
Aimed at addressing a “surprisingly neglected component of the Irish and Scottish diasporas” (p. 3), namely their numerous encounters with Indigenous people in North America and the Antipodes, this publication tackles both the general and the specific with impressive dexterity. While Akenson writes an excellent introductory chapter on the large scale phenomena of the Great European Migration, others go into great detail in their discourses on individual people and localities. One of the main questions at the heart of the volume addresses the extent to which Irishness or Scottishness affected attitudes toward indigenous people. This proves to be a complex subject area, and it becomes apparent that, while some empathized and identified, to varying extents, with the aborigines, others had no misgivings in mistreating aborigines as they themselves had been mistreated in their homelands. The bulk of this book addresses various topics related to Scots and Irish diasporic studies, although with eight chapters Canada is by far the best represented of the four New World countries. Three chapters discuss encounters in the United States, and there are just two chapters related to the Antipodes - one each on Australia and New Zealand.

Akenson opens the volume by discussing the devastating effects of the Great European Migration on indigenous populations, particularly in the Americas. Calling it the “greatest single period of land theft, cultural pillage, and casual genocide in world history”, (p. 25), he explores the reasons for the phenomenon, the mindsets of the migrants, and the huge disjuncture between the immigrant and indigenous experiences. Many other essays take a more specific approach and discuss the careers and motivations of writers, poets, ethnologists, and missionaries, who spent time amongst indigenous populations. O’Siadhail, for example, looks at
the career of nineteenth century Irish-American ethnologist James Mooney while Eastlake presents a similar biographical exploration of ethnologists Jeremiah and Alma Curtin. In contrast, McGowan presents a study of Michael Powers, the first Roman Catholic bishop of Toronto, and his efforts to ally First Nations people to his diocese, and Hinson and Morton extend the study of religious activity by discussing references to indigenous people the writings of Rev. William Bell, a nineteenth century Scots missionary in Upper Canada.

Encounters with indigenous people often inspired romantic notions and political ideologies among writers, and Holmgren presents three Irish writers and poets – Fitzgerald, Moore and Kidd – who embraced the aboriginal communities they visited, painting them in a positive light, and using them to “make implicit criticisms of European life” (p. 184). Newton adds his analysis of Gaelic texts depicting indigenous people in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Hutchings presents a study later in the book on the Scots writer, John Buchan, who became a highly influential figure in Canada and drew on his many positive encounters with First Nations people to inform aspects of his ultimate novel, Sick Heart River.

The final four chapters address various cultural aspects of the Hudson’s Bay Company and its influences both on First Nations groups and on the Scots who signed up to work for the company. While McCormack and Harper discuss the fur traders themselves, Soloway and Lederman look into the longer term cultural influences in and around the trade posts. McCormack’s historical study of the fur traders from the early days of the industry contrasts well with Harper’s exploration of the personal narratives of men who had worked for the company during the latter days of the HBC. Soloway presents an interesting discussion of the processes of establishing horticulture at HBC fur trading posts and the ways in which this could create cultural misunderstandings, while Lederman provides a vivid recollection of her introduction to the vast area of Metis fiddle traditions in Manitoba. In her chapter, she discusses the repertoire, tunings, playing styles, and dancing, and draws parallels with related Scottish and North American traditions, particularly the Shetland and Quebecois fiddle traditions.
The two chapters related to the Antipodes provide valuable parallels with the vaster North American research. McGrath’s chapter on “Shamrock Aborigines” gives an insight into the relations between Irish and aborigines in Australia, concepts of “whiteness”, and the racism expressed towards the Irish from other white colonisers. This chapter provides and interesting follow-on from McMahon’s discussion of Irish and aboriginal struggles against British imperialism. Following in the vein of positive cultural meetings, Patterson presents a case study of Turakina, a small settlement in lower North Island, and its background of positive interactions between Highland Scots and Maori.

In conclusion, this is an excellent edition covering a wide range of subjects and perspective related to Scots and Irish encounters with, and attitudes towards, indigenous people. This is an important addition to the field of diasporic studies and would be of great benefit to researchers and students with an interest in Scots and Irish diaspora studies and North American indigenous and cultural history.

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