

Grant Jarvie, *Highland Games. The making of the Myth*. Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 1991. Index. pp. 120, \$49.95 paper.

When I arrived in the wintry wastelands of Maine, USA, in January 1991, I told a local reporter of my interest in Robert Burns. There followed a veritable avalanche of calls from Burns and Caledonian societies throughout the state and as far away as Canada, inviting me to their annual celebration of the bard's birthday. The result was a delight. I remember in particular one Burns Night, held in a cottage that could well have seen the birth of the bard, without plumbing but boasting a fax and photocopying machine, where the amiable host told me, with only the faintest twinkle in his eye, that when he went to Scotland he always wore his kilt 'so that everyone will know I am an American'.

The Highland Games are a sort of athletic pendant to the Burns Nights which millions of Scottish emigrés and their descendants have carried to the four corners of the globe. I have never been to a Highland Games gathering: they reek rather of tartan torism, and indeed both Burns and the Highland Games have been hostage to Conservatives whose contemporary interests have hidden the reality that they have appropriated. In the case of Burns, the fiery radical has been replaced by a harmless lad who loved the lasses and sang in praise of his native land. In the case of the Highland Games there was more than an individual's reputation at stake. Instead there was the insult to the fate of a whole class of Highland dwellers who were driven from their land and their livelihood by people who then went on to romanticise the culture they had helped destroy.

This is what Grant Jarvie characterises as 'balmoralization', with its 'loyalty, royalty, tartanry' and what Tom Nairn has called the 'glamour of backwardness'. This was followed by a popularisation of the Highland Games, with upstart landowners parading as Highland Chiefs, their fortunes made out of sheep and deer at the expense of people.

In his carefully argued analysis of the transformation of the old Highland Games, Jarvie sees four phases. The first went as far back as the eleventh century, with the royal sports meetings of Malcolm Canmore on the Braes of Mar to test would-be post runners. This included races up mountains with virtually no holds barred. The second phase began with the repression following the Jacobite rebellion of 1745-46, with the banning of most of the Highlanders' cultural artefacts, and lasted through to about 1840. This was the high (or low) point of the Clearances, when crofters were replaced by sheep and deer which guaranteed a surer source of profit. In the third phase, from about 1840 to 1920, came 'balmoralization', when the Highlands were adopted by Queen Victoria and her hangers-on, and the Games became one aspect of the Highlands as a sporting haven for a social elite. The fourth phase, from about 1920, shows how the usurpers, whether Scottish, English or increasingly, European, came to terms with modernisation and the legitimising of their hold on the land mass of the Highlands and Islands. This is a crude outline of Jarvie's much more sophisticated analysis of the transformation of old habits and customs, which among other things shows that in contrast to Trevor - (wrong again!) Roper, kilts and tartanry were not an invention of the mid-nineteenth century, but a romanticisation of an old way of life.

The use of the Highland Games as a 'safety valve' against popular resentment by the descendants of those who were deprived of their lands is not a major argument of Jarvie's, whose argument is essentially political. Indeed I would like to have read more about the Games themselves: how they were run, who ran them and who took part, as well as some descriptions of the actual events. Good sports history needs the cultural background, but I think a chapter on the Games themselves would not have been out of place. I would also like to have seen more on the way the Games were used as an 'opium', and how and whether those who were presumably being 'doped' reacted to this. The book is a short one, tightly argued, but there is some repetition and the author perhaps

assumes too much knowledge on the part of the reader of what the Highland Games involved.

Jarvie is a sociologist, but like the best of his breed, and especially many of those who have been writing on sport in the last two decades, his work has a solid historical foundation. His argument proceeds logically and smoothly, with only the faintest jarring of sociological phrasing (too many 'fractions' and 'formations' for me). This book will have a wide appeal to historians and to theoreticians of sport, with a particular relevance to those who want to test more general hypotheses against what may be seen as peripheral cases. For those involved, of course, there was nothing peripheral, and the story of a people who lose their land and their culture, and then have it appropriated in romanticised form by those who would have destroyed them and it, is a story only too tragically universal.

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