

# The Outward Urge

## By The Unreliable Narrator

“The noblest prospect which a Scotchman ever sees, is the high road that leads to England”, said Samuel Johnson. Like many of his countrymen his vision was impaired by the Great Wen: why else would he utter such a sadly parochial statement? As an Englishman - even more so as a Londoner - Johnson imagined himself as living at the heart of things, a dweller in the Middle Kingdom surrounded by the scurf of a barbarian hinterland. The Scots labour under no such illusion; proudly marginal, consciously peripheral, the world is our oyster, and there are a great many locations better suited to pearl-fishing than that flat bland country to the south.

Are we Scots more naturally adventurous, then? Perhaps our upbringing in the land of the mountain and the flood lends to our characters a staunch and steely resolve; perhaps our vertiginous and all-too-near horizons breed in us a desire to see beyond the hills of home. Or maybe we are just searching for a better climate. What is undeniable is that great numbers have voluntarily departed fair Caledonia, impelled by the outward urge to travel to all the corners of the Earth. Nearly as many, in fact, as those who were compelled to go by economic necessity - either their own, or someone else's.

Going a-roving and a-reiving have been Scottish specialities, celebrated in poetry, prose and song, since the days of Dál Riata. We have breenged, wambled and jouked across the globe, for god, king, and country, fun and profit, romance, revenge, science and spite. High roads and low roads, we've taken them all, and got in there early, too, most times. The first bootprints on the moon belonged to an Armstrong: no surprise to those who know the folk of Liddesdale.

In this issue, *The Bottle Imp* sniffs out the trail of some of our nation's greatest wanderers. John Burnside uses his acute sense for a frontier to walk some dusty and debateable lines in ***Borderlands***, finding beauty in the intersections. Kenneth Simpson, meanwhile, trots along with one of Scotland's most travelled writers, in ***Expanding Horizons: to California with RLS***, on a voyage that was powered by steam and impelled by love. A first-class writer but a third-class

passenger, Stevenson gives us our only clear first-hand impression of the true immigrant experience in late-19th century America.

Anne Scriven sets out to pursue Margaret Oliphant in her **unhappy wanderings** about the Continent and the Holy Land. Oliphant knew hard work, hard times and sore misfortune, and her reward? An unkind quip by Henry James. She travelled far but seldom failed to collect a trunkful of adversity on the way. The footprints of **Elizabeth Isabella Spence**, on the other hand, were lighter, and less burdened with woe - but rough male erosion has almost worn them down to nothing. Pam Perkins, though, notes the bent grasses and broken twigs, and reveals her routes through a more feminine Scotland.

**R. B. Cunninghame Graham** may not have been the first Scot to set off in search of a forbidden city, and yet today he too teeters on the brink of obscurity. But Alan MacGillivray shines a light onto his story, and Don Roberto may take his rightful place again in Scotland's literary pantheon. Tobias Smollett, now, sits there still, although he is more famous for his imaginary journeys than his real ones: Ronnie Young takes a **Scenic Route to Humphrey Clinker**, and traces out the true paths that underlie the fiction.

Maggie Smith **stravaigs** her way around the Scots word of the season, and Alison Grant takes the Gaelic **rathad**. Two new columns give our readers an **interview with Irvine Welsh** and provide a profile of the **Scottish Universities International Summer School** in its 65th year. All this and more is crammed into *The Bottle Imp's* backpack, as we humphle forwards towards the red channel with something very much to declare!

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