

THE HECTOR
(Iain Macdonald 2007)

The 'Hector' slipped free of her moorings, and then
turned her back on the shores of Loch Broom.

Her course set towards Nova Scotia.
A land, it was said, with no shortage of room.
And where fish filled the lakes and the rivers
while the forests were teeming with game.
A land, above all, where a man could be free.
Back in seventeen seventy-three.

One hundred and eighty-nine settlers, in all
were crowded aboard that small ship.
Some in flight from religious oppression
and others, the cold clasp of poverty's grip.
But they carried the songs and the stories
of the world they were leaving behind.
For the Lord only knew what their future might be.
Back in seventeen seventy-three.

One hundred and eighty-nine stowed down below,
and many with reasons to weep,
when the vessel was ravaged by fever,
and eighteen poor children consigned to the deep.
But the 'Hector' kept plugging on westwards
in the face of perpetual storms.
And was pummeled and pressed by a merciless sea
Back in seventeen seventy-three.

The endured this hard crossing for twelve weeks or so
in a torment of grief and disease
Till the 'Hector' dropped anchor at Pictou,
and they stumbled ashore in a land filled with trees
Though the voyage was finally over,
their struggles had barely begun.
But tough and resourceful those Scots proved to be.
Back in seventeen seventy-three.

There's a tartan named after that famous old ship
where the emigrants' tale can be traced.
Woven out of the fabric of memory,
with colours denoting the trials they faced.
Royal blue for the link with their homeland,
that Scotland they'd never more see.
White for the breakers that swept the Atlantic.
Black for those lives that were lost on the journey.
Green for the forests that seemed never-ending,
but Gold for the bright sun that greeted their landfall,
To herald their new destiny.
Back in seventeen seventy-three.