

‘*Tam o’ Shanter ’s Geansaidh Snàith*’:
The Innovative Work Songs of Gaelic-Speaking
Herring Gutters

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Introduction

In the mid-nineteenth century, the commercial fishing industry introduced a new type of itinerant labour to women in the Hebrides: gutting herring. From the 1850s to the 1950s, thousands of Hebridean women spent part of their youths away from home in the busy fishing ports of the North Sea. In this article I will address their work song, which has previously received little scholarly attention. Through an archival survey of oral history recordings held in the School of Scottish Studies Archives and Canna House, as well as published materials on Gaelic song, I have identified fifty-seven variants of eight Scottish Gaelic gutting songs (see Appendix A). My analysis of these songs will be primarily sociohistorical in nature rather than musicological, though musical genre will also form an important component.¹

The Gaelic songs of Hebridean gutters reveal a vibrant world of economic change, female agency, and the expansion of geographical and linguistic horizons. Capturing the *Gàidhealtachd* at a moment of great transition, they reveal the adaptations women made to Gaelic work and dance song when faced with new work contexts. I will argue that while gutting songs grew out of the female communal work song tradition, gutters favoured singing *puirt-à-beul* (‘mouth music’, typically used for dancing) to accompany the quick work of gutting. Gutting song has historically been excluded from studies of Gaelic work song. In part, this is due to an ambiguity of genre; the songs are variously classified as *puirt-à-beul* and different types of work songs, such as waulking and spinning songs, an ambiguity which will be explored throughout this article. However, I will also argue that their association with the relatively recent commercial fishing industry, rather than the agricultural and domestic work contexts which have historically dominated the interests of work song collectors and commentators, has contributed to their invisibility in Gaelic song scholarship. The songs’ fluidity of genre and their full engagement with the multilingual landscape of the fishing industry call for a reassessment of standard narratives about the effects that outside influences had on the Gaelic work and dance song traditions in the twentieth century.

1. The Gutters and Their Songs

In this section, I will introduce the evidence for women singing while gutting and then give an overview of the body of gutting songs I researched. I will then analyse contextual information which enables different variants of the songs to be dated, concluding with a rough

¹ This article is an adaptation of my MSc thesis in Celtic and Scottish Studies at the University of Edinburgh. The title of this article comes from a bilingual line of one of the fish gutting songs: *tam o’ shanter ’s geansaidh snàith*, meaning “a tam o’ shanter hat and a knitted jumper”, a reference to the fishermen’s clothing.

chronological guide to the oldest known variants of each song. Throughout the analysis, key contributors of gutting songs will be introduced.

1.1 Singing at the Gutting

The nineteenth century saw a profound shift in Hebridean fishing practice. Although Hebridean people had long engaged in subsistence fishing, islanders' employment in the commercial fishing industry, based in the Lowlands, increased substantially from the 1850s to the 1880s (Domhnallach and Davenport 1987: 15–20). Hundreds of Hebridean women began working as gutters and packers (Macdonald 1978: 104). Within a generation, herring came to feature prominently in the lives of many Hebridean women; in Stornoway in 1887, for example, there were 1,212 women working as gutters (known as *clann-nighean an sgadain* in Gaelic), about



Figure 1. Women gutting at a farlan. © The Scottish Fisheries Museum

800 of whom were from Lewis and Harris alone (Domhnallach and Davenport 1987: 16–20). As soon as the catch was landed, the women began gutting and packing the herring into barrels, curing them with salt so that they could be sold all over Europe. Women worked in teams of three – two gutters and a packer – and several teams would work at one farlan, a wooden trough set up on the pier (Wilkins 2018: 85–86; See Fig. 1). The gutters were employed by curers, men who owned the gutting yards and paid the women by the barrel (Watt 2004: 96–104).

Not only did women gut at their home ports, but they travelled all over Scotland and England to follow the herring shoals. The season ran from May to November, beginning in the Hebrides before moving clockwise around the coast of Britain, through the Northern Isles and the fishing ports of the Moray Firth and the east Fife coast, all the way down to East Anglia, where the season ended in the winter in Lowestoft and Yarmouth (Wilkins 2018: 21). In the early days, women would take boats to each of these destinations; later, special trains were also set up to transport workers between mainland ports (MacLeod 1988). Sometimes gutters worked in Ireland, the Isle of Man, and even Newfoundland (Watt 2004: 81; Stewart 2016). Gutters

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could start working as young as ten (Watt 2004: 38). However, they typically began as young teenagers, often working until they got married but sometimes continuing well into adulthood (Wilkins 2018: 21). This meant that for many young Hebridean women, working as a gutter was not only a source of employment, but an opportunity to travel and meet people from all over Britain and beyond. Thousands of women left home for the first time, accompanied by their peers and meeting a wide range of other young people, leading to a situation where ‘every young island girl looked forward to the time when they were old enough to get away to the fishing’ (Macleod 1988). Hebridean women worked alongside gutters from Lowland Scotland and England as well as Ireland, Man, Sweden and Norway (MacKenzie 2019; Watt 2004: 132–133). The working conditions could be gruelling at times, since the women had to continue gutting until all of the fish had been cured; sometimes they were still gutting after midnight (Lawrie et al. 1988: 25). However, they routinely report that it was an incredibly happy time in their lives (e.g. MacNeil 1974; Hughes and Hughes 2016). The decline of the herring industry in the mid-twentieth century means that this form of itinerant labour only lasted about a hundred years. Across that period, however, it impacted the lives of thousands of Hebridean women.

One aspect of their lives which has received little scholarly attention is the role of music. Dancing was a regular feature of the women’s lives. Dances were often held in their lodgings on Saturday nights, since there was no fishing on a Sunday (Domhnallach and Davenport 1987: 110–112; M. Morrison 1974a; Macleod 1988). The men sometimes brought melodeons or fiddles to accompany the dancing; although fishermen were not supposed to have instruments on the boats, they sometimes smuggled melodeons aboard so that they could use them at these dances (Domhnallach and Davenport 1987: 110–112; Innes 1988). At other times, however, the Gaelic-speaking women would accompany dancing themselves by singing *puirt-à-beul*, and some women even achieved reputations as good singers of *puirt* among their colleagues (M. Morrison 1974a; MacMillan 1974; Johnson 1969b; MacNeil 1970).



Figure 2. Gutters on their way to work. © The Scottish Fisheries Museum



Figure 3. Scottish gutters knitting in Lowestoft. © The Scottish Fisheries Museum

Gutters’ singing went beyond evening recreation. They sang on the way to work, whether on the trains that brought them to port or while travelling from their huts to the gutting yards (Macleod 1988; see Fig. 2). While waiting for the catch to land, they were always knitting, and

some women sang while doing this (Macleod 1988; Nic a' Ghobhainn 2016; see Fig. 3). They even sang while striking for higher wages, which happened several times in the early twentieth century (Macleod 1988; Thompson et al. 1983: 169–172). Perhaps most remarkably, however, they also sang *while* gutting, meaning that the herring industry stimulated a new context for work song among Gaelic-speaking women. They came to the gutting with a long tradition of singing while working, most famously while waulking tweed (Bennett 2007: 40–43). In the gutting yards, this tradition was applied to the new work of gutting great quantities of fish at high speeds – some women gutted fifty fish a minute (Macleod 1988). The knives they used were very sharp, meaning that the women often sustained injuries to their hands which were made worse by the curing salt. They wrapped their hands with cloth bandages (known in Scots as *clooties*) in order to prevent further damage, and children would sometimes stand to attention in the gutting yards ready to provide more (Patrick 2003: 52).

In such high-paced and dangerous work, communal singing helped coordinate the women's movements and maintain focus (Wilkins 2018: 87). Lizy MacMillan of Barra reported that she and the other women sang 'anything' while gutting, but dancing tunes in particular (1974). An English gutter recalled that 'as one passed through Lower Pultney in Wick, one could hear them singing the lovely Gaelic songs as they worked at the herring' (Domhnallach and Davenport 1987: 56–59). Gaelic-speaking women were not alone in singing while gutting. Maggie Durno, a gutter interviewed by Buckie Heritage, said that there were 'twa o ye ti ae barrel, singin a the time in a' (Durno and Durno 1988). When writing of how the women sometimes had to keep gutting after dark, Mary Bella Findlay of Whitehills described herself and her colleagues singing 'My eyes are dim, I cannot see' (a line from the folk song 'The Quartermaster's Stores') and commented, 'We sang a lot at work: I sometimes think we sang to stop ourselves crying' (Lawrie et al. 1988: 25).

The most detailed academic work on gutting songs has been done by Frances Wilkins (2018). Her research explored the effects of evangelical Christian revivals on the fishing communities of North East Scotland (6). She found that these revivals instigated the singing of hymns in many different contexts in fishing communities, including the gutting, where women started singing hymns while they worked. They favoured hymns with nautical themes, relating their choice of repertoire directly to their own lives (88). Not all of the Scots-speaking women sang hymns; others sang 'the popular songs of the day, including well known Scottish and Irish folk and music hall songs' (Wilkins 2018: 87; cf. Innes 1988; Motion 2017). However, Wilkins argues that the singing of hymns in particular demonstrates how 'the gospel repertoire was used as a form of testimony, prayer and work song', transforming secular work into a devotional act (2018: 89).

While her analysis highlights the profound impact of evangelical revival on gutters' repertoires and brings to light crucial contextual evidence about the practice of singing while gutting, it is of limited application when understanding the repertoire of Gaelic-speaking gutters. Gutting song was only a small part of Wilkins's much larger project about sacred song in fishing communities in the North East. It was never her intention to analyse gutting song as a whole or in Gaelic, and indeed, her work serves as a model and inspiration for the present analysis which seeks to bridge the language divide by subjecting gutting song in Gaelic to similar levels of scrutiny. In the same vein, gutting song was addressed in several places in the book *Rhythms of Labour: Music at Work in Britain* (Korczynski et al 2013: 56, 100–112, 130). The authors were primarily interested in assessing the ways singing built a sense of community among fish gutters and drew significantly from oral history interviews conducted by Jane Liffen for her PhD research (Liffen 2007). Although Gaelic-speaking gutters were briefly

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mentioned, the book focused on the experiences of women from the North East, particularly while they were working as itinerant gutters in England.

The only other researcher who has investigated gutting songs in Scottish Gaelic is Maggie Smith, who undertook a substantial amount of unpublished research on the topic as preparation for her play *Os Mo Chionn Sheinn an Uiseag: A Souvenir of Great Yarmouth*. My interview of Smith in 2016 will be referenced periodically throughout this paper (Smith 2016). Beyond her work, no systematic survey of Gaelic gutters’ repertoire has ever been undertaken (see Section 4). The following paper will build on this small foundation to expand our understanding of this under-studied area of Gaelic work song.

1.2 The Songs

In the course of my research, I identified eight discrete Gaelic songs which were used as work songs among herring gutters. An additional Manx Gaelic gutting song was also identified, but its provenance is unclear. Of the eight Scottish Gaelic gutting songs, there are in total fifty-seven variants, combining printed and recorded materials. While I endeavoured to be as exhaustive as possible in my search, several of these variants were happened upon by chance, and it is reasonable to assume that there are other variants in the School of Scottish Studies Archives and elsewhere which have yet to be identified. The high level of variability in song titles is largely responsible for this discrepancy. In addition to the eight primary gutting songs, seven songs were identified which were composed or transmitted by gutters but whose rhythms and structure suggest they were not used as work songs. This study will not focus on these songs in as much detail, but they will sometimes be referenced in the course of the wider analysis. Most of the songs go under various names, a full list of which can be seen in Appendix A, but a list of the eight work songs under the names used in this paper are as follows:

Title	Translation	Variants
‘ <i>Rionnag às an oidhche fhrasaich</i> ’	‘A star out of a showery sky’	15
‘ <i>Caolas eadar mi ’s mo luaidh</i> ’	‘A strait between me and my love’	21
‘ <i>Cha dèan mise fuireach riut</i> ’	‘I won’t be waiting for you’	2
‘ <i>Chan e taigh air am bi tughadh</i> ’	‘It’s not a thatched house [that I want]’	6
‘ <i>Nuair a sheinneas ise ’n fhìdeag</i> ’	‘When she plays the whistle’	1
‘ <i>Haoi o nach dannsadh sibh e</i> ’	‘Haoi o won’t you all dance it?’	1
‘ <i>Càit’ am bi na maraichean</i> ’	‘Where will the sailors be?’	7
‘ <i>Tha fear a muigh a’ fuireach rium</i> ’	‘There’s a man out waiting for me’	3

Most variants lack contextual evidence which could establish their time of composition and transmission more specifically than the early- to mid-twentieth century. However, occasionally there is evidence from either internal references or information about the contributor’s life that has enabled me to date variants more precisely.

The oldest two songs are Nan MacKinnon’s versions of ‘*Chan e taigh air am bi tughadh*’ and ‘*Haoi o nach dannsadh sibh e*’ (1958c; 1958d). MacKinnon is one of the School’s most prolific contributors, whose repertoire of over 400 songs has been described as being ‘the most varied and extensive in the archives of the School’ (Campbell and Collinson 1977: 10;

MacInnes 1972: 201; see Fig. 4). Like many of her songs, she learned these two from her mother, a native of Mingulay. Her mother heard the song from Lewis women working at the gutting. MacKinnon's mother worked as a gutter before she married around 1890 at the age of twenty-two. The transmission of this song may have happened at any point in the 1880s, when she worked as a gutter in Fraserburgh, Peterhead and Aberdeen (MacKinnon 1958e). MacKinnon herself worked as a herring gutter (MacInnes 1972: 201) but specifically traces these songs to her mother. Her version of '*Haoi o nach dannsadh sibh e*' is the only variant of that song I was able to find, while her version of '*Chan e taigh air am bi tughadh*' is the only one not provided by Mary Morrison of Barra.

Mary Morrison was recorded singing gutting songs more often than any other contributor (see Fig. 8 and Appendix B).

Born in Barra in 1894, Morrison worked as a gutter from a young age. The song described as her 'masterpiece' (M. Morrison 1974b), which she recorded three times, was a variant of '*Caolas eadar mi 's mo luaidh*' (see Appendix A). Morag MacLeod published a transcription and translation of it (1993: 240–243). It contains many verses which do not appear in any other version. The unique verses she provides date her version of the song to 1922 or later. She sings that the boats *Honeydew* and *Fair Weather* are coming into the bay (MacLeod 1993: 243).



Figure 4. Nan MacKinnon, photographed by James Ross in 1958. © The School of Scottish Studies Archives



Figure 5. The Honeydew (with its later registration number BF122) in Fraserburgh, late 1940s © The Scottish Fisheries Museum



Figure 6. KY47 Fairweather in Anstruther, pictured left, date unknown © The Scottish Fisheries Museum

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The fishermen’s almanacs of 1901, 1903, 1910, 1920 and 1922 are complete accounts of every fishing boat registered in the United Kingdom in those years. The only boats which match those named in Morrison’s song are the herring drifters KY47 *Fairweather* of Pittenweem and the BCK96 *Honeydew* of Buckie (see Figs. 5 and 6). Built in 1911, the *Honeydew* first appears in the 1920 almanac, but the *Fairweather* does not appear until 1922 (Almanack: 1920 and 1922). This suggests Morrison was still working as a gutter in 1922, aged twenty-eight, at which time she probably composed her own verses of this song.

Peigi MacRae’s gutting songs were also transmitted in 1922. These are ‘*Cha dèan mise fuireach riut*’ (1951b) and two variants of ‘*Caolas eadar mi ’s mo luaidh*’ (1951a; 1955). MacRae grew up in South Uist. She and her sister Màiri became close friends of folklore collector Margaret Fay Shaw, who lived with them while doing her fieldwork (see Fig. 7). Before Margaret moved in with them, however, MacRae spent eleven weeks in 1922 gutting in Shetland, the only time she engaged in this line of work (MacKenzie 2019). This brief transmission period for her gutting songs means that all of her gutting-related repertoire dates to 1922.



Figure 7. Màiri and Peigi MacRae in South Uist. Reproduced by kind permission of the Margaret Fay Shaw Photographic Archives, Canna House, National Trust for Scotland

There are four further versions of ‘*Caolas eadar mi ’s mo luaidh*’ which date to before Mary Morrison’s and Peigi MacRae’s variants. Christina MacKinnon of Barra and Mary MacKay of Lewis both contributed variants which can be dated to between about 1903 and 1905. MacKinnon was born in 1886 and left for the gutting at age seventeen, working for at least two years (MacKinnon 1970). She therefore gutted between approximately 1903 and 1905, learning the song at that point. MacKay, on the other hand, learned the song as a waulking song at her mother’s waulking table in Stornoway when she was a child of ten or twelve (1957a). Although her date of birth is not known, her husband, the fiddler Geordie MacKay, was born around 1893 (MacKay 1956); if they are the same age, that would date her learning of ‘*Caolas eadar mi ’s mo luaidh*’ to between about 1903 and 1905. Another version of the song dates to sometime before WWI. Morag Johnson of South Uist worked as a gutter before the war (1969b). Thus, her versions of both ‘*Caolas eadar mi ’s mo luaidh*’ and ‘*Nuair a sheinneas ise ’n fhìdeag*’ date to that time. Her contribution of the latter song is the only version of that song I could locate (1969a).

The oldest variant of ‘*Caolas eadar mi ’s mo luaidh*’, however, may be Marion Morrison’s version (1968). Morrison’s song contains several verses unknown in other versions.

In one, she sings that her lover is sailing *an eathar mòr an Irish*, in the large boat belonging to ‘an Irish’. Maggie Smith has identified ‘an Irish’ as Malcolm Macritchie of Uig, who was known by this byname locally (personal correspondence). He was the eldest of the Reef Raiders who were arrested for occupying Reef in 1913 in an attempt to resettle the village, which had been cleared in the mid-19th century. When Reef was finally resettled in 1921, he moved there from Kneep with his family (Hebridean Connections 2020c). Later in Morrison’s song, she sings that one of Macritchie’s sons, *mac an Irish*, is in Uig, and she expects to marry him (1968). Only two of Malcolm’s five sons married. Donald Macritchie, known as Dòmhnall an Irish, born 1895, served in the RNR and married an unknown woman in Hull (Hebridean Connections 2020b). The song does refer to a man called Dòmhnall Donn fixing a broken oar on Macritchie’s boat, but he may have been a different man who lived in the Reef/Kneep area (Maggie Smith, personal correspondence). The other son who married was Norman Macritchie, Tormod an Irish, born in 1877. He worked as a line fisherman out of Aberdeen and married Catherine O’Hare there in 1898 (Hebridean Connections 2020d). O’Hare herself had been born in Lochgilhead under the surname Kerley, but after her parents met an unknown fate she was adopted by the O’Hare family of Carishader (Hebridean Connections 2020a). Of the two brothers, Norman’s profession as a fisherman makes him a more likely candidate for the *mac an Irish* named in the song. If the song is indeed about him, then the verses about him and his father’s boat must have been composed before 1898, since the singer expects to marry him. They may have even been composed by Catherine O’Hare herself; Aberdeen is on the fishing route so it is not even out of the question that she may have been a gutter. Regardless of the composer’s identity, if Norman is the *mac an Irish* this would push the earliest known date of ‘*Caolas eadar mi ’s mo luaidh*’ to before his marriage in 1898. Since the song could refer to Dòmhnall an Irish, however, who was only born in 1895, this is not an iron-clad date, but it nevertheless suggests the song’s origins *could* go back to the 19th century. While variants of ‘*Caolas eadar mi ’s mo luaidh*’ are the most numerous, the song which shows the most textual instability between variants is ‘*Rionnag às an oidhche fhrasaich*’. Hamish Henderson described this song as a ‘floating song in the Western Hebrides’ of which ‘you get versions [...] in Lewis especially’ (MacLennan and MacLennan 1960). While this is true of all the gutting songs to some extent, some variants of this song are so different that it is not entirely clear they are all the same song. The two verses which appear in most variants begin *Rionnag às an oidhche fhrasaich* (‘a star out of a showery sky’) and *Rud nach fhaca duin’ air thalamh* (‘something no one on earth has seen’). The former appears in the versions sung by Peigi Oighrig MacIver (1949); Mary MacKay (1957b); Peggy MacLean (1958); Dolina MacLennan (e.g. 1958a); and Norman MacAskill (e.g. 1975b). The latter verse appears in the versions sung by Peigi Oighrig MacIver (1949); Kitty and Marietta MacLeod (1952); and Dolina



Figure 8. Mary Morrison in the 1920s. © The School of Scottish Studies Archives

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MacLennan (e.g. 1958a). That verse also appears printed in the *Eilean Fraoich*, but under a song titled ‘*Abu chuibhl*’ (Comunn 1938: 60–61). This ‘*Abu chuibhl*’ shares many verses in common with other recorded variants of ‘*Rionnag às an oidhche fhresaich*’ but has a different tune and different vocables and is notably missing the *rionnag* verse. While this initially suggests that two different songs share a substantial number of lyrics, matters are further complicated by Mary Morrison’s recording (1956d). Her song is given the name ‘*Abo Chuidhil*’ in the chronological register even though that phrase does not appear in the recording. However, its tune resembles both the printed melody of ‘*Abu Chuibhl*’ (Comunn 1982: 55) and recordings of ‘*Rionnag às an oidhche fhresaich*’. Although it has several unique verses, it shares many lyrics with both of those songs, particularly Dolina MacLennan’s recording of ‘*Rionnag às an oidhche fhresaich*’ (1958a). *Eilean Fraoich* labels ‘*Abu Chuibhl*’ a waulking song, and commercial recordings have characterised it as a spinning song – an example of the ambiguity of genre alluded to above (e.g. Believe SAS 2018).

The missing link in the chain may be Kate MacLeod’s recording of ‘*Abu Chuibhl*’, which directly follows her performance of ‘*Caolas eadar mi ’s mo luaidh*’ (1955a; 1955b). While this song has the same melody as that printed in *Eilean Fraoich*, its vocable refrain begins with the sound of *abu chui* but becomes *abu chuidil uidil uidil*, the quick percussive rhythm of which bears some resemblance to Mary Morrison’s *o ato i o ari | hio itil arii*. Kate MacLeod’s version also includes the *rionnag* verse which other versions of ‘*Abu Chuibhl*’ do not, further suggesting the link between the songs. While the exact relationship between these variants remains unclear, this is evidently a song which has morphed to have many different uses and verses. Usually in Gaelic work song, the vocable refrain is the key identifying feature between variants (Campbell and Collinson 1969: 227–228). While these variants do not all carry the same vocable refrain, the similarities of melody and lyrics between them have led me to cautiously consider them all as variants of the same song. I have not been able to date any variants of this song earlier than *Eilean Fraoich*’s 1938 publication of ‘*Abu Chuibhl*’ (60–61).

The remaining song for which there is dating evidence available is ‘*Tha fear a-muigh a’ fuireach riut*’. In her book *Sheòl Mi ’n-Uiridh*, Màiri Nic a’ Ghobhainn writes that the song was composed by Lewis gutters while gutting in Barra. This version contains lines about the singer’s lover serving aboard the *HMS Virginian* (Nic a’ Ghobhainn 2009: 128). The ship served in WWI and was renamed in 1920, meaning that this verse, at least, must date to before then (‘HMS Virginian’ 2016). The two variants of this song held in the School of Scottish Studies Archives do not include this verse (cf. MacArthur and MacLean 1954; MacLeod 1956). Finally, although I located seven variants of ‘*Càit am bi na maraichean*’, there is no evidence available with which to determine a date of composition or transmission for any variant.

In conclusion, the earliest known dates of each song are as follows:

Title	Earliest Known Date	Source
<i>Rionnag às an oidhche fhresaich</i>	1938* *if same as <i>Abu Chuibhl</i> ’	<i>Eilean Fraoich</i> (Comunn 1938: 60–61)
<i>Caolas eadar mi ’s mo luaidh</i>	c. 1903 – c. 1905 or before 1898	Christina MacKinnon (1970) Marion Morrison (1968)
<i>Cha dèan mise fuireach riut</i>	1922	Peigi MacRae (1951b)
<i>Chan e taigh air am bi tughadh</i>	1880s	Nan MacKinnon (1958c)
<i>Nuair a sheinneas ise ’n fhìdeag</i>	before 1914	Morag Johnson (1969b)
<i>Haoi o nach dannsadh sibh e</i>	1880s	Nan MacKinnon (1958d)

<i>Càit' am bi na maraichean</i>	?	N/A
<i>Tha fear a muigh a' fuireach rium</i>	1914–1918	<i>Sheòl Mi 'n-Uiridh</i> (Nic a' Ghobhainn 2009: 128)

While each song is probably older than its first dateable variant, the above table gives an overview of the time range which will inform the following discussion of gutting song composition, from about the 1880s to the 1930s.

Before proceeding to analyse the contents of these songs, a final disclaimer is necessary about how I determined which songs to consider gutters' work songs. As explained above (see Section 1.1), there is ample evidence to indicate that Gaelic-speaking women did sing songs while gutting, in particular *puirt-à-beul*. However, recordings of individual songs are rarely prefaced with the explicit information that they were learned from gutters *while gutting*, as opposed to the other occasions for music-making in their lives such as dances or knitting. The phrase 'at the gutting' (in Gaelic, *aig a' chutadh*), when used to describe the time a contributor heard the song, does not technically rule out these other music-making opportunities in the gutters' lives since this phrase is also used to describe a woman's time as a gutter in general. The only Gaelic song which has been explicitly referred to as a gutting work song is '*Caolas eadar mi 's mo luaidh*'. When Christina MacKinnon related her version of the song, it was described as *òran luaidh na cutadh*, or the 'gutters' waulking song' (1970). While the other seven songs are never so explicit about their function, they have all been included due to very strong links to the gutting in their transmission, subject and contributor. Other songs which were closely associated with gutters, but not in such a way that led me to conclude they could be work songs, are also included in a section below the work songs (see Appendix A). Although the number of songs which I have been able to identify as gutting work songs is relatively small, these songs represent a chronological range of at least fifty years. Their contents reflect a rich and exciting time in the lives of young Hebridean women, the most salient themes of which will be explored below.

2. Themes in Gutting Song

In this section, I will analyse the lyrics of the gutting songs to explore two major types of thematic content in the songs: the women's economic environment, and their relationships with men. I will argue that these songs demonstrate that gutters played an active role in ushering in economic change in the Hebrides and in negotiating their relationships with men.

2.1 Economic Themes

Working in the front lines of the commercial fishing industry, the gutters



Figure 9. Interior of gutters' accommodation c. 1900. Walker and McGregor 1999: 35. Provenance unknown.



Figure 10. Single-storey block of gutters' housing in Shetland, c. 1900. Walker and McGregor 1999: 36. Provenance unknown.

were part of a new era in the economy of the *Gàidhealtachd*. Their songs reflect this. While some women also had experience of employment from working in domestic service, for others who had only worked in the context of subsistence crofting, this was the first time they were directly employed for wages (Macleod 1988). As such, it is unsurprising that the names of employers occasionally appear in the songs. Some of the gutting songs name the curers who employed them in reference to the lodgings they built for the women. Curers built temporary housing for their employees (Leitch 2003: 224–235; Walker and McGregor 1999: 31; see Figs. 9 and 10). The gutting crews and fishermen would gather in them on Saturday nights for dances. The oldest musical reference to a curer comes in Nan MacKinnon's '*Haoi o nach dannsadh sibh e*' (1958d), which dates back to the 1880s (see Section 1.2). The song is about people dancing merrily in the houses of Alig Steven, who MacKinnon reported worked as a curer. Alig Steven was likely the head of Alexander Stephen and Sons, curers from Peterhead who operated curing stations in Shetland (Walker and McGregor 1999: 44–46). In this song, the curer primarily serves as a backdrop to the dancing which is of more immediate interest to the singer.

Other curers were mentioned in the context of the fishing work itself. Two different variants of '*Caolas eadar mi 's mo luaidh*' refer to a man called MacIver. Maggie Smith learned a version of the song from Morag MacLeod which contained lines about the *Fear Not* bringing in herring for MacIver (Smith 2016). Through her research, Smith determined that this referred to Duncan MacIver, a curer from Stornoway who owned a gutting yard in Yarmouth. He also owned yards in Shetland (Walker and McGregor 1999: 44–46). While the name *Fear Not* is too common for fishing boats to identify the specific boat referenced in this version of the song, MacIver's name appears again in Mary Morrison's versions which, as explained above, must date to later than 1920 (see Section 1.2). Mary sings of how her boyfriend aboard the *Honeydew* is bringing in a *shottie*, privately owned by MacIver (MacLeod 1993: 242–243). *Shottie* is a Scots word which can signify a catch of fish ('Shottie' 2019). The BCK96 *Honeydew* was

owned by J. Cowie and others of Buckie (Almanack 1920), so the private ownership refers not to the boat itself, but to the catch of herring, which belongs to the curer. The only song which goes into more detail about individual curers is ‘*Earnaisean ’s duaisean air gluasad gu tighinn*’ (‘Earnests and wages are on the way’), but this was written from a man’s perspective addressing a gutter (MacKinnon 1958b); there is no indication that women ever sang it while working (see Appendix A).

Overall, the references to curers in gutting songs reflect the women’s experiences working directly for these middle men of the herring trade, something which would have been a new experience to many of them who had never before worked in commercial ventures. The relationships between gutters and curers were not always good, with gutters occasionally striking to raise wages in protest of what they considered exploitative economic practices (Thompson et al. 1983: 169–172; cf. Watt 2004: 102–104, 122–125). However, the gutting songs which mention the curers do not reflect these tensions. They instead engage with the curers primarily as background figures influencing the action of their lives, declining to pass any direct comment on their character.

While the temporary lodgings that the curers built for the women featured in some of their songs, far more recordings make reference to the houses the singers expected their sweethearts to build them when they returned home. Mary Morrison’s versions of ‘*Chan e taigh air am bi tughadh*’ are centred around the premise of what kind of house she wants her lover to build: She doesn’t want a thatched house, but a white house with running water and a new carpet under her feet.² The reasons for this are suggested by the rest of the song’s lyrics, which detail how in spite of much negotiation about the best time and place to meet, the lovers’ rendezvous is foiled anyway by an old woman who catches them in the act in the singer’s current living arrangements (e.g. 1956b). The desire for a white house is echoed in Norman MacAskill’s versions of ‘*Rionnag às an oidhche fhrasaich*’, where he sings that the house and the floor will be white-washed to keep his sweetheart healthy (e.g. 1975b). In the closely related ‘*Abu Chuibhl*’ (see Section 1.2), Kate MacLeod sings that she will fill all the nooks and crannies of the house with whitewash so that her sweetheart doesn’t get dirty (1955b).

This preoccupation with modern housing captures a snapshot of a time of monumental transition in the domestic architecture of the Hebrides. The houses which Mary Morrison’s song rejects are the traditional thatched houses which had served the Hebrides for centuries, but by the mid-twentieth century they were falling out of use. In 1953, Colin Sinclair wrote, ‘Standards of living yield to change, and what pertains to-day may be discarded to-morrow. These houses are the survivals of a phase of Gaelic life of which but the scene remains [... but] while these old dwellings are rapidly diminishing in number, many remain in occupancy at the present day’ (8). The turn of the twentieth century saw the beginnings of a shift away from thatched roofs to slate, pantiles and felt (Beaton 1997: 99–100). The black houses, or *taighean dubha*, were built out of local materials and suited the local conditions, meeting the needs of people whose lives were primarily lived outdoors but needed shelter from the wind and rain (Pride 1996: 16; Carruthers and Frew 2003: 90–91). The older ones were built of turf and often had no windows. The new white houses, or *taighean geala*, were by contrast built of whitewashed stone walls and had a slated roof (Pride 1996: 16, 64). White houses started appearing elsewhere in Scotland in the eighteenth century and were occasionally built in the

² I am grateful to Margaret Stewart for pointing out that the transcribed *bùth* (shop) should actually be *bùrn* (water) here, the error possibly arising as a mondegreen and/or from Mary Morrison’s Barra accent.

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Hebrides for wealthier people such as ministers, but it was not until the twentieth century that they started replacing black houses in the Hebrides in earnest (Carruthers and Frew 2003: 90–93). As early as the 1880s, however, Nan MacKinnon’s mother was singing in ‘*Haoi o nach dannsadh sibh e*’ of how her sweetheart was building a white house for her with a wooden floor and stairs, foreshadowing the coming change (1958d). The construction of semi-detached villas and bungalows took off in Scotland in the 1930s, with over 47,000 such houses built across the country. Coloured washes were particularly favoured on the west coast where they helped protect against rain (Carruthers and Frew 2003: 93, 101–102). By the time Alan Lomax visited the Hebrides in the early 1950s, the shift to ‘two-storey, whitewashed houses with slate roofs’ was already well underway (Bennett 2007: 38).

While the changes in Hebridean housing have been attributed to different itinerant Gaels such as soldiers and returning emigrants (MacLeod 1996: 128), the gutting songs which eagerly anticipate whitewashed houses suggest that the women who travelled all around the country to work as gutters were also key actors in this architectural shift. The song ‘*Càit am bi na maraichean*’ is a catalogue of all the places sailors go to dance with women when the weather keeps them from the sea. All variants of this song include *taighean geala* in these destinations, in either Lerwick, Gordon, or Greenock (e.g. Chaimbeul 2002: 75–77). In Shetland, participation in the fishing industry escalated from the 1870s onwards and led to a marked improvement in the economic status of ordinary islanders, a change reflected in local architecture where stone walls and wooden floors began to dominate. Thus, it was the commercial fishing industry that prompted the transition towards ‘post-vernacular’ architecture in Shetland (Tait 2012: 507–512). A similar process happened in the Hebrides, where in spite of local alterations, the domestic architectural model which predominates today is one which was imported from elsewhere rather than a strictly vernacular form (Carruthers and Frew 2003: 90–93). Itinerant gutters saw these more modern houses and aspired to have their own when they returned home.

In contrast to the cheerfulness with which the gutters sang of wanting their new houses, the shift away from the black house has often been portrayed in negative terms. For example, the strain which this hope for domestic upgrades could put on the men expected to pay for and construct them has been explored in prose by Iain Moireach (1973: 39–44). It has even been suggested that the transition to carpets was one factor in the decline of the *taigh cèilidh* or *ceilidh* house, the traditional focal point for music-making in Gaelic culture. Morag MacLeod argues that ‘beautiful light-coloured carpets, which became practical because they could be kept clean by electric vacuum cleaners, are discouraging to courteous visitors who are afraid they might dirty them’ (MacLeod 1996: 128). Surely this was not the intent of the gutters who brought ideas of mainstream Scottish architecture back home, given the hosting of their own *ceilidhs* in their gutting huts. Nevertheless, the impacts of architectural change on the Hebrides have been profound and more far-reaching than the gutters and others who aspired for this change may have ever anticipated.

The other main economic themes at play in the gutting songs are to do with the work of catching and gutting fish. The main reference the women made to their own work was in discussing the herring coming in to be gutted, such as the version of ‘*Caolas eadar mi ’s mo luaidh*’ that Maggie Smith learned from Morag MacLeod. Smith sings of boats so heavy with fish for the curers that the water has risen up to the boats’ registration numbers in the harbour (2016). In her version of the same song, Christina MacKinnon sang that there were no herring coming out of the loch, with only *sgadan grod* (‘rotten herring’) left for Calder, who was presumably a curer (1970). These lyrics may refer to a situation where there is not enough fresh

herring being caught and sold, or it may simply reflect the disgust with which women sometimes viewed the fish they gutted. Annie MacNeil, Mary Morrison's niece, said of her experiences as a gutter, 'We'd never see the bottom of the farlans for weeks and weeks. We used to go down and put a face to the herring' (1974). She also reported that the gutters themselves rarely ate the herring 'cause we were sick [of] looking at it' and that the herring they were given to eat was usually old and unappetising. Aside from their own work, the work of the fishermen also merited occasional mention. Mary Morrison's version of '*Caolas eadar mi 's mo luaidh*' features the most extensive treatment of this topic. In a series of verses about her lover's life aboard a fishing boat, she sings of how he is a deck-hand, how he works in the engine room, and how engine trouble has forced him to raise a red alarm light and keeps him from coming home sooner (MacLeod 1993: 242–243).

Beyond the fishing work, there are occasional references in the songs to the wider world of agriculture. After all, women who worked the herring season still had to return home to crofting communities in the Hebrides once the season was over. Some gutting songs, such as Dolina MacLennan's version of '*Caolas eadar mi 's mo luaidh*' which included lines about eating curds and drinking cream at Anna Finlay's shieling, may have been songs of the shieling before they circulated in fishing communities, though the difficulty of dating song variants make this difficult to prove (1958b; Maggie Smith, personal correspondence). Shielings for the care of cattle and dairy production remained operative in Lewis until the mid-twentieth century, the last survival of a system which had existed in the Irish Sea region since at least the early medieval period (Cheape 1996: 12).

The shieling system and the gutting work have several characteristics in common, despite being in pursuit of the different economic goals of subsistence agriculture and commercial fisheries. Both activities were summer seasonal work for young women which involved being away from their usual domestic setting. Because of the relative independence and youth of the women who worked on shielings, shielings took on connotations of pre-marital sex and youthful merriment, to the extent that 'some expression of female sexuality was integral to the social construction of seasonal upland sites in northern Europe', including in the Hebrides where the young men's visits would often include dancing and music (Costello 2018: 168–171). Gaelic poetry is full of references to summer frivolities at the shielings (e.g. Meek 2003: 6–7; cf. MacLeod 1996: 127–129). The gutting was likewise an opportunity for young women to spend time away from parental supervision and meet other young people. For many young women, it was a time of romantic intrigue and courtship; the end of the fishing season in the winter typically saw many marriages between gutters and fishermen (Hughes and Hughes 2016). The line about eating curds and drinking cream appears in other variants of '*Caolas eadar mi 's mo luaidh*', but MacLennan's version is the only one which makes direct reference to a shieling; the others comment on how the man ate an entire summer's worth of cheese, but it won't make him any taller, and the summer in Fraserburgh at the gutting is sometimes referenced instead of the shielings (e.g. Gillies 2005: 107–109).

In some parts of the wider Gaelic-speaking world, agricultural and fishing activities were more closely linked than in the major fishing ports. According to Manx folklore collector Mona Douglas, gutting sometimes took place in farmyards on the Isle of Man:

They always used to sing [...] when they salted down the herrings for the winter [...] I remember when the farms were there in Ballaragh, they used to go to each in turn, then all the girls and women of the district, they would have two or three big tubs set out on [...] the farmyard [...] and they would sit round these tubs, working to salt down the herrings. [...] As they worked, they sang [...] they made

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little rhymes in the Manx, about somebody making fun of somebody (Bazin 1997: 65–66).

While Scottish ports seem to have had a clearer demarcation between space used for fish processing and space used for agriculture, this anecdote about Manx gutting shows the overlap between the women’s lives on the farm and their lives curing herring. The link between agricultural and fishing work in the Scottish Gaelic gutting songs paints a holistic picture of their lives, showing their world beyond the gutting at which they were temporarily employed. At the same time, subjects from life at the shieling might have been chosen specifically because it related a part of their lives back in the Hebrides to the work they were doing now, establishing a thread of cultural continuity even in a new economic environment.

2.2 Love

While the women’s economic world is omnipresent in their music, the principal unifying theme in all of the gutting songs is the relationship between the gutters and the men in their lives. Every song discusses the singer’s beloved in some capacity. Love songs were popular among gutters in general (Domhnallach and Davenport 1987: 113). Individual men whose names have been preserved in these songs include Murchadh, son of Catriona, addressed in Mary Morrison’s versions of ‘*Chan e taigh air am bi tughadh*’ (e.g. 1956b). Different men are named in the variants of ‘*Caolas eadar mi ’s mo luaidh*’, such as Iain, who the singer longs to meet at midnight in Calum and Annie Johnston’s version (1949); Dòmhnall Donn, the Lewis sailor who fixed a broken oar in Marion Morrison’s version (1968; identified as being from Lewis by Maggie Smith, personal correspondence); and, in the same song, Macolm Macritchie, one of the Reef Raiders (Maggie Smith, personal correspondence). In ‘*Cha dèan mise fuireach riut*’, Peigi MacRae sings that if Dòmhnall Mòr never comes for her, she won’t keep waiting for him no matter how lonely she is (1951b). Even the Manx gutting song ‘*Juan y jaggad keeir*’, or ‘Grey-jacketed John’, names two men, the Juan of the title as well as Juan y Quirk who mourns him when he gets shot (Bazin 1997: 66).

More often than not, however, the specific identities of the men in the songs are up to the singers’ and audience’s imaginations. This universality made the songs ripe for teasing and extemporisation. When I interviewed her in 2016, Lewis singer Margaret Stewart commented on this phenomenon:

A lot of them would have known each other. They might have come from the same district, same village. And they were young [...] and they were generally very happy, and they would have sung songs that they knew. But then they would have created verses to tease each other. [...] When a lot of girls are together, or a lot of men are together, doing tasks like that, there’s bound to be verses created extempore [...] and because these fishing girls were away from home together, as a big group [...] and there were always these young men around, there was more opportunity. There was a hefty amount of courtship and teasing going on. [...] Maybe they were just kind of pairing off in a jocular fashion, you know. You see that in some waulking songs, so that would be brought into the gutting songs as well. Just young girls, working together and teasing each other, putting it into song. (Stewart 2016)

Thus, when references to individual men are preserved in some of the songs, they represent moments of improvisation and teasing which were once extemporised and full of personal meaning. These ephemeral moments have now crystallised in sound recordings, the original context usually long forgotten.

There are several facets of the relationships between gutters and the men they loved which feature in the gutting songs. The most poignant of these is the separation which lovers experienced while the men were at sea or otherwise deployed. One of the most commonly occurring verses in variants of ‘*Caolas eadar mi ’s mo luaidh*’ is about the strait that keeps the two sweethearts apart – usually the strait between Bernera and Uig in Lewis (e.g. Smith 1957b). The man’s employment as a fisherman was often the cause of separation (e.g. MacLeod 1993: 240–243). Other times, the Armed Forces were responsible. This is the premise in Margaret MacArthur’s ‘*Cha dèan mise fuireach riut*’ where it is the Army that keeps her lover away (1954). The Militia and Navy are also causes of separation (e.g. MacKenzie 1957; Nic a’ Ghobhainn 2009: 128). Fort George is mentioned as a place where sweethearts are stationed (e.g. MacAskill 1972). Several of the songs’ sweethearts are attached to the Royal National Reserve (e.g. MacRae 1951a). The most extended treatments of the anxiety that came from loving a man who was frequently away in dangerous employment occur not in the work songs, but in other songs which gutters composed. ‘*O cò thogas dhìom an fhadachd?*’ is a song from Point in Lewis wherein the singer fears the hardships, including storms and duplicitous Lowlanders, that will face her lover while he is away (e.g. Domhnallach and Davenport 1987: 79). The work songs tended not to focus on the perils of the fishing industry, though even one as jocular as Mary Morrison’s ‘*Caolas eadar mi ’s mo luaidh*’ referenced mishaps that could keep a man at sea longer than planned (MacLeod 1993: 242–243).

The times when lovers were reunited, however, also provided ample material for gutting song. Bawdiness in Gaelic song is not always easy to study given the bowdlerisation of verses that happened when they passed through the hands of collectors such as Marjory Kennedy-Fraser (MacLeod 1996: 128–129). With the mostly unpublished corpus of gutting songs, however, there is more room for bawdiness to survive, though the innuendo in which it is cloaked is often obscure to an outsider. For example, references to butter and milk in versions of ‘*Caolas eadar mi ’s mo luaidh*’ may be innuendo befitting songs of the shieling (e.g. MacLennan 1958b; cf. Anonymous 1907: 314–316, 345). Maggie Smith has suggested that the two versions of the song which mention a lover’s feet keeping the cows awake are allusions to night-visiting (personal correspondence; see Morrison 1968, MacLean et al. 1954, and Ross 1957: 103–105). Mary Morrison’s version of ‘*Caolas eadar mi ’s mo luaidh*’ also has a good deal of innuendo concerning her lover’s inability to reach the ‘gangway’ due to ‘engine trouble’ (MacLeod 1993: 240–243).

The song ‘*Chan e taigh air am bi tughadh*’ is an extended treatment of night-visiting. It features a back-and-forth dialogue between lovers, worked out in clandestine meetings behind the peat-stack or garden, a theme which also appears in some variants of ‘*Rionnag às an oidhche fhresaich*’ (e.g. M. Morrison 1956a; MacLean 1958; cf. Celtic Lyrics Corner 2008). Indeed, Hamish Henderson acknowledged the bawdiness inherent in the latter when he introduced it at the Bothy Ballads and Blues Céilidh of 1960 as ‘a kind of floating “Ball of Kirriemuir” [...] in the Western Hebrides’ (MacLennan and MacLennan 1960). The ‘Ball of Kirriemuir’ is a Scots song from the 1880s. It is unabashedly sexual in its graphic description of a drunken orgy (Coleman 2016). While nothing in any recorded variant of ‘*Rionnag às an oidhche fhresaich*’ is so brazenly bawdy, Peigi Oighrig MacIver’s reference to a hat on the mast in a version about men from Uig may be a phallic euphemism (1949; cf. Anonymous 1907: 299; Bennett 2007: 37). Nan MacKinnon’s version of ‘*Chan e taigh air am bi tughadh*’, dating from the 1880s, may jokingly allude to group sex or at least a lively group of suitors: She sings that she will go down to get herself a lover and find sixteen of them in Lower Shader (1958c). In Mary Morrison’s later variants, that number has been reduced to six (e.g. 1956b),

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the same number also found by the singer in ‘*Tha fear a-muigh a’ fuireach rium*’ (Nic a’ Ghobhainn 2009: 128).

Whether the gutters were actually engaging in such adventurous liaisons is beside the point given the hyperbolic and teasing nature of the songs. Rather, the takeaway from such exaggerated songs is that they clearly entertained the women singing them. There were, however, premarital sexual relationships between gutters and fishermen, as evidenced by the bitter songs of women left pregnant by promiscuous sailors (e.g. Gillies 2005: 65–67). Indeed, some of the relationships between men and women in the industry were far from pleasant, as indicated by Christian Watt’s account of how fisherwomen were always prepared to use their sharp gutting knives to defend themselves against sexual assault on dark roads at night (2004: 36). However, in keeping with their cheerful nature, the songs that gutters sang while working appear never to have referenced the darker side of sexual relationships and focused instead on the playful pairing off of gutters with fishermen. These cheerful and cheeky songs reflect how the gutting is almost always described as one of the happiest times of the women’s lives. Thrust into the new world of the commercial fisheries, their songs suggest that these women embraced the exciting opportunities, both economic and romantic, that their new lives offered them.

3. The Geography of Gutting Songs

In the following section, I will assess the geographical origins of the gutting songs. I will argue that while the songs tend to be very in touch with local concerns, particularly connected to Lewis, they also reveal a world with active connections to the Lowlands, England and beyond. This argument will be made through the analysis of place-names referenced in songs, places associated with their composition and transmission, and their macaronic quality and choice of vocables which demonstrate the profound influence of Scots and English on women who worked in the fishing industry.

3.1 *The Gàidhealtachd and Beyond*

The women who contributed Gaelic gutting songs to the School of Scottish Studies came from a variety of islands, but many of their songs were attributed to the women of just one – Lewis. As early as the 1880s, Nan MacKinnon’s mother learned her gutting songs from Lewis gutters (1958c). Both her and Mary Morrison’s versions of ‘*Chan e taigh air am bi tughadh*’ discuss the men of Lower Shader (MacKinnon 1958c; M. Morrison 1956b). The Lewis gutting song *par excellence*, however, is ‘*Caolas eadar mi ’s mo luaidh*’. It is described as a Lewis song in recordings provided by singers from Lewis (e.g. MacRae and MacLeod 1977), but also of those from South Uist (Johnson 1969a) and Barra (MacKinnon 1970). The song appeared in *Eilean Fraoich*, a collection of Lewis melodies, in 1938 (86). When Morag MacLeod recorded the song from Marion Morrison of Lewis, she noted that the song was a modern, local composition (Morrison 1968), and when publishing Mary Morrison’s version of the song in *Tocher*, MacLeod wrote, ‘The song repertory of Barra women like Mary Morrison contains a handful of songs like this, learned from Lewis girls when they followed the herring as gutters’ (1993: 243). The song’s Lewis provenance is also evident in its lyrics. One of the most commonly appearing verses laments how the strait between Bernera and Uig separates the singer from her lover (e.g. Gillies 2005: 108). Uig is also the setting of Marion Morrison’s version, in which an individual local family (the Macritchies) are discussed through references to their byname *an Irish* (1968; see section 1.2). Other Lewis locales mentioned in variants of the song are Leurbost, Back and Aird Thunga (MacLeod 1955a). These represent just a sample of the possibilities which women may have substituted to sing about their own hometowns.

‘*Rionnag às an oidhche fhrasaich*’ also has strong links with Lewis. Some versions of the song extol the qualities of Uig men, such as the one sung by Peigi Oighrig MacIver, herself from Uig (1949). In other variants, the *rionnag às an oidhche fhrasaich* (‘a star out of a showery sky’, a Gaelic idiom referring to something unlikely) of the title is seeing a sailor from Achmore (e.g. MacLennan 1959). Achmore is an inland farming community (Smith 2016) and the only Lewis location mentioned in the gutting songs which is not on the coast. The rest of the places mentioned in different versions of the song are all on the eastern side of the island. In one, the singer explains how she could get a man from Gravir or Keose, but she will get a ‘smasher’ from Cromore (MacLennan 1959). Stornoway also features as the setting for one sweetheart’s drunken escapades at the Royal Hotel (MacLennan 1958a). Like ‘*Caolas eadar mi ’s mo luaidh*’, this song has been described as originating in Lewis. For example, Mary MacKay sang the song in response to Hamish Henderson asking her if she knew any Lewis songs (1957b). The most assertive Lewis identity comes in the version published in *Eilean Fraoich* (Comunn 1938: 60–61). It goes beyond the light-hearted praise of men from different villages and expresses the singer’s refusal to leave for Glasgow. She uses the brave, bonny heroes of Sandwick and Coulregrein to represent the superiority of Lewis and a rejection of the merits of urbanisation. Glasgow has a long history of being denigrated in Gaelic poetry (c.f. Meek 2003: 22). This early version of the song is therefore in keeping with a long-standing antipathy towards the city where so many Gaels moved when they left the islands.

These verses, however, do not appear in any of the versions of the song recorded in connection with the fishing industry, and gutting songs as a whole show a markedly different attitude towards cities outside the Hebrides. While Lewis dominates the gazetteer of geographical references, other place names which come up in the songs represent the cosmopolitan outlooks of the women who sang them. The frequent mentions of the houses in Lerwick have already been discussed, representing the Shetland leg of the fishing season and demonstrating a great interest in exogenous architectural styles (see Section 2.1). References to spending the summer in Fraserburgh appear in variants of ‘*Caolas eadar mi ’s mo luaidh*’ as early as Christina MacKinnon’s version from the turn of the twentieth century (1970). Hers is also the only one to mention Yarmouth, the great English fishing port, but Fraserburgh is mentioned more often. Morag Johnson sings in her pre-1914 version, ‘*Chan eil mo leannan-sa às a’ Bhruaich | cha dèan mi suas ri strainnsear*’ (‘my sweetheart is not from Fraserburgh and I won’t take up with a stranger’) (1969a), while by 1922 Peigi MacRae has learned to sing, ‘*Tha mo leannan às a’ Bhruaich | ’s cha dèan mi suas ri strainnsear*’ (‘my sweetheart is from Fraserburgh, and I won’t take up with a stranger’) (1955). The extent to which a man from Fraserburgh was considered a stranger was consequently a matter of varying opinion. Mary Morrison’s sweetheart in ‘*Caolas eadar mi ’s mo luaidh*’ may also be a Lowlander, as he works aboard the BCK96 *Honeydew*, a Buckie boat, though his catch of herring will ultimately be sold to Stornoway merchant Duncan MacIver (MacLeod 1993: 240–243). While a non-work song like ‘*O cò thogas dhìom an fhadachd?*’ expresses a gutter’s fear that her lover will be taken advantage of by Lowlanders (Domhnallach and Davenport 1987: 79), other gutters clearly felt more warmth towards the Lowlanders in the industry – enough to engage in romantic relationships with them.

These relationships did not always end happily. ‘Stornsay Rocky Shores’ was written in the 1920s or 1930s by Jessie Finlayson of Barvas, a Gael, but she wrote her song in English so that if it ever circulated back to her ex-lover, he would be able to understand it (Smith 2012; Smith 2016). The song chronicles how the man seduced her in Stornsay before she realised he was married. The final verses extend his deceptive behaviour to all Lowland men, ending with

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the warning, ‘Oh never trust a Lowlander, nor on his oath rely’ (Smith 2012). The gutters’ songs relate their full engagement with the places and people of the wider fishing industry. These encounters were not without occasional prejudice and mistrust, but they were also characterised by mutual curiosity and affection as many women were exposed to a world beyond their home villages for the first time.

These songs, which are at the same time lovingly local in their detail and internationally aware in their outlook, resonate with the tensions Ronald Black explores in his deconstruction of the term *bàrd baile* as it has been applied to the study of Gaelic poets (1999: xliv–lxvi). Black follows Sorley MacLean and Angus MacNeacail in arguing that the distinction between a *bàrd baile*, a village poet whose verse is confined to local affairs, and the composer of *nua-bhàrdachd*, typically a university-educated man whose concerns were global, is a false dichotomy. He argues that terms like *bàrd baile*

were used as loaded weapons in the tradition-innovation wars of the 1960s. What they seek to imply is that such a person is a laureate of a small community and therefore narrow in his (or her) view of the world. In practice, however, such poets have typically fought a war, sailed seven seas, or otherwise sweated blood far and wide for a living, and their view of their community is by no means uncritical or lacking in global perspective (lxi).

Female poets and their poetry were largely absent from these debates, which centred around the conflicts between traditionally male clan and village bards’ poetry and what Black has rightfully characterised as ‘a hugely successful men’s club’ of educated men in the mid-twentieth century (lviii). While this leads Black to describe the final quarter of the twentieth century’s resurgence of female poets as a ‘refeminisation’ of Gaelic poetry, such a framing of the situation ignores the robust female composition of poetry which the gutting songs represent. References to personal automobiles in Lewis in Kate MacLeod’s version of ‘*Rionnag às an oidhche fhresaich*’, recorded in 1955, suggest that these women were composing new verse right up until the mid-twentieth century (1955b; cf. Macdonald 1978: 194–195). Ephemeral, extemporised, and sung far from the armchairs of Edinburgh literati, these gutting songs nevertheless show that women’s verse composition in the first half of the twentieth century reinforces Black’s point that poetry composed from the point of view of someone who is rooted in a local Hebridean community can be far from provincial in its worldview.

3.2 Linguistic Diversity

It is not only the subjects of their songs which bring out the gutters’ engagement with the world beyond the *Gàidhealtachd*, but their language. Many of the gutting songs are macaronic, meaning that they mix English and Scots with Gaelic (cf. Ross 1957: 130). In the version of ‘*Caolas eadar mi ’s mo luaidh*’ published in *Eilean Fraoich* in 1938, the editors put the words *gainsie* (‘gansey’, a Scots name for a fisherman’s jumper; cf. Gordon 2016: 18–28), *Mhalaisi* (‘Militia’), and *drile* (‘drill’) in quotations (86). By the 1982 edition, these words were no longer differentiated from the other Gaelic words in the text (87–88), indicating that in the intervening fifty years, all of these loan-words had been sufficiently Gaelicised. Elsewhere, the non-Gaelic words remain clearly marked. Morag MacLeod italicised *engine-room*, *deck-hand*, *shottie*, *private*, *engine trouble* and *gangway* when transcribing Mary Morrison’s version of ‘*Caolas eadar mi ’s mo luaidh*’ (1993: 240–243). Morrison also used *carpet* in ‘*Chan e taigh air am bi tughadh*’ (1956b). The most macaronic version of ‘*Rionnag às an oidhche fhresaich*’ includes *Morris*, *whitewash*, *gable*, *tidy*, *Ford*, *smashair*, and *gin* (MacLeod 1955b). Sometimes singers even substituted an English or Scots word when a Gaelic equivalent was

available; Peigi MacRae used *tam o' shanter* instead of *'boineid cruinn'* when describing her sweetheart's hat (1951a; cf. Comunn 1982: 88).

Macaronic verse is not something which has received much attention in the history of Gaelic song, though James Ross argued it is usually meant to be humorous (1957: 130). In Ireland, it has been described as a 'transitional song category' (Ó Muirthe 2011: 642). Ó Muirthe argues,

The sudden flowering of macaronic song [in the nineteenth century] coincides with the period in which a variety of pressures led to the gradual dominance of English [...] In those places where the people were comfortable in both Irish and their new English, a certain pride was shown both by the makers of the bilingual songs and those who sang them (643).

Whether or not the gutters felt pride in their multilingualism, there is certainly nothing shy about the liberal use of English and Scots in Gaelic gutting songs like Mary Morrison's. The timeframe of these songs' composition is one that encompasses a substantial decline in the number of Gaelic speakers in Scotland, with the number dropping by nearly 160,000 speakers from 1891 to 1951 (McLeod 2014: 4). The role of macaronic Gaelic song in multilingualism requires further research, but the gutting songs suggest that Hebridean gutters who picked up terminology from working in the fishing industry were part of a phenomenon not unlike that which Ó Muirthe describes in Ireland.

The vocables used in gutting songs are also of great interest in analysing the degree of Scots influence on the music. Vocables, the syllabic components of songs which on their own carry no lexical value, are an integral part of Gaelic work song, wherein they form the bulk of the refrains (Chambers 1980: 1, 178–181). Although the sounds carry no specific meanings in the Gaelic language, vocable refrains serve as the primary identifying feature in waulking songs because the verses are so variable. The sounds which make up these vocables in Gaelic song have traditionally been 'strikingly restricted as compared with the spoken language' (Campbell and Collinson 1969: 227–229). Christine Chambers conducted a phonetic analysis on 167 Gaelic recordings of songs with vocable refrains and compared them to 196 recordings of Scots songs (1980: 178, 150). She summarised her findings in a chart which compares the most common releasing consonants (the beginning of the sound), arresting consonants (used to interrupt the sound) and vowels in the vocable refrains of Scots and Gaelic songs (see Fig. 11). Among releasing consonants, Scots songs employ *d* most frequently, in over twenty per cent of cases, with *h* forming less than five per cent of vocables. The case is flipped in Gaelic, wherein over twenty-five per cent of vocables begin with *h* and only about five per cent begin with *d*. Arresting consonants occur

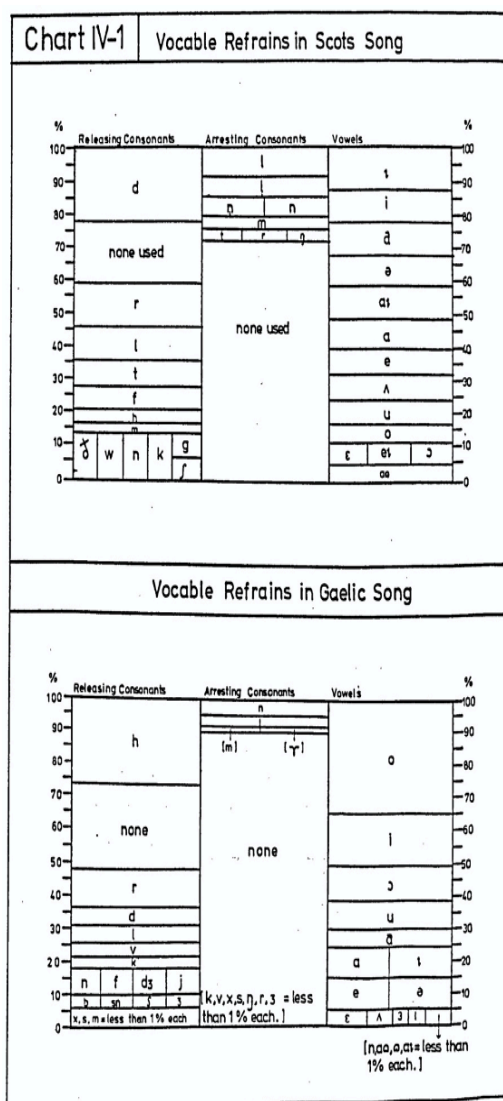


Figure 11. Comparison of vocables in Scots and Gaelic song refrains. Chambers 1980: 182

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in just over ten per cent of Gaelic vocables but over twenty-five percent in Scots. Among vowels, Gaelic speakers prefer *o* and *i* while Scots-speakers shows a more balanced range of vowel preferences, with *o* taking up one of the smallest shares (Chambers 1980: 182).

Chambers’s conclusions can be used to analyse the gutting songs’ vocable refrains in order to assess the possible influence of Scots on the gutters’ choice of vocables. Some of them fit the typical Gaelic mould, such as Nan MacKinnon’s ‘*Haoi o nach dannsadh sibh e*’ with the vocables *haoi ó* (1958d). However, others show the influence of diddling, a form of Scots vocableising which involves singing a tune with non-lexical vocables instead of words, often to a fast rhythm used for dancing (Chambers 1980: 17–24). Diddling is named for its most common sounds, namely *d* as a releasing consonant and *l* as an arresting consonant (cf. Blankenhorn 2018: 110). Diddling is an art form which was historically associated with women in Scots tradition, though this changed throughout the twentieth century (Hyland 2019). Diddling’s influence can be detected in several gutting songs’ vocable refrains. Peigi MacRae’s ‘*Cha dèan mise fuireach riut*’ employs an almost entirely diddled chorus (1951b). In many of the songs, however, the distinction is not so clear-cut because the vocables show a mixture of typical Gaelic sounds like *o* with the *d*, *l* and *um* sounds of diddling. Such a hybridity is evident in Mary Morrison’s ‘*Chan e taigh air am bi tughadh*’ when she sings, ‘*O hodil oidil o | Ho hodil oil adi | O hoidil oidil o | Hodil o hodil adi*’ (1956b). The degree of diddling’s influence on a given song sometimes varies between singers. For example, in ‘*Rionnag às an oidhche fhrasaich*’, Peigi Oighrig MacIver (1949) sings ‘*Dheòghail am sa dheòghail i*’ which, while not immediately reminiscent of waulking songs, shows a greater fidelity to Gaelic style than Kitty and Marietta MacLeod’s ‘*O ha leido ha leidio halo ha leidh*’ (1952). Tellingly, the transcriber who annotated the latter version for *Tobar an Dualchais* wrote that the ‘vocables [are] sung in an untraditional style’.

The best example of the hybridised vocable refrain comes in the many variants of ‘*Caolas eadar mi ’s mo luaidh*’. The transcribers who have worked for the School of Scottish Studies or who have published the song in books have made many different attempts to render the refrain of this song into Gaelic orthography. Thus, although the song’s refrain remains remarkably stable from one variant to the next, it has been transcribed in a myriad of ways:

Transcription	Source
’ <i>S a dhió al ó al ó al am</i> (x3) ’ <i>S a dhió al am ’s ì h-aurum</i>	<i>Eilean Fraoich</i> (Comunn 1938: 86)
<i>Ió ari ó ari ai ri um</i> ’ <i>S ió ari o ari ai ri um</i> (x2) ’ <i>S ia ai ri um si àrum</i>	transcription book (Johnson and Johnson 1949)
’ <i>S i dheó ali ó ali aidi um</i> (x3) ’ <i>s i dheó alum sa dhearum</i>	transcription book (MacLeod 1955a)
’ <i>S a dheó a leó a laoi di am</i> (x3) ’ <i>S a dheó ri am ’s i dheàram</i>	<i>Tocher</i> 46 (MacLeod 1993: 240)
’ <i>S i ò, à lò, à laoididh</i>	<i>Tobar an Dualchais</i> (MacKenzie 1957)
’ <i>Si dheo ail o ail ad iam</i>	chronological register and transcription book (MacKenzie 1957)

<i>Hi ló hi ló ha lai di hum</i>	a biographical index card for Gormelia MacKenzie, referring to MacKenzie 1957
' <i>S i ó hol ó i di um</i> (x3) <i>ó i ó hol ó hol owrum</i>	transcription book (MacKay 1957a)
' <i>S a lo alo alaidiau</i>	chronological register (MacKay 1957a)
' <i>S o ail o ail aidi am</i>	chronological register (Morrison 1959b)
<i>I eó a leó a laoi di am</i>	chronological register (Morrison 1968)
' <i>S a eo a lo a li di um</i>	chronological register (MacKinnon 1970)
' <i>S i o al o al o al am</i> (x3) ' <i>S io al am 's i h-aurum</i>	<i>Eilean Fraoich</i> (Comunn 1982: 87)
' <i>S i o al o al o al am</i> (x3) ' <i>s i o al am 's i h-abhram</i>	<i>Tog Fonn! 2</i> (Mhàrtainn 2000: 13)
' <i>S i o al o a leididh am</i> (x3) ' <i>s a leididh am 's i h-aurum</i>	<i>Songs of Gaelic Scotland</i> (Gilles 2005: 108)

Transcribing this vocable refrain with Gaelic orthography is not straightforward. These attempts make recourse to spellings which do not accurately represent the sounds; for example, '*s i*' and '*di*' do not represent the slenderised pronunciations that Gaelic orthographical conventions would usually imply. The frequency of *l* and *d* as arresting consonants is more in keeping with Scots vocableising than Gaelic. However, this refrain is not truly diddled in the Scots sense. The biggest giveaway is the beginning of phrases with '*s*', a normal way of starting song lyrics in Gaelic, representing either a contracted form of *agus* ('and') or *is* (the verb for 'to be'). For example, the lament '*S daor a cheannaich mi an t-iasgach*' ('I paid dearly for the fishing') begins thus (Gillies 2005: 45). The prevalence of *h* as an initial consonant and *o* as a vowel are similarly indicative of Gaelic influence as suggested by Chambers's analysis.

Chambers identifies many categories of vocableising which fall between the twin poles of Gaelic and Scots vocable refrains. These comprise a spectrum from formal *canntaireachd* – the relatively standardised system of vocables which is used by highly trained pipers to teach tunes – to diddling which merely imitates the sound of the bagpipes as part of strictly vocal repertoire (1980: 21–36). This pipe-diddling or cantering lacks the strict correspondence between sung syllables and notes on the bagpipe that formal *canntaireachd* has. Virginia Blankenhorn makes a similar distinction between what she calls 'didactic *canntaireachd*' and 'pseudo-*canntaireachd*', the latter of which includes Mary Morrison's performances (2018: 109–110). She describes diddling separately as having 'infiltrated the *Gàidhealtachd* through contact with itinerant musicians from non-Gaelic speaking areas' (117). Diddling is originally a Scots musical form, but it has been adopted in other linguistic settings, most notably in Ireland where the practice is called liling (Chambers 1980: 73; Madden and Vallely 2011: 403–405). Diddling and *puirt-à-beul* are both strongly associated with dancing, creating an overlap in both their function and in the associated musicality; both require singing at a tongue-twisting, relentless pace to keep up with the dancers (Chambers 1980: 70–74; MacDonald 2012: 17–29). The main difference is that diddling is mostly non-lexical while *puirt-à-beul* usually contains lyrics. Gaelic and Scots dance tunes have a long history of mutual influence and exchange (see

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Lamb 2013), so it is not surprising that the vocable refrains of dance songs are an area where we would find cross-fertilisation.

Willie Fraser, a competitive diddler, identified Highland and Lowland diddling as two separate but related styles, saying, ‘the West coast follow the bagpipes, more or less, an’ the East coast follow [...] the fiddle and piano’ (Chambers 1980: 301). This theory may explain the influence of diddling in Mary Morrison’s gutting songs; she became proficient at *canntaireachd* after being barred from playing the bagpipes due to her gender, and she would sing *canntaireachd* for dances so well that ‘people couldn’t keep off the floor’ (1974c). Joshua Dickson has argued that the links between Morrison’s *canntaireachd* and diddling have contributed to an unfair devaluation of her repertoire as less authentic compared to male pipers (2013: 53–60). While *canntaireachd* clearly influenced Morrison’s gutting refrains, she is not the only gutter who diddled. Scots-influenced diddling may have already started to permeate the dance music of the *Gàidhealtachd*, giving rise to what Fraser describes as ‘Highland diddling’ and influencing what Blankenhorn calls ‘pseudo-*canntaireachd*’, before Hebridean women ever left home for the gutting (see Blankenhorn 2018: 110).

Alternatively, working side-by-side in the gutting yards with women singing in Scots, in what Frances Wilkins has described as ‘a mélange of different songs sung in parallel’ (2018: 86–87), gutters may have played a crucial part in the absorption of Scots vocable refrains into Gaelic song. Indeed, the mixing of musical languages is explicitly described by gutter Mary Findlay, who said of Gaelic-speaking gutters in 1930 in Wick, ‘We worked very well together, and they soon had us singing in their language’ (Findlay 1991: 28). One can imagine that the vocable refrains of Gaelic songs, which required no knowledge of the language to sing, would have been the easiest part of the songs for women like Findlay to pick up – and perhaps influence with their own vocableising styles as they joined in the choruses.

Regardless of the exact mechanism by which Scots-style diddling entered gutting songs, the hybridised nature of these vocable refrains further emphasises the way that these songs represent a world of cultural cross-fertilisation. The women who composed and sang them were not isolated from the world beyond the *Gàidhealtachd*, but fully engaged with it. They leave us with a corpus of Gaelic work songs which are, in language, unapologetically macaronic; in musical style, openly influenced by Scots; and in subject, rooted in local communities while honestly appraising the merits (or lack thereof) of the outside world.

4. Gutting and Gaelic Song Scholarship

I will now evaluate how gutting songs fit into the wider field of Gaelic work song. We have seen that the songs gutters sang while working hold a vast range of detail about their social lives, economic environments, gender relations, and interactions with the world outside the *Gàidhealtachd*. Given the great wealth of information preserved in these songs, the question inevitably arises: Why hasn’t anyone written about this before? I will expose the absence of gutting song in all major academic treatments of Gaelic work song and investigate how this absence came to be. I will argue that these songs have been omitted because of their relationship to the relatively modern and cosmopolitan fishing industry as well as their defiance of easy categorisation. Finally, I will argue that rather than being an anomaly in the Gaelic work song corpus, gutting songs reinforce the ultimate fluidity and adaptability that work and dance songs have always shown, as well as their fundamental relationship to each other as expressed in the emic song category of the *luinneag*.

To my knowledge, gutting songs have never been included in any published evaluation of Gaelic song. They are entirely absent from Alexander Carmichael’s *Carmina Gadelica* (1900a; 1900b); Frances Tolmie’s *One Hundred and Five Songs of Occupation from the*

Western Isles of Scotland (1911); James Ross's 'The Classification of Gaelic Folk Song' (1957); John Lorne Campbell and Francis Collinson's *Hebridean Folksongs* (1969; 1977); Margaret Fay Shaw's *Folksongs and Folklore of South Uist* (1998); and Virginia Blankenhorn's 'A New Approach to the Classification of Gaelic Song' (2018). They also do not appear in Margaret Bennett's "'A Song for Every Cow She Milked...'" *Sharing the Work and Sharing the Voices in Gaeldom* (2007). However, Bennett has indicated that she is aware of the phenomenon, recalling that 'the girls loved songs that had choruses and were fun' (2016, personal correspondence). Morag MacLeod included a note about gutters' repertoire on Mary Morrison's performance of '*Caolas eadar mi 's mo luaidh*' published in *Tocher* (1993: 243) but has not published anything more on the topic and did not mention it in her overview of twentieth-century Gaelic song (1996). Maggie Smith, who consulted MacLeod, is the only known researcher who has previously investigated the songs of Gaelic-speaking gutters, but most of her work was in preparation for live performances and has not been published (see Section 1.1). We are thus left with a situation where, in over a century of Gaelic song scholarship, gutting songs have managed to go completely unmentioned by any of the major scholarly publications in the field and have barely registered in publication history at all. The question is, *why?*

In some cases, the dates of fieldwork that informed a collection mean that it would be unrealistic to expect gutting songs to have been included. This is true of Frances Tolmie's work. Although *One Hundred and Five Songs of Occupation* was published in 1911, Tolmie learned most of her songs in the 1860s and 1870s from women who were by then elderly (143–149; 155–156). Alexander Carmichael's fieldwork was also undertaken during a similar time frame (Stiùbhart 2008: 3–19). The women these collectors met, who tended to be older members of their communities, would not have gone to the gutting, which had only taken off for younger women in the 1850s (Domhnallach and Davenport 1987: 15–20). We could therefore not expect them to have known any songs from that line of work, and so the collectors who interviewed them did not publish any. However, the introduction to Tolmie's work written by Lucy Broadwood of the English Folk Dance and Song Society gives us our first hint as to why these songs might not have been of great interest to early collectors even if they had come across them:

[T]he interest and importance of Gaelic traditional song-texts [... is that] we have in them legend, history and lore which owe nothing to broadsides, chap-books or other printed matter [...] Gaelic traditional songs put us in touch with a long and romantic past, with verse and music of an older and more untouched type than is found elsewhere in British folk-song. (Tolmie 1911: ix).

Gutting song hardly fits the romantic view of Gaelic work song that Broadwood applies to Tolmie's collection. Itinerant gutting was a new phenomenon, not part of the 'long and romantic past' of agricultural labour, and its macaronic lyrics were far from 'untouched' by outside influences. While Tolmie and Carmichael can be forgiven for publishing song collections which were a few decades out of date, the vision these publications set out for Gaelic work song has had a long-lasting impact.

The most recent iteration of this preference for songs representing older traditions is in Virginia Blankenhorn's lengthy re-evaluation of Gaelic song classification (2018). While her work is a far cry from the romanticism of Broadwood, she still frames modern developments of Gaelic song as fundamentally irreconcilable with the tradition's long history. She establishes a timeframe of between about 1850 and 1960 for her classification system, a period which encapsulates the height of the herring industry from beginning to end, but gutting songs do not

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appear. In part, this may be due to the common inclination against seeing commercial contexts as a part of ‘traditional’ Gaelic culture. Blankenhorn frames the twentieth century as a time of decline in the tradition due to war and economic change which have ‘effectively brought about the demise of traditional Gaelic communities’ (82). The ‘dominance of the Anglophone world’ and bilingualism are two of Blankenhorn’s culprits in the downfall of traditional Gaelic song culture, but the cheerfully macaronic work songs of herring gutters hardly fit into this paradigm, and they challenge Blankenhorn’s emphasis on ‘the essential conservatism of the Gaels’ as a defining feature of their society (126–130). Gutting songs, while connected to the long tradition of Gaelic work song, are anything but conservative. All of the work songs which Blankenhorn includes in her classification system are songs of agricultural and domestic labour, except for rowing (91–92), following the pattern established by Tolmie and Carmichael over a century earlier.

As crucial as it is to recognise the way scholars have overlooked commercial work as a source of work song, it is not only a bias against including modern innovations that has led to these songs being left out. Another key factor is the gutting songs’ utter defiance of easy categorisation. While they are, by definition, work songs, they were very rarely categorised that way by collectors and transcribers working for the School of Scottish Studies. This must explain in part why James Ross did not include them as ‘occupational songs’ in 1957, despite having already personally collected six variants of four gutting songs by that point (MacLeod 1955a and 1955b; MacDonald 1956; M. Morrison 1956a, 1956c, and 1956d). As explained above, gutting songs have most often been categorised as *puirt-à-beul*, the genre gutters favoured when choosing songs to sing at work (see Section 1.1). Indeed, some of the songs were introduced by their contributors simply as *puirt* without making any connection to the gutting at all, and they may not have been aware of the song’s use as a work song (e.g. MacDonald 1956). However, gutting songs have also been categorised as waulking songs, and some are on record as having been sung at waulkings (see Section 1.2). The preference for categorising the songs as *puirt-à-beul* is understandable, as they share much in common with that repertoire. Gutting songs and *puirt-à-beul* are both usually humorous, favour four-line verses with frequent repetition, and sometimes sport vocable refrains (Sparling 2014: 139–143). But they also share qualities with waulking songs, particularly clapping songs which were sung at the end of the waulking process and were improvised along comic formulas to pair up men and women (Ross 1957: 102–103, 144; Stewart 2016). Waulking songs follow a similar performance structure to gutting songs, with one woman taking the lead by singing the verses, and the other women coming in on the refrain (Blankenhorn 2018: 101–102; cf. Wilkins 2018: 87–88). *Puirt-à-beul* were sometimes sung this way too (e.g. Morrison 1950). Similarities between *puirt-à-beul* and clapping songs, notably their shared delight in bawdry and quick wit, have been observed before (Blankenhorn 2018: 108–109, 131).

Their overlap with *puirt-à-beul* means that much of the reason gutting songs have escaped notice before now may be explained by the same factors which have caused that genre to be historically under-represented in Gaelic song scholarship; according to Heather Sparling, these include poor preservation and a concern among some Gaelic-speakers that they do not represent the full poetic weight of Gaelic tradition to outsiders (see Sparling 2014: 1–10, 302–309). And yet, this cannot entirely explain their absence. *Puirt-à-beul* have been covered in Tolmie (1911: 192–195), Ross (1957: 133), Lamb (MacDonald 2012), Sparling (2014) and Blankenhorn (2018: 107–110), and it seems that in academia, at least, their status has been undergoing a successful rehabilitation, if indeed they were under-represented to begin with.

This has not been the case for gutting songs, which remain mostly unknown. It is their innovation, their comparatively modern usage, and their resistance to clear categorisation that has made them fly under the radar of Gaelic song scholars.

But this fluidity of genre is not in itself alien to Gaelic song. Waulking songs are known for adapting songs from different backgrounds (including other work contexts) into the new context of waulking (Blankenhorn 2018: 75). Ross actually excluded waulking songs as a category because he believed the diversity of repertoire made it less useful as a category than, say, milking songs, which were mainly about the work itself and thus more easily contained within a classification system (1957: 96). However, the fact that songs sung during a particular type of work rarely addressed the work itself should not make them any less important a category of work song, and few today would agree with Ross that ‘waulking song’ is an unhelpful category. Ross’s evaluation of waulking songs’ great diversity does point to the waulkers’ happiness to adapt a wide variety of song genres, such as ballads and rowing songs which are today only preserved as adapted waulking songs (cf. MacInnes 2006b: 208; MacDonald 1951). Similarly, while I have in this study isolated gutting songs whose lyrics show a clear relationship to the gutters’ work and lives, many gutting songs likely began their lives as existing *puirt-à-beul* or other songs such as clapping or night-visiting songs before being adapted to the gutting (Smith 2016). They also often had lives beyond the gutting; Anne Lorne Gillies has reported hearing a version of ‘*Caolas eadar mi ’s mo luaidh*’ sung about a Glasgow police officer (2005: 109). These constant adaptations of old songs to new contexts undermine Blankenhorn’s rejection of ‘incremental change’ as a useful way to analyse the shifting uses of song in twentieth-century Gaelic society since the gutting songs’ remixing of older materials stands in continuity with the waulking tradition (2018: 126).

Genre fluidity has of course been acknowledged by scholars working to classify Gaelic song, including Blankenhorn’s many caveats about her own classification system (2018: 75, 91–94, 111, 130–132). Nevertheless, these systems have all failed to accommodate gutting song. They have suffered from the same problem Lamb diagnosed for *puirt-à-beul* scholarship:

Very little of what we know about the performance of *puirt* has been constructed from first-hand sources [...] [S]cholars have been content to base their understanding of the genre on the paltry written evidence that exists in books and manuscripts. Much yet lurking in our sound archives could challenge our preconceptions about the history and performance of not just *puirt-à-beul*, but Gaelic (and Scottish) music at large (MacDonald 2012: 29).

The present study has done precisely that. By delving into the Sound Archives, we have brought to light an entire genre of Gaelic song which has gone mostly unnoticed. The gutting songs certainly challenge our understanding of *puirt-à-beul*, pushing its documented use for dancing through at least the first quarter of the twentieth century, if not later (cf. Lamb 2013: 87–88). Beyond that, they pose a fundamental challenge to our existing classification systems of Gaelic song.

Where do we go from here? Is it enough to append a ‘gutting song’ category to all future enumerations of the different types of Gaelic work song? Or would this do a disservice to what the gutting songs tell us about the mutability of boundaries and adaptability to change inherent in the tradition? In spite of these difficulties, there is, in fact, a song category in the literature which the gutting songs fit perfectly into: the *luinneag*. MacInnes brought the *luinneag* back into wider conversation in his article ‘Gaelic Song and the Dance’ (2006a). He quotes the eighteenth-century author John Ramsay of Ochtertyre, who wrote that ‘*luinigs* were sung by the women [...] during almost every kind of work, where more than one person is employed

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[...] When labourers appear to flag, a *luinig* is called for, which makes them for a time forget their toil, and work with redoubled ardour’ (255). A *luinneag* in this historical context is ‘a choral song with vocable refrains’ which accompanies group labour, particularly among women, though in contemporary Gaelic the word is usually translated as a ‘ditty’ or ‘light song’ (262). Broadwood’s evaluation of Tolmie’s collection also concluded that songs in the collection were *luinneagan*, making reference to Ramsay’s criteria (1911: vi). Crucially, Tolmie’s collection included a few examples of *puirt-à-beul*, thereby including them under the *luinneag* umbrella. Lamb picks up on this underlying relationship between *luinneagan*, dance song and work song in his article ‘Reeling in the Strathspey’ (2013). After arguing that the same fundamental rhythm underlies much of Gaelic work and dance song (68–81), he expands on MacInnes’s observation that today’s words for ‘dance’ in Gaelic are all loan-words and that Gaelic culture must have therefore lexicalised dance differently in the past (84). Lamb highlights several examples of the word *luinneag* being applied to dance song and argues that the word could have once lexicalised dance and work song as ‘merely parts of a greater, holistic category of communal activity’ (83–85).

Through the lens of *luinneag*, gutting songs cease to be an outlier. Their conflicts of genre – dance song used as work song, and vice versa – are reconciled when it is recognised that these categories are ultimately two sides of the same coin. The fluidity between dance and work song which they represent reinforces Lamb and MacInnes’s argument that understanding *luinneag* as an emic category for lexicalising songs which are rhythmically linked to coordinated group movements is a fruitful way forward. The gutting songs show that the cultural drive behind women composing *luinneagan* to lighten their labours continued undeterred until the end of itinerant gutting in the mid-twentieth century. Rather than commercial industry and exposure to English and Scots being a catalyst of decline in Gaelic work and dance song, these forces shaped an environment that kept the genre functional and relevant longer than in any other context. The gutting song corpus thus undermines the construction of Gaelic song culture’s twentieth-century experience as one of monolithic decline in the face of outside forces. Instead, we find that the resilience, creativity, and open-mindedness of Gaelic-speaking women kept their *luinneagan* alive and vibrant in a time of seismic economic and linguistic shifts in the *Gàidhealtachd*.

5. Conclusion

This study has demonstrated how a close investigation of archival sources can stimulate new directions in the study of Gaelic song. The ultimate endpoint which scholars such as Blankenhorn describe as the state of Gaelic song today – a preference for performance aesthetics instead of community participation, and a decline in audience comprehension (2018: 126–130) – may not have changed. The story of how we got here, however, is not a linear one. The impact of multilingualism and economic change on Gaelic song have generally been evaluated in negative terms without recognising that alternative threads exist in the narrative. In a situation where Gaelic has been experiencing critical decline, it is understandable that Gaelic work songs which happily employ English and Scots and valorise a commercial industry have not been a priority. Failing to explore the implications of these songs, however, does an injustice to the resilience and adaptability inherent in the tradition.

This is only the beginning of the study of Gaelic gutting songs. As awareness of these songs grows in the scholarly community, further studies may uncover more about their origins. Musicological analysis comparing their melodies and rhythms to other dance and work songs could either strengthen or complicate Lamb’s arguments about the strathspey rhythm being a fundamental part of the *luinneag* concept (2013: 81–89). A thorough linguistic comparison

between the songs of gutters from different islands could uncover a rich variety of dialectical variation. It might also shed light on the unresolved question of why so many of the songs are attributed to Lewis women – is this simply the product of a higher population (cf. Domhnallach and Davenport 1987: 20), or could there be unique qualities in the practice of work song or *puirt-à-beul* on Lewis that influenced the women there in their choice of repertoire? In particular, investigating the social history of gutting in Skye would be valuable, since James Ross, Frances Tolmie, and Margaret Bennett all hail from Skye (Blankenhorn 2018: 75–80). It is possible that this strong Skye strain in the scholarship has contributed to the invisibility of gutting song, since Lewis and Barra have dominated the oral history accounts of the practice; if Skye women were not as likely to participate in the gutting, then scholars from these areas may not have been as attuned to the practice as if they had been from Lewis or Barra. Furthermore, the macaronic quality of gutting songs could usefully be incorporated into studies on the development of multilingualism among Hebridean Gaels; this too could yield illuminating differences between the islands.

While it has so far proven more difficult to find examples of Scots and English gutting songs than Gaelic, further research could uncover more comparative material which would enable scholars to explore the similarities and differences between gutting song repertoires across the country. Bill Motion, from a Cellardyke fishing family, reported how his mother improvised a romantically teasing Scots gutting song about a fellow gutter and her future husband to the air of the dance tune ‘Bon Accord’ (2017). This suggests that in areas where hymns were not taken up as work song, Scots-speaking women may have been calling on an underlying fluidity between work and dance song in their compositions similar to that of their Gaelic-speaking counterparts. Broadening out beyond Scotland to more thoroughly investigate whether Irish, Canadian, Manx, American and English oral history archives contain any gutting songs would shed light on the wider North Atlantic phenomenon. The same can be said of extensions into Scandinavia, since gutters from Sweden and Norway gutted alongside Gaels in Scottish ports (MacKenzie 2019; Watt 2004: 132–133). Repertoire exchange between Norway and Britain happened among fishermen (cf. Spooner 1976); might the same have happened among herring gutters? There is still much to be done in the study of women’s itinerant work song in the fishing industry and beyond. The study of Gaelic gutting songs opens up an under-explored chapter of Scotland’s musical history, and new conversations and directions for the field will hopefully follow.

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APPENDIX A: GUTTING SONGS

For Appendix A, please see the linked document, [Appendix A](#).

APPENDIX B: CONTRIBUTORS AND THEIR SONGS

Key

Contributor’s Name (# of discrete songs - # of total contributions) Place of Origin

Title of variant, Archival reference when applicable (Fieldworker)

Variants of a song already listed

Contributors

Dolina MacLennan (3-5) Marvig, Lewis

Rionnag anns/as an Oidhche Fhrasaich, SA1958.180.A9 (Hamish Henderson)

Chan eil mo leannan ann a seo, SA1958.180.B5 (Hamish Henderson)

Càit’ am bi na Maraichean, SA1971.72.3 (Peter Cooke)

Rionnag anns/as an Oidhche Fhrasaich, SA1959.116.2 (Hamish Henderson)

Rionnag as an Oidhche Fhrasaich, SA1960.111.A5 (Hamish Henderson) (with her sister)

Peggy MacLean (1-1) Berneray

Rionnag anns/as an Oidhche Fhrasaich, SA1958.173.A6 (John MacInnes)

Kitty MacLeod and Marietta MacLeod (1-1) Skigersta, Ness, Lewis

Rionnag anns an Oidhche Fhrasaich, SA1952.39.B5 (Hamish Henderson)

Norman MacAskill (1-3) Glendale, Skye

Rionnagan air oidhche fhrasach, SA1972.179.A10 (Ian Paterson)

Rionnagan air oidhche fhrasaich, SA1975.157.A14 (Ian Paterson)

Rionnagan air oidhche fhrasaich, SA1975.161.A8 (Ian Paterson)

Mary MacKay (2-2) Stornoway, Lewis

’S a lo alo alaidiau, SA1957.47.A2 (Hamish Henderson)

Rionnag as an Oidhche Fhrasaich, SA1957.48.A1 (Hamish Henderson)

Peigi Oighrig MacIver/Peggy Effie Smith (2-2) Kneep, Lewis

Rionnag as an Oidhche Fhrasaich, SA1949.8

Caolas Bhearnaraigh is Uig, SA1957.102.B10 (James Ross)

Peigi MacRae (2-3) North Glendale, South Uist

Tam o' Shanter 's Geansaidh Snàith, CW0160A.729 (Margaret Fay Shaw)

Mura tig thu Dhòmhnaill Mhòir/Cha dèan mise fuireach riut, CW0160C.813 (Margaret Fay Shaw)

O Théid 's gun Téid mo Luaidh, CW0194.1128 (John Lorne Campbell)

Mary Morrison (3-9) Ersary, Barra

Caolas Eadar mi 's mo Luaidh, SA1956.66.2 (James Ross) (with chorus)

Gimleid 'is Tàl 'is Locair/Abo Chuidhil, SA1956.76.4 (James Ross) (with others)

Chan e taigh air am bi tugadh, SA1956.95.3 (James Ross)

Chan eil taigh air am bi tughadh/Ho hadil hoidil, SA1959.67.B6 (James Ross)

Chan e taigh air 'm Biodh Tughadh, CW1046C.733 (John Lorne Campbell)

Chan eil taigh air am bi tugadh, CW0146D (John Lorne Campbell; Annie Johnston)

Chan eil taigh air am bi tugadh, CannaTape.0088 (John Lorne Campbell)

Air Tìr A-raoir 's air Muir A-nochd/'S o ail o ail aidi am, SA1959.67.B7 (James Ross)

Air Muir A-raoir 's air Tìr A-nochd, SA1974.110.B7 (Mary MacDonald, Emily Lyle) (with others)

Marion Morrison (1-1) Uig, Lewis

'S Eò a Leò a Laoi Di Am, SA1968.124.10 (Morag MacLeod)

Christina MacKinnon (1-1) Ledaig/Castlebay, Barra

Chan eil mo leannan ann an seo/'s a hò a lò a li di um, SA1970.351.B2 (Mary MacDonald)

Morag Johnson (2-2) Carnan, South Uist

O théid 's gun téid mi cuairt, SA1969.104.A7 (Angus John MacDonald)

Nuair a sheinneas ise 'n fhideag, SA1969.104.A8 (Angus John MacDonald)

Gormelia MacKenzie (1-1) Balallan, Lewis

'S ì ò, à lò, à laoidhidh, SA1957.12.B9 (James Ross)

Mary MacRae and Mary Ann Macleod (1-1) Uig, Lewis; Reef, Lewis

Chan eil mo leannan ann a seo/Cha dèan ìm, no gruth, no bàrr, SA1977.63.B2 (Morag MacLeod)

Calum and Annie Johnston (1-1) Barra

Tha caolas eadar mi 's mo luaidh, Log 89

Nan MacKinnon (2-2) Barra/Vatersay

Tha i fuar, tha i frasach, SA1958.149.3 (James Ross)

Haoid nach dannsadh sibh e, SA1958.149.4 (James Ross)

Angus MacKenzie & Co. (1-1) New South Wales

Rud nach fhaca duin' air thalamh, SA1977.44.B2a (Emily Lyle)

Maggie Smith (1-1) Achmore (?), Lewis

Fearnot a steach a loch (Meg Hyland)

Chrissie and Margaret MacArthur and John MacLean (3-3) Stornoway, Lewis

Càit' am bi na Maraichean, SA1954.75.A6 (Francis Collinson)

Tha fear a muigh a' fuireach rium, SA1954.75.B10 (Francis Collinson) (just with a Miss MacArthur – first name unknown)

Caolas Bhearnaraidh is Uig, SA1954.75.B14 (Francis Collinson)

Annie MacLeod (1-1) Lewis

Càit' am bi na Maraichean, SA1954.78.A14 (Francis Collinson)

Rev. Norman MacDonald (1-1) Skye

Càit am bi na Maraichean (James Ross)

Kenneth MacIver (1-2) Lewis/London

Càit' am bi na Maraichean, SA1956.56.B4 (James Ross)

Càit' am bi na Maraichean, SA1959.12.3 (James Ross)

Catriona Anna Nic a' Phì (1-1) Barra/Ottawa

Grinn donn sgiobalta, mo ghiobag air an ùrlar

Nan MacLeod (1-1) Lewis

Tha fear am muigh a' fuireach rium, SA1957.11.A8 (James Ross)

Màiri Nic a' Ghobhainn (1-1) Lewis

Hò rì ai trì haoiream (Meg Hyland)

Kate MacLeod (2-2) Leurbost/Stornoway, Lewis

'S ann an Leurbost nan Loch, SA1955.2.A15 (James Ross and Francis Collinson) (with chorus)

Abo Chuibhl, SA1955.2.A16 (James Ross and Francis Collinson) (with chorus)

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