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Editorial

As the School of Scottish Studies approaches the sixtieth anniversary of its founding, it is timely for those active in the field, from young scholars who are beginning their productive careers to the seasoned ethnologists, to look back over projects recently completed, and to consider current and future initiatives. Among the welcome major changes, and one that has already provided a significant increase in Scottish Ethnology research and publications produced, is the presence of the European Ethnological Research Centre (EERC) within the School since August 2006. Current research activity by staff ranges widely within the discipline and has been supported by two major awards of external funding: the Carmichael Watson Project, newly launched, and the Calum Maclean Project, completed in September 2009 and now accessible online (www.celtscot.ed.ac.uk/calum-maclean). Both resources will play a pioneering role in future ethnological research in bringing the benefits of digitisation to two of Scotland's most important and extensive Gaelic folklore collections. Further projects include compiling an electronic catalogue for the Maclagan Manuscripts (1893-1902 c.9000 pp.); continuing work on the Scottish Place-Name Database; making publications of traditional ballad airs accessible in electronic format; and a study of calendar customs and community rituals. Also located at the School is a major working section of *Tobar an Dualchais/Kist O Riches*, a national digitisation project making available online to communities, institutions and researchers the primary sound archives of Scottish folklore.

Work on historical and cross-cultural aspects of ethnology has progressed under the aegis of the Traditional Cosmology Society (TCS) with its journal *Cosmos*, which has carried *inter alia* papers from its 2007 Deep History of Stories conference, held at Edinburgh and featuring a distinguished international set of speakers. Other TCS sponsored conferences have featured recent research on myths, tales and legends, and have explored the extensive legacy of the comparative mythologist Georges Dumézil in its contemporary contexts.

The EERC's primary publishing initiative is the detailed and authoritative *Compendium of Scottish Ethnology* series; of the 14 projected volumes 11, have appeared to date and have been welcomed by researchers and students in our field and beyond. Further recent books by members of staff have appeared on such topics as the fiddle in Scotland; the Greig-Duncan collection of ballads from the North-East; ritual dialogue in marriage traditions; an ethnography of rural Perthshire; and a collection of traditional Gaelic tales recorded in the field. Collections of articles have appeared on the life and work of the Highland folklore collector Alexander Carmichael; international views on tourism, festivals and local identity; and a festschrift in honour of Dr Emily Lyle, along with a collection of articles by her on fairy ballads and active promoters of ballad traditions. The Scottish Traditions Series has continued to make available CDs of selected audio field recordings on specific themes from Gaelic and Scots traditions, and *Tocher*, the in-house journal, has been given a new and expanded format.

A Bawdy New Year's Rhyme from Gaelic Scotland

RONALD BLACK

The primary purpose of this paper* is to improve our understanding of a difficult New Year's rhyme, Text H below, whose original was first published in *The Gaelic Otherworld* (Black 2005). In the course of contextualising it a number of emendments will be proposed to the translation of two other New Year's rhymes, Texts G1 and G2 below, which appeared in *Tocher* no. 20 (1975: 144–45), under the title 'Duan Calluinn: Hogmanay Poem'.

The Gaelic Otherworld consists basically of a work on Gaelic traditions written by the Rev. John Gregorson Campbell of Tìree (JGC) in and around 1874. It was first published as two books, *Superstitions of the Highlands & Islands* (JG Campbell 1900) and *Witchcraft & Second Sight in the Highlands & Islands* (JG Campbell 1902). The text which is the primary focus of the present article appeared (in translation only) in the chapter 'The Celtic Year' (JG Campbell 1902: 224–307), to which my attention was drawn by Margaret Bennett in 1983 after I had given a paper in a School of Scottish Studies seminar series on the calendar.

JGC died in 1891. A few years later, when Alexander Carmichael was in the process of bringing out *Carmina Gadelica* in a sumptuous two-volume edition at his own expense, JGC's sister Jessy decided to have something done about publishing her late brother's collection of traditions. James Macle hose, the Glasgow university printer, agreed to do it for her, but his strategy was timid. He divided it into two small books so that he could test the market before committing himself fully, and stripped away the Gaelic originals of all texts longer than one stanza. JGC may have inadvertently made this easy by putting them in an appendix.

Both books were a success, as they deserved to be. Macle hose, feeling guilty perhaps about the appendix, showed it to George Henderson in Glasgow, who showed it to Alexander Carmichael in Edinburgh, who made a copy of it in his own hand before sending it back to Glasgow, where it disappeared. The copy is now MS 241 in the Carmichael Watson Collection in Edinburgh University Library. Words cannot express my delight when I found it in 2004. This then is why the Gaelic originals of JGC's longer texts appear in the book edited in 2005 even though they were dropped from those published in 1900 and 1902.

In most cases the text of the originals that I put into *The Gaelic Otherworld* was lightly edited by me for spelling and punctuation. The same applies to JGC's printed works, except that there were a remarkable number of typographic errors, such as 'wine' for 'urine', which I also had to correct. But in a few cases, where the material was particularly difficult, I gave Carmichael's text exactly as it stood in the manuscript, along with JGC's translation, thus exposing any dysfunction to the full view of the reader, and I attempted to deal with it in my commentary. Of our Text H, which was particularly challenging, I was forced to conclude (Black 2005: 579):

I have chosen to present the Gaelic text unedited, exactly as it stands in the manuscript – it requires more detailed commentary than is possible here, and the text which gave rise to Campbell's translation will be more helpful for present purposes than one which raises fresh questions. There are a number of things which I do not understand.

* Based on one given as part of the Traditional Cosmology Society's seminar series in the Department of Celtic and Scottish Studies on 6 November 2007

The process of ‘detailed commentary’ demands prior contextualisation, so at this point we must take a step back and look more broadly at the genre.

A *duan Callainn, rann Callainn* or New Year’s rhyme was spoken or sung on New Year’s night to gain admittance to a house. That is why its characteristic ending is *Fosgail ’s leig a-staigh mi*: “Open and let me in.” It is about opening doors; whether this may be characterised as ‘appropriate metaphor’ or ‘imitative magic’ should not detain us here, but it is certainly an ‘entry ritual’ as defined by Neill Martin (354–55).

The need for a rhyme was common to everyone, but at New Year there seem to have been at least two sorts of people going about. One was adult friends and neighbours bearing gifts. The other was young folk and strangers wearing masks and long white shirts or women’s gowns and making a lot of noise, led by a person wearing an animal skin who represented the sacrificial scapegoat of Leviticus 16. His companions yelled and walloped the skin with sticks to make as much of a drumming noise as possible. They went round the outside of a house three times sunwise, beating at the walls before banging on the door. In the case of island houses where it was possible to walk around the top of the wall, the rhymes show them clambering up to the left of the door, dancing, shouting and banging their way around the thatch, clambering down to the right of the door, and doing the same again twice more. Since they were liable to be drunk and may have been rogues, beggars or thieves, it must have been frightening to the people inside. When they came to the door and spoke their rhymes, the leader produced a *caisean* or *caisean-uchd* (a sheep’s dewlap or similar piece of meat) which was then singed at the fire and sniffed by everyone in the family to symbolise a year of plenty to come (Black 2005: 530–31, 575–78).

There are many *duain Chlainn* on record. I gave references to thirty or so in *The Gaelic Otherworld* (Black 2005: 577). A complete collection of disparate texts might consist of fifty, and the addition of significant variants might bring the total up to a hundred. The best known and most fundamental example, at least in recent times, is typified by what we may call **Text A** (Shaw: 24):

Tha mise nochd a’ tighinn dh’ur n-ionnsaigh
A dh’ùrachadh dhuibh na Callaig;
Cha ruig mi leas a bhith ’ga innse,
Bha i ann ri linn mo sheanar.
Mo chaisean Callaig ann am phòcaid,
’S math an ceò thig as an fhear ud:
Théid e deiseal air na pàisdean,
Gu h-àraid air bean an taighe.
Bean an taighe is i as fhiach e,
Làmh a riarachadh na Callaig.
Rud beag do shochair an t-samhraidh

A’ cumail geall air aig an aran.
Fosgail an doras is lig a staigh mi!

I am coming to-night to you
 To renew for you Hogmanay.
 I have no need to tell you of it,
 It existed in the time of my grandfather;
 My Hogmanay skin-strip is in my pocket
 And good is the smoke that comes from it.
 It will go sun-wise round the children
 And especially round the housewife.
 ’Tis the housewife who deserves it,
 Hers is the hand for the ‘Hogmanay’.
 A small thing of the good things of summer (e.g.
 butter)
 To keep a promise got with the bread.
 Open the door and let me in!

It can be seen that the central themes here are the *caisean* and food.

Other examples have more of an edge. The following, which we may call **Text B**, is I think the oldest on record (Macleoid: 177–78). It portrays *faoighe* (‘thigging’ or ‘genteel begging’). This was where a person or young couple went around cadging food, seed, wool or other gifts to help them in a specific aim such as setting up house (Black 2001: xxix–xxxii). I have modernised the spelling; the translation is mine.

<i>DUAN CALLAINN, le Dòmhnall MacLeòid, air dha dhol mar chompanach maille ri bràthair a mhàthar do theaghlach an d'fhuair e cuireadh.</i>	A HOGMANAY ODE, By Donald MacLeod, on his having gone along as his uncle's companion, to a family by which he had been invited.	
<i>Ged as tric fhuair mi fialaidheachd 'Na do thalla, Cha d'fhàinig mi gu'n am-bliadhn' ann Riamh air Challainn; 'S tha mi 'n dùil gum bi mi riarraicht' Mar as math leam — O tha mo ghille fo fhiasaig Gum faigh sinn fiach às ar damaist.</i>	Though I've often been entertained In your hall, Till this year I've never come here At Hogmanay; And I expect I'll be satisfied As I prefer — Because my servant-lad is bearded We'll get the value of our damage.	4 8
<i>O thàinig gorta sa bhliadhna, Chan iarr sinn riarachadh arain: Gabhaidh sinn bhuat stuth na Tòiseachd, O se as dòcha thogail gean oimn;</i>	As there has been famine during the year, We will not ask to be served with bread: We will accept a good dram of whisky, Because it's most likely to raise our spirits;	12
<i>O se as ilachdmhoire ri riaghladh, 'S o se as lionmhoire ri cheannach, Cha sàraich sinn duine fialaidh Air son spìochdaire dà bhannaig.</i>	Because it is more pleasant to serve, And because it is more widely available, We won't oppress a generous man For a niggardly couple of bannocks.	16
<i>O dh'fhiathaich thu bràthair mo mhàthar, Na leig an làmh aige falamh: Dh'fhàg e bhean 's a chòignear phàistean San rànaich a-staigh mun teallach, An dùil gun robh buinnig sa cheàird sa, Gun sàbhaladh dhaibh an arain — 'S thogair mise tighinn 'na phàirt On tha e fhéin gun dàn gun ealain.</i>	Since you invited my mother's brother, Do not allow his hand to go empty: He has left his wife and five children Weeping at home around the hearth, Expecting gain from this activity, Their not having saved any bread — And I have elected to play his part As he has no ode or poem himself.	20 24
<i>Ghabh sinn an taigh sa mar àraidh O shàbhail sibh ur cuid barra, 'S o tha bhean a th' ann cho bàidheil 'S gun tuigeadh i càs na gainne; Is cinnteach ma shìneas i làmh dha Gheibh e chuid as fheàrr dh'a eallach — 'S ge b'e 'r bith na bheir sibh dhàsan, Thugaibh dhan aos-dàna drama.</i>	We have taken this house as a ladder Because you were able to save your crop, And because its goodwife is kind enough To understand what it means to be short; For sure if she stretches out her hand He will get the better part of his load — And whatever it be that you give to him, Will you please give a dram to the poet.	28 32
Lines 7–8 are of particular interest: I take it that the <i>gille</i> or manservant is wearing a mask, which automatically justifies a reward, as at Hallowe'en on this day. From this it is a small step to actual aggression, as in Text C (Carmichael 5: 378–79).		
<i>Nochd oidhche Chalainn chruaidh, Thàna mi le uan g'a reic,— Thuirt am bodach thall le guraim</i>	To-night is the hard night of Hogmanay, I am come with a lamb to sell,— The old fellow yonder sternly said	

Gum buaileadh e mo chluas ri creig. He would strike my ear against a rock.

Thuir a' bhean a b'fhearra glòir
Gum bu chòir mo leigeil a-steach;
Air son m'ithidh agus m'òil,
Crioman còir agus rud leis!
 The woman, better of speech, said
 That I should be let in;
 For my food and for my drink,
 A morsel due and something with it!

Text C has a happy ending, but many others do not, and this can lead to a reaction in which the *gillean* place a curse, as in **Text D** (Carmichael 6: 143).

Is iad muinntir a' bhaile seo thall
Clannd as dona 'san domhan,
Salach seideagach sodalach sannt,
Loireagach ladhragach ludagach lothan,
Daoine gun tùr gun toinisg gun taing,
Daoine daobhaidh dao-chaidh dona,
Tur air a' bhaile seo thall—
A Chalainn a nall an seo.
 The people of yonder townland
 Are people the worst in the world,
 Dirty filthy flattering avaricious,
 Swampy footling little toy hounds,
 People void of sense, void of gratitude,
 People ugly [frightful] ill-hued [perverse], wicked,
 Drought upon yonder townland—
 The Noel over here [let the Hogmanay revellers come
 over here].

This is a threat: “If you don’t treat us well, we’ll say the same about you.” The following from Benbecula, **Text E**, tells us more about what *sort* of people are turning up (Carmichael 5: 380–83).

A nochd oidhche mu dheireadh na
bliadhna,
Bithibh fialaidh rium san ardraich,
Dol a ghabhail mo dhuana Calaig,
Thugaibh an aire 'na thràth dhomh.
 To-night is the last night of the year,
 Be generous to me in the dwelling,
 As I come to sing my Hogmanay song,
 Give to me timely heed.

Banais gille dubh an t-snaoisein
'S adhbhar smaointean anns an àite;
Nam bithinn-sa am measg na laoisig,
'S mór bhiodh ann do dhaoine grànda.
 The wedding-feast of the black lad of the
 snuff
 Is a cause of pondering in the place;
 Were I among the rabble,
 Many an ugly fellow there would be.

Cuid ri brosgal, cuid ri briagan,
Cuid ri briathran mi-ghnàthaicht,
Cuid eile 'g ithe nan ciaban
Bh'ann an cearcan liath a' chàrsain;
 Some at flattery, some at lies,
 Some at words unwonted,
 Others devouring the gizzards
 Of the wheezy grey fowls;

Cuid dhiubh a' stalcaidh nan cùlag
Anns na h-uilt bha 'n cùl na tònach,
'S cuid dhiubh 'nan dalla-chrùban
Ann an cùil air torr bhuntàta.
 Some of them fixing their back-teeth
 In the back joints of the cattle,
 And some of them hunkering down
 In a corner on a heap of potatoes.

Tha iad as gach cearn de'n dùthaich,
Ceachairean nan cùil 's nan carnan;
'S e rupall an cuirp thug triùir dhiubh
 They are from every quarter of the land,
 The hungry ones of the corners and the
 cairns;
 'Tis the rumbling of their bodies has
 brought

<i>Air astar co dhiùbh do'n àite.</i>	Three of them, at any rate, to this place.
<i>. . . an isean ann á Leódhas, Cas-a-luidean á Ceann tSàile, Sliopaireach mór bha 'n Tir Iodha Dh'ith an t-imdeal 'm Baile Mhàrtainn.</i>	. . . the chicken here from Lewis, A ragged-foot from Kintail, A great clumsy lout that was in Tiree Who ate the milk-pail-cover in Balemartin.
<i>Bho nach fiù dhomh bhith ag ìnnseadh Mar tha 'n tìr seo leis a' ghràisg ud,</i>	Since it is not worth my telling The state of this country with yon rabble,
<i>Tha mi 'n dùil gum faigh mi mìrean, 'S gum bi ìm air agus càise.</i>	I hope that I shall get a morsel, And that there will be butter and cheese on it.
<i>Guidhim leannanachd is sìth dhuibh Gu bliadhna bho'n tìm seo, chairdean, 'S bho na tha mo chasan rùisgte, Fosglaibh dhomh dùnadh na fardraich.</i>	I pray for you sweethearting and peace Until a year from this time, O friends, And since my feet are bare, Open to me the fastening of the house.

The impression given here is that these are criminals and hungry ones at that. This man is basically saying, "If you think I'm scary wait till you meet my friends." His idea of good wishes is not *Dia dhuibh* 'God be with you' but *leannanachd is sìth dhuibh*, 'for you sweethearting and peace', as Carmichael has it.

Leannanachd is a good word for what is going on in our 'target' texts G1, G2 and H. Before approaching them, however, we must consider the curious case of 'Duan na Ceàrdaich' ('The Lay of the Smithy').

'Duan na Ceàrdaich' is an Ossianic ballad which came in recent times to be employed as a *rann Callainn*. Versions of it were published on several occasions in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and in none of these was any Hogmanay connection noted (Gillies 1786: 233–36; McCallum: 216–20; J.F. Campbell 1862: 378–402; J.F. Campbell 1872: 65–68). The earliest evidence for its use in this way appears to come from one of Fr Allan McDonald's folklore notebooks. Writing in 1891 in what is now EUL MS CW 58B, ff. 25v–26v, Fr Allan notes down a version of the ballad under the heading 'Duan Chùllaig' (*sic*). At the end he states (ff. 26v–27r): "The above is called Duan na Ceardach I got it from a Kenneth McLeod in Dalibrog who recited it on Hogmanay night. He learned it from his grand uncle . . . Second version from a woman from North Uist."

Later evidence is furnished by Margaret Fay Shaw, who prints the ballad in Gaelic and English then explains: "Taken down from John MacDonald, South Lochboisdale, 30th September 1934 . . . This was always one of the most popular of the Ossianic ballads amongst the people, and many versions have been preserved; it was frequently recited on Hogmanay (the last verse here makes this clear)." Indeed, her 'last verse' consists of a traditional quatrain with a significant addition:

<i>Claidheamh luinneach an làimh Mhic Cumhail, Nach do dh'fhàg fui[dheal]l feòla caoineadh; Mise a nochd sgèth mar thà mi An déidh bhith 'g àireamh na buidhne.</i>	A swift sword in the hand of Mac Cumhail Which never left a remnant of flesh lamenting; Tired am I to-night in my condition, After numbering (recounting) the companies;
---	---

Fosgail seo 's lig a staigh mi.

Open the door and let me in.

If we ask why this particular ballad should have become a *duan Callainn*, the answer is provided by a glance at its content. The Féinn are approached one day by a one-legged man wearing a leather apron. He is a smith called Lon mac Liobhainn, he says, and he places them under *geasa* (taboos, spells) to come back with him *gu dorsaibh mo Cheàrdaich* ('to the doors of my smithy') where he toiled for the king of Norway. Arriving there after a long journey, there is a terse exchange between Lon and Daorghlas, who happens to be *fear (fh)aire* (or *gharadh*, or even *ghlanadh*) *na ceàrdaich*, watcher (or stoker, or cleaner) to the smithy of the Féinn (Shaw: 30–31):

‘Fosgail, fosgail’ ars an gobha—	‘Open, open,’ said the smith;
‘Put romhad e’ arsa Daorghlas;	‘Push it in before you,’ said Daorghlas.
‘Cha n-fhàgainn dorus mo cheàrdaich	‘I would not leave the door of my smithy,
An àit’ gàbhaidh ‘s mi ‘nam aonar.’	In a place of danger, while I was alone.’

Sure enough, the smithy is a weird and dreadful place, manned by four- or seven-handed slaves. The delighted Féinn set everyone to work making weapons, however, and among much else they forge Fionn’s celebrated sword *Mac an Luin nach fhàg fuigheall beuma*, ‘Lon’s son who leaves no stroke unfinished’. Lon declares that it must be tempered in human blood; lots are cast, and it falls to Fionn to find a victim. He goes to a neighbouring house where he finds an old woman, Lon’s mother. She has not seen her son for a long time, and Fionn tells her kindly that she will find him in the smithy. As she goes through the door Lon, who is expecting someone else, thrusts the new sword through her body and kills her. Afterwards Fionn fights Lon and kills him (Christiansen: 197–215).

It can thus be seen that ‘Duan na Ceàrdaich’ is about doors. The fact that invisible terrors lurk behind these doors appears to have made it more, rather than less, suitable for recital at New Year. Whether other such ballads, songs or poems were ever used in the same way I do not know.

The penetration of Lon’s mother by *Mac an Luin* appears to lead us, in symbolic terms, to the *leannanachd* of Texts G1, G2 and H. First however something must be said about metrical structure. I pointed out in *The Gaelic Otherworld* (Black 2005: 579) that most of Text H is

clearly in *snéadhbhairdne*, a verse-form which consists of alternating lines of eight and four syllables with end-rhyme linking the shorter lines, e.g. *ceòlmhor : stròdhail . . .* The use of *snéadhbhairdne* was largely restricted to a curious type of composition called *croasanachd* in which serious verse alternated with comic prose . . . Typically, an individual was praised in the verse while his enemies were satirised in the prose. It may well be, then, that the passages with no discernible structure are not poetry at all but prose; all of them are clearly intended to be comic. The sixteen lines from *Bhuail e gnogag to S e lan toraidh* consist of comic verse on a sexual theme. The *crambail*, *crambaid* or ‘stick’ (harp-key, *crann*) is the male sexual organ, the harp the female one; the scenario is as in the Blind Harper’s song ‘Féill nan Crann’ (‘The Harp-Key Fair’ . . .) except that here the key is broken, there it is lost.

The keen-eyed reader may already have noticed that lines 1–6 of Text B are in *snéadhbhairdne*. The term *croasanachd*, Irish *croántacht*, comes from *crován*, a carrier of crosses in medieval religious processions who became a travelling musician and satirist (Harrison: 35–53). The *croasanachd* mode was popular in Gaelic Scotland in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. As an example of its appearance and atmosphere, here, as **Text F**, is

a snatch of 'Crosanachd Fhir nan Druimnean' ('The Laird of Drimnin's Crosanachd') by the Mull poet Iain mac Ailein (Black 2001: 104–07). This was made in 1731 when the laird of Drimnin in Morvern had a row with a shoemaker about his bill, which resulted in the laird pulling up the poor man's kilt in full view of his other customers and assaulting him on the bare buttocks with his shoemaker's belt. It was a huge scandal at the time, and Iain mac Ailein made no less than four poems or songs about it. It can easily be seen that the subject of lines 1–14 is the shoemaker's private parts. In the prose the poet is at pains to defend *nighean Shomhairle* from any insinuation that she was observing the evidence of the shoemaker's fertility with the evil eye, that is to say, appropriating it to her own husband; then we return to the verse.

<i>A' chuideachd do'm bu chòir bhith diamhair</i>	The company that should be private	
<i>'S a ghnàth am falach,</i>	And always hidden,	
<i>Cha d'fhàgadh da'n dìon bho chunnart</i>	There wasn't left to keep them safe	
<i>Sion de dh'earradh.</i>	Any clothing.	4
<i>Bha iad aon uair an làthair fianais</i>	They were once exposed to witness	
<i>An taigh greusaich;</i>	In a shoe-shop;	
<i>Thuir nìghean Shomhairle le ràbhart,</i>	Said Samuel's daughter, always civil,	
<i>'S a gnàths sìobhalt',</i>	With great humour,	
<i>"S còir gum beannaich sinn gu saidhbhir</i>	"It's right that we should richly bless	
<i>Cuid gach Crìostaidh.</i>	Each Christian's gear.	10
<i>"B' fheàrr leam, ged nach eil mi maoineach</i>	"I only wish, though I'm not wealthy	
<i>No luach gearrain,</i>	Or worth a mare,	
<i>Gum bitheadh coltas do thriùir</i>	That Calum had something like your trio	
<i>Gu tùrn aig Calum!"</i>	Just for a while!"	14
<i>Se adhbhar thug don mhnaoi bheusaich, cheart, chòir, seo a ràdh, a rùn deagh- chneasta, chum gum biodh aig a fear fhéin a leithid 's a bhiodh aig a nàbaidhean; 's nach sùil ghointe no lombais a bh' aic' air cuid a coimhearsnaich, mar bh' aig Gillebrìde Mac an t-Saoir ann an Ruthaig an Tiridhe, a mhort an ceithir fichead cearc le aon bheum-sùla 's a bhris long mhòr nan cùig crannag, a dh'ainneoin a càblaichean 's a h-acraichean. Uaithe sin a dubhradh: "Sann den cheàird a' chungaidh."</i>	What made the virtuous, proper, decent woman say this was her perfectly kind wish that her own husband should have the same as her neighbours; and not any evil eye or covetousness that she had for what belonged to her neighbour, as had Gilbert Macintyre in Ruaig in Tìree, who murdered eighty hens with one look and destroyed a great five- masted ship, despite her cables and her anchors. That's why it has been said: "The tools go with the trade."	24
<i>Tha bith ùr an tìr na Dreòllainn</i>	There's a new fad in MacLean lands	
<i>A thog am Baran,</i>	That the Baron's started,	
<i>Air gach aon fhear a labhras buna-chainnt</i>	That every man who speaks plain truth	
<i>Rùsgadh feamain.</i>	Must bare his tail.	28

An earlier example of full-blown *crostanachd* is ‘Eireóchthar fós le cloinn gColla’ (‘Colla’s race will rise again’, c. 1640), in which a trained poet from Benbecula, Cathal MacMhuirich, elegantly mocks his chief’s political enemies, the Covenanters, and his own professional enemies, the untrained poets (Black 1979: 335–37). A later one is ‘Baran Suipeir’, made by a certain John Bethune or Beaton about 1770 when James Maxwell, the duke of Argyll’s factor for Morvern and Mull, had the misfortune to defecate while sitting next to the duchess on a much-delayed ferry crossing (Gillies 1780: 101–06; Ranauro). So we can say that *crostanachd* had a particular association, but by no means an exclusive one, with satire, with low life, with bawdry, with obscenity, with scatology, and with the county of Argyll.

When *snéadhbhairdne* appears on its own, without prose passages, it may have a hidden satirical function. It is open to us to argue, if we can, that the overt part of the satire was contained in lost prose passages. Equally, the prose passages have been turned into mangled verse. Metre is the key. We must look for lines of roughly eight syllables, then four, then eight, then four, in which the four-syllable lines rhyme with each other. If we seem to have this in some places but not in others, then perhaps the dysfunctional portions originated as prose.

It occurred to me to wonder if this analysis could be applied to texts G1 and G2, which are set out in *Tocher* as long rhyming couplets, e.g.

Oidhche dhòmhs’ air Challuig mar a b’ àbhaist
Thug mi chiad sgriob a Thaigh a’ Ghàrraidh.

Obviously my eye was caught by the reference to playing the *clàrsach*, which occurs twice at the beginning of both G1 and G2. So let us see what lessons can be learnt from these texts before we move on to Text H.

Texts G1 and G2 are described in *Tocher* as ‘typical of the locally-composed poems, a mixture of local satirical references and pure nonsense, which used to be recited in the Gaelic-speaking areas by men going around the houses at New Year’. **Text G1** (SA 1974/107/A1) was recorded from Jonathan MacLeod, Vatersay, in 1974 by Mary MacDonald and Emily Lyle, and transcribed by Murdo MacLeod. Except where stated in my commentary, both text and translation are exactly as in *Tocher* but rearranged either as *snéadhbhairdne* or, where it fails, as prose.

<i>Oidhche dhòmhs’ air Challuig</i>	One night when I was Hogmanaying	
<i>Mar a b’ àbhaist</i>	In the usual way	
<i>Thug mi chiad sgriob</i>	My first call was	3
<i>A Thaigh a’ Ghàrraidh:</i>	To Taigh a’ Ghàrraidh:	
<i>Chualas a’ nigheà’ mhór</i>	The big girl could be heard	
<i>A’ seinn na clàrsaich.</i>	Playing the clarsach.	6

<i>“Fire, faire, Chairistiona, cà’na</i>	“Well, well, Christine, where did you learn	
<i>dh’ionnsaich thu na puirt mhara?”</i>	sailors’ tunes?” “I learned them as a young	
<i>“Dh’ionnsaich mi iad òg ’nam chailinn a’s</i>	girl in the wheelhouse. The tricks of	9
<i>a’ chuibhleas.” Bhuinigeadh a’ chlàrsach</i>	music-making were got from MacCairin in	
<i>air MacCairin a’s a’ chuibhleas — an</i>	the wheelhouse – the west turn and the east	
<i>iorabho ’s an earabho ’s an ceòl gàire.</i>	turn and the merry music. Put it in, put it	12
<i>“Wick e, Wick e (?), gille nam both!</i>	in, the lad of the actions! . . .	

<i>Beairtich an t-each ’s gum bithinn</i>	Equip the horse so that I can	
<i>A’ falbh leis.”</i>	Go off with him.	
<i>Cha do lig iad mise ’nam chuideachd</i>	They didn’t allow me to be company	

<i>Air son airgid.</i>	For money.”	16
<i>Thill Calum</i> <i>Far na fochainn,</i> <i>'S bhrìst e 'dhà lurga</i> <i>'S chaill e 'ghartain.</i>	Calum came away From the young cornfields, And he broke both legs And lost his garters.	20
<i>'S an cogar thug Murchadh do Ruairidh</i> <i>'S a' Chàrnaich,</i> <i>Chuala Calum air Tràigh Bhainein</i> <i>E 's a' bhàta.</i>	And what Murdo whispered to Roderick In Carnoch, Calum heard it on Tràigh Bhainein In the boat.	24
<i>Bha dùil aig Dòmhnall Ruadh a' Mhuilinn</i> <i>Le 'bhalg mineadh</i> <i>Gu faigheadh e nighean Uilleim,</i> <i>Bean mo ghille.</i>	Red-haired Donald from the mill With his bag of meal was hoping To get William's daughter, My boy's wife —	28
<i>'S ann a chuile latha féilleadh</i> <i>Bhiodh i maistreadh,</i> <i>'S gheobhainn fhìn</i> <i>A' chiad cheap dheth.</i>	She used to churn Every holy day, And I was the one to get The first lump [of butter] from it.	32
<i>Thug i mach na cóig ginidhean òir</i> <i>As a pòca,</i> <i>Na cóig cearca móra fireann</i> <i>'S an coileach boireann</i> <i>'S an clàr fuineadh, 's biodh</i> <i>Siod aig Uilleam.</i>	She took the five gold guineas Out of her pocket, The five great male hens And the female cock And the baking-board, and William Was to have that.	35 38

- 1 The translation of this stanza in *Tocher* is: “One night when I was Hogmanaying in the usual way / My first call was at Taigh a' Ghàrraidh: / The eldest daughter could be heard playing the clarsach.” It can thus be seen that my only change is from ‘the eldest daughter’ to ‘the big girl’. The latter is the literal meaning.
- 4 *Taigh a' Ghàrraidh* ‘Garden House’ suggests a house with a walled garden, something of a rarity in the eighteenth-century Highlands. Even in 1773, Johnson and Boswell found that some of the island gentry, such as Ullinish and Lochbuie, possessed a garden, while others, such as Coirechatachan, did not (Black 2007: 258, 275, 406). On the mainland, the governor of Fort Augustus had one (*ibid.*, 108), and there had been one at Acharn in Morvern as early as 1725 (NLS Adv. MS 29.1.1, vol. 2, f. 187). Our *Taigh a' Ghàrraidh* was in or near a place called Carnoch (see line 22); I do not know whether MacDonald of Glencoe’s residence at Carnoch near Ballachulish had one, or indeed whether the house had any name beyond the obvious *Taigh na Càrnaich*, but it is very likely that Sir Alexander Murray’s residence at Strontian (‘Horsey Hall’, as it came to be called) had one. The text imposed on Murray’s map of Loch Sunart (Bruce 1733) speaks of ‘Inclosing, bringing in, & Cultivating both Garden & other Grounds’; in April 1730 the number of gardeners employed by his estate of Ardnamurchan and Sunart appears to have stood at three or four, and it is unlikely that all their efforts went into the garden at Mingary alone (see appendix 11 below). It may be worth pointing out in passing that the Mingary garden is almost certainly the subject of the following stanza in Alexander MacDonald’s *Allt an t-Siùcair* (Mac-Dhonnail: 85; Macdonald: 46–47):

<i>Bidh lòchrain mheala lùbadh</i>	The stalks bend with honey lanterns
<i>Nan sràbh 's brù air gach géig</i>	And every branch has a womb
<i>De mheasaibh milis cùbhraidh</i>	Of the sweet and fragrant harvests
<i>Nan ùbhlán is nam peur;</i>	Of apples and of pears;
<i>Na duilleagan a' lùgadh</i>	The leaves are curling upwards
<i>Is fallas cùil dhiubh fhéin —</i>	From the sweat on their own backs
	—
<i>Is clann a' gabhail tùchaidh</i>	And bairns get hoarse from licking
<i>D'an imlich dlùth le'm beul.</i>	Them closely with their mouths.

Allt an t-Siùcair 'The Sugar Burn' is *Allt a' Choire Mhuilim*, which reaches the sea near Mingary. The song was made about 1743 (Black 1986: 31–32).

- 6 For a brief account of musical metaphors for sex in European literatures see Atkins 1978: 179–80. In Gaelic 'playing the harp' seems to have been a firm favourite, see Black 2001: 164–65, 352–53; note also the wry humour of *eud bean a' chlàrsair, a' chlàrsach fhéin* 'the harper's wife's jealousy, the harp itself' (Dwelly: 397). Clearly the metaphor survived the demise of the harp itself, which had given way to the violin in Gaelic society by c. 1700. The latter instrument provides the classic instance of the motif in English literature, in Shakespeare's *Pericles*, act 1, scene 1, where the hero takes Antiochus's daughter by the hand and describes her incest with her father:

You're a fair viol, and your sense the strings;
 Who, finger'd to make man his lawful music,
 Would draw heaven down, and all the gods to hearken;
 But, being play'd upon before your time,
 Hell only danceth at so harsh a chime.

- 7 The translation of this section in *Tocher* is: "'Well, well, Christine, where did you learn sailors' tunes?' / 'I learned them as a young girl in the wheelhouse (?)' / The clarsach was won from the Duke of Argyll (?) in the wheelhouse – / The *iorabho* and the *earabho* and the merry music.' / 'Send him to Wick (?), the ranter and raver!'"
- 10 The name *MacCairin* is a likely one for a Gaelic-speaking seaman from the Firth of Clyde area. As *Mc carran, Mc Carran, McCarne, mc charen, Mc Carrane* or *mc Cayrn* it occurs eighteen times in the Argyll name-lists of 1685 and 1692 – eight times in Kilmichael Glassary, five times in Knapdale, twice in Melfort, once each in Kilfinan, Dalmally and Kilmore/Kilbride (MacTavish: 7, 9, 18, 29, 30, 39–40, 42–44, 55). See also Text G2 line 11. *Cuibhleas* will be a Gaelicised form of English 'wheelhouse', just as *cuibhle* is a Gaelicised form of 'wheel'.
- 11 The *iarabho* and the *earabho* clearly contain points of the compass, *iar* 'west' and *ear* 'east'. In the Highlands and Islands, awareness of the points of the compass was formerly so acute that they were used habitually for everyday purposes. A person might be said to be standing *tuath ort* 'north of you' instead of *ri do thaobh* 'beside you', and might go *sìar* 'west' to fetch something from the back of the house in the same way that nowadays one would 'go into the kitchen'. Here the compass points are being used of sexual activities. I take *wick* to be an otherwise unrecorded verb, English or Gaelic or a mixture of both, related in some way to English 'wag' (of the tail) or 'fuck', and/or to Gaelic *bog* or *buig* in the meaning 'steep', 'dip', 'wag', 'fuck', see Thomson: 115, line 1213, and Black 2001: 372.
- 12 For this use of *gille* 'lad' see line 28 and Text H line 17. Alexander MacDonald uses *fear* 'man' in the same way (Watson 1959: 114), while an anonymous poet gives his

membrum the name *Dòmhnallan Dubh* 'Little Black Donnie' (Black 2001: 78–81); William Ross's *ladie dubh* 'black laddie' brings us back, albeit in translation, to *gille* (Calder: 108–09). *Both* comes up three times here in the meaning given by Dwelly (111): "Both, *s.m.ind.* Perturbation. 2 Furious agitation. 3 Declamation. 4 Vehement action of body. A' cur nam both dheth, *in great agitation.*"

- 13 The translation of this section in *Tocher* is: "Harness the horse so that I can cart him off.' / They wouldn't let me into their company for [love or] money." I differ from the *Tocher* translators, and from their parenthesis, in that I think that this is all the girl still talking, explaining to us that she was paid in kind, in this case with a horse. There may be a hint here that the girl is being kept away from the better class of client, the kind that might conceivably be able to pay in cash. In the eighteenth-century Highlands cash was in notoriously short supply, but horses were small and plentiful. Among the exceptions to the renewal of tacks and wadsets detailed by Sir Alexander Murray in his memorandum of 1726–27 (appendix 3 below) are the reservation of Ariundle for the maintenance of 'my horses & Cows kept by my Miners' and of the moss of Achnanellan on Loch Shiel 'for the maintenance of my horses to be employed in my woods', the latter being chosen 'first because it lyes in the center of all my woods – & so hinders my horses to be scattered here & there or from running into other peoples hain'd grass or Cornes – Secondly because thereby I become less troublesome in borrowing the horses of the Countrey' (NLS Adv. MS 29.1.1, ff. 232r, 232v).

It is equally and additionally possible, however, that the horse is metaphorical. In early modern Europe the riding of horses (or other animals) by women was a trope for the inversion of moral order as represented by such activities as prostitution and witchcraft (Zika: 293, 331–32).

- 18 *Fochann* is a masculine noun meaning 'young corn in the blade', but here the noun is feminine. In any case we cannot take 'young corn' literally, as this is of course happening in winter. There is, or was, a feminine noun *fochain* meaning 'cause, motive, reason, disturbance' (Dwelly: 443). So either *fochainn* here means 'disturbance' or young corn is being used as a metaphor for girlhood. Breaking both legs and losing one's garters is slapstick comedy of the kind to be expected in a bawdy song.
- 21 This stanza offers more broad comedy – a drunk man in a particular township thinks that he is whispering when he is actually talking so loud that he can even be heard offshore.
- 22 I know of four places called Carnoch, though no doubt there are others. One is near Ballachulish on Loch Leven, and was the residence of the MacDonalds of Glencoe until the nineteenth century. Another is at the head of Loch Sunart, two miles east of Strontian (appendix 4 below). The third is in Arisaig, and the fourth is at the head of Loch Nevis in Knoydart. As Iain Thornber has pointed out to me, the name appears to mean a place with a prehistoric cairn – there is a large one at the head of Loch Sunart, while a similar one in Arisaig was destroyed during the building of the railway. Slate was quarried at Ballachulish from 1693 to 1955 (RCAHMS 1975: 277; Fairweather 1985, 1, 4), and my initial working hypothesis was that the poem was set in that area during the quarrying boom in the mid- or late eighteenth century. However, other factors – the numbers of men involved in each case, the lack of evidence for prostitution at Ballachulish, the emergence of information about 'Mr Campbell' and the bark trade – have convinced me that the Carnoch in question is the one at Strontian. At Ballachulish, 322 people were employed by 1791, rising to 587 by 1875 (RCAHMS 1975: 277; Fairweather 1985, 1–2). At Strontian 400–500 men were employed as early as 1725, most of them imported from England, Wales and the Low Countries, and by 1740 the community numbered about 1,500 people (RCAHMS 1980: 255; Cummings: 258, 280).

In 1746, by which time the mines were closed, it was estimated that 200 soldiers could be accommodated there (Terry: 327).

- 23 The *Tocher* translation of this couplet is ‘Calum heard it in the boat on Tràigh Bhainein.’ As with *Taigh a’ Ghàrraidh*, the clear identification of a place-name *Tràigh Bhainein* close to one of the four Carnochs would fix the location of our poem beyond reasonable doubt. I have failed to make such an identification, but at least it is possible to say what lies behind the name: it is *Tràigh a’ Bhaidnein* ‘the Beach of the Little Boat’, from *baidnein*, pronounced *bainnein*, ‘little boat, yawl, pinnace’ (Dwelly: 58, s.vv. *baidean*, *baidne*, *baidein*). Curiously, all of the Carnochs offer beaches, modest or otherwise. In particular, at Ballachulish in 1790 vessels of any burthen could be beached ‘most commodiously in fine smooth sand, so near the shore, that they may be loaded by throwing a few planks between the vessels and the shore’ (McNicol 1791: 500). At the head of Loch Sunart, rock-strewn sands are exposed at low tide at the mouths of the Strontian and Carnoch rivers, and ‘the head of Loch Sunart’ is frequently referred to in eighteenth-century sources as a meeting- or gathering-place, being conveniently accessible by sea as well as by land (Fergusson: 197; appendix 3 below). Iain Thornber points out to me that Kinlochsunart came to be the site of an important cattle market, and was also frequented by hundreds of herring-boats at a time, the nets being laid out to dry along the short stretch of shoreline between Strontian and Carnoch.
- 25 In this stanza there is a strong hint of payment in kind.
- 28 I do not think that *nighean Uilleim* was anyone’s wife in a literal way. *Mo ghille*, ‘my boy’, ‘my lad’, seems to be the poet’s way of referring to his own prize possession.
- 32 The parenthesis ‘of butter’ is in *Tocher*, but *ceap* simply means a ‘lump’ or ‘snatch’, so in the bawdy context the introduction of butter is unhelpful.
- 34 The spelling *pòca* correctly represents what the Vatersay reciter said. It does not rhyme with *boireann*, however, unless we remove the lengthmark and interpret it as ‘bag’ rather than ‘pocket’. This interpretation appears to be confirmed by Text G2 lines 24 and 40, see notes on those lines.
- 35 For the ‘male hens’ and ‘female cock’ see Text G2 line 41, note.
- 38 All in all, then, Cairistiona takes her earnings (a jumble of money and goods) out of her bag and gives them to her father. As this appears to raise the issue of prostitution in Ardnamurchan and Sunart in the years 1723–29, it would be as well to state here what is known about it. Appendix 12 below alleges that a certain Nellie McMorphew, housekeeper at Horsey Hall in our period, was a ‘very bad woman’ who had slept with the factor, Donald Cameron, and was now ‘talking openly She got herself pepper’d in this family by the Laird’. This seems distinctly possible, as Sir Alexander had separated from his wife in 1714 after four unhappy years of marriage (Cameron: 444) and was the father of a child in London, for whose upkeep he paid £10 to the relevant parish (NLS Adv. MS 29.1.1, vol. 4, ff. 175–76). Although Nellie was married to an Irishman, her surname McMorphew (*Mac Mhurchaidh*, MacMurchy) suggests a connection with Islay or Kintyre. There is also the case of Mary MacDonald, mentioned in the records of the Presbytery of Mull as an adulteress in the parish of Ardnamurchan in 1739, and subsequently as an adulteress in the parish of Kilninian in Mull in 1747, ‘but who lived formerly at Stron’tsíthen’ (Black 1986: 22). She may be the woman to whom the poet Alexander MacDonald (catechist or schoolmaster/catechist in Ardnamurchan, 1729–45) composed his obscene but brilliant ‘*Marbhrann na h-Aigeannaich*’ ‘Wanton’s Elegy’ (Mac-Dhonuill 1751: 153–58). The problem of sexually transmitted disease became so acute in the parish that he also published ‘*Tinneas na h-Urchaid*’ ‘Venereal Disease’, a health warning in eight quatrains (*ibid.*, 159–60). He begins *Gu bheil tinneas na h-urchaid / Air feadh Àird nam Murchan* ‘Venereal Disease / Is throughout Ardnamurchan’, then describes the symptoms of syphilis and its treatment by mercury

(Rosebury: 123). He does not mention Strontian, mines, migrant labour or prostitution, but concludes by warning his flock against 'alien diseases' (MacilleDhuibh).

*Thig oirbh easlaintibh coimheach,
Bolgach, plàigh agus cloimhean,
Gur sgrìos is gur clomhadh
Mar eich bhrothach bhios
seannda.*

You'll have alien diseases,
Smallpox, plague and the scabies,
Destroying and corrupting you
Like many horses grown old.

The dangers of gonorrhoea are mentioned in MacDonald's much longer '*Òran nam Bodach*' 'The Song of the Old Men' (Mac-Dhonnell: 123–34): *Mhoire nach iadsan / A smiarthe le clapa / Gun fhòirinn da'n urchag / Gun phurgaid da'n aiceid?* 'Might they not, Holy Mary, / Be smeared with the clap / With no remedy to heal them / And no purge for their pain?' A satire on two men in Ardnamurchan – one named Angus son of Allan and one named Allan – who have allegedly taken to whoring at the age of eighty, this poem appears to be motivated as much by personal grudge as by social concern. Close reading of one stanza, the seventh of fifteen, reveals cross-references back to Sir Alexander's regime and to the mines at Strontian (*ibid.*, 128).

*Gur neònach am fonn
A thachair sna bailtibh ud —
Is mìos' a chinneas druim iomair
Na ùrlar nan claisean unnt',
Is cho dàrail na seann tairbh
Ri trì-bhliadhnaich acfhainneach
'S ge math feur nan Coirean

Is seachd sona feur Fhaisgeadail.
Marbhaisg air na bodaichibh:
Bhuairleadh na beartaich leo',
Thairgeadh màl dùbailt
'S bunndaiste gearrsmainn ast'
Le staodhrum 's le mosradh
'S le bodradh nan
tailceanach
As briosairneach frogaiseach
Cochallach taplaichean!*

Some extraordinary land
Is to hand in those townships —
A rig-top grows worse in them
Than bottoms of furrows,
The old bulls are as horny
As well-equipped three-year-olds
And though the Corries are
verdant
It's far grassier in Faskadale.
Confound the old buggers:
They've run rings round the rich,
Double rent has been offered
And a grassum fee out of them
By caressing and schmoozing
And shafting the ludicrous

Frolicsome stalwarts
Whose wallets are bulging!

Claisean 'furrows' bears the double meaning 'grooves, groves', the term used for the mine-shafts at Strontian (see appendix 13). *Marbhaisg air na bodaichibh* could equally be translated 'A plague on the peasants'. Who is paying double rent and a grassum fee to whom is not entirely clear. On one level we may guess that Angus and Allan have obtained land at Faskadale which the poet wanted for himself (cf. Black 1986: 20). On another level, this may be a reference to the extortionate rent of £3,600 which the York Buildings Company (in the person of its governor, Col. Samuel Horsey) agreed to pay for the mines in 1730, and to the lump sum ('grassum fee') of £6,000 also paid to Sir Alexander and his partners in compensation for their expenditure on the works, not to mention 'the royalty of the sixth dish to the overlord' – the feudal proprietor, Sir Duncan Campbell of Lochnell. The then manager, Francis Place, an experienced mining engineer, considered £3,600 to be seven times what the works were worth (Murray 1883: 70).

An alternative version of Text G1, **Text G2** (SA 1974/91/B9), was recorded by the same fieldworkers from a Mrs MacCormick, who was in her seventies, at Earsary in Barra. It was transcribed by Donald Archie MacDonald. The editors of *Tocher* give lines 17–44 only, saying that what precedes these is ‘very similar’ to the Vatersay version. In what follows, therefore, lines 1–16 were transcribed and translated by myself, while the rest is as in *Tocher*, except where stated in my commentary (but rearranged into *snéadhbhairdne*).

<i>Chaidh mi aoigheadh air Chullainn</i> <i>Chon mo chàirdean</i> <i>'S thug mi chiad sgrìob</i> <i>A Thaigh a' Ghàrraidh.</i>	I went guesting at Hogmanay To my relations And the first visit I made was To Taigh a' Ghàrraidh.	4
<i>Bha iomas 'ic Iain Mhóir an Fhirich</i> <i>A' seinn clàrsach:</i> <i>“Càit, a Chairistiona a chridhe, an do</i> <i>dh'ionnsaich thusa</i> <i>Na puirt mhara?”</i>	Big John of the Moor's son's inspiration Was playing the harp: “Where, Cairistiona my love, did <i>you</i> learn Nautical tunes?”	8
<i>“Dh'ionnsaich mi iad òg 'nam chailin</i> <i>'S mi 'nam mhaighdinn:</i> <i>Bhuinnich mi clàrsach Mhic Garaidh</i> <i>Air a' chuibhneas,</i> <i>An iorabho 's an earabho</i> <i>'S an ceòl gàire.</i>	“I learned them when I was a young girl As a virgin: I won Mac Garaidh's harp On the wheelhouse, The west turn and the east turn And the merry music.	11 14
<i>“Thig iad am buath, thug iad a-mach,</i> <i>B'e sin cnoidhein,</i> <i>'S ann bu choltach e ri barpa</i> <i>'S dà chois fodha.”</i>	“They come in a frenzy, off they went, That was a small pain, It was like a chambered cairn With two feet underneath.”	18
<i>'Se Uilleam bu mhiosa dh'fhalbhadh</i> <i>Dhe na daoine:</i> <i>Rug casadaich air is anfhadh</i> <i>'S a' bhreith aoise.</i>	William was the worst of the men Who could go: He was seized by coughing and shortness of breath And the (?) debility of old age.	22
<i>“Fuirich Uilleim, fear na sochair,</i> <i>Ris a' bhaga!”</i> <i>'S bhris e 'dhà lurgainn 's a churrachd</i> <i>'S chaill e ghartan.</i>	“Wait, William, you idle fellow, For the bag!” And he broke both legs and his cap, And lost his garter.	26
<i>Moire, gum bu h-éibhinn</i> <i>Dhut, Eachainn!</i> <i>'S ann a chuile latha féilleadh</i> <i>A bhiodh tu maistreadh:</i> <i>Gheibhinn-sa bhuat uibhir an t-séidhir</i> <i>De dh'aona cheapair.</i>	Marry, joy To you, Hector! You used to churn Every holy day: I would get a piece like a chair-seat from you On one sandwich.	29 32
<i>Chaidh impric Iain Mhóir an Fhirich a</i> <i>Shasunn</i>	Big John of the Moor's son's inspiration went to England	

<p><i>A chreic annlainn,</i> 'S thug i leithe barc <i>Do Mhaighstir Caimbeul.</i></p>	<p>To sell condiments, And took with her some bark For Mr Campbell.</p>	<p>36</p>
<p><i>Moire, gum bu slàn a thig ise</i> <i>Far a turuis:</i> 'S ann thug i dhomhsa na deich gini <i>As a pòca</i> 'S na ceithir cearca móra boirionn <i>'S an coileach firionn</i> 'S an criathar mór a nì an t-aiseag <i>'S an clàr-fuine.</i></p>	<p>Mary, send her back safe From her journey: She gave me the ten guineas Out of her bag And the four great female hens And the male cock And the big sieve that serves as a ferry And the baking-board.</p>	<p>40 44</p>

1 The first stanza is similar to that in the other version, but some of the vocabulary is different: *aoigheadh* 'guesting, visiting' and *Cullainn* instead of *Callaig*, both literally 'Calendar', for Hogmanay.

4 *Taigh a' Ghàrraidh*: see Text G1 line 4, note.

5 *Iomas* 'ic turns into *impric* at line 33. As it is clear that the girl is called Cairistiona, *iomas* cannot be a name and must be a word – presumably a rare Scottish example of early Irish *imbas* 'great knowledge, poetic talent, inspiration, foreknowledge, magic lore' (*DIL*), modern Irish *iomas* 'intuition, inspiration, manifestation, a guess' (Dinneen 1927: 604). It thus represents a first hint of the witchcraft which surfaces again later (see note on line 41). As for *Iain Mór an Fhirich*, obviously if this person could be identified we would have further evidence for the locus of the poem. *Fireach* is widely used in mainland dialects for 'hill, moor, mountain, acclivity' (Dwelly: 439). *Druim an Fhirich* is marked on maps at the head of Glen Borrodale in Ardnamurchan. However, it is safer to regard *Iain Mór an Fhirich* as a name that could apply to any big mountain man called John.

6 In this stanza, *clàrsach* and *mhara* do not make good rhyme, so there may be something wrong.

8 *Na puirt mhara* is a pun. It means both 'nautical tunes' and 'seaports'.

9 Clearly this stanza shows Cairistiona telling how she lost her virginity.

11 *Mac Garaidh* looks like a corruption of the unfamiliar *MacCairin* (Text G1 line 10). The preservation of *Mac Garaidh* in this context allows us to hypothesise a development *MacCairin* > *Mac Garaidh* > MacGarry. 'M(a)cGarry' is quite a common surname today in the west of Scotland, but there are no instances of it in the Argyll name-lists of 1685 and 1692 (MacTavish). It is unlikely to be related to *Mc gorry* (MacTavish 1935: 57–58), which is readily derived from *Gofraidh*, *Goiridh* 'Godfrey'.

13 See Text G1, note on line 11.

14 *Gàire* would not normally be considered to rhyme with *mhaighdinn* and *chuibhleas*, so my reconstruction may be faulty here. In Text G1 I made this line part of a prose section.

15 This stanza is a description of coitus from the woman's viewpoint. The *Tocher* text begins right in the middle of it. However, the rhyme between *cnoidhein* and *fodha* shows clearly that these lines belong together. *Thug iad a-mach* means literally 'they took out'.

17 The *Tocher* translation of this couplet is: "...He was just like a chambered cairn standing on two feet."

19 This is the translation in *Tocher*, and it is a very good one indeed, but I doubt if the translators realised that it was a description by a prostitute of her least favourite client.

- Again the rhyme shows that these four lines belong together. In text G1 Uilleam was the name of the girl's father, but not so here.
- 22 The '(?)' is in *Tocher*. I believe the translation is entirely correct.
- 24 The bag must be the one referred to earlier (Text G1, note on line 34) in which Cairistiona puts her earnings. Uilleam seems to have run off without putting anything in it, and either broke his legs in the process or had them broken for him (I take it that *currachd* is here a kneecap). If that means there was a pimp involved, we may well be meeting him, speaking in the first person, in line 39. In the circumstances, I am not sure that 'idle fellow' is the best translation for *fear na sochair* – *sochair* is primarily a benefit, a privilege, so here I think *fear na sochair* may mean 'a man who tries to get away with a freebie'.
- 27 In this stanza we have rhyme between *éibhinn*, *féilleadh* and *t-séidhir* as well as between *Eachainn*, *maistreadh* and *cheapair*. The girl turns from her least favourite to her most favourite client, and tells us of the generous payments of meat, cheese and so on that he makes to her.
- 33 The *Tocher* translation of this stanza is: "Big John of the moor's retinue went to England to sell condiments, / And took with her a boat for Mr Campbell." The word 'retinue' is there footnoted: "Impric, 'a flitting', seems to be used in this version of the poem as a girl's name (like Oighrig): it also replaces 'a' nighean mhór' in the third line." In my opinion this makes much less sense than *iomas 'ic* in Text G1 line 5. I suspect that what happened is that, not understanding *iomas 'ic*, the reciter here substituted *impric* 'flitting' because that is what the rest of the line is about.
- 34 I think the idea of selling 'condiments' in England is a pun inspired by the previous stanza. 'Condiments' is the usual translation of *annlann*, which means anything eaten with bread, such as meat, cheese or crowdie.
- 35 As *Tocher* makes clear, in Mrs MacCormick's recitation *barc* is short, unlike *bàrc* 'boat' which has a long vowel. (In the original it may have been *barca*, rhyming with *Shasunn*, in line with the poem's structure of disyllabic line-endings, but *barc* / *Do* conveys the same effect in any case.) This is suggestive of the English word 'bark' (of a tree), usually in Gaelic *rùsg*. Oak bark was used for tanning and birch bark for packaging and tinder, while willow and wych hazel bark have medicinal properties. Sir Alexander Murray's correspondence reveals his constant anxiety to realise the value of the bark on his Ardnamurchan and Sunart estate (appendices **1, 2, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10** below). At the same time, the ships which plied up and down Loch Sunart were regularly referred to as 'barks', and in appendix **6** we see Sir Alexander turning these into 'barques' for the sake of clarity. Appendices **7** and **13** reveal the economic conundrum with which he was wrestling: the lead smelters and furnaces at Strontian, which were leased to his mining partnership and subsequently sub-let to the York Buildings Company, consumed enormous quantities of timber from his estate, from which the bark had first to be stripped and packed for export to pay the cost of harvesting the trees. Unfortunately, the more timber the mines consumed, the more bark was produced, whether it was in demand or not. Edward Lothian's remark in appendix **13** that 'Your Factor got always the Bark, the proceeds thereof, would pay the value of the Wood' should not be taken to suggest that the bark was the factor's perquisite, but that it was his responsibility – and his headache.
- 36 From 1723 to 1729 the factor on Sir Alexander Murray's estate of Ardnamurchan and Sunart was Donald Campbell, younger of Octomore in Islay. He is routinely referred to in the estate papers of the period, now NLS Adv. MS 29.1.1, as 'Mr Campbell', sometimes as 'Long Donald Campbell' (see appendix **8** below). The Octomore Campbells were a branch of the Airds family. George Campbell, fifth son of George Campbell of Airds (tutor of Cawdor), obtained Octomore by marriage to Anna, widow

of Lachlan Campbell of Daill and daughter of Archibald Roy Campbell of Octomore, who was baillie (factor) of Islay in 1685 (Alastair Campbell of Airds, personal communication). George Campbell of Octomore had at least four sons (Donald, Alexander, John, Colin) and one daughter, Margaret, who married Colin Campbell of Crackaig in 1717. Donald, a particular friend of Sir Alexander Murray's brother Charles, appears to have come to Sir Alexander's attention in connection with proposals for mining in Islay in 1722. He ran the estate with an attention to detail which met Sir Alexander's approval, but his letters to Charles are incautiously frank. In 1729, when the estate was in deep financial trouble, he was dismissed in the reorganisation which introduced Captain Edmund Burt as manager of the mines and Donald Cameron as factor (appendix 8 below).

'Long Donald' appears to have served the Airds estate in Appin and Lismore for all or part of the next seventeen years, during which time Donald Campbell of Airds, the duke of Argyll's factor for Morvern, was building a splendid new house at Airds in the south of Appin and moving out of Castle Stalker, which had been the residence of his family since 1627 (RCAHMS 1975: 193–94: 245; Campbell 1992: 22). On his father's death in 1737, Long Donald granted his rights in Octomore to his brother Alexander ('Sandy'). In 1745 his role at Castle Stalker, midway between Dunstaffnage and Fort William, became vital to the Government's tenuous hold on the West Highlands. He received the rank of captain in the Argyll militia, with a garrison consisting of a sergeant, a corporal and twenty men (Fergusson: 195, 250). He was responsible for the storage of military supplies, the custody of prisoners, the control of shipping in Loch Linnhe, and above all the transmission of intelligence, for which armed boats called every other day (*ibid.*, 113–14, 145, 228; Terry: 291). Prior to Culloden, he was the recipient of one of the most celebrated letters in Highland history, that of 20 March 1746 in which Lochiel and Keppoch threatened the Campbells with reprisals for 'their burning of houses and stripping of women and children and exposing to the open field and severity of the weather, burning of corns (i.e., corn or grain), houghing of cattle, and killing of horses' (Black 2007: 329–30). Lochiel and Keppoch did not know that the policy of carrying out these brutal acts was initiated by Cumberland and mitigated as far as possible by the commander of the Argyll militia, General John Campbell of Mamore (Fergusson: 122–24). After Culloden, still with his ear to the ground, Octomore provided the Government with some of its most accurate reports about Prince Charles's wanderings and other Jacobite activity (*ibid.*, 241–42; Terry: 228–30, 238–39). He is given two quatrains in Alexander MacDonald's long poem '*An Àirce*' ('The Ark'), which describes the retribution to be visited upon individual Campbells by a latter-day Noah in the event of a flood overwhelming Argyll (Mac-Dhonnail: 179; Macdonald: 262).

<i>An Dòmhnallach Ìleach an rasgal, An glagaire fada bòstail, Thoir urchair dha chum an aigin, Gu leaba-chadail nan sòrnan.</i>	Donald Campbell from Islay, the rascal, The long, clacking-tongued boaster, Give him a push, down to the deep, Down to the sleeping-bed of the skates.
<i>Mac Dheòrs' òig, ged thuit e 'm peacadh Le impidh prasaigain, 's le gòraich,</i>	The son of young George, though he fell into sin Through the rabble's incitement, and folly,
<i>Leig plumadh dha chum an aigin 'S thoir gu grad a-steach le d' ròp e.</i>	Give him a dip right down to the bottom, Then quickly haul him in with your rope.

- 37 The *Tocher* translation of this stanza is as follows: “Mary, send her back safe from her journey: / She actually gave me the ten guineas out of her pocket / And the four great female hens and the male cock / And the big sieve for a ferry-boat and the baking-board.” This is the end of the poem, and all, I think, is revealed, as my remaining notes show.
- 40 Again I think the text originally had *poca* ‘a bag’ and not *pòca* ‘a pocket’. That is certainly what the rhyme with *turuis* suggests.
- 41 The male hens and female cock now turn into female hens and a male cock, which makes *less* sense in terms of witchcraft (see following note). Male hens and a female cock sound like the diabolical sort of thing a witch would have. They are also suggestive of cross-dressing, a common practice at Hallowe’en and New Year.
- 43 The ‘big sieve that serves as a ferry’ is a clear allusion to witchcraft. In Gaelic tradition witches routinely sail across water in sieves or riddles (Bruford: 21; Black 2005: 174, 180; *Tocher* 58 [2005]: 18). Thus a connection is established between witchcraft and prostitution. If we exclude the importance of sex to the iconography of witchcraft (for which see Zika: 269–304) and the fanciful ‘carnal compact’ with the devil demanded by witchcraft legislation, such a connection is remarkably hard to find in surviving transcripts of witchcraft trials. As Jensen has pointed out (162) with reference to early modern Europe as a whole, “Women who violated gender expectations might be viewed as prime candidates for charges of witchcraft, but those who entered into prostitution as a career were playing a role that was quite well integrated into patriarchal society. The prostitute engaged in sexual activities with an assortment of men in the real world and had little reason to pursue secretive or fantastic relationships with Satan or to waste time in unpaid sabbatical orgies.”

In his examination of the sixteenth-century Eichstätt trials, Durrant probes the issue in some detail with respect to specific individuals who “would seem to conform to the stereotype of the marginal old woman who fell victim to accusations of witchcraft”, being in their sixties, having a history of poverty and sexual indiscretion, and being also in one case ‘a known wisewoman who used herbs to cause abortions for indiscreet young women, many from the households of councillors, and to then help them get pregnant’ (171, 174). Clearly the services of such people were useful in different ways to both men and women. Pointing out that the traditional role ascribed to the prostitute by medieval society was as a means of sexual relief ‘for the Catholic man away from home and the widower’, Durrant concludes tellingly that witch commissioners and witnesses alike ‘seem to have understood the direct connection between poverty and prostitution’ (*ibid.*, 175, 234).

This picture of the healer-prostitute in the bottom layer of society, partly respected, partly feared and seldom prosecuted, rings true for Gaelic Scotland. Curiously, one of the clearest recorded cases of a link between common prostitution and criminalised witchcraft comes from southern Italy (Gentilcore 2002: 100), a part of Europe which has been bracketed with the Highlands due to the crucial importance in both areas of belief in the evil eye, the consequences of which are unintended and therefore seen as distinct from witchcraft (Larner: 8).

- 44 The baking-board can also be seen as an occult object. There was a prominent superstition that meal could be removed by fairies unless specific precautions were taken (Black 2005: 127). In literal terms, the reason why Cairistiona has given the poet all these things can only be that he is her pimp (see note on line 24). In terms of metaphor, however, a kneading-trough and sieve were used in early Irish law to symbolise rightful possession of a disputed holding by a female, while in *Noínden Ulad* Crunncu’s fairy wife brings a kneading-trough and sieve, among other things, to

assert her position as mistress of his house (Kelly: 188). The appearance of these two objects together at the close of a New Year's rhyme from Gaelic Scotland, in a context reeking of 'entry ritual' (Martin: 294–95), seems to go beyond coincidence into the realms of genuine archaic survival.

What lessons have been learned from this study of texts G1 and G2 that can be taken into our study of text H?

- Reconstruction of text as *croasanachd* (verse in *snéadhbhairdne* with prose passages) seems to work well;
- Hogmanay rhymes can lead us into a bawdy-house;
- as suspected, the *clàrsach* is a key that can open this 'can o' worms';
- like any other language, Gaelic possesses a lexicon of bawdy imagery (e.g. *maistreadh* 'churning' for sex) which must be more fully identified and explored;
- it is possible for tradition-bearers, collectors, translators and editors to be blissfully unaware of salacious content;
- there is a social connection between prostitution and witchcraft which deserves to be further explored;
- the Strontian setting that has emerged, and the use of loanwords like *cuibhleas* 'wheelhouse', suggest that this tradition of bawdry may not be indigenous, while the use of *snéadhbhairdne* suggests the opposite.

We may now move on with renewed confidence to **Text H**, which JGC introduces by saying (Black 2005: 532): "The following New Year's rhyme must have tried the breath of the speaker and the patience of his listeners considerably. It consists probably of several separate rhymes tagged together . . . The rhyme is given as it came to hand." We should be on the lookout, therefore, for non-sequiturs and other clues that may indicate the end of one original text and the beginning of another.

JGC gives no indication of provenance. The words 'as it came to hand' suggest that he received the text in writing. He was minister of Tiree, and the source may have been one of his parishioners, but Islay appears to be mentioned at line 16, while the name Martin (line 23) is associated above all with the Portree area of Skye, with which JGC had strong connections (Black 2005: 620). Dialect evidence points both ways at once: *dhutsa* (line 37) is a northern form, *dhuit* (line 43) an Argyll one.

As explained above, the Gaelic original of this text is based on JGC's 'lost appendix' as transcribed by Alexander Carmichael into CW MS 241 and published *verbatim et literatim* in *The Gaelic Otherworld* (Black 2005: 533–34). I attempt to rationalise it here as *snéadhbhairdne*, as other metres or as prose, and I edit it for spelling and punctuation. Except where stated in my commentary, the translation is JGC's (JG Campbell 1902: 234–36); I edit it here for punctuation and rearrange it to echo the reconstructed original.

<i>Beannaich am brugh fonnmhor</i>	Bless this cheerful dwelling	
<i>Mar ghuth ceòlmhor</i>	With a musical voice	
<i>Bhith coltach ri àros rioghail</i>	That it be like a royal palace	
<i>Gun bhith stròdhail.</i>	Without being wasteful.	4
<i>Beannaich gach aon duine</i>	Bless each person	
<i>Dh'iadh mu choinneamh</i>	Who has encircled a gathering	
<i>Eadar am fear a dh'fhàs liath le sinead</i>	From the one grown grey with seniority	
<i>Gu aois leinibh.</i>	To the one of infant's age.	8

<i>Beannaich ar daoin' uaisle</i> <i>'S ar clann òga,</i> <i>Gach neach a thàrlas an uair seo</i> <i>Teachd air Dòmhnall.</i>	Bless our gentle men And our young children, All who chance at this time To come to Donald's.	12
<i>Fheara, se seo tùs mo sgeula</i> <i>'S fheudar innse:</i> <i>Bho gach taobh gu taobh eile</i> <i>Hó gu Ìle!</i>	Men! This begins my tale And I must tell it. From each side to another side Hó to Islay!	16
<i>Rinn mo chuid-sa, chliath mo ghille</i> <i>Tuill an tora —</i> <i>Sin mar thuirt Mairearad, fheudail</i> <i>uile:</i> <i>“Tuill an tora.”</i>	My equipment made, my lad treaded The wimble holes — That's what Margaret, everyone's favourite, said: “The wimble holes.”	20
<i>Sin mar thuirt Màiri:</i> <i>“Ghràidh, mo chéile,</i> <i>Tha Màrtainn cùl na còmhla,</i> <i>'S e gar n-éisteachd.”</i>	That's how Mary said, “Darling, my spouse, Martin is behind the door, Listening to us!”	24
<i>“Seo lethsgheul dhàsan,” ars ise,</i> <i>“Hu fadar he feadar / fodar,</i> <i>Suas, a bhleidein!” Dh' éirich</i> <i>cuisnean</i> <i>Garbh air Dòmhnall,</i> <i>Bhuail e air Mairearad</i> <i>Fìor spreòdadh.</i>	“That is his excuse,” said she [Margaret]. <i>Hu fudar!</i> Hey drinker! Up with you, you teaser! A thick member Rose on Donald, He aimed at Margaret A veritable frenzy.	27 30
<i>Bhuail e gnogag air a' chlàrsaich</i> <i>'S ghairm na teudan;</i> <i>Thug e grad tharraing air crambail</i> <i>'S theann ri gleusadh.</i>	He gave a tap to the harp And the strings sounded. He quickly drew a crambat And tried to tune it.	34
<i>“Rinn thu mìostadh,” ars an</i> <i>clàrsair,</i> <i>“As leam nach misde —</i> <i>Mo chreach léir a dh' éirich dhutsa</i> <i>'S do chrann briste.</i>	“You have done a mischief,” said the harper, “That I don't regret! Utter ruin has come upon you With your broken stick!”	38
<i>Sann agads' tha 'm ballan</i> <i>iocshlaint' ,”</i> <i>Ars an clàrsair —</i> <i>“Nuair a dh' fhiachar riut a-ris e,</i> <i>Nì thu slàn e!</i>	“You have a healing vessel,” Said the harper. “When you are tried with it a second time, 'Twill make the stick whole.	42
<i>Do chuid dhuit den bhallan-</i> <i>iocshlaint'</i> <i>Fheudail uile,</i>	So your share be yours of the healing cup. O dearest sir!	

<i>Do chrann buadh-mhor 'S e làn toraidh."</i>	May that stick of many virtues Be full of produce!"	46
<i>Chaidh mi Oidhche Choilne thaigh nam maragan reamhar. Dh'iarr mi fosgladh, 's an doras gu brosnach teann. Labhair bleidire mór na sràide facal brùideil: "Nam biodh mo chaman odhar am' làimh, cha do leig mi do cheann slàn on doras!"</i>	I went on Calendar Night to the house of fat puddings. I asked to be let in, the door being tightly closed with brushwood. The big sneak of the street spoke a brutal word: "If I had had my brown shinty- stick in my hand, I wouldn't have let your head away from the door in one piece!"	49 52
<i>Chaidh mi tuaitheal an dorais — B'e sin tuaitheal mo chrochaidh! Bhuail mi òrdag mo chois Ann an aodann na cloiche.</i>	I took the north turn to the door, That was a north turn of mischief to me: I struck the big toe of my foot In the face of a stone.	56
<i>Thuit am pinne, thuit am painne, thuit a' chliath-chliata san doras, rinn i gliong glang meanachan/neanachan.</i>	The pin fell, the pan fell, the harrows in the door fell, they made a cling clang clattering!	59
<i>Éirich a-suas, a bhean òg 'S a bhean chòir a choisinn cliù, Bi gu smearail mar bu dual — Éirich a-suas, a chailin duinn.</i>	Rise up, young wife And kindly wife who has won fame, Be lively as was in your blood — Rise up, my brown-haired lass.	63
<i>Càbag na h-aghaidh réidh 'S pàirt de mhionach réidh gun sùgh — Mur eil sin agad ad' chòir, Fóghnaidh aran is feòil duinn!</i>	The smooth-faced cheese And part of smooth gut without juice; If you don't have that to hand Bread and meat will do as well.	67
<i>"Chan e lon-craois thug dhan bhaile mi, ach maois air muin mo ghille-sa: gille geal gam ghlacadh, saill gam losgadh — fosgail 's leig a-staigh mi." "Is fìor sin," arsa fear an taighe. "Leigibh a-staigh e!"</i>	"It's not gluttony that has brought me to the township, but a hamper on my servant's back: a whiteboy seizing me, fat burning me — open and let me in." "That's true," said the man of the house. "Let him in!"	72

- 1 *Brugh*, as JGC points out elsewhere (Black 2005: 7), is 'the fairy dwelling viewed as it were from the inside' – bigger inside than outside, all lit up with wax candles, and full of music and dancing.
- 5 JGC's translation of this stanza was: "Bless each man / Who surrounds this gathering / From the one grown grey with seniority / To the one of infant's age."
- 6 This seems to be a reference to the way everyone has gone three times around the house sunwise for luck.
- 13 JGC's translation of this stanza was: "Men! This begins my tale / And I must tell it. / Ho! Each black, black generous one! / Hò-go! Each generous one!"
- 15 This line and the following are uncertain. JGC's original was: *Ho gach du du fheile / Ho gu eile*. He took *du* to mean 'black' (*dubh*), but I suspect that, as elsewhere in his

- work (Black 2005: xiv), it represents a misunderstanding of *taobh* ‘side’. Rhyme with *innse* suggests not *eile* but *Ìle* ‘Islay’. If I am right, this is a sailor’s rhyme about a woman of easy virtue, and it appears that Islay was where she lived.
- 17 JGC’s original was: *Roinn mo chuidse / Chliabh mo ghille / Tuille toraidh / Sin mar thuir Mairgearad / Fheudail uile tuille toraidh*. His translation was: “Divide this portion / My servant harrowed! / More produce! / Then it was that Margaret said, / ‘O dear! More produce!’” The adjustments which I have made to the Gaelic text are very slight but make an enormous difference to the translation, which is now full of strong sexual innuendo. *Cuid* for the male genitalia is in Text F line 10. *Cliath* is the verb used for the copulation of chickens. *Gille* for the male organ appears in Text G1 lines 11 and 28. The metaphor of wimble-holes or gimlet-holes is particularly vulgar. It seems to be in the plural because more than one woman is involved, as the following stanza reveals.
- 21 JGC’s translation of this stanza was: “Then said Mary, / ‘My dearest dear! / Martin is behind the door, / Listening to us!’”
- 22 Bearing in mind *bean mo ghille* ‘my boy’s wife’ at Text G1 line 28, I think *céile* ‘spouse’ may be said to be a relative term. Its use as a metaphor was put on a firm footing by Alexander MacDonald when in ‘*Moladh air Pìob-Mhóir Mhic Cruimein*’ he described the bagpipe as the piper’s *céile*, the fiddle as the fiddler’s *céile* (MacDhonnail: 65, 73, 74; Watson: 104, 110, 111).
- 23 Bearing in mind Text G2 (line 24, note), I think the implication of Martin’s being behind the door is a threat to the client to pay up and cause no trouble.
- 25 JGC’s translation of this stanza was: “‘That is his excuse,’ said she. / Hu fudar! Hei fedar! / Up with you, you cajoler! / Fierce icinesses rose / On Donald, / He levelled at Margaret / Fair abuse!” Perhaps the less said the better.
- 26 As it stands this line is meaningless. If the rhyme is on the sound *é*, going with the previous stanza, perhaps what we have is *feudail* ‘darling’. If it is on *ò* to go with *this* stanza, which is semantically more likely, it could be the vocative case of *pòitear* ‘a hard drinker’.
- 27 I take *cuisnean* to be the same as *cuislean*, defined by Dwelly (1977: 296) as a little vein or artery, a chanter or a little pipe.
- 33 Carmichael’s *crambail* may be a misreading of *crambait* in JGC’s lost original. JGC’s ‘t’ could easily be mistaken for ‘l’ in an unfamiliar word (Black 2005: 639). Dwelly gives *crambaid* as ‘metal on the end of a sword-sheath or -stick, ferrule’ (260). It is the English word ‘crampet’. The metaphor is of a harp-key, a key for tuning a harp, presumably inspired by the Blind Harper’s hilarious song ‘*Féill nan Crann*’, where he tells how he lost his *crann* or harp-key and the women of Dunvegan clubbed together to send to Barra for a new one (Matheson 1970: 12–19). It is full of doubles entendres like: *Chaidh ionnstramaid o ghleus / On chaill e fhéin a chrann*. “His instrument has gone out of tune / Since he lost his harp-key.” There is a possible inference that if a man had lost his sexual potency he would find it again in Barra, perhaps because at that period, c. 1700, religious sanctions against promiscuity were in particularly short supply in Catholic areas, or perhaps because the MacNeil of the day encouraged promiscuity or failed to control it. This is of some interest given that in more recent times Barra and neighbouring Vatersay were the source of texts G1 and G2.
- 35 JGC’s translation of this stanza was: “‘You have done a mischief,’ said the clerk, / ‘That I don’t regret! / Utter ruin has come upon you / With your broken stick!’” His ‘clerk’ for ‘harper’ was a slip of the pen, I think, due to the similarity of sound between *clàrsach* and ‘clerk’. The harper is clearly the owner of the harp, that is, the pimp who runs the brothel. He does not care whether the clients perform or not, as long as they pay.

- 39 JGC's translation of this stanza is good. It sounds to me as if the pimp/landlord is persuading the drunken client to take even more drink on the basis that it will actually bring back his potency.
- 43 Again, JGC's translation of this stanza is good. Whether he had suspicions about what it really meant, we will never know. He was already eleven years dead when it was published in 1902, which helps explain how it got into print.
- 46 With the client dead drunk and no use for anything, we say farewell to bawdry.
- 47 Obviously this prose passage begins something new. The theme is not sex but food, and I have made many changes to JGC's translation, which ran: "I went on Candle night to hold New Year revel / In the house of fat puddings, / I asked admittance at the door, / Coaxingly with fair words; / The big clerk of the street spoke / A senseless word: / 'If my gold crook were in my hand / I would not let your head whole from the door.'"
- 49 *Brosnach* is clearly the adjective from *brosna*, a faggot of wood. In many of the poorer island homes where wood was in short supply, loose faggots were the only door-closures the people had. Perhaps here, since the poet is saying that these people had plenty to eat, it means that there was a proper door but that the householder was so mean that he had jammed it tight with faggots.
- 51 JGC has the poet wishing that he had his *caman òir* or 'gold crook', but I am fairly sure that it was a *caman odhar* 'brown shinty-stick' or 'dun-coloured shinty stick'. New Year's day was associated above all with shinty matches (Black 2005: 536–37).
- 53 What JGC calls a 'north turn' is what we would call going anticlockwise – this frustrated first-footer tries to get his own back on *bleidire mór na sràide* by going round his house in the devil's direction to curse it, with predictable results. This is the first piece of verse in this new section, and it is clearly not in *snéadhbhairdne*. There is in fact a closely related text in *Tocher* no. 41 (1987–88, p. 286), got from Mrs Christina Shaw in Harris in 1973 as part of a more conventional Hogmanay rhyme.

*Chaidh mi timcheall na creige—
B'e siod timcheall mo chreicheadh:
Bhuail ordag mo choiseadh
Ann an aodann na cloicheadh.
Fhuair mi leagadh anns a' pholl:
Siod an leagadh a bha trom!
Dh'éirich coin a' bhail' air mo
dhrum.*

I went around the rock—
That was a disastrous turn:
My big toe hit
The face of the rock.
I fell flat in the mud:
What a heavy fall that was!
The township's dogs set upon my
back.

The Harris version does not make a lot of sense in itself, but JGC's helps us understand its dynamic. It started off as a curse, as I have shown, but by the twentieth century in Harris *timcheall* had been substituted for *tuaitheal*.

- 57 The translation is JGC's, and it stands up well. Whereas in Harris our hero falls in the mud and the dogs set upon him, in Tìree all the metal objects hanging in the doorway fall on him instead. Either way there is much noise and fun. That is clearly the end of this particular *rann Callainn*, which could perhaps be characterised as belonging to the 'aggressive reception' type, like Text C.
- 60 This is the start of a mainstream *rann Callainn*, again not in *snéadhbhairdne*, but very eccentrically translated by JGC: "Rise down, young wife / And honest dame, that hast carried praise, / Be womanly as thou wert wont / And bring our Christmas gifts to us." In fact he had already cited and translated a very similar one (JG Campbell 1902: 233–34; Black 2005: 532):

Éirich a-nuas, a bhean chòir,

Rise down, young wife,

<p>'S a bhean òg a choisinn cliù; Éirich a-nìos, mar bu dual, 'S thoir a-nuas ar Callainn duinn. A' chàbag air am bheil an aghaidh réidh 'S an t-ìm nach do bheum sùil — 'S mur bheil sin agad air chòir, Fòghnaidh aran is feòil duinn.</p>	<p>And young wife who hast earned praise; Rise (and come) down, as you were wont, And bring down our <i>Calluinn</i> to us. The cheese, that has the smooth face, And butter eye has not blinked; But if you have not that beside you, Bread and flesh will suffice.</p>
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Ìm nach do bheum sùil is properly 'butter not struck by the evil eye'.

- 63 Given his translation (see previous note), I think JGC believed that this line had come in from a love-song by mistake for *Thoir a-nuas ar Callainn duinn* ('Bring down our Hogmanay to us' or 'Bring down our Christmas gifts to us'). It should be remembered that in Protestant Scotland there was total confusion between Christmas and Hogmanay, especially after the introduction in 1752 of the Gregorian Calendar, which caused Old Christmas Day to fall on 5 January.
- 64 JGC's translation of this stanza was a little careless: "The smoothed-faced cheese / And entrails prepared with juice; / But if these are not convenient / Bread and cheese will suffice." I have emended as necessary; the important point is that our visitor is hungry.
- 68 Here the verse crumbles into prose, but what it says is fascinating. JGC's translation was: "It was not greed with open mouth / That brought me to the town / But a hamper on my servant's back! / A white servant catch me, / Fatness burns me! / Open and let me in! / 'True for him,' said the goodman, / 'let him in.'" As can be seen, I have made a few small emendations.
- 69 The poet insists that what he is engaged in is 'thigging', as in Text B. The hamper on the servant's back is reminiscent of a graphic description of thigging by the Rev. Thomas Pococke, who travelled in Sutherland in June 1760 (Kemp: 8): "I, this day, met an aged person, who had much the look of a gentlewoman. She had about her shoulders a striped blanket, and saluted us genteely. She was followed by a maid without a cap or fillet, with a bundle at her back; this was a sort of decayed proprietor, who, I suppose, was going round a-visiting; and as they are very hospitable to all, so they are not uncivil to such unfortunate persons."
- 70 With regard to the extraordinary 'whiteboy seizing me, fat burning me', Hogmanay lads disguised themselves with white hoods, cloaks and masks, a tradition which could certainly have sinister or aggressive undertones. These were picked up from Scottish settlers in the southern states by what became the Ku Klux Klan (cf. Hayward: 569), while their Irish equivalent evolved into the agrarian resistance movement called the Whiteboys. This is the only place where I have seen one of the *gillean Callaig* referred to as a *gille geal*, but it makes perfect sense – as does 'fat burning me', because, as pointed out earlier, at the heart of the Hogmanay ritual was a *caisean(-uchd)* or sheep's dewlap which was brought to the house by the *gillean Callaig*, singed at the fire and sniffed by everyone in the family. This was a fatty piece of meat, and here it sounds as if it was being used almost as an instrument of torture. So the man of the house says: "Let him in."

Thus, in spectacular fashion, do we reach the end of Text H. Thanks to contextualisation, we have reached a pretty good understanding of it. As a result of the exercise as a whole, a potential typology of Gaelic Hogmanay rhymes has emerged. Firstly there are the 'standard' rhymes, such as text A, in which the *caisean-uchd* is presented and a polite appeal is made for food and drink. Secondly there are the thigging rhymes, where the *caisean-uchd* is dispensed with and the begging is 'up front' and professional. Thirdly there are rhymes

containing elements of physical and/or verbal violence, including threats and curses. Fourthly there are sexual rhymes, and fifthly there is 'Duan na Ceàrdaich', which raises the possibility that other rhymes about doors may have been pressed into service in the same way. With regard to form, we have noticed the *snéadhbhairdne* metre being used for the sexual rhymes in particular. Prose passages may occur with any kind of metre, though in some cases these may equally be regarded as unscannable free verse or as corruptions of good verse. Text H lines 47–50 look scannable, for example.

Since I have proposed adjustments to translations published in *Tocher*, I would like to emphasise that this is in no way intended to reflect on the professionalism of any member of that journal's editorial team, past or present. The translations of Gaelic material in *Tocher* have been of a consistently high quality since it was founded in 1971, and remain so today. The blame lies entirely at the door of past scholars who have denied the existence of a tradition of bawdry in Gaelic literature, or suppressed the existing record of it to justify their views. For the latest discussion of this problem see W. Gillies: 160–61.

It may well be asked whether it is possible that Texts G1 and G2 derive from an otherwise unknown poem by the celebrated Alexander MacDonald (see Text G1, note on line 38). It may be argued that he was fond of bawdry, that he employed the 'harp' metaphor for sex, that he made copious use of *snéadhbhairdne* in his greatest poem, '*Birlinn Chlann Raghnaill*', that he was born and brought up at Dalilea, seven miles from Strontian, and that he served as catechist or schoolmaster/catechist for Strontian (as part of the parish of Ardnamurchan) from 1729 to 1745. Indeed, it is against the backdrop of the mines that he made his first appearance in fiction (Watts: 51, 90). On the other hand, it would have to be pointed out that *Maighstir Caimbeul*, 'Long Donald' Campbell of Text G2 line 36, lost his position as factor in the year that MacDonald was first appointed as catechist, so one promising connection appears to fall away. It seems to me that the most persuasive argument in this matter is the existence of Text H, which confirms that there was a popular tradition of New Year being spontaneously celebrated with the composition of *crossanachd* consisting mainly of bawdy rhymes in *snéadhbhairdne*. MacDonald may have participated in this tradition, just as he participated in the making of waulking songs, but there is no evidence that he invented it.

This allows me to make some further points from a more strictly ethnological perspective. Firstly, Neill Martin has asked (352, 379) whether Hogmanay rhymes from Gaelic Scotland reveal the vestiges of a dialogic tradition analogous to those associated with marriage rituals or with the admission of St Brigid to the house on the February quarter-day, involving 'the householders – perhaps mainly the women – in ritual acts amounting to more than merely lifting the latch'. Judging from our three poems, the answer is yes. Text G1 is a dialogue between a client and a prostitute. Text G2 adds the voice of a pimp. And text H appears to boast a whole cast of characters, including a narrator, a client, prostitutes called Margaret and Mary, a pimping innkeeper called Martin (also referred to as the *clàrsair* 'harper'), and a thigger.

Secondly, this Gaelic material makes a good fit with its Lowland equivalent, the Galoshins play, as described by Hayward. In the form in which it is known today, the Galoshins seems to be a late seventeenth-century invention, but the Gaelic material is suggestive of an uninterrupted medieval tradition, elements of which may have been practised at one time throughout Scotland. There is so much about sex and the cure of venereal disease in the Galoshins that Hayward says (566): "All this tends to the conclusion that the original action was the bringing of fertility, dramatised by applying black, the colour of sexual vigour, to the male and female sex organs."

Thirdly, our material could be fed very successfully into the discussion of festive misrule in Humphrey's *Politics of Carnival*: to what extent do these rhymes represent a subversion of the norms of social behaviour (that is, real social change)? To what extent are they a mere

safety-valve by which traditional society lets off steam once a year in well-defined circumstances in order to preserve conservative values intact through ‘symbolic inversion’? Humphrey seeks to find a middle road between these constructs by taking the sources for festive misrule one at a time and examining their specific context. This is what I have tried to do. And to *that* extent, I think JGC was on the right track when he wrote about Text H in 1874 (Black 2005: 532): “The allusions it contains to the ‘big clerk of the street’, etc., make it highly probable the ceremonies of the evening were remains of the Festival of Fools, and had their origin in the streets of Rome.”

Appendix: Correspondence of Sir Alexander Murray

Sir Alexander Murray (1687–1743), third baronet of Stanhope in Peeblesshire, was a Jacobite entrepreneur with a passionate interest in exploiting the mineral wealth of the West Highlands. In 1723 he purchased the estate of Ardnamurchan and Sunart from Sir Duncan Campbell of Lochnell. Setting up his headquarters in Mingary Castle, he made grandiose plans for the development of the lead mines at Strontian. With the help of his brother Charles and a partnership of investors who included the duke of Norfolk and Field-Marshal George Wade, several veins of ore were opened, principally at Bellsgrove (Bell’s Groove), and accommodation was created for 500 workers. The mines lost money from the start, and were leased to the York Buildings Company in 1730, whereupon the settlement became known as New York.

Things then went from bad to worse. In 1735 the unpaid miners took possession of the ore. In 1737 an Edinburgh merchant, Francis Grant, took over the management of the works on a sub-lease from the company. In 1738 Murray’s estate was sequestered, and in 1740–41 the mines were abandoned. They were worked again with occasional success, however, during the years 1751–60, 1767–??, 1800–71, 1901–04 and, finally, 1982–86, when up to sixty-three workers were employed supplying barytes to the North Sea Oil industry (Murray: 68–78; Cameron; RCAHMS 1980: 254–55; Cummings: 234–86; Clarke). Strontianite, which gave its name to the element strontium, was discovered there in 1790 (Murray). The spoil heaps and broken rock are being crushed and used in local road works to this day (Iain Thornber, personal communication).

Sir Alexander’s correspondence is contained in the seven bound volumes of NLS Adv. MS 29.1.1. It is a rich source of detailed information on his life and times, his family and contemporaries, his estates and enterprises. It has been quarried in the past by such scholars as Basil Megaw (1963) and Ian Fisher (RCAHMS 1980: 253–55); also on one occasion, thanks to information from Dr Megaw, by myself (Black 1986: 20). Regrettably it is poorly organised and uncatalogued, so it is hoped that this little guide to material of particular relevance to students of West Highland history may be of use:

Vol. 1, ff. 11–27, 40–42, 54–55, 89–92, 97, 103–85.

Vol. 2, ff. 102–10, 157–58, 176–248.

Vol. 3, ff. 101–27, 187–259.

Vol. 4, ff. 11–12, 70–71, 84–94, 98–99, 104–09, 114–18, 121–22, 125–31, 140–43, 148, 151–54, 157–58, 161–64, 175–76.

Vol. 5, ff. 125–54, 208–09.

Vol. 6, ff. 21, 73–156, 190–251, 260–61.

Vol. 7, ff. 33, 36–38, 49–60, 76–77, 80–82, 95, 122–23, 133–34, 137–42, 152, 161–63.

The following excerpts have been chosen to illuminate points made above about gardens (Text G1 line 4, note), Carnoch (Text G1 line 22, note), the head of Loch Sunart (Text G1

line 23, note), prostitution (Text G1 line 38, note), bark (Text G2 line 35, note) and Donald Campbell (Text G2 line 36, note). They are here arranged in chronological order.

(1) vol. 1, ff. 136–39 (Donald Campbell, factor, Mingary, 30 September 1723, to Sir Alexander Murray), f. 136v: “As to the Cutting and peeling of Wood; ’till Keepers are appointed, a Court held, the whole people old & young Sworn as is usual, ffinnes imposed and severely exacted, and withall private and trusty inspectors commission’d both over the Countrey People & publick Keepers of the Woods, I don’t really see at present what can be done that way further than publickly & privately to warn and exhort them which I have already frequently done.”

(2) vol. 6, ff. 79–80 (Donald Campbell, factor, Camustorsay, 21 July 1726, to Charles Murray, Strontian), begins acephalous f. 79r “. . . God’s sake let me have your advice – My own opinion is that the Barks should be sent off with the greatest haste that so the whole may not be lost – and yet I dread it’s rotting and turning useless before it can be sold off – In short I am heartily vex’d about it – The Rogue Will Rea is still and gives no attendance Once I clear Accompts [79v] with him I’ll turn him off – I am much vex’d at what has happen’d your face – ffarewell my dear Charles and may God bless you Return the bearer in the greatest haste and let me know how you are I am / Yours [*signed*] DonCamp. / Camustorsay 21st July 1726 / [80r] After a second Thought I think its not proper to take Wm. MacLeod off from his Labouring least he should make an Excuse of it afterwards for not fulfilling his Bargain Refuses his Expence – The Barks will not make near so many Barrels as was thought at first The wind proves so very favourable for my brother that I think . . .” Remainder illegible.

(3) vol. 6, ff. 81–82 (Donald Campbell, factor, Mingary, 13 August 1726, to Charles Murray, Glasgow), f. 81r: “John MacLean will I suppose write to you from the head of the Loch about what Tackling Anchors & Cables &ca. will be wanting for our Boats – which are already very near being useless for want of Such.”

(4) vol. 2, ff. 224–35 (memorandum by Sir Alexander Murray, acephalous and undated, c. 1726–27), f. 225v: “The lands of Strontian & Carnuck a pendicle thereof is possessed by one Mckay who has the stock of Cattle belonging to the late Dungallons nice upon Steellbow – The Baillie of Morvin being the said Girle’s nearest agnate did sett the said goods to the said Mckay & took upon him to sett it him for 5 years altho’ at the time of setting him the same the 7 years of prolongation granted by Sir Duncan were expired so that it was & is in my pow’r to remove [*‘all’ deleted*] him & all concerned in the said Wadsett – This I mention the rather because I was thraiten’d likewise this year by Donald Mcallan & Baillie of Morvin to be hindered from building houses upon Strontian ground – & the said Mckay did begin to give me opposition so much as to lead Wood from of my own grounds of Carnuck untill I fell upon methods of Bambusleing [*‘all’ deleted*] him as well as the Baillie of Morvin & Donald Mcallan – for first haveing heard of the Baillie of Morvin’s design of giveing me opposition in building houses at Strontian I pay’d him a visite & told I resolved to to take Strontian into my own hand and to take the Girle’s stock of Cattle from Mckay & put them upon my grass in Ardnamurchan upon the same terms that Mckay pay’d for them. By [226r] By this means said I to the Baillie I shall be able to satisfy Donald Mcallan for his loss of Ariundel by giving him Carnuck to join to his lands in Morvin – Strontian it self is more than I want at the head of Loch Sunart. This took with him immediatly, whereupon we promised all mutual friendship to one another – he promised to concurr in every thing with me in turning away the goats &ca.”

(5) vol. 2, f. 232v (at this point in the memorandum Sir Alexander is telling his unknown correspondent that he will meet the gentlemen of his new estate and tell them that he is resolved to continue them in their wadsets and tacks, with certain exceptions, of which the fifth and sixth are as follows): “Alltho by my wadsett contract I am not obliged to allow [*them* deleted] you any manner of wood – & altho’ I might pursue the wadsetter & other tennents for all the dammadges already done by cutting barking [233r] barking or destroying my said woods – yet I am willing to pass over all that’s past provideing you come in to reasonable terms for the future – I am content on the one hand to allow timber for all manner of houses provideing they do not exceed the number presently built upon the saids lands – whereof a list must be given me up from all & each tennements of the Countrey & mentiond in the Contract providding that no wood except Birch wood be taken – and that at the sight of Servants to be employed by me for seeing the saids woods cutt down – and at proper times of the year – I mean for preservation of the bark – providing likewise that the walls of all the future houses to be built shall be made of Stone & that no Creel houses whatsoever shall be either built or repair’d. 6to That all the Goats shall be removed out of all & Sundry the lands of Sunart at & betwixt the term of Whitsunday 1727.”

(6) vol. 2, f. 189 (Sir Alexander Murray, Mingary, 21 July 1727, to John Cameron, ‘Son to Euan Cameron In Respole’), f. 189r: “Dr John / Having hir’d a Bark for some time to Carry up lime Stone from this to Strontyan, and to bring down timber from the woods to this place – [*fitt* deleted] I must intreat you would upon Sight of this my letter get as many of the Countrey people as you can for dragging down the timber of all sorts that you can find in all places nearest the Shore that so it may be caried or dragd by little boats or in floats to the Side of the Barque and so put aboard [*thereof* deleted] of her.

“In the first place let all the Birch timber which was bark’d last year be draggd to the Shore – and at the Same time let all the pieces of old [*Squar’d* deleted] oak whither Squar’d or fitt for any use which you may find near the places where the said [*Barkd* deleted] peeld Birch dos lye be likewise dragd to the shore and Sent of with the Said [*Birch* deleted, *Barqued* deleted] peeled Birch wood –

“When you have drawn [*as much as you can* deleted] all the said wood to the Shoar, than [*sic*] let all the other Squard pieces of oak lying along the Braes of the Loch Side be nixt dragd to the Shore to be ready to be put aboard the Said Barque by the help of our little Boats – and so brought down hither

“but in case you have not [*enough* deleted] as much of timber for use of the above kinds got ready dragd to the shoar as will throughly load the Barque then [*load her* deleted, *fill* deleted] make up her loadning with the Oak fire wood which lyes upon the Shoar Side already [*and employ likewise people to* deleted] laid together

“[189v] I leave it intirely to your [*self* deleted] own discretion to agree as reasonably as you can with Such people as will work for Meal & wadges – and shall pay the money every Saturdays night – and have sent you up two bolles Meal to be given Such of them as wants –

“In short as you have been very usefull & faithfull to me So I expect you & your brother will continue to be so in your turns and [*now* deleted] you may depend if god spare me you shall not repent it give my kind service to your honest father and advise with him in this matter – so as by the help of floats I mean tying & Swimming a parcell of Birch wood together and dragging it after a boat to the Barque Side you may make great dispatch. [*I am* deleted] Mr Lachlan McLean will help you in the way we used in floating last year / Dr John / your assur’d friend to serve you – AM – / Mingary July 21st / 1727 / I expect your answer as the boat return’s but pray see she don’t come back unloaded –”

(7) vol. 2, ff. 176–77 (Sir Alexander Murray, London, 30 June 1729, to Mr Benjamin Kirkup, Newcastle upon Tyne, his adviser on the ‘Iron trade’ and therefore also on his woods), f.

176v: "I desire to know 1mo if the Bark will not pay a considerable part of the Charge and how much you think it may be worth – or whither you mean that it should be allowed to the undertakers – they paying me only the said 3 sh: per Cord – if this be your meaning tho I shall not even grudge them this advantage, yet surely by a good management they may make a vast profite – for I got betwixt five & six shilling pr barrell for the Birch bark which for a tryall I [*'sold' deleted*] sent [*'into Ir' deleted*] and sold at Newry in Ireland – and there is thirty six thousand barrel computed –

"But this you see naturally leads me to repeat 2do the desire of having as many of my former Questions anent Bark answerd as you can by the help of people dealing in that trade – which I beg therefor you would do as soon as you can."

(8) vol. 3, ff. 198–99 (Donald Cameron, factor, Strontian, 23 December 1729, to Sir Alexander Murray, Edinburgh), f. 198r: "Sir / After parting with you I made all possible speed home, not only to look after my own Family affairs; but also to put my Commission in Execution, that you had given me. So as soon as I came home; I went to Mingary upon Martinmass Day; shewed Mr. Campbell your Commission: And besides I sent my Servants through the whole Tenants of Ardnamorchan, desiring them, to tell them plainly, not to pay their Rents to Mr Campbell this year: or if the[y] did, that his discharge would not be valid; and that you, if you pleased, might cause them to pay the same again. Mr. Campbell told me, that he had taken up some Cows at May last; that he was very well pleased with your proposal; he would raise no more of the Rents, but Concluded that he would, within four or five days at most, take his Journey for Edinr. come to Strontian and settle all affairs in the most proper Manner; and give me a true List of all such as had made partial pay[men]ts to him of part of their Rent: But no sooner was I come home, than he changed his Resolusion, and declined his coming, at ye Time appointed: And as the Tenants tells me, he sent his Officer thrice, over the whole Towns of Ardnamorchan, chargeing them to come in with their Rents. Such as were his favorites, and did not fear what I had formerly warned them of, came and paid him their Rent. And such as feared double payment observed my warning and kept up their Rents for me. However by the way I see plainly that there is partiality amongst your Tenants, and that they are divided into Factions. At last when I lost hopes of Mr Campbell's coming up, (not knowing what detained him) I went down a second Journey to Ardnamorchan, and to my great surprize found, that he was Just waiting a fair Hour to go off the way of Mull, and not see me at all: His reason for so doing is best known to himself; he told it not to me, and as little I enquired after it."

(9) vol. 3, same letter, f. 198v: "I made all diligent enquiry about your Barks & Timber in order to answer your demands concerning them: as to ye first, I have not as yet mett with any, that could truly Inform me. The best intilgence I got, was from your old Servant Thomas Durham, who says that the Bark-Barrel should Contain 16 Gallons Scots, or 64 Gallons English, which Barrell of Bark might be stripped and Kiln-dried for about Twenty pence: But as to ye pryces of Carriage, and value to the owner, he did not pretend to know. And he says that ordinarily a Bark Merchant will be a wood Merchant also. As for the Timber part, I have gott no information of as yet. But how soon soever I can be informed of that affair I will send you word.

"However, be pleased to take a view of a Scheme that some Gentlemen of your welwishers, & I, had of your Bark-trade; which is briefly thus: That you should make Enquiry for, and find some fitt Merchant to buy a Certain quantity of Barks, either from Ireland, or in Scotland; and so inform yourself of the best prices, which merchant being found; that he must buy the Barks for so much per Tun, or Barrell, to the Proprietor, when it is ready to be putt on Board the Ship, or Boat: That he is to find Strippers, dryers, & Carriers himself, and likewise bear their Expences. That you should only allow him to make use of

such and such spots of your Woods, as you think may make the quantity of Bark he has agreed for: keeping only one Man to over See the whole work. The reasonableness of this proposal we maintain by this following Consideration; That you will be at great Expences for Stripping, drying, Grinding, Carrying and Sea Freight for the Bark; that if the Season prove moist you will undoubtedly Loss it altogether: it may gett Seadammage or be cast away when transporting and so lost: Besides if you should trust your Barks with some Sly Irish Skipper to Ireland, perhaps you would have the last account of both at departure. And lastly Merchants are more brisk in buying when they are obliged to look out for their wares, than when they come home to their Doors in our humble oppinion this is the safer way when money is gotten for Barks at delivery with little Expences and no hazard.”

(10) vol. 3, ff. 207–08 (Euan Cameron, Resipole, 4 February 1730, to Sir Alexander Murray), f. 207r: “Honrd Sr. / My Sone tells me that ye desired him to tell me that I Should Inform mySelf the best way I Could how undertakers would take in hand to make Each barrell of Bark by which I understand ye’ll not Get Each Barrel below two Shill: Ster: which will require a deal of money, and Some Irishmen tells me that the price they gett for Each Barrell of Birch Bark is Eight Shill: Ster: whither this be truth or not I doe not take in hand to Confirm it for truth, for the Irishmen that wanders here what they Say Cannot all be believed – To my Opinion If ye Could gett people to buy your Bark before Sirped [= *stripped*] it would be more to your Advantage for you’ll be att much Charges or [= *ere*] ye Gett your Bark made and sold in Barrels pardon me for telling you my weak Opinion – If ye donot think this Method proper ye’ll require to have faithfull Servants to Oversee your Workmen in Cutting & Stirping [= *stripping*] your Woods who by Some Experience may Inform you what ye will require to Give to undertakers for making Each Barrel of Bark.”

(11) vol. 4, ff. 128–29 (Robert Blackburn, Mingary Castle, 4 April 1730, to Sir Alexander Murray, Strontian), f. 128r: “Bartholemew McManus Gardiner is fully Determined to leave the service tomorrow and the Reason why because hes not Allow’d [expenses for] plants. I have Argued with him pretty warmly upon this point and told him that his Demand was very unreasonable Considering that his day wages was Extraordinary. Andrew the Gardiner is lying Indispos[e]d since he Arrived from Mull so that I am at Demur. Seeing theres a Necessity for a Man to be close in the Garden and particularly at this Juncture your Answer to this will be verry Satisfactory.” At f. 130v, in a letter from which the end (and therefore the date and writer’s name) is missing, is the resolution of the dispute: “I have half made a bargain with McManus who is to get two [or] thre[e] other men to himself.”

(12) vol. 1, ff. 54–55 (Robert Hunter, Strontian, 1731, to Sir Alexander Murray), f. 55: “Sir in Like your honour ther is one Nellie McMorhew who was house Keeper here when you left this She is now talking openly She got herself pepper’d in this family by the Laird and we hear others Say its your Baillie but agreed it betuixt you, for its non of mine but if it happen to be your’s I have procur’d one that will father it for you which is George Murray Suppose he has a wife of his own, he was married Last Tuesday but without all jesting he offers his Se[r]vice to you if ther be occation and if you can make her give it to him, Thers Some of the Servants in this family has found your Baillie in her roum at twelve acclock at night and She in bed and nothing but Darknes and a great many other presumptions I hear She is a very bad woman So it’s hard to Show who it belongs to, for on proof of it, She made her Self pass for a wedow here and yet I hear her husband is still alive and on his way from Irland to Struntian. So the farther in the deeper, I hear She has Sent a letter to you Latly which confirms the Story Most to me, if ther be Such a thing I wish it had been better managed.”

(13) vol. 6, ff. 250–51 (Edward Lothian, Edinburgh, 10 March 1760, to Charles Murray), f. 251r: “The Factor complains of our having cutt more wood in the five Years, than was used in that space: I dare say, You’ll not grudge the advantage of having a small Quantity on hand for the good of the groves; especially, when You Consider, the Trouble We have all along taken, of Selling Your Lead, which We have sold to much better Advantage than any Factor could have done, besides saving you the Commission on the Sales; Just now to force Sale, We have bought 600 Bolls Meall at 9 Shillings p[er] Boll from a person who is greatly Conserved in contracts for Farms, when at the same time, We could have gott meall above 1s6d p[er] Boll Cheaper, but We agreed to this Extravagant price, for the Benefite of Selling 40 Tons of Lead, 20shs p[er] Ton higher than any could fetch for it; moreover, as Your Factor got always the Bark, the proceeds thereof, would pay the value of the Wood.”

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Carnival and Other Festivity in Scotland in the Nineteenth Century

JOHN BURNETT

Introduction: Approaches to Carnival

In Medieval Europe carnival was one of the turning points of the year, beginning at the end of the Christmas season and finishing immediately before the self-denial of Lent. In the face of the impending privation, people consumed food and drink in large quantities, and a range of festive activities was enjoyed in public places.

Carnival is a complex phenomenon that varies from place to place and over time, and it has attracted extensive attention from ethnologists and cultural historians. We can set out its central features. First, it was a period for indulgence in food, drink and sex: carnival was a feast of the lower body in contrast to Lent's domination of the upper body and the mind (Bakhtin 1984: 368-436). Next, normal structures of power were inverted and rules were suspended: not only were all equal in the crowd, but for a few hours or days the idea of 'the world turned upside down' was acted out. In the late Middle Ages and Renaissance it was a festival when those in power might be openly criticised (Bristol 1985: 72; Muir 1997: 104-14). The adoption of roles led to the next characteristic, the use of masking and disguise. Finally, the whole thing was carried out in a crowd in which the individual's identity was for a time subsumed in the mass.

The various names of carnival characterise aspects of it. In England, carnival culminated on Shrove Tuesday, the day on which people were shriven, in other words when they made a confession before Lent. The Gaelic *Di-màirt inid* and the Welsh *Dydd Mawrth Ynyd* express the same idea, and the Danish *Hvide tirstag*, white Tuesday, indicates the purity of the shriven. The Czech *masopustní úterý* (maso = meat, úterý = Tuesday) is so named because it is the last day on which meat can be eaten. The German *Fastnacht* and the Scots *Fastern's E'en* indicate the evening before the fast, and *carnival* (English), *carnaval* (several romance languages) and *Karnaval* (German) indicate the giving up of meat. The French *Mardi Gras* (Fat Tuesday, the day on which fat was eaten before Lent), the Italian *Martedì Grasso*, and the Norwegian *fettisdag* (fett = fat) refer to the plenitude of food consumed on the day.

Some writers have given the word *carnival* more specific meanings which detached it from a fixed place in the calendar (Muir 1997: 86-93). The anthropologist Victor Turner, drawing on the ideas of Arnold van Gennep, looked at it as a phase in which reality is suspended, between two normal periods of social life. They both called this phase *liminal*. In van Gennep's conception of the *rite de passage*, it was the period in which change took place; Turner and others have seen the liminal as a period when change might (but might not) happen (Turner 1995: 94-130; Bristol 1985: 36-8). Alternatively, in his book on Rabelais, the Russian literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin saw carnival as a free-standing phenomenon entirely separate from everyday existence:

‘carnival is the people’s second life’ (Bakhtin 1984: 8). He saw inversion of all kinds as central to popular laughter.

The purpose of this essay is to suggest a way of looking at carnival, based on the ‘grid / group’ cultural theory of Mary Douglas, first proposed in outline in her book *Natural Symbols* (1970), and elaborated elsewhere (Douglas 1996: 40-9, 67-70, 83-90).¹ The concern of the theory – model might be a better term – is with people who share a particular attitude, or particular ways of looking at an issue, rather than with formally constituted groups (Douglas 1997: 128). It is concerned with how people relate to their social environment at a particular time, and not with amorphous units such as ‘society’ and ‘class’ (Ostrander 1982: 14).

Douglas’s analysis stems from the thought that ‘in all their behaviour persons are continuously engaged in trying to realize an ideal form of community life and trying to persuade one another to make it actual’ (Douglas 1996: 42), or to put it another way, it is all about attitudes to authority and power (Douglas 1996: 68). The two measures according to which she divides cultures are, first, the degree of commitment to the group and, second, the extent and complexity of the rules according to which the culture operates, or its degree of structure. By combining the two, four types of culture can be described and compared with one another, for a key point about Douglas’s model is that each of these cultures tends to be aware of, and often hostile to, the other three: to adopt one is to reject the others, and to some extent each culture articulates its image of the world by laughing at, or abusing, the others. Figure 1 shows them laid out in a diagram.

Figure 1: Diagram of Douglas's four cultures and the types of festivity that correspond to them

<p>Low Group + High Structure</p> <p>Isolationist culture: individuals and small groups withdraw from society</p> <p>Household festivity: Ritual in the domestic setting – perhaps widespread, but enjoyed separately in separate houses. There is no crowd.</p>	<p>High Group + High Structure</p> <p>Hierarchist culture: Strongly hierarchic, in which it is important for individuals to understand their place; it values established institutions and traditions</p> <p>Celebration: Conservative, accepts the existing structure: festivity reinforces hierarchy. There need not be a crowd, but if there is, its role is to approve.</p>
<p>Low Group + Low structure</p> <p>Individualist culture: self-seeking, action-oriented, accepts risk</p> <p>Spectacle: there is something to watch: the members of the crowd are spectators. All are equal in relation to the spectacle, and having made the choice to experience it, are largely powerless to act.</p>	<p>High Group + Low Structure</p> <p>Sect culture: dissidence, equality between members of the group and loathing of the inequalities in hierarchy. Hostility to structure means that simplicity is favoured, rather than formality and elaborate public display.</p> <p>Carnival: all are equal (partly through the use of disguise); and carnival contains the possibility of change. All members of the crowd are participants.</p>

The descriptions of the four cultures are based on Douglas (1996: 40-9). The outlines of the four forms of festivity are discussed in more detail in this essay.

If a culture has a low level of structure and little enthusiasm for the group, it is *individualist*. In it, people are powerful actors who behave as far as possible in their own interest, competing aggressively in a world in which there are few rules. This is the world of the entrepreneur, small or large. The opposite of individualism is a culture that is highly structured and highly aware of the group, a *hierarchy* in which everyone has their distinct place. Laws and orders are very important to its members and it tends to be conservative. Next is the *sect*, which shares with the hierarchy an awareness of the group, but is against complex structures. It believes in equality and simplicity, and is thus hostile to hierarchies and the way in which power is manipulated within them. Finally, there is *isolate* culture, for which the world is highly structured, but its members feel that they are not members of a group: they are detached observers with little or no power, at least in their interaction with the other cultures.²

Some of the ways in which members of a culture reject the others can be illustrated from literature. John Skinner expresses the opposition of the sectist to hierarchy in his song 'Tullochgorm'. All are equal in the whirl of the dance, 'it gars us a' in ane unite', but in contrast he objects to 'dringin dull Italian lays' with 'a' their variorum' – they are too structured, not impulsive enough. He objects also to 'worldly worms' who are in fear of 'double cess' – being taxed twice (McQueen & Scott 1966: 335-6). John Davidson's poem, 'Thirty Bob a Week', imagines the resentment of an underpaid clerk with a wife and family, living in poverty, classic Douglas isolationists. His frustrations are represented by 'A god-almighty devil' inside him:

Who would shout and whistle in the street,
 And squelch the passers flat against the wall;
 If the whole world was a cake he had the power to take,
 He would take it, ask for more, and eat it all. (Davidson 1973: i, 64)

This inner persona is hyper-individualist. In one of his most Nietzschean poems, Davidson tells the story of a young man who relishes living in the modern world, and rebels against his father's Christianity, seeing it as:

The vulture-phoenix that forever tears
 The soul of man in chains of flesh and blood
 Rivetted to the Earth. (Davidson 1973: ii, 297)

The vulture and the phoenix are complex cultural references: hierarchy uses symbolic and other complexity to create an intense net of relationships. 'Forever' is a word characteristic of hierarchy, for hierarchy expects to endure. The father dies, and the son is left in a world without the parent or God.

... men to know,

Women to love are waiting everywhere. (Davidson 1973: ii, 302)

This is the individualist rejecting hierarchy. John Gourlay in *The House with the Green Shutters* by George Douglas Brown is more worldly. At the beginning of the novel we meet him enjoying the impression that his twelve carts make as they go in line up the main street of the country town, enjoying them going slowly up the brae, so that people could see them for longer, 'the event of the day' (Brown 1901: chapter 1). This is classic individualist ostentation. But he 'could never be provost, or bailie either – or even the chairman of the gasworks!' Gourlay is an outsider, unable to join the small-town hierarchy: here the individualist and the hierarch reject one another.

Douglas's approach can be used to create a model of individuals' attitudes in festive situations and enable us to see carnival in distinction to other forms of festivity. *Individualist* festivity is dominated by the entrepreneurs who lay on entertainment for the remainder of the participants. The crowd is transformed into a passive audience whose members are focused on what they see: as individuals they respond in their own ways (Handelman 1982). Examples are a firework display or a play performed in a theatre. Here we will follow Handelman and call it *spectacle*. *Hierarchical* festivity occurs when those in power put on a show, such as a military review (uniforms, ranks, salutes to show relationships, flags). We can call it *celebration*, the celebration of structures of time and power, and of their endurance. Whereas *celebration* elevates and extols the ordinary and the established, *spectacle* is extraordinary or is presented as being extraordinary. *Sect* beliefs are found during the true carnival, particularly in its liminal

phase when the participants feel they are equal. This shows us that carnival can be contrasted with celebration: carnival consists of ‘fructifying chaos, rather than the rituals of status elevation’ (Turner 1977: 44). In *isolate* festivity there are no communal events, for they have retreated indoors to the fireside or the kitchen: it is nothing more than domestic ritual, like dooking for apples on Hallowe’en.

The remainder of this essay will discuss these four categories of festivity, and how they have operated in Lowland Scotland. Though some earlier evidence will be deployed, the essay is centred in the nineteenth century, and the latter part of it focuses on the largest holiday in Scotland, Glasgow Fair.

Fastern’s E’en

In the Middle Ages the Scottish carnival was held on one day, Fastern’s E’en. It was not one of the most important calendar-related festivals. Although the monarchy dined and jousted, it was for the common people less of a holiday than Corpus Christi or May Day (Mill 1927: 60-74).

Some fragments of evidence are available to describe the medieval festival in Scotland. In his account of the taking of Roxburgh Castle by the Douglas on Fastern’s E’en 1314, John Barbour described the garrison:

...dansying
Synging, and other wayis playing,
As apou fastryu evynis

The custom, to mak ioy and blis (Barbour 1894: 255).

There is a reference to a ‘tulye’ at Peebles in 1467, maybe a football match which got out of hand or some form of factional struggle (Chambers 1872: 156); and to ‘the fluring [decorating with flowers] of the tulbuth’ at Lanark in 1490 (Renwick 1893: 7). It was common in north-west Europe to hold contests on Shrove Tuesday— at various times and places tournaments, football matches, cock fights and bull running. At the court of James IV tournaments were held for which payment was made for the ‘dighting’ [cleaning] of swords in 1505 (Paul 1900: 476). One of William Dunbar’s poems is set on Fastern’s E’en but, sophisticated intellectual that he was, it is not a description of the festival but a parody of it. It is in the form of a play, the dance of the seven deadly sins, in which figures of power are lampooned. For example two fiends, ‘Black belly and Bawsy brown’, represent the Dominicans and Franciscans (Dunbar: 1998, i, 150; Ross 1981: 172). The poem ends with a tournament in which chivalry is mocked through a contest between a soutar and a tailor (Dunbar 1998: i, 155).

The annual pattern of festivity in Scotland was completely reshaped in the middle of the sixteenth century by the Protestant Reformation, which suppressed anything that might be associated with Catholic religion and idolatry. The three principal elements of the medieval calendar all disappeared: the Christmas cycle, the Easter cycle, and saints’ days. The repression of public festivity may not have been as severe or rapid as historians once believed, but it was effective in the long term and by 1650 survivals were few (Todd 2000). In Scotland it was the one religious holiday to survive the Reformation, albeit stripped of its religious content and meaning. There is no comparison with Zwingli’s protestant Zürich, where repeated censures did not prevent carnival from continuing on quite a lavish scale (Hugger 1984: 56).

The pleasures of Fastern's E'en, consequently, were secular. Cock fighting continued until about 1830,³ and local football matches were widespread in the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and are still played to-day in a few places (Burnett 2000: 87-97). At Musselburgh there was a football match between married and unmarried fishwives (Carlyle 1792: 19), an unusual example of gender inversion in post-Reformation Scotland. This was the sum of its public aspect, for Fastern's E'en had retreated indoors.

Fastern's E'en was not a day for heavy drinking, in contrast with most Scottish holidays. A slightly richer food was eaten, as the names of *Brose Day* and *Bannock Night* indicate (Banks 1937-41, i, 2; Fenton 2007, 168-73, 190-3). The *carcake* of North-East Scotland and the *skairscone* further south were made with eggs and in the nineteenth century with sugar. It was only a faint echo of the lavish consumption of eggs and fatty dishes in other countries. Also in the North-East, a wedding ring and trade symbols were added to the bannock, and those present took pieces and thus discovered who was to be married first, who was to remain single, and women could also find the trade of their future husband (Banks 1937-41: i, 7-10).

In terms of Douglas's cultural theory, the celebration of Fastern's E'en had become *isolationist*. The inclusion of divination rituals points to the acceptance of fate rather than a willingness to seek change. Though football games continued as a public event, shorn of their context they were no more than a way of relishing local identity. Fastern's E'en may have had its origins in carnival, but by the nineteenth century it was a completely different kind of festival.

Fastern's E'en preceded Lent. Lent was not observed as part of the religious calendar in post-Reformation Scotland. However, living a Calvinist life involved the individual in the continual awareness of his or her salvation, the kind of contemplative state which the Catholic church encouraged during Lent. In this sense, the Scots lived in a permanent Lent. There was also a formal Lent. The fasting which the Church had required was continued after the Reformation by annual Acts of Parliament which did not stop until 1654. Only then was there sufficient confidence in the food supply to end the conservation of food stocks which had seemed essential to keeping people alive when the food stored for winter ran low.

The New Year

New Year's Day was 'The chief of gala-days' in Galloway (*Dumfries & Galloway Courier*, 8 January 1833, 4c) and in the Lowlands, including the cities. However, it was not celebrated everywhere before the middle of the nineteenth century. In the east of Scotland Handsel Monday, the first Monday of the year, was instead 'that jubilee-day of the Scottish peasantry' (*Falkirk Herald*, 2 June 1831, 50b). By definition, Handsel Monday could never fall on a Sunday: New Year's Day could do so, in which case the holiday was taken the following day. In the North-East of Scotland *Aul Eel* [Old Yule, or Yule according to the Julian calendar] was still held as a secular festival on 6th January in the new calendar.

The New Year holidays had grown in significance when the Kirk abolished Christmas and the other winter holy days (Mill 1927: 85-96). For the first two centuries after the Reformation there is insufficient evidence to tell us how vigorously it was

celebrated. Then, as Hutton puts it, in the second half of the eighteenth century the New Year escaped from the Kirk Session (Hutton 1996: 32-3): the increasing wealth of the country, and the easy availability of cheap whisky, produced a festival of heavy drinking. Traditional folklore has largely ignored the extremes of drunkenness which characterised Scottish holidays in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In the first half of the nineteenth century quite staggering quantities of whisky were consumed – in the 1830s, an average of a pint of dutied spirit a week for every person over the age of 14 (Smout 1986: 133-9, 288). Heavy drinking was the norm on holidays. The historian of Moray remembered that around 1840:

the sternest precisian, the veriest churl, was bound to be jolly on Hogmanay. Even an elder of the Church might get drunk on that occasion without damage to his reputation (Rampini 1897: 326).

There is little evidence for the eating of special food at the New Year, until steak pie was adopted in some areas in the twentieth century. Excessive eating is not linked with any Scottish festival: before the agricultural and industrial revolutions Scotland was a poor country with little surplus food.

We can now outline New Year activities in the nineteenth century. They took place in two places: the home and the street (Hutton 1996: 32-3, 50-2; King 1987: 144-8). In towns there was a gathering at the Tron or in the square at midnight, and subsequent perambulating and drinking in the streets. Members of the town watch of Dumfries were offered refreshment: ‘invited to taste this, that and the other bottle ... some of them were in a better state to be deposited in the salt-box⁴ themselves, than to carry other people there’ (*Dumfries & Galloway Courier*, 6 January 1824, 4b). In the cities the lives of working people (particularly men) were lived in the street, but celebrations took place in the open air in some villages too. At Kennoway (Fife) in 1831 groups strolled the streets during daylight on New Year’s Day, treating one another to drams and holding raffles for a kebbock [cheese] or a pound of snuff (*Fife Herald*, 2 January 1831, 50b).⁵

Misrule was a feature of the medieval Yule and it survived at the New Year in the form of creating disorder (Hutton 1996: 95-111). At Dumfries, New Year’s Day 1829 was unusually quiet and there were none of the usual pranks such as pulling down shop signs, breaking lamps, and dragging carts into the street (*Dumfries & Galloway Courier*, 6 January 1829, 4d). At the fishing village of Burghead (Moray), boats were carried into the street and left upside down, and doors were barricaded from the outside (Jeffrey 1862: 12). This was also done in the North East, where in inland villages groups of young men took ploughs and carts to hide them or place them in awkward places such as in front of doors (Banks 1937-41: ii, 66-7). In Galloway, the practice only died out at the end of the century. In the village of Isle of Whithorn in 1895 it was said that, ‘the usual turnover of every moveable thing about the village’ for once did not take place (*Galloway Advertiser*, 3 January 1895, 3c).

Since the Middle Ages, New Year had been a time for charitable giving. An aristocrat might give food to poor people in the town on her family’s land, as the Duchess of Hamilton did at Hamilton in 1836, having four bullocks slaughtered and oatmeal and 80 cartloads of coal distributed (*Glasgow Herald*, 9 January 1836, 3e). Those of less wealth attended charitable functions such as the New Year concert at Lochwinnoch (Renfrewshire) in aid of the industrious poor (*Glasgow Herald*, 14 January 1820, 2c).

There was also civic charity. On New Year's Day 1846, the Lord Provost of Glasgow and the other magistrates lunched with the inmates of the Town's Hospital, enjoying a tankard of old ale while 'the veterans mumbled their pies and sipped their swats [weak beer]' (*Glasgow Herald*, 2 January 1846, 2e).

Increased sexual freedom was available at the New Year. At Dumfries in 1823 young men were "'prieving" [tasting] the rosy lips of their future spouses', and in 1824 'preein the wee bit mou [mouth]', and three years later it was said that 'Prudes may decry the priviledged kiss, which is part and parcel of the privileges of the season' (*Dumfries & Galloway Courier*, 7 January 1823, 4b; 6 January 1824, 4b; 9 January 1827, 4c-d). In Edinburgh in the 1830s, men freely kissed women in the street (Banks 1937-41: ii, 94). A New Year song from Moray, sung by young men when they called on each guidwife, ran:

If meal an' maut be wi' you scant ...

We'll kiss the maidens afore we want. (Rampini 1897: 328)

As for that European phenomenon 'the ritualized mistreatment of poultry' (Hutton 1997: 157), it was in Scotland mostly carried out on Fastern's E'en, though in some places it was moved to the period around the new year. Cock fighting was in the East a pleasure on Handsel Monday (Burnett 2000: 82). Throwing at cocks was rarer: it took place at the New Year at Glasgow, where people were still walking to Govan for it about 1780 (Reid 1851-6: iii, 342-3), but it does not seem to have lasted into the nineteenth century. In North-East Scotland a reformed version of it continued well into the nineteenth century: the target was not a bird but typically a door, and the use of a highly inaccurate firearm turned it into a lottery under the name of *wad* [wager] shooting (Burnett 2000: 82-3).

New Year was a time for drinking, and so it became from the mid-1830s an occasion for teetotal meetings. At Galston (Ayrshire) in 1838 there was a temperance soirée in the schoolroom, with tea served at six o' clock. Each person paid sixpence and was given an orange and an apple tart. They listened to songs, recitations and a glee club from Newmilns (*Ayr Advertiser*, 11 January 1838, 4c). The sense of restraint became stronger in 1861 when the three hundredth anniversary of the Reformation was commemorated on the first day of the year. A report from Symington in Ayrshire said that 'instead of the people celebrating the opries of Bacchus, they had set the day apart for fasting and the worship of God' (*Ayr Advertiser*, 3 January 1861, 5d). This established the custom of holding religious services on New Year's Day.

'Festival is often a celebration of the overall unity and integration of cosmic and social order' and so is conservative and closely associated with hierarchy (Handelman 1982: 166). This is a characteristic of the Scottish New Year. New Year rituals in the home are about luck: the preference for a dark man as first foot, cleaning the house, and emptying it of dirty water and ashes so that nothing is taken out on New Year's Day (Banks 1937-41: ii, 27-8). In these rituals, people are working with the cosmic order, and trying to influence it. In other instances we can see nostalgia as a celebration of the time past when the cosmos was correctly ordered. Robert Burns's poem 'The Auld Farmer's New-Year Salutation ...' is concerned with the time when both the farmer and his horse were young (Burns 1968: i, 158). 'Auld Lang Syne' is about ourselves when young, and were all equal: 'We twa' hae paidled [paddled] in the burn' (Burns 1968: i, 443-4). The poem and the song are nostalgic and conformist, accepting the world as it is. Or as

another Ayrshire poet wrote at New Year 1838:

Fond memory spreads her treasures in my view,
Leading me through the scenes of other days –
Bidding past years their silent flights renew (Murray 1838).

Whereas the English Christmas was reinvented around 1840 as a celebration of the family (Hutton 1996: 112-23), the emphasis at New Year was largely on the community, and on the individual and collective ability to survive. As Vladimir Propp has argued, the continuation of the community underlies many traditional festivities (Propp 1987). Yet in the nineteenth century the New Year was by far the most complicated holiday in Scotland, and the activities associated with it were diverse both in their nature and origin. The killing of cocks, and the sexual freedom enjoyed by men, both suggest that some practices had been moved from Fastern's E'en. An element of carnival was present, mixed with celebration of a limited form of hierarchy which sought a stable society and a reliable cosmos.

The King's Birthday

If we adopt the test of survival for three generations, the king's birthday was by 1800 a traditional holiday (Whatley 1994). It had become a public event when Charles II's birthday was celebrated in Scots burghs as a demonstration of political loyalty, and his successors were similarly honoured, particularly in Glasgow, which was conspicuously loyal to the House of Hanover. At the end of the eighteenth century, regular soldiers and volunteers marched through the city in the morning, each corps with its own gathering music. The soldiers assembled on Glasgow Green and fired three volleys. They marched to the streets around the Cross, and fired another three. Bells were rung from five o'clock in the evening, and at six the Council appeared in front of the Tolbooth, drank the king's health, and threw their glasses into the crowd (Reid 1851: i, 216-8).⁶ Elsewhere industrial employers supplied drink and food for their men (Whatley 1992: 171-2). One might call this part of the king's birthday a hierarchical celebration, for it is based on, and emphasises, the established structure of society.

After the French Revolution the second half of the day's proceedings developed a vigour that was not paralleled in England, at least in the provinces (Whatley 1994: 91). When the dignitaries retired for further toasting in private, the people stayed on the streets, firing guns and letting off fireworks. The liveliest scenes were in Glasgow (*Inverness Courier*, 23 November 1820, 3a). In the middle of the evening the mob brought tar barrels to the Cross to start a bonfire to which were added carts, loose shutters, signboards, ladders, pieces of scaffolding, and sometimes even a watchman's box (Reid 1851: i, 218-9). The Town Council did not try to stop the festivity, though in 1813 they attempted to set limits to it. The Council placed notices in the newspaper, saying that the violence and outrages of recent years would no longer be tolerated, and warning parents and masters of apprentices to control young men (*Glasgow Herald*, 4 June 1813, 3a). In 1818 the *Herald* said that the mob had 'rather too little regard for the rights of property, when any thing combustible came in the way.' At 11.30 the Magistrates told the fire brigade to dowse the bonfire, and with a jet which reached 40 feet high it was put out, 'the people going home perfectly quiet and somewhat astonished' (*Glasgow Herald*, 5 June 1818, 2d). The Glasgow mob was intensely loyal

to the crown (Whatley 1994: 99): if protest was part of the point of the riot, it was against local masters and perhaps the rioters' own poverty. There was a hint of this in 1819 when some of the new paling round the Green was torn out and added to the fire, as a gesture of resentment at the enclosure of a public space (*Glasgow Herald*, 7 June 1819, 2c-d).

Political change was not the purpose of the riot. As Christopher Whatley points out, the riot was a form of carnival (Whatley 1992: 185), with the people in control of the streets, and equality of dress enforced by knocking off hats. The astonishment of the crowd at the intervention of the fire engine suggests that they knew that the carnival, like all carnivals, had come to the end of its short life. This was expressed clearly in 1819 when youths from the mob helped to douse the fire. That year the bonfire had been particularly large, and the *Herald* suggested that the Council in future should supply coal so there would be less destruction to property. Even though a spirit dealer's premises had been broken into and emptied of cash, whisky and rum, the newspaper said that the mob did not bear ill-will towards any individual, and that 'mischief [had been] merely subservient to amusement' (*Glasgow Herald*, 7 June 1819, 2d). In this period the riots which were genuine protest were very few with the exception of reactions to specific events or problems, such as shortage of meal or the activities of the press gang (Logue 1979).

Fighting and destruction were common at the end of public events all of Europe, in particular at fairs and horse races, and Scotland was no exception. For example, before 1815, each year the final act of Leith Races was a battle in the streets when the merchants' *crammes* [booths] were demolished and the people fought among themselves to their own satisfaction: fighting was a pleasure and was the chief content of Fastern's E'en ba' games. In a free fight, all are equal. In looking at the bonfire at Glasgow Cross, we should not focus on the fire but on the destruction of property, another gesture towards equality. The crowd was hostile to both the hierarchy (the Council) and individualism (the spirit merchant) even though it did not usually have a specific grievance. Violence and levelling are characteristic of carnival (Muir 1997: 104-14). So in Douglas's terms the king's birthday was a secular carnival, in which a heavy emphasis was placed upon equality.

Glasgow Fair in the City

Glasgow began to grow rapidly around 1760, and by the 1821 census it had overtaken Edinburgh in size (Maver 2000: 83). Its population was then 147,000, and rapid and continuous growth brought the total to over one million in 1912. In parallel with the city, in the middle of the nineteenth century Glasgow Fair grew to be the largest fair in Scotland. It dated from the twelfth century, when it started eight days after the feasts of St Peter and St Paul (29/30 June), and after the reform of the calendar in 1753 it was held in the middle of July. By 1820 it was in decline as a livestock and hiring fair, but was expanding rapidly as a fair for pleasure: between 1840 and 1860 it was enormous (King 1987: 157-62, Burnett, 2004-5).

By this stage, the Fair was not held in the centre of the city, but at the foot of the Saltmarket, on the edge of Glasgow Green. The Green is a space about a mile long and quarter of a mile wide: the Saltmarket forms its short west side, and the River Clyde the

long south side. In the middle of the Green was the Nelson monument (1806), an obelisk 144 feet high. On the west side of the Saltmarket stood the Judiciary Court, built in 1809-14: in the 1820s it was one of the two or three largest buildings in the city; and with its massive Greek portico visible right across the Green, it was the one with the most impact. The space beside it was Jail Square, the place of public execution where criminals died 'facing the monument'. This was not a neutral space in which to hold a fair: the booths and tents had symbols of power behind them.

During the Fair, the crowd was dense in the street, inside the booths, and in the dances in the public houses in the Saltmarket. The denseness enforced equality:

... the penny admission levels all distinctions. The man well done up in superfine finds himself in a close pack, with a baker in his working coat in front, and a sweep behind, and however agonised at the embrace, he must just wait till a new reel of the crowd relieves him (*Glasgow Herald*, 18 July 1845, 2d).

Once in the concentrated mass of people, the individual experienced 'the uproar caused by several frantic individuals spouting through speaking trumpets, ringing bells, and beating furiously on cymbals and gongs' (*Glasgow Herald*, 19 July 1865, 7a). Inside the menagerie, on any stimulus such as the chatter of a monkey, the roar of a lion, or even just the appearance of a keeper:

visitors seem to reel hither and thither in a mass; females are screaming almost up to the fainting climax, the whole varied by the hearty maledictions of those who have no shoes against those who wear them (*Glasgow Herald*, 18 July 1845, 2d).

This is carnival itself: equality, sexual excitement, lack of control of the body and disorientation caused by the various noises all separated the participants from mundane reality. The visual confusion of the brightly-painted booths intensified the experience, as did the supply of cheap whisky. Nor were the performers mere actors, as was seen in the case of the showman David Prince Miller. He rose to being a manager of a legitimate theatre, but by the Fair of 1847 he was down on his luck, sunk in debt, without his props and still performing the magic tricks he had performed ten years before. The Glasgow people supported him, and if someone raised a critical voice 'he was soon given to understand ... by jostling, bonneting &c., that it was most prudent to keep quiet' (Miller 1849: 141). The player and the people were still close to one another and they shared the experience of the Fair. Indeed, many of the ballad-singers, fiddlers and pipers at Glasgow Fair were working people who for a few days earned coppers in a different way (*Glasgow Herald*, 13 July 1838, 2e).

Around 1840 there were two developments, stemming from the emergence of different kinds of entrepreneurial showmen. First, the drama and other performances were shown to much larger audiences. Second, visitors to shows began to report their experience with disappointment.

The minor shows of the 1820s were driven out by theatres that offered more for the same price – a penny. By 1844 there were four large temporary structures, one of which seated 1500 people (*Glasgow Herald*, 12 July 1844, 2d). The entertainment at Glasgow Fair was becoming more professional and more commercial: in the new theatres there was a greater distance between the crowd and popular-culture professionals. These theatres put on eight to ten performances per day, so each one must have lasted an hour or a little more (*Glasgow Herald*, 14 July 1843, 2d), though Prince Miller said he had

performed *Richard the Third* twenty times in seven hours (Miller 1849: 111). This is the discipline of the sweatshop applied to the fairground. The transformation was brought about by the activity of entrepreneurs, and they were beginning to be active in many forms of popular culture, in this period creating the music hall, professional sport, the popular press and the seaside holiday (Cunningham 1980: 151-78).

The most conspicuous figure in Scottish entertainment in the middle of the nineteenth century was the magician and actor, John Henry Anderson (1814-74), 'The Wizard of the North' (Bayer 1990; King 1987: 155; Maver 2000: 102-4). Anderson had the confidence to invest heavily in handbills and in newspaper advertising, and in illusions for the stage; he was willing to seek new forms of entertainment; and he took huge risks. Having built up his act in Scotland, he first appeared in London in 1840, managing his own show, and with the profits was able to build a theatre in Glasgow. In 1845, without realising what it was doing, the Town Council gave Anderson permission to build a theatre of brick, rather than a temporary wooden one, at one end of the Green. There was a popular outcry: 'A council green the Green hath sold' said a lampoon (*Glasgow Dramatic Review*, 11 June 1845, 162). It was a huge structure with a stage 50 feet deep, and could hold 5000 people. It was said to be the largest theatre in Britain outside London (Pagan 1847: 110-1). It opened on 12 July 1845 – unfinished, but the Fair was about to start – and it burned down four months later, on 19 November. The conflagration drew a crowd of thousands, and there was general satisfaction at the removal of the theatre from a space that the people believed was their own (King 1987: 154-5).

One can interpret this as the conflict between an entrepreneur and the people he is exploiting, first by encroaching on their space, and secondly by charging a higher admission than the other shows. In dozens of towns and cities, the joint action of capitalists and councils was removing public open spaces (Cunningham 1980: 81-3). Deploying Douglas's cultural theory enables us to see Anderson as an individualist, manipulating an inefficient hierarchy; and he produced spectacles. The poor of Glasgow, sectist or equal in their poverty, resented both the power of the individual to shape his own destiny and the bumbling Council that was unable to protect the rights of those at the bottom of the social pyramid.

One of Anderson's rivals was the Calvert family, whose Royal Hibernian Theatre was an ephemeral wooden structure whose size varied from year to year. In 1845 it could hold an audience of three thousand, half of them standing.

Immediately behind the orchestra is a dense mass of ragamuffins, fighting, tearing and screaming for the best places. These generally consist of children from 11 to 15 or 16 years of age ... the raw material, so to speak, of the artful dodgers, thieves, the loose women, and dangerous scum of Glasgow some five years hence ... Behind the youngsters ... are seated ... a very 'scruffy-looking' class, who may be the friends, relations, associates and instructors of the juniors ... Behind these gentry is a miscellaneous company of soldiers, sailors, navies, operatives, &c., who are quiet and orderly, and have no disposition to fraternise with the folks in front; and behind these again, completing the picture, are a few scores of respectable citizens, who have looked in timidly ... (*Glasgow Herald*, 14 July 1848, 2d)

This is not a description of an unstructured audience, but of a series of strata. The undifferentiated mass in the Saltmarket twenty years earlier had been replaced by an audience laid out in social gradations.

At the Fair, the entrepreneurs were in control of events from hour to hour. From year to year, however, the Town Council was in charge, and it exercised its power by controlling space and limiting the leases it granted. It stopped the largest temporary theatres, like Calvert's, from appearing on the Green. By 1864 the Fair was almost exclusively for the poorer classes, and the booths were 'rickety erections of bare fir deals, covered with patched and rotten canvas,' and not brightly painted, as they had been earlier (*Glasgow Herald*, 16 July 1864, 4f). The Fair was last held on the Green in 1870, after which the Council refused to let stances and instead allowed a fair on the eastern edge of the city, at Vinegarhill. The broader picture is that the Council started to be much more active in their management of space and the places where the poor lived: between 1866 and 1876 they caused no less than 6% of the people to Glasgow to move out of the worst slums (Gibb 1983: 143-5).

We can now turn to the content of the shows. Everything was exaggerated, complained one commentator, and nothing lived up to its bill matter (*Glasgow Dramatic Review*, 16 July 1845, 187). One tent was embellished on the outside with a polar scene of icebergs, whales, polar bears, serpents and monsters of the deep eating sailors. Inside was a solitary seal 'about the size of a salmon' (*Glasgow Herald*, 19 July 1865, 7a). A Glaswegian remembered seeing a booth on which was painted a mermaid with an admirable figure, combing her hair. He went in and found a one-eyed seal, so he asked 'her' what she had eaten for breakfast, at which the animal rolled over. 'A penny roll,' said the showman, 'More than I 'ad myself.' The seal-mermaid kissed him: 'Been chewing terbacker,' was the comment (Hammond 1904: 168-9). A feature in 1849 was the 'happy family', a group of animals who might have been expected to chase or eat one another, playing together:

The exhibitor informed us that the reducing of the fox to common sense nearly drove his own senses out of his head. This animal was one year and eight months under training ... [and] on three occasions he eat up the whole contents of the caravan, with the exception of the [62 year-old] duck ... The man positively assured us that the duck had been more than five hundred times in the fox's mouth ... The value of the flesh and fowl that had passed through the fox's stomach during his training, is estimated by his master at the sum of £107 5s 3¼ (*Glasgow Herald*, 13 July 1849, 2d).

The key to understanding this was provided by *Punch*. It printed the following, in which the sceptical Mr Punch is interviewing the unreliable trader who wants to put on his show at Bartholomew Fair; he is also Lord John Russell who was then electioneering:

Punch – You were a promoter of state conjuring and legerdemain tricks on the stage.

Russell – Only a little hanky-panky, my lud. The people likes it; they loves to be cheated before their faces (*Punch*, 1 (1841), 88).

The cheating and the disappointment were part of the show: the surprise was the method or the excuse. The entertainment came from the showman's patter. One kind of minor entrepreneur could minimise his capital outlay at the same time as pretending that that he

had spent lavishly.

The presentation of the shows was also an example of ‘the world turned upside down’ in carnival, an ancient technique for producing laughter. At the Fair, the worlds and pictures showed the wonder and power of nature, but the real animals were tawdry and exploited. The educated journalist experienced only disappointment, but the people must have appreciated the inversion: how else would the showmen have stayed in business? And the sense of inversion was all the greater in the shadow of the Judiciary Court. Thus, despite the fact that the entertainment was provided by showmen and entrepreneurs, there is an element of carnival about the Fair.

Glasgow Fair cannot be interpreted by identifying it with one or two categories in Douglas’s model: it included all four. Spectacle and carnival were on the Green, and they were made safe for the people and the showmen by the surrounding envelope of hierarchy in the form of the police. The isolate was part of the Fair too, hearing it in the distance, seeing the people going eagerly towards it and unsteadily from it. The whole was an intense experience compounded of the different forms of festivity, the stimulation of all of the five senses, and the crush of the crowd.

Glasgow Fair at the Coast

The first recorded trip *doon the watter* – down the River Clyde from Glasgow – at the Fair took place in 1816, when the Trustees of the River Navigation, along with other dignitaries, sailed aboard the *Albion* steamboat to Cumbrae and Toward Point. They completed their one hundred mile journey early the following morning (*Glasgow Herald*, 19 July 1816, 2c). An early example of ordinary folk going down the River occurred in 1833, when the owners of the Caledonian Pottery chartered the *Apollo* to sail from the Broomielaw at 6 o’clock on Fair Saturday, making for Millport and Rothesay. She did not, however, call at either of these places, ‘the object of the pleasure-trip being to draw the workmen from the riot and dissipation of the town.’ On board was a professional quadrille band, two amateur bands and a choir, but no spirits to drink (*Glasgow Herald*, 12 July 1833, 4d). The employer was the hidden force who limited disorderly behaviour, for passengers had freedom if they paid their own fares. These travellers stand at the beginning of the change from Glasgow Fair as a fair in the city, to a holiday period when the crowd left town.

Beyond Greenock the Clyde estuary opens out into a giant drowned landscape of narrow lochs from which hills rise steeply: ‘these form a picture on which even the eye of an ennuyee might hundreds of times gaze, and never become drowsy or tired’ (Fullarton 1842: i, 234). Rothesay and Dunoon, the principal destinations of Fair holidaymakers, were a Highland town and village less than three hours distant from Glasgow by train and steamer. This is what Handelman calls spectacle. The spectacle does not communicate anything other than ‘diffuse wonder or awe’ to which each spectator can respond in his or her own way (Handelman 1982: 180). This is the feeling of being on a Clyde steamer, or at the loch side, experiencing the sea and the landscape. The ship had become an itinerant grandstand.

A large number of people left Glasgow at the Fair. In 1851, when steamers were becoming bigger and the railway network existed in outline, 25,000 travelled from the

city by boat on Fair Saturday and 18,800 by train (*Glasgow Herald*, 21 July 1851, 5b). The city's population was 329,000. By 1868, when the peak of travelling covered Fair Friday and Saturday, 40,000 left the city by boat and at least 75,000 by rail (*Glasgow Herald*, 15 July 1868, 5a). By then, the holiday was spread over ten days, so the total number who travelled was probably around 200,000 out of a population of 460,000. They had to stay somewhere. Rothesay in particular became excessively crowded: from the 1850s those who could not obtain a room slept in the surrounding woods, and this practice continued well into the twentieth century (Durie 2003: 45, 87). In 1913 there were sleepers in billiard rooms, corridors, the woods and the cemetery, and it was said that public and private houses might hold more people if the wallpaper was removed from their walls (*Rothesay Chronicle*, 22 July 1913, 3b and e).

The railway and steamer companies were funded by private capital, but they were not, in Douglas's terms, individualist: each one was a structured hierarchy with timetables, detailed schedules of fares, uniformed employees with ranks and specific roles, and stations on which every function was allocated a space. They enabled working people to have a cheap holiday that they could themselves control, and during which they could make their own choice from the entrepreneurs' offerings (Fiske 1989: 76-7). At the Clyde resorts accommodation, food and entertainment were provided by small operators – families who moved into sheds and let each room of their house, owners of cafés, the proprietors of the shooting ranges, shows, nut barrows and sweetie stands (*Glasgow Herald*, 15 July 1872, 4f). Only at the end of the century did larger capitalists emerge or move in, as at Brighton, Blackpool and elsewhere, though on the Clyde the main investment was in railways and steamers (Cunningham 1980: 162-4; Durie 2003: 47-55).

Over the decades, the railway companies increased their role in Glasgow Fair. Year by year, more powerful locomotives, better operating practices, and more efficient organisation, enabled them to carry larger numbers of people. In the early 1890s they became the dominant steamboat owners on the Firth of Clyde. Although the small operators – the street singers, the rowing boat hirers, the café owners – were still an essential part of the Fair, the transport companies increasingly controlled people's behaviour because they could control their movement. At the coast, as on the Green, hierarchy and individualism can often be found working together, the first providing structure and safety, the second opportunism and flexibility (Burnett, 2004-5). In the years before the First World War, hierarchy in the form of royalty and the armed forces became increasingly important in the provision of entertainment. In 1894 and 1896, yachts belonging to the Kaiser and the Prince of Wales raced one another on the Firth, watched in the latter year by 100,000 spectators (*Glasgow Herald*, 13 July 1896, 6f). The military Volunteers trained at their summer camp, but they also provided entertainment. For example, when the Lanarkshire Engineers arrived at Rothesay, three bands led them up the High Street (*Evening Times*, 21 July 1902, 2e). In 1910 a gunnery range was opened south of Dunoon, with the floating targets pulled by a tugboat, watched from land and sea (*Evening Times*, 21 July 1910, 5d).

Going *doon the watter* was the form of festivity we have identified as *spectacle*. There are significantly different forms of spectacle, depending on whether it is produced by large or by small entrepreneurs. Small ones are flexible, have many faces, no fixed

premises (or use their own homes), and like the urban poor, they may have to work many roles in order to earn a living from month to month and year to year. The small showman is antagonistic to hierarchy because it tries to exploit and control him by issuing licences and making rules. Celebration, the festive form of hierarchy, distracts the people from the showman's booth. Large entrepreneurs, however, are able to manipulate hierarchy, or at least negotiate with it.

Conclusion

The value of an approach to festivity based on Douglas's cultural theory is that it provides a way of analysing how festivities differ on the basis of the way people experienced them. It can be contrasted with the deployment of the concept of social control, which has been used to explain the evolution and extermination of fairs (Cunningham 1977). 'Decisions and arguments about leisure were decisions and arguments about power and control, that is to say they were political' (Cunningham 1980:12). The social control model is based on the direct expression of the power of those at the top of the hierarchy. Douglas's model is more subtle because it enables us to see the several forms of festivity, and also the different ways in which they relate to power and self-interest. For example, it reveals that celebration provides an indirect way for the powerful to amuse and distract the people, at the same time as reinforcing their social values and institutions.

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NOTES

¹ The terminology given here is slightly different from Douglas's own, which has itself varied over time: see Fardon 1999: 259. For commentaries on the evolution of Douglas's model, see Fardon 1999: 110-22 and 218-23, and for clarification of its power and limits, Douglas 1982 (particularly Ostrander 1982), and Ellis and Thompson 1997b.

² One might wonder whether *isolate* is an unnecessarily negative word which emphasises the lack of contact this culture has with the rest of the world, leading to the idea that it describes individuals who are disaffected and powerless (Douglas 1996: 46, 69-70). One might alternatively think that it refers to a culture which rejects the manipulation of power hierarchy, the cut-and-thrust of individualism, and the structureless equality of the sect. In that case, it might have its own structure which is different from the other three, in which case the family at home would be an example.

³ When cockfighting is mentioned by earlier authors, it is either seen as an ancient Celtic tradition, or no origin is indicated. In the latter case, it is implied that since Fastern's

E'en is medieval, so its practices must be medieval too. However, the earliest reference given by Mrs Banks dates from 1626, and the earliest Candlemas cockfighting reference is in the middle of the eighteenth century (Banks 1937-41, i, 11; ii: 165-6). Robert Chambers says the sport was introduced from England in the 1690s, and implies that it spread from the burgh schools to country ones (Chambers, 1858-61, iii: 266-69). Perhaps he was right. Charles Rogers, who is not always reliable, said that cock fighting was brought to Scotland by the Duke of York, and was common in the eighteenth century (Rogers 1884-6, ii: 340).

⁴ The 'salt box' is the box-like base of the Mid Steeple in the High Street in Dumfries. It included prison cells.

⁵ The present essay ignores the problem of first footing. In the middle of the nineteenth century newspaper reports from all over the Lowlands said that it was in rapid decline. Yet it was characteristic of the New Year in the twentieth century. Was it revived? Perhaps, but it is more likely that the newspaper reports missed a change in the nature of first footing. Here is a conjecture. The original meaning of *first foot* is the first person met on the way to church by a wedding or christening party. In this sense, the *Scottish National Dictionary* dates its earliest use to 1719, but the connection with the New Year does not start until a quotation from 1792. So perhaps New Year first footing in the nineteenth century was conducted in the open air, with people greeting their neighbours for the first time in the year, and taking a dram with each one in rapid succession. As the historian of Kilmarnock put it:

As soon as the town-clock had numbered twelve, hundreds of persons of both sexes sallied forth from their domiciles to greet their friends and acquaintances, and treat them with intoxicating liquors (Mackay 1864: 112).

The newspapers may have missed the fact that the first footing had gone indoors, and become more static and – comparatively – less alcoholic.

⁶ The account of the king's birthday in Reid's book was written by Dr Mathie Hamilton under the pseudonym 'Aliquis'. He is identified in a letter from John Buchanan of Glasgow to Daniel Wilson, Secretary of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, 9 July 1851, in the copy of Reid's book in the Library of the National Museums of Scotland.

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ILLUSTRATIONS



- The Jedburgh Fastern's E'en ba', c.1910 [SLA C.10320 (107D2)]



- The business of leisure: the performers at Jooly Fair at Kinross, c.1950 are on a small stage outside their theatre – as at Glasgow Fair, and a hundred other fairs, a hundred years earlier [SLA C.12133 (90B2)]



- Paddle steamer *Vulcan* leaving Keppel Pier, Great Cumbrae, on a hazy summer morning about 1904 [SLA C.17971 (3A1)]

Brìgh 'Chiùil:
Vernacular Ear-Learned Piping in Cape
Breton and South Uist
Explored through *Seanchas*-Based
Narratives¹

TIBER F.M. FALZETT

Throughout the growing interest in the study of vernacular forms of intangible performance culture, i.e. the verbal arts, instrumental music and dance, in both the Old and New World Scottish *Gàidhealtachd*, attention has traditionally focused on the collection of the traditions themselves, often treating them as curiosities held within a Victorian curio-cabinet. However, little consideration has been given to local perceptions of these traditions, capable of revealing their function, meaning and context within the communities that have intergenerationally maintained them. This deficiency correlates with trends in broader scholarship concerning both verbal arts and instrumental music traditions in an oral/aural framework of transmission. Recently however, local aesthetics and thought have gradually come to be understood as essential components in examining and understanding any given tradition, and have begun to be discussed as distinct areas of inquiry in their own right (Finnegan: 131). John Shaw, in his “Language, Music and Local Aesthetics: Views from Gaeldom and Beyond”, notes the growing importance of such research and discusses how, within a Scottish Gaelic context where informants have grown scarcer in recent decades, these narratives can be compiled and compared to contribute in revealing broader unities of perception and understanding of these cultural practices:

If we accept that informants are capable of providing useful insights into their native culture, then internal views on ‘local aesthetics’, particularly when they appear with some consistency, can suggest relationships within the tradition that would otherwise be apparent to the outside researcher only after lengthy investigation. (1992/1993: 37)

Shaw’s seminal article concerning communal aesthetics among Scottish Gaels, along with several studies that have appeared in print over the past several decades,² have made valuable contributions in terms of recording and employing oral narratives concerning various forms of cultural expression. Such narratives on local aesthetics fall within the realm of *seanchas*, which can denote both communal knowledge and the act of verbally communicating such knowledge among members of the same community, thus serving as a means of reinforcing and transmitting shared identity and aesthetic acceptability within communities.³ *Seanchas* narratives can also occur between fieldworker and tradition-bearer in the course of emic-based research, where the researcher can take on the role of student, and it is such narratives that form the basis of the research presented in this article.

Although, as noted earlier, the tradition-bearers available to us today for consultation of their traditions are relatively few, the current generation of Gaelic-

speaking elders in these communities appear to universally recall a time when the various genres of performance culture functioned in tandem, maintaining a unity in the nature of their expression and revealing a distinct cultural cosmos among Scottish Gaels at the communal level.⁴ Theresa Burke, née MacNeil, styled in her native language as *Treasag ni'n Pheadair Mhòir Steaphain Mhìcheil*, of the Rear Big Pond, Cape Breton, recalled gatherings at her childhood home where various forms of Scottish Gaelic cultural expression occurred under the same roof in the course of an evening:

Theresa: *Bhiodh luadh shìos a's a' chidsin, no 's a' cheann-shìos, 's dannsa shuas air a' lobhtaidh a's an aon oidhche. Yeah, bhiodh sin againn a ch-uile bliadhna—luadh, daoine 'gabhail òran. Shin far an cuala sinn na h-òran uileadh, duine mu seach 'gabhail òran.*

Tiber: *Bha sibh làn a' chiùil.*

Theresa: *Bha a ch-uile duine... Gàidhlig a bh'aig a ch-uile duine, òg 's sean. Bha saoghal math an uair sin. Cha robh mòran eagail ort.*⁵

Theresa: There would be a milling frolic [waulking] down in the kitchen, or in the living room, and a dance up in the loft in the one night. Yeah, we would have that every year, a milling frolic, people singing songs. That was where we heard all the songs, one person after another singing songs.

Tiber: You were full of music.

Theresa: Everyone was... everyone had Gaelic, young and old. The world was good at that time. You didn't fear much.

Theresa's commentary reveals the value of *seanchas*-based narratives from native Scottish Gaelic-speaking tradition-bearers in not only understanding the internal perceptions of tradition but also in verbally demonstrating cultural attitudes within Scottish Gaeldom. The identified importance of the overarching Gaelic cultural cosmos discussed above will be kept in mind throughout this paper, although only one aspect of its whole will be discussed, namely traditional bagpiping⁶ in Uist (Outer Hebrides) and Cape Breton Island, Canada.

Associations and cultural correlations between ethnically kindred communities in Cape Breton and Scotland have never been fully explored. Linguistically, dialectal similarities in the Scottish Gaelic of certain districts in Cape Breton still correspond to, and maintain traits of, their districts of origin; i.e. one can still find aspects of Barra Gaelic in the Gaelic of Christmas Island and Iona, of Mainland Lochaber and Moidart Gaelic in Inverness County, and to a certain degree South Uist Gaelic in Boisdale, Cape Breton.⁷ It should also be noted that the Cape Breton Gaels considered here represent the final generation of first-language Scottish Gaelic-speakers in Nova Scotia with a linguistic tradition that can trace its origins in an unbroken line back to emigration from the Highlands and Islands of Scotland in the first half of the nineteenth century.

The island communities of South Uist and Cape Breton were chosen for examination not only because of their rich cultural and linguistic traditions but also because many of the last of the ear-learned dance pipers of Cape Breton traced their ancestry back to South Uist. Maintaining that community is an essential factor in the successful transmission of all cultural forms, and in light of the survival of certain representative dialectal distinctiveness in the language of some of these communities extant to this day, the author considers it possible to discover aesthetic similarities in

the vernacular piping styles of South Uist and kindred communities descended from Uist emigrants in Cape Breton through the use of *seanchas* narratives. Such narratives, recorded by the author over the past three years from Scottish Gaelic-speakers in Cape Breton Island, and South Uist, Benbecula and North Uist, Scotland concerning their communities' traditional piping, along with transcriptions of archive recordings, will be employed in order to reveal similarities in attitudes towards this recently lost art-form.

This article begins by discussing the relationship between Uist and Cape Breton through the emigration of pipers, continues by examining narratives from two of the latest practitioners of ear-learned dance piping of Uist and Cape Breton, and goes on to consider commentary and reminiscences of ear-learned dance-pipers in their communities from some of the last musicians of Uist and Cape Breton for whom Gaelic was their first language. The paper concludes by reflecting on some of the distinctive traits of vernacular dance piping. The voices of those who played the music, along with those who remembered listening and dancing to it, form the article's basis, providing us with insight to the nature and function of the ear-learned dance piper in the Old and New World *Gàidhealtachds*.

The emigrant connections between South Uist and the Canadian Maritimes were strong from quite early on, with some of the first of these settlers arriving in the first wave of emigration, as early as 1772 in Prince Edward Island.⁸ This was followed by the larger scale emigrations to Cape Breton and Eastern Nova Scotia in the first half of the nineteenth century. An agent of Clanranald's South Uist holdings in 1827 provides insight into the harsh realities faced by many emigrants to Cape Breton:

The people of this country [South Uist] will all go to Cape Breton, and nowhere else if they can help it. They are accustomed to live at home almost exclusively on meal and milk and potatoes. The expense therefore of sending them across the Atlantic will be much less than that of transporting the same number of people from England. I am of the opinion that from 30s to £2 would feed a full-grown Highlander for the ordinary voyage to Cape Breton and I should imagine ampill [*sic*] might be freighted for about 40s each passenger. If you substitute molasses for the milk they are accustomed to at home, and lay in a sufficient quantity of good meal for the voyage, I do not think more will be necessary. (qtd. in Campbell: 19)

Included in this major exodus from South Uist to Cape Breton were pipers, transplanting their social role and contributing to the social fabric of the New World *Gàidhealtachd*.⁹ Not only do many of the present day Cape Breton Gaels of South Uist descent maintain memory of their forbears' emigration from Scotland, but they also recall emigrant and first generation pipers of South Uist background being vital assets to their communities.

Joe Peter MacLean, styled *Eòs Peadar mac Theàrlaich 'ic Eòis Pheadair Theàrlaich*, an accomplished exponent of traditional fiddling in Boisdale, Cape Breton, whose forbears emigrated from Frobost, South Uist in the 1820s, and Angus Joseph Currie, styled *Aonghas mac Dhùghaill 'ic Aonghais Lachlainn Aonghais*, of North Side East Bay, Cape Breton, also of South Uist descent, recalled a MacLean piper in their local community, known as *Seonaidh Chaluum Ruaidh*, who as noted below was either an emigrant direct from South Uist or of the first generation born in Cape Breton.¹⁰

Jim Watson: *A' Seonaidh Chaluum Ruaidh a bha seo, an ann às an t-Seann Dùthaich-fhèin a bha e?*

Angus Joseph Currie: *'S ann.*

Joe Peter MacLean: *'Athair a thàinig a-nall.*

JW: *Bha sibhse ga chluinneadh a' cluich, a' seinn na pìobadh?*

AJC: *Seadh.*

JW: *An tigeadh e dhan taigh agaibh dìreach airson a bhith...? Thigeadh e air chèilidh.*

AJC: *O thigeadh! Thigeadh e air chèilidh.*

JPMcL: *Thigeadh e air chèilidh. Oh yes, uaireannan thigeadh.*

JW: *A' faca sibh riamh e, fhad 's a bha e 'cluich ann an taigh sam bith, daoine 'step-adh fhad 's a bha e 'cluich?*

AJC: *O bhitheadh, bhiodh. Bha feadhainn ann. Bha mo mhàthair.*

JPMcL: *Bhiodh.*

JW: *Bhiodh esan a' cluich 's bhiodh cuideigin a' step-adh?*

AJC: *Bhitheadh, dìreach, bhitheadh.¹¹*

Jim Watson: This Seonaidh Chaluum Ruaidh, did he come from the Old Country?

Angus Joseph Currie: Yes.

Joe Peter MacLean: [It was] his father that came over.

JW: You heard him playing the pipes?

AJC: Yes.

JW: Would he come to the house just to be...? He would come to visit.

AJC: Oh yes! He would come to visit.

JPMcL: He would come to visit. Oh yes, sometimes.

JW: Did you ever see, as long as he was playing in any house, people step-dancing as he played?

AJC: Yes, yes. Some were there. My mother was.

JPMcL: Yes.

JW: He would be playing and someone would be step-dancing?

AJC: Yes, exactly, yes.

This commentary is a remarkable one in that it links an early Cape Breton piper's playing aesthetic for dance-piping as corresponding to the rhythms of step-dancing¹² in Boisdale, Cape Breton, in living memory. Regardless of *Seonaidh Chaluum Ruaidh*'s place of birth, the above narrative reveals him as a piper who was either adaptive to differing forms of dance or was already familiar with the tempos and rhythms of step-dance music, preceding the introduction of formal and standardized methods of literate piping that entered Uist in the following decades.

The dawn of the twentieth century brought with it to South Uist, and a few decades later to Cape Breton, the introduction of formal literate tuition of the Great Highland Bagpipe. In South Uist specifically, this was accomplished through a series of piping tutors sent by the Piobaireachd Society, commencing in 1909 with Pipe Major John MacDonald of Inverness, all of whose efforts, as John Gibson argues, “worked to displace from prominence the older sense of complete Gaelic musicality that had been the prime Gaelic prerequisite, and that had driven a thousand unselfconscious traditional dance-music pipers of earlier times” (1998: 252). This transition between an orally/aurally transmitted style of piping and the competitive

literate tradition was perhaps a more gradual one that did not undermine ‘Gaelic’ musicality as drastically and instantaneously as previously thought.

In Gaelic Scotland, even with the introduction of formal literate piping, an almost universal term still exists in the aesthetic vocabulary of Southern Outer Hebridean Gaels to describe and distinguish an aurally transmitted piping style in comparison with a literate: *ceòl cluaiseadh*, or ‘ear music’. The use of the term in South Uist, Benbecula and North Uist would infer that both the literate and aural piping on these islands coexisted for several decades and that there was a need to differentiate them; otherwise the simple term *ceòl* ‘music’ would suffice. Joshua Dickson also likens the style of piping denoted by *ceòl cluaiseadh*¹³ as sharing similarities with the aurally transmitted instrumental dance music of Cape Breton (8). However, such terminology is not recorded among Cape Breton Gaels, who have more universal Scottish Gaelic expressions to denote the acceptability of music according to their communal aesthetics, such as *blas*, ‘flavour’ or ‘taste’, or *ceòl ceart*,¹⁴ ‘proper’ or ‘genuine’ music (Shaw 1992/1993: 43), or more recently *ceòl a’s an t-seann dòigh*, ‘music in the old fashion’, as noted by Joe Peter MacLean,¹⁵ one of Cape Breton’s last Gaelic-speaking fiddlers. However, it is the survival of the term *ceòl cluaiseadh* among Uist’s Gaels and the possibility that it could share links with the ear-learned dance-piping of Cape Breton that motivated the author to undertake fieldwork on the topic.

Before looking to the more recent personal fieldwork undertaken over the last three years, it would be appropriate to examine some valuable narratives from two of the latest practitioners of aurally transmitted piping, namely Kenneth Morrison of Griminis, North Uist and Alex Currie of Frenchvale, Cape Breton. The recording of Kenneth Morrison from the School of Scottish Studies Sound Archive is the only known recording of a *piobaire cluaiseadh*, or ear-learned piper, from Uist (Dickson 207). The Chronological Register of Sound Recordings provides some remarkable information concerning Kenneth Morrison, with the following note: “Ear Piper. Cannot speak nor read English. Cannot read Gaelic. Monoglot.” In the interview recorded in 1970 in Lochboisdale, South Uist by Peter Cooke, with the assistance of John MacLean, Kenneth Morrison recalls the changes that occurred with the introduction of literate piping to the islands. He also recalls having played for dances at the Taigh Ghearraidh School House in North Uist. In a recent interview with piper Tommy MacLellan of Huna, North Uist, styled *Tomaidh mac Dhòmhnaill ‘ic Aonghais ‘ic Dhòmhnaill*, he confirmed that Kenneth Morrison often played for local dances, noting, “‘S e piobaire cluaiseadh a bh’ann. ‘S e ceòl cluaiseadh a bh’aige. Bha e gu math ceòlmhor ‘s tha mi ‘tuigsinn na latha gu robh feum mhòr airson chluichd aig na dannsaichean” [He was an ear-learned piper and I understand in his day that there was a great need for him to play at the dances].¹⁶ Tommy also went on to note Kenneth’s remarkable ability at picking up tunes, stating, “‘Bhiodh am port aige nan cluinneadh e dà thurais e, chluicheadh e dìreach. Abair thusa, bha cluas mhath aige! [He would have the tune if he would hear it two times, he would play it spot on. Let me tell you he had a good ear!].” The combination of being both a monoglot speaker of Scottish Gaelic and an ear-learned dance-piper of North Uist¹⁷ background in the 1970s makes Kenneth an individual of notable significance. He performs several selections of pipe music, which appear to have been influenced by literate piping repertoire, and it has been argued that these tunes are not representative of the *ceòl cluaiseadh* tradition and that their performance might have been done to impress his academic interviewers (Dickson 208).¹⁸ However, it should be noted that he discusses having received a good portion of his tunes from gramophone recordings

of Pipe Major William Ross,¹⁹ which perhaps had a standardizing effect on his piping:

*Bha mise cluinntinn na records aige [aig Pipe Major Ross], records air gramophone, 's ann a bhithinn ga chluinntinn. Bha feadhainn ag innse dhomh a bha eòlach air gu robh e 'g atharrachadh nam port agus a' cur tionnadaichean eile riuth'. [...] 'S ann bho na gramophones a bhithinnsa 'togail nam port, fhios agad, na puirt cinnteach. Na puirt cinnteach a bh'ann, 's ann bho na gramophones a bha sinn gan togail, mi-fhèin agus gillean eile, ag obair air togail bho na gramophones a bha sin. Och uill, dh'fhalbh sin a bhalaich.*²⁰

I was listening to his [Pipe Major William Ross's] records, gramophone records; that's where I would be hearing him. There were some who knew him who were telling me that he was changing the tunes and putting other turns to them. It was from the gramophones that I would be taking the tunes, you know, the exact tunes. The exact tunes that were there, it was from the gramophones that we were getting them, myself and other boys, working at picking them up from those gramophones. Oh well, that's gone lad.

This narrative reveals the consciousness that Kenneth Morrison had concerning the changes his tradition was undergoing, providing invaluable insight into a *piobaire cluaiseadh*'s perceptions of his tradition. He cites Pipe Major William Ross's notorious skill at collecting and altering tunes from the traditional repertoire in Uist²¹ and goes on to note, "*Mar a bha am port air a dhèanamh an toiseach, 's ann as fheàrr e*" [The way the tune was made initially is the best]. Kenneth Morrison's repeated use of the phrase *na puirt cinnteach*, literally 'the exact tunes', in reference to the standardized and literate form of piping heard from the gramophones should also be noted. This could suggest a standardization that developed when recorded music entered the realm of aural transmission of piping on Uist, allowing a set version of a tune to be heard repeatedly with exactitude; much like reading a tune's score from the staff.

It could be that Kenneth Morrison's links with the *ceòl cluaiseadh* tradition were weakened when fewer of its practitioners were extant in the Uist dance and *cèilidh* circuits to maintain the traditional methods of transmission. He alludes to this and the traditional methods in which he received his tunes at first in the following narrative:

Kenneth Morrison: *Nuair a bha mise òg b'fheàrr leamsa a' phìob mhòr a chluichd na feadan. B'fhasa dhomh ga cluich 's chluichinnsa na b'fheàrr i cuideachd na feadan. 'S thogainn na puirt nam biodh piobair' eile 'cluichd ann a shin agus bhithinnsa dìreach ga watchadh ann a shin. Cho luath dìreach 's a leigeadh e a-nuas a' phìob, leigeadh e sìos a' phìob, dìreach bhiodh e agam as a' mhionaid, [...] a' cluichd fear no dhà. Bha an gnothach agam an uair sin. Ach nan cluinninn na sean phuirt a dh'ionnsaich mi ann an toiseach mar siod, nan cluinninn an-dràs'd' iad gan cluich aig duin' eil', bhiodh iad agam a's a' mhionaid.*

John MacLean: *Thigeadh iad air ais 'ugaibh.*

KM: *Thigeadh.*²²

Kenneth Morrison: When I was young I preferred playing the Great Highland Pipes than the practice chanter. It was easier for me to play it and I would also play it better than the chanter. And I would pick up the tunes if there would be another piper playing there and I would be just watching him there just as soon as he would let the pipes down, I would just have it immediately, playing one of two. I had the calling then. But if I would hear the old tunes I learned in that way at first, if I would hear them now being played by another person, I would have them immediately.

John MacLean: They would come back to you.

KM: Yes.

Kenneth Morrison's comments here provide insight into the nature of the transmission of *ceòl chluiseadh*, in the mind of its practitioner, an area of research that is under-investigated in all aspects of Scottish Gaelic tradition. In the above narrative he is noting the importance of having other practitioners of his art-form in order to maintain it. It should also be noted that Kenneth Morrison discusses both visual and aural aspects concerning the transmission of tunes, sharing parallels with the transmission of other forms Scottish Gaelic performance culture.²³ In both of the narratives examined here, Kenneth Morrison employs various forms of the verbs *togail*, literally 'lifting', and in the second narrative of *ionnsachadh*, 'learning', which can denote informal and formal forms of transmission in broader Gaelic contexts.²⁴ Although a good portion of Kenneth Morrison's repertoire came from gramophone records, there were still ear-learned dance-piper's in Uist emigrant communities in the later part of the twentieth century who received most of their tunes in their communal repertoire through these traditional methods.

Alex Currie of Frenchvale, Cape Breton, like Kenneth Morrison, was one of the last practitioners of ear-learned dance-piping in his district, yet he recalls more aurally and also orally based methods by which his tunes were passed on to him. Alex grew up in a household where both of his parents still spoke Gaelic, and his mother would sing pipe-tunes to him as his father would accompany them with step-dancing. He describes the method by which he learned his piping as follows:

Here's the way I learned: My mother would jig the tune as it was written in the olden days [...]. She jigged in words—in Gaelic. She pronounced the notes in Gaelic, and the note would be the same as it would be written in the book! The old people who came over from Scotland—her father and grandfather—they took that over here with them. She couldn't play the pipes, though. But if I wouldn't hit a note right, she'd say, 'That's not right! You gotta put a little more stir to it—a little livelier.' In that way I had the tunes more accurate than the ones in the books! But she had *no* books; it was all in her head! She'd jig tunes night and day; she had all kinds of them. I know that when I was in my early twenties I could play the pipes *all* night and a different tune each time, and I got a lot of those tunes from her.²⁵ (MacGillivray 208-209)

Although Alex Currie employs literate vocabulary, such as the tunes being written in books, there is no question that he is stressing the importance and accuracy of having heard the tunes from his mother's singing. It should also be noted that Alex could not read or write music in spite of his commentary. John MacLean, a grand-nephew of

Alex and a grandson of his brother Paddy and an accomplished piper in his own right, also maintains that some of the Currie brothers' piping came directly from a MacKinnon who emigrated from South Uist to Cape Breton.²⁶

The Currie Pipers of Frenchvale were descended from Curries, MacMullins and MacIntyres who had arrived in Cape Breton from South Uist in the early nineteenth-century (MacMillan, *A West Wind to East Bay*). Alex and Paddy Currie's great-grandfather on their paternal side, *Lachlann mac Iain 'ic Dhonnchaidh 'ic Sheumais*, arrived in Cape Breton from South Uist in 1808 (MacMillan 63). In the early 1990s, Alex was given a great deal of attention by academics and musicians alike searching for an older 'Gaelic' style of piping, including pipers Hamish Moore²⁷ of Dunkeld, Scotland and Barry Shears²⁸ of Halifax, Nova Scotia. Several published interviews²⁹ with Alex concerning his tradition along with a large surviving number of recordings of Alex's and his brother Paddy's piping made by family and friends are available³⁰. The Currie brothers' piping was in popular demand in and around their district of Cape Breton, including Boisdale and also Christmas Island, as a well known Gaelic-singer of the district, Peter Jack MacLean, styled *Peadar Jack mac Pheadair 'ic Chalum Ghobha*, noted,

*Nuair a bhiodh esan [Paddy Currie] a' seinn, bhiodh e math, ceòl na pìobadh aigesan! Oh bha deagh cheòl aige. [...] Uill, bha na Curries, tha 'n t-seansa, muinntir cho math a thigeadh mun cuairt. Bha an ceòl unnta 's bha ceòl aca 's rachadh aca air pìobaireachd! [...] Bha deagh cheòl aca 's bha deagh phuirt aca 's bha iad uileadh math.*³¹

When he [Paddy Currie] would be playing it would be good, the pipe music he had! Oh he had good music. Well the Curries were, I suppose, some of the best that would come around. Music was in them and they had music and they could pipe! They had good music and good tunes and they were all good.

If Alex and Paddy Currie's piping was the latest survival of this older style of 'Gaelic' orally/aurally transmitted piping, known in Uist as *ceòl cluaiseadh* and at one time extant in both Uist and Cape Breton, the remaining Gaelic-speaking musicians of both areas should be able to provide valuable *seanachas* on the nature of Alex's piping style.

It was all the above reasons that made the music of Alex and Paddy Currie a perfect means of entering discussion with Uist and Cape Breton tradition-bearers concerning their own communities' ear-learned dance-pipers, or *pìobairean cluaiseadh*. In the summer of 2006 the author set out with the recordings of Alex Currie and Paddy to South Uist to interview some of the last Gaelic-speakers with knowledge of this music. Tradition-bearers were sought out who not only had Scottish Gaelic and knowledge of pipe music, but also who heard in their youth some of the last *pìobairean cluaiseadh* on the island prior to the 1950s when the bagpipe was displaced from prominence by the piano-accordion and *cèilidh* band for local dances. After playing excerpts of Alex Currie's piping, Rona Lightfoot, a well-known piper and singer of the MacDonalds of Garryhellie in South Uist, responded with this, "*Bhithheadh na seann daoine, sin mar a bhithheadh iad a' cluich. 'S ann, 's ann, tha e uamhasach coltach ris*" ["The old people would be, that is how they would play. Indeed, it is quite similar"].³² Rona and the other tradition-bearers were from a post-World War II era of piping in South Uist, a time when pipes were still the instrument for dance and when Bob Nicol, the famous instructor of *ceòl mòr*, came

from the Royal Balmoral Estate in Aberdeenshire to South Uist to provide tuition to many of my informants in the 1950s. The narratives that follow are reminiscences of South Uist's *piobairean cluaiseadh*, brought to mind upon hearing recordings of the Currie brothers' piping from Frenchvale.

The late Calum Beaton, *Calum mac Eairdsidh Choinnich 'ic Alasdair 'ic Ruairidh 'ic Ruairidh*, of Stoneybridge, South Uist was well versed in all aspects of the instrument and was another student of Nicol's piping classes (Dickson 132-4). He was also a noted player for community dances and although he received formal tuition, his father, Archie Beaton, was a practitioner of *ceòl cluaiseadh* (Dickson 114-5), who transmitted many of his dance tunes to Calum, as he noted in an interview with the author.³³ This excerpt from a conversation with Calum provides us with some insight into the way he viewed *ceòl cluaiseadh* in South Uist:

*Nuair a thòisich iad a' seo an toiseach, ceòl cluaiseadh a chanadh iad ris, playing by ear. Ach 's e bha diofair, cha mhòr a h-uile duine. Ach nuair a thòisich feadhainn a dhol dhan airm thug iad staff-notation 's rudan mar sin. Ach an toiseach, 'se, mar a chanadh iad, 'se ceòl cluaiseadh a bh'ann. [...] O, chuala mise gu leòr dhiubh sin a' cluich agus bha feadhainn dhiubh glè mhath. Bha iad math. Bha, mar a chanamaid, 'time' aca. Bha iad air leth math. Bha togail aca, aig na puirt, nach cluinn thu 's dòcha an-diugh idir. [...] 'S iad a b' fheàrr leis na dannsairean nuair a bhiodh iad a' cluich le ceòl cluaiseadh, mar gum biodh e gan togail na b' fheàrr airson dannsa.*³⁴

When they began here at first, *ceòl cluaiseadh* they would call it, playing by ear. But that's what was different, almost with everyone. But when some began to go to the army they took staff-notation and things like that. But at first, it was, as they would say, it was *ceòl cluaiseadh*. Oh, I heard plenty of them playing and some of them were very good. They were good. They, as we would say, had good timing. They were especially good. They had a lift, the tunes, that you perhaps won't hear at all today. They were preferred by the dancers when they would be playing *ceòl cluaiseadh*, as it would be lifting them better for dancing.

Calum Beaton's narrative demonstrates an indigenous Gaelic aesthetic sensitive to the nuances of music and how pipers that played in this orally/aurally transmitted style were the preferred accompaniment for dancing. His use of the verbal-noun *togail* has parallels in its usage among Cape Breton's Gaels, referring to the "...invigorating rhythmic 'lift' that is the hallmark of the respected local fiddler, and translates into Cape Breton English as 'swing'" (Shaw 1992/1993: 43). Calum Beaton confirmed these parallels in musical aesthetic between Cape Breton and South Uist on several occasions, when he likened the swing in Alex and Paddy Currie's piping to the swing of the *piobairean cluaiseadh* he heard in South Uist, noting recently "*Bha e caran an aon rud. Cha robh mòran diofair ann. [...] Bha togail aca*" [It was sort of the same thing. There wasn't much difference. They had swing].³⁵ Calum Beaton in the same interview also likened Alex Currie's rhythmic foot accompaniment to other pipers who played seated for dancing in Uist, including *Aonghas 'an Gighat'* Campbell³⁶ of Iochdar, after seeing a video³⁷ of Alex Currie playing.

Neil MacMillan of Gearraidh Bhailteas, South Uist, styled *Niall Sheonaidh Nill*, who learned to play the pipes alongside his friend Calum Beaton in Bob Nicol's

classes noted a strong difference between literate and oral methods of piping. Neil's commentary recalls a time when *ceòl cluaiseadh* was widely practiced throughout the Scottish *Gàidhealtachd*, including the neighbouring mainland districts of Clanranald, stating, “‘*Se an aon rud a bh’aca ’s cha robh e gu diofair cà’ robh thu, ach na seann phìobairean, sin caran an aon rud a bh’aca air an taobh eile cuideachd, ann am Mùideart ’s Cnòideart ’s na h-àiteachan a bha sin. Cha bhiodh iad ach a’ cluich ris a’ chluas*” [It was the one thing they had and it didn’t make a difference where you were, but the old pipers, that’s somewhat the same thing they had on the other side as well in, in Moidart and Knoydart and those places. They would just be playing by ear]. Neil MacMillan, once Pipe Major of the 4th/5th Cameron Highlanders (Innes 25), notices from first hand experience the strong divisions between the competitive literate piping tradition heard today and the older relationship between piping and the Gaelic language:

Bha ’phìobaireachd na bu làidir’. Bhiodh iad a’ cluichd pìobaireachd cuideachd a’s an t-seann aimsir a bha sineach. Bha iad a’ toir barrachd às a’ cheòl o chionn ’s a tha diubhair pìobaireachd ann a’ staff-notation co-dhiubh. [...] Tha iad a’ cluichd a h-uile sion air a’ pìobaireachd sin cho square, ’fhios agad, mar gum bitheadh e dìreach cut out of paper. Chan ann mar sin a bha feadhainn dhiubh ga cluichd idir ach bha iad a’ leantail an òrain. [...] Chan eil thu ’toir an òrain am bàrr idir, ’s cha robh pìobaireachd a bha ’sineach nach robh faclan rithe. Shin agad. Chan ann ach mar gum biodh tu ’cur òrain... mar gum bitheadh tu ’cur naidheachd air a’ phìob. Bha ’Ghàidhlig ’s a’ pìobaireachd a’ dol còmhla, fhios agad, ach chan eil an-diugh. Chan eil guth air. [...] Tha e cho square ri bocsa. Chan eil ann ach dìreach to be finger perfect, sin agad a’ rud. Chan eil thu ’toir na brìgh às, brìgh ’chiùil às idir.’³⁸

The piping was stronger. They would be playing pipe music in that old method. They were getting more out of the music than since there is a difference of piping in staff-notation. They are playing everything in that piping so square, you know, as if it were just cut out of paper. It wasn’t like that that some of them were playing at all but they were following the song. You aren’t putting the song first, and there wasn’t pipe tune that there weren’t words to. There you have it. There isn’t but as if you would be putting a song... as if you would be putting a story on the pipes. Gaelic and piping went together, you know, but not today. There isn’t a word about it. It is as square as a box. It’s only about being finger perfect, that’s the thing. You are not getting the essence out of it, the essence of the music out of it at all.

Neil MacMillan’s above commentary provides some powerful insight into the divorce that has occurred between piping and the Gaelic language, and brings to mind the continuum of Scottish Gaelic intangible culture noted earlier. Neil’s use of the noun *brìgh*,³⁹ which can denote ‘essence’, ‘vigour’, and moreover as conveying ‘meaning’ or ‘story’ in the Gaelic verbal arts (MacLellan 24; Ó Laoire 79-80), provides some important aesthetic vocabulary for describing *ceòl cluaiseadh*, especially when juxtaposing it against a competitive style of piping.

Brìgh, fits John Miles Foley’s discussion of word power, acting as a lexeme capable of “summon[ing] enormous meaning, as word-power effectively takes

advantage of the medium's limitations to convey information and experience in a densely packed code" (Foley 1995: 110). Another example of the use of the word comes from Peter Jack MacLean, who noted, "*Ma tha thu 'dol fhaighinn brigh nan òran agus a' Ghàidhlig, feumaidh tu 'tòiseachadh nuair a tha thu òg mar a thoisich sinn uileadh agus am measg nan daoine ga bruidhinn 's ga labhairt. Gheobh thu an uair sin e*" [If you are going to get the essence of the songs and the Gaelic language, you must start when you are young as we all were when we started, among the people conversing and speaking in the language. You'll get it then].⁴⁰ In this instance, *brigh* denotes a quality in performance that is achieved through being immersed in a Gaelic-speaking community, being an encultured member of that community. In many ways, the use of the noun *brigh* along with the accompanying attitudes held by Peter Jack share parallels with Neil MacMillan's description of aurally transmitted dance-piping in Uist, emphasising the central role of community in the transmission of culture.

Catriona Garbutt, née Campbell, of Uachdar, Benbecula, styled *Catriona ni'n'n Chaluim Iain Chaluim Bhig 'ic Alasdair 'ic Chaluim Ruaidh*, a noted tradition-bearer of Gaelic-song and piping, similarly discusses the changes caused by the gradual removal of ear-learned piping from its position of prominence as the preferred accompaniment to communal dancing in Uist, demonstrating a shift in the attitudes of locals towards the *piobairean cluaiseadh* in the second half of the twentieth century:

'S e 'phìob a bhiodh iad a' cleachdadh aig dannsaichean. 'S ann dhan dannsa a bha na puirt. Dh'fheumadh iad [na piobairean cluaiseadh] a bhith caran adaptive airson an dannsa. Cha bhiodh iad [na puirt] idir sgriobhte. Bhiodh iad gan ionnsachadh bho 'chèile. [...] Ach a-rithist bhiodh iad [na piobairean cluaiseadh] diùid agus cha bhiodh iad ro dhèidheil air cluichd aig cèilidh no dannsa mar sin. 'S ann gun cluinne' tu 's gu robh iad caran gun fhiosda agus bha daoine caran 'coimhead caran sìos orra, 'fhios agad, 'Cha robh e math idir nuair a bha iad a' cluichd ceòl cluaiseadh,' this was the idea.⁴¹

It was the pipes that they would be using at the dances. The tunes were for dancing. They had to be somewhat adaptive for the dances. They [the tunes] would not be written at all. They [the ear-learned pipers] would be learning them from each other. But again, they would be shy and they would not be too fond of playing at a *cèilidh* or dance like that. Indeed, you would hear that they were somewhat ignorant and that people were sort of looking down on them, you know, "It wasn't good at all when they were playing *ceòl cluaiseadh*," - this was the idea.

It should also be noted that Catriona's father, Calum Campbell, although a literate piper, learned much of his repertoire of what Catriona terms *na puirt bheaga*, or 'the small tunes', from local *piobairean cluaiseadh*, including the aforementioned *Aonghas 'An Gighat'* Campbell and *Seonaidh Ruadh Dhòmhnagain* MacIntyre of Iochdar, South Uist.⁴² Catriona has written down a good number of her father's tunes in a notebook, many of which may form a repertoire unique to Uist, providing an excellent source for further investigation concerning the *ceòl cluaiseadh* tradition of Uist. It should also be noted that upon listening to the recordings of Alex and Paddy Currie, she was able to recall several versions of *puirt-à-beul* related to tunes played on the recording.⁴³ Joe Peter MacLean of Boisdale, Cape Breton, was able to do a

similar exercise, providing local versions of *puirt-à-beul* from his and Alex's and Paddy's home district of Boisdale, Cape Breton.⁴⁴ These both help support Alex Currie's commentary that describes learning his music orally from his mother's Gaelic singing.

Although we have no surviving exponent of this dance piping today, the *seanchas*-based narratives employed here add to the legacy of vernacular ear-learned dance-piping in the Scottish and New World *Gàidhealtachds*. It should be noted that much of the music of these pipers survives in some of the present accordion and fiddle repertoires of South Uist and Cape Breton respectively. Joe Peter MacLean notes how this pipe music has been transferred into the realm of other instruments:

*Uill, na muinntir a bha 'seinn anns an t-seann dòigh mar sin, dìreach na Curries, Ailig Currie agus Pat Currie. Bhiodh iad a' seinn port air a' phìob mar gum bitheadh m'athair a' seinn air an fhìdheall, 's ma dh'fhaoidte gum bitheadh esan a' seinn air an fhìdheall mar a bha iadsan a' seinn air a' phìob. Co-dhiubh, bha esan a' faighinn port bhuaithe-san 's bho fheadhainn mar sin, mar gum bitheadh an t-seann dòigh a bha sin.*⁴⁵

Well, the people that were playing in the old style were Alex and Paddy Currie. They would be playing tunes on the pipes as my father would be playing on the fiddle, and perhaps he would be playing on the fiddle as they were playing on the pipes. Anyway, he was getting tunes from him and from others like that, as was the old custom.

It is not only interesting to note the close relationship between the fiddle music of Joe Peter's father and the Currie brothers' piping, but also to note that they were transmitting tunes aurally between each other, in a method that appears to correlate with the methods of the *ceòl cluaiseadh* tradition of Uist. Joe Peter MacLean, being one of the last Gaelic-speaking musicians in Cape Breton, is invaluable in his ability to perceive his New World community's music from a Gaelic perspective. Having known Alex Currie personally and having grown up in a community with strong South Uist connections, Joe Peter understands the interrelationships between fiddle and pipe music and the Scottish Gaelic language, and how they have influenced and sustained each other and other forms of communal performance culture. Joe Peter is also capable of providing insight into literate versus oral/oral aesthetics in the transmission of fiddle music within his community, as noted in the following commentary concerning how his father and others learned the fiddle in MacAdam's Lake, Cape Breton:

*Ach co-dhiubh, bha seann phuirt aige. Sin mar a bha iad gan ionnsachadh—a' coimhead air a chèile 'dannsa 's a' seinn na fìdheall ma dh'fhaoidte 's a' togail. [...] Cha robh pàipear no sion aca riamh. Tha 'n t-seansa nach b'urrainn do mhòran a leubhadh co-dhiubh agus an tuigsinn aca—cha rachadh e 'staigh as a' cheann. Ach, chluinneadh iad òran aon turas bha e aca. Bha, tha sin ceart! An duine a thog an gnothach bho phìos de phàipear tha e gu math nas—tha cùram mòr air a' ghnothach a chumail ceart mar a tha e. Ach fear nach do thog e bhon a' phàipear tha e ga sheinn mar a chuala e e. Sin an diofar a th'ann. Uaireannan tha e gu math nas fheàrr na fear a dh'ionnsaich e bhon a' phàipear agus uaireannan eile chan eil. [...] Tha togail ann 's barrachd blas ann mar a thogadh mise e—cha robh duine a' leubhadh sion.*⁴⁶

But anyway, he had old tunes. That's how they learned—looking at each other dancing and playing the fiddle perhaps and picking it up. They had no written music ever. I suppose that many of them couldn't read anyway and their comprehension was such that they couldn't absorb it. However, they would hear a song once and know it. Yes, that's right! A person who can pick up things from a piece of paper is much more—there is great care in keeping the thing correct as it is. But a person who doesn't pick it up from paper is playing it as he heard it. That's the difference. Sometimes it is much better than a person who learned it from the paper and others times it isn't. But there's lift in it and more of a certain quality to it as I picked it up—no one read a thing.

This narrative provides internal perceptions of the difference in aurally transmitted music, noting again that such qualities as *togail* or 'lift' and *blas*, literally meaning 'taste' or flavour but here referring to the quality of sound, in the music is achieved when one obtains music through *togail* or 'lifting' rather than learning it through formal literate means, sharing parallels with other *seanchas*-based narratives discussed here. Such commentaries reveal much about the changes that have occurred in musical performance over the last century and also document aesthetic similarities in the style of oral/aural dance piping extant in both Uist and Cape Breton.

It would be appropriate to close by discussing a specific feature that has made itself evident through repeated listening to the recordings of Alex and Paddy Currie, and that correlates nicely with Joe Peter MacLean's above narrative; that although there are limitations given through tempo, time signature and key signature of music, and the metre and stresses of the Gaelic language in the playing of *ceòl cluaiseadh*, or aurally transmitted dance music, what adds the distinctive nature to the music is an individual's performance of it upon obtaining the tune from his community. This has been revealed in the use of terms including *togail* or 'swing,' *blas* and *brigh* among the current generation of tradition-bearers. Having listened acutely to the recordings of Alex Currie and having spoken to those who knew him, one of the distinct features of his performance style was that he could never play the same tune the same way twice, constantly twisting it in a different direction each time but still rendering it recognizable. This is evident in melodic transcriptions of one of Alex and Paddy Currie's stock tunes, "*Am Muileann Dubh*," or as Alex used to also call it "The Black Snuff Mill," where subtle melodic variation can be noted within a single performance.⁴⁷ Another notable characteristic of these transcriptions is the note 'G' sitting somewhere between 'G' sharp and natural in all of the brothers' performances, sharing close parallels with the 'G' used in modern *ceòl mòr* performance and perhaps revealing an older aesthetic preference in the scale among musicians in Gaelic-speaking communities. It was chosen not to transcribe the ornamentation or grace-notes from the recordings because if variation occurred in the main melody of the tune it is obvious that the ornamentation would vary even more so.

"*Am Muileann Dubh*" is well placed to demonstrate these nuances. Being the most widely extant tune in the archival recordings of the Currie brothers' piping and a staple tune in both Cape Breton and South Uist dance-music repertoires allows for further melodic comparisons to be made in future research. This also makes it the best candidate for examining the nature and mechanics of this piping tradition, fitting into the concepts of thick corpus and organic variation as discussed by Lauri Honko, who suggests that:

By producing “thickness” of text and context through multiple documentation of expressions of folklore in their varying manifestations in performance within a “biologically” definable tradition bearer, community or environment has created a solid field of observation conducive to the understanding of prime “causes” or sources of variation, i.e. the mental processes of oral textualisation and construction of meaning. (17)

Although the melodic transcriptions and the above *seanchas* narratives employed in this article reveal a rather forensic approach to thick corpus and the discussion of vernacular dance-piping in Cape Breton and Uist, they are still capable of providing us with an impression of the nature of the tradition. Taking the evidence available into account, it should be noted that a certain degree of individual expression, perhaps even improvisation, within the said limits of a tradition is the missing ingredient in this ‘Gaelic’ style of pipe music. That is, the orally/aurally transmitted pipe tunes of the Uist and Cape Breton *Gàidhealtachd* behaved as vibrant ever-changing entities from one player or performance to the next until they were frozen on the staff of a music manuscript, the reel of a tape recorder, or the grooves of a gramophone record, as noted earlier by Kenneth Morrison of Griminis, North Uist. Those who played this music in an orally/aurally-transmitted style received it from the repositories or *stòras* of songs and tunes in their respective communities, maintaining it as a living idiom in its truest sense.

The appended melodic transcriptions from ear-learned pipers and the associated *seanchas* appearing in this article, and for that matter the archival recordings from which the transcriptions were made, cannot hope to convey the complex inner workings and associated aesthetics of vernacular dance piping, or *ceòl chuaiseadh* as it was referred to in Uist, yet they are capable of providing one with a glimpse into the nature of that tradition. In many ways the tradition in question fits the definition of immanent art as described by John Miles Foley pertaining to the performance of verbal art. The discussion of oral epics and their literary counterparts shares great similarities in the performance of music as revealed in the transcriptions of “*Am Muileann Dubh*” and the *seanchas*-based narratives discussed here, which reveal not only aspects of the inner mechanics but aesthetics of this style of piping, and its ability in “adhering to the idiom, on varying only within limits set by the natural flexibility of traditional structures. Properly managed by the poet [or piper] and properly received by his or her audience [...] these simple forms will bring forth enormous complexity by making present immanent associations that can never be captured in the textual net alone” (Foley 1991: 245). Therefore, it must be noted that these musicians, who filled dance halls in the Hebrides and Nova Scotia for generations, were practising, perhaps unknowingly, a living, vibrant and volatile art-form through an indigenous oral/aural idiom that was passed down to them from one generation to the next and defined by a given community’s understanding of the needs, meanings and functions associated with the music. The ebbing of this tradition is not solely affected with the passing of the Scottish Gaelic language or the changes in vernacular instrumental music and dance styles, but mainly in the loss of understanding the meaning, or *brìgh*, of how the various forms of cultural expression in the Gaelic cultural cosmos supported and sustained each other through intergenerational transmission at the communal level.

APPENDIX

“AM MUILEANN DUBH” (“THE BLACK SNUFF MILL”)
TRANSCRIPTIONS:

The Black Snuff Mill 01

as played by Paddy Currie

The musical score for "The Black Snuff Mill 01" is presented in a single system of eight staves. The key signature is G major (one sharp, F#) and the time signature is common time (C). The notation is in treble clef. The piece begins with a quarter rest followed by a quarter note G4. The melody continues with eighth and sixteenth notes, including some beamed eighth notes and sixteenth notes. There are several repeat signs (double bar lines) throughout the piece. The score ends with a double bar line and a fermata over the final note, G4.

The Black Snuff Mill 02

as played by Alex Currie

The musical score is written in treble clef with a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#) and a common time signature (C). The piece consists of seven staves of music, each containing a single melodic line. The notation includes various rhythmic values such as quarter, eighth, and sixteenth notes, as well as rests and accidentals. The score is divided into measures by vertical bar lines, with measure numbers 5, 10, 15, 20, 25, and 30 indicated at the beginning of their respective staves. The piece concludes with a double bar line and a repeat sign at the end of the seventh staff.

The Black Snuff Mill 03

as played by Alex Currie

The musical score for 'The Black Snuff Mill 03' is presented in three staves of music. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is common time (C). The first staff begins with a treble clef and contains the first four measures of the piece. The second staff, starting with a measure number '5', contains measures 5 through 9. The third staff, starting with a measure number '10', contains measures 10 through 14. The music consists of a single melodic line with various rhythmic patterns, including eighth and sixteenth notes, and rests.

The Black Snuff Mill 04

as played by Alex Currie (chanter)

The musical score is written on five staves in treble clef, with a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#) and a common time signature (C). The first staff begins with a whole note G4, followed by two whole rests. The second staff contains measures 2 through 4. The third staff contains measures 5 through 9. The fourth staff contains measures 10 through 14. The fifth staff contains measures 15 through 19. The piece concludes with a double bar line at the end of the fifth staff.

The Black Snuff Mill 05

as played by Alex Currie (chanter)

The musical score for 'The Black Snuff Mill 05' is presented in four staves of music. The key signature is two sharps (F# and C#), and the time signature is common time (C). The notation is in a single melodic line on a treble clef staff. The first staff contains measures 1 through 4. The second staff, starting with a measure number '5', contains measures 5 through 8. The third staff, starting with a measure number '10', contains measures 9 through 12. The fourth staff, starting with a measure number '15', contains measures 13 through 15. The piece concludes with a double bar line and repeat dots.

NOTES

¹ Portions of this article are based on research and fieldwork originally presented in the author's BA Honours thesis entitled, "*Brìgh 'Chiuil*: Aspects of the Vernacular Piping Traditions of Cape Breton and South Uist," conducted at the Department of Celtic Studies, St Francis Xavier University (2007) and in a paper entitled, "Remaining 'Gaelic' Elements Common in the Piping Traditions of Nova Scotia and the Hebrides," presented at the Twenty-Sixth Annual Harvard Celtic Colloquium (2006).

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² John Shaw's studies of Cape Breton tradition-bearers, *Sgeul gu Latha* (MacNeil 1987) and *Brìgh an Òrain* (MacLellan 2000), concerning the traditions of Joe Neil MacNeil and Lauchie Dan N. MacLellan, respectively, contain comprehensive passages of oral narrative from the tradition-bearers themselves, providing their own perceptions of various aspects pertaining to their tradition. More recently, Joshua Dickson in his volume based on his PhD research, *When Piping Was Strong*, employed narratives from a good number of South Uist tradition-bearers concerning their island's piping traditions. These works have both motivated and influenced much of the current author's research appearing here.

³ A more detailed discussion on *seanchas* can be found in the current author's MSc Dissertation, "*A' Cur Seanchais gu Feum: An exploration in the various applications of seanchas-based discourse*" (Falzett 2008).

⁴ See Figure 1 in Shaw 1992/1993: 39.

⁵ Recorded in Sydney, Cape Breton on Friday, 6 October 2006.

⁶ Along with the diversity of Scottish bagpiping traditions there is varied usage of the term 'traditional' in describing each of them. Here the term 'traditional' refers to vernacular piping traditions, often transmitted aurally, that were at one time the preferred accompaniment for communal dance in both the Old and New World Scottish *Gàidhealtachd*. John Gibson's *Traditional Gaelic Bagpiping: 1745-1945* and *Old and New World Highland Bagpiping* provide a comprehensive introduction to this piping tradition, although his definition and parameters of the tradition do not necessarily coincide directly with those of the author.

⁷ On 23 March 2007, Joe Peter MacLean of Boisdale, Cape Breton answered a survey of one-hundred words taken from the isoglosses in Carl Borgstrøm's *The Dialects of the Outer Hebrides* (236-43) administered by the author and Professor Kenneth Nilsen of St F.X.U., Antigonish. His responses largely corresponded with the South Uist dialectal forms presented in Borgstrøm's isoglosses.

⁸ John MacDonald of Glenaladale, *Fear a' Ghlinne*, organized the first major Highland emigration to what is today Canada, including thirty-six families from South Uist, settling Prince Edward Island in 1772 (Kennedy 183).

⁹ Barry Shears lists eleven pipers from South Uist and Benbecula who emigrated to Nova Scotia between the years 1773 and 1848 in "Appendix A" of his volume *Dance*

to the Piper: The Highland Bagpipe in Nova Scotia, based on his MA dissertation (2008: 201-203).

¹⁰ As noted from the following narrative, there is some discrepancy between accounts as to whether *Seonaidh Chaluim Ruaidh* emigrated from South Uist or was born in Cape Breton; here the author will consider Seonaidh to be of the first generation of his family born in Cape Breton. Joe Lawrence MacDonald, a tradition-bearer from Rear Beaver Cove, Cape Breton maintains that *Seonaidh* was an ear-learned Gaelic-speaking piper who accompanied step-dancing and he also places *Seonaidh's* death in the 1950s when he was near the age of 88, putting his birth in the vicinity of the 1860s (Gibson 2002: 212). Father Allan MacMillan in his genealogy *To the Hill of Boisdale* notes that *Seonaidh's* father, *Calum Ruadh*, emigrated from Frobost, South Uist at the age of twelve (497) and also notes *Seonaidh Chaluim Ruaidh* as the only one of his children without a noted year of birth (499). These notes from oral tradition along with *Seonaidh's* shortened *sloinneadh*, or patronymic, not going past his father, add to the question of his origins.

¹¹ Recorded by the author in North Side East Bay, Cape Breton on 1 March 2007.

¹² Step-dancing is a popular form of solo-dancing on Cape Breton, but is also practiced in the island's square dancing, where the dancer's steps rhythmically correspond to the tune and also quite often to the stressed vowels of the Gaelic language when a tune shares associations with the *puirt-à-beul* tradition of Gaelic vocal music. The author has found no firm evidence of step-dancing existing in the oral memory of South Uist tradition-bearers; however this is not to say that the tradition does not trace its origins to Scotland. For further discussion on step-dance in Scotland see the Fletts' volumes, *Traditional Dancing in Scotland* and *Traditional Step-Dancing in Scotland*.

¹³ For a more complete analysis of the term *ceòl chuaiseadh* in South Uist see Chapter 11 of Dickson's *When Piping Was Strong* (207-35).

¹⁴ It should be noted that the term *ceòl ceart*, literally 'correct music', among many contemporary South Uist tradition-bearers has an opposing connotation to its usage in Cape Breton, denoting a more literate and standardized form of piping, occasionally being employed through the term *piobaireachd cheart*. This also reveals the extent to which conventional Western ideals and aesthetics of correctness have gradually influenced the Scottish Gaelic worldview.

¹⁵ Recorded by the author in St Ann's, Cape Breton on Friday, 15 September 2006.

¹⁶ Recorded by the author in Huna, North Uist on 6 February 2008.

¹⁷ The author is currently conducting more intensive fieldwork and research concerning the piping traditions of North Uist.

¹⁸ Although the presence of tunes from literate piping repertoire can show the encroachment of standardized tradition on pipe music, it should also be noted that the fiddle tradition of Cape Breton has absorbed a good number a tunes from a literate

piping tradition into their own more aural dance idiom, including 2/4 marches. See Chapter 5, “The Influence of the Military Piping Tradition,” from “Cape Breton Fiddling and the Piping Connection,” unpublished B.A. thesis by Kimberley Fraser (40-5).

¹⁹ William Ross held classes in Daliburgh, South Uist, in 1923 and 1924 and an anecdotal description of his last two evenings in Daliburgh are noted in the *Oban Times* (Dickson 129-131).

²⁰ From SA 1970.334.

²¹ Neil MacMillan, styled *Niall Sheonaidh Nill*, of Gearraidh Bhailteas, South Uist noted that William Ross collected tunes from many of his ear-learned pupils in South Uist and put them to staff-notation:

Neil MacMillan: Willie Ross, *bha e 'cruinneachadh nam port a bha sineach ach bha e-shèin ga' sgrìobhadh* correct.

Tiber Falzett: *Chuir e iad a's na leabhraichean aige.*

NMcM: *Seadh, 's ann an Uibhist a thog e na puirt a bha sin. Bhiodh e 'cruinneachadh iad bhon a' chlas, a' togail nam port—puirt cluaiseadh. Bha e-shèin ga' sgrìobhadh ann a' staff notation.* (Recorded by the author in Milton, South Uist, 5 August 2006)

Neil MacMillan: Willie Ross, he was gathering those tunes but he himself was writing them correctly.

Tiber Falzett: He put them in his books.

NMcM: Yes, it was in Uist that he got those tunes. He would be gathering them from the class, picking up the tunes, the ear-tunes. He himself was writing them in staff-notation.

²² From SA 1970.334.

²³ Donald Archie MacDonald's article “Some Aspects of Visual and Verbal Memory in Gaelic Storytelling” employs oral commentary from two Uist tradition-bearers, Donald Alasdair Johnson of South Uist and Angus MacMillan of North Uist, both of whom provide invaluable insight into the nature of various forms of memory in the transmission of Scottish Gaelic verbal arts.

²⁴ Lillis Ó Laoire, in his study on the transmission and nature of song on Tory Island, Donegal, entitled *On a Rock in the Middle of the Ocean*, discusses an under-examined Gaelic perception of cultural transmission in the Irish verbs, *tógáil* [lifting] versus *foghlaim* [learning], denoting informal and formal methods of cultural acquisition (59-65) and sharing similar parallels with the Scottish Gaelic verbal-nouns *a' togail* and *ag ionnsachadh*.

²⁵ Alex Currie's description of the methods by which his tunes were orally transmitted to him shares similarities with the *hardingfele* tradition of Norway, in that mothers were often the earliest sources of tuition for their sons through vocal imitations of the instruments (Hopkins 106).

²⁶ John MacLean of Cole Harbour recalled a MacKinnon piper from Uist having given them both tunes played on the chanter, noting:

They both were mentored by a Uist man, he was a MacKinnon and I think he must have come directly from the old country as a little boy. As a matter of fact Paddy and Alex, they used to call it *Uibhist*, but more often they said the Old Country. When you think of it in the 1970s they're still calling it the Old Country! [Laughter] But it was an old man, he was in his eighties and I think he might have come over as a child from Uist in the 1830s, because the only connection I can see was that he might have even been 90 in the 1920s. And he used to sit in the corner and blow the chanter for them so they learned a lot of tunes from him but also I think they learned most of their tunes from their mother's singing. But he was an Old-Country man as far as I knew. (Recorded by the author in Cole Harbour, Nova Scotia on 21 June 2006)

²⁷ See liner notes from Hamish Moore's album, *Dannsa' air an Drochaid: Stepping on the Bridge*.

²⁸ See the bibliography for a listing of Barry Shear's publications and MA thesis.

²⁹ See also Ronald Caplan's interview with Alex Currie in his anthology *Talking Cape Breton Music: Conversations with People who Love and Make the Music*, recorded in 1998 just several days before Alex passed away.

³⁰ See discography for a complete listing of recordings of Alex Currie available to the author and their various sources.

³¹ Recorded by the author on the 2 May 2007 in Rear Christmas Island, Cape Breton.

³² Recorded by the author in Daliburgh, South Uist on 3 July 2006.

³³ Recorded by the author in Stoneybridge, South Uist on 11 July 2006.

³⁴ Recorded by the author in Stoneybridge, South Uist on 11 July 2006.

³⁵ Recorded by the author in Stoneybridge, South Uist on 6 February 2008.

³⁶ Angus Campbell was an ear-learned piper of Iochdar, South Uist, who often played while seated working both of his feet. Peter 'an Gighat' Campbell, son of Angus, provided the author with the following narrative concerning his father's playing:

Peter 'An Gighat' Caimbeul: *Chum e an danns' a' dol fad na h-oidhcheadh.*

Griogair Labhruidh: *Agus bhiodh e 'cluich 's an uinneag, suas air a' sgeilp na shuidhe.*

PC: *Bhiodh e na shuidhe, sin mar a bha e ga cluichd co-dhiubh, 's ann.*

Tiber Falzett: *Agus am biodh e 'g obair a dhà chois nuair a bha e ga cluich?*

PC: *Bhitheadh, depending ge b'e dè danns' a bhiodh ann.*

GL: *A' cumail am beat.*

PC: *Dìreach, a' cumail beat, aidh, aidh. O bha e math airson dannsa, gun teagamh. Bhiodh e a' cluichd daonnan aig na bainnsean.*

TF: *Càit' an d'fhuair e na puirt a bh'aige?*

PC: *Bhiodh e 'cluinntinn iad bho sheadhainn eile, muinntir eile.*

TF: *Piobairean agus seinneadairean? Agus bha sibh ag ràdhainn gur e 'phiuthar na seinneadair. Dè an t-ainm a bh'oirre?*

PC: *Ceit NicNeacail.*

Mrs. Peter Campbell: *O 's e seinneadair gu math ainmeil a bh'ann an Ceit.*

GL: *An cluicheadh e cuideachd na puirt-à-beul?*

PC: *Chluicheadh. (Recorded by the author in Iochdar, South Uist on 1 August 2006)*

Peter Campbell: He kept the dance going all night.

Griogair Labhruidh: And he would be playing in the window, sitting up on the ledge?

PC: He would be sitting. That is how he would be playing it [the pipes] anyway, indeed.

Tiber Falzett: And would he be working his two feet when he would be playing it [the pipes]?

PC: Yes, depending on whatever dance it would be.

GL: Keeping the beat?

PC: Exactly, keeping the beat, aye, aye. Oh he was good at playing for dancing, without a doubt! He would always be playing at the weddings!

TF: Where did he get his tunes?

PC: He would be hearing them from some others, other folks.

TF: Pipers and singers? You were saying his sister was a singer. What was her name?

PC: Kate Nicholson

Mrs. Peter Campbell: Oh, Kate was quite a well-known singer.

GL: Would he [Angus 'an Gighat' Caimbeul] play *puirt-à-beul* also?

PC: Yes.

³⁷ This is a home video of Alex Currie playing in his home in Frenchvale, Cape Breton in the 1980s, a copy of which was provided to the author by the Currie Family.

³⁸ Recorded by the author in Milton, South Uist on 5 August 2006. Neil MacMillan's sentiments on the relationship between language and music are reiterated by Peter Jack MacLean, who noted the older generation of fiddlers relationship with the Gaelic language and its song tradition:

Èisd ris na seann fhìdhlearan. Bha iad a' leantail air na h-òrain, caoin an òrain 's mar a chaidh an t-òran ga chur a chèile. Ach an-diugh thèid

agad air—seinnidh iad rud sam bith oirre ach chan eil... Tha mi 'dèanamh a-mach na seann fhidhlearan—bha Gàidhlig aca 's bha caoin nan òran aca 's bha iad gan cluinntinn. 'S bha siod nan cridhe 's bha e 'tighinn a-mach luachmhòr. [...] An aon rud a bh'aig na pìobairean. Bha siod dìreach 'tighinn o 'n cridhe. Bha iad a' cluinntinn na h-òrain 's bha iad a' cluinntinn na puirt a bha sin 's bha iad ga tharraing a chèile. (Recorded by author with James Watson in Rear Christmas Island, Cape Breton, July 2007)

Listen to the old fiddlers. They were following the songs—the melody of the song and how the song was put together. But today they can—they'll play anything on it but it isn't... I perceive that the old fiddlers—they understood Gaelic and they knew the melodies of the songs and they were hearing them. And that was in their heart and it was coming out with conviction. The pipers were the same. That was just coming from their hearts. They were hearing those songs and tunes and they were pulling it together.

³⁹ Dwelly defines *brìgh* as, “Essence. 2 Substance. 3 Wealth. 4 Sap, juice, pith. 5 Elixir. 6 Vigour. 7 Strength, virtue. 8 Value. 9 Effect, avail, benefit. 10 Juice of meat. 11 Meaning, interpretation. 12 Energy” (2001: 123).

⁴⁰ Recorded by the author with James Watson in Rear Christmas Island, Cape Breton, July 2007.

⁴¹ Recorded by the author in Uachdar, Benbecula on 13 July 2006.

⁴² From interview recorded by the author in Uachdar, Benbecula on 13 July 2006.

⁴³ Catriona Garbutt's *puirt-à-beul* versions of some of the Currie tunes are available on an interview recorded by the author in Uachdar, Benbecula on 18 July 2006.

⁴⁴ Joe Peter MacLean provided several examples of *puirt-à-beul* from his father's and the Currie's repertoires in an interview recorded in St Ann's, Cape Breton on 15 September 2006.

⁴⁵ Recorded in St Ann's, Cape Breton on 15 September 2006.

⁴⁶ Recorded by author with James Watson in Iona, Cape Breton on 5 July 2007.

⁴⁷ See the appendix for the melodic transcriptions of “*Am Muilean Dubh*”/“The Black Snuff Mill” from the piping of Alex and Paddy Currie made by Kimberly Fraser and the author.

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 13 November 2007
 6 February 2008

THERESA BURKE (NÉE MACNEIL) OF REAR BIG POND, CAPE BRETON:

6 October 2006 in Sydney, Cape Breton
 1 August 2007 in Iona, Cape Breton

PETER "AN GIGHAT" CAMPBELL OF IOCHDAR, SOUTH UIST:

1 August 2006

ANGUS JOSEPH CURRIE OF NORTH SIDE EAST BAY, CAPE BRETON:

1 March 2007

CATRIONA GARBUTT (NÉE CAMPBELL) OF UACHDAR, BENBECULA:

13 July 2006
 18 July 2006
 12 November 2007
 2 February 2008
 9 February 2008

RONA LIGHTFOOT (NÉE MACDONALD) OF GARRYHELLIE, SOUTH UIST:

29 July 2005 in Inverness, Scotland
 1-6 July 2006 in Daliburgh, South Uist

JOE PETER MACLEAN OF BOISDALE, CAPE BRETON:

15 September 2006 in St. Ann's, Cape Breton
5 July 2007 in Iona, Cape Breton
11 July 2007 in Iona, Cape Breton

JOHN MACLEAN OF COLE HARBOUR, NOVA SCOTIA:

21 June 2006
2 March 2007

PETER JACK MACLEAN OF REAR CHRISTMAS ISLAND, CAPE BRETON:

2 May 2007
20 July 2007

TOMMY MACLELLAN OF HUNA, NORTH UIST:

6 February 2008

NEIL MACMILLAN OF MILTON, SOUTH UIST:

5 August 2006

ANGUS MORRISON OF LOCH EYNORT, SOUTH UIST:

6 August 2006 in Ormacleit, South Uist

‘Hildina’ – A Norn Ballad in Shetland

FRANCES J. FISCHER

Scotland is currently blessed as a land of three languages and much is written in praise of each. We, however, should not forget that other languages and their bearers have played important, though fleeting, roles in the Scottish past. Old Norse, in the Scottish form of Norn, for instance, lingered for almost a thousand years in the islands of Orkney and Shetland where it had been implanted by the invading Northmen. Although the islands came to the Scottish crown in 1468-69 when they were pledged as surety for the dowry of Princess Margaret, daughter of King Christian I, on her marriage to James III, King of Scots, the language and culture changed slowly.

There are very few remnants of what appears to have been a rich repertoire of ballads and songs (to say nothing of other genres of oral and written culture). It is believed that the ‘*Málsháttakvæði*’ [The Proverb Poem] originated in Orkney and that the ‘*Jómsvíkingadrápa*’ [Lay of the Jómsvíkings] is the work of the Orkney Bishop Bjarni Kolbeinson (d. 1222). It is probable that the ‘*Krákumál*’ [Lay of Kráka – about the battle of Ragnar loðbrók] may also be attributed to Orkney because of certain linguistic forms used (Olsen: 147, 151). In addition to those, Renaud also attributes the ‘*Háttalykill*’ to Orcadians Earl Rognvaldr Kali and Hallr Þórarinsson (about 1145). These works are now only preserved in Icelandic manuscripts. There is also the possible Orkney origin of the ‘*Darraðarljóð*’, concerning the Battle of Clontarf fought in Ireland in 1014 (Renaud 191).¹

Aside from a rich array of Norse-origin place names, a few documents (none, apparently, displaying specifically Norn linguistic features) noted by Ballantyne and Smith (1999: xi), the disconnected Shetland snippets garnered by Jakob Jakobsen (1897), the Orkney gleanings of Marwick (1929), and the ‘*Darraðarljóð*’, our major surviving example of Norn is ‘*Hildinakvædet*’. This thirty five-verse ballad concerns the relationship between Hildina, daughter of a king of Norway, and a Jarl (Earl) of Orkney. This paper looks at the little known ballad, a little of what we have learned about its language and the ballad’s cultural relationship to Scotland and Scandinavia.

George Low recorded the text during his tour of Shetland in 1774 (published 1879). As Low himself wrote concerning the Shetland folk: “Most or all of their tales are relative to the history of Norway; they seem to know little of the rest of Europe but by names; Norwegian transactions they have at their fingers’ ends” (114). The text was taken down from the recitation of William Henry of Guttorm on the island of Foula², who, according to Hibbert, was one of the last survivors able to give fragments of old songs, albeit indistinctly (Hibbert: 275). A brief summary of the story is as follows:

The Jarl of Orkney abducts Hildina, daughter of the king of Norway, during the king’s absence. The king comes in pursuit. Hildina persuades her husband, the Jarl, to make peace with her father, and her father is persuaded to accept the Jarl as a son-in-law. After that meeting, however, a jealous courtier, Hilluge, who has long lusted after Hildina, re-ignites the king’s anger. Battle is joined and is eventually focussed on a duel between the Jarl and Hilluge. The latter cuts off the Jarl’s head and throws it into Hildina’s lap while taunting her. Hildina is now obliged to return with her father to Norway. Hilluge seeks Hildina’s hand, her father presses the suit and the lady agrees after being granted the right to serve the wine at the wedding feast. Hildina drugs the wine and, when all fall asleep, has her father removed from

the house. At that point the house is set on fire and Hildina gains her revenge by preventing Hilluge's escape.

The text itself consists of the following 35 stanzas that are given here from Low (101-106). Low was not totally happy with the presentation and marked some stanzas to illustrate this point. These are indicated as marked:

* Stanzas viewed by Low as confused, having too much or too little "to render the verse complete".

+ Wording viewed by Low as seeming "to be part of an intermediate stanza, perhaps to be placed between these marked 12 and 13".

There is, as far as I know, only one complete translation of the 'Hildina' text. This was completed in 1908 by W. G Collingwood and published by the Viking Club. Collingwood's fascination with the Vikings is examined in the recently published volume by Townend. Collingwood himself carefully stated his aim with regard to "Hildina":

From his [Hægstad's] recension, this rendering has been made, as an attempt to represent the ballad in readable English, without sacrificing rhyme and metre to literal translation, though, at the same time without needless paraphrase. Additions to the text are marked with brackets, and asterisks denote the breaks in the story, though it is not certain that any stanzas are missing. In one or two places I have ventured to give a turn to the dialogue, not suggested by Prof. Hægstad's notes, but most of the stanzas are line for line, and almost word for word, in the ballad-metre of the original (Collingwood 211).

Unfortunately, the requirements of duplicating the metre and end-rhyme scheme have also led to an intensification of the mood which is even further emphasized by a stiff and archaizing diction. For all of the above reasons, I have chosen not to use the Collingwood translation. Instead, I offer a literal prose translation also based on Hægstad's Nynorsk recension (excluding added lines). I believe this might give a better feeling of the plain, everyday language apparently used in the original Norn.

'Hildina-kvadet' [The Hildina Ballad]

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1. Da vara Iarlin d' Orkneyar
For frinda sin spur de ro
Whirdi an skildè meun
Our glas buryon burtaga. | <i>It was the Earl of Orkney / he asked his
relative for advice / whether he ought to take
the girl away from Castle Glass.</i> |
| 2. Or vanna ro eidnar fuo
Tega du meun our glas buryon
Kere friendè min yamna meun
Eso vrildan stiende gede min vara to din. | <i>Take her away from her suffering / Take the
girl away from Castle Glass / my dear
relative as long as the world exists your deed
will be told.</i> |
| 3. Yom keimir cullingin
Fro liene burt
Asta vaar hon fruen Hildina
Hemi stu mer stien, | <i>The noble one came home / from a campaign
/ away was the Lady Hildina / [only] the
stepmother remained at home.</i> |
| 4. Whar an yaar elonden
Ita kan sadnast wo
An scal vara kundè
Wo osta tre sin reithin ridna dar fro | <i>Whoever in this country / is guilty of this / he
shall be hanged / from the highest tree with
roots running from it.</i> |
| 5. Kemi to Orkneyar Iarlin | <i>If the Earl reaches Orkney / St. Magnus will</i> |

- Vilda mien sante Maunis
I Orknian u bian sian
I lian far diar.
6. An gevè Drotnign kedn puster
On de kin firsane furu
Tworare wo eder
Whitranè kidn.
7. In kimerin Iarlin
U klapasse Hildina
On de kidn quirto
Vult doch, fiegan vara moch or fly din.*
8. Elde vilda fiegan vara
Fy min u alt sin
Ans namnu wo
So minyach u ere min heve Orkneyar
kingè ro*
9. Nu di skall iaga dor yochwo
And u ria dor to strandane nir
U yilsa fly minu avon
Blit an ear ne cumi i dora band.
10. Nu Swaran Konign
So mege gak honon i muthi
Whath ear di ho gane mier
I daute buthe.
11. Tretti merkè vath ru godle
Da skall yach ger yo
U all de vara sonna less
So linge sin yach liva mo.
12. Nu linge stug an Konign
U linge wo an swo Wordig vaar dogh
mugè sonè
Yacha skier fare moga so minde yach
angaan u
frien rost wath comman mier to landa.+
13. Nu swara Hiluge
Hera geve honon scam
Taga di gild firre Hildina
Sin yach skall liga dor fram.
14. Estin whaar u feur fetign
Agonga kadn i sluge
Feur fetign sin gonga
Kadn i pluge.
15. Nu stienderin Iarlin
U linge swo an wo
Dese mo eke Orkneyar
So linge san yach lava mo.
16. Nu eke tegaran san
- ensure / that he spends the rest of his life
there / go after him now.*
- Then he slapped the Queen's / face in anger
/ and indeed her tears / ran down her white
cheeks.*
- The Earl comes in / fondly pats Hildina's /
cheek / whom would you rather see doomed ,
me or your father?*
- I would rather / my father died and all his kin
/ then I and my good husband / should govern
Orkney for a long time.*
- Now you must take a horse / and ride down to
the beach / and greet my father extremely
kindly / maybe there can be a reconciliation.*
- Now the king responded / - so meekly he
came to meet him - / What will you give me
as compensation / for my daughter?*
- Thirty marks of red gold / you'll get from me
now / and you will never be without a son / as
long as I live.*
- The king stood for a long time / and looked at
him You are just as good as many sons, / I
wish we could be reconciled, then I would not
/ fear any enemy that might come to my land.*
- Now Hilluge answers / - May God shame him
- / Take the compensation for Lady Hildina /
that I suggest.*
- Every horse and four-footed animal / able or
not to draw a harrow / every four-footed
animal / which can pull a plough.*
- The Earl stands now / and looks at him for a
while / This will not happen in Orkney / as
long as I might live.*
- Now he is against reconciliation / the king*

- Sot Koningn fyrin din
U alt yach an Hilhugin
Widn ugare din arar.
17. Nu swarar an frauna Hildina
U dem san idne i fro
Di slo dor a bardagana
Dar comme ov sin mo.
18. Nu Iarlin an genger
I vadlin fram
U kadnar sina mien
Geven skeger i Orkneyan.
19. Han u cummin
In u vod lerdin
Fronde fans lever
Vel burne mun.
20. Nu fruna Hildina
On genger i vadlin fram
Fy di yera da ov man dum
Dora di spidlaiki mire man
21. Nu sware an Hiluge
Crego gevan a scam
Gayer an Iarlin frinde
Din an u fadlin in.
22. Nu fac an Iarlin dahuge
Dar min de an engin gro
An east ans huge ei
Fong ednar u vaxhedne more neo.
23. Di lava mir gugna
Yift bal yagh fur o lande
Gipt mir nu fruan Hildina
Vath godle u fasta bande.
24. Nu bill on heve da yals
Guadnè borè u da kadn
Sina kloyn a bera do skall
Fon fruna Hildina verka wo sino chelsina
villya*
25. Hildina liger wo chaldona
U o dukrar u grothè
Min du buga till bridlevsin
Bonlother u duka dogha.
26. Nu Hildina on askar feyrin
Sien di gava mier livè
Ou skinka vin
Ou guida vin.*
27. Duska skinka vin, u guida vin
Tinka dogh eke wo Iarlin
- your father / And it seems to me that Hilluge / also has something else in mind.*
- Now Lady Hildina speaks up / from inside the room / You will have a battle / let it happen as it will.*
- Now the Earl went / onto the battlefield / and reviewed his men / noble, bearded men of Orkney.*
- The king came/ went through your fields / his friend put to flight / the well-born men.*
- Now Lady Hildina / goes out on the battlefield / Father now do a manly thing / don't waste more men's lives.*
- Now Hilluge answers / – may the good Lord bring him disgrace – / Yes, as soon as your husband the Earl / has also fallen.*
- Now the Earl received a death blow / – none could heal the wound – / He [Hilluge] threw his head into her arms / And she grew even more angry.*
- You promised me marriage / if I led boldly abroad / Now give me Lady Hildina / with gold and betrothal ties.*
- Now you must have patience / till the child is born / and can be clothed [is weaned?] / then Lady Hildina can decide for herself.*
- Hildina lies on the tapestry / her eyes dim and weeping / But when the wedding preparations are made / she adds something to the drinks.*
- Now Hildina asks her father / Please give me permission /to serve the wine / and pour the wine.*
- You may serve the wine and pour the wine. / but do not think about the Earl / your good*

- an gougha here din.*
28. Watha skilde tinka
Wo Iarlin gouga herè min
Hien minde yagh inga forlskona
Bera fare kera fyrin min.
29. Da gerde on fruna Hildina
On bar se mien ot
On soverin fest,
Fysin u quarsin sat.
30. Da gerde un fruna Hildina
On bard im ur
Hadlin burt sien on laghdè
Gloug i osta jatha port.
31. Nu iki visti an Hiluge
Ike ov till do
Eldin var commin i lut
U stor u silkè sark ans smo.
32. Nu leveren fram
Hiluge du kereda
Fraun Hildina du
Gevemir live u gre.
33. So mege u gouga gre
Skall dogh swo
Skall lathi min heran
I bardagana fwo.
34. Du tuchtada lide undocht yach
Swo et sa ans bugin bleo
Dogh casta ans huge
I mit fung u vexemir mise meo.
35. Nu tachtè on heve fwelско
Ans bo vad mild u stien
Dogh skall aldè misè Koningnsens
Vadne wilde mien.
- husband.*
- Yes I shall think / about the Earl my good husband / otherwise I would not set a drugged / cup before my father.*
- That's what Hildina did / she brought out the mead / they fell fast asleep /her father and all others there.*
- That's what Hildina did / she carried them [her father] out / of the hall then she set fire / at the outer gate.*
- Now Hilluge did not know / anything at all / until the fire came to the door / and his short silk shirt.*
- Now Hilluge ran out / dear / Lady Hildina / save and forgive me!*
- As great and as good a forgiveness / you shall see / as you allowed my husband / in your fight.*
- You seemed to think it was nothing when I / saw his bloody body / You threw his head / into my arms and my anger grew.*
- Now she has covered his ashes / with both earth and stone. / You will never again have the power to harm / the king's child [Hildina].*

Given its linguistic importance, remarkably few people have concerned themselves with 'Hildina'. Foremost among those who have, is Marius Hægstad who wrote a monograph about the text and what it could tell us about the Norn language (1900), and a journal article about the ballad itself (1901). It would appear to be Hægstad who gave the work the name of its principal character where Low had merely called the text "The Earl of Orkney and the King of Norway's Daughter: a ballad". The lack of English language academic attention to the work may be in large part due to the relative obscurity of the subject and the seeming completeness of Hægstad's study (although it has not, unfortunately, been translated into English).

In the 1901 article, 'Hildinakvadet', Hægstad had comments to make about the Low text. First and foremost, he noted that it is difficult to read by other than trained linguists – a statement that finds support from later scholars (Barnes 1991: 441). Hægstad explains this by pointing out the problems faced by Low: he did not understand the Norn language, he wrote

down the words as he, a Scot, heard them and he employed a standard English orthography to do so. Hægstad also feels that Low may have misinterpreted his first draft because he made later changes in his manuscript (1901: 2). Hægstad stresses the fact that the ballad is indeed difficult to untangle and that he, Hægstad, had, in 1900, been the first to make the effort. Many of the difficulties are a result of Low's handwriting. Although it is generally 'greid og lettlesi' [obvious and legible], now and then letters ran into each other in a blotch. Sometimes the dot on the 'i' is forgotten or the closure on the 'e' is missing; 'e' is confused with 'o' and 'o' with 'a'. These all impede understanding (1900: 2).

The manuscript was lodged first in the Advocates Library in Edinburgh, is now in the Library of the University of Edinburgh (manuscript La.111.580) and was finally published in 1879. George Barry and Joseph Anderson (who prepared the Low manuscript for publication) both studied the original handwriting of the manuscript. In addition, Professor Alf Torp studied the lanternslides of the text that had been made in 1884. Barry (1808) and Munch (1839) both had included the text in their publications. Anderson, Barry, Munch and Torp all made attempts to clarify letter ambiguities in the text and their various readings of the script are noted in the Norn text used by Hægstad (1900: 2-9). In reproducing the text, I have almost always chosen the reading made by Anderson. Hægstad also re-examined Low's poorly distinguished line and verse divisions and, in addition, provided some analysis of the Norn language. In the 1901 article, Hægstad gives a translation of 'Hildina' into Nynorsk (one of the two official languages of Norway), which was familiar to the readers of the *Syn og Segn* journal in which he published. He notes that this translation is a somewhat free one of the original in Norn as he had made slight alterations to accommodate the ballad metre and rhyme scheme. This is somewhat similar to the claims of Collingwood for his translation (see above). In three places, where he felt there were missing lines in the Norn text, Hægstad supplies lines from context after the style of Faroese ballads – although no specific ballad was cited (1901: 3). These extra lines were not included in the above translation.³

Hægstad also comments on the poem itself and finds it "full of dramatic expression" in "unaffected form" with a "plain vocabulary" (1901: 13). He reasons that, "Verseformi og mange vendingar i visa lærer oss at folkediktingi paa Shetland hev havt ei form millom færøysk og heime-norsk." [*The verse form and the many turns of speech in the ballad teach us that folk poetry in Shetland had a form between Faroese and the original Norwegian.*] (1901: 14). As regards the language itself, much is said about the morphology, phonology and syntax (1900: 32-75). In turn, much of this is supported by the current authority on North Atlantic dialects, Michael Barnes at the University of London. Barnes distinguishes between the examples we have of written and spoken Norn and observes that the written form has reflected the changes in Norwegian with the increasing Danicisation of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and the complete breakdown of the Norse system of inflexion. Everyday speech in Orkney and Shetland, however,

appears to have developed in much the same way as Faroese and, to a lesser extent, the more conservative dialects of western Norway: only limited Danicisation is evident, while the essentials of the inflexional system seem still to have been intact in the sixteenth century, and in Shetland at least to have remained so in the seventeenth and possible even into the eighteenth. (Barnes 1998: 16)

These observations of Barnes are supported by his numerous examples of sound shifts and other linguistic evidence. This encourages the belief that Norn and Faroese would have retained a certain degree of inter-comprehensibility until a relatively late date.

Hægstad, on the other hand, believes that Norn actually tends to be closer to the dialect forms in Ryfylke and West Agder (Norway) than it is to Faroese (1901: 14). This claim he supports in the 1900 monograph with a line by line, verse by verse analysis of the poem

comparing word forms and grammatical constructs with their parallels in other Scandinavian languages and dialects (1900: 20-31). In addition, Hægstad provides an extensive, alphabetic glossary that also supplies the same information. As far as the claim about the verse forms is concerned, Hægstad, in the process of his verse analysis, takes the ballad commonplaces and illustrates how the same or similar expressions are used in (mostly) Faroese and Norwegian ballads.

The examples given to illustrate this point argue quite persuasively for some connection between Shetland and the Faroe Islands, even if only through Bergen in Norway. There is the example of verse 20 in the Norn text:

Nu fruna Hildina	<i>Now Lady Hildina</i>
On genger i vadlin fram	<i>goes to the battlefield</i>
Fy di yera da ov man dum	<i>Father now do a manly thing</i>
Dora di spidlaike mire man	<i>don't waste more men's lives.</i>

Against this is given an example from the 39th verse of the Faroese ballad 'Finnur hin Fríði' (CCF 26). Unfortunately, the use of Low's mangled phonetic text does not show as much visual similarity as a reconstituted dialect form might do

Tað var frúgvín Ingibjörg,	<i>It was the lady Ingibjörg,</i>
Hon fellur på síni knæ:	<i>she fell to her knees:</i>
“Ger tað fyrri manndóm tín,	<i>do this for the sake of your manliness,</i>
tú gev tann riddara mær.	<i>don't kill any more knights like this.</i>

There are even story similarities here since the hero is Finn (son of Earl Olav of Norway and brother of Halvdan den stærke) who goes to Ireland to seek a wife. He becomes enamoured of Ingebjörg, daughter of the king of Ireland, and is embroiled in battle.

Motif and commonplace echoes are also clear in the comparison of verse 4 in the Low text:

Whar an yaar elonden	<i>Whoever in the country</i>
Ita kan sadnast wo	<i>is guilty of this,</i>
An scal vara kundè	<i>he will be hanged from the highest tree</i>
Wo osta tre sin reithin ridna dar fro.	<i>with roots running from it.</i>

and verse 30 from the Faroese ballad 'Ormar Tóraldssons kvæði' (CCF 24A).

Er tað nakar av mínum monnum,	<i>If any of my men here</i>
Einari hetta smáir,	<i>is so disgraced</i>
hann skal hanga í hægsta træ,	<i>he will be hanged from the highest tree</i>
sum rótum rennur frá!	<i>with roots running from it.</i>

Even the matter of asking for mercy is phrased in terms of a commonplace in verses 32-33 of the Norn 'Hildina':

... (kereda) Fraun Hildina du	<i>... (dear) Lady Hildina</i>
Gevemir live u gre.	<i>save and forgive me.</i>

So mege u gouga gre	<i>As great and as good a forgiveness</i>
Skall dogh swo	<i>you shall see</i>
Skall lathi min heran	<i>as you allowed my husband</i>
I bardagana fwo.	<i>in your fight.</i>

which echoes the verses 46-47 of 'Arngríms Synir' (CCF 16D)

... ..mín kæra Hervík,	<i>... ..my dear Hervík,</i>
gev mær gríð.	<i>grant me forgiveness.</i>

Slíkan skaltú griðin
af mær fá,
sum tú læt mín sæla faðir
við sínum lívi ná.

*Just such forgiveness will you
get from me,
as you allowed my beloved father
along with his life.*

Even more examples are given from Norwegian texts. All this is not meant to imply, however, that there is total acceptance of Hægstad's placing of Norn in an original relationship with southwest Norway. Pettersen (1988) sees much Swedish influence in the Norn vocabulary. Renaud (1992: 150), on the other hand, wonders if the continuation of the Shetland-Norway trading into the eighteenth century affected the language samples that were first collected in the nineteenth century. Vocabulary arriving from the Bergen area in this latter period might tend to obscure the earlier language forms and even influence the ideas of the geographic origins of the Scandinavian settlers. This assumption of incoming language influence is echoed by Barnes who, in an earlier paper, drew on Murison (1954: 125) to suggest,

that a number of words Jakobsen assumed to be Scandinavian are in fact of Dutch or Low German origin. They were probably borrowed into Norn or Scots, or both, as a result of the extensive contacts that existed first with the Hanseatic traders and later with the Dutch fishing industry. (Barnes 1991: 445)

This, at an earlier period, might have affected the language of the 'Hildina' but such influence is not obvious.

There is then a question of the existence of an equivalent ballad narrative in general Scottish tradition. An exact analogue does not appear to exist. Individual motifs, however, do occur and a review of some of those might enable us to compare and contrast how similar situations are handled in the two cultures. Let us consider three different motifs that are prominent in 'Hildina': (1) the choice that has to be made by the woman, present at the scene, when the lover must fight a member of her family, (2) the reaction to the severed head of a presumed lover and (3) the nature of revenge inflicted on a man who believes all is forgiven and comes trustingly to his death.

The four Scottish versions of 'Earl Brand' (Child 7), for instance, concern themselves with the "abduction of a willing young noblewoman" motif. In the case of 'Earl Brand', however, detection and pursuit are soon accomplished. There is no time for the lovers to delight in their escape. Here, as in 'Hildina', we have the battle of father (or brothers) against a would-be son-in-law and it is imperative that the lady choose sides. When she does intervene, it is to ask her lover to spare her father – the exact opposite of what happens in 'Hildina'. Where Hildina begs: "Father, for humanity's sake, don't waste more men's lives." Lady Margaret orders: "O hold your hand, Lord William!" she said, / "For your strokes they are wondrous sair; / True lovers I can get many a ane, / But a father I can never get mair." (Child 7B: 7). The reaction to receiving the severed head of a loved one is difficult to portray. In the case of Hildina it is stark in its simplicity. "Now the Earl received a deathblow / – none could heal the wound – / He threw his head into her arms / And she grew even angrier (22). Nothing further is said.

In 'Bob Norice', a Scottish version of 'Child Maurice' (Child 83 as printed in Lyle: 105), we have another lady who receives a head, but she is immediately more demonstrative:

He tock the bluidie heid in his haun
An brought it to the haw
An flang it into his ladie's lap,
Sayand lady there's a baw (20)

Sho tock the bluidie heid in her haun
 An kissit it frae cheik to chin
 Sayand Better I lyke that weil faurit face
 Than aw my royal kin (21)

This, in turn, is closely related to ‘Little Musgrave and Lady Barnard’ (Child 81) where Lord Barnard asks his wife:

“Oh how do ye like his cheeks, ladie?
 Or how do ye like his chin?
 Or how do ye like his fair bodie,
 That there’s nae life within?” (81G: 26)

And she replies:

“Oh weel I like his cheeks,” she said,
 “And weel I like his chin;
 And better I like his fair bodie
 Than a’ your kith and kin.” (29)

This anguished response, of course, leads to her death.

The drugging of food or drink is not uncommon. In ‘Hildina’ we saw her preparations for the wedding to the villain Hilluge:

Hildina lies on the tapestry / Her eyes dim and weeping / But when the wedding
 preparations are made / She puts something in the drink. (25)
 That’s what Hildina did / She brought out the mead; / They fell fast asleep / her father and
 all others there. (29)

After that, of course, she is able to set the fire and Hilluge is burned to death. The question of what was put into the drink is difficult to know. Hægstad (1901: 7, verse 26) suggested that the herb used was “hemp nettle” (*Galeopsis tetrahit*). Heizman (xxviii), on the other hand, proposes that the herb used was “darnel” / “cockle” (*Lolium temulentum*).

This use of narcotics and poisons appears to be particularly popular with Scottish women who wish to rid themselves of lovers for various reasons. In the case of Lord Ronald (‘Lord Randal’, Child 12) the past misdeed is never revealed. Lord Ronald innocently accepts an invitation to dine and is given eels or fish. His dogs perish from having eaten scraps of the meal and he himself comes home to die. With his last breath, he condemns his true love because she has poisoned him. For Lord Thomas (‘Lord Thomas and Lady Margaret’, Child 260, [Lyle: 255]), the situation is much clearer. He had chased down his lover, Lady Margaret, with the aid of his hunting dogs and she is still incensed. When Lord Thomas appears at her husband’s castle, she invites him to drink with her and he gladly and naively accepts. Lady Margaret’s preparations are, however, even more deadly than Hildina’s:

She called for her butler boy
 Tae draw her a pint o’ wine
 Ann’ wi’ her fingers lang an’ sma’
 She steer’d the poison in.
 She put it tae her rosie cheeks
 Syne tae her dimple’d chin
 She put it tae her rubbie lips
 But ne’er a drap gaed in.
 He put it tae his rosie cheeks
 Syne tae his dimple’d chin

He put it tae his rubbie lips
An' the rank poison gaed in. (11-13)

Hildina, on the other hand, does not use a drug to kill but rather as “knock-out drops” that allow her to set the scene for the fire and her revenge on Hilluge.

In all the above-mentioned instances, the motifs in ‘Hildina’ are present in Scottish ballads, but the contexts and results are not quite the same. Hægstad makes a similar point, “I have neither seen or heard any song which is quite like this one in any other country” (1901: 9). He then, however, proceeds to comment on a series of Scandinavian ballads concerning the theme of abduction and rescue and employing characters of the same name. There are the Faroese ‘*Kappin Illhugi*’ (CCF 18), the Norwegian ‘*Kappen Illugjen*’ (Landstad 2), and the Danish ‘*Hr. Hylleland*’ (DgF 44). These are all listed in TSB under types E140.

These ballads all concern themselves with a king’s daughter (Híld or Helleliti) who is abducted by a giantess (or a troll woman). The king offers his daughter in marriage to the man who rescues her. The hero Illuge (in Denmark, Hylleland) succeeds and gains the promised reward. In Shetland, Hilluge is the villain; in other ballads, he is the hero. In Shetland, the abduction is accomplished by the hero; in the others, the abducting ogress is the villain. From this picture, Hægstad reasons that the ballads ‘Hildina’ and ‘Illuge’ are related by descent from a common source (1901: 10).

The search for just such a common source had been pursued in the previous century. It led Professor P. A. Munch (as reported in Hægstad 1901: 11-12) to suggest that the first part of the ‘Hildina’ (up to the scene of the battle) was reminiscent of the legend of the battle of Hjadninge as told in both the ‘Younger Edda’ and in the ‘*Sörla þáttur*’ (in the *Saga of Olaf Tryggvason*) – both of which may be dated to the thirteenth century or earlier. There is some variation in the details of the endings of these two ballads but, in general, they are the same. A king, Hogne, has a daughter Hild who is abducted by Hedin Hjarrandeson while Hogne is away from home. Hogne follows Hedin north to Norway and west to Háey [Hoy] in Orkney. Hild tries to effect reconciliation as does Hedin, but both fail. Battle is joined and Hild resorts to sorcery. Each night she raises the dead and reconstitutes the weapons. In the ‘Edda’ it is said that this battle will continue until Ragnarok. In the *Saga of Olaf Tryggvason*, however, there is the expected Christian intervention. Odin orders the battle to continue until a Christian man comes between the warring armies. This happens with the arrival of Olaf: Hedin and Hogne are both killed and the sorcery brought to an end. This, for Munch, was the basis for stanzas 1-22 of ‘Hildina’ while stanzas 23 to the end were considered to be an imitation of some chivalric romance or other from the 13th or 14th century (Hægstad 1901: 12). At a later date, Liestøl saw the above mentioned ballads as having their source in the Old Norse *Illuga saga Griðarfóstra* (104).

It was noted above that the Scandinavian ballads concerning Illuge were grouped together in TSB as E140, while ‘Hildina-kvadet’ was listed as E97. This is a sub grouping “Woman’s lover killed by rival, and she takes revenge” under the group heading of “Erotic complications lead to conflict”. Most of the surrounding ballads mentioned in the listings of this group (49 ballads from E64 to E112) are exclusively Faroese. Of the 11 exceptions, 4 are found in Norway as well as in the Faroe Islands, 3 are found in Denmark only, 1 in Iceland only, and 2 are found in wider Scandinavian distribution. It is interesting to note the lack of greater Scandinavian parallels in this group and to speculate as to whether more such ballads had, in the past, existed in Shetland as they did in the Faroes.

In any case, ‘Hildina’ also shows a remarkable number of features in common with E98, the Faroese ‘*Grimmars kvæði*’ (CCF 51). This is a very long ballad with verses distributed in sub-ballads, or *táttir*, which provide a wealth of details impossible in a shorter narrative. The

heroine, Hilda, dreams of her abduction in the third verse (CCF 51 B): “Sunnan kom ein hvítur fuglur, / bar meg yvir björgum”, [A white bird came from the south / carried me over the cliffs]. Hilda’s father, Grimmar, king of Garðaríki [Novgorod], interprets this as the action of a Christian knight. Nevertheless, Hilda is left behind when Grimmar goes to war. Harald from Ongland [England] arrives and carries Hilda away, marries her in splendour, and fathers three sons. In startling contrast to Hildina’s father, Grimmar offers no pursuit. He effectively cuts Hilda off, saying he will not go to Ongland while Hilda lives there. Harald eventually comes with two of his sons to seek reconciliation with Grimmar. They are viciously betrayed, served drugged wine and in the ninety-ninth verse: “fyrstur sovnaði Haraldur kongur, / síðan hírðin øll”, [First, King Harald fell asleep and then his whole retinue] (CCF 51 B (II Grimmars tåttur) verse 99). They are removed to their quarters and burned to death. The final section of the Faroese ballad deals with the vengeance gained by Hilda’s remaining son. This is, of course, in sharp contrast to the actions of Hildina who sought and achieved her own revenge.

It would appear that as long as Norn remained, there was no great linguistic bar to contacts between Shetland and the Faroe Islands. At the same time, however, the Scandinavian tongue had retreated from northern Scotland and there was no longer a comfortable Scandinavian language relationship in that direction. The language future of the northern isles lay in the languages they shared with Scotland. Although Shetland in the early 1700s was still, to some limited extent, a bilingual community, ‘Hildina’ had not travelled into English or Scots. There is little or nothing here in common with “Scottish” ballads. The connections, however, with the ballads of other North Atlantic areas are many and obvious. “Hildina” is a Scandinavian language ballad in Scotland – a part of our Scottish heritage frozen in space and time.

NOTES

¹ Scotland is generous with the culture of her historic minorities. These works have become the patrimony of Iceland in the same way that the ‘Gododdin’ (from a British Kingdom in Southern Scotland) has been inherited by Wales. There is an existing Orkney text of the *Darraðarljóð* (along with a Latin translation) in Barry (483-86). This is entitled “From the Orcades of Thormodus Torfæus” and has a note that “The above is translated by Grey, in his Ode, entitled ‘The Fatal Sisters’.”

² According to Barnes, there are two interesting problems with taking what Low wrote as an authentic example of the language of Foula. Firstly, the island was devastated by the plague (presumed to be smallpox) in 1720 and repopulated from other islands, and secondly, there are several traditions of shipwrecked Faroese fishermen settling in Foula. Barnes, however, does not feel that these factors would be sufficient to affect the general situation (Barnes 1998: 18). There is also the question of whether ballads are in themselves a good guide to contemporary speech. Barnes notes that “Faroese and Norwegian ballads, for example, not only contain archaic linguistic features, as one might expect, but also a number which do not seem ever to have been part of everyday language . . .” (Barnes 1991: 441). None of this, however, affects the general presentation offered in this paper.

³ In verse 12, where the text is marked with + and the lines are especially long, Hægstad combines the first two long lines into four shorter ones. Two extra lines “og fer det som eg ynskjer det / at du gjeng meg til hande” [and if that turns out as I hope it will / that you will help me] are then inserted before the original third and fourth lines to provide an extra verse. In verse 18 (19 in Hægstad’s revised version), where the lines are short, Hægstad combines lines one and two and adds a repetition of “velborne menn” [well-born men] as the fourth line. In verse 32 (33), Hægstad combines lines one and two and inserts “stod uti borge-led” [stood in the castle gate] as the second line.

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A Hero's Lament: Aithbhreac inghean Coirceadail's Lament for Niall Óg mac Néill¹

JOSEPH J. FLAHIVE

In recent years, the lament of Aithbhreac inghean Coirceadail has not been without interest to scholars of Scottish Gaelic— and indeed to the wider field of Celtic Literature, after a long period of neglect. Some of this delay may have been Protestant religious hesitation due to the domination of the poem by the image of a rosary; in the first printed edition of it, The Rev. Thomas McLauchlan translated the unequivocal *paidrín* as 'jewel', only informing the reader that it was indeed a rosary in a deliberately ambiguous footnote: 'The word "paidrein", derived from "Paidir", *The Lord's Prayer*, really means a *rosary*' (McLauchlan: 126). More recent neglect has probably been because of the notorious difficulty of the manuscript in which it is preserved rather than the nature of the text.

It should suffice to begin with a brief summary of the poem's background and preservation. The poem is an elegy in the Early Modern Gaelic shared by Scotland and Ireland, lamenting the decease of Niall Óg mac Néill of Gigha, the hereditary keeper of Castle Sween. It is preserved solely in that most fascinating of manuscripts, the *Book of the Dean of Lismore* (hereafter, *BDL*), an early sixteenth-century compendium of everything from the *Chronicle of Fortingall* to a shopping list, with much verse filling the literary distance between these genres. The Gaelic in it is written in an orthography based on Middle Scots and far removed from the conventions of Gaelic spelling. Although attempts to interpret sections of the manuscript are still ongoing, the text of the poem with which this paper is concerned has been less problematic than some, and there are no ongoing debates about the readings of it. The discussion which follows will be based on the normalised edition in the standard orthography of Early Modern Gaelic by W.J. Watson. Because this text has been reprinted in a number of anthologies with different translations, this paper will cite the poem by numbering its quatrains, and quotations will be accompanied the by recent translation by Bateman.²

The poem is sixteen quatrains in length and follows a close structure. It opens with an apostrophe of the dead man's rosary in the first line. The narrator proceeds to a series of expressions of her own grief and that of the poets, the clan, and its land. She then returns to address the rosary again in the three final stanzas. This first-person narrator is clearly identified as the wife of the deceased in q. 14, and the manuscript heading reads 'Auctor Huius Aithbhreac Inghean Coirceadail'. Despite the caution of Donald Meek, who observed that 'auctor' in *BDL* may also be interpreted in the Latin sense 'source, authority' (one often retained in its loaned Gaelic form *ughdhar*), rather than as 'author', the feminine name to which the elegy is attributed and the feminine narrative voice, compounded with its unusual contents, do suggest that *BDL* has preserved the name of the earliest known Scottish Gaelic poetess (Meek 1988: 55-8, 65-7; Meek 1989: 137-42).

The poem's frame of reference has long been considered as bardic, following the approach of Derick Thomson, who used it as an example of how 'poets, both professional and amateur but more often perhaps amateur, used the bardic language and metres for personal utterance'. Although he also opined that 'the simplicity and emotional surge of this poem may be seen as a foretaste of the many vernacular songs by women which survive from succeeding

centuries' (Thomson: 53, 55), it is notable that he points towards emotional force, not structure, imagery, or technique, as the link to traditional genres of women's poetry in Scottish Gaelic.

In recent years, several scholars have commented further on unique aspects of the contents of this poem. Meg Bateman considers Aithbhreac's poem a learned, aristocratic imitation of bardic verse that

...draws heavily on the panegyric code in praising his influence and generosity, but departs from conventional expressions of grief in the opening stanza where one of her husband's personal possessions— his rosary— evokes the memory of him and the sadness she feels at his death. (Qtd. in Kerrigan: 13).³

Thomas Clancy's brief treatment of the poem for the purpose of comparison with mediæval Irish verse attributed to women is along similar lines, calling it a poem that is

as fine a lament on the death of a chieftain as one is likely to find, and one which despite its personal elements... maintains both the structure and imagery of aristocratic verse... The attribution to Níall Óg's widow is almost certainly genuine, and the style, restraint, and professionalism of it should be instructive in looking at laments in the voice of lovers and widows in Ireland in both the early and later middle ages (Clancy: 56).

Comparisons to the *caoineadh*, the traditional genre of women's laments, or even to the vernacular tradition of elegy— such as the poems of Mary MacLeod, who composed a century later— are not made by any of these scholars; similarities in form and technique to these traditions of women's or popular verse are conspicuous by their absence. The structures and conventions of these other forms of non-bardic Gaelic lament do not present themselves as sources or parallels for this unique poem.⁴ In form, the poem is in the syllabic *rannaigheacht mhór* metre, but written in accordance with the conventions of *óglachas*, a more simple form of the metre than is usual in bardic elegy.⁵ Bateman's suggestion that the writer had learnt to copy the forms of court poetry has not been contested (Kerrigan: 13). Bardic poetry was certainly present in aristocratic Scottish Gaelic households to be heard, and one surviving bardic poem associated with the same house from the previous century, the Castle Sween poem, is also preserved in *BDL*.⁶ But the move of a woman's lament into a bardic form would give rise to competition with the bardic poets, who often presented themselves within their poems as the symbolic spouses of their patrons, even to the point of the writing of graveside competitions of grief with the keening women of the family; such images were especially common in poetry of the fifteenth century (Breatnach: 54-61). Yet, surprisingly, the strong personal closeness and physicality of so much bardic verse is surprisingly restrained in a poem where the wife can make the claim deeper and truer in contrast to a bardic poet, whose use of those images is conventional rather than personal. The absence of these motifs suggests that models other than the current fashions for bardic verse were being followed.

The most detailed analysis of this poem's literary features is to be found in Wilson McLeod's *Divided Gaels* (McLeod: 154-7). McLeod finds the poem unique in its portrayal of the land, for Irish place names are almost always given descriptive tags, as much as the metre permits, but Scottish ones almost never are:

Interestingly, it is very much the exception for the Scottish placenames

given in... kennings to be embellished with any kind of adjective or descriptive phrase, as happens more often than not in similar Irish poetry. The effect, once again, is that Ireland appears as a land saturated with associations, Scotland as a relatively unimagined landscape in comparison, about which there is not a great deal to say. The only Scottish poem where this device is used with any intensity is Aithbhreac inghean Coirceadail's elegy for Niall Óg Mac Néill (fl. 1455) beginning 'A phaidrín do dhúisg mo dhéar' ('O rosary that has roused my tear'), in which she labels Niall Óg 'leómhan Muile na múr ngeal', 'seabhag Íle na magh mín', 'dreagan Leódhuis na learg ngeal', and 'éigne Sanais na sreabh séimh' ('lion of white-walled Mull', 'hawk of Islay of smooth plains', 'dragon of Lewis of bright slopes', 'salmon of Sanas of quiet streams'), and laments the plight of 'Giodha an fhuinn mhín' ('smooth-soiled Gigha') after Niall Óg's death. Styling like this would not be remotely unusual in Irish bardic poetry— it would certainly be reckless to attribute its presence here to female authorship— but this kind of decoration stands out starkly in the Scottish context, even in the work of other amateurs. Also striking is the contrast between the underdevelopment of Scottish bardic poetry and the vivid imagined landscape of later Scottish vernacular verse, with its dense use of placenames and adjectival phrasing (McLeod: 154-5).

There is, however, a possible reason for both the mode of expression of grief and for the unusual descriptions of the terrain that also explains some of the other features of the poem's construction. Aithbhreac inghean Coirceadail was perhaps not only using formal bardic models for elegy to express her grief, but also the other great corpus of syllabic verse (and one which also consistently favoured the *óglachas* forms of metres like the one used in Aithbhreac's elegy): the Ossianic tradition. There are several textual points that support the hypothesis of an heroic model: the use of a frame focusing on an object; the opening formula of the frame; the formulae of the closing, including a treble *dínadh* ('closing') and an invocation of the Virgin for her own salvation; the geographical concerns of the poem; and the compressed account of Niall's noble qualities.

The presentation of the poem as an apostrophe to the rosary is a motif associated with heroic verse rather than with bardic elegies. Bardic poems focusing upon objects (not including animals) are quite rare, although not unknown in the bardic tradition.⁷ Apostrophe as a framing device used in both opening and closing to create a frame is extremely rare; the author's search through hundreds of published poems in the bardic corpus yielded only three such poems.⁸ None of these is an elegy, and their structural relation to the elegy on Niall mac Néill is slight. The author is aware of only a single elegy in the bardic corpus of Ireland and Scotland that both addresses and praises an object in more than a passing mention in order to recall its deceased owner; it is a praise of the harp, the most frequently praised object in the bardic corpus.⁹ In heroic poetry there is, however, a group of lays that use this device in a manner identical to the way that Aithbhreac's elegy does. Among the Ossianic lays in the Irish manuscript *Duanaire Finn* (Killiney MS A20, now deposited in the archives of University College, Dublin), there are five which focus on an object to provide a frame for an in-tale, characterised by a strong elegiac element in gazing upon Fenian objects and recalling the men who bore them; these lays may be judged on linguistic grounds to date as early as the late twelfth or the thirteenth century. These poems are '*Ceisd agam ort, a Cháoilte*' (known as '*An Corr-Bholg*', i.e. 'The Crane-Bag'), '*Uchán a sgiéth mo ríogh réil*' ('*Sgiath Finn*'), i.e. 'Fionn's Shield'), '*Siothal Chaálta, cíá ros fuair*' ('*Síothal*

Chaoilte, i.e. 'Caoilte's Dipper'), 'A *chlóidhimh chléircín in chluig* ('*Cloidheamh Osgair*', i.e. 'Oscar's Sword'), 'Iss é súd colg in laoich láin' ('*Colg Chaoilte*', i.e. 'Caoilte's Sword'). The poems 'Sgiath Finn' and 'Colg Caoilte' are also preserved in RIA MS D.ii.1, called the *Book of Uí Maine* (or Hy Many), a fourteenth-century MS.¹⁰ As a group, these poems all open with the address to an object or discussion of it followed by a few quatrains on its owner's qualities, and all close with a return to the object and a lament for its owner, usually with a religious invocation.¹¹ The structural closeness of this group of Ossianic lays to the elegy, in the use of a frame employing an apostrophe to remember one deceased through an object associated with him, is much greater than the resemblance of the elegy to bardic or vernacular poems. It is not unreasonable to expect that these Ossianic ballads (or lost ballads of the same structure) are the template for the type of elegy that Aithbhreac composed, or at least that the operation of an awareness of laments in heroic ballads influenced her style.

Each of the Ossianic poems opens with the introduction of an object belonging to a departed warrior. The first quatrain of the poem on Fionn's shield turns from the shield to grief at the loss of Fionn:

Uchán a sgiéith mo ríogh réil
ionnsa do beth fó mísgéimh
dogra nach mair do triath tenn,
a chomla sgiéith na hÉireann (Mac Neill: 34 [equiv. to Meyer: 146, except réidh
'graceful, even-tempered' in place of réil 'rightful']).

(Alas, O shield of my rightful king,
[it is] hard, thy being in a disfigured state,
a misery that thy powerful master lives not,
O gate of the shields of Erin!) .

Aithbhreac's elegy similarly opens with the apostrophe that turns into grief-bearing memory:

A phaidrín do dhúisg mo dhéar,
ionmhain méar do bhithheadh ort;
ionmhain cridhe fáilteach fial,
'gá raibhe gus a nocht.

(Oh rosary that woke my tears,
beloved the finger that on you did lie,
beloved the kindly generous heart
that you belonged to till tonight) (q. 1).

The opening leads into a broader discussion of loss in both the elegy and the heroic laments. It is notable that quatrains opening with the adjective *ionmhain*, 'dear', or describing someone or something as *caomh*, are devices of introduction in Ossianic verse, e.g. the mention of Caoilte as *ionmhain* in q. 4 of '*Síothal Chaoilte*' (MacNeill: 38) that begins the description of his character. However, it is not in the brief opening frame, but in the more substantial closing, that the Ossianic formulæ are most apparent.

The closing of Aithbhreac's elegy has three quatrains, each using the entire initial line of the poem as a *dúnadh*:

An rogha fá deireadh díbh

's é thug gan mo bhrígh an sgéal:
do sgar ríom mo leathchuing rúin,
a phaidrín do dhúisg mo dhéar.

Is briste mo chridhe im chlí,
agus bídh nó go dtí m'éag,
ar éis an abhradh dhuibh úir,
a phaidrín do dhúisg mo dhéar.

Muire mháthair, muime an Ríogh,
go robh 'gam dhíon ar gach séad,
's a Mac do chruthuigh gach dúil,
a phaidrín do dhúisg mo dhéar.

(The most recent, finest of them all,
the tale of him has cost me dear,
my beloved yokefellow has parted from me,
Oh rosary that woke my tears.

Broken is my heart within my breast,
and will remain so until my death,
longing for the fresh dark-lashed man,
Oh rosary that woke my tears.

Mary, mother, nurse of the King,
may she protect me far and near,
and also her Son who created every beast,
Oh rosary that woke my tears) (qq. 14-16).

Of the four complete Ossianic poems with the apostrophe frame, two of them, '*Sgiath Finn*' and '*Síothal Chaoilte*', employ the same triple closure. There are a number of more specific reflexions of the motifs that close the Ossianic lays which are also found in the elegy. In '*Sgiath Finn*', the final quatrain is a plea for personal salvation that invokes Christ and makes mention of the Virgin Mary:

Go rum sáora rí neimhe
mac maith Muire inghene
ar iffreann go ngeire ngádh
fa ndearnadh éighme is uchán (Mac Neill: 38).

(The King of Heaven save me,
Son of the Virgin Mary,
from Hell so sharply perilous
whereby has been made weeping and woe.)

The frequent complaint of the aged Oisean in the lays, *Brisde mo chroidhe is mo corp* ('Broken is my heart and my body') (Mac Neill: 37) is reflected almost verbatim by Aithbhreac in her closing also: '*Is briste mo chroidhe im chlí*' ('Broken is my heart within my breast') (q. 15a). The

line 14b in the elegy, '*s é thug gan mo bhrígh an sgéal* ('the tale of him has cost me dear', more literally 'the tale of him has sapped my strength'), which reflects the uselessness of mourning in pursuit of salvation, forms the first of the three closing quatrains and is mirrored in the line '*nochán fhuil mo mhaoinse dhe*' ('my benefit is not from it') (Mac Neill: 45) at the conclusion of '*Síothal Chaoilte*'. Also of note among the poem closings, is that '*Colg Chaoilte*' in its final quatrain also speaks of tears raised by the sight of the sword around which the poem is composed (Mac Neill: 140). It is clear that the closing formulæ of these texts share closely in a common model.

It is notable that Aithbhreac, in the final quatrain quoted above, prays for her own protection—just as Oisean does in the poem on Fionn's shield—rather than for the salvation of her husband, as would be expected within the pre-Reformation practice of her time, when prayer for the dead was considered a duty, though one which was only rarely expressed in verse before the Counter-Reformation (Simms: 400, 410 n. 12).¹² A number of other heroic ballads surviving in Scotland which do not share in the apostrophe frame sub-genre, have closing religious invocations for the protection of Oisean the narrator, even when he is lamenting Osgar, Fionn, or the *fian* in general. In *BDL*, lays III, IV, VI, and XII (by Ross' numbering) all have invocations of Mary, Christ or the Apostles. Invocations are also common in later Irish lays, though absent in later Scottish ones, such as those printed by Campbell in *Leabhar na Féinne* (apart from those taken from *BDL*); this discrepancy is almost certainly due to the changing theology of Protestant Scotland causing change in the texts. It suffices to show through the preservation of such closing prayers in *BDL* that such forms were also current in late mediæval Scotland.

As has been discussed above, McLeod finds the development of the Scottish landscape in the elegy to be unparalleled in bardic verse and found in the later vernacular tradition. But additionally, the description of the Scottish landscape occurs in heroic verse. Because such description is common in the vernacular tradition in the Early Modern era, one cannot look to later Ossianic texts for an answer, due to the possibility of modification of the heroic poems through interaction with other genres of verse at a later period. The only source which is old enough to provide a clue is again *BDL*. In it, Ossianic texts demonstrate a love of description of places of uncertain location, some of which may be Scottish, although their true location is often ambiguous. Poem IX, 'The Death of Diarmaid', is attributed to an *ughdhar*, Ailéin Mac Ruaidhrí, bearing a name which is likely Scottish. The lay should be regarded as naturalised to a Perthshire context, as Donald Meek has argued in his recent edition (Meek: 1990: 343-5). The places mentioned are Gleann Síodh and Beinn Ghulbainn (q. 1: '*Gleann Síodh an gleann-so rém thaoibh / a[m] binn faoidh éan agus lon*' 'Glen Shee is this glen beside me, where songbird and blackbird sweetly sing'). Adjectives are also applied to the places; in q. 2, Beinn Ghulbainn is '*gorm*'; in q. 8, it is '*glas*' (Meek 1990: 352-3). There is no sign in the text in *BDL* that it would have been perceived by either author or audience as being set in Ireland, and Ross observed that there is no Gleann Síodh in Ireland, associated with Beinn Ghulbainn or not (Ross: 304). The toponyms in the 'Lay of Fraoch' (poem XXIX in Ross), which also receive description, may similarly be regarded as nativised to several Scottish sites; the lay itself, despite its connections to an Old-Irish tale in the Ulster cycle and the *dinnshenchas* of Carnfree in Co. Roscommon, is only known in Scotland, and likely Scottish in origin (Meek 1984: *passim*).

These points suggest that Ossianic verse may again be an influence in Aithbhreac inghean Coirceadail's style, although it cannot be ruled out that she simply extended the imagery of the Irish bardic landscape to Scotland. Most of the other ballads in *BDL*, many of which are of likely Irish origin, bear Irish toponyms or have no specific geography at all, but the case of 'The Death of Diarmaid' suggests that the extension of geographical description had occurred within heroic verse in Scotland before the opening of the sixteenth century, early enough to be an

influence on the lament for Niall Óg Mac Néill. The descriptions of Scottish terrain may be a heroic influence; nevertheless, due to the lack of conclusive evidence the question must remain open.

In contrast to the usual thirty or forty quatrains of a bardic lament, the elegy for Niall Óg is only sixteen quatrains. Of these, the first three are the introductory frame. The body of the poem only extends from the fourth to the eleventh quatrains; an invocation of Christ and a return to personal expressions of grief at the grave for her own loss begins the return to the frame at quatrain twelve, and the final three quatrains are addressed to the rosary directly. The quatrain of the grave which precedes them, moreover, is something that is common to all poetry of lamentation, popular or bardic, keen or epic lament.

There are only eight quatrains in the main body of the elegy (qq. 4-11), which may be seen as a rapid progression of motifs: a quatrain on Niall's noble speech, two on his patronage to poets, one on his patronage to the Church, and four on the joylessness of life without him: a quatrain on personal effects of the loss, and three on the court, lands, and people of the clan. These motifs are, of course, key points in the panegyric code and are thus to be expected. However, it is within Ossianic laments that such summarised progressions of the highlights are to be found. For example, in Oisean's lament for Fionn in the *BDL* poem XXVII (incipit '*Sé lá gus andé*'), Oisean gives twenty quatrains on Fionn's qualities followed by ten primarily concerned with his own personal loss. The progression of motifs describing Fionn is: eloquence, bravery, generosity to poets, lordship over his lands, and the protection of Ireland. Other Ossianic laments in *BDL* and elsewhere share this outline: a short lament on the qualities of the one lamented and a section, often as long, on personal ruin. Perhaps more important than the similarities to the general form of the Ossianic lament is the fact that two of the poems in *Duanaire Finn* that contain the object-focused framework also contain a section of several quatrains lamenting the loss of such a noble warrior once had the object, before proceeding to the in-tale. A lament of this type for Fionn is made in qq. 2-5 of '*Sgiath Finn*' (Mac Neill: 34); and a similar one for Caoilte is located in qq. 7-11 of '*Stiothal Chaoilte*' (Mac Neill: I, 38). A different type of grief, not dissimilar from that expressed regarding the land bereft of good lordship in the elegy (q. 10), is found immediately preceding the closing frame of '*Colg Chaoilte*' in qq. 53-8 (Murphy: II, 138-40).

To probe deeper into the motivation for choosing an Ossianic model for a very real lament is speculative by its nature. Perhaps there was a desire to avoid direct competition with a court poet who certainly would have composed an elegy on the decease of his patron. Perhaps the less strict metrical form was easier, or the ubiquitousness of Ossianic poetry provided models of greater familiarity than more rarefied bardic verse.¹³ Nevertheless, there is one possibility for which there is more concrete evidence. Within the vernacular heroic verse of the Ulster Cycle, the poem '*Clann Uisneach nan each geala*', first printed in the Gillies collection (260-7) and later by Campbell (22-4), often called 'The Lament of Deirdre', lists Dún Suibhne as one of the places in Scotland to which Deirdre must bid adieu; the same quatrain, number 40 (Campbell: 23; Gillies: 265) is also found in one of the short poems in Early Modern Irish prose versions of the tale of Deirdre.¹⁴ The heroic associations of Niall mac Néill's hereditary seat are also seen in the Castle Sween poem: it describes the singing of Ossianic lays as customary in the castle and as a fitting welcome to its ruler by the *aos dána* :

Teagathair [d'] aos eal[adh]an Alban
 fearaid fáilte ar onchoin Mís;
 lucht cáinte <[ó] Mhuir Mhanainn>
 do chuir fáilte ó rannaibh ris.

Gnáthach bhí a n-iomarbháidh áine,
eachtra féine Fhinn a [g]ceóil;
aithnigh[id] an duasach deithbhir,
mar tá dualach [d'] einigh Eóin.

(There is a coming of the men of art of Scotland, [and] they bid welcome to the warrior-dog of Mis; satirists <from the sea of Man> gave him a welcome by means of verses.

Customary was their pleasurable contention; the adventure of the Fian of Fionn [fills] their songs; they recognize the lawful bestower, as is proper to a man of John's generosity) (Meek 1997: 35, 38, qq. 21-2).

Thus the literary contexts of Castle Sween in both other references in verse are heroic in nature.

In addition to the associations of Castle Sween and the Ossianic cycle, Pádraig Ó Macháin, in his 1989 thesis on Fearghal Óg Mac an Bhaird, found another connexion. He observed that the poetry of the Mac Suibhne family, who had been the previous keepers of Castle Sween, had an unusually large number of references to the *fiana*. For example, the poem '*Cia a-deir gur imthigh Éamonn*', a lament for Éamonn mac Maol Mhuire mhic Dhonnchaidh Mhic Shuibhne, the poem is primarily a long comparison between Éamonn and Fionn, stressing the similarity of the gallowglass' position to Fionn's: Éamonn was *athbhuanna mar Fionn* ('a mercenary like Fionn'; Ó Macháin: 217). Other poets also tended to use Ossianic allusions when writing of the Mac Suibhne family; poems by Tadhg Dall and Eochaidh Ó hEoghusa actually stress the superiority of various Mac Suibhne men to Fionn, on the grounds that although their careers were similar, the Mac Suibhne family was also blessed with a superior lineage (Ó Macháin: 218-9).¹⁵ Katherine Simms' database of the corpus of bardic poetry has enabled a thorough search for poems for the Mac Suibhne family which have sections comparing members of that family to Ossianic warriors. This search identified five more poems with extended Fenian conceits, demonstrating that this motif was a frequent means of praising that family.¹⁶

Finally, it is worthy of note that the hall is silenced in Aithbhreac's elegy:

Mar thá Giodha an fhuinn mhín,
Dún Suibhne do-chím gan cheól,
faithche longphuir na bhfear bhfial:
aithmhéala na Niall a n-eól.

(Sad is Gigha of the smooth soils,
I see Dùn Suibhne standing on its green,
fort of the men now without a tune,
they know the sorrow of Clan MacNeill) (q. 10).

The death of music is a natural motif of grief, but it is not unlikely that Aithbhreac had in mind the scene in the Castle Sween poem which specifically associates it with the recitation of *laoithe fianaigheachta* when she composed the quatrain, or at least drew on a pre-existing connexion of the castle with heroic verse. She therefore may have thought it appropriate to mourn a keeper of Castle Sween in Ossianic terms because the castle itself had similar heroic associations.

In conclusion, Aithbhreac inghean Coirceadail's elegy for Niall Óg appears to have Ossianic models in form and in content. The relationship is strongest with those early lays

focused on the Fenian *reliquiae* which are found in *Duanaire Finn* (and other manuscripts containing the poem '*Síothal Chaoilte*'). It appears that she took the model of the frame and lament, simply removing the extended history or in-tale of more lengthy heroic models. This may also explain why this poem is preserved in *BDL*, which preserves it in the context of a large collection of Ossianic laments, and vernacular poems. (This natural context is somewhat obscured to the modern reader by the artificial separation of the published poems from that manuscript by genre in the most widely available editions, the thematic volumes in the Scottish Gaelic Texts Society series published as *Scottish Verse* and *Heroic Poetry*.) The poem occurs in the manuscript immediately following the Ossianic poems '*Rosg Ghull*' ('Goll's War-Song') and then the death-tale lay '*Bàs Dhiarmaid*' ('The Death of Diarmaid'). A Scottish vernacular poem by Duncan Mac Caillein follows (Mackechnie: I, 185). One might summarise the position of the poem as surrounded by the distinctly Scottish, the Ossianic, and the elegiac: a triad that would epitomise the taste of Duncan MacGregor, the Dean of Lismore. The thematic similarities of this elegy with the heroic elegies would have recommended this poem to the dean on the grounds of his literary tastes and provide good reason for its preservation in the manuscript in which it is found, among texts of the sort which inspired it. To read the elegy '*A phaidrín do dhúisg mo dhéar*' in the context of the tradition of heroic verse not only suggests a wider distribution of a rare and early sub-genre of Ossianic lays, but also provides a fascinating case-study of how branches of the Gaelic tradition could interweave to create new and unique works in different genres.

NOTES

¹ Versions of this paper have been read at Rannsachadh na Gàidhlig III, Edinburgh, July 2004; and in the seminar of The Department of Early and Medieval Irish, University College, Cork, in January 2005. I thank all those who attended and especially William Gillies, Donald Meek, Kevin Murray and Seán Ó Coileáin for assistance in revising and expanding this paper.

² The original edition of the text is in Watson 60-5. It is reprinted with Bateman's translation in Kerrigan: 52-5. The text is also reprinted in Crawford & Imlah: 78-83 with a verse translation by Derick Thomson previously published without the Gaelic text in Thomson: 53-4. There is one minor change in the later printings: Watson printed the author's name as Aithbhreac Inghean Coirceadail, but the reprints spell the name Corcadail.

³ The 'panegyric code' is the stock of traditional images used in poetry, usually to indicate nobility (or lack of it). A description of these images as used in professional bardic poetry is given in Knott 1922-6: I, li-lxiv. The use of these images in Scottish verse is explored at length in MacInnes.

⁴ The conventions of the *caoineadh* ('keen'), regarding form, content and performance, are summarised by Bromwich in her analysis of the Irish 'Keen for Art O'Leary' (Bromwich: 242-3). Her list of conventions of the keen, in summarised form, includes: (a) direct address to the corpse; (b) arrangement in short lines of 2 or 3 stresses, arranged in irregular stanzas; (c) each stanza opens with a term of endearment (*Mo ghrádh*, &c.); items (d) through (h) of her list are conventional images such as warning dreams and themes from the panegyric code.

⁵ *Rannaigheacht mhór* consists of quatrains in which lines of seven syllables end in monosyllabic words, and lines b and d rhyme. The final word in c also rhymes with a word in the interior of d, and there are additional internal rhymes within the couplets. Further metrical ornaments are required in stricter forms of the metre. A full technical description of the metre as

used in Classical verse can be found in Knott 1928: 13-16, and an outline of the of the rules for rhyme is found in Knott 1928: 5-9.

⁶ The poem on Castle Sween has been printed and edited several times. The edition of the Castle Sween poem in Watson: 6-13 has been entirely superseded by Meek 1997. In the poem, the MacSweeney family in Ireland is urged to recapture the Scottish castle to which they claimed ancestral right. The poet describes the glory of the planned fleet and expedition, then MacSweeney hearing poetry and heroic lays at the recovered castle.

⁷ Katherine Simms' database of bardic poetry now posted on the website of the Dublin Institute of Advanced Studies (www.dias.ie) lists only twelve poems in the category of praises of objects; half of these are praises of steeds or hounds. The more common type of object-poems, such as the praise of the bowl of the king of Connaught, 'Cuach ríogh Connacht cuanna séad', (McKenna 1939-40: I, 33-5; II, 20-1) are a simple secondary praise of a person through his possession, or a request for the object through praising it; such poems are linear in form and do not serve as a frame for in-tales.

⁸ The poems are: '*Mo chean doit, a Ghráinne gharbh*' (ed. & trans. in Knott 1922-6: I, 243-5; II, 160-1), in which Tadhg Dall Ó hUiginn praises and obtains a dagger; the poem '*A chláirsíoch Chnuic Í Chosgair*', in which Gofraidh Fionn Ó Dálaigh praises the harp of O'Conor: this circulated in Scotland and is preserved in the *Book of the Dean of Lismore* (an edition of it based on other manuscripts is printed in Bergin: 66-9); the dagger-praise '*Gur mheala an t-armsa a Éamúinn*', (ed. & trans. in Knott 1922-6: I, 138-40; II, 91-2); and the late Irish example of '*An tú m'aithne, a fhalluing donn?*' in the Book of the O'Conor Don, (ed. in Bergin: 157-8). The last of these poems now appears to be of a different character than had been previously thought: Prof. Roibeard Ó Maolalaigh's paper at Rannsachadh na Gàidhlig III, August 2004, yet unpublished, has unmasked it as a bawdy double entendre, and removed it far from the serious bardic corpus. Of these, only the second predates Aithbhreac's elegy. One more poem is worthy of mention, 'Tabhraidh chugam cruit mo ríogh' by Giolla Brighde Albanach (ed. in O'Curry: III, 271-3 and Walsh: 113-5). It is a praise of O'Brien's harp, which he has been sent to buy back from Scotland. He failed in his mission and praises the harp and O'Brien, whilst lamenting that it will not return to its home. The image of the harp opens and closes the poem, though he addresses it only at the beginning. Cf. Flahive: 117-20.

⁹ 'Aithne charad clairseach Bhriain' is a five-quatrain address to the harp of Brian Mag Shamhradhain (ob. 1298). It is a poem of a single conventional image with no development: four quatrains describe the past merriment in the hall; the final quatrain praises Brian as generous to poets. The poem is preserved in the Book of Magauran, from which it has been edited and translated in McKenna 1947: 59, 311-12.

¹⁰ All quotations of *Duanaire Finn* have been cited from the edition of MacNeill, continued by Murphy. Unpublished editions of these poems have been included in Flahive: 224-62, 295-328, on which the translations given are based. Regarding the dates of composition of these poems, vid. Murphy: III, cvii-cxvii and the introductions to the commentaries on the individual poems; the critique of Murphy's methods in Carey: 1-18; and in Flahive: ch. IV. The texts of the two poems in the *Book of Uí Maine*, found on fol. 203-4, remain unpublished, apart from two opening quatrains of 'Sgiath Finn' in Meyer: 146, but the texts match quatrain by quatrain to those in *Duanaire Finn*.

¹¹ The poem 'Ceisd agam ort, a Chaoilte' ('The Crane-Bag') appears to fit the pattern from its opening, but is fragmentary and lacks its *dúnadh*.

¹² Cf. the corpus of religious verse in McKenna, much of which is taken from the Yellow Book of Lecan *duanaire* dated to 1473, and therefore unquestionably earlier than Aithbhreac inghean

Coirceadail's elegy. Pleadings for the speaker's salvation, often by invocation to the Virgin or another saint, are usual. Similarly, lines of prayer for the salvation of the deceased are frequent in elegies. None of these poems, nor others of which the author is aware, are about the death of another climaxing with a plea for *one's own* salvation, excepting only Aithbhreac's elegy.

¹³Use of an Ossianic model in Scottish vernacular verse is not unique to this poem; Anja Gunderloch demonstrates a later example of a rather different type in 'Donnchadh bán MacIntyre's "Marbhrann do Chù" and the Gaelic Ballad Tradition'.

¹⁴The quatrain is printed in Mac Giolla Léith: 98, line 206, and in O'Flanagan: 44-5.

¹⁵The poems are Ó hUiginn's '*Leithéid Almhan i nUltaibh*', poem 27 in Knott 1922-6: I, 195-201; II, 130-4, and Ó hEoghusa's unpublished poem '*Roinn leithe ar anbhúain Éireann*' to Eoghan Óg Mac Suibhne na dTuath in RIA MS 23.F.16, p. 47, equivalent to British Library Egerton MS 111, p. 107.

¹⁶Many thanks are due to Katherine Simms for her kindness for searching her database for the author prior to its publication on the website of the Dublin Institute of Advanced Studies (www.dias.ie) to provide further examples. None of these poems not located by Ó Macháin are published. Four are found in RIA 24.P.25: '*Da uaithni fulaing fa Fhainid*', fol. 73r; '*Fada Fanaid re rath ríogh*', fol. 72v; '*Geall re hinbhe oighreacht Finn*', fol. 73r; and '*Cia chosnas buanacht Banbha*', fol. 79r. One more, '*Triar do thogas ós iath Mogha*', is found in Maynooth MS B.6, p. 4.

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Supernatural Beings in the Far North: Folklore, Folk Belief, and The Selkie

NANCY CASSELL MCENTIRE

Within the world of folklore, stories of people turning into animals are well known. Either by accident or by design, a person may become a malevolent wolf, a swan, a helpful bird, a magic seal, a dog, a cat. Sometimes these stories are presented as folktales, part of a fictitious, make-believe world. Other times they are presented as legends, grounded in a narrator's credibility and connected to everyday life. They may be sung as ballads or their core truths may be implied in a familiar proverb. They also affect human behavior as folk belief. Occasionally, sympathetic magic is involved: the human imagination infers a permanent and contiguous relationship between items that once were either in contact or were parts of a whole that later became separated or transformed. A narrative found in Ireland, England, and North America depicts a man who spends a night in a haunted mill, where he struggles with a cat and cuts off the cat's paw. In the morning, the wife of a local villager has lost her hand (Baughman: 99; Disenchantment / Motif no. D702.1.1). France, French-speaking Canada and French-speaking Louisiana have stories of the *loup-garou*, a shape-shifter who is a person trapped in the body of an animal. One might suspect that he or she has encountered a *loup-garou* if that the animal is unusually annoying, provoking anger and hostile action. One penetrating cut will break the spell that has kept it trapped in animal form. In a Cajun variant of this tale, a woman who is vexed with a dog that will not leave her alone throws a knife at the dog and cuts it on the nose. As soon as it begins to bleed, it turns into a man. 'Thank you very much, Madame', he says. 'You have released me from a curse' (Ancelet: 160).

Countless variants of the Grimm brothers' famous fairy tales 'Beauty and the Beast' and 'The Frog King' describe magical transformations. Pursued by an animal suitor, the heroine has conflicting feelings of obligation to her parents, who support the union, and a personal revulsion at the prospect of an animal lover. 'As her duty', she dines with, entertains, and finally is faced with the ultimate sacrifice of going to bed with a pig, a snake, a goat, a donkey, a mouse or a frog. In nearly every variant, it is an act of compassion (accepting the beast) or an act of furious defiance (attempting to harm the beast in a fit of rage) that has the power to disenchant, and the beast becomes a handsome prince (Tatar: 29).

From northern seas of the world come a number of folk narratives, ballads, proverbs and folk beliefs about magical creatures known as selkies, supernatural beings who are capable of transformation from human form on the land to seals in the water. Selkies are similar to but not the same as mermaids, women of wondrous beauty who have both human and marine physical characteristics in the same body. Neither are they the same as kelpies, water creatures that assume the form of a beautiful horse in order to capture and drown their human victims (Douglas: 112-16), or njuggles (or neugles), the Shetland equivalent of a water horse. A njuggle will appear as an ordinary Shetland pony, which, if mounted, will 'plunge in the twinkling of an eye into the nearest burn' (Robertson: 274; also Blind: 188-205).

Selkies are often found along a shore, at the edge of the ocean, where human life and marine life meet. The water's edge, like all liminal locations, can be the setting for extraordinary experiences. Those who frequent such locations, such as fishermen, are poised between the familiar world of their

local community and the vast expanse of unpredictable sea. From this expanse, a magical creature emerges and comes ashore, where it transforms itself into human (often female) form. Thus disguised, it attracts people with its startling beauty, sometimes for amorous purposes and sometimes to lure them into the sea. Selkies can be found on rocky coastal outcroppings, where gray seals typically reside. Here the selkie will shed her sealskin and bask in the sun. If a man manages to locate the sealskin and take possession of it, the selkie who has shed it will become his ‘property’ and will have to stay with him. Selkies who come ashore as men are also physically attractive, so it isn’t difficult for them to woo young women and father their children, who will in turn become selkies or will possess physical ‘seal-like’ attributes, such as webbed fingers and toes.

The ballad ‘The Great Silkie of Sule Skerry’ (Child 113) is well known by ballad scholars and by folksong revivalists introduced to selkie lore through the singing of Joan Baez in the late 1960s and early 1970s. This sparse and haunting ballad reveals the dramatic highlights of a story of a transformation from seal to man. Francis James Child received a text for the ballad from a Shetland correspondent, William Macmath. In his notes for the ‘The Great Silkie of Sule Skerry’, Child wrote: ‘The ballad . . . would have followed No. 40 had I known of it earlier’.¹ A forward movement of this ballad (from number 113 up to number 40) would have put it among ballads about shape-changers and mortals who move with the folk of the otherworld, a more likely harbour within Child’s vast collection.

Macmath’s Shetland text comes from an 1852 volume of the Scottish Society of Antiquaries, and contains the following key elements of plot: 1) a woman nurses her son, lamenting that she hardly knows the father, or even less, where he is from; 2) a man comes to her and identifies himself as the father, apologising for his ‘grumly’, or fierce, appearance; 3) he explains that he is a selkie; and 4) he offers her a purse of gold in exchange for his son; 5) he prophesies his own death and the death of his son at the hand of the woman’s future husband, a ‘proud gunner’. The ballad’s sparse narrative style raises as many questions as it answers. How did this woman come to be the lover of a selkie? Does she accept the bribe of a purse of gold in exchange for her own child? Is the selkie’s prophecy carried out? In her notes for ‘The Great Silkie of Sule Skerry’ in *Scottish Ballads*, Emily Lyle sheds further light on relations between humans and seal people:

Humans are thought of as close kin of the seal people and the fairy people and can have fruitful relations with them. Even so, the child of the mixed union is doomed in this ballad version, and will fall victim to the human husband. Seal people and fairy people are closely associated in the legend that fits them into the biblical scheme of things, it being said that, when Lucifer was driven out of heaven and fell down to hell, some of the angels who had supported him did not fall as far as hell but landed on the earth and became fairies, or in the sea and became seal people (274-75).

Child 113 The Great Silkie of Sule Skerry²

An eartly nourris sits and sings,
And aye she sings, Ba, lily wean!

Little ken I my bairnis father,
Far less the land that he staps in.

Then ane arose at her bed-fit,
An a grumly guest I'm sure was he:
'Here am I, thy bairnis father,
Although that I be not comelie,

'I am a man, upo the lan,
An I am a silkie in the sea,
And when I'm far and far frae lan,
My dwelling is in Sule Skerrie.'

'It was na weel,' quo the maiden fair,
'It was na weel, indeed,' quo she,
'That the Great Silkie of Sule Skerrie
Suld hae come and aught a bairn to me.'

Now he has taen a purse of goud,
And he has pat it upo her knee,
Sayin, Gie to me my little young son,
An tak thee up thy nourris-fee.

An it sall come to pass on a simmer's day,
When the sin shines het on evera stane,
That I will tak my little young son,
An teach him for to swim the faem.

An thu sall marry a proud gunner,
An a proud gunner I'm sure he'll be,
An the very first schot that ere he schoots,
He'll schoot baith my young son and me.

According to Alan Bruford of the School of Scottish Studies, the selkie ballad 'may have been based on a tale that had been told in Norse, even on a Norse ballad, but as we have it, it was launched into and carried down on a Scots stream of tradition' (1974: 77). Alongside this stream of tradition, as Bruford has described it, was a dramatic poem, 'The Lady Odivere', whose length exceeded 90 stanzas. This longer work, collected and published by Walter Traill Dennison, is an epic narrative with some of the same elements of plot that are found in Child's ballad text, such as the woman with a selkie lover, the birth of a selkie son, the selkie lover's offer of payment to the woman for nursing the child, and the death of the selkie son. Although much of this poem has, according to Bruford, 'a core of tradition,' there is evidence of creative editing in Dennison's text (Bruford 1974: 70-77). 'The Lady Odivere' can be found in Dennison's *The Scottish Antiquary*

(1894), G. F. Black's *County Folklore* (1903), and in Ernest W. Marwick's *An Anthology of Orkney Verse* (1949). Its most recent reprinting is in *Orkney Folklore and Sea Legends* (Dennison: 90-103). The contemporary Orkney writer George Mackay Brown incorporated 'The Lady Odivere' into a dramatic reenactment, 'The Ballad Singer', in *An Orkney Tapestry* (1973). Brown described it as 'a great unknown ballad' (4). The American folksinger Gordon Bok adapted the work and set it to music in a 1989 production, 'The Play of The Lady Odivere'.

The plot of 'The Lady Odivere' is elaborate. The heroine is courted by Odivere, a man of great physical strength who cannot resist women: 'he lo'ed de sword, he lo'ed de sang; But aye he lo'ed the lasses mair'. He woos her, enticing her not into Christian marriage but by 'Odin's oath,' apparently deceiving her.³ He departs, leaving her waiting and hearing no word of him. She eventually realises that her marriage was not valid, and she is left with 'peerie' [little] joy:

Her bony een blinked so sae bright,
Her reed an' white grew white an' grey,
An' ilka day shü wised for nicht,
An' ilka nicht shü wised for day.

*Her lovely eyes their brightness lost,
What had been red and white grew white and grey,
And each day she wished for night,
And each night she wished for day.*

Lady Odivere meets and falls in love with a selkie, and gives birth to a son. Here, as in the Child ballad, she laments her lack of knowledge of the father, whereupon he appears, not as a 'guest', as in Child's collection, but a 'gest,' or apparition (Dennison: 95). The selkie offers to pay her for nursing his child, promising to return in six months. He does return at the appointed time, his hands full of money, which she takes for her 'services'. She then places a golden chain around her child's neck ('Hid for her sake shü bade him wear'). The selkie claims his son, bidding his lover farewell. 'Doo'r anither's wife [You are another's wife]', he explains. Lady Odivere is left alone.

The scene shifts to the return of Odivere, to his great hall, where he boasts of killing a selkie and has brought along the corpse as evidence. When Lady Odivere arrives, her husband has something to show her. It is the golden chain, taken from the seal's body: 'Here's de gowd chain ye got fae me. Tell me, gudewife, who cam it here?'

Lady Odivere collapses in tears; she throws her arms around the seal. She confesses to having a selkie for a lover and explains that this slain selkie was her son. Odivere's reaction is one of indignation:

'Wi' selkie folk du's led a life!
Awa, ye limmer slut fae me!
I wadno hae dee for a wife,
For a' de gowd I' Christendee!'

'With selkie folk you've led a life?

*Away, you wretched slut, from me!
I would not have you for a wife
For all the gold in Christendom!*

Odivere orders his men to lock his wife in a tower. Soon after, her selkie lover (disguised in human form) steps forward and announces that whales are near (in the North Sea). Odivere and his men depart 'wi' muckle speed' to hunt them, but they catch nothing. Discouraged, they return to the great hall to find every door wide open, including the door to the tower. Lady Odivere is gone: 'De lathie fair was clean awa,' / An' never mair bae mortal seen'. Odivere remains a lonely man, ruing the day he took the oath of Odin.

Discoveries of other versions of the shorter selkie ballad, made in years following Child's publication of Macmath's text, are worth noting. In the summer of 1938, Finnish folklorist Otto Andersson spent several days collecting ballads in the Orkney Islands. Not only did Andersson publish a version longer than the Shetland text, but he also made it complete with a tune. Here is Andersson's account of his find, made while interviewing a farmer, Mr Sinclair, on the island of Flotta (Andersson 1954: 39).

The second song later revealed itself as the tune to the 'Great Selchie of the Sule Skerries'⁴ (Child 113). I had no idea at the time that I was the first to write down the tune to this famous ballad. Its pure pentatonic form and the beautiful melodic line with its charming rhythm in irregular time, which gave the text a natural rendering, showed me that it was a very ancient tune I had set on paper.

The image shows three staves of musical notation in G major (one sharp) and 2+3+4 time. The lyrics are: "I am a man up - on the land. I am a Sel-chie in the sea. And when I'm far from eve-ry strand. my dwell-ing is in Sol-sker - rie."

Mr Sinclair was only able to recall one stanza of text, the heart or 'emotional core' of the ballad:⁵ 'I am a man upon the land. I am a Selchie in the sea. And when I'm far from every strand, my dwelling is in Solskerrie'. However, Andersson eventually published a 14-stanza variant with this tune, having found a more complete text in the Orkney newspaper, *The Orcadian* (January 11, 1934). *The Orcadian* text includes a refused wedding proposal, possibly an allusion to fuller accounts of the selkie story: He says, 'My dear, I'll wed thee with a ring, With a ring, my dear, will I wed with thee'. She says, 'Thoo may go wed thee weddens wi' whom thoo will, For I'm sure thoo'll never wed none wi' me'.⁶

'The Grey Selchie of Shool Skerry'

In Norway land there lived a maid,
 'Hush, ba, loo lillie' this maid began,
 'I know not where my baby's father is,
 Whether by land or sea does he travel in'.

It happened on a certain day,
 When this fair lady fell fast asleep,
 That in cam' a good grey selchie,
 And set him down at her bed feet.

Saying 'Awak', awak' my pretty fair maid,
 For oh, now sound as thou dost sleep,
 An' I'll tell thee where thy baby's father is,
 He's sittin' close at thy bed feet'.

'I pray come tell to me thy name,
 Oh, tell me where does thy dwelling be?'
 'My name is good Hein Mailer,
 An' I earn my livin' oot' o' the sea.

'I am a man upon the land,
 I am a selchie in the sea,
 An' when I'm far from every strand,
 My dwelling it is Shool Skerry'.

'Alas, alas this woeful fate,
 This weary fate that's been laid on me,
 That a man should come frae the Wast o' Hoy,
 To the Norway lands to have a bairn wi' me'.

'My dear, I'll wed thee with a ring,
 With a ring, my dear, will I wed with thee'.
 'Thoo may go wed thee weddings wi' whom thoo wilt,
 For I'm sure thoo'll never wed none wi' me'.

'Thoo will nurse my little wee son
 For seven long years upon thy knee;
 An' at the end o' seven long years
 I'll come back and pay the nursing fee'.

She's nursed her little wee son
 For seven long years upon her knee,

An' at the end o' seven long years
He cam' back wi' gold an' white monie.

He says, 'My dear, I'll wed thee wi' a ring,
Wi' a ring, my dear, I'll wed wi' thee'.
'Thoo may go wed thee weddens wi' whom thoo will,
For I'm sure thoo'll never wed none wi' me'.

'But I'll put a gold chain around his neck,
An' a gey good gold chain it'll be,
That if ever he comes to the Norway lands,
Thoo may hae a gey good guess on he'.

'An' thoo will get a gunner good,
An' a gey good gunner it will be,
An' he'll gae oot on a May morning
An' shoot the son an' the grey selchie.

Oh, she has got a gunner good,
An' a gey good gunner it was he,
An' he gaed oot on a May morning,
An' he shot the son and the grey selchie.

(When the gunner returned and showed the Norway woman the gold chain which he found round the neck of the young seal she realized that her son had perished, and gave expression to her sorrow in the last verse.)

'Alas, alas, this woeful fate,
This weary fate that's been laid on me'.
An' ance or twice she sobbed and sighed,
An' her tender heart did brak in three.

While traditional ballads about selkies are limited to the Orkney and Shetland Islands, stories of a human taking the form of a seal or other marine animal, although dominant in northern seas, can be found worldwide. In narrative form, the selkie story is identified as Christiansen's (1958) type ML 4080, 'The Seal Woman'. It also can be classified as a subtype of AT 400 (ATU 400), 'The Man on a Quest for his Lost Wife,' II. (e) The Enchanted Princess (the hero steals one coat and will give back to the owner only if she will marry him; IV. (d) The swan-maiden finds her swan coat and flies away. Donald Archie MacDonald classifies it as F75 'Man captures fairy woman by hiding her seal's etc. skin. After may years she finds skin (usually through one of children) and goes A) taking children; B) Leaving children; C) Leaving some special blessing on husband (MacDonald: 53). Variants involving human-mermaid interaction include the human stealing her cap (Croker: 240-41), her cloak (Ó Duilearga: No. 123), or her

fish-tail (Lessa: 120; Bruford and MacDonald: 273-4; 477). The closest Motif-Index identification for the story of human-seal interaction comes under the category of transformation: D327.2, Seal becomes person. Other motifs include B601.18, Marriage to seal, and B631.2, Human beings descended from seals. The story of seal-human interaction follows the following plot: A selkie meets a mortal who is walking by the edge of the sea. He steals her sealskin. As long as he has the sealskin, she is in his possession. However, she eventually discovers the location of the sealskin and leaves him as soon as she reclaims it.

In most variants of 'The Seal Woman', the selkie is free and at ease in the world of nature, swimming among the waves in the sea as a seal or dancing along the shore as a woman. The man who finds her, however, is able to curtail her freedom by taking and hiding her seal skin. Once her skin is 'taken', she also is removed from her animal life and must conform to human society. She often longs for the sea, but she resigns herself to her fate and becomes a dutiful wife and mother. It is only by chance – a key accidentally left behind, a casual reference to the hiding place, an innocent question from one of her children – that she is given the opportunity to find her seal skin and return to her previous state. She always does, sometimes with sorrow and sometimes (less often) with playful humour.

'The Seal Woman' appears to have a westerly, Atlantic distribution. According to Alan Bruford, this story is widely known on the western and northern coasts of Ireland and Scotland. Variants involving mermaids can be found on the east coasts, where the Atlantic grey seal is prevalent (Bruford 1986: 171-74). Francis James Child quotes Grimm's *Mythologie I* (354f) in drawing Scandinavian and German parallels to the seal-woman theme:

'Finns', as they are for the most part called, denizens of a region below the depths of the ocean, are able to ascent to the land above by donning a seal-skin, which they are then wont to lay off, and, having divested themselves of it, they 'act just like men and women'. If this integument be taken away from them, they cannot pass through the sea again and return to their proper abode, and they become subject to the power of man, like the swanmaidens and mer-wives of Scandinavian and German tradition. Female Finns, under these circumstances, have been fain to accept of human partners. (Child: 494)

Otto Andersson also wrote of his fascination with the appearance of the swan maiden in tales of the North European literary tradition and with other figures such as the 'seal-man' and 'fish-girl' of Celtic and Scottish folklore and the 'porpoise girl' of Oceanic folklore (Andersson 1967: 1-6; also Lessa: 120-67). 'The theme of the Scottish ballad 'The Grey Selchie of Sule Skerrie' is certainly related', he said, 'and so in my opinion is a motif in the famous Finnish epic *Kalevala*' (Andersson 1967: 1). The *Kalevala* contains an episode in the adventures of Vainamoinen, which describes how Vainamoinen is about to slit a fish that he has caught so that he can eat it for his breakfast. The fish, which is unusually beautiful, leaps back into the water, where it assumes female form and speaks to him. She says that she is Aino, the girl whom he wanted to marry, but had let her go. She then dives under the waves, never to be seen again.

In a 1938 letter to Otto Andersson, Anne Gilchrist wrote: 'These seal legends are extremely interesting, for there seems to be, as you will know, a belief around the northern shores of Scotland

that they [seals] are real half-humans - the children of the kin of Lochlann [Scandinavia] under a spell; and the members of a family who were more or less webbed between their fingers and toes were believed to show in this way the traces of their seal descent' (Andersson 1967: 3-4). Walter Traill Dennison recalls stories in Orkney about selkie descendants whose fins were clipped regularly: '... the fins not being allowed to grow in their natural way, grew into a horny crust on the palms of the hands and soles of the feet' (Dennison 1995: 86). Orkney scholar Ernest Marwick also writes about 'the descendants of a Stronsay woman, who sprang from her union with the seal-man she loved, had a thick horn skin on the palms of their hands and on the soles of their feet. In one of the race, known to the present writer, this was a greenish-white tegument fully a sixteenth of an inch thick which was cracked in places and had a strong fishy odor' (Marwick 1975: 28). In another account, the seal-human connection is suggested through ancient or incomprehensible speech. A captured 'Finn woman' (seal woman) would sometimes leave her human husband and 'go down amongst the rocks to converse with her Finn one; but the inquisitive people who listened could not understand a single word of the conversation' (Blind Part II: 405).

In *Scottish Traditional Tales*, Donald MacDougall's narration of the selkie story, set in North Uist, is entitled 'MacCodrum's Seal Wife'. It is framed with a reference to the family as 'the MacCodrums of the seals' (Bruford and MacDonald: 365; also MacAulay: 1-9). A text from Scotland, 'Tom Moore and the Seal Woman', also concerns this family. 'No man of the MacCodrums', it states, 'would kill a seal' (Curtin: 151). Ronald MacDonald Douglas writes in *The Scots Book of Lore and Folklore* that 'although it is not usual for there to be any fruits of a human and a fairy union, it is well-known, of course, that all the MacCodrums, for one clan at least, are descended of a seal'. Further,

Shetlanders, without knowing it, often take fairy-seal-women for their wives. And sometimes very good wives they are, until the day comes when they have to return to the sea, and so to fairyland. And this is how a Shetlander may take a seal-woman for his wife, and know nothing about it until the day she vanishes; and even then he may not understand - he may only think that his wife has run away with a foreign sailor, or something of the kind. When a seal-woman comes ashore, perhaps having failed to entice the man she wants into the waters, she puts off her seal skin and becomes to all outward appearances a normal-looking woman—but always a very beautiful one. As a beautiful woman she has little difficulty in courting the man of her choice, and eventually becoming his wife. Then the day is sure to come—and it may be after years—when her own doffed sealskin is put before her by some mysterious means. Then is she powerless. She can do no other than put on the skin, and when she has done that she must make for the sea, and plunge into the waves, to be seen on earth no more. (Douglas: 111)

From Deerness, Orkney, comes the narrative 'The Selkie Wife', transcribed by J. A. Pottinger. This text contains touches of everyday life, such as a credible justification for the selkie's desire to reconnect with her sealskin ('Mebbe she wanted tae feel the auld selkie skin on her back again') or the description of her subsequent and hasty departure, in which she leaves

her clothes scattered everywhere (in a 'raffle').

A man wanders near the banks of the sea, he hears 'a soond o' fiddles playin' and folk dancin' and laffin' and caerryin' on'.

He hides behind a large crag to observe 'bonnie, nakit weemen' [beautiful, naked women] dancing and playing on the rocks. Lying nearby were 'mair than a score o' selkie skins' [more than 20 seal skins]. He manages to grip a hold of one of the skins. The lass who owned it 'skreekit oot' [cried out] for him to return it. 'I'm tellin' thee the selkie can spaek tae ane anither as weel as thee or me'.

He carries her, fussing all the way, to his home. Eventually she calms down and gets more accustomed to human ways. She is beautiful; he takes 'a fancy tae her'. They marry and live together as man and wife.

One day he goes off into town and takes the bairns with him. She comes across the key to the chest where her sealskin is kept.

'Mebbe she wantid tae feel the auld selkie skin on her back again. . . Onnyway, when her peur man cam back, there was no wife'. The kist [chest] was o[p]en, the skin wasna to be fund and a' her claes [clothes] were lying about i' a raffle'.

He never saw her again. I've heard say that when her bairns take a walk along the banks on a summer's evening, 'they wad hear her greetin' like tae brak her hert'. (Pottinger: 173-5)

A Shetland variant of the same folktale, collected by James Nicholson, describes a Finn

[selkie] maiden's discovery of her skin and subsequent return to the sea:⁷

He did not destroy the skin, contenting himself with hiding it where it was thought there was little chance of her coming across it. The pair married and several children were born. It happened, however, that one of the bairns came across the skin one day in his father's absence, and unthinkingly gave it to his mother. The latter at once left the house, taking the skin with her, but it was said that she cried at parting with the children.

When the father returned he found the bairns in tears. On hearing what had taken place, the distracted man ran instantly to the seashore, just in time to see his wife shaking flippers and embracing a seal. On seeing her husband on the rocky shore, she cried:

Blessins be wi' de,
Baid de an' da bairns:

Bit du kens, da first love
Is aye da best.

*Blessings be with you,
Both you and the children:
But you know, the first love
Is always the best.*

An Icelandic version of ‘The Seal Woman’ refers to the divided sympathies of the departing selkie as she says good-bye to her children, as well as to the subsequent luck of the selkie’s husband, a fisherman:

. . . She had taken the key, looked into the trunk out of curiosity, and found the skin. Unable to resist the temptation, she then had said good-bye to her children, put on the skin, and plunged into the sea. But before she did, the story goes, she recited these words, as if to herself:

‘Of two minds must I be:
I’ve seven children in the sea
And seven more on land’.

The husband is said to have grieved for her deeply.

Later, when he went out fishing, a seal would often circle around his skiff, and sometimes it looked as if tears were running from its eyes. The man had the best of luck in his fisheries ever after, and the sea washed many things up on his shore. People often noticed that when his children happened to be walking on the beach, a seal would swim offshore along with them and throw them multicolored fish and pretty seashells.

But never again did their mother return to land. (Hallmundsson: 96; See also Simpson: 101)

Key characteristics of the selkie story are represented in these texts: The discovery of the selkie; the luring of the human into the selkie world, through music, beauty, nakedness, and charm; the union of the selkie and the human; the discovery of the sealskin; and the inevitable return of the selkie to the sea.

My own fieldwork in Orkney led to this spirited narration from Willie Thomson of

‘Neven’, on the northernmost island of North Ronaldsay.⁸

It was about the Christmas time, and of course everybody had some ale about the New Year, to welcome in the New Year. You see, this laddie, oh, he was what you call a confirmed bachelor. Women were all right in their place.

Aye that! They called for marriage for him and all and would be nagging away 'boot this and that and spoiled a man's freedom. The good wife o' Langer says, 'Now look, Laddie, I can see it coming. Thoo are going to be trapped wi' a lassie and be happy'. 'Ach! Stuff and nonsense,' he says, you see?

Anyway. He was walking along the beach one day a while after, and could he hear some music or something? He couldna say where. He looked all around and thought it was coming from the sea gulls. So he got down among the rocks and there were five or six lassies dancin' away. Not a stitch o' clothes on. Beautiful, that! Then he saw the sealskins lying. So he got around the corner where no one could see him and then he got it, he got a skin pulled down. So then he made a noise or something and then of course everyone grabbed their skin and they all jumped in the sea and away. This poor lassie couldna. So she pleaded wi' him and pleaded wi' him ta give him the [skin]. 'No, no, no,' he said. Oh, he fell in love w' her nearly first sight! [laughter] It was exactly as the old wife o' Langer had foretold, you see.

So anyway, he got her persuaded and she came back to the hoose, and of course they had ta be married. And the minister came and he married them, but they said of this lassie, she put her fingers in her ears during the ceremony. For you see they were supposed to be of the faith of Odin, not Christians, you see? They're spirits. And they were turned into seals on the day [time?], and they could come ashore at certain times.

Well, they did all right, and he had, was it, three children, or four, w' her. Oh, they was there for years and years! Because he were out for the fishing one day with the eldest, who was, say, maybe 12 or 13 years old, with his boat. But the youngest lassie, she hurt her foot somehow, oh, maybe a thorn in it or something. Nothing serious. And her mother kept her in this day, you see, and she was bathing her foot and all and telling her it would soon be better and then she was telling stories, and then the lassie says to her mother, 'Mother, what is that beautiful skin I've seen Daddy looking to sometimes? And he strokes it and strokes it and puts it back and hides it away up there in the corner?'

So, of course, her mother got her a chair. Up she goes. And here was her skin. Seal skin, you see. She took her skin, she kissed her lassie, and she away, down to the sea.

When the man o' the boat came back, there she was, swimming around. And she cried to him. She says, 'I've had a good time together, boy! Take care o' the bairns. I'm off!'

[laughter] But they said -it was said, you know, that sometimes, when the lassie

come doon ta' the rocks on the seashore, she [the selkie] would come o'er there and comb her hair and see if her clothes was all right and everything. Yes. That's what they said.

Willie Thomson's version of 'The Seal Woman' is lighthearted, bringing the fantastic closer to real life through the use of ordinary language and irrepressible humor. Instead of weeping tears of regret, the selkie in Thomson's narrative calls out to her husband ('Boy!') as naturally as any Orkney wife might address her man. She has enjoyed herself as the wife of an Orkney fisherman, but now she is free: 'Take care of the bairns. I'm off!'

Selkie lore can also connect with everyday life through personal and historical legends about deliberate human attempts to help or to harm a selkie. From Shetland comes a legend of how three men arrived at the Ve Skerries (small islands west of Shetland, near the island Papa Stour) with the intention of killing seals for their pelts.

They were in a small boat, but a heavy sea was running and one of them, named Herman Perk, managed to get ashore while the other two agreed to remain in the boat, keeping it a short distance from the rocks. Unfortunately the weather worsened, and the two men in the boat were forced to leave their companion behind. They struggled at the oars against wind and sea and eventually reached Papa Stour, where they set out at once for Herman Perk's house to convey the sad news to his family. They were naturally surprised to find their companion sitting warming himself at the fire.

He had a strange story to tell. After the other two had left him a large seal came up to him and said: 'Herman Perk, you have destroyed many of our folk in your time. Yet nevertheless if you will undertake to do me a service I will carry you in safety to Papa Stour. Some time ago my wife Maryara was made captive in Papa. Her skin is hanging in the skeo [a hut built for drying fish] at Nortoos and without it she cannot return with me to Finnmark. It is the third skin from the door and I wish you to bring it to me'.

Herman agreed to the seal's request and was told to cut two slits in the creature's back as support for his feet, and to place his arms firmly round its neck. The seal then plunged into the sea and within a short time Herman found himself at Papa Stour. True to his promise, he went to the skeo and carried the skin down to the beach where the seal was waiting with his lovely wife. (Nicolson: 88)

Some narratives about the consequences of deliberately harming a selkie (or even speaking ill of them) are full of doom. The selkie may be beautiful, but she is also dangerous. This early account of Shetland belief, narrated by George Sinclair, incorporates the ritual of magic conversion (the use of silver) to offset the power of the shape-shifting Finns:

Sea monsters are for [the] most part called 'Finns' in Shetland. They

have the power to take any shape of any marine animal, as also that of human beings. They were wont to *pursue boats at sea*, and it was dangerous in the extreme *to say anything against them*. I have heard that *silver money was thrown overboard to them* to prevent their doing any damage to the boat. (Blind: 404)

In *Legends and Superstitions of the Sea and of Sailors*, Fletcher Bassett remarks that on the west coast of Ireland, fishermen fear killing seals, for they might possess ‘the souls of them that were drowned at the flood’. Greenlanders, he wrote, also think that people’s souls inhabit the bodies of seals.⁹ According to Icelandic folk belief, ‘sea people’ were said to have descended from Pharaoh’s soldiers, drowned in the Red Sea. They lay aside their skins and resume human form once a year, on Midsummer Eve or on the twelfth day of Christmas (Simpson: 102). A legend collected in the Faeroe Islands describes selkies as ‘people who of their own free will plunged themselves into the ocean and drowned. Once each year, on Twelfth Night [January 6], they get a chance to take off their sealskins, and then they look just like everyone else’ (Kvideland and Sehmsdorf: 264).

An early account of Shetland folklore notes ‘an aversion to and superstitious dread of killing a selkie, lest it should be a metamorphic Finn’ (Spence: 24-25). Folklorist Margaret Baker confirms the notion of ill-fated human–seal involvement: ‘Scottish fisherman’, she writes, ‘regarded seals as women under enchantment, disposed like mermaids to marry ashore. . . . For this reason and because they embodied drowned souls, there was often a marked reluctance to kill seals, and uncanny tales recited the fates of those who did’ (Baker: 146).

One of those tales comes from the Orkney island of Sanday. Orkney scholar Ernest Marwick relates the following:

The mystery inherent in a true folk tale permeates a story about the Holms of Ire, north-west of Sanday. The holms are little tidal islands, and the crofters [farmers] in the neighbourhood had grazing rights on the outer holm, which is the bigger one. In summer, when all the ewes had lambed, they put sheep there. One man, the story goes, put seven ewes and their followers there one year. On his way over with this little flock, he killed a seal burd [pup]. That night all his sheep disappeared without trace. All the rest of the sheep on the holm were completely safe. This occurred in good summer weather, when there was no question of the sheep being swept away. Moreover, the ewes were well-used to being on the holm in summer. Local opinion attributed the disappearance of the sheep to the vengeance of the seal-folk. (Marwick 1991: 295-96)

A similar story comes from Seal Harbor, Maine, on the other side of the Atlantic. The narrator is fisherman Stanley Hadlock:

The seals were a problem, keeping the herring in the harbor. One of the men told the others he would get rid of the seals. One moonlight night he loaded his shotgun and rowed off into the harbor until he saw the old seal and the pup sittin' on a rock. He rowed as near as he dared and laid down the oars and took up the gun. He gave it to the mother with the first barrel and she just rolled off the rock and never came up again. He was goin' to shoot the pup

too, but somehow he couldn't quite bring himself to fire and the chance was lost. The baby seal dove overboard after its mother and the man rowed home and told them he'd shot the seal.

For three weeks after that the little seal swam around the harbor all day long, looking for its mother. Back and forth, back and forth, and at night it would haul itself out on the rock where its mother was shot and cry and whimper just like a baby all night long. It seemed to get thinner and weaker every day and it didn't make so much noise [at] nights toward the end of it and then one mornin' it was gone. And the herrin' was gone.

From that time to this no seal has ever come back to the harbor and after that pup seal left it or disappeared there hasn't been a herrin' ever come into the harbor again. That was a long time ago now and there still aren't any herrin' in the harbor. The fellow that shot that seal felt pretty bad about it and he tried to catch the little one but he never did, you know. It sounded just like a baby and he made up his mind never to shoot another seal and he never did. I was that man. (Beck: 205-6)

In recent decades, in both Orkney and Shetland, there has been active public protest of the widespread killing of seals. Seal pups are killed by fishermen, who claim that the seals consume too much of the local supply of fish. Pups are also killed for their skins. In 1978 Greenpeace, an internationally known environmental action group, staged a dramatic encounter with a Norwegian ship that had arrived in Orkney to cull the seal population. The Greenpeace ship sailed persistently between the Norwegian ship and the seal pups; the Norwegians were never able to get close enough to the seals to shoot them, and were finally discouraged enough to sail home. Obvious reasons for the protest can be found in environmental and humane principles. Less obvious reasons reside in folk beliefs about seal-human interaction.

Ballads, legends, folktales, and even films, such as *The Secret of Roan Inish* (set in Ireland), keep alive the concept of capricious, loving, vengeful or life-saving selkies.¹⁰ At the edge of the sea, an interaction with a magical creature constitutes a core experience in which the supernatural world and the natural world intersect. According to David Hufford (11-45), these sorts of core experiences are crucial to establishing and nurturing spiritual belief. Selkie lore, which focuses on the incursion of the supernatural into everyday life, reveals several provocative beliefs: 1) seals may have special powers; 2) they can move in and out of society, interacting with people who do not know of their powers; 3) in these interactions, selkies are capable of both compassion and revenge.

What meaning can we derive from these beliefs? On an *environmental* level, the selkie stories allow us to consider how we interact with the natural world, how we regard the animal life that surrounds us, and what consequences those interactions might have. Folk legends linking living people to selkie ancestors serve as everyday reminders of the interconnectedness of all life, giving fair warning to those who kill seals for sport or personal gain. The man who kills a seal only for its skin may have a poor season of fishing or he may be lost at sea. Further, the folk belief that the selkies contain the

souls of humans recalls the concept of a larger, sympathetic force.¹¹ Nature and humanity are thus linked: If the seals are harmed, the humans who inflict the harm will suffer as well through illness, bad luck in fishing or emotional distress. Many aspects of these stories recall Sir James Frazer's law of contagious magic. The selkie and her skin are connected spiritually, even when they are physically separated. Even while the selkie is unable to reclaim her stolen or hidden skin, she retains a strong connection to it (a longing for it). Further, destruction of the sealskin could likely cause harm to the selkie as well (Frazer: 45-58).

On the level of *gender relations*, selkie stories provide a context for considering issues of balance of power between men and women. The male 'keeps' the female by claiming a part of her and keeping it hidden from her. The sealskin, so much a part of the woman's first identity, is taken away from her. As long as it belongs to the man who has found her, she must allow that man to have the position of power. Her life on the land is physically and socially contained. Her world is narrow and its rules, determined by her husband and his community, are rigid and predictable. She is obedient. She bears children and feeds and cares for them lovingly. However, the selkie 'keeps' a sense of self through sympathetic connection with her sealskin. Even though she is physically separated from it, she maintains a longing for it and for the freedom that it represents. As soon as she discovers it, she wastes no time in returning to the sea. If the selkie is a male, he does not give up his sealskin and belong to a woman. The sealskin is not mentioned in regard to male selkies—they seemingly come and go as they please between the land and sea. Although they interact with their female lovers, the interaction focuses on their payment of gold, a type of alimony, for the care of their offspring.

In some of the selkie narratives, however, the sealskin gives the female selkie a chance to escape her marriage and frolic with new lovers. A Shetland text describes the horror that a man feels after discovering that his selkie wife has reclaimed her sealskin and abandoned him:

When the father came home, he found the children in tears, and on learning what had happened, bounded through the standing corn to the shore, where he only arrived in time to see, to his grief, his good wife shaking flippers and embracing an ugly brute of a seal. (Blind: 405)

Although women do not relinquish their skins when they pledge themselves in marriage, they do relinquish certain freedoms. Their world shrinks as it becomes focused on domestic concerns and child rearing. They may feel a loss of self as they focus exclusively on their husband's and their children's domains. 'The Seal Woman' texts remind us of tensions inherent in marital life, of freedoms relinquished and adaptive measures taken to 'make the best' of a confined domestic world and a longing that will not go away. If marriage turns sour, women may wish for a return to their former 'self', just as the selkie longs for the sea, but such a change, so vital and inevitable in the selkie folktale, is complicated in real life. The desire for escape from marital bonds has especially poignant implications for women who are caught in abusive relationships and feel powerless to leave them. There is nothing hidden away in a chest somewhere, no magical object that will allow escape through transformation.

The selkie and her sealskin are eventually reunited. This skin, an essential part of the selkie's original identity, has been in the hands of her male captor and husband, sometimes for years. Even

if the union of selkie and human has been a satisfying one, it cannot last indefinitely. The reunion of the selkie with her skin marks the moment of departure from marital life and confirms her inherent ‘otherness’. Although the selkie can live among humans, she is not one of them. Her husband’s attempts to own her by hiding her sealskin cannot succeed. Once a selkie reclaims her individuality, she will, and indeed *must* return to the sea and to her previous state of freedom and uncertainty. A Scandinavian proverb recalls the power of the sealskin: ‘He couldn’t control himself any more than a seal that finds its skin’ (Kvideland and Sehmsdorf: 265).

How do we consider the offspring of selkie-human marriages? These children may be marked with physical features that recall their selkie ancestry, but they may also be given special powers, such as the ability to see the future or uncanny luck at catching fish. Embedded in the concept of supernatural-human union is a sense of reciprocity: the human is ‘captured’ by the beauty of the selkie; he falls in love with her ‘at first sight’ and decides to form a union with her (Thomson). She eventually leaves him to return to the sea, but she also leaves her offspring behind. She swims back now and then to keep an eye on them, watching them when they come to the shore, grooming them, or leaving gifts of seashells. They are aware of their selkie heritage, as are other members of their community. Although the husband ‘captures’ his selkie bride by stealing her skin, he cannot ‘own’ her. After her departure, he assumes his parenthood for their offspring, his ‘payment’ for having taken her from her natural home. The marriage has not been forged without risk or obligation, just as any relationship that involves unions of two previously unrelated groups. Imbedded in the selkie tales is a warning: ‘Beware, for these are in-laws like no other!’ Yet there is also a challenge to take the risk and love a creature from another realm. In his provocative discussion of cosmic intermarriages in Native American origin stories, Gregory Schrepp notes,

‘... such relationships do not always work: they sometimes have disastrous consequences. But these failures do not diminish the value of such relationships as ideals, and, indeed, there would seem to be as much risk in foregoing them as there would be in attempting to create them’ (Schrepp: 23).

On a *cosmological* level, selkie stories may function to keep us aware of larger rhythms and their meanings. The selkie is a supernatural creature that participates in ordinary life, though only for a brief time. The rhythms of her sea-life and her earth-life evoke key moments of our own life-cycle. As she emerges from the salt sea, evolving into human form, so we emerge from the sea of the womb to join our own families and societies. And as the selkie will leave her human form, so will we eventually die, leaving our body behind and returning to nature. This is certain: One day, years from now, the sealskin will be found, but the selkie does not know when or how this will occur, just as we remain unaware of the details of our own release from life on earth. The discovery of the sealskin is always accidental. A key carelessly left behind by the husband or a casual remark from one of the children will take the selkie woman to the place where it has been hidden. In one variant of the story from the Hebridean island of North Uist, a blast of wind causes the cottage door to bang shut with a clash that dislodges the sealskin from its hiding place on the lintel (Wilson: 6). Once a selkie reclaims her original self, there is no turning back. Even though she has proven herself capable of love, patience and compassion in her human form, she leaves that world behind in one

hasty and irrevocable moment of transformation.

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NOTES

¹ See Child 2: 494. Time does not permit a lengthy discussion of the significance attributed to numbers in Francis James Child's opus. In short, lower numbers sometimes mean older, which, by his discernment, may also secure higher value.

² Child 2: 494. Sule Skerry (Skerrie in the ballad text) is a small, rocky, uninhabited island about 40 miles west of the Orkney Islands. Those who have been there describe it as well populated by seals.

³ Odin (Old Norse *Óðinn*), one of the principal gods in Norse mythology, is the Scandinavian representative of the Germanic deity Woden. In Northern belief, he was the son of the god Borr and the giantess Bestla. Odin was a war god; he protected heroes, and fallen warriors joined him in Valhalla. He also was regarded as the great magician among the gods. He was depicted as a vigorous man of about 50, dressed in gray with a cloak and hood of blue. In Christian times, Odin was often identified with the Devil.

⁴ There is much variation in the title of this ballad: 'The Great Silkie of Sule Skerry' (Child, Bronson); the selkie of Soola-Skerry (Brown); the selchie of Shool Skerry (Andersson). The grey seal is a more logical adjective than the great seal, although the grey seal is, indeed, larger than the common seal. For the sake of consistency and place-name accuracy, I will refer to this story as that of the grey selkie of Sule Skerry.

⁵ See Coffin for a definition of the ballad's emotional core.

⁶ See Bronson 1976: 271.

⁷ Sea monsters are often called *finns* in Shetland. (See Andersson 1967 : 4-5). They have the power to take any shape of marine animal. In seal form they come ashore to dance on the sands. They cannot, however, return to the sea without their skins. (See Blind: 403-4).

⁸ Excerpt from an interview with Willie Thomson, North Ronaldsay, Orkney, Scotland., July 31, 1983. Field tape no. 9. Transcribed by Nancy C. McEntire. See also ‘The Goodman of Wastness and the Selkie’ in Philip: 457-59.

⁹ Bassett: 245–46. Bassett also comments on the acute hearing of the seal and its fondness for music. In Iceland, he writes, ‘the seal is a *sjovite*, or animal that will come when called.’

¹⁰ *The Secret of Roan Inish (Island of the Seals)*. 1993, Skerry Movies Corporation.

¹¹ While the transformations described in this article are assumed to be physical (from seal to man or from seal to woman), they may also be accomplished through a trance. The distinction is not always clear. While most of the stories of seals returning to human form focus on implied physical transformations, a few refer to changes that are less tangible. For example, in his investigation of accounts of shape-changing in the Old Norse sagas, H. R. Ellis Davidson identifies shape journeys, in which a shaman or someone with magical powers leaves his or her body in animal form while resting in sleep or in a trance. In these cases of shape-shifting, the return of the spirit to the body can be a difficult process. For example, a girl who assumes the form of a porpoise and returns to human form becomes weak and has to be revived with wine (Davidson: 156).

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Prophecy and Cultural Conflict in Gaelic Tradition

MICHAEL NEWTON

The theme of prophecy appears in virtually all genres of Scottish Gaelic literature, written and oral, in every era from which we have surviving evidence. Prophecy has often been used towards social and political ends, especially as propaganda at times of crisis and discord. Despite the pervasiveness of this theme, prophecy has received scant attention in scholarship about Scottish Gaelic literature and tradition.

In this brief survey I will examine the rôle of prophecy as a cultural resource in Scottish Gaelic society, especially in the context of cultural conflict and upheaval. I will for the most part be leaving aside prophecy significant at a merely personal or local level and will be examining the ways that seers, or interpreters of prophecy, discuss the potential future of Gaelic society at large. The dominant voice in Scottish Gaelic tradition for such prophecy is Thomas the Rhymer, and the adoption of this Border poet as a prophetic and messianic figure is counter-intuitive. I will examine the appearance of Thomas in Gaelic literature and suggest some ways in which he may have entered oral tradition and attained such stature in the Scottish Highlands.

Millenarism in Gaeldom

The formation of the kingdom of Scotland was due largely to the success of Gaelic institutions and leaders. Centuries later, the seminal rôle of the Gaels in Scottish history remained in Gaelic consciousness. 'The sense of integrity of the kingdom of Scotland [...] emerges time and time again in Gaelic tradition and the integrating principle is a sense of the Gaelic basis of Scotland.' (MacInnes 1989a: 96).

A stray Gaelic poetic survival from twelfth-century Scotland, lamenting the 'plundering of stable Alba' (Clancy: 89), seems to convey the anxiety of a kingdom in cultural and political flux. John MacInnes was the first to draw attention to the messianic theme in Scottish Gaelic literature and its link to the dispossession of the Gaels from positions of prestige as well as territory. He posited the antiquity of this motif by pointing out verses in the twelfth-century *Prophecy of St Berchan* that celebrate the long-prophesied king of Scotland who will usher in a reign of victory and prosperity, as well as the legend of Thomas the Rhymer, with its probable Brythonic influences (MacInnes 1981: 153).

By the seventeenth century, Scottish Gaeldom had become largely estranged from the central government, which became increasingly disruptive of and intrusive into Gaelic society, attempting to dismantle native formal institutions, stigmatise cultural and linguistic forms, introduce colonial settlements, destabilise social patterns, and even extirpate many of its inhabitants (cf. MacCoinnich 2000). People of all social stations in seventeenth-century Britain as a whole, in fact, looked to prophecy to help explain the social, religious and political upheavals rife during that period (Thomas: 399, 409-413, 429, Ó Buachalla: 509).

Societies, or segments of societies under severe strain, typically respond by creating *millenarian movements*. Such movements promise the imminent coming of a new and better world often, in part, through supernatural intervention, so as to reconstitute society and restore its social order, moral codes, distribution of wealth and so on, to a pre-collapse ideal. The forthcoming Golden Age is often personified in a messiah figure, and the entire set of circumstances, personages, and events are expressed (usually in symbolic and ambiguous terms) in prophetic literature.

Millenarian beliefs have recurred again and again throughout history despite failures, disappointments, and repression, precisely because they make such a strong appeal to the oppressed, the disinherited, and the wretched. They therefore form an integral part of that stream of thought which refused to accept the rule of a superordinate class, or of a foreign power, or some combination of both (Worsley: 225).

Millenarian movements are not limited to ancient times or 'primitive' societies, but are a universal phenomenon for social progress: 'Millenarism has, in fact, played an important role in all national and social liberation movements in pre-modern and modern Europe' (Talmon: 197). The aspirations of millenarian movements are often given expression in prophecies or interpretations of prophecies, responding dynamically to changing conditions. Geertz's study of Hopi Prophecy gives a comprehensive and concise description of prophecy:

Prophecy is not prediction, even though it purports to be so. Prophecy is a thread in the total fabric of meaning, in the total worldview [...] It is tradition that is spoken by someone to someone else for specific purposes, whether for moral, ideological, or political reasons. Prophecy is not static, but is and always has been used in response to internal and external conditions. It is a way of articulating and defining contemporary events within the context and language of "tradition". Prophecy, being understood in this manner as a cultural strategy, gives us a major key to understanding not only our pueblo neighbors but also ourselves (Geertz: 6-7).

The eighteenth-century Irish intelligentsia harnessed this latent millenarian potential primarily in terms of the Jacobite cause (cf. Ó Buachalla). The political *aisling* ('vision'), a poetic narrative in which a distressed female (the personification of Ireland) foretold the future return of her spouse (the true king and saviour of Ireland), became one of the dominant forms of Irish Jacobite prophetic literature (cf. Ó Buachalla [especially Chapter Eleven], Mahon). The Scottish Gaelic intelligentsia shared and expressed many of the same hopes (cf. Gillies 1991). While there are a few isolated echoes of the political *aisling* in Scottish Gaelic literature,¹ the lack of a deeply-rooted identification of Scotland with a tutelary goddess no doubt inhibited the development of such a genre in Scottish Gaeldom.

The archetype of the saviour of Irish Gaeldom was based on the figure of Brian Bórainmhe and nurtured by the Irish literati as early as the twelfth century (Ó Buachalla:

486-492). Irish prophetic literature is almost exclusively in the voice of native saints, such as Patrick and Columba, although poets were expected to provide an exegesis of traditional texts in terms of contemporary personages and events (Ó Buachalla: 484-5). Prophecy in vernacular Scottish Gaelic (at least as evidenced in the post-Reformation era) diverges strikingly from this pattern and seems more akin to prophecies from the rest of Britain. Most Scottish Gaelic prophets were not saints who owed their powers of foresight to their connection with God, but secular figures whose prophecies and ability to see the future were obtained through supernatural means, especially from Otherworld beings and magical books (Henderson and Cowan 2001: 181-9, Newton 2006).

Thomas The Jacobite

Vernacular Scottish Gaelic prophetic literature is primarily in the voice of seers operating outwith the church, sometimes highly localised figures. Since at least the mid-seventeenth century, when documentary sources become reasonably numerous, the foremost of these has been Thomas the Rhymer. Also known in English sources as ‘Thomas of Erceldoune’ on account of lands he held near the modern Earlston in western Berwickshire, Thomas was born c. 1225 and was dead by the end of the thirteenth century (Henderson and Cowan: 146, Black 2005: 398-9).

The Romance and Prophecies of Thomas of Erceldoune is a Northern English narrative, probably composed in the late fourteenth century (Henderson and Cowan: 142-5). It describes Thomas’s encounter with a beautiful woman at the Eildon Tree, their journey to a supernatural realm, and her gift to him of verbal powers (whether in the form of tale or prophecy). She then relates a number of prophecies about the disasters and defeats awaiting Scotland through the Battle of Otterburn (1388).

A number of later Lowland sources make allusion to Thomas, showing the development of his character as prophet. His predictions were compared with those of Merlin by Thomas Gray in 1355; Barbour, writing in the 1370s, claimed that Thomas had foretold the kingship of Robert the Bruce (who himself exploited Arthurian propaganda); Hary’s *Wallace* (written 1476-8) made use of traditional lore attributed to Thomas claiming that William Wallace was not actually dead but was waiting to drive off the ‘Sothrouns’ and bring peace to Scotland (Henderson and Cowan: 147-9).

Thomas the Rhymer first appears in vernacular Scottish Gaelic literature in songs rallying support for the Stewart kings in the mid-seventeenth century. Iain Lom MacDonald (of Keppoch) mentions the prophecy in three of his surviving songs. He implores Graham of Montrose to rejoin the Royalist cause in his song ‘*Soraidh do’n Ghràmach*’ of 1646, imagining him sailing to Ireland, with a reference to the prophecy of Thomas the Rhymer:

*Nan tigeadh Montròs’
Ann ar comhdhail a dh’Éirinn
Le trì fichead long sgòdach
'S buill chòrsaich mar shréin orr’,
Le’m brataichibh sròil
Agus òrdugh Rìgh Seurlas:
Thug an fhàistinn ud beò sinn
Mar dh’òrdaich Tom Reumhair.*

(MacKenzie: lines 309-316).

‘Were Montrose to come to Ireland to join forces with us, with three score rigged ships and hempen ropes as reins on them, with banners of satin and King Charles’s command, the fulfillment of that prophecy would bring us to life, as Thomas the Rhymer foretold.’

The reference to the prophecy may be a double-entendre, alluding not only to the encouragement offered by the prophecy but also to the ‘sleeping warriors’ or ‘resurrected messiah’ motifs of the legend. In his later song, ‘*Cumha Morair Hunnaidh*’, Iain Lom implores Montrose to return in 1649 after the execution of the Marquis of Huntly in essentially the same words (MacKenzie: lines 627-634). In his ‘*Òran air Rìgh Uilleam agus Banrigh Màiri*’ of c. 1692 denouncing William and Mary, Iain Lom asserts that the rightful King will be avenged, if the prophecy is true, and at the end of the poem he explicitly names Thomas the Rhymer (MacKenzie: lines 2607, 2726). Iain Lom never spells out exactly what the prophecy is, however.

Iain Dubh mac Iain (a MacDonald of uncertain origin) began his rallying song ‘*Òran nam Fineachan*’ to all potential allies of the Jacobites in 1715 by declaring boldly:

*Seo an aimsir 'n do dhearbhadh
An targainteachd dhuinn
Bras meamnach fir Alba
Le an armaibh air thùs*
(Ó Baoill 1994: lines 245-6)

‘This is the moment in which the prophecy was fulfilled for us, with the spirited and fierce men of Scotland, in the vanguard of battle with their weaponry.’

Although it is not stated explicitly, it is likely that he is making reference to the prophecy of Thomas the Rhymer. Although the song pays most of its attention to the Highland clans, Iain Dubh is inclusive of the nobles of the Lowlands, thanking them in advance for their support.

Sileas na Ceapaich, at the end of her song ‘*Do Dh’fheachd Mhorair Màr*’, wishes well to the departing army of the Earl of Mar, assuring them that they will fulfill the prophecy and emerge triumphant (Ó Baoill 1972: lines 303-7). She later laments the failure of the Battle of Sheriffmuir (1715), but takes heart in the prophecy:

*Gu bheil Tòmas ag ràdh ann a fhàistneachd
Gur h-iad na Gàidheil a bhuidhneas buaidh;
Bidh fallus fala air gach mala
A’ cur a’ chatha ud aig uisge Chluaidh;
Nì Sasunn strìochdadh, ge mòr an inntleachd
Ag iarraidh sìth air an rìgh tha uainn.*
(Ó Baoill 1972: lines 520-5).

‘According to Thomas’s prophecy, it is the Gaels who will be victorious; every brow will sweat blood, fighting that battle at the river Clyde; England will submit, despite her cunning, seeking peace from the king who is away from us.’

The poet Iain MacLachlainn of Cille Bhrìde mentions in his ‘*Òran air Bhreith Phrionnsa Teàrlach*’ that a star appearing when Charles Edward Stewart was born in 1720 confirms the prophecy (MacCoinnich: 243), although he assumes that it is so well known that he need not repeat it.

Alasdair mac Mhaighstir Alasdair reminds the Gaels during the campaign of 1745:

*’S i seo an aon bhliadhna chorr
Tha Tòmas ag innse gu beachd
Gum faigh sinn coinne gu leòr
Biomaid beò an dòchas rag*
(Mackinnon 1908-9: 301)

‘Thomas tells us very clearly that this is the very year that we will have plenty of encounters²: let us live in that conviction.’

Elsewhere, in a satire of the Campbells, he suggests that the conclusive battle presided over by Thomas the Rhymer will occur in the very heart of their authority, Inverary:

*Adhra mhialach³ nan cat
Air dhealbh nathrach ’s a grunn fuar:
Nuair thig Tòmas le chuid each
Bidh là nan creach mu d’ bhruaich.*
(Mackinnon 1907-8: 297)

‘Louse-ridden Aray (river) of the cats, shaped like a snake with a cold underbelly: when Thomas comes with his horses, the day of pillaging will be on your banks.’

Poems were composed in the aftermath of Culloden whose messianic visions were as grand as they were desperate. After lamenting the plundering and oppression of the Highlands, the tacksman of Inbhir Chadain in Rannoch attempts to convince the Gaels to unite in solidarity for a renewed effort on behalf of the Jacobite cause:

*Mosglaidh uile gach treun-laoch
’S bithibh gleusta mar a b’ àbhaist;
Mar thràillean na dèanaibh gèilleadh
Fhad ’s a bhios fuil ’nur fèithean blàth;
Chuala mi a bhith leughadh
Bharr air Reumar, iomadh fàidh,
Gum bheil curaidhean aig Seumas
Nì treubhantas as dèidh bhith marbh*
(Turner: 281-2; MacilleDhuibh 1998c)

‘Awaken all of you, every warrior! And be adroit, as was your custom; do not submit like slaves as long as blood runs warm in your veins. I have heard that it has been read that many a prophet besides Thomas the Rhymer has said that King James has warriors who can perform great feats after death.’

This verse appears to refer to the return of dead (or ‘sleeping’) warriors under Thomas’s command. The details, then, surrounding the prophecy are late and slow in coming: from Iain Lom we hear that Thomas has prophesied that the true king will return to the throne; it is not until the 1715 Rising that we hear that the Gaels will emerge victorious from battle with the English on the Clyde; from Alasdair mac Mhaighstir Alasdair’s verse we learn that Thomas will come with cavalry; some time after Culloden the idea that dead warriors will fight again appears in song.

Prose narratives and Gaelic texts of the prophecy were not recorded until the nineteenth century, well after the Jacobite cause was lost. Although they contain many more details than the verses quoted above, they are consistent with them. The earliest published fragment of prose from the Highlands concerning Thomas and his slumber that I know of comes from Anne Grant of Laggan:

There is current in the Highlands, a prophecy ascribed to the famous Thomas of Ercildown, which was in these terms: “The time is coming, when all the wisdom of the world shall centre in the grey goose’s quill; and the jawbone of the sheep cover the coulter of the plough with rust.” This I have heard from very old people, who had not a word of English.

Yet notwithstanding of these excellent authorities, I do not exactly believe that Thomas said so. Nor do I give implicit credit to his being buried under that romantic and singular eminence, the *tomhan na heurich*, which rises in a fine plain near Inverness, and is pre-eminent among enchanted tomans. Nor do I entirely trust to his promise of throwing off all that incumbant load of earth, to rise and attest the truth of his prophecies (in very good Gaelic,) when they are all fulfilled. Yet, from whatever source the prophecy sprung, the spirit and application of it indicate no common sagacity. (Grant vol. 2: 12-13)

The millenarian aspect of the full text of the legend is clear in the following statement from an elderly Highland woman (unnamed):

Thomas the Rhymer, or some other magician and prophet of the olden time now detained in Fairyland, is destined yet to reappear upon earth with some companions almost as powerful as himself; then shall the water-horses be bridled and saddled by a brave company of Scottishmen from Fairyland, some Highland, some Lowland, bridled and saddled, and fearlessly mounted; a great battle will be fought; all Englishmen and other foreigners will be driven out of the country; the crown will again revert to the rightful heirs, and Scotland once again become a free, independent, and happy kingdom! (Stewart: 45)⁴

According to other material recorded in the mid-nineteenth-century Highlands, Thomas is waiting for the last horse to be found with particular characteristics so that his cavalry will be complete. As John Francis Campbell of Islay relates:

There is a popular saying still current in Islay, which joins true Thomas to a common Celtic British legend. He is supposed to be still living, enchanted in Dumbuck (Dun-a-mhuic, the swine's hill), near Dumbarton (Dunbreaton, Mount Breaton); and he appears occasionally in search of horses of a peculiar kind and colour. He pays for them when they are brought to the hill; and the vendor sees enchanted steeds and armed men within the rock. It is said —

Nuair a thig Tomas an riom 's a chuid each,

Bidh latha nan creach an Cluaidh.

When Thomas of power and his horses shall come,

The day of plunderings will be in Clyde. (J.F. Campbell: 36-7).

The version of the quatrain about the battle at the Clyde collected by Rev. John G. Campbell gives more detail:

Nuair thig Tòmas le chuid each

Bidh latha nan creach air Cluaidh

Millear naoi mìle fear math

'S thèid rìgh òg air a' chrùn.

(J.G. Campbell 1900: 271)

‘When Thomas comes with his horses, there will be a day of pillaging on the Clyde; nine thousand good men will be drowned and a young king will be crowned.’

In summary, a prophecy attributed to Thomas the Rhymer promising the Gaels ultimate victory in battle on behalf of the true king seems to have had a large audience in the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Highlands. The use of this prophecy stressed that Highlanders could regain their prestige in Scotland by fighting for the Stewart kings and ensuring the fulfillment of that prophecy. It is difficult to be sure exactly when the Gaelic legend developed these themes and motifs, given the paucity of evidence, but it would seem to be no later than the early Jacobite period. It also seems likely that legends about Robert the Bruce, well known in Gaelic tradition, also had some influence on the legends of Thomas the Rhymer (MacInnes 1981: 159). According to Barbour's *Bruce*, the bishop of St Andrews had hoped that Bruce was the king foretold by Thomas (Lyle 1968: 114).

There is historical evidence to confirm that Jacobite Highlanders in the 1745 Rising knew of and believed in versions of prophecies attributed to Thomas (Ó Baoill 1972: 53, Ó Buachalla: 508, Thomas: 415, MacilleDhuibh 1998d). Further post-Culloden texts make use of prophecy to lift the spirits of demoralised Highlanders. The vision of a further war appears in the poem ‘*An Taisbean*’ (‘The Revelation’) by Eachann MacLeòid (Black 2001: 192-201). In style, the poem suggests the influence of the Book of

Revelation and the propaganda which James VI was so keen to promote upon gaining the throne of England (cf. Williamson). When the poet describes the armies preparing for battle, we are given the *brosnachadh* composed to incite them, which no doubt was meant to stir the heart of the hearers of this poem itself. The end of the poem predicts that the victorious Gaels will be able to conduct themselves regally throughout the kingdom, as is their right.

An anecdote recorded in a letter from a gentleman in Aberdeen to a friend in Edinburgh, relates what was described as an eye-witness account of a prophetic vision:

In August 1748, before the Town Council of Aberdeen, eleven men and women swore to the truth of a vision they said they had seen in a valley five miles to the west of the city. On the fifth of that month, at two o'clock in the afternoon, they saw three globes of light in the sky above, which they first took to be weather-galls but which increased in brilliance until twelve tall men in clean and bright attire crossed the valley. There were seen two armies. The first wore clothing of dark blue and displayed Saint Andrew's Cross on its ensigns. The other was uniformed in scarlet and was assembled beneath the Union Flag. Twice the red army attacked the blue, and twice it was beaten back. When it rallied and attacked for a third time it was routed by the Scots army. Those who watched saw the smoke of the cannon, the glitter of steel, and the colours waving, but they heard no sound. When the blue army was triumphant the vision passed. (Forbes vol. 2: 181)

Whatever reality such cultural expressions have, they certainly reflect the aspirations and concerns of the people involved and are likely to occur at times of great duress. Anecdotes such as this also demonstrate that the belief in and exploitation of prophecy was not confined to the literati.

Thomas the Rhymer continued to fascinate people and capture their imagination into the nineteenth century. Sir David Dalrymple, Scottish historian and annalist, lamented in 1773 that the Rhymer's name 'is not forgotten in Scotland nor his authority slighted even at this day'. The prophecies of Thomas had been recently reprinted for the public and 'have been consulted with a weak, if not criminal, curiosity' (Henderson and Cowan: 149). Even Scottish immigrants in the United States showed interest in his prophecies as foreshadowing historical events in the late-nineteenth century (*The Scottish-American Journal* 14 August 1889).

Literary Exploitation of Prophecy

Geertz has shown that prophecy can act as a statement of intention in deliberate acts of cultural change in Hopi culture, as an overture to social engineering (Geertz: 40). This model suggests that poets and other social leaders could exploit prophecy to bolster the persuasiveness of their arguments by recourse to the authorities of the past and the force of tradition.

A particular interpretation of a prophecy may identify the exact people and places that will fulfill long-awaited expectations, but most prophetic texts do not express a clear and definitive vision of what is to come. Instead, prophecy is usually expressed in open-

ended rhetoric employing ambiguous metaphors. This encourages it to be the subject of discussion throughout the community (Geertz: 52-3). The author of the late seventeenth-century *A Collection of Highland Rites and Customes* notes, 'Some pretend to prophetic inspirations and foretel very fortuitous events. Their Responses are deliver'd in very ambiguous Terms, so that they are not known til the event' (J.L. Campbell: 35).

Three times during the course of the Wardlaw History of the Frasers (written between 1666 and 1699), the Reverend James Fraser records historical events which he sees as the unfolding of predictions made by Thomas the Rhymer, but which were unintelligible until interpreted with hindsight (MacKay 1903: 296, 338, 356). He himself witnessed the declaration of a prophecy which was not understood in his time, but he notes that, 'Ridles will unfold themselves. [Thomas] Rymer's prophesies were clear when fullfilled: so may this' (William MacKay: 469).

Prophecy is malleable, and in capable hands it can provide a framework in which to express contemporary events, or to resist or justify the status quo. It was prophecy's potential to support or reject regimes that prompted central authorities to either co-opt it or legislate against it (Ó Buachalla: 513, Thomas: 397, Henderson and Cowan: 182). Jacobite and Hanoverian wrestled to have the last word on the analysis of portents. While the Jacobite poet Iain MacLachlainn, mentioned above, claimed that the star which heralded the birth of Prince Charles was an omen of the deliverance of the Gaels, Dòmhnall MacCoinnich's song '*Óran Gàirdeachais*' upon the repeal of the Act of Proscription and the Act of Forfeited Estates wrested this topos from the Jacobites in favour of King George, claiming the sighting of another star (Newton 2003). While signs themselves continue to appear, there are endless opportunities for recognising and interpreting them. After a Campbell poetess satirised Prince Charles's arrival in Britain as heralded by a comet, Alasdair mac Mhaighstir Alasdair responded by warning her not to meddle in the interpretation of prophecies:

*Tighinn chùramach Prionns' Tearlach
Ciallach bairlinn còmaid
Gun robh urra mhòr gun fhàillinn
Teachd gun dàil gu'r còrsa;
'S iomadh facal seadhail tàbhachdach
An cruaidh fhàistinn Thòmais
Bhon fhidrichte nach cuspair àiridh
Do bhan-bhard taigh-òst' e.
(MacilleDhuibh 1998c)*

'True was the comet's sign of the cautious approach of Prince Charles, that there was a flawless nobleman coming imminently to us; there is many a solid and sensible passage in Thomas's complex prophecy, from which it can be seen to be an inappropriate subject for the poetess of a hostelry.'

I have already quoted Geertz's observation that prophecy 'is a way of articulating and defining contemporary events within the context and language of "tradition"' (Geertz: 8, 165). Prophecy was, at least in part, a means of articulating the essence of historical

events. By utilising the style and techniques of Gaelic oral literature, it enabled a native telling of history. Such techniques include metrical structure, rhyme, alliteration, literary allusion, and the exploitation of symbolism developed in the rest of the traditional corpus. John MacInnes similarly declared of the Gaelic seer, ‘the products of his vision are art-forms (whatever else they may or may not be) shaped by the expectations of society and its aesthetic needs’ (MacInnes 1989a: 13).

William Matheson’s study of the prophecies of Coinneach Odhar reveals the historical basis of items pertaining to the political turmoil of *Linn nan Creach*. These were apparently retained in oral tradition for their literary merit after their historical significance was forgotten: ‘Once the prophecy is in circulation it may have a very long life indeed, especially if it is couched in verse or in words that are otherwise memorable; so much so that memory of the prophecy may outlast memory of the event to which it refers’ (Matheson 1968: 78).

Consider one of the many prophecies attributed to Coinneach Odhar, *Thig an là nuair a dh’fhuadaicheas cailleach nam mogan Baintighearna Chloinn Raghnaill a Taigh Bhaile nan Cailleach ann am Beinn a’ Bhaoghla* (‘The day will come when an old woman wearing stockings will evict the Lady of Clan Ranald from the House of Baile nan Cailleach in Benbecula’) (MacIomhair: 38). The prophecy records an event in history using word play and irony that not only describe the end of a dynasty, but suggest a general reversal of things in the world.

A prophecy attributed to Baintighearna Labhair (‘the Lady of Lawers’), but which apparently survives only in English translation, makes good use of the well-developed tree symbolism of Gaelic oral narrative. She predicted that the MacNab lands ‘would be added to the Breadalbane estates when a broken branch from a fir-tree would fall on another fir-tree, and then grow as part of the tree on which it fell’ (Gillies 1938: 252). Although trees more typically represent human individuals or dynasties than their possessions in Gaelic symbolism, the biological process of grafting two plants is a neat metaphor for the amalgamation of family legacies.

Given these precedents, it is not surprising that prophecy was used to attempt to control the cultural damage from the tumultuous and humiliating calamities of the Clearances. One such declared, *Cuiridh claigninn nan caorach an crann o fheum* (‘Sheep skulls will make the plough useless’) ⁵ — in other words, the work of men in the fields would be brought to an end because of the introduction of sheep. The prophecy has been variously attributed to Thomas the Rhymer (Campbell 1900: 272), *Baintighearna Labhair* (J.G. Campbell: 275; Gillies 1938: 250), ⁶ *Am Fiosaiche Ìleach* (Matheson 1968: 75), and probably other prophetic figures.

This prophecy appears in at least five different Gaelic songs. The earliest usage recorded may be in a song by Seumas Shaw, *Bard Loch nan Eala*, probably sometime in the late eighteenth century (Henderson: 390, Matheson 1952: 329). It is also mentioned in ‘*Òran air cuairt do dh’America*’ (‘A Song on the voyage to America’) by *An Cùbair Colach* sometime in the late eighteenth century (Sinclair 1900: 10). The third is in ‘*Òran do na Ciobairean Gallda*’ (‘A Song to the Lowland Shepherds’) by Ailean Dall Dubhghallach sometime between 1798 and 1800 (Meek 1995: 47-51). The fourth is ‘*Caoidh air son Cor na Gàidhealtachd agus Fògradh nan Gàidheal*’ (‘Lament for the Highland people and the Eviction of the Gaels’) by Donnchadh Stiubhart, probably in the early nineteenth century.⁷ The fifth is ‘*Och! Och! Mar a tha mi!*’ (‘Alas! Alas! My

condition!') by Dr Iain MacLachlainn of Rath-thuidhe (Rahoy) (Sinclair 1879: 101-2), composed, I assume, in the mid-nineteenth century. The appearance of this prophecy in numerous songs in a demotic register confirms the need to explain the present in terms of traditional forms of knowledge, the promiscuity of the different genres of oral tradition, and the ways in which prophetic formulae may have been transmitted in Gaelic society.

Prophecy was no longer common in Gaelic verse after the eighteenth century for a number of reasons. There are a couple of late literary examples, however, in which prophecies are invoked in order to inspire and unify Gaels in circumstances which are argued to be threatening to their society.

Renewing so many of the traditional motifs in Gaelic poetry, Màiri Mhòr nan Òran composed a song entitled '*Fàistneachd agus Beannachd do na Gàidheil*' ('A Prophecy and a Blessing to the Gaels') which was sung to the air of a popular Jacobite song from the 1745 Rising that relayed the arrival of the prince. Màiri composed this song sometime between 1882 and 1886 about the just cause of the crofters, urging them to remain united so that the wrongs inflicted on them might be righted:

*'S nuair bhios mise 's na bòrdaibh
Bidh mo chòmhradh mar fhàistneachd:
'S pillidh gineal na tuatha
Rinneadh fhuadach thar sàile
(Meek 1998: 221)*

'And when I am in the coffin, my words will be a prophecy: and the progeny of the crofters who were expelled overseas will return.'

By placing the fulfillment of the prophecy in the non-immediate future — sometime after her own death — Màiri Mhòr signals that this will be a long struggle and keeps the window of opportunity open for as long as possible. The return of the Gaelic people from exile overseas echoes that of the return of the king over the water.

South Uist poet Dòmhnall Ruadh Mac an t-Saoir is also an excellent example of a modern poet composing songs on contemporary topics, who was at the same time keen to draw from the well-springs of tradition. He concludes his protest song ('*Na Rocaidean*') against the military rocket range in Uist, warning of the apocalyptic potential of nuclear war, by providing an interpretation of a local prophecy regarding a salient feature of the landscape:

*Carragh Beinn na Corr-airigh
Gur coltach leam gun d' fhalbh i
Bho 'n ionad as na chuireadh i
Aig cruthachadh na talmhainn.
Nuair thuiteadh i bho 'n ionad sin
Bhiodh sgrìos a' tighinn air Albainn;
Thuir fiosaiche bha ainmeil
'S an aimsir a bha.
(Macintyre: lines 8490-7)*

‘It seems to me that (the rock) Carragh Beinn na Corr-airigh has moved from that spot where it was placed at the creation of the Earth. A famous seer foretold in the days of old that destruction would come upon Scotland when it would fall from that location.’

The expression of prophecy in terms of the landscape is another topic for future exploration of prophecy in Gaelic tradition. The unsettling of rocks and the felling of trees are common harbingers of greater disaster. While early Irish literature generally created *dinnshenchus* to account for the origins of place-names in terms of past events, vernacular Scottish Gaelic tradition often informs us of the future events to occur at specific locations.⁸

The most interesting example of the literary exploitation of prophecy I have yet found is a short allegory expressing a strong pan-Gaelic nationalism, which draws strongly upon the idiom and style of traditional folk-tales (Faloisg). The first part of the story depicts a Golden Age, when a queen named *Éire* (Ireland) rules over a kingdom named *Innis nan Naomh* (the Isle of Saints). She is in love with a man named *Alba* (Scotland), who rules over a kingdom named *Tìr nam Beann ’s nan Gleann* (the Land of the Bens and Glens). Trouble comes in the form of *Iain Buidhe* (Yellow John, who is explicitly named as John Bull), who rules over *Sasann* (England) but is covetous of his neighbours. He throws *Éire* into prison and strikes *Alba* with a magic wand which makes him do the bidding of Iain Buidhe even when it is to *Alba*’s own detriment. Having told of the demise of the Golden Age, the story shifts into prophetic mode:

(Sin shuas agaibh sgeul a fhuair mi fèin bho sheann duine liath ris an abrar “Eachdraidh.” Dh’fhag e an sgeul an sin gun chrìoch a chur air. Ach thachair seanachaidh eile orm, “Faisneachd” a ainm, agus dh’innis e dhomh a chuid eile dheth.)

Bha na Fianntan a’ mosgladh as an suain, agus ag éiridh bharr an uileannan; agus, ma bha, bha Tomas Reumair. Tha fhios agaibh

“An uair thig Tomas le ’chuid each

Bidh là nan creach aig Cluaidh,”

Agus chan ann aig Cluaidh a mhàin, ach

“Bho Chluaidh nan long gleusda

Gun leum e Port Phàdruig.”

Seadh, mus tàinig là a’ mhòr-bhlàir, bha éirigh nach facas riamh a leithid air na Gàidheil eadar dhà chloich na dùthcha, bho’n Chìrc Leoghasaich mu thuath gus a’ Choileach Arranach agus an Teach Mhòir Ni Odhrain mu dheas. Muinntir Tìr nam Beann agus sluagh Innis nan Naomh a’ cuideachadh a chèile, mar bu chòir, cogadh fada eadar iad fèin agus Iain Buidhe. Theab ’s nach d’rinn iad an gnothach air fad air Iain, am fear sin a chuir eagal a bhathaidh air iomadh fear eile, agus leis am bu mhiann a h-uile cinneach ach e fèin a chur fo thuinn. Ach mu dheireadh fhuair iad làmh an uachdar air, là bha sin, agus cha bu chobhartach riamh e gus a sin. Bhrist iad an slachdan druidheachd, agus cha robh Alba fo gheasaibh tuilleadh bho’n àm sin a mach. Chuir iad na caoirich agus na fèidh air falbh, agus bha na Gàidheil air a’ Ghàidhealtachd a rithist.

Liubhradh a' bhan-rìghinn Éire, agus, ged is iomadh bliadhna a thug i ann an tigh-fo-thalamh, thàinig a bòidhchead a rithist innte cho ciatach 's a bha riamh. Bha ise agus Alba a' riaghladh na Gàidhealtachd a rithist, agus bhlaiss a' Ghàidhlig air cupan milis a h-àigh.

Phòs Alba agus Éire. Bha banais mhòr, chridheil aca a mhair là is bliadhna, agus bha an là mu dheireadh dhi a cheart cho math ris a' cheud là.

(That which is given above is a story I received from an old, grey man who is called "History". He left the story there, without giving it a conclusion. But I met another tradition-bearer whose name is "Prophecy" and he told me the other part of it.)

'The Fianna were awakening from their slumber, and rising from resting on their elbows; and so was Thomas the Rhymer. You all know

"When Thomas comes with his horses,
There will be a day of pillaging on the Clyde,"
And not only on the Clyde, but
"From the Clyde of the swift ships
He will hurdle Portpatrick."

'Aye, before the day of the great battle came, an uprising of the Gaels such as never before has been seen occurred between the two landmark-stones of the country, from the Hen of Lewis in the north to the Cock of Arran and Teach Mhór Ni Odhrain in the south (of Ireland). The people of the Land of the Bens and Glens and the host(s) of the Isle of Saints (were) helping one another, as is proper, (in the) long war between themselves and Yellow John. They almost did not completely vanquish John, that man who made many people fear that he would smother them, and who wished to extinguish every other race but himself. But at last they gained the upper hand on him, on that day, and he had never been plundered until then. They broke the magic wand, and Alba was no longer enchanted from that time forward. They sent away the sheep and the deer, and the Gaels inhabited the Highlands once again.

'The queen Éire was rescued, and, although she had spent many years underground, her beauty returned to her again and she was as lovely as ever. She and Alba reigned over the Highlands again, and Gaelic relished the sweet cup of her success.

'Scotland and Ireland were married. They had a great, merry wedding that lasted a year and a day, and the last day of it was just as good as the first day.'

Although polemical and heavy-handed, we could hardly ask for a better illustration of the classic millenarian pattern, outlining the Golden Age of old, the decline, and the anticipated restoration of idealised conditions, all articulated in the language of tradition.

Prophecy as a Tool for Survival

John Carey has argued that an aspect of druidic eschatology survives in some early sources that foretell that Ireland will be submerged by the ocean at the end of the world. Encountering a pre-existing belief that a climactic conflagration would destroy the world, the early Christian missionaries promised the Irish that God would ameliorate this doom by swallowing their island in water beforehand (Carey). A quatrain survives in Scottish Gaelic oral tradition which seems to derive from this same harmonising of native and Christian eschatology:

*Seachd bliadhna roimh' 'n Bhràth
Thig muir thar Èirinn re aon tràth
'S thar Ìle ghuirm ghlais
Ach snàmhaidh Ì Choluim Chlèirich.⁹*

‘Seven years before Judgment Day the sea will suddenly come over Ireland and over green Islay, but Columba’s Iona will float.’

Like early Irish sources treating this prophecy, this quatrain specifies that the flood will happen seven years before the end of the world. This fragment may have been composed when the original druidic belief in the destruction of the world by fire had been forgotten and only the sentence of a future flood was remembered (Carey: 47-8). It may also reflect rivalry between Patrician and Columban cults. Alternatively, it may reflect the need of Iona residents to reassure themselves that they will ultimately survive the perils of the ocean, ever present in their lives.

People look into the future with anxiety. Prophecy frequently concerns natural catastrophes, the fall of dynasties, the casualties of war, and the inevitability of death. Societies coping with destabilisation and dispossession — those most likely to develop millenarian movements — are particularly concerned about their immediate condition and future. Both Hopi and Gaelic cultures have been subject to assimilation from a dominant outside culture. The sense of inferiority and dependency that comes with a position of subservience or marginality can be damaging to the psyche. Geertz (59) suggests that prophecy has played an important part in maintaining Hopi identity in the face of such forces. ‘Hopi prophecy formulates and conceptualizes cultural confrontation in terms of symbols that are highly significant to Hopi identity. Thus, it evaluates confrontation, conceives it, assimilates it, and ultimately defuses it’. By discussing the impact of external forces within the framework of native language and literature, prophecy likewise may have allowed Gaels to maintain belief in the authority of their own tradition and hope that they had control over their own destiny.

Thomas Pennant quotes (in translation) a prophecy about Highland emigration attributed to Coinneach Odhar, gleaned during his 1772 tour: ‘Oppressors would appear in the country, and the people change their own land for a strange one.’ Despite the distress people felt regarding their economic predicament, traditional forms of knowledge themselves remained triumphant: ‘The predictions, say the goods wives, have been fulfilled, and not a single breach in the oracular effusions of Kenneah Oaur [sic]’ (Pennant: 319).

It should be remembered that while prophecies of the downfall of the Gaels may be common, prophecies about the return of the Gaels are also to be found. Màiri Mhòr nan Òran's song above is one such example.¹⁰

The Wheel of Fortune is a common motif in Gaelic poetry, as in many other traditions, and clan fortunes were seen to rise and fall with time. A poem preserved in the Hector MacLean MSS attributed to Domhnall Ó Conchair, apparently a member of the medical family who served MacDougall of Dunolly, is interesting in this regard. It is a prophecy about the downfall of prominent Argyll families: the MacLeans of Duart, the MacDougalls of Dunolly, the Stewarts of Appin, and even the Campbells (Sinclair 1890: 265, 898).

The downfall of the MacLeans was the subject of many songs in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries (Ó Baoill 1979: xxxvii-xliii). A poem by Gilleasbuig MacGilleain of Tìree to Domhnall MacGilleain, the Laird of Cornaig, in the late-eighteenth century, however, optimistically anticipates the resurgence of the MacLeans:

*Bha na fàidhean ag innse
Gun dìreadh sibh fathast
A cheart aindeoin luchd mì-rùin
Bha do dh'fhìor Chlann 'illeathain
(Macilleain: 158)*

'The seers foretold that you would rise again despite the ill-wishers of the MacLeans.'

There were similar prophecies concerning the downfall and return of the MacFarlanes of Arrochar in the post-Culloden era. The tacksman of Inbhir Snàthaid, Rob MacPhàdrìg, predicted, on the one hand, that the chieftancy of the MacFarlanes would be defunct when a black goose arrived in the MacFarlane lands (Newton 1999: 252-3). On the other hand, in witnessing the clearance of the clan itself, he predicted that they would eventually return to rout the English-speaking usurpers of their land (Newton 2000).

The prophecy *Nuair a thrèigeas na dùthchasaich Ìle / Beannachd le sìth na h-Alba* ('When the natives abandon Islay / say goodbye to peace in Scotland') has been attributed to MacAoidh na Ranna and has been assumed to be a warning about the consequences of the Clearances (Fionn: 12-13). It possible, however, that it originated at the time that the Campbells ousted Clann Iain Mhòir (Clan Donald South) in the early seventeenth century and the violent conflicts that came shortly thereafter. In that case, the prophecy might have suggested that the expulsion of this branch of Clan Donald foreshadowed the dramatic events that rocked the Highlands in the decades to follow.

Thomas Triumphant

Every community in the Highlands had its recognised figures of prophetic authority: *Baintighearna Labhair* ('the Lady of Lawers') was renowned in Perthshire; in Islay, *MacAoidh nan Ranna*,¹¹ *Am Fiosaiche Ìleach*,¹² or *Guala Chrosta*; in Barra, *Mac a' Chreachadair*; in Ross-shire and Lewis, *Coinneach Odhar*. For the most part, the prophecies of these various figures were fairly local in nature. The figure who emerged as

chief of prophetic authorities in Gaelic literature, at least from the mid-seventeenth century, was Thomas the Rhymer. This is clear from the authority attributed to him in the Gaelic poetry already cited, in the Wardlaw Manuscript, and in traditions recorded about Highland prophecies, such as the following: '[Prophecies about the downfall of clans] originated usually in clannish or personal animosity or revenge, and are usually ascribed to a certain renowned sage, Thomas the Rhymer' (Teignmouth: 140).¹³

An explanation of the ascendancy of Thomas the Rhymer as prophet and messiah in Scottish Gaelic literature poses some interesting challenges. Besides the lack of a common language and literary tradition, there was much mutual antipathy between Highlanders and Lowlanders by the seventeenth century (cf. MacInnes 1989a), so a Lowlander makes an unlikely culture-hero for Highland Jacobites like Iain Lom. English-language prophecies attributed to Thomas make no special mention of the Gael, but Gaelic prophecies attributed to Thomas emphasise the disenfranchisement of the Highlanders from the kingdom that rightfully belongs to them and that Thomas was to lead a crusade on their behalf. In fact, the Gaelic version of the Rhymer legend in general seems to have diverged and developed independently at some point from its ultimate Lowland sources.

A complete solution to the genesis of the Gaelic Rhymer legend would have to account for:

- A. Differences in the motifs in Lowland and Highland versions of the legend;
- B. The channel by which the legend was transmitted from Lowland tradition to Gaelic tradition;
- C. The reason for the adoption of Thomas the Rhymer as messiah by the Gaels.

I will attempt to suggest some solutions to these issues in the sections that follow, but given the shortage of documentary evidence, the following hypotheses will have to remain speculative.

Thomas: Motifs

A story added anonymously to the 1665 edition of *The Discovery of Witchcraft, whereunto is added a discourse of Devils and Spirits* by Reginald Scot attests to the development of the Rhymer legend in anglophone literature. This tells of a man going to a fair to sell his horse, and, having failed, was on his way home when he encountered a man (clearly implied to be Thomas the Rhymer) on a milk-white steed. Thomas leads him into an underground chamber where there are 'above six hundred men in armour laid prostrate on the ground as if asleep'. A beautiful woman pays for the horse and he finds himself alone in the field where he first met Thomas.

Sir Walter Scott, in his *Letters on Demonology and Witchcraft* (Letter IV, written in 1830), recounts a story about a man who sells his horse to a wizard (implied to be Thomas), who meets him on the Eildon Hills to close the deal. Thomas takes him inside the hill to a cavern, where he had amassed an army of horses and warriors who 'will awaken at the battle of Sheriffmoor'. The man takes the horn at the end of the room in order to rouse the warriors, but his attempt fails because he has not first drawn the sword next to the horn.

The evidence from Sir Walter Scott and Reginald Scot suggests that narratives about Thomas as a saviour figure had been developing in the Lowlands with many motifs in common with the Gaelic legend. None of the surviving Gaelic sources quite match the

literary *Romance and Prophecies*, or even the Lowland oral ballads about Thomas. Instead of explaining Thomas's abilities as being a gift of the fairy queen, his strange and supernatural birth marks him as an exceptional being in Highland folktales (cf. Newton 2006: 323-4), like other legendary Gaelic figures. This, however, is to be expected when a person becomes the subject of oral tradition: his biography is remodeled according to traditional aesthetic expectations, including those set by archetypal heroic patterns.

In Gaelic literature, Fionn mac Cumhail and his warrior band, the Fianna, defended Scotland and Ireland against invaders and enemies. The messianic motifs in popular Fenian traditions (cf. Bruford 1986-7: 36, Ó Buachalla: 458) likely influenced Thomas's character in Gaelic legend. The proverbial phrase *An Fhèinn air a h-uilinn* ('the Fenians reposing on their elbows') refers to the legend that they are asleep in a secret underground location, waiting for the right conditions before they will return to rescue the Gaels. The legends place their chamber in Tom na h-Iubhraich or Dunbuck (J.G. Campbell: 270, Nicolson: 30, J.F. Campbell: 37), sites where Thomas was also said to be slumbering.¹⁴

Over all, the characteristics of the messianic tale describing Thomas follow the international folk motif Stith Thompson D1960.2, often referred to as the 'Barbarossa legend' or the 'Charlemagne legend' (Thompson: 350).¹⁵ This same mythic narrative attached itself to the Fitzgerald Earls of Desmond: Gearóid Iarla, it was claimed, was not dead but seen by horse-traders at night, trying to persuade them to come to his underwater chambers to make a bargain so that he could make ready for the salvation of his people (Ó hÓgáin: 227-230, Ó Buachalla: 458-9). The legend was fully operational in seventeenth-century Ireland, attached to a hero known as *Ball Dearg*, encouraging popular support for native military action (Ó Buachalla: Ch. 9).

It is not clear how Thomas came to be depicted as riding the *each-uisge* ('water-horse'), as I know of no other Gaelic hero depicted as a rider of that supernatural beast. It may be that it was a means of 'indigenising' Thomas and empowering him over the elements. Perhaps this feature was transferred from lore about a heroic figure such as Manannán mac Lir (cf. kennings for ocean waves referred to Manannán in Gaelic (Ó hÓgáin: 287)). Alternatively, this may simply be a development of the idea that the saviour will come from another country via the ocean, as stated ('A basterd shall come out of the west') in the Lansdowne Manuscript copy of *The Romance and Prophecies* (MacilleDhuibh 1998b) and the Irish *Ball Dearg* prophecy (Ó Buachalla: 449-59). After the Flight of the Earls, the deliverer of Irish Gaels was expected to come from overseas, as was the later exiled Stewart king. Similarly, Iain Lom's poetry depicts Montrose on the Irish sea just before invoking the prophecy of Thomas the Rhymer.

Thomas: Transmission

There are at least four potential channels through which the Rhymer legend may have been transmitted from Lowland tradition to Gaelic tradition, each of which was operative at certain times and under certain conditions. It may be that only a combination of them fully explains the development and adoption of Thomas and his prophecies as found in Gaelic literature and tradition.

1. *Lore introduced by families with southern connections.* The most direct connection between Thomas of Erceldoune and the Scottish Highlands is the Gordon family. Robert the Bruce awarded Sir Adam of Gordon, Warden of the Marches, with the lands of

Strathbogie in Aberdeenshire. The family took their surname ‘Gordon’ from their home parish of Gordon in Berwickshire, which was also the residence of Thomas. If the Gordon family took traditions about Thomas with them from Berwickshire to Aberdeenshire, it would ‘explain the abundant traces of Thomas’s fame and presence in the counties of Aberdeen and Banff’ (Geddie: 30, Black 2005: 398-9).

Nevertheless, it would be difficult to attribute the development of the Gaelic legend to the work of the Gordons alone given that their rôle as a check against the Gaelic kin-groups in the north-east attracted much resentment to them: ‘Indeed, a large part of their history in the north was a continued struggle with the Celtic atmosphere, and continued as such at least to the end of the eighteenth century.’ (Bulloch: 319-20) Alexander Gordon (the third Earl of Huntly) was granted lands in Lochaber at the expense of the MacDonalds after the forfeiture of the Lordship of the Isles, and their relations with Clan Chattan were always strained (Cathcart: 168, 170).

On the other hand, the Gordons did form networks with dominant Highland kin-groups and were sometimes recognised for their leadership in the Gaelic world. Jock Gordon, the great-great-grandson of the original settler of Strathbogie, took the daughter of Macleod of Harris in a handfasting marriage (Bulloch: 325). In 1586 George, 6th Earl of Huntly, contracted a bond of manrent with Donald Gorm (chieftain of the MacDonalds of Sleat) and in 1592 he formed alliances with Cameron of Lochiel and MacDonald of Keppoch (Cathcart: 173, 177). Gaelic poetess Sileas MacDonald, of the MacDonalds of Keppoch, married the factor of the Marquis of Huntly’s lands in Lochaber and came to live on his estate in Strathavon (Ó Baoill 1972: xlvi-xlvii). It is her poetry that records the Marquis of Huntly (amongst others) joining the Jacobite Rising of Braemar on 27th August 1715; still, she does not hesitate to deride him for his poor performance in the venture in a following song (Ó Baoill 1972: lines 312-314, 350).

If the Gordons fostered lore about Thomas to legitimise their authority in the Highlands, their efforts left no lasting trace in the surviving Gaelic corpus. Given the ambiguity of the evidence, we should remain open to the possibility that lore about Thomas may have been reintroduced and further developed by other emigrants. Anglo-Norman families who spanned Lowland and Highland zones may have acted as a conduit for the legend. The literary activities of Reverend James Fraser, noted above, demonstrate that this scenario is possible. The Gaelic personal name ‘Tòmas’ was closely associated with the Highland Frasers (cf. MacKenzie: lines 295-7), and one supposed resting place of Thomas the Rhymer, *Tom na h-Iubhraich*, has special associations with the Frasers.

Thomas’s name appears in some Gaelic accounts as *Tòmas Reumhair* (‘Thomas the Wanderer’) (J.G. Campbell: 269). While the name ‘*Reumhair*’ may only reflect an attempt to relate a Scots word to a Gaelic homophone, it is suggestive of the importation of his legend with immigrants. The most obvious candidate would be some family associated with the branch of the MacDonalds in Dalness (in Glen Etive), who were known by the name *Clann Reubhair*. John MacCodrum ends his song ‘*Moladh Chloinn Domhnaill*’ (c. 1760) in praise of Clan Donald with a list of allies, concluding with this family, leading him to repeat the prophecy:

*’S thigeadh Clann Reubhair an òrdan —
Nuair a dhùisgeadh fir na h-Iubhraich
Cò thigeadh air tùs ach Tòmas?*

(Matheson 1938: 130)

‘And the Clan Reumhair would form in ranks —When the men of Tom
na h-Iubhraich would awaken, who would lead them but Thomas?’

This suggests that a Gaelic speaker would recognise an obvious resemblance between Thomas’s Gaelic name and this clan nickname, although it doesn’t prove that there was any actual historical link. It may be significant that all of the Jacobite songs that referred to the Rhymer legend were composed by mainland MacDonald poets: Iain Lom and Sileas na Ceapaich of Lochaber, Iain Dubh of Morar, and Alasdair mac Mhaighstir Alasdair of Moidart. Thus, it might be the case that the Gaelic Rhymer legend was advanced by the MacDonalds (perhaps after their contact with the Gordons or others) and given special impetus by the Jacobite cause: ‘Given the strong ideological loyalty to the true dynastic line, this ‘mystical reverence’ of the Gaels for the king, the prophecy could only become prominent if that dynasty were displaced or destroyed’ (MacInnes 1989a: 98).

2. Continuity of tradition. Given that there are Celtic elements in the Scots-language sources for Thomas the Rhymer (cf. Lyle 1967; Lyle 1968; Newton 2006), some form of the legend is likely to have been known at an early stage by speakers of a Celtic language and could have been made its way to a northern Gaelic community that maintained and popularised it during the medieval period.

During Thomas’s life in the thirteenth century, the Scottish Borders were home to speakers of Gaelic, Inglis, French, Flemish, and possibly Cumbric. Thomas himself was certainly multilingual and may have had ancestry from more than one of these ethnic communities (MacilleDhuibh 1998b). Legends about him must have begun flourishing shortly after his death, for the story of his journey to the Otherworld was known as early as the fourteenth century (Lyle 1994: 275). This incident was supposed to have occurred under the Eildon Hills, an ancient holy site (MacilleDhuibh 1997). Prophecies attributed to Thomas appear in learned texts from the fourteenth century to the eighteenth century (Henderson and Cowan: 145-9), demonstrating the strength and longevity of his legend. It may have moved via translinguistic ‘cèilidh crawl’, moving from the Borders, via Gaelic-speaking Ayrshire (where Gaelic died only in the eighteenth century), through to Argyll. This hypothesis might be strengthened by the late nineteenth-century observation that, among Gaelic-speaking areas, Thomas the Rhymer was particularly well known in Argyll and Perthshire (J.G. Campbell: 269).

There are other examples of Brythonic survivals in Gaelic tradition. The Highland narrative repertoire included Arthurian material, although it derives from both Celtic and non-Celtic sources (cf. Gillies 1982). Campbell claims of British origin (and descent from Arthur himself!) were backed up by genealogies that include genuine Welsh names, demonstrating a longevity of interest in Brythonic tradition (cf. Gillies 1999).

A few other Lowland characters appear in surviving Gaelic tradition, most notably Robert Bruce, William Wallace (sometimes taking on the attributes of a ‘Fenian giant’) and Michael Scott (c. 1175-1234, also associated with the Eildon Hills and riding a supernatural horse (Campbell 1889: 46-53)). These are, however, characters on the margins of Gaelic tradition divested of any lasting political import. Nor is there any evidence of the relevance of Thomas’s ethnicity in surviving Gaelic sources. Any

memory of the ‘Celticity’ of the historical Thomas or the Eildon Hills would likely have been long forgotten and of little cultural significance to seventeenth-century Highlanders (cf. MacInnes 1989a).

While this hypothesis would give the legend sufficient time to develop Gaelic characteristics and spread through the Highlands, it would require extraordinary continuities given the chronological and geographical discontinuities in Celtic Scotland. It also does not provide sufficient explanatory power for the relevance of Thomas to Gaelic-speaking communities throughout this time period.

3. Later learned importation. Scottish Gaelic literati were familiar with mainstream texts written by Lowland scholars (cf. Thomson 1963: 296, 299), some of which contained references to Thomas the Rhymer. As was necessary, learned men in the Highlands typically were literate in Gaelic, Latin and Scots. This is reflected in the Scots orthography adopted by many scribes writing Gaelic language texts. Multilingual Reverend James Fraser recorded Gaelic verses in the Wardlaw Manuscript, as well as excerpts of prophetic verse written in Scots attributed to Thomas the Rhymer. He used them to illustrate contemporary historical events in the Highlands, such as the Battle of Auldearn (1645). The Statutes of Iona (1609) required the sons of Highland gentlemen to be sent to the Lowlands to be educated through the medium of English, thus facilitating familiarity with Lowland literature that might have been carried to home communities in the Highlands.

Despite the status of men of learning, it is difficult to imagine why this solitary literary figure from Lowland legend would have made such an impact on popular Gaelic consciousness via such a medium. Given the tenacity of native heroes in Highland oral tradition (Cù Chulainn, Fionn, etc.), very few characters entered the vernacular repertoire as literary imports, although there are some exceptions (Bruford 1969: 11-12). If learned literary import alone was a viable explanation, we might expect other popular Lowland characters to have entered the mainstream of Gaelic tradition with vestiges of their identity intact.

4. Jacobite Propaganda. Thomas may be a character imported at a relatively late stage into Gaelic Jacobite verse. James VI commissioned Robert Waldegrave to print the book *The Whole Prophecie of Scotland, England and Some part of France and Denmark...* in Edinburgh upon his accession to the English throne in 1603. The prophecies therein were attributed to Merlin, Bede, Thomas the Rhymer and others, but there was a ‘substantial bedrock of Rhymer material’ in the book (Henderson and Cowan: 149). The new edition was printed in 1610 and portions from it were recycled in popular chapbooks (MacilleDhuibh 1998b). *The Whole Prophecie...* was meant to bolster James VI’s grand political aspirations, and such prophetic material proved popular later in the propaganda of the Jacobite Risings.

Thomas may have been a convenient symbol of Highland-Lowland symbiosis for the Jacobites. By the time of the eighteenth-century Jacobite Risings, Gaelic poets were eager to incorporate Lowland clans into their roll calls of conceptual unity. Such collaboration may have looked expedient, if not necessary, for the accomplishment of Highland objectives. Hard-core Jacobite Alasdair mac Mhaighstir Alasdair (educated at Glasgow University) is willing, in the Preface to his 1751 book of poetry, to extend his invitation for Gaelic cultural renewal ‘even to the inhabitants of the lowlands of Scotland, who have always shared with them [the Highlanders] the honour of every gallant action.’

This scenario may not, however, give sufficient time for the Rhymer legend to develop a specifically Highland form. Given the familiarity with which the traditions were related in poetry to a mid seventeenth-century Highland audience, we would expect that the Gaelic version of the legend had been fully gestated and distributed before the deployment of Royalist propaganda. Furthermore, given that James VI had demonstrated strong anti-Highland policies even before attaining the English crown, it is not altogether likely that Scottish Gaels (especially traditionalists, like the MacDonalds, who later became Jacobites) would create and adopt traditions so closely allied to James's interests. It is possible, however, that the 'Highland Thomas' was the result of Gaelic counter-propaganda, giving an alternative interpretation to James's own royally-subsidised texts.

Thomas: Rationale

It may be significant that the first Gaelic poetry in which Thomas the Rhymer's name and references to his prophecies appear, the songs of Iain Lom, are Jacobite come-all-ye's which highlight the antagonism between Scotland and England but are silent on tensions between Highlands and Lowlands. Lowland allies figure prominently in his first two songs. These features are also pronounced in Iain Dubh's '*Óran nam Fineachan*'.

That James VI had propaganda put in the voice of Thomas the Rhymer demonstrates the popularity of this legendary figure in the Lowlands and re-entrenched his authority as a prophet. Gaels may have appropriated him in order to participate through him in the heroic future of the wider Scottish nation. By taking him within the fold of Gaelic prophecy, his voice could be used to assert the importance of the Gaels in the destiny of the nation. By passing on to him the rôle of messiah, which would have normally been the inheritance of Fionn mac Cumhaill in Gaelic tradition, they have transformed a potentially threatening figure into the leader of their own cause.

Other characteristics attributed to Thomas in Gaelic tradition demonstrate his ability to span worlds. Being in close association with the Dead and the *Sithe* ('fairies') provided his Otherworldly powers of prescience.¹⁶ Furthermore, some traditions assign him a liminal geographical position between Highland and Lowland regions. One of his alleged sleeping chambers is Dunbuck (J.G. Campbell: 270; Lyle 1968: 117) in the Lennox, an area where Gael and Lowlander interacted throughout the Middle Ages. That the climactic battle in which he will participate is located on the Clyde, a symbolic boundary between Highlands and Lowlands (cf. Newton 1999: 246-7), also reinforces his rôle as a figure of cultural mediation.

The poem entitled 'A phrofesie made before the situas'ne of Inverness', uniquely preserved in the Fernaig Manuscript (c. 1688-1693), depicts MacBeth as the messiah figure to triumph in combat (MacPhàrlain 1923: 170-1). The prophecy is localised at Tom na h-lubhraich, a graveyard whose many sacred associations suggest that it is an ancient holy site and possibly the sacred centre of the kingdom of Moray. It appears that Moray long held out from being completely under the authority of the Scottish kings based at Scone, as conflicts between King Duncan and MacBeth, and the agitation of the MacWilliam claimants, illustrate. The last stanza of the prophecy has been deciphered as:

*Ionbhar Nis an Dail Chlasg
An toirear cath an tùir-ghlais
A'n tig MacBeathaig a-mach*

*Le 'lainn agus le 'lùireach
Tuitidh na Gàidheil mu seach
Mu bhòrlum Tom na h-Iùbhraich.*

‘Inverness in Dail Chlasg, in which the battle of the grey tower will be fought, from which MacBeth will emerge with his blades and his armour; the Gaels will fall one by one about Borland of Tom na h-Iùbhraich.’

Could this stanza be a reworking of much earlier local tradition, a distant echo of despair resounding from the pacification of Moray and Ross? An interesting question, and one which I have not yet solved to satisfaction, revolves around the word *Gàidheil* in this text. In light of the later Thomas the Rhymer tradition, we might expect this word to be *Goill*. Although this would be a plausible reading of the manuscript ‘Ghayle’,¹⁷ it leaves the line a syllable short. So if it is indeed meant as *Gàidheil*, did this originally refer to MacBeth liberating Moray from the domination of the southern branch of the kingdom of Scotland? It is an intriguing possibility, though it is highly unlikely that the Moray people would not have thought of themselves as *Gàidheil*, and that more specific ethnonyms would not have been used.

In any case, this verse is contained in a manuscript that demonstrates further points of contact between Lowland scholarship and Highland Jacobitism. The scribe not only employed an orthography based on Scots (rather than standard Gaelic orthography) but also translated two English broadsheet ballads into Gaelic. Jacobite songs are also represented in the collection (Thomson 1994: 72).

This particular prophecy seems to originate in an earlier era, and the association of MacBeth with Tom na h-Iùbhraich suggests that Thomas the Rhymer is supplanting earlier archetypes. While the late seventeenth-century compilers of the Fernaig Manuscript themselves are rather late to be the authors of the Rhymer’s lore in Gaelic tradition, they exemplify the kind of men who may have fostered the growth of the legend.

Conclusions

I have argued that prophecy is an important cultural resource in the wider body of Gaelic tradition. It can be used to mobilise people to act in unison for a common purpose, to discuss possible outcomes of current social and political processes, to integrate history into the larger body of native oral narrative, to maintain dignity and authority in the face of cultural invasion, and to assimilate potentially threatening forces.

I have also attempted to find possible explanations for the adoption and growth of tradition about Scottish Gaeldom’s most prominent prophetic figure, Thomas the Rhymer. Although Thomas’s character and legend first evolved in Lowland literature, it became grafted onto Highland messianic archetypes through contact with Lowland tradition. The Highland version of the prophecy gave voice to Gaelic hopes that, by backing the true king and conquering English enemies, they would be restored to a place of honour within Scotland and that the kingdom would be reintegrated.

Prophecy can be seen as an attempt to de-emphasise the discontinuities of history: cultural icons of the past sanction what might otherwise be disruptive to the social order

and explain contemporary events in the context of tradition. Belief in prophecy is built on the assumption that figures of the past, or people with supernatural associations, would have an interest in communicating with people in the present and that this method of acquiring knowledge was sufficiently reliable to take seriously. Although the learned classes had always shown some degree of skepticism about prophecy, the development of formal history and science made it increasingly difficult to maintain faith in prophecy and other traditional forms of knowledge (Thomas: 428-32, Henderson and Cowan: 24-30).

Nevertheless, prophecy is also an art form that exercises the imagination of society in envisioning and proactively making decisions about its own future, analogous to modern science fiction. The waning of prophecy in Gaelic oral tradition seems to have added significance in the perceptions of Highland communities about their subaltern status and lack of self-determination:

In the past, so far as I am aware, a seer's vision or precognition did not imply that the event was predestined and absolutely bound to happen. In fact it was a seer's duty to warn of the approaching danger. The individuals concerned had some freedom to take evasive action. But it is not so now, in the minds of those who believe in such matters and are prepared to discuss them. Fate is now fixed. Is this a reflection of Gaelic historical experience, which is so much an experience of ethnocide? (MacInnes 1992: 17)

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NOTES

¹ Such as '*An Taisbean*' (Black 2001: poem 37), '*Chunnacas Bean 's an Tùr 'na Suidhe*' (MacPhàrlain 1908: 76-7), Alasdair mac Mhaighstir Alasdair's '*Moladh Mòraig*'. Regarding the sovereignty myth in Gaelic tradition, it may be significant that many Scottish Gaelic Jacobite songs present a female cypher for Prince Charles (Mòrag, etc).

² I am not certain whether *coinne* should be interpreted as *coinneamh* ('meeting, encounter') or *coinmh(eadh)* ('provisions'), or a pun on both terms.

³ It is possible that *miamhalach*, meaning 'meowing', is meant for '*mialach*'.

⁴ According to J.G. Mackay (93), the legend reprinted in Stewart was originally printed in an 1874 issue of *The Inverness Courier*.

⁵ There are, of course, several versions of this prophecy. This particular version is notable for its alliteration.

⁶ This prophecy also appears in a MS. in private hands I have consulted that was written by Seumas MacDiarmaid for a talk he gave in 1902. This actually appears to have been Gillies's source.

⁷ This poem was first printed in *The Highlander* 31 August 1878. Donnchadh Stiubhart was the son of Rob 'Raithneach' who published a book of Gaelic poetry in 1802.

⁸ This aspect of prophecy is mentioned in John MacInnes 1989b: 10-11.

⁹ This first appeared in print in Pennant 1774 (page 239 in the 1998 edition). However, it appears in exactly the same form in the MacDiarmid MS (held by the Department of Celtic, University of Glasgow) as proverb 736. This collection of proverbs appears to have been made in 1769 (Thomson 1992: 1).

¹⁰ Others can be found in MacÌomhair (Prophecy 20) and (by implication) Thornber: 43.

¹¹ See Fionn: 11-14.

¹² There is some information about the magical book from which MacAoidh read his prophecies in NLS Adv.50.2.2 fo. 130-1. Thanks to Dòmhnall Uilleam Stiubhart for this reference.

¹³ Coinneach Odhar appears to have been developing into a figure of larger stature as prophecies of national significance were being attributed to him from at least the eighteenth century. According to J.G. Campbell, 'In Argyllshire and Perthshire, the celebrated Thomas the Rhymer is as well known as in the Lowlands of Scotland' (269), whereas in the North Highlands, significant prophecies were attributed to Coinneach Odhar 'whose name is hardly known in Argyllshire' (272).

¹⁴ The tale in MacDougall: 73-5 placing the Fianna in the Smith's Cave in Skye does not seem to correspond to any surviving tradition about Thomas in the same cave.

¹⁵ See also Thomas: 415-22.

¹⁶ See Newton 2006: 323-4 for more on this connection.

¹⁷ See, for example, 'ghail' for *Ghall* on page 162.

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Caterwauling and Demon Raising: The Ancient Rite of the *Taghairm*?

ANDREW E. M. WISEMAN

‘Last evening-tide
Brian an augury tried,
Of that kind which must not be
Unless in dread extremity
The Taghairm called...’ (Scott 1810: 146)

This is, so as far as I am aware, the only mention of the *taghairm* in verse. It appears in the fourth canto (suitably entitled ‘The Prophecy’) of Sir Walter Scott’s *The Lady of the Lake* (1810). Some appreciation of the literary interpretation of the tradition concerning this dread rite can be established: firstly, that it was only performed as a last resort due to its extremely dangerous repercussions; and, secondly, that the results, if the rite was performed in accordance with the instructions given, could, in fact, predict a future event usually to the practitioner’s benefit. This was the motive for undertaking the rite in the first place.

Before giving examples from earlier writers who discuss this so-called ‘awful ceremony’, it would be pertinent to give an etymology of the word *taghairm*. John Gregorson Campbell (1836–1891), the famous folklorist and minister of Tiree, referred to the *taghairm* as ‘giving his supper to the devil’ (J.G. Campbell 2005: 167). Many writers variously spell *taghairm* as *tighairm*, *tigh ghairm*, *taighairm*, or even *taigheirm*, which may reflect the dialect of the writer’s local area. This has led some to fall into an etymological trap by explaining *taghairm* from *taigh* [house] and *gairm* [call], thus giving the ‘House of Invocation’. This is an understandable, if incorrect, folk etymology. John Gregorson Campbell understood the meaning as ‘spirit-call’, as in ‘the calling of spirits from the vasty deep’, stemming from *ta*, a root closely related to such words as *taibhse* or *taidhbhse*, *tannasg* or *tamhasg* which have shades of meaning such as apparitions, ghosts, wraiths or even visions (*ibid.*: 170). According to *The Dictionary of the Irish Language*, the word *taghairm* developed from *togairm* (sometimes *tagairm*), the verbal noun of *do-gair*, attested in the Gaelic of the ninth century. It has a range of senses including calling, invoking, petitioning and conjuring. An example taken from Keating’s seventeenth-century *Foras Feasa ar Éirinn* [History of Ireland] is especially relevant in this context: *do thoghairm na ndeamhan*—‘to conjure up demons’ (Royal Irish Academy 1913–75: T, 215–16).

The purpose of this paper is to explore the *taghairm* traditions in their cultural context and, more specifically, to analyse the most bizarre *taghairm* rite involving cat sacrifice, or feline immolation, rendered by MacKay *taghairm nan cat* [summons of cats] (MacKay 1893: 432–33). Before going on to discuss the *taghairm* of cats in greater detail, the other methods of the *taghairm* will be analysed and discussed in the light of various antiquarian notices, especially from those accounts given in both Irish and Welsh traditions.

Water Summons: Martin’s First Description of the *Taghairm*

An early writer who mentions the *taghairm* (though he does not use the actual word itself) was Martin Martin (c. 1668–1718),¹ one of the first indigenous travellers to write about the Highlands and Islands of Scotland. In *A Description of the Western Isles of Scotland* (1703), the writer offers a hotchpotch of fascinating insights, folk customs, superstitions and ethnographical observations, as well as much factual detail. Among his observations, Martin includes three important accounts of this divination practice, which may be labelled as the water, hide and cat summons, the first of which is as follows:

It was an ordinary thing among the over-curious to consult an invisible oracle, concerning the fate of families, and battles, &c. This was performed three different ways; the first was by a company of men, one of whom being by lot; was afterwards carried to a river, which was the boundary between two villages; four of the company laid hold on him, and having shut his eyes, they took him by the legs and arms, and then tossing him to and again, struck his hips with force against the bank. One of them cried out, “What is it you have got there?” Another answers, “A log of birchwood.” The other cries again, “Let his invisible friends appear from all quarters, and let them relieve him by giving an answer to our present demands”: and in a few minutes after a number of little creatures came from the sea, who answered the question and disappeared suddenly. The man was then set at liberty, and they all returned home to take their measures according to the prediction of their false prophets; but the poor deluded fools were abused, for the answer was still ambiguous. This was always practised in the night, and may literally be called the works of darkness (Martin 1994: 172).

The first two of these ways, the water and the hide summons, are sometimes found in combination but for the sake of clarity they will be treated as separate methods for this study and I will then go on to consider the third way, the summons of cats, which is the main focus of this article.

Referring to this method of performing the *taghairm*, Martin adds, somewhat credulously:

I had an account from the most intelligent and judicious men in the Isle of Skye that about sixty-two years ago the oracle was thus consulted only once, and that was in the parish of Kilmartin, on the east side, by a wicked and mischievous race of people, who are now extinguished, both root and branch (Martin 1994: 173).

Unfortunately, Martin does not provide any details concerning why the oracle was consulted, although he makes it clear that their practice and they themselves were beneath contempt. John Gregorson Campbell adds that the ‘race of people’ who performed the rite were *Clann ’ic Cuithein* [MacQueens] a minor sept of Skye, in *An Eaglais Bhréige* (see fig. 1), which he translates as the ‘Make-believe Cave’, in Trotternish on the eastern side of Skye, near Tote (Campbell 2005: 169). Contrary to Martin’s report, they were more likely to have been absorbed into Clan Donald than to have been totally extirpated (MacLean 1985: 300), despite the rather disparaging local rhyme:—

*Clann 'ic Cuthain chur nam briag,
Clann 'ic Cuithein chur an t-sodail,
Clann 'ic Mhannain chur na braide
Ged nach b'fhaid' iad na cas biodaig.*

The M'Cuthans, expert in lies,
The M'Quithens, expert in base flattery,
The M'Vannins, expert as thieves,
Though no bigger than a dagger handle (Campbell 2005: 169).²

John Ramsay of Ochtertyre (1736–1814), describes the use of both the water and hide methods of *taghairm*, also in Skye:

Another species of it is called *Taghairm an uisge*—i.e., *taghairm* by water. It was last used by a tenant of the name M'Curdhean, whose predecessors were also farmers³ for that art. He lived in the Isle of Skye, near a beautiful cascade, on the water of *Eas-bhereraig*;⁴ and when consulted on any matter of consequence, he covered his whole body with a cow's hide, and placed himself between the water of the cascade and rock. Another man attended with a heavy pole, whose office it was to give repeated strokes to the water and to the man concealed behind it, crying now and then, "*An maide fearna so?*"—i.e., "Is this a stock of arn?" This operation was continued till it was perceived that M'Curdhean was frantic or furious; and he was then thought to be in a condition to answer the most important questions. He was frequently consulted about futurity, and his responses were attended to, as proceeding from something more than human. A degree of frenzy seems to have been affected by those Highland seers [...] (Ramsay 1888: 2, 460).

The two types of wood referred to in this account and in the one mentioned earlier by Martin are of some interest: alder (*arn* in Scots) and birchwood, both of which, according to traditional Gaelic cosmology are servile (*daor*) rather than noble (*saor*).

In this version of the water summons, the location is given as Eas Bhearraig, which is on the Scorbreck coast directly below the Storr Lochs, just north of Portree.



Fig 1. *An Eaglais Bhrèige* (sometimes referred to as *An Eaglais Bhreugach*), or ‘The False Church’, is a gigantic boulder around forty feet in height that sits on the east shore of Trotternish, Skye. It is holed right through by a cave thus giving rise to its name as it has a strong resemblance to a church. © John Allan and licensed for reuse under the Creative Commons License.

According to the Rev. Norman MacDonald, it was none other than the Rev. Dr Donald Macqueen of Kilmuir (c. 1716–1785), whose erudition so impressed the man of letters and lexicographer, Dr Samuel Johnson,⁵ that put a stop to this heathen practice as the ‘learned cleric walked all the way from Kilmuir, a distance of over twenty miles, to censure the querent and his companions’ (MacDonald 1970: 19–20). In fact, according to this minister’s own testimony, it was not he but rather one of his ancestors who took it upon himself to put a stop to this pagan practice. The Rev. Dr Donald Macqueen wrote a letter on December 17, 1781 mentioning the *taghairm* when he visited Beareraig in the company of Sir James Macdonald:

Where the Mauliens in their Hereditary office, gave responses at a beautiful cascade of water, which jets out over the Rock, so far as to leave an opening about the middle of the Precipice, where four or five men could stand in the crevice dry, tho’ the body of water passed over their heads. Here one of the Priest’s associates laid himself down covered with a cow’s hide when Maluien laid on as many blows with a rung, as seemed to drive him out of his senses, the length of a *Prophetic fury*. Then his groans and words, twisted, squeezed and moulded by the Revered Priest, afforded materials for an answer to every enquirer, who gave each a sheep as a Recompence for his drudgery and abuse. This oracle was called *Ti-ghairm (Taghairm)*, i.e. an address to the Being (God), for it seems they pretended by prayer to obtain the Gift of Prophecy [...] The Oracle of Beareraig was suppressed but about two hundred years ago by one of my ancestors who took a short cut to his

Reformation by coming to the cascade on the appointed night and driving off the Priests under the discipline of a hazel rung threatening worse usage, if ever they returned to the same place for the purpose of imposing on their neighbours (MacLeod 1931–33: 386–87).

It may be assumed from the above descriptions that both Ramsay and Macqueen were familiar with Martin's *A Description of the Western Isles of Scotland*.

Hide Summons: Martin's Second Description of the *Taghairm*

In *A Description of the Western Isles of Scotland*, to which I now return, Martin moves on to an account of the hide summons, after treating the water summons, in which a man is wrapped or tied into an animal hide (usually that of a cow or an ox):

The second way of consulting the oracle was by a party of men who first retired to solitary places, remote from any house, and there they singled out one of their number, and wrapt him in a big cow's hide, which they folded about him; his whole body was covered with it except his head, and so left in this posture all night until his invisible friends relieved him by giving a proper answer to the question in hand, which he received, as he fancied, from several persons he found about him all the time. His consorts returned to him at break of day, and then he communicated his news to them, which often proved fatal to those concerned in such unwarrantable enquiries (Martin 1994: 173).

The Welsh antiquarian, Thomas Pennant (1726–1798), in *A Tour in Scotland, and Voyage to the Hebrides* (1772), also mentions the *taghairm* as practised in Skye:

A wild species of magic was practised in the district of Trotterness, that was attended with a horrible solemnity: a family who pretended to oracular knowledge practised these ceremonies. In this country is a vast cataract, whose waters falling from a high rock, jet so far as to form a dry hollow beneath, between them and the precipice. One of the impostors was sowed up in a hide of an ox, and, to add terror to the ceremony, was placed in this concavity: the trembling enquirer was brought to the place, where the shade, and the roaring of waters, increased the dread of the occasion. The question is put, and the person in the hide delivers his answer, and so ends this species of divination styled *Taghairm* (Pennant 1774: 311).

In his *The Magic Arts of Celtic Britain* (1945), Lewis Spence mentions the *taghairm* with regard to evidence of the rite in Welsh tradition: '[...] that this was practised in Wales is clear from the statement in the tale known as 'The Vision of Rhonabwy', in which Rhonabwy, a warrior of Powys, beheld a vision of the court of King Arthur while sleeping on the skin of a yellow heifer, as we read in the *Mabinogion*' (Lewis 1945: 97). A translation from medieval Welsh, taken from the thirteenth-century *Mabinogion*, shows how the vision is said to have taken place:

[...] And they went to sleep. Rhonabwy's two companions fell into a deep sleep, after the fleas and discomfort had tormented them. But

Rhonabwy, since he could neither sleep nor rest, thought he would suffer less if he went to sleep on the yellow ox-skin on the dais. And there he slept

And soon as sleep entered his eyes he was granted a vision, that he and his companions were travelling across Maes Argyngroeg, and his inclination and intent, so he thought, was towards Rhyd-y-groes on the Hafren [...] So loud was that commotion, Rhonabwy awoke. And when he awoke he was on the yellow ox-skin, having slept for three nights and three days (Davies 2007: 215, 226).

The *taghairm* was not to be taken lightly, as can be seen from the traumatic psychological effect of a performance of the rite described in a testimony recorded by Martin:

Mr. Alexander Cooper, present minister of North-Uist, told me that one John Erach,⁶ in the isle of Lewis, assured him it was his fate to have been led by his curiosity with some who had consulted this oracle, and that he was a night within the hide, as above mentioned; during which time he felt and heard such terrible things that he could [not] express them: the impression it made on him was such as could never go off, and he said that for a thousand worlds he would never again be concerned in the like performance, for this had disordered him to a high degree. He confessed it ingenuously, and with an air of great remorse, and seems to be very penitent under a just sense of so great a crime. He declared this about five years since, and is still living in Lewis, for anything I know (Martin 1994: 174).

One can theorise that the methods employed in performing the *taghairm* caused sensory deprivation, or attenuation, and that this in turn caused heightened mental awareness, or consciousness, thus inducing a trance-like meditation receptive to higher, or preternatural, intelligences. This type of method is common enough in shamanic operations where there is a need to heighten concentration, to dull normal sensory input, control breathing and so forth, in order for the desired effect to occur: an alternate (usually higher) state of consciousness. Such a type of process may have in fact brought the practitioner into contact with the workings of the sub-consciousness, or higher self, rather than incorporeal elementals.

The theme of mantic technique has been discussed by Nora K. Chadwick, where she cites evidence from early Celtic literature (Chadwick 1942: 5–6). It is no coincidence that a similar type of method was used for poetic composition, for Martin describes the way in which the *Aos Dàna*, or poets, would undertake sensory deprivation in order to attract the muses:

The orators, in their language called *Is-dane*, were in high esteem both in these islands and the Continent,⁷ until within these last forty years they sat always among their nobles and chiefs of families in the *streak* or circle [...] The orators, after the Druids were extinct, were brought in to preserve the genealogy of families, and to repeat the same at every succession of a chief; and upon the occasion of marriages and births, they made epithalamiums and panegyrics which the poet or bard

pronounced. The orators by the force of the eloquence had a powerful ascendance over the greatest men of their time [...] I must not omit to relate their way of study, which is very singular: they shut their doors and windows for a day's time, and lie on their backs, with a stone upon their belly, and plaids about their necks, and their eyes being covered, they pump their brains for rhetorical encomium or panegyric; and indeed they furnish such a style from this dark cell, as is understood by a very few [...] (Martin 1994: 176–77).

The utterance of poetic prophecy in language readily understood only by the initiated few is attested from Irish, Welsh and Norse sources. The connection of poetic and mantic language goes further back into roots of Indo-European poetic tradition (Leavitt 1997: 9–16). Geraldus Cambrensis, or Gerald of Wales (c. 1146–c. 1223), in his twelfth-century *Descriptio Cambriae*, or *Description of Wales* (1194), provides an account of Welsh seers called *Awenyddion* which compares well with Martin's own account. From the brief but tantalising description given by Gerald of Wales, it seems that they practised a kind of oracular seership, for they were attributed with the ability to go into trances at will from which their mantic utterances would emanate.⁸

One thing that can be made clear is that the *taghairm* has a pre-Christian origin. If the traditional stories from Geoffrey Keating's (c. 1570–c. 1644) *Foras Feasa ar Éirinn* can be taken at face value, they allegedly go back in time to a period when Druidic practice was to the fore and, although Keating's specific link with Druids should be discounted since Keating is not a reliable source in such matters as these, it may well be the case that the practice was an ancient one:

Dála na ndrúadh, is é feidhm do-nídís do sheithidhibh na dtarbh n-iodhbarta, a gcoimhéad ré hucht bheith ag déanamh coniuuration, nó ag cor na ndeamhan fá gheasaibh, 7 is iomdha céim ar a gcuirdís geasa orra, mar atá silleadh ar a sgáile féin i n-uisge, nó ré hamharc ar néallaibh nimhe, nó ré foghar gaoithe nó glór éan do chlos. Gidh eadh, an tan do cheileadh gach áisig dhiobh sin orra, is eadh do-nídís, cruinnchliatha caorthainn do dhéanamh 7 seithidhe na dtarbh n-iodhbarta do leathadh orra, 7 an taobh do bhíodh ris an bhfeóil do chor i n-uachtar dhiobh, 7 dol mar sin i muinighin a ngeas do thoghairm na ndeamhan, do bhuaín sgéal diobh, amhail do-ní an togharmach san chiorcaill aníú. Gonadh de sin do lean an seanshocail ó shoin, adeir go dtéid neach ar a chliathaibh fis, an tan do-ní dícheall ar sgéalaibh d'fhagháil (Keating 1930: 24–25).

As to the druids, the use they made of the hides of the bulls offered in sacrifice was to keep them for the purpose of making conjuration, or laying geasa on the demons; and many are the ways in which they laid geasa on them, such as to keep looking at their own images in water, or gaze on the clouds of heaven, or keep listening to the noise of the wind or the chattering of birds. But when all these expedients failed them, and they were obliged to do their utmost, what they did was, to make round wattles of the quicken tree, and to spread thereon the hides of the bulls offered in sacrifice, putting the side which had been next the flesh uppermost, and thus relying on their geasa to summon the demons to get

information from them, as the conjurer does nowadays in the circus; whence the old saw has since been current which says that one has gone on his wattles of knowledge when he has done his uttermost to obtain information (Keating 1902-13: 2, 349–51).

The connection of bull hides and the raising of demons is made clear and, as shown earlier, is the second *taghairm* method noticed by Martin. The development of ‘magical concentration’ can also be seen from the above passage.

The evidence so far adduced from earlier sources strongly suggests a connection between poetic inspiration and premonition as argued by Nora K. Chadwick (1891–1972) in her article ‘*Imbas Forosnai*’ (Chadwick 1935: 97–135). The *Imbas Forosnai* [Ir. *imbas*, great knowledge, poetic talent, inspiration; *forosnai*, that illuminates], as far as can be gleaned, produces a mantic sleep not unlike that of Rhonabwy who lay down in a yellow ox-skin, mentioned previously. It also rings with the description of the *Aos Dána* [people of poetry] which Martin described earlier. Further, Chadwick quotes a passage translated by Kuno Meyer (1856–1919) from *Sanas Cormaic* (‘Cormac’s Glossary’):

Imbass forosnae .i. dofūarascaib sec[h]ip rēt bas maith lasin filid & bes adhlaic dó d’foillsiugad. Is amlaid didiu dognīther ōn .i. concā in file mīr do c[h]arna dirg muice nō c[h]on nō c[h]ait] ocus dobir iarom for lic iar cūl na comlad & dichain dīchetal fair & adodpair do dēib īdal & cotagair dó & nī fabaib īarnabāroch, & dochain iarom for a dī bois & congair dēo īdal cuige arnā tarmascthar a c[h]odlud & dobeir a dī bois ima dī lecaim & contuli & bīthir og a foraire ar nachn-imparræ & nach toirmescae neach, agas doadbanar dō iarom annī aradmbi co cend nōmaide nō a [col. 2] dōu nō a trī, fut ngair conmeassad ocind andbairt. Et ideo imbas dicitur .i. bas disīu & bass anal im a agaid nō im a c[h]end. Atrorbe Pātraic anisin, & an teim laoda & fotroirgell a brīathar nā bad nimhe nā talman nach aon dogēnai, ar is dīultad bathis. Dīc[h]etal doc[h]ennaib immorro fodrācbad sōn i cōrcus c[h]jerdæ, ar is soas fodera sōn: nī ēcen audbairt do demnaib oca, achi aisnēis do c[h]ennaib a chnāmae fochēdōir (Meyer 1907–13: 64).

The *Imbas Forosnai* sets forth whatever seems good to the seer (*fili*) and what he desires to make known. It is done thus. The seer chews a piece of the red flesh of a pig, or a dog, or a cat, and then places it on a flagstone behind the door. He sings an incantation over it, offers it to the false gods, and then calls on them to him. And he leaves them not on the next day, and chants then on his two hands, and again calls his false gods to him, lest they should disturb his sleep. And he puts his two hands over his two cheeks till he falls asleep. And they watch by him lest no one overturn him and disturb him till everything he wants to know is revealed to him, to the end of nine days, or of twice that time, or, how ever long he was judged at the offering (Chadwick 1935: 99–100).⁹

Thomas F. O’ Rahilly states that the ‘object of the *fili* or seer was to commune with the Otherworld in order that he might tap [...] the divine omniscience for his own ends. By being sacrificed to the deity, the animal became in a sense deified; and so the

seer, by chewing some of the animal's flesh and by wrapping himself in its hide, was believed to be able to acquire some of the knowledge possessed by the deity, which was imparted to him when he fell into a sleep or a trance' (O' Rahilly 1946: 325).

With reference to the hide *taghairm*, Nagy writes that 'the hide [...] has come off an animal just killed, as well as the seeker of knowledge wrapped in it, are suspended in a liminal state between life and death. The seer identifies with the slain animal and exists between the categories of human and beast during the ritual. As a marginal member of society who [...] acquires special knowledge' (Nagy 1981–82: 138). Generalising from the specific instances of each type of techniques for all these *taghairm* rituals, Nagy comments that the "poet-seer uses liminal devices (anomalous food, tips, hurdles, skins) in liminal places (near a door, between civilisation and wilderness) to create a liminal 'atmosphere' in which he gains access to the source of knowledge' (*op.cit.*: 138).

Episodes like this occur in older tales such as the *tarbfeis* [bull-feast] in *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* [The Destruction of Da Derga's Hostel] in *Lebor na hUidre* [The Book of the Dun Cow], the oldest manuscript entirely written in Gaelic compiled before 1106 at the great monastic centre of Clonmacnoise on the Shannon (MacKillop 1998: 43). A rather terse description of the *tarbfeis* is given which is relevant as it offers an example (albeit implicit) of a type of ceremony not unlike that of the *taghairm*. The *tarbfeis* is used to legitimise the claims of legendary *Conaire Mór mac Eterscélae* to the throne as the rightful future king of Ireland:

Marb in rí iarunn .i. Eterscéle. Con-grenar taibfeis la firu Hérenn .i. no marbad tarb leó & ithead oenfear a sáith de & no ibead a enbruithi & no chanta ór firindi fair ina ligiu. Fer at-chichead ina chotlad is é bad rí, & at-baildis a beòil in tan ad-beiread gai [...] (Knott 1936: 4).

After that, the king, Eterscélae, died. The men of Ériu then assembled at the bull feast: a bull was killed, and one man ate his fill and drank its broth and slept, and an incantation of truth was chanted over him. Whoever this man saw in his sleep became king: if the man lied about what he saw in his sleep, he would die [...] (Gantz 1981: 65).

A particularly detailed description of the *tarbfeis* is contained in the tale *Serglige Con Culainn* [The Wasting Sickness of Cú Chulainn] and a version of this tale also appears in *Lebor na hUidre*. The comparison of this passage, and other similar ones from early tales, with the *taghairm* methods, demonstrates clear similarities, suggesting that they reflect quite a well-known practice of ancient divination within a Celtic context.

The water and hide methods of the *taghairm* would seem to have their origins from at least the medieval period, and it seems that they compare well with similar methods described from classical sources. If the descriptions of the locations in which the *taghairm* revelations are examined, then a glimpse of their remote antiquity may be gleaned—Dalyell, paraphrasing Martin, has recorded that in the rite 'the Taighairm' the querent was 'carried by assistants to a solitary spot, or left under the arch formed by the projected waters of a cataract' (Dalyell 1894: 495). Removing oneself to a remote location outwith 'society' or 'civilisation' in order to gain the right conditions for the desired effect to occur seems to be a universal practice. Divinatory rites practiced in ancient Greece are clearly similar, as Pythagoras 'after

being cleansed by the Ideaen Dactyls, slept by a river on the skin of a black lamb' (Ettlinger 1946: 106). Like Rhonabwy, mentioned before, there is a reference to Virgil's Bryttys who 'laid himself down on the pelt of a white hind' (*ibid.*: 107). In addition to this, Leslie D. Johnston writes that 'the oracle-consultant who slept upon the raw skin gained contact [...] with the spirits of the dead enticed to him by the bloody skin' and then goes on to state that the 'best literary account of the power of blood to draw the spirits of the dead' occurs in the *Odyssey* 11.23 ff. (Johnston 1948: 349). The ability of a seer to summon the dead through the use of fresh blood and then to gain prophetic insight from the resultant commune is at least as old as the *Odyssey* (11. 23–25). Tiresias is said to have been summoned when Odysseus slaughtered a sheep and then let its fresh blood drain into a pit. Odysseus then fended off all the other spirits until Tiresias drew near and spoke thus to him: 'Nay, draw back from the pit, hold off your sharp sword so that I may drink of the blood and speak to you true words [...]' (*ibid.*: 351). Other similar occurrences from Vergil as well as Ovid are given (*ibid.*: 350–51) and where a summary of the former citation is given:

Latinus, on his part, sacrificed one hundred sheep [...] and after spreading out the fresh skins, lay upon them. A voice was then heard, coming from the deep woods [...] (*ibid.*: 350).

The fact that the priest or seer sleeps upon the hide and then goes on to see apparitions, and that he speaks with Acheron, who resides in the infernal regions, is not without significance. The similarities between this ancient method of divination and the *taghairm* are striking. Chadwick states in her *Poetry and Prophecy*: "The association of inspiration and knowledge of whatever kind acquired by supernatural means is ancient and widespread. Inspiration, in fact, relates to revealed knowledge. Revelation covers the whole field of human consciousness. It includes knowledge of the past and the hidden present, as well as the future' (Chadwick 1942: 41). To sum up, it may be said that many such practices were not only common but that they also have a long pedigree.

Cat Summons: Martin's Third Description of the *Taghairm*

The features noted above do not fit easily, if at all, into the most interesting and bizarre method of performing the *taghairm* noticed by Martin:

There was a third way of consulting, which was a confirmation of the second above-mentioned. The same company who put the man into the hide took a live cat and put him on a spit; one of the number was employed to turn the spit, and one of the consorts inquired of him. What are you doing? He answered, I roast this cat until his friends answer the question, which must be the same that was proposed by the man shut up in the hide. And afterwards a very big cat comes, attended by a number of lesser cats, desiring to relieve the cat turned on the spit, and then answers the question. If this answer proved the same that was given to the man in the hide, then it was taken as a confirmation of the other, which in this case was believed infallible (Martin 1994: 173–74).

William MacKenzie (1851–1935) slightly fleshes out the above account: "Tradition suggests pagan rites being carried out at the Eaglais Bhréige (lying church) at which

his Satanic Majesty presided. Black cats were roasted alive as one of the sacrifices. A young MacQueen woman is said to have been inveigled to their rites. Her whereabouts became known to her people, who assembled and put to rout the idolatrous assemblage, rescued the young woman and removed the Cùbaid, Satan's seat, to where it now stands [...] (MacKenzie 1930: 15–16; see also Forbes 1923: 178).

There is, however, a slightly earlier reference to *taghairm nan cat* dating from c. 1685 (and, as far as I am aware, the earliest reference to such a rite) in a section "Of their Augury, Predictions & Second Sight" of a treatise entitled *A Collection of Highland Rites and Customs*, probably penned by the Rev. Robert Kirk, or Kirke (1644–1692), famous for his fascinating treatise, *The Secret Commonwealth of Elves, Fauns and Fairies* (1690/1),¹⁰ on fairy belief and second sight:

RHAMANTA. When they'd have a Response there are four or more sturdy persons who go to a Loch end, or a Kiln which hath two Doors; in which they roast a Cat alive backwards [...] One of them goes under a Cauldron, a third invocats the Divel and a fourth faceth him. Sometimes there appear men with their heads in their hands. The Devil first asks somewhat, then they take the Cat & throw it <at> his Face. Then they ask the Devil & get answers, and obtain Requests, as the having meat, Lives prolong'd &c. (Hunter 2001: 60).

It would also seem that this particular method of the *taghairm* is unique to the Highlands and Islands of Scotland as it does not seem to have been mentioned elsewhere. Such were the dire consequences of *taghairm nan cat* that, according to John Gregorson Campbell, there were only three recorded mentions of its actual performance in the Highlands and Islands. Apart from the young MacQueen woman mentioned above, the two others who are said to have performed *taghairm nan cat* were Allan Cameron (c. 1448–c. 1480), who succeeded his father around 1461 as chief (and first to be styled captain) of Clan Cameron. In Gaelic tradition he is known as *Ailean nan Creach* ('Allan of the Forays') and is said to have performed the ritual at *Dail a' Chait* ('The Cat Meadow'), near Torcastle, Lochaber (see fig. 2). The other performance is said to have been carried out by *Lachlann Odhar* ('Dun Lachlan') in *Sabhal Mòr Peighinn a' Ghobhainn* ('Big Barn of Pennygowan') in Mull c. 1600.¹¹

There are, however, some other instances of *taghairm nan cat* that can be identified and added to this number. These include an instance from Islay mentioned by R. MacDonald Robertson (Robertson 1977: 119–20); another mentioned in a manuscript of John Francis Campbell of Islay (1821–1885) which tells of the MacArthurs of Glassary performing the *taghairm* (Henderson 1911: 269–70); a Glenmoriston tradition noted by William MacKay (MacKay 1893: 432–33); and a passing mention referenced by Alexander Stewart, where he cites a standing stone named *Clach Taghairm nan Cat*, in Blackwood, near Fortingall, Perthshire (Stewart 1928: 333). A further interesting mention of the *taghairm* is made in a fairly long tale, *Eachdraidh Mhànuis* ('History of Manus'), collected in South Uist by Fr Allan McDonald (1859–1905), where the rite is resorted to by a certain Horst Mac Chatha Chathaich, on the eve of a battle, in which he would be subsequently killed, so that he could find out that he would father a son who would later become the future king of Ireland.¹² The *taghairm* was also known by a tradition bearer from Benbecula, Angus MacLellan, who mentions the rite in passing in connection with Mull and also with

Cameron of Lochiel.¹³ Two brief mentions are made of the *taghairm* in the MacLagan MSS, one of which explains that the branch of the MacLeans to which Lachlann Odhar belongs was ‘exceedingly fierce and on this account they used to be called [...] “Siol a’ chlaidheamh iarunn, a dh’fhag an Tighearna air diochuimhne” (The seed of the iron sword which left the Lord out of their thoughts).’¹⁴ Finally, there is a mention of one other *taghairm* tradition from Strath Nairn (specifically Dunlichity), and, although it contains no added detail, it is significant that this vestigial memory was retained up to modern times (Cumming 1978–80: 520–21).

John Gregorson Campbell notes that the details of the Mull and Lochaber traditions ‘are so exactly the same that there is reason to think they must be versions of an older legend’ (Campbell 2005: 167). In other words, what is being dealt with here is a migratory legend. The similarities go so far as to replicate the actual dialogue verbatim strongly indicating that the Lochaber and Mull versions have a common source or, alternatively, that one is a redaction of the other. I shall first give the Lochaber version of the tale.



Fig 2. Engraving of Torcastle, Lochaber, which was the seat of Gillechattan Mòr, the founder of Clan Chattan, of whom the MacIntoshes later became chiefs. The sketch was drawn by a Mr Rhind, of Inverness, for Charles Fraser-MacKintosh, in 1871, who imaginatively reconstructed the ruinous castle of how it may have looked in the late thirteenth-century. The place where the *taghairm* rite is said to have been carried out by Ailean nan Creach is nearby. Reproduced from Fraser-MacKintosh 1875: facing 49.

As mentioned earlier, the Lochaber version is usually attributed to *Ailean nan Creach*, but John Stewart of Ardvorlich argues that it would be better to attribute the tradition to his son, *Eòghain MacAilein* (‘Ewen, son of Allan’). This would be more in keeping with the dates, so he argues, in which *Gormshuil Mhòr na Maighe* (‘Great Gormula of Moy’) is said to have lived (Stewart 1981: 20–21). This famous witch appears in quite a few supernatural tales in Lochaber (and elsewhere) and she is alleged to have had

not a few dealings with the chiefs of Clan Cameron. The reason for the tale's attribution to *Ailean nan Creach* was his notorious fame as a cattle reiver: 'He is said to have made 32 expeditions into his enemy's country for the 32 years that he lived, and three more, for the three-fourths of a year that he was in his mother's womb' (Drummond 1842: 24). After which he is said to have regretted the misdeeds of his past and have undergone the rite of *taghairm nan cat* in the hope of gaining salvation. John Stewart of Ardvorlich's argument is based upon the fact that his untimely death, at the age of thirty-two, would have scarcely given him enough time to have lifted every *creach* said to have been attributed to him, far less to have regretted them.¹⁵ And, further, his son, Ewen, according to tradition, gained an even greater notoriety for cattle reiving than his father, and the event which led him to undertake *taghairm nan cat* was said to have been the death of Ewen's son Donald.

A rather more incredible version of this tale relates that Ewen, on his way to Rome on pilgrimage, fell ill in Holland, and, taking this as a portent, returned to consult *Gormshuil*, who told him that he must perform *taghairm nan cat* in order to relinquish the burden of his past misdeeds. Ewen then went to a place named *Dail a' Chait* ('The Cat Meadow') and built a wattle hut. On the strict instruction given by *Gormshuil*, he was to be attended only by his ghillie and a captured cat. He then ran a spit through the non-vital parts of the cat over the fire within the hut, while Ewen stood guard outside with his claymore in hand. The excruciating wild screams of the roasted cat attracted all the other cats in Lochaber, who were supposed to have been a legion of demons in feline form. If Ewen's nerve failed, or if any false move was made, then he would have been shredded to death. However, Ewen's resolution stood up well in the face of imminent disaster, when he is alleged to have coolly said: '*Ciod air bith a chì, no chual thu, cuir mu'n cuairt an cat*' (Stewart 1981: 23). An alternative rendition of this proverbial phrase is: '*Ge b'e chì no chluinneas tu, cùm an cat mun cuairt*.—Whatever you see or hear, keep the cat turning' (Nicolson 1996: 216). Another version of the same story states that the cats were endowed with the power of human speech, and, as the Rev. Somerled MacMillan relates, they each in turn cried out: 'This is ill-usage for a cat,' to which Ewen retorted: 'It will be better presently' (MacMillan 1971: 193). On the point of being torn limb from limb, Ewen said that he would only release the cat on the condition that the King of the Cats came himself. He duly appeared as a gigantic one-eyed black cat called *Cam Dubh* (Stewart 1981: 26). Silencing the other cats he then asked Ewen: 'Why are you torturing my brother?' Ewen replied that he would only stop if he could inform him of the best way to make atonement for his past misdeeds. 'You must,' said the head of the feline tribe, 'build seven churches—one for each of the seven forays' (MacMillan 1971: 193). Ewen duly assented to this and released the scorched cat who then rushed from the hut, followed closely by the host of other felines, who then flung themselves into the River Lochy in a place still known to this day as *Poll a' Chait* ('The Cat Pool'). Afterwards the cats swam down the river to the first bend where they then climbed out and merged into the night. This part of the river is still known as *Buinne a' Chait* ('The Cat Eddy'). A more prosaic explanation for these place-names is their long association with the Clan Chattan, whose totemic symbol is the wild cat (*ibid.*: 117–18; Fraser-MacKintosh 1888: 467–68). These points will be returned to when discussing the historical interpretations of the *taghairm nan cat* tradition.

The source for most of the Mull versions would seem to be an article that appeared in the *London Literary Gazette* (1824) by an anonymous writer (Anon. 1824: 172).¹⁶ However, quite a long version of the tale, which may have been based

on this, appears in John Gregorson Campbell's *Superstitions of the Highlands and Islands of Scotland*:

Lachlan Oär and a companion, *Ailein mac Eachainn*, Allan the son of Hector¹⁷ (some say he had two companions), shut themselves up in a barn at Pennygowan on the Sound of Mull, and putting cats on spits roasted them alive at a blazing fire. By-and-by other cats came in and joined in the horrible howling of those being roasted, till at last the beams (*sparrun an taighe*) were crowded with cats, and a concert of caterwauling filled the house. The infernal noise almost daunted Lachlan Oär, especially when the biggest of the cats said, "When my brother the Ear of Melting comes—"

Allan the son of Hector did not allow the sentence to be finished. "Away cat," he cried, and then added to his companion, in an expression which has become proverbial in the Highlands when telling a person to attend his work he has in hand, and never mind what discouragements or temptations may come in his way, *Dé sam bith a chì no chluinneas tu, cum an cat mun cuairt*. "Whatever you see or hear, keep the cat turning."

Dun Lachlan, recovering courage, said, "I will wait for him yet, and his son too."

At last the Ear of Melting came among the other cats of the beams, and said, while all the other cats kept silence, *Lachuinn Uidhir 'ic Dhòmhnail 'ic Néill, is olc an càramh cait sin*. "Dun Lachlan, son of Donald, son of Neil, that is bad treatment for a cat."

Allan to this called out as before, "Whatever you see or hear, keep the cat turning." And the fearful rite was proceeded with.

At last the Ear of Melting sprang to the floor and said, *Ge b'e có air am mùin Cluas an Leoghaidh chan fhaic e gnùis na Trianaid*. "Whomsoever the Ear of Melting makes water upon will not see the face of the Trinity."

Crois a chladheamh ad' cheann, a bhiast, 's tu mùn fallais! answered Dun Lachlan. "The cross of the sword in your head, wretch; your water is sweat." And he struck the cat on the head with the hilt of his two-handed sword.

Immediately the devil, under the potent spell, assumed his proper shape and asked his wild summoners what they wanted with him. One asked *conach is clann* ('prosperity and children'), and Dun Lachlan asked: *Cuid is conach, is saoghal fada 'na cheann*. "Property and prosperity, and a long life to enjoy it."

The devil rushed out through the door crying, *Conach! Conach! Conach!* "Prosperity! Prosperity! Prosperity!"

The two men obtained their desires, but were obliged (some say) to repeat the *taghairm* every year to keep the devil to the mark (Campbell 2005: 167–68).

A Gaelic version of this story appears in *Am Measg nam Bodach* (Mac a Phì 1938: 54–55), and compares favourably with the English version, strongly indicating that the latter came from this very source. It is a pity that the narrator of the Gaelic version

did not give a fuller version, but this may have been due to the exigencies of time as it was scripted for a radio programme.¹⁸ In addition, there is an account of the *taghairm* from the pen of the Rev. Norman MacLeod (1812–1872), affectionately known as *Caraid nan Gàidheal* [the friend of the Highlanders], who wrote a succinct rendition of the various episodes involved in the story but adds little.¹⁹ Nevertheless, the greatest number of *taghairm nan cat* tales to appear in various publications over the years are from Mull, and the reason for this was probably the fact that the Mull version was published in the *London Literary Gazette*.

Donald A. MacKenzie in *Tales from the Moors and Mountains*, offers additional information concerning *taghairm nan cat* with reference to the Mull version. In this account and the following one there is reference to another kind of *taghairm* not included by Martin, namely *taghairm nan daoine* ('summons of men').

Now there are two forms of this ceremony, the "*taghairm* of men" (*Taghairm nan Daoine*) and the "*taghairm* of cats" (*Taghairm nan Cat*). In one the magic-worker entered a big cauldron in an ancient burial-ground, and caused the dead to appear and walk past him. From one or other he received an answer to the question he happened to ask with regard to either the future or the past. The *cat taghairm* was performed by roasting cats on a big fire for four days and four nights, during which time the magic workers had to observe a strict fast (MacKenzie 1931: 44).

MacKenzie then relates the tale, more or less as in the previous two versions. The *taghairm* of men is, of course, a form of necromancy, and thus differs in kind from the *taghairm* of cats, which is a form of demonology. They both, though, share the same nefarious ends. A similar version hailing from Glenmoriston also differentiates between these two types:

Somewhat akin to witchcraft was the species of DIVINATION which was known by the name of TAGHAIRM. Two forms of it were practised in Glenmoriston—Taghairm nan Daoine (the Taghairm of Men), and Taghairm nan Cat (the Taghairm of Cats). The last expert in this black art was Alasdair Mac Iain 'Ic Iain, who flourished at Ballintombuy, in that Glen, in the beginning of last century. When he wished to operate with men, he placed himself within a large boiler just outside the entrance of the ancient burying-ground of Clachan Mheircheird, and from there summoned the dead to rise and pass before him. This they did until one appeared who was able to communicate the information which he required. On one occasion, when he was in this way making an unusually bold attempt to solve the mysteries of the future, the dead arose and streamed out of the burying-ground, until three thousand of them crowded the surrounding fields; but still no glimpse of the future was given to the seer. At last the form of his own dead niece appeared, and revealed to him the evils that were to befall himself. He never practised his art again—but his niece's prophecies were in due time fulfilled, and his career was closed by a party of Lochabermen, who threw him down as he tried to turn back the cattle which they were in the

act of taking from him. He fell three times before he expired, and the places are marked by three cairns to this day (MacKay 1893: 432–33).

What is interesting about both these accounts is the reference to a more formal ceremony normally absent from the other versions which, as noted earlier, is a common practice in magical or shamanic operations. The ceremony is said to have begun at midnight and lasted four days and four nights.

In a variation of the Lochaber version, which adds local colour to the tale, *Abrach* (Donald C. MacPherson) relates that Sir Ewen Cameron (1629–1719), whom the historian Macaulay referred to as the Ulysses of the Highlands, allegedly encountered *Gormshuil*:

Nise, an luib na bròig-airgid a fhuair Sir Eobhan 's an taghairm, fhuair e buaidh air cruaidh, air luaidhe 's air buidseachd, 's cha robh sin gun fhios da [...] (MacPherson 1875: 113).

Now, in connection with the silver shoe that Sir Ewen got when he performed the taghairm, he received power over steel [swords], lead [musket shot] and bewitchment, and this was not unknown to him [...]

This is as good an example as any in which an older tradition has been latched onto a famous personality. One of the most fluid elements in historical folklore narratives, and oral tradition in general, are names, which thus have to be treated with caution. The first mention of this magical shoe is given along with the *taghairm* tale in the *London Literary Gazette*, where the author recounts: ‘Cameron of Lochiel performed the Tagheirm some time before this and was presented with a small silver shoe, which has to be put on the left foot of every son born in that family; and this custom was continued, until the shoe was unfortunately lost when Lochiel’s house was consumed by fire in 1746. This shoe fitted all of them but one; and he afterwards turned his back to the foe at Sheriff Muir, having inherited a large foot by his mother, who was of another race’ (Anon. 1824: 172).

For the sake of completeness, a legend from Glassary in Argyll concerning the *taghairm* will be given as it contains some unique features in comparison with the other accounts of the *taghairm*. It was sent to John Francis Campbell by the Rev. Thomas Pattison in 1863 at the time Campbell was collecting and editing a vast store of Gaelic oral tradition.²⁰

The Mac Arthurs of Glassaridh had a long field which when they had gathered together as they were in the habit of doing in the spring time—they used to plough up in one day. On a certain occasion having finished their work—earlier than usual—they thought they would make a “Taoghairm.” It seems if you make a “Taoghairm” the “Mac-Mollach” will come and tell you anything you ask him. The Mac Arthurs accordingly made their Taoghairm—and they asked to know [what] was in land and sea—and the “Mac-Mollach” was obliged to show it to them. One of their number at last—a strong man and a champion—got under the mouth of a corrie near the seashore—and he called on all that was dead or alive within the sea to come and fight with him. At once the sea began to roar and the waves rolled red and flaming up the Corrie

where the Mac Arthurs lay. But he got terrified when he saw this. And leaping out of the Corrie he rushed along the land to escape. The sea still followed however roaring and red and flaming—till at last the man reached Octomore and ran breathless into a house there—where as his good luck would have it two women happened to be just there making a “teine-eigin”—rubbing two sticks together—this saved Mac Arthur. The last roll of the sea just reached the gable of the house he entered and knocked a great hole in it but immediately before the “teine-eigin” the waves receded and he was safe.²¹

There is no direct reference to the roasting of cats, although this may be made implicit from the name mentioned Mac-Mollach (i.e. *Màg Molach*, meaning either hairy hand or paw), as suggested by George Henderson (Henderson 1911: 269). In all probability it means *Mac Mollachd* (lit. ‘cursed son’) which equates the name with the Devil. Although a reference to *taghairm nan cat* cannot be made with any degree of confidence, it does show, at least, a variation in the ending. The young champion challenging the living and the dead of the sea and then escaping its vengeance through the effects of the *tein’-éigin* (‘need-fire’) seem rather odd, at least in comparison to the other traditions. It should also be noted that the *tein’-éigin* was a well-known method to neutralise the effects of evil through enchantment, as MacArthur found out to his advantage (Martin 1994: 174; Davidson 1955: 132–36).

The tradition of *taghairm nan cat* seems to invite further speculation rather than definitive answers. Why, for example, does such an unusual tale as the *taghairm* have such a paucity of sources? Could it be that it was more common before it was recorded (a common enough occurrence with regard to oral traditions)? Why does *taghairm nan cat* seem to be unique to the Scottish Highlands and Islands? What are the actual origins of the *taghairm nan cat*? Is *taghairm nan cat* as ancient as it would first appear?

Over a number of articles, Ronald Black (MacilleDhuibh 2001a: 15; 2001b: 15; 2001c: 15; 2005a: 21; 2005b: 17; 2005c: 17), writing under his Gaelic name, Ragnall MacilleDhuibh, has put forward the idea that the various traditions of *taghairm nan cat* can be traced to historical events and are strongly, if not exclusively, connected with the Clan Chattan, especially the MacIntoshes, whose totemic symbol is, of course, the Scottish wild cat (*Felis silvestris grampia*). As well as this, this version of the *taghairm* can be interpreted as a type of pantomime based, so it is argued, on Protestant satire upon the Roman Catholic church as well as being a none too subtle satirical jibe upon the Clan Chattan, or the MacIntoshes. Certainly, there was great enmity between the Camerons and the MacIntoshes which led to one of the longest feuds ever to have been recorded between two Highland clans. According to Black, it is possible that the whole story is a kind of metaphor of how captured MacIntoshes ‘were tortured in order to gain some concessions out of their chief’ (MacilleDhuibh 2005b: 17). Or, in the Mull version, where Lachlann Odhar, himself related to the MacLean chief, Lachlann Catanach, who, in extremity, may have brought over some of his MacIntosh relations from Badenoch (cat country) to quell any unrest (*ibid.*: 17), when the said Lachlann Catanach was thrown out of the estate of Lochbuie in Mull. The very machinations behind this plot led to the MacLean chief—who held sway over Duart from 1496 until his death in 1523—being awarded Scalpay and Pabbay in Broadford Bay in the Isle of Skye. Apparently Pabbay was the refuge of a band of outlaws which caused a great deal of trouble for

the locals. According to Otta F. Swire in her book, *Skye, the Island and its Legends* (1961), the chief robber decided to get rid of their enemies by performing the *taghairm*:

So they made a great fire on the beach and roasted three cats alive with appropriate spells [...] Several minor demons appeared, but the robber chief insisted that he would do business only with the Devil in person. At length Satan himself rose from the earth and asked their will (Swire 1961: 6–7).

An argument arose and the bandits were slaughtered to a man. This ‘Satan himself’, it might be interpreted, could have been Lachlann Catanach who, through political expediency, once this robber band had served their purpose, decided to simply get rid of them (MacilleDhuibh 2005c: 17). Further, the Skye version of the tale might simply be an example of the migratory nature of this legend and, so the argument goes, became ‘the codification of a small kindred’s act of defiance against a big one’ (*op.cit.*: 17). This might well have been the case, but there is perhaps less strength to this interpretation since the MacIntoshes, or Clan Chattan, are featured less in this version of *taghairm nan cat*, despite the fact that Lachlann Catanach was married to a sister of *Alasdair Crotach* of Dunvegan (c. 1450–1547). Although there are valid historical interpretations for some of the *taghairm nan cat* variants—those that have a definite connection with the MacIntoshes or Clan Chattan—they cannot all be explained by this linkage which is probably reflected by the migratory nature of its (albeit slight) variants. This connection, however, does indicate the development of *taghairm nan cat* within the cultural milieu of Gaelic tradition.

It nevertheless remains strange that there is no mention of *taghairm nan cat*, as termed, in early Gaelic or Celtic literature, as far as I know. Why it occurs only in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland remains unclear. And yet, cats are renowned to have been witches’ familiars and have also had a close connection (and sometimes identification) with the Devil from medieval times. Moving further back in time, the worship of cats as animal deities goes as far back as the Egyptians who personified them in their feline goddess Bast (Harvey 1993: 109–21). Bast (and her alter-ego, Sekhmet) played an important role in Egyptian culture, to such an extent that the death penalty was meted out to anybody who had the temerity to kill a cat.

It may be that the same type of religious reverence was afforded to cats by other ancient peoples including the Celts. R. A. S. Macalister (1870–1950) writes of animal worship in pre-Celtic and pre-Christian times with reference to cats:

Probably “Irusan mac Arusain,” king of the cats, of whom there a grotesque description in the rollicking satire on the bards called *Imtheacht na Tromdhaimhe*, is a parody of some cat divinity. We have some evidence for cat worship in that singularly interesting biographical dictionary, as we may call it, known as *Cóir Anmann*. This compilation tells us that Cairbre Cat-head, who led the revolt of the serfs, that is, the enslaved aborigines, in A.D. 9 (according to the chronology of the Four Masters) was so called “because his god had the shape of a cat.” Clearly that is no reason for such a name, and it could not have been invented as a reason. It must have been in existence as a separate story about Cairbre, and have been adapted by the writer of the

treatise. It does not necessarily prove that the aboriginal inhabitants worshipped cats but it does show that their Celtic masters asserted that they did so (Macalister 1921: 240).

Macalister's remark at the end exercises due caution in reading too much into the evidence of cat worship in pre-Christian Ireland. It would seem that the entry for *Cairbre Cenn Cait* ('Cairbre Cat-head') in *Cóir Anmann* ('Fitness of Names') is really medieval word play, and thus cannot be taken as concrete proof of cat worship.²² In effect, the mythological character Cairbre has been given the name of cat-head in order to demonise his character. Though needless, perhaps, to say, cats are mentioned not infrequently in Gaelic, both Irish and Scottish, animal folklore (see, for example, Ó Néill 1991: 167–88).

Other evidence, such as that offered by Joseph Ennemoser (1787–1854) in *The History of Magic* regarding *taghairm nan cat*, emphasises the demonic element: 'Not only in Scotland, but throughout Europe, cats were sacrificed to the subterranean gods, as a peculiarly effective means of coming into communication with the powers of darkness' (Ennemoser 1854: 105–6). This comment made by Ennemoser offers, I think, the most likely interpretation of *taghairm nan cat*. He further adds, citing Horst's *Deuteroscopy*:

...black cats were indispensable to the incantation ceremony of the Taigheirm, and these were dedicated to the subterranean gods, or later, to the demons of Christianity. The midnight hour, between Friday and Saturday, was the authentic time for these horrible practices and invocations; and the sacrifice was continued four whole nights and days, without the operator taking nourishment. 'After the cats were dedicated to all the devils, and put into a magico-sympathetic condition by the shameful things done to them, and the agony occasioned them, one of them was put upon the spit, and, amid terrific howlings, roasted before a slow fire. The moment that the howls of one tortured cat ceased in death, another was put upon the spit, for a minute of interval must not take place if they would control hell; and this continued for the four entire days and nights. If the exorcist could hold out still longer, and even till his physical powers were absolutely exhausted, he must do so.'

After a certain continuance of the sacrifice, infernal spirits appeared in the shape of black cats. There came continually more and more of these cats; and their howlings, mingled with those of the cats roasting on the spits, were terrific. Finally appeared a cat of monstrous size, with dreadful menaces. When the Taigheirm was complete, the sacrificer demanded of the spirits the reward of the offering, which consisted of various things; as riches, children, food and clothing. The gift of second-sight, which they had not had before, was, however, the usual recompense; and they retained it to the day of their death (Ennemoser 1854: 104–05).

On a comparative basis, there are seventeenth-century church records which refer to a bull-sacrifice on the island in Loch Maree, Ross-shire, which have led commentators to the belief that it may have been a practice of pre-Christian pagan worship which

was later usurped by St Maelrubha. It is recorded that in 1678, Hector Mackenzie, in Mellon of the parish of Gairloch, along with his sons and grandson, were called before the Presbytery of Dingwall ‘for sacrificing a bull in ane heathnish manner’ on St. Mourie’s Isle (Isle Maree), in Loch Maree, ‘for the recovering of the health of Cirstane Mackenzie, spouse to the said Hector Mackenzie, who was formerlie sicke and valetudinarie’ (Mackay 1896: 338; Mitchell 1860–62: 258). Earlier, in 1656, the Presbytery of Dingwall records that the inhabitants of the surrounding districts were discovered to have been in the habit of sacrificing bulls on the feast-day of the saint (August 25) with ‘other idolatrous customs’, including ‘circulating’ ruinous chapels associated with the saint’s memory—marching round them sun-wise, no doubt; of learning the future, ‘in reference especiallie to lyf and death in taking jurneys’, which was clearly the practice of divination rites (Mackay 1896: xxxviii, 280). From the nineteenth century, there seems to be a vestigial, if corrupt, folk memory of a rite entitled *Calluinn a Bhuilg* [Hogmany of the Sack] that is not at all too dissimilar from the hide method of the *taghairm* that was collected by Alexander Carmichael (1832–1912) in his *Carmina Gadelica* (1900):

The ‘gillean Callaig’ carollers or Hogmanay lads perambulate the townland at night. One man is enveloped in the hard hide of a bull with the horns and hoofs still attached. When the men come to a house they ascend the wall and run round sunwise, the man in the hide shaking the horns and hoofs, and the other men striking the hard hide with sticks. The appearance of the man in the hide is gruesome, while the din made is terrific. Having descended and recited their runes at the door, the Hogmanay men are admitted and treated to the best in the house. The performance seems to be symbolic, but of what it is not easy to say, unless of laying an evil spirit. That the rite is heathen and ancient is evident (Carmichael 1928–71, i: 149).

The revellers involved also chanted a version of the following song as they carried out their festive custom:

<i>CALLIUNN a bhuilg,</i>	HOGMANAY of the sack,
<i>Calluin a bhuilg,</i>	Hogmanay of the sack,
<i>Buail am boicinn,</i>	Strike the hide,
<i>Buail am boicinn.</i>	Strike the hide.
<i>Calluin a bhuilg,</i>	Hogmanay of the sack,
<i>Calluin a bhuilg,</i>	Hogmanay of the sack,
<i>Buail am craicinn,</i>	Beat the skin,
<i>Buail am craicinn.</i>	Beat the skin.
<i>Calluin a bhuilg,</i>	Hogmanay of the sack,
<i>Calluin a bhuilg,</i>	Hogmanay of the sack,
<i>Sios e! suas e!</i>	Down with it! up with it!
<i>Buail am boicinn.</i>	Strike the hide.
<i>Calluin a bhuilg,</i>	Hogmany of the sack,
<i>Calluin a bhuilg,</i>	Hogmany of the sack,
<i>Sios e! suas e!</i>	Down with it! up with it!
<i>Buail am craicinn.</i>	Beat the skin.
<i>Calluin a bhuilg,</i>	Hogmanay of the sack,
<i>Calluin a bhuilg.</i>	Hogmanay of the sack.

(*ibid.*: 148–49)²³

Ennemoser's valuable insight, with regard to *taghairm nan cat*, is his belief that cats as demonic animals were sacrificed to chthonic deities. Although the origins of the *taghairm nan cat* are obscure and there does not seem to be a direct ancient source of such a practice, there are too many liminal elements within the tradition to dismiss it as something which could be described as relatively new. It has been argued that cats were venerated during pagan times and then, during medieval times, cats came to be associated with witchcraft. Such was the fear that cats are said to have instilled in some members of the populace, that large-scale massacres of felines (that ironically encouraged the spread of the Black Plague due to a resultant uncontrollable rat infestation) began after Pope Gregory IX (c. 1155–1241) issued a Papal Bull, *Vox in Rama* ('A Voice on High'), in 1233, which placed the Devil at the witches' sabbats in the form of a gigantic black cat. This Papal Bull had been prompted by a report of unsubstantiated allegations made upon heretics by Conrad of Marburg, a fanatical, ascetic priest (Kors and Peters 2001: 114–15). Further to this, many of the fire festivals which were widespread throughout Europe involved the sacrifice or burning of cats. On Shrove Tuesday during the medieval period, black cats were routinely hunted down and burned (Frazer 1922: 610, 656). Shrove Tuesday is, of course, the last day before Lent and it subsequently became popular for divination among many other activities. This was no doubt due to the liminal status of this particular day, a time of feasting and celebration that contrasted with the self-denial and abstinence of Lent. As noted above, women cat-owners were accused of witchcraft, as their feline companions were said to have been familiars. By medieval times, cats in Christendom had more or less lost their vestiges of divine status, although they were still believed to have magic powers. In some respects, the cat had by now gained a liminal status of its own, as it could both be a symbol of luck to some as well as being an instrument of evil to others. The connection of the cat as a witch's familiar was most likely the reason for the persecution and ill-treatment of the animal during the seventeenth century.

It might well be the case that the roasting of cats for sacrificial purposes had its origins in pagan Celtic practice which later surfaced as 'calendar dates of mass cat-killing in medieval and early modern Europe' (Engels 1999: 128).

Conclusions

Pagan practices such as this came under the scrutiny of a society which was becoming Christianised and therefore regarded such ceremonies as quite antithetical to such a development. An undercurrent of pagan beliefs, nominally Christianised, may well have been still apparent, and at times would have been powerful enough so that such rites (or folk memories of them) could not be fully submerged. Christianity, after all, had been making use of pagan festivals, holy sites and so forth over the centuries in order to make the new faith more acceptable and more readily digestible to the newly converted. Thus, the same type of development may have occurred with reference to the *taghairm* as an out-moded ceremony with definite occult overtones, which would have been unacceptable within a society progressing towards a Christian morality and religious outlook. Certainly, when the *taghairm* traditions were said to have been performed in the Scottish Highlands and Islands, the area had been Christianised for well over a millennium. Thus, instead of the *taghairm* being invoked to attract the help of 'invisible friends', as put by Martin Martin, it would naturally be identified

with supernatural powers, especially with demonic powers, given the associations of sacrificial cats in *taghairm nan cat*.

Although the water and hide methods of the *taghairm* have ancient classical equivalents, the same claim cannot be made for the cat summons. That *taghairm nan cat* seems to be unique to the Highlands and Islands seems to be due to a later development from the medieval persecution of cats, with its demonical connections as witches' familiars which then naturally became associated, if not identified, with the totemic symbol of the MacIntoshes, or Clan Chattan. Most of the *taghairm nan cat* traditions are fairly homogenous in nature, especially the Mull and Lochaber traditions which, in all likelihood, stem from the same source. These variants strongly indicate a migratory legend, and make for compelling and interesting accounts. Like all good migratory legends, *taghairm nan cat* has been adaptable, with a few variations that reflect its ability to change, not only over space but also over time, from its epicentre of where the MacIntoshes in the guise of Clan Chattan once held political sway (in Lochaber), together with its development of the story as a satirical swipe at the Roman Catholic church, but that also reflects its deep roots in traditions of the *taghairm* from pre-Christian times. In this sense then, *taghairm nan cat* might be interpreted as a survival of animal sacrifice to chthonic deities performed in order to gain some favour (in the hope of receiving some reward or another), which later received a Christianised interpretation as the invocation of infernal spirits.

While the rite of *taghairm nan cat* cannot make a claim to be truly ancient, with regard to the modern form into which it has been adapted so as to fit into an early modern Gaelic cultural milieu, its substance from earlier methods of executing the *taghairm*, which may be termed an incubation-oracle, clearly stretches far back into antiquity. The necessity of gaining succour for an unknown future in an uncertain world, by whatever divinatory method so used, can be seen to be a very human characteristic and, as such, is a concern as relevant today as it has been for those who are said to have undertaken that so-called 'awful ceremony' involving the roasting of cats.

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NOTES

¹ I am grateful to Dr Dòmhnall Uilleam Stiùbhart, University of Edinburgh, for supplying Martin Martin's correct dates. For more information on Martin's career, see Stiùbhart 2004: 963–64, and also his forthcoming biographical study.

² These are respectively the MacCowans, the MacQueens, and, probably, the Buchanans (Campbell 2005: 427, n. 579). For a tradition of the Skye Buchanans see Forbes 1923: 273.

³ This is a misprinting for 'famous'.

⁴ Eas-bheraraig is a misprinting for Eas-bhercaig, i.e. Eas Bhearraig, six miles to the north of Portree (Campbell 2005: 427, n. 578.)

⁵ The Rev. Dr Donald Macqueen, among others, provided both Johnson and Boswell with a great deal of material. See Jemielity 1974: 403–20, for further details, especially with regard to the faculty of second sight.

⁶ Most likely to be Iain Hearach, John of Harris, as this individual may have been fostered on that particular island.

⁷ Presumably what Martin means here is the Hebrides and the mainland Scottish Highlands.

⁸ Gerald of Wales 1978: 246–47, where an editorial note adds that the word *awenyddion* is the plural of *awenydd*, a word that means poet-prophet and which derives from *awen* ('inspiration') 'oracular frenzy'.

⁹ As quoted from Meyer 1907–13, iv: § 756.

¹⁰ For the most recent scholarly edition with explanatory notes and commentary, see Hunter 2001: 38–41, 77–117.

¹¹ According to the Rev. A. MacLean Sinclair (Sinclair 1899: 426), *Ailean nan Sop* ('Allan of the Straws') died in 1551 and his grandson lived two generations afterwards which would make the date roughly either at the end of the sixteenth century or at the beginning of the seventeenth century.

¹² GUL MS Gen 1090/28 [Notebook 5], 117–52 This story was recorded from Angus MacInnes, Smerlcete, South Uist, on 16 October 1896. The *taghairm* appears not to be mentioned in other versions of this tale.

¹³ IFC MS 1031, 420–21.

¹⁴ Maclagan MSS, 2337, collected from a Mr Macdougall in Colonsay; the other mention of the *taghairm* is given at Maclagan MSS, 2025–26, collected from another Mr M^cDougall, a native of Mull.

¹⁵ Ailean nan Creach met his end when the Camerons fought against the combined forces of the MacDonalds of Keppoch and the MacIntoshes *c.* 1480. After a hot fight, the Camerons eventually retired demoralised after their chief had fallen. For an account of the battle, see Drummond 1842: 24.

¹⁶ This article was later published word for word by Lachlan MacLean (1798–1848), *Lachlann na Gàidhlig*, strongly indicating his authorship of the article in the London Literary Gazette (MacLean 1840: 264–66). For a sketch of Lachlan MacLean’s life, see MacLean 1914: 25–30.

¹⁷ According to the Rev. Alexander MacLean Sinclair (Sinclair 1889: 351), Allan MacEachainn was evidently Allan Og, son of Hector, son of *Ailein nan Sop*, which would make his Gaelic patronymic *Ailean Òg mac Eachainn 'ic Ailein nan Sop*. Further, according to the Sobieski Stuarts, Allan mac Eachainn was a MacLean of the family of Lochbuie and who associated with one of the ‘*Sliochd a chlaibhich iorain*’, ‘The race of the iron swords’, or MacLeans of Ross (Stuart & Stuart 1845: 82). The Sobieski Stuarts write that the gravestone of Allan mac Eachainn lies in the cemetery of the ruined church of *Peighinn a' Ghobhainn* (*ibid.*: Pl 1. fig. 15).

¹⁸ MacLean, Lachlan, *Taghairm*, SA 1963/32/A6. Recorded by E. Sinclair and Morag MacLeod. The informant, prompted by the fieldworkers, relates that one of the MacLeans of Duart frequently performed the *taghairm*, or convocation of cats, in Pennygowan barn. It is a skeletal version of the story given in *Am Measg nam Bodach* (Mac a Phi 1938: 54–55), which shows that memories of the tradition were still extant up until at least the 1960s.

¹⁹ For this see MacLeod, 1901: 32–35. It may be added in the passing that MacLeod knew either MacLean’s account (see MacLean 1840: 264–66) or the account given in the *London Literary Gazette* (see Anon. 1824: 174).

²⁰ These appeared as *Popular Tales of the West Highlands*, a large collection of traditional stories edited by J. F. Campbell in the wake of the interest shown in folklore initiated by the work of the Brothers Grimm. Much of the material which Campbell was instrumental in collecting remains in manuscripts which Campbell deposited at the Advocates’ Library that subsequently became the National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh.

²¹ NLS, Adv.MS.50.1.13(ii), 485^r–86^v. It may also be added, judging by the handwriting and the lack of punctuation in Pattison’s hand, that the account given here is a summarised version.

²² I am indebted to Dr Sharon Arbuthnot, formerly of the Department of Celtic, University of Aberdeen, for her expert advice on *Cóir Anmann* which she, at the time of writing, is editing for publication for the Irish Texts Society.

²³ Alexander Carmichael (Carmichael 1928–71: ii, 346) states that this item was collected from Alexander MacDonald, a shoemaker, from Bailanloch, North Uist.

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Variation in Gaelic Storytelling

CAROL ZALL

‘I must not omit to relate their way of study, which is very singular: they shut their doors and windows for a day’s time, and lie on their backs, with a stone upon their belly, and plaids about their heads, and their eyes being covered, they pump their brains for rhetorical encomium or panegyric; and indeed they furnish such a style from this dark cell, as is understood by very few....’

– Martin Martin’s description of Scottish Gaelic ‘orators’ in
A description of the Western Isles of Scotland, circa 1695.

For centuries, scholars and commentators have been interested in the ways in which Gaelic storytellers, poets and other practitioners of the verbal arts have learned, remembered and performed their material. More recently, scholars have raised specific questions about memory and performance in relation to Gaelic storytelling. One of the most important issues which has arisen in this context has been the nature and role of variation in Gaelic storytelling. In his 1945 article ‘The Gaelic Storyteller’, James Delargy notably discusses the existence of both very conservative modes of storytelling, as well as freer, more improvisational styles, thus raising the question of whether, and to what extent, Gaelic stories differ from one telling to another. On the conservative side, he tells of individuals who practised their stories for hours before telling them, presumably going over sections and details which they had committed to memory. He also recounts instances of storytellers who had phenomenal memories and who seemed to be able to reproduce stories almost exactly as they had heard them. Indeed, comments of Delargy’s such as ‘I myself have heard the tale of *Diarmuid agus Gráinne* recited almost word for word from [Standish Hayes O’ Grady’s 1855] edition ... from the beginning to p. 92, by Séan Ó Conaill, the Kerry story-teller’ (201), suggest that memorisation played an important role for some storytellers, and that there would have been very little variation between tellings of the same story as told by the same storyteller.

Such references to ‘word for word’ recitation are not uncommon, and have contributed to an impression that it has been the custom for Gaelic storytellers to be very faithful to a remembered original. Maartje Draak, for example, refers to the ‘special aptitude’ of Irish and Scottish storytellers for ‘prodigious feats of memory’ (48), and D.A. Binchy states that storytellers of old could ‘repeat the stories word-perfect, without making the least slip – or if they did make a slip, [were] at once corrected by the audience’ (9).¹

However, in addition to the accounts of ‘word perfect’ recitation, we also find references to less fixed storytelling styles. In the same 1945 article in which he recounts Séan Ó Conaill’s ‘word for word’ recitation, Delargy also describes the Gaelic storyteller as ‘a conscious literary artist’ (184), who strives to pass on his or her story ‘as it has been received, unaltered, *not in regard to language*, but in form and plot’ (194, emphasis mine), suggesting that the storyteller’s use of language is a matter of personal choice rather than memorised recitation. In addition, he makes

comparisons between the medieval and modern storyteller which suggest that word for word recitation has not historically been the norm:

... the story-teller of the eighth century as well as his successor, the Gaelic *sgéalaí* of to-day, depended upon mnemonics and memorised tale-synopses, which they expanded later when called upon, impressing on their narrative all the skill derived from long training and experience (207).

He goes on to say that in medieval storytelling ‘...the narrative itself had no fixed form, its development depending entirely on the skill of the individual story-teller. The same holds good for the modern folk-tale’ (209). Delargy thus describes both conservative, fixed modes of storytelling which border on memorisation, as well as more improvisational styles in which the story has ‘no fixed form’ – and in so doing raises fundamental questions about the nature of the tradition and the extent to which traditional material varies from one telling to another.

Alan Bruford raises similar questions in relation to Gaelic storytelling. In his 1978 article ‘Recitation or Re-creation? Examples from South Uist Storytelling,’ he addresses the question of how storytellers remember and tell stories, and the extent to which their use of language varies between different tellings of the same story. Noting Delargy’s 1945 comment that tales had to be transmitted ‘unaltered, not in regard to language, but in form and plot,’ Bruford states that ‘... some Scottish Gaelic storytellers have tried to pass on their tales unaltered in language as well as plot’ (1978: 27). He then goes on to consider how some of the twentieth century’s most prominent South Uist storytellers remembered and told stories, concluding that there is a case to be made for believing that the model of ‘... narrative wording improvised on a memorised framework, but much of the dialogue learned by heart – was the most usual one for experienced storytellers in South Uist’ (37). Here Bruford’s penetrating and well documented discussion of the evidence recorded from a number of storytellers – including a consideration of highly similar versions from the storytelling brothers Duncan and Neil MacDonald, as well as the examination of more than one version of the same story from the same storyteller – draws attention to the significance of such issues for the field of storytelling scholarship, and points to the detailed examination of multiple recordings² from the same storyteller (or versions otherwise collected more than once) as one way forward for such investigation.

The Use of Sound Recordings to Study Storytelling

Other scholars also have suggested that our understanding could be advanced through the study of recordings of Gaelic storytellers. Those who have made explicit reference to such research include James Delargy (1945), Maartje Draak (1957), James Ross (1959) and Seán Ó Coileáin (1977, 1978).

As early as 1945, James Delargy makes specific reference to the role recordings could play in the study of Gaelic stories:

By using the Ediphone recording machine in our work of collection we have been able to preserve traditional features of story-telling which are lost when tales are written slowly from dictation. It would be unwise to form conclusions about the style of Gaelic folk-tales based on an examination of much of what has been published hitherto (207).

In 1959, James Ross also drew attention to the possibility of studying sound recordings in order to improve our understanding of Gaelic storytelling. Writing in response to some of Milman Parry's ideas about the use and role of formulae in oral verse,³ Ross raises the question of whether Gaelic storytellers traditionally have made use of spontaneous composition in their storytelling, saying:

... it is not certain that extemporizing played any fundamental part in the transmission of such tales. With the advent of the tape recorder, the comparative study of different tellings of the same tale from the same teller has been made possible (12).

Ross goes on to say that for at least one storyteller who had been recorded, Duncan MacDonald of South Uist, the stories were not impromptu creations but rather very precise versions of an already prepared story.

In the 1970s, Seán Ó Coileáin also called for the study of multiple recordings from the same storyteller. Responding to ideas made popular by Albert Lord and the subsequent proponents of Oral Formulaic Theory,⁴ he suggests that Gaelic storytelling is less 'conservative' and more 'formulaic' than previously had been believed to be the case. Arguing that prevailing ideas about Gaelic storytelling were based more on assumptions than on observations, he makes the following statement:

Despite the amount of fieldwork carried out I know of no experiment to test the degree to which a storyteller reproduced a tale as narrated to him, or the variation which might occur in a tale as told by the same narrator on two or more occasions. (Such duplicate recordings as were made more or less by accident would repay further study in this regard). It was probably thought unnecessary to conduct such an experiment.... (12).

In more recent decades, scholars of other traditions also have made the case for using multiple recordings as a way to investigate features of traditional narrative. In a 1986 article entitled 'Folk-Narrative Performance and Tape Transcription, Theory Versus Practice,' Herbert Halpert and J.D.A. Widdowson, referring to stories collected in Newfoundland, also raise the possibility of studying variation between recorded texts. They conclude that although such a method is desirable and potentially valuable, it had not been used much in published scholarship up to that point:

...when one seeks demonstrations of the fact that a tale lives in different performances by the same teller through the publication of more than one telling by even a single performer, the publishing record is indeed scant (42).

The authors go on to state that their own interest in such a study is prompted by the hope that through the use of very accurately transcribed recordings – stories transcribed 'as literally and exactly as possible' – they will be able to 'reflect oral storytelling styles with some accuracy ... so as to reveal aspects of storytelling style not visible in more literary transcriptions' (46).

More recently, Lauri Honko has discussed the practice of collecting the same items of traditional material from the same tradition bearer or group of tradition

bearers on multiple occasions. According to Honko, such repeated collection helps to create a 'thick corpus' of material which, he says, is crucial to the study of 'organic variation' in traditional material. According to Honko,

By producing 'thickness' of text and context through multiple documentation of expressions of folklore in their varying manifestations in performance within a 'biologically' definable tradition bearer, community or environment it [fieldwork-based research] has created a solid field of observation conducive to the understanding of prime 'causes' or sources of variation, i.e. the mental processes of oral textualisation and construction of meaning (17).

The terminology may be new, but concepts such as 'thick corpus' and 'organic variation' are not unfamiliar in the context of Gaelic storytelling scholarship. James Ross's 1959 call to compare different tellings of the same tale from the same storyteller anticipates Honko's view that the repeated collection of traditional material from the same teller or group of tellers can reveal variation which otherwise would not be apparent to scholars. Honko goes on to say that such repeated collection '...has proved to be worth its weight in gold in the analysis of discourse and variation' (21).

While scholars such as Maartje Draak and Alan Bruford (1978) have made limited use of multiple recordings to compare different versions of the same story as told by the same storyteller, there have been no large scale studies of Gaelic storytelling which have employed this method until recently. However, beginning in 1993 I undertook a detailed study of one Scottish Gaelic storyteller, Mr Brian Stewart, which made use of this method in order to analyse Mr Stewart's storytelling.⁵

Brian Stewart

Brian Stewart, a storyteller from Sutherland in the north of Scotland, was recorded by the School of Scottish Studies for the first time in 1958, when two of his stories were recorded by Hamish Henderson. He was recorded again for both the School of Scottish Studies and the Linguistic Survey of Scotland between 1973 and 1978, during which time almost all of the stories in his repertoire were recorded. Finally, between 1993 and 1995, I recorded all of Mr Stewart's stories from him again. During both the 1973-1978 and 1993-1995 periods, most of Mr Stewart's stories were recorded more than once. This has resulted in a body of 39 different recordings of nine separate stories, with four or five separate recordings of each of the stories. Such a large body of multiple recordings from the same storyteller presents a unique opportunity to study one man's storytelling over time and to investigate some fundamental questions about Mr Stewart's storytelling dynamic and techniques.⁶

In my doctoral study of Brian Stewart, the separately recorded stories are compared to each other in terms of story structure, episodic content and language in order to discover patterns of variation and similarity between the story versions and to identify important features of Mr Stewart's storytelling. In order to compare the stories at the episodic level, the stories were initially analysed in terms of their basic plot structures. This enabled discussion of both the structural features of Brian Stewart's storytelling as well as a comparison of episodic content, considering such topics as the use of repetition, the relationship between story structure and memory, the borrowing of motifs and characters between stories, and the implications of Mr Stewart's storytelling behaviour for his relationship to, and understanding of, the

stories. The final section of the analysis consisted of a comparison of the stories in terms of Brian Stewart's use of language, particularly his use of formalised or set language, and the patterns of such language use both in individual story groups (i.e. groups of separate recordings of the same story), as well as across the entire body of stories. It is with the results of this analysis of Mr Stewart's use of language that the rest of this article is concerned.

Before proceeding to the analysis, some information about Mr Stewart and the provenance of his stories is in order. Brian Stewart was born on 20 February 1911 in the north of Scotland to a family of Gaelic-speaking travellers. His given name was Alasdair, but throughout his life he was known as 'Brian', a nickname that stemmed from the place of his birth, *Ach a' Bhraigh* ('field of the brae').⁷ The family were based at Rhemarstaig, near Lairg, in the winter, but travelled during the summer. They were tinsmiths and horse traders. Mr Stewart inherited his stories from his father's side of the family. It was from his father's mother, Susie Stewart, born in Argyll in 1846, that he learned his stories as a boy, as well as from his uncle (Susie's son), Alasdair Stewart, often known as '*Ailidh Dall*' ('Blind Alasdair'). Although *Ailidh Dall* has been described by Calum Maclean as 'the best Gaelic storyteller ever recorded on the mainland of Scotland,'⁸ Ailidh himself has said that he learned many of his stories from his mother Susie; and from what Brian Stewart told me, it seems clear that Susie was the master storyteller in the family. Brian Stewart therefore learned his craft from two storytellers whose skills were formidable.⁹ Mr Stewart died on 17 June 2008.

The Stewarts appear to have excelled at long heroic tales, and of the nine stories considered in this article, eight are native heroic or international wonder tales, some of which contain Fenian material. This means that they represent the type of long hero stories and adventures which, according to accounts, were extremely popular amongst the Gaels up to modern times, and thus arguably best represent the native Gaelic storytelling tradition.¹⁰

The nine stories considered in my analysis are as follows:

1. *Am Bodach Baigeir* ('The Old Beggar') – a version of AT 303.¹¹
2. *Stòiridh a'Chaimbeulaich* ('Campbell's Story') – related to AT 880, 884A and 890.
3. *Stòiridh a'Chòcaire* ('The Story of the Cook') – a version of AT 300.
4. *Stòiridh an Eich Dhuibh* ('The Story of the Black Horse') – related to AT 531.
5. *Gille nan Cochulla Craicinn* ('The Lad of the Skin Coverings') – related to *Cèadach*, a native hero tale.
6. *Stòiridh Ladhair* ('The Story of Ladhar') – a native hero tale.
7. *Stòiridh Loircein* ('The Story of Loircean') – related to AT 301 and the native hero tale *Eachtra Iollainn Airmdheirg*.
8. *Am Maraiche Màirneal* ('The Seaworthy Mariner') – related to AT 433B.
9. *Stòiridh Oisean as dèidh na Fèinn* ('The Story of Ossian after the Fenians') – a native hero tale.

Analysis – Use of Language

When the multiple recordings of Brian Stewart's stories are compared to each other in terms of phrasing and language, the outstanding feature which emerges is Mr Stewart's use of various kinds of set language. By 'set language' I mean phrases and dialogue which occurred in the same way and in the same context each time Brian Stewart told a particular story. This language could also be called 'formulaic'. Such set language is characteristic of Gaelic storytelling, and has been discussed in the scholarly literature.¹² However, it has not been defined rigorously (although Bruford's

chapters on the development of words and runs in Gaelic storytelling [1969: 167-209] are very useful), perhaps because the use of set language is so widespread that it would be difficult to define narrowly. James Ross does give a general definition of such language when he refers to ‘...numerous recurrent expressions...frequently involving rhythm and alliteration’ (10). Bruford, too, discusses runs and set phrases, defining runs as ‘... set passages of florid description which are introduced by storytellers into any hero-tale where the appropriate action comes in...’ and adds that they are ‘... recited by heart, the same narrator using exactly the same words whenever a situation occurs...’ (1969: 36).¹³ He also makes the important point that runs themselves are composed of shorter stock phrases which, in his words, ‘may be put together to form a run or used separately’ (1969: 37). These comments provide a useful starting point for our discussion, for the set language which Brian Stewart used exhibits, to varying degrees, all of these characteristics: sometimes his set phrases exhibit rhythm and alliteration, and sometimes they occur in exactly the same form in the same place in different tellings of the same story. However, in order to fully understand Mr Stewart’s set language, we must first try to define it with more precision, after which we may examine the role it played in his storytelling.

Different Types of Set Language

Type 1 Set Language

For the purposes of comparison, I have divided Brian Stewart’s set language into three different types. The first – Type 1 Set Language – comprises phrases, epithets, formulae and dialogue which are recognisably drawn from what Bruford refers to as ‘the common stock’ (1969: 223, n. 21) of storytelling language which seems to have been widespread in Gaelic Scotland and Ireland. This language is often rhythmic and alliterative, is highly fixed, and often sounds archaic. In addition, it is often traceable to manuscript sources. Another notable feature of Type 1 set language is that it may occur in more than one different story (as opposed to more than one recorded version of the *same* story) in similar contexts. Thus such language represents a kind of common stock of storytelling language which could have been drawn upon freely by storytellers as required, and which may have become widespread through just such a practice. Brian Stewart has some Type 1 set language in his storytelling, although most of his fixed language is comprised of the next two types, Type 2 and Type 3.

Type 2 Set Language

The next type of set language which Brian Stewart used is highly similar to Type 1, with the exception that these set phrases and pieces of dialogue occur only in different recorded versions of the *same* story, rather than moving between the stories. In other words, Brian Stewart may have used these rhythmic and alliterative phrases in a highly identical form from one version of a story to another, but this same dialogue or phrasing does not occur in the other stories which he told. While such set language may have originated from a common stock of fixed language which was used freely in the storytelling past, the language appears to have become attached to particular stories in Mr Stewart’s repertoire, and thus does not appear to represent a free or arbitrary use of stock elements on his part. Like Type 1, this language often appears to be specialised, and comprises phrases, dialogue or formulae which are sometimes traceable to a specific manuscript tradition. The distinction between Type 1 and Type 2 is a subtle one, but it may provide important information about the ways in which the tradition has evolved.¹⁴ I also have included in the Type 2 category language

which is not noticeably drawn from traditional idiom, but which nevertheless seems to have become fixed in Brian Stewart's storytelling. Thus there are some phrases which seem quite ordinary, but which repeatedly occurred in Brian Stewart's separate tellings of the same stories in the same form, and which also occurred in versions of these stories recorded from *other* members of the Stewart family, giving weight to the supposition that such language or wording may have become associated with a particular story in the Stewart family tradition.¹⁵

Much of Brian Stewart's Type 2 set language consists of dialogue, which is not surprising, as fixed dialogue is typical of other Gaelic storytellers as well. Donald Archie MacDonald tells us that the language used for runs and dialogue is that which is most often fixed: '*Se còmhradh an t-àite eile, a bharrachd air na ruitheannan, far am bheil teacs dualach air fàs stèidhichte...*' ['Dialogue is the other area, in addition to the runs, where text tends to become fixed...'] (1989 218, n. 31). Alan Bruford also points to the fixed nature of dialogue, saying, 'The dialogue in standard situations in folk-tales naturally tends to be standardized...' (1969: 195). Brian Stewart's Type 2 set language also included the type of fixed phrases or names which are no longer very meaningful, either to the listener or to the storyteller himself. These meaningless but apparently archaic or corrupt words and phrases are most often associated with one particular story in Brian Stewart's repertoire, as if Mr Stewart had learned them as part of a fixed pattern and retained them as necessary, albeit meaningless, parts of the story.¹⁶

Type 3 Set Language: 'Similar' Language

The third kind of set language used by Brian Stewart consists of dialogue and other phrasing which does not seem to be identifiably archaic, rhythmic, or otherwise 'special,' but which nevertheless recurs from story to story in a highly similar form. This type of language is not so much 'set' as 'similar,' and its use in Brian Stewart's stories is widespread. Thus the dialogue in almost all of Brian's stories, if not of Type 1 or Type 2, is almost always Type 3. In these cases, the dialogue of the different story versions is not identical, but the degree of similarity is striking, and the overall impression is that the language of the stories is very much 'the same'. Such 'ordinary' but strikingly similar language is not unexpected in Gaelic storytelling: Alan Bruford encountered the same type of language as used by South Uist storytellers. Discussing Angus MacLellan's use of such language (1978: 39), Bruford says that '[t]he language used is in no way remarkable, but the wording ... remains remarkably constant.'

Type 3 language is the most difficult of the three language types to characterise, as it refers to a large proportion of the language which Brian Stewart used. It is generally comprised of ordinary language which nevertheless seems to have assumed some sort of settled shape in Brian's storytelling, and which he deployed in much the same way and with much the same effect each time he told a story. Type 3 set language, like Type 2 set language, occurs in different recorded versions of the same story, rather than occurring across the repertoire in more than one story. Rather than representing standardised storytelling language which Mr Stewart was drawing on at will to construct the story, this type of similar language appears to indicate that Brian had internalised certain patterns of language which he associated with specific stories, and reserved such language for the particular story in question as part of an attempt to be faithful to a remembered original. It is not possible to say whether Brian developed this practice on his own, or whether he learned it from the storytelling of other tradition bearers. (Further study of the limited evidence from other Stewart storytellers might help to shed light on whether this practice may have been common

in the Stewart family). While the use of highly similar language from telling to telling of the same story does not represent memorisation, it seems likely that this process of associating language patterns with a particular story (be they patterns originating with the storyteller or patterns learned from other storytellers) is related to the process of memorisation in some way.

It may be useful to consider the example of another storyteller whose use of language has received some attention from scholars, that of Duncan MacDonald of South Uist (see Draak; MacDonald 1989, 1983; and Bruford 1969, 1978, 1983). By all accounts, Duncan MacDonald was a conservative storyteller who often told stories in a highly similar form from one telling to another, and whose brother Neil also told stories in much the same way. Although Duncan and his brother ‘... learned some of their father's tales virtually word for word’ (Bruford 1978: 34), MacDonald also narrated many other tales in a less fixed form. Bruford describes these latter stories as being comprised of ‘... narrative wording improvised on a memorised framework, but much of the dialogue learned by heart’ (1978: 37). Bruford also hypothesises that Duncan MacDonald

...learned the story in the form of tableaux and some set passages of dialogue and description, and gradually came to use a settled form of words from his own mind and the common stock for the rest (1969: 223, n. 21).

This idea that MacDonald ‘came to use a settled form of words from his own mind and the common stock’ is most interesting, and the same could be said to be generally true of Brian Stewart; for even when Brian did use traditional formulae from ‘the common stock’, these seem to have been limited to specific story contexts, rather than representing a more spontaneous use of this material as the moment requires. For Brian Stewart, the Type 1 and Type 2 phrases *usually* appear in the same stories in the same places; and the rest of his fixed language – the Type 3 ‘similar’ language – appears to represent a form of ordinary language which has settled into a fairly predictable form and which he associated with specific stories. (Whether this ordinary language originated with Brian Stewart or whether it represents the ordinary language of the stories as used by his grandmother Susie and those from whom she heard the stories is another question which cannot be answered with any certainty. Often the Type 3 language is very ‘ordinary’, but when the extent of its similarity from one telling to another becomes apparent, it is clear that this language is more stylised or formulaic than would be supposed at first glance.

Runs

Before turning to a more detailed examination of the different types of fixed language, it is worth noting that I have not singled out ‘runs’ for special mention in my discussion of Brian Stewart’s use of language. This is due to the fact that although the use of long runs appears to have been highly characteristic of many Gaelic storytellers, Brian himself used very few long runs, and the vast majority of his set language consists of short stock phrases or dialogue.¹⁷ One possible reason for this is that although Brian, along with others of his generation, was exposed to a fairly active storytelling tradition in his youth, the tradition was in decline throughout his life, and his exposure to it decreased as time passed. A storyteller thus removed from an active storytelling context might lose the ability to use and easily manipulate some of the

longer and more complex set pieces or runs, while keeping the shorter, more memorable phrases in active use. Interestingly, the great nineteenth century story collector John F. Campbell of Islay commented that when a ‘narrator has been long absent from his native place, or has ceased to be a regular storyteller’ the stories ‘are told with less peculiar language,’¹⁸ by which presumably Campbell meant runs and other traditional idiom. Perhaps his comments apply equally well to Brian Stewart. There is also the possibility that Brian simply was not exposed to many long runs in the stories which he heard from his grandmother and uncle. However, as Brian reported that his grandmother Susie’s stories usually lasted about an hour, it seems that she must have told the stories in such a way as to make them longer than Brian’s versions, which typically lasted no more than twenty-five minutes. Together with the evidence provided in stories from *Ailidh Dall* (Susie’s son) which have more long runs than Brian’s, it seems reasonable to suppose that she would have used some long runs in her storytelling. Therefore, perhaps the answer to the question of the paucity of long runs in Brian’s repertoire is indeed that his lack of exposure to frequent storytelling for most of his life left him with a lesser command of traditional idiom and imagery than would have been ordinary for storytellers of previous generations.¹⁹ Whatever the explanation for the lack of long runs, the result is that this discussion is primarily concerned with the other varieties of fixed language in Brian Stewart’s storytelling.

Examples of Set Language

Type 1 Set Language - Examples

Having described the kinds of set language which Brian used, it will be useful to look at some examples of each type. Type 1 set language has been defined as rhythmic or alliterative language comprising phrases, epithets, formulae and dialogue which are recognisably drawn from the common stock of storytelling idiom or which appear to derive from an old motif or manuscript tradition, and which was used by Brian in more than one different story (as opposed to more than one version of the *same* story). A good example of Type 1 language is to be found in the dialogue used when one character puts another character under binding obligations (*‘geasan’*) in Brian’s stories. The following example comes from Brian’s 1978 recording of *‘Stòiridh Ladhair,’* and occurs at a point in the story when the king has played and lost a game of dice to an unknown woman. For her prize, the woman puts the king under obligation to obtain *‘fios feagal an aon sgeul’* (‘true knowledge of the one tale’).²⁰ The woman puts the king under *‘geasan’* as follows:

‘Mo chrosan ’s mo gheasan,’ thuir i, ‘tri buaraichean matha sìdh nach stad oidhch’ a’s gach taigh dhut gus a’faigh thu dhomh-as fios feagal an aon sgeul.’²¹

‘My spells and my crosses,’ she said, ‘the three fetters of the fairy [women] that you shall not stop a night in [any] house until you obtain for me ‘true knowledge of the one tale’ (i.e., the object of the quest).’

This is in fact a rather short version of a formula common in Gaelic stories which is used to place characters under obligation, numerous examples of which can be found in collections of Gaelic stories (see e.g. J.G. McKay 1940: 228 and following) and in the archives of the School of Scottish Studies.²² It is not surprising,

then, that Brian used this formula in more than one story (both in ‘*Stòiridh Ladhair*’ and ‘*Stòiridh an Eich Dhuibh*’), and if we compare the phrase as it is used above with the phrase as it appears in Brian’s 1974 recording of ‘*Stòiridh an Eich Dhuibh*,’ it is clear that the formula as he used it in the two different stories is more or less constant. In ‘*Stòiridh an Eich Dhuibh*,’ the be-spelling phrase is used at a point in the story when a strand of hair falls out of a prince’s pocket while he is dancing at a king’s ball, and the king puts the prince under obligations to find the woman whose hair it is:

*‘Tha mo chrosan ’s mo gheasan,’ thuirt e ris, ‘trì buaraichean mathra sidh nach stad oidhch’ a’s gach taigh dhut, gus a’faigh thus’ dhomh-as am boirionnach bha ’caith’ an fhalt a bha sin.’*²³

‘My spells and my crosses,’ he said to him, ‘the three fetters of the fairy [women] that you shall not stop a night in [any] house until you obtain for me the woman whose hair that was (i.e., the object of the quest).’

In another recording of ‘*Stòiridh an Eich Dhuibh*’ from 1974, the be-spelling formula is all but identical:

*‘Mo chrosan ’s mo gheasan,’ thuirt e, ‘trì buaraichean mathr’ sidh, nach stad oidhch’ a’s gach taigh dhut-as gus a’faigh thus’ dhomh-as a’boirionnach bha ’caith’ an fhalt bha sin.’*²⁴

My spells and my crosses,’ he said, ‘the three fetters of the fairy [women] that you shall not stop a night in [any] house until you obtain for me the woman whose hair that was (i.e., the object of the quest).’

Another example of an established formulaic phrase is to be found in Brian’s tellings of ‘*Stòiridh Ladhair*’. Here the hero of the story, Ladhar, approaches a giant’s castle and shouts out that he has come to obtain ‘*ceann fear agus filidh*’ (literally ‘the head of a man and a poet’).²⁵ The giant’s men come out of the castle and Ladhar seizes on the one who has the slimmest leg and the largest head, using him as a club with which to knock the brains out of the other men.²⁶

In his 1978 version of ‘*Stòiridh Ladhair*,’ Brian’s words are as follows:

*...’s rug e air a’fear bu chaoil’ cas agus bu mhoth’ ceann, agus sgleog e ’n t-eanchainn às an fheadhainn eil’ leis.’*²⁷

...and he seized on the man with the slimmest leg and the largest head, and he bashed the brains out of the others with him.

In Brian’s 1994 version of the same story the words are almost identical:

... rug e air a’fear bu, bu mhoth’ ceann ’s bu chaoil’ cas, ’s sgleoc e an t-eanchainn às an fheadhainn eil’.

...he seized on the man with the, the largest head and the slimmest leg, and he bashed the brains out of the other ones.

Brian also used the same formula in ‘*Stòiridh Loircein*’. In this scenario, the hero approaches a giant's castle and shouts out that he has come to retrieve his father's teeth, which have been stolen by the giant. The giant's men then come out of the castle and Loircean seizes on the man who has the slimmest leg and the largest head as described above. Compare the phrase as recorded in 1974:

*...rug e air a'fear, 'fear bu mhòth' ceann dhiubh, 's bu chaoile cas. 'S rug e air 'chasan, 's sgleog e 'n t-eanchainn às an fheadhainn aig an doras.*²⁸

...he seized on the man, the man with the biggest head of them, and the slimmest leg. And he seized on his legs, and he bashed the brains out of the ones at the door.

Other recognisably formulaic language includes stock descriptions, such as the effort which a hero makes to lift his sword and kill his enemy in a battle. In Brian's 1973 version of ‘*Stòiridh a'Chòcaire*,’ when the hero is about to kill a giant and cut off his two heads, the action is described as follows:

*...thug e an sin an togail mhòr, èibhinn, aighearach dhan a'chlaindeamh aig', 's sgud e an dà cheann dheth.*²⁹

...then he gave the great, boisterous, joyful heave to his sword, and he cut the two heads off him.

In the May 1978 recording of ‘*Stòiridh Ladhair*,’ the same phrase is used when the king kills a giant:

*... 's, thug e 'n togail mhòr, èibhinn, aighearach dhan fhomhair 's chuir e ri talamh e 's, ghearr e 'n ceann dheth, leis 'chlaindeamh aig'.*³⁰

... and, he gave the great, boisterous, joyful heave to the giant and he put him to the ground and, he cut the head off him, with his sword.

Brian also used this same phrase in a similar context in his 1974 recording of ‘*Stòiridh Loircein*’:

*... 's, thug e an togail mhòr, èibhinn, aighearach ud dhan fhomhair, 's chuir e air a dhruim e 's, sgud e an ceann deth.*³¹

... and, he gave that great, boisterous, joyful heave to the giant, and he put him on his back and, he cut the head off him.

This is a good example of Brian Stewart's use of the same formulaic phrase in three different stories in an identical form each time.³²

Type 2 Set Language - Examples

We turn now to some examples of Type 2 set language, which has already been defined in detail above. As already noted, Type 2 set language is very similar to Type 1 set language, the main difference being that Type 2 language only appears in versions of the same story, rather than in recordings of different stories. Thus it appears that this set language had become associated in Brian's storytelling with specific story contexts.

To begin with an example of language which is recognisably formulaic and drawn from the common storytelling stock, but which appears in only one of Brian Stewart's stories, let us look at the situation in which two characters play a game of cards or dice, and the loser of the game asks the winner to name his or her prize. Here the stock phrase is '*Tog brìgh do chluich*' – 'name the price of your gaming' (i.e., name your prize). This phrase is characteristic of a common gaming motif which often appears in Gaelic stories,³³ but it only occurs in Brian's recordings of '*Stòiridh Ladhair*'. Another example of a formula which only occurs in one of Brian's stories is the phrasing which he used in the story '*Am Bodach Baigeir*' to describe how the hero of the story chases after a fox. Consider the following examples from all four recordings of the story:

Example 1:

*'S dar a b'ìosal air-eas b'àird' air a' t-seannach's dar a b'àird' air-eas b'ìosal air an t-seannach, gus do ruig e taighean caol, fad', dubh.*³⁴

And when he was lowest the fox was highest and when he was highest the fox was lowest, until he reached a narrow, long, black little house.

Example 2:

*Agus, eh, dar chaidh e as dèidh 'seannach, far a' b'ìosal air-eas b'àird' air a' t-seannach, 's far a' b'àird' air-eas b'ìosal air an t-seannach, gus do ruig e taighean fad', dubh ann a' sin.*³⁵

[And, eh, when he went after the fox, where he was lowest the fox was highest, and where he was highest the fox was lowest, until he reached a long, black little house there.

Example 3:

*Far a' b'àird' air-eas b'ìosal air a' t-seannach, 's far a' b'ìosal air-eas b'àird' air a' t-seannach gus do ruig e taighean fad', duaichnidh.*³⁶

Where he was highest the fox was lowest, and where he was lowest the fox was highest until he reached a long, gloomy little house.

Example 4:

*Far a' b'ìosal air-eas b'àird' air an t-seannach, ach. Ruig es' taigh fad', caol, dubh ann a' sin 's, ghnog e aig a' doras.*³⁷

Where he was lowest the fox was highest, but. He reached a long, narrow, black house there and, he knocked at the door.

Notice that here the formula, which involves rhythm and alliteration, occurs in much the same way in each version, even in the 1993 version (example 4). Notice also that there is a second stock phrase in the excerpt, a description of the house which the hero reaches as being ‘*caol, fad, dubh*’ (‘narrow, long, black’), or a slightly varied version thereof.

For two more examples from ‘*Am Bodach Baigeir*’, we turn to the point in the story when the hero (and subsequently the hero’s brother) has reached the ‘long, narrow, black house’ and hears a knock at the door. When he asks who is there, a voice replies in highly stylised speech that it is ‘the speckled hen of the one night’. Compare the following excerpts from the various recordings of the story:

Example 1:

‘*O chan eil ach cearc bhruc na h-aon oidhch*’. *Bios i null air beinn, ’s bios i nall air beinn, ’s bios i oidhch’ a’ seo.*³⁸

‘Oh it’s just the speckled hen of the one night. She’s hither and thither on the mountain, and she’s a night here.’

Example 2:

‘*O chan eil, ’ thuirt is, ’ach cearc bhruc na h-aon oidhch*’. *Bios i null air oidhch, ’s bios i nall air oidhch, ’s bios i oidhch’ a’ seo.*³⁹

‘O it’s only,’ she said, ‘the speckled hen of the one night. She’s hither and thither at night, and she’s a night here.’

Example 3:

‘*Ooo, ’ thuirt i ris, ’cearc bhruc na h-aon oidhch*’. *Bios i a-null air oidh– beinn, ’s bios i a-nall air beinn, ’s bios i oidhch’ a’ seo.*⁴⁰

‘Ooo,’ she said to him, ‘the speckled hen of the one night. She’s hither and thither at night– on the mountain, and she’s a night here.’

Example 4:

‘*O chan eil ach cearc bhruc na h-aon oidhch*’. *Bios i null air beinn, ’s bios i a-nall air beinn, ’s bios i oidhch’ a’ seo.*⁴¹

‘O it’s only the speckled hen of the one night. She’s hither and thither on the mountain, and she’s a night here.’

Note that here the speech is just as formalised as the Type 1 speech discussed above, the chief difference being that these phrases only occur in versions of the story ‘*Am Bodach Baigeir*’. Similarly, when the hag enters the house and begins to get bigger and bigger, the hero comments on this transformation and the dialogue is again formulaic:

Example 1:

‘*Dhia, a Chaillich, ’ thuirt e, ’tha thu ’fàs mòr.*’
‘*Och chan eil ach m’iteagan ’s m’oiteagan, ’ thuirt i, ’tha breò ris na h-èibhlean.*’⁴²

‘God, old woman,’ he said, ‘you are growing large.’
 ‘Och, it’s just my feathers and my down,’ she said, ‘flaring up by the embers.’⁷⁴³

Example 2:

... *‘Dhia, a Chaillich, tha thu ’fas mòr.’*
*‘Och,’ thuir i ris, ‘m’iteagan ’s m’oiteagan tha breò ris na h-èibhlean.’*⁷⁴⁴

... ‘God, old woman, you are growing large.’
 ‘Och,’ she said to him, ‘[it’s] my feathers and my down flaring up by the embers.’

Example 3:

‘Tha thu ’fàs mòr, a Chaillich.’
*Agus, ‘Och,’ thuir i, ‘chan eil ach m’iteagan is m’oiteagan,’ thuir i, ‘tha breò ris na h-èibhlean.’*⁷⁴⁵

‘You are growing large, old woman.’
 And, ‘Och,’ she said, ‘it’s only my feathers and my down,’ she said, ‘flaring up by the embers.’

Example 4:

‘O mo chreach, a Chailleach!’ thuir e, ‘tha thu ’fàs mòr.’
*‘O,’ thuir i, ‘m’iteagan is m’oiteagan tha breò ris na h-èibhlean.’*⁷⁴⁶

‘Alas, old woman!’ he said, ‘you are growing large.’
 ‘Oh,’ she said, ‘[it’s] my feathers and my down flaring up by the embers.’

Type 2 Set Language – Examples of More ‘Ordinary’ Formulae

Also included in the Type 2 category is some language which, although still formulaic, is closer to ‘ordinary’ language (and indeed to Type 3 language, which is discussed below) than the examples at the more formal end of the spectrum. One such example occurs in *‘Am Bodach Baigeir,’* this time near the beginning of the story. Here the hero is in bed with his wife, and he hears a sound outside his house. He asks his wife what the noise is and his wife replies that it is a fox that wants chasing. The hero then replies, *‘O uill, ma fhuair e ’ruagadh riamh gheobh e ’ruagadh a-nochd’* (‘Well, if he ever got chasing, he’ll get chasing tonight’). Here the language used does not have as unusual a ring to it as some of the phrases we have already considered, but there is still an element of rhythmic repetition and symmetry to the phrase, and each time Brian Stewart uses it, it occurs in a highly similar form. Compare the following examples of the phrase as it occurs in different recordings of *‘Am Bodach Baigeir’*:

Example 1:

‘O uill, ma fhuair e ’ruagadh riamh gheobh e ’ruagadh a-nochd.’
 ‘Oh well, if he ever got chasing, he’ll get chasing tonight.’⁷⁴⁷

Example 2:

*'O ma tha e ag iarraidh 'ruagadh riamh, gheobh e 'ruagadh a-nochd.'*²⁴⁸

['Oh if he is ever wanting chasing, he'll get chasing tonight.'

Example 3:

*'Uill, ma fhuair e 'ruagadh riamh,' thuirt e riutha (sic), 'gheobh e 'ruagadh nochd.'*²⁴⁹

'Well, if he ever got chasing,' he said to them (sic), 'he'll get chasing tonight.'

Example 4:

*'Uill, ma fhuair e 'ruagadh riamh gheobh e 'ruagadh a-nochd.'*²⁵⁰

'Well, if he ever got chasing he'll get chasing tonight.'

Example 5:

*'Uill, ma fhuair e 'ruagadh riamh,' thuirt e, 'gheobh e 'ruagadh a-nochd.'*²⁵¹

'Well, if he ever got chasing,' he said, 'he'll get chasing tonight.'

Example 6:

*'Uill,' thuirt e, 'ma fhuair e 'ruagadh riamh gheobh e 'ruagadh a-nochd.'*²⁵²

['Well,' he said, 'if he ever got chasing he'll get chasing tonight.'

Example 7:

*'Och, ma fhuair e 'ruagadh a-riamh, gheobh e 'ruagadh a-nochd.'*²⁵³

'Och, if he ever got chasing, he'll get chasing tonight.'

Thus while the language may at first glance appear to be 'ordinary,' the repetition of this phrase in every recorded version of the story shows that it functions as stock dialogue which plays a formulaic role, i.e., it expresses the same idea in a given context. The phrase is also somewhat rhythmic and alliterative, which helps to identify it as 'special' language, rather than being 'ordinary' language, and these characteristics almost certainly helped Brian Stewart to retain the phrasing in this settled form.

Formulae Specific to Brian Stewart's Storytelling of to his Immediate Family

When considering the Type 2 set language which is on the more 'ordinary' end of the spectrum, it is striking that while some of these phrases are seemingly commonplace and not particularly memorable, Mr Stewart still managed to remember and use them in the same way over a span of decades. Moreover, some of these seemingly mundane phrases were also used by other members of Brian's family when they told stories, providing further evidence that the phrases were indeed fixed and functioned as formulae. For instance, in Brian Stewart's 1974 version of '*Stòiridh Ladhair*', the king loses a game of dice to an otherworldly woman, and is set under obligations by her to obtain '*fios feagal an aon sgeul*' ('true knowledge of the one tale'). The king then asks the woman if anyone has ever succeeded in such a quest, to which she replies that some have succeeded and some have not:

Agus, thuirt i, thuirt e rith' rithist, 'An d'fhuair gin riamh e?'
*'Cuid a fhuair, 's cuid nach d'fhuair.'*⁵⁴

And, she said, he said to her again, 'Has anyone ever obtained it?'
 'Some have, and some have not.'

This phrasing is seemingly mundane, but in the April 1995 recording of this story, Brian used the same exact dialogue, this time when the woman sends the king on a quest for '*ceann fear agus filidh*' (literally 'the head of a man and a poet' – see note 25). The dialogue is as follows:

'An d'fhuair gin riamh e?'
'Cuid a fhuair, cuid nach d'fhuair.'

'Has anyone ever obtained it?'
 'Some have, some have not.'

Interestingly, this is the first time in 21 years that Brian had used this dialogue in a recorded version of the story. What is more remarkable still is that his cousin, Mary Stewart (the daughter of *Ailidh Dall*, Brian's uncle), used the same dialogue in her 1957 recording of the story '*Gille nan Cochulla Craicinn*'. Here Fionn asks *Gille nan Cochulla Craicinn* ('the lad of the skin coverings') to go to '*Eilean nam Fear Mòr*' ('the Isle of the Big Men') to obtain '*Còrn an Leathraich*' (a magic drinking horn) for him. *Gille nan Cochulla Craicinn* asks whether anyone has ever succeeded in this quest, and as in Brian's stories, Fionn replies that some have succeeded and some have not:

'D'fhuair gin a-riamh e?' thuirt Gille nan Cochulla Craicinn.
*'Uill, ' thuirt es', 'cuid a fhuair, cuid nach d'fhuair.'*⁵⁵

'Has anyone ever obtained it?' said the lad of the skin coverings.
 'Well,' he said, 'some have, and some have not.'

Thus while this language is at first glance ordinary, it has taken on a formulaic function not only in Brian Stewart's storytelling, but in his cousin's storytelling as well. While Alan Bruford states that only language which is 'interesting enough to be worth remembering' (1969: 167) as well as easy to remember will be passed on in the oral tradition, here we have an example of a very ordinary piece of dialogue being faithfully retained. (Admittedly, the phrase *is* easy to remember, but it is certainly not striking). The fact that both Brian and Mary Stewart used this piece of set dialogue suggests that they heard it from the same source. Mary cited her grandmother Susie as the source for her version of '*Gille nan Cochulla Craicinn*', so it is fair to guess that both Brian and Mary heard this phrase from her. In addition to suggesting a common source, the use of the phrase by both cousins also indicates a high degree of fidelity to the original source of the story, even when the phrasing in question is not especially marked by alliteration or other similar memorable qualities. Here then we have an indication that the ethos of Brian Stewart's immediate storytelling context may have been a conservative one, which valued the faithful retention and telling of the stories in a given way, as they were originally heard. That said, the fact that this dialogue occurs in both Brian's version of '*Stòiridh Ladhair*' and Mary's version of '*Gille nan*

Cochulla Craicinn may indicate that traditional idiom moved more freely between different stories in the Stewart family tradition than Brian's storytelling might suggest.

One other similar example is also of interest, both for the light it sheds on Brian Stewart's storytelling dynamic, as well as the insight it provides into the way in which he may have remembered details. In Brian's version of '*Stòiridh Ladhair*', the king is sent on a quest for '*ceann fear agus filidh*', which in the context of the story refers to a certain giant's head. The king is told that no one may accompany him on this quest, not even his faithful companion Ladhar, a detail which remained in Brian's memory and in his tellings of the story. In the 1974 recording of the story, Brian could not remember the content of this episode, but he remembered the fact that the king has to go on a quest for something and that Ladhar cannot accompany him on his quest. In the following transcription, we can witness Brian rehearsing the story in an effort to remember what happens, saying:

*Ceann fear agus filidh. 'S chan fhaodadh gin bhith cuide ris ach, eh, e fhèin. Chan fhaodadh e Ladhar thoir' leis. Chan fhaodadh e creutair thoir leis ach e fhèin. Ach seall, cha, chan eil cuimhn', cuimhn' agam, ged a bheireadh si' an ceann dith, ciamar a bha ceann fear agus filidh.*⁵⁶

The head of '*fear agus filidh*'. And no one could be with him but, eh, himself. He couldn't take Ladhar with him. He couldn't take a single creature with him but himself. But see, I can't, I can't remember, even if you gave me the end of it, how it was with 'the head of a man and a poet'.

In Brian's other versions of the story, he used the same wording to refer to the fact that Ladhair could not accompany the king on his quest. In the May 1978 version, the king is told by the otherworldly woman that no one may accompany him on his quest. She says, '*Chan fhaod gin a dhol ann ach thu fhèin*' ('No one may go but yourself') and the king then relays this news to Ladhar:

'Chan fhaod thu bhith ann,' thuirt e, 'Ladhar Laochain,' thuirt e, 'chan fhaod thus' bhith ann.'
'You may not be there,' he said, 'Ladhar, little hero,' he said, 'you may not be there.'⁵⁷

Brian again used highly similar language in his 1994 and 1995 versions of the story. Compare the following excerpts:

Example 1:

*Agus thuirt e ri Ladhar, 'Chan fhaod thus' bhith cuide rium an dràsdaich. Feumaidh mi fholbh leum fhèin.*⁵⁸
And he said to Ladhar, 'You may not be with me now. I must go by myself.'

Example 2:

‘O, ma tha, Ladhair,’ thuir e, ‘chan fhaod thus’ a bhith ann. Chan fhaod thu, chan fhaod thu, thuir i rium nach fhaodadh gin dhol, ach mi-fhèin.’⁵⁹

‘Oh, well, Ladhar,’ he said, ‘you may not be there. You may not, you may not, she said to me that no one could go, except myself.’

Clearly Brian associated this phrasing with the story – even, as is evidenced in the 1974 recording, when he could not remember the actual content of this episode.

Brian’s uncle *Ailidh Dall* also used the same wording in his own recording of the story. Here the king is told by the otherworldly woman that he must go alone on a quest to ‘*Eilean nam Fear Mòr*’ (‘the Isle of the Big Men’). The king’s response, in the form of his lament to Ladhar, is highly similar to the wording heard in Brian’s tellings: ‘*O Ladhar Laochain,*’ *thuir e ri Ladhar, ‘chan fhaod thu bhith ann*’ (‘Oh Ladhar, little hero,’ he said to Ladhar, ‘you may not be present’).⁶⁰

The fact that this same rather ordinary phrasing was used by both Brian and his uncle, together with the above examples of Brian’s highly similar language used in his different recordings of this story, would be enough to provide a striking example of seemingly mundane language taking on importance for our storyteller and being retained by him in a fixed form. In addition, there is also evidence to suggest that this detail of the king’s having to complete his quest alone was an important trigger to Brian’s memory of the story. In a joint interview recorded with Brian Stewart and his cousin Mary Stewart in November 1973⁶¹ during which the two cousins discussed ‘*Stòiridh Ladhair,*’ both Brian and Mary clearly stated that Ladhar could not accompany the king on his second quest, a fact which seemed to have stuck in both their memories and which seemed to play an important role in the way in which they remembered the structure of the story.⁶²

There is some additional evidence which makes this case still more interesting. In July 1995, I conducted an interview with Mr Alec John Williamson of Edderton, a Gaelic-speaking traveller who is a cousin of Brian Stewart’s, related to Brian through his grandmother Susie. Susie’s sister Cleimidh was Mr Williamson’s great-grandmother, and thus Mr Williamson is linked to Brian through the source of Brian’s stories. It was evident from my discussion with Mr Williamson that he had been exposed to the same family storytelling context as Brian Stewart, and had heard many of the same stories that Brian had heard. While asking Mr Williamson whether he knew various stories, I mentioned ‘*Stòiridh Ladhair,*’ whereupon Mr Williamson said that he had heard the story, but could not tell it. He then immediately uttered the phrase, ‘*Ladhair Laochain, chan fhaodhadh e a bhith ann*’ (‘Ladhar [the] little hero, he could not be there’). Thus this same phrasing had stayed in Mr Williamson’s memory over the decades, and is all the more striking for the way in which Mr Williamson spontaneously uttered it. Again, then, we see that a seemingly unmemorable and ‘ordinary’ phrase can be remembered over time, and that somehow the storyteller associates such language with a particular story – perhaps, in fact, remembers the story *because* he or she has remembered the phrase. This evidence contributes to an impression that the storytelling in Brian Stewart’s immediate family context was conservative in nature and that there was a common storytelling idiom used by Brian and the storytellers in his family.

Type 3 Set Language - Examples

Type 3 set language has been described as language which, although not alliterative, rhythmic, or otherwise ‘special,’ still occurred again and again in Brian Stewart’s

stories in a highly similar form each time it was used. Type 3 language does not refer to isolated sentences or pieces of dialogue, but to entire sections of stories which are highly similar from one telling to another. Indeed, such ‘similar’ language is the type of language which occurred most frequently in Brian’s storytelling, and it would be impossible to cite every example of it as some of these examples would comprise large chunks of entire stories. Thus while ‘*Stòiridh an Eich Dhuibh*’, for example, has very little Type 1 or Type 2 set language, it is still the case that a very high proportion of the dialogue in the recordings of this story is highly similar from telling to telling. We can speculate that in the absence of traditional formulae, perhaps the language which our storyteller used nevertheless tended to become fixed in set shapes or patterns. Let us consider a few examples.

In ‘*Stòiridh an Eich Dhuibh*,’ a king’s son is told by his stepmother that she would like to give him a present. The boy protests that he has never given his stepmother a present, but she tells him that this does not matter, and proceeds to offer him his choice of horse from her stables. Compare the similar language used in each of the recorded versions:

Example 1:

‘...*Agus, tha mi ag iarraidh prèusant thoir’ dhut.*
‘*Och,*’ *thuirt ’balach rith,* ‘*cha tug mis’ riamh prèusant dhuibh fhèin.*’⁶³

‘...And, I want to give you a present.’
‘Och,’ said the boy to her, ‘I’ve never given a present to yourself.’

Example 2:

‘*O uill,*’ *thuirt i,* ‘*cha tug mi prèusant riamh dhut.*
‘*Och,*’ *thuirt a leas-mhac rith,* ‘*cha tug mis’ riamh prèusant riamh dhuibh fhèin.*’⁶⁴

‘Oh well,’ she said, ‘I’ve never given you a present.’
‘Och,’ said her stepson to her, ‘I’ve never given a present to yourself.’

Example 3:

‘...*Nis,*’ *thuirt i ris,* ‘*seo,*’ *thuirt i,* ‘*prèusant bhuam-as, aon ’sam bith dhe na h-eich tha sin. Aon ’sam bith a thogras thu, thoir leis ’sann leat-as a tha e.*
‘*Och uill,*’ *thuirt e, am balach ris a’ bhàn-righ,* ‘*cha tug mis’ dad a-riamh, cha tug mis’ prèusant dhui’-fhèin.*’⁶⁵

‘...Now,’ she said to him, ‘here is,’ she said, ‘a present from me, any one of the horses there. Whichever one you want, take it it’s yours.’
‘Och well,’ he said, the boy to the queen, ‘I’ve never given a thing, I’ve never given a present to yourself.’

Example 4:

Agus thuirt a’ bhàn-righ ris’ ma– a’ ghille, ‘*Tha mi ’dol a thoir’ dhut prèusant ’n diugh,*’ *thuirt i.*
‘*O,*’ *thuirt a’ gill’ rith,* ‘*cha tug mis’ riamh prèusant dhuibh fhèin.*’⁶⁶

And the queen said to – the boy, ‘I’m going to give you a present today,’ she said.
 ‘Oh,’ said the boy to her, ‘I’ve never given a present to yourself.’

As can be seen, all four versions above use highly similar language to express similar ideas. While the language is not absolutely identical in each excerpt, the degree of similarity is very high indeed, and this was very typical of Brian Stewart's storytelling across his repertoire.

Later in this story the hero finds a strand of hair on the road, and when he picks it up his horse advises him that he should not take the hair with him. The boy expresses surprise that the horse can speak, to which the horse replies that he ‘has a certain amount of speech’. As above, this incident is expressed in highly similar language in each telling. Compare the four versions:

Example 1:

Thuir an t-each ris, ‘Cuir– fàg sin,’ thuir e, ‘fàg a’ falt sin no gheobh e ann an trioblaid thu.’

Thu’ e sin sùil air an each ’s thuir e, ‘Bheil bruidhinn agad-as?’

‘O,’ thuir e, ‘tha an uibhir sin de bhruidhinn agam. ‘S tha mis’ ag inns’ dhut,’ thuir e, ‘mur cuir thus’ air folbh a’ falt tha sin, gheobh thus’ ann an trioblaid leis.’⁶⁷

The horse said to him, ‘Put– leave that,’ he said, ‘leave that hair or it will get you into trouble.’

He looked at the horse and he said, ‘Can you speak?’

‘Oh,’ he said, ‘I have a certain amount of speech. And I’m telling you,’ he said, ‘if you don’t throw away that hair, you’ll get into trouble with it.’

Example 2:

Thug an t-each dubh sùil air ’s, thuir e ris, ‘Fàg a’ falt sin,’ thuir e. Thug a’ gil– am balach sùil air an each, thuir e, ‘Beil bruidhinn agad-as?’ thuir e.

‘Uill,’ thuir e, ‘tha an uibhir sin dhe bhruidhinn agam.’ Thuir e, ‘Tha mis’ ’g inns’ dhut-as a’ falt sin fhàgail, na gheobh e ann an trioblaid thu.’⁶⁸

The horse looked at him and, he said to him, ‘Leave that hair,’ he said.

The lad– the boy looked at the horse, he said, ‘Can you speak?’ he said.

‘Well,’ he said, ‘I have a certain amount of speech.’ He said, ‘I’m telling you to leave that hair, or it will get you into trouble.’

Example 3:

Thuir an t-each ris, ‘Nis,’ thuir es’, ‘cuimhnic, cuireas thu ’falt sin air folbh, cui– na tog, na cum sin. Tilg air folbh e.... Uill, uill, [mur thil’], tha mis’ ag inns’ dhut, gheobh sin ann an dragh thu.’

‘Bheil thus’ ag ràdh sin? Bheil thus’ ’bruidhinn?’ thuir e.

‘Uill tha an uibhir sin de bhruidhinn agam,’ thuir an t-each ris. ‘Tha fhios agam,’ thuir e, ‘gu’ faigh e thus’ ann an dragh.’⁶⁹

The horse said to him, ‘Now,’ he said, ‘remember, put that hair away, put– don’t lift, don’t keep that. Throw it away....Well, well, [if you don’t], I’m telling you, that will get you into difficulty.’
 ‘Are you saying that? Are you speaking?’ he said.
 ‘Well I have a certain amount of speech,’ said the horse to him. ‘I know,’ he said, ‘that it will get you into difficulty.’

Example 4:

Thionndaidh an t-each sin, ‘Uill,’ thuirt an t-each ris, ‘n t-each dubh ris, ‘Tilg sin air folbh,’ thuirt e, ‘na gheobh e ann a’ mòran dragh thu. A’ falt sin.’

‘Och,’ thuirt es’, chuir e [’na] phòcaid e. ‘Bheil bruidhinn agad-s?’ ‘Tha an uibhir sin de bhruidhinn agam,’ thuirt an t-each ris. ‘Cuir thus’ a’ falt sin air folbh bhuaat.’⁷⁰

The horse turned then, ‘Well,’ said the horse to him, the black horse to him, ‘Throw that away,’ he said, ‘or it will get you into a lot of difficulty, that hair.’
 ‘Och,’ he said, he put it [in his] pocket. ‘Can you speak?’
 ‘I have a certain amount of speech,’ said the horse to him. ‘Put that hair away from you.’

Here again the high degree of similarity between the language of these passages is evident. Note that some of the phrases appear to have become fixed. For example, when the horse admits that he has a certain degree of speech, the storyteller puts the same phrase into the horse’s mouth each time: ‘*Tha an uibhir sin de bhruidhinn agam*’ (‘I have a certain amount of speech’). Perhaps this reflects a more general process whereby ordinary dialogue may become fixed and may even spread to other storytelling contexts.

Another example of ‘similar’ language is to be found in Brian Stewart’s tellings of ‘*Stòiridh a’ Chòcaire*’. In this story, the hero has attended a ball arranged by a princess. He has in fact rescued the princess from some giants, but the princess’s father and the rest of the kingdom mistakenly believe that the princess has been rescued by the king’s cook. To prove that the cook did not really rescue her, the princess sets up a test of strength whereby all the men at the ball must attempt to break an ox’s shank bone with their bare hands. When the cook makes his attempt to break the bone, he hurts his hand and cries out in pain. However, when the true hero attempts the feat, he breaks the shank bone and his blow is so mighty that the four legs of the table crumble beneath it. The princess then asks her father which man he thinks saved her from the giants – the man who was able to break the ox’s shank bone, or the man who was unable to do so. The king replies that he thinks that the man who could break the shank bone is the man who saved her, whereupon proof of this fact is offered and the story continues. Compare the following excerpts from the different versions to see how similar the language is from telling to telling:

Example 1:

Ach thàinig a’ sin ’m balach bha seo air adhairt ’s, thog e ’dhòrn ’s bhuail e an cnàimh. ’S dar a bhuail e an cnàimh, dh’fholbh an cnàimh ’na smàl. Chuir e ’na smàl air a’ bhòrd e, ’s bhrist e ’bòrd cuide ris.

Agus chaidh sin 'chail' gus a' bhalach 's thuirt i ris a' rìgh, a h-athair, 'Cò,' thuirt i ris, 'shaoileadh sibh-s' a shàbhail mis' bho na fomhairean: am fear a bhris an cnàimh na am fear nach do bhris an cnàimh?'⁷¹

But then this boy came forward and, he raised his fist and he struck the bone. And when he struck the bone, the bone was crushed. He crushed it on the table, and he broke the table along with it. And then the girl went to the boy and she said to the king, her father, 'Who,' she said to him, 'would you think it was that saved me from the giants: the man who broke the bone, or the man who didn't break the bone?'

Example 2:

'S thog e 'dhòrn 's thug e daolong⁷² air a' chnàimh 's, chuir e an cnàimh 'na sgonn air a' bhòrd, 's dh'fhòlbh na ceithir casan bhon a' bhòrd. Bhris e na ceithir casan. Agus thug a' sin nighean 'rìgh sùil air a h-athair.

'Nis,' thuirt i ri h-athair, 'cò chreideadh sibh-s' an duin' a shàbhail mis' bho na fomhairean? An duin' a bhris an cnàimh, no am fear nach do bhris an cnàimh?'⁷³

And he raised his fist and he gave a blow to the bone, and he crushed the bone on the table, and the four legs of the table collapsed. He broke the four legs.

And then the king's daughter looked at her father.

'Now,' she said to her father, 'who would you believe was the man who saved me from the giants? The man who broke the bone, or the man who didn't break the bone?]

Example 3:

Thog es' a dhòrn 's chuir e an cnàimh 'na sgonn air a' bhòrd.

Thuirt i sin ri a h-athair, 'Cò chreideadh si,' thuirt i, 'am fear a mharbh – a shàbhail mis' bho na fomhairean, 'm fear a bhris an cnàimh, no am fear nach do bhris e?'⁷⁴

He raised his fist and he crushed the bone on the table.

Then she said to her father, 'Who would you believe,' she said, 'was the man who killed – who saved me from the giants, the man who broke the bone, or the man who didn't break it?'

Example 4:

Ach thog am balach aon dhorn, 's thug e aon bhuill' às, chuir e an cnàimh 'na smùid air a', air a' bhòrd.

'S char i nis gu h-athair, a' chail', 's thuirt i ris, 'Cò shaoileadh si,' thuirt i, 'am fear a shàbhail mis' bho na fomhairean? Am fear a bhris an cnàimh, no am fear a chiùrr a làimh?'⁷⁵

But the boy raised one fist, and he gave it one blow, he pulverised the bone on the, on the table.

And now she went to her father, the girl, and she said to him, ‘Who would you think,’ she said, ‘was the man who saved me from the giants? The man who broke the bone, or the man who hurt his hand?’

This example of similar language occurring from version to version of the same story is highly representative of Brian Stewart’s storytelling.⁷⁶ What is interesting is that although this language is clearly different from the examples of Type 1 and Type 2 set language examined above, there is nevertheless a similar dynamic behind all of these types of language, that keeps the overall pattern and shape of Brian Stewart’s storytelling essentially the same. Of course there are instances in which Brian Stewart’s language is more innovative, but in the vast majority of his storytelling, the dialogue and other wording exhibits sameness, not innovation. Moreover, because the language which Mr Stewart used throughout his stories is a combination of this Type 3 ‘similar language’ and the even more fixed Type 1 and Type 2 set language, the overall effect is an overwhelming impression that the story versions are highly similar to one another. Interestingly, this can give the overall impression that Brian Stewart’s stories are always ‘the same’, even when the language used in different tellings is not identical.⁷⁷

Frequency of Type 1 and Type 2 Set Language

While the Type 3 ‘similar language’ was the norm for much of Brian Stewart’s storytelling and was used widely in all of his stories, it is useful to ask whether the distribution of Type 1 and Type 2 set language reveals any patterns across the stories, and whether certain stories exhibit more or less Type 1 and Type 2 set language than others. The answer is that there is a marked difference between the nine different stories considered here in terms of how much of these types of set language occurs in them. The three stories which have the most Type 1 and Type 2 language are ‘*Am Bodach Baigeir*,’ ‘*Gille nan Cochulla Craicinn*,’ and ‘*Stòiridh Ladhair*’. Next come three stories with a lesser degree of Type 1 and Type 2 fixed language, ‘*Oisean as dèidh na Fèinn*’, ‘*Stòiridh a’ Chòcaire*,’ and ‘*Stòiridh Loircein*’. Finally, ‘*Am Maraiche Màirneal*,’ ‘*Stòiridh an Eich Dhuibh*,’ and ‘*Stòiridh a’ Chaimbeulaich*’ exhibit almost no Type 1 or Type 2 set language. The distribution of Types 1 and 2 set language is illustrated in the following table:

TYPE 1 AND TYPE 2 LANGUAGE – HIGHEST AMOUNT	TYPE 1 AND TYPE 2 LANGUAGE – LESSER AMOUNT	TYPE 1 AND TYPE 2 LANGUAGE – LITTLE OR NONE
<i>Am Bodach Baigeir</i> <i>Gille nan Cochulla Craicinn</i> <i>Stòiridh Ladhair</i>	<i>Oisean as dèidh na Fèinn</i> <i>Stòiridh a’ Chòcaire</i> <i>Stòiridh Loircein</i>	<i>Am Maraiche Màirneal</i> <i>Stòiridh an Eich Dhuibh</i> <i>Stòiridh a’ Chaimbeulaich</i>

This difference of language use in the various stories is significant, for it again points to a fixed storytelling dynamic on Brian Stewart’s part. Not only is the fixed language highly stable from one telling of a story to another, but our storyteller also was consistent in his use of different types of fixed language within the different stories.

In considering the distribution of the Type 1 and Type 2 fixed language, perhaps it is not surprising that one of the stories which uses the most such language is ‘*Gille nan Cochulla Craicinn*,’ which derives from the native tradition and may have found its way into the oral tradition from manuscripts.⁷⁸ Thus certain phrases and dialogue may have been associated with the story from an early time. Similarly, ‘*Stòiridh Loircein*’ is related to ‘*Eachtra Iollainn Airmdheirg*,’ a popular native romance, as well as to the international tale type AT 301 which was very popular in Gaelic storytelling; and ‘*Stòiridh a’ Chòcaire*’ (AT 300) and ‘*Am Bodach Baigeir*’ (AT 303) also belong to the international tale types which Delargy assures us comprise ‘... the oldest stratum of our existing body of [Gaelic] folk-tales...’ (211). Along with ‘*Oisean as dèidh na Fèinn*’, these stories represent some of the most popular and widespread stories in the Gaelic tradition, and for this reason it is not surprising that these stories contain a higher proportion of stylised language representative of the common stock of storytelling idiom than do the other stories. ‘*Stòiridh Ladhair*’ also contains a higher degree of Types 1 and 2 set language, but the history of the tale is unclear, making it harder to speculate on the reasons for this.

‘*Stòiridh an Eich Dhuibh*,’ ‘*Stòiridh a’ Chaimbeulaich*’ and ‘*Am Maraiche Màirneal*’ correspond to international tale types which do not seem to have been as popular in Scotland as the other six stories, and perhaps this accounts for the very small amount of Type 1 and Type 2 set language to be found in them; for if they were never widespread or popular, there may not have been a chance for certain stock language or phrases to become associated with them as integral parts of the story. Interestingly, very few versions of these stories have been collected in Scotland apart from those recorded from Brian Stewart and his family. For instance, in the case of ‘*Stòiridh a’ Chaimbeulaich*,’ a story somewhat related to tale type AT 880 and 884A, the only two recorded Scottish versions of this tale come from Brian and from *Ailidh Dall*.⁷⁹ Similarly, only six versions of ‘*Am Maraiche Màirneal*’ have been recorded in Scotland, three from Brian and his immediate family, and three more from other Gaelic-speaking travellers. As for ‘*Stòiridh an Eich Dhuibh*,’ two out of five Scottish versions come from Brian and *Ailidh Dall*. By contrast, for five out of six of the stories which contain a higher proportion of Types 1 and 2 set language, there have been at least ten versions of each story collected in Scotland in addition to the versions collected from the Stewart family.⁸⁰ Therefore, if ‘*Stòiridh an Eich Dhuibh*,’ ‘*Stòiridh a’ Chaimbeulaich*’ and ‘*Am Maraiche Màirneal*’ were never as popular or widespread in Scotland as the other six stories, it is possible to speculate that the language associated with their telling may have been less influenced by the common stock of storytelling idiom, and may have developed with less exposure to such specialised language. This in turn would mean that these particular stories would have been less likely to develop a permanent association with Type 1 or Type 2 set language. Whatever the true reason for the distribution of such language, it is significant that the type of language used appears to depend on the particular story being told, for this indicates that Brian Stewart’s use of language was, at least in part, dictated by the story itself rather than being a matter of personal choice.

Conclusions

Having used multiple recordings of the same stories from the same storyteller, it has been possible to compare Brian Stewart’s stories to one another in order to discover patterns of language use in his storytelling. Brian Stewart’s language has been divided into three different types of ‘set’ or ‘similar’ language. Type 1 set language has been described as having characteristics such as rhythm, alliteration and fixity, and as being

typical of traditional idiom or formulae from the common stock of Gaelic storytelling language. Type 2 set language is much the same, the main difference being that Type 1 set language appears in more than one of Brian Stewart's stories, while Type 2 set language appears only in different versions of the *same* story. Also included in the Type 2 category is language which is not noticeably archaic or traditional, but which nevertheless seems to have taken on a formulaic role for the storyteller. Type 3 language, by contrast, has been described as language which is not immediately identifiable as being formulaic, rhythmic, alliterative or otherwise 'special,' but which occurs in a highly similar form from one telling of a story to another.

While Brian Stewart did not tell his stories using the same exact words each time, and while he did not seem formally to have 'memorised' the language used in his stories in the general sense of that word, much of his language (Types 1 and 2) is the same from telling to telling. Furthermore, a good deal of the Type 3 language is highly similar from telling to telling, and so appears to have been nearly as fixed in our storyteller's mind as the Type 1 and Type 2 set language. The fact that certain phrases and formulae were used by our storyteller only in certain stories adds to the impression of fixity, while the fact that different stories consistently make use of different types of set language strongly indicates that Brian Stewart's use of language was highly dependent on the story he was telling. Thus while the examples of Type 1 and Type 2 set language make it clear that Brian Stewart had a command of a large amount of traditional storytelling idiom, his consistent use of this material in the same story contexts suggests that rather than representing a stock of language from which Brian Stewart may have selected at will, this language was actually an echo of the language of the stories as Mr Stewart first heard them and represented his attempt to tell the stories in the same way each time. The evidence of language use by members of Brian Stewart's immediate family lends further weight to this supposition. Thus while formulaic dialogue and other traditional devices may have been used by other storytellers for more spontaneous or flexible storytelling, Brian Stewart's use of these devices in consistently fixed contexts points not to a creative dynamic, but to a re-productive one.

While the comparison of the multiple recordings of Brian Stewart's stories has made certain patterns of language use visible, there is no doubt that more detailed comparisons of the recordings would repay further study. Similar scrutiny of the multiple recordings from members of Brian Stewart's immediate family, especially from his uncle *Ailidh Dall*, would also yield valuable results, as would the study of multiple story recordings from other Gaelic storytellers.

NOTES

¹ Many other writers have touched on the ethos of earlier storytellers and bards in more general discussions concerning the history of Gaelic narrative and the Gaelic literary tradition, including Flower; Murphy 1940, 1953, 1955a-b, 1961; Dillon; Carney; Knott; Binchy; Greene; Bergin; Mac Cana 1974, 1977, 1980, 1987 and Neat and MacInnes: 321-352. See also Almqvist, Ó Catháin and Ó Healaí (eds.) for many relevant articles, and C.I. Maclean 1952, 1954 for details of individual storytelling styles.

² Throughout this article I use the term ‘multiple recordings’ or ‘multiply recorded’ to refer to separate recordings made of the *same* story from the same storyteller on different occasions. Thus a ‘multiply recorded story’ refers to a story which has been recorded more than once from the same person, the resultant separate recordings being the ‘multiple recordings’.

³ Cf. Parry.

⁴ Cf. Foley 1988, 1990.

⁵ Cf. Zall 1998.

⁶ In addition to the nine stories considered in my analysis, Mr Stewart also recorded songs, poetry, and additional stories or story fragments. However, for my analysis I have chosen the nine stories which Mr Stewart clearly knew well, and which he could tell to the best of his ability. These nine stories are also the ones for which there is a significant body of multiple recordings. Note that of the nine stories analysed, one of them (the 1994 recording of *Stòiridh Loircein*) is a conversation *about* the story during which Mr Stewart narrated various sections of the story. All other story versions analysed are complete tellings of the stories.

⁷ *Ach a' Bhràigh* is located near Altandhu on the road past Achiltibuie on the Coigeach headland in Sutherland, at latitude 58 degrees north and longitude 5 degrees 25' west.

⁸ Quoted by Hamish Henderson in Neat : 71.

⁹ For fuller biographical information about Brian Stewart, see Zall 1998.

¹⁰ For assertions that such tales have been highly esteemed in Gaelic tradition, see Bruford, 1987; Delargy: 192, 211; and MacDonald 1989: 187.

¹¹ ‘AT’ numbers refer to the Aarne-Thompson system of tale classification; see Antti Aarne and Stith Thompson 1961.

¹² See e.g. Bruford 1969 and 1983; Delargy; O' Nolan 1975, 1987; MacDonald 1989; and Ross. Donald MacAulay's 1982 article on 'Register Range and Choice in Scottish Gaelic' is also of interest.

¹³ In the course of research presentations, it has been pointed out that linguistic formulae can also incorporate variants. I am grateful to Dr John Shaw for bringing this to my attention.

¹⁴ Dr John Shaw has made the elegant suggestion that the difference between the Type 1 and Type 2 set language in Brian Stewart's storytelling 'could still be important as a reflection of a larger process where a larger pool of floating formulae in an earlier, more extensive tradition turns into isolated, small pools 'as the tide recedes'.'

¹⁵ While an exhaustive study of the evidence provided by other recordings from members of the Stewart family has not been carried out, it is hoped that the occasional reference to the evidence provided by these recordings will be a useful addition to this analysis. Also see Zall 2006 for some discussion of types of language in stories collected from some related Stewart tradition bearers.

¹⁶ A practice which was apparently common amongst storytellers. See Delargy's discussion of the 'crua-Ghaoluinn' ('hard Irish') which was not intelligible to listeners (207).

¹⁷ Examples of long runs can be found in Campbell. Similarly, see O' Nolan for many examples.

¹⁸ Quoted by the Rev. Dr. George Henderson: 186-187.

¹⁹ In addition to the question of runs, the lack of exposure to active storytelling during most of his life will also have had an influence on the other aspects of Brian Stewart's use of language.

²⁰ '*Fios feagal an aon sgeul*': the phrase is usually associated with spells of obligation which require a character to obtain knowledge of the fate of a certain king. Brian's term '*fios feagal an aon sgeul*' is related to similar terms found in versions of '*An Tuairsegeul Mòr*' and the Irish story '*Fios Fátha an aon scéil*,' also sometimes known as '*Fios Fátha an doimhin-scéil*.' See *Béaloideas* I, pg. 105, where '*fios fátha an doimhin-scéil*' is glossed as 'the significance of the profound tale' and there is more discussion of these terms. Cf. also Gillies 1981: 54 for discussion of Gaelic tales which deal with quests for '*fios fátha an aoinsgéil ar na mnáibh*' or similar. For a discussion of 'be-spelling incantations', see J.G. McKay 1940: 504.

²¹ Linguistic Survey of Scotland tape T1006.

²² Also see Bruford 1969: 196, where he cites the following formula as being 'normal in Scotland': '*Tha mi gad chur fo gheasaibh 's fo chrosaibh 's fo naoi buaraichean mnatha sithle siubhla seachrain an laochan beag gearr donn as miot' agus as mì-threòiriche na thu fhèin a thoirt do chinn 's do chluais 's do chaitheamh beatha dhìot, ma nì thu stad choisèadh no chinn gos am faigh thu mach....'* Brian's phrase '*matha*

sìdh’ probably evolved from an earlier phrase such as the ‘*mnatha sìdh*’ (‘fairy women’) which Bruford cites, or ‘*màthraichean sìdh*’ (‘fairy mothers’), an example of which can be found in MacNeil 1987: 52. In his discussion of be-spelling formulae, J.G. McKay (1940: 505) explains the reference to the fairy women's cow fetters as follows: ‘The dreaded fairy-woman is also invoked against him. If he failed [to obtain the object demanded], she was to meet him, and strike him with the nine cow-fetters which she carried. It must be explained here that even the ordinary cow-fetter or cow-spangel of ordinary mortals was a most ominous instrument.... If struck by them a hero was supposed to be rendered so awkward and silly, so fey and unlucky, that the veriest scum of the populace would be able to overcome him in battle, and take his ear, and his head, and his means of life from him.’

²³ School of Scottish Studies Recording SA 1974/26/A1.

²⁴ Linguistic Survey of Scotland tape 954.

²⁵ ‘*Fear agus filidh*’: a somewhat enigmatic term which Brian Stewart used. Literally it means ‘a man and a poet’. It was suggested to me by the late Donald Archie MacDonald that the term may have evolved from the proper name ‘*Fearghus Filidh*’ (‘Fergus the Poet’), which could easily have evolved into ‘*fear agus filidh*’ over the course of time.

²⁶ Bruford states that this is part of the ‘*teach na n-amhus*’ motif, which he says may date to the sixteenth century or earlier (1969: 15).

²⁷ Linguistic Survey of Scotland tape 1006.

²⁸ School of Scottish Studies recording SA 1974/27/A-B1.

²⁹ Linguistic Survey of Scotland tape 965 (November 1973).

³⁰ Linguistic Survey of Scotland tape 1006.

³¹ School of Scottish Studies recording SA 1974/27/A-B1.

³² It should also be noted that Brian Stewart also used this same phrase in his 1974 version of ‘*Stòiridh a’ Chòcaire*’.

³³ Alan Bruford identifies the motif as an old one (1969: 80).

³⁴ School of Scottish Studies recording SA 1974/32/B1.

³⁵ Linguistic Survey tape 954 (May 1974).

³⁶ Linguistic Survey tape 956 (1977).

³⁷ 24 September 1993. N.B. All recordings from 1993 or later were made by Carol Zall unless otherwise noted. Copies of all recordings discussed in this article have

been deposited into the archives of the School of Scottish Studies of the University of Edinburgh.

³⁸ School of Scottish Studies recording SA 1974/32/B1.

³⁹ Linguistic Survey tape 954 (May 1974).

⁴⁰ Linguistic Survey tape 956 (1977).

⁴¹ 24 September 1993, Tape 1 of 1.

⁴² School of Scottish Studies recording SA 1974/32/B1.

⁴³ The word '*m'oiteagan*' is something of a nonsense word which alliterates with '*m'iteagan*,' 'my feathers.' I have supplied the word 'down' in this and the following translations in order to provide an appropriate approximation of the phrase. In J.G. McKay 1960, the similar phrase '*Tha mo chiteagan [is mo thopagan] ag éirigh ris an teine*' is translated as 'It is only my duds and tufts standing out with the warmth of the fire' (304-305; see also 378-383). It is interesting to note that the word '*m'oiteagan*' represents one of the 'nonsense words' which had no meaning for Brian, but which he preserved in his storytelling nonetheless.

⁴⁴ Linguistic Survey tape 954 (May 1974).

⁴⁵ Linguistic Survey tape 956 (1977).

⁴⁶ 24 September 1993, Tape 1 of 1.

⁴⁷ School of Scottish Studies recording SA 1974/32/B1.

⁴⁸ School of Scottish Studies recording SA 1974/32/B1.

⁴⁹ Linguistic Survey of Scotland Tape 954 (May 1974).

⁵⁰ Linguistic Survey of Scotland Tape 954 (May 1974).

⁵¹ Linguistic Survey of Scotland Tape 956 (1977).

⁵² Linguistic Survey of Scotland Tape 956 (1977).

⁵³ 24 September 1993, Tape 1 of 1.

⁵⁴ School of Scottish Studies recording SA 1974/32/A4.

⁵⁵ School of Scottish Studies recording SA 1957/48/A4 & B1.

⁵⁶ School of Scottish Studies recording SA 1974/32/A4.

⁵⁷ Linguistic Survey of Scotland Tape 1006.

⁵⁸ 14 May 1994.

⁵⁹ 1 April 1995.

⁶⁰ School of Scottish Studies recording SA 1957/37/1. Transcribed by Ian Paterson. Note that Ailidh Dall's story has been labelled '*Rìgh Òg na Frainge*' ('The young King of France') in the School of Scottish Studies transcription.

⁶¹ Linguistic Survey of Scotland recording T964.

⁶² See Zall 1998: 159-167 for a full discussion of this recording and its implications for how Brian and Mary Stewart remembered story structure.

⁶³ School of Scottish Studies recording SA 1974/26/A1.

⁶⁴ Linguistic Survey of Scotland Tape 954 (May 1974).

⁶⁵ April 1993, Tape 1 of 1.

⁶⁶ October 1993, Tape 1 of 1. This recording was made together with Dr John Shaw.

⁶⁷ School of Scottish Studies recording SA 1974/26/A1.

⁶⁸ Linguistic Survey of Scotland Tape 954 (May 1974).

⁶⁹ April 1993, Tape 1 of 1.

⁷⁰ October 1993, Tape 1 of 1.

⁷¹ Linguistic Survey of Scotland Tape 965 (1973).

⁷² This word, seemingly meaning 'a blow', appears in this story and in some other stories of Brian Stewart's in similar contexts, but I have not been able to identify it, despite consultation with others. I asked Brian about it in July 1997 and he seemed to know the word as '*dilong*' or '*daolong*' and repeated it back to me. There is an Old Irish verb '*dlongid*' meaning to split, cleave or cut away; perhaps the word in question is a derivative of this verb. See *Dictionary of the Irish Language* (1983: 220) for more details.

⁷³ School of Scottish Studies recording SA 1974/27/B3 & 28/A1.

⁷⁴ 24 September 1993, Tape 1 of 1.

⁷⁵ 18 September 1995.

⁷⁶ Those interested in further illustrations of similar language in Brian Stewart's stories should consult Appendix B in Zall 1998, which contains full transcriptions of all thirty-nine of the story recordings.

⁷⁷ In this regard it is interesting to note cognitive psychologist David C. Rubin's observation that because the 'concept of verbatim recall requires a record other than human memory,' '...verbatim recall in an oral culture means no more than accurate within the limits of human memory' (6-7). In other words, highly similar versions of a story might be considered by both storyteller and audience to be 'the same'.

⁷⁸ See Bruford 1969: 123 for his discussion of the Cèdach story, from which 'Gille nan Cochulla Craicinn' appears to derive.

⁷⁹ A story recorded in Cowal in 1859 bears some resemblance to Ailidh Dall's version, but it is closer to AT 890; see 'Ursgeul' ('The Chest') in Campbell vol. 2: 9-23.

⁸⁰ For 'Stòiridh Ladhair,' however, only four versions have been collected in addition to the Stewart versions.

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The Last Georgic, or James Grahame's Revision of Eighteenth-Century Rural Labour

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Left behind in the field of Scottish literary history is the last poem in English that names itself a 'georgic'. Before Scotsman James Grahame published his 3100-plus line poem *British Georgics* in 1809, English and Scottish poets' imitations of Virgil's *Georgics* had dominated the British literary landscape for over a century with their poetry's ability to define the British empire through descriptions of the nation's agriculture. The story of georgic poetry is always the story of the land; how the poet portrays rural labourers and the effect of their produce on the world tells us how a culture constructs ideas of nationhood. Without James Grahame's contribution to this story, British georgic histories usually begin with John Dryden's translation of Virgil's *Georgics* in 1697 and extend through adaptations of Virgil in John Philip's *Cyder*, Christopher Smart's *The Hop-Garden*, John Dyer's *The Fleece*, and often conclude with James Grainger's *The Sugar-Cane* in 1764, so that, thanks to the mighty apple, hop, wool and sugar cane, Britain stands as a conqueror of nature and nations, fed by agricultural technology.¹ However, because Francis Jeffrey's article in the *Edinburgh Review* in 1810 was the last publication devoted to *British Georgics*, it is fair to say that Grahame's poem has been largely forgotten. By forgetting *British Georgics*, we lose an understanding of poetry's power in the late nineteenth-century to form notions of rural labour that rearticulates 'Britain' as a matrix of local, even peculiarly Scottish, customs.

Before Grahame, georgics tended to celebrate the expansive reach of the British farm, where not only produce but systems of commercial behavior that begin locally propagate globally, as the minute becomes the cosmic. This movement occurs throughout an earlier Scottish poem to which *British Georgics* repeatedly and explicitly invites comparison, James Thomson's *The Seasons* (1726-1748). Thomson, for example, suddenly dilates a 'simple scene' of sheep shearing in *The Seasons*' 'Summer' into his vision of the rise of Britannia's 'solid grandeur' as she 'commands / The exalted stores of every brighter clime' with the 'dreadful thunder' of her wool-laden ships that ride 'o'er the waves sublime' ('Summer' 423-29). This motion from unit to universal is a controlling metaphoric process in Thomson; the 'secret all-invading power' of nature contained in a crystal of frost in 'Winter' is a 'potent energy, unseen' that seizes rivers from shore to shore so that people the world over, all beneath one 'starry glitter, [that] glows from pole to pole,' may skate about on the Rhine, or frolic in Russia and Scandinavia (Winter 715, 717, 765-777, 741). One may see, then, how earlier eighteenth-century georgic imagines a structural pattern from the atomic level, infinitely outward.

British Georgics is an important cultural statement² because it exactly reverses this course; specific early nineteenth-century global exigencies—the war with France, the

whims of the market, and governmental enclosures—combine to pressure rural life and labour from the outside-in. The poet responds by collapsing cultivation and culture as he revisions British rural labour as an amalgam of individuated localities and customs. In this, the final named georgic, what is truly national is truly local.

The strongest external, historical force that shapes this poem is the land enclosure movement, a phenomenon that gained momentum in the last three decades of the eighteenth-century, after the earlier, more celebratory georgic fell out of fashion. The effect of enclosures led to a new kind of writing about the land, the sort that we find in Oliver Goldsmith's *The Deserted Village* in 1770. What late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century poets reacted to when they wrote about the land was the way that Britain was reshaped in just a few decades. Parliamentary acts of land enclosure—where the open field system of common pastures, with its bare fallows and inefficient manuring (Roberts 188), were transformed into a network of single farmsteads allotted to individual freeholders or tenants—sundered a multitude of landless labourers from rural societies, as well as from their only means of income. Since not all farmers in the former open field system could have their claims satisfied, some were given small, odd-shaped corners of larger fields, perhaps separated at opposite ends of the parish, while others were granted hundreds of acres more than they could manage (Turner: 17). Exacerbating this, Parliamentary enclosures explicitly allowed enclosures without the consent of all the proprietors (Yelling: 8).

The depth, width and suddenness of this upheaval can be quantified. In the first six decades of the eighteenth-century only 313,000 acres were enclosed, but in the century's remaining four decades, there was a ten-fold increase in the rate of enclosure, affecting eventually seven million acres or 20% of the total area of England—and of course, as a percentage of the country's arable land, the effect was overwhelming. For example, in Berkshire and Cambridgeshire, 94% and 85%, respectively, of the farm land was affected (Turner: 24). In all, over 5200 Parliamentary acts were spread over 300 years, but 3800 of these acts were passed from 1750 to 1820 (*op.cit.*: 32), the vast majority of which occurred during the Napoleonic wars (*op.cit.*: 93).

Worse yet, the country suffered nine bad harvests in the 19 years from 1794-1812 (*op.cit.*: 103). Thus, by the time that Grahame drafted *British Georgics*, wartime conscriptions that took many hands from the plough, and agricultural prices which could not keep pace with a general inflation that was at times severe—cutting into the average worker's income by as much as 20% per year (Mingay: 114), pushing rents up by 90-100% since the beginning of the war (*op.cit.*: 46)—combined with enclosures to force irrevocable changes upon tenant farmers and smaller landowners. Technological improvements that were instituted to boost productivity in the face of these pressures 'steadily and at times ruthlessly brok[e] down' the 'social relations which stood in the way of...modernization' (*op.cit.*: 60). That is exactly where James Grahame's project begins: it chronicles the breakdown of these local social relations.

He asks those who 'plough a wide domain,'—with the verb 'to plough' clearly implying ownership and not manual labour:

Are fields alone
Worthy the culture of a fostering state?
What is a country rich in waving grain,

In sweeping herds and flocks, barren of men,
 Or, fruitful of a race degenerate, sunk
 In gloomy ignorance, without a ray
 Of useful, or of pleasing lore, to cheer
 The listless hours, when labour folds his arms? (416-23)

The nation's wealth is figured organically as being nurtured by the state, where 'state' infers a broader sense than merely the political, since throughout the poem, the speaker addresses what would then be called 'men of state', the landed proprietors and regional lords. They are to act as husbandmen of the community, for even though the countryside was being depopulated, they are implored to see that the land is not 'barren of men', nor that labourers, who are likened to agricultural produce, do not bear the fruit of ignorance. Those who grow and that which is grown compose a 'field of life', a unifying metaphor that asserts the interdependency of culture and cultivation. The Preface to the poem, therefore, argues that 'the welfare of the country depends in great measure on preserving the cultivators of the soil in that relative state of respectability, comfort, and consequence, which they have hitherto held, but which the fashionable system of agriculture has an evident tendency to destroy' (ii). '[F]estivals, holidays, customary sports, and every institution which adds an hour of importance, or of harmless enjoyment, to the poor man's heart, ' he contends, 'ought to be religiously observed' (ii). If not, then 'Trade's encroaching power.../ Will drive each older custom from the land, / Will drive each generous passion from the breast' (1184-86).

Wishing to seal off rural labour from socioeconomic incursions, Grahame establishes a pattern of communal circularity in a contrast between his own poetic text and his poem's first epigraph, a passage from Thomson's 'Winter'. *The Seasons'* speaker decries the 'thoughtless eye' that sees winter as only ruin and does not feel the natural 'renovating force' that 'Draws in abundant vegetable soul' through the 'frost concocted glebe' ('Winter' 705-707). Rather than a whole person grounded in a community, one finds an abstraction, an 'eye' that beholds the wintry field, that ought to perceive a gathering of invisible elements that ready the earth for productivity—a geometrically linear image. The first picture in *British Georgics*, though, is of a New Year's Day tradition: the initial neighbour to greet a cottage is called the 'First-Foot,' a significant synecdochical distinction from Thomson's 'eye.' The visitor conveys the 'steaming flaggon, borne from house to house, [which] elates the poor man's heart, / And makes him feel that life has still its joys' (37-39). The hot beverage circulates from one household to the next, labourers make the social rounds, and, in comparison to Thomson, the social supplants nature as an unseen, binding force. Natural conviviality is the basis for welfare and prosperity, which come to every house that receives the het-pint.

Grahame then widens the metaphor of social circularity to the land itself. After the flaggon makes the rounds, the voice of a wizened farmer instructs the reader on how to rotate properly one's crops. Considering that enclosures were causing such great instability, it is surprising to find crop rotation, the quintessential agricultural strategy on the enclosed farm where turnips, clover and other fodder crops are grown on otherwise fallow ground, advocated through the character of a rural sage. However, the physically horizontal circularity of crop rotation at once becomes a kind of vertical circularity when one reads the endnote appended to the farmer's instruction, a three-and-a-half page

excerpt that Grahame supplies from Lord Kame's *The Gentleman Farmer*. The source of the poem's staged folkloric sagacity is an aristocrat's published scientific advice. When placed into the mouth of a rural worker who addresses the poem's readers—specified in the Preface as the landowning class—one finds a vertical circularity of discourse. Furthermore, the precepts espoused by the elderly farmer, he claims, have made the labour he loves like rest to him. Modern agricultural techniques on the enclosed farm apparently turn *negotium* into *otium*. One way that this is obtained is through the construction and maintenance of hedgerows, another fixture of enclosure, which transmutes 'bleak and shivering cold to genial warmth' (79). Warmth is found inside the circle of rural labour, much like the cottage to which a lost shepherd in the poem's first book, 'January', returns—a direct and intentional contrast to James Thomson's shepherd in 'Winter', who is also lost but is overcome by a brutal nature that freezes his internal organs. Again, Thomson gives the reader linearity—his shepherd never returns—and Grahame renders a society that musters an insular completeness as a defense to a threatening world.

Beyond the perimeter of Grahame's farm, vermin seek to attack, an echo from Virgil's *Georgics* where barns must be sealed up and every part explored (239). And yet, the poet subtly acknowledges that his bucolic peace has already been broken when he notes that the sound of the single flail in the threshing field reminds him that 'peace is not within our gates' (125-28); the thresher has been conscripted and sent to battle. This is not to say, though, that the rupture of an enclosed system always garners protest, for even as he praises the attributes of agricultural improvements, he also records the changes to the countryside with an unmistakable nostalgia:

By such resources so applied, I've seen,
As if it were, a new creation smile;
Have seen the clover, red and white, supplant
The purple heath-bell; rustling ears succeed
The dreary stillness of the lurid moor;
The glutton heifer lowing for the pail,
Where starving sheep picked up their scanty fare;
The sheltering hawthorn blossom, where the furze
Its rugged aspect reared; and I have heard,
Where melancholy plovers hovering screamed,
The partridge-call, at gloamin's lovely hour,
Far o'er the ridges break the tranquil hush;
And morning-larks ascend with songs of joy,
Where erst the whinchat chirped from stone to stone. (574-87)

The red and white clover, a staple crop of the enclosed farm, has displaced the purple heath-bell, and the morning-lark's song comes at the expense of the whinchat that once 'chirped from stone to stone,' leaving the assonance of that phrase a hollow echo of its voice. In the ideology of improvement, 'rustling' may be preferred to 'dreary stillness', and 'glutton heifers' over 'starving sheep', but a poignancy is registered in the absence of the rugged furze and the melancholy plover. Far from the waste and emptiness with which pre-enclosed land is usually described in, for instance, Arthur Young's *Annals of*

Agriculture, Grahame hints at a sorrow for the supplanted wilderness, imparting an emotional ambivalence. When enclosures '[w]ere rare,[...]every hill-side, every lea, / And broomy bank, was vocal with the notes / Of rustic pipe, or rudely chaunted rhymes' (1167-69). Bogs have been drained into fields leaving a 'joyless stubble ridge' where 'no more the heath-fowl her nestling brood fosters' (1236-41). The word consistently used to describe the absented foliage, wildlife and human labourers is 'exile'. Grahame's contradictory position may be thus: 'happy the enclosed farmer, but sad the farmer displaced by enclosure.'

The site of rural labour, this land that contains both gain and loss, producing more but experiencing its people's exile, requires a different kind of perceptive process than previous georgic writing. The eye is a dominant sensory organ in eighteenth-century poetry with its intimate connection to the mind's operation, whereas Grahame's travellers through the landscape are often blind. In the same breath that the poet describes the 'balmy odour' of flowery fields that grow beside acres of 'bearded grain' in 'June' (1392), a traveler passes through who is '[p]erhaps some veteran, whom Egyptian sands / Have reft of sight,' in the war, and wishes to 'behold these blooms, / Which now recal his father's little field' (1397-1404). Indeed, nostalgia may be Grahame's primary means of understanding an invading world beyond the limits of the Scottish farm. In a recent article, Kirsten Daly reads Grahame's *The Sabbath* (which he published five years before *British Georgics*) as imagining a Britain that has become a defensive fortress under attack by the French. Scotland, and I would add, the Scottish enclosed farm, has become, as Daly says, 'a citadel within a corrupt and menacing world'. Nostalgia enables the realization that, according to Daly, 'if the community is broken up, the land will be vulnerable to attack' (Daly: 33, 34).

To the poet's credit, nostalgia can help foreigners, as well, by binding life's wounds. At the end of 'February', after instructing the reader where to plant willows, he digresses to list the kinds of work that those unfit for farm labour can perform, such as weaving willows into wicker (690). One of these weavers is a blind French prisoner of war, whose 'wicker-work...almost seemed / To him a sort of play' (710). He, too, was a rural labourer on the 'willowy banks of Loire', and whose forced enlistment tears him from wife and child, causing him to wish 'For liberty and home, [to]...stretch [him]self and die upon [his wife's] grave' (730-31). Longing for home, working with one's hands, and sympathetically reacting to such a sentimental tale are all intended not only to heal a breach in the rural community, but also to extend the circle across national borders.

Still, as neatly tied as some moments appear in *British Georgics*, the work in its entirety, with its 100-plus pages of prosaic endnotes, begs the question of how one can talk poetically about rural labour, and further, how one can hope to unify the ideas of English and Scottish rural custom into a credible notion of the British nation. Grahame clearly struggles with this dilemma in his Preface:

[T]he modes of cultivation which I recommend are not, strictly speaking, *local*. That the scenery and manners *are local*, or rather *national*, is true; but the rules of agricultural improvement which I have inculcated, whether by description [in the poem] or by direct precept [in the endnotes], are equally suitable to both divisions of the island....With respect to the notes, which compose the concluding part

of this volume, I can safely say, that, in adding them, I have been induced, by a firm conviction that they would form a useful supplement to the poetical part of the work. In a composition partly didactic, it is often impossible to reconcile minuteness with poetry...When to these considerations is added this, - that allusions to manners and customs are, of all others, those which most generally require illustration, and that the manners and customs, which are the subjects either of allusion or description of the following poem, are many of them peculiar to one only of the united kingdoms, I trust that, in the judgment of every candid reader, I shall be acquitted of having practiced the unworthy device of increasing the bulk without adding to the value of my work. (v, vii-viii)

Francis Jeffrey disagreed. In his 1810 review, he found the poem fundamentally split between the 'legible' and the 'illegible', between the poetry and the prose explanations of customs and agricultural didactics. With the often tedious instruction on planting beans, selecting soil, fertilizing, or establishing hedgerows being simply unreadable for Jeffrey, the value of the work is in the 'reliable, true descriptions that come from personal, original feelings or sentiments'. As he strikes a playfully chauvinistic pose, Jeffrey ignores Grahame's effort to bring together the schism of the United Kingdom, and instead intones: '[T]he rustics of Scotland are a far more interesting race, and far fitter subjects for poetry than their brethren of the same condition in the South...To say all in a word, they are far less *brutish* than the great body of the English peasantry' (Jeffrey: 213, 216).

But the problem I find is that an abnegation of the worth of didactics in this poem denies the georgic's unique ability to define the nation out of disparate parts. Certainly, as L. P. Wilkinson reminds us in his introduction to Virgil's *Georgics*, the *Georgics* becomes the 'great poem of united Italy' through its shoring up of internal disunities—both politically and within its own textual apparatus (Wilkinson: 21). Grahame attempts the same mantle in naming his poem *British Georgics*. His speaking only of the Scottish countryside as a series of ethnic localities with traits that can be nationalized is then very much to the point.

Any time the georgic is read, there is always that problem of excess, those details and digressions that do not fit cleanly into what should be a purposeful scheme. Dr Johnson's faulting of Thomson's *The Seasons* for a 'want of method' (Kroeber: 96) is a case in point. In at least one moment, however, I suggest that Grahame's struggle to reconcile the minute with the poetic—and the poetic seems to signify for him and Jeffrey, the universal—he achieves a sophisticated success. In the poem's eighth book, 'August', he supplies what Jeffrey, and perhaps we too, might call tedious advice on how to redirect the path of a river in order to fertilize a field with its alluvial overflow of mud. The 'rich deposit' of nourishing, excessive soil will 'swell the compost pile' (2076) to give the farmer a plentiful store to fortify his crops. The endnote for this line credits the first book of Virgil's *Georgics*, where the farmer is advised to guide the river away from the corn so that the crop will not be overwhelmed. Grahame then quotes Dryden's translation that counsels the labourer to 'drain the standing waters, when they yield / Too large a beverage to the drunken field' (1.170). However, when Grahame follows these

selections with an excerpt from the 'Agriculture' entry in the Edinburgh Encyclopedia that describes how to utilize the 'fertilizing deposit which almost every overflowing river leaves,' he seizes the contemporary, prose literature of improvement from the Encyclopedia and marries it to the georgic poem for the purpose of making a contrast; he does not want to redirect the water away from his fields as in Virgil and Dryden, but he shows how to enrich the unseen and unused potential of the land. Excess is an important supplement that must not run off unused. In georgic poetry, then, as well as in husbandry, there is more than one can use at one time.

Attention to these notes permits an analysis of Grahame's careful characterization of rural life and labour in 1809. Perhaps the quintessential Virgilian georgic metaphor appropriated by Grahame is the care of bees, for they represent (in Dryden's translation) 'embattled squadrons, and adventurous kings - / A mighty pomp, though made of little things' (4.4-5). In *Georgics* IV, when the bees fly away to find 'sweet waters and leafy coverts', the farmer should scatter 'the scents of bruised balm, honeywort,' and 'raise a tinkling sound, and shake the Mighty Mother's cymbals round about,' a reference to the worship of Cybele that was accompanied by the clash of cymbals. But when the bees fly away in *British Georgics*, substituted for the cymbals are the village church bells on Sunday, perhaps a reference to his own poem *The Sabbath* as the exiles depart Scotland. In Virgil, the scents and cymbals can coax the bees' return. In Grahame, nothing can. The bees of *British Georgics* are called '[t]he emigrating tribe' that has 'gone past hope; / Nor, after anxious search o'er hill and dale, / Does e'er the slumberous owner hear again / Their welcome hum' (1731-34). They represent a local community that, instead of a Virgilian warring between states, gathered in a 'reeling dance' on 'these honied morns' before the crowded porch of their hive, evoking the images elsewhere in the poem of Highland dances. It is significant, then, that even the church bells ringing as they take wing cannot keep the bees at home. They vacate the country, leaving the legacy of the Virgilian georgic behind, just as the georgic genre itself has been left as a literary memory.

NOTES

¹ Dates of publication for these texts: Dryden's translation of *Virgil's Georgics*, 1697; John Philip's *Cyder*, 1708; Christopher Smart's *The Hop-Garden*, 1752; John Dyer's *The Fleece*, 1757; James Grainger's *The Sugar-Cane*, 1764. Anthony Low's *The Georgic Revolution* gives a detailed history of the georgic up to the eighteenth-century, with a broad discussion of canonical georgic text after Dryden. John Chalker's *The English Georgic* is the last monograph devoted to an eighteenth-century georgic history. Kurt Heinzelman brackets traditional eighteenth-century georgic from 1697 to 1764 (Grainger) or 1767 (Richard Jago's *Edge Hill*) in 'Roman Georgic in the Georgian Age: A Theory of Romantic Genre'.

² As a text, it is difficult to assert the strength of the poem's contemporaneous influence, since it was published in only four editions from 1809 to 1812 before its final printing in 1821. The British Library's printed catalogue shows that the first edition was published by Ballantyne in Edinburgh in 1809 and a second edition in 1812. However, I have

studied an 1811 Edinburgh edition as well (located at Johns Hopkins University). In 1821 another copy was printed with a new title page: *Rural poem illustrative of the husbandry, scenery and manners of Scotland, or British Georgics*.

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Book Reviews

Scottish Life and Society 10. A Compendium of Scottish Ethnology: Oral Literature and Performance Culture. Eds. John Beech, Owen Hand, Fiona MacDonald, Mark A. Mulhern and Jeremy Weston. Edinburgh. John Donald (Birlinn) in association with The European Ethnological Research Centre. 2007. ISBN 10: 0 85976 679 9. ISBN 13: 978 085976 679. pp 616 £45 (Hardback).

This book is the tenth in a series of 14 volumes dedicated to providing a body of ethnological knowledge about Scottish Life and Society at all periods, as the series title clearly states. At the time of publishing five other volumes in the series had already appeared, dealing with areas such as Buildings (Vol. 3), Domestic Life (Vol. 6), The Individual and Community Life (Vol. 9), Education (Vol. 11). The last volume (14) provides a bibliography for Scottish Ethnology. The aims of this ambitious project are well realised in this volume, with thirty-two essays altogether, divided into three parts: One: Narrative and Verse; Two: Song and Music; and Three: Dance and Drama, thereby encompassing comprehensively most of the genres of popular oral culture. Only slight overlaps appear in this format, and even these are approached differently by the various contributors, so that they complement each other rather than going over the same ground a second time.

Scotland as an entity, presents something of an anomaly, a fact pointed out acerbically by Ian Olson in the following observation:

...Scotland...ceased to exist as an independent nation from the earlier part of the seventeenth century.... Scotland has largely existed as a country of the mind....The reality of her current existence as a post-industrial society, increasingly Anglified (and Americanised), with a Gaelic-speaking population that would scarcely fill one medium-sized town, is, however, seldom, if ever, reflected in the various 'Scotlands' of the mind' (379).

These Scotlands of the mind, indeed, repeatedly come to the fore in this volume, although the contributors deal with the challenges presented by such imagined representations admirably, always reverting to trustworthy sources for their information and clearly distinguishing between romantic constructions of the 'traditional' and the facts. Nevertheless, the papers also acknowledge the important influence of these imagined Scotlands on cultural directions. Consequently, it was somewhat surprising to read in the Foreword by Alexander Fenton that 'Scotland, unlike the Netherlands, has not felt the urgencies and dislocations of war for many centuries' (xvii). While Scotland was not a direct theatre of conflict in the twentieth century, given the effects of Culloden, and the strong military traditions that continue to the present in the Highlands, this is a surprising statement, and one that has been recently challenged by Mairhead Challan in an excellent study of North Uist folklore. Here, she attributes the breakdown in transmission of oral culture in part

directly to the adverse effects of both the First and Second World Wars on returned soldiers, using evidence obtained from local inhabitants to support her claim.¹

Fiona MacDonald leads off in Part One with a discussion of narrative collection and scholarship in Scotland, including both Highland Gaelic and Lowland traditions. She claims that narrative collection was badly served in Lowland Scotland because academics assumed that storytelling had died out there. The Northern Isles have yielded a greater wealth of narrative than elsewhere and have been given a chapter of their own, also by MacDonald (3). MacDonald gives a brief but comprehensive survey of directions in folk narrative collection in Europe and how these impacted the Scottish endeavour. Deservedly, John Francis Campbell's *Popular Tales* is extensively discussed and its enduring value reaffirmed. John Shaw's chapter on Storytellers (ch. 2) represents a welcome focus on the performer as distinct only from the material performed. This brief chapter gives a tantalizing insight into many of the questions that arise from performer-centred study and prompts questions that others must answer with more detailed studies of storytellers, repertoires and contexts. Shaw discusses both Gaelic and Lowland, and especially traveller traditions, in this essay. His chapter on Scottish Narrative Overseas (ch. 5) may be read as an extension of this. Traveller narrative is authoritatively discussed in greater detail by Sheila Douglas in chapter four. She gives a fascinating insight into the geographic range of sources for traveller stories and reveals instances of transference from Gaelic to English, pointing to items occurring in both from different sources. She also addresses the difficulties of analysis, editing and presentation of oral material in written form. Ideally one would have liked more discussion on this topic, as the terse comment, 'difficulty was experienced in deciding where one episode ended and another began' (55), no doubt conceals a well of experience from which others could richly benefit.

The magisterial contribution of John MacInnes provides one of the highlights of the book for the student of Gaelic material. His light, assured touch conceals a deep and complex knowledge of the subject and again, one finds oneself wishing for more. As well as a discussion of Ulster and Ossianic Cycles, MacInnes gives us a fascinating insight into 'late realistic legends that offer us vignettes of notable men and accounts of feuds and vendettas, [in which]...Men and women equally are real persons in real places, not pale reflections of humanity in shadowy landscapes' (71). The value of MacInnes' discussion of 'Gaelic historical tradition' (73) is complemented in chapter ten by Dòmhnall Uilleam Stiùbhart. This essay presents an up-to-date survey of the problems and opportunities of sources and methods for the use of oral materials in Scottish history. Stiùbhart argues cogently for the inclusion of frequently neglected oral material into historiography, claiming that it elucidates 'broader historical patterns' (137) and that the abundance of written sources contributes further to the marginalisation of such material from mainstream history (138). A sense of frustration is evident in the final statement: '...given the extreme paucity of historians competent in the native language of the people they study, it may be some time before Gàidhealtachd historiography is affected by any linguistic turn' (139).

Sandy Hobbs and Gordon McCulloch address the question of urban legends in chapter 9, discussing the range of the term 'legend' itself and how it may be interpreted. They discuss non-narrative aspects of legend belief (120) and conclude that legend narratives constitute the rhetorical expression of belief concepts, a claim which would

¹ Challan, Maighread. *Sealladh air Leantalachd Beul-Aithris Ghàidhlig Uibhist a Tuath*. M. Phil. School of Scottish Studies, University of Edinburgh 2007.

seem to link legends close to genres such as the proverb – discussed by Fionnuala Carson Williams in chapter 12. Among other themes, Barbara Hiller's contribution on the International Folktale in Scotland in chapter 11 valuably focuses on gender in folktale performance, giving brief vignettes of two noted storytellers, Nan MacKinnon of Vatersay, and Betsy Whyte of the Perthshire travelling community. Moreover, she also relates the story of Mrs. Campbell of South Uist's deathbed recitation of an Ossianic lay (162). Similar deathbed performances have been noted for Ireland, reinforcing our knowledge of the close affinity between performance traditions.² Betsy Whyte's maternal Gaelic background meant that her repertoire contained items from that tradition, confirming Sheila Douglas' discovery of transmission across the language boundary, and challenging Delargy's assertion for Ireland that very little material ever crossed the linguistic divide.³ Interestingly, traveller storytellers in Ireland, such as Mickey Greene and Paddy Sherlock, also seem to have acted as conduits through which material crossed over from Irish to English.⁴

Chapters 7 and 8 are dedicated to Gaelic verse, with John MacInnes and Donald Meek explaining 'how' both panegyric verse and township verse 'mean'.⁵ These two chapters link the section on verse and narrative to the second section on music and song, since much of the verse discussed in them is, in fact, sung. This is borne out by the fact that fully half of the fourteen essays in section two contain the word 'song' in their titles. The other seven deal with themes such as diversity, education and there are three detailed organological surveys on the iconic instruments, pipes, fiddle and clàrsach (harp). In chapter 24, John MacInnes, in his third essay, discusses the famous *òrain luaidh* and other work songs, effectively a continuation of and complement to his earlier chapters on Gaelic hero tales and panegyric verse. MacInnes suggests here that Clan Donald's influence over cultural life in the area of Skye and the Western Isles may have influenced the continuity of the waulking song tradition there when it had fallen into abeyance in other places. His discussion of the term *luinneag* claims that it might specifically refer to women's verse as a name for light, short song – a ditty. His summary of the semantic range of the term *iorram* is equally clear and lucid.

In chapter 14, Peter Cooke takes up the traveller theme again in a discussion of traveller music, describing this minority group as an underclass that faced much prejudice from the settled community. This is a fascinating essay dealing with many musical questions, one of the most interesting being the 'rhapsodic' style of Martha Johnstone (Peasie), thought to be the last exponent of this kind of singing style, 'improvising on a variable melody to a memorized or variable text' (221). Such a style was also known in Ireland, among singers such as Séamas Ó hÍghne from Gleann Cholm Cille and others. Certainly, it is arguable that this style was linked to oral transmission, and with the greater access to literacy and the greater fixity that attends it, such a style might be expected to decline. Other factors for change are mentioned; the promotion of travellers as exponents of traditional story and song by

² See Ó Madagáin, Breandán, 'Functions of Irish Folksong in the Nineteenth Century' *Béaloideas* 53 (1985) and Ó Laoire, Lillis *On a Rock in the Middle of the Ocean: Songs and Singers in Tory Island*. Cló Iar-Chonnachta: Indreabhán, 2007, for Irish examples and discussion.

³ Delargy, James H. 'The Gaelic Story-Teller with some notes on Gaelic Folk-Tales,' *Proceedings of the British Academy* 31, 1945: 1-47.

⁴ Ní Fhloinn, Bairbre, 'Generations of Traveller Talent.' *The Irish Times*. 9 December 2006. See Ó Duilearga, Séamus, 'Paddy Sherlock's Stories' *Béaloideas* 30: 1-76.

⁵ Foley, John Miles. *How To Read an Oral Poem..* Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois Press 2002: 10.

those who were recording their repertoires undoubtedly accelerated change. Cooke gives the last pessimistic word to Ewan MacColl and Peggy Seeger, who believed that traveller culture had been completely undermined by such change and the coming of mass media. It is difficult to assess whether Cooke agrees fully with these statements or not.

The three chapters on Pipes, Fiddle and Harp (15, 16 and 17) give historical overviews of the origins and spread of the instruments in Scotland. Indeed, these essays will be invaluable, not just for Scottish students, but for all students of the folk music of Britain and Ireland. Kinnaird and Sanger's discussion of the *clàrsach* discusses the origins of the Gaelic terminology, stating that *cruit*, the older term for a stringed instrument, was more widespread in Ireland, whereas Scotland used the term *clàrsach* exclusively (275). *Cruit* was indeed used in Ireland, but both *clàrsach* and *clàirseach* were also widely used, perhaps more in the north than in the south. The availability of more linguistic resources suggests that the geographical distribution of these terms is due for re-examination.⁶

The section is instructive for an Irish reader with an interest in music and song. One is struck both by the similarities and differences among the early collectors of the two areas for example, their assumptions and hopes, the material they gathered and the problems of interpreting that material nowadays. In Ireland, Edward Bunting was the first important field collector of music and song. Although he knew no Gaelic, he hired a scholar, Patrick Lynch, to write down the words. Bunting's melodies are often difficult to interpret for the same reasons as those given for the Scottish material. As Morag MacLeod states in chapter 26, pointing out the difference between the brothers Patrick and Joseph MacDonald, among the most important early collectors: 'Patrick MacDonald's *Collection* contained melodies with Gaelic titles attached. His brother Joseph had made a strong attempt to depict the melodies of poems with irregular stress just as he had heard them, keeping to the rhythms used by the singers...Patrick admits that he put them into equal bars...this makes it extremely difficult to be certain of the basic tune' (440). Presumptions also abounded that, because singers were illiterate, their performances were inaccurate, revealing the eternal tension between the two modes, one which continues to the present, although nowadays, the opposite is invariably held to be the case: that the challenges in acquiring material originally orally transmitted from a written text lead to various kinds of disjuncture. Happily for Scotland, such difficulties were overcome by the likes of the great Frances Tolmie (1840-1926), who spoke and wrote Gaelic, was musically literate and under no illusion about the singers' abilities to reproduce material accurately. Given the restrictions of the time, her collection still provides an exemplary model, comparable to collections made by A.M. Freeman and Mrs. Eileen Costello in Ireland around the same period⁷ and followed by the monumental achievements of J.L. Campbell and Francis Collinson, who benefited from the advantages of sound-recording technology. The similarity between the early twentieth century Scottish and Irish collections is traceable to the Folksong movement, which did much to enhance an understanding of vernacular singing forms and styles, and which deeply influenced perceptions of folk song in Britain and Ireland down to the present. Later, of course,

⁶ *Corpas na Gaeilge 1600-1882* (The Irish Language Corpus). Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 2004.

⁷ Costello, Eileen, *Amhráin Mhuighe Seola*. Dublin: Talbot Press 1923; Freeman, A.M. 'Irish Songs from Ballyvourney'. *Journal of the Folk-Song Society* 6/23-25: vii-xxviii, 1920-22: 95-342. .

the Irish Folklore Commission was instrumental in stimulating further interest in folklore collection, especially in the Western Isles, where storytelling and poetry composition had remained living art-forms well into the 1950s. Calum Maclean, a prodigious worker, was hired in the 1940s to collect for the Irish institution, before eventually leaving to take up employment in the newly established School of Scottish Studies in 1951 (18-19).

Josephine Miller argues that the study of learning and teaching of music is important for understanding the music itself in chapter 18. She points out the move from informal learning contexts to informal classroom setting over the second half of the twentieth century. Difficulties with terms such as 'community', 'place' and 'folk' are pointed out as their meaning shifts and as they are adapted, interpreted through academic and commercial discourse. Miller also gives a short summary of the very successful model for transmitting music and song of the Gaelic *Fèisean* movement, with thirty-six of these festivals in 2004-5 instructing almost 5000 participants. Miller calls for more critical study of methods of teaching and learning used at these festivals. Also in this chapter is a discussion of the more formal context of learning music within the education system. The anomaly that most formal music education teaches the Western Classical canon whereas much greater numbers of students learn traditional music in the informal sector is pointed out, but Miller warns against the trend of placing all traditional music education under the authority of formal structures (300). In fact, she notes the need for all sectors to 'work together...to provide the best experience for those who want to learn' (300).

Section three, chapters 28 to 32, includes areas that did not fit easily into other sections, encompassing essays on classical music and Scottish identity, the folklore of children (especially games), dance, theatre and folk drama.

One senses from some of the papers an abiding sense of frustration that, because Scotland inheres largely in the imagination, its people often refuse to take their own popular cultural achievements seriously. Furthermore, it seems that the pride taken in popular and oral traditions may be a reaction to external domination and feelings of exclusion. If this is the case, it has served Scotland well, and its traditions seem set to continue robustly in the era of devolution. Indeed, one wonders how developments emerging from the new dispensation will affect Scotland's oral and popular cultures from now on.

On the whole, this monumental collection of essays provides a good introduction to Scottish folk culture, striking an even balance between Highland and Lowland cultures and frequently identifying areas of commonality between them. For academics and for lovers of Scotland's heritage of narrative, song, music and dance, it will become an indispensable resource, containing a rich trove of information, thought-provoking analysis and valuable up to date bibliographies for those wishing to conduct further investigation.

LILLIS Ó LAOIRE

The Gaelic Otherworld. John Gregorson Campbell's Superstitions of the Highlands and Islands of Scotland and Witchcraft and Second Sight in the Highlands and Islands. Ed. Ronald Black. Birlinn, 2005. ISBN: 1841582077 (pbk.). xciii, 753 pp.: ill., maps.

The Gaelic Otherworld presents two of Campbell's best-known works, annotated with extensive commentary by the editor. The volume is prefaced by a substantial introductory essay. The publication of this volume is a major event in Gaelic letters; Campbell's work has long deserved to be exhumed, made more accessible and placed in a modern context. At the same time, anything appearing in print by Ronald Black, one of the most distinguished, versatile and widely-respected Gaelic scholars, is indispensable reading for those with an interest in the field.

This is a substantial piece of work, extending to well over 700 pages. Black's 82 page introduction provides not only the background necessary for an appreciation of the source material, but is itself a wide-ranging piece of academic writing which makes its own highly valuable contribution to the field. Black makes only minor changes to the structure of both books. His main aim lies in restoring the Gaelic content of these two volumes, prioritising the language over English. We learn that it was not Campbell's fault that the Gaelic originals were left out of the quoted texts, rather that this was the decision of his publisher. Black's inclusion of extensive passages in Gaelic brings, as we might expect, new vitality, richness and insight to the material. Black is very interested in how Campbell himself spoke and used Gaelic, and this aspect receives very close scrutiny and is highly revealing. Black develops the themes of Campbell's orthography and dialect in substantial – one might say loving – detail. His aim is to preserve as much as possible of the language that Campbell used, whilst repairing inconsistencies. Black is splendidly opinionated as regards certain aspects of modern Gaelic and clearly delights in comparing these with the language of Campbell's time, taking swipes here and there at what he regards as today's careless usages and awkward neologisms.

Herein lies something of the unique and memorable impact of Black's writing; his reputation leaves us in no doubt that he knows what he is talking about, but he chooses to communicate his insights not through charmless and laboured academese but rather with a certain archness and lack of pretension which is refreshing, stimulating and a delight to read.

Another of Black's chief aims is to correct the numerous misprints in the original, and Black devotes considerable space to detailing these, whether in Gaelic or English. Campbell's own handwriting was to blame in many cases, including one rather alarming confusion of 'wine' for 'urine'.

Having dealt with the language, Black moves on to offer his own commentary on the material contained in Campbell's texts. His contextualising of fairy belief is masterful, and he makes a convincing case that Robert Kirk was the principal author of *A Collection of Highland Rites and Customs*, itself something of a breakthrough in understanding the dynamics of the authorship of these and other early folklore studies. In his discussion of Campbell's source material in the Introduction, here again we find not the usual endlessly-qualified and hedged-about 'it could be argued' kind of academic writing, but rather a robust, racy, free-ranging and at times blatantly provocative analysis of the narratives. The section dealing with changelings is a case in point; at times one may not be completely convinced of the perspective offered, but it is impossible not to be swept along by the sheer exuberance and verve of the writing. Black is often cheerfully controversial and thinks nothing of interrupting the flow of his narrative with such interjections as 'Water-horse my foot. This was a real man' (xliv). He can also startle through his use of powerful imagery, as evidenced in his discussion of female fairy narratives, where he notes that, 'In a society which portrayed itself in words and music instead of oils, they represent women's paintings of themselves in their pain' (lv).

The remainder of the book is devoted to Campbell's restored texts, the editor's commentaries and a biography. The critical analysis by Black is truly impressive and on a scale which dwarfs that typically encountered in volumes of this kind. In over 200-plus densely-packed pages he offers insight, illumination and guidance on a huge variety of topics; etymology, geography, flora and fauna, architecture – all in extraordinary detail. If an alternate version of a tale is known, Black will take the time to quote at length. Rarely is an allusion, motif, place-name or genealogy left unexplored; obscure manuscripts are mined, yellowing letters located and dusted off. The book concludes with Black's biography of Campbell, another highly useful, substantial and much-needed contribution to the field. Again, a combination of Black's wide-ranging approach, prose style and extensive quotation from hard-won sources, allows the reader the opportunity to become steeped in the material, to become immersed in the intellectual world Campbell inhabited. We encounter letters, verses, close textual analysis of three different versions of a manuscript excerpt. So it is with Black's writing; the reader is led unexpectedly here and there, vistas opened up. Above all, the depth of knowledge Black displays ensures that the reader will have cause to reflect on the pioneering importance of Campbell's work, its utility in the modern day, and by extension the nature of the culture's distinctiveness.

The Gaelic Otherworld is a remarkable achievement. Reading Campbell's material alongside Black's extensive commentary offers an endlessly fascinating journey of re-engagement with the belief system and mentalities of the time. In creating this scholarly experience, Black does justice to the original author's intentions, making accessible and revivifying that which was shrouded in layers of dusty Victoriana. There is an enormous amount of material here, and in savouring its substantial bulk, those of us with a specific interest in the field of supernatural belief owe Ronald Black a debt of gratitude. However, anyone with a love of the language or culture will find endless opportunities to deepen and enrich their understanding and appreciation. This book is far more than an authoritative re-presentation of old folklore volumes; it is a masterful, thought-provoking meditation on the culture itself. Of immense value to scholars and general readers alike, *The Gaelic Otherworld* is easily the most comprehensive, detailed and inspired analysis of Gaelic folklore published in modern times.

NEILL MARTIN

Parallels Between Celtic and Slavic: Proceedings of the First International Colloquium of 'Societas Celto-Slavica', Eds. trs. Séamus Mac Mathúna and Maxim Fomin. Held at the University of Ulster, Coleraine, 19-21 June 2005. (*Studia Celto-Slavica* 1.) Coleraine: The Stationery Office, 2006. ISBN 0-33-708836-5. xiv + 334 pp. GBP 30 USD 60 EUR 50.

Rarely does a book on Celtic Studies stir the imagination as much as this one. It implies Celts and Slavs share more than one might think. It has eighteen chapters, as follows: Séamus Mac Mathúna learnedly describes Russian Celticists past and present; Piotr Stalmaszczyk does the same for their modern Polish confrères. Both give ample bibliographies for their themes. The late Viktor Kalygin discusses K. H. Schmidt's hypothesis on the eastern origin of the Celts. Respect for his erudition is jolted by the remark (69) that the Pennine Hills have a name 'from the Celtic word for

head, *penno-'. This is misleading. Kalygin never knew that the form Pennine is a recent one, due to the English literary forger Charles Bertram (1723-65). See *The Cambridge Dictionary of English Place-Names*. Ed. V. E. Watts. Cambridge (2004): 467.

Alexander Falileyev, in a note on the Ukrainian contribution to Holder's *Alt-celtische Sprachschatz*, stresses the evidence for Celtic settlement in the Ukraine (when there is very little for Russia). Václav Blažek sets out equivalents in Slavic mythology to the Irish divine names Dagdae and Macha. He also discusses Pwyll (whose name means 'sense') in the Four Branches of the Mabinogi and his namesakes in Czech tradition. Although noting that Pwyll is chosen by his bride, Rhiannon, Blažek is silent on Pwyll's curious passivity and *lack of sense*. (For an explanation of that strange courtship and Pwyll's stranger ineptness, see this reviewer's *Medieval Welsh Literature*: 75.)

Folke Josephson compares prefixes of Old Irish and Slavic verbs; Anna Bondaruk outlines typology of control in Irish and Polish; Elena Parina discusses direct object double-marking or pronominal reprise in Celtic and South Slavic; Viktor Bayda explores the ways Irish and Russian show possession. In a short but striking paper, Anna Muradova is illuminating on a Breton vocabulary in Catherine the Great's proposed 'dictionary of all the languages of the world'. This project was directed by the German scholar Peter Simon Pallas (1741-1811), explorer of Siberia and elsewhere in the Russian Empire; an investigator of heroic mould. The paper perhaps implies there was more interest in Breton at St Petersburg than in Brittany. Nevertheless, the Empress's enlightened patronage of linguistics helped raise the status of Breton in the 1960s, when scholars in Brittany drew attention to it. Such are the long-term blessings of disinterested research.

John Carey's 'Russia, Cradle of the Gael' looks at supposed Irish and Scottish origins in Scythia. Tatyana Mikhailova compares names in Russian and Irish incantations. Dean Miller contrasts Cú Chulainn with Ilya of Murom, antagonist of Prince Vladimir, ruler of Kiev. Grigory Bondarenko's "'Knowledge in the Clouds" in Old Irish and Old Russian', finding parallels in prophetic dialogues associated with Bran and the twelfth-century *Lay of Igor's Campaign*, refers to the 'shamanic flight' of their authors. Nina Chekhonadskaya writes on disruption of feasts in the saga of Mac Dátho's Pig and Russian epic. Maxim Fomin furthers discussion on early Ireland and India. After noting Kim McCone's revisionist challenges to the work of Myles Dillon and D. A. Binchy, Fomin speaks of how society in each land accepted religious change. He considers this, rather than the survival in both of Indo-European archaisms in kingship and government, to be the appropriate subject for researchers. Indian rulers had to take on board the ethics of Buddhism: Irish kings had to rethink their role as regards Christianity. Fomin thinks that, by seeing matters in this context, common political desiderata such as 'abundance' and 'moral uprightness' will make more sense.

Frank Sewell writes on recent poetry in Ulster and Russia. Hildegard Tristram's concluding remarks 'What's in Celto-Slavonica?' stress the bulk of material on Celtic Studies from Slavic lands, little of it known in the West. She goes on to define lines of research under the headings of contrastive studies, aspects of contact, and common inheritance. The volume ends with an obituary of V. P. Kalygin (1950-2004) and a list of publications by that brave philological pioneer.

There is much to admire in this truly ground-breaking volume. Worthy of praise is the emphasis on traditional linguistic science, something now (one feels) out of favour in British universities, but evidently flourishing in Ireland and the Slavic

countries. Both are heirs to the great philologists of nineteenth-century Europe. It is thus perhaps no surprise that visitors from Moscow or Lublin found their hosts in Coleraine speaking the same methodological language. This may be because Ireland and Russia are old-fashioned places, where change comes late; or because philological study and linguistic nationalism have long been friends. A future International Colloquium of Societas Celto-Slavica may find the latter a fertile subject. It would bring together vast swathes of modern European history, in which literary romanticism, having sown a crop of romantic legends, reaped a harvest of intransigent nationalism. In this tremendous movement the poets were aided by professors of philology, with their grammar-books and glossaries. The subject is a promising one for Celts and Slavs alike.

After praise, criticism. Some will be pained at the book's general implication that Celtic = Irish. Celts in (say) Scotland and Wales may feel aggrieved that it says so little on their countries. Some contributors to it apologize for not referring more to work by Czechs, Slovaks, Slovenes, Croats, Serbs or Bulgarians. (Hungarians and Romanians, being non-Slavs, are just ignored.) Yet one finds nothing on those lines as regards Scotland, Wales or Cornwall. But then Pan-Slavism is strong: Pan-Celticism is weak. This also merits analysis.

Parallels Between Celtic and Slavic is hence far from being a quixotic or eccentric venture. It touches upon basic questions of language, culture, and historical identity. Future volumes in the series could therefore have very interesting things indeed to say on Celts and Slavs, peoples who from each part of their continent have been crucial in shaping its destiny.

ANDREW BREEZE

Bondagers. Ian McDougall. Flashbacks No.10. East Linton: Tuckwell Press in association with the European Ethnological Research Centre and the Scottish Working People's History Trust, 2000. ISBN 1862321221. xvi, 240 p., [12] p. of plates : ill., ports.

This is a collection of oral recollections of interviews conducted on behalf of the Scottish Working People's History Trust with eight women involved as agricultural workers in the Borders and Midlothian between the end of WWI and the early 1960s. These memories provide an insight into aspects of childhood, schooldays, working families and the women's personal fulfilments and hopes. It is a fascinating account of the lives of women who worked on the land for long hours and in all weathers and is also a retrospective account of other family members.

The term 'bondager', as Ian McDougall indicates in the introduction, applies to full-time women farm outworkers or field workers in the south-east of Scotland. Most of these women came from families connected with the land. Some of their mothers had been bondagers in their youth, and many of their fathers and brothers had worked as ploughmen (or 'hinds' as they were known). The women and young girls were bonded or hired by farmers for a term of engagement along with fathers and brothers for a year at a time. If the engagement ended or was not mutually renewed, then the bondager might have to seek employment at a hiring fair. One of the interviewees, Jean Leid, remembers her experience of the hiring fairs at Earlston:

Earlston hirin' wis always the last Monday in February ...jist outside the Corn Exchange. Sawdust on the flair: the auld fermers - spit, spit. Oh, there was a lot o' womenfolk there, bondagers...And then the fermers they yaised tae take them tae the pub and gie them five shillin' and that was their erles. Oh, ah aye ca'ed them 'erles'. And that was the bond.

'Erles' were an advance on the wages of the bondagers. As part of their wage it was normal for the women to be paid in kind with a `ton of tatties'. Wages paid to the women in the early 1920s varied between 14s and 22s per week. When Edith Hope became a bondager in 1929, she earned £4 a week. `My fither had bargained fort or ah widnae ha' gotten't . Oh there were some o' the bondagers no' gettin' that. But ah got £4 a week'. As Iain McDougall indicates, the passing of the Agricultural Wages (Regulations)(Scotland) Act in 1937 led to the disappearance of the hiring fairs and of the long (yearly) engagements.

It is obvious from some of the interviews that a few of the women had yearnings to become nurses during the First World War rather than work on the land. Regretfully they never had the opportunity, as the pattern of their lives was determined by the necessity to remain close to home at this time and become financially supportive to their immediate families. As Margaret Moffat says, `but, ee see, well, in thae days ee had tae work because ee had tae help the family oot. Ah'd be fourteen when ah left Eckford School'. She in fact went into domestic service, working for the local minister's wife. At the age of seventeen, she became a bondager working alongside her brothers. As she recalls, she had no say in it:

Ah wis never asked when Dan and George were hired at Bankheid. They wanted somebody, ee see, jist if they had a wumman tae work on the farm. Oh, ah wisnae consulted.

The work she did on the farm involved harvesting, haymaking and the singling and shawing of turnips.

Unlike the women of the Land Army in the Second World War who were supplied with their uniform, bondagers had to buy or make their own working clothes, which consisted of a striped druggit skirt, an apron and a blouse, plus a pair of tackety boots. A headscarf was worn round the neck or head and a straw hat protected the head. The hat was bought. As Margaret Moffat remembers, `Ee didnae make the hats eersel. They wis 1 s.6d. when ee bought them. That wis quite a lot o' money in thae days.'

Recollections such as these convey also details of the conditions of labour expected of these women. Some girls started work straight from school, with no idea how hard the work would be. Margaret Paxton remembers her first experience of singling turnips:

Jim Turner wis the steward and sent me tae single maself. The band wis further back in the field. And ah'd never singled before. And he showed me how tae single. So it was awfy...ee ken, when ah'd been a long time singlin' ah could hardly take my hands off the how (hoe)!

She also recalls an amusing account from her experience at Yetholm Mains:

Oo started at six and we got oor breakfast in the fields at half past seven. We didnae come back tae the steading for it. Ah took my piece wi' me - two

slices o' bread - and a wee tin tea bottle wi' tea. Well, ah've seen us havin' cheese. ... And there was one day ah thought ah wid take a change and put potted meat on it... And here ma tea bottle had been too hot, ee see, and it had been agin the bread. And it melted the potted meat! So it wis a kind o' gravy ahl got! So ah didnae dae that again.

Many of the women enjoyed the relative freedom of being out in the fields and not cooped up working indoors. During harvest time there were opportunities to socialise at the local dances. It was often there that they met their future partners. Bondagers stopped working once they got married - 'that was usual'. While some were married young, others like Jean Leid worked for thirty-eight years on different farms before leaving to get married at the age of fifty-two. She enjoyed her life in the outdoors - 'ah never wanted tae dae nithing else'. However not all of the women interviewed were as contented and worked for only a few years as bondagers. Agnes Blackie, for example, preferred her work in domestic service, which she did for forty-eight years. 'I didn't really enjoy farm work at all. Well, I think - shawin' turnips in these cold, cold bitter mornings. No. I jist never was happy working on the farm'.

The book is divided into eight chapters in which Ian McDougall presents the lives of each woman as a flowing narrative of direct speech. Speaking directly in their own words which reflect the hard graft of their lives, these women recount their stories in a forthright manner and in straightforward terms. Some readers might find the dialect a little hard to comprehend at first, but as they become immersed, will find themselves responding to the richness and diversity of the Scots language as it is spoken. They include personal thoughts on their work, their employers and fellow workers.

A useful glossary is included as an aid for those who might find some of the meanings of words and expressions perplexing. Altogether this is an enthralling book, well illustrated with photographs from the Scottish Life Archive, as well as photographs from private collections. It is an excellent addition to the ever growing 'Flashback' series of oral history and personal reminiscence under the general editorship of Alexander Fenton.

JANE GEORGE

A West Wind to East Bay: A Short History and A Genealogical Tracing of the Pioneer Families Of the East Bay Areas of Cape Breton. A.J. MacMillan. Music Hill Publications, P.O. Box 1612, Sydney, Nova Scotia, Canada, B1P 6R8, 2001. Printed by The Casket Printing & Publishing Co., Antigonish, NS. Hard-cover, 652 pages, with 22 additional unpaginated pp. of 86 black & white photographs; 3 maps; 6 appendices and bibliography. \$50.00 Cdn.

There is no intimate knowing of Gaelic Cape Breton without knowledge of family history and Fr. Allan MacMillan's *A West Wind to East Bay* is his second remarkable work on the subject. The first dealt with Boisdale (*To the Hill of Boisdale*, 1986, 1987, 2001); this one, along the same lines, deals with the Gaelic-speaking Scots who settled in the East Bay area. Both works fall into a Nova Scotian writing, and later also publishing, category which goes back for about a century and which

includes, where Scotch Highlanders are concerned, the works of *Sagart Arasaig* (Fr A. MacGillivray), John L. MacDougall, A.A. MacKenzie, A.D. MacDonald, Stephen R. MacNeil, John Colin Big John (MacDonald), and many others. Like all of them, MacMillan is a bilingual Gaelic speaker (who knows other languages), one of a valued but fast-disappearing group in Cape Breton.

His is one of the last voices of a rural folk whose language and consciousness once were commonplace from Cape Breton to New Caledonian (BC). This book deals with families under 28 headings, and as all genealogies must, strays to all sorts of corners. The pioneers he describes, and many of their descendants, lived, and live still (some of them), within a clearly defined area which had East Bay on the Bras d'Or lake as its parish focal point.

In its own quietly first-person way, *A West Wind to East Bay* is primary material of an invaluable sort. As a whole, it adds to the understanding of the wider Gaelic world of the ordinary man and woman, the folk who, in their thousands, had to vacate their beloved ancestral homes. A prominent component running naturally through the work is the recurrent movement of Scottish Gaels to Prince Edward Island first and thence to the East Bay area of Cape Breton, often to the forest backlands. From the 1880s, the imprint of the travelling Gael is repeatedly traced to the north-east of the United States.

Perhaps an equivalent in the literature of Gaelic Scotland is found in the works of people like *Iain Òg Ìle* (John Francis Campbell of Islay), John Lorne Campbell and Calum Maclean who sought out and recorded cultural gems, often from shy, retiring people whose gifts had for decades been overlooked if not derogated as useless fancy, even lies.

But MacMillan's (and the others') work is different, simpler one might think, in a way – 'What could be in a collection of genealogies?' some might ask. Yet, when carefully assessed, it shows its own richness and importance. Unless you read books like this, the records that remain in Scotland of the ordinary folk in Morar, Moidart, Arisaig, South Uist and Barra and other places leave countless unimaginable gaps. The New World haunts the Old and in the most mannerly and understated way. The more one reads through the well-presented histories of generations of people, and the reported and personal vignettes sprinkled here and there, the more one imagines the extent of what once must have been, not just in Clanranald lands, but in almost every Highland community.

This book puts people back where they once lived. It measures a step to explaining the shielings on long-deserted hillsides. It plays a part in explaining the ancient field patterns still traceable in the once-farmed valley bottoms at Glenfinnan and Glen Uig. For an emigrant who has seen empty glens, the book is often anguishingly sad. Fr MacMillan's simple words on the clearances run, 'The pattern is familiar: scarcity of land, lack of tenure, people forced to move from place to place, from arable land to the rocks, and finally across the ocean' (424).

And it isn't only ordinary folk. Unselfconsciously the book includes people from all but the highest level of Highland society. It includes, perhaps, information that sometime may add to an as-yet unconstructed passenger list of the Captain John emigration to Prince Edward Island in 1772. It includes independent mention, from an oral source, of the Corbetts, elsewhere known as imported ship builders. Added to an ever-growing list are the names of immigrant pipers and fiddlers, and there is included the plausible suggestion that a MacCrimmon piper was teaching piping long after Lt Donald had moved to London and Black John, his brother, was dead. Then there is a lovely cameo of Ailean 'The Gardiner' Cameron, whose

kindly and civilised bearing was impervious to the harsh world of forest clearing in Highland Cape Breton. The genetic path from Donald MacDonald, a Captain John emigrant on the ship *Alexander*, to Ludwig Saleski's wife's son, the famous Canadian hockey player, Donald Patrick Saleski, is a surprise - one of many of the sort which tracks the fate of Gaels in the New World.

A recent article in *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries* throws scholarly light on the Glenaladale who had the monument in Glenfinnan built. *A West Wind to East Bay* on the other hand adds a Glenfinnan (MacDonald) name to those who found Castle Bay, Cape Breton, via Prince Edward Island. Maybe not a typical comparison of the offerings from either side of the Atlantic, but one that does not disfavour Allan MacMillan's labours. Like many another publication about Highland folk, *A West Wind to East Bay* was self-funded. It is the fruit of work done meticulously over many years, sorted and collated on the kitchen and dining-room tables in the old Empire-style glebe in Judique. It commemorates a once-flourishing oral record. Allan MacMillan is well-known as a thorough collector who balances his reliance on family memory with careful work in the written record.

JOHN GIBSON

The Book of the Cailleach. Stories of the Wise-Woman Healer. Gearóid Ó Cruaíoch. Cork: Cork University Press 2003. xvi + 302.

The theme of the Cailleach, in her various manifestations, appears time and again in the Gaelic traditions of Ireland and Scotland, persisting well into our own time. Ó Cruaíoch's innovative and substantial work, based on decades of research and a number of earlier publications, is a major step forward in understanding the nature and significance of this timeless 'supernatural old female'; at the same time its progressive approach, drawing on a wide range of historical, ethnographical and theoretical sources, suggests some fundamental directions to be pursued by folklore research in the future.

The book is in two main sections, one dealing with 'Tradition and Theory', followed by 'Stories of the Cailleach and the Wise-Woman' comprising 34 recorded narratives from folklore archives. Throughout the first section the theoretical discussion, though contemporary and embracing a wide perspective, is firmly linked to the traditions of Ireland. The author's focus, effectively maintained throughout the work, is on symbols and symbolic processes as part of the cultural consciousness or 'shared universe of cultural discourse' designated by the word *coimcne* in medieval Ireland and identified in that function by Proinseas Mac Cana in 1980. For the purposes of the work, the author has chosen to characterise the larger environment in which such transmissions and changes occur as consisting of the realms of the physical, the social and the symbolic, and this proves to be appropriate for the large and varied range of materials examined.

In identifying a useful theoretical framework for the materials, the author draws on contemporary anthropology. The processes by which such shared knowledge is created, transmitted and transformed over time are related to a recent model developed by the Swedish anthropologist Ulf Hannerz that views them as 'processes of mind' which are externalised through verbal and institutional activity and distributed through society. Care is taken to confine the explorations of mythology,

symbolism and the significance of the stories to Irish (or Gaelic) tradition, leaving broader theoretical musings to the reader. A more limited but primary objective is to explore what the narratives meant to their 'original' audiences in terms of their various environments, and their continuing importance in terms of human experience in our own times.

Certainly in the case of the Cailleach the physical and social realms from written and oral sources were manifest as the recurring themes of landscape and sovereignty. One of the most noteworthy developments over time has been the transformation in the social domain of the role of sovereignty goddess/queen in Ireland with the introduction of Christianity and the rise of a patriarchal structure during the middle ages. The historical process described in this section on the transformation of the otherworld female, 'The Traditional Personification of Cultural Knowledge', is a thought-provoking study on the effects social changes can bring to bear on shared oral culture. The result, as sources clearly indicate, was the differentiation of the earlier shared knowledge into its 'official' and 'vernacular' representations, the latter persisting in strength into early modern times, and in some instances later, as the *bean chaoite* and the *bean feasa*. The occasionally fraught questions surrounding orality and literacy contain important implications for historical processes examined in the work, as well as the sources used. The telling point Ó Cualaoich raises is that 'the social world from which we derive the whole repertoire of Irish traditional oral narrative is ... poised on the edge of literacy' – a caveat likewise appreciated by ethnologists in Scotland – recalling the questions raised by John Miles Foley, Walter Ong and others concerning the relationships between oral and written media.

Most traditional narratives concerning the Cailleach are in the form of *seanchas*, a native category comprising 'oral, local, popular history and tradition' passed on through informal and formal language registers, and many of the narratives provided are in the form we term legends. Intrinsic to a 'creative reading' of these is the role of the feminine and the female voice in the tradition through time, which is explored from the Old European (Neolithic, pre-Indo-European) period of mother-goddesses through their incorporation into the more familiar Celtic pantheon. The author is unequivocal in his observations concerning the systematic devaluing and marginalisation of the feminine in the religious, social and literary domains, yet he maintains that traditional narrative in Ireland has at the same time conserved and promoted a feminine consciousness as a necessary and valued part of creation in its most extended sense. Two well known medieval tales (*Emain Macha*, *Echtra ma nEchach Muigmedóin*) and the famous poem 'The Lament of the Old Woman of Beare' are interpreted by way of illustration. Later reinterpretations of the female, e.g. the *bean sí* and *bean feasa* ('wise woman') are examined, together with literary representations such as the *spéirbhean* of eighteenth century *aisling* poetry and the divine hag *Aoibheall* in Brian Merriman's *Cúirt an Mhéan Oíche*, all bearing witness to the creative continuity of an old theme extending over more than a recorded millennium.

The stories in the second section 'Stories of the Cailleach and the Wise Woman' are more or less evenly divided between the divine personified female (the Cailleach) and the human old woman associated with the supernatural (the *bean feasa*). Stories of the Cailleach are organised under headings reflecting long-term chronological progression; those of the wise woman are grouped according to activities and function. The positions of both in oral tradition are examined within their earlier historical contexts, or within wider folklore and theoretical contexts. In his treatment of the story materials in the second section, the author's premise is 'the idea that

cultural meaning is never either bounded or totally coherent; it is rather a question of the continual construction and recreation of meaning in an ongoing process of symbolic and ritual representation that is continually giving fresh externalization and communication to the perception of meaningfulness that informs our lives...' (71). The historical aspects of the foregoing are evident in the author's insightful discussion of the pan-Gaelic narrative traditions of *Cailleach Bhéarra*, a 'complex figure' featured in accounts 'from the worlds of Celtic mythology, Gaelic medieval literature and modern Irish and Scottish folklore with, in each case, a possible Norse connection.' In fact we may regard her in her literary and oral legacy as embodying a long history of cultural consciousness embracing the primordial formation of the landscape, female divinities of the late Neolithic, international folktale themes dating back to early Indo-European times, female representations of sovereignty, the impact of Christian ideology, and the suppression of the female voice in the middle ages. One of these many memorable accounts is from Scotland (*Cailleach Bheurr*, no. 7), recorded in Mull in the 1950s by the Gaelic fieldworker Calum Maclean. Ó Cruaíoch provides a detailed commentary on a further story, this time recorded on Great Blasket Island by Kenneth Jackson from Peig Sayers, examining the various layers of meaning contained in the text and their handling by the reciter, resulting in an exemplary exercise in interpretation: an open and suggestive 'How to read an Irish legend'. The texts of the legends themselves are deeply engaging, as good stories are, leaving the reader with the sense of enormity frequently conveyed by major mythological narratives. In the 18 legends where she is featured, the *bean feasa* with her healing skills and supernatural associations is firmly situated within the community. The author, continually mindful of the larger body of theory, makes use of the perspectives of figure, function and process in his analyses of the texts, once more, through a comprehensive and detailed knowledge of the Gaelic world, bringing to light a far greater content of shared cultural knowledge than would appear on the surface. In some instances (e.g. no. 24) the readings reveal a symbolic account of the conflict between two religious traditions; or the continuity of underlying themes (female sovereignty); or the emergence around ailments of delicate psychological or social truths. The original Irish and Scottish Gaelic texts are provided in the final section.

Ó Cruaíoch clearly avoids attributing lasting authority to the views expressed in his book, insisting that equally useful insights can and will emerge. Nevertheless the work is remarkable – perhaps uniquely so in Gaelic ethnology – for the degree to which it succeeds in integrating contemporary theory with a rare knowledge of the Irish material, and a gift for interpreting it. I shall return to it often, and would regard it as required reading for anyone with an active interest in Irish folklore.

JOHN SHAW

On a Rock in the Middle of the Ocean: Songs and Singers in Tory Island. Lillis Ó Laoire. Cló Iar-Chonnachta, Indreabhán, 2005. xvi+359pp. 33 photographs, 2 maps, musical transcriptions, compact disc, bibliography, index. ISBN 978-1-905560-15-8. €35.00.

Lillis Ó Laoire's *On a Rock in the Middle of the Ocean*, a revised translation of his original work in Irish, *Ar Chreag i Lár na Farraige* (2002), represents one of the latest and most meaningful contributions to the field of ethnology among Gaelic-speaking peoples in Ireland, Scotland and beyond. It is the first study of its kind to

provide a detailed discussion of Gaelic song tradition at the communal level. Ó Laoire emphasises this in the volume's introduction, noting that, "[...] songs are often taken for granted, or are regarded simply as decontextualized products or artifacts, with the cultural world of which they are a part receiving little or no attention. This book is specifically about this contextualized world, constituting a study of songs as they function in one community and centering upon the importance of song as an integral part of that community's culture" (xi). Therefore, Ó Laoire's research on the *sean nós* singing-tradition in the Irish-speaking community of Tory Island, off the north coast of Donegal, adds a new and refreshing dimension to the extant published corpus that has resulted from similar fieldwork, which in Gaelic circles has traditionally focused on the collection of song repertoires and, if fortunate, has also included the attitudes, perceptions and insights of the singer within his/her community (cf. *Brigh an Òrain: A Story in Every Song*. Lauchie MacLellan. Ed. J. Shaw. Montreal, 2000). In this case, Tory Island provides a rich starting point for the discussion of local aesthetics and the transmission of song.

On a Rock in the Middle of the Ocean's main strengths lie in Ó Laoire's employment of personal fieldwork, conducted in Tory Island over the past three decades. His respectful relationship with community members (referred to by the author as *oidí*, or 'consultants') in Tory, including Éamonn Mac Ruairí, Belle Mhic Ruairí, Teresa McClafferty, Séamas Ó Dúgáin, Gráinne Uí Dhúgáin and John Ó Duibheannaigh, is evident in their appearance as collaborating authors of the work. This emic or naturalist approach to fieldwork is facilitated by the innate tendency for such research in the *Gaeltacht/Gàidhealtachd* of Ireland and Scotland to fall within the realm of *seanchas* (talk, stories, oral history) as practised among community members in order to communicate internal perceptions and other aspects of their shared identity. This most inspiring feature of the work, along with the care and consideration that Ó Laoire has taken in presenting this material with his healthy dose of reflexivity and the use of modern theoretical frameworks from anthropology, provides a model in ethnographic writing. Ó Laoire's engagement with the hermeneutic methodologies of Hans Georg Gadamer and Paul Ricoeur, and his sociolinguistic approach to semiotics, have also served the work well. It is especially in the latter areas that the reviewer has found some of the most significant contributions to ethnographic research - including such methodologies as an ethnography of speaking - concerning the *Gaeltacht/Gàidhealtachd* of Ireland, Scotland and the Scottish Gaelic-speaking emigrant communities of Cape Breton Island, Nova Scotia. Ó Laoire's use of *seanchas*-based narratives, as transcribed from the field-recordings of his consultants is well suited to providing meaningful insights into shared attitudes among Gaels in the verbal expression of their communities' aesthetics. It should be noted that only selected portions of the transcribed narratives used in the text appear in the original Irish in brackets next to their English translations, something that will prompt those with a deeper interest in language use to engage with the earlier Irish language edition.

The examination of words as symbols in the work, explicating their folk semantics in the context of such recorded narratives, is demonstrated by the vocabulary referenced in Chapter Six ("The Emotional Matrix of Song and Dance") when discussing social gatherings where dance and song are performed, both of which can be referred to as *caitheamh aimsire* (a pastime). This includes the balance required between such opposing lexemes as *te/teas* (hot/heat) and *fuar/fuacht* (cold); and *trom* (heavy) and *éadrom* (light); and the emotions of *cumha* (longing, grief, nostalgia), *uaigneas* (fear of supernatural, want for company), and *misneach* (courage), all of

which appear as concepts at play in the organisation of *oíche mhór* (a big night). The role of words is similarly highlighted in the discussion of song transmission in Chapter Three (“Lifting and Learning”) and its associated aesthetics in Chapter Four (“The Mechanics of Aesthetic”), which examine in great detail such terms as *dúil* (desire), *ceart* (right), *ciotach* (wrong), *cuma* (appearance), *brí* (sense, meaning), *cuidiú* (help), as well as terms used for the acquisition of culture, including *tóg* (lift) and *foghlaim* (learning), many of which have Scottish Gaelic cognates, both linguistically and semantically.

Such similarities have been made evident to the reviewer especially in the latter two lexemes, *tóg* and *foghlaim*, and their parallels with the use of the Scottish Gaelic verbs *tog* and *ionnsaich* as encountered by the reviewer during fieldwork among Gaelic-speakers in the Outer Hebrides and Cape Breton Island. Although both terms can be used interchangeably in either Irish or Scottish Gaelic, they often refer to two distinct processes in the transmission of cultural knowledge. Ó Laoire aptly describes this semantic difference, noting, ‘The term *foghlaim* [...] can stress the formality and the conscious awareness involved in the structured education process, what we have called schooling, while *tógáil*, or orally based appropriation, is less detached, less formal, and less gnostically aware’ (74). The ability to draw such correspondences in verbal semantics and aesthetic attitudes between Irish and Scottish Gaeldom as evidenced by Lillis Ó Laoire’s research, reveals fodder for fruitful exchanges to be made between ethnologists conducting fieldwork in these respective traditions at the comparative level.

Another notable aspect of the work is Ó Laoire’s case study of the song “*A Pháidí a Ghrá*” on Tory Island, and its associations with the concepts of *communitas* as defined by Victor Turner. This is examined again in the context of *cumha* (grief, or a lament), as expressed at both the familial and communal level through the song’s portrayal of both unrequited love and the associated lore (*seanchas*) concerning the premature death of its subject, Pádraig Dixon, after emigration to America, revealing the ability for such metaphors to evolve and change over time and space based on the varying attitudes of the song’s performers as well as its audiences. Such differences in contextual interpretation and presentation are also demonstrated by variation in the *údar* (authority, reason) and *brí* (life, force, meaning, story) associated with the song’s context, meaning and function based on both communal, familial and individual performer’s attitudes, and the various relationships between performer, source and audience. Lillis Ó Laoire’s considerate and detailed discussion on the nature of the song-text “*A Pháidí a Ghrá*” and its associated music provides an indispensable methodological guide for the contextual analysis of the function and meaning of verbal art at the local level and beyond.

Ó Laoire’s analysis of song is further facilitated by the volume’s accompanying CD, which contains several excellent examples of the island’s *sean nós* singing and instrumental dance music traditions, along with an excerpt of an interview between IFC fieldworker and *seanchaí* Séamas Ennis (perhaps a plug for *Mise an Fear Ceoil*, which has a chapter on Tory) and Tory’s John Tom Ó Mianáin concerning the community’s musical traditions. The CD also includes multiple versions of certain songs, including “*Seán Bán Mo Ghrá*,” “*Dónall Óg*,” and the aforementioned “*A Pháidí a Ghrá*,” which aid the author in examining what he has termed *mouvance* (acceptable variation) with its associations to Albert Lord’s and Gregory Nagy’s use of ‘multiformity’, and which the reviewer sees as sharing several parallels with Lauri Honko’s use of the term ‘organic variation’ as well as John Miles Foley’s discussions on ‘immanent art’. The CD therefore serves as an effective aural guide through the

various concepts laid out by Ó Laoire, and its tracks are often cited with this purpose within the text.

Lillis Ó Laoire's *On a Rock in the Middle of the Ocean* is an invaluable contribution to the discussion of local aesthetics and the process of transmission in Gaelic circles and beyond, setting the trend for continued valuable contributions to the field. This was particularly evident at the University of Glasgow's Angus Matheson Memorial Lecture given this past December by Ó Laoire with his paper entitled "'Chonaic mé na deora/I saw the tears': Aesthetics in Gaelic Song." In it Ó Laoire laid down the tracks for the examination of Gaelic song-aesthetics at the comparative level, drawing on his own personal fieldwork in Ireland and Scotland as well as the work of others, including John Shaw's work with the Broad Cove, Cape Breton singer, Lauchie Dan N. MacLellan, cited earlier in this review. The ramifications of such *seanchas*-based discourse are capable of extending the realm of song to all aspects of intangible performance culture, and contain some of the most exciting prospects in the field of ethnology and in particular for continued fieldwork in the *Gaeltacht/Gàidhealtachd*.

TIBER F.M. FALZETT

Storytelling Scotland: A Nation in Narrative. Donald Smith. Edinburgh: Polygon, 2001. x + 198pp. ISBN: 0 7486 6310 X. £12.99.

Within the covers of this book, the author reviews the place of storytelling in Scottish culture, tracing it back to its origins as well as placing its role in contemporary Scottish society.

Beginning with a general introduction to the topic, the book then delves into Lowland and Highland/Gaelic traditions before turning its attention from 'geographic' specifics to a more discursive analysis of the types of stories that have been popular since medieval times throughout Scotland. Indeed, the first two chapters examine storytelling from a medieval context, when Scottish chroniclers (or rather historians) were less concerned with verifiable facts than they were with some very powerful folklore, myths and legends that resonate down to our own day. This is partly due to the fact that oral traditions have had a far more powerful hold on people's imaginations than they do now. This is not to say, however, that oral traditions are nowadays irrelevant, but rather they have adapted to their surroundings as Scottish society has inevitably evolved over time. Oral traditions are very much like a 'carrying stream' from which successive generations are either supplied, replenished or, indeed, inspired.

The author is at pains to point this out, especially in two chapters which deal with the development of narrative tales into the nineteenth century, and also a further chapter adding to this detail when dealing with the twentieth century. Nevertheless, there is too much reliance upon literary works influenced by oral narratives in the chapter dealing with the nineteenth century and, unhappily, there is very little attention given to Gaelic narrative traditions during this period. Turning to the twentieth century, the author is best placed to give an overall picture of the art of storytelling from a modern perspective in his role as Director of the Scottish Storytelling Centre at the Netherbow (in Edinburgh). So it is not surprising that this book does not deal primarily with an historical perspective but rather is forward-thinking and looking to the future of Scottish storytelling within an international

context. The book is written in an engaging and clear manner that brings the subject matter of storytelling to as wide a readership as possible.

But for one caveat, this book can be recommended for anyone with even a passing interest in Scottish tradition taken in its widest sense. That caveat, it must be said, is that the author has a firmer grip on Lowland Scots tradition than Highland Gaelic tradition which, in effect, slightly mars the overall picture that has otherwise been so well presented.

Errors are few and hardly worth mentioning, apart from the fact that consistency of spelling surnames would have been appreciated. For instance John MacDonald/Macdonald (142); Fr Allan MacDONald should be McDonald (139); Calum Maclean (not MacLean; 46), whose intense collecting period was rather less than the twenty years stated (140), and so on. It is rather odd that when Gaelic sources are quoted, they appear after the translation rather than before (the usual practice is to have the primary source quoted followed by a translation). Also, there is occasionally too much reliance upon quotation when a point could have been made with a reference to the text, thus allowing for the kind of discursive analysis that is one of this book's great strengths.

Despite these small drawbacks, this book represents one of the best and most accessible texts on the subject, both for an academic as well as a more general readership. Even though this book has subsequently been superseded since its publication by more recent and more in-depth publications with regard to storytelling in Scotland, I very much doubt whether there is a clearer or better general introduction to the topic. A second updated and expanded edition of this volume would be most welcome, as this would allow the author to take into account the most recent scholarship. Such an opportunity would also allow the author to expand upon the subject matter at hand. The author does himself great credit by explaining the cultural context of storytelling with an historical framework in such a way that it is not trivialised, and also by doing a signal service by bringing out the relevance of oral narratives to modern times. For that very reason, this book as it stands can be recommended for any reader who wishes to have an accessible, wide-ranging and digestible introduction from a Scottish perspective to that most human of art forms.

ANDREW WISEMAN

Saoghal Bana-mharaiche. Ed./deas. Seòsamh Watson. Tigh a'Mhaide, Ceann Drochaid, Siorrachd Pheairt: Clann Tuirc 2007. ISBN 9780954973346 (pbk.). xlv + 226: ill., maps.

From the late twentieth century, the Gaelic-speaking fishing communities on the east coast of the Highlands have been the focus of a number of pioneering studies, notably the linguist Nancy Dorian's *Language Death* (1981) and *The Tyranny of Tide* (1985). The editor of the present work, Seòsamh Watson, is well known for his work on Gaelic dialects in Ireland, Scotland, and as far afield as Cape Breton, and his knowledge gained from decades of linguistic fieldwork informs every part of the book. It has been a sensible and productive practice in the history of Gaelic dialect study to include ethnographic texts, often of some length and considerable interest, in the resulting publications, and the editor's own adherence to this tradition has been captured succinctly in the subtitle: 'A folklore account of the life of the fisherfolk in Easter Ross'. He goes on to state, 'But what can and must be done, I believe, is to

rescue and preserve in their own language and words the memories and a portion of the history of the final [Gaelic-speaking] generation, so that other Gaels in Scotland and elsewhere in the world will have access to some account of what life was like in Easter Ross: how they gained their livelihood, what their pastimes were, and so forth' (xxi).

From the opening pages, those experienced in the world of fieldwork in Gaeldom will recognise through Watson's brief anecdotes and asides the excitements, trials and unique rewards that this kind of research provides. As the list of recordings drawn on – 151 in all – reveals, fieldwork was carried out over numerous visits to the area between 1967 and 1983, mostly during the summers. As is often the case for fieldworkers, particularly at the beginning of their careers, conditions were not always comfortable. Watson recalls one memorable episode where the tent sheltering himself, his wife and four sleeping children was lifted over their heads and blown away in a storm beside the Moray Firth. The Introduction provides essential background on the Gaelic communities of Easter Ross (with a useful map giving the Gaelic place-names mentioned in the book) and the state of the language, along with the rationales behind the choice and editing of the texts and detailed notes on the principles used in transcription, which in themselves furnish a valuable introduction to the dialect. The editor remains well in the background, with pride of place given to the reciters and their community traditions, but a quiet presence is manifest throughout in the thoughtful organisation, skilful editing and humanistic orientation. The most striking folklore materials recorded are a surprising number of local narratives, along with proverbs and expressions, taken down from six reciters, and these form the core of the book. There is one surviving locally composed song, *An Linnet Mhòr*, recounting a maritime disaster from the middle of the nineteenth century, that nevertheless was known to many in the area at the time of recording. As the editor and many readers will be aware, the materials in this important collection are not along the lines of the ideal models set by nineteenth century tale collections from Argyll, or twentieth century publications from the Western Isles, Donegal or the Blaskets which contain lengthy versions of international tale types, complex hero-tales or distinctive, highly developed community song repertoires. Here the recorded items are nearly all brief, often anecdotal; taken together they present a vital and accurate portrait from the inside of the mental, social and working life of a recently-eclipsed Gaelic fishing community.

From the descriptions in the Introduction it is evident that making the acquaintance of the main Gaelic source, *Isbeil Anna* (*bean Uilleim MhicAonghuis*, Mrs William MacAngus) from Hilton of Cadboll (*Baile a'Chnuic*) was a major event in Watson's gathering of tradition. Not unlike other exceptional reciters described by collectors in the Highlands, Isbeil Anna came from a strong Gaelic background, and throughout her long life (1889-1980) demonstrated unusual strength of body and character. Early on she took a keen interest in the collecting work and committed herself unreservedly to contributing toward the most complete account possible of her Easter Ross language and folklore tradition, directing the editor towards other living sources, and making her sitting room regularly available for recording sessions. In her own view, the demise of Gaelic in her area could be put down to the widespread poverty she witnessed; for all the worldly disadvantages, her own heavy family responsibilities and the necessity to engage in heavy labour on the outside placed her in an ideal position to provide a verbal chronicle of the realities of her world.

The texts, of which Isbeil Anna contributed the great majority, are diverse, giving the reader access to a wide spectrum of traditions and activities in the fishing

villages. Items are provided with useful and informed end-notes which address any questions a reader might have as to their being an integral part of a wider Gaelic tradition. The texts are arranged according to broad topics, beginning with work and livelihood: the tasks of the women, including the smoking and curing of fish; selling it; and the seasonal work as herring girls away from home in the southern fishing port of Yarmouth. A good number of photos - many of the subjects appearing surprisingly cheerful considering the constant hard work - portray people mentioned in the texts and the various activities they are engaged in. The men's work in the fishing industry follows, with accounts of inshore fishing, preparing bait, etc. Both men and women worked away for long periods, the women often in service in the larger houses, the men at sea. A section on daily village life consists of a series of anecdotes which are at once amusing and revealing. These often refer to religion, however the anti-clerical stories so frequently encountered elsewhere are notably absent here, or at least carefully veiled. Some of the folk beliefs, for example those under the heading of witchcraft such as the virtues of *uisge airgid*, 'silver water', or the misfortune brought on by the evil eye, are paralleled in nearly all Gaelic areas. Health practices include a firsthand account of the use of leeches in cures; divination games were a regular feature surrounding marriages and midwives were constantly called upon. Anecdotes in the section on Gaelic bring to the fore, here as in the rest of Gaeldom, the distinctive bond forged by a common language, especially for those venturing beyond their own home territory. Also typical of the wider culture are the headings of pastimes: drink (often humorous and revealing of the less official attitudes in the villages); and the kind of oral history that is a staple of conversation wherever the language is spoken. In providing the background to these last items, the editor has gone as far as searching out the details of the warships named from both world wars.

Proverbs and expressions proved to be surprisingly plentiful in the retained tradition, and 136 are given here under 26 headings. Many of these will be familiar to folklorists (Scottish Gaelic, Scots and Irish parallels with references are provided under each item); in their pointed brevity, the local variants are a welcome complement to the other collections. Where the meaning of expressions is obscure, Watson has quite sensibly sought and included interpretations from Isbeil Anna.

The book ends with the locally composed lament for the loss of the *Linnet* off the north coast of Hilton in 1843, in which men from the district lost their lives in a futile rescue attempt. The presentation of the song, which consists of 56 verses, amounts to a detailed examination from a number of perspectives of a tradition based on an actual event, and provides an apt parallel to similar work based on 19th century Western Isles traditions. In addition to the local oral accounts recorded among the narratives earlier in the work, contemporary accounts from the newspapers are included and the details of the disaster are reproduced as far as possible from the sources. In his comments on the published version, Watson remarks on the composition style and observes that the composer, while careful to observe contemporary orthographical conventions, also intentionally incorporated features of his own dialect for metrical purposes (195). Such features are of linguistic interest as well, and are described and commented on in detail. In addition to the various kinds of sources and topics listed at the end, there are complete lists of personal names and place-names in the texts, and a list of dialect words that will be a valuable resource for linguists. Like the contents of the work, the production is both elegant and low-key.

Watson's contribution is not confined to Scottish Gaelic ethnology alone; the work provides a model for contemporary ethnographical writing in Gaelic, incorporating technical terms with clear, effective and grounded prose, and will prove

useful to a wide range of users. Being thus represented should be a source of lasting pride to any Gaelic community.

JOHN SHAW

The Hearth in Scotland. Ed. Marion Wood. Scottish Vernacular Buildings Working Group, Regional and Thematic Studies 7, 2001. ISBN 1 901971 02 3. 111pp.

Set up in 1972, the Scottish Vernacular Buildings Working Group was intended 'as a focus for all those interested in the traditional buildings of Scotland' and, thirty years on, members include scholars from a great variety of disciplines as well as people with a general interest in traditional buildings. This latest publication, the seventh in their series of Regional and Thematic Studies, well illustrates this diversity. The result of a one-day conference in January 2000, this book comprises six of the papers presented, and covers a wide range of aspects of the hearth in Scotland.

And indeed there are many aspects to cover. The hearth is discussed on a number of levels, from the social to the symbolic to the purely practical, from the hearth as a form of art to the hearth as portrayed in art, to a particular piece of craftsmanship on the late 18th century Dumfries Freedom Box.

Socially, the hearth was the centre of home-life and Hugh Cheape's paper focuses on the place of the hearth in the home, looking particularly at the western Highlands and islands. He uses a range of sources to look at the evolution and development of certain building-types, whilst looking also at regional variations, and shows that continuity can be found, not so much in the surviving structures, but in surviving social practices and symbolic meanings. The validity of certain written sources is questioned and he stresses also the importance of terminology as a source, showing how modern usage can reflect past ideology and organisation of space within the house.

Alexander Fenton argues that the hearth as a source of heat was secondary to the hearth as an apparatus for food preparation, as he takes us through a whistle-stop tour of the development of the hearth from pre-history to the present-day, using various sources, archaeological and ethnographic, and giving examples not only from Scotland but from Scandinavia and even further afield. Central to the paper is the suggestion that cooking pits and floor-level hearths may have co-existed but performed different cooking functions. He discusses also types of fuel, the position of the hearth within the house, and methods of smoke extraction, all of which he terms as diagnostic features. It seems that developments had a tendency to spread from the south northwards and Fenton illustrates this by detailing what is known of the spread of the 'hingin lum' or 'hanging chimney' in Scotland, during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

This spread of ideas was also apparent in upper-class housing from the seventeenth century onwards. Tastes changed frequently over this period, with Scottish chimneypiece design being greatly influenced by continental styles. However, although it was fashionable for those who could afford it to import chimneypieces from abroad, Ian Gow also describes the important contribution of two of Scotland's, and indeed Britain's, leading architects in the eighteenth century, William Adam and his son Robert, both of whom were very much at the centre of

chimneypiece design (owning the leading marble works in Scotland at Leith) and each of whom is accredited with his own design of chimneypiece.

The acceptance of the hearth as a metaphor for a good home was well established by the nineteenth century and was a common feature in Scottish painting, much of which featured scenes from rural life. John Morrison's description of a number of paintings, including three by David Wilkie, in which this metaphor was successfully used show, interestingly, that the absence of the hearth, or of fire, could be just as symbolic as its presence, and indeed that by the late nineteenth century, so widely recognised was the metaphor that it was possible to imply the presence of a hearth without actually including it in the painting. The popularity of this type of 'rural-life' painting continued throughout the early period of industrialisation, a comment on the perceived superiority of this way of life over life in the, now overpopulated, cities.

The hearth was more than just a rural metaphor, however. It was the heart of the home, and arguably the heart of the community, until within living memory. There were many beliefs and superstitions that surrounded the hearth: it could offer protection from evil, drive away evil, and was often used in divination. Gary J. West takes us through a number of these rituals using some existing examples, many from the School of Scottish Studies Archive. Hallowe'en was the most common time for divination, especially in matters of the heart, and it is clear that a number of such customs and rituals took place at particular times of the year. West also talks in some detail about the importance of keeping the fire lit, especially at Hogmanay, and about the building of the need-fire at Beltane, from which all fires in the community were lit.

The coal-fire was the subject of the impressive vignettes engraved on the back of the Dumfries Freedom Box of 1793. The box contained a document giving the Freedom of the Royal Burgh of Dumfries to Lord Melville, Henry Dundas, who had been instrumental in the Act which brought about the repeal of the Coal Tax. George R. Dalglish's paper talks about Dundas' own background and places this Act, and the fine artwork displayed on the box, against a background of social and economic change, which saw a rising industrial society with an ever increasing need for coal. It was also used domestically, and it is interesting to note that the vignettes portray the coal being used, not in an urban environment, but in the form of an idealized rural cottage.

Although, as a collection of individual papers by authors from a variety of disciplines, this book is lacking in any real cohesion (as one might expect from a publication of conference papers), it is, in this reviewer's opinion, a worthy read for anyone with an interest in the home-life of Scottish society, from pre-history to modern times, the centre of which has always been, as this book admirably shows, the hearth.

CATRIONA MACKIE