

The Historical Plays of Donald Sinclair

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The Gaelic poet, playwright and essayist Donald Sinclair (*Dòmhnall Mac na Ceàrdaich*, 1885-1932) has received renewed attention in recent years, signalled most notably by the publication of a large selection of his writings (Mac na Ceàrdaich 2014) and a new academic interest in his work. (Mac Leòid 2012; Watson 2011: 29-30) The reassessment of Sinclair's output stems in part from the role he plays as an innovator in Gaelic writing across a range of genres, developing Gaelic verse, prose and drama. This paper focuses on the latter, but argues that the development visible in his dramatic work reflects the experimental trajectory of his work in other media.

Sinclair published six plays in total: two comedies *Dòmhnall nan Trioblaid* and *Suiridhe Raoghail Mhaoil*, both 1912; two historical dramas which are the focus of this essay, *Fearann a Shinnsir* (1913) and *Crois-Tàra!* (1914); and two plays for children *Ruairdeachan* (1924) and *Long nan Òg* (1927). Of the two plays to be examined in this paper *Fearann a Shinnsir* (The Land of his Forebears) (1913) focuses on the Highland Clearances, utilising the history of Sinclair's native island of Barra, to decry the outrages of the landlords whilst contributing to debates on land ownership prior to the First World War. The second historical play *Crois-Tàra!* (The Fiery Cross) (1914) is based on the 1745-46 Jacobite Rising under Charles Edward Stuart and examines the personal and political motivations of the Clanranald gentry and tenants. A noted character within the play is one of the pre-eminent Gaelic poets of the eighteenth century Alasdair mac Mhaighstir Alasdair [Alexander MacDonald] and Sinclair clearly questions the propagandist role of the poet within eighteenth-century Gaelic society. Given the pre-war context of its 1914 publication, this is one of areas where the play's themes would have enjoyed a contemporary thematic resonance. Both plays were published in the radical nationalist journal *Guth na Bliadhna*.

Biographical information and Critical Reception

Sinclair was born in Barra in 1885, living on the east side of Castlebay in the area called Leideag which would later give him his nickname *Bàrd na Leideig* (the Poet of

Leideag). He left the island at eighteen, gaining an apprenticeship as a draughtsman for the Edinburgh-based electrical engineering firm Bruce Peebles. His years in Edinburgh exposed him to the influence of prominent Gaelic authors, writers and scholars including the folklorist Alexander Carmichael; the Skye poet Neil MacLeod and Henry 'Fionn' Whyte. His professional life would lead him to London and Manchester, where he resided until his death from tuberculosis in 1932. (Black 1999: 736-37)

Sinclair had written songs and poems whilst in school, which were performed and transmitted within the Barra community. Most of these were published for the first time in the 2014 collection. (Mac na Ceàrdaich 2014: 101-35) The appearance of Sinclair's four adult plays within a three year period 1912-14 marked the beginning of a period of extraordinary literary output: 34 published pieces of writing appeared between 1912-1920, including Sinclair's epic long poem *Là nan Seachd Sion* ('*The Day of the Seven Elements*'), literary and political criticism, lyrics, songs and the four plays themselves.

Both contemporary sources and subsequent scholars have recognised the importance of Sinclair's contribution to Gaelic drama. One of the first to generously praise his work was the editor who afforded Sinclair the opportunity for publication, Ruaraidh Erskine of Marr. Erskine was the younger son of an aristocrat and had learnt Gaelic from his Hebridean nanny. Politically, he was a nationalist who had been involved in the Scottish Home Rule Association and promoted Home Rule and pro-independence work in the publications he edited. Erskine's labours with journals such as *Guth na Bliadhna* made him one of the most productive publishers and editors of Gaelic literature in the early decades of the twentieth century ('Ruaraidh Arascain is Mhàir' 1956). Sinclair shared Erskine of Marr's nationalist views, establishing a branch of the Scots National League in Manchester and becoming the first Gaelic columnist for the *Scots' Independent* newspaper. (Mac Leòid 2014: 41)

Erskine had run competitions in early 1912 for Gaelic dramatists. Whilst there is no mention of whether Sinclair entered these competitions, his initial emergence as a dramatist later that year was likely encouraged by Erskine's desire to develop Gaelic drama. (Erskine 1912) Whilst An Comunn Gàidhealach had run literary competitions via its annual Mòd and literary publications for over twenty years previously (Kidd 2009, 177), I have not found evidence of Sinclair having entered these. Indeed, Sinclair writings only appear in one of An Comunn Gàidhealach's many publications, *Voices from the Hills* (1927), from relatively late in his literary career.

In his 1914 essay on 'Gaelic Drama' Erskine states:

In Mr Donald Sinclair, and other craftsmen I could mention we have dramatists of whom any country which is going through such an artistic crisis as we are passing through might be reasonably proud. Mr Sinclair at all events has deliberately eschewed foreign models in the writing of his plays for the Stage, and, by surrounding his work with a national atmosphere, has done not a little to point out the road on which true Gaelic Drama should proceed. (206-219)

Erskine's analysis is at odds with Sinclair's plays, in that whilst Sinclair invariably uses Gaelic themes and subjects his plays are not attempts to create a new model of drama on nationalistic lines. Rather they frequently involve familiar literary figures and follow a four-act structure. The Gaelic scholar Donald John MacLeod is more accurate when he recognises Dòmhnall nan Trioblaid as 'the common farce figure of the drunk'. (1969: 155) Sinclair's second protagonist Raoghull Maol is also a standard figure in European comedy: the bachelor in want of a wife. In spite of Erskine's analysis above, Sinclair's work strengthens Gaelic literature's ties with European drama, rather than weakening them. Erskine's argument does highlight, however, the strength of the desire in activist circles (i.e. Ross 1918, 1926) to develop Gaelic theatre along culturally nationalist lines.

Sinclair's emergence does not, therefore, stand in isolation but rather is part of a vibrant pre-war Gaelic literary scene in which a small number of journals like those supported by Erskine of Marr or the Comunn Gàidhealach played an overwhelming role. The earliest Gaelic novels emerged at the same time as Sinclair's plays with John MacCormick's *Dùn-Àluinn* serialised in 1910 and published in its entirety in 1912. The following year another novel *An t-Ogha Mòr* ('The Great Grandchild', Mac Dhonnachaidh 1913) also appeared in print. Indeed, Kidd (2006: 191) notes that *Dùn-Àluinn's* lengthy dialogues and monologues, whilst rooted in the nineteenth-century written dialogue genre, leaves sections of the novel resembling a drama for the stage. It is also worth noting that whilst it is unclear whether Sinclair was familiar with these two early novels shortly after publication, his two historical plays share the theme of emigration and return with *Dùn-Àluinn* and a focus on Jacobitism which appears in *An t-Ogha Mòr*.

Looking across Sinclair's literary output, there is a clear trajectory of development beginning with subjects and forms that would be familiar to his audience: community songs about humorous characters and incidents; songs about work and songs about the exotic attractions in the city. After building a firm base in these traditional subjects his work becomes increasingly confident and exploratory (Mac Leòid 2012: 166-67) with innovative lyrics, a ground-breaking short story and mystical prose pieces all being published in later years.

Similarly in his dramatic output the two comedies based incrofting communities are followed by more sophisticated committed dramas on historical themes. His two final plays for children¹ are not the focus of this paper, however they are substantial enough to merit further study elsewhere. (MacilleDhuibh 2015) Macleod and Watson (2007: 281) have already recognised the importance of Sinclair's work in developing Gaelic drama away from the comedic cross of theatre hall and cèilidh house that had characterised earlier efforts. Indeed the Lowland theatre hall was in part influenced by Highland and Irish cèilidh culture. (Sorensen 2007: 139) Therefore, early Gaelic plays such as Iain MacLeòid's *Rèiteach Mòraig* ('Morag's Betrothal' 1911) were light-hearted and humorous in the cèilidh tradition, focused on social customs such as betrothal (Macleod and Watson 2007: 281) a theme shared with Sinclair's second comedy. Sinclair's two historical plays move away from this initial phase of Gaelic drama and coincided with a desire to develop serious English-language drama in Scotland, influenced in part by the Irish example in the years immediately surrounding the First World War. (Smith and Horvat 2009: 61) Sinclair was clearly interested in the literature of Ireland, reviewing Irish publications in 1917 and 1919. (Mac Leòid 2012: 142-43)

Fearann a Shinnsir – Reflecting on the Clearances

Fearann a Shinnsir marks this initial foray into serious drama. Written in four acts, it differs in tone and in the way Sinclair develops the primary characters from his two previous plays. The play follows the eviction of Alasdair Dhomhnuill Phìobaire and his parents, as they are forced to emigrate to Canada. Alasdair's parents die in Canada, leaving Alasdair to return home for the final scene. His sweetheart encourages him to forgive the Baillie who had been a junior partner in their eviction and is now wracked with guilt. The play concludes with a focus on forgiveness which appears to develop from Sinclair's faith and use of Catholic theology elsewhere in his work, rather than any historical basis.

¹ Sinclair had married in 1918 and would become father to seven children.

The majority of the play is set in a Hebridean island, which resembles the playwright's own, with a third act following the emigrants to Canada before returning to the Western Isles for the dénouement. There are similarly substantial leaps in the chronology with five years passing between the second and third acts to cover the epic scope of the transatlantic clearance tale within four acts.

D.J. MacLeod recognised that the play is a significant step away from the humorous style saying:

This play is the first example in Gaelic of a seriously committed play, or a play with a worthwhile statement to make. The statement is made perhaps rather naively, but in its Gaelic literary setting, is very refreshing and important nonetheless. (1969, 161)

Whilst the romantic sub-plots and the repentance of one of the antagonists justify MacLeod's reference to naivety, the scrutiny it affords to issues of class and the clearances ensure that it is an important piece of political drama emerging from the early twentieth-century Gaelic community. The play focuses on land clearance and emigration and is directly related to the experiences of Sinclair's home community on Barra. John 'An Codaidh' MacPherson was a decade older than Sinclair and went on to be recorded by the twentieth-century folklorist John Lorne Campbell. His stories demonstrate how the eyewitnesses to the events in Barra in the mid-nineteenth century ensured that subsequent generations were aware of the brutality of the clearances. MacPherson's account was based on conversations with Farquhar MacRae, who was present during the emigration aboard the *Admiralty* in 1851:

The captain was a burly big fellow and he gave orders to erect a sort of fence amidships, with those that were staying on this side of the fence, and those that were going out on the other side of the fence. And after he got this done he gave an order to the sailors, 'Come on, boys, now lash them out.' And the sailors got ropes and lashed the poor men and women into their boats back home, after parting with their nearest and dearest friends. (1961, 93-94)

Similarly, crofters from both South Uist and Barra gave testimony to the Napier Commission in the 1880s regarding the brutality of these clearances, directed by the proprietor Colonel Gordon of Cluny. John MacKay of Cille Pheadair gave testimony to the Commissioners reflecting what he had witnessed in South Uist, including people hiding in the cliff-faces or being bound and taken aboard the ship. (1883, 707) In addition to the forced evictions of previous generations, the evidence presented to the Napier Commission in Castlebay highlights the poverty faced by the cottars, amongst whom Donald was raised. (1883, 643-98) Newby (2001) provides a modern academic overview of the roles played by Barra landlords in the clearances up to and including Colonel Gordon of whom he confirms, 'No scholar denies that Gordon's infamy stems from his enforced evictions of his destitute population'. (135)

The unwanted attention thrust by the Maor [Factor] upon the main character's love interest Mòrag also echoes the historical record in Barra, available to Sinclair in 1913. The account of the Barra clearances included in Donald MacLeod's *Gloomy Memories*, one of the first broad-ranging accounts of the clearances throughout the Highlands and Islands, makes reference to D.W. McGillvray [*sic*], Tacksman and Justice of Peace, with the newly-cleared Barra informants saying they 'think he should be last to speak of 'illegitimate children', as a poor idiotic female [...] fathered a child on him, and declared that various stratagems were tried to prevent disclosures'. (1892, 137) The Factor's unwanted interest in Mòrag is therefore not only a characteristic of an archetypal aristocratic villain, but also reflects an unsavoury feature of class relations in clearance-era Hebridean life.

Sinclair's generation, whilst missing most of the Crofters' War in the 1880s, had personal experience of land agitation in the early twentieth century. His first cousins were amongst the cottars who had raided the island of Vatersay in 1907, dividing land and building houses without the permission of the proprietrix Lady Gordon-Cathcart. (Storey 2007: 149-50) This became a *cause célèbre* and eventually led to their imprisonment in Edinburgh, with Sinclair attending the court proceedings. (Mac na Ceàrdaich 2014: 111) Sinclair himself was, of course, an economic migrant whose first published poem 'Faoileag an droch-chladaich' [The Gull of the Dire Shore] debates the arguments for and against attempting to make a living on Barra. (31-32) It is clear that, as well as a comment on historical events, that Sinclair uses this play, like its successor, to influence Gaelic opinion on contemporary debates.

The characters are more developed in this play than in Sinclair's previous efforts. The main character Alasdair, in particular, develops from an angry young man raging against the clearances and the Estate's tyranny, to a sullen exile in Canada and then finally is convinced, somewhat reluctantly, to forgive the Baillie for his part in the clearance, in the final act. In the first two Acts, Sinclair uses Alasdair's rage to denounce the clearers and their methods, in a powerful piece of political theatre:

Alasdair: A dhuine gun airidh air ainm duine! 'S ann leat-sa tha 'm fearann. Smaointich, a dhuine gun iochd, air gu dé mar a fhuair thu e. Gu dé mar a fhuair do dhaoine e, agus co a cheannaich le am fuil e, agus a chuir an ìre e le falus an gruaidheach. (206)

A man unworthy to be called a man! The land is yours. Think, you heartless man, how it was you got it. How it was that your people got it, and who bought it with their blood and developed it with the sweat of their brow. [Translations by Mac Leòid]

Some of Sinclair's criticism of the aristocracy appears to have been influenced by Tom Johnson's *Our Scots Noble Families* (1909), which sought to dispel the notion that landlords acquired their lands as a just reward for their good deeds over the centuries. Johnson had revealed the unjust methods by which the landed magnates in Scotland had often acquired their land and Sinclair has his protagonist comment that the landowners have only the 'riadh na braid a chaidh a dhèanamh mu'n do rugadh do shì-sheanair' (207) (The interest on the theft committed before your great-grandfather's birth.).

Similarly, he castigates the Baillie and the Factor's cruelty along egalitarian lines:

Coimhead air an duine so a tha thu a' meas cho truailidh ris an daol! Coimhead air! Rùisg e agus rùisg thu féin! O, coimhead air, agus seall dhomh an dealachadh a tha eadaraibh! Seall dhomh an comharra prionnsail a tha eadar uachdaran agus iochdaran! (p. 207) (*Look at this man you rate as lowly as a mite. Look at him. Strip him and strip yourself and look at him and show me the difference between you. Show me the princely sign that marks the difference between landlords and tenants.*)

Sinclair's politically interested literary talents are also in evidence in his handling of the estate officers. He makes a clear attack on the ideology of the improvement, which was used to justify the clearances. The Factor espouses a paternalism that is a generic representation of this position: "S e bu chòir a bhi 'nar cridhe taingealachd agus buidheachas do dh' fhear-solair ur leas, agus cha 'n e a bhi a' cur an-diu air cobhair an àm 'ur feuma' (202) (*What you should have in your hearts is a gratefulness and rejoicing to the supplier of your relief, and not be despising help in your time of need.*). He continues: 'Cha chulaidh-fharmaid le cinnte neach 'sam bith nach gabh an cothrom so' (203) (*He's certainly not to be envied, the man who fails to take up this opportunity.*). Sinclair constructs a stark contrast between these warm words in the first act and the vicious barbarism of Act 2. There the Factor drives Alasdair's parents to the shore like cattle, in scenes reminiscent of the historical clearances in Barra under Gordon of Cluny, with all pretensions of magnanimity revealed to be phoney. Sinclair is offering, therefore, a fairly blunt, if powerful, condemnation of the clearances, arguing that the methods utilised discredit any attempt to justify them on moralistic or utilitarian grounds.

The social power of political drama is brought to the fore by *Fearann a Shinnsir*, with it being based as far as can be ascertained on these historical clearances in Barra and South Uist. In the same way that Somhairle MacGill-Eain (2011) was to detail the clearing of Skye in his epic poem 'An Cuilithionn', the dramatic performance of the clearances for perhaps the first time would be a powerful artistic event for any cleared community. Given the ultimately successful land raids launched from the poet's own home community in 1907, the play's outright condemnation both of the clearances and the authority of the landed class would have had a powerful contemporary relevance, as well as processing a historical trauma inflicted upon the community, and reflected upon in the oral tradition as recorded by MacPherson. His play was later to be published separately c.1930, most likely as an offprint, by Alexander MacLaren publishers in Glasgow; as were his two comedies and *Crois-Tàra!*. (MacLeod 1980: 171-72).

Crois-Tàra! – *The Fiery Cross* and the advent of Total War

Sinclair's fourth play is again based on historical matters: the 1745-46 Jacobite Rising. Like *Fearann a Shinnsir* this is also a four-act play, set variously in the Laird of Borrodale's houseriu Uist; a farmhouse in Moidart; Charles Edward Stewart's hiding place and his departure point for France. The first act focuses on the varying reactions, from sceptical to militaristic, amongst the Clan Ranald gentry in Uist to the advent of Charles Edward Stewart. The middle two acts focus on the effect of the Rising on the

MacEachan family in Loch Moidart – highlighting the conflict between a young son eager to take part in the Rising and an old veteran father who also feels duty bound to participate. This debate plays out in the second act with the father concluding his duty to his chief is fulfilled by his son taking part in the rebellion and his remaining at home. The third act brings news of the rebellion's defeat, but their son's survival, to the elderly MacEachan couple in Moidart; followed by two Hanoverian soldiers roughly entering the farmhouse to search for the Jacobite men. The fourth act returns to the remnants of the Clan Ranald gentry and the Prince, as they attempt to deal with the defeat of the Rising and watch Charles Edward Stewart depart.

Donald John MacLeod thought the play was 'very technically assured', an assessment which is rather restrained in contrast to that of Hugh MacDiarmid. However, MacLeod's knowledge of Gaelic makes his assessment much more reliable than the hyperbolic MacDiarmid, who claimed in 1926 that the play was the best written by any living Scottish playwright, whilst commenting on the state of Scotland's three national languages. Ronald Black (MacilleDhuibh, 2015) is less convinced saying that 'Nam bheachd-sa chan eil Crois-Tàra! (1914) ach suarach' (*In my opinion Crois-Tàra! isn't worth much*).

Despite its grand historic subject, Sinclair is restrained enough to rein in the more bombastic possibilities of his theme. The raising of the standard at Glenfinnan and the battles of Prestonpans, Falkirk and Culloden are all left to one side, whilst the more jingoistic speeches which are included are used to demonstrate a hubris which fits neatly with the wider themes of the play. Even though the constraints of performance provide good reason for working on a smaller scale, Sinclair also uses his domestic settings effectively. The Redcoats' sudden intrusion into Donald's house in Act 3 is all the more shocking given the audience has grown accustomed to the rather homely scene. In Act 1 Sinclair utilises the liminal space of Borrodale's reception room to both emphasise the anticipation of those awaiting the Prince's arrival and to heighten the suffocating intensity of the varying reactions to the news of the Prince's coming.

Sinclair's focus on the obligations and motivations of the main characters makes the play a sophisticated departure for Gaelic drama and also contributed to its positive critical reception by MacLeod and MacDiarmid. Borrodale does not hesitate to shame one of the doubtful clansman into action "S mi fhearail, Eòghainn Dhòmhnallaich, do spiorad agus is mi chliùiteach am beus a bhith a' cur droch mhanaidh air ionnsuidh so na h-Albann as leth a rìgh agus saorsa!" (30) (*It is unmanly, Ewan MacDonald, in spirit*

and unworthy in virtue to put such ill omens on this campaign in Scotland on behalf of the King and of Freedom!). The renowned Gaelic poet Alasdair mac Mhaighstir Alasdair (Alexander MacDonald) also attempts to shame the doubting Ewan MacDonald into changing his mind, reflecting the satirical function of Gaelic poets which continued to be a common characteristic of their role into the twentieth century. (Black 1999: xxv-xxvi).

Sinclair effectively utilises the audience's awareness of the certainty of defeat, with several tragic themes emerging in the early acts. The sceptically inclined Ewan MacDonald argues with Alexander MacDonald about the role of fate in human affairs: 'Dàn! 'S minig a dheilbh neach an don-gnothuich a dhàn fein agus is tric a chuir teas an teine faoin-chruadail an cridhe gun eòlas' (228-29) (*Fate! Many a time has an ill-deed's author designed his own fate and often has the heat of the fire put an idiotic determination in a clueless heart.*) Alexander MacDonald's final words in Act 4 of the play clearly echo this earlier debate, with him claiming: 'Ach bha e 'n dàn, bha e 'n dàn' (265) (*But it was destined, it was destined.*)² This neatly absolves himself from any moral culpability in the failure of the Rising which he had vigorously encouraged in Act 1.

The play's exploration of the role of societal obligations in a wartime context demonstrates the importance of shame and honour to the characters. In Act 1, Scene 2, after Cameron of Locheil advises against a rising, Charles Edward Stuart refers to his father's frequent praising of Locheil's loyalty to shame the chief into supporting the campaign, in a similar manner to Borrodale shaming Ewan MacDonald in the opening scene: 'agus fuiricheadh Loch-lal, mu'n cuala mi m' athair gu tric ag iomradh mar a charaid bu dilse, aig baile agus cluinneadh e an sin bho chàch mar a dh'éireas do'n Phrionnsa' (2014: 239) (*And Locheil, who I've often heard my father refer to as his most loyal friend, would stay at home and hear from there what becomes of the Prince.*). This has the desired effect; with Locheil stating that he would never allow such a thing to happen, despite having, only moments before, outlined the reasons against a rising.

The MacEachan family in their farmhouse on Loch Moidart are also concerned about maintaining their honour and proving their loyalty. Donald MacEachan is the patriarch who had fought at the Battle of Sheriffmuir thirty years previously. Despite this military service he is convinced that he has 'dlighe agam fhathast ri a dioladh; agus

² Given the themes Sinclair is exploring, it is worth drawing to the attention of non-Gaelic speakers that Dàn (fate) and Dàn (poem) are homonyms.

dleasnas agam ri a choilionadh mu'n tig an t-àm' (2014: 242) ([...] *loyalty still to be repaid; and duty to be fulfilled before the time comes.*). It is not until his son tells him he is intending on enlisting and that his chief, Clanranald, tells him that he has already fulfilled his duty that he is content that he is not under an obligation to join the Rising.

Despite Sinclair being an advocate of the historical Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair's literary achievements, most notably using MacDonald's long poem 'Birlinn Chlann Raghnaill' as a model for his epic 'Là nan Seachd Sion' (2014: 42-62), the dramatic representation of the poet is not a sympathetic one. Sinclair scrutinised his own role as a poet in a number of his writings, writing a poetic manifesto (1916) and a self-deprecating song debating the worth of poetry (2014: 113-15). It is therefore likely that his unsympathetic portrayal of the battle-inciting poet reflects his awareness of both the chauvinistic elements in the Gaelic poetic tradition and of contemporary poets who glorified military power in the run up to the First World War. This is in keeping with his critique of traditional Gaelic ideals of heroism in his pacifistic essay *Innis-na-Bréige - The Island of Falsehoods* (1918: 246-7). Whilst it is difficult to determine to what extent Sinclair feared the outbreak of hostilities in 1914, the play certainly condemns militarism and the bombastic promotion of violence by poets.

Conclusion

This article has examined the two of Donald Sinclair's plays which could fairly be labelled his most important contribution to Gaelic drama. Shortly before the outbreak of World War One, he explored the different obligations and motivations which led to his characters reaching different conclusions on the 1745 Jacobite Rising. With his portrayal of his literary predecessor Alexander MacDonald it is clear that Sinclair is sceptical about those pushing for armed confrontation more generally and the role of the poet in promoting militarism in particular. Likewise, his highlighting of the role of shame and societal obligations would also prove remarkably prescient. In *Fearann a Shinnsir*, Sinclair had taken a significant step forward for Gaelic drama with one of the first Gaelic plays on a non-comedic subject. His choice of the land question for his theme again shows his ability to use historical drama to influence contemporary debates in Gaelic society. Despite its overly neat conclusion, there is enough worthy content in the play to make it a worthwhile initial foray into serious drama. It parallels and reflects developments in drama in English, both in Scotland and Ireland, with a committed nationalist style of theatre in Gaelic being an objective of his publisher Erskine of Marr. From a captioned photograph of the cast that appeared in the 'Oban Times' we know

that *Crois-Tàra!* was performed in Glasgow, Oban and Edinburgh in 1935 (2014: 136), twenty years after publication and following Sinclair's death. The plays considered here are undoubtedly laudable and at the time constituted an important advance for Gaelic literature. They provide important insights into the development of Gaelic drama during the period. Given their enduring themes, the success or otherwise of attempting a revival of Sinclair's serious drama today would also be an intriguing prospect, a century after they first made their appearance in *Guth na Bliadhna*.

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