

***Gaelic Songs in Nova Scotia.* By Helen Creighton and Calum MacLeod (Ottawa: National Museum of Man, 1979. Pp. 308, photographs. \$9.50 paper.)**

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Volume 2, numéro 1-2, 1980

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1081037ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1081037ar>

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Éditeur(s)

Association Canadienne d'Ethnologie et de Folklore

ISSN

1481-5974 (imprimé)

1708-0401 (numérique)

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Citer ce compte rendu

Ashton, J. (1980). Compte rendu de [*Gaelic Songs in Nova Scotia.* By Helen Creighton and Calum MacLeod (Ottawa: National Museum of Man, 1979. Pp. 308, photographs. \$9.50 paper.)]. *Ethnologies*, 2(1-2), 74–75.
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1081037ar>

Gaelic Songs in Nova Scotia

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This reprint of an earlier (1964) National Museum publication represents only a minor departure from the original format. The book is more attractively bound than its forebearer with a rather pleasing cover illustration — a reproduction of a 19th-century painting of a Nova Scotian schooner. It also contains a short new preface written by Helen Creighton, in part to honour her late co-editor who passed away in 1977. Major Calum MacLeod was a linguist, historian, and professor of Celtic Studies at St. Francis Xavier University.

The preface informs us that the milling or fulling of cloth has been largely responsible for the perpetuation of many of the songs presented in this collection. There are, in all, ninety-three Gaelic folksongs from Cape Breton, many of them locally composed. Each item is accompanied by an English translation and brief notes. Most of the songs were collected by Creighton between 1933 and the time of publication. Gaelic material, she tells us, is scattered throughout her recorded collection from Prince Edward Island, the mainland of Nova Scotia and, primarily, the Cape Breton region. At no time did she make a field-trip in pursuit of Gaelic songs alone. Major MacLeod also contributed a few items to the collection, but was principally responsible for transcribing the Gaelic and providing the English translations. A number of musicologists furnished the editors with musical transcriptions. The notes accompanying the songs vary in detail, consisting in some cases of no more than one or two lines, in others of several paragraphs. Explanations are given, where necessary, of aspects of the transcription and translation of Gaelic words and phrases. For the comparativist, reference is made to other extant versions and parallels in available published works

A brief bibliography is provided and, for obvious reasons, most of the works cited are of Scots origin.

Despite the editors' careful attention to detail and the overall soundness of the organization and presentation of this volume, there are one or two things in the book which strike the reader as being somewhat out of place. Several of the photographs, for example, seem to have no logical connection whatsoever with the text. (For instance, one shot shows two young children in unbearable pain, shielding their ears from the haunting sounds of the bagpipes which are being manipulated by a nearby piper who is clad in full Scots regalia. The accompanying caption runs, "It isn't everybody likes the bagpipes.") More seriously, perhaps, we find towards the end of the book that the editors have chosen to provide a single text of the Gaelic legend "An Caidheal Agus An T-Innseanach," (The Gael and the Indian). They offer no explanation for the inclusion of this one narrative in the middle of a book of folksongs. While most of the items in this collection are entirely in the Gaelic language, two or three of the songs offer evidence for the existence of some mixed or macaronic speech element within the tradition. This point, rather surprisingly I thought, also goes unremarked by both of the editors.

Beyond these somewhat technical points, the main criticisms that can be made of this work pertain to the overall tone of the book and perhaps, in the final analysis, to the theoretical persuasions of the editors themselves. Carole Henderson Carpenter's research has demonstrated that Calum MacLeod adjusted or modified the texts of songs in this collection to make them more "suitable" for publication.¹ This problem is aggravated by the fact that while MacLeod freely admitted tampering with the material, at no point

¹Carole Henderson Carpenter, *Many Voices: A Study of Folklore Activities in Canada and Their Role in Canadian Culture*. (Ottawa: National Museums of Canada, 1979), p. 415.

did he indicate where, in what ways or to what extent, these modifications were undertaken. In similar fashion, Kenneth Peacock's musical transcriptions cannot be entirely trusted for their accuracy. While the songs in this book obviously represent a unified body of material because of their interconnectedness in both regional and linguistic terms, *Gaelic Songs in Nova Scotia* provides the reader with very little insight into the Gaelic singing tradition in that part of the world. The editors reveal practically nothing (the introduction is barely three pages long) about the region itself, the currency of the Gaelic language and the Gaelic song tradition, the repertory of the Gaelic community in Nova Scotia and of individuals within that community. One is left to seek for oneself the contextual and stylistic details that are sparsely scattered through the notes to individual songs, although it should be mentioned that the National Museum did publish a recording of some of the material in 1964.

There can be little doubt that this is an important folksong collection. It deals with the folk tradition of one of the most significant cultural groups in Eastern Canada and is also one of the few studies of Gaelic folklore in this country that involved a scholar who was, first and foremost, a folklorist.² It is, however, a collection from start to finish. It would appear that the editors were concerned not so much with understanding and explaining this body of tradition as they were with the more restricted ambitions of preserving and perpetuating it. While one cannot deny the laudability of these aims, one is left with the impression that the editors of *Gaelic Songs in Nova Scotia* were unduly constrained by them, to the detriment of a more detailed consideration of Gaelic singing in Nova Scotia.

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²In addition to the section on Gaelic folklore in Carpenter's work cited above, (pp. 346-52), see

Joe Scott: The Woodsman-Songmaker

By Edward D. Ives

(Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1978.

Pp. 475. \$22.50 cloth.)

In a shift in focus during the past quarter century or so away from "text" and towards "context," "process," and "performance," folklorists are concentrating more and more on individual performers of folklore genres, so-called "tradition bearers," and their "relation to tradition." The cry seems to be not only to "put the folk (back) into folklore," but to do it one person at a time. The models for these studies are the psychosocial novel and the biography. The result is a sort of folklore-and-personality approach to the definition, analysis, and presentation of data. A noteworthy example of a study with this individual focus is Edward D. Ives's *Joe Scott: The Woodsman-Songmaker*.

Joe Scott was a New Brunswickman who lived most of his itinerant life in turn-of-the-century New England. He worked in the lumbercamps and was something of a local character, with a reputation as a magician, jokester, and hypnotist. Most important for Ives, Scott was a songmaker. He composed ballads based on locally or personally significant events, which he printed on broadsheets and peddled from camp to camp, demonstrating them himself. Scott died penniless and insane in 1917. He left in print and in people's memories all over the northeastern U.S. and Canada (except Newfoundland) some 13 ballads he had written. These ballads, and Scott's biography, form the core of Ives's study.

Joe Scott is Ives's third book that focuses on a long-dead northeastern songmaker. It is Ives's best developed effort. In method it is similar to his other books: Ives talked to everyone he could find who knew the song maker; collected in print or

also Edith Fowke and Carole Henderson, *A Bibliography of Canadian Folklore in English* (Downsview: York University, 1976), for a survey of published works related to Gaelic folklore.