Book Reviews

All the World's Reward: Folktales Told by Five Scandinavian Storytellers, edited by Reimund Kvideland and Henning K. Sehmsdorf. University of Washington Press, Seattle and London: 1999. ISBN 0-295-97810-4 (cloth), 0-295-97754-x (pbk.). xv, 323 pp.

As the last of a series providing critical editions of oral folklore from the Scandinavian countries, this collection of 98 folktales incorporating 90 international tale types goes considerably beyond a consecutive march through the Aarne-Thompson folktale classification system. The editors have opted to concentrate on repertoires of international folktales taken from a single noteworthy reciter in each tradition (Norway, Denmark, Sweden, Swedish-speaking Finland and Iceland) and by this means 'have endeavored in separate introductions to each of the repertoires and in commentaries to the individual texts, to place the tales of these storytellers in relation to their own lives and to the cultural experience of the communities in which they performed them'. The result is intended for a wide audience which includes the general reader as well as the oral narrative specialist. There are period illustrations for tales and story-telling occasions together with photographs of story-tellers and collectors.

Introductions and tale commentaries are provided by scholars from each tradition (Reimund Kvideland, the late Bengt Holbek, Bengt af Klintberg, Gun Herranen and Hallfreður Örn Eiríksson) with collaboration in writing and editing throughout from Henning K. Sehmsdorf.

The introduction to the collection sets the tone, exploring topics such as storytelling in contemporary Scandinavia; the supposed oral/written and rural/urban divides; the myth of single genre repertoires; and issues of 'authenticity'. The general picture that emerges of records of storytelling in Scandinavia from the 19th century is much like that in Scotland or Ireland from the same period, suggesting a rich and varied social context for tales of which little has been recorded. The introductions to each section serve to restore to us as far as possible these and other aspects of storytelling recognised as important by modern scholars. With regard to gender distribution (2 women, 3 men) and social circumstances (generally low economic position from rural areas), the choice of reciters is intended to reflect their world from late 19th to mid 20th century (the most recent material is from tape recordings made in Iceland in the late 60s), and the size of repertoires as given in the work ranges from 10 tales to over 40. The length of individual stories likewise varies greatly, bringing to the fore the editors' recurring (and healthy) preoccupation with the breadth of storytelling over this geographical

area. A further theme that reappears is the extent to which personal history can be seen to affect the storyteller's 'orientation' as manifested in repertoire and performance.

These and further theoretical issues are discussed at length in the section introductions. They also provide a useful history of folktale research for each country; remarks on the collectors and the process(es) of textualisation (with some valuable accounts of the inevitable dialogue and negotiation between reciter and fieldworker); social context, life history, repertoire and narrative style. In some instances sources permit going as far as the storytellers' own perceptions of their art. Olav Eivindsson Austad, 'Norway's Last Great Storyteller' '... understood very clearly that he was passing on not only traditional story contents but a traditional form'. An undoubted high point is Bengt Holbek's account of Evald Tang Kristiansen, the collector of Ane Margarete Hansen's stories from Jutland, which is bound to elicit a heartfelt response from anyone who has collected folktales in the field. Kristiansen laboured under adverse physical and social conditions, carrying out pioneering work documenting his informants' lives and the contexts of the folklore materials, and even going as far as hiring an artist 'to accompany him on a field trip in 1889 to make drawings of the informants, but the man could not stand the pace and gave up.' As an innovative collector the multitalented August Bondeson of Sweden as described by Bengt af Klintberg is no less impressive, and the portrait of the outspoken labourer-storyteller Jakob Gleder in the same section ('Meeting the Storyteller') is thoroughly absorbing. Gleder's storytelling, in translation at least, seemed to this reviewer to be particularly effective (and it is one of his tales that provides the collection's title), but others may find their own favourites in this entertaining collection.

The repertoires combined range over the entire spectrum of the international tale classification, providing easily accessible and reliable Scandinavian variants of familiar tales e.g. Hansel and Gretel and Jack and the Beanstalk(Nos. 88, 89 from Iceland), and two items related to the Cinderella cycle (Nos. 12, 90 from Norway, Iceland). For the comparatist, No. 97 from Iceland is a rare example of AT 934E The Magic Ball of Thread, and Ane Margarete Hansen's version of AT 613 The Two Travellers is one of the longest and most complete known (presumably in Denmark). Within each section tales are arranged sequentially according to their AT classification (eight items in all are listed as unclassified). For some of the tales we may compare variants from more than one Scandinavian tradition, and the editors have taken care to list the Finnish language variants of tales from Swedish Finland. A number of items from Denmark, Sweden and Iceland have not been previously published. The editors make it clear that they are aware of the limitations of 'sanitised' versions of tales, and the language is consequently direct and down to earth. Some of the colloquialisms may take getting used to in print, but they work well when read aloud. Except for the very occasional lapse in verbal tense or use of expressions, the style is entertaining and well suited to the material.

All the World's Reward, being the result of collaboration between workers in five distinct storytelling traditions, is an inclusive work in the best sense of the term. The

editors and their co-workers have succeeded in presenting traditional folktale repertoires stored in archives in a form that is attractive to the general reader and at the same time relevant and challenging to folklorists at the opening of the 21st century.

JOHN SHAW

The Language of the Ogam Inscriptions of Scotland: Contributions to the Study of Ogam, Runic and Roman Alphabet Inscriptions in Scotland by Richard A.V. Cox. Department of Celtic, University of Aberdeen: Scottish Gaelic Studies Monograph Series 1, Aberdeen: 1999. ISBN 0-9523911-3-9. xvi, 187 pp.

In his introduction the author calls his book 'iconoclastic'. It is, in the sense that it knocks on the head all the other theories about the ogam inscriptions of Pictland: not Celtic, not Basque, not Caucasian or Finnish (the latest theories), indeed not non-Indoeuropean at all, but Norse, the language of a people whose presence in Scotland is very well attested over many centuries of the mediaeval period.

The author describes how the insight came to him, how he presented it to his colleagues in Aberdeen and then had the chance to discuss and refine his decipherment in Norway before publishing this book where he sets out the transliteration and interpretation in detail.

One is bound to ask: how did Richard Cox make this discovery and not any of his predecessors, whose work he cites and acknowledges generously? Perhaps we were blinded by the obvious, believing that the Norse had their own runic alphabet and had no apparent need for ogam, despite their use in tandem in inscriptions in the Isle of Man and (once) in Ireland.

Most recently, in 1996, Katherine Forsyth presented her Harvard doctoral thesis on the ogam inscriptions of Scotland and furnished reliable readings with variants of all the known inscriptions. In her Van Hamel lecture she attacks the late Kenneth Jackson's non-Indoeuropean theory about Pictish. Cox's debt to her careful readings are generously acknowledged throughout the book.

Perhaps the problem lies in the difficulties of the later runic alphabet known as the Younger Futhark, from which the ogam inscriptions in this volume appear to have been transliterated. When the runic alphabet was first invented, it fitted the sound system of the early Germanic dialects quite well. Over the centuries, as the Scandinavian dialects changed, a larger vowel system developed, while only two consonants, /z/ and /r/, merged. By 800, the older futhark, as the alphabet was called (named after the first six letters: f,u,th,a,r k), was no longer adequate to deal with the new sounds. Instead of the number of symbols being increased (as happened in England), they were reduced to sixteen. Thus /g/ or /k/ could be written with the k-rune, /d/ or /t/ with the t-rune, and the b-rune was used for /b/ as well as /p/. The Ing-rune, used for writing the velar nasal, disappeared in Scandinavia, leaving the clumsy solution that we find in the inscriptions in this volume, where the name Ingjaldr is written ICOT (Auquhollie),

IKOT (Newton I, where a symbol like Greek chi is used for K) and inutr (Newton II – Latin alphabet) .

Although the ogam alphabet has symbols for both /g/ and /k/, the same principle of ignoring the distinction in writing was followed when Norse words or names are written in ogam. In addition, ogam has two ways of writing /k/, as C and Q have long since fallen together. So we find Norse *mik* 'me' written variously MIQ, MEQQ and MAQ. It may also occur in Auquhollie (KCD), where the author reads *ek* ' I '.

This was the red herring that misled so many would-be readers of the transcriptions. Like me, they may have thought: 'These Picts have borrowed the Norse word *dattr* (found on the Bressay Stone on display in the National Museum in Edinburgh) for 'daughter' and the Gaelic word MAQ for 'son'.' The names in what turn out, not surprisingly, to be memorial inscriptions, were disguised, again as shown by Cox, according to the orthographic conventions of the younger futhark. Thus Olaf, Asa, Arni, Hallgeirr, Ingjald, Eystein, Gunnvor and Hrolf emerge – all names well attested in Norway, as well as the Gaelic name QALLM 'Calum'. According to Cox, Hrolf is attested in the abbreviated form RV in the Pool inscription from Sanday in the Northern Isles and dated to the 6th century. Here, and only here, was the reviewer inclined to doubt the interpretation: why not some name beginning with R- or Hr- followed by a patronymic beginning with V- or U-?

On the other hand, St Ethernan, whose name is attested independently, is a casualty of the decipherment: Cox thinks that the word, which occurs with surprising frequency, is Norse **ettermun*, meaning 'memory'. The word, a compound nowhere attested in Old Norse or modern Scandinavian languages, but read in the inscription on the knife discovered in Gurness (Orkney) in 1931 INEITTEMUN, translated 'in memory'. Here the reviewer is more reluctant to follow Cox. The independent attestations of St Ethernan are exactly in the right period (around 1200) to which Cox dates the Norse inscriptions on linguistic grounds. There is an inscription from Fordoun (KCD) in Roman letters, the legible part of which reads PIdarnoin or PIdarmoin. Cox thinks the P is an abbreviation for Pater Noster (there is an attestation of this abbreviation in Norway and other abbreviations for Pater Noster occur). If he is right in reading **ettermun* 'memory' here again, perhaps P stands for Latin *pius*, as in the very frequent expression *in piam memoriam*, which is still used at Cambridge colleges to this day at feasts to commemorate their founders.

Why should the Norse in Scotland use such a clumsy system for writing their language? Evidently the mediaeval church in Scotland prescribed the use of ogam rather than runes for memorial inscriptions, whereas runes were used until long after the Reformation in Scandinavia. Runes are found on the Ruthwell cross on the Solway coast of Dumfriesshire in a religious context (*Dream of the Rood*, early 8th century), but under the aegis of the Northumbrian Church. The Northern Isles and northern Scotland came under the see of Nidaros (later called Trondheim) in Norway.

As Cox points out, his discovery has an impact on the dating of the Pictish Symbol

Stones (although some may have been re-used by the inscriber of the ogam). We may also use his insights to interpret 'Pictish' inscriptions in Roman letters, which incorporate some of the conventions of the ogam inscriptions in this volume. For example the inscription from St Vigeans in Perthshire, which can be read clearly as DROSTEN IPE VORED ETT FORCUS, should be interpreted as 'Drosten the bishop carved (this) in memory of Forcus'. (The non-ogam inscription on the Newton Stone has *ip* as an abbreviation for the Latin *episcopus*, and the preposition EHT/AHHT is attested in the Ackergill and Bressay inscriptions with the same meaning as *etter* 'in memory of'.

The book is well printed and despite the variety of languages and scripts seems to contain only one minor misprint. The book is very well organised and easy to use. It is divided into four parts: an Introduction giving a brief history of scholarship, and tables of futharks and the standard 5 x 5 table of ogam symbols. This includes the letters H, Z and NG, which do not correspond to any phonemes in Gaelic, though all three are in the Older Futhark and relate to phonemes in Germanic. This is followed by Part II, the Ogam Inscriptions (Literature, Description, Transcription). Roman Alphabet Inscriptions, two in number, make up Part III – perhaps the Drosten Stone could be added. Part IV, Analysis of the Language of the Transcriptions, contains a very useful two-page summary of the texts, followed by Formulae, an important feature of runic inscriptions, Contractions, Abbreviations and Errors (three out of four being in one single inscription), Orthography, Morphology and Syntax, Chronology and finally Conclusions and Implications. The book also contains a bibliography and three indexes – General, Runic Inscriptions and Words and Names.

As the author suggests, it is possible that minor adjustments may be made to the interpretations contained in this volume, not least because of the uncertainties of some of the ogam readings. However, it is the opinion of the reviewer that the main thesis stands: the language of the ogam inscriptions of Scotland is Norse.

R. D. CLEMENT

Màiri Mhòr nan Oran: Taghadh de a h-Òrain edited by Donald E. Meek. Scottish Academic Press, Edinburgh, for the Scottish Gaelic Texts Society: 1998. ISBN 0-7073-0767-8. 240 pp. £11.50.

Mary MacPherson's songs were first written down by John Whyte of Easdale and published, with financial help from Lachlan MacDonald, the proprietor of Skeabost, by Alexander MacBain in 1891, as *Dàin agus Orain Ghàidhlig*. Professor Donald Meek, in his own second edition, quotes from an Alasdair Bàn writing in *The Highlander* in 1785: 'I have letters from some of my friends and they say that Màiri nighean Iain Bhàin's songs are above the common and that they should be published.' (My translation). Màiri nighean Iain Bhàin was well known throughout the Highlands then, and some of her songs were probably going the rounds through oral transmission before they were published. MacBain states that she was able to give John Whyte about 9,000

lines from memory. Not all her critics were as admiring as Alasdair Bàn's friends and Professor Meek himself does not regard her as one of the best poets of the nineteenth century, but he, and many others, including the late Sorley Maclean, had a high regard for her sincerity and enthusiasm. In general that high regard is probably due to her support for the Highland tenantry of her day. Professor Derick Thomson, in his book *An Introduction to Gaelic Poetry,* says of her, 'It has been said that her songs contributed significantly to the victory of the popular land-law reform candidates in the Highlands in 1885 and 1886, and she was indeed the bard of that movement.'

Professor Meek's first edition of Màiri nighean Iain Bhàin's poems was published by *Gairm* in 1977. This coincided with a number of publications about the struggle for land in the Highlands, beginning with James Hunter's *The Making of the Crofting Community* in 1976. Some of Mary's songs had been popular for some time; they often appeared in the list of prescribed songs for competitions in the National Mod of *An Comunn Gàidhealach.* But the renewed interest in Highland land matters resulted in television and stage drama depicting those times, and more of the less well-known songs were learned for those dramatic productions. One example was a TV production, *Màiri Mhòr,* from which a CD, *Catherine-Ann MacPhee sings Màiri Mhòr*, appeared in 1994 (Greentrax Recordings CDTRAX 070).

The 1977 edition quickly sold out, and the present edition appeared in 1998, in time to mark the centenary of Mary MacPherson's death. It is an expanded and revised version of the 1977 one and is the second in a new series from the Scottish Gaelic Texts Society in paperback, and with no English translations. It contains 40 songs, about a third of the number in MacBain's edition. Professor Meek's is a careful selection, grouped in the book in such a way as to highlight the different phases of the poet's life. For example, the first five songs are connected with Mary's sufferings when, while a servant in a house in Inverness, she was accused of theft and sent to prison. There are eight sections altogether, and the other seven are: Highland politics; Skye and her own homesickness; the territorial associations in the cities; praise songs for friends and well-known people; passenger boats and travel; the land agitations of 1878–1887; the changes in Skye as a result of the Clearances. Each section has an introduction. The text sources, with the circumstances of its composition, are given for every song. The book is full of interesting details, of the poet's life, of the contemporary land agitation, of assessment of her poetry and of the tunes of the songs – the latter supplied with the able help of Professor Colm O Boyle. There is also a glossary of unusual words. There is a list of sources of some of the rest of the songs attributed to her, the main one being *Dàin agus Orain Ghàidhlig,* and some appeared in newspapers and periodicals.

In *An Introduction to Gaelic Poetry,* Professor Thomson described Mary MacPherson as 'something of a figure of legend . . . who had become a legend in her own life-time'. Her imprisonment in an Inverness jail is a story that everyone knows. That that was the spur for her first attempts at poetry is also well known, whether that knowledge came from her own hints of it in *Soraidh le Eilean a' Cheò* (Farewell to the Isle of the

Mist, much better known than the first song in Meek's book, *Luchd na Beurla,* in which she gives details of her arrest), or from oral testimonies before publication of her texts. The following story recorded from Kirsty Munro of Bor na Sgiotaig in Skye by James Ross for the School of Scottish Studies, has a bearing on some aspects of her art. First Kirsty Munro sang the song, *Iain Shomaltaich.* (It may be heard on the Greentrax recording in the Scottish Tradition series CDTRAX 9019, sung by Joan MacKenzie as she learned it from Kirsty Munro's recording.) Then, replying to a question from James Ross as to whether there was a story attached to the song, she says:

> No, except that – Mary MacPherson, a poetess who was in Skye – my mother used to tell me that she arose early one morning, in Uig, and climbed up to Teilegreac Well, before anyone was up, so as to see the sun rise. She returned at about 7 o'clock in the morning to the house, to Conon Lodge, and she stood in the corridor holding a walking-stick and she sang this song, and everyone in the house got up – they had still been in their beds when she returned. She had just thrown on a shawl and gone as far as Teilegreac Well, wherever that is. But many's the time I heard my mother say that she had a big, strong voice. (SA1958/43 B.12; my translation.)

Iain Shomaltaich would seem to be translatable according to this story as Lazy John. Mary's appreciation of nature is evident as is her knowledge of songs. She refers to sunrise in *Nuair bha mi òg* and one can imagine her listing the places she loved as she visualised them in the early morning in *Soraidh le Eilean a' Cheò.* Professor Meek quotes Alexander Nicolson's disparaging comments on that song, that 'the whole production too often resolves itself into a glorified tourist's guide'. But we may again quote Professor Derick Thomson, 'She belonged to the people [in Skye] and had a voice that could reach them, and that is the voice that survives' – and not only in Skye, but all over the Gaelic-speaking world. Professor Meek notes that opinion changed over Mary MacPherson's songs and his explanation of that phenomenon is but one of the sections of this book that makes it a worthwhile production.

Morag MacLeod