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# The Women of Islay and Issues of Gender in the Core Fairy Tale Repertoires of Scotland and Appalachia

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We do not have, from her own mouth, one word spoken by Margaret Conal, but some who witnessed her narrations would never forget her performative presence.

In John Francis Campbell's monumental *Popular Tales of the West Highlands* (hereafter, *PTWH*), Ann Darroch of Islay retells two tales she had heard as a girl from Conal. These were recorded by Campbell's star ethnographer, Hector MacLean, who added his own vivid memories of Conal's power as a storyteller:

> I have some recollection of her myself; she was wont to repeat numerous 'ursgeuln' (tales). Her favourite resorts were the kilns, where the people were kiln-drying their corn, and where she was frequently rewarded, for amusing them in this manner, with supplies of meal. She was paralytic; her head shook like an aspen leaf, and whenever she repeated anything that was very exciting, her head shook more rapidly; which impressed children with great awe.[1]

Highland narrative tradition, in which stories were often told in darkness, typically privileges the spoken word far above the physical gesture. But Margaret Conal did not narrate exclusively at bedtime to children in pitch-dark rooms. Like only a handful of other exceptional female narrators cited by folklorists in her century, Margaret was a crossover artist.[2] Her tales unfolded in public spaces where people of all ages met to carry out essential work. In full view of an unrestricted public, Margaret *became* her stories as she made her own body and its afflictions intrinsic to her style.

John Francis Campbell, Margaret Conal, Ann Darroch, and Hector MacLean were all Islay natives, and all four are crucial figures in my ongoing search to reconstruct vanished traditional narrative communities. Campbell himself never knew Conal, but he was intimately familiar with

> … the very place which Margaret Conal used to haunt …. [T]he kiln and the men about it may be seen now, and such scenes may well account for the preservation of wild stories. A child would not easily forget a story learned amongst a lot of rough farmers, seated at night round a blazing fire, listening to an old crone with palsied head and hands; and accordingly, I have repeatedly heard that the mill, and the kiln, were the places where my informants learned their tales.[3]

One woman's spectacularly told tale, combined with two men's written memories, allow us to retrieve performance scenes dating back at least to the 1830s and invite us to consider what we might gain

[1] John Francis Campbell, *Popular Tales of the West Highlands*. *Orally Collected with a Translation by the late J. F. Campbell*, New edition, 2 vols. (Edinburgh, 1994 [1890]), 1, 267–68.
[2] The model 19th-century crossover artist was the Grimms' Dorothea Viehmann, who, though often portrayed as a peasant homebody, learned and told her tales in her parents' inn and the market where she sold garden vegetables.
[3] Campbell, *PTWH* 1, 268.

from viewing *PTWH* as an ethnographic exploration of the roles of gender in folktale performance and repertoire formation in an island community.

Campbell's masterpiece never stops educating its readers. Depending on your persuasion, folklore can be the most expansive, abstract and theoretical – or the most intimate, concrete, and empirical – of studies. Campbell was of both persuasions. He undertook to collect and publish *PTWH* to develop and bolster his theories that folktales were tools for tracing the origin, age, and worldwide dissemination of an ancient and otherwise irrecoverable mythology; yet, at least equally, his work constituted a gift from, and to, the Gaelic-speaking narrators whose words it captured – a celebratory record of their shared, distinctive storytelling culture.

Campbell derived his theories largely from predecessors, most notably the Grimm brothers and George Webbe Dasent, a British translator of Norwegian folktales.[4] But as an ethnographer, Campbell owed nothing to the theorists who inspired him. Rather, he struck new paths and standards for personalizing each tale, identifying each teller, and honouring each telling's exact words, as well as for orchestrating contexts that allowed performances to emerge naturally in an atmosphere of comfort and familiarity. As an ethnographer Campbell was a century ahead of the emerging field of folklore.

The care and detail that Campbell devoted to his collections allow 21st-century folklorists to take a middle road between cosmic questions of origin and the granular explorations of the phraseology of closely transcribed texts. Campbell's work gives us enough specific information to add the narratives of Gaelic-speaking Scotland to my ongoing study of transatlantic narrative traditions. I begin with the question, What can a close look at the repertoire of one locale (Islay) tell us about the roles of women and men as traditional narrators? This question opens up into others: Can we identify a core fairy tale repertoire that Gaelic-speaking narrators shared with Scots- and English-speaking British and North American communities? Also, to what extent can we identify such a repertoire as 'gendered'? And, finally, how do female and male performers and audiences influence the composition of a narrational core and the variations within it?

In nineteenth-century Scotland (as throughout Europe) the documentation of women's stories depended disproportionately on the attentiveness of privileged males. The great majority of subsistence-class female narrators seldom narrated to men of means. In one of his notes, Campbell of Islay meditates on how stories remain hidden from a searcher who ignores the conditions from which they naturally emerge. Campbell and Donald MacCraw, a hired companion who helped him collect tales as they walked the Western Isles together, had stopped for the night at an inn. Campbell retreated to his room to write up his reflections, but MacCraw lingered downstairs in the kitchen to listen to a memorable performance of 'Morag a Chota Bhain, Margery White Coats' by a 'girl, who told it with a great deal of the queer old language The following day, MacCraw narrated his approximation of the tale to Campbell as they walked through North Uist. Realizing that they had captured only a shadow of the remarkable performance that MacCraw witnessed, Campbell reflects:

[4] Richard M. Dorson, *The British Folklorists: A History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), 393–402; see also John Shaw, 'The Collectors: John Francis Campbell and Alexander Carmichael' in *The Edinburgh History of Scottish Literature, Volume 2: Enlightenment, Britain and Empire (1707–1918),* edited by Ian Brown, Susan Manning, Thomas Owen Clancy and Murray Pittock (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), 347–352, and 'Scottish Traditional Tales: Distribution and Prehistory', *Cosmos* 32 (2016): 39–62.

> This shows what may be lost by dignified traveling. While the man was enjoying himself in the kitchen, the employer was smoking in solitary dignity, up stairs in his bed-room, writing a journal, and utterly unconscious that the game he pursued was so near.[5]

Campbell was ultimately well served by his acute awareness of how easily a stranger can miss the most important stories and performances. When he could not listen to or remember a tale, he relied on his remarkable team to draw him closer to the narrative community.

Although in Scotland in Campbell's time the recording, publishing, and study of *märchen* was an all-male industry, fairy tales and female narrators had long been yoked together – and trivialized together – in Western imagination. The 'popular tales' that Campbell sought had been gendered as female for millennia. In first-century c.e. Rome, Apuleius of Rhodes knew them as 'old wives tales' (*anilis fabulae*). Through subsequent centuries, such 'nursery tales' – as Campbell introduces them in his collection[6] – were yoked to *Ma Mère l'Oye* ('Mother Goose')[7], and in Campbell's youth English publishers introduced the character of 'Gammer Grethel' as the archetypal old woman storyteller, to serve as the one face of all the invisible storytellers behind their translation of the Grimm fairy tales.[8]

Yet even as the stereotype of the old nursemaid storyteller persisted, linguists and mythologists of the late eighteenth century re-envisaged nursery tales as, in Campbell's words, 'a museum of curious rubbish about to perish' embedding constellations of plots, characters, and motifs of vast geographic distribution with particularly close correspondences within the Indo European language family, and embedding characteristics traceable through the oldest mythological records of Scandinavia, Celtic Britain, Rome, Greece, and India.[9] The old wives were now elevated in stature to assume the role of the conservators and guardians of the great imaginarium of the past. In 1815 the Grimms introduced their readers to Frau Dorothea Viehmann, an 'unusually lively' performer, as the prototypical fairy tale teller.[10] She was the sole narrator, among the scores the Grimms recorded, who was given individual treatment in the *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*. Unlike Margaret Conal, Viehmann was singled out not for the drama of her narrations, but rather for the precision of her memory. Her ability to retell a tale exactly as she heard it, with few if any changes, was the Grimms' guarantee that her performances fully reflected the original content of the ancient myths. Viehmann was important to the Grimms as a vessel of tradition rather than as a creative participant in it.[11]

In 1842, when the international literati's interest in fairy tales made its first deep impression on Scotland, Robert Chambers personalized the role of aged female storytellers in the male imaginary. 'Gammer Grethel' and the 'Viehmann woman' were transformed into Every Man's Nursemaid. Introducing the 'Fireside Nursery Stories'[12] – to this day the most important collection of fairy tales

[5] Campbell, *PTWH* 1, 275, no. 14.
[6] Campbell, *PTWH* 1, 1.
[7] Charles Perrault, *Contes de Ma Mère l'Oye.* Bound manuscript, 1695. Morgan Library, New York.
[8] Carl Lindahl, 'Storytelling among Lowland Scots since 1800: An All-Female Upper-Middle-Class Family Oral Tradition in the Context of Written Tale Collections', *Scottish Studies* 38 (2018): 81.
[9] Campbell, *PTWH* 1, 2.
[10] Jack Zipes, trans. and ed., *The Original Folk and Fairy Tales of the Brothers Grimm: The Complete First Edition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012), 270.
[11] Donald Ward, 'New Misconceptions about Old Folktales: The Brothers Grimm' in *The Brothers Grimm and Folktale,* edited by James M. McGlathery (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 91–100.
[12] Chambers' classic *Popular Rhymes of Scotland* was first published in 1828, without folktales; the chapter 'Fireside Nursery Stories' was added in 1842 and expanded in subsequent editions. See Robert Chambers,

in Lowland Scottish tradition – Chambers asks his readers to recreate the era (ending, in his estimation, about 1820) when aged, lower-class nurses entranced young boys with magic tales.

> What man of middle age, or above it, does not remember the tales of drollery and wonder which used to be told by the fireside, in cottage and in nursery, by the old women time out of mind the vehicles for such traditions?[13]

Chambers collected no tales from these iconic old women. Rather, his all-male team of friends and correspondents wrote out the stories as remembered from their childhood.

Chambers' compilation was in effect a portrait of the male memory culture of his contemporaries. Some of the middle-aged men took great pains to serve as vessels for their ventriloquist nursemaids. Chambers' collection is revolutionary in its attempts to reconstruct the contexts and performances that most stirred the memories of his male contemporaries. The vanished nurses of male memory were viewed as creators in a way that the Grimms had never viewed Frau Viehmann, as lively figures who engaged boys' imaginations, much as Margaret Conal had captivated the girls and boys of Islay.

Less than two decades after the publication of 'Fireside Nursery Stories', some of the correspondents who furnished Campbell with Gaelic *märchen* acted exactly as Chambers' friends had done before, by presenting themselves as mouthpieces for their long-dead nursemaids. John Dewar, Campbell's most accomplished correspondent, recalled stories told to him by his childhood nurse, Catherine Macfarlane, and he credited her as the narrator of two stories.[14] Campbell followed suit and in turn listed Macfarlane as the performer and Dewar as the collector, though we have only Dewar's words on record.[15]

Campbell's personal memory culture was gendered differently. He mentioned no childhood memories of elderly female storytellers, but wrote instead of a 'piper nurse'[16] whom he described as

> a stalwart, kindly, gentle man, whose face is often before me, though he has long since gone to his rest. From him I first heard a few of the tales in this collection. They had almost faded from my memory, but I remembered their existence, and I knew where to search'.[17]

In notable ways, then, Campbell was more distant from his material than were his assistants. He publishes one very brief, ten-line tale that he had heard at about age eight from the piper, but his recollection for anything longer is sketchy at best.[18] About another tale, he writes, 'I used to hear the adventures of Comhaoise Ordaig … from my piper nurse myself, but I was so young at the time that I have forgotten all but the name'.[19] Elsewhere, he recalls how he and a childhood friend talked about

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*Popular Rhymes of Scotland*, New Edition (Edinburgh: W. & R. Chambers, 1870), 48–107; also Lindahl, 'Storytelling among Lowland Scots since 1800'.

[13] Chambers, *Popular Rhymes*, 48.

[14] See *PTWH* no. 69 ('*from Catherine Macfarlane in 1809*'; vol. 2, 308–9) and no. 75 ('*from Kate MacFarlane, as early as 1810*'; vol. 2, 367–70). The two differently spelled attributions may refer to two women, as Dewar's mother was a MacFarlane and we may thus assume the presence of several MacFarlanes in Dewar's childhood. Similarly, Campbell cites his late 'piper nurse' as teller, and himself as collector, of no. 57 (vol. 2, 211). But there are inconsistencies: e.g., the table of contents cited collector Donald MacCraw as the narrator of 'Margery White Coats,' though MacCraw had heard the tale just the night before from a female teller (*PTWH* vol. 1, xii; no. 14).

[15] Campbell, *PTWH* 2, x.

[16] Campbell, *PTWH* 2, 309.

[17] Campbell, *PTWH* 1, 10.

[18] Campbell, *PTWH* 2, 211, no. 57.

[19] Campbell, *PTWH* 2, 309, no. 69.

what they would do if they could be the heroes of 'The Three Soldiers'.[20] Clearly, Campbell had once lived with the stories, even to the point of projecting himself into their characters, but the stories themselves did not continue to live in him.

Having lost touch with his childhood *märchen*, Campbell leaned upon his childhood friends, and they were the ones who supplied the depth of context and wealth of narration that, enriched by Campbell's analyses and reflections, make *Popular Tales of the West Highlands* a masterpiece. Part of the contextualization process was the reclamation of the female narrator as a major performer. In addition to MacLean's recollections of the riveting Margaret Conal, there was Donald MacCraw's account of an 'old wife' in North Uist whose tales enthralled him as a child:

> [her] cottage was the resort of all the children for miles and miles. [MacCraw] has often gone himself six or seven miles in the snow, and he used to sit with dozens of other bairns about her fire, mute and motionless for most of the night. The children brought offerings of tobacco, *which* they got from older people, as best they could, and for each bit the old woman gave a story. He 'Never heard her like'.[21]

Through MacLean and MacCraw, Campbell and his readers experienced vicariously the great female Gaelic narrators. Eventually in the course of his fieldwork Campbell himself witnessed firsthand the power of a masterful woman performer, an 'old dame' who 'used action and great emphasis' to provoke 'a shiver of horror' in 'the junior part of the audience, who were listening intently'.[22] These descriptions suggest that female narrators exceeded males in acting out their tales, and also that such dramatization served primarily to impress the children in the audience.

Campbell's team collected so sensitively and assiduously that the whole sweep of their ethnographic work has not yet been adequately summarized, let alone explored. First printed in four volumes (1860–2), *PTWH*, landmark though it is, published and analysed just a fraction of the manuscripts the team amassed. Two further volumes, titled *More West Highland Tales* (Watson, MacLean, and Rose 1940, 1960), appeared long after Campbell's death;[23] and beyond these there remains a vast number of unpublished manuscripts and contextualization awaiting full attention in the National Library of Scotland.[24]

Nevertheless, by concentrating just on the first two printed volumes we can gather more about the provenance, performance, and variants of the tales and the lives, words, and imaginations of their tellers than I have found in any other published nineteenth-century source. Here space allows only groundwork for an exploration of gender in the storytelling traditions of Campbell's native Islay – and of what the Islay tales can reveal about a posited transatlantic core repertoire shared by Highland and Lowland Scotland as well as the Appalachian Mountains of the United States.

In his comprehensive introduction to *PTWH* Campbell describes how he gathered tales: first, at the beginning of 1859, by corresponding with friends and acquaintances from the Highlands and Islands, then by himself making a visit 'at Easter [which fell on 24 April that year] to a Highland district', where he

[20] Campbell, *PTWH* 1, 247, no. 10.
[21] Campbell, *PTWH* 2, 68, no. 44.
[22] Campbell, *PTWH* 2, 552, no. 83.
[23] J. F. Campbell, John G. MacKay, W. J. Watson, Donald MacLean and H. J. Rose, *More West Highland Tales*, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd), 1940; and vol. 2 (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd), 1960.
[24] Campbell ended *PTWH* with two catalogues of the tales collected by his team; these lists comprise more than800 texts, far more than have been published in *PTWH* and the two volumes of *More West Highland Tales* combined; *PTWH*, 2, 554–597.

initially encountered diffidence among those he asked to narrate. Once he determined that an indispensable step 'toward the acquisition of a story is to establish confidence', he sought 'men able and willing to write Gaelic'. Then he undertook a contextual examination devoted to 'studying the actual condition of this popular lore, where I found that it existed in the greatest profusion' by walking the length of the Outer Hebrides, listening, reaching rapport, and learning how to ask.[25]

> When I was questioned, I answered, and told my errand, and prospered. 'I was not a drover come to drive cattle at the fair.' … 'I was the gentleman who was after Sgialachdan.' My collector had made my name known. I spoke Gaelic, and answered questions. I am one of themselves, so I got on famously.[26]

For all its value, the account of Campbell's self-education as a traveling ethnographer disguises what I regard as an (at least) equally important dimension of his collection: his team did its most thorough work at home. Campbell concedes that he missed much when undertaking 'dignified traveling', but even when getting on 'famously' among the natives of the Long Island during his fieldwork journey, he failed to find the proportion of female to male narrators, and depth of female repertoire, that *PTWH* records from Islay.

Consider the gender ratio of the tales and variants recorded from Islay: only on Campbell's home island do female-told tales constitute the majority: fourteen of the twenty-six published tales. This fact is all the more remarkable considering the tally for the entire published collection, in which male-narrated tales outnumber female tales by more than seven to one. 'Men and women of all ages could and did tell me stories', writes Campbell of his traveling fieldwork;[27] but when Islay women's tales are subtracted, only five female-narrated tales and variants appear in the collection, about 3.6 percent of the whole.

As *Chart 1* (below) reveals, Campbell's great ethnographic journey began about 24 April 1859. During his first month of collecting, he recorded only one tale told by a woman. Meanwhile, back in Islay, Hector MacLean recorded five tales from women in April of the same year, another four in May and June, and a total of nine by September, when he collected the second of two non-Islay, female-told tales. MacLean is far and away the leading contributor of female-told tales for the entire collection, accounting for more than two-thirds of the texts.

*Chart 1* underlines the importance of Islay for a gender-focused survey of collection dates and female-narrated tales: Islay texts account for nearly seventy-five percent of all the female tales in the collection. Hector MacLean, Campbell's friend 'from boyhood',[28] recorded and transcribed all but three of these female-narrated Islay tales. Margaret MacTavish, one of Campbell's 'earliest friends'[29] and the only identified female correspondent who sent him tales, supplied the remaining female texts, one as told by her 'serving maid' and two relying upon her memory of performances she heard earlier in her life.

Dating data, combined with some of written notes (such as MacLean's description of Margaret Conal's kiln performances quoted above), suggest that MacLean began his epic collecting enterprise at home, by invoking the older women whose narrations had impressed him in his youth, and then seeking out female tellers he thought most likely to remember those performances. I think it probable that MacLean began with Ann Darroch and Ann MacGilvray because they were neighbours who shared with him local knowledge (and likely, personal friendship) from childhood, that period in their lives

[25] Campbell, *PTWH* 1, 10–13.
[26] Campbell, *PTWH* 1, 14.
[27] Campbell, *PTWH* 1, 14.
[28] Campbell, *PTWH* 1, 3.
[29] Campbell, *PTWH* 1, 13.

when older female narrators performed for girls and boys gathered together by fireside and bedside. Honouring his childhood bond with female narrators and listeners may have spurred MacLean to guide the collection through Campbell's gender barrier to share with subsequent centuries these portraits of master women narrators and traces of a core Gaelic Island female repertoire.

***Chart 1:*** **Female *Märchen* Narrators in *Popular Tales of the West Highlands***

| **Narrator[1] / Collector[1]** | **Place[2]** | ***PTWH* tale no.** | ***ATU* type[3]** | **Date** | **Sketch** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Ann Darroch / Hector MacLean | Islay | 2-2 | 313 | 6/1859 | Giant's daughter helps her solve tasks, escape |
| | Islay | 8 | 2015 | 4/1859 | Chain tale; most popular in *PTWH* (1, 220) |
| | Islay | 13 | **480/326** | 5/1859 | Strong, obedient daughter faces down corpse |
| | Islay | 14 | **510B** | 5/1859 | *Peau d'âne* version of 'Cinderella' tale |
| Ann MacGilvray / Hector MacLean | Islay | 3 | **425** | 4/1859 | Animal bridegroom tale: girl marries crow |
| | Islay | 17-1 | **328** | 4/1859 | *Maol a Chliobain* (cf. 'Molly Whuppie') |
| Flora MacIntyre / Hector MacLean | Islay | 15 | **1536A** | 5/1859 | A poor man bests his abusive employer |
| | Islay | 17-2 | **328** | 6/1859 | *Maol a Chliobain* (cf. 'Molly Whuppie') |
| Mrs MacGeachy / Hector MacLean | Islay | 18 | 882 | 4/1859 | Wager on wife's chastity; wife wins over cheaters |
| | Islay | 41 | **312** | 5/1859 | 'Bluebeard' plot; discussed by Campbell, *PTWH* 2, 47 |
| A Woman / Hector MacLean | Islay | 10-4 | 566 | 6/1860 | Centred on poor soldiers |
| Mrs MacTavish / Mrs MacTavish | Islay | 33 | 440 | n.d. | Female hero, well at world's end, frog-prince story |
| | Islay | 61-1 | — | 11/1859 | Lay of Diarmaid, Gràinne and Fionn |
| A servant maid / Mrs MacTavish | Islay | 11 | 130 | 11/1859 | Poor male hero, animal helpers |
| Margaret MacKinnon / Hector MacLean | Skye | 39-3 | **1535** | n.d. | 'Unibos'; poor man tricks greedy, treacherous man |
| Janet Currie / Hector MacLean | S. Uist | 61-2 | — | 9/1859 | Lay of Diarmaid, Gràinne and Fionn |
| Maid / J. F. Campbell | Argyll | 17-3 | **328** | 25/4/1859 | *Maol a Chliobain* / 'Molly Whuppie' |
| Catherine Macfarlane / John Dewar | Dum-bartonshire | 69 | 700 | 1809 | A 'Tom Thumb' tale written from memory of nurse's narration |
| Kate MacFarlane / John Dewar | Dum-bartonshire | 75 | — | 1810 | Boy a giant herdsman (motif G152) written from childhood memory |

**Notes:**

[1] Of the nineteen *märchen* collected from women, thirteen were recorded by Hector MacLean. Three were contributed by Campbell's friend Mrs MacTavish, two written from memory and one collected from a servant. The two tales collected in Dumbartonshire by John Dewar may or may not have come from the same narrator; John Dewar's mother was a MacFarlane by birth, and these informants may be two different relatives of his. The maidservant recorded by J. F. Campbell in April 1859 was one of his first informants, recorded during his first week of fieldwork.

[2] Fourteen of the nineteen women's tales were recorded on Islay, eleven of them by Hector MacLean.

[3] Nine of these nineteen tales, noted in **bold type**, represent the core repertoire common in both Scotland and Appalachia. Seven of those nine core types are represented in Islay.

Note that this list of nineteen narratives excludes significant female contributors and contributions to *PTWH*; for example, I have excluded Johanna Mac Crimmon's belief tale about a bogle (no. 30-7) and all of the variants of no. 30 because none of these are, strictly speaking, *märchen*; they do not represent variants of a tale type, but rather individual accounts of experiences with one kind of supernatural being: a bogle. Similarly, I have left out the 'Widow M Calder' version of no. 37-1, one in a set of ten accounts of encounters with another supernatural creature, the *brollachan*.

***Chart 2.*** **A transatlantic core repertoire of Appalachian, Lowland Scottish, and Scottish Gaelic *Märchen***

| | 20th Century United States Appalachian Mountain Core Repertoire | | | | 19th Century Scottish Core: Scottish Lowland Core | | | | | 19th Century Scottish Core: Scottish Gaelic Core |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **A** | **B** | **C** | **D** | **E** | **F** | **G** | **H**** | **I**** | **J**** | **K**** |
| **International (*ATU*) Tale Type Nos.[1]** | ***LRC*[2] 112 of ~ 400 tales** | **1 mountain man[3]** | **1 mountain family[4]** | **1 mountain woman[5]** | **Jeanie Durie Fife nurse[6]** | **Chambers 'Fireside Nursery Stories'[7]** | ***PTWH* tale number[8]** | **No. of variants[9]** | **Female variants[10]** | **Islay tales[11]** |
| 326 | 24 | | 3 | 2 | 1 | 1 | **[13]** | **1** | **1** | **1F** |
| 366 | 19 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 1 | | | | | |
| 327/8 | 19 | 1 | 3 | | 1 | | [17] | 4 | 3 | 2F |
| 312/955 | 11 | 1 | | 1 | | | **[41]** | **1** | **1** | **1F** |
| 510/11 | 11 | 1 | 2 | 2 | | 2 | [14] 510B | 2 | 2 | 1f |
| | | | | | | | [43] 510A | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| 720/80 | 10 | 1 | 1 | | | 1 | | | | |
| 480 | 9 | | 2 | 1 | | 1 | **[13]** | **1** | **1** | **1F** |
| 1535 / 1535A* | 5 | | 1 | 1 | | | [15] | 1 | 1 | 1F |
| 425* | 4 | | 2 | 1 | | 2 | [2] | 1 | 1 | 1F |
| | | | | | | | [12] | 1 | 1 | 1M |
| Core tales in repertoire | 112 of ~ 400 28% | 5 of 18 28% | 16 of 60 27% | 9 of 33 27% | 3 of 5 60% | 7 of 27 26% | | 13 of 138 9% | 11 of 13 85% | 9 of 26 35% |

* 1535 and 425 are not heavily represented in *LRC*, but are well enough known in other Appalachian collections to stand among the most often collected Appalachian tales.

** Tale numbers in **boldface** in columns H–K represent the three published core tale types told only by women, only in Islay, and recorded solely by Hector MacLean

**Notes**

[1] The most common plots in English-speaking narratives of the Appalachian region of the U.S.

[2] The Leonard Roberts Collection, Berea College (1948–83), the principal source collection from which the core repertoire was extracted.

[3] Characteristic Appalachian male repertoire (c. 1940–1954): James Taylor Adams, Harlan Co., KY. James T. Adams, *Grandpap Told Me Tales* (Big Stone Gap, VA, 1993).

[4] Characteristic Appalachian male family repertoire (1950s): The Couch Family, Harlan Co., KY. Leonard Roberts, *Sang Branch Settlers: Folksongs and Tales of a Kentucky Mountain Family* (Austin, TX: American Folklore Society, Memoir Series, 61), items 101–135 and 137–161.

[5] Characteristic Appalachian female repertoire (1950s): Nora Morgan Lewis. Nora Morgan Lewis Folktale Collection, Berea College, KY. See *NML*; 36 tales (three family reminiscence narratives excluded: nos. 2, 30, 35).

[6] Lowland Scottish nursemaid narrator (c. 1820s–1900): Jeannie Durie. See Lindahl, 'Storytelling among Lowland Scots'. At least one of the tales (*ATU* 328) shows evidence of Highland influence.

[7] Lowland Scottish male repertoire (c. 1840–1870). 'Fireside Nursery Stories' in Chambers, *Popular Rhymes.* Most appeared first in the 2nd edn (1842); all had been published by 1870.

[8] Tale nos. from Campbell, *PTWH*, corresponding to Appalachian tale types. Campbell numbers the tales 1–86; here nos. 17a, 28, 30 and 37 are excluded because each contains ten or more variants, most with sketchy attributions; some of the variants are personal experience, some legends, some expressions of belief rather than narratives.

[9] Number of core tale type variants published in *PTWH.*

[10] Number of core tale type variants told by women in *PTWH.* Note that women account for 85 percent of the core repertoire and that the eleven core texts total 58 percent of all nineteen female-told *märchen* in *PTWH.*

[11] Number of core tale type variants recorded from Islay. 'F' and 'M' represent female and male narrators, respectively.

Studies of the 'biology of storytelling' tend to posit two distinct traditions of performing fairy tales: a male-dominated public tradition of master narrators who share their stories with adults, and a female-dominated domestic tradition in which older women narrate to children.[30] By such accounts, the male master tale-tellers travelled from place to place, often for cèilidh events, and often exchanging their artistry for lodging or money, to entertain primarily adult audiences; while female performers – often aged and usually poor – engaged children of relative privilege.

Contextual evidence presented by MacLean, MacCraw, and Campbell muddies the traditional distinctions. Up to a certain age, nearly all children, regardless of gender, sat together to listen to female narrators, some of whom narrated with a mastery that left lifelong impressions upon their auditors. It may seem too easy for us to isolate the Islay women narrators exclusively within the domestic sphere. Nevertheless, the evidence of the *PTWH* texts themselves presents an Islay female repertoire that conforms closely with the domestic, female-focused *märchen* traditions of Lowland Scotland and Appalachia – and that is almost totally lacking elsewhere in the published collection.[31]

*Chart 2* demonstrates that the female narrators of Islay narrated sixty-four percent of the core repertoire narratives (nine of fourteen tales) found in the entire published collection. We may expect a certain continuity between Lowland Scotland and the U.S. Appalachian region, which was settled largely by Ulster Scots whose culture dominated the region, influencing groups that arrived later. There were a few Highland families as well, and Celtic influences were amplified by Ulster Scots and Lowland Scottish traditions demonstrably influenced by Irish and Gaelic traditions.[32]

The core repertoire presented in *Chart 2* is derived from the largest archive of orally recorded Appalachian *märchen*: the Leonard Roberts Collection (*LRC*), housed in Berea College, Kentucky, comprising well over eight hundred audio recorded and manuscript tales, of which approximately half are *märchen*.[33] In addition to its size, this collection possesses qualities that enhance its value: Roberts, like Hector MacLean, was a cultural insider who recorded, like Campbell, from anyone who would

[30] Linda Dégh, *Narratives in Society: A Performance-Centered Study of Narration* (Helsinki: Folklore Fellows Communications no. 255, 1995), 47–61; also Gerald Thomas, *The Two Traditions: The Art of Storytelling Amongst French Newfoundlanders* (St John's: Breakwater Books, 1993), and Carl Lindahl, 'Jacks: The Name, the Tales, the American Traditions' in W. B. McCarthy, ed., *Jack in Two Worlds: Contemporary North American Tales and Their Tellers* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), xviii–xxi.

[31] Campbell drops occasional hints of a potential wealth of female-narrated tales in his unpublished collection. He states, for example, 'I have many Gaelic versions' of his one published variant of *ATU* 510A, *Cinderella,* a tale greatly favoured by female narrators (*PTWH* 2, 61, no. 43); we should expect some female sources among these.

[32] Campbell documents Gaelic influence on Lowland tales and listeners in his Introduction (*PTWH* 1, 27–8).

[33] Throughout this description I use '*märchen*' and 'fairy tale' interchangeably to denote any narrative generally regarded as fiction and told largely to entertain. These include wonder tales, but also animal tales, tall tales, and some legends told both to entertain and instruct. I have made one adjustment in counting tales from the Roberts Collection: tall tales, by far the most popular Appalachian traditional genre. Because literally thousands of tall tales were written and submitted by Roberts' students, any attempt to count them would skew the sample, for such tales appear sparsely in such collections as *PTWH* and the Grimms'. So I limit my count to Roberts' audio-recorded tales (*LRC,* Leonard Roberts Field Recordings). In Scotland, Chambers counted rhymes and songs, including Child ballads, among his 'Fireside Nursery Stories', and my counts respect his editorial judgment. Campbell was clear about the variety of his texts; he lists nine different categories of Highland verbal art, including 'prose tales' from 'the traditions of the Finne', 'children's tales', songs, and 'the romantic popular tales of which this collection mainly consists' (*PTWH* 1, 22–26). Here, I've decided to include nearly all the tales in my count, with a few exceptions noted and explained in *Chart 2*, n. 8. Campbell would have understood the core repertoire sketched here as comprising mainly 'popular romances' and 'children's tales'.

narrate for him. Finally, because Roberts recorded his tales into the 1960s and recorded frequently from children, I have been able to find some of his narrators still living and to record their tales and memories.

*Chart 2*, column A lists, in descending order, the story plots that Roberts recorded most often. The tales are identified by their international tale type numbers (*ATU*). The top nine tales in the list total more than one hundred texts, about twenty-five percent of all the *märchen* Roberts collected. The first two tale types, accounting for over forty percent of the texts of the top nine tales, focus on fear tests. The following abstracts sketch the most common Appalachian forms of the tale:[34]

***ATU* 326** **The Boy Who Wanted to Learn What Fear Is**. A person accepts a challenge to spend the night in a haunted house. Showing no fear of the spirits that attack him, the hero is rewarded when they reveal the location of hidden treasure.

***ATU* 366** **The Man from the Gallows.** A family digging potatoes find a large toe. They cook and eat it and that night a beast comes to claim the toe, often with fatal results.

*ATU* 326 is often shared among people of all ages and often told as a belief tale; ATU 366 is almost always told by adults to frighten children (or children to frighten each other) and always told as a fiction. The two types share the motif of a *porous house*, and inculcate the concept that four walls offer no protection from outside forces. Both tales also underscore isolation by focusing on a lone individual facing monstrous challenges. Significantly, Lowland and Highland versions of these tale types do not emphasize the house to the degree that Appalachian texts do. The marauding forces typically attack people in the outside world, often in cemeteries.

The remaining seven most common tale types are more often found in storybooks than the first two, but, in Appalachia at least, are less often told.

***ATU* 327/328** Both of these tale types involve children traveling to confront monsters (cf. 'Hansel and Gretel' and 'Jack and the Beanstalk'). The most common versions in Appalachia (as well as in Lowland and Gaelic Scotland) involve three siblings, more often girls, who are challenged to steal three articles from a giant; the youngest child succeeds, as in 'Molly Whuppie'.

***ATU* 312/955** These types are 'Bluebeard' and 'Robber Bridegroom' tales. Three girls leave home one by one and enter the house of a man (often a prospective husband), who murders the first two when they break a tabu; the third escapes and sometimes revives her sisters.

***ATU* 510/511** These are 'Cinderella' tales usually involving a girl who is exiled wearing ashes, rushes, or animal skins.

***ATU* 720/780** **'Juniper Tree'** and **'Singing Bone'**. These tales involve children who are murdered by relatives and transformed into birds or phantoms that reveal the crime and punish the murderer.

[34] Note that these do not represent the most common *international* forms.

| | |
|---|---|
| ***ATU* 480** | **'The Kind and Unkind Girls'** (including **'The Wal at the Warld's End')** features a good girl who journeys to retrieve water from a distant well, gives food and help to beings she meets along the way, and honours the monsters (named 'Rawhead' and 'Bloodybones)' that guard the well. She is rewarded. Her step-sister then makes the same journey, but mocks the beings that ask for her help and is punished. |
| ***ATU* 1535/ 1536A** | ***Unibos* or 'Big Claus and Little Claus'**: a poor man repeatedly tricks an abusive rich man. |
| ***ATU* 425** | **'Beauty and the Beast'** plot in which a bear, bull, or human 'bully' plays the role of the animal bridegroom.[35] |

One of the most significant aspects of this core repertoire is that it upends some of the leading stereotypes about Appalachian tales. Richard Chase's overly influential collection, *The Jack Tales* (1943), pushed the ideas that 'Jack' was the dominant American folktale character and that Jack Tales were a male-dominated narrative tradition, as exemplified by the Harmon and Hicks families of Western North Carolina, who, due to Chase's influence, became the most famous American folktale narrators.[36] Roberts' collection, however, indicates that the overemphasis on male narrators and male folktale characters obscured a rich and extensive domestic narrative tradition shared by adults with their grandchildren. Child heroes, most often girls, dominate in this repertoire; among the core repertoire tales, only *ATU* 1535 typically features an adult protagonist and only *ATU* 1535 and *ATU* 328 often feature a character named Jack.

Returning to *Chart 2*, columns C, D, and E, we find that the separate repertoires of one Appalachian woman, one Appalachian man, and one Appalachian family confirm that the core repertoire is well represented in each context.

Moving to Lowland Scotland (columns F and G), note that more than one quarter of the tales in Chambers' collection match the Appalachian core, a strong correlation. Furthermore, the only individual teller's repertoire that I have been able to locate, the stories told by Fife nurse Jeannie Durie in the 1820s, as passed down through an all-female line of in an upper-class family, presents a sixty percent correlation: three of the five tales represent the three most commonly told tales in Appalachia.[37]

The importance of the women of Islay in this transatlantic connection becomes glaringly relevant when we consult columns I – J. A total of fourteen variants of the Appalachian core repertoire appears in *PTWH* (column I), not a large number, but also note that twelve of those fourteen variants

[35] The core repertoire presented here is almost identical to the nine-tale list published earlier with one exception: *ATU* 1535, a tale told mostly by men in the Appalachians, has replaced *ATU* 313, 'The Magic Flight'; see Carl Lindahl, 'Female Narrators, Protagonists, and Villains of the American Mountain Märchen', *Fabula* 52, 1/2. Though *ATU* 313 was the most esteemed folktale in Roberts' own family tradition, it has proved rare in the Appalachians. (If *ATU* were correct in re-classifying 'Jack and his Bull' as 313 [*ATU* 1, 197], the type would indeed be popular in the U.S.; but I and others recognize this tale as *ATU* 511 and thus part of the 'Cinderella' constellation in the core). Ironically, *ATU* 313 was extremely popular among Campbell's narrators, and it would undoubtedly form part of a 'Gaelic island core' with links to Irish, Newfoundland, and French-Canadian traditions (See note 41, below.)

[36] Richard T. Chase, *The Jack Tales: Folk Tales from the Southern Appalachians* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1943).

[37] See Lindahl, 'Storytelling among Lowland Scots since 1800'.

are narrated by women. Most tellingly, ten of the fourteen variants were collected in Islay by Hector MacLean, nine of them from women. Three of the nine core tale types in *PTWH* are attested exclusively from Islay, narrated exclusively by women, and collected exclusively by MacLean. Without Islay's female narrators, and without MacLean to listen to them, there would be little if any trace of the substantial body of story connecting Gaelic Scotland to the Lowlands and Appalachia. This transcultural continuity of *märchen* tradition implies that some fairy tale plots belonged to a largely stable, female-dominated narrative tradition in nineteenth-century households, even as male-dominated traditions displayed far greater variation from culture to culture.

John Shaw has done remarkable work tracing *PTWH*'s story elements that can be linked to ancient and prehistoric roots.[38] Here I have attempted a related kind of tracing by identifying *PTWH*'s links to contemporary Lowland and transatlantic narrative traditions. The preliminary results of this comparison offer substantial evidence of a body of Scottish Gaelic *märchen* told primarily by women. This female repertoire featured principally female, child protagonists, and was performed predominately by older women to all children, regardless of gender. But with some exceptions (e.g., Margaret Conal's kiln tales), this repertoire was not repeated publicly to adults, and might have been rarely shared with outsiders in Campbell's time.

This tri-cultural core repertoire varies notably from what today's audiences expect of 'fairy tales', given that only two of the nine types (*ATU* 510, 425) typically present as much as one scene of courtship or marriage. Thematically, core tales depict children facing their fears, and pit child heroes against adult or giant adversaries. Narrative performances likely functioned, at least in part, to inculcate in children the sense that they will eventually succeed in mastering the obstacles that loom so large when one is small. Even so, the path to success is presented as formidable and terrifying. Core tales are crowded with grim images and brutal actions: monsters and adults murder (*ATU* 720/80, 327/28), kidnap (*ATU* 425) and eat (*ATU* 327/328, 720/780) their children and their pets (*ATU* 510/11); children discover their siblings' dismembered corpses (*ATU* 312/955); children must groom or eat dismembered monsters (*ATU* 326, 366, 480, 720/80) and single-handedly endure attacks by corpses, monsters, and spirits (*ATU* 326, 327/328, 366); young heroes must engineer the deaths of the villains' children or grandparents (*ATU* 327/328, 1535) to save themselves. By enacting such tales in dramatic performances, a storyteller like Margaret Conal might be seen as subjecting her young listeners to an initiatory trial by fear.

The transatlantic core tales collected in Islay sometimes correspond precisely to the standard international tale type and sometimes deviate dramatically, yet still retain motifs or details shared with the Lowland and Appalachian tales. Returning again to the remarkable Margaret Conal (as voiced by Ann Darroch), note that 'The King Who Wanted to Marry His Daughter' (*PTWH* no. 14), her version of the Cinderella story (*ATU* 510B), conforms in outline with the Lowland 'Rashie-coat' and the Appalachian 'Rushycoat and the King's Son'.[39] The signal trait setting Margaret Conal's version apart from the others is the father-daughter incest theme, common in Gaelic, Irish, and Traveller versions of the type, but almost always absent from Lowland and Appalachian versions. So 'The King Who Wanted to Marry His Daughter' is persuasively linked to Lowland and Appalachian traditions but also characteristically Gaelic in its deviations.

[38] Shaw, 'Scottish Traditional Tales'.
[39] Chambers, *Popular Rhymes*, 66–8; Leonard W. Roberts, *Old Greasybeard: Tales from the Cumberland Gap* (Pikeville, KY: Pikeville College Press, 1969), no. 22.

Margaret Conal's 'The Girl and the Dead Man' is both a thing-in-itself and highly resonant with the Lowland and Appalachian repertoires. It begins as a typical example of *ATU* 480, 'The Kind and Unkind Girls', with two unkind girls leaving home, selfishly refusing to share with their supernatural would-be helpers, and being punished – in this case, by death, a more extreme punishment than in most versions – for their selfishness. The good girl then takes off, shows kindness to all, and succeeds in her tasks. The typical task in Lowland and Appalachian texts – consider the Lowland 'Wal at the Warld's End' and the Appalachian 'Rawhead and Bloodybones' – is to retrieve water from a well guarded by disembodied heads.[40] But in Conal's narration the good girl has to spend the night with a corpse, and, as Campbell notes, the plot takes on the characteristics of 'The man who travelled to learn what fear was', *ATU* 326.[41] The girl battles the corpse all night long, receiving as her reward 'a peck of gold and a peck of silver, and the vessel of cordial. She rubbed the vessel of cordial to her two sisters, and brought them home alive'. Campbell states, 'I know of nothing quite like it in Gaelic, nor in any other language,' an important observation; yet in all of its major motifs, this text possesses close parallels in Appalachian, Lowland, and other Gaelic Scottish tales.

The body of narratives collected by John Francis Campbell of Islay and his team is likely at least as large as Leonard Roberts' Appalachian corpus that I drew upon to extract the core repertoire applied in this brief study. It would be of great value to examine all of Campbell's texts, published and unpublished, to extract a core Scottish Gaelic repertoire. Some tales relatively rare in Appalachia would figure substantially in a Scottish Gaelic core; some of these would, for example, show a strong affinity with Irish or Scandinavian tradition.[42] Thanks to the care with which they were recorded, the tales themselves (and the Islay tales in particular) display depths of local narrative tradition missing from other printed collections. This corpus, coupled with the remarkable observations of Campbell and MacLean, offers an uncommon glimpse of how fairy tales influenced the lives and embodied the imaginations of Gaelic-speaking island communities in the mid-nineteenth century.

**DEDICATION**

This sketch is dedicated with admiration to John Shaw, who shares with John Francis Campbell of Islay a fruitful double vision of folk narrative. Like Campbell, Shaw is a dedicated and careful listener who strives to capture every word and meaning of a master storyteller, as illustrated in his collaboration with Joe Neil MacNeil in *Tales until Dawn*, which records the oral autobiography and extensive repertoire of one remarkable Cape Breton storyteller. And like Campbell, Shaw poses the big questions of origin and meaning through inventive explorations linking Gaelic folktales to imaginatively reconstructed ancient narratives.[43] Contemporary folk narrative studies are richer for such double vision. Regarding my present

[40] Chambers, *Popular Rhymes*, 105–7; Leonard W. Roberts, *South from Hell-fer-Sartin: Kentucky Mountain Folk Tales* (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 1955), no. 13a.
[41] Campbell, *PTWH* 1, 267.
[42] For example, one of the best-attested international fairy tale types in *PTWH* is ATU 313, 'The Magic Flight', in which a demon's daughter helps a human suitor fulfil the demon's tasks. This type does not appear often in the Lowlands or Appalachia (*ATU* notwithstanding; see note 34, above), but clearly shares traits and popularity with the Irish corpus and in the English-language repertoire of Newfoundland, a storytelling community heavily influenced by immigrants from Ireland.
[43] See especially 'Scottish Traditional Tales: Distribution and Prehistory', *Cosmos* 32 (2016): 39–62; but also 'A Gaelic Eschatological Folktale, Celtic Cosmology and Dumézil's "Three Realms"', *Journal of Indo-European Studies* 35 (2007): 250–273; and 'Mythological Aspects of the "Return Song" Theme and Their Counterparts in North-Western Europe', *Nouvelle Mythologie Comparée* 6 (2021): 5–29.

inquiry: I have not yet found persuasive evidence in Shaw's intensive fieldwork and publications that the Appalachian core tales as delineated and described here can also be found in Cape Breton; for example, Joe Neil MacNeil's repertoire of fifty-two tales seems to include versions of only two of the core types (*ATU* 326 and 1135).[44] This is a topic for future work.

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*ATU* Aarne-Thompson-Uther. *The Types of International Folktales: A Classification and Bibliography.* Edited by Hans-Jörg Uther. 3 vols. Helsinki : Folklore Fellows Communications Nos. 284–286, 2004.

*LRC* Leonard Roberts Collection. 1950–1983. Thousands of audio-recorded and hand-written narratives collected by Leonard W. Roberts, on deposit at the Berea College Special Collections, Berea, KY. Written texts catalogued in Series 12, Folktales.

https://bereaarchives.libraryhost.com/repositories/2/resources/567.

More than 800 audio recordings of narrative performances and interviews are catalogued as Leonard Roberts Field Recordings: https://berea.access.preservica.com/index.php?name=SO_c65dd2ea-ce17-41a6-94de-ced994acf461

*NML* *Nora Morgan Lewis Folktale Collection*. Berea College, Berea, KY: 36 mss and typescripts based on family oral tradition in Leslie Co., KY in the mid-1950s. https://bereaarchives.libraryhost.com/repositories/2/resources/656

*PTWH* *Popular Tales of the West Highlands. Orally Collected with a translation by the late J.F. Campbell.* New edition, 2 vols. (Edinburgh, 1994). Originally published under this title in four volumes, 1860–62; The New Edition ('under the auspices of the Islay Association') was first published in London in 1890. The text drawn upon here, the one now most easily available, is reduced to 2 volumes and paginated differently than the 1890 printing. To aid readers of earlier editions, the *PTWH* tale numbers, in addition to the page numbers, are given in the footnotes here.

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[44] Joe Neil MacNeil, *Tales until Dawn / Sgeul gu Latha: The World of a Cape Breton Gaelic Story-Teller,* trans. and ed. by John Shaw (Kingston & Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 1987), nos. 10 and 28.

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