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**Nearly Dark, Darkly Near**

**Telling Tales: Storytelling in the Scottish oral tradition and the problems inherent in attempts to study, preserve or continue it: a suggested methodology for future interactions.**

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## Declaration

This thesis was composed by the student. All work, unless otherwise referenced, is entirely their own.

The work has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

Signed,

Greg Whelan

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## Abstract

This doctoral thesis is composed of two separate sections: a novel and a contextualising critical discussion.

The novel deals with a thirteen-year-old boy named Morgan whose parents are separating, moving him from a comfortable city life to his mother's hometown in rural Perthshire. There he begins a friendship with a mysterious young girl and together they tap into the landscape's rich cultural history of Scottish tales and folklore. Split between parents he cannot understand and an ancient world of which he is not a part, Morgan's flirtations with Scottish storytelling become a search for personal history and heritage, culminating in Morgan crafting his own story. This final story acts as a teller-created bildungsroman but also challenges the authority and validity of the stories that he is told, highlighting the fallacy of any concepts of "ownership" inherent in them.

The critical portion contextualises Morgan's tale. It discusses how we problematize our interactions with the form of storytelling by fixing it as linear history to promote it as a national signifier or cultural vessel. The paper discusses this by engaging with the novel's main themes through three distinct sections. The first examines eighteenth century engagements with Scottish storytelling and their role in creating national identity. It focuses on MacPherson's Ossian scandals, Scott and Burns. The second section examines how this fractious groundwork developed during the twentieth century folk revivals and the cultural engagements of Henderson and the Scottish travellers. The final section discusses methodology and both the problems and strengths of contemporary academic responses. The paper argues that we have developed a methodology that is too rigid and reverential, often essentializing "fixed" understandings of storytelling in attempts to distribute ownership or champion nationalistic priorities. The thesis argues that attempts to preserve or promote the form often work to limit it. To make any progress in developing the "tradition", we must approach it with a critical methodology that is free of elitism and allows new patrons of whatever experience or knowledge to contribute to it. The discussion poses that this is only possible if our critical and academic interactions become as malleable as the form itself: rather than attempt to absolve or excuse the difficulties and historical contradictions inherent in the form, it must openly embrace them as a vital part of a very "Scottish" form of storytelling.

### Telling Tales

**Storytelling in the Scottish oral tradition and the problems inherent in attempts to study, preserve or continue it: a suggested methodology for future interactions.**

## 1. Orality, Preservation and Scotland

*N.B. The many facets of oral cultures and traditions have a highly metonymic relationship. Therefore, unless otherwise stated, when a singular term is used within this paper, it is intended that it also encapsulate many of the other inter-woven forms. For example, the storytelling of this paper refers not merely to the telling of tales, but the umbrella network that composes the canon of Scottish oral tradition and folklore, ranging from lyrics, poetry, fairy tales, myths, legends and ballads. This paper does not group them together with reductive intention, but rather for the sake of simplicity and fluidity within the discussion.*

*Gie noo a thocht to what we hae in this land o' the leal*

*The Highland glen, the Doric stream the fertile Lowland field*

*They seem tae offer different views when looked at from within*

*Can strangers be the only eyes to see it a' as yin*

*The choice will be upon us soon tae set oor destiny*

*I'll drink a toast tae Scotland yet whaever ye may be*

*Oor mither tongue spoke different weys that past tae present ties*

*Each separate and yet entwined that's where oor real strength lies*

*For should one strand unwind itself the others tae forsake*

*Then a' would be forever lost fur a' the strands would break.*

- **Scotland Yet**

**Davy Steele**

As Scotland move towards the independence referendum currently dated for the 18<sup>th</sup> of September 2014, the notions of Steele's song and its many references to Scottish cultural heritage are once again highly pertinent. But why is this the case?

Whether intentionally or not, Davy Steele's song – written for the 1997 Scottish referendum result – is a telling beast. Its lyrics espouse a sentimental and nationalistic notion of Scotland, demonstrating a nation that is fuelled by the synthetic coupling of romanticised history

with a glorified and fixed tradition. Indeed, this has been a prevalent and yet divisive notion throughout the progression and development of Scottish cultural history, and yet has managed also to emphasise the unifying importance of orality.

In his text, *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson states that, “many ‘old nations,’ once thoughtfully consolidated, find themselves challenged by ‘sub’-nationalisms within their borders – nationalisms which, naturally, dream of shedding this sub-ness one happy day.” (Anderson, 2006, p.3) Scotland is currently a prime example of one of these ‘sub-nations’ within the United Kingdom – though some would argue that it has been that way since the Union of 1707. Scotland however, proves more problematic than Anderson’s definition, often portraying itself as a patchwork quilt of further ‘sub-nations’ who are tied (at times somewhat tenuously) by conceptions of a shared history and cultural heritage. In no part of this shared culture is this more evident than in Scottish storytelling and oral culture.

This is not surprising, nor is it specific to Scotland: storytelling and oral transmission have long been regarded as carrying vessels for identity, community, nationality, history, languages and cultures both active and inactive:

A story provides a self-portrait: a linguistic lens through which to discover peoples' own (somewhat idealized) views of themselves as situated in a social structure... to provide a view of self that can be either challenged or validated by an audience. (Schiffrin, 1996, p.199)

It is these values, then, that drive Steele’s lyrics to insist that we try to preserve and cultivate our oral traditions and natures. Certainly, they have proven themselves worth preserving.

However, this is fundamentally problematic: Scottish tradition is not fixed to a tangible rooted ‘Ancient Scotland.’ As such, conceptions of what Scotland’s tradition signifies are constantly redefined by the ever-shifting paradigm of the Scottish national psyche. While this fits

the ever-changing nature of oral exchange very well, preservative attempts often struggle to follow such a malleable model. As such, this paper shall work to show how preservation efforts could be strengthened by tapping into more creative sensibilities, modelling methodologies on the unfixed and constant flux upon which storytelling is fundamentally built.

Anderson assures us that “nation-ness, as well as nationalism, are cultural artefacts of a particular kind.” (Anderson, 2006, p.4) This is very true of Scotland. Like most nations, Scotland reflects upon its past to understand itself as a ‘nation’ in attempts to define its future. Yet in doing so, it has also shown itself willing to deviate from the rich and dynamic nature of its tumultuous history in favour of a more unified foundation from which to build forward. In these instances, any concepts of fragmentation are denied in favour of portraying a strong, singular nation. The ramification of this is that we are denied the core value of such fragmented histories at a more local level. This can prove highly detrimental: Cairns Craig states that at the level of the regional, “it is possible to glimpse those associations of time that go beyond history, and that can bring back into history values denied by the very processes of history.” (Craig, 1999, p.159)

At this stage, ideas of fixed ‘origins’ become so paramount that we can struggle to define, relate or understand without them. History is re-examined and repurposed in an attempt to model a new and solidified vision with which to unify sub-national communities (an exercise that verges on being both voyeuristic and exploitative). Even from its Germanic beginnings, Scotland has been a fractious body defined and redefined by many separate races, faiths and cultures. Multiple colonisations have further complicated this. Therefore defining validating fixed ‘origins’ can be inherently problematic and as such requires a methodology pliable enough to openly accept such intricate cultural tapestries. Attempts to homogenise and simplify to better fit established academic and cultural models create results that are either too rigid or simply misleading.

It is for this reason that I chose to open this paper with Davy Steele's song. Though presented here as a song promoting nationalism in anticipation of the 1997 referendum, it is, of course, a much older song than that.<sup>1</sup> It has simply been repurposed, modified and manipulated to emphasise nationalistic intention. This isn't new to Scottish storytelling; in fact, it is fundamental in the processes of oral transmission and culture.

It has always been in the nature of Scottish storytellers (and the nation's oral culture) to transmit and preserve historical narrative and fact. Whether through identical retellings, or teller-crafted alterations, it is the act of transmission that is culturally vital:

Modern institutional education tends to divorce the 'literary' transmission of culture from the living reality of that culture. Huge bureaucracies have grown up around almost self-contained educational establishments – at the expense of the lived culture, the real culture carriers and poetic force that culture should embody. In more traditional and less institutionalised communities, the process of transmission is an integral part of the lived culture. (Neat, 2008, p.180)

The many efforts currently being enacted in the hope of preserving Scotland's culture of storytelling are significant. Almost uniformly, however, they struggle to assert themselves alongside the paradoxical nature of storytelling: on the one side, storytelling as a key vessel of cultural and historical transmission; on the other, storytelling as something that by its nature resists defined origins. The strain of storytelling is highly adaptive; preservative efforts and studies are currently not. Accordingly, the study and preservation of storytelling can be wildly divergent in its results.

Academic research concerning oral tradition or folklore is currently self-aware without being self-reflexive. Where it should be open and reactive, aware of how its own models of

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<sup>1</sup> A much older version of *Scotland Yet* can be found in the Henry S. Riddell's *Lytic Gems of Scotland* from 1856 in the form of a broadside ballad.

theory are developing unaided and instinctively within a contemporary society, it can instead prove dangerously self-preservative. An unfixed, adaptable model must be adopted if folklore study is to continue to be both viable and relevant and its attempts at preservation to prove lasting. Simply, the theory and criticism of storytelling must behave more flexibly if it is to continue to successfully study it.

Since the Acts of Union in 1707, duality has been a predominant part of the Scottish cultural psyche. Over the past thirty or so years the search for Scottish self-respect has once again been re-ignited. This has stoked a double-edged effort: on the one hand, a re-energised Scottish effort to create new valid and viable cultural contributions, and on the other, a renewed effort to study, collect, preserve and understand past contributions. Often, these two can meet and work in interesting, if disingenuous ways. The promotion of such interactions should be striven for.

Such efforts are in the process of once again being re-contextualised within the sphere of modernity. In his work, *Voicing Scotland: Folk, Culture, Nation*, Gary West states that we now live in a post-traditional world “where community is often virtual, our interaction electronic... where nothing stays still long enough to solidify into anything of substance, where roots are tethers and cultural baggage a debilitating burden.” (West, 2014, p.11) The rise of the internet and social media has the potential to forge a new more international community, further exposing ideas of unified national heritage as disingenuous.

Accordingly, orality and storytelling are being unfixed from particular nations and their histories. Storytelling is fundamentally fluid and adaptive and as such, conceptions of preservation must change, moving away from the perception of storytelling as merely a value to be archived. It is instead something both ‘alive’ and removed from linear, fixed time. Therefore preservation attempts must be adapted to continue to develop and perpetuate the oral art,

involving those who wish to interact in a direct manner that is both highly reflexive and self-aware - whether their artistic medium fits the established tradition or not.

This paper is not intended to offer a concrete academic or theoretical solution, but instead aims to merely highlight the problems inherent in those methodology regarding the preservation and continuation of Scottish storytelling and folklore. Through this, it aims to show many of the motivations, problems and successes of preservative attempts and interactions up until this point, as opposed to offering a binary opinion or static solution that is no doubt problematic in itself. Instead, it merely encourages an adapted genus of theory and practise that fits more organically to the nature of that which it studies and exemplifies: interactions must be more self-aware and reflexive while also allowing an adaptive interplay. This cannot rely solely on theory-based studies nor first-hand fieldwork. Instead, it must exploit a combination of both that is open to new creative engagements.

It aims not for revolution then, but evolution. Ultimately, storytelling will always be aware of its past, but it must not stagnate under the weight of such notions. Instead, new voices and tellers must be allowed to rise, and theory must unsettle itself, thinking less of self-preservation and become more involved in the contemporary space and the myriad of new storytelling possibilities that it potentially allows. Methodologies can be adapted and repurposed to allow contemporary writers to simultaneously preserve and value the past while freeing themselves from a rigid conception of tradition to create anew, therefore once again contributing to an ongoing cultural history. It is in this space that the other portion of this doctoral thesis, *Nearly Dark, Darkly Near*,<sup>2</sup> hopes to find itself.

In order to understand why this new adapted and reflexive methodology is essential, let us first delve into greater detail regarding the shifting processes and concerns that have lead us to this point.

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<sup>2</sup> *Nearly Dark, Darkly Near* will be abbreviated as *NDDN* from this point onwards.

## **2. Tales of History: Folklore, storytelling and oral tradition in Scotland**

Walter Benjamin famously stated that, “the storyteller in his living immediacy is by no means a present force. He has already become something remote from us and something that is getting even more distant.” (Benjamin, 2005) There are many reasons why this opinion is upheld. Most are tied to the functions of orality.

As I have already set out in the introduction to this paper, storytelling and orality are not hermetic topics; they touch upon a vastly interwoven network of interrelated anthropological topics such as nationality, culture, community, heritage, ethnology, linguistics and identity. This is particularly true of Scotland, where a cultural and national identity is marred by an often indistinguishable hybridisation of romanticised fact and mythic fiction.

In the introduction to Hugh Trevor-Roper’s often incendiary text, *The Invention of Scotland*, Jeremy J. Carter states that “the whole history of Scotland has been coloured by myth; and that myth, in Scotland, is never driven out by reality, or by reason, but lingers on until another myth has been discovered, or elaborated, to replace it.” (Trevor-Roper, 2009, p.xx) While psychologically complex, colonisation has undoubtedly exacerbated the desire to find or found a national myth. Regardless of the validity of such pursuits, it is the *desire* to discover, champion and preserve oral storytelling history that is most important.

In his text, *The Voice of the Bard*, Timothy Neat romantically describes why Scottish storytellers are of particular prominence:

The rural bardic tradition has real substance to offer the modern world. The bards are part of a disappearing continuity – of people, of work, of experience, of

language, of memory. They offer connections to things that have ‘worked’ over millennia. (Neat, 1999, p.296)

As such, it is no great surprise that so many attempts have been made to understand and preserve as much of the nation’s oral culture as possible. But storytelling’s ability to affect the aforementioned network of ideas – and their relationships with each other – cannot be simply defined.

At the heart of every interaction or preservative method lies the problematic nature of orality itself; most attempts made to understand or decipher the oral ultimately become an attempt to ‘fix’ it to a binary definition. This process is neither sustainable nor fully achievable as the anthropological values of orality are also fluid. Accordingly, an ideal methodology would be built upon this dynamic understanding and capable of changing organically alongside it.

In her text, *Writing and Orality*, Professor Penny Fielding states that:

The self-evident nature of orality is itself based on a paradox: on the one hand, the oral is something everyone knows, it is shared experience, communal knowledge, the wisdom of the people. On the other hand, the oral cannot really be known at all because of its habit of vanishing without record into the past. (Fielding, 1996, p.4)

Orality is not diminished by paradox, but instead embodies it: it is a topic which is simultaneously ‘present’ and ‘past,’ repeatedly proving its own sustainability and survival-ensuring adaptability. It can also simultaneously be regarded as both ‘present’ and ‘removed’ from a culture, paradoxically giving it simultaneous and yet differing sets of cultural values. This duality is precisely what makes it an effective anthropological tool for considering culture and identity but also what makes it so difficult to preserve. It cannot simply be written down or recorded.

Many of the anxieties surrounding orality come from its assumed oppositions – primarily to writing. But orality is not merely the opposite of writing; that is too broad a stroke. It resists recording, existing instead through engagement. As such, the interactions between the two are far more complicated.

In regards to preservation, the value of writing is obvious: the oral cannot survive the temporal moment without writing to record it. However, neither is a mere reflection of the other, nor are they co-dependent. Often they are supplementary. Storytelling, however, can differentiate itself from purely oral examples (such as day-to-day speech) as it can act as a modification of the momentary. Benjamin states that:

The value of information does not survive the moment in which it was new. It lives only at that moment; it has to surrender to it completely and explain itself to it without losing any time. A story is different. It does not expend itself. It preserves and concentrates its strength and is capable of releasing it even after a long time. (Benjamin, 2005)

It is for this reason that storytelling survives in a way that plain oral interaction does not. It is also the reason why this paper believes that authors can engage in storytelling preservation through appropriating engagements into their creative works.

However, this is not without problems: the act of recording a story fixes it, changing its shape. It is no longer fluid, and in the case of transcripts and recording techniques, no longer oral. When details are fixed, continued cultural relevancy can diminish. For instance, when Robert Burns' wrote his version of *Tam Linn*, it remained a song of violent female sexual aggression:

She had na pu'd a double rose,

A rose but only tway,

Till up then started young Tom-lin,

Says, Lady, thou's pu' nae me. (Noble and Hogg, 2003, p.895)

Burn's symbolic plucking of the rose is an essential signifier to the motif behind the tale. However, when the famed Scottish Storyteller, Duncan Williamson, tells the same tale, it is framed as a popular ballad, *Lady Margaret*, which is loved for its melody and closer to a fairy tale in form and content:

She had not pulled one nut, one nut

One nut not scarcely three

When the highest lord in all the countryside

Came a-riding through the tree. (Campbell, 2012, p.87)

Burn's signifiers have been removed, taking along with them the aforementioned subtext of that tale. Williamson's tale has assumed the form that it has because of the way he had heard it as a child – had it featured Burn's contexts, it may not have been told to him, and thus remained in Williamson's repertoire for centuries. Accordingly, had Williamson's fairy-tale-esque elements informed Burn's telling, it would not have told the tale that Burn's had wanted to tell his audience. This is merely a small example of an almost infinite network of differences in tellings. But these differences, however slight, are important and signify where our cultural understanding is directed and formed.

In the preface to her collection of fairy tales, Angela Carter states that “fairy tales, folk tales, stories from the oral tradition, are all of them the most vital connection we have with the imaginations of the ordinary men and women whose labour created our world.” (Carter, 2008, p. xi) It is the ability to tap into this creative imagination that is important. Though neither interpretations of the aforementioned tale really inform our contemporary situation, their

structure or key elements have been retained, allowing for future modification. Such interactions are positive and very natural.

Whatever form storytelling might take, context remains a key consideration when regarding preservation attempts. Tales may no longer warn contemporary audiences of the dangers of the woods (because, for the most part, those contexts are out-with the relevancy of our own cultural experience) but oral tales still represent a vessel for carrying important values, lessons and knowledge, loaded by a teller and modified for the specifics of each audience.

For instance, Williamson always claimed that stories and storytelling were the traveller's formal education, stating that he'd been "brought up with stories. So that's where we learned most of our trades, from father, it was passed down to all the children." (Campbell, 2011, p.55) The inherent morals and skills in these stories would not have been fixed, but instead have been re-contextualised by Williamson's father to impart specific information. This is a very natural process; yet to maintain cultural relevancy, storytelling and oral forms must remain perceptive to their cultural surroundings. As Williamson states of his own experience, that "by listening to the old people you had a better knowledge of the world you lived in. What makes a good storyteller? A good listener." (Campbell, 2012, p.129)

We cannot fully attempt to 'preserve' storytelling without defying the oral and momentary nature of the telling. To do so would be to negate all other states of the story: past iterations, alternative tellings - or most importantly - future iterations. However, we do not need to defy the nature of storytelling if we push to continue engaging with it; after all, we can forge our own creative interpretations of ancient tales and these can be imbued with contemporary value and detail. To do so does not demerit the inherent cultural values of oral storytelling, but instead promotes them by keeping them alive and vital. To maintain this, methodologies simply need to accept such tales as being part of the oral tradition instead of indexing them in separate archive categorizations.

To fix an oral story is to dismiss the tenants of orality and perceive it in the past tense. Fielding states that “we are putting orality to another use in order to shore up the values of the present. The idealization of orality turns out to be a strategy in which its assumed ‘death’ is a means for ignoring its survival in marginalized forms.” (Fielding 1996, p.5) Such concepts take on special relevance in regards to Scotland; despite its vast wealth of oral history, the fractured state of the nation has often been paired to a sense of self-depreciation, or lack of identity confidence, often generalised as ‘the Scottish Condition,’ wherein:

...the distinctness of Scottish nationality had little to sustain it but memory, and so, for almost 300 years, the Scots have wallowed in an aggrieved nostalgia, uncertain of what it now means to be Scottish, and gnawing perpetually at the problem. (Reid, 1994, p.53)

Such emotions and impressions had huge ramifications on the development of Scottish culture throughout the twentieth century; Hugh MacDiarmid captured a sense of this during the Scottish renaissance, calling it an “antisyzygy,” a “zigzag of contradictions.” (Kelly, 2011 p.18) This contradiction-based identity harbours direct effects for orality and thus also its preservative methodologies.

While driving original attempts to preserve Scottish storytelling in the first instance, the Caledonian Antisyzygy has also proven to undermine the validity or value of that which it once championed. If our ongoing Scottish consciousness “wells from ancestral gloom, from the shadows of a severe Calvinism... from a gritty mixture of disappointment and indignation,” (Reid, 1994, p.52) then it is as much a part of the preservative mentality as it is the recreational. If this is consciously accepted, then it can become a functional component of Scottish storytelling forms.

The uneasy formation of a new Union state from 1707 onwards simultaneously encouraged a search for origin and cultural distinction: Britishness was being constructed alongside Scottishness, pushing speech and writing to the forefront due to their perceived value in constructing nationhood “because each can assist in the homogenization of a populace which might otherwise remain disparate in terms of class and language.” (p.8) As a ramification, the Scots were enlivened by an increased determination to source and understand their historical-national identity amongst this newly formed national community.<sup>3</sup>

Anderson assures us that “communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined.” (Anderson, 2006, p.6) As such, stories are not only great signifiers of how national communities and identities are constructed but are also useful for pushing us to question why they are created and for whom. As Deborah Schiffrin poses in *Narrative as Self-Portrait*, “the way we tell our stories also reveals a self that exists within a cultural matrix of meanings, beliefs, and normative practises.” (Schiffrin, 1996, p.170) I am in particular agreement with this and it is for such reasons that we must find an appropriate way to preserve, strengthen and develop the richness of the national and international relationships that are harboured within stories and storytelling. Let us look at a few key examples that have raised awareness of such considerations.

One of the earliest examples can be found in the work of Allan Ramsay (1686-1758), a song collector within the Romantic period whose work and intention laid the functional groundwork for those who followed, affecting the methodology and understandings still commonly worked with today. Murray Pittock describes Ramsay as:

...an avatar of subsequent literary development in several areas: in his promotion of a Scottish public sphere in his altermentality and inflection of genre, designed

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<sup>3</sup> Trevor-Roper reiterated Samuel Johnson’s narrow attitudes when he stated that “it was natural that the Scots, seeking compensation for the end of their independent history and politics, should turn to discover and appreciate their native literature. Unfortunately, when they looked for it, they could not find it. There was none.” (p.76)

to protect and promote a distinctive national voice by transforming predominantly English uses of literary kinds, not surrendering to them; and in his development of a taxonomy of glory to justify a continuity of kinds and forms in a distinctively Scottish literature, for which he was in reality largely personally responsible. (Pittock, 1995, p.32)

Ramsay's work at re-establishing national cultural and literary voice would set a predominant example for centuries to come, though one that still requires a form of best practise to be discovered.

The vernacular of Scottish orality was of fundamental importance to a bardic tradition that Ramsay saw Scotland as edifying. To Ramsay, the great bards of Scotland were being quashed by exterior force and, most frustratingly, he saw our developing national tastes as dangerously supportive of such forces. As such, he was keen to remain connected to the national bardic traditions that he believed had flourished when Scotland "had not yet made Use of imported Trimmings upon our Cloaths, nor of foreign Embroidery in our Writings. Their Poetry is the Product of their own Country." (p.33) Foreshadowing the early attitudes of many who would follow, Ramsay proposed that to regain and redefine our own literary traditions, tastes would have to be drawn inwards.

Indeed, Ramsay had a particular interest in the early Makars and the vernacular literatures of Scotland. Seeing such works as disappearing, Ramsay collected, rewrote and published many tales, drawing even on established sources such as the 1568 Bannatyne manuscript. However, his work with the manuscript was far from verbatim and featured many modifications. After all, Ramsay's work had an intention: to bring forth a Scottish tradition that he felt was fading. As such, he often re-contextualised the tales to fit his motivations, modifying many to hold contemporary value or reshaping them to make a point within the context of his own intentions. Through such interactions, Ramsay set a precedent that would prove highly influential.

In 1760 James Macpherson (1736-1796) published *Fragments of ancient poetry, collected in the Highlands of Scotland, and translated from the Gaelic or Erse language*, claiming them to be the authentic collected fragments of a third century Scotland that had been preserved through highland communities.<sup>4</sup> Macpherson's consideration of the 'authentic' was a fundamentally tenuous one, and has conceptually haunted preservative methods ever since. Many scholars and intellectuals soon questioned anyone's capacity to memorise a poem the length that Macpherson claimed belonged to Scotland's bardic tradition. Samuel Johnson (1709-1784) was among the most vocal on the subject, refusing alongside David Hume to believe that "oral tradition could have preserved an epic poem nine thousand lines long over fifteen centuries." (Trevor-Roper, 2009, p.137) Johnson was willing to acknowledge the existence of such tales in Scotland, preserved on the tongues of the Highland folks, yet challenged Macpherson's transmission. Of course, Johnson's suspicions were right – Macpherson had coloured his collections with his own poetic sensibility and character. However, to create the grand romantic tradition that Macpherson desired, his tales had to be realised as antiquity; an ancient heritage discovered that had been preserved by its rural peoples. To veil his invention as such a discovery would allow it to act as something homogenising and prideful among the fragmented Scots: a tradition to build from.

Eric Hobsbawm describes the invention of tradition as "the contrast between the constant change and innovation of the modern world and the attempt to structure at least some parts of social life within it as unchanging and invariant." (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1985, p.2) In feigning a discovery of a preserved past and 'tradition,' Macpherson was attempting to stabilize Scotland by fixing it to a linear idea of history by which its patrons could establish or identify themselves. However, the lasting effects have been somewhat different: it is hard now to

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<sup>4</sup>Macpherson's works received a phenomenal response from both a hurting Scotland hungry for national history and a Britain intrigued at such an ancient discovery. The national hunger for antiquity soon led to grants which allowed Macpherson to travel, collect and collate further volumes, including his highly controversial works of Fingal. The first of these appeared in December 1761 entitled, *Fingal, an ancient epic Poem, in six books, together with several other poems composed by Ossian, the son of Fingal, translated from the Gaelic language by James Macpherson*. Afterwards came *Temora, an ancient Epic in eight books, composed by Ossian, the son of Fingal*.

consider any preservation attempt without cynicism or suspicion. Despite participating in sincere fieldwork, by not openly acknowledging his manipulation of his collected Ossianic tales, Macpherson unintentionally undermined the ‘authenticity’ of Scottish antiquity, thus altering his own legacy and shaping the progression of Scottish oral culture from that point onwards.

For those studying oral tradition or the preservation of storytelling, such reclamation is nothing new; the more cynical researcher would be able to argue the existence of degrees of disingenuous manipulation in almost any source or academic contribution. As such, disingenuousness is a highly functioning part of the tradition itself and needs to be considered openly in the development of future methodologies.

Macpherson’s Ossian scandals show how original sources can be manipulated to a great extent. Preservation attempts therefore demand extreme care, or at the very least, awareness. As Macpherson demonstrated, when sources are manipulated too far to appease their target audiences,<sup>5</sup> one of two things can happen: either the text is identified as disingenuous and is disregarded wholesale or, alternatively, if the modified tale is met with success, it runs the risk of becoming fixed from that point onwards as the root form of the tale. In this case, the material cannot make its way back to the source, and is changed irrevocably. As an awareness of this anxiety is generally accepted by any serious study of orality now, Macpherson’s work (and its reception) can be considered to have set an important precedent.

By attempting to fix the oral culture that he had collected via a written text, Macpherson accidentally revealed the often tenuous interactions between the written and the oral (and the dangers that they can represent to each other). Furthermore, his work exemplified how ‘traditional’ origins can be fixed and re-fixed creatively, further generating questions over

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<sup>5</sup> “Macpherson’s ‘translations,’ re-creations and inventions were shaped from the start by his knowledge of what a polite eighteenth-century readership would expect of a ‘primitive’ bard; anticipating the critical response, not only of academics like Blair, but of the periodical journals like the *Gentleman’s Magazine* or the *Scots Magazine* which set the standard of polite taste in literature.” (Irvine, 2010, p.x-xi)

whether such interactions should even be prevented in the first place. As such, a new more flexibly organic methodology needs to be considered.

Macpherson's legacy may be one of illegitimacy, full of "distorting and interdependent fabrications," (Trevor-Roper, 2009, p.18) but much of it was based on genuine fieldwork from trips around the highlands. It is understandable then that he should consider himself to have discovered a genuine link to historical Scotland, then, when hearing the rich tapestry of these stories. However, his deceptions were problematic on a deeper level: despite his claims, Ossian, son of Fingal, was not a figure of Scottish antiquity in a straight-forward sense, but instead was part of Celtic lore and more inherent to the heritage of the Irish. Furthermore, Macpherson's Ossian differed from even that heritage.

His inclusion of such lore is not wholly disingenuous; such Celtic and Gaelic tales would have had already crossed the Emerald Sea centuries before, amalgamating and forming new sets of values and national signifiers. As two nations geographically close, Trevor-Roper seems to have missed the commonplace reality of such cultural exchanges when he accused Macpherson and his supporters of "bold forgery, they created an indigenous literature for Celtic Scotland and, as a necessary support to it, a new history. Both this literature and this history, in so far as they had any connection with reality, had been stolen from the Irish." (Trevor-Roper, 1985, p.17) If a methodology is self-aware enough, then such discoveries in the folk or oral culture cease to seem problematic; instead they become richer fonts to draw from, opening the value of folklore to a wider academic and creative interest, increasing cross-disciplinary appeal, whether to historians, anthropologists or authors.

Such obvious value further emphasizes the need for effective preservation methodologies. It is not until the past century that scholars of the oral tradition have challenged the exploitative nature of Celticity as a tag in newer revival tales, where its capacity changes from that of defining, to that of blurring and confusing. But as eager followers assumed the Celticity

of Macpherson's Highland fieldwork to be representative of a more homogenised concept of 'the Scot,' the nation was becoming akin to Anderson's concept of the 'imagined community.' Craig states that for the Scots, such imagined tradition building "is continually engaged in a vast self-deception, wilfully substituting a fictional for an actual identity, and turning the tragedy of real history into a theatrical (but murderous) farce." (Craig, 2001, p.17) However, it is due to the reflexivity of such willing self-deception that Macpherson's works retain cultural validity even now.

By exposing the possible falsity of all factors contributing to national heritage, Macpherson raised a historical questioning, creating an awareness of the tension that exists between perceived history and the impossibility of drawing 'authentic' historical culture from oral sources. This began to expose the dangers of academic and cultural idolisation: the palette for antiquity and authenticity can drive searches back as far as possible to champion whatever discoveries that might be found there, regardless of how they correlate. Yet whatever amalgams of national heritage and culture formed during our pre-nation period of antiquity are almost irretrievably lost; they have been coupled with a national fiction that is indistinguishable from any fact that may have been collected.

Instead of regarding this as a threat to something inherently sincere, the more productive option would be self-reflexively assimilating this string of conscious and unconscious alterations directly into the tradition. However, there exists a romantic academic notion that due to the oral transmission of history, a connection can still be made with the distant past by engaging the available fonts (the folk) with honest and impartial fieldwork.<sup>6</sup> This is misleading: authenticity simply cannot be guaranteed.

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<sup>6</sup> The concept of honest fieldwork carries its own set of problems, many of which will be explored more fully in the next section of the paper concerning the revival period of the 1960s.

An early progenitor to these problems can be found at this point though, when examining the legacy of John Francis Campbell of Islay (1821-85). Working in a period where the value of tales had already been established, Campbell's legacy represents the complete antithesis to that of Macpherson. Famed for his collection and preservation efforts, his fieldwork championed tellers and drew tales directly from oral sources, using recording devices and therefore bypassing any accusations of manipulation.

His work proves some of the most enduring early preservation efforts the nation has – indeed, much of it still resides in the National Library of Scotland's archives. In many senses, his methods formed the foundational groundwork for those who would travel later with wax cylinder or cassette alongside Hamish Henderson<sup>7</sup> on behalf of the University of Edinburgh's School of Scottish Studies. However, Campbell's importance lies in championing not only the tale, but also the teller, showing an acute awareness of how locality and circumstance could affect the telling:

Campbell broke new ground in focusing attention on the tellers and the way in which they manipulated their texts, where the conventional book of folktales even today conceals the carriers of tradition... Although not a system-builder, Campbell was more than an imaginative and creative collector. He sought to fit his bricks into some symmetrical structure, and dallied with what propositions were available to him. (Dorson, 1968, p.400)

Campbell's work proves some of the earliest recordings available, and yet are far from pure, carrying many similar discrepancies to that of Macpherson's work.

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<sup>7</sup> Indeed, Campbell was notably forward thinking and seems a perfect fit for a progenitor of Henderson and his methods: "To his credit, Campbell brought to life the tellers and gave them their due. The neat table of contents listed the tale title, storyteller and his occupation, place and date of the telling, and the collector." (Dorson, 1968, p.397)

Campbell's team was most famed for recording tales as handwritten transcripts. This allowed for errors when transcribing a fluid and fluent oral source. However, his recordings are still regarded as authoritative. This is because by visiting the National Library it is possible to read the exact fixed transcriptions that were taken as Campbell and his team sat before the tellers. It is possible to hold them in our hands, read them for ourselves. This fixed physicality and tangibility is authoritative and we do not challenge it. It is a strong example of the problematic way in which the written legitimises the oral, quite simply because the momentary and fleeting nature of the oral is unable to self-legitimise.

Identity and telling is rarely static: like an oral telling's ability to modify itself to suit the audience of each retelling, the teller's identity can also modify itself to the expectation of the recording. Fielding defines these shifts when she asserts that "conversation has no subjects but only subject positions." (Fielding, 1996, p.134) Indeed, this further emphasizes the tension that exists in the transition from oral form (spoken and transient) to written form (fixed and preserved):

Western culture is phonocentric, but that it is deeply imbued with the sense of writing as *pharmakon*: simultaneously poison and cure. Writing poisons the well of a pure orality that guarantees moral values and authentic experience, but it is also the only means of transmuting that experience into a form acceptable to a literate and socially 'advanced' readership. (p.5)

When fixing the terms of the written and the spoken they are designated representative values which are set in binary opposition. As Fielding states, these symbolic rules shift fluidly against each other, because "experiences that constitute the oral cannot be represented in writing which finds that speech slopes away to obscure the traces of its presence." (p.199) Such values are oversimplified and do not embrace the fluid nature of orality reflexively or openly enough. It is gaps

such as this where creative writing can demonstrate its capability to bridge the gap between the theory and practise of storytelling.

Writing also disregards a multitude of oral nuances – speed, inflection, manner and tone for instance – all key factors to a storyteller. Accordingly, Campbell's efforts must be scrutinised as closely as Macpherson's: in their recording, there were doubtless aspects of short-hand involved due to simultaneously transcribing and listening or gap-filling when the system stuttered or broke. Furthermore, any oral breaks in the telling would not have been recorded and are now permanently lost.

What becomes evident is that despite the sincere intentions of Campbell and his team, modifications were (and remain) inherently part of their process, albeit unconsciously. To compound this thought, Campbell and his team (most notably Lachlan MacNeil) copied their transcripts in Gaelic, further modifying the work through translation. The result of this is not 'representation' as its authoritative stance dictates, but 're-presentation.' Even with its most sincere intentions and expectations, representation often becomes a form of adaptation. In such scenarios, there can exist a further transition beyond the standard movement between the oral and the written: in the case of Gaelic, a transition from culture to culture. For preservation, it is often the study of such transitions that can prove most fruitful – provided that the methodology used is reflexive enough.

The work of Allan Cunningham (1784-1842) posed a new problem. Collecting many rural tales from his own locality, and preserving them in print (most notably in his collection *Traditional Tales*), but in adopting a creative approach in his folklore interactions. As such, he represents a hybridisation of the efforts and intentions of Macpherson and Campbell. Much like Macpherson, Cunningham altered the material he collected where he saw fit, while also proposing them to be part of the 'tradition' that was being so hungrily sought after:

Cunningham operated in a borderland between literary invention and deference to the traditional material on which he drew. For twentieth-century critics, this ambiguous position can appear to lack respect for the distinctiveness of the oral tradition. (Cunningham and Killick, 2012, p.xix)

Though he was never intentionally disrespectful, his *Remains of Nithsdale and Galloway Song* (1810) created a controversy similar to that of Macpherson's work due to its cavalier treatment of tales in a period when the readership's tastes demanded 'authenticity.'

Indeed, Cunningham's instincts as a creative writer seem to have set a precedent wherein he regarded it possible to treat the tales he had grown up alongside with both respect and carelessness. While this attitude sets itself against the demands for authenticity at the time, it is also closer to the fundamental forms of orality where stories are told and then retold, passing from teller to teller. This importantly represents a hybridisation of written preservative attempts with the actual creative spirit and fundamental attributes of the tradition itself.

Of course, Cunningham's cavalier attitude may seem positive now, but considerations must be made for how his writing (and re-writing) sat amongst the other examples of the Victorian period, where the early precursors of folklore studies were beginning to establish a discipline amidst the growing taste for antiquities:

The ballad revival and the new field of popular antiquities both helped set up certain protocols which were highly influential on those writers and collectors, like Cunningham, who followed the earliest practitioners. In essence, there evolved a tension between practitioner and antiquarian, and a corresponding anxiety about how the process of collecting oral material might serve to ossify traditions as much as preserve them. (p.xvi-xvii)

This anxiety between practitioner and antiquarian is a key tension and has remained within interactions with oral traditions. As such, methodologies need to be able to self-examine such tensions to a far greater degree.

Among the many others contributing at the time, perhaps none were so successful – or respected by Cunningham – as Sir Walter Scott (1771-1832). Scott sat at the forefront of a famously ‘Scottish’ literature, and was in the prime place to ensure that aspects of Scottish storytelling and oral tradition were preserved respectfully and honestly.

Following the Ossian controversies Scott attempted to alleviate the anxiety surrounding Scottish tales with his work *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* (1802-03). Like Macpherson, Cunningham and Campbell before him, his collections were sincere in nature: the mother of James Hogg (1770-1835) proved essential in Scott’s compiling work on the *Minstrelsy*, her archive-like memory able to help him source and establish the authenticity of many of the songs that he dabbled with. However, afterwards she cautioned him:

There was never ane o my songs prentit till ye prentit them yoursel’, and ye have spoilt them awgither. They were made for singin’ and no’ for readin’, but ye have broken the charm now, an’ they’ll never be sung mair. (Kelly, 2011, p.63)

This argument was not lost on Scott, but neither was it solved. As Stuart Kelly states:

...ambiguity is riddled though the *Minstrelsy*: the ‘original’ is always unobtainable; the extent of corruption is also the extent of authenticity; the more that something has become illegible, the more that it must be genuine. (p.63)

It is perhaps for this reason that he is often regarded as “the first major figure to cultivate the literary uses of folklore with sympathy and comprehension.” (Dorson, 1968, p.107) His methodology was reflexive enough that his legacy is the most influential and lasting, but it is not without its own intrinsic problems.

Being a writer of international popularity, Scott also helped to identify a ‘tradition’ of oral cultures worldwide, as opposed to merely a ‘Scottish tradition’ for a Scottish nation. An excellent example of this can be found through the Grimm brothers; struck by many similarities they discovered while reading through Robert Jamieson’s *Popular Ballads* and Scott’s *Minstrelsy of the Border* their folklorist interests were shifted from out of the Black Forest and spread across the seas to Scotland:

The wealth of Scottish tradition had attracted the brothers early. In a letter to Wilhelm of 1812, Jacob wrote: ‘. . . in a Scottish book I have this afternoon found the tale of the Frog Prince,<sup>8</sup> I believe no other people is so rich in oral tradition. (Michaelis-Jena, 1975, p.42)

Unsurprisingly a correspondence was soon initiated between the two brothers and Scott. Some of these unpublished letters prove a treasure trove of insight into the early correlating work of folklorists between working in different nations, traditions or cultures.<sup>9</sup> For instance, in a letter to Jamieson, Wilhelm wrote, “your *Popular Ballads and Songs* (Edinb. 1806) and Mr. Scott’s *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* 4th ed. Have been in my possession for some time. I such value these collections, not only for their own poetical worth, but equally for their affinity to the Danish ballads, and even our own German ones.” (p.46). This challenged any ideas of a solely Scottish antiquity. The nation would have to realise that any genuine claims of antiquity would also have to embrace the greater world; after all, the formation of early populations of the island were far from singular.

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<sup>8</sup> Interestingly, *The Frog Prince* is a German folk tradition of the same tale form as *The Well at the World’s End* – a tale that Neil Gunn would later rewrite for a twentieth century audience, and also one that *NDDN* attempts to re-contextualise for a twenty-first century audience. This will be picked up in greater detail during the third section of this paper.

<sup>9</sup> Wilhelm had previously worked on links between German folktales and the Danish work of Kaempe Viser. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that he became particularly interested in Jamieson, who was notable for having began linking Scottish folklore to that of the old Scandinavian tales. (Michaelis-Jena, 1975)

However, Scott's position amongst this international discourse as Scotland's greatest literary celebrity did not prevent the spread of a conceptual 'Scotttishness' which could be easily identified and thus replicated, adopted or marketed. A further problem arose: works such as the *Minstrely* also supported the belief that the oral could only be brought to print culture by "polite Edinburgh gentlemen like himself," when in fact "the Borders glens where Scott found his originals were just as literate as Burns' Ayrshire. Scott's work tends to efface the literacy of working people because the 1790s had revealed itself to be a political threat."<sup>10</sup> (Irvine, 2010, p.xiii) Such attitudes served to bolster the division between the written and the spoken, affirming issues that our methodologies are still struggling to alleviate.

Robert Burns (1759-1796), however, bypassed such scrutiny because he (like Hogg) was self-taught. As a ploughman, Burns sincerely *was* 'the folk' – therefore it seemed perfectly acceptable for him to champion the oral traditions and be a vessel for its continuation or discovery. However, sincere as Burns' beginnings may have been, he was not without his own manipulations.

Gaining renown with his own poetry, Burns was soon involved with James Johnson's *Scots Musical Museum*, first published in 1787. What began here as collection soon become re-appropriation and old tunes or lyrics that were collected were farmed out into the hands of classical composers such as Haydn, Beethoven and Hummel. Burns began to write his own modified versions of older folksongs,<sup>11</sup> culminating in Burns' numerous whole-hearted contributions to George Thomson's famous songbooks.<sup>12</sup> Inevitably, this has modified the history of traditional Scottish music. While the methodology that I am proposing welcomes this

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<sup>10</sup> Though Scott's knowledge of orally transmitted stories and folktales were what made up the body of the *Minstrely*, his social status held him apart from the 'folk' or their illiterate folk cultures. Such parties represented an unstable political danger and thus held the potential to damage his career or the reception of his work amidst a still raw union. This was not merely political, but also tied into the language of inherited culture and tradition. As Craig states, "the cultural role of Gaelic and Scots were issues to be avoided, since they raised the spectre of a divided community rather than a united administrative region." (Craig, 1990, p.30)

<sup>11</sup> Such as the version of *Tam Linn* referenced earlier in the paper.

<sup>12</sup> *A Select Collection of Scottish Airs For the Voice*, published in five volumes between 1799 and 1818.

sort of reflexive and open engagement as part of the very tradition itself, what I want to note as problematic is that despite their similar manipulations, Burns' origin as sincere ploughman elicited a very different response to that of the university-taught Macpherson.

Despite some obvious modifications, due to his origins, Burns' intentions were deemed, quite rightly, as respectful; after all, he was 'one of the folk.' Sincerity, it seems, is the key:

Macpherson is more like Burns: the difference being that instead of dressing oral material as his own, he passed it off as a dressy version of itself. Macpherson's adaptations are far clumsier than Burns', admittedly, and he has more the air of the opportunist: but his categorization as culture-villain shows that there is something destabilising about his work and its claims. (Pittock, 1995, p.136)

Sincerity, context and intention matter; for instance, the work of John Mackay Wilson (1804-1835) has been celebrated despite also featuring the same re-appropriation and blending of fact and fiction. However, the title of his border collections are very clear in their intentions: *Wilson's Tales of the Border and of Scotland, Historical, Traditionary and Imaginative*. Creative engagement is accepted so long as it is not labelled otherwise. This has continued to be true through the following years and cultural shifts and, as such, needs to be incorporated more openly and reflexively into our methodology and approaches.

However, unlike Burns, Scott did not allow himself to commit fully to the folk tales or oral traditions of the nation, but merely reworked them into a more internationally and commercially palatable form.<sup>13</sup> After all, books at this point were a luxury commodity that much of the lower classes would have limited access to.<sup>14</sup> This produced an anxiety that folklore was

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<sup>13</sup> Scott showed an awareness for national-cultural ramifications of orality when he stated that as opposed to being a pure work of antiquity, (like Macpherson claimed) the *Minstrelsy* was instead "amplified with notes and 'occasional dissertations' on 'popular superstitions, and legendary history.' These additions, Scott hoped, would 'contribute somewhat to the history of my native country.'" (Dorson, 1968, p.107)

<sup>14</sup> Allan Ramsay was a notable exception to this, creating a circulating library in 1728 where books could be rented from his bookshop rather than purchased.

being taken from the folk in the transition from the oral to the written. Through gentrification and commoditisation, the folk would no longer be able to afford their own lore.

But of course, exclusion can work both ways; through his international popularity in print, Scott managed to spread the tales further, thus ensuring their survival, whether modified to fit a new tradition of ‘Scottishness’ or not.

The nation as an entirely modern phenomenon disguises itself as something ancient and conceals from its citizens the truth about their own historical position... What Scott did was to anaesthetize Scotland against real nationalism by providing it with a fantasy surrogate. (Craig, 2001, p.36)

Scott’s re-imagining of history was internationally palatable, and as such, his fictions, in part, have crafted a Scottish national character that remains known worldwide. This new national character proved a perfect fit for popular entertainment. After all, the anxiety of the Union was being made moot by the Napoleonic Wars: in 1815 Scotland was being galvanized into Great Britain against ‘the Common Enemy.’ It seems that Scott regarded national identity and history as something which held no intrinsic importance against the concepts of fiction or reality. After all, Scott is often credited with inventing the popular amalgam known as the ‘historical fiction’ genre – or at the very least, popularising it with his novel, *Waverley; or ‘Tis Sixty Years Since*.<sup>15</sup> While that novel may have put the wheels in motion on his international reputation,<sup>16</sup> Scott had already searched through Scottish antiquity with the *Minstrelsy*, and no doubt encountered many of the contradictions which expose themselves through the study of oral forms.

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<sup>15</sup> “In Shorthand parlance, Scott ‘invented’ the historical novel. This does not mean that prior novels had not been set in the past – many had, from interminable French romances to Gothic shockers. Scott was not a historical novelist so much as he was a novelist with a theory of history.” (Kelly, 2011, p.108) For a more balanced view on Scott’s contribution to the historical genre, see Lukács’ *The Historical Novel*. For a wider exploration of the problems of the interactions between fiction and history themselves, see Beverly Southgate’s *History Meets Fiction*.

<sup>16</sup> Hesketh Peason’s words, it ‘changed the direction of imaginative literature in every civilised country.’” (Kelly, 2011, p.14)

In his choice to repurpose his preserved tales creatively, he directly connected with the discourse itself as opposed to solidifying a stance on either side, and thus created a sub-space for questions of nationalism and identity. In this space each person was forced to value their own considerations through the prism of their own cultural heritages, questioning conceptions of authenticity. Perhaps most importantly, they were given the space to consider whether this authenticity was actually the value that mattered most. A less rigid interaction with folklore was beginning, though this was not isolated to Scotland by any means. Both Burns and Scott were known internationally, as were the questions being raised by the Ossian controversies. As a result, their interactions with folklore tradition and the searches for a Scottish antiquity spread.

A perfect example of this international reach can be found in Goethe's *Sorrows of Young Werther* where multiple passages of Macpherson's *Ancient Fragments*<sup>17</sup> are read within the frame of the text and used as shorthand for romantic identification:

'Have you nothing you might read?' She said.— [Werther] had nothing. — 'Over there in my drawer', she began, 'is your translation of some of the poems of Ossian. I haven't read them yet, I always hoped to hear you read them, but all this time it hasn't happened, we haven't managed it.' — He smiled, fetched the songs, a shudder went through him as he took them in his hands and his eyes filled with tears when he looked at them. He sat down again and read. (Goethe, 2012, p.96)

Lotte's perception of the poetry is telling; to her, these are not Macpherson's poems, but 'the poems of Ossian.' It is the form of Ossian and Fingal that has travelled with such reputation and import, as opposed to any specific work of James Macpherson. If an authorial credit were to be granted at this point, in Lotte's eyes it would surely be the translator of the work – in this case, Werther himself. Furthermore, the fact that Lotte longs to hear them read aloud rather than read

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<sup>17</sup> Interestingly, Goethe also claimed that Scott's *Waverly* stood "alongside the best things that had ever been written in the world." (Kelly, 2011, p.30)

them herself now enacts an almost postmodern acknowledgement of the tension between the written and the oral. What Goethe's inclusion demonstrates is that it didn't matter to the world whether Ossian was of Scottish or Irish nationality, what mattered was the spirit that it influenced; Scotland was leading a new appetite for items of national-cultural antiquity.<sup>18</sup>

To this day, Scott's choices have effected not only his legacy, but also academic considerations of how oral transmissions of culture are neither negated nor supported by what is considered as 'false':

Scott's Scotland is symptomatic of all nations and nationalisms: they are a fiction whose modern 'identity' is fraudulently constructed from a misremembered or invented past that claims, falsely, to be founded on the primordial bases of all human community. (Craig, 2001, pp.16-17)

A growing awareness of the inherent falsity of 'true' claims of nationalism and national traditional heritage has generated a vibrant discourse that challenges the effectiveness of linear, fact-based conceptions of history. After all, Scott's creative work has held a lasting sway over what now constitutes 'Scotland' and the 'Scottish' and yet they are openly works of fiction. Methodology needs to acknowledge this fluidity fully if it is to stay vital and functional; non-linear considerations of history must come to be accepted, studied and appreciated. Nations are not forged in a vacuum. Fact does not solely influence fiction; fiction can also influence the formation and consideration of fact.

However, it seems that an inability to accept these amendments ensures that claims of the fractured Scottish psyche retain validity. Alastair Reid notes in his essay, *The Scottish Condition*, that "bewitched by Scotland's vivid and violent past, Scott proceeded to mummify it in all his

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<sup>18</sup> Scott even went so far as to take on other national cultures himself, such as English cultural-historical identity with *Ivanhoe*, or his interactions alongside Robert Jamieson and Henry Weber with the Icelandic epics: *Illustrations of northern antiquities, from the earlier Teutonic and Scandinavian romances; being an abstract of the Book of heroes, and Nibelungen lay* (1814).

many writings, lighting it with the candle glow of nostalgia” (Reid, 1994, p.54) and the result was “a bizarre travesty of Scottish history, Scottish reality.” (Craig, 2001, p.15) Such opinions have lingered throughout the development of Scottish cultural identity:

Scottish writers and thinkers looked back to the Scottish past and saw only (in the words of Edwin Muir) 'Burns and Scott / Sham bards of a sham nation' ('Scotland 1941'); they looked at Scottish culture and saw only the parody kitsch of 'kailyard' (the parochial whimsy of J.M. Barrie)<sup>19</sup> and 'tartanry' (the false glamour that Scott had foisted on Scotland and which had turned it into Brigadoon). To oppose that falsehood was to recognise that Scots were not fully mature, fully developed in their identity. (Craig, 1990, p.31)

Though this has not been solely negative; in fact, it has often acted as a motivator for some of the most well regarded contributions to Scottish culture. But we will look at this in the greater detail in the following section.

This paper proposes that fighting Scott’s hybrid national creation is stifling; time should not be wasted attempting to untangle layers of fabrications in a search for misplaced and diluted conceptions of reality or authenticity. Instead, it would be far more beneficial to embrace the way in which Scott created a new (and lasting<sup>20</sup>) identity for the Scots within not only the British community, but also the international one. Whether intentionally or not, it is in this way that Scott most closely mirrored the fundamental value and nature of orally transmitted storytelling and culture: he listened, he re-contextualised, he re-told.

Whether it presents itself as folklore, poetry or balladry, Scottish storytelling must be identified as a living, migratory oral tradition. It is something organic and fluid, always caught in a range of simultaneous and often contradictory states. By attempting to ‘fix’ these states to

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<sup>19</sup> Namely, for his 1889 work, *A Window in Thrums*.

<sup>20</sup> The residual result has commonly become labelled as “the synthetic Scotsman.” (Gardiner, 2006, p.20)

better preserve or understand them, all other states are negated, thus suffocating the validity of work outside of the chosen catchment. Hard fact has proved almost irrelevant when studying oral cultural heritage.

The *Ossian* scandal provided the first weighty example of this: the nature of Macpherson's interactions with national heritage has fixed his legacy as that of the cultural villain. Timing seems to be the most feasible reason for such a legacy; after all, Cunningham, Burns and Scott have all repurposed and modified tales to suit their audiences without receiving such treatment. Indeed, such open interactions have since become one of the most celebrated characteristics of storytelling culture.

Unlike Macpherson, Scott has enjoyed a mostly celebrated legacy, despite the fact that his Scottish romances have had the same corruptive effect that Macpherson's *Fingal* was vilified for in the first place. The apparent difference lies in approach; while Macpherson claimed to write genuine history, Scott's corpus of work formed an openly creative engagement with Scottish history. However, the degree of his ensuing popularity has ensured that Scottish history is not only romantic but now romantically confused.

From this, responses seem to be divided into two general camps. On the one hand, attempts are made to neutralise the errors and contradictions, with hopes to disseminating the fiction from the supposed fact. This can therefore be utilised to help establish a homogenous Scottish history and national identity that champions the inter-disciplinary value of a linear cultural history. On the other side, the romantic mix-up of fact and fiction that Scottish history has become can be embraced and identified as a behavioural foundation inherent in oral transmission, and accordingly, other facets of Scottish culture such as art, music and literature. This adaptability promotes a much-modified romance as truer in nature to a sense of genuine representative history and national identity than the aforementioned alternative. With this option, nations and communities can be freed from the burden of their histories.

Regardless of what option is chosen, the real danger is in essentializing elements of history to exploit a sense of cultural relativism. In this decision, it seems that nationalistic pride and emotive responses are almost unavoidably present. But even our most staunch nationalist ideal can be broken down at the point of the local; Scotland after all is a fractured nation which struggles to understand itself because its identity is more realistically made up of many smaller identities that carry their own cultures and languages. If these identities continue to be erased by attempts to forge a synthetic national homogeneity, then Sara Maitland's fears may become a sad reality:

What seems worryingly possible is that we will diminish, degrade and even destroy these common roots, these shared stories, leaving us increasingly isolated and without any sense of collective identity. (Maitland, 2012, p.320)

As such, this thesis is not about preserving particular traditions or iterations of cultural heritage, but instead about sustaining the art, craft and creativity that is fundamentally abundant within storytelling.

### **3. Storytelling Now: Continued theory and preservation efforts - Renaissance, revival and aftermath**

This thesis is not suggesting another inflexible model as a 'solution' but rather emphasizing self-awareness and the importance of self-reflexivity in allowing any future methodologies or story forms to shape themselves. The forms of Scottish storytelling and orality need to be allowed to move past a state of "aggrieved nostalgia" (Reid, 1994, p.53) and onto a new path which is neither fed nor motivated by a loaded reverence for the past. Primarily, this section will highlight the successes and failures of the past seventy years, focusing mainly on Hamish Henderson's folk revival throughout the Scottish Renaissance and the long-lasting ramifications that this period held for contemporary methodologies.

For better or worse, lingering expectations of established traditions and forms have no doubt formed the cultural shadow now cast by the revival. After all, "the life story of a song is not one of slow change or gradual deterioration." (Niles, 1986, p.92) These forms are simply not as fragile or binary as they are often mistaken to be. And yet, interactions must remain careful.

The development of interactions with folklore has opened our awareness of storytelling relationships, yet in doing so, has also further muddied preservation efforts. However, when attempts are self-aware enough, they can also sharpen applicable methodologies:

We cannot avoid, in this postmodern climate, a deeper critical issue that overarches any simple definition of folklore, namely that of cultural representation: who is representing whom, or what, and why? (Porter, 1998, p.1)

While indeed now retrospectively applicable to our considerations of Campbell, Cunningham, Macpherson, Burns and Scott, the question of representation remains highly relevant to twentieth century studies.

We cannot doubt the importance of the folk revival surrounding Henderson and the development of the School of Scottish Studies, but an increased level of objectivity should be applied when examining the process, desires and results of the period. This is especially true in regards to the championing of the Scottish travellers, the developments in localised ideas of community and culture and the nourishment for newer studies of folklore as an academic field. As Amy Shuman states in her essay, *Dismantling Local Culture*, “the problem is not methods of observation, description, or analysis; rather, the problem is inventing the local as a solution to either universal hegemonic truths and values or to diversity.” (Shuman, 1993, p.351) By merely re-contextualising such root problems again and again, developmental foundations are stifled, limiting the ability of methodologies to develop in the future.

First, let us look at the folk revival itself and more specifically at Hamish Henderson’s intentions and involvement, as he has come to reshape the common perceptions of Scottish storytelling, both for better and worse, exemplifying how “we have moved from a goal of documenting and/or conserving dying traditions to studies of the commodification of culture.” (Shuman, 1993, p.362) Indeed, his interactions mark the beginning of the self-reflexive methodology that this paper seeks.

The lasting reputation of Henderson highlights why: he actively represents the contradictions of the form by embodying the very fundamentals of Scottish storytelling culture. As an active teller, performer, archivist and scholar that was academically championed for his field-work, Henderson’s interactions represent a man who though genuinely and sincerely passionate about his subjects, often romanticised them to the point of commodification. But he

was highly aware of the contradictory nature of what he was trying to preserve<sup>21</sup> and it is perhaps for this reason that he is almost now more myth than man himself.

Henderson exemplifies the juxtaposition of reality and unreality evidenced in the previous sections of this paper, being simultaneously positioned as both one of the key figureheads of the revival and also an active poet. This held wide-ranging ramifications for the development of storytelling and oral traditions, raising key questions about the developmental interactions of teller and receiver (or audience). One major ramification, argues John D. Niles in his essay *Context Loss in Traditional Scottish Ballad Tradition* is that:

For many poets and editors of this time, there was no greater coup than passing off a freshly composed text as ‘medieval,’ and the nineteenth century's success in this enterprise has contributed to a still-current scholarly devaluation of the rough but often vigorous products of genuine oral tradition. (Niles, 1986, p.88)

This interplay between contribution and preservation, authenticity and tradition, is a challenge to the form, establishing itself as a permanent question to now be cast against every contribution. Though especially true and problematic of the nineteenth century, Henderson changed the field by beginning to knowingly acknowledge this within his methodology.

However, the search for reality is really a semantic one. Discussions regarding the ‘real’ are really searching for an *authoritative* version of Scottish storytelling, folklore and oral tradition. This evaluation is often a measure of reality that is weighed by a consideration of the subjectivity of each source. Niles outlines why this is problematic when he states:

The very terms ‘purity’ and ‘impurity’ imply a distinction and an aesthetic hierarchy that upon inspection turn out to be meaningless, for often, as one might

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<sup>21</sup> As Henderson stated in 1956, “All folksong kids us on. And why not? Folksong after all is largely myth, so why expect practitioners to stick to facts when they are dealing with one of the great unrealities of life?” (Neat, 2009, p.121)

expect, the ballads that have been printed most frequently are also the ones that have been found most commonly in oral tradition. (Niles, 1986, p.89)

The concept of purity is a dynamic one: it both poses a legitimate problem while simultaneously undermining that very problem on a fundamental level. While one scholar strives for a ‘pure’ (or ‘real’) concept of the tradition, another identifies that very tradition as a fallacy. This has the effect of creating – as in the days of Scott and Macpherson – an identity or trope based upon what values this ‘pure’ representation may hold. While anthropologically useful for allowing us to gauge the cultural state of a period, such attitudes can also come dangerously close to essentializing the form, further feeding conflicting conceptions of a fractured Scottish psyche.

According to Alastair Reid, “after Scotland was deprived of its public existence, it really turned into countless secret countries, private Scotland’s, from the sentimental to the politically committed.” (Reid, 1994, p.58) Indeed, the mutual rise of both the Scottish literary renaissance and the folk revival of Henderson and his contemporaries is a good example of Reid’s claim: both held similar intentions and sentiment but often differed in execution and approach, as will be discussed later.

The greater danger of such fractured psyches, however, can lie in storytellers becoming overtly aware of expectation and thus forging an idiosyncratic character where Scottishness becomes “a kind of free-floating nationality, something like a dress suit, to be worn on unspecified occasions.” (p.54) While verging consciously away from Scott’s established and widely conceived ‘Scottishness,’ Henderson and the revival still generated an identity to adopt. This identity is no different from Scott in its effect, boxing Scottish storytelling into a set of character values founded upon an intricate and tangled amalgamation of fact and fiction.

Henderson’s passion for the Travellers of Scotland is well known. This passion primarily spawned from his belief that they were the last vestige of genuine Scottish storytelling, of which

he and many others feared was disappearing. The field trips and recording sessions in which he attempted to record 'source' tales are well documented. He would eventually bring these to a widening appreciation in the capital, with festivals and dedicated venues, beginning what is now known as the folk revival of the 1960s. Despite the preservative contributions he made, the way in which Henderson reshaped the working methodology and once again re-contextualised a nation's awareness of its 'tradition' has proved more important and enduring.

Accordingly, I have focused upon Henderson not merely because of his role at the forefront of the revival, but also due to the contradictions and modifications inherent in his attitude and approaches<sup>22</sup>: for instance, much of his fieldwork is now being cast under similar scrutiny to that of Cunningham and Macpherson, identifying where "Hamish himself occasionally overstepped the role of the fieldworker in terms of his involvement with his informants in relation to conventional or 'proper' fieldwork methodology." (Byrne, 2010, p.298)

The scrutiny now cast over his legacy and body of academic work is similar to that of John Campbell as, despite technological advancements, much of his actual recordings no doubt faced many of the same problems with editing and gap-filling that Campbell and his team did. Certainly, Byrne states emphatically that Henderson's own academic virtue furthered this problem greatly, shaping the 'tradition' procured from the 'tradition bearers' to a form closer to the one that he hoped to find:

In several cases Hamish actively took part in creating or recreating the 'tradition' he was recording whether it was by providing prompts to aged informants for certain songs, or stopping and starting the tape until he had helped the informant recall an item, often with knowledge from his own repertoire. (p.298)

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<sup>22</sup> Like Cunningham and Macpherson before him, Henderson was both active in preservation and contribution; as an active poet and songwriter, we must always subjectively consider how his own work, intentions or politics may have pollinated his field recordings.

It is perhaps such legitimising that has proved to have the most corruptive lingering effect over the studies and preservative attempts that followed his own efforts. But by acknowledging how “his view of folk culture seemed to follow similar blurred lines between material old and new as it did between informant and collector,” (p.299) a more complex poignancy must also be considered: in embodying this mix within his scholarly work, he is more closely enacting the actual fundamental behaviour of storytelling. As such, it could be argued that his unorthodox methodology also gave the spark that formed the energy of the revival and propelled the renewed interest that is still felt today.

I have argued that during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, our interactions with ‘tradition’ largely spawned from the opinion that Scotland lived “in a state of mourning for itself,” (Reid, 1994, p.54). But through the development of the twentieth century, such frailty recedes, making way for an extremely confident over-romanticising of the tradition that approached a state more akin to that of celebration than mourning. This iteration would see folklorists such as Henderson manipulate the bespoke storyteller identity of ‘tradition-bearers’ in an attempt to validate the cultural-historical links and repertoires of said tellers. However, despite his claims that the travellers were the last remaining pure source, he also acknowledged how they were “every bit the proud mongrel hybrid Scotland.” (Byrne, 2010, p.292) These contradictions were a key part of the man and his methodology. However, such romanticism forms a fissure that can be seen easily by more modern criticism, and yet can present a limiting strategy for the storytellers, scholars and archivists that follow it, actively shaping the efforts of those who take up the oral tradition itself to continue it.

Peeling away the modern romantic myth, Henderson reveals himself to be:

...a man who was fully aware of the complex synthesis of book, broadside, gramophone record, radio and oral sources that made up the repertoires of the singers he was collecting. It seems to me that Hamish was under no illusion that

there was a 'holy grail' of the pure 'oral tradition', but accepted the singers' wide-ranging influences with minimal bias.' (p.286)

It is dangerous to bypass this. Though Henderson romanticised the traveller storytellers in attempts to promote their craft, he was also aware of the dichotomy between what he was attempting to preserve and the result of its preservation. When this awareness is bypassed, we miss how the fieldwork instigated by the revival held its own unintentional ramifications for the modification of the tradition:

It was only once they were discovered by the folklorists, and put on the pedestal of the concert stage that self-identification of themselves as 'folk singers' began and performance repertoires were considered more carefully. (p.286)

Due to the archiving efforts of the School of Scottish Studies and the National Poetry Library, such reactive modifications from storytellers can be comparatively identified with greater ease. Folklore studies and preservation attempts are always likely to interfere with the storytelling and its tellers over time, re-appropriating and re-contextualising, regardless of whether or not the intention to do so is there.

However, this should not be seen as problematic; such interactions bring methodology more in line with the form and function of storytelling. As such, it should be encouraged, though generalisation is an ever-present danger: the relationship between folklorist, storyteller and audience is a complex one. Ideally, the solution could lie in attempting to avoid bestowing identity anxieties in the first place. However, due to the myriad complexities of the situation, representation, interaction and preservation cannot feasibly find such neutral ground.

Widespread celebration and reverence has encouraged a cult of personality around certain storytellers; any half-knowledgeable student of folklore or oral tradition will be able to name at least Jeannie Robertson, Duncan Williamson or Sheila Stewart, despite those teller's

resistance to international archiving techniques such as the Aarne-Thompson. Their omission from such systems points to a critical anxiety to challenge the problematic nature of memory techniques that such storytellers use. Awareness of these factors is now commonplace enough to sub-categorise ‘revival storytellers.’ This is not a solution however; such selective admission will only become more problematic as modern storytellers move further and further away from their original context.

Even well-intentioned approaches can have their dangers. The Directory of Professional Storytellers in Scotland<sup>23</sup> has been created to help network, promote and preserve current active storytellers. As such, an apprenticeship is offered to help new generations to enter into the tradition.<sup>24</sup> To promote certain storytellers with the label ‘professional’ may support and promote many contributors and performers, but it also doubtlessly undermines and negates as many others who are not included. This also potentially shuts many doors on contributors who may work outside the accepted mediums for the directory; novelists, popular musicians or film-makers for instance. This fixes storytelling in another way: promoting only what has come to be expected of the form and limiting any future innovation.

It is possible to see how audience expectation plays a part in this; after all, storytellers not only modify their repertoire to best accommodate each audience, but in some cases, also their own storyteller identity. This seems to have gained more ground in the years following the folk revival, with new tellers attempting to channel the reputations or identities of more traditionally revered tellers. Again, this forces the problematic and highly loaded questioning of ‘authenticity’ and ‘purity’ to reappear, conceptual labels which new tellers cannot sincerely apply to themselves outside of performance. Maitland tells us that:

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<sup>23</sup> <http://www.tracscotland.org/traditional-arts/storytelling/scottish-storytelling-forum/join-usdonate>

<sup>24</sup> <http://www.tracscotland.org/traditional-arts/storytelling/directory-of-storytellers/storytelling-apprenticeship>

Field anthropologists have become sensitive to the fact that asking someone in an oral culture to tell you a traditional story will distort the story; the teller will mould the story to the listener's expectations – at least as far as such expectations are understood. (Maitland, 2012, p.44)

However, this re-modification and alteration is an essential element to the storytelling form; storytellers have long adapted their repertoires to suit the cultural context of their listeners. It is a self-reflexive issue that is problematic only if our methodology is too rigid to allow for it. As Maitland also notes, “this is not deliberate deceit or secrecy; it is the job of a storyteller to do so.” (p.44) In this sense, the shifting expectations of audiences can prove extremely healthy, forcing the form to progress and innovate. Preservative methodologies need only allow the creative facets of storytelling to drive both form and academic response.

This correlation is nothing new: Macpherson's Ossian scandal created a national, cultural and historical tension that fixed the progression of folklore response and folk studies for many decades. Modern re-applications will undoubtedly do the same – preservation is self-defeating when it attempts to prevent this. Study is now surely far enough away from the revival to appreciate its failures and dangers just as much as its successes have been celebrated.

As Stevie Byrne notes in his essay detailing the legacy of Henderson (*Riches in the Kist*):

...the modern interpretation of Hamish's collecting, with some romanticising of the background of informants, in particular Scottish Travellers, and the folk revival's search for the 'authentic' has left a somewhat skewed view of reality.

(Byrne, 2010, p.286)

This has somehow arisen despite the fact that Hamish's notes revealed him to be aware that there was no “‘holy grail’ of the pure ‘oral tradition’, but accepted the singer's wide-ranging influences with minimal bias’.” (p.286) As such, the values and riches of the oral tradition must

be separated from the romanticising of the individual; the value of the story must be dissociated with any one particular teller and refocused on the craft and creativity of the art form. This would allow new contributors such as singers, novelists and performance storytellers to take up the oral frameworks with greater ease, and making the tradition easier to access. Furthermore, attempts must be made to displace reading 'the folk' as a natural and genuine human category, which can be not only reductive but misleading. To do so implies a shared universal experience or expression and yet "in practice, individual and collective memories are often in tension, and the recollections of individuals frequently challenge the construction of partial accounts designed primarily to achieve collective unity." (Green, 2004, p.41) As a term, its catchment is as diverse as it is diffuse.

This becomes especially challenging in terms of the cultural – or conceptual – divide between scholar/academic and traveller/folk. Representation or appropriation holds the implication that the selected group are fundamentally unable to represent themselves. Worse still, it works on the assumption "that if one person from that group speaks out that they are able to represent all." (Abrams, 1993, p.389) Steps must be taken carefully. The folklorist assures us that "though not missionaries, folklorists are cultural advocates." (Zeitlen, 2000, p.3) While there is no doubt a certain degree of validity in this in intention at the very least, the field would be stronger were it not to take such a boisterously romantic stance on the matter of how folklorists represent their subjects.

In her essay, 'Dismantling Local Culture', Amy Shuman states that:

... our attempts to be neutral encourages us to stick with what appear to be safe local subjects and gives us the false security of believing that we can isolate our subjects of study from murky outside influences, including our own ethnocentrism. In other words, the politics of ethnocentrism. (Shuman, 1993, p.349)

It is improbable to study or interact with cultural minorities without unconsciously enacting pre-loaded agendas. As such, Shuman concurs that “the concept of local culture as a natural, essential phenomenon can and does serve opposing interests; it is never a neutral category.” (p.345) As dangerous as it is, ongoing methodologies must constantly question just who represents whom, on what level, and ultimately, why?

Regardless of possible accusations of cultural tourism or assimilation by cultural relativism, if development of the field is to continue then methodologies must also engage directly with the negative attributes of both historical and contemporary efforts rather than romanticise solutions to them. Advocates and propagators of preservation efforts must prove willing to question of both their work and the effects of the interest and attention it may gather. Our methodology must practise a critical adaptability more similar to that of oral storytelling itself.

Through the work of Henderson and the revival, Duncan Williamson rose to celebrity status as one of Scotland’s most famous storytellers. With the benefit of distance, and the mass of work published about the man and his tales, it is possible to see a clear development that exposes how Williamson’s performances for the revival audiences altered his style as he became a “world renowned storyteller and ‘character.’” (Campbell, 2012, p.11) Williamson went from someone who didn’t consider himself a storyteller,<sup>25</sup> to someone who could “inhabit nostalgia with thespian panache.” (p.14) The increase in recognition certainly helped Williamson to develop a strong performance identity<sup>26</sup> and as such, echoes the earlier discussion of context.

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<sup>25</sup> “She [his wife and American student, Linda Headlee] wrote to the education authority and she was the very first one around here saying I was a storyteller. Now the funny thing was, when I first met Linda, I was a singer! I never did any storytelling at any time,” (Campbell, 2012, p.93)

<sup>26</sup> Indeed, Ken Shapley’s description of Williamson’s performances shed light on just how far this transformation went: “He manoeuvred around the awkward shaped room like Pan in the forest. There is a definite way he walks, almost as if he has hooves, steps with feet that know the road, steps towards the listeners like a kind hearted, silver tongued devil. He prances in slow motion, alive to the air and the dance words make.” (p.143)

Furthermore, like the early exploration of the phrase ‘professional,’ Williamson seemed to see it as connected to commercial status, stating that “I told Linda all these stories but I’d never done it professionally. Like, for money.” (p.93) Whether or not Williamson would even have deemed himself a ‘professional storyteller’ is liable for debate. While he may have felt pride from such accolades, it never cast him apart from his cultural roots. Indeed, his desire to be a representative of Scots Traveller culture never changed,<sup>27</sup> yet it is possible to see how his repertoire may have been influenced by other storytellers encountered at folk-clubs or festivals now categorised as ‘professional.’ This is not, by any means, especial to the revivalists or those who surrounded them. It is simply an example of storyteller identity being self-reflexively modified by its re-contextualisation.

However, Williamson not only credited an academically-perpetuated awareness of traveller-storyteller identity in transforming his repertoire, but also noted how his exposure to other travellers modified his understanding of his delineated role. Schuman states:

Local cultures are not threatened by diversity in general but by particular incursions and competitions for rights. Questions of entitlement and representation (or who has the right to speak on behalf of whom). (Shuman, 1993, p.352)

interact with cultural minorities, but it can also be seen to function as a barrier set up to protect those that the ‘local’ encapsulates. Inclusion and exclusion remains a difficult circumstance to navigate.

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<sup>27</sup> After his death, Campbell found the following set of lyrics in Williamson’s black notebook:  
 O they are gon the old folk / And their way of life  
 Their campfires, stories and their songs.  
 Will they be forgotten and fade into the past?  
 If I could somehow bring to life  
 Those things so far behind / To see again these places  
 Some peace at last I’d find. (Campbell, 2012, p.150)

These concepts are most problematic directly at the stage of preservation itself. As mentioned earlier, the mentalities inherent in our broadest interactions with storytelling cultures are hampered by an over-awareness that lacks self-reflexivity. Those who currently interact with orality must remain aware how “oral historians are increasingly focusing upon the ways in which individual recollections fit (often unconscious) cultural scripts or mental templates.” (Green, 2004, p.35) Current methodologies should be adapted to defy such templates and resist fixing that which has always proven fluid and momentary.

However, the process of much preservative methodologies is problematic because it realigns authority from the oral to the written, and fixes it there. Fielding states that the establishment of “authority depends upon the text’s becoming fixed, with a stable existence before any particular telling; that is, the text’s being written down.” (Fielding, 1996, p.13) Considering, then, that these are tales that have been told and re-told thousands of times over, often gaining different inflections, characters or structures from telling to telling, it is clear to see how problematic a fixed, written ‘authoritative’ version could prove. The main fear then would be that the temporal permutations of the oral are left to atrophy.

Ideally, new tellers should be given the space to establish themselves on their own grounds and within their own contexts as opposed to fitting themselves to pre-existing “cultural scripts or mental templates.” They should feel comfortable challenging these and they should be supported in doing so. But the current reality shows that many tellers instead establish themselves based on concepts of ‘ownership’ and ‘status.’ More problematically, in many cases these performances mimic those who were already being recast from their original contexts by academic interest.

It is not just traveller culture which has been re-appropriated this way. ‘Celticism’ is often highlighted as a key offender on these grounds, representing a performance identity that “arises from the idealisation of past cultures and traditions and a misunderstanding of how real

identity, rather than an assumed one, contributes to genuine storytelling.” (Ryan, 2006, p.325) This harks back to the confused Gaelic/Celtic heritage of Macpherson’s *Ossian*, or the ongoing notion of tartantry composed by Scott that is still often perceived as genuine by the international community.

However, folklore studies and preservative methods can be just as dangerously loaded. A matrix of social, economic and political factors all inform the development and direction of folklore study. This is nothing new: the *Ossian* scandal was as much based on the push and pull of national politics as it was on the dishonest claims of antiquity. And it is no surprise that Henderson recognised the potential of storytelling to carry political logic. However, it did not prevent him from, pairing storytelling culture and the folk revival with his socialist leanings in the name of devolution.<sup>28</sup> This is not to undermine Henderson’s passion for the oral culture, or those that he hoped to champion, but we should not deny or ignore how he exploited aspects of Scottish culture. After all, any interaction has the potential to change not only a model of history, but also the very structure of the theory that the preservative methods are built upon.<sup>29</sup>

That Henderson recognised the mimetic relationship inherent in storytelling is clear, evidenced by his correspondences with the leader of the Scottish literary renaissance, Hugh MacDiarmid. Though they had a strong friendship, MacDiarmid was resistant to Henderson’s efforts to allow the Scots folk revival to simply piggyback the literary renaissance.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> A perfect example of the sentimental result of this can be seen in the lyric that opened this paper. Henderson often emphasised “the possibilities of a political utilisation of folklore – the fostering of an alternative to official bourgeois culture, seeking out the positive and ‘progressive’ aspect of folk culture.” (Henderson and Finlay, 2004, p. 356.)

<sup>29</sup> “Overuse of external evaluation language causes a self-reflexivity in storytelling in private and public arenas, already mentioned, making contemporary storytelling more of a post-modern expression than a traditional one.” (p.325)

<sup>30</sup> “The national consciousness is stirring; if we act promptly and boldly, we can make the folk-song revival a powerful component part of the Scottish Renaissance.” (p.50) The public letters between MacDiarmid and Henderson are an illuminating resource for detailing the complexities of their interactions. Corey Gibson’s article, *The Folkniks in the Kailyard: Hamish Henderson and the Folk-Song Flying*’ is a useful article for delving into their complicated back and forth.

MacDiarmid's personal politics were wary of much of the oral tradition but their debates are also a strong example of the oral being poised in direct conflict with the written and textual. If methodologies are self-reflexive enough, they can encourage us to not delineate binary stances to either of the two intrinsically linked forms.

Creative engagements, however, can avoid such dangers while also making important contributions, as exemplified by the work produced by the renaissance from the 1930s onwards. Hugh MacDiarmid and Edwin Muir are key examples of creating writers trying to pull Scotland away from such cultural shadows, if not merely for how influential they remain within the considerations of contemporary Scottish culture. MacDiarmid's *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle* and Muir's *Scotland 1941* remain two of the most important Scottish works of the twentieth century because their creative interactions dig into the Caledonian Antisyzygy – “a war cry for [MacDiarmid's] Scottish Renaissance movement of the 1920s” (Crotty, 1999, p.89) – in a way that critical or theoretical engagement cannot.

What remains important is not similarities in their writing, however, but rather similarities in sentiment, passion and objective. Both lashed out at the ‘synthetic Scotsman’; what they saw as a dampening of Scottish creativity by the expectation of historical inheritance. MacDiarmid's *Drunk Man* rallied against what he saw as a creative dearth post-Burns, “an apparently bottomless abyss of doggered, moralistic rubbish, mawkish sentimentality and witless jocosity.” (Crawford and Imlah, 2000, p.xxi). MacDiarmid encapsulates this disillusionment perfectly in the opening to his poem when he compares Scottish culture to another international short-hand signifier of Scottish sensibilities – Scotch whiskey:

And a' that's Scotch aboot it is the name,

Like a' thing else ca'd Scottish nooadays –

- A' destitute o' speerit juist the same. (MacDiarmid, 2008, p.55)

This destitution of spirit seems a recent malady as opposed to a natural pre-disposition. As such, MacDiarmid articulates his antisyzygy perfectly, highlighting how the Scottish nature is equipped to combat such pitfalls through its dual nature:

Hauf his soul a Scot maun use  
 Indulgin' in illusions,  
 And half in getting' rid o' them (p.221)

MacDiarmid saw these 'illusions' as a temporary condition that must be combated. To him, successful combat could be taken by poets and writers creating afresh, unimpaired from the synthetic and commercial history that was being imposed upon them.

His intention was not to demoralise the roots of Scottish heritage or cultural history, but merely the murky waters that it had slid into. Scotland's capacity for creativity was never what was being challenged; as Scott's own famous line from *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* demonstrates when he exclaims 'O Caledonia! Stern and wild / Meet nurse for a poetic child!' (Crawford and Imlah, 2000, pg.xxviii) The inspiration of the country and heritage was never in question, but rather how it would, could or should be applied.

Indeed, MacDiarmid saw the dangers that those he resented had slipped into, and how they were still dangers to contemporary poets and authors:

'A Scottish poet maun assume  
 The burden o' his people's doom,  
 And dee to brak' their livin' tomb.  
 Mony ha'e tried, but a' ha'e failed.  
 Their sacrifice has nocht availed.

Upon the thistle they're impaled. (MacDiarmid, 2008, p.239)

Scots authors and poets must walk the line between their national-cultural identity without becoming 'impaled' upon the thistle, that national symbol and troublesome weed.

The Caledonian Antisyzygy comes from this difficult act of tightrope walking; it embodied the Scots consciousness, and as such, must rightfully embody Scottish art and cultural contributions:

To pit in a concrete abstraction

My country's contrair qualities,

And mak' a unity o' these (p.195)

The unity did not need to be one of national identity or the fragmented Scottish psyche; instead, MacDiarmid was detailing a healthy state in which the 'contrair qualities' were identified and acknowledged, instead of denied or synthetically embraced:

...the future depends upon freeing development of that opposite tendency in our consciousness which runs counter to the conventional conceptions of what is Scottish. In other words, the slogan of a Scottish literary revival must be the Nietzschean 'Become what you are.' (MacDiarmid, 1923, p.22)

MacDiarmid believed that such self-reflexive openness could forge a new cultural identity in which Scottish cultural contributions could become vibrant and alive once again. Or to quote MacDiarmid's *Scottish Chapbook* slogan, "not tradition – precedent." (Duncan, 2007, p.248)

Working in the same cultural climate, it is no surprise to see how similar Muir's opinions were similar in essence, portraying "Scotland as a nation in stasis, as an anthropological site whose inhabitants are trapped in a ritualized performance of national identity." (Robichaud, 2005, p.144)

Muir's poem, *Scotland, 1941* exemplifies this effectively:

We were a tribe, a family, a people.  
 Wallace and Bruce guard now a painted field,  
 And all may read the folio of our fable,  
 Peruse the sword, the sceptre and the shield. (Muir, 2010, p.403)

Scottish history remains visible and open, though its unity exists in the past-tense. History can be seen, yet is held in an artificial state of preservation, a "painted field." Muir follows by condemning the legacy of that culturally distant tribe, family and people:

Now smoke and dearth and money everywhere,  
 Mean heirlooms of each fainter generation,  
 And mummied housegods in their musty niches,  
 Burns and Scott, sham bards of a sham nation. (p.403)

The juxtaposition of "dearth" alongside "money" is especially telling of Muir's sentiment; as "sham bards," Burns and Scott tarnish a history that is being forgotten, in the accumulation of acclaim and financial success. To Muir, the national heritage and identity has been undermined by a commercialisation of spirit: the nation's "heirlooms," - or cultural and historical value - perpetually decreasing for "each fainter generation."

Though these are very small examples, both Muir and MacDiarmid are excellent proof of how even a critical argument over national heritage can be adapted successfully and effectively within the structure and form of a creative art. The legacy of their works speaks volumes for the success of such re-contextualisations. Creative engagements hold an inherent set of qualities that are ideal for developing the fundamental functions of storytelling without being burdened by the weight of what has come before.

Critical approaches are not currently so well placed. The current lack of self-reflexivity in academic approaches ensures that more formal preservation efforts buckle under the strain of expectation, interaction and representation. As a field in its relative academic adolescence, folklorism often seems to wrestle with its own anxieties in the academic world. At times this can lead us dangerously close to a “tradition of talking about tradition,” (West, 2014, p.23) when our real concentration should be on the contributions that form the body of work constituting the ‘tradition’ itself. Work must be done to point efforts away from this cultural cul-de-sac, otherwise folklorism risks becoming the flotsam that falls by the wayside on Henderson’s famous carrying stream. Regardless of what is at stake, we are assured that this “marginalization, however, is partly self-induced by virtue of the types of problems we set out to tackle and the public arenas where we situate our work.” (Payne, 1998, p.267) But if this were the problem, then it would surely be its own solution. However, no other field of academic research or scholarly interest could prove to be so similar in fundamental motive and functional perception as the very thing it is designed to study. The main difficulty, then, lies in creating a balanced malleable model that can accommodate not only the weight of its own antiquity and field of research, but also the other anthropological values that it holds:

The politics of the ways in which folkloristics as a discipline have been shaped will have an effect on folklorists' work by shifting the domain of study from the effort to accumulate empirical truths to the effort to understand the distribution of knowledge, including politics, hierarchies, and entitlements and the interests they serve. (Shuman, 1993, p.346)

Realistically, this highlights solid ground from which begin to building a valid folklorist model. There is, however, already the frank danger that part of the problem lies in folklorism becoming too meta-discursive, studying and preserving folklorism itself instead of folklore. A balance, then, must be struck:

There is both an expansive and a delimited way of practicing folklore. The delimited position carefully defines and limits the field, studies its own history, and musters its resources. It defends the field from outside incursions... at its worst, declares, 'I'm a folklorist and you're not'; at its best, it creates a justification for an autonomous discipline. (Zeitlen, 2000, p.5)

The practice of folklore would benefit from opening itself to other disciplines, whether from traditionally academic avenues, or more unorthodox and creative contributions, such as creative writing. Self-reflexivity does not necessarily constitute closed introspection.

However, what seems to be the main problem inherent in folklorist sentiment is that it has tasked itself with justifying storytelling unnecessarily; it is attempting to legitimize that which does not need to be legitimized. Perhaps, if it were more reflexive in its introspection, it would recognise Henderson's field work not as 'trailblazing;' after all, not only had Campbell and his team set themselves the same task with similar methods, but outwith Scotland, the Grimm brothers had taken up similar efforts, inspired by the claims of Macpherson's *Ossian*. If it could step back and look objectively, it would be able to identify how the field has been actively participating long before the term 'folklorism' was coined to help it ease its way into the universities:

Such movements, common among intellectuals since the Romantics, can never develop or even preserve a living past... but must become 'invented tradition.' On the other hand the strength and adaptability of genuine traditions is not to be confused with the 'invention of tradition.' Where the old ways are alive, traditions need be neither revived nor invented. (Hobsbawn and Ranger, 1985, p.8)

This applies not only to folklorists but to all who interact with storytelling or the oral tradition on any level. If common perceptions of the culture as existing as passively past-tense is not altered, then it is unavoidable that it will soon become just that.

#### 4. Telling the Future: Theory, threats and potential pitfalls

What makes Henderson so significant is the incredible degree of awareness that his interactions with the tradition show. Despite the issues that I have previously outlined, it was never Henderson's intention to make static or remedy the form. As he stated in a letter written to Jimmie MacGregor in 1967, "as for the songs I collected and put into circulation, I did this in the context of a definite cultural strategy... My hope... Has been to encourage young folk to approach their cultural heritage with creative élan." (Byrne, 2010, p.303) It is that which should be taken forward as his greatest and most important message.

It can be uncomfortable to engage with newer efforts without holding pre-loaded conceptions; the tradition has long been established, and as such, newer contributions are often challenged for how they might oppose the 'real' and 'authentic' values that retain its validity. However, if the tradition is to continue to develop and be culturally valid, it cannot be held static. We must consider how terms such as 'authentic,' 'traditional' and 'real' are falsified subjective concepts in themselves, verging on self-aware artifice. Thankfully, such awareness is becoming prominent:

Both the idea of collecting folk tales as 'authentic' expressions of a deep and ancient sensibility and the picturesque aesthetic which informed ornamental woods like Glenlee grew out of the same historical impulse. (Maitland, 2012, p.289)

But this voice is currently not loud enough. Though conceptual, impressions of 'ancient sensibility' have no doubt transformed our perception of oral culture. Fiction and myth have long since entered the canon and become irreversibly tangled with fact. Yet methodologies are not yet reflexive enough to widely acknowledge this.

As our preservation processes develop, and the archives become more readily accessible and all-encompassing, the non-linear and unfixed origins that are inherent in the form must be enforced. Instead, field recordings and archives are allowed to create a linear recorded model wherein the development of stories can feasibly be traced and the concept of a canon can begin to be applied. These are often highly subjective. Therefore there is a very real danger that within a generation or two, if the transient nature of story forms and teller interactions is not made explicitly clear and pushed to the very forefront of preservation efforts, then the very nature of what we attempt to preserve will be lost.

Recording is relied heavily upon to create tangible records, but such efforts inevitably undermine the sources or forms that they are being used to maintain and perpetuate:

Throughout the historical era fairy stories have always existed in two forms – the oral stories, and the literary versions of them. What is unclear is how much the literary versions affected the oral versions, as well as, more obviously, the reverse.  
(p.47)

These are demarcated, categorisation-dependent times. As such, the main problem is endemic to our current cultural model.

New folk contributions are dismissed as cultural tourism if they are too similar to the materials that have influenced them, and yet are also devaluated if they stray too far from those very sources. This can see work loaded with a blinding and regressive sentimentality. Such attitudes are strangely insular and self-defeating; they work on the assumption that the revered contributions of the folk revival were exempt from being created as a mere act of witness.

A folk tradition once famously open to universal participation is now becoming overly critical and limiting: without first facing the test of durability – and thus, apparently, quality – a number of critics and folklorists refuse to categorise the work alongside established works of the

‘tradition.’ Anxiety lies in fearing how new contributions may alter the existing ‘tradition,’ the historical value of its canon, but that is surely a sign of when a storytelling tradition is functioning as it should. New contributors should not be dissuaded from interactions with established traditions as if they are a fragile object: the history of storytelling has already now been recorded, but the future of the form must now be engaged with. The key strength of the storytelling form is its malleability. This should be promoted, and all possible contributors encouraged to engage with it without hesitation.

It is often in this hesitation between past and present, established and unknown, that claims of ‘fakelore’ become resonant. The cliques of academia and folk clubs have a lot of responsibility for the existence of such claims, yet the exploitation of overblown national sentiment and historical blurring as seen in concepts such as Celticism also grant validity to the terms. But it is inevitable that there be a vein of populist interaction with ‘tradition.’ It was some of the early ramifications of these interactions that moulded MacDiarmid’s distaste for the cultural ‘Scottishness’ that existed around him:

The lustre of depoliticised sentiment casts a glow over political defeat symbolized by images torn out of history to grace the niches of romantic veneration and its commercial pastiche. They are thrust out from the contextualising world of fact, the struggle to be Scotland rather than remember it. (Pittock, 2008, p.136)

Key examples of this can be found in the populist contributions of folksong that began to appear in the twentieth century. The problem is not the populist works themselves, but rather that an environment has been cultivated where to exist means to exist solely as a part of the national tradition. It is no wonder that people like MacDiarmid felt the cultural cringe.

When new folk contributions are denied the space to define themselves, it forms a blurred space in which past definitions are juxtaposed and merged. Attempting to protect

tradition by a degree of subjective quality limits storytelling to a rigid form, narrowing its future considerably. Development is fed by culture as opposed to the critical response to that culture; as such, it seems impossible to preserve and interact without dangerously interfering with the natural flow of the form. But oral storytelling fundamentally requires interaction and modification: the assumption that methodologies can simultaneously preserve tradition while working as arbiters of subjective taste that must be challenged.

Such problems can spawn from over-awareness: those interested in storytelling should instead follow Henderson's intentions and simply get stuck in. However, there are countless examples where a misplaced preference for 'authenticity' still prevents such new interactions:

The authentic Scots revivalists today are hardly noticed, while the attention-seekers gain large public followings, their music in general becoming deracinated and blander. The performer spends more on dressing for the stage than ever before. (Chalmers, 2011, p.127)

Despite awareness of the many differing efforts that have maintained Scottish orality, vague and diffuse concepts of the 'authentic' are still anxiously clung to. Dismissal of contemporary folk contributions are painted in deliberately broad strokes, exploiting the sentiment and nationalistic pride inherent in concepts of cultural heritage and inheritance. But it is a tradition that has actually sustained relevancy by repeatedly breaking and re-breaking itself to fit the needs of each evolution of culture. As such, damning new contributions for differing from culturally constructed expectation is dangerous and short-sighted.

Regardless of the intentions or sentiments of those who hold them, ideas of 'authenticity' are highly problematic. For instance, while there is no doubt validity in the value of the travellers, their contributions are not challenged in the same way that new tellers are. It is a cultural blindness that can be very clearly linked to a prevailing reverence for Scottish historical tropes;

romanticised notions of community and shared identity; an ironic decision now that many of these travellers have removed themselves from their indigenous contexts.

Again, current methodologies and interactions are not reflexive enough; they do not learn enough from past mistakes and do not question new intentions. For instance, Norman Chalmers states:

There are great young singers emerging, and remarkably skilled and moving young players. There will always appear artfulness and quality, and it behoves us to seek the gold among the dross – to be discriminating, and seek to find the continuity of the Scottish character, and the beautiful and often strange new shapes thrown up by the endlessly enduring Carrying Stream. (p.127)

While optimistic, this attitude is also limiting. To define a current expectation of ‘good’ is to also simultaneously define a ‘bad.’ Chalmers’ attitude is nothing new, mirroring attitudes as old as Alan Cunningham, whose correspondences with Walter Scott are strong evidence for the hugely subjective way that folksong collection has long been practised.<sup>31</sup>

While Cunningham’s anxiety is most likely tied to his own sales of stories to London magazines, it communicates the point I am making. Cunningham, much to Scott’s distress, disregards the door-to-door storyteller, simply because his method does not fit his interpretation of the oral tradition. It is disheartening to see how the same subjective quantifying of quality continues; a point exemplified once again by the idolisation of the travelling community.

Currently, it seems that current methodologies are still dangerously determined to tenuously theorise our way around these attitudes in much the same way that Cunningham was,

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<sup>31</sup> Cunningham’s letters show how he differentiating between what he considered authentic art and another form of interaction that he more closely tied to shallow consumerist or capitalist gain: “In one of his letters he recalls a man (‘the last of a race of district tale-tellers’) who made his living by telling stories and singing ballads. Cunningham remembers him as having ‘a devout tale for the old, and a merry tale for the young’ and describes him as ‘a sort of beggar.’ To which Scott responds: ‘Out upon thee, Allan. Dost thou call that begging? Why, man, we make our bread by story-telling, and honest bread it is.’” (Hogg, 1875, p.79)

without openly and honestly confronting the dangers inherent in them. The danger of tarnishing preservation with our own rigid subjective preferences remains omnipresent. Care is required: research and understanding is the pursuit of similarity, but preservation should prioritise the importance of difference.

Most likely, the endurance of such attitudes and snobbishly cavalier approaches is informed by methodologies being dragged into the debate over the Scottish condition and its fractured psyche: well-established tradition is championed because a suitable replacement ‘tradition’ for the nation has not yet been discovered or forged. While I am suggesting that current storytellers and creative writers hold the keys to a positive future, they also still work from under the shadows of national-cultural representations that they cannot relate to. It is a difficult foundation.

The lasting negativity of this national problem surely entices archivists and preservationists to become more ruthlessly selective in what they acknowledge as ‘genuine’ cultural contributions. But this is self-awareness without self-reflexivity. Creative writers are surely perfectly equipped to break from the cultural cul-de-sac that Scottish antiquity and heritage has been shaped in to. Efforts should instead be focused on ensuring that the oral tradition simply continues, no matter what form, or guided by whose hand.

Craig does show light at the end of the tunnel, stating that “the establishment of centres of Scottish studies in the various Scottish universities is, for Scotland, a radical departure, but one that offers the possibility of coming to terms with the realities of the Scottish past rather than its myths.” (p.32) Indeed, the work of such institutions and centres holds much potential – provided that it is self-reflexive and open enough in its studies and pursuits. The greatest gains will be made when their work is then integrated with new creative efforts, whether written, oral or a mixture of both. The less binary delineation made between the two at this juncture the better.

However, such stages are still some distance away and work needs to be done. Newer recordings or contributions are struggling to find validity amongst the very establishment once set up to secure and preserve them. From his own experiences archiving in the School of Scottish Studies, Stevie Byrne states that “other staff seem to have shown a snobbery towards ‘revivalists’ as not being the ‘real deal’, evidenced by the fact that, even until 1988, the School’s archive card index did not have a subject heading for ‘revival.’” (Byrne, 2010, p.307) A very singular example, perhaps, but a potent one none-the-less. Such attitudes of exclusivity seem to directly oppose the very open nature of storytelling on the most fundamental level.

In his foreword to Stuart McHardy’s *Scotland the Brave Land*, the director of the Scottish Storytelling Centre, Donald Smith, states that:

The key thing in folktales was to entertain while also passing on lots of cultural knowledge and life wisdom. In our own time these folk traditions have experienced a remarkable renaissance as new storytellers have taken up old themes and given them back to a wider audience. Perhaps ‘Brave’ itself is part of that movement of rediscovery and reinvention. (McHardy, 2012, p.8)

While some may oppose the insinuation that Pixar’s animated movie could become a part of the continued tradition in its own way, the real question is ‘why not?’

Those who are most passionately invested in the continuation of tradition are often those who hold it back the most. Investment seems to breed exclusivity: once one is within the pre-supposed conditions of the ‘tradition,’ one becomes very discerning over the admission of what may follow. Regardless of intention or sincerity, such selective attitudes are more preventative than preservative.

Such exclusivity is often encumbered with a trepidation around allowing the tradition to surpass conceived notions of itself; those involved in preservation are hesitant to allow the oral

form to evolve into a shape that is unrecognisable as in doing so, they risk losing the pre-established shape forever. However, as I have tried to allude to in the earlier sections, there is no genuine way of proving that this has not already happened, perhaps even ten times over. The method of passing on tales from teller to teller or generation to generation was never a safeguard against modification, but instead an encouragement to refresh and re-contextualise and therefore keeping *the values* that it carried alive. It is why there exists no finite ‘origin’ to the tradition, and also why we cannot, and should not, ‘fix’ it in an attempt to establish one.

However, our current culture has changed radically from that of a century ago, let alone five hundred or a thousand years ago. As Carter states:

Now we have machines to do our dreaming for us. But within that ‘video-gadgetry’ might lie the source of a continuation, even a transformation, of storytelling and story-performance. The human imagination is infinitely resilient... Nevertheless, this last century has seen the most fundamental change in human culture since the Iron Age – the final divorce from the land. (Carter, 2005, p.xxiii)

This ‘final divorce from the land’ ensures that to fix the form in any one way would deny prolonged validity or relevance in a further-sighted future. The growth of electronic media in recent years has pushed informal communication skills to the forefront, highlighting a renewed need and interest in live exchanges. It is an important realisation, as “in the end, storytelling is about community and wherever people get together there is a story. Narrative is one of humanity’s oldest and most defining artistic skills.” (Smith, 1999)

To open tradition to the digital world without restraint would be greatly beneficial in undoing the boundaries that have been created. It seems natural to the form (but perhaps not the tradition) that it be allowed to evolve organically alongside the ever-changing world of computers and the internet. I have no doubt that the tradition itself would modify and adapt in

this world through the multitudes of different handlings it would encounter – far healthier than hermetic preservation in an archive.

Digital spaces and forms may seem an unorthodox carrier of ‘tradition’ but Macpherson’s modified transcriptions were once considered avant-garde, as were Campbell’s wax cylinders, and then the later field recordings of Henderson. Realising such considerations and practises would force us to refresh the mentalities and questions that we approach storytelling with, forging new investigative paths and methodologies. Increased reflexivity would raise further questions: what could be considered a ‘typical’ span of time before the avant-garde became simply ‘the norm’? And then: how much longer before that ‘avant-garde’ becomes ‘traditional’?

However, these are binary states of understanding; the real potency would come from studying the transitional timespan between such stages of recognition would encourage the realignment of expectations regarding what denotes works accepted into the tradition or canon. Fresh perspective can be gained by breaking down the hermetic barriers that are imposed by the antiquarian values that have been amassed by the oral tradition over the centuries. From that point, new contributors could more easily search beyond the known value of archived pieces, and begin to consider the compositional values of those alongside their own works.

Storytelling has survived and thrived upon transitioning cultural stages throughout history by adapting its shape quite distinguishably. Indeed, transition seems to be key. As Maitland points out:

When people could read and be productive after dark, something very fundamental changed, and there was no longer need or space for the ancient oral tradition. The stories were often confined to books, which makes the text static, and they were handed over to children. In this century, our projected tenderness

or sentimentality towards children, as well as our somewhat literalistic addiction to scientific realism, has made us more and more unwilling to expose the young to the violence and irrationality of the forest and its stories. (Maitland, 2012, p.17)

To the current generation, the internet marks the next significant transition. It is the equivalent of Maitland's forest: in it, there lies the same fundamental concern for children's learning and safety, yet it harbours the same potential for personal or communal growth. The potential it holds for developing telling, transmission and performance is remarkable, as it "provides small, accessible and punchy platforms for marginal cultures to have a place, and in some cases thrive." (Byrne, 2010, p.303) A digital space therefore sidesteps the questions of representation. Furthermore, it ignores fixing, displaces 'tradition' and encourages fluidity by spreading cultural heritages. Generations going forward have been given the tools to reflexively adapt the same methods that orality has used to survive, retaining its base values and then nurturing it in the wild grounds of a boundless digital space shared between people right around the globe. Such possibilities for transmission and exchanges of culture are tantalising.

However, this is not to insinuate that all of academia is resistant: there has already been an engagement between scholars and these new possibilities. For instance, the developmental possibilities of preservative projects has been readily recognised. A perfect example is the *Tobar An Dualchais (Kist o' Riches)* project:<sup>32</sup> an internet portal in which fieldwork recordings are currently being digitised and made available to all, removing the musty archive from the interaction altogether. One presumes that any wariness to further adopt and adapt such projects is akin to Henderson's cautionary note about "having to steer the Scottish folksong revival between the shoals of dusty archivism on the one hand and commercial prostitution on the other." (Neat, 2009, p.301) However, it is important that such anxieties are respectfully discarded in view of their possible rewards. For through portals such as the *Kist*, field recordings are open

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<sup>32</sup> <http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/>

to all. They exist here not only to be listened to, but also, one would hope, to encourage anyone to feel that they may interact themselves and take up the storytelling mantle.

Importantly, such digital spaces remove the atavistic anxieties of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that were tied to social class in regards to reading ability or the affordability of books. However, if books no longer exist as the key font or resource, if folklorists fail to adapt to new digital opportunities, then there is a great chance that their validity will greatly reduce.

It is now more than ever within everyone's power to become storytellers, adding their own modifications and personal inflections, and thus participating in a developing tradition as opposed to being oppressed by a stagnating one. As West states:

Those voices on the shelves can now emerge from computer speakers anywhere in the world, and the audience is a truly international one. There is still much work to be done, however, both in completing this Herculean task and in following it up with projects which help these users to engage with the material in ways which enhances their understanding of its meaning and worth. (West 47)

The international nature of the internet is a seemingly limitless asset; if more of the tradition could be opened to new digital processes, it is doubtless that more links between nations, communities and cultures would further expose themselves, and do so with greater ease. A globalising of our methodology would benefit from the erosion of fixed sentimental misconceptions such as nationalised traditions and localised tales. West states that "globalisation means that 'traditional' ways of thinking and acting lack the reach required." (West, 2014, p.11) This is because the nationalistic values are not genuinely inherent in storytelling or oral tradition; they are retrospectively added and often with intention. As Craig states:

All cultures exist not in themselves – in the autonomy and the autoletic trajectory of their own narratives – but in the relations between themselves and others. Culture is not an organism, nor a totality, nor a unity: it is the site of a dialogue, it is a dialect. It is being between. (Craig, 1999, p.206)

Value lies not in the fabrication of unity but in the identification of difference and the examination of transition. Oral traditions will always be better understood, and thus better developed moving forward, when our engagements with them are open and untarnished by nationalist sentiment or ideas of ownership.

With this mentality, our interactions with traditions become developmental and forward-facing processes and a greater engagement with digital processes could mark the biggest evolutionary leap for storytelling and oral culture yet. Storytelling's ability to adapt and be re-contextualised is ideal for such a space: social networking, video-sharing, blogging and multimedia expressions could provide an exciting new set of shapes for storytelling to bend itself to, altering not only the processes of transmission, but also those of audience engagement, encouraging even further interactions. Fundamental arguments begin to seem like antiquity themselves: the digitalisation of text or field recordings dismantles the tenuous binary definition between the oral and the written, becoming ever-increasingly amalgamated in an potentially resource-rich digital space. Such free-form methodological development could expose and erode:

...the borders that early folklore collections had been highlighting were largely *created borders*, in other words frameworks, many of which were neither recognised nor truly understood by the people from whom the material was being collected. (Gunnell, 2013, p.201)

This is important because it removes the past-tense definitions of existing methodologies and allows newer models “to capture lore as it lives.” (p.237-8)

Such open approaches (as opposed to merely archival projects such as the *kist o'riches*) would allow storytellers to perform, learn, interact and adapt simultaneously, remodelling the to become incredibly open at each stage, from conception to performance, and then, possibly, adaptation and translation (through both language and culture.) We need only have the courage to allow it storytelling to adapt organically. In such a space, conceptions of tradition would no longer be anathema:

This philosophy might see mass and instant communication not as a threat, not as a vehicle for the inevitable homogenisation of the world's cultures, but rather as a wonderful means to recognise, display, share, understand and celebrate cultural difference. In such a vision, 'tradition' remains entirely relevant – indeed, crucial – to the modern world. For it is partly within tradition that cultural difference is stored, that the vast richness of human creativity is represented and that place, locality and belonging are given meaning. (West, 2014, p.12)

This is not to be understated; for the first time since an academic interest was taken in orality and storytelling, folklore is being given back to the 'folk.' Perhaps alongside it, folklorism can find it within itself to relinquish the tenuous academic reins and allow itself to do the same. Tradition is no longer to be denigrated or blindly celebrated but interacted with and explored. Ultimately, what is most important is the continuation a key founding aspect of oral culture – of creativity. Currently, that creativity can often be quashed by a rigid reverence to 'traditional' and time-tested material. It is essential then, that newer participants in storytelling are aware of the pitfalls of storytelling antiquarianism.

Oral tales find themselves able to survive and adapt because they have no fixed reference: locations are created in broad strokes and characters can often be nameless. Key objects can potentially be inter-changed with those more symbolic to their audience without any intrinsic values being changed. However, literature can seem less opaque and malleable.

In his text, *How Fiction Works*, James Woods assures us that “literature differs from life in that life is amorphously full of detail, and rarely directs us toward it, whereas literature teaches us to notice.” (p.52) But I would argue that the relationship between the written and the oral is more fluid and amorphous than that as they are linked by their fundamental functions; despite any differences in form, structure or transmission, they are both *narratives*. Any future successes must not only acknowledge this factor, but engage with it directly and without anxiety.

Regardless of geographical boundaries, applied history or politics, what has maintained storytelling and tales is the fundamental vein of creativity which adapts and re-adapts it. In her preface to Angela Carter states that:

...stories have seeded themselves all around the world, not because we all share the same imagination and experience but because stories are portable, part of the invisible luggage people take with them when they leave home. (Carter, 2005, p.xvi)

These stories can be unpacked and repackaged, their values altered or retained. What is most important, it seems, is that these values and this malleability is not forgotten; preservative efforts are not merely those of archival, but also those of creative re-interpretation. What is fundamental to storytelling should remain fundamental to preservative efforts.

Such interactions can be easily and successfully achieved because, contextually, tales are merely compositions of several key elements; all other story features outside these elements are repurposed and unique to their own telling. The children’s wonder tale, *Rashiecoats*,<sup>33</sup> for instance, is often credited as being a Scottish Cinderella due to its transformative princess and enchanted garment; in this case, not the glass slipper of Charles Perrault (Carter, 2008, pp. 31-39) but a coat of feathers and gold. However, this coat and the role it proceeds to play are actually more akin to

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<sup>33</sup> Tom Muir’s telling of the story can be found here:  
<http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/scotlandsstories/rashiecoats/rashiecoatsstory/index.asp>

the tale *Donkey-skin*, by Perrault. (Carter, 2008, pp.61-71) Furthermore, in her collection *Folktales of England*, Katherine Briggs collected the tale as an English folktale named *Mossycoat*. As such, these tales have come to be grouped together by their key elements under the Aarne-Thompson Type 510B. While undeniably useful, such categorising systems are also problematic: why then is *Cinderella* not grouped beside them under type 510B? The system is affected by elements of subjectivity. Furthermore, what of novels or novelists who also adopt elements of fairy tales or folklore and rework them? Will Angela Carter's *The Bloody Chamber* be at some point adopted into such categorisation?<sup>34</sup>

It is a key question. Novelists, after all, are storytellers in a print medium; as such, they have the power to engage with international tradition and heritage as they see fit, and creatively amalgamate or re-contextualise their interactions. Furthermore, novelists have the potential to push elements of tradition further from their formal origins and thus from antiquarianism. They have the ability to remove story elements and *completely* recast them. While this may sound detrimental, it wholly embodies the creative engagement and personal interpretation fundamental to the form of storytelling, potentially furthering its appeal and reach by slipping elements of the tradition where it may have never previously been found. This way, new audiences are reached.

Duncan Williamson's famed telling of the *Silkie* (in itself, not vastly different from his tale *Mary and the Seal*, famously recorded for the BBC) runs as such:

The Silkie has found her skin again

Takes once more her nature and name.

Moonlady welcomes her long gone daughter

So many turnings / In those long years

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<sup>34</sup> A strong essay to further develop this line of thought and questioning is Alan Dundes' *The Motif-Index and the Tale Type Index: A Critique*.

Waiting for her child / To splash from the land

Into the wide ocean and swim glistening, / Free. (Campbell, 2012, p.121)

While also similar to many changeling tales from around the world (not least to the Scandinavian folklores<sup>35</sup>), the idea of the silkie, or selkie, has also been retold and recast within a very contemporary novel named *Orkney* by Amy Sackville. In the novel, an elderly professor of folklore details his honeymoon to a young student on the island of Orkney:

...she is still staring out. And so I have turned away from my work, just for a moment, to attend to her. All those subtle serpents and slippery fishtailed maidens I have been trying to get hold of; for now it seems foolish to labour over fairy-tales when out there on the shore I have one of my own. I sit quietly here, adding to my endless index of her, observing as she becomes a silhouette. She is Protean, a Thetis, a daughter of the sea, a shape-shifting goddess of who must be subdued; I hold her fast and she changes in my grasp... (Sackville, 2013, p.22)

While her novel tells a tale of contemporary isolation, of the difficulties of personal connections and of the blurred line between knowledge and obsession, it does so through using the familiar elements of the selkie folklores, using that rich heritage not only to colour the narrative for readers, but also act as shorthand signifiers to those readers with an awareness of folklore. For instance, Sackville's phrasing is not accidental when the professor considers his "endless index." Nor is it accidental that his lover should embody the ever-shifting nature of the form ("I hold her fast and she changes in my grasp"), or the inability to truly fix it. Sackville's narrative is not defined by her interactions with folklore, but instead represents a symbiotic relationship which strengthens each component.

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<sup>35</sup> "The Nordic connection is clearly reflected in Shetlandic legends about Changelings (F61-70; cf.ML5085); the kelpie or water horse (like the Nordic nokken: F57, 58, 68, 94/ MLSIT 4086-7); the selkie (or seal man or woman cf. ML 4080)." (Gunnell, 2013, p.220)

Perhaps a greater example of such interactions, however, can be found in the work of Neil Gunn. Like Sackville, Gunn's interactions merely assimilate elements of tales and storytelling, using them to emphasize theme or location through clever manipulation. In *The Well at the World's End*, Gunn coolly weaves around the original forms and tropes of the tale, maintaining merely the aspect of the search for the well itself:<sup>36</sup>

He was silent for a little while. 'What did she expect to find in the well?'

'Knowledge and poetry. There are hazels above the well, and they burst into blossom when you find it, and inspirations and wisdom fall into the well, and the well surges. You'll often find mention of this well in the old legends. (Gunn, 2008, p.14)

Not only does Gunn interact with the tradition, the frame of his novel becomes a fictional pursuit of it, a search to pin it down and revive it. The pursuit of knowledge or meaning in life during a period of post-war disenchantment becomes symbiotic with the search for a particular story asset; in this case, the well.

As such, we encounter the nature of storytelling itself within the novel:

You see what I mean? This gloom that hangs over us. Violence and death. Without end. It's not that we've forgotten how to approach the well in the right way: we've forgotten the well itself. The thing isn't even tragic: it's a bloody mess. (p.14)

Gunn's intentions here are clear; to promote and maintain such a font of knowledge, wisdom and experience. What his work proves is how perfect a vessel the novel is for such intentions to

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<sup>36</sup> A fairy tale regarding a prince as a frog, a well and a beautiful maiden. *NDDN* also interacts with this tale in a key way, specifically the Elizabeth Grierson version (found in the Penguin collection, *Scottish Folk and Fairy Tales from Burns to Buchan*.) However, it must also be noted that there are many versions of this tale also, not least in the very similar tale collected by the Grimm brothers entitled *The Frog King, or Iron Henry*, which can be found in *The Complete Grimm's Fairy Tales* (2013).

reach beyond those who are already involved in preservation attempts, more naturally embedding the flux of centuries-worth of interactions subtly into the social consciousness.

In his novel, *The Drinking Well*, Gunn removes the search from the rural Scottish landscape to the city of Edinburgh, and uses the spirit of enlightened debate to further probe the concept of his fiction-based methodology:

‘Need I go any further?’ Davidson asked MacGeorge.

‘I see the implications, but they do not impress me, apart from what has happened in the past. If you are arguing for a modern literature in Scotland, then I see no reason why it should not be produced in the existing circumstances.’

‘Without reference to the past?’

‘Without any direct reference.’

‘Then by indirect reference?’

‘What do you mean by indirect?’ (Gunn, 2006, p.208)

Gunn questions not the tradition itself, which is clearly established to him, but instead the capacity of modern literature to maintain or accommodate it. It is an appropriate question, and certainly one that remained vital throughout the Scottish Renaissance of MacDiarmid, Muir and company. But Gunn has Davidson give a telling reply to the enquiry:

‘Literature, as indeed all the arts, is in its highest form held to be an expression of what you call the unconscious. Its expression is made, of course, through the intellect, but its power derives directly from the unconscious. And the unconscious, I understand, is the sum of our past.’ (p.208)

The sentiment is undeniable: we waste time and energy on the question of whether literature can accommodate or support the tradition of storytelling, whether oral or not. It is a moot point. To Gunn, literature is irrevocably connected to the cultural and national heritage through storytelling. Accordingly, it is undeniable how it affects a nation's authors and literature, whether they choose to engage with it directly or not.

What these small examples show, however, is that the story elements of folklore are not exclusive to oral storytellers or ballad singers, and most definitely not exclusive to folklorists or archivists. Instead, they can be adopted and reworked by any thread or medium of storytelling, even the novel. Furthermore, to ensure the vitality of the original tales the inclusion of such elements may not need to explicitly identify the whole story of their origin, or even other connected story elements. They can be chosen or disregarded as an author sees fit and a story can still be told – perhaps even a uniquely new one.

The Czech author and critic, Milan Kundera stated that “every novelist's work contains an explicit vision of the history of the novel, an idea of what the novel is.” (Kundera, 2005, foreword) Considering the arguments laid out in this paper, then, it is very easy to see how naturally Scottish authors may adapt storytelling into their creations. Regardless of degrees of success or integration, what is most important at this point is that the storytelling culture and heritage is continuing to be creatively engaged with. Then not only will its vitality and versatility be maintained, but further promoted. It is from this sentiment that the creative portion of this thesis, *NDDN*, launches itself.

*NDDN* attempts not only to highlight the key discussions of this paper, but also to engage with them in a meaningful way. It is structured in such a way that each problem is expounded upon and simultaneously delineated, countered, defeated, promoted and advanced. The discussion of oral storytelling is not a superficial theme in the narrative – it *is* the narrative.

In typical *Bildungsroman* fashion, Morgan is entering puberty and trying to define his own character. Many classical factors contribute to this, be it culture, friends, environment or family. But the most prominent aspect that drives Morgan is his lack of personal history: he begins as one of the blurry, amorphous characters often presented within a classic folktale. He is nameless for the entire first chapter, visiting a house he has recently discovered belongs to a part of his family that he did not know existed. From this point forward, he begins to attempt to root himself in this newly discovered heritage, finding interest in the unfamiliar and fairy tale-like rural landscape, and the stories that he is told by both his neighbour Tam and new-found friend, Anna.

This mixing of social, historical and physical environment is crucial in his development of *self*:

Although telling stories is a very fundamental human attribute, to the extent that psychiatry now often treats ‘narrative loss’ – the inability to construct a story of one’s own life – as a loss of identity or ‘personhood’, it is not natural but an art form – you have to learn how to tell stories. (Maitland, 2012, p.17)

Even to a contemporary protagonist, the archaic values of storytelling and oral culture are developmentally essential. In *NDDN*, Morgan pays little attention at school. Instead, his education comes from the cultural vessels of the land around him, the people that live there, and the stories that they tell, for, “the story is the thing. The landscapes and seasons are here, along with the history, humour and dreams of the Scottish Highlands. It is an education and an entertainment all at once.” (Barrington, 2013, p.9) It is this intrinsic value of storytelling that we should work to preserve instead of arguing over ownership or authenticity.

*NDDN* self-reflexively examines the intricate and problematic act of storytelling by focusing on the creation of a story and its telling by someone who is new to the ‘national

tradition,' along with all its many ramifications. In the text *The Lore of Scotland*, Jennifer Westwood articulates very well why this is important:

Legends are passed on both by word of mouth and by print. An interesting story (whether or not it actually happened) is remembered within a community, and repeated and embroidered until it becomes part of the local colour. Told to outsiders, or written down and read by people far away, it may then come to be told in a new region as part of a new history, its action ascribed to different protagonists and related to different landmarks, but still remaining identifiably the same tale. (Westwood and Kingshill, 2011, p.xi)

This new culture and landscape, so firmly rooted in the tales and traditional history of the Scottish travellers, becomes the inkwell that Morgan draws from to craft his own story.

Morgan's construction of a story engages not only with the oral tradition, but also with the tangle of its incumbent critical discourse. Elements of other stories are assimilated and bent, rewritten and repurposed, and other novels implicitly referenced (such as the similarities in situation and manner between Beatrix in *NDDN* and Miss Havisham in Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations*, or the discovery of the house behind the ivy being akin to elements of Frances Hodgson Burnett's *The Secret Garden*), highlighting the functional similarities of intertextuality in the written form to the adaptive practises of the oral form. To best accommodate these elements, Morgan embodies a blank canvas for both the story and the reader, a young boy fresh from the comforts of the city and middle-class living, uninitiated with the land and its cultural heritage. This relocation is not redundant. As Maitland states, "Landscape informs the collective imagination as much as or more than it forms the individual psyche and its imagination." (Maitland, 2012, p.7)

Indeed, as McHardy states, “without stories the land is a territory unknown, unmapped, unfriendly.” (McHardy, 2012, p.9) Both the ramifications of the local historical land and the acts of storytelling encountered combine with Morgan’s own search for personal ‘tradition’ or tentative history. This is absorbed into the narrative structure, forming the gestation of a story that Morgan primes himself to tell despite being a cultural outsider, creating an easy entry level for the reader.

There are, of course, more straightforward and superficial nods, such as the loose sense of time, where the story is never tied too closely to the seasons, as if it is ready to be changed and retold at any moment. It is a conscious decision to mirror the form of storytelling without explicitly having to point the finger at the narrative and say ‘this: this is storytelling.’

Another of the more casual interactions with Scottish history are the houses of Anna and Morgan’s grandparents, symbolising the abandonment not only of Scottish heritage and culture, but also of older systems of feudalism and clanship. These grand old houses, filled with nothing but cobwebs, tartans, clan heraldry and mementos also effectively evoke the hollow artifice of a fictionalised Scottish selfhood that historians and critics such as Trever-Roper have worked to expose. In these tomb-like homes of tentative and questionable history, Morgan and Anna still vividly keep the practise of oral storytelling alive, separate almost entirely from the pollution or noise that folkloristic arguments generate over historical sources, authenticity, and heritage. As such, their pure storytelling interactions represent the best hopes of this paper. Counter to this is Tam, who provides the opposing side of the discussion, stuck in his own sense of history and Scottishness and altering the children’s tales with his own sense of what is ‘correct.’ This constant mixing is important because as Fielding states:

Speech and writing can exist neither separately nor together. Value remains necessary as orality and literacy both constitute valuable assets, but because of the

way they become culturally locked together, to value one results in the devaluation of the other. (Fielding, 1996, p.43)

*NDDN* attempts to create a fictional space that engages purely with ‘storytelling’ – that is neither fixed to a written or oral definition – so as not to value one at the demerit of the other. In this way, they are presented as a cultural symbiosis, and are thus able to be adapted or altered by their readership without the binary definitions set by previous engagements or critical discourses on Scottish storytelling.

Well-known tales are also regurgitated in whatever forms most suit the characters or narrative at the particular time of telling – Tam’s rendition of several verses of Burns’ *Tam Lin*, for instance, are repurposed to poke at Natalie’s tender past. Anna, Craigie and Tam all tell Morgan differing versions of a familiar folktale about a healing well, playing with the conventions of common Scottish renditions (of which there are several) and many more international ones. These are then assimilated into Morgan’s own tale, and thus gradually within novel itself, eventually reshaping *NDDN* to become the final rendition of *The Well at the World’s End*, (or *the Water at the World’s End* to Anna and Tam).

Adaptation and adoption by other cultural forms is the most vital way forward. It is in this interaction that *NDDN* attempts to progressively detail orality on more than merely a thematic level, coupling them with the disenchantments more universally akin to the typical *Bildungsroman*.

However, the manipulative engagement that *NDDN* has with storytelling also has more malicious and corruptive intentions, skirting playfully with ambiguity and duplicitousness. Tales are not only told in *NDDN* to impart knowledge (local or historical), or to carry lessons and important information, but are also used as veils to cover portions of painful history. Anna tells tales to Morgan, unable to fully acknowledge or engage with the troubles of her own past and

current situation, hiding pertinent details about her father's death and her brother's absence. The sentiments and emotions of these stories are genuine and honest, but the frames of the story are constructed to buffer and shield against detail – Anna uses storytelling and a world of folklore to cope with the harsh reality of her existence. However, this also has another effect: the dishonesty of these real tales within their fictional frames is subliminally informative to Morgan, subconsciously shaping the way that he later casts his own story.

His own story is another retelling of *The Well at the World's End* that eventually becomes Morgan's tale to the police, which leads to Lachlin's suicide. This represents perhaps the main repurposing of storytelling within *NDDN*, recasting it within a modern and media-orientated world where the terms 'tale-telling' and 'story-telling' are trivialised from their traditional interpretations and more commonly associated with dishonesty, lying or gossip.

The rise of tabloid media, social media such as *Facebook*, and the explosive popularity of blog trends such as *Twitter*, *Instagram* and *Tumblr* only serve to signify that although it has been argued that widespread storytelling fell out of favour a long time ago, along with its inherent values and strengths, it has in fact become a more prominent part of our lifestyle. It is not gone. It is simply different. Storytelling does, and always will, exist from moment to moment in our current daily lives, though perhaps not always in the culturally informative way that we may hope. What is really being argued against in these kinds of statements is rather how many of the aspects which marked storytelling with flags such as 'traditional' and 'national' have been cut away during the evolution of the form.

Perhaps the main issue that arises from storytelling modernisation is less one of the possessive sense of nationality or community that has been seen over the past two centuries, but instead an issue that spawns more from a sense of possession tied to consumerist sensibilities and materialistic anxieties:

To tell stories, you have to hear stories and you have to have an audience to hear the stories you tell. Storytelling is economically unproductive – there is no marketable product; it is outwith the laws of patents and copyright; it cannot easily be commoditised; it is a skill without monetary value. (Maitland, 2012, p.18)

Such considerations should not be allowed to devalue storytelling: the solution does not lie in fighting against current modernity and its trends, but in attempting to modify our storytelling to address societal and cultural changes at the base level of process and function.

*NDDN* attempts to find its feet among the discourse on Scottish storytelling by acting as a response that is both self-aware and highly reflexive. Writers are no longer seeking a national identity for their work as in the nineteenth century; the MacDiarmid-led literary renaissance has successfully subverted that. Instead, the contemporary Scottish writer is faced with creating meaningful work under the burden of a firmly established national identity that is built upon a tangle of dishonesty, fiction and cultural appeasement.

It is entirely possible, then, that the solution to the national storytelling burden is not to escape or deny it, but instead to engage with it in as direct and intuitive a method as possible. Therefore, it is all a text can do to highlight problem and intention, and through that hopefully produce an action. Readers will then decide whether it is a creation of sincere or synthetic nature, or whether that ultimately matters. It is in this decision that the future of Scottish storytelling will find both its answer and its fated future-form, still unforeseeable to us now.

## Conclusions

Today, most books that engage with the inseparable tangle of Scottish storytelling, oral culture or folklore are keen to emphasize not only the power of Scottish stories and their tellers, but also of the hunger of the audience to receive and digest them. Donald Smith, director of the Scottish Storytelling Centre, for instance, gives an exemplary foreword entitled *Scotland: Where Legends Come to Life*:

As long as people want to tell and to enjoy stories, then the storytelling traditions will remain alive, continuous yet ever changing in new contexts. Scots of all ages and cultures like to talk! The river of memory, entertainment and wisdom is as unstoppable as the moment Auld Mither Cailleach unplugged the well of stories and let it flow. (Smith, 2012, pp.8-9)

While I agree with the sentiment, the reality has often proven otherwise.

In an article in the *Herald* newspaper entitled *What is Art?* Allan Taylor posed the following statement:

It is hard to think of another nation which would treat its cultural heritage so cavalierly. Hard, too, to think of another nation that would not want to champion its culture, not least to its own citizens. Scotland, though, is not like other countries. For whatever reason it has lamentably been the case for longer than one cares to think that so many of those charged with maintaining our culture have often been the ones who do their utmost to undermine it, for who knows what motives and leading to who knows what damage to the national psyche... there has never been a nation so receptive to other cultures that has treated its own with such disdain. (Byrne, 2010, p.306)

While such attitudes may be identified in each period that this paper has covered, it would be unfair to blame this attitude solely on “those charged with maintaining our cultures” as Taylor does.

It would be more useful to see how it is the very notion of a Scottish ‘cultural heritage’ that actually works to undermine itself. In a sense, our current models of preservation suffer from the same problems that Taylor and countless others attribute to the fractured Scottish psyche, often oscillating between two extremes. On the one hand, propagators of cultural heritage adopt cavalier approaches that blur the realities of established Scottish history and culture with a *mélange* of materials tailored to suit the expected desires of audience and market, creating a fiction in place of a history. On the other hand, it has also condemned the severely limiting strategies that are ensconced too rigidly in a sense of national history and tradition, attempting to fix an established sense of national past and keep it there. Both are common. Both are damaging.

Either way, it is the intention to ‘fix’ easily identifiable values that seems to be the recurrent problematic element. Even with the best of intentions, the urge to define and fix terminology or to generate established understandings for the benefit of theory and methodology almost always creates new perversions. Part of defining and ‘fixing’ one thing is to set it in opposition to another; to define aspects of Scottish storytelling as rooted in travelling communities, for example, is a way of setting *x* against *y*, as rural lives against city-folk or academics, as storytellers against audiences and vice-versa. To set aside storytelling and make it only available to those that are already perceived as steeped in cultural conceptions of the tradition is to define it as belonging to such persons, and therefore negating all others. By essentializing it, the range of its audience and participants is vastly reduced, undoubtedly damaging its future. Such assumptions must be challenged at every turn.

By extension, if storytelling and all of its cultural relevancies are fed to the fires of essentialism, then the sincerity of preservative attempts must be reconsidered. Accordingly, this raises further questions as to whether academic interactions with storytelling genuinely try to perpetuate a valuable art form passed down through Scottish culture from ‘antiquity,’ or whether they are closer to self-indulgent cultural atavism and voyeurism. While in no way universally applicable, it is an uncomfortable question for scholars, researchers and collectors alike. But to genuinely continue to develop and prolong the craft, our methodologies must adopt a more self-reflexive understanding of even our own interactions. After all, it is a craft that is inherently organic and adaptive. Difficult questions cannot – and must not – be avoided, as to do so forces stagnation.

The most valid preservative efforts mirror these facts. It is the voices which try to say otherwise that hinder, block and confuse any real progress, defending against accusations of sentiment, blasphemy or self-sanctioning intent. The cultural divide between MacDiarmid and Henderson exemplifies this: both men champion the Scottish Renaissance with a mind to devolution, yet remained directly opposed over the value of Scottish oral tradition’s contribution to the matter. This is vastly indicative in highlighting the divide in appreciation even within a small portion of Scotland’s cultural players. MacDiarmid may have later yielded as to the value of the contributions, but he never conceded over what he considered to be a set of traditional and backwards-facing values miring the road to forward-facing development for Scotland.

Tradition itself, as this paper has worked to show, has been made a Scottish burden for people to carry forward. Pursuers of tradition and cultural origins may have acknowledged the contradictions, modifications and constant flux of storytelling as a form, but they have not embraced these fundamental factors in any useful sense. It has encouraged too many backwards-facing approaches to the craft and canon of storytelling without allowing space for it to continue to develop. It is now time to set it down, let it re-root and see what fresh fruit grows. As Gary

West says, “our skills must be varied, flexible and transferable rather than creatively crafted and carefully honed, and to manage anything at all we must show that we can ‘drive through change.’” (West, 2014, p.11)

The internet is a perfect outlet, creating a vast multitude of new techniques and possibilities not only in preserving but also in creating things anew. Most importantly, by opening up the boundaries set by previous patrons and academics, the internet and a new generation of contributors are unbound from the burden of ‘tradition’ and leaden concepts of heritage. This may work to bring the craft forward into the twenty-first century and make it gradually less hermetic. Storytelling’s relevance as a tradition-bearing art cannot be forgotten, but this must not fix it in the past tense by giving it solely historic qualities for the ease of archiving. As such, future methodologies would be better served to nurture storytelling in an open cultural space.

This paper has strived to highlight the problematic dual functionality of preservation efforts and argued that rather than merely attempting to sustain a vague and often disingenuous idea of tradition, it is instead the promotion and development of the art, craft and creativity so fundamental to storytelling that must be encouraged. Methodologies will best achieve this when they encourage interaction. What I am encouraging is not a radical re-shifting of what has come before, but rather a preservative methodology that is both self-aware and self-reflexive enough to embody the very spirit and qualities of storytelling culture itself. This should disengage with any singular commanding story that dictates not only what the national past is, but more importantly, how it should be understood. This would not be a weakness, but instead, be liberating: an allowance of space for imagination and originality.

When given a minor alteration, the current preservative models which have made Scottish history and cultural heritage a burden can instead expose how the fictionalisation of history actually allows contributors the leeway to disregard homogeneity and exclusivity, freeing

them to use whatever aspects of the national narrative fit their personal identities. Scottish history is most successful when it is treated as the old oral storytellers would have treated it – as a framework or a function, a vessel that can and will be added to – as national identity without emotive sentimentality.

Whilst no doubt essential and commendable, the preservative work from the sixties onwards has not achieved the full success of its intentions; emotional and sentimental attitudes inevitably made their way into the collecting and recording processes, leaving an unidentifiable quantity of collected materials altered not by the storytellers, but by the collectors. While this may seem to feed into the self-reflexive methodology that I am proposing, it has a more corruptive sentiment. The intention to record and ‘fix’ portions of a culture that is seen to be disappearing, or modifying fieldwork to better fit the academic expectation of oral representations is counter-productive, a dead end. It limits those attempting to actively contribute to the form and practise of storytelling.

It is undeniable that storytelling is a valuable contributor to our understandings of our own heritage and culture. However, the main problem seems to be that the cultural zeitgeist created by such considerations is always temporal and therefore so are their results. Whereas the 1960s folk revival culturally clashed with the renaissance, more permanent solutions should fit themselves better to the landscape. Unavoidably, revival events become fixed in their own time and are marred by that fact. When looked at retrospectively, Hamish Henderson's ‘folk revival,’ was more of a ‘folk survival.’ Despite his expectations, it struggled to find appropriate footing amongst the movements and shifting plains of the more progressive model of MacDiarmid’s Scottish literary renaissance.

The vast network of anthropological values inherent in orality has come back to the forefront of cultural self-examination time and again. With the independence referendum looming, national consciousness is no doubt once again stirring. As such, care needs to be taken

over how the oral culture is reintroduced and reinvigorated. Fielding outlines just why this is so important when she states:

We should hesitate before reintroducing orality as if it were an endangered species whose peculiar qualities must be preserved, for the identification of those qualities can be extremely problematic.... The more we examine the relationship between 'orality' and 'writing', the less stable it seems to be, and the less confident we become in deciding quite what these terms signify. (Fielding, 1996, p.3)

There needs to be something more permanent and bluntly fearless in our considerations that leads to a more defiantly flexible and progressive methodology. Our theories and awareness of the fallacies in history, culture, storytelling, nationality and identity are merely vogue unless instilled at an unconscious level, becoming more inherently part of culture, unnoticed, organic and natural, and less like a guilt-driven lesson or dogmatic lecture. Only this will allow the space for new voices, new interpretations and interactions that are free from anxiety or encumbered with a desire for ratification.

In this regard, attempts should be made to shift the focus from celebrating 'authenticity,' to merely celebrating contribution. From here, Scotland and its new emerging talents may find fertile soil, freshly toiled by the progress and gains of the many Scottish folk revivals. These contributors may work in different genres, arts or forms entirely, like *NDDN* attempts within a novel, carrying not a tradition itself, but rather the spirit of the craft that moulded such a powerfully resonant idea in the first place. If such contributors are freed of the stigmatising and essentializing nature of sentimentalised national tradition, then they may create afresh. This can remain entirely respectful of the complex tapestry of heritage, culture and tradition that has been weaving since before Scotland's formation, rather than simply being reverential of a cultural past that is currently being preserved with only partial success.

This paper has striven to show such examples through touching upon such differing works as Neil Gunn and Angela Carter, Hugh MacDiarmid and Amy Sackville, the Brothers Grimm and Edwin Muir, Duncan Williamson and Goethe, demonstrating how creativity can re-shape, re-form and re-contextualise the old traditions. Most importantly, the paper has striven to show how in doing so, these works most importantly re-invigorate old stories, characters, forms and aspects of heritage that might otherwise be lost. As MacDiarmid proclaimed, “not tradition – precedent.” (Duncan, 2007, p.248) Such re-imaginings perfectly fit the form, and should not be prevented. Instead they should be greatly encouraged. New talent cannot, and *must not*, be haunted by old ghosts, but must build new cultural contributions.

Through the School of Scottish Studies, the travellers, and the efforts of people like Hamish Henderson (and those in the centuries before), the foundations to Scotland’s indigenous arts and culture have been re-established. However, these foundations have revealed themselves to be less indigenous than many may have hoped. This, quite simply, needs to be accepted and those foundations built upon regardless. Those who interact with the oral tradition at any level must remain self-aware enough to not block the flow of progress with anxious attempts to preserve it. Instead, they must learn, observe and create fearlessly. Interaction cannot be timid; creation must not necessitate ‘recreation.’ Countless times, the oral nature of the tradition has proven flexible and amiable enough to survive whatever shape it is twisted into, or to what lands it is carried or over what seas it may cross. Stories, it seems, are the real travellers.

This paper began by highlighting the fallacy inherent in Davy Steele’s nationalist song. So let us also finish there by reflecting on his verse, this time modifying and re-purposing his nationalist sentiment to instead summarise the goals and concerns of this paper:

Oor mither tongue spoke different weys that past tae present ties  
 Each separate and yet entwined that’s where oor real strength lies  
 For should one strand unwind itself the others tae forsake

Then a' would be forever lost fur a' the strands would break. (Bort, 2011, p.25)

It is essential for a Scotland, independent or otherwise, that this never be the case. The fluid and organic interactions of its arts, cultures and national identities must flow together to ensure this very fact. In the terminology of Hamish Henderson and his many followers, its storytellers must 'carry stream.'

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