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### Brigadoon: Lerner and Loewe's Scotland

Jennifer Oates

*Queens College, City University of New York*

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*In memory of Richard Wall.*

### ***Brigadoon: Lerner and Loewe's Scotland***

Upon arriving at a Scots baronial castle for a wedding, Simon Callow's character in *Four Weddings and a Funeral* exclaims "Christ! It's bloody Brigadoon!" pointing to the ubiquitous and camp nature of *Brigadoon's* Scottishness (McArthur 2003: 2-3).<sup>1</sup> *Brigadoon's* (1947) Scotland consists of a highland landscape with lochs, mists, castles with fair maidens, warlike yet sensitive kilted men and bagpipers. The Scottishness of *Brigadoon*, aside from the visual elements, comes from Scottish sounding names and words, Scottish dances and music, and Scottish traditions. Much of this comes from the invented traditions of Scotland, such as kilts and clan tartans; Scottish literature, including MacPherson's *Ossian*, Sir Walter Scott and the Kailyard movement; Scottish propaganda for tourism; and Scottish popular culture, like the music-hall caricature of a drunken, kilted Scot popularized by Harry Lauder (McArthur 2003: 14-18, 47-49; Maloney 2003: 2, 14). The Scots played a role in creating these as way to recover or assert a national identity after merging with England in the Union of 1707. Colin McArthur calls these the embodiment of the "Scottish Discursive Unconscious," or what the world outside of Scotland views as Scottish and how this impacts how Scotland is perceived (McArthur 2003: 6, 62). More recent examples also rely on the Scottish discursive unconscious. Mel Gibson romanticizes the life of William Wallace in *Braveheart*. *Saturday Night Live's* "All things Scottish" from the 1990s features a Scottish store keeper (played by Mike Myers) who regularly shouts "If it's not Scottish it's crap!" parodying the Scots's work ethic that helped build the British Empire (Finlay 1997; Fry 2001; MacKenzie 1998).

While *Brigadoon* is not alone in depicting Scotland through these elements, it helped solidify the Scottish discursive unconscious. Why Lerner and Loewe chose to set the show in Scotland is not known. Lerner claimed that he was inspired by the works of the Kailyard author James M. Barrie

and that the idea came from Loewe's casual comment that "faith can move mountains" (Citron 1995: 157; Jablonski 1996: 26).<sup>2</sup> While Barrie may have provided the link to Scotland, it is equally likely that Lerner and Loewe were drawn to the appeal of Scotland as a remote, idealistic locale. They also may have counted on Scottish immigrants being drawn to a musical set in their homeland. Many post-World War II musicals sought to escape the political turmoil that followed the war with settings in exotic locales. *Brigadoon* is a unique example of this transporting the audience to the nostalgic past of a charming, pre-modern culture of an exotic place. Scotland, with its rich and well-known traditions, provided Lerner and Loewe with the perfect location.

### ***Brigadoon* and Scottishness**

*Brigadoon* tells of two New Yorkers who stumble upon an enchanted village while hunting in the Scottish Highlands. It is 1746 in Brigadoon. The town appears for one day every one-hundred years. In the eighteenth century, the village minister sacrificed himself to save the town from a plague of witches and other social and political ills. As long as none of the original inhabitants leave Brigadoon, the village remains safe. The Americans join the town for a wedding and an unexpected funeral. Back in New York, one of the Americans realizes he is in love with one of the villagers. Upon returning to Scotland, they look around the Highland forest as the village schoolmaster appears welcoming them: "I told ye when ye love someone deeply anythin' is possible. Even miracles" (Lerner 1973: 1:211).

Before the curtain rises, the overture establishes the Scottish setting and introduces the majority of the Scottish musical elements. The opening notes elicit sounds of a bagpipe skirl, including open-fifth drones with raised fourth-scale degree grace notes (see Example 1a; all examples are taken from the piano-vocal score). Above the drones, a pentatonic scale using the rhythms of a Scottish jig, a fast dance in duple meter with flowing eighth notes, appears (see

Example 1b) (McArthur 2003: 20; Kislán 1995: 222; Collinson 1980: 668). To highlight the Scottish setting, a number of songs and choruses make use of the Scottish musical devices of the overture or incorporate other Scottish dance rhythms, including: “Vendors’ calls,” “Down on MacConnachy Square,” “I’ll go home with Bonnie Jean,” “Come to me, bend to me,” “My mother’s wedding day,” and “The heather on the hill.” While only some songs use Scottish musical elements, several, including Fiona’s “Waitin’ for my dearie,” use some Scots words, or Scots-like words, but no Scottish musical traits. Lerner and Loewe gave the musical the name of a bridge (brig) over the river Doon in Southwest Scotland near where Robert Burns lived. Similarly, the character names and place names are Scottish, or at least Scottish sounding, including MacConnachy Square, Angus MacGuffie, and Jean MacLaren. This English yet Scots-sounding dialect featuring well-placed words associated with Scotland, like “dearie,” “kirk,” and “heather,” helped create the Scottish atmosphere and may show the influence of “the vaudeville persona of Harry Lauder” (McArthur 2003: 51). Broadway audiences, however, expected English-language productions and would not have been able to understand the Scots language.

The most obvious uses of Scottish traditions and music occur during the wedding and the funeral scenes, both of which offer opportunities for spectacles with music related to the drama that does not drive the plot. While discussing “Other” musics in opera, Ralph Locke notes that “the stylistically most ‘different’ moments tend to be located at the beginning of scenes or acts and tend to involve the orchestra alone, or the chorus, or dancers (but little or no solo singing)” (Locke 1998: 125). The best known operas based on Scottish texts, such as Donizetti’s *Lucia di Lammermoor* and Verdi’s *Macbeth*, ignore the Scottish setting. In *Brigadoon*, the instrumental numbers are the moments when the drama comes closest to depicting Scottish customs.

At the wedding, the entire town is dressed in clan tartans and some carry swords and dirks, or daggers. Three traditional Scottish dances, a jig, a sword dance, and a Scottish reel, are performed

after the wedding. The 1947 production paid particular attention to the dances using James Jamieson, a specialist in Scottish dance (McArthur 2003: 60). Loewe's jig features dotted rhythms with wide melodic leaps found in traditional Scottish jigs. In the sword dance, motives from the overture, including the grace-note and drone figures, return as the dancers are instructed to move ever more rapidly among the crossed swords on the ground without touching the blades with their feet (see Example 2). The unrestrained energy of the sword dance, particularly with Harry (who is in love with the bride) starting the dance and being the most frenzied dancer, brings the dramatic tension to a head. Immediately after the sword dance, the reel begins and features a musical quotation of the overture now in reel rhythms with slurred strong beats and staccato weak beats typical of traditional Scottish fiddling and reels (see Example 3).

After the wedding, Harry tries to leave, threatening the village's utopian enchantment. A chase ensues. Harry is tripped, falls on a rock, and dies. In the funeral scene, the book and score indicate bagpipes should appear, though not necessarily be played, on stage. The scene is labeled a traditional *piobaireachd*, a form of traditional Scottish bagpipe music. This genre consists of highly ornamented variations, including laments that were often played at Scottish funerals (Collinson 1966: 176; Haddow 1982: 24). Loewe's *piobaireachd* is slow, ornamented, and accompanied by open-fifth drones in the bass line that once again mimic bagpipe drones (see Example 4). While there are repetitive figures, it is not a set of variations and the repeated phrases are not ornamented.

*Brigadoon* was written as an integrated musical, which had certain structural and musical expectations, particularly in the songs. The instrumental numbers and dances offered the safest opportunities to exploit the Scottish setting musically without deviating from the accepted form. Locke shows that the foreign music, which seems perfunctory, adds to the work in ways often overlooked by critics. Numbers using local color are popular with audiences, can play a major role in establishing the social and gender context of the plot, and can frame the rest of the musical (Locke

1998: 127–28). The Scottish musical numbers establish *Brigadoon*'s social and cultural context.

Abridged recordings often omit these Scottish numbers, except for the overture and the incidental Scottish elements in the songs, leaving little trace of Scottish music or the true context of the musical. Without the Scottish music (and the Scottish costumes, scenery, and dancing), where is *Brigadoon*?

### **Roots of Lerner and Loewe's Scottishness**

Much of the Scottish discursive unconscious comes from invented traditions, which illustrate a longing for a simpler past. Kilts and clan tartans, well-known symbols of Scottishness, were creations of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. An Englishman invented kilts after the Union of 1707. Sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Highlanders wore “Irish” long shirts, tunics, or trews (a combination of breeches and stockings). Clan tartans were established for the festivities to honor George IV's 1822 visit to Edinburgh, which Walter Scott helped plan (Trevor-Roper 1983: 19). Many writers have appropriated these Highland symbols to represent the entire Scottish nation. George IV's visit, as Hugh Trevor-Roper describes it, “marked the last stage in the creation of the Highland myth: the reconstruction and extension, in ghostly and sartorial form, of that clan system whose reality had been destroyed after 1745” (Trevor-Roper 1983: 31).

McArthur points to problems between *Brigadoon* and Scottish history. Tommy and Jeff arrive in Brigadoon on 24 May 1746, six weeks after one of the bloodiest events in Scotland, the Battle of Culloden, in which the Jacobite rebellion was finally quashed. In the following weeks, English forces roamed the Highlands slaughtering remaining Jacobite supporters. Tartans and bagpipes, viewed as symbols of Jacobites, were outlawed for forty years (McArthur 2003: 56; Trevor-Roper 1983: 24). While it is hard to explain why an entire tartan-clad village with pipers would have survived the bloody aftermath of the Battle of Culloden, it was an ideal time to escape from the world

surrounding Brigadoon. Most likely, Lerner was unaware of the significance of the date and picked the date because it was two hundred years before he started the libretto.

Scottish literature adopted these invented symbols and often glamorized its history and rural society. The writings of the ancient Celtic Bard Ossian, later proved to be written by James MacPherson, brought Scotland to Western Europe's attention in the eighteenth century. Walter Scott's works thrust Scotland into the spotlight of Western literature and imagination while promoting Scottish tourism. In the process, Scott perpetuated the invented histories of Scotland, glorified Scottish culture, and emphasized the fact that Scotland was no longer a threat to England or any nation (Raleigh 1996: 47–69). Scott's works often show the modern world triumphing over old Scotland. In the nineteenth-century, authors in the Kailyard movement continued Scott's romantic view of Scotland by depicting Scottish rural society as quaint and charming. The movement began as a reaction against literature whose Scottish tales included the ugly realities of daily life and history. Scottish intellectuals criticized Kailyard literature for its sentimentality and refusal to connect with the modern, industrialized world (McArthur 2003: 14). While this limited view of Scotland bears a striking resemblance to Brigadoon, it ignores Scotland's history by omitting clashes between Highland and Lowland cultures as well as Scotland and England. It does, however, preserve Scotland's reputation as a pastoral yet exotic and romantic locale.

Carl Dahlhaus noted that “a style becomes a national style not so much on its own merits as by popular decree” (Dahlhaus 1989: 68). While he was referring to national music accepted by natives, the same applies to the musical depiction of one country by an outsider. Scottish literature, including that of Scott and the Kailyard literary movement, was popular in the United States. Following World War II, Americans had been bombarded with romanticized postcards of Scotland and advertisements for Scottish goods and tourism adopting images of McArthur's Scottish discursive unconscious (McArthur 2004: 20, 22). As seen in Plate 1, a magazine advertisement for

Old Angus Scotch features a Scotsman in tartan and a kilt in a pastoral setting with lambs reflecting the catch phrase, “A Noble Scotch: Gentle as a Lamb.” Similarly, the stereotypical musical sounds of Scotland used by Lerner and Loewe permeated popular culture’s portrayal of Scotland. The American public would have viewed the works of Scott and the Kailyard movement, Scottish advertisements, and the musical sounds of the Scottish discursive unconscious as accurate depictions of Scotland and would have expected such images and sounds in any production set in Scotland.

### **Why Scotland?**

Why is *Brigadoon* set in Scotland? *Brigadoon* opened in 1947 after two world wars, a twelve-year depression, the communist take-over in Eastern Europe, and following the Red Scare in the United States. John Bush Jones notes, “Is it any wonder that the thought of a Brigadoon-like retreat brought comfort and solace to many Americans in 1947?” (Jones 2003: 166). The foreign, mystical atmosphere served as an escape from the harsh realities endured after World War II through the 1950s. Brigadoon, a quaint eighteenth-century Scottish village, provided a peaceful utopia contrasting with the complicated modern life of America.<sup>3</sup> Broadway musicals of the time tended to promote a world tour of exoticism as seen in *Brigadoon* (1947), *South Pacific* (1949), and *The King and I* (1951). Scotland provided a similar though not so geographically distant exoticism.

Ultimately, *Brigadoon*’s depiction of Scotland points to the complex relationship between popular culture, history, and art. Scots created and maintained the Scottish discursive unconscious to keep Scotland from disappearing. Scotland lost its autonomy and, in a sense, identity with the Union of 1707. Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Scottish literature portrayed an idealized, rural country clinging to a romanticized past. It is as if Scotland’s history ended with England’s final defeat of Scottish nationalists in 1746. The choice of Scotland for this seemingly idyllic village continues the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century fascination with Scotland, particularly the rugged Highlands, as a

wild, exotic, and romantic place largely untouched by the modern world. Following WWII, few countries could be used for *Brigadoon's* enchanting tale. In addition, Scotland was recovering from the near destruction of their ship building industry, which had been the main source of their economy and stronghold within the British Empire, and launched a tourism campaign reiterating this romantic view of Scotland. All of this allowed Lerner and Loewe to create a work that provided peaceful escapism on the surface with social commentary for those willing to dig a little deeper.

Even though *Brigadoon* is just over fifty years old, such a portrayal of Scotland is no longer possible. In 1999 Scotland regained its Parliament and a political voice. Further, Scottish artists, while still embracing their nation's rich history, are writing works that show the gritty side of modern Scotland, such as *Trainspotting*, or more realistically portray Scottish history rather than painting Scotland as a picturesque, rural escape, as in Thea Musgrave's *Mary, Queen of Scots*. Perhaps Scots have now relegated the romanticized Scotland to the past. Yet, was the *Brigadoon* of mid-twentieth century Scottish? While Scottish intellectuals would say no, the fact that *Brigadoon* drew upon Scottish literary traditions, what Scotland's own contemporary popular culture produced as "Scottish," and devices that were viewed as Scottish by the Western world, it was. *Brigadoon* captures the spirit of a post-WII America seeking to find comfort in the distant past of a far-away yet familiar place. The Scots and their plentiful traditions gave *Brigadoon* just that.

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<sup>1</sup> Henry-Russell Hitchcock notes that Scottish Baronial architecture was associated with Scott's characters, kilts, clan tartans, and other elements of McArthur's "Scottish Discursive Unconscious." Scott's home, Abbotsford, is a primary example of Scottish Baronial architecture second only to Balmoral (Hitchcock 1954: 245–48).

<sup>2</sup> The critic George J. Nathan claimed that *Brigadoon* was based on an ancient German folk tale "Germelshausen," which Lerner denied (Lerner 1978: 26–27; Jablonski 1996: 27). New York Times critic John Lardner had already pointed out the similarities concluding that it was mere coincidence.

<sup>3</sup> Jones has shown that this utopia is not all it seems. Rather than being a utopia, *Brigadoon's* isolationist ways require conformity. Harry longs to escape, but he cannot and is forced to comply with *Brigadoon's* way of life. When he fails to do so, he is killed, though accidentally (Jones 2003: 167).