This summer I had the opportunity of staying in Edinburgh for the whole Fringe. Though I have lived in the city for four years as a student, I had never before been to the world’s biggest arts festival. This year the Fringe was bigger than ever, with more than 3000 shows in 299 venues. Ticket sales were up by 12% on last year. In fact there was so much on that I could hardly decide what to see in the first fortnight.

A play in Welsh was the first thing I saw, performed in a small room in the back of a posh hotel in the centre. Many Fringe events take place in various nooks, crannies and cupboards wherever space can be found. Many of the shows are quite expensive, but there are some venues which do free shows (mainly comedy) all day. Sometimes this gives you the change to see the best up-and-coming acts, but I soon learned that there is a good reason many of these acts are free!

Then I saw a version of Hamlet with only three actors in one hour, and plenty of special effects. I think the intention was to portray the prince’s confusion as he descends into madness, but at the end it was me that was left confused and trying to remember the plot from reading it at school. There were eight versions of Hamlet in the Fringe altogether.
I also saw some stand-up and sketch shows. It was no surprise that the independence referendum was a recurrent theme, with most shows leaning towards the Yes camp. This gave one London journalist cause to complain that nationalists were taking over the festival, but it isn’t really the Yes side’s fault if they are more creative than the unionists. Some of the stand-up was very whacky; I saw a woman with red paint smeared on her face yelling at a shrub, and a man dancing with a vacuum cleaner with a wig on it. In one skit the princess, instead of pursuing the prince, started climbing over the knees of the audience asking them to marry her.

After 25 days, relative peace and quiet returned to the streets of Edinburgh.