in which Scotland was represented and received in cultural terms for local and global audiences, was also undoubtedly influenced by Welsh and *Trainspotting*, particularly in its difference to the other runaway ‘Scottish’ cinema success of the mid-1990s, *Braveheart* (Gibson 1995). In terms of Scottish literary adaptations, its pervasive success is indicative of the ways in which the adaptation industry ‘functions systematically to favour, exclude, or generally shape the range of texts available’ (Murray 2012, p.77). Filmed adaptations of Alexander Trocchi’s *Young Adam* (2003) and Alan Warner’s *Morvern Callar* (2002) were released in cinemas at the beginning of the twenty-first century, and the influence of the Welsh phenomenon on the appearance of both is not difficult to discern. Despite claiming to have never read Trocchi before writing *Trainspotting* (Schoene 2010), Welsh’s work has often been compared backward to Trocchi, whose heroin addiction and lascivious narratives were well known by Scotland’s literati, if not the general public. Alan Warner, on the other hand, was marketed widely as ‘the new Irvine Welsh’ upon the publication of his debut novel *Morvern Callar* in 1995. Not only that, but the original sleeve cover for *Morvern Callar* was emblazoned with a quote from Welsh, declaring Warner as one of the most ‘talented, original and interesting voices around’ (Warner 1995). Therefore, Welsh confers symbolic capital on Warner, an inheritor of a Scottish literary landscape in a renaissance in great part fuelled by Welsh. In addition, Welsh’s success confers symbolic capital back to Trocchi: *Young Adam* was republished in 1996 by Rebel Inc, who originally published Irvine Welsh. These relationships provide evidence of the ways in which the adaptation industry relies on the mutual successes of the screen and book industries. It is also again appropriate to return to Bourdieu’s theorisation of cultural production at this point, through which he describes how ‘subversive’ art becomes ‘consecrated’ and appropriated by the ‘makers of taste’ (1993, p.80). It is worth quoting Bourdieu’s description of the ways in which a variety of social agents operate in the field of cultural production at length:

the production of the work of art as a sacred, consecrated object, [is]  
the product of a vast operation of *social alchemy* jointly conducted,

with equal conviction and very unequal profits, by all the agents in the field of production, i.e. obscure artists and writers as well as ‘consecrated’ masters, critics and publishers as well as authors, enthusiastic clients as well as convinced vendors. (1993, p.81)

Irvine Welsh’s rise from establishment outsider to ‘consecrated’ master, whose worth is utilised by ‘convinced vendors’ is a useful way in which to consider how this writer has come to shape the range of texts available in the publishing sphere, their adaptation for the cinema and the thematic and aesthetic representations of Scotland in the era that followed.

### **Adapting *Filth***

Released in 1998, *Filth* was only Welsh’s second novel since *Trainspotting* and his first for two and a half years, after 1995’s *Marabou Stork Nightmares*. The marketing campaign for the novel again made great play on Welsh’s apparently controversial, counter-culture image, with the cover sleeve depicting a mean-looking pig wearing a traditional policeman’s helmet askew. Rumours spread that the police force in Southampton demanded that the book not be displayed in the windows of book shops (Kelly 2005, Morace 2007), while Jon S. Baird, who would later write and direct the film adaptation, claimed that the book’s provocative imagery and marketing piqued his interest on release (Baird 2014). The novel was Welsh’s biggest seller since *Trainspotting*, selling 250,000 copies in its first two years of publication. This encouraged Miramax-Hal, a brief British subsidiary of Miramax, at that time run by the Weinstein brothers, to purchase the film rights to the novel. The way in which the success of the novel, the orientation of the British publishing industry and subsequently the adaptation industry, relied upon the *idea* of Irvine Welsh is expressed by Morace who argues: ‘*Filth*’s success derives at least as much from Welsh’s earlier successes and cult status as from the new novel’s literary merits. It certainly benefited from deft marketing’ (2007, p.89). Squires goes so far as to call Irvine Welsh a ‘consumable marketing dream and, in the high sales, a publisher’s

bankrolling bad boy' (2007, p.124). While the novel may not have received the critical adoration of *Trainspotting*, it ensured that Welsh and Welshian literature remained present within the British publishing industry and, subsequently, the adaptation industry. Yet despite Welsh's success, and the success of *Trainspotting*, *Filth* had a troubled journey to the screen. A script was commissioned by Miramax-Hal and a first draft written by Dan Cavanagh, but subsequent legal difficulties, not the least of which was the splitting between Miramax and Hal, resulted in the project being lost for years in development limbo. However, Welsh remained confident that the book he always felt would make the best film of his novels would eventually make it to the big screen, declaring in a 2013 interview: 'There was so much interest in *Filth* back in 1998, especially on the back of *Trainspotting*, and this one was seen as the banker' (*Big Issue* 2013).

*Filth* eventually resumed its journey to the screen after director and writer Jon S. Baird bought the rights to the novel himself after a chance encounter with Welsh during which he enthused about the novel and his desire to see it filmed (Baird 2014). Irvine Welsh and James McAvoy are both executive-producers on the film, with Welsh using his star persona to help raise the visibility of the project and also attach authorial credibility. However crucial McAvoy's attachment to the project is in encouraging investment, his star profile is dwarfed by that of Irvine Welsh, whose clear and well-publicised links to the film throughout the adaptation process are indicative of the 'star author'. The adaptation industry relies heavily on a conception of the author dating back to the Romantic era, in which the text solely originates from the author's creative, individual genius. This romantic ideal of the author is reinforced at every opportunity, even though the collaborative nature of film-making and, particularly, adapting already existing material to a new medium would appear to undermine such a notion (Murray 2012, p.28). This can be seen in the marketing for the film, which relies heavily on the star persona of Irvine Welsh. The film poster, and subsequent movie tie-in book cover, utilise the image of the pig and the policeman from the novel's original cover. The film poster also announces the film as arriving 'FROM THE CREATOR OF TRAINSPOTTING', the reference clearly intended to draw the audience's mind to both *Trainspotting* the book and the film. International posters, interestingly, labelled the film more overtly as arriving from Irvine Welsh,

with the German poster declaring it ‘Irvine Welsh’s Drecksau’ [translation: ‘filthy swine’].

As in *Trainspotting*, Welsh also has a cameo role in this most recent film adaptation of his work which, although cut for theatrical release, arrives as an extra on DVD and Bluray, and was released for-free online as part of the publicity campaign in the press (*Edinburgh Evening News* 2014). Again this conforms to the conception of the star author, and their importance in publicising adaptations, with Murray stating: ‘Public alertness to an author’s cameo role bestows authorial imprimatur upon a screen adaptation – a writerly benediction especially important where fan readerships are restive about the possible travesty of a beloved book by the Hollywood machine’ (2012, p.45). Yet, while this demonstrates a promotional desire to raise public awareness of the author’s involvement in the project, it also demonstrates the influence of Baird who, as director, decided not to include Welsh’s brief appearance in the film. Baird and Welsh debate the cutting of Welsh’s performance as a newspaper reporter in a good-natured manner on the DVD extras, which accompany the film, but Baird’s decision to drop the rather superfluous scene indicates a strong-willed desire to assert his own authority on the film, ensuring that the world of the film is not ruptured by an ironic nudge to audiences familiar with Welsh. Welsh’s authorial approval of this adaptation can also be seen through his wide availability in publicising the film in the media-marketing campaign of its theatrical and home releases. Added to this, a newer form of authorial ‘benediction’ can be seen in Welsh’s repeated promotion of the film on his Twitter account. With over 150,000 followers on the social media site (Twitter 2014), Welsh is able to directly, and in a seemingly personal and unfiltered manner, market to an already interested readership, thus strengthening the bond between author and adapted film. Again, this reinforces the ways in which the figure of the author is pressed into service across differing media platforms by an adaptation industry which understands the public’s desire for ‘an individualist explanation for cultural phenomena’ (Murray 2012, p.48).

The importance of the persona of Irvine Welsh is also reinforced in the film’s funding application to national arts body Creative Scotland. In the ‘Film Briefing’ (Creative Scotland 2011a) submitted along with the funding application, producer

Ken Marshall and writer/director Jon S. Baird set out their vision for the film, in which the first item is a 'note from the author', Irvine Welsh. Again, this corresponds to Welsh's star author persona and his ability to bestow authorial prestige upon the project, by explicitly giving his approval for the project. Added to this, Welsh sets out the film's link to *Trainspotting* very clearly, writing: 'With Jon and Ken's (producer) work ethic and love of the material, they remind me very much of Danny Boyle, John Hodge and Andrew Macdonald with *Trainspotting*' (Creative Scotland 2011a, p.2) Therefore from the film's first documented interaction with funding body Creative Scotland, the Irvine Welsh phenomenon, with *Trainspotting* in tow, is invoked and made explicit. Not only can Creative Scotland bank on the personality of Irvine Welsh, and also on the bankability of a *Trainspotting*-like adaptation. Jon S. Baird furthers this link, writing that the film will be shot through with a 'heightened sense of reality; something no doubt associated with an Irvine Welsh adaptation' (Creative Scotland 2011a, p.8). Yet Baird also seeks distance from *Trainspotting*, in his insistence that the soundtrack for *Filth* will, unlike, Boyle's earlier Irvine Welsh adaptation, offer an ironic aural accompaniment to the film, mining so-called 'guilty pleasures' rather than the counter-culture cool of *Trainspotting* (Creative Scotland 2011a).

The nature of the film's pitch for investment can also be seen in the subsequent 'Investment Assessment' document produced by Creative Scotland to consider the film's bid for funds. Assessor Robbie Allen, writes:

*Filth* is a film adaptation of Irvine Welsh's cult novel and will [be] an entertaining piece of mainstream cinema that will be recognisable to an international audience as Scottish. One of the most successful Scottish films is 'Trainspotting' based on Irvine Welsh's novel and it is hoped that this will echo that success and promote Scotland's talent. (Creative Scotland 2011b, p.3)

The Investors' Assessment goes to great lengths to stress the project's Scottishness, something which of course corresponds to Creative Scotland's brief for funding film projects. All three criteria that guide Creative Scotland's investment decisions were met: Scottish subject matter, Scottish personnel involved in production and production spend in Scotland (Creative Scotland 2011b). Therefore the project's approval and funding by Creative Scotland is bound up not only in the past successes of its star author, Irvine Welsh, but also the desire to provide a bankable screen representation of Scotland, with literary heritage, within the context of the global film industry. The ways in which *Filth* engages with notions of Scottish national identity across Scotland's most recent era of 'national movement' (Hroch 2007) will subsequently be addressed.

### Reading *Filth*

*Filth's* narrative tracks the downward trajectory of the life and career of policeman Bruce Robertson, an Edinburgh-based law enforcer whose right-wing, racist, misogynistic, misanthropic, heavy-drinking, cocaine-snorting, 'hard man' persona is served up to the reader as a grotesque caricature which masks Bruce's inner insecurities and mental health problems. In this light, *Filth* interrogates one of Scottish literature's most persistent themes, that of the Caledonian Antisyzygy. Running through *Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* and *1982, Janine*, among many others, this references a depiction of the idea of contested binary personalities within one being, often psychotically expressed and read as indicative of the Scottish nation and its inhabitants (Craig 1999). On this front, Welsh's insistence that Bruce is not a narrator to be taken at face value is made evident from the beginning of the novel, with a self-deprecating jibe at his own success:

So that's what they call art now, is it? Or some fuckin schemie writin about aw the fuckin drugs him in his wide mates have taken. Of course,

he's no fuckin' wi them now, he's livin' in the south ay fuckin' France or somewhere like that, conning aw these liberal fuckin' pony twats in tae thinkin' that ehs some kind ay fuckin' artiste...

baws! (1998, p.37)

By inverting the name of Robert the Bruce for his lead character, Welsh indicates the ways in which his novel will engage in a subversive manner with established or institutionalised notions of myth, tradition, Scotland and Scottishness (Kelly 2005); while Schoene asserts that:

Welsh's depiction of Scottish nationalism in *Filth* is devastatingly pessimistic, not least because of its dubious choice of protagonist. If Bruce is the new Scotsman, then the new Scotland is not a postcolonial nation rejoicing in its newly soon independence but, on the contrary, a compulsively autocratic power [...] (2004, p.135)

However, Schoene's reading of *Filth* seems to misinterpret the deliberate subversion of the text. Written in the years leading up to the Scottish Parliament's resumption in 1999, one can read *Filth* and the hyperbolic characterisation of Bruce Robertson not as a premonition for the kind of Scotland – 'a compulsively autocratic power' – that Welsh perceives as being born through increasing national sovereignty, but rather one which must be authoritatively rejected for a new, culturally-diverse, aspirant nation to emerge. This is personified in Bruce's conflicted self, one which cannot accept the injustices of its birth and childhood. As Bruce's tapeworm reveals by interjecting frequently throughout the text, his real father is a repeated sex-offender who had raped his mother. He was subsequently raised by another man, never receiving the fatherly love afforded to his younger brother, whose death Bruce is implicated in after an accident at a coal slag heap. The guilt and self-loathing which cripples the adult Bruce from his childhood is subsequently hidden beneath his brutish exterior, his exaggerated sense of masculinity. March writes that the representation of Bruce

verges on the ‘caricaturistic and the ridiculous, in the process exposing the meaningless of “hard man” models’ (2002, p.28). Therefore, rather than reading Bruce as an embodiment of the ‘New Scotsman’ as Schoene does, he must be read as an embodiment of all that ‘New Scotland’ must leave behind; namely a Scotland that is traumatised by its subnational status and the perceived injustices of it. That the death of Bruce’s brother is inextricably linked to the death of Scottish working class industry at the coal mines is indicative of the way Welsh’s narrative links the hollowed ‘hard man’ persona to the British establishment, and the entrenched conservatism of the early 1990s. By imbuing Bruce with an authoritarian representation of a Scottish Britishness, Welsh then calls for the modern Scotland to refute the injustices of the recent past in order to move confidently towards the future, something which is made graphic by the end of the novel, as Bruce’s psychological descent culminates with his suicide.

It is instructive to utilise Cairns Craig’s theory of the ‘fearful and the fear-inspiring’ at this point. Craig argues that the ‘mutual dependence of the fearful and the fearless is the recurring moral problem posed by the modern Scottish novel’ (1999, p.52), and we can see its reoccurrence in the case of *Filth*. Craig invokes these terms to explain the contemporary engagement with the aforementioned Caledonian Antisyzygy, with protagonists in contemporary Scottish literature often conflicted between their own fear – of powers greater than themselves – and their ability to inspire fear through their appropriation of power. In this sense Bruce Robertson’s external, state-approved fear-inspiring persona aggressively masks his fearful internal conflicts, woven explicitly in to the text by the aforementioned interjection of Bruce’s tapeworm (and rendered in the film through Baird’s use of Jim Broadbent as a delirious doctor). As detailed above, Bruce is fearful of coming to terms with his own existence, his bastard birth and unloved childhood. This can be read as allegorical for the modern Scottish nation, whose birth in the Union of 1707 was voted for by its political class, despite widespread public opposition (Devine 2000, McCrone 2001). This fear is then masked by Bruce’s ‘fear-inspiring’ outward persona, which ties into the Scottish ‘hard man’ caricature identified by Petrie (2004) in contemporary Scottish fiction. Yet ultimately this ‘hard man’ exterior results in psychological

deterioration and, in a quite literal sense, the ‘self mutilating ethic’ (1999, pp.54-55) that Craig sees in Welsh’s prior work, *Trainspotting*.

The way in which Bruce is used as a cypher for Scotland’s petty grievances of the past, and their manifest mutation of the present, is exemplified in a typically invective section of the novel which directly links his authoritarian and racist projections of power to the representation of the past, and a ‘blood and soil’ nationalism increasingly irrelevant to the future:

-Aye, says Gus Bain, - Scotland’s a white man’s country. Always has been, always will be. That’s the way ah see it at any rate, and ah’m too long in the tooth tae change now, he chuckles. A good auld boy Gus.

- Precisely Gus. Ah mind when ah took Carole and wee Stacey tae see that *Braveheart*. How many pakis or spades did ye see in the colours fightin for Scotland? Same wi *Rob Roy*, same wi *The Bruce*.

- Aye, says Andy Clelland, - but that’s a long time ago now.

- Precisely. We built this fuckin country. Thir wis nane ay them at Bannockburn or Culloden when the going was tough. It’s our blood, our soil, our history. Then they want tae waltz in here and reap all the benefits and tell us that we should be ashamed ay that! We were fuckin slaves before these cunts were ever rounded up and shipped tae America! (1998, pp.46-47)

Not only does Bruce relate exuberant nationalist pride in Scotland to ethnic chauvinism, but there is also a clear linking of such attitudes to a perceived victim status through the statement that ‘We were fuckin slaves [...]’. Welsh’s disavowal of nationalistic representations of the past corresponds to Craig’s statement that ‘In Scotland, far from the Scottish past being the medium through which the nation could rediscover and remake its identity, Scottish history had ceased [...] to have anything but destructive implications [...]’ (1990, p.21).

Welsh's novel continually links Bruce's autocratic power to societal divisions signified by the political landscape of the late 1980s and 1990s, a period often seen as conducive to Scotland's most recent wave of national movement (McCrone 2001, p.27). Scotland continually opposed the Conservative administration of Margaret Thatcher; the Conservatives returned 22 MPs in Scotland in 1979, but just 10 MPs in 1987 before returning none at all in Tony Blair's landslide New Labour victory of 1997. Therefore *Filth*, published in 1998, reflects upon this landscape and caricatures the slide from relevance of its protagonist Bruce Robertson, an enthusiastic enforcer of the political ideology symbolised by Margaret Thatcher. When asked what inspired him to become a police officer, Bruce states:

- Why did I join the force I repeat, - Oh I'd have to say that it was due to police oppression. I'd witnessed it within my own community and decided that it was something I wanted to be a part of, I smile (1998, p.146).

Bruce frequently refers to the conflict between Margaret Thatcher and the Miners in the mid 1980s, with Arthur Scargill's status as the 'enemy within' significantly linked to Bruce's own 'enemy within', the tapeworm, a manifestation of Bruce's conscience and repressed childhood trauma. Therefore, Welsh's novel engages clearly with the social and political currents of its era, and the era preceding it, to illustrate a complicated notion of Scotland and Scottishness, one at the same time bound up with a sense of Britishness and critical of the chauvinism traditionally associated with 'blood and soil' Scottish nationalism, with its clear and deliberate skewering of populist representations of Scotland. However, the text is also overtly critical of some of the ways in which the political ideology of the British establishment of the era manifested itself in Scotland, during an era in which Scotland drifted from one referendum on devolution in 1979 to another in 1997.

The film, released in cinemas in 2013, also relies upon an engagement with Scotland and Scottishness in both its material production (as seen in the Creative Scotland documents referred to previously) and symbolic production. Like Welsh's novel, Baird's film engages the audience with expectations of familiar representations

of Scotland and Scottishness from the very beginning. In an introductory scene Bruce walks out of Edinburgh Castle and in to Edinburgh's recognisable Grassmarket area, as his voice over details notable Scottish achievements: penicillin, the television, the steam engine and so on. His voice-over narration and the traditional Edinburgh location are juxtaposed with images which aim to undermine any patriotic or glamorised sense of Scottishness. Upon referring to Scots as a 'uniquely successful race' Bruce glances towards a selection of apparently typical Scottish inhabitants: overweight, ginger-haired people, who smoke while pregnant, chomp through their fried food and take a swig of the national drink: Buckfast. (Figure One)



Figure One

This representational engagement with familiar images of Scotland continues, as Bruce sticks his fingers in his ears upon passing a kilted bagpipe player further down the street. Therefore, not only is *Filth* engaging with images of Scotland for international audiences (scenic Edinburgh, bagpipes, the castle and so on), but also has an ironic nod to domestic audiences, engaging both the global and the local with juxtaposition played for laughs.

Frequently scenes involving Bruce and his superior, DCI Toal, make the same link to rampant Scottish nationalism and regressive attitudes seen above in Welsh's novel. Upon hearing that interest in the press over the murder of a black man in Edinburgh has cooled, Toal invokes Robbie Burns's 'A Man's A Man For A' That', by telling Bruce 'A Wog's A Wog For A' That'. The deliberate appropriation of one of Scotland's most famous songs, by Scotland's most famous poet, sung at the opening of the Scottish Parliament in 1999, clearly indicates Baird's desire to invoke the spirit of Welsh's work and represents another ironic nod to domestic audiences. An even more overt example of this is given in another conversation between Bruce and Toal:

Bruce: Y'know, in some parts of the country the force even advertise in the gay press.

Toal: This isn't some parts of the country. This is Scotland, by Christ!  
(Figure Two)



Figure Two

The camera swoops in to Toal, whose triumphalist fist pump in the air can do nothing but invoke the kind of nationalist, rabble-rousing sentiment evoked by Bruce's description of watching *Braveheart* in Welsh's novel. Therefore, clearly, and perhaps in more explicit ways than the novel does, *Filth* overtly engages with unflattering representations of Scotland and Scottish national identity. However, rather than reading this in the manner Schoene does, these representational tropes and dialogical engagements with discourses around Scottishness can be read as self-confident and subversive, willingly undermining the desirability of representing any unified national identity. In a passage relevant to the characterisation of Bruce Robertson on page and screen, Nairn (2000) describes the shame and destructive attitudes exhibited by such Scottish characters as a sort of 'national nihilism'. This nihilism is constructed through the hopeless ability to reconcile one's personal self with the community at large, a community which Nairn argues the self 'must escape at all costs, by flight, emigration or pretending to be someone else' (2000, p.103). This runs true for Bruce, whose inability to accept and integrate himself in to a Scotland in which divisions of race, gender and sexuality are no longer quite as prohibitive as his imaginative Bannockburn. The disintegration of Bruce's personal self away from this 'New Scotland' is compounded by his inability to accept and confront his own past, corresponding to Craig's assertion that: 'Scotland is a country always erasing itself, turning its past into falsehood or falsifying its present by disconnecting it from its past' (1999, p.25).

### Conclusion

*Filth*, in both its novel and film forms, can be seen as an adaptation with cultural importance in contemporary, post-devolution Scotland. The adaptive process, its marketability and its success across domestic and international markets – the film took almost £250,000 in its opening weekend in Scotland alone (Brocklehurst 2013), with total revenues just over \$8 million by summer 2014 (Box Office Mojo 2014) – are indicative of the ways in which the adaptation industry operates in twenty-first century Scotland. The complex negotiations of Scotland and Scottish national identities approached by the texts, and their importance in the film's marketing and production, indicate the manner through which locally specific cultural content can

become available globally despite the domination of UK and US cultural networks, as noted by Simone Murray (2012). *Filth*, and its negotiation of the adaptation industry, provides a crucial example of how Scotland's culture is renewed and reconstituted in different forms, across different generational eras. The text also engages in crucial ways with Scottish national identities, and the ways in which they are constituted and corrupted in the contemporary era. *Filth* is indicative of the contemporary era of cinema in Scotland, in that it exists undoubtedly as a cinematic representation of Scotland, in both its theoretical and industrial guises. While this essay has focused solely on *Filth*, it is instructive to consider how such an approach would assess other Scottish adaptations, of which there is no shortage. Since the year 2000 there have been 12 feature length films funded by either Scottish Screen or Creative Scotland which are adapted from prior material, with an additional four at various stages of post-production at the time of writing (*Legend of Barney Thomson* (dir. Robert Carlyle), *Macbeth* (dir. Justin Kurzel), *Sunset Song* (dir. Terence Davies) and *Swung* (dir. Colin Kennedy). An interrogation of *Filth*'s contemporaries in this regard, *Sunshine on Leith* (Fletcher 2013) and *Under the Skin* (Glazer 2013), would provide a fascinating and undoubtedly complex interrogation of the ways in which such adaptations engage with the 'nation' and all its complexities. While *Young Adam* and *Morvern Callar* have been the subject of academic enquiry (see Morace, Caughie and Petrie) in terms of their status as adaptations, there has been very little attention paid to the Scottish cinema as a whole on these terms, despite the prevalence of such adaptations, as noted by Murray (2007) and my own research. As has been argued, one way in which a small nation such as Scotland can successfully market itself in a competitive international film market is through a reliance on 'bankable' films, which rest upon literary sources, and the prestige associated with them.

Rather than foregrounding the national specificity of the text in a reductive, totalising manner, this article has argued that *Filth*'s engagement with thematic and iconographic concerns associated with Scotland, can be read as one of the key ways in which cinema production in a small nation, through the machinations of the adaptation industry, can achieve a viable level of exposure on a global level. To avoid any consideration of Scottish cinema's frequent representational engagements with Scottishness is to undermine the texts, and the manner by which they are produced,

and to disengage the text with the society in which it was produced. It may be argued that academic inquiry into Scottish cinema has swung from one extreme to the other; from a desire for an 'authentic' Scottish cinema to break from the representational clutches of Hollywood and London to the more recently expressed desire to understand Scottish filmmaking from a transnational perspective, foregrounding the links of production and thematic similarities across nations, and requesting a retreat from the allegedly regressive approaches primarily concerned with the representation of Scottish national identity. Perhaps the case of *Filth* indicates that there is room to meet in the middle. The film may have more production funding from Swedish and German taxpayers than Scottish, and the psychological deterioration of an individual who cannot relate to society is universal in its appeal, yet at key junctures in both its material and symbolic production the film relates distinctly to the nation in which it was produced, and its narrative occurs, and this remains key to its ability to successfully puncture the Anglophone-sphere of film production.

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