

## REVIEW: SCOTTISH DIASPORAS

*Tom Hubbard*

Angela McCarthy, ed., **A Global Clan: Scottish Migrant Networks and Identities Since the Eighteenth Century**. London, New York: Tauris Academic Studies, 2006, 242pp., hb, £47.50, ISBN 1 84511 067 6.

Coming to this book from a background in literature, one might feel a certain uneasiness about the claims of the ‘artist’ who cuts loose from a perceived philistine milieu in favour of somewhere more interesting. This is dilettantism, it seems, compared to the all-too-real challenges faced by ordinary folk impelled to leave their country for economic reasons. Robert Louis Stevenson’s account of his journey across America, undertaken during 1879-80, carries the title **The Amateur Emigrant**. That unpromising premise, however, is offset by the hardships which RLS shared with his fellow-passengers, and by his heartfelt concern for the plight of Mexicans and native Americans at a time when few cared. Certainly **A Global Clan** is at many points quick to dispel any pious notions that Stevenson’s compatriots would necessarily share his enlightened attitudes to the indigenous or otherwise *hauden-doon* peoples in the promised lands of North America, the Caribbean, India and Australasia.

In the notes to his play **Exiles**, James Joyce observes that ‘a nation exacts a penance from those who dared to leave her, payable on their return.’ He goes on to cite the parable of the Prodigal Son. Again, this would seem a far cry from the cases documented in **A Global Clan**. Scottish migrants, animated by a Protestant work ethic, were hardly disposed to be ‘prodigal’, and those possessing a ‘sojourner mentality’ – i.e. those who continued to regard

---

*Tom Hubbard was Visiting Professor in Scottish Literature and Culture at the University of Budapest from January to June 2006. He is an Honorary Fellow of Glasgow and Edinburgh Universities, and is now based at the National University of Ireland, Maynooth.*

## *Scottish Affairs*

Scotland as 'home' – intended to become successfully returned natives, though of course this would not always be the assured outcome.

**A Global Clan**, then, focuses on mainly hard-headed, practical people not obviously given to reflection, far less posing. They are well served by the cool academic solidity of these essays. Nevertheless, as one proceeds through the book, there looms the more 'subjective' side of diaspora. In a footnote to his essay on Mary Ann Archbald's correspondence from America with her oldest friend back 'home', David A. Gerber remarks that studies of migration have failed either 'to psychologize the social' or, conversely, 'to provide a social context for the psychological'. Professor Gerber offers a corrective: 'Personal identity depends on continuity – knowing we are the same people today and will be tomorrow as we have been in the past.' Migration disrupts this; the artist-intellectual would talk of existential crisis, and in a sense that is what happens also to people who are not artists or intellectuals. A profoundly unsettled settler in upstate New York, Mary Archbald constructed an imaginary comfort-zone out of a Scotland of personal memories and readings in Walter Scott, whose laments for a pre-capitalist past suited the mood of a lady who was unwilling to identify with the thrusting, nineteenth-century modernity of the USA (or, indeed, that of the 'real' Scotland to which she would never return, despite fading hopes). Other Scots, loyal to their native values of 'temperance, progress and perseverance', contributed thereby to 'mainstream culture in North America' (Sarah Katherine Gibson, chapter 6). Religious and economic individualism, Protestantism and capitalism, followed a common agenda.

The stroke of midnight, every 31 December, would represent to Mary Archbald the 'symbolic presence' of her stay-at-home friend Margaret Wodrow. Yet while clearly an introvert, Mary was by no means alone in her desire to structure her experience and to find meaning in it. Compared with Catholics, Presbyterians are not particularly given to liturgical worship, but in Otago, New Zealand, Scots were inclined towards 'elaborate rituals' for 'special occasions such as the harvest home [...] [A]t least until the 1890s, the Presbyterian Church met the spiritual and social needs of Scottish immigrants during the time when "atomization" was at its height.' (Tom Brooking, chapter 8) Migrants desire to see the familiar in the strange, so Otago Harbour could serve as an Antipodean Loch Katrine.

A tough-minded attitude to making it in the adopted country was not incompatible with a sentimental regard for the one left behind. The Cupar-born James Graham could take delight, at Sydney, in employing fellow-Fifers: the

*Review: Scottish Diasporas*

most reliable workers tended to be one's ain folk, and that is a leitmotiv of **A Global Clan**. There is no 'either/or', moreover, in the readiness to adhere variously to local, Scottish and British identities as occasion demanded; the coexistence of 'multiple identities' could meet needs that were equally emotional and pragmatic.

However, the essays do address the fluctuating demands of markedly 'local' and broadly 'Scottish' loyalties. Many immigrants expressed a stronger preference for the former. The banker John Bathgate rejoiced that Peebles men turned up everywhere in New Zealand. (The expat poet Alastair Reid once quoted that sublimely parochial line: 'A day oot o Selkirk is a day wastit'. Surely it is not, if Selkirk has gone 'oot' *en masse*). Eric Richards (chapter 7) cites 'mutual contempt and hostility between Highlanders and Lowlanders in the [Australian] colonies', hardly conducive to pan-Scottish sentiment. In a Canadian context, however, there could be 'Lowland appropriation of Highland symbols' in attempts to project a sense of Scottishness: 'spurious' that might have been, writes the editor in her own essay (chapter 9), but it 'served to foster good relations among various national groups.'

The earlier chapters necessarily concentrate on Scottish settlement in the Asian subcontinent, the Caribbean, and South Carolina. For the student of literature, Douglas Hamilton's coverage of the second would provide an excellent historical gloss to James Robertson's novel **Joseph Knight** (2003). In India, Scots served the Danish colony of Tranquebar: traditional North Sea links were thereby relocated far South. Clanship, muted if not altogether obliterated in late eighteenth-century Scotland, could be 'remade in the Empire', providing support systems for Scots in the West Indies.

The last chapter, by A. James Hammerton, closes with the affecting story of the Docherty family's movement from a troubled migrancy to a healthy pride in both their Scottish and Australian identities. Collectively, the essays in **A Global Clan** offer meticulous accounts of how far Scots and their 'new' territories adopted (and adapted) each other.

*August 2006*