'MUC DHEARG!' ORS' ISE:

WOMEN AND GAELIC STORYTELLING IN THE OUTER HEBRIDES OF SCOTLAND C.1850-C.1980

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the hitherto under-researched role of women within the Gàidhlig storytelling traditions of the Outer Hebrides of Scotland between c.1850 and c.1980. Drawing upon secondary sources, original audio material, and interviews with former collectors, this study will examine women's role in and relationship to traditional storytelling events such as the "taigh-cèilidh" and draw attention to the lives and repertoires of eight women storytellers recorded by the School of Scottish Studies (est. 1951) over the time period researched. In so doing, this study demonstrates for the first time the historical importance of women's participation in Gaelic storytelling practice throughout the Outer Hebrides.

Adopting a feminist approach, this study will provide an in-depth analysis of two tales recited by Gaelic women storytellers in the twentieth-century, Peigidh NicDhòmhnaill (Peggy MacDonald) originally from South Uist and Anna NicIain (Annie Johnston) from Barra. Much of the scholarship to date has either omitted or missed the facts of NicDhòmhnaill's familial relations. But NicDhòmhnaill was the sister of celebrated tradition bearer Aonghas 'Beag' Mac 'IllFhialain (Angus MacLellan). This study will make use of these familial relations by comparing the siblings' versions of the same tale and thus demonstrate the value of recognising and utilising women's stories as a source for research. Throughout, this study aims to contribute to a greater awareness and more accurate appraisal of Highland women's role in the oral literature traditions of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Gaelic storytelling culture.

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

The history and traditions of women storytellers in Gaelic Scotland is an area of research which has received limited scholarly attention. While women have been appraised for their contribution of song to the folkloric record, little is made of their tales. Yet, countless recordings of women from Gaelic Scotland narrating tales survive in archives and collections compiled in the nineteenth- and twentieth-centuries. Furthermore, although Maighread Challan in her book *Air Bilean an t-Sluaigh* has addressed practices of women's storytelling in North Uist, there remains a lack of direct investigation into women storytellers themselves and their general participation in the storytelling tradition of the Outer Hebrides as a whole.[1] In light of this, this dissertation aims to contribute to a greater understanding and awareness of women's participation in the storytelling tradition of twentieth-century Gaelic Scotland. In this introduction, I will begin by summarising the context for my research, drawing attention to key scholarly influences. I will then detail my temporal and spatial research focus and finally present my research aim and objectives.

In 1989, Clodagh Brennan Harvey identified a gap in the scholarship concerning women's folklore and storytelling in Ireland.[2] Women, Harvey argued, have not received an "accurate appraisal" for their role in traditional Irish storytelling on account of "long-standing and generally-accepted notions".[3] These notions include the idea that women participated less than men in storytelling tradition and that women storytellers were "inferior narrators".[4] As a result, little effort has been made to assess and investigate women's role as storytellers in the tradition. Yet, Harvey concludes, such investigation into women's role and their tales could yield a great deal of information about storytelling tradition generally.[5] A similar assessment can arguably be made of scholarship in the context of Gaelic Scotland. Here, the rule of women "as singers" and men "as storytellers" is well-established. Prominent twentieth-century folklore collector Calum Iain Maclean made this differentiation in 1957, observing "[m]en as a rule are the storytellers" in Gaelic Scotland, "women [have] the songs".[6] To this

[1] Maighread Challan, *Air Bilean an t-Sluaigh: Sealladh air Leantalachd Beul-Aithris Ghàidhlig Uibhist a Tuath*, (Belfast: Cló Ollscoil na Banríona, 2012).
[2] Clodagh Brennan Harvey, 'Some Irish Women Storytellers and Reflections on the Role of Women in the Storytelling Tradition', *Western Folklore*, 48, (1989), 109-128, (p. 119).
[3] Harvey, p. 111 and 120.
[4] Harvey, p. 111.
[5] Harvey, p. 125.
[6] Calum I. Maclean, 'Hebridean Traditions', *Gweirn*, 1, (Denbigh: Gee and Son Ltd., 1957), 21-33, (p. 32).

day, scholars interested in investigating the role of women in practices of traditional verbal art, including, for example, Barbara Hillers and Angela Bourke, tend to take as their source material song rather than story.[7] This is despite the fact that the School of Scottish Studies' archives include a vast and diverse selection of Gaelic narrative recordings from female storytellers.[8] Though it is true that the majority of tales recorded by the School since its establishment in 1951 were contributed by men,[9] this does not mean to say that tales from female storytellers should be overlooked or ignored. Rather, their uniqueness should make them a site of intensive investigation, especially since, as Ronald Black demonstrated in 2005, "fairy belief" in Gaelic Scotland was "used by men" but "necessary for women".[10] This necessity is based on what folklorist William Bascom called the "paradox of folklore".[11] On the one hand, folklore, including tales, songs, proverbs and traditional beliefs, can be used by the dominant social group to "maintain conformity to accepted patterns of behaviour" by encouraging individuals to accept and emulate their society's expectations of them through threats and rewards communicated through story.[12] On the other hand, marginalised groups in society, like women in male-dominated cultures, can use the imaginative realm of folklore to subvert and challenge social expectations and criticise male dominance.[13] In their chapter on women's folk culture, Joan Radner and Susan Lanser built on this theory, exploring the ways in which women could communicate subversive messages through folklore.[14] Radner and Lanser concluded that messages which challenge or criticise the dominant social group may be dangerous to state explicitly in mixed company.[15] However, such messages can be covertly coded into the images and characters of folk stories making them available only to those who need them.[16] Radner and Lanser set out a typology for strategies which women can use to encode messages into folk tales and folk culture. "Coding" is defined as "the adoption

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[7] Barbara Hillers, 'Dialogue or Monologue? Lullabies in *Litreachas & Eachdraidh / Literature & History*, ed. by Michel Byrne, T.O. Clancy and S. Kidd (Glasgow: University of Glasgow Press, 2006), pp. 33-55. Angela Bourke, 'Working and Weeping: Women's Oral Poetry in Irish and Scottish Gaelic', *Women and Gender Studies Series*, (1988), 1-17.

[8] *Tobar an Dualchais – Kist O' Riches*, [online archive], Available at <https://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/> (Accessed August 17th 2021). Challan, *Air Bilean an t-Sluaigh,* p. 182.

[9] Barbara Hillers, 'Storytelling and the International Folktale in Scotland', in *Oral Literature and Performance Culture*, ed. by John Beech, (Edinburgh: John Donald, 2007), pp. 153-170 (p. 160).

[10] Ronald Black, 'Introduction', in *The Gaelic Otherworld: John Gregorson Campbell's Superstitions of the Highlands and Islands of Scotland*, ed. by Ronald Black, (Edinburgh: Birlinn Press, 2005), pp. xix-lxxxii (p. lxxxii).

[11] William Bascom, 'The Four Functions of Folklore', *Journal of American Folklore*, 67 (1954), 333-349, (p. 349).

[12] Bascom, p. 346.

[13] Bascom, p. 346.

[14] Joan Radner and Susan Lanser, 'Strategies of Coding in Women's Folk Cultures', in *Feminist Messages: Coding in Women's Folk Culture*, ed. by Joan Radner (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), pp. 1-31.

[15] Radner and Lanser, p. 2.

[16] Radner and Lanser, p. 3.

of a system of signals (words, forms, signifiers) that protect the creator from the dangerous consequences of stating a particular message".[17] Such strategies as "distancing" and "distraction" can protect the storyteller in mixed company. Joan Radner and Bettina Kimpton among others have identified coding strategies at work in folk tales from Ireland.[18] While Radner and Lanser's theories have been applied to song in the Scottish context as will be demonstrated in the literature review, there has been limited to no investigation of this type into women's story.

This dissertation therefore will be the first extensive research project to directly investigate women storytellers, their participation in the storytelling tradition of Gaelic Scotland and, crucially, their tales. This research will investigate female storytellers born between c.1850 and c.1900 who acted as folklore informants between c.1930 and c.1980. The research will be concerned with folklore informants born in the Outer Hebrides and, specifically, those born on the islands south of Berneray (Beàrnaraigh na Hearadh). All informants relate their tales in Gaelic and all were brought up in Gaelic-speaking communities. The temporal and geographical limits of this research have been chosen because, since storytelling tradition in Gaelic Scotland lasted well into the twentieth-century, a large collection of folklore recordings survive from this time and place. Some of these recordings exist only in transcription but most remain in their original audio form. This dissertation will make use of the online archive *Tobar an Dualchais – Kist of Riches*, which grants public access to a wide selection of the School of Scottish Studies' archives in audio. Transcribed tales and data published in periodicals such as *Tocher* (1971-present) and *Béaloideas* (1927-present) will also be consulted for the purposes of this research.

As Harvey demonstrated in the context of Ireland, this is a "virtually uncharted" area of research.[19] The notion that women participated less in storytelling tradition combined with the focus on women's song as a site for investigation has overshadowed women's participation in storytelling practice such that women storytellers and their tales have arguably been almost forgotten in the scholarship. This project aims to address this gap by contributing to a greater understanding and awareness of women's role in Gaelic storytelling traditions. Each chapter of this dissertation will seek to fulfil this aim by addressing one of four related objectives. The first chapter, the *Literature Review*, aims to evaluate previous

[17] Radner and Lanser, p. 3.

[18] Bettina Kimpton, 'Blow the House Down: Coding, the Banshee, and Women's Place', *Proceedings of the Harvard Celtic Colloquium*, 13, (1993), 39-48. Joan Radner, '"The Woman Who Went to Hell": Coded Values in Irish Folk Narrative', *Midwestern Folklore*, 15, (1989), 109-117.

[19] Harvey, p. 125.

scholarship concerning women's participation in Gaelic storytelling tradition. This chapter will discuss the scholarship and demonstrate the inadequacy of current research into women and storytelling. It will further provide the scholarly backdrop for the following research. This chapter, and those which follow, will include as evidence a number of new transcriptions and translations from *Tobar an Dualchais*. The second chapter, entitled *Storytelling Context*, is intended to investigate women's place in storytelling culture and contexts. This chapter will draw upon historical accounts of storytelling practice in audio and written form and consider when and where women were able to "perform" and relate stories in the Gaelic context. This chapter will build on the work of Maighread Challan, mentioned above.[20] The third chapter, *Storyteller Biographies*, aims to identify specific women storytellers from the research period and review their recorded storytelling repertoires. These recorded storytelling repertoires can be defined as the collection of folkloric material recorded from individual storytellers. This chapter will contribute to a more accurate appraisal and greater awareness of Gaelic women storytellers by bringing to light their names and lives and by drawing attention to the diverse and extensive nature of their repertoires. The final chapter of this dissertation, entitled *Analysis*, will be presented in the form of two case studies. The aim of these studies is to critically analyse two tales from women storytellers and demonstrate that future analysis of this type would be beneficial. These studies will take a feminist approach, inspired by the work of Radner, Lanser, and Bourke, mentioned above, to listen for the voices of the female storytellers within the tales. In so doing, this chapter intends to demonstrate the value of research of this kind.[21]

The research presented in this dissertation is by no means exhaustive. The breadth of this topic and limits of this dissertation restrict the stretch of this study. However, the aim of this project is not to present an all-inclusive study of women's participation in Gaelic storytelling tradition. Rather, this project intends to take important steps towards understanding and appraising women's contributions to and role in Gaelic storytelling traditions.

[20] Challan, *Air Bilean an t-Sluaigh*.

[21] Radner and Lanser, pp. 1-31. Bourke, 'Working and Weeping', pp. 1-17. Radner, '"The Woman Who Went to Hell"', pp. 109-117.

CHAPTER 1

Literature Review

In this chapter, I intend to place my research into the context of Gaelic folklore studies and, in particular, studies concerning women. Since the recordings of tradition and verbal art made by the School of Scottish Studies (est. 1951, hereafter referred to as "the School") will form the basis of my research, I will begin this chapter with a brief introduction and evaluation of the School, its establishment, aims, and collection practices. This evaluation will be necessary if an accurate analysis of their data is to be made. Given the focus of this study, the following discussion will specifically consider gender and women's role in the School and in collection practice in Scotland as a whole. Following this, I will introduce the importance of the relationship between the individual and tradition and offer an overview of published biographical material for Gaelic storytellers which will provide a backdrop for chapter four of this dissertation. Finally, I will consider verbal art in Gaelic Scotland as an "allegorical vocabulary" and route to understanding the otherwise undocumented experiences of women in traditional Gaelic-speaking communities.[22] I will argue that research into women's folklore in Scotland has to date been restricted to specific "predetermined genres", namely genres of song, but that research into stories could yield a great deal of information about women's lives and experiences.[23] Throughout this chapter, I intend to highlight the uniqueness of my research as a source for the experience and storytelling traditions of women in late nineteenth- and twentieth-century Gaelic Scotland.

In Scotland, the tradition of "scientific" folklore collection began in the nineteenth-century with John Francis Campbell who endeavoured to save "from perdition whatever may be valuable in a language which is hardly known to the learned and must soon lapse away".[24] A mindset of preservation continued into the twentieth-century amongst collectors of Gaelic folklore. In Ireland, institutional Irish-language folklore collection emerged contemporaneously with the struggle for political independence. Following the founding of the Irish Free State in 1922, the Irish Folklore Commission was established in 1935 as a

[22] Angela Bourke, *The Burning of Bridget Cleary: A True Story*, (London: Pimlico, 1999), p. 37, quoted in Black, 'Introduction', p. xliii.
[23] Claire R. Farrer, 'Introduction: Women and Folklore: Images and Genres', *The Journal of American Folklore*, 88, (1975), v-xv, (p. v). Harvey, p. 125.
[24] Donald E. Meek, 'Romanticism and Revival: Ossian and Gaelic Scholarship', *Nineteenth-century studies: Ossian and Gaelic Scholarship* (2013) <http://meekwrite.blogspot.com/2013/03/romanticism-and-revivalossian-and.html> (Accessed 6th Dec. 2020), at para. 8 of 16.

publically-funded body which aimed to collect and preserve Irish oral tradition.[25] It was in large part by this Irish inspiration that the School of Scottish Studies emerged in Scotland in 1951.[26] Indeed, the first fieldworker and a prominent figure in the School, Calum Iain Maclean, trained as a folklore collector and began his career under the Irish Folklore Commission.[27] Maclean was still working for the Commission when he collected material in Scotland in the five years from 1945 to 1950.[28] Maclean began to work for the School when it was established in 1951 as a research institute of "folklore" and "folk life", terms defined by the School's first archivist, Stewart Sanderson, as the "intimate domestic history of a people".[29] The School began to collect oral material on tape from Scots- and Gaelic-speakers at cèilidhs and in and around people's homes. Cathlin Macaulay has described the School's early work as "rescue ethnology" since fieldworkers for the School focussed on rural areas and crofting communities where dialects and tradition were disappearing as a result of the social and political changes in the twentieth-century.[30] From the start, the School were using tape to record their material, a technology unavailable to the Irish Folklore Commission upon their establishment in 1935.[31] To date, the School have collected in excess of 12,500 tapes in Gaelic and Scots, some of which has recently been made available on the School's multi-lingual online archive *Tobar an Dualchais – Kist o' Riches*.[32] Macaulay has praised the School's decision to make their material available in audio rather than written transcription, emphasising the layers of subjectivity which written transcription can endure.[33] The School's practice is certainly commendable as it gives widespread access to community traditions in their original form. Irish folklorist Deirdre Ní Chonghaile has described such innovations as the "democratization" of traditional material.[34]

[25] Patricia Lysaght, 'From "Collect the Fragments..." to "Memory of the World" – Collecting the Folklore of Ireland 1927-70: Aims, Achievements, Legacy', *Folklore*, 130:1, (2019), 1-30, (p. 1).
[26] Cathlin Macaulay, 'Dipping into the Well: Scottish Oral Tradition Online', *Oral Tradition*, 27:1, (2012), 171-186, (p. 173).
[27] 'Biography of Calum Iain Maclean', *Calum Iain Maclean Project* (University of Edinburgh), Available at <https://www.calum-maclean-project.celtscot.ed.ac.uk/about-calum-maclean/biography/> (Accessed January 15th 2021).
[28] 'Biography of Calum Iain Maclean'.
[29] Stewart Sanderson, 'The Work of the School of Scottish Studies', *Scottish Studies*, 1 (1957), 3-13, (p. 6).
[30] Macaulay, p. 174.
[31] Lysaght, 'Collect the Fragments', p. 15.
[32] Macaulay, p. 174. *Tobar an Dualchais – Kist o' Riches* [online], Available at <http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/> .
[33] Macaulay, p. 174.
[34] Deirdre Ní Chonghaile, *Collecting Music in the Aran Islands: A Century of History and Practice*, (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 2021), p. 11.

Although the School have historically been dedicated to accurate and fair collection using the latest technologies available, it is still important to scrutinise the approaches and composition of collectors for the School if the oral material is to be appropriately analysed. Certainly, the collector has an important role to play in influencing what kinds of oral material are recorded, when, where, and by whom.[35] Harvey identified the "very direct impact" that folklore collectors have had on the lives of traditional Irish storytellers and their communities.[36] It was only after being recorded by professional folklore collectors that one of Harvey's informants, Elizabeth Bourke, became a public performer of "seanchas", short historical tales.[37] Irish folklore collectors were for a time preoccupied with collecting long, episodic and structurally complex tales and would actively seek this material by offering certain incentives to storytellers.[38] In 1988, Barra singer Flora MacNeil spoke about the impact that the activities of folklore collectors had on the Gaelic-speaking community in Scotland. Collectors in Barra, MacNeil explained, "made people realise that they had something very important to give […] It stimulated them to remember songs they had not sung for a long time".[39] The School's collectors, then, encouraged individuals to remember and perform old songs and, as folk revivalist Norman Buchan wrote, "gave prestige" to traditional forms of verbal art.[40] However, MacNeil criticised some aspects of the School's collecting, stating that she felt it "unfair" that "it was always the collector that got the credit" and collectors should have asked "more about the singer and the person they had learnt their songs from".[41] Indeed, the question of "ownership" of traditional material is one which Scottish folklore studies and folkloristics in general have been grappling with in recent years.[42] Early folklorists were primarily concerned with the material itself rather than the transmitters of that material, as MacNeil rightly points out, or, if folklorists did ask about storytellers and their own informants it was often very brief and this information on the people embodying the tradition was seldom of primary importance to the academics analysing the folklore itself. The problem of attribution of a certain song or story to a single individual is intensified by the

[35] Bengt Holbek, *The Interpretation of Fairy Tales: Danish Folklore in a European Perspective*, (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, 1987), p. 155.
[36] Harvey, p. 119.
[37] Harvey, p. 119.
[38] Harvey, p. 119.
[39] Flora MacNeil (interview, 1988) cited in Ailie Munro, 'The Role of the School of Scottish Studies in the Folk Music Revival', *Folk Music Journal*, 6, (1991), 132-168, (p. 143).
[40] Norman Buchan (interview, 1988) cited in Munro, p. 157.
[41] MacNeil cited in Munro, p. 143.
[42] Diarmuid Ó Giolláin, 'Who Owns Folklore? From Collective Creation to Collective Ownership', *Béaloideas*, 79, (2011), 44-59, (p. 53).

nature of traditional material. As early as 1929, folklorists Roman Jakobson and Piotr Bogatyrev noted that folkloric work is not born at the moment of creation, as literary work is, but rather once the community accepts it.[43] Thus, folklore does not belong specifically to any one individual. As Diarmuid Ó Giolláin points out, this notion of community ownership runs contrary to modern ideologies of capitalism and privatisation, proving problematic for contemporary folklorists who are attempting to give credit to traditional storytellers and singers.[44] In recent years, the School of Scottish Studies have been involved in an endeavour to fill out information about informants and acknowledge their contribution to the School's collection.[45] Although they have met with issues along the way, including those concerning communal ownership, their aims are commendable, providing some much needed recognition to traditional storytellers and singers. The creation of *Tobar an Dualchais* has helped the School in fulfilling this objective as a greater number of people are able to access the archives and aid in identifying contributors.[46] This dissertation aims to acknowledge the nature of folklore both as a product of the community and of the individual by drawing attention to the biographies of storytellers, in chapter three, as well as discussing their social and cultural surroundings, dealt with in chapter two specifically in relation to the storytelling context.

Crucially for this dissertation, gender relations between folklore collectors and informants have been shown to impact the volume and type of material recorded. According to Harvey, in her overview of women's place in the storytelling tradition of Ireland, the two factors which have militated against the "accurate appraisal" of women storytellers in Ireland are, firstly, that most twentieth-century folklore collectors were male, and, secondly, that most storytelling occurred in same-sex groups.[47] Thus, collectors were unable to access the sphere of women's storytelling and fewer of their tales were collected.[48] As a result, Harvey argues, women storytellers in Ireland have historically been perceived as "inferior narrators" in the scholarship.[49] To illustrate this point, Harvey details that many of her informants in Ireland recall visiting houses to meet with other women and hear stories while the men were

[43] Roman Jakobson and Piotr Bogatyrev, 'Le folklore: forme spécifique de création' in R. Jakobson (ed.) *Questions de poétique*, (Paris, 1973), (p. 62).
[44] Ó Giolláin, 'Who Owns Folklore?', p. 52.
[45] Macaulay, p. 178.
[46] Macaulay, p. 179.
[47] Harvey, p. 120.
[48] Holbek, p. 155.
[49] Harvey, p. 111.

cèilidhing.[50] In Gaelic Scotland, the segregated nature of some aspects of women's folk culture is well-documented. Men, for instance, were traditionally excluded from the luadh ("waulking"), the rhythmic pounding of cloth against a board to bind and make the fibres water tight, an activity accompanied by song.[51] In terms of storytelling practice, records in Scotland frequently refer to "an taigh cèilidh" ("the ceilidh house") where storytelling took place as an occupation for long winter nights. The Rev. Norman MacDonald hinted at the segregated nature of these affairs when he told Maclean in 1953 that although one or two women were normally present at the cèilidh, "'s e na fireannaich bu mhòtha a bh' ann" ("it was mostly the men").[52] In his 1957 article 'Hebridean Traditions', Maclean's informants Seumas MacKinnon and Angus MacMillan both describe the segregated nature of visiting by which young men would gather to hear older men narrate tales.[53] Maclean's article originates in a masculine experience of storytelling, emphasising male storytelling practices and stating that "men as a rule are the storytellers".[54] He goes on to mention one female storyteller by name "Mary Ann, [Angus's] sister".[55] The sum of her description can be quoted here, "She was a small but dignified old lady. She had tales, songs, prayers, and every kind of lore".[56] Despite her apparent wealth of tradition, Maclean expounds a mere two sentences on her life in comparison to the many paragraphs for his male informants. Nevertheless, Maclean does provide evidence for women storytellers, observing "there were quite a lot of women storytellers too".[57] It is possible that these women storytellers performed in the private sphere as was the case in Ireland. Describing the practice of visiting in Reay, Caithness, Henry Henderson informed Hamish Henderson that "[he had] one neighbour [who was] very social. They would drop in, older men, not so much the women, they had meetings of their own, but the older men would come in".[58] In 2012, Challan discussed the participation of women in traditional storytelling practices of North Uist, concluding that the School's records prove that many women had stories; that it was from women that many of the School's male and female informants first heard and learned their stories, and; that both men and women were

[50] Harvey, pp. 114-115.
[51] Bourke, 'Working and Weeping', p. 5.
[52] Rev. Norman MacDonald, 'An-taigh-cèilidh agus a' Ghàidhlig', [audio recording] *Tobar an Dualchais – Kist o' Riches*, Available at <https://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/track/2649?l=en> (Accessed August 26th 2021).
[53] Maclean, 'Hebridean Traditions', pp. 27-29.
[54] Maclean, 'Hebridean Traditions', p. 32.
[55] Maclean, 'Hebridean Traditions', p. 30.
[56] Maclean, 'Hebridean Traditions', p. 30
[57] Maclean, 'Hebridean Traditions', p. 32.
[58] Henry Henderson, 'Ceilidhing in Reay' [audio recording] *Tobar an Dualchais – Kist o' Riches*, Available at <https://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/track/15638?l=en> (Accessed August 26th 2021).

competent at storytelling performance.[59] Women in North Uist, furthermore, had "àite fìor chudromach" (a very important place") in encouraging storytellers, by aiding and correcting them, and "performing" in the home.[60] The second chapter of this dissertation will build on Challan's work by compiling written and oral sources from across the Outer Hebrides, beyond Challan's North Uist focus, in order to understand contexts for storytelling by women in twentieth-century Gaelic Scotland. Moreover, Challan in her research does not identify specific women storytellers or investigate their tales. Drawing upon original audio recordings, chapters three and four of this dissertation will further Challan's research not only by considering a wider geographical area but also by drawing attention to the names and lives of twentieth-century women storytellers and their tales.

It is certainly possible that women and men socialised separately in Scotland, a circumstance Harvey identifies in the Irish context.[61] However, while the majority of collectors for the School throughout the twentieth-century were male, as was the case in Ireland, a number of female collectors were operating within Gaelic-speaking Scotland throughout the period covered in this dissertation. Morag MacLeod was employed by the School for over thirty-seven years, collecting and transcribing music, and succeeding Alan Bruford as editor of the School's journal *Tocher*.[62] Margaret Bennett, similarly, collected for the School as did Barbara McDermitt and Lisa Storey, among others. There were also female collectors working outside of the School, notably, Margaret Fay Shaw who had already amassed a great deal of musical material from South Uist and Canna by 1951.[63] Without doubt, the diverse composition of folklore collectors for the School would have enabled them to access a greater number of informants from different walks of life. Furthermore, while collecting from women storytellers may have been more difficult for male collectors, Dòmhnall Uilleam Stiùbhart has demonstrated that it was by no means impossible in the Gaelic context and, in fact, that strong, trusting relationships could develop between storyteller and collector regardless of gender.[64] Stiùbhart highlights the efforts of collector Alexander Carmichael

[59] Challan, *Air Bilean an t-Sluaigh*, p. 182.
[60] Challan, *Air Bilean an t-Sluaigh*, p. 182.
[61] Harvey, p. 120.
[62] Arthur Cormack, 'Morag Macleod: Arthur Cormack's introduction at the 2007 Scots Trad Music Awards', *Scottish Traditional Music Hall of Fame*, [online] Available at <https://projects.handsupfortrad.scot/hall-of-fame/morag-macleod/> (Accessed January 25th 2021).
[63] Mary McCarthy, 'Margaret Fay Shaw (1903-2004)', *Folk Music Journal*, 9:1, (2006), 136-137, (p. 136).
[64] Dòmhnall Uilleam Stiùbhart, 'The Theology of Carmina Gadelica', in *The History of Scottish Theology, Volume III: The Long Twentieth Century*, ed. by David Fergusson and Mark Elliott, (Oxford: Oxford University Press: 2019), pp. 1-18, (p.6). Dòmhnall Uilleam Stiùbhart, '"Mì-thuigse, Dìth Tuigse, Tàthagan": Buannachd nam

who, thanks in large part to the charitable work of his wife Mary Frances MacBean, was able to build strong relationships with women storytellers in Gaelic Scotland in the nineteenth-century and record from them.[65] Ní Chonghaile perhaps summarises the practice of collecting folk material best as a "palimpsest of individual practices of engagement, navigation, and negotiation that yield a varied palette of collaboration" amongst and between collectors and performers.[66] Thus, the relationship between collector and informant cannot be defined by gender alone.

In order to fulfil this project's aim to develop an awareness and understanding of women's place in Gaelic storytelling tradition, chapter three will explore the specifics of the lives and repertoires of eight twentieth-century female storytellers from Gaelic Scotland. In so doing, this chapter will bring to light the lives and histories of Gaelic women storytellers. This is especially important since the personal experiences of storytellers have been shown to be fundamentally important in storytelling performance. Ray Cashman *et al*. have demonstrated that storytellers are not passive transmitters of tradition since "there is no such thing as tradition without the individuals who enact it".[67] Cashman found that Irish storyteller Packy Jim McGrath used tales not just to critique and comprehend society but also to articulate a coherent sense of self.[68] Since tales and repertoires of tales are shaped by the individual life experiences of the storytellers, all storytelling is in some way "autobiographical".[69] As Flora MacNeil's observation mentioned earlier indicates, some collectors in Scotland were initially uninterested in collecting information about the storytellers themselves. Collectors, according to MacNeil, should have asked "more about the singer and the person they had learnt their songs from".[70] While this may have been true for some collectors, there was a growing interest in the lives of Irish and Gaelic storytellers throughout the twentieth-century. In Ireland, this interest manifested itself in a series of "autobiographies" dictated by Irish

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Mearachd ann an Cruinneachaidhean Beul-Aithris Alasdair MhicGille Mhìcheil', *Scottish Studies*, 37 (2017) 231-244.

[65] Stiùbhart, 'Theology of Carmina Gadelica', p. 7.

[66] Ní Chonghaile, *Collecting Music in the Aran Islands*, p. 11.

[67] Ray Cashman, T. Mould, and P. Shukla, 'Introduction: The Individual and Tradition', in *The Individual and Tradition: Folkloristic Perspectives*, ed. by R. Cashman, T. Mould, and P. Shukla, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011), 1-26, (p. 2).

[68] Ray Cashman, 'The Role of Tradition in the Individual: At Work in Donegal with Packy Jim McGrath', in *The Individual and Tradition: Folkloristic Perspectives*, ed. by R. Cashman, T. Mould, and P. Shukla, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011), 303-322, (p. 305).

[69] Cashman, 'At Work in Donegal', p. 308.

[70] MacNeil cited in Munro, p. 143.

storytellers such as Tomás Ó Criomhthain in 1929 and Peig Sayers in 1936.[71] In Scotland, Calum Maclean recorded the life stories of storytellers Angus MacMillan in 1948 and Duncan MacDonald in 1949.[72] Some of this material was published by Maclean in the periodical *Gairm* but the majority remains in manuscript.[73] In 1950, Maclean began recording the autobiography of South Uist storyteller Aonghas Mac 'IllFhialain (Angus MacLellan, hereafter referred to as Mac 'IllFhialain), styled Aonghas Beag, but Maclean's untimely death brought his project to an abrupt end.[74] The project was taken up again ten years later by John Lorne Campbell who published Mac 'IllFhialain's autobiography first in English in 1962 and subsequently in the original Gaelic in 1972.[75] These books followed a published selection of Mac 'IllFhialain's repertoire, edited by Campbell, in 1961.[76] In terms of the length, Mac 'IllFhialain has received by far the most biographical attention of all Scottish Gaelic storytellers. His Gaelic autobiography *Saoghal an Treobhaiche* was, at the time of release, one of the longest books to have been published in colloquial Scottish Gaelic.[77] The lives of female storytellers have not historically been documented or sought in the same way. Published biographical information for Anna NicIain (Annie Johnston), for instance, appears only in her obituary.[78] In 2019, a biography for Berneray storyteller Ceit Dix was published alongside a selection of her stories and poems by Dix's grand-daughter Alison Dix.[79] Previous to this, a short biography for Dix appeared in a chapter on storytelling in Scotland by Barbara Hillers.[80] However, the only female storyteller to have received anything close to the degree of attention given to the male storytellers mentioned above is Nan NicFhionghain

[71] Tomás Ó Criomhthain, *An tOileánach: Scéal a Bheathadh Féin*, ed. by An Seabhac, (Dublin: Oifig an tSoláthair, 1929). Peig Sayers, *Peig: A Scéal Féin*, (Dingle: An Sagart, 1998 [1936]).

[72] Andrew Wiseman, 'Duncan MacDonald: A Summary of His Life Story', *Calum I. Maclean Blog*, [online] (2014) Available at <https://calumimaclean.blogspot.com/2014/08/duncan-macdonald-summary-of-his-life.html> (Accessed August 14th 2021). Andrew Wiseman, 'Angus MacMillan: A Summary of his Life Story', *Calum I. Maclean Blog*, [online] (2014) Available at <http://calumimaclean.blogspot.com/2014/01/angus-macmillan-summary-of-his-life.html> (Accessed August 14th 2021).

[73] Calum I. Maclean, 'Aonghas agus Donnchadh', *Gairm*, 10, (1954), 170-174.

[74] Wiseman, 'Angus MacMillan'.

[75] Angus MacLellan, *The Furrow Behind Me: the Autobiography of a Hebridean Crofter*, ed. and trans. by John L. Campbell, (London: Routledge and Paul Ltd., 1962). Angus MacLellan, *Saoghal an Treobhaiche*, ed. by John L. Campbell, (Inverness: Club Leabhar, 1972).

[76] Angus MacLellan, *Stories from South Uist*, ed. and trans. by John L. Campbell, (London: Routledge and Paul Ltd., 1961).

[77] Andrew Wiseman, 'Angus MacLellan of Loch Eynort, South Uist', *Calum I. Maclean Blog*, [online], (2014) Available at <https://calumimaclean.blogspot.com/2013/03/angus-maclellan-of-loch-eynort-south.html> (Accessed August 14th 2021).

[78] John Lorne Campbell, 'Loss to Highland Folklore: The Late Miss Annie Johnston, Barra', *Oban Times*, (14th March 1963). John Lorne Campbell, 'Anna and Calum Johnston', *Tocher*, 13 (1974), 162-165.

[79] Alison Dix, 'Ro-ràdh', in *Ceit an Tàilleir à Beàrnaraigh: Eachdraidh Beatha agus Taghadh de Stòiridhean is Rannan*, ed. by Alison Dix, (Inverness: Clàr, 2019).

[80] Hillers, 'Storytelling in Scotland', p. 164.

(Nan MacKinnon) of Vatersay.[81] NicFhionghain, who learned the majority of her extensive repertoire of stories and songs from her Mingulay mother, was a "favourite informant" of the School of Scottish Studies, receiving many visits by the School's collectors over her lifetime.[82] Articles by James Ross, Francis Thomson and Barbara McDermitt among others provide biographical information for NicFhionghain though this is rarely brought into conversation with her tales.[83] While the attention given to NicFhionghain is welcome and warranted, her life, talents and stories are rarely considered in conjunction with other women storytellers throughout the highlands and islands, a method which would provide a deeper understanding of NicFhionghain's own tales and of women's role in the Gaelic storytelling practice as a whole. Therefore, the third chapter of this dissertation will discuss NicFhionghain in relation to other twentieth-century female storytellers by presenting the biographies of eight women contemporary with NicFhionghain. This chapter will constitute a new synthesis of information on the lives and repertoires of women storytellers by using as evidence original audio recordings and interviews with a former folklore collector. A review of these women's biographies will not only put faces and lives to names, and thus grant appraisal for recorded tradition where it is due, but will inform the analysis of the tales in the fifth chapter of this dissertation and help to determine the ways in which stories may have been used by individuals and groups within the community.

Methodology for the analysis of the tales in this dissertation will be set out at the beginning of the fourth chapter. It is enough to say here that the analysis will take a feminist approach to search for the voices of women storytellers within the tales. This approach will build on the work of Ronald Black who demonstrated, following similar work in Ireland, that the fairies in Gaelic Scotland functioned as a "psychic construct" which was used to explain the unexplainable and "provide a set of rules for the living".[84] Fairy stories in Gaelic Scotland arguably provided the community with an allegorical means by which to discuss issues which were otherwise difficult to explain such as death, murder or domestic abuse.[85] This "allegorical vocabulary" could further be used to communicate "disciplinary" messages to

[81] For more information on NicIain, Dix and NicFhionghain see Chapter 3 of this dissertation.
[82] Barbara McDermitt, 'Nan MacKinnon', *Tocher*, 6, (1982), 3-47, (p. 10).
[83] James Ross, 'Folk Song and Social Environment', *Scottish Studies*, 5, (1961), 18-39. Francis Collinson, 'The Repertoire of a Traditional Gaelic Singer in the Outer Hebrides: With Reference to Versions of her Songs Known in Canada', *Journal of the International Folk Music Council*, 14, (1962), 87-90. McDermitt, 'Nan MacKinnon'.
[84] Black, 'Introduction', p. xxxvi.
[85] Black, 'Introduction', p. xxxiv.

women, encouraging them to conform to their expected role in society as wives and mothers.[86] Violent husbands and injured wives, for instance, might be allegorised as fairy abductions or attacks. However, while on the one hand, tales could be "used by men" to emphasise conformity, they were also "necessary for women" as a way of challenging social convention and accepted patterns of behaviour.[87] Angela Bourke highlighted the very real implications of fairy belief for women in Gaelic societies when she documented the tragic burning and death of Bridget Cleary, a young woman accused of being a fairy in nineteenth-century Ireland.[88] However, Bourke also points to the ways in which fairy belief can provide women with a defence and escape from social expectations.[89] A woman, for instance, who claimed to be a fairy changeling might be able to escape further abuse at home if she convinced her husband that he was lessening his chances of retrieving his "real" wife by injuring her.[90] On a more covert level, the apparently contradictory messages of folklore were demonstrated in the Irish context by Bettina Kimpton with reference to banshee legends.[91] Tales about the banshee emphasise her violent and malevolent aspects and seem to be about regulating women's space by forcing a "wild" and "disordered" woman outside.[92] For a male audience this tale might be a humorous anecdote about a deviant female character.[93] However, a woman might perceive the legend as a safe expression of her own power to resist male domination as the banshee breaks down social expectations which limit women to the domestic sphere, prevent them from being alone at night and force them to submit to male domination.[94] Thus, such tales are "serving the purposes of both sexes".[95]

Therefore, as a "psychic construct" and "allegorical vocabulary", folklore is a useful source for inquiry into gender relations and the lived experience of women. This is particularly true when material by women is considered, as Omar Sougou concluded in his discussion of African women's folk tales. [96] In the Scottish Gaelic context, however, inquiries of this kind overwhelmingly take as their source material song, rather than prose. This pattern perhaps

[86] Bourke, *The Burning of Bridget Cleary*, p. 37, quoted in Black, 'Introduction', p. xliii.
[87] Black, 'Introduction', p. lxxviii.
[88] Angela Bourke, *The Burning of Bridget Cleary: A True Story*, (London: Pimlico, 2006).
[89] Bourke, *Burning*, p. 67.
[90] Bourke, *Burning*, p. 67.
[91] Bettina Kimpton, 'Blow the House Down: Coding, the Banshee, and Women's Place', *Proceedings of the Harvard Celtic Colloquium*, 13, (1993), 39-48.
[92] Kimtpon, pp. 40-43.
[93] Kimpton, p. 44.
[94] Kimpton, p. 44.
[95] Kimpton, p. 44.
[96] Omar Sougou, 'Transformational Narratives: Hearing/Reading Selected Senegalese Folktales by Young Women', *Research in African Literature*, 39:3 (2008), 26-38, (p. 26).

reflects the long-held notion in the study of Gaelic folklore that song, particularly song which accompanied domestic tasks such as lullabies and waulking songs, was the preserve of women.[97] Tales told by women are rarely consulted in research of this kind. This bias may be in part to the notion that women are tellers of less prestigious, short, historical anecdotes while men alone narrate the lengthy, episodic narratives known as "wonder tales".[98] Wonder tales, including Finn Cycle tales, have been interpreted as the most prestigious genre of Gaelic folk stories on account of their length and complexity.[99] Séamus Ó Duilearga wrote in 1945 that while "seanchas", those tales traditionally told by women, passed "easily" between people and communities, the "more intricate" wonder tales which were almost entirely restricted to male storytellers "require considerable powers of memory" and even the well-educated could not reproduce them.[100] More than short tales, though, women have been historically associated with song in the Gaelic context.[101] As shown in the *Introduction* of this dissertation, Maclean made this differentiation as early as 1957. [102] Furthermore, in 1996, Alan Bruford pointed out that half of the types of Gaelic folk-song identified by James Ross are associated with women and the School of Scottish Studies has recorded far more Gaelic songs from women than from men.[103] Bruford singles out lullabies, laments, and working songs as "predominantly women's music".[104] Bourke likewise identified waulking songs as "belonging particularly to women" and used these songs as a source for women's voice in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Gaelic Scotland.[105] Bourke demonstrated that women could use songs to criticise male dominance in the safe space of the waulking, a female-only environment, and found evidence for "loud protest" in the songs.[106] Hillers similarly used lullabies as a source for the female experience in traditional Gaelic society since lullabies

[97] Harvey, at 111. Anne Ross, *Folklore of the Scottish Highlands*, (London: Batsford, 1976), at 13. Alan Bruford, 'Workers, Weepers and Witches: The Status of the Female Singer in Gaelic Society', *Scottish Gaelic Studies*, 17, (1996), 61-70, (pp. 64-65).
[98] Harvey, p. 111. Séamus Ó Duilearga, 'The Gaelic Storyteller: With Some Notes on Gaelic Folk Tales', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 31, (1945), 177-221, (p. 181).
[99] Harvey, p. 111.
[100] Ó Duilearga, 'The Gaelic Storyteller', p. 208.
[101] Women were also traditionally associated with song in the Gaelic-speaking communities of Cape Breton in the nineteenth- and twentieth-centuries. For more information on women and Gaelic singing in Cape Breton see, John Shaw, 'Gaelic Singing in Broad Cove Parish' in *Brìgh an Òrain: A Story in Every Song: The Songs and Tales of Lauchie MacLellan*, ed. by John Shaw, (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000), pp. 3-55, (pp. 15-18).
[102] Maclean, 'Hebridean Traditions', p. 32.
[103] Bruford, 'Workers', p. 62. James Ross, 'A Classification of Gaelic Folk-Song', *Scottish Studies*, 1, (1957), 95-151.
[104] Bruford, 'Workers', pp. 64-65.
[105] Bourke, 'Working and Weeping', p. 3.
[106] Bourke, 'Working and Weeping', p. 8.

were sung "virtually exclusively" by women while Margaret Harrison chose to analyse waulking songs, which she described as "unquestionably" a woman's genre, to identify "feminist messages" encoded in the songs.[107] This research indicates a clear bias for song as a source for the female experience throughout history. This bias is arguably justified given that many songs in Gaelic Scotland which were believed to have been performed and composed in female-only environments survive in the records.[108] The research mentioned above has undeniably been fruitful in investigating the lives, attitudes, and experiences of women in Gaelic society from the nineteenth- and twentieth-century. However, as Claire Farrer argues, the genres "predetermined" to belong to women are not the only ones valid for investigation into women's experiences and lives.[109] The research into song, while profitable, overlooks stories as a source for female voices and experiences. Yet, the School's archives prove that many Gaelic women had tales.[110] Given the success of research into song, analysis of stories told by women, an area as yet under-researched, could yield a great deal of information not only about their experiences and lives but also about traditions of Gaelic storytelling as a whole.[111] This dissertation aims to address this gap in the scholarship by subjecting tales recorded by female informants to analysis and by bringing this analysis into conversation with storyteller biographies and their social context.

Thus far, studies on the role of women within practices of Gaelic oral tradition demonstrate a preference for "predetermined" genres of folklore as source material.[112] The research quoted in this chapter indicates that, while there may not be evidence to suggest that women have been necessarily perceived as "inferior narrators" in the Gaelic tradition, as Harvey suggests in the Irish context, Gaelic storytelling as an activity has certainly been imagined as a man's occupation in Scotland.[113] This perception is evident elsewhere in Europe. In 1969, folklorist Linda Dégh wrote that "[d]oubtless it is the men who are the storytellers among European

[107] Hillers, 'Dialogue or Monologue?', p. 38. Margaret Harrison, 'Gender in the Waulking Songs of Màiri nighean Alasdair', in *Child's Children: Ballad Study and its Legacies*, ed. by Joseph Harris and Barbara Hillers, (Trier Press, 2012), pp. 205-217, (p. 209). For a further example of research into Gaelic song as a form of emotional expression see, Lillis Ó Laoire, *On a Rock in the Middle of the Ocean: Songs and Singers in Tory Island, Ireland*, (Oxford: Scarecrow Press, 2005).
[108] Bruford, 'Workers', p. 62.
[109] Farrer, p. viii.
[110] Challan, *Air Bilean an t-Sluaigh*, p. 182.
[111] Harvey, p. 111.
[112] Farrer, p. viii.
[113] Harvey, p. 111.

people".[114] However, this does not mean to say that there were no women storytellers or that their tales should be overlooked. Dégh herself identified one particularly talented woman storyteller Zsuzsánna Palkó in the Hungarian tradition, who, in terms of storytelling, "could vie with any man".[115] In Scotland, the perception of storytelling as a male pursuit has arguably resulted in an over-emphasis on song as a source for Gaelic women's voices. Yet, this bias towards song does not accurately reflect the contributions women have made to other folkloric genres. The research which follows in this dissertation is unique because it will be the first to specifically address women as storytellers and their tales in the Scottish Gaelic context. This chapter has identified a gap in the scholarship concerning women's place in the Gaelic storytelling tradition. The following chapters will attempt to address this gap by drawing attention to the lives, contexts and tales of women storytellers. In so doing, this dissertation aims to contribute to a more accurate appraisal of women storytellers in Gaelic Scotland. The next chapter considers in particular the various contexts in which women were able to tell tales and participate in Gaelic storytelling traditions.

[114] Linda Dégh, *Folktales and Society: Story-telling in a Hungarian Peasant Community*, trans. by Emily M. Schossberger, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1969), p. 92.
[115] Dégh, *Folktales and Society*, p. 93.

CHAPTER 2

Storytelling Context

As the previous chapters have demonstrated, scholarship on Gaelic folklore tends to single out men as the primary storytellers in traditional Gaelic-speaking communities.[116] Yet Hebridean storytellers regularly cite women as the source of at least some of their material and women have made substantial contributions to twentieth-century collections.[117] This chapter will consider where and when women's storytelling took place in the late nineteenth- and twentieth-century Outer Hebrides. I will begin by introducing the taigh-cèilidh, a highly important site for the performance of storytelling in Gaelic communities up to the mid-twentieth-century. I will argue that traditions of the taigh-cèilidh were dynamic throughout the Outer Hebrides in the time period studied. Women's role in the cèilidh house thus varied temporally and geographically. Although the anecdotal evidence suggests that many taighean-cèilidh may have been male-dominated spaces, it will be argued that cèilidh houses were nonetheless sources of stories for women storytellers. This chapter will then consider alternative storytelling sites for women. I will argue that women's social spaces may have offered an opportunity to share stories and tales and that women were able to "perform" to children in the home. Amongst all of this, I would like to emphasise that the context of collection was often altogether different from the environments here explored. While some collectors such as Alexander Carmichael might have attended the taigh-cèilidh to collect tales, as will be discussed below, this was often not an option for collectors for the School of Scottish Studies as the cèilidh tradition declined.

The word "cèilidh" appears in a variety of historical sources from Scotland, referred to in Gaelic orthography but also in Scots as kailie, and sometimes kal(e)y, kaily(ee) or ca(i)ley.[118] A full study of descriptions of the cèilidh by insiders and outsiders remains to be undertaken as has been done with reference to the "rèiteach" by Neill Martin or to dancing at the wake by

[116] For example, Maclean, 'Hebridean Traditions', p. 32.
[117] John Shaw, 'Storytellers in Scotland: Context and Function', in *Scottish Life and Society: Oral Literature and Performance Culture*, ed. by John Beech, (Edinburgh: John Donald, 2007), pp. 28-41, (p. 36). Challan, *Air Bilean an t-Sluaigh*, p. 181.
[118] *Dictionary of the Scots Language / Dictionars o the Scots Leid,* 'KAILIE', Available online at <https://dsl.ac.uk/entry/snd/kailie> (Accessed April 6th 2021). For mention of "kailie", see for example: Lachlan McKenzie, *"Muckle Kate": A Wonderful Story of an Aged Profiligate and Abandoned Woman, Converted in a Peculiarly Remarkable Manner*, (Rothesay: J. Wilson, 1847), p. 4. W. and R. Chambers (eds.), *Chamber's Journal of Popular Science Literature and Art*, fourth series, 116, (London: W & R Chambers, 1866), pp. 174-176.

Michael Newton.[119] The following description of the cèilidh tradition will bring together scholarly sources as well as original recordings of anecdotes from contributors to the School. Though these sources are in no way exhaustive of the full array of material available, the aim in this chapter is to develop a general sense of the cèilidh tradition in a specific time and place and, in particular, women's role in these settings.

At the end of the nineteenth-century, Alexander Carmichael described the cèilidh as:

> "[…] a literary entertainment where stories and tales, poems and ballads, are rehearsed and recited, and songs are sung, conundrums are put, proverbs are quoted and many other literary matters are related and discussed".[120]

Carmichael's account reflects a vibrant and lively cèilidh tradition. The houses he visits are packed with men, women and children, sitting and standing to near capacity.[121] The man of the house would be the first to tell a story but the stranger must continue till the end of the night.[122] After a story has been told, the plot, characters and events might be discussed by those present.[123]

According to Margaret Bennett, the cèilidh or "cèilidhing" in its most general sense traditionally denoted any household gathering or visiting of family and friends.[124] The taigh-cèilidh, "cèilidh-house", or "taighean-cèilidh" in the Gaelic plural, were houses within the community where people could gather to tell stories, share songs and discuss local events as an occupation for the long winter nights between Hallowe'en and Easter.[125] A community or neighbourhood might have one or a number of designated taighean-cèilidh occupied by tradition bearers, storytellers or singers. John Francis Campbell observed in the nineteenth-century that "in every cluster of houses is some one man famed as "good at sgialachdan"

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[119] Neill Martin, 'Gaelic Rèiteach: Symbolism and Practice', *Scottish Studies*, 34, (2006), 77-158. Michael Newton, 'Dancing with the Dead: A Highland Wake Custom', in *Cànan is Cultar / Language and Culture: Rannsachadh na Gàidhlig 1*, ed. by W. McLeod and A. Gunderloch, (Edinburgh: Dunedin Academic Press, 2003), pp. 215-234.

[120] Alexander Carmichael, 'Introduction', in A. Carmichael (ed.) *Carmina Gadelica: Hymns and Incantations with illustrative notes on words, rites and customs, dying and obsolete orally collected in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland*, [new edition], (Edinburgh: Floris Books, 2006), pp. xv-xxxii, (p. xviii).

[121] Carmichael, at xix.

[122] Carmichael, at xix.

[123] Carmichael, at xix.

[124] Margaret Bennett, 'Céilidh (Scottish Gael.: 'a visit'; Irish Gael.: céili)', (2001) Available at <https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.05249> (Accessed February 14th 2021).

[125] Bennett, 'Céilidh'.

whose house is a winter's evening resort".[126] A strict code of conduct was practiced in many taighean-cèilidh by which members expected silence if a story was being told, though the audience, and in particular the women, often worked at spinning, carding or knitting through the evening's proceedings.[127] Carmichael observed the women of the house working while "[n]eighbour wives and neighbour daughters are knitting, sewing, or embroidering" during the cèilidh.[128] The "houseman" might also be working on twisting ropes.[129] Joe Neil MacNeil, a Gaelic storyteller from Cape Breton, summarised the work permitted in the taigh-cèilidh as that which would not interfere with the stories being told.[130] While Carmichael and Campbell describe cèilidhing as a social event which could occur on any winter's night, the performance of tradition was also an important part of specific lifecycle events such as the "rèiteach", a formal betrothal ceremony, weddings, and wakes for the dead.[131]

Accounts of the taigh-cèilidh collected by the School of Scottish Studies indicate that the tradition continued into the twentieth-century. The cèilidh tradition according to these accounts might be best referred to in the plural as "cèilidh traditions" given that cèilidh etiquette varied from township to township and even from house to house.[132] These traditions are ultimately unified by the underlying definition of the cèilidh as gathering or visiting.[133] For instance, although Carmichael and Joe Neil MacNeil relate that work was permitted in the taigh-cèilidh, Gaelic storyteller Donald Alasdair Johnson explained that in his childhood home, a popular taigh-cèilidh in South Uist, work was limited as his father expected complete silence and concentration when he was reciting a tale.[134] The taigh-cèilidh may variously refer to a home within and open to all members of the community, as Alexander Murdie of Corrie in Ross and Cromarty explained in 1956.[135] Or it may be a space where exclusive sects such as seasonal workers, herders and fishermen gathered for storytelling and song.[136] In

[126] John Francis Campbell, 'Introduction', in J.F. Campbell (ed.) *Popular Tales of the West Highlands*, vol. 1, (Edmonston and Douglas, 1860), pp. i-cxxiii, (p. xxvii).
[127] Bennett, 'Céilidh'.
[128] Carmichael, p. xix.
[129] Carmichael, p. xix.
[130] Joe Neil MacNeil, *Sgeul gu Latha / Tales Until Dawn*, ed. by John William Shaw, (Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1987), p. 33.
[131] Challan, *Air Bilean an t-Sluaigh*, pp. 50-53.
[132] Shaw, 'Storytellers in Scotland', p. 36.
[133] Bennett, 'Céilidh'.
[134] Shaw, 'Storytellers in Scotland', p. 36.
[135] Alexander Murdie, 'Ceilidhs in the old days', [audio recording], *Tobar an Dualchais*, <http://tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/4426> (Accessed March 17th 2021).
[136] David Maclaren, 'David Maclaren describes herds' ceilidhs', [audio recording], *Tobar an Dualchais*, <http://tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/181> (Accessed March 17th 2021). Angus Campbell, 'A

Castlebay, Barra, Maclean found that there were distinct "schools of storytelling" each headed by one of two well-known local storytellers.[137] While some young men attended the "school" of Roderick More MacNeil for stories, a totally separate group visited John Roy Campbell's home.[138]

These variations in cèilidh-house etiquette extend to variations in gendered codes of conduct. Carmichael in the nineteenth-century, for instance, observed that it was the man, not the woman of the house, who was expected to give the first story.[139] According to Barbara Hillers, the performance role of storyteller did not "easily accommodate" women in traditional Gaelic-speaking communities.[140] Women were not expected to draw attention to themselves and, in the taigh-cèilidh, social etiquette inhibited them from performing in front of their husbands.[141] For Donald Alasdair Johnson, recorded in 1982, telling tales was a man's role and there were some stories which women and children were not permitted to hear.[142] In accounts from the twentieth-century, the fact that "most of the visitors [to the cèilidh house] were men" is rehearsed repeatedly by male contributors to the School. In 'Hebridean Traditions' (1957), Maclean observed that cèilidh visitors were "mostly young men".[143] Barra storytellers Seumas MacKinnon (1866-1957) of Northbay and Neil Gillies and Neil MacNeil of Castlebay, specifically recall visiting storytellers in groups of young men in their youth as did Angus MacMillan (1874-1954) of Benbecula.[144] Maclean does not discuss women storytellers to any great extent in this article yet there are accounts of women visiting elsewhere. In Skye, Peigi Stewart (born in 1919) remembers her mother and father taking her and her siblings to the various taighean-cèilidh in their local community.[145] Interestingly, in Mingulay, Màiri Chaimbeul (Mary Campbell), interviewed in 1960, remembered girls gathering in the cèilidh house to have mock-waulking sessions and to learn songs from the

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description of a cèilidh house in Oban', [audio recording], *Tobar an Dualchais*, <http://tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/3593> (Accessed March 17th 2021).

[137] Maclean, 'Hebridean Traditions', p. 29.

[138] Maclean, 'Hebridean Traditions' p. 29.

[139] Carmichael, p. xix.

[140] Hillers, 'Storytelling and the International Folktale', p. 157.

[141] Hillers, 'Storytelling and the International Folktale', p. 157.

[142] Shaw, 'Storytellers in Scotland', p. 35.

[143] Maclean, 'Hebridean Traditions', p. 29.

[144] Maclean, 'Hebridean Traditions', pp. 27-31.

[145] Margaret Bennett, 'From Kennedy Fraser to the Jimmy Shandrix Experience in Five Generations', in *Crosbhealach an Cheoil – The Crossroads Conference, 1996 Tradition and Change in Irish Traditional Music*, ed. by Fintan Vallely, Colin Hamilton, Eithne Vallely and Liz Doherty, (Dublin: Whinstone Music, 1999), pp. 1-12, (p. 4).

old women of the community.[146] Given that the content of this occasion was waulking songs, it is possible that Chaimbeul is here referring to a female-only gathering, a topic I will return to later in this chapter.

Furthermore, although most *visitors* were male, the taigh-cèilidh household itself might include women. The Rev. Norman MacDonald of Skye, for instance, lived in a taigh-cèilidh in his youth.[147] Most of the visitors, he explains, were male but his grandmother would be present, spinning and carding throughout proceedings.[148] Challan concluded that women in these positions may not have been able to contribute stories but that they were actively engaged in listening to and aiding male storytellers in the taigh-cèilidh.[149] Séamus Ó Duilearga similarly observed Irish women interrupting and correcting male storytellers in 1945.[150] I would like to build on Challan's conclusions and Ó Duilearga's observations in the following discussion by suggesting that women were able not just to aid and listen but to *learn* new tales in the taigh-cèilidh. Many of the women storytellers whom I have identified for the purposes of this project belonged to tradition bearing families or lived in homes which welcomed visitors to share stories and songs. Màiri Chaimbeul, for instance, explains that people would come to visit her grandfather for stories while Peigi Stewart's childhood home was regarded by locals in Glenconan, Skye, as a taigh-cèilidh.[151] Ealasaid NicFhionghain's (Elizabeth MacKinnon, born 1857) childhood home on Sandray became a popular taigh-cèilidh for visiting fishermen from Pabbay, Mingulay and Castlebay.[152] Women in the position of Màiri Chaimbeul, Peigi Stewart and Ealasaid NicFhionghain had a front row seat, so to speak, of the taigh-cèilidh as children without having to leave their own homes, arguably enabling them to learn tales by repetition. As Carol Zall demonstrated with reference to Gaelic-speaking traveller communities, repetition is one of the key strategies for learning tales in youth.[153] Collector Lisa Storey observed this in the case of Màiri Chaimbeul, noting that although Chaimbeul preferred to hear songs, "dh'ionnsaich i [Chaimbeul]

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[146] Mary Campbell, 'Cur-seachadan san taigh-chèilidh', [audio recording], *Tobar an Dualchais*, Available online at <http://tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/52986> (Accessed March 17th 2021).
[147] Norman MacDonald, 'A taigh-cèilidh agus a' Ghàidhlig', [audio recording], *Tobar an Dualchais*, <http://tobarandualchais.o.uk/en/fullrecord/2649> (Accessed March 16th 2021).
[148] Norman MacDonald, 'An taigh-cèilidh'.
[149] Challan, *Air Bilean an t-Sluaigh,* p. 181.
[150] Ó Duilearga, 'The Gaelic Storyteller', p. 181.
[151] Mary Campbell, 'Ag innse sgeulachdan', [audio recording] *Tobar an Dualchais – Kist o' Riches*, Available at <http://tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/52987> (Accessed March 16th 2021). Bennett, 'From Kennedy Fraser', p. 4.
[152] Annag NicIain, 'Na Beanntan Gorma', *Béaloideas*, 4:1 (1933), 46-50, (p. 50).
[153] Carol Zall, 'Learning and Remembering Gaelic Stories: Brian Stewart', *Scottish Studies*, 36 (2011-13), 125-139, p. 125.

sgeulachdan is laoidhean is eile leis cho tric 's chuala i iad bho a seanair" ("she [Campbell] learned stories and lays and other things by hearing them so often from her grandfather").[154] Ealasaid NicFhionghain, who grew up in a taigh-cèilidh on Sandray, attributes the source of her long folktale "Na Beanntan Gorma" to one of the visiting Mingulay fishermen "dead long ago".[155] NicFhionghain and Chaimbeul were thus able to learn tales not by visiting but by listening to the taigh-cèilidh in their childhood homes. Challan concludes that women could listen to and aid male storytellers in the taigh-cèilidh.[156] However, these examples indicate that this space also functioned as a source of tales for women.

From the end of the nineteenth-century to the second half of the twentieth, traditions of the taigh-cèilidh declined considerably across Gaelic Scotland.[157] Storytellers across the Hebrides regularly cite the "advent of television" as the factor which had the greatest impact on the practice of tradition.[158] As storyteller Nan NicFhionghain summarised:

> "You know the ceilidhs, the day of the ceilidhs and the singing of songs and the telling of stories is gone. Oh yes, I think it [television] ruined the days of the ceilidhs […] I would have everything for the house before I would have a TV!"[159]

NicFhionghain explicitly blames television for the decline of tradition in the Outer Hebrides and swears never to own one.[160] However, not all islanders shared NicFhionghain's view. Jane Webster found that the post-war period saw many islanders make "a conscious effort to shed traditional lifeways and buy into mainland mass culture" as traditionally Gaelic communities attempted to distance themselves from a history of poverty.[161] The television, itself a symptom of wider economic and social change reaching back into the eighteenth-century, is but one in a myriad of factors leading to the decline in the performance of tradition in Gaelic-speaking communities. It is outwith the remit of this dissertation to discuss all such factors. Rather, it is enough to know that cèilidh traditions declined considerably over the

[154] Lisa Storey, in an email to Isla Parker, 20th July 2021. My translation.
[155] NicIain, 'Na Beanntan Gorma', p. 50.
[156] Challan, *Air Bilean an t-Sluaigh*, p. 181.
[157] Bennett, 'Céilidh'.
[158] Bennett, 'Céilidh'. Shaw, 'Storytellers in Scotland', p. 36.
[159] Nan MacKinnon quoted in Barbara McDermitt, 'Nan MacKinnon', *Tocher*, 6, (1982), 3-47, (p. 8).
[160] MacKinnon quoted in McDermitt, 'Nan MacKinnon', p. 8.
[161] Jane Webster, 'Resisting Traditions: Ceramics, Identity and Consumer Choice in the Outer Hebrides from 1800 to the Present', *International Journal of Historical Archaeology*, 3:1 (1999), 53-73, (p. 64 and 71).

research period towards a state of "virtual extinction" in many parts of the Highlands and Islands today.[162]

Therefore, the traditional taigh-cèilidh, a site in which men were often more able to perform than women, could nevertheless be a source of stories for women storytellers. Many of the accounts here discussed describe a tradition of male cèilidhing or visiting. However, Harvey has shown that in Ireland there was also a tradition of women visiting one another independently of the men to talk and share stories and songs.[163] Women informants from the counties of Donegal, Mayo and Kerry, along the west coast of Ireland, recall visiting the homes of women storytellers independently of the men to share fairy stories and legends.[164] Given the cultural affinities between the west coast of Ireland and the Outer Hebrides, it is possible that women in Gaelic Scotland similarly met to share stories independently of men. In her autobiography, Margaret Fay Shaw speaks to this possibility. She wrote of Peigi NicRath's (Peggy MacRae) South Uist home: "When the women came to spin and talk to me, we sat 'up' in my room; when the men came, we sat 'down' in the kitchen".[165] This quote provides an interesting insight into the lives of women in South Uist in the first half of the twentieth-century. It demonstrates first of all the segregated nature of socialising. The women occupy the "private" space of the bedroom, closed off by a door from the main room of the building, but when the men arrive, the group enters the more "public" area of the kitchen, closer to the front door of the house.[166] Secondly, Shaw's quote introduces the possibility that women in Gaelic Scotland came together to work. The women arrive "to spin". Spinning is the stage in the clothes-making process during which the wool, having been sheared and "teased", is drawn out into spools ready for knitting.[167] There are certainly records of women in Cape Breton coming together at spinning and sewing "bees" or "frolics" to lighten the load of this otherwise tedious occupation.[168] Finally, and crucially, Shaw's observation indicates that this work environment offered an opportunity for women to socialise. The women come "to spin and talk to me". Throughout the nineteenth-century in Germany and France, as well as in Gaelic-speaking communities of Cape Breton into the twentieth-century, spinning was

[162] Bennett, 'Céilidh'.
[163] Harvey, p. 114.
[164] Harvey, p. 114, 115 and 118.
[165] Margaret Fay Shaw, *From the Alleghenies to the Hebrides: An Autobiography*, (Edinburgh: Canongate Press), p. 62.
[166] Farrer, 'Introduction', at ix.
[167] Margaret Bennett, *Oatmeal and Catechism: Scottish Gaelic Settlers in Quebec*, (Edinburgh: John Donald Publishers, 1998), pp. 204-206.
[168] Bennett, *Oatmeal*, p. 208. Shaw, 'Gaelic Singing and Broad Cove Parish', p. 15.

an important social event for women, a place where they could come together to work but also to talk and share stories.[169] An in-depth investigation remains to be done on "visiting" and socialising by Scottish women independently of men. However, preliminary research indicates that it is not unlikely that female-only gatherings took place in Gaelic Scotland. Events such as the "cùileagan" whereby women met to socialise while the men were away was described in *An Teachdaire Gae'lach* in 1829 as a common occurrence, much to the annoyance of the author:

> "[tha] e cummanda san dùthaichs' nuair gheibh na mnathan na fir mìle no dhà o'n tigh, cruinneachadh an ceann a chéile gu cuirm sònraichte ris an abair iad cuileagan."[170]

("it is common in these parts when the women get the men a mile or two from the house, they would gather together to feast in what they called a cùileagan.")

Similarly, a midwife from the Outer Hebrides who worked in the first half of the twentieth-century described the "bangaid" as a female-only social event.[171] "Bangaid" can be translated as "banquet" but also referred more specifically to a small gathering of normally older married women to the home of a new mother for tea, wine, and gift-giving.[172] Although further research is yet to be done into social spaces for women in traditional Gaelic-speaking communities, these preliminary findings indicate that such research would be profitable.

Another area of life in which women have been shown to "perform" tradition is in the home.[173] Women in Gaelic speaking communities were the primary caregivers to children and tradition could aid them in this work.[174] Lullabies, for instance, were used to help children to sleep and, as Hillers points out, were sung "virtually exclusively" by women in Gaelic Scotland.[175] In terms of stories, Hillers proposes that women storytellers "habitually

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[169] Karen E. Rowe, 'To Spin a Yarn: The Female Voice in Folklore and Fairy Tale', in *Fairy Tales and Society: Illusion, Allusion and Paradigm*, ed. by Ruth Bottigheimer, (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 1989), 53-74, (pp. 63-64).
[170] 'Litir o'n t-Seana-Ghiullan', *An Teachdaire Gae'lach*, 6, (1829), 129-131, (p. 129).
[171] Lindsay Reid (ed.), *Scottish Midwives: Twentieth-century Voices*, (Edinburgh: Hewar Text Ltd., 2000), p. 58.
[172] Reid, *Midwives*, p. 58. See 'bangaid' in Edward Dwelly, *A Gaelic Dictionary : Specifically designed for beginners and for use in schools*, (Edinburgh: Birlinn Press, 2001), p. 65.
[173] Challan, *Air Bilean an t-Sluaigh*, p. 180.
[174] Hillers, 'Storytelling and the International Folktale', p. 162.
[175] Hillers, 'Dialogue or Monologue?', p. 38.

'performed' to a houseful of children".[176] As a result, Hillers argues, women specialise in "child-oriented" genres, such as riddles, rhymes, songs, and stories involving songs, rhymes, movement and repetition.[177] Equally, however, children could, and still do, enjoy longer international folktales and legends such as "Cinderella" and "Snow White". Hillers in her chapter on storytelling in Scotland includes Alan Bruford's anecdote about Betsy Whyte telling his daughter a version of "Cinderella" in which she changed the name of the heroine to that of his daughter.[178]

A number of contributors to the School of Scottish Studies also recall women telling stories to children. Catherine MacNeil of Mingulay (1892-1966, interviewed 1960), Donald Alasdair Johnson of South Uist (1889-1978, interviewed 1971), and Màiri Chaimbeul of Vatersay (interviewed 1960) all relate that women told stories to children.[179] Chaimbeul further told Lisa Storey in 1960 that the old women were "cho math", ("so good") at "a' dèanamh suas" ("making up") stories about the fairies.[180] These accounts do not detail the specifics of the context of storytelling to children. According to Hillers, women and girls working in the cities could use such tales for upper- and middle-class children in the family nursery.[181] In the rural household, Challan identified the work environment as important in the transmission of tradition from one generation to the next.[182] When the women were spinning and carding in the evenings for instance, some would be "ag innse sgeulachdan a bharrachd air a bhith a' seinn òran dhan cuid chloinne" ("telling stories in addition to singing songs to their children").[183] Milking and dairy work, occupations carried out almost exclusively by women, as well as when the women and children were "a' stampadh nam plangaidean" ("stamping the blankets"), were further opportunities where young children could be "a' togail nan òran agus fiosrachadh co-cheangailte ris an obair" ("picking up songs and information connected to the work").[184] Thus, the transmission of tradition was integrated into the everyday lives of rural Hebridean women. Anecdotal evidence from the School's archives supports Challan's

[176] Hillers, 'Storytelling and the International Folktale', p. 162.
[177] Hillers, 'Storytelling and the International Folktale', p. 162.
[178] Hillers, 'Storytelling and the International Folktale', p. 165.
[179] Catherine MacNeil, 'Cur-seachadan a bha aig daoine ann am Miughalaigh', [audio recording], *Tobar an Dualchais*, Available at <http://tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/50009> (Accessed March 16th 2021). Donald Johnson, 'Beagan mu shinnsearachd an fhiosraiche agus seanchaidhean', [audio recording], *Tobar an Dualchais*, Available at <http://tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/30899> (Accessed March 16th 2021). Mary Campbell, 'Ag innse sgeulachdan'.
[180] Mary Campbell, 'Ag innse sgeulachdan'.
[181] Hillers, 'Storytelling and the International Folktale', at 162.
[182] Challan, *Air Bilean an t-Sluaigh*, p. 35.
[183] Challan, *Air Bilean an t-Sluaigh*, p. 40.
[184] Challan, *Air Bilean an t-Sluaigh*, p. 43 and 45.

conclusions on the work environment. In Gaelic and Scots speaking traveller communities for instance, Betsy Whyte remembers her mother telling her a story as a "reward" for going through her hair for lice.[185] Similarly, Duncan Williamson told collector Linda Williamson in 1976 that the children would have to do chores such as gathering sticks and water before his father would tell them a story.[186] In the Hebridean tradition, Nan NicFhionghain's mother was baking when she apparently spontaneously told NicFhionghain a fairy story about why people put a hole in the middle of the bannock.[187] At the end of one of her tales, Peigidh NicDhòmhnaill (Peggy MacDonald) remembers "bhiodh feadhainn a' tighinn a dh'iarraidh na naidheachdan oirnn" ("they [folk] would come and get stories from us") and "[c]ha robh iad ri falbh gus am faiceadh iad sruth le cas na poiteadh" ("they wouldn't leave until they'd see a stream of boiling water over the pot's legs").[188] As Lisa Storey points out, this conversation tells of how stories might be timed by the boiling of potatoes.[189] Perhaps this was a way of preventing the story from going on for too long or leaving it to continue another night.[190] Either way, this and all of these examples are illustrative of the ways in which stories might be integrated into everyday life to occupy children and adults and pass on tradition related to the work. Storytelling in these contexts may have been deemed more suitable for women storytellers as a site of performance than the taigh-cèilidh which meant performing to a largely male audience.[191]

This chapter has considered the sites in Gaelic-speaking communities in the nineteenth- and twentieth-centuries in which women were able to perform as storytellers. In so doing, I have called into question the common view that storytelling was a predominantly male occupation in Gaelic-speaking communities. The taigh-cèilidh was a highly important site for Gaelic storytelling in this period and while women may have been discouraged from telling tales here, they were actively engaged in proceedings, listening to and aiding male storytellers, as

[185] Betsy Whyte, 'Betsy Whyte's memories of her mother in connection with storytelling', [audio recording], *Tobar an Dualchais*, Available at <http://tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/78071> (Accessed March 16th 2021).
[186] Duncan Williamson, 'Duncan Williamson recalls his father telling stories', [audio recording], *Tobar an Dualchais*, Available at <http://tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/29627> (Accessed March 16th 2021).
[187] Nan MacKinnon quoted in McDermitt, 'Nan', p. 21.
[188] Peggy MacDonald, 'Mac na Banntraich', transcribed by Elizabeth Sinclair, [blog post] *Calum I. Maclean*, Available at <http://www.facebook.com/calumiainmaclean/posts/4508694169170690> (Accessed March 16th 2021).
[189] 'Mac na Banntraich'.
[190] 'Mac na Banntraich'.
[191] Hillers, 'Storytelling and the International Folktale', p. 162.

Challan concluded.[192] This chapter has demonstrated, further to Challan's conclusions, that women who were repeatedly exposed to the taigh-cèilidh were arguably able to use this site to *learn* new stories. While more research remains to be done on women's social sites in Gaelic-speaking communities, a preliminary investigation in this chapter indicates that female-only nightly visiting accompanied by spinning might be an example of the kind of opportunity women had to socialise and possibly to tell stories. This chapter has also explored the context for women's storytelling to children in the home, demonstrating that stories could be integrated into everyday life as a way of occupying young children and passing tradition on to the next generation. This chapter is not exhaustive of the many ways women participated in the storytelling life of their communities. However, this discussion indicates that further research into this area would be profitable in understanding women's experiences and lives in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Gaelic-speaking communities. Drawing upon these contextual findings, the following chapter will consider individual women storytellers born between c.1850 and c.1900 in an attempt to draw attention to the lives and repertoires of specific individuals.

[192] Challan, *Air Bilean an t-Sluaigh*, p. 181.

CHAPTER 3

Storyteller Biographies

The purpose of this chapter is to draw attention to the lives and repertoires of eight female storytellers born between c.1850 and c.1900 who acted as folklore informants between c.1930 and c.1980. In so doing, this chapter intends to emphasise that women storytellers were not necessarily an "exception" to storytelling rule and that women could tell stories from a variety of genres. As noted in chapter one of this dissertation, Maclean concluded that, although men "as a rule" were the storytellers, "there were quite a number of women storytellers too. Several of these are still remembered […] In two houses in Benbecula fifty years ago old women told stories to regular visitors".[193] Here, Maclean indicates that women storytellers were a fixture of the past in 1957. However, as the following biographies will demonstrate, women storytellers lived and were recorded telling tales as late as the 1980s. The literature review of this dissertation found that Nan NicFhionghain is perhaps the only Gaelic female storyteller to have received a notable degree of scholarly attention. I further propose that NicFhionghain is rarely considered in conjunction with other women storytellers but that research of this kind could provide a deeper understanding of NicFhionghain's own tales as well as women's role in Gaelic storytelling practice as whole. This chapter aims to draw attention to women storytellers in Gaelic Scotland, contemporary with NicFhionghain, who have to date been overlooked in the scholarship. This approach is not to detract from NicFhionghain's status as a great storyteller and she will be included in the following biographies. Rather, this chapter aims to simply show that NicFhionghain is not the only woman storyteller worthy of scholarly attention and appraisal. It is outwith the remit of this chapter to discuss all of the women who have been recorded telling stories by the School. Therefore, I have attempted to identify women with large storytelling repertoires or who are tellers of genres not normally associated with their gender, for example wonder or Finn Cycle tales.[194] Still, this list is not exhaustive and there are a number of other women in the School's archives who could be included in future research. Furthermore, my research is limited to those women who were recorded by collectors and it is important to acknowledge that many male and female storytellers may have gone unrecognised by the School entirely. I will present each storyteller's biography using the structure which Hillers employed for the

[193] Maclean, 'Hebridean Traditions', (p. 32).
[194] Harvey, pp. 111-112.

storyteller biographies in her chapter in *Oral Literature and Performance Culture*.[195] Compiling original audio recordings, some of which appear here for the first time in written transcription and translation, interviews with a former folklore collector, and secondary source material, each biography will include a short life biography, information on the storyteller's own informants, a history of collection from the storytellers, and a description of the storyteller's repertoire. The repertoire description will be based on the storyteller's track listings on the School's online archive *Tobar an Dualchais* though I will also draw upon transcriptions in publications such as *Béaloideas*, *Tocher* and *Scottish Traditional Tales*.[196] This is the first time a list of Gaelic women storytellers has been brought together in this way. The women to be considered are listed below by patronymic, Gaelic name, and English name. For purposes of consistency, the storytellers will be referred to by their Gaelic surname in the following discussion.

- Ceit Ghilleasbaig Tàilleir / Ceit Dix / Katherine Dix (1890-1980)
- Nan Eachainn Fhionnlaigh / Nan NicFhionghain / Nan MacKinnon (1902-1982)
- Anna Aonghais Chaluim / Anna(g) NicIain / Annie Johnston (1886-1963)
- Ealasaid Eachainn 'Illeasbaig / Ealasaid NicFhionghain / Elizabeth MacKinnon (1857-?)
- Peigidh Aonghais 'ic Eachainn / Peigidh NicDhòmhnaill / Peggy MacDonald (1879-?)
- Mòr nighean Aonghais 'ic Eachainn / Mòr Chaimbeul / Marion Campbell (1868-1971)
- Peigi nighean Anndra na h-Àirigh Molaich / Peigi NicRath / Peggy MacRae (1874-1969)
- Màiri Aonghais Nèill Bhig / Màiri Chaimbeul / Mary Campbell (1874-1969)

Ceit Ghilleasbaig Tàilleir / Ceit Dix / Katherine Dix (1890-1980)

Dix (see Figure 1 below), also known as Ceit an Tàilleir, was one of seven children born to Anna NicPhilip (1859-1946) and Gilleasbaig MacLeòid (1849-1931), the tailor, on Berneray (Beàrnaraigh na Hearadh).[197] Dix left school at fourteen to work as a dairymaid in Appin and

[195] Hillers, 'Storytelling and the International Folktale', pp. 163-165.
[196] Alan Bruford and Duncan A. MacDonald (eds.), *Scottish Traditional Tales*, (Edinburgh: Birlinn Press, 1994).
[197] Alison Dix, 'Ro-ràdh', in *Ceit an Tàilleir à Beàrnaraigh: Eachdraidh Beatha agus Taghadh de Stòiridhean is Rannan*, ed. by Alison Dix, (Inverness: Clàr, 2019), pp. 9-18, (p. 9). All biographical data for this storyteller from A. Dix, 'Ro-ràdh', (pp. 9-18) unless otherwise stated. Dix's childhood home appears as House No. 63 in Bill

subsequently moved to Oban. During the First World War, Dix worked in a Gretna munitions factory before returning to Oban where she met sea-engineer Jack Dix. The couple married in 1918. After the war, Dix moved with Jack to Sunderland and they had three children. The family returned to Berneray at the start of the Second World War. Following Jack's death in 1953, Dix remained on Berneray. Dix loved and was immersed in island life despite her time spent away. Dix was recorded in the year before her death saying, "Is toigh leam na daoine ann am Beàrnaraigh; is toigh leam an t-adhar; is toigh leam am muir […] bu thoigh leam a h-uile rud a bha timcheall air Beàrnaraigh", ("I like the people on Berneray; I like the air; I like the sea […] I liked everything about Berneray").[198]

Dix inherited tradition and skills as a poet from her father. In the style of a traditional community song-poet, Dix could compose poetry on the spot in response to the world around her.[199] On Berneray, Dix regularly welcomed visitors and relatives into her home for games and stories. In 1975, she spoke fondly of a local cèilidh house called Taigh Dhòmhnaill Mairead ("Donald [son of] Margaret's House"), noteworthy since the cèilidh was a traditionally male-dominated space as discussed in the previous chapter.[200] Dix's material has been published in several editions of the School's journal *Tocher* and in *Scottish Traditional*

Figure 1: Still of Ceit Dix from *The Shepherds of Berneray*, [documentary film] dir. by Jack Shea (Film Study Center Harvard University, 1981), [online] Available at <https://player.bfi.org.uk/free/film/watch-the-shepherds-of-berneray-1981-online> (Accessed May 24th 2021).

Lawson, *Croft Histories: Isle of Berneray, Volume 1*, (Isle of Harris: Bill Lawson Publications, 2000), p. 115. Dix's adult home is House No. 73 in Lawson, *Isle of Berneray, Volume 1*, p. 120.

[198] Quote from, *The Shepherds of Berneray*, [documentary film] dir. by Jack Shea (Film Study Center Harvard University, 1981), online film recording, Available at <https://player.bfi.org.uk/free/film/watch-the-shepherds-of-berneray-1981-online> (Accessed May 24th 2021).

[199] For Gaelic community song poets see, Thomas McKean, 'Tradition and Modernity: Gaelic Bards in the Twentieth Century', in *The Edinburgh History of Scottish Literature: Modern Transformations, New Identities (from 1918)*, ed. by Ian Brown, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), pp. 130-141.

[200] Katherine Dix, 'Tha Ceit an Tàilleir ag innse mu thaigh Dhòmhnaill Mairead', [audio recording], *Tobar an Dualchais*, Available online at <http://tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/1628> (Accessed April 14th 2021).

Tales.[201] More recently, Dix's grand-daughter, Alison Dix, published a selection of Dix's tradition in the devoted collection, *Ceit an Tàilleir à Beàrnaraigh*.[202] There are 564 entries under Dix's name on *Tobar an Dualchais*, material collected apparently exclusively by collector Ian Paterson who visited Dix every year between 1967 and 1978.[203] Dix's storytelling repertoire comprises predominantly of Gaelic versions of international tales.[204] She also told a variety of wonder tales, including a Gaelic version of "Cinderella" (ATU 471), which indicate a "mastery" of the genre.[205] Local, historical and humorous anecdotes and supernatural fairy legends all feature predominantly in her repertoire.[206]

Figure 2: Barbara McDermitt, 'Nan MacKinnon', *Tocher*, 6 (1982) p.2.

Nan Eachainn Fhionnlaigh / Nan NicFhionghain / Nan MacKinnnon (1902-1982)

NicFhionghain (see Figure 2) was born the youngest of seven on Barra (Barraigh) in 1902 to Hector MacKinnon and her Mingulay mother, through whom NicFhionghain was related to the MacNeils of Barra.[207] She lived for four years in Kentagaval, Barra, until the family moved to Vatersay (Bhatarsaigh) where NicFhionghain's father built a thatched cottage. NicFhionghain was working in Glasgow during the war but returned to Vatersay following the sudden death of her sister. She stayed on the island from then on, helping her brother-in-law to raise her niece and nephew. NicFhionghain learned her stories and songs from a man and a woman, her mother and father. But it was her mother's waulking songs that were NicFhionghain's favourite. NicFhionghain

[201] For example: Alan Bruford and Duncan A. MacDonald, (eds.), *Tocher* 35, (Edinburgh: School of Scottish Studies, 1981). See also *Tocher* 1 (1971), 4 (1971), 8 (1972), and 20 (1975). Bruford and MacDonald, *Scottish Traditional Tales*, p. 40, 366 and 392.

[202] Alison Dix (ed.), *Ceit an Tàilleir à Beàrnaraigh: Eachdraidh Beatha agus Taghadh de Stòiridhean is Rannan*, (Inverness: Clàr, 2019)

[203] 'Biography – Kate Dix', *Tobar an Dualchais*, [online], Available at <http://tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/searchperson?id=363> (Accessed April 14th 2021).

[204] Hillers, 'Storytelling and International Folktale', p. 164.

[205] Hillers, 'Storytelling and International Folktale', p. 164.

[206] Hillers, 'Storytelling and International Folktale', p. 164.

[207] McDermitt, 'Nan MacKinnon', p. 4. All biographical information for this storyteller sourced from Barbara McDermitt, 'Nan MacKinnon', *Tocher*, 6, (1982), 3-47, (pp. 4-8), unless otherwise stated.

remembered that, as a young girl, she would practice her mother's waulking songs "relentlessly" until she knew them perfectly. It was from her mother, too, that NicFhionghain inherited many of her stories, tales and anecdotes. Hillers described NicFhionghain as "one of the greatest singers and storytellers of the twentieth-century".[208] She was a "favourite informant" and "close friend" of the School of Scottish Studies since its inception in the 1950s. From then on, she was recorded by collectors from the School and elsewhere including Anne Ross, Lisa Storey, Mary MacDonald, and Ian Fraser. Her tales and songs have appeared in numerous editions of *Tocher*, though a planned dedicated compilation of her work never materialised.[209] Some of her tales also appear in *Scottish Traditional Tales*.[210] Collector Barbara McDermitt described NicFhionghain in her eightieth year as an "intelligent woman, quick-witted and bright, brimming with enthusiasm and curiosity; a woman firm in her opinions and feelings yet flexible and sensitive to the realities of change; […] a woman at peace with her God, herself and her fellow man".[211]

NicFhionghain had an extensive repertoire. Around 800 songs and more than 100 stories have been recorded from her.[212] NicFhionghain had no wonder tales but excelled at international folktales, religious tales and legends, robber tales, historical traditions, supernatural legends and anecdotes.[213]

Anna Aonghais Chaluim / Anna NicIain / Annie Johnston (1886-1963)[214]

NicIain (see Figure 3 below) was one of eight siblings, "Clann Aonghais Chaluim", born to Catrìona Aonghais 'ic Dhomhnaill Mhòir (Catherine MacNeil) and fisherman Angus Johnston.[215] The family lived in Glen, near Castlebay, Barra. NicIain stayed on Barra throughout her adult life and became a schoolteacher at the Castlebay primary school. She also taught adults on the island at the Gaelic Summer School.[216]

[208] Hillers, 'Storytelling and the International Folktale', p. 163.
[209] McDermitt, 'Nan Mackinnon', p. 3.
[210] For example: Bruford and MacDonald, *Scottish Traditional Tales*, p. 324, 379 and 390.
[211] McDermitt, 'Nan MacKinnon', p. 4.
[212] Hillers, 'Storytelling and the International Folktale', p. 163.
[213] Hillers, 'Storytelling and the International Folktale', p. 163.
[214] Anna NicIain appears as Anna Nic Iain in publications for the Irish folklore journal *Béaloideas*.
[215] John Lorne Campbell, 'Anna and Calum Johnston', *Tocher*, 13 (1974), 162-165, (p. 163).
[216] Sir Compton MacKenzie quoted in Andrew Wiseman, 'Annie Johnston: A Barra Tradition Bearer', *Calum I. Maclean blog*, [online], (2013) Available at < https://calumimaclean.blogspot.com/2013/07/annie-johnston-barra-tradition-bearer.html> (Accessed April 17th 2021).

Figure 3: George Scott-Moncrieff, 'Annie Johnson in her classroom in Castlebay in May, 1947' [online], Available at <http://calumimaclean.blogspot.com/2013/07/annie-johnston-barra-tradition-bearer.html> (Accessed May 24th 2021).

NicIain was remembered fondly by folklore collectors and scholars operating in Scotland in the twentieth-century for her knowledge of and enthusiasm for tradition. NicIain, and her brother Calum, also a noted Gaelic tradition bearer, cited their mother Catrìona for their knowledge of tradition, as well as their neighbours in Glen, the sisters Peigi and Ealasaid NicFhionghain (Peggy and Elizabeth MacKinnon, see below for the Ealasaid's biography).[217] Anna and Calum NicIain were recorded by numerous notable folklore collectors including John L. Campbell, Calum Maclean and Marjory Kennedy-Fraser.[218] It is in the latter's *Songs of the Hebrides* that the siblings' songs first appeared in print.[219] The pair contributed to *Hebridean Folksongs*.[220] NicIain herself published a number of her own and neighbours' tales in *Béaloideas* and *Gairm* for NicIain was not only a contributor to folklore collections but also a collector and great aid to folklorists seeking tradition.[221] Campbell, in an edition of *Tocher* dedicated to the siblings, praised NicIain for "the introduction to collectors of some of the best women folk-singers of Barra who would otherwise have been too shy or too inaccessible ever to have been recorded at all".[222] In an account of her first meeting with Kennedy-Fraser, NicIain recalled bringing the older women in for a cèilidh and encouraging them to sing for the collector.[223] Her local, traditional, and linguistic knowledge also proved invaluable for folklore scholars in the twentieth-century. Campbell

[217] Campbell, 'Anna and Calum', p. 163.
[218] Campbell, 'Anna and Calum', p. 163.
[219] Marjory Kennedy-Fraser, *Songs of the Hebrides and other Celtic Songs from the Highlands and Islands of Scotland*, vol. 1-3, (London: Boosey & Co., 1909-1921).
[220] For example: John L. Campbell and Francis Collison (eds.), *Hebridean Folksongs: Waulking Songs from Barra, South Uist, Eriskay and Benbecula*, vol. 2, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), p. 66 and 178.
[221] For example: Anna NicIain, 'Tóimhseachain o Innse Gall', *Béaloideas*, 4:2 (1933), 173-177. Anna NicIain, 'Sgeulachd A' Ghamhna Dhuinn', *Béaloideas*, 6:2 (1936), 293-297.
[222] Campbell, 'Anna and Calum', p. 163.
[223] Anna NicIain, 'Beachd na te Bharraich', *Gairm*, 21, (1957), 74-77, (p. 75).

acknowledged her help with *Deoch-Slàinte nan Gillean* (1948) and *Stories from South Uist* (1961) among other publications.[224] Although NicIain was primarily known for her songs, her repertoire of lore and tradition was also extensive.[225] Sir Compton MacKenzie described NicIain as a "perennial spring of Gaelic folk-lore; her tales are inexhaustible".[226] NicIain knew a series of children's games, rhymes and songs. Her collection of tales also included fairy stories, international legends and wonder tales, including "Sgeulachd nan Cat" and "Am Prionnsa fo Gheasaibh".

Ealasaid Eachainn 'Illeasbaig / Ealasaid NicFhionghain / Elizabeth MacKinnon (1857-?)
Ealasaid NicFhionghain was born on Vatersay in 1857.[227] She spent most of her young life living in the only inhabited house on Sandray (Sanndraigh) where her father was a shepherd. The family's existence was not altogether lonely though. In Spring, Summer, and Autumn, their house became a popular taigh-cèilidh for visiting fishermen from Mingulay, Pabbay and Castlebay. The men would come in, take their supper, and tell tales. NicFhionghain lived latterly in Glen, Barra, with her sister Peigi, neighbours to Anna and Calum NicIain's childhood home.[228] Anna NicIain records that Peigi, NicFhionghain's sister, had "the finest store of folk-songs" that anyone living had heard. Ealasaid NicFhionghain inherited her tales and tradition from her father, "a well-known reciter of tales", and her mother, Màiri ni' Dhòmhnaill Mhòir, who "had a ready wit". NicFhionghain was also able to pick up stories and tradition, such as "Na Beanntan Gorma" which she heard from a visiting fisherman, in the taigh-cèilidh of her youth. Some of NicFhionghain's tales were transcribed and published by Anna NicIain in *Béaloideas* in 1933 and 1936.[229] NicFhionghain undoubtedly had a large repertoire. She is cited by the NicIain siblings as a major source for their tales. Campbell wrote, "Between them, Ealasaid and Peigi had a wonderful store of Gaelic stories and song".[230] In 1937, Peigi NicFhionghain was still alive and Campbell recorded some folkloric

[224] Colm O Lochlainn, *Deoch-Slàinte nan Gillean: Dòrnan Òran a Barraidh*, (Belfast: Fo Chomhardha nan Trí Coinnlean, 1948). Angus MacLellan, *Stories from South Uist*, ed. and trans. by John L. Campbell, (London: Routledge and Paul Ltd., 1961).
[225] Wiseman, 'Annie Johnston'.
[226] Sir Compton MacKenzie quoted in Wiseman, 'Annie Johnston'.
[227] NicIain, 'Na Beanntan Gorma', p. 50. All biographical information for this storyteller from Anna NicIain (ed.), 'Na Beanntan Gorma', *Beáloideas*, 4:1 (1933), 46-50, unless otherwise stated.
[228] Campbell, 'Anna and Calum', p. 163. See above for Anna NicIain's biography.
[229] NicIain (ed.), 'Na Beanntan Gorma'. NicIain, 'Sgeulachd a' Ghamhna Dhuinn', *Béaloideas*, 6:2, (1936), 293-297.
[230] Campbell, 'Anna and Calum', p. 163.

material from her.[231] Only a limited sample of Ealasaid NicFhionghain's repertoire survives today.[232] However, she has been included in this research because the two stories which do survive are lengthy wonder tales of the type not normally associated with women in Gaelic Scotland. The first is "Na Beanntan Gorma" (AT706 *The Maiden Without Hands*) and the second, "Sgeulachd a' Ghamhna Dhuinn*"* (AT510 *Cinderella*).[233] The length and intricacy of these tales is further evidence that NicFhionghain was indeed a practiced storyteller.

Peigidh nighean Aonghais 'ic Eachainn / Peigidh NicDhòmhnaill / Peggy MacDonald (1879-?)

NicDhòmhnaill, was born on South Uist (Uibhist a Deas) in 1879. To date, much of the scholarship has either omitted or missed the facts of NicDhòmhnaill's familial relations. But NicDhòmhnaill is the younger sister of celebrated tradition bearers Aonghas Mac 'IllFhialain (Angus MacLellan) and Mòr Chaimbeul (Marion Campbell).[234] This is an important point to acknowledge given that a great deal of material survives from each sibling.[235] Comparison between their individual repertoires could yield important information about the processes of transmission within a family group and gendered differences in performance and traditional practice.[236] My research will take initial steps on this latter point in the following chapter. NicDhòmhnaill left South Uist at the age of eighteen and spent twenty years on Tiree

[231] Campbell, 'Anna and Calum', p. 163.

[232] It is possible that further material from Ealasaid NicFhionghain is in the Margaret Fay Shaw and John Lorne Campbell archives on Canna.

[233] Niclain (ed.), 'Na Beanntan Gorma', at 46-49. Niclain (ed.), 'Sgeulachd a' Ghamhna Dhuinn', pp. 293-297. The latter of these was published in English translation as 'The Tale of the Brown Calf' in Bruford and MacDonald (eds.), *Scottish Traditional Tales*, pp. 21-24.

[234] Calum I. Maclean, 'A Folk-Variant of Táin Bó Cúailgne from Uist', *ARV: Journal of Scandinavian Studies*, 15, (1959), 160-181, (p. 170). Mòr Chaimbeul biography presented below. For Aonghas Mac 'IlleFhialain see: Angus MacLellan, *Stories from South Uist,* trans. by John Lorne Campbell, (Edinburgh: Birlinn Press, 1997): Angus MacLellan *The Furrow Behind Me: An Autobiography of a Hebridean Crofter*, trans. by J.L. Campbell, (Edinburgh: Birlinn Press, 1997), and: Alan Bruford, 'Recitation or Re-creation? Examples from South Uist Storytelling', *Scottish Studies*, 22 (1978), 27-44, (pp. 37-40).

[235] For Aonghas Mac 'IlleFhialain see: MacLellan, *Stories from South Uist*.

[236] Carol Zall compared tales from relatives Ailidh Dall, Brian Stewart and Alexander Stewart to investigate the processes of storytelling transmission in, Carol Zall, 'Mouth to Mouth: Gaelic Stories as Told Within One Family', *Proceedings of the Harvard Celtic Colloquium*, 26/27, (2006/2007), 197-217. Peigidh NicDhòmhnaill, Mòr Chaimbeul and Aonghas Mac 'IlleFhialain are more closely related to one another than Zall's three Stewarts. Thus, a comparison of the former group's tales could offer a new perspective on processes of storytelling and transmission. Joan Radner compared versions of "The Woman Who Went to Hell" by traditional storyteller Peig Sayers and her son Mícheál Ó Gaoithín in, Joan Radner, '"The Woman Who Went to Hell": Coded Values in Irish Folk Narrative', *Midwestern Folklore*, 15, (1989), 109-117. Radner concluded that a single plot can carry close to opposite messages about the nature and responsibility of women, p. 112.

(Tiriodh).[237] Following in the footsteps of many of her female contemporaries, NicDhòmhnaill moved to the mainland for work. She lived in various villages in Argyll including Fasnacloich, Taynuilt, and finally Connel, near Oban, where she was living with her daughter when Calum Maclean visited her in 1959.[238] NicDhòmhnaill was still alive when the School recorded her sister Mòr in 1967.[239] NicDhòmhnaill's father, Aonghus mac Eachainn 'ic Dhòmhnaill, was a known local storyteller.[240] Her childhood home received visits from another "outstanding" South Uist storyteller, Alasdair Mòr mac Iain Dheirg (Alasdair MacIntyre), who had, in turn, heard stories from and was recorded by Alexander Carmichael.[241] It is likely that NicDhòmhnaill's mother, Mary Wilson, was also a tradition bearer. Mòr Chaimbeul recorded many waulking and working songs for the School which were likely inherited through the maternal line.[242] NicDhòmhnaill also relates that her father was a great friend of Iain Mòr Mac a' Bhreabadair whose own father had spent twenty years in Ireland and had brought back books with Ossianic material, "thug e [athair Iain] fichead bliadhna ann an Èirinn […] sin mar a fhuair e na leabhraichean […] Leabraichean Oisein" ("he [Iain's father] spent twenty years on Ireland […] that's how he got the books […] Books of Ossian").[243] It is not clear in what way, if any, NicDhòmhnaill's family engaged with these or similar books. However, that NicDhòmhnaill knew about them and their content serves as a reminder that Gaelic oral tradition did not exist in a vacuum in the nineteenth-century but was subject to written and published literary influence.[244] NicDhòmhnaill was recorded by Calum Maclean in 1959 and Duncan MacDonald in 1965. NicDhòmhnaill's storytelling

[237] Peggy MacDonald, 'Beatha-eachdraidh', [audio recording], *Tobar an Dualchais*, Available online at <http://tobarandualachais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/109343> (Accessed May 29th 2021).
[238] Maclean, 'A Folk-Variant', p. 170.
[239] Marion Campbell, 'An teaghlach aig Mòr Chaimbeul', [audio recording], *Tobar an Dualchais*, Available online at <http://tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/61189> (Accessed May 29th 2021). I have so far been unable to find further biographical information for this storyteller in, for example, Bill Lawson's *Croft History* series. Although Lawson covers large areas of North and South Uist in his collection, Locheynort, South Uist, where NicDhòmhnaill and her sister Mòr Chaimbeul (biography below) were raised, is absent.
[240] Andrew Wiseman, 'Angus MacLellan of Loch Eynort, South Uist', *Calum Maclean Project Blog*, (2013), [online], Available at <http://calumimaclean.blogspot.com/2013/03/angus-maclellan-of-loch-eynort-south.html> (Accessed April 20th 2021).
[241] Wiseman, 'Angus MacLellan'.
[242] Andrew Wiseman, 'Kate MacDonald: Bean Eairdsidh Raghnaill', *Calum Maclean Project Blog*, (2013), [online], Available at <https://calumimaclean.blogspot.com/2013/08/kate-macdonald-bean-eairdsidh-raghnaill.html> (Accessed April 21st 2021).
[243] Peggy MacDonald, 'Athair an fhiosraiche', [audio recording], *Tobar an Dualchais*, Available online at <http://tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/109341> (Accessed April 21st 2021). Transcription and translation my own.
[244] For more on the relationship between oral and published material in the Outer Hebrides see, Sìm Innes 'Fionn and Ailbhe's Riddles between Ireland and Scotland', in *Ollam: Studies in Gaelic and Related Traditions in Honor of Tomás Ó Cathasaigh*, ed. by Matthieu Boyd, (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2016), pp. 271-285.

repertoire is extensive and diverse.[245] Her recordings comprise of historical and local legends covering a wide geographic range, including tales about Coinneach Odhar and the Rannoch Seer, humorous anecdotes, fairy legends, and animal stories. A number of her historical and local legends verge on the macabre and she could tell a series of tales about corpses coming back to life.[246] While her repertoire does not include a large selection of wonder tales, she has been recorded relating Ossianic material, both tales and ballads, including "Duan na Cèardaich", tales involving St Patrick, and the story of how Fionn acquired his tooth of knowledge. NicDhòmhnaill also had fragments of Ulster Cycle tales. Although Mòr Chaimbeul and in particular Aonghas Mac 'IllFhialain have received a lot more scholarly attention, Calum Maclean wrote of NicDhòmhnaill, "as far as tradition goes, she is not a whit inferior to the two other members of the family".[247] NicDhòmhnaill's repertoire challenges the notion that women did not tell Fionn Cycle legends.

Figure 4: Kenneth Robertson, 'From left to right: Calum Maclean, Aonghas Mac 'IllFhialain, and Mòr Chaimbeul on South Uist in 1959', [online] Available at <https://www.facebook.com/492814657425348/photos/a.494453580594789/533433883363425> (Accessed April 26th 2021).

Mòr nighean Aonghais 'ic Eachainn / Mòr Chaimbeul / Marion Campbell (1868-1971)

Chaimbeul (see Figure 4), styled Bean Nìll, was born at Loch Eynort (Loch Aoineart), South Uist.[248] She was sister to Peigidh NicDhòmhnaill (described above) and Aonghas Mac 'IllFhialain, mother to tradition-bearer Bean Eàrdsidh Raghnaill (Kate MacDonald) and grandmother to tradition-bearer and piper Rona

[245] 'Track Listings – Peggy MacDonald', *Tobar an Dualchais* [online], Available at <http://tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/searchperson?id=4884> (Accessed April 21st 2021).
[246] For example: Peggy MacDonald, 'Corp a thàinig beò a-rithist', [audio recording], *Tobar an Dualchais*, Available online at <http://tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/39547> (Accessed May 31st 2021). Peggy MacDonald, 'Fear a Chaidil Còmhla ri Corp', [audio recording], *Tobar an Dualchais*, Available online at <http://tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/40373> (Accessed May 31st 2021).
[247] Maclean, 'A Folk-Variant', p. 170.
[248] Wiseman, 'Kate MacDonald'.

Eàrdsaidh Raghnaill (Rona Lightfoot).[249] Chaimbeul did not go to school.[250] As such, she is believed to be one of the last monoglot speakers of Gaelic.[251] However, Chaimbeul left home at fifteen to work on the mainland previous to her marriage, indicating that she did know at least some English in her younger years.[252] Of her various employers, some were kind and treated her well but she also recalled difficult experiences with one employer who was a heavy drinker and another who was a sexual predator.[253] Chaimbeul married Uist ferryman Neil Campbell and they had three children. The family lived at Garryheillie (Gearraidh Sheilidh), South Uist. Calum Maclean described ninety-three-year-old Chaimbeul in 1959 as "a terrific old lady, sharp, alert and extremely humorous".[254] The storytelling tradition of Chaimbeul's childhood home is described above in Peigidh NicDhòmhnaill's biography. For Chaimbeul's part, she has been described as "one of the most remarkable sources of traditional Gaelic song ever to have been recorded by the School".[255] Chaimbeul's wide ranging knowledge earned her the family nickname "The Dictionary" for she was the "ultimate authority" on Gaelic words and tradition.[256] Her stories, songs and tradition were recorded by various collectors including Calum Maclean, John L. Campbell, and Donald MacDonald. Maclean's brother, Dr. Alasdair Maclean, described difficulty in collecting from Chaimbeul on account of her living situation:

> "Angus MacLellan […] was clearly jealous if interest was paid to his richly endowed sister, Mrs Marion Campbell. As they both lived in the same house that required tactful handling […] I wonder if the old lady took to her grave many gems which he [Calum Maclean] might otherwise have unlocked".[257]

Despite this, much from Chaimbeul has survived in the School's archives. Although she is known primarily for waulking songs, which "she could sing for hours on end", Chaimbeul

[249] Wiseman, 'Kate MacDonald'.
[250] Marion Campbell, 'Mòr Chaimbeul a' cuimhneachadh air Uibhist a Deas agus an sgoil', [audio recording], Tobar an Dualchais, <http://tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/61183> (Accessed May 29th 2021).
[251] Wiseman, 'Kate MacDonald'.
[252] Marion Campbell, 'Na diofar chosnaidhean aig Mòr Chaimbeul mus do phòs i', [audio recording], *Tobar an Dualchais*, Availbale online at <http://tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/61194> (Accessed April 29th 2021).
[253] Marion Campbell, 'Tha am fiosraiche ag innse naidheachdan mu a beatha', [audio recording] Tobar an Dualchais, Available online at <http://tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/110346> (Accessed April 23rd 2021).
[254] Maclean, 'A Folk-Variant', p. 172.
[255] Wiseman, 'Kate MacDonald'.
[256] Wiseman, 'Kate MacDonald'.
[257] Dr. Alasdair Maclean quoted in Wiseman, 'Angus MacLellan'.

also possessed a considerable number of stories, including Ossianic ballads and tales, fairy legends, animal stories, humorous anecdotes, local history and ghost stories.[258] Chaimbeul's stories, and indeed her songs, have received limited scholarly attention. Yet, many items in Chaimbeul's extensive repertoire were unique and thus her tales are valuable material for investigation into Gaelic storytelling tradition.[259]

Figure 5: Margaret Fay Shaw, 'Màiri (left) and Peigi (right) at the launch of *Folksongs and Folklore of South Uist*, 1955', [online] Available at <http://nts.org.uk/stories/stories-songs-and-starlings> (Accessed May 29th 2021).

Peigi nighean Anndra na h-Àirigh Molaich / Peigi NicRath / Peggy MacRae (1874-1969)

NicRath (see Figure 5) was born in Lochmaddy, North Uist (Uibhist a Tuath) in 1874 and raised in North Glendale, South Uist. NicRath worked at the herring guttings in Shetland between the Wars and as a young woman was employed in domestic service on the mainland though her experience working in Edinburgh was difficult.[260] She returned to South Uist and was working as a cook and dairymaid, and "ruled over all", at the Boisdale Hotel until retirement. Following this, NicRath worked the croft and stayed with her sister, Màiri Mhòr an t-Saighdeir, and Màiri's son Dòmhnall.[261] This was the home the collector Margaret Fay Shaw lived in on Uist in her twenties. Shaw wrote of the sisters:

[258] 'Marion Campbell – Track Listings', *Tobar an Dualchais*, Available online at < http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/searchByPerson?personid=3469&name=Marion%20Campbell> (Accessed May 31st 2021).

[259] 'Marion Campbell', *Calum I. Maclean Project* [Facebook post], Available online at <https://www.facebook.com/492814657425348/photos/a.494453580594789/606522009387945> (Accessed April 23rd 2021).

[260] Shaw, *From the Alleghenies*, p. 60. All biographical information about this storyteller from Shaw, From the Alleghenies, at 60-62, unless otherwise stated.

[261] I have been unable to find additional biographical material for this storyteller in, Bill Lawson, *Croft History: Isle of South Uist, Volume 3*, (Isle of Harris: Bill Lawson Publications, 1997), which contains the area south of Lochboisdale where the NicRath sisters lived. However, future investigation into the biographies of this and all of the storytellers mentioned here would undoubtedly enrich our understanding of their lives and tales.

> "Peigi and Mairi had the greatest wisdom, tolerance, cheer and courage, and yet had so little. They were glad to have nice things but they didn't expect them […] they took great pleasure in what they did possess".[262]

Both sisters were talented at song. NicRath, in particular, "was a wonderful singer". The sisters had songs for every occasion from dance tunes to waulking, spinning and milking songs. Shaw recalls visits "every night" from locals to their home to talk and tell stories, activities often accompanied by work. Shaw recorded a great deal of material from the sisters during her time with them, part of which has been published in *Folksongs and Folklore of South Uist*.[263] Shaw was primarily interested in song, but tradition and stories have been recorded from NicRath. NicRath's stories comprise of a variety of short supernatural anecdotes including stories about the evil eye, death omens and second sight.[264] Her local anecdotes feature various individuals from the surrounding townships and beyond and she has a number of stories which demonstrate the bravery of Uist priests in times of illness on the island.[265] NicRath's longest recorded tale by far, however, is "Catrìona nam Bòcan", a tale about a local seer and her powers.[266] The recording of the tale is over fifteen minutes long.[267] Thus, while Shaw may have focussed on song, the length and intricacy of "Catrìona nam Bòcan" indicates that NicRath was also a practiced and capable teller of tales.

Màiri Aonghais Nèill Bhig / Màiri Chaimbeul / Mary Campbell (1874-1969)

Chaimbeul was born on the now uninhabited island of Mingulay (Miughalaigh).[268] She moved to Vatersay when Mingulay was evacuated between 1907 and 1912.[269] Collector Lisa Storey who grew up on Vatersay recalled sitting with her sisters in Chaimbeul's house as a

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[262] Shaw, *From the Alleghenies*, p. 61.
[263] Margaret Fay Shaw (ed.), *Folksongs and Folklore of South Uist*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977).
[264] Peggy MacRae, 'Naidheachdan os-nàdarrach', [audio recording], *Tobar an Dualchais*, Available online at <http://tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/93379> (Accessed May 19th 2021).
[265] Peggy MacRae, 'Mgr Ailean agus a' ghriùthrach', [audio recording], *Tobar an Dualchais*, Available online at <http://tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/35102> (Accessed May 19th 2021). Peggy MacRae, 'Mar a chaochail Mgr Seòras leis an fhiabhras, 1897', [audio recording], *Tobar an Dualchais*, Available online at <http://tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/35104> (Accessed May 19th 2021).
[266] Peggy MacRae, 'Catriona nam Bòcan', [audio recording], *Tobar an Dualchais*, Available online at <http://tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/35128> (Accessed May 19th 2021). Gaelic transcription available at, 'Aireamh: 35128', *Tobar an Dualchais – Transcriptions* [online], Available at <http://tadtranscriptions.co.uk/35128-2/> (Accessed May 19th 2021).
[267] Peggy MacRae, 'Catriona nam Bòcan'.
[268] 'Biography – Mary Campbell', *Tobar an Dualchais* [online] Available at <http://tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/searchperson?id=2184> (Accessed May 24th 2021).
[269] *A' Fagail Mhiughalaidh*, dir. by Raghnaid Nic Dhòmhnaill (BBC Alba, 2007), online film recording, *BBC iPlayer*, Available at <http://bbc.co.uk/programmes/b007hx6n> (Accessed May 24th 2021).

child while Chaimbeul worked and talked.[270] Chaimbeul enjoyed talking and laughing and "bhiodh i tric a dol air cèilidh air boireannaich eile" ("she would often go on a cèilidh with other women"). Chaimbeul's grandfather Cathtaidh's house on Mingulay was a particularly popular taigh-cèilidh since he was "cho math air sgeulachdan innse" ("so good at telling stories"). Chaimbeul picked up many of her tales from her grandfather. Storey noted, "ged a b'e òrain a b'fheàrr leatha-se a chluinntinn, dh'ionnsaich i sgeulachdan is laoidhean is eile leis cho tric 's chuala i iad bho a seanair" ("although it was the songs that she [Chaimbeul] preferred to hear, she learned stories and lays and other things by hearing them so often from her grandfather").

Chaimbeul was recorded in the 1960s by Lisa Storey.[271] Chaimbeul provided Storey with a great deal of information about Mingulay traditions and life much of which informed Storey's book *Muinntir Mhiughalaigh*, which was published in 2007 and includes a selection of Chaimbeul's own tales in transcription.[272] Chaimbeul's repertoire consists of a number of local and personal anecdotes.[273] She often accompanies descriptions of traditional beliefs and practices on Mingulay with anecdotes about individual local people.[274] Chaimbeul was also recorded telling supernatural legends including a gift of midwifery tale and tales about Boban Saor, a carpenter whose adventures were known in Scotland, Cape Breton and Ireland.[275] Preliminary research indicates that Nan NicFhionghain and Màiri Chaimbeul are the only two female contributors recorded reciting tales about Boban Saor in the School's archives.[276] Chaimbeul also tells a series of tales about the "Fingalians", including tales about Fionn mac Cumhail's childhood and how he gained the power of knowledge.[277]

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[270] All biographical information for this storyteller generously provided by Lisa Storey, in an email to Isla Parker, 20th July 2021, unless otherwise stated. My translation.

[271] Lisa Storey, *Muinntir Mhiughalaigh*, (Glasgow: Clàr, 2007), p. 6.

[272] Storey, *Muinntir Mhiughalaigh*, for example see pages 66, 76, 100 and 101.

[273] 'Tracks Listing – Mary Campbell', Tobar an Dualchais [online], Available at <http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/searchByPerson?personid=2184&name=Mary%20Campbell> (Accessed May 24th 2021).

[274] For example: Mary Campbell, 'Treabhadh ann am Miughalaigh', [audio recording], *Tobar an Dualchais*, Available online at <http://tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/58330> (Accessed May 24th 2021).

[275] Mary Campbell, 'Gibht na mnatha-glùine agus a' bhean-ghlùine ainmeil à Miughalaigh', [audio recording], *Tobar an Dualchais*, Available online at <http://tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/19806> (Accessed May 24th 2021). Mary Campbell, 'Mar a thachair do Bhoban Saor agus thriùir mhac', [audio recording], *Tobar an Dualchais*, Available online at <http://tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/58163> (Accessed May 24th 2021). Alan Bruford, 'Review: Tales Until Dawn. Sgeul Gu Latha', *Béaloideas*, 57 (1989), 191-195, (p. 193).

[276] For example: Nan MacKinnon, 'Boban Saor agus an droch bhan-tighearna', [audio recording], *Tobar an Dualchais*, Available online at <http://tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/54557> (Accessed May 24th 2021).

[277] Mary Campbell, 'Sgeulachd na Fèinne agus còmhradh mu dheidhinn sgeulachdan', [audio recording] *Tobar an Dualchais*, Available online at <http://tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/53143> (Accessed May 24th 2021).

Conclusion

Drawing upon audio recordings, interviews with a former collector, obituaries and secondary sources, this chapter offers a new synthesis of information on the lives and repertoires of eight Gaelic women storytellers. Compiled in this way, certain similarities between the biographies and repertoires of these eight have become evident. Based on the biographical information available, for example, at least four of these women travelled to the mainland as economic migrants in their late teens or early twenties. Those who left eventually returned to the islands where they married and started families or, in the case of Nan NicFhionghain, moved in with family members. The only storyteller who did not return to the islands is NicDhòmhnaill who stayed in Argyll. As Challan points out, many folklore collectors for the School were initially drawn to South Uist and Barra where they had "discovered" informants such as Donnchadh Clachair and Anna NicIain.[278] Furthermore, the notion that Presbyterianism had driven out traditional practices in Protestant areas persisted amongst twentieth-century collectors such that scholars often visited only Catholic areas.[279] As a result, "bha cruinneachadh ann an àiteachan [a bharrachd air Barraigh is Uibhist a Deas] air a chur an dara taobh" ("collecting in places [other than Barra and South Uist] was put to one side").[280] NicDhòmhnaill's geographical situation, then, outside of these islands despite having come from there, might help to explain why she has received less scholarly attention than her siblings, Mac 'IllFhialain and Mòr Chaimbeul. Female relatives or friends are mentioned as a source for folk tales and song by two informants; NicIain and Nan NicFhionghain. Ealasaid NicFhionghain mentions that her mother "had a ready wit" but does not explicitly cite her as a source for her own repertoire. Male relatives, specifically fathers and grandfathers, are cited as a primary source for tradition by five of the eight storytellers, NicDhòmhaill, Mòr Chaimbeul, Màiri Chaimbeul, Dix and Ealasaid NicFhionghain, and mentioned by a further one, Nan NicFhionghain, whose father knew many tales. Of the five formally mentioned women, all lived, as children, in homes which welcomed visitors to share stories and song. The second chapter of this dissertation found that although women may not have been expected to narrate tales in some traditional taighean-cèilidh, hearing the tales repeatedly as children in the cèilidh houses of their older male relatives may have enabled them to learn new stories including wonder and Finn Cycle tales. This appears to be true in

[278] Challan, *Air Bilean an t-Sluaigh*, p. 5.
[279] Challan, *Air Bilean an t-Sluaigh*, p. 6.
[280] Challan, *Air Bilean an t-Sluaigh*, p. 5.

the case of NicDhòmhaill, Mòr Chaimbeul, Màiri Chaimbeul, Dix and Ealasaid NicFhionghain.

Furthermore, the repertoires of these eight demonstrate the hitherto under-researched breadth of Gaelic women's storytelling tradition. In scholarship, the repertoires of women storytellers are limited by genre and length.[281] Yet, on closer inspection, many of these women were found to recite tales not normally associated with their gender. Finn Cycle tales, for instance, were recorded from NicDhòmhnaill, Mòr Chaimbeul and Màiri Chaimbeul. Dix demonstrated a "mastery" of wonder tales while Ealasaid NicFhionghain and NicIain contributed lengthy Gaelic versions of international tale types such as "Cinderella".[282] Though NicRath and Nan NicFhionghain might be best known for their songs, they also narrated a number of tales of various lengths and genres.

In addition, the evidence provided in this chapter illustrates the narrative abilities of women storytellers in Gaelic Scotland. According to Hillers, the traditional definition of a "star storyteller" in Gaelic oral tradition is a "self-conscious verbal artist" and a practiced performer who is actively engaged in expanding their vast and diverse repertoire.[283] This role, Hillers argues, does not "easily accommodate" women as social etiquette discouraged them from performing in front of their husbands and other men.[284] The women discussed in this chapter, though, did possess vast and diverse storytelling repertoires indicating that they were capable performers. Their contributions to the School are substantial. Perhaps in order to acknowledge and appraise the "star" quality of women storytellers we must recognise the opportunities available to women for learning stories inside the taigh-cèilidh, the various storytelling contexts for women, public and private, and audiences, children and adults, as described in the previous chapter. Such an approach would enable researchers to fully appreciate women's contribution to storytelling as a folkloric genre in Gaelic Scotland.

[281] Harvey, p. 111.
[282] Hillers, 'Storytelling and the International Folktale', p. 164.
[283] Hillers, 'Storytelling and the International Folktale', pp. 157-158.
[284] Hillers, 'Storytelling and the International Folktale', p. 158.

CHAPTER 4

Analysis

So far, this dissertation has explored women's place in the storytelling tradition of the Outer Hebrides by considering historical sources and anecdotes. In the literature review, I identified a gap in scholarship concerning women's folklore; namely, that tales recorded from women are often overlooked in favour of song given that women are perceived as having participated less than men in storytelling tradition.[285] This chapter will address this gap by subjecting tales from some of the women storytellers mentioned in the previous chapter to analysis. Since, as previously discussed, all storytelling is claimed to be in some way autobiographical, this chapter will take a "feminist" approach to listen for the voices of female storytellers within their tales.[286] Ronald Black, Bettina Kimpton and others have demonstrated that marginalised groups in traditional Gaelic societies, like women, could "use" stories as a way to covertly communicate messages which might subvert or challenge traditional gender expectations and which would thus be dangerous or at the very least unusual or frowned upon to state explicitly.[287] As Radner and Lanser conclude, storytellers may not always be aware of the messages encoded in their tales since "coding need not be a conscious act".[288] Therefore, it is difficult to determine whether or not the storytellers mentioned in the following discussion intended to include "feminist messages" in their tales. This analysis will speculate on this point. However, demonstrating that women consciously included subversive messages is not the purpose of this chapter. Rather, I intend to demonstrate that stories and storytelling *could* be used by women in Gaelic Scotland to transmit messages which offered an escape from traditional gender expectations by showing that "feminist" messages are encoded into the tales. In so doing, this chapter intends to contribute to a greater understanding and appraisal of the abilities of Gaelic women storytellers.

I will begin this chapter with an overview of my methodological approach to the tales before offering analysis of two tales recorded by women storytellers in the twentieth-century; "Na Sìthichean agus an Leanabh", recorded from Peigidh NicDhòmhnaill, and "Am Prionnsa Fo Gheasaibh", recorded from Anna NicIain.

[285] Harvery, p. 111.
[286] Cashman, 'At Work in Donegal', p. 308.
[287] Black, 'Introduction', p. xlv. Kimpton, '"Blow the House Down"', p. 44. Radner and Lanser, p. 2.
[288] Radner and Lanser, p. 3.

Methodology

This chapter will approach the tales using the analysis technique employed by Omar Sougou in his paper on African women's folktales.[289] In his paper, Sougou used folktales by women, recorded in 2004, to embark on an inquiry into gender relations at work in a twenty-first-century Senegalese community.[290] Folktales are a suitable source for this purpose, Sougou explained, since verbal art provides "a site for presenting the daily struggles aimed at subverting the authority that oppresses [storytellers] as girls, sisters, wives and mothers, and mothers-in-law".[291] Following Sougou's methodology, I will search for "transformational trends" in gender relations, defined by Sougou as trends which propound ideas and practices that present women in positive roles and "grant them a comfortable space in the social formation".[292] Such ideas are a "transformation" of the traditional view of women in patriarchal societies as subordinate.[293] I will apply Radner and Lanser's "coding" theory to the tales and consider whether Gaelic women storytellers may have used "coding strategies" to conceal the "feminist messages" in the tales.[294] Finally, and where possible, I will consider whether the woman storytellers recited tales as they heard them or whether they "distort the formulaic pattern" and retell the stories, as was argued by Sougou for his corpus.[295] In the case of NicDhòmhnaill's "Na Sìthichean agus an Leanabh", I will do this by comparing versions of the same tale as recited by different members of the same family. In 1989, Joan Radner compared Irish folktale "The Woman Who Went to Hell" as told by Peig Sayers and her son Mícheál Ó Gaoithín and demonstrated how the life experiences and gender of the individual storytellers influenced their rendering of the tale.[296] A comparison of various versions of the same tale will help to determine whether NicDhòmhnaill simply recited her tale as heard or whether she "distorted" and retold the story in favour of a "feminist message" and based on her life experience. This dissertation will be the first to compare male and female versions of the same tale from Gaelic Scotland. Since a comparable version of "Am Prionnsa" as narrated by a male relative of Anna NicIain's is not available, I will consider NicIain's use of formulaic language and propose that future investigation into formulae as

[289] Omar Sougou, 'Transformational Narratives: Hearing/Reading Selected Senegalese Folktales by Young Women', *Research in African Literatures*, 39:3, (2008), 26-38.
[290] Sougou, 'Transformational Narratives', p. 26.
[291] Sougou, 'Transformational Narratives', p. 26.
[292] Sougou, 'Transformational Narratives', p. 28.
[293] Sougou, 'Transformational Narratives', p. 28.
[294] Radner and Lanser, 1-30.
[295] Sougou, 'Transformational Narratives', p. 29.
[296] Radner, '"The Woman Who Went to Hell"', p. 114.

used by male and female storytellers could offer valuable insight into women's participation in storytelling tradition.

Sougou's analysis is based primarily on the transcribed version of oral tales. However, as Kerry Mallan and others have demonstrated, the *mode* of narration is as important as the content of the tale itself.[297] Storytellers are judged not only on the plot but also on their performance of the tale and narrative skill.[298] Furthermore, storytellers can use performance as an "interpretative frame", altering their tone, pitch and pace to communicate messages which the words alone cannot.[299] Thus, as I will be analysing the tales for hidden messages, it is important to consider the performance itself as well as the text of the tale. For this reason, and in the absence of video recordings, I will make use of the audio recording alongside the transcribed text of the tale. This approach, considering performance and text, will allow access to an additional layer of meaning which is inaccessible through the text alone.

Na Sìthichean agus an Leanabh

The first tale to be analysed was recorded from Peigidh NicDhòmhnaill (see previous chapter for biographical information) and is entitled "Mar a chuidich Fear Stadhlaigearraidh boireannach gus a pàiste fhaighinn air ais bho na sìthichean" ("How the Tacksman of Stilligarry helped a woman to get her child back from the fairies", hereafter referred to as "Na Sìthichean agus an Leanabh", "The Fairies and the Child") on *Tobar an Dualchais*.[300] This tale has been chosen because it lends itself to discussion about gender relations. Throughout the tale, the central female character comes into contact with various men in a quest to retrieve her child. Arguably, NicDhòmhnaill's version includes a "transformational trend" in gender relations because she presents her female character as resilient and courageous. The tale has also been chosen because it is possible to compare NicDhòmhnaill's version of the tale with a version of the same tale recorded from her brother Aonghas Mac 'IllFhialain. This comparison will help to determine whether NicDhòmhnaill, as a female storyteller, recited the tale as she heard it or altered the tale to reflect her own experiences as a woman and

[297] Kerry Mallan, *Children as Storytellers*, (Australia: Primary English Teaching Association, 1991), p. 5. Alan Bruford wrote of the importance of studying "gestures, asides to the audience, tones of voice for different characters, and every trick of the trade" in oral storytelling in Alan Bruford and Duncan A. MacDonald (eds.), *Scottish Traditional Tales*, (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1994), p. 27.

[298] Richard Bauman, *Verbal Art as Performance*, (Illinois: Waveland Press, Inc., 1984), p. 9.

[299] Bauman, *Verbal Art*, p. 9.

[300] Peggy MacDonald, 'Mar a chuidich Fear Stadhlaigearraidh boireannach gus a pàiste fhaighinn air ais bho na sìthichean', [audio recording], *Tobar an Dualchais*, Available online at < https://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/track/40335?l=en> (Accessed June 17th 2021). All analyses of NicDhòmhnaill's recording in the following discussion are based on this source.

mother. In “Na Sìthichean agus an Leanabh”, NicDhòmhnaill tells the story of a woman whose child was crying unceasingly, “bha [am pàiste] a’ rànaich ’s bha e a’ caoineadh” (“[the child] was crying and hollering”).[301] She asks “seann duine” (“an old man”) what to do and he suggests taking the child to “Fear Stadhlaigearraidh” (“the Tacksman of Stilligarry”). When the tacksman threatens her, she is told to say “Muc Dhearg” (“Red Pig”) and step into his house. The woman visits the tacksman and responds “Muc Dhearg” to his threats. On his second threat, she cries “Muc Dhearg” and “dol a-staigh, agus rug e an sin air bata agus e dol a chur an eanchainn aisde” (“going in and he grabbed a stick and he was going to strike her brains out”). But the changeling in her child leaps out of her breast in the guise of an old man and runs out of the house. The tacksman tells the woman that her real child will be at home when she returns.

In this tale, NicDhòmhnaill’s female character is surrounded by men who are both helpful and dangerous. The “seann duine” is initially helpful in advising on how to retrieve the child, “nuair a mhaoidheas e ort […] seas a’s an doras” (“when he threatens you […] stand at the door”). The woman is instructed to be resolute and literally stand her ground, “seas a’s an doras” (“stand at the door”). Fear Stadhlaigearraidh contrasts with the “seann duine” in that he is threatening from the moment of his entrance:

> “Gu dè,” ors’ esan [Fear Stadhlaigearraidh], “a chuir an seo thu? Tarraing a-mach às an seo!”
> “Muc dhearg!” ors’ ise.
> Agus mhaoidh e seo a-rithist oirre.
> “Tarraing air falbh,” ors’ esan, “cho luath ’s a rinn thu riamh mach às an seo!”
> “Muc dhearg!” ors’ ise, ’s e dol a-staigh, agus rug e an sin air bata agus e dol a chur an eanchainn aisde.

(“What brought you here? Get out of here!” / “Red pig!” she exclaimed. / And he threatened her again. / “Get out,” he shouted, “as quickly as you’ve ever done,” he shouted, “get out of

[301] All quotations of “Na Sìthichean agus an Leanabh” in the following discussion are based on Lisa Storey’s transcription and translation of the tale, available at Peigidh NicDhòmhnaill, ‘Sìthichean agus an Leanabh’, ed. by Lisa Storey, [Facebook post] *Calum I. Maclean Project*, Available online at <https://www.facebook.com/calumiainmaclean/posts/4564071443632962> (Accessed March 26th 2021). Alternative transcription available at <https://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/track/40335?l=en> (Accessed June 17th 2021).

here!" / "Red pig!" she exclaimed, going in, and he grabbed a stick and he was going to strike her brains out.")

The threat of the tacksman is evident in the literal transcription but is emphasised by NicDhòmhnaill's use of paralanguage. In this section of reported speech, NicDhòmhnaill alters the tone and pitch of her voice depending on the character she is imitating. NicDhòmhnaill's voice for the tacksman, which she uses for both his speech and actions, is loud, low in tone, and forceful. NicDhòmhnaill voices the female character's "Muc Dhearg" with a softer, higher pitch and quieter volume. Through her voice, NicDhòmhnaill conjures the strength and size of the tacksman which she contrasts with the smallness of the heroine. In this contrast, NicDhòmhnaill emphasises the level of danger for the woman in this scene as well as the extent of her courage. Even in the face of these threats, the female character continues to pursue her task, exclaiming "Muc Dhearg" a second time. In 1966, John L. Campbell praised NicDhòmhnaill's brother Mac 'IllFhialain's vocal techniques, recalling that Mac 'IllFhialain had a "remarkable degree of capacity for acting different characters" in his stories.[302] It is clear from this tale that NicDhòmhnaill possessed the same talents. NicDhòmhnaill returns to her original narrative voice when the woman is "dol a-staigh, agus rug e [Fear Stadhlaigearraidh] an sin air bata agus e dol a chur an eanchainn aisde" ("going in, and he [the Tacksman] grabbed a stick and he was going to strike her brains out"). NicDhòmhnaill switches tense in this sentence from the simple past tense of the rest of the narrative ("mhaoidh", "ors'", "threatened", "said") to the progressive past ("a' dol", "going"). Gillian Bennett has demonstrated that tense switching is an effective oral storytelling technique which temporarily suspends the narrative at the climax of a story.[303] Tense switching acts as a "freeze-frame", preventing the climax from running on too fast.[304] NicDhòmhnaill's tense switch suspends the narrative just as the woman steps towards the tacksman even as he continues to threaten her. The actions of the female character in this moment emphasise the courage and resilience of the women who, in stepping towards rather than away from her adversary, demonstrates that she will not be controlled by threatening or domineering men. Furthermore, that this action occurs at the climax of the tale indicates that the resilience and ability of women is indeed the central message of this tale. NicDhòmhnaill's message, which subverts the expectation that women should be silent and

[302] John L. Campbell, 'Angus MacLellan MBE', *Scottish Studies*, 10, (1966), 193-197, (p. 196).
[303] Gillian Bennett, ''And I Turned Round to Her and Said…': A Preliminary Analysis of Shape and Structure in Women's Storytelling', *Folklore*, 100:2 (1989), 167-183, (p. 176).
[304] Bennett, 'A Preliminary Analysis', pp. 176-177.

subordinate, is concealed through the use of coding strategies. Following the action with the "bata" ("stick"), NicDhòmhnaill introduces a moment of humour, "leum am fear ud a-mach às a h-uchd 's ceann glas" ("the man leapt out of her oxter [breast] and he had grey-hair on his head"), after which we can hear NicDhòmhnaill laughing.[305] This humour which immediately follows the woman's action represents a form of "distraction" from the feminist message, creating "noise" or interference which prevents the message from being heard except by those who "need" it.[306] At the end of the tale, once the changeling has left the child, the tacksman becomes helpful and even kind. He informs the woman that her child will have returned to her home, "Thalla a-nist dhachaigh […] bidh do phàiste fhèin a-staigh romhad" ("Go home […] your own infant will be there"). NicDhòmhnaill drops the forceful tones of the tacksman in this final interchange, returning once again to her narrative voice. The tacksman's directions to the woman perhaps function to "distract" from the feminist message by ensuring the audience that the authority of men has been restored. However, the tacksman's apparently instantaneous switch in attitude might also function to warn women of the volatile nature of some men in their community. The woman who is unrelenting and who stands her ground can survive in a patriarchal environment.

"Na Sìthichean agus an Leanabh", then, lends itself to discussion about gender relations given that the tale follows a female character as she comes into contact with various men. NicDhòmhnaill's tale appears to subvert the patriarchal expectation that women should be silent and subordinate in response to masculine authority. In order to determine whether NicDhòmhnaill retold the story in favour of this subversive message, I will offer a comparison of this tale with NicDhòmhnaill's brother Mac 'IllFhialain's recording of the same tale. As Radner demonstrated in the Irish context, this comparison will indicate that women storytellers did not simply recite tales as they heard them but were capable of retelling stories based on their own life experiences and in favour of a "feminist message".[307] Whether or not these female storytellers consciously altered their tales for this purpose may be impossible to determine. However, this analysis intends to speculate as to this possibility and take steps towards acknowledging and appraising women's storytelling abilities.
"Na Sìthichean agus an Leanabh" belongs to a tradition of tales involving Clann MacMhuirich. "Fear Stadhlaigearraidh", "the Tacksman of Stilligarry", in NicDhòmhnaill's

[305] Storey translates "a h-uchd" as "her oxter". However, "uchd" is "Breast, bosom" in Dwelly, *A Gaelic Dictionary,* p. 989.
[306] Radner and Lanser, p. 5.
[307] Radner, '"The Woman Who Went to Hell"', p. 114.

tale can be identified as the character MacMhuirich who appears throughout nineteenth- and twentieth-century Gaelic oral tradition.[308] The historical MacMhuirichs (anglicised as "MacVurich" and "Curry" or "Currie") were granted land at Stilligarry, South Uist, following the decline of the Lordship of the Isles, under whom the MacMhuirichs served as bards until the sixteenth-century.[309] By the late nineteenth-century, tales about the character MacMhuirich, a landowner with supernatural abilities, were prevalent in the oral tradition of South Uist.[310] In the nineteenth- and twentieth-centuries, a series of tales concerning MacMhuirich and a changeling were recorded on South Uist.[311] Barbara Hillers identified nine versions of this tale in the School of Scottish Studies' archives which she referred to as "MacMhuirich and the Fairies".[312] William Gillies, likewise, noted that a changeling-MacMhuirich tale exists in the collections of Alexander Carmichael.[313] I would like to advance Gillies and Hillers' conclusions by pointing out that there are two distinct versions of the changeling-MacMhuirich tale in these combined records. The most common version is described by Hillers; a mother is advised to take her child to MacMhuirich who first "shows her the door" but subsequently arms himself and engages in a dialogue with the changeling during which both repeat "Muc Dhearg" several times.[314] The key difference between this and NicDhòmhnaill's tale is that in NicDhòmhnaill's version it is the mother who repeats "Muc Dhearg". To my knowledge, the only other recorded version of the changeling-MacMhuirich tale in which it is the mother who speaks is NicDhòmhnaill's brother Mac 'IllFhialain's version.[315] The uniqueness of their tale-type along with their relationship as siblings indicates that NicDhòmhnaill and Mac 'IllFhialain received the tale from one another or from a common source, perhaps a parent or visitor. Comparison of their tales then could

[308] Storey makes this connection in notes accompanying her transcription of NicDhòmhnaill's tale, available at <https://www.facebook.com/calumiainmaclean/posts/4564071443632962> (Accessed March 26th 2021). According to Barbara Hillers, (pseudo)historical *seanchas* about Clann MacMhuirich from the nineteenth- and twentieth-centuries stipulates that the family held land at Stilligarry, South Uist in Barbara Hillers, 'Poet or Magician: Mac Mhuirich Mór in Oral Tradition', in *Heroic poets and poetic heroes in Celtic Tradition. A Festschrift for Patrick K. Ford*, ed. by Joseph F. Nagy and Leslie E. Jones, (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2005), pp. 141-157, (p. 145).

[309] Hillers, 'Poet or Magician', pp. 142-143.

[310] William Gillies, 'Alexander Carmichael and Clann Mhuirich', *Scottish Gaelic Studies*, 20, (2000), 1-67, (p. 7).

[311] Gillies, 'Clann Mhuirich', p. 8. Hillers, 'Poet or Magician', p. 154.

[312] Hillers, 'Poet or Magician', p. 154.

[313] Gillies, 'Clann Mhuirich', p. 8. For the tale recorded in Carmichael's papers, 'Story entitled 'Muc Dhearg'', 29 January 1875, Coll-97/CW106/121. Edinburgh University Library Special Collections. Available at <http://lac-archivesspace-live1.is.ed.ac.uk:8081/repositories/2/archival_objects/142356> (Accessed June 18th 2021).

[314] Hillers, 'Poet or Magician', p. 154.

[315] Angus MacLellan, 'MacMhuirich, am boireannach, agus am bodach sìth', [audio recording], *Tobar an Dualchais,* Available online at <https://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/track/45568?l=en> (Accessed June 17th 2021). The English translation of this tale can be found in MacLellan, *Stories from South Uist,* pp. 90-91.

provide further insight into the ways in which stories can be adapted by individual storytellers to carry various messages about gender relations.

Mac ’IllFhialain’s version follows the same general plotline as NicDhòmhnaill’s tale. However, there are a number of key differences between the siblings’ versions of the tale which make for close to opposite messages about the nature of the central female character and arguably about the nature of women in general. The first key difference is that while in NicDhòmhnaill’s version the woman is sent to Fear Stadhlaigearraidh (MacMhuirich) to restore her child, it is MacMhuirich himself in Mac ’IllFhialain’s version who sends the woman away. The woman is reaping for MacMhuirich in Mac ’IllFhialain’s version but her child begins to cry unceasingly. The woman comes to MacMhuirich twice to ask for advice. The first time, MacMhuirich dismisses the woman saying, “cha tugadh tu feart orm reimhid. Tha e a-nist agad’, ars’ esan, ‘agus gabh do dhìol a-nist dheth” (“you didn’t pay heed to me beforehand. Now you have him,’ he said, ‘so take your fill of it”).[316] MacMhuirich finally advises the woman to visit Mac ’Ille Bhuidhe on Lewis. MacMhuirich in this section takes on the role of the “seann duine” in NicDhòmhnaill’s tale, instructing the woman to repeat “Muc Dhearg” to Mac ’Ille Bhuidhe but “bidh e gu math fiathaich riut,’ ars esan [MacMhuirich], ‘agus iarraidh e ort,’ ars esan, ‘clìoradh a-mach à siud” (“he’ll be angry with you’, he [MacMhuirich] said, ‘and he’ll ask you’, he said, ‘to clear out of there”). The woman travels to Lewis and is met initially by Mac ’Ille Bhuidhe’s wife who invites the woman in. When Mac ’Ille Bhuidhe comes home and threatens the woman, she repeats “Muc Dhearg”. This happens three times until Mac ’Ille Bhuidhe tells the changeling to leave. The fairy leaps from the woman’s breast and her own child is restored. At the end of the tale, Mac ’Ille Bhuidhe says to her, “cha leigeadh leas MacMhuirich do chur air an astar,’ ars esan, ‘dh’fhaodadh e fhèin a dhèanamh,’ ars esan, ‘ach feumaidh nach do ghabh thu a chomhairle” (“MacMhuirich didn’t need to send you all this way,’ he said, ‘he could have done it himself,’ he said, ‘you must not have taken his advice”). To which the woman responds, “Tha mi cinnteach,’ thuirt ise, ‘gur e sin fhèin a bh’ ann” (“I’m sure,’ she said, ‘that’s exactly what it was”). To my knowledge, Mac ’IllFhialain’s tale is the only version of all of the changeling-MacMhuirich narratives in which it is MacMhuirich himself who sends the woman away. This change has the effect of emphasising the senselessness of the female character’s actions. “[C]ha tug i [am boireannach] feart air [MacMhuirich]” (“she [the

[316] All quotations taken from Mac ’IllFhialain’s recording of the tale available at <https://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/track/45568?l=en> (Accessed June 17th 2021). Transcription and translation my own.

woman] paid no heed to him [MacMhuirich]"), her employer, and is therefore forced to travel to Lewis, a distance of around one hundred miles from Stilligarry, to cure her child, only to be told that MacMhuirich himself could have saved the child if the woman had done as MacMhuirich told her in the first place. The female character's apparently "deviant" behaviour is thus presented as foolish and senseless. This is in contrast to NicDhòmhnaill's character who stands her ground and wins back her child by her own agency. Radner found that Peig Sayers's son Mícheál rendered "The Woman Who Went to Hell" as a tale of "wilful womanhood, finally brought by suffering to a correct acceptance of responsibilities".[317] We find this same message encoded in Mac 'IllFhialain's tale of the changeling. The woman wilfully ignores MacMhuirich's request to return to work when her baby is crying. She is forced to suffer for her actions, travelling a great distance and facing the ill-tempered Mac 'Ille Bhuidhe. Finally, she accepts her responsibility to conform to patriarchal norms when she agrees with Mac 'Ille Bhuidhe that it was her behaviour which caused her suffering, saying of her actions, "Tha mi cinnteach […] gur e sin fhèin a bh' ann" ("I'm sure […] that's exactly what it was").

There are definite similarities between NicDhòmhnaill and Mac 'IllFhialain's recordings of this tale in the plotline and in the way the narrative is performed; both siblings imitate their characters' voices with remarkable similarity in the way described of NicDhòmhnaill above. However, these two versions of the changeling-MacMhuirich tale encode close to opposite messages about the nature of women and gender relations. In a "transformation" of traditional gender stereotypes, NicDhòmhnaill presents her female character as resilient and prepared to stand her ground in the face of masculine authority. The use of humour and paralanguage distracts from this subversive message. On the other hand, Mac 'IllFhialain renders his female character senseless and foolish, forced to suffer for her deviation from gender norms. The similarities in these tales indicate that the siblings heard this tale from a common source. However, it seems that both have, consciously or not, altered the tale according to their experiences and attitudes towards women; NicDhòmhnaill perhaps through her experience as a woman and mother; and Mac 'IllFhialain as an unmarried man, who is recorded as having been jealous of his sister Mòr who was "richly endowed" with a large repertoire of songs and stories.[318] NicDhòmhnaill's example is of a woman storyteller who does not simply retell a tale as heard, but recites it with skill, employing oral storytelling techniques which indicate a

[317] Radner, '"The Woman Who Went to Hell"', p. 114.
[318] Dr. Alasdair Maclean quoted in Wiseman, 'Angus MacLellan'.

degree of practice, and arguably incorporating something of her own worldview on the strength of women. The messages in her tale, whether NicDhòmhnaill consciously incorporated them or not, are the kind which may have offered women an imaginative escape from traditional gender expectations as well as advice on how to survive in a patriarchal environment.

Am Prionnsa Fo Gheasaibh

The second and final tale to be analysed in this chapter is "Am Prionnsa Fo Gheasaibh" ("The Enchanted Prince") recorded from Anna NicIain (Annie Johnston, see previous chapter for biographical information).[319] This tale was recorded at the International Celtic Folklore Conference in Stornoway in 1953 by Calum Maclean.[320] The *Stornoway Gazette* reported at the time that this was "probably the most important conference on Celtic subjects ever convened".[321] Although NicIain's contribution to the conference is not mentioned in the *Gazette*'s extensive coverage of proceedings, she does appear in an image entitled "Three Noted Gaels" which accompanied an article on the conference in October 1953.[322] Notably, there appears to have been no female "delegates" in attendance at the conference.[323] "Am Prionnsa Fo Gheasaibh" has been chosen for analysis because it involves a central female character whose actions demonstrate a transformation of traditional gender norms. The female character in this tale is active, curious and resourceful. The tale has also been chosen because it is a wonder tale, a genre not typically associated with women in scholarship on Gaelic oral tradition.[324] In the recording, we can hear NicIain pause near the beginning of her tale to wait for the audience to silence before continuing. Following this, NicIain holds the attention of the audience, which may have been largely male based on the *Gazette*'s report,

[319] Annie Johnston, 'Mar a shàbhail bana-phrionnsa prionnsa a bha fo gheasaibh', [audio recording], *Tobar an Dualchais*, Available online at < https://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/track/109396?l=en> (Accessed August 2nd 2021). Transcription and translation available at, 'Am Prionnsa Fo Gheasaibh / The Enchanted Prince', *Tocher: Tales, Songs, Tradition*, 39, (1985), 126-133. All discussion of 'Am Prionnsa' hereafter will be based on the above audio recording. All quotations hereafter sourced from the above *Tocher* transcription.
[320] 'Am Prionnsa Fo Gheasaibh', *Tocher*, p. 133.
[321] Anon. [Editorial], 'International Conference At Stornoway', *Stornoway Gazette* (6 October 1953), p. 1.
[322] 'Three Noted Gaels', [image], from *The Stornoway Gazette* (20 October 1953), p. 6. *Stornoway Gazette* articles concerning the conference compiled by Andrew Wiseman and available at, Andrew Wiseman, 'International Celtic Folklore Conference, 1953', *Calum I. Maclean blog*, [online], (2016), Available at < http://calumimaclean.blogspot.com/2016/08/international-celtic-folklore.html> (Accessed August 3rd 2021).
[323] Anon. [Editorial], 'International Conference', p.1.
[324] Clodagh Brennan Harvey, 'Some Irish Women Storytellers and Reflections on the Role of Women in the Storytelling Tradition', *Western Folklore*, 48, (1989), 109-128, (p. 111). Anne Ross, *Folklore of the Scottish Highlands*, (London: Batsford, 1976), p. 13.

but certainly mixed, for twelve minutes.[325] The length and intricacy of this tale demonstrates that, despite being historically characterised as tellers of short historical anecdotes, female storytellers were also able to narrate intricate tales.[326]

"Am Prionnsa Fo Gheasaibh" is difficult to classify but might be best identified as ATU 444* *Enchanted Prince Disenchanted*.[327] This tale-type appears in Scottish, Irish, and Gaelic folklore collections.[328] The tale can also be likened to Irish folktale, "The Woman Who Went to Hell" which follows a central female character as she faces trials and attempts to disenchant her husband.[329] Peigidh NicDhòmhnaill recites a version of ATU 444* entitled "Na trì nigheanan agus am balach" ("The three sisters and the boy") on *Tobar an Dualchais*.[330] NicDhòmhnaill's version includes the motif of a heroine waking an enchanted boy but begins with three sisters seeking their fortune, a motif which does not occur in "Am Prionnsa". A tale comparable in plotline to NicDhòmhnaill and NicIain's versions was published as the title tale in *Am Bloigh Beag le Beannachd agus sgeulachdan eile* (1997), compiled by Murchadh 'HMI' MacLeòid.[331]

In NicIain's "Am Prionnsa Fo Gheasaibh", assisted by her half-brother, the daughter of the king escapes her evil stepmother. As the girl travels, she comes upon a hovel and is invited in by an old woman "a' bristeadh agus ag ithe nan cnò" ("cracking and eating nuts"). The girl asks for some nuts and the old woman agrees if the girl watches the corpse in the corner of the hovel overnight. The girl watches the corpse which gets up at midnight and returns before dawn as the old woman instructed. After some time of taking turns watching the corpse, the young girl decides to find out where the body disappears to every night and grabs the shroud as the body leaves. The girl flies out with the corpse "thairis air aibhnichean 's thairis air

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[325] The *Stornoway Gazette* lists the delegates in attendance at the conference in, Anon. [Editorial], 'International Conference', p. 1.
[326] Harvey, p. 111.
[327] 'ATU 444* Enchanted Prince Disenchanted', in Hans-Jörg Uther (ed.), *The Types of International Folktales: A Classification and Bibliography, based on the system of Antti Aarne and Stith Thompson*, vol. 1, (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, 2004), p. 264.
[328] Patrick Kennedy (ed.), 'The Corpse Watchers', in *Legendary Fictions of the Irish Celts*, (London: MacMillan and Co., 1866), pp. 54-57. 'Kate Crackernuts', in Joseph Jacobs, *English Fairy Tales collected by Joseph Jacobs*, third edition, (New York: Schocken Books, 1967), pp. 207-211.
[329] Anita Best, Martin Lovelace, and Pauline Greenhill (eds.), *Clever Maids, Fearless Jacks, and a Cat: Fairy Tales from a Living Oral Tradition*, (Colorado: University Press of Colorado, 2019), p. 70.
[330] Peggy MacDonald, 'Na trì nigheanan agus am balach', [audio recording], *Tobar an Dualchais*, Available online at <https://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/track/42787?l=en> (Accessed August 8th 2021).
[331] 'Am Bloigh Beag le Beannachd', [online] *ambaile: highland history and culture*, Available at <https://www.ambaile.org.uk/gd/asset/2336/1/GD2336-am-bloigh-beag-le.htm/> (Accessed August 25th 2021). Murchadh MacLeòid and Susan Walker (eds.), *Am Bloigh Beag le Beannachd agus sgeulachdan eile*, ([n.p.]: [n.pub.], 1997).

monaidhean" ("over rivers and over hills"). The corpse finally enters a mountain and the girl lets go. She meets another woman at the entrance to the mountain who asks for nuts for she is "gu bàsachadh leis an acras" ("almost dying with hunger"). The girl exchanges her nuts for information about the corpse. The woman explains that the corpse is the body of a prince, enchanted by the daughter of a king who turned out to be a witch. In order to disenchant the prince, the girl must give a sack of nuts to the woman of the well and use her cupped hands to give him a drink from "tobar fìor-uisge" ("a well of pure water") hidden deep in the mountain. The girl carries out this task and the prince is disenchanted. They return to his kingdom and are married.

From a "feminist perspective", it is possible to read this tale as a comment on the relentlessness of women's work. All of the women in this tale appear to be trapped in a state of suffering, each tasked with guarding a portion of the prince's journey to the well. The first woman cracking nuts informs the heroine that if either of them falls asleep while they are watching the corpse, they will be turned into stone. The old woman explains that she is "sgìth le cion a' chadail agus le caithris" ("tired with lack of sleep and night watching") and asks the girl to take the night's watch in exchange for nuts. In Edward Dwelly's Gaelic dictionary, "caithris" is translated both as "watch by night" and "excessive fatigue from watching incessantly".[332] This word then brings to mind both night watching and exhaustion. By this time, the girl is "gu bàsachadh leis an acras" ("almost dying with hunger") and agrees. The woman guarding the entrance to the mountain is also "gu bàsachadh leis an acras" ("almost dying with hunger"). She explains that the girl must find the woman at the well who is "dìreach mar a tha mise, gu bàsachadh leis an acras" ("just like me, dying with hunger"). Virginia Blankenhorn discussed women's relentless work into nineteenth-century Gaelic Scotland, explaining that women had a "direct responsibility" for growing and preparing food, making and mending clothes, looking after children and domestic animals and keeping the living space clean.[333] Prior to the development of modern sanitation, these tasks were often "extraordinarily messy".[334] In the twentieth-century, folklorists used women's relentless work to explain why they knew less tales than men in oral storytelling communities.[335] Folklorist Bengt Holbek explained that women's domestic responsibilities prevented them

[332] Dwelly, *A Gaelic Dictionary*, p. 154.
[333] Virginia Blankenhorn, *Tradition, Transmission, Transformation: Essays on Scottish Gaelic Poetry and Song*, (Oxford: Peter Lang Ltd., 2019), p. 284.
[334] Blankenhorn, p. 284.
[335] Harvey, p. 113.

from sitting in on storytelling events and learning new tales.[336] In Gaelic Scotland, when women were able to sit in on the taigh-cèilidh, they typically worked throughout proceedings, as the second chapter of this dissertation demonstrated. Each of these examples points to the relentless nature of women's work, continuing even during "recreational" activities such as the taigh-cèilidh. In "Am Prionnsa", it appears that the responsibilities of the women, watching over various portions of the prince's journey, are causing them to suffer and starve. This tale arguably brings to light the destructive nature of women's relentless responsibilities, thus questioning the expectation that these responsibilities be fulfilled.

"Transformational trends" in gender relations are evident in the character of the girl, an active female who uses her voice and resources to complete tasks and revive the enchanted prince. We see the true curiosity and resourcefulness of the girl, attributes for which she is rewarded at the end of the tale, in her relationships with other female characters. In the interchange between the girl and the old woman cracking nuts in the hovel, the girl is first to speak, as she enquires, "B'fheàrr leam fhìn, a bhean, gun tugadh tu dhomh feadhainn dhe na cnothan a tha agad a's a' phoca, 's mi gu bàsachadh leis an acras" ("Woman, I wish you could give me some of the nuts in the bag you have, I'm almost dying with hunger").[337] Nuts in Gaelic, Scottish and Irish tradition have otherworldly connotations. In Scots tradition, attested in recordings made by the School and earlier literary sources, nuts could be used for the purposes of divination while early Irish sources associate nuts with divine and prophetic wisdom.[338] In "Am Prionnsa", the girl agrees to help the old woman in exchange for nuts. Nuts and information continue to be interchangeable throughout this tale, possibly reflecting their wider association with prophetic wisdom. The old woman tells the girl that she must watch the body as it goes out at night. Eventually, inspired only by her own curiosity, the girl decides to find out where the body disappears to, saying to herself, "An truaighe mur a bi fhios agam-sa a nochd c'àite 'm bi thusa cur seachad nan oichdheannan", ("Hang me if I

[336] Holbek, *The Interpretation of Fairy Tales*, p. 154.

[337] The image of an old woman cracking nuts is reminiscent of the character "Cailleach nan Cnò" who appears in a popular folktale entitled "Cailleach nan Cnò is Tàillear nan Clàr" ("the old woman of the nuts and the tailor of the fables"), recorded at least thirteen times by the School. Examples of this tale include, Donald Alasdair Johnson, 'Cailleach nan Cnò agus Tàillear nan Clàr', [audio recording] *Tobar an Dualchais*, Available online at <https://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/track/107283?l=en> (Accessed August 11th 2021). And, Nan MacKinnon, 'Caillear nan Cnò agus Tàillear nan Clàr', [audio recording] *Tobar an Dualchais*, Available online at <https://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/track/108676?l=en> (Accessed August 11th 2021).

[338] William Forbes, 'Halloween Customs', [audio recording], Tobar an Dualchais, Available online at <https://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/track/18591?l=en> (Accessed August 15th 2021). Sharon Paice MacLeod, 'A Confluence of Wisdom: The Symbolism of Wells, Whirlpools, Waterfalls and Rivers in Early Celtic Sources', *Proceedings of the Harvard Celtic Colloquium*, 26 (2006), 337-355, (p. 341 and 352).

don't find out tonight where you spend your nights"). Philip Sellow demonstrated that an "interior monologue", the expression of a character's internal thoughts in a story, helps the audience grasp the character's "self-understanding and moral dilemmas with increased psychological depth".[339] The deployment of the heroine's "interior monologue" in "Am Prionnsa" then establishes her "self-understanding" and demonstrates that she is able to actively make decisions for herself. The heroine's determination and representation of her thoughts challenges the notion that women should passively accept their position in society. Moreover, the girl's decision to follow the corpse may function to challenge women's physical confines. The girl escapes the mundane and relentless task of watching over the corpse into the adventure of the outside world. Given the inclusion of "caithris" ("night watching") here, another useful analytical framework for this tale, not included in this dissertation for reasons of space, would be the funeral wake in Gaelic Scotland, an occasion during which Gaelic women traditionally had an important role to play.[340]

The heroine meets a second woman on the mountainside. Following her initial transaction, the girl can exchange nuts for information. She says, "ma dh'innseas tusa dhòmhsa gu dé 'n dòigh air am fuasgail mi na geasan aige, bheir mi dhut am poca chnò mar a tha e" ("if you can tell me the way to break his enchantment, I'll give you the sack of nuts outright"). The girl carries out the final task by providing the prince with a drink and breaks the enchantment. The heroine is active in acquiring food, curious when the prince disappears, and resourceful in her bargaining. These characteristics transform the traditional trope of women as subservient and passive in patriarchal societies. For these qualities the girl is granted a "comfortable space in the social formation" at the end of the tale, escaping the relentless task of watching the corpse and marrying the prince. Furthermore, in this tale, the very active nature of the female character contrasts with the passive male character, the prince. Maria Tatar argues that young female characters in popular fairy tales such as Sleeping Beauty and Snow White are "frozen, immobile, comatose", reliant on the actions of another for freedom and objects of a voyeuristic gaze.[341] This gaze is invariably gendered male; female characters

[339] Philip Sellew, 'Interior Monologue as a Narrative Device in the Parables of Luke', *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 111:2, (1992), 239-253, (p. 240).

[340] For more on the funeral wake in Highland Scotland see, Dòmhnall Uilleam Stiùbhart, 'Keening in the Scottish Gàidhealtachd', in *Death in Scotland: Chapters from the Twelfth Century to the Twenty-First*, ed. by Peter Jupp and Hilary Grainger, (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2019), 127-146. Patricia Lysaght, '"Caoineadh os Cionn Coirp": The Lament for the Dead in Ireland', *Folklore*, 108, (1997), 65-82. Frank G. Vallee, 'Burial and Mourning Customs in a Hebridean Community', *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain*, 85:1, (1955), 119-130.

[341] Maria Tatar, 'Show and Tell: Sleeping Beauty as Verbal Icon and Seductive Story', *Marvels and Tales*, 28:1 (2014), 142-158, (p. 142 and 143).

are displayed for the pleasure of the observer as erotic spectacle.[342] In "Am Prionnsa Fo Gheasaibh", the opposite is true. The female character in this tale is the active observer of the sleeping corpse. When the prince is revived, he is described only in physical terms as "a' fiùran àlainn maiseach" ("the fine handsome gallant"). In this case, it is the woman who takes pleasure in looking at the male character.[343] In "Am Prionnsa", then, there is a transformation both in the character of the heroine, who is presented as active, and the prince, arguably presented as passive.

It is notable that NicIain chooses to recite a wonder tale for the conference rather than perform a genre more typically associated with women throughout the history of Gaelic folklore scholarship. Simply by retelling this type of story, NicIain "appropriates" a typically "masculine" genre of Gaelic verbal art, demonstrating that women could tell long, intricate wonder tales as well as historical anecdotes.[344] Arguably, wonder tales offer a powerful form of "distraction" as the magical setting and events drown out the feminist message.[345] NicIain ends "Am Prionnsa" with a form of "distancing", stating, "Agus sin mar chuala mise", ("And that's how I heard it").[346] In this final phrase, NicIain distances herself from any subversive messaging by making an "appeal to tradition".[347] According to Radner and Lanser's typology, this strategy can be classified as the "distancing" sub-category "impersonisation".[348] NicIain states that she told the tale as she heard it from another, thus the words and messages therein do not truly belong to her. In this way, the storyteller can protect herself from the potentially dangerous consequences of stating a particular message.

Since a comparable version of "Am Prionnsa" has not been identified, the same methodology as was used for NicDhòmhnaill's tale above cannot be used to determine whether or not NicIain retold the story based on her own experiences as a woman. We can assume that some aspect of NicIain's lived experience made its way into the tale since on some level "all expression is autobiographical".[349] However, we can also look to NicIain's language as a

[342] Tatar, 'Show and Tell', (p. 143).
[343] The dichotomy of active female viewer versus passive masculine object of observation is emphasised in some Irish versions of this tale in which the girl expresses her pleasure in looking at the prince while he is still asleep, Kennedy, (ed.), 'The Corpse Watchers', p. 55.
[344] Radner and Lanser, p. 4.
[345] Radner and Lanser, p. 6.
[346] Radner and Lanser, p. 7.
[347] Bauman, *Verbal Art*, p. 21.
[348] Radner and Lanser, p. 9.
[349] Cashman, 'At Work in Donegal', p. 308.

source for understanding the role of female storytellers in the Gaelic storytelling tradition. NicIain uses formulaic language in her story. According to Alison Wray, a formula in oral storytelling is "a sequence, continuous or discontinuous, of words or other elements, which is, or appears to be, prefabricated".[350] Formulae are not generated by the storyteller and are often grammatically incoherent though have been conventionalised within the language community.[351] Such expressions are identifiable by the fact that they appear across multiple narrators' texts. Examples of formulaic expressions in NicIain's tale include, "thug i saoghal fo ceann" ("she set off for the wide world") which appears, for example, as "thug e 'n saoghal fuidh' cheann" in the tale "A Mhaighdean Mhara" published in the nineteenth-century collection *Popular Tales of the West Highlands*.[352] The first line of NicIain's tale, "bha siud ann o chionn fada rìgh, agus phòs e bean, agus bha aon nighean aige" ("once long ago there was a king, and he married a woman, and he had one daughter"), is a typical example of a "boundary" formula at the opening of a tale which introduces the following content as separate from ordinary discourse.[353] Donald Alasdair Johnson (Dòmhnall Alasdair mac Iain Mhòir) sets up his tale "Rìgh nan Ceist" with an almost identical structure, "bha siud ann ma-tà rìgh agus bha e pòsta, agus bha aon ghille aige" ("there was once a king, and he was married, and he had one son") as does nineteenth-century storyteller Sarah MacMillan, introducing "Lasair Gheug" with, "bha rìgh ann, 's phòs e bà'-righinn, 's bha nighean aice" ("there was a king and he married a queen and she had one daughter").[354] According to William Lamb, formulae such as these are a "constituent part of the register" of traditional Gaelic storytelling which, when employed, "gain powerful associations" across the tradition.[355] The formulae that NicIain uses are not of the long, complicated, and sometimes incomprehensible, type which Alan Bruford discussed in his paper on Gaelic folktales and literary romances.[356] These longer "runs" are normally associated with male storytellers but

[350] Alison Wray, *Formulaic Language: Pushing the Boundaries*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 96.
[351] Wray, *Formulaic Language*, p. 8.
[352] Annie Johnson, "Am Prionnsa", p. 126. John F. Campbell (ed.), *Popular Tales of the West Highlands: Orally Collected*, vol. 1, (London: A. Gardner, 1890), p. 88.
[353] Annie Johnston, "Am Prionnsa", p. 126. William Lamb, 'Verbal Formulas in Gaelic Traditional Narrative: Some Aspects of their Form and Function', in *The Registers of Communications,* ed. by Asif Agha and Frog, (Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society, 2018), pp. 225-246, (p. 236).
[354] Donald Alasdair Johnson, 'Rìgh nan Ceist', [audio recording], Tobar an Dualchais, Available online at <https://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/track/39589?l=en> (Accessed August 13th 2021) [my transcription and translation]. Roberston, S. and Dilworth, T., (ed. and trans.) *Tales from Highland Perthshire: Collected by Lady Evelyn Stewart Murray*, (Scottish Gaelic Texts Society, 2009), p. 374.
[355] Lamb, 'Verbal Formulas', p. 235.
[356] Alan Bruford, 'Gaelic Folk-Tales and Mediaeval Romances: A Study of the Early Modern Irish Romantic Tales and their Oral Derivatives', *Béaloideas*, 34, (1966), i-v, 1-655, 167-285. See pages 182 and 185 for examples of lengthy and complicated runs.

have also been related by female storytellers such as Sarah MacMillan, mentioned above.[357] While NicIain does not make use of lengthy runs, her formulaic expressions key to the audience that her story is part of a wider tradition of storytelling. Further analysis and comparison between the types of formulaic expressions and "runs" used by male and female storytellers in the Gaelic tradition would arguably prove beneficial in understanding women's place in and relationship to the Gaelic storytelling tradition as a whole.

From a "feminist perspective" it is possible to read NicIain's "Am Prionnsa Fo Gheasaibh" as a comment on the untenable relentlessness of women's work. Furthermore, the tale includes "transformational trends" in gender relations since the female character is presented in a positive role as active, curious, and resourceful, characteristics for which she is rewarded with a "comfortable space in the social formation" at the end of the tale. Her actions and thoughts challenge the psychological and physical confines of women's position in society. NicIain's use of formulaic language keys to the audience that her tale is part of a wider tradition of storytelling. Thus, NicIain's example is of a woman storyteller who recites a wonder tale with skill, engaging the attention of the audience for twelve minutes, despite the notion that this genre was deemed unsuitable for women. It is possible that the "feminist messages" were unconsciously incorporated into the tale. Yet, these messages nevertheless challenge and transform traditional gender expectations, potentially providing for women an escape and avenue to express attitudes towards their position in society.

[357] *Tales from Highland Perthshire,* p. 390 and 498.

CONCLUSION

This dissertation aimed to contribute to a greater understanding and awareness of women's participation in the storytelling tradition of twentieth-century Gaelic-speaking Scotland. I have attempted to achieve this aim by addressing four related objectives; to evaluate previous scholarship concerning women's participation in Gaelic storytelling tradition; to investigate women's place in storytelling culture and contexts; to identify specific women storytellers from the research period, c.1850-c.1980, and review their storytelling repertoires, and; to critically analyse two tales from women storytellers and demonstrate that future research of this kind would be fruitful. This chapter will take each objective individually and offer a summary of my conclusions based on the findings of my literature review and research. I will end by considering some suggestions as to future steps in this field.

The completion of my *Literature Review*, which was designed to address the first objective, found that scholarship on women's folklore and experience in Gaelic-speaking communities tends to take as its source material song rather than story. Research into when and where storytelling took place in Gaelic Scotland has historically been written from a male perspective and based on the male experience. With the exception of Nan NicFhionghain, the biographies of female storytellers have historically been under-researched and unsought. Given the success of research into women's song, investigation into folktales narrated by women could yield a great deal of information about Gaelic storytelling as a whole. The *Storytelling Context* chapter of this dissertation sought to investigate women's place in storytelling culture and contexts. This chapter demonstrated that while the taigh-cèilidh may have been a male-dominated social space, evidence suggests that women were able to listen and crucially to learn stories from relatives and visiting storytellers. This chapter identified accounts of female-only storytelling gatherings in Gaelic Scotland and compiled evidence for women who told stories while working in and around the home, proving that although women may not have been able to fully participate in some taighean-cèilidh, they did "habitually 'perform'" in the home.[358] The *Storyteller Biographies* chapter of this dissertation aimed to identify specific storytellers and review their repertoires. This chapter identified eight individual storytellers from the Outer Hebrides south of Berneray (Beàrnaraigh na Hearadh) and presented short biographies for each. These biographies and related repertoire

[358] Hillers, 'Storytelling and the International Folktale', p. 162.

descriptions demonstrate that women storytellers existed not as anomalies or features of the past by the mid-twentieth-century. Rather, the more well-known storytellers, such as Nan NicFhionghain, were part of a wider tradition of women storytellers in the Outer Hebrides. The women identified in this chapter possessed vast and varied repertoires of tradition, including Finn Cycle tales, ballads and wonder tales, genres typically associated with men in the Gaelic context.[359] This dissertation has identified the life and repertoire of Peigidh NicDhòmhnaill whose storytelling abilities have arguably been overshadowed by her celebrated storytelling brother, Mac 'IllFhialain. Throughout this research, I have collected and collated primary data by, for example, listening to original audio recordings from *Tobar an Dualchais*, some of which appear in transcription and translation for the first time in this dissertation, and interviewing former collectors. This dissertation thus provides a new synthesis of information on the lives and repertories of Gaelic women storytellers.

The fourth chapter of this dissertation drew upon NicDhòmhnaill's repertoire and familial relations to address the final objective; to critically analyse two tales recorded from women storytellers and demonstrate that future analysis of this type would be valuable. This chapter demonstrated that NicDhòmhnaill, in her performance of "Na Sìthichean agus an Leanabh", employed oral storytelling techniques which indicate a degree of practice in her performance. NicDhòmhnaill's tale arguably favoured the female character, presenting her as courageous. This chapter found that while NicDhòmhnaill and Mac 'IllFhialain's versions of the changeling-MacMhuirich tale were unique in the Gaelic tradition, their renditions of this tale communicated close to opposite messages about the nature and expectations of women. While NicDhòmhnaill's heroine stands strong in the face of the tacksman's threats, Mac 'IllFhialain's female character is presented as senseless, having caused her own suffering by her deviance from masculine authority. With regards to Anna NicIain's "Am Prionnsa fo Gheasaibh", this dissertation found that NicIain presented her female character in a positive light who is rewarded for her curiosity and resourcefulness. The female character as active and male character as passive is a "transformation" of the rule common in popular modern folktales. From a "feminist perspective", it is possible to read this tale as a comment on the untenable relentlessness of women's work. This dissertation identified "coding strategies" such as "distraction", "appropriation" and "distancing" by "impersonisation" in NicIain's rendition of the tale. Through formulaic language, NicIain appeals to the wider tradition of storytelling and indicates her familiarity and place within it.

[359] Harvey, p. 111-112.

To focus on "predetermined" genres of folklore, namely song in the Gaelic context, is not enough to fully comprehend the participation of women in twentieth-century Gaelic storytelling traditions. Tales were part of the female repertoire and, as this dissertation has demonstrated, can yield a great deal of information with regards the Gaelic storytelling tradition as a whole and in particular women's role therein. This dissertation has by no means exhausted the potential of the School of Scottish Studies' archives as a source for this purpose. Future research into these archives from a feminist perspective would be profitable. This dissertation has also brought to light the lives and repertoires of individual female storytellers, in particular, Peigidh NicDhòmhnaill and Anna NicIain. This dissertation was able to address only a small portion of these storytellers' repertoires. Future studies could consider in more depth these individuals and indeed female storytellers and folklore informants from across the breadth of Scottish Gaelic collections to aid in their recognition. As mentioned in the *Storyteller Biographies* chapter, NicDhòmnaill's familial relations provide valuable insight into the processes of transmission within a family group and gendered differences in performance and traditional practice. This research would build on similar studies such as those carried out by Carol Zall with regards the Stewart cousins.[360] NicDhòmnaill, Mòr Chaimbeul and Aonghas Mac 'IllFhialain are siblings rather than cousins and thus arguably more closely related than the Stewarts. Comparative research into their stories and songs would potentially offer a new perspective on the processes of transmission highlighted by Zall. As proposed previously in the *Analysis* chapter, there remains scope for research into the use of formulaic language in folk tales by men and women storytellers. Such investigation could help us to understand more fully the ways in which women and men narrate tales and thus provide insight into women's participation in Gaelic storytelling as a whole. Furthermore, the *Literature Review* of this dissertation concluded that tales typically associated with women in the Gaelic context have historically been considered less prestigious than those associated with men. This dissertation has demonstrated, however, that analysis of "seanchas", short historical anecdotes such as "Na Sìthichean agus an Leanabh", can be valuable in understanding women's participation in the storytelling tradition and in acknowledging women's storytelling abilities. Going forward, if an "accurate appraisal" of women's contribution to Gaelic storytelling tradition is to be attained, future research must approach female storytellers and their tales as worthy sources for investigation.

[360] Zall, 'Mouth to Mouth', pp. 197-217.

This dissertation aimed to contribute to a greater understanding and appraisal of the participation of women in twentieth-century Gaelic storytelling traditions. The research presented offers a new perspective and synthesis of information on women storytellers and their tales by bringing to light when and where women were able to perform, by drawing attention to the names and lives of eight female storytellers and by demonstrating the value of analysing their tales.

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