Imagining Scotland: *Local Hero* (1983) and Kailyardism

Beatriz Oria Gómez
Universidad de Zaragoza
beaoria@unizar.es

The aim of this article is to reflect on how cinematic representations of Scotland shape our image of the country. Far from offering realistic portrayals of the Scottish identity, most films depicting Scotland today still dwell on the clichés and stereotypes traditionally associated with this nation, thus perpetuating its dreamlike image and immersing the country in a *stasis* which prevents it from active participation in the historical present. In the present article, I will focus on one particular trend of representation, the Kailyard tradition, paying attention to its use in the film *Local Hero* (Bill Forsyth, 1983) as marker of a distinctive Celtic identity. The analysis will show how the apparent subversion of stereotypes and 'militant' attitude that some critics have identified in the film actually hide, once again, a reinforcement of traditional representations of the nation whose main target is commercial success.

Keywords: Scotland; Kailyardism; *Local Hero;* tradition; representation.

Este artículo pretende reflexionar sobre cómo las representaciones cinematográficas de Escocia condicionan la imagen que tenemos de este país. Lejos de ofrecer retratos realistas de la identidad escocesa, la mayoría de las películas que muestran Escocia en la actualidad todavía beben de los clichés y estereotipos asociados tradicionalmente a esta nación, perpetuando así su imagen idílica y sumergiéndola en un estancamiento que dificulta su participación activa en el presente histórico. En este artículo me centraré en un tipo de representación concreto: la tradición 'Kailyard', prestando especial atención a su uso en la película *Local Hero* (Bill Forsyth, 1983) como marcador de una identidad Celta distintiva. El análisis mostrará cómo la aparente subversión de estereotipos y la actitud 'militante' que algunos críticos han identificado en la película en realidad encubren, una vez más, una reafirmación de las representaciones tradicionales de la nación que tienen en el éxito comercial su principal objetivo.

Palabras clave: Escocia; tradición 'Kailyard'; *Local Hero*; tradición; representación.

It is a well-known fact that, during the 1950s, Hollywood producer Arthur Freed went to Scotland to search for locations for the shooting of *Brigadoon* (Vincente Minnelli, 1954), the famous Gene Kelly musical. He visited the most representative and picturesque sites of the land, but was not convinced by the "Scottishness" of these places. There was no village or glen in Scotland which looked "Scottish enough" for him. In the end, he decided to shoot the film in a Hollywood studio, where the Scottish essence could be "faithfully" recreated (Forsyth 1990: 1). As was to be expected, the result was a film which offered a highly romanticised representation of Scotland far removed from reality: *Brigadoon* pictured a dream-like village which emerged from the mist every 100

years and which was populated by harmless and colourfully-dressed people whose only apparent motivation in life was to sing and dance. However, rather than a drawback, this remarkable lack of realism proved to be the film's greatest asset, as its great popularity with the public throughout time has shown. One of the keys for *Brigadoon*'s success did not lie in the mere display of Scottish scenery and traditions, but in the display of what people assumed Scottish scenery and traditions to be like. These assumptions on the part of Hollywood's producers and audiences stemmed basically from a cultural heritage including literature, poetry, music and art which laid the basis for the creation of a mythical view of Scotland born with Romanticism and perpetuated to the present day thanks to the most far-reaching cultural manifestation of our time: cinema.

The aim of this essay is to reflect on how cinematic representations of Scotland shape our image of the country. With this purpose, I will focus specifically on one particular trend, the Kailyard tradition, paying attention to its use in the film *Local Hero* (Bill Forsyth, 1983) as marker of a distinctive Celtic identity. More specifically, I intend to show how the film plays with Kailyard stereotypes, eventually perpetuating them. The reason why I have chosen *Local Hero* as my object of analysis is that, due to the marked national character and popularity of Bill Forsyth's films (he is one of the few Scottish directors with international projection), they have become one of the favourite arenas among critics for discussion of the representation of Scottish identity in film. Among Forsyth's Scottish works, which include *That Sinking Feeling* (1979), *Gregory's Girl* (1980), *Comfort and Joy* (1984) and *Gregory's Two Girls* (1999), *Local Hero* is his most remarkable achievement to date, given both its quality and its commercial success.

Due to the fact that Scotland has not had (at least until recently) a developed film industry, it is representations from outside that have traditionally prevailed in people's minds. These representations are frequently accompanied by adjectives like mythical, dream-like, timeless or rural. In a word, what predominates is the image of a country anchored in the past. This has several consequences: on the one hand, the exploitation of landscape and traditional heritage has been positive for the promotion of tourism. On the other, excess of emphasis on tradition, nature and rurality has led to a damaging association in people's minds between Scotland, underdevelopment and cultural inferiority.[1] This, of course, has had negative effects for the country and its economy has been one of the most damaged sectors because Scotland is not perceived from abroad as a modern nation suitable for foreign investment.[2] However, these external representations are not entirely to blame for the promotion of a mythical vision of the nation. As I hope to show in this essay, the Scots themselves have also contributed to their own stereotyping, something which is openly acknowledged by some Scottish critics like Alistair McKay, who claims that "[w]hen it comes to film, we behave like a conquered people" (2006), or David Bruce, who acknowledges that "it was ourselves, mainly per Walter

---

[1] In this sense, the world's view on the Scottish land is appropriately encapsulated by Brigadoon, a village "constructed from myth and left in limbo while the rest of the world moved on" (Bruce 1996: 39).
[2] According to McArthur, a survey among German industrialists revealed that "the image of Scotland inside their heads led them to conclude that Scotland was a good country to rest in but not invest in" (1994: 117).

Scott, who invented the myth in the first place and we are not above exploiting it for our own purposes when it suits us" (1996: 39).

The most typical trends of representation of the Scottish identity are Tartantry and Kailyardism. Both have in common their emergence "in the 19th century to give Scotland a distinctive identity that was not English" (Richards 1997: 191). However, they offer very different representations of Scotland. As Colin McArthur explains, "[t]artantry, with its emphasis on the clans, the wild Highlands and Jacobitism, is tribal, neo-feudal and atavistic, defiantly pre- and anti-modern", while "Kailyard is domesticated village Scotland, parochial, sentimental, backward-looking, small-scale, deeply religious" (in Richards 1997: 191). So it could be argued that the Kailyard tradition opposes Tartantry's Highland romanticism in its focus on simple village life and folk, and yet complements it by sharing the same backward-looking ethos. At bottom, what links both traditions is their reinforcement of Scotland's cultural and political inferiority. This idea is supported by Cairns Craig, who argues that

> Tartantry and Kailyard, seemingly so opposite in their ethos, are the joint creations of an imagination which, in recoil from the apparently featureless integration of Scottish life into an industrial culture whose power and identity lies outside Scottish control, acknowledges its own inability to lay hold of contemporary reality by projecting itself upon images of a society equally impotent before the forces of history. (1982: 13)

In this way, Craig, like many other critics, sees Tartantry and Kailyardism as projections of a mythical past which imply an escape from Scotland's present reality, thus preventing change and burdening the nation's development.

1. Reiventing the Past

It must be emphasised, at the outset, that this old tradition and history Scotland seems so attached to is nothing but an invention. According to Hugh Trevor-Roper's article "The Invention of Tradition: The Highland Tradition of Scotland" (1994: 15-41), up until the later 17th century the Highlands were a colony of Ireland in racial, cultural and political terms, and it was not until the late 18th and early 19th centuries that Scotland started to develop an independent Highland tradition. This was done by means of a cultural revolt against Ireland which claimed that Celtic Scotland was the "mother-nation" of Ireland and not the other way round. This idea was reasserted in the 1760s by James Macpherson and Rev. John Macpherson, who created a new literature and history for Celtic Scotland actually stolen from the Irish. Once this had been done, the way was open for the creation of new Highland traditions, which were conveniently presented as ancient. The most remarkable of these traditions was, of course, the kilt. The tartan was known in the 16th century, but the kilt as we know it today was invented by an English Quaker industrialist in the mid 17th century. An even later invention was the differentiation of clans by tartans, which originated in the different tartan uniforms worn by the Highland regiments. Trevor-Roper goes on to say that this historical fabrication was supported by the Highland Society, which was founded in 1778 with the aim of "preserving"

ancient Highland virtues and traditions. It was also intended to give historical respectability to the Highland dress, which was basically promoted by the tartan industry. Manufacturers saw a ripe business in the possibility of building up a repertoire of differentiated clan tartans. This took the Highland myth a step further with the reconstruction and extension of a clan system actually destroyed after the great rebellion of 1745. With the passing of time and the intervention of figures like the brothers Allen (later known as the Sobieski Stuarts) or James Logan, supposedly ancient traditions like the clan system and their corresponding dresses were gradually expanded and even accepted by Lowland Scotland.

As this brief historical account shows, mythical Scotland was a creation of the late 18th and early 19th centuries, which coincides with the Romantic period. Therefore, it can be argued that the image of Scotland and the Celtic identity we have today was basically an invention of this artistic movement. With its exaltation of dramatic landscapes, which were directly related to the unruly Scottish character, and its fondness of the past, this movement quickly fabricated a rich cultural and historical heritage whose falsehood did not prevent its blind adoption on the part of the people.

The decline of the Jacobite myth was followed by another trend of representation known as Kailyardism. It was initiated in the late 1880s and 1890s by the Kailyard writers S. R. Crockett, Ian MacLaren, and above all, J. M. Barrie, whose work *Auld Licht Idylls* (1888) is credited by Cairns Craig as the most influential piece of Kailyard writing (1982: 7). These authors popularised a pastoral form of literature marked by a clear absence of contemporary industrial Scotland and a sentimental idealisation of humble village life, thus giving expression to the Scottish working class (the only social group in Scotland which still 'lacked' a recognisable identity). This literature was characterised by its escapism and by giving the readers the image of Scotland they liked to imagine. However, the parochialism and narrow-mindedness of this image has been seen by many critics as extremely damaging for the nation. Colin McArthur, for instance, laments that "[f]ilms depicting Scotland evoke a timeless, pre-industrial, highland world in which the simple inhabitants do not work, they *dance*" (1998: 27). The problem is that this view has become so widespread that, as Cairns Craig puts it, "[a]fter Kailyard it becomes impossible to give expression to a vernacular working-class environment in Scotland without provoking those connotations" (1982: 11). Indeed, the Kailyard influence is so far-reaching that a myth initially born with literature in the 19th century has materialised today in film. This view of the country has become so deeply ingrained in most people's minds that today very few dare contradict the weak historical foundation which cements it, a circumstance which is nowadays boosted by the cinematic representations of the nation: far from offering realistic portrayals of the Scottish identity, most films depicting Scotland still dwell on the clichés and stereotypes traditionally associated with this nation, thus perpetuating its dreamlike image and immersing the country in a *stasis* which prevents it from active participation in the historical present.[3]

---

[3] Even though traditional representations of Scotland in the Tartantry and Kailyard fashions are the dominant trends, I am aware of the existence of other kinds of films which do not fit readily into traditional representations of the nation such as *My Childhood Trilogy* (Bill Douglas, 1972-78), *The Wicker Man* (Robin Hardy, 1973), *Death Watch* (Bertrand Tavernier, 1980), *Wilbur Wants to Kill Himself* (Lone Scherfig, 2002), or *Young Adam* (David Mackenzie, 2003). Some of

Some films following this mode of representation are for example *I Know Where I'm going* (Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger, 1945), *Whisky Galore* (Alexander Mackendrick, 1949)*, Laxdale Hall* (John Eldridge, 1953) or *The Maggie* (Alexander Mackendrick, 1954), to name just a few. These films have traditionally been very popular with the public and their success resides, just as in Kailyard literature, in the fact that they provide warm pictures of Scotland people can relate to, as they are presented with a familiar image of the country. Watching these films is pleasant because they satisfy their audiences' expectations. Their view of the country is not challenged and therefore there is no need to change it. This is true for both international audiences as well as for Scottish ones. However, the blind faith of some Scots in this kind of representations has upset some critics such as Craig, who sees Tartantry and Kailyardism as inventions fostered by an educated middle class committed in the 19th century to English assimilation, which was meant to prevent "significant change directed from within the Scottish community itself" (1982: 13). Nevertheless, the author who has raised his voice more frequently against these myths is Colin McArthur, who dismisses them as ahistorical, regressive and culturally disabling (1982: 40-69). For McArthur, the most alarming thing is that this dominant discourse has been interiorised and accepted even by the Scots themselves who have ended up believing this self-image, and consequently, the feeling of inferiority that accompanies it. McArthur denounces this "colonisation of the mental as well as the material life" and labels this phenomenon "the Scottish Discursive Unconscious", which he defines as "an unconscious predilection among Scots (and any who would make images of or tell stories about Scotland) for lachrymosely elegiac tales set in the Scottish highlands of the past and, the corollary, the greatest difficulty in making or appreciating images of Scotland which do not conform to this model" (1998: 28).

2. *Local Hero* and Kailyardism

In my analysis of *Local Hero,* I will leave aside Tartantry in order to focus on the film's use of the Kailyard trend of representation of the Scottish identity. In the following lines, I will try to show that the apparent subversion of stereotypes and 'militant' attitude that some critics have identified in the film actually hides a deeper reinforcement of traditional representations of the nation whose main target is commercial success. *Local Hero* continues playing with the assumptions and stereotypes set up by Minnelli's film in the 1950s. In Bill Forsyth's words, "[i]t seemed to contain a similar theme to *Brigadoon,* which also involved some Americans coming over to Scotland, becoming part of a small community, being changed by the experience and affecting the place in their own way" (in Hunter and Astaire 1983). In *Local Hero* the intruding

---

them have been very successful with the public, sometimes including international audiences, as is the case of *Shallow Grave* (Danny Boyle, 1994) or *Trainspotting* (Danny Boyle, 1996). However, the representations of Scotland offered by these films are by no means as influential as the images provided by more 'traditional' mainstream films like *Brigadoon* (Vincente Minnelli, 1954), *Highlander* (Russell Mulcahy, 1986), *Rob Roy* (Michael Caton-Jones, 1995) or *Braveheart* (Mel Gibson, 1995), which was voted the second "most important movie of our generation" in an American poll in 1998 ("Master Clan" 1999).

American is Mac MacIntyre (Peter Riegert), a corporate deal-maker for an American oil company who is sent to Ferness, a small Scottish fishing village, in order to persuade its inhabitants to sell their properties so that a refinery can be built. The film presents the strong contrast between Mac's view of life and the laid-back habits of the village's dwellers. However, the film gives this familiar story an unexpected twist when the American intruder is welcomed with open arms by the greedy villagers, who are willing to exchange scenery for wealth. In spite of this, the film ends with the preservation of nature thanks to the stubbornness of Ben (Fulton MacKay), who will not sell his six miles of beach, and Mac's transformation from a ruthless executive into a soft-hearted dreamer.

As John Brown puts it, *Local Hero* deals with "the basic Highland myth in films about Scotland, namely, the image of the isolated Highland/rural community facing disruption from the outside world" (1984: 42). The American oil man is confronted with the slower pace of Kailyard life and eventually taken over by it. It is important to emphasise that what is presented here is the confrontation of two cultures: Scotland and North America. This is an important point which could be used to contradict McArthur's criticism. *Local Hero* deviates from other Kailyard films in the fact that England is totally absent. Recalling the myth of David and Goliath, it appears as an independent nation able to confront a giant such as the United States and to defeat it. Kailyard films usually portray the 'fight' between Scotland and England, showing Scotland in a subordinate position, in constant struggle for freedom. Here, however, this fight is wholly ignored, showing that Scotland can be an autonomous and independent entity which can be depicted in film in other terms than the English/Scottish opposition.

As the familiar plot announces, the film relies on the common cinematic myth of Kailyardism, presenting the spectators with well-known characters and situations and playing with the audience's expectations. *Local Hero* begins in typical Kailyard fashion: with a couple of foreigners arriving at this isolated community. Meaningfully, they are introduced into this world by a thick mist which reminds the viewer of *Brigadoon*, thus bringing into play all the associations and meanings regarding Scottish identity that this film evokes. This is, of course, the ancient mist that pervades many other Scottish films as a sign of the quasi-magical nature of the country's self-contained villages. At this point the audience can feel at ease with the familiar situation of the confrontation between tradition and modernity usually portrayed in Kailyard films. The striking contrast between the two worlds is sympathetically depicted by Forsyth by means of comedy: for instance, the character of Gordon (Denis Lawson) laughs at McIntyre's ways and accent and the inhabitants of the village are amazed because he has only one job. On the other hand, McIntyre also seems quite puzzled at the Scots' way of life and is surprised when he learns that they can speak English and not just some ancient dialect.

This traditional representation is emphasised by certain symbols which are recurrent throughout the film, such as the sky and the sea (which will be commented on later) or the telephone-box. This is the only link that McIntyre has with the 'civilised' world, a detail that symbolises the village's remoteness. A central theme of Kailyardism, this remoteness is not only physical, but also social and moral, and it means a breakaway from "metropolitan rules, conventions and certainties. Scotland is consequently a space in which a range

6

of fantasies, desires and anxieties can be explored and expressed" (Petrie 2000: 32). Once again, *Local Hero* plays with these assumptions: beneath its innocent comic plot, more serious themes such as loneliness and isolation emerge, and the virgin land of Scotland, with its 'purity' of spirit is presented as the answer to urban anxieties. These ideas are enacted in the character of McIntyre, who sees the fantasy of belonging to a community fulfilled in this remote Scottish village. By means of the initial scenes in Houston the audience gets to know the isolation and the lack of human contact which is experienced in this big city. McIntyre communicates with other people mainly through mechanical means such as the telephone, and his attempts to establish some kind of link with them fail, as is shown in the scene in which he tries to ask a girl out on the phone while being in the same room as her. The distance that separates them despite being so close indicates the difficulty of establishing close human bonds in the metropolis, where relationships are superficial and short-lived. In contrast, Scotland is presented to us as a close-knit community, a place full of human warmth where real friends as well as love can be found, which is shown by the very close relationship between Gordon and his wife Stella (Jennifer Black), for instance.

Love is symbolised by the two female characters in the film: Marina (Jenny Seagrove) and Stella. However, unlike Danny (Peter Capaldi), who seems to get the girl at the end, McIntyre does not. In this respect, *Local Hero* deviates from the typical Kailyard plot: in these films the outsider usually wins the girl's heart, marrying into the community and cementing his relationship with the environment, as occurs in *Brigadoon*, for instance. This process of 'nativisation' is not fully achieved here, since McIntyre finally returns home alone. However, his experience has not been worthless as he feels completely changed by it. Indeed, his evolution throughout the film is striking and, once more, follows the typical Kailyard pattern. Kailyard fans can thus delight in the familiar transformation of a sophisticated executive into a soft-hearted dreamer. This change in the character is progressive and is shown in the contrast between the initial scenes where he is seen carefully placing his suits on hangers or asking for an adaptor in order to plug his electrical suitcase in; and the second half of the film, in which he appears casually dressed, picking up seashells, even forgetting his watch on the rocks, which is swept away by the sea. The role that the sky plays in his 'conversion' is also interesting since the main changes in him are produced after he is dazzled by a meteor shower. Significantly, the next step in his evolution, when he decides that he wants to stay and swap lives with Gordon, takes place after witnessing the *aurora borealis*.

As stated before, the sky, together with the sea, are key symbols in the film, and they are directly associated with the women by means of their names, Marina and Stella. The two outsiders literally fall in love with the women and consequently with what they represent, that is, the sea and the stars, the greatness and beauty of the wild, incorrupt Scottish landscape. The sky, for instance, plays an important role: at the beginning of the film, McIntyre's boss, Happer (Burt Lancaster), tells him to keep watch over Virgo (which stands for Scotland's virgin land) and many events and occurrences take place in the sky: meteor showers, northern lights, jet fighters, Happer's arrival by helicopter, McIntyre's leaving by the same means, and more importantly, Happer's obsession with astronomy, which eventually brings about the preservation of

7

the village. In this way, the sky functions as a recurrent motif whose meaning comes full circle at the end of the film. The last scene shows us McIntyre, back in the city, now a changed man, taking out his sea shells, looking at the empty sky of Houston, alone with his memories and with the phone as his only link with this dream-like Scotland.

Although much in *Local Hero* meets the audience's Kailyard expectations, early in the film the spectator also realises how the story departs from traditional representations and how archetypes are defamiliarised. In this respect, Forsyth shows his awareness of the image which Scotland has exported to the rest of the world, thus playing with the viewers' knowledge of this kind of film. According to Duncan Petrie, in Kailyard films "[m]odernity takes the form of unwelcome outsiders, representing the forces of the state, the law, big business and the city, who invariably gets their come-uppance at the hands of the wily locals" (2000: 4). Martin McLoone thinks similarly: "the regressive and nostalgic nature of Kailyardism is filtered through the village's wise characters whose role in life is to point out the shortcomings and worldliness of big-city life or to resist interventions from the modern world outside" (2001: 187). Taking into account these definitions of Kailyardism in film, *Local Hero* seems to deviate from this pattern, subverting the audience's expectations. Rather than resisting the foreigners and fighting to keep their landscape and way of life, the film presents us with greedy villagers who are willing to collaborate in "their own exploitation" (Petrie 2000: 155), thus reversing traditional roles and attitudes and distancing itself ironically from earlier Kailyard films such as *Rockets Galore* (Michael Relph, 1957) in which the islanders sabotage the plans for a rocket site.

A similar defamiliarisation of roles is present all through the film: for example, the parish minister, symbol for the church, is black and as such, not what we would call the representative of an immemorial tradition; for his part, Happer, the great boss, is portrayed as an eccentric rather than a big-city executive, more interested in the sky than in doing business. Likewise, the rabbit which is tenderly rescued from the mist by Danny and McIntyre ends up converted into a stew, thus reversing our expectations about ruthless big-city executives and amiable villagers.

This subversion of roles gives a fresh approach to a hackneyed story, thus contributing to the evolution of the Kailyard genre. However, Chantal Cornut-Gentille has gone further in this direction, contending that through this defamiliarisation of stereotypes, the film takes a strong militant political standpoint with respect to British national identity. She argues that the institutional conflict between England and Scotland is basic in the film and that *Local Hero*'s aim is not to perpetuate a Kailyard vision of the country, but to dramatise the confrontation between two different worlds: the urban world of progress, capitalism and fierce materialism represented by Houston, and the rural world of tranquillity and warmth epitomised by Ferness (2006: 271-73). According to her, the film's display of a strong regional image is an attempt to resist the "dictatorial, and almost racial, imposition of a British 'nationalist' hegemony on Thatcher's part" (2006: 279, my translation). From my point of view, Cornut-Gentille is taking her argument too far because the cultural confrontation which the film proposes takes place exclusively between Scotland and the US. England is totally out of the picture in this case. Besides, even if England were present in the film, it could be argued that the use of regionalism

as a strategy of resistance in the face of English oppression has been a constant throughout the tradition of Kailyardism. In fact, the features she describes as specific of Scottish regionalism are precisely the ones which have always been used by Kailyard films in order to support their traditional view of the country. Scotland's peculiar geography, which motivates the feeling of isolation and remoteness transmitted by Ferness; the scarce economic activity of the area together with the humorous representation of labour, and the stereotyped representation of the Scottish character based on pride, stubbornness and local chauvinism are seen by Cornut-Gentille as a kind of "antidote" against British nationalism (2006: 279-80). It cannot be denied that *Local Hero*'s display of Scottish idiosyncrasy can be taken as an attempt to differentiate itself from its historical oppressor. However, this is nothing new. Kailyard films have *always* been associated with the support of the Scottish identity against possible external threats through the emphasis (and sometimes exaggeration) of local qualities. For this reason, I do not consider Forsyth's film particularly militant or innovative with respect to previous Kailyard films.

From my point of view, the main reason why the film can be regarded as highly traditional in the depiction of the Scottish identity is that rather than the extreme materialism the villagers seem so happy to embrace throughout the film, it is the 'traditional' Scottish character which stays in the mind of the viewer when the film finishes. The end of the film invalidates previous statements about a different kind of Scottishness which the greedy villagers seem to represent. This view is shared by Duncan Petrie, who also believes that "ultimately the film conforms to the established tradition in terms of a reliance on the romantic and elemental appeal of the beauty and remoteness of the landscape" (2000: 155). Indeed, despite most of the characters' wish to sell the village and embrace progress, it is Ben, the beach dweller, who has the last word in the matter… and the last word in the audience's mind too. The stubbornness he embodies is one of the Scottish features *par excellence* typically represented in Kailyard films. His position is clearly backward-looking, burdening Scotland's progress and preventing change, just like Kailyard representations have always done. However, the main reason why the film can be said to align firmly with tradition at the end is that Ben's position is not negatively portrayed by the film as damaging for the village. Rather, it clearly feels like a happy ending, thus invalidating previous images of Scottishness proposed by the film: even though the representation of the traditional Scottish character is subverted throughout the film, at bottom *Local Hero* is Kailyardian, because the community is 'saved' by the very flaw the picture seems to make fun of. Scottish stubbornness and idealism are rendered conspicuous by the film, but they are sympathetically portrayed as they serve to preserve the land's virginal state. Conveniently, the project of building a refinery is rejected in favour of a natural preserve, which may as well function as a metaphor for the state of timeless preservation (and marginality) in which the nation has been traditionally immersed since Tartantry and Kailyardism took root in people's imagination. Once again, the preservation of the past is more important than finding a future for Scotland. In this way, *Local Hero* finally adheres to traditional Kailyard discourses in its privileging of scenery over economic resources, thus preventing the country from industrial development and reinforcing the spectators' view of Scotland as a non-industrial, virgin land which must be 'preserved' from progress. The fact that the American

company's decision not to invest in the area is perceived as a happy ending represents an attempt to keep intact the image of Scotland as a dreamlike land forever anchored in the past.

The traditional view of the country that the film ultimately proposes does not really come as a surprise if we take into account its commercial aspirations. Producer David Puttnam has always been involved in the making of commercial mainstream cinema and has openly admitted his self-conscious efforts to reach the largest possible audience with his films (Milne 1983: 87; Sutherland 1983: 16). It cannot be forgotten that films are not only artistic manifestations, but also (and in some cases *only*) commercial products. As Puttnam himself acknowledges, "the desire to make lasting works of art must be balanced with the need—even the desire—to make a living" (1994: 81-82). For this reason, the success of his previous film, *Chariots of Fire* (Hugh Hudson, 1981), prompted Puttnam to take advantage of its popularity by embarking on a similar project. He invested $5 million in Forsyth's film, knowing that the safest way to obtain a profit was to capitalise on a formula which had already proved successful with international audiences, namely, the idealised and romanticised vision of Scotland popularised by films like *Brigadoon.*[4] Puttnam and Forsyth also tried to ensure commercial success through the casting of an international star (Burt Lancaster) for one of the main parts. The formula seemed to work well, since *Local Hero* grossed almost $6 million in the US alone, a considerable box-office taking into account its 'modest' pretensions in comparison with Hollywood productions.[5] What can be drawn from these data is that the film's intention was not precisely to change wide-spread preconceptions about Scotland, but to 'sell' the traditional Scottish identity to international audiences through the use of well-known stereotypes and familiar images of what people assume Scotland is like.

In spite of its commercial aims, Forsyth's use of stereotypes is slightly more sophisticated than usual in mainstream cinema. He does not deploy these familiar types innocently, as was the case in early examples of the genre. Rather, he plays consciously with the audience's expectations about this kind of film, apparently subverting their assumptions. However, as pointed out before, this subversion does not last long, since the audience's Kailyard expectations are fully met at the end of the film. The problem with stereotypes is that they do not take into account the fact that identity is fluid and changeable since they tend "to reproduce the idea of a core identity, a fixed and relatively stable centre" (Higson 1998: 360). Regarding the topic of stereotypes, Joachim Schwend makes a useful distinction between the concepts of autostereotype and heterostereotype. The former is a means of self-definition, while the latter is the representation of a people created from the outside (2000: 30). The main implication of this idea is that, according to Edward Said, "all cultures tend to

---

[4] This mode of representation is seen by Colin McArthur (and obviously also by Puttnam), as the only way to market Scotland to the rest of the world. For him, those films which do not conform to this pattern are "likely to be quite literally 'unreadable' to a wide, international audience" (1994: 119). However, unlike the producer, who was probably highly satisfied with the film's final result, McArthur sees this kind of films as a true disgrace for the progress of the nation. He gives the following advice to Celtic film-makers: "the more your films are consciously aimed at an international market, the more their conditions of intelligibility will be bound up with regressive discourses about your own culture" (1994: 119-20).
[5] Taking inflation into account this figure would amount to more than $12 million today. <http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=localhero.htm.> [Accessed on 19 April 2007]

10

make representations of foreign cultures the better to master or in some way control them" (1994: 120). This is connected to the way imperialism makes use of these outside representations of 'the Other' in order to subjugate it, turning these representations from the outside into truths for the whole world and even for the community which is being mastered.

Bearing this in mind, the portrayal of Scottish identity offered by *Local Hero* is especially interesting because, being a Scottish production, it constitutes an internal representation of the country, thus falling into Schwend's category of autostereotype. This film is an example of how sometimes the mythical vision of Scotland cannot be attributed to an imperialist need of stereotyping 'the Other' in order to control it. Rather, despite the film's address to an international market, *Local Hero* is also a film made by a Scot for the Scots, whose identification with the national identity proposed by the film reveals a lot about their self-image as a community. For this reason, Forsyth's film would be a good example of what Malcomson sees as the "incorporation by the oppressed of the cultural discourses of the oppressors" (1985: 17). This cultural colonisation of the popular unconscious has repeatedly been examined by Colin McArthur, who regrets the discursive entrapment of the Scots: "The truly terrifying dimension of this, however, is that *homo celticus* will come to live within the discursive categories fashioned by the oppressor to the extent of casting himself in the imposed role in the stories he makes about himself" (1994: 119). Taking into account all that has been said before, it is obvious that breaking with traditional representations of the nation is not in Forsyth's agenda. Rather, he also seems deeply influenced by what McArthur calls "the Scottish Discursive Unconscious". For all these reasons, I do not see Forsyth's initial 'subversion' of traditional Scottish stereotypes as a serious attempt to construct a different kind of Scottishness. As I see it, Forsyth's film infuses a measure of novelty in the Kailyard genre by slightly shaking the pillars on which it is cemented. However, he takes neither the transgression of the Scottish identity nor the genre's boundaries too far, since in the end *Local Hero* clearly aligns itself with traditional Kailyard ideals.[6] So, it can be concluded that Forsyth's film makes a self-conscious use of the Kailyard tradition, reworking traditional views of Scotland, but rather than deviate from it, it turns out to be equally romantic at bottom: the film's happy ending with the preservation of the land guarantees that Scotland will remain anchored in the dream-like mist of the past forever… at least in the minds of spectators all around the world.

---

[6] Similar readings of the film can be found in Malcomson (1985: 16-21), Michie (1992: 252-71), McArthur (1994: 117-20) and McLoone (2000: 54).

3. Conclusion

Shot in stunning Scottish locations, *Local Hero* features all the clichés and commonplaces about the country most international audiences expect to find. Indeed, Forsyth's film was made with the international market in mind but always keeping an eye on the Scottish audience, whose national identity feels powerfully engaged through the recognition of shared cultural traits. In a word, it tries to define the Scottish essence as it is perceived from abroad, but also as experienced by the Scots themselves. This image does not need to correspond with reality, since the inaccuracy that the romantisation of village life implies is not so important for the Scots as the recognition of their (imagined) Scottish identity in the film. This essay has tried to show how our image of Scotland is still powerfully influenced by traditional representations of the nation, in this case by the Kailyard tradition, a trend which has strongly contributed to the world's perception of Scotland in terms of rurality and underdevelopment on account of the contrast which is frequently established between modernity and tradition. This confrontation is usually won by the latter, thus perpetuating a disempowered image of the nation which paralyses Scotland in the mists of the past and prevents its insertion into the historical present. This phenomenon has been frequently blamed on cultural impositions from outside, but, as this essay has pointed out, the traditional 'Scottish essence' shown in films like *Local Hero* has just as often been created and perpetuated by the Scots themselves. This 'invention' of a national culture, however, has proved to be a minor detail compared to the sense of national unity it has brought about. Cinematic representations of Scotland may be imprecise and unrealistic, but they are successful among the Scots because they have become a part of their imagined identity as a nation. As long as people keep on believing in mythical Scotland, this kind of films will exist because, as Gene Kelly's character says in *Brigadoon*: "Sometimes the things you have faith in become more real to you than the things you can see and touch".[7]

Works Cited

Brown, J. 1984: "The Land Beyond Brigadoon". *Sight and Sound* 53.4: 40-46.

Bruce, D. 1996: *Scotland, the Movie.* Edinburgh: Polygon.

Cornut-Gentille, C. 2006: *El cine británico de la era Thatcher: ¿cine nacional o "nacionalista"?* Zaragoza: Prensas Universitarias.

Craig, C. 1982: "Myths against History: Tartantry and Kailyard in 19th-Century Scottish Literature". *Scotch Reels: Scotland in Cinema and Television.* Ed. C. McArthur. London: BFI. 7-15.

Forsyth, H. 1990: *Scotland in Film.* Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP.

Higson, A. 1998: "Nationality: National Identity and the Media". *The Media: An Introduction.* Eds. A. Briggs and P. Cobley. Harlow: Longman. 354-64.

Hunter, A. and M. Astaire 1983: *Local Hero: The Making of the Film.* Edinburgh: Polygon Books. <http://www.scc.net/~heather/localhero.html> [Accessed: 20 April 2007]

Malcomson, S. L. 1985: "Modernism Comes to the Cabbage Patch: Bill Forsyth and the Scottish Cinema". *Film Quarterly* 38.3: 16-21.

"Master Clan". 1999: *Guardian Unlimited* 23 April. <http://film.guardian.co.uk/Guardian_NFT/story/0,,69907,00.html#article_c ontinue> [Accessed: 25 March 2007]

McArthur, C. 1982: "Scotland and Cinema: The Iniquity of the Fathers". *Scotch Reels: Scotland in Cinema and Television.* Ed. C. McArthur. London: BFI. 40-69.

—— 1994: "The Cultural Necessity of a Poor Celtic Cinema". *Border Crossing: Film in Ireland, Britain and Europe.* Eds. J. Hill, M. McLoone, and P. Hainsworth. Belfast: Institute of Irish Studies. 112-25.

—— 1998: "Scotland and the *Braveheart* Effect". *Journal for the Study of British Culture* 5.1: 27-39.

—— 2003: Brigadoon*, Braveheart and the Scots.* London and New York: I.B. Tauris.

McKay, A. 2006: "Caledonia Makes the Cut". *Scotland on Sunday* 21 May. <http://living.scotsman.com/topics.cfm?tid=36&id=760672006> [Accessed: 18 April 2007]

McLoone, M. 2000: *Irish Film: The Emergence of a Contemporary Cinema.* London: BFI.

—— 2001: "Internal Decolonisation?: British Cinema in the Celtic Fringe". *The British Cinema Book.* Ed. R. Murphy. London: BFI. 184-90.

Michie, A. 1992: "Scotland: Strategies of Centralisation". *All Our Yesterdays: 90 Years of British Cinema.* Ed. C. Barr. London: BFI. 252-71.

Milne, T. 1983: "Local Hero". *Monthly Film Bulletin* 50.591: 87-88.

Petrie, D. 2000: *Screening Scotland.* London: BFI.

Puttnam, D. 1994: "Creativity and Commerciality: Film-making in Europe". *Border Crossing: Film in Ireland, Britain and Europe.* Eds. J. Hill, M. McLoone, and P. Hainsworth. Belfast: Institute of Irish Studies. 81-87.

Richards, J. 1997: *Films and British National Identity: From Dickens to* Dad's Army*.* Manchester: Manchester UP.

Said, E. W. 1994: *Culture and Imperialism.* London: Vintage.

Schwend, J. 2000: "Scottishness". *Journal for the Study of British Cultures* 7.1: 29-38.

Sutherland, A. 1983: "Local Hero". *Screen International* 385 (12 March): 16.

Trevor-Roper, H. 1994: "The Invention of Tradition: The Highland Tradition of Scotland". *The Invention of Tradition.* Eds. E. Hobsbawn and T. Ranger. Cambridge: Cambridge UP. 15-41.

Films cited

Braveheart (Mel Gibson, 1995)
Brigadoon (Vincente Minnelli, 1954)
Chariots of Fire (Hugh Hudson, 1981)
Comfort and Joy (Bill Forsyth, 1984)
Death Watch (Bertrand Tavernier, 1980)
Gregory's Girl (Bill Forsyth, 1980)
Gregory's Two Girls (Bill Forsyth, 1999)
Highlander (Russell Mulcahy, 1986)

I Know Where I'm going (Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger, 1945)
Laxdale Hall (John Eldridge, 1953)
Local Hero (Bill Forsyth, 1983)
The Maggie (Alexander Mackendrick, 1954)
My Childhood Trilogy (Bill Douglas, 1972-78)
Rob Roy (Michael Caton-Jones, 1995)
Rockets Galore (Michael Relph, 1957)
Shallow Grave (Danny Boyle, 1994)
That Sinking Feeling (Bill Forsyth, 1979)
Trainspotting (Danny Boyle, 1996)
Whisky Galore (Alexander Mackendrick, 1949)
The Wicker Man (Robin Hardy, 1973)
Wilbur Wants to Kill Himself (Lone Scherfig, 2002)
Young Adam (David Mackenzie, 2003)