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Editorial

Applications of digital technology have figured large in recent research and publications in Scottish ethnology. The major digitisation projects initiated or completed during the past decade have involved both of the indigenous languages of Scotland, with the preponderance of Gaelic-based materials reflecting the contents of the School of Scottish Studies archive. Considerable work remains to be carried out in the digitisation of ethnology collections at the national level, while subsequent short-term projects have come on stream. The Carmichael Watson Project aims to develop one of Europe's foremost 19th century folklore collections into an effective modern research tool, at the same time making the materials accessible to communities throughout Scotland. Such social objectives for ethnology are further supported by 'Reconnecting with Gaelic Scotland's Community Traditions', a project launched last year to raise a wider awareness of the importance of the legacy of Scotland's most prolific folklore fieldworker, Calum Maclean. A recent edition of the Elizabeth Ross Manuscript, containing 150 Highland airs from the early 19th century, is now freely available online. Together such recent results form a unique and accessible resource for folklore research. A further major research initiative is the Walter Scott Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border Project, with an aim to produce a new critical edition, and research continues in the fields of calendar customs and community rituals, Scottish emigrant communities, place names, and traditional music (for above see http://www.ed.ac.uk/schools-departments/literatures-languages-cultures/celtic-scottish-studies/research-publications/overview)

It is an encouraging sign for the future of the discipline that three of the six articles in the present volume are the work of a younger generation of scholars now coming into their own. No less heartening is the fact that their articles draw significantly on materials from the sound archive, or from their personal field collections. Research in Gaelic song is further advanced in an examination, likewise based on field recording transcriptions, of the performance by one of Scotland's foremost traditional singers of songs composed centuries ago and in some cases retained in the oral repertoire. Turning to the international context of high art, historical research reveals how a Gaelic version of an international folktale type came to be featured in a well-known European operatic work. Drawing largely on the traditions of Northeast Scotland, the historical strand is extended back many centuries in a study that sheds light on the distribution of a custom whose origins, as suggested by comparisons with related cultures, may well reflect a survival from Indo-European times, continuing a long-standing and active interest among Scottish ethnologists in the "deep" history of Scotland's traditions.

Following a decision taken last year by the Editorial Board, *Scottish Studies* will be available online (http://journals.ed.ac.uk./scottishstudies) as an open access journal beginning with the present volume, with a limited number of hard copies still available. In addition to providing universal access research that has been supported at least in part by public funds, the new format will bring to our discipline the advantages of wider dissemination of results and greater technical flexibility, including sound and video 'companions', to present and future publications.

Richard Wagner's *Der fliegende Holländer* – A Flying Hebridean in Disguise?

PER G.L. AHLANDER

ABSTRACT. Several scholars have drawn attention both to the many Scottish references in Richard Wagner's initial sketches of *The Flying Dutchman* and to the close links between the opera and the composer's own disastrous Nordic sea journey, but discussions tend to centre on the opera's libretto. What appear to be musical reminiscences of Hebridean songs in the opera's core thematic material have not been alluded to since Marjory Kennedy-Fraser pointed them out at the beginning of the twentieth century. Having a long-standing interest in Wagner's *œuvre*, she associated various themes and tunes she had collected in the Outer Hebrides with the German composer, and among her extant field recordings – now at Edinburgh University Library – there are indeed snippets of music that closely resemble Wagnerian *leitmotifs* and airs, in particular Senta's ballad in *Der fliegende Holländer*. Drawing on a paper Kennedy-Fraser read to the Musical Association in London in 1918, various scattered references, and letters from Sir Granville Bantock and John Lorne Campbell, my article discusses the potential links between Hebridean songs and, in particular, Senta's ballad.

As suggested vaguely by the title, the purpose of my paper[*] is to explore any plausible links between Richard Wagner's opera *Der fliegende Holländer* and the musical idiom of the Scottish Hebrides. Several scholars have already drawn attention to the many Scottish references in the German composer's initial sketches of the opera more generally, and the pivotal importance of his disastrous Nordic sea journey has been frequently discussed. Still, what appear to be musical reminiscences of Hebridean songs in the opera's core thematic material have not been alluded to since Marjory Kennedy-Fraser pointed them out at the beginning of the twentieth century. Before turning to any musicological details, however, I will begin by providing a brief outline of Wagner's earlier life and career, followed by a discussion on Kennedy-Fraser's gradually deepening interest in Wagnerian matters and how she came to promote the composer's *œuvre* in Scotland.

Born in Leipzig, Richard Wagner (1813–83) grew up in Dresden, in the proximity of the theatre; interested mainly in literature, he dreamt of becoming a poet. After hearing Beethoven's *Egmont* music, however, he changed his mind and decided instead to devote himself to music. He returned with his family to Leipzig in 1828, and in 1829 he attended a performance of Beethoven's *Fidelio*, where Wilhelmine Schröder-Devrient[1] sang Leonore's part. In raptures over the music and Schröder-Devrient's interpretation, he wrote to the singer that she had given his life a meaning, and Madame Schröder-Devrient, who was apparently flattered, kept the letter, remembering it when she met with him in 1842 to create the leading soprano parts in *Rienzi* and *Der fliegende Holländer*.

Various music positions in Würzburg and Magdeburg led Wagner via Königsberg (now Kaliningrad) to Riga in 1837, where he had been appointed conductor at the theatre. Having a great talent for running into debt, he would usually choose to run away when the creditors became too many and too persistent, but this time they tracked him down, both from Magdeburg and Königsberg, and with new debts incurred in Riga, the Russian authorities decided to confiscate his passport. Clearly, it was time to escape again; in July 1839, while on tour with the theatre to Mitau, closer to Prussia than Riga, Richard Wagner quietly sneaked away. Together with his wife Minna Planer, whom he had married in 1836 – 'his young and pretty but somewhat silly and at last discontented wife',[2] according to Marjory Kennedy-

[*] Based on a paper presented at *Musica Scotica 2007: 800 years of Scottish Music*, Musica Scotica's Third Annual Conference, held at Glasgow University on 28 April 2007. Subsequently, a reworked version of the paper was given as part of the Research Seminar series in the Department of Celtic and Scottish Studies, University of Edinburgh, on 9 November 2007.

Fraser – and their huge Newfoundland dog Robber, he crossed the Russo-Prussian frontier illegally and arrived in Königsberg two days later. At the Prussian port of Pillau the three of them boarded the *Thetis*, a small merchant vessel with a crew of seven, bound for London. Most unfortunately, however, a violent storm off the Danish coast forced the captain to seek refuge, landing in Sandvika at Borøya, near the small town of Tvedestrand[3] on the southern coast of Norway. Two days later the *Thetis* set sail again, only to narrowly escape being splintered after striking a submerged rock. After a day of further recovery back in Sandvika, they all finally managed to cross over to England, surviving yet another furious storm. Eventually, more than three weeks after setting out from Pillau, the company arrived in London, having by then certainly discovered what it meant to be at the mercy of the forces of nature (Evensen).

During the extended voyage, Wagner had many opportunities to listen to the sailors singing their songs; furthermore, he was brought face to face with the antagonism of a superstitious crew who believed that a crime committed by someone on board a ship might cause its destruction and put their own lives at risk. This is a widespread belief in the Gaelic world;[4] the well-known ballad 'William Glen'[5] tells of a how a sea captain who had once committed a murder is thrown overboard at sea by his crew during a dreadful storm, when the ship is about to be wrecked. According to Richard Wagner's '*Autobiographische Skizze*', the sailors also told him stories of the Flying Dutchman, though this may not have actually taken place (Grey 2000: 17, 178–79, 201 n 3). In any case, all these dramatic events – the sea voyage, the shipwreck, the shanties, the superstition, the stories, and the dramatic Norwegian coastline – made a deep impression on him. The experience was still fresh in his mind many years later, when he wrote in *A Communication to my Friends*: 'The figure of the "Flying Dutchman" is a mythical creation [*Gedicht*] of the people: it gives emotionally compelling expression to a timeless feature of human nature. This feature, in its most general sense, is the longing for peace from the storms of life.'[6]

In the years that followed, living in Paris, Wagner wrote a first sketch of the Flying Dutchman material in French, which he sent to the famous librettist Eugène Scribe (1791–1861) for versification in May 1840, but most disappointingly, nothing came of the effort. He subsequently reworked the story and made his own versification, hoping for a commission from the Paris Opéra, but as the illustrious institution preferred another composer, Wagner, in financial difficulties as usual, sold his Flying Dutchman scenario for five hundred francs to the Opéra in 1841. The ensuing result was *Le Vaisseau fantôme* by Pierre-Louis Dietsch (1808–65), which opera quietly sank into oblivion after a few years. The sale of the scenario in Paris did not preclude Wagner from performing his own version elsewhere though, and in those years, anyway, copyright was not high on the agenda. His own versification being already completed, he quickly set to work on a new prose sketch – this time in German – as well as on composing the music, and on 2 January 1843, *Der fliegende Holländer* was premièred in Dresden, with Wilhelmine Schröder-Devrient interpreting Senta's part.

The new opera was no particular success in Dresden, however, and it closed after only four nights. Wagner was more satisfied with the staging in Berlin the following year, where, in January 1844, he himself conducted the first two evenings of the run. In February, in the remaining two performances, Schröder-Devrient returned to sing the rôle of Senta. In between the Dresden and Berlin productions, the *Holländer* had been well received in Kassel, and also in Riga, where the theatre management and audience obviously did not bear any hard feelings towards the composer, in spite of the fact that he, deeply in debt, had run away from them only four years earlier. Today there is still a street named after him in central Riga, the 'Riharda Vāgnera iela' (Figure 1).

Figure 1: The Richard Wagner street in central Riga, Latvia. (© Per G.L. Ahlander)

Although *Der fliegende Holländer* did not enter the standard repertoire until well into the twentieth century, it was to be the first of Wagner's operas that reached London, where – as *L'Olandese dannato* – it was given in Italian at Drury Lane in July 1870, with Sir Charles Santley (1834–1922) in the title rôle. Somewhat surprisingly, Senta's part was sung by Ilma de Murska (Ema Pukšec, 1834–89), the Croatian nightingale, who was famous for her brilliant *coloratura*, a skill that might not have been so very useful for this particular part. Nevertheless, despite the obvious need for a slightly heavier type of voice, when the opera was first performed at Covent Garden in 1877, the rôle was created by Emma Albani (Emma Lajeunesse, 1847–1930), another *coloratura diva* of the period. It was still sung in Italian, this time under the title of *Il Vascello fantasma*, which is the opera's Italian name, and not until 1882 was there a London production in the original German. *Der fliegende Holländer* was not performed at Bayreuth until 1901. As was the case with other famous operas, various piano arrangements were soon available on the market, a phenomenon that was instrumental in popularising larger musical works in the pre-recording era. Franz Liszt (1811–86), Richard Wagner's father-in-law, was among those producing such arrangements, but he apparently saw his own virtuoso Wagner transcriptions merely as 'a modest propaganda on the inadequate piano for the sublime genius of Wagner!'[7]

There were several Scottish connections inherent in the sources Wagner might have used, the most significant of which was Heinrich Heine's pseudo-autobiographical *Aus den Memoiren des Herren von Schnabelewopski*, published in *Der Salon* in 1833. In this story, the fictitious von Schnabelewopski describes a play that he once saw in Amsterdam, on the subject of the Flying Dutchman. Heine lets the reader follow the plot until the Dutchman meets with Katharina, the daughter of a Scots sea captain. Then, von Schnabelewopski leaves the theatre with 'a girl of breathtaking beauty' (Millington 26) who was in the audience, only to return in time to witness Katharina throwing herself into the sea, redeeming the Dutchman's soul from the grip of Satan. The play is treated ironically by Heine, and his 'cynicism is encapsulated in the final moral: that women should beware of marrying a Flying Dutchman, while men should take care that they are not ruined by women' (Millington 2000: 26). Notwithstanding his slightly mocking approach, it was Heinrich Heine (1797–1856) who introduced the motif of redemption into the legend, a theme Wagner would repeatedly return to: man redeemed through the unselfish sacrifice of a completely devoted woman; Elisabeth, Sieglinde, Brünnhilde, Isolde, and Kundry – that is how the story ends for all of them.

In his first sketch in 1840, Wagner placed the action geographically somewhere along the Scottish coast. Entitled *Le Hollandais volant (nom d'un fantôme de mer)* [The Flying Dutchman (name of a sea phantom)], it reads in the very first paragraph: '*De son sombre vaisseau, dont les voiles d'un rouge sanguin et l'équipage de spectres sont l'effroi des marins dans les eaux étrangères, il descend aujourd'hui sur une des côtes de l'Ecosse.*'[8] (Laroche 1993: 69–71) [From his dark ship, whose blood-red sails and crew of ghosts are the terror of sailors in foreign waters, he goes ashore today on one of the coasts of Scotland.] In the completed opera, the action still took place in Scotland, more specifically in the fictitious village of 'Holystrand', and it was only while preparing for the Dresden première in January 1843 that he moved it to 'Sandwike' in Norway, recalling the name of the fishing-village where the *Thetis* had sought respite from the North Sea storms in 1839. Hugh Macdonald

gives two reasons for this change: that Scottish subjects by then had become somewhat *démodé* and that Wagner wanted to make the links clearer to his own North Sea experience. Consequently, Daland's line in Act I, scene 3, '*Gastfreundschaft kennt der Schotte*', was changed to '*Gastfreundschaft kennt der Seemann*' (Wagner 1909: 50). (Macdonald 2005: 277–78; see also Grey 2000: 2–3) 'Any speculation that the opera might have been called *The Flying Scotsman*, though', Macdonald continues, 'is dashed by the fact that the legend always concerned a Dutchman, and probably an actual Dutchman of the seventeenth century' (Macdonald 2005: 279).

By the 1880s, Richard Wagner, together with Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, had become a cult figure; both his music and his ideas of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* and the *Zukunftsmusik* were fervently admired far beyond the German-speaking parts of Europe. Scottish singer David Kennedy (1825–86), Marjory Kennedy-Fraser's father, was among the early enthusiasts, and while on holiday in London in June 1882, he attended the first performances in Britain of both *Tristan und Isolde* and *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* at Drury Lane, 'enjoying it as a rare feast. […] There was a "bigness", a wild grandeur about it, which quite moved him.'[9] Presumably, his daughter Marjory was there as well, having by then returned from her student years in Milan (Ahlander 2008: 52–54). It has always been the desire of every true Wagnerian to go on a pilgrimage to Bayreuth and its Festspielhaus *auf dem Grünen Hügel*, and many individuals of the British avant-garde circles travelled there in the 1890s, primarily for performances of *Parsifal*, which opera was to be heard nowhere else. Edinburgh-based Irish artist Phoebe Anna Traquair (1852–1936), piano professor Tobias Matthay (1858–1945) and his wife Jessie (Marjory Kennedy-Fraser's youngest sister), and journalist and author Elizabeth A. Sharp (1856–1932, married to William Sharp, a.k.a. Fiona MacLeod)[10] had already been in Bayreuth when Marjory Kennedy-Fraser (1857–1930) and her sister Margaret made their journey in 1899 (Cumming 2005: 64; Kennedy-Fraser 1929: 99; Matthay 1945: 32). By then, however, Mrs Kennedy-Fraser was already well versed in Wagner's music, having included works by him on several occasions in the recitals she produced for Patrick Geddes's Edinburgh Summer Meetings in 1892–96. In the fourth and final recital in 1892, entitled 'Modern Composers of all Nationalities', her brother John Kennedy sang 'O Star of Eve' from *Tannhäuser*.[11] In 1894, in a programme called 'German Song Writers of the Nineteenth Century', her sister Margaret Kennedy interpreted '*Träume*', the last of Wagner's five *Wesendonck Lieder*.[12]

In the lecture-recitals Mrs Kennedy-Fraser presented in Edinburgh in 1903–07, she made Wagner's music the topic of some of her programmes, and over the years to come, in lectures and articles, she would frequently return to both his music and writings. She took a particular interest in *Parsifal* and *Der fliegende Holländer*, in the latter, however, not so much for the music itself. In 1906, she said in one of her lectures:

> "The Flying Dutchman" is not a very important musical composition – there is more of tempest and storm and the feelings which these conjure up in [the] 1st movement of Beethoven's D minor sonata than in this whole music – but the composition of it marks a turning point of vital importance in Wagner's artistic development whilst the story itself is so interwoven with the tissue of his life at the time that the title forms a convenient text for reflections on the master and the composition of the work [–] a salient point to and from which to study the great music drama composer's evolution.[13]

Marjory Kennedy-Fraser's Wagner concert on 20 January 1906 was a considerably larger production than her usual lecture-recitals: 'This Recital will have special reference to Messrs Paterson & Sons' Choral Orchestral Concert Recital of "The Flying Dutchman", and

will, in the course of a sketch of the Composer's life, have a special bearing on that work.' Margaret Kennedy opened with '*Träume*', and after Kennedy-Fraser's 'Sketch of Wagner's Life' there followed excerpts from all three acts of the opera with four soloists[14] and '50 Members of Mr Kirkhope's Choir'. Mr John Kirkhope conducted, and Mrs Kennedy-Fraser and Mr R.W. Pentland presided at the piano.[15] In her talk, *The Scotsman* reported, '[s]he condensed and focused the chief events of the composer's life, and tracing the influence of character and environment on his works. […] The large audience appreciated alike the lecture and the illustrations.'[16] Paterson & Sons' choral-orchestral concert performance with soloists, Mr Kirkhope's Choir and the Scottish Orchestra, which followed on 5 February in the McEwan Hall,[17] was apparently not entirely successful, however. *The Scotsman* commented that 'it may be doubted if the experiment of presenting a "romantic opera in three acts", with the leading singers in orthodox evening dress and the chorus massed behind in the style suitable to oratorio, will be repeated'. The choir did perform 'with a degree of accuracy and finish which could never be looked for from the chorus singers of a travelling provincial company' and the Scottish Orchestra left 'the theatre orchestra far behind. But these two advantages could not atone for the incongruity of having a music-drama which is peculiarly dependent upon pure spectacle presented upon the comparatively cold and formal platform of the concert-room.'[18]

In the spring that same year, Mrs Kennedy-Fraser was one of the two lecturers featured at the Incorporated Society of Musicians' Fourth Annual Scottish Sectional Conference, held at the Royal Hotel in Edinburgh. On that occasion, she brought forth a second Wagner concert, a shortened version of her 'Flying Dutchman' programme performed in January, with two soloists instead of four and without Mr Kirkhope's Choir.[19] A few years later, while working over some of the musical material she had collected in the Hebrides, Mrs Kennedy-Fraser came across tunes and themes that she associated with Richard Wagner. Among her extant field recordings, now held by Edinburgh University Library, there are indeed some snippets of songs that bear a close resemblance to leitmotifs and airs from Wagner's *œuvre*, in particular to Senta's ballad in *Der fliegende Holländer*. In February 1910, Kennedy-Fraser touched upon her recent findings when discussing the 'reviving interest in Scots national music' in her lecture on 'Scots Songs – Highland and Lowland' in the Goold Hall, St Andrew Square, Edinburgh, 'under the auspices of the local centre of the Scottish National Song Society'. In thislecture, she noted that 'all Europe and America had been gradually awakening to a realisation of the value and importance of folk-music':

> The art value of such racially individualised music had of recent years been acknowledged by the greatest composers. Wagner, who had put it on record that "the folk are the vital force conditioning art", was himself influenced at an early stage in his career (as a tone-poet indeed influenced for life) by his experience of the northern folk-lore and song gained on a memorable voyage in the North Sea, an experience which took artistic shape in his dramatic ballad "The Flying Dutchman".[20]

'We know by a study of his music-dramas', she maintained further, 'that he must have heard from the sailors just such songs as those we have collected in the Hebrides.'[21]

Senta's ballad in the second act of *Der fliegende Holländer* is the core of the opera, and it was one of the 'numbers' Wagner composed in Paris back in 1840, when he still cherished hopes of a commission from the Opéra. '*Diese [vorab komponierten Teile] waren: Die Ballade der Senta, das Lied der norwegischen Matrosen und der Spuk-Gesang der Mannschaft des "Fliegenden Holländers*".'[22] [These (sections composed in advance) were: Senta's ballad, the Norwegian sailors' song and the 'Flying Dutchman' crew's ghost song.]

Over the years, Wagner made various alterations to the score, and he even seems to have contemplated altering the ballad; 'on 17 October 1878 Cosima [Wagner] noted that he was still "thinking of revising Senta's Ballad, the beginning of which he finds quite like a folk-song, but not characteristic of *Der fliegende Holländer*"'[23]. If he ever created a revised version, however, it never found its way into the completed opera.

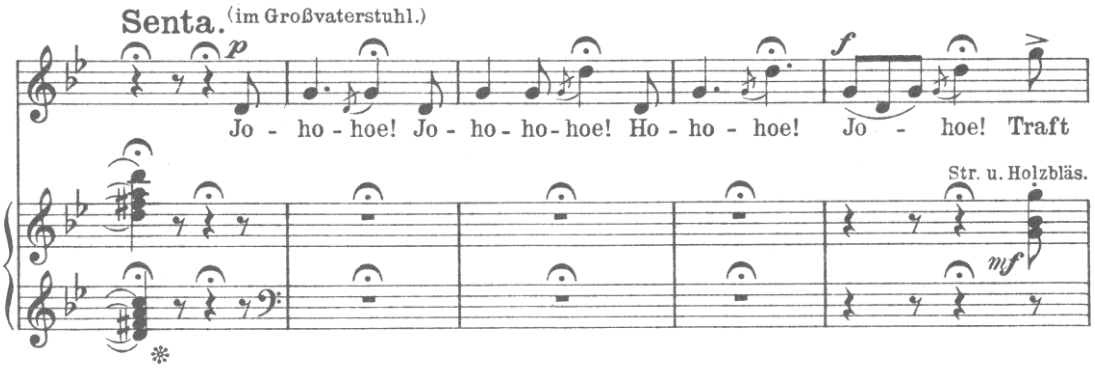

Figure 2: *Der fliegende Holländer* – Senta's ballad, beginning. (Wagner: 110)

The ballad, '*Jo-ho-hoe! Jo-ho-ho-hoe!*', opens with the Dutchman motif (Figure 2), which is the first of the opera's two main motifs. With Senta 'rending asunder the veil that separates fiction and reality, and opening up a window for the numinous Dutchman to penetrate the confines of her ordinary and unfulfilled existence' (Grey 2000: 75), it ends with an abruptly introduced coda, '*Ich sei's, die dich durch ihre Treu' erlöse!*' (Figure 3). The coda – *Allegro con fuoco* – begins with a transformation of the opera's second main motif, the Redemption motif, also referred to as the motif of human love. Kennedy-Fraser called it 'the beautiful little scrap of melody in Senta which expresses a prayer for the Dutchman's redemption'.[24]

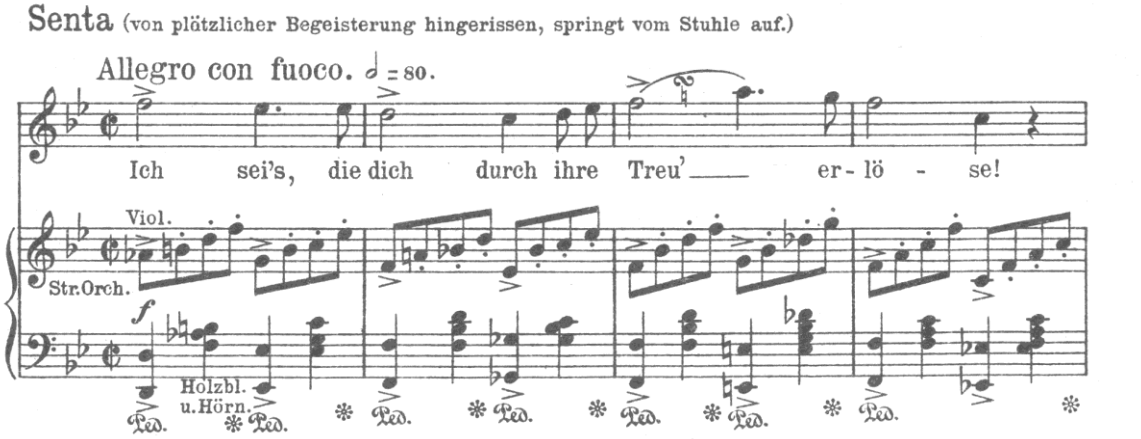

Figure 3: *Der fliegende Holländer* – Senta's ballad, coda. (Wagner: 118)

Both these motifs are first introduced in the Overture, which begins with the Dutchman motif (Figure 4: *molto marcato*, bars 2–5), followed sixty bars later by the Redemption motif in its ground form (Figure 5: *Andante*, bars 65–68). The latter starts with a falling scale of three

notes and ends *ritardando* with the motif of the second. Recurring throughout the entire opera, the very idea of these three notes on their falling scale is generally believed to have been conceived by Wagner during his tempestuous North Sea voyage in 1839.

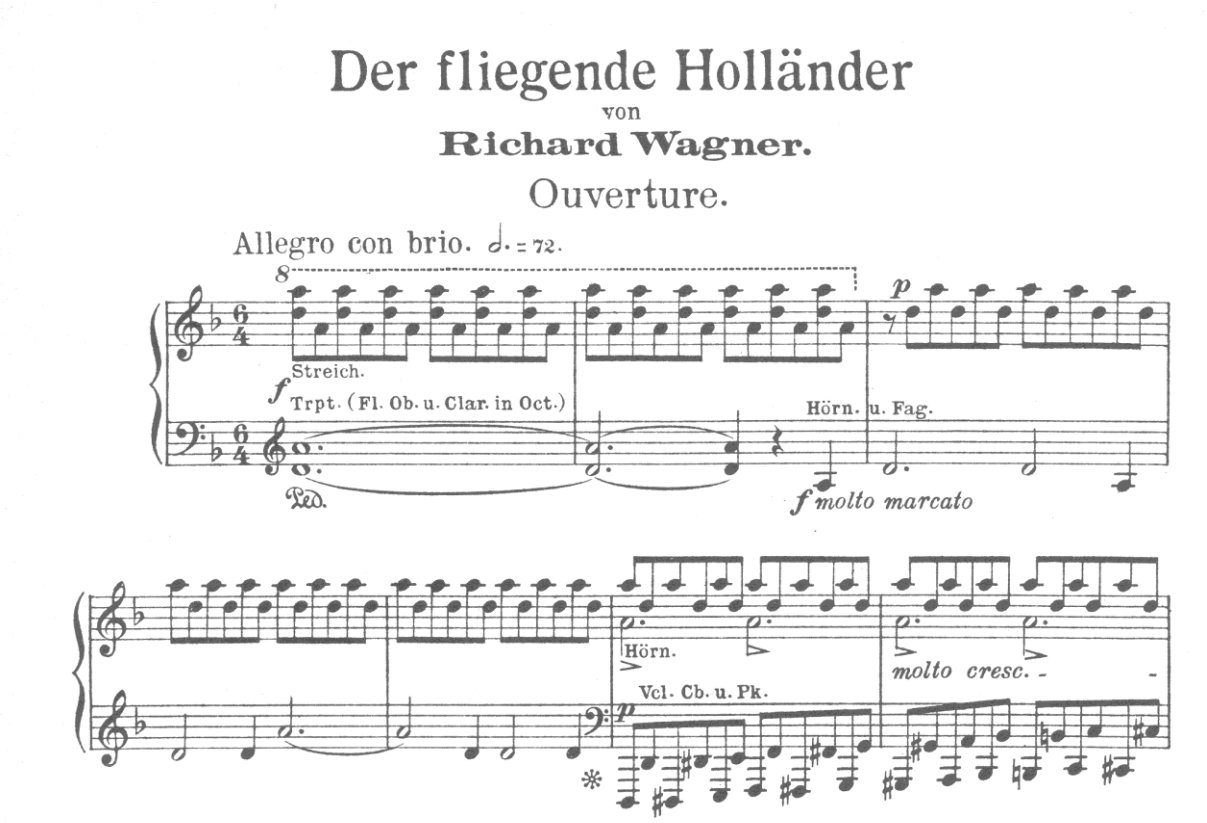

Figure 4: *Der fliegende Holländer* – Overture, bars 1–7. (Wagner: 3)

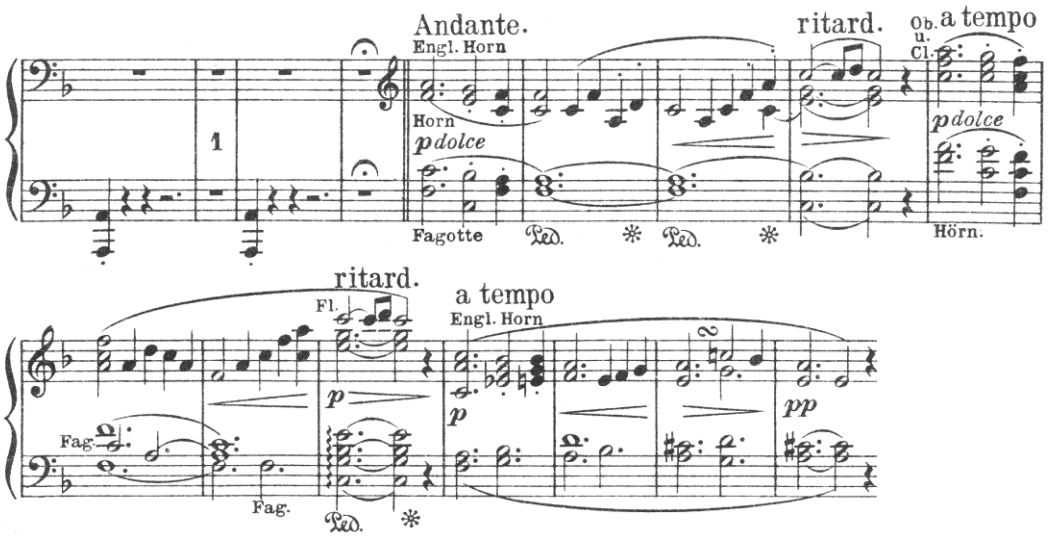

Figure 5: *Der fliegende Holländer* – Overture, bars 61–76. (Wagner: 5)

In 'Songs of the Hebrides', a paper Marjory Kennedy-Fraser read in London to the Musical Association on 5 November 1918, with musical illustrations by herself, her daughter Patuffa Kennedy-Fraser, and her sister Margaret Kennedy[25] (Kennedy-Fraser 1918–19: 1; 'The Musical Association. Report' 1919–20: xi), she discussed what it is that colours Hebridean songs such as 'Kishmul's Galley'[26]. 'It may be Norse or may derive from a far-flung sea-faring idiom persisting still in remote sea-faring places from the days when the sea, as a convenient high-way, *united*, not divided peoples.' (Kennedy-Fraser 1918–19: 8) 'This [Figure 6] was sung into my phonograph by a woman from the rocky isle of Minguly (so inaccessible that it is since deserted)', Mrs Kennedy-Fraser continued, 'and in our first volume [of *Songs of the Hebrides* (Kennedy-Fraser & Macleod 1909)] it will be found with the verses varied exactly as sung by her' (Kennedy-Fraser 1918–19: 9).

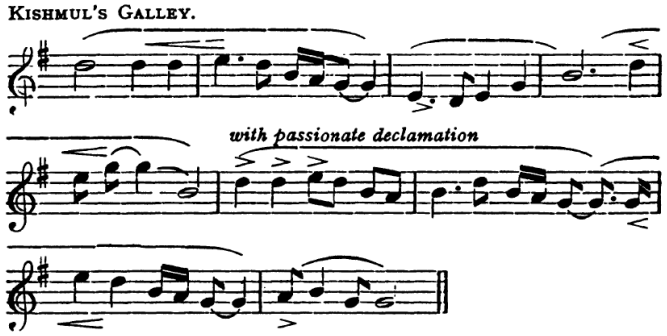

Figure 6: 'Kishmul's Galley'. (Kennedy-Fraser 1918–19: 9)

'Returning to Wagner's presumed indebtedness to this sea-faring music, his *Senta's Ballad* might have been lifted from it.'

> In my earliest collecting in Barra I got so many airs on the phonograph that I misconstrued at first the occasional presence of vocalized *introductory* bars. These appeared sporadically, so to speak, on the phonograph, and I, having concentrated attention on the regularly recurring air, had regarded them as accidental. I now know by experience that they are essential (Kennedy-Fraser 1918–19: 9).

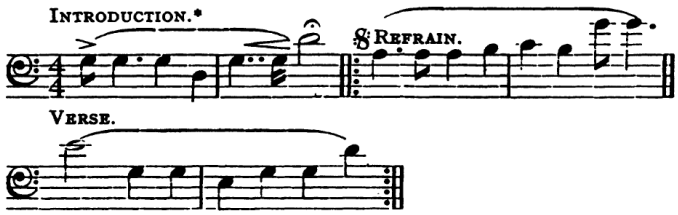

Figure 7: Vocalised introductory bars. (Kennedy-Fraser 1918–19: 9)

When comparing the vocalised introductory bars as shown by Mrs Kennedy-Fraser (Figure 7), it will indeed be noted that the motif is close to identical with the first phrase of Senta's ballad (Figure 2), albeit appearing in a different key. Playing through one of Kennedy-Fraser's many piano arrangements of songs, *Songs of the Hebrides: Popular Selection of Seven Airs*[27] (Kennedy-Fraser 1923), I was immediately struck by the similarity between her introduction (Figure 8) and Wagner's *Fliegende Holländer* music, an observation that ties in well with what she said herself at the Forum Club in London on 10 February 1922.

> [Wagner], among that Northern song-singing sea-faring people, caught up and retained (Geniuses retains and uses everything) the strong melodic motives that he heard and they later crop up all the time in his work altho the most immediate outcome of it was of course "The Flying Dutchman" which he wrote on his arrival in Paris. So musically are these motives now attributed to him. In some of the songs I publish, I have to add a note to the effect that certain themes are not borrowed from Wagner!!![28]

In a broader perspective, Marjory Kennedy-Fraser equally attributed other Wagnerian traits to the composer's exposure to the North Sea culture, including the descending pentatonic passage he used in the music surrounding Brünhilde in *Die Walküre* and the recurring high note – indeed a characteristic of Senta's ballad – that can be found in many old Scots airs.[29]

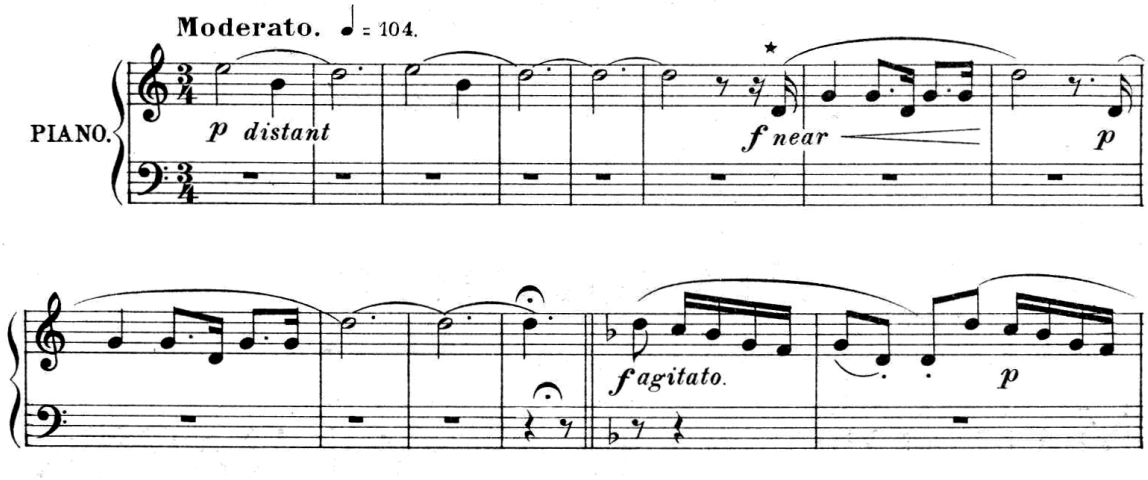

Figure 8: ***Songs of the Hebrides: Popular Selection of Seven Airs*** **– Introduction. (Kennedy-Fraser 1923: 2)**

British composer and music professor Sir Granville Bantock (1868–1946), Mrs Kennedy-Fraser's ardent supporter and friend, had made similar observations, and on 5 September 1915, he wrote to her:

> What a curious resemblance to the bird's motive in "Siegfried" there is in the West Wind song in A major! Have you also noticed the similar idiom of "Senta's Ballad" from the "Flying Dutchman" with the "Hebridean Sea-Reiver's Song"? Wagner must have heard some of these sea-songs on his eventful voyage across the North Sea.[30]

These resemblances were not always truly acknowledged, however. In 1979, when John Lorne Campbell had come across one such reference, he apparently found the idea ridiculous

and wrote to his musical collaborator Frank M. Collinson: 'What rubbish that Wagner reference of Mrs K.F. It shows that there is no limit to the drivel that devotees of the Celtic Twilight can and could talk.'[31] At that time though, Professor Bantock's concordant views could not possibly have been known to him; the letter referred to above was still buried in the uncatalogued Kennedy-Fraser Collection.

The similarities between Hebridean and Wagnerian musical traits and leitmotifs are indeed striking, but without any more tangible proofs, the connection must remain a hypothesis. The political, commercial and cultural links between Scotland and Scandinavia have been significant for more than a millennium, however, and large numbers of Scots – of both Gaelic and Lowland extraction – have lived for long periods of time in the Scandinavian countries, working mainly either in trade and shipping or in the armed forces as mercenary officers and soldiers. The Scottish connections with the seaports along the Norwegian coast were particularly close, especially with the city of Bergen.[32] Incidentally, the Norwegian composer Edvard Grieg (1843–1907) – Bergen's famous son – was of Scottish extraction; his great-grandfather was a Scot named Greig (Kennedy 1996: 304–05). An exchange of customs and ideas would thus appear natural, including the transmission of songs, tunes and stories. Although diversity of language usually makes the transfer of traditional material more complicated, it 'is not a serious obstacle to the spread of the music of songs and ballads from one people to another', Malcolm MacFarlane, Elderslie, observed in December 1908. 'For all people can apprehend, memorise, and utter the language of music with some degree of proficiency' (MacFarlane 1915: 55). In her autobiography, *A Life of Song*, Marjory Kennedy-Fraser offered some reflections upon these close links, wondering what effect they had had on the respective countries' traditional music:

> The natives of Barra have always been famed as sea-faring folk. Did they get from sea-faring men of the northern seas some Scandinavian ways of music-thinking, or did the Norse rather, in their traffic with the Isles, borrow themes and motives from the Gaels? Wagner, anyhow, seems to have borrowed some of his themes and *motifs* showing kinship with Hebridean melody from the sea-faring songs of the Norse sailors, with whom he came in contact in his young manhood on a stormy voyage of three weeks in the Northern seas (Kennedy-Fraser 1929: 133–34).

NOTES

[1] Wilhelmine Schröder-Devrient (1804–60). German soprano. Operatic début in Vienna in 1821 (as Pamina in Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte*), where she sang Leonore in *Fidelio* in the presence of Beethoven the following year. Sang in Dresden 1823–47, and in Paris and London. Created three of Wagner's leading soprano rôles: Adriano in *Rienzi*, Senta in *Der fliegende Holländer*, and Venus in *Tannhäuser*. Robert Schumann's song '*Ich grolle nicht*' was dedicated to her. (Kennedy 1996: 650).

[2] Marjory Kennedy-Fraser, 'Wagner and Handel', lecture, [n.d., but 12 January 1907], EUL Gen. 285.

[3] Tvedestrand is situated on Norway's southern coast, about sixty miles north of Kristiansand.

[4] The theme is an international folktale (ATU 973) and is listed in its various forms in the Motif Index of Folk Literature as N271.10; D1318.10.1; N134.1.5; S264.1. It is strong in the

British Isles but also occurs in Nova Scotia, presumably mainly within the Scottish communities. A story recorded in Broad Cove, Cape Breton, in 1975 by Dr John Shaw, tells of an emigrant ship captain who summoned all the passengers on board during a tremendous storm, in order to identify the one guilty of a crime –possibly a murder – back in Scotland. Both ship and culprit were eventually saved by the blessings of a bishop who happened to be among the passengers crossing over to Canada. I am grateful to Dr John Shaw both for the references to the international tale type and Motif Index and for kindly sharing the transcript of his 1975 recording with me.

[5] For a version of the 'William Glen' ballad, see 'Folk and Traditional Song Lyrics: William Glen' [online], available at: <http://www.traditionalmusic.co.uk/folk-song-lyrics/William_Glen.htm> [accessed 5 December 2012]. I am grateful to Dr John Shaw for the reference to the 'William Glen' ballad.

[6] Quotation from Richard Wagner, *Gesammelte Schriften und Dichtungen*, 10 vols (Leipzig, 1887ff), vol. 4: 265. (Grey: 1). Marjory Kennedy-Fraser quoted the same passage, albeit in a different translation: 'The figure of the "Flying Dutchman" is a mythical creation of the folk: a primal trait of human nature speaks out from it with heart-enthralling force. This trait is the longing after rest from amid the storms of life.' (Marjory Kennedy-Fraser, 'Wagner', lecture, [n.d., but 20 January 1906, reworked 27 April 1906], EUL Gen. 285).

[7] Quoted in Marjory Kennedy-Fraser, 'Liszt', lecture, [n.d., but 16 December 1905], EUL Gen. 285.

[8] The manuscript Richard Wagner sent to Eugène Scribe on 6 May 1840 later surfaced in Scribe's literary remains; now in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France in Paris (NAF 22552, f267). (Laroche : 28, 207).

[9] Mr W. Henderson, London, [to Marjory? Kennedy], [n.d., but 1886–87], Kennedy 1887: 78; see also Kennedy 1996: 469, 747.

[10] William Sharp, Paris, to Thomas A. Janvier, New York, 23 April 1892, Sharp 1910: 197.

[11] 'Summer Meeting, Edinburgh, August 1892: Musical & Literary Recitals', recital programme, SUA T-GED 12/2/44/1.

[12] 'Summer Meeting, Edinburgh, August 1894: Musical Recitals', recital programme, SUA T-GED 12/2/44/3.

[13] Marjory Kennedy-Fraser, 'Wagner', lecture, [n.d., but 20 January 1906, reworked 27 April 1906], EUL Gen. 285. Thomas Grey corroborates Kennedy-Fraser's opinion: 'No one has ever questioned Wagner's assessment of *Der fliegende Holländer* as a crucial turning point in his career as composer and dramatist.' (Grey 2000: 3).

[14] The soloists were Miss J. Black Thomson, Mr George A. Campbell, Mr H. Tyhurst, and Mr Alfred C. Young.

[15] 'Mrs Kennedy Fraser's Last Lecture Recital: Freemasons' Hall, Saturday, 20th January 1906, at three o'clock. Subject – Wagner', recital programme, EUL Gen. 285.

[16] 'Lecture on Wagner', *The Scotsman*, 22 January 1906: 6.

[17] 'Paterson & Sons' Subscription Orchestral concerts', *The Scotsman*, 5 February 1906: 1. The soloists were Miss Gleeson White, Miss T. Gabrowsky, Mr Lloyd Chandos, Mr Arthur Winckworth and Mr Lewys James; the conductor was Dr Frederic Cowen.

[18] 'Paterson's Orchestral Concerts. Mr Kirkhope's Choir in "The Flying Dutchman"', *The Scotsman*, 6 February 1906: 8.

[19] 'The Incorporated Society of Musicians – Fourth Annual Scottish Sectional Conference, Edinburgh, 27th and 28th April 1906', conference programme, EUL Gen. 285. The soloists were Miss J. Black Thomson and Mr George A. Campbell. Mr Alfred C. Young did appear in the printed programme but was possibly indisposed, as George Campbell, who sang Daland's 'Wilt thou, my Child' ('*Mögst du, mein Kind*'), also gave the Flying Dutchman's 'Engulphed in Ocean's deepest Wave' ('*Die Frist ist um*'). The soloists Mrs Kennedy-Fraser had engaged for her two concerts were thus not those who performed at Paterson's Orchestral Concert in the McEwan Hall.

[20] 'Scots Songs – Highland and Lowland', *The Scotsman*, 21 February 1910: 6.

[21] Marjory Kennedy-Fraser, lecture fragment, [n.d., but 19 February 1910], EUL Gen. 284.

[22] Quotation from Richard Wagner, *Mein Leben*, edited by Martin Gregor-Dellin (Mainz, 1983): 212. (Laroche 1993: 30).

[23] Quotation from Cosima Wagner, *Diaries*, edited by M. Gregor-Dellin and D. Mack, translated by Geoffrey Skelton, 2 vols (New York & London, 1978: 1980). (Grey 2000: 23).

[24] Marjory Kennedy-Fraser, 'Wagner', lecture, [n.d., but 20 January 1906, reworked 27 April 1906], EUL Gen. 285.

[25] Charles Harford Lloyd, Mus.Doc. and vice-president, was in the chair.

[26] 'Kishmul's Galley' / '*A' Bhirlinn Bharrach*'. 'Words from Mrs Maclean, Barra. Air from the singing of Mary Macdonald, Mingulay. With English adaptation and pianoforte accomp. by Marjory Kennedy-Fraser.' (Kennedy-Fraser & Macleod 1909: 80–83).

[27] The seven airs are 'The Birlinn of Clanranald', 'Island Sheiling Song', 'Hebridean Sea Reivers' Song', 'An Eriskay Love Lilt', 'The Cockle Gatherer', 'A Fairy Love Song', and 'The Road to the Isles'.

[28] Marjory Kennedy-Fraser, 'Songs of the Hebrides', lecture, dated 10 February 1922, EUL Gen. 284.

[29] Marjory Kennedy-Fraser, notes, [n.d.], EUL Gen. 284; see also Kennedy-Fraser 1929: 133–34.

[30] Granville Bantock to Marjory Kennedy-Fraser, 5 September 1915, EUL Gen. 519.

[31] John Lorne Campbell to Francis M. Collinson, 24 September 1979, NLS Acc. 8985/20.

[32] Dr Steve Murdoch, 'Scotland and the Baltic: An Early Modern Gaelic Perspective', lecture given as part of 'Scotland and Her Neighbours', the 2006–07 annual lecture series of the Research Institute for the Culture, History and Ethnology of Scotland (RICHES), University of Edinburgh, on 18 April 2007.

Abbreviations

EUL Edinburgh University Library, Edinburgh
SUA Strathclyde University Archives, Glasgow

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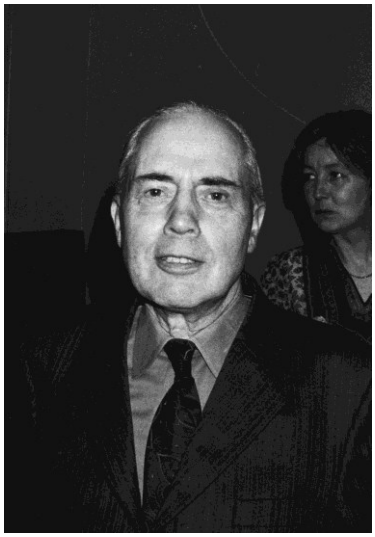
The Rev. William Matheson and the Performance of Scottish Gaelic ‘Strophic’ Verse

V. S. BLANKENHORN

ABSTRACT. The late Rev. William Matheson's lifelong fascination with the performance of Gaelic songs in so-called 'strophic' metres ultimately resulted in his recording seventeen such songs for the album *Gaelic Bards and Minstrels,* No. 16 in the Scottish Tradition series of recordings from the School of Scottish Studies Archive. Strophic metre, used largely for clan eulogy, elegy, and other praise-poetry in the period after the decline of the syllabic metres, is remarkable in that the final line of each stanza contrasts metrically and ornamentally with all of the preceding lines in that stanza. This article examines Matheson's sources, methodology, and performance; evaluates his rationale; and assesses the likely authenticity of his performances of six songs in which the number of lines varies from one stanza to the next.



Among the many topics that engaged the late Rev. William Matheson, there can be few – with the possible exception of genealogy and clan history – that interested him more deeply than the sung performance of Gaelic poetry, in particular, of poetry that had largely ceased to be sung in living tradition. Among the types of verse that interested him particularly was that which was composed in what W. J. Watson termed ‘strophic’ metre (W. J. Watson: xlv-liv). The scholarly community first became aware of his fascination with this topic during the International Congress of Celtic Studies in 1967, at which Matheson talked about strophic verse, and demonstrated how he believed songs of this type would have been performed. Some years later, in the early 1980’s, he sat down with Morag MacLeod of the School of Scottish Studies and recorded seventeen of these songs, which were included in a commercial recording issued in 1993 as part of the School’s Scottish Tradition series (Matheson 1993/2000). This paper will examine how William Matheson came to his understanding of how poems in strophic metre should be performed, and will attempt to assess not only his implementation of that understanding in his own practice, but also its possible implications with regard to other types of sung performance among the Gaels.

The Rev. William Matheson (1910-1995)

Born in Sollas, North Uist, to Lewis parents, William Matheson was steeped in Gaelic tradition from his earliest days. He and his younger brother Angus (who would eventually become the first occupant of the Chair of Celtic at Glasgow University) were encouraged to indulge their natural interest in the stories and songs, both religious and secular, that enlivened their community. After graduating with an honours degree in history at the University of Edinburgh in 1933, William eventually undertook postgraduate study in Celtic Studies, where he was taken under the wing of Prof. W. J. Watson, who was nearing the end of his career as head of the Edinburgh Celtic Department. It was at Watson’s suggestion that William began to prepare an edition of the poems of John MacCodrum, an eighteenth-century Uist bard, for publication in the newly-founded Scottish Gaelic Texts Society series.

As part of his work on the MacCodrum poems, William made long visits to North and South Uist in the summers of 1935 and 1936. The late Donald Archie MacDonald of the

School of Scottish Studies described this undertaking in a profile of William Matheson in 1980 (*Tocher* 5/35: 283-91):

> It was his own idea to make these expeditions and to include tunes, and anecdotes about the bard, in the book, as he was becoming increasingly alive to the value of oral tradition. This awareness was a gradually developing one. Mòd type singing was very much in vogue among the Gaels in towns and cities at the time. There seemed to be a general feeling that oral tradition was more or less dead and that Gaelic song was now to be found only in books. He himself had sung with the Inverness Gaelic Choir and was also associated for some time with the Edinburgh Gaelic Choir, but he became disillusioned with musical notation as an adequate means of transmitting the complexities of Gaelic singing. …[A]ll in all, there was a growing awareness that there was much more to Gaelic singing than what could usually be heard at Mòds and concerts, and indeed that Marjory Kennedy-Fraser's treatment of the materials she had collected did not do them justice.
>
> On his long visit to North Uist at the end of his first year at University in 1930, William himself had come to realise that there was much more music and oral tradition in the surrounding community than he had noticed in his boyhood years…. It was, however, the MacCodrum expeditions of 1935 and 1936 that brought this development to full maturity. As he himself described it: 'There was a gradual awareness that what I was hearing from these people in the islands was…not only truer – not just authentic – but *better as music* than what I had been reading in the books … I began to be discontented with how badly and inadequately the music was written in the books.'
>
> He had no difficulty in getting informants to sing to him. His usual technique was to concentrate on learning the tunes by heart. He would then as soon as possible write down the words and an outline of the tune in tonic sol-fa, as a safety device to back up his own memory and to ensure that some written record, even if an imperfect one, survived. … He also had a thorough knowledge of printed and manuscript sources such as the Eigg Collection and the Maclagan MSS, and could direct his researches and questions accordingly.
>
> On these expeditions what he learned was not confined to the songs of John MacCodrum, but encompassed the whole spectrum of Gaelic singing and, indeed, oral tradition in general, including aspects of local and family history in North Uist. These years gave his interests a stimulus and a direction that remained with him from then on…

Following publication of his work on MacCodrum, William Matheson studied for the ministry of the Church of Scotland, to which he was ordained in 1941, and spent about ten years in active ministry before returning to academic life as a lecturer in Celtic at Edinburgh University in 1952 – a year after the School of Scottish Studies was established. Over the subsequent three decades, William Matheson recorded some 500 items for the School's archives, including narratives, reminiscences, anecdotes, and Gaelic songs of all kinds. D. A. MacDonald summarized his achievements thus (op.cit):

> There can be no-one alive who has united within himself quite such a range of knowledge of tradition and song on the one hand and academic learning on the

other as William Matheson. Drawing on all manner of sources, oral, manuscript and printed, he has achieved an astonishing synthesis.

Songs in strophic metre

Strophic verse is a type of accentual versification that came into its own following the disintegration of the hereditary Gaelic social system in the seventeenth century.[1] One casualty of this cataclysm was *dàn dìreach,* the strict-metre syllabic poetry composed in Classical Gaelic, which had been cultivated for centuries by court poets in both Scotland and Ireland for the expression of formal panegyric. With the Gaelic courts abandoned and much of the clan chief's power dissipated, the system of patronage that had supported the formal training of court poets and the composition of strict-metre poetry collapsed.

Although the clan chiefs had lost much of their power and authority, clan loyalties remained strong, and clan panegyric was still composed. Now, however, the bards drew upon the deep reservoir of vernacular poetic forms long practised among ordinary people. Whether the particular metres we now call 'strophic' were invented at this time or whether they simply emerged from that reservoir and were adapted for this purpose, it is clear that the strophic metrical forms came into particular favour for the composition of poetry in praise of the clan chief and his household. Noted practitioners include Iain Lom MacDonald (*c.* 1624 – 1707), Mary MacLeod (*c.* 1615 – 1707), Eachann Bacach Mac Gille-Eathain (*fl.* 1650), Murdo MacKenzie of Achilty (died *c.* 1689), Niall Mac Mhuirich (*c*. 1637 – 1726), Murchadh Mac Mhathain (*c*. 1670 – *c*. 1757), John MacCodrum (*c.* 1693 – 1779), Margaret Maclean (*c.* 1660 – *c.* 1730), and John MacLean '*Bard Thighearna Cholla*' (1787–1848), among others.

'Strophic' verse – 'strophic' simply means 'stanzaic' – is fundamentally different from *dàn* in that it is based on a regularly-recurring rhythmic pattern, *i.e.* it is accentual rather than syllabic verse. Accentual verse represents, indeed, a natural development in Scottish Gaelic, reflecting the stress-timed character of Gaelic speech; and a wide variety of accentual verse forms were doubtless practised for centuries among ordinary Gaels in Scotland – as in Ireland – prior to their earliest appearances in manuscript and printed sources.[2]

Even so, the type of accentual verse with which we are concerned here appears to be unique to Scottish Gaelic tradition; it is not a recognized form in Irish verse-practice. What makes it unique is its stanzaic structure: rather than a couplet or a quatrain – stanzaic forms that characterize most Irish and a considerable proportion of Scottish Gaelic accentual verse – the 'strophe' in this case consists of a paragraph containing between three and nine lines, in which the final line contrasts with those preceding. And while the number of lines per stanza is generally regularised, there is a significant number of poems in strophic metre in which the length of the paragraph/strophe can vary by as many as three lines from one strophe to the next. Such metrical variability challenges musical performance, as the singer must adjust his or her air *ad hoc* to fit the changing shape of the verse. Our task here will be to examine the nature of such adjustments, as revealed by William Matheson's performances of six such songs.

Reviving a lost art

When Matheson began work, there were very few people singing songs in strophic metre, and even fewer who knew songs by the poets he was interested in. For this reason, he realized that he needed not only to consult oral tradition-bearers but also to investigate manuscript and printed sources if he were to identify and recreate the music associated with specific texts. His familiarity with such sources, and his ability to credibly interpret the staff notation he saw on the page – notation which he knew represented at best a vague approximation of what the original had sounded like – enabled him to reconstruct a style and

method of singing these songs that satisfied him. Thus his work in this area truly represents – to borrow Donald Archie MacDonald's term – an 'astonishing synthesis' of written and oral sources, the whole informed by his deep understanding of oral tradition and, in particular, the needs of its audience for an aurally-integrated and easily comprehensible style of performance that would support the sense of the text.

The liner notes published with William Matheson's recording *Gaelic Bards and Minstrels* contain rather imprecise attribution of his sources. For example, the first item on the recording, '*Thriall ur bunadh gu Pharao*', is described as follows:

> '*A' Chnò Shamhna' do Shir Lachlainn MacGilleathainn, Triath Dhubhaird* – The Hallowe'en Nut to Sir Lachlan Maclean of Duart. Text from *Bàrdachd Ghàidhlig,* by W. J. Watson… but see also *Bàrdachd Chloinn GhillEathainn* by Colm O'Baoill (Edinburgh 1979); tune from the Torloisg ms.

Our first task, then, in coming to an understanding of Matheson's working method, was to identify his sources for the six songs under consideration. While some of these, like *Bàrdachd Ghàidhlig*, are easy to lay hands on, others – for example, the 'Torloisg ms' – are less so. Eventually, however, it became possible to assemble the following list, which readers who own William Matheson's recording may find a useful supplement to the liner notes:

1. ***'Thriall bhur bunadh gu Pharao' ('A' Chnò Shamhna' do Shir Lachlainn Mac Gill-Eathainn, Triath Dhubhaird)***
   - Author: Hector MacLean (*Eachann Bacach Mac Ghille-Eathain*)
   - Text: *Bàrdachd Ghàidhlig* (W. J. Watson: 205-9).
     Bàrdachd Chloinn GhillEathainn (Ó Baoill: 14).
   - Air: The second of two airs headed '*Clann Ghilleane*' (NLS 14149A: 42).[3]
2. ***'Deoch-slàinte an Iarla thuathaich sin'* ('Òran don Iarla Thuathach')**
   - Author: Murdoch Matheson (*An t-Aosdàna MacMhathain*)
   - Text: *Sàr-Obair nam Bàrd Gaelach* (J. Mackenzie: 83-5).
   - Air: '*Fàilte Mhic Shimidh*' (Fraser: 27).
3. **'*Mo bheud 's mo chràdh' (*'*Marbhrann Iain Ghairbh Mhic Gille Chaluim*')**
   - Author: Mary MacLeod (*Màiri nighean Alasdair Ruaidh*)
   - Text: *Gaelic Songs of Mary MacLeod* (J. C. Watson: 26-31).
   - Air: '*Marbhrann Iain Ghairbh Mhic Gille Chaluim*' (Fraser: 13).
4. **'*An naidheachd so an-dè*' ('*An Crònan*')**
   - Author: Mary MacLeod (*Màiri nighean Alasdair Ruaidh*)
   - Text: *Gaelic Songs of Mary MacLeod* (J. C. Watson: 60-70).
   - Air: *A Treatise on the Language, Poetry and Music of the Highland Clans* (Campbell: Appendix, 2).
     105 songs collected in Skye (Tolmie: 263).
5. **'*A bhean, leasaich an stòp dhuinn'* ('*Òran do Shir Dòmhnall Shlèite*')**
   - Author: Iain Lom MacDonald
   - Text: *Bàrdachd Ghàidhlig* (W. J. Watson: 189-92).
     Orain Iain Luim (A. MacKenzie: 146-51).
   - Air: Duncan MacDonald (*Donnchadh mac Dhòmhnaill 'ic Dhonnchaidh*), Peninerine, South Uist.[4]
6. **'*Cha sùrd cadail*' ('*Marbhrann do Shir Tormod MacLeòid*')**
   - Author: Mary MacLeod (*Màiri nighean Alasdair Ruaidh*)
   - Text: *Bàrdachd Ghàidhlig* (W. J. Watson: 157-8).

Air: '*Crònan Màiri Ni'an Alastair Ruaidh*' (Fraser: 19).

We shall here examine these six songs in some detail, beginning with the sources Matheson consulted, proceeding to a transcription of what he actually sang, and ending with a discussion of his musical choices and his rationale for choosing as he did.

'*Thriall ur bunadh gu Pharao*'

This song, also known as '*A' Chnò Shamhna*' ('The Hallowe'en Nut') was composed by Eachann Bacach for Sir Lachlann MacLean of Duart. Matheson took his text from *Bàrdachd Ghàidhlig* (W. J. Watson: 205-9):

Thriall ur bunadh gu Pharao;
cò 's urrainn d'a sheanchas?
Mac Mhuirich, Mac Fhearghais
Craobh a thuinich rè aimsir,
fhreumhaich bun ann an Alba;
chuidich fear dhiu Cath Gairbheach.
Fhuair sinn ulaidh fear d'ainme theachd beò.
Fhuair sinn ulaidh fear d'ainme theachd beò.

Cha chraobh chur is cha phlannta
cha chnò 'n uiridh o'n dh'fhàs thu;
cha bhlàth chuirte ma Bhealltainn,
ach fàs duillich is meanglain,
am meur-mullaich seo dh'fhàg sinn.
Cuir, a Chrìosd', tuilleadh 'n àite na dh'fholbh.
Cuir, a Chrìosd', tuilleadh 'n àite na dh'fholbh.

Is mòr pudhar an ràith-sa.
's trom an dubhadh-sa dh'fhàs oirnn;
gura cumhang leinn d'fhàrdach,
'n ciste-laighe nan clàran:
's fhada 's cuimhne leinn càradh nam bòrd.
's fhada 's cuimhne leinn càradh nam bòrd.

Chaidh do chist' an taigh-gheamhraidh,
cha do bhrist thu 'chnò-shamhna –
misneachd fir Innse Gall thu:
's mòr as misde do ranntaidh
nach do chlisg thu roimh armailt –
fhir bu mhiosaile 'n campa Mhontròis.
fhir bu mhiosaile 'n campa Mhontròis.

Nàile, chunna mi aimsir
's tu ri siubhal na sealga,
cha bu chuing ort an garbhlach:
pìc den iubhar cha d'fhàs i
chuireadh umhaill no spàirn ort:
cha bhiodh fuidheall a tàirrne
nam biodh luthadh 'na crannghail
chuireadh siubhal fo eàrrit' an eòin.
chuireadh siubhal fo eàrrit' an eòin.

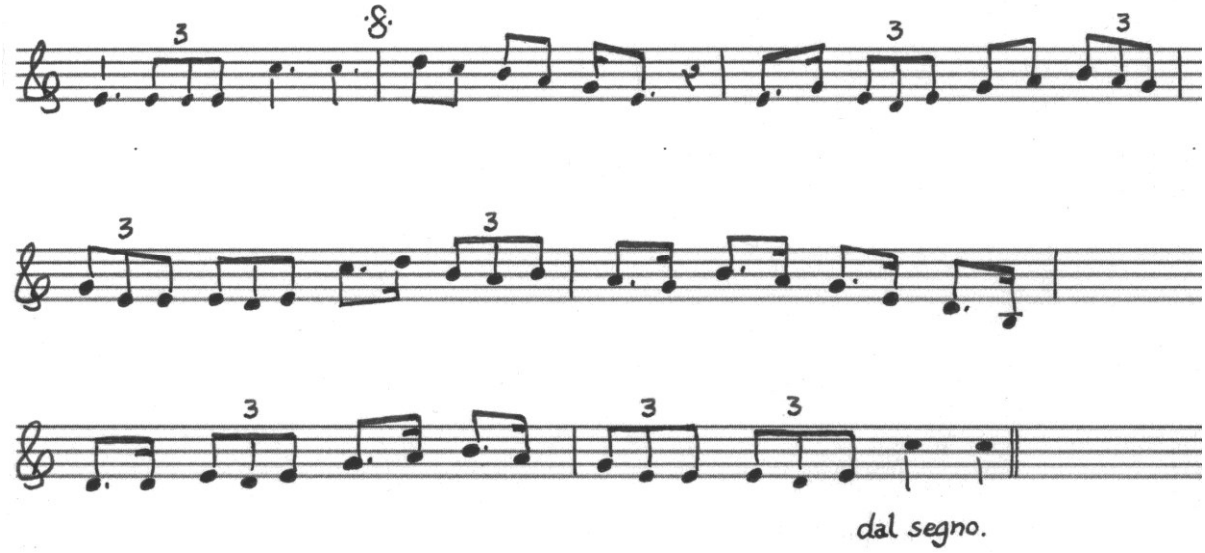
Gum bu mhath do dhìol freasdail
an taigh mòr am beul feasgair,
uisge-beatha nam feadan
ann am pìosaibh 'ga leigeil,
sin is clàrsach 'ga spreigeadh ri ceòl
sin is clàrsach 'ga spreigeadh ri ceòl.

Bhuineadh dhinne 'na ùrros
fear ar taighe 's ar crùnair,
ghabh an rathad air thùs bhuainn;
liuthad latha r'a chunntais
bha aig maithibh do dhùthcha,
meud an aighir 's am mùirne!
Bha mi tathaich do chùirte
seal mam b'aithne dhomh 'n t-ùrlar a dh'fholbh
seal mam b'aithne dhomh 'n t-ùrlar a dh'fholbh.

For an appropriate air, William Matheson turned to the Torloisg manuscript, a collection of Gaelic song-tunes compiled in Mull in the early years of the nineteenth century. In the manuscript of a talk delivered in Mull, preserved among Matheson’s papers, he describes this document and its origins (NLS 9711: Box 13/19):

> One of the most valuable collections of Gaelic music ever made has been discovered within recent years…at Torloisk. It was made during the first three decades of [the] last century, and we owe it to a very talented family, the daughters of Major-General Clephane of Carslogie in Fife. Their mother was Marianne, heiress of Lachlan Maclean, 7th of Torloisk; and their guardian, appointed on their father’s death in 1803, was Sir Walter Scott. Subsequent to that date, their domicile appears to have been mostly in Mull. In addition to their other accomplishments, these girls were brought up to be fluent Gaelic speakers. In their work on Gaelic music, the moving spirit was Margaret, who later became the Countess of Compton. A considerable part of the collection, words and music, appears to be in her hand. The music transcription is of a high standard, well in advance of other collections of the period. Even more surprising is the knowledge shown of Gaelic orthography – not a very common accomplishment at the time, especially among women. The number of Gaelic songs, many of them by Maclean bards, must be well into three figures, and includes a sequence of 42 songs taken down from one singer in December 1812 and January 1813, Miss Margaret Maclean of Gaisgarwell (?). The National Library of Scotland and the School of Scottish Studies of Edinburgh University now possess Xerox copies of what may be called the Torloisk collection of Gaelic songs.

The air that Matheson identified as befitting this particular poem is the second of two tunes appearing on page 42 of the manuscript under the heading ‘Clann Ghilleane’:



Here is how William Matheson copied this air from the manuscript into his notebook:[5]

It should be noted that, in making his transcription of the air, William Matheson is not simply copying the air as noted, but is already beginning to put his own stamp on the melody.

Clann Ghilleathain (2)

(Thriall ur bunadh gu Pharao)

(Maclean Bards I.37)

| m^{m} : m m m : d^{1} : d^{1} *| r^{1} d^{1} : t ^{t}l : s m *: |

$\overset{6}{\frown}$ $\overset{7}{\frown}$ $\overset{5}{\frown}$
| m s : m r m : s l *: t ls | s m m : mr m *: d^{1} r^{1} : t l t | l . s *:

t l : s ^{s}m : r t_{1} *| r r : m r m : s l *: t l |

ɔ D.S.
| s m m : mr m : d^{1} d^{1} *||

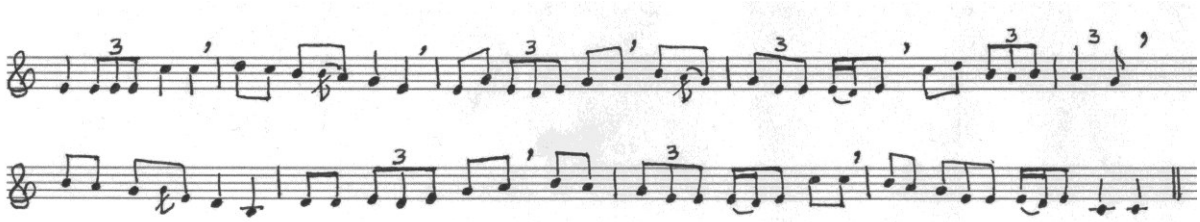
: d : d ||

7 Omit this phrase for 7-line stanza.

6 Omit this phrase and phrase 7 for 6-line stanza.

5 Omit this phrase and phrases 6 and 7 for 5-line stanza.

Most of his changes relate to rhythm, suggesting his overriding concern that the rhythm of the music conform as naturally as possible to that of the text. It is also clear from his transcription that he is not particularly concerned with the placement of bar-lines, given that some of his bars appear to contain only three beats.[6] For ease of comparison, here is how Matheson's sol-fa translates back into staff notation:



A particularly interesting feature of Matheson's sol-fa transcription is his indication of a repeated line at the end. He may have assumed such a repeat on the authority of the *'dal segno'* noted in Torloisg (although the manuscript's placement of the *'segno'* at the beginning of the second bar is incomprehensible in terms of a sung performance); or he may have decided that this song was one in which the repetition of the final line was called for, and he needed music for that purpose; or he may have made the decision on musical grounds alone, feeling that the tune should end on the lower tonic note. It seems likely that a combination of the latter two considerations decided the matter for him, but it's unfortunate that we cannot ask him.[7]

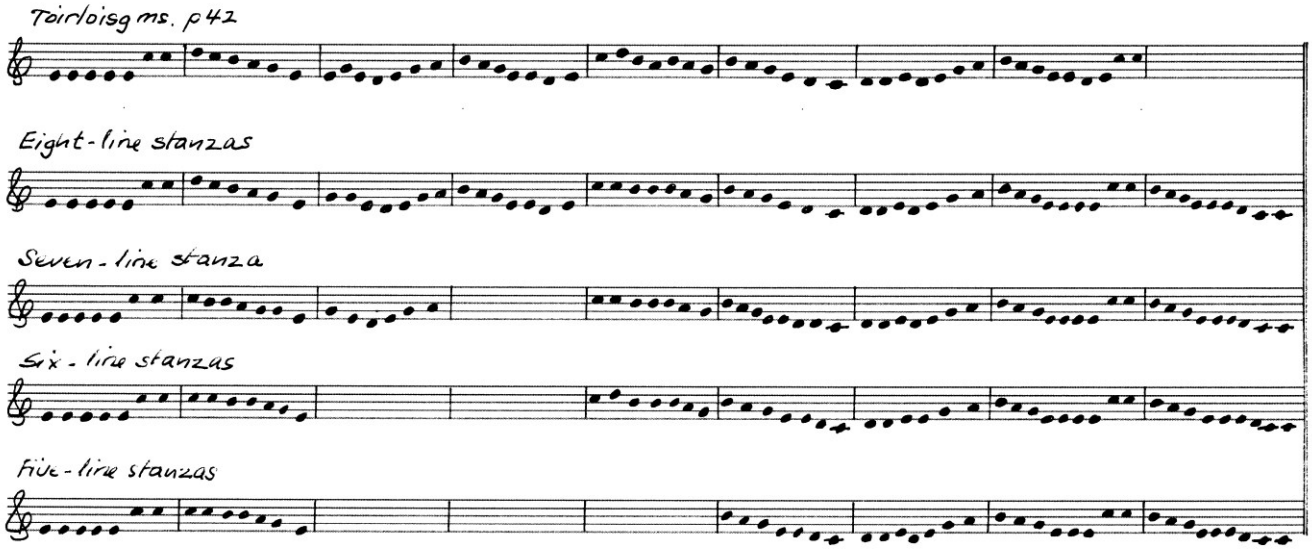
Flexibility in Performance

With regard to the variable length of the stanzas or 'strophes' in this song, Matheson's sol-fa transcription gives us a crucially important clue to his working method. The second line of this transcript indicates which phrases he considers should be omitted in the case of stanzas containing fewer than eight lines (or nine, if you count the repeated line at the end). By choosing lines from the middle of the air for this purpose, Matheson is ensuring that each strophe begins and ends with the same music – something that he believed was absolutely necessary. In connection with the recording of these songs in 1982-3, Morag MacLeod recalls:[8]

> I did ask Willie how he got to organise the melodies of bits that he didn't have from oral tradition or in writing. He said the phrases had to 'chime'. I understood that it was a bit like harmony between two parts, only between different phrases within the same verse. The problem was to finish with the same melody, whatever the length of the verse was, and the other phrases had to lead to that in a way that pleased the ear, and the melodic conventions of the tradition.

In searching for airs appropriate to the texts he was interested in, Matheson clearly had in mind the number of lines per strophe, and he generally sought out airs containing as many phrases as would be needed to perform the longest strophe in the poem, thereby obviating the need for him to compose music out of his own head to complete a stanza. In this case, there appears to be both musical and historical justification for his assumption that the Torloisg air was intended to accompany the text that begins *'Thriall ur bunadh gu Pharao'*: not only are the musical phrases the correct length, and not only is there the right number of such phrases, but the manuscript's provenance and the association of this particular air with 'Clann Ghilleane' all support that conclusion.

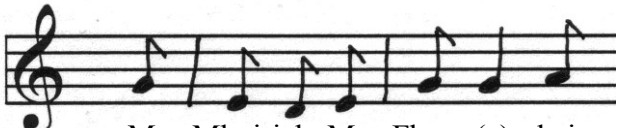
In performing this song, Matheson has followed the procedure laid out above to its logical conclusion. Here is how Matheson adapted the air from the Torloisg manuscript to his purposes:



Notation of these motifs is meant only to convey the melodic contour of the line, the sequence of pitches relative to one another. The bar line is placed following the pitch or pitches assigned to the final metrical foot in the line, which in this poem consists of a disyllable in the initial lines, and a monosyllable in the final line. In addition, we should note that these contours represent the most common melodic patterns used in Matheson's performance, and that individual stanzas may contain small melodic variations – one or two notes at most – that nonetheless support the overall contour of the melody at that point.

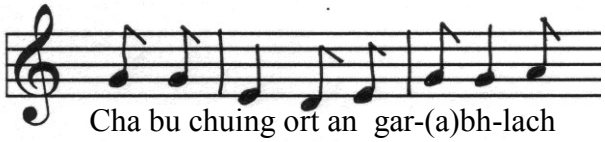
Because the rhythmic quantities of notes vis-à-vis one another are determined by a combination of word-stress and metrical accent, the rhythmical realization of a given motif is likely to differ substantially from stanza to stanza, depending upon the number of syllables (including epenthetic syllables) for which music is needed, the presence of anacrusis or 'up-beat' before the first stressed syllable in the line, and the placement of stressed syllables in the line. Here, for example, is a rough approximation of how Matheson performs the third motif from the left, above, in each of the stanzas in which it occurs:

Stanza 1 :



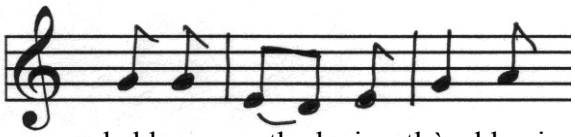
Mac Mhuirich, Mac Fhear-(a)-ghais

Stanza 5 :



Cha bu chuing ort an gar-(a)bh-lach

Stanza 7 :



ghabh an rathad air thùs bhuainn

In the end, Matheson's performance of '*Thriall ur bunadh go Pharao*' is a mixture of simplicity and subtlety – the subtle, rhythmical interplay of words and metre set to a flexible sequence of chant-like musical motifs characterised by a narrow melodic compass, largely step-wise motion, and a good deal of repetition. Regardless of length, each strophe begins and ends with the same musical material, giving an impression of uniformity despite the fact that shorter strophes will lack one or more of the musical motifs. These songs require great discipline from the singer, who must omit the correct motifs for shorter strophes so as not to end up in the wrong place, and maintain the motifs in the correct order throughout.

This flexible style of performance also characterises Matheson's renditions of the other five songs of this type, as we shall see in what follows.

'*A bhean, leasaich an stòp dhuinn*'

William Matheson's notes reveal that his source for the air to Iain Lom's text was the singing of Duncan MacDonald (*Donnchadh mac Dhòmhaill 'ic Dhonnchaidh*) of Peninerine, South Uist, a gifted storyteller and *seanchaidh* who recorded a great deal of important material now held in the School of Scottish Studies. Matheson apparently learned the song from him by heart and subsequently recorded it in sol-fa notation; no audio recording of Duncan MacDonald singing this song has yet been found. Here is the air as Matheson took it down in

his notebook:[9]

{ : l . l | d^1 : l : l | l : - . s	}
{ $^{\otimes}$: l . t | l : s : l | l : - . l	|| D. S. $^{\otimes}$ for extra lines
{ : r . r | s : m : s | l : - . l	}
{ : t . l | l : s : r | m : - . s	}
{ : t . l | l : s : r | m : - . f : m | r : - : - | - : -	}
{ : f . f | s : s : m^1 | l : - . t : l | s : - : - | - : -	||

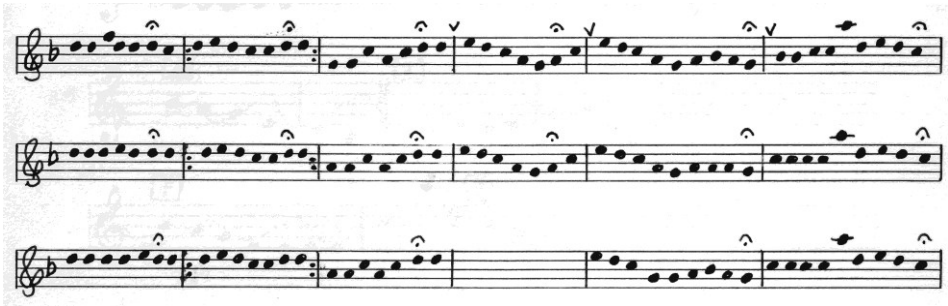
Matheson notes six phrases of music, the last of which is used to repeat the longer line of text at the beginning of the following stanza. Because the text contains stanzas of five and six lines, he indicates that longer stanzas are to be accommodated by the repetition of phrase two – as he puts it, 'D. S. [*dal segno*] $^{\otimes}$ for extra lines'.

Curiously, however, Matheson's performance of '*A bhean, leasaich an stòp dhuinn*' differs slightly from the air as he noted it down from Duncan MacDonald. The following comparison of Matheson's sol-fa with his performance of the song on *Gaelic Bards and Minstrels* reveals that he chose to repeat the second phrase, not just in those stanzas containing 'extra lines' (*i.e.* the six-line stanzas), but in all stanzas, and to accommodate the shorter, five-line stanzas by removing the fourth phrase. This choice probably reflects his own musical preference rather than any structural concern.[10] The two stanzas quoted are as Matheson gives them in the liner notes of his recording:[11]

Sol-fa

Six-line stanzas

Five-line stanzas

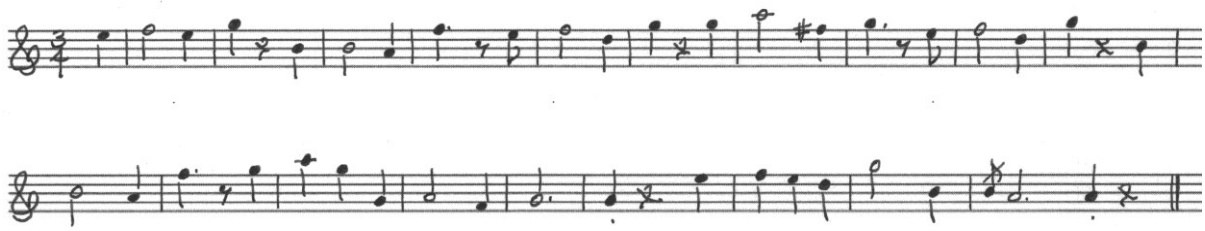


A bhean, leasaich an stòp dhuinn
's lion an cupa le sòlas
masa branndaidh no beòir i
tha mi toileach a h-òl:
'n deoch-s' air caibtean Chlann Dòmhnall
's air Alasdair òg thig o'n Chaol.

Am fear nach dùraig a h-òl
gun tuit an t-sùil air a' bhòrd as;

tha mo dhùrachd do’n òigfhear,
crann cubhraidh Chlann Dòmhnaill:
Righ na dùl bhith gan chòmhnach, fhir chaoimh.

‘*Cha sùrd cadail*’
A nineteenth-century manuscript compiled by Angus Fraser, son of Captain Simon Fraser, provided Matheson with an air for this song by *Màiri nighean Alasdair Ruaidh* (Fraser: 19):



This air, however, only contains seven phrases of music, if we assume that the final phrase is to be used for the repeat of the final line of each stanza. This leaves a problem in the case of the ninth stanza of the text, which contains stanzas varying in length from five to eight lines. An example of each stanza-length is given below (W. J. Watson: 157-8):

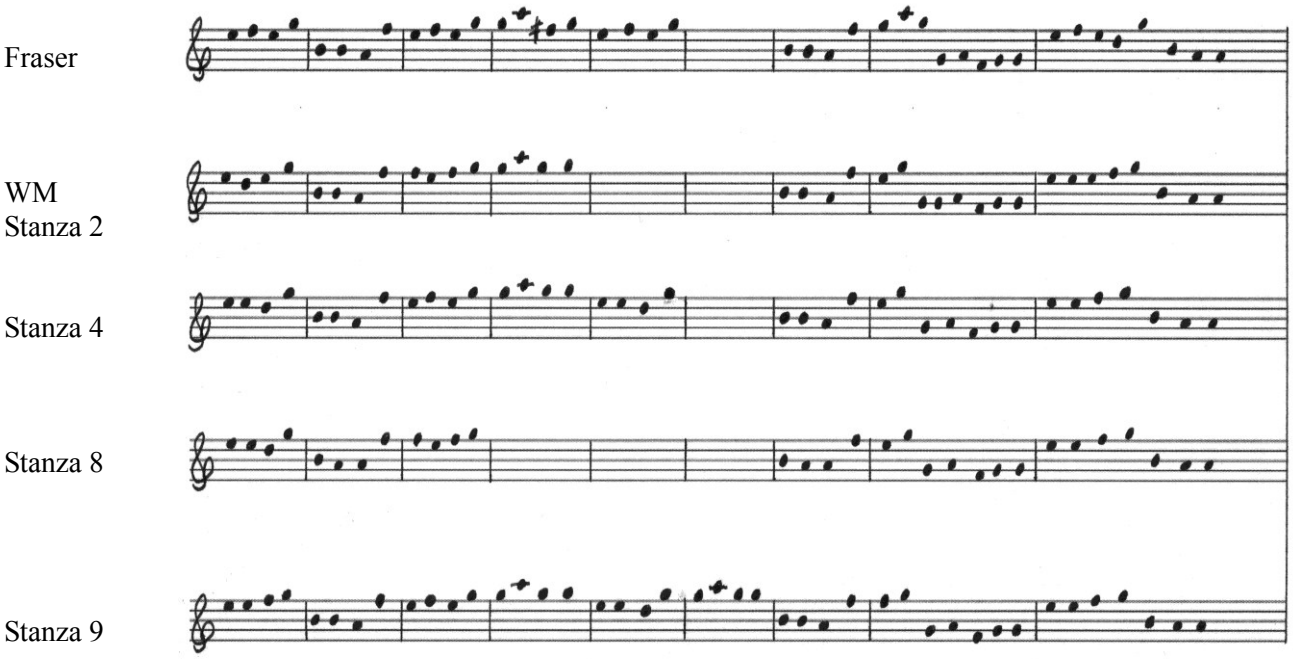
Stanza 2 (six lines):
Is trom an cudthrom so dhrùidh
Dh’fhàg mo chùislean gun lùth,
Is tric snighe mo shùl
A’ tuiteam gu dlùth,
Chaill mi iuchair mo chùil:
An cuideachd luchd-ciùil cha tèid mi.
An cuideachd luchd-ciùil cha tèid mi.

Stanza 4 (seven lines):
Co neach dh’an eòl
Fear t-fhasain beò
Am blasdachd beòil
Is am maise neòil,
An gaisge gleòis
An ceart ’s an còir,
Gun airceas no sgleò fèile?
Gun airceas no sgleò fèile?

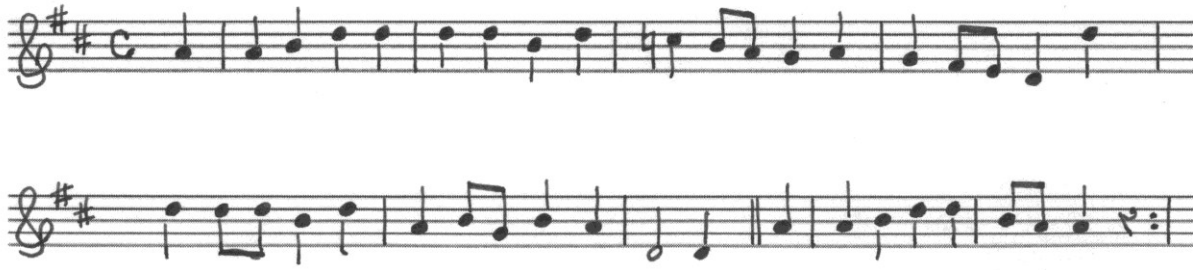
Stanza 8 (five lines):
Nighean Sheumais nan crùn,
bean-chèile ghlan ùr,
thug i ceudghràdh da rùn
bu mhòr a h-adhbhar ri sunnd
nuair a shealladh i ‘n gnùis a cèile
nuair a shealladh i ‘n gnùis a cèile

Stanza 9 (eight lines):
‘S i ‘n fhras nach ciùin
thàinig às ùr,
a shrac ar siùil
‘s a bhrist ar stiùir
‘s ar cairt mhath iùil
‘s ar taice cùil
‘s ar caidreabh ciùil
bhiodh againn ‘nad thùr èibhinn.
bhiodh againn ‘nad thùr èibhinn.

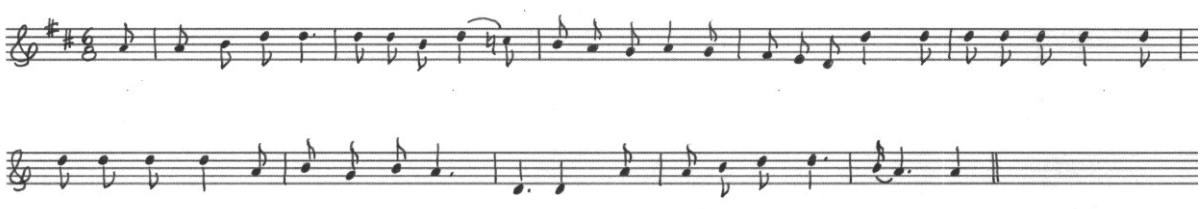
To solve the problem of stanza nine, Matheson chooses the simple and conservative expedient of repeating an earlier motif – the one found in the fourth phrase of the air – to extend the melody. The following example shows how Matheson has adapted Fraser’s air to the four stanzas quoted above. Again, he has ensured that the beginning and end of each stanza retains the same melodic contour, while the internal phrases drop in and out as needed:



'*An naidheachd so an-dè*'
For another song by *Màiri nighean Alasdair Ruaidh*, Matheson found the following air in Donald Campbell's collection, *A Treatise on the Language, Literature and Music of the Highland Clans* (Campbell: Appendix 2):



In connection with his 1982 recording of this song for the School of Scottish Studies, Matheson mentioned to Morag MacLeod the difficulty he had encountered in adapting Campbell's air, which he said had been supplied to Campbell by the nineteenth-century collector Frances Tolmie.[12] Fortunately, it also appears in Tolmie's own collection of songs from Skye, as transcribed from Margaret Gillies, Bracadale, Skye, in 1862 (Tolmie: 99). We say 'fortunately' because the fifth bar of Tolmie's air, given below, is missing from Campbell's printed version of the air:



Unlike other early collectors, Tolmie was in the habit of recording the texts as well as the airs she encountered. In this case, the text differs subtly from the one chosen by J. C. Watson in his collection of Màiri's verse and sung by Matheson on *Gaelic Bards and Minstrels*. This difference is fortuitous, as Margaret Gillies' text represents a conflation of the first two verses as Watson gives them, with the result that the first of Gillies' stanzas contains seven lines, where Watson's has only five. As a result, Tolmie's transcription of Gillies' singing provides sufficient music for the longest stanzas in this poem, *i.e.* stanzas of five, six, and seven lines:

Gillies text (stanza 1)

An naigheachd 'so 'n dé
'S aighearach ì!
Moladh do 'n léigh
'thug maileart do m' chèill,
Cha ghearain mi féin,
Na chailleadh 's na dh'éug,
'S mo leanabh 'na dhéidh comhshlàn.
'S mo leanabh 'na dhéidh comhshlàn.

Watson text (stanzas 1 and 2)

An naidheachd so an-dé,
Aighearach è
Moladh don lèigh
Thug malairt dam chèill
Nis teannaidh mi fhèin ri crònan.

Beannachd dhan bheul
A dh'aithris an sgeul,
Dh'fhàg fallain mo chrè;
Cha ghearain mi fhèin
Na chailleadh 's na dh'eug
'S mo leanabh nan dèidh còmhshlan.

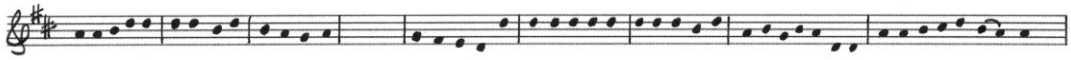
However, despite the fact that Tolmie's transcription provides a complete air for this song, William Matheson remarked to Morag MacLeod that the performance had given him difficulty, because the version of the air he was looking at – presumably the one in Campbell's volume – lacked sufficient music for all the verses:

> *Nise, chan eil anns a'…Tolmie Collection ach…eisimpleir dhe dh'aon rann. Is mar sin, rinn mi fhèin suas mar a bheadh còir dhuinn na rainn eile a sheinn. Nuair a thuigeas tu dualchas, tuigidh tu dè a tha agad ri chur ann airson an ceòl a dhèanamh suas, a' bheil a fhios agat…. Sè tha mi a' ciallachadh, tha feadhainn dhe na rainn anns nach eil ann ach còig sreathean, feadhainn anns a bheil sia, agus feadhainn anns a bheil seachd. Agus chan eil cuimhn' agam a-nisd co-dhiùbh tha Frances Tolmie a' toirt a'chiùil mar a tha 's na còig sreathan nà na sia sreathan, ach – chan eil na seachd, co-dhiùbh – ach co-dhiùbh, ge air bith dè a th' aice chan eil aice ann ach aon rann….'S mar sin bh'agamsa ri, bha e agamsa ri sreath a bharrachd a chur dhan cheòl dhan chuid dhe na rainn 's dòcha, na bha aice-se. Tha mi smaointeach gur h-e na còig sreathan a bh' aice…. Agus a'* reprise*, a bheil a fhios agad.*[13] *Agus an uair sin, mar sin, bh' agamsa ri sreath a bharrachd dhe cheòl a chur ann an cuid dhe na rainn agus dà shreath a bharrachd dhan cheòl a chur ann an rainn eile.* (SA2001.079.03-11)
>
> Now, the Tolmie Collection only gives one stanza as an example. For this reason, I myself made up how the other stanzas should be sung. When you understand tradition, you understand what needs to be added to make up the music, you know….What I mean is, there are some stanzas that only have five lines, some have six, and some have seven. I don't recall now whether Tolmie

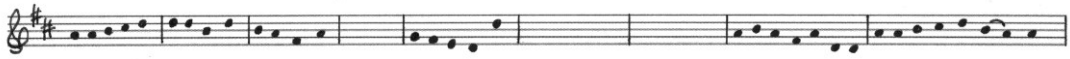
> gives music for a verse of five lines or of six, but it wasn’t for a seven-line verse anyway. In any case, she only gives one stanza….So I had to add a line to the music for some of the stanzas, beyond what she gave. I think it was a five-line stanza that she had….And the *reprise*,[13] you know. And then accordingly, I had to add an additional line of music in some of the stanzas, and two additional lines in others.

Curiously, although Matheson on this occasion mentions Tolmie’s air, he clearly cannot have looked carefully enough at Tolmie’s transcription as it appears in JFSS which, because of Margaret Gillies’ conflation of the first two stanzas, actually *does* include enough music for the longest stanzas of the poem. Matheson’s solution to this (non-existent) problem, however, resembles his approach to stanza nine of ‘*Cha sùrd cadail*’: where six or seven phrases are called for, he simply doubles-up phrase three. Arguably the result is just as successful musically as if he had used Tolmie’s phrase five:

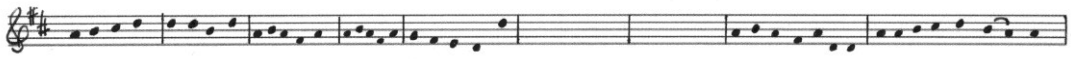
Tolmie



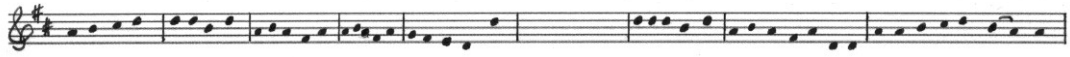
WM 5-line stanza



6-line stanza



7-line stanza



'*Mo bheud 's mo chràdh*'

An air for this song by *Màiri nighean Alasdair Ruaid*h appears in the Angus Fraser manuscript, headed *Marbhrann Iain Ghairbh 'Ic Gille-Chaluim,* 'A requiem for MacLeod of Raasay' (Fraser: 13). But before we turn to the air, and for reasons that will become clear, it is worth quoting in full the stanzas that Matheson chose for his performance (J. C. Watson: 36-41):

Mo bheud 's mo chràdh
mar dh'èirich dhà
'n fhear ghleusta ghràidh
bha treun 's an spàirn
's nach fhaicear gu bràth an Ratharsair.
's nach fhaicear gu bràth an Ratharsair.

Bu tu 'm fear curanta mòr
bu mhath spionnadh is treòir
o d'mhullach gu d' bhròig
o d'uilinn gu d' dhòrn:
Mhic Mhuire mo leòn,
thu bhith 'n innis nan ròn 's nach faighear thu.
thu bhith 'n innis nan ròn 's nach faighear thu.

Bu tu sealgair a' gheòidh,
làmh gun dearmad gun leòn,
air 'm bu shuarrach an t-òr
thoirt a bhuannachd a' cheòil,
is gun d'fhuair thu nas leòr 's na chaitheadh tu.
is gun d'fhuair thu nas leòr 's na chaitheadh tu.

Bu tu sealgair an fhèidh
leis an deargte na bèin;
bhiodh coin earbsach air èill
aig an Albannach threun;
càit' a faca mi fhèin
aon duine fo'n ghrèin
a dhèanadh riut euchd flathasach?
a dhèanadh riut euchd flathasach?

Spealp nach dìobradh
'n cath no 'n strí thu,
casan dìreach
fada fìnealt:
mo chreach dhìobhail,
chaidh thu dhìth oirnn
le neart sìne,
làmh nach dìobradh cathadh oirr'.
làmh nach dìobradh cathadh oirr'.

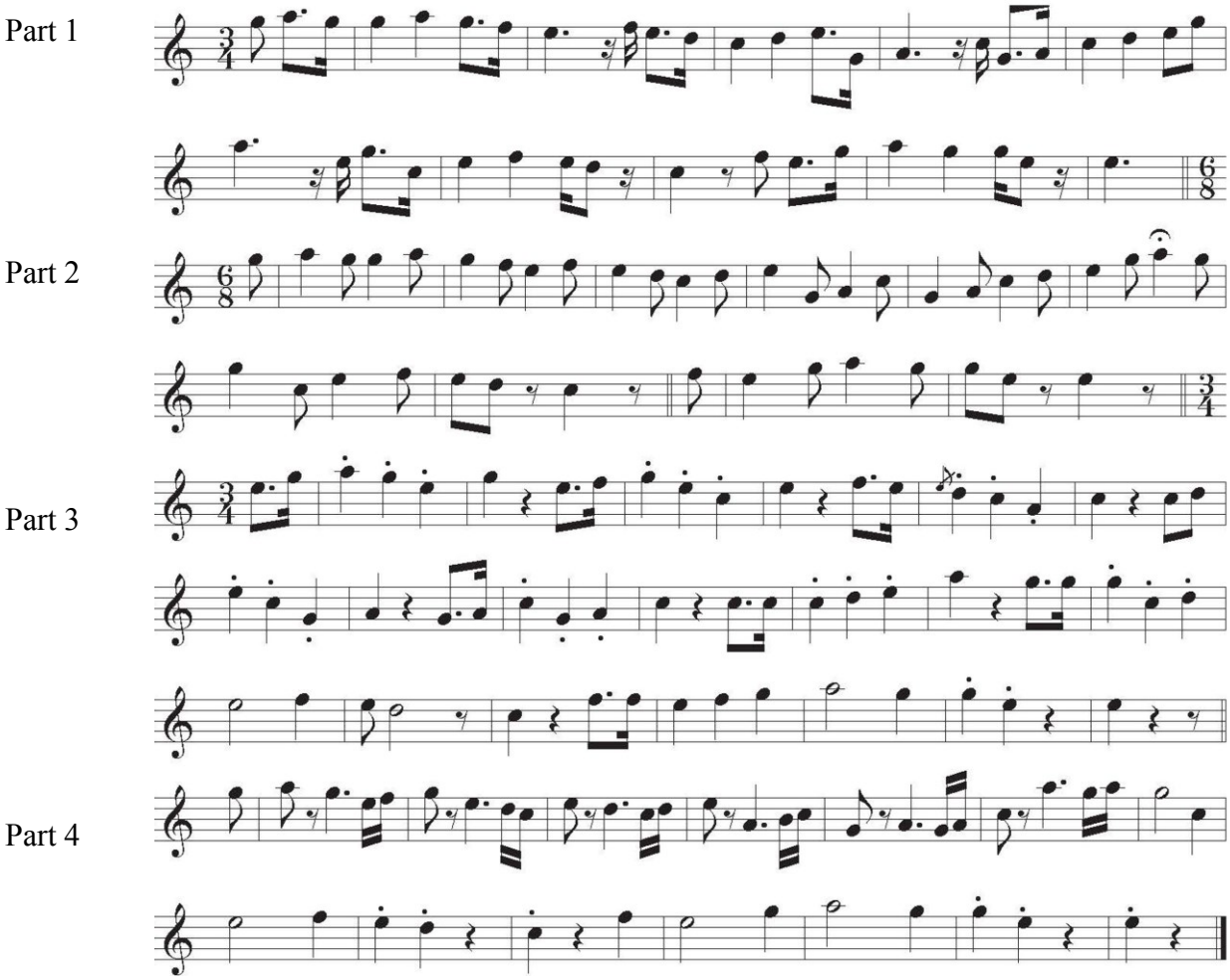
Och m'eudail bhuam
gun sgeul 's a' chuan
bu ghlè mhath snuadh
ri grèin 's ri fuachd,
's e chlaoidh do shluagh
nach d'fheud thu 'n uair a ghabhail oirr'.
nach d'fheud thu 'n uair a ghabhail oirr'.

Mo bheud 's mo bhròn
mar dh'eirich dhò
muir beucach mòr
a leum mad bhòrd,
thu fhèin 's do sheòid
nuair reub ur seòil,
nach d'fheud sibh treòir a chathadh oirr'.
nach d'fheud sibh treòir a chathadh oirr'.

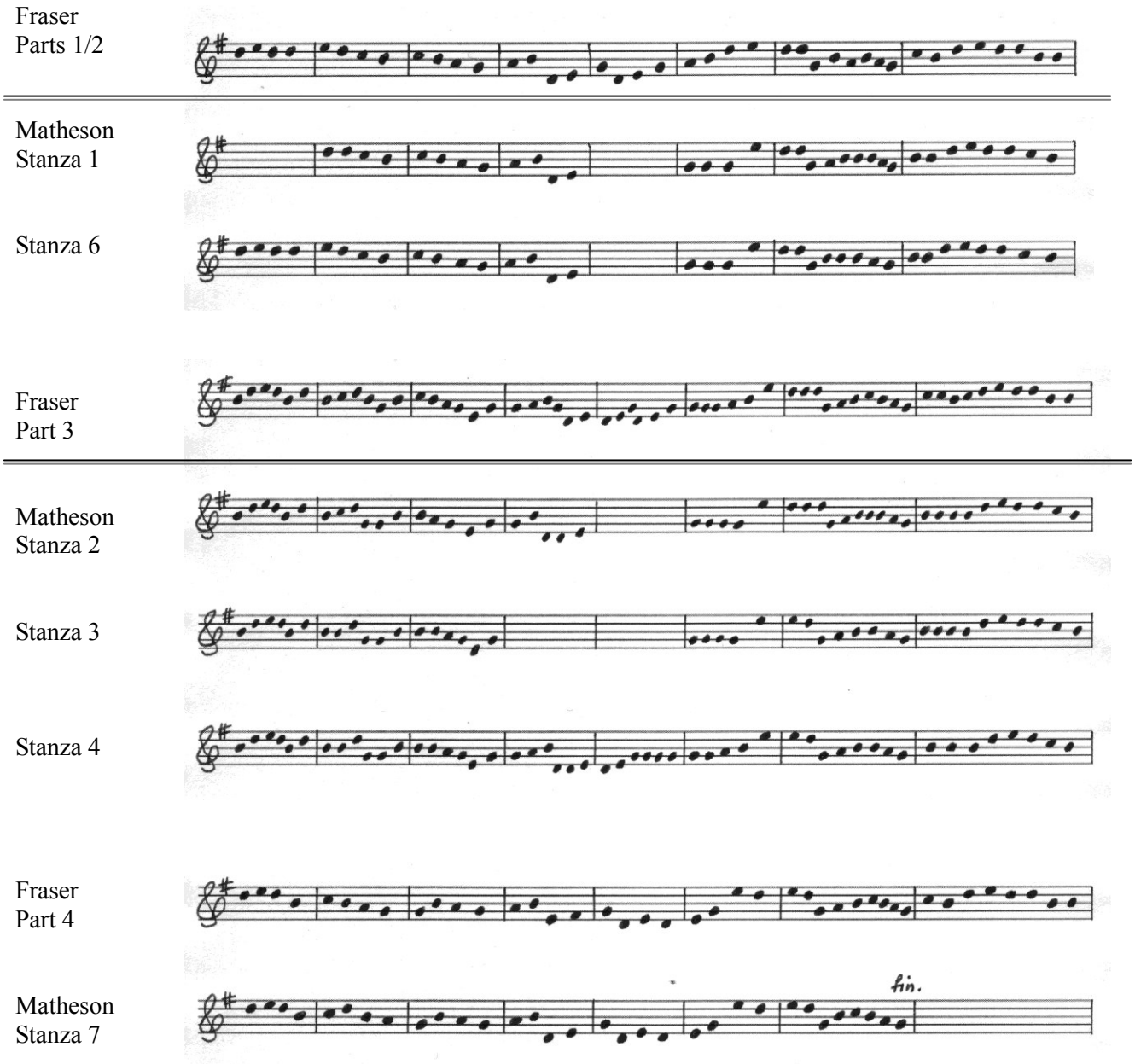
Here we have seven stanzas, varying in length between five and eight lines (not counting the repeated final line). While all of the stanzas end in a trisyllable, the fifth stanza – the one beginning *spealp nach dìobradh* above – is not only the longest, but it is also subtly different from the others in that the seven non-final lines end in a monosyllable, and most of

the lines begin with a stressed syllable. These features pose a significant challenge, as we shall see.

Fraser gives the tune four times, subjecting it to both rhythmical and melodic variation. It is not clear whether these variations represent something Fraser had heard from singers, or whether he composed them himself in order to extend the music for an instrumental performer. Remarkably, however, Matheson's performance takes advantage of all of them. Here is Fraser's setting:



In adapting this music to his purposes, Matheson has replaced Fraser's rhythmical inventions with the rhythms dictated by the text, and simply matched the melodic contours – the basic series of tones – with the words, increasing or reducing the number of notes as needed to fit the number of syllables in the text. The following transcripts show how Matheson has adapted Fraser's different versions of the tune to all but one of the stanzas of the poem. Note that, stripped of their rhythmical variation, the first two parts of Fraser's tune contain the same melodic material; for this reason they are conflated in what follows:



The fifth stanza presented Matheson with a peculiar problem. In the first place, this stanza contains eight lines (not counting the repeated line at the end), making it longer than any of the others. More important, however, is the conformation of the initial quadrisyllabic lines: most of them begin with a stressed syllable (meaning that there is no room for an 'up-beat' or anacrusis in the musical setting); and they end in a disyllable rather than a monosyllable.

None of Fraser's settings is long enough to accommodate an eight-line stanza; and while the first, sixth and seventh stanzas of the poem also contain quadrisyllabic lines, Matheson clearly felt that the music appropriate for those stanzas would not work for the fifth stanza. Indeed, the musical phrases used for the initial lines of those stanzas sound awkward

when applied to stanza five, because the metrical requirements of the verse upset the rhythmical pattern that one has, by that time, come to associate with those melodic motifs. In any case, the problem of the additional line had also to be dealt with.

Matheson's solution was to improvise some music of his own for the initial lines of stanza five, while ensuring a smooth transition to the final two phrases, which had to remain the same as in all the other stanzas:

Stanza 5

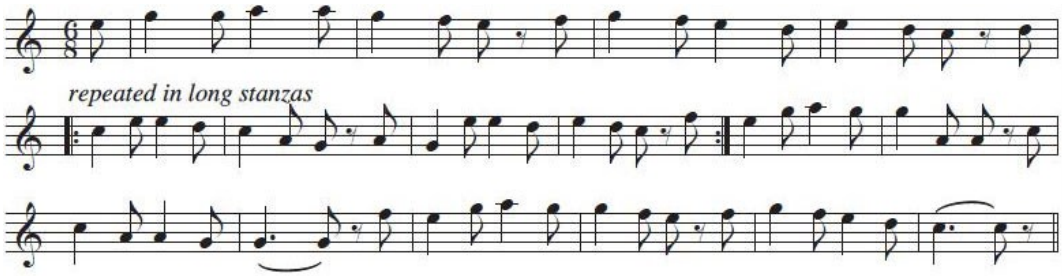
Spealp nach dìobradh
'n cath no 'n strí thu,
casan dìreach
fada fìnealt:
mo chreach dhìobhail,
chaidh thu dhìth oirnn
le neart sìne,
làmh nach dìobradh cathadh oirr'.
làmh nach dìobradh cathadh oirr'

Morag MacLeod has recalled that, during their work together, William Matheson referred to the fact that Angus Fraser's air suggests 'different ways of singing. In Mary MacLeod's *Lament for Iain Garbh* there are variations in the number of lines, but also in the number of syllables in each verse. The music has to accommodate that. He says, "It took me a while to work that out."'[14] Possibly it was this problematic stanza that Matheson had in mind, and it is a pity that he did not discuss it while the tape was running, nor did he address it anywhere in print or in his notebooks so far as I am aware. In any case, however, his solution certainly passes muster, judging solely by musical and metrical criteria; and as the problem must have been commonly faced by anyone in the habit of reciting poetry of this kind, Matheson's solution suggests one way in which it might have been addressed.

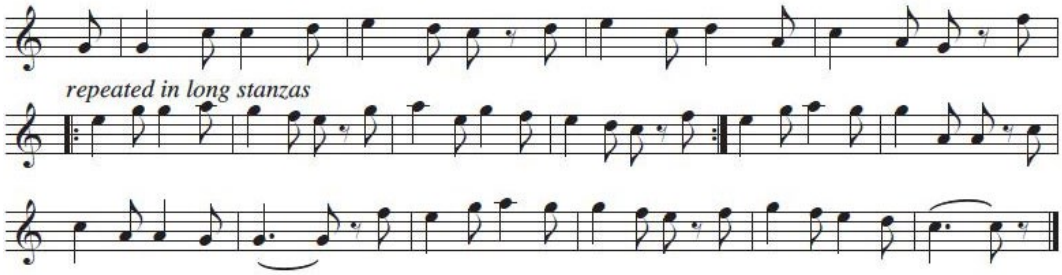
'*Deoch-slàinte an Iarla thuathaich sin*'

Matheson took the text for this poem, by Murdoch Matheson (*An t-Aosdàna MacMhathain*), from *Sàr-Obair nam Bàrd* (Mackenzie: 83-5); and chose an air from Angus Fraser's collection entitled *Fàilte Mhic Shimidh,* 'A bard's salute to Lord Lovat' (Fraser: 27).[15] As he had done with his arrangement of the lament for MacLeod of Raasay, Fraser set *Fàilte Mhic Shimidh* in multiple parts:

Part 1



Part 2



Stanzas vary in length between five and six lines, with (if the evidence of the musical setting is to be believed) the final long line repeated twice. Unusually, however, the initial lines of each stanza each contain three stresses rather than two, and they end in a trisyllable, rather than the usual monosyllable or disyllable. More unusually still, the final long line contains twice as many stressed syllables as the initial lines, rather than only one additional stress. Here is the text as Matheson sings it:

Deoch-slàinte ‘n Iarla thuathaich sin
a thriall an dè thar chuantan bhuainn
le sgioba làidir luasganach
nach pilleadh càs no fuathas iad;
muir gàireach ris gach guallainn dhi.
Air clàr do luinge luaithe ghabh mi cead
dhiot ‘s fhuair mi’n t-òr.
Air clàr do luinge luaithe ghabh mi cead
dhiot ‘s fhuair mi’n t-òr.

Gun gleidheadh Dia o bhaoghal thu,
o charraid cuain ‘s o chaolasan,
o charraig fhuair gun chaomhalachd,
seachd beannachd tuath is daonnachd
dhut;
buaidh làrach ri do shaoghal ort fhir-
ghaoil ga d’ fhaicinn beò.
buaidh làrach ri do shaoghal ort fhir-ghaoil
ga d’ fhaicinn beò.

D’fhear-eòlais làidir fradharcach
deas-chainnteach gàireach gleadharach
min-chinnteach calma foighidneach
crann geadha ‘na làimh adhartaich –
Mac-samhail Rasg Mhic-Fhradhairc, siud
mar thaghainn dhut na seòid.
Mac-samhail Rasg Mhic-Fhradhairc, siud
mar thaghainn dhut na seòid.

Ma chaidh thu null thar chuantan bhuainn,
air darach naomh a ghluaiseas tu,
fior bhuille saoir le’n d’ fhuaigheadh i;
bidh barant de dhaoin uaisl’ oirre,
bidh beannachd bhochd is tuath agad,
chan eagal baoghal fuadaich dhut, bidh
Dia man cuairt dha d’ sheòl.
chan eagal baoghal fuadaich dhut, bidh Dia
man cuairt dha d’ sheòl.

Gur gaoth a deas a dh'èighinn dhut
gun chruas gun tais bhith sèideadh rith'
fear beairte beachdail geurchuiseach
gu sanntach bras neo-èisleanach
a dh'fhuasg'leadh pailteas eudaich dhi ga bhrèideadh air gach bòrd.
a dh'fhuasg'leadh pailteas eudaich dhi ga bhrèideadh air gach bòrd.

Gun innsinn gnìomh do stiùireadair –
fear cuimhneach ciallach, cùramach,
a dh' aithnicheadh fiamh a' chùlanaich,
's a chuireadh srian ri cùrsaireachd;
mam bristeadh trian a' chùirnein oirr', a mhùchadh e fo sròin.
mam bristeadh trian a' chùirnein oirr', a mhùchadh e fo sròin.

Ma chaidh thu null thar fairrge bhuainn
thu fhèin 's do choirneal Calmanach,
fhuair cliù an cùirt nan Albannach,
gur h-iomadh tùrn a dhearbhadh leis;
b'e siud an leòmhann ainmeil bu mhòr
seanchas air gach bòrd.
b'e siud an leòmhann ainmeil bu mhòr seanchas air gach bòrd

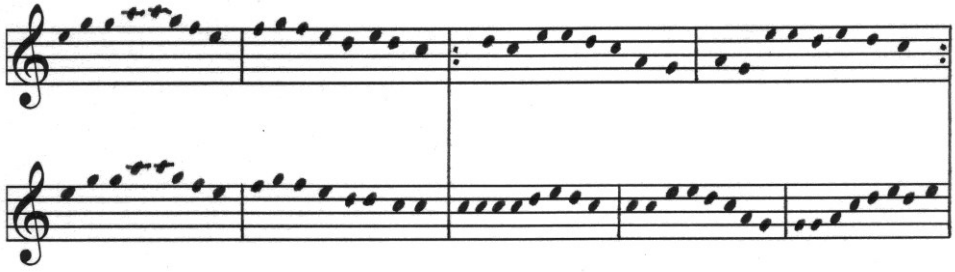
Gur tagha cala dh'innsinn dhut
an dèidh na mara Sìofordaich,
thu dhol gu fallain firinneach
do Steòrnabhagh thar linntichean:
bidh ròiseil gheala thinteannan
aig fir 's aig mnài, 's toil-inntinn orr' ri linn thu thighinn gu'n còrs'.
aig fir 's aig mnài, 's toil-inntinn orr' ri linn thu thighinn gu'n còrs'.

On the basis of this text, one might foresee a general redefinition of 'strophic' metre; but this is not our business here. The interesting thing about this example for our purposes is the fact that Angus Fraser appears to support Matheson's core principle in reconstructing these songs, namely, that the air needs to be flexible in order to accommodate stanzas of varying length; and by directing the performer to repeat bars five through eight 'in long stanzas,' Fraser is confirming that this flexibility needs to come in the middle of the tune, rather than at the beginning or end.

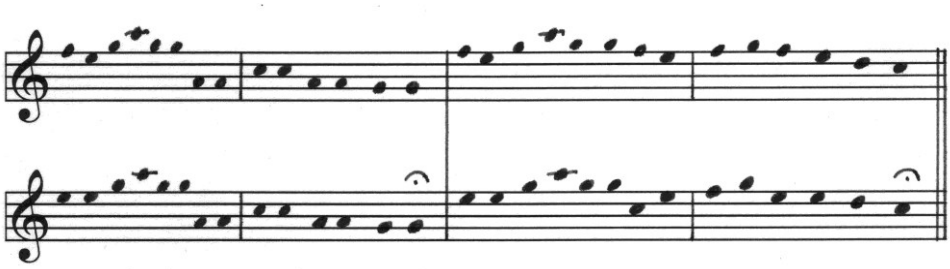
Even so, however, Fraser's setting fails to account for the fact that the text does not fit handily into a standard sixteen-bar musical form. This probably didn't matter for his purposes, as I suspect that he had instrumental performance in mind, and the audience for his collection of tunes would have expected sixteen-bar musical settings. But for Matheson, seeking to re-fit the air to the text, the repeated section would have provided too much extra music for the longer stanzas, as it contains enough for two additional lines of verse, where only one is needed. In other words, Fraser's setting, including the repeated section, supplies music sufficient for a stanza of eight lines (including the repeated last line), rather than only seven.

As he did in the case of '*Mo bheud 's mo chràdh*', Matheson chose to make full use of Fraser's setting of *Fàilte Mhic Shimidh*, adapting Part 1 of Fraser's music to the seven-line stanzas, and using Part 2 for the shorter, six-line stanzas. In any case, the final two musical phrases (*i.e.* the final four bars) are the same for each of the two sections as Fraser gives them. Here is how Matheson adapted Fraser's material to his purposes.

Fraser Pt. 1



Matheson
Stanzas 1, 2, 6, 8

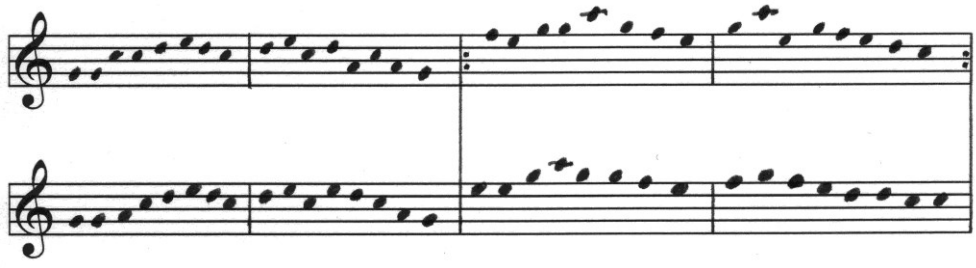


With regard to the repeated section of Part 1 of Fraser's air, where the text required only three phrases rather than four, Matheson has used only one bar of Fraser's material – the first, which appears second in Matheson's sequence – and has added two bars of his own to make up the music required.

For the shorter stanzas, Matheson has expeditiously used Part 2 of Fraser's material as it stands, with very few minor alterations. As directed, he ignores the repeat:

Fraser
Part 2

Matheson
Stanzas 3, 4,
5, 7



The final two phrases are as given for Part 1.

However awkward it may be to adapt Fraser's air to the longer stanzas, his confirmation of Matheson's core assumption in reconstructing these songs is of inestimable value. The performance of songs in strophic metre has been uncommon for some time, as Matheson's recourse to manuscripts and printed sources attests; very few such songs are to be found in the archives of the School of Scottish Studies, and those that do are, as far as I am aware, songs in which the number of lines per stanza has been regularized.

Conclusions and conjectures

As William Matheson was quick to acknowledge, his performance of songs in strophic metre – whether the stanzas were of fixed length or otherwise – was unlikely to resemble that of someone who had learned the songs from living tradition. In the first place, he believed that the airs were likely to have been composed by the poets themselves, and that they would change to accommodate rhythmical changes in the text. Talking of *Màiri nighean Alasdair Ruaidh*, he says:

> *'S e a tha ann ach* declamation *... an uair a bha i a' dèanamh na facal tha mi a' smaoineachadh gu robh fuaim nam facal a' tighinn thuice aig an aon am leis*

> *na facail fhèin ann an dòigh air choireigin, a bheil fhios agad. Agus seall mar a tha e 'g atharrachadh bho rann gu rann cuideachd, a bheil fhios agad. A bheil fhios agad, an rud a tha 'g atharrachadh bho rann gu rann, mar sin, tha sin 'na dhearbhadh gu bheil e air a dhèanamh ann an làrach nam bonn, gu bheil e mar a chanas 'sa Bheurla* spontaneous. *Chan e* stereotype *a tha ann. Tha e a' tighinn thugad mar a nì thu e….* (SA2001.079.03-11)
>
> What it is is a declamation … when she was composing the words I think the sound of the words was coming to her at the same time as the words themselves somehow, you know. And see how it changes from stanza to stanza, too, you know. You know, the thing which changes from stanza to stanza like that, that proves that it's been made on the spot, that it is, as the English has it, spontaneous. It's not a stereotype. It's coming to you as you create it….

What Matheson is saying is, of course, impossible to prove – and in any event, what might have been true for one poet might not have been true for another. It seems equally possible that certain reciting-tones and melodic motifs circulated within communities, and could have been appropriated as needed by poets and singers. Matheson's own performances provide plenty of evidence that, by repeating a note or subtly altering a melodic contour, a given motif can easily be adapted for lines containing additional syllables; and the same would be true in reverse. Some singers may have been more skilled than others at this sort of manipulation – just as, given the difficulties we have been examining here, some singers were probably better than others at performing songs in which stanza-length was not fixed.

Matheson also acknowledges that there might be a considerable difference between one performance and another of the same song. Again, he is referring to *Màiri nighean Alasdair Ruaidh*:

> *Tha mi a' smaoineachadh gum biodh eadardhealachadh math eadar 's dòcha mar a ghabh i e dà uair, a' bheil a fhios agad. Dà uair. … Tha mi a' smaoineachadh, na seann daoine, an uair a bhiodh iad a' gabhail a leitheid gum biodh eadardhealachadh mòr 's dòcha eadar mar a* [unintelligible] *ghabh iad e, dà uair.* (SA2001.079.03-11)
>
> I think there would be a considerable difference between how she performed it on two occasions, you know. On two occasions. … I think, the old people, when they sang something like that there would be a big difference between how they sang on two occasions.

Matheson appears to be saying that performing these songs allowed a good deal of room for improvisation on the part of the singer. Insofar as his own performances are the result of long study and thought over many years, it is clear that they are not typical of the spontaneous and improvisatory performance that he says would have been common. In particular, his use of the variations supplied by Angus Fraser for '*Mo bheud 's mo chràdh*' and '*Deoch-slàinte an Iarla thuathaich sin*' – variations probably composed by Fraser himself with the instrumental performer in mind – may not reflect traditional performance practice. At the same time, Matheson's use of these variations certainly does reflect his understanding that rhythmical differences between stanzas would have required sensitive adaptation of the melody to fit – whether instinctive and improvisatory, or carefully planned in advance.

Matheson's unflagging interest in this material, his dogged detective work, and his creativity in solving the problems posed by stanzas of irregular length, have given us not only a sense of how these particular songs might have been performed, but a possible insight into how we might unlock the mysteries of other types of sung performance of which only the faintest echoes remain.

While working on this material, I happened to recall a recording made in the 1950s in County Galway in Ireland. At that time the American collector Sidney Robertson Cowell made two recordings of *caointeoireacht*, the keening of the dead, from elderly women in the Aran Islands.[16] While the age and infirmity of one singer made her recording very difficult to make out, the second woman, who chose to remain anonymous, recorded the following. The text is admittedly very basic and formulaic, but its metrical shape is unambiguous: a short stanza of unfixed length, composed of a series of short two-stress lines ending in a monosyllable, concluding with a contrasting two-stress line ending in a disyllable.[17] It is also eerily reminiscent of the metrical shape of strophic verse, suggesting that the latter metre may not have been invented out of thin air by Iain Lom and his contemporaries as some have argued, but may actually have metrical ancestry of some antiquity:

1. *Och ochón ó*
   'gus ochón ar maidin

2. *Och och ochón ó,*
   och ochón ó,
   'gus och ochón ó
   go deo ar maidin.

3. *A bhó a bhó,*
   a bhó a bhó,
   'gus a bhó
   'gus a bhó a bhó,
   'gus a bhó a bhó,
   a bhó ar maidin.

4. (*ar) Dia linn go deo,*
   'gus Dia linn go deo,
   's Dia linn faoi dhó
   'gus Dia linn, Dia linn,
   'gus Dia linn, Dia linn,
   agus Dia dhár réiteach.

5. *Och ochón ó,*
   och ochón ó,
   go brách agus go deo,
   is ochón ó,
   is ochón ó,
   's go deo ar maidin.

6. *A bhó a bhó,*
   a bhó a bhó,
   'gus a bhó a bhó,
   is a bhó a bhó,
   a bhó ar maidin.

7. *Och ochón ó,*
   is ochón ó
   is ochón ó
   [unclear] dóite dearga.

8. *Dia linn go deo,*
   'gus Dia linn faoi dhó
   'gus Dia linn go deo,
   is Dia linn ar maidin.

9. *A bhó a bhó,*
   'gus a bhó a bhó,
   is a bhó a bhó
   'gus a bhó ar maidin.

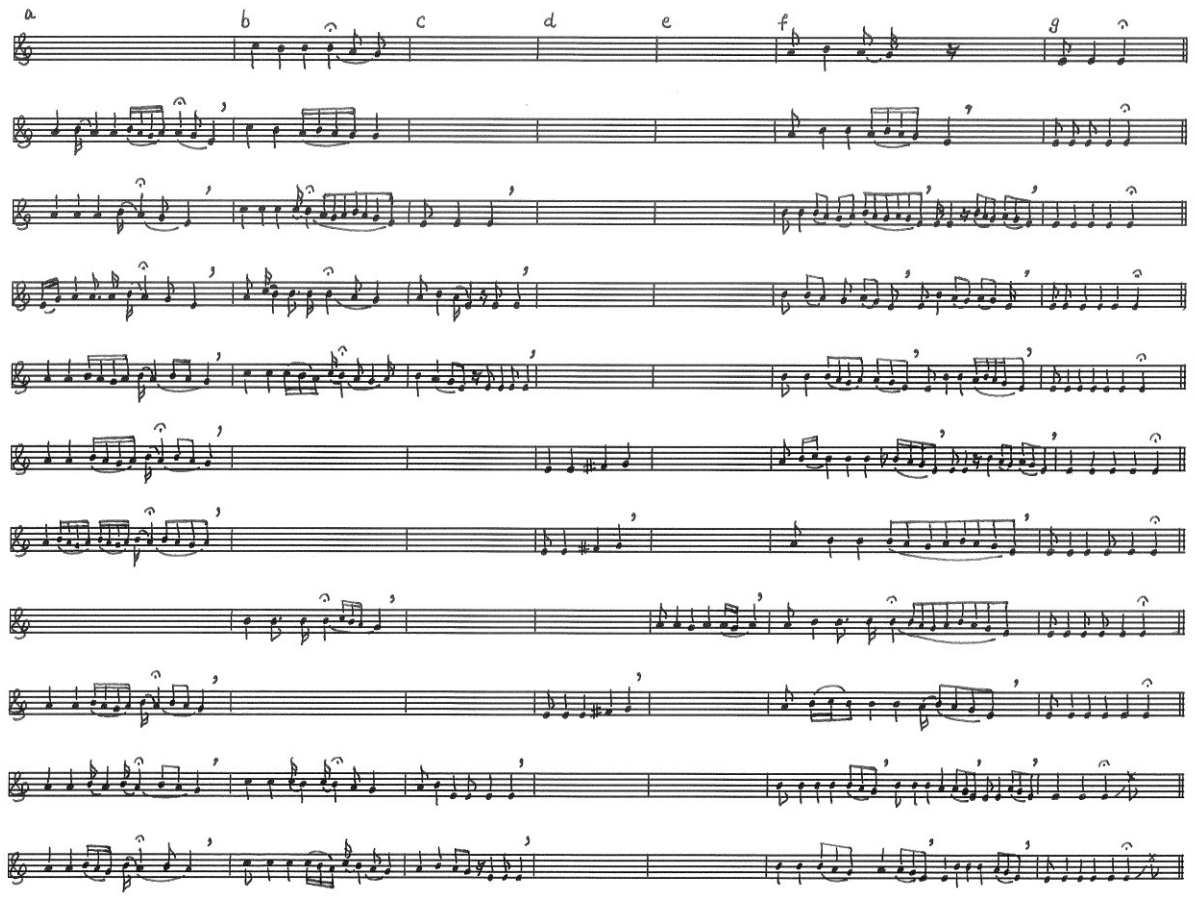
10. *Ochón ó,*
    och ochón ó,
    go deo agus a bhó
    is a bhó a bhó,
    is a bhó a bhó,
    is a bhó ar maidin.

11. *Och ochón ó,*
    is och ochón ó,
    go brách agus go deo

is Dia linn faoi dhó, *is Dia linn ar maidin.*
is Dia linn go deo,

The air, while it relies to a considerable extent on rhapsodic melisma for its expressive qualities – a phenomenon that makes it look very complicated on the page – is actually a simple tune composed of a series of falling motifs within the interval of a minor sixth. In the following transcription, which I made in the 1970s, each staff corresponds to a stanza of text:

The air employs seven motifs in all, labelled [a] through [g] across the top staff. Each stanza uses between three and five of these motifs, always keeping them in the correct order,



and ending with the sequence [f]-[g]. Most important – and most reminiscent of what happens in the performance of the Scottish examples that we have been discussing here – is the fact that most of the melodic variation from one stanza to the next occurs in the middle of the stanza, *i.e.* in the place where it will cause least disturbance to the aural apprehension of the stanzaic unit. Here is the text once again, this time with the corresponding musical motifs marked to show clearly how the process of turning them into a sung performance works:

B *Och ochón ó*
F *'gus ochón*
G *ar maidin*

A *Och och ochón ó,*
B *och ochón ó,*
F *'gus och ochón ó*
G *go deo ar maidin.*

A *A bhó a bhó,*
B *a bhó a bhó,*
C *'gus a bhó*
F *'gus a bhó a bhó,*
F *'gus a bhó a bhó,*
G *a bhó ar maidin.*

A *(ar) Dia linn go deo,*
B *'gus Dia linn go deo,*
C *'s Dia linn faoi dhó*
F *'gus Dia linn, Dia linn,*
F *'gus Dia linn, Dia linn,*
G *agus Dia dhár réiteach.*

A *Och ochón ó,*
B *och ochón ó,*
C *go brách agus go deo,*
F *is ochón ó,*
F *is ochón ó,*
G *'s go deo ar maidin.*

A *A bhó a bhó,*
D *a bhó a bhó,*
F *'gus a bhó a bhó,*
F *is a bhó a bhó,*
G *a bhó ar maidin.*

A *Och ochón ó,*
D *is ochón ó*
F *is ochón ó*
G *[unclear] dóite dearga.*

B *Dia linn go deo,*
E *'gus Dia linn faoi dhó*
F *'gus Dia linn go deo,*
G *is Dia linn ar maidin.*

A *A bhó a bhó,*
D *'gus a bhó a bhó,*
F *is a bhó a bhó*
G *'gus a bhó ar maidin.*

A *Ochón ó,*
B *och ochón ó,*
C *go deo agus a bhó*
F *is a bhó a bhó,*
F *is a bhó a bhó,*
F *is a bhó*
G *ar maidin.*

A *Och ochón ó,*
B *is och ochón ó,*
C *go brách agus go deo*
F *is Dia linn faoi dhó,*
F *is Dia linn go deo,*
G *is Dia linn ar maidin.*

Unfortunately, so few recordings of *caointeoireacht* are available for public discussion (although I believe there may be some in private hands) that it is impossible to say how commonly this sort of flexible structure might once have been attested in Ireland.[18] It is nonetheless suggestive that the principle which governs treatment of stanzas of unequal length is as clearly demonstrated in this example as it is in the case of the strophic metres. At the very least, this example provides, from living tradition, a useful corollary to Matheson's studied performances, and gives resonance to his conclusions about how poems in strophic metre would have been heard some three hundred years ago.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to my esteemed former colleagues Dr John MacInnes and Prof. William Gillies for their helpful comments and suggestions as this paper was being prepared for publication.

NOTES

[1] The term 'strophic' is problematic. William Gillies has suggested to me that if, as seems likely, Watson himself coined the term, he was probably thinking of 'the lyric metres of Greek tragedy (choral etc.), rather than just another word for "stanza"'. Its application to 'strophes' of variable as well as of fixed length renders it somewhat meaningless, as 'stanzas' are, *ipso facto*, of fixed length. Lacking a better term, however, we shall use the term 'strophic' here.

[2] For a survey of accentual verse-forms in Scottish Gaelic, including a description of the 'strophic' metres, see Blankenhorn, 'Verse structure and performance in Scottish Gaelic vernacular poetry' in *Rannsachadh na Gàidhlig 6*, forthcoming.

[3] A copy of some parts of this MS (including Part A) is also available for consultation in the Archive of the School of Scottish Studies, Edinburgh University.

[4] No audio recording of Duncan MacDonald singing this song has been located yet. For Matheson's notation of the air in tonic solfa see NLS 9711, Box 11/1, 296.

[5] NLS 9711, Box 12/4, 54a (counting from back of volume).

[6] Quite early in his career, Matheson elucidated a number of the problems associated with the musical notation of Gaelic songs (Matheson 1955: 67-82). Although he preferred tonic sol-fa to staff notation for transcribing unaccompanied singing, his transcriptions reveal that he found sol-fa a less-than-ideal means of indicating the rhythmic variability of Gaelic song. His transcriptions reveal a variety of techniques, and tend toward suggesting that the rhythm of the line should govern the rhythmic character of the music. In one of the transcriptions relevant to this paper he simply writes the pitch values above individual syllables, without bothering to include any rhythmic values or bar-lines at all; see his sol-fa notation of *'Oran do'n Iarla Thuathach'*, adapted from an air entitled *'Fàilte Mhic Shimidh'* in the Angus Fraser manuscript (Fraser: 27), in NLS Acc. 9711, Box 12/4, p. 17a.

[7] We should also note that, in his performance of this song, Matheson has raised the final note of the fifth bar from the leading-tone 'B' to the tonic 'C'. It is arguable that the original 'B' in Torloisg may have been an error, as the tonic makes a great deal better sense in musical terms.

[8] In an e-mail to the present writer, February 2011.

[9] NLS Acc. 9711, Box 11/1, p. 296. Matheson gives the text reference 'S.O.' – presumably *Sàr Obair nam Bard Gaelach.* While this notebook does not give a source for the air, Matheson's notes for *Gaelic Bards and Minstrels* credit Duncan MacDonald.

[10] In addition to his recordings for Morag MacLeod in the early 1980s, William Matheson was also recorded singing this song for James Ross in 1954 (SA1954/55/A15). This earlier recording – made when his work with Duncan MacDonald was comparatively recent – also reveals his choice to repeat the second phrase throughout, and omit the fourth phrase in the shorter stanzas. See *Tocher* vol. 4, no. 25, pp. 20 ff. Prof. Gillies suggests that Matheson's musical choices may have been influenced by the performance of other texts using the same

air, as for example Allan MacDougall's poem to MacDonald of Glengarry which is designated to be sung '*Air fonn agus tomhas "A bhean, leasaich a stop dhuinn*"' (1829:13). We cannot know for certain whether or not William Matheson encountered such a performance in living tradition, but the association of this air with multiple texts suggests the possibility.

[11] Although his notebook suggests he was following the text from *Sàr-Obair* when he was working with Duncan MacDonald, the notes to *Gaelic Bards and Minstrels* cite *Bàrdachd Ghàidhlig* and Mackenzie's *Orain Iain Luim* as his sources for the text.

[12] For Matheson's remarks, see SA 2001.079.03-11. For Tolmie's transcription, see *Journal of the Folk-Song Society*, no. 16 (London, 1911): 263.

[13] By 'reprise' Matheson appears to be referring to the final phrase of music, to which the last line of each verse is sung as a prelude to the following verse.

[14] Morag MacLeod, in correspondence by e-mail, 24/2/2011.

[15] Unfortunately, Matheson does not tell us why he chose this particular air, apart from the implicit fact that it fitted the metre of the verse and accommodated the variable stanza-length of the poem. Dr John MacInnes tells me that he thinks he recalls William Matheson saying on one occasion that he had heard this song sung in tradition; if so, however, the notes to his recording do not mention such an experience.

[16] *Songs of Aran*, Smithsonian Folkways FW 04002 (1957).

[17] So far as I am aware, this is the first time that such a structure has been described for an example of *caointeoireacht.* Extensive study of the genre has, however, been undertaken over many years by Prof. Breandán Ó Madagáin and others, much of it focused on the performance of *Caoineadh Áirt Uí Laoghaire* and the distinction between what Ó Madagáin calls the *gol* – the verse of the *caoineadh*, in which the qualities of the deceased person are enumerated – and the *olagón*, the cry of grief taken up by the mourners in chorus, between verses (O Madagáin: 32-41). While I am in fundamental agreement with Prof. Ó Madagáin, I believe that, in addition to the ritualistic use of *caointeoireacht* that he describes, there was also a more private sort of *caointeoireacht* in which a person might seek the solace of song as an ease to grief. In these examples one finds syllables of lamentation such as *ochón* and *ariú* mingling with more specific text relating to the deceased person, without any formal boundary between the two. The present example is, I believe, an example of this sort of *caointeoireacht*, and there are others; see for example Kitty Gallagher's 'Keen for a dead child' on Alan Lomax's seminal early recording for the Columbia World Library of Folk and Primitive Music (Columbia AKL 4941; Rounder 1742), or the fragment recorded by Seosamh Ó hÉanaí at the request of his friend Liam Clancy (search 'caoineadh' at www.joeheaney.org).

[18] Ritual keening of the dead has not been heard in Scotland for many generations, and no records of the musical component of this practice – assuming there to have been such a thing – have survived.

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Piping Sung: Women, *Canntaireachd* and the Role of the Tradition-Bearer[1]

JOSHUA DICKSON

ABSTRACT. *Canntaireachd* (pronounced 'counter-achk'), Gaelic for 'chanting', is a complex oral notation used by Scottish pipers for centuries to teach repertoire and performance style in the courtly, ceremonial *ceòl mór* idiom. Its popular historiography since the 19th century suggests it was fixed and highly formulaic in structure and therefore formal (as befitting its connection to *ceòl mór*), its use the preserve of the studied elite. However, field recordings of pipers and other tradition-bearers collected and archived since the 1950s in the School of Scottish Studies present a vast trove of evidence suggesting that *canntaireachd* as a living, vocal medium was (and remains) a dynamic and flexible tool, adapted and refined to personal tastes by each musician; and that it was (is) widely used as well in the transmission of the vernacular *ceòl beag* idiom - pipe music for dancing and marching.

In this paper, I offer some remarks on the nature of *canntaireachd,* followed by a review of the role of women in the transmission and performance of Highland, and specifically Hebridean, bagpipe music, including the use of *canntaireachd* as a surrogate performance practice. There follows a case study of Mary Morrison, a woman of twentieth century Barra upbringing, who specialised in performing *canntaireachd;* concluding with a discussion on what her singing of pipe music has to say about her knowledge of piping and the nature of her role as, arguably, a piping tradition-bearer.

In 2006, Professor Hugh Cheape of Sabhal Mòr Ostaig wrote of author William Donaldson's work, *Pipers: a Guide to the Players and Music of the Highland Bagpipe,* as effectively defining an 'ethnomusicology of piping' (Cheape 2006: 169). Implicit in this remark was a perceived dearth of such defining studies, a recognition that this was a field ripe for development, and an exhortation for further studies to emerge in a similar spirit of participant observation and socio-cultural insight. The reviewer's comment was prescient in that doctoral theses and published works have since emerged that have significantly contributed to our understanding of Scottish Highland piping in ethnological, sociological, compositional and performative terms from the points of view of scholar-practitioners.[2] It bears reminding, however, that his comment was predated by many years by the ground-breaking and arguably ethnomusicological studies of Robin Lorimer in the 1950s and 1960s, Peter Cooke and Christine Chambers in the 1970s, and Allan MacDonald in the 1990s,[3] among others. As Scottish bagpipe music constitutes a largely unbroken tradition, and as such is both an emblem of the past and an artefact of the present, it has drawn the attention of western and folk musicologists and cultural historians alike; the common factor between them being an insider's knowledge of the music and its traditions.

In short, we have seen in the past two decades an unprecedented rise in our understanding of the bagpipe as a cultural as well as musical artefact, articulated as never before through, as I once put it elsewhere, 'the performer's own grasp of his craft' (Dickson 2009a: 1).

Such gender-specific language now seems ironic, for the present work is an attempt to continue toward the realisation of an 'ethnomusicology of piping' by focusing on two intimately related, and equally neglected, subjects: pipers' traditional syllabic notation, known as *canntaireachd*, as it pertains to *ceòl beag*, or the 'light music' of the pipes; and the role of women as inheritors and intermediaries of Hebridean piping – that is, as tacitly significant tradition-bearers in historically a man's arena of expertise.

The present study assumes the following research premises:

1. women in the Hebrides, or indeed the greater Highlands and Islands, were until relatively recently barred from actively participating in the region's piping tradition on the basis of a general cultural taboo;
2. women so barred were commonly known to sing pipe tunes in *canntaireachd* – particularly for dances on occasions when a bagpipe or piper was not to hand; and
3. an analysis of the *canntaireachd* sung by Hebridean non-piping women within living memory, compared diachronically and phonologically to that of their piping male contemporaries, would afford a greater understanding of the extent to which women in the Hebrides could be considered legitimate inheritors and intermediaries of the region's historically vibrant piping tradition.

With these premises in mind, the study therefore pursues the following aims:

- to demonstrate that women's passive participation in an instrumental tradition otherwise denied them can be revealed in large part by their singing of *canntaireachd*; and
- to argue that women's historical exclusion from active participation in piping in traditional Hebridean life prior to modern emancipation, belied a deep understanding of the piping idiom afforded by upbringing, observation, their role as singers and the cultural primacy of the voice in the transmission of knowledge.

To begin with, I offer some remarks on the nature of *canntaireachd*, followed by a review of the role of women in the transmission and performance of Highland, and specifically Hebridean, bagpipe music, including the use of *canntaireachd* as a surrogate performance practice. There follows a case study of Mary Morrison, a woman of twentieth century Barra upbringing who specialised in performing *canntaireachd*, concluding with a discussion on what her singing of pipe music has to say about her knowledge of piping and the nature of her role as, arguably, a piping tradition-bearer.

Canntaireachd (pronounced 'counter-achk'), Gaelic for 'chanting', is a complex oral notation used by Scottish pipers for centuries to teach repertoire and performance style in the courtly, ceremonial *ceòl mór* idiom. Its popular historiography since the nineteenth century suggests it was fixed and highly formulaic in structure and therefore formal (as befitting its connection to *ceòl mór*), its use the preserve of the studied elite.[4] However, field recordings of pipers and other tradition-bearers, collected and archived since the 1950s in the School of Scottish Studies, present a vast trove of evidence suggesting that *canntaireachd* as a living, vocal medium was (and remains) a dynamic and flexible tool, adapted and refined to personal tastes by each musician; and that it was (is) widely used in the transmission of the vernacular *ceòl beag* idiom – pipe music for dancing and marching – as well.

The most significant research to date into *canntaireachd* as a living, vocal medium was conducted by Chambers (1980), who solicited the opinions of a wide variety of exponents in the late 1970s on the nature of *canntaireachd* (e.g. what it is, what it is not, and what it is used for). She divided the perceptions as coming from two basic categories of informant: pipers and non-pipers. She further divided the non-pipers into three sub-groups, two of which are relevant to the present study. The first were 'relatives (particularly female relatives) of pipers themselves … people who have taken an interest in *canntaireachd*, who understand it and who have absorbed all the related piping lore while growing up in a pipe-oriented family or community'. The second were 'those who imitate the repertory of sounds used by pipers,

but arrange them in a euphonic rather than systematically associative fashion'. In other words, '*canntaireachd*' is what traditionally or formally trained pipers do for the purpose of transmission, teaching and the highlighting of technical detail; non-pipers or informally trained pipers (e.g. travellers), imitating the sounds of pipe music in ignorance of what the sounds actually signify and whose purpose is entertainment, are instead said to be 'cantering' (Chambers: 17-35, 319-20).

Women and piping in Hebridean tradition: historiography v. reality

Today, women and men enjoy essentially equal status in the professional piping world. Women or girls possess equal access to piping tuition in Scottish schools (and of course privately), and access to all competitions, and have begun to achieve the highest awards. This 'emancipation' is a relatively recent phenomenon; women were barred, for instance, from competing at the Northern Meeting and Argyllshire Gathering (the Scottish piping world's two premier annual competitions) until 1977, following the passage of the Sex Discrimination Act in the United Kingdom in 1975. One of the first women officially to compete at the highest level, thanks to the passage of the Act, was Rona Lightfoot née MacDonald (b. 1936), a native of South Uist, who, like contemporaries Seonaid MacAulay née MacIntyre of South Uist's south end and Catriona Garbutt née Campbell of Benbecula, proved a noteworthy exception to the general cultural taboo against women piping in the Isles. As Lightfoot recently remarked to a journalist, 'Although girls and women didn't normally play the pipes I just copied my father and brother and picked up the chanter and learned by ear' (Muirhead: 10). It has been shown elsewhere that it was not unusual for young girls to learn piping in the mid-twentieth century Hebrides only to be discouraged as young adults; gendered roles in the apprehension of music and song seemed to become entrenched only in adolescence (Dickson 2006: 160). In Lightfoot's case, she simply carried on playing and was fortunate to have the support of her immediate family in doing so.

The status of women in the professional piping world has since risen dramatically, and in 2010, a Gold Medal for *ceòl mór* was awarded to a woman – Faye Henderson of Kirriemuir – for the first time.[5]

Conventional wisdom has it, however, that prior to modern times, a cultural taboo saw piping as unwomanly, and first-hand testimony by Hebridean (and other) pipers bears this out. The father of the late traditional ballad singer, Lizzie Higgins of Perthshire, is said to have burnt the chanter Lizzie had begun to play upon as a child, with the words 'I'll have no she-pipers in my house' (Donaldson: 67). 'It was out of the question in them days for a girl to play the pipes [in Barra]', explained a niece of Mary Morrison in a 1974 interview. 'Oh, it was unheard of' (SA 1974.110). Lightfoot, more circumspect, reminisced how 'sometimes, you would get the impression that there were those who said it was a masculine thing to do, that it wasn't feminine to do it' (Dickson 2006: 160). Calum Johnston of Barra recalled in conversation in 1964 that women 'didn't go in for pipe music, you see' (SA 1964.146), an opinion echoed by contemporary Neil Angus MacDonald when interviewed in 1977:

MM *A bheil sibh a' smaoineachadh gum biodh boireannaich – an robh beachdan sam bith agaibh no aig ur n-athair mu dheidhinn boireannaich a bhi a' cleachdadh na pìobadh?* … Do you think that women – did you or your father have any opinion about women playing the pipes?[6]

NAM Well, it is said that some of the daughters of the MacCrimmons[7] sang the pipes. It was 'singing the pipes' that the old people said, not 'playing'. Donald Dubh had a daughter and she could go over *ceòl mór*, Donald Dubh MacCrimmon.

MM But I understood that they weren't for women playing the pipes.

NAM It wasn't considered feminine to be playing the pipes [a generation ago … though there are] many today! (SA 1977.68)

Such views meant that the following verse in the traditional Gaelic song *'S e Morag a Rinn a' Bhànais*' ('It's Morag Who Made the Wedding') was to be considered satirical:

Bha Seonaid is fiodhall aice	Joan was there with her fiddle
Raghnaid is pìob aice	Rachel with her pipe
Mór nan dos is feadan aice	Mor of the drones with her chanter
'S sheinneadh iad a' ruighle.[8]	And they played the reel.

Despite the patriarchal nature of the piping tradition, the reality is that women have indeed played an important role in the inheritance, composition and transmission of the music of the pipe, though not always publicly. The largely invisible but still significant contributions of women to piping in Scotland generally have been broadly outlined elsewhere (Donaldson: 66-9). As '*Se Morag a Rinn a' Bhànais*' suggests, the role of women in piping in the still strongly patriarchal Hebridean community is no less complex. A brief survey of oral and literary evidence suggests that women, particularly those brought up in piping families, were keen life-long observers of their communities' cultural milieu and as such often acted as respected repositories of knowledge without whom breadth of repertoire and vibrancy of style would have been far less surely inherited from one generation to the next. As Neil Angus MacDonald mentioned in passing, piping folklore dictates that the wives and daughters of the famous MacCrimmon dynasty in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were able pipers all, albeit largely out of the view of the public. One of Barra's most celebrated authorities on Gaelic music and piping, Calum Johnston, was known to possess songs intimately related to the *ceòl mór* idiom which he had learned from his sister Annie, who in turn had learned them from a local elderly woman.[9] Similarly, the late South Uist piper Calum Beaton reminisced about a pipe reel he had learned as a young man from his neighbour, who had learned it from the singing of a local widow who in turn had claimed to have been given the tune in *canntaireachd* by fairies (Dickson 2006: 26). Fellow Uist piper Alasdair Boyd owed a great deal of his knowledge of the words and melodies associated with *ceòl mór* to his childhood nurse, Anne MacLean, or *Anna nighean a' Phìobaire* ('Anne daughter of the Piper'), who would sing the words to accompany sewing and knitting (SA 1970.007). And one of the twentieth century's most celebrated pipers, the late John MacDonald of South Uist, was of the opinion that certain women at the turn of the century were, against all conventional wisdom, veritable custodians of local knowledge of the classical genre prior to the age of modern instruction:

DAM *An robh ceòl mór ann mus tàinig Iain Domhnallach Inbhir Nis? ...* Did *ceòl mór* exist here before John MacDonald [of Inverness] arrived?
JMcD Yes, but it wasn't so good. It wasn't so good but we had it.
DAM And who had it –
JMcD The women had it. There was one woman, *Màiri Dhomhnaill 'ic an t-Saoir*, the bardess – there wasn't a pibroch that she didn't know. In *canntaireachd*.
DAM What was her name?
JMcD 'The Daughter of the Fair-haired Piper'. (SA 1982.145).

The conclusion to be reached is that women's status as repositories was predicated on the cultural primacy of the voice in the transmission of tradition in Hebridean life and in turn on their command of *canntaireachd*.

Women and *canntaireachd*

Women often turned to *canntaireachd* as a surrogate for active performance on the pipes. According to the nineteenth century aristocrat, polymath and folklorist John Francis Campbell, the sister of celebrated Raasay piper John MacKay (1767-1848) would 'sit by the fire and dictate the words of *canntaireachd* and sing them as the piper played'; Campbell went on to quote his informant, Duncan Ross, piper to the Duke of Argyll: 'Many a time,' said Ross, 'have I heard old women, myself, out herding cattle, sing great music [i.e. *ceòl mór*] in the words of *canntaireachd*' (Campbell 1989: 34). Flora Boyd of Barra was not a piper, but nonetheless sang lyrically in an indicative and onomatopoeic Hebridean *canntaireachd*, having observed pipers teaching young pupils: 'The words they were saying, when they were learning the boys on the chanter … I know how to do the *canntaireachd* because of that' (SA 1974.112). Women were frequently in demand in their local communities as singers of *canntaireachd* for dance music at ceilidhs and weddings when a bagpipe (or piper) was not to hand, and were often acclaimed for their skills. Among the traveller families, 'diddling' as performance, for entertainment and dancing, was at one time seen as a woman's specialism (Chambers: 72-3). This was no less true among Hebridean Gaels, as piper Donald Morrison attested to Christine Chambers:

CC Did you ever see people dancing to that kind of mouth music or diddling?
DM Och yes … many, many times indeed … In my young days it was sort of – especially if there were youngsters learning dancing – you didn't have the facility of the piper all the time. The mother would maybe 'strike up', if you might call it that, start singing the tunes. (SA 1977.168)

Canntaireachd was in fact a lifeline to women who, brought up in families staunchly proud of their piping lineage but conservative as regards gender roles, wished to learn and play the pipes but were prevented socially from doing so. This was the experience of Mary Morrison, who learned her craft by observing the piping and singing of her male relatives:

EL And was it [her brother] Donald that Mary learned most of her *canntaireachd* from?
N Yes, from her brother. Auntie Mary was very keen to go, when she was young, but they wouldn't let her. It was out of the question in them days for a girl to play the pipes. Oh, it was unheard of.
EL So you sang *canntaireachd* instead.
N So she said, well, I'll do the next best thing. I'll play by mouth – mouth music. And I remember Auntie Mary used to do that at the dances.
EL And I don't suppose people could keep off the floor when Mary was doing it.
N No! They couldn't! (SA 1974.110)

In Chambers's evaluation, Morrison would have been a performer of 'cantering' rather than '*canntaireachd*'. But it is significant that the way Mary Morrison and other Barra women, such as Mary Ann Lindsay and Flora Boyd, learned their vocalising – that is, by life-long observation and assimilation rather than through active teaching and learning – was no different to that of Calum Johnston, Neil Angus MacDonald or any other male contemporary. How they *used* it is another matter: for women, or non-pipers, it was a medium for performance, whereas for men – active pipers – it was (and is) a tool for transmission and the shorthand musical communication of small details. But the traditional means by which both (piping) men and (non-piping) women acquired *canntaireachd* was the same.

This suggests that the inventory of sounds and how those sounds are used – in essence a vocabulary and grammar of *canntaireachd*, or a Hebridean 'dialect' thereof – would not significantly differ between a non-piper and a piper, man or woman. This hypothesis is supported by the data comprising Table 1, which compares the sounds used by five non-piping women and five piping men of southern Outer Hebridean upbringing across a 30-year period to convey the plain and accented pitches of the bagpipe scale, and Table 2, which compares how these sounds were organised and structured by the same sources to convey a range of ornaments typical of the *ceòl beag* genre. In both tables the onamatopoeism and general phonetic and structural characteristics are consistent across all sources:

Table 1: Bagpipe scale represented in *canntaireachd* by Hebridean women (non-pipers) and men (pipers), 1951-1981[10]

Bagpipe scale, plain and accented	Mary Ann Lindsay, 1976	Mary Morrison, 1951-74	Kate MacCormick, 1956	Flora Boyd, 1974	Kate MacDonald, 1966
Low G	in, hin, chin, din	um, hum, hin	-	im, him	in, hin
Low A	in, hin, chin, din, dim	um, hum, hun, hin, rin, chin	im, um, him, hum, chum	im, um, hum, him, rin	in, hin, um
B	o, ho, do, ro	o, ho, ro, do, bo, ba	o	o, ho, ro, bo, da	o, to, ho
C	a, ha, ta	a, ha, ra, da, ta, pa, va, re	a, ha, pa, ra, ba, he, re, pe	a, ha, ba	a, ba
D	a, ra, ha, dha, e, he, re	e, he, ve, re, a, da, cha, la	a, ha, pa, ra, va, da, e	a, ha, cha, ra, ba, rum	e, che, a, ra
E	u, hu, i, hi, pi, vi, dhi, po, ro	u, du, hu, ru, i, hi, ti, pi	i, di, e, he	i, hi, chi, dhi, ri	u, ru, e, he, i, hi, pi, ri
F	pa, va	i, vi, ri, li, bi, ru	-	i, di, dhi, ti, ri, hi, pi, hu	u
High G	i, dhi, vi, ti	pi, li, vi, chi, ti	i, hi, ri, di	i, hi	i, hi, ri, pi
High A	i, dhi, hi, pi, ti	i, ti, ri, li, bi, fi, vi	i, hi, ri	i, dhi	i, ti, ri, pi

Bagpipe scale, plain and accented	Calum Johnston, 1953-65	Neil Angus MacDonald, 1976-81	Alasdair Boyd, 1970	Archie MacDonald, 1951	Patrick MacCormick, 1953
Low G	um, im, hum, him, hun	um, hum, chum	-	-	um, hum
Low A	un, in, hun, hin, chin, ro	in, hin, chun	um, hum, dum, him	um, hum, chum	um, chum
B	o, ho, po, bo, do, ro	o, ho, po, to, ro, vo, roi	a, ha, ra, o, ho, ro, do, dho	o, ho, ro, bo, ba	o, bo
C	a, ha, pa, da	a, ha, pa, ra, boi	a, ha, ra, ba	a, ha, ra	o, ho, do, ro, pe, re,
D	a, ha, pa, ra, e, he	a, ha, ra, va, ta, e, pe, be	a, ha	a, ha, ra, pa, e, ve	a, da, ra, ba, ach, pe, re, dhe
E	u, hu, i, hi, ti, vi, dhi, pi	u, hu, i, hi, ri, di, vi	u, i, hi, ri, vi, pi, oi, hoi, poi, hè, rè	i, di, u, o	i, hi, e, he
F	e, i, vi	i, hi, vi, ti	i, hi, oi, hoi, poi, e, he, ru	i, hi, ri, vi, he	i, hi, ri
High G	e, i, vi	i, hi, ri	-	i, hi, ri	u, hu, i, hi, dhi
High A	i, chi	i, vi, ti	i, hi, ri	i, ri, pi	i, dhi, ri, rich

Table 2: Sample of *ceòl beag* movements represented in *canntaireachd* by Hebridean women (non-pipers) and men (pipers), 1951-1981

Movements	Mary Ann Lindsay	Mary Morrison	Kate MacCormick	Flora Boyd	Kate MacDonald
Birl	rin, dirin, diririn	dirin, binim	pinim, minim	binim	-
Doubling on B	horo	doro, horo, boro	horo, choro	horo	-
Doubling on C	-	hara	para, hara	-	-
Tachum	tochin	dohin, dohim, dachin, achin	pachim, bahim	hinim	-
Throw on D	-	-	chere, chara	hara	hara
Strike on D	hara, here	ara, hara, chala, hala, hare	here, ara	hara	-
Doubling on E	huru	duru, hili, tili, pili	-	hiri	hiri, piri
Doubling on High A	pidhi	hili, hiri	hiri	hiri, piri	tiri, piri
Single-note triplet	hindinin, hininin	hororo, pororo, varara, hininin, huminim	-	humbinim, hororo, herere	haninin
Multi-note triplet	tobara	bibili, uvili, bilivi, haravi	humina	-	heara, tobara
Grip	br-, a-	-	padi	*[11]	-
Taorluath	-	binim, bidhim	-	-	-

Movements	Calum Johnston	Neil Angus MacDonald	Alasdair Boyd	Archie MacDonald	Patrick MacCormick
Birl	haninin	-	-	bininim, biririm	-
Doubling on B	boro, horo	horo, boro, boroich, toroich	horo	horo	-
Doubling on C	tara, hara	para, hara	hara	-	horo, doro, boro
Tachum	tachin, tarachim, harachin, borochin	aichin, taichin, hachin, hoichin, boichim	harachim, hahin	bachim, hachim, horochim	-
Throw on D	-	-	-	hara	dhe
Strike on D	bere	hara, para	-	ara	dara, bara, pere
Doubling on E	hiri	huru	piri	hiri, piri	-
Doubling on High A	-		hiri	-	dhi
Single-note triplet	haninin	chumbinim, huminim, himinim, hororoich	hororo	-	huminum
Multi-note triplet	habidi, hobara, hiriri		-	hiaru	-
Grip	-	bidi	dhro,dhoro	badi	-
Taorluath	-		-	-	

What was not evident in the tables was the extent to which the *canntaireachd* of the women involved conveyed other, more deep-rooted aspects of orthodox pipers' practice, such as internal consistency of the use of vocables representing conventional pipe ornaments, within the space of one tune or indeed across many performances of the same tune. To address these in greater detail, we turn now to our case study.

Mary Morrison

Mary Morrison, known as *Màiri Eóghainn Mhóir* or 'Mary (daughter of) Big Ewan', was not a piper, but achieved no small measure of fame in her lifetime for her ability to perform *canntaireachd*: her vocables were uncommonly articulate; her tempi uncommonly quick, but always controlled and nimble; and she often concluded her performances with a crowd-pleasing imitation of the piper's characteristic cascade of notes to the tonic low A. Although the tempo she employed when singing a jig was far quicker than what was and is considered appropriate for traditional solo Highland piping today, her status as an acclaimed and in-demand singer of *canntaireachd* for dancing in her native Barra community was a strong indication that such tempi were considered perfectly acceptable, perhaps even necessary, for accompaniment to the Highland Schottische or Eightsome Reel at the local *céilidhs* and wedding dances of the early to mid 20th century.

She was not without her detractors; particularly in response to the question of the authenticity of her *canntaireachd*. The normal reaction to her singing among authoritative pipers varied from cool to withering, focusing in the main on the idea that her *canntaireachd* was not the 'true' *canntaireachd* of a piper, but merely imitative doggeral. 'I could never listen to that woman,' stated Alasdair Boyd emphatically in 1970:

PC You mean, the *canntaireachd* is wrong? Because she's using her own *canntaireachd*?
AB I don't know what she's using at all.
PC So there is a right *canntaireachd*?
AB 'Paddy's Leather Britches' is a beautiful tune. Now, Mary Morrison could never play it, but I could play it ... I could play it, many's the time I did (sings through the tune). I could play the tune, and she couldn't. I could never listen to that woman.
PC Because she sings the *canntaireachd* wrong?
AB I don't know, I wouldn't say she sings it wrong, but she doesn't know the tune. (SA 1970.007)

Note that Boyd does not fault Morrison's *canntaireachd per se*, but her timing and tempo ('she doesn't know the tune'). Neil Angus MacDonald was more circumspect:

MM *A bheil thu eòlach air an t-seòrsa channtaireachd air a sheinn le Màiri Eóghainn Mhóir? ...* Are you familiar with the kind of *canntaireachd* performed by *Màiri Eóghainn Mhóir*?
NAM Yes.
MM Do you think that was normal in local custom?
NAM Yes. But I think if your *canntaireachd* is to be authentic, you need to be a piper … there might be other opinions, but you must be a piper in order to speak and understand the *canntaireachd* (SA 1977.68).

Christine Chambers, like Peter Cooke before her, probed for more detailed answers when the topic came up in conversation with Donald Morrison:

CC Could you have told that she (Mary Morrison) wasn't a piper from listening to her?

DM Oh yes, you can tell.
CC And yet she doesn't use, you were describing earlier how the women would, say, choose a 'D' and put that; she doesn't do that.
DM No, well, perhaps, you're quite right there. Perhaps that was a very wide sweep, saying that.
CC There must have been something that gave her away as a non-piper to you, because you *are* a piper.
DM Well, it's just the little items like, maybe, taorluath movements … and stuff like that … a piper puts in more detail, and the embellishments are put in the correct place … where the non-piper would maybe just throw in doublings and taorluaths at random.
CC Because he'd heard the sound from a piper.
DM Yes, yes. (SA 1977.168)

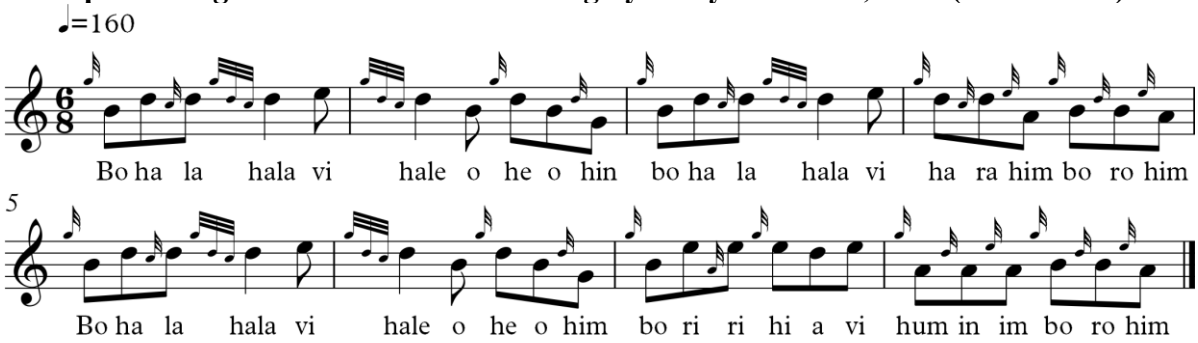
Morrison, Boyd and MacDonald all called attention to the fact that she was not a piper, and suggested that her *canntaireachd* was simply imitative and therefore technically inconsistent ('the non-piper would just throw in doublings and taorluaths at random'). Donald Morrison's remarks relate to the question of internal consistency in the singing of *canntaireachd*. That is, a non-piper's singing is considered imitative of piping in the general sense, lacking the consistent use and distribution of vocables representing conventional pipe ornaments and vowels in relation to pitch afforded by the specialist knowledge of pipers alone. The singing of a non-piper is therefore considered cantering or diddling rather than 'true' or authentic *canntaireachd* in Chambers's evaluation (1980: 17-35).

My survey and transcription of the singing of five women (non-piping) and five men (piping) of Gaelic Hebridean upbringing recorded between 1951 and 1981, broadly represented in Tables 1-3, suggest that women's use and distribution of conventional vocables and vowels in relation to pitch were in the main no less consistent than the men's; that is, when a part of a tune was repeated as is customary in piping, the *canntaireachd* sung was, in the vast majority of cases, the same, down to the last phoneme. This suggests that the women were not singing imitative or conventional vocables randomly, but in fixed patterns retained in memory. Campbell of Islay remarked on this aspect of retentive, articulatory memory in *canntaireachd* among pipers in 1880: 'Each school of pipers of old,' he wrote, 'and every individual piper now has a separate method of singing … [they] repeat the same sounds in chanting the same tune, when it has been learned by rote and committed to memory' (Campbell: 6). Further on this point, Chambers (60) refers to the late Pipe Major Bob Brown – one of the twentieth century's most celebrated exponents – singing 'The Lament for the Union' twice across a span of eight years, a diachronic comparison of these two performances yielding that his vocables hardly changed at all, vowel or consonant. The upshot is that individual pipers trained formally and traditionally still evolve a style and vocabulary of accepted vocables and phrases unique in practice to that piper in several respects and, due to the habituation of the physical act of singing, will usually retain in memory that unique style and vocabulary over time. Each piper evolves a unique style of *canntaireachd* within certain limits defined by customary acceptability. The over-arching structure of *canntaireachd* – the wider inventory of onomatopoeic and conventional vocables, associative releasing or arresting consonants, clusters or digraphs – remains inviolable; they are the common palette from which the individual piper develops his or her unique style in the individual sense, including combinations of vocables, the choice of vowel sound in relation to pitch, choice and appropriateness of releasing consonant, and so on.

This consistency of style can be observed synchronically (within a single performance) and diachronically (across several performances of the same tune over time) in the singing of non-piper Mary Morrison.

As regards the synchronic analysis, Example 1 is a transcription of Morrison's singing the jig *'Bog Liath nan Gobhar'*, or 'The Shaggy Grey Buck', in 1965 during an interview with the late Rev. William Matheson. This is a traditional Gaelic 6/8 jig well established in the *ceòl beag* canon, having been in print since at least 1848[12] and presumably in oral circulation earlier still. The tune as it is normally played today consists of 12 measures (or parts in pipers' jargon) of eight bars each; pipe tunes are normally performed today in two or four parts, but it was not unusual in Hebridean tradition for pipe tunes for dancing to contain as many as a dozen, and each part in a pipe tune is customarily repeated once. Morrison's rendition of *'Bog Liath nan Gobhar'* in 1965 contained a mere five parts performed in the sequence AA X BB CC DD EE AA CC D. The 'X' represents Morrison filling the space of an entire eight-bar part by repeating the melody of what was bar 7 of part 1, which seems to serve the function of an elaborate interlude or anacrusis, creating a tension that is finally released upon beginning the second part proper. This is not the orthodox practice of pipers today, but it may very well have been the custom of Mary's brother or other local Barra pipers to do so at dances in an earlier generation.

Example 1: *'Bog Liath nan Gobhar'* as sung by Mary Morrison, 1965 (SA 1965.12)[13]



When Morrison repeats a part, the vocables sung are in the vast majority of cases identical in phonemic quality, structure and sequence to those sung the first time. Also, the internal structure of each part in Morrison's singing follows a consistent rhyming pattern, as in poetry: for instance, the last vocable in line three of every part transcribed above (corresponding to bar 6 of each part in the instrumental pipe tune), is a variation on [heohin/m], i.e. the [e] phoneme (corresponding in this performance to the note D on the bagpipe scale and similar in sound to 'ay', as in 'hay' or 'say') punctuating and marking a specific place in each part. The last part features the [e] especially prominently, with the third line featuring the [e] phoneme in every major vocable – i.e. marking by the quality of the phoneme the end of the tune.

On the relationship of vowel to pitch in *canntaireachd*, Chambers (133) refers to a strong correlation between pitch and choice of vowel sound across all types of vocalising, onomatopoeicism being consistently applied. Buisman later corroborated this by demonstrating the traditional 'regions' on the pipe chanter scale that are represented most consistently by specific vowels in the historical written sources (Buisman 1997-8: 27), and this is in turn confirmed by the oral data compiled in the present Table 1. The data indicates that the Hebridean 'dialect' of *canntaireachd*, including that of Mary Morrison and other non-piping women, associated vowel to pitch generally in the following onomatopoeic descension from narrow and velar to broad and labial (or alveolar):

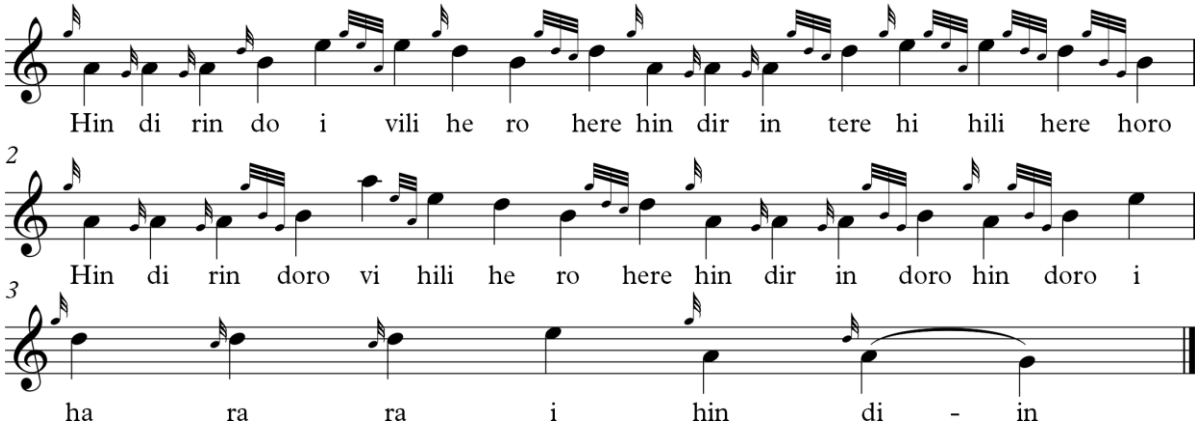
Table 3: Vowel-to-pitch assocation in *canntaireachd* by Hebridean exponents, 1951-1981

High A High G	} i
F	i, e
E	u, e
D	a, e
C	a, o
B	o, a
Low A Low G	} m, n

But, as Tables 1 and 2 confirm, Chambers also comments that systematic, or consistent, relating of vowel to pitch among any group of musicians was elusive; i.e. although some individuals within any group associated vowel to pitch with more consistency than others, variability was wide. Chambers (135) cites one formally-trained and renowned mainland piper who used as many as ten different vowel sounds to represent one pitch in a single example of *ceòl beag*. Contrast this with Mary Morrison's '*Bog Liath nan Gobhar*', where the vowel quality of the vocable [heohin] was consistent in every part.

As regards the diachronic analysis, compare Chambers's account of PM Brown's performances of the pibroch 'The Lament for the Union' (60), in which he sang the tune twice over an eight-year period displaying no significant changes, with the following transcriptions of Mary Morrison's singing of a passage of *ceòl mór canntaireachd* over a 20-year period. Morrison sang the pibroch song 'Cholla Mo Run', which is associated with the pibroch 'The Piper's Warning to His Master', for School of Scottish Studies researchers on at least eight occasions between 1950 and 1970, customarily ending each performance with a burst of *canntaireachd*. Morrison's neighbours and family considered it her masterpiece. The free rhythm and irregular tempi may reflect an earlier, more rubato and declamatory pibroch performance style in the Western Isles – if not expounded by the classical families, then by the rank and file pipers and singers to whom *ceòl mór* repertoire and style may have diffused as the status of the classical families waned in the 18th century. Example 2 compares the first strain of each performance:

Example 2: Variorum of *'Cholla Mo Rùn'* vocables performed by Mary Morrison, 1950-1970



1950 (CW0034E)
Hindirin do i hili hero here hindirin tere hi hili here horo / hindirin doro vi hili hero here hindirin doro hin doro i / harara hi hin din

SA 1951.11
Hindirin do vi hili hero here hindirin tèrè hi hili here horo / hindirin doro vi hili hero here hindirin doro hin doro vi / harara hi hin din

SA 1965.12
Hindirin do i hili hero here hindirin tèrè hi hili here horo / hindirin doro vi hili hero here hindirin doro hin doro i / harara hi hin din

SA 1965.52
Hindirin do vi hili hero he him here hi hili here horo / hindirin doro vi hili hero he hinin doro hin doro i / harara hi hin din

SA 1965.56
Hindirin do vi hili hero here hindirin tèrè hi hili here horo / hindirin doro vi hili hero here hindirin doro hin doro i / harara hi hin din

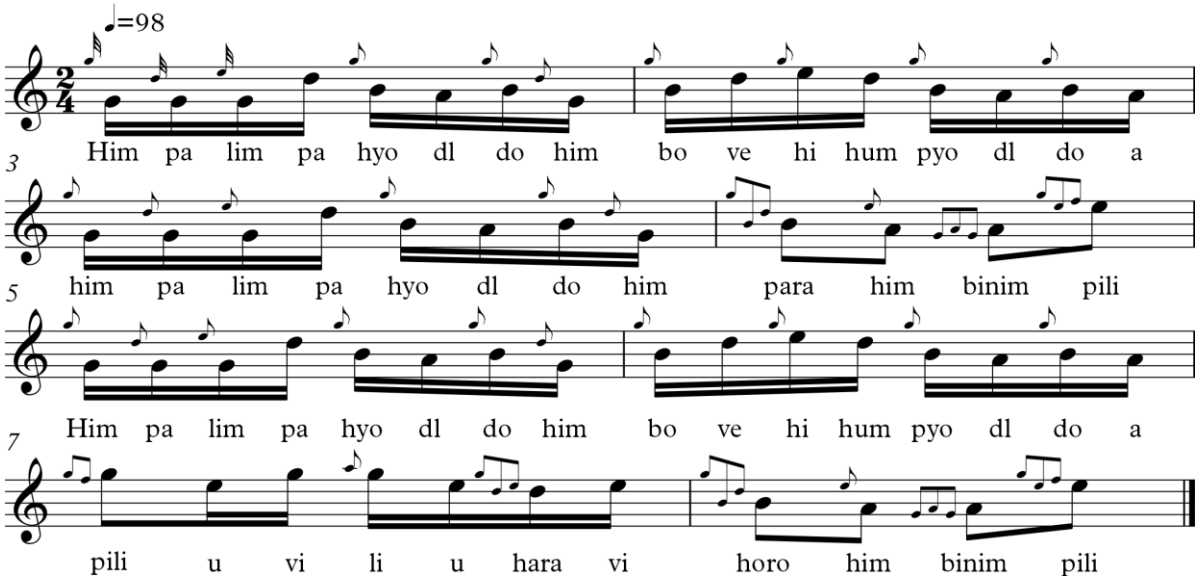
SA 1965.107
Hindirin do vi hili hero here hindirin tere hi hili here horo / hindirin doro vi hili hero here hindirin doro hin doro i / harara hi hin din

SA 1967.72
Hindirin do vi hili hero here hindirin tere hi hili here horo / hindirin doro vi hili hero here hindirin doro hin doro i / harara hi hin din

SA 1970.164
Hindirin do vi hili hero here hindirin tele hi hili here horo / hindirin doro vi hili hero here hindirin doro hin doro i / harara hi hin din

We see similar diachronic consistency in her performance of *ceòl beag*. In her singing of the following unnamed traditional quickstep march, recorded on at least seven occasions between 1956 and 1974, Morrison displays the strong onomatopoeic consistency and vocables typical of Hebridean pipers' *canntaireachd* such as [horo], [pili] and [hindirin] placed in a manner appropriate to the pipe tune; whilst her [didl] and [hyodl][14] were examples of the use of laterally and/or nasally released voiced and unvoiced stops normally observed in singers of both Hebridean *canntaireachd* and Perthshire traveller diddling (Chambers:46). Example 3 compares the first part, or measure, of each performance:

Example 3: Variorum of unnamed quickstep vocables performed by Mary Morrison, 1956-1974



SA 1956.060
Himpalim pa hyodl dohim bove hi hump hyodl do a himpalim pa hyodl dohim para hum binim pili / himpalim pa hyodl dohim bove hi hump hyodl do a pili uvi liu haravi horo hum binim pili

SA 1965.12
Himpalim pa hyodl dohim bove hi hump hyodl do a himpalim pa hyodl dohim para hum binim pili / himpalim pa hyodl dohim bove hi hump hyodl do a pili uvi liu haravi horo hum binim pili

SA 1965.48
Himpalim pa hyodl dohim bove hi hump hyodl do a himpalim pa hyodl dohim para hum binim pili / himpalim pa hyodl dohim bove hi hump hyodl do a pili uvi liu haravi horo hum binim pili

SA 1966.17
Himpalim pa hyodl dohim bove hi hump hyodl do a himpalim pa hyodl dohim para hum binim pili / himpalim pa hyodl dohim bove hi hump hyodl do a pili uvi liu haravi horo hum binim pi

SA 1967.72
Hindirin ta hyodl dohim bove hi hump hyodl do a hindirin ta hyodl dohin tara hin dirin tili / hindirin ta hyodl dohim bove hi hump hyodl do a pili uvi liu haravi horo hum binim pi

SA 1970.164
Hindirin ta hyodl dohin bove hi hump hyodl do a hindirin ta hyodl dohin doro hin dirin tili / hindirin ta hyodl dohin bove hi hump hyodl do a pili uvi liu haravi horo hin dirin ti

SA 1974.110
Hindirin ta hyodl dohin bove hi hump hyodl do a hindirin ta hyodl dohin doro hin dirin tili / hindirin ta hyodl dohin bove hi hump hyodl do a pili uvi liu haravi horo hin dirin tili

The main feature of change discernible in the above variora is the occasional switch from such phrases as [himpalim pa] to [hindirin ta] and [hum binim pi] to [hin dirin ti]; this is

an example of the use of homorganic junctures – when the releasing segment or consonant of one vocable occupies the same place of articulation as the arresting segment of the previous vocable. It is a hallmark of Gaelic, and by extension the *canntaireachd* of Gaelic-speaking pipers. So in both '*Cholla Mo Rùn'* and the unnamed quickstep march we see a clear consistency in the use of vocables and the authentic grammar of *canntaireachd* over the period in question, further underlining Morrison's credentials as a piping tradition-bearer in the Hebridean context.

Conclusions

Taking Chambers's definitions into account, the *canntaireachd* of Mary Morrison and other women appearing in this paper's tables may fall into the category of cantering rather than 'true *canntaireachd*' due to their common performance context as contributions to ceilidhs, general entertainment and to provide music for dancing; the fact that some aspects of Mary Morrison's performances beyond the tunes themselves were purely imitative; and the fact that they were not formally trained pipers but 'picked up' what they knew from pipers in their families, musical circles and communities. They did not sing *canntaireachd* in order to swap tunes with pipers, teach pipers certain passages or correct errors in ornamentation or melodic line (though this latter has been documented in Perthshire[15]), which is what Chambers observed to be some of the main functions of pipers' *canntaireachd*.

However, despite the scoffing of some of her male contemporaries, the evidence presented in this paper suggests that Mary Morrison shared aspects of authentic pipers' *canntaireachd* to an equal extent with male, bona fide pipers in her community, such as consistency and retention of vocable memory and usage (both within a given tune and diachronically across repeated performances of that tune) and her command of associative vocables and their appropriate placement.

Chambers was at pains to affirm the importance of understanding the indigenous evaluation of a musical custom or idiom as a bulwark against an unbalanced or less than complete understanding of the music in question on the part of the 'outside' scholar. The traditional Gaelic or Hebridean evaluation of piping has been shown elsewhere to classify a 'good' piping performance as prioritising *timing* over *technique*, or rather, precision of timing and rhythm over precision of fingering and embellishment, due to traditional Hebridean piping's frequent functional context as dance music (Dickson 2006: 214-5). In this evaluation, the singing of Mary Morrison *et al*, can indeed be regarded as piper's *canntaireachd*, for the following reasons:

- their inventory of vocables was largely identical to that of pipers similarly recorded;
- their inventory of constituent sounds and phrases for *ceòl beag* was likewise identical;
- the way they assembled and combined such sounds into vocables and repetitive phrases was in the main consistent with pipers similarly recorded;
- their internal consistency of vocable usage synchronically and diachronically was almost absolute, which suggests that they did not place vocables at random, but retained physical and mental memory of the vocables' articulatory shapes and appropriate placement, a characteristic of all traditionally trained, *canntaireachd*-singing pipers;
- they used vocables representing conventional pipe ornaments, and placed them in the main at points in tunes appropriate to their technical and traditional execution by pipers, such as the birl, the grip and the throw on D; and
- their singing could be regarded as imbuing a real or potential pedagogic function – one of the acknowledged main functions of Chambers's 'true' *canntaireachd* – since they conveyed the tempo, timing and internal rhythmic dynamism of a tune

> appropriate to their musical culture. In other words, their singing conveyed all that a piper brought up in a Gaelic Hebridean community context that favoured timing over technique would need to know in order to learn and master a typical tune in his tradition's main performance context (the *céilidh*). In short, a piper could just as well *learn* from their singing as be *entertained* by it.

The tables offered in this paper contain an inventory of sounds/vocables from five non-piping women and five piping men across Barra, South Uist and Benbecula, showing that differences in sound and vocable usage were few, in turn suggesting that a style and breadth of vocabulary was common to all, regardless of gender or whether or not one actually played the pipes. This affirms the intuitive conclusion that *canntaireachd*, insofar as the Hebridean tradition is concerned, is (or was) something inexorably absorbed rather than actively taught and was, prior to the rise of piping among women generally in the late twentieth century, considered by women to be a precious link to a tradition denied them in the fuller sense; a link on the basis of which Hebridean women could, and did, undertake a significant role as bearers of the community's most vital instrumental tradition.

NOTES

[1] My thanks go to Roderick Cannon and Hugh Cheape for their invaluable comments on drafts of this paper.

[2] See West, 2003; McKerrell, 2005; Cheape, 2008; Forrest; Dickson, 2009.

[3] I refer in Lorimer's case to interviews he conducted with pipers such as Bob Brown and Bob Nicol (e.g. SA 1953.062-3 and SA 1953.256) and Calum Johnston (SA 1964.145-6), which led to greater recognition of pipers' own evaluations of their craft in modern scholarship – notably absent in prior writings on Scottish piping. See also Cooke, 1972; Chambers, 1980; MacDonald, 1995.

[4] See Grant: iii-vi; Moss; Buisman (1987, 1994a-b, 1997-8); and Donaldson:83-8.

[5] Argyllshire Gathering, Oban, August 2010.

[6] Interview extracts which begin in Gaelic were originally recorded entirely in Gaelic, and have been translated into English for the purposes of this paper by the author.

[7] The MacCrimmons were a family of pipers based in Skye who enjoyed a very high professional status as hereditary pipers to the chiefs of Clan MacLeod for about two centuries until c. 1822. See, for instance, MacKay 8' Poulter & Fisher; Campbell, 1948: 9 and Donaldson: 80.

[8] As sung by Calum Johnston, SA 1953.252_253.

[9] See for instance *'Bruadar Dhierdre'* in Johnston: 178-9 and SA 1964.146.

[10] See References for a complete list of the recordings from which data comprising Tables 1 and 2 are based.

[11] Flora Boyd's rendition of a quickstep march included a sound which I have chosen to represent with an asterisk (*) and which can likened to a voiceless palatal fricative similar to the sound of a jazz drum kit's hi-hat. The tune's context suggests that the sound was meant to convey a ripple-like movement known to pipers as the 'grip'.

[12] The tune appears as 'Nameless' in Donald MacDonald's *Quicksteps ...* of 1828; as 'Am Boc Luideach. The Shaggy Buck' in Angus MacKay's *Piper's Assistant* of 1843; and in Wiliam Gunn's *Caledonian Repository of Music*, first published in 1848 under the title 'Am Bog Glas'. Pipers today most often refer to the setting found in *Scots Guards Standard Settings of Pipe Music*, Vol. 1, 1965 p. 273-5. The setting sang by Mary Morrison departed melodically from these printed settings in significant respects, a product of the variation that emerges in oral tradition.

[13] This and subsequent music examples use conventional Highland bagpipe notation, in which all main note stems point downward and all gracenote stems point upward. The gracenote arrangements are editorial.

[14] The [dl] element is pronounced as in the second syllable of 'fiddle'.

[15] Chambers (1980) relates an anecdote of Belle Stewart, of the well-known Perthshire traveller family, correcting her husband's performance of a pipe tune by 'cantering' the correct version.

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SA 1951.11 Mary Morrison, Earsary, Barra
- '*Cholla Mo Rùn*'

- '79th's Farewell to Gibraltor'
- 'Reel of Tulloch'
- 'Highland Wedding'
- 'Paddy's Leather Britches'
- '*Dé Chuir am Mulad Ort Oidhche do Bhainnseadh*'

SA 1953.062 Pipe Major Robert U Brown, Balmoral
- Various *ceòl mór*; discussion

SA 1953.063 Pipe Major Robert U Brown, Balmoral
- Various *ceòl mór*; discussion

SA 1953.256 Pipe Major Robert U Brown, Balmoral
- Various *ceòl mór*; discussion

SA 1953.32 Patrick MacCormick, Hacleit, Benbecula
- '*Cailleach a' Ghlinn Dorcha*' (a.k.a. 'The Cameronian Rant')

SA 1953.33 Archie MacDonald, Garryhellie, South Uist
- 'Portree Men'

SA 1956.060 Mary Morrison
- Unnamed quickstep march

SA 1956.158 Kate MacCormick, Hacleit, Benbecula
- Unnamed quickstep march
- 'Devil in the Kitchen'
- '*Calum Crùbach*'
- Unnamed reel

SA 1958.26 Patrick MacCormick, Hacleit, Benbecula
- Unnamed reel

SA 1962.23 Donald Ruadh MacIntyre, Snishval, South Uist
- '*Cailleach a' Ghlinn Dorcha*' (a.k.a. 'The Cameronian Rant')

SA 1964.145 Calum Johnston, Barra
- Various *ceòl mór* and *ceòl beag*; discussion

SA 1964.146 Calum Johnston, Barra
- Various *ceòl mór* and *ceòl beag*; discussion

SA 1965.12 Mary Morrison, Earsary, Barra
- Unnamed quickstep march
- '*Seann Triubhas*'
- '*Conas an Dranndain*'
- '*Bog Liath nan Gobhar*'
- '*Cholla Mo Rùn*'
- 'Reel of Tulloch'
- 'Lady of Glenorchy'
- '*Tarbh Mhic Eòin*'

SA 1965.48 Mary Morrison, Earsary, Barra
- Unnamed quickstep march

SA 1965.52 Mary Morrison, Earsary, Barra
- '*Cholla Mo Rùn*'

SA 1965.56 Mary Morrison, Earsary, Barra
- '*Cholla Mo Rùn*'

SA 1965.62 Mary Morrison, Earsary, Barra
- '*Conas an Dranndain*'

SA 1965.66 Mary Morrison, Earsary, Barra
- '*Cholla Mo Rùn*'

SA 1965.107 Mary Morrison, Earsary, Barra
- '*Cholla Mo Rùn*'

SA 1966.17 Mary Morrison, Earsary, Barra
- Unnamed quickstep march
- '*Port Dannsa*'
- 'Smith of Chilliehassie'

SA 1966.96 Kate MacDonald (Mrs Archie), Garryhellie, South Uist
- '*Cailleach an Dùdain*'

SA 1967.72 Mary Morrison, Earsary, Barra
- '*Cholla Mo Rùn*'
- Unnamed quickstep march

SA 1970.007 Alasdair Boyd, Oban
- Various *ceòl mór* and *ceòl beag*; discussion

SA 1970.164 Mary Morrison, Earsary, Barra
- '*Cholla Mo Rùn*'
- Unnamed quickstep march

SA 1974.110 Mary Morrison, Earsary, Barra
- Unnamed quickstep march; discussion
- '*Dannsa Ruidhle*'

SA 1974.112 Flora Boyd, Barra
- Various *ceòl beag*; discussion

SA 1976.26 Neil Angus MacDonald, Inverness
- Various *ceòl mór* and *ceòl beag*; discussion

SA 1976.77 Mary Ann Lindsay, Oban
- Various *ceòl beag*, inc. 'Dark Island', 'Hills of South Uist', 'Black Bear' and 'South Uist Golf Club'
- Own composition 'Leaving Lochaline'
- Own composition 'Mary MacKay's Birthday'

SA 1977.68 Neil Angus MacDonald, Inverness
- '*Bog Liath nan Gobhar*'
- '*Làir Iain 'ic Phàdruig*'
- Discussion

SA1977.168 Donald Morrison, South Uist
- Discussion

SA 1981.054 Neil Angus MacDonald, Inverness
- Discussion

SA 1982.145 *Seonaidh Roidein*, Daliburgh, South Uist
Discussion

Reeling in the Strathspey: The Origins of Scotland's National Music

WILLIAM LAMB

ABSTRACT. According to the conventionally held view, the strathspey or 'strathspey reel' was an eighteenth century innovation instigated by fiddlers of the Speyside region, such as the Browns of Kincardine and the Cummings of Grantown. However, the basic rhythmic characteristics inherent to the strathspey – a series of long and short notes, organised within two or four strong beats per bar – are found in Gaelic songs thought to be much older. Using a range of data from early fiddle collections and transcriptions of twentieth century audio recordings, this paper explores the musical and semantic connections between the strathspey and Gaelic song, suggesting an alternative developmental path for Scotland's national music.

There needs na' be sae great a fraise
Wi dringing dull Italian lays –
I widna gie our ain strathspeys
For half a hundred score o 'em.
Rev John Skinner (1760) 'Tullochgorm'[1]

The Strathspey is to Scotland what the jig is to Ireland, the contra dance or the hornpipe to England, the Czardas to Hungary, the Tarantella to Italy, or the Cachucha to Spain – it enshrines the gayest spirit and life of the nation.
William C. Honeyman (1922)

Every old reel and strathspey, being originally a 'port-à-beul,' has its own words. Now, if you wish to play with genuine taste, keep singing the words in your mind when you are playing the tune.
Charles Stewart (1884)[2]

For two hundred and fifty years at least, the strathspey has been the most iconic variety of Scottish music. Celebrated as national music by Skinner and Honeyman, it is even said to have formed the basis of the *écossaise* compositions of Beethoven, Schubert and Chopin (Thurston: 15). Today, it is recognised as a slower, rhythmically dotted variety of the common reel. However, there has been confusion and debate over its origins for many years and even its basic nature: is it best construed as a dance, a musical form, a type of song, a rhythm or something else entirely? Although it is usually taken to have been the innovation of eighteenth century Speyside fiddlers, the rhythm inherent to the strathspey is commonly found in Gaelic songs thought to be much older. In this paper, I attempt to assess and integrate the diverse strands of evidence regarding the origins of the strathspey and to classify it as a form of music and dance.

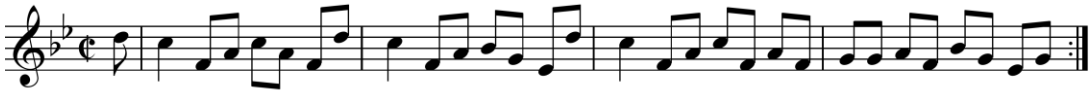
In Section 1, I provide a brief diachronic overview of strathspeys and reels in Scottish music and their musical characteristics. Readers who already have expertise in this area may wish to proceed directly to Section 2. There, I assess the standard account of the strathspey's origins – that it is a form of fiddle music that developed in the Speyside region. In Section 3, I suggest an alternative thesis in an attempt to rectify inconsistencies in the standard account and incorporate new evidence. I propose that the strathspey is a rhythmic matrix that developed directly out of the Gaelic dance song tradition. Although I am not the first author to link the strathspey and Gaelic song,[3] none has explored the topic in any depth to date. Finally, in Section 4, I broaden the focus and suggest that both the work and dance song genres developed out of an earlier innovation in Gaelic culture: the pairing of rhythmically-co-oordinated human movement and song. At the core of this innovation, and extending through its various evolutions, was the rhythm that we identify today as the strathspey.

1 Strathspeys and Reels in Scottish Music: A Brief Overview

The word 'reel'[4] is defined by Collinson (2012a) as 'a rapid but smooth-flowing quaver movement in *alla breve*' (i.e. cut time or 2/2). The 'smooth-flowing', or rhythmically consistent way in which reels are commonly played today is referred to as a 'round' style (see Example 1).[5] This contrasts to a 'pointed' style, which has a more dotted nature, as discussed below. In modern Scottish music, reels tend to be played at about 105 beats per minute (BPM) if notated in cut time, or 210 BPM if in common time (i.e. 4/4).

The term 'Reel' originally referred to dancing. (NB: Henceforth, following the convention of the Fletts, capitalised forms will refer to dances, while lower-case forms will refer to musical types.) The Reel is first attested in Scottish sources from the proceedings of a 1591 witch trial: 'Geilles Duncan did goe before them playing this reill or daunce upon a small trump, called a jew's trump, until they entered into the kerke of North Barrick' (see Thurston: 20). However, there is nothing in this account to indicate that it was a specific kind of dance *per se*, and a more general semantic sense appears to have prevailed – as far as we can determine from written evidence – until the eighteenth century, with the appearance of the first collections of instrumental dance music.[6]

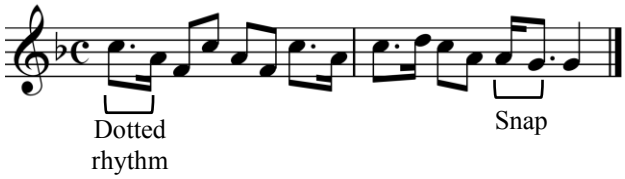
Example 1: The beginning of '*Ruidhle Thulaichean*' ('Reel of Tullach': from Lamb: 40)



The first time in writing that the word 'Reel' denotes a particular dance is in Playford's 1700 collection, which contains the title 'The Comers of Largo Areell [sic]'. However, as it was set in 9/4, it was not a Reel in the modern sense of the word (Alburger: 26). Indeed, even in the late eighteenth century, there is more rhythmic variety associated with the word than Collinson's definition would suggest. As Alburger (77) says about Cumming's (1782) collection of reels, for instance, 'There is rhythmically … an embarrassment of riches'. Most of the tunes in the collection feature dots and semi-quavers to some extent, and thus resemble strathspeys more than a 'smooth-flowing', round variety of tune. The same quality can be observed in other collections from this period, such as McGlashan (1786).

The strathspey (or 'strathspey reel') is a moderately slow reel in 4/4 time.[7] When played for dancing, the strathspey tends to be at a tempo of 160-170 BPM. Unlike the common reel, it is played with a combination of dotted rhythms and their inversion, known as the 'Scots snap' (Collinson 2012b). These qualities are illustrated below in Example 2. In Scotland, dance music that exhibits these features is referred to as 'pointed',[8] contrasting to the rhythmic consistency of a 'round' musical style.

Example 2: The beginning of 'Let's to the Ard':[9] with dotted notes and a Scots 'snap'

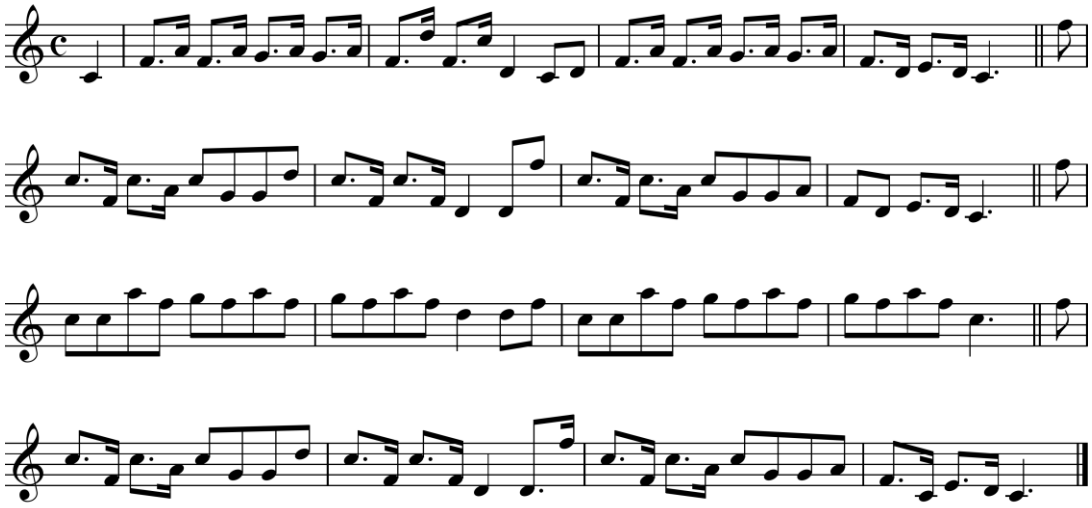


It is the 'snap'[10] that most typifies the strathspey, as opposed to other dance tune varieties in common time – for example, faster reels and hornpipes. Johnson (32) says that the earliest written tune in strathspey rhythm is 'Macpherson's Testament', in the 1710 Sinkler

manuscript (see Example 3 below).[11] Although the snap is missing from the original notation, Johnson indicates (*ibid.*) that it would have been present in performances of the tune.

The Menzies manuscript of 1749, which describes a set of dance figures, gives us the first mention of the word 'strathspey' in connection with a specific type of music or dance: two selections are described as 'strathspey reels'. The first compositions clearly exhibiting both snaps and dots, and called 'strathspeys', are two items in *The Caledonian Pocket Companion* (Oswald: Vol 3) named 'A New Strathspey Reel'. Finally, Bremner's 1757 collection gives us the first anonymous tunes described as strathspeys, such as 'Let's to the Ard' (62: see Example 2).

Example 3: Macpherson's Testament (taken from Sinkler: 5), the earliest written strathspey



To summarise, although the reel and strathspey – as forms of music and dance – appeared in print or manuscript in the early eighteenth century, the terminology associated with them was ambiguous. In other words, whilst the division between round and pointed music serves us well today, it was not so clear in earlier times. This observation will become important in the sections to come. Having now introduced the musical characteristics of the strathspey and reel, and their early history, we are in a position to assess the standard account of the strathspey's origins.

2 The Origins of the Strathspey: A Critique of the Standard Account

In general, the literature concerning the origin of the strathspey adopts a consistent 'standard account', or avoids espousing any particular point of view due to a perceived paucity of evidence.[12] The standard account can be summarised as follows: 1) the strathspey, first and foremost, is a type of fiddle music (Collinson 1966: 206; Bruford: 74; Newton 2009: 253);[13] 2) it was originally conceived in the Speyside area of the Highlands, in the eighteenth century (Doherty 1999b: 385); and 3) its earliest players are reputed to have been the Browns, of Kincardine-on-Spey, and the Cummings, of Grantown, who were hereditary musicians in the area (Bruford: 74). Whether acknowledged or not, this narrative is based on a 1791 source, Thomas Newte's *Prospects and Observations; On a Tour in England and Scotland*.[14]

Newte was the pseudonym of Rev. Dr William Thomson (1746-1817), a Scottish-born, fiddle-playing minister. His book details his 1785 tour of northern England and Scotland (under Anon. 1788 in reference section). In one respect, being a Scot and a fiddler, one might consider him to be a reliable source. However, in another – being a non-Gaelic speaker[15] – he is less than ideal, for the Highlands were predominantly Gaelic-speaking at the

time,[16] including Speyside, which he apparently did not visit on his trip.[17] The relevant excerpt from Thomson's book follows:

> Strathspey is celebrated for its reels, a species of music that happily unites gaiety with grace, moving now with measured step and flow, and now at a quick and sudden pace. Music, in general, was divided by Macrimmon the piper, principal of the musical college in the Isle of Skye, into four kinds: music for love, music for sorrow, music for war, and music for meat. By the last of these he must have meant reels, among which the strathspey is as highly distinguished among the reels of the North-Highlands, the Islands, Argyllshire and Perthshire, as the plaintive melody of the southern counties, is among the slow tunes that arose in the other parts of the Lowlands of Scotland.
>
> With regard to the first composers, or even performers of strathspey reels, there are not any certain accounts. According to the tradition of the country, the first who played them were the Browns of Kincardin: to whom are ascribed a few of the most ancient tunes. After these men, the Cummings of Freuchie, now Castle-Grant [i.e. Grantown-on-Spey], were in the highest estimation for their knowledge and execution in strathspey music; and most of the tunes handed down to us are certainly of their composing. A successive race of musicians, like people of the same caste in Hindustan, succeeded each other for many generations. The last of that name, famous for his skill in music, was John Roy Cumming. He died about thirty years ago and there are many persons, still alive, who speak of his performance with the greatest rapture ... Before I quit my present subject, I shall just take notice, that the Strathspey is to the common Scotch Reel what a Spanish Fandango is to a French Cotillon (Newte: 163-165).

Despite the fact that Thomson might not have been acquainted with the Speyside area himself, it is worth examining this passage closely for the influence that it has had. First, he does not specifically link the fiddle with the 'strathspey reel'; its proponents are merely called 'musicians'. He is also indefinite about its origins, apart from saying that it has been handed down for many years via intergenerational transmission and that the Browns and Cummings were prolific composers in the idiom. He says that it was, in some way, a more desirable[18] or marked form of the reel in comparison to other areas, including the Islands, which he also did not visit on his tour (Rackwitz: 245). Finally, and crucially, he is evidently discussing a musical form that incorporated a *tempo change*, for he says that it was 'a species of music that … [moved] now with measured step and flow, and now at a quick and sudden pace'.[19] It follows from this that the strathspey reel was a dynamic music-dance complex and that the term 'strathspey' had not been fully conventionalised, by this time at least, to mean only the slower section of this complex.

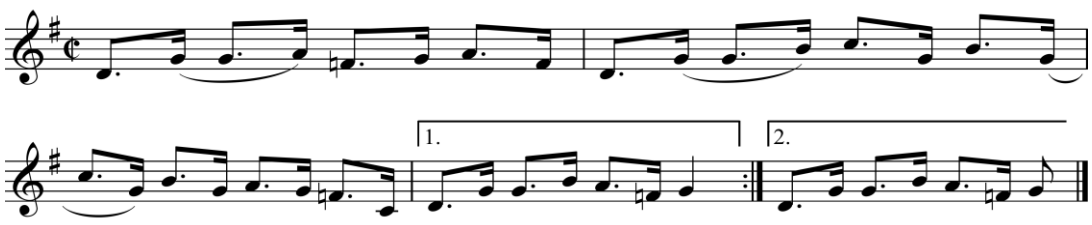
When contrasting what Thomson actually wrote with how it has been interpreted by other authors – whether first or second hand – it is clear that there is no direct basis for claiming that the strathspey was fiddle music *per se*. Furthermore, Thomson provides no indication that it originated, specifically, in the Speyside area at a particular time. In fact, as the dance master Francis Peacock tells us (89-90), the strathspey was found 'in many parts of the Highlands'. Bolstering this, Alburger (67) points out that Alexander McGlashan's second collection was entitled *A Collection of Reels, Consisting Chiefly of Strathspeys, Athole Reels, With a Bass &c*, which implies that the type of tune beginning to be known elsewhere as a strathspey was still known in the Athole district as a reel. Finally, Thomson does not even suggest that it was a fixed musical form.[20] This intriguing point is substantiated by what we find in Angus Cumming's 1782 collection, about which Collinson says, 'here for the first

time is the real fiddle music of the Strathspey country, compiled or composed by one of the important names for fiddle music in Strathspey' (1966: 207).

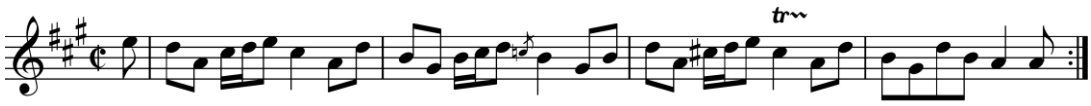
Figure 1: Title plate of Cumming (1782)

The title of Cumming's book, in full, is *A Collection of Strathspeys or Old Highland Reels by Angus Cumming at Grantown in Strathspey* (see Figure 1).[21] Cumming (c1750 – c1800) maintains in his preface that he was from a long line of Speyside musicians. Curiously, however, he never uses the word 'strathspey' within the actual collection itself; the tunes were simply all 'Old Highland reels' to him.[22] As can be seen in Table 1 below, most of them are unambiguously dotted in nature, as we would expect: only 12 of 60 could be described as predominantly 'round'. However, only 17 tunes show clear signs of the Scots snap. This is surprising, given that the snap is considered a defining quality of the idiom. Mistakes in notation make some of the rhythms difficult to interpret, but it is clear, to Angus Cumming, that Strathspeys could be danced to tunes with a range of musical features. Take, for instance, 'Carron's Reel', given as Example 4 below. Apart from the fact that it is written in *alla breve,* it is immediately recognisable as a strathspey. In contrast, however, 'Arndilly's Reel' (Example 5 below) looks more like a reel. By today's definitions, these are two different tune types but, to Cumming, they were both 'strathspeys'. Indeed, other tunes appear to be a mixture of both forms (see Example 6 below).

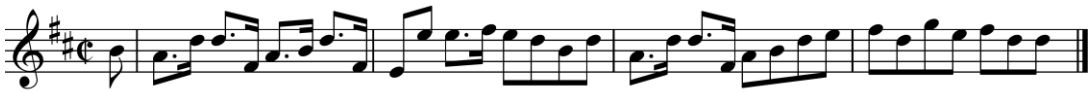
Example 4: Carron's Reell – or *U Choira Chruim* (from Gore *et al*)



Example 5: Arndilly's Reell – or *Bittac air Mac'homaich* (*ibid.*)



Example 6: Kilravock's Reell (*ibid.*)



Interestingly, about one half of the time signatures (28/60) in Cumming's collection are marked *alla breve*, which indicates a faster tempo.[23] This accords with Thomson's comment above regarding a tempo shift.[24] To Cumming as well as Thomson, the strathspey could be performed at either a 'measured step and flow' or a 'quick and sudden pace'. In any case, and confusingly, it is evident that neither author considered the strathspey to be a discrete variety of tune.

Table 1: Statistics from Cumming's collection

Aspect	Frequency	Percentage
Dotted notes	48	80%
Scots Snaps	17	28%
'Round' tunes[25]	12	20%
Common time	32	53%
Alla breve	28	47%

As mentioned above, a similar degree of ambiguity is found in other collections from the time. This is perplexing for the modern scholar. However, the confusion can be cleared up by changing the way in which we delineate the semantic boundaries of music and dance and their interrelated associations. In the eighteenth century, music and dance were not as conceptually dissociated from one another as they are today. To writers at the time, the words 'reel' and 'strathspey' meant both dance *and* music. The 'strathspey', in other words, was not a tune type, *per se*. Rather, it was a semantic fusion, a dance-music complex featuring pointed rhythm and a tempo change. Through the process of synecdoche, the word increasingly came to denote the musical side of the equation. However, in earlier times, and over a large swathe of the Highlands, a 'strathspey' (or 'reel') – musically speaking – would have been any tune that could have been performed for dancing a Reel. Although this appears, *prima facie*, to be tautological, it merely restores the original, superordinate category: music and dance were a unified notion.

Fused semantic categories are well represented in the Gaelic tradition, and further afield, in the sphere of music and dance. For instance, among the Tiwi people of northern Australia, there is no direct translation for the English word 'dance'. The closest word is *yoi*, but it has a more holistic meaning:

> *Yoi* is defined by the Tiwi not only as the dance, to dance, and the social event (that includes dance), but also as the songs used for dance, the rhythm of these songs, and to sing for dance. Thus *yoi* denotes the whole event, the act of dancing, the music associated with dance, and the performance of that music (Grau: 32).[26]

The same type of semantic unity obtains in the way that Scottish and Irish Gaelic speakers viewed song; a song's melody was inseparable from its words:

> I never heard my friends in Glendale [South Uist] hum or sing an old tune without words. To them the words and the air were inseparable. I once mentioned that I thought a neighbour had the air of a song, and the reply was, 'How could she have the air and not the words?' (Shaw 1955: 76).

A. Martin Freeman, who collected songs in Ballyvourney, Co. Cork, provides an Irish parallel:

> If you tell [a traditional singer] that two of his songs have the same tune, he will answer that that is impossible, since they are different songs. If you then say, that the tunes are very much alike, he will agree, and look upon you as a musical genius for having noticed it. 'What a marvellous thing,' he will exclaim, 'for a man who was not brought up in Irish to know so much about our songs!' For – may I repeat it? – the tune without the words is as a voice without a mouth. He thinks that you understand the song (that is, the words) so perfectly, that you have got the tune (xxv: in Blankenhorn).

It is generally the case in indigenous cultures that informants are unable to dissociate the words of a song from its respective melody (Nettl: 21). In any case, to return to the problem at hand – that is, how such a diverse group of rhythms could be subsumed within a single rubric – it is apparent that music was defined in terms of dance and not vice versa. However, in earlier times, we know that dancing was not done to instrumental music primarily, but to *song*.

3 The Strathspey as Song

Until the explosion of instrumental dance music in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, 'dance tunes… customarily assumed the name of the songs to which they were set' (Emmerson 1971: 12). For example, in 1531, Sir Thomas Elyot (*ibid*., 6) tells us that the names of dances popular at the time were taken from the first line of the song associated with them. This was also the practice of Gaelic-speaking musicians, as we shall see below. The earliest hint of the Gaelic dance song genre comes in 1593, when three Elgin women confessed to the Kirk to have danced 'gillatrype'[27] whilst singing 'a foull hieland sang' (Henderson and Cowan: 134). Elgin was a Gaelic-speaking area in the sixteenth century[28] and the modifier 'hieland' suggests that the song was in the language (cf. MacInnes 2006b: 260).[29] We know that Gaelic dance songs were performed throughout the Highlands and Islands in earlier times. They persisted into the 20th century in remote areas (Lamb: 26), sometimes even being used in preference to instrumental music (Rhodes, in Flett and Flett 1996: 189).[30] As Logan tells us in *The Scottish Gael*, 'Dancing, among the Gael, does not depend on the presence of musical instruments. They reel and set to their own vocal music or to the songs of those who are near' (440). While some Gaelic dance songs were local compositions and never travelled far, others have been recorded from one side of the *Gàidhealtachd* to the other: dance song was a pervasive and important tradition.[31]

Newton (2009: 253)[32] states that the melodies associated with Gaelic dance songs, particularly those in the form of strathspeys and reels, were composed originally on the fiddle and that words accreted to them *ex post facto*. However, I think that this is unlikely in the wider context of what we know about dancing in Britain – as seen in Elyot's quote above – and throughout the world. As in the Celtic tradition of Brittany (see Wilkinson: 123), instrumental dance music is often parasitic on an earlier song tradition. Indeed, it is a commonly expressed belief amongst Gaelic speakers that their dance music originated as

song.[33] Gaelic dance song has the appearance of being an old and once widespread tradition that, like other genres of verbal art, predates the European-led instrumental innovations of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.[34] Indeed, Cumming's collection – the earliest collection of strathspeys by a native of the area – features unambiguous references to Gaelic dance songs.

3.1 The Importance of Titles

When looking at Example 4 and Example 5 above from Cumming, one finds adjoined Gaelic subtitles in a non-standard, English-based orthography. Interestingly, 42% of the items published have Gaelic subtitles (25/60). This is not surprising, given that Speyside was Gaelic-speaking in the eighteenth century, but the key point is that some of these titles are immediately recognisable as the internal lyrics of Gaelic dance songs. For example, 'Carron's Reell' has the Gaelic subtitle '*U Choira Chruim*'. This is a reference to a lyric that appears in the song '*Tha Bainn' Aig na Caoraich Uile*' (i.e. 'All of the Sheep Have Milk'). Also, the Gaelic title given for 'Arndilly's Reel' is '*Biodag air Mac Thòmais*' ('Thomas's Son Wears a Dirk'), another instantly recognisable dance song that was once distributed throughout the *Gàidhealtachd*.

Table 2: Gaelic and English titles from Cumming's collection

English	**Gaelic (corrected)**	**Translation**
Dutchess of Gordon's Reell	*Ceann Loch Àlainn*	Lochaline Head
Dutchess of Athole's Reell	*Tiugainn Dachaidh Null 'n Àird*	Come Home by Way of the 'Ard'
Acharnac's Reell	*Bail' nan Granndach*	Town of the Grants
Arndilly's Reell	*Biodag air Mac Thòmais*	Thomas's Son Wears a Dirk
The Wedding	*'S ann A-raoir a Bha a' Bhanais*	The Wedding Was Last Night
Dr Wm Grant's Reell	*Seann Triubhais Uilleachain*	Willie's Old Trousers
Carron's Reell	*A' Chaora Chruim*	The Crooked Sheep
Muchard's Dream	*Bruadar Fear Mullach Àrd*[35]	The Dream of the Man of the 'High Peak'

It is incontrovertible that the Gaelic titles in Cumming's collection, overall, have an earlier provenance than the English ones. About 70% of the English titles are dedicatory, presumably to honour a subscribing patron (40% of these explicitly name a titled personage, i.e. with the prefixes 'Lady', 'Lord', 'Sir' etc.). As Emmerson (1971: 61) tells us, the majority of music publications during this time were financed by subscription; patrons' contributions were acknowledged in the form of personalised tune titles.[36] In contrast, the Gaelic titles in Cumming are of a completely different nature, as can be seen from the sample in Table 2. They are declarative and descriptive, as would be expected from song lyrics; not one is transparently dedicatory.

Purely instrumental tune titles – that is, those devoid of lyrical associations – are arbitrary and, unless committed to print, ephemeral: they are subject to change, re-appropriation and abandonment.[37] Music, on its own, has little or no underlying semantic basis (Stravinsky: 53-54);[38] however, when music and words are associated with one another, they create a dynamic, unified matrix, and cue each other synergistically (Rubin: 109). Crucially, because of this, they are more likely to be transmitted from person to person, and over time and place. In other words, a title based upon a song lyric is more likely to persist in an oral tradition than one based upon an idiosyncratic, dedicatory reference. It is logical that some, if not all, of the other Gaelic titles in Cumming's collection refer to songs. Indeed, William Gunn tells us in the preface to his collection of dance tunes for the pipes, that the titles he gives are:

> … the original Gaelic designations by which the [pieces] have been known in the Highlands … [they] consist generally of something peculiar or striking in the *verse or verses to which they were composed* [emphasis added] (1848).

Thus, it is probable that the oldest melodies described as 'strathspeys', by a native of Speyside in the eighteenth century, are actually Gaelic dance songs. This conclusion is reinforced by an historical survey of the melodies in Keith Norman MacDonald's *Puirt-a-Beul* (MacDonald 1901). In this book, which contains 85 complete dance songs (i.e. with both music and lyrics represented), the earlier that a melody associated with one of them entered into a musical collection, the more likely it was to be printed as a strathspey (Lamb: 28). As I will argue in Section 3.3, this is the case simply because the rhythmically pointed style that we associate with the strathspey was the way in which Gaels tended to sing and play for social dancing in general. Before discussing this, however, it is important to consider the context of social dancing in the *Gàidhealtachd*, in which the dance song was a key element.

3.2 Reel Dancing in the Highlands and Islands

We have few descriptions of social dancing in the Highlands before the nineteenth century, but there are indications that it was so well established, by the point that it was observed by expert commentators, that it was deemed worthy of emulation. Dance master Francis Peacock (1723-1807) was so impressed with the Highlanders' command of Reel dancing that he wrote:

> The fondness the Highlanders have for … [Reel dancing] … is unbounded; and so is their ambition to excel in it. This pleasing propensity, one would think, was born with them, from the early indications we sometimes see their children show for this exercise. I have seen children of theirs, at five or six years of age, attempt, nay even execute, some of their steps so well, as almost to surpass belief. I once had the pleasure of seeing, in a remote part of the country, a Reel danced by a herd boy and two young girls, who surprised me much, especially the boy, who appeared to be about twelve years of age. He had a variety of well-chosen steps, and executed them with so much justness and ease, as if he meant to set criticism at defiance. Circumstances like these plainly evince, that those qualities must either be inherent in the Highlanders, or that they must have an uncommon aptitude for imitation.
>
> Our Colleges draw hither, every year, a number of students from the Western Isles, as well as from the Highlands, and the greater part of them excel in this dance; some of them, indeed, in so superior a degree, that I, myself, have thought them worthy of imitation (85-86).

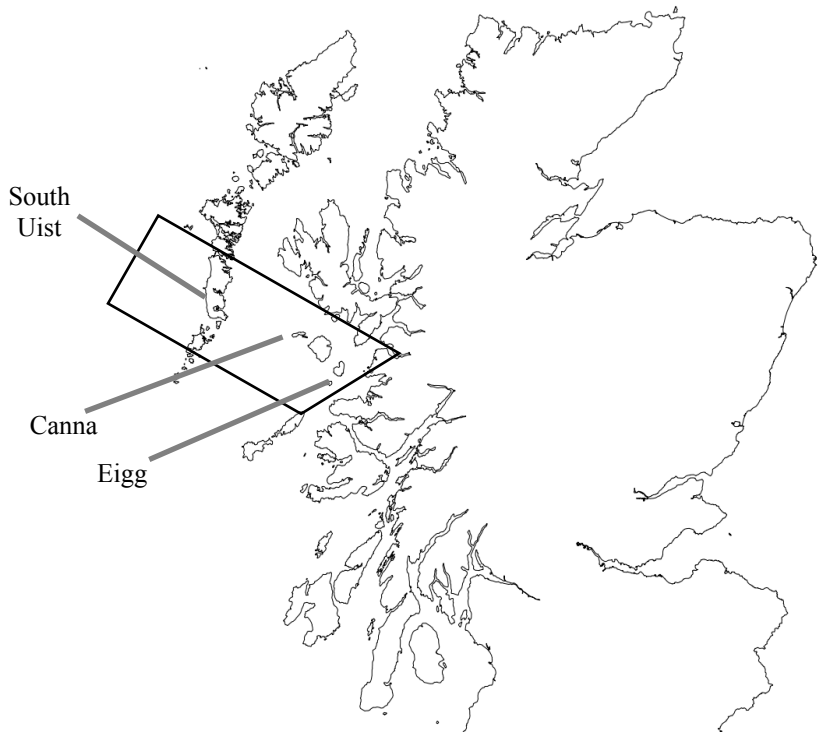
The fact that young, Gaelic-speaking children were proficient in Reel dancing in the eighteenth century signifies a widespread and advanced culture of social dance.[39] Another indication of this is the likelihood that the *Branle d'Écosse*, a dance popular in sixteenth century France, originated in Scotland (Emmerson 1972: 41). The primary step of this dance replicates the Strathspey setting step still used by Scottish country dancers today (*ibid*.). Similarly, the survival of the Old West Highland circular Reel in former Clanranald territories, the basic form of which was 'one or more strathspeys followed without pause by one or more reels' (Flett and Flett 1964: 157), strongly suggests that Reel dancing in the *Gàidhealtachd* was an early, pre-Reformation development:[40]

> The circular reel … is an unsophisticated dance which could be of very great antiquity … [M]any parts of the West Highlands and the Western Isles retained their Catholic faith throughout the Reformation period, so that social dancing would have taken place there in an unbroken tradition dating back to

> medieval times, and the circular reel could be part of this tradition (Flett and Flett 1972: 111).

Some of the informants to whom the Fletts spoke in the 1950s – in places like Eigg, Skye, South Uist and Barra – said that they could remember when the Foursome Reel was unknown,[41] and when the circular Reel was dominant (*ibid*., 156). The fact that the travelling figure was a simple circle, rather than a 'figure of 8', is noteworthy, for the circle figure is an attested, ancient form of social and ritualistic dance.[42] Knowledge of the circular Reel was only found, in the 20th century, in areas within or bordering the former territories of Clanranald (see Figure 2),[43] as previously mentioned – 'an area noted for its cultural conservatism' (Shaw 2007: 254).

Figure 2: Clanranald Territory (from Shaw 2007: 253)



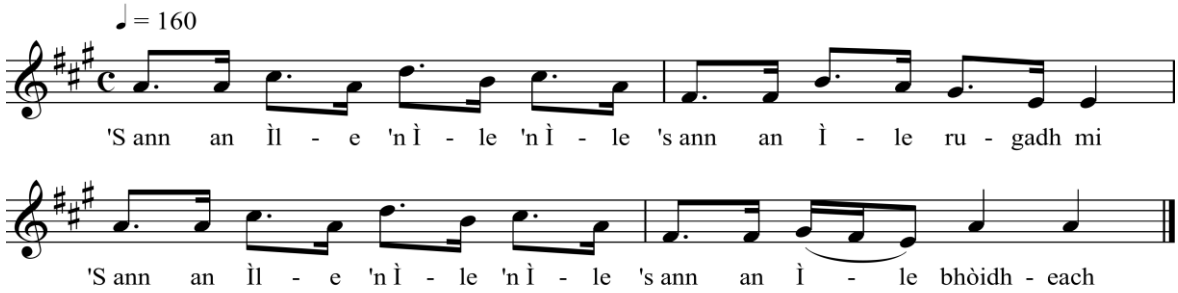
Gaelic dance songs were no doubt influenced by native fiddle and pipe traditions, as well as the swirl of art and folk music trends characteristic of Enlightenment-era Scotland. However, we must assume that if people in the Hebrides and other remote areas were dancing Reels or something similar in the early seventeenth century, that these dances were primarily fuelled by song. It is interesting that the circular Reel is noted by the Fletts to have been danced to 'strathspeys' followed by reels. However, the distinction being made here – between strathspeys and reels – is an artefact of modern sensibilities. What we take to be the strathspey was simply the way in which Highlanders sang and played for Reels more generally; the pointed quality we associate with it was a widespread rhythmic matrix for Gaelic dance music in general, at least when in non-compound time signatures.[44]

3.3 Pointed Rhythm and Tempo in Gaelic Reels

As discussed previously, the Reel was associated with a tempo change in the Highland area, including Speyside, but there is no evidence that the strathspey had become conventionalised as a 'tune type' by the end of the eighteenth century. Emmerson (1972: 166-7) suggests that

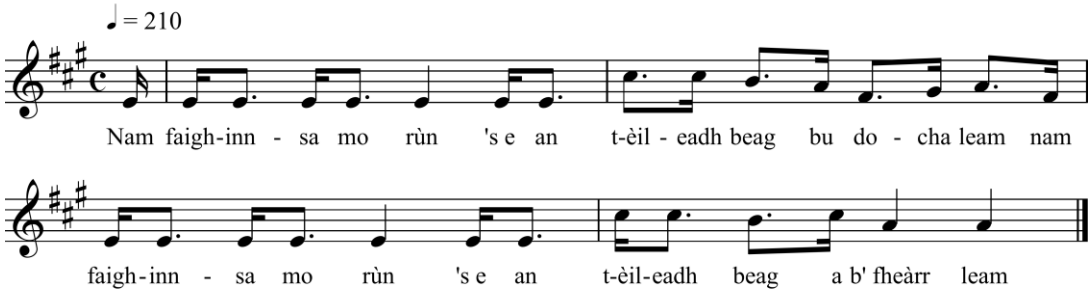
the segue from slower 'strathspeys' to quicker 'reels' began in the nineteenth century, with the creation of the Foursome Reel.[45] However, what we have seen above points to an earlier date for the tempo change, perhaps one as far back as the pre-Reformation period. There are copious examples in the sound archives of Scotland and Nova Scotia of Gaelic speakers singing and playing one or more strathspeys followed by one or more reels. What is curious is that when one listens closely to the way in which many of these sets are performed, the pointed rhythm that we associate with the strathspey is often maintained as a sort of rhythmic palimpsest after the tempo change (i.e. during the 'reel'). This is obscured by the sudden acceleration: It only becomes obvious when the reels are slowed down to be at the same tempo as the strathspeys, such as with audio software. Take, for example, a set of dance songs sung by Hugh Duncan, from Islay: ''*S ann an Ìle*' – 'It was in Islay' (strathspey) – followed by '*A Chur nan Gobhar às a' Chreig*' – 'When Putting the Goats off the Hill' (reel).

Example 7: ''*S ann an Ìle*' (Strathspey: TAD 6905[46])*



Example 7 sounds unambiguously like a strathspey. However, when the reel following it (Example 8) is brought to the same tempo, it is revealed to have the same pointed rhythm:

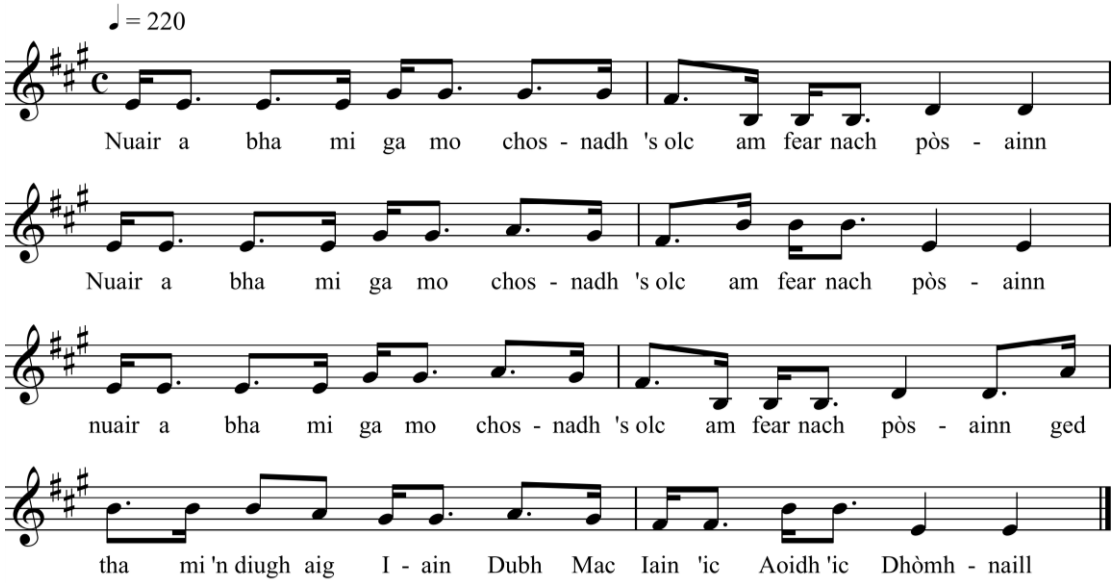
Example 8: '*A Chur nan Gobhar às a' Chreig*' (Reel)



This same characteristic is found in another set of dance songs, sung by Jonathan MacDonald, of Kilmuir, Skye. Although the reel '*Nuair a Bha Mi 'n Cùl a' Bhealaich*' ('When I Was Behind the Gap') begins in a slightly rounded fashion following the strathspey, it returns to a fully pointed rhythm in the third part (see Example 9 below):

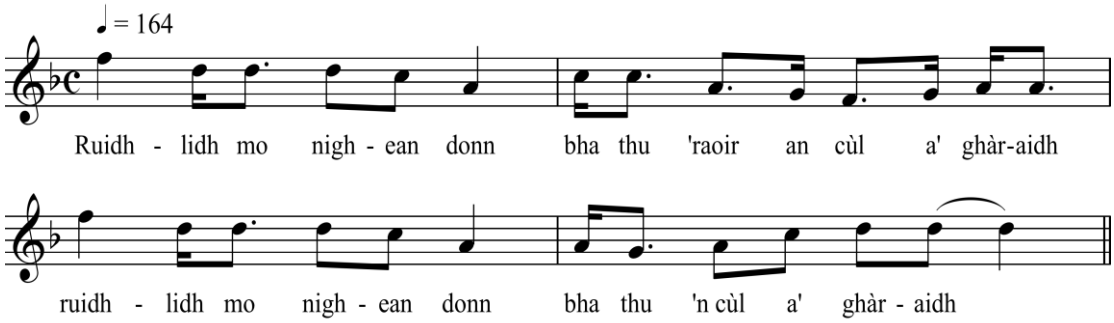
* An audio companion for this paper containing the cited examples is at http://youtu.be/LP188D6Phlo.

Example 9: '*Nuair a Bha Mi 'n Cùl a' Bhealaich*' (Reel: TAD 63475)

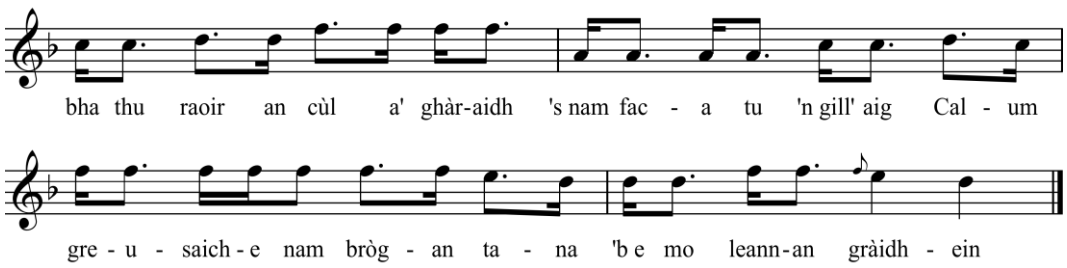


A final example of a dance song reel sung in a 'strathspey' style is Peggy MacRae's[47] rendition of '*Ruidhlidh Mo Nighean Donn*' ('My Brown Maiden Will Reel'). The first four bars of part one are sung in slightly rounded style (Example 10), however, the rhythm of bars 9-12 is virtually indistinguishable from a strathspey (Example 11):

Example 10: '*Ruidhlidh Mo Nighean Donn*' (Reel: TAD 34864), Bars 1-4

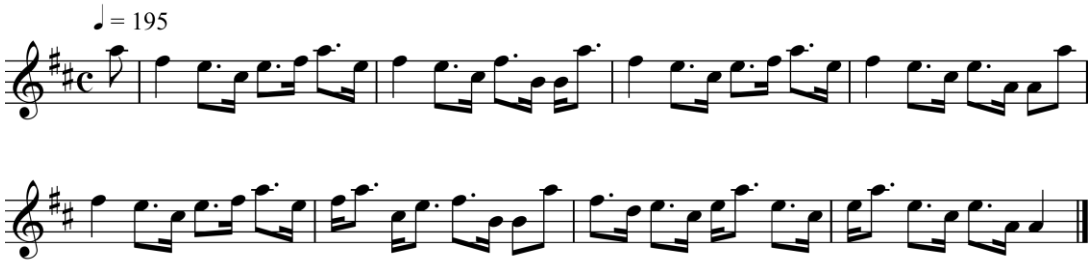


Example 11: '*Ruidhlidh Mo Nighean Donn*', Bars 9-12



The same trait is found in the piping of many Gaelic speakers. In the following transcription, taken from the third part of the reel, 'Pretty Marion', Rona Lightfoot, from South Uist, plays in a pointed style that sounds almost identical to the strathspeys in the first part of her set:

Example 12: 'Pretty Marion' (Reel: TAD 53524), Third Part



Scores of other examples could be given of reels that resemble strathspeys when slowed down. Although the faster tempo pieces tend to be rounder than the slower ones to a varying extent, this is probably due, at least in part, to the tempo increase itself; as one increases tempo, the note values are proportionately shortened, making the articulation of minute rhythmic intervals more difficult. Thus, one would expect that both Scots snaps and dotted notes would naturally gravitate towards each other in correlation with a tempo increase.

Given the generally pointed quality of dance music amongst Gaelic speakers, could it be, for common time metres at least, that tempo is a more operative factor than tune type? In other words, as is suggested by Cumming's collection and Peacock, could it be that there was no rhythmic difference between the strathspey and reel in earlier times in the Highlands? Emmerson (1971: 144) says that the strathspey was 'a way of playing reels *andante*'. However, based upon the evidence, perhaps it would be more proper to say that the reel, for Gaelic speakers, was a way of playing strathspeys *allegro*.

In the archives of the School of Scottish Studies,[48] there is an enlightening conversation on this subject between two experts of Gaelic song and music, Rev. William Matheson and Iseabail T NicDhòmhnaill. They are discussing a dance song that had just been sung by Iseabail T, known as '*A Chaorain, a Chaorain*' ('O Little Peat, O Little Peat'):[49]

Original

WM: Srath spè tha siud. Bha a' chiad fhear na bu luaithe na siud, nach robh? A robh e ... robh e na bu luaithe, a' chiad fhear a ghabh thu?
ITM: Bha.
WM: An e ruidhl' a bhiodh ann? Chan e. Bidh mise ... bidh mi uaireannan, nach bi mi glè chinnteach an e ... Agus ... bruidhinn mu dheidhinn seo, chan eil mise cinnteach 'l fhios a'd gu robh iad o chionn fhada a' dèanamh eadar-dhealachadh eadar strathspey and reel …
ITM: Tha feadhainn de phuirt ann a ghabhadh sinne air a' phìob na strath spè 's na ruidhle.

[an dèidh tacain…]

WM: Bidh mi a'gabhail iongnadh uaireannan 'l fhios a'd nach e ruidhleachan a bhiodh annta air fad o chionn fada … Seo an dràsta, Lord MacDonald's Reel*, 'l fhios a'd, tha feadhainn a' ràdh an-diugh gun e … bidh mise dìreach*

ga ghabhail a's an tìm a tha freagairt air na faclan, chan eil dragh orm dhe [is e ga ghabhail mar 'srath spè']

Translation
WM: That is a strathspey. The first one was faster than that, wasn't it? Was it … was it faster, the first one that you sang?
ITM: Yes.
WM: Would it be a reel? No. I'm … sometimes, I'm not very sure if it is … And … talking about this, I'm not sure, you know, that they used to make a distinction a long time ago between a strathspey and reel …
ITM: There are some tunes that we used to play on the pipes that can be both a strathspey and a reel.

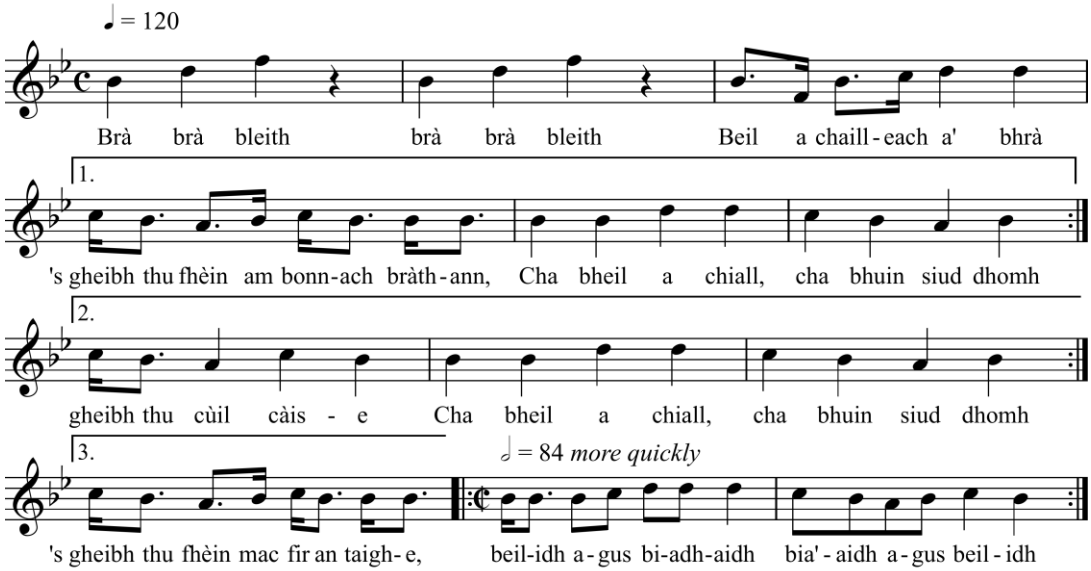
[further on …]

WM: I sometimes wonder, you know, if they weren't all reels a long time ago… Here now, Lord MacDonald's Reel, you know, some say today that it is a … I just sing it in the time that most suits the words, I don't bother with it [and then he sings it as a strathspey]

Matheson indicates that he is sometimes unsure whether dance songs are meant to be sung in reel or strathspey time. He says, at least for 'Lord MacDonald's Reel' (i.e. '*Bidh Eòghann is Fear a' Chiubha*'), that he does not concern himself with tune types, but, instead, allows the words to dictate the rhythm. The fact that he does actually sing 'Lord MacDonald's' as a strathspey supports the thesis that this is the default rhythm of Gaelic dance music in non-compound meters. He speculates that all of the reels and strathspeys were originally the same type of tune. Although he suggests that they were all 'reels', his lack of clarity over the musical distinctions between a reel and strathspey recalls the semantic issues raised at the end of the previous section: should we, perhaps, transcribe the word 'reel' here with a capital 'R'? Does his statement, to some extent, betray the older way of viewing dance music, as discussed above?

Iseabail T's comment regarding tunes that can be played as both strathspeys and reels on the pipes[50] strengthens the position that, in earlier times, the only difference between them was one of tempo; they shared the same rhythmic matrix. As discussed above, music was defined previously in terms of dance: these tunes – pointed or not, slow or fast – were all 'reels' because the dance itself was known as a Reel. However, the basic musical form, in Gaelic speaking areas, was *not* the 'rapid but smooth-flowing[51] quaver movement in *alla breve* time' *à la* Collinson, but one containing a high proportion of dots and snaps. This is seen in Cumming's collection and others from the time (e.g. McGlashan's), as well as in the transcriptions of dance songs and pipe music from the Western Isles in the 20th century. It is also seen – to an extent at least – in the Scottish-derived music of Cape Breton Island. In the second section of the Reel, in much of the Highlands and Islands, there was a tempo change with a concomitant degree of roundness, but the music did not lose its underlying pointed nature entirely. Consider the following example:

Example 13: '*Brà brà bleith*', from Miss Annie Johnson, Barra (TAD 62331)



'*Brà brà bleith*'[52] is a quern song from Barra, recorded in 1951. Although we have no way of knowing how old this song is, not to mention the genre as a whole, it is thought that querns were introduced to Scotland around the time of the Roman occupation (Grant: 115). Whatever the case, the practice of milling by quern is antiquated (see Figure 3) and was actually legislated against in early modern times (Gauldie: 215).[53] What is of most interest here is that the first part of the song above displays the three qualities that we associate with strathspeys – common metre, dotted notes and snaps – and the coda features both a tempo increase and more rounded quality.[54] It is a Reel in miniature. The theory that the strathspey was an eighteenth century mainland development that subsequently spread throughout the *Gàidhealtachd* seems incongruous with its appearance, in its basic form, in an antiquated work song from Barra. Indeed, this example suggests – in tandem with the other evidence above – that both the strathspey rhythm and the tempo change proposed to have become associated with the Foursome Reels in the nineteenth century, were already a feature of Gaelic song in earlier times.

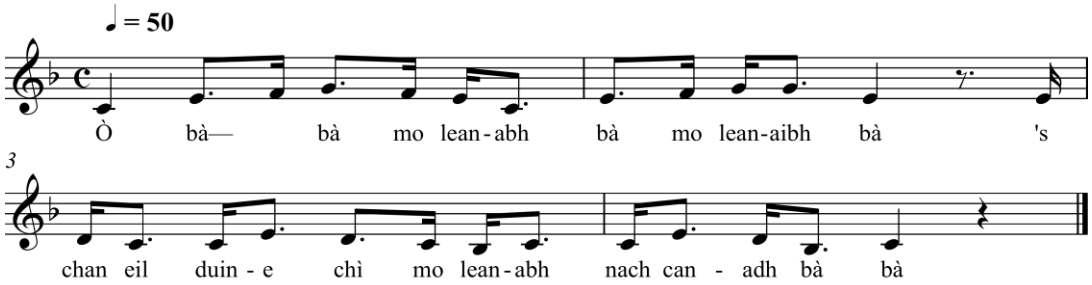
Figure 3: Two women from South Uist working a quern in 1953 (© School of Scottish Studies[55])

The Gaelic work-song genre is replete with examples of songs performed in a strathspey-like rhythm.[56] As I intend to demonstrate in the next section, its ubiquity can only be explained by there having been an ancient association in Gaelic culture between rhythmically joined-up human movement and song.

4 The Strathspey as Movement Song: The *Luinneag*

The lullaby known as '*Griogal Cridhe*' can be dated on a textual basis to about 1570.[57] Although it is normally sung in a slow, plaintive fashion, if sped up,[58] it would suffice – on a rhythmic and melodic basis – as a strathspey for dancing.

Example 14: The lullaby '*Griogal Cridhe*' ('The Glen Lyon Lament'): from Jessie MacKenzie, Lewis

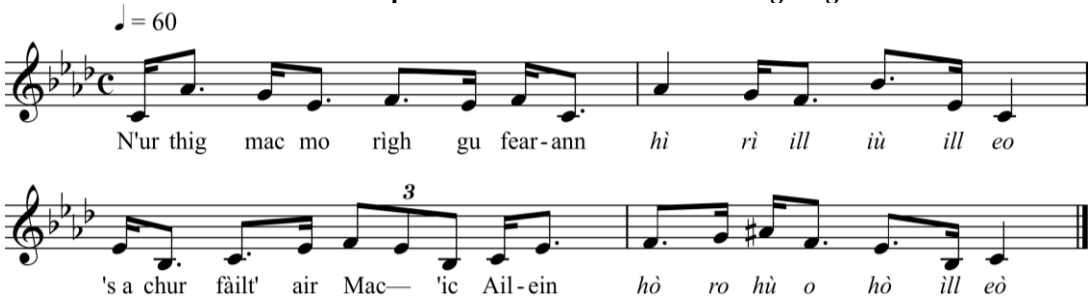


Although many versions of '*Griogal Cridhe*' were collected by the School of Scottish Studies (see Thomson 1954: 7), the chorus remains relatively consistent across them. Unless the way in which it is sung has changed radically since its composition, it suggests that the basic rhythm inherent to the strathspey goes back at least as far.[59]

Figure 4: Waulking the tweed in Eriskay, 1934 (© School of Scottish Studies)

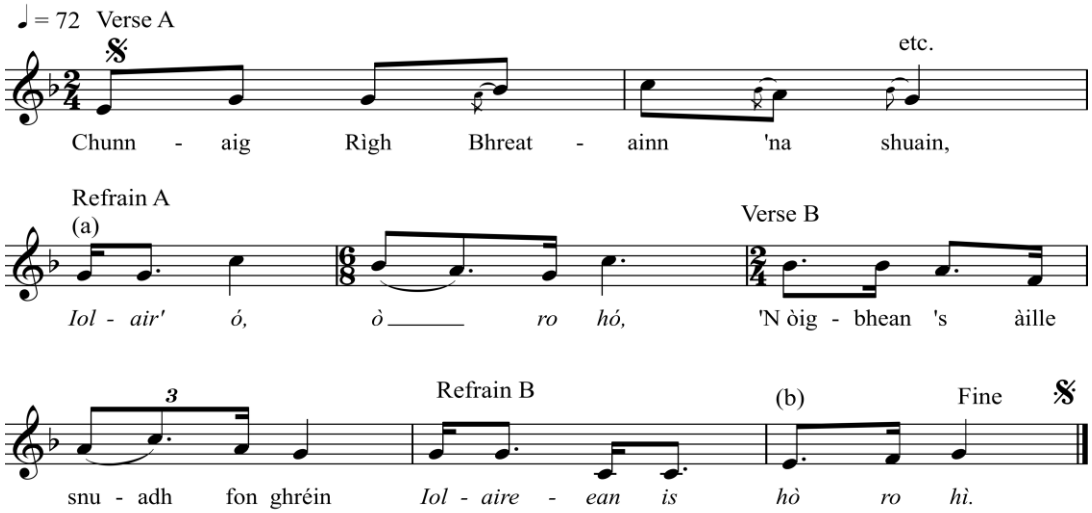
Of course, lullabies and quern songs are an important part of the Gaelic work song tradition, but waulking songs form the greatest and, one can argue, most important part of this tradition (see Figure 4). On a rhythmic basis, many of them are remarkably like strathspeys. Take, for example, '*Cò Sheinneadh an Fhìdeag Airgid*' ('Who Would Play the Silver Whistle'), from the Barra tradition (Example 15):

Example 15: '*Cò Sheinneadh an Fhìdeag Airgid*'[60]



In earlier times, waulking singers appropriated almost any song rhythmically suitable for the purpose, regardless of its origin. The Arthurian ballad, '*Am Bròn Binn*' ('The Sweet Sorrow'),[61] for example, can be found as a waulking song. In Campbell and Collinson's transcription of one rendition,[62] the section from Refrain A through Refrain B is, again, rhythmically similar to the strathspey, showing short and long notes:

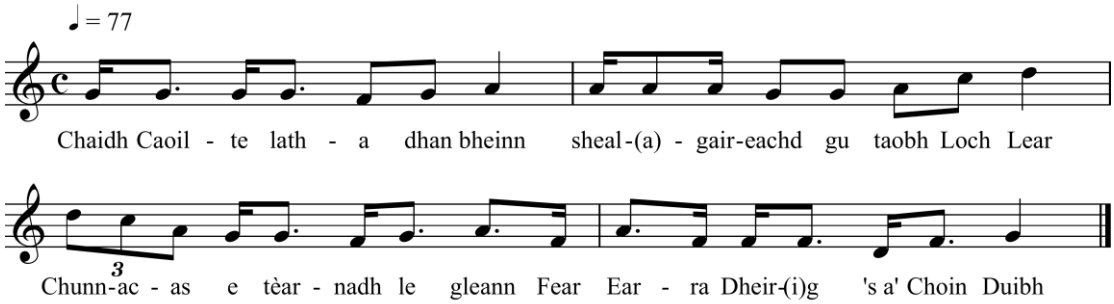
Example 16: '*Am Bròn Binn*' (from Campbell & Collinson 1977: 272-273)



In the Ossianic ballad tradition, which is demonstrably archaic,[63] there are also songs that exemplify strathspey-like characteristics. Apart from the straight quavers at the end of bar one and in bar two, Example 17 could be easily interpreted as a strathspey. Peacock himself (n 89-90) suggested that there was a relationship between the rhythm of Ossianic lays and of Gaelic dance music:

> It is curious to observe, that [the] division of time corresponds with the measure which predominates in the heroic stanzas of Ossian, and in many pieces of remote antiquity, still repeated in the Highlands … It is probable the time of the Reel and Strathspey may have been regulated by [these][64] circumstances.

Example 17: '*Laoidh a' Choin Duibh*' ('The Lay of the Black Dog'): from Marion Campbell, South Uist (TAD: 45572)[65]



As the above examples establish, the rhythm associated with the strathspey is ubiquitous in Gaelic song, even in the earliest examples of its vernacular tradition. Perhaps the reason that this has not been more obvious is that the practices of transcription vary between collectors due to the underlying rhythmic ratio in the songs (and instrumental music) itself being so labile. For instance, in many Gaelic song collections, songs exhibiting long and short notes within two or four beats per bar are often presented in compound (i.e. 6/8 or 12/8), rather than common metre. Presumably, this is to illustrate the 'looseness' of the rhythm:

> Characteristic of much Gaelic song is a dotted rhythm which is neither the dotted quaver of 2/4 rhythm … nor the more flowing long-short rhythm of 6/8 time … but which is something between the two. In the course of a single song, dotted rhythms will seem to vary in approximating more nearly to the one figure than to the other (Campbell and Collinson 1969: 226).

Dunlay and Greenberg detect a similar phenomenon in the way that older Cape Bretoners play strathspeys on the fiddle:

> [O]ne of the complexities of old-style Cape Breton bowing technique is the constant shifting of ... strathspey rhythms … In a strathspey, the ratio of the note lengths [i.e. short-long – the 'snap' – and long-short] should not be interpreted strictly as written[66] ... In Cape Breton, the rhythm of the Scots Snap ... is quite variable; the rhythmic lengths of the two notes range from sharply different to almost equal. The long-short pattern is usually executed with the long note played only a little longer than the short note. (13)

They continue by saying that the longer, dotted note is usually played somewhere between a straight quaver and a triplet, thus closely echoing the sentiments of Campbell and Collinson above:

i.e. between  and 

Given the rhythmic affinity between Gaelic work songs, dance songs and instrumental dance music, the obvious question becomes, could they have a common musical ancestor? Moreover, what it is about the Scottish Gaelic language, and its interaction with music, that produces the 'strathspey' rhythm? As Shaw (1992/93: 44-46) indicates, one can observe a sort of linguistic analogue operating in the playing of older Gaelic-speaking fiddlers in Cape Breton: the long and short notes in their strathspeys tend to correspond to the long and short vowels of dance songs known to be associated with them.[67] Therefore, one might posit that languages for which there is a phonological distinction between short and long vowels are

more likely to feature strathspey-like rhythms. However, as the strathspey is only found in Ireland[68] on loan from Scotland – despite the phonological similarity of Irish and Scottish Gaelic – it must have been motivated by something else.

Some have speculated that the Scots snap is more likely to occur in languages favouring short, stressed syllables. Temperley and Temperley (59) suggested this, after examining collections of nineteenth century song in English, Scottish[69] (hereafter, 'Scots'), German and Italian. They found that the Scots snap was not represented in the German and Italian songs at all; German and Italian do not have as many short, stressed words as English and Scots. There were more snaps in the English sample, but the greatest proportion was in the Scots collection (see the first four numerical columns in Table 3 below):

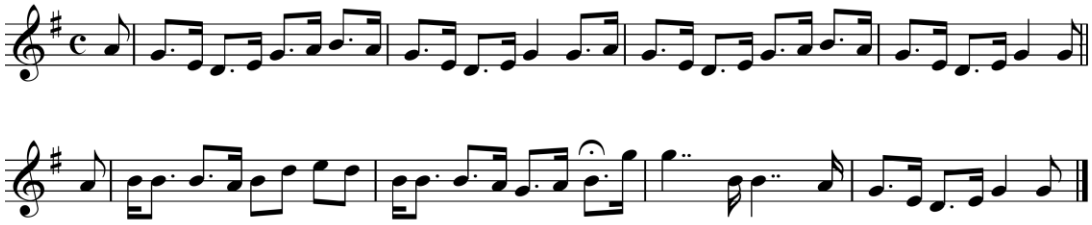
Table 3: Scots snaps in song collections[70]

	English	Scots	German	Italian	Gaelic	Waulking songs
Songs in corpus	100	100	100	100	72	29
Songs with snaps	18	32	0	0	49	25
Percentage with snaps	18%	32%	0%	0%	68%	86%

The authors concluded that the snap is 'characteristic of musical settings of the English language in general, but is more marked in Scottish songs' (*ibid*., 56). Although pioneering in many ways – especially in its attempt to pair musical characteristics with linguistic ones – the study did not include any data from Gaelic collections. To provide a comparison for Gaelic song, I applied the criteria used by Temperley and Temperley (54-55) and counted up the number of Scots snaps in Margaret Fay Shaw's *Folksongs and Folklore of South Uist* (Shaw 1955). This is presented in columns 6 and 7, of Table 3 above. Although Shaw's collection is not from the nineteenth century, it is a representative and reliable collection of Gaelic songs from the mid-twentieth century.

On the basis of this investigation, it would seem that the snap is much more common in Gaelic song than in either Scots or English song: as seen in Table 3, it occurs twice as often in Gaelic songs as in Scots songs, and nearly four times more often than in English songs. It is particularly intriguing that it is even more common in waulking songs: out of 29 waulking songs in Shaw's collection, only four did not have the snap.[71] Like strathspeys, waulking songs present with two to four strong beats per bar, and feature dots and snaps as a fundamental rhythm. It is tempting to speculate that strathspeys and waulking songs could be linked in some way. This might have been on the mind of Keith Norman MacDonald, when he says in the notes preceding '*Hìll-ean is Hog Ù*' (see Lamb: 49): 'I shall now give a specimen of a song that … suits for strathspey dancing, or an *òran luadhaidh*, waulking song' (see Example 18). However, as demonstrated above, these rhythmic characteristics are found across a wide variety of work and dance song. If the strathspey, as song, were linked to an earlier tradition, it would have to have been one that encompassed various functions and contexts, but with a basic commonality at its core.

Example 18: '*Hìll-ean is Hog Ù*' from KN MacDonald's Puirt-à-Beul (Lamb: 50)



As discussed earlier, the Tiwi do not have a native word for 'dance'. The word *yoi* has a more holistic connotation. The words for dancing in Scottish Gaelic, *dannsa* 'dance' and *ruidhle* 'reel', are transparent loans. However, given the universality of dance in human culture, we must assume that dancing took place in Gaelic society before these words were assimilated. From the more inclusive way in which the word 'Reel' was used by eighteenth century writers, and the fact that Gaels found it difficult to disassociate the verbal and melodic component of song, it would appear that the compartmentalised semantics to which we are accustomed in the domains of dance, song and music are a recent development.[72] Perhaps the reason that we find no native words in Scottish Gaelic for dance is not that the activity was novel to Gaelic speakers at the point that *dannsa* and *ruidhle* were assimilated, but that the association of song with rhythmically joined-up activity was lexicalised in a different way (cf. MacInnes 2006b: 262). The word *luinneag*, today, tends to mean a 'ditty', a song of little significance.[73] However, in earlier times it meant a choral song[74] for accompanying work, specifically one with vocal refrains:[75]

> The luinneags are often very happy in their construction and cheering in their effect, especially with the natives of the Highlands, who formerly sung them at all kinds of work, - rowing, reaping, fulling, milling, grinding, haymaking, &c, *keeping in time with great exactness*, one person singing the verse while the remainder struck in on the return of the chorus, which in general consisted of words of no meaning [emphasis added] (Fraser: 188).

The link between the *luinneag* and dance has been suggested by MacInnes (2006b: 262), who points out that the root of the word has the connotation of 'vehemence' and 'ferocity'. This implies that it could have stemmed from an 'ecstatic performance of dance' (*ibid*., 262). Dwelly (609) gives the additional associations of 'impetuosity', 'mirth' and 'melody', which also suit this interpretation. Indeed, the word *luinneag* meant a dance song to at least some Gaelic speakers in recent times. As part of the Turnaig collection of Gaelic dance song, held in the National Library of Scotland, there is a letter from Norman MacLeod to Major N T MacLeod dated 25 July 1951 that makes this association explicit:

> … I knew Alasdair Camshron, Bard Thùrnaig, when he was hale and hearty, some 27 years ago. I had heard him, evening after evening, entertain his young grandson, another Alasdair, with *port danns'* [dance song] after *port danns'* from a seemingly endless store. I wrote to the Bard's son Roddie, to enquire if he could remember and write down for me some of the many *luinneags* that his father had been accustomed to sing to his young grandson (MacLeod).

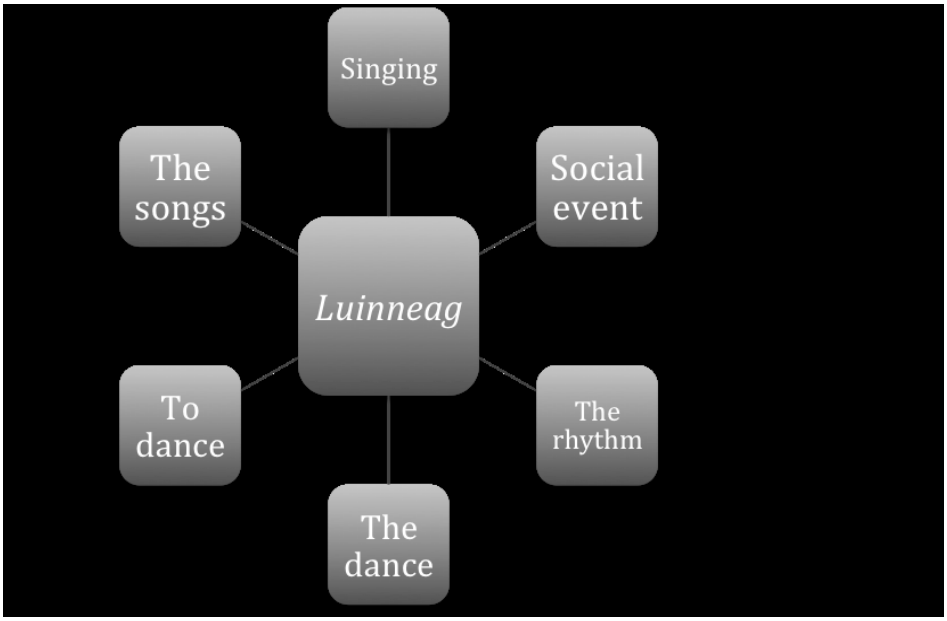
Although the meaning of *luinneag* has changed over time, it is possible that dancing was amongst its original denotations. Bolstering this, neither the strathspey – a type of dance tune – nor songs that are performed in a rhythmically joined-up fashion with work – i.e. *luinneags* – are found as native developments in Ireland. As Breathnach says (28-29):

> Labour or occupational songs, with rhythms to match the physical actions to which they were the accompaniment, are not common in Ireland. This is remarkable when we compare our music to the related music of Gaelic Scotland, and remind ourselves that the social conditions of the two communities in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were much alike ... The process, known as waulking ... was, naturally, performed in Ireland, but evidently no songs were composed to relieve the tedium of it ... Although there

> are some beautiful examples of the lullaby, this is another type of song which is not very well represented in the national store.

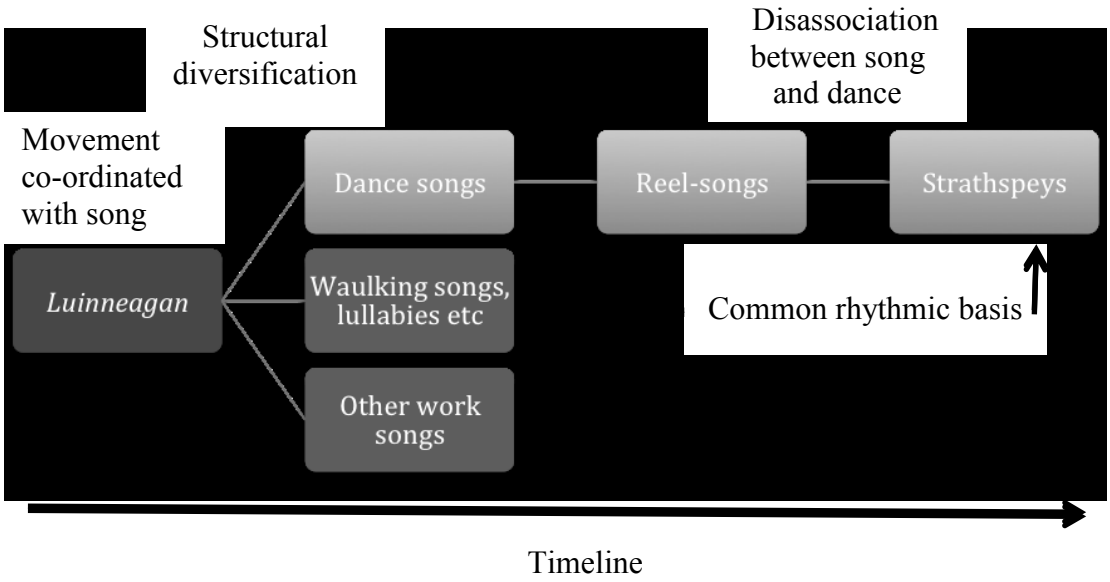
This is a glaring difference, when there is so much commonality between the two countries' Gaelic cultures. It suggests a strong link between the strathspey and work song. Of course, in both, keeping time 'with great exactness' is of utmost importance.

Figure 5: The earlier semantics of *luinneag*?



Could the word *luinneag* once have had a meaning similar to that of *yoi* (see Figure 5)? This seems possible, given the aforementioned musical discrepancy between Scotland and Ireland, the etymological evidence above, the greater tendency towards semantic fusion in earlier times and the fact that the rhythm that we associate with the strathspey is ubiquitous in both Gaelic work and dance song. If we accept this proposition, which appears to explain some important features of Scottish music and song, then the 'strathspey' could be said to hark back to an historical association of language, melody and movement that once existed in Gaelic society.[76]

Figure 6: Proposed evolution of the strathspey



It is likely, at some point after the Scottish and Irish Gaelic cultures began to diverge from one another (perhaps in the middle of the first millennium AD), that a rhythmically-paired association of song and activity began in a specific work or dance setting, and spread to other similar contexts. This might have been an externally influenced development, such as via the Picts, early Britons or Scandinavians, or one native to the Scottish Gaels. Over time, structural distinctions would have occurred in tandem with the functional requirements of each context. For instance, the waulking song needed to be sustained over a prolonged period, and two features noted for the genre served this purpose, namely extempore versification and the repeated line, interjected by a vocable refrain. A circle dance, which featured shuffling or simple, repetitive movements only (e.g. *An Dannsa Mòr*: see Flett and Flett 1953: 120), could be accompanied by such a song as well,[77] but a dance with more complex sequences of movement would require one that was, itself, more involved. The Old West Highland Circular Reel, for instance – a dance for sets of two couples – favours verse-chorus structures of 4 bars with repeats, such as ABAB or ABAC.[78] The structure of the songs or tunes used for the Reel both constrains and allows for the movements within it. If it had an even more complex structure, or were a dance for a different number of people, it would require a different type of tune.

Although the Gaelic work-song tradition survived intact until the middle of the twentieth century in the Outer Hebrides, the dance song tradition had become largely dissociated from dancing a generation or two earlier. Presumably, this occurred due to the greater availability of musical instruments, the growing number and popularity of parish halls – in which instruments were necessary[79] – and the disappearance of dances that had been, previously, closely aligned with dance song. On the mainland of Scotland, these cultural attritions took place much earlier. It is difficult to know to what extent Gaelic dance song was still alive in Speyside in the eighteenth century, but it seems as if the use of instrumental music had eclipsed it. With the ascent of instrumental dance music, the waning of the Gaelic language, the appropriation of Highland culture by outside commentators, and the subsequent adoption of non-native categories by the Highlanders themselves, the origins of a once ubiquitous musical form, as song, were forgotten. Although there will never be a discrete material artefact or written source to prove, beyond any doubt, that the strathspey originated in Gaelic song, the multiple strands of evidence presented here point strongly to this conclusion.

Summary and Conclusions

The central hypothesis of this article is that the rhythmic qualities associated with the strathspey (i.e. dotted notes, Scots snaps and common time) are so profusely represented in the Gaelic song corpus that the strathspey must have developed as part of that tradition. The discussion began by examining the standard theory of the strathspey's origin, as a tune type instigated by eighteenth century Speyside fiddlers. This was abandoned on the basis of weak and conflicting evidence: a survey of early accounts indicated that it was a style of playing and singing for Reels, rather than a discrete musical variety, and that it was actually widely distributed across the Highlands.[80]

The connection between the strathspey and the Gaelic song tradition was made in two ways: first, through an analysis of the tune titles in the earliest collection of strathspeys by a native of the Speyside area, and second, by a survey of 'pointed rhythm' in Gaelic dance song. The oldest tune titles in Cumming's collection are, demonstrably, those in Gaelic, and it was argued that most of these, if not all, derive from dance songs. After a short discussion about the performative context of the genre, which established that Reel dancing could have been a pre-Reformation development in Scotland, it was argued that the 'strathspey' was a rhythmic matrix underlying a large proportion of dance songs. Notably, it was demonstrated that when audio recordings of reels performed by Gaelic speakers were played back at a slower tempo, they were virtually indistinguishable from strathspeys. Along with the fact that a great proportion of traditional Gaelic tunes are known in both strathspey and reel time, this observation was deployed to reinforce the argument that the strathspey, as a tune type, did not exist in earlier times. Rather, it was a general style of playing and singing for Reels amongst Gaelic speakers and that Reels encompassed two tempos.

The final major point of this paper, covered in the last section, was that this same, pointed rhythmic matrix is seen across a number of different types of Gaelic work song. Examples were given of songs exhibiting the 'strathspey rhythm' from early stages of the vernacular record. Given what we know about the semantics involved in music and dance from older periods of European history, not to mention amongst aboriginal peoples in recent times, it was proposed that Gaelic work and dance song stem from a common root. This position is bolstered by the absence of both the strathspey – as a native tune type – and rhythmically joined-up work songs in the Irish tradition, which is similar to its Scottish counterpart in other ways. It was proposed that the word *luinneag* could have once had a similar meaning to the Tiwi word *yoi*, in which 'dance' and 'song' are merely parts of a greater, holistic category of communal activity. This was supported by the word's etymology, and its having been used to refer to both dance and work song genres in the recent past.

To return to the question posed at the beginning of the article, that is, what is the nature of the strathspey, the answer depends upon one's point of view. If denoting a 'tune type', then one must clarify the relevant period involved, not to mention geographical and performance style. The strathspey evolved into an art form of great expressive potential in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and was conventionalised in various ways. It is not the purpose of this article to weigh up the validity of these forms in the 21st century: its focus is entirely diachronic. To answer the question at hand in this diachronic context, the strathspey is a rhythmic matrix pervading a number of different types of Scottish and, particularly, Gaelic music. If taking a synchronic view, there are no grounds for devaluing any child of the strathspey, regardless of how distant a shoot may be from its root. Such is a matter of personal taste and, for that, there is no accounting. However, in a country still struggling with its linguistic history, it is ironic that its national music probably originated in a variety of song known to a diminishing number of citizens along its northwest periphery.[81] For most of its life as a nation, Scotland is likely to have had a higher proportion of Gaelic speakers than

any other language.[82] The strathspey appears to be one of the many inheritances engendered by this legacy.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My sincere thanks to John Shaw, Gary West and Virginia Blankenhorn, who read and commented on a draft of this paper. My thanks also to Jake King, who provided the outline of the map on page 75.

NOTES

[1] In Ford: 147-150.

[2] *Blas* 'taste' in Gaelic is often used in the sense of 'good style': see Falzett: 323. Stewart is quoting another gentlemen, 'one of our very best reel players', with whom he had had a conversation a few days prior (Stewart: x). Thank you to Michael Newton for this source.

[3] For instance, in *Puirt a Beul* (see Lamb: 135), Keith Norman MacDonald wrote 'there is very strong evidence to show that much of our strathspey music was taken originally from the Gaelic' (cf. Emmerson 1971:145).

[4] Cognate with the Swedish Gothic *rulla,* 'to whirl' (Collinson 2012b), and *ruidhle* in Scottish Gaelic, which is likely to be a medieval or early modern borrowing. An early use of the word in Gaelic occurs in the song '*Siùbhlaidh mi 's fàgaidh mi 'm fearann*' (Campbell and Collinson 1969: 138), which appears to be from the eighteenth century on the basis of its Jacobite references. (NB: *Mac 'ic Dùbhail* is MacDonald of Morar):

Soiridh uam gu ***Mac 'ic Dùbhail,***	My farewell to ***Mac 'ic Dùbhail***,
Dhomhsa b'aithne beus do thùrlaich,	I knew your household's custom well,
Pìob mhòr ga spreigeadh air ùrlar,	Great pipes struck up on dance floor,
Ruidhle *mu seach air an ùrlar,*	**Reels** in turn upon the dance floor,
Clàrsach ghrinn 's a cruinn gan rùsgadh.	Pleasant harp with its keys uncovered.

It is worth noting that, unlike the word 'reel', there is no native Gaelic word for 'strathspey'.

[5] However, as seen in the DunGreen collection, reels continue to be played with occasional snaps and dots by some fiddle players in Cape Breton (Dunlay and Greenberg).

[6] See Emmerson 1972 (151-152).

[7] i.e. a bar of four quaver (quarter notes) beats, also known as 4/4 time.

[8] 'Pointedness' is not restricted to strathspeys; jigs, reels and other types of tunes can be played in a pointed style.

[9] Bremner: 62, cf. Cumming: 'Dutchess of Athole's Reels – or Tuggin tachi nul 'n Aird', which is most likely *Tiugainn Dachaidh Null 'n Àird*, 'Come home over the high place'.

[10] Collinson (1966: 29) calls it 'the very life blood of Scots musical rhythm'. Some have suggested that the combination of short and long notes in Gaelic 'mouth music' for strathspeys is indicated by the nature of Gaelic vowels, which can be either long or short (see Shaw 1992-93: 44-46). However, Irish also shares this phonological quality and there is a

striking absence of the 'snap' in Irish instrumental music, apart from in Northern Ireland, where it is almost certainly from Scottish influence.

[11] Of course, MacPherson was a native of the Speyside area (Collinson 1966: 210), so it is conceivable that he played in the style.

[12] For example, see Thurston: 25-28.

[13] Collinson (1966: 204) says: 'The strathspey ... though played now as often on the pipes, is essentially *fiddle* music, depending for its full effect upon the characteristic up-bow stroke of the Scottish traditional fiddler, and the capacity of the instrument to stop abruptly' [emphasis in original].

[14] This was an enlarged and improved second edition of his original book (Anonymous [Thomson] 1788). The original made no reference to Speyside or its music.

[15] He was born in 1746 in Forteviot, Perthshire (Rackwitz: 47 in PDF) and was raised as an English speaker by his mother, the daughter of a schoolmaster from Airntully, near Dunkeld:

> To this worthy mother William was indebted for his early proficiency in the rudiments of acquired knowledge. From her he learned to spell and to read English; and perhaps it was no small advantage to his intellects, that he was not born a few miles further among the highlands of Perthshire, as his talents might have been clogged and his ideas encumbered *by means of an additional language*' [emphasis added] (Anonymous 1818: 76).

[16] There were approximately 300,000 monoglot Gaelic speakers in the Highlands in 1800, out of a total population of 335,000 (MacKinnon: 63).

[17] There is no direct indication in his book that he visited the area. Indeed, Speyside was not even mentioned in the first edition. See Rackwitz for a map indicating that he skirted around the area, taking the north-eastern route from Inverness to Fochabers.

[18] It is not clear if this is his opinion, or one he considered to be the general consensus on the matter. Unless the propensity for Highlanders to feel a sense of local pride has emerged only in the past two centuries, then the belief that they would somehow idealise the form of the reel in Speyside over their own seems credulous to the extreme.

[19] Another interpretation is that he was referring to setting and travelling steps, but his wording indicates that he was referring to the music itself. A further possibility is that he was referring to the triplet and quadruplet runs that occur in some strathspeys, although 'pace' indicates something more long lasting, i.e. tempo.

[20] I believe that this can be explained by its being appreciated as a dance form rather than a tune type, at this point. As I argue later on, if the dance itself required a tempo shift, then the musical form associated with it would have been ambiguous.

[21] John Shaw mentioned to me (2012) that this collection, more than any other that he has come across – including *The Skye Collection* – recalls the core repertoire of older Cape Breton fiddlers.

[22] Similarly, Peacock makes no distinction between the steps danced for the Reel and Strathspey.

[23] NB: I found no correlation between the time signature and the presence of dotted notes and snaps.

[24] He clearly groups them together in his book: in the second half, he presents 16 consecutive tunes that are all in *alla breve* time, apart from one in common time.

[25] That is, tunes that are predominantly without snaps or dots.

[26] The notion that dancing and singing form a fundamental unit is also found amongst certain tribal groups in India, where 'singing and dancing are collective endeavours … there is no audience as such, because the whole community participates in singing and dancing' (Deogaonkar and Deogaonkar: 9). This recalls the description of dancing to *puirt-à-beul* Alexander Campbell provided, from his trip to North Uist in 1815: the participants danced and sang simultaneously (see Lamb: 22 and 26).

[27] As Newton suggests (2006: 231), the derivation of this word might be *gille an troimb* 'lad of the Jew's harp'.

[28] There were still Gaelic-speakers indigenous to Elgin in 1879, although the language was 'rapidly becoming extinct' (Ravenstein: 596).

[29] MacInnes suggests (2006b: 260) that it could have been bawdy due to it being called 'foull'; bawdry is well represented in Gaelic dance song. However, I think it is likely that any song in Gaelic, at this time, would have been deemed uncouth by the English-speaking, Protestant clergy. The climate was such that the Statutes of Iona, one of the first government-sponsored attempts to eradicate Gaelic culture, were brought in just a few years later, in 1609.

[30] The unavailability of instruments was probably the crucial factor. For example, there are records of *puirt-à-beul* being widely used for dancing in St Kilda, where the only instrument was the *tromb* or Jew's harp, and even in Eriskay in the early twentieth century (see discussion in Lamb). It also appears that the older dramatic or pantomimic dances were performed to song preferentially, even when instruments were available (see Rhodes, in Flett and Flett 1996: 189).

[31] For instance, *'Cur nan Gobhar Às a' Chreig'* (collected in the Black Isle, Strathglass, Uist, Barra and Skye), '*Fear a' Phige*' (collected in Perthshire, S. Uist and Lewis), '*Biodag aig Mac Thòmais*' (collected in Sutherland and throughout the Uists: associated with the Dirk Dance – see Flett and Flett 1996) and *'Sabhal Iain 'ic Ùisdein'* (also known as '*Tha Òr aig Coinneach a' Rubha*' or '*Ruidhle nam Pòg*', which translates as 'The Kissing Reel'), which was used for the circle dance in Eigg, known as *An Dannsa Mòr* 'The Big Dance' (for information on the latter see Flett and Flett 1953: 120-124).

[32] 'When the modern violin arrived in Scotland in the seventeenth century it came with a new style of dance music which, once reshaped by native musical sensibilities, evolved into distinctly Scottish forms, particularly the reel and strathspey … As [these tunes] became 'verbalised' in song form … they acquired the rhythms and cadences of Gaelic speech … these ditties, however, are not considered true poetry … but mnemonic verbalisations, sung for dancers if instruments are not available' (Newton 2009: 253).

[33] Falzett (319) quotes Anna MacKinnon, from Sight Point (*Rubha an t-Seallaidh*), Cape Breton: 'The tunes that they are playing, they were Gaelic songs to begin with at first anyway'. See also Stewart's quote at the beginning of the present article. Allan MacDonald (1995) postulates that the piping genre known as *ceòl mòr* ('big music') or pibroch also originated in an older song tradition.

[34] I am aware of no attempts to date Gaelic dance songs based on internal, verbal evidence. However, the practice of Gaelic dance song, like the practice of other types of songs that accompanied activity – e.g. waulking songs, milking songs, rowing songs and lullabies – could be as old as the practice of co-ordinated, group dancing amongst Gaelic speakers.

[35] This would have probably been *bruadar fear a' mhullaich àird*.

[36] 'Most of the collections were published by subscription and distinguished by a dedication to an important patron ... We can imagine them ... sending for their copy ere the ink was dry, and culling with pride the new tune bearing their name' (Emmerson 1971: 61).

[37] One need only consider the number of melodies in the Irish tradition referred to as *'Gan Ainm'*, i.e. without a name. See Emmerson (1971: 75-84) for a discussion of tunes appropriated by the Gows and others.

[38] '[M]usic is, by its very nature, essentially powerless to express anything at all … If, as is nearly always the case, music appears to express something, this is only an illusion and not a reality. It is simply an additional attribute which, by tacit and inveterate agreement, we have lent it, thrust upon it, as a label, a convention – in short, an aspect which, unconsciously or by force of habit, we have come to confuse with its essential being' [emphasis in original] (Stravinsky: 53-54).

[39] One can imagine that they learnt the steps, which they performed 'so well, as almost to surpass belief', in the home as part of the traditional *cèilidh.*

[40] On a related point, while Johnson concedes that the fiddle tradition in Scotland probably had input from European traditions, he says that it was mainly an 'old-fashioned and insular tradition' (20). An older form of the instrument pre-dated the modern fiddle, which is estimated to have come to Scotland around 1670 (*ibid*.). Lachlan MacKinnon, a Skye poet who lived from 1665-1734, is said to have been a fiddler (Collinson 1966: 63) and Martin Martin (14) mentions a number of fiddlers in Lewis in the early 1700s. Of course, the piping tradition was another influence on the Gaelic musical mind, although we are similarly unable to establish its age. Campbell (1981: 27) says that the references to musical instruments in Gaelic waulking songs 'recall the days of medieval Scotland: the harp, the fiddle, the great and small bagpipes, and the jew's harp (*tromb*)'.

[41] In South Uist, Reels were danced in a circular formation until 1885 and in Torrin, Skye, this date is put at 1900 (Flett and Flett 1964: 156).

[42] The Fletts surmised that it was perfectly suited to the old black houses (*taighean dubha*), and could have circled the hearth in the middle of the floor. Circle dances often feature an item of symbolic or ritualistic importance in the centre, and the hearth is patently of this nature.

[43] My appreciation to Frank McConnell for bringing this point to my attention.

[44] i.e. those not in 6/8, 9/8 etc.

[45] Known variously as the Strathspey and Reel, the Highland Reel or the Scotch Reel (Emmerson 1972: 167).

[46] This is a reference to a track ID from the *Tobar an Dualchais/ Kist o' Riches* website (www.tobarandualchais.co.uk), which can be used to retrieve the original audio recording. Go to the site, and click on the 'advanced search' tab at the top of the screen. Then, input the number in the first search field. Pull down the tab saying 'All Fields' and select 'Track ID'.

After pressing 'search', you will be offered information about the item as well as the opportunity to listen to it.

[47] i.e. *Peigi Anndra*, of South Uist, who gave many songs to Margaret Fay Shaw.

[48] The original School of Scottish Studies sound archive number (SA) for this recording is 1975.82.B4-B5: see TAD 87023 and 87035.

[49] Logan (439) speculates that this song might have been used for some kind of dramatised fighting in earlier times. See Shaw (1955: 173) for text.

[50] There are a vast number of tunes still played by traditional musicians in both tempos. To name just a few: Miss Lyall, The Devil in the Kitchen, Stumpie, *Chuir i Glùn air a' Bhodach* ('She Put Her Knee on the Old Man'), The Back of the Change House, *Cabar Fèidh* ('Stag Antlers'), Maggie Cameron, *'S Iomadh Rud a Chunnaic Mi* ('Many Things I Saw'), The Reel of Tulloch, Farewell to Erin (Highlander's Farewell to Erin/ Highland Harry), Mrs Ramsay of Barton, Beaton's Delight, *Ho Ro Bu Siud an Fhidheall* ('Ho Ro That Was The Fiddle'/Hoch Hey Johnnie Lad) and *Tha Dìth nam Bròg air Donnchadh Dubh* ('Black Duncan Lacked Shoes'/The Earl of Hume's Strathspey). It is surely no coincidence that so many of these pertain to the Gaelic tradition and have dance song versions (see the Index in Lamb). My thanks to Eilidh MacKenzie, Alasdair White, Deirdre Morrison, Ronald McCoy, Ruairidh Pringle, Decker Forrest, Mike Kennedy, Ben Miller and Allan MacDonald, who provided many of the tune names above.

[51] It is worth observing that Joseph McDonald, in his piping tutor, indicates that reels on the pipes were played in a rounder fashion than 'violin reels'. Cannon (86) says that McDonald did not consider 'violin reels' to be a different tune type *per se*, but a musical style, which eventually became conventionalised as the strathspey. McDonald linking this style to the violin, indicates that the way in which the pipes were played for dancing had diverged further away from the song tradition than that of the fiddle. As most of the early bagpipe versions of strathspeys, such as those in the Gunn collection, were of Gaelic dance songs (Forrest 235), this appears, at first glance, to be a curious notion. However, we find an analogous situation in *ceòl mòr* (i.e. pibroch), which is proposed to have had diverged significantly from an earlier song tradition by the same period (MacDonald 1995), so it is quite possible that the same thing happened in regard to dance music on the pipes.

[52] *Brà* is the Gaelic for 'quern'. A partial transcription of the song was originally published in Collinson (1966: 82). The current transcription is taken from the recording available at TAD 62331, which is, presumably, the same version that was used by Collinson (*ibid*.).

[53] In Uist, as in other parts of Scotland, once water mills had been built, millers were legally entitled to enter houses and seize querns (Gauldie), which they viewed as a threat to their livelihood. There were attempts to bury family quern stones or otherwise hide them (see TAD 64250); those that came into the hands of the miller were frequently smashed or thrown into lochs.

[54] The note values of the coda are not entirely even; there is still a degree of pointedness. It is difficult to notate the rhythms of Gaelic song. As Campbell (1969: 233) says, the dotted rhythms tend to be slightly shorter than indicated and the semiquavers, slighter longer.

[55] Available at www.scran.co.uk.

[56] See Campbell and Collinson's exhaustive treatment of the waulking song genre in their three-volumes of *Hebridean Folksongs*.

[57] It is thought to have been composed by the wife of Gregor Roy MacGregor of Glenstrae – who was beheaded in 1570 – to their young child (see Gillies: 140).

[58] Not that this is to be generally advised, of course! However, readers with access to an instrument can try playing this at 160 BPM.

[59] Another example of a lullaby from the sixteenth century, which features the same rhythmic qualities and, like most dance songs, a two part musical structure, is *'Tàladh Choinnich Òig'* – 'Young Kenneth's Lullaby' (TAD 34822; transcribed in Shaw 1955: 152-153).

[60] The original recording is from the album *Waulking Songs from Barra* (Greentrax/ School of Scottish Studies). However, readers can find a similar version at TAD 39093.

[61] For a study of this interesting ballad, see Gowans. See also TAD 39131 and Campbell and Collinson 1977: 18-26; 271-274.

[62] From Mrs Anna MacDougall and Annie Johnson: see Collinson and Campbell (1977: 272-273).

[63] See Thomson 1974: 99-105 and Campbell 1872.

[64] He refers here to a statement he made prior: 'Those who have acquired a little knowledge of Music, and are acquainted with Reels and Strathspey tunes, cannot but know that they are divided into two parts, each consisting of four bars, which severally four crotchets, or eight quavers; and that, in the generality of Strathspeys, the notes are, alternatively, a dotted quaver, and a semiquaver; the bar frequently terminates in a crotchet' (Peacock: 89).

[65] A related version is found in Matheson (22-25).

[66] Patrick McDonald was well aware of the inability of music notation to capture the true nature of the transcriptions that he edited: 'In the present state of musical notation, little more, than what may be called the elements or ground-work of an air, can be conveyed by it.' (5).

[67] Joe Neil MacNeil, an exceptional Cape Breton tradition bearer (see MacNeil), said that the post-Gaelic style of playing these fiddle tunes, which does not observe such a distinction, is like a foreign language (Shaw 1992/93: 44-45).

[68] Where it became known as the 'Highland', short for 'Highland Schottische' (Doherty 1999a: 187). The Schottische had been taken over to Ireland by migrant workers in the mid-nineteenth century (*ibid*.)

[69] Taken from *Songs of Scotland* (Pittman, Brown and Mackay).

[70] As mentioned, the non-Gaelic data is from Temperley and Temperley: 56. This is only a summary of the first two rows of their table. However, as it subsumes the other data, it is the most important aspect under consideration.

[71] This is comparable to what I found from another, related collection: in the first two volumes of Campbell and Collinson (1969; 1977) – comprised entirely of waulking songs – snaps are found in 72% of the transcriptions, or 90%, if triplet forms are included, i.e. 𝅘𝅥𝅯𝅘𝅥𝅮.

[72] For instance, the word 'carol' once meant both dance and song, and 'ballad' is said to be from the Latin *ballare* 'to dance' (MacInnes 2006b: 262). Of course, the word 'ballet' also derives from the same root (*βαλλίζειν* in the earlier Greek – thank you to John MacInnes for this) Curiously, the Icelandic word *danz*, at one point denoted the words sung for a dance,

rather than the dance itself (*ibid.*), showing how the synecdochic process can develop differently in related languages and cultures.

[73] Perhaps the reason that the *luinneag* became devalorised is that its worth was not tied up in its musical and lyrical attributes alone: it was only fully realised when paired with activity. This could also help to explain the devalorisation of *puirt-à-beul* (see Sparling: 146). They are both, it seems, instances of the proverbial whole being greater than the sum of its parts.

[74] The chorus, as a repetitive lyrical structure, encourages synchronised group activity. Perhaps it came about for this very purpose.

[75] See discussion in MacInnes 2006a and 2006b.

[76] If this cultural innovation was instigated prior to the sixteenth century, as seems likely, then it would be, perhaps, more appropriate to use the words 'Scottish society' here than 'Gaelic society': at least one-half of Scotland was thought to still be Gaelic speaking in 1521 (Withers: 21-22).

[77] Necker de Saussure gives us an approximate description of this from a dance he witnessed in Iona, on 17 Aug 1807:

> Between one reel and another, they sang Gaelic songs in chorus … Men and women sat in a circle around the room, and held each other's hands, or held two by two the corners of a handkerchief which they moved in time with the music during the choruses. We were told that such a movement imitates the operation of waulking the cloth, and that these songs, as their name indicates, formerly used to accompany this kind of work (in Campbell and Collinson 1969: 6).

Although de Saussure says that the party was sitting down, there are accounts of people singing waulking songs in Cape Breton whilst standing up, and shuffling slowly in a clockwise direction (MacInnes 2006b: 257).

[78] However, some dance songs collected in the nineteenth and twentieth century evince a refrain structure similar to waulking songs: e.g. '*E Ho Rithill Àill*' (see Lamb); '*Hìll-ean is Hog Ù*' (*ibid.*); and '*Arsa Nighean a' Mhuilleir*' (Flett and Flett 1953: 122-123).

[79] Interestingly, singers could have possibly matched the volume of instruments in some situations, as the following comment indicates, from an anonymous collector of the early nineteenth century:

> Cainntearachd's pronounced Canderach's are I believe a species of Music peculiar to the Highlands of Scotland. Before Piano's became general they were universally used for dancing at small merry meetings. At larger ones Weddings &c. there was a Piper. Two or three females sing together and seldom the dancing drowns the voice for they bawl [sorry about that!] in their loudest key. This ancient custom like many others has nearly worn out, but I am happy to say that Cainntearachd, are still used in the Islands and some few parts of the mainland. I have often danced to them and liked it as well, perhaps better than a Reel performed on an instrument. The Pipers have picked up the tunes. I have given both sets. The words have in general no meaning and are merely used to bring out the air (Anonymous 1823: 10n).

Although the collector uses the word *canntaireachd*, which is generally taken as the practice of using vocables to represent pipe music, he is clearly referring to dance songs here. My appreciation to Roderick Cannon for making me aware of this quote, and this collection.

[80] In a future paper, I will suggest that the reason that it was first noticed in Speyside was the opening up of the region through major military roads and its proximity to Anglicised commerce centres.

[81] Of course, one might say that Cape Breton Island is the furthest removed member of this periphery.

[82] There are 678 years between the time that Scotland was united under Kenneth MacAlpin (*Cináed mac Alpín*) in 843 and 1521, when the country was reckoned to be, still, more than 50% Gaelic-speaking. It will not be until 2199 that we will be able to say that it is likely to have been mainly English (or Scots) speaking for most of its known history.

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The Good Man's Croft

EMILY LYLE

ABSTRACT. The 'croft' of the title is a piece of cultivable land which is left untilled in order to devote it to a supernatural being, one name for whom is the 'good man'. The practice is documented in Scotland in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries through official and kirk records concerned with stamping out the practice and in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries through accounts which see it as an interesting survival from the past. The setting aside of the piece of land had a definite purpose and was designed to keep the livestock, especially cattle, healthy. The croft could be an old one, or it could be freshly established, and there is one detailed description of how a croft could be made by placing stones at the four corners and charming them.

The word 'croft' in the title has the sense of 'a patch of ground', as also does the word 'fold/fauld/faulie', which is another of the terms found in use. 'The good man' who owns the croft is an ambiguous figure. He is an imagined source of magical power, and, in the context of the Christian church, could only be understood as the devil – an instance of the process of demonisation of the gods and spirits of the pagan past. He is sometimes simply called Clootie (a familiar name for the devil), but is sometimes given indirect appellations like 'the halyman', meaning the holy man, and 'the hynd knycht', meaning the kind, gentle or courteous knight (*DSL* s.v. 'hynd' and 'hende' a.), which could either have been direct expressions of positive feeling, perhaps intended to disguise, or reverse, a socially current identification with the devil, or have been euphemisms designed to avert possible danger from the being spoken of. 'The good man' is a term of this type, corresponding linguistically to the term 'the good people' used of the fairies (*DSL* s.v. 'guid', a. 7: 14, 22). It is, of course, quite likely that the term was sometimes understood by users as 'the goodman' meaning husband or tenant, but this would be a secondary sense.

Our early evidence of the 'good man's croft' is from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when we hear about it almost entirely through the records of those who condemned it. There is a pre-Reformation record of a 'Cluttis Croft' in Dunfermline in 1539,[1] but the initiative that gives us our first information about official notice being taken of such a croft stemmed from the General Assembly of the Kirk of Scotland held in Edinburgh in May 1586, when commissioners were appointed by King James VI to visit parishes throughout much of the country and report on the conditions in each. Documents relating to these visits are extant only for Lothian and Dunblane, but it seems that they are representative and give us a window through which to see what was going on in many parts of Scotland at this time. In Lothian, the instruction to the commissioner includes the command 'that he inquyre the names of certane croftis or peicis of ground superstitiouslyie reportit to be consecratit to the devill under the name of the gud mane or hynd knycht',[2] and the briefer statement available for Dunblane says that enquiry should be made about 'peces off grond dedicat to Satan onder the name off hynd knycht'.[3]

Although there are no positive responses in the extant records, the 1586 survey probably did turn up evidence of the practice and was very likely the basis for the 1594 recommendation which pinpoints the Garioch as a black spot. The General Assembly called upon Parliament to enact a law making it illegal to leave pieces of land 'dedicate to the Devill' untilled, and proposed that any land that was left untilled in this way should be forfeit to the king and given by him to those who were prepared to till it. This recommendation was made in the following terms at the General Assembly convened at Edinburgh on 7 May 1594 in Session 11, held on 13 May:

> Anent the horrible superstitioun vsed in Garioch and diverse parts of the countrey, in not labouring ane parcell of ground dedicate to the Devill, vnder the name of the Goodmans Craft: The Kirk, for remedie therof, hes found meitt that ane article be formed to the Parliament, that ane act may proceid from the Estates therof, ordaining all persons, possessours of the saids lands, to cause labour the samein betuixt and ane certane day appointit therto; vtherwayes, in cace of dissobedience, the saids lands to fall in the Kings hands, to be disponit to such persons as pleases his Majestie, quho will labour the samein.[4]

Parliament did not take the action requested by the General Assembly and the possession of a good man's croft in itself was never declared illegal. We might expect that possession of land considered to be dedicated to the devil would have made the owner or tenant concerned vulnerable to accusations connected with superstitious practices in general, and might conceivably have been construed as involving the crime of witchcraft, which carried the death penalty. However, no legal proceedings are known that included possession of a good man's croft in a criminal accusation. The only known case of a criminal accusation where land devoted to the devil is mentioned[5] is that relating to witchcraft made against Andro Man, of Tarbruich in the parish of Rathven (Presbytery of Fordyce), and Man was accused, not of being an owner or tenant, but of being the creator through his charms of pieces of land devoted in this way. This emphasis gives us a fuller picture of the act of establishment than any other source. The details are given in the fourth point in the dittay against Man recorded at Aberdeen in 1598 which runs (*Miscellany* 1841: 120):

> Thou hes mett and messurit dyvers peces of land, callit wardis, to the hynd knicht quhom thow confessis to be a spreit, and puttis four stanis in the four nokis of the ward, and charmes the samen, and theirby haillis the guidis, and preservis thame fra the lunsaucht and all vther diseasis, and thow forbiddis to cast faill or divett theron, or put plewis therin; and this thow did in the Manis of Innes, in the Manis of Caddell, and in dyvers vtheris places, quhilkis thow confessis thy self, and can nocht deny the same.

All the specific cases of leaving pieces of land untilled for 'superstitious' purposes that were identified through the Kirk's enquiries (that we know of from the surviving records) are in North-East Scotland, where there are a dozen reported instances of the practice in the presbyteries of Elgin, Ellon, Fordyce, Garioch,[6] Strathbogie and Turriff between 1602 and 1690. In addition to the statements that the practice was being carried on, there are records of the denial of the practice which are also of some interest. Several records of this sort that have come to light in the records of the Presbytery of Fordyce give negative responses to queries about the existence of: 'any plot of land unlabored dedicated to the devill caled ye gudmans croft' (Banff, 12 December 1649), or 'any Land unlabored, dedicat to superstitious uses' (Mortlach, 2 July 1651) (CH2/158/2: ff. 45r, 69v; Cramond 1886: 12–13). The report on the queries addressed to Alexander Seaton, minister of Banff, on 25 June 1651, demonstrates the care that was taken to return an accurate reply.

> It was demandit, if ther ^ were ^ any superstitious dayes kept her, or burialls within the kirk, answerd negative, it was lykwyss demand if ther any plot of land in his paroshe unlabored dedicated to superstitious uses, the minister answered he knew none, Thomas Meldrum & Thomas Ross elders wer ordained to try theranent & to report yair diligence. (CH2/158/2: f. 68r)

It was as a result of a search like this, involving the minister as well as two elders, that the specific Inverurie pieces of land were identified and their owners and possessors warned to till them (case **11** of Table 1).

Details of the twelve cases of the practice of 'superstitiously' leaving land untilled that are found in the Kirk records are transcribed in chronological order in the listing in Table 1.[7] References are to be found in both presbytery (P) and kirk session (KS) records; generally only one of the records is extant, but in the two instances where both records are available, at Forgue and Inverurie (cases **7** and **11),** the case is reported in both. In the summary in Table 2 (where modern spelling is adopted) the presbyteries are given in alphabetical order and the parishes in alphabetical order under the presbytery headings, and, where possible, the pieces of land referred to and their owners or tenants are listed.

The records of condemnation of the good man's croft by the Kirk authorities in North-East Scotland cease before the end of the seventeenth century, the last one identified being dated 1690, and the next we hear of the custom of leaving a piece of land untilled in this area is found a century later in the *Statistical Account,* where there are two references to it, both from the presbytery of Turriff. The Reverend Alexander Johnston in Monquhitter listed a number of outmoded superstitions and contrasted them with the contemporary situation. His sentences on land use run (Sinclair, ed.: 11.346–47),

> Fairies held from time immemorial certain fields, which could not be taken away without gratifying these merry spirits by a piece of money. The old man's fold, where the druid sacrificed to the demon for his corn and cattle, could not be violated by the ploughshare. … But now … Fairies, without requiring compensation, have renounced their possessions. The old man's fold is reduced to tillage.

Alexander Simpson, schoolmaster of the parish of King-Edward, included the following information in a note concerning the farm of Strathairy (Sinclair, ed.: 11.264):

> On the same farm there is a small spot, called GIVEN GROUND, which, till lately, it was thought sacrilege to break with spade or plough. It is now converted into a corn field, nor has any interruption been given by the ancient proprietors. This is mentioned as one instance, among many, of the decline of superstition.

Writing late in the nineteenth century, but referring back to an event of the eighteenth, the Maud antiquary, John Milne (McKean), pinpointed another location in the presbytery of Turriff, the farm of West Affleck in the parish of New Deer, when he spoke of the rite of 'lowsin' a gaun (going) plough' which, it was believed, 'would take all the luck away from the farm on which the ceremony was performed' (1891: 31).

> It was said to have been gone through on the farm of Honeynook in the latter half of the last century. A tenant of that farm was being put away against his will; and, to be revenged on the incoming and after tenants, the last time he had his twelve-oxen plough yoked he took it, with all the earth it would hold, off the farm and unyoked it on a part of the neighbouring farm of West Affleck called 'the Guid Man's faul.' I have been unable to ascertain fully all the particular ceremonies and incantations connected with taking a working plough off a farm, as old people always spoke about it with a good deal of awe and reserve. They would give no explanation for doing it farther than that it was the same as shaking the dust off one's feet, and that another tenant would never thrive nor sit a whole lease on a

> farm where the 'plough lowsin'' was once performed. I have never seen this rite mentioned by any writer on superstitions. Perhaps it is indigenous to the Buchan district. Many old people have assured me that it was sometimes done. In regard to the instance referred to it may be mentioned that Honeynook happened to change a good many tenants during the first half of the present century; and I remember old people shaking their heads and saying nobody would ever sit a whole lease there. The latter half of the century, however, has proved their prediction to be incorrect.

Milne mentioned in an enquiry he sent at this time to *Scottish Notes and Queries*, that the farm he was speaking about was in his own neighbourhood (his farm of Atherb actually bordered on Honeynook on the opposite side from West Affleck), and so he was in a good position to ascertain the facts. He also defined the custom more generally in this enquiry, saying (1890–91: 160):

> When a tenant was being put out of his farm against his will, the last time he was ploughing, he drove his plough with all the earth it would hold or carry off the farm, and unyoked it on some neighbouring farm. Certain spots were supposed to be preferable, such as a 'Gweed man's croft.'

He makes it clear here that the custom could be carried on independently of a good man's croft, but implies that the existence of such a piece of land could be looked for. The concept was clearly quite familiar in the district and his definition (1891: 31) appears to give the explanation that was current in the community: 'The Guid Man thus referred to was understood to be the Spirit of Evil, and the "faul" – fold or field – was a piece of ground allowed to lie uncultivated for his use.'

J. M. McPherson, drawing on a manuscript study of the presbytery of Turriff by James Brebner,[8] describes a 'deevil's faulie' in the parish of Forgue, a parish that we have already found represented in the Kirk records (case **7**), and gives details about how it was brought under cultivation (136–37):

> There was a piece of land in Forgue known till quite lately as 'the deevil's faulie' or 'the black faulie.' It is now embraced in the farm of Boginspro, on the slope of the Flourmanhill, about four and a half miles from Huntly. The field extended to three or four acres. For long it lay untilled, but at the beginning of the nineteenth century a man from the neighbourhood of Bognie said 'the deil had had lang eneuch o't and he wud hae a turn o't neist.' He took his turn, cultivated it, and no evil befell him.

The Reverend Walter Gregor (Olson), in a presentation he gave at a meeting of the Banffshire Field Club held on 16 October 1884, identifies two cases including this Forgue parish instance, which he describes first (Gregor 1884: 99):

> One is on the farm of Boginspro, on the estate of the Duke of Richmond and Gordon, and still goes by the name of 'The Deevil's Craft.' It lies on the slope of the Fourmanhill contiguous to the Cobairdy estate about 4½ miles from Huntly. It has a south-westerly exposure, and has an area of between 3 and 4 acres. About 40 years ago it was brought under cultivation from a state of heath, broom, and other wild plants, at which time [it] was looked upon with much awe by the people.

> Mr Gurnell, Huntly, from whom I have this information, writes me that not far from 'The Deevil's Craft' are the remains of a circular structure called 'The Deevil's Faul.' Mr Gurnell, however, thinks that this name is an afterthought to correspond to the 'Craft.'

Gregor had first-hand acquaintance with the other case, which was in his native parish of Keith. Speaking of this case (1884: 99), he comments that 'the one I know personally is not the best land' (by contrast with what George Henderson had asserted [111]). Gregor evidently derived background information from the two land-holders he mentions, Mr Scott, tenant of Auchairn, and James Watt, tenant of Fieldhead, and was able to recount in vivid detail how the land was brought under cultivation. The first attempt was aborted when one of the oxen of the plough-team died and the next attempt was made by hand-digging the land (1884: 99–100):

> Another piece of ground dedicated to the Power of Evil, and called 'The Helliman's Rig', lies in the parish of Keith, about 2½ miles from Keith, on the south slope of the high ground called Killishment. The spot commands a most extensive, as well as a very striking, view of the surrounding country. At the north end of the 'Rig', the rock came in one part almost to the surface, and from this rock the 'Rig' lay in a southerly direction for about 200 yards, with a breadth of about 12 yards. On the rock at the north end, which forms the highest part of the rising ground, were cut nine cup-holes, arranged in three rows of three each, each hole about nine inches apart from the other. The rock when struck, or when the plough went over it after the 'Rig' was brought under cultivation, gave forth a hollow, rumbling sound, and the tradition was that there was below it a treasure of gold wrapped in a bull's skin. That gold, when hid, was rolled in a bull's hide was the common belief.
>
> Tradition has it that James Scott, the great grandfather of Mr Scott, the present tenant of Auchairn, resolved to bring the 'Rig' under cultivation; but the moment the plough touched the forbidden ground one of the oxen fell dead, killed by a 'fairy dairt,' or, as the folk sometimes said, the animal was 'shot-a-dead'.
>
> Robert Watt, the grandfather of James Watt, the present tenant of Fieldhead, the farm in which the most of the 'Rig' is now included, resolved, about seventy years ago, to cultivate the dreaded piece of ground. But in doing so, he risked his own life, and trenched it. His work was regarded with dread by some of his neighbours, and it was expected every moment he would fall dead. Three women – Maggie Barber, Jane Turner, and Janet Maconachie – set themselves to watch – each taking the watch in turn – when the fatal arrow would be shot. So the 'Rig' yielded to cultivation. About twenty-three years ago, James Watt, the present tenant of Fieldhead, and his father, removed the rock. Unfortunately, the piece with the cup-holes was not preserved. The rock was about 6 yards square.

In connection with the places he describes in Forgue and Keith, Gregor comments: 'Up to this time [1884], I have not been able to identify but two such 'Crafts,' 'Rigs,' or 'Fields.'' He was clearly interested in going on looking, and had an opportunity at a later date to extend his search to the South-West of the country when he was employed to produce a study of Galloway for the Ethnographical Survey of the United Kingdom. Here he found one case where bringing the land into cultivation was attended by disaster and another where the land was still untilled (1894: 494–95):

> There was a time not long ago when a field on the farm of Dullarg, parish of Parton, lay unploughed. The saying was: 'The man that ploughed the ley would never cut the crop.' Peter McCutcheon the farmer ploughed the field and sowed it. He died before the crop was reaped. The field has been cropped since. (Told in Kells by an old man.)
>
> On the farm of Balannan, Tungland, there are two fields adjoining each other, the one called The Drum, and the other The Croft, which have never been cultivated. The belief is that if cultivated, the death either of proprietor or tenant will be the consequence. Both fields were reserved during the last lease. They are not now reserved, but they still lie untilled.

It is very valuable to have these specific cases recorded for the South-West of Scotland. The Reverend James Napier, also dealing with this part of the country, speaks broadly of the custom and tells how one particular piece of land that had been deliberately neglected was brought under cultivation (140):

> It was customary for farmers to leave a portion of their fields uncropped, which was a dedication to the evil spirit, and called good man's croft. The Church exerted itself for a long time to abolish this practice, but farmers, who are generally very superstitious, were afraid to discontinue the practice for fear of ill luck. I remember a farmer as late as 1825 always leaving a small piece of field uncropped, but then did not know why. At length he gave the right of working these bits to a poor labourer, who did well with it, and in a few years the farmer cultivated the whole himself.

But for these notes by Gregor and Napier on three specific instances, we would, so far as I am aware, have no accounts of the practice from the South-West, but it may have been generally known there and also in other parts of the country, where the only references we have are vague ones. A late instance of the fresh establishment of a good man's croft, for which we have good evidence, comes from Central Scotland. James Young Simpson spoke of it when he delivered his vice-presidential address to the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland on 28 January 1861 (Simpson: 33–34):

> In the same district [Torphichen in West Lothian] a relative of mine bought a farm not very many years ago. Among his first acts, after taking possession, was the inclosing a small triangular corner of one of the fields within a stone wall. The corner cut off – and which still remains cut off – was the 'Goodman's Croft' – an offering to the Spirit of Evil, in order that he might abstain from ever blighting or damaging the rest of the farm. The clergyman of the parish,[9] in lately telling me the circumstance, added, that my kinsman had been, he feared, far from acting honestly with Lucifer, after all, as the corner which he had cut off for the 'Goodman's' share was perhaps the most worthless and sterile spot on the whole property.

The relative was Thomas Simpson, an uncle of James Young Simpson's, and his farm was called Gormyre (Duns: 3–8).

Returning to the North East, we find mention of milk-offering in association with the good man's croft in an account by the Reverend William Cramond written in 1894. He was able to give details concerning two crofts at Corgarff in the presbytery of Alford in western

Aberdeenshire, deriving some at least of his information from a memory of the past (Banks: 2.196–97):

> In a good many parts of the country there were pieces of land left uncultivated, though there was no natural obstacle to their being so. They were dedicated to the Devil, and went by the name of 'The Devil's Craft' or 'The Gueedman's Craft'. In Corgarff there were two such spots. They had a rampart of stones round them to prevent any man or beast from going over them. They had also to be some distance from water. (Told to my informant by an old man of 83 years of age, who died about 21 years ago (1894).) They were sprinkled yearly with milk on the first of April (O.S.). (My informant was not exactly certain of the day and hour.) This oblation was to keep the evil one out of 'the hoose, the milk-hoose, the byre an' the barn'. If the guidman crossed the forbidden ground, he lost the best tooth in his head; if the gueedwife did so, she lost a moggan [stocking]; if a horse, a shoe came off; and if a cow, a hoof fell off.
>
> One of the places was at Delnadamph (Stag-haugh) on the south side of a hillock called Tornashaltic (Fire-hillock), and the other at Tornahaish (Cheese-hillock).

This is the only mention we have of a milk-offering at the good man's croft and we just cannot say on the evidence we have whether this practice was carried out in these crofts more generally. Milk-offerings were familiar, though, in a parallel practice. An eighteenth-century description of the island of St Kilda by the Reverend Kenneth Macaulay[10] includes accounts of both untilled land and of a stone where milk was offered to Gruagach (cf. Black 2005: 85, 98–100). I shall give both passages, quoting first the one on the Gruagach stone (Macaulay: 86-87):

> In the face of another hill that lies directly in the road, from the *St. Kilda* village to the valley on the north-west side, there is a very large stone, white and square, on which they formerly poured, on the Sundays, *libations of milk*, to a subordinate Divinity, whose name was *Gruagach*. According to the belief of some weak, superstitiously inclined persons in the islands, this *Gruagach* was a good humoured, sportive and placable Deity. He was likewise very moderate in his demands; a small tribute of milk, when easily spared, the milk of a single cow in Summer or Autumn, was enough to conciliate his friendship. The name of this God signifies, in the *Galic* tongue, one with fine hair or long tresses.

Macaulay adds that 'there was a *Grugach* stone, in almost every village throughout the western isles'. James Robertson toured the western isles in 1768 shortly after Macaulay's publication, and reports from a location in Skye that 'a flat stone a little hollowed in the middle, called Clach Ghruagaich' had been taken out of use four or five years previously by being built into a dyke (Mitchell: 17–18). He recounts more generally that 'the milk-maids had a superstitious custom of making a libation of their milk every Saturday night to Gruagach, … uttering a sort of prayer beseeching he would take under his protection for the ensuing week all their cows, milk, etc.'. The milk-maids felt obliged to make this offering and 'if any accident happened to them or to their cattle at any time, when they omitted to perform this piece of worship, they imputed their misfortune wholly to this neglect'.

It is interesting to have mention here of a prayer for the protection of the cows and milk by Gruagach in the previous quotation for the Corgarff account, that appears to include part of the words of a prayer begging protection for 'the hoose, the milk-hoose, the byre an' the

barn' although in this case it takes the form of requesting that 'the evil one' should not come into these buildings.

Although no offering of milk is mentioned in connection with the untilled land in any other instance besides Corgarff, Gregor makes a general remark about making a gift to the good man of part of a crop which should be taken into account as another form of offering. Speaking of the good man's croft, he says (1884: 98): 'It may be mentioned in connection with this subject that a corner of the field last reaped was left unreaped for "the guidman."' Instead of the land being left untilled, it was left unreaped so that, in both scenarios, humans did not receive any produce from the land.

Macaulay goes on to give an account of a piece of ground in St Kilda that his parishioners insisted should remain untilled despite his attempts to argue them out of their belief that bad fortune would follow if they tilled it (90–91):

> [In the same vicinity there is a] beautiful spot, tolerably extensive, and in appearance fertile. The people are obstinately averse to turn it up for corn, being possessed with a strong belief, that the spot ought to be kept inviolably sacred, and that such a bold incroachment on it would be infallibly attended with the loss of their boat, or some other public calamity. They have forgotten the name of the Divinity to whom this ground belongs; but like the old *Athenians*, and some other nations, they are determined at all adventures to worship their *unknown God*.
>
> I was at some pains to reason and ridicule them out of this absurd fancy, but to little purpose. They appealed first to the sad experience of their predecessors, and afterwards eluded my arguments, by maintaining, with a violent obstinacy, that the produce of this spot, if tilled, could never balance the expence. In short, if any one excepting the Steward, should presume to turn this sacred plot, I am persuaded that the *St. Kildians*, would, with a much more honest zeal, seek their revenge on so impious a person, than *Philip of Macedon* and his confederates, did on the irreligious or greedy *Phocœans*, for their sacrilegious encroachments on the *Delphic God* in his holy-land.

This eighteenth-century representative of the Kirk has moved away from anathemas on devil worship to the recognition of an affinity with ancient pagan ideas familiar to him through his classical education. He finds the belief not evil but absurd, and attempts to eliminate it through rational argument. His classical reference is to 'the plain near Cirrha on the Corinthian Gulf consecrated to Apollo of Delphi and so not supposed to be cultivated'.[11] The Council of the Amphictyonic League, which had the care of the temple of Delphi, fined the Phocians 'for having cultivated a large portion of the consecrated territory named Cirrhaean'. The Phocians protested that the judgements of the Amphictyons were unjust 'since they had inflicted huge fines for the cultivation of what was a very small parcel of land'. They refused to pay and the incident was said in some sources to have been the cause of the Second Sacred War (357–346 BCE) which left Phocis devastated. It was forbidden to till this *temenos* at Delphi, dedicated to Apollo, and one at Eleusis, dedicated to Demeter, although elsewhere in Greece the *temenos* could be cultivated to sustain the temple (Malkin: 1481). Walter Scott picked up on the Greek connection when he discussed the good man's croft and called it a *temenos*.[12]

Charles Rogers in 1884 for the first time related the good man's croft, not to the Greek *temenos* of classical antiquity, but to the sanctuaries mentioned in the listing of heathen practices in the so-called 'Canons of Edgar' by Wulfstan dated 1005 x 1008, which is a geographically closer parallel (Rogers: 1.22, 2.204–05). In a modern edition (Whitelock *et al*.: 319–20, No. 16) this item runs as follows in translation from the Old English source:

> And it is right that every priest zealously teach the Christian faith and entirely extinguish every heathen practice; and forbid worship of wells, and necromancy, and auguries and incantations, and worship of trees and worship of stones, and that devil's craft which is performed when children are drawn through the earth, and the nonsense which is performed on New Year's day in various kinds of sorcery, and in heathen sanctuaries [*on friðsplottum*] and elder-trees, and in many various delusions in which men carry on much that they should not.

There is rather more detail at the beginning of a similar instruction that occurs in 'The Northumbrian Priests' Law' dated 1008 x 1023 (Whitelock *et al*.: 463, No. 54; cf. Lieberman: 1.383, 2.290–92):

> If there is on anyone's land a sanctuary [*friðgeard*] round a stone or a tree or a well or any such nonsense, he who made it is then to pay *lahslit* [i.e. a fine], half to Christ, half to the lord of the estate.

The term *frið-geard* is equivalent to *frið-splot*, and the 'splot' or 'geard' part of the word means a plot of land. *Frið* means peace or sanctuary and is often paired with *grið* in expressions such as, for example, a guarantee of keeping *frið ond grið*, and the Scots 'girth' meaning sanctuary is the metathesised form of *grið* (*OED*, *DSL*). The 'girth' associated with some ecclesiastical buildings and generally marked by stone crosses was an area where certain types of criminal were safe from pursuit, and one, at Holyrood in Edinburgh, was in active use as an asylum for debtors up to the late nineteenth century (MacQueen: *passim*; Ewan: *passim*). It seems that the pre-Christian notion of a sanctuary lived on as the piece of land that had the church's blessing and protection, and also lingered on in the mode that the church condemned as a place connected with posited supernatural power that the church opposed. The good man's croft is the subject of a split perception, with certain people creating and using these set-apart pieces of land with positive ends in view, while others utterly condemned them as evil.

It is interesting to find a mention in 'The Northumbrian Priests' Law' of the point that 'he who made it' is liable to a fine. Here is evidence that the *frithgeard*, like the good man's croft, could be established afresh. No doubt many such places were inherited, but it was not a necessary part of their identity that the land had been 'sacred' from an earlier time. The *concept* of the croft in post-Reformation Scotland seems to stem from a remote past, but the actual croft could be a contemporary creation, and we have some details of how it could be established in case **7** (Table 1) and in the accounts of the actions of Andro Man in the sixteenth century and Thomas Simpson in the nineteenth.

When we hear of the use of a good man's croft, the intention is always to keep cattle healthy. In Elgin (case **1**) the offenders were asked explicitly 'to gif a ressoun quhy they reseruit a peix land to ye deuill callit ye gudman' and so we have their explanation that it was 'for ye noltis caus' (for the sake of the cattle). As for the means, there is always a supernatural being envisaged with whom a transaction takes place.

As regards the piece of untilled land itself, we are apparently in the presence of a very widespread phenomenon, but it is difficult to find discussion with just this focus since the topic can be approached through such wide terms as 'sacrifice', 'tithe', 'taboo', 'sanctuary', 'sacred place' and 'land ownership'. We can say, however, that an important point to be borne in mind is that the land is considered capable of cultivation. There are many wild places that have associations with supernatural beings, but that is a different matter.

The 'good man's croft' in Scotland is an instance of what could be defined more generally as 'a piece of cultivable land that is deliberately left untilled for a purpose connected with a supernatural being'. This definition applies to what George Scott Robertson found in the late nineteenth century in a valley in the Himalyas where the Nuristanis were particularly devoted to the practice of their indigenous religion. He observes (380): 'Large tracts of fertile lands lie undisturbed by the plough, because they are consecrated to Imrá [the chief god of the pantheon].'

Although we may wish to look for the explanation of some customs in terms of human universals, it remains the case that a specific cultural impress that we know was available was the Indo-European one, and N. J. Allen has written valuably on the religion of the Nuristanis in the Indo-European context. He notes that 'we may think of the speakers of proto-Indo-Iranian (PII) as separating into three branches, ancestral respectively to the Iranian languages, to those of Nuristan, and to Sanskrit' (145) and that the religion expressed in the Nuristani branch was retained in an oral context. He notes (142): 'Before they were forcibly Islamised at the end of the last century [i.e. the nineteenth century], the Nuristanis of North-east Afghanistan worshipped their own local pantheon.' The comparable situation in Scotland is that the inhabitants had the languages, and potentially the cultures, of the Germanic and Celtic branches of the Indo-European family. The name of a member of the indigenous pantheon is not found in association with the good man's croft, but it is likely that the interface between the human and the divine expressed in this custom is at root an Indo-European one.

Gods can be best identified by their functions rather than by their names, and we can probably hope soon to arrive at an accepted overall view of the Indo-European gods and to have a good sense of their various attributes (Lyle *passim*). As work progresses on the level of Indo-European comparison, it becomes increasingly vital that we should interrogate the customs of the various countries that share the Indo-European inheritance as witnesses to the unwritten part of our history. In the case of the good man's croft, Scotland is able to offer information on a custom that was exceptionally well documented over several centuries and this may perhaps be found a useful base for reviewing the comparable traditions in other countries, as well as offering a resource for increased understanding of one strand within Scottish culture.

GLOSSARY

als, as
ane, a, an
anent, concerning
auneris, owners
ay and quhill, until
be, by
beasts, cattle
betuixt and ane certane day appointit therto, between the date of the ordinance and a future date to be fixed
byre, cattle-shed
cast, cut (turf); throw
censor, censure
citatione, summons
Clootie, familiar name for the devil
compeir, **compear**, present oneself, appear
contumaces, contumacious

conveinit, convened
decreit, decree
dedicat, **dedicate**, dedicated
delatis, accuses; **delatit**, **delated**, **dilat**, accused
deponed, declared, swore
divett, **deawet**, divot, thin piece of turf
dyet, church meeting
dyk, wall
dyvers, various
eneuch, enough
exautorate of, deposed from
faching = fauching; **[land] for faching**, [fallow land] due to be ploughed or harrowed
fact, deed
faill, thick piece of turf
fairy dairt, dart or arrow said to be used by fairies, sometimes identified with a neolithic arrowhead
falling, dying
fold, fald, fauld, piece of ground
folkis, people
gie'n, given, dedicated
goodis, guidis, livestock, cattle
guid, gweed, good
gueedwife, woman of the house, wife
guidman, man of the house, husband, tenant
haillis, heals
halie man, hellyman, holy man
heretaris, proprietors of land in a parish with responsibilities for church matters
hiest, highest
ingenuitie, nobility of character
intimat, announced, notified
keiparis, keepers
lattine, let, allowed to
ley, lye, untilled land, pasture
lowsin', unyoking
lunsaucht, lung disease
maines, Manis, home farm
meitt, appropriate
mett, measured
micht, might
moggan, woollen stocking
neist, nixt, next
nixttocum, next
nocht, not
nokis, corners
nolt; for ye noltis caus, cattle; for the sake of the cattle
ordained, ordeined, ordered
ower, over
parochin, parochine, parish
peice, peic, peix, peece land, piece of land
plewis, ploughs

pro 2do (*pro secundo*, Latin) for the second time
pro tertio (Latin) for the third time
process, bring to trial
quhairfor, wherefore, why
quhairupon, whereupon
quhat, what
quhen, when
quhilk, quhilkis, which
quhom, whom
quhy, why
rig, strip of land
rowme, possession
samen, same
seik, such
shot-a-dead, killed by magic
spreit, spirit
stand, endure without succumbing, survive
stanis, steinis, stones
summondit, summoned
tak, tack, leased land
testificatione, testimony, witness
the, they
theranent, about this, concerning this matter
toune, farm
trenched, dug a series of contiguous ditches
try, investigate
vas, was
ver, were
vt supra (Latin), as above
witsonday, Whitsunday, seventh Sunday after Easter
wynt, went
yair, there, their
yairof, thereof
yat, that
ye, the

TABLES

Case 1	**Elgin (Presbytery of Elgin)**
	27 August 1602
glakmarres	It is appoyntit that on Sonday nixttocum yat the men of glakmarres be summondit to compeir instantlie befoir ye sessioun to gif a ressoun quhy they reseruit a peix land to ye deuill callit ye gudman (KS)
	16 August 1603
	Robert keyth elder delatis baith blakhillis & glakmarres ill keiparis of ye kirk, seik folkis yair Iohn man Iames broun, alexander sandison elspet talzeour
	forther ye said robert delatis ye tennentis of glakmarres to haue left a peice land to the gudmane (deuill) for ye noltis caus (KS; CH2/145/2 ff. 108r, 132v; Cramond 1897–1908: 2.105, 145)

Case 2 **Rothiemay (Presbytery of Strathbogie)**

28 July 1631

The land in turterie dedicat to ye guidman ordaned to be ma nured (P; CH2/342/2 f. 10v)

Case 3 **Glass (Presbytery of Strathbogie)**

25 November 1646

seifvreight & stronah

The said day compeired William seifvright & georg<e> stronah in Glas & being accused of sorcerie In a loting & giueing over some land to the old goodman (as they call it) denyed the same & becaus it v<as> so alledgit they promised to manure said land / the bretheren taking the mater to yair consideratioun contino<wed> ther censure till the performance of this yair promis (P)

4 August 1647

seifvright & <s>tronah

Compeired William seifvright & george stronah in glas ordained to satisfie according to the former ordinance for ther sorcere vt supra (P)

18 August 1647

seifvright & stronah

mr george Meldrum reported that William seifvreight & george stronah had not obeyed the decreit of ye presbytrie vt supra

ver ordained to be summondit to ye nixt day to heir themselfs declared contumaces & ye censures of ye churche to proceid a ganist them. (P)

10 November 1647

seifwright sronah

mr george meldrum reported he vas at ye 2 admoni tion with William seifvright george stronah george robertsone for yair contumacie to ye decreit of ye presbytrie vt supra (P)

5 January 1648

seifwright stronah

mr george Meldrum reported yat William seifvright george stronah & george robertsone had satisfied the de creit of ye presbytrie & now ver absolued (P; CH2/342/2 ff. 70v, 76v, 78v, 79v; Stuart 1843: 71, for 25 November 1646)

Case 4 **Boyndie (Presbytery of Fordyce)**

29 August 1649

superstitious dayes

It was lykwys demandet if yair war any superstitious dayes vsed heir, or burialis within the kirk ansuered negatiue alwayes It is wes found yat ther wes some peice of land in this parochine wnlabored [called the halie man's ley *deleted*] dedicated to superstitious vses the minister ordeined to sie it labored (P; CH2/158/2 f.42v; Cramond 1886: 12)

Case 5 **Slains (Presbytery of Ellon)**

18 November 1649

Inquisitione for land calit ye goodmanes land

The said day the Minister requyrit of the elderis if they knew aney peices of land with in the Paroche that was calit the goodmanes land or fauld or dedicatit To satane or lattine ly wnlabourit they said yair was ane peic land in brogane calit the garlet ^ or guidmans fauld ^ within andro robes tak that was not labourit this manie yeires for quhat respect the knew not the Minister desyrit them to try quhairfor it lay wnlabourit (KS; CH2/480/1 p. 193; Rust 1871: 41–42)

Case 6 **Slains (Presbytery of Ellon)**

25 November 1649

Intimat to ye parochineris to delatit to ye session for land calit ye goodmane his fauld yat lyis wnlabourit

The said day the Minister did Intimat out of <ye> pulpet yat if aney mane within the paroche k<new> aney peice of land or parcell of grownd within the paroche that was calit the goodmanes land or the goodmanes fauld and lattine ly <wn> labourit yat they would delatit to ye sessione that the auneris yairof micht be summondit befor ye sessione

<de>latit ane p>eic of land belscamphie calit ye good manes fauld I>ames to be <> de

The said day Iames wilkeine elder delatit to ye sessione that thomas patersone tenent in bescamphie told him that yair was ane peice of land in his tak calit the goodmanes land and fauld quhilk was not labourit thes maney yeires the said thomas patersone to summondit to ye nixt sessione

9 December 1649

Thomas patersone to be summondit pro 2 (KS)

16 December 1649

Patersone to be Summondit

Thomas patersone to be summondit to ye nixt lordis day (KS)

23 December 1649

Patersone to be summondit pro 3

The said day the Minister and elderis being conveinit in sess<ione> and efter Invocatione on the name of god Thomas pater sone being sumoned and calit compeirit not ordanit to be summondit pro tertio (KS)

30 December 1649

<t>homas Patersone ordinance & promise

The said day the Minister and elderis being conveinit in sessione and efter Invocatione on the name of god compeirit thomas patersone and confessit that yair was peice land in his rowme calit the goodmanes fauld quhilk was this long tyme wnlabourit he is ordanit to labourit and promist to do so efter witsonday quhen it was for faching (KS)

(KS; CH2/480/1 pp. 194–197; Rust 1871: 42–43)

Case 7

Forgue (Presbytery of Turriff)

3 March 1650

This day normond Leslie & Iames tuickis in ye martenine hawing bein dilat to hawe gewin away a fauld to ye guidman as they call him to mak yair catell stand vpon citatione Compeired & both of them con fessid yat they wynt to a fald & promisit to lett it ly on laboured als long as they possessit yair takis & In testificatione yairof they did cast sum steinis in ower ye dyk of ye fald quhairvpon ye sessione Iudging it to be a most Impious & superstitious fact referit them both to ye presbeterie & ordered them to labour ye said fald vnder all hiest censor & lykwayes recomendit to ye elderis to mak Inquyrwies gif yair war any such landis within ye parish (KS; CH2/539/1 p. 93)

21 March 1650

Toux

Compeared Iames Towx in forgue and being accuised for dedicating some land to the gudman (as they speake) confessed that he and his nighbour Nor mond Irving in respect there goodis war falling resolued to lay out a peece land vnlaboured to essay if that might be a meanes to caus there beastis to stand the assemblie to be consulted what shall be the censure of those who does the lyke (P; CH2/1120/1 p. 92)

Case 8

Oyne (Presbytery of Garioch)

8 August 1650

Ther ar Three peices of land commonlie called the guidmans fold not laboured The minister ordayned to process them ay and quhill they labour the same, William law in ardyne, williame & Iames andersons elders and labourers of the ground ordayned to labour the pairtis of that land in yair posession & If not they to be exautorate of ther eldership disgracefullie, (P; CH2/166/1 p. 65; Davidson 1878: 308)

Case 9

Rathven (Presbytery of Fordyce)

26 September 1650

Lykwys it was demandit if yair wer any superstitious dayes keipt her, or burialis within the kirk, or any plot of land, wnlabored dedicat to the deuill caled the gud manis croft. it was ansuered yair was no such thing her. but yair wes a litle peice of land about nether bukie not labored but men vsed to cast faillis & deawetis on it. The presbiterie ordeinis yat it be labored (P;

CH2/158/2 f. 57r; Cramond 1885: 20)

Case 10 **Rhynie (Presbytery of Strathbogie)**

13 August 1651

The minister and rest of the Elders being remoued Sir William Gordoune of Lesmore declared as followeth … Lastly being asked whither or no ther was any land in that parisch that was giuen away (as is commonly said) to the goodman & used not to be laboured ansuered it was reported to him that ther some of that In his owne maines, bot that he had a mynd be the assi stance of god to cause labour the samen / quhairupon he was commended for his Ingenui tie in declareing it and exhorted to take paines shortly to haue it laboured. (P; CH2/342/2 f. 10v; Stuart 1843: 207–09)

Case 11 **Inverurie (Presbytery of Garioch)**

10 July 1656

Ther is land vithin the parochin dedicat to the deuill commonlie called the guidmanis fald,

It is ordayned that the minister & elders mak Inquirie throwghout the vhole parochin quhat land is dedicate to this purpose and ordayne the heretaris to quhom the said lands belongs to labour the samen othervise to process them (P; CH2/166/1 page marked X; Davidson 1878: 311)

8 March 1657

The ministeris report of obedience to the ordina<nce> of the / presbetrie anent sea / rching the parish<e> concerning some parcil<is> of land cald the goodmanis land.

The minister reports that according to the ordinance of the Presbetrie he with tuo elders viz androw watt and watt duncan had gone throw the parishe for searching if ther wer anie such land as the goodmans fold & he reports that after search having fund such that it was recommended be him & the tuo elders with him to the owners & possessors therof to labour these portions of land (KS; CH2/196/1 page marked X)

Case 12 **Rothiemay (Presbytery of Strathbogie)**

9 February 1690

Clark John Clerk delated guilty in geiveing over a peice off land as hellymans lye ordained to be summoned (KS)

23 February 1690

Clark Conveined Minister and Elders in session after Prayer

sumoned calt, and compeired not Iohn Clerk apointed to be <su>monded pro 2do (KS)

2 March 1690

Summoned, calt, and compeired Iohn Clerk questioned iff he had given over a peice off land as helly mans lye denyed

Andrew Wattsone, James Mill, John Stewart, and Thomas Hendersone appointed to be somonded against the next dyet to prove the forsaid scandall (KS)

16 March 1690

Session Conveined Minister and elders in session after prayer

Watsone wit: sumoned, calt and compeired Andrew Watsone as witnes

deponed upon oath that he heard John Clerk say that he had given off a peice off his land, because that Robert Hendry (or Hendryis<on>) his predecessour who possesst his toune formerly had 13 heads off horse and cattel that dyed

Mill wit sumoned, calt and compeired James Mill deponed that John Clerk had given off a peice land (not mentioning to whom) and that his father had done so formerly

Henderson wit sumoned, calt and compeired Thomas Hendersone denyed that he had given

ane (or anie?) part off his land as helly mans lye

Stewart wit: sumoned, calt, and compeired John stewart who deponed upon oath that John Clerk had given off a peice off his land a<s> helly mans lye that his beasts might thrive the better

said John Clerk was referred to the Presbitrie and the said depositions extracted so given to the Presbitrie (KS; CH2/416/3 pp. 36–38, 65–66)

Table 1

Case	*Record*	*Place*	*Owner/Tenant*
	Elgin		
1	Elgin, 27 Aug. 1602, 16 Aug. 1603 (KS)	a piece of land in Clakmarres	
	Ellon		
5	Slains, 18 Nov.1649 (KS)	a piece of land in Brogan	Andrew Robb
6	Slains, 25 Nov., 9, 16, 23, 30 Dec. 1649 (KS)	Belscamphie	Thomas Paterson
	Fordyce		
4	Boyndie, 29 Aug. 1649 (P)	some piece of land	
9	Rathven, 26 Sep. 1650 (P)	a little piece of land in the vicinity of Nether Buckie	
	Garioch		
11	Inverurie,10 July 1656 (P), 8 Mar. 1657 (KS)	some parcels of land	
8	Oyne, 8 Aug. 1650 (P)	three pieces of land located in Ardoyne and possibly elsewhere	William Law William Anderson James Anderson
	Strathbogie		
3	Glass, 25 Nov. 1646, 18 Aug., 10 Nov. 1647, 5 Jan. 1648 (P)	some land	William Seifwright George Stronach George Robertson
10	Rhynie, 13 Aug. 1651 (P)	some land in Mains of Lesmore	Sir William Gordon
2	Rothiemay, 1631 (P)	land in Turterie	
12	Rothiemay, 9, 23 Feb., 2, 16 Mar. 1690 (KS)	a piece of land	John Clark
	Turriff		
7	Forgue, 3 Mar. 1650 (KS), 21 Mar. 1650 (P)	A piece of land (or a fold) in the Martenine	James Toux Norman Leslie (or Norman Irving)

Table 2

NOTES

[1] Webster and Duncan: 162, 164–65. I am indebted to Dr Simon Fraser for supplying this reference.

[2] Kirk, ed.: 94; the manuscript source is National Records of Scotland CH2/121/1, p. 16. Margo Todd (219) quotes part of the text from manuscript but misreads 'mane' as 'May' and suggests a connection with the fairies which appears to be based on the supposed connection with Beltane arising from this misreading. Goodare (34, 46–47) corrects this error but unfortunately misreads 'knycht' as 'king'. I have expanded the abbreviation 'kny^{t}' which occurs in both manuscript records as 'knycht' in each case.

[3] Kirk, ed..: 13. The word 'kynd' in the printed text has been corrected to 'hynd' by reference to the source, Edinburgh University Library MS La.II.14, p. 5 Logie.

[4] *BUK* 1845: part 3, p. 834. Michael F. Graham (146) mentions this attempt to bring about legislation on this matter in the context of discussion of the creation of the Presbyterian system. John Davidson says (1878: 152): 'The order of the Church [in 1594] must have got scant attention, for it had to be repeated a century afterwards.' I have not succeeded in locating such a repetition.

[5] The claim that there was another case related to an accusation of witchcraft is the result of a misunderstanding. There is a mention of a croft in a dittay against Janet Wishart in Aberdeen in 1597 (*Miscellany*: 93), which has been taken by David W. Hood in the online 'North East Folklore Archive' to be an instance of untilled ground but the reference is to a piece of land belonging to Janet Wishart's husband identified as 'thi awin gudmannis's croft, callit Round About'. I am grateful to Dr Joyce Miller and Dr Lauren Martin for checking this item and confirming that there were no records of the untilled field called the good man's croft in the witchcraft database (Goodare *et al.*).

[6] In the secular context, there is a mention in a contract dated 1633 of a place called 'the Gudeman's Croft' near the Bass of Inverurie in the parish of Monkegy (later called Keithhall) in the presbytery of Garioch (Davidson 1878: 2, 152, 256–58; 1884: 8).

[7] All of these cases were mentioned in McPherson: 134–41. I am extremely grateful to Dr Eila Williamson for her expert transcription of these passages from photostat copies which I obtained from the National Archives of Scotland (now National Records of Scotland). Expansion of abbreviations is indicated by underlining and insertion by carat marks. Presumed missing letters are indicated by <>.

[8] I have been unable to trace this manuscript which McPherson calls 'James Brebner's "In the Presbytery of Turriff 200 Years ago."'

[9] This was evidently John Duns, minister of the Free Church at Torphichen from 1844 to 1864, who wrote a biography of James Young Simpson in which he mentions the incident (7).

[10] Macaulay 1764. I owe this interesting reference to Dr Aude Le Borgne.

[11] Diodorus of Sicily, Book XVI.22–23 (tr. Sherman: 300–303, and n. 4).

[12] Scott 1830: 89. Scott had evidently received the idea from David Dalrymple, Lord Hailes, for, after quoting from the 1594 Assembly recommendation, he says: 'Lord Hailes conjectured this to have been the *temenos* adjoining to some ancient Pagan temple.' (Scott 1803: 2.229, n.).

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Learning and Remembering Gaelic Stories: Brian Stewart

CAROL ZALL

ABSTRACT. Questions about how Gaelic storytellers have learned, remembered and performed their tales are key to understanding the Gaelic narrative tradition. This article examines the experience of Brian Stewart, a Scottish Gaelic storyteller, and the techniques he reported using for learning, remembering and telling traditional Gaelic stories. Mr Stewart learned his stories – native heroic or international wonder tales – from his grandmother Susie Stewart and his uncle Alasdair Stewart (also known as '*Alilidh Dall'*). Strategies considered include taking an interest in stories; repeatedly listening to tales being told by a more experienced tradition bearer; practicing in front of, and being corrected by, another storyteller; consciously reviewing and rehearsing tales; visualizing stories; and retaining a faithful memory of formulaic language or runs. The difference between learning a story and learning a song is also discussed. It is suggested that studying these strategies can contribute to a better understanding of the Stewarts' storytelling ethos.

Questions about the ways in which Gaelic storytellers have learned, remembered and performed their tales are key to our understanding of the Gaelic narrative tradition, yet this area of inquiry remains under-explored. How did Gaelic tradition bearers conceive of the tale tradition? Did they seek to memorise their material or did they view storytelling as more of an improvisational narrative form? Has there been one approach to storytelling that has dominated storytelling practices historically, or has there been much variation between the ways in which different storytellers approached their tales? These are just a few of the questions that arise in relation to the practice of Gaelic storytelling, and they form the backdrop to the research that I have pursued in regard to the Gaelic storyteller Brian Stewart.[1] In this article I will review the evidence that I have gathered about the way in which Mr Stewart learned and remembered his repertoire of tales, and will consider how this information can contribute to a better understanding of Mr Stewart's storytelling technique and ethos.

Brian Stewart

Brian Stewart was born to a family of Gaelic-speaking travellers in the north of Scotland on 20 February 1911, and he died nearly a century later, on 17 June 2008. His given name was Alasdair, but he was always known as Brian to his family and friends.[2] Mr Stewart and his family were based at Rhemarstaig, close to Lairg, in the winter, and travelled throughout the north of Scotland during the summer. Travelling established routes by horse and cart, they were tinsmiths and horse traders.

As a boy, Brian Stewart heard and learned stories from his father's mother, Susie Stewart, who was born in Argyll in 1846. The other main source for his stories was his paternal uncle, Alasdair Stewart (Susie Stewart's son), also known as '*Ailidh Dall*' ('Blind Ali') due to the fact that he was blind in the later years of his life. While *Ailidh Dall* had a formidable reputation as a storyteller (he was described by Calum Maclean as 'the best Gaelic storyteller ever recorded on the mainland of Scotland'),[3] *Ailidh* reported that he learned many of his stories from his mother Susie. Indeed, according to Brian Stewart, it was Susie who was the acknowledged master storyteller in the family. As such, it is clear that Brian Stewart learned his tales from two storytellers whose skills were considerable.[4]

From the evidence of extant recordings, the Stewarts were masters of the long heroic tale, and the stories that Brian Stewart remembered best were native heroic or international wonder tales. Thus Mr Stewart's repertoire was representative of the type of long hero stories and adventures which were most popular amongst the Gael up to modern times.[5] Brian was

first recorded telling stories for the School of Scottish Studies in 1958. He was recorded again by fieldworkers from the School on several occasions in 1973 and 1978. Between 1993 and 1995, I recorded Mr Stewart's stories again, and also recorded songs and information about his family history. Much of the discussion that follows is based on the recorded conversations I had with Mr Stewart about how he learned and remembered stories.[6]

Repeatedly Hearing Stories

To turn to the question of how Brian Stewart learned his material, he told me on many occasions that he learned stories by 'taking an interest' in them as a young boy and by repeatedly listening to his grandmother Susie tell them. It was Mr Stewart's habit as a boy to go to his grandmother's house after supper in the winters and to ask her to tell him stories, often until it was time for him to go to bed. He often described this period with comments such as:

> '....I was always with my granny, you know.... I'd be always to, in the house with her and, at night and, especially at night and, when my, *Ailidh Dall* would be playing the bagpipes, then I was very interested in the bagpipes.... and then, when I came down, 'Oh, come on, Granny, 'til you give us a story now.' ....And then she was starting to tell the story and, och I would be very interested in the story and, I picked them all up, you know.'[7]

Here, as on other occasions, Brian Stewart says that he was ''interested'' in the stories and the music and describes how he ''always'' asked his grandmother for stories. On another occasion, he described how he would visit his grandmother until he 'got every one' of her stories:

> **Brian Stewart:** '.... my granny. Because her house was not, where she lived wasn't very far away from where I lived in, as a boy. And I would be, after supper every night I was down at my granny's. And I would be there 'til bedtime....'
> **Carol Zall:** 'So she, she must have had loads of stories, or did she tell you the same stories many times?'
> **B.S.:** 'Aye. Not, not the same story every time, no, she would be telling me different stories'.
> **C.Z.:** 'Different stories. Could she tell you different stories every night?'
> **B.S.:** 'Oh, more or less.... Until I got every one that she had and then she....'
> **C.Z.:** 'Then she'd tell them again?'
> **B.S.:** Aye.'[8]

Here Brian Stewart identifies interest in the stories and repeated exposure to them as important factors in the learning process. This account of repeated requests for stories from an older family member is very similar to experiences described by other storytellers. Barbara McDermitt, for instance, states that the Scottish storyteller Stanley Robertson has identified 'hearing the same tales told many times' as one of the ways in which he learned stories as a child (1986: 356), and that the North Carolina storyteller Ray Hicks used to '... ask his Grandfather Ben to tell the same stories over and over again' (338).

Some more light may be shed on the question of transmission of stories within a family if we consider some comments which Brian Stewart made in reference to his uncle Donald, who was one of his paternal uncles (and therefore a brother of *Ailidh Dall*). Mr Stewart said

that he told stories to his uncle Donald when the latter was 'wanting to refresh his memory on the old stories again.' Brian's words on the subject were as follows:

> 'Oh, I told it to my own uncle. Because he was wanting to renew, to refresh his memory on them. I went over and told him some of them again, over again.... [H]e was away a long time in Aberdeen, and. When he came back to these parts again, he, he was wanting to refresh his memory on the, old stories again.....'[9]

The fact that Brian Stewart told the stories to Donald Stewart so that his uncle could 'refresh' his memory is another indication that repeatedly hearing stories from a more experienced family member was an important way in which the Stewarts learned their stories – whether as children or as adults. It is particularly interesting that Brian Stewart told his uncle the stories rather than discussing or summarising them for him; one might ask whether this means that Donald Stewart felt that he had to hear the stories *told* again in order to remember them properly. It is possible that it was important to hear the entire story as it should be told, rather than breaking it down and analysing it in terms of its constituent parts. This also may indicate that Brian Stewart and his uncle related to the stories as complete entities which could only be dealt with intact, starting from the beginning and continuing through to the end. In this regard it is interesting to consider some comments made by the South Uist storyteller Donald Alasdair Johnson, which indicate that rather than having a summary of a story in mind when he began to tell it, the story emerged bit by bit as he proceeded: 'As you go on ... the thing comes upon you.... It's easier to tell a story right through ... from the beginning.... It comes little by little to me....' (MacDonald 1983: 118-119). This suggests the possibility that the story was not consciously broken down into constituent parts in the mind of the storyteller, but instead was perceived as an organic whole, and that the very process of telling it triggered the act of remembering. As such, Johnson's comments resemble some that Brian Stewart made on the topic of piping. In discussing how he remembered various pipe tunes, Brian on one occasion said: 'Do you know, when you'd be playing them, like everything else, it would come into your mind more of them.'[10] This comment can be taken as an indication that one pipe tune would elicit another in Mr Stewart's mind, just as one part of a story might elicit or trigger the next section of the story during the storytelling process .[11]

Repetition and Correction

To return to the issue of learning stories, while it is not particularly surprising that many storytellers would identify taking an 'interest' in stories as being important to the learning process; most of us are probably more curious to know *how* storytellers manage to learn their material. On occasion Brian Stewart went beyond saying that he was simply 'interested' in the stories and made comments which cast more light on the learning process. During one interview, he described how he would repeat stories back to his grandmother after he had heard them from her:

> **C.Z.:** 'Did you ever tell stories in front of your grandmother, did you ever tell your grandmother the stories?'
> **B.S.:** 'Oh, yes I told my uncles stories.'
> **C.Z.:** 'And what about your grandmother? Susie?'
> **B.S.:** 'Oh yes, I, sometimes I repeated them back ... to see if I would have them all, you know. And, if I hadn't got them all, you see, she would say, 'Oh, you missed this bit out of that.'
> **C.Z.:** 'Would she?'
> **B.S.:** 'Aye.'

C.Z.: 'Uh huh. And then would you tell it again?'
B.S.: 'Aye.'
C.Z.: 'Uh huh. Until you got it right.'
B.S.: 'Aye, got it right, yeah.'
C.Z.: 'Mmm hmm. Right. And –'
B.S.: 'That's the way I learned.' [12]

Here we discover that Brian Stewart actually repeated the stories back to his grandmother and that she would correct him if he had not remembered a story in the right way. This indicates that Susie Stewart believed that there was a correct way to tell a story, or at least that she considered that there were set elements to be included in it, rather than conceiving of the story in a more improvisational way. Similar behaviour has been described by other storytellers. Donatien Laurent tells how the Breton storyteller Jean-Louis le Rolland, after hearing stories from an old weaver, would repeat them to his sisters. According to Laurent, '...when he was wrong, they said: "No! Here you went too far! You have omitted this episode or you put it in the wrong place. – You have to go further back"' (113).

We may speculate that this type of correction from close family members was not uncommon in the Stewart family, and certainly such practices have been mentioned in relation to Gaelic storytelling. In his 1945 'The Gaelic Storyteller,' James Delargy states that '... it is no uncommon experience of mine to hear the listening women interrupt and correct the speaker' (181), and D.A. Binchy speaks of similar behaviour (cf.: 9).[13]

Reviewing or Practising Stories

In addition to making an active effort to learn the stories from his grandmother as he heard them from her, it also seems to be the case that Brian Stewart would go over the stories in his own mind and practise them. This is not unexpected, as there are many documented instances of Gaelic storytellers reporting similar practices. Delargy cites examples of storytellers who practised their stories before going to the *taigh cèilidh* (185, 186, 188, 193) and Donald Archie MacDonald reports that the storyteller Angus MacLellan stated that he consciously went over stories in his mind (1983: 123). On one occasion, Brian told me that he used to review the stories directly after he had heard them from his grandmother, and that he still practiced them at the time of our interviews, when he was in his eighties:

C.Z.: 'Say when your grandmother would tell you a story, afterwards, would you go over it in your head to, to get it straight?'
B.S.: 'I just would go over it in my own mind, you know.'
C.Z.: 'Right. Do you ever go over stories in your own mind now?'
B.S.: 'Yes, I do.' [*Tone of voice is very emphatic*.]
C.Z.: 'And remember them…?'
B.S.: 'I'll go over them in my own mind'.
C.Z.: 'Right. And do you -'
B.S.: 'I go over what the minister preaches on a Sunday.' [14]

Here Mr Stewart's comment that not only did he go over stories in his mind but that he also went over what the minister preached, gives us some insight into the general workings of his mind; he was in the habit of replaying not just traditional material, but any material which he found to be of interest. This is not the only time that Brian Stewart said that he deliberately reviewed stories in his mind. In a 1974 interview with Donald Archie MacDonald, Brian was asked whether he ever thought about or analysed the stories he told. The exchange was as follows:

D.A.M.: '*'S am bi sibh fhèin uaireanan, nuair a bhios sibh leibh fhèin, bi sibh a' smaoineachadh air na stòiridhean tha seo, a' toir an eanchainn asda mar sin?*
B.S.: *'Bidh. Bidh. Bidh. Bidh mis' 'dol mach ... 'smaoineachdainn orr', bidh mi 'dol air ais cho fad' agus tha cuimhn' agam, 's rudan dhen t-seòrs' sin... Aye. 'S air rudan a bhithinn mi fhèin 'dèanamh, agus dhen a', 'm pàirt dhen an sluagh bha cuide ruinn an uair sin, 's bha beò an uair sin. 'S bhithinn 'dol air ais, tha mi 'creidsinn gu' bheil na h-uile gin mar sin, gu' tèid iad air ais uairean, a's a' chèill aig', gu' smaoinich aid air ais.* '[15]

[**D.A.M.:** 'And do you yourself sometimes, when you're by yourself, do you think about these stories, analyse them like that?'
B.S.: 'I do. I do. I do. I'll be going out ... thinking about them, I go back as far as I can remember, and that sort of thing... Aye. And about things I myself used to do, and about the, some of the people who were with us then, and were alive at that time. And I would go back, I think that everyone is like that, that they go back at times, in their mind, that they think back.']

Not only did Brian Stewart think back on the stories, but he also would think back over past times and about people he used to know. It is significant that Brian made this comment in 1974 when he was 63 years old and was still leading an active life. Were it not for this earlier evidence, one might have wondered whether Mr Stewart's habit of retreating to the sanctuary of memory and stories in his mind was a result of being in a nursing home[16] where his everyday experience was not as interesting as his past. But even when Brian Stewart was much younger, he was in the habit of revisiting the past in his mind.

Interest in a Story or Song Identified as Key Factor
On another occasion when I was questioning Mr Stewart about how he managed to remember stories and other information, he first attributed his good memory to God's help, but then went on to explain the process further as he related the ease with which he could learn a song from the radio:

C.Z.: 'Have you ever thought about how you manage to remember so many stories?'
B.S.: 'Oh, no, but I don't know, but I just, trust in God. It's Him that's keeping them maybe, not me. The Lord is keeping my memory. And it's Him that does everything. That's the way I see it, anyhow.'
C.Z.: 'But do you ever, kind of practice them in your head, or try to remember the words, or anything like that, or when you were younger did you, did you make a special effort to memorise words, or things like that?'
B.S.: 'Oh, yes, I may have. If for instance .... I was wanting to have it. Like, eh, when ... the radio was there, on the other day, when Andy Stewart was singing on it, singing a song, ... Glencoe. I picked that up. And, another one, he said, he said ... "Come on to the ceilidh, come on to the ceilidh, by the sea of Loch Broom. Come by – travel the morning, and wait 'til noon. Come at night, and go home by the moonlight."'
C.Z.: 'And if you heard a story, say, how long would it take you before you would know it?'
B.S.: 'Oh, not very long.'

C.Z.: 'Like, if you heard a story now, someone told you, you know, a different story, *Stòiridh a' ... Chòcaire,* but it was a different *Stòiridh a' Chòcaire-'*
B.S.: 'Well, if I was interested in it, I would learn it right away.'[17]

Here Brian's point that he could pick up words to a song, or a new version of a story, if he 'was wanting to have it', again emphasises the fact that it was his interest in a story or song which was important to the learning process.

Learning from Individuals
In addition to stating that he learned stories and songs if he was interested in them, on several occasions Mr Stewart went on to give precise details about the people from whom he learned particular songs. This is significant, as it shows that Brian had fixed memories of when he first learned certain songs. In one instance Brian described learning a song from his wife, and then went on to describe how he had learned another song from a crofter with whom he was working in Durness:

[*B.S. has just sung a song*.]
B.S.: 'It was my late wife that had it, it's from her that I got it from. One night we were way up west there, and, the two of us, sitting in a tent and, she started singing and, she started singing that song, and I made her sing it 'til I picked it up.'
C.Z.: 'How long did it take you, how long does it take you?'
B.S.: 'Oh, just a while of a night. I got it. She sang, she sang it two or three times, but och, she was a good singer. She's a beautiful singer. She would [put] a lovely voice to it, you know.'
[*There is a break in the recording, which resumes with B.S. singing another song, after which the conversation resumes as follows*:]
C.Z.: .... 'How do you remember it? It's amazing.'
B.S.: 'Well it's quite easy.... Well I learned it in Durness itself, from a man that I was working with, in Durness, he, he had a croft. And he had a pair of horses, and he said to me, "Can you plough?"
"Yes," I say, "I can plough."
And, he says, "Would you take," he says, "that pair," he says, "and plough this [bit of] land for me."
So I – he was Charlie White, the name of the man, in Durness. So I, I ploughed it, and then I harrowed it, and he sowed it.'
C.Z.: 'How long did that take?'
B.S.: 'Och, it would – half a day.'
C.Z.: 'Half a day. And when, did he teach you the song while you were working?'
B.S.: 'Pardon?'
C.Z.: 'Was it while you were working that he gave you the song?'
B.S.: 'Yes....'[18]

Here the fact that Brian Stewart's precise memory of a specific person, time and place is tied to the learning of a song is worthy of our attention for it may cast light on the learning process. On another occasion when I asked him where he had learned a particular song, his response was as follows:

[*BS has just finished singing 'Lord Ronald, My Son'*.]

C.Z.: …. 'And where did you learn that song?'
B.S.: 'Aye, how did I hear that?'
C.Z.: 'Where did you hear it?
B.S.: 'Och, I don't know, I heard it every – I heard it first, well a chappie that was working with me, in the nineteen-thirties. From Scourie.'
C.Z.: 'Scourie?'
B.S.: 'Aye, Scourie in Sutherlandshire.'
C.Z.: 'Uh huh'.
B.S.: 'His name was Tommy MacLeod.'
C.Z.: 'Mmm hmm. What was – what kind of work were you doing?'
B.S.: 'Eh, we were taking in a new bit of land.'
C.Z.: 'Uh huh.'
B.S.: 'And we -'
C.Z.: 'The Forestry Commission?'
B.S.: 'Aye – no, it was just a local job. And there was .... trees been cut down, and the root died off, they had to blow the roots up, you know, to get the – so that it could be plowed. So he came from Scourie, Tommy MacLeod...'.[19]

Again, the identification of the particular individual from whom the song was learned, as well as the specific place and time that this occurred, is noteworthy. It is significant that Brian only recounted such specific details of time and place in relation to songs, the implication being that while the words to songs had to be memorised, stories were not learned word by word. This gives weight to the supposition that the learning and memory processes related to mastering stories are different from the straightforward memorisation used for committing songs or verse to memory. While learning a song may be a fixed act of memorisation or learning which Brian Stewart could clearly remember and identify, the acquisition of stories seems to have taken place over time and by a different process, and therefore could not be dated with the same precision.

Here Mr Stewart's memory and learning seem to have operated in a similar way to that indicated by another Gaelic storyteller, Angus MacLellan. In an article by Donald Archie MacDonald, MacLellan is quoted as saying that he differentiated between the way in which he learned set verses and the way in which he learned or remembered a story. Discussing a particular story which contained a set section of verse, MacLellan said that while he had a clear visual picture of much of the action of the story, he had no image corresponding to the verse:

> 'You can learn the verse as you would learn a song or any kind of poetry... You needn't see a picture of it – or you can see one if you want to, but you don't have to see it ... but I think you have to see the rest of the story as it happens ... or you can't remember it.' (1983: 122)

Ray Hicks of North Carolina also differentiated between the processes used for learning stories and learning songs, explaining that memorisation played a role in the learning of songs but not of stories. Discussing the telling of stories, Hicks said, 'It ain't like a song ya see. A song ya have to memorize ta make it sing on its tune, ya see' (MacDermitt: 337).

Learning and Remembering Formulaic Language

Another point of interest in relation to Brian Stewart's memory is how he learned and remembered formulaic language – the set phrases, dialogue and descriptions that occurred in his stories in much the same way each time. Although it is clear that this language was

important to the stories, as it occurred over and over again in the same form, it is equally clear that it was difficult for Brian Stewart to consciously articulate the role which this language played in his storytelling. Often he was at a loss to explain how he had remembered the formalised set language of dialogue and runs, but it is clear from his storytelling that he remembered these set phrases and set pieces as he heard them and that he repeated them in nearly the same way each time he used them. On some level he must have recognised these phrases, descriptions and bits of dialogue as being important to the story and must have internalised the concept that he should retain them unaltered.[20]

I discussed the issue of formulaic language with Brian Stewart many times. On a number of occasions, we considered the somewhat enigmatic term '*fios feagal an aon sgeul*,'[21] which is the object of the hero's quest in Brian's version of *'Stòiridh Ladhair'*.[22] Although Brian could not say what the term meant, he had retained it in his tellings of the story. When I asked him about the phrase in March of 1995, it was clear that the phrase did not mean much to him:

> **B.S.:** 'It, the, the other word, I don't know what it means, I don't think it means anything, just a, a word.'
> **C.Z.:** 'Right, but that's what your grandmother would have said.'
> **B.S.:** 'Aye.'
> **C.Z.:** 'So that's, that's the way you learned the story.'
> **B.S.:** 'Aye, when I was a boy, you see, I would be always, eh ... in with her.'[23]

Brian could not really explain how he had remembered the term, which he said he did not think 'means anything', and he reiterated the explanation that he was 'always in with' his grandmother. As we continued our conversation, Brian went on to mention another enigmatic term which occurs in his stories, the phrase '*fear agus filidh*'.[24] As we discussed the term, Brian explained what he thought it meant:

> **B.S.: '***Fear agus filidh*.'
> **C.Z.:** 'When you have words like that, that don't necessarily make that much sense, is -'
> **B.S.:** 'Well the *fear*, is a person.'
> **C.Z.:** 'Mmm hmm'.
> **B.S.:** 'And *filidh*, *filidh* was the name.'
> **C.Z.:** 'Uh huh, right. And are those -'
> **B.S.:** '*Ceann fear agus filidh* – is the head.'
> **C.Z.:** 'Mmm hmm.'
> **B.S.:** '*Ceann fear*: the head of that fellow, *filidh*.'
> **C.Z.:** 'Mmm hmm, right. And how did you remember, say, things like *fios feagal an aon sgeul*, like, those special wo– were those words special in any way?'
> **B.S.:** 'No, no, they weren't special.'[25]

Brian's on-the-spot analysis here of the phrase *ceann fear agus filidh* is most interesting. With his comment '*Ceann fear*: the head of that fellow, *filidh,*' Brian made it clear that the phrase did not make that much sense to him; and yet what is also clear is that he remembered and retained it unaltered despite its ambiguous meaning. Interestingly, however, he stated that such words were not 'special'.

On another occasion, I questioned Brian about these same formulaic phrases, and he told me that *fios feagal an aon sgeul* was '*dìreach facal*' ('just a word').[26] We then discussed some more of the story, and when I asked him to translate *fios feagal an aon sgeul* he replied

by saying 'I cannot do it'. Similarly, he could not translate the somewhat archaic phrase *trì buaraichean matha sìdh* ('the three fetters of the fairy [women]'), another phrase which he used in a be-spelling formula and which is common in Gaelic stories.[27] He thought for a long while and then said, '*O chan eil fhios agam*' ('Oh I do not know'). While Brian was unable to say how he had remembered the words or what they meant, he did answer in the affirmative when I asked him whether the formulaic phrases were important to the story, although he could only explain his retention of them by saying, 'Och, I remember them, all right'.

Interestingly, despite the uncertainty as to the meaning of these phrases, on one occasion Brian did acknowledge that the formulaic words he used remained the same from one telling of a tale to another:

> **C.Z.:** '....there are certain parts in it with special words, you know, like, like when you – '*Tha mi a' cur mo gheasan – tha mi a' cur'* – what is it?'
> **B.S.:** *'Mo chrosan 's mo gheasan'* –
> **C.Z.:** *'Mo chrosan 's mo gheasan,'* and it's '*trì màtha'* –
> **B.S.:** *'Trì buaraichean màtha sìdh.'*
> **C.Z.:** 'Aye, that's -'
> **B.S.:** – '*nach stad aon oidhche agad ... gus am faigh thu fios feagal,'* whatever it was.
> **C.Z.:** 'That's right, *'fios feagal an aon sgeul'*. But that's always the same. Like every time you would tell that story, those words are always the same –
> **B.S.:** 'Aye, always the same.'[28]
>
> [**C.Z.:** '….there are certain parts in it with special words, you know, like, like when you – 'I put my spells – I put my' – what is it?'
> **B.S.:** 'My spells and my crosses' –
> **C.Z.:** 'My spells and my crosses,' and it's 'the three [mothers]' –
> **B.S.:** 'The three fetters of the fairy [mothers]'.
> **C.Z.:** 'Aye, that's -'
> **B.S.:** – 'you won't stop one night ... until you obtain for me true knowledge, whatever it was'.
> **C.Z.:** 'That's right, 'true knowledge of the one tale'. But that's always the same. Like every time you would tell that story, those words are always the same -'
> **B.S.:** 'Aye, always the same.']

I then proceeded to ask Mr Stewart how he learned such words, but he was unable to offer any explanation other than that he had learned the stories from his family, adding, 'Oh I would remember the words of it, if I'm interested in anything.' Thus once again Brian explained his ability to remember the archaic phrases by saying that he took an interest in them, but was unable to further describe the process by which he had learned or retained the words.

Visualisation and Visual Memory

Related to the way in which Brian Stewart would go over stories and speech his mind (such as the minister's sermon mentioned above), is the question of what Mr Stewart's visual memory was like and whether he pictured his stories in his mind. On one occasion when we were discussing memory, Mr Stewart himself brought up the subject of visual memory:

> **C.Z.:** 'When I was talking to you yesterday, you said that when you were a little boy you would just remember the stories. How did you remember them?'

B.S.: 'Oh, just it, I don't know, because I was like that, you know, anything I was interested in I could keep it.'
C.Z.: 'Right. Do you have a good memory for anything you want to remember?'
B.S.: 'Yes, I have a good memory. Thank goodness I have a good memory.'
C.Z.: 'Mmm, that's a great thing to have.'
B.S.: 'And I have a good memory of you in my, eh, I'll be seeing you in my vision. I'll always see -'
C.Z.: 'Do you have a good memory for faces?'
B.S.: 'Yes, I have a good memory of faces. I'll always see you in my vision….'
C.Z.: 'Can you remember places, too, the way places look?'
B.S.: 'Yes.'
C.Z.: 'Outdoors, and scenes and things like that?'
B.S.: 'I can see it in my vision, you, your face and your way you're speaking to me, I see for years in my...' [*B.S. trails off*.]
C.Z.: 'Right. So when you tell a story, do you see, do you see it happening?'
B.S.: 'Aye.'
C.Z.: 'Do you see the people, like when you tell the *Each Dubh*,[29] do you see the horse?'
B.S.: 'Aye.' [*Very emphatic tone of voice*.][30]

Brian Stewart thus provided a clear indication that he had a strong visual memory and that he often pictured people in his mind. Most significant for our consideration of Brian as a storyteller, is his confirmation that there was some visualisation of stories in his mind as he told them, and that he visualised the characters in his stories. During another interview we again discussed the issue of visualisation and Brian's comments made it clear that his imagination and memory were highly visual. When I asked him whether he saw the characters of his stories in his mind's eye as he told a story, he answered me very definitely that he did. He also went on to state that he occasionally visualised friends and acquaintances, adding, 'I go back, I'll be sitting in bed, I go to bed and I'm thinking on a lot of things. My late wife, my father and mother and, I was very fond of my mother and father, you see....'[31]

While Mr Stewart's comments on the visual aspect of his imagination are interesting and indicate a high degree of internal visualisation accompanying his thought processes in general, they are a far cry from comments made by Donald Alasdair Johnson[32] which indicated that Johnson saw the story happening as he told it, and that this process was vital to his ability to tell stories. Indeed, the evidence which Alan Bruford cites in his article 'Memory, Performance and Structure in Traditional Tales' (1983) indicates that visualisation functions in different ways for different storytellers. For Brian Stewart, it is clear that he had a highly visual memory and imagination and that the stories and their characters had a visual dimension in his mind, yet there was no evidence to suggest that visualisation could be singled out as having played a distinct or specialised role in his storytelling, as may be the case with other individuals.

Summary

Having reviewed the different types of evidence relating to Brian Stewart's learning and remembering of stories, we might ask what conclusions, if any, we can draw about these processes, or whether any patterns are apparent. Although it was difficult for Mr Stewart to identify a specific process which had enabled him to learn and remember stories, it is clear that he identified taking an interest in the material as a key factor contributing to his storytelling abilities. Repeated hearing of the same tales was also an important part of the learning process. Of particular interest is his description of the way in which he listened to

stories told by his grandmother and then repeated them back to her in order to learn them accurately. This is important evidence about the way in which Brian learned the stories, and about the way in which he and his grandmother – and possibly other members of the Stewart family – viewed the material and the manner in which it was to be transmitted from one generation to another. Also significant is the evidence that Brian actively rehearsed stories and other information in his mind, and that often he consciously reviewed memories and a wide range of material when he was on his own. Such conscious rehearsal is another important indication of the way in which Brian regarded stories and storytelling, implying that the stories had to be practised in order to be told in the 'correct' way.

Brian Stewart's comments on visualisation indicate that, like many other storytellers, he did indeed 'see' stories and characters in his mind's eye as he told them or thought about them; however, he never singled out visualisation as playing a crucial role in his ability to remember the stories, and the implication is that visualisation was just one aspect of a complex cognitive process associated with Mr Stewart's storytelling. Further evidence about the ways in which he learned and remembered comes from Brian's ability to pinpoint individuals from whom he had learned specific songs and the occasions on which he had learned them. Such evidence adds weight to the supposition that the process of learning a fixed song or a specific verse or group of verses differs from that of learning a story, both on a cognitive level and perhaps on a neurological one as well.

In contrast to his comments about learning songs, Mr Stewart's comments on formulaic language, and his difficulty in explaining how he retained such language, indicate that here the storyteller was not consciously aware of the memory and learning processes involved, and that the acquisition and retention of this material must have taken place on some other level of consciousness. It indicates, too, that the conservative values surrounding such formalised language were ones that Brian had internalised without, perhaps, being fully aware of it. The fact that he seemed to be unaware of the meaning of certain archaic set words or phrases, yet was able to consistently reproduce them in his storytelling, indicates a belief (on some level) that these words were important to the story and that they must be retained, whether or not the storyteller or listener fully understood them. This, in turn, may reflect the unspoken assumptions about storytelling with which Brian Stewart was raised.

Conclusion

My discussions with Brian Stewart about how he learned and remembered his stories revealed a number of complementary strategies by which he acquired and retained tales, and also elicited information that hinted at the storytelling ethos of the Stewart family more generally. While we can never have direct knowledge of the processes which occur in the mind of a storyteller as he or she learns or tells a story, the examination of these processes may shed light on the questions of memory and learning which are so central to Gaelic storytelling. By pursuing these questions we can only improve our understanding of the tradition, and in so doing we may raise further questions which will lead us to understand the tradition in new ways.

NOTES

[1] For a more detailed discussion of the scholarship regarding learning, memory and performance in relation to Gaelic storytelling, see Zall 2010b: 209-210.

[2]This nickname derived from the place of Mr Stewart's birth, *Ach a' Bhràigh* ('field of the brae'), which is located near Altandhu on the road past Achiltibuie on the Coigeach headland in Sutherland, at latitude 58 degrees north and longitude 5 degrees 25' west.

[3]Quoted by Hamish Henderson in Neat: 71.

[4]For more complete biographical information about Brian Stewart, see Zall 1998.

[5]For discussions of the place of such tales in Gaelic tradition, see Bruford, 1987; Delargy: 192, 211; and MacDonald 1989: 187.

[6] For a more extensive study of Mr Stewart as a storyteller see Zall 1998; and for additional details related to Mr Stewart and the Stewart storytelling tradition, see Zall 2006, 2010a and 2010b.

[7]30 October 1993, Tape 1 of 1. N.B. All recordings were made by the author unless otherwise noted. Copies of these recordings have been deposited in the archives of the School of Scottish Studies of the University of Edinburgh. It is my understanding that at present, not all of these recordings have been assigned SA numbers. However some of the recordings I made with Brian Stewart are to be found on SA1993.48-53.

[8]14 April 1993, Tape 2 of 2.

[9]14 April 1993, Tape 2 of 2.

[10]1 April 1995, Tape 1 of 2.

[11]The concept of 'organic unity' has been discussed and studied by neurologists and musicologists in relation to music, recitation and other metrical structures. Referring to these as 'flowing dynamic-semantic structures', the neurologist Oliver Sacks says that with such structures it is typical that 'each part leads on to the next, that every part has reference to the rest. Such structures cannot usually be perceived, or remembered in part – they are perceived and remembered, if at all, as wholes' (61). The way in which some Gaelic storytellers remember their stories appears to be highly similar to the way in which such 'flowing dynamic-semantic structures' have been described. See Rubin for more on the ways in which the research of cognitive psychologists and others who study memory is relevant to the study of traditional narrative.

[12]31 March 1995, Tape 2 of 2.

[13] Interestingly, it appears that little research has been done in relation to such correction: Ruth Finnegan notes that '... there has until recently been relatively little culture-specific work on social strategies relating to memory....' (1992: 116).

[14]15 April 1993, Tape 2 of 2.

[15]School of Scottish Studies recording SA1974/27/A-B1.

[16]Brian Stewart was in nursing homes from 1993 until his death in 2008. .

[17]30 March 1995, Tape 1 of 1.

[18]16 April 1993, Tape 1 of 2.

[19] 2 July 1994, Tape 1of 2.

[20]For a fuller discussion of Brian Stewart's use of formalised language, set dialogue and runs see Zall 2010b and Chapter Four in Zall 1998.

[21] *'Fios feagal an aon sgeul'*: a phrase usually associated with spells of obligation that require a character to obtain knowledge of the fate of a certain king. Brian Stewart's phrase '*fios feagal an aon sgeul*' is related to similar terms found in versions of '*An Tuairsgeul Mòr*' and the Irish story '*Fios Fátha an aon scéil*', also sometimes known as '*Fios Fátha an doimhin-scéil*'. See *Béaloideas* I: 105, where '*fios fátha an doimhin-scéil*' is glossed as 'the significance of the profound tale'. Cf. also Gillies 1981: 54 for discussion of Gaelic tales which deal with quests for '*fios fátha an aoinsgéil ar na mnáibh*' or similar. For a discussion of 'Be-Spelling Incantations` see McKay: 504. Cf. Zall 2010b: 235 fn 20.

[22]'*Stòiridh Ladhair*': a native hero tale which has some similarity to the '*Tuairisgeul Mòr*' story and which contains the '*Rìdire gan Ghàire*' ('Knight without Laughter') motif.

[23] 31 March 1995, Tape 2 of 2.

[24]This is another term which Brian used in his versions of '*Stòiridh Ladhair*'. Literally it means 'a man and a poet'. It was suggested to me by the late Donald Archie MacDonald that the term may have evolved from the proper name '*Fearghus Filidh*' ('Fergus the Poet'), which could have been re-interpreted as '*fear agus filidh*' over time.

[25]31 March 1995, Tape 2 of 2.

[26]13 May 1994, Tape 2 of 2.

[27]The spell is typically used to place characters under obligation; many examples of it may be found in collections of Gaelic stories, such as J.G. McKay: 228 and following, and in the archives of the School of Scottish Studies. See MacDonell and Shaw: 88 note 6 for some discussion of the origins of the phrase. Also see Bruford 1969: 196. Brian's phrase *'matha sìdh'* probably evolved from an earlier phrase such as *'màthraichean sìdh'* ('fairy mothers'), an example of which can be found in MacNeil: 52. For more on this formula see Zall 2010b: 217-218 and note 22.

[28]30 March 1995, Tape 1 of 1.

[29] '*Stòiridh an Eich Dhuibh'* ('The Story of the Black Horse'), a native hero tale related to A.T. 531, is one of the stories in Brian's repertoire.

[30]15 April 1993, Tape 2 of 2.

[31] 1 April 1995, Tape 1 of 2.

[32]See MacDonald 1983.

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2010a 'Mouth to Mouth: Gaelic Stories as Told Within One Family.' *Proceedings of the Harvard Celtic Colloquium*, vol. XXVI and XXVII, 199-217. Cambridge and London.

2010b 'Variation in Gaelic Storytelling.' *Scottish Studies* 35: 209-243.

Book Reviews

Air Bilean an t-Sluaigh: Sealladh air Leantalachd Beul-Aithris Ghàidhlig Uibhist a Tuath[1]. Maighread A. Challan. Belfast Studies in Language, Culture and Politics 23, Queen's University Press, 2012. ISBN: 978 0 85389 988 4 (pbk). pp. xvi + 256; map, illus.

In this book, Margaret Callan provides an overview of the traditions of her native island in which she demonstrates an appreciation not only of their formal diversity and imaginative vibrancy, but more particularly of their social context and function within Gaelic culture. In doing so, she brings to the study of Gaelic oral traditions an appreciation of the concerns of ethnographers and anthropologists over the past century, and demonstrates their compelling importance not only to those whose interests are literary or historical, but also to scholars seeking to understand how pre-literate societies expressed and maintained their cultural integrity and values through many generations.

Modelled upon an outline suggested by American anthropologist W. R. Bascom,[2] Callan's analysis reviews the social contexts in which oral traditions were exchanged and kept alive; describes the cultural understanding, practices and values of Gaelic society, of which its oral traditions are a verbal reflection; and examines the ways in which oral traditions functioned to ensure the well-being and long-term survival of that society. Her work adds an important dimension to the study of Scottish Gaelic oral traditions, which has long focused on the content of the traditions themselves rather than upon the cultural context in which they were transmitted. Because Callan writes in Gaelic, a short summary of her analysis may be useful here.

While readers of *Scottish Studies* will be aware of the central importance of the céilidh house in the passing on of tales, songs, and other lore, we are usefully reminded that such transmission occurred elsewhere as well. Wherever people's daily work took them – to the moor for the cutting of peats, to the loch to wash blankets, to the machair to lift potatoes, to the grinding-mill or the smithy, to the market to sell livestock, to a fishing-boat at anchor, to a neighbour's house to plan for the fank – all such settings provided occasions for the exchange of news and knowledge. Indeed, some types of work such as milking and spinning were facilitated by the accompaniment of song, while the waulking of tweed actually required it. Apart from the work context, social occasions such as engagements and weddings, the obsequies following a death, and various aspects of religious practice afforded settings in which oral traditions and knowledge could be exchanged and recalled to mind.

Citing I. M. Lewis' definition of *culture* as 'the sum of learned knowledge and skills – including religion and language – that distinguish one community from another and which, subject to the vagaries of innovation and change, passes on in a recognisable form from generation to generation',[3] Callan discusses the features of social life that most clearly define the Gaelic culture of North Uist: the high value placed upon 'community kinship' and co-operation; the gender-based understanding of roles and authority; the importance of memory, and people's pride in being able to remember and deliver a song or story precisely as they had learned it; the importance of family relationships, and the acknowledgement of traits and talents reckoned to run in certain families. She shows how most oral traditions reflected those cultural values in everyday life: the practice of *sloinneadh* and the naming of children, which enabled people to keep track of relationships within a small community, and to show pride in

and respect for their ancestors; the use of proverbs and tales, which demonstrated the close connection between language, knowledge and philosophy; the hymns and sayings that revealed people's religious belief and spirituality; and the role of local bards in formally expressing the history, experience, emotions and values of the community.

In addition, she mentions those traditions traceable to pre-Christian belief-systems, such as the observance of certain holidays (Callainn, Bealtainn, St Bridget's Day); belief in fairies, omens, ghosts, the evil eye and the second-sight; the practice of moving 'sunwise' when travelling in a circle or setting out on a journey; the designation of certain days as 'lucky' or 'unlucky' for certain types of work or activity; the practice of blessing the fire, while smooring it, to ensure that it stayed alive overnight. Such customs – not to mention the frequent appearance of supernatural themes, characters and elements in tales, songs and other lore – run counter to the expressed values of an observant Christian community, and reflect a frequently-noted difference between the substance and meaning of oral tradition within a culture, and how people actually conduct themselves within that culture – a conundrum which, as Bascom puts it, 'raises significant questions about the...psychological implications and the sociological functions of folklore'.[4]

Oral tradition in the Gaelic-speaking communities of North Uist functioned to support the culture of the people, thereby helping to ensure the health and viability of the community. As entertainment, the telling of stories and singing of songs not only helped fix these items in the memories of those who performed and listened to them, but also reinforced commitment to those qualities that characterized an excellent performance, and acknowledged the importance of the material being performed as it had been learned 'from the old people'. Whether in the *céilidh*-house, at the celebration of an engagement or wedding, at the time of a death and burial, or at worship, oral traditions of all kinds validated the culture, strengthened the unity and identity of the community, and renewed people's familiarity with the tales, songs, hymns and other lore that were their common heritage.

Oral traditions also played a crucial role in the education of children, whose first lessons took the form of songs, rhymes, proverbs, riddles, and short tales teaching the wisdom of the ancestors and knowledge of local history, geography and genealogy. Even an adult, however, might need an occasional reminder – often a proverb – that his behaviour or choices might have negative consequences. In such fashion oral traditions inculcated and supported the community's values and rules for conduct, and gave people a means of enforcing the rules while avoiding open conflict or embarassment.

In her final chapters, Callan explores the reasons behind the gradual attenuation of oral tradition in Uist, and the collapse of traditional culture in the second half of the twentieth century. The horrendous loss of life that islanders suffered during the two world wars (particularly the Great War), and the emigration of many survivors, significantly reduced the population, sapping the confidence of those who remained and lowering the frequency of important occasions (such as engagements and weddings) when the community came together. The improvement of housing stock moved the fireplace from the middle of the floor to the gable-end, a change that many informants said altered the dynamic and affected the frequency of house-gatherings. Community 'concerts' failed to provide the conversation and companionship of the céilidh houses, or the variety and vigour of the songs, stories and anecdotes that had animated those earlier gatherings. As a result of all of these changes, people had less opportunity to hear, retain and pass on traditional material, and the knowledge that had been cherished for so many years was greatly diminished within a single generation.

The Gaelic world is not the only culture to have suffered apocalyptic change over the past hundred years. Many rural cultures – including English-speaking ones – have been transformed by mechanization, the collapse of collaborative work practices, the coming of electricity and the telephone, and colonisation by outsiders. A man with a tractor does not need a horse or a blacksmith; fencing eliminates the need for a cowherd; central heating replaces peat-fires; and much of what people need – from foodstuffs to fertilizer – can be purchased from the mainland. New housing schemes obviate the need for several generations to live under one roof. Telephone service and the entertainment media keep people at home. Employment with the County Council or the Army brings money into the community, but also creates inequalities among neighbours. The tragedy for North Uist and places like it is, that the survival of Gaelic culture depended entirely upon the survival of communal work practices and living conditions. When these were swept away, most of the opportunities for the sharing of oral tradition were also lost.

As if these historical and economic pressures were not enough, however, Gaelic culture and identity also suffered deliberate and sustained assault over many years. What the SSPCK could not achieve in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries came to pass in the twentieth: the erosion of Gaelic as a community language. Under pressure from an influx of non-Gaels into the Gàidhealtachd, an educational system that provided instruction exclusively through the medium of English, and the influence of mass media and mass culture, Gaelic speakers lost confidence in their native language to the point that, today, wherever a gathering contains even a single non-Gael, English is used. Even church services in the Gàidhealtachd are now held in English. Worst of all, too many Gaelic-speaking parents assume that Gaelic will disadvantage their children, and speak English at home.

Callan's monograph represents an essential step towards a more holistic appreciation of the traditional life of Gaelic-speaking Scotland and its response to a century of apocalyptic societal, economic and cultural change. The fact that the book is written in Gaelic offers hope that the death-knell of the language has not yet sounded, and that a register appropriate for scholarly discourse may be established in Gaelic, as has happened with Irish and Welsh.[5] By providing a model for others, Callan's book has established a vital beachhead for such an effort.

The author has, however, overstated her case in a few respects. In making extensive use of the Sound Archive of the School of Scottish Studies, she has drawn some conclusions regarding the work of the School that should not go unchallenged. Principally, it should be recognised that, while the School provided resources for the tape-recording of oral traditions as required to support the work of individual researchers, it was not initially envisaged that these tapes would become part of a permanent sound archive. How else can we explain the fact that recordings made by Calum Maclean in the School's early days were transcribed and then erased so that the tapes – which were expensive – could be used again? Fortunately, this policy was reversed early on. Even then, however, I am assured by Dr John MacInnes – who began collecting for the School in the early 1950s and joined the staff in 1958 – there was never a systematic plan for the School's collecting activities: no assignment of 'territory' among researchers, and no direction given as to what sort of material should be recorded, what questions should be asked, or what methodology should be followed. Individual researchers were left to decide where and how they wished to focus their collecting activities, with some researchers far more committed to collecting than others. This lack of co-ordination may be lamentable, but it does not justify Callan's

statement that 'scholars of that era had little interest in or respect for North Uist material' and that they devalued the traditions of North Uist, Harris and Lewis in respect of both collecting activity and subsequent publication. [6]

Despite John Lorne Campbell's assertion that the richest veins of tradition survived in Catholic South Uist and Barra, collectors from the School of Scottish Studies carried out considerable field work in Protestant areas from an early date. Among the Sound Archive's treasures are recordings made from 1948-51 in Lewis and North Uist for the Linguistic Survey of the Gaelic Dialects of Scotland by the late Derick Thomson – recordings which include material of considerable relevance to Callan's study.[7] Dr MacInnes told me that he never heard anyone disparage North Uist as a site for collecting; indeed, he cited the efforts not just of Thomson but also of D. A. MacDonald and particularly of Angus John MacDonald, who made it his business to call at every house in both Uists and Benbecula, whether they were known to be homes of active tradition-bearers or not.

As regards the well-worn 'etic' vs. 'emic' argument, there should surely, by this time, be room for compromise. Dr MacInnes, an 'insider', tells me that his informants would have considered it very odd of him to ask questions to which he already knew the answers; their interest was in sharing the oral traditions themselves – the songs, stories and *seanchas* that they feared were on the point of being lost. By contrast, it must have seemed natural to Margaret Fay Shaw's informants to answer questions about the social context of oral traditions, given that she herself was an 'outsider'.[8] What seems clear is that before embarking on any field-work the observer needs to speak the community's language and be thoroughly familiar with its philosophy and values. Although an insider would have a clear head-start in both respects, it is notable that Callan cites the work of John Shaw and Thomas McKean – both of whom are Americans – as models for the sort of culturally-informed and sensitive study she advocates.

From the founding of the School onwards, the advancing age of most informants made the collecting of oral traditions in the Gàidhealtachd a race against time. While some researchers – Eric Cregeen in Tiree, and ethnomusicologist Thorkild Knudsen, who explored the repertoires of Calum Ruadh Nicholson in Skye and Murdina MacDonald in Lewis – preferred to stay in one spot and dig deep, the School's Gaelic-speaking collectors tried to cover as much ground as possible, knowing that they themselves possessed all the contextual knowledge they would need to evaluate and assess what they had collected when they had the leisure to do so. With the passing of these researchers, as of the culture within which they were raised, it is high time for such evaluation and assessment to gather pace. Margaret Callan is to be commended for her contribution to this effort.

V.S. BLANKENHORN

NOTES

[1] Roughly translated: *From the Mouths of the People: A Survey of the Transmission of Oral Tradition in North Uist*.
[2] 'Four functions of folklore' (1954). *Journal of American Folklore* 67: 333-49.

[3] *Social Anthropology in Perspective.* New York: 1977: 17.
[4] *Op. cit.*: 338.
[5] The author informs me that an English translation of her book is planned.
[6] *'Tha fianais ann gun deachaidh dìmeas agus dearmad a dhèanamh air beul-aithris Uibhist a Tuath le sgoilearan an ama,'* p. 5; also p. 6, *'Tha aon rud dearbhte: ann a bhith a' seachnach Leòdhais agus na Hearadh anns an obair chruinneachaidh aca; ann a bhith a' dèanamh maill ann a bhith a' tòiseachadh air cruinneachadh farsaing ann an Uibhist a Tuath; ann a bhith a' taghadh stuth à Uibhist a Deas fhoillseachadh air thoiseach air stuth à Uibhist a Tuath, chuir sgoilearan Gàidhlig, math dh'fhaodte gun fhiosta dhaibha fhèin, ri [beachd Fhear Chanaidh].'*
[7] SSS manuscript 'Early Recorded Discs in Archive', compiled July 1962, lists the following recordings from North Uist informants: evictions (logs 999, 1031, 1215, 1245); raids from Harris (1001); horse-racing (1012, 1017); a drowing at Sollas (1013); cattle lifting (1013-4, 1210, 1240); a highland funeral (1023); a seafaring story from Houghharry (1066); a speech improvised on the eve of a wedding (1093); privations in North Uist, 1914-18 (1099); illicit distilling (1203), 1248); poaching (1243, 1259); emigration (1241), ploughing matches (2796); the second sight (1244); and other reminiscences (1207-9, 1220-1). These are in addition to a large number of tales, traditional songs, and songs from Roderick MacKay, 'Bard Iollaraigh' (logs 1109-1111) and Dòmhnall Ruaidh Chorùna (1151-1201).
[8] *Folksongs and Folklore of South Uist,* London (1955).

A Traveller in Two Worlds. Volume One: The Early Life of Scotland's Wandering Bard. David Campbell and Duncan Williamson in Conversation. Edinburgh: Luath Press Limited, 2011. ISBN 978-1906817-88-6. £14.99.

A Traveller in Two Worlds. Volume Two: The Tinker and the Student. David Campbell. Edinburgh: Luath Press Limited, 2012. ISBN 978 1 908373 32 8. £14.99.

Duncan Williamson (1928 – 2007) was a traveller, a singer, and a storyteller regarded by some as the best in the English language. He was certainly widely known and admired for his presentation of a vital tradition central to Scottish verbal art, and his performances have given rise to a substantial literature consisting of publications based on his own recitations, as well as being featured in works by major folklorists and in learned articles in academic journals. In his two volumes David Campbell, a close friend and storytelling colleague of Duncan, has provided a welcome addition to publications on Duncan and his tradition. Campbell is a practiced storyteller, and his work is presented as a single story in two parts. He makes clear from the outset his personal and professional debt to Duncan, yet his story is not confined to the form of a personal memoir: it makes frequent and effective use of 30 tapes of interviews recorded over 10 years with Duncan, and with his friends, associates and family members.

Volume 1 covers Duncan's youth and early manhood in traveler society up until 1971. As we would expect, the style is anecdotal: the book opens with the first meeting between Duncan and Campbell in 1987. Some episodes parallel those familiar to us from the earlier recorded autobiography *The Horsieman* (1994), an engaging and varied account of life on the road. We are introduced to the setting of Duncan's boyhood in Argyll and his family background, which includes colourful sketches of his traveller relatives that suggest much in

terms of culture and individual character. We become aware of the travellers' widespread kinship networks, and the large and varied store of skills acquired in the traveller upbringing, including cures, trading and hawking, and foraging for food. In the interviews concerning this stage of his life, Duncan speaks at length about the travellers' awareness of nature and concern for the environment; also their concepts of wealth: topics familiar to today's audiences at public performances of folk tradition. Perhaps as a further means of communicating with the larger world, Duncan emphasizes the educational aspects of childhood enculturation in traveller society, extending from their experience of nature to social interactions with the settled population. In this connection he mentions, as if in passing, the many incidences of active prejudice against travellers. Here, more than elsewhere, he provides us with a view of his own introduction to his oral tradition, introducing us to his maternal grandmother, big Bett MacColl, by his own account a Gaelic speaker, and a major source of the songs he was to perform. Duncan's talent for performance surfaced at an early age with the winning of a medal for poetry recitation at his school in Furnace. This is followed by a notable anecdote of his first storytelling performance, age 7, at the same school where he was given responsibility for the younger children by the teacher and entertained them with the story of the Fox and the Crow: 'So, here was all the little ones and me a seven-year-old. I'm telling them the story.' The consequent change in the teacher's perception of him together with additional requests from the children for more stories led Duncan to aspire to become a storyteller: 'I was going to be as good as my grandmother.' Interestingly, as the anecdote reveals, Duncan's awareness of the power of stories and his wish to tell them, seems to have been awakened in a context outside that of traveller society. A further constant theme to appear is the pervasive sense of loss over the passing of the traveller way of life, which emerges regularly in Duncan's interviews and song compositions. Any preoccupation with the past, however, is relieved by Campbell's technique of forwarding to the time of recording, and to their own developing relationship. There is also the occasional tale from Duncan, by way of illustration.

The world portrayed in this first volume is of a fairly typical traveller existence, albeit an adventurous one. Much of Duncan's youth was spent acquiring a large variety of trades, extending to drag-line fishing and boxing. It ends with two significant developments in Duncan's life: the marriage to his first wife, Jeannie, to start up a family; and his emergence as a traditional singer. During his adolescence, he had begun singing, apparently to some acclaim, at the odd *céilidh* in Argyll. A recording visit from Helen Fullerton, a friend of Hamish Henderson, proved to be the catalyst, and Campbell notes that there was already a sense outside of the traveller world that something important was emerging, where traveller traditions had a central part to play. From his description of the opening up of opportunities, Duncan seemed almost presciently aware of the potential for his own future:

> 'But I wanted to get out there, to be with people, to sing. This kind of gave me enlightenment about what to do. It was coming up for the 60s and folk music was taking a grip and here was me with all these beautiful songs, a knowledge of songs and stories that some people had never had. That's all I wanted to do. I'd never heard nor never been to The School of Scottish Studies, even though they told me about it.' (236).

A premonition of the future challenges in Duncan's chosen path appears in the reluctance of his wife, Jeannie, to release him into his development as a singer; her feelings were echoed by other members of his traveller family in later years.

In Volume 2, the focus shifts away from traveller life to a more mainstream context, and things begin to take on a life of their own. Together Campbell and Duncan describe at first hand and to great effect what took place in the encounter between the values and demands of the travellers' world, and the larger society with its rewards and expectations. As a narrative thread to hold together an ever-changing and frequently chaotic stream of events, Campbell uses his evolving personal and professional relationship with Duncan and their shared commitment to traditional storytelling. Campbell's writing style throughout is anecdotal and relaxed; yet the issues, questions and agendas encountered are substantial ones that relate directly to the ever increasing number of interactions between 'traditional' societies with their exponents, and audiences and participants from larger, more powerful societies. The story is resumed some years following Duncan's marriage, with the deaths of his wife and of his parents and the responsibility of caring for his own children. Campbell conveys an increasing sense that Duncan's life has reached a watershed, and an inexorable feeling that things will never be the same again. It is certainly true that opportunities and changes for traveller performers arose from the folk revival, and Campbell helpfully describes the context of this larger movement in Scotland. The movement included the promotion of a 'folk consciousness', for which Duncan's background, experience and intelligence had admirably prepared him, and from the late 60s he began singing at festivals, gaining a far wider exposure. Having attracted the attention of academics, sometime in the mid-70s (dates differ according to sources) he was invited to sing at the School of Scottish Studies. His entrance into this and other realms of the '"otherworld' was precipitated by his meeting Linda Headlee, a postgraduate student from the US who, we are told, was the first to record his tales. The long-term and fruitful collaboration that was to result from their meeting, stemmed from a reciprocal fascination with the other's world. Linda describes her own search for an alternative to the limitations of her American background, and her transition from what she perceived as a disjointed world to that of the travellers, with an 'aesthetic … firmly connected with their way of living' (139). Campbell then provides an insightful account of a committed collaboration between two gifted individuals from widely differing cultures, centring on folklore materials. The crossing of boundaries that this alliance entailed, however, was not always easy on either side. Linda's choices were subject to questioning and scrutiny from observers and colleagues, including an academic supervisor: 'Is it possible for an American postgraduate to conceal her identity from those to whom she is hawking paper flowers? I am sure not, and I fear that sooner or later people will begin asking questions' (53). Nearly four decades later, we can wonder how such questions might be received by today's active, professional performers and teachers of Scotland's traditions - including academics - who have originated from beyond its borders.

Duncan's crossing of boundaries appears to have met with wider external acceptance, but as he and Campbell both recount, the social and personal consequences were eventually felt. Pooling their complementary skills and abilities from both worlds, the couple launched on an ideal collaboration, and Linda rapidly became a talented hawker with an ability to work with institutions. It was around that time that Hamish Henderson suggested Duncan publish a book of his stories (89), and Linda proved to be adept at negotiating the publication of the first collection, *Fireside Tales of the Traveller Children* (1983), and the many that followed. Linda was also able to extend Duncan's activities to regular performances of storytelling in the school system, where he excelled. He encouraged Campbell to perform with him in what became an apprenticeship and then a partnership. Such relationships between the cultural mentor and the outside apprentice are an essential and emerging aspect of folklore that has

never been adequately explored in the literature and Campbell recounts his experiences, which were not always easy, with candour and good humour.

The new set of commitments inevitably necessitated changes, not the least of which was a move from the gelly tent to a small cottage. Duncan's growing fame led to a widening of his circle of friends, attracting large numbers of visitors who were generously received and entertained. This period of happiness was tempered by continuing questions for both the traveller and the student. Duncan, in terms of his background and the social commitments of his earlier life, could not have stated his situation more clearly:

> 'But I chose Linda because it was something different, it was another world. It was a world that I knew nothing about, a world of other people, not of my own culture, not of my own class. Of course, she found the same thing.'
>
> 'Now here I was caught in the middle. I'm caught right in the middle between two cultures, two worlds. One life. Only one life to see through. Now was I going one way or the other?' (119, 108)

Campbell handles the account of the various forces at work with tact and a constant awareness of the cultural dimensions at play. In communicating the larger issues he perceives, his delivery draws on the strengths of traditional narrative, relying more on anecdote and verbal art than on surface analysis. He makes no claim to be an ethnologist, yet his account strikes a sensible balance between the theoretical extremes of ethnographic description and has much of interest to offer those in the field, recalling the priorities advocated by Barre Toelken in his exemplary work with North American native peoples (*The Anguish of Snails* 2003: 3). In making clear his own participant role as a close friend and apprentice to Duncan, along with his encounter with traveller traditions and the effect that these had on determining his own life direction, Campbell makes no claims to 'objectivity'. Nevertheless, many of the anecdotes and descriptions in the book are anchored by the tape-recorded interviews, introducing a welcome 'polyvocality'. This technique allows for a balanced and varied portrait of his mentor and their relationship, while managing to avoid the pitfalls of the self-reflective 'me-ethnography' that began to appear in academic publications from the 1970s. It is taken as a given that all human cultures are constantly changing, and that the world's cultures, extending from the 'small' one described here in microcosm to the 'large' ones, are connected in ways we have only begun to perceive.

The final chapter, dealing with the years following Duncan's death in 2007, serves as an epilogue; it recalls the timeliness of his appearance on the Scottish folk scene, and the continuing influence of his storytelling on contemporary storytellers and audiences. What Campbell has brought us is an absorbing story of a complex individual and the people closest to him; one who was possessed of deep loyalties and a broad vision for the future role of a tradition in Scotland to be shared by all.

JOHN SHAW

Keith Norman MacDonald's Puirt-à-Beul. The Vocal Dance of the Scottish Gaels. William Lamb ed. Taigh nan Teud 2012. ISBN 978 1 906804 10 7. £15.00.

Puirt-à-beul "tunes from the mouth", more commonly known as 'mouth music', are a form of verbal music noted over the Gaelic speaking area of Scotland for centuries. They have attracted a small amount of commentary, learned and otherwise, including theories of their origin arising from the proscription of musical instruments. The most complete and authoritative collection to be published, the work of Keith Norman MacDonald (1834 – 1913) of Skye, first appeared in 1901, and in a more recent edition in 1931. The editor of the present edition, William Lamb, provides all of the materials from the earlier editions, with the tunes converted from the original sol-fa to conventional musical notation, and the Gaelic re-edited for consistency. The collection consists of 116 items, including reels, strathspeys , jigs, miscellaneous dance melodies and a variety of song airs. A number of items in the collection appear nowhere else. Aside from the three songs from the Faroe Islands that appear somewhat incongruously at the end, the range of genres is representative of what we would find in Highland communities.

As Lamb indicates in the brief and colourful biography provided, Keith Norman MacDonald had access from birth of an excellent education and wide social contacts. Much like his song collecting contemporary Frances Tolmie, he directed his advantages toward the study and promotion of the Gaelic traditions of Skye. An accomplished fiddler, he is best known for his *Skye* and *Gesto Collections*, which occupy a prominent place in the printed repertoire of Scottish fiddle music. His uncle, Neil MacLeod of Gesto, had produced a work on piping in 1820 and had taken down transcriptions of *canntaireachd* from a MacCrimmon piper; his regard for traditional music was very likely an influence on his nephew. MacDonald's interests, and the scope of his writings, were wide ranging. His medical training and service in Burma led to publications on local medical practices; his publications on religion would have been considered in those days to be of a decidedly liberal bent. He was a contemporary, friend and ally of Alexander Carmichael, and in his later years produced several books on Gaelic tradition as well as compositions for the violin.

In his introduction, Lamb addresses the main questions surrounding *puirt-à-beul,* and it soon becomes apparent that the genre is not as trivial as previous treatments would suggest. In his discussions of its origins, Lamb draws on a wide range of sources including linguistic, literary and historical, and relates the associated melodies to printed music collections from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The upshot of this multidisciplinary approach is the suggestion that a good portion of the tunes are not recent compositions, and may well antedate by some time the earliest published sources. Regarding the origins of *puirt-à-beul*, cogent reasons are given – now well known to ethnologists in Scotland – against an association between their emergence into performed tradition and the proscription of various forms of music and dance following Culloden. The evidence instead indicates a close link between the *puirt* and the developing instrumental music tradition in the time before the first tune publications of the eighteenth century, with a useful chronological analysis provided of the first publications of the tunes in the collection (23). Turning to the words, the editor draws our attention to opportunities for attempting to date some of them from internal evidence associated with a specific historic event. Another association that emerges here, and with various items throughout the collection, is that with dance songs which are occasionally reflected in the words accompanying the tune. The association with dance, however far back it goes, is reinforced by early accounts of the performance of *puirt*, drawing on sources such as the travel description by Alexander Campbell, author of *Albyn's Anthology,* of a performance occasion combining *puirt* and dance in North Uist during his journey throughout the western Highlands and Islands in 1815. The dance aspects of the *puirt* are examined closely by the editor, with reference to dance songs originating in medieval times

or before, and passing on to the performance aspects from the time that records became available. The association of *puirt* with circular dances is particularly intriguing, and Lamb points out parallels here with the waulking song tradition. The question as to whether *puirt-à-beul* were a viable means of accompanying dance with any regularity is dealt with carefully and in some detail. The custom of group singing, observed here and in North America, has the advantage of allowing for continuous delivery of the dance music and the ability to obscure the occasional error (27). It is demonstrated as well that the duration of singing, based on the required number of bars at widely observed tempos, falls well within the capability of singers recorded during the last century.

One of the strengths of the present edition is the way in which it places the collection in the larger context of published Scottish traditional music. Keith Norman MacDonald, not always the most careful of editors, included a substantial number of items whose sources were not attributed. These have been traced, and embrace collections by Patrick MacDonald, Alexander MacDonald (Inverness/Ness-side 1902), Frances Tolmie, and Alexander Campbell (*Albyn's Anthology*). Each item in the collection is prefaced by the compiler's original comments, and provided with detailed notes by the editor at the end of the book. A detailed reading with the tune names in Gaelic and Scots, and the accompanying introductions and notes is, to the reviewer's mind, the best introduction to information surrounding the central Gaelic tune repertoire presently available. In the Musical Notes and Commentary the author gives the recorded version when available on the *Tobar an Dualchais* website, where the performance can be heard; the source of the earliest publication of the item; the published source drawn on by MacDonald; its appearance in Cape Breton oral and instrumental tradition; interpretations of the words and possible historical content; and other members of the same 'tune family'. Between the audio links and the traditions attached to each item, the effect is to bring the collection alive in a way that other printed collections have not achieved before. Endnotes and a useful bibliography are provided, together with an index of titles, including all of those in Gaelic and the English ones in common usage.

For those interested in any aspect of Gaelic music, this new edition of a heretofore largely inaccessible but central work will prove to be immensely useful. The editor's work is imaginative and thorough, and ever conscious of the important relationship of the genre to the rest of Gaelic culture. Its applications will range from a reliable source for the performance of *puirt-à-beul* to new directions in research on Gaelic verbal and instrumental music.

JOHN SHAW

Hamish Henderson, A Biography. Timothy Neat. Volume 1 *The Making of the Poet* (1919-1953) Edinburgh: Polygon, 2007. £14.99. Volume 2 *Poetry Becomes People* (1952-2002). Edinburgh: Polygon, 2009. £25.00.

Timothy Neat's two substantial volumes constitute the first biography of Hamish Henderson. It was clearly a monumental task, and involved tackling a large and to some extent disorganised archive of personal papers, ranging through ten thousand letters to a series of remarkable creative notebooks full of draft poems and translations, reflections and jottings. Already, one consequence of the biography is that the archive has been systematically reviewed and prepared for cataloguing and preservation. Neat's use of the letters and creative papers is exemplary, allowing the subject to speak for himself, and by

so doing introducing most of us for the first time to these hidden seams. But Neat is also a storyteller, and to some extent companion on the journey, since he was a creative colleague and close friend of Henderson's later years. The storytelling has two aspects. In the first, Neat opens up areas of the life that have hitherto been closed off or the subject of mythologising. These include Henderson's upbringing as an orphaned child by enlightened church institutions in England, the identity of his father, the pivotal war years, his involvement in direct nationalist 'guerrilla' actions in postwar Scotland, the apparent failure in later years of his personal poetic gifts, and his sexuality. Though not all of these matters are definitively resolved, Neat lays out the ground with skill and sensitivity. The other aspect of Neat's storytelling relates to his gifts as a filmmaker as well as a biographer. He sounds some big cultural and political themes to give an epic tone and scale to the overall shape of the narrative. In his view, Hamish Henderson's life and work have a defining role in remaking Scotland's identity and in the championing of an inclusive, passionate sense of humanity. To this end, Neat accepts the mythologising as valid, affirming its role in defining the full heroic stature of his subject. This aspect of the work will inevitably divide critics and perhaps some readers, since it challenges the more academic canons of biography. Neat though remains true, in this as in much else, to the spirit of his subject, as Henderson himself consistently challenged academia with his own heady brew of poetic learning and political advocacy. Writing a while after publication of the completed work, it is interesting to note the widespread reception of Neat's work and the reactions evoked. These are characterised mainly by puzzlement. Why, reviewers ask, is Henderson not better known, and what exactly is his significance? Ethnologist? Poet? Activist? It is as if the sheer size, the scope and the diversity of Henderson's achievements are hard to assimilate. Also, there remains an elusiveness stemming from Henderson's presentation of himself, or lack of presentation, since few major public or artistic figures have been less interested in personal status or public definition on their own terms. The answers to this enigma lie in Neat's work, though sometimes the wealth of the material may obscure them. Henderson, in Neat's fashioning, is not just the poet, but the bard - one who intuits and articulates the collective, and speaks with prophetic urgency and insight in times of crisis. For Neat this far outweighs Henderson the scholar, significant as were his field collecting and publications for the School of Scottish Studies following its founding in 1951. It also outweighs political or educational or social considerations since all of these, for Henderson, were contained in the poetic vocation. As he wrote in an unpublished Workers Education Association lecture in Ireland in the late forties, quoted by Neat:

> Art depends on the society. In primitive societies the poet or bard was an honoured person. Integrally part of the community. His songs or hymns were a part of the reality for the people (the poet's 'illusion' of the harvest field was part of the reality)…In all class societies the completeness of the artist's perception of reality is to a certain extent crippled.....Even in the period of rising imperialism - the robust self-confident capitalism of the Victorian age could still produce a Dickens - but in this anxious, despondent, febrile period of late capitalism artists have become more and more isolated, more and more shut in on themselves.....Poets of course realise this - realise what has been lost. The Scot MacDiarmid, and the Irishman Yeats have expressed it with poignancy...But others have retreated into 'contempt', into what would seem to be a contempt for life.....What is the alternative? (Volume 1: 235)

Henderson was writing and speaking these words at the same time as he was receiving the Somerset Maugham Prize for his own wartime poetry, 'Elegies of the Dead in Cyrenaica'. It explains why there was no disjunction for Henderson between the elegies of war experience and the making or collecting of songs. Only those who do not appreciate the artistry of Henderson's later songs can speak of him 'giving up poetry'. The overall poetic achievement has been garnered by Raymond Ross in the *Collected Poems and Songs*, edited in consultation with Henderson before his death, and it is now further supplemented by Neat from the notebooks. These lay out the seamless legacy of a fully conscious and committed artist who understood his vocation to be 'integrally part of the community', animated by a poiesis that fuses personal inspiration, translations and folk song in an uncommon common art. Such was Hamish Henderson's alternative. But there is another level or resonance. In Neat's interpretation, Henderson is a wounded bard, one who has suffered personally and communally. Henderson is separated from his mother at a traumatic age and cut off from the Scottish environment and culture in which he has invested his earliest sense of familial identity. He is consoled and nurtured in the fellowship of the Anglican church and later of comrades-in-arms, including the Italian partisans, but his inner loss and yearning seek identification with a wider community. Through his intellectual growth, his artistic ambition, and his European experiences, Henderson harnesses these psychic energies into a radical passion for human unity, grounded in Scotland. In my view, Neat is wholly correct in placing the emergence and expression of Henderson's distinctive poetic vocation at the centre of the life. This is reinforced through the epic dimension of the biography, which is in effect 'Poetry and the People', as the individual poetic talent is given back to the carrying stream of the tradition through Henderson's later role as parent and symbolic figurehead of a widening cultural renaissance in Scotland. This wide ranging phenomenon is very inadequately covered by the term 'folk revival', as Neat's account of Henderson's many friendships and interactions demonstrates. The woundedness of Henderson's vocation relates intimately to the emotional power of his art, but also to the paradoxical hiddenness of so much of his personal experience. His preference for losing self in the communal is reflected in his love of congenial *céilidh*-making, which becomes both bacchanal and communion. Sexuality and family are not definitively expressed or dominant, since energies constantly transfer to embodying a collective or communal tradition that has to be energised, reformed and carried forward. Anonymity, or at least a lack of self-definition, is desirable because, this keeps open the channels of communication, and of the bardic gift. When the gift fails, then it is time to surrender life itself to the flow. Hence the passive thread interwoven through the later years. The warmth and acceptance that Henderson found amongst Scotland's Travelling People is emblematic in Neat's account of his vulnerability, and of how through poetry and people, he turned his wound to a wider gift. This transformative 'turning' is the theme of the lengthy Romance Tale '*Am Maraiche Màirnealach*' that Hamish Henderson collected from the Sutherland patriarch, Ali Dall Stewart. It is one of the finest folk narratives ever gathered from Scotland's riches, and clearly struck an emotional chord with Henderson as he walked alongside the Sutherland Travellers, recovering from the traumas of wartime service. Sheila Stewart, another vital Traveller tradition bearer, describes the reciprocal relationship between Henderson and this long marginalised culture:

> ‘Hamish told us about the Homes he was in. He had a hard life but he said it wisnae hard like the Travellers had - living in tents wi’ every hand against them. He had the grieving for his mother - but we had ‘the Tinker’s curse’.....People hated us and were terrified of us. It was Hamish who drew us back to the fire.’ (Volume 2: .49)

For Henderson, bringing Traveller culture into a renovated cultural mainstream was both a restoration of Scottish identity and a healing act of integration - personal, communal and poetic. Neat identifies a strong religious impulse running through Henderson’s life. But though he remained affectionately attached to his Scottish Episcopal heritage, Henderson’s religion is closer to Blake than church, and it fuels his poetic passions rather than repressing or even channelling them. As he wrote in a nineties notebook, quoted by Neat, ‘Love: Love is the only God that I believe in.’ If there remains a Hamish Henderson mystery, then its heart lies in that refusal to define, restrict or divide. By overturning deeply entrenched Scottish defences, he enabled an upwelling of cultural, social, political and spiritual energy that is still not exhausted, and that may yet ‘ding the fell gallows o the burghers doun’. The whole enterprise was foreshadowed from the start by the poet himself in the closing stanza of the sixth Cyrenaica elegy:

> So the words that I have looked for, and must go on looking for, are worlds of whole love, which can slowly gain the power to reconcile and heal. Other words would be pointless.

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