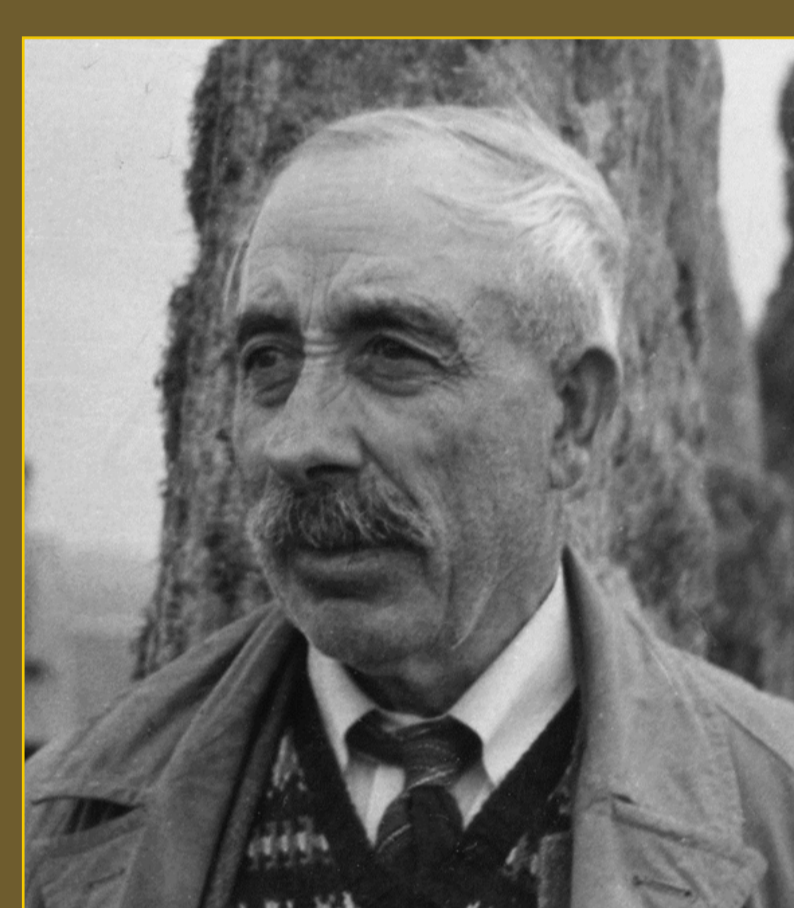


As far as style goes, he is, I think, the best storyteller the Gaelic-speaking peoples of Scotland and Ireland possess.

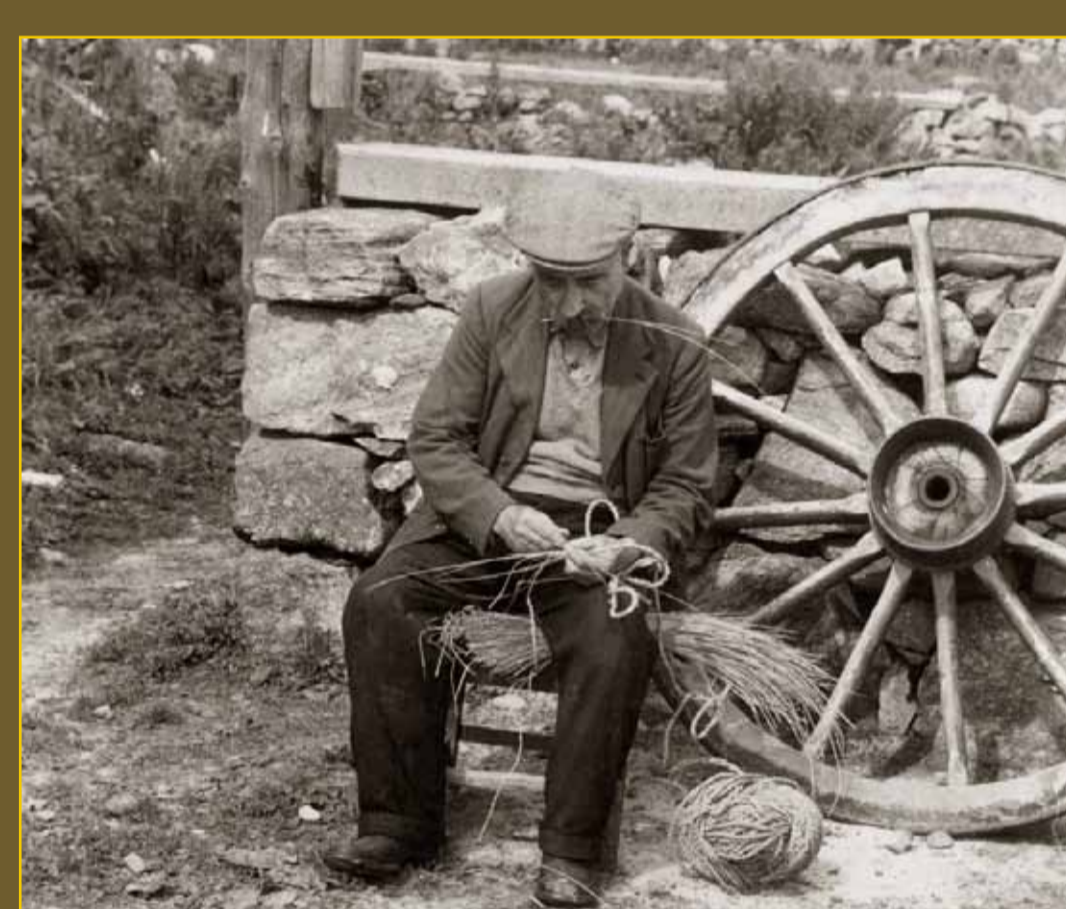
[Maclean writing in 1956]



Duncan MacDonald at Callanish Stones, Isle of Lewis, 1953.
* Courtesy of the School of Scottish Studies Archives.

THE 'FAMOUS FOUR': DUNCAN MACDONALD (1882-1954)

Invited to an international folklore conference held in the Hebridean town of Stornoway, in October 1953, MacDonald held an audience spellbound throughout the duration of his telling of an heroic Gaelic tale called *Fear na h-Eabaid* ('The Man of the Habit'). Those in attendance who were fortunate enough to have a copy of the transcribed tale to hand, published a short time before, would have listened with a mixture of awe and astonishment as he recited this long tale almost word for word. By anybody's standards, it was not only an amazing recitation but also a remarkable feat of memory. MacDonald's performance received a well-deserved standing ovation.



Duncan MacDonald rope-making, Peninernine, South Uist by Werner Kissling, 1953.
* Courtesy of the School of Scottish Studies Archives.

Duncan MacDonald, styled *Donnchadh mac Dhòmhnail 'ic Dhonnchaidh*, was from Snishival in South Uist, and from whom Maclean had heard no better storytelling. He would later write:



Snishival / Snaoiseabhal, South Uist, 1957.
* Licensed under Creative Commons.

Duncan as a storyteller was the equal of Patrick Òg MacCrimmon as a piper. Everything that he recited was polished, shapely and elegant. Duncan's Gaelic was most eloquent and fluent: the best I have ever heard. Everything he recited was given both weight and due consideration.

Maclean was not only struck by MacDonald's eloquence but even more so by the sheer depth and richness of his perfected art of storytelling:

Duncan's interest lay more in a story's shape and form, and also in the splendour and depth of rhetorical language as deep, hard Gaelic flowed from him like grace notes played upon a silver chanter.

Perhaps more importantly was the social aspect for Maclean reckoned that MacDonald's storytelling was "an art that delighted not only learned audiences but also his humbler fellow-islanders at the firesides in South Uist."

Writing in his obituary, Maclean was of the opinion that MacDonald "was the most authoritative tradition bearer in the Highlands, and with him a very great part of lore passes into oblivion, lore of which he alone was in proud possession."