



# Gaelic Genesis

Hugh Cheape

*For many Gaels past and present, the 'Gaelic Book' would mean one thing – the Bible – and indeed, in the sorry situation in which literacy in Gaelic in past generations was rare, a Gaelic Bible might have been the only printed book in Scottish Gaelic in Gaelic-speaking households, whether in the Highlands and Islands or in the towns and cities such as Glasgow. But today, publishing and broadcasting in Gaelic are enjoying the fruits of a new interest and enthusiasm, and there is a feeling in Scotland that the language is experiencing a renaissance or ath-bheòthachadh. This comes after decades of perceived decline and neglect when the language, insofar as the outside world took an interest in it, was regarded as occupying an insular and parochial fringe, without relevance to the 'modern world' and its economic imperatives, and moving towards a cultural extinction, to be enjoyed (or tolerated) for the musical element it added to expectations of the romantic atmosphere of misty islands – while sometimes being regarded with suspicion by an obstinately and traditionally monolingual English-speaking establishment.*

IF GAELIC HAS retreated geographically northwards and westwards and numbers of speakers have continued to decline, the language has not been universally neglected or devalued; it has maintained a status in the literary and bibliographical context by continuing to be published. This process has not been evenly sustained; fluctuations in response to internal and external influences and threats can be tracked in detail in Donald John MacLeod's *Twentieth Century Publications in Scottish Gaelic* (Scottish Academic Press, 1980).

There was a notable revival of writing in Scottish Gaelic in the 1930s and 1950s, for example, inspired perhaps by the contemporary literary renaissance in Scots led by Hugh MacDiarmid. He and his circle looked to recreate a distinctively Scottish culture in the wake of a steady attrition and acculturation since 1707, and MacDiarmid, in step with the political nationalism of the day, wrote in an acerbic and iconoclastic tone against the hegemony of English literature. Gaelic poets, most notably Sorley MacLean (1911–96) and George Campbell Hay (1915–84), were writing for a different audience and in a different tone. They and other (then) younger poets, such as Derick Thomson, Iain Crichton Smith and Donald MacAulay, have maintained an output of their verse and collected editions, beginning with MacLean's iconic *Dàin do Eimhir* ('Poems to Eimhir') in 1943 and continuing significantly to the recently-published scholarly edition of the work of Campbell Hay (*Collected Poems and Songs of George Campbell Hay*, edited by Michel Byrne, Edinburgh

University Press, 2000). This highly significant group of twentieth-century Gaelic poets – a 'famous five' – can be readily appreciated in *Nua-bhardachd Ghaidhlig. Modern Scottish Gaelic Poems. A Bilingual Anthology*, edited by Donald MacAulay (Southside, 1976; republished as a Canongate Classic, 1995).

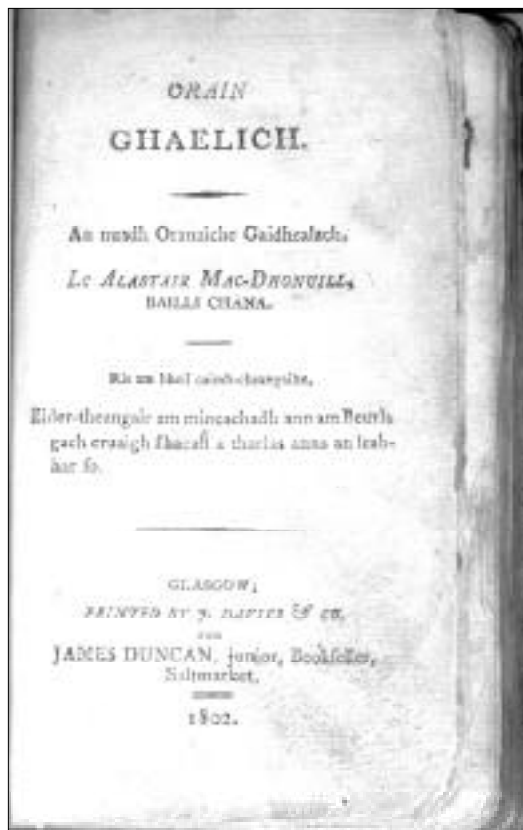
The torch is being carried forward by a younger generation of poets, such as Aonghas MacNeacail, Catriona and Morag Montgomery, Myles Campbell, Angus Peter Campbell, Meg Bateman and Rody Gorman, all of whom have been relatively extensively published. The recent generations have experimented with new metrical structures in line with developments in English and European poetry but remained until recently thirled to an elegiac tone. They write so often of homeland, the disintegration of community and dispossession, and they examine fundamental questions of personal and cultural identity. In its weakened state, theirs has been a heavy burden of linguistic inheritance, given its longevity and antiquity.

Scottish Gaelic probably originates from migrations across the Irish Sea from about the third century AD. From a historical and perceivable linguistic point of view, the most significant migrations from Ireland to Scotland took place in the late fifth century, establishing apparently a kingdom in Argyll and the southern Hebrides. From here, these peoples and their Gaelic language spread east and south to achieve in the eleventh century probably the language's greatest extent in Scotland. In this period, we have plentiful evidence of the written language, mainly in the manuscript texts surviving in Ireland, although, for example, the Book of Kells is now accepted as having been at least begun in the monastic scriptorium in Iona, where historical annals were also being compiled. From this point the Gaelic language thrived both culturally and politically, certainly until the eighteenth century, since when it has declined dramatically.

Census records have mapped the modern decline of the numbers of people speaking Gaelic, the numerical loss being especially marked since the 1914–18 war. In the mid-nineteenth century, about one quarter of the population still spoke Gaelic and this has fallen to about 1.2 per cent today, in other words representing perhaps at its most optimistic about 70,000 speakers. Adopting Samuel Johnson's maxim that "languages are the pedigree of nations", we should take serious notice of this decline to avoid the cultural débâcle of extinction. Gaelic is historically one of the main languages of Scotland and certainly contributes powerfully to a cultural distinctiveness; and from the point of view of

Sorley MacLean's *Dain do Eimhir* of 1943 is prefaced by a note by Douglas Young "on the making of this book", in which he describes the difficulties encountered in finding a publisher – until he "had the good fortune to meet with William MacLellan in Glasgow, who is making it his aim to set a new standard in Scottish books". MacLean's work was the cutting edge of the Gaelic renaissance. The MacLellan edition is embellished with drawings by William Crosbie. (His frontispiece is reproduced on page 15).





Left: later, but still unexpurgated edition of Alexander MacDonal's 'Resurrection of the Ancient Scottish Language', first published in 1751.

was spoken in the western mainland of Argyllshire and Inverness-shire, and more specifically in the districts of Ardnamurchan, Moidart, Arisaig and Morar, sadly today areas where Gaelic is the daily speech of only a few and its survival may be in question.

A proper inventory of printed books had to wait until MacLean's *Typographia Scoto-Gadelica, or, Books Printed in the Gaelic of Scotland from the Year 1567 to the Year 1914*, which then created the major bibliographical listing of works in Scottish Gaelic. Rev. Donald (1856–1917), Church of Scotland minister of Dunvegan, introduced his mission with the following words:

I have searched the leading libraries of Great Britain and have been in communication with Colonial and Continental Libraries and Booksellers. I have approached private collectors as far as I could go and I have for many years scanned and noted the pages of booksellers' and auctioneers' catalogues.

Major private libraries included those of the Marquesses of Bute in Mount Stuart and the Dukes of Argyll at Inveraray and these yielded key texts. For example, the beginning of all accounts of the printed book in Scottish Gaelic is Bishop John Carswell's 'Book of Common Order', often referred to as 'Knox's Liturgy', which was the service book prepared by the reformers of the church in Scotland under the leadership of John Knox following the Reformation in 1560. Knox's Liturgy was then translated into Gaelic by John Carswell as 'Superintendent of Argyll' in 1567. MacLean's judgement was: "The first book printed in Gaelic of which there are only three imperfect copies known"; and he goes on to describe the examples inspected in the library of the Dukes of Argyll, in Edinburgh University Library and in the British Museum. Neither scholars nor antiquarian booksellers have succeeded in adding any further example to this frail remnant and it has been edited and printed twice since, the first scholarly edition being a reprint by Rev. Dr Thomas MacLauchlan in 1873 and most recently the definitive treatment by R.L. Thomson of the University of Leeds for the Scottish Gaelic Texts Society in 1970, the latter completing the text prepared by Angus Matheson (1912–62), Professor of Celtic in Glasgow University.

That the Highlands were 'bookless' was for long almost axiomatic. This can be explained in part by the destruction of manuscripts and books in the course of long-term clan, territorial and national warfare on the one hand, and the persecution of Gaelic and the neglect and

linguistic scholarship, it is arguably the most important. This was recognised as early as the mid-nineteenth century, with the emergence of the European science of philology, because it was, and is, one of the earliest surviving written vernacular languages of Europe, with easily identifiable texts from the seventh or even sixth centuries.

The essential works of reference for the Gaelic book are Rev. Donald MacLean's *Typographia Scoto-Gadelica* of 1915 and the National Library of Scotland's *Scottish Gaelic Union Catalogue* of 1984, edited by Mary Ferguson and Ann Matheson. Details include locations and this essential bibliographical tool offers a modern finding list for books in Scottish Gaelic amounting to 3038 titles with distinguishing features such as the 265 editions of the Bible, from items 79–344.

The foundations of listing and cataloguing had, in fact, begun earlier, with a book which tends to be dismissed as hopelessly outdated but which gives a useful account of Gaelic and its literature – John Reid's *Bibliotheca Scoto-Celtica*, published in Glasgow in 1832. Printed works are discussed diagnostically by theme, with bibles and liturgical items predictably opening the listings. There is, however, interesting and important contemporary insight into the state of the language and of opinions about it and its literature from a range of different authorities. For example, Reid offers the information that, in the opinion of all, the 'best' or purest Gaelic

A later edition by Patrick Turner of Ronald MacDonald's 'Eigg Collection', first published in 1776.



ignorance of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries on the other. Dr Johnson's throwaway comment that the Highlands and Highland society had little or nothing to offer in print or manuscript of its own literary work seemed to satisfy most.

Variance of opinion, hostility or neglect were sharpened with the appearance of *Fragments of Ancient Poetry collected in the Highlands of Scotland* in 1760, revealing perversely to the outside world that there was an extremely rich literary vein in the Highlands. The poetry of a prehistoric bard, Ossian, was seen as a classical epic of the stature of the Greek and Roman poets and compared to the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* of Homer. Indeed, as some critic quipped, they had discovered a 'Homer in the Highlands'. Entering only briefly into the topic of Ossian, though significantly it has been translated into many languages, it may be too easy to characterise and denounce it as literary fraud without considering the zeitgeist of eighteenth-century literary Europe or the acerbity, if not personal savagery, of Dr Johnson's denunciation of James Macpherson, its 'author'.

It is sufficient to indicate that there was a substantial body of mainly ballad literature surviving through oral transmission and very well known throughout the Highlands and Islands; the contemporary surprise and enthusiasm, and even the ensuing literary controversy on the authenticity of Ossian, led to research and

collection which accumulated the Advocates' Library Gaelic Manuscripts, the Edinburgh University Manuscripts, the Highland Society Collection and one or two important individual collections. Ossian has undoubtedly been an important cultural catalyst in spite of the misgivings 'he' has inspired.

The output of printed works in Scottish Gaelic was meagre until the second half of the eighteenth century. The preamble to the Book of Common Order provides an insight into Gaelic culture: in an expansive dedicatory epistle, for example, the text is addressed to "learned men skilled in poetry and history and some good scholars". Carswell, as 'Superintendent' in the Reformed Church for Argyll and the Isles, then claimed that the printing of Gaelic books would be for the purposes of religious edification and not for "the framing of vain, hurtful, lying earthly stories about the Tuatha De Danaan and about the sons of Milesius and about the heroes and Finn MacCoul with his giants".

Calvin's Catechism, *Catechismus Ecclesiae Genevensis*, was translated about 1630 and has survived in a single copy from which a scholarly edition, *Adtimchiol an Chreidimh*, was published by the Scottish Gaelic Texts Society in 1968. Three Gaelic versions of the metrical psalms were prepared in the seventeenth century, the first fifty psalms in metre translated and published for the Synod of Argyll in 1659 and a full edition of 150 psalms published in 1694. Scholarly analysis of these texts has focused on the evident stages of evolution of Scottish Gaelic as a distinct language, distinct, that is, from a standardised form of Irish often referred to as Classical Gaelic. Changes occurring in the spoken languages of Irish and Scottish Gaelic respectively began to be reflected in printed material. Carswell's liturgy follows a classical norm, though he pleads that his ability in the language is far from adequate, and the first significant divergence appears in the Shorter Catechism of 1651, which is written in more nearly a spoken form of Scottish Gaelic.

The first Gaelic Bible was an Irish production of the seventeenth century, the New Testament printed in 1603 and the Old Testament in 1686. Although these were known in the Highlands, they were considered to be of little use because Scottish Gaels were unfamiliar with the Irish script and an Irish or 'Hiberno-Latin' printers' font and because of divergence in the language between Scotland and Ireland by that date. Scholarship is now showing that distinctions between Scottish Gaelic and Irish – between what might be termed 'northern' and 'southern' Gaelic – were pronounced by the twelfth century, considerably earlier than previously thought. A

remedy was offered in an edition of 3000 copies printed in London in 1690 of a transcription of the Bedell-O'Donnell Irish Bible into Roman characters. This was the work of Rev. Robert Kirk, the Episcopalian minister of Aberfoyle, described on his tombstone as *Linguae Hiberniae Lumen* and better known to posterity as the author of *The Secret Commonwealth of Elves, Fauns and Fairies* of c.1691. Such was his familiarity with the wee folk, it was said in the district, that he was carried off by them the following year and his headstone stands over an empty tomb.

In the eighteenth century, Scottish Gaelic can be said to have come into being as a written language, insofar as in the Bible it achieved a literary form and standard in its own right. At the request and expense of the SSPCK, the work of translation and publication began with the New Testament in 1767, translated from the Greek by Rev. James Stuart of Killin, with the help of Dugald Buchanan, religious poet, school master and catechist of Rannoch. This text may not have been much used because few could read Gaelic and the older practice of a minister's extemporary and colloquial translation from English was apparently more acceptable. Indeed, the Gaelic New Testament met with opposition as an uncalled-for innovation. In 1773, the minister in the island of Coll told Dr Johnson that "he did not use the Irish [i.e. Gaelic] translation of the New Testament which had been lately published because he could make the text more intelligible to his auditors by an ex tempore version". The Old Testament appeared in four separate parts between 1783 and 1801, the work of Rev. Dr John Stuart of Luss (son of Rev James Stuart) and of Rev. Dr John Smith of Campbeltown. In 1826, the Bible was republished, revised and entire, and became a standard classic of written Gaelic syntax, orthography and morphology.

In terms of numbers rather than importance perhaps for the language, religious works still held the stage in the eighteenth century and the Gaelic book was largely the work of churchmen. There was considerable demand for print, particularly in the later-eighteenth century, as evangelical theology gained a firm hold throughout the Highlands and Islands. Under the influence of the General Assembly, of the missionary agencies, and also of Scotland's Secession churches, Gaelic translations were made of seventeenth-century English Puritan divines, such as John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, and these went through multiple editions. In many households, Gaelic versions of *Pilgrim's Progress* or *Turus a' Chriosdaidh* enjoyed a status second only to the Bible. Another highly popular evangelical work

was Richard Baxter's *Call to the Unconverted*, which developed the theme of the "call" or warning to the unrepentant sinner on the dangers of lost eternity, exhorting them to allow the conversion of their soul.

The mid-eighteenth century saw the publication of the first book of original Gaelic verse and, in terms of the language, essentially the first published vernacular and the vital genesis of a written tradition in Scottish Gaelic. Published in Edinburgh in 1751, and reputedly burnt as seditious by the public hangman at the city's Mercat Cross, Alexander MacDonald's *Ais-eiridh na Sean Chánoin Albannaich, no An Nuadh Oranaiche Gaidhealach* (*The Resurrection of the Ancient Scottish Language, or, New Gaelic Songster*) might well have encouraged another Jacobite rising with its powerful propagandist tone. MacDonald (c.1698–1770), known to tradition as Alasdair Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair, dominates the stage of Gaelic literature. A learned, inventive and complex author, his work seems to have defied proper editing, due particularly to the powerful scatological element which led in successive editions of his poems through to 1924 to major omissions amounting to a form of censure. The same author published one of the first vocabularies, *Leabhar a Theagasc Ainmínnin*, printed in Edinburgh in 1741 to the order of the SSPCK. This was a translation into Gaelic of Latin and English word lists made for teaching the English language in their schools.

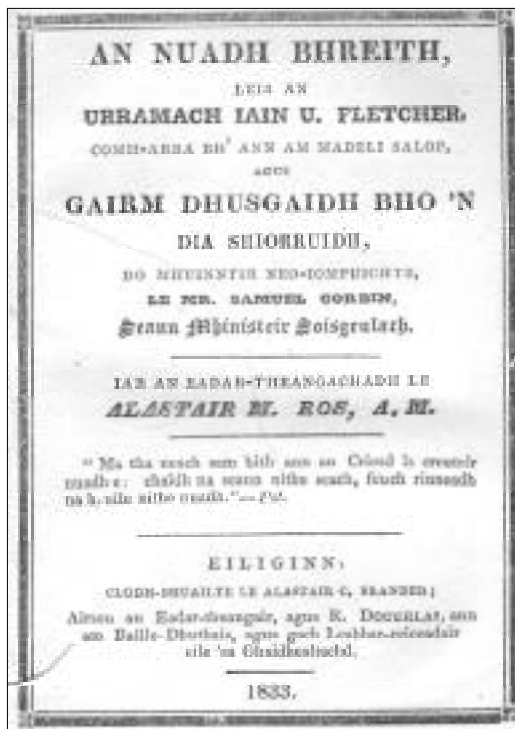
Duncan Bàn Macintyre's collection of 1768 is the next major work of original Gaelic verse, written down for publication from his recitation by Rev. John Stuart of Luss. The poet is also said to have dictated his work, amounting to about 6000 lines, to the Rev. Donald MacNicol, the minister of Lismore, demonstrating the ready ability of the practised poet or bard who was illiterate in his own language to memorise, and the primary importance of the oral tradition for the transmission of Gaelic beyond the printed



The Rev. Dr Norman MacLeod (1783–1862), known then and since as 'the friend of the Gael', instigator of a Gaelic periodical literature and creator of a formal prose or essay style followed by subsequent generations of Gaelic writers.

Right: A product of the evangelical presses. Double bill pamphlet printed in Elgin in 1833, with 'The Rebirth' by the Rev. John Fletcher and 'A Call to Awaken' by the Rev. Samuel Corbyn.

Below: The first published listing of the Gaelic book. John Reid's *Bibliotheca Scoto-Celtica*, published in Glasgow in 1832.



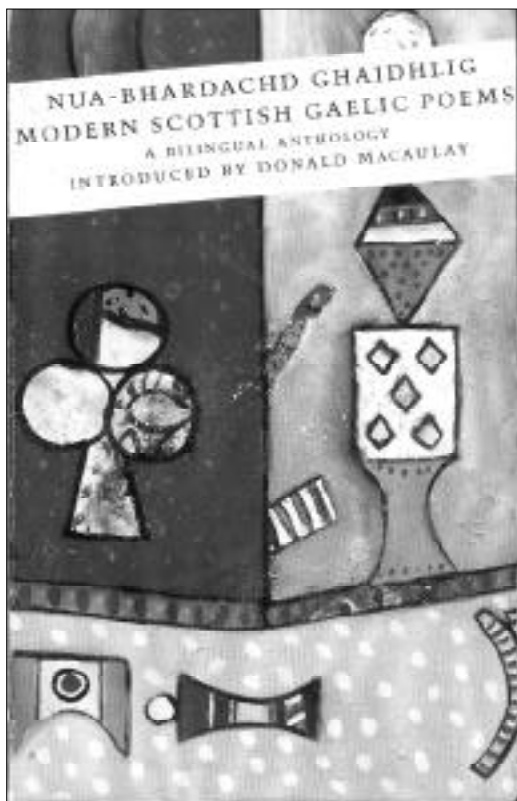
page. Duncan Bàn's collection went through successive editions, such was his reputation and popularity in the Gaelic world. As with other major texts, it has been collated in a modern scholarly text by the Scottish Gaelic Texts Society. An anthology of 1776 by Alexander MacDonald's son, Ronald, and based largely on collections of verse made by his father, has come to be known as the 'Eigg Collection', from his being tenant of the farm of Laig in the Island of Eigg. The contents of the Eigg Collection set the tone for a flow of similar publications at the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth centuries, the volumes by John Gillies of Perth, Alexander and Donald Stewart and Patrick Turner being the most notable and popular at the time. The tone was encomiastic and rhetorical, which reflected the work of the professional poets of earlier generations but gives only a partial view of Gaelic literature. The function of the bard was to 'praise famous men' and poems and songs were written down for their subject-matter rather than necessarily on their merits. Later anthologies continued to draw on the earlier collections and therefore still gave a limited account of the different aspects of the oral tradition. These included publications which went through many editions and became for a time the most familiar representatives of the printed book in Scottish Gaelic, works such as John Mackenzie's *Beauties of Gaelic Poetry* (or *Sàr Obair nam Bard Gàidhealach*) of 1841 and William J. Watson's *Bàrdachd Ghàidhlig* of 1918, which was for the twentieth century the principal textbook for the teaching of Gaelic literature.

The Eigg Collection is also significant as

being the first produced in response to the intense national and international interest aroused by the publication of the works of Ossian in the 1760s, and with the cachet 'Volume 1' on the title page, a projected (but never published) second volume was to contain 'poems of much older date than these of the first' which might well have included genuine Ossianic ballads. It is notable that these three collections all include variations of the word *Oran* or 'Song' in their title, emphasising on the one hand the essential link between poetry and song – that more or less all poetry was made to be sung – and on the other the defining context of an oral tradition for Gaelic literature. The richness of this oral tradition, evident in the earlier surviving manuscript sources such as the 'Book of the Dean of Lismore' and the Fernaig Manuscript, gives Scottish Gaelic a special value and its strength is richly demonstrated by the quantity of pre-eighteenth-century poetry and folktale narrative surviving in the oral tradition to be recorded in the publications of more recent generations, a process that has continued to our own time with the work of individual and institutional collectors, pre-eminently the School of Scottish Studies founded by Edinburgh University in 1951.

A sense of crisis facing a demonstrably ancient culture and literature, and periodic challenges to its significance and originality (in the wake of the Ossian controversy), led to the publication in the second half of the nineteenth century of song collections which began to break the bardic mould of eulogy and elegy. *An Duanaire*,





published in Edinburgh in 1868, was a collection of hitherto unpublished material mainly from the single locality of Lochaber. *An t-Oranaiche* ('The Gaelic Songster') edited by Archibald Sinclair and printed in Glasgow in 1879, was the first collection of popular songs, and Rev. Thomas Sinton's *Poetry of Badenoch* of 1906 illustrates significantly the character and context and extent of traditional and ephemeral verse composition in a Gaelic community. Perhaps the most extraordinary component of neglected material in the Gaelic tradition was the class of songs associated with work, that is the chorus songs, 'waulking' songs or *òrain luaidh*. These are songs of a distinctive metrical type, with refrains of vocables followed by single lines or couplets; their authorship is seldom known and their history has been much debated by academics. An important selection of chorus songs, mainly from Barra and Uist, was published by Rev. Angus MacDonald and Rev. Archibald MacDonald in their *MacDonald Collection of Gaelic Poetry* of 1911, further selections by Miss Frances Tolmie and K.C. Craig, and the most recent monument to this genre is the collection of *Hebridean Folksongs* in three volumes edited by John Lorne Campbell and Francis Collinson (Oxford University Press 1969, 1977 and 1981).

If song gives deeper insights into the Gaelic tradition, works in prose tend to dominate publishers' output by the nineteenth century. Antiquarian and literary interests inspired by Ossian prompted the production of grammars and dictionaries, the first grammars being

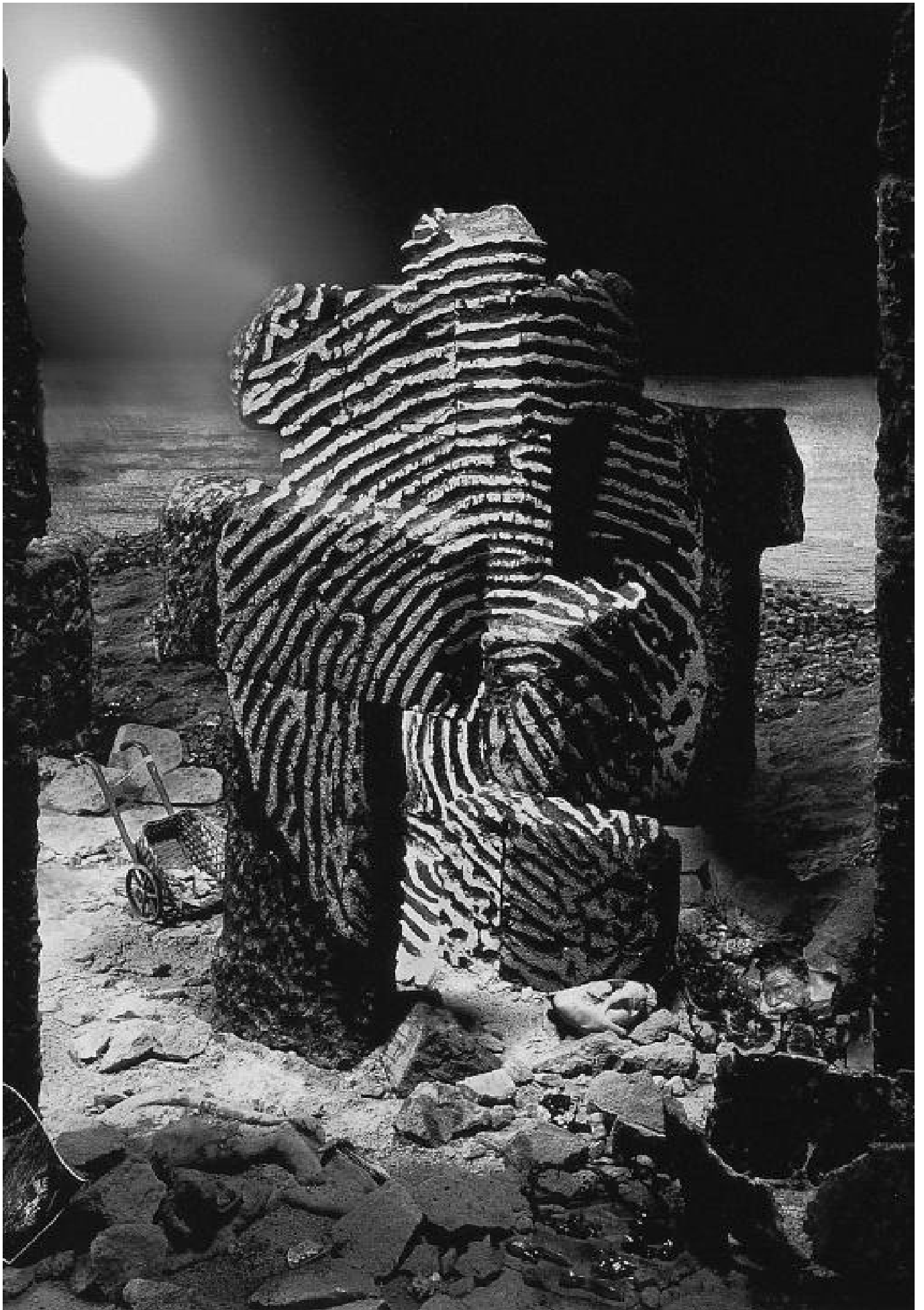
William Shaw's *An Analysis of the Gaelic Language* (1773) and Alexander Stewart's *Elements of Gaelic Grammar* (1801). Antiquarian interest prompted also the collection of proverbs and Donald Macintosh's *Collection of Gaelic Proverbs* was published in Edinburgh in 1785. Apart from Alexander MacDonald's 1741 word list, the first dictionaries were Robert Armstrong's in 1825 and the more massive Highland Society Dictionary of 1828. A number of dictionaries then appeared in the nineteenth century before the (to date) standard lexicon was assembled by the Englishman, Edward Dwelly, who first printed his *Illustrated Gaelic to English Dictionary* in thirty-three parts in his garden shed in Herne Bay between 1902 and 1911. It continues to provide a service in a composite edition today.

The enlightenment of Gaels by the SSPCK included teaching Gaelic reading in their schools, since the strategy of the language's eradication stalled on an inability in the first instance to communicate. But apart from the Bible and texts of religious teachings and catechisms, there was little to read and few prose works until the mid-nineteenth century. Original Gaelic prose writing and publishing began most substantially with *An Teachdaire Gaelach* ('The Highland Messenger'), published as a periodical between 1829 and 1831, *Cuairtear nan Gleann* ('The Traveller of the Glens'), between 1840 and 1843, and *An Fhianuis* (*The Witness*) between 1845 and 1850. These were the work of or inspired by Rev. Dr Norman MacLeod (1785–1852), who, writing in a biblical style of lexis and syntax, pursued ideological ends of providing more evangelical reading matter and self-improving prose for a new audience literate in their own language.

The range of prose writing expanded in the second half of the century to include national and international current affairs, politics, history and literature and, with cheaper paper and printing, provided outlets through printers mainly in Glasgow and Edinburgh particularly for the literary talents and ambitions of emigrant and city Gaels. Though there was much to discuss, such as clearance, dispossession, disenfranchisement and enforced migration, the general tone of Gaelic prose is anodyne, apart from occasional political 'shots' and editorials in *An Gaidheal* (1871–1877) and the bi-lingual *Celtic Magazine* and *Celtic Monthly*.

Periodical production continued into the twentieth century with such titles as *Am Bàrd*, *Guth na Bliadhna*, *An Deò Gréine*, *An Sgeulaiche* and *An Rosarnach*, all of which await more scholarly evaluation. Undoubtedly the triumph of Gaelic periodical publishing, in its longevity and the opportunities it offers, for original

Bilingual poetry collection of the 'famous five'. Canongate Classics' modern treatment of Gaelic poetry reissued by them in 1995.





writing was the Glasgow-based Gairm, founded by Derick Thomson and Finlay J. MacDonald in 1952, ceasing production in 2002. They greatly extended the range of subject-matter, as well as linguistic register, and, in taking over the business of other publishers such as Alexander MacLaren and Sons of Glasgow, offered a wide range of titles of reprint and original work in Scottish Gaelic.

The other important class of Gaelic prose is the traditional tale, the recording of which began in earnest in 1859 with the energetic and single-minded efforts of John Francis Campbell of Islay (1822–1885), working with helpers such as Hector MacLean, Hector Urquhart and John Dewar. The fruits of their labour were published in *Popular Tales of the West Highlands* (four volumes, 1860–62), which Campbell engagingly described in the Introduction as the “new science of ‘storyology’... a museum of curious rubbish about to perish”. Further volumes were published from the Campbell Papers in the National Library of Scotland in 1940 and 1960. The subject-matter can be summarised as Scottish Gaelic versions of the international folktale, oral versions of medieval romances, and heroic tales deriving from the great Gaelic story-cycles of the ‘Ulster Cycle’ (with Cu Chulainn as its central figure) and the later Fenian Cycle. The diffusion and transmission of these, especially international tales such as the ‘Tale of the Grateful Dead’ found in localised form in South Uist, was likened by him to the mysterious passage over time and space of tropical drift seeds, which, carried by the Gulf Stream, were enigmatic arrivals on the West Coast and often

customarily kept as charms. Campbell introduces the metaphor with:

On the stormy coasts of the Hebrides, amongst seaweed and shells, fishermen and kelp-burners often find certain hard, light, floating objects, somewhat like flat chestnuts, of various colours – grey, black and brown, which they call sea-nuts, strand-nuts and fairy-eggs.

Campbell of Islay inspired others such as Alexander Carmichael (1832–1912), whose own, extraordinary collection, *Carmina Gadelica*, began to be published in 1900 and the editing of his papers was continued posthumously to fill six volumes between 1928 and 1971. This was traditional verse rather than prose narrative, but verse that moved, chiming strongly with the mores of the late-nineteenth century, into a spiritual dimension with prayers, charms, blessings and hymns. Translation into English is provided for every page and every word, making the material accessible to a wide readership and bringing Scottish Gaelic literature to the world. *Carmina Gadelica*, with perceivable flaws of heightened tone in translation and reconstructed text, has inspired the English-speaking world but has sharpened issues such as the viability and survival of Gaelic. For all its inherent charm, an artificiality pervades the texts and creates discriminating preconceptions of intelligibility and identity; the Gaelic-speaking world today may not always wish to be the perpetrators and transmitters of *Carmina Gadelica* and is examining its soul in the exposed and threatening state of bilingualism and parallel texts.

‘Gaelic Genesis’ is based on a talk delivered at the last ILAB Convention in Edinburgh, and is published here with thanks to the International League of Antiquarian Booksellers.

**Further Reading**

Ronald Black, ed. *An Tuil. Anthology of Twentieth Century Scottish Gaelic Verse*, Polygon, 1999  
 Michel Byrne, ed. *Collected Poems and Songs of George Campbell Hay*, 2 volumes, Edinburgh University Press, 2000  
 Mary Ferguson and Ann Matheson, eds. *Scottish Gaelic Union Catalogue*, National Library of Scotland, 1984  
 Donald MacAulay, ed. *Nua-bhardachd Ghaidhlig. Modern Scottish Gaelic Poems. A Bilingual Anthology*, Southside Publishers, 1976; Canongate Classic, 1995  
 Rev. Donald MacKinnon, *The Gaelic Bible and Psalter*, 1930  
 Rev. Donald MacLean, *The Literature of the Scottish Gael*, 1912  
 MacLean, Rev. Donald, *Typographia Scoto-Gadelica*, John Grant, 1915  
 Donald John MacLeod, *Twentieth Century Publications in Scottish Gaelic*, Scottish Academic Press, 1980  
 Derick Thomson, *An Introduction to Gaelic Poetry*, Gollancz, 1974  
 Derick Thomson ed. *The Companion to Gaelic Scotland*, Blackwell, 1983

# Great Book



Calum Colvin’s image and Réiltin Murphy’s subtle calligraphy are inspired by *Is Fada Liom Oiche Fhíorthluich* by Aogán Ó Rathaille c. 1670–1729. Calum Colvin is Professor of Fine Art Photography at Dundee University. His work is held in numerous collections including the Metropolitan Museum of Modern Art, New York; the Victoria and Albert Museum, London and the Scottish National Portrait Gallery, Edinburgh.



*The Great Book of Gaelic* exhibition in the City Arts Centre, Edinburgh, runs until 24 January 2004, reopening at the Gracefield Art Gallery in Dumfries in the autumn (tbc). It will tour Ireland and Northern Ireland during 2005, exhibiting in Cork, Belfast and Sligo. The following year, after a spell at the V&A in London, the exhibition will embark on an international tour. *The Great Book* is published by Canongate Books (HBK £35).