Traditional and Bogus Elements in 'MacCrimmon's Lament'

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As Derick Thomson has pointed out, one of the most fascinating and least-explored areas of Gaelic studies is that of the bogus literature and scholarship of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (1958 : 172 ff.). The antiquarian tastes of the reading public of that time encouraged and rewarded the efforts of James Macpherson and his imitators, and their productions had a marked influence on the romantic revival of the nineteenth century.

A proven method of dealing with bogus productions is to compare them with genuine traditional materials which are associated with the same subject. Once scholars were content to conduct a searching examination of the traditional Fenian materials the solution to the problem of Macpherson's authenticity was not far to seek. In the present essay the field of enquiry is both smaller and broader. It involves a number of items, both traditional and bogus, which are associated with the name of Domhnall Bàn MacCrimmon, a piper who died fighting with MacLeod of Dunvegan in the 'Forty-five. These items include (i) stories and 'legends' about Domhnall Bàn, both genuine and spurious; (ii) a poem in English, 'Mackrimmon's Lament', by Sir Walter Scott, which has the death of the piper as its theme; (iii) two Gaelic poems in imitation of Scott; (iv) a bagpipe lament, 'Cha till mi tuille', attributed to Domhnall Bàn; and (v) various musical productions, traditional and non-traditional, based upon the bagpipe air. Taken as a whole these materials illustrate the range and effectiveness of post-Macphersonic romanticism, not only in the more scholarly type of literary production, but also in the 'legends' and musical settings which their authors perpetrated in order to give such productions the necessary air of authentic antiquity.

Domhall Bàn MacCrimmon belonged to the fourth generation of that family whose members had been hereditary pipers to the MacLeods of Dunvegan. The MacCrimmons were known throughout the Highlands not only as masterful performers on the bagpipes, but also as instructors in that art, and in that of composing for the instrument. A college of piping, endowed by MacLeod and established at Boreraig probably in the time of Padruig Mór MacCrimmon (who held office 1640–70) drew aspiring pipers from all over the Highlands. In the approximately one hundred years that the college flourished, the MacCrimmons contributed significantly to the *pìobaireachd* form known as *ceòl mór* (Campbell 1953 : 16).

In 1745, Norman MacLeod, 22nd Chief, decided to lead his clansmen into the field on the side of the government, and in August of that year set sail for the mainland to join the Independent Companies under the command of Lord Loudon. Accompanying him in the office of piper to the company was Domhnall Bàn, younger brother of Malcolm MacCrimmon, MacLeod's hereditary piper, who for some reason was unable to join the campaign (Grant 1959 : 444). MacLeod and his clansmen reached Inverness on 9 September 1745, and were billeted there along with the rest of Lord Loudon's troops, 1700 in all (MacKintosh 1903 : 46).

On 16 February 1746 Loudon learned that the Prince had arrived, virtually unattended, at Moy Hall, the seat of Mackintosh of Mackintosh, a few miles to the southeast of the city. The place was largely unguarded, Mackintosh and his clansmen being occupied elsewhere in the Royalist cause. Lady Mackintosh, however, was a fervent Jacobite, and feared that Loudon might learn of the Prince's presence; so, for some protection, she armed the blacksmith, one Donald Fraser, and four or five others with muskets and told them to keep a look-out on the moor, along the Inverness road. That night, Fraser and his men perceived a body of men approaching—in fact, Lord Loudon and most of the Inverness garrison, including the MacLeods. The situation called for desperate bluff: the watchers retired behind some peat stacks which stood near the road at the Pass of Creag-an-eoin, and when the column of men came into the pass they burst out of hiding, loosed off their blunderbusses and bellowed the war-cries of various Jacobite clans, urging these non-existent reinforcements into battle. With this, in the dark, Lord Loudon assumed that the Prince's entire army were at hand, and signalled a speedy retreat. This is the incident rather gleefully referred to in Jacobite histories as the 'Rout of Moy'; the only sober aspect of the affair was that Domhnall Bàn, the piper, got in the path of one of the bullets and was killed on the spot—the only casualty (MacLeod 1933 : 45–6; MacKintosh 1903 : 46).

It is sometime during this period that Domhnall Bàn is supposed to have composed the *pìobaireachd* 'Cha till mi tuille' which is attributed to him (see Fig. 1 below). The circumstances of its composition are impossible to determine with any certainty, although several accounts are available to us which purport to tell the story. Sir Walter Scott gives one version in a note to his poem, 'Mackrimmon's Lament', in *Albyn's Anthology*. Referring to the bagpipe air, which is printed along with his poem, he writes:

> Mackrimmon, hereditary piper to the Laird of Macleod, is said to have composed this Lament when the Clan was about to depart upon a distant and dangerous expedition. The minstrel was impressed with a belief, which the event verified, that he was to be slain in the approaching feud; and hence the Gaelic words, "*Cha till mi tuille; ged thillis Macleod, cha till Macrimmon;*—I shall never return; although Macleod returns, yet Mackrimmon shall never return! The piece is but too well known, from its being the strain with which the emigrants from the West Highlands, and Isles, usually take leave of their native shore (Campbell 1818 : 57).

It seems to me that the bareness of this account argues against its being a product of Scott's imagination: understatement is so far from being his style that I cannot believe that he would normally refer to the 'Forty-Five Rebellion as a 'feud'! It seems more likely that he heard the story during his visit at Dunvegan in 1814 (although his diary makes no mention of it), or that he got it from some Highland correspondent to whom the details were unknown. The story probably represents the truth as far as it was known to Scott. His reference to the music's connection with emigration is probably based on fact; this aspect will be discussed below.

Scott's statement that MacCrimmon was convinced he was to be killed in the coming engagement may be traceable to the following report of an incident which is supposed to have occurred before the expedition set out for Moy. It is contained in Theophilus Insulanus' *Treatise on the Second Sight,* 1763:

> Patrick MacCaskill, an honest Country Farmer, of good Report with all his Neighbours, who deserves Credit as much as any Church-man of the most unblemished Morals, and is mentioned in the Body of the Treatise, declared to me, that, in the Evening before the Earl of Loudon attempted to surprize the young Pretender, at the Castle of Moy, Donald MacCrummen, Piper to the Independent Company, (commanded by the young Laird of MacLeod,) talked with him on the Streets of Inverness, where they were then under Arms, to march, they did not know whither, as their Expedition was kept a Secret; and that, after the said Donald, a goodly Person, six Feet high, parted with him about a Pistol-Shot, he saw him all at once contracted to the Bigness of a Boy of five or six Years old, and immediately, with the next Look, resume his former Size. The same Night, MacCrummen was accidentally shot dead on their long March, which concluded the Operation of that Night's Enterprize (Kirk 1815 : Appendix, 91–92; see also MS 1820 : 146–7).

Mr William Matheson informs me that this account resembles the Lewis version of the MacCrimmon story, in which the man has a dream in which he sees himself lying dead on the field of battle:

> 'Bha fear air a' bhlàr 's fhuil bhlàth a' sileadh.'
> (There was a man on the battlefield, his warm blood flowing.)

In any case the story is reminiscent of any number of accounts involving second sight, and unmistakably belongs to the native Gaelic tradition, whether or not it represents a true occurrence.

The same cannot be said for the account given by F. T. MacLeod in his history of the MacCrimmons which he puts forward as an explanation of the circumstances in which Domhnall Bàn composed his pipe air. He claims to have got this story from the grand-daughter of Domhnall Bàn, and says that she in turn heard it from her grandmother, the piper's widow:

> You will remember, *mo leanabh,* my oft telling of the great love and happiness MacCrimmon and I had together, and of our longing for the day when the old line of Kings should be restored to Scotland. Many a time on his Chanter my husband played to me when walking by the shore a wonderful joyful piobaireachd he had made, but which

> he would not put on his pipes till he should go forth with the Clan under MacLeod for the King. Joy was in our hearts when we heard of the landing of Prince Charlie, and we were hourly expecting the summons for the Clan to rise on his behalf. But there came gloom and apprehension—MacLeod was not himself but pondering deeply. We could not believe it when word came that the MacLeods were to fight against the race to which they had always been loyal. Sad was MacCrimmon that day . . . How could he be against his King? How could he be against his Chief? Sad was my heart when from the point I saw the birlinns leave, MacLeod in the stern of the foremost birlinn, looking sad and mournful and MacCrimmon in the prow playing a piobaireachd but not the joyful piobaireachd but a sad sad tune (MacLeod 1933 : 82–4).

It seems unlikely, on two grounds, that this is anything more than the fruit of someone's imagination (probably, in the first instance, that of Dr Norman MacLeod, whose contributions will be discussed below). In the first place, the style and sentiment of the account are far more representative of nineteenth-century English romance than of the Gaelic point of view at any period. Second, the historical outlook presented is also that of the nineteenth century, when the Jacobite movement had ceased to be a reality and was reduced to providing raw material for fantasy, like many another attractive lost cause before it. In point of fact, the MacLeods were far from keen to join the Prince's ranks, and took a very cynical view of the whole Jacobite business, having been disappointed in their expectations at the time of the Restoration. They joined the Jacobite cause neither in 1715 nor in 1745.

Several elements suggest that F. T. MacLeod's story may have some connection with Sir Walter Scott's poem, 'Mackrimmon's Lament', which first appeared in 1818. This poem was included, along with the note given above, in the second volume of *Albyn's Anthology*, set to a tune which, in its melodic shape if not in its rhythm, is identifiable as the *ùrlar* or ground of Domhnall Bàn's bagpipe air, 'Cha till mi tuille' (see Fig. 1).

> Macleod's wizzard flag from the grey castle sallies,
> The rowers are seated, unmoored are the galleys;
> Gleam war-axe and broad-sword, clang target and quiver,
> As Mackrimmon sings "Farewell to Dunvegan for ever!"
> "Farewell each tall cliff, on which breakers are foaming;
> Farewell each dark glen, in which red deer are roaming;
> Farewell lonely SKYE; to lake, mountain and river,
> Macleod may return—but, Mackrimmon shall never!"
>
> "Farewell the bright clouds, that on Quillan are sleeping;
> Farewell the bright eyes, in the Dun that are weeping;
> To each minstrel delusion farewell—and for ever—
> Mackrimmon departs—to return to you never!—
> The *Banshee's* wild voice sings the death-dirge before me,
> The pall of the dead for a mantle hangs o'er me;—
> But, my heart shall not flag, and my nerves shall not shiver,
> Tho' devoted I go—to return again never!—

"Too oft shall the notes of Mackrimmon's bewailing
Be heard when the GAEL on their exile are sailing;—
Dear land! to the shores, whence unwilling we sever,
Return—return—return shall we never!—
Cha till, cha till, cha till sin tuille!
Cha till, cha till, cha till sin tuille!
Cha till, cha till, cha till sin tuille
Ged thillis Macleod, cha till Macrimmon!"

Several elements in this poem, *e.g.* references to a departure by sea (ll. 2–4) and to weeping women-folk left behind (l. 10) may very well have a basis in fact: MacLeod and his clansmen undoubtedly did travel by sea; MacCrimmon may have left a lamenting wife or sweetheart behind him; and the pipes would be most likely to have played at such an important leave-taking. These points, along with other details about MacLeod traditions (*e.g.* the 'fairy flag', referred to in line 1) and scenery around Dunvegan, are probably the fruits of a visit which Scott paid to Skye and the Highlands in 1814 (Lockhart 1842 : 281–5). Scott's inventiveness is here confined to the art of poetry, the evocation of a mood, rather than to the fabrication of an historical account.

But if Scott's poem was an honest literary production, it was used by some of his admirers as the basis for further productions which were not quite so honest. In 1830 there appeared in Dr Norman MacLeod's publication, *An Teachdaire Gaelach,* the following translation of 'Mackrimmon's Lament' into Gaelic (vol. 2 no. 19 : 165). It was not acknowledged as a translation, but was simply printed, with no comment whatsoever, under the title 'Macruimein, no, Cumhadh an Fhògarraich' ('Macruimein, or, the Exile's Lament'):

Bratach bhuadhail Mhicleòid o'n tùr mhòr a' lasadh,
'S luchd-iomradh nan ràmh greasadh bhàrc thair ghlas-chuan;
Bogha, sgiath, 's claidheamh mòr, 's tuagh gu leòn, airm nam fleasgach,
'S Macruimein cluich cuairt—"Soraidh-bhuan do Dhun-Bheagain".

Slàn leis gach creig àrd ris 'm bheil gàirich àrd-thonnan—
Slàn leis gach gleann fàs san dean cràchd-dhaimh an langan—
Eilein Sciathnaich àidh! slàn le d'bheanntaibh 's guirm fireach
Tillidh dh'fhaoidte Macleòid ach cha bheo Macruimein.

Soraidh-bhuan do'n gheal-cheo tha còmhdachadh Cuillein!
Slàn leis gach blàth shuil, th'air an Dùn, 's iad a' tuireadh!
Soraidh-bhuain do'n luchd-ciùil 's tric 'chuir sunnd orm a's tioma!
Sheòl Macruimein thar sàil 's gu bràth cha phill tuilleadh.

Nuallan allt' na Piob-mhòir, cluich marbh-rann an fhilidh,
Agus dearbhbhrat a' bhàis mar fhalluing aig uime;
Ach cha mheataich mo chrìdhe 's cha ragaidh mo chuislean,
Ged dh'fhalbham le m' dheoin—'s fios nach till mi chaoidh tuilleadh.

'S tric a chuinnear fuaim bhinn caoidh thiom-chridhe Mhicruimein
'Nuair 'bhios Gàidheil a' falbh thair an fhairge 'ga'n iomain;
O chaomh thir ar gràidh! o do thràigh 's rag ar 'n imeachd;
Och cha till—cha till—och cha till sinn tuilleadh!

The greatest likelihood is that Dr Norman MacLeod himself was the translator. It is a great pity, however, that he did not acknowledge the fact, since the poem as it stands has caused a good deal of confusion. It was reprinted, in 1881, in the *Scottish Celtic Review,* alongside Scott's poem; but instead of perceiving the truth of the situation the editor of that volume equated anonymity with antiquity and decided that Scott's poem was a translation of the Gaelic version (*SCR* no. 2 : 157–9). Unfortunately the *Scottish Celtic Review* seems to have been influential enough to persuade its readers—among them W. J. Watson, who refers to the poem in the introduction to *Bardachd Gaidhlig* (1918 : lii–liii)—that the Gaelic version of Scott's poem was an authentic product of native tradition.

But 'Mackrimmon's Lament' inspired more than a translation into Gaelic. In 1836, the following poem appeared in a small volume compiled by John Mackenzie entitled *Co-chruinneachadh de dh'Oranan Taoghta: A Collection of the Most Popular Gaelic Songs* (p. 71), with the note that it was taken from 'an old MS':

Dh'iadh ceo nan stuchd ma aodain Chulain
Gun sheinn a bhean-shì a torghan mulaid:
Tha suile gorm, ciun, san Dun ri sileadh;
On thraill thu bh'uain, 's nach pill thu tuile.

Cha phill, cha phill, cha phill M'Cruimen,
Ann cogadh, no sith, cha phill e tuile:
Le airgead, no ni, cha phill M'Cruimen;
Cha phill gu brath, gu là na cruinne.

Tha osag nan gleann, gu fann a g-imeachd;
Gach sruthan 's gach allt, gu mall le bruthach:
Tha ialt' nan speur, feagh gheugan dubhach,
A'g caoi' gun dh'fhalbh, 's nach pill thu tuile.

Tha'n fhairge fadheoidh, lan broin a's mulaid;
Tha 'm bat' fo sheol, ach dhiult i siubhal:
Tha gair nan tonn, le fuaim neo-shubhach,
A radh gun dh'fhalbh, 's nach pill thu tuile.

Cha chluinnear do cheol, san Dun ma fheasgar,
No talla-mhac na mùr, le muirn ga fhreagairt:
Gach fleasgach, a's oigh, gun cheol, gun bheadradh,
On thriall thu bh'uain, 's nach pill thu tuile.

Translation

The mist of the cliffs has enshrouded the Coolins
And the Banshee has crooned her cry of sadness:
Kindly blue eyes in the castle are weeping;
Since you journeyed from us, and shall never return.

No more, no more shall MacCrimmon return,
In war nor in peace he'll return no more:
Neither with wealth nor property
Shall MacCrimmon return until the Last Day.

The breeze of the glen is gently moving;
Each brook and burn is slowly flowing:
The birds of the sky are mournful midst branches
Lamenting that you left, and shall never return.

The sea is at last full of sorrow and sadness;
The boat under sail, but will not set out;
The roar of the waves, with joyless sound,
Is saying you've gone to return no more.

Your music shall not be heard in the castle at evening,
Nor shall the echo of the ramparts joyfully answer it:
Every youth and maiden, without music or sport,
Since you journeyed from us, nevermore to return.

The author of this poem is clearly in debt to Scott for a good many of his images—not to mention the device of the chorus which is taken on wholesale from the other poem. Scott's images involving galleys, the mist-enshrouded Cuillin, the wail of the banshee, the weeping one left behind in the castle—all appear here in much the same function; and the principal unifying device, the reiteration of 'cha till e tuilleadh', is the same in all three poems *i.e.* Scott, the translation, and this last, which might most accurately be described as an imitation of Scott's poem.

It is possible that John Mackenzie himself wrote this poem; he was, in fact, a poet as well as an anthologist. But on the whole it seems more reasonable to guess that Dr Norman MacLeod is the author of this as well as of the translation. The similarity of the two Gaelic poems, in point of language and imagery, suggests this. And to lend support to this supposition we have the fact that this poem appeared in print again, four years after the publication of *Popular Gaelic Songs*, in Dr MacLeod's own publication *Cuairtear nan Gleann*. In this volume, along with the poem, was included the following account of its composition—an account which, needless to say, is designed to convince the reader of the antiquity of what is put before him. Referring initially to Domhnall Bàn and the bagpipe lament, Dr MacLeod writes:

Se Dòmull Bàn Mac-Cruimein a chuir r'a chéile 'm port iomraiteach, tiamhaidh sin ris an canar 'Cha till Mac-Cruimein'.

'Nuair a chaidh Mac Leòid Dhùn-bheagain a mach bliadhna Theàrlaich leis an arm

dhearg, bha a' chuid bu lìonmhoire de'n chinneadh 'nan cridheachan le Teàrlach, agus nam b'urrainn iad, 's esan a leanadh iad. B'ann san rùn so 'bha Mac-Cruimein. Mun d'fhag iad an Dùn thuairt Mac Cruimein gu'n robh fhios aige nach tilleadh e tuille, agus an latha thug na Leòdaich orra 'mach o Dhùn bheagain, agus mnàthan na tire 'gul is a' caoidh, 's ann an sin a chluich e am port tiamhaidh brònach sin, 'Cha till mi tuille', agus b'fhior mar thubhairt e; anns a' cheud bhlàr anns a robh e, thuit e agus cha do mharbhadh duine ach e fèin. Bha leannan aig Dònull Bàn san Dùn. 'Nuair a chual' i 'm port, chuir i na briathran a leanas r'a chèile (*i.e.* 'Dh'iadh ceò nan stùc') MacLeod 1840 : 1.134–7).

Translation

Domhnall Bàn MacCrimmon it was who composed that famous and affecting tune called 'Cha till Mac-Cruimein'.

When MacLeod of Dunvegan went out in Charlie's Year with the red-coats, the greater part of his clansmen sympathised in their hearts with Charles, and if they had been able, it is him they would have followed. MacCrimmon was one of these. Before they left the Castle, MacCrimmon said that he knew he would never return; and the day that the MacLeods took their departure from Dunvegan, whilst the women of the place were weeping and wailing, he played that sad, melancholy tune, 'Cha till mi tuille', and it was true what he said; in his first battle, he fell, and no one was killed but himself. Domhnall Bàn had a sweetheart in the Castle. When she heard the tune, she composed the following words (*i.e.* 'Dh'iadh ceo nan stuchd').

In this story we probably have the original of F. T. MacLeod's romantic account given above, for here are the same historical details and the same romantic sentiments expressed. F. T. MacLeod has elaborated upon these themes, re-cast them in the form of a first-person narrative and attributed them, as he thinks, to an unimpeachable source—the grand-daughter of the piper's widow. It would be amusing to know if he realised that Dr Norman MacLeod had played precisely the same trick one hundred years before him; for Dr MacLeod, too, chose cleverly when he set out to find a suitable 'author' for his own composition. He knew, of course, many genuine examples in Gaelic of laments composed by the female relations of departed heroes. The fact that the style of his own poem in no way resembles that of traditional Gaelic *caoineadh* seems not to have disturbed Dr MacLeod.

One curious feature of these poems is the presence of the chorus, with the reiterated words 'Cha till, cha till, cha till sinn tuilleadh' (in the last example 'cha till Mac Cruimein'). They are most unexpected, of course, in Scott's poem, for Scott's knowledge of Gaelic was scanty, and it is improbable that he should have composed even such a small amount of Gaelic as this chorus contains. The natural explanation—the one that he himself gives, in fact—is that it represents traditional material. In his note, Scott mentions Domhnall Bàn's *pìobaireachd*, 'Cha till mi tuilleadh' as being often played at the departure of emigrant ships. The words 'cha till sinn tuilleadh' (referring to a group) are probably an adaptation of the earlier 'cha till mi tuilleadh' (referring to piper alone) to suit this function of the music.

If Scott's Gaelic chorus is indeed traditional, one might expect to find remnants of

the traditional words amongst the people themselves. This proves to be easily accomplished.

The earliest record of these traditional words which we have from a written source (excluding Scott) is the verse which Angus Mackay gives as the text to his version of Domhnall Bàn's air in his *Collection of Ancient Pìobaireachd* (1838 : 17); the translation given below appears in the 'Historical and Traditional Notes' to that volume (p. 4), and is presumably Mackay's own.

Cha till cha till cha till mi tuille;
Cha till cha till cha till mi tuille;
Ged Phillias MacLeoid cha bheo MacCruimein,
s 'mo thruaighe mo thruaighe mo thruaighe mo chruinneag;
bidh Suil bidh Suil bidh Suil a' sille,
bidh Suil bidh Suil bidh Suil a sille:
S 'mo chul ris an dun s' gan duil ri tille,
A'n cogadh, na n' Sith, cha till MacCruimein.

Translation

Return, return, return shall I never;
Return, return, return shall I never;
Though MacLeod should return, not alive shall MacCrummen.
Poor dear, poor dear, poor dear, my sweetheart,
Her eye, her eye, her eye, 'ill be weeping,
Her eye, her eye, her eye, 'ill be weeping!
And my back on the Dun, without hope of returning;
In war nor in peace, ne'er return will MacCrummen.

It comes as no surprise that the words should be preserved in a collection of pipe-music, for such poetry was apparently often used by the pipers as an aid to memory in the absence of written musical notation (Cooke 1972 : 53). There is every likelihood, then, that this verse is only slightly younger than the *pìobaireachd* itself, and that it was composed by a fellow piper who knew what happened to Domhnall Bàn.

We have also several variants of this text which have been obtained from native informants in the last few years. These variants are all in the form of pibroch-songs, *i.e.* songs based upon a bagpipe tune, in this case 'Cha till mi tuille'. (The musical aspects of these variants will be discussed below.) One of these pibroch-songs appears on a recording issued by the School of Scottish Studies, *Music from the Western Isles*. It was recorded in the South Uist from Mrs Archie MacDonald:

Cha till, cha till, cha till MacCruimean,
An cogadh na sìth, cha till e tuilleadh;
Cha till, cha till, cha till MacCruimean,
'S gad thilleadh a phìob, cha till MacCruimean.

Cha till, cha till, cha till MacCruimean,
'S gad thilleadh MacLeòid, cha bheò MacCruimean;

Cha till, cha till, cha till e tuilleadh,
Cha till e gu bràth go là na cruinneadh.

Mo chùl ri d'chùl gun dùil ri tilleadh,
Mo bheul ri d'bheul 's na deòir a' sileadh;
Mo chùl ri d'chùl gun dùil ri tilleadh,
Mo bheul ri d'bheul 's na deòir a' sileadh.

Translation

MacCrimmon will never come back, never come back, never come back,
In war or in peace, he will never come back again.
MacCrimmon will never come back, never come back, never come back,
Although his pipes may come back, MacCrimmon will not.

MacCrimmon will never come back, never come back, never come back,
MacLeod may come back; MacCrimmon is no more.
He will never come back, never, never come back again.
He will never more come back until Doomsday.

My back to your back and no hope of return
My face to your face and tears flowing
My back to your back and no hope of return
My face to your face and tears flowing.

(TNGM 1971)

A second variant of this song was very kindly supplied to me by Mr William Matheson, who learned it from his mother, a native of Lewis:

Chorus: Cha till, cha till, cha till Mac Cruimein (× 3)
Mac Cruimein 's phìob, cha till e tuilleadh.

'S ann ann am Port-rìgh a dh'fhàg mi mo chruinneag (× 3)
Mo thriùir nighean donn 's mo chòigear ghillean.

Dol sìos, dol sìos, dol sìos dh'an iomairt (× 3)
Bha fear air a' bhlàr 's fhuil bhlàth a' sileadh.

Cha till, cha till, cha till Mac Cruimein (× 3)
Nuair thilleas Mac Leòid cha bheò MacCruimein.

Translation

Chorus: MacCrimmon shall not, shall not return;
MacCrimmon and his pipe shall return no more.

'Tis in Portree I've left my fine girl,
My three brown daughters and my five lads.

Going down, going down, going down whilst playing;
There was a man on the battlefield, his warm blood flowing.

MacCrimmon shall not, shall not return;
When MacLeod returns, not alive shall MacCrimmon.

The most important thematic elements of these three versions, the points on which they all agree, may be summarized as follows:

1 The piper, MacCrimmon, is leaving home never to return. His pipes may return, and his Chieftain, MacLeod, but MacCrimmon himself shall never return.
2 He is leaving behind him in Dunvegan/Portree a woman and, in the third song, a large family; this leave-taking grieves him to the point of tears.

Another set of themes, in addition to these, makes its appearance in the following variant of 'Cha till Mac Cruimein' which was given me by Miss Morag MacLeod of the School of Scottish Studies. She learned it as a child in Harris:

Nach truagh leat mì gun trì lâmhan (× 3)
Dà làimh 's a' phìob is tè 's a' chlaidheamh.

Mo ghaol, mo bhean òg 's mo chòigear chloinne (× 3)
Mo thòir, geall òir 's na deòir a' sileadh.

Chorus: Cha till, cha till, cha till Mac Cruimein (× 3)
Cha till e gu bràth go là na cruinneadh.

Meall òir, meall òir, meall òir mo ghille (× 3)
'S ma bhitheas tu beo 's tu prois do chinnidh.

Mo chùl, mo chùl, mo chùl ri m' chruinneig (× 3)
Mo chùl rì do chùl 's gun dùil rì tilleadh.

Chorus: Cha till, cha till, cha till Mac Cruimein (× 3)
Ged thilleas Mac Leòid cha bheò Mac Cruimein.

Translation

Don't you pity me, that I have not three hands:
Two hands for the pipe and one for the sword.

My love, my young wife and my five children;
My quest, a promise of gold, and tears flowing.

Chorus: MacCrimmon shall not, shall not return;
He shall never return until the Last Day.

Gold entices, entices my young man;
And if you are alive you are the pride of your kinsmen.

My back, my back, my back to my fine girl;
My back to your back without hope of returning.

Chorus: MacCrimmon shall not, shall not return;
Though MacLeod returns, not alive shall MacCrimmon.

Verses 1 and 3 and the second line of verse 2 belong to a different tradition altogether, that of 'Uamh an Oir'. According to Daniel Melia, the 'Uamh an Oir' legends may be traced to stories connected with the Lughnasa myths in Ireland. Such stories 'tell of a harper, piper or fiddler who enters a cave, not a fairy mound, in search of treasure and is assumed to be dead when those outside can no longer hear his music—and, indeed, he never returns' (Melia 1967 : 365). In more recent times this story has come to be associated with particular localities: there are specific caves in

Skye, Mull, and Inverness which are pointed out as the scene of the adventure. In many versions of the story the unfortunate piper (often a MacCrimmon) enters a cave and encounters magical beasts, fairy dogs (*galla uaine*, literally 'green bitches') which can only be kept at bay as long as he continues to play his instrument. He knows that he must eventually succumb, and has no hope of seeing the outer world again. Thus he complains,

Nach truagh leat mi gun trì làmhan
Dà làimh 's a' phìob 's làmh 's a' chlaidheamh.

Several versions of 'Uamh an Oir' have been published by Frances Tolmie (1911 : 157–9) and K. N. MacDonald (1901 : 47–8). One variant which does not appear in either of these collections is the following long version which was given me by William Matheson. He learned it from a piper in Grogarry, South Uist:

Nach truagh mi, rìgh, gun trì làmhan,
Dà làimh 's a' phìob, dà làimh 's a' phìob,
Nach truagh mi, rìgh, gun trì làmhan,
Dà làimh 's a' phìob s' làmh 's a' chlaidheamh.

Chorus: Eadarainn a' chruit, a' chruit, a' chruit,
Eadarainn a' chruit, mo chuideachd ar m'fhàgail,
Eadarainn a luaidh, a luaidh, a luaidh,
Eadarainn a luaidh 's i ghall' uaine a shàraich mi.

Mo thaobh fodham, m'fheoil air breothadh,
Daol am shùil, daol am shùil,
Dà bhior iaruinn 'gan sìor shiaradh
Ann am ghlùin, ann am ghlùin.

Bidh na minn bheaga 'nan gobhair chreagach
Man tig mise, man till mis' a Uamh an Oir, Uamh an Oir,
'S na lothan cliathta 'nan eich dhiallta
Man tig mise, man till mis' a Uamh an Oir, Uamh an Oir.

Bidh na laoigh bheaga 'nan crodh eadraidh
Man tig mise, man till mis' a Uamh an Oir, Uamh an Oir,
'S na mic uchda 'nam fir fheachda
Man tig mise, man till mis' a Uamh an Oir, Uamh an Oir.

'S iomadh maighdeann òg fo ciadbharr
Théid a null, théid a null,
Man tig mise, man till mis'
A Uamh an Oir, Uamh an Oir.

Translation

Is it not a pity, oh king, that I have not three hands:
Two hands for the pipe and one for the sword.

Chorus: The harp, the harp, the harp between us; my companions leaving me; between us, my love, it was a green bitch that overcame me.

> My side beneath me, my flesh decaying, a worm in my eye; two iron pins being constantly thrust into my knee.
>
> The small kids will be goats of the crags, before I return from the Cave of Gold; and creel-bearing colts will be saddled steeds before I return from the Cave of Gold.
>
> The small calves will be milch-cows, before I return from the Cave of Gold; and suckling babes will be men bearing arms, before I return from the Cave of Gold.
>
> Many a young maiden bearing her first head-dress will go over before I return from the Cave of Gold.[1]

Obviously there are several points of resemblance between 'Uamh an Oir' and the MacCrimmon story, *e.g.* (i) the fact that the principal character is a piper and a MacCrimmon; and (ii) the fact that he is leaving never to return, and that he dies in the end. It is perhaps significant, also, that the supernatural plays a part in both stories: in 'Uamh an Oir' the piper meets death in an encounter with magical creatures; in 'Cha till Mac Cruimein' the hero has an experience of the second sight which forecasts his own death.

But in spite of these similarities the confusion of the two sets of materials is not as widespread as it might be. Of the existing variants of 'Cha till Mac Cruimein' a minority are contaminated with material from 'Uamh an Oir'; and there seems to be no tendency—at least in the examples I have met with—for the contamination to spread in the opposite direction, *i.e.* for materials from MacCrimmon to be found in versions of 'Uamh an Oir'. From this it seems reasonable to assume that the confusion of the two strains is of comparatively recent origin.

It remains briefly to discuss the musical aspects of the problem, *i.e.* the various versions of MacCrimmon's *pìobaireachd* 'Cha till mi tuille', and the relations of these versions to the pibroch-songs of oral tradition, and to the nineteenth-century art-songs associated with MacCrimmon's name.

The pipe-tune has long been a favourite, judging from the number of manuscript and published collections in which it appears. Sir Walter Scott asserted, in his note in *Albyn's Anthology*, that the tune was commonly heard at the leave-takings of departing emigrants—a suggestion which Dr Norman MacLeod seeks to confirm in the title which he gives to the translation of Scott in *An Teachdaire Gaelach*, 'MacCruimein, no, Cumhadh an Fhògarraich'—'The Exile's Lament'. If the tune was indeed put to this use, it would have been familiar to many during the period of the Highland Clearances.

The collections of pipe-music in which the tune appears are particularly valuable, not only for the light they shed upon the varying interpretations of the composition as *pìobaireachd* (and, incidentally, upon the problems of notation which this form of music presents), but also upon the development of the tune outside of piping tradition.


P. Macdonald (1784)
Nether Lorn Cannitairachd (c. 1800)
Albyn's Anthology, 1818
P. Reid's M.S. (c. 1826)
Reid: 'A Lament played at Funerals' (c. 1836)
Angus Mackay, 1838 [Cannitairachd: Logan's Tutor, 1962]
Mackay: Doubling of 2nd variation

Fig. 1

The earliest source for Domhnall Bàn's *pìobaireachd* is the Reverend Patrick MacDonald's work of 1784, *A Collection of Highland Vocal Airs*. The tune appears there under the title 'Cha till mi tuille' and is designated 'a bagpipe lament' (see Fig. 1). In the preface to the collection MacDonald notes that 'Cha till mi tuille' was one of the four *pìobaireachd* which he transcribed from the playing of 'an eminent performer' of Lochaber. Since he was not a piper himself, MacDonald made no attempt to transcribe grace notes or other piping embellishments; he has, however, left us an admirable record of the essential melody of the ground and of the six variations which follow it.[2]

'Cha till mi tuille' is also preserved in Colin Campbell's manuscript, the Nether Lorn Canntaireachd, which dates from about 1800 (Bk. I : 145). In Figure 1 I have attempted to transcribe Campbell's *canntaireachd* notation of the tune into modern pitch notation, using as guides the rules set out by the Piobaireachd Society and the version of the *canntaireachd* printed in *Logan's Complete Tutor for the Highland Bagpipe* (Ross 1962 : 42–3). *Logan's* version corresponds to the ground as Angus Mackay gives it (see below), and is reproduced in Figure 1 in conjunction with Mackay's tune.

The main differences between Nether Lorn and the *canntaireachd* given in *Logan's Tutor* are (i) the first figure, given as 'edre' in Logan and as 'dre' in Nether Lorn, and (ii) the syllable 'hiao' in Nether Lorn as opposed to 'hio' in Logan. Both 'dre' and 'edre' are used in Nether Lorn to indicate the 'throw' on *e* (the same five-note figure as in the other sources); but in other contexts 'dre' is reserved for phrases where the preceding melody note is lower than *e*, and 'edre' when it is higher. The appearance of 'a' in 'hiao' in Nether Lorn is more difficult to explain since 'a' usually indicates the note *d* and it is difficult to see how this note could occur in the context.

The most important feature of the tune, however, is the way in which it begins, for in this it differs materially from Patrick Macdonald's version. In the first place, it preserves no anacrusis, the initial *b* in MacDonald's tune. Why this initial note should have been omitted is a mystery: Peter Cook has suggested to me that the anacrusis (which has disappeared from a number of other *pìobaireachd* in similar fashion) may have become lost in the blowing-up process which is a necessary prelude to any performance on the bagpipes; alternatively, it may have somehow been absorbed into the initial 'throw' on *e* with which the *pìobaireachd* begins. Other versions of the tune discussed below are similarly bereft of it. But a more crucial difference between this air and MacDonald's lies within the first bar itself, as the most cursory comparison of the two will show. That this melodic difference was taken by pipers to be very important indeed is borne out by other sources.[3]

The tune appeared in print for the second time in 1818, with the publication of the second volume of *Albyn's Anthology*. On this occasion someone took liberties with the rhythm of the tune in order to accommodate the words of Sir Walter Scott's poem. This version is included in Figure 1 because of its early date and because its

melodic outline confirms that of MacDonald's version; it makes no attempt to give the tune in piping terms.

The first person to record the *pìobaireachd* in staff notation for the benefit of pipers was Peter Reid, whose manuscript of about 1826 contains two versions of the ground (pp. 48–9). The first of these, which he designates 'A Lament play'd at Funerals', consists of an air essentially similar to MacDonald's, followed by a single variation and its 'doubling'. The second version of the ground, which is followed by no variations, conforms melodically to the Nether Lorn version—although this time the anacrusis is preserved.

By far the most influential source for 'Cha till mi tuille' has been Angus Mackay's *Collection of Ancient Pìobaireachd* (1838 : 17–20). Like Reid, Mackay preserves both tunes: as *ùrlar* of the *pìobaireachd* he gives the tune which we first encountered in Colin Campbell's manuscript, and as the doubling of the second variation he gives Patrick MacDonald's tune. This is, however, a reversal of Reid's arrangement, in which MacDonald's tune was the one from which the variations flowed, and the other air was seemingly included as a variant of the ground.

In our own century 'Cha till mi tuille' has made at least six further appearances in collections of pipe-music, and the source for all but one of these appears to be Mackay's collection. The earliest occurrence is in Major General Thomson's *Ceol Mor* (1900 : 162), where the Nether Lorn tune appears as the ground, and the other tune as the fourth variation. John Grant's manuscript collection 'The Music of the MacCrimmons' in Harvard University Library (1947 : 143–8) is a reproduction, note-for-note and without acknowledgment, of Mackay's *pìobaireachd*. Also based substantially on Mackay are the versions reproduced in Sir Archibald Campbell's *Kilberry Book of Ceol Mor* (1953 : 103), in Robertson and Ramsay's *Master Method for the Highland Bagpipe* (1953 : 83), and in *Logan's Tutor*. The only version not conforming to this pattern is that given by Malcolm MacInnes, whose *ceol beag* collection *120 Bagpipe Tunes* (1939 : 58) preserves a variant of Patrick MacDonald's tune, rather than the one which has seemingly come to be regarded—by pipers, at any rate—as the correct ground for 'Cha till mi tuille'.

What is the possible significance of the fact that there are two distinct versions of this *pìobaireachd* air? Perhaps some clue is offered (i) by the fact that one of them was included in two volumes purporting to contain *vocal* airs, and (ii) by the circumstances of the same version being called 'a bagpipe lament' or 'a lament play'd at funerals'. In including 'Cha till mi tuille' in his collection, Patrick MacDonald may well have been silently acknowledging that the tune was one familiar not only to pipers, but to substantial numbers of non-pipers as well; the appearance of the same tune in *Albyn's Anthology* confirms its existence as a song (though not with the text given!); and as we shall shortly see this same tune is the one preserved in the pibroch-songs. In other words, the tune was probably never the sole property of the piping fraternity, whatever its ultimate origin as a *pìobaireachd* may have been. And if it was


Patrick MacDonald (1784)
Orain h-Albain (1848)
Cha, phill, cha phill, cha phill Mac Cruimen, ann cogadh no sith, cha phill e tuile.
Mrs A. MacDonald, South Uist
cha till, cha till, cha till Mac Cruimean, an cogadh na sith, cha till e tuilleadh;
William Matheson, Lewis
cha till, cha till, cha till Mac Cruimein, cha till, cha till, cha till Mac Cruimein;
Mairi MacLeod, Harris
nach truagh leat mi gun tri lamhan, nach truagh leat mi gun tri lamhan;
etc.
le airgiod no ni, cha phill Mac Cruimen; cha phill gu brach, gu la na cruinne.
cha till, cha till, cha till Mac Cruimean; 'gad thilleadh a phiob cha till Mac Cruimean,
cha till, cha till, cha till Mac Cruimein, Mac Cruimein 's a phiob, cha till e tuilleadh.
nach truagh leat mi gun tri lamhan, da laimh 's a' phiob is te 's a' chlaidheamh.
Fig. 2.

frequently heard not only at genuine funerals but also at scenes of emigration, then its popular character must have been marked indeed.

Why then should another tune, differing from this one only slightly, have come to take precedence over it, both in Colin Campbell's manuscript and in Mackay's collection? This is difficult to say, in the light of such scanty evidence as we possess. Perhaps pipers wished for a ground which would be more uniquely their own; or perhaps 'Cha till mi tuille' was borrowed for other purposes (witness 'MacIver's March') leaving a vacancy. It is a curious problem, and one with which someone who is a piper himself might be better equipped to deal.

As I suggested above, the gradual dominance of the Nether Lorn tune in piping collections has not lost the other air to us altogether, for the latter is found as the melody to nearly all the pibroch-songs whose texts were earlier discussed. Futher confirmation of the vocal character of this tune is supplied by the version which appears in Finlay Dun's *Orain na h-Albain* ((1848) : 20–17). With the exception of *Albyn's Anthology,* this collection contains the earliest printed version of a vocal setting of this tune; and although the compiler has seen fit to alter the tune in some aspects and to substitute the text of 'Dh'iadh ceo nan stuchd' for the traditional words, the tune is recognisably the same as that given by Patrick MacDonald sixty-five years earlier.

The continuity of the vocal tradition of this tune I have tried to demonstrate in Figure 2. For purposes of comparison I have included Patrick MacDonald's tune (which is the same as the tune in *Albyn's Anthology* without the rhythmical complications), and the tune as it appeared in *Orain na h-Albain,* as well as the three pibroch-songs from the oral tradition. In transcribing these last I have made no attempt to give more than an outline of the melodies; the rhythmical arrangement in none of them is as regular as it is here represented, and the tunes have been transposed so as to be easy on the eye.

Of the three traditional variants, the version given by Mrs Archie MacDonald is closest to the tune as printed in Patrick MacDonald's collection. Mrs MacDonald's version is also interesting in that it preserves the character of bagpipe music in one or two details apart from the melodic contour, as for example in the descending third at the end of the line, which is more major than minor but which is not really in the tempered scale at all. Mr Matheson's variant resembles Mrs MacDonald's in essentials; and while Morag MacLeod's version is quite different from the first two it still retains a discernible relationship with Patrick MacDonald's air. From this we may perhaps be justified in the conclusion that the tune given by Patrick MacDonald, Alexander Campbell and Peter Reid represents a popular version of the bagpipe air, a version which was probably more often sung than played, and which may often have been heard at scenes of emigration and at funerals. It is significant, surely, that this is the version which has come down to us in the oral tradition.

In addition to the piping versions and to the pibroch-songs, 'MacCrimmon's Lament' has for some time enjoyed wide popularity as art-music. As such it appears in

a number of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century song-books. Early productions of this type include *Albyn's Anthology* and *Orain na h-Albain;* later examples are MacBean's *Songs and Hymns of the Scottish Highlands* (1888), and *Coisir a' Mhoid* 1910. Such productions were, of course, principally designed to beguile the winter evenings in Edinburgh drawing-rooms, and had no connection whatever with developments in the living Gaelic tradition.

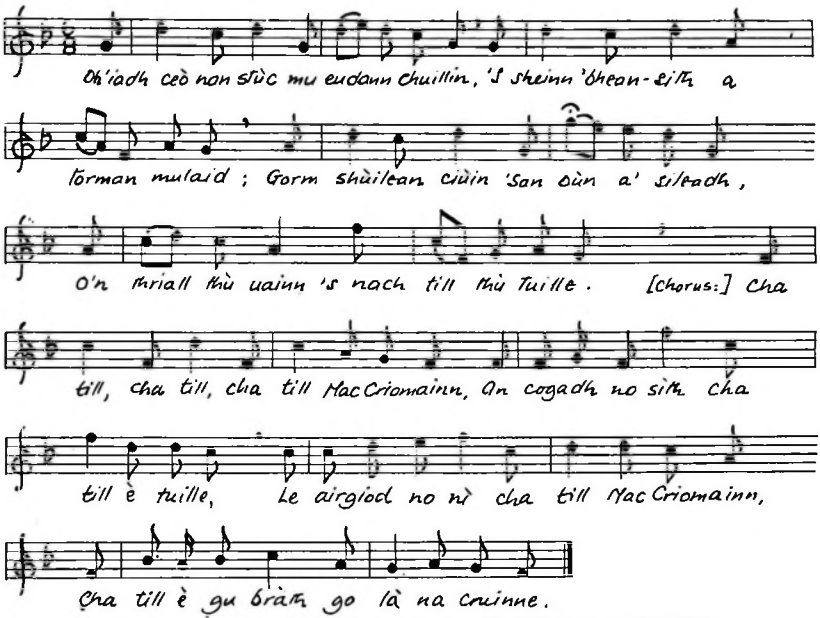

Fig. 3. Arrangement of 'MacCrimmon's Lament' in Colin Brown's *The Thistle.*

These collections did, however, exert certain influences upon one another. The most influential version of 'MacCrimmon's Lament' as drawing-room music is undoubtedly the arrangement which first appeared in the 1870s in Colin Brown's publication, *The Thistle* (see edition of 1883 : 73). This song is the source for the versions printed in MacBean's collection, and in *Coisir a' Mhoid,* and in others too numerous to mention. The air bears a superficial resemblance to the tune published by Patrick MacDonald; but here the bogus element creeps in again, for it is plain that someone, probably Colin Brown himself, has seen fit to make some 'improvements' in the music (Fig. 3).

It must be acknowleged that the high romanticism of Dr Norman MacLeod's poem and the rather over-ripe qualities of the musical arrangement are perfectly suited to

one another. The pity is that the tune, like the poem, has been represented as authentic and traditional, rather than left alone to stand or fall on its own merits. At its second appearance in print, in the *Scottish Celtic Review*, the editor of that volume acknowledges *The Thistle* as his source for the tune and goes on to say, 'This air, one of the finest of our Highland melodies, is more accurate and natural as now noted than in the common sets' (*SCR* 1881 : 159). It would be illuminating to know what standard he had in mind when he praised the 'accuracy' of the tune.

It is understandable, in a way, why he should have found the music more 'natural' in Brown's arrangement. To ears accustomed to the melodic and harmonic variety of European art-music, the native traditional music may indeed have sounded unnatural. An unvarying feature of pibroch-songs is their repetitiveness; all the traditional examples in Figure 2 display an element of repetitiveness in both words and music. It is this quality which the nineteenth century seemingly found unnatural, for it is this element which the poetical and musical forgers of that age eliminated from their own productions.

Ironically, it is Colin Brown's air, set to an English translation of part of Dr Norman MacLeod's poem, which is fondly believed by many in the modern folk-song movement to be traditional. The song has been commercially recorded by a number of people, among them the unimpeachably traditional singer Jeannie Robertson (Topic Record 12T96). This shows that Brown's arrangement has been popular long enough to acquire a certain oral tradition of its own; it is a pleasant song, and quite worthy to be sung by anyone who fancies it. But the claim should not be made, for either the tune or the text, that it demonstrates any of the qualities of authentic traditional Scottish music or poetry, for it does not do so.

'MacCrimmon's Lament' is not the only example of the confusion of the traditional with the bogus which the nineteenth century produced. But it is an excellent sample of its kind, for it shows how the antiquarian tastes of that century, combined with the romantic impulse, left their mark upon all aspects of the creative arts, and produced an effect which is still being felt today.

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NOTES

1 The translation of this text is problematical, particularly that of the chorus. Mr Matheson himself offered one solution: 'The question is whether *eadarainn* is meant to have any semantic content, or whether it is to be regarded as a meaningless vocable. I don't think that singers in recent times have attached any meaning to *eadarainn a' chruit*, but it does not necessarily follow that there was no meaning originally. It might be possible to regard the first verse as a later addition, and suppose that the original story was about a *harper* going into a cave. That is to say, the harp was between him and his attackers, and the magic of its music kept them at bay.' There are several stories of this type, as Daniel Melia has pointed out (1967 : 365 ff.).

2 MacDonald's version of 'Cha till mi tuille' is discussed and translated into modern piping notation by Roderick Cannon in the *Piping Times*, 1978 : 18–21.

3 A recent contribution to the *Piping Times* (Cannon 1977 : 20–21) is a transcription from the Nether Lorn manuscript of 'MacIver's March', which is found to have the same tune as 'Cha till mi tuille' as preserved in Patrick MacDonald's collection. The writer, Roderick Cannon, points out that 'the MacIvers are a sept of the Clan Campbell, so the name "MacIver's March" may have been only a local name, current in the district of Argyll where Colin Campbell lived.' If 'Cha till mi tuille' had indeed become associated with a MacIver chieftain in that area it might explain why Campbell did not include it under the name 'Cha till mi tuille', which in other districts it continued to bear.

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