

Reviews

***Cànan agus Cultar / Language and Culture: Rannsachadh na Gàidhlig 10.* Wilson McLeod, Anja Gunderloch and Rob Dunbar, eds. Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 2021. Pp. vii + 280. ISBN 978-1-85752-088-0.**

The most recent volume of proceedings from the biennial *Rannsachadh na Gàidhlig* conference, hosted in 2018 at the University of Edinburgh, presents nineteen essays that reveal a lively snapshot of topics interesting today's researchers in Scottish Gaelic studies. A few overarching themes emerge.

Historical topics concerned three writers. Plenary speaker Thomas Owen Clancy ('The Church and the domains of Gaelic in early medieval Scotland') examines how Gaelic expanded between c. 600 and 1100, and how its importance to the early medieval Church in northern Britain and Ireland during this period institutionalised its status and gave it the strength to resist competition from Old Norse colonisers during the Viking Age. Eoin Mac Cárthaigh ('Alasdair mac Colla anns a' Ghaeilge') discusses the cultural reliquiae of Scottish warrior Alasdair mac Colla in Ireland, from his escape to Ulster in 1639 to his participation in the Irish Confederate Wars (1641–53). While his own research drew largely on historical and poetic references to Alasdair, Mac Cárthaigh argues that the persistence of Irish oral traditions referencing the hero and his importance as a cultural icon among today's Irish nationalists would justify further study. An essay by Jamie Kelly ('The SSPCK and Highland elites: Cooperation and criticism, 1709–c. 1745') examines the growth and deterioration of the relationship between the Edinburgh-based Society in Scotland for Propagating Christian Knowledge (SSPCK) and Highland gentry in the first half of the eighteenth century.

Literature was the focus for other contributors. For Skye poet Màiri MacPherson, tangible objects – especially natural objects – carried symbolic meaning: her poems portray gifts of wildflowers and heather as reminders of shared history and common values. Priscilla Scott ('The fabric of the land: Exploring the significance of homespun tweed in the life and work of Màiri Mhòr nan Òran') argues that Màiri's wool-working shows how the texture and colours of the land woven into her textiles similarly reflect nature and memory, 'conveying intrinsic statements of place, cultural values and identity' (103). Anne MacLeod Hill ('Anna NicFhearghais and the growth of allegorical exegesis in Gaelic evangelical song') considers the songs of Anna Nic Fhearghais (1796–1879), a farmer's wife whose spiritual song compositions reflect her understanding and interpretation of teachings from the newly published Gaelic Bible. Contextualising her poems in rural Kintyre, she provides a window not only into the teachings and poetic conventions of the Bible but also into the daily life of her community at a time of religious and social upheaval. Gearóidín Uí Laighléis ('The cultural crossing from Gaelic to Irish') examines how Irish writer and translator Seán Tóibín met the challenges of translating works by Scottish writer Neil Munro for an Irish-speaking readership in the 1920s. Showing how Tóibín censored some themes (e.g., illegitimacy) and altered the treatment of Munro's female characters, she cautions translators to consider not just the linguistic challenges, but also issues of cultural and moral fidelity both to the original work and to the target readership. Finally, Iain Howieson ('Bàrdachd baile – Ath-mheasadh') – in a foretaste of his paper in this volume of *Scottish Studies* – discusses his reasons for exploring the poetic legacy of the nineteenth-century 'village bards', arguing that their poems deserve to be judged, not by modernist criteria, but according to those of the centuries-old tradition of oral composition of which they are a part.

The oral and material culture of Gaelic Scotland inspired several essays. Ronald Black ('The Dewar Project') describes work underway to transcribe and publish the ten volumes of the Dewar MSS, a collection of oral historical narrative tales collected and written down in Gaelic by storyteller and woodsman John Dewar, whom J. F. Campbell described as 'the most matter-of-fact man among my collectors' (75). The manuscripts, as transcribed from digitised copies by volunteers worldwide, will provide an invaluable resource to scholars studying the relationship between oral and written

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accounts of historical persons and events. Micheal Klevenhaus (“‘Cumha Mhic an Tòisich” – bun-stèidh dhan òran “Oh, ono chrio” le Ludwig van Beethoven?”) explores the musical ancestor of ‘Oh, ono chrio’, one of several songs arranged by Beethoven at the behest of Edinburgh publisher George Thomson. The song’s title suggesting Gaelic lamentation (*ochòin* in Gaelic), Klevenhaus speculates that the original may have been ‘Cumha Mhic an Tòisich’, a pibroch song lamenting the death of a Mackintosh chieftain.

Given the gendered assignment of roles and activities typical of traditional Gaelic society, it should not surprise us that vocabulary specific to those roles and activities should be similarly gendered. Ùisdean Cheape (‘Briathrachas beatha nam ban’) describes how An Comunn Gàidhealach’s early efforts to preserve technical terms inspired women such as Katherine White Grant, Mary MacKellar and others to share women’s specialised vocabulary and the daily tasks that required it. By contrast, a male work environment was the topic for Magnus Course and Gillebride MacMillan (‘Fishing, Gaelic and environment in the Outer Hebrides’), who note that fishing employs a significantly higher percentage of Gaelic speakers than any other economic sector in Scotland. They explore the ongoing symbiotic relationship between fishing and the use of Gaelic in the Islands, pointing out that the specialised knowledge embedded for generations in the Gaelic language – knowledge of navigation, of landmarks, of the seasonal habits of fish – forms ‘an essential part of a centuries-old relationship with the sea, one premised on care, custodianship and sustainability’ (231).

The Gaelic language and its speakers were the focus of several essays. In a technical review of literature and summary of his own research, phonetician Pavel Iosad (‘The phonology of Gaelic tonal accent’) revisits a phonetic feature relating to syllabification that has given rise to several earlier theories. Peadar Ó Muirheartaigh (‘Cleachdadh, eachdraidh agus freumhachd an fhacail *nàile* sa Ghàidhlig’) discusses the linguistic origin, history, meaning(s) and poetic use of the Gaelic word *nàile* (‘indeed’, ‘truly’), and shows how scrutiny of even a single word can shed light on the history of the language and its dialects, both Scottish and Irish.

The challenges of learning and using Gaelic were the subject of three papers. Vicky Chondrogianni, Morna Butcher and Maria Garraffa (‘Supporting children with Developmental Language Disorder in Gaelic-medium primary education’) report on a Bòrd na Gàidhlig-funded project aimed at assessing language acquisition in Gaelic-medium primary education. Their research focused on the needs of children with compromised language abilities and their integration within the educational process. Michelle NicLeòid and Marsaili NicLeòid (‘Luchd-ionnsachaidh dualchasach: innleachdan agus iarrtasan gu fileantas’) describe the results of a 2017 study of ten adult heritage learners – people with some familial exposure to Gaelic – and their efforts to gain proficiency in the language. Ingeborg Birnie (‘Language management initiatives and language use in public spaces’) reports on a study examining the efficacy of measures put in place following the *Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005* aimed at reducing the decline in the use of Gaelic. The study focused on ten public environments in Stornoway, half of which had a Gaelic Language Plan (GLP) in place, and attempted to determine the extent to which the existence of a GLP led to greater use of the language by both staff and members of the public.

Given the age of ‘identity politics’ in which we find ourselves, it would be a wonder if the vexed topic of Gaelic identity did not come up. Anthropologist Jean Forward (‘Cultural heritage: archaeology, mythology, and tourism’) surveys three ‘landscapes’ – Tory Island in Donegal, Iona, and St Kilda – in terms of their archaeological and mythological reliquiae, and shows how an agreed understanding of ‘cultural heritage’ has helped these communities, both in the past and at present, sustain their economies through tourism while articulating Gaelic identity in positive terms. Clive James (‘Peter May – an honorary Gael?’) tackled the subject of identity head-on in reviewing the career of English writer Peter May, whose work on the Gaelic television soap-opera *Machair* broke important ground, and whose six best-selling Hebridean novels painted a realistic and detailed picture of contemporary life in the Highlands and Islands. Arguing that May ‘has achieved much [more] to raise a wider awareness of the language and culture than traditional novels or previous minority

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language television in Gaelic could ever hope to do' (148), James asked the audience at this talk whether the author should be afforded the status of 'honorary Gael'. The listeners being evenly divided, the chair voted 'No'.

Identity was also the focus for Silke Stroh ('Literature and beyond: the uses of postcolonial perspectives in Gaelic Studies'), who considered how reading literary and historical texts through the theoretical lens of postcolonialism might enhance our understanding of how the Gaels have been represented as (colonised) 'other' within the 'insider' (coloniser) hegemony. Such representations continue to inform debates about the future of the Gaelic language, Gaelic culture, the Gàidhealtachd as a geographic entity (or not), and Gaelic identity. By employing postcolonial perspectives, and by comparing the Gaels' experiences with those of subaltern populations elsewhere, Stroh suggests we may become better at building confidence, empowering diversity, and reframing the traditional – and harmful – narratives of cultural and linguistic decline.

Finally, Thomas Clancy, writing about the medieval expansion of Gaelic and its successful resistance to colonisation, describes it as 'the vernacular language with the highest status, and with a close association with religion, and hence, in certain contexts, with identity'. Contrasting that situation with today's tendency to view Gaelic as a low status 'language of the colonised, rather than the coloniser', Clancy suggests that 'there would be much to be gained by further training a more sociolinguistic lens on the fortunes of Gaelic in early medieval Scotland' (37).

In addition to the nineteen essays published in this volume, a further fifty-one papers were delivered at the 2018 Rannsachadh na Gàidhlig conference. Unfortunately, the Covid pandemic prevented the 2020 conference from going ahead, and no plans for a subsequent meeting have so far been announced. It is greatly to be hoped that academic colleagues will find the time and resources to re-boot this important series, as there are clearly more than enough scholars with the willingness, energy and commitment to participate.

VIRGINIA BLANKENHORN

Seòl mo Bheatha: Turas eadar Croit is Eilean is Oilthigh. Dòmhnall Eachann Meek. Inverness: CLÁR, 2019. ISBN: 978 1-9161458-0-1 (pbk). Pp. iv+283; map, illus.¹

No Gael of his generation has ploughed as broad a furrow, or harvested as many different crops, as Professor Donald Meek. Crofter and poet, scholar and academic, broadcaster, champion of Gaelic, enthusiastic naval architect, Baptist lay preacher, restorer of ancestral buildings and ancient farm equipment – few of us can claim such a varied and interesting life. This book is his account of it.

Born in 1949, Meek grew up an only child in Caolas, Tìree, after familial duty brought his father Eachann, a Baptist minister in Islay, home to Tìree to look after the croft and its aging occupants. Donald's earliest memories involve these elderly grand-aunts and grand-uncles, and it is those memories – and the rich, idiomatic Gaelic in which they are expressed – that form the beating heart of this book. Combining personal recollections with rigorous research, oral tradition, family genealogy and lively anecdotes, Meek's first twelve chapters provide an extraordinarily detailed ethnographic record of life in Tìree in the twentieth century, told with warmth and humour. While he thoroughly appreciates the difficulties his parents faced in dealing with an old house, a demanding croft and a houseful of elderly people, the overall impression of these chapters is of his own delight: in the land, the sea, the animals, the neighbours, the natural environment, the farm machinery, the dinghies and the ferries, and all that his family and the surrounding community could teach him.

At the same time, Meek's understanding of how things used to be helps him explain the changes affecting island communities in his lifetime. While some of these changes – the banning of the tawse, the coming of the car-ferries – have been benign, too many others have not. The system that

¹ This review was first published in the *Edinburgh University Journal* 49/2 (2019), 145–6. We are grateful to the Editor for allowing its republication here.

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encouraged parents to send their gifted children, aged fourteen, to secondary school in Oban – a plan that Donald managed through guile to delay for two years; the gradual replacement of small shops and vans by supermarkets, and small community churches and the social hubs they provided by centralised congregations; the decline of collaboration among neighbours as farm equipment allowed one person to manage a croft on their own; above all, the constant emigration to the mainland, to Canada and elsewhere – such changes have, over a few decades, undermined islanders' self-confidence and weakened the bonds that for centuries held their communities together. Today, Tiree has become, to many, a rest-haven for successful retirees, or a holiday home for incomers with fancy accents who sail pleasure-boats in the Sound of Gunna and build family compounds where croft houses and cottars' huts once stood. Meek does not hide his bitterness at such developments.

Meek's academic career spanned a period in which the ethos of Britain's universities, the narrowing trajectory of Celtic Studies in Scotland, and the fortunes of Gaelic both as a community language and as a medium of sophisticated discourse were comprehensively transformed. As a scholar, he has written about the historic struggles of nineteenth century Gaeldom, and about the diversity of thought and literature that emerged from those struggles. His studies of the Christian evangelical movement in the Gàidhealtachd have helped us understand this important aspect of religious belief and practice in Scotland. But while Meek's scholarly achievements are widely appreciated, they were hard won. Although scholarly interests are often what propels someone into academic life, today's universities tend to value scholarship not just for its intrinsic worth, but for its financial contribution to their 'bottom line' – an approach that privileges subject areas where research funds are needed, and collaborative work is the norm. Meanwhile individual scholars who need neither research assistants nor expensive resources to conduct their investigations can feel that their work is going unnoticed and disregarded.

For Donald Meek, the dissonance between his expectations of an academic career and what he found when he achieved it became insupportable. Since taking early retirement in 2008, he has devoted himself to projects close to his heart: restoring 'Coll View', the 130-year-old croft house in Tiree where his daughter now lives; naval architecture (in miniature); scholarly interests; painting; creative writing; and family life.

Because Meek's rich observations and trenchant arguments deserve a wider audience, one may hope that a translation may one day appear.² Meanwhile Donald Meek must be congratulated on a superb contribution to our understanding of what it means to be a Gael, and on a life well lived.

VIRGINIA BLANKENHORN

***Auld Lang Syne: A Song and Its Culture.* M. J. Grant. Cambridge: OpenBook Publishers, 2021. ISBN Digital (PDF): 9781800640672. DOI: 10.11647/OBP.0231. Pp. xviii+340.**

In this interesting book – which employs diverse sources of evidence – Morag Grant examines the song in its pre- and post-Burns contexts, and in some of its international guises (including its German reception), bringing her discussion up to the modern day.

Robert Burns based his 'Auld Lang Syne' on an earlier song found in oral tradition, stating that he 'took it down from an old man's singing'. Grant's discussion and Appendix material gives us an insight into the poet at work, and presents five extant versions of the song text: a song sent in a letter to Frances Dunlop in 1788; a version from the famous eighteenth-century song publication, the *Scots Musical Museum* (1796); a text which was written into the Interleaved Museum; a text sent in a letter to George Thompson (1793); and the MS text of what is thought to be a 'working version'.

² Donald Meek subsequently published a volume in English which covers some of the same ground, including the history of 'Coll View' and its owners down to the present day, as well as a vivid description of his boyhood in Tiree; see *A Croft in Caolas* (Falkirk: Leabhraichean Tirisdeach/Tiree Books), 2021.

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The author presents three core melodies associated with the song: the tune in the *Scots Musical Museum* in 1796 which was the one that Burns intended to be used; the tune best-known worldwide that appeared in George Thompson's *Select Collection*; and a more contemporary-sounding melody from an album recorded in 1980–81 by the Tannahill Weavers – a tune which, as one band member pointed out, derives from that of the Scots ballad 'May Colvin' (246). Earlier sources related to the *Scots Musical Museum* tune include an unnamed melody in the Sinkler MS (c. 1710) and a tune in Playford's *Scotch Tunes* (1700). These can be heard amongst the 13 audio examples (for which there are URL links), which form a useful addition to the publication.

Grant argues (99) that Burns's 'Auld Lang Syne' 'first came to attention in Scotland in the early years of the nineteenth century and then, largely due to the influence of theatre, became firmly established throughout Britain and America in the course of the 1820s and 1830s.' She finds that it was the song's use in conjunction with three traditions – singing with hands joined in a circle, at occasions of parting, and at New Year – that have ensured its longevity. The song's use in group contexts and in 'fraternal-type organisations' is also given detailed treatment.

In the final chapter, 'Auld Acquaintance: Auld Lang Syne Comes Home', Grant notes that two interesting things have happened with regard to the melody: 1) Burns's original tune has returned to the repertoire of modern singers (she presents a table of recordings dating from 1980/81-2003, where the majority use Burns's melody), and 2) the Tannahill Weavers' tune has been adopted by others, including Eddi Reader who sang it at the ceremony to open the new Scottish Parliament building at Holyrood in 2004. In the last section of the chapter, Grant examines the question 'What does Auld Lang Syne have to do with Burns?' She concludes (253) that 'there is certainly more than a small dose of irony in the fact that those elements of Burns's song that have slipped into most widespread use, and into the common consciousness, are also the oldest and most original of the textual elements, dating from long before Burns – the opening line "Should auld acquaintance be forgot" and the refrain, with its reiteration of the sentiment "for auld lang syne"'.

This is an important study for scholars of oral transmission, as well as for those interested in the transmission of Scottish culture more generally, and Morag Grant is to be congratulated on the detailed research and analysis which underpin this scholarly yet accessible book.

KATHERINE CAMPBELL

***Iain mac Mhurchaidh: The life and work of John MacRae, Kintail and North Carolina.* Màiri Sìne Chaimbeul, ed. and trans. Glasgow: Scottish Gaelic Texts Society, vol. 26, 2020. ISBN: 978-0-903586-12-5. Pp. 310; maps; illus.**

The opening acknowledgments to Màiri Sìne Chaimbeul's long and eagerly-awaited collection *Iain mac Mhurchaidh: The life and work of John MacRae, Kintail and North Carolina* reveal the editor's fundamental *modh*: *modh nan Gàidheal is modh na sgoilearachd, còmhla*.³ Chaimbeul's manner, mode and graciousness are apparent as she thanks all of those – from local Kintail and Lochalsh tradition-bearers to well-known Gaelic academics here and abroad – whose work, having prepared the ground for her own, allows her to happily correct the impression that 'very little [Gaelic] verse is to be found in Lochalsh and Kintail' (1). But while Chaimbeul generously recognises the fruits of others' labours, her own work in gathering together, editing, translating and introducing all of the poems known to have been composed by Iain mac Mhurchaidh is impressive. This is a pleasurable and inspiring book which deserves to be read and appreciated wherever there is an interest in Gaelic literature in general and diasporic song-poems in particular.

In her introduction, Chaimbeul provides a minutely-sourced, elegantly-calibrated and wide-ranging survey of the poet's life and background, from his origin in Kintail, where his family belonged to the tacksman class, to his life as a planter-settler in the colony of North Carolina on the eve of the

³ 'the manner or manners of the Gaels and the mode of scholarship, together'

American Revolutionary War. She focuses on Mac Mhurchaidh's impressive Kintail *dùthchas*, which included chieftains, constables, churchmen, and compilers of Gaelic manuscripts – the *Fernaig Manuscript* among them. The MacRaes were solidly Episcopal in religion and Royalist (Jacobite) in politics. Iain mac Mhurchaidh 'ic Fhearchair 'ic Alasdair 'ic Fhearchair was not a stereotypical late-eighteenth-century Highland emigrant forced to leave his *dùthaich* by the ineluctable forces of history, but one who came from and enjoyed the benefits of a large and well-established family. Here was a man who not only chose to leave but who encouraged others to leave with him, illustrating the principle of chain-migration that explains how so many Gaels from here (the Gàidealtachd of Scotland) ended up there (British North America).

Despite his privileged background, Chaimbeul compellingly argues that it must surely have been the brutal death of his father which most deeply marked our poet, a boy at the time. Murchadh mac Fhearchair was publicly hanged in the aftermath of Culloden, and Chaimbeul describes the competing traditions and chronologies regarding his death at the hands of the Hanoverian State. Summing up this traumatic chapter in Mac Mhurchaidh's life, Chaimbeul writes that 'in every account of Murchadh's hanging, two things are mentioned: ...he was innocent and...the tree on which he was hanged withered and died' (14).

Notwithstanding this harrowing story, Iain mac Mhurchaidh subsequently maintained a 'privileged and carefree lifestyle, unhampered by...physical labour and with no shortage of food or entertainment' in Kintail prior to emigrating (32). It is a life and a lifestyle one would expect for a man of his class and background: hunting, fishing, drinking, dining, marrying (well) and composing verse initially witty and free-wheeling but subsequently critical and clear-eyed about the changing world around him. This is a world that Chaimbeul, herself a native Lochalsh Gael, is able to bring to vivid life with the help of local tradition-bearers. Duncan 'Stalker' Matheson, for example, relates that 'three of the biggest landlords in Ross-shire' tried to convince Mac Mhurchaidh not to emigrate by offering him 'any farm in Kintail, Lochalsh and Glen Shiel' (37). But Mac Mhurchaidh had seen the wheel turning, how 'the landlord cared for nothing but the money he could raise in rent, [giving] the land to anyone who could pay, regardless of their character' (35). In the months before he emigrated his verse turned pointedly political, as here in Song 24 (224–27):

Ghabhadh iad, an àite an diùnlaidh, Slaodaire liùgach 's e beartach	<i>They would take instead of brave men A craven lout as long as he is rich.</i>
Ghabhadh iad an àit' an t-seòid An t-òr ge b' ann à spòig a' phartain	<i>They would take instead of the hero The gold though it would be taken out of the claw of the crab.</i>

'They' were of course the very Highland gentry and kindred chieftains with whom Mac Mhurchaidh would have had much – and well-lubricated – social intercourse, a fact that distinguishes his finger-pointing from, for example, the criticism levelled at the *maighstir ùr* ('the new master') by the unlettered and unconnected Skye poet Calum Bàn Buchanan, who settled in Prince Edward Island a generation later. Mac Mhurchaidh was 'convinced that only in America would he achieve the quality of life he had enjoyed in his youth' and felt, despite the blandishments of the Gaelic gentry, that he could not stay behind as he had personally encouraged others to sell up and emigrate with him (38). In all the accounts of his emigration two points stand out: his 'reputation as a poet of renown in his own day in Kintail' and the fact that 'he emigrated from choice' (40).

Having departed around 1772 (the actual year is uncertain), Mac Mhurchaidh apparently managed, in a shockingly short period of time, to acquire 'two plantations' along with 'several occupations' and 'considerable personal property' in the British Crown Colony of North Carolina – property that included at least one 'young Negro girl' (49–52). Slaveowning, while 'shocking to modern eyes', would have been unremarkable at the time, as Chaimbeul quotes historian Donald MacDonald's observation that 'a census taken in 1790 proved that most former Highland tacksmen

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owned slaves, some in the hundreds' (51–2).⁴ So, far from being a landless member of the *tuath* (the Gaelic *demos*) à la Calum Bàn Buchanan in pre-1803 Skye, Mac Mhurchaidh came from standing and ease, if not outright wealth, and ended up a North Carolina plantation owner with at least one enslaved person to his name.

Barely three years later, however, Mac Mhurchaidh was caught up in the American War of Independence, where payroll records of 5 February 1776 list him as a lieutenant in the Royal Highland Emigrant Regiment, raised on behalf of King George. It may seem ironic, given his father's fate following Culloden, that the poet now found himself under the command of officers who had fought for the King in that very battle. But the fact was that, in addition to incentivising recruits with promises of rent-free land, the Crown also required new settlers to swear loyalty oaths before land was granted to them. Consequently, many Highlanders willingly answered the call (56). Mac Mhurchaidh's period of active service was, however, very short: the RHER, short of weapons and quite unprepared, was overcome in battle at the end of February, and Iain mac Mhurchaidh was captured and incarcerated in various insalubrious prisons for the next four years – an experience upon which he reflected with bitterness in Song 30 (258–61):

Tha mi sgìth 'n fhògar seo,	<i>I am tired of this banishment</i>
Tha mi sgìth dhen t-stri;	<i>I am tired of the strife;</i>
Seo an tim dhòrainneach;	<i>This is the tormenting time;</i>
Tha mi sgìth 'n fhògar seo.	<i>I am tired of this banishment.</i>
...	...
Tha mi nis air mo dhìteach	<i>Now I am condemned</i>
Ann am prìosan droch bheòshlainteach.	<i>in a disease-ridden prison.</i>

Released at last in early 1780, Mac Mhurchaidh rejoined the Loyalist campaign and was awarded a captaincy by Earl Cornwallis, who tasked him with recruiting more Highlanders to the King's cause. Unfortunately, his years in prison had weakened his health, and the most credible accounts suggest that Mac Mhurchaidh died in late September 1780, whereupon his wife returned to London with their surviving children and petitioned the Crown for compensation of her loss (67–9).

Uncovering the truth concerning Mac Mhurchaidh's short life and untimely death in North America, from his few years as a settler-planter to the turmoil of the American Revolutionary War, was no simple matter. His name was subject to different spellings ('Murchison', 'Mickeson', 'Mulkeson') in surviving records, and various oral traditions were spread concerning his incarceration and death – traditions which Chaimbeul, with typical understatement, suggests may 'owe more to vivid imaginations than to fact' (67). Chaimbeul's extensive and fastidious research in archives and in unpublished works, as well as among tradition-bearers in Scotland and contacts in the American South, has given us a credible, piercing account not just of Iain mac Mhurchaidh's final years, but also of what many Highland emigrants must have experienced during that tumultuous period.

Having dealt so compellingly with the trajectory of Mac Mhurchaidh's life, Chaimbeul turns to untangling the trajectory of his poetry in both Carolina and Kintail, sorting out the poems that can be credibly ascribed to him from those that may have been attributed to him because he was so well-known on both sides of the Atlantic. As she pithily summarizes the challenge to editors and readers, 'Iain mac Mhurchaidh's legacy endures both as a poet and as a remarkable character, and this legacy requires to be understood on its own terms' (71).

Gathering the poems from oral tradition as well as from manuscript sources that include the late eighteenth-century MacNicol MS and the nineteenth-century Dornie MS, Chaimbeul traces their likely transmission through the emigrant communities of the 'New World' – not just the Carolinas, but also the Canadian Gàidhealtachd that began to take shape with the influx of United Empire

⁴ Donald MacDonald, *America's Braemar: Grandfather Mountain and the Revival of Scottish Identity in the US* (Madison, GA: Southern Lion Books, 2007), 379.

Loyalists, many Highlanders among them, after the Revolutionary War. She follows other threads back to Scotland, where the poet's songs – including those he composed in America – were known in Kintail as early as 1793, thanks no doubt to returning emigrants like one-armed John MacRae (Iain Mac Rath, 'Fear na Leth Làimh'), who returned home around 1782 and lived to the ripe age of 93 (80).

The poems that are at the heart of this book Chaimbeul divides into three groups: those composed in Kintail dealing with local subjects (Songs 1–21); those composed in contemplation of emigration, which take on a more political tone (Songs 22–25); and those composed in America, which reflect the poet's experiences there and his longing for home (Songs 26–30). Each is presented clearly and legibly, with facing English translations and end-notes that name sources and provide alternative readings.

Chaimbeul points out that 'there is a critical watershed between the North Carolina songs and the two previous groups' (74). Given the upheaval in the poet's life at this time, it would be remarkable if such a watershed did not exist. Recently, however, Michael Newton has questioned Mac Mhurchaidh's authorship of the American poems, arguing that they could have been authored by others, or developed from poems authored by others, and that their ascription to Mac Mhurchaidh may have come about simply because he was well-known.⁵

Chaimbeul devotes some fifteen pages of her introduction to addressing Newton's arguments (75–90). Responding to his extended commentary on the so-called 'Carolina Lullaby' (*Dèan cadalan sàmhach, a chuilein mo rùin*, Song 26), Chaimbeul makes several telling points (77–86), two of which stand out. First, in response to Newton's contention that *pàiste* denotes a female child in Kintail Gaelic, she gives several examples, including ones from the Kintail area, in which *pàiste* refers to a male child (82–3). Second, where Newton argues that the line *Gum bheil sinne nar n-Innseanaich cinnteach gu leòr* ('We have become Indians sure enough') reflects the Gaels' fellow-feeling with Indigenous people persecuted, as the Gaels themselves had been, by the British Empire, Chaimbeul suggests rather that the poet is using the comparison 'to illustrate the reduced and primitive circumstances in which the author and his family and friends find themselves', and points out that 'apart from some notable exceptions, it seems likely that the vast majority of Highland emigrants would be no more sympathetic to the plight of the Native Americans than the foot soldiers of the Hanoverian Army and later their own chieftains had been to them' (84).

Chaimbeul does, however, acknowledge that Newton's doubts about authorship cannot be entirely discounted (74–5):

Iain mac Mhurchaidh...possesses what might be termed a 'poetic biography' which covers the principal chapters of his life. Whether this arose solely from his own composition, or...from a desire on the part of the relevant communities to furnish their poet with a 'poetic biography' to match his – and especially their own – known circumstances at a time of considerable social upheaval and displacement, is not an issue that can be settled beyond doubt. ... While we can be more confident about his authorship of songs which have a traditional context attached, we need to consider the possibility that at least some of his alleged compositions may be in whole or part 'borrowed' from the responses of other songsters going through similar experiences.

Indeed, an important aspect of oral composition is 'borrowing'. Perhaps 'modeling' would be a better term. Whatever we call it, the practice of basing a new composition on a pre-existing one is well-documented; and by offering the listening ear something recognisable, it makes the new poem easier to remember, thereby facilitating oral transmission. Chaimbeul argues compellingly that 'even

⁵ Michael Newton, *We're Indians Sure Enough* (Auburn, NH: Saorsa Media), 2001; and 'Unsettling Iain mac Mhurchaidh's slumber: The Carolina Lullaby, authorship, and the influence of print media on Gaelic oral tradition'. *Aiste* 4 (2014), 131–54.

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where there is evidence for a song-text predating our poet, it seems plausible to suggest that Iain moulded it and made it his own in ways that are perfectly familiar in traditional Gaelic song-poetry' (87).

This edition of Iain mac Mhurchaidh's poems is the work of a scholar whose ear is finely attuned to the cadences and connotations of her native language, in all its rich and polysemic nuances. Màiri Sìne Chaimbeul is to be congratulated for her sensitive, balanced and painstaking curation of these song-poems, and for contextualising them in a fashion that brings them – and the extraordinarily eventful life of their author – to life for the twenty-first century reader. Well done – *math fhèin*.

IAIN S MACPHERSON

***Oral Literature in the Digital Age: Archiving Orality and Connecting with Communities.* Mark Turin, Claire Wheeler and Eleanor Wilkinson, eds. Cambridge: OpenBook Publishers, 2013. ISBN Digital: 978-1-909254-32-9; DOI 10.111647/OBP.0032. Pp. xxiv+164; illus.**

Digitizing collections of oral lore can provide an important resource for minority and endangered languages, especially for community members engaged in preserving and maintaining languages which may exist primarily in oral form. Oral literature, broadly defined here to include oral histories, ceremonial songs, stories and other lore, can be easier to collect than less marked conversational speech, and encodes both the language and cultural beliefs and norms. In this volume, Turin, Wheeler and Wilkinson draw together chapters from several authors that explore the collection, archiving and uses of oral literature in minority languages around the globe.

Following an introduction, eight chapters are divided into two sections. The first section considers the theoretical and technological issues at stake in archiving and conservation, particularly as they relate to the pragmatics of using newer digital archives and formats on one end of the process (Thomas Widlok) and to addressing the differing needs of multiple stakeholders at the other (David Nathan). In the final chapter in this section, Judith Aston and Paul Matthews explore how digital archives can also bear witness during political upheaval and help communities navigate memory, traditional practice, and their own family histories productively. This chapter offers the most pressing articulation of what is at stake in this kind of collection work.

In the second section of the book, headed 'Engagements and Reflections from the Field', five case studies examine some of the specific challenges faced by fieldworkers. Taken from a closer vantage point to their source material and covering a wide range of field sites and situations, these studies may provide the best resource for students and researchers considering their own fieldwork. Despite the wide net, some common themes emerge. Three chapters focus on migration narratives as the centre of their collection: Daniela Merolla and Felix Ameka, in collaboration with Kofi Dorvlo, use video documentation techniques to explore Ewe migration stories in Ghana; Margaret Field explores connections between oral literature, cultural identity and language revitalisation in the Kumeyaay communities of southern California and Baja California; and Ha Mingzong, Ha Mingzhu, and C. K. Stuart discuss documentation of the oral history of the Mongghul Ha Clan in China. Two articles (Ha, Ha and Stuart as well as Jorge Gómez Rendón, who studies the relationship between orality and literacy among indigenous people in Ecuador) examine how specific histories have shaped language policy, while others discuss how local differences (Merolla *et al.*, Field, and Madan Meena, who describes the challenges of documenting a Rajasthani ballad tradition) or generational ones (Rendón, Ha *et al.*) have affected the development of linguistic ideology.

Because this text seeks to do a lot of work – attempting to build bridges between the technical challenges of digitization and archiving, the pragmatic challenges of accessibility, and the social challenges of collaborative fieldwork – the focus on oral literature and the rationale for that focus get a bit lost along the way. There is much that is helpful here, however, especially in terms of examining closely what the field may hold. What emerges from the text above all is the ongoing need for

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collaborative collection and archiving work, both for the sake of current research and for the benefit of future communities.

WILLOW MULLINS

***The Complete Works of Robert Johnson.* Elaine Moohan and Kenneth Elliot, eds. Glasgow: Musica Scotica Trust, 2019. ISBN 0-9548865-8-5. Pp. xxviii + 283.**

This is the eighth volume in the main series of editions of early Scottish music published by Musica Scotica, a trust founded by the late Kenneth Elliot in 1996 with the goal of opening up this historical art music repertoire to modern readers and listeners. To date, meticulously researched editions have included substantial collections of sacred music from the later medieval and renaissance, chamber music from the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and domestic songs from the nineteenth century, along with individual shorter works, scholarly essays, and conference proceedings. The mission is to facilitate both study and performance.

Robert Johnson – not to be confused with a later English composer of the same name who composed lute songs for Jacobean theatre – was a Scottish priest and composer. According to marginalia in the hand of Thomas Wode, St Andrews minister and compiler of the sixteenth-century Wode Psalter, the Scottish Robert Johnson (*fl.* 1520s to 1540s) was born in Duns in the Scottish Borders, but moved to England, possibly because he held heretical (that is, reforming) ideas. Johnson's work shows, firstly, the musical skillset of a clerical musician originally trained in Renaissance Scotland, and secondly, the transitional journey of this music as Protestantism reshaped both texts (from Latin to English) and liturgy. Although much of Johnson's career was in England, his work was nevertheless known in Scotland after 1560, as the reference to him in the Wode psalter marginalia shows. His career suggests how musicians working in the period immediately prior to the Scottish Reformation were working to balance tradition with innovation.

Kenneth Elliot himself set the highest standards for scholarly editing and source analysis, and when he died in 2011, this left his successors quite a challenge. The editorial fine-polishing for the collection has been undertaken by Elaine Moohan, adding to Elliot's unfinished notes her own careful reappraisal of sources and emerging new research resources. Moohan has also redesigned the critical apparatus, so that in each case, the main copy source is clearly identifiable, along with the rationale for its use compared with other variants. The result is a collection reflects both Elliot's eye for scholarly detail and Moohan's sense of what will make the edition accessible for a variety of potential users.

The introduction is a two-hander, led by a biography by Moohan that says what can be said and what might be speculated about Johnson, followed by a guide to the music drafted by Elliot but completed by Moohan that explains in terms that would be accessible to most general readers how the ordering of material in the collection demonstrates the evolution of Johnson's music in response to contemporary musical influences and liturgical reform. The arrangement of material within the collection is thematic (liturgical, secular, instrumental) and within those headings, as far as possible presented chronologically.

The first section of the collection contains nine Latin liturgical works from the 1520s to a speculative end date of around 1560: the beginning of the reign of Elizabeth I, and the eve of the Scottish Reformation. Earlier pieces show a Scottish composer aware of his contemporaries, like Josquin des Prez, who was able to create new works by using existing traditions, and by inserting 'troped' additions to existing chant. In Johnson's compositions, polyphonic psalm settings in Latin give way to English translations, and his early imitative (polyphonic) style gradually becomes more chordal (homophonic), reflecting church reformers' concerns about textual clarity. Settings of canticles from the 1552 *Book of Common Prayer* demonstrate Johnson responding to the opportunities to compose for the new Morning, Evening, and communion services of the Anglican church.

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What happened to Johnson during the reign of Mary I is not known, but this collection shows that he also composed some secular songs and instrumental settings. The latter – viol consort arrangements – are mostly headed with religious titles, suggesting that these could be played in contexts of domestic piety. Of the songs, perhaps the most remarkable is the satirical ‘Ty the mare tom boy’, which is provided both in a setting for solo voice, and then more fully reconstructed by Elliott as a duet for two voices in variations over a repeating or ‘ground’ bass line. Moohan suggests the anti-Catholic lyrics in this song may be a parody of a 1547 poem by Scottish poet and psalm versifier William Kethe. Adapting this to Johnson’s own times, while ‘Tom’ could still be Thomas Cranmer, for a Scot working in the 1550s the troublesome ‘mare’ might be either Mary Tudor or Mary Queen of Scots (or Marie de Guise, her mother). Any of these might suggest why Johnson kept a low public profile in this period, and explain why, for him, returning to Scotland was not a likely option.

The note on editorial method that prefixes the music makes clear to anyone wishing either to perform or study the material what decisions have been made. Rather than providing variants, ‘all scores are produced from a single source’ (xxiii), and the source survey in each case is laid out in the critical apparatus that follows the music. Initial staves show the original source clefs, key and mensuration, but the scores thereafter use whatever will be easiest for modern singers. This means that the music itself is easy to read for performance, although there is enough information in the critical apparatus at the end of the work for any scholarly reader or conductor to interrogate editorial decisions should they so wish. If a concert programme needs any translations of the Latin texts, Elliott’s translations, and translations from the Edwardian 1552 *Book of Common Prayer*, are available in the appendices.

In a 1997 review of Elliott’s first edition, the complete works of Robert Carver, Peter Philips (founder and director of the Tallis Scholars) suggested that ‘Elliott was creating a library edition, not a performing one’.⁶ Moohan, updating Elliott, has managed to provide both. While the printed book will not sit easily on music stands (I’ve tried), the affordable PDF offprints of individual works supplied by the Scottish Music Centre come with a licence to print multiple copies for ensemble performance.

Buy, read, sing.

JANE PETTEGREE

Dhá Leagan Déag: Léargais Nua ar an Sean-Nós. Philip Fogarty, Tiber Falzett and Lillis Ó Laoire, eds. An Spidéal, Co. na Gaillimhe: Cló Iar-Chonnacht, 2022. Pp. 405. ISBN 978-1-78444-237-8.

In this volume of fifteen essays, twelve deal with the Irish *sean-nós* (‘old style’) singing tradition and are written in Irish. Three articles, however, are relevant here because they deal with the Gaelic song traditions on both sides of the Atlantic. The articles are written in Gaelic.

Cape Breton island, Nova Scotia, is the only region outside of Scotland where Gaelic song has persisted and flourished over a number of generations. The late Seumas Watson (‘Ag éirigh air Orain an Albainn Nuaidh: Suas e!’) provides a survey of Gaelic singing in the island’s rural *Gàidhealtachd* communities. After summarising the background to 19th century settlement and the development of distinctive communities, he describes how the tradition flourished. Earlier songs continued to be transmitted, and new compositions were added to the repertoire as local bards emerged. Watson describes the social contexts in which singing continues to thrive, mentions the efforts of recent field collectors, and enumerates the variety of song collections available, including those available in digital form. Both earlier and recent printed sources are ably dealt with. Of particular interest, however, is the availability of live field interviews with Gaels – conversations that lend life and

⁶ Peter Phillips, “Scotland Rules,” *The Musical Times* 138, no.1853 (1997): 28-30, p.28

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immediacy to the songs discussed, and which provide first-hand accounts from within the tradition that challenge some conventional views, including the notion that Cape Breton song reflected a pervasive sea-divided nostalgia for life in the Old Country. For an area so demonstrably rich in its repertoire of Gaelic songs, it is surprising how narrow a range is available commercially, considering that the older community style of singing is still widely appreciated throughout the island and presently cultivated by a younger generation.

The use of field interviews to reveal more about singing among Cape Breton Gaels is also a central theme in the contribution from Tiber Falzett (“‘Tighinn o’n cridhe’”: Sùil air seinn, seachas agus meatafor am measg an t-sluaigh’). Here, too, the insiders’ perspective is emphasised, as Falzett draws from interviews he conducted for his doctoral research with four of the very few remaining first-language Gaelic speakers in Cape Breton. In seeking to understand more about how traditional Gaels perceive and conceptualise their community song tradition, the writer employs close analysis of his informants’ *seachas* – their conversational descriptions of song and singing. What emerges is the crucial importance of family and community as environments for cultural transmission, and the pervasive effects – above and below the cultural surface – of recent language shift. Unsurprisingly, the accounts provided by these few surviving witnesses express a strong feeling of loss (*call*) and marginalisation within their own people, which Falzett links with modern presentations of the culture in the form of stage performances, competitions and commercialization. He ends by discussing individual words used routinely in his informants’ *seachas* (*shuas* ‘up’, *cridhe* ‘heart’, *blas* ‘taste’) – words often tied to sensory experience that reveal shared underlying cultural perceptions of the quality and value of oral tradition.

For the past century and more, the issues concerning ‘re-created Gaelic song tradition’ in Scotland have received little scrutiny. In a clear and well documented essay, Griogair Labhruidh takes an historical perspective to explore the main motivations for such re-creation and examine the results of the process (‘Traidisean seinn ath-chruthaichte nan Gàidheal Albannach’). From the outset, the writer’s concerns are not confined to aesthetics, but extend to the initiation and results of ‘soft’ cultural change as a political issue. In the late 19th-century context of growing economic development and expanding empire, traditional Gaelic singing styles, branded as ‘primitive’ or ‘barbarous’, were gradually reinterpreted through a romantic filter, at least in public events, that rendered Gaelic song more compatible with the tastes of people outside the tradition itself. Quoting Calum MacPhàrlain (1853–1931), Labhruidh explores how the promotion of choral singing and the introduction of piano accompaniment to Gaelic song led to trivialization of the words, and the presentation of the solo singer as a musical instrument – a clear departure from what MacPhàrlain called ‘the practice of the old singers’ (255). Comparing the music of choral versions with recordings of traditional singers, he describes how song airs on the older pentatonic scale were reworked to suit the tempered scale of European high culture, how published collections of Gaelic songs were primarily intended for use by Gaelic choirs, and how these redefined forms of Gaelic song were reinforced by the introduction of the spectacle of public competitions, where standard printed versions became the canon and the performances were judged, not by Gaels, but by outsiders. Almost exactly a century ago it was observed that such ‘improvements’ had met with considerable success in urban areas but were ‘much less pronounced in the country parts’ (256).

Drawing upon his extensive and direct knowledge of Gaelic tradition, Labhruidh concludes on a political note. In his view, the ‘re-creation’ of Gaelic song, however intended initially, follows a centuries-old colonial pattern. His clear implication is that it should now be questioned. Together with the two other Scottish Gaelic authors in the present collection, he notes the importance of traditional Gaelic song in maintaining ethnic identity, self-esteem and positive internal social cohesion essential for cultural survival and self-determination.

JOHN SHAW

Iain Mac a' Ghobhainn, *Na Sgeulachdan Gàidhlig*. Iain MacDhòmhnaill agus Moray Watson, deas. Glaschu: Comann Litreachas Gàidhlig na h-Alba, 2022. Tdd. 678.

'S e clach-mhìle chudromach ann am foillseachadh rosg Ghàidhlig a th' anns an leabhar tomadach seo. Anns an leabhar tha an luchd-deasachaidh, Iain MacDhòmhnaill agus Moray Watson, a' cruinneachadh airson a' chiad turas na sgeulachdan Gàidhlig gu lèir a sgrìobh aon de na sgrìobhadairean as cudromaiche a dh'obraich anns a' chànan anns an 20mh linn, Iain Mac a' Ghobhainn. Tha 116 sgeulachdan anns an leabhar, a chaidh fhoillseachadh eadar 1953 agus 1999 (bliadhna às dèidh bàs Mhic a' Ghobhainn), a' mhòr-chuid dhiubh ann an leabhraichean nach eil ann an clò tuilleadh, no sgapte ann an irisean agus pàipearan-naidheachd nach eil ri làimh do mhòran (chan eil e cho goireasach a' feuchainn ri *The Scotsman* 3/12/1983 a lorg anns an Leabharlann Nàiseanta ma tha thu airson "Na Gibhtean" a leughadh!). Mar sin, tha e feumail da-rìreadh na sgeulachdan seo uile a bhith againn ann an aon àite.

Tha na sgeulachdan air an òrdachadh a rèir cuspair, seach a rèir òrdugh foillseachaidh, ann an 11 roinnean-seòrsa: Eilthireachd agus Siubhal (14 sgeulachdan); Diomhaireachd agus Sireadh na Fìrinne (16); Foghlam agus Cuimhne (18); Àm Cogaidh (8); Gaol agus Conaltradh (10); Uirsgeul Mac-meanmnach (7); Teaghlach (7); Taghadh (7); Ceanglaichean Poilitigeach (6); Dualchas agus Coimhearsnachd (8) agus Sgeulachdan Eile (15). Ann an seòrsachadh mar seo, tha e do-sheachnadh gum 'buineadh' sgeul no dhà do chòrr is aon roinn (m.e. chuir an luchd-deasachaidh "Coigreach" anns an roinn "Teaghlach", ach faodadh e dhol ann an "Eilthireachd agus Siubhal" ceart cho math), ach 's e roinnean ghoireasach a th' annta gus saothair Mhic a' Ghobhainn eagrachadh, seach roinnean a stiùireas ar tuigse air na sgeulachdan fhèin ann an dòigh ro chumhang is rag. Tha an siostam-òrdachaidh seo a' ciallachadh nach eil an leughadair a' faicinn leasachadh sgrìobhadh Mhic a' Ghobhainn tro thim ma leughas iad an leabhar o cheann gu ceann, ach tha am fiosrachadh uile mu fhoillseachadh nan sgeulachdan anns an leabhar. Mar sin tha e uile gu lèir còmhach na sgeulachdan a leughadh ann an òrdugh foillseachaidh cuideachd.

Le foillseachadh an leabhair seo, tha e a-nis comasach sealladh fhaighinn air farsaingeachd ficsean Mhic a' Ghobhainn. Dhan fheadhainn a tha air na nobhailean aige a leughadh, no cuid de na sgeulachdan goirid as aithnichte (anns an dà chànan), cha bhiodh e na annas gu bheil cuspairean leithid eilthireachd, buaidh na h-eaglaise air coimhearsnachdan Gàidhealach, foghlam agus litreachas agus cultar clasaigeach na Grèige agus na Ròimhe (m.e. "Air a' Bhus – 2") a' nochdadh gu math tric anns a' chruinneachadh seo, cho math ri an spèis a bha aige do sgrìobhadairean sa Bheurla – Shakespeare gu sònraichte, ach cuideachd Defoe agus, mar a dh'innseas tiotal aon sgeulachd dhuinn, Jenkins agus Marlow. Cha robh e riamh diùid ann a bhith a' còmhradh ri cultaran agus litreachasan eile, ged a bha aire cho tric air coimhearsnachdan agus fiosrachadh a mhuinntir fhèin.

Ach chìthear cuideachd feartan nach eil cho aithnichte do chuid ann an obair Mhic a' Ghobhainn, leithid sgeulachdan sci-fi agus tachartasan os-nàdarra (m.e. "An Dèidh a' Chogaidh", "An Rionnag"). Faodaidh sinn cuideachd co-mheasadh nas doimhne a dhèanamh air an dàimh eadar rosg Beurla agus rosg Gàidhlig Mhic a' Ghobhainn, an dà chuid a thaobh caractair agus sgeulachd (m.e. on a tha Mgr Trill a' nochdadh ann an sgeulachdan san dà chànan) agus a thaobh stoidhle, on a tha a rosg Gàidhlig fada nas simplidh agus lom na tha a chuid roisg sa Bheurla (ged nach eil sin a' ciallachadh idir gu bheil na sgeulachdan fhèin simplidh, no bheil gainnead brìghe annta!). Mar sin, 's e ceum air adhart ann an sgoilearachd litreachas na Gàidhlig a th' anns an leabhar seo, agus bidh e nas fhasa rannsachadh – agus teagasg – a dhèanamh air ficsean Mhic a' Ghobhainn a-nis na bha e roimhe, agus an goireas feumail a-nis ri làimh.

A bharrachd air na sgeulachdan fhèin, tha rudan eile anns an leabhar seo a bhios gu feum do luchd-rannsachaidh agus dhan fheadhainn a tha airson tuigse nas doimhne air obair Mhic a' Ghobhainn a bhith aca: fiosrachadh foillseachadh nan sgeulachdan (air an tug mi iomradh shuas), fiosrachadh foillseachadh leabhraichean Gàidhlig Mhic a' Ghobhainn gu lèir (sgeulachdan goirid, duanairean, dealbhan-chluiche, leabhraichean do chloinn agus do dh'òigridh), agus dà aiste leis an luchd-deasachaidh. Tha an dà chuid le chèile susbainteach agus fiosrachail, "Iain Mac a' Ghobhainn:

An Duine agus an Sgrìobhadair” (38 tdd.), le Iain MacDhòmhnaill agus “Am Bodach agus An Guth: A’ tuigsinn sgeulachdan goirid Iain Mhic a’ Ghobhainn” (48 tdd.), le Moray Watson.

Tha MacDhòmhnaill a’ toirt cunntais air beatha Mhic a’ Ghobhainn, le tuairisgeul goirid air na cruinneachaidhean de sgeulachdan goirid: *Bùrn is Aran* (1960), *An Dubh is an Gorm* (1963), *Maighstirean is Ministearan* (1970), *An t-Adhar Ameireaganach* (1973), *Na Guthan* (1991) agus na sgeulachdan nach do nochd ann an leabhar, seach irisean agus pàipearan-naidheachd, thuige seo. Tha e ag innse cuideachd mu na feartan sònraichte ann am ficsean Mhic a’ Ghobhainn, gu h-àraidh “cion conaltraidh, cion tuigse air a chèile, cion eòlas air beatha a chèile, no beachdan làidir glè eadar-dhealaichte, a’ sgaradh dhaoine o chèile” (td. 35). Tha iomradh ann cuideachd air cliù Mhic a’ Ghobhainn an dà chuid ann an Albainn (tdd. 4–5) agus gu h-eadar-nàiseanta (tdd. 5–8), rud nach eil cho aithnichte ann an Albainn. Chì sinn ann fiosrachadh mu na duaisean a chaidh a bhuileachadh air, cuiridhean a fhuair e gu fèisean litreachais thall-thairis, eadar-theangaidhean a chuid obrach ann an cànan eile: Fraingis, Pòlanais, Nirribhis, Gearmailtis, Ungairis, Eadailtis, Gaeilge, Cuimris. Tha iomradh ann cuideachd air obair sgoileireil air ros g agus bàrdachd Mhic a’ Ghobhainn le sgoilearan ann an caochladh dhùthchannan. San aiste aige-san, tha Watson a’ sgrùdadh chan ann a-mhàin na h-ìomhaighean agus moitifean ann am ficsean (agus bàrdachd) Mhic a’ Ghobhainn, ach cuideachd a’ nochdadh na cudromachd a tha aige ann an eachdraidh litreachas na Gàidhlig, on as e “is dòcha a’ chiad neach a dh’fhoillsich sgeulachdan goirid ùr-nòsach sa Ghàidhlig, agus tha e coltach gun do dh’fhoillsich e barrachd dhiubh na duine eile a-riamh.” (td. 39) Air sgàth sin, tha an leabhar seo na ghoireas air leth do sgoilearan a tha a’ rannsachadh litreachas na Gàidhlig, litreachas a fhuair buannachd neach beag bho sgrìobhaidhean Mhic a’ Ghobhainn.

Tha an luchd-deasachaidh airidh air moladh airson na h-obrach a rinn iad, a’ toirt còmhla agus gu follais farsaingeachd cho mòr de na sgrìobhaidhean aig Iain Mac a’ Ghobhainn, agus thathas an dùil gun tig adhartas ann an sgoilearachd air Mac a’ Ghobhainn anns na bliadhnaichean a tha romhainn mar thoradh air sin.

Summary:

The publication of this comprehensive collection of Iain Crichton Smith’s Gaelic short stories marks an important step forward in modern Gaelic literary scholarship, making available much that has been long uncollected and/or out of print. This publication will enable scholars to gain a more rounded and thorough appreciation of the work of one of Scotland’s most prominent twentieth-century writers, whose Gaelic work connects with and diverges from his fiction in English in different ways.

DONNCHADH SNEDDON

Two books of Irish Interest

***Conamara Chronicles: Tales from Iorras Aithneach*, compiled by Seán Mac Giollarnáth. Liam Mac Con Iomaire and Tim Robinson, trans. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2022. ISBN 978-0-253-06352-6 (pbk). Pp. xx+309; maps, illus.**

Iorras Aithneach, a peninsula located between Cuan Chill Chiaráin (‘Kilkerrin Bay’) and Cuan na Beirtrí (‘Bertraghboy Bay’) at the southwestern extremity of Co. Galway, is – or was until modernity caught up with it – one of the principal redoubts of traditional oral culture in Ireland. *Annála Beaga ó Iorras Aithneach*, published in 1941, was Seán Mac Giollarnáth’s largest collection of oral history and traditional lore from this small area. Given the scarcity of the original publication, its re-emergence here, in translation, is very welcome.

Seán Mac Giollarnáth (Seán Forde, 1880–1970) was a native of east Co. Galway. Having joined the Gaelic League and the Irish Republican Brotherhood during a stay in London, he embarked on a career in journalism and in 1909 succeeded Pádraic Pearse as editor of the influential Irish-language

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weekly *An Claidheamh Soluis*, in whose columns folklore and rural customs were often featured. Finding journalism a precarious calling after 1916, Forde qualified as a solicitor in 1920, and in the middle of that decade he was named a District Justice in western Co. Galway – a peripatetic assignment that exposed him to the people of Connemara and their way of life. As he began to collect their stories and lore, several of his informants became ‘regulars’: of the 251 items included in this collection, over ninety percent were contributed by eight men, seven of whom also contributed to collections Mac Giollarnáth had earlier published in *Béaloides* and elsewhere.⁷

The topics covered reveal much about people’s beliefs, values, occupations, and understanding of historical events. Anecdotes about ‘holy men’ include stories about well-known Irish saints (Patrick, Brigid, Colmcille) as well as local ones whose names and legends enliven the Connemara landscape (Mac Dara, Flannán, Cáillín). A long confessional poem attributed to the cantankerous wife of one holy man, ‘Donncha Mór’ (possibly Donnchadha Mór Ó Dálaigh?), appears in this section. Known historical figures – oppressive landlord Tadhg ‘na Buile’ Ó Flaitheartaigh, Fr Myles Prendergast of ‘the Year of the French’ – are recalled in stories that reveal the role played by Connemara’s rough lands and rougher coastline in harbouring fugitives and desperadoes. Stories about ‘tories’, robbers and crafty smugglers reveal a society living on its wits, because there wasn’t much else to live on. The mythic status of money is reflected in legends about dead men’s golden hoards guarded by magical creatures, some of which turn out to be the spell-bound owners of the treasure. By far the largest number of anecdotes relate to local people – strong men, scholars, priests, pedlars, kelp-burners, landlords, boat builders and sailors, lame men with quick wits, men who owned famous dogs or who knew the habits of wild creatures or who witnessed magical events, people whose names became by-words for disaster, for long-windedness or learning, for piety or wickedness. A chapter devoted to foodstuffs reveals the precariousness of daily existence as well as the rare indulgence of bread and butter at Christmas. A chapter headed ‘Wisps of Straw’ contains everything else – placename lore, scraps of Fenian legends, feast days and their meanings, riddles and triads, myths about the ‘shilling cobbler’ (leprachaun), plants and plant-lore, clever animal tales. As is the nature of *seanchas*, these stories combine a sense of concrete immediacy – hard facts tied to specific points in a known landscape – with the immanence of the supernatural, whether of the Christian variety, or that of an older otherworld.

In the final chapter, Mac Giollarnáth gives eight of his collaborators space to share their own stories. While these are not chronological narratives, they reveal the warm relationship between the collector and his informants that encouraged them to grant ‘Justice Forde’ custody of their family’s and community’s traditions. In an appendix, editor and translator Liam Mac Con Iomaire summarises what is known about each of the eighteen listed contributors, including some photographs. Reflecting the interest of editor and cartographer Tim Robinson, the scholarly apparatus includes endnotes (most of which deal with placenames) and a placename index. Presumably neither editor knew why Mac Giollarnáth listed two informants as contributors while attributing no specific segments to them, or why several segments lack attributions altogether. On the other hand, they might have suspected that Mac Giollarnáth himself appears to be the narrator in a couple of segments, while others clearly involved group discussion. Lastly, a complete list of the segments included under each chapter heading – something that Mac Giollarnáth did not supply – might have helped readers more quickly identify items of interest to them.

Tim Robinson’s atmospheric essay, ‘Space, Time and Connemara’ is reprinted here,⁸ along with a useful introduction by Liam Mac Con Iomaire contextualising Mac Giollarnáth’s life and work. This final collaboration between Liam Mac Con Iomaire (1937–2019) and Tim Robinson (1935–

⁷ Mac Giollarnáth’s earlier collections included ‘Tiachóg ó Iorras Aintheach’, *Béaloides* 3:4 (Dec. 1932), 467–501; *Loinnir Mac Leabhair agus Sgeulta Gaisgidhe Eile*, Dublin: An Gúm (1936); and ‘An Dara Tiachóg as Iorras Aithneach’, *Béaloides* 10:1-2 (June–Dec. 1940), 3–100.

⁸ It was published twice previously, in the 1990s; see p. 26.

2020) is a legacy worthy of their friendship and long partnership, and a welcome contribution to our understanding of a remarkable place and time.

***Colm Ó Caodháin: An Irish singer and his world.* Ríonach úí Ógáin. Cork: Cork University Press, 2021. ISBN: 978-1-782-05431-3. Pp. viii+280. CD; map; illus.**

A generation younger than Seán Mac Giollarnáth's contributors, singer, storyteller and all-round raconteur Colm Ó Caodháin (1893–1975) lived in Glinsce, about five kilometres north of Carna on the coast of Bertraghboy Bay. For some forty years, Ó Caodháin entertained fieldworkers from the Irish Folklore Commission and other institutions, becoming what Ríonach úí Ógáin calls 'the exemplar contributor to the early days of folklore collecting in Ireland' (6). In this sampler of Colm's stories, songs and lore, we not only learn much about the daily life of a small farmer and fisherman in Iorras Aithneach in the first half of the last century, but also become acquainted with an individual for whom tradition was not simply a repertoire of detachable, collectible items, but something truly inseparable from life itself.

In her introductory chapter, 'Colm and his world', the editor summarises and contextualises Colm's life and his relationship with Séamus Ennis (1919–82), the collector most closely associated with him. In the following chapter, we hear from Colm himself as he describes how his father taught him the rudiments of seafaring and navigation, recounts two miracles at sea that he ascribes to divine intervention, and finally describes how, following a fruitless interlude in Scotland looking for work, he returned home and built a house (52):

I am a person who got no schooling and who has learned no English and I was able to build the house, thanks be to God. I had never put a slate roof on a house...and I began to think it through, to consider it and to work it out in my head what I should do. At night, when there was nothing else bothering me, I would take down my cardboard, get my scissors, begin to draw wedges and cut them and put them together. But thanks be to God, I immediately saw a way of putting on the slates and I put them on and built the house.

Having built his own house and all the furniture in it, Colm built other houses throughout the district until 'there were no more to build' (52). Well into his forties, Colm at last settled down and began to raise a family.

The next three chapters sample Colm's repertoire, including songs and instrumental music (Colm was a proficient melodeon player); short passages of lore, local custom and belief; and a selection of short tales and rhymes. Material given in Irish is translated as needed, and short explanatory notes provide context and commentary on individual items.

Colm is best known as a singer. Although access to his archival recordings has been limited, Colm's name first became known to a wider audience when, in 1955, Alan Lomax included two of his songs on his influential LP, *The Columbia World Library of Folk and Primitive Music: Vol. 2 – Ireland*.⁹ This recording became iconic: the late Seosamh Ó hÉanaí often boasted of his family connection to Colm (they were second cousins); and Colm's relationship with Séamus Ennis – whose own career as an uilleann piper, singer and raconteur took off in the 1960s – became a well-known part of Ennis's own legend.

Unsurprisingly, the chapter devoted to Colm's songs and music is at the heart of this book. It contains transcriptions, translations and notes for thirty-three items provided on the accompanying compact disc, including fifteen songs in Irish, seven in English, and three instrumental tunes. The recordings reveal the extent to which the celebrated Connemara *sean nós* singing style has changed since professional recording technology came into widespread use in Ireland. Colm's singing is straightforward, rhythmically aligned with the text, not florid, neither ponderously slow nor unintelligibly fast. This is a style that is communicative rather than 'performative' in the modern

⁹ See <https://archive.culturalequity.org/taxonomy/term/4861>.

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sense, uninfluenced by the aesthetic criteria imposed by decades of Oireachtas competitions and today's recording industry. It is singing designed to entertain a small gathering of friends and family, rather than to impress a roomful of strangers. Once he got used to it, Colm even turned Séumas Ennis's recording equipment into a human presence – he called it *an seanfhear* ('the old man'), and suggested that a drink might improve its scratchy voice (10, 148). Despite their roughness, these recordings allow the listener to be the proverbial fly on the wall, to witness the intimacy of the environment in which they were made, and the warmth of the relationship between the singer and listener.

Ennis's work with Colm was at its most intense in the 1940s. While better audio recording technology eventually made it possible to capture more of Colm's repertoire, the bulkiness of the equipment and cost of recording media meant that about two-thirds of his songs and music were only ever taken down in writing. Of those that were recorded, only six were ever publicly released. The CD here includes five of these, as well as twenty-two songs and tunes never previously available outside the archives. One lively song, 'Port na Giobóige' (The Unfortunate Widow's Tune) includes the earliest known sound recording from Colm. Items of Scottish interest include Colm's performance of 'The Keel Row', a fragment of 'Captain Wedderburn's Courtship' (Child 46), and a spirited rendition of 'Miss McLeod's Reel'.

In addition to songs and music, the CD contains eight spoken items. The most remarkable of these is 'An Martháin Phádraig' (St Patrick's Sustaining Prayer), a 'prayer in a form of incantation' that Colm believed had healing powers if it were recited 'without hesitation from start to finish' (131–2). The fact that some words are unintelligible is unimportant because such utterances – like the descriptive 'runs' in hero tales, or the Scottish Gaelic *duain Challainn* (Hogmanay lays) – are functionally and semantically charms, and any verbal shortcomings are of little significance because the meaning of the whole is understood.

In this book, Ríonach úí Ógáin demonstrates her deep sympathy for her subject and her respect for the tradition which Colm Ó Caodháin, with the help of Séamus Ennis, other collectors, and the 'old man', brought so vividly to life. The editorial work of selecting, transcribing, translating, annotating, and contextualising the items included here must have been monumental – but it was only half the job. As archivist, úí Ógáin charts the collection and development of Colm's material in two exhaustive appendixes. The first describes the various audio technologies used to record about a fifth of Colm's repertoire between 1943 and 1973, including what material was recorded and who was involved. The second appendix lists over 500 separate items contributed by Colm and held in the National Folklore Collection. While 261 of these are songs or tunes, Colm also recorded international folktales, religious items, fairy lore and otherworld stories, and a wealth of local lore, historical tales, personal anecdotes, and proverbial wisdom.

Given such a wealth of material, choosing what items to highlight and what to say about them must have been a challenge. As regards songs, the decision to choose only from audio recordings meant that two thirds of Colm's song repertoire – including his own favourites (4) – were omitted, despite having been recorded in Ennis's elegant staff notation. Which songs would Colm himself have chosen to include? As recording technologies and ethnographic fieldwork techniques have become more sophisticated, it has become easier to discern, and thus to convey, the relationship between the tradition bearers and what they choose to share – and why they choose to share it.

This is a book to be studied, certainly; but it is also a work to be enjoyed, one that will allow us to briefly imagine the rich life, multivalent repertoire, and vanished world of this remarkable singer, storyteller, and raconteur – Colm Ó Caodháin.

VIRGINIA BLANKENHORN