

A Visual Memory*

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Elsewhere in this volume my colleague Dr Alan Bruford discusses aspects of the remarkable verbal memory of the late Duncan MacDonald, South Uist. Donald Alasdair Johnson,¹ also of South Uist, and probably the finest storyteller living in this country today**, also displays—in some of his stories at least—a considerable talent for reproducing certain passages almost verbatim each time he tells these particular stories.² The interview printed below, however, deals rather with his truly dramatic visual memory.

I had long been convinced that a number of factors, in various permutations, were probably represented in the way in which good storytellers remembered and told their stories—among these being:

- 1 Conceptual or structural memory—as exemplified by their ability to remember plots.³
- 2 Verbal memory.
- 3 Visual imagery.⁴

However, I had not, in fact, tested these theories on a practising storyteller till I happened to try them out rather diffidently on Mr Johnson in April 1973. He had just finished telling me his splendid version of the hero-tale *An Tuaraisgeul Mòr*.⁵ The ensuing interview, recorded without a pause and continuing to the end of the tape, is set out below. It is no exaggeration to say that the results went far beyond my wildest expectations.

It is a matter for regret that, in so far as I am aware, this approach was not tried with some of the other great Gaelic storytellers of recent memory such as Duncan MacDonald, Angus MacLellan and others.⁶ Mr Johnson, now aged 86, is probably in a class of his own among surviving storytellers. I do suggest, however, that, wherever possible, fieldworkers should try similar lines of questioning with their best informants.⁷

I am indebted to my wife Agnes MacDonald, one-time texts transcriber at the School of Scottish Studies and the Gaelic Section of the Linguistic Survey of Scotland, who produced the first draft of the transcript that follows.

* This paper was written as a contribution to an unpublished collection of papers by former pupils and colleagues presented to Professor K. H. Jackson in June 1976 to mark his completion of 25 years as Professor of Celtic at the University of Edinburgh (1950–75).

** The School of Scottish Studies records with regret that Donald Alasdair Johnson died in May this year.

Hesitations, slight stumbles and unfinished sentences are indicated . . . Minor interjections—such as *ub-ub*—are indicated. . Apart from the latter, what follows is a complete and unabridged transcript of the interview (SA1973/42A2. Translation pp. 13–24).

DAM O, *well*, math ga-rìreabh, a Dhòmhnail Alasdair. O, *well*, tha i math.

DAJ Sin agad mar a chuala mis' i.

DAM Agus 's math a b'fhiach i bhith 'ga h-éisdeachd.

DAJ O 'se naidheachd . . . 'se sgeulachd mhath a bh'innte.

DAM . . . Sgeulachd mhath ga-rìreabh.

DAJ 'Sè.

DAM . . . Saoil de cho tric 's a chuala sibh fhéin i, aig ur n-athair, an té bha sen?

DAJ O Dhia 's ioma turus sin—ach bu shuarach na h-ùineachan a bha i . . . a bha i . . . a chuala mi i 'nuair a thog mi i.

DAM 'Nuair a thog sibh i.

DAJ 'Nuair a thog mi i. Bu shuarach. Bu shuarach.

DAM Agus an fheadhainn a bhiodh a staigh air chéilidh, robh toil aca dhen a' stòiridh a bha sen? Am bu toil leotha bhith 'ga cluinnteil?

DAJ O Dhia b'eadh 's gum biodh iad a' tighinn a dh'aon ghnòthuch air a son.

DAM Bhitheadh?

DAJ Bhitheadh.

DAM 'S can nan tigeadh feadhainn . . .

DAJ Na seann . . . Na seann fheadhainn a bh'ann a shiod-ach —na *class* a bha sinach.

DAM Seadh.

DAJ Bhitheadh, a ghràidhein agus . . . Bhitheadh agus an fheadhainn òga bh'ann an uair ud mar a . . . mar a bha mi fhìn 's iad sin.

DAM Bha dìreach. Bha.

DAJ A chlann a bha timchioll a sin, nam biodh iad ann.

DAM Dìreach. Ach bha feadhainn ann a b'fhearr cuimhne na chéile, feumaidh, 'nuair a bha . . .

DAJ O bha. Bha.

DAM Feadhainn mar a bha sibh fhein . . .

DAJ Bha. Fios agad, bha feadhainn dhiubh a bha *interest* unnta na b'fhearr.

DAM Bha.

DAJ Bha.

DAM Ach a réir a chonais bha chuile duine dhen an fheadhainn òga a bha sen, bha iad a' gabhail *interest*: dh'fheumadh iad fuireach sàmhach 's dh'fheumadh iad éisdeachd 's bha iad a' . . .

DAJ O, dh'fheumadh, dh'fheumadh.

DAM Bha iad ag éisdeachd ris a' ghnòthuch.

DAJ O, bhiodh iad ag éisdeachd, fhios agad, ach cha robh i 'dol sìos ac', fhios agad.

DAM A, dìreach. Dìreach.

DAJ Cha robh i 'dol 'san inntinn ac' idir, fhios agad. Cha robh iad ach ag éisdeachd rithe mar a bha esan 'ga gabhail dhaibh.

DAM Seadh. Ach cumaidh an dala duine cuimhn' air rud . . .

DAJ Ach cumaidh duine—'n dàrna duine . . . 's tha e 'cumail beachd air gu dé mar a bha i 's a chuile sìon.

DAM Tha. Tha.

DAJ Cumaidh. Sin mar a bha iad.

DAM Neist . . .

DAJ O ghráidhein, cha robh . . . Cha robh . . . Cha robh brag ri dheanamh thall na bhos.

DAM Cha robh?

DAJ O cha robh.

DAM Dìreach a bhith sàmhach. Agus, a neist, 'nuair a bha sibhse 'cluinn-teil stòiridh mar sen, robh sibh—'nur n-inntinn fhéin—robh sibh mar gum biodh sibh a' faicinn dealbh air a'ghnothuch air neò . . .?

DAJ Bha. Bha mi dìreach mar gum faicinn mar a bha 'rud a' dol air aghaidh.

DAM Bha. Bha.

DAJ Mar gum bithinn 'ga tarraicinn air a bhall' ann a shin-ach, dìreach, mar a bha 'rud a' dol air aghaidh.

DAM Bha. 'S bha sibh 'ga faicinn 'na . . . 'na h-ìomhaighean . . .?

DAJ Bha. 'Sè. Bha. Bha, mi dìreach mar gum biodh . . . dìreach mar gum bithinn dìreach 'ga faicinn a' dol mar sin air aghaidh air a bhalla mar sin—mar gum biodh, dìreach, bha mi 'pigtiùreadh a ghnòthuich air a' . . . air a' rud.⁸

DAM Seadh. Agus fhathast 'nuair a bhios sibh 'ga h-innse 'n dràsda fhein 'm bi sibh 'ga faicinn 'na dealbh mar sen?

DAJ O tha cuideachd. Tha

DAM Tha fhathast?

DAJ Feumaidh tu . . . Feumaidh tu bhith 'ga faicinn 'na dealbh romhad air neò cha bhi beachd agad orra.

DAM Seadh. Seadh.

DAJ Chi thu . . . Tha thu . . . Tha thu mar gum biodh an dealbh romhad ann a sheo-ach, 's chan eil thu ach a'leantail a' rud mar a tha e . . . Tha.

DAM 'S cha mhór nach eil sibh 'ga fhaicinn 'na dhealbh air a bhall' air ur beulaibh?

DAJ Cha mhór nach eil. Cha mhór. Cha mhór . . . Chithinn-sa nam bithinn a' coimhead air a bhall' ann a shin-ach, chithinn dìreach mar a bha iad—mar a bha iad a' tighinn—na daoine—'s mar a bha a' rud ud 's a' rud ud eile.

DAM . . . 'S a faiceadh sibh dé 'n t-aodach a bh'orra na dé . . . Robh sibh a' faicinn dathan is rudan mar sen?

DAJ *Well*, cha . . . cha . . . cha . . . Chan fhaiceadh⁹. Chithinn . . . chithinn

dìreach mar . . . far . . . 'nuair a chaidh esan chon a' choire, bha mi dìreach mar gum bithinn a' faicinn a choir' ann a shin dìreach—meirgeach.

DAM Seadh.

DAJ Ma m'choinneamh.

DAM Seadh.

DAJ Bha mi 'faicinn an tom-luachrach (? - -)¹⁰ a thog esan e.

DAM Seadh dìreach. Seadh.

DAJ Bha.

DAM 'S an fhàlaire dhonn, bha sibh 'ga faicinn?

DAJ 'S an fhàlaire dhonn, bha i ann a shin. Bha i ma m'choinneamh.

DAM Bha dìreach.

DAJ Bha. Bha mi 'ga faicinn a' leum seachad air a' . . . air a gheat' aig an duine.

DAM Bha dìreach. Bha.

DAJ Bha.

DAM Neist 'nuair a tha sibh a' faicinn geata mar sen 'ne geat' iaruin . . . 'ne geata mór iaruin tha sibh a' faicinn na geata fiodha na dé bha sibh a' faicinn?

DAJ Geat' iaruin.

DAM Geat' iaruin.

DAJ 'Sè.

DAM De gheat' àrd, an e?

DAJ Seadh. Geat' àrd.

DAM Sheadh. Ai, Ai. 'S chitheadh sibh an caisteal 's chitheadh sibh na ridirean . . . ?

DAJ Chithinn dìreach tuairmeachd nan taighean a bh'ann, 's na . . . seòrsa taighean. Chitheadh. Bhithinn a' pigtiureadh gur ann mar seo-ach a bha . . .

DAM Bha, dìreach. Bha. 'Se rud math tha sen a neist.

DAJ 'Sè.

DAM 'Neist 'nuair a bha sibh a' faicinn na ridirean a bha sen, ciamar a bha sibh 'ga faicinn-san?

DAJ Cha robh ach dìreach 'ga faicinn 'nan daoine cumanta, dìreach, ach gu faiceadh tu iad, gu robh iad dreaisde seach càch.

DAM Seadh. Seadh. 'S bhiodh aodach orra . . . ?

DAJ 'S bhiodh an aodach orra. Bhitheadh. Chitheadh tu 'n t-aodach orra.

DAM Seach càch, gu-tà? Bhiodh aodach àraid orra?

DAJ Bhitheadh. Bha aodach àraid orra: striobaichean is rudan dhen t-seòrsa sin . . . Bhitheadh.

DAM Agus Ridire na Sgèithe Gile 's Ridire na Sgèithe Uaine . . . ?

DAJ Bha. Bha sin-ach, bha iad mar gum biodh e ac' air an gualainn ann a sheo-ach, air . . . air *tab*¹¹ . . . an dath.

DAM O, 'sè dìreach: air a' ghuailinn ann a shen?

DAJ Seadh.

DAM Seadh. Mar gum biodh sgrìob dhen dath, dìreach?

DAJ Seadh. Mar gum biodh sgrìob dhen dath ann . . . geal, na uaine, na dearg.

DAM . . . Seadh gu dearbha. O *well*, tha sen math.

DAJ Bhitheadh.

DAM Tha sen math. Agus 'nuair a bha . . . 'nuair a bha 'n ceanna' tighinn a nuas uige-san ma dheireadh . . . ?

DAJ Bha. Bha mi dìreach 'ga fhaicinn a' tighinn, dìreach, a' tighinn anns an iarmailt ann a shin mar gum biodh e 'tighinn . . . mar gum bithinn dìreach air a' chnoc ann a shin a' gabhail alla ris.

DAM . . . Neist an Tuaraisgeul Og agus an Tuaraisgeul Mór, robh sibh 'ga faicinn 'nan daoine móra, móra nas mutha na 'n cumantas na ciamar . . . ?

DAJ *Well*, bha mi 'faicinn an Tuaraisgeil Mhóir . . .

DAM Seadh.

DAJ 'Na dhuine . . . sgràthail gnòthalach . . . mar sin-ach . . . gur e brùid uamhasach a bh'ann . . . ach cha robh sìon . . . cha robh mi 'faicinn an Tuaraisgeil Og ach car 's gun moran tacs' ann ach . . . ach àird. Bha s . . . Caol, àrd.

DAM Sheadh.

DAJ Ach cha robh e fuathasach garbh idir.

DAM Seadh.

DAJ Ach bha mi 'ga fhaicinn-san garbh.

DAM Bha dìreach. 'S na cràgan a bha seo . . .

DAJ Seadh. Bha.

DAM Cràgan móra . . . 'N ann colach ri làmh duine bha sibh 'ga faicinn a neist . . . ?

DAJ 'Sann. 'Sann. Bha mi, dìreach . . . Saoilidh mi gu robh mi 'faicinn an dòrn a dh'fhàg an cù, dìreach—a thug e as—gu robh mi 'ga fhaicinn ann a shin.

DAM Seadh. Seadh. O *well* tha seo . . . Tha seo math. Tha seo math. Agus, à, 's fhad o bha mise 'deanamh a mach . . . 'S fhad o bha mi 'smaoineachadh . . . gura dòcha gur ann mar seo a bha duine 'cumail cuimhn' air a ghnòthuch—gu robh e 'ga fhaicinn, dìreach . . .

DAJ 'Sann a tha e 'ga fhaicinn.

DAM Mar gu faiceadh tu *film* air . . . ?

DAJ Dìreach mar gum biodh *film*.

DAM 'Sè . . .

DAJ Dìreach, tha . . . Mar gum biodh *film* a' dol seachad mar sin-ach ort, mar sin.

DAM Seadh. Agus a neist abair nam biodh sibh a' sealltainn ris a' bhall' ann a shen, 'sann mar gum bitheadh on a' lamh chli go na laimhe deiseadh a tha 'n ghnòthuch a' dol, an ann?

DAJ 'Sann.

DAM *Left go right?*

DAJ 'Sann. 'Sann. A' dol . . . deiseal.

DAM Seadh. Seadh, seadh . . .

DAJ 'Sann.

DAM O *well*, tha sen math.

DAJ Chan fhaic . . . Chan fhaic thu uair 'sam bith . . . uair 'sam bith a' dol mar siod e.

DAM 'Dol an taobh eile. Chan fhaic, dìreach. Chan fhaic, dìreach.

DAJ Mar siod. Ach chi thu . . . Chi thu 'tighinn mar seo e.

DAM Chi thu na dealbhan a' tighinn mar seo?

DAJ Chi. Chi thu 'n dealbh a' tighinn ma chuairt mar seo deiseal.

DAM Seadh. Seadh.

DAJ Mar tha ghrian a' dol.

DAM Neist, 'nuair a tha 'n cù . . . 'Nuair a bha 'n duine 'na chù, robh sibh 'ga fhaicinn 'na chù a' deanamh a chuile ston dhe seo, air neo robh sibh uaireannan 'ga fhaicinn 'na dhuine?

DAJ O, cha robh mi 'ga fhaicinn 'na dhuin' idir ach 'na chù.

DAM Ach 'na chù.

DAJ 'Na chù.

DAM Fad na h-ùine?

DAJ Cha robh . . . Chan fhaicinn ach 'na chù e . . . Chan fhaiceadh.

DAM O *well*, tha sen . . . Tha seo math ga-rìreabh, math ga-rìreabh.

DAJ Chan fhaiceadh . . . Chan fhaicinn ann ach 'na chù e 's bha mi 'ga . . . Chithinn . . . Bha mi 'ga fhaicinn as an tulmasan a bh'ann a sheo-ach, as a' sgallaidh, bha mi 'ga fhaicinn 'na chù 'na shuidh' ann.

DAM 'Na shuidhe?

DAJ Sheadh.

DAM Seadh.

DAJ Bha.

DAM Seadh, mas do thòisich e air comhartaich idir?

DAJ Seadh man do thòisich e air comhartaich ris an t-soitheach—man do nochd a' soitheach 's gun do thòisich e air comhartaich. Bha na coin eile 'dol air gach taobh dhe stòs dhan mhuir.

DAM Bha.

DAJ Leis a' sgallaidh.

DAM 'S 'ne coin mhóra bhiodh ann?

DAJ 'Sè coin mhóra bh'ann.

DAM Seadh. Seadh.

DAJ 'Sè.

DAM O *well*, tha fhios a neist, 's ann dìreach mar sen a bha daoine—'n dala duine . . . Neist 's dòcha daoine eile bha 'cluinn-teil seo nach fhaigheadh iad ìomhaighean cho math air na . . . ?

DAJ Chan fhaigheadh, fhios agad. Chan fhaigheadh. Cha robh iad a' . . . beachdnachadh air na rudan a bha seo-ach idir, fhios agad.

DAM Cha robh dìreach.

DAJ 'Sann bhuaithe sin a bha iad nach toireadh iad leoth' i 's nach . . . nach cumadh iad cuimhn' orra . . . ach aon uair 's gu bheil thusa 'tòiseachadh orra, 's i 'san inntinn agad, tha thu 'faicinn a' rud romhad ann a shin.

DAM 'Sann a tha thu . . . Cha mhór nach biodh tu . . . mar gum biodh tu 'ga leughadh far a' bhalla?

DAJ Mar gum biodh tu 'ga leughadh far a' bhalla . . . Mar gum biodh i 'tighinn ort.

DAM Seadh.

DAJ Brith gu . . . cò sgeulachd a th'ann, chan eil e go deifear, ach 'nuair a tha thu 'tòiseachadh as an toiseach aice tha 'nuairsin an corr soilleir romhad, mar gum biodh tu 'ga fhaicinn air a' bhall' ann a shin-ach—dé mar a tha chuile sìon a' dol.

DAM Tha, dìreach. Tha, dìreach.

DAJ Tha.

DAM Agus 'sann mar a tha sibh ag innse na stòiridh, 'sann tha i stòr thighinn ugaibh, mar sen?

DAJ 'Sann. Sìor thighinn ugad. Sìor thighinn ugad. 'Sann.

DAM Mar gum biodh tu . . . mar gum biodh, dìreach, i stòr nochdadh?

DAJ I sìor nochdadh riut—i sìor chumail riut. Mar a tha thusa 'dol air aghaidh . . . tha 'n gnothuch a' tighinn ort.

DAM . . . Mar sen nam biodh agaibh ris a' stòiridh a dheanamh uamhasach goirid—nam biodh agaibh ri *summary*, mar gum bitheadh, a thoir seachad, cha bhiodh e cho furasda 's dòch' idir?

DAJ *Well*, cha bhitheadh e cho furasd' idir ach dìreach (? nas lugha, doch', gun)¹² gearradh tu dheth buileach i.¹³

DAM Ach tha e nas fhasa stòiridh inns' air fad na tha e . . . ?

DAJ Tha e nas fhasa stòiridh innse air a f. . . o cheann, chionn tha i romhad ann a shìod go ceann, fad an t-siubhail. Chan eil thu ach a' dol . . . Chan eil thu ach 'ga leantail.

DAM Agus tha 'n dala dealbh, mar gum bitheadh, a' leantail na dealbh eile?

DAJ Tha . . . 'leantail na dealbh eile. Tha. Tha. Chuile sìon a' tighinn a staigh 'na àite fhéin.

DAM Seadh. Seadh. Seadh. O *well*, tha sen math.

DAJ Tha.

DAM Math ga-rìreabh.

DAJ O chan eil mi 'smaoineachadh mar a biodh beachd aig duine mar sìod-ach orra gun cumadh e cuimhn' orra uileag cho math idir.

DAM O, mar a bi . . . Tha mise 'smaoindeachadh gur e seo a tha . . . tha 'stéidheachadh na stòiridh ann a . . . ann an inntinn duine . . .

DAJ 'Sè. 'Sè.

DAM Bhith 'ga faicinn.

DAJ 'Sè. 'Sè. Tha thu 'ga faicinn. Tha thu 'ga faicinn ma d' choinneamh.

DAM Tha.

DAJ 'Se sin tha mi 'g ràdha. Mar a biodh i 'stèidheachadh as an inntinn agad mar sin-ach, chan eil mi 'smaoineachadh gun deargadh tu air a cumail. . .

DAM Seadh. Seadh.

DAJ Air chuimhne cheart.

DAM Seadh. Chan eil sibh ach mar gum biodh sibh, cha mhór, 'ga leughadh . . . ?

DAJ Chan eil sòn ach mar gum biodh . . . 'Nuair a thòisicheas mis' air a' stòiridh . . . chan eil mi ach mar gum bithinn 'ga leughadh far a bhall' ann a shin.

DAM *A well* . . .

DAJ Tha i 'tighinn beag air bheag ugam ann a sin-ach—ise stòr thighinn ugam mar a tha i 'dol—mar tha còir aice.

DAM Tha dìreach. Tha dìreach . . . Agus a neist 'nuair a bhios sibh libh fhéin am bi uaireannan na stòireannan sen a' dol thromh ur n-inntinn mar sen?

DAJ Bithidh. Bidh mis' uaireannan a bheir mi treiseagan air feadhainn aca mar siod-ach 's mi leam fhìn aig an tein' ann a sheo.

DAM Sheadh. 'S bidh sibh a' faighinn toileachas as a sen?

DAJ Ach a Dhia bithidh. 'S esan a Dhia bhitheas sin . . . 'S esan a Dhia bhitheas . . .

DAM O 'se deagh . . . 'Se deagh chur seachad ùine th'ann cuideachd.

DAJ O ghràidhein, 'sè : 'sè—do dhuine tha . . . nòisein aige dhiùbh.

DAM 'Sè, nach e seo an gnothuch.

DAJ 'Sè.

DAM 'S tha e 'cumail na h-inntinn beothail.

DAJ Tha e 'cumail na h-inntinn agad cho beothail.

DAM Tha dìreach.

DAJ Tha, seach a bhith *wander*-adh 's a' smaointinn air rudan neònach eile.

DAM Seadh. Seadh.

DAJ Tha, gu dearbha, 's esan a th'ann a shin.

DAM Neist cha bhi sibh fhéin uaireannan, mar gum bitheadh, a' feuchainn ri . . . Cha robh sibh riamh . . . Cha chòrdadh e ribh, mar gum bitheadh, stòireannan as ùr a dheanamh suas sibh fhéin, an còrdadh?

DAJ A Dhia cha chòrdadh . . . Cha chòrdadh.

DAM Fhios agaibh mar a bhios daoine 'deanamh leabhraichean . . .

DAJ Seadh leabhraichean . . .

DAM Na . . . Na . . . Cha chòrdadh e ribh ach dìreach mar a chuala sibh?

DAJ Cha chòrdadh ach mar a chuala mi.

DAM Mar a chuala sibh. 'Sè dìreach.

DAJ Cha chòrdadh. Cha chòrdadh. Cha chòrdadh gu dearbha.

DAM O *well*, tha sen math—math ga-fìreabh. Chuile duine . . . chuile duin' tha math, that sibh a' smaoineachadh . . . ?

DAJ Seadh, a chuile duin' tha math air sgeulachdan 's a tha cuimhn' aig' orra ceart

DAM Tha sibh a' deanamh a mach gur h-ann . . . ?

DAJ Tha mi smaoineachadh gur h-ann mar siod a tha . . . a tha iad—a leithid—nach eil . . . nach eil rathad aca bhith air a chaochladh co-dhiùbh.

DAM . . . Cha chuala sibh duine 'sam bith eile riamh a' bruidhinn air a seo—gu faiceadh iad a' stòiridh?

DAJ O cha chuala . . . Cha chuala gu dearbha. Cha chuala.

DAM Ach tha mi deimhine . . . Tha mi deimhine gur h-ann mar sen tha 'n gnothuch.

DAJ Ach 'sann mar siod a tha e . . . Bha sealladh agam-s' air a sgeulachd a ghabh mi dhut ann a shin—bha sealladh agam romham orra fad an t-siubhail, dìreach mar a bha i.

DAM Bha.

DAJ Mar gum bithinn 'ga faicinn ann a shin.

DAM Ach 'nuair a thòisich sibh, bha seorsa . . . bha seorsa sealladh agaibh air a stòiridh uileag, a robh?

DAJ *Well* . . . cha . . . Cha . . .

DAM Na robh agaibh ach sealladh orra . . .

DAJ Cha robh agam ach sealladh mar a bha mi 'dol air aghaidh.

DAM Sheadh. Sheadh. Sheadh.

DAJ Cha robh sealladh agam air a' cheann a b'fhaid air falbh idir dhi.

DAM Seadh.

DAJ Cha robh.

DAM Go ruigeadh sibh na b'fhaisg air . . . ?

DAJ Gos a ruiginn an t-àite bha seo . . .

DAM O *well*, tha sen math.

DAJ Cha robh sealladh air aghaidh ach dìreach mar a bha thu fhéin a' dol air aghaidh 's bha 'sealladh a' . . . cumail ort mar gum biodh e dìreach a' tighinn ugad mar sin.

DAM Bha dìreach. Bha dìreach.

DAJ Bha.

DAM A *well*, tha sen math. Tha mi toilichte gun d'fhuir mi siod sìos.

DAJ 'S ged a dh'fhàginn-sa pìos dhi as ma dheaghaidh, math-dh'fhaoidte gur h-ann a chuireadh i ceàrr mi airson pìos eile.

DAM Seadh, tha mi faicinn.

DAJ O nach robh sealladh dòigheil agam orra . . . 's o nach do lean mi 'sealladh aice-se fad an t-siubhail.

DAM Agus . . . 's dòcha gur e rudeigin a thachradh, a thogadh ur n-inntinn . . . Can na . . . Can nan gluaiseadh an cù—nan toireadh e boc as—na leighidh sen . . . 's dòch' . . . 's dòch' gun togadh sen ur n-inntinn tìotan far . . . ?

DAJ Thogadh far a' rud. Thogadh. Thogadh.

DAM Seadh.

DAJ 'S esan a dheanadh sin.

DAM Agus cha bhiodh e buileach cho furasda dhuibh an uairsen . . . ?

DAJ Cha bhitheadh.

DAM A cur an altaibh a chèile as a dheaghaidh sen?

DAJ Cha bhitheadh; a cur a staigh còmhladh a rithist mar a bhà i, idir.

DAM Cha bhitheadh.

DAJ 'Sann bhuaithe sin-ach a bha iad, fhios agad, bha iad airson a bhith . . . a' fear nach maireann, m'athair . . . 'sann, airson gum biodh a chuile sìon socair.¹⁴

DAM 'Sann.

DAJ Bhiodh iad a' cur na h-inntinn aige far dheth . . . dheth far a' rud idir—far a' rud a bha e 'g obair air.

DAM 'Sè.

DAJ Cha robh chridhe brag thall na bhos na sìon.

DAM Cha robh. Bha sen a' cur an duine . . . ?

DAJ Bha sin a cur an duine . . . Math-dh'fhaoidte gu sealladh e mar sin, gu de 'm brag a bh'ann, 's bha 'n inntinn aige far a' rud a bha e 'g obair air.

DAM Bha dìreach. Bha. Bha.

DAJ Bha. Sin mar a bha e.

DAM Glè mhath. 'S tha sibh a' cumail na h-ìomhaighean aig a chuile stòiridh—tha iad air an cumail air leth dìreach . . . ?

DAJ O tha iad air an cumail air leth dìreach . . .

DAM Mar gum b'e *film* as ùr a bha 'sa chuile gin?

DAJ Dìreach . . . 'Sè dìreach mar gum b'e te as ùr a tha 'sa chuile gin dhuibh. 'Sè. 'Sè. O tha. Tha. Tha. Tha isin a' tighinn ast . . . ugrad mar tha 'n corr, dìreach: tha i' tighinn 'nad' shealladh mar a tha thu 'dol air aghaidh leatha. Tha i' tighinn . . . Gu de tha 'tighinn as a dheaghaidh sin 's mar sin: tha e 'tighinn . . . fad an t-siubhail.

DAM Tha. Agus a neist ged a chluinneadh sibh duin' eile ag innse seorsa dhen aon naidheachd—dhen aon stòiridh—cha deanadh sen deifear 'sam bith air a' stòiridh agaibh fhéin? 'Se stòiridh agaibh fhéin a chumadh sibh-se . . . ?

DAJ O 'se stòiridh agam fhìn a chumadh mise. 'Sè. 'Sè.

DAM 'Sè.

DAJ Ged a bhithinn-sa cearr innte, 'se mar a dh'ionnsaich mi . . .

DAM 'Sann mar a dh'ionn . . .

DAJ Mar a dh'ionnsaich mi.

DAM Shen agaibh e. Shen agaibh e.

DAJ Chumainn-sa mar a dh'ionnsaich mi i.

DAM Mar a dh'ionnsaich sibh i, 'Sann. 'Sann. 'N dealbh a fhuair sibh o thùs, mar gum bitheadh?

DAJ Seadh. Seadh. Seadh dìreach. An dealbh a fhuair mise—a' sealladh a fhuair mis' orr' on toiseach dìreach 'sì . . . 'sè . . . sìod e.

DAM 'Sè. O tha sen math. Tha sen math.

DAJ Sin mar a dheanainn e. Ged a bhithinn ag ràdha rium fhìn gu robh mi cearr ann . . . 'se siod mar a dh'ionnsaich mis' e 's 'se siod sealladh a dh'fheumainn-sa chumail.¹⁵

DAM 'Sè. Agus 'se sen a tha sibh a' toir seachad an còmhnaidh . . . a' sealladh . . . ?

DAJ 'Sè. 'Sè.

DAM O *well*, tha siod math ga-rìreabh.

DAJ Sin agad a nis, ma-thà.¹⁶

DAM *Well*, 's math is fhiach siod dram beag.

DAJ O Dhia, Dhia teann 's do dhram. Thu fhéin 's do dhram.

DAM Cà 'n do chuir sibh . . . ? Tha i ann a sheo.

DAJ Na cuir innt' ach drudhag bheag a niste.

DAM O *well* . . .

DAJ A, Dia, Dia 'gad' shàbhaldh.

DAM Chan eil i ach beag co-dhiùbh . . .

DAJ O, 'n dà Dhia as a' Chathair tha gu h-àrd, chan eil t'èil' air an dreasair urad rithe. 'Si gin is mutha th'ann.

DAM Dé tha sibh ach a' dol dha leabaidh co-dhiùbh a dh'aithghearr, tha mi cinn-deach?

DAJ O tha gu dearbha.

DAM Cha mhisde . . . Cha mhisde duine . . .

DAJ Bhithinn-s' innte roimhe seo mar a bitheadh gun tàna tu.

DAM Och, tha mi 'creid . . . Bhitheadh gu dearbha, Dhòmhnail Alasdair.

DAJ O bhithinn-sa 'dol innte aig deich, na beagan an deidh a deich *steady*.

DAM . . . Thà chuile h-oidhche, bheil?

DAJ Chuile h-oidhche . . . Chan eil duine 'tighinn . . . duine 'tighinn air chéilidh co-dhiùbh 's . . . Tha 'n céilidh fhéin air sgur.

DAM O tha 'n céilidh air sgur buileach.

DAJ O tha gu dearbha, 'n céilidh air sgur as a chuile h-àite . . . 'N dà 'se rud laghach a bha 'sa' chéilidh.

DAM O 'se sen a bh'ann.

DAJ Agus . . . cur seachad ùine 's nach fhairicheadh tu 'n oidhche 'dol seachad.

DAM 'Sè cuideachd.

DAJ 'Nuair a thigeadh dithis na thriùir ann a shin air chéilidh 's bhiodh naidheachdan thall 's naidheachdan a bhos 's bhiodh siod ann 's bhiodh seo ann agus cha bhiodh an oidhche mionaid a' dol seachad seach 'nuair tha duine 'na shuidhe leis fhéin, gun duine 'bruidhinn ris na sìon mar a bruidhinn thu ris a' chù.

DAM Ai. Ach tha na . . . *Well* tha na . . . tha na sgeulachdan agaibh gu-tà airson a bhith beachdnachadh orra . . .

DAJ O tha. O bidh mi uaireannan a' beachdnachadh air a sin. Bidh mi 'gan gabhail fo m'shuim fhìn, dìreach, 'na m'inntinn.

DAM Seadh.

DAJ Uaireannan. Bithidh. *Well*, slàinthe mhath, ma-tha!

DAM Slàinte mhath, a Dhòmhnuille Alasdair . . .

'S tha mi cindeach gum bi sibh a' cuimhneachadh air na seann lathaichean cuideachd, mar a bha gnothuichean 's . . . ?

DAJ O Dhia bithidh. 'S mise Dhia bhitheas sin. 'S mise Dhia bhitheas sin, a ghràidhein.

DAM Agus a neist bidh chuile duine dhe na seann daoine 'ràdha rium gur e saoghal nas toilichte bh'ann.

DAJ O Dhia 'sè. 'Se sin a bh'ann saoghal toilichte 'n toiseach.

DAM Seadh.

DAJ Ri m'cheud chuimhne.

DAM Seadh.

DAJ O ghràidhein 'sè. Bha na daoine cho nàdurra ri chèile 's bha chuile duine cho coibhneil ri chèile.

DAM Bha dìreach.

DAJ Bhiodh iad a' . . . Seall fhéin mar a bha 'n céilidh a bha sin fhéin. Bhiodh iad a' dol air chéilidh air a chèile 's: theid mis' air chéilidh or'sa nochd 's thig thusa 'n athoidhch' 's mar sin. Chan eil sin an diugh idir ann.

DAM Chan eil. Chan eil.

DAJ *Well* 'se nis car de ghràin a th'ac' air a chèile . . . 'air nach eil iad mar sin. Feumaidh gura h-è.

DAM 'Sè. Chan eil iad as an aon dàimh ri chèile co-dhiùbh.

DAJ Chan eil. 'Se sin tha mi 'g ràdha . . nach eil.

DAM Chan eil.

DAJ 'Siad nach eil . . Agus tha iad an diugh, tha . . . Na faigheadh tusa sìon, tha iad an diugh cho farmadach, 's an uair ud cha robh ach: "A Dhia . . ." 's cha bhiodh ann ach: "A Dhia nach tu bha *lucky*" . . "Dhia . . . Dhia, mo bheannachd ort, nach tu bha *lucky*."

DAM Agus 'sann a bhiodh daoine toilichte gun d'fhuir thu . . .

DAJ 'Se sin tha mi 'g ràdha—'nuair ud. 'Se sin a chanadh na daoine riut . . ach an diugh 'sann a tha farmad riut ma . . . ma gheibh thu . . .

DAM 'Sann, ma-thà.

DAJ Sìon 'sam bith seach . . . seach a . . . seach duin' eile.

DAM Seach duin' eile. 'Sè dìreach.

DAJ Farmad riut an diugh air a shon.

DAM . . Agus am beagan a bh'ac' o chionn fada, roinneadh iad a mìosg . . .

DAJ Roinneadh iad eatorr' e: ga nach biodh ann ach a' bhreacag arain, gheibheadh tu 'n ceathramh dhi.

DAM Gheibheadh. Gheibheadh dìreach.

DAJ Roinneadh . . 'S cha robh iad ach a' falbh . . . Nan toireadh tu 'n diugh . . . Reachadh iad . . . Reachadh iad a dh'iarraidh Ìosad *tea* air an duin' ud 's

thigeadh an duin' ud a màireach math-dh'fhaoidte—ìosad *tea*'s . . . na ìosad siùcair, na rud air choireigin orra . . . 'nuairsin . . . Chan eil sin ann an diugh. Chan eil. Nan deanadh tu sin an diugh chan eil fhios gu dé . . .

DAM Ach sen mar a tha còir aig daoine bhith gu-tà.

DAJ 'Sann mar sin a bha còir aca bhith, a Dhomhnuill Eairdsidh . . . Agus an diugh cuideachd 'sann a bha còir aca bhith.

DAM 'Sann cuideachd. Ach tha gnothuch an airgid air gnothuichean a mhilleadh an diugh.

DAJ Gnothuch an airgid. Tha, agus cha b'fheairrd' a' saoghal an *television* a bha sin.

DAM Cha b'fheairrde cuideachd. Cha b'fheairrde.

DAJ Rinn i call mòr, mòr air an t-saoghal agus air na daoine.

DAM Tha. B'fhearr le daoine bhith 'coimhead an *television* seach a bhith 'coimhead a chèile.

DAJ B'fhearr . . . Agus seall thusa na tha i air deanamh a *crimes*.

DAM Tha cuideachd.

DAJ Rudan a tha iad a' faicinn air an *television* a tha sin-ach.

DAM Tha cuideachd. Chan fheairrd' iad dad e.

DAJ Chan fheairrde.

DAM Chan fheairrde.

DAJ Tha 'n *television* math gu leòr nan gabhadh à-san 'na dòigh fhéin i.

DAM 'Sè. 'Sè, sen an gnothuch ach . . .

DAJ Ach chan eil iad sin . . .

(End of interview. Tape runs out)

Translation

DAM Oh well, that was great, Donald Alasdair. Oh well, it is good.

DAJ That's how I heard it.

DAM And it really was well worth listening to.

DAJ Oh, it was a story . . . it was a fine tale.

DAM . . . A great tale.

DAJ Yes.

DAM . . . How often do you think you yourself heard it from your father, that one.

DAJ Oh God many a time that—but it wasn't all that many times that it . . . that it . . . that I heard it when I picked it up.

DAM When you picked it up.

DAJ When I picked it up. Not all that many. Not all that many.

DAM And the people who were in ceilidhing, did they like that story? Were they fond of hearing it?

DAJ Oh God yes, when they used to come specially for it.

DAM They did?

DAJ They did.

DAM And, say, if some came . . .

DAJ These old . . . These old ones there—that class of people.

DAM Yes.

DAJ Yes, my dear fellow and . . . Yes and even the young folk at that time like . . . like myself and the others there.

DAM Yes indeed. Yes.

DAJ The children who lived round about, if they happened to be there.

DAM Yes indeed. But there must have been some with better memories than others when . . .?

DAJ Oh yes. Yes.

DAM People like yourself . . .

DAJ Yes. You know there were some of them who took a keener interest than others.

DAM Yes.

DAJ Yes.

DAM But on the face of it, every one of these young people, they were all taking an interest: they had to keep quiet and they had to listen, and they were . . .

DAJ Oh they had to, yes.

DAM They were listening to the whole thing.

DAJ Oh, they were listening, you know, but it didn't sink in with them, you know.

DAM Ah, quite. Quite.

DAJ It didn't get into their mind at all, you know. They just listened to it as he told it to them.

DAM Yes. But one person will remember things . . .

DAJ A person—one person will . . . and he takes stock of how it goes on and everything.

DAM Yes. Yes.

DAJ Yes. That's how they were.

DAM Now . . .

DAJ Oh, my lad, there wasn't . . . There wasn't . . . There wasn't a sound to be made anywhere.

DAM No?

DAJ Oh, no.

DAM They just had to keep quiet. And now, yourself, when you were listening to a story like that, were you—in your own mind—were you, as it were, seeing a picture of the thing, or . . .?

DAJ Yes. I was just as if I saw how the thing was going on.

DAM Yes. Yes.

DAJ Just as if I were drawing it on the wall there, how the thing was going on.

DAM Yes. And you were seeing it in . . . in images . . .?

DAJ Yes. That's it. Yes. Yes, I was just, as it were . . . just as if I were, just, seeing it going on like that on the wall like that—as it were, just, I was picturing the business about the . . . about the thing.⁸

DAM Yes. And even yet, when you're telling it even now, do you see it as a picture like that?

DAJ Oh yes I do, too. Yes.

DAM Even yet?

DAJ You've got to . . . You've got to see it as a picture in front of you or you can't remember it properly.

DAM Yes. Yes.

DAJ You can see . . . You . . . You're as if the picture were in front of you here and all you do is follow the thing as it is . . . Yes.

DAM And you're almost seeing it like a picture on the wall in front of you.

DAJ Yes, almost that. Yes, almost. Yes, almost . . . I could see, if I were looking at the wall there, I could see just how they were—how they came in—the people—and how this thing was and that and the other.

DAM . . . And could you see how they were dressed, or what . . . Could you see colours and that sort of thing?

DAJ Well, n . . . n . . . n . . . I couldn't⁹. . . I could see . . . I could see just, how . . . where . . . when he went up to the cauldron, I was just as if I were seeing the cauldron right there—rusty.

DAM Yes.

DAJ In front of me.

DAM Yes.

DAJ I could see the clump of rushes (? - -)¹⁰ he pulled it up.

DAM Yes indeed. Yes.

DAJ Yes.

DAM And the bay mare—you could see her?

DAJ And the bay mare, she was there. She was in front of me.

DAM Yes indeed.

DAJ Yes, I could see her leaping over the . . . over the man's gate.

DAM Yes indeed. Yes.

DAJ Yes.

DAM Now, when you see a gate like that, is it an iron gate . . . is it a great iron gate you see or a wooden gate, or what did you see?

DAJ An iron gate.

DAM An iron gate.

DAJ Yes.

DAM And a high gate, is it?

DAJ Yes, a high gate.

DAM Yes. Well, well. And you could see the castle—and you could see the knights . . . ?

DAJ I could just see the appearance of the houses that were there and the . . . the kind of houses. Yes. I'd be picturing that this is how it was . . .

DAM Yes indeed. Yes. That's a good thing now.

DAJ Yes.

DAM Now when you were seeing these knights, how did you see them?

DAJ I just saw them like ordinary people but that you could see them, that they were more finely dressed than the others.

DAM Yes, yes. They were dressed . . . ?

DAJ They were dressed. Yes. You could see the clothes they had on.

DAM But compared with the rest? They'd have special clothes on?

DAJ Yes. They had special clothes on : stripes and things like that . . . Yes.

DAM And the Knight of the White Shield and the Knight of the Green Shield . . . ?

DAJ Yes. That was—they were as if they had it on their shoulder here, on . . . on a tab¹¹. . . the colour.

DAM Oh, yes indeed : on the shoulder there?

DAJ Yes.

DAM Yes. Just like a strip of the colour?

DAJ Yes. Like a strip of the colour there . . . white, or green, or red.

DAM . . . Yes indeed. Oh well, that's good.

DAJ Yes they did.

DAM That's good. And when . . . when the head was bearing down on him at the end . . . ?

DAJ Yes. I could just see it coming, just coming in the sky there, as if it were coming . . . as if I were outside there watching it.

DAM . . . Now the Tuairisgeul Og and the Tuairisgeul Mór, did you see them as great big men—bigger than the ordinary, or how . . . ?

DAJ Well I saw the Tuairisgeul Mór . . .

DAM Yes?

DAJ As a man . . . terribly fearsome . . . like that . . . that he was a fearful brute . . . but there was nothing . . . I could just see the Tuairisgeul Og rather as if there wasn't all that much to him but . . . but height. Yes . . . Slim and tall.

DAM Yes.

DAJ But he wasn't very powerfully built at all.

DAM Yes.

DAJ But I could see *him* powerfully built.

DAM Yes indeed. And these hands . . .

DAJ Yes. They were.

DAM Huge hands . . . ? Was it like a man's hands you saw them now . . . ?

DAJ Yes. Yes. I was just . . . I think I could see the hand that the dog left, just—that it tore off him—that I could see it there.

DAM Yes. Yes. Oh well, this is . . . this is good. This is good. And, oh, I've been

thinking for a long time now . . . that this might be the way a person kept something in his memory—that he could see it, just . . .

DAJ Yes, he sees it.

DAM As if you were watching a film of it . . .?

DAJ Just like a film

DAM Yes . . .

DAJ Just so . . . like a film passing in front of you there like that.

DAM Yes. And now, say, if you were looking at the wall there, it's from the left hand to the right hand as it were that the thing runs, is it?

DAJ Yes.

DAM Left to right?

DAJ Yes. Yes. Going . . . right-handed.

DAM Yes. Yes. Yes.

DAJ Yes.

DAM Oh well, that's good.

DAJ You don't see . . . You never see . . . never see it going that way.

DAM Going the other way? No, quite. No, quite.

DAJ That way. But you see . . . You see it coming this way.

DAM You see the picture coming this way.

DAJ Yes. You see the picture coming round this way, right-handed.

DAM Yes. Yes.

DAJ As the sun goes.

DAM Now, when the dog . . . when the man was in the form of a dog, did you see him doing all these things as a dog or did you sometimes see him as a man?

DAJ Oh, I never saw him as a man—but as a dog.

DAM But as a dog.

DAJ As a dog.

DAM All the time?

DAJ No . . . I could just see him as a dog . . . No.

DAM Oh well, that's . . . This is great, great.

DAJ No . . . I could just see him there as a dog and I was . . . I could see . . . I was seeing him in this little patch of vegetation on the cliff, I was seeing him as a dog sitting there.

DAM Sitting?

DAJ Yes.

DAM Yes.

DAJ He was.

DAM Yes, before he started barking at all?

DAJ Yes, before he started barking at the ship—before the ship appeared and he started barking. The other dogs were falling down on either side of him, into the sea.

DAM Yes.

DAJ Down the cliff.

DAM And would they be big dogs?

DAJ Yes, they were big dogs.

DAM Yes. Yes.

DAJ Yes.

DAM Oh well surely now, it must be just in that way that people—one man as against another . . . Now perhaps others who heard the story wouldn't get such clear images of the . . .?

DAJ No, they wouldn't, you know. They wouldn't. They weren't . . . taking stock of these things at all, you know.

DAM No. Quite so.

DAJ It's because of that they were unable to grasp it and they couldn't remember it . . . but once you get started on it, and it's there in your mind, you can see the whole thing before you there.

DAM So what you're doing . . . You'd almost be . . . as if you were reading it off the wall?

DAJ As if you were reading it off the wall . . . as if it were coming at you.

DAM Yes.

DAJ Whatever . . . tale it is, it doesn't matter, but when you start at the beginning of it the rest of it is there then clearly before you, just as if you were seeing it on the wall there—how the whole thing goes.

DAM Yes, indeed. Yes, indeed.

DAJ Yes.

DAM And it's as you go on telling the story that it keeps on coming to you, then?

DAJ Yes. It keeps on coming—keeps on coming. Yes.

DAM As if you were . . . As if it were, just, keeping on appearing to you?

DAJ Keeping on appearing to you—keeping pace with you all the time. As you go on . . . the thing comes upon you.

DAM So if you had to cut the story very short—if you had to give a summary, as it were, it mightn't be so easy at all, maybe?

DAJ Well, it wouldn't be so easy at all but just (?unless perhaps you)¹² cut it off altogether.¹³

DAM But it's easier to tell a story right through than it is . . .?

DAJ Yes, it's easier to tell a story right through . . . from the beginning, because it's there in front of you to the end, all the way. All you have to do is follow it.

DAM And the one picture follows the other, as it were?

DAJ Yes . . . follows the other. Yes, yes, everything coming in in its proper place.

DAM Yes, yes, yes. Oh well that's good.

DAJ Yes.

DAM That's great.

DAJ Oh, I don't think, unless a person could visualise it in that way, that he could remember the whole of it so well at all.

DAM Oh, if it's not . . . I think this is what . . . what establishes the story . . . in a person's mind.

DAJ Yes. Yes.

DAM Seeing it.

DAJ Yes. Yes. You see it. You see it in front of you.

DAM Yes.

DAJ That's what I'm saying—unless it's established in your mind in that way, I don't think you'd be able to . . .

DAM Yes. Yes.

DAJ Remember it properly.

DAM Yes. You're just as if you were almost reading it . . . ?

DAJ It's just as if . . . When I start to tell the story . . . I'm just as if I were reading it off the wall there.

DAM Ah well . . .

DAJ It comes little by little to me there—it keeps coming to me as it goes on—as it ought to.

DAM Yes, quite. Yes, quite . . . And now when you're alone do these stories sometimes go through your mind in that way?

DAJ Yes. There are times when I spend a while with some of them in that way when I'm here alone by the fire.

DAM Yes. And you get pleasure out of that?

DAJ Och, by God yes. Indeed I do, by God. Indeed I do, by God.

DAM Oh it's a good . . . It's a good way of passing the time too.

DAJ Oh yes, my dear fellow. Yes—for someone who . . . cares about them.

DAM Yes, that's just it.

DAJ Yes.

DAM And it keeps the mind alive.

DAJ It keeps your mind so lively.

DAM Yes, indeed.

DAJ Yes, rather than wandering and thinking about other odd things.

DAM Yes. Yes.

DAJ Yes. Yes, indeed. So it does.

DAM Now you yourself never, as it were, try to . . . You never have . . . You wouldn't like, as it were, to make up new stories yourself, would you?

DAJ Oh God no, I wouldn't like it . . . I wouldn't like it.

DAM You know, the way people make books . . . ?

DAJ Yes, books . . .

DAM Or . . . Or . . . You wouldn't like it except just the way you heard it?

DAJ No, I wouldn't like to, but just the way I heard it.

DAM As you heard it. Yes, quite.

DAJ I wouldn't like to. I wouldn't like to. I wouldn't like to indeed.

DAM Oh well, that's good. That's great. Everyone . . . everyone who's good, you think . . . ?

DAJ Yes, everyone who's good at tales and remembers them properly.

DAM You think that . . . ?

DAJ I think that's the way that . . . that they—people like that—that they haven't . . . that they've got no other option anyway.

DAM . . . You've never heard anyone else talking about this—that they could see the story?

DAJ Oh no I haven't . . . No indeed I haven't. No, I haven't.

DAM But I'm certain . . . I'm certain that that's how it works.

DAJ But that's how it is. I could see the story I told you there—I could see it going before me all the way, just as it was.

DAM Yes.

DAJ Just as if I was seeing it there.

DAM But when you started, you had a kind . . . you had a kind of vision of the whole story, did you?

DAJ Well . . . no . . . no . . .

DAM Or did you just have a vision of it . . . ?

DAJ I just had a vision of it as I went on.

DAM Yes. Yes. Yes.

DAJ I didn't have any vision of the far away end of it at all.

DAM Yes.

DAJ No.

DAM Till you got nearer to . . . ?

DAJ Till I got to that place . . .

DAM Oh well, that's good.

DAJ There's was no vision ahead but just as you went ahead yourself, and the vision . . . kept pace with you just as if it were coming upon you, like that.

DAM Yes indeed. Yes indeed.

DAJ Yes.

DAM Ah well, that's good. I'm glad I got that down.

DAJ And if I were to go and leave a bit of it out, it might well put me wrong in another bit of it.

DAM Yes, I understand.

DAJ Because I didn't have a proper vision of it . . . and because I didn't follow the vision of it all the way.

DAM And . . . it might be something that would happen that would distract your mind . . . Say if . . . say if the dog moved—if it gave a jump—or the like of that . . . perhaps . . . perhaps it might distract your mind for a moment from . . . ?

DAJ Yes, from the thing. It would. It would.

DAM Yes.

DAJ So it would indeed.

DAM And it wouldn't be quite as easy for you then . . . ?

DAJ No it wouldn't.

DAM To fit it together properly afterwards?

DAJ No it wouldn't: to put it together at all again as it was.

DAM No.

DAJ It was because of that, you know, that they wanted to be . . . the one who is gone, my father . . . wanted everything to be quiet.¹⁴

DAM Yes.

DAJ They would put his mind off . . . off the thing altogether—off the thing he was at.

DAM Yes.

DAJ There wasn't to be a sound anywhere—or anything.

DAM No. That would put the person . . . ?

DAJ That would put the person . . . Maybe he'd look like that to see what had made the noise, and then his mind was off the thing he was at.

DAM Yes, quite. Yes. Yes.

DAJ Yes. That's how he was.

DAM Fine. And you keep the images of every story—they're kept apart just . . . ?

DAJ Oh, they're kept apart, yes . . .

DAM As if each one were a new film?

DAJ Yes, indeed. Just as if every one of them is a new one. Yes. Yes. Oh yes. Yes. Yes. That one comes in . . . to you just as the others do: it just comes into your vision as you go ahead with it. It comes . . . What follows after that and so on: it keeps coming . . . all the way.

DAM Yes. And now even if you heard someone else telling a version of the same thing—of the same story—that wouldn't make any difference to your story? It's your own story that you'd keep . . . ?

DAJ Oh, it's my own story that I'd keep. Yes. Yes.

DAM Yes.

DAJ Even if I were wrong in it, it's the way I learned . . .

DAM It's the way you learned . . .

DAJ The way I learned.

DAM That's it. That's it.

DAJ I'd keep it the way I learned it.

DAM The way you learned it. Yes. Yes. The picture you got at first, as it were?

DAJ Yes. Yes. Yes indeed. The picture I got—just the vision I got of it from the beginning, yes . . . Yes . . . That's it.

DAM Yes. Oh, that's good. That's good.

DAJ That's how I'd do it. Though I was telling myself I was wrong in it . . . that was the way I learned it and that was the vision I had to keep.¹⁵

DAM Yes. And that's what you give every time . . . the vision . . . ?

DAJ Yes. Yes.

DAM Oh well, that's great.

DAJ There you are, then.¹⁶

DAM Well, that's well worth a wee dram.

DAJ Oh God, God, away with your dram. You and your dram.

DAM Where did you put . . . ? It's here.

DAJ Just a wee drop in it now.

DAM Oh well . . .

DAJ Oh God, God save us!

DAM It's just a wee one anyway . . .

DAJ Oh, by God on the throne up above, there's not another one on the dresser as big as it! It's the biggest one there.

DAM What are you going to do anyway but go to bed soon, I suppose?

DAJ Oh I am indeed.

DAM One's no worse . . . One's no worse for . . .

DAJ I'd have been in bed before now if you hadn't come.

DAM Oh I believe . . . Yes, I'm sure you would, Donald Alasdair.

DAJ Oh I'm usually in bed at ten—or a little after ten, always.

DAM . . . Every night, are you?

DAJ Every night . . . There's no one coming . . . no one coming c eilidhing anyway and . . . The c eilidh itself has stopped.

DAM Oh, the c eilidh has stopped altogether.

DAJ Oh yes, indeed, the c eilidh has stopped everywhere . . . Well, indeed the c eilidh was a fine thing.

DAM Oh, so it was.

DAJ And . . . something to pass the time, so that you wouldn't notice the night passing.

DAM So it was too.

DAJ When two or three would come c eilidhing there and there were stories here and stories there and there would be this and there would be that—and the night wouldn't be a minute passing—so different when a man's sitting alone, with no one to talk to him or anything, unless you talk to the dog.

DAM Aye. But there's . . . Well, you've got the tales though, to think about . . .

DAJ Oh yes. Oh I sometimes think about these. I sometimes tell them to please myself, just, in my mind.

DAM Yes.

DAJ Sometimes. Yes. Well, Good Health, then!

DAM Good Health, Donald Alasdair . . . And I suppose you keep remembering the old days too—how things were and . . .

DAJ Oh God yes. So I do, by God. So I do, by God, my lad.

DAM And now, all the old people keep telling me it was a happier world.

DAJ Oh God, yes. So it was—a happy world in the old days.

DAM Yes.

DAJ When I can first remember.

DAM Yes.

DAJ Oh, my dear lad yes. The people were so natural to each other—and everyone was so kind to everyone else.

DAM Yes, quite.

DAJ They used to . . . You look at the céilidh itself there. They used to go céilidhing to each other's houses and: I'll go to céilidh to you tonight and you'll come tomorrow night—and so on. There's nothing like that today.

DAM No. No.

DAJ Well, now, it's a sort of hate they've got for each other . . . since they're not like that any more. It must be.

DAM Yes. They're not so close to each other, anyway.

DAJ No. That's what I'm saying . . . that they're not.

DAM No.

DAJ Indeed they're not . . . And today, they . . . If you happened to get anything they're so envious today, but then it was just: "By God . . ." and it was just: "By God, weren't you lucky" . . . "God . . . God bless you, weren't you lucky".

DAM And people would be pleased you had got . . . ?

DAJ That's what I'm saying—at that time. That's what the people would say to you . . . but today, they're just envious if you get . . .

DAM Yes, indeed.

DAJ Anything at all more . . . more than anyone else.

DAM More than anyone else. Yes, quite.

DAJ They're envious of you nowadays for it.

DAM . . . And the little they had long ago, they'd share among . . . ?

DAJ They'd share it among them. Though it was just a bannock, you'd get the quarter of it.

DAM You would. You would indeed.

DAJ Yes, they would . . . And they'd just go . . . If you gave today . . . They'd go . . . They'd go to ask for a loan of tea from that one and that one would come tomorrow, maybe—a loan of tea and . . . or a loan of sugar, or something from them . . . in those days . . . There's nothing like that nowadays. No . . . If you did that today, there's no knowing . . .

DAM But that's how people ought to be, though.

DAJ That's how people ought to be, Donald Archie . . . And today too, that's how they ought to be.

DAM Yes indeed. But this business of money has ruined things today.

DAJ This business of money. Yes, and the world is none the better for this television.

DAM No, neither it is. Neither it is.

DAJ It's done great, great harm to the world, and to the people.

DAM Yes. People would rather watch television than see each other.

DAJ They would . . . And see how many crimes it's caused.

DAM So it has, too.

DAJ Things they see on that television there.

DAM So it has, too. They're none the better for it.

DAJ None the better.

DAM None the better.

DAJ The television's all right if they could take it at its own value.

DAM Yes. That's just it but . . .

DAJ But they don't . . .

(End of interview. Tape runs out)

NOTES

- 1 For further information on Donald Alasdair Johnson and some examples of his storytelling see *Scottish Studies* 14 : 133-54; 16 : 1-22 and *Tocher* 2 : 36-57; 7 : 222-9.
- 2 This is especially noticeable in the several performances now recorded of his version of the romance *An Ceatharnach Caol Riabhach*, (see also Note 15 below).
- 3 Ability to memorise plots and various other aspects of memory are admirably dealt with by Professor Kenneth Jackson in his Gregynog Lectures (Jackson 1961 : 55-64).
- 4 My colleague Dr Bruford refers to visual imagery as an important factor in remembering stories as follows: 'It seems likely that the average storyteller, who does not memorise a whole story word for word, remembers much of it in the form of a series of tableaux, possibly actually visualised, which he then describes in his own words: it may even be the normal way of learning stories for all storytellers . . . It is often apparent that the storyteller has a scene clearly in his mind's eye, especially if it is an unusual one' (Bruford 1969 : 217).
- 5 I know of no-one else who can tell a full version of this tale, which used to be very highly prized by Gaelic storytellers. This particular telling lasted about 50 minutes. In summary it goes as follows:

The son of the King of Ireland when out hunting on three successive days meets the Tuaraisgeul Og (son of the giant Tuaraisgeul Mór). They play cards and on the first two days the prince wins the maiden who has come with the Tuaraisgeul Og and his bay mare (both of whom have been stolen by him). On the third day the Tuaraisgeul Og wins and imposes *geasa* on the prince: he must find out for him how the Tuaraisgeul Mór met his death. The prince imposes counter *geasa*: the Tuaraisgeul Og must stand, a foot on each of two hills, facing wind and weather till he gets back. With the maiden's help, and the bay mare whose speed is miraculous, the prince visits her father and two uncles—the Knights of the Red, Green and White Shields. When refused admission by their porters, the mare leaps over the gates of their castles. The third knight directs him across a river to an old man, great-grandson of a still older man who has shrunk to a tiny size with old age. The mare leaps the river and the great-grandson, very impressed, wishes to buy her. Following advice, the prince sells the mare in exchange for the great-grandfather, but keeps the bridle with which he can summon her back. Again following advice, the prince carries off the great-grandfather but refuses to accede to his requests. At length his thwarted captive leads him to a clump of rushes which he pulls up to reveal a rusty cauldron with a sword under it. The old captive turns out to be the man who slew the Tuaraisgeul Mór. He starts to tell the details to the prince and as he does so he also writes the story on the blade of the sword:

He himself had been a prince with a cruel stepmother. By striking him with a magic wand she transformed him into a dog. He killed her sheep and she sent men and dogs in pursuit of him. He

leapt over a cliff landing on a little clump of vegetation. The pursuing dogs fell into the sea. He attracted the attention of a ship by barking and was taken aboard and befriended by the captain. The owner of the ship kept him at home while the captain and his ship were away on a long voyage. Three years in succession the owner's wife bore a son but each in turn was snatched away by a giant hand that came down through the roof. (The midwives who had fallen asleep blamed the dog which was in danger of being destroyed.) On the third occasion the dog tore off the great hand but the other hand snatched the child. The dog followed the trail of blood to an island. The Tuaraisgeul Mór was lying sleeping there, wounded, and the three children were with him safe and well. The dog managed to make the giant's own sword fall on his throat and beheaded him. He rescued the children. On the next voyage with the captain the ship was wrecked near the prince's father's palace. His father had died. His stepmother, in anger, when the dog tried to repel her advances on the captain, struck him with the same magic wand and he was restored to human form. That is the story of Tuaraisgeul Mór's death. The old captive asks the prince to bury him under the cauldron and go back and read the story off the sword blade to the Tuaraisgeul Og. He must read as quickly as possible. The prince buries the old man regretfully, shakes the bride, recovers the mare and returns. The Tuaraisgeul Og has become a little heap of bones where he was forced to stand on the hillside, but as the story is read to him he gradually assumes his own shape and is almost fully resuscitated when the story comes to an end. The prince strikes off his head with the sword—but the head tries to rejoin the body. Finally the head takes off and tries to attack the prince from the air. He holds the sword aloft and the head splits in two on it. The prince marries the maiden (SA 1973/41-42A1). For further references to *An Tuaraisgeul Mór* see Bruford 1969: 157-9.

- 6 For references to Duncan MacDonald see Dr Alan Bruford's contribution to this volume. For Angus MacLellan see *Stories from South Uist and The Furrow behind Me*, both edited by Dr John Lorne Campbell (Campbell 1961 and 1962 *passim*).
- 7 I have since touched on the subject with a number of informants, eliciting varying degrees of response—though nothing nearly as dramatic as Mr Johnson's testimony. I have also covered much the same ground again with Mr Johnson himself following his telling of a version of AT 314. *The Magic Flight*, in 1974 (SA 1974/55B1-2). This interview confirms much of what is printed above but adds nothing new of real importance.
- 8 Compare the tradition of the poetess Maighread Ní Lachainn: *a' feitheamh na bàrdachd a' ruith air na glasghadan*, 'seeing the poems running along the turves that formed the intersection of wall and roof', quoted by my colleague Dr John MacInnes (MacInnes 1968 : 41).
- 9 Despite the hesitation and apparent denial here, it seem clear from what follows that he does in fact see colour.
- 10 About two words unclear on tape.
- 11 Perhaps visualised like flashes on the shoulders of military uniform.
- 12 Unfortunately, coming as they do at this fairly crucial point, these few words are unclear on the tape and must be regarded as a conjectural reading.
- 13 Mr Johnson's replies here and below *passim* would seem to indicate that summary plots are of little consequence to his own method of remembering stories. That he was, however, quite capable of effectively summarising a tale is well demonstrated by an efficient three minute summary of a considerable part of his story of *Rìgh nan Ceist* (AT851), which he recited off for me when I was slow to grasp which story he was referring to (SA1974/55B3). This he normally told in a much more extended form.
- 14 I have recorded a considerable amount of information from Mr Johnson about the cèilidhing and storytelling sessions which were regular occurrences in his own home when he was a boy. His father John Johnson (Iain Mór mac Dhòmhnail 'ic Iain 'ic Raghail) from whom he learned almost all his tales, was the most notable storyteller in the Rubha Ghàisirnis area of South Uist.
- 15 Mr Johnson's fidelity to what he learned in his youth is well demonstrated by an incident connected with his version of *An Ceatharnach Caol Riabhach* (see also Note 2 above). In 1970 Dr Bruford and I published in *Scottish Studies* a version of this tale recorded in the previous summer from Mr Johnson by Mr A. J. MacDonald (MacDonald and Bruford 1970 : 133-54). Mr Johnson subsequently read this printed text and all our notes and comments. At Easter 1972 I again recorded

the story from him (SA1972/34A) and this time he incorporated in it an extra episode, the trick of blowing away the straw, as referred to in note 9 to our published version. Mr Johnson explained that when he read the note he remembered that his father's version of the story had included this episode. Accordingly he had re-incorporated it in his own version. All our other variant episodes and readings he had totally and, in his own terms quite rightly, ignored.

- 16 Much of what follows is not, strictly speaking, very relevant to the subject of 'memory' but I feel there is a strong case for presenting this interview complete and unabridged.

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