

A New Source in Notebook VI.B.7: *SONGS OF THE HEBRIDES*

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At the beginning of 1925, in preparation for the publication of *The Hen*—Book I, chapter 5—in T. S. Eliot’s *Criterion* and of the Earwicker episode—Book I, chapter 2—in Robert McAlmon’s *Contact Collection of Contemporary Writers* and in spite of his ophthalmological problems, Joyce began to read and to take down notes in a new notebook, VI.B.7.

The attentive genetic study of the notebook that Joyce compiled between February and April 1925 showed that Joyce’s interest and choice of subjects followed the same literary patterns that he had established for himself in his previous notebooks. Apart from the two major sources on the Viking civilisation, *The Vikings* by Allen Mawer published in 1913 in The Cambridge Manuals of Science and Literature by the Cambridge University Press, —in the following months, Joyce would annotate two more of the Cambridge Manuals: *King Arthur in History and Legend* by Prof. W. Lewis Jones in what is now D1, and *The Work of Rain and Rivers* by T. G. Bonney in VI.B.9—and *The Scandinavian Kingdom of Dublin* by Charles Haliday to *From Luther to Steiner* by Ernst Boldt and a reread of Vico’s *New Science*, Joyce would fill the notebook with many other entries that still need further sourcing.

With the help of one of the digital projects of UR Research at the University of Rochester set on the Internet, several of the entries that Joyce jotted down towards the end of VI.B.7 that at first sight had nothing to do with music, but more with legend, domestic economy or to customs of the English Isles could be traced back to a collection of songs entitled: *Songs of the Hebrides*.

Songs of the Hebrides was the second of the three volumes of Scottish songs collected by Marjory Kennedy-Fraser and Kenneth Macleod. The songs, arranged for voice and pianoforte with Gaelic and English texts that were published in London, in 1917 by Boosey & Co supplied Joyce with a fresh first-hand material that he would use for the future revisions of *Work in Progress* in 1926.

The notes that make up pages 209 until 214 were harvested only from the *Foreword* of the collection:

VI.B.7.209

- (f) **forebear h >**
 VI.C.7.007(a)
- (g) **skerry >>**
 VI.C.7.007(b)

VI.B.7.210

(a) ^bfully alive to – >

MS 47484b-351v, PrTMA: ^+, I, being fully alive to it+^ | *JJA* 59:064 | Jun-Jul 1929 | III§3B.10' | *FW* 533.27

(b) **treasury of Mary** >

VI.C.7.007(c)

(c) **of fisher-crofters** >

VI.C.7.007(d)

(d) **Hebrides** >

VI.C.7.007(e)

(e) **Vowelthreaded**

Songs of the Hebrides, p. ix: “Skulls are harder than consonants, and races lurk where languages slink away,” wrote William Sharp,¹ and too many of us Celtic Scots the language of our ancestors is a sealed book. Yet still, in the music of our race, we find ourselves; in these racial musical survivals the very character and spirit of our forebears is distilled. “C’est le grand révélateur des forces créatrices d’une nation,” says a French writer. And the perfervid feeling of the Scot, though it smoulder like the dull embers of the peat fire, needs but the breath of an old song to make it leap again into flame. And such surviving fragmentary human documents seem to tend to drift ever westwards before the advancing tide of cosmopolitanism; to the remote Western Isles, therefore, one must go to-day to find still unrecorded types of this racial self-expression. And gladly one goes to the West!

“Who has not felt the glamour of the Western Sea?” says Kenneth Macleod, our island poet collaborator. And wrote Nicolson of Skye:—

“Good is the smell of the brine that laves
Black rock and skerry,
Where the great palm-leaved tangle waves
Down in the green depths.”

The glamour of the Western Sea, the lure of the Isles, and the snare of the elusive song-quest—these have drawn us again and again into their charmed circle. And that even although during the long summer days, when we frequent the isles, the winds sometimes blow for weeks together, and the sea shows itself in dangerous moods. The fisher-crofters, who get their living from the sea—“their treasury of Mary”—and, in so doing, have a “life-long struggle with something greater than themselves,” are yet fully alive alike to its seduction and to its cruelty. “The Sea,” says Kenneth Macleod, “has cast her spell upon the impressionable Celt—her generosity, her might, her playfulness, her frequent cruelty, are felt, but what really haunts the Celtic mind is her awful mysteriousness.” Yet they love their boats, these Islesmen, and in a seaman’s love song to his boat² this personal temperamental bond between Islesman and Birlinn gives us one of the most beautiful songs in the collection. In the curves and leaps of the tune, indeed, can we not see the vessel, its³ “white fillet of foam under its brows,” “white its shoulders cresting sea-foam.”

The sadness and the restlessness of many of the airs again reflect the sadness and the restlessness of the sea,⁴ that mysterious, rhythmical, relentlessly pulsating sea, which everywhere encompasses the Hebridean Celt. And the wind too, the never-ceasing wind, makes itself heard in the weird, vowel-threaded rising and falling “motives” that link together the chanted phrases of many an old bardic bay.

ixn1: The writer who, as *Fiona Macleod*, wrote many original tales of the Hebrides. His *Immortal Hour* has been set to music by Rutland Boughton, music inspired by and largely founded on our first Vol. of Hebridean Songs. Of this work Ernest Newman has written that it contains some of the loveliest music of our day.

ixn2: Page 51. “The Birlinn of the White Shoulders.”

ixn3: Conrad’s “Mirror of the Sea.”

ixn4: It is lake water, says John Kelman, that sounds the undertone in Yeats’ Irish Poetry, “always night and day I hear lake water lapping.”

MS 47472-151, TsILA: ^+in her vowelthreaded syllables ^+syllables: +^+^ | *JJA* 45:190 | early 1927 | I.3§1.3/2.3/3.3 | *FW* 061.06

(f) ^xBride – fostermother >

MS 47482a-64, EM: ^+May+^ Maledictions ^+of ~~Lucifer lousy~~ ^+Lousyfear+^ fall heavy on ^+the white friar’s father that converted+^ the fostermother of the first Nancyfree that went off with the bloodtempered trumpadour that mangled melodies that turned the ~~daft~~ ^+tub’s+^head of the ^+daft+^ journal writer ~~on him~~ to inspire the prime minister to fell the firtree out of which Jeeny Cooper made the bum of the beerbarrel on which my granddaddy’s eldest ~~sat~~ ^+took his seat of wisdom+^ with my ^+grand+^ aunt’s ~~sister~~ ^+niece+^ for a ~~playgirl~~ ^+ the cause of his joy+^ | *JJA* 57:192 | Mar 1926 | III§2A.5 | /2B.2 | /2C.5 | | *FW* 439.06-14
VI.C.7.007(f)

(g) of † hearth cult

Songs of the Hebrides, p. x: Incredibly hard are the physical conditions on some of the smaller isles. Into the rocky hollows a little sandy soil is wind-drifted, and here the self-same crops are grown year after year, the drifting sand probably bringing with it afresh each season the needful supply of vital elements. And it is not possible that the physical hard conditions, the small holdings—the only possible allotment of such saucersful of sandy soil—depriving the *men* of the chance to develop constructive and organising faculty, may have contributed to the development of the personality of the *women* and to the creation of a civilisation of the hearth , a social order symbolised in the beautiful figure of Bride,³ the foster-mother of Christ.
xn3: The eminent biologist, Prof. Arthur Thomson, remarked of the “Death Croon,” in our first volume, that it was “the high water-mark of civilisation.”

VI.C.7.007(g)

(h) mist fighting tides

Songs of the Hebrides, p. xi: The drive to Benbecula ended in the crossing of one of the dangerous sea-fords, which serve to cut off the isle effectively from the outside world. The north ford, which we crossed later, covers five miles of treacherous sand, and on this trackless stretch travellers, at times, overtaken by a mist which obscures distant land-marks, unwittingly and fatally turn toward the swiftly incoming tide.

VI.C.7.007(h)

(i) mirage

Songs of the Hebrides, p. x: Low-lying, watery Benbecula of the sea-fords and the lochs and the mirage-like illusions yielded us a great crop of labour lilt and some interesting and valuable Ossianic forms of chanting.

VI.C.7.007(i)

VI.B.7.211

(a) guidwife >

VI.C.7.007(j)

(b) carding brushes >

VI.C.7.007(k)

(c) weaving shuttle >

VI.C.7.007(l)

(d) ^rglebe >

MS 47471a-6, MT: Hurrah, there is but young glebe | *JJA* 44:051 | Nov 1926 | I.1§1.*1 | *FW* 006.29

(e) ^rgoodman

Songs of the Hebrides, p. xi: Carding, spinning and weaving were going busily forward, but at our entrance the guidwife laid aside her carding brushes, her son’s young wife her spinning wheel, and the daughter of the house her weaving shuttle to welcome us. To the priest we owed our introduction here, and, indeed, all the success that followed our song-quest in the isle. Father Ian Macmillan was a daily visitor at Calum’s thatched cottage, which stood just beside the prebytery glebe, and on our visits there he drew for us from the old folk the best they had of Hebridean lore.

From the goodman, we heard only Ossianic tales and lays. And ancient custom, we found, did not sanction an easy transition from these to lighter lilt.

(f) waulking song / fulling >

VI.C.7.007(m), (n)

(g) Kalevala epos / Finn

Songs of the Hebrides, p. xii: From the guidwife we got labour lilt *guleor*, with intoxicatingly rhythmic refrains, among them the airs to which we have set the “Benbecula Bridal,” the “Grail Galley,” and “Ruari Ruari.” These were mostly *waulking* songs, sung at the shrinking of the home-spun web. As this process of fulling the cloth was long and heavy, the songs used for it were correspondingly stimulating. And many ancient airs are still preserved in Benbecula just because the work of weaving still goes busily forward there. A much larger crofter community than that of Eriskay—there were some 1,300 folk in the Isle of Benbecula—hardly a day passes that is not marked by a waulking. And where there are many waulkings there will survive the greater number of varied and complex labour-song refrains. For at these gatherings³ the singing is the attraction, and the tedious work of tossing, dumping and circulating the moisture laden cloth is completely forgotten in the intoxicating swing of the body to the rhythmic refrain.

xiiin3: Mr. Otto Anderson, a musician from Finland, who paid me a hasty visit in my music room in Edinburgh, told me that the Finns still chant their Kalevala epic to a bodily movement that resembles that of a Hebridean waulking. “The Finns are the only other race in modern Europe that has preserved to the present day an heroic epos reaching back into a far-distant past.”

VI.C.7.008(a)

(h) 'potatoshaws >>

Not located in *MS/FW*.

VI.B.7.212

(a) Shoaling Sea >

VI.C.7.008(b)

(b) bens of Jura >

VI.C.7.008(c)

(c) conservers >

VI.C.7.008(d)

(d) [§]Widow MacD— / Kristy — / Ishabel —

Songs of the Hebrides, p. xv: It was a strange scene. Veils of mist were rising from each little tarn, and the moon hung low from the middle of the sky like a great golden lamp. But there are strange traveller's tales of atmospheric illusions in Benbecula. A grove of trees appeared to one in this treeless isle. Nearer approach suggested a hedgerow, still nearer inspection proved the illusory grove to be a row of potato shaws!

Benbecula is one of the outpost isles and is surrounded by a “shoaling sea, the lovely blue playing into the green.” From the sheen-white sands of its western shores, one looks out on an unbroken stretch of the Atlantic, as did the Gaels of yore, sensing a land of heart's desire, *Tir nan og*, and “catching a glimpse against the sunset of its summer isles of Eden lying in dark purple spheres of sea.” [...]

Eigg is a very beautiful little island. Than the outlook from the white curves of Laig¹ Bay westward to the blue altar peaks of Rum,² one could not find anywhere a more impressive scene. Rich in rank green undergrowth and gay with wild flowers in summer, a rivulet running in the Laig¹ Bay bears a vivid green border of water-cress that recalls the island love-song, “Like watercress gathered fresh from cool streams, thy kiss, dear love, by the Bens of Jura.”³

In Eigg Kenneth Macleod was born, and there cradled in Celtic lore. He had for nurse a singer reputed the best in the island, and his aunt, Janet Macleod from Skye, was one of the hereditary conservers of the traditions of the Macleods. [...]

The singers from whom in the main we have collected in Eigg, were three women—Widow Macdonald (who was over ninety), and two others, also widows, Isabel Macleod and Kirsty Mackinnon.

MS 47482a-9v, ScriLA: ^+ who was going to be when she grew up one Sunday a sister Isabelle ~~in her [??]~~ ^+only 20 years+^ the beautiful nun & next Sunday the beautiful nurse Isabelle ^+still in her teens+^ with her white starched cuffs but on Easter Sunday morning the beautiful widow ^+of^+[??] +^ eighteen ~~spring~~ ^+fashions+^ Madame Isa La belle; so sad & lucksome+^ | *JJA* 60:130 | Oct-Nov 1925 | III§4A.*0+ | *FW* 556.02-10

(e) reiving ship

Songs of the Hebrides, p. xvi: One of the simplest forms of crooning or keening, the very short refrain here cuts remorselessly into each verse-line. From Widow Macdonald also we learnt the electrifying “Reiving Ship” (p. 45). Strange that the old women should have sung to us these virile pirate chants! The “A ho hi! Hirm bo!” of its refrain is a rapturously reiving cry, and the ship in her course in Kenneth Macleod’s English:

“Grinds beneath her gray-blue limpets,
Crunches curving whelks to sand-drift.”

then,

“Speeds she gaily Moola’s waters,
Kyles and Moyles, to fair green Isla.
Leaps her way to Isles of daring—
Gleaming Isles of blades and laughter.
A ho hi! ”

VI.C.7.008(e)

(f) juice of the rasp >

VI.C.7.008(f)

(g) cleansing croon

Songs of the Hebrides, p. xvii: From Kirsty we got the air used for St. Bride’s Cleansing Croon, a croon that recalls that other Celtic cleansing from Uist:

“I bathe thy palms
In showers of wine,
In the lustral fire,
In the seven elements,
In the juice of the raspberry,
In the milk of honey.”¹

xviii1: Carmichael’s *Carmina Gadelica*. Song to a young bride.

VI.C.7.008(g)

VI.B.7.213

(a) Iberian / Hebridean >

VI.C.7.008(g),(h)

(b) WBY RLS >

VI.C.7.008(i)

(c) prays to cloud

Songs of the Hebrides, p. xviii: Eigg has been richly endowed alike by nature and by tradition, and has for some an extraordinarily mystic charm; the charm of¹ “moving waters in their priest-like task of pure ablution round earth’s human shore”; the charm of its groves,² “Enter these enchanted woods, ye who dare”; the charm of its small community³ “bound together by imaginative possessions, stories and poems that have grown out of its own life.”

Did Christina Rossetti know the Eigg of St. Bride’s Coracle when she wrote:

Three little children on a wide, wide sea,
Motherless children, safe as safe can be
With guardian angels.”?

Sure, the mystical and spiritual love of beauty is a central fact in the Celtic genius. The Celt truly feels with Robert Louis Stevenson, (who strangely enough in his portraits shows the type of the Iberian Hebridean,) “the beauty and the terror of the world.” An elderly woman, elderly in 1856, when talking to Miss Frances Tolmie⁴ about the beauty of the world, confessed of having gone down on her knees to a magnificent cloud overhead. “Beauty, like sorrow,” says Ben Jonson, “dwelleth everywhere,” and there seems a large measure of both in the life of the Western Isles.

xviiiin1: Keats.

xviiiin2: Meredith.

xviiiin3: Yeats.

xviiiin4: See Miss Tolmie’s contribution to Hebridean Lore, Vol. IV., No. 16, of Folk Song Society.

VI.C.7.008(j)

(d) cairngorm

Songs of the Hebrides, p. xix: In setting the airs we have in no case altered the melodies. We have tried merely to set them in an harmonic and rhythmic framework of pianoforte wrought-metal, so to speak, as one would set a beautiful stone, a cairngorm or the like, and have tried by such setting to show the tune the more clearly—have tried to bring out its peculiar character.

VI.C.7.008(k)

From the genetic point of view, the electronic version of the book helped in filling in the relevant paragraphs, and provided the clue to the deciphering of earlier misread units.

Volume II of *Songs of the Hebrides* together with Volume I and Volume III of the same collection can be found at: <http://hdl.handle.net/1802/9594>.