

REVIEW: TRANSATLANTIC SCOTS

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Celeste Ray (ed.), **Transatlantic Scots**, Foreword by James Hunter,
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In his foreword to **Transatlantic Scots**, James Hunter writes, 'To those of us trying to help with the emergence of a new Scotland, the Scottish diaspora can be a source of endless aggravation. Don't you realise, we ask our North American cousins, that Scotland has moved on; that it's no longer the country your ancestors left, that there's much more to our twenty-first century nation than castles, clan chiefs, kilts, Highland games, and thatched cottages? But if Americans of Scottish ancestry can legitimately be accused of misunderstanding modern Scotland, so we Scots are guilty of failing to come to terms with the fact that Scottish Americans are the product of a history that is not ours.' (p.xiii)

This enlightening collection of essays deals with various dimensions of North American identification with Scotland and Scottishness. As anthropologist Celeste Ray notes in her introduction, 'much of the analysis in this book considers how history and heritage diverge. However, we do not critically examine the heritage lore of hyphenated Scots as a hollow exercise in deconstruction; instead we wish to explore how heritage is created and why some historical events, rather than others, shape public ritual and family memories. That a tradition is invented does not detract from its present meaning to those who emotionally invest in its practice.' (p.6) Ray goes on to say, 'this collection does not seek to validate myths nor to insult those who hold them dear, but to understand how historical events are mythologized and

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why people want to believe, or critically repeat, mythic visions of history cast as heritage.’ (p.10)

As Ray points out in Chapter 1, ‘Transatlantic Scots and Ethnicity’, popular and academic interest in ethnicity in the U.S. has been growing since the 1970s. The current Scottish heritage movement in the U.S. should be seen as part of a larger ethnic heritage movement. Ethnic identities evolve over time; they can be abandoned and later reclaimed. Participants in ethnic heritage celebrations may become deeply attached to cultural symbols their ancestors may have abandoned: ‘As a cultural phenomenon, ethnicity is dynamic, evolves over time, and is renegotiated in different contexts and periods.’ (p.24) Ray seeks to take the analysis of this revival or reinvention of Scottish identity beyond deconstruction: ‘what matters more is understanding why people embrace the visions of ethnicity they do, how they learn them, and what roles identities and heritage play in structuring their realities in particular contexts and periods.’ (p.36)

In Chapter 2, ‘Scottish Immigration and Ethnic Organization in The United States’, Ray explores the present-day contexts of Scottish-American heritage activities. Hyphenated Scots are emotionally attached to a nostalgic romantic vision of Scotland as it supposedly existed in the past. Three groups of Scottish settlers – Lowland Scots, Highland Scots, and Scots-Irish – began settling in North America during the eighteenth century. The romantic symbology associated with Highlanders was adopted by these various groups during the nineteenth century, an example of what folklorist Linda Dégh has termed a ‘cultural umbrella’, a selected set of symbols that has come to express the unity of diverse groups. Though Scottish organizations in North America date to the seventeenth century, the recent Scottish heritage movement has fostered the growth of hundreds of clan societies, special interest groups catering to devotees of Scottish music and dance, as well as nearly three hundred Highland Games and Celtic festivals in the U.S. and Canada.

In Chapter 3, ‘A Brief History of Organized Scottishness in Canada’, Michael Vance discusses Canadian involvement in the Scottish heritage movement. Though the post-WWII Scottish heritage movement has flourished in Canada as well as the U.S., there are significant differences between the two, largely determined by Canada’s history as part of the British Empire. (see p.46). According to Vance, Scottish organizations in nineteenth century Canada served to consolidate the power and influence of a Scottish-Canadian elite while promoting interest in various facets of Scottish culture. The

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establishment of Tartan Day on 6 April – the anniversary of the Declaration of Arbroath – speaks to the persistence of Scottish consciousness in late-twentieth-century Canada.

Margaret Bennett, in Chapter 4, 'From The Quebec-Hebrideans to "les Écossais-Québécois": Tracing The Evolution of A Scottish Cultural Identity in Canada's Eastern Townships', draws upon extensive fieldwork with the descendents of emigrants from the Western Isles of Scotland to the Eastern Townships of Quebec. Bennett recounts their adaptation to life in Canada and its effects upon their identity and cultural heritage. Over the course of time, the descendents of the Gaelic-speaking settlers assimilated the language and traditions of their neighbours, nonetheless preserving connections with kinfolk remaining on their ancestral islands. In recent years, the development of a festival and an inn celebrating the Scottish heritage of the Eastern Townships can be viewed as local manifestations of a wider cultural roots revival movement.

In Chapter 5, 'Powerful Pathos: The Triumph of Scottishness in Nova Scotia', Michael Vance deconstructs the romantic myth of a Scottish Nova Scotia, asserting that a hegemonic Scottish symbology has served to negate the cultural presence of non-Scottish Nova Scotians and has otherwise tacitly supported a conservative political agenda. In Chapter 6, 'You Play It As You Would Sing It: Cape Breton, Scottishness, and the Means of Cultural Production', Jonathan Dembling examines how Cape Breton has emerged as a reservoir of Scottish folk music, dance and other traditions that have largely disappeared in their ancestral homeland. As a result of the activities of prominent Scottish musicians, present-day Scots are taking up Cape Breton fiddling and dancing.

As Grant Jarvie observes in Chapter 7, 'The North American Émigré, Highland Games, and Social Capital in International Communities', at least 13 million Americans claim Scottish ancestry. (see p.198) Highland games serve to create social capital, meaningful bonds between individuals that promote a heightened sense of community. In Chapter 8, 'Troubling Times in the Scottish American Relationship', Andrew Hook notes that the establishment of Tartan Day in the U.S. supports the claim that American democracy has its roots in Scotland. American stereotypes of Scots in the eighteenth century were largely negative, but today Scots are portrayed as heroic, masculine, democratic. However, racists and bigots including the Ku Klux Klan have adopted Scottish symbology. Tartan-clad bigots may not be

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the majority of the Scottish heritage movement but their presence cannot be ignored.

In Chapter 9, 'Bravehearts and Patriarches: Masculinity on the Pedestal in Southern Scottish Celebrations', Celeste Ray comments: 'In heritage dress, in ethnic organization, and in heritage events, Scottish Americans assert a non-WASP identity with predominantly male imagery. (p.233) Ray asserts, 'if patriarchy and masculinity are now put on the pedestal, perhaps this reflects very real changes in the power of gender identities. Although it may in some instances seem a ritual response to recent social changes, the masculine and military focus of Scottish-American heritage lore and celebration is much more complex than a simple backlash to feminism and evolving "family values".' (p.257)

John W. Sheets, in 'Finding Colonsay's Emigrants and a "Heritage of Place"' (Chapter 10), focuses upon a small island in the Inner Hebrides which experienced substantial out-migration in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In the twentieth century, Colonsay became the locus of heritage tourists seeking to reconnect with their ancestral roots. In Chapter 11, 'Pilgrims to the Far Country: North American "roots-tourists" in the Scottish Highlands and Islands', Paul Basu cites extensive interviews with North Americans of Scottish ancestry seeking to reconnect with their ancestral homeland. According to Basu, the roots-tourist is engaged in a form of pilgrimage. Though some native Scots look upon these roots-seekers as emotional cripples, the pilgrimage is '... a salve for the ills of modernity.' (p.314)

In Chapter 12, 'Tartan Day In America', Edward J. Cowan urges his fellow Scots to better understand the North American Scottish heritage movement: 'the Canadians invented Tartan Day, and however much some Scots may deplore the label, it must be respected as a piece of uniquely North American Scottish heritage. Heritage, as we know all too well in Scotland, is not the same as history, and the past is often pressed into the service of the present.' (p.336) In Chapter 13, 'Transatlantic Scots, their Interlocutors, and the Scottish Discursive Unconscious', Colin McArthur writes: 'wherever one looks within discourse relating to Scotland – whether produced by Scots or non-Scots is irrelevant – one is confronted by the same restricted range of images, tones, rhetorical tropes, and ideological tendencies, often within utterances promulgated decades (sometimes even a century or more) apart.' (p. 340). The Scottish Discursive Unconscious, a limited range of images and

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ideas grounded in the past, constricts meaningful discussions of Scottish issues and themes in the present.

Hopefully, the ideas and issues addressed in this volume will lead to more reflective and illuminating discussions of the international dimensions of Scottishness in the future. Strongly recommended.

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