Cumha do Mhuinntir a' Bharra-Bhric: An Eye-Witness Account of Evictions in 1840s Argyll

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Abstract
This article considers two songs by a previously unrecognised Gaelic poet, Catrìona Nic an Fhlèisdeir (Catherine Fletcher), both composed in the period 1839−40 and preserved in the late nineteenth-early twentieth century press. The first is an elegy to the young heir of Innistrinich; the second, which is the main focus of the article, is a lament occasioned by the eviction of tenants on the Barbreck, Lochaweside, estate of Alexander Campbell of Monzie *c*. 1840. The lament captures a specific moment in time very shortly after the tenants had received notice of their eviction but before the evictions had taken place, and conveys something of the lived experience of this township at this moment of crisis. The article considers how the poet draws on panegyric motifs to praise this flourishing community − rather than to praise individuals – and considers how she expresses her distress, anger, and acceptance, placing her responses within the wider context of the traditional role of women as keeners in Gaelic-speaking society.

The principal subject of this essay is a song, previously unrecognised by Gaelic literary scholarship, which offers a unique and striking perspective on the eviction of tenants in mid-nineteenth-century Argyll. The song captures, in a very specific and immediate way, the physical and emotional effects of the unexpected news that tenants in Barbreck, Lochaweside, were to be evicted *c*. 1840, and depicts the loss of what is shown in the song to be a self-sustaining and vibrant township. Composed by Catrìona Nic an Fhlèisdeir (Catherine Fletcher), who witnessed the eviction of her friends and neighbours first-hand, it was published for the first time in 1890, some fifty years after its composition. It owed its survival to a man, still living in this community at the time of his death in 1890, who would have been around thirty years of age when the evictions took place, his retention of the song speaking to its continued importance as a memorial to this pre-Clearance township. In addition, the article considers a further song by Nic an Fhlèisdeir from around the same time which offers further insights into the life and compositions of this previously unknown female poet. These poems afford a rare view from within a Gaelic-speaking community at the very point of its being dismantled, and allow us to examine how the poet conveys her – and by extension, given the public role of Gaelic poets, the community's – reaction to this disastrous turn of events.

Scottish Gaelic songs and poetry of the Clearances tended, until relatively recently, to be viewed somewhat unfavourably. Critics such as William J. Watson and Sorley MacLean found much of the corpus lacking by comparison with the literature of the preceding century.[1] This dismissal was echoed by, and doubtless helped to reinforce, the general disposition of Highland historians to overlook Gaelic sources for the period, succumbing to the belief that, as Eric Richards put it, these were 'slight and not easily interpreted'.[2] A turning point came, however, with the publication in 1995 of Donald E. Meek's *Tuath is Tighearna. Tenants and Landlords*, a collection of Gaelic verse from the late eighteenth-century through to the late nineteenth century which revealed a rich seam of verse on

[1] William J. Watson, *Bàrdachd Ghàidhlig: Specimens of Gaelic Poetry 1550−1900* (Inverness: An Comunn Gaidhealach, 1918), xxxi; Samuel MacLean, 'The poetry of the Clearances', *Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness* 38 (1937−41): 293−324.
[2] Eric Richards, *A History of the Highland Clearances Volume 2: Emigration, Protest, Reasons* (London: Croom Helm, 1985), 289.

clearance and land agitation.[3] Similarly, Meek's later anthology of nineteenth-century Gaelic verse, *The Wiles of the World. Caran an t-Saoghail*, counters some of the negative perceptions of song and poetry from this period.[4] Significantly, Meek obtained much of the material for *Tuath is Tighearna* from the pages of nineteenth-century newspapers, and it is to the press that both songs to be considered here owe their survival.

The later nineteenth-century Highland press is an invaluable and vastly under-explored resource for Gaelic literature, despite Gaelic appearing regularly from the 1870s in a number of publications, most importantly the *Highlander*, the *Oban Times*, the *Northern Chronicle*, the *Oban Telegraph* and the *Scottish Highlander*.[5] Most of this material consisted of songs and poetry, forms which Kirstie Blair's research has shown were prominent in the Scottish press more generally at the time.[6] Highland newspapers offered Gaelic poets a valuable opportunity to share their work with readers throughout the Highlands as well as in the Lowlands and overseas. Many of the best-known Gaelic literary figures of the later nineteenth century came to prominence through the publication of their work in these newspapers, among them the two most recognisable female voices of the century, Màiri Mhòr nan Òran ('Big Mary of the Songs', Mary MacPherson, 1821−1898) and Màiri NicEalair (Mary MacKellar, 1834−1890).[7] Similarly, we find voices from earlier periods introduced to a late nineteenth-century readership, reflecting the contemporary *zeitgeist* of preserving what remained of older Gaelic traditions in the face of encroaching anglicisation.

Two such interesting survivals, both published in the *Oban Times*, were the work of the same poet, Catrìona Nic an Fhlèisdeir. Both were composed within a year or two of one another. The first song chronologically was, in fact, the second to appear. Entitled *Marbhrann do Thormaid Og Mhic-'Ic-Alastair, Innis-Droighnich* ('An Elegy to Young Norman MacAlister, Innistrinich'), it appeared in August 1900 in the *Oban Times,* where it was attributed to '*Bean 'Ic-an-Fhleisdeir, a bha aig am a bhais anns a'Bharrabhreac*' ('Mrs Fletcher, who was at the time of his death in Barbreck').[8] Although a contributor's name is often provided when this is not the same as that of the composer, in this case no contributor's name – either real name or pseudonym – is given. The twelve-year old heir to Innistrinich, Keith Norman MacAlister, died in November 1839, and it can be safely assumed that this elegy was composed soon afterwards, given the poet's reference to '*Bho cheann còrr agus*

[3] Donald E. Meek, ed., *Tuath is Tighearna. Tenants and Landlords* (Edinburgh: Scottish Gaelic Texts Society, 1995).

[4] Donald E. Meek, ed., *The Wiles of the World. Caran an t-Saoghail. Anthology of 19th Century Scottish Gaelic Verse* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2003), xiii−xxxviii. For further discussion of the development of scholarly approaches to Gaelic poetry of the Clearances see Martin MacGregor, 'The Highland Clearances: A reassessment' (forthcoming).

[5] Sheila M. Kidd, 'The Scottish Gaelic Press', in *The Edinburgh History of the British and Irish Press, Vol. 2: Expansion and Evolution 1800−1900*, ed. David Finkelstein (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020), 353−54.

[6] Kirstie Blair, *Working Verse in Victorian Scotland. Poetry, Press and Community* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019); Kirstie Blair, ed., *Poets of the People's Journal. Newspaper Poetry in Victorian Scotland* (Glasgow: The Association for Scottish Literary Studies, 2016).

[7] Dòmhnall Eachann Meek, ed., *Màiri Mhòr nan Òran. Taghadh de a h-Òrain* (Edinburgh: Scottish Gaelic Texts Society, 1998); Priscilla Scott, '"Bean-Chomuinn nam bàrd": Exploring common ground in the lives and perspectives of the Gaelic poets Mary MacPherson and Mary MacKellar', in *Cànan & Cultar / Language & Culture. Rannsachadh na Gàidhlig 8*, ed. Wilson McLeod, Anja Gunderloch and Rob Dunbar (Edinburgh: Dunedin Academic Press, 2016), 71−84.

[8] Bean 'Ic-an-Fhleisdeir, 'Marbhrann do Thormaid Og Mhic-'Ic-Alastair, Innis-Droighnich', *Oban Times*, 18 August, 1900, 7. The Gaelic orthography in both songs discussed in this article appears as it was printed in the *Oban Times*.

seachduin / Thàinig teachdaire a' bhàis ort' ('A week and more ago / Death's messenger came upon you').[9]

The second song – although it was the first to appear in the *Oban Times* – was seemingly composed a year or so after the *Marbhrann*. This was *Cumha do Mhuinntir a' Bharra-Bhric, Taobh Loch-Atha* ('A Lament for the People of Barbreck, Lochaweside'), whose composer was named as '*Catriona nic Lachlann, Bean Araidh anns a' Bhaile Cheudna, 1840*' ('Catherine MacLachlan, a woman in the same township, 1840').[10] That these were one and the same woman is confirmed by Malcolm MacFarlane (1853−1936), a prolific Gaelic writer and scholar who was born and raised in Dalavich, a short distance south of Barbreck, Loch Awe. It was MacFarlane who contributed the *Cumha* to the *Oban Times*; and although he mentions no other songs by the poet, he introduces her as 'Catherine MacLachlan, wife of John Fletcher, once a carrier between Kilchrenan and Oban'.[11]

Catherine and John Fletcher appear in the Census of 1841 as living in Barbreck, on the west side of Loch Awe, with two sons, Dugald (8) and John (2). John's age is given as forty-five, and he is described as an agricultural labourer; Catherine's age is given as forty, although it has not been possible to establish her date of birth with any certainty given a lack of corroborating evidence and the fact that her name was not uncommon in this period.[12] (It is worth noting that ages in the early censuses are often inaccurate, and that those of adults in the 1841 Census were generally rounded down to the nearest multiple of five.) The record of Catherine's marriage to John on 3 January 1825 reveals that she was from Oban.[13] As well as the two sons who appeared in the 1841 Census, they had at least three daughters, Christian, (born 1825), Mary (born 1827) and Margaret (born 1829).[14] Beyond this, little information is to be gleaned about the poet and her family.

Keith Norman MacAlister, the subject of the elegy, was the only son of Keith MacDonald MacAlister of Innistrinich and his wife Flora. Innistrinich, to the north-east of Barbreck on the other side of Loch Awe, was very much within the poet's geographical orbit. This elegy is not the only contemporary Gaelic composition directed towards the MacAlisters of Innistrinich. Dòmhnall Mac-an-Roich (Donald Munro, 1789−1867) dedicated his 1848 collection, *Orain Ghàidhealach,* to Keith MacDonald MacAlister, referencing '*meud do speis do na gaidheil, agus d'a 'n cleachdan*' ('how great your regard is for the Gaels and their customs'). This collection contains three songs to MacAlister, with one describing him as '*caraid nan gaidheal'* ('friend of the Gaels'), suggesting genuine esteem for this member of the landowning class in a period where the connection between the landed gentry and the tenantry had become more tenuous than in previous centuries, and often fraught when issues of land were concerned.[15] The fact that MacAlister was not landlord to Mac-an-

[9] He was born on 11 January 1827, Old Parish Records, Births 533/South Knapdale, 38. No record of his death has been found in Old Parish Records; his death was, however, announced in 'Died', *Caledonian Mercury*, 28 November 1839, 3.

[10] Catriona Nic Lachlann, 'Cumha do Mhuinntir a' Bharra-Bhric, Taobh Loch-Atha', *Oban Times*, 4 January, 1890, 3. See Appendix for the full text and translation of this song. For a recent overview, see Tòmas MacAilpein, 'Òran air Fuadach a' Bharrac Bhric (1840) [1890]', https://ceardach.blog/2024/06/04/oran-air-fuadach-a-bharra-bhric-1840-1890/.

[11] Nic Lachlann, 'Cumha do Mhuinntir a' Bharra-Bhric', 3.

[12] Census 1841 512/6/1, Parish of Inishail available at https://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk/

[13] Old Parish Records, Marriages, 512/ Glenorchy and Inishail 124, available at https://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk/

[14] Old Parish Records, Births. Fifteen-year-old Christian Fletcher is recorded in the 1841 Census as a lodger living in the neighbouring village, Coilleag, with Donald MacIntyre and his wife. Christian is most likely the Fletchers' older daughter. Census 1841 517/4/3.

[15] Domhnull Mac-an-Roich, *Orain Ghaidhealach* (Dun-Eidin: Clo-bhuailte airson an Ughdair, 1848), 38. For a discussion of this collection of poetry see Michel Byrne and Sheila M. Kidd, 'Vintners and criminal officers: Two nineteenth-century collections and their subscribers', in *Lìontan Lìonmhor: Local, National and Global Gaelic Networks from the 18th to the 20th Century*, ed. Michel Byrne and Sheila M. Kidd (Glasgow: Celtic and Gaelic, University of Glasgow, 2019), 85−107.

Roich nor indeed most likely, as is discussed briefly below, to Nic an Fhlèisdeir, presumably made for a less strained relationship and an appreciation of someone who was seen as a supporter of Gaels and their culture.

Nic an Fhlèisdeir's elegy is traditional in form, albeit limited to the types of praise which could be lavished upon a twelve-year old. It uses the tune of *Mo rùn geal òg* ('My fair young love'), the well-known elegy generally accepted to have been composed by Christina Ferguson to her husband, William Chisholm, who died at Culloden.[16] The young MacAlister's kindness is praised, in particular his kindness to the poor, a common feature of traditional panegyric:

Gu'm b'e t'iarrtas gach àm	It was your desire each time
A bhi deanamh ceann ris na bochdan	To be good to the poor
'S gun bhi cruaidh air a' bhantraich	And not to be harsh to the widow
A bha fann gun chùl-taice	Who was weak without support

Similarly, the poet praised the young man's horsemanship, his education, his wisdom and his future potential as a wise landlord: '*Bha do bhuaidhean a' gealltainn / Gu'm biodh thu'd Mhaighstir maith tuatha*' ('Your qualities promised / That you'd be a good master over tenantry').

One of the more striking and unusual verses is this one, which offers a view of his domestic role as a peace-keeper:

'S iomadh ceann a bh'air liathadh	Many a head turned grey
Nach robh co riaghailteach dòigh riut,	Wasn't as peaceable in their way as you,
'S e 'bhi deanamh na rèite	You were always keen
'Bha thu 'n déidh air 'an comhnuidh:	To be conciliatory:
Na'm biodh miothlachd air t'athair	If your father were displeased
'Nuair bhiodh am baile a òrdugh,	When the home was disorganised,
'S tric a dh'fhalbh thu 'n a choinneamh	You'd often go to meet him
A chumail moille air le d'chòmhradh:	To delay him with your chat:
Mo Rùn geal òg!	My fair young love!

The description of this very specific household scene suggests that the poet was intimately acquainted with the boy and his family, perhaps employed by them in a domestic role, such as that of a nurse, albeit no longer so by the time of his death. In the final verse, the poet mentions how the young heir used to visit her:

'S tric a thàinig thu 'm amharc	You'd often come to see me
'N àm dol do Dunéudainn:	When heading to Edinburgh:
'S nuair a thigeadh tu dhachaidh,	And when you'd come home
Bhiodh tu 'gabhail mo sgeula'	You'd be asking after me

While eighteenth-century poet Rob Donn (Robert Mackay, 1714−1778) acknowledged in his *Marbhrann do Iain Mac-Eachainn* ('Elegy to Iain MacEachann') that Gaelic elegies were often overly flattering, he nonetheless asserted: '*Cha do luaidh mu 'n duine-s' / Ach buaidh a chunnaic mo shùil air*' ('I didn't mention about this man / But qualities my own eye witnessed'). In the same way, Nic an Fhlèisdeir insists on the veracity of her praise:[17]

Faodaidh 'mhuinntir 'tha aineolach	Those who are ignorant
A bhi 'n an-fhios mu 'd ghnìomharan,	Being unfamiliar with your deeds
'S a bhi 'n teagamh mu'm rannan	May be doubtful about my verses
'Bhi air an ceangal le fìrinn;	Being based on truth;
Ach 's maith a thuigeas na h-eòlaich	But those familiar know well
Nach e sgleò 'chuir mi sìos ann,	That it's no lies I put in them

[16] For a discussion of this song and its melody see Anne Lorne Gillies, *Songs of Gaelic Scotland* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2005), 185−89.

[17] Robert Mackay, *Songs and Poems in the Gaelic Language* (Inverness: Kenneth Douglas, 1829), p. 321.

'S trian idir de 'd mhaitheas	And a third of your virtues
Cha rachadh agam air innseadh:	I was unable to tell:
Mo Rùn geal òg!	My fair young love!

The second and more interesting song by Nic an Fhlèisdeir is the twenty-two-verse *Cumha do Mhuinntir a' Bharra-Bhric* that was published almost exactly fifty years after its composition, a song which Malcolm MacFarlane introduces in terms of its continuing relevance in 1890: 'in these days when land reform is in the air and people inclined to recall incidents which tend to throw light upon the land administrators of the past, the following song cannot fail to be of interest'.[18] Following land agitation in the Highlands and Islands in the 1880s, the Napier Commission was established in 1883 to enquire into the conditions of the crofters; but even after the Crofters Holdings (Scotland) Act was passed in 1886, conflict over land rights remained a difficult issue. This ongoing tension was reflected in the establishment of a further commission, the Royal Commission (Highlands and Islands) 1892, or the 'Deer Forest Commission' as it is commonly known.

MacFarlane explains that his source for the *Cumha* was 'old "Polinduich" (Duncan Sinclair)', and said that the poet had lived in the house where Sinclair now lived, although when she lived there is not clear. Polinduich, like Barbreck, was on the Inverawe estate. Duncan Sinclair died on 9 February 1890, just a month after the song he gave to MacFarlane was published in the *Oban Times*, with the entry for his death showing him as seventy-nine and confirming that he lived at Barbreck.[19] His age, and the fact that he was a native of the area, suggests that he most likely knew the poet and may have acquired the song directly from her; indeed, it may still have been a part of the area's oral tradition. What is not clear is whether MacFarlane transcribed the song from Sinclair singing it, or if Sinclair had it in manuscript form. MacFarlane reveals that the song 'was composed in 1840 and refers to the eviction by Campbell of Monzie of all the crofters on Barbreck for the purpose of letting it as one farm to Donald MacLulich (Domhnall laidir MacLulaich) [...] there were eighteen families in all, having 120 cows, for whom a herd was maintained by the crofters. After the evictions several of them became reduced to poverty'.[20]

The proprietor of Barbreck, which formed part of his Inverawe estate, was Alexander Cameron Campbell of Monzie, near Crieff in Perthshire (1811–1869). While evidence of the evictions which prompted the song have been hard to come by, Tòmas MacAilpein has uncovered a list of Barbreck crofters, dated to 1839, which was published in the *Oban Times* in 1932, almost a century later. The author of this article, writing under the pseudonym 'Agasha', had acquired the list from his father, who had been born in Barbreck in 1821. His list names some nineteen crofters, a figure which correlates closely with the 'eighteen families' mentioned by MacFarlane.[21]

It is hard to know how to square these pre-eviction figures with the higher figures recorded in the Census of 1841, although there is certainly evidence for a loss of population between 1841 and 1851. In 1841, twenty-six households and 136 individuals were recorded; by 1851 these figures were twenty-two and ninety-five respectively.[22] The fall in population is much more marked than that in households. Possibly the evictions had been announced before the Census date, but the actual removals carried out after it; on the other hand, the year given to MacFarlane may have been incorrect. Donald MacLullich, as well as being named by the poet as the individual being given the new lease, appears in the 1841 Census for Barbreck along with his family, two farm servants and two agricultural labourers, lending further support to the contextualising information given by Sinclair to MacFarlane.

[18] Nic Lachlann, 'Cumha do Mhuinntir a' Bharra-Bhric', 3.
[19] Statutory Deaths 517/1/3, available at https://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk/
[20] Nic Lachlann, 'Cumha do Mhuinntir a' Bharra-Bhric', 3.
[21] MacAilpein, 'Òran'; Agasha, 'Crofters at Barbreck, Lochaweside, 1839', *Oban Times* 1 October 1932, 3.
[22] Census 1841 512/6/1, Census 512/7/8, Parish of Inishail.

Potentially related to the evictions, Barbreck Farm was advertised to let in 1844, consisting 'of about 80 acres of superior arable ground, and 450 of excellent Grazings'.[23]

In a lecture on Gaelic song to the Paisley Liberal Club in November 1889, a few weeks before Nic an Fhlèisdeir's lament appeared in the *Oban Times*, MacFarlane prefaced an English translation of the poem with this somewhat dismissive comment:

> A large proportion of Gaelic songs seem to have sprung directly from the heart [...] there is not much evidence of intellectual afterthought about them. It could scarcely be otherwise, for most of the Gaelic songmakers could neither read nor write. It is not an uncommon case to find persons, on critical occasions, labouring under strong emotions, giving vent to their feelings in poetry once in their lives and never again. I received, the other day, a composition of this kind, which had not been previously published. It was composed by an old woman.[24]

MacFarlane's casual dismissal of the poet as a nameless 'old woman' belies the fact that he did in fact know her name, although perhaps he assumed her name was of little relevance to his Paisley audience. He was, however, clearly unaware of other compositions by Nic an Fhlèisdeir. His somewhat condescending view of many Gaelic songs takes little account of oral tradition or indeed of the relatively limited access to printing and publishing – even for literate Gaels – fifty years earlier when the song had been composed. In any case, his suggestion that this was a one-off composition at a moment of emotional crisis would seem to fall short of the mark. In addition to the fact that we have an earlier composition by this poet, it is hard to believe that this could have been Catrìona Nic an Fhlèisdeir's first or even (as we now know) second song. The twenty-two verses have a coherence of structure and message, draw on a raft of conventions of traditional Gaelic praise poetry, and have an almost entirely consistent pattern of rhyme – both end rhyme and internal rhyme – throughout, clearly the skills of an adept and experienced poet. It should of course be noted that MacFarlane eventually became an active editor of Gaelic literature, so we cannot be sure how much of an editorial hand he had in the final published version; even so, as will become clear, the lament was clearly the output of an accomplished poet.[25]

The tune which Nic an Fhlèisdeir used, *An raoir a chunnaic mi 'm bruadar / A dh'fhàg luaineach mi 'm chadal* ('Last night I saw the dream / That left me unsettled in my sleep'), was borrowed from fellow Argyll poet Seumas Seadhach, Bàrd Loch nan Eala (James Shaw, the Lochnell Poet *c*. 1758–*c*. 1828). As Michael Newton has pointed out, Seadhach's late eighteenth-century song of social criticism includes denunciation of rack-renting landlords and evictions.[26] Given the subject of Nic an Fhlèisdeir's own song, her choice of tune is unlikely to be a coincidence, nor, presumably, would her local audience be unaware of the association.

In both of her extant compositions we see Nic an Fhlèisdeir in elegaic mode, thus occupying a traditional female space within Gaelic-speaking society. The role of women as keeners in Ireland and, to a lesser extent, in Scotland, is well-attested. Virginia Blankenhorn has described the keening ritual as 'a matrix for the reconstruction of a functioning community, transforming a chaotic event into something that could be comprehended and, in theory at least, laid to rest so that roles and relationships could be redefined and normality could reassert itself'.[27]

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[23] 'Arable and Grazing Farm on Lochaweside, Argyllshire', *Glasgow Herald*, 5 February, 1844, 3.
[24] [Malcolm MacFarlane], 'Gaelic Song', *Paisley and Renfrewshire Gazette*, 15 February, 1890, 3.
[25] Roderick MacLeod, 'Malcolm MacFarlane (1853−1931) of Dalavich and Elderslie: Writer, editor, composer, correspondent and controversialist', *Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness* 64 (2004−2006): 304−05.
[26] Michael Newton, 'The radical trickster of Mull: A poem by Seumas Seadhach, Bàrd Loch nan Eala', *Aiste* 5 (2019): 147.
[27] Virginia Blankenhorn, 'From ritual to rhetoric, from rhetoric to art: Women's poetry of lamentation in the Gaelic world', in Virginia Blankenhorn, *Tradition, Transmission, Transformation: Essays on Scottish Gaelic Poetry and Song* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2019), 296.

Because Nic an Fhlèisdeir's *Cumha* laments not an individual who has died, but rather a community of people and their way of life, the rhetoric of keening is adapted to reflect those circumstances. Her praise of the township reminds listeners of the praise heaped upon many a departed leader: it fed many mouths, it was hospitable and charitable, its individuals were industrious. But the rhetoric also references at least three of the stages of grief noted by Blankenhorn – anger, depression and acceptance – thus reinforcing the keening dimension as the poet seeks to share with others the process of coming to terms with the loss of their community.[28] Indeed, her own keening anticipates the involvement of others in the fifteenth verse, in the line '*Gu'm bi mnathan 's paisdean / 'S an deoir gu laidir a' sruthadh*' ('Women and children's tears / Will flow freely'). In its adaptation of keening rhetoric to address contemporary circumstances and societal need, Nic an Fhlèisdeir's *Cumha* supports Dòmhnall Uilleam Stiùbhart's suggestion that 'we might use keening to reassess the soundscape and behaviour patterns associated with the traumatic Age of Clearance'.[29]

The *Cumha* has an immediacy and level of detail about it which Gaelic poetry of the Clearances tends to lack, especially in its naming of individuals and its descriptions of specific circumstances and places. While the published title of the song may not have been the one originally given to it by its creator, the poet establishes the locale by mentioning specific place-names, such as '*mu'n Mhaolan riabhach 's Dun-Mhungain*' ('around the grey Maolan and Dun Mhungan'), '*cul na Druim-buidhe*' ('behind Druim Buidhe'), '*Dun-Caoch*', and Barbreck itself, along with the wider geographical setting encompassing Inverary and the River Awe.[30] While the song bears some comparison with *Oran do thuath an t-shlis mhin* ('Song to the tenantry of the smooth slope [i.e. north side of Loch Rannoch]') by an earlier poet, Mairearad Ghriogarach (Margaret MacGregor, *c*. 1750−1820), Nic an Fhlèisdeir's *Cumha* contains a much more extensive exposition of circumstances.[31] Where much of Mairearad Ghriogarach's response to evictions in Rannoch is an attempt to offer spiritual comfort, Catrìona Nic an Fhlèisdeir, although drawing briefly on her faith, focuses on the immediate context and its effects on her community. Indeed, she offers something of 'the lived experience of the Clearances of ordinary men, women and children' which Annie Tindley has identified as being in short supply in sources for the Clearances.[32]

The opening stanza is traditional in its expression of deep distress. The news of evictions in Barbreck has left the poet with '*leann dubh air mo shuilean*' ('tears in my eyes'). At the same time, lines 3–4 seem to suggest that it was her neighbours who were being evicted, rather than herself and her family, as she specifically expresses grief '*mu na coimhearsnaich ghradhach / A ta laimh rium*

[28] Blankenhorn, 'From ritual to rhetoric', 326−45.

[29] Dòmhnall Uilleam Stiùbhart, 'Keening in the Scottish Gàidhealtachd', in *Death in Scotland. Chapters from the Twelfth Century to the Twenty-First*, ed. Peter C. Jupp and Hilary J. Grainger (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2019), 146.

[30] Dun Mhungain may be Dùn Bhugan, immediately south of Barbreck, which appeared in both the Ordnance Survey Name Book (OS1/2/54/71) when the area was surveyed in 1871 (https://scotlandsplaces.gov.uk/digital-volumes/ ordnance-survey-name-books/argyll-os-name-books-1868-1878/argyll-volume-54/72.), as well as on the map (https://maps.nls.uk/view-full/74427397#zoom=6&lat=5902&lon=11173&layers=BT), published in 1875. It may, however, refer to Dunvungan Castle which, according to a correspondent to the *Oban Telegraph* writing under the name 'Old Tar', 'stands on a little islet of Loch Awe', 22 October 1886, 3. Druim Buidhe, immediately to the north of Barbreck, and Dun na Cuaiche to the east, also appear on this map. While Am Maolan (Riabhach) does not appear to have been recorded, Ardreoch appears just south of Dun Bhugan in 1900 (https://maps.nls.uk/view/75483252).

[31] Michel Byrne, 'A window on the late eighteenth-century Scottish Highlands: The songs of Mairearad Ghriogarach', *Proceedings of the Harvard Celtic Colloquium* 30 (2010): 51−52. For Mairearad Ghriogarach's songs see Donncha Mac in Toisich, *Co-chruinneach dh 'Orain Thaghte Ghaeleach, nach robh riamh roimh an clo-buala* (Edinburgh: John Elder, 1831).

[32] Annie Tindley, '"This will always be a problem in Highland history": A review of the historiography of the Highland Clearances', *Journal of Scottish Historical Studies* 41, no 2 (2021): 184.

a' fuireach' ('for the dear neighbours / who live next to me'). [33] Given that her husband is said by Duncan Sinclair to have been a letter carrier − though described in the 1841 Census as an agricultural labourer − it may be that her own family was not among those evicted, or that not everyone was evicted.

MacLean has noted that much of the surviving poetry of the Clearances is retrospective.[34] The fifth stanza of the *Cumha*, however – perhaps uniquely in Gaelic song – contains a very immediate depiction of how the eviction was announced:

Ach mar chloich as an athar	But like a bolt from the blue
Fhuair iad brath air a' chaochladh:	They heard otherwise:
Thainig teachdaireachd chabhaig	A speedy message came
Bho Ionar-Atha, le maor oirr'	From Inverary with a factor
Iad a chruinn 'chadh 'n a fhianuis,	To have them gather in his presence,
A chur a bhriathran an ceill doibh –	To explain matters to them –
Fhuair iad sgeul ri thoirt-dachaidh	They received news to take home
Nach robh taitneach ri eisdeachd.	That was not pleasant to hear.

Contrary to the common tendency of Gaelic poets to blame the factor, the English or the sheep, the poet conveys a strong sense of betrayal by the landlord, whom she specifically names in stanza 2:

Tha Mon-gheadh a' cur cùl ruinn;	Monzie is turning his back on us;
Rinn e burach na dunaidh	He has made a woeful mess
Air na daoine bha baigheil,	For the kind people
Anns an aite so fuireach.	Who live here.

Stanzas 6–7 return to this betrayal, in which the poet recalls an occasion where Monzie addressed those attending a local dinner. Her detailed description of the feast echoes similar descriptions in poetry of an older period, where the plentiful food provided in the chief's hall was a predictable theme in poetic panegyric. The implication in these verses is that Nic an Fhlèisdeir herself was present at this event:

'S e Mongheadh rinn ar mealladh	Monzie deceived us
Leis an aidmheil bu mhilse,	With the sweetest of declarations,
Aig ceann drochaid Atha	At the end of the Awe bridge
'N uair a ghabh sinn an dinneir –	When we took dinner –
Sheas e suas air an sgafal	He stood up on the platform
An coslas taitneach a' Chriosdaidh;	With the pleasant appearance of a Christian;
Ach 's ann an diugh rinn e dhearbhadh	But today he has proved
Gu 'm bu shearmoin gun bhrigh i.	That it was a sermon with no substance.
B' i siod a' chuirm a bha soghmhor;	That was the luxurious feast;
Bha muilt-roiste gun dith ann,	There was no lack of mutton,
Damh biadhte, slan fallain,	Well-fed venison, healthy and wholesome,
'S air a ghearradh 'n a mhiribh,	And cut into pieces,
Aran cruinneachd am pailteas,	Plenty wheat bread,
'S deoch chasgadh arn iota;	And drink to quench our thirst;
Ach 's daor rinn sinn a paigheadh	But dearly we paid for it,
'S e nis gar fagail 'n ar dibrich.	And he has made us outcasts.

Alexander Campbell had inherited the Inverawe Estate, along with the Perthshire estate of Monzie, in 1832 on the death of his father, General Alexander Campbell (*c*. 1750−1832). Like many other contemporary Highland estate owners, Campbell was an absentee landlord, as his father had

[33] MacFarlane provided a full English translation of the song in Nic Lachlann, *Cumha*, 3. The translations provided here are based on MacFarlane's but diverge from it in places.
[34] MacLean, 'The poetry of the Clearances', 314.

been before him; his obituary notes that he died at Markham House, Leamington, described as his 'usual residence', as it had also been his father's.[35] This obituary also describes him as 'one of the boldest and most daring riders with the Old Warwickshire Hounds', and mentions his 'taste for the fine arts'– all of which underlines his English, rather than Scottish, never-mind Highland credentials. He makes an appearance as a member of the Scottish gentry in Queen Victoria's diary, which records in September 1842 that he had been deer-stalking with Prince Albert and that after dinner he proved to be 'an exceedingly good dancer'.[36] None of this speaks to a landlord with a close connection to his Argyllshire tenantry.

Following in the footsteps of his father, who had been MP for Anstruther East Burghs (1797−1806) and then Stirling Burghs (1807−1818), the younger Campbell entered into politics and, following an unsuccessful attempt in 1837, was elected Conservative MP for Argyll in 1841. While the date of the dinner mentioned by the poet is not clear, it may have formed part of his electioneering campaign preceding the election of 1841. In the run-up to the 1837 election, the electors of Ardnamurchan, for example, were reported as hosting a dinner for him at Strontian, and it may be a similar event which is being described here.[37] Where his father had been interested in the military, in antiquarian matters and in Highland culture – he was a founding member of the Highland Society of Scotland in 1784 – his son's interests lay in church politics.[38] As a church elder, from 1838 Campbell of Monzie took an active, non-intrusionist stance in church politics; he became an elder in the Free Church when it came into being in 1843.[39] Given his high profile in contemporary ecclesiastical politics, Nic an Fhlèisdeir's reference to Campbell of Monzie's Christianity being an appearance rather than reality carries added resonance.

Traditional Gaelic praise poetry often addressed a clan chief's heir, encouraging him to follow the example of his father in his conduct. Where the heir's profligate reputation is already known – as in the case of the late seventeenth-century *Òran do Mhac Leòid Dhùn Bheagain* ('A Song to MacLeod of Dunvegan') by Roderick Morrison (*an Clàrsair Dall* ['The Blind Harper'] *c*. 1656–*c*. 1714) – the poet might criticise his behaviour.[40] In the *Cumha*, Nic an Fhlèisdeir starkly contrasts the younger Campbell's approach to his tenants with that of his father, whom she describes as having been highly esteemed for those qualities seen as important in a traditional chief, such as kindness and generosity of spirit. She pointedly observes that the father did not evict tenants without cause:

Na 'm bu mhac mar ant athair;	If only the son were like the father;
Bha e mathasach, faoilidh;	He was benevolent, hospitable;
Bha e iochdmhor r' a thuath-cheath'rn,	He was merciful to the tenantry,
'S cha d' rinn e gluasad gun aobhar;	He didn't remove them without reason;
Bha e iriosal, baigheil,	He was humble, kindly,
A deanamh fabhair ri daonie (sic)	Doing favours for people
'S gu 'n robh beannachd ant shloigh leis	And the blessing of the people was with him
A' dol fo 'n fhoid aig a' chaochladh.	Going to the grave at his death.

[35] 'Mr. Campbell of Monzie', *The Register and Magazine of Biography* (March, 1869): 207. For an obituary of General Alexander Campbell which offers detailed information about his military service see 'General A. Campbell', *The Gentleman's Magazine* (March, 1832): 273.

[36] Arthur Helps, ed., *Leaves from our Journal of Life in the Highlands from 1848 to 1861* (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1868): 34−36.

[37] 'Dinner to Mr Campbell of Monzie', *Morning Post*, 1 November, 1836, 3.

[38] 'Appendix No. ii', *Prize Essays and Transactions of the Highland Society of Scotland* 1 (1799): lxxii. See also a discussion of General Alexander Campbell's collection of gold artefacts from Ireland in John Ó Néill, 'An Irish provenance for the Monzie Estate gold?', *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland* 138 (2008): 7−1.

[39] Martin Spychal, 'The Disruption, Parliament and Conservative division: Alexander Campbell (1811−1869), https://victoriancommons.wordpress.com/tag/alexander-campbell-of-monzie/.

[40] William Matheson, ed., *The Blind Harper* (Edinburgh: Scottish Gaelic Texts Society, 1970), 58−72.

In addition to blaming '*amaideachd oige*' ('the foolishness of youth'), the poet points out that, despite his high-profile involvement in church politics, the younger Campbell of Monzie is '*gun suim do reachdan a' Bhiobuill*' ('with no regard for the decrees of the Bible'). This brings her to what had, by the time this song was composed, become a trope of Clearance verse: that the land cleared of people would no longer be able to provide soldiers should they be needed to protect the country:[41]

Bu mhor am beud an duin'-uasal	More's the pity that the gentleman
Bhi cho truagh air a dhalladh,	Is so pitifully blinded,
Bhi cur cul ris an oigridh	To be turning has back on the young folk
Dh' fheudadh comhnadh leis fathast.	Who might yet come to his aid.
Na 'm biodh naimhdean an toir air,	If enemies were pursuing him,
A dheanadh foirneart adh aindeoin	To oppress him in spite of him,
Bhiodh iad ullamh, fo ordugh,	They would be ready, in order,
Dhol an comhdail a' chatha.	To go into the thick of battle.
Cha'n ion da nis a bhi 'n dochas	He needn't now hope
Ged dh' eireadh foirneart 's an Rioghachd	Though violence should arise in the kingdom
Gu'n tog iad claidheamh no gunna	That they will lift sword or gun
Dhol a chumail a chinn air.	To keep his head on his shoulders.
'S ged is laidir mac Lulaich	Although MacLullich is strong
'S na 'm bheil de chuid 's de ni aig',	And has wealth and property
Cha sheas e aite nan daoine –	He won't take the place of the people –
Mu Dhun-Chaoch tha iad lionmhor.	Who were numerous around Duncaoch.

Community and people are at the heart of this lament: the word *coimhearsnaich* ('neighbours') is used twice; various words for 'people' or 'population' (*sluagh, muinntir, daoine*) occur eight times; and *teaghlach* ('family'), *oigridh* ('young people'), *tuath-cheath'rn* ('common people'), *mnathan* ('women'), and *paisdean* ('infants') each appear once. Even more personal is the vignette in verse fourteen:

'S tric bha Paruig Mac Ailpein	Often was Peter MacAlpine
Gu ruig an achlais 's na digean,	Up to his armpits in the ditches,
'S greis eile ri ruamhar	And another spell spent digging
Gu fliuch fuar air droch-dhiol ann;	Cold and wet with little to show for it;
Ri fearas-tighe 'us aiteach	Working and cultivating the land
Bheir ioma barr ge b' e chi e –	Which will give many a crop, whoever will see it
Bidh nis a bhuannachd aig cach dheth	Which others will now benefit from
O 'n a' bhairlinn is ni dha.	Since he has received an eviction notice.

This level of detail is unusual in Gaelic Clearance poetry which, as Donald Meek has observed, has 'little to say about the harsh realities of Highland life prior to 1850'. [42] In a highly personalised way it captures something of the hard labour required to cultivate the land, and further underlines the injustice of these evictions. While an 1839 list of Barbreck crofters includes Peter MacAlpine, the absence of his name from the 1841 Census for the township is presumably evidence of his eviction. He may have been the seventy-five-year old Peter McAlpine, an agricultural labourer who is recorded in 1841 in Keppochan, near Cladich on the other side of Lochawe.[43]

[41] See, for example, Coinneach MacCoinnich's *Oran do na Caoraich Mhoire* ('Song to the Big Sheep'), *Orain Ghaidhealach agus Bearla air an Eadar-theangacha* (Duneadainn: Clo-bhuailt' air son an ughdair, 1792), 88−92; and Iain MacGriogair's *Tuireadh airson Slios Min Raineach* ('Lament for the smooth slope [i.e. north side of Loch Rannoch]'), *Orain Ghaelach* (Edin-bruaich: Adhamh Mac Neill agus a Chuideachd, 1801), 130−34.

[42] Meek, *Tuath*, 35.

[43] Census 1841 512/5/5.

This picture of the labourer at work also contrasts with the prevailing imagery of Clearance verse, which tends to emphasise the absence of people. In *Dìreadh a-mach ri Beinn Shianta* ('Climbing up towards Ben Shiant'), composed around ten years before Nic an Fhlèisdeir's song, Iain MacLachlainn (John MacLachlan, 1804−74) describes a post-Clearance scene containing '*lìonmhor bothan bochd gun àird air*' ('many a poor cottage without a roof') where – in place of the fire, children and heroes – there are rushes and sheep.[44] Nic an Fhlèisdeir's focus on the loss of tenants' hard-earned gains foreshadows what would become one of the key tenets of the late nineteenth-century campaign for crofters' rights which, as well as seeking security of tenure, sought the right to compensation for improvements carried out.

The *Cumha* laments the destruction of a thriving, self-supporting, independent township where everyone had enough to eat:

'S e so am baile tha ainmeil;	This is the township that is famous;
Tha e 'n seanchas gach duine	It is in everybody's conversation
'S ioma beul bha e biadhadh	Many a mouth it fed
Mu'n Mhaolan riabhach 's Dun-Mhungain	Around the grey Maolan and Dun Mungan

It depicts a self-regulating community that resolved its own disputes:

'S ann a chruinnicheadh iad comhluadh	They would gather together
A chur an ordugh gach rud ann,	To set everything in order
Gun dol gu maighstir no factor	Without going to master or factor
Le casaidean faoine.	With trivial accusations.

Martin MacGregor has recently discussed the centuries-long concept of the social contract which governed Gaelic-speaking society, and the failure of the landowning classes to maintain that contract during the Clearances.[45] So, too, Ronald Black has described how poetry reflected the social contract understood to exist between chief and clan, with the former held up as a protector of the poor, weak and needy.[46] Nic an Fhlèisdeir's song shows how this contract has broken down in Barbreck and how, rather than protecting the vulnerable, Campbell of Monzie has not just failed to support them, but has actively removed what support they had to fall back on:

Gu 'm bheil seann-daoine leointe,	Old people who lost their vigour with age
'Chaill an treoir leis an aois ann,	Are injured there,
Rinn ioma saothair 'us obair	Who worked and laboured
Mu'n do thog iad an teaghlaich,	To raise their family,
A shaoil gu 'm faigheadh iad comhnuidh	Who thought they would have a home
Fhad 's bu bheo iad 's ant shaoghal,	As long as they were alive,
'S gu 'm buaineadh iad far 'n do chuir iad,	And that they would reap where they sowed
'S nach biodh duilich mu 'n saothair.	And wouldn't regret their labour.

Women and children, often singled out by poets as being protected by the chief, are here depicted as abandoned, tearful and anxious at the prospect of eviction. Here it is the people themselves and their community who are shown as upholding the traditional ethos of hospitality and generosity, *a bheireadh biadh agus deirce / Do na feumanaich uile* ('who would give food and charity / To all those in need'). Unlike his late father who is described as *faoilidh* ('generous'), the younger Campbell fails in that virtue by comparison with his own tenants. The community, however, is ultimately powerless. Where tenants would traditionally have looked to their chief as an arbiter of justice, they

[44] Meek, *Tuath*, 57−58, 192−93.
[45] MacGregor, 'Highland Clearances'.
[46] Ronald Black, *An Lasair. Anthology of 18th Century Scottish Gaelic Verse* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2001), xxxii−xxxv.

now face eviction at the decree of the very person who should have been their *caraid 's a chuirt* ('friend in court'). The social contract, as Nic an Fhlèisdeir describes it, is in ruins.

Despite the anger and distress she expresses in her verse, Nic an Fhlèisdeir sees no solution other than passive acceptance, advocating the exercise of patience *(foighidinn 'fhoghlum),* and placing her faith in the Bible and the life to come, where *cha bhi foirneart air fearann / 'S cha bhi creach ann mar tha e* ('there will be no oppression on land / And there will be no plunder as now'). Her allusion to the wheel of fortune – *Theag'gu'n tionndaidh a chuibheall* ('perhaps the wheel will turn') – offers hope that their fortunes will improve. This motif had been deployed at other times of crisis, notably among Jacobite poets from the late seventeenth century onwards; it would reappear later in the nineteenth century in the work of Màiri Mhòr nan Òran, whose song *Eilean a' Cheò* encouraged crofters to maintain their struggle for land rights.[47]

Catrìona Nic an Fhlèisdeir's two known songs are substantial and accomplished pieces, strongly suggesting that she must surely have composed a larger corpus of verse. Her *Cumha* offers a visceral account of evictions in the village of Barbreck and the destruction of a thriving community, and its survival speaks to its sentiments retaining importance and relevance fifty years later. Unlike later poetry of the Clearances that looks back at a desolate landscape from which people have been evicted, this song gives a sense of the human impact of those evictions on individual community members, and does so within a loose framework of poetic rhetoric which the song's audience would fully understand. It suggests a development of the traditional role of women as keeners, here keening the death of a community rather than of an individual. It sheds valuable light on a forgotten poet, and offers an unparalleled, contemporary sense of the 'lived experience' of eviction in this mid-nineteenth-century Gaelic-speaking township.

Appendix

Cumha do Mhuinntir a' Bharra-Bhric, Taobh Loch-Atha

Le Catriona nic Lachlainn, Bean Araidh anns a' Bhaile Cheudna, 1840[48]

Air Fonn 'An raoir a chunnaic mi 'm bruadar
A dh'fhag luaineach mi 'm chadal'

Och 'us och mar a ta mi!	Och and och for how I am!
Tha mi 'n trath s' deth fo mhulad	I am grieved
Mu na coimhearsnaich ghradhach	For the dear neighbours
A ta laimh rium a' fuireach;	Who live next to me;
'S leann dubh air mo shuilean,	Tears in my eyes
Mu'n sgeul ùr thainig h-ugainn,	With this new tale that has reached us
A bhi 'g ar sgaradh o cheile	That we are to be sundered from each other
'S sinn bhi cho reidhbheartach uile.	When we are all so comfortable.
Tha Mon-gheadh a' cur cùl ruinn;	Monzie is turning his back on us;
Rinn e burach na dunaidh	He has made a woeful mess
Air na daoine bha baigheil,	For the kind people
Anns an aite so fuireach;	Who live here;
Fhuair e tuathanach araidh,	He has got a certain farmer,

[47] Damhnait Ní Suaird, 'Jacobite rhetoric and terminology in the political poems of the Fernaig MS (1688−1693)', *Scottish Gaelic Studies* 19 (1999): 113−15; William Gillies, 'Gaelic songs of the 'Forty-Five', *Scottish Studies* 30 (1991), 27; Mairi Nic-a-Phearsain, *Dain agus Orain Ghaidhlig* (Inbhirnis: A. agus U. MacCoinnich, 1891), 7.

[48] *Oban Times,* 4 January 1890, 3. The translation provided here is guided by that provided by Malcolm MacFarlane, but diverges from it in places.

Domhnull laidir Mac Lulaich –
Cha 'n abhar farmaid an trath s' e,
'S mallachd chaich dol 'n a chuideachd.

Strong Donald MacLulich
He is no cause of envy now
With the curse of others following him.

'S e so am baile tha ainmeil;
Tha e 'n seanchas gach duine
'S ioma beul bha e biadhadh
Mu'n Mhaolan riabhach 's Dun-Mhungain
Ach 's ann an taobh so de 'n gharadh
Tha 'n sluagh gun aireamh a' fuireach;
'S mo chuid agam-s de'n tursadh
'S a bhothain cul na Druim-buidhe.

This is the township that is famous;
It is in everybody's conversation
Many a mouth it fed
Around the grey Maolan and Dun Mungan
But it's on this side of the dyke
That the countless people live;
And my share of sorrow is
In the bothy at the back of Druim Buidhe.

Gu 'm bheil seann-daoine leointe,
'Chaill an treoir leis an aois ann,
Rinn ioma saothair 'us obair
Mu'n do thog iad an teaghlaich,
A shaoil gu 'm faigheadh iad comhnuidh
Fhad 's bu bheo iad 's ant shaoghal,
'S gu 'm buaineadh iad far 'n do chuir iad,
'S nach biodh duilich mu 'n saothair.

Old people who lost their vigour with age
Are injured there,
Who worked and laboured
To raise their family,
Who thought they would have a home
As long as they were alive,
And that they would reap where they sowed
And wouldn't regret their labour.

Ach mar chloich as an athar
Fhuair iad brath air a' chaochladh:
Thainig teachdaireachd chabhaig
Bho Ionar-Atha, le maoir oirr'
Iad a chruinn 'chadh 'n a fhianuis,
A chur a bhriathran an ceill doibh –
Fhuair iad sgeul ri thoirt-dachaidh
Nach robh taitneach ri eisdeachd.
'S e Mon-gheadh rinn ar mealladh
Leis an aidmheil bu mhilse,
Aig ceann drochaid Atha
'N uair a ghabh sinn an dinneir –
Sheas e suas air an sgafal
An coslas taitneach a' Chriosdaidh;
Ach 's ann an diugh rinn e dhearbhadh
Gu 'm bu shearmoin gun bhrigh i.

But like a bolt from the blue
They heard otherwise:
A speedy message came
From Inverary with a factor
To have them gather in his presence,
To explain matters to them –
They received news to take home
That was not pleasant to hear.
Monzie deceived us
With the sweetest of declarations,
At the end of the Awe bridge
When we took dinner –
He stood up on the platform
With the pleasant appearance of a Christian;
But today he has proved
That it was a sermon with no substance.

B' i siod a' chuirm a bha soghmhor;
Bha muilt-roiste gun dith ann,
Damh biadhte, slan fallain,
'S air a ghearradh 'n a mhiribh,
Aran cruinneachd am pailteas,
'S deoch chasgadh arn iota;
Ach 's daor rinn sinn a paigheadh
'S e nis gar fagail 'n ar dibrich.

That was the luxurious feast;
There was no lack of mutton,
Well-fed venison, healthy and wholesome,
And cut into pieces,
Plenty wheat bread,
And drink to quench our thirst;
But dearly we paid for it,
And he has made us outcasts.

Na 'm bu mhac mar ant athair;
Bha e mathasach, faoilidh;
Bha e iochdmhor r' a thuath-cheath'rn,
'S cha d' rinn e gluasad gun aobhar;
Bha e iriosal, baigheil,
A deanamh fabhair ri daonie (sic)
'S gu 'n robh beannachd ant shloigh leis
A' dol fo 'n fhoid aig a' chaochladh.

If only the son were like the father;
He was benevolent, hospitable;
He was merciful to the tenantry,
He didn't remove them without reason;
He was humble, kindly,
Doing favours for people
And the blessing of the people was with him
Going to the grave at his death.

Ach tha amaideachd oige
Ri moran call do na miltean;
Nach eisd comhairle 'cheartais
Gun suim do reachdan a' Bhiobuill.
Ach ma thionnd'ar a thuigse,
'S e thighuin gu gliocsas na firinn,
Suilean inntinn theid fhosgladh
'S chi e 'n lochd bh' anns an ni so.

But the foolishness of youth
Is cause of ruin for thousands;
They listen not to the counsel of righteousness
With no regard for the decrees of the Bible.
But should his understanding be changed,
And he come to a knowledge of the truth,
His mind's eyes will be opened
And he will see the harm that was in this thing.

Bu mhor am beud an duin'-uasal
Bhi cho truagh air a dhalladh,
Bhi cur cul ris an oigridh
Dh' fheudadh comhnadh leis fathast.
Na 'm biodh naimhdean an toir air,
A dheanadh foirneart adh aindeoin,
Bhiodh iad ullamh, fo ordugh,
Dhol an comhdail a' chatha.

More's the pity that the gentleman
Is so pitifully blinded,
To be turning his back on the young folk
Who might yet come to his aid.
If enemies were pursuing him,
To oppress him in spite of him,
They would be ready, in order,
To go into the thick of battle.

Cha'n ion da nis a bhi 'n dochas
Ged dh' eireadh foirneart 's an Rioghachd
Gu'n tog iad claidheamh no gunna
Dhol a chumail a chinn air.
'S ged is laidir mac Lulaich
'S na 'm bheil de chuid 's de ni aig',
Cha sheas e aite nan daoine –
Mu Dhun-Chaoch tha iad lionmhor.

He needn't now hope
Though violence should arise in the kingdom
That they will lift sword or gun
To keep his head on his shoulders.
Although MacLullich is strong
And has wealth and property
He won't take the place of the people –
Who are numerous around Dun Caoch.

'S goirt leam caradh nan daoine
Bha ri faoileachd 'us furan,
Ris a mhuinntir bha faontrach
Feadh ant shaoghail a' siubhal;
A bheireadh biadh agus deirce
Do na feumanaich uile –
'S bochd an diugh e ri radh
Nach bi 'n an ait, ach aon dhuine.

I am grieved for the lot of the people
Who were kindly and hospitable
To the wanderers and travellers
Of the world;
Who would give food and charity
To all those in need –
It's sad to say today
That there will only be one person in their place.

'S mor tha mis ann am barail
Gu'm feud mi aithris gu saor dhuibh
Nach eil an leithid 'n a fhearann
Ach gle ainneamh ri fhaotainn;
'S ann a chruinnicheadh iad comhluadh
A chur an ordugh gach rud ann,
Gun dol gu maighstir no factor
Le casaidean faoine.

I am much of the opinion
I may freely tell you
That their likes are rare
In all his land.
They would gather together
To set everything in order,
Without going to master or factor
With trivial accusations.

'S tric bha Paruig Mac Ailpein
Gu ruig an achlais 's na digean,
'S greis eile ri ruamhar
Gu fliuch fuar air droch-dhiol ann;
Ri fearas-tighe 'us aiteach
Bheir ioma barr ge b' e chi e –
Bidh nis a bhuannachd aig cach dheth
O' n a' bhairlinn is ni dha.

Often was Peter MacAlpine
Up to his armpits in the ditches,
And another spell spent digging
Cold and wet with little to show for it;
Working and cultivating the land
Which will give many a crop, whoever will see it –
Which others will now benefit from
Since he has received an eviction notice.

Gu'm bi mnathan 's paisdean
'S an deoir gu laidir a' sruthadh,
An àm togail na h-imrich,

Women and children's tears
Will flow freely
At the time of flitting

'S iad fo iomgain 'us mulad;
'S mairg bhitheas 'g an eisdeachd,
'S trom an ceum air an turas,
Ag cur an cul ris an aite
'S am bu ghnath leo bhi fuireach.

And them anxious and sorrowful;
It is pitiful to listen to them,
Heavy is their step on their journey,
Turning their backs on the place
In which they used to live.

Ach glacaibh misneach 's bibh laidir,
'S bidh Righ nan Gràs air an stiuir dhuibh;
Fosglaidh Esan dhuibh aite
Ged tha cach a cur cuil ribh;
Theag' gu'n tionndaidh a chuibheall,
Mar tha mi guidhe le durachd,
'S gu'm pill sibh fhathast le beartas
Do'n Bharra-bhreac chum ar duthchais.

But take courage and be strong,
And the King of Grace will be your guide;
He will open a place for you
Though others abandon you.
Perhaps the wheel will turn,
As I fervently wish,
And you may return yet with riches
to Barbreck, to our[49] rightful land.

Nam biodh sibhse co eolach
Ri' daoine mora na tire,
'S gu'm faighte caraid 's a chuirt duibh
A sgoilteadh cuisean le firinn,
Dh' fhanadh sibh mar a tha sibh,
Air an laraich car bliadhna,
Dh' aindeoin na rinn iad uile,
'S sibh bhi murach g' a dhioladh.

If you were as knowing
As the great ones of the land,
And if you could get a friend in court
Who would analyse affairs truthfully,
You could remain as you are
In the place for another year,
Despite all they did
And you ready to recompense him.

Ach 's e foighidinn 'fhoghlum
An ni is coir dhuinn a dheanadh,
'S a bhi cur casg' air ar naduir,
Tha an trath-s' air dhroch fheuchainn
An Ti thuirt "'s leamsa 'n dioghaltas,"
Mar tha 'm Biobull ag radhainn,
Gu 'm bi e reir mar tha sgriobhte,
'G a chur an gniomh mar is aill leis.

But to exercise patience
Is what we should do
And to restrain our nature
Which is currently sorely tried.
He who said 'vengeance is mine',
As the Bible says,
It will be as it is written
Each thing will be done as he wishes.

'Nuair theid an aimsir so thairis
'S chuirear casg' air an namhaid,
'S bhios riaghladh na talmhainn
Aig naoimh an Ti a's ro airde,
Cha bhi foirneart air fearann,
'S cha bhi creach ann mar tha e;
'S ann bhios gach cuis ann an ceartas.
Mar tha 'm Focal ag radhainn.

When this time has passed
And the enemy is vanquished
And the ruling of the earth
Is in the hands of the saints of the highest One,
There will be no oppression on land
And there will be no plunder as now;
All things will be disposed of justly
As the Word says.

Cha'n ioghnadh mise bhi tursach
'S a bhi fo mhulad mu 'r deighinn;
'S ioma là thug mi easlan,
'S bha bhur freasdal dhomh feumail;
'S ann fhuair mi coimhearsnaich chairdeil,
Gach aon toirt barr air a cheile;
'S bu chruaidh an turn rinn an duine
'Chuir sgapadh buileach 's an treud so.

It is no wonder I am sad
And sorrowful about you
Many days I was ill,
And your attention helped me;
I had friendly neighbours
Each one better than the next;
It was a harsh turn brought about by the man
Who completely scattered this flock.

[49] The text, as published, has '*ar*' (our) which MacFarlane translates as 'your' which would be '*ur*'. The two words are readily confused and I have opted to translate as 'our' to reflect the meaning of the published Gaelic text.

Ach tha latha gu tighinn.	But there is a day coming,
Ma chreideas sinne an Soisgeul,	If we believe the Gospel
'S an teid ar cruinneachadh comhluadh–	When we will be gathered together−
Siod a chomhdhail bhios aoibhinn	That will be the joyful meeting
'S cha bhi Mon-gheadh no Mac Lulaich,	And neither Monzie nor MacLullich,
No aon duine fo 'n ghrein so,	Nor any man under this sun,
A sgapas sinn as a' chrò sin	Will disperse us from that fold
'S am faigh sinn solas nach treig sinn.	Where we will get happiness that will not forsake us.
'S diomhain dhomhsa bhi 'g aithris	It is in vain I try to tell
Na bheil de eallaich air m' inntinn	The burden that is on my mind
Mu dheigh muinntir a' bhaile–	About the people of the township−
Mo mhile beannachd le sith dhoibh.	My thousand blessings with peace to them.
Guidheam aran 'us bainne,	I pray for bread and milk for them,
Spreidh 'us sabhal lan innlinn,	Livestock and barns full of fodder,
Saoghal fad 'an deagh bheatha	Long and good lives
'S na h-uile latha gun dith dhoibh.	And every day lacking for nothing.

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