FILM-PHILOSOPHY

Review: David Martin-Jones (2010) *Scotland: Global Cinema: Genres, Modes and Identities*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

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David Martin-Jones' *Scotland: Global Cinema: Genres, Modes and Identities* is a fascinating inquiry into the nature of contemporary Scottish cinema. In this study, Martin-Jones examines a variety of films, made in the 1990's and 2000's, set in Scotland's cities, suburbs and countryside. These depictions of Scotland are wide ranging and diverse, consisting of what the author refers to as an assortment of 'fantasy Scotlands' (Martin-Jones 2010, 19), all of which serve as locations within which characters confront, explore and negotiate their own ethnic, sexual, national and regional identities. The main conclusion reached in the book is that there is no one authentic representation of Scotland that most correctly reveals the true spirit of the nation. Rather, there are many 'Scotlands' that symbolize different things to different filmmakers who are concerned with the exploration of different ideas from differing perspectives. As a consequence any adequate conception of a Scottish cinema needs to be conceived broadly and situated within a global, rather than a merely national, perspective. Indeed, the author maintains that the boundaries defining national cinemas in general have become so 'increasingly blurry' due to the 'global context of production and distribution' (Martin-Jones 2010, 234), that it is necessary for us to rethink what is even meant by the phrase 'Scottish cinema.'

The book is organized around 10 chapters, each examining a distinct film genre. Immediately apparent is the remarkable variety of Scottish themed films made during the last two decades. Most people would probably expect the presence of a chapter on Loch Ness Monster films (Chapter 4), costume dramas (Chapter 6), and social realist melodrama (Chapter 8). But then there are also surprises like Chapter 2, which focuses on the Scottish road movie, and Chapter 3, which deals with Bollywood films made in Scotland. Other sections examine comedies (Chapter 1), horror films (Chapter 5), gangster films (Chapter 7), female friendship films (Chapter 9), and art films (Chapter 10). As the author states in the book's conclusion, 'In

all these instances the Scotland we see is...at once Scotland and not Scotland; at once true to life, and fantasy.' (Martin-Jones 2010, 234) Scotland as a setting, as a culture – and even as an ideal – has been deployed by an assortment of filmmakers for a variety of goals; and, the author claims, the perspectives through which filmmakers have filtered their understanding both draws upon and fortifies an ever evolving and increasingly robust tradition of internationally significant cinema.

Scholarship focusing on Scottish cinema first began to emerge with the appearance of Colin McArthur's *Scotch Reels* in 1982. Much of this intial wave of writing tended to be critical of a handful of recurrent stereotypes, or myths, characterizing Scotland's depiction in film. Among these are the myths of Tartanry, the Kailyard, and Clydesideism. The myth of Tartanry portrays Scotland as a 'premodern wilderness' (Martin-Jones 2010, 5) that offers men an opportunity to rediscover and reinvigorate their masculinity. Films like *Braveheart* (Mel Gibson, 1995) and *Rob Roy* (Michael Canton-Jones, 1995) come to mind in this regard. This myth ignores the urban side of Scotland, instead focusing on the Highlands as a mysterious and wild place where men wear kilts and wield swords. Likewise, the myth of the Kailyard (or Cabbage Patch), depicts a romanticized, rural and idyllic Scotland made up of 'isolated, tight-knit communities' (Martin-Jones 2010, 5) that retain purity of spirit through their resistance to the modern world. Films like *Whiskey Galore!* (Alexander Mackendrick, 1949), *The Maggie* (Alexander Mackendrick, 1954), and *Brigadoon* (Vincente Minnelli, 1954) are examples. Finally, there is Clydesideism, which focuses on the working class culture of cities like Glasgow along the River Clyde. The recurrent theme here is that of the 'hard man' who must salvage his sense of masculinity in a post-industrial setting. This type of film is often 'miserablist' (Martin-Jones 2010, 222) in character, depicting a bleak, violent urban world that stands in stark contrast to the idyllic rural settings of the other stereotypes. Films like *Small Faces* (Gillies Mackinnon, 1996), *Ratcatcher* (Lynne Ramsay, 1999), and *Red Road* (Andrea Arnold, 2006) (as well as the recent film *NEDs* (Peter Mullan, 2010), which is not discussed in this book) provide illustrations of this category.

Martin-Jones rejects the position of previous writers who interpret these sorts of films as merely promoting false stereotypes. Such criticism, he claims, has the effect of encouraging us to pass judgment without considering the ways in which stereotypes might serve as a springboard for the exploration of the Scottish identity as perceived and interpreted from a variety of perspectives, both at home and abroad. While it may be the case that Tartantry, the Kailyard and Clydesideism are myths, they do nonetheless tell us something about how Scotland and its inhabitants are thought about and regarded. If we refocus our attention on the differing ways that Scottish fantasies are constructed, this may potentially yield some interesting insight

into what Scotland symbolizes to filmmakers and audiences both within and outside of the country.

An important part of the overall argument in *Scotland: Global Cinema* is that films made in Scotland, while still often drawing upon the above mentioned myths , have also begun to carve out a global identity, in part by depicting Scotland as a location that could be 'anyplace,' and thus an appropriate setting for stories that fall outside of the usual, regionally specific categories. This development increases their appeal to international audiences, and thus increases the marketability and the commercial potential of Scottish films. Though the author doesn't quite come out and explicitly state this, it seems as if he is suggesting the creation of a new form of Scottish myth/stereotype. I'll call it the myth of 'Scotland as 'anyplace.' In this myth, Scotland is largely divested of its history, its traditions and its culture to become merely a backdrop for 'the flows of people.' (Martin-Jones 2010, 171) Martin-Jones throughout the book insinuates that this sort of anyplace myth has been consciously promoted for economic reasons, and that the marketing and financing of Scottish films for the art circuit is part of a strategy designed to make it possible for these films to appeal globally, while avoiding competition with bigger budgeted Hollywood productions.

Scotland: Global Cinema begins and ends with chapters that consider a handful of popular Scottish movies that have been treated as art films by critics. In Chapter One Bill Forsyth's *Gregory's Two Girls* (1999) and Annie Griffin's *Festival* (2005) are analyzed. In Chapter 10, David Mackenzie's *Young Adam* (2003) and Andrea Arnold's *Red Road* (2006) are examined. In both of these chapters, the author's purpose is to demonstrate how these particular Scottish movies illustrate some of the elements that are characteristic of what I have called the anyplace myth, and how this has worked hand-in-hand with the promotion of these works as art films rather than as 'mere' entertainment.

In the case of Bill Forsyth's work, the author points out that critics have been keen to promote films like *Gregory's Two Girls* 'as though they were art films rather than comedies.' (Martin-Jones 2010,28) This tendency seems to be motivated by the mistaken assumption that comedies cannot also be taken seriously as works of art; an assumption that Martin-Jones correctly rejects when he writes, '...a film can be worth studying because, rather than in spite, of it being funny.' (Martin-Jones 2010, 29) The categories of art and comedy are not mutually exclusive, even though there is a tradition, perhaps going all the way back to Aristotle,that tends to treat comedy as a less profound form of drama than tragedy. Martin-Jones argues, in particular, that the promotion of Forsyth as a Scottish auteur has served to elevate his status as an artist precisely by downplaying his popularity as a director of comedies. Nonetheless, the artistic success of a film like *Gregory's Two Girls* is directly related to its comic perspective and how this perspective is brought

to bear on the serious issues it confronts. Primary among these issues is how the identities of the characters on a local, Scottish level relate to their identities on a global, international level; especially in light of the forces of corporate capitalism.

In *Gregory's Two Girls*, this global/local negotiation is facilitated by the film's setting. It takes place in Cumbernauld, one of the Scottish 'new towns' that form the suburbs of Glasgow. These new towns were built, starting in the 1950's, to alleviate the congestion and urban decay of inner city Glasgow, and although they began with a great deal of utopian enthusiasm, the current reality is less than idyllic. In fact, Cumbernauld has twice (in 2001 and 2005) been the 'winner' of *Urban Realm* magazine's 'Carbuncle Award' for the most 'dismal town in Scotland.' Cumbernauld is a planned community with a city center surrounded by parks, walking paths, housing developments, schools and other 'nondescript spaces' (Martin-Jones 2010, 37) As Martin-Jones states, this setting 'could be, literally, anywhere.' (Martin-Jones 2010, 37) The film, in this way, cultivates an international appeal by telling its comedic story about the corrupt nature of global corporate culture against a backdrop that is not overtly tied to any particular national location. Other than the thick Glaswegian accents of many of the characters, there is nothing at all distinctively Scottish about the film.[1] For this reason it is potentially appealing to anyone, in any suburb, anywhere.

Martin-Jones claims that this strategy of detaching the themes in Scottish films from regional or national peculiarities is key in the success of many art films to come out in the 1990s and 2000s. In *Festival*, it is Edinburgh and its annual Fringe Festival that serves as the anyplace setting where, during the course of the film, the paths of English, Canadian, and American characters cross. Although there are iconic Scottish symbols introduced at the start of the film (like bagpipers and the Edinburgh Castle), the emphasis is on Edinburgh as 'a nodal point in the globe wherein international flows of people, cash and culture briefly intersect.' (Martin-Jones 2010, 39) To an even more extreme degree, Martin-Jones argues that the international success of *Red Road* rests in its deliberate avoidance of 'recognizable markers of Scotland or Scottishness.' (Martin-Jones 2010, 229) A film like *Young Adam*, on the other hand, failed to garner as much international attention because it retained too much of a Scottish identity. Films that root themselves too deeply in Scottish traditions, locations and customs, he argues, run the risk of alienating those outside of the culture, and thus because of their desire to achieve a global audience, Scottish filmmakers often downplay regional idiosyncrasies and details.

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[1]*Gregory's Two Girls* is a sequel to Bill Forsyth's second feature *Gregory's Girl* (1981), which was released in America with a dubbed soundtrack that even obliterated the thick Glaswegian accents of the main characters.

By contrast, however, there are films that succeed precisely because of how their depictions of recognizable Scottish settings appeal to the hopes, ideals and desires of international audiences. Films of this sort tend to be bigger budgeted projects made by filmmakers outside of Scotland. In the chapter on Bollywood movies, for example, the author examines how Indian filmmakers have utilized Scotland and its locations in order to appeal to Indian fantasies about Scotland, and thus promote it as a tourist destination. In films such as *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* (Karan Johar, 1998) and *Kandukondain Kandukondain* (Rajiv Menon, 2000), 'the strategic deployment of tourist locales' (Martin-Jones 2010, 73) sells Scotland to the Indian middle classes as an achievable fantasy destination. Here, the focus is on Indian characters who navigate through a Scottish environment in which native Scots are merely a backdrop or window dressing for the activities of the foreign protagonists. These films benefit Scotland as much as they benefit non-resident Indian viewers, Martin-Jones writes, because of the revenue generated for Scotland in location shooting, box office receipts and the increase in tourism.

The chapter on Loch Ness Monster movies continues the discussion of films that use recognizable Scottish locations in order to cater to the fantasies of foreign audiences; this time American audiences. In this chapter the focus is on two US productions: *Loch Ness* (John Henderson, 1996) and *The Water Horse* (Jay Russell, 2007). In both of these films, the myth of the Kailyard is called upon in order to tell stories that set up a contrast between the fantasy of a mysterious, pre-modern, and unspoiled Highland way of life and the civilized yet cynical modern life of urban dwellers. What is particularly interesting in Marin-Jones' analysis here is his observation that both of these films, while directed toward international audiences, in particular target US audiences and aim to depict the Scottish Highlands as a place recalling a sort of wild past that Americans long for in their own culture. In this way, the mystery of the Loch Ness Monster, when viewed through an American perspective, is symbolic of the lost Wild West that no longer exists today. It is an American nostalgia trip, veiled by Scottish imagery.

There are many other films the author analyzes in this book. His discussion of Scottish horror films, like *Dog Soldiers* (Neil Marshall, 2002) and *Wild Country* (Craig Strachan, 2005), focuses on how the myth of Tartantry is deployed to depict the Highlands (contrary to its depiction in the Loch Ness Monster films) as a dangerous, sinister and savage wilderness that rejuvenates the masculinity of those who are able to survive its hazards. The chapter on gangster films provides a fascinating discussion of how the city of Glasgow serves as a gritty setting for films like *American Cousins* (Don Coutts, 2003) and *Danny the Dog* (Louis Leterrier, 2005), both of which involve American characters who find themselves in the ironic position of

leaving New York to live in Glasgow; thus turning the traditional story of the American Dream on its head.

The chapter on the road movie discusses films like *Soft Top, Hard Shoulder* (Stefan Schwartz, 1993), *Carla's Song* (Ken Loach, 1996), and *Tickets* (Ermanno Olmi, Abbas Kiarostami, Ken Loach, 2005), all of which depict Scotland as a symbolically significant destination for travelers. Other films analyzed in depth include: *The Governess* (Sandra Goldbacher, 1998), *Ae Fond Kiss* (Ken Loach, 2004), *On a Clear Day* (Gaby Dellal, 2005), *Women Talking Dirty* (Coky Giedroyc, 1999), and *Beautiful Creatures* (Bill Eagles, 2000). The overall theme throughout the investigation of these varied and diverse films remains consistent: contemporary Scottish cinema, even when drawing on old myths and stereotypes, increasingly engages with global issues and ideas that have an appeal beyond Scotland's national borders.

Despite the book's many strengths, I have two minor criticisms; one having to do with structure and the other being a related criticism about content. Although it does generally argue a consistent point, *Scotland: Global Cinema* reads more like a collection of separate essays on particular films than one cohesive treatise. Any of the chapters could be read in isolation from the others without confusion; and this could be viewed either as a strength or as a weakness. On the positive side, such a structure makes it easy to pick up the work after a long pause in reading or to dive directly into chapters of particular interest without worrying too much about the other sections. On the negative side, the book sometimes feels fragmented.

This leads to my second criticism about the book's content. The bulk of Martin-Jones's attention is focused on the analysis of particular films in order to highlight how their funding, plots, choice of characters and use of imagery illustrate his main thesis that Scottish themed cinema has international, rather than merely regional, significance. There are times when it feels as if this general conclusion is being unnecessarily reinforced in the context of analyzing what may be too many films. While the author's introduction does go some distance to tie together the various sub-themes that arise during the course of his analysis, it would be useful if there was more philosophical discussion, especially in the book's conclusion where I was hoping ideas would be summarized in greater detail, more generalizations would be drawn and the book's various sub-arguments would be reconstructed and related to one another. The analysis of more and more films does not necessarily produce deeper understanding, and there are points in the book where Martin-Jones should perhaps address fewer films in more depth (like *Red Road*), and devote a greater amount of space to making fully explicit more of the intriguing implications hinted at in the text.

But, after all, one book cannot do everything and so perhaps this second criticism is merely an indication of how full of ideas *Scotland: Global*

Cinema really is. It is an engrossing and thought provoking work that calls the idea of any 'national cinema' into question while encouraging readers to think beyond its pages in order to consider Scotland's diverse symbolic meanings for film audiences around the world.

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