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Cairns in the Landscape

Migrant Stones and Migrant Stories in Scotland and its Diaspora

Paul Basu

> Fall indeed I may: But raise my tomb, Crimora. Some stones,
> a mound of earth, shall keep my memory.
> – James Macpherson, Fragments of Ancient Poetry, 1760

There can be few landscapes as thoroughly interfused with narrative as those of the Scottish Highlands and Islands. As a nineteenth-century antiquarian once remarked, Scotland is a place where 'every stone' has its history, and where 'there is no mouldering castle, nor heap of ruined stones, which had formed a few cottages, that is not memorable for some story of war or piety, some gleam of long past love, or dark with tale of revenge' (Ord 1930). 'Occasionally', note Bruner and Gorfain, 'a story becomes so prominent in the consciousness of an entire society, that its recurrent tellings … help to constitute and reshape [that] society' (1988: 56). Here, I am concerned with one such story and with the manner in which it is materialised, presenced and thereby recurrently told in the landscape through a particular monumental form. It is a narrative that continues to shape Scottish society both within its homeland and in diaspora: an ambivalent history of migration and depopulation, sometimes celebrated as triumph over adversity, but more often experienced as tragic defeat and exile.

Among many Scots, and particularly among those North Americans, Australians and New Zealanders who claim Scottish descent and who constitute a transnational Scottish heritage community, the story of Scottish emigration is often conflated with that of the so-called Highland Clearances. Rather than being driven by colonial opportunism and emigrants' desires to better their fortune in the New World, popular perceptions of the forces behind eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Scottish emigration are dominated by a victimological narrative in which members of an impoverished but noble peasantry are portrayed as being violently driven out of their ancestral homes and forced onto waiting emigrant ships: an unwanted population coerced into exile overseas (Basu 2005a). Despite the weight of historical research, which muddies the 'vivid simplicities' and moral certitudes of this appalling narrative, the Highland Clearances are widely understood to be the traumatic series of events that dispersed Scotland's people and caused the Scottish diaspora to come into being. This is a narrative that shapes not only a society's perception of itself, but also the continued perception of the depopulated landscapes over which such atrocities were supposedly perpetrated. 'The bare hills tell their own story of unfinished business', remarks Rob Gibson, a prominent Scottish nationalist and author of *The Highland Clearances Trail* (1996: 2).

As Gibson's guide book attests, these bare hills and the traces of the deserted settlements that may still be found on them have become destinations in a kind of 'dark tourism'. They have become 'sites of memory' visited by members of a heritage-hungry Scottish diaspora, as they seek to learn about and experience their sometimes newly discovered Highland family histories, and 'work through' a dislocating trauma they have often only recently come to identify with. Like the 'Stations of the Cross' in Christian traditions, such sites become key nodes incorporated into these heritage tourists' secular pilgrimage practices: sites that organise itineraries, that themselves narrate different stages in this migrant's tale, and which, through their form and context, have an emotional and provocative effect on their visitors. At these sites a dialectical interaction unfolds between the stories visitors bring with them (stories usually learned in popular history books, websites and heritage centres), and the stories the sites themselves appear to tell (sometimes through the explicit narrations of interpretive signage, but more often through an affective capacity constituted in a broader discursive 'habitus': the unconsciously inhabited conventions of Romanticism, the sublime, the picturesque). Through the acts of visiting – of walking, searching, touching, photographing, sensing – person, place and narrative become fused, co-constitutive of a pervading sense of identity (Basu 2007).

Elsewhere I have explored a range of intentional and unintentional monuments that serve to presence the narrative of the Highland Clearances in the Highland landscape (Basu 1997, 1999). Here, my interest is both narrower and broader. Narrower in the sense that I focus on a specific monumental form, that of the cairn. Broader, since I am not exclusively concerned with the Highland Clearance narrative but with the wider context of Highland emigration: a context that, as I have argued, is dominated by the Clearance narrative, but that also permits alternative 'tellings' that reflect the truer ambivalence of migratory experience (including diasporic successes that run contrary to the prevailing discourses of absence, loss and nostalgia). The commemorative cairn is ubiquitous throughout the Scottish Highlands and Islands, and is sometimes regarded as a uniquely Scottish monumental form. Acknowledging that cairns are actually far more widespread in different regions and cultural contexts throughout the world, my objective is, nevertheless, to 'place' the cairn within the Scottish Highland landscape, and to observe how the form itself migrates in the wake of population movements (and, for that matter, in the wake of ethnic revitalisation movements), colonising memoryscapes as well as landscapes in the New World (see Bunn 2002).

When considering the relationship between landscape and narrative in Scotland, it should be remembered that perceptions of the Scottish landscape have been shaped for two and a half centuries by the Romantic imagination. Thus, to consider the place of the cairn in the Scottish landscape is also to consider its place in the Romantic aesthetic, and, more particularly, in what I refer to as an 'Ossianic' landscape tradition. James Macpherson's contested translations of *The Works of Ossian* in the mid-eighteenth century were precursors of the Romantic movement and were immensely popular, spawning a literary tourist boom in the Western Highlands and feeding a growing interest in antiquarianism (Andrews 1989; Gold and Gold 1995). Here, I am interested in exploring the continuing influence of this tradition on contemporary perceptions of the Scottish Highlands and Scottish emigration: in particular, how it contributes to an affective transformation of a depopulated region into a landscape *haunted* by the memory of loss. I suggest that the monumental form of the cairn embodies and invokes this tradition, and that the continued erection of new memorial cairns – as well as the continued incorporation of old cairns into new commemorative practices – perpetuates this tradition in the present.

In Gaelic, the word *carn* or *cairn* refers equally to natural and cultural landscape features, meaning both a 'rocky hill or mountain' and a 'heap of stones' (MacLennan 1979: 73). As a cultural form, cairns have been raised up in Scotland as boundary markers, way markers, summit markers and, notably, as grave markers, burial places and memorials for millennia. Formed from the most durable of materials, they seem to have the ability to fix memories in stone and in place. Thus the Gaelic phrase, *Cuiridh mi clach air do charn* ('I will put a stone on your cairn'), has the deeper sense of a pledge of lasting remembrance: to 'never forget'. And yet cairns are also 'living' monuments that grow and reduce over time as people contribute additional stones or carry away existing ones; sometimes – as one of my examples will show – they may also 'die' and become mere memories themselves. Indeed, cairns are 'material metaphors' par excellence: conglomerate forms that combine fragments into greater wholes, but where their parts do not lose their fragmentary character. Thus the individual stones of a cairn may each have their own migratory biographies, carrying with them particular essences or associations, reflecting, for instance, where the stones were sourced or who placed them and why.

Another objective of this essay is therefore to explore in more detail some of these formal qualities of the cairn. In order to do this, the essay is conceived, in the spirit of Beresford (1957), as a 'journey among monuments': an itinerary that links various cairns in the Highland landscape (and beyond), where each 'station' provides an opportunity to reflect both on the form of a particular monument and on particular aspects of the more general form. Such an approach enables us to examine how the formal qualities of monuments generate different 'textures' of remembrance, and how 'every "memorial text" generates a different meaning in memory' (Young 1993: viii). It also reveals, however, that such differentiation can be appropriated into the aesthetic of a dominant narrative, reducing the capacity of these monuments to narrate alternative versions of the past.

Graves of the Martyrs, Homes of the Silent Vanished Races[1]

A great deal has been written on James Macpherson's supposed 'translations' of the poems of the third-century Celtic bard, Ossian; works comprising *Fragments of Ancient Poetry Collected in the Highlands of Scotland* (1760) and the epics *Fingal* (1762) and *Temora* (1763) (see Sher 2004). Much of this commentary has addressed the so-called fraudulence issue associated with Samuel Johnson, which brought into question the authenticity of the translations and did lasting damage to Macpherson's reputation as a scholarly collector and editor. More recent research has, however, demonstrated that, while Macpherson's Ossianic works were not what they purported to be (i.e., literal translations of Gaelic poems that had survived unaltered in oral tradition since the third century), neither were they 'the work of a confidence trickster, bent on achieving fame and fortune through a clever hoax' (Stafford 1988: 4). Although it seems that Macpherson had more than an editorial role, his Ossianic compositions were nevertheless based on his thorough knowledge of Highland storytelling conventions, and they incorporated traditional plots and passages of accurate translation from Gaelic originals (Thomson 1952). And yet the claim that these 'fragments' were *collected* and not composed is, of course, highly significant, since they are thereby given the aura of relics. Indeed, it is this *aspiration* to antiquity, argues Fiona Stafford, that makes Macpherson's *Ossian* 'very much a product of the mid-eighteenth century' (1988: 148). Its evocation of the lost, heroic world of the Celts may not have been 'constructed with the accuracy of an archaeologist', but its imaginative re-creation of the ancient world appealed to the contemporary interest in the antique, and also conveyed a 'sense of the modern inferiority to that world' (Stafford 1988: 148).

Born in 1736, Macpherson grew up in Badenoch in the Central Highlands of Scotland in what was still essentially a martial society. Living in the shadow of Ruthven Barracks, he would have known the district in the aftermath of the failed Jacobite Uprising of 1745–46 – a period in which the British Government, under the 1747 Act of Proscription, attempted to systematically dismantle the structures of traditional Highland society and pacify it once and for all. Pro-Jacobite regions of the Highlands, such as Badenoch, suffered severe reprisals after the defeat of the Jacobite army at Culloden, and as Jacobite leaders went into hiding or fled into exile overseas, so their escapades became mythologised in popular story and song. Published a mere fifteen years after the rebellion, Macpherson's Ossianic verse is replete with motifs of exile and loss, nostalgia for the passing of a noble warrior race and lamentations for 'the fallen in war'. The use of such tropes has led to a dominant interpretation of Macpherson's poetry as a thinly disguised elegy for the lost Jacobite cause, albeit one located in the remote 'Celtic' past (see Moore 2006 for discussion).

In the present context, what is interesting to note is the way in which this elegiac narrative was fused with the contemporary cult of the sublime and projected onto the Highland landscape, such that the Highlands become a *ruined* landscape from which life had ebbed, but where the memory of the past is ever present. As William Hazlitt wrote in 1818 of Macpherson's mythical bard: '[Ossian] lives only in the recollection and regret of the past. There is one impression which he conveys more entirely than all other poets, namely, the sense of privation, the loss of all things, of friends, of good name, of country … He converses only with the spirit of the departed' (quoted by Stafford 1988: 149).

The sites where this communion between the solitary, wandering poet – himself, 'the last of the race of Fingal' – and the departed warriors of old takes place is typically at their graves, 'the dwellings of the ghosts', which usually take the form of cairns. Thus the stones of the burial cairn are said to 'speak of other years', and are described as keeping the fame of past heroes alive for future generations, presencing their memory in the landscape, as the following excerpt from *Fingal* illustrates:

> Let thy bards mourn those who fell. Let Erin give the sons of Lochlin to earth; and raise the mossy stones of their fame. That the children of the north hereafter may behold the place where their fathers fought. And some hunter may say, when he leans on a mossy tomb, here Fingal and Swaran fought, the heroes of other years. Thus hereafter shall he say, and our fame shall last for ever. (Macpherson 1996: 101)

My argument is that, along with his incantations of dark, stormy hills; bending oaks; grey mists and blasted heaths, Macpherson's reiterative references to these heaps of 'mossy stone', raised 'in memory of the past' (1996: 327), continue to be invoked, not only in Scottish literary traditions, but also in multiple visual and material forms, and in the landscape itself. As Colin McArthur has recently noted: 'Wherever one looks within discourse relating to Scotland … one is confronted by the same restricted

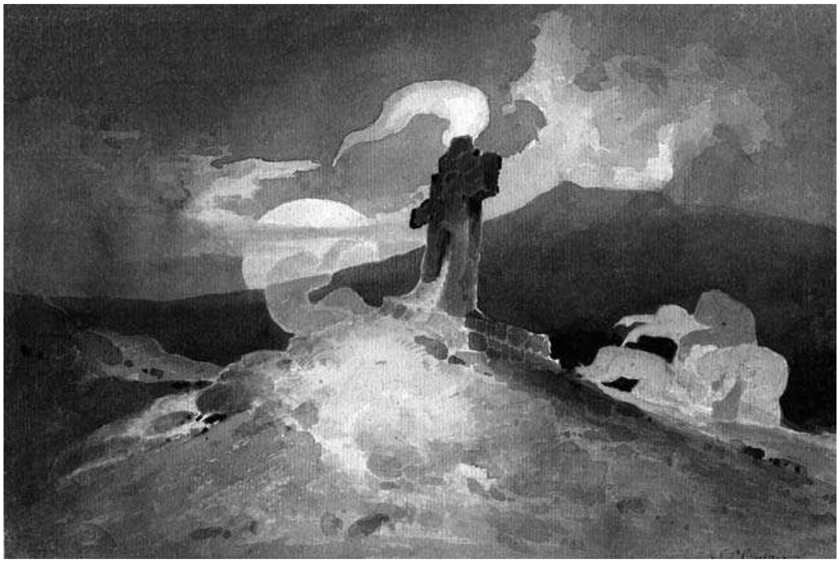

Figure 7.1. 'The moon looks abroad from her cloud. The grey-skirted mist is near; the dwelling of the ghosts!' J. S. Cotman, 'Moonlight', 1803, inspired by Ossian's *Temora.* © Trustees of the British Museum.

range of images, tones, rhetorical tropes, and ideological tendencies, often within utterances promulgated decades (sometimes even a century or more) apart' (2005: 340). Many of these predispositions can be traced to Macpherson and his sources, and this 'Ossianic legacy' can thus be placed at the heart of what McArthur terms the 'Scottish Discursive Unconscious' (2005: 340): its influence visited both upon the perception of Scottish landscapes and upon what might be regarded as the landscaping of perceptions of Scottishness at home and in diaspora.

Torr-an-riachaidh, Kildonan, Sutherland, Scotland

Neolithic and Bronze Age burial cairns are populous in many regions of the Highlands and Islands (see for example Henshall 1963, 1972; Hingley 1996; Bradley 2000). Long associated with fairy lore and therefore often left untampered with, these sites began to attract the curiosity of antiquarians in the mid-eighteenth century and were subsequently subjected to their quasi-scientific investigations (Mitchell 1982). Indeed, Macpherson's Ossianic writings were both influenced by British antiquarianism and themselves further popularised this movement, seemingly confirming the association of such burial mounds with what were thought to be Britain's aboriginal population: the Celts (Mitchell 1982: 13, 68; see also Sweet 2004). Whereas stone circles and henges were imagined as the temples of a Druidic order, burial cairns and barrows were perceived as the graves of warrior chiefs killed in ancient battles. Evidence of the popularity of such impressions among literate classes may be found in the journals and local history works compiled by antiquarians and amateur archaeologists (often members of the clergy) well into the nineteenth century.

To provide just one example, an Ossianic influence is clearly evident in the memoirs of the Church of Scotland minister, Rev. Donald Sage (1789–1869), published posthumously in 1889. In a chapter recalling his childhood growing up at Kildonan in Sutherland, Sage provides a telling account of the 'heath covered knolls' in the vicinity of his father's manse, which, he notes, 'lacked nothing to make them like an Arcadia but a clothing of oak or weeping birch'. The greater number of these knolls, Sage explains, 'were tumuli, or ancient sepulchres, wherein reposed the ashes of those mighty men of renown who fought and bustled in the world about seven or eight centuries ago'. Each tumulus, he elaborates, 'had its separate interest and particular tradition', and he goes on to describe that known as Torr-an-riachaidh, the 'scratching knowe'. This was a recent toponym, Sage suggests, derived from the whin bushes that grow on it; its 'ancient name', he adds, 'is lost'. He continues:

> A few years ago, the top was laid open, when it was found to consist of a huge pile of stones. The only key to its history is a standing stone, about a hundred yards to the west of it, on a small eminence, having a rude cross cut on one side of it. This is called 'clach-an-éig' (or the 'stone of death'). According to tradition, a bloody battle was here fought between the aborigines of the country

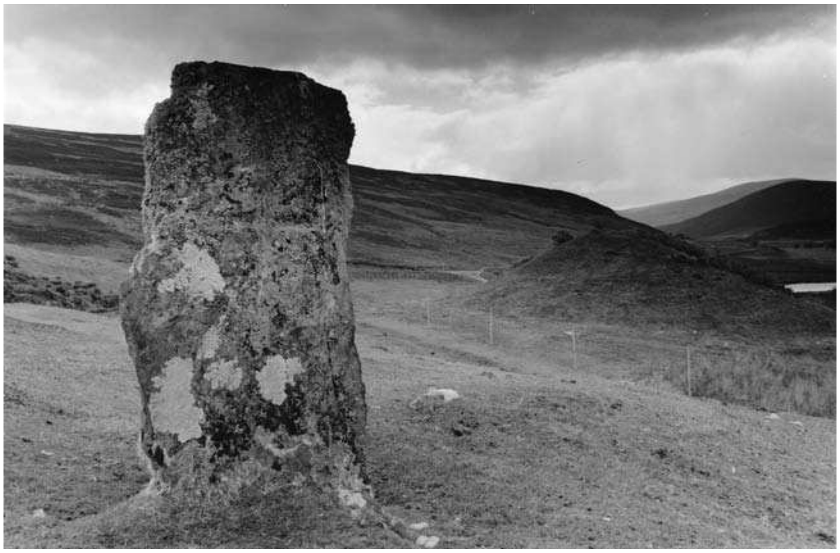

Figure 7.2. Clach-an-éig in the foreground, with Torr-an-riachaidh to the right in the middle distance. Kildonan, Sutherland. © Paul Basu.

> and the Norwegians, in which the latter were defeated, and their leader killed. On the spot where he fell this rude slab was erected, and his remains were buried on the battlefield, and 'Torr-an-riachaidh' reared over them. (Sage 1889: 76–77)

Although associated with the burial of a Norse warrior, and not a Celt, the ghost of Ossian is apparent in the very vocabulary Sage employs: the 'heath covered knolls', a hankering after Arcadia, reference to those 'mighty men of renown', cairns reared over the bodies of the vanquished. While other nineteenth-century 'authorities' also considered the mound to be an ancient burial-cairn (e.g., Scott 1906), it is interesting to note that more recent archaeological investigations have identified Torr-an-riachaidh as a conical moraine: a natural glacial feature, and not a burial mound at all. This reinforces a point I alluded to earlier regarding the cairn's ambiguous position in relation to the nature-culture divide. The cairn can be both a cultural form that appears as a natural emanation of the landscape, and a natural form that attracts cultural associations and contributes to the perception of the Highlands as a monumental landscape in which memory is everywhere immanent.

The Culloden Memorial, Culloden, Inverness-shire, Scotland

If Torr-an-riachaidh provides an example of how an Ossianic legacy influences cultural perceptions of natural features of the Scottish Highland landscape, rousing the antiquarian imagination and populating glacial deposits with the memory of vanquished heroes, the periodic 'landscaping' of Culloden Moor reminds us that this Ossianic aesthetic, with its powerfully affective aura, has also been subject to contrivance. Culloden is, of course, the site of the battle at which, on 16 April 1746, Charles Edward Stuart's army was routed and the Jacobite cause finally lost. It is now one of the most iconic sites of memory in Scotland, and yet, as McArthur has argued, 'the process whereby Culloden Moor became constituted as a memorial is a classic case of … "the invention of tradition"' (1994: 102), paralleling the way in which Jacobitism was transformed from a political threat into a benign icon of Romantic nationalism. Whereas the site of the battlefield elicited little interest in the decades following the Jacobite defeat, by the 1820s Culloden had begun to draw the attentions of scholarly travellers, and the inflections of Ossian are abundant in their published accounts. Thus, Robert Chambers, in his 1827 volume *The Picture of Scotland,* describes a scene 'as desolate and blasted in appearance as if it suffered under a curse, or were conscious of the blood which it had drunk' (1827: 301). Meanwhile Beriah Botfield writes of 'a grim and shelterless' waste, on which the 'shallow graves of the slain' are still evident

(1830: 174). In a literary flourish, he continues: 'The snows of upwards of seventy winters have, since the hurried entombment of the gallant dead, fallen and melted upon Culloden' (1830: 175).

Proposals to erect a 'tumulus or obelisk' to memorialize Culloden were first put forward in the mid-1830s (Gold and Gold 2007: 23), and they were revived again amid the celebrations that accompanied the centenary of the battle in 1846. At this time a debate seems to have taken place regarding the most appropriate form for such a monument. In contrast to the tower raised at Glenfinnan in 1815 to mark the place where Charles Stuart raised the Jacobite standard and began his campaign, the idea of a 'Cockney cenotaph or pillar' at Culloden was rejected in favour of 'a simple, but massive, cairn', which was regarded as 'the most touching and the most noble memorial of the nation's admiration and respect' for those killed in the battle (*Inverness Courier,* 1846, quoted in McArthur 1994: 107).

Attempts to raise the monument failed in 1849 and 1858 through lack of public support and it was not until 1881 that the landscaping of Culloden as a memorial site was finally begun by the local landowner, Duncan Forbes. As well as the twenty-foot-high cairn, Forbes set up a series of stones marking the supposed mass grave sites of the Jacobite clansmen who fell in the battle. Dedicated to 'the gallant Highlanders who fought for Scot-

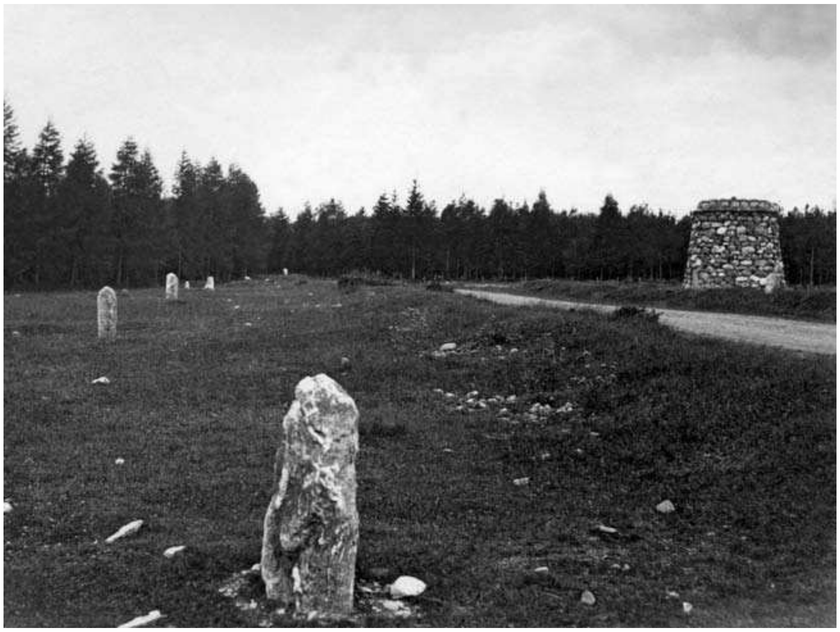

Figure 7.3. 'Culloden Field' c. 1890, showing the clan grave markers and memorial cairn prior to the felling of the conifer plantation and rerouting of the B9006 road. © Francis Frith Collection.

land and for Bonnie Prince Charlie', the memorial cairn commemorates a mythic version of history, in which 'the Stuart dead' were appropriated 'for the cause of Scotland and Scottish national identity' (Gold and Gold 2007: 23). After 135 years of Ossianic Romanticism, this dynastic conflict was thus reimagined as a heroic struggle for the survival of a nation, and done so in the full cognisance of its eventual failure. The cairn is thus a monument of defeat, its stones memorials to a lost cause.

The 'Culloden Memorials', as they became known, were scheduled as Ancient Monuments in 1925, and, between 1937 and 1989, in piecemeal fashion, the battlefield gradually passed from private hands into the ownership of the National Trust for Scotland. Throughout this period the site has undergone considerable transformation as buildings have been razed, a forestry plantation cut down, a main road rerouted and other monuments erected, all in an attempt to transform what was originally an undifferentiated stretch of moorland into that 'battle darkened' 'blasted heath' in which the memory of tragedy is palpable. The continuing metamorphosis of Culloden Moor, with its cairn and 'field of graves', thus not only commemorates a mythic version of history but it re-creates a mythic landscape – one that accords with the Ossianic aesthetic as befits this site of national pilgrimage.

The Croft Ruin as Cairn

According to John Prebble (1963) and other popular historians of the Highlands, the defeat and expulsion of the Highland people begun at Culloden was only completed with the aforementioned Highland Clearances and the associated mass emigrations of the nineteenth century. In the name of social and agricultural improvement, these events emptied vast swathes of northern Scotland and replaced its settled communities first with sheep and then deer, as landowners sought to refashion their estates according to the Ossianic tenets of the picturesque and the sublime (Womack 1989). The struggle for security of tenure of the Highlands' rural population is one of the dominant themes in nineteenth-century Scottish history, culminating in the so-called Land Wars of the 1870s and 1880s. Whilst there are many local monuments – the majority in the form of cairns – commemorating particular evictions or acts of resistance (see Withers 1996; Basu 1997, 1999; Robertson and Hall 2007), the absence of a single commemorative site to focus the 'recollection' of this struggle has the effect of charging the whole Highland landscape with the 'memory' of its desertion.

Indeed, it is particularly interesting to see how the ruins of croft houses and earlier settlement remains left in the wake of these events become powerfully evocative 'unintentional monuments', which presence the absence of their erstwhile occupants. The abandoned home comes to stand

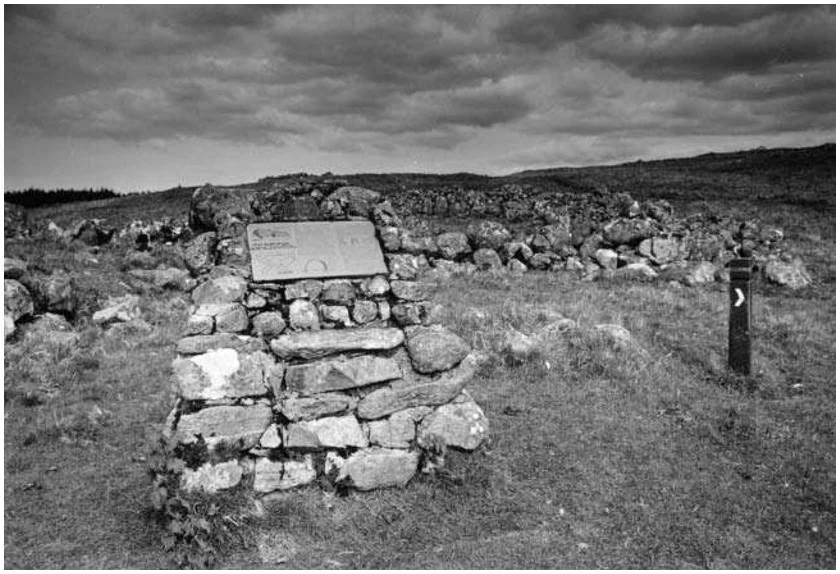

Figure 7.4. Stone-clad panels interpreting the cairn-like settlement remains at Rosal, Strathnaver. The township was 'cleared' between 1814 and 1819. © Paul Basu.

for the emigrant's lost homeland. 'It is the croft that's exiled', writes Arthur Ball, 'time is showing' (1994: 82). Other Scottish writers have noted how, over time, the tumbled stone walls of such ruins become cairn-like in appearance. Thus, in his bitter poem, '*gleann fadamach*' ('glen remote'), Aonghas Macneacail writes, '*'sa bhaile seo | chan eileas a' siubhal ach an aon uair | 's na clachan a rinn ballaichean | a' dol 'nan càirn'* (in this village | people only travel once | and the stones that made walls | become cairns) (Dunn 1992: 315–16). The novelist Neil Gunn similarly observes how the 'old lichened stones of the ruin at last become a cairn' and how the cairn – a grave marker, no less – replaces the hearthstone at the heart of the Highland home (1991: 148).

The echo of Ossian is evident in the intonations of these twentieth-century writers, though the defeated heroes of their narratives are no longer 'the mighty men of renown', but the ordinary Highland folk driven from their homes by rapacious landlords or else tempted to seek their fortunes elsewhere. Their departure marked the passing of a way of life, and the memory of this tragedy continues to be evoked through the very visibility of the cairn-like ruins of deserted townships and crofts throughout the Highlands and Islands. It is an implicit narrative that is sometimes made explicit when such settlement remains are transformed into heritage sites and furnished with interpretation boards and other paraphernalia of display: plaques and panels, themselves often clad in stone – cairns, it might be said, commemorating cairns (Basu 1997, 1999).

The Duke of Gordon Cairn, Kingussie, Inverness-shire, Scotland

I remarked earlier that cairns have their own life histories and may themselves disappear. The next cairn on our itinerary exists only as a single fragment in the storeroom of the Highland Folk Museum in Kingussie, and in a passing reference in Rev. Thomas Sinton's account of the popular folk song, '*Guma slàn do na fearaibh thèid thairis a' chuan*' (Farewell to the fellows who'll cross over the sea). This song was written to mark the departure of a large number of emigrants from Badenoch in the Central Highlands who had gathered at Kingussie on the day of St Columba's Fair in 1838, before heading to Oban to embark on a ship bound for New South Wales, Australia. Sinton's account, published in 1906, was based on the recollections of several of his close relatives who were present at the leave taking, and it includes reference to a cairn erected to commemorate Alexander, the Fourth Duke of Gordon (1743–1827), which once stood at the summit of Creag Bheag, a hill that rises above Kingussie. Whilst the cairn can no longer be identified, a fragment of its dedication stone, marked '… by the youths of Kingussie – To the memory of Alx Duke of Gordon – 1828', survives. The significance of this mnemonic can be discerned in Sinton's narrative of the emigrants' farewell:

> A band of strolling musicians … readily entered into the situation and temper of their assembled patrons at the fair. Playing airs suited to the occasion, and followed by crowds of people, they made their way to the top of the Little Rock [Creag Bheag], which commands a view of the whole of Badenoch downwards from Glen Truim. From that height, where a few years before, 'the young men of Kingussie' had erected a cairn in memory of Duke Alexander, many eyes were turned wistfully to take a last farewell of much-loved haunts and homes. One strain of song touched every heart, and snatches of it were ever associated with recollections of the affecting events of the day:
>
> Let Fortune use me as it may
> I will think on Scotland far away
>
> After descending from the Creag Bheag, the emigrants set out on their westward journey, accompanied as far as the old stage-house of Pitmain by relatives and friends. Here, those who were departing for the 'New World' and those who were remaining behind took leave of each other as persons who would never meet again on this side of the grave. (Sinton 1906: 34–5)

This fragment of a cairn, juxtaposed with this fragment of a story, succeeds in evoking all the heartache of emigration: the loss of home and family, the relinquishing of one's destiny to fortune, the correlation between death and departure. The cairn erected to mark the death of a duke evidently soon came to mark the departure of a people, and it has now become absent itself save for this fragment. From this fragment of the past,

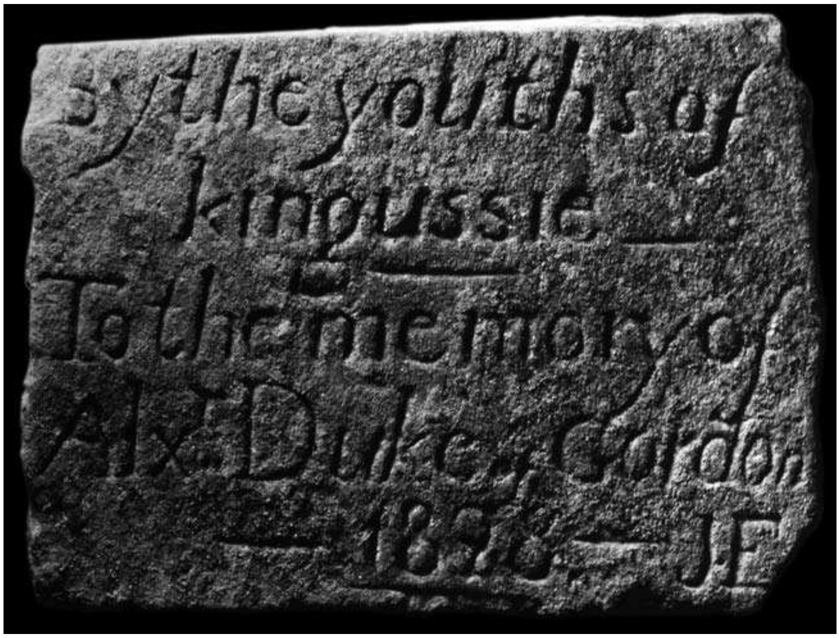

Figure 7.5. The surviving fragment of the Duke of Gordon cairn, which recalls the emigrants' farewell on St Columba's Day, 1838. Kingussie, Inverness-shire. © Paul Basu.

we reconstruct the cairn. From the cairn we reconstruct the story. And so it becomes a material metaphor for the machinations of the work of memory.

The Memorial Cairns at Badbae, Caithness, and Dalmore, Sutherland

The next two cairns on our itinerary follow the emigrants' journeys and reach out to two different regions of the Scottish diaspora – New Zealand and Canada – but they also share a common feature insofar as they were both constructed from the remains of ruined houses. The 'stones that made walls' of Macneacail's poem are thus quite literally transformed into cairns and the powerful symbolism of the deserted home is rearticulated and embodied in the very substance of the monuments. And yet, paradoxically, both of these cairns are as celebratory in character as they are nostalgic. They speak, therefore, of the ambiguities of migration and, in a Highland context, ought to challenge the dominant assumption that emigration was necessarily exile.

At Badbae, near Ousdale in Caithness, a cairn of remembrance was raised in 1911 on the site of – and from the stones of – the house of one Alexander Sutherland. The cairn stands among the ruins of the other houses and enclosures that made up this cliff-top settlement. A few years ago, Badbae featured in a *Scotland on Sunday* supplement entitled 'The Story of a Nation: 300 Years of Scottish History', illustrating an article about the Highland Clearances. The caption to the photograph reads: 'Empty stones: Badbae in Sutherland was cleared of its people in 1839 to make way for more economically viable sheep. Many more communities were to suffer similar fates' (Devine n.d.: 28–29). This caption is inaccurate in two respects: not only is Badbae not in Sutherland – a county made notorious through its associations with the Clearances – but it was not cleared of people to make way for sheep. Rather it was established during the Clearances by people displaced from the nearby Langwell estate. Indeed, it was still partly inhabited at the beginning of the twentieth century.

To quibble over a caption may seem like splitting hairs, but this erroneous narrative is frequently repeated: Badbae has come to stand for something it does not in fact represent. The story – the victimological orthodoxy of forced emigration and exile – has usurped the place. And whilst the interpretive plaques set up at Badbae describe the many hardships of eking out a living from the poor ground where the township was located, its 'cairn of remembrance' was actually erected as a celebration of the township's community. It was raised by Alexander Sutherland's son,

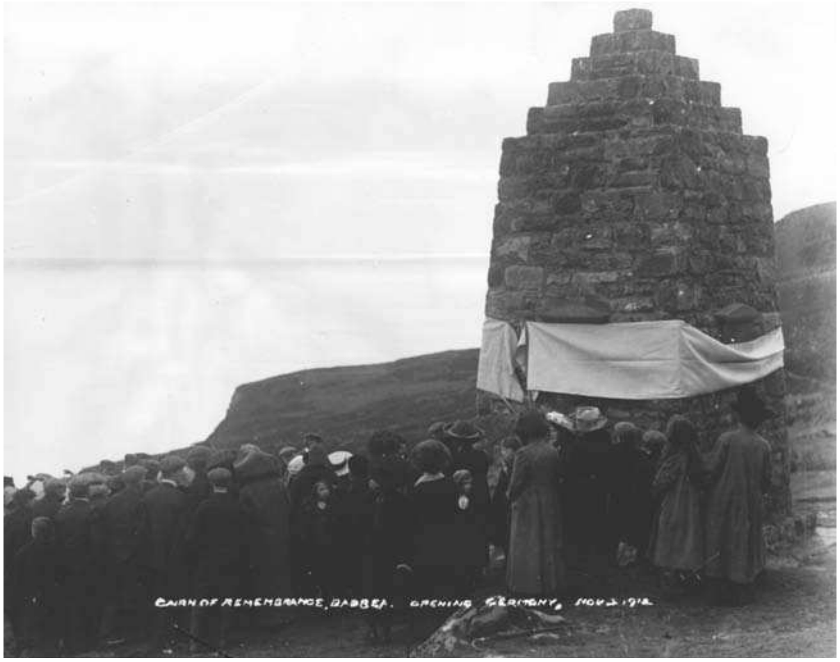
CAIRN OF REMEMBRANCE, BADBEA. OPENING CEREMONY, NOV 2 1912

Figure 7.6 . Unveiling of the 'cairn of remembrance' at Badbae, Caithness, November 1912. © Highland Council.

David Sutherland, a New Zealander by birth, to commemorate his father's old home. And, indeed, far from being forcibly removed from Badbae, Alexander Sutherland answered an advertisement in the local *John O'Groat Journal* and, in 1839, *chose* to emigrate to New Zealand, where he settled and prospered as a dairy farmer.

This more celebratory version of the story of Scottish migration and settlement overseas is articulated more forcefully in a little-visited cairn erected in 1968 at Dalmore, near Rogart in Sutherland. The cairn marks the site of the family home of Sir John Alexander Macdonald, the first prime minister of Canada, the so-called father of its confederation and advocate of such ambitious colonial enterprises as the world's first transcontinental railway. Macdonald was himself born in Glasgow in 1815 and was taken to Canada as a child by his parents when they emigrated in 1820. The cairn was built from the stones of his paternal grandparents' deserted house and unveiled by another former Canadian prime minister, John Diefenbaker. The cairn reminds us that many of the great empire builders, not only of Canada, but also the United States, Australia and New Zealand, were Scots or of Scottish descent. As the dedication plaque at Dalmore proudly extols, Macdonald's true 'Monument is a Nation … this cairn is but a footnote to his greatness'.

In an era of postcolonial unsettling of settler societies, the triumphalist narrative of the 'Enterprising Scot' has, however, become downplayed. Confronted with the devastating impact of their emigrant ancestors on the indigenous populations whose lands they appropriated, it is more comforting for members of the Scottish diaspora to regard their predecessors as the victims and not perpetrators of displacement, to identify with an Ossianic heritage of noble defeat rather than ignoble colonial expansionism and to seek refuge in fantasies of the Celtic past as an antidote to the disenchanting realities of late modernity (see Basu 2007 for an extended discussion of these themes).

The Scotland Australia Cairn, Mosman, New South Wales, Australia, and the Grandfather Mountain Memorial Cairn, Linville, North Carolina, United States

If the cairns at Badbae and Dalmore embody the symbolism of the deserted home through the incorporation of their stones into the fabric of the monument, the next two cairns on our itinerary may be said to embody the symbolism of the deserted home write large: the symbolism, that is, of the lost homeland. These cairns reach out to another two corners of the Scottish diaspora: to Australia and the United States. Indeed, they are to be found respectively in Mosman in New South Wales, and Linville in North Carolina. In this case, the common feature they share is being at least partly constructed from stones carried from Scotland itself. Fragments, as it were, of the old country translated, as with the sacred relics of saints, to the New World (Basu and Coleman 2008).

The Scotland Australia Cairn at Mosman, which contains stones collected from every parish in Scotland, was raised as part of Australia's bicentenary celebrations in 1988. In somewhat dubious Scots, the epigraph on the cairn's dedication plaque alludes to the metaphorical resonance of the cairn's form for a diasporic population: '*Here Frai A'The Airts, Stane Upon Stane Haud The Gither Thru Wind And Rain Minders O'Scotland That Aince Was Hame*' (Here from all the parts, stone upon stone held together through wind and rain. Reminders of Scotland that once was home). A local government website provides the following summary of the cairn's origins and significance:

> The Scotland Australia Cairn was built in 1988 to celebrate the landing of Captain Arthur Phillip in Australia in 1788. The Scottish Australian Bicentennial Committee conceived the idea of a memorial cairn with a stone from every Parish in Scotland …
>
> In the Highlands of Scotland, cairns have always been built to commemorate great events or tragedies which happened there, or as a memorial to someone connected with the area. The cairn in Mosman is a fine example built by Duncan Mathieson from Wester Ross, a distinguished craftsman and Gaelic tradition bearer.
>
> There are 1,750 stones in all, collected by Sunday school children, and Ministers … Some stones are engraved with their origins. Most are richly coloured, reflecting the geological tapestry of Scotland.
>
> Embedded in the top of the Cairn lies a stone originating from the hillside of Ulva, birthplace of Lachlan Macquarie, fifth governor of Australia. The stone is engraved with a Celtic cross and Macquarie's personal motto: *An t'Arm breac dearg* – the red tartaned army. (Mosman Municipal Council n.d.)

Note particularly how, in this explanation, the building of a cairn is itself understood as a traditional act. Indeed, elsewhere the cairn is described as being 'of traditional Scottish form' (Aussie Heritage n.d.). Aside from stereotypical 'Celticisms', such as the inclusion of Macquarie's clan slogan, the building of the Scotland Australia cairn thus represents an assertion of continuity in this mnemonic practice: an assertion of the continuation, rather than reinvention, of tradition in the diaspora. Furthermore, by commissioning a native Scot – a 'Gaelic tradition bearer', no less – to build the cairn, the Scottish Australian Bicentennial Committee thereby guarantee the authenticity of their memorial form and bestow upon it the capacity to hold the memory of a distant country that once was home.

MacRae Meadows at Linville, North Carolina, is the venue for the annual Grandfather Mountain Highland Games, which typically draws over

30,000 spectators and is the oldest and best known such gathering in the United States (Ray 2001). In 1980, the games celebrated its twenty-fifth anniversary and one of the highlights of that year's programme was the dedication of the games' own memorial cairn. The cairn has subsequently become a key site of pilgrimage for the North American Scottish heritage community, and a focus for various 'clan' ceremonials.

Set into the sides of the cairn are four panels containing, in total, seventy-four polished stones. Each of these stones was contributed by a different clan association, the majority being sourced in Scotland from those territories that, according to the romantic ideology of Highland clanship, represent each clan's ancient and inalienable home (Basu 2005b). In this respect, it is important to remember the centrality of 'clanship' in the performance of Scottishness in the United States. The clan represents not only an assertion of kinship, providing many Scottish Americans with a sense of belonging to an extended family, but each clan also represents a particular 'community of memory', with its own genealogy, its own body of folklore and its own historical associations with these supposedly inalienable clanlands – lands from which, through generations of emigration, the diasporic clansfolk have indeed become alienated.

The polished stones of the Grandfather Mountain cairn thus stand as metonyms for the clan territories of which they are fragments, represenc-

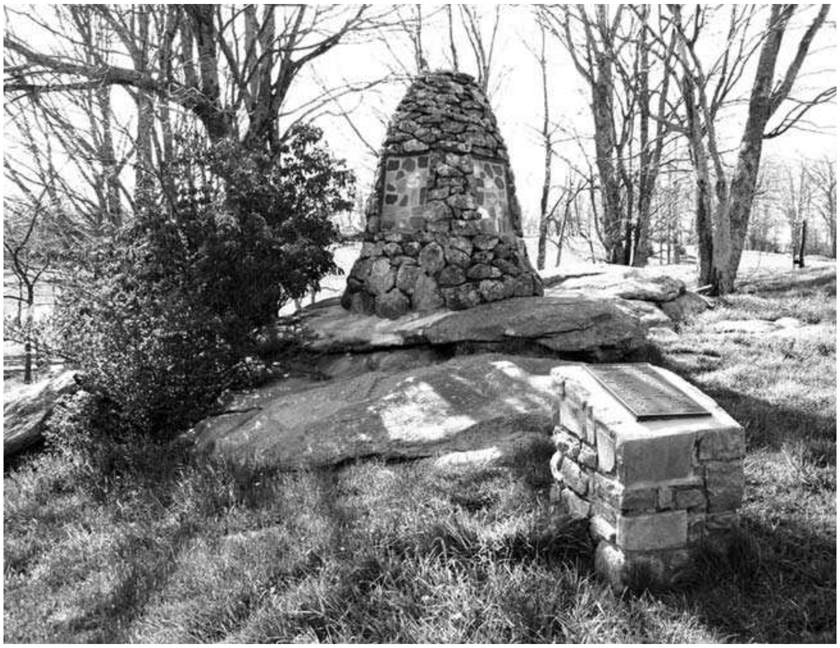

Figure 7.7. The Grandfather Mountain Memorial Cairn, MacRae Meadows, Linville, North Carolina. © Grandfather Mountain Highland Games.

ing in the landscape of the American South not only the clanlands of the old country but also the collective clan 'memories' imagined to be sedimented in those lands.

Cluny Macpherson Memorial Cairn, Glentruim, Inverness-shire, Scotland

The last cairn on our itinerary takes us back to Badenoch in the Central Highlands of Scotland. It was raised at Glentruim in 1996 as part of the Clan Macpherson Association's fiftieth anniversary celebrations. Ostensibly, the cairn was erected to commemorate one of the clan's great heroes: Cluny Macpherson of the '45, who led his men in support of Charles Stuart during the 1745–46 Jacobite Uprising. After years in hiding in the aftermath of Culloden, Macpherson died in exile in France in 1764 and his actual burial place is now unknown. In contrast to the memorial cairns at Mosman and Linville, in which stones from the homeland were incorporated into monuments raised in the diaspora, the cairn at Glentruim – at the heart of the Macpherson homeland – is constructed from stones sent from the diaspora; indeed, sent from no fewer than twenty-six differ-

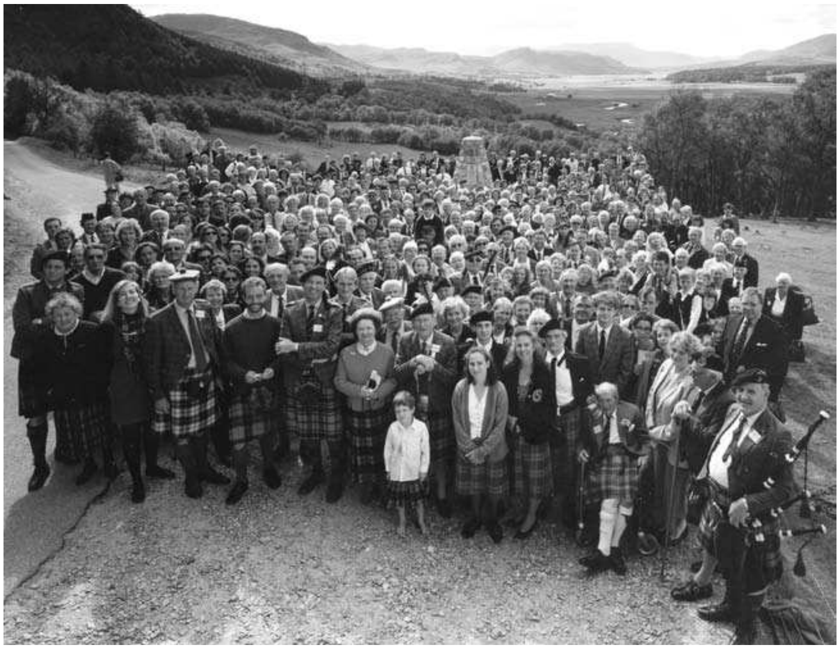

Figure 7.8. Members of the International Clan Macpherson Association gathered around the memorial cairn dedicated to Cluny Macpherson of the '45. Glentruim, Badenoch, Inverness-shire. © Jerome LeRoy Lewis.

ent countries throughout the world in which Macpherson migrants have settled.

Whilst most of the stones are anonymous within the fabric of the cairn, the Clan Association kept records of every stone donated, detailing where they were sourced and the migrant stories each represents. As the architect of the monument explained at the unveiling ceremony, in contributing these stones, the 'clansmen and women have donated part of their country, culture and personal history' and within the form of the cairn, the 'layers of meaning' embodied in the individual stones intricately overlap with one another.

Collected from old homesteads and farms, historic forts, mountains, rivers, mines and other sites from throughout the world where the migrants settled, each stone thus materialises the memory of a migration. Each tells a particular migrant's narrative, but each particular narrative is also a fragment of a wider story: that of the Macpherson diaspora, which is, in turn, a fragment of the story of the Scottish diaspora as a whole. Just as the fragments of rock are conglomerated into one in the cairn, so the personal histories they each embody are fused in the cement of a shared heritage into the collective history of a people.

It seems, therefore, that Cluny Macpherson's cairn is not merely a memorial to a Jacobite hero. It is, rather, the clan's memorial to the clan itself: on the one hand, an acknowledgement of its essentially dispersed nature, on the other, an emphatic assertion of the resilience of its attachment to the place it still identifies as home. Despite its continued absence, the monument succeeds in represencing the clan in its erstwhile clanlands. As such, the cairn completes the circle of migration, symbolising most eloquently the diaspora's return.

Conclusion

One could, of course, tarry longer at each of these cairns to tease out their nuances, or else extend the itinerary to include further examples, of which there are many. What, however, can we learn from this brief journey among monuments? What do these few cairns tell us about the relationship between landscape and narrative in Scotland and its diaspora? We might be struck by the dull repetition of this memorial form across time and space (nothing more imaginative than a heap of stones). We might note how the form is appropriated as an icon of Scottish national identity: an embodiment of tradition, a distinctive form to be defended against invasive counterparts such as the 'cenotaph or pillar' and yet a form steeped in what I have described as an Ossianic legacy. As such, the cairn embeds dominant cultural narratives of defeat and exile in the Scottish landscape, and provides a material manifestation of that 'restricted range of images, tones, rhetorical tropes, and ideological tendencies' that continue to characterise the representation of Scotland and Scottishness at home and abroad (McArthur 2005).

Often raised to remember the event of an emigration, the cairn has itself emigrated; it resurfaces throughout the world. Through this nationalised memorial form, a Scottish presence is thus asserted in countries where Scots have historically settled, and the cairn becomes a means of publicly marking and distinguishing a 'Scottish space' in settler society landscapes: a space where 'Scottishness' is narrated, performed and reinvented, both through the monument itself and through the 'ceremonials' that take place around it. And yet there is more to it than this. The cairn carries a deeper 'memory' in the antiquity of its form. In the Scottish Highlands one might describe the cairn as an autochthonous monument, arising from the ground of which it is made. As noted above, it is a form that carries an Ossianic legacy, which 'speaks of other years' and haunts the present with memories of the lost, heroic past – the past before Culloden, before the Clearances, before emigration. And in the diaspora, too, the cairn carries over these associations, sometimes literally through the incorporation of stones that have also been carried over from lost clanlands and homelands. Such cairns commemorate more than the recent history of Scottish settlement in the New World: they invoke an 'ancestral presence' in landscapes where the Scots can claim no such ancestral connections. Empty burial mounds, these cairns nevertheless seed the memory of ancient Celtic heroes in the ancestral lands of others and in this way may be said to colonise memoryscapes as well as landscapes.

Despite the conservativism of the form, however, the cairn also invites innovation. Whilst the Ossianic aesthetic of absence, loss and nostalgia continues to dominate, we have seen that cairns can also be raised to tell other migrant stories: triumphalist narratives of imperial expansion, celebratory narratives of the resilience of displaced communities and ambiguous narratives that evoke both rupture and continuity. The 'memory' of the Scots seems safeguarded by the durability of the stones of the cairn, yet the echoes of Shelley's *Ozymandias* may outlast those of Macpherson's *Ossian* (one need only think of the Duke of Gordon's cairn). No, the affective power of this particular monumental form lies not in its rigidity, but in its adaptability. A material metonym par excellence, like people, like stories, the stones of the cairn may be continually reconfigured as they gather, coalesce and are dispersed again.

Notes

1. The section heading is from Robert Louis Stevenson's 'To S. R. Crockett' (1895). Although alluding to the graves of the Covenanters killed at the Battle of Rullion Green in 1666, the imagery of the poem is unquestionably Ossianic:

> 'Grey recumbent tombs of the dead in desert places, | Standing stones on the vacant wine-red moor, | Hills of sheep, and the howes of the silent vanished races, | And winds, austere and pure.'

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