

Book Reviews

Scottish Life and Society 10. A Compendium of Scottish Ethnology: Oral Literature and Performance Culture. Eds. John Beech, Owen Hand, Fiona MacDonald, Mark A. Mulhern and Jeremy Weston. Edinburgh. John Donald (Birlinn) in association with The European Ethnological Research Centre. 2007. ISBN 10: 0 85976 679 9. ISBN 13: 978 085976 679. pp 616 £45 (Hardback).

This book is the tenth in a series of 14 volumes dedicated to providing a body of ethnological knowledge about Scottish Life and Society at all periods, as the series title clearly states. At the time of publishing five other volumes in the series had already appeared, dealing with areas such as Buildings (Vol. 3), Domestic Life (Vol. 6), The Individual and Community Life (Vol. 9), Education (Vol. 11). The last volume (14) provides a bibliography for Scottish Ethnology. The aims of this ambitious project are well realised in this volume, with thirty-two essays altogether, divided into three parts: One: Narrative and Verse; Two: Song and Music; and Three: Dance and Drama, thereby encompassing comprehensively most of the genres of popular oral culture. Only slight overlaps appear in this format, and even these are approached differently by the various contributors, so that they complement each other rather than going over the same ground a second time.

Scotland as an entity, presents something of an anomaly, a fact pointed out acerbically by Ian Olson in the following observation:

...Scotland...ceased to exist as an independent nation from the earlier part of the seventeenth century.... Scotland has largely existed as a country of the mind....The reality of her current existence as a post-industrial society, increasingly Anglified (and Americanised), with a Gaelic-speaking population that would scarcely fill one medium-sized town, is, however, seldom, if ever, reflected in the various 'Scotlands' of the mind' (379).

These Scotlands of the mind, indeed, repeatedly come to the fore in this volume, although the contributors deal with the challenges presented by such imagined representations admirably, always reverting to trustworthy sources for their information and clearly distinguishing between romantic constructions of the 'traditional' and the facts. Nevertheless, the papers also acknowledge the important influence of these imagined Scotlands on cultural directions. Consequently, it was somewhat surprising to read in the Foreword by Alexander Fenton that 'Scotland, unlike the Netherlands, has not felt the urgencies and dislocations of war for many centuries' (xvii). While Scotland was not a direct theatre of conflict in the twentieth century, given the effects of Culloden, and the strong military traditions that continue to the present in the Highlands, this is a surprising statement, and one that has been recently challenged by Mairghread Challan in an excellent study of North Uist folklore. Here, she attributes the breakdown in transmission of oral culture in part

directly to the adverse effects of both the First and Second World Wars on returned soldiers, using evidence obtained from local inhabitants to support her claim.¹

Fiona MacDonald leads off in Part One with a discussion of narrative collection and scholarship in Scotland, including both Highland Gaelic and Lowland traditions. She claims that narrative collection was badly served in Lowland Scotland because academics assumed that storytelling had died out there. The Northern Isles have yielded a greater wealth of narrative than elsewhere and have been given a chapter of their own, also by MacDonald (3). MacDonald gives a brief but comprehensive survey of directions in folk narrative collection in Europe and how these impacted the Scottish endeavour. Deservedly, John Francis Campbell's *Popular Tales* is extensively discussed and its enduring value reaffirmed. John Shaw's chapter on Storytellers (ch. 2) represents a welcome focus on the performer as distinct only from the material performed. This brief chapter gives a tantalizing insight into many of the questions that arise from performer-centred study and prompts questions that others must answer with more detailed studies of storytellers, repertoires and contexts. Shaw discusses both Gaelic and Lowland, and especially traveller traditions, in this essay. His chapter on Scottish Narrative Overseas (ch. 5) may be read as an extension of this. Traveller narrative is authoritatively discussed in greater detail by Sheila Douglas in chapter four. She gives a fascinating insight into the geographic range of sources for traveller stories and reveals instances of transference from Gaelic to English, pointing to items occurring in both from different sources. She also addresses the difficulties of analysis, editing and presentation of oral material in written form. Ideally one would have liked more discussion on this topic, as the terse comment, 'difficulty was experienced in deciding where one episode ended and another began' (55), no doubt conceals a well of experience from which others could richly benefit.

The magisterial contribution of John MacInnes provides one of the highlights of the book for the student of Gaelic material. His light, assured touch conceals a deep and complex knowledge of the subject and again, one finds oneself wishing for more. As well as a discussion of Ulster and Ossianic Cycles, MacInnes gives us a fascinating insight into 'late realistic legends that offer us vignettes of notable men and accounts of feuds and vendettas, [in which]...Men and women equally are real persons in real places, not pale reflections of humanity in shadowy landscapes' (71). The value of MacInnes' discussion of 'Gaelic historical tradition' (73) is complemented in chapter ten by Dòmhnall Uilleam Stiùbhart. This essay presents an up-to-date survey of the problems and opportunities of sources and methods for the use of oral materials in Scottish history. Stiùbhart argues cogently for the inclusion of frequently neglected oral material into historiography, claiming that it elucidates 'broader historical patterns' (137) and that the abundance of written sources contributes further to the marginalisation of such material from mainstream history (138). A sense of frustration is evident in the final statement: '...given the extreme paucity of historians competent in the native language of the people they study, it may be some time before Gàidhealtachd historiography is affected by any linguistic turn' (139).

Sandy Hobbs and Gordon McCulloch address the question of urban legends in chapter 9, discussing the range of the term 'legend' itself and how it may be interpreted. They discuss non-narrative aspects of legend belief (120) and conclude that legend narratives constitute the rhetorical expression of belief concepts, a claim which would

¹ Challan, Maighread. *Sealladh air Leantailachd Beul-Aithris Ghàidhlig Uibhist a Tuath*. M. Phil. School of Scottish Studies, University of Edinburgh 2007.

seem to link legends close to genres such as the proverb – discussed by Fionnuala Carson Williams in chapter 12. Among other themes, Barbara Hiller's contribution on the International Folktale in Scotland in chapter 11 valuably focuses on gender in folktale performance, giving brief vignettes of two noted storytellers, Nan MacKinnon of Vatersay, and Betsy Whyte of the Perthshire travelling community. Moreover, she also relates the story of Mrs. Campbell of South Uist's deathbed recitation of an Ossianic lay (162). Similar deathbed performances have been noted for Ireland, reinforcing our knowledge of the close affinity between performance traditions.² Betsy Whyte's maternal Gaelic background meant that her repertoire contained items from that tradition, confirming Sheila Douglas' discovery of transmission across the language boundary, and challenging Delargy's assertion for Ireland that very little material ever crossed the linguistic divide.³ Interestingly, traveller storytellers in Ireland, such as Mickey Greene and Paddy Sherlock, also seem to have acted as conduits through which material crossed over from Irish to English.⁴

Chapters 7 and 8 are dedicated to Gaelic verse, with John MacInnes and Donald Meek explaining 'how' both panegyric verse and township verse 'mean'.⁵ These two chapters link the section on verse and narrative to the second section on music and song, since much of the verse discussed in them is, in fact, sung. This is borne out by the fact that fully half of the fourteen essays in section two contain the word 'song' in their titles. The other seven deal with themes such as diversity, education and there are three detailed organological surveys on the iconic instruments, pipes, fiddle and clàrsach (harp). In chapter 24, John MacInnes, in his third essay, discusses the famous *òrain luaidh* and other work songs, effectively a continuation of and complement to his earlier chapters on Gaelic hero tales and panegyric verse. MacInnes suggests here that Clan Donald's influence over cultural life in the area of Skye and the Western Isles may have influenced the continuity of the waulking song tradition there when it had fallen into abeyance in other places. His discussion of the term *luinneag* claims that it might specifically refer to women's verse as a name for light, short song – a ditty. His summary of the semantic range of the term *iorram* is equally clear and lucid.

In chapter 14, Peter Cooke takes up the traveller theme again in a discussion of traveller music, describing this minority group as an underclass that faced much prejudice from the settled community. This is a fascinating essay dealing with many musical questions, one of the most interesting being the 'rhapsodic' style of Martha Johnstone (Peasie), thought to be the last exponent of this kind of singing style, 'improvising on a variable melody to a memorized or variable text' (221). Such a style was also known in Ireland, among singers such as Séamas Ó hIghne from Gleann Cholm Cille and others. Certainly, it is arguable that this style was linked to oral transmission, and with the greater access to literacy and the greater fixity that attends it, such a style might be expected to decline. Other factors for change are mentioned; the promotion of travellers as exponents of traditional story and song by

² See Ó Madagáin, Breandán, 'Functions of Irish Folksong in the Nineteenth Century' *Béaloideas* 53 (1985) and Ó Laoire, Lillis *On a Rock in the Middle of the Ocean: Songs and Singers in Tory Island*. Cló Iar-Chonnachta: Indreabhán, 2007, for Irish examples and discussion.

³ Delargy, James H. 'The Gaelic Story-Teller with some notes on Gaelic Folk-Tales,' *Proceedings of the British Academy* 31, 1945: 1-47.

⁴ Ní Fhloinn, Bairbre, 'Generations of Traveller Talent.' *The Irish Times*. 9 December 2006. See Ó Duilearga, Séamus, 'Paddy Sherlock's Stories' *Béaloideas* 30: 1-76.

⁵ Foley, John Miles. *How To Read an Oral Poem..* Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois Press 2002: 10.

those who were recording their repertoires undoubtedly accelerated change. Cooke gives the last pessimistic word to Ewan MacColl and Peggy Seeger, who believed that traveller culture had been completely undermined by such change and the coming of mass media. It is difficult to assess whether Cooke agrees fully with these statements or not.

The three chapters on Pipes, Fiddle and Harp (15, 16 and 17) give historical overviews of the origins and spread of the instruments in Scotland. Indeed, these essays will be invaluable, not just for Scottish students, but for all students of the folk music of Britain and Ireland. Kinnaird and Sanger's discussion of the *clàrsach* discusses the origins of the Gaelic terminology, stating that *cruit*, the older term for a stringed instrument, was more widespread in Ireland, whereas Scotland used the term *clàrsach* exclusively (275). *Cruit* was indeed used in Ireland, but both *clàrsach* and *clàirseach* were also widely used, perhaps more in the north than in the south. The availability of more linguistic resources suggests that the geographical distribution of these terms is due for re-examination.⁶

The section is instructive for an Irish reader with an interest in music and song. One is struck both by the similarities and differences among the early collectors of the two areas for example, their assumptions and hopes, the material they gathered and the problems of interpreting that material nowadays. In Ireland, Edward Bunting was the first important field collector of music and song. Although he knew no Gaelic, he hired a scholar, Patrick Lynch, to write down the words. Bunting's melodies are often difficult to interpret for the same reasons as those given for the Scottish material. As Morag MacLeod states in chapter 26, pointing out the difference between the brothers Patrick and Joseph MacDonald, among the most important early collectors: 'Patrick MacDonald's *Collection* contained melodies with Gaelic titles attached. His brother Joseph had made a strong attempt to depict the melodies of poems with irregular stress just as he had heard them, keeping to the rhythms used by the singers...Patrick admits that he put them into equal bars...this makes it extremely difficult to be certain of the basic tune' (440). Presumptions also abounded that, because singers were illiterate, their performances were inaccurate, revealing the eternal tension between the two modes, one which continues to the present, although nowadays, the opposite is invariably held to be the case: that the challenges in acquiring material originally orally transmitted from a written text lead to various kinds of disjuncture. Happily for Scotland, such difficulties were overcome by the likes of the great Frances Tolmie (1840-1926), who spoke and wrote Gaelic, was musically literate and under no illusion about the singers' abilities to reproduce material accurately. Given the restrictions of the time, her collection still provides an exemplary model, comparable to collections made by A.M. Freeman and Mrs. Eileen Costello in Ireland around the same period⁷ and followed by the monumental achievements of J.L. Campbell and Francis Collinson, who benefited from the advantages of sound-recording technology. The similarity between the early twentieth century Scottish and Irish collections is traceable to the Folksong movement, which did much to enhance an understanding of vernacular singing forms and styles, and which deeply influenced perceptions of folk song in Britain and Ireland down to the present. Later, of course,

⁶ *Corpas na Gaeilge 1600-1882* (The Irish Language Corpus). Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 2004.

⁷ Costello, Eileen, *Amhráin Mhuighe Seola*. Dublin: Talbot Press 1923; Freeman, A.M. 'Irish Songs from Ballyvourney'. *Journal of the Folk-Song Society* 6/23-25: vii-xxviii, 1920-22: 95-342. .

the Irish Folklore Commission was instrumental in stimulating further interest in folklore collection, especially in the Western Isles, where storytelling and poetry composition had remained living art-forms well into the 1950s. Calum Maclean, a prodigious worker, was hired in the 1940s to collect for the Irish institution, before eventually leaving to take up employment in the newly established School of Scottish Studies in 1951 (18-19).

Josephine Miller argues that the study of learning and teaching of music is important for understanding the music itself in chapter 18. She points out the move from informal learning contexts to informal classroom setting over the second half of the twentieth century. Difficulties with terms such as 'community', 'place' and 'folk' are pointed out as their meaning shifts and as they are adapted, interpreted through academic and commercial discourse. Miller also gives a short summary of the very successful model for transmitting music and song of the Gaelic *Fèisean* movement, with thirty-six of these festivals in 2004-5 instructing almost 5000 participants. Miller calls for more critical study of methods of teaching and learning used at these festivals. Also in this chapter is a discussion of the more formal context of learning music within the education system. The anomaly that most formal music education teaches the Western Classical canon whereas much greater numbers of students learn traditional music in the informal sector is pointed out, but Miller warns against the trend of placing all traditional music education under the authority of formal structures (300). In fact, she notes the need for all sectors to 'work together...to provide the best experience for those who want to learn' (300).

Section three, chapters 28 to 32, includes areas that did not fit easily into other sections, encompassing essays on classical music and Scottish identity, the folklore of children (especially games), dance, theatre and folk drama.

One senses from some of the papers an abiding sense of frustration that, because Scotland inheres largely in the imagination, its people often refuse to take their own popular cultural achievements seriously. Furthermore, it seems that the pride taken in popular and oral traditions may be a reaction to external domination and feelings of exclusion. If this is the case, it has served Scotland well, and its traditions seem set to continue robustly in the era of devolution. Indeed, one wonders how developments emerging from the new dispensation will affect Scotland's oral and popular cultures from now on.

On the whole, this monumental collection of essays provides a good introduction to Scottish folk culture, striking an even balance between Highland and Lowland cultures and frequently identifying areas of commonality between them. For academics and for lovers of Scotland's heritage of narrative, song, music and dance, it will become an indispensable resource, containing a rich trove of information, thought-provoking analysis and valuable up to date bibliographies for those wishing to conduct further investigation.

LILLIS Ó LAOIRE

The Gaelic Otherworld. John Gregorson Campbell's Superstitions of the Highlands and Islands of Scotland and Witchcraft and Second Sight in the Highlands and Islands. Ed. Ronald Black. Birlinn, 2005. ISBN: 1841582077 (pbk.). xciii, 753 pp.: ill., maps.

The Gaelic Otherworld presents two of Campbell's best-known works, annotated with extensive commentary by the editor. The volume is prefaced by a substantial introductory essay. The publication of this volume is a major event in Gaelic letters; Campbell's work has long deserved to be exhumed, made more accessible and placed in a modern context. At the same time, anything appearing in print by Ronald Black, one of the most distinguished, versatile and widely-respected Gaelic scholars, is indispensable reading for those with an interest in the field.

This is a substantial piece of work, extending to well over 700 pages. Black's 82 page introduction provides not only the background necessary for an appreciation of the source material, but is itself a wide-ranging piece of academic writing which makes its own highly valuable contribution to the field. Black makes only minor changes to the structure of both books. His main aim lies in restoring the Gaelic content of these two volumes, prioritising the language over English. We learn that it was not Campbell's fault that the Gaelic originals were left out of the quoted texts, rather that this was the decision of his publisher. Black's inclusion of extensive passages in Gaelic brings, as we might expect, new vitality, richness and insight to the material. Black is very interested in how Campbell himself spoke and used Gaelic, and this aspect receives very close scrutiny and is highly revealing. Black develops the themes of Campbell's orthography and dialect in substantial – one might say loving – detail. His aim is to preserve as much as possible of the language that Campbell used, whilst repairing inconsistencies. Black is splendidly opinionated as regards certain aspects of modern Gaelic and clearly delights in comparing these with the language of Campbell's time, taking swipes here and there at what he regards as today's careless usages and awkward neologisms.

Herein lies something of the unique and memorable impact of Black's writing; his reputation leaves us in no doubt that he knows what he is talking about, but he chooses to communicate his insights not through charmless and laboured academese but rather with a certain archness and lack of pretension which is refreshing, stimulating and a delight to read.

Another of Black's chief aims is to correct the numerous misprints in the original, and Black devotes considerable space to detailing these, whether in Gaelic or English. Campbell's own handwriting was to blame in many cases, including one rather alarming confusion of 'wine' for 'urine'.

Having dealt with the language, Black moves on to offer his own commentary on the material contained in Campbell's texts. His contextualising of fairy belief is masterful, and he makes a convincing case that Robert Kirk was the principal author of *A Collection of Highland Rites and Customs*, itself something of a breakthrough in understanding the dynamics of the authorship of these and other early folklore studies. In his discussion of Campbell's source material in the Introduction, here again we find not the usual endlessly-qualified and hedged-about 'it could be argued' kind of academic writing, but rather a robust, racy, free-ranging and at times blatantly provocative analysis of the narratives. The section dealing with changelings is a case in point; at times one may not be completely convinced of the perspective offered, but it is impossible not to be swept along by the sheer exuberance and verve of the writing. Black is often cheerfully controversial and thinks nothing of interrupting the flow of his narrative with such interjections as 'Water-horse my foot. This was a real man' (xliv). He can also startle through his use of powerful imagery, as evidenced in his discussion of female fairy narratives, where he notes that, 'In a society which portrayed itself in words and music instead of oils, they represent women's paintings of themselves in their pain' (lv).

The remainder of the book is devoted to Campbell's restored texts, the editor's commentaries and a biography. The critical analysis by Black is truly impressive and on a scale which dwarfs that typically encountered in volumes of this kind. In over 200-plus densely-packed pages he offers insight, illumination and guidance on a huge variety of topics; etymology, geography, flora and fauna, architecture – all in extraordinary detail. If an alternate version of a tale is known, Black will take the time to quote at length. Rarely is an allusion, motif, place-name or genealogy left unexplored; obscure manuscripts are mined, yellowing letters located and dusted off. The book concludes with Black's biography of Campbell, another highly useful, substantial and much-needed contribution to the field. Again, a combination of Black's wide-ranging approach, prose style and extensive quotation from hard-won sources, allows the reader the opportunity to become steeped in the material, to become immersed in the intellectual world Campbell inhabited. We encounter letters, verses, close textual analysis of three different versions of a manuscript excerpt. So it is with Black's writing; the reader is led unexpectedly here and there, vistas opened up. Above all, the depth of knowledge Black displays ensures that the reader will have cause to reflect on the pioneering importance of Campbell's work, its utility in the modern day, and by extension the nature of the culture's distinctiveness.

The Gaelic Otherworld is a remarkable achievement. Reading Campbell's material alongside Black's extensive commentary offers an endlessly fascinating journey of re-engagement with the belief system and mentalities of the time. In creating this scholarly experience, Black does justice to the original author's intentions, making accessible and revivifying that which was shrouded in layers of dusty Victoriana. There is an enormous amount of material here, and in savouring its substantial bulk, those of us with a specific interest in the field of supernatural belief owe Ronald Black a debt of gratitude. However, anyone with a love of the language or culture will find endless opportunities to deepen and enrich their understanding and appreciation. This book is far more than an authoritative re-presentation of old folklore volumes; it is a masterful, thought-provoking meditation on the culture itself. Of immense value to scholars and general readers alike, *The Gaelic Otherworld* is easily the most comprehensive, detailed and inspired analysis of Gaelic folklore published in modern times.

NEILL MARTIN

Parallels Between Celtic and Slavic: Proceedings of the First International Colloquium of 'Societas Celto-Slavica', Eds. trs. Séamus Mac Mathúna and Maxim Fomin. Held at the University of Ulster, Coleraine, 19-21 June 2005. (*Studia Celto-Slavica* 1.) Coleraine: The Stationery Office, 2006. ISBN 0-33-708836-5. xiv + 334 pp. GBP 30 USD 60 EUR 50.

Rarely does a book on Celtic Studies stir the imagination as much as this one. It implies Celts and Slavs share more than one might think. It has eighteen chapters, as follows: Séamus Mac Mathúna learnedly describes Russian Celticists past and present; Piotr Stalmaszczyk does the same for their modern Polish confrères. Both give ample bibliographies for their themes. The late Viktor Kalygin discusses K. H. Schmidt's hypothesis on the eastern origin of the Celts. Respect for his erudition is jolted by the remark (69) that the Pennine Hills have a name 'from the Celtic word for

head, *penno-'. This is misleading. Kalygin never knew that the form Pennine is a recent one, due to the English literary forger Charles Bertram (1723-65). See *The Cambridge Dictionary of English Place-Names*. Ed. V. E. Watts. Cambridge (2004): 467.

Alexander Falileyev, in a note on the Ukrainian contribution to Holder's *Alt-celtische Sprachschatz*, stresses the evidence for Celtic settlement in the Ukraine (when there is very little for Russia). Václav Blažek sets out equivalents in Slavic mythology to the Irish divine names Dagdae and Macha. He also discusses Pwyll (whose name means 'sense') in the Four Branches of the Mabinogi and his namesakes in Czech tradition. Although noting that Pwyll is chosen by his bride, Rhiannon, Blažek is silent on Pwyll's curious passivity and *lack of sense*. (For an explanation of that strange courtship and Pwyll's stranger ineptness, see this reviewer's *Medieval Welsh Literature*: 75.)

Folke Josephson compares prefixes of Old Irish and Slavic verbs; Anna Bondaruk outlines typology of control in Irish and Polish; Elena Parina discusses direct object double-marking or pronominal reprise in Celtic and South Slavic; Viktor Bayda explores the ways Irish and Russian show possession. In a short but striking paper, Anna Muradova is illuminating on a Breton vocabulary in Catherine the Great's proposed 'dictionary of all the languages of the world'. This project was directed by the German scholar Peter Simon Pallas (1741-1811), explorer of Siberia and elsewhere in the Russian Empire; an investigator of heroic mould. The paper perhaps implies there was more interest in Breton at St Petersburg than in Brittany. Nevertheless, the Empress's enlightened patronage of linguistics helped raise the status of Breton in the 1960s, when scholars in Brittany drew attention to it. Such are the long-term blessings of disinterested research.

John Carey's 'Russia, Cradle of the Gael' looks at supposed Irish and Scottish origins in Scythia. Tatyana Mikhailova compares names in Russian and Irish incantations. Dean Miller contrasts Cú Chulainn with Ilya of Murom, antagonist of Prince Vladimir, ruler of Kiev. Grigory Bondarenko's "'Knowledge in the Clouds" in Old Irish and Old Russian', finding parallels in prophetic dialogues associated with Bran and the twelfth-century *Lay of Igor's Campaign*, refers to the 'shamanic flight' of their authors. Nina Chekhonadskaya writes on disruption of feasts in the saga of Mac Dátho's Pig and Russian epic. Maxim Fomin furthers discussion on early Ireland and India. After noting Kim McCone's revisionist challenges to the work of Myles Dillon and D. A. Binchy, Fomin speaks of how society in each land accepted religious change. He considers this, rather than the survival in both of Indo-European archaisms in kingship and government, to be the appropriate subject for researchers. Indian rulers had to take on board the ethics of Buddhism: Irish kings had to rethink their role as regards Christianity. Fomin thinks that, by seeing matters in this context, common political desiderata such as 'abundance' and 'moral uprightness' will make more sense.

Frank Sewell writes on recent poetry in Ulster and Russia. Hildegard Tristram's concluding remarks 'What's in Celto-Slavonica?' stress the bulk of material on Celtic Studies from Slavic lands, little of it known in the West. She goes on to define lines of research under the headings of contrastive studies, aspects of contact, and common inheritance. The volume ends with an obituary of V. P. Kalygin (1950-2004) and a list of publications by that brave philological pioneer.

There is much to admire in this truly ground-breaking volume. Worthy of praise is the emphasis on traditional linguistic science, something now (one feels) out of favour in British universities, but evidently flourishing in Ireland and the Slavic

countries. Both are heirs to the great philologists of nineteenth-century Europe. It is thus perhaps no surprise that visitors from Moscow or Lublin found their hosts in Coleraine speaking the same methodological language. This may be because Ireland and Russia are old-fashioned places, where change comes late; or because philological study and linguistic nationalism have long been friends. A future International Colloquium of Societas Celto-Slavica may find the latter a fertile subject. It would bring together vast swathes of modern European history, in which literary romanticism, having sown a crop of romantic legends, reaped a harvest of intransigent nationalism. In this tremendous movement the poets were aided by professors of philology, with their grammar-books and glossaries. The subject is a promising one for Celts and Slavs alike.

After praise, criticism. Some will be pained at the book's general implication that Celtic = Irish. Celts in (say) Scotland and Wales may feel aggrieved that it says so little on their countries. Some contributors to it apologize for not referring more to work by Czechs, Slovaks, Slovenes, Croats, Serbs or Bulgarians. (Hungarians and Romanians, being non-Slavs, are just ignored.) Yet one finds nothing on those lines as regards Scotland, Wales or Cornwall. But then Pan-Slavism is strong: Pan-Celticism is weak. This also merits analysis.

Parallels Between Celtic and Slavic is hence far from being a quixotic or eccentric venture. It touches upon basic questions of language, culture, and historical identity. Future volumes in the series could therefore have very interesting things indeed to say on Celts and Slavs, peoples who from each part of their continent have been crucial in shaping its destiny.

ANDREW BREEZE

Bondagers. Ian McDougall. Flashbacks No.10. East Linton: Tuckwell Press in association with the European Ethnological Research Centre and the Scottish Working People's History Trust, 2000. ISBN 1862321221. xvi, 240 p., [12] p. of plates : ill., ports.

This is a collection of oral recollections of interviews conducted on behalf of the Scottish Working People's History Trust with eight women involved as agricultural workers in the Borders and Midlothian between the end of WWI and the early 1960s. These memories provide an insight into aspects of childhood, schooldays, working families and the women's personal fulfilments and hopes. It is a fascinating account of the lives of women who worked on the land for long hours and in all weathers and is also a retrospective account of other family members.

The term 'bondager', as Ian McDougall indicates in the introduction, applies to full-time women farm outworkers or field workers in the south-east of Scotland. Most of these women came from families connected with the land. Some of their mothers had been bondagers in their youth, and many of their fathers and brothers had worked as ploughmen (or 'hinds' as they were known). The women and young girls were bonded or hired by farmers for a term of engagement along with fathers and brothers for a year at a time. If the engagement ended or was not mutually renewed, then the bondager might have to seek employment at a hiring fair. One of the interviewees, Jean Leid, remembers her experience of the hiring fairs at Earlston:

Earlston hirin' wis always the last Monday in February ...jist outside the Corn Exchange. Sawdust on the flair: the auld fermers - spit, spit. Oh, there was a lot o' womenfolk there, bondagers...And then the fermers they yaised tae take them tae the pub and gie them five shillin' and that was their erles. Oh, ah aye ca'ed them 'erles'. And that was the bond.

'Erles' were an advance on the wages of the bondagers. As part of their wage it was normal for the women to be paid in kind with a `ton of tatties'. Wages paid to the women in the early 1920s varied between 14s and 22s per week. When Edith Hope became a bondager in 1929, she earned £4 a week. `My fither had bargained fort or ah widnae ha' gotten't . Oh there were some o' the bondagers no' gettin' that. But ah got £4 a week'. As Iain McDougall indicates, the passing of the Agricultural Wages (Regulations)(Scotland) Act in 1937 led to the disappearance of the hiring fairs and of the long (yearly) engagements.

It is obvious from some of the interviews that a few of the women had yearnings to become nurses during the First World War rather than work on the land. Regretfully they never had the opportunity, as the pattern of their lives was determined by the necessity to remain close to home at this time and become financially supportive to their immediate families. As Margaret Moffat says, `but, ee see, well, in thae days ee had tae work because ee had tae help the family oot. Ah'd be fourteen when ah left Eckford School'. She in fact went into domestic service, working for the local minister's wife. At the age of seventeen, she became a bondager working alongside her brothers. As she recalls, she had no say in it:

Ah wis never asked when Dan and George were hired at Bankheid. They wanted somebody, ee see, jist if they had a wumman tae work on the farm. Oh, ah wisnae consulted.

The work she did on the farm involved harvesting, haymaking and the singling and shawing of turnips.

Unlike the women of the Land Army in the Second World War who were supplied with their uniform, bondagers had to buy or make their own working clothes, which consisted of a striped druggit skirt, an apron and a blouse, plus a pair of tackety boots. A headscarf was worn round the neck or head and a straw hat protected the head. The hat was bought. As Margaret Moffat remembers, `Ee didnae make the hats eersel. They wis 1 s.6d. when ee bought them. That wis quite a lot o' money in thae days.'

Recollections such as these convey also details of the conditions of labour expected of these women. Some girls started work straight from school, with no idea how hard the work would be. Margaret Paxton remembers her first experience of singling turnips:

Jim Turner wis the steward and sent me tae single maself. The band wis further back in the field. And ah'd never singled before. And he showed me how tae single. So it was awfy...ee ken, when ah'd been a long time singlin' ah could hardly take my hands off the how (hoe)!

She also recalls an amusing account from her experience at Yetholm Mains:

Oo started at six and we got oor breakfast in the fields at half past seven. We didnae come back tae the steading for it. Ah took my piece wi' me - two

slices o' bread - and a wee tin tea bottle wi' tea. Well, ah've seen us havin' cheese. ... And there was one day ah thought ah wid take a change and put potted meat on it... And here ma tea bottle had been too hot, ee see, and it had been agin the bread. And it melted the potted meat! So it wis a kind o' gravy ahl got! So ah didnae dae that again.

Many of the women enjoyed the relative freedom of being out in the fields and not cooped up working indoors. During harvest time there were opportunities to socialise at the local dances. It was often there that they met their future partners. Bondagers stopped working once they got married - 'that was usual'. While some were married young, others like Jean Leid worked for thirty-eight years on different farms before leaving to get married at the age of fifty-two. She enjoyed her life in the outdoors - 'ah never wanted tae dae nithing else'. However not all of the women interviewed were as contented and worked for only a few years as bondagers. Agnes Blackie, for example, preferred her work in domestic service, which she did for forty-eight years. 'I didn't really enjoy farm work at all. Well, I think - shawin' turnips in these cold, cold bitter mornings. No. I jist never was happy working on the farm'.

The book is divided into eight chapters in which Ian McDougall presents the lives of each woman as a flowing narrative of direct speech. Speaking directly in their own words which reflect the hard graft of their lives, these women recount their stories in a forthright manner and in straightforward terms. Some readers might find the dialect a little hard to comprehend at first, but as they become immersed, will find themselves responding to the richness and diversity of the Scots language as it is spoken. They include personal thoughts on their work, their employers and fellow workers.

A useful glossary is included as an aid for those who might find some of the meanings of words and expressions perplexing. Altogether this is an enthralling book, well illustrated with photographs from the Scottish Life Archive, as well as photographs from private collections. It is an excellent addition to the ever growing 'Flashback' series of oral history and personal reminiscence under the general editorship of Alexander Fenton.

JANE GEORGE

A West Wind to East Bay: A Short History and A Genealogical Tracing of the Pioneer Families Of the East Bay Areas of Cape Breton. A.J. MacMillan. Music Hill Publications, P.O. Box 1612, Sydney, Nova Scotia, Canada, B1P 6R8, 2001. Printed by The Casket Printing & Publishing Co., Antigonish, NS. Hard-cover, 652 pages, with 22 additional unpaginated pp. of 86 black & white photographs; 3 maps; 6 appendices and bibliography. \$50.00 Cdn.

There is no intimate knowing of Gaelic Cape Breton without knowledge of family history and Fr. Allan MacMillan's *A West Wind to East Bay* is his second remarkable work on the subject. The first dealt with Boisdale (*To the Hill of Boisdale*, 1986, 1987, 2001); this one, along the same lines, deals with the Gaelic-speaking Scots who settled in the East Bay area. Both works fall into a Nova Scotian writing, and later also publishing, category which goes back for about a century and which

includes, where Scotch Highlanders are concerned, the works of *Sagart Arasaig* (Fr A. MacGillivray), John L. MacDougall, A.A. MacKenzie, A.D. MacDonald, Stephen R. MacNeil, John Colin Big John (MacDonald), and many others. Like all of them, MacMillan is a bilingual Gaelic speaker (who knows other languages), one of a valued but fast-disappearing group in Cape Breton.

His is one of the last voices of a rural folk whose language and consciousness once were commonplace from Cape Breton to New Caledonian (BC). This book deals with families under 28 headings, and as all genealogies must, strays to all sorts of corners. The pioneers he describes, and many of their descendants, lived, and live still (some of them), within a clearly defined area which had East Bay on the Bras d'Or lake as its parish focal point.

In its own quietly first-person way, *A West Wind to East Bay* is primary material of an invaluable sort. As a whole, it adds to the understanding of the wider Gaelic world of the ordinary man and woman, the folk who, in their thousands, had to vacate their beloved ancestral homes. A prominent component running naturally through the work is the recurrent movement of Scottish Gaels to Prince Edward Island first and thence to the East Bay area of Cape Breton, often to the forest backlands. From the 1880s, the imprint of the travelling Gael is repeatedly traced to the north-east of the United States.

Perhaps an equivalent in the literature of Gaelic Scotland is found in the works of people like *Iain Òg Ìle* (John Francis Campbell of Islay), John Lorne Campbell and Calum Maclean who sought out and recorded cultural gems, often from shy, retiring people whose gifts had for decades been overlooked if not derogated as useless fancy, even lies.

But MacMillan's (and the others') work is different, simpler one might think, in a way – 'What could be in a collection of genealogies?' some might ask. Yet, when carefully assessed, it shows its own richness and importance. Unless you read books like this, the records that remain in Scotland of the ordinary folk in Morar, Moidart, Arisaig, South Uist and Barra and other places leave countless unimaginable gaps. The New World haunts the Old and in the most mannerly and understated way. The more one reads through the well-presented histories of generations of people, and the reported and personal vignettes sprinkled here and there, the more one imagines the extent of what once must have been, not just in Clanranald lands, but in almost every Highland community.

This book puts people back where they once lived. It measures a step to explaining the shielings on long-deserted hillsides. It plays a part in explaining the ancient field patterns still traceable in the once-farmed valley bottoms at Glenfinnan and Glen Uig. For an emigrant who has seen empty glens, the book is often anguishingly sad. Fr MacMillan's simple words on the clearances run, 'The pattern is familiar: scarcity of land, lack of tenure, people forced to move from place to place, from arable land to the rocks, and finally across the ocean' (424).

And it isn't only ordinary folk. Unselfconsciously the book includes people from all but the highest level of Highland society. It includes, perhaps, information that sometime may add to an as-yet unconstructed passenger list of the Captain John emigration to Prince Edward Island in 1772. It includes independent mention, from an oral source, of the Corbetts, elsewhere known as imported ship builders. Added to an ever-growing list are the names of immigrant pipers and fiddlers, and there is included the plausible suggestion that a MacCrimmon piper was teaching piping long after Lt Donald had moved to London and Black John, his brother, was dead. Then there is a lovely cameo of Ailean 'The Gardiner' Cameron, whose

kindly and civilised bearing was impervious to the harsh world of forest clearing in Highland Cape Breton. The genetic path from Donald MacDonald, a Captain John emigrant on the ship *Alexander*, to Ludwig Saleski's wife's son, the famous Canadian hockey player, Donald Patrick Saleski, is a surprise - one of many of the sort which tracks the fate of Gaels in the New World.

A recent article in *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries* throws scholarly light on the Glenaladale who had the monument in Glenfinnan built. *A West Wind to East Bay* on the other hand adds a Glenfinnan (MacDonald) name to those who found Castle Bay, Cape Breton, via Prince Edward Island. Maybe not a typical comparison of the offerings from either side of the Atlantic, but one that does not disfavour Allan MacMillan's labours. Like many another publication about Highland folk, *A West Wind to East Bay* was self-funded. It is the fruit of work done meticulously over many years, sorted and collated on the kitchen and dining-room tables in the old Empire-style glebe in Judique. It commemorates a once-flourishing oral record. Allan MacMillan is well-known as a thorough collector who balances his reliance on family memory with careful work in the written record.

JOHN GIBSON

The Book of the Cailleach. Stories of the Wise-Woman Healer. Gearóid Ó Cruaíoch. Cork: Cork University Press 2003. xvi + 302.

The theme of the Cailleach, in her various manifestations, appears time and again in the Gaelic traditions of Ireland and Scotland, persisting well into our own time. Ó Cruaíoch's innovative and substantial work, based on decades of research and a number of earlier publications, is a major step forward in understanding the nature and significance of this timeless 'supernatural old female'; at the same time its progressive approach, drawing on a wide range of historical, ethnographical and theoretical sources, suggests some fundamental directions to be pursued by folklore research in the future.

The book is in two main sections, one dealing with 'Tradition and Theory', followed by 'Stories of the Cailleach and the Wise-Woman' comprising 34 recorded narratives from folklore archives. Throughout the first section the theoretical discussion, though contemporary and embracing a wide perspective, is firmly linked to the traditions of Ireland. The author's focus, effectively maintained throughout the work, is on symbols and symbolic processes as part of the cultural consciousness or 'shared universe of cultural discourse' designated by the word *coimcne* in medieval Ireland and identified in that function by Proinseas Mac Cana in 1980. For the purposes of the work, the author has chosen to characterise the larger environment in which such transmissions and changes occur as consisting of the realms of the physical, the social and the symbolic, and this proves to be appropriate for the large and varied range of materials examined.

In identifying a useful theoretical framework for the materials, the author draws on contemporary anthropology. The processes by which such shared knowledge is created, transmitted and transformed over time are related to a recent model developed by the Swedish anthropologist Ulf Hannerz that views them as 'processes of mind' which are externalised through verbal and institutional activity and distributed through society. Care is taken to confine the explorations of mythology,

symbolism and the significance of the stories to Irish (or Gaelic) tradition, leaving broader theoretical musings to the reader. A more limited but primary objective is to explore what the narratives meant to their 'original' audiences in terms of their various environments, and their continuing importance in terms of human experience in our own times.

Certainly in the case of the Cailleach the physical and social realms from written and oral sources were manifest as the recurring themes of landscape and sovereignty. One of the most noteworthy developments over time has been the transformation in the social domain of the role of sovereignty goddess/queen in Ireland with the introduction of Christianity and the rise of a patriarchal structure during the middle ages. The historical process described in this section on the transformation of the otherworld female, 'The Traditional Personification of Cultural Knowledge', is a thought-provoking study on the effects social changes can bring to bear on shared oral culture. The result, as sources clearly indicate, was the differentiation of the earlier shared knowledge into its 'official' and 'vernacular' representations, the latter persisting in strength into early modern times, and in some instances later, as the *bean chaoite* and the *bean feasa*. The occasionally fraught questions surrounding orality and literacy contain important implications for historical processes examined in the work, as well as the sources used. The telling point Ó Cualaoich raises is that 'the social world from which we derive the whole repertoire of Irish traditional oral narrative is ... poised on the edge of literacy' – a caveat likewise appreciated by ethnologists in Scotland – recalling the questions raised by John Miles Foley, Walter Ong and others concerning the relationships between oral and written media.

Most traditional narratives concerning the Cailleach are in the form of *seanchas*, a native category comprising 'oral, local, popular history and tradition' passed on through informal and formal language registers, and many of the narratives provided are in the form we term legends. Intrinsic to a 'creative reading' of these is the role of the feminine and the female voice in the tradition through time, which is explored from the Old European (Neolithic, pre-Indo-European) period of mother-goddesses through their incorporation into the more familiar Celtic pantheon. The author is unequivocal in his observations concerning the systematic devaluing and marginalisation of the feminine in the religious, social and literary domains, yet he maintains that traditional narrative in Ireland has at the same time conserved and promoted a feminine consciousness as a necessary and valued part of creation in its most extended sense. Two well known medieval tales (*Emain Macha*, *Echtra ma nEchach Muigmedóin*) and the famous poem 'The Lament of the Old Woman of Beare' are interpreted by way of illustration. Later reinterpretations of the female, e.g. the *bean sí* and *bean feasa* ('wise woman') are examined, together with literary representations such as the *spéirbhean* of eighteenth century *aisling* poetry and the divine hag *Aoibheall* in Brian Merriman's *Cúirt an Mhéan Oíche*, all bearing witness to the creative continuity of an old theme extending over more than a recorded millennium.

The stories in the second section 'Stories of the Cailleach and the Wise Woman' are more or less evenly divided between the divine personified female (the Cailleach) and the human old woman associated with the supernatural (the *bean feasa*). Stories of the Cailleach are organised under headings reflecting long-term chronological progression; those of the wise woman are grouped according to activities and function. The positions of both in oral tradition are examined within their earlier historical contexts, or within wider folklore and theoretical contexts. In his treatment of the story materials in the second section, the author's premise is 'the idea that

cultural meaning is never either bounded or totally coherent; it is rather a question of the continual construction and recreation of meaning in an ongoing process of symbolic and ritual representation that is continually giving fresh externalization and communication to the perception of meaningfulness that informs our lives...' (71). The historical aspects of the foregoing are evident in the author's insightful discussion of the pan-Gaelic narrative traditions of *Cailleach Bhéarra*, a 'complex figure' featured in accounts 'from the worlds of Celtic mythology, Gaelic medieval literature and modern Irish and Scottish folklore with, in each case, a possible Norse connection.' In fact we may regard her in her literary and oral legacy as embodying a long history of cultural consciousness embracing the primordial formation of the landscape, female divinities of the late Neolithic, international folktale themes dating back to early Indo-European times, female representations of sovereignty, the impact of Christian ideology, and the suppression of the female voice in the middle ages. One of these many memorable accounts is from Scotland (*Cailleach Bheurr*, no. 7), recorded in Mull in the 1950s by the Gaelic fieldworker Calum Maclean. Ó Cruaíoch provides a detailed commentary on a further story, this time recorded on Great Blasket Island by Kenneth Jackson from Peig Sayers, examining the various layers of meaning contained in the text and their handling by the reciter, resulting in an exemplary exercise in interpretation: an open and suggestive 'How to read an Irish legend'. The texts of the legends themselves are deeply engaging, as good stories are, leaving the reader with the sense of enormity frequently conveyed by major mythological narratives. In the 18 legends where she is featured, the *bean feasa* with her healing skills and supernatural associations is firmly situated within the community. The author, continually mindful of the larger body of theory, makes use of the perspectives of figure, function and process in his analyses of the texts, once more, through a comprehensive and detailed knowledge of the Gaelic world, bringing to light a far greater content of shared cultural knowledge than would appear on the surface. In some instances (e.g. no. 24) the readings reveal a symbolic account of the conflict between two religious traditions; or the continuity of underlying themes (female sovereignty); or the emergence around ailments of delicate psychological or social truths. The original Irish and Scottish Gaelic texts are provided in the final section.

Ó Cruaíoch clearly avoids attributing lasting authority to the views expressed in his book, insisting that equally useful insights can and will emerge. Nevertheless the work is remarkable – perhaps uniquely so in Gaelic ethnology – for the degree to which it succeeds in integrating contemporary theory with a rare knowledge of the Irish material, and a gift for interpreting it. I shall return to it often, and would regard it as required reading for anyone with an active interest in Irish folklore.

JOHN SHAW

On a Rock in the Middle of the Ocean: Songs and Singers in Tory Island. Lillis Ó Laoire. Cló Iar-Chonnachta, Indreabhán, 2005. xvi+359pp. 33 photographs, 2 maps, musical transcriptions, compact disc, bibliography, index. ISBN 978-1-905560-15-8. €35.00.

Lillis Ó Laoire's *On a Rock in the Middle of the Ocean*, a revised translation of his original work in Irish, *Ar Chreag i Lár na Farraige* (2002), represents one of the latest and most meaningful contributions to the field of ethnology among Gaelic-speaking peoples in Ireland, Scotland and beyond. It is the first study of its kind to

provide a detailed discussion of Gaelic song tradition at the communal level. Ó Laoire emphasises this in the volume's introduction, noting that, "[...] songs are often taken for granted, or are regarded simply as decontextualized products or artifacts, with the cultural world of which they are a part receiving little or no attention. This book is specifically about this contextualized world, constituting a study of songs as they function in one community and centering upon the importance of song as an integral part of that community's culture" (xi). Therefore, Ó Laoire's research on the *sean nós* singing-tradition in the Irish-speaking community of Tory Island, off the north coast of Donegal, adds a new and refreshing dimension to the extant published corpus that has resulted from similar fieldwork, which in Gaelic circles has traditionally focused on the collection of song repertoires and, if fortunate, has also included the attitudes, perceptions and insights of the singer within his/her community (cf. *Brigh an Òrain: A Story in Every Song*. Lauchie MacLellan. Ed. J. Shaw. Montreal, 2000). In this case, Tory Island provides a rich starting point for the discussion of local aesthetics and the transmission of song.

On a Rock in the Middle of the Ocean's main strengths lie in Ó Laoire's employment of personal fieldwork, conducted in Tory Island over the past three decades. His respectful relationship with community members (referred to by the author as *oidí*, or 'consultants') in Tory, including Éamonn Mac Ruairí, Belle Mhic Ruairí, Teresa McClafferty, Séamas Ó Dúgáin, Gráinne Uí Dhúgáin and John Ó Duibheannaigh, is evident in their appearance as collaborating authors of the work. This emic or naturalist approach to fieldwork is facilitated by the innate tendency for such research in the *Gaeltacht/Gàidhealtachd* of Ireland and Scotland to fall within the realm of *seanchas* (talk, stories, oral history) as practised among community members in order to communicate internal perceptions and other aspects of their shared identity. This most inspiring feature of the work, along with the care and consideration that Ó Laoire has taken in presenting this material with his healthy dose of reflexivity and the use of modern theoretical frameworks from anthropology, provides a model in ethnographic writing. Ó Laoire's engagement with the hermeneutic methodologies of Hans Georg Gadamer and Paul Ricoeur, and his sociolinguistic approach to semiotics, have also served the work well. It is especially in the latter areas that the reviewer has found some of the most significant contributions to ethnographic research - including such methodologies as an ethnography of speaking - concerning the *Gaeltacht/Gàidhealtachd* of Ireland, Scotland and the Scottish Gaelic-speaking emigrant communities of Cape Breton Island, Nova Scotia. Ó Laoire's use of *seanchas*-based narratives, as transcribed from the field-recordings of his consultants is well suited to providing meaningful insights into shared attitudes among Gaels in the verbal expression of their communities' aesthetics. It should be noted that only selected portions of the transcribed narratives used in the text appear in the original Irish in brackets next to their English translations, something that will prompt those with a deeper interest in language use to engage with the earlier Irish language edition.

The examination of words as symbols in the work, explicating their folk semantics in the context of such recorded narratives, is demonstrated by the vocabulary referenced in Chapter Six ("The Emotional Matrix of Song and Dance") when discussing social gatherings where dance and song are performed, both of which can be referred to as *caitheamh aimsire* (a pastime). This includes the balance required between such opposing lexemes as *te/teas* (hot/heat) and *fuar/fuacht* (cold); and *trom* (heavy) and *éadrom* (light); and the emotions of *cumha* (longing, grief, nostalgia), *uaigneas* (fear of supernatural, want for company), and *misneach* (courage), all of

which appear as concepts at play in the organisation of *oíche mhór* (a big night). The role of words is similarly highlighted in the discussion of song transmission in Chapter Three (“Lifting and Learning”) and its associated aesthetics in Chapter Four (“The Mechanics of Aesthetic”), which examine in great detail such terms as *dúil* (desire), *ceart* (right), *ciotach* (wrong), *cuma* (appearance), *brí* (sense, meaning), *cuidiú* (help), as well as terms used for the acquisition of culture, including *tóg* (lift) and *foghlaim* (learning), many of which have Scottish Gaelic cognates, both linguistically and semantically.

Such similarities have been made evident to the reviewer especially in the latter two lexemes, *tóg* and *foghlaim*, and their parallels with the use of the Scottish Gaelic verbs *tog* and *ionnsaich* as encountered by the reviewer during fieldwork among Gaelic-speakers in the Outer Hebrides and Cape Breton Island. Although both terms can be used interchangeably in either Irish or Scottish Gaelic, they often refer to two distinct processes in the transmission of cultural knowledge. Ó Laoire aptly describes this semantic difference, noting, ‘The term *foghlaim* [...] can stress the formality and the conscious awareness involved in the structured education process, what we have called schooling, while *tógáil*, or orally based appropriation, is less detached, less formal, and less gnostically aware’ (74). The ability to draw such correspondences in verbal semantics and aesthetic attitudes between Irish and Scottish Gaeldom as evidenced by Lillis Ó Laoire’s research, reveals fodder for fruitful exchanges to be made between ethnologists conducting fieldwork in these respective traditions at the comparative level.

Another notable aspect of the work is Ó Laoire’s case study of the song “*A Pháidí a Ghrá*” on Tory Island, and its associations with the concepts of *communitas* as defined by Victor Turner. This is examined again in the context of *cumha* (grief, or a lament), as expressed at both the familial and communal level through the song’s portrayal of both unrequited love and the associated lore (*seanchas*) concerning the premature death of its subject, Pádraig Dixon, after emigration to America, revealing the ability for such metaphors to evolve and change over time and space based on the varying attitudes of the song’s performers as well as its audiences. Such differences in contextual interpretation and presentation are also demonstrated by variation in the *údar* (authority, reason) and *brí* (life, force, meaning, story) associated with the song’s context, meaning and function based on both communal, familial and individual performer’s attitudes, and the various relationships between performer, source and audience. Lillis Ó Laoire’s considerate and detailed discussion on the nature of the song-text “*A Pháidí a Ghrá*” and its associated music provides an indispensable methodological guide for the contextual analysis of the function and meaning of verbal art at the local level and beyond.

Ó Laoire’s analysis of song is further facilitated by the volume’s accompanying CD, which contains several excellent examples of the island’s *sean nós* singing and instrumental dance music traditions, along with an excerpt of an interview between IFC fieldworker and *seanchaí* Séamas Ennis (perhaps a plug for *Mise an Fear Ceoil*, which has a chapter on Tory) and Tory’s John Tom Ó Mianáin concerning the community’s musical traditions. The CD also includes multiple versions of certain songs, including “*Seán Bán Mo Ghrá*,” “*Dónall Óg*,” and the aforementioned “*A Pháidí a Ghrá*,” which aid the author in examining what he has termed *mouvance* (acceptable variation) with its associations to Albert Lord’s and Gregory Nagy’s use of ‘multiformity’, and which the reviewer sees as sharing several parallels with Lauri Honko’s use of the term ‘organic variation’ as well as John Miles Foley’s discussions on ‘immanent art’. The CD therefore serves as an effective aural guide through the

various concepts laid out by Ó Laoire, and its tracks are often cited with this purpose within the text.

Lillis Ó Laoire's *On a Rock in the Middle of the Ocean* is an invaluable contribution to the discussion of local aesthetics and the process of transmission in Gaelic circles and beyond, setting the trend for continued valuable contributions to the field. This was particularly evident at the University of Glasgow's Angus Matheson Memorial Lecture given this past December by Ó Laoire with his paper entitled "'Chonaic mé na deora/I saw the tears': Aesthetics in Gaelic Song." In it Ó Laoire laid down the tracks for the examination of Gaelic song-aesthetics at the comparative level, drawing on his own personal fieldwork in Ireland and Scotland as well as the work of others, including John Shaw's work with the Broad Cove, Cape Breton singer, Lauchie Dan N. MacLellan, cited earlier in this review. The ramifications of such *seanchas*-based discourse are capable of extending the realm of song to all aspects of intangible performance culture, and contain some of the most exciting prospects in the field of ethnology and in particular for continued fieldwork in the *Gaeltacht/Gàidhealtachd*.

TIBER F.M. FALZETT

Storytelling Scotland: A Nation in Narrative. Donald Smith. Edinburgh: Polygon, 2001. x + 198pp. ISBN: 0 7486 6310 X. £12.99.

Within the covers of this book, the author reviews the place of storytelling in Scottish culture, tracing it back to its origins as well as placing its role in contemporary Scottish society.

Beginning with a general introduction to the topic, the book then delves into Lowland and Highland/Gaelic traditions before turning its attention from 'geographic' specifics to a more discursive analysis of the types of stories that have been popular since medieval times throughout Scotland. Indeed, the first two chapters examine storytelling from a medieval context, when Scottish chroniclers (or rather historians) were less concerned with verifiable facts than they were with some very powerful folklore, myths and legends that resonate down to our own day. This is partly due to the fact that oral traditions have had a far more powerful hold on people's imaginations than they do now. This is not to say, however, that oral traditions are nowadays irrelevant, but rather they have adapted to their surroundings as Scottish society has inevitably evolved over time. Oral traditions are very much like a 'carrying stream' from which successive generations are either supplied, replenished or, indeed, inspired.

The author is at pains to point this out, especially in two chapters which deal with the development of narrative tales into the nineteenth century, and also a further chapter adding to this detail when dealing with the twentieth century. Nevertheless, there is too much reliance upon literary works influenced by oral narratives in the chapter dealing with the nineteenth century and, unhappily, there is very little attention given to Gaelic narrative traditions during this period. Turning to the twentieth century, the author is best placed to give an overall picture of the art of storytelling from a modern perspective in his role as Director of the Scottish Storytelling Centre at the Netherbow (in Edinburgh). So it is not surprising that this book does not deal primarily with an historical perspective but rather is forward-thinking and looking to the future of Scottish storytelling within an international

context. The book is written in an engaging and clear manner that brings the subject matter of storytelling to as wide a readership as possible.

But for one caveat, this book can be recommended for anyone with even a passing interest in Scottish tradition taken in its widest sense. That caveat, it must be said, is that the author has a firmer grip on Lowland Scots tradition than Highland Gaelic tradition which, in effect, slightly mars the overall picture that has otherwise been so well presented.

Errors are few and hardly worth mentioning, apart from the fact that consistency of spelling surnames would have been appreciated. For instance John MacDonald/Macdonald (142); Fr Allan MacDonal should be McDonald (139); Calum Maclean (not MacLean; 46), whose intense collecting period was rather less than the twenty years stated (140), and so on. It is rather odd that when Gaelic sources are quoted, they appear after the translation rather than before (the usual practice is to have the primary source quoted followed by a translation). Also, there is occasionally too much reliance upon quotation when a point could have been made with a reference to the text, thus allowing for the kind of discursive analysis that is one of this book's great strengths.

Despite these small drawbacks, this book represents one of the best and most accessible texts on the subject, both for an academic as well as a more general readership. Even though this book has subsequently been superseded since its publication by more recent and more in-depth publications with regard to storytelling in Scotland, I very much doubt whether there is a clearer or better general introduction to the topic. A second updated and expanded edition of this volume would be most welcome, as this would allow the author to take into account the most recent scholarship. Such an opportunity would also allow the author to expand upon the subject matter at hand. The author does himself great credit by explaining the cultural context of storytelling with an historical framework in such a way that it is not trivialised, and also by doing a signal service by bringing out the relevance of oral narratives to modern times. For that very reason, this book as it stands can be recommended for any reader who wishes to have an accessible, wide-ranging and digestible introduction from a Scottish perspective to that most human of art forms.

ANDREW WISEMAN

Saoghal Bana-mharaiche. Ed./deas. Seòsamh Watson. Tigh a'Mhaide, Ceann Drochaid, Siorrachd Pheairt: Clann Tuirc 2007. ISBN 9780954973346 (pbk.). xlv + 226: ill., maps.

From the late twentieth century, the Gaelic-speaking fishing communities on the east coast of the Highlands have been the focus of a number of pioneering studies, notably the linguist Nancy Dorian's *Language Death* (1981) and *The Tyranny of Tide* (1985). The editor of the present work, Seòsamh Watson, is well known for his work on Gaelic dialects in Ireland, Scotland, and as far afield as Cape Breton, and his knowledge gained from decades of linguistic fieldwork informs every part of the book. It has been a sensible and productive practice in the history of Gaelic dialect study to include ethnographic texts, often of some length and considerable interest, in the resulting publications, and the editor's own adherence to this tradition has been captured succinctly in the subtitle: 'A folklore account of the life of the fisherfolk in Easter Ross'. He goes on to state, 'But what can and must be done, I believe, is to

rescue and preserve in their own language and words the memories and a portion of the history of the final [Gaelic-speaking] generation, so that other Gaels in Scotland and elsewhere in the world will have access to some account of what life was like in Easter Ross: how they gained their livelihood, what their pastimes were, and so forth' (xxi).

From the opening pages, those experienced in the world of fieldwork in Gaeldom will recognise through Watson's brief anecdotes and asides the excitements, trials and unique rewards that this kind of research provides. As the list of recordings drawn on – 151 in all – reveals, fieldwork was carried out over numerous visits to the area between 1967 and 1983, mostly during the summers. As is often the case for fieldworkers, particularly at the beginning of their careers, conditions were not always comfortable. Watson recalls one memorable episode where the tent sheltering himself, his wife and four sleeping children was lifted over their heads and blown away in a storm beside the Moray Firth. The Introduction provides essential background on the Gaelic communities of Easter Ross (with a useful map giving the Gaelic place-names mentioned in the book) and the state of the language, along with the rationales behind the choice and editing of the texts and detailed notes on the principles used in transcription, which in themselves furnish a valuable introduction to the dialect. The editor remains well in the background, with pride of place given to the reciters and their community traditions, but a quiet presence is manifest throughout in the thoughtful organisation, skilful editing and humanistic orientation. The most striking folklore materials recorded are a surprising number of local narratives, along with proverbs and expressions, taken down from six reciters, and these form the core of the book. There is one surviving locally composed song, *An Linnet Mhòr*, recounting a maritime disaster from the middle of the nineteenth century, that nevertheless was known to many in the area at the time of recording. As the editor and many readers will be aware, the materials in this important collection are not along the lines of the ideal models set by nineteenth century tale collections from Argyll, or twentieth century publications from the Western Isles, Donegal or the Blaskets which contain lengthy versions of international tale types, complex hero-tales or distinctive, highly developed community song repertoires. Here the recorded items are nearly all brief, often anecdotal; taken together they present a vital and accurate portrait from the inside of the mental, social and working life of a recently-eclipsed Gaelic fishing community.

From the descriptions in the Introduction it is evident that making the acquaintance of the main Gaelic source, *Isbeil Anna* (*bean Uilleim MhicAonghuis*, Mrs William MacAngus) from Hilton of Cadboll (*Baile a'Chnuic*) was a major event in Watson's gathering of tradition. Not unlike other exceptional reciters described by collectors in the Highlands, Isbeil Anna came from a strong Gaelic background, and throughout her long life (1889-1980) demonstrated unusual strength of body and character. Early on she took a keen interest in the collecting work and committed herself unreservedly to contributing toward the most complete account possible of her Easter Ross language and folklore tradition, directing the editor towards other living sources, and making her sitting room regularly available for recording sessions. In her own view, the demise of Gaelic in her area could be put down to the widespread poverty she witnessed; for all the worldly disadvantages, her own heavy family responsibilities and the necessity to engage in heavy labour on the outside placed her in an ideal position to provide a verbal chronicle of the realities of her world.

The texts, of which Isbeil Anna contributed the great majority, are diverse, giving the reader access to a wide spectrum of traditions and activities in the fishing

villages. Items are provided with useful and informed end-notes which address any questions a reader might have as to their being an integral part of a wider Gaelic tradition. The texts are arranged according to broad topics, beginning with work and livelihood: the tasks of the women, including the smoking and curing of fish; selling it; and the seasonal work as herring girls away from home in the southern fishing port of Yarmouth. A good number of photos - many of the subjects appearing surprisingly cheerful considering the constant hard work - portray people mentioned in the texts and the various activities they are engaged in. The men's work in the fishing industry follows, with accounts of inshore fishing, preparing bait, etc. Both men and women worked away for long periods, the women often in service in the larger houses, the men at sea. A section on daily village life consists of a series of anecdotes which are at once amusing and revealing. These often refer to religion, however the anti-clerical stories so frequently encountered elsewhere are notably absent here, or at least carefully veiled. Some of the folk beliefs, for example those under the heading of witchcraft such as the virtues of *uisge airgid*, 'silver water', or the misfortune brought on by the evil eye, are paralleled in nearly all Gaelic areas. Health practices include a firsthand account of the use of leeches in cures; divination games were a regular feature surrounding marriages and midwives were constantly called upon. Anecdotes in the section on Gaelic bring to the fore, here as in the rest of Gaeldom, the distinctive bond forged by a common language, especially for those venturing beyond their own home territory. Also typical of the wider culture are the headings of pastimes: drink (often humorous and revealing of the less official attitudes in the villages); and the kind of oral history that is a staple of conversation wherever the language is spoken. In providing the background to these last items, the editor has gone as far as searching out the details of the warships named from both world wars.

Proverbs and expressions proved to be surprisingly plentiful in the retained tradition, and 136 are given here under 26 headings. Many of these will be familiar to folklorists (Scottish Gaelic, Scots and Irish parallels with references are provided under each item); in their pointed brevity, the local variants are a welcome complement to the other collections. Where the meaning of expressions is obscure, Watson has quite sensibly sought and included interpretations from Isbeil Anna.

The book ends with the locally composed lament for the loss of the *Linnet* off the north coast of Hilton in 1843, in which men from the district lost their lives in a futile rescue attempt. The presentation of the song, which consists of 56 verses, amounts to a detailed examination from a number of perspectives of a tradition based on an actual event, and provides an apt parallel to similar work based on 19th century Western Isles traditions. In addition to the local oral accounts recorded among the narratives earlier in the work, contemporary accounts from the newspapers are included and the details of the disaster are reproduced as far as possible from the sources. In his comments on the published version, Watson remarks on the composition style and observes that the composer, while careful to observe contemporary orthographical conventions, also intentionally incorporated features of his own dialect for metrical purposes (195). Such features are of linguistic interest as well, and are described and commented on in detail. In addition to the various kinds of sources and topics listed at the end, there are complete lists of personal names and place-names in the texts, and a list of dialect words that will be a valuable resource for linguists. Like the contents of the work, the production is both elegant and low-key.

Watson's contribution is not confined to Scottish Gaelic ethnology alone; the work provides a model for contemporary ethnographical writing in Gaelic, incorporating technical terms with clear, effective and grounded prose, and will prove

useful to a wide range of users. Being thus represented should be a source of lasting pride to any Gaelic community.

JOHN SHAW

The Hearth in Scotland. Ed. Marion Wood. Scottish Vernacular Buildings Working Group, Regional and Thematic Studies 7, 2001. ISBN 1 901971 02 3. 111pp.

Set up in 1972, the Scottish Vernacular Buildings Working Group was intended 'as a focus for all those interested in the traditional buildings of Scotland' and, thirty years on, members include scholars from a great variety of disciplines as well as people with a general interest in traditional buildings. This latest publication, the seventh in their series of Regional and Thematic Studies, well illustrates this diversity. The result of a one-day conference in January 2000, this book comprises six of the papers presented, and covers a wide range of aspects of the hearth in Scotland.

And indeed there are many aspects to cover. The hearth is discussed on a number of levels, from the social to the symbolic to the purely practical, from the hearth as a form of art to the hearth as portrayed in art, to a particular piece of craftsmanship on the late 18th century Dumfries Freedom Box.

Socially, the hearth was the centre of home-life and Hugh Cheape's paper focuses on the place of the hearth in the home, looking particularly at the western Highlands and islands. He uses a range of sources to look at the evolution and development of certain building-types, whilst looking also at regional variations, and shows that continuity can be found, not so much in the surviving structures, but in surviving social practices and symbolic meanings. The validity of certain written sources is questioned and he stresses also the importance of terminology as a source, showing how modern usage can reflect past ideology and organisation of space within the house.

Alexander Fenton argues that the hearth as a source of heat was secondary to the hearth as an apparatus for food preparation, as he takes us through a whistle-stop tour of the development of the hearth from pre-history to the present-day, using various sources, archaeological and ethnographic, and giving examples not only from Scotland but from Scandinavia and even further afield. Central to the paper is the suggestion that cooking pits and floor-level hearths may have co-existed but performed different cooking functions. He discusses also types of fuel, the position of the hearth within the house, and methods of smoke extraction, all of which he terms as diagnostic features. It seems that developments had a tendency to spread from the south northwards and Fenton illustrates this by detailing what is known of the spread of the 'hingin lum' or 'hanging chimney' in Scotland, during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

This spread of ideas was also apparent in upper-class housing from the seventeenth century onwards. Tastes changed frequently over this period, with Scottish chimneypiece design being greatly influenced by continental styles. However, although it was fashionable for those who could afford it to import chimneypieces from abroad, Ian Gow also describes the important contribution of two of Scotland's, and indeed Britain's, leading architects in the eighteenth century, William Adam and his son Robert, both of whom were very much at the centre of

chimneypiece design (owning the leading marble works in Scotland at Leith) and each of whom is accredited with his own design of chimneypiece.

The acceptance of the hearth as a metaphor for a good home was well established by the nineteenth century and was a common feature in Scottish painting, much of which featured scenes from rural life. John Morrison's description of a number of paintings, including three by David Wilkie, in which this metaphor was successfully used show, interestingly, that the absence of the hearth, or of fire, could be just as symbolic as its presence, and indeed that by the late nineteenth century, so widely recognised was the metaphor that it was possible to imply the presence of a hearth without actually including it in the painting. The popularity of this type of 'rural-life' painting continued throughout the early period of industrialisation, a comment on the perceived superiority of this way of life over life in the, now overpopulated, cities.

The hearth was more than just a rural metaphor, however. It was the heart of the home, and arguably the heart of the community, until within living memory. There were many beliefs and superstitions that surrounded the hearth: it could offer protection from evil, drive away evil, and was often used in divination. Gary J. West takes us through a number of these rituals using some existing examples, many from the School of Scottish Studies Archive. Hallowe'en was the most common time for divination, especially in matters of the heart, and it is clear that a number of such customs and rituals took place at particular times of the year. West also talks in some detail about the importance of keeping the fire lit, especially at Hogmanay, and about the building of the need-fire at Beltane, from which all fires in the community were lit.

The coal-fire was the subject of the impressive vignettes engraved on the back of the Dumfries Freedom Box of 1793. The box contained a document giving the Freedom of the Royal Burgh of Dumfries to Lord Melville, Henry Dundas, who had been instrumental in the Act which brought about the repeal of the Coal Tax. George R. Dalglish's paper talks about Dundas' own background and places this Act, and the fine artwork displayed on the box, against a background of social and economic change, which saw a rising industrial society with an ever increasing need for coal. It was also used domestically, and it is interesting to note that the vignettes portray the coal being used, not in an urban environment, but in the form of an idealized rural cottage.

Although, as a collection of individual papers by authors from a variety of disciplines, this book is lacking in any real cohesion (as one might expect from a publication of conference papers), it is, in this reviewer's opinion, a worthy read for anyone with an interest in the home-life of Scottish society, from pre-history to modern times, the centre of which has always been, as this book admirably shows, the hearth.

CATRIONA MACKIE