FOUR SCOTTISH JOURNEYS: AN
IDENTITY REDISCOVERED


Recently celebrating over forty years of membership in the Folio Society, Robertson Davies writes as follows:

I once wrote an essay about books and reading named *A Call to the Clerisy*, and I defined that unusual and almost obsolete word like this: “The clerisy are those who read for pleasure, but not for idleness; who read for pastime but not to kill time; who love books, but do not live by books.” The clerisy are not professional critics or scholars, tirelessly assessing books, or bound by their work to read a lot of books that give them no pleasure. The clerisy are those who seek, and find, delight and enlargement of life in books. The clerisy are those for whom reading is a personal art.

It is the pleasant duty of this review to report that *Four Scottish Journeys* is for the clerisy. A delightful “read” from cover to cover, it is a happily unusual member of the travelogue genus, a book that goes far towards communicating to the clerisy the soul of modern Scotland.

The sub-title, *An identity rediscovered*, is splendidly ambiguous, for Andrew Eames rediscovers at one and the same time Scotland’s identity and his own. His is the peripatetic intelligence by means of which the reader views the length and breadth of today’s Scotland and the gamut of colourful “characters” presented in cameo for the reader’s delectation, and simultaneously one can see the growing effect on the author’s personality
of his travels in Scotland; as Wordsworth put it, “There are in our existence spots of time that with a distinct pre-eminence retain a renovating virtue.” *Four Scottish Journeys* is a most pleasurable compilation of those spots of time which nourish and nurture the soul of Andrew Eames and of the discriminating reader.

Having had the misfortune of being born far to the south of the world’s most important border, in 1958 in Brighton, Eames can claim respectability in the eyes of what Dr. Johnson would no doubt call “inhabitants of North Britain” through his grandfather, originally a crofter on the Isle of Skye. The dust-jacket for *Four Scottish Journeys* reveals that annual pilgrimages to Scotland enliven and enlighten Eames’ life in London as a freelance feature writer (mainly for the newspaper the *Independent*) and as managing editor of a noted publishing company. The Cambridge graduate’s first book, the critically-esteemed *Crossing the Shadow Line*, documents a two-year period of travel in Southeast Asia and traces the formative influence on his spirit of the varied and often perilous adventures experienced in Thailand, Laos, India, Malaysia, Singapore and the Himalayas. And that same dust-jacket’s reproduction of Anne Redpath’s painting of Pittenweem (1952) serves to focus one’s attention on Eames’ more recent peregrinations through what it calls “that intimate wilderness,” Scotland.

The spirit of *Four Scottish Journeys* is in part that of the penetrating remark of the little boy watching his father struggling into his kilt jacket on January 25th who asked, ‘Daddy, why do you insist on wearing that jacket when you know very well you’ll have an awful headache tomorrow morning?’ This is at least more promising than the obscure remark of the BBC announcer some years ago who told his listeners, “The last programme of the evening is ‘Lighten our darkness, O Lord’ except for listeners to the Scottish Home Service.” But the other, darker and more hard-bitten view is also present, the Scotland of, for example, the new Glasgow slums. Eames pulls no punches, showing the reader simultaneously the Glasgow of modern architecture married to Georgian and Victorian buildings, of the international garden festival with its four million visitors, and of the massive housing estates on the periphery of the city which Mrs. Thatcher built in the mid-1950s (Castlemilk, Pollok,
Drumchapel, Easterhouse) referred to by Glaswegians as Sowetos, after South Africa’s black township outside Johannesburg. The eyes through which the reader views Scotland are both sentimental and cynical, and in this blend lie fascination, enlightenment and entertainment.

The use of the journey motif as a metaphor for life is, of course, as old as literature itself—the Old Testament, the Odyssey, the Aeneid, Tacitus’ Germania, Herodotus’ account of Egypt, the Wanderer, the Seafarer, Beowulf, Everyman, The Faerie Queene, Paradise Lost, Malory’s Arthurian cycle, Bunyan’s Pilgrim’s Progress, Eliot’s The Waste Land, Hakluyt’s Voyages, Gulliver’s Travels, Cervantes’ Don Quixote and Fielding’s picaresque novels such as Joseph Andrews and Tom Jones, Mandeville’s Travels, the travelogues of Marco Polo, Livingston, Burton and Speke, Bruce in Abyssinia, Darwin’s The Voyage of the Beagle, the more subterranean wanderings of Dante’s Inferno... Except to Hannibal, the Alps present a fearfully impenetrable aspect until their rehabilitation in the Romantic Period, when more impressionistic accounts of travel come to include Robert Louis Stevenson’s Travels with a Donkey, Byron’s Childe Harold in which the poet drags his bleeding heart across Europe en route to his death in Missolonghi while fighting the Greek War of Independence, Wordsworth and Coleridge going through the Simplon Pass or beholding the Grande Chartreuse so that Wordsworth can write them up in the Prelude. For famous travellers’ impressions of Caledonia stern and wild one need look no further than to Samuel Johnson and Bosky journeying to the Western Isles of Scotland, or to Robert Burns’s Tour of the Highlands. But while writing in the wider context of this journey genre Eames makes no pretentious claims, simply and refreshingly subordinating travel details, historical and literary associations to his personal impressions of the Scotland of today, his Scotland which he wishes to share with the reader with something more than a dash of that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment which constitutes an audience’s literary faith in any writer. And did H.V. Morton’s In Search of Scotland or Edwin Muir’s Scottish Journey or John Buchan’s Northern Muse ever sound as homely and frank as Eames’ cameo portrait of a typical night in Glasgow’s George Square?
... Weaving through [the crowd] were the old drunks, leaving splodges of vomit like calling cards at the foot of Scotland’s most famous men. These statues of the square, Walter Scott, James Watt, et al., all rather appropriately seemed to be trying to march out, away from such frivolity, an unfortunate reminder that an awful lot of Scotland’s quality men and women have left the country, and continue to do so... I was accosted by three abusively drunk Englishmen. They clung close together, emboldened by the fact that they’d been parading around the city abusing the Glaswegians and nobody had beaten them up yet. “What are you doing making notes,” they jeered. “Write down that this is a shit city full of shits.”... By half past three most of the night buses had gone and the remaining few were being gutted of their troublemakers by the police. A gang of a dozen young men started a running battle up and down the square, but it was far from being a serious fight; they’d end up in a motionless pile on the grass, grunting feebly, and someone at the bottom would scream: “Wha’s farted?” (72-3)

Evelyn Waugh, it is true, defined Hogmanay as “people being sick on the pavement in Glasgow,” but he was never this graphic about an average Glasgow evening!

While writing thus modestly, Eames has nevertheless set himself a formidable task when attempting to define that rather elusive will-o’-the-wisp, the essence of Scotland. Many attempts have been made in the past, of course, but the usual experience is akin to trying to put one’s finger on a blob of spilled mercury—it merely fragments at too heavy a touch into smaller blobs which are even more difficult to handle. Perhaps best is Lord Byron’s kaleidoscopic series of dreamlike impressions unsorted but unified by the firm underpinning of genuine emotion:

As Auld Lange Syne brings Scotland one and all, Scotch plaids, Scotch snoods, the blue hills and clear streams,
The Dee, the Don, Balgounie’s brig’s black wall, All my boy feelings, all my gentler dreams
Of what I then dreamt, clothed in their own pall,
Like Banquo’s offspring; floating past me seems
My childhood in this childishness of mine;
I care not—’tis a glimpse of “Auld Lang Syne.”

Eames gives the reader the same spots of time to pass before
the eyes, flashes of light on the retina which appear random but
which are in fact firmly unified by the writer’s vision.

Not for Eames the heart-on-the-shirtsleeve sentiment of an
overt patriotism, not for him Scots Wha Hae, The Flower of
Scotland, or Scott’s Lay of the Last Minstrel:

Breathes there the man, with soul so dead,
Who never to himself hath said,
This is my own, my native land!
Whose heart hath ne’er within him burn’d,
As home his footsteps he hath turn’d,
From wandering on a foreign strand!
If such there breathe, go, mark him well;
For him no minstrel raptures swell;
High though his titles, proud his name,
Boundless his wealth as wish can claim;
Despite these titles, power, and pelf,
The wretch, concentrated all in self,
Living, shall forfeit fair renown,
And, doubly dying, shall go down
To the vile dust from whence he sprung,
Unwept, unhonour’d, and unsung.

But the reader can detect behind Four Scottish Journeys the
theme of liberty and the right of every person to its enjoyment
and privilege. Such was the point of the Declaration of Arbroath
when, on April 6, 1320, the nobles, clergy and commons of
Scotland sent to Pope John XXII this noble statement of their
devotion to their native land:

So long as a hundred of us are left alive, we shall
never be subject to English domination. It is not for
glory, nor riches, nor honour that we fight, but only
for that liberty which no true man relinquishes but
with his life.
Or here is Andrew Fletcher of Saltoun, writing in 1698:

No inclination is so honourable, nor has anything been so much esteemed in all nations, and ages, as the love of that country and society in which every man is born. And those who have placed their greatest satisfaction in doing good, have accounted themselves happy, or unfortunate, according to the success of their endeavours to serve the interest of their country. For nothing can be more powerful in the minds of men, than a natural inclination and duty concurring in the same disposition... Allow me to make the songs of a country, and I will allow you to make its laws.

It was Robert Burns who made the songs of Scotland and who found a duty to an higher patriotism, too, finding a vital need for all mankind, of all nations, colours and creeds, to have love and liberty in public and in private life alike. The expression is Scottish; the sentiments are universal. As he tells Dr. Blacklock:

To make a happy fireside clime
    To weans and wife,
That’s the true pathos and sublime
    Of human life.

Honesty, simplicity, laughter, love, liberty, sincerity, patriotism, piety, universal brotherhood—these are the values by which Scots everywhere live and die.

To these values which may be perceived by the perspicacious to lie beneath his thumb-nail sketches of his fascinating array of "characters" Eames would have to add a sense of the ridiculous, for his Scotland is the one that has British Rail trains so slow that if a man ties his wife to the railway track the chances are she will starve to death. His Scotland is the one of the old saying that breeding in Edinburgh means good manners but in Glasgow means good fun. His Scotland is the one of the accountant who told his friend, "This deficit really had me worried for a minute, until I remembered I work for the government." His Scotland is the one of Mr. Major’s claim that the economy is looking up when every Scotsman knows that that’s the only direction it can look since it’s been flat on its back for years. His Scotland is the
one in which Burns apostrophized the capital city in his Address to Edinburgh as “Edina! Scotia’s darling seat!” and Maurice Lindsay notes gleefully in The Burns Encyclopedia that Burns’s opening line gave the cue to a firm of bathroom manufacturers to apply the name ‘Edina’ to one of their necessary though unpoetic products.

Rev. Sydney Smith last century referred to Scotland as ‘that knuckle-end of England—that land of Calvin, oat-cakes, and sulphur.” And he was the one who said, “It requires a surgical operation to get a joke well into a Scotch understanding.” But can these be the only ingredients that constitute Scotland and the Scots—Calvin, oat-cakes, and sulphur? What, indeed, about jokes and laughter? Aldous Huxley tells us of the vital role played in common humanity by spontaneous laughter:

... Laughter clears the air as nothing else can do; it is good for us, every now and then, to see our ideals laughed at, our conception of nobility caricatured; it is good for solemnity’s nose to be tweaked, for human pomposity to be made to look ridiculous.

This is part of the point of a Burns Supper, after all, for that is the one night in the year that 30 Scotsmen in Edmonton persuade 450 Ukrainians to pay $65.00 each to eat haggis. As the late Tommy Douglas told the Edmonton Burns Club in 1957, Scots pretend to be dour, but really they are very sensitive—we have hearts which can be touched if our wallets cannot! A joke is the only thing a Scotsman can enjoy at his own expense, after all, and Scotsmen are told jokes when they are young so that they can enjoy them in old age. For Eames, too, the combination in Scottish humour of dourness, practicality and whimsy comes to typify both the nation and the land it occupies.

Erin Hennessey wrote recently, “To say that Scotland has a dramatic history is like saying haggis is a bit filling... Haggis has a strong flavour and is not for the faint of heart. Neither is Scotland.” And Scotland the What? also suggests that the key to the Scots’ character may be their national dish, known in Burns’s time as Bonny Mary of Argyll:

It seems to me that Scotland is very like a haggis. Scotland, you see, has got plenty of guts. Like the
haggis, Scotland's outward appearance is grey and sodden, and its constituents are simple and course, and with a proven propensity for turning Prime Minister Thatcher's stomach—a propensity which is warmly reciprocated.

Eames' happy discussion of this Scottish soul-food runs in part as follows:

I wouldn't spare half a sentence on a hard-boiled egg or a saveloy, but a haggis is a conversation piece. One of the best Scottish sayings is "Even a haggis can run doonhill," because its use can only be surreal. Remember it when you're told to clear your desk on a Friday afternoon and not to come back: "Ah well, even a haggis can run doonhill." Remember it when the clear favourite at Ascot comes last, and the longest odds comes first: "Even a haggis can run doonhill." (24)

That is one face of Eames' Scotland; the other is that of Robertson Nicoll in The British Weekly (January 16, 1902):

In the first place, the Scotsman is a son of the rock. The circumstances of his birth and upbringing are as a rule very stern. He is cradled in the storm; he has to fight for life in a rough climate, in a huddle of grey houses. The amenities of life are by no means plentiful. As a rule money is scarce. There are few demonstrations of affection; one is made to feel that he must trust himself, that man is a soldier, and life is a fight.

Eames is equally determined to get away from the Harry Lauder or White Heather Show kitch and give us the real landscape of Scotland:

Right at that very moment it didn't occur to me that I should actually go to Scotland and have a good look round in order to try to define why it was such a familiar piece of land. Instead, I turned to books. Several months later I was still dissatisfied, for although there were reams of published material about Scotland, it seemed that very few writers had reached the top of a Scottish hill, looked down on the other
side and seen what was actually there. Most had seen a combination of what used to be there, together with what they thought the reader would like to see. Their landscape was of crofters wearing tartan, cooking grouse, drinking whisky and playing the bagpipes, in a perpetual atmosphere of hardy merriment spiced with courageous foolhardiness. What is worst, they didn’t give the country a present—and when a country itself makes a business out of people who come to it for its romanticised past, it too begins to despair of its present.

So Eames opens with a picture of “the bog on a wide treeless plateau of nothing” which is Corrour (1), shows how “In Scotland, selection of a portion of the view simply means that some of the magnificence is lost—a camera cannot match Scotland’s scale” (12), takes the reader to Nancy’s hostel at Fersit (16), and then on to Tyndrum:

It was light by the time the train reached Tyndrum, but the drizzle had descended on the hills like a curtain. Tyndrum is a small cocktail of mismatched establishments lodged at various points around road and rail junctions: a petrol station, a couple of tour bus hotels, a couple of cafés, a small housing estate of bungalows, a handful of shops and two railway stations, all spread thinly as if to demarcate the outer limits of a planned town whose centre had never been built. The Little Chef was doing a steady breakfast trade and the windows of the Royal Hotel dining-room were steamed up with the tea-laden breath of three coach parties; tea that had been nurtured and picked in hot Indian hills was being consumed in great quantities in that brown and wet moorland.

This is evocative description of the real Scotland of today. Other fine examples include the descriptions of Inverness and Dingwall (25), the road to the Scoraig peninsula (38), Shenavall and Kinlochbervie:

Around the corner of the mountain the path dipped towards the strath. The snow on the moorland had
disappeared quickly, exposing raw ground where the topsoil had stretched, slipped and peeled off the sandstone and quartzite like the skin burning off a face in a horror film. Ahead was a tapestry of mountains stretching benignly into the distance... (43) I couldn’t but be drawn to the windscreen sticker on his car, which said “Kinlochbervie—God’s handiwork.” I looked out of the window at what God had made. It all looked like raw material waiting for the making to begin. There was no snow up here, and every roadside crag had a deer nailed to it. Absence of light drained all detail from the ground itself, but daylight was lingering on the lochs, producing scenery like a photographic negative with light in all the wrong places. God’s handiwork was still only a silhouette, a negative for a print, a rough model prepared for completion later. (50)

Other memorable mental snapshots include the Kildonan Hotel (104), St. Andrews (185-6), Dundee (187), Peterhead (214), the parallel between the Hebrides and the Nusa Tenggara archipelago in Indonesia (97-8), the battle between men and the landscape at the Braemar Gathering (198), and, of course, the Clisham:

Somewhere beyond Tarbert the road is suddenly picked up by the scruff of its neck by the mountains, which lift it to a giddy height and stretch it thin, gasping and thrashing, across their own backs, presenting it as a sacrilege to the sky. No one lives up on the Clisham... Beyond the Clisham, Lewis is wide, flat and squidy; before it, Harris is tall, bony, aristocratic and threadbare. (163)

The use of the objective correlative shows the harsh landscape as alive, and it is an active landscape, peopled with Eames’ “characters.”

Obviously a man with a strong penchant for travel, Eames would no doubt agree that the Scot in general is an inveterate wanderer, as is well attested in the rubric to chapter 8 of the book Punch on Scotland, as follows:
The great westward movement of tribes across Europe over the years resulted in the Scots finding themselves trapped in a wet, misty cul-de-sac in the northern half of Britain with nowhere left to go except the Orkneys and Shetlands. As this seemed a poor solution, most of them have taken a deep breath and gone on to Canada, New Zealand, Australia, Samoa, the Far East and even, in desperate cases, London, where they have formed Caledonian societies and become even more fiercely Scottish than before. They turn out en masse twice a year, once for Burns Night and once for Billy Connolly’s world tour … For further details on that other great group of Scottish exiles, Celtic and Rangers fans stranded abroad, see the chapter on Sport.

One possible reply to this English calumny is that grand auld Scottish toast, “Here’s tae us! Wha’s like us? Damn few, and they’re a’ deid.” Another possible reply is Four Scottish Journeys.

The constitution of the St. Andrew Society reads as follows:

The Society shall be called ‘The St. Andrew Society.’ The Objects of the Society shall be to uphold the honour and dignity of Scotland, and to foster the study of Scottish History, Archaeology, Art, Literature, Music, and Customs, and to bring the Scottish Societies throughout the British Isles and abroad into closer touch with the mother country. The Society shall be composed of persons in sympathy with these objects …

Eames is not one in sympathy with these objects but is rather one who wishes to discover the real identity of real Scottish people (and himself) along the lines of Burns’s Epistle to a Young Friend:

Ye’ll try the world soon, my lad,
    And, Andrew dear, believe me,
Ye’ll find mankind an unco squad,
    And muckle they may grieve ye:
For care and trouble set your thought,
    E’en when your end’s attained;
And a’ your views may come to nought,
    Where every nerve is strained.
I'll no say men are villains a';
    The real, hardened wicked,
Wha ha'e nae check but human law,
    Are to a few restricted:
But och, mankind are unco weak,
    An' little to be trusted;
If self the wavering balance shake,
    It's rarely right adjusted!

The unco squad that make up Scottish mankind is the true subject of Four Scottish Journeys.

From Eames we get the same picture of Scotland and the Scots that we get from Robert Louis Stevenson:

Scotland is indefinable: it has no unity except upon the map. Two languages, many dialects, innumerable forms of piety, and countless local patriotisms and prejudices, part us among ourselves... When I am at home, I feel a man from Glasgow to be something like a rival, a man from Barra to be more than half a foreigner. Yet let us meet in some far country, and, whether we hail from the Braes of Manor or the Braes of Mar, some ready-made affections join us on the instant. It is not race. Look at us. One is Norse, one Celtic, another Saxon. It is not the community of tongue. We have it not among ourselves: and we have it almost to perfection with English, or Irish, or American. It is no tie of faith, for we detest each other’s errors... The happiest lot on earth is to born a Scotsman. You must pay for it in many ways... You have to learn the Paraphrases and the Shorter Catechism; you generally take to drink; your youth... is a time of louder war against society, of more outcry and tears and turmoil, than if you had been born, for instance, in England. But somehow life is warmer and closer; the hearth burns more redly; the lights of home shine softer on the rainy street...

Eames has the power to take his audience along that rainy street, to make them feel with him the glow of that welcoming
hearth. His “characters” laugh, and puke, and fart, and swear, wipe the furtive tear from the eye, and have an unassailable inner life. And what a raggle-taggle, bare-arsed panoply of Scottish mankind unfolds itself to the reader! There is Jimmy Morgan, ex-stationmaster at Corrour (1-2), Mrs. Campbell in her B&B uniform of lilac tracksuit and slippers in Dingwall (23), Billy Macrae and Alex in Ullapool as descendants of Tam o’ Shanter and Soutar Johnnie in Auld Ayr:

He was a tall prawn fisherman, with a flat Para Handy cap and a coat covered in rusty metal poppers and zips and he too smelt of fish oil and sweat, although the aroma of whisky and beer chasers was stronger. At his elbow was Alex, a sticky, grizzled man with glasses as thick as Fox’s glacier mints who spent the evening staring into the mirror behind the optics. (30)

We meet Tom and Sundara running Samadhan, a centre for actors and movement rituals near Scoraig (36-41), go sailing with Bernie and Davey in the Zephyr off Dunoon (79-82), cut peat with Tosh the peat-king of Islay:

His waterproofs made expressive farting noises as he strode about his patch of boggy land, like a pocket battleship surging through the wet heather, prodding bits of spit defiantly into the wind. (116)

We meet Angus the Boot and his wellie on Colonsay (127) with Charlie the bus (128-30), the South Uist polisman chasing a ram in the dark in his pyjamas because the ram has his keys on one of his horns (142), Mick the Scrappie who keeps his home in Dundee but searches the Western Highlands and Islands for scrap (143-49), Splash of Berneray with whom Prince Charles came to stay (151-2), the Wec Free minister in Leverburgh who preached “a famous sermon on Christmas Day about how it had been Christ’s hard luck to have been born a bastard” (160), Jim the Jesuit priest at the Leverburgh ceilidh (163), Kenny the Leatherman in his tigh dubh on Lewis (167), Jonathon Brown at the Edinburgh Festival (179-81), Roger Banks the gourmet harbourmaster in Crail (182-5), Sydney Scroggie the blind, one-legged mountaineer, poet, author and Oxford man in Dundee
(188-89), Munro Gillespie the headmaster in Monymusk (197), and so on. And these people are shown us in all their rugged individuality, colourful personality and conversational freedom:

I aired my theory that the quality of life in Scotland was somehow purer and better because of a closeness with a cathartic landscape. "What a load of balls," said Jonathon, with his characteristic chortle...

Of course, not everyone encountered on Eames' travels in Scotland is Scottish; there is, for instance, Tom Rigg the Yorkshireman with his hostel on Loch Ossian who "should have had a pipe" (8-11); Ken Smith the Derbyshireman with his log cabin on the Moor of Rannoch five miles from anywhere who "knew exactly where he was: he was 314 mice, 121.5 pounds of pike and 2,316 pages of diary into his life" (12-15); the Mafia in Oban (22); the lorry driver from Milton Keynes searching Wick and Thurso for paper for shredding (23-4); the fish-farmer from Lancashire encountered near Ullapool (27); the Eastern bloc klondyker factory ships in Loch Broom, "Baltic heron, Lithuanian storks and Bulgarian crows come to Ullapool from places like Plovdiv, Riga and Murmansk" (28-30); John Ridgway who rowed across the Atlantic, paddled up the Amazon and was planning a canoe trip round Cape Horn, with his boat permanently primed—"Water, diesel, food, you name it. Always ready to just fuck off" (52); the German minister on Gigha (110-11); the millionaire outsiders doing their island shopping (100-104, 111-14); and the Glen Etive deerstalker Tim Healey, an ex-window-dresser from Poole. (201-2)

Andrew Eames himself is revealed as somewhat of an eccentric adventurer, getting himself involved in a bewildering variety of activities—winter climbing, the Dingwall cattle auction, the Glasgow march against the poll tax, spending the night on the streets of Glasgow, trawling off Dunoon, riding from Ayr to Gatehouse of Fleet with the Video Man, getting out of Harris before the Sabbath, deer-stalking in Glen Etive, salmon poaching on the Tweed, sheep-shearing on Hermetray, sleeping rough on Colonsay, riding the Gigha ferry, writing graffiti on the airport runway (the beach) on Barra, listening to the trout farting on Harris, flying on a helicopter to the oilrigs off Aber-
deen, and sailing from Buckie harbour to Berwick. Every action is described colourfully and naturally; here, for instance, is Eames looking for accommodation on Colonsay:

I trekked hurriedly across the island in the semidarkness, spinning fantasies and sniffing the scent of fresh cut grass, until I found Walter. “They’s a bugger, they’s really a bugger,” he said when I explained my predicament. “I canna reelly help. There’s a few roofless hooses down the south, but a roofless hoose is no much use. I’ve only a byre which isn’t reelly suitable, not reelly suitable at all.” Having seen a few byres in my time, most of which were concrete floored and carpeted with wall-to-wall cowshit, I wasn’t keen either. (124)

Certain motifs pervade Four Scottish Journeys to give the reader a sense of unity lying behind the fragmentation of the narrative’s surface caused by the demands of geography and chronology. The infamous poll tax, which Mrs. Thatcher tried out on the Scots a couple of years before inflicting it on the English, is a case in point. On lonely Rannoch Moor, Tom Rigg complains as early as page 9, “I pay poll tax: £236 for no facilities at all—No dustbin collection, no electricity, nothing. They generously let me off £20 because I get my own water in buckets from the lake.” To the encouraging sounds of a kilted punk group called “Fool-i-shite against the poll tax,” the Glaswegians march to Queen’s Park:

The march took place on the same day as a rally in London’s Trafalgar Square which marked the start of poll tax in England. The English rally turned into a riot. In Glasgow a man with a loudhailer announced the news with a certain relish. “The English air having a bit rammy theirsel,” he said. “The English thunk we’re a nation ae beggars, whingeing awa’ up here because ae the cauld wither. The English thunk their pain uz the genuine article, but iversons else’s uz character-building. Now they’re squealing aboot the poll tax.” Loud cheers from the audience. (65)
Eames is sair fash'd with midges throughout, and tells a few
tall tales about these savage Scottish predators from page 2
onwards:

Some while ago the papers had reported the story of
how midges had stopped the train at Achnashellach,
on the Inverness to Kyle of Lochalsh line, when the
heat of the rail had attracted the pests in massive
quantities, so that where the gradient was steep the
metal became too slippery to grip. (2)

Neil Munro's Para Handy had met "mudges" that were so big
that you had to throw stones at them to keep them away (79), and
Eames has to leave Kildonan for Mull of Kintyre "pursued by a
small cloud of midges which caught up whenever I stopped
walking. It was one of those completely calm, completely grey
days, where the water content of the air is so heavy that walking
through the suspension makes the air drizzle on one's skin." (105)

How well the Scot can empathize with Eames in his midge-
infested sojourn in a land in which it so often seems to be either
raining or threatening to do so at any moment. Eames, indeed,
spends much of Four Scottish Journeys soaking wet. The reader's
sympathy is instantly engaged when he reads, "It was uncompro-
misingly wet and windy my first day on Gigha and every mooring
was occupied. Rapid squalls passed overhead, making enthusiastically for the mainland" (107), "The physical damage—blisters
and a stiff back—of a day out on the moss was not so bad as I had
feared, especially as I had been soaked most of the time" (118),
or "The lorry's windscreen wipers didn't do a particularly good
job, so I saw little of Benbecula." (146) And a day on South Uist
as grey as only Scotland can be grey (142) pales into insignifi-
cance compared to the storms which lash Peterhead and
Fraserburgh. (217, 218)

Eames "characters", it will already have been noted, are not
reticent of speech, but are quite prepared to turn the air blue in
the manner which cludes your typical Scott novel yet is typical of
modern Scottish blasphemy. "Ach," Big Al bellowed over the
engine noise, "there's maire tae li' then fuckin fush." (51) The
pub on Byres Road is not frequented by Henry Fowler (69), a
blasphemous water-skier in Largs gets his watery comeuppance
(83), and the doorman at the Grassmarket mission is no linguistic diplomat. (177) Yet the worst swearing comes from English lips on Arran!

So I travelled south, to see what that was like, hitching a lift from two rough Geordies ("we only stopped out of bloody guilt") in a car held together by carpentry and string. They lived on the island but laughed at it. Bloody chaos, they said it was. And bloody nothing to do in the winter except get bloody pissed. We swung down into Kildonan and the island of Pladda came into view, not much more than an upturned dinner plate with a tall pimple on it—the lighthouse. I asked politely whether the island was still for sale. "Some bloody yuppie's bought it," muttered the driver. "Fuck knows what he's going to do with it. Ile can't fucking do anything with it. Fucking tax dodge I suppose." (103-4)

Like life itself, Eames' journey has a dash or two of lavatorial humour (such as the memorable farts on p. 202) and a tinge of sexual imagery. Memories of Colonel Thomas Thornton apart (88-9), the wavepower machine on Barra becomes a metaphor for sex, life and death:

I wondered...if the scientist had been too much of a boffin to appreciate the sexual metaphor of his machine—the water rising and falling rhythmically under the skirt and the resulting groaning and snorting up above. It must have occurred to the farmers and their wives as they lay in their beds in moments of wakefulness before sleep, and contemplating its emulation. (119)

The reader is told that "There is something virginal about the islands as a whole, but at Stornoway they definitely lose their virginity." (166) And on Colonsay the memory of the wavepower machine leads to naked and natural lust:

Travel is also a sexually arousing business... Scotland, with no scent of suntan oil and sangria to act as an aphrodisiac, is not necessarily the ideal venue for sexual encounters but sometimes the circumstances
are unexpected and equally unavoidable... She was a fruit, now sweet and heavy on the tree, ready to drop like Sir Isaac Newton’s apple, on to my head, into my hand and on to my pillow. (121-22)

Buy a copy of the book if you really need to know the outcome!

The exiled Scot naturally turns to Four Scottish Journeys to see how his or her native haunts have been treated. My home city of Aberdeen emerges fresh as new paint from the pages of the book, as if I had been there only yesterday. There is a strong sense of Maurice Lindsay’s The Exiled Heart:

And my restless thoughts migrate to a Northern city—
fat pigeons stalking the dirty, cobbled quays, where a sluggish river carries the cold self-pity of those for whom life has never flowed with ease, from a granite bridge to the grey Atlantic seas.

And Eames describes the modern Aberdeen of oilmen paying high prices and telling tall tales of life on the rigs. “Entertainment in Aberdeen is not spontaneous, it is Rest and Recreation, the famous euphemism that turned many Asian cities into brothels and bars. Aberdeen is a Scottish Saigon or a Bangkok, filled with a transient alien population who bring plenty of money but who only care about the city inasmuch as it fulfils those needs which they can’t fulfil offshore.” (208-9) But get Eames into the countryside of Lewis Grassie Gibbon, get him to Ballater and Braemar (where I currently have a home) and the true North-east is there in all its agricultural splendour, Balmorality, and Royal Braemar Highland Gathering.

With some satisfaction the Aberdonian reader notes that Eames is equally frank in his treatment of what is virtually a motif not only in his book but also in modern Scottish life itself, the contrast between Glasgow and Edinburgh—rough and tumble Glasgow on the brooding, khaki waters of the River Clyde, that strongly Calvinistic, soot-covered metropolis in which the definition of a tourist is someone who is lost, whose downtown possesses all the radiant charm that one usually associates with a Murmansk slaughterhouse; and up-market, snooty Edinburgh,
where the Fire Brigade has an unlisted number, folk take fish and chips home in briefcases, they always have grapes on the table even if nobody is ill, and if you want red cabbage in Morningside you have to get it through Interflora. Eames devotes pages 57-74 to Glasgow, quoting one MP who in 1924 said it was "earth's closest suburb to Hell" (57) and going on to reveal the true heart of the city which is experiencing a wonderful cultural, musical, architectural and horticultural Renaissance. Edinburgh the AIDS capital of Europe gets equal billing on pages 173-82, with the monumental buildings of the "Athens of the North" as the set for the Festival and the Fringe, which latter is hilariously described:

But the show which was causing the most debate and which had the most credibility as a fringe performance, beating even a world premiere of Gary the Thief in which a naked performer had accidentally found himself shitting on a stage while being a human sculpture, was *Glad*, performed by actors and winos from the Grassmarket Mission at the foot of the castle rock. (176)

After this, Dundee appears rather drab, with its jute, its jam, its journalism, its Bridge and its reputation as the home of William McGonagall, the world's only truly bad poet who went from bad to worse and yet was heard in his hubris to say one day, "Burns is dead. Sir Walter Scott is dead. And I'm not feeling too well myself."

Are there any disappointments in the book? Well, inevitably there are, for the basis of the work is so personal that Eames can never be right all of the time in the eyes of any one reader. The book might have benefited from having a map on which the reader could trace the four journeys, or some photographs of the landscape and its colourful denizens—yet it would take a Hogarth to illustrate this book, and Eames' verbal vignettes are so well painted that they exist as wonderful cameos which a photograph might simply destroy. An index would help those who, like myself, want to find their native haunts—I wanted to see right away what Eames made of Aberdeen, Ballater, Braemar, the Carnegie grant that took me to work on the Scottish National Dictionary one summer in my third year at Aberdeen
University, the piper in Oban playing for the Scottish Tourist Board as my son plays each summer in Braemar for the Kincardine and Deeside Tourist Board.

Eames' Scotland is not really that of history or of literature, even Burns, and for richness of allusion one has to turn to David Murison's *The Scottish Year*. Nor, I feel, do we really find here the Scottish linguistic dilemma that was so controverted between Edwin Muir and Hugh MacDiarmid, the Scotland of the three languages English, Scots and Gaelic and the Scotland of such widely varying Scots dialects that Chris Grieve's reconstructed Lallans provides no easy solution. I don't think that Eames really succeeds in reproducing convincingly the speech of various locales, hard though he tries.

Yet the book overall is a huge success. Opening with a fitting quotation from Lewis Carroll, the book is divided into four seasons and sections: WINTER—the West Highlands; SPRING—the Clyde to the Tweed; SUMMER—the Islands; and AUTUMN—the Eastern Seaboard, with NEW YEAR'S DAY providing a fitting Epilogue. But the reader's delight is not divided; rather, it is continuous and great. There should be no need by this stage of the review to make mention of Eames' sense of humour, realism, and individual and attractive style.

Samuel Johnson in his *Dictionary* of 1755 defined an essay as a loose sally of the mind, and this review has the further fault of having much in common with the River Meander. Yet it is my hope that enough has been said and quoted to whet the reader's appetite and to demonstrate that this excellent book is a self-recommending purchase. Although the price has been tastefully, delicately, but not, I hope, tactfully excised from the dust jacket of the review copy, *Four Scottish Journeys* is well worth every new penny, and is compulsory reading for the clergy.

It were tempting to conclude with Munro Gillespie's poem about Eames' travels in Scotland, but the spirit I find in *Four Scottish Journeys* in the last analysis is that of Charles Murray in his poem *Hame with*:

- Hot youth ever is a ranger,
  New scenes ever its desire;
Cauld Eild, doubtfu' o' the stranger,
    Thinks but o' haudin' in the fire.
Midway, the wanderer is weary,
    Fain he'd be turnin' in his prime
Hamewith—the road that's never dreary,
    Back where his heart is a' the time.

PROF. RAYMOND J.S. GRANT
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA
EDMONTON, ALBERTA