Introduction to 'Scottish Sociability: The Literature of Clubs and Societies'

By Corey E. Andrews

The Scottish Forum session this year at the MLA Conference in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania focused on the theme of Scottish Sociability: the Literature of Clubs and Associations. The topic of sociability has long been a mainstay of social and cultural histories of Scotland, which often begin with mention of the seventeenth-century origins of Freemasonry in Edinburgh, Glasgow, and Dundee. Along with this distinction, another key feature of Scottish sociability was the development of urban debating clubs during the eighteenth century, sometimes open to the public for a nominal fee. Many Enlightenment thinkers received early training for their later careers in such sociable arenas, as did poets and artists.

Conviviality was also another important instance of Scottish clubbability in which many rural and urban Scots participated. For instance, the Edinburgh poet Allan Ramsay and his son Allan (principal painter in ordinary to George III) were both intimately involved in Scottish club life throughout their careers, and each owed to social clubs an early audience and occasion for their artistic productions. Later figures such as Robert Burns found much support among a plethora of social clubs, ranging from the Freemasons to the convivial Crochallan Fencibles and the Caledonian Hunt, whose subscriptions to Burns's Edinburgh edition in many ways facilitated his rise to fame.

Indeed, it is difficult to overstate the enduring influence of sociability in Scotland, and each of the panelists examined its significance for a range of Scottish authors and associations. Juliet Shields, associate professor of English at the University of Washington and author of *Sentimental Literature and Anglo-Scottish Identity, 1745-1820* (Cambridge, 2010) and *Nation and Migration: the Making of British Atlantic Literature, 1765-1835* (Oxford, 2016), presented a paper entitled 'Margaret Oliphant on the Margins of Maga', which discusses the contributions made by Oliphant to *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* in a series of columns she

wrote called ‘The Old Saloon’. Shields examines how Oliphant both explored and critiqued the convivial masculine sociability promoted within the pages of *Blackwood’s*.

Mark Wallace, Associate Professor of History at Lyon College and editor of a collection of essays entitled *The Clubbable Scots: Clubs and Societies in Eighteenth-Century Scotland* (slated to be published in early 2018 through Bucknell University Press in conjunction with the Studies in Eighteenth-Century Scottish Series), delivered a paper entitled ‘”The Scotch Diable Boiteaux”, or, The Lame Scottish Devil: Masonic Rebellion and the Rise of the Whigs’, in which he examines the varying political affiliations of operative and speculative masonic lodges in Scotland. In particular, Wallace discusses how during the early 1800s, a polarization of party allegiances occurred within the Grand Lodge of Scotland which ultimately spilled over into several Edinburgh lodges and resulted in the Masonic Secession of 1808.

Steven Newman, Associate Professor of English and Director of Graduate Studies at Temple University and editor of the forthcoming play *The Gentle Shepherd* (for the Edinburgh University Press edition of Allan Ramsay), presented a paper entitled ‘From The Easy Club to “Hodden-Gray”: Ramsay’s Versions of Enlightenment Improvement and National Collectivity’. Newman focuses on Allan Ramsay’s club experience and its relation to his popular verse drama *The Gentle Shepherd*; he also discusses the emergence of the Scots phrase ‘hodden-gray’ and assesses the varying ways that Ramsay confirms but also challenges the Scottish model of sociability.

It was a great pleasure to moderate this lively session, and I would like to thank all the participants as well as the current members of the Scottish Forum Group (Juliet Shields, Rivka Swenson, Anthony Jarrells, and past chair Evan Gottlieb) for their input and support during the selection process. It is in the abiding spirit of convivial sociability that these papers are offered, in the hopes of continuing to stimulate interest and scholarship in the history and practice of Scottish club life.The Scottish Forum session this year at the MLA Conference in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania focused on the theme of Scottish Sociability: the Literature of Clubs and Associations. The topic of sociability has long been a mainstay of social and cultural histories of Scotland, which often begin with mention of the seventeenth-century origins of Freemasonry in Edinburgh, Glasgow, and Dundee. Along with this distinction, another key feature of Scottish sociability was the development of

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