The School of Scottish Studies, an Island Community

Carl Lindahl

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Swapping Stories: Folktales from Louisiana *(1997) was named the Louisiana Humanities Book of the Year by the Louisiana Endowment for the Humanities. He has received the Alcée Fortier Award from the American Folklore society. Among his books are* Earnest Games: Folkloric Patterns in the Canterbury Tales *(1987),* Cajun Mardi Gras Masks *(1997),* Perspectives on the Jack Tales *(2001), and* American Folktales from the Collections of the Library of Congress *(2004).*

In 2002 he was a scholar in residence at the School of Scottish Studies in Edinburgh, and during the academic year of 2004–2005 he returned to the School as a Fulbright Distinguished Scholar to study relationships between the folktale traditions of Scotland, Ulster, and the American Appalachians.

In 2005 he founded Surviving Katrina and Rita in Houston [SKRH], the world's first project in which disaster survivors have taken the lead in documenting fellow survivors' experience of disaster. He continues to co-direct SKRH, which received worldwide recognition for its role in aiding survivors overcome the traumatic effects of hurricanes. A discussion of SKRH and some of the survivor interviews may be found in the book Second Line Rescue: Vernacular Responses to Hurricanes Katrina and Rita *(2012), which he co-edited with Barry Jean Ancelet and Marcia Gaudet.*

He currently serves on the international editorial Board of Fabula: Journal of Folktale Studies.

Among all the contributors to this book, I have the briefest personal experience of the School of Scottish Studies. My firsthand knowledge of the School's great scholars is no older than the new millennium, so there is nothing I can do to deepen or lengthen the memories of those

who have written from lifetimes of personal knowledge of their heroes, colleagues, and friends. What I can do, however, is share with you a sense of what makes the School so extraordinarily important to outsiders, and what makes it Scotland's single most valuable institution for enhancing the recognition and continuity of Scottish traditional culture.

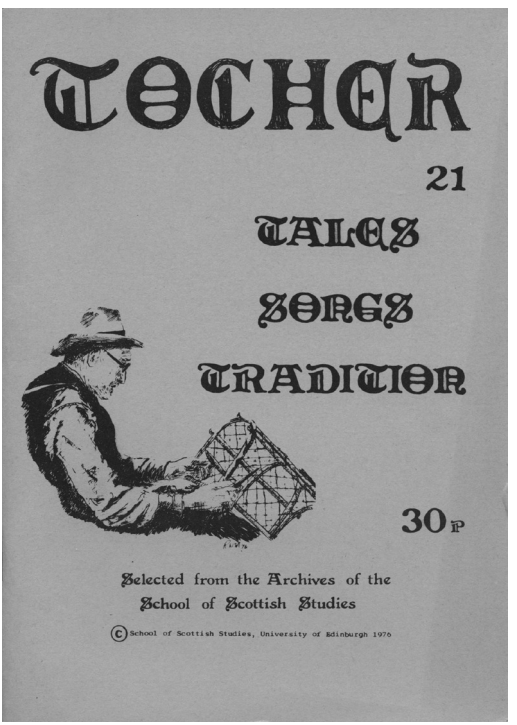
Twenty-four years before I met the collectors, scholars, and archivists of the School of Scottish Studies, I experienced the School in print. Mary Ellen Brown, the extraordinary Child scholar, taught me in my first year as a graduate student in Folklore at Indiana University. The course was 'British Folklore', and among the assigned texts was issue number 21 of *Tocher,* then selling for 30p in Scotland and for not much more at the university bookstore. There were some heavy tomes assigned for that course, including Richard M. Dorson's *The British Folklorists: A History.* All of them were thicker and costlier than the *Tocher.* But that *Tocher* issue was (and not only penny for penny) by far the best purchase I made at Indiana University. It was the unique text from that British Folklore course that stayed with me in a deeply personal way to set the better part of the professional course I've taken since.

Tocher number 21 featured the great family of Traveller artists known as the Stewarts of Blair, with many tales and songs from Alex and Belle Stewart, alive at that time, as well as from Alex's father, John, and sister, Bella Higgins (who had passed away by then), and Alex and Belle's daughter Sheila (who continues to perform the family traditions even today). The family's performances, rendered in Scots, took up the lion's share of the issue, but there were also descriptions of Shetland haaf fishing traditions shared by James Smith of Unst and John Ridland of Troswickness, and numerous tales and songs in Gaelic, with English translations, including a devil legend from North Uist and a prayer for the protection of cattle from Vatersay.

The issue was filled with the creations of traditional artists so celebrated that even I had previously heard some of their names. But there were also the names of the scholars and collectors, which I knew a bit better: in this one issue, Alan Bruford, Hamish Henderson, Emily Lyle, Donald Archie MacDonald, Calum Maclean, and James Porter, among others, all

had a hand. Their names were harder to find on the small pages than the names of the storytellers. The folklorists in the issue uniformly presented themselves with a humility that I could not easily associate with the American folklorists I was just then beginning to meet.

This tiny production had the look of a chapbook and, in the best sense possible, that was precisely what it was. It did not project a forbidding air of scholarly superiority, and that was one great reason why I liked it so much. Despite its slim count of 48 small pages and its homey look, it was substantial. I learned as much from that one issue as I did from any of the longer, more outwardly important texts that I read for the course. It was a publication that belonged at least as much to the folk who shared their arts as to the folklorists who recorded them. Indeed, at the end, there



Tocher *no 21, 1976*

were notes to the editor from civilians who had no degrees but who deeply knew their own traditions, as well as an obituary roll listing the names of the friends of the School, especially those traditional artists who had passed away since the previous issue had been printed.

It is for those very touches, and what I rightly intuited them to represent, that to this day I consider *Tocher* the model of what a folklore publication should be. There is no national journal in the United States that demonstrates the level of respect that *Tocher* accords the traditional artist, or that, like *Tocher,* steadfastly refuses to allow academic pretense to undercut that honest respect. When I compared *Tocher* to the major national and regional American journals, I found that little chapbook incomparably better. In the mid 1970s it was nearly impossible to find a story or a song published in the American journals. Indeed it was difficult to find an American author brave enough to threaten a theory with a fact as plain and obvious as a story or a song. This was the era during which Dan Ben Amos – an imposing scholar then and now – could write a book on storytelling in Benin without presenting a single one of the stories that he had heard in his fieldwork, and without describing at any length one of the story's performances or performers. The title of the Ben Amos's book was *Sweet Words*, but the sweetest words were missing. *Tocher,* in contrast, gave us the stories alongside affectionate portraits of the performers. In an era when American scholarship sought to discover folklore everywhere but in its expression – *Tocher* had no trouble identifying the teller and the tale, the singer and the song as folklore's reason for being. No matter what one's orientation, that is what, in the end, ethnology or folklore *has* to be about. And that is why *Tocher* remains my model for the best that folklore can offer. Unless folklorists can surrender their ambitions to the people who constitute their real reason for being, we are just a bunch of academics talking to ourselves about people whom we don't know well enough to rightly describe.

It wasn't until the year 2000 that I finally got to George Square – and saw the childhood home of Sir Walter Scott, the Georgian structure that he described as a "*cat-lugged band box*" (Wilson 1980:13) – and, a few doors to its south, another band box, the School itself. I learned in a short

time that what made that early issue of *Tocher* so remarkable was being replicated within that building on a daily basis. The *Tocher* issue on the Stewarts of Blair featured an appreciation by Maurice Fleming, who was not only a journalist and folklore collector, but also a neighbor of the Stewarts and a family friend. He described their welcoming home as a magnet for international travelers who honored the family's traditions as much as did the Stewarts themselves. Fleming wrote:

> *Letters with strange postmarks keep falling on their mat …. You just never know, when you walk in, who will be sitting by the wide log fire – Big Willie McPhee the piper, or Ewan MacColl on a flying visit, a group of youths from Holland, a student from Nebraska. All receive*

The featured section on the Stewarts of Blair, Tocher *no 21, 1976*

the same kindly, easy welcome. Sit long enough – you always stay longer than you intended – and Cathie and Sheila, their two married daughters, will be dropping in, and Sheila's sons … the ramifications of Clan Stewart seem limitless.

Once I found my way to 27–29 George Square, it did not take me long to discover that the library at the School was just a slightly more formal version of the Stewart hearth. It was the lost and found of Scottish tradition, most often meaning that everything – and everybody – that was lost elsewhere could be found there. There was that same dynamic of people's comings and goings at work in the library: I first met Margaret Bennett, Emily Lyle, Margaret Mackay, John MacInnes, Donald Meek,

The School of Scottish Studies, 27–29 George Square, Edinburgh

Stanley Robertson, and numerous other special friends and practitioners of Scottish traditional arts in those rooms. I learned as much from their chat as I did from the books that surrounded us.

Among the things that distinguish the books and conversation in the School's library are two in particular that, to my mind, also distinguish the people and the work that have made the School such a powerful resource and magnet. First is the strength of comparatist scholarship that shapes that library and continually works to enlighten those who use it. You may find this comparatist streak working, I think, as far back as you can find Scots writing ethnographically about other Scots.

Close Comparison and the Respectful Recognition of Difference

In *A Description of the Western Islands of Scotland ca. 1695,* Martin Martin presents close parallel descriptions of one tiny Gaelic-speaking community after another with a minute appreciation of difference that sets him apart from Herodotus, Caesar, Tacitus, Bede, and the other Western models that preceded him. What I am suggesting is that the current comparative excellence of the School is deeply embedded in local cultural tendencies. Martin displays a level of comparative precision that prefigures what the folklore world would discover two centuries later in the meticulous work of Francis James Child, Franz Boas, Antti Aarne, and Stith Thompson: a penchant for close comparison that refuses to distort any of the individual expressions and yet still works carefully to articulate their interrelationships.

So the remarkable comparative precision that has come to me to signal the best work of the School seems rooted in something long-established and deep-seated in Scottish ethnography, something I know best from the narrative perspective. We find it at work in the 19th century in rich ways.

Set the work published by Robert Chambers in 1841 (the second edition of *Popular Rhymes of Scotland)* and John Francis Campbell of Islay in 1860 (with his *Popular Tales of the West Highlands)* against the preceding international gold standard of the Grimm brothers, and the two Scots emerge as enlightened revolutionaries. The Grimms were looking for archetypes and other sorts of ideal forms of the folktales they collected; to

this end, they created their own tales by mixing the tales told by countesses together with those told by innkeepers' daughters, and in the process – despite their intentions – stealing the voices of them all.

Nearly three decades after the Grimms comes Chambers, who honors the integrity of each tale and teller that he brings into his collections. He publishes complete tales, different versions of the same type or title, next to each other, and serves both equally. He gives us, word for word, Charles K. Sharpe's careful rendering of '*Whuppity Story*' as recalled from the narration of his childhood nurse, Jenny, followed by the word-for-word rendition of a different version submitted by another contributor. Chambers preserves the integrity of all of his texts. He does what the Grimms at one brief moment in 1815 said they were going to do, but never accomplished. They were intent they said, in preserving every word of one great storyteller because, to them, she embodied the ideal voice of an entire culture. But in the end the Grimms did not let even this one exceptional narrator speak for herself. Chambers realized that one does not honor the greatness of a tradition by singling out one special artist as the representative of them all and then 'improving' her tales with heavy edits; rather, one allows each voice its full, unaltered expression, and tries to repeat it exactly as first rendered.

Less than two decades after Chambers' remarkable feat, John Francis Campbell of Islay's *Popular Tales of the West Highlands* presented a deeper statement in the same vein that introduces the field of folklore to a new, higher standard of representation. Chambers had relied mainly on correspondents who remembered as best they could the tales they had once heard and tried to ventriloquize their long dead tellers. But Campbell of Islay would not settle for memories of someone else's words: he gave us exactly the words of the narrators, a century before it became the standard practice of folklorists to do so. And Campbell, like Chambers, honored the various narrators' voices. He enfranchised everyone. Others followed suit: the remarkable, recently-published *Tales from Highland Perthshire,* were first collected, *verbatim,* with respectful regard for each narrator, by Lady Evelyn Stewart Murray in the closing years of the nineteenth century. This careful attention to the words of each storyteller, and the recognition that

every tale possesses personal and regional inflections that make it a worthy work in its own right, were simply part of a national approach to tradition. Such attentiveness, rare or absent in other nations, simply represents the way things have been done in Scotland.

No matter what outside fantasies of Scotland exist, it is difficult to find any insider cultural characterization of Scotland that does not bring the difference of Lowland and Highland into play. Typically, in characterizing their nation, Scots will identify many more binary divisions: between Gaelic speakers and Scots speakers, between island and mainland, Catholic and Covenanter, nationalist and unionist. I believe that the School's excellence in honoring the uniqueness of every folk artist and work of folk art has to do with Scotland's history of cultural difference. The artists whose work is seen as representing Scotland tend to earn that honor through respectful recognition of difference. I do not think it an accident that Walter Scott earned his reputation as a novelist through *Waverley,* a story of a Sassenach converted through experience to respect for the Highlanders. I do not think it an accident that Burns' reputation as a love poet rests largely on his imagined relationship with a woman who apparently lived just across the Firth of Clyde from him, but who in fact was born into a different cultural world and likely spoke a different language. Scotland's literary myths are consecrated to this notion of difference, and the School of Scottish Studies' great ethnographers are also, in a much more grounded way, conditioned by that same recognition. In their fieldwork, these ethnographers have typically explored two or more different realms. Although brought back to Scotland expressly to record Gaelic-speaking traditions, Calum Maclean also worked with the Scots speakers of the Borders, as his nephew Cailean Maclean narrates in an essay in this book. Hamish Henderson and Alan Bruford mastered the narrative traditions of both Scots and Gaelic speakers. Donald Archie MacDonald, the co-editor of the magisterial *Scottish Traditional Tales,* worked equally with Bruford in putting together a national folk narrative collection based upon these two remarkable corpora. That special double-focused work continues today: Emily Lyle and Margaret Mackay have recorded oral traditions in both Scots and Gaelic, and in the field of community ritual, Neill Martin

has produced studies of both the Gaelic-language courtship rituals of the Highlands and Islands and the Scots-language Galoshins folk plays of the Lowlands (N. Martin 2007a, 2007b).

That respectful recognition of difference has made the School the ideal site for exploring the international comparisons that become increasingly important as the European Union matures and international students come to Edinburgh to learn Scottish ethnology with an eye toward studying the traditions of their native countries as well as those of the host nation. The work that Katherine Campbell has done in Slovenia, that Neill Martin has pursued in Hungary, that Margaret Mackay has constantly fostered among immigrant and minority populations here in Scotland, and that Emily Lyle has undertaken everywhere in her comparative explorations of the ritual year is part of a great expansion that has broadened the base of the School in fruitful ways. In my decade of visiting the School, I have met a German student coming here to study to Scottish Gaelic, as one would expect, but also a Danish student working on Norse Eddic material and an Italian student who has published major work on northern Italian narrative and festive traditions. These students have prospered at the School because this it a place where close comparative research is superlatively done.

This comparatist streak in Scottish folklore comes from honoring every speaker. We are able to discover the one – the one narrator, the one tale, the one singer, the one song – and know the one best, by refusing to surrender the various identities of the many. Close listening, close comparison, and faithfulness to sources has generated a great tradition in scholarship.

The palpable fruits of this scholarship, the measurable wealth of the School, lies of course in its remarkable archives: the sound archive, the tale archive, the Tyree archive, and the print and digital resources that have sprung from these archives. Among the narrative performances recorded in Scotland are those recorded by Calum Maclean, which John Shaw and Andrew Wiseman have recently compiled into a website, one of the richest imaginable resources of Gaelic oral tradition. The monumental Sound Archive, administered by Cathlin Macaulay, is the repository of all of the School's recordings, including the great collections that Hamish Henderson, Alan Bruford, Linda Williamson, Barbara McDermitt and

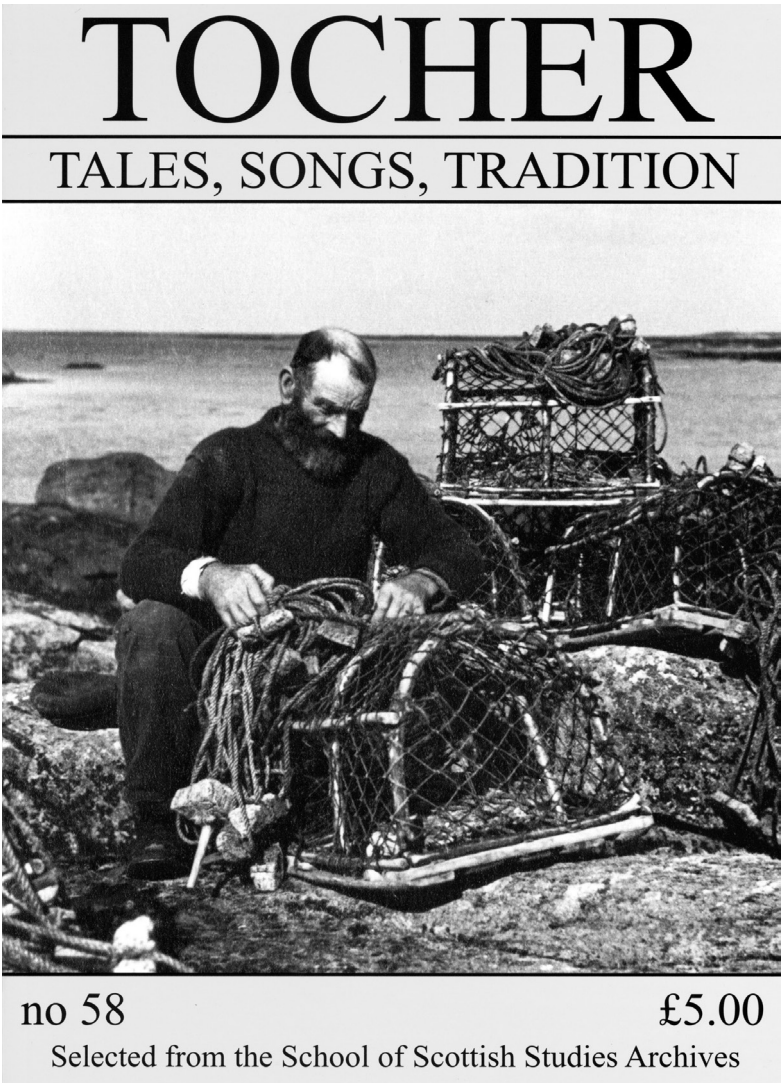
others have made of the Scottish Travellers. The Sound Archive has supplied nearly all of the songs and tales that appeared in *Tocher,* as well as the music and verbal art of the Greentrax series of commercial sound recordings, the *Tobar an Dualchais/Kist o Riches*, and other publically accessible websites.

The value of these collections is inestimable, and it is long past time for the increasingly autonomous Scottish government to fully recognize that what is housed in 27–29 George Square easily rivals anything that can be found in the Scottish National Museum (let alone Holyrood Palace, or the Castle) as a resource for Scottish tradition. In recent years the University of Edinburgh and other governmental institutions have begun to demonstrate their recognition of the School's importance by generously funding the digitalization of the Calum Maclean Collection and many other archival treasures. Thanks to the work of the School anyone, anywhere in the world, can now hear many of the songs and tales that have made *Tocher* the greatest journal of its time.

An Island Community

My only misgiving about digitizing the School's archives is that those who now enjoy these resources could easily forget that – priceless as these recordings are – they are only the frozen representations of great living traditions, and that they exist for us now only because of the network of personal relationships established between the folklorists and the folk.

The second special feature of the School's research, and the single most important reason for its excellence, lies in the bonds that it fostered between folklorist and folk. This is the same reason why *Tocher* is the model folklore journal. *Tocher* was founded on the premise that there is no substitute for local knowledge. *Tocher* was created in the certainty that we cannot properly observe folk culture without entering into it. That we can't just simply *watch* the folk; rather, we must join them. It is an inescapable fact that nearly all of the narratives recorded by the School, and many of the songs as well, are no better than the personal relationships created and maintained in the moments of recording. A true collector of folklore does not merely hold out a mic for the performer, and



A recent issue of Tocher*: no 58*

is not merely seeking information. Rather, to capture lore as it lives, the collector establishes a relationship of engaged insider-ship, a recording environment that allows the performer not merely to deliver the content of a story or the summary of a song, but much more than that. A performance that does justice to the tradition in which it was created must incorporate the structures, styles, strategies, nuances, and attitudes fostered and typically employed within the artist's home community. These are qualities that will easily contort or dissolve if we try to impose a foreign frame of inquiry or interviewing style. The structures and styles we seek are not those of formal performances. Much of the greatest verbal folk artistry is intended not as proscenium art, but rather as '*kitchen table stories*' (Lindahl 2012): intimate, conversational, and above all shared with others who have been brought up exposed to those same styles.

I repeat: our understanding is no *better* than our relationships during interviewing. This is not the same as the postmodern view that our understanding is no *other* than the relationship between interviewer and the interviewee. That view needs to be examined in terms of a brief, broad look back at folklorists' assumptions concerning why we observe and interview in the first place. In early excitement over the folk, the urge to know was spurred by the conviction of shared identity: the researcher and the researched possessed a common origin and therefore a common essence. For Herder, like the Romantic nationalists who followed him, the folk were the best surviving representation of a pure national past; he believed that he needed to study them to discover his and his nation's shared core identity (Herder 1773). When evolutionary theory came to dominate folklore studies, we looked to representatives of more primitive cultures, because they presumably showed us where we came from: they were going through the same stages of development that we had once experienced (Tylor 1871). Both of these early ideas were working in the mind of William Goodell Frost when he looked at the Appalachian mountaineers of the American South and saw them both as his national progenitors and as the generic barbarians on whose sturdy backs all civilization was built: he called them "*our contemporary ancestors*" (Frost 1899).

The impulse to inflict individual and national egos upon communities still survives in pockets of our discipline and positively thrives in many lay perceptions of folklore; it is in reaction to them that postmodern ethnography declared group identity dead. In many po-mo formulations, there is no group consciousness, and no group is recoverable in the act of recording. We are simply a bunch of separate subjective bundles. Because we cannot know anyone else, let us simply examine ourselves. The Post-modernists were certainly correct about a lot of things – for instance, in recognizing that we can never escape our own subjectivity (Tyler 1986, 1987). We may thank them for stressing this necessary perception. Yet it is important to question their proposed solution: to make the goal of fieldwork – "*the comprehension of the self through the detour of the comprehension of the other*" (Rabinow 1977), an enormous dialectical overstatement, perhaps at one time a necessary overstatement, but ultimately a means of keeping the Other, permanently Other.

The great collectors of the School of Scottish Studies never lapsed into this demeaning Post-modernist posture, for three reasons. First, for those who seriously believe that there is such a thing as community culture – or whose disciplinary name, FOLK-LORE, presupposes it – this celebration of individual subjectivity and the goal of self-discovery effectively declare the discipline dead. Elsewhere, there have been attempts to do away with such terms as 'folklore' and 'ethnology' and replace them with 'expressive culture', but through such a move we would lose the sense that we are studying groups: families, neighborhoods, congregations, and the like. And the scholars of the School have not abandoned the group.

A second issue is that Post-modern ethnography, for all its seeming differences from earlier views of folklore, simply repeats the fatal obsession of all the prior approaches: the obsession with *ME*. In seeking our contemporary ancestors, we were looking right past the people in front of us and into the mirror behind them. We believed that we were studying our roots; our goal was to know ourselves. So Post-modernists, in declaring the group dead, were simply making it easy to return to ethnography's – and the West's – favored obsession: me. There is, at root, nothing new and revolutionary about this approach. Its object is strikingly similar to

Herder's and E.B. Tylor's, though– as is typical of Western modernity and Postmodernity – even more selfish. So when Stephen Tyler declares that we can get nothing more from interviews than a kind of mutual therapy – effectively retaining the 'folk narrator' as a personal psychoanalyst, the whole process becomes patently, and by this point unsurprisingly, about us. The 'folk' are reduced to supporting actors in our autobiographical accounts of self-discovery.

The third – and for me, the greatest – problem with this construction of the world as consisting of numberless separate subjectivities is that it is rejected out of hand, in praxis when not explicitly, by many members of many communities. In fact, the subjectivist stance is a tiny minority position, when it is apparent at all, in every group among whom I've conducted extensive fieldwork. At times in the communities that I've studied the sovereign self is asserted as an ideal to the world outside but minimized or erased from practice *within* the group. I remember a friend from a small and economically troubled Louisiana town whom I've been visiting for more than 20 years. He had recently been laid off after an injury on the job; he was out of money and for good reason worried about his health. I suggested that he sign on for workman's compensation. But, even though he had paid into plans that could compensate him for his injury, he said: "*I'll never do that. I'm my own man*" – a powerful display of the self-sovereignty of the face that he shows his employers. But he lived his daily life in a neighborhood network in which self was continually subordinated to interdependent relationship. He had moved away from Louisiana with his nuclear family to work a high-paying job, but after a few months he quit and the family returned because they missed family and neighbors. He could have made a healthy living as a mechanic had he lived in a distant town, and he had tried that once too; instead he returned to spend most of his time fixing relatives' and friends' cars for free or barter. The assertion of being his own man was true on the face that he turned to the outside world: but inside his own community his life was bounded by mutual obligations, and he repeatedly chose that life over a life of independence elsewhere in which he could exercise the supreme selfhood of being his own man. In some isolated contexts,

he paid lip service to the notion that every man can and should be an island — but in his persisting choice to live and act within the tangible boundaries and established networks of his community, his choice to stay within the boundaries of that community nearly always and no matter the expense to him, he spoke and demonstrated an ironclad commitment to, and shared identity with, his family and friends (cf. Lindahl 1997).

So in making self-therapy the goal of fieldwork we set up an impossible representational situation: forcing the narrators' worldviews into a conceptual frame that they rarely if ever share on their home turf. In whatever ontological sense it is true that we are mutually isolated islands of subjectivity, this idea is not even represented as a distant notion in the vast majority of fieldwork that I've conducted. If it is our goal to represent these people on their own terms, we cannot successfully represent them in terms that they themselves reject.

The communities that created the great treasures of the School's archives were (and many remain) extraordinarily close-knit. Most of them experienced a significant isolation: they were island communities, separated from most of the rest of Scotland, not only by water, but language; or Traveller communities, rendered separate by migratory lifestyle and social stigma; or working communities (such as fishing, waulking, herding groups), set apart by prodigious, often subsistence labour. The greatest spur for solidifying groups, intensifying community interaction, and creating rich traditional artistry is a tight *involuntary frame*: people are driven into interdependence by war, disaster, incarceration, economic or geographic necessity, the bigotry of more powerful groups. Whereas the 'folk' groups that dominate our public space (folk musicians, folk dancers, storytelling groups) are increasingly voluntary and recreational in nature, the groups with which the School has worked have shared the involuntary frame: they tend to be communities of both birth and necessity, and their art is testimony to their close neighborly bonds.

The more intensely involuntary the frame, the more readily those within it bond. This fact is borne out in a recent book by Christopher Mylne that chronicles his eighteen months on the dramatically isolated

island of Foula (Mylne 2011). Mylne chose to serve as the island's teacher and lay missionary; once there, though, there was little choice remaining. He was the island's only religious official; he conducted all services and rituals in ways dictated by longstanding community tradition. He was also bound to his fellow islanders in every other aspect of his life, sharing food, shelter, fuel, equipment, physical and emotional strength, as his neighbors did with him. Within the frame of necessity, a richly interdependent community thrived.

The folklorists of the School, like Mylne, chose to study community culture, and, like Mylne, once within the community, did not merely conduct hit-and-run collecting. They became the friends, stalwarts, and advocates of their newfound communities. Some went native, marrying into the families from whom they recorded traditions. Most became champions of their adopted communities' legal rights, as in the case of Hamish Henderson, who fought to ensure the just treatment of Scotland's Travellers.

If you do fieldwork properly, you will soon multiply the list of holiday cards you send and funerals you attend. You will be adopted and loved, and your loves will be the loves of those you study – and 'study' will soon be a term utterly inadequate to describe your relation to your 'folk.' Your fieldwork goal, as necessary to pursue as it is impossible to achieve, will be the representation of the folks you study *on their own terms* – and it will inevitably follow that folklore and folklore fieldwork will be the work of advocacy (Lindahl 2004).

The School's dedication to its traditional communities is so ingrained that to speak to its staff of the importance of community-immersion fieldwork is to bring coals to Newcastle, peat to Islay, wind to Shetland. Yet the folklorist's need to bond with the folk is a requisite that much of the folklore world has not yet learned. In the area of fieldwork that I know best, folk narrative, the greatest American folklorists, those who excelled in local knowledge, people like Vance Randolph and Leonard Roberts, were community insiders but institutionally homeless. In the past thirty years, most of the great North American theory-based folklore programs (University of Pennsylvania, University of Texas, UCLA) have collapsed

under the weight of their theory. Only in recent decades are the programs built on local knowledge beginning to thrive (University of Louisiana, the University of Wisconsin, Western Kentucky University, Memorial University of Newfoundland); at these schools, the local people who clean the dorms and lock the classroom doors at night are often recognized as the cultural experts; in matters of tradition, the enlightened professors will defer to them.

These are not relationships that one can cultivate objectively or impersonally. Many of us were trained academically, before Post-modernism, in the scholarly illusion that one must be objective. I remember a great senior American folklore scholar who had been trained to assert that communities must be studied from a dispassionate emotional distance. Once she got into a debate with a young man, a man committed, like the School's staff, to immersion. The older professor asserted that a great belief scholar was one who did not herself believe in the beliefs that she was studying. The young folklorist responded, "*Does that mean that to study traditional cuisine you would have to be anorexic*?" Or to study folksong, you would have to be deaf? No, if you cultivate distance you will never know the community well enough to represent it adequately in writings or recordings. Rather, you enter into a close relationship that makes the community your teacher. You approach the community caringly, and with the same humility evident in *Tocher.* That humility goes hand in hand with deep community involvement. The staff of the School has so thoroughly internalized the lesson of humility that they boast too little of their work in the company of those academics who have never learned the lesson. In the essays collected here, writer after writer has praised the past great folklorists of the School, but none of them has pointed out that his or her own work displays the same greatness, for the same reasons: Katherine Campbell, Cathlin Macaulay, Margaret Mackay, Morag MacLeod, John Shaw, Doreen Waugh, and Gary West, whose work is presented in this book, share with their mentors absolute humility in the face of the traditions they have studied and absolute dedication to the 'island communities' that shape those traditions. Great singers and storytellers will always tell you that their

art pales in comparison to that of a neighbor or a parent, now gone, who was the greatest of all; just so the School folklorists whose work is published speak of greatness modestly, only in the past tense. But the knowledge and dedication that they have shared in their work reveal that the greatness continues.

Once more: to properly understand the folk whom you study, you must join them. And once you have joined them, you share a responsibility for them, an association that goes far beyond objectivity. In a recent article on the meaning of tradition, Dorothy Noyes has sought to discover the common ground among the various folk she has worked with, their shared sense of tradition. Tradition, she concludes, is the person-to-person transfer of something – "*A practice, a body of knowledge … a song*," a story: "*what is being transferred through the object is not … authority, which fetishizes the giver, nor property, which fetishizes the object while eventually debasing it into a commodity. Rather, the transfer is of responsibility*." One transfers "*the acceptance of responsibility to*" a group. This notion, she writes, "*resonates with the awareness of every performer I've ever encountered that tradition is not at bottom either a badge or pride or an inheritance to display but a job that must be done*" (Noyes 2009: 248). This sounds a bit Calvinistic, but I agree with her. Those who truly live their traditions will not be satisfied simply to proudly display them. They seek others who will continue the job of making the tradition live, others who "*will be willing and [right] to do the work*." Thus the song or story that is transferred is always transferred with a certain awareness – a knowledge of "*what it means, how it is to be used*," in short, the soul of the tradition is not the object itself "*but everything that is shaven off when it is packaged as a product or an entry in a database*." And that is why, as incomparably priceless as are the well-funded websites that now display the fruits of the School's hard labor, they reveal no more than half of the tradition. Scotland needs, and the world needs, the knowledge, the wisdom, the relationships lovingly cultivated between the tradition bearers and the members of the School. There is simply no substitute for that.

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