

Ossian, which purported to be translated from a body of Gaelic epic poetry analogous to Homer, was in fact mostly faked. However, Jefferson was not alone in being impressed. Among others outside of the British Isles who were deeply affected, Goethe depicted his hero Werther as preferring Ossian to Homer ("Ossian has taken Homer's place in my heart. What a world, into which this magnificent hero leads me!"), in a work based on Goethe's own unhappy love affair of 1772-73; and J.G. von Herder saw Ossian as a key example of "the songs of ancient peoples" (in his seminal essay *Briefwechsel über Ossian und die Lieder alter Völker*, written 1771, published 1772).

Since Jefferson is in many other ways a typical Enlightenment guy, it's interesting to see him responding so enthusiastically to this early harbinger of Romanticism, in exactly the same time period as Goethe and Herder. At the same time, it's also possible to read into Jefferson's letter a bit of the early skepticism about *Ossian's* authenticity, more pointedly displayed in his 1775 letter from Samuel Johnson to MacPherson. Certainly he's taking a very American "show me the facts" attitude.

I'm confident that Jefferson never succeeded in getting the Gaelic originals of the *Ossian* poems, and I suspect that his plan to learn Gaelic did not go any further forward. He may have been disappointed by his failure to get the Gaelic originals, or distracted by subsequent events. And yet, I'm impressed that he wanted to try, and believed that he could.

Jefferson the Gaelic Scholar continued from page 5

Slighe nan Gaidheal

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Latha Tumadh Gaidhlig in Seattle on February 11



The "Zero to Gaelic" program will return with another intensive day on Saturday, February 11, at University Heights Center for the Community (55th N.E. and University Way, in Seattle). Slighe nan Gaidheal's founding president, Rich Hill, will continue to work with the beginners' group—and maybe they'll come up with a name for themselves! Invitations are pending to previous presenters to work with the other two groups.

The beginners' series will be meeting for only the second time, so learners who have been working on their own will be able to jump right in, without feeling far behind. (This won't be true in April, so if you've been hesitating, now is the time to join in.)

As usual, the charge is \$35 for members of Slighe nan Gaidheal, \$40 for non-members.

The Gaelic Education Committee asks that participants register in advance (by mail), if they can. Registration and membership forms can be downloaded from the Web site.

Those who plan to register on the day are asked to arrive promptly at 9:30 AM.

Parking is available on-site, but fills up quickly. We will start to wind down the classes at 3:45 PM to be out of the building by the 4:00 PM deadline.

We are all on our own for lunch—brown-bagging is fine and there are good places for lunch nearby, on "The Ave." Contact Chas Talbot (chas@slighe.com) for more information.

Slighe nan Gaidheal's Board of Directors

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Editor Nan Pardew; Layout Robin Scharer

Contributors to this issue: Seumas Gagne, Kent Jewell, Mark Liberman, Ted Neveln and Chas Talbot.

If you would like to work on the Communications Committee, please contact Seumas at (206) 297-8398 or via e-mail at seumas@slighe.com

Next Publication deadline: March 15th, 2006.

Words from the President

The start of a New Year can be both a time for reflection on the past and a time to think about what lies ahead. As the newly-elected president of Slighe nan Gaidheal (SnG), I find myself thinking about my predecessors in the post and all the other board members, past and present, whose hard work means that my job will be much easier. Many things that SnG does now run in a well-oiled fashion, giving us the opportunity to look ahead and plan for the future. What will our organisation be doing in 10 or 20 years' time? What will the state of the Gaelic language as a whole be by then? And what can we do this year to help bring about our aims for the more distant future?

One thing that we know is happening this year is Feis Shiatail. By the time you read this, registration will already have opened, so check out the Web site for more information. I hope to see lots of you there for a wonderful 4 days of Gaelic language, culture, and music. There is a great line-up of presenters from both sides of the Atlantic; this is your chance to soak up all the music and language that they will bring with them.

If you are just starting your journey of learning the Gaelic language, it isn't too late to join our new intake of students on the Zero to Gaelic (Z2G) course. For more information, contact edcomm@slighe.com and look at the Web site. When I started learning Gaelic back in Scotland at the age of 15, I had no idea where it would take me. I certainly had no idea that I would marry an American, end up on the other side of the globe and be the president of a Scottish Gaelic society in Seattle. Where will your adventures with Gaelic lead you? There's only one way to find out...*Agus gur math a thèid leibh!* (And may it go well with you!).

Bliadhna Mhath Ùr

Judith Cummings

Notes from *Litir do Luchd-Ionnsachaidh* continued from page 6

III.

In *Litir 77 Ruairidh* discusses the seasons; he concentrates on tales of *Samhainn* but also has an interesting rhyme about the months of the year:

*Leis an Fhaoilleach, thig an sneachda,
Anns a' Ghearran, tuiltean mòr'.
Gheibh sinn stoirmean anns a' Mhàrt,
Ach tùs nam blàth sa Ghiblean chòir.
Anns a' Chèitean, bidh uain a' leumnaich,
Bheir an t-Ogmhios mòran fais,
Frasan-cinneachaidh san Iuchar
'S an Lùnasdal – sin mìos a' bhàrr.
Measan agus sealg san t-Sultain,
Cnothan anns an Dàmhair dhuinn,
Gailleann 's lomadh chraobh san t-Samhain,
'S an Dùbhlachd dhorch as annsa leinn.*



At the end of each letter he has a discussion of a grammatical point, then a saying, and gives the meanings of some of the vocabulary. So, rather than translating the whole rhyme, here is a copy of his vocabulary: *leis an Fhaoilleach thig an sneachda*: with January comes the snow; *tùs nam blàth sa Ghiblean chòir*: the start of blossoms in pleasant April; *bheir an t-Og-mhios mòran fais*: June brings on much growth; *frasan-cinneachaidh san Iuchar*: growth-inducing showers in July; *mìos a' bhàrr*: the month of crops; *measan agus sealg san t-Sultain*: fruit and hunting in September; *cnothan anns an Dàmhair dhuinn*: nuts in brown October; *gailleann 's lomadh chraobh*: storm and the baring of trees.

He also discusses the phrase as *annsa leinn* in some detail and describes how it is the irregular comparative of *ionmhainn* which means dear or beloved. He concludes by saying: "If you want to write a letter to somebody for whom you feel extreme respect and affection, you might start it 'A charaid ionmhainn...'"

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Gaelic Otherworld: John Gregorson Campbell's Superstitions of the Highlands and Islands of Scotland and Witchcraft and Second Sight in the Highlands and Islands

Ronald Black, Ed.

2005, Birlinn, Ltd., \$20.00, Paperback (available in the U.S. through various distributors)

by Kent Jewell

This massive tome represents another work of vital Gàidhlig scholarship from Edinburgh University's Ronald Black (who edited *An Tuil*, a collection of 20th-century Gàidhlig poetry published in 1999). The work under current consideration is two books written by John Gregorson Campbell (1834-1891), a native Gael from Appin who spent most of his adult life as a minister on the isle of Tiree. *Superstitions* and *Witchcraft* were published as separate books in 1900 and 1902, roughly a decade after Campbell's passing, but Black here re-unites them into the single whole that they were intended to be and provides contextual information. The bulk of the folkloric material for the book was collected on Tiree and throughout the Highlands and Islands primarily in the 1850s and 1860s by Campbell (with assistance from informants and friends).

Why would Black concentrate the better part of two years on putting a couple books of old folklore back together instead of developing his own work? The answer becomes apparent as one lifts this hefty volume. While the text of Campbell's *Superstitions* and *Witchcraft* runs to some 300 pages, the whole work as re-edited and presented by Black runs to almost 900. Black has greatly expanded the work by providing a preface and introduction outlining Campbell's scholarship and writing efforts, noting the contexts of and methods by which he collected the folklore, outlining the uniqueness of the materials, writing a biography of Campbell, providing extensive notes on the Gàidhlig phrasing and idioms captured in the folklore, and providing maps and a lengthy bibliography. Black notes in the introduction that "the main alteration to the structure of the two books lies in the prioritization of Gaelic (where it occurs) over English. This is in fact the primary aim of the present edition." Black, more than re-positioning JGC's use of Gàidhlig, provides much more new and explanatory material in Gàidhlig.

Black also separates out the section of Campbell's work "The Celtic Year," which "offers a brief sketch of the complex matrix of time in which all of the...beliefs and practices are set, including Celtic quarter-days, Gaelic wind-names, Roman months, Latin weekdays and Christian feasts." Black gives this section its own set of footnotes, arguing that the Gaelic calendar is an important "subject in its own right which transcends superstitions, witchcraft, second sight and the otherworlds."

Dr. Black makes a strong case that Campbell's efforts are equal in importance with better-known names in the collection of 19th-century Gàidhlig folklore such as Alexander Carmichael (1832-1912; whose *Carmina Gadelica* was also published after his death in 16 volumes between 1900 and 1974, and caused its own measure of controversy over the years), and John Francis Campbell (1822-1885; published the four-volume *Popular Tales of the West Highlands*). Indeed, he claims that John Gregorson Campbell's work can be considered "among the most important folklore collections ever published." While there are continuing academic debates regarding the veracity and contextualization of much of the folkloric materials collected in the Highlands and Islands in the 19th century, Black argues that the bulk of Campbell's materials can be trusted. Black notes in the Introduction that "JGC's translations were sometimes too literal, sometimes too interpretative, but he never ceased to stress that what he printed in Gaelic was what he had heard." While some have argued that Carmichael's efforts in the *Carmina Gadelica* may have occasionally been embellished, Dr. Black notes, this charge has not generally been made in consideration of JGC's work. Black estimates that JGC collected his materials between 1850 and 1874, and argues convincingly that some of the material collected refers to people and communities in the latter part of the 18th century

continued on page 5

Gaelic Otherworld continued from page 4

While the titles of the two originally published works by JGC give some picture of the topical contents of the folklore that is presented, I would argue that these materials (possibly more so than the *Carmina Gaedelica* provide a full picture of the life of the Gaels in the 19th century. What comes through is much of their worldview, their means of entertaining themselves and remembering cultural and social achievements, their social mores and moral strictures, and a broad perspective of the lessons that they see surrounding them and their communities living in such poverty and amidst the elements of the natural world and with their animals (both of which inspired a huge variety of beliefs and tales). Through the extensive Gàidhlig material, one also gets information about history, place-names, geographic features, and weather, and learns how the folklore and mystical beliefs of these 19th-century Gaels thoroughly interpenetrates the poetry, songs, and the stories that were so important to their lives. In short, anyone interested in learning more about the Gaels will find this material fascinating. As with the materials collected in the *Carmina Gadelica*, it's the kind of work that one can read straight through, but that one finds oneself referring back to both for some measure of inspiration as well as in the capacity of a reference work.

After such a strong recommendation, I should mention a minor quibble that I have with Black's brief attempt in his introduction to provide an analytical or genre-equivalence framework to "understand" or "explain" the folklore. He argues that the Gaelic otherworld can be best understood by being considered as consisting of three parts: the realms of fairies, witches and spirits. He mentions that the stories regarding fairies are along the equivalent of soap operas; stories involving spirits are the functional equivalent of horror stories or movies; and tales mentioning witchcraft or the devil bring to his mind a current rough equivalence in TV news, documentaries and even satire. I wish that he had left his interpretative attempt to this simple statement later in the introduction: "Each of these otherworlds represents a different attempt to probe the mysteries of time and space." The spirit of inherent mystery and wonder is best kept alive when these materials are presented relatively unadorned and not overly analyzed—that way they are no less fascinating than the day they were collected. But I also trust that contemporary readers will appreciate Black's extensive efforts in contextualizing this important folkloric collection.

Jefferson the Gaelic Scholar

(The following article is reprinted by permission of the author; originally posted to the University of Pennsylvania Language Log, June 25, 2004)

by Mark Liberman

I recently learned that Thomas Jefferson, the well-known 18th-century American linguist and politician, once set out to learn Gaelic. Impressed by James MacPherson's *Ossian*, he wrote on Feb. 25, 1773 to a relative of MacPherson's that he had met, one Charles McPherson Albemarle, asking for a copy of the (nonexistent) Gaelic originals:

"Merely for the pleasure of reading his works, I am become desirous of learning the language in which he sung, and of possessing his songs in their original form. Mr. McPherson, I think, informs us he is possessed of the originals. Indeed, a gentleman has lately told me he had seen them in print; but I am afraid he has mistaken a specimen from Temora, annexed to some of the editions of the translation, for the whole works. If they are printed, it will abridge my request and your trouble, to the sending me a printed copy; but if there be more such, my petition is, that you would be so good as to use your interest with Mr. McPherson to obtain leave to take a manuscript copy of them, and procure it to be done."

The letter goes on to make it clear that Jefferson proposed to learn the language in order to read the manuscripts:

"I would further beg the favor of you to give me a catalogue of the books written in that language, and to send me such of them as may be necessary for learning it. These will, of course, include a grammar and dictionary."

continued on back page

Notes from *Litir do Luchd-Ionnsachaidh*

by Ted Neveln

I.
Did you know that the word Penguin is Welsh? *pen* = head, *gwyn* = white. Therefore the exact Gàidhlig cognate of *pen-gwyn* is *ceann-fionn*. I read (and heard) this in *Litir do Luchd-Ionnsachaidh* by Ruairidh MacIlleathain, Litir 27, which I downloaded from the BBC Web site (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/scotland/alba/foghlam/learnghaelic/litir/index.shtml>).

II.
In Litir 37, Ruairidh MacIlleathain mentions that fingers and toes have the same corresponding words, that is to say, *òrdag* serves for both thumb and big toe: *Òrdag-làimhe* or *òrdag coise*. But it does not stay that simple. Depending on one's dialect, the index finger is *sgealbag*, *sgolbag*, *sgolabag*, *sgolagag* or *calagag*. The middle finger can be *meur a mheadhain* or *fionna-fad* or children might say *Fionnladh Fada* or *Màiri Fhada*. The ring finger might be *mac-an-aba* (son of the abbot). The little finger can be called the *lùdag* or *lùdan*.

A children's nursery rhyme goes:

*Seo an tè a leig an sabhal,
Seo an tè a ghoid na sìl,
Seo an tè a sheas ag amharc,
Seo an tè a ruith air falbh,
Is seo an tè bheag a b'fheudar dhi a phàigheadh air fad.*



This is the one that demolished the barn;
This is the one that stole the seed;
This is the one that stood and watched;
This is the one that ran away;
This is the little one that had to pay for it all;

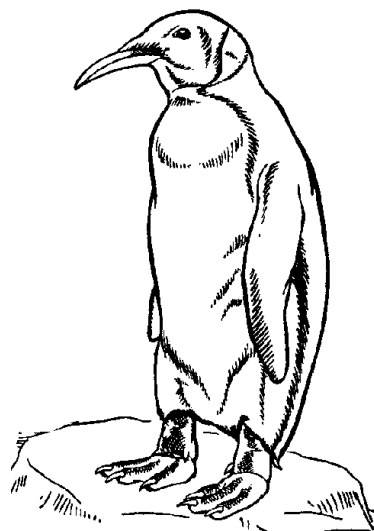
Catriona Parsons gives still more finger names in *Brìgh na Gàidhlig*:
an ordag
a' chorrage
a' mheur mheadhoin
màthair na lùdaig
an lùdag

and this nursery rhyme:

*Seo an té a bhris an sabhal
Seo an té a ghoid an t-arbhar
Seo an té a sheas ag amharc
Seo an té a theich air falbh
Seo an té a dh'inis e, a dh'inis e, a dh'inis e.*

This is the one who broke into the barn,
This is the one who stole the corn,
This is the one who stood watching,
This is the one who ran away,
This is the one that told it, that told it, that told it.

Source: *Brìgh na Gàidhlig*, Pages L-9 and L-10.



Calendar of Events

February 11th, 2006 **Gaelic Intensive Day** Our presenters for this Z2G2 intensive day will be announced soon! The cost for the event is \$30 for current members of Slighe nan Gaidheal, \$40 for non-members. The class will be held between 9:30 AM and 4:30 PM at University Heights Center, which is located at 5031 University Way NE, Seattle, WA 98000. For more information, contact Chas Talbot via e-mail at chas@slighe.com or via phone at (206) 722-4261.

March 18th, 2006 **Seirm Spring Ceilidh** Join Seirm, special guest artist Judith Cummings, and friends for a special evening of Gaelic song. Tickets at the door. \$7 Members, students, and seniors. \$10 General. The concert will be held between 7:30 PM and 10:00 PM at Central Lutheran Church, which is located at 1710 11th Ave, Seattle, WA 98122420. For more information, contact Mairi Fears via e-mail to mary@slighe.com via phone at (425) 258-8945.

April 29th, 2006 **Gaelic Intensive Day** Our presenters for this Z2G2 intensive day will be announced soon! The cost for the event is \$30 for current members of Slighe nan Gaidheal, \$40 for non-members. The class will be held between 9:30 AM and 4:30 PM at University Heights Center, which is located at 5031 University Way NE, Seattle, WA 98000. For more information, contact Chas Talbot via e-mail at chas@slighe.com or via phone at (206) 722-4261.

June 13th, 2006 **Feis Shiatail 2006** Classes, ceilidhs, and community celebration with internationally renowned presenters. Public concert on Friday, June 16th. The event will be held from 6/13/2006 through 6/18/2006 at Fort Worden State Park Conference Center, which is located at 200 Battery Way, Port Townsend, WA 98368. For more information, contact Seumas Gagne via e-mail at seumas@slighe.com or via phone at (206) 297-8398.

September 16th, 2006 **Gaelic Intensive Day** Our presenters for this Z2G2 intensive day will be announced soon! The cost for the event is \$30 for current members of Slighe nan Gaidheal, \$40 for non-members. The class will be held between 9:30 AM and 4:30 PM at University Heights Center, which is located at 5031 University Way NE, Seattle, WA 98000. For more information, contact Chas Talbot via e-mail at chas@slighe.com or via phone at (206) 722-4261.

Board at Full Strength

The Board of Directors of Slighe nan Gaidheal is once again at full strength, with Carole Martin and Taylor Holtz having been elected Directors at the Annual General Meeting on 29 October.

At its November meeting, the Board of Directors elected Judith Cummings to serve as President till November 2006. Ms. Cummings succeeds Penny MacLeod DeGraff, who chose not to seek a second term because of school work. Ms. Cummings also serves on the Gaelic Education Committee.

As Vice-President, the Board elected Mary Fears. Ms. Fears is on staff with Habitat for Humanity in Everett, and chairs the Slighe nan Gaidheal Fundraising Committee and Outreach Committee.

Pandora Fitzpatrick agreed to serve another term as Treasurer, while continuing as Co-Chair of the Féis Shiatail Committee. Chas Talbot will serve as Secretary, Gaelic Education Officer, and chair of the Library and Archives Committee. Long-time Highland Arts Officer Kevin McKenzie was elected to another term in that position.

The remaining members of our Board are Seumas Gagné, who directs Seirm and serves on the Communications Committee, Féis Committee, and Gaelic Education Committee, Taylor Holtz, and Carole Martin (Gaelic Education Committee and Féis Committee).

continued on page 7