Book Reviews

A Social History of Scottish Dance by G. S. Emmerson. McGill–Queen's University Press, Montreal and London 1972. Pp. xviii+352+39 plates.

This eclectic work covers the history of Scottish dancing from earliest times to the present day. The first three chapters deal with the mediæval festivals, the ritual dances associated with the passing of the seasons, and the social dances of the Scottish court and countryside up to the end of the sixteenth century. Chapter 4 reviews the dances of the courts of the Stuarts in London in the seventeenth century, while Chapter 5 deals with the corresponding period in Scotland, where the Church viewed social dancing with disfavour. The eighteenth century is covered in Chapters 6–8 which deal respectively with dancing in polite society in Edinburgh and elsewhere, with Scottish dances on the London stage, and with dancing in the Scottish countryside. These three chapters are the best part of the book, and it is obvious that the eighteenth century represents to the author the golden age of Scottish dancing.

Chapter 10, which comes almost halfway through the book, represents a fresh start, with more attention being paid to the dances and less to the social background. Following a general and rather diffuse survey, the author treats in succession Reels, the Highland Fling, Seann Truibhais, the Gille Callum, the Jig and Hornpipe, Dramatic jigs, and Highland Games. The book ends with four chapters on the Country Dance which include an account of the Country Dance revival movement and bring the history up to date. Four appendices give further information about the Papa Stour Sword Dance, early Reel steps, the Directors and Directresses of the Edinburgh Assemblies, and the Northern Meeting at Inverness. In this second half of the book the chapters on the Jig and Hornpipe incorporate much original research, though the relevance of some of the material to Scotland seems doubtful. The book also includes an interesting set of 39 plates, though again not all of these refer to Scotland.

Perhaps surprisingly, the author does not include any detailed descriptions of Scottish dances other than the Scotch (Foursome) Reel and one or two dramatic jigs. He does include a reproduction of the instructions of the English Country Dance 'Newcastle' from Playford's *Dancing Master*, but he does not reproduce any of the Country Dances from the early Scottish manuscript collections. Indeed, I am not sure that he has even consulted some of these manuscripts, since he does not appear to know (p. 276) that the Menzies MS of 1749 is dated. There are also very few musical examples, and in one of those included, Cailleach an Dudain (p. 233), the author omits to say that the tune is the pipe setting, so that sharp signs for notes C and F are omitted.

The book owes much to the researches of others, particularly Anna J. Mill, Margaret Dean-Smith and E. J. Nicol, Melusine Wood, and Hugh Thurston. The extent of the author's indebtedness to these and other workers in this field is far from clear, for he sometimes uses, without acknowledgment, not only their remarks but also their bibliographical footnotes (on five occasions the *wrong ones!*), so that the reader might well feel that he is reading the product of original research. It is perhaps churlish of this particular reviewer to make such criticisms, since my wife and I are thanked for our 'valuable field researches' no fewer than five times, and references to our book *Traditional Dancing in Scotland* and our articles are too numerous to count. But there is much in this book which one could condone in a pioneering work but which is inexcusable in a work compiled in well-mapped territory.

The author has tried to write both a scholarly book for those deeply interested in the history of European dancing and of Scottish dancing in particular, and also a popular book for enthusiastic Scottish dancers. The result is unfortunately neither: the frequent emotive passages in which the author paints the social background contrast oddly with the passages where he determinedly takes the reader through every known reference (Scottish *and* English *and* Irish) to some particular topic. The number of minor errors is high, and the author's attempt to be popular causes him to mix surmise and conjecture with historical fact in a manner that makes it difficult to distinguish them.

To illustrate with just two of many such items, I would query what evidence there is for the statement (p. 20) that 'ritual sword dancing . . . [was] well known in mediæval Scotland, certainly in the principal east coast towns . . . '? Previous researchers have listed references to only three occurrences of such dances in Scotland before the year 1700, in Edinburgh at the entry of Anne of Denmark in 1590, in Perth *c.* 1609–33, and at Elgin in 1623.

Again, what evidence is there that (p. 152) 'many Scottish reels' of the early eighteenth century were of the longways formation of the English Country Dance? If the author has such evidence it should certainly have been quoted, for the earliest reference to a reel in longways form that has been discovered so far is dated 1805.

It is a revealing exercise to try to follow the author's arguments in his treatment of Scottish dance technique, particularly in relation to Reels and Country Dances. Thus on page 288 we read:

> There is no reason to believe that the Scots employed the same steps as the English in the ballroom Country Dance in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and much reason to believe, as was expounded at some length in the previous chapter, that they would favour the same steps—both travelling and setting—as they employed in the reel.

There is in fact abundant evidence from oral tradition that in that part of the nineteenth century covered by living memory Scottish dancers did distinguish in both style and steps between Reels and Country Dances; this evidence, with a list of sources, is given in our book *Traditional Dancing in Scotland*, to which the author refers so frequently.

But in any case, what are the reasons 'expounded in the previous chapter'? The only relevant passage is (p. 279):

> If the Scottish contribution to the figures of the Country Dance could be considered slight in the eighteenth century, there can be little doubt that the difference between the Scottish and English manner of executing the Country Dance was at least as great as the difference between the dancing characteristics of the two peoples. The evidence of several observers, some of which has been quoted in Chapter 18, confirms this.
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> We have been told of the electric effect of the music of the reel on the Scots. Who can believe, then, that in a dance performed to this music and involving the sequence set-to-and-turn-corners-and-reel, for instance, a sequence so similar to that of their favourite dance, the Scots would not naturally set and travel as they would do in a reel to the same music.

The second of these paragraphs ignores the evidence from the Scottish manuscript collections of Country Dances that *c.* 1740 reel tunes were played at half-speed for Country Dances (see *Scottish Studies* 11: 141), just as the Duke of Perth is so played today. The first paragraph refers us back to Chapter 18, but none of the descriptions of Scottish dancing quoted there can definitely be said to refer to Country Dancing. Indeed, the only relevant passage in Chapter 18 appears to be the author's curious assertion at the end of the chapter (p. 264) that it 'is Highland Dance *tradition* that is the fertilizing force in Scottish dancing; and the Scottish Country Dance is all the richer because of it, and indeed may have little peculiar identity without it'.

This argument by intimidation, using a rhetorical question which is subsequently assumed to have been answered in the sense that the author would like, and using a phrase such as 'there can be little doubt', 'doubtless', 'no doubt', 'surely', is only one of many examples that could be quoted, and is certainly not history, social or otherwise.

The last two chapters of the book concern the creation of the Royal Scottish Country Dance Society, and one cannot help contrasting the author's fulsome remarks concerning Miss Jean Milligan, co-founder of the Society, with his treatment earlier in the text of the late Ion C. B. Jamieson and Mrs Mary Isdale MacNab.

Ion C. B. Jamieson receives only a grudging mention (p. 280) from Professor Emmerson: 'We have to thank Ian [*sic*] C. B. Jamieson for collecting these dances [Haughs of Cromdale, Braes of Busby, and Loch Erichtside], although not all of them are well-conceived.' One might have expected that a history of Country Dancing in Scotland would pay a better tribute than this to the man to whom, more than any other person, we are indebted for the collecting of Scottish Country Dances from oral tradition. He was the factor of a large estate at Langshaw, about 5 miles from Galashiels, and between about 1925 and 1935 he collected over forty Scottish Country Dances from old people in the Border country and Galloway. Many of these were published in the *Border Dance Book* and (without acknowledgment) in the R.S.C.D.S. *Scottish Country Dance Books*. His knowledge of oral tradition was unequalled among the early leaders of the Country Dance revival, but he found himself in increasing disagreement with the

policy of refinement so well described by Professor Emmerson in this book, and eventually he resigned from the Society.

Mary Isdale MacNab of Vancouver can be joined with Jamieson as one of the most notable collectors of Scottish dances. Her collecting was carried out largely from about 1910 to 1930 in Western Canada among the descendants of emigrants from Scotland, and the dances she obtained, which include a number of elaborate set dances, belong to the Highland tradition rather than to the Lowland Country Dance tradition. Over twenty of the dances she collected have been published in pamphlet form by the R.S.C.D.S.

Professor Emmerson permits himself two comments on Mrs MacNab. Thus of the Threesome Hankies Reel he remarks (p. 166):

> Mary Isdale MacNab published another version which she entitled The Shepherd's Crook. This is a very pretty dance in Strathspey style, but since no source is declared, our suspicions are confirmed that, whatever the original, the published dance is largely of Mrs MacNab's own devising.

One can only wonder why the author makes no similar criticism of the R.S.C.D.S., for in only a very few cases have they named the sources of the Country Dances collected from oral tradition that they have published!

The second comment (p. 225) is even more sweeping:

> Mary Isdale MacNab published a version of the [Swedish weaving dance] Vava Vadmal called Hebridean Weaving Lilt which, she tells us, was collected from a Canadian whose Norwegian ancestors had settled in Iona. Unfortunately, Mrs MacNab did not publish the raw material from which she fashioned her many attractive re-creations; it is to be hoped that this will be made available some day.

As a point of interest, the Hebridean Weaving Lilt is known to have been performed in Shetland by fisher girls from the Hebrides long before Mrs MacNab collected it from her source. We may ask what evidence Professor Emmerson has that Mrs MacNab's dances are 're-creations', and why has he not produced it in his book? If on the contrary there is no such evidence, then these comments are both ungracious and out of place in what is supposed to be a serious work of scholarship.

T. M. FLETT

The Ballad and the Folk by David Buchan. Routledge and Kegan Paul, London 1972. Pp. xii+326. £4.50.

A Scottish Ballad Book by David Buchan. Routledge and Kegan Paul, London 1973. Pp. xii+232. £3.50.

This is the first large scale attempt to bring ballad scholarship up to date in Scotland. That the first book is both important and valuable has already been recognised in the

many favourable reviews that have welcomed it, in the award of a doctorate, the Chicago distinction and the Blackwell prize at Aberdeen to the author. The second book, though designed to stand on its own legs independently of the first, is essentially an appendix to it containing the texts of some seventy-two ballads and folk-songs on which Dr Buchan's thesis is based.

The general argument starts from A. B. Lord's notions, themselves derivative of Milman Parry's work on formulae in Homer, that the traditional ballad-singer in the non-literate society, not having definitive texts, memorised not the words verbatim or the details of the incidents, but the story in a more general way, with patterns of word formulae, stanza arrangement and narrative motif. Every performance was in a sense *de novo* in which the singer filled in impromptu with his formulae the general skeleton of the story which he carried in his head. The result might be compared roughly, in musical terms, to a kind of simple fugue, and Dr Buchan devotes three chapters with diagrams in the approved modern paramathematical manner to showing how various ballads are structured according to this thesis. This is done with much expository skill and is one of the most illuminating parts of the book. He shows how the pattern is built up in triads, balanced stanzas, and frequently in a circular form so that the story winds and unwinds itself in a regular and even manner. This, according to Dr Buchan, is the type of the classical ballad of the early eighteenth century, handed down orally from one generation to the other until the population became by and large literate. Chapbooks, broadsheets, song-books and the like began to circulate among the popular singers, who gradually developed an undue reverence for the printed text and started to memorise a ballad word for word instead of 'structurally' and so lost that freedom to 'recreate' with each performance that, according to Dr Buchan, is the essence of the authentic balladist, and that distinguishes the old ballad tradition from the new.

His business of course, having worked out this neat theory, is to prove it, and Dr Buchan turns for support to one of the very best of ballad traditions, that of the North-East of Scotland, which stretches from the mid-eighteenth century to the present day. After a very well-written and persuasive analysis of North-East society and its development from the Middle Ages, from the clan structure, especially in the upper part of Aberdeenshire, the land of the Gordons and the Forbeses, to the agricultural revolution and the drastic changes it involved, Dr Buchan sidesteps into the world of theory on ballad-singing, as propounded by Parry and Lord, shooting the usual American line that everyone got it all wrong in the past and that what is needed is a new polysyllabic terminology which will make it all plain. If one may judge from what has happened in other disciplines, like linguistics, this is in danger of ending up in a blind alley of jargon. Its real weakness lies in failing to make clear beyond a peradventure the *practical* distinction between memorising the structure and memorising the words, in ignoring the relationship between the 'formulae' and the story, and in dealing in equivocal concepts like 'literate', 'oral minds', 'recreating', *etc.*

Dr Buchan then produces Mrs Brown of Falkland whose large repertoire of ballads,

learned from older relatives and nurses from Braemar, went back into the first half of the eighteenth century, as a classical example of the traditional balladist. No one can possibly deny the importance of Mrs Brown in the tradition or the excellence of her ballad texts, but she was certainly not the pure uncontaminated illiterate ballad singer of the theory. She was literate in the fullest sense of the term, the daughter of an Aberdeen professor brought up in the academic cloisters of King's College: Robert Jamieson, who got most of his ballads from her for his 1806 Collection, says she gathered 'all the varieties of the same tale which she could meet with. In some instances, these different readings may have insensibly mixed with each other, and produced, from various disjointed fragments, a whole, such as reciters, whose memories and judgments are less perfect, can seldom produce'. In other words Mrs Brown was not only a singer but also an editress, in her own way, of ballads, not unlike Sir Walter Scott. Can we be sure that the undoubted structural symmetry of so many of her texts was not due to Mrs Brown's literary skill and her upbringing in the humanities? From the theoretical point of view the repertoire of the 'Old Lady', another North-East ballad singer, who was from her spelling at least much less literate, would have been a more satisfactory source, though her texts are less stylised and sophisticated than Mrs Brown's, as Dr Buchan admits (p. 155), and as can be seen very clearly by comparing their versions of *The Kitchie Boy* (No. 25 in the *Ballad Book*). Despite Dr Buchan's insistence on Mrs Brown's 'positive recreative approach', compared favourably with Bell Robertson's rigidity in the matter of text, it is very difficult to see much difference between her earlier and later versions of *Willie's Lady* (Child 6*a* and *b*), except that *b* is incomplete in its narrative and its deficiencies are more obviously due to faulty memory than to 'recreative' variation. And the same appears to be true of the two texts of *The Lass of Roch Royal* (p. 155). In *The Twa Sisters* the enlarged cast of characters is noted as a feature of the early ballad, though later we are told that this crowding of the stage is a symptom of literacy. In fact if one were to look for a palpable example of the creative process, one could find it in Bell Robertson's version of *Fair Annie* which is fuller than any of the others and shows evidence of patching where the original was forgotten and in which the story is developed with more detail (see Nos. 9 and 45).

The thesis develops through an able and well-documented survey of the effect of the Agricultural Revolution, the spread of education, and the changing social structure in the North-East in the late eighteenth century. This, according to Dr Buchan, brought a general literacy to the community and a consequent degeneration of the old tradition as described in the second paragraph above. This argument is followed through by an examination of the ballads collected by Peter Buchan of Peterhead and his sub-contractor, James Nicol of Strichen. Dr Buchan has much interesting and useful matter here, especially casting new light on Nicol, who was no less 'literate' (in any sense of the term) than Mrs Brown. Peter is rightly defended against the hypercriticism of Child, though often at the expense of the 'theory'. Nicol is criticised for prolixity in his texts, ascribed to the result of a 'deteriorating structural sense', but this is mere assertion and

anyone who has listened to a real folk-singer going on and on apparently interminably will not be easily convinced that this is a new and decadent feature in the art, as indeed Dr Buchan seems implicitly to admit on page 213, in agreement with Grundtvig.

There are again questionable statements here. It is doubtful if the commonalty in lowland Aberdeenshire was as illiterate or non-literate as Dr Buchan labours to make out, and a reference to Simpson's history of education in the county should be made as a corrective. That there is a good deal of bathos in Nicol's texts cannot be denied but can as plausibly be attributed to the fact that his particular singers were less rather than more literate, or to put it another way, to avoid the ambiguity of Dr Buchan's use of 'literate', were less skilled 'creators', poets, or improvisers, and the mention of doctor's shops and the like prosaic items merely incorporate the social changes which every folk-singer in close contact with his milieu is bound to reflect.

Nicol's text of *Tam Lin* (No. 27) compares unfavourably with the version rescued by Burns but we don't know what an artist like Burns did with the text when he got it. Again in *Bonny John Seton* (No. 36) there are more non-ballad traits, less structure and more comment, as Dr Buchan points out. Yet the ballad is pretty accurate in its historical detail, leading us to assume that it had survived fairly intact from 1639 to about 1825, and we are obliged to ask what the original text was like and whether Nicol (or his sources) tampered with it and if so, how?

When we come to the discussion of Bell Robertson, Gavin Greig's great source, we again run into difficulties with the theory. Many of Bell's texts derive plainly from pre-Buchan versions, as Gabrielle Humbert demonstrated, that is to a period not far short of Mrs Brown's, and we know that Bell was a stickler for the text as she got it aurally from her mother, and not from printed texts, though they undoubtedly intervened earlier in the tradition. If Bell's texts are inferior to Mrs Brown's in spite of being frequently contemporary, it by no means follows that the deficiences are due to corrupting influences in the interval. One begins to suspect that Dr Buchan is not really comparing like with like. Mrs Brown is really more 'literate' than Bell Robertson. What would an eighteenth-century Bell Robertson have given us, for instance? We might here profitably compare the texts given by Maidment or Motherwell, especially those collected by the latter from Renfrewshire singers. Another useful study would be the three versions of *Lady Isabel* (No. 42) collected by Peter Buchan, all showing different workings of the same theme, which deserves a closer examination than Dr Buchan has given it. And the same applies to *Leesome Brand* (No. 43).

Incidentally one is surprised to find so little mention of Herd in Dr Buchan's book. Herd was contemporary with Mrs Brown, a most accurate and reliable collector, who almost certainly got most of his material, which was used by Percy, from roughly the same area in the North-East and whose texts also are very relevant in the discussion. And the same criticism is true to a lesser extent in his treatment of Kinloch.

It may be that the whole problem of the ballads has been bedevilled partly by Child's

misguided efforts to establish a 'pure' text and partly by fruitless wrangles about origins which Dr Buchan touches only at arm's length. It still cannot be said to have been settled; perhaps we are still asking the wrong questions; and Dr Buchan's thesis begs as many more. Gabrielle Humbert's words are still true: 'We have not yet succeeded in drawing a hard and fast boundary between folk-poetry and literature nor yet in clearly separating folk influence and literary intrusion in the orally transmitted fragments'.

With all these strictures on Dr Buchan's theories, the fact remains that Dr Buchan's book is an excellent one, fully deserving the general approbation with which it has been received. Indeed the sceptical reader could ignore the theory altogether and still find the book a mine of information, an invaluable guide to a most complex subject, easy to read and to follow. Together the two books form the most substantial and penetrating contribution to ballad study that has come out since the war.

DAVID MURISON

Bàrdachd Shìlis na Ceapaich (*Poems and Songs by Sìleas MacDonald*), edited by Colm Ó Baoill. Scottish Gaelic Texts, Volume 13. Scottish Academic Press, Edinburgh 1972. Pp. lxvii+271.

This volume contains the works of the MacDonald poetess Sìlis nighean mhic Raghnaill (Sìlis na Ceapaich). It is of particular interest since it provides the first collected edition and translation of her poetry, access to which had often been difficult even for Gaelic scholars; and it is the more welcome in view of the strength and variety of the compositions themselves. In keeping with the practice in the present series the text and translation appear on facing pages; they are preceded by a substantial introductory section (in which is assembled what can be known of the origins, life and posterity of Sìlis, and other general questions), and followed by sets of notes dealing with specific points (historical, textual, and metrical *cum* musical), so that when appendices, index and glossary are counted in, the actual text takes up little over one-third of the book. The nature of their material, and the dearth of scholarly work in so many fields, forces editors of Scottish Gaelic texts to become pioneers in many areas besides the strictly textual.

Sìlis was born, it appears, around 1660, the daughter of Gilleasbuig, 15th chief of the MacDonalds of Keppoch, and died about 1729; she married Alexander Gordon of Camdell—perhaps in 1685—and moved to live with him in Camdell and then Beldorney, in Gordon country in upper Banff-shire, where their family was reared and where she seems to have spent the rest of her life. This framework of basic facts may have been attainable before now, but it is here established methodically—often

by the use of documentary evidence newly turned up by Dr Ó Baoill's researches. And when we look beyond this outline the story is the same: a new and different picture is offered, at a closer range than was hitherto possible. Where we no longer have to accommodate the mooted love-affair with the Skye poet Lachlann mac Theàrlaich Óig, we are offered in its stead evidence as to what sort of business it was that took Alexander Gordon into Lochaber and MacDonald parts, both before and after his marriage to Sìlis (pp. xlvi–xlvii); we are shown the sasine whereby Sìlis was guaranteed an annuity from her husband's lands (Appendix IV); in short, we have some factual and circumstantial detail to set beside the enlarged *corpus* of poems now presented, and it is no surprise that new points from within them are now seen to be salient, while others are shown to have been false scents.

A brief analysis is given (p. lviii *et seq.*) of the sorts of song composed by Sìlis, dividing them formally, by metre and thematically, into the categories of family, political comment, laments, religious verse, moral verses, and the harp and its music. The latter is not, of course, to be taken as a rigid classification of song-categories; indeed the themes themselves overlap considerably in Sìlis' work, and, if the distinctions fall short of being clear-cut, that fact comes near to explaining part of her appeal: Sìlis expresses in verse, as she clearly lived, a continuity which drew all aspects of her life together. At all events, it is to the present editor's credit that he goes on to ask how, and on what occasions, and for whom did Sìlis compose her songs (though one question seems to have been begged at pp. ix, lxi, 128, 173, where he uses the term 'writing' to describe her activity); and it seems plausible to hold with Dr Ó Baoill that she composed for her family and household and perhaps visiting relatives and friends, more or less occasionally, and perhaps not starting until well on in her married life. (The most precisely dated are those political songs associated with the events of 1715, though these, it must be added, include at least one whose association with Sìlis herself is not so secure.)

It has been to Sìlis' disadvantage that, while her reputation—perhaps mostly in Lochaber and Badenoch—won her a place in most of the early printed collections of Gaelic songs, few of them give more than a couple of her compositions. Perhaps she suffered for being a woman; perhaps she was overshadowed by the MacDonald bards of her father's generation, in her own and other branches of the family; perhaps she suffered the fate of one removed from the hub of things (from a MacDonald point of view), though one cannot say that she would have been moved to compose when and as she did, had she remained in Lochaber. Certainly a feeling of isolation seems to come through in the poem on Lachlann Dall, the blind harper who (she tells us) used to be plied with her questions about MacDonald families and with requests for the most esteemed compositions—on MacDonald subjects—of the time. It would be tempting to see Sìlis as a Highland mother asserting the Gaelic side of their heritage for her children and household in Strathavon, which must have appeared relatively *gallda* ('lowland') to a Keppoch girl, and was perhaps already subject to anglicisation at

certain levels. (*Cf.* pp. lxi, xlix, where one should not omit Professor Watson's *Baile Dòrnaigh*, *C.P.N.S.*, p. 488, as the Gaelic form for Beldorney; *cf.* also K. N. MacDonald, *MacDonald Bards*, p. 92.)

As to the songs themselves, one is pleasantly surprised at how well they read together, and at the familiarity one now feels with their maker, who had previously been only a little better known than a host of minor figures of a comparable period. They do (with a couple of exceptions) strike one positively as being by the same person, a quality by no means to be taken for granted when one thinks of the pressures which an oral tradition could exert in the direction of uniformity both before and after composition. That person is one who is confiding and warm, with strong maternal (if not matriarchal) instincts for her family, and a crusading sense of right and wong which extends from this forgivably partisan base to inform her attitudes in the compromised and contradictory world of politics. For Sìlis was ready to take up cudgels and join in the political song-mongering of her time. We have to regard the sectarian fervour of such lines as, *e.g.*, 288–92 in this light too; for such uninhibited strictures against the ministers of the Reformed Church are less theological than political—part of the ammunition available to one railing against Whiggery, Hanover, the Union, the Reformed Church and other associated targets.

There is thus no real contradiction—Sìlis would not have noticed one—between the militant Catholicism implicit in her Jacobite stance and the non-doctrinal, personal religion which we encounter in her *laoidhean* ('hymns'), whose directness and simple piety echo that of the *Carmina Gadelica*. A crucial point emerges here: her hymns echo the popular Gaelic ones because she has allowed their form and tone to provide the model and register for her own: her religious poetry substitutes for timelessness a persistent feeling of unique circumstance and occasion—one might say, of personality—but she is thoroughly traditional in her assumption of the existing *genre* as a starting-point.

It seems to me that we can make this into a general point about Sìlis' art: she shows awareness of the formal and stylistic requirements of the various traditions of Gaelic song she uses, but has a distinct matter-of-factness about her approach to them; she will bend them to suit her own needs rather than subsume her case in the traditional model, in a way which is enough to mark her off from most of her contemporaries. Thus she can cast herself in the 'below stairs' women's world of such songs as 'To her Daughter Mary' (Number I in the present collection), or, again, conjure up the *ambiance* of the chief's hall in the elegy on Alasdair Dubh (Number XIV). In both of these songs, as in the *laoidhean*, we find the appropriate vocabulary and conceptual framework, with scarcely a false note: the obligatory formulae are honoured, whether it is 'my child is too good for A, B,...' (listing hypothetical spouses) in a *tàladh*, ('lullaby'), (see ll. 18 ff.), or whether it is in the enumeration of the age-old princely qualities (see ll. 831 ff.). She can get inside these—or any other—chosen subjects for versification, but for whatever reason (as an amateur? as a woman?) she is comparatively resistant to the mesmeric, centripetal pull of the tradition. If her poetry is unsteady in places

because of this readiness to throw aside the crutches of the tradition, her firmer paces stand out for that very reason.

Finally, one cannot altogether avoid having thoughts on the subject of her alleged conversion to the religious life after an immoral youth: I should not like to have to say definitely whether these stories are motival (*i.e.* likely to attach themselves to any female poetical figure in Gaelic tradition), the result of false inference, or fact. It may be that she did have a frivolous period in her youth, and also reached some personal crisis later on in life, whether or not the two are to be causally connected. For what it is worth, a hint of the conviction of the convert may be sensed in her religious songs, which might be suggestive for the persistent traditions of her trance and recovery (see especially *Laoidh nan Ceudfathan*, the 'Hymn of the Senses', printed as Appendix I). Whatever the answer is, the poems are now there for each to make his judgment, and the speculation and guesswork of earlier authorities has been trimmed down to size. The reader can only be recommended to make the acquaintance of this very worthwhile lady.

From what was said at the outset of this review it will be clear that we are dealing with a very well-served text: it should be added that the marshalling and evaluation of whatever sort of evidence, often a complicated task, is accomplished with sympathy and lucidity. As for the text itself, it is only here that one's respect for this volume must be tempered by a degree of reservation; for it seems to the present writer that the editor's other efforts are detracted from, and the text itself, while being serviceable, does not show up well by the highest standards (which one would like to be able to apply to this series if to any).

Bearing in mind that he has had to start almost from scratch, one feels that there should have been more research into the Gaelic used by Sìlis: there are limitations to the usefulness of strings of parallels and analogous usages, but one suspects that the very unearthing of such linguistic material would have caused a number of misinterpetations to fade away at an early stage. For example, the *raspars uasal* of lines 100–7 is pursuing the same quarry as the *misdear* in *Songs of Duncan Ban Macintyre*, lines 1279 ff., *ag èaladh 'sna cùilteau/ 'se rùdhrach gu h-ìosal fo mhàgan*, and there is no need for *'sa' chùil* to be emended to *mar chùl*, whatever the latter is supposed to mean.

One is also irked by a number of departures and inconsistencies in orthography, but in the absence of any agreed guide-lines on the subject it is perhaps as well to let that pass at the present time: it will better serve the interests of those likely to read *Scottish Studies* if this review confines itself to the two points most affecting readers dependent on the present edition and translation for their knowledge of Sìlis' poems. Of these, the first concerns Gaelic text and the second translation.

Most of Sìlis' poems occur in two or more of the early collections (manuscript or printed) of Gaelic poetry, and Dr Ó Baoill supposes that a synthetic text can be constructed from these, which will go nearer to what Sìlis herself composed than any one of the sources themselves. Thus (p. ix) ' . . . in some cases I have partially fused two or

more versions of the same poem . . . '; and in others, where he claims to follow the version giving ' . . . the best text of the poem as a whole, . . . very often the oldest text', his practice is still influenced by this synthetic ideal, for he is frequently to be found looking over his shoulder to the other versions when his chosen one is unexceptionable. Thus, at line 338 the Stewarts' version (which is being followed here—see p. 190) has *Bha fuil air faobhair, 's claig'nean sgaoilte*, but the Irvine MS has caused Dr Ó Baoill to read *fuil is faobh is claignean 7rl.*. Sìlis herself would have called this weakness *cleas a' choin sholair*—see lines 584 ff., where the dog sees a reflection of his bone in the water, and loses the real one through snatching at the insubstantial one. In fact it is the prime assumption, that a meaningful synthetic text is attainable in these circumstances, which really needs questioning. Fuller reasoning will have to be enunciated elsewhere, but a simple example may be allowed to symbolize the present *malaise*: at lines 350–1 Sìlis is saying, 'curses on those who left you in the lurch . . . ' in both the sources, and they then diverge in what they say about these turncoats. One calls them *luchd spuinnidh nan ceud* and the other describes their activities *ri pluntruin nar deighe* (*i.e. ri plùnndrainn 'nur déidh*). These are *equivalent* readings, and there is no reason, historical, syntactical or metrical, for preferring one to the other, except that it be the reading of the source one happens to be following. This sort of divergence is well-known in Gaelic songs, and, as I say, I must hope, unless anticipated, to investigate the principles that govern it, and the problems it provides for an editor, on a future occasion. Dr Ó Baoill is not the first to have blunted the sharp edge of textual criticism (of the conventional sort) on the too yielding substance of orally transmitted Gaelic poetry; but whatever the precedents I feel it is misguided to believe that conflation can make a more authentic text than these sources, and I hence regard Dr Ó Baoill's reading at line 351, *luchd plùnndrainn nan ceud*, as a less than legitimate exercise of editorial judgment. Nor may this sort of procedure be dismissed as mere harmless self-delusion when it can lead to the appearance of a text like the present Poem II ('Advice to Young Girls'), which fails to match the degree of coherence and sense offered by either of the two main source-versions taken by itself: the editor's difficulties with this song (see p. 126) are, in my opinion, largely self-inflicted.

Secondly, the translation: this is usually intelligible (a heartfelt compliment), but sometimes allows itself freedom beyond the minimum required to enable a just rendering. This leads inevitably to imprecision, to which is added in the present volume a larger number of plain errors than we are entitled to expect. Thus *aontadh* (l. 50) is 'consent', not 'uniting' (which is *aonadh*); the advice at line 105 is much more precise and practical than would appear from the translation, though here *pudicitia* may have caused the translator's pen to waver; *cuir sgairt ort* (l. 269) is 'bestir yourself', 'gird yourself up' (against the army *etc.*), not 'call out to'; *buachaillean* (ll. 1000, 1101) are 'shepherds' not 'herdsmen'; *faosaid* (l. 1226) is 'confession', not 'penance'; *cur* and *gabhail* (l. 1304) in a musical context mean 'to accompany' and 'to sing', not 'to make music' and 'to recite'; *etc.*, *etc.*

The glossary is not satisfactory: if, as stated, it is to contain 'the less common words', why is the celebrated *socair dhàna* (l. 1309) omitted, and the rare form *oighear* (l. 32), and the rare meaning 'long-lived' for *saogh'lach* (l. 830)? And what are such entries as '*fhìn*, self (1st person singular)' doing in it? Again, it sometimes baldly repeats meanings given uncertainly in the text, as if the fact of repetition would give them (much-needed) strength: thus, *e.g.*, '*sèamhaidh*, wise, 380' (*recte* 'mild' =*sèimhidh*). Sometimes, it must be admitted, the Glossary silently corrects errors made in the text (*e.g.* '*sròl*, satin'—contrast ll. 471, 784); but equally the Glossary ventures some errors where the treatment of the text is perfectly correct, as at line 61, where *saobhadh* is correctly construed 'dissembling', but the Glossary gives 'infatuation'.

It is not intended to excuse these faults—they are serious enough—yet it is only fair to say that one is brought back in the final summing up to this book's positive achievements. One's lasting impression, like one's first, is still one of gratitude to the editor. On the historical side Dr Ó Baoill has been diligent and shrewd, and he has presented his discoveries in a sober, characteristically modest way, with the result that Sìlis herself can emerge as a real person in a reliable and confidence-inspiring setting, as far as possible removed from the vague, repetitious material which has mostly served as her 'biography' up till now. In musical questions his familiarity with the 'Irish dimension' is to our advantage when he comes to discuss the filiation of tunes.

Sìlis na Ceapaich was not the greatest Gaelic poet of her sex or her age, but she stands up very well to being edited. We are indebted to Dr Ó Baoill for enabling us to discover her—a Highland lady, a Jacobite, a MacDonald, a Catholic, and the composer of songs both robust and tender.

WILLIAM GILLIES

The Various Names of Shetland, written and published by Alexander Fenton, National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland, Edinburgh 1973. Pp. 22+vi. 20p.

In this model of systematic research and exposition Mr Fenton explores the whole history of the name Shetland from its first appearance in an old Norse skaldic poem of *c.* 1000 as *Hjaltland* through *Hj-* and *Sh-* forms with an occasional *H-* or *Y-*, written in Middle Scots as 3- and later supplanted through the caseroom deficiencies of Scottish printers by a *z-*, as in *Menzies*, *MacKenzie*, *spulzie*, *tailzie*, ending up in the pronunciation Zetland in the English manner, still affected in the marquisate title of the Dundas family and in bureaucratic usage—but one that the modern Shetlanders justifiably abominate. All this is of course well-trodden ground for historical linguists, of whom there are still one or two surviving in our Universities, but Mr Fenton has assembled and deployed all the evidence, primary and secondary, with exemplary thoroughness: he adduces parallels to the various developments of O.N. *hj-*, not only

from Scots and Northern English place-names like Shap and Shipton but also from Norwegian, which is very useful, and there are plenty of supporting instances from the modern vocabulary of Shetland and Orkney. Another, if remoter, parallel could have been mentioned in the history of the word *sherry*, also spelt *xery* after Spanish and occasionally *zery* in Scots.

The derivation of *Sheltie*, the pony, is slightly tricky. Gaelic *Sealtainn* is rightly dismissed as having no relevance here, its form suggesting straight derivation from the O.N. dative case. The likeliest explanation is to trace the word to *Hjalti*, n., a Shetlander, following Jakobsen, used as a kind of nickname attributively, as a *Shelty horse*, the first instance of the name, found early in the eighteenth century.

The pamphlet, of some two dozen pages, is packed with facts, though the argument is never lost sight of and is easy to follow; there is a surprisingly large bibliography, an interesting, if somewhat crude, Dutch map of 1643, just about the time when the Dutch were beginning to discover Shetland; and the format and design with the Jarlshof viking ship drawing on the cover are particularly attractive. In Shetland itself, where every man and woman is a born philologist and can quote Jakobsen more or less by heart, the book should give the greatest satisfaction.

DAVID MURISON

Folklore and Traditional History, edited by Richard M. Dorson. Mouton, The Hague, 1973. Pp. 118. Fl. 22.

This symposium, the first of a new series of 'Studies in Folklore', is a reprint, with a new index, of *Journal of the Folklore Institute* vol. 8, nos. 2–3 (1971), which in its turn was based partly on a panel at a meeting of the American Historical Association in 1970. It has nothing to do with what it is now fashionable to call 'oral history', the study of social data and recent events through living memory: all the papers are concerned with accounts of historical events handed down by oral tradition over periods of a hundred years or more. Predictably, the most interesting comes from Africa, where this sort of study is developing most rapidly. Kwame Y. Daaku gives a fascinating description of the historical sources available among the Akan of Ghana, which include not only verbal material but triumphal slogans sounded by 'talking' drums and horns, ceremonial umbrellas decorated with pictures of historical scenes, and rooms full of the blackened stools of office of departed chiefs ranged in chronological order, to be watered every forty weeks with libations poured by the chief while all his chiefly ancestors are invoked by name. Ceremonials are still important enough in this part of West Africa for tribes mixed in population to the point where they speak the same dialect to continue to observe different festivals at which their separate slogans are proclaimed. Oral tradition remains essential not only to chiefs but to anyone, as the only

title to land and property. The parallel with former times in Scotland is clearest in the description of funeral laments, which are sources for the names of ancestors, and oaths, which are based on formulae recalling the kingdom's disasters and defeats, like some Highland and border clan slogans—'Cuimhnich bàs Ailpein!' or 'Remember Broomhouse!'

Another study of West African tradition, by David Robinson, compares accounts from two different classes of Fulbe professional oral historians. One class is associated with the chiefs of the settled agricultural Fulbe, the other with the nobility of the nomadic pastoral groups. The first praise Umar Tal, a member of their race who led a nineteenth-century Muslim *jihad*, and even their oral performance is based on written contemporary Arabic and vernacular sources. The second class, more concerned with musical performance and less accurate in their history, continue to glorify Umar's defeated pagan opponents, members of the group which they serve. Both in their stories stress the role of members of their own class as makers, not only transmitters, of history, able to sway public opinion.

Barbro Klein's paper examines in detail the tradition that Charles XII of Sweden was shot by one of his own soldiers with a button off his own coat, and the controversy over the claim that the actual button had been found in 1924. Some surprising details about this emerge, but in view of parallel international traditions about the death of supposedly invulnerable heroes—Claverhouse among them—it is impossible to claim the tradition as true, though, as Dr Klein points out, if the king *was* believed invulnerable in his lifetime a would-be assassin *might* have used such a bullet. Swedish public interest in the controversy reflects the place of Charles XII as an aggressive national hero.

In shorter papers Marlene Ciklamini gives a digest of current ideas on the historical value of Old Norse skaldic verses as against the fictionalised Kings' Sagas and Sagas of Icelanders, and Albert Lord uses a parallel from his favourite Bosnian epic singer to show that Homer's Catalogue of the Ships may represent an element of a particular performer's style rather than an authentic Mycenaean Greek order of battle somehow preserved in tradition. The last and longest paper is Professor Dorson's own. He has chosen to leave aside the North American scene which he knows so well and break new ground in 'the Scottish highlands and outer islands whose history and folklore are notoriously intertwined and the product well collected'. True, but in selecting items from the archives of the School of Scottish Studies for transcription and translation (a saga in itself when the completed manuscripts were stolen by a thief to use as camouflage on University premises and the work had to be done again) he seems to have been guided less by local advice than by a preconception that 'for the Highlands, three episodes in particular have caught the folk imagination: the bloody battle of Culloden; the escape and wanderings of Prince Charlie . . . ; and the Glencoe massacre'. Anyone collecting Gaelic historical traditions in the field soon discovers that these are subjects on which most tradition-bearers may have opinions, but few have information,

true or fictional: the Heroic Age of the Scottish Gaels which generated the best of the legends was the period of unrestrained clan warfare which in most areas had been stamped out long before Glencoe, and the heroes and events known to the average storyteller are almost exclusively those of his own island or district. Fortunately Dorson also considers some material from printed sources—two of John Lorne Campbell's collections, Hugh Miller's *Scenes and Legends*, the MacKechnie edition of a few of the Dewar Manuscripts, and Alasdair Alpin MacGregor's *Peat-Fire Flame*—which despite the very different qualities of their editors all provide a more representative selection of themes.

Dorson ploughs steadily through forty or fifty tales from these sources, weeding out obviously non-historical international motifs. This done, he is not equipped to carry out a significant analysis of either the style or historical content of what remains. His most notable comment on the storytelling is the baseless suggestion that Angus MacLellan's comic tales as opposed to Dewar's 'grim clan histories' show a change in the balance of Gaelic repertoires over the past century. On the historical background Dorson only provides a few quotations from Prebble and the editors of the printed collections he uses, and clearly has not taken the time to look into other sources: he interpolates stories of the Appin Murder (whose victim is allowed to appear first as 'Campbell of Glure') among accounts of the Massacre of Glencoe as if they referred to the same event, and treats Prince Charles's disguise in woman's dress when accompanying Flora MacDonald as a 'legendary accretion'. The seven 'criteria for evaluating the historical validity of oral traditions' with which he concludes are admittedly preconceived, and the whole lengthy paper can hardly be seen as building up to the single Scottish example which he gives of each criterion.

ALAN BRUFORD

Books Received

Some of these books may be reviewed later in *Scottish Studies*

New Shetlander Writing. An Anthology from the first hundred numbers, edited by John and Lawrence Graham. Shetland Council of Social Welfare, Lerwick 1973. Pp. 112. 80p.

Folklore and Traditional History, edited by R. Dorson. Mouton & Co., The Hague, Paris, 1973. Pp. 118. Fl.22.

The Black Douglas by I. M. Davis. Routledge & Kegan Paul, London 1974. Pp. 184. £2.95.

Scott: Bicentenary Essays (Selected Papers read at the Sir Walter Scott Bicentenary Conference), edited by Alan Bell. Scottish Academic Press, Edinburgh and London 1974. Pp. 344. £3.75.

Robert Baillie and the Second Scots Reformation by F. N. McCoy. University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London 1974. Pp. 244. £5.

Record Apart by Andrew Herron. Scottish Academic Press, Edinburgh 1974. Pp. 209. £2.25.

Poems by Allan Ramsay and Robert Fergusson, edited by Alexander Manson Kinghorn and Alexander Law. Scottish Academic Press, Edinburgh and London 1974. Pp. 225. £3.75.

Studies in the History of Dalriada by John Bannerman. Scottish Academic Press, Edinburgh 1974. Pp. 178. £3.50.

Onoma. Bibliographical and Information Bulletin vol. XVII (1972/73), published with the assistance of the Belgian Government. International Centre of Onomastics, Leuven, Belgium. Pp. viii+477. 700B.fr.

The Scottish Tradition. Essays in honour of Ronald Gordon Cant, edited by Geoffrey Barrow. St Andrews University Publications no. LX, Scottish Academic Press, Edinburgh 1974. Pp. 267. £5.

Selected Reports in Ethnomusicology vol. II, no. 1. Institute of Ethnomusicology, University of California, Los Angeles 1974. Pp. 175 (+ illus.).

Liosta Focal As Ros Muc le T. S. Ó Máille. Irish University Press, Baile Átha Cliath, Eire 1974. Pp. 253.

Breacadh le T. S. Ó Máille. Irish University Press, Baile Átha Cliath, Eire 1973. Pp. 146.

Old Galloway by Ian Donnachie & Innes MacLeod. David & Charles, Newton Abbot 1974. Pp. 168 (+ illus.). £3.50.

Thomas Carlyle by Ian Campbell. Hamish Hamilton, London 1974. Pp. 210+8 plates. £4.25.