

***Sicily and Scotland: Where Extremes Meet* edited by Graham Tulloch,
Karen Agutter and Luciana d’Arcangeli (Troubador Publishing, 2015)**

Speech by Margaret Baker at the Launch in Adelaide on 15 October 2015

I’m delighted to speak at this launch of *Sicily and Scotland: Where Extremes Meet*, published this year by Troubador Publishing of the UK in its Italian Series.

The contributors to this volume all have strong professional and/or personal ties to Scotland or Sicily, and they offer here a variety of information linking these two geographically distant places – places which have given our country many new residents across the years.

In their introduction the editors draw attention to a basic similarity between Sicily and Scotland which relates to the separate identity that each carries within its present political union. These strongly-held individual identities come from long, often turbulent histories prior to unification, and are at times in contrast with the situation within the wider union – or, in Scotland’s case the contrast can be between the two Scottish partners themselves. The editors say that they have chosen ‘to traverse only part’ of an ‘enormous’ topic; even so, we have here a most interesting range of discussions, for which the introduction offers a helpful background.

The contributions focus on three main areas, viz.,

- Various ways in which Sicily and Scotland have been represented in literature and film;
- Records of the tours made by Scottish travellers in Southern Italy from the seventeenth century onwards;
- Aspects of emigration from both regions to the US and Australia in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

And there is an afterword entitled ‘Sicily and Scotland Compared: Some Economic and Demographic Limits’.

In the first chapter, ‘Sicilian Waistcoats and Scottish Kilts: Filmic Representations from Opposite Extremes’, Luciana d’Arcangeli gives an account of the development of local film production in each place, looking at the way it embodies past stereotypes and contemporary reactions to them. One of the first film studios in Sicily, Morgana Film in Catania, dates from 1913, whereas the Films of Scotland Committee was formed in the 1930s ‘to promote the country nationally and internationally’. Two of the three categories of film recognised as representative of Scotland are shared by Sicilian film-makers: one dealing with basic human situations, and described as ‘strongly parochial’, the other, referred to as ‘Tartanry’ in Scotland, represents historical events such as the 1745 uprising of Scottish Highlanders, and the landing in 1860 at Marsala in Sicily of ‘the thousand’ wearing their red shirts or ‘waistcoats’. The category associated with the industrial area of Clydesdale, which ‘celebrated the male working-class hero’, has no parallel in Sicilian films. The emergence in the 1990s of a ‘New Scottish Cinema’ in response to contemporary issues is seen as corresponding to the depiction of ‘anti-mafia cinema’ in Sicily, involving the ordinary person heroically doing what is right, regardless of the consequences. An example given is Marco Tullio Giordana’s film *I cento passi/One hundred steps* (2000) about Peppino Impastato whose statements on radio proved to be heroic, in that they cost him his life.

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Liz Campbell's 'Double Lives: Luigi Pirandello and Robert Louis Stevenson' looks at the life experiences of these two nineteenth-century writers as possible explanations for their themes of escape and dual lives. The writers' personal situations would seem to have reinforced the representation of a duality present in the socio-political life of their regions. Such feelings of otherness are seen to have been exacerbated by the writers' personal difficulties: in Stevenson's case by his constant illnesses – we are told that 'he was highly strung, and prone to depression'. Evidence of a nervous disposition in Pirandello appears in a letter to his then fiancée Antonietta when he writes: 'It's almost as if there are two people in me.' Antonietta's own later illness was to take an even greater toll on Pirandello and the family: the flooding in 1903 of the family's sulphur mine (bought with Antonietta's dowry) led to her 'schizophrenic paranoia'. The works discussed – Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* and Pirandello's *Henry IV* – are seen to share 'a common concern with the concept of identity and its destruction', in that 'Jekyll obliterates his identity and that of Hyde through suicide', and Pirandello's nobleman 'kills his own identity by imprisoning himself in the role of Henry IV'.

In the following chapter, Liam McIlvanney and Graham Tulloch compare two works of detective fiction: Leonardo Sciascia's *Il giorno della civetta* (The Day of the Owl) (1961), and Ian Rankin's *Mortal Causes* (1994), noting that the works share a strong identification of place along with the defining characteristics of each society. The action, in a contemporary setting, has roots in past issues left unresolved: i.e. the *Mafia* in Sicily and Sectarianism in Scotland.

Sciascia's story opens with a murder one morning in the piazza of a Sicilian township, seen by a busload of people waiting for their journey to begin. Rankin's story also begins with a murder, this one committed in Old Edinburgh, but not in full view. The detectives are also opposites – Sciascia's Captain Bellodi, from Parma in 'the North', is an 'outsider' in the eyes of the locals; Detective John Rebus, though not from Edinburgh, is of close enough birth-place to be considered within the Pale. Their investigations reflect the ongoing issues the writers are underlining: although in each case the detective grows to understand what forces have been at play, the outcomes are less than ideal. In Rankin's story there is seen to be 'rough justice'; in Sciascia's account, the nature and extent of the power of the *Mafia* preclude the carriage of Justice.

In Chapter 4 Stefano Bona discusses Tomasi di Lampedusa's novel *Il Gattopardo* (*The Leopard*) (1958) in relation to the view it gives of the Unification of Italy. He refers to the political situation in the Italian Peninsula following the Congress of Vienna (1815) when ideas began circulating that eventually led to the unification proclaimed in March 1861. He notes the fact that this new political reality, based on that in Piedmont, was at odds with the different types of governance in other Italian regions; the different perspective in Sicily is shown through his brief summary of the power-structure operating in Sicilian communities, outside the official governing bodies. In the novel, Don Fabrizio's 'distrust' of any foreign ruler is evident during his meeting with the Piedmontese official Chevalley who, while attempting to enlist him as a senator in the new government, displays how inadequate is his own knowledge, and that of Northern politicians in general, about Sicily. Chevalley's failure to understand what he sees and what he hears about Sicily from Don Fabrizio, and the latter's overwhelming 'disillusionment and discomfort' is seen here as 'chronic incapability of reciprocal comprehension'.

In 'Turning Points and Change: Scotland and Sicily, Scott and Lampedusa', Graham Tulloch looks at the question of how change in Scotland and Sicily has been represented in the novels *Waverley* and *The Leopard*. In each case unification is described as a turning point, in many ways, and the question here is: how much did things change at these crucial turning points?

We are reminded that critical appraisal has questioned the extent to which the novels can be called *historical*. Sciascia's opinion of *The Leopard*, that it was 'without an understanding of history', is countered here by the view that Lampedusa presented history 'from an aristocratic perspective based on his personal background'; the conclusion is that 'neither of these texts is solely (or even perhaps, in the case of *The Leopard*, principally) a historical novel'. The autobiographical and regional aspects that figure importantly in the novels are discussed. The first is perhaps strongest in *The Leopard*, since Lampedusa linked the character of Don Fabrizio to himself and to his great-grandfather Don Giulio. The links between Scott and his characters Edward Waverley and the Baron of Bradwardine are also seen to show autobiographical elements in that Waverley 'represents Scott's idea of his younger self'. In recognising that 'there is a certain tension in combining a regional, and autobiographical novel with a historical novel', the author adds that the answer needs to take account of the fact that each novel offers more than one perspective. It is in this area of different, even changing, perspectives that the chapter continues its interesting discussion.

The question 'How much did things change?' is examined in relation to the later perspective of the time when the novels were written. Scott was writing *Waverley* at a time (between 1805 and 1814) when 'it was possible to feel that the traditional ruling class had retained their power despite the change of dynasty'. Lampedusa was writing in the middle of the twentieth century when Italy was no longer a Kingdom but a Republic, and in his view 'things had not remained the same'.

Chapters 6 and 7 are linked through their attention to early Scottish travellers to the South of Italy: Jonathan Esposito's title is 'Distant Caledonians: Scottish Travellers in Sicily and Southern Italy (1600-1900)', and Joseph Farrell's 'A Reverend Pilgrim: Patrick Brydone in Sicily'. Brydone's book was published in 1773.

William Lithgow of Lanark, the earliest of the 'distant Caledonians' discussed by Jonathan Esposito, *walked* down the Tyrrhenian coast on his way through Southern Italy to other countries. He visited Naples and Sicily in 1616, encountering bandits on his way, and he climbed Mt Etna; his account of this was published in 1632. In the next century Robert Mylne from Edinburgh (another great walker) left drawings of the Greek temples at Agrigento which served the archaeologist Johann Winckelmann.

Joseph Farrell discusses the importance of the eighteenth-century Scottish travel-writer Patrick Brydone, who continues to arouse interest – witness the five volumes concerning him (cited in the Notes) published in France and Italy between 1755 and 2011. Discussion follows of Brydone's writing and intellectual interests, and the degree to which his *Tour Through Sicily and Malta* has continued to provide 'valuable source material for subsequent Sicilian writers and commentators'. The folklorist Giuseppe Pitrè of the following century is cited as one 'who was highly critical of *Goethe's* depiction of Sicilian life, but [who] used Brydone as a reliable and trustworthy source for information'. The author notes the range and degree of Brydone's interest in the Sicily he saw, which extended to comments on the 'poverty of the island, its backwardness and the failed emergence of "industrious hands"', which he laid squarely at the feet of the Bourbon rulers of the time.

In the first of the chapters in the next group, Karen Agutter writes of Sicilians in Australia, with particular emphasis on the period before and after the First World War, when over fourteen million Italians left their homeland as migrants. In the years to 1915, Sicilians numbered about one-eighth of this total and their destination was largely the Americas. Some of the patterns relating to this settlement are compared with information available in Australian records, and an

analysis of the material is preceded by data relating to the years of peak migration from Sicily: their settlement in each Australian State, their occupation soon after arrival and later, and also an overview of Australian attitudes towards migrants from Sicily or Southern Italy.

In seeking to understand the situation of these migrants and their choices, the question is asked: could the possibility of military service have encouraged this high number of young males to emigrate? Another similarity between Australia and the US is seen in the negative way Sicilian migrants were viewed in the new country. The author links this to the ‘potential Italian origins of this negativity’.

On the other hand, in the following chapter Eric Richards looks at Scottish immigration to Australia as being welcomed with strong enthusiasm. He throws light on the internal situation in Scotland as background to early emigration, reminding us that ‘Scotland is by no means a homogeneous country’. Thus his title ‘Scotland, the Highlands and “the Elephant Question”’ is to be understood in terms of the disadvantage the Highlanders suffered because of their close proximity to the Lowlands. It is noted that the divergencies between them were more stark in centuries past (including differences in language and culture – plus poverty in the Highlands). There were changes in the nineteenth century following the industrial success in the Lowlands, which provided the Highlands with opportunities to supply goods (wool being one of them) for the southern manufacturing, but the Highlands were dependent in this, and not the initiators.

These differences are then shown as replicated to some extent in the settlement of Scots abroad. Throughout the British Empire, Scottish migration was seen as a success story, and ‘in terms of the esteem accorded to Scots in the colonial context there seems to be little dispute that they received preference at practically every level’. But the situation for the Highlanders contrasted with this, especially in the mid-nineteenth century when their poverty affected their chances of migrating. Even with assistance to migrate, they brought with them the effects of their home circumstances, and initially met with the same prejudices here. However, the passage of time seems to have brought equal status for all migrants from culturally or politically divided countries, in that the distinctions within the groups mostly faded once here. It is ironic, in the author’s view, that ‘outward trappings of Scottishness were manufactured out of specifically Highland symbols – dances, Highland Games, haggis, bagpipes ...’ and that ‘emigrant Scots across the world have re-created this amalgam of identity for Scotland, which drew disproportionately on a Highland model.’

In ‘Off Centre in the New World: Assimilation Experiences of a Bicultural Family’ Thomas MacPherson rounds out this section’s discussions by looking at the experiences of his ancestors who came from the Highlands of Scotland as well as from Sicily; they arrived in the United States, between the early and late years of the nineteenth century. Both families settled in the small town of LeRoy in western New York State, and the author follows his interest as an historian and a visual artist in giving an account of their assimilation into American society.

Their initial experiences reflect the stories of migrant groups elsewhere. The Scottish group succeeded more quickly in being accepted into the dominant culture, whereas the Sicilians experienced discrimination. The ease with which the former Highlander Alex MacPherson settled in New York State had much to do with his financial security; we’re told he ‘immigrated with sufficient funds and with the necessary managerial background to start his “American Dream” on his own terms’. The Barone family arrived in very different financial circumstances, and lived a life of poverty and hard work for most of the first generation.

To illustrate these two different experiences of settlement and eventual assimilation, the author describes a woman from each line of his ancestors: in the Scottish line, his Great Aunt

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Catherine MacPherson became a nurse and in 1914 served overseas with the British Expeditionary Forces in Belgium, later receiving a distinguished service cross. His grandmother Carrie (*Calogera*) Barone, was illiterate, having had to leave school at 8 years old to take care of her seven siblings. She spent a life of hard work, in a degree of poverty. After her (arranged) marriage, she and her husband were lent the money by family members to buy a farm – and were once again supported by them financially during the Depression.

The afterword to the volume, by Eric Richards, entitled ‘Sicily and Scotland Compared: Some Economic and Demographic Limits’, reaffirms the comparisons made in earlier chapters while considering also ‘how far the comparison of Sicily and Scotland holds, in relation to their economic and demographic trajectories over the last three hundred years’. The discussion shows that these are areas in which striking differences have existed between them, one being the fact, for example, that ‘the population of Scotland reached its plateau by the end of the 19th century and that of the Highlands fell continuously for 150 years. In Italy the population grew through to the 21st century and that of Sicily has continued to expand without reversal.’ It is then noted that both Sicily and the Highlands ‘were saddled with ostensibly antiquated systems of landholding, dominated by very large landholders’; in the Highlands there were ‘radical programmes of modernisation’, but in Sicily ‘there seems to have been little concerted effort to reorganize the agricultural systems, in the context of increasing congestion on the land’. This led, in both places, to the re-entrenchment of poverty, and thus ‘the differential with the rest of the country widened’. These matters are then related to the social consequences: the disadvantages for the inhabitants in their homeland, which they carried with them as they emigrated.

From here it is worth looking back to the editors’ words at the close of the introduction: that ‘much could be achieved by examining all the fascinating parallels and contrasts discussed in this introduction, as well as those suggested in Eric Richards’ afterword: this book is a first beginning of that much larger project.’ I expect that readers of this volume will agree.

Margaret Baker lived for some years in Italy before attending the University of Melbourne where she completed an MA on the work of the twentieth-century writer Carlo Emilio Gadda. Later, as a member of the Italian Department at The Flinders University of South Australia, her research and publications included the work of other Italian writers from various periods. Further affinities with Sicily and Scotland: Where Extremes Meet date back to her childhood in Queensland, in a small community whose culture was enriched by the presence of families that had migrated from those regions.