A New Approach to the Classification of Gaelic Song

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A good deal of water has flowed under the bridge since James Ross published "A Classification of Gaelic Folk-Song" in 1957.[1] Ross's study was typical of a time when scholars favored a clinical and taxonomical approach to oral traditional culture, before modern theories about text, context, and genre began to raise good questions about the application of scientific methods to the analysis of cultural activity. The search for answers to these questions has greatly advanced the way ethnographers and ethnomusicologists understand culture, including the cultures of the Gael.[2] After six decades, it seems fitting to revisit Ross's classification system, and to examine whether the effort of constructing such a system is still worthwhile or not.

In *The Anthropology of Music*, Alan Merriam (1964:209) suggests that we understand musical activity by considering the uses and functions that music serves within a given culture:

> In the study of human behavior we search constantly . . . not only for the descriptive facts about music, but, more important, for the meaning of music. We wish to know not only what a thing is, but, more significantly, what it does for people and how it does it.

Merriam defines the *uses* of music as "the ways in which music is employed in human society . . . the habitual practice or customary exercise of music either as a thing in itself or in conjunction with other activities" (210), suggesting that the *uses* of music can be understood in terms of how musical activity is manifest in daily life—in what social contexts it occurs, and to what utilitarian purposes it is deployed. *Function*, on the other hand, "concerns the reasons for

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[music's] employment, particularly the broader purpose which it serves" (*ibid*.). He contrasts a song's express utility—what it is used for by and within the community, how the people put it to conscious use—with its meaning for that community, how its members feel about that song, and what it says about their life together. He writes (*ibid*.):

> Function may not be expressed or even understood from the standpoint of folk evaluation. . . . The sense in which we use these terms, then, refers to the understanding of what music does for human beings as evaluated by the outside observer . . .

As Merriam suggests, these "functional" concepts may go without saying within the community itself. Indeed, John Shaw's Cape Breton experience seems to indicate as much. Shaw (2010:22) recalls what his informants said when he asked them why they sang:

> [W]ithout exception the singers regarded it as a non-question and registered a degree of polite confusion as to what was intended by it. The only really coherent answer, that of my friend Dan Allan Gillis of Broad Cove, stated the shared cultural perception concisely enough: "Singing songs? Well, I don't know. People have been singing songs since the world began." The underlying message coming from a people whose favorite pastime is to speculate, usually with great eloquence, on anything encountered in their daily experience, is that singing is a fundamental property of creation along with humankind, the natural environment or the passage of time. In the world-view of their community it doesn't need explaining.

Similarly, Thomas McKean (1997:139) observes of his subject, song-maker Iain MacNeacail of Skye, that while he might classify his compositions as nothing more than pastimes:

> song-making, learning and singing were such a part of daily life that they also functioned on many other levels. . . . MacNeacail, as part of the community, may not see some of the other ways the songs work; he is unable to gain an objective perspective (and it probably does not occur to him to try).

Even so, the gradual transformation of the *Gàidhealtachd*, the decline of traditional work and leisure contexts, and the increasing influence of the dominant culture have long prompted Gaels to think carefully about their community's legacy of traditional song and lore, and the role that legacy played in the life of the community, in the lives of their parents and grandparents. As a consequence, our understandings of both *use* and *function* in the native context of Gaelic song are enriched not only by the observations of non-Gaels, but also by the "eloquent speculation" and considerable insights of Gaels themselves. Indeed, the distinction between etic and emic in the present case needs to be made with care, given the fact that the native Gaelic-speaking populations of Scotland and Canada no longer live in relatively isolated traditional communities, and have not done so for some time. Only the elderly can personally recall a way of life that has been in steep decline since the nineteenth century, and has virtually disappeared by now. The insights of today's Gaels are, therefore, to a large extent based upon recollections rather than

direct experience, and mediated by the same dominant-culture world-view that those of Gaelic heritage now share with non-Gaels.

Merriam's ideas have found considerable favor, not least among scholars of Gaelic and Irish song. They provide the foundation of Breandán Ó Madagáin's (1985) influential study of Irish traditional song in the nineteenth century and Lillis Ó Laoire's (2007) examination of singing and song-culture in Tory Island; they inform Thomas McKean's (1997) profile of Skye bard Iain MacNeacail and John Shaw's (2000) presentation of the life and repertoire of Cape Breton singer and tradition-bearer Lauchie MacLellan; and they support the arguments of Maighread Challan (2012) in her recent examination of oral traditional culture in North Uist in the first half of the twentieth century. These form the background to this study.

Classification: What are the Options?

In the world of science, a taxonomy is intended to be a straightforward and intuitively comprehensible instrument. The system devised by Carl Linnaeus (1707-78) for the classification of natural phenomena starts with a question so simple that it has become the basis of a guessing-game: "Is it animal, vegetable, or mineral?" Having obtained the answer "animal," for example, the questioner can then systematically narrow the choices to determine what phylum the creature belongs to (chordates, sub-phylum vertebrates, and so on) to class (mammals), order (primates), family (*hominidae*), genus (*homo*), and species (*homo sapiens*). Other questions then reveal the age, gender, cultural background, and name of the *homo sapiens* in question. This sort of system is generally known as a rank-based scientific classification.

Another science-based taxonomic system, known as *cladistics*, groups items according to unique characteristics suggestive of a common ancestor. Each division (*clade*) consists of a family tree tracing each item's descent from this shared ancestor. For example, DNA evidence has proven that the family *canidae* contains two clades: *canini*—that includes domestic dogs and are descended from wolves—and *vulpini*, descended from foxes. While a rank-based taxonomy is purely descriptive, a cladistic system provides a means of focusing on historical/genealogical relationships. Such a system provides a helpful tool for understanding evolution, not only in the natural world but also in fields such as linguistics and paleography in which researchers seek to identify the original form of a linguistic feature, or the earliest of several related manuscripts.

Either of these models might provide a starting-point for the classification of Gaelic song, depending on what questions the researcher wished to answer. A cladistic model might be used to trace thematic correspondences between Gaelic verse and that of other European cultures. A rank-based model might help sort out the multitude of refrain-types in Gaelic song, or describe the hierarchy of poetic elements of which the verse is composed. Cladistic models are useful for analyzing relationships and derivations over a long period; rank-based models, being more purely descriptive, are suited to understanding differences between items at a particular moment. So at the outset one must have a clear objective in mind, as it will have implications for the type of catalog that will be most useful in achieving that objective. As in linguistics, where researchers are careful to distinguish between diachronic and synchronic investigation of

language, our present topic requires us to define our parameters with care. Before we do so, however, a brief review of previous approaches is in order.

One of the most ambitious attempts at a science-based taxonomy of human singing is undoubtedly that of Alan Lomax (1915-2002). While Merriam and his followers recommended starting with an understanding of the society in question and seeking to enrich that understanding by examining musical activity within that context, Lomax approached the problem from the opposite end, seeking to generalize conclusions about human society by comparing singing practices across a wide spectrum of cultures. Lomax's *cantometrics* (1959 and 1968) attempt to define a statistically-rigorous and globally-consistent classification system for traditional songs capable of revealing relationships between the stylistic features of sung performance and various aspects of culture in human societies worldwide. Examining variables such as voice-quality, posture, singing technique, and various gender-based characteristics, Lomax attempts to arrive at universal truths about human society by correlating stylistic features of song with specific societal characteristics. He includes Hebridean song-styles in his profile for what he calls the "Old European" area, where "singing and dancing are basically choral and cooperative" (1959:936). Quite apart, however, from problems inherent in such a vast undertaking, Lomax's approach does not facilitate close examination of any individual song-culture. So while the stylistic features Lomax identified may help to illuminate some aspects of Gaelic singing for those interested in performance style and practice, they are unlikely to provide a useful model for a catalog of Gaelic song.

While Lomax tried to base a classification system on the stylistic elements characteristic of sung performance, another approach—so far untried in the context of Gaelic song—would build upon musical criteria, for example, specific rhythmic and melodic characteristics, stanzaic structures, refrain elements, and the like. Gaelic song illustrates a number of interesting musical features: its use of modal and pentatonic scales (Tolmie 1911:150-55; Gillies 2005:xxvi-xxvii); the occurrence of what William Matheson called the "variable third" (1955:77-78); the fact that, while many of its tunes reflect the binary and rounded-binary forms common in other European cultures, many others do not; the mix-and-match, motif-based circularity of many of its melodies, which creates subtle variety out of scant material (Kennedy-Fraser and MacLeod 1909:xxxi); the fact that melodic structure and verse structure are often at variance within the same song (Blankenhorn 2013c:76-80); the undoubted existence of "tune families," however difficult these are to define and pin down in practice (Bayard 1950); the syncopation ("wrenched accent") that, in some sorts of songs, brings musical rhythm into conflict with that of the text (Gillies 2005:xxviii-xxxi). But while these are all interesting subjects, they do not immediately suggest a classificatory method that would reveal anything significant about the society that employed this musical language. Indeed, just as the phonemic elements of spoken language are meaningless out of context, the sonic components of Gaelic music do not themselves tell us anything remarkable about Gaelic society, or about how musical practices reflect the culture of the Gael. A classification system, in my view, needs not just to help us understand the various parts, but also to offer a glimpse of the whole organism. I cannot imagine how a system that defined its categories on the basis of tonality or rhythm or melodic structure would help us understand how musical behavior reflects the humanity, or the world-view, of Gaeldom. But perhaps the best reason of all to avoid basing a classification system on musical criteria is simply

that, as John Shaw and others have observed, in Gaelic tradition, as "[i]n most unlettered song traditions, words and music are conceived as a single unit . . ." (2000:24). A music-based taxonomy of Gaelic song would therefore seem to require an analytic habit not widely cultivated among Gaels themselves.

Clearly, devising a system of classification for an aspect of human culture like song is no straightforward matter, because human culture is dynamic, and any categories we construct must be able to accommodate this protean quality. The evolution of tradition is a fluid phenomenon, and Gaelic tradition is no exception. Whether we are talking about the texts of laments, love songs, and rowing songs preserved in the waulking-song tradition;[3] or Fenian narrative poems re-purposed as *duain Challainn*; or *puirt-à-beul* used to teach tunes to young fiddle-players (as they have been in Cape Breton; see Shaw 1992/93:47), it is clear that some items can potentially occupy multiple categories. Unlike Linnaeus, we have to deal with a world in which a single entity—a song—may occupy multiple taxonomic positions reflective of its changing use and function in society over time.

Take for example *Cumha Sheathain* ("The Lament for Seathan"), which has come down to us as a waulking-song. In terms of its textual content this song is a lament, and one which reflects interesting historical and mythological elements (Campbell and Collinson 1977:40-45, 196-200). As a waulking-song, it receives appropriately robust treatment when performed in the waulking context (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/24170/1); but must we therefore assume that its original composer composed it as such, given the searing grief expressed in the text? Must we assume that its lively tempo and its choral refrain, both so characteristic of waulking-songs, were intended from the start? What are we to make of performances such as this one (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/94370/1), by Vatersay singer Nan MacKinnon, which was clearly recorded outside the work context and thus freed from the rhythmical constraints imposed by that context? Does her performance hearken back to an earlier time when such laments would have been performed in more contemplative fashion by a solo singer? Does its style arise out of some aspect of Nan MacKinnon's personality, or of her living circumstances, or of her long standing as one of James Ross's most prolific informants? Are our expectations colored by the fact that we are accustomed, in our own culture, to laments receiving slower and more contemplative treatment in performance? Finally, should our system of classification account for the historical and/or mythological elements noted by Campbell and Collinson, assuming that these were indeed important to the society in which the song was first composed?

Writers concerned with Gaelic song in particular have, by and large, sought to situate our understanding of the songs within the culture that composed and sang them. We have already named some of these scholars, and this may be a good point to examine their work more closely. Because James Ross' "A Classification of Gaelic Folk-Song" (1957) represents the only focused attempt at a taxonomy, we shall deal with it in detail at the end of this review. In the meantime, a number of other writers and collectors—Gaels as well as non-Gaels—have found it expedient to

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[3] Waulking-songs are work songs performed to facilitate the fulling of handwoven woolen cloth; see Note 24 below.

group Gaelic songs into categories, and in so doing have helped shape our understanding of the social contexts in which they were performed.[4]

In 1911 Frances Tolmie (1840-1926) published her collection of *105 Songs of Occupation* in the *Journal of the Folk-Song Society*. Valuable for any number of reasons, it is important not least because Tolmie's organizational structure suggests that she was thinking in terms of taxonomical divisions. She divides the songs into five categories, the first two of which are based on social function, and contain sub-headings: Songs of Rest and Recreation (cradle songs; nurse's songs; vocal dance music); and Songs of Labour (waulking songs of four different types; a reaping song and four rowing songs, which she states were also used for waulking; and milking songs). The last three categories, by contrast, are differentiated by theme: Ancient Heroic Lays; Songs to Chiefs and Others; and Laments, Love-Lyrics, Etc. The collection is in fact a more comprehensive catalog than its title would suggest, and is not limited to songs performed in a work context. It is enriched throughout by Tolmie's observations about the social context in which the songs would have been sung, and her implicit understanding that the categories she proposed were subject to revision.

Margaret Fay Shaw (1903-2004) began collecting songs in the 1930s in South Uist. Her collection *Folksongs and Folklore of South Uist*, first published in 1955 and still in print, includes 109 songs gathered from 22 informants, of whom nine (eight women and one man) supplied the vast majority of the items. Like Tolmie before her and others afterwards, Shaw uses a variety of organizing principles—theme, social function, cultural reference—to construct her chapter-headings, although it may be said that these form less a catalog than a list. Songs identified by theme include seven groupings: songs in praise of Uist, sailing songs, songs of war, an exile's song, laments, songs about hunting, and songs of love. A further five are defined by the social context in which songs are sung, including: vocal dance music, milking songs, spinning songs, waulking songs, and clapping songs. The list is completed by three additional rather vague categories—songs of the fair, little songs, and fairy songs—the latter of which we shall see again when we examine James Ross's catalog. *Duain*—Ossianic narrative verse (including the fragments chanted at Christmas and Hogmanay)—Shaw differentiates from songs, and lists instead under the heading "Ballads."

Longtime Reader in Celtic at the University of Edinburgh, William Matheson (1910-95) exerted a formidable influence on scholarship relating to Gaelic song. As a native Gaelic speaker from North Uist, a collector, and a singer himself, Matheson was heir to the living tradition; as a Celticist, he made a lifetime's study of how that tradition revealed the aesthetic values of past centuries. As a performer, he was not averse to combining these two preoccupations and performing his own versions of songs—texts and melodies thoughtfully reconstructed from print and manuscript sources as well as from oral tradition—as he liked to think they would have been heard in the courts of the Gaelic chieftains and elsewhere (Blankenhorn 2013a). Speaking to an

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[4]There is no denying the importance of emic terminology in Gaelic or any other culture. Unfortunately, we have found ourselves unable to rely upon a native taxonomy, perhaps because so few Gaels have seen fit to give thought to such a matter, while those who have done so have themselves been influenced by foreign models. John Shaw told me that "in trying to find Gaelic terms for various kinds of songs from singers, my own efforts did not take me all that far" (personal communication). Of those whose work is summarized here, three—Frances Tolmie, William Matheson, and James Ross—were born and brought up in Gaelic-speaking communities.

audience in Mull, Matheson suggested a four-part hierarchical catalog of Gaelic song based upon his understanding of traditional terms applied to poets from medieval times onward (Matheson n.d.). This hierarchy included the professional court poets (*fìlidh*) of Gaelic Scotland and Ireland, whose poetry (*dàn*) was composed in syllabic meters and performed to harp accompaniment on high ceremonial occasions; the bards, whose *bàrdachd* included formal eulogies and elegies composed in accentual meters; and the musicians or minstrels (*luchd-ealaidh* or *luchd-theud*), who composed and sang songs (*amhran*/*òran*) in a wide variety of accentual meters. At the bottom of the hierarchy Matheson added a fourth group of poetic practitioners: the unnamed multitude of (largely women) poets responsible for the waulking-song repertoire. Matheson's catalog is unique in being based not upon thematic or social contextual criteria, but upon undoubtedly emic distinctions, albeit ones that had fallen out of use among ordinary people by the time he wrote about them.

Although Alan Bruford (1937-95) published many works in an academic vein, his articles on "Gaelic Song" in *Folk Review* (1978-79) were written for a general readership. Even so, they reflect the author's long-term scholarly preoccupations with the historical development of poetry and song in Gaelic Ireland and Scotland. Focusing for the most part on the songs' textual content, poetic style, and historical antecedents, Bruford relies upon a mixture of typological criteria to organize his material. Of his ten different song-groupings, four include sub-categories: narrative songs (Fenian ballads; songs embedded in stories; translations of Child ballads; songs about battles; songs about voyages); work songs (waulking songs; rowing songs; harvest songs; quern songs; churning songs; spinning songs; carding songs); mouth music (pibroch songs; *canntaireachd*;[5] drinking songs; comic and nonsense songs); and political themes (Jacobite songs). The remainder—love songs, lullabies, laments, bardic themes, religious songs, and psalm-singing—are listed separately. It is unclear whether Bruford intends this catalog—if that is what it is—to describe the distant past, the immediate past, or the present day, as he devotes considerable time to the medieval origins of certain song-types, the applicability of Matheson's distinction between *dàn* and *amhran*, and the possible impact of the Norman French *amour courtois* on Gaelic song.

A more up-to-date approach is that of John Shaw who, in a long career on both sides of the Atlantic, has focused on the oral traditions of Scotland and of Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, where he lived for many years and collected traditional tales, songs, and lore from the people. A number of Shaw's works are cited here, but his major contribution is *Brìgh an Òrain* (2000), in which he presents a selection from the repertoire of Lauchie MacLellan (1910-91) of Broad Cove, Cape Breton. We shall have more to say about this collection presently; for the moment, we may note that Shaw groups Lauchie MacLellan's songs in seven categories: love songs, sailing songs, waulking (milling) songs, local songs, war songs, fairy songs, and drinking songs.

In his examination of the songs composed by Iain MacNeacail of Skye, Thomas McKean (1997:130-41) suggests a catalog based on *function*—but not in the term's usual sense of a song's importance for the community as a whole; rather, McKean describes function from the bard's point of view, specifically, the sorts of circumstances that would spur him to composition in the

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[5] The mnemonic system of tuition used by pipers, which employs a unique set of syllables corresponding to specific notes and note-values; see §5.3.1 below.

first place. The outline includes: songs improvised in response to a specific circumstance, for amusement, more or less at the drop of a hat (1997:131-32); songs composed at the request of another person (133-34); songs composed in response to adversity, including songs of public retaliation (135); songs of protest, composed in hope of change or simply "as a record of discontent" (135); satirical songs composed as revenge or therapy, "more of a catharsis and a 'laying to rest' of a grievance than a real retribution or punishment" (136-37); songs composed in response to a formal challenge or competition (137-38); songs composed to simply pass the time (138-39); and songs composed to express the song-maker's individual vision and point-of-view —or as MacNeacail put it himself, "That's how I was, just putting it in my own way" (139). McKean (139) explains:

> The songs have a more central role in MacNeacail's internal life than he has been letting on and, by extension, in the life of the community of which he is a part. . . . To the poet, this vision will have its own internal logic, reference and validity. . . . It is this internalized model we are trying to understand through examining MacNeacail's songs and his world in such detail. I believe that this perspective is the core of the folkloric study of context; it is as central to the artist's view as an outsider can get.

While McKean recognizes that these categories are not mutually exclusive, and while he is describing the output of a single song-maker at a particular place and time, his insights may provide useful guidance in the larger context we are addressing here.

A well-known performer and popularizer of Gaelic songs, Anne Lorne Gillies published many of her favorites in *Songs of Gaelic Scotland* (2006), an anthology designed for Gaelic-speakers, Gaelic-learners, and singers. Songs are grouped thematically under five headings: songs of the sea; songs of clan and conflict; songs of land and longing; songs of love; and songs of courtship and conviviality. In the introduction, Gillies describes her approach to the classification of Gaelic song, acknowledges the work of Ross and others, and provides contextual and musical notes; a separate note on "Gaelic work-songs" describes the work-context of songs cataloged by theme. More generalist than scholarly in its orientation, Gillies' collection is reminiscent of the many nineteenth-century collections of Gaelic songs popular with upwardly-mobile Gaels whose families had left the traditional way of life behind, but who wished to preserve some aspects of Gaelic culture in their lives.

James Ross (1923-71) was a native of Skye, and as a researcher at Edinburgh University's School of Scottish Studies in its early years he collected and deposited many hundreds of items in what was to become the School's sound archive. His article "A Classification of Gaelic Folk-Song" appeared in the first volume of *Scottish Studies* in 1957. Because it was his stated objective to provide a typology of Gaelic song, we need to examine this work closely. His system is summarized below:

I.   SONG THEME

1.1   Songs with an inter-sexual aspect

    1.1.1   Love songs (general)

    1.1.2   Matchmaking songs

    1.1.3   Night visit songs

    1.1.4   Pregnancy songs

    1.1.5   Tàmailt (complaints)

1.2   Songs relating to the physical environment

    1.2.1   Hunting songs

    1.2.2   Homeland songs

    1.2.3   Topographical songs

1.3   Panegyric

    1.3.1   Eulogy

    1.3.2   Elegy

    1.3.3   Lament

1.4   Satire   4.1.2

    1.4.1   Aoir

    1.4.2   Flyting

1.5   Songs of miscellaneous themes

    1.5.1   Religious songs

    1.5.2   Bacchanalia

    1.5.3   Jacobite songs

    1.5.4   Merry songs

II.   SONG STRUCTURE

2.1   Ballads

    2.1.1   Heroic ballads

    2.1.2   Sailors' ballads
(place-name songs)

    2.1.3   Soldiers' ballads

2.2   Macaronics

2.3   Pibroch songs

2.4   Puirt-à-beul

III.   FOLK ÆTIOLOGY

3.1   Fairy songs

IV.   SONG FUNCTION

4.1   Songs associated with ritual

    4.1.1   Duain Challuinn
(Hogmanay songs)
Eòlais (charms and incantations)

4.2   Occupational songs

    4.2.1   Cradle songs

    4.2.2   Milking songs

    4.2.3   Orain basaidh (palming/
clapping songs)

    4.2.4   Rowing songs

    4.2.5   Spinning songs

The most awkward feature of Ross's catalog—and one that has reappeared in subsequent publications—is his use of dissimilar criteria in its construction. While each of these elements—song theme, song structure, folk aetiology, function—is interesting in the context of Gaelic song and singing, the fact that they are used to construct a classification system is misleading. Do the songs categorized by structure or function not have themes? Do love songs, hunting songs, Jacobite songs, and all the others lack structure? What does "folk aetiology" mean in this context? Noting that Ross wrote some years before Alan Merriam suggested a new meaning for *function* in the context of traditional song, we cannot expect Ross's catalog to reflect that definition.

Not only are Ross's four categories far from being mutually exclusive, they are not even defined in similar terms. "Song theme" concerns itself with textual content; "song structure" deals with matters of metrical and (potentially) musical design; "folk aetiology"—a cladistic criterion—refers to songs embedded in, or closely related to, stories of a supernatural character; and "song function" distinguishes types of songs according to the social utility of their performance—closer to what Merriam would have called "use." There is considerable overlap between these categories, especially as regards items in the "song function" category, whose texts reflect many of the themes listed under "song theme."

Most strikingly, Ross fails to include one of the most important bodies of song known in Gaelic: waulking songs. He himself explains (1957a:96):

> Although one hears the term frequently used in discussions about traditional Gaelic song, [the waulking song] has not been given generic status in this classification because of the wide variety of themes and structures which are found in this tradition.

In this fashion Ross acknowledges that he has created a catalog that manages to exclude one of the largest and most interesting bodies of song in the Gaelic language.

Perhaps the greatest failing of Ross's typology, however, is that he fails to articulate an overarching rationale for proposing it in the first place. Why do we need such a thing? What understanding is the catalog meant to facilitate? The closest he comes to answering this question is this (Ross 1957a:95):

> One of the major barriers to the analytic discussion of any folk-song culture is the lack of a definitive terminology. There has been very little objective study in this field over the last fifty years and it has not been possible to use a previous classificatory system as a model. This state of affairs contrasts sharply with the great progress that has been made in the systematic study of the folk-tale. Antti Aarne published his *Verzeichnis der Märchentypen* forty-six years ago, setting forth a classification of tales which set the pattern for all future catalogues up to the present time.

It would appear that Ross sees a need for a cataloging system for Gaelic song for the simple reason that such a system has already been invented for folk-tales. Indeed, Ross was writing at a time when the classification of texts, both oral and written, in imitation of scientific models was part of the scholarly landscape (Sparling 2008:405). He does not, however, envision how it will advance the understanding of future scholars to know that a given song, in and of itself, exhibits particular thematic or structural characteristics.

Ross's article has been widely referenced. It contains many valuable insights about Gaelic song-texts, and raises important issues for further study. The choice of differing criteria has allowed Ross to explore his material from different angles, in the process of which he has richly illuminated some aspects of the song heritage of Gaelic Scotland. But because the parameters of his classification system are insufficiently clear, and because it fails to guide the user in dealing with its multiple non-mutually-exclusive categories, Ross's schema is unconvincing as a classification system *per se*. If the purpose of such a system is to guide its users in placing new or unfamiliar items into a context that will facilitate fuller understanding of those items, then Ross's system creates a difficulty for such users. Whether we can devise a system that will avoid this difficulty is debatable; but it is from that debate that deeper understanding may eventually emerge.

Ross's system equips us to sort individual Gaelic songs into named categories, and it has proven to be handy enough for this purpose. What it fails to do, however, is tell us what these labels actually mean, how these song-categories support the social identity of the communities that sing the songs, or what emotional significance the songs have for the people themselves, how singing helps them to make sense of their lives. Assuming that we want a classification of

Gaelic song to help us gather such information, we need to design our parameters with that purpose in mind. But because—as we saw with *Cumha Sheathain* and shall see with other songs and song-types—"re-purposing" poses a common conundrum and cultural change is a constant, any classification system devised today is likely to be out-of-date tomorrow. So why bother? I believe there are at least two good reasons.

First, by closely examining how things stood at one period in history, we can more easily begin to assess how things have changed. As Heather Sparling has noted, "because genres are not static and definitions change over time, genre analysis can provide the ethnomusicologist with a potential tool for assessing musical change . . . " (2008:402).

Second, such an enterprise allows us to explore the lives of people vastly different from ourselves—and not so different at all. While societies past and present have differed greatly in terms of their values, their ethos, and their organizing principles, all societies are composed of human beings in whose physical, emotional, and spiritual needs we can find reflections of our own. By examining the cultural manifestations of others, we can better understand the development of culture in our own society, and how it continues to evolve around us.

Defining the Parameters

The classificatory tool described below is intended to help us understand how song functioned both at a societal and a personal level in a traditional Gaelic-speaking community, by providing a means of sorting the songs themselves in a manner that reflects their social and emotional significance both for those who sang, and for those who listened. But before we describe it, some defining boundaries must be stated.

1. Time frame

Our approach is broadly synchronic, if such a term can be applied to a time frame as long as a century. Our period extends roughly from 1850—events in the latter half of the nineteenth century being well within the recall of many informants in the sources cited here—to about 1960, when the effect of two world wars, changes in rural work-practices and housing-stock, the coming of mass communications, and the growing importance of a money economy had at last undermined the age-old mutual dependency of neighbors, and effectively brought about the demise of traditional Gaelic communities on both sides of the Atlantic. Beyond that date, traditional ways may have lived on for a time among older people, but they were increasingly ignored by the younger generation.

This approach is not hard science; it is a judgement call. We cannot create a catalog for all ages, however interesting it might be to speculate about the "original" use or function of a given song, based on the evidence of its text or of its musical form. A song like *Cumha Sheathain* may have been composed as a contemplative lament, but it has survived into our own day as a consequence of its use as a lively waulking song, and for that reason it will be included in our catalog as a waulking song. (Indeed, if one looks carefully at the texts of waulking songs, one finds that a great many reflect sorrowful themes and narratives—the common threads of

women's lives for centuries.) This is not to say that it was never heard in other contexts—Nan MacKinnon's recording for James Ross proves otherwise—but that it has most often been identified by those who sang and recorded it as a waulking-song—that is, a song performed in a specific work context.

2. Sources

An important source for our study is recordings contributed by living informants during the twentieth century in the *Gàidhealtachd* areas of Scotland and in Cape Breton, Nova Scotia. Many of these contributors were middle-aged or elderly people, recorded at a time when the living context for the traditions they had inherited was fading fast. They wanted to ensure that an item they knew—a song, a story, a bit of local history—was not lost forever, and it was on that transactional basis that they welcomed the researchers and field-workers into their homes, and participated eagerly in what both sides clearly regarded as an eleventh-hour salvage operation. The Sound Archive of the School of Scottish Studies at Edinburgh University, the Gaelic Folklore Project Tape Collection at St Francis Xavier University in Antigonish, Nova Scotia, the Gaelic recordings held in the BBC Sound Archive, and various other audio collections, public and private, are the result of these endeavors. They contain waulking-songs sung solo by informants of both genders, lullabies recalled in old age, Fenian lays sung by elderly women, tweed-waulkings re-enacted by mature ladies who had participated in the real thing in their youth, Cape Breton milling-frolics re-defined as Gaelic heritage festivals, and many recordings of people gathered together in reminiscence, reminding themselves of what they used to hear all around them decades previously. Many of these informants were passive tradition-bearers, not people who themselves would have performed such material in its natural environment, but who had nonetheless learned it through repeated hearings. Many—perhaps all—of the recording situations were artificial to a greater or lesser extent; and it must be acknowledged that, for both Scotland and Gaelic Canada, determining the *use* and *function* of a song or song-type has become a matter of historical research rather than direct observation. This situation is far from ideal, but it is what we have.

Because collectors and informants alike were focused upon the items of song and lore themselves, rather than upon the social circumstances in which they would have traditionally featured, many of these archival recordings contain less information about those contexts than we might wish. Indeed, the fact that the most productive collectors in Gaelic-speaking areas were themselves Gaels must have mitigated against the gathering of such details: as one of them—Dr. John MacInnes, who worked at the School of Scottish Studies for some 40 years—told me, "People would have thought it odd for me to ask questions I could answer myself."

So it is safe to say that the examples of Gaelic songs preserved in the various archives are not what might have been recorded a hundred years earlier, assuming an invisible collector could have stolen in with a recording device and turned it on without anybody noticing. (The distancing effect of the microphone and of the presence of strangers is clear in many of these recordings.) Even so, the fact that so many informants were older people meant that they could share detailed memories of much earlier times, and their own informed speculations about their communities' traditions contribute hugely to what we can learn from these recordings.

In addition to the sound and video archives, a number of published collections draw from the same well. While we have already mentioned some of these in our typological review, a few additional details may be helpful.

Frances Tolmie's collection of *105 Songs of Occupation* (1911) is important because of its early date and because it broke new ground in recording texts and tunes from the same informant.[6] It includes items collected from 23 named people, 19 women and four men, some of whom were born before 1800. Of the 109 songs and variants attributed to named individuals, the vast majority—some 91 items—were collected from only eight singers. Of these, 24 were songs Miss Tolmie herself recalled from childhood, and 36 were recorded from a single informant, Mary Ross from Kilmaluag in Skye, a member of the Tolmie household from 1882. While Tolmie and all of her informants had learned their songs in their traditional contexts, it is important to remember that her collection was published in retrospect, when she had been living outside the *Gàidhealtachd* for some years. In addition to the song-texts and airs, the volume includes an introduction by the journal's editor, Lucy Broadwood, setting Tolmie's collection in context for the early twentieth-century reader (1911:v-xiv); Tolmie's own personal reminiscence of her own life (1911:143-46); a summary account of Mary Ross's girlhood memories of Skye (1911:147-49); and "a note on the modal system of Gaelic tunes" by Annie G. Gilchrist (1911:150-53).

Frances Tolmie also contributed some 45 songs to Keith Norman MacDonald (1834-1913), who published 28 of them in the second and third editions of *The Gesto Collection of Highland Music* (1997 [1895]), where they appear in appendices. In his *Puirt-à-Beul—Mouth Tunes: or Songs for Dancing* (1931 [1901]), MacDonald included a further 13 of Tolmie's songs, most of them not *puirt-à-beu*l. Tolmie's contribution to these works has been studied by Ethel Bassin (1977:80-3) and by William Lamb, whose 2012 re-edition of the latter work has been an important resource for this study. Lamb describes the contents of MacDonald's *Puirt-à-Beul* thus (2012:17):

> In this collection, there are 116 songs where words and music are printed together, and 85 of these are *puirt*. Amongst these *puirt*, there are 47 reels (55% of the total), 30 strathspeys (35%), 4 jigs (5%) and 4 miscellaneous dance melodies (5%) . . . . There are also 12 *puirt* printed without music and 22 alternative verses dotted throughout the collection.
>
> The other types of song in the collection include: waulking songs, children's songs and rowing songs (11 in total); piping songs and *canntaireachd* (5 in total) and, perhaps surprising, song melodies from the Faroe Islands (3 in total). All in all, although it is primarily a collection of *puirt-à-beul*, roughly 15% is devoted to other types of song.

Lamb's introduction, annotations, and other scholarly apparatus provide an excellent overview of the *puirt-à-beul* genre, including its origins and its role in providing music for dancing in *Gàidhealtachd* communities.

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[6] Nineteenth-century song collections often paired a text collected from one informant with an air collected from someone else—even someone from a different locality. Informants often went unnamed; and airs were frequently altered to suit accompanied performance by trained singers; see, for example, Campbell (1816) and Dun (1848).

Doubtless the most controversial of the twentieth-century collectors was Marjory Kennedy-Fraser (1857-1930), whose expeditions to the Hebrides began in Eriskay in 1905. The first volume of *Songs of the Hebrides* appeared in 1909, two years before Tolmie's collection, and it was followed by four more, the last of which appeared only a year before Mrs Kennedy-Fraser's death (Kennedy-Fraser and MacLeod 1909, 1917, 1921 and 1925; also Kennedy-Fraser 1929). This is not the place for a discussion of her heavily-critiqued concert arrangements of Gaelic song, nor of the Celtic Twilight-infused verse fantasies of her Gaelic-speaking collaborator, the Rev. Kenneth MacLeod (see Blankenhorn forthcoming). It is, however, worth noting that the introductions to these volumes, the first two in particular, include rich and vivid observation of the social context for Gaelic song at the turn of the century. These passages, along with Kennedy-Fraser's transcriptions of tunes as she actually heard them (as opposed to the concert arrangements), and her keen insights into their melodic structure and tonal character, provide valuable information that supports what we have from other sources, and adds a unique voice to that discussion.

In 1929 a young American, Margaret Fay Shaw, made her way to the island of South Uist. Familiar with Kennedy-Fraser's arrangements, she wanted to hear Gaelic songs in their native environment. Shaw's collection *Folksongs and Folklore of South Uist* (1955) includes 109 songs gathered from 22 informants, of whom nine (eight women and one man) supplied the vast majority of the items. In the introduction—which is enriched by a selection of her own photographs—Shaw illustrates the outsider's advantage in documenting a way of life that, at the time, an insider might have taken for granted.

In 1935 Margaret Fay Shaw married John Lorne Campbell (1906-96), whose own careful scholarship and ardent advocacy on behalf of Gaelic culture is widely acknowledged to have launched the field of Scottish Gaelic ethnology into its modern trajectory. Many of his field-recordings, now owned by the National Trust for Scotland, can be accessed through the Sound Archive of the School of Scottish Studies and the website *Tobar an Dualchais* (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/). His collection of songs from Nova Scotia, *Songs Remembered in Exile*, includes sixty items that he recorded from 12 singers during a visit to Cape Breton and Antigonish County in 1937. A diary of his visit, given as an introduction to the volume, notes a number of differences between how songs were sung in Canada and in "the old country" (an *Seann-Dùthach*, as Cape Breton Gaels refer to Scotland).

Perhaps the best-known of Campbell's works, however, is his three-volume collection of waulking-songs, *Hebridean Folksongs* (1969-81). The first of these comprises an edition of songs collected in 1893 by Donald MacCormick in Kilphedir, South Uist, in which tunes recorded by Campbell and Shaw were matched with song-texts from MacCormick's manuscript. The two subsequent volumes contain transcriptions of texts and tunes collected by Campbell; and all three volumes include musical transcriptions in staff notation by his collaborator Francis Collinson. According to Campbell's own summary (1981:13):

> the three volumes of *Hebridean Folksongs* contain 135 different waulking and clapping songs,
> many in more than one version; there are 225 tune transcriptions in all. Forty-two women and
> eight men singers are represented in the following proportions: Barra, 15 women and 4 men;

South Uist, 15 women and 4 men; Benbecula, 6 women; Eriskay, 3 women; Vatersay, 2 women; Cape Breton, 1 woman.

Extensive introductory essays and critical apparatus provide descriptions of the waulking process; notes on verse meter and features of musicological interest; brief biographies of the singers and notes about the recording process; full Gaelic texts with translations and references; and historical commentary.

Finally, we must include three collections that reflect more recent ethnological principles in casting light not just upon the songs as cultural artifacts, but upon their importance in the lives of the singers and their communities. As noted above, John Shaw's book *Brìgh an Òrain* (2000) examines the life and repertoire of the late Lauchie MacLellan of Broad Cove Parish, Cape Breton, Nova Scotia. The volume includes 48 songs, chosen from over 150 that Shaw recorded from Lauchie MacLellan, along with nine short folktales and MacLellan's own account of his life, over nearly two decades beginning in 1964. Shaw describes how the focus of his field-work gradually changed over that period (2000:xxii):

> When we first embarked on the work of recording, the emphasis was on the preservation of song texts with their airs, along with narratives. As recording progressed, however, our conversations turned increasingly towards the role of family and community in singing, and the need to regard song in its social context became one of the main strands in the present work.

Each song is transcribed (both text and music), translated, and contextualized by the singer's own account of it, and full documentation of other sources is provided. Shaw's wide-ranging introduction focuses upon the social contexts for singing in Broad Cove during a period in which the Gaelic language, and the community that spoke it, were in steady decline; his descriptions will be of substantial use in what follows.

Thomas McKean's book *Hebridean Song-Maker* (1997), also noted earlier, examines the life and songs of Iain MacNeacail (1903-99) of Skye. In this case, the 31 songs included in the volume are those of MacNeacail himself, a bard whose verses reflect a broad range of themes and concerns, including love, exile, elegy, satire, and songs about local and even national events. Recorded by McKean beginning in 1988, the songs are embedded in the bard's life story, as told in his own words. The collection thus presents the art of this local poet in his own person and from his own lips, while also scrutinizing his life, his songs, and his community from an etic perspective.

Fonn: The Campbells of Greepe (2013) is a collection of songs, *puirt-à-beul*, and reminiscences from three generations of this influential Skye family.[7] Lavishly supported by photographs, geographical information, and local and family history, the heart of the volume consists of 118 items, with texts in Gaelic and English, transcripts of the tunes in staff-notation, and a CD of 30 recordings made by researchers from the School of Scottish Studies, by the BBC, and by family members. While the focus throughout the book is on the songs themselves, the

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[7]The distinction between "songs" and "*puirt-à-beul*" is important to the Campbells, or at least to the editor of the musical notes, Mary Ann Kennedy, who stresses that *puirt* are dance-tunes first and foremost (Campbell 2013:111).

contextual material more than justifies the subtitle: *Music and a Sense of Place in a Gaelic Family Song Tradition*. Like Lauchie MacLellan and Iain MacNeacail, the Campbells are able to place their sung heritage in its traditional context. Additionally, their experience shows how that heritage has been, and continues to be, transformed to reflect the experience and outlook of today's Gaels.

3. The Gàidhealtachd

Our study focuses on songs sung in two distinct Gaelic-speaking areas. As regards Scotland itself, most of our sources draw from Hebridean traditions, as Gaelic was already in steep decline as a community language when researchers from the School of Scottish Studies and elsewhere began to record living informants. There are, to be sure, plenty of recordings in the School of Scottish Studies Sound Archive from mainland tradition-bearers, and many printed sources—especially nineteenth-century collections of songs, stories, and lore—contain anecdotal evidence of mainland Gaelic culture; but I am aware of no broad-based investigation of the differences between mainland and island Gaelic culture in our time-period that would contribute a meaningful dimension to this study. As regards Gaelic culture in maritime Canada, we shall depend upon the sources named above, and endeavor to point out the significant differences between the two *Gàidhealtachd* areas as we go. I should acknowledge that I have no personal experience of Cape Breton's Gaelic-speaking community, beyond those Canadian Gaels I have met when they happened to be visiting Scotland.

In recent years, several scholars have contributed to our understanding of how prevalent song was in Gaelic-speaking communities. In a comprehensive study of a Scottish *Gàidhealtachd*, Maighread Challan examines North Uist Gaelic-speaking communities and their culture in the first half of the twentieth century.[8] She describes a society in which singing and all other aspects of what she calls *beul-aithris* were not regarded simply as entertainment (although entertainment undoubtedly came into it), but as essential to the community's sense of itself (2012:14):[9]

> . . . *[B]eul-aithris* in Gaelic can be defined as the verbal arts of the people—what Herskovits (1961:165) called "these verbal aspects of the people"—which came down through the generations on people's lips. It includes any sort of information that revealed the knowledge and philosophy of the community: stories, songs, fenian ballads, history, proverbs, riddles, figures of speech, and the language itself. It also comprises the practices and ceremonies, from birth to death, which accompanied such recitation.

John Shaw explains that these verbal arts formed an important part of the structural framework of people's working lives, and a great part of what gave their lives meaning both at a societal and an individual level (2010:22):

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[8] *Air Bilean an t-Sluaigh: Sealladh air Leantalachd Beul-Aithris Ghàidhlig Uibhist a Tuath* (2012) is in Gaelic. A review in English (Blankenhorn 2013b) contains a summary of Challan's arguments.

[9] Translated from Gaelic by the present writer.

Recent ethnographic observation together with written accounts from the Highlands reaching back as far as the seventeenth century attest that a wide range of activities in the daily lives of Gaels were permeated with song. In both the Old World and New World *Gàidhealtachds* (Gaelic-speaking districts) it was usual practice for people to accompany even the most mundane of rural chores with singing, and commonplace for passers-by on the road to hear songs emanating from the crofts or farm holdings. Otherwise monotonous chores accompanied by singing included milking; churning; women's gatherings for spinning thread; weaving on the family loom (often a solitary activity carried out during the winter months); waulking or milling the woolen tweed; the singing of hymns and psalms by men in the Protestant settlements [of Nova Scotia] as they hauled lumber out of the woods, or marked the boundaries between properties; Hebridean labourers in Scotland's industrial belt sang when they gathered in the public houses; the cheerful singing of Nova Scotians returning in the winter on their sleighs from making purchases in the town could be heard over a considerable distance as they approached those at home in their rural parishes; and people would sing frequently when they ceased their daily routine activities for a few minutes to catch their breath. And it was by no means rare for people to sing when alone. The result, shared by virtually everyone in the community, was one whereby song with its perceptions, social messages, affective content and historical associations made up a central part of a person's inner verbal activity for most of the day.[10]

It is worth highlighting the contrast between this situation and what we, in contemporary western society, are used to. Nowadays, when singing and story-telling are largely restricted to carefully-structured occasions and are increasingly professionalized, and when most of us would be terrified at the very idea of singing for others, such intense integration of song into everyday life is difficult to imagine. Our cultural ethos could not be more different.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, living conditions in North Uist were challenging (Challan 2012:18-19). Multiple generations lived in cramped and uncomfortable conditions under a single roof. To feed themselves, the people depended upon fishing, livestock, a few basic crops, and whatever they could catch when the gamekeeper's head was turned; they harvested peat for fuel, and kelp for fertilizer; they drew water from lochs, streams, and wells; they sheared their own sheep, and processed the wool from fleece to fabric. Commerce with the mainland played only a very small part in their way of life. Up until the Second World War, Gaelic remained the language of daily life, despite education policies that, from 1872 onwards, required schoolchildren to be taught through the medium of English.

In Canada, Gaelic immigrant families had more rights to the land than they had enjoyed in Scotland: John Shaw notes that "the system of land grants promoting small family holdings . . . produced a rural society markedly less hierarchical than the vertically ordered world left behind, with its lairds, tacksmen, tenant farmers, and landless poor" (2000:5). Even so, their

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[10] As illustrations, see Calum Johnston's description of singing a particular song as he collected a bag of peats from the peat-stack as a schoolboy in Barra (*Tocher* 13:180); also Duncan MacDonald (Dunnchadh Mac Dhòmhnaill 'ic Dhunnchaidh) of Peninerine, South Uist, describing how his father "would never stop singing songs all evening. When there was no-one in but himself and my mother, with nobody visiting the house, if you went near the house you would hear the song through the door, with him singing it for all he was worth, and at the same time twisting heather ropes, or else ropes of bent. He was never idle" (*Tocher* 25:6-7).

lives were no easier for that. Charles Dunn (1953:28-32) describes how, having once cleared the land of timber (no small task), the settlers resumed familiar patterns of farming, animal husbandry, and fishing. They supplemented their diet with game (in Canada, they did not have to worry about gamekeepers). As in Scotland, women were responsible for providing the household clothing. The ever-present spruce replaced peat as a source of fuel; and timber replaced stone and thatch as the primary building material. Gaelic remained the community language until economic change forced people to look for supplementary work away from home; national educational policies, along with the inescapable sense that Gaelic was not helpful to those seeking employment in the wider world, also played a significant role in the language's decline. In all of their activities, members of the community continued to depend upon kinship and community relationships to sustain them in good times and bad.

Indeed, being able to depend upon neighbors was essential to survival (Challan 2012:78-81). In North Uist, relationships were nurtured wherever people gathered in the course of a day's work: at the smithy, the grinding-mill, the post-office, the local shop; at the quay and on boats at anchor—and any such gathering might provide an opportunity for a song, or a yarn, or a bit of oral genealogy (*sloinneadh*). Some types of work could only be accomplished collaboratively: work on the land, such as cutting and gathering peats, planting and harvesting crops; working with wool, which included a number of specific tasks; work with livestock, such as milking, herding, and transhumance; and work related to fishing and seafaring. Visiting tradesmen—masons, carpenters, shoemakers, tailors, the vet, the man with the stallion—often brought songs and stories with them (Challan 2012:35-46). In Cape Breton, communal work-parties or "frolics" provided not only the context for such tasks as spinning and tweed-milling (waulking), but also a welcome focus for social gatherings and entertainment, particularly during the autumn and winter months (Shaw 2000:15-16).

Ceremonial occasions also brought people together, and the singing and other oral traditions shared at these gatherings reinforced their importance for those present, reminding people of their shared history and kinship. Betrothals and weddings; death-customs and obsequies; church-going and religious observance—all of these gave structure to life, marked important events, and strengthened the community's sense of solidarity (Challan 2012:47-58).

In both Scotland and Cape Breton, the best-known locus for the transmission of *beul-aithris* was the *taigh cèilidh*—the *cèilidh*-house—a house in the community where people would gather after the day's work was done, or break their journey home from town, or wait for the tide to turn. Some *taighean cèilidh* became known for a single specialty such as storytelling or instrumental music, while others welcomed visitors with varied interests (Challan 2012:20-35; Shaw 2000:15). Such variety was an essential ingredient of the *cèilidh*, John Shaw (2010:24) argues, not least because it reinforced the linkages between genres:

> Within the folklore context, a notable feature of *cèilidh* gatherings (and one not unique to Gaelic culture) is the extent to which the performed genres reinforce each other. Thus in addition to genres such as storytelling, song, and instrumental music (to whatever extent they are distinct), the tradition also provides "intermediary" genres that serve as bridges to link the major ones. Instrumental music and storytelling, for example, are linked by a repertoire of piping stories concerning famous performers or the origins of particular tunes, legendary or otherwise. Song and

instrumental music likewise find mutual reinforcement through the singing of "mouth music" (*puirt-à-beul*): verbal renditions of tunes either containing words or semantically empty vocables which serve to retain and transmit tunes, and can even be danced to.

The *taighean cèilidh* were important not only for their role in preserving tradition, but also for their function as a community safety-valve. As Thomas McKean puts it (1997:98):

> The exchanges characteristic of the *taighean cèilidh* were the life-blood of the village and reflected a living community. News was passed, people gently ribbed and satires exchanged, relieving many of the pressures that build up in a small self-contained community—essential in a society that relies on cooperation for survival. Curiously enough, in many small rural communities there is no anonymity, no hiding from the public eye, no personal "space" to cool off, as there is in a large city. Social pressures must therefore be released before devastating feuds and libellous gossip arise that could severely damage crucial interpersonal relations.

On both sides of the Atlantic, Gaelic communities were conservative. Because people living in near-isolation from mainstream society had to depend upon those nearest to them, they had little inclination to stick their necks out. Colin MacDonald (1943:112-16) recounts how, as a young agricultural advisor sent to work in the Outer Hebrides in the early years of the twentieth century, he attempted to persuade some crofters to raise pigs. The conditions were good for pigs, and there was profit to be made from them; but the people had never raised pigs, and were reluctant to adopt any new idea that their neighbors might ridicule. There is even a Gaelic word for this phenomenon, *coimhearspa*, which reportedly means "waiting for the other man to do it first" (McDonald 1958:78).

Challan (2012:80) notes that the same life-philosophy that kept people from making improvements in their way of life for fear of appearing to compete with their neighbors was also what strengthened people's regard for the old practices and ways of thinking. Thus a young person learning a song was enjoined to learn it properly—singing the right words, maintaining the correct air, keeping the verses in the right order, and gaining a proper understanding of the background to the song—before singing it for others (Shaw 2000:37-38). People took pride in their powers of memory, of being able to deliver a song or a story just as they had learned it from the previous generation, and the community as a whole disapproved of gratuitous changes (Challan 2012:88; McKean 1997:178).

Reflecting the ideas of Merriam and others, Challan emphasizes the multi-functionality of song in North Uist's Gaelic-speaking communities. In addition to helping to lighten various kinds of work, it also entertained both singers and listeners, and served as an emotional catharsis and comfort, helping people express and share feelings that they might otherwise have no opportunity to explore. Singing also acted as an "aid in the integration of society" (2012:116). At a *cèilidh*, the chorus would encourage the soloist and confirm the solidarity of the group; in this way passive tradition-bearers were essential to the activity, helping to keep the singers on track with the text, and in discussing the song afterwards. Here is how Eric Cregeen (2004:108-09) summarized the importance of music and singing in *Gàidhealtachd* life:

Music in all its forms—piping, fiddling, psalm-singing, unaccompanied —was much more than recreation. It was a necessity of life, indulged in not only on special occasions but at all times. Songs are crucial to understanding life at all times in the Highlands and Islands . . . for they mirror the concerns of everyday life—the courtings and weddings, feuds and disasters, work and recreations, evictions and clearances which people experienced personally. Songs consoled them in their daily hardships, and were continually being sung in the home, among neighbours and at work. . . . One old man told me, "In the old days that's the only thing they had, songs, and the old ones was learning the young ones."

Songs of Introversion and Extroversion

Singing is, above all else, an emotional activity. It allows people to distill emotion and articulate feelings in ways that words alone cannot do. Together, music and words support the emotional and mental health of the community as a whole and of the individuals within it, allowing people to acknowledge, affirm, and share the delights and the pains of life. It is this emotional element that also, I believe, has the power to convey something of the human experiences of one community to listeners from another, however different their ways of life.

Because singing in Gaelic society occurred in so many different contexts and involved so many people, it fulfilled a number of different functions within those contexts. Keeping in mind that in many cases songs could perform multiple functions, and be sung in multiple contexts, we can say that the classificatory structure outlined below is based upon the social context with which particular songs were most frequently identified, and upon the social and emotional functions they would have performed within that context. We shall see that while the presence, absence, or character of certain structural features—repetition, use of vocable syllables, refrain structures, rhythm, melismatic ornament, choral participation—can offer clues to the appropriate classification of an item, they should not be regarded as diagnostic. Other intrinsic features, including theme and poetic meter, may be useful in describing various subsets within our classifications:

GAELIC SONG

Songs of Introversion	**Songs of Extroversion**
1. Songs to express subjective emotion	2. Songs to accompany domestic life
	3. Songs to facilitate group labor
	4. Songs to lift the spirits
	5. Songs to inform/teach
	6. Songs to affirm community identity

The terms "introversion" and "extroversion" express a basic fact about human personality and interaction, a fact reflected in the songs created and sung in the Gaelic community, as in communities everywhere. The terms are not meant to suggest that the singers need to "be" extroverts or introverts; nor that songs of introversion are always sung in solitude. Rather, they describe the mood that these songs create, the emotions they evoke in listeners.

Songs of introversion seek to establish an intimate emotional connection with listeners. They may be sung for a very few people, for a child or animal, or as emotional release in solitude. Many of them are also sung in larger gatherings, where they have the effect of turning listeners' thoughts inward, and of promoting a reflective, serious mood:

<u>**SONGS OF INTROVERSION**</u>

1.   Songs to express subjective emotion

    1.1 Love songs

    1.2 Songs of loss

       1.2.1   Laments

       1.2.2   Songs of exile and nostalgia

    1.3 Worship

       1.3.1   Psalms

       1.3.2   Religious songs

By contrast, songs of extroversion are ones in which the singer seeks the appreciation and even the participation of others. They require collaboration between singer and listeners, whether to facilitate a job of work, to indulge high spirits, or to focus attention on an important story or aspect of community life. While they may be sung in solitude or simply to pass time, their real reason for being is to be sung in company, when refrains can be sung in chorus, comments and encouragement passed, and conversation and banter exchanged:

<u>**SONGS OF EXTROVERSION**</u>

2.   Songs to Accompany Domestic Life

    2.1 Lullabies

    2.2 Songs of occupation

       2.1.1   Milking songs

       2.1.2   Spinning songs

       2.1.3   Quern songs

3.   Songs to Facilitate Group Labor

    3.1 Waulking / Milling songs

       3.1.2   Clapping songs

    3.2 Rowing songs

4.   Songs to Lift the Spirits

    4.1 Children's songs

    4.2 Hogmanay ritual songs

    4.3 *Puirt-à-beul*

       4.3.1   Dance-songs

       4.3.2   Tongue-twisters

       4.3.3   Pseudo-*canntaireachd*

       4.3.4   Diddling

4.4 Drinking songs

4.5 Humorous songs

5. Songs to Inform / Teach

5.1 Narrative songs

    5.1.1 Ballads

    5.1.2 Religious narratives

    5.1.3 Historical narratives

5.2 Cante fable

    5.2.1 Songs of the supernatural

    5.2.2 Pibroch songs

5.3 Didactic songs

    5.3.1 *Canntaireachd*

    5.3.2 Religious songs

6. Songs to Affirm Identity

6.1 Clan panegyric, satire, and complaint

6.2 Homeland and nature panegyric

6.3 Political panegyric, satire and complaint

6.4 Panegyric, satire and complaint about local events, characters

6.5 Religious panegyric and evangelism (hymns)

We must acknowledge that "extroversion" and "introversion" are not mutually-exclusive categories, and some items will end up on both sides of the divide, depending upon the social context in which they are sung. As we have seen, "re-purposing" goes on all the time: how else can we explain Presbyterian hymns being sung by Gaelic loggers in the Canadian forest? Fenian lays used as lullabies? Because a person is free to sing anything at any time, in solitude or in company, the distinction between songs of introversion and songs of extroversion is nothing as clear as "animal, vegetable, or mineral," and songs in any category—especially when sung in solitude—can easily qualify as songs of introversion.

It must also be stated that judging the emotional significance of a song or a performance from field-recordings that are half-a-century old, many of them made by outsiders in circumstances very different from their traditional settings, is far from straightforward. There is not—and nor should there be—anything hard-and-fast about any of this. Indeed, the difference between songs of introversion and songs of extroversion is not exactly a bright boundary, and the "correct" placement of an individual song must rely upon whatever is known of the style and circumstances of its performance on any given occasion, rather than upon any intrinsic evidence derived from the text or tune.

At the same time, some conclusions regarding a song's emotional significance can be drawn from considering its textual content, the style in which it is performed, the account the singer gives of it, and the social context in which it is performed, or in which informants say they performed it, or heard it performed, in earlier days. But while the effort to understand the emotional impact of a particular song or performance may be doomed to failure (at least in

categorical terms), it is, I believe, nonetheless crucially important that it be made, if we are to have a hope of understanding what it might have been like to live in Gaelic society. We may not be able to experience the Gaels' traditional way of life or their cultural ethos, but we can have no doubt that their emotional lives bore at least some semblance to our own.

Group 1: Songs to Express Subjective Emotion

1.1. Love Songs

James Ross (1957:100) notes the difference between "love songs" and what he calls the "sub-literary eulogy." In respect of the latter, he points to its "objectivity . . . its tendency to describe and attribute qualities to the subject, as distinct from the more emotional, subjective tendency" of the love song. This crucial difference explains why we have placed love songs in Group 1, and clan panegyric (including eulogy, elegy, and satire) in Group 6. The same distinction is also made in the case of laments, with the "sub-literary" clan elegy included in Group 6 and the more personal songs of lamentation, like other songs of loss, included in Group 1. This is not to say that there are not intimations of deep feeling among the clan eulogies and elegies, but rather to argue that those songs were primarily intended to serve the more formal purpose of creating a sense of group solidarity based upon a leadership figure. For this reason they belong with other songs of extroversion.

In one sense, Ross is clearly correct to describe as love songs "women's songs from the early modern period which have survived through the waulking culture" (1957:99). The texts of many waulking/milling songs speak vividly and movingly of love from the woman's point-of-view, and as I believe Ross originally set out to classify Gaelic songs in terms of their thematic content, his inclusion of waulking-song texts under the heading "love songs" makes sense. Indeed, many waulking-song texts may have originally been composed as love songs, and only later—possibly for metrical reasons—adopted for use in the waulking context. If this is the case, however, this adoption occurred well before the modern period of which we have certain knowledge, and the texts are known to us today only because they have been preserved in waulking songs. Because waulking songs clearly require group participation and coordination, they are included in Group 3. While we may imagine that these texts may have once been performed in a more contemplative fashion—indeed, Nan MacKinnon's performance of *Cumha Sheathain* for James Ross suggests that such a possibility survived down to our own time—the fact that they are generally identified as waulking-songs by the singers themselves leads us to classify them as such for the purposes of the present study, which seeks to describe a classification based on documented practice in the modern era.[11]

In addition to the introspective, deeply-felt love songs included in Group 1, there are of course songs dealing with other aspects of the relationships between men and women—what Ross calls "songs with an inter-sexual aspect" (1957:96 *et passim*). Some of these—night-visiting songs, comic songs of the *malmarié(e)*—are clearly intended to entertain, and should be

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[11] The only one of our categories not so documented is that of rowing songs; see below, §3.2.

included among the humorous songs in §4.4; others, including those of the "complaint" type in which a lover describes the ill-treatment he or she has received, are included here in §6.4.

1.2. Songs of Loss

Songs of lamentation and loss are unsurprisingly well-attested in Gaelic Scotland, given the Gaels' experience of dispossession and emigration over many centuries. Songs in this category range from personal laments following the loss of a loved one to songs describing the hardships of the emigrant's life, homesickness, and nostalgia for the homeland. The genre has been productive down to our own time: John Shaw notes that in Cape Breton, "laments were routinely produced for the locality, or sung within a family as a means of reinforcing its own history" (2000:17).

One of the most famous Gaelic laments, *Cumha Ghriogair Mhic Griogair à Gleann Sréith* (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/94452/1), more commonly known as *Griogal Cridhe*, was composed in the form of a lullaby by a young widow lamenting the murder of her children's father by members of her own family. While evidence collected in the past century suggests that *Griogal Cridhe* has probably survived to this day because of its functionality as a lullaby, the quality of the verse indicates that it must have served an additional, probably primary, function for the woman who composed it and for many in succeeding generations, namely, that of giving voice to the poet's strong feelings of love, lamentation, anger, and desire for vengeance.[12]

Curiously, the Skye variant (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/90459/1) of *Griogal Cridhe* that has become standard at Mòd competitions and on commercial recordings appears in Frances Tolmie's collection (1911:196-214) in the category she terms "Waulking Songs: Slow Type" along with a half-dozen other laments, including *Cumha Sheathain*. How such songs figured in the tweed-waulking process she does not tell us (no other commentator, to my knowledge, separates waulking-songs into four separate categories as Tolmie does); nor does she explain why she has included them as waulking songs rather than under the heading, "Laments, Love Lyrics Etc." with which her collection ends. All of the items she lists as "slow waulking songs," however, in one way or another reflect the female perspective, and are thus characteristic of the waulking-song repertoire generally.[13] This situation illustrates how the difficulty of categorization becomes more complex the further back in time one tries to go, especially if one wishes to reflect how the people themselves thought about their own culture.

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[12] Barbara Hillers (2006) has discussed this duality, in acknowledgement of which we have included *Griogal Cridhe* here under both Laments (§1.2.1) and Lullabies (§2.1). The poem survived for over 240 years between its probable date of composition and its first appearance in written form; for a thorough discussion of its background and oral transmission see MacGregor (1999) and Blankenhorn (2014).

[13] Also included in this group is *Cumha Mhic-Leòid*, an elegy by Màiri nighean Alasdair Ruaidh for MacLeod of Dunvegan, which we would assign to §6.1 below.

1.3. Songs of Worship

Religious worship is a crucially important aspect of life in the *Gàidhealtachd* and, as we shall see, the expression of religious belief occupies important space among songs of extroversion as well as songs of introversion. Religious songs that fall into Group 1 are those whose overt function is to communicate with the Almighty and not primarily with other people. The emotional character of Gaelic religious song is intense—perhaps nowhere more so than in the singing of the psalms. Although generally undertaken in company, psalm-singing is an individual act, where each worshipper attempts to express his or her emotional commitment to God by interpreting the psalm text in song. It is emphatically not a choral performance—in fact, it is not a "performance" at all in the usual sense of the word. It is rather a way in which people attempt to address God as individuals in a manner that transcends normal speech or even prayer. Notwithstanding their communal use—the fact that they are performed in concert, with singers sufficiently aware of one another to follow the precentor's lead—the psalms clearly belong in Group 1 because of the inward focus and intense emotional commitment of each individual worshipper. As North Uist poet Mary MacLean asserts (Challan 2012:116, cited from Neat 1999:47; see also Ó Madagáin 1985:135-36, 144):[14]

> in the midst of a committed congregation, responding to the lead of a good precentor, a sense of spiritual ecstasy can come, at once overwhelming and sublime, yet totally within one's comprehension and control.

At the same time, it is important to acknowledge that communal psalm-singing also expresses the solidarity of the group that sings in this way. The act of coming together in worship confirms the ethos of the society, and the psalms allow the congregation to worship God both individually, as they interact with the text and the melody given out by the precentor, and as a community engaged together at a specific place and time.[15]

Also included in this group are certain religious songs of a contemplative character, some of which may be described as hymns, of which Presbyterian Scotland has produced many in both Gaelic and English. Murdina MacDonald explained that these were not sung in church, but were "Godly pieces—[people] putting into verse their feelings" meant for singing at home.[16] While

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[14] One of the School of Scottish Studies' most extraordinary informants was Murdina MacDonald of Ballantrushal, Barvas, Lewis, who recorded at least 175 spiritual songs, hymns, and (predominantly) psalms for various researchers from the School, including *Salm 71* and *Tha do Rìoghachd Làn do Ghlòir*, both of which are among the examples listed below. Although women were not allowed to lead the psalms in church, they clearly did so in the context of family worship at home, and Murdina MacDonald's mastery of the art of presenting was unparalleled. It is of interest that, although she was clearly familiar with the secular repertoire of her area, she refused to record secular songs for any of the School's researchers.

[15] In the past few years a group called "The Lewis Psalm Singers," from the village of Back, have taken psalm-singing on the road—partly out of a spirit of evangelism, no doubt, but also in acknowledgment that, largely through its dissemination through the media and recordings, this form of worship has now found a more worldly audience. The group has performed at the Edinburgh Festival (2009) and at Celtic Connections (2014), among other venues.

[16] Interview with Abby Sale in 1968 (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/44185/1).

such spiritual songs and hymns would often have been heard in the context of family worship (that is, in company), they would also have been sung in solitude, as an element of prayer. It must be acknowledged that religious songs are difficult to classify, and we have also included a number of hymns—those of a more panegyric, didactic or proselytizing character and thus suggestive of a need for an audience—in Groups 5 and 6 below.[17] In addition to these contemplative songs, a very few religious narrative songs—both Protestant and Roman Catholic communities have produced these—are included in Group 5.

Examples

Many of the song-types mentioned here have been illustrated in previous studies, and the descriptions are not intended to replace or refute those of earlier scholars, but simply to suggest a new way of understanding the social and emotional role of songs in a traditional Gaelic-speaking community, and thus to explain their placement in the classification system outlined here.

The availability of the website *Tobar an Dualchais* now makes it possible for anyone with access to a computer to hear many of the field-recordings made in the last century by researchers at the School of Scottish Studies, by the BBC, and by Dr. John Lorne Campbell of Canna and his wife Margaret Fay Shaw, whose recordings are held by the National Trust for Scotland. Examples used for illustration of these categories (in the lists below) have been chosen from the *Tobar an Dualchais* collection, which contains approximately twenty-five percent of the recordings held in the School of Scottish Studies Archive. Because song is a living art whose emotional impact only becomes apparent in performance, we have chosen not to provide transcriptions of either texts or airs, but simply to encourage readers to listen to the performances for themselves, keeping in mind that many of them were recorded outside the social context in which they would have originally been heard. Recording dates and singers' names are supplied on the website, along with references to source material—verse anthologies, song collections (with music), historical background—containing information about individual items; additional resources are suggested at the end of this essay:

GROUP 1: SONGS TO EXPRESS SUBJECTIVE EMOTION

1.2 Songs of Loss

1.2.1 Laments

Agus hò ged a tha mi 'm ònar (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/100209/1)

Air feasgar Diciadain (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/31919/1)

Bà, bà mo leanabh (Griogal Cridhe) (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/94452/1)

Cadal cha dèan mi (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/93905/1)

Tha thìde agam èirigh (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/101432/1)

Mo rùn geal òg (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/20100/1)

Cumha Sheathain (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/94370/1)

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[17] We have already noted the phenomenon of Presbyterian hymn-singing by logging-crews in Canada (Shaw 2010:22). Unfortunately Shaw does not tell us anything about the hymns chosen for this purpose, or whether the choice mattered.

Òran na h-*Iolaire* (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/42423/1)

1.2.2 Songs of Exile and Nostalgia

’S e fàth mo mhulaid (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/90607/1)

Nuair a thilleas ruinn an samhradh (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/2721/1)

Soraidh leis an àite (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/3386/1)

’S a haoi hó ’s na ho gó ri ri (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/7846/1)

Tha mi duilich, duilich, duilich (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/88983/1)

Chaidh maille air mo lèirsinn (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/40809/1)

1.3 Worship

1.3.1. Psalms

Adhradh Teaghlaich (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/70135/1)

Dèanamaid Adhradh (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/26290/1)

Salm 30 (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/66846/1)

Psalm 118 (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/66578/1)

Salm 116 (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/66796/1)

Salm 71 (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/73862/1)

1.3.2 Religious Songs

An Neamhnaid Luachmhor (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/80978/1)

Nach mithich dhomh bhith tòiseachadh (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/94629/1)

O cuin thèid mi null ann? (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/33709/1)

Tha do Rìoghachd Làn do Ghlòir (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/105997/1)

Group 2: Songs to Accompany Domestic Life

The circumstance that brings these types of songs together is that they would most likely have been sung in a domestic setting. Because the jobs of milking a cow, spinning thread, grinding meal, and particularly that of lulling a cranky child fell to the woman’s lot, many of these songs were sung exclusively by women, often to an audience consisting solely of an infant or, indeed, a cow. Sometimes there were, however, other listeners and even other participants in these songs apart from the principal singer; and it is for this reason—the presence of a lively audience and the possibility of group performance—that we have classed these domestic songs as songs of extroversion.

2.1. Lullabies

In terms of their function, some lullabies occupy two categories. While most lullabies—for example, *Crodh an tàilleir* and *Hó ho bhó, leadaidh bheag* in the sample here—have simple, repetitive texts that reflect the child’s circumstances and the parent’s hopes, others such as

Griogal Cridhe, discussed above, reflect more complicated themes, and illustrate how the lullaby genre provided women a rare opportunity of expressing strong feelings in a manner that was not too disruptive of the male-dominated society in which they lived. Of course, any song could be used, in a pinch, to lull a child; indeed, there is evidence that both milking songs and Ossianic lays were used as lullabies (Challan 2012:71). In Cape Breton, "songs used for this purpose were not restricted to the genre; often a singer would choose a favourite song delivered in a soothing manner…and some singers would extemporise verses" (Shaw 2000:17).

Frances Tolmie (1911:157-91) groups 37 items—over a third of her collection—under the heading "Songs of Rest and Recreation." Of these, the first 22 she calls "cradle songs"—presumably lullabies—and the remaining 15 "nurse's songs." The difference between these two sub-groups is not clear, although the quicker tempo indicated for many of the latter suggests that they might be more entertaining than soporific—thus dandling songs rather than lullabies. Ten of the "cradle songs" and two of the "nurse's songs" contain supernatural references, and for this reason we would include these in §5.2.1 below.[18] Nonetheless, it is important to note that Tolmie places the social context for such songs at home, where they played an important role in the rearing and enculturation of children.

2.2. Songs of Occupation

While the types of occupation with which we are concerned here—milking a cow, spinning yarn, grinding meal—all involve rhythmical movement, the songs identified with these sorts of work display nothing like the essential correlation between singing and manual labor that is found in the waulking/milling songs.[19] While there is a natural rhythm to such tasks, they do not fundamentally require musical accompaniment, but can be performed in silence, or while the worker converses with others. By contrast, the tweed-waulking process required the rhythmic regulation of song, and could not proceed without it. Thus we may describe the songs in Group 2 as pastimes—a means of accompanying the task—rather than as essential, in practical terms, to getting the work done.

While such tasks would often have been performed alone with only an infant or an animal for audience, they were also undertaken in company. There are accounts of young women gathering to milk their cows—at the sheilings, certainly, and probably at home as well—and their choice of songs and style of performance would no doubt have reflected their enjoyment of each

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[18] Including *An Cùbhrachan* (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/89261/1), *Òran Tàlaidh na Mna-Sidhe, Buain na Rainich* (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/101935/1), four versions of *Uamh an Òir* (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/54755/1)—usually classified as a pibroch song—and three songs about the *each uisge* (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/99707/1)—the kelpie or "water horse." The "nurse's songs" category includes *Maolruainidh Ghlinneachain* and *Colann gun Cheann* (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/85507/1).

[19] Other household tasks such as carding and knitting, while not innately rhythmical, might be accompanied by song (Shaw 2000:37); Alasdair Boyd, a highly-regarded singer from Iochdar, South Uist, "learned songs connected with pibroch from his uncle's wife, Annie MacDonald—Anna nighean a' Phìobaire—who sang all the time as she knitted or sewed" (*Tocher* 3:84). Churning, undeniably rhythmical, often called for a rhyme or charm rather than a song (Bruford 1978e:7-8). SCRE (1964) includes rhymes related to milking, churning, lambing, spinning, warping of cloth, sowing and harvest, hunting, and other activities. No tunes are given.

other's company.[20] In addition, the singing had a practical value in calming the cows, as Mrs Anne Morrison, from Milton in South Uist, explained (*Tocher* 7:219):[21]

> *Bha buaile an uair ad ann . . . agus bha 'n cuman ri bhith agaibh, 's bha sibh a' suidh' aig a' bhoin 'ga bleoghain 's bha sibh a' tòiseachadh air an òran, 's cho fiadhaich 's gum bitheadh i, dh'fhanadh a' bhó ribh 'nuair a bha i 'cluinntinn an òrain. . . . 'Nuair a rachadh iad dhan bhuailidh bhiodh òran air choireigin aca dha na beothaichean 's na beothaichean gan imlich. Ach an diugh chan fhaigh iad ach breab. Chan eil guth air òran.*

> There used to be a cattle-fold in these days . . . and you had to have a pail. And you sat by the cow milking her and you started to sing the song and no matter how wild she was, the cow would stand still for you when she heard the song. . . . When they went to the fold they always had some song or other for the cows and the cows used to lick them. But today all they get is a kick. There's no word of a song.

Similarly, spinning thread could well have been—and in many households probably was—a solitary occupation; but evidence shows that, in Cape Breton, spinning "frolics" brought women together to lighten the work. Dan Allan Gillis of Broad Cove described one of these (Shaw 2000:15):[22]

> They used to sing fairly lively songs [at spinning frolics]. . . . I remember one spinning frolic that my mother attended; I took her up and came to get her in the evening. And there was one old woman at the frolic. . . . I can almost see her. "Faill ill ó, faill ill ó" was the song she sang and she would keep spinning the wool in time to the song air. The air suited, and so did the cheerfulness of the song. And when you saw something like half a dozen spinning wheels turning—all the women singing the chorus, then the old lady singing the verse—it was quite a pretty thing to watch. We'll never see anything like it again.

Likewise, the grinding of grain at home using a stone quern was a heavy and monotonous task with a certain rhythm to it; some querns (big circular flat stones driven by a wooden handle) required the efforts of two people (Pennant 1774-76:29). Alexander Carmichael's description (1900a:254) of the process reveals not only the rhythmical coordination between the work and the singing, but also that even such a lowly performance could command an appreciative audience:

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[20] John Shaw (2000:13) records that in Cape Breton "at least one township recalled special songs sung while milking."

[21] Recorded in 1964. Tolmie's collection (1911:240-44) includes five songs she identifies as "milking songs."

[22] It is unclear whether spinning made use of specific songs, or whether songs used for spinning were ones that women simply employed for this purpose, or whether the practice varied from one locality to another; see Challan (2012:70 and n.279) and Shaw (2000:15). A spinning song in which the spinning-wheel itself provides accompaniment was recorded in 1951 by Alan Lomax; it appears on his compilation LP *Heather and Glen*, now reissued: Acrobat #ACRCD 309 (2008).

The quern songs, like all the labor songs of the people, were composed in a measure suited to the special labor involved. The measure changed to suit the rhythmic motion of the body at work, at times slow, at times fast, as occasion required. . . . Having fanned the grain and swept the floor, the woman spread out the sheepskin again and placed the quern thereon. She then sat down to grind, filling and relieving the quern with one hand and turning it with the other, singing the while to the accompaniment of the whirr! whirr! whirr! birr! birr! birr! of the revolving stone. Several strong sturdy boys in scant kilts, and sweet comely girls in nondescript frocks, sat round the peat fire enjoying it fully, and watching the work and listening to the song of their radiant mother.

Our catalog must reflect the fact that these domestic occupations were carried out in diverse circumstances—sometimes alone, sometimes in company. It is for this reason that these occupational songs are listed separately from waulking/milling songs and rowing songs, which required the company's active participation in both the singing and the work:

GROUP 2: SONGS TO ACCOMPANY DOMESTIC LIFE

2.1 Lullabies

Mo ghaol, mo ghràdh, is m' eudail thu (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/75243/1)

Bà, bà, bà mo leanabh/Crodh an Tàilleir (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/98765/1)

A hù a hó, crodh an tàilleir (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/75240/1)

An cluinn thu, an cluinn thu, an cluinn thu, Iain? (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/39142/1)

Ho ho bhó, leadaidh bheag (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/43244/1)

2.2 Songs of Occupation

2.2.1 Milking Songs

Gaol a' chruidh, gràdh a' chruidh (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/39147/1)

Till an crodh, faigh an crodh (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/26715/1)

'S e m' aghan fhìn thu (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/26788/1)

A bhólagan, a bhó chiùin (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/43635/1)

Fire, faire, ho ro ho (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/43981/1)

Hòro fianach bheag hò ro èileadh (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/85511/1)

2.2.2 Spinning Songs

Cuir car dhìot mo chuigeal (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/8932/1)

Mi 'm ònar am buail a' lochain (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/102203/1)

Theann e staigh rium (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/79413/1)

Hug òireann ò 's ì 'n aighear i (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/85928/1)

A Mhòr, a Mhòr, till rid mhacan (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/99707/1)

Ho o ho hao Nighean Donn (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/72413/1)

2.2.3 Quern Songs
  Brà brà bleith (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/25903/1)
  Iomaiream Ò (recited) (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/61113/1)
  Agus hò Mhòrag (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/60270/1)
  Casag an Èisg (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/95516/1)

Group 3: Songs to Facilitate Group Labor

3.1. Waulking/Milling Songs

As James Ross and many others have understood, waulking songs are impossible to classify according to theme, as texts of many kinds—love lyrics, clan panegyrics, Fenian ballads, lullabies, even religious verse—have found their way into the waulking-song repertoire. Dr. John MacInnes tells me that women he spoke with in the course of research and collecting for the School of Scottish Studies, when asked if a particular song were known as a waulking song, frequently replied, in effect, "Well, it could be used for waulking, right enough" (personal communcation). Frances Tolmie (1911:234-39) notes the same phenomenon when she describes a reaping song and four rowing-songs as having been "also used for waulking." The category was clearly a flexible one right up until the hand-fulling of tweed gave way to mechanization. What can be said is that many waulking-song texts, as well as the musical forms they accompany, survived into the twentieth century largely because they met the needs of the hand-fulling process.[23]

Waulking songs are characterized above all else by strong, regular rhythm. It is this quality that makes them suitable for the work of the waulking women, who must pass a length of wet, heavy wool cloth from hand to hand around a table, each woman thumping the cloth vigorously against the table in order to raise the nap of the newly-woven tweed, thereby shrinking the fibers sufficiently to tighten the weave into a fabric that will provide a suitably weatherproof garment. This is not light work.[24]

Any understanding of the structure of waulking songs must encompass the totality of the performance, not just the structure of text or musical elements. This structure is flexible: the woman leading the singers can choose, for example, whether not to employ chain-linking, a practice that effectively doubles the amount of text available to be sung; and she can also choose whether or not to repeat refrain elements in different ways in order to lengthen or shorten the

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[23] John MacInnes (2006c:248ff and 2007:418-09) has argued persuasively that the musical form and structure of the waulking song may ultimately derive from—or at the very least be related to—medieval choral dance forms. I myself believe that the waulking song structure may reflect an even older dance tradition, possibly of Scandinavian origin (Blankenhorn 2013c:80-87).

[24] For detailed description of the waulking/milling process, see Kenneth MacLeod, writing in Kennedy-Fraser and MacLeod (1909:22); Tolmie (1911:148-9); Campbell and Collinson (1969:3-16); Bassin (1977:11-12); and Lauchie MacLellan as reported in Shaw (2000:16-17, 80-83).

song to fit the needs of the work.[25] What can be said, however, is that the structure involves a more-or-less elaborate call-and-response pattern, and that the "response" portion—the refrain—often takes up more time than the "call"—verse elements—sung by the soloist. Refrain segments may be both interlinear, that is, occurring between lines or couplets of text, and intralinear, occurring at the mid-point of the line; both of these further stretch the text. Reflecting the length and demanding physical nature of this process, many of the waulking songs recorded during the past 60 years tend to be long in the performance.[26]

Many waulking-song texts, as we have them today, appear to combine verse from different sources whose only common feature may be that of verse-meter. For this reason, they often display a disjointed character which may only be acknowledged in performance by a change in the refrain vocables, or by a break in the chain-linking at the point where the junction of two texts occurs. Another hindrance to textual intelligibility is the fact that, because of the need for a regular beat, rhythmic subtleties in the verse are often obliterated by the beat falling on a syllable that would normally be unstressed—the "wrenched accent" syncopation referred to earlier. All of these features obscure the emotional content of waulking-song texts, and render them difficult for the uninitiated to follow or appreciate.

While the breaking of text into short phrases, the insertion of vocable refrain elements, and the rapid interaction between chorus and soloist mitigate against the text being comprehensible to bystanders, these same features render the song singable by women who are simultaneously engaged in a physically demanding act of work. Indeed, evoking an emotional response in bystanders is of no importance to the singers, as bystanders (especially men) appear to have been banned from the waulking itself, and were invited in only when the bolt of cloth had been rolled up and the evening celebration was to begin.[27]

All of the comments above can be taken to apply equally to the waulking process as it was carried forward in the New World, with a couple of interesting differences. In Cape Breton, the English translation of *luadh* (in Scotland, "waulking") is "milling," and the event itself is known as a "milling frolic." At some point, men became involved as full participants in the work—a development that brought about changes to the repertoire: "women might have felt some of their songs would be inappropriate to sing in front of men. . . . Meanwhile, the men did not know

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[25] Waulking-song texts are normally presented in writing as extended paragraphs with no stanzaic marking. By making use of *chain-linking*—connecting lines of text in a pattern such as *ab bc cd de ef* and so forth—the singer restructures the text as a series of couplets, making it twice as long in performance as it appears on the page. John Shaw's informant Lauchie MacLellan referred to a waulking song that employed this device as an *òran fillte* or *òran dùbailte*—a "woven song" or "doubled song" (Shaw 2000:395). Whether Lauchie's terms comprise both the chain-linking feature and the embedded refrain elements is unclear—or perhaps one of them does so, and the other does not. Bassin (1977:12 and n.20) observes that this "overlapping of couplets" is also a feature of other song traditions.

[26] Longer, generally, if the singer is in company with others who can take up the refrain, especially if a waulking is being simulated. We must remember that many recordings of waulking-songs were made outside the work context by people who were recalling the songs in old age; in such cases, repetitive elements such as chain-linking and choral repetition of text and refrains were often minimized.

[27] The importance of these occasions to the men is revealed in the song *Mo chridhe trom* (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/7931/1), in which a henpecked husband laments that his wife will not let him go to the *taigh luaidh,* the waulking-house.

the traditional milling songs and instead sang songs from other contexts, such as sailing songs, at the table" (Sparling 2008:410).[28]

Today, milling frolics continue to be important events in the life of the Cape Breton Gaelic community—not as occasions for the hand-fulling of woolen cloth (which now, as everywhere, takes place in textile mills), but rather as community heritage events, showcasing Gaelic culture to outsiders, and affording Gaels themselves an opportunity to maintain an important locus of community pride and solidarity.[29] The songs performed at milling frolics include both Old World waulking-songs and songs from the greater Cape Breton repertoire that were adapted for the purpose (Shaw 2000:15-16).[30] In Scotland, the appearance of the menfolk would have coincided with the "clapping" of the tweed, to which we now turn.[31]

3.1.1. Clapping Songs

A subset of waulking songs, clapping songs are performed at the end of the waulking process, when the tweed has been rolled up and the bolt of cloth is laid lengthwise on the table, where it is struck or "clapped" by the women as they sing. In Gaelic Scotland, clapping songs are recently attested for Uist and Barra only, but were undoubtedly more widespread at one time. Lauchie MacLellan provided a lively account of a milling frolic in Broad Cove, Nova Scotia which includes the following (Shaw 2000:17):

> After the milling had gone on for two songs the woman of the house would come up and measure the length of her middle finger . . . to determine whether the web had been milled enough, or whether another song was required. Usually it would take three songs, and the folded-over web was passed [sunwise] around on the milling surface. When this was completed, it was usual to sing three "striking songs" (*òrain bualaidh*) or "clapping songs" (*òrain basaidh*) as some prefer to call them, and these were happy, cheerful songs.

Sung at a quicker pace than the waulking songs, many clapping songs are improvised to include the names of men in the community who might be considered interesting marriage

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[28] While it is accepted that, in Scotland, the *luadh* was women's work, there is occasional evidence of men participating. A 1965 Skye account describes how single men used to participate in the singing along with the women (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/29172/1); and for another example, see Macintosh (1861:37).

[29] For an example, see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XHax-NPP2vo

[30] In both Scotland (Pennant 1774-76:329) and Cape Breton there is evidence that foot-waulking (*luadh-chas*) was also practiced, but no one recorded in Cape Breton claimed to have actually witnessed it (Shaw 2000:16). In Scotland, Roderick Campbell of Bragar, Lewis, told Hamish Henderson in 1954 about seeing foot-waulkings in his young days (*Tocher* 43:59-61); a search for "foot waulking" in *Tobar an Dualchais* provides a number of oral accounts, and songs that people associated with the practice; see also MacLeod (2013:45-62).

[31] In addition to dividing waulking-songs into two categories by tempo, Frances Tolmie (1911:196-226) identifies a further two types: "tightening" songs "for wringing the cloth" (227-30) and songs of the "improvisatory type" (230-34). The "tightening" songs accompanied "the last process of waulking…in a varying measure, expressive now of leisure, and now of urgent haste" (228). Songs of the "improvisatory type" were doubtless the clapping songs, discussed below, §3.1.1.

prospects (or not) to the female participants. Charles Dunn describes the "putting-up" songs sung in Canada, discussing how "the more knowing matrons would pair off the various girls present with the men who were destined to be their husbands. There were many forms of this 'pairing' song and many ingenious impromptu modifications of each form" (1953:40-41). Indeed, many of these songs have a humorous, rowdy, even bawdy character, eliciting whoops and encouragement from bystanders. Frances Tolmie (1911:231) describes one such as "a fragment of one of the ridiculous songs, imagining the rescue of some favored youth from the waulking-tub"—a large vat of stale urine in which the cloth to be waulked is first soaked—suggesting the sort of ribald humor common in these songs.[32]

3.2. Rowing Songs

As indicated earlier, rowing songs constitute the one genre for which we do not possess context-specific recorded evidence. There can be no doubt, however, that songs were sung as accompaniment to rowing, and that they would have facilitated the labor, especially when it required the coordination of two or more rowers. Alexander Smith's 1865 account of a summer spent in Skye includes several references to oarsmen singing at their work; the most detailed is the following (84):

> The wind came only in intermitting puffs, and the boatmen took to the oars. The transparent autumn night fell upon us; the mainland was gathering in gloom behind, and before us rocky islands glimmered on the level deep. To the chorus of a Gaelic song of remarkable length and monotony the crew plied their oars . . .

Elsewhere, Smith applies the adjectives "many-chorused" and "melancholy" to the songs sung by these Skye boatmen (1865:124, 134).

While it may be possible that many songs used for rowing passed into oblivion with the mechanization of sea travel, it seems clear that some of them are preserved within the waulking-song repertoire (Tolmie 1911:236-39). Certainly the work requirements of both tasks—steady rhythm, call-and-response structure, flexible length—would have been comparable. The waulking women did not confine themselves to texts dealing with the fulling of tweed, and it seems probable that rowing songs, like waulking songs, also covered a wide range of sentiment and subject matter. The songs listed among the examples here were identified as rowing songs by the informants who recorded them.[33]

Rowing-boats still ply the coastal waters of the *Gàidhealtachd*, and the tradition of singing at sea appears to have survived the transition to motorized craft. John MacInnes tells me

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[32] According to Lauchie MacLennan, "warm, soapy water" was the preferred liquid in Cape Breton's Gaelic community (Shaw 2000:17).

[33] Annie Gilchrist, in a pair of comments included in Tolmie's text, speculates that "the slow and solemn character of several of these rowing-measures appears in some instances to be due to the fact that they were also of the nature of laments, being chanted by the rowers conveying the remains of chiefs across the western seas to Iona" (Tolmie 1911:236); also "in the rhythmic rise and fall—the ocean swing—of its well-marked choruses, this song possesses considerable resemblance to a sea-chanty . . . " (Tolmie 1911:237).

of hearing a boatman singing at his oars in the 1940s (MacInnes was aboard at the time); he also recalls hearing the sound of singing above the *put-put-put* of a motorized dinghy entering the harbor at Cheese Bay in North Uist. Rowing, like milking and the grinding of meal, is an intrinsically rhythmical activity; but it seems clear that once a boat could be handled by a single oarsman, singing became more of a pastime than a necessity.

A number of stylistic features typically characterize songs in this group, including: call-and-response alternation of soloist and chorus; strong, regular rhythm; prominent use of refrains, often two or more refrains of different structures (interlinear, intralinear); flexible performance structure, reflecting the immediate needs of the work; "wrenched stress"—rhythmic emphasis on what would normally be an unstressed syllable. In many cases, textual disjuncture in the middle of the song (where one textual theme or thread gives way to another) reflects the fact that the texts of such songs are considered vehicles for performance, rather than performance being a vehicle for the text:

GROUP 3: SONGS TO FACILITATE GROUP LABOR

3.1 Waulking Songs

Bidh an deochs' air làimh mo rùin (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/14203/1)

Coisich a rùin (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/30240/1)

Chailin òig a stiùireamaiche (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/15031/1)

'S minig a chuala e nach do dh'innis e (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/24170/1)

A' bhean eudach (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/72077/1)

No chaora cheannfhionn [34] (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/14192/1)

Tàladh Dhòmhnaill Ghuirm (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/14178/1)

Clò nan gillean (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/99831/1)

A Bhradag Dhubh (1) [35] (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/52742/1)

A Bhradag Dhubh (2) [32] (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/25913/1)

'S muladach mi 's mi air m' aineoil [36] (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/24946/1)

3.1.1 Clapping Songs

Hò mo leannan hè mo leannan (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/14638/1)

Chaidh mo lothag air chall (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/24178/1)

O cò bheir mi leam air an luing Èireannaich? (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/25007/1)

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[34] The title should be *Mo chaora cheannfhionn*, but is given here as it appears on the website.

[35] Variants of the flyting *An Spaidsearachd Bharrach* (the "Barra Boasting Song") go by a number of titles, including *A Bhradag Dhubh* and *Cha téid Mòr a Bharraidh bhrònach* and *A Dhia! 's gaolach liom an gille.* See Campbell and Collinson (1977:112-21, 124-8 and notes 226-39); for a traditional telling of the story behind the song, see Nan MacKinnon's in *Tocher* 12 (Winter 1973:134-39).

[36] Another flyting, also known as *M' eudail mhòr Mac 'ic Ailein*; see Campbell and Collinson (1969:112-15 and 180-81).

Leannan do mharaich mi sheasadh ri cruadal (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/49533/1)

Latha siubhal beinne dhomh (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/24174/1)

Nighean Bàillidh à Loch Bhraoin (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/100868/1)

3.2 Rowing Songs

Iomairibh eutrom hò hò (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/21645/1)

An t-iorram Niseach (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/22290/1)

Iomaiream ò thèid i dh'aindeoin (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/58816/1)

Alla bharra bò choisinn cò bheag (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/103479/1)

Group 4: Songs to Lift the Spirits

When asked why singing was such an important part of people's lives in their community, John Shaw's Cape Breton informants often told him (2000:19):

> *"Bha i toirt togail-intinne dhaibh"* (it raised people's spirits). . . . Singing could help relieve the tedium of solitary chores, liven up a wedding, lend some perspective on the wiles of politician, or prove a reliable focus for conviviality among neighbours. An aspect of singing often advanced by Gaels themselves, and one of major importance in all *Gàidhealthachds* is that of simple entertainment.

It is clear that, whatever else they might be doing at the time, people took delight in singing and in hearing songs. It seems safe to say that song was a vital medium of everyday communication in the community, a means of expressing thoughts and observations as well as feelings—a use for song that people in our own society would associate with musical theatre rather than real life. The entertainment value of song cannot be overstated, and many songs, including those in this category, appear principally designed to entertain.

4.1. Children's Songs

Neither *Tobar an Dualchais* nor any other collection of traditional song distinguishes usefully between songs sung to children by adults and those sung *by* children for their own recreation; and because all of the songs recorded in recent years are recollections from childhood by elderly informants rather than recordings of children at play, it is difficult to judge how and in what circumstances children themselves actually sang.[37] Exceptionally in this regard, Keith Norman MacDonald's *Puirt-à-Beul: The Vocal Dance Music of the Scottish Gaels* contains a short section that includes descriptions of "Gaelic singing games" associated with four *puirt*, and identifies the participants specifically as children (Lamb 2012:142-3); two of these—*Thuirt an*

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[37] The valuable collection of traditional rhymes *Aithris is Oideas* (SCRE 1964) includes some that are featured in children's games, but unfortunately it contains no tunes, nor does it indicate which, if any, of the items would have been sung.

luchag as an toll and *Cò ach Anna mo nighean*—are included among our examples. Of the others, *M' iteagan is m' eòin is m' uighean* seems to be a tongue-twister, while the rest rely more on repetition and simplicity of text. The version of *Na trì eòin* sung by the late William Matheson is, by his own account, something of a reconstruction: a version of the song appears in Tolmie (1911:85), and a fuller text in *The MacDonald Collection of Gaelic Poetry* (1911:337). Matheson's version consists of a refrain, which he says he learned from a traditional source, to which he added a number of stanzas from printed sources.

4.2 Hogmanay Ritual Songs

Duain Challain (Hogmanay lays) are closely related to the preeminent Gaelic narrative genre, that of the Ossianic ballads or Fenian lays. Like the narrative ballads, *duain Challain* are performed in a chant-like fashion, and (apart from the usual opening and closing formulae) their texts are borrowed directly from Ossianic balladry; indeed, it is reckoned that it is through their use as *duain Challain* that many of the Ossianic ballad texts survived into the twentieth century. On thematic and structural grounds, therefore, the obvious place for them in this catalog would be in Group 5 below. In terms of their social function, however, these Hogmanay chants are not so much narratives as passwords—a sort of "open-sesame" rigmarole designed to entertain the people inside the house so that they will open the door and let the singers in. Measured against these criteria, these songs clearly belong in Group 4.

4.3 Puirt-à-beul

Nowadays, the lively rhythmical songs with short, simple texts that form such a large part of the corpus of Gaelic song are generally referred to as *puirt-à-beul* ("mouth music"), and are explained as having provided music for dancing at times when musical instruments—and musicians able to play them—were unavailable. While a great many *puirt* were indeed used for this purpose, others are clearly intended as entertainment in and of themselves.

4.3.1 Dance-Songs

While the connection between *puirt-à-beul* and instrumental music-making is a strong one, William Lamb argues persuasively that some communities actually preferred mouth-music to instrumental music, and that this fact reflects a fondness for dancing that undoubtedly predated the invention of musical instruments. "It is almost inconceivable" he writes, "that Gaelic speakers only began to dance socially upon the widespread acquisition of modern instruments and the filtering down of customs from the upper classes" (2012:24). Whether performed by one singer, two singers (a practice that allowed one to carry on while the other caught his breath), or by the dancers themselves, *puirt-à-beul* are a centrally-important genre in the larger context of Gaelic song.

While the majority of *puirt* support dances are still popular today, there were other dance forms, including many "ancient character dances" that, Keith Norman MacDonald explains, were popular "long before the days of country dances and waltzes . . . all [of which] would have been

danced to the *puirt-à-beul*" (Lamb 2012:133). Lamb also suggests (2012:17) that *puirt* served other purposes as well as that of supplying dance-music, including dandling a child on one's knee (§2.1 above), or providing jocular cover for criticism of a neighbor (§6.4 below). John Shaw (1992/93:47) notes the use of *puirt* for didactic purposes in Cape Breton, where young fiddlers were encouraged to learn them as an aid to remembering tunes, in the same way that pibroch songs and *canntaireachd* were used in the training of pipers (§5.3).

Most dance-songs are sung to instrumental marches, jigs, reels, and strathspeys to which syllables have been added—normally short, repetitive texts, often with choruses of semantically-meaningless syllables "chosen as much for their sound as for the message that they conveyed" (Lamb 2012:17). This instinct for textual playfulness may, indeed, reinforce an important and rarely-mentioned aspect of many *puirt-à-beul*: their earthiness.[38] The most cursory browse through MacDonald's *Puirt-à-Beul* reveals a wealth of metaphors for both male and female genitalia and their deployment in a wild variety of imagined circumstances. Notwithstanding W. J. Watson's (1976:xxv-xxvi) well-known declaration about the general suitability of Gaelic verse *virginibus puerisque*, a recent compilation of what the editors call "transgressive" verse (MacKay and MacPherson 2016) reveals that even the greatest Gaelic poets—the likes of Sìleas na Ceapaich (c. 1660-1729) and, pre-eminently, Alexander MacDonald (Alasdair Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair, c. 1698-1770)—were happy to call a spade a spade.[39] As the editors point out, such poetry belongs "to a long and healthy tradition—or counter tradition or subculture—of bawdry, erotic or love poetry that stretches as far back as the age of Ossian" (MacKay and MacPherson 2016:35). We have already noted that many of the clapping songs (§3.1.1) tended to be ribald; indeed, the same subversive tendency is to be found in many waulking-songs and in other songs relating to the lives of women, such as songs relating to the social life of the sheilings (many of the latter seemingly composed by men). In the main, such poetry relies upon gentle suggestion, upon double-entendre—principally, upon listeners' familiarity with what we might term a "lexicon of love," a set of images and figures-of-speech that mean one thing and imply another.[40] Many poems can indeed be given a clean bill-of-health on one level, and be heard as blue by those in the know. Once heard through such a filter,

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[38] Given the bawdiness of many *puirt,* it is remarkable that so many of them are regularly performed by choirs of children on the family-friendly platform of the National Mòd. Compare the 1981 performance of *Am Muileann Dubh* (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/90463/1) by the Nicholson Institute Gaelic Choir to that of *Tha nead na circe fraoiche* (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/34892/1) by Margaret Fay Shaw's informant Peggy MacRae, recorded in 1948. The "black mill" of the title is not a snuff-mill, as the children and their parents may have been assured, but is, according to Maclagan's lexicon (1907:346), a term of endearment for the female genitalia. The text is available in the Campbells' anthology (2013:210-11) and in Lamb (2012:57-58).

[39] Of the latter, the editors write: "[W]hen assessing MacDonald it is impossible to avoid the fact that much of his poetry was avowedly, exuberantly, excessively rude, (porno)graphic, and blue" (MacKay and MacPherson 2016:33).

[40] At a 2013 conference on "Sex and Sexualities in the Celtic World," Domhnall Uilleam Stiùbhart suggested that it would be useful to compile a "pornographic code" of such images, a starting-point for which would doubtless be the collection of "Gaelic Erotica" collected by Edinburgh surgeon Robert Craig Maclagan and published in 1907 in the French periodical *Kryptadia* (1907:295-367). Re-publication of such material might not be in good taste even today, but it would surely help to expose the layers of meaning presented to us in Gaelic tradition, and thus reveal the Gaels to be fully-rounded human beings like ourselves, rather than two-dimensional figures from the irrevocable past.

however, *puirt-à-beul* in particular reveal much about how the Gaels dealt with the earthy side of life, their attitudes to sexuality, and the fun both men and women were inclined to poke at the opposite sex.

4.3.2. Tongue-Twisters

Here we have a subset of *puirt* consisting of songs that may not have been danced to, but which would certainly have amazed listeners by their cross-rhythmical subtlety. *Bainis Iain 'ic Uisdein*, also known as *Ruidleadh nam Pòg*, alternates sections of steady rhythm and foursquare predictability with sections whose rhythmic character catches the listener off-balance. Likewise *Thuirt an gobha fuirichidh mi*, while starting out as a reel (that is, two measures in 2/2 or "cut time"), wrenches the rhythm into groups of three eighth-notes (and other configurations) before returning to a single bar in cut time at the very end; matters are made even more interesting by the insertion of a run of *canntaireachd*-like syllables in the middle of the text. A version of this song recorded from Calum Johnston of Barra has inspired modern groups specializing in the music and song of Gaelic Scotland and Ireland.[41] As tongue-twisters, such songs resemble *M' iteagan is m' eòin is m' uighean* (§4.1), and clearly the emotional intent is the same: to astonish and entertain listeners with the singer's command of syncopation, verbal dexterity, and dash.

4.3.3 Pseudo-*canntaireachd*

Unlike the majority of *puirt-à-beul*, which rely upon actual words and a familiar repertoire of vocable syllables for their texts, pseudo-*canntaireachd* draws upon the syllables used as mnemonics for the teaching of piping.[42] Josh Dickson (2013) has shown that the sort of *canntaireachd* practiced by female singers in the Hebrides—the most famous being Mrs Mary Morrison (Màiri Eoghainn Mhóir) of Ersary, Barra—is not so different in terms of tonal accuracy and rhythmic essentials from the sort used by (male) pipers in the learning and transmission of their art. But because women were, until quite recently, barred from studying piping formally, those who learned *canntaireachd* growing up in piping households generally used it to entertain, selecting tunes from the *ceol beag* repertoire—marches, jigs, reels, and strathspeys—as opposed to the formal pibroch literature. This sort of *canntaireachd*, based on dance music, also served the same purpose as other *puirt* in supporting dancing in the absence of a musician (Dickson 2013:46). Not only was the vocal performance of *ceol beag* by women of undoubted entertainment value, but it also reflects the importance of women as bearers of the *ceol beag*

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[41] For example, Anúna's performance, which appears on their album *Celtic Origins,* probably derives from The Bothy Band's of a generation earlier; both are available on YouTube at this time of writing. Calum Johnston's version (*Am Bothan a bh' aig Fionnghuala*) can be heard on *Music from the Western Isles*. Johnston's performance is not on *Tobar an Dualchais*, but our list includes an equally good one recorded in 1948 from Peggy MacRae of South Uist (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/42367/1).

[42] The term "pseudo-*canntaireachd*" appears in the long-form booklet of notes supplied with *Music from the Western Isles,* where it is applied to an example sung by Mary Morrison. The heading provided for Side 1, Band 6 on this LP, "Puirt-à-Beul," lends legitimacy to the sub-categories identified here, as it includes four items drawn from the first three of them. For discussion of formal *canntaireachd* used by pipers, see below (§5.3).

repertoire. Indeed, we must also consider the likelihood that they played some role in the transmission of that repertoire to young pipers in their own households (see §5.3 below).

4.3.4 Diddling

Finally, diddling—the lilting of dance-tunes using syllables that are as much at home (or more so) in the non-Gaelic parts of Scotland and Ireland as in the *Gàidhealtachd*. These syllables are derived neither from *canntaireachd* nor from the sorts of vocables (*hó hì rìri ù*, and so on) found in the refrains of waulking songs and elsewhere. In fact, the name used for them—diddling —describes them pretty well: *diddlum-doo oh didle-um* are typical. Although this lexicon surely infiltrated the *Gàidhealtachd* through contact with itinerant musicians from non-Gaelic-speaking areas, the fact that the Scottish Studies Archives contain quite a few examples of diddling from *Gàidhealtachd* areas suggests that diddling has been a common feature of Gaelic singing for some time. Indeed, examples like *Chuir iad mise dh'an a' chladach* and *Han an an dò, mo chuilean mìn* suggest that diddling, like *canntaireachd*, was an important element in the song-maker's arsenal. As with other sorts of *puirt*, diddling is used among musicians to remind themselves of how a tune goes, and is also used to accompany dancing.

Whatever else one may say about *puirt-à-beul*, there is no doubt that they constitute a distinct genre. Mary Ann Kennedy notes that the Campbells of Greepe regard *puirt* as quintessentially different from other types of Gaelic song (Campbell 2013:111); Heather Sparling (2008:416-17) argues that *puirt-à-beul* occupy a lower status among latter-day performers of Gaelic song because they are easier to learn and thus more readily accessible to Gaelic learners than are the high-status "heavy" songs that rely upon deeper knowledge of the language (see below, Group 6); and Michael Newton affirms the view of many scholars that *puirt* "were recognized as a distinct genre of such a low register as not to be classified as *bàrdachd* 'poetry' at all, but as a kind of playful doggerel which remains separate from older song types" (2013:67). Even so, there is no denying the ubiquity of the genre among Gaelic speakers on both sides of the Atlantic. Whether the uniqueness of these *puirt* resides in their textual fearlessness, their use as dance-music (dancing being another of the devil's inventions, according to some), their use as a didactic short-cut by musicians, or simply their embodiment of fun and *joie-de-vivre*, they reveal much about the Gaelic view of life.

4.4 Drinking Songs and Toasts and 4.5 Humorous Songs

While we have chosen to list examples of drinking songs/toasts separately from those of humorous songs here, the two types have much in common in terms of structure, performance style, and social utility and function.[43] These songs are generally structured in quatrains, and refrains, where present, tend to consist of meaningful text rather than vocables. They are characterized by strong rhythm (drinking-songs typically in triple rhythm), reflecting their breezy good-humor. Refrains may either be sung in full between each pair of stanzas, or may be sung in

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[43] Many songs in *Tobar and Dualchais* are described as "humorous songs" or "drinking songs," but it is unclear how this distinction is made, as not all those identified as drinking songs refer to drinking, while many of the songs labeled humorous do so.

full at the beginning and then in abbreviated form (that is, the first line only) at the end of each stanza. While it is tempting to think that the decision to sing a refrain in full, or to abbreviate it, might depend on the presence of others, this distinction is not borne out in the small sample cited here; indeed, the singer of *Hùg sibh air nighean donn nam meall-shùil* sings only the first line of the refrain, despite being joined by the company, whereas the singer of *Gun òlainn slàinte Theàrlaich*—a Jacobite-era toast also included in §6.3 below—gives the refrain in full each time, despite her only audience being the fieldworker. As we saw in the case of waulking songs, flexibility regarding the performance of refrains seems generally to reflect the social dynamic of the occasion, rather than an intrinsic and inalienable fact about the textual structure of such songs; but even this rule is certainly not hard-and-fast.

Two examples further illustrate the fluidity of our genre boundaries. *O Fiollagan Gòrach* is a satirical song about a confirmed bachelor and his unlikely marriage prospects, sung at a leisurely pace in a swinging 3/4 rhythm.[44] A livelier variant in 9/8, *Hòro Fhiollaigein Ghòraich*, calls to mind the Irish slip-jig; whether it also resembles a dance known in the Hebrides or in Cape Breton I lack the knowledge to say. A third version of the song, *Saoil a Mhòr am Pòs Thu*, sung by a children's choir, identifies it as "mouth music," although it contains more stanzas than usually feature in *puirt-à-beul*. Similarly, *Bainis Móir Chamroin* is also sung to a jig-tune, suggesting that it also may have done occasional duty as a port. Clearly, hairsplitting is an occupational hazard for those seeking to create catalogs, and the best we can do is acknowledge the ambiguity.

And when is a drinking song more than a drinking song? When it is a *Jacobite* drinking song, like *Gun òlainn slàinte Theàrlaich*; or when it praises a clan leader, like *Faigh anuas dhuinn am botul*; or when it is a toast to people who emigrated, like *Airson na tìm a bh'ann o shean*; or when it raises a glass to the place from which they emigrated, like *Deoch-Slàinte nan Càirdean a dh'Fhàg Sinn air Tìr*; or, for that matter, when it proposes a health to any place, or boat, or dog, or horse, or gun. Indeed, we must admit that many drinking songs—especially toasts—belong among other panegyrics in Group 6, in addition to their placement here.

Our examples also illustrate the habit, common among song-makers, of borrowing: in the drinking-song *Hùg sibh air nighean donn nam meall-shùil* the singer begins with the refrain, and the song is in jovial triple rhythm; *An cuala sibh gu lèir mar a tha e*—a humorous song about (of all things) a dead sheep—uses the same refrain and a close variant of the air, but the singer subtly alters the rhythm, and omits the initial iteration of the refrain at the beginning of the song. From such examples it is clear that a tune used for one song was considered fair game for others, and the refrain would simply travel along with the air. Thomas McKean points out that this practice was a time-honored one, and served a distinct purpose (1997:178):

> In a society accustomed to song, the use of verse, as opposed to prose, alerts the listener that he is receiving a distilled message. The custom that most traditional song-makers follow, of using a familiar tune for a new composition, may actually allow easier access to this message, for the listener need not come to terms with the melody before taking in the content. . . . [T]he melody

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[44] This song is in print in Gillies (2006:414-16) and elsewhere, and a magnificent rendition of it by Lewismen Murdo MacLeod and John Murray appears on *Music from the Western Isles* but not, unfortunately, on the *Tobar an Dualchais* website.

(and possibly form) is selected (consciously or subconsciously) by the song-maker because of its associations. The audience is therefore predisposed to the tenor of the poet's message.

In this respect, song-making practice offers another reflection of what John MacInnes (2006:275) has described as the "panegyric code" used by court poets and bards in the composition of Gaelic poetry. These elements produce (*ibid*.):

a densely woven texture of imagery in which every phrase, indeed almost every word, is significant. Even the shortest utterance sets off a train of memories of linked epithets . . . [and] evoke different sets of new images interlocking with each other in the same way. . . . [T]he ramifications of the system eventually extend throughout society.

In this fashion, a poet's use of a familiar image—or, as here, the appropriation of a familiar refrain and air—resonates with listeners, bringing to mind the whole universe of other poems and songs and stories in which that image, or tune, or refrain has occurred, linking the new song with what had gone before, and connecting it firmly to the living organism that was Gaelic tradition. We shall have more to say on this topic in connection with Group 6 below:

GROUP 4: SONGS TO LIFT THE SPIRITS

4.1 Children's Songs

M' iteagan is m' eòin is m' uighean (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/26780/1)

Tobar tobar sìolaidh (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/25901/1)

Clach mhìn mheallain (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/25899/1)

Na h-eòin bhùchainn air tràigh bhàchainn (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/39144/1)

Na trì eòin (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/95473/1)

Thuirt an luchag as an toll (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/36825/1)

Cò ach Anna mo nighean (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/33618/1)

4.2 Hogmanay Ritual Songs

Òran na Callainn (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/59748/1)

Duan na Callaig (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/26598/1)

Group 5 : Songs to Inform/Teach

If communicating the meaning of a song's text may be of secondary importance in the case of waulking songs, it is of primary importance to the songs in Group 5. Whether they tell a story through song, invoke the the memory and mystery of a story, help someone learn the bagpipes, or teach people how to lead a Christian life, the songs in this group all imply the existence of an audience willing to be engaged and informed.

5.1. Narrative Songs

Thomas McKean points out that in Gaelic tradition, "songs . . . about issues and events . . . are usually not narrative songs in the Anglo-American ballad sense. There is a story behind each song . . . but [the songs] largely depend on the audience knowing the story and the characters already" (1997:131). Emphasizing the importance of the *taighean cèilidh*, John Shaw makes a similar point (2010:24):

> Of greatest interest to the present discussion . . . are the song narratives that link song with storytelling. These are in the form of generally brief stories associated with a particular song, and may consist of the naming of the bard followed by a short anecdote, often revealing of his or her character. Alternatively the narratives may provide a background to the entire text of the song, explaining to the uninitiated the reasons or circumstances of its composition. Such explanations, usually offered as a preface to performing the song, help the first-time listener to decode the often subtle allusions in the verses, and to appreciate the composer's skillful use of language in the deployment of memorable imagery or social nuances.

There are, however, some exceptions to the general rule that the story-behind-the-song would only be told if the presence of the "uninitiated"—the "first-timers"—required it. This category comprises two major sub-groups of narrative songs. The first of these includes songs that themselves contain narrative elements, while the second includes songs that provide a climax to, or commentary upon, a spoken narrative. In the first case, the story is intrinsic to the song; in the second, the framing story may either be told aloud, before the song is sung, or omitted if the singer knows that listeners are already familiar with it. In other words, these are songs whose function is to convey a sense of a series of events—to tell a story.

5.1.1. Ballads

When researchers from the School of Scottish Studies began recording oral tradition in the *Gàidhealtachd*, they were fortunate to find a number of people who remembered some of the Ossianic (Fenian) ballads or "heroic lays," the oldest surviving form of sung narrative in Gaelic oral tradition (Thomson 1974:99-106). These narratives, which chronicle the exploits of Fionn MacCumhaill (Finn MacCool) and his warriors, have been comprehensively collected from the sixteenth century onwards, and were mined for narrative material by James MacPherson, who based his own poem, *Ossian*, upon stories drawn from them (Ross:1952:127, 145 n.75). There are, in addition, a very few examples of Arthurian ballads in Scottish Gaelic; the example here is *Am Bròn Binn* (Gowans 1992). As all of the examples demonstrate, performance of these poems is characterized by a distinctive chant-like style, with one syllable per note, and rhythm dictated by the stress of normal speech. A quatrain, consisting as a rule of heptasyllabic lines, is sung to an air consisting of four corresponding phrases. On some occasions, however—the performances of *Am Bròn Binn and Laoidh an Fhir Mhóir* for example—there is evidence of chain-linking, with the final couplet of one quatrain being repeated at the beginning of the next. A further departure is notable in the case of the second performance of *Laoidh Fhraoich* which, although

fragmentary, appears originally to have used an air that encompassed two quatrains of text rather than one. Readers wondering why the *duain Challain*, Hogmanay ritual ballads, are not listed here are reminded that we included the *duain* above (§4.2), as their function in our period has tended to subordinate their narrative content to their social context as part of the Hogmanay visiting custom.

5.1.2 Religious Narratives

A few songs based upon Biblical narratives have emerged from both the Roman Catholic and the Protestant communities in Gaelic Scotland. In form and style of performance the song *Laoidh Mhoire Mhaighdeann*, from the Catholic tradition, strongly resembles that of the Ossianic ballads, and even suggests by its title that such a resemblance was acknowledged by the community.[45] This song relates the story of the life of Jesus from his birth to his crucifixion, and employs a stressed meter, rather than the heptasyllabic meter of the Ossianic ballads. It also employs the same air as several other songs in Group 5 and one in Group 6; we shall have more to say about this fact presently.

The other religious narrative song included here, *Am Mac Stròdhail*, comes from the Protestant tradition, and tells the story of the Prodigal Son. Stylistically, it is more in keeping with other didactic hymns from this tradition, and one could argue that it belongs in §5.4 below; we have included it here solely on the basis of its narrative content. In form it consists of a series of quatrains composed of lines containing three stresses, each quatrain followed by a refrain which (one assumes) would have been taken up by listeners.

5.1.3. Historical Narratives

In defining this sub-category, we have distinguished between songs which arise from historical events and those which actually narrate them. Group 6.1 below contains a number of songs of the former type, including a number of Jacobite songs which obviously concern events of tremendous importance, but which do not so much narrate as comment upon them.

Like the two religious *laoidhean* just discussed, some historical narrative songs bear clear stylistic resemblance to the Ossianic ballads in being sung to a chant-like air that is governed by the natural rhythm of speech. Indeed, *Blàr na h-Olaind*, *Blàr na h-Eaglaise Brice*, and *Òran a' Chogaidh*—a First World War-era song—employ the same poetic meter and are sung to the same air as the one used for *Laoidh Mhoire Mhaighdeann* and *Laoidh a' Phurgadair*.[46] It seems clear

[45] Another song to the same air, *Laoidh a' Phurgadair*, is not a narrative, but requests prayers for the redemption of souls in Purgatory (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/46026/1). The singer on this track, Fanny MacIsaac, on that occasion follows her singing of *Laoidh a' Phurgadair* by singing *Laoidh Mhoire Mhaighdeann*, so it may be that the two were considered parts of the same song; alternatively, it may simply be that, on the occasion of the recording, singing the first reminded her of the second, so she sang it as well.

[46] This air appears to be a distant cousin of a famously peripatetic tune, one of whose (many) variants in Ireland is "The Star of the County Down." A variant of this air is also associated with the panegyric *Alasdair à Gleanna Garaidh* (see §6.1 below) and a number of other songs which have appeared in print with the indication that they were sung to the tune of *Alasdair à Gleanna Garaidh*.

that certain airs, having become associated with songs of a particular character—in this case, solemn songs about war—provided a metrical and musical model upon which other songs of a similar character could be based.[47] It was as if the people who sang these songs, whose cultural heritage they formed, recognized that certain songs belonged to certain categories, and—consciously or unconsciously—sorted them in their minds accordingly. Not all songs carrying a narrative thread are of this character, however, and the last two in our list illustrate that other modes of performance were possible for narrative songs.

5.2 Cante Fable

To understand this category, we must slightly reinterpret the term cante fable, which *A Dictionary of English Folklore* defines as "a technical term for spoken prose narratives interspersed with short songs conveying crucial information (for example, magical utterances, riddles, threats, and so on)" (Simpson and Roud 2003). In the Gaelic tradition, what has latterly remained are the sung elements, the stories in which these songs were originally embedded no longer an essential component of performance. Even so, an understanding of the background to the song—the narrative component—is essential to an understanding of many of these songs, particularly those in which the supernatural world plays a part. Seemingly the community assumed such an understanding, and dispensed with the actual telling of the story in those social contexts where everyone was already familiar with it.

5.2.1. Supernatural Songs

James Ross states that items in the category he called "fairy songs" are "difficult to isolate" in terms of any particular textual, metrical or musical type; rather, a "fairy song" is "merely the song a fairy sang in a certain situation, and for this information we depend upon a traditional account of its origin which is given by the singer of the song" (1952:134). We have enlarged Ross's definition here to include not just songs in which the fairy is actually singing, but more particularly songs in which supernatural agency plays any part, and—most crucially—to which some thread of the original narrative still clings as a means of explaining the mystery of the song. Indeed, mystery is at the heart of these songs, and a sense of mystery is the primary effect that these songs evoke. Texts of such songs tend to be limited, and to contain lots of repetition; airs tend to be simple and generally through-composed.

Although we have included these songs among other songs of extroversion, it must be noted that these are not gregarious songs. They were probably sung at home by parents and grandparents more frequently than at noisier gatherings, and it would have been at home that children would have first learned the stories connected with them. Indeed, one of the informants tells the collector that she learned the song *A Mhòr, a Mhòr, till rid mhacan* at home because she

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[47] The Skye bard Calum Ruadh Nicholson, from Braes, composed a number of songs on historical themes and recorded many of them for the School of Scottish Studies. The recordings reveal Calum's overwhelming fondness for the chant-like style mentioned here. Some of his own compositions can be sung to the air of *Alasdair à Gleanna Garaidh*, while he chants others in a flexible improvisatory style to airs seemingly of his own composition.

heard her mother using it as a spinning-song; and were it not for the associated narrative details, this song would have been assigned to §2.2.2.[48]

On the other hand, three of the songs listed in this category—*A nighean nan geug*, *A phiuthrag 's a phiuthar*, and *Sealgair a' choilich bhuidhe*—are, in terms of form, verse-meter and refrain structure, reminiscent of waulking songs. Given the fact that waulking-song texts are so thematically variable, it seems at least possible that these three songs may at some point have been used as accompaniment for some such rhythmically-regulated activity. In the performances here, however, they sound like anything but waulking songs; and we have classed them as supernatural songs because of the narrative element that is central to them.

Finally it is worth noting that this category should be admitted as unabashedly "etic" in its construction. John MacInnes tells me that, in his childhood, the natural and supernatural worlds were not separate, but that supernatural explanations were given and accepted as part of the way things were. Modern children learn to distinguish "fairy tales" from more fact-based narratives at an early age, but it is worth remembering that other societies have not always done so.

5.2.2. Pibroch Songs

Pibroch songs are associated with the tradition of *pìobaireachd*, the formal, classical music of the Highland bagpipes (Ross:1952:131-33). Some pibroch songs are associated with the circumstances in which the original pibroch was composed, while others may lack this dimension; some of them are recognizable melodic variations on the pibroch air, while others cannot be traced in this way. All of them, however, display certain qualities in common: textually, they are simple and undeveloped, incorporating a good deal of repetition; musically, they have slow, deliberate melodies reminiscent of the *ùrlar*—the principal theme—of a pibroch composition, with some of them moving on to a slightly quicker second strain. Many of these songs were no doubt composed by pipers themselves for mnemonic purposes, and are clearly derived from specific *pìobaireachd* compositions; additionally, they may have been further inspired by the circumstances in which a piper found himself—*Cha till Mac Cruimein* is an example—or by some other aspect of the story. The fundamental relationship between pibroch songs and their instrumental background—both music and text—has been a source of fascination to many, including pipers themselves.[49]

The important fact about pibroch songs for our purposes is that there is very often a story associated with them, a fact which justifies their placement among songs of extroversion. Like

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[48] After the song, the following conversation ensues between the collector, John MacInnes, and the singer, Mrs Annie Arnott: *"An ann aig ur màthair a chuala sibh an t-òran a tha sin . . . ?' ''S ann.' 'Agus . . . cha bhiodh i a' tàladh . . . ?" "Cha bhiodh, cha bhiodh i idir ris." "Cuin a bhiodh i ga sheinn, ma-tha?" "Bhiodh i ga sheinn nuair a bhiodh i a' snìomh!" "Seadh, dìreach."* ["Was it from your mother that you heard that song?" "Yes." "And . . . she wouldn't be using it as a lullaby . . . ?" "No, not at all." "When did she sing it, then?" "She used to sing it when she was spinning!" "I see."]

[49] The well-known piper Allan MacDonald (1995) has explored this issue in considerable detail. For a study of some of the legends and other materials associated with *Cha till Mac Cruimein* in particular, see Blankenhorn (1978).

the supernatural songs, however—and many pibroch songs contain supernatural elements—these songs are contemplative in mood: they are not showy, they are easy to grasp both textually and musically, and they could serve as accompaniment to any number of domestic tasks if required, resembling the sorts of songs in §2.2 in all these respects.

The fact that pibroch songs are associated with specific narratives—about the composition of the pibroch, or the fate of the piper—links them with the considerable group of supernatural songs as well as other songs that explicitly or implicitly involve the use of narrative. Such songs are indeed incomplete apart from the enfolding narrative that gives them their reason for being; and because narrative involves storytelling—an inherently extroverted activity—all types of narrative songs are included in Group 5.

5.3 Didactic Songs

Songs in this category are not necessarily narratives, but they are ones that require an explicit verbal context. Their function is to underline and reinforce a specific lesson that the listener—child or adult—is being asked to learn and take to heart.

5.3.1 *Canntaireachd*

We have already included what we called pseudo-*canntaireachd* in this catalog (§4.3.3). There remains the original didactic *canntaireachd*—the formal system of "oral notation" developed and used by pipers in recording their compositions and in passing on their art to their students. Unlike the lively context in which pseudo-*canntaireachd* is to be found, the formal teaching of *ceòl-mór*—the "big music" of the pipes, *pìobaireachd*—is most likely to take place in a private setting, one-on-one. The *canntaireachd* associated with formal piping instruction is therefore unlikely to function as entertainment *per se*, except possibly in a gathering of piping *cognoscenti*.

The *pìobaireachd* genre is inherently introspective, requiring focused concentration on the part of both player and listeners. There is no dancing, no foot-tapping—nothing gregarious or extroverted about it. At the same time, the didactic use of *canntaireachd* unquestionably involves explanation, discussion, audience (that is, pupil) participation, and other aspects of two-way communication. While there is no narrative being communicated, there is an important "text" that is, that of the piping notation, and through it, the music of the *pìobaireachd*, which the pupil is expected to learn by heart. For these reasons we have included this sort of *canntaireachd* here.

5.3.2 Religious Songs

Finally, this group of songs includes a number of Protestant hymns whose primary purpose is to teach believers about important aspects of Christian life. Themes of the songs listed as examples include the importance of avoiding drunkenness and other forms of sinful behavior, of appreciating Christ's sacrifice, of coming to terms with one's own mortality, and of contemplating the Day of Judgement. They are included here because of their didactic character —they often address their audience directly, as in *Rùn don Fhear Ùr*, where the second stanza

begins, *Éistibh sibhse a chlann òg* ("Listen, young people")—and it is taken for granted that a song intended to teach or inform others about something is a song that must be sung before an audience. This is not to say that they could not have been sung in solitude, similarly to those contemplative religious songs in §1.3.2; but because they were designed for an explicitly didactic purpose, they are included here.

The importance of songs in Group 5 lies in their texts, and the clear communication of textual meaning—whether the text is intended to tell a story, to underscore the mystery of a story told in prose, or to teach some specific content—is the singer's principal duty. The performance of these songs can vary considerably, from the chant-like recitation of the *duain* and historical narratives, to the simple and repetitive singing of the supernatural and pibroch songs. In all cases, however, necessary attention is paid to conveying the meaning of the text. For this reason, they share a number of stylistic features. All of these songs are generally performed (sung or chanted) by a soloist at a tempo approximating that of ordinary speech. Narrative songs do not generally feature refrains, and repetition occurs only where chain-linking is employed. Texts and airs of supernatural and pibroch songs tend to be simple and repetitive, and where refrains are present, others join in:

GROUP 5: SONGS TO INFORM / TEACH

5.1 Narrative Songs

5.1.1 Ballads

Laoidh Fhraoich (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/17302/1)

Laoidh Fhraoich (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/46105/1)

Bàs Oscair (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/58590/1)

Duan na Cèardaich (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/24519/1)

Duan na Muilidheartaich (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/41016/1)

Laoidh Dhiarmaid (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/43734/1)

Laoidh a' Choin Duibh (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/24539/1)

Am Bròn Binn (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/5769/1)

Laoidh an Fhir Mhòir (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/45580/1)

5.1.2 Religious Narratives

Laoidh Mhoire Mhaighdeann (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/26401/1)

Am Mac Stròdhail (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/33725/1)

5.1.3 Historical Narratives

Sa mhìos dheireannach dhen fhoghar (Blàr na h-Òlaind) (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/34588/1)

Òran air Blàr na h-Eaglaise Brice (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/93669/1)

Òran a Chogaidh (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/87461/1)

Tha mi fo chùram ar cùlaibh Èireann (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/93937/1)

Madainn Dhomh 's Mi Sràidearachd (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/10998/1)

5.2 Cante Fable

5.2.1 Supernatural Songs

Ille bhig, 'ille bhig shunndaich ò (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/79470/1)

A Mhòr, a Mhòr, till rid mhacan (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/99707/1)

'S olc an obair do theachdaire… (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/27084/1)

A Mhòr a ghaoil (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/100670/1)

A nighean nan geug (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/45003/1)

A phiuthrag 's a phiuthar (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/40841/1)

Sealgair a' choilich-bhuidhe (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/85533/1)

Cailleach Bheinn a' Bric (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/61456/1)

Pilliù Pillililileòghain (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/24917/1)

Dh'fhàg mi 'n seo 'na shìneadh e (An Cùbhrachan) (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/89261/1)

Buain na Rainich (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/101935/1)

Uamh an Òir (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/54755/1)

5.2.2 Pibroch Songs

A Cholla mo Rùn, Seachainn an Caol (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/22608/1)

Fàilte Dhruim Fionn (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/21236/1)

Aodann Corrabheinn (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/44677/1)

Chaidh Donnchadh dhan bheinn (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/43797/1)

Cha Till MacCruimein (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/92099/1)

Uamh an Òir (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/54755/1)

Mo ghlùin fodham (Uamh an Òir) (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/21509/1)

Fraoch à Rònaigh (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/18986/1)

5.3 Didactic Songs

5.3.1 Canntaireachd

Crònan na Caillich sa Bheinn Bhric (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/78399/1)

A' Ghlas Mheur (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/58273/1)

Cherede Che o Dro O (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/86976/1)

Cille Chrìosd (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/75819/1)

5.3.2 Religious Songs

A' Mhisg (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/98520/1)

'S mi 'm shuidh' aig an uaighe (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/19933/1)

Rùn don Fhear Ùr (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/3779/1)

Òran na h-Eaglaise Saoire (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/75238/1)

Latha a' Bhreitheanais (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/94644/1)

Och Mar Tha Mi 's Mi san Fhàsaich (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/48937/1)

Group 6 : Songs to Affirm Identity

Songs in this category are all, in one way or another, conscious declarations of identity. Because they affirm what sort of people the Gaels understand themselves to be, what lies at the heart of their value-system, they are given pride of place by Gaels themselves in their song repertoire. In Scotland, this category includes the so-called *òrain mhóra* ("big songs") that occupy the big stages in Mòd competitions, songs of high prestige and considerable antiquity. Heather Sparling (2008:412) received an email from a Mòd correspondent that described them as having their basis in panegyric poetry:

> Mainly of a classical content, they describe, for example, battles, praise clans/nobility, lament death or are sad lullabies, or songs of intense love. Generally they are quite difficult to sing and normally consist of eight lines or more per verse. They are heavy and sad and it is rare that you would come across a new song that would be considered to be an *òran mòr*.

In Cape Breton, such songs are labeled "heavy" (*trom*) or "deep" (*domhainn*). Sparling explains (2008:411):

> [They] consist of eight-line strophes (although the number of lines can vary) and generally do not have a chorus. The lack of a chorus marks heavy songs as songs for listening, rather than songs for participating. . . . The rhyme schemes and meters tend to be complex, and the lyrics tend to be in a high linguistic register. . . . Although the quantity of heavy songs in Gaelic song publications suggests that they were once commonly heard in Cape Breton Gaelic communities . . . [t]heir length, complexity, and high register Gaelic makes them difficult to access for all but fluent Gaelic speakers.

As we shall see, our categorization takes some liberty with these descriptions. We have already discussed lullabies, laments, and "songs of intense love" elsewhere (see §§1.1, 1.2, and 2.1 above). So while Group 6 includes many examples that could be labeled as *òrain mhóra* or "heavy" songs, it includes others that might not.

The panegyric impulse lies at the heart of Gaelic poetry: whether explicitly or by implication, the people, places, animals, boats, natural phenomena, and events that appear in song-poetry are subject to the judgment of the poet, who expresses the judgment of the community upon them. The form of that judgment is expressed through what Dr. John MacInnes (2006:265-66) has termed a "panegyric code," to which we earlier referred (§4). As MacInnes has persuasively argued, this code is more than a summary of the rhetorical system found in the poetry. It describes a state of mind, a frame of reference that encompassed all aspects of life in the *Gàidhealtachd* and gave form to the belief that despite centuries of harsh experience it was nonetheless worthwhile to promote the notion of a unified Gaeldom (*ibid.*):

> The primary function of *bàrdachd* is to be found in clan panegyric, where the stress is on the survival of the group of warrior-hunters at the top of society. The diction is codified in sets of conventional images, most densely concentrated in the heroic elegy composed at the point of crisis

brought about by the death of a leader—in other words, when it was most necessary to reaffirm the traditional values of the community.

 . . .

The attempts on the part of poets to preserve at least a conceptual Gaelic unity were successful up to a point, but at the price of developing panegyric not only as a form but as a pervasive style. The style in turn reflects an attitude to the world, which is regarded intellectually in terms of praise versus dispraise. It extends to love poetry and to nature poetry, in the latter evoking a sense of friendly or unfriendly territory: in short, it bears the Gaelic sense of social psychology, of history, of geography.

All of the songs in Group 6—whether songs of praise, songs of dispraise, or songs of complaint—reflect the central importance of this panegyric impulse (and its opposites) in establishing the Gaelic world-view. Thematically, the five categories within this group differ only in their subject matter. They are included among songs of extroversion because, to a very important degree, they express the public persona of the Gael, reaffirming that persona in the minds of the Gaels themselves—what Finnegan has termed "a mythical or sociological charter for a society" (1977:242)—and providing its purest expression to the minds of others. The songs in Group 6, especially those in §§6.1 and 6.2, express pride in one's country and one's people—in other words, they are patriotic songs, even if the *patria* exists largely in the mind.

Many of these songs are by known authors, poets whose service to chieftains ensured that their works survived in manuscripts of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as well as in the memories of the people. Nearer our own time, the songs of local bards like Màiri MacPherson (Màiri Mhór nan Òran), Calum Ruadh Nicholson, Iain MacNeacail, and many others have expressed the views of countless Gaels who remember and sing them.

Texts of these songs tend to be complex, and often present an argument. Performance by a solo singer tends to be moderate-to-slow, and repetition is uncommon, except where chain-linking occurs. Refrains are less common, but not unheard of in these songs; when a refrain is present, and the song is sung in ordinary company (that is, not from a platform), people are likely to join in.

A number of these songs inhabit multiple categories in this catalog. Some have narrative tendencies, and could as easily be listed in Group 5; three of the Jacobite songs listed here could also function as waulking-songs; and the presence of toasts already included in §4.4—a genre which, come to think of it, would naturally include songs of praise—further demonstrates the slippery character of human culture, as opposed to biology or physics.

6.1. Clan Panegyric, Satire, and Complaint

The panegyric model doubtless has its origin in clan panegyric, which was for centuries essential to maintaining the standing of those at the top of the Gaelic world. Whether practiced by professional hereditary poets on behalf of the chieftain and his family, or by vernacular bards both prior to and following the disintegration of Gaelic society, the composition and dissemination of such poetry not only reinforced traditional relationships and allegiances, but was also crucial to maintaining Gaels' sense of their identity in the world.

Because this is such an important category, I have included more examples than I have done for other genres. Although the majority of them are sung by only two singers—Calum Johnston of Barra and Duncan MacDonald of South Uist—I feel that there is unlikely to have been a great deal of variation in the performance, understanding, and social context of such songs from one part of the *Gàidhealtachd* to another.

As in Group 5, the expression of textual content and meaning is of paramount importance in these songs that are sung slowly and deliberately, enabling the listener to grasp both the words themselves and the solemnity of their meaning. In terms of melody, airs are generally non-repetitive within the stanza, with the music of the refrain (in the four items where a refrain is present) echoing that of the stanza. Chain-linking, which occurs in seven of the examples, allows the listener more time to follow the song's argument. As regards meter, most of the songs included here consist of regular stanzas, with one of them—*Duan do dh'fhear de Chlann 'Illeathain*—composed in heptasyllabic lines and chanted by Duncan MacDonald in the style of the other *duain* we have examined (see §5.1.1 above). Other metrical forms include quatrains and couplets of four- or five-stress lines, and stanzas in so-called "strophic" meter, in which the last line of each stanza contains one more stressed syllable than in preceding lines.[50]

6.2. Homeland and Nature Panegyric

Songs in this section describe the poet's homeland, the goodness of the people who live there, and the beauty and bounty of the countryside. As in all panegyric, the comprehensibility of the text is of utmost importance. Unlike the songs in §6.1, however, two-thirds of the songs in this section are sung to melodies suggestive of rounded-binary form, either AABA or ABBA. The last two songs are chanted, and the second of these—*Ghabh mi suas gu àirigh luachrach*—is sung to the same air that we saw earlier employed for the two historical narrative songs in §5.1.4, for *Laoidh Mhoire Mhaighdeann* in §5.1.3, and for *Alasdair à Gleanna Garaidh* in §6.1.

6.3 Political Panegyric, Satire, and Complaint

As one might expect of a people who have long found themselves at the sharp end of political developments, Gaelic poets have not been short of material for songs about the events in which Gaels have been caught up. From the Jacobite period and the Clearances to the great wars of the twentieth century, some of Gaeldom's greatest songs are those that offer comment upon political matters.

Although the structure of three of the Jacobite songs listed among our examples—*Agus hò Mhòrag*, *An fhideag airgid*, and *Smeorach Chlann Raghnaill*—suggests their probable use as waulking-songs at some time in the past, our recordings show that the singers valued them for textual reasons and gave them appropriately serious treatment. Indeed, many waulking-songs

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[50] The late Rev. William Matheson made a lifetime's study of poetry in strophic meters and how it should be performed; see Blankenhorn (2013a). Recordings of his singing of clan panegyric in both strophic and other meters, most of them reconstructed from his study of manuscript and printed sources in light of his deep knowledge of tradition, are an important resource. These items are not included in *Tobar an Dualchais*, but are available on the Scottish Tradition CD *Gaelic Bards and Minstrels*.

preserve Jacobite themes, as a search for "Jacobite" songs in *Tobar an Dualchais* will reveal. Similarly, we have already noted that *Gun òlainn slàinte Theàrlaich* is, as its title indicates, a drinking-song (§4.4); at the same time, its hearty praise for Prince Charles Edward Stuart reflects the fact that the panegyric impulse infused Gaelic poetry of all kinds.

6.4 Panegyric, Satire, and Complaint about Local Events and Characters

This category has been a productive one up to modern times, and is well represented among the works of local bards on both sides of the Atlantic.[51] The first three songs listed here are all panegyrics; *Deoch-slàinte nan gillean* takes the form of a drinking-song and is also listed in §4.4. The next three are satires—the best-known being Alasdair Mac Mhaighistir Alasdair's *Diomoladh Mòraig*; and the remaining five are songs of complaint.

All such songs were designed to make a strong point, and thereby to reaffirm the values and social conventions that held the community together. For the most part, they sought to do so without causing too much offense. John Shaw's observation about Cape Breton can equally be well applied to the Scottish *Gàidhealtachd*. Topical songs, he says (2000:32):

> can be placed on an ascending scale of directness and force, beginning with . . . affectionate and entertaining portrayals . . . and extending to undisguised verbal attacks. . . . In their social commentaries the songs frequently call attention to the less flattering characteristics present in a community—excessive pride, vanity, pretension, malice—by devices such as putting words in the mouths of local characters. . . . [And] a village bard in a local setting can use innuendo and indirect imagery contrasted with direct bawdry to address such delicate issues as female vanity, aging, and sexual mores.

Satire was, however, a sharp weapon whose use could have grievous consequences. In a tight-knit community, the direct expression of ridicule and contempt carried risk not just for the target, but for the poet.[52] While some poets appear to have cared less than others about these social conventions (Alasdair mac Mhaighistir Alasdair comes to mind), there is no doubt that the social opportunities for satire and bawdry were fewer than for other types of song.

6.5 Religious Panegyric and Evangelism (Hymns)

Of the relevance of the panegyric model to the composition of religious verse, John MacInnes writes (2006:318, emphasis added):

> [T]he crumbling of the traditional rhetoric of Gaelic poetry, involved a crumbling of Gaelic identity also. In this connection, it is to be observed that, apart from the transference of loyalty to

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[51] John Shaw (2000:17-18) notes that, from the mid-nineteenth century onwards, poets born in Nova Scotia began to compose panegyrics, political songs, and other songs commenting on current events and situations, similar to those composed by so-called "village bards" in Scotland.

[52] Cape Breton poet Donald (Dòmhnall Thormaid) MacDonald discovered that the composition of even gently satirical verse could have adverse consequences for himself (Shaw 2000:42-43).

the British Army and Empire . . . the only system which introduced a competing psychology, and therefore offered a new identity, was the intense, evangelical Presbyterianism which took root in most of the Gaelic area only after 1745—in fact, in the later eighteenth century and throughout the nineteenth—that is to say, when the older social system had been conspicuously broken. . . . [This new psychology] affected but failed to displace the older intellectual order: indeed, although *the panegyric code can be traced even in some of the hymns of the Evangelical Revival*, the two systems remained on the whole in mutual hostility.

The six hymns given here as examples illustrate MacInnes' point. Three are sung to melodies that contain no repeated element, and three to tunes using some sort of rounded-binary form (ABAC, ABCA). All are composed in four-line stanzas; two of the songs employ refrains that are also in four-line stanzaic form.[53]

As was the case with songs in Group 5, the *raison d'être* of these panegyric songs is to impart a significant text. In asserting the virtues of clan, country or religious belief, the poet has crafted his verse—and the singer must sing it—in order that the proud sentiment it embodies be clearly communicated, understood, and appreciated by others. Those songs that represent the antithesis of panegyric—the satires and, most commonly in modern times, the complaints—uphold the rules of virtuous behavior by showing what happens when those rules are flouted. In either case, it is the affirmation of the community's core belief in such virtues that constitutes the essential message of such songs:

GROUP 6: SONGS OF PRAISE AND DISPRAISE

6.1 Clan Panegyric, Satire, and Complaint

Alasdair à Gleanna Garadh (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/32209/1)
O Iain Ghlinne Chuaich (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/40814/1)
Duan do dh'fhear . . . (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/25198/1)
Alasdair a laoigh mo chèile (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/57810/1)
Faigh a-nuas dhuinn am botal (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/40740/1)
Tàladh Iain Mhùideartaich (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/40742/1)
An Dubh Ghleannach (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/24913/1)
Cumha Chailein Ghlinn Iubhair (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/78250/1)
Fhuair mi naidheachd as ùr (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/24898/1)
Mo chiad iomagain . . . (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/98591/1)
Òran do dh'Iain Breac MacLeòid (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/78251/1)
'S cian 's gur fhada mi 'm thàmh (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/78247/1)
An deicheamh latha de thùs a' Mhàirt (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/25482/1)
Fhuaras naigheachd an-dé (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/35326/1)

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[53] Cape Breton's largely Catholic population preferred the *òrain matha* or *laoidhean* (religious hymns), but "even the oldest singers only recall hearing them infrequently" (Shaw 2000:18).

Tha mulad, tha mulad (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/97615/1)
Chaidh a' chuibhle mun cuairt (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/7229/1)
Latha Inbhir Lòchaidh (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/19929/1)
O gur mise a tha air mo chràdh (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/76181/1)

6.2   Homeland / Nature Panegyric and Complaint

Allt an t-Siùcair (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/88148/1)
'S toigh leam 's toigh leam… (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/23897/1)
Eilean mo ghaoil (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/25288/1)
Ma shaoileas sibh uile gur bàrd mi (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/44471/1)
O gur toil leam hè gur toil leam (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/4249/1)
Òran Choire a' Cheathaich (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/42426/1)
Gur moch a rinn mi dùsgadh (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/97270/1)
'S e mis bhith fada bho thìr m' eòlais (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/64526/1)
Ghabh mi suas gu àirigh luachrach (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/28416/1)
Moch 's mi ag èirigh . . . (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/44335/1)
Eilean a' Cheò (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/68000/1)

6.3   Political Panegyric, Satire, and Complaint

Agus hò Mhòrag (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/94100/1)
An fhìdeag airgid (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/22363/1)
Smeorach Chlann Raghnaill (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/73077/1)
Gun òlainn slàinte Theàrlaich (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/3120/1)
Cabar Fèidh (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/33325/1)
Ged tha mo cheann air liathadh (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/30131/1)
Beinn Lì (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/45313/1)
Cha mhòr nach coma leam . . . (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/79197/1)
Tha rìoghachdan an t-saoghail seo (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/19143/1)
Thàinig bàta air tìr dhan àite (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/42378/1)

6.4   Panegyric, Satire, and Complaint about Local Events and Characters

Deoch-slàinte nan gillean (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/65751/1)
Fàilte ort Uilleim (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/77784/1)
Òran Iain 'illEaspaig (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/25887/1)
Aoir Sheumais Bhàin (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/69800/1)
Diomoladh Mòraig (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/103601/1)
Aoir a rinn Iain MacIllEathain . . . (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/59833/1)
Ach 's e an t-Èireannach a bh' ann (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/8921/1)
Hoa gur mise tha fo mhì-ghean (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/13287/1)

Òran mu Niall Mac Dhonnchadh . . . (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/61453/1)

'S diumbach mi do mhuinntir . . . (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/19631/1)

'S gann gun dìrich mi a-chaoidh (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/1897/1)

6.5 Religious Panegyric and Evangelism (Hymns)

Tìr an Àigh (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/75377/1)

Is e gràdh fir-saoraidh (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/71779/1)

Tha fhios agad gur toil leam thu (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/72625/1)

Tha tìr ann a tha nas deàlraiche na là (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/44878/1)

Long an t-soisgeil, long an àigh (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/33616/1)

Sona gu bràth an àireamh . . . (http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/34547/1)

Gaelic Song Today

As should be obvious, this essay has made no attempt to deal with, much less categorize, Gaelic song as it is manifested in mainstream western society. What seems clear is that, however much some of us may wish to describe today's performance of Gaelic song in terms of a seamless continuum, as part of a traditional process of incremental change, the time has come to acknowledge the watershed that exists between the Gaelic society that regarded singing as a part of everyday activity, and the society—our own—that regards singing for other people as something requiring professional expertise. This is not to say that today's Gaels do not value Gaelic song for many of the same reasons that their ancestors did. For people of Gaelic heritage (and for an increasing number whose Gaelic heritage, if any, is based on research rather than personal upbringing), songs in Gaelic still have great power to charm and entertain; they evoke longing, pride, nostalgia, and patriotic fervor; and they provide a focus for personal and group identity in a world that many perceive as inimical to such differentiation.

But there are important differences; and it is in these that the bright line, the undeniable difference between our world and that of the traditional Gael, must be acknowledged. For one thing, our appreciation of Gaelic song today cannot possibly be as nuanced as that of our forbears. When we hear a song in Gaelic, very few of us can accurately visualize the places and people named in it; we will not be instantly reminded of an older song—and all that that older song signified—when we hear a newly-composed one; we are unlikely to take for granted the notion of a Gaelic *patria,* what John MacInnes called "conceptual Gaelic unity"; and most of us have not borne anything like the daily hardships—never mind the shameful indignities—endured by generations of Gaels on both sides of the Atlantic. Sorley MacLean, in his bitter and sustained attack on the works of Marjory Kennedy-Fraser in the 1930s, complained about the unequal power relationship between Gaeldom and the dominant culture (Mac Gill-Eain 1985:20):

> . . . [W]ith the kind of people who call Mrs Kennedy-Fraser's travesties of Gaelic songs "faithful reproductions of the spirit of the original," I have no dispute. They are harmless as long as ignorance and crassness are considered failings in criticism of poetry. They have had their hour in the drawing-rooms of Edinburgh and London; they have soothed the ears of old ladies of the Anglo-Saxon bourgeoisie: they have spoken after dinner, hiding with a halo the bracken that grew with the Clearances . . .

The Clearances? No one today longs to experience the life lived by people, isolated in every way imaginable, who had no rights to the land they farmed and every likelihood of being victimized by their supposed leaders. All of today's Gaelic-speakers are bilingual; and because the dominance of the Anglophone world is so overwhelming, it is hardly surprising that our understanding, appreciation, and latter-day performance of Gaelic song are largely informed and shaped by unconscious aesthetic expectations, associations, and assumptions that have their origins in the dominant culture, and have little to do with the Gaelic world we have been describing here.

If we are truly to understand how Gaeldom regarded song and singing, we must fully comprehend the essential conservatism of the Gaels. As we have seen, Gaels were conservative because they had to be: in order to preserve their communities and their way of life, they needed to pull together, and individual innovation was frowned upon. John Shaw observed that when musical instruments (piano, pump organ, violin) began to be used to accompany Gaelic songs in Cape Breton, "the results occasionally elicited emotional reactions from older singers: '*Carson fo Dhia nach cum thu suas an cleachdadh a bh'againn?*' (Why in God's name won't you keep up the way that we had?)" (2000:14). Margaret Fay Shaw, acknowledging that the tunes she transcribed in South Uist would lend themselves to harmonized arrangements for part-singing, explained why she would not present them as such: "The traditional songs of the Hebrides are never accompanied nor sung in parts" (1955:72). Thomas McKean, describing how poets selected tunes for their compositions, noted that the choice was often made because the existing tune provided not just a suitable melody in metrical terms, but also a set of associations that would enrich listeners' experience of the new song by helping them fit it into an appropriate cultural context. A newly-composed air would not do this, and would ring false for another reason as well (McKean 1997:178):

> To demand a fresh melody for each song would be to apply a modern "art" music aesthetic and to imply that a song is primarily an artistic rather than a functional, emotional and communicative creation. In order to communicate at this level, the message must be sung . . . in the register in which such communications are expected to be coded.

To the Gael, songs—how they were composed, and how they were performed—affirmed the essential unity of the community. Anybody could compose a song, and anybody could sing; but when they did so, they knew that they were giving voice not just to their own personal emotional reality, but to that of their neighbors and of their community as a whole. As McKean (1997:97) learned from Skye bard Iain MacNeacail, the primary purpose of a new song was to express something about a particular moment, and to bring people together in that moment:

> Between the wars Iain often made a new song, sang it at a céilidh or two and then it would be forgotten as it ceased to be topical or a new issue presented itself; "They were for the time being, just." Since the topics were usually ephemeral, a song often had a short working life.

McKean (1997:129) later expands upon this point:

> One of the crucial features of these songs was their transience, a concept that is hard for most Western Europeans to grasp, used as we are to the permanence of the written word. They were oral both in use and in nature and were never meant to be written. By being transcribed, they have been so divorced from their function that they are transformed into different entities and judged by inappropriate criteria.

Even when a song became popular and spread abroad, it was the song itself that survived, not necessarily the name of the bard who composed it.

The social changes that have led to today's "contemporary traditional music" have not come about overnight.[54] John Shaw (2000:51) recounts how, at the beginning of the twentieth century, Gaels in Cape Breton declined to adopt the innovations advanced by the Mòd in Scotland, and how in Scotland itself:

> the effects of acculturation in the form of imposed settings and performance standards were being remarked on as early as 1905, when Amy Murray during her collecting visit to Eriskay noted Father Allan Macdonald's dismay at songs being "spoiled" and altered in their performance "as though you were to fit a statue in a box by taking off the nose and ears" (Murray 1936:89-91).

Describing how he himself learned songs, Lauchie MacLellan contrasts his own experience with how he sees the situation today (Shaw 2000:75):

> In those times a song meant something. If you were going to sing it you had to know it. It would do you no good to start in on the verses just to sing something that neither you nor anyone else could understand. You had to sing the song with the verses in order. I can remember learning this from [my uncle] Neil: "Now Lauchie," he said, "you're going to be telling a story. And you must go ahead with one verse following the other."

Such descriptions suggest that what traditional Gaels themselves felt had been lost is understanding, what Cape Breton singer Dan Allan Gillies called *brìgh an òrain*—the "central proposition of the song," an understanding that "extends beyond performance into the realm of what constitutes a good song, and is also central to the process of learning a song" (Shaw 2000:24). This loss is reflected in the distinction expressed by Heather Sparling's informants between *puirt-à-beul* and so-called "heavy" songs, and the Cape Bretoner's higher regard for the latter as requiring greater understanding and nuance from the singer, while the *puirt* were

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[54] The phrase—whose meaning clearly depends upon one's point-of-view—is discussed by Ian Olson (2007).

dismissed as being the choice of outsiders, of people who didn't have much Gaelic and who "did not really understand Gaelic culture" (2008:404, 416-17). The same distinction, expressed in more personal terms, seems to underlie Calum Johnston's preference for the "big songs" (*òrain mhóra*), as he explained to field-worker Thorkild Knudsen in 1967 (*Tocher* 13:180):

> . . . I sing [the big songs] to myself because I know that people nowadays, very few . . . like the old big songs, but say fifty or sixty years ago, there were plenty of people who did enjoy that type of song and they would prefer it to anything else that you sang. Nowadays they're much lighter in their choice. You see, it's this "diddles" that they like. . . . It's just the way things have gone. The present generation, they seem to have lost taste for all these things. . . . [T]he old songs have gone, because nobody has any interest in them. They're too difficult for them to learn and they don't like them in any case. And it's a new generation, as you might say, that has grown, and you can't do anything to stop it.

Such objections gathered force on both sides of the Atlantic during the twentieth century, and even today many lament the changes—linguistic, social, economic, aesthetic—that brought an end to traditional Gaelic communities and the well-integrated culture they embodied.

Nowadays, we expect newly-composed songs to showcase the poet or singer-songwriter's unique voice. We expect singers and musicians to explore the printed collections and on-line resources like *Tobar an Dualchais*, to stamp their own style upon the old songs, and to copyright the result. But even with such a wealth of material at our disposal, there is no doubt that the breadth and variability of the repertoire of Gaelic song has been considerably narrowed, not only because few singers these days attempt the *òrain mhóra*, but also because as singers learn from recordings and from printed sources, certain versions of songs become canonical, enshrined in the Mòd songbooks and in the recordings of successful professionals, pushing aside the less-well-known variants. We must also acknowledge that, when instruments are used, the needs of a unified ensemble tend to smooth out the rhythmical irregularities and tonal ambiguities characteristic of unaccompanied Gaelic singing;[55] and that song-texts are often obscured by the instrumental backing, or by unwonted ornamentation, or (with rising frequency) by the singer's uncertain grasp of Gaelic pronunciation.

But for those who flock to the National Mòd, or Glasgow's Celtic Connections, or the innumerable "trad" festivals such purist objections are unimportant. For these audiences, the performer's exuberant talent, voice quality, persona, and the atmosphere created by the performance are more important than the content of the songs themselves. For them, what intensifies the emotional (introverted) response to a lament sung by a longhaired young woman in an ethereal, breathy style to harp notes, or raises an (extroverted) eruption of delight and pride as a set of accompanied *puirt* is brought to a fiery finish is that the performance of a Gaelic song

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[55] Morag MacLeod, describing the difficulty of transcribing the singing of Margaret MacKay of Scarp, Harris, notes: "Any attempt at an accurate representation of Margaret MacKay's use of rhythm, particularly in this song, would make for irksome reading, with far too many changes of time signature. . . . She does not, however, distort the overall rhythm of the verses in the song: this is, rather, one of her subtle ways of 'conveying the changing moods and drama of it'" (*Tocher* 22:213).

is an important symbol of identity.[56] In this fashion, Gaelic song still functions as an important means of reinforcing the audience-community's sense of itself, of demarcating its difference from other audiences, and of justifying its own reality. It matters little that we, the audience-community, are consumers rather than active participants in the music-making, and that we reside on the far side of the proscenium arch.[57]

Conclusions

> How does one define a genre (and *who* defines a genre)? How does one know where one genre begins and another ends? How does one make sense of songs that seem to fit more than one genre? How does one decide whether a particular song is an exception to a given genre, or whether it is better understood as belonging to a separate genre category? (Sparling 2008:401)

This essay has attempted to address two questions. First: is the construction of a categorical system for Gaelic song still a worthwhile project, given our awareness that song must be understood within its social context, rather than apart from it? And second: is the construction of such a system even possible, given the protean nature of human culture?

As we have seen, constructing a generic system for Gaelic song is not a straightforward matter. Category boundaries are permeable; re-purposing is common; and genre labels must always, with time, be subject to revision. Likewise, while emic category distinctions may shed light on how a community thinks about its song repertoire at a given moment, they may not reflect the longer perspective of a well-read and experienced observer, Gael or otherwise.[58] The guiding distinction, used here, between songs of introversion and songs of extroversion can, I believe, provide useful insight, but it can take us only so far.

For example, it would have been easy enough to conclude that the supernatural songs and the pibroch songs belonged among the songs of introversion, as I believe that these would for the most part have been sung in an understated and thoughtful style, as is common with such songs. But because they would have been sung to an audience—probably an audience of children—to tell a story and impart a sense of the unknowable, and because an audience, however young, is

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[56] "Identity" is one of those terms whose meaning must be in dispute in this connection, as today many regard their identity (or even identities) as a matter of personal choice, rather than a fact of life over which they have no control. In this we see yet another difference between traditional Gaeldom and our own diverse world.

[57] This altered social context, along with the decline in singing standards and the change in aesthetic values, is well described in Shaw (2000:52-53).

[58] Sparling notes that "even with ethnographers increasingly focusing on emic labels and taxonomies rather than imposing outside systems, the ethnographer must be sensitive to the fact that not all of a culture's taxonomies will be fully developed, coherent, or explicit" (2008:408).

expected to react to what it hears, these songs are clearly songs of extroversion, and we have placed them among the Songs to Inform, Group 5.[59]

We have already mentioned the considerable overlap between some of the drinking songs (§4.4) and various types of panegyric songs (Group 6). Likewise, it is difficult at times to find the right category in which to place the various types of religious song: should one grant primacy to their emotional content (introversion) or to their evangelical fervor (extroversion)? In many cases, religious songs display both qualities. The question of where to put a given song is one that can only encourage further exploration and discovery, and the appropriate placement of religious songs may offer such an opportunity.

Another question meriting further exploration is how far one might go in cross-cataloging waulking songs. As James Ross (1957:97-98) noted, these songs cover such a wide range of themes that he found himself unable to create a single category for them. While we have done so, there is no doubt that waulking songs reflect many of the themes listed here, including love, loss, narrative, the supernatural, clan panegyric, and satire—all from a woman's point-of-view. They include Gaelic examples of flytings, a combative genre attested in Norse, Anglo-Saxon, English, and Scots tradition since medieval times that involves the ritual exchange of (sometimes profane) insults. Subtle bawdry is well-attested in waulking-songs; and they also—and we think of clapping-songs particularly—take the same rich delight in the skillful use of language as is evident in many *puirt-à-beul*.

There are also significant historical questions which, had this exercise been undertaken, say, two centuries ago, would surely have led to some different conclusions. The use of song to lighten various types of work (for example, reaping, weaving) might have led to more sub-categories being included in Group 2; and the use of choral song in other social contexts such as weddings, where both men and women participated, could have enlarged our understanding of what we now refer to as the waulking-song genre (MacInnes 2007:419-20). We would certainly have been able to record rowing-songs in an actual seagoing context.

In undertaking this study, I have been aware that the whole issue of genre has been a topic of academic debate for some time. The thematic- and structure-based understanding of genre assumed by James Ross has rightly given way to an awareness that the social context of performance can tell us a great deal more about how the participants themselves understand what they are doing, and that their choice of what to sing, and of how and where to sing it, reveals the category to which they would assign that song, assuming they thought of classifying it at all. As Heather Sparling puts it, "In this case, location, vocabulary, gestures, and audience behavior all become significant factors when determining genre" (2008:407).

In light of these arguments, I believe that the framework proposed here offers a useful tool for exploring Gaelic traditional song—its emotional depth; the breadth of its subject-matter and of its reach into people's lives; its social usefulness; its emotional importance for the people, both as individuals and as communities; its capacity to teach, to comfort, and to amuse; its role in affirming the Gaels' consciousness of the world and their place in it. The existence of a catalog

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[59] Maighread Challan (2012:92) points out that such songs, along with rhymes and proverbs, may have functioned to warn children about the danger of doing certain things; certainly children who heard the legend of *Uamh an Òir* might be less inclined to wander into a cave, in case they—like the piper—might fall prey to the green fairy dog.

such as ours in no way negates the validity of applying thematic, metrical, historical, musical or other criteria to Gaelic song, and the examination of song in light of these can only be illuminating, so long as we do not expect any such criteria to yield a taxonomy that will account uniquely for every item in the corpus.

In the end, however, it is not the eventual placement of an item in a particular category that is of value, but rather the effort of careful listening and discernment required to make a choice. This is not a scientific taxonomy, for the simple reason that human culture never stands still long enough to allow such a thing. The categories we have suggested should not be thought of as labels; names by themselves tell us nothing interesting. Rather they should be regarded as lenses that invite us to inspect a song from a singular perspective, in the full understanding that a different lens trained on the same song will probably reveal something else of interest. All we can claim is that we have attempted to suggest working categories that are wide enough to be useful, but narrow enough to be meaningful, and that we have managed to avoid resorting to a "miscellaneous" category for items that fit nowhere else. Indeed, there could never be such a category, because in song as in all of its other manifestations, the culture of the Gaels was a tightly-woven, strong and seamless fabric that—like the *clò mór* when it emerged from the waulking board—protected and gave color to the way of life and the world-view of those who created and sustained it for centuries, even up to our own time.

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