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The Bottle Imp

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Tartan Nation

"Once you can accept the universe as being something expanding into an infinite nothing which is something, wearing stripes with plaid is easy."
– Albert Einstein

Tartan is significant. Famously it was banned by the Hanoverian regime, following the Jacobite rebellion of 1745. Later rebels of other sorts have taken to it too, from mohawk'd Punks to the irregular footsoldiers of Clan Burberry. It has been calculated that the area of tartan cloth made each year is sufficient to cover Edinburgh's Royal Mile to a depth of six hundred feet, an event which you could be forgiven for thinking has already happened. Festooned around with proud pretence and phoney proscription, it can signify allegiance and rejection both: a fabric built around cross-purposes.

Tartan, then, makes a good blanket term to drape across Scotland, this country which it has colonised for its own. Our warps and wefts cut over and under each other, threads running down through history and across geography: green and gold, black and white, orange, red white and blue; woven by time and far from finished yet. Bloodlines mix and mingle, peoples shuttle in and shuttle out; diasporas loom large. In this issue, *The Bottle Imp* takes on issues of ethnicity and notions of nationality, and looks to tease out some home truths, and wauk the line between fact and fancy.

A Tartan Nation, of course requires a (famous) Tartan Army: Joseph Bradley scouts out where their loyalties might lie in **Scottishness in the Tartan Army**, and comes up with some surprising results. Silke Stroh, meanwhile, digs down to find how deep the Highland Line might run, in **Gaeldom and multi-ethnic Scotland: A long history and a short story**; Jonathan Henderson celebrates the mix of cultures – and the problems they can pose for

mainstream literary criticism – in **An Outward Looking Land: Suhayl Saadi and Scottish Multicultural Literature**; and Bashabi Fraser tells us how she carries two nations within her writings in **An Émigré at Home**.

Carla Sassi's article, **Caribbean-Scottish Relations: for a Poetics of Memory**, probes Scottish complicity in the slave trade, and holds up for all to see how we allow Scotland's ambiguous existence to hide our sins from ourselves, all fur coat and nae knickers: we put up a front of hard-done-by pride, and let Britain carry the shame. It's all still there, though, and the darkness shines through. But ours is a chequered history, right enough, and Damian Shaw's **Thomas Pringle and the 'Hot-tentots'** shows that we sometimes get things right, too.

More than most, Scotland is a nation made of words: Alison Grant picks out some foreign flags that dot our map, with an analysis of **Gall** placenames; Maggie Scott, meanwhile, jigs with the Devil beneath his **Mahoun** monicker.

All this and an expanded **book review** section too – not to mention our special **Tenth Issue cut-out-and-keep Bottle Imp Thaumatrope!** Put the treadle to the metal!

The Unreliable Narrator



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