



***Celts in the Americas.* Edited by Michael Newton. Sydney, Nova Scotia: Cape Breton University Press, 2013. 376 pages. ISBN: 978-1-897009-75-8. Can. 27.95; U.S. \$26.29.**

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With a focus on the Celtic experience in the Americas, this volume contains eighteen quite diverse papers that seek to document and explore a variety of issues that mainly center on language as the criteria for "Celticity". The articles are mainly drawn from a conference held at St. Francis Xavier University, Nova Scotia, Canada from 29 June to 2 July 2011, eight of which are focused on Scottish Gaelic, five on Welsh, and the rest on Irish, Cornish and Breton.

The first section, *Overviews of Celtic Peoples* (pp. 18-116), was specifically commissioned for the volume in order to provide summaries of the histories of each of the Celtic-speaking peoples, information not gathered together in any previous text. These chapters cover the Bretons (chapter 1), the Cornish (chapters 2 and 12), the Irish (chapter 3), the Scottish Gaels (chapters 4, 8, 10, 11, 14, 15 and 18) and the Welsh (chapters 5, 7, 12, 13 and 17) in both North and South America. Guillourel and Jouas (chapter 1) provide a very welcome and detailed account of the Bretons in North America, noting that the Breton language had no well-documented presence there in comparison to the Welsh, Irish and Scottish experiences. The matter is complicated by Breton speakers being counted as French speakers for the most part, unlike the Basques who left "a durable linguistic imprint" (p. 23). Deacon (chapter 2) notes that the Cornish, in a similar fashion, "could seem invisible on the Celtic stage" (p. 41), but that their presence in the mining industry as "an occupationally distinct group" (p. 43) granted them a degree of recognition. Ó h-Íde's chapter (chapter 3) draws on a rich set of data on the decline in the use of Irish, focusing on L1 use in particular, with little mention of other users, which would have enriched the chapter even further. Newton's chapter (chapter 4) on the Scottish Gaels exposes the differences with other migrant groups, such as the French or the Germans, in that the lack of prestige of Gaelic back in Scotland was transported to the New World in the face of "unyielding anglocentric hegemony" (p. 84). Gaels in the Americas were not immune either from "cod Highlandism", which transformed Gaelic culture there (as well as in Scotland) into "palatable commodities agreeable to the tastes and fantasies of the "respectable" classes of British society" (p. 88). Matthews, writing on the Welsh emigration experience (chapter 5), notes that early emigration in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was religiously distinct (mainly Quakers and Baptists, fleeing religious persecution) and makes the qualification that "the impact

was substantially less [on Wales] than that on Ireland and Scotland" (p. 97). This section, then, retrospectively examines issues of language and identity from a very contemporary stance. The authors emphasize the difference between the approaches of current researchers and the actual experiences of the migrants themselves, who may not have viewed their identities in linguistic terms at all, a point highlighted by Matthews, who concentrates primarily on religious affiliation.

The second section on language examines multiculturalism in Canada, and the revitalization of Welsh and Gaelic in Chubut, Argentina and Nova Scotia, Canada, respectively. Dunbar offers us an overview of multicultural policies and cultural diversity in Canada (chapter 6), with particular emphasis on Gaelic and shows how multicultural policy in that country has shifted away from preservation to participation, given the change in immigration patterns. Johnson (chapter 7) reports on the Welsh Language Teaching Project in Patagonia, and how participants in the revitalization process have, out of necessity, created "hybrid identities" (p. 156), that is both Welsh and Argentine, which Johnson considers to have hampered the process and produced semi-speakers of Welsh as the main outcome. McEwan-Fujita (chapter 8) stresses the need for clear goal-setting and co-ordination between all parties in the Gaelic revival in Nova Scotia if the project is not to go the same way as the Welsh language revitalization in Patagonia. The most pressing need, she claims, is to take into account "unique local conditions" which include "ideological-emotional and technical-practical barriers to Gaelic revitalization" (p. 182). This ties in with current research being undertaken with respect to "new" speakers of minority (including Celtic) languages in Europe, as a research strand in the COST Network. O'Rourke, Pujolar and Ramallo write that there is a "now a growing emphasis in multilingual research to understand the new communicative order of the modern era which is characterized by new types of speakers, new forms of language and new modes of communication. In our view, the "new speaker" phenomenon contradicts the ways in which both majorities and minorities have historically used language to legitimize claims to nationhood and cultural authenticity" (2015: 2). Such considerations can profitably be examined in an American, as much as a European, context and the articles in this section feed more generally into this body of work and research.

Part three looks at Celtic cultural expression in the Americas. Ó hAllmhuráin explores the "Celtic soundscapes of North America" (chapter 9), noting the chameleon nature of Celtic music (p. 188) and the fact that "American Celts learn more about themselves and their history and their music from Mel Gibson, Sting, Riverdance and the Irish pub-in-a-box than they do from Celtic scholars ..." (p. 204). This chapter is followed by MacDonald's examination of central Cape Breton placenames (chapter 10), where he makes the point that oral culture, which includes local toponymy, should play a vital role in the revitalization of Gaelic in Nova Scotia. The theme of oral culture is continued in Sumner's account of the development of the Fenian folktale of Ceudach on Cape Breton (chapter 11), showing how the existence of three distinct versions of the tale point to the strength of the storytelling tradition on the island in the second half of the twentieth century. What stood out in this section was the importance of examining the notion of continuation, hybridity, and change in terms of cultural transmission and, particularly in the case of Ó hAllmhuráin's chapter (9), the challenge of "pointing to blendings possible before, beyond, and around established binaries, ...[showing] us how performance can effectively express, and expressly mark, the multiplicity of contests over cultural identity" (Batson 2009: 80).

Part four of the volume examines identity and race; Birt, in chapter 12, discusses identity hybridization in three American contexts (Patagonia, Pennsylvania and California) and gives examples of the survival of a sense of Welshness and Cornishness in those locations. R. H. Williams (chapter 13) examines the question of Welsh identity in North America as portrayed in the Welsh language press, and charts the gradual emergence of a Welsh-American identity. Newton, in his second article (chapter 14) in the volume, traces how the theme of racialism was introduced into Gaelic literature and culture, following the necessity of Highlanders and their descendants to "act as honorary Anglo-Saxons" (p. 295), if they were to make any headway in their new surroundings. MacLennan also explores the use of racist themes in print with the appearance no less than three times over a period of twelve years of a tale concerning a "good Indian" who is met with malice and hostility in the Gaelic-language newspaper, *Mac-Talla* (chapter 15).

The final section of the volume concentrates on interethnic relations and D. Williams' chapter (16) looks at the "pan" in Pan-Celticism, comparing it to pan-Africanism in an attempt to discover if it is possible to conceive of these movements in non-chauvinistic, non-racial terms. Next, Brooks, in chapter 17, examines the theme of native peoples in Welsh-language poetry and prose, aiming to show common cause with indigenous peoples trying to preserve their languages and cultures. The last chapter (18) of this section and indeed of the whole volume, Guillore's examination of the linguistic policies of the Catholic Church in Eastern Canada in the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries, demonstrates quite distinct practices under French and subsequently British rule, with native and Celtic languages being presented as in competition by Catholic missionaries in the first instance, but being portrayed as having a common cause in opposition to the British regime later on.

This is a volume with a necessarily wide focus, looking at three main strands: the Celtic languages in the Americas, the experience of Celtic diasporas beyond the remit of language, and interactions between speakers of Celtic languages and other minority language and ethnic groups. In contrast to the focus on medieval Europe that dominates the traditional practice of Celtic Studies in the North American academy, this volume adds new and refreshing considerations to the field and brings to our attention recent and contemporary issues for speakers of Celtic languages in the Americas. Celtic Studies evolved largely out of philology, with many scholars being drawn to it by the medieval evidence. Because the American university system and its system of knowledge was established under English influence, and before any Celtic nations had an independent existence as nation states (and were therefore able to project their cultural existence as independent entities), this focus on Celtic 'antiquity' has continued to the present day. From a European point of view, this book is a very welcome addition to the field of Celtic Studies, given its emphasis on diasporic issues, which have tended to be overlooked in the Celtic countries and elsewhere in Europe. As such, the work falls between the established paths of two different approaches to Celtic Studies, offering new and hybridized concepts for the enrichment of both establishments, and indicates new and exciting directions for the future of Celtic Studies, at least in an academic sense. As the editor notes, the field of Celtic Studies is increasingly under threat in other contexts and issues a warning on the ever-shrinking place of Celtic Studies within academia (p. 12). The warning is accompanied by the suggestion that a greater engagement with contemporary speech communities would make the field more relevant and possibly more attractive to a greater variety of audiences: "Celtic-

speaking peoples are not reflected in academic institutions or standard educational materials in proportion either to their numbers or to their cultural and intellectual achievements" (p. 10), a point that merits greater recognition and is easily observable in a review of the programs of Celtic Studies conferences/symposia in North America. Take, for example, the Celtic Studies Association of North America 2014 conference (<http://www.cpe.vt.edu/csana/csana-program.pdf>). The majority of the participants have North American affiliations, but of the 30 or so presentations at the conference not a single talk focuses on North America nor is there a paper which discusses anything from the modern period, reinforcing the point made above, about the emphasis on the medieval period of Celtic Studies to the near exclusion of anything else. As Newton (2013), the editor of the volume, blogs elsewhere ([virtualgael.wordpress.com](http://virtualgael.wordpress.com)): "Rather than remaining framed solely in medieval Europe, Celtic Studies as practiced in the North American academy needs to prioritize those cultural remains and expressions that are unique to this continent. Just as each Celtic homeland highlights what is unique to it and should be nurtured by its institutions, so do the United States and Canada have distinctive resources and narratives that are worthy of scrutiny." This volume, it is to be hoped, is a step in the direction of rectifying this situation.

## **Bibliography**

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