

Folklore Material in Ruairaidh Erskine's Gaelic Magazines

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INTRODUCTION

The corpus of dedicated research on the five Gaelic magazines founded by author and activist Ruairaidh Erskine of Mar (Ruairaidh Arascain is Mhàirr, 1869–1960) in the first three decades of the twentieth century is still limited, but those critics who have engaged with them tend to stress their ambition to support new literature and focus on contemporary affairs. According to Donald John MacLeod (Dòmhnall Iain MacLeòid), Erskine ‘held that Gaelic writers, instead of continuing to produce a basically peasant literature or mimicking third-rate Scottish and English exemplars, ought to aim at the same standards as the best European writers of their time’ (1969: 21) and ‘deployed his own capital and his remarkable resources of ideas and of energy to rid Gaelic literature of the influence both of its “peasant origins” and its new “enthusiasm for the music hall” and so to raise it to the same level as the best of English literature’ (1976: 210). Derick Thomson (Ruairaidh MacThòmais), who had a lifelong interest in Erskine’s work, observed that he ‘concentrated on Gaelic writing and publishing in particular, seeing a need to extend the literary range and reinvigorate literary standards, moving away from the music-hall tendency and from the

emphasis on folk-culture, and bringing written Gaelic into the modern world’ (1998: 287).

MacLeod and Thomson naturally emphasized what they perceived as innovative and influential features of Erskine’s periodicals, which were also those that reflected their own preoccupations. This image of the periodicals, while entirely justified on one level, nonetheless downplays the substantial engagement with folklore material and traditional Gaelic culture, which was not innovative in the sense of differentiating Erskine’s ventures from other Gaelic magazines of the time, as similar content appeared regularly, for instance, in *An Deò-ghréine*, the magazine of An Comunn Gàidhealach, but it should not be disregarded.¹ The decision to include this type of content reflects not only the interests of the editor and the contributors but also practical concerns, such as the availability of older anonymous material which was ready to be republished, retold, and translated without copyright strictures. Furthermore, attracting a broader readership, catering to its tastes, and drawing attention to the long and diverse history of Gaelic culture, including its traditional elements, was part of the magazines’ revivalist agenda. This essay is the first attempt to examine folklore and traditional

material in the corpus to provide a more nuanced understanding of the magazines' profile, the networks of contributors involved in them, and their influence on following Gaelic initiatives.

THE MAGAZINES

Erskine's first venture into Gaelic periodical press was the bilingual monthly *Am Bàrd* ('The Poet', 1901–1902). Even the first issue (May 1909) reveals the characteristic mixture of radical and innovative content and more approachable items, and a substantial involvement with folklore and traditional culture. It opens with a praise poem to the magazine by Neil MacLeod (Niall MacLeòid, c. 1845–1913) – already a popular songwriter who could be perceived as a representative of nostalgic traditional poetry – and yet, his name appears regularly in Erskine's periodicals, together with other traditional poets such as Alexander Cameron (Alasdair Camshron, 1848–1933), 'Bàrd Thùrnaig'. Over its relatively short existence, the monthly featured a substantial corpus of folklore material, including retellings of traditional tales with commentary, such as 'A' Ghobhar Ghlas' (June 1901) with commentary by 'Iain', i.e. John MacRury (Iain MacRuairidh, 1843–1907), folktales retold by 'Dearg MacDhonnchaidh', which was a pseudonym used by Charles Moncrieff Robertson (1864–1927), and a discussion of the traditional way of counting sheep in Welsh, 'Àireamh nan Caorach' (September 1901), by a contributor using the pseudonym 'Loch-Aic'.² 'Loch-Aic' also supplied the Gaelic retellings of the Manx tale 'Am Buggane' (June 1901), about the shapeshifting being endemic to

the island's folklore, and of the Welsh story 'Na Leth-Aonan Sith' (June 1901). These three pieces tie in with the important pan-Celtic dimension of the magazines which involved not only articles reporting on congresses and contributions by influential representatives of local revivalist movements but also interest in the traditional culture and folklore of fellow Celtic countries.

Furthermore, *Am Bàrd* reveals Erskine's contact with the Edinburgh Gaelic scene and with the influential family of the folklore collector and compiler of *Carmina Gadelica* Alexander Carmichael (Alasdair MacGilleMhicheil, 1832–1912). The fifth issue of *Am Bàrd* published an advertisement for the upcoming programme of the Celtic Union (September 1909), presided over by Alexander Carmichael and Robert Blair. The list featured, among other events, talks by Ella C. Carmichael (Ealasaid C. NicGilleMhicheil, 1870–1928), who, apart from being Alexander's daughter and assistant, was a respected Celtic scholar in her own right, and by Erskine himself. While Ella Carmichael published several pieces in *Am Bàrd*, no contribution by Alexander Carmichael himself has been identified with certainty so far, but he constitutes one of the major presences in the magazines in terms of references and appreciative comments.³

The quarterly *Guth na Bliadhna* ('The Voice of the Year', 1904–1925), Erskine's most viable project, was initially bilingual and switched to all-Gaelic content in 1919. Some directions evident in *Am Bàrd* were developed further in the quarterly, including the interest in the tales of the Fianna. The summer issue of 1904 included a prose tale

about Fionn, ‘Sgeulachd Gharaidh’, singed by ‘A. McD’. The same tale was later reprinted in *An Sgeulaiche* (‘The Storyteller’, 1909–10 monthly, 1910–11 quarterly), this time with the note that it was ‘air a chur sìos leis an Athair Gilleasbuig Dòmhnallach nach maireann’ [recorded by the late Rev. Archibald MacDonald] (1909: 298).⁴ Similarly, *Guth na Bliadhna* followed the pan-Celtic preoccupations, including the publication of folklore material from other Celtic countries. The very first issue of the quarterly (Winter 1904) featured ‘A Connaght Love-song’ (Da mbeith ‘aitreabh agam fein), with English translation by ‘An Craoibhín Aoibhinn’ [the pleasant little branch], which was the established *nom-de-plume* of the Irish scholar and revivalist Douglas Hyde (1860–1949), later the first president of Ireland. Over the years, Hyde made several other contributions, in all cases but one Irish poems and songs presented with his translations into English: ‘Mallachd’, the transcription of a curse composed by an anonymous Irish poet in County Kerry (Spring 1904), a selection of Irish religious poetry ‘Dàin Naomha Èireannaich’ (Spring 1905), and ‘A Mhuire nan Gras’, transcribed from the oral recitation of a shepherd in the Aran Islands (Autumn 1916). These contributions reflect Hyde’s activities as a Gaelic scholar and represent an important complement to his political and public presence.

Guth na Bliadhna provides more proof of Erskine’s contacts with Celtic scholars and folklore collectors and experts, often connected to the University of Glasgow. Already in *Am Bàrd* (May 1901), Erskine published an article

on ‘Celtic Manuscripts’ by Magnus MacLean (Mànus MacGill-Eain, 1858–1937), the first lecturer in Celtic at the University of Glasgow. The very first issue of *Guth na Bliadhna* featured an appreciative essay ‘Gaelic Literature and Professor Kuno Meyer’ and an unattributed translation of a poem included in Meyer’s anthology *Ancient Irish Poetry* into modern Gaelic by ‘Alasdair Beag.’⁵ Meyer (1858–1919), a German scholar who specialised in Celtic philology and served as MacCallum lecturer in Celtic at the University of Glasgow in 1903–1906, constitutes another large presence in Erskine’s magazines.⁶ Apart from a letter reprinted in *Am Bàrd* (August 1901) where Meyer expresses his support of the magazine and highlights the importance of international cooperation between Celtic countries, there are no contributions clearly attributable to him, although it is possible he was using a pseudonym. Extracts from Meyer’s *Selections from Ancient Irish Poetry* (1911) were regularly featured, usually with a translation into Scottish Gaelic provided by Erskine’s regular contributors Malcolm MacFarlane (Calum MacPhàrlain, 1853–1931) and Donald Sinclair (Dòmhnall Mac na Ceàrdaich, 1885–1932). When Meyer died in October 1919, Erskine reflected on his demise in the next issue of the quarterly (Winter 1919), and a series of Sinclair’s translations from *Ancient Irish Poetry* was published from the spring until the autumn of 1920, as an immediate tribute to the scholar’s life and work.

The essay on Meyer and Gaelic literature also criticises the underused potential of Scottish manuscript collections: ‘Our national MSS. (a

rich and valuable collection) lie untranslated in the Advocates' Library in Edinburgh, principally because those who would like to translate them are incapable of doing so; whilst those who could do so lack either the time or the inclination to translate them' (1904: 26). In the following years, the quarterly indeed endeavoured to contribute to a change in this respect.

Guth na Bliadhna also published more recently collected folklore material. The autumn issue of 1905 included the tale 'Ciad Mhac Rìogh Afraca' with the note: 'An so sìos focal air an fhocal leis an Ollamh Seòras Mac Eanraig o bheul-aithris Iain Mhic Fhiongain, an Dalabrog, Uibhist Chinn a Deas' [This was recorded word by word by Dr George Henderson from the oral recitation of John Mackinnon, Dalibrog, South Uist] (1905: 353), and with further commentary by George Henderson about the tradition bearer, his style and manner of delivery, and the story itself. Henderson (Deòrsa MacEanraig, 1866–1912), who became a lecturer in Celtic at the University of Glasgow after studying in Edinburgh, Oxford, Berlin, and Vienna, is another respected scholar contributing to Erskine's magazines and, like Hamburg-born Meyer, had strong links to Celtic studies in Central Europe.

Some of the folklore submissions came from the pen of major Gaelic literary figures. Allan MacDonald (Ailean Dòmhnallach, 1859–1905) published his poem 'Eilein na h-Òige' in the second issue of *Guth na Bliadhna*. According to Ronald Black's bibliography (2002: 505), MacDonald is also the likely transcriber of several prose folktales that appeared in the quarterly

in 1904–1905, signed as 'Iain Mac an Tàilleir' and 'Alasdair Ruadh'. The winter issue of 1909 published the folktale 'Cath nan Ian a Bha 'n Eirinn', transcribed by John MacCormick (Iain MacCormaig, 1860–1947) from the recitation of Alasdair MacLucais in Mull. MacCormick was a prolific contributor to Erskine's magazines in a number of genres, from original prose to essays and a comic play, and he had a lifelong interest in the history and tradition of his native Mull.

Over the spring and summer issue of 1912, the quarterly published 'A' Bhean-Nighe, or Loireag', a substantial two-part essay on the figure of the 'washing woman' in Gaelic folklore, signed by the pseudonym 'Sithiche'. The essay provides a summary of the figure's appearances with extensive quotes and detailed references to manuscript sources, the work of scholars including John Gregorson Campbell, John Francis Campbell, Ella Carmichael, and Alexander Carmichael, and articles in academic journals and the periodical press, and information from tradition bearers, as the essay refers to a statement from 'Alasdair Ross, of Colbost, Skye' which 'Sithiche' 'took down from his lips' (1912b: 338). Apart from these, it also features more surprising references to figures such as the novelist Maria Corelli and the Irish leader Charles Stewart Parnell, and to the euhemeristic view of the fairies and changelings, proposing that they are in fact an aboriginal human tribe which predated the Celts in the British Isles and has been developing separately.⁷ All these features would indicate Erskine's authorship.⁸ When 'A' Bhean-Nighe' was later republished as a separate booklet in the series *Leabhraichean nan Ceilidh*,

there was no indication of authorship either. The series reprinted articles, stories, and plays from Erskine's magazines and included at least forty-six numbers, but due to their ephemeral quality, they were not frequently acquired by libraries (MacLeod 1969: 61). The essay about the washing woman was reissued as no. 38. However, the authorship is revealed in the *Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness* XXXIV, where John G. Mackay indicates in Footnote 66 to his essay: 'See my monograph on this creature, A' Bhean-nighe (*Guth na Bliadhna*, IX, pp. 195, 333)' (1927-28, 64). This attributes him beyond doubt as 'Sithiche,' and illustrates the intricacies of attributing anonymous and pseudonymous content among Erskine and some of his regular contributors, due to shared interests and common preoccupations of the time.

In the same issue as the second part of 'Bean-Nighe', *Guth na Bliadhna* featured the folktale 'Rogailleach Mac an Orracaillich', which was accompanied by the following note: 'Is i so sgeulachd air na làithean a dh'aom air a h-innseadh le Alasdair Camshron, Achadh-mòr, Poll-iù, mar bu chleachdadh aithris aig a' chèilidh' [This tale of bygone days was told by Alexander Cameron, Achadh Mor, Poolewe, according to the storytelling customs at a ceilidh] (1912: 367). It seems most likely that this is Alexander Cameron, 'Bàrd Thùrnaig', who lived in Achadh Mor, contributed poetry to Erskine's magazines, and was supportive of his initiatives.⁹

Other contributions concerning folklore and traditional culture in the quarterly, including transcriptions of tales and essays on topics such

as the folksong tradition and proverbs, were supplied by some of Erskine's most prolific collaborators, including John N. MacLeod (Iain N. MacLeòid) and Henry 'Fionn' Whyte (Eanraig MacIlleBhàin). They constitute a substantial and fairly regularly distributed corpus, although in the later years, the quarterly drifted more towards new writing and discussion of contemporary affairs.

Guth na Bliadhna, focused as it was on substantial essays and with a strong religious and political agenda, was in 1909 supplemented by *An Sgeulaiche* as a lighter companion which published mostly new Gaelic fiction but also plays, songs, translations, and folklore material. It featured some reprints from the quarterly, including the tales selected by John N. MacLeod. Some of the folktales in *An Sgeulaiche* were presented as reading for children. The weekly newspaper *Alba* ('Scotland'), which first appeared in 1908-1909 and was revived for another run in 1920-1921, interspersed coverage of current affairs with both anonymous and attributed songs. In Issue 34 (26 September 1908), the weekly published the tale 'Nighean Rìgh na Spàinntè' [King of Spain's Daughter], which led to a discussion in the letter sections with contributions from the author and historian Martin Hume (14 November 1908) and from the folklore collector, author, and critic Andrew Lang (28 November 1908).

ERSKINE'S MAGAZINES & JOHN FRANCIS CAMPBELL

Another important aspect of the magazines' engagement with folklore is that they provided a platform for publishing material from the

manuscripts of John Francis Campbell (Iain Frangan Caimbeul, 1821–1885), one of the most influential nineteenth-century collectors of Gaelic folklore, whose four-volume *Popular Tales of the West Highlands* constitute a landmark in the field. Although he could not have made any actual submissions to Erskine's magazines, having died sixteen years before the first issue of *Am Bàrd* came out, Campbell constitutes another important presence in Erskine's periodicals, and material from his archive appeared in three out of five. Erskine could have felt affinity to him in terms of sharing an aristocratic background, moving in fashionable society, and coming to Gaelic as a learner, rather than being brought up in a Gaelic-speaking family, although Campbell had much more immediate access to the language in the community in Islay.¹⁰ In a series of programmatic essays on Gaelic drama, which was a genre he especially sought to further for artistic and revivalist reasons, Erskine recommended topics from Campbell's *Popular Tales* as subject material for symbolist drama in Gaelic:

No one, I maintain, can take up such a book as Campbell's *West Highland Tales* without being struck by the richness and abundance of the raw material for Symbolic drama therein supplied. What would not the author of *The Blue Bird* – an indifferent example of the Symbolic play – give for such material? Yet, who amongst the Scottish Gael has yet thought of making use of Campbell's collection for stage purposes? (1914: 82)

Here, traditional material meets with revivalist programme for new Gaelic writing aspiring to contemporary European trends, in the manner

of Continental revivals (and it would have been interesting to see how Maurice Maeterlinck, the author of the 'indifferent Symbolic play', would have responded to Erskine's proposal). In his own Gaelic plays, which so far has not been subject to any detailed critical analysis, apart from short commentary by Donald John MacLeod (1969: 161–162), Erskine does not follow this advice, and the plays are more reminiscent of the symbolist drama of W. B. Yeats, Auguste de Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, and indeed Maeterlinck himself.

In 1885, Campbell left his papers to the Advocates' Library in Edinburgh, where Erskine and his collaborators could have accessed them, and the awareness of the richness of the material is evident in the first issue of *Guth na Bliadhna*, as cited above.¹¹ The first appearance of material from Campbell's manuscripts in Erskine's periodicals was rather inconspicuous. The spring issue of *An Sgeulaiche* in 1911 included the prose tale 'Clann an Rìgh fo Gheasaibh', accompanied by a brief footnote: 'Is ann am measg a cho-chruinneachaidh ainmeil sin aig I. F. Caimbeul nach maireann a fhuireadh an seann-sgeul seo. Faodar a ràdh nach deach a chur an clò riamh roimh seo. Fear *An Sgeulaiche*.' [This old story comes from the famous collection by the late J. F. Campbell. It should be said that it has not appeared in print before. The editor of *An Sgeulaiche*.] (1911: 65). *An Sgeulaiche* was the least scholarly of all Erskine's Gaelic magazines, so readers would likely be most interested in the story itself, rather than in details about its provenance and transmission. However, even in *Guth na Bliadhna*, which was much more academic, the initial presentation

was surprisingly casual. The first tale included in the quarterly was 'Fear a' Bhratain Uaine' which appeared in the autumn issue of 1912 with no attribution whatsoever, but when it came out as a booklet as no. 23 in *Leabhraichean nan Ceilidh*, it was introduced as 'seann sgeul, le I. F. Caimbeul, Iain Òg Ìle' [an old tale by J. F. Campbell, Young John of Islay].

The third tale, 'Iain Òg, Mac Rìgh na Frainge', which was brought out in the winter issue of 1914, was introduced with more care:

From Roderick MacNeill, labourer, Glen, Barra. 'Heard it from many old men of whom are those already mentioned'. From the unpublished M. S. Collections of the late J. F. Campbell of Islay, listed in the famous *West Highland Tales*, Vol. IV, page 402, as tale 31. Campbell says of the story on the flyleaf to it, 'One of the regular Highland stories which have nothing earthly to do with books of any kind that I ever read – quite peculiar.' (1914: 479–480)

This indicates a growing attention paid to the presentation of folklore material. In the following year, 'An Tuairisgeal Mòr' appeared in two parts, in the summer and autumn issue of 1915.¹² This time, it was not a mere reprint of the tale alone but a substantial critical essay which analyses and compares 'two unpublished versions of this wild story were found in the magnificent MS. Collections of the late J. F. Campbell of Islay' (1915: 218), draws on other sources, and provides detailed commentary about the versions, vocabulary, sources, a list of related stories, and the stories themselves in Gaelic.

'An Tuairisgeal Mòr' is signed by 'I. M. A.', which is undoubtedly John G. Mackay (Iain

MacAoidh, 1869–1942).¹³ Mackay was involved already in *Am Bàrd*, supplying a regular section on Gaelic idioms, and he was also an active member of the London Gaelic scene, which is likely where Erskine made his acquaintance (Gillies 1990: 517). Mackay also published tales from Campbell's manuscripts in *An Deò-ghréine*, with translations and intended as learning materials. Eventually, he went on to translate many of the folktales collected by Campbell, and he edited the two-volume *More West Highland Tales* (1940 & 1960), in which he included the tales that had previously appeared in Erskine's quarterly.¹⁴ The possibility to publish the tales in Erskine's magazines seems to have been an important prequel to these subsequent developments in making more material from Campbell's manuscripts available to readers and scholars, although these early appearances are not mentioned at all in the introductory material supplied by Mackay and other scholars in *More West Highland Tales*.

Guth na Bliadhna featured two more tales from Campbell's manuscripts, but these were presented in connection with John Dewar. Dewar (Iain Mac an Deòir, 1802–1872) was one of the collectors who supplied transcriptions of material to Campbell.¹⁵ Their presentation in Erskine's quarterly stresses the importance of the content but draws attention to Dewar's interference and suggests that they fail to reach the same standard as those by Campbell himself.¹⁶ The story 'Mogan Dearg Mac Iachair', which appeared in the winter issue of 1913, is accompanied by a note that includes information about the tale and the transcription from Campbell's manuscripts,

and further discourse on the tale with references to Campbell's *Popular Tales*, J. G. Campbell's *Superstitions, Waifs and Strays*, and other sources on the topic of the 'tamhasg' in general. This commentary is not attributed, but it was probably supplied by John G. Mackay.

The second tale transcribed by Dewar, 'An t-Uirsgeul aig na Rìghrean, Rìgh na h-Iuraibhinn agus Rìgh nan Ailp', appeared in the spring issue of 1916 with the note: 'I heard this from a servant maid, that was in my father's employment, some time before 1812' (1916: 140). Again, it is accompanied an unattributed note, likely by Mackay, which theorizes about the age of the tale and asserts that the 'magnificent story' is 'spoilt by the Transcriber, Dewar, who alters his Gaelic to fit English (as J. F. Campbell himself remarks)' (1916: 140), putting Campbell forward as the ultimate authority but also making readers aware of how transcription and presentation shape the way oral tradition is preserved.

In 1917, Erskine published the first issue of *An Ròsarnach* ('The Rose Garden'), a lavishly produced annual which featured mostly essays, new writing, and illustrations. The volume concluded with the folktale 'Nighean Rìgh-fo-Thuinn', attributed in the list of contents as 'seann-sgeulachd fo làimh Iain Mhic Aoidh' [an old tale presented by John Mackay]. It opens with a transcription of Campbell's English summary of the tale, preserved on the back side of a page on which the story was written down. At the end of the tale, it includes the following information: 'From Roderick MacLean, Tailor, Ken Tangval, Barra, who heard it frequently recited by old men

in South Uist, about fifteen years ago. One of them was Angus MacIntyre, Bornish, who was about 80 years of age at the time. (Fios tha so a chaidh a thoirt seachad le Eachann MacGilleathain)' [Information from Hector MacLean] (1917: 227). The same tale had also been included in the third volume of *Popular Tales of the West Highlands*, with the same attribution as to the tradition-bearer.¹⁷

In *An Ròsarnach*, the story was accompanied by three original illustrations by Andrew Scott Rankin, credited as 'A. Sgott Mac Fhraing'. Scott Rankin (1868–1942) was a painter and a native Gaelic speaker from Aberfeldy who supplied several original artworks for the annual. The same tale is the subject of a drawing by John Duncan, which appeared in D. A. Mackenzie's *Wonder Tales from Scottish Myth & Legend*, also published in 1917. In contrast to Duncan's elegant, elongated figures and characteristic focus on ornament and decoration, Rankin's three illustrations are much more robust, even humorous, and reminiscent of visuals for a children's book. Nonetheless, they lend the tale a visual prominence and testify to the importance accredited to Campbell's work and to the tradition preserved thanks to it by Erskine and his collaborators, as Erskine would have decided about which content was to be illustrated and organize the commissions accordingly.

CONCLUSION

Apart from their proclaimed support for new Gaelic writing, Erskine's Gaelic magazines continuously provided a platform for bringing out important folklore material, contributed to the dissemination of previously unpublished tales

from J. F. Campbell's manuscripts, and attracted some of the most influential Celtic scholars and collectors of the time as their contributors. They did not present folklore and tradition as the well of Scottish nationhood and the only source of Gaelic culture but integrated them as one of the core aspects. This dimension has rarely been mentioned in the limited corpus of existing scholarship. Engaging with folklore material from Erskine's magazines opens a new perspective onto the development of Celtic studies, changing practices of collecting, publishing, and presenting folklore material, and onto the careers of major collectors and scholars, including hitherto overlooked interests and achievements.

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Endnotes

- 1 For complete overviews of the magazines' contents and a database of contributors, see 'ERSKINE: Exploring the Gaelic Magazines Founded by Ruairaidh Erskine of Mar', <https://erskine.glasgow.ac.uk/> [accessed 11 September 2025]. There is also a dedicated section listing 'Folklore Material and Traditional Tales', <https://erskine.glasgow.ac.uk/topics/folklore-material-and-traditional-tales/>.

- 2 Sheila Kidd has brought to my attention the letter ‘Highlanders and the Gaelic in Liverpool’ from *Oban Times* (17 November 1900), signed by ‘Loch Aic, Liverpool’. It could therefore be somebody from Kuno Meyer’s circle, as he lectured at Liverpool University for almost thirty years since 1895, possibly even Meyer himself.
- 3 One possibility is the article ‘Ancient Holy Wells in Scotland’ from *Guth na Bliadhna* I: 4 (1904), signed with the initials ‘A. C.’ – the same Alexander Carmichael used in when contributing to the *Highlander*. I am grateful to Ronald Black and Sheila Kidd for leads in this respect. Erskine composed a poem upon Carmichael’s death which appeared in *Guth na Bliadhna* IX: 3 (1912).
- 4 Given the indication MacDonald had passed away by this time, it cannot be the scholar and translator Rev. Archibald MacDonald (Gilleasbuig MacDhòmhnaill, 1853–1948) of Kiltarlity, otherwise a likely candidate.
- 5 ‘Alasdair Beag’ could be Erskine himself, or possibly John G. Mackay, for reasons outlined below.
- 6 See ‘Prof. Kuno Meyer 1903–1906’, *Sgeul na Gàidhlig aig Oilthigh Ghlaschu / The Gaelic Story at the University of Glasgow*, <https://sgeulnagaidhlig.ac.uk/20th-c-department-of-celtic/?lang=en> [accessed 12 October 2024].
- 7 In this respect, the essay taps into a similar idea as Arthur Machen in stories such as ‘The Shining Pyramid’ and ‘The Red Hand’. Given Machen’s Welsh origin, his involvement in the London magazine scene in the 1890s and in the Hermetic Order (another member, John William Brodie-Innes, delivered a lecture for the Celtic Union in Edinburgh in December 1901, in the same series as Erskine), and his interest in Celtic Christianity, it is tempting to consider possible influences within the Celtic circles in London, not merely the general climate of the period.
- 8 Ronald Black, in his introduction to *The Gaelic Otherworld*, an edition of J. G. Campbell’s *Superstitions of the Highlands and Islands of Scotland*, suggests that ‘Sithiche’ is indeed Erskine himself, and lists him, alongside David MacRitchie and W. C. Mackenzie, as the ‘proponents of the racial theory’ of the Fairies’ (2005: xxvi).
- 9 However, the story is not included in the volume that brought together Cameron’s prose, poetry, and letters: Moffat-Pender, I., ed (1926), *Am Bàrd: Òran, Sgrìobhadhean, is Litrichean: Bàrd Thurnaig (Alasdair Camshron)*, Edinburgh: Urquhart & Son.
- 10 As Black and Dreacup note, Campbell grew up in the island and ‘the Gaelic part of his education was seen to by his father’s piper, John Campbell from Lorn (1795–1831)’ (2024: 11).
- 11 In 1925, the collection was presented by the Faculty of Advocates to the National Library of Scotland, which has held it since (Adv.MSS.50.1.1–51.2.7), <https://manuscripts.nls.uk/repositories/2/resources/16292> [accessed 11 September 2025].
- 12 This volume of the *TGSI* featured several regular contributors to Erskine’s magazines, including James MacDiarmid (Seumas MacDhiarmaid, 1851–1930), Alexander ‘Gleannach’ MacDonald (Alasdair MacDhòmhnaill, 1860–1928), and Hector MacDougall (Eachann MacDhùghaill, 1880–1954).
- 13 Not to be confused with John Mackay of Hereford (1822–1906), originally from Sutherland, likewise a Celtic scholar, author of publications on the place-names of Sutherland and the Highland Regiments, and president of An Comunn Gàidhealach in 1895–1896; and John Gunn Mackay (1848–1924), born in Lochalsh, an expert on Highland tartans, one of the leaders of the movement supporting the Valtos crofters in 1881, and a Portree businessman. For information about them, see Loughran (2018).
- 14 These were: ‘An Tuairisgeal Mòr’ and ‘Iain Òg, Mac Rìgh na Frainge’ in *More West Highland Tales*, Vol. I, and ‘Mac an Rìgh agus Fear a’ Bhratain Uaine’ and ‘Clann an Rìgh fo Gheasaibh’ in *More West Highland Tales*, Vol. II.
- 15 Dewar’s writings are currently the subject of the Dewar Project, which seeks to transcribe, analyse, and publish his ten manuscripts. The first volume, *John Dewar’s Islay, Jura, and Colonsay*, ed. Ronald Black and Christopher Dracup, was published in 2024.
- 16 As Black and Dreacup note, Campbell would supervise and annotate Dewar’s work, leaving notes in the manuscripts in margins, on the versos, or on separate sheets of paper, including general observations, comments on the stories, and remarks concerning Dewar’s style (2024: 11–12).
- 17 ‘LXXXVI: Nighean Rìgh fo Thuinn’, in Campbell, J. F., ed (1862), *Popular Tales of the West Highlands* Vol. III, Edinburgh: Edmonston and Douglas, pp. 403–422. It is preceded by the same commentary as in *An Ròsarnach*,

which however omits Campbell's reasons to include the tale: 'as it shews one of the Ossianic heroes in very mythological character' (403).

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