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**Imagining the Scottish-Canadian Diaspora:
Emigration and Memory in Alistair MacLeod's *No
Great Mischief* and Alice Munro's
'The View from Castle Rock'**

Elisabeth Winkler

The Scottish-Canadian community—as reflected in its literature—has traditionally been shown a keen interest in its origins and history. In the last decade, two works were published that stand out in this respect: Alistair MacLeod's novel *No Great Mischief* (1999) and Alice Munro's collection of stories *The View from Castle Rock* (2006). Both these texts deal with questions relating to emigration, belonging and the articulation of national and cultural identities. Both of them also consider how Scotland is remembered, which traditions are brought to the New World, and how they are employed in the creation of a diasporic identity. Alistair MacLeod's fiction is mostly set on Cape Breton and depicts its close-knit Scottish Gaelic community. *No Great Mischief* in particular is concerned with the experience of emigration as well as questions of transmitting cultural traditions and the construction of a diasporic identity. Furthermore, the circular structure of the novel allows MacLeod to reiterate the experience of the diaspora in Canada itself by fashioning Cape Breton as a 'second Scotland' and depicting the exodus of the younger generations from the island. Alice Munro's *The View from Castle Rock*, and in particular the title story, is concerned with similar questions: though she is not attempting to write a 'new Scotland', she is interested in the question of how history and cultural traditions can be transmitted. This juxtaposition of the oral and the written tradition feature prominently at the beginning of her short story collection. Moreover, Munro portrays the actual experience of emigration and of arrival in North America in greater detail than MacLeod presenting the birthing moment of the diaspora.

Alistair MacLeod, *No Great Mischief*

Alistair MacLeod's first, and so far only, novel is steeped in questions of memory and identity.¹ The memory of an ancestral home is presented in

¹ Karl E. Jirgens calls it 'a work of *memory*'. Karl E. Jirgens, 'Lighthouse, Ring and

No Great Mischief in relation to Scotland as well as to Cape Breton, in both cases revolving around the central foci of the history and family structure of the Cape Breton MacDonalds. While the frame narrative deals with the relationship of the I-narrator, Alexander MacDonald, and his eldest brother Calum, the embedded narrative is the story of the *clann Chalum Ruaidh*, the Canadian branch of the MacDonald family named for the founding father, the red-haired Calum MacDonald (*Calum Ruadh*). Karl E. Jirgens points out that a circular pattern is the central structural element of this novel, in which the frame narrative and the various embedded stories and memories continuously mirror and echo one another.² Indeed, MacLeod even presents history as cyclical and hints at the potential for identity construction inherent in these circular patterns.

In *No Great Mischief* history functions as the most important means of identity construction, and accordingly the MacDonalds are closely linked to important events in Scottish and in North American history.³ They fought at Bannockburn, suffered the massacre of Glencoe, and *Calum Ruadh* himself—prior to his emigration—participated in the Jacobite Rebellion of 1745. When *Calum Ruadh* and his family leave Scotland in 1779, this is due to the Highland Clearances, as Alexander points out: ‘Anyone who knows the history of Scotland, particularly that of the Highlands and the Western Isles in the period around 1779, is not hard-pressed to understand the reasons for their leaving.’⁴ For Alexander, the Clearances are so much part of common memory that they do not need to be explicitly mentioned. The mechanism of identity construction that MacLeod suggests in this passage can be read as an echo of the one described by Stuart Hall in ‘Cultural Identity and Diaspora’. According to Hall, diasporic communities define their identity along two axes: one of continuity and one of discontinuity or rupture.⁵ As he points out,

Fountain: The Never-Ending Circle in *No Great Mischief* in Irene Guilford (ed.), *Alistair MacLeod: Essays on his Works* (Toronto et al., 2001), 85 (emphasis in the original).

² Ibid., 84–94.

³ Benedict Anderson, for instance, discusses the role of history in the process of identity construction arguing that historical events are frequently emplotted and interpreted in such a way as to serve the needs of each community. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (3rd edition, London, 2006), 187–206.

⁴ Alistair MacLeod, *No Great Mischief* (1999; London, 2001), 17–18.

⁵ Stuart Hall, ‘Cultural Identity and Diaspora’ in Jonathan Rutherford (ed.), *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference* (London, 1990); reprinted in Padmini Mangia (ed.), *Contemporary Postcolonial Theory. A Reader* (London, 1997), 113.

continuity plays a vital role in the construction of cultural identity for the diaspora as it provides ‘some grounding in, some continuity with the past’.⁶ For the MacDonalds in *No Great Mischief* the various significant events in Scottish history that some of their family members were involved in serve as this element of continuity. Hall’s axis of discontinuity is important for the development of a diasporic identity in so far as implies the experience of emigration and being uprooted.⁷ In *No Great Mischief*, the Clearances are not only an experience shared by Scots in Scotland and Scots who emigrated.⁸ For the Scottish Gaelic community on Cape Breton, the Clearances provide this experience of discontinuity, appearing here almost as a founding myth, albeit a traumatic one. At the same time, however, the narrator’s fleeting allusion to the Clearances and the necessity of emigration has another implication. The historical events Alexander refers to—Bannockburn, Glencoe, the Jacobite Rebellion and the Highland Clearances—are well-known outside of Scotland as well. By presupposing some knowledge of them on the reader’s side, MacLeod creates not only a common memory for Scots at home and Scots abroad, but allows the reader to feel included in this group, thus possibly enlarging the ‘imagined community’.⁹

Yet MacLeod does not link this history-based construction of identity only to Scotland; the MacDonald family history is also intertwined with North American and in particular Canadian historical events. Members of the MacDonald family fought on both sides in the American War of Independence and they played an important role during the French and Indian War in the battle of Quebec in 1759:

⁶ Ibid., 113.

⁷ Ibid., 113.

⁸ With reference to the short story ‘Clearances’, Kirsten Sandrock argues that MacLeod tends to describe the Clearances as a shared memory. Kirsten Sandrock, ‘Scottish Territories and Canadian Identity: Regional Aspects in the Literature of Alistair MacLeod’ in Petra Rüdiger and Konrad Gross (eds), *Translation of Cultures*. ASNEL Papers 13 (Amsterdam, 2009), 176.

⁹ The Clearances are frequently alluded to in the literature of the Scottish diaspora in Canada, for instance in Alistair MacLeod’s short story ‘Clearances’, in Margaret Laurence’s *The Diviners*, or in Lister Sinclair’s drama *The Blood is Strong*. For a discussion of further echoes of the Clearances in Canadian as well as Scottish literature see also Christopher Gittings, “Sounds in the Empty Spaces of History”: The Highland Clearances in Neil Gunn’s *Highland River* and Alistair MacLeod’s “The Road to Rankin’s Point”, *Studies in Canadian Literature*, 17 (1992), http://www.lib.unb.ca/Texts/SCL/bin/get.cgi?directory=vol17_1/&filename=Gittings.htm [accessed 12 January 2010].

'It is true', said my grandfather ...

'What?' asked Grandpa.

'Wolfe and the Highlanders at Quebec, on the Plains of Abraham. He was just using them against the French. He was suspicious of them and probably would have been satisfied if the French had killed them all. Just using them for his own goals, for as long as they might last.'

'But', said Grandpa, 'didn't you tell me once that it was a French-speaking MacDonald who got them past the sentries? And that he was first up the cliff with the other Highlanders, and that they pulled themselves up by grasping the roots of the twisted trees? Didn't you tell me that?'

'Yes', said my grandfather. '*First up the cliff*. Wolfe was still below in the boat. Think about it.'

'They were first because they were the best', said Grandpa stoutly. 'I think of them as winning Canada for *us*.'¹⁰

Grandpa, Alexander's paternal grandfather, postulates here the decisive role members of his clan played in the colonisation of North America. The pronoun 'us' appears to be ambiguous in this passage as it can either refer to the Highlanders or the Scottish or it can—in a narrower sense—refer to the MacDonalds themselves. This final interpretation would emphasise the family's close connection to North American or Canadian history.¹¹ This idea of a personal interpretation of history is also suggested in another passage that is directly linked with the family. *Calum Ruadh* represents the parallels between family and national Canadian history:

[After 1820] He continued to live for another fourteen years, giving his life a strange sort of balanced structure; living to be one hundred and ten years old; fifty-five in Scotland and a second fifty-five 'in the land across the sea'. Of the second fifty-five, he spent five as a sort energetic squatter and thirty-six as a 'citizen of Cape Breton' and fourteen as a citizen of Nova Scotia. When he died, in 1834, it was thirty-three years before Confederation.¹²

¹⁰ MacLeod, *No Great Mischief*, 101; emphases in the original.

¹¹ Cynthia Sugars, 'Repetition with a Difference: The Paradox of Origins in Alistair MacLeod's *No Great Mischief*', *Studies in Canadian Literature*, 33 (2008), 133–4.

¹² MacLeod, *No Great Mischief*, 23.

The 'balanced structure' of *Calum Ruadh's* life implies a strong connection between the old and the new home, virtually turning them into mirror images. Moreover, this suggests that the MacDonalds are older than Canada itself: settling and attempting to cultivate the land in colonial times makes them, as Cynthia Sugars argues, 'emblematic founders of Canadian settlement'.¹³

At the same time, MacLeod hints at the potential difficulty of making history the basis of identity. As Laurie Brinklow points out, he often uses the characters of grandparents to serve as guardians of the old traditions and as protectors of memory.¹⁴ In *No Great Mischief*, however, Alexander's two grandfathers also represent different approaches to memory and different treatments of the past. The paternal grandfather Grandpa stands for an oral culture with an emotional, at times even romanticised attitude towards history, whereas (the maternal) Grandfather represents a more objective, almost academic approach to history.¹⁵ The juxtaposition of the oral and the written tradition is noticeable, for instance, in the discussion about the Battle of Quebec quoted above. Grandfather presents his latest findings from the library while attempting to paint a more differentiated picture. He tries to make Grandpa understand that the MacDonalds fought against Wolfe at Culloden and changed sides in fighting for the British in Quebec. Grandpa, however, appears to be disinterested in these questions and chooses to keep his entirely heroic view of his ancestors as 'the best', 'winning Canada for us'.¹⁶ These different attitudes towards the past and the opposition of a written and an oral tradition are also aptly rendered in the description of their deaths. Grandpa, still firmly rooted in the Celtic cultural heritage, dies at a social function 'from jumping up in the air and trying to click his heels together twice'.¹⁷ Grandfather also dies in a manner fitting his life, 'reading a book called *A History of the Scottish Highlands*'.¹⁸ Despite the opposition of these two approaches to history, MacLeod does not favour one over the other. For the MacDonalds, Grandfather's academic interest in the past is as relevant

¹³ Sugars, 'Repetition with a Difference', 134.

¹⁴ Laurie Brinklow, 'A "Subterranean River" to the Past: The Importance of Inheritance in Creating Island Identity in the Fiction of Alistair MacLeod', *Refereed Papers from the 3rd International Small Island Cultures Conference* (Institute of Island Studies, University of Prince Edward Island, 2008), 10; <http://www.sicri-network.org/ISIC3/English/ISIC3Papers/Brinklow.pdf> [accessed 16 March 2010].

¹⁵ David Williams, 'From Clan to Nation: Orality and the Book in Alistair MacLeod's *No Great Mischief*' in Guilford (ed.), *Alistair MacLeod*, 70.

¹⁶ MacLeod, *No Great Mischief*, 101.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 245.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 245.

as Grandpa's romanticised, heroic view. In fact, the tension between these approaches is also tangible on a more abstract level. As David Williams shows, the novel is modelled on an oral narrative; being a novel, however, it is also part of the written tradition.¹⁹ Like the two grandfathers, the two traditions appear to complement each other by portraying two equally relevant and important means of transmitting memory.

Another idea of the memory of, and the connection with, Scotland is presented in the role and structure of the family, it is almost a form of genetic memory.²⁰ The *clann Chalum Ruaidh* is modelled on and still lives according to the Gaelic clan structure they brought with them from Scotland. The Scottish-Australian poet Les Murray has commented on the role of the family in the Scottish diaspora, arguing that the clan or 'extended family' is central to the identity of members of the Scottish diaspora.²¹ In *No Great Mischief*, the clan is one of the most important elements for the construction of identity for the family members.²² The importance of the family is emphasised many times in the novel, for instance in Grandma's admonition to 'always look after your own blood', the many repetitions of which emphasise the significance of this idea.²³ The most dominant characteristic in this family history is again the cyclical element.²⁴ It is not only grander history repeating itself, but also that of the MacDonalds as various allusions indicate: be it the 'balanced structure' of *Calum Ruadh's* life or the recurrence of family characteristics, such as the red or black colour of their hair.²⁵ Even more noticeable in this respect are the first names of the characters that are also passed from one generation to the next. There is, for instance, Alexander's eldest brother Calum, who is named not only after his grandfather, but bears the name of *Calum Ruadh*. Calum also functions as the head of the family after the parents' death and even lives in *Calum Ruadh's* old house for a while. The most remarkable

¹⁹ David Williams, 'From Clan to Nation', 62.

²⁰ For a more detailed discussion of this almost innate memory see also Sugars, 'Repetition with a Difference', 136 ff. and Brinklow, 'A "Subterranean River" to the Past', 11–14.

²¹ Les Murray, 'The Bonnie Disproportion', *Helix*, 1 (1980) and *Edinburgh Review*, May 1981 (shorter versions), expanded version published in Edmund Campion and Axel Clark (eds), *Celts in Australia: Imagination and Identity*, Brennan Society Colloquium Papers (1980); reprinted in Les Murray, *The Paperbark Tree. Selected Prose* (Manchester, 1992), 110.

²² David Creelman, *Setting in the East: Maritime Realist Fiction* (Montreal, 2003), 140.

²³ MacLeod, *No Great Mischief*, 12.

²⁴ Williams discusses this in greater detail. Williams, 'From Clan to Nation', *passim*.

²⁵ MacLeod, *No Great Mischief*, 23.

instance of the identity of names occurs with Alexander himself, the *gille bbig ruaidh* (the 'little red-haired boy'). While this Gaelic epithet does still grant him some individuality, he also has two red-haired cousins called Alexander.²⁶ When his Cape Breton-based cousin dies in an accident in the uranium mines of Ontario, the narrator is asked to replace him. The repetition of names and of outer appearance thus acquires an almost symbolic quality implying the replaceability of the individual within the clan system.²⁷ This notion is emphasised again with the appearance of the third red-haired Alexander, a distant cousin from San Francisco, a draft dodger who takes over at the mines for the narrator. MacLeod renders the idea of the mirror images of these three characters in the carefully crafted image of a tartan shirt:

We never saw Alexander MacDonald again. I realised later that he had been wearing my MacDonald tartan shirt. The one that the mother of the red-haired Alexander MacDonald had purchased for him on my graduation day, the day that he had been killed. The shirt had been purchased for one Alexander MacDonald who had never worn it. It had been worn by a second and vanished on the back of a third.²⁸

The relative unimportance of the individual suggested here is almost a grim echo of the novel's title. At the same time, however, this also illustrates the grandmother's postulate to 'always look after your own blood'.²⁹ The idea of a horizontal family structure and the lack of individuality are also stressed by the narrator's use of the pronouns 'we' and 'us' in the chapters set in the mines.

However, the idea of a diaspora is not limited by MacLeod to Scotland. Kirsten Sandrock shows that there are parallels between the Cape Breton Highlanders and other ethnic groups present in the novel, particularly the seasonal workers.³⁰ Moreover, there is also another, distinctly Scottish Gaelic diaspora, only this time it occurs exclusively on the North American continent. This is alluded to by the exodus from Cape Breton and by the longing for this island. The 'emigration' from Cape Breton is suggested in several instances. The clan *Chalum Ruaidh* has spread across Canada, not

²⁶ Sugars, 'Repetition with a Difference', 138–9.

²⁷ Williams, 'From Clan to Nation', 49–52.

²⁸ MacLeod, *No Great Mischief*, 241.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 12. The only MacDonald who refuses to act accordingly is the American Alexander. Just before the fight between the MacDonalds and the Quebeckers, he flees from the mines saying: 'I didn't come here to die in the boondocks.' *Ibid.*, 235.

³⁰ Sandrock, 'Scottish Territories and Canadian Identity', 179–80.

only echoing the westward expansion in North America, but also indicating the younger generation's move from their ancestral home for economic reasons.³¹ This notion of an emigration from Cape Breton is most noticeable in the narrator himself, who has an orthodontist practice in Ontario, and in his sister Catriona, who has moved to Calgary. Despite the economic success this generation has had, they also experience nostalgia for Cape Breton, which has become their object of belonging and longing. By his depiction of the close-knit Scottish Gaelic community on the island MacLeod has created a 'second Scotland'. Though the grandparents' generation still has a nostalgic longing for Scotland, they are already portrayed as being firmly rooted in Cape Breton, which Grandpa refers to as 'God's country' and 'our own country'.³²

This strong emotional tie to Cape Breton is also suggested by the song '*Cumha Ceap Breatuinn*' ('Lament for Cape Breton') which occurs twice in *No Great Mischief*: once at the very beginning of the novel and once when Alexander and his grandparents return to the island after his graduation in Halifax. Placing the song in the first chapter points to the importance of the motif of belonging and nostalgia: 'I see far, far away. / I see far o'er the tide; / I see Cape Breton, my love, / Far away o'er the sea ... There's a longing in my heart now / To be where I was / Though I know that it's quite sure / I never shall return.'³³ As Alexander says, this is 'one of those communal songs often sung by large groups of people'.³⁴ While the (oral) tradition of the communal song has survived in the Scottish Gaelic community, the object of lament has changed with Cape Breton becoming the lost, lamented homeland and replacing Scotland in this respect.³⁵ In Calum, moreover, MacLeod offers the most obvious rendition of the idea of an inner-Canadian diaspora. Not only is he the first character to sing the 'Lament for Cape Breton', he is also the one whose wish to return is the most pronounced, a typical trait of members of the diaspora.³⁶ At the end of the novel, Calum asks Alexander to drive with him to Cape Breton, where he dies shortly after having passed the Causeway:

³¹ Christopher Gittings points to the presence of this motif in MacLeod's short fiction. Christopher Gittings, 'A Conversation with Alistair MacLeod', *Scottlands*, 2 (1995), 101.

³² MacLeod, *No Great Mischief*, 108.

³³ *Ibid.*, 13–14.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 13.

³⁵ Williams argues similarly; Williams, 'From Clan to Nation', 56.

³⁶ William Safran, 'Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return', *Diaspora*, 1 (1991), 83–4.

I turn to Calum once again. I reach for his cooling hand which lies on the seat beside him. I touch the Celtic ring.³⁷ With the image of the Celtic ring, the ‘never ending circle’, MacLeod also repeats the circular motif of his novel. It is not only Calum’s life coming full circle, but also that of Alexander. At the same time, this might imply a significant difference between the first and the second diaspora. While the preceding generations from *Calum Ruadh* onwards could not return to their Scottish homeland, the younger generation can still do so.

Alice Munro, ‘The View from Castle Rock’

Alice Munro’s short story collection *The View from Castle Rock* is also a family history concerned with the diasporic experience, though one with a distinctly autobiographical background. The first part of the collection deals with the history of the Laidlaw family, from their Scottish origin to their move to Ontario. Particularly in the first two stories—‘No Advantages’ and the title story ‘The View from Castle Rock’—Munro is concerned with the transmission of (cultural) traditions and the construction of identity in the diaspora.³⁸

The opening story ‘No Advantages’ lays the ground work for the remainder of the collection. The narrator describes her visit to the village of Ettrick in the Scottish Lowlands, where she visits her ancestors’ graves and provides a short overview of their lives. These miniatures highlight the characteristics and traditions that the Laidlaw family will take with them to Canada: the rigid Calvinism, the interest in writing, and stories of fairies and the supernatural. In this last respect, the narrator’s ancestor Will O’Phaup, who lived on the family farm Far-Hope in Ettrick Valley, plays an important role. As a young man, he was a larger-than-life character, prone to alcohol abuse and with occasional supernatural encounters. Particularly these episodes, which present Will O’Phaup as a brother in spirit to Robert Burns’ Tam O’Shanter, play an important role for the emigration story ‘The View from Castle Rock’.

This second story encapsulates two ideas central to the diaspora: the experience of emigration and being uprooted and the question of how

³⁷ MacLeod, *No Great Mischief*, 261.

³⁸ Some details and episodes that Munro used in her story ‘A Wilderness Station’ (1994) reoccur in *The View from Castle Rock*. For parallels between the two texts, see Karl Miller, ‘The Passion of Alice Laidlaw’, *Changing English*, 14 (2007), 17–22, especially 20.

memory can be transmitted and kept alive through the juxtaposition of oral and written traditions. The father in this story, Old James Laidlaw, expects economic betterment for his family in North America and is at first more than keen to leave Scotland. The further the ship moves across the Atlantic, however, the more Old James clings to the old family stories involving the notorious Will O'Phaup. Walter, Old James' son, is present when his father narrates some of these tales to an audience of fellow emigrants:

[Walter] has heard these stories his father is spouting, and others like them, for the whole of his life, but the odd thing is that until they came on board this ship he never heard them from his father. The father he has known up till a short while ago would, he is certain, have had no use for them ... 'To be born in the Ettrick is to be born in a backward place,' he would say, 'where the people is all believing in old stories and seeing ghosts and I tell you it is a curse to be born in the Ettrick.'³⁹

A profound change within the character has taken place on board the ship. The father who used to scorn the 'old stories' is now eagerly telling them. The growing distance from home increases the sense of loss and appears to necessitate story telling as a means of maintaining and affirming identity. Munro underscores this by recreating Old James' remarks about Ettrick and the New World. When the family leaves Scotland and the Scottish coast fades in the east, Old James declines looking back saying, 'It is nothing to me. I have seen the last of the Ettrick so I have seen the last of Scotland already.'⁴⁰ However, when the family sees the coast of Nova Scotia for the first time, he has a change of heart refusing to look at the new home, 'What does it matter to me? It cannot be my home. It can be nothing to me but the land where I will die.'⁴¹ Even for him, who so far appeared to be eager to leave rural Scotland, North America has lost its allure. Emigration is marked here as a highly unsettling experience and predictably Old James turns to his two-year-old grandson Young James to tell him another story about Will O'Phaup in a final attempt to remember the old home.

Munro juxtaposes this oral tradition with its inklings of folklore with the written tradition of history and memory. This second approach is represented

³⁹ Alice Munro, 'The View from Castle Rock' in idem, *The View from Castle Rock* (2006; London, 2007), 62.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 44.

⁴¹ Ibid., 80.

by Walter who is keeping a journal of the journey. On board he befriends a young girl, the daughter of the wealthy merchant Carbert, with whom Walter converses while his father tells stories from Ettrick:

'I only write what happens,' Walter says, wanting to make clear that this is a job for him and not an idle pleasure ...

[Carbert:] 'You are not writing about what we have just heard?'

[Walter:] 'No.'

[Carbert:] 'It might be worth it. There are people who go around now prying into every part of Scotland and writing down whatever these old country folk have to say. They think that the old songs and stories are disappearing and that they are worth recording. I don't know about that, it isn't my business. But I would not be surprised if the people who have written it all down find that it was worth their trouble—I mean to say, there will be money in it.'⁴²

The allusion here is to writers such as Walter Scott, who collected the old ballads and stories in the early nineteenth century.⁴³ This folklorist approach is contrasted with Walter's reductive notion of recording only 'what happens'. The question invoked here is whether the oral or the written tradition allows for a more accurate or at least adequate rendition of memory. It is notable that Munro refrains from portraying one tradition as being superior to the other, implying instead that one cannot exist without the other. In an authorial, essentially metafictional comment her narrator says of 'The View from Castle Rock': 'Except for Walter's journals, and the letters, the story is full of my own invention.'⁴⁴ On the one hand this implies that written sources may not always suffice to create a complete image of the past and that there is more to history and memory than the mere recording of 'what happens'. On the other hand, this comment points to the potentially problematic nature of memory and historiography, which are subjective interpretations of past events. Munro may imply that a narrative woven around the mere facts might be necessary to attribute meaning to these events and thus help to create identity.

Connected with the idea of memory is the emergence of a diasporic community and identity, Munro's second concern in this story. This is alluded

⁴² Ibid., 60–1.

⁴³ Munro mentions Scott's *The Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* in Munro, 'No Advantages', 21.

⁴⁴ Munro, 'The View from Castle Rock', 84.

to, for instance, in the behaviour of the passengers on board the ship. During boarding, Old James is worried about the fellow travellers, as the Lowlander does not appreciate his Gaelic countrymen: 'Highlanders being one of the sorts the old man despises.'⁴⁵ In fact, Old James told his family that on the ship there would be 'All Scotsmen and all decent folk. No Highlanders, no Irish.'⁴⁶ Though the reader does not get to know whether the family members or other travellers share this sentiment, this statement suggests significant regional, linguistic, religious and possibly even social differences between the Lowlanders and the Gaelic Highlanders. Significantly, this changes utterly once the ship comes within sight of the North American shore:

People are dancing, not just in the figure of the reel but quite outside of it, all over the deck. They are grabbing anyone at all and twirling around. They are even grabbing some of the sailors if they can get a hold of them. Men dance with women, men dance with men, women dance with women, children dance with each other or all alone and without any idea of the steps, getting in the way—but everybody is in everybody's way already and it is no matter.⁴⁷

This *impromptu ceilidh* starts with the first sight of Nova Scotia. It appears as if all social and regional distinctions are equalised by the new territory: the 'New Scotland' amalgamates the originally disparate emigrants into one relatively homogeneous group of diasporic Scots. The traditional Scottish music here has a twofold function. As with Old James' story-telling, it allows the emigrants to hold on to the familiar cultural traditions when faced with the unknown territory. At the same time, the music develops a uniting moment capable of contributing to the construction of a new form of Scottishness and to a diasporic identity, free—however briefly—from the regional, social or religious differences.⁴⁸ This tension between a nostalgic adherence to the Scottish traditions and the emergence of a diasporic identity is also alluded to at the end of the story, when Walter journeys back to Scotland: 'Walter was able to take a trip back to Scotland, where he had himself photographed wearing a plaid and holding on to bouquet of thistles.'⁴⁹ His choice of the traditional

⁴⁵ Ibid., 32.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 32.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 69.

⁴⁸ The idea of music as a universal language and as a part of the cultural identity of the diaspora plays also an important role MacLeod's fiction.

⁴⁹ Munro, 'The View from Castle Rock', 87.

tartan Highland attire and the thistles, both markers of a stereotypical image of Scotland, point to the romanticised image of Scotland and Scottishness that he has developed and mark him as a forebear of the modern heritage tourist.

Conclusion

Munro's and MacLeod's texts both emphasise the significance of memory and history for the construction of a diasporic identity. MacLeod presents the MacDonalds' family history as inextricably linked with that of Scotland and Canada, emphasising its relevance for their identity. This is particularly evident in Alexander's grandfathers who represent a juxtaposition of the oral and the written traditions. Munro also contrasts these traditions. Significantly, their very texts mirror the tension between both approaches: Munro and MacLeod stress the relevance of both traditions as complementing each other.

MacLeod presents the reader with a circular understanding of life, where everything is repeated or reoccurs. This is visible in the clan structure and even more dominantly in the reiteration of the diasporic experience in Canada. Cape Breton with its close-knit Scottish Gaelic community is presented as a 'second Scotland' from which younger generations emigrate and which becomes their object of diasporic longing. Munro, by contrast, highlights the moment of the historical emigration from Scotland and carefully depicts the birth of diasporic nostalgia. The arrival in the New World does not only create a homogenous group identity amongst the émigrés, it also goes to show how nostalgia develops with increasing spatial and temporal distance from the homeland.

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