

G A E L I C P O E T R Y

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Introduction

The poetry of any nation or people has its own characteristics, no matter how complex and difficult to define they may be. In Europe, for instance, because of the classical and Christian heritages, certain qualities are pervasive, crossing ethnic and national frontiers. Yet in so far as each community has its own history, these qualities manifest themselves in distinctive ways. Scottish Gaelic poetry participates in the general European tradition, and in the general Gaelic tradition, but makes its own contribution also, within that context. This thesis attempts to define the leading characteristics of Scottish Gaelic poetry: what makes it specifically Scottish.

The investigation is conducted with, and to some extent is controlled by, an awareness of the special circumstances of Gaelic history. That the position of the Gaels in Scotland, from the twelfth century, was somewhat anomalous is taken for granted. Linguistically and culturally a distinctive community, the Gaels were politically never more than quasi-independent. It is posited that this background produced an idiosyncratic culture. The impingement of influences, political and cultural, from the greater community of Scotland (and to some extent of Britain) upon our society is recognised throughout. But in order to keep a balance, discussion of historical events is kept to a minimum.

One of the idiosyncrasies is the prominence of oral tradition, and the lateness of our written sources. The circumstances in which these sources were compiled, the influence of the pioneer collectors, and their historical and cultural attitudes, and editorial methods, are all investigated in considerable detail.

We conclude that, although the influences of writing upon the oral tradition are important, the essential rhetoric of Gaelic verse has not been obscured thereby. The ambiguities of the relationship between Written and Oral are reduced to such minimal proportions as the evidence allows.

The literary criticism consists of an examination of the rhetorical structures of Gaelic verse. The guiding lines followed are those laid down by the Rev. Wm. Matheson in his work on metrical traditions, expounded in lectures and private discussion. We find that the rhetoric has developed its essential features in bardic panegyric; we demonstrate how its properties provide, from different standpoints, according to which metrical tradition is used, a definable 'universe of discourse' and a coherent view of experience.

We consider the bardic role in its social setting and argue that vernacular bardic attitudes were shaped by the pressures of history; that the bardic verse became developed to maintain a sense of identity and produce a conceptual unity of Gaelic society. We isolate and define rhetorical topics, one of which (the Allies of a clan) is consciously used to foster that sense of unity; other topics interlock with this in a dense and complicated pattern. We try to show that an external cultural influence (that of the European amatory tradition) can be assimilated into the system and given its own place there.

Furthermore, we suggest that the attitudes developed by this cultural complex institutionalise Gaelic poetry, not only in its explicit topics, but also at a deeper level of consciousness, so that experience is ordered in terms of what is to be praised and what is to be dispraised.

III.

This theoretical model, based on a comprehensive view of Gaelic poetry and history, necessarily relegates to the periphery certain qualities which on other criteria would occupy the centre: for instance, the individual perceptions of a Rob Donn or the sensibility of a William Ross. It also omits, almost entirely, two great traditions: Ossianic balladry and religious verse. These could certainly be accommodated in a more complex model, but would still be peripheral, for both are to some extent sui generis.

Although we have concentrated on the rhetorical framework, certain qualitative judgments emerge: one metrical tradition may be better adapted to handle a given topic than another tradition.

The poetry dealt with is largely that of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, for this is its high age. But it is implicit that the attitudes developed there and discussed in this study survive, anachronistically and parochially, to the present day, and that they still provide the native Gael with his sense of identity. In societies with a different historical development, culture is shaped and identity affected by the work of major poets. It is not so much the concept of a 'major poet' that is important in Gaelic as the concept of bardachd. This thesis, in brief, attempts to explain what a Gael means when he expresses positive, critical appreciation of a song or poem in the comment: Tha sin math: tha bardachd air.

The Historical Background

On any view the Gaels of Scotland constitute a distinctive element in the life of the country. To what extent they are to be regarded as separate, however, is a more ambivalent matter, since, distinctive in language though this community may have been, it has never been wholly separable in political terms from the rest of the kingdom. We must therefore begin by observing that the cardinal principle assumed in this study concerns the nature of Gaelic society, viz., that the Gaels in Scotland for most of our history have been a nation. This does not, of course, deny involvement in the rest of Scotland.

The concept of 'nation' may be interpreted in different ways; some historians would no doubt object to its use in this context, but I know of no more adequate term to express the particular sense of identity possessed by the Gaels throughout the vicissitudes of Scottish history. There are indeed complexities in the use of the term. During the last two and a half centuries the processes of decline have produced what can only be regarded now as the detritus of a nation. Earlier than that, and for most of the Middle Ages, internecine strife, often fomented by the policies of the crown and parliament in Edinburgh, made the 'nation' an exceedingly fragmented one. There is in addition to such facts the complication that if we are to speak of a Scottish nation, we must fit into that notion this 'nationhood' of the Gaelic part of the kingdom, and admit that Gaelic Scots, if they are to be regarded as Scots rather than Gaels in Scotland, were at least in a very special relationship to Ireland. Indeed it is demonstrably true that until

the seventeenth century, Gaelic Scotland and Ireland formed one cultural and linguistic province, if not exactly a unity. But while this is so, the Scottish Gaels never denied that they owed allegiance to the King of Scots as their own sovereign, no matter how much they might at any given time disagree with the attitudes and policies of a particular monarch.

The central importance then of this background is that in spite of the idiosyncratic history of Gaelic society and literature, the arrested development of art as well as social institutions, the persistence of oral composition and transmission remarkable in a Western European country, and the existence of certain strains in poetry which can fairly be called 'primitive', it would be quite misleading to categorise Gaelic poetry as a whole with the label of Primitive. There is a fairly well defined notion of Primitive poetry: it is used, for instance, by Sir Maurice Bowra in his book Primitive Song.¹ Primitive poetry according to this definition is the poetry of peoples who lack developed political institutions and marked social stratification. It is invariably oral but is to be distinguished from 'folk poetry' which is a sub-literary tradition defined against the official, written literature of a stratified society. From this viewpoint, Bowra examines the poetry of Eskimos, Bushmen, Australian aborigines and others. No scholar has perhaps expressed the view in print that non-classical, oral, vernacular Scots Gaelic poetry is 'primitive' in that sense, but the opinion can be heard from time to time expressed in academic discussions and seminars, as can also the view that oral, vernacular Gaelic poetry is all

1. V. pp. 1-18.

folk poetry.

One can easily see the reasons for this - plain ignorance being one but by no means the only reason. However that may be, it is a fundamental mistake to interpret Gaelic poetry in this way. It is a judgment made from the outside, which refuses to treat the poetry on its own terms, denies its own explicit claims, and instead of providing the imagined objectivity merely distorts the entire perspective of criticism.

What then constitutes the nationhood of Gaelic? Some of the evidence will become obvious in the course of discussing actual poems; we may however anticipate by glancing at certain of the events of Scottish history as they affected Gaelic society.¹ To some historians the interpretation offered here may appear commonplace and unnecessary. Others would dismiss it as wrongheaded: both professional Scottish historians, with whom the question has been discussed, and also politically conscious individuals who would see Scotland as one homogeneous country and nation, with of course important regional variations.

By the middle of the ninth century the name of Scotia came to be used for most of the country north of Forth and Clyde, now under a Gaelic king. By the early part of the eleventh century, King Duncan had become ruler of the whole of the mainland of modern Scotland. The authority of these early Gaelic kings over a large portion of their realm was merely nominal: the Hebrides, for instance, and sizable tracts of the north and

1. The details are set out in Skene's Celtic Scotland. V. vol. 2, chaps. 8 and 9. A useful modern compendium is W. R. Kermack The Scottish Highlands.

west were under Norse domination. Even so, this kingdom "achieved the remarkable feat of preserving its integrity in the face of Scandinavian onslaughts, so that no significant numbers of Norwegians or Danes ever gained a permanent footing between the Moray Firth and the Firth of Forth."¹ South of Forth, the Gaelic colonisation of Lothian used to be regarded as following the Battle of Carham in 1016 or 1018.² The latest historian to comment on the problem argues that Gaelicisation of the province, which must have proceeded gradually over a fairly lengthy period, began early in the tenth century.³ At all events, by the middle of the eleventh century, when Malcolm Canmore became king, the expansion of these earlier centuries had been to a large extent consolidated. A dominant and relatively highly organised Gaelic society had emerged, backed by a Gaelic-speaking church. One could argue, a priori, that such a situation could scarcely fail to leave a powerful historical impression, even if there was a change of culture and language. And historians such as Major and Boece bear testimony to this fact.

As events turned out, the survival of Gaelic after the Anglicisation of the Court and the administrative institutions, did indeed ensure that a memory of former greatness continued in Gaelic tradition. We have firm evidence of this in

1. G. W. S. Barrow The Kingdom of Scots p.150.
2. Barrow op.cit. p.150. fn.
3. Barrow op.cit. pp.153-4.

Alexander MacDonald's poetry, in the eighteenth century, and this will be discussed in its proper place. The maintenance of the tradition would naturally be secured in the first instance by the mandarin poets and historians who were associated with the King and his Court. Their functions were no doubt diminishing from the time of Alexander I, but some vestige, possibly the last, remained until the inauguration of Alexander III, in 1249. The seanchaidh who recited the descent of the boy king at that ceremony was performing the same kind of seanchas as appears in the one poem that survives of the productions of poets who performed at, or were associated with, the Court of the early Gaelic kings, viz., the Duan Albanach.¹ Although the inauguration of Alexander III may have witnessed the last official appearance of a seanchaidh at the Gaelic Court, descendants of such poets and historians, or descendants of fili families in the service of the great magnates of the kingdom, may nevertheless have survived in Scotland and contributed to the stock of knowledge and craft used by later 'bardic poets'. Among these may be some of the Scottish authors in the Book of the Dean of Lismore. At all events it is interesting to find Donnchadh mac Dubhghaill Mhaoil, the Dean's brother, in a poem addressed to the chief of Clan Gregor, drawing upon this self-same kind of seanchas:

1. K. H. Jackson, The Duan Albanach in Scottish Historical Review, Vol. 36, p.125 ff.

Id chineadh nach críon ré fóir
 is é a líon do ghabh coróin
 dá fhichead agus triúir ríogh:
 dlighthear a n-iúl san airdríomh.

Trí tuaithir, trí deisir dhóibh
 i ndiaidh Mhaoil Choluim Cheanmhóir;
 dá chóigear choróin a chín
 ó Mhaol Choluim go hAilpín.

Ó Ailpín suas is é a mheas
 ceithre fir dhéag go Fearghus:
 cá líon do sheanchas mar sin?
 ríomh go Fearghus is féidir.¹

Just over three centuries after the date of this poem, in the same area of Perthshire, we have an interesting testimony to the state and content of oral tradition. It comes from Duncan Campbell, who was born in 1828 at Kerrumore in Glenlyon. He depicts a society of small tenants, farmers, and minor gentry, who were all Gaelic speaking. He tells us, and demonstrates his claim, that "Our Glenlyon men of age ... were wise and deep in traditional lore."²

In one vignette³ concerning the coronation of Queen Victoria, in 1838, he describes his own aged grandmother

1. W. J. Watson, Scottish Verse from the Book of the Dean of Lismore, pp.215-217.
2. Duncan Campbell: Reminiscences and Reflections of an Octogenarian Highlander, p.108.
3. Campbell, op.cit. pp.136-7.

discussing that event, and adds: "She and others of her generation enjoyed the liberty this occasion gave them for going ... to the history of Scottish Kings as far as Kenneth Macalpin, which had come down by oral tradition. Long afterwards when I read the 'Duan Albanach', I was much surprised to discover that the substance of it was retained to a remarkable extent in the oral and local traditions which our aged people recalled and told at the time of Queen Victoria's coronation. As for the later Kings from the days of Wallace and Bruce, as Glenlyon was visited by so many of them for hunting purposes until the Union of the English and Scottish Crowns, there was nothing very strange in the fact that the traditions were fairly strong and unbroken."

It does not affect our argument as to the attitudes of the by then diminished Gaelic community in Scotland if we allow that these traditions were probably reinforced through the ages from other sources, whether clerical, antiquarian, or even those of schoolmasters. It may be remarked that in modern Gaelic oral tradition, Bruce and Wallace are both represented as Gaelic speakers; and although this is demonstrably based upon (or reinforced by) English language sources, tradition bearers will cite it as evidence of the predominance of Gaelic in Scottish ~~history~~.

We might be tempted to dismiss such claims as the expression of a defence-mechanism by no means uncommon in minority cultures. But deeper knowledge soon leads us to realise that there is either a curious chauvinism or an implicit sense of historical perspective behind them. If Gaelic and its

culture had suffered a steady and unrelenting decline from the death of Malcolm Canmore, it is doubtful if modern tradition-bearers would have this sense of history or could even articulate such claims. But in the reorganisation of Gaelic society after the dynasty had become Anglicised, a new focus of Gaelic culture emerged. This is of course the Lordship of the Isles, headed by Clan Donald.¹

Although the steps that lead to the assumption by John of Islay, about 1354, of the title 'Dominus Insularum' are well enough known, it will be convenient to select a few from the general Scottish background in order to suggest the ways in which the continuity of Gaelic history may have been maintained.

The Gaelic reaction to the aggressive Anglicising policy of the sons of Malcolm Canmore and Queen Margaret was at first expressed in large-scale rebellions (in which the MacHeths especially are prominent) organised mainly in the eastern and south-western parts of Scotland. After these had been crushed the main, certainly the successful, sources of rebellion were in the west. In this process, the anti-Scottish inheritance of the Norsemen played a part. As a Gallghaidheal, Somerled himself, though represented in tradition as a leader of the Gaels against the Norsemen, presumably drew upon these attitudes: there is no reason why they should have disappeared as the Isles became progressively Gaelicised. But can we trace any direct connection between the eastern Gaelic rebellions and contemporary or later western Gaelic hostility to the central

1. For a convenient brief sketch v. W. R. Kermack, op.cit. p.51 ff.

authorities? There is first the admittedly tenuous connection between Somerled and the MacHeths formed by Malcolm MacHeth's marriage to Somerled's sister. But such a 'dynastic' marriage points to a community of interest: W. R. Kermack suggests that it was this alliance that brought Somerled into conflict with Malcolm IV - "perhaps for the same reason that Macbeth rebelled against Duncan - succession to the Crown by direct descent from the preceding sovereign, which had not hitherto occurred in the House of Atholl."¹ This casts MacHeths and Somerled alike in the role of champions of the older order, with the cultural allegiances that that implies. Given such a framework, attitudes would certainly be strengthened by a process of displacement and dispersal of leaders of Gaelic society from east to west such as is indicated in the statement that "King Malcolm [IV] transported the men of Moray",² in 1162, the year before Somerled met his death. It has been cogently argued that the Macleans and MacKenzie are of common origin, of the line of Old Dugall of Scone, in Gowrie.³ If this is so, and that there was a movement from Gowrie to Moray and from Moray to the west, ancient traditions of the Cenél Gabrán, going back to the founding of the Scoto-Pictish kingdom, would naturally become compounded with those of the Gallghaidheal, providing an added

1. ibid. p.47.

2. Quoted from the Chronicle of Holyrood by W. Matheson "Traditions of the MacKenzies" in Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness, vol. 39-40, pp.193-228. v. p.215 ff.

3. ibid.

historical justification in any conflict with the central authorities.

It may be remarked that the compound would be an uneasy one, causing internal dissension as well as unity.¹ From our point of view it is only important that a sense of Gaelic identity and continuity of Gaelic history in Scotland must surely have been strengthened as these or similar ancestral traditions pervaded the lore of the western Gaels. The MacDonald History, written in the reign of Charles II, represents Somerled's claim to the Isles as going back to the grant of "Eugenius the First", and his claim to mainland territories as equally valid, though "these lands were unjustly possessed by the King MacBeath and Donald Bain."²

We have now indicated some of the lines which connect the later medieval sense of Gaelic identity with the older organisation of the Kingdom of the Scots. Equally important, however, is the disjunction which occurred ~~when~~ the Court became Anglicised and royal patronage of men of letters became uncertain and then non-existent. This gave the practice of literature a profound and permanent setback. No longer the sermo regius of Scotland, Gaelic was now fated never to fulfil what had seemed to be its destiny: to become the language of

1. i.e. Gael and Gaelicised Norseman might still continue an old antagonism.
2. In Collectanea de Rebus Albanicis pp.282-326. v. p.285. A Norse and anti-Gaelic attitude may underlie the reference to MacBeth and Donald; but the writer also claims that MacBeth's action was due to Somerled's loyalty to Duncan, perhaps in order to stress a consistent loyalty to the 'true' dynastic line.

cultured society throughout the kingdom and the medium of expression in its leading institutions. Instead there began the process which ultimately banished it to the remote and inaccessible parts of the land; and although the language continued to develop, its literature became largely cut off from the influence of the great innovating movements of late medieval, and especially post-medieval Europe. Although in one sense it may be idle to speculate upon how Scottish Gaelic literature would have developed had Gaelic become the official language of the kingdom, nevertheless it can highlight what actually did happen if we bear that speculation in mind as an imaginative background. In spite of the Irish origins of Gaelic, the Scoto-Pictish kingdom, in its political and social organisation at least, was markedly different from Irish society.¹ No doubt in due course these differences would have become apparent also in the literature of the Scottish community. But the development of the northern English dialect as the official language of Scotland, and the growth of a distinctive Scottish literature in that language, meant that Scotland became a country of two literary cultures. Down to the 16th century 'Scottis' was used to describe Gaelic and what is now called Scots was then called Inglis. Later, Gaelic was frequently referred to as Irish or Erse. This change in nomenclature serves to illustrate the shift in cultural orientation which dominance of the Lowland tongue produced in Gaelic society. For now Ireland, the mother country whose influence had to some extent been

1. v. K. H. Jackson The Gaelic Notes in the Book of Deer, p.102 ff. for a discussion of the non-Irish office of mormaer.

out-grown by the Scoto-Pictish 'marriage', reassumes a dominant role and Gaelic Scotland becomes something of a cultural periphery. The redefined relationship between the two branches of the 'sea-divided Gael' was consolidated when, about 1399, Eóin Mór, brother of Donald, Lord of the Isles, married Margaret Bisset, the heiress of the Glens of Antrim, and the Clan Donald began to move into the north of Ireland.

The real significance of the Lordship of the Isles as an entity apart from the Scotland that was centred on Edinburgh cannot be too strongly emphasised. Kermack observes that: "It is by the effect of its rule over its island dominions that the Lordship of the Isles can most justly be judged; and here the supremacy of law (for there was a brieve ... in every island ...), the bond of blood between the Lords of the Isles and their MacDonald kinsmen, and the respect and loyalty rendered to their high position and ancient descent by their other great vassals (Macleans of Mull, MacLeods of Skye and the Long Island, MacNeils, MacKinnons, Macquarries, Macfies, some of whom held hereditary offices under the Lordship), checked feuds between the clans who were developing within the Lordship, and thus maintained a substantial degree of internal peace ... The Lord of the Isles acted on the advice of a Council ... which was also a court of appeal from the decisions of the island judges. Although he held his lands feudally from the Crown, and his vassals were feudal vassals, he was the head of a Gaelic, rather than a feudal principality. He traced his descent far back to legendary Irish princes. He was inaugurated with Gaelic ceremonial; granted charters which

were written in Gaelic; had his hereditary seanachies, the MacMhuirichs, and his hereditary physicians, the Beatons ...”¹

To this it may be added that his influence, if not always his authority - the influence of a highly organised, semi-independent Scottish Gaelic state, in close communion with Ireland - extended to a considerable part of the north-west mainland. As a focal point of Gaelic sympathy in the west Highlands, the Lordship was not entirely broken down until the reign of James IV and some of its cultural resonances linger in Gaelic tradition to the present day.²

It is possible indeed that the native view of the history of the Gaels in Scotland, distilled in the account presented here, is itself one of the most important of these.

We are not to suppose that contacts between Irish and Scottish Gaels were mediated only through the political and social mechanisms of the Lordship of the Isles; but it is safe to claim that without the opportunities given to men of letters and other artists, and to makers of oral poetry, under the Lordship, the non-'Primitive' element in Gaelic poetry would have been drastically reduced. One may add, indeed, that the surviving corpus of Gaelic poetry, drawn mostly from oral sources in the eighteenth century, when organised collection

1. Kermack op.cit. p.57.

2. Apart from influences that shaped the poetic tradition, we still find references in oral tradition to Tighearna nan Eilean; sia Comhairlichean Deug Mhic Dhomhnaill; Màg Dhomhnaill, etc. The latter is not always recognised as MacDhomhnaill by the modern seanchaidh; nor was he even in the 18th century if we judge by the spelling Matha Conuill in the MacNicol and MacLagan MSS.

got under way, would be very much slighter, for the major contribution to these collections comes from the areas which came under the sway of Clan Donald and their allies. In other areas, some verse traditions had either never been so assiduously practised or a much weaker sense of 'nationality' had failed to keep transmission vital.

The allies of Clan Donald might vary and indeed at times take the opposite role according to what immediate political and military objectives were in question. Such tactical manoeuvrings were common throughout Gaelic society. But from the 14th century there was one great strategic opposition which simply cannot be explained in these terms: this was, of course, the MacDonald-Campbell 'feud'. In reality, as it seems to me, the long hostility between these two groups, still so vigorously discussed in modern oral tradition, is more in the nature of a sometimes dormant, sometimes very active civil war, the springs of which are intelligible in the light of the attitudes of both sides towards the central authorities in Edinburgh. While the MacDonalds did not dispute the right of the King in Edinburgh as the King of Scots, the policies of his administration were another thing. Their attitude can be summed up from a statement in the document given by the Islesmen to the Commissioners empowered to treat with Henry VIII for aid, in 1545. "We have beyne auld enemys to the realms of Scotland, and quhen they had peasche with the kings hienes, thei hanged, hedit, presoned, and destroyed many of our kyn,

friends, and forbearis." ¹

The Campbells, on the other hand, especially after the time of Robert the Bruce, whose cause they supported in the Wars of Independence and who in turn rewarded them handsomely (partly at the expense of the MacDougalls, the senior branch of the descendants of Somerled) pursued a pretty consistent policy of collaboration with the Scottish Court and Parliament, through the centuries filling some of the highest offices of state. Yet in a basic sense the Campbells were as Gaelic as any other clan, and they too may have inherited ancient traditions deriving from the Scoto-Pictish kingdom which justified the course they took. Because of their involvement in official Scottish policies, they might be said to be more truly Scottish Gaels than their opponents. W. J. Watson makes the interesting point "that while the MacDonalds vaunted descent from Conn Céchtach ... and Colla Uais ... Mac Cailin's bards disclaimed Irish connection, and traced the line of Mac Cailin up to Arthur of the Round Table, emphasising the British origin." ²

Though the chief of the MacGregor is similarly connected with Arthur by the Dean of Lismore's brother, in the poem

1. Document of credence given by the Islesmen to the Commissioners empowered to treat with Henry VIII for aid, 1545. Quoted by Hayes-McCoy Scots Mercenary Forces in Ireland p.1. cf. the attitudes expressed by John Elder 'A Redshanke' in his 'A Proposal for uniting Scotland with England, addressed to King Henry VIII' in 1542 or 1543. Printed in Collectanea de Rebus Albanicis, pp.23-32.
2. W. J. Watson Classic Gaelic Poetry of Panegyric in Scotland, TGS, vol. 29, pp.194-235. v. esp. p.215.

already quoted,¹ the Campbells may have indeed developed this pretension as a point of propaganda. It is interesting, too, that the only poem which exhorts a chief to take part in a military campaign undertaken by the realm of Scotland rather than by the Gaelic nation, is the poem addressed to the Earl of Argyll before Flodden. Watson observes that "there must no doubt have been many such poems, now lost to us, in connection with the Wars of Independence; one other, composed in 1310 ... is found in the Dean's book ...";² and this judgment may be valid. But even allowing for the distance in time, and the consequently greater chances of loss of manuscripts, it is remarkable that nothing of the kind has been preserved, for instance among Mac Vurich remains. This other poem mentioned by Watson is by no means an unequivocal example of pan-Scottish propaganda (it is from the anti-Bruce side); one may venture to suggest that if poems ever existed which gave primacy to the concept of Scottish nationhood, they would be exceptional in attitude, very much in the minority, and except perhaps for the Campbells, something of an aberration. The MacDonalds were deeply involved in the Wars of Independence, to a large extent through the personal contacts between Robert the Bruce and Angus Og of Islay. But there is nothing to suggest in the entire history of Somerled's line, in its various dealings with the Kings of Scotland, that its poet-spokesmen would ever

1. W. J. Watson Scottish Verse from the Book of the Dean of Lismore, pp.158-165.
2. W. J. Watson op.cit. pp.6-13.

celebrate any great venture in which Clan Donald was involved as other than a primarily MacDonald and Gaelic event. The 'Scottish dimension' might be there, but it is of secondary importance. In this connection one may cite the reference in the Book of Clanranald to these stirring times: the writer merely notes that the MacDougalls took Baliol's side and the line of Ragnall son of Somhairle took that of Bruce.¹ Even the Campbell poem to the Earl of Argyll before Flodden is very much in the conventional terms of Gaelic panegyric. In spite of the 'British origin' which Watson draws attention to, the poet draws on the commonplaces of Irish mythology and cites Ireland as an example to follow.

It may be true to say that the attitudes of the bardic order, partly because they were members of a conservative, mandarin caste, were not always identical with those of their patrons, who were continuously involved in the rough-and-tumble of Scottish real-politik.

A practised panegyrist would not be greatly troubled by this since his rhetorical commonplaces gave him scope for manoeuvre also: if necessary, he would praise mutual foes in the required terms.² But there must always be some common ground, either a sufficiently flexible rhetoric or a basic view of the world that can accommodate the divergencies. In Scotland it was a view of the Scots Gaels as a nation that provided that

1. Reliquiae Celticae, vol. 2, p.156.

2. cf. Gofraídh Fionn Ó Dálaigh's frank statement, quoted by Eleanor Knott. J. Carney, E. Knott and G. Murphy Early Irish Literature, p.77

ground. It was not developed until the vernacular poets became involved as political spokesmen, but the development may have been assisted by this very flexibility that we have just noticed, and by the relative distance from the shifts of practical politics at which the classical panegyric poets kept themselves.¹

The picture of Gaelic society and the forces that shaped it which we have presented here as a necessary background to any study of Gaelic poetry is naturally a gross simplification. To do other than construct such a theoretical model would lead us into far too much detail and obscure what is relevant so far as literature is concerned.

We have argued that there is a continuity of Gaelic history and a sense of nationhood. We have tried to show that after the defeat of Gaelic at the Scottish national level, Gaelic society reorganised itself and redefined its relationship with Ireland. Eventually the pressure of historical events reduced the possibilities to sharply contrasting alternatives: existence as a Gaelic community in collaboration with the central authorities or existence as a Gaelic community in resistance to the central authorities. Underlying both attitudes, however, remains an allegiance to the dynastic line of Malcolm Canmore; no matter how obscured this loyalty might become in the turbulence of history, it survived to become for much of Gaelic society a suicidal loyalty when the Revolution

1. A good example of poets reflecting a different view of the Gaelic world from that of their political masters is afforded by the Jacobites who lived under anti-Jacobite clan chiefs.

of 1688 and the flight of James VII gave it new dimensions. The alternative chosen by the Lordship of the Isles does not require any further laboured discussion. But one clarification has to be added with regard to their antagonists. We have chosen the Campbells to represent this group, to some extent because they have become in tradition symbolic as much as real historical protagonists. In actual fact, the 'Campbell idea' was much more pervasive than this. In a historical study, the role of clans such as the Frasers or the Gordons, neither of which was accepted as fully Gaelic, and of a clan such as the MacKenzies who were Gaelic but yet frequently played a part in the north comparable to that of the Campbells elsewhere, would all have to be analysed in detail. From time to time, collaboration with Scottish Government policies informed the actions of all the clans, if only, for some of them, to gain a brief respite or a limited tactical advantage.

This is a dialectic of history, being played out under the pressure of external events. The thesis is implicit in the fundamental actions of the Lordship of the Isles, their vassals, allies, and successors; the antithesis is in the actions of their opponents. The actual events, as these are reflected in written records or oral legends, are at all times painfully confused and confusing.

There is no synthesis. Gaelic history remained in a dialectical opposition until the whole organisation of society finally broke after 1745. Yet an ideal synthesis must have been taking form for a long period, perhaps from the mid-14th century, after the issues of the Wars of Independence had been settled, before it became fully explicit in the 18th century.

This ideal synthesis was given overt expression by the poets. It was they, amidst all the complexities and vicissitudes of Gaelic history, especially after the downfall of the Lordship and the reduction of Gaelic society to a multiplicity of feuding clans, who preserved a conceptual unity for the Gaels of Scotland.

Most orthodox historians appear to have little sympathy with this view of Gaelic Scotland. It is often difficult to say, where hard evidence is lacking, that they are wrong. Their sources of information are, almost without exception, official, national records, which in our opinion do not, by definition, give the aboriginal point of view. This is to be found in oral verse, legends, and general tradition. Those who know these sources, and have inherited traditional attitudes from early childhood, appear to have a different sense of history which, if the oral sources are used with judiciousness, yields an interpretation different from that of the historian who sees 'Highland' (not 'Gaelic') history motivated only by a bewildering and sometimes irrational discontent. The foregoing account is an attempt, in the most general terms, to interpret the society which produced Gaelic poetry.

Early Sources of Vernacular Poetry in the context
of the Scottish Enlightenment and later historical
periods.

No one who has paused for long enough to take a detached look at Scottish Gaelic literary culture can fail to be arrested by the fact that no matter how secure the practice of writing may have been at various times and places in Gaelic Scotland, written literature is little more than an epiphenomenon. To say this it is not necessary to set up an absolute distinction between written and oral literature; it is enough to show that there are characteristic styles - more, perhaps, a characteristic tone - to be found in a corpus of literature whose creators, on all the evidence, were unlettered.

This is particularly true of Gaelic poetry. And poetry is the form in which the main drive of Gaelic creative genius has found expression. Yet this situation, in which written poetry is really no more than the tip of the iceberg, has never adequately been described, nor have its crucial problems been debated. In the small, but not insignificant, body of literary criticism that has been written about Scottish Gaelic verse, we seem to meet with a curious reluctance to draw out the full implications of the significance of oral composition and transmission. It is true that the inherent difficulties are immense. We have, for example, a number of variants of a song attributed in oral tradition to a named author. Do we try, using as many as possible of the techniques of textual scholarship, to produce the original, identifying good and bad oral transmission as we would identify good and bad textual

transmission? There is no reason why we should not do so when this is possible. Gaelic oral transmission, at least in particular strands of it, is remarkable in its attributions to authors.¹ And it was true in the past, and is to some extent true still, that singers with a deep interest in their repertoires would in oral discussion debate variant 'readings'. The modern literary editor who produces as exact as possible an original text is thus merely reproducing the same process in another context. But often enough variants have developed so far from each other that they cannot be used in this way. At these extremes the problem is minimal. The difficulty consists in determining the limits within which we can attempt to reconstruct an original text without doing violence to the peculiar nature of Gaelic oral transmission. This argues that there ought to be a flexibility of approach and, if necessary, compromise. Ideally, perhaps, there should be a methodology that can cope with a complex, heterogeneous oral tradition in which potential originals can be discerned, co-existing with anonymous poems and individualistic variants, and in which the musical component ought to be given equal prominence with the verbal.

The reluctance to emphasise the oral aspects of Gaelic poetry that has hitherto characterised literary criticism is doubtless in part due to a realisation of these problems:

1. One of the foremost scholars of Finnish oral poetry, Professor Lauri Honko, expressed great astonishment, during a fieldwork trip with the writer, at the ability of Gaelic tradition-bearers to produce a composer's name. Some of these singers were illiterate Gaelic speaking tinkers.

generally speaking, the paths of least resistance are chosen. But one senses also another reason. That is a feeling, conscious or otherwise, that oral literature is in some sense inferior, and not worthy of the attention of educated people. In the previous chapter we discussed the consciousness of nationhood: it may well be that even modern critics project this in a somewhat defensive manner under the impression that 'national' coherence is diminished by admitting the intractability (in terms of orthodox literary techniques) of so much of our poetry. Such a feeling certainly seems to have existed among educated Gaels of the eighteenth century.¹ And, though public attitudes to oral literature have changed greatly in the course of the last half century or so, Gaelic critics may still be affected by older views.

At all events, the tenor of some of the criticism appears to suggest (without perhaps ever stating it in so many words) that vernacular Gaelic poetry has run an unbroken course in writing for several centuries. Paradoxically, in view of what has just been said about unlettered composers, such a view is not completely invalid. This is not merely because the relationship between the categories of oral and written is a complex one - at times even an ambiguous one - in Gaelic: it is because we can arrange the evidence in such a way that the most significant dividing line runs not between 'Oral' and 'Written' at all, not between the unlettered bard and the literate poet, but between, on the one hand, the class of bard,

1. V. Chap. 4.

reciter, or tradition-bearer, and the class of collector or transcriber on the other. That is to say, the staple of Gaelic poetry has certainly been composed orally, and like oral poetry everywhere has been subject to change in transmission, although there are different planes of transmission, characterised by extremes of stability and mutability. But arranged alongside this stream, as it were, are the ranks of recorded texts, recovered from oral tradition and placed in a chronological sequence by successive generations of scholars and collectors, down to our own time. It is no doubt this prospect that gives our critics their notion of a textual continuum in Gaelic poetry. And once such a notion became established, it could be strengthened by the realisation that there exist certain tenuous but demonstrable links between the classical Gaelic tradition of verse and the vernacular.

But in reality the perspective created for us by these recorded verse collections is not one that stretches back in time as far as the ordinary literate Gaelic speaker - for instance, a person with secondary school education in Gaelic - appears to imagine. Such a person may have been told that a song to Uisdean mac Gilleaspa' Chléirich¹ can be dated back to the sixteenth century but is much less likely to be told that the actual written versions are from the nineteenth or twentieth century.

What we have to attempt here is not an analysis of all the collections of poetry, even all the primary sources, made in Gaelic, and the relationships between them (although a certain amount of the latter is necessary to establish some of

1. V. A. Matheson (ed.) Carmina Gadelica Vol. V., pp. 10-15.

the points of the argument), but rather to survey certain basic sources of vernacular poetry, and particularly to enquire whether we can detect different movements of collecting activity; to determine what factors in the general culture of their times motivated the collectors; and to enquire whether, assuming oral composition, the reduction of the poetry to written form involved distortion of the tradition.

We begin, conventionally, with the Dorlach Laoidhean¹, the so-called Fernaig Manuscript, that Duncan MacRae of Inverinate, in Ross-shire, wrote down about the year 1688, for that anthology contains poems that bear evidence (the orthography adopted being part of this) of having been composed for oral, and not for manuscript, circulation. Some of these poems will be relevant to our discussion later. The collection as a whole, however, is rather different in nature from those with which we shall presently be concerned.

There are three main reasons for saying this. First, in the light of our evidence (which, admittedly, may be defective) of the existence of such anthologies, Fernaig occupies an isolated position in time and lies largely outside any traceable network of collecting activity. Second, the presence of the medieval, classical Irish-Scottish tradition is much more obtrusive in the poetry of Fernaig than in later collections: it is impossible to escape the 'feel' of a different literary ambience. Third, and last, the work is clearly of the nature of a personal anthology - it discloses an individual taste and

1. v. MacPharlain Lamh-Sgriobhainn Mhic Rath.

awareness - whereas the main collections, at least of vernacular verse, seem to be built up on a different principle: that of wholesale recovery.

But having said this, one must concede that the case remains slightly ambivalent. The difference between MacRae's and the big collections of a later epoch is one of degree, not one of kind; and the matter may be argued in such a way that the same piece of evidence can be used either pro or con - for instance, possession and use of manuscripts.

Viewed in a wider context of literary history, Fernaig can of course be placed and connected without difficulty; among other things it demonstrates some of these links, alluded to above, that exist between the modern and the classical Gaelic traditions. Without an appeal to this wider frame of reference, it is preferable to regard the anthology as a late example, modified by different historical circumstances, of the same process as produced the Book of the Dean of Lismore. In that process Gaelic verse of the classical, written tradition became partly vernacularised, without wholly losing its original features, so that we are left with a semi-classical, semi-demotic poetry. This produces a most interesting strain in Gaelic verse, but the fact that it has a demonstrable source in written poetry compounds the problem of making a clear-cut division between oral and written, at least if we seek to make a disjunction between these two kinds.

The next half century or more following the writing of Fernaig is very largely a blank. There were probably faltering, sporadic attempts to set down in writing poems that had

been composed orally in vernacular Gaelic, or to recast, in more or less colloquial language, certain poems originally composed orally in dán díreach either of the strict variety, or, more likely, of the looser and more accessible kind. There may have been attempts to make up anthologies in the early decades of the eighteenth century. But the century has neared its half-way mark before we can produce dateable examples.

From that point on, however, the entire cultural landscape becomes altered. There are several major manuscript collections which must be placed (approximately, for the moment) in the second half of the eighteenth century: those of Rev. James MacLagan, Rev. Donald MacNicol, Dr. Hector Maclean, and, a little later, Rev. Dr. Alexander Irvine. As early as 1750-1756 we find Jerome Stone, a Lowland Scot, learning Gaelic in Perthshire and engaging in the same collecting pursuits. In 1776, Ranald MacDonald of Eigg produces the first printed anthology of Gaelic poetry; and this is followed in 1786 by John Gillies' collection, based on the manuscripts of the Rev. James Maclagan.¹ It is quite clear that a new cultural age has been inaugurated. If we may anticipate a little (but pointing as an example to Gillies' book drawing upon Maclagan's manuscripts) we can say that we witness at this stage in Gaelic literary history a movement of more or less organised recovery and publication which probably aimed at preserving what was

1. For details of collections and collectors v. chap 3.

felt to be the best, or the most distinguished, in the vernacular poetry tradition of the whole of Gaelic Scotland. It was a movement of great vigour and enthusiasm, the primary impulse of which lasted right through into the nineteenth century, when the brothers Alexander and Donald Stewart, and Peter Turner, collected and published (in 1804 and 1813 respectively) anthologies that are primary sources of Gaelic verse.

The cultural activity of the age is not restricted to literature. We are concerned here only with the collection of verse; but the verse was almost entirely that of song, and it should be noted that the same era produced a succession of collectors of Gaelic melodies. The recorders of these two complementary aspects of the song tradition tended to work along parallel lines: collectors of texts did not concern themselves with melody;¹ nor, at least at the outset, did the musicians collect the text - or, to put it precisely, they did not publish them. This is the more surprising when we consider that the pioneers on the musical side (the brothers Patrick and Joseph MacDonald)² were men of considerable ability and formal education, fluent Gaelic speakers, and friends of the poet Rob Donn, who composed elegies to their father, the Rev. Murdoch MacDonald of Durness. The divorce between words and music is possibly to be explained as due to the authority of Lowland models: we shall see presently that Lowland models

1. Although Gillies has an occasional reference to Patrick MacDonald.
2. V. Patrick MacDonald A Collection of Highland Vocal Airs, etc. Edinburgh 1784.

at least existed and that the Rev. Patrick MacDonald was aware of the musical scene in Edinburgh. Whether these models are wholly to blame or not, we can now see how unfortunate the fashion was, for we can trace its effects even in matters of textual criticism and editorial policy down to the twentieth century. But the main point in drawing attention to these musical collections at this stage is to emphasise the scope of the interest in Gaelic song that emerged around the middle of the eighteenth century and continues to the present day.

We must now ask what is the historical explanation of this phenomenon. This is the age from which literary historians trace the beginnings of the European Romantic Revival. It is well known that one of the characteristic activities of literary men during that era was the collection of 'antient' or 'primitive' poetry. Equally it was the age in which an interest in 'primitive' or exotic music began. Now the first printed collection of Gaelic poetry did not appear until 1776. Eleven years before that, in 1765, Thomas Percy published his Reliques of Ancient English Poetry, which is one of the key works in the development of European Romanticism. There were of course earlier collections which were made in Scotland, of Scots poetry. But it was Percy's Reliques, not the Lowland Scots collections, that became internationally famous - its influence on Herder, for example, was profound. And even Walter Scott says that he was more influenced by Percy than he was by earlier eighteenth century Scottish collections. We might thus be tempted to see the Gaelic collectors' labours as the product of a much bigger historical movement. It would not

be wrong to do so, but the sequence of events must be kept firmly in mind.

To begin this part of our enquiry we must go direct to the person who, more than anyone else, dominates the Gaelic scene in the eighteenth century. This is of course Alexander MacDonald. MacDonald was a Gaelic nationalist, in whatever greater framework he might have seen Jacobitism; he was deeply involved in the campaign of 1745; and he had seen the crumbling of all the hopes pinned upon that venture. In 1751 he published his poems. The introduction to this is in English, clearly addressed to the English-speaking world in general, but to the Lowland Scots in the first place.¹

He makes a number of arresting statements. First, after some remarks about his own poems he says: "The other reason of their publication at present is, to bespeak, if possible, the favour of the public, to a greater collection of poems of the same sort, in all kinds of poetry that have been in use amongst the most cultivated nations, from those of the earliest composition to modern times; their antiquity either proved by historical accounts, or ascertained by the best tradition; with a translation into English verse, and critical observations on the nature of such writings, to render the work useful to those that do not understand the Galic language."

He then goes on to mention briefly the antiquity of Gaelic and to point out that an analysis of the language would be an outstanding contribution "to discover the progress of genius ...

1. V. Appendix I for the full text (excluding remarks on Gaelic sounds) which is available only in the 1751 and 1802 editions.

An agreeable inquiry, surely! and one would think not displeasing, even to the inhabitants of the Lowlands of Scotland, who have always shared with them (i.e. the Gaels) the honour of every gallant action ... " Having made this apparently diplomatic overture, he goes on: " ... and are now first invited to a participation of their reputation for arts, if that too shall be found, on an impartial scrutiny, to be justly claimed by them."

He is clearly aware of the interests of the age: "We cannot however but testify our surprise, that in an age in which the study of antiquity is so much in fashion ... this language alone ... this people and this language should be alone persecuted and intolated."

MacDonald is obviously attempting to heal the wounds that still smarted in Scotland from the effects of the late Rising; he is concerned to bring Highlands and Lowlands together in a new cultural venture and he makes his appeal in terms of the spirit of the age. All of this might be considered natural enough in a greatly gifted man of considerable initiative. If one takes that view, one will argue that the Gaelic cause was lost; military and even political activity was now impossible; therefore, a transference to the cultural plane of the energies before expended in war seemed the only reasonable action to take. But in fact, in 1751 Jacobitism was by no means dead in the country. Moreover, the content of MacDonald's own poetry is anything but calculated to quench the embers of rebellion.

This is an interesting paradox; but for the moment it is sufficient to say that the publication of the book (poetry and

introduction alike) seems to be an attempt to exploit more than one situation, and that MacDonald is doing this deliberately and consciously under the influence of trends in the political and cultural life of eighteenth century Scotland as a whole.

At the very beginning of the century one of the most momentous events in the history of Scotland occurred in the Union of the Parliaments of 1707. Although the years just before it were filled with debate and unrest, it was clear enough by 1703 or 1704 that some kind of union was inevitable. Jacobites were in general opposed to any kind of union, especially after the Revolution of 1688. What seems to have occurred is that Scottish Jacobites and anti-union patriots, sensing that further political action was useless, shifted their ground to that of cultural nationalism. Consequently the early years of the eighteenth century saw the growth in the Lowlands of Scotland of an intense interest in Scottish poetry.

In 1706 James Watson published the first volume (there were three in all) of A Choice Collection of Comic and Serious Poems both Ancient and Modern.¹ Watson, who was an ardent Scottish patriot, and a Jacobite sympathiser, was led to make this collection from overtly political motives in an attempt to make contact with Scotland's literary past. He himself notes that the collection is "the first of its Nature which has been publish'd in our own Native Scots Dialect."² In

1. See 1869 ed. Glasgow, entitled A Choice Collection of Comic and Serious Scots Poems.
2. Watson, op.cit. p.III.

1724, following Watson's example, Allan Ramsay published the two volumes of The Ever Green¹ and between 1724 and 1737, the four volumes of The Tea-Table Miscellany.² These two works of Ramsay's point the two main directions of literary interest in Scottish society at this time: the former orientated towards the past, towards the great poetry of late medieval Scotland; the other centred on popular song and ballad. Ramsay's comment in The Ever Green is worth noting: "When these good old Bards wrote, we had not yet made Use of imported Trimmings upon our Cloaths, nor of Foreign Embroidery in our Writings. Their poetry is the product of their own Country, not pilfered and spoiled in the Transportation from abroad: their Images are native, and their Landskips domestick; copied from those Fields and Meadows we every Day behold."³ This celebration of native tradition is repeated in one form or another in similar writings of the time.

The Tea-Table Miscellany appears to have set a fashion for publishing collections of songs and ballads. Ramsay did not print any music, but he made it clear that the songs in his volumes were meant to be sung. Then, in 1725, there appeared the first printed collection of Scots airs for the voice, under the title of Orpheus Caledonius.⁴ This was followed by a

1. George Chalmers The Works of Allan Ramsay, 3 v. Edinburgh and London, 1800.
2. Chalmers, op.cit.
3. Chalmers, op.cit.I, p.xxi.
4. William Thomson Orpheus Caledonius, or, a collection of Scots Songs. Set to musick by W. T. 2v. London, 1733.

stream of similar publications, of which the most famous is probably James Johnson's Scots Musical Museum,¹ to whose later volumes Robert Burns contributed so much. In fact, the development of Burns' own poetry cannot be dissociated from this collecting activity: many of the fragments that Burns worked up into songs for the Musical Museum came from David Herd's great collection of songs,² the two volumes of which appeared in 1776. Herd's is the most impressive eighteenth century collection of texts (there are no melodies) for its aim was no less than to bring together all the words, new and old, of Scottish song that survived. Herd, moreover, set an example of scrupulous faithfulness to the texts as he found them - which cannot be said of all the editors of the period. Just as texts were often 'improved' and 'refined' in an attempt to subject them to the criteria of elegant, neo-classic English taste; so tunes, of which numerous collections, arranged for a variety of instruments, appeared in the course of the century, were altered in accordance with canons of foreign taste. In the seventeen-fifties there seems to have arisen in Edinburgh a fashion for Italianising Scottish airs - a cultural phenomenon obviously associated with the prominence in music circles of Italian teachers and performers. It was against this tendency that Robert Fergusson protested in his Elegy on the Death of Scots Music.³ In these musical gatherings the Rev. Patrick

1. James Johnson The Scots Musical Museum New ed. 4v. Edinburgh 1853.

2. David Herd, Ancient and Modern Scottish Songs, heroic ballads, etc. Reprinted from the edition of 1776 2v. Glasgow, 1869.

3. M.P. MacDiarmid, The Poems of Robert Fergusson,^{Vol. 2} p. 37.

MacDonald, the pioneer of Gaelic music collection, is said to have once created a sensation by appearing in place of a noted Italian violinist.¹

This then is the cultural atmosphere of the mid-eighteenth century in Scotland. Quite clearly these cultural trends we have summarised are to be explained in terms of the political and social consciousness of the period.

Throughout the century, then, a profound interest in Scotland's literary heritage and general cultural past has been shown to exist. Nevertheless, it may be argued, what has been discussed is solely a Lowland movement, centred in Edinburgh, and therefore concurrent with, rather than involved with, cultural trends within the Gaelic part of the country.

But by this time any formally educated Gaelic speaker was by definition bi-cultural. Any university educated Gael, for instance, was as much a man of his time, as much exposed to, and involved in, current intellectual and political movements as any of his contemporaries from other parts of the kingdom.

Now MacDonald was a university educated Gael who was a young man in the immediate post-Union years. (He was probably born about 1690). The poem Ais-eiridh na Sean Chanain Alban-naich with its claims on behalf of the language, was probably composed before 1745 and the author may indeed have been inspired by the spirit of cultural nationalism that prevailed from his youth onwards. But at any rate the title of the poem achieves a new significance when MacDonald used it for

1. W. Matheson, Some Early Collectors of Gaelic Folk-Song in The Proceedings of the Scottish Anthropological and Folklore Society vol. V, No. 2, pp.67-82.

the title of his book in 1751, the first printed collection of secular poetry in Scottish Gaelic.

MacDonald's indebtedness to James Thomson's Seasons is well known. Even more striking, his Oran an t-Samhraidh shows that he knew Allan Ramsay's Tea-Table Miscellany.¹ It is unthinkable that a personality as vigorous as his, a poet clearly so interested in tradition as well as innovation, should have restricted himself to that one work. Accordingly, it seems a most reasonable inference that MacDonald knew of the literary campaign directed by Ramsay; and that through that, and doubtless through other means also, he was fully aware of the whole Scottish cultural environment in which it was produced. Thus we can see his work as a Gaelic branch of this eighteenth century Scottish growth of literary activity.

MacDonald's influence was immense. We can trace the profound effects of his innovations on contemporaries and successors; what we cannot recover is the subtler transmission of his influence, through verbal discussion, in moulding the attitude of that and succeeding generations towards the whole Gaelic poetic tradition. With no contemporary written literary criticism to guide us, no diaries of literary gossip, without even any surviving letters such as those preserved in the Highland Society's Report on the Ossianic Controversy, we can only guess at how interested Gaels, poets or non-poets, discussed such issues. But we have a vignette of Alasdair himself being given a special place in the company of congenial spirits, for Ranald MacDonald, in his 'Eigg' collection of

1. W. J. Watson Bardachd Ghàidhlig, p.xxxii.

poetry, has preserved for us a poem composed to his father by the Goodman of Arnabidh.

Chan 'eil bard na filidh
 Na fear ionad na luchd sgeul againn
 Nach miannach bhith 'nad chuideachda
 'S do shusbaint bhith 'ga éisdeachd leo.
 A foghlum is a fiosrachadh,
 'N ard thuigse bha thu éifeachdach;
 'S tu rìgh na laoidh 's nan óranan —
 Liom fhìn gur bu ghasd¹ gun dh'éideadh e.²

This makes his popularity clear enough, even if we take the poem as a typical piece of Gaelic panegyric. In an earlier stanza in the same poem there is a hint of the deference shown to him by poets and literary critics:

Bho 's riaghailt do gach ughdar thu

But the most significant point of all in MacDonald's career from our point of view is that his preface to Ais-eiridh na Sean Chanain Albannaich suggests that he intended to issue a collection of poetry himself. It was probably with this in mind that he acquired Gaelic manuscripts from the Mac Vu^orichs.³ It was left to his son to carry out this part of his work; and, as we shall see later, Ranald MacDonald was known to, or was in contact with, other collectors.

1. sic.

2. Eigg, p.322.

3. Report on Ossian, p.276.

It may be that the statement in MacDonald's preface concerning an anthology fired the enthusiasm of more than one collector. But we cannot say so with any certainty. According to tradition, many copies of the poems were destroyed and we do not know how great was the circulation of those that survived. As the book was printed in Edinburgh we may guess that the southern Highland Gaels stood a better chance of obtaining copies than their more isolated compatriots in the far north and west. It may be significant that there are said to be two copies of this very rare work in private possession in Perthshire at the present time.

Now one of the great collectors of Gaelic poetry was the Rev. James MacLagan of Amulree and Blair Atholl. MacLagan we know to have owned a copy of Alexander MacDonald's Glossary; his copy, bearing his name, is now in Edinburgh University Library. It would have been rather extraordinary if he had not taken great pains at least to read, if not actually to own, the poems also when these came out ten years later.

We cannot, unfortunately, clinch the argument: it remains, one may suggest, an interesting probability. The MacLagan Collection contains an assortment of material, some of it from different correspondents, with certain items in the old Gaelic manuscript hand. Most of the contents, however, are in the current hand of the day.

The problem that confronts us now is when did MacLagan begin his great work. We know that already by 1760 he enjoyed a considerable reputation as a collector. In that year we find James MacPherson writing to him in the following terms:

"You have perhaps heard, that I am employed to make a collection of the ancient Poetry in the Gaelic ... By letters from Edinburgh, as well as gentlemen of your acquaintance, I am informed, that you have a good collection of poems of the kind I want."¹ MacPherson's interest was of course restricted to Ossianic ballads, but Maclagan's interest may not have been, nor his reputation as a collector. In any event, Alexander MacDonald's observations on making a collection of poetry "from those of the earliest compositions to modern times" almost certainly implies Ossianic ballads which have traditionally been regarded at alltimes as the most ancient poetry we possess. But given the popularity of Ossianic ballads and the veneration in which they were held, it would be quite natural for an educated Gael with a general literary and antiquarian bent to have interested himself in collecting ballads before Alexander MacDonald wrote. The Rev. Alexander Pope, for instance, had made his collection around 1739.² Yet we must note that in 1751, when MacDonald's poems appeared, Maclagan was only 23 years of age and is unlikely to have had the opportunity of amassing very much material; although, on the other hand, Adam Ferguson had taken down a number of ballads in his father's house in Logierait, when he was a youth of 17.³

As Maclagan's manuscripts are rarely dated, and as he

1. Report on Ossian, Appendix, p.153.
2. Report on Ossian, Appendix, p.52
3. ibid. p.62 ff.

lived until 1805, we have to leave open the possibility that he became a highly organised collector of general Gaelic verse at a considerably later date than 1760. But there is one item in the collection which suggests the opposite. This is a section of MS 73, which bears the date 1st July 1755. It is non-Ossianic, but it is not in Maclagan's own hand and its ultimate source is unknown. It is, however, very clearly connected with Jerome Stone's manuscript of Gaelic poetry, the presumption being that Stone copied it at some point between 1750 and 1756. Did then Stone, a Lowlander who learnt Gaelic, interest himself in 'antient' and 'primitive' poetry in Gaelic as an extension of the general Lowland Scots cultural nationalism which we have already discussed, and, further, did he influence Maclagan? We cannot be dogmatic on this point, however great the temptation may be to strengthen the Highland-Lowland link in order to articulate a more coherent argument. In fact, one item of evidence falls to be noticed here, which suggests that it was Stone who was indebted to Maclagan. This is the presence in Stone's manuscript of an anonymous poem entitled Miann an Fhior Ghail 'nuair a bha e'n tìr Aineoil. It is the earliest example known to me in Gaelic of a nostalgic poem in praise of the poet's Highland homeland. It projects an idealised picture of landscape and natural beauty; the author delights in the memory of going out to shoot, or going to fish with his book in his pocket; his friends are persons of cultivated tastes; and when he turns from these occupations he takes pleasure in the poems of the Fiann. The entire tone and rhetorical patterning of this poem give the impression of a sensibility

very different from that of traditional Gaelic poetry in any of its manifold forms. Its 'foreignness' is without any doubt due to English or Scots influences; perhaps it also owes something, at a far remove, to Virgil. In addition to Stone, the poem has been printed twice, in Stewart's Collection and in Menzies' Collection.¹ The nature of the poem made me speculate at one time whether Stone himself might not have been the author; it is not a poem of great distinction, and with his learning and background, Stone, one may think, would have been competent enough to write it. But in a copy of Menzies' Collection, which once belonged to Paul Cameron of Pitlochry, himself a minor but important collector of Perthshire poetry,² there is a note in ink beneath the title of this poem, which reads: Le Mr. MacLagain Ministeir Bhlair an Adholl. This is not in Paul Cameron's handwriting but in a hand that was formed in the mid-nineteenth century or probably earlier. Cameron has no marginal comment; he has allowed it to stand, which may give it his tacit approval. Maclagan would at all events fit the role of author; and if he is the author we may reasonably see him also in the role of Stone's mentor, lending him manuscripts³ and encouraging him to develop his interests as a

1. Stewart, p.323 ff. Menzies' version is derived from this.
2. V. T.G.S.I., Vol. 17, p.126 ff, and vol. 18, p.340.
3. V. chap. 3, where the relationship between Maclagan MS 73 and Stone's collection is discussed.

learner of the language and as a collector of Gaelic poetry. But it would be natural to expect mutual encouragement. This must have been between 1750, when Stone came to Perthshire, and 1756, the year in which he died: for obvious reasons, nearer 1756 than 1750, and 1755 finds its place admirably in the body of evidence. Maclagan and Stone were both young men (in 1755 Maclagan was 27 and Stone 28 years of age); hence, the conclusion that Maclagan began to organise his work of collection in the years just after 1751 falls into place equally neatly.

Thus far then we have tried to build up a case for Alexander MacDonald's interest having been formed against a background of cultural and political events in Gaelic society and in that of Lowland Scotland; for MacDonald's influence on Maclagan; and for, possibly, another strain of Lowland influence impinging upon Maclagan through Jerome Stone. Now it was to Maclagan that James MacPherson applied when he set out to collect Ossianic ballads in 1760. We can at this stage, therefore, examine the influence of the Ossianic controversy upon collectors of Gaelic poetry, and to do this we have to return to Edinburgh in the eighteenth century.

In the concern with Scotland's literary past that we have noted we can sense a division of interests, even in the very close knit life of the Edinburgh of that age, where the cultural trend was set. Although Edinburgh was still almost a medieval town in the degree of social intercourse between different classes,¹

1. V. Henry Grey Graham *The Social Life of Scotland in the Eighteenth Century*, p.81 ff. and James Grant *Old and New Edinburgh*, vol. 2, p.100 ff.

the 'international' figures of this era - Blair, Carlyle, Home, Kames, and their like - represent a different viewpoint from that of men such as James Watson, Robert Ferguson, David Herd, or even Allan Ramsay. The latter had a strong sense of the organic life of Scots literature and were solidly in contact with a still strongly flowing current of Scottish poetry - some of it in oral song, some of it art poetry carried by chap-books and popular classics. The literati, as Robertson, Blair, Hume and the rest of that circle liked to call themselves, tend on the other hand to adopt a rather superior pose with regard to Scots vernacular poetry or song (even though they simultaneously display a marked patriotism) and accept it only when it is embodied in a poet like Burns, whom they could regard with interest as an example of untutored sensibility. This complex and potentially self-contradictory attitude may, however, have actually helped to foster the enthusiasm of this group for Gaelic poetry. There certainly did exist a genuine interest in Highland affairs in general among a group of literary men who, intellectually, were somewhat on the fringe of the circle of literati. We find Ramsay of Ochtertyre contributing a Dissertation to the Rev. Patrick MacDonald's collection of Highland airs,¹ and on one occasion he tried to persuade Robert Burns to write a drama on the legend of a Cameron who helped the Earl of Mar after the first battle of Inverlochy.²

1. Allardyce Scotland and Scotsmen, from the Ochtertyre MSS. Vol. II, pp.194-5.
2. Chambers and Wallace The Life and Work of Robert Burns, vol. II, pp.194-5.

Henry MacKenzie, the 'Man of Feeling', was involved in the foundation of the Highland Society⁽¹⁷⁸⁴⁾, edited its Transactions, and was associated with its enquiries concerning possible improvements in Highland economy, as well as the preservation of the Gaelic language, poetry and music. Although such men are not usually numbered among the litterati, their influence, as is well known, was important in Edinburgh social and literary circles. It is against this somewhat complicated background that we must view the processes that lead to the Ossianic controversy and the effects of that controversy upon our special interest here.

The Edinburgh litterati all responded to the idea of recovering and publishing Ossianic ballads - these Gaelic poetic 'relics' - with a profound enthusiasm.¹ They did so because the intellectual climate of their age, not only in Scotland, was one in which the emergent concept of society gave the idea of the 'primitive' a particularly conspicuous place; and theories of the proper balance between the primitive and the polished in the good society, and of the nature and function of early poetry, were already attracting discussion. It is precisely at this point that we can see a European impulse impinging on the field of Gaelic oral poetry, but there is also a specifically Scottish intellectual climate, as we have described in some detail, which plays its own part. So far as the litterati were concerned, they could take a keen interest in what might emerge as Scotland's own epic: they were, after all,

1. This emerges very clearly in their letters in the Report on Ossian. V. Appendix to Report, pp. 56-69.

Scottish patriots. It was 'antient' and 'primitive', with something of a Golden Age aura about it, and an interest in it was sanctioned by the growing European fashion. Yet it was sufficiently far removed from their own lives to prevent this interest from labelling them as parochial. Without this background James MacPherson's career, and probably also the entire style of his purported translation - which engendered the scepticism of critics - would have been very different. It is important, therefore, to realise that MacPherson acted as the specifically qualified representative of the Edinburgh literati.

James MacPherson, no doubt like almost any representative eighteenth century Gaelic speaker, could scarcely have avoided knowing at least lines or phrases of Ossianic ballads from childhood, such was the immense popularity of this poetry in the Highlands and Islands from the fifteenth century. We do not know if he deliberately cultivated such knowledge, but we have it on the evidence of Alexander Carlyle, the famous minister of Inveresk, that MacPherson had "some specimens of that poetry ... by heart" when he first came into the ken of the Edinburgh circle. But it was the accident of his meeting with John Home, the author of Douglas, in 1759, that started him off on his momentous career as an author. We are assured by Carlyle that "before this accidental meeting with Mr. Home, Mr. MacPherson had no idea of collecting and translating the work of Ossian." It was with "much solicitation and difficulty" that he was "prevailed with to translate some specimens of that poetry."¹ Home accompanied MacPherson on one of his journeys;

1. Report on Ossian, Appendix, p.66 (My italics).

he doubtless came to know MacPherson more intimately than did any of the others of the Edinburgh men. The literati all corroborate each other on the details already cited; what none of them (including Home himself) mentions is the fascinating information, hitherto unnoticed, in a footnote in John Ramsay of Ochtertyre's manuscript¹ that "It is said Mr. John Home gave MacPherson the first hint of this mode of translation." Home then is the main force behind MacPherson. Of that first meeting, Carlyle says: "he told me that he had at last found what he had been long wishing for, a person who could make him acquainted with ancient Highland poetry, of which he had heard so much."²

At this point we can isolate the catalyst in the whole process and it brings us back to Gaelic. Adam Ferguson, one of the founding fathers of sociology, and a leading member of the Edinburgh literati, was a Gaelic speaker from Atholl. About 1740, when he was 17 years old, he wrote down some Ossianic poetry from a certain John Fleming. Concerning this and some other fragments he heard at different times, he says: "The principal use I made of them was, to tell my friend and companion at College, Mr. John Home, that there were such relicks of ancient poetry in the Highlands, and which led him to the inquiries which produced Mr. Macpherson's communications." John Home corroborates this in his own note to the Highland Society.³

1. Allardyce, op.cit. vol I p.544 fn.
2. Report on Ossian, ibid.
3. Report on Ossian Appendix, p.63 and p.68.

Here we have, therefore, another of the numerous confluences of eighteenth century Scottish cultural life. Ferguson's role, not only in the history of Ossian but through that, in the history of European Romanticism, seems to have been completely overlooked. It was Ferguson's specific influence, in the cultural atmosphere of the age, that turned Home's mind, as it were, to receive the information that MacPherson had to impart at that chance meeting in the autumn of 1759. And it was probably Home who gave Ossian that peculiar style that aroused the critics' suspicions.

We have now come full circle to the point raised near the beginning of this chapter, viz., that while we may see the Gaelic collectors' labour as the product of a much bigger historical movement, the complicated sequence of event and influence have first to be traced. It is perfectly possible that Ranald MacDonald, son of Alexander MacDonald, publishing the first printed anthology of Gaelic poetry,¹ in 1776, was fortified by the example of Thomas Percy's Reliques in 1765. But Percy in his turn had received his direct stimulus from Ossian. There can be little doubt that Eigg is the anthology, or part of it, projected by Ranald's father, for which both of them had received manuscripts from the MacVurich family. Its long delayed publication came at this point, however, as an answer to the criticisms expressed by Dr. Samuel Johnson in his Journey to the Western Islands, published in 1775. Ranald MacDonald reveals quite clearly how directly MacPherson's work,

1. V. Chap. 3 for details of the 'Eigg' collection.

and the ensuing controversy affected himself. "Men of taste and genius in all parts," he writes, "have coveted an acquaintance with a language that could boast of the name of OSSIAN; and could triumph, almost unrivalled, in the exalted character of FINGAL. Thus the love of the Gaelic has been revived; and a taste for Gaelic composition has become general.

The Editor, moved by these considerations, and desirous to preserve his mother tongue, has bestowed much labour and expense, during the course of two years, in collecting the poems now offered to the public."

There is also a direct reference to the critics of the authenticity of Ossian. "The appearance of these Poems excited universal attention. The Highlanders, perhaps, were the only people in Europe whom they did not astonish. Independent of the beauty of their composition, they served to exhibit a picture of human manners so exalted and refined that some persons, judging from their own depravity, could not believe the existence of the state it described."²

He makes two other points that are worth noting. Referring to the critics who declared in favour of the authenticity of MacPherson's Ossian, he cites, in a footnote Lord Kaimes (sic) and Dr. Blair. In an allusion to the neglect of Gaelic (reminiscent of his father's Preface), to such an extent that it was in danger of being entirely obliterated, he says: "At

1. Eigg, Preface, p.viii. For full text v. Appendix I.
2. A reference primarily to Dr. Johnson. Ranald included a song against Johnson (Eigg, p.318). For similar poems cf. Gillies p.173 ff.

this critical period a fortunate event happened. Some individuals, animated with the love of their native language, regretted the danger to which they saw it exposed." Although he then goes on to describe the search for ancient poetry and the publication of Ossian, it is likely that he is also tactfully including his own father among these individuals. He is in any event fulfilling his father's cherished intention.

This first group of collectors whom we have listed, those whom we described as belonging to a new cultural age, viz., MacLagan, Stone, MacNicol, Maclean, MacDonald and Irvine were all men of a considerable degree of formal education.¹ Maclean was a doctor of medicine, MacLagan, MacNicol and Irvine were ministers, and all were graduates of St. Andrews University, which Stone had also attended before becoming headmaster of Dunkeld Grammar School. Ranald MacDonald's command of English, as shown in his preface to Eigg, puts him on much the same level: he had acted as substitute for his father as schoolmaster in 1774.² Indeed his translations of some Gaelic poems at the end of Eigg are probably better than most of what appeared in the nineteenth century. All these men then belonged to a professional class. In addition, the native Gaels all belonged to the upper stratum of Gaelic society. These privileges of birth and education naturally provided a common bond. We can show in fact that Maclean and MacDonald were in contact

1. For details of their careers v. Chap. 3, The Individual Collections, where evidence for the general remarks made here is set out in detail.
2. A. & A. MacDonald The Poems of Alexander MacDonald, p.xxix.

with each other from an examination of their collections, and the same applies to MacNicol and Maclagan, who would in any case have ecclesiastical contact.¹ MacNicol, in his Remarks on Johnson's Journey mentioned MacDonald in terms that indicate that they were friends.² Irvine, however, seems to have been less involved with others, perhaps because he was a much younger man, and his work falls just at the end of the century and the beginning of the next. Stone died in 1756 at the age of twenty-nine.

We are thus left with a tiny band of gentlemen³ whom we can fairly regard as the pioneers who established the foundations of our written sources of Gaelic vernacular poetry. The impression their work gives is that they were all taking part together in an organised campaign of recovering texts; all in touch with each other, but each of them working independently also, and each of them showing his own predilections, based on clan, locality or personal taste. Accordingly, Maclagan's

1. In addition, these two were to be involved with other gentlemen, apparently almost all clergymen, in a Gaelic-English and English-Gaelic dictionary. V. The Highland Monthly 'Notes and Queries' in Vol. I, p.64; and MacKinnon Catalogue of MSS p.281.
2. Remarks p.435 and p.461.
3. There is another collection, the existence of which I was ignorant when writing the above, viz. the 'Mac Diarmid MS Collection', listed and drawn upon in Professor Derick Thomson's An Introduction to Gaelic Poetry (1974), p.301. The collection is presumably connected with the 'MS [of ballads] written in 1762 by Eobhan MacDiarmid' mentioned by Mackinnon Catalogue of MSS, p.288. So far as Ossianic poetry is concerned, he had apparently access to Stone's collection or both transcribed from the same MS. The exclusion of his work from this study is regrettable but unavoidable, although the main argument is almost certainly unaffected. *The MS is in Glasgow University Library.*

collection contains Perthshire and Aberdeenshire material to which he had better access in the eastern Highlands than did the others; similarly MacNicol drew on Argyll. But these two obviously used correspondents from a wide area, in some cases probably the same people;¹ or it might be that Maclagan, the slightly older man - by seven years - supplied MacNicol with manuscripts which the latter copied. Much of MacNicol's collection is in his own hand, or that of his son, whereas Maclagan's is more heterogeneous. Ranald MacDonald prints a fair amount of his father's poetry. His anthology has a general Clan Donald bias, and is also more restricted than Maclagan and MacNicol to the heroic strains in Gaelic verse, although he must have had access, since he had Hebridean connections, to very rich sources of the poetry of the female sub-culture. In this he no doubt betrays his own personal tastes - these being perhaps more representative of male attitudes to poetry in Gaelic society than were those of his ecclesiastical co-workers. Maclean is similarly restricted, probably for the same reasons; he also has a marked Clan Maclean bias, and he had taken pains to gather the poetry of John Maclean, Iain mac Ailein, who came briefly to the knowledge of non-Gaels when Dr. Maclean's daughter selected and translated one of his poems for Dr. Johnson. Maclean began collecting some time before 1768: we may surmise that Alexander MacDonald, directly or through Ranald, had some influence on him from the start, but

1. e.g. Rev. John Stewart, Maclagan's brother-in-law, who supplied him with a Lennox poem in 1776. V. Highland Monthly Vol. 1, p.342 ff.



it is possible that he began independently and made contact with Ranald at a later date.

We shall see that there is some evidence that these pioneer collectors influenced each other's texts.¹ But there is no evidence of wholesale 'improvement' through their mutual contact. Even when close variants exist, provided there is no consistent orthographical evidence to connect them, we can explain the relationship by the kind of conservative transmission that survived to at least the middle of this century. It appears reasonable to conclude that if they had indulged in such editorial meddling on a large scale, they would either have done so openly and left evidence;² or, alternatively, they could not have covered their tracks so consistently and well. In this respect they were probably ahead of their time, not only among Gaelic editors. They may have been helped in this by the tolerance of their community to a certain amount, and certain kinds, of textual variation.³

The impetus of this vigorous and enthusiastic campaign continues, with the work of Dr. Alexander Irvine partly acting

1. There is also evidence of slight editorial doctoring of Ossianic ballads by Maclagan. The temptation may have been greater with Ossianic poetry; v. D. S. Thomson SGS, Vol. VIII, p.182. And James MacPherson had heard that Maclagan had "taken pains to restore the style". Report on Ossian, Appendix, p.154.
2. 'Improvement' in Ramsay's Tea Table Miscellany, for instance, is easily detectible.
3. V. Chap. 4.

as a bridge, partly pointing towards an interest in a different kind of verse. For Irvine begins to introduce a more plebeian and local type of composition, not altogether unknown in the eclectic collections of Maclagan and MacNicol, but clearly more akin to contemporary compositions of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century there are two printed collections that in content have a good deal in common with the eighteenth century collections, particularly in their predilection for the more aristocratic and heroic compositions of Gaelic verse rather than plebeian or local compositions. These two anthologies are A. and D. Stewart's and Peter Turner's, of 1804 and 1813 respectively. In this respect Turner may be said to be the more old-fashioned in that clan panegyric features more strongly in his book than it does in the Stewarts'. Here again, we can see a personal taste operating, but it is also relevant that Turner travelled over the Highlands collecting poetry¹ and had therefore an opportunity of receiving from good informants what they themselves would regard as outstanding material. This experience is well-known to collectors of oral poetry to the present day. But it is also relevant that Donald Stewart was a university graduate, with possibly a differently defined attitude towards what ought to be published to represent Gaelic poetry at that point in history. The Stewarts had access to Ranald MacDonald's Eigg collection, as is demonstrated by the footnotes on p.223 of their work, which

1. Maclean Typographia sub Turner, p.361.

correspond to those on p.30 of Eigg. This is borne out by the texts of the poem, which correspond stanza for stanza and word for word - with one full and four partial exceptions. The Stewarts might thus have copied from Eigg, altered the orthography and edited the text very slightly. The same is true of Eigg pp.26-7 and Stewart, pp.213-5. They also print the poem which, as we have already noted, is attributed in a copy of Menzies' collection, to James Maclagan; in addition to which they include a poem to Donald MacNicol 'le duin' uasal araid 'nuair a bha è na sheasamh ag uaimh!¹ MacNicol died two years before the publication of their anthology. The Stewarts were natives of Perthshire but Donald Stewart was for some years a schoolmaster in North Uist. Thus they had access to and published poems from Island as well as Perthshire sources. Much of the same connections with the eighteenth century collections exist in the case of Turner's collection. While we cannot demonstrate that he possessed or used, for instance, either Eigg or Gillies, it is of interest that one poem Oran do dh'Fhiunnla Marsanta² is identical in his book and in MacNicol.

The fact is that these collectors, though a little removed in time from the founding fathers in the eighteenth century, really belong to the first wave of the movement. More isolated collections which can nevertheless be seen as the product of the same drive are exemplified by Allan MacDougall's

1. Stewart, p.281 ff.

2. Turner, p.261 ff.

publication, in 1798, of his own poetry together with thirteen poems by various other poets; Donald MacLeod of Skye's similar publication in 1811 or that of Ranald MacDonald of Ardness in 1821. In 1811, also, there appeared the anonymous Inverness Collection.

What we have discussed thus far is a movement stimulated both from within and without the Gaelic community; a movement founded and directed by highly literate and sophisticated men acting in co-operation to establish in writing what has become the foundations of the edifice of Gaelic poetry. This literary campaign, the strategy of which ramifies beyond the work of the pioneers, makes us revise the assumption that we are dealing with a pure oral tradition. Nevertheless the evidence does not compel us to concede that the tradition which these men recorded for posterity has been thereby distorted to a degree which makes it impossible for us now to recover the rhetorical pattern (not to mention subject matter) which constitutes the essential form of Gaelic verse.

We now enter a new phase. The growing literacy in Gaelic, partly due to the translation of the Bible (the New Testament in 1767, the Old in 1801) and the influence of the Evangelical Revival with its encouragement of family worship, partly to the foundation of the voluntary Gaelic Schools Societies (founded in Edinburgh in 1811), helped by a feeling that the old world was disappearing and that Gaelic society was progressively under siege, forms from now on the background to collecting. The movement was no longer an integrated campaign, no longer capable of being interpreted as a current in the mainstream of Scottish

cultural life. Lowland interest had waned with the disenchantment that followed the Ossianic controversy; although collection was continued and collectors sometimes encouraged each other, more often they worked in isolation. Journals devoted to Highland and Gaelic affairs, and Highland newspapers, organised these efforts to some extent, and an important focus, which still exists, was provided from 1871 by the Gaelic Society of Inverness. The influence of the Society extended beyond its Transactions. Members produced individual works of great value as primary sources, e.g. Uist Bards (1894)¹ or Song and Story from Lochness-side (1914).²

There is throughout this period a much less equivocal attitude to the orally composed and transmitted song. Released from the pressures which participation in a general movement engendered, Gaels (of whatever social status) were no longer forced into a position of having to assert and justify a spurious virtue in their society in relation to other nations. There is, indeed, a larger framework which replaces the Scottish movement of the eighteenth century and it is that provided by the British Empire. Civil and military activities in the Imperial service justified the Gaelic community to itself, being now profoundly bound up with a world-wide movement of progress and the pacification of heathen peoples. This transference of loyalty meant that the biggest claims were now likely to be made not so much on behalf of Gaelic literary tradition as on behalf of military prowess and loyalty. So far as oral poetry is concerned, collectors are generally content to state that it is oral, without compounding the issues further.

1. Ed. Rev. A. MacDonald.

2. Ed. Alexander MacDonald.

As the nineteenth century progresses, new strains of poetry, manifested in form and content, become more apparent. This naturally is a reflexion of the rapidly changing order of Gaelic society. The poetry of clan bard and patron, the aristocratic and heroic strains, is in one sense becoming anachronistic. Yet it is much too simple to dismiss it as anachronistic. It survives because it provides a unifying framework - a framework of rhetoric reflecting now a psychological unity of the Gaelic 'nation' in the Imperial framework. Thus the emergent strains, the currents of verse that surface more and more in these later collections, are a compound of the heroic, aristocratic voice and that of the common people. But, as we shall see later, it is possible to draw certain lines of demarcation.

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries there were still tradition-bearers who could supply much of the corpus of poetry available to the pioneer collectors of the eighteenth century. On some of them one nineteenth century anthology had a considerable influence. This was John MacKenzie's Sàr-Obair nam Bard Gaelach (1841). It is a derivative work, based upon earlier collections and anthologies - though MacKenzie did have access to current oral tradition - but it circulated more widely in the Highlands and Islands among the common people than any of the previous printed collections. In consequence, it was used to standardise texts; we can still hear anecdotes of appeals being made to the authority of its printed words, which were usually accepted as the canonical text. Modern traditional singers who possess a certain degree of literacy

will sometimes sing from its pages - the melodies being of course unaffected. In other cases it is possible to tell from the singer's text that Sàr-Obair has played its part at some earlier stage in transmission. From one point of view an intrusion into oral tradition, MacKenzie's work had nevertheless the effect of keeping certain songs in popularity which might otherwise have disappeared.

One of the most remarkable collections of the nineteenth century is that made by Captain Alexander Matheson of Dornie, Ross-shire. Professor Donald MacKinnon, who regarded it as, next to J. F. Campbell's MSS, the most meritorious collection of the nineteenth century, describes it as "an extensive collection of songs and poems composed in the west of Ross-shire and neighbouring districts by Mathesons, MacRaes, MacKenzies and others, and recovered from old people by the industrious collector ..."¹ This indicates the local bias: Matheson appears to have made an intensive search of a fairly limited area, and judging from the contents of the collection concentrated on the oldest material available - there must have been immense numbers of more recent compositions known to his informants as well as work songs and the like. There are indeed some stray poems and verses, riddles, etc., and one or two examples of the type of song associated with labour.

1. V. MacKinnon, Catalogue of MSS pp.321-2.
 Prof. A. Matheson "Gleanings from the Dornie Manuscripts" in TGSI, 41, pp.310-351.
 Rev. Wm. Matheson "Further Gleanings from the Dornie Manuscripts" in TGSI, 45, pp.148-195.

But the extraordinary feature is that it contains poems that are dateable to the sixteenth century, on the face of it apparently still circulating in oral tradition. We should, perhaps, not discount the influence of some literary transmission, but this remains a mere speculation.

The remaining collections, ranging from the mid-nineteenth century to the present, are selected because of the originality of their content and because they enable us to assess, though only in a limited fashion, something of what Martin Martin had in mind when he describes the abilities of the "Vulgar": "Several of both Sexes have a quick Vein of Poesy, and in their Language (which is very Emphatick) they compose Rhyme and Verse, both which powerfully affect the Fancy: And in my Judgment (which is not singular in this matter) with as great force as that of any antient or modern Poet I ever yet read."¹

In 1868, D. C. MacPherson published his anthology An Duanaire. "Most of the pieces contained in the following collection," he writes, "were taken down some time ago in the Braes of Lochaber." It is noteworthy that echoes of the Ossianic controversy are still apparent: what the editor terms the immense labour involved "is in no small degree compensated by the fact of his contributing so much to establish the authenticity of the effusions of the venerable bard of Cona, by silencing the prejudices of sceptics, so that now even Southrons believe that "Fingal lived, and that Ossian sang."²

But the Duanaire is not a collection of Ossianic verse.

1. Martin, p. 200
2. Preface p.viii.

It contains a large number of heroic songs of the panegyric tradition, some by outstanding poets such as Iain Lom and Gilleasbuig na Ceapaich, as well as songs by named poets of more local reputation. For our purpose, its relevance lies largely in the fact that texts of the waulking song type are included, and also a group of songs which are constructed basically on the couplet, which is then repeated to make a quatrain.

In 1879, Archibald Sinclair published An t-Oranaiche. This includes a number of more or less contemporary songs, and introduces the first large selection of popular ephemeral compositions that, certainly from the nineteenth century to the present, are composed by bards in the Gaelic townships, circulate locally for little more than a generation, and then disappear from oral tradition. This type of song, at least so far as social setting is concerned, is doubtless in the tradition of the "quick Vein of Poesy" mentioned by Martin Martin. But we lack the evidence by which we could determine to what extent both its form and content, and especially the former, was altered by changing social circumstances.

Finally, there are collections of choral songs associated with communal labour. The Oranaiche, indeed, prints a number of valuable examples, but the first important printed collection of these is contained in A. & A. MacDonald's The MacDonald Collection of Gaelic Poetry (1911) in which there appeared a very wide range of verse illustrative of most of the categories of Gaelic poetry. Some of this is derived from eighteenth century collections, but a great deal was taken directly from oral tradition in Uist. In the same year Frances Tolmie published her collection of songs, words and music, from oral

tradition, in the Journal of the Folk-song Society, No. 16. Alexander Carmichael's Collection of waulking songs appears in Vol. V of Carmina Gadelica, edited in 1955. Donald MacCormick's collection of waulking songs, made in 1893, was edited in 1969. K. C. Craig's Orain Luaidh Màiri Nighean Alasdair (n.d.) also a collection of waulking songs taken down from one woman in South Uist in the late 1940s, appeared c. 1950. On these late sources, to which may be added the extensive repertoire of the School of Scottish Studies' Archives, we are dependent for our knowledge of the choral songs of Scottish Gaelic. As such they rank in importance with the pioneer collections of the mid- and late eighteenth century.

Because of the cultural conditions under which they were made, it is not necessary to analyse these later collections for evidence of editorial co-operation and interference. There is one minor exception to this: some of Alexander Carmichael's waulking song texts appear to be conflate versions. For instance, Tàladh Dhomhnuill Ghuirm as printed in Bardachd Ghàidhlig by the collector's son-in-law is said to be "The text ... supplied to the Gael, V. 68, by Dr. Alexander Carmichael, with a few improvements from a much fuller version which the great Collector put together later ... "¹

It is interesting to reflect, in closing this chapter, that the general Scottish interest in Gaelic poetry and antiquities, centred on the literati in the late eighteenth century, is in certain ways paralleled in the late twentieth

1. W. J. Watson Bardachd Ghàidhlig, p.334, Note on 1.6507.

century preoccupation with the same interests. This, too, is part of a much greater cultural movement, involving the rest of the British Isles, America, and Europe, viz., the post-World War Two "folksong revival."

A P P E N D I X 1.

Part of PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION (1751)

of Alexander MacDonal'd's Poems.

The following is presented to the public for two reasons. One is the hopes the author entertains, that the publication of those Poems wrote some time ago, for the amusement of a private gentleman, may afford some entertainment to those versed in this antient and comprehensive language; and raise in others a desire to learn something of it, if they can be brought to think, that it may possibly contain in its bosom the charms of poetry and rhetoric, those two great sources of pleasure and persuasion, to which all other languages have owed their gradual advancement, and, in those improving times, their last polish and refinement.

The other reason of their publication at present is, to bespeak, if possible, the favour of the public, to a greater collection of poems of the same sort, in all kinds of poetry that have been in use amongst the most cultivated nations, from those of the earliest composition to modern times; their antiquity either proved by historical accounts, or ascertained by the best tradition; with a translation into English verse, and critical observations on the nature of such writings, to render the work useful to others that do not understand the Galic language. And if such a series can be made out, besides the general agreeableness of the thing itself, nothing perhaps will better contribute to discover the progress of genius, through all its different degrees of improvement, from extreme simplicity in whatever height we shall happen upon examination to find it, amongst this people, and from thence

we shall be able to judge, what further improvements it might have received had the same happy circumstances concurred in its favour, to which other languages, whether living or dead ones, have owed their success. An agreeable inquiry, surely! and one would think not displeasing, even to the inhabitants of the Lowlands of Scotland, who have always shared with them the honour of every gallant action, and are now first invited to a participation of their reputation for arts, if that it shall be found, on an impartial scrutiny, to be justly claimed by them.

Nor need it surprise anyone, that this genius should be found among a people so remote from the commerce of nations famous for arts and sciences, and now relegated to an obscure neglected corner, who considers, that the Celtic nation, of which they are a small, but precious remain, once diffused itself over a great part of the globe. From its bosom have issued the conquerors of Rome, the invaders of Gaul, Britain, Ireland, still found subsisting in this last, in Wales, in some parts of Spain, and along the coast of France; once great and flourishing in Asia; and peculiarly distinguished, in having one of the holy epistles of the great Apostle of the Gentiles addressed to them. A people so extensive and numerous, could not fail of having made considerable improvements amongst them, though many of their monuments are left, and the greatest monument of all, the language, entirely neglected.

It would be agreeable to trace the progress of their genius as far as it is now possible to discover it, through all its modifications and changes; to observe what different tinctures, as one may say, it has received, from the many different

climates, people, and customs, through which, as so many strain-ers, it has passed. But as this is a work of a much longer detail than can be executed in this place, we shall leave the further prosecution of this notion to a more favourable opportunity. We cannot however but testify our surprise, that in an age in which the study of antiquity is so much in fashion, and so successfully applied to so many valuable purposes, whether religious or civil, this language alone, which is the depository of the manners, customs, and notions of the earliest inhabitants of this island, and consequently seems to promise, on an accurate review of it, the most authentic account of many things useful for us to know, should remain in a state, not only of total abandon, but, which is more astonishing, in an age so happily distinguished from all others, for freedom of thought, love of knowledge, and moderation, this people and this language should be alone persecuted and intolated.

Part of PREFACE TO THE EIGG COLLECTION (1776)

The Gaelic Language, now struggling for existence in a narrow corner, was once the mother tongue of the principal states of Europe. It was, in particular, and for a considerable length of time, the only language spoken by our ancestors, the ancient Caledonians.

The concise and nervous expression of this language; it's passionate and elevated tone; display, in lively colours, the national spirit of Caledonia; that spirit which had effectually repelled the invasions of those who had torn the rest of Europe to pieces.

The intrinsic excellence of the language itself, added to that love of ancient customs so prevalent among mankind, and so conspicuous among the Caledonians, might seem, at first view, to give immortality to the Gaelic tongue: but many political causes, which it is not my present purpose to enumerate, concurred to introduce the English language into this country and to render it fashionable at Court. - From this period, we date the decay of the Gaelic language. The English, which paved the way to honour and preferment, was naturally cultivated with care; while the Gaelic, the knowledge or study of which could not then be attended with any emolument, and the speaking of which became even unpolite, was as naturally neglected, and often treated with contempt. The influence of these causes became the more obvious, and operated the more powerfully, the nearer they approached to our times; so that the very remembrance of a language, which had once been general over almost all Europe, was in danger of being entirely

obliterated.

At this critical period a fortunate event happened. Some individuals, animated with the love of their native language, regretted the danger to which they saw it exposed. Compositions of great merit in the language were known to exist. Inquiry was made after these, with a view to publish them; and this was esteemed the best method of preserving the language itself. The inquiry was attended with considerable success; and a few years ago, some fragments of the best and most ancient Gaelic Poetry were offered to the public in an English translation, inspired with a considerable share of the majesty, simplicity and elegance of the original composition.

The appearance of these Poems excited universal attention. The Highlanders, perhaps, were the only people in Europe whom they did not astonish. Independent of the beauty of their composition, they served to exhibit a picture of human manners so exalted and refined, that some persons, judging from their own depravity, could not believe the existence of the state it described. The general voice, however, declared in favour of the authenticity of the Poems; and the general voice has been supported by the opinions of men of genius and extensive learnings*. - The delineation of Caledonian manners, exhibited in their poems, while it gratified the curiosity, commanded likewise the admiration of Europe. Men of taste and genius, in all parts, have coveted an acquaintance with a language which could boast of the name of OSSIAN; and could triumph, almost unrivaled, in the exalted character of FINGAL.

* Lord Kaimes. Dr. Blair

Thus the love of the Gaelic has been revived; and a taste for Gaelic compositions has become general.

The Editor, moved by these considerations, and desirous to preserve his mother tongue, has bestowed much labour and expence, during the course of two years, in collecting the poems now offered to the public.

Most of the pieces in the first volume have been composed within the last two hundred years; and hence, some English words have been adopted in the Gaelic compositions: Since the commencement of this period, the intercourse between the Highlands and the low country has been considerable. The progress of society has given rise to new ideas, and occasioned the introduction of many arts, to which the Highlanders, in their state of ancient simplicity, were entire strangers, and for which, therefore, they could have no language. In this situation, it was but natural to expect, that the Gaelic Poets of later days, in alluding to those ideas and arts, should be reduced to the necessity of adopting, upon such occasions, the English idiom and the English term of expression. Excepting words introduced in this manner, and which could not be altered without doing violence to the meaning of the author, no expression has been admitted into the present collection but what is pure Gaelic, and no pieces have been received but those of approved merit.

All the songs are set to music. The nature of the language is such, that the words properly support the sound; the words are well adapted to the subject, and commonly known and sung by every person in the Highlands. The music is not of

that light kind, that can only tickle the ear; it has power to interest the passions and touch the heart. It has commanded the attention of a Sovereign, who is no less celebrated as a judge of the fine arts, than for his abilities in the cabinet, and his conduct in the field. This illustrious personage has procured from a gentleman of North Britain, a collection of Highland tunes, and he esteems them extremely valuable. Is it possible not to admire the music that can give pleasure to the King of Prussia?

The elegies on the death of some eminent men in the Highlands are not the composition of venal poets, straining to express sentiments they never felt; but the genuine effusions of the heart on the loss of a friend and protector; for such to them was the chief of their tribe. They looked on him as a father, whose commands they were bound to obey; he in return protected them from injuries, relieved their necessities, and supplied their wants; and the very lowest of his dependants was admitted to his hospitable board, and rejoiced with him in the hall. Expressive of this is a saying now grown proverbial in the Highlands: Suidhe thuairn-fhear; suidhe thail-fhear; suidhe gach duine mar as deise, agus suidhe usa leisd-fhear : "Sit down, turner, sit down, taylor; sit down every man as is convenient, and sit down, thou arrow-maker.

The second volume will consist of poems of a much older date than those of the first, some being as far back as the third and fourth centuries. As our ancestors were then surrounded with enemies on all sides, their military exploits will employ the greatest part of the book. If we live in happier times, when we can have leisure to apply to the soft arts of

peace, let us pay at least a tribute of gratitude to the memory of those heroes of ancient days, to whose valour it is owing that we are yet a people. They fought for us before we had a any existence, and their breasts once glowed with the love of fame. In Greece or Rome, statues and altars would have marked the scene of every glorious deed; all that is asked of us is, That we should not let their names and their language entirely perish.

The Eighteenth Century Pioneer Collections
and their Relationships.

We may now consider those collections that constitute our basic, pioneer sources in the eighteenth century. This is done in order to set out briefly the evidence of the contents, and their relationship to each other, where this can be traced, so that the general remarks made in the previous chapter can be checked. When this has been done, we are in a better position to discuss the attitudes of the collectors themselves towards their work and towards what they believed were the lines of transmission, oral or written, which maintained the continuity of Gaelic poetry.

I have used certain descriptive headings, e.g. Encomia; but it is important to bear in mind that they are not rigid categories. Within Encomia I have included elegies as well as praise-poems to the living, but it will be suggested later that the Gaelic panegyric is really one of the basic styles that poets use: a song may be, indifferently, a love song or a comment on personal or social events, and still be classifiable as a panegyric. Religious or moralistic poetry should, perhaps, by the same token, be put in one class, but some poems are more injunctions and admonitions than expressions of devotion, though there is inevitably a shading off from one to the other. The class of satirical and humorous poems is a very mixed group which may contain anything from bitter invective to light-hearted compositions which express little or no real disapproval. They can be lumped together, nonetheless, because there is almost always some element of ridicule, however slight, present in them. Finally, the category called 'choral songs' has a

different criterion, viz., a structural one. This has been used for two reasons. First, choral song, in the sense that the term is used at this stage, denotes the very distinctive structure of single line or couplet followed by a choral refrain; and this structure stands out against most of the other structures (quatrains, eight-lined stanzas, irregular strophes, etc.) of Gaelic verse. (It will be tentatively argued later on that the repeated couplet structure is in some way related to these single line or couplet songs, but as it is impossible in the present state of our knowledge to clinch the connection, these are not involved now in the class.) Secondly, neglect of this genre by editors before the twentieth century makes it important to isolate examples in the early collections. Certain interrelationships between all the groupings will be indicated later: meantime they provide a rough guide to what each collection contains, both as regards quantity and subject-matter.

The Turner Manuscript

This manuscript is in the National Library of Scotland and has been very briefly described by MacKinnon, Catalogue of Gaelic MSS in Scotland, Appendix I (p.278). Its designation derives from its having apparently been at one time in the possession of Peter Turner, the compiler of the printed collection of Gaelic poems, but its history previous to that is unknown. On p.54 of the manuscript appears the date 1748; MacKinnon suggests that it was written a few years earlier, but gives no reason. The whole of the contents are printed in Reliquiae Celticae, Vol.II, p.310, ff. It is now known as National Library MS CXXI.

1. Dating

The first poem in the collection Marbhrainn Eoin Diuc Earreghaoidhiol provides a terminus a quo. John, 2nd Duke of Argyll, died in 1743.

The manuscript was therefore written between 1743 and 1748.

2. Classification

There are 51 items in the manuscript. They may be grouped as follows: Heroic ballads 15; Encomia 10; Religious 5; Moralistic 5; Love 2; Nature 2; Satire 4; Complaints 3; Songs about Pipes 2; Drink Songs 1; Miscellaneous 2.

3. Authors

Only one author is mentioned, the Irish Gormfhlaith Ni Fhloinn.

4. Manuscript Transmission

Some poems have a manuscript ancestry or have some demonstrable connection with the manuscript tradition, e.g. Dán Mhic Dhiarmuid, No.8 in the MS, is obviously derived from the poem by Giolla Crióst Brúilingeach to Tomaltach Mac Diarmada, lord of Magh Luirg in Connacht, who died in 1458. The poem is preserved in a form much nearer its strict original in the Book of the Dean of Lismore¹ but there is no direct connection with our text. Caoi Ghormfhlaith ni Fhloinn has a very distant relationship with two poems by the same author, also in the Book of the Dean of Lismore.

1. W.J. Watson Scottish Verse from the Book of the Dean of Lismore p.32.

The Turner Manuscript has a special status among the collections noted here, standing apart from the later collections. It represents, to some degree, the process whereby the older, classical tradition becomes vernacularised: the language on the whole is colloquial Gaelic, but the imprint of the literary, standard Gaelic of the schools is unmistakable.

I have selected the manuscript from a small group that belong to the early part of the century, because it has a fairly wide range of contents, and it can be dated to within five years. An almost equally good example is National Library MS LXV, some of whose contents are common to the Turner MS. National Library MSS LVII and LXII are in the same tradition.

The collection is poised, rather uneasily, between the written and the oral, between the medieval, literary world of manuscripts and the modern tradition. In this respect it could be classified along with the Fernaig MS, for it seems to hark back to the conventions of an earlier period. Yet there is probably, at the same time, a good deal of oral transmission behind it, not only in poems like No.17, which is in strophic metre, or No.50 (a version of the Clàrsair Dall's Oran Mór Mhic Leòid), but even in poems like No.8, a version of which is preserved in the Book of the Dean of Lismore, as noted above.¹

A poem such as No.1 might have been composed originally as a dán díreach, but by a process of 'vernacularisation' - which we see already at work in the sixteenth century in the Book of the Dean of Lismore, when the classical tradition must have been much stronger - and by oral transmission, it has taken on its present form. On the other hand, an item such as No.15 may well have been composed orally by a poet who was fairly closely

in touch with representatives of the learned tradition.

The collection is clearly of Argyll-shire provenance. Its literary quality is no doubt to be explained by the concentration of learned families in that corner of Gaelic Scotland - Ó Muirgheasáins, MacEwans, O'Conachers and Beatons. It is not without significance that the manuscript preserves a version of a composition by Giolla Crióst Brúilingeach, whom Professor Derick Thomson has convincingly identified¹ as a member of the family of Mac an Bhreatnaich or Galbraith, who seem to have been harpers in the MacDonald territory of Kintyre, and who are represented by a family in Leim, in Gigha, which explains the poet's epithet in the Book of the Dean - 'bard in Leymm.' We should also note the fact that the MacLachlans of Kilbride possessed a noted archive of Gaelic MSS and that Eoghain Maclean, schoolmaster at Kilchenzie, Kintyre, was a well-known scribe. He is mentioned by Edward Lhuyd in 1699.²

1. D.S. Thomson Gaelic Learned Orders and Literati, p.69 in Scottish Studies 12 Part 1 (1968).
2. Campbell and Thomson Edward Lhuyd in the Scottish Highlands, Index p.315; also MacKinnon Catalogue p.2 for MacLachlans; pp.116,173 for Maclean.

Jerome Stone's Collection

This collection is in the Edinburgh University Library, and has been described in some detail by MacKinnon, Catalogue of Gaelic MSS, p.286.

Jerome Stone was a native of Scoonie, Fife, where he was born in 1727. He first earned his living as a chapman, and afterwards by selling books at fairs, travelling with them all over the country. His linguistic abilities were obviously of a high order: he taught himself Greek and Hebrew, and studied Latin with the aid of a parish schoolmaster. The professors of St. Andrews University, hearing of his abilities, permitted him to attend their classes, and at the end of three years recommended him for the post of usher in the Grammar School of Dunkeld. Two or three years afterwards the Duke of Atholl appointed him headmaster. He died in 1756, at the age of 29.¹

Stone is well-known for his collection of Heroic ballads; they were published by Professor Donald MacKinnon in Vol.XIV, p.314 of the Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness. Following the ballads in his MSS is "A Collection of such modern songs as are remarkable upon account of their Beauty of the interesting Nature of their Subject." It is with this group that we are concerned.

1. Dating

Jerome Stone was appointed to the post of usher in Dunkeld Grammar School in 1750. His collecting work falls between this date and 1756, the year of his death. We have no evidence

1. Dictionary of National Biography, Vol.6.

that he had studied Gaelic before 1750, which, given his command of Gaelic orthography, would lead us to suppose that his work is nearer 1756 than 1750. We may also note that his first publication was in January 1756. Unless, indeed, it was Stone himself who wrote the date 1755 on Maclagan MS 73, which he used, i.e., unless he had that MS in his possession before 1755, we can conclude that his collection was written 1755-1756.

2. Classification

There are 17 items in the collection. Heroic ballads 10; Encomia 4; Plaint 1; Homeland 1; Nature 1.

3. Authors

The only author mentioned by name is 'John Lom' in No.13. It is here made clear that he is the author of No.12, while his authorship is implied for No.14.

4. Manuscript Transmission and Relationships

The three songs by Iain Lom have a close textual relationship with a MS once housed in the National Library of Scotland but now with the Maclagan MSS since it appears to have originally been a part of Maclagan MS 73. It is not possible to say dogmatically that Stone borrowed from Maclagan, rather than vice versa, but there is a fairly strong presumption that this is so. The English rubrics for Poems 13 and 14 in Stone's MS, by "John Lom" read as follows: Poem 13: "John Lom the Author of the above poem (i.e. Poem 12) having incurr'd the Hatred of the Murderers by his Verses was constrained to fly the Country for fear of them and in his Exile composed the following Song still more to enflame the Country against them."

Poem 14: "The Poet having by his Verses spirited up the

Friends of the deceas'd children to take a Solid Revenge on there Murderers by putting them to Death returns Thanks in the following Manner."

These rubrics may be compared with the Gaelic rubric for Maclagan 73's text of Poem 14. This reads:

"Gheibh u, n, lorg sho mar dubhairt ughdar chumhidh, agus no murtairin ar fhogra e dhuich, ar son no bha e grait ump, n, sheol dusg chuir air a Chinnidh dhonallich ar fad, gu dheanibh, mar rinn Sir Sheumas, s, chuir shin geann ar Ian lom, a ghra mar chi u romhad arda hseoll, - gu duthrachdich, tabhairt taing do dhia mar hachir do na murtarin."

It seems quite reasonable that Stone paraphrased the Gaelic. The Gaelic is certainly not likely to be based upon Stone's English rubrics.

The presumption of Stone's drawing on Maclagan 73 is considerably strengthened by Poem 15, a version of the well-known Oran na Comhachaig. The connection between the version in Maclagan 73 and the version in Stone has already been noted by Professor Robert Rankin.¹ Rankin says, "It seems almost certain that Stone copied from the McLagan MS and regularised the spelling." To this he adds a note: "This is borne out by the fact that in Stone's MS ... there occurs 'S Coire Choinnich where the McLagan MS ... has scoirrchoinich, whereas Sgurra Chòinnich appears in the other two versions which contain this verse..."

The source of the verse in Maclagan 73 is no doubt oral tradition.

1. Oran na Comhachaig in The Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Glasgow, Vol.V, pp.122-171. The quotations come from p.126.

Jerome Stone's collection is of interest if only for the fact that, unlike the other known collectors of this era, he was a Lowland Scot, and presumably less likely to have been motivated by the kind of patriotism that might have operated for instance in the case of Ranald MacDonald. Stone's linguistic interests and outstanding ability would have led him naturally to a study of Gaelic; but his early profession as a chapman and purveyor of books, in addition to his formal education, would have made him very sharply aware of the revival of interest in Scots poetry and ballads, which is discussed in detail in Chapter 2.

Apart from the poems which we have supposed are copied from Maclagan 73; there are four items in Stone's collection (Nos. 10,11,16 and 17) for which I can find no evidence of earlier manuscript transmission. But No.17 is printed in A. & D. Stewart's collection and in Menzies' collection, as already discussed; in the later attributed, in a handwritten note in Paul Cameron's copy, to James Maclagan.

No.11 appears in variant form in Eigg; and No.16 in Eigg and twice in Gillies; but Stone's versions of both these poems are distinct.

We may therefore postulate that Stone collected direct from oral tradition as well as from a manuscript. Finally, it should be noted that Maclagan 73 was not actually written by the Rev. James Maclagan himself and that the handwriting, which is rather distinctive, gives the impression of belonging to the early part, rather than to the middle of the eighteenth century. It is not in the common hand of the seventeenth century, but there are points of resemblance. Accordingly, it appears that Maclagan

73, used by Stone, is an example of sporadic collection made before the organised collecting of the mid and late eighteenth century had begun.

Dr. Hector Maclean's Manuscript

This manuscript is in the Public Archives, Halifax, Nova Scotia, with copies in Edinburgh and Aberdeen University Libraries. Its history is described as follows by the Rev. A. Maclean Sinclair in a note at the beginning of the manuscript.

"This book has been in possession of the following persons.

1. Dr. Hector Maclean. 2. Mary, the doctor's daughter.
3. John Maclean, the poet. 4. Charles Maclean, the poet's son.
5. Rev. A. Maclean Sinclair, grandson of John Maclean."

This is followed on the next page by another note.

"This book belonged to Doctor Hector Maclean, only son of Lachlan Maclean of Grulin. Dr. Maclean spent several years in Flanders and Holland. He married Catherine, daughter of Donald Maclean of Coll, by whom he had one child, Mary. He resided in Glasgow several years after his marriage. He lived during the latter part of his life on the farm of Erray, about a mile from Tobermory. Dr. Johnson and Boswell spent a night at his house in 1773. He died about 1785. Dr. Johnson speaks of his daughter, Mary, as the most accomplished lady that he had found in the Highlands. She was married, June 6th, 1786, to a man named Duncan MacKenzie. She died in 1826. She gave this book to John Maclean the poet, about the year 1818. John Maclean brought it with him to Nova Scotia in 1819. The date 1768 was stamped on the cover.

In June 1891 I got this book bound anew. I have placed the poems written down by Dr. Maclean after one another at the beginning, and the poems composed by John Maclean at the end.

All the poems from page 1 to page 122 were written down by Dr. Maclean, with the following exceptions:- (1) The poem

NOT
from MacAulley

beginning on page 88 was written down in this book by Charles Maclean, eldest son of John Maclean, the poet. (2) The poems on pages 106, 107 and 108 were probably written down by Mary, Dr. Maclean's daughter. My mother told me that she had heard her father say that a few of the poems at the end of the book were written down by Mary. (3) Twelve lines at the bottom of page 110 and eight lines at the bottom of page 115 were written down by John Maclean, the poet. They are a part of the poem which begins on page 150.

John Maclean composed and wrote down in this book the poems from page 127 to page 164. The poems from page 165 to page 190 were composed by John Maclean and written down in this book by Charles Maclean, his son.

Page 122 was the last page of this book in its original form.

The poems are placed one after another in the order in which they stood before the book was rebound.

This is a valuable collection of Gaelic poetry, and should be carefully preserved.

A. Maclean Sinclair, Belfast, Prince Edward Island, June 10th, 1891"

The eighteenth century part of the collection is therefore contained between page 1 and page 122, which are contained in Phot. 1130¹ and Phot. 1130² in Edinburgh University Library.

Dating

The date 1768, stamped on the cover of the MS, appears to be the only indication of the period of Dr. Maclean's life during which the collection was made. It is possible, however, that it was begun before 1741, the year of Iain Mac Ailein's death, according to an uncorroborated note in the MSS of the

Rev. Alexander Irvine. Dr. Maclean must have taken down Iain Mac Ailein's poems from a good source who knew the bard well, or from the bard himself.

Classification

There are 70 items in the collection. It is interesting that there are no Heroic Ballads in this collection. The texts may be grouped as follows: Encomia 32, Satire/Humorous/Critical Comment 14; Love 1; Moralistic 1; Religious 2; Plaint 3; Songs about Bagpipes 3; Miscellaneous 12. Prose item 2.

Authors

Authorship is stated or implied 35 times, i.e. there are 35 occasions on which the poet is named or a phrase such as "aon cheudna" is used. But from the grouping of the poems in the MS, we can assume, with very few exceptions, knowledge of authorship on the part of the writer(s) all through this work.

Manuscript transmission and Relationships

There appears to be some MS connection between Dr. Maclean's MS and the Eigg Collection. There are eight texts in Maclean that also appear, usually with some variation, in Eigg.

These are the following.

1. Maclean No.5 - Eigg, p.175 ff. The versions are so close that they can scarcely be called variants. Highly conservative oral transmission might account for some of the similarities, for the texts do not betray any unequivocal influence in orthography from a written version, or that of one upon the other. There is one small exception to this: MS v.4, 1.2 has aprehension where Eigg, 1776 ed., has smuaintin criodhe. But Eigg, 1782 ed., has apre hension.

2. Maclean No.6 - Eigg,p.168 ff. Fairly close variants.
3. Maclean No.10 - Eigg,p.295 ff. The same number of verses in the same sequence, with a number of variant readings.
4. Maclean No.27 - Eigg,p.125 ff. Fairly close variants.
5. Maclean No.44 - Eigg,p.300 ff. Fairly close variants.
6. Maclean No.51 - Eigg,p.297 ff. The title in Maclean is Oran le Lachin Mac Gilleon do thigh Collo rein e do Lachin, triach cholla a bhathigh 1681. It begins:

Maribhasc air a' thsaoil chruaidh

'S laidir buainn n carrich e

The title in Eigg is: Oran le Lachlin MacIleon do thigh collo, do Lachlin triath colla bathigh 1681.

There are 11 8-11 vv. in both sources; there are minor, or even trivial, variations throughout, but the two versions are extremely close. The sequence of verses corresponds exactly. It would seem as if Maclean and MacDonald each knew the song in slightly different form - which is the usual impression to be gained when comparison is possible of the two collections. But the possibility of actual MS influence is beyond reasonable doubt. The following points are worth noting.

1. Both titles are close in wording, both provide a date, and there are spelling similarities, viz. MS Collo : E collo; MS cholla : E colla; MS bhathigh : E bathigh (cf. sp. bhathidh in 52).

2. There are a number of other spellings in the body of the poem which may be considered slightly eccentric but which are identical (in one case, Verse 11, almost identical) in both sources. They are:

Verse 1 1.2 : buainn for buan

- Verse 1 1.8 : ghealighchin for gheallaidhean
- Verse 4 1.6 : aos danna for aos dana
- Verse 5 1.3 : Bha ud mharador for Bha thu 'd mharbhadair
1.8 : triochd for tric
- Verse 6 1.4 : a ballol dhu for a b'alluil' dhiubh
- Verse 8 1.2 : luchd elontadh for luchd ealanta
1.3 : moror for mormhair
- Verse 10 1.6 : elibh for ealamh
- Verse 11 1.1 : 'N tigh chrubhech for An Tì Chruthaich
'N tigh chrubhaech
1.2 : dhiat for dhiot
1.3 : Diann for dèan
1.4 : a for e
1.5 : ghunsidh for dh'ionnsaigh

7. Maclean No.55 - Eigg, p.178 ff.

There are 15 verses in both sources but each has a verse that has no corresponding verse in the other. Verses 1-8 and 11-15 correspond in sequence in both.

Apart from the extra verses, the texts are pretty close. There are a few spellings identical in both sources that suggest a MS influence:

- MS v.10 ; Eigg v.9, 1.2 : gherana tha for ghearain a tha
- MS and Eigg v.11, 1.8 : les agus creasog for leas (agus[?]) crea-
fog (i.e. creubhag). Eigg has è on creasog ; no accent in MS.
- MS and Eigg v.12, 1.8 : centort for ceannard (or ceannbhard).
- MS and Eigg v.14, L.3 : decir for deacair

8. Maclean No.56 - Eigg, p.85 ff. Fairly close variants.

Both sources have 18 verses but apart from 1-7 vary in sequence. Lines also vary in sequence, e.g. MS v.15 11.1-3

correspond with Eigg v.13 ll.1-3, and so on.

MS v.7 is written twice, so that it reappears as v.11, with two words altered, shéideadh becomes sheisdeadh and tigeadh becomes bhiadh. The first appearance of these words in the MS corresponds with Eigg, except that Eigg has shèideadh.

This rewriting suggests that Maclean was using two sources (one of which he shared with Eigg).

The impression left after a detailed comparison of the relevant poems is that of two collectors working, on the whole, independently of each other, but certainly in contact with each other, perhaps on terms of personal friendship, and probably discussing their work. E.g. Maclean No.51 from the orthographical similarities, betrays a MS connection between Dr. Maclean's Manuscript and Eigg. As Maclean Sinclair notes at the beginning of the MS, Dr. Samuel Johnson mentioned Mary Maclean. "The young laird of Col ... conducted us to the house of Dr. Maclean, where we found very kind entertainment and very pleasing conversation. Miss Maclean, who was born, and had been bred, at Glasgow, having removed with her father to Mull, added to other qualifications a great knowledge of the Earse language, which she had not learned in her childhood, but gained by study, and was the only interpreter of the Earse poetry that I could ever find."¹

Boswell's comment may be quoted at this point. "Miss Maclean produced some Erse poems by John McLean, who was a famous bard in Mull and died only a few years ago. He could neither read nor write. She read and translated two of them; one, a kind

1. Samuel Johnson A Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland p.190.

of elegy on Sir John McLean's being obliged to fly the country in 1715; another, a dialogue between two Roman Catholick young ladies, sisters, whether it was better to be a nun or to marry. I could not perceive much poetical imagery in the translation. Yet all of our company who understood Erse, seemed charmed with the original. There may, perhaps, be some choice of expression, and some excellence of arrangement, that cannot be shewn in translation. After we had exhausted the Erse poems, of which Dr. Johnson said nothing, Miss Maclean gave us several tunes ..."¹

The "dialogue" is Poem No.5; the "kind of elegy" may be No.2. John Maclean is, of course, Iain Mac Ailein, who is represented by 33 compositions in the MS. Iain Mac Ailein's poems, in fact, constitute the major part of this collection, which may have been begun specifically to preserve his work. It is significant that Boswell got the impression that he was "a famous bard"; and equally significant that Mary Maclean should have chosen two of his poems to translate for such a formidable critic as Dr. Johnson. This assessment of Iain Mac Ailein is reflected by Maclean Sinclair: "He is fairly entitled to a high rank among the bards of the Highlands and Islands of Scotland."²

Johnson, in another part of his Journey, makes this comment, "There has lately been in the Islands one of these illiterate

1. James Boswell The Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides, etc. p.217.
2. A. Maclean Sinclair Maclean Bards, Vol.1, p.82.

poets, who hearing the Bible read at church, is said to have turned the sacred history into verse. I heard part of a dialogue, composed by him, translated by a young lady in Mull, and thought it had more meaning than I expected from a man totally uneducated; but he had some opportunities of knowledge; he lived among a learned people."¹

Johnson's criticisms will be discussed more fully later. Meantime, it is important to note that both he and Boswell had apparently been clearly informed that Iain Mac Ailein was illiterate. This is the more interesting when we consider his knowledge of the Tuatha De Danann, even though this appears to be a mock-serious composition. His source for such learned tradition was almost certainly the Rev. John Beaton,² with whom he seems to have been on friendly terms. See Poem No.17, where he addresses Beaton more or less as an equal. Johnson's reference to "a learned people," however, probably points to the good knowledge of English, with what that implied, which he found among the upper classes of Mull society in the late eighteenth century. English had begun to come in strongly in the early part of the century, according to Poem No.13.

According to a note in the Irvine MSS, Iain Mac Ailein died in 1741, i.e. 32 years before Johnson and Boswell visited Mull. Boswell's remark that the bard "had died only a few years ago" is almost certainly wrong, if the evidence of the

1. Johnson op.cit. p.160.

2. For information about Beaton see J.L.Campbell and D.S. Thomson Edward Lhuyd in the Scottish Highlands. Index, p.310.

poetry is taken into consideration. Maclean Sinclair puts him tentatively c.1665-1738.¹ It may well be, however, that Boswell was misled as to the date simply because Dr. Maclean had known Iain Mac Ailein personally and described him vividly. It is possible, too, that Dr. Maclean took the poems down from the bard himself. This would of course mean that the collection was begun long before 1768. One of the distinctive features about it is the extent to which its poetry is Clan Maclean poetry. Perhaps, in view of the connection, already noted, between this manuscript and Eigg, we may see here an instance of Ranald MacDonald's influence and encouragement, or even that of his father, Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair.

Finally, it should be said that although almost all the poems from Dr. Maclean's manuscript have been printed by Maclean Sinclair, many of these have been accidentally or deliberately altered in the process of editing.

1. A. Maclean Sinclair op.cit. Vol.I, pp.82-83.

The MacNicol MSS

The manuscript collections of the Rev. Donald MacNicol are in two parts: three notebooks in Edinburgh University Library, where they form part of the Colin Campbell Collection; and the bulk of the MSS, housed in the National Library of Scotland. The notebooks in Edinburgh University Library are briefly described by Dr. A. MacKenzie, Orain Iain Luim, p.XVIII. For a fuller description of the remainder of the MacNicol MSS, see George Henderson in The Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness, Vol.XXVII, p.340 ff. Henderson also printed some poems from the MSS in the same volume. The Edinburgh University Library MSS and the National Library MSS have been taken together for the purpose of classifying the material which they contain. As with the other collections, Heroic Ballads in these MSS have been counted in the index, but they have not been otherwise dealt with. Other material, letters, sermons, etc. have not been included.

Donald MacNicol was born in 1735, educated at the University of St. Andrews, where he graduated in 1756, and appointed minister of Saddell, Argyll in 1763. In 1766 he was transferred to Lismore, where he died in 1802.¹

For a brief description of some of the contents of the MacNicol MSS, then in the possession of George Henderson, see further MacKinnon Catalogue of Gaelic MSS, p.319 ff.

Dating

A few of the notebooks in this collection have Lismore written on them, and a date. None are earlier than 1773; which does not necessarily mean that MacNicol did not begin

1. Fasti Ecclesiae Scoticae, Vol.IV, p.99.

collecting earlier than that, but he may have taken no interest in collection until 1766, when he was transferred to Lismore. According to an item in the MSS, viz. "Information regarding Rev. D. MacNicol, furnished by Dr. Duncan MacColl, Salen," and dated "Glenaros, 22nd March 1871," "MacNicol greatly assisted Duncan Ban in getting his poetry into shape. Duncan took his wife to Lismore and lived there for months, working with MacNicol at the poems and making journeys to obtain subscriptions..."¹ Angus MacLeod points out that Macintyre's visit could not be later than 1766, "for we know he was settled in Edinburgh in the following year."² It may have been Duncan Bàn's visit that started MacNicol off on his work of collecting; it is equally possible, however, that Macintyre applied to him, knowing of his interest in Gaelic poetry.³

Classification

There are 422 items in the collection. There is some duplication, and some re-writing in a more modern hand. The items may be grouped as follows: Encomia 90, Heroic ballads and other Ossianic verses 26; Love songs 64; Satire, humorous pieces, etc. 125; Choral songs 29; Complaints 15; Moralistic

1. cf Henderson in Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness Vol. XXVII, p. 342.
2. A. MacLeod The Songs of Duncan Bàn Macintyre, Introd. p. XXVII.
3. One of MacNicol's Ossianic MSS (MS 24) is dated 1752. As MacNicol was only 17 years old then, this is probably not very significant. A single date, which may have another import than that of actual collection, taken in isolation from the rest of the evidence, cannot be made the pivot of an argument.

poems 9; Religious 7; Songs in praise, etc. of poet's homeland 8; Songs about drink 6; Hunting 3; Songs about the bagpipes 2; Charms 2; Run (from a tale?) 1; Nature poems 6; Miscellaneous 28.

Authors

There are 151 occasions on which authors are named or on which it is implied that the author is known. Sometimes the attribution may really be quite vague, e.g. "le MacMhuirich;" the MacVurichs are not distinguished by name in present day oral tradition: "Mac Mhuirich" is simply one character - just as Màg [Dh]omhnaill is one character in Tìree tradition. Thus when a song is ascribed to Mac Mhic Raghnaill, for instance, the singer or reciter may not have been able to say which chief this was. At other times, however, the attribution is quite secure, e.g. "Le Iain Mac Codrum" or "le Nighean Alasdair Ruaidh."

The importance of this, of course, is that the Gaelic oral tradition, as reflected in these MSS, does place emphasis on authorship.

Manuscript Transmission and Relationships

There are undoubted contacts between these two great collections made by MacNicol and Maclagan. As they are so extensive, however, and contain such a variety of verse, and as they are housed in Edinburgh and Glasgow, it has been found impossible, for this study, to carry out a detailed collation of manuscripts.¹ Using Gillies' collection, which is based on Maclagan, it can be seen that there are numerous examples of

1. Such a study, which depends so much on idiosyncrasies of orthography, requires not merely a word for word but literally a letter for letter comparison before any firm verdict can be given.

variants of the same poem, some of them very close. E.g. Gillies p.49, Iurram : Sud a rìgh gur trom m'eire / Nochd 's mi 'n eilein a' chaoil; Gillies p.83, Soighdean Ghlinn-Liobhunn; Gillies p.128, Oran do Lachlann og Mac Ionmhuinn, leis an Aig-eannuich Nighean Donuill Ghuirm are all textually identical with versions in MacNicol. Some variants may show slight orthographical variations; others, e.g. Mary MacLeod's Mo bheud 's chràdh may be very close though not identical, but nevertheless share readings not found in any other available variant. Yet another of Mary MacLeod's songs, Luinneag Mhic Leoid, exists in MacNicol in a distinct variant for which there is no corresponding text in MacLagan. These close connections as well as evidence of separateness could be multiplied: a full demonstration would in fact amount to an independent study, which would be compounded by the existence of more than one variant of the same text having been collected by both men.

To demonstrate, however, that both collectors were in contact with each other, it ought to be sufficient, on the principle of Occam's razor, to point that one of the versions of Oran na Comhachaig, taken from MacLagan and printed by Prof. Robert Rankine in his paper on that poem is identical with the MacNicol version.¹

There are also observable connections between some poems in the MacNicol MSS and versions in Eigg. One of these is the poem called Marbhrann Alasdair Uaibhrich. This poem is in the Book of the Dean of Lismore² in a form very close to that of

1. Robert A. Rankine Oran na Comhachaig, Text and Tradition, in Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Glasgow, Vol.V, pp.122-171; v. p.149 ff.
2. See Reliquiae Celticae, Vol.i, p.24 ff. and McLauchlan The Dean of Lismore's Book, pp.84-85.

Eigg (p.133 ff.). MacNicol may have copied it from Eigg.

MacNicol and Ranald MacDonald were acquainted. In his Remarks on Johnson's Journey, MacNicol observes: "Since I began these Remarks, I have been informed by Mr. Macdonald, the publisher of the Gaelic poetry ..."¹

The MacNicol MSS, being a much bigger collection than those previously discussed, give a much truer impression of the range of the Gaelic oral tradition in poetry. Although the groupings given under Classification are only a rough guide to the contents, they make it clear that MacNicol was an eclectic recorder of the tradition, and was not bound by the limits of a clan tradition, as was, for instance, Dr. Hector Maclean. The paragraph on classification gives a guide to the 'tone' of the material. The very high ratio of satirical and related compositions may seem unusual: this is due to the inclusion of a large number of very short pieces in the tradition of bardic flyting. A number of these are obscene. It is interesting that MacNicol, who is described by an ecclesiastical historian as a moderate Evangelical² should have been so broadminded as to collect them. This robust side of the tradition was regarded as important by Mac Mhaighistir Alasdair, and his influence may have played a part. At all events, it is a tribute to MacNicol's honesty as a collector that he should have included these compositions.

The heading Choral Song introduces a new group. For some remarks on these, see my paper on The Oral Tradition in Scottish

1. Donald MacNicol Remarks on Johnson's Journey, p.461.

2. MacInnes The Evangelical Movement in the Highlands, p.59.

Gaelic Poetry.¹ They are lyrical songs, often laments or love-songs, designed to be sung by a leader and chorus, and full of vivid imagery expressed with an elemental simplicity.

This has been a neglected genre in Gaelic poetry; as already noted, it received little attention from editors until the appearance of The MacDonald Collection of Gaelic Poetry in 1911. The relative neglect of these songs in our collections might to some extent be explained by the fact that they survived more strongly on the north-western coast and in the Islands. John Ramsay of Ochtertyre remarks: "Over all the Highlands, there are various songs, which are sung to airs suited to the nature of the subject. But on the western coast, benorth middle Lorn, and in all the Hebrides, luinigs are most in request."² These luinigs (Gaelic luinneagan) are our choral songs.

Modern investigation supports Ramsay, except that the area is now, of course, even more restricted. But this unequal distribution of the choral tradition does not wholly explain the collectors' neglect, as we shall see when we come to discuss Eigg. MacNicol must therefore be given credit here, too, for catholicity of taste.

But the main bulk of the poetry - not necessarily the number of separate pieces - is in the encomiastic tradition. This reflects the upper class life of Gaelic society rather than that of the middle or lower strata. In this connection, it is no doubt significant that MacNicol is said to have derived "much information from the MacDonalds of Ardshiel, representat-

1. In Scottish Studies, Vol.XII, Part 1, pp.29-43.

2. In Patrick MacDonald's Collection of Highland Vocal Airs, p.10 (Introduction).

ives of the original MacDonalDs of the Isles, and connected with the MacDonalDs of Dalness."¹ This connects MacNicol with traditions on which Alasdair Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair and his son might both have drawn, for Ranald's mother, Jane MacDonalD, is said to have been related to the MacDonalDs of Dalness.²

MacNicol himself, like all the Gaelic speaking clergy of that age, was well connected in Highland society. On his father's side, he belonged to the MacNicolS of Socach; on his mother's, to the Stewarts of Invernahyle. He may have inherited an interest in tradition from both sides, but his maternal uncle, Alexander Stewart of Invernahyle, it may be remarked, was the man who introduced Sir Walter Scott to the Highlands and Highland traditions. The ramifications of all the branches of MacNicol's family are set down by himself and printed by George Henderson.³ They make it clear that, through these connections with the upper classes of Gaelic society, he could have access to the oral poetry of a fairly wide area. It is to be expected, too, that he would reflect the interests of his class. In reality, he appears to have done rather more.

The collection was continued by MacNicol's eighth son, Major Dugald MacNicol, who died in 1844.

1. See Henderson TGSI, Vol. XXVII, p.343.
2. A. & A. MacDonalD The Poems of Alexander MacDonalD, p.XIII (Introduction)
3. Henderson, ibid.

The Eigg Collection

The Gaelic title is Comh-chruinneachidh Orannaigh Ghaidh-ealach le Raonuill Mac Dhomhnuill Ann 'N Eilein Eigg Vol.I.
DUNEIDIUNN: Clo-bhuailt ann le Walter Ruddiman M DCC LXXVI.

This is the first printed anthology of Gaelic poetry. MacDonald states in his Preface that "The second volume will consist of poems of a much older date than those of the first ..." (p.XI). The second volume never appeared. In 1782 a new edition appeared, bearing Clodh-bhuailt' agus r'an reic le Eoin Gillies ... am Peairt, agus Sheumais Gillies, Glasacha, agus Alistair Dabhidson, Iunoirnis. MacLean Typographia Scoto-Gadelica, p.202 says: "This is the same volume as the one dated 1776, only a new Title is printed for the work, with a new date. This arose from the unpopularity¹ of the work, which prevented its sale. The booksellers, having a large stock on hand, issued a fresh Title and eliminated 'Vol.I'. This move served two purposes: (1) it promised no further portion of the work at a subsequent date; (2) the unwary bought it either as a new work, or as the complement of 'Vol.I' - the second volume that never appeared."

MacLean is not quite precise when he calls this "the same volume." There are minor orthographical differences, and one or two emendations.

In 1809 Peter Turner published a supplemented edition.

1. If this is true, the unpopularity may have been due to the orthography, which is a good deal less easy to read (misprints apart) than that of Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair's 1751 edition of Ais-eiridh.

Ranald MacDonald (c. 1720?-1800) was the only son of Alasdair Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair, the poet, and a member of Clan Ranald. On his father's side he was a great-great-grandson of Ranald MacDonald of Benbecula and Mary, daughter of Angus MacDonald of Dunyveg and the Glens of Antrim. In 1744 he appears acting as substitute for his father as teacher of the S.P.C.K. school in Ardnamurchan. He was tenant for a time of the inn at Strath Arisaig: some time before 1770 he became tacksman of Laig, In Eigg. He died in 1800.¹

Dating

According to Ranald's own preface, he "bestowed much labour and expence, during the course of two years, in collecting the poems now offered to the public." (Preface, p.VIII). This may have been well before 1776, a suggestion which is strengthened by the sequence of certain statements in Lachlan MacVurich's Declaration. "Tha cuimhne mhath aige," the report says, "gu robh saothair Oisein scriobht ar craicin ann an glèatanas athar o shinsearaibh ... cuid ... mar leabhraichean, agus cuid eile fuasgailt o chèile, anns an robh cuid do shaothair bhard eile, bharachd ar saothair Oisein ... gu robh leabhar aig athair ris an canadh iad an leabhar dearg ... anns a robh mòran do shean eachdrai na fineachan Gaidhealach, agus cuid do shaothair Oisein ... Chan eil e cinnteach cid e thainig ris na craicin, ach gu bheil barail aige gu tug Alasdair mac Mhaighsdir Alasdair 'ic Dhonail ar falbh cuid diubh, agus Raonal a mhac cuid eile dhiubh ... Agus tha cuimhne mhath aige gu tug mac 'ic Ailein

1. A. & A. MacDonald, op.cit. pp.XXIII-XLIV (Introduction).

ar athair an leabhar dearg a thabhairt seachad do Sheumas mac Mhuirich a Bàidenach ..."¹

Whether or not the MS given to James MacPherson on Clanranald's order was the Leabhar Dearg,² it appears to be implied that the parchments had gone before 1759-60; otherwise, one might suppose, Clanranald would have included these with the other material presented to MacPherson.

As Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair had already planned an anthology before 1751, it is quite possible that MacVurich MSS, which Ranald could have inherited, were removed before that date. Ranald himself, who was probably born in the 1720's, could easily have become interested about the mid-century too. As Lachlan MacVurich was born in 1741 or 1742, his much greater certainty about MacPherson's getting the MS is perhaps due to his having been too young to remember the exact nature of the transaction that occurred between his father and the MacDonalds.

This is all, admittedly, conjecture; the two years that Ranald devoted to his work may have lain much nearer to 1776. His decision to publish - he might have had materials, his own, or poems inherited from his father, for a number of years - was almost certainly influenced by the publication of MacPherson's Ossian and the ensuing controversy.

The years between 1760 and 1776 were probably, therefore, the period during which Ranald MacDonald was most active as a collector; as editor, probably from about 1773 to 1775.

1. Highland Society's Report on Ossian, p.275 ff.
2. See Highland Society's Report on Ossian, pp.96-97.

Classification

120 items are listed in Appendix 5. For these groupings, however, the various parts of Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair's Birlinn have been taken as one piece, and so have two parts of a dialogue love song. The remainder are grouped as follows:

Encomia 63; Love poems 21; Satirical, etc. 5; Nature 5; Moralistic 2; Religious 2; Plaint 2; Drink 2; Choral 1; Homeland 1; Hunting 4; Miscellaneous 5.

Authors

There are 72 occasions on which authors are named or attribution is clear. As in the MacNicol MSS, a tradition of authorship is reflected.

Manuscript Transmission and Relationships

To suggest that Ranald MacDonald used MSS, or drew on an older, written tradition for the Eigg collection, we have not only the evidence of poems like Marbhrann Alastair Uaibhrich, of which an almost identical version exists in the Book of the Dean of Lismore;¹ we have also the statement, already quoted at length, from Lachlan MacVurich that both Ranald and his father had been given MacVurich MSS. In connection with Ranald's possession of MSS, and, more important, the use he may have made of them, it is interesting to note that Professor Derick Thomson has come to the conclusion that "It is quite clear that Ranald MacDonald knew both versions [of the Harlaw Brosnachadh] and produced a conflation of both."²

1. See supra on MacNicol: p.93.
2. Derick S. Thomson The Harlaw Brosnachadh: An early fifteenth-century literary curio, p.149. In Carney and Green, Celtic Studies, pp.147-169.

Points of contact with Dr. Maclean's Manuscript and with the MacNicol MSS have been noted above: it is unnecessary to present the evidence again. One interesting problem may, however, be raised. Did the vernacular Gaelic poems in Eigg which were composed by Neil MacVurich,¹ come to Ranald in MS form, along with other MSS? In other words, were the MacVurichs among the pioneers of adapting the orthography of classical Gaelic to vernacular use?²

The Eigg Collection may be seen as the realisation of at least part of the project that Alasdair Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair had in mind. Like his father, Ranald MacDonald was well aware of contemporary cultural movements and interests, both in the Highlands and the Lowlands of Scotland. This is quite clear from the preface to the collection, but it is relevant also to glance at the Dedication. It is addressed to "James Grant, Younger of Coriemony, Esq; Advocate," and begins: "A Publication which, in a great measure, owes its origin and completion to the generosity and spirit of the family of Coriemony, throws itself naturally upon their protection." It ends by mentioning "the deep sense I entertain of the uncommon friendship with which I have been honoured by you and your worthy father, in the course of this undertaking."³

After due allowance has been made for the usual complimentary phrases of a dedication, this remains an interesting state-

1. Eigg, pp.73-78.
2. The implications of this are discussed in the following chapter on Oral versus Written etc.
3. Eigg, pp. III-IV.

ment, which suggests that this particular Grant family may have encouraged the project from Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair's time. Alexander Grant of Corrimony was a staunch Jacobite, who came out in the Forty-Five; he almost certainly knew Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair. Of more direct relevance, however, is the fact that James Grant of Corrimony (1743-1835) was another figure whose interests were typically those of an eighteenth century Scottish man of letters. Almost certainly a Gaelic speaker, he was a friend of Henry Erskine, Henry MacKenzie, Lord Cockburn, and others of that circle. We see him pursuing some of the favourite enquiries of the Edinburgh literati in publications such as "Essays on the Origin of Society, Language, Property, Government, Jurisdiction, Contracts, and Marriages, interspersed with Illustrations from the Gaelic and Greek languages" and "Thoughts on the Origin and Descent of the Gael with an account of the Picts, Caledonians and Scots, and Observations relative to the Authorship of the Poems of Ossian."¹

Ranald's inclusion in his collection of a song to the Laird of Grant² may have been intended as a further compliment to James Grant's clan, or it may have been communicated to the MacDonalds by the family of Corrimony.

The relatively high proportion of encomiastic to other pieces is worth noting: Eigg is obviously a less eclectic collection than, say, the MacNicol MSS. Although both men, MacDonald and MacNicol, had a somewhat similar background in that both were connected by ties of kinship to a large number

1. See MacKay Urquhart and Glenmoriston p.405 and p.508.

2. Eigg, p.182: Oran le Semus M'Grigor do Thighearna Ghrante.

of leading Highland families, and though both reflect the interest of their own class, one can detect a difference of emphasis in their work. While MacNicol displays something of the attitude of a liberal scholar, Ranald MacDonald appears by comparison to be more consciously a propagandist. MacDonald may have been more aware of pedigree: through Angus MacDonald of Dunyveg and the Glens of Antrim, he could claim descent from Robert II. At all events, he presents an ideal of Gaelic Society, and the compositions he singles out for notice are from the central stream of the panegyric tradition. "The elegies on the death of some eminent men in the Highlands," he writes, "are not the composition of venal poets, straining to express sentiments they never felt; but the genuine effusions of the heart on the loss of a friend and protector; for such to them was the chief of their tribe."¹

It is perhaps worth observing that MacDonald was in a particularly favourable position for drawing on the Gaelic tradition of choral songs. His grandfather had come from Benbecula, his uncle was tacksman in Dremisdale, South Uist, and he himself latterly lived on the island of Eigg. Since the choral song tradition was stronger in the Islands than on the mainland, even in the eighteenth century², Ranald cannot but have been aware of the existence of this interesting body of song, and had ample opportunity of gathering from it. The fact that he did not do so, set beside his remark on the elegies, shows very

1. Eigg, Preface, pp.X-XI.

2. See supra on MacNicol.

clearly the kind of poetry that his society - and himself as representative of it - regarded as valuable.

It is only fair to point out, however, that a strong patriotic and even propagandist, tone is to be found in MacNicol's Remarks on Johnson's Journey, and that this is not very different from what we find in Ranald MacDonald's preface to the Eigg Collection. We ought, perhaps, to make a distinction between the roles of collector and editor.¹

The absence of Ossianic ballads is noticeable. These were no doubt intended to appear in the second volume.

1. But James Maclagan, if he really was the editor of Gillies' Collection, as Maclean claims in Typographia Scoto-Gadelica, p.136, did include choral songs.

The Gillies Collection

This collection appeared in 1786, published in Perth. Maclean, Typographica Scoto-Gadelica, pp.135-6, notes that one English and three Gaelic titles were issued, but "Rarely are two Gaelic Titles bound with the English Title." Maclean observes that the Gaelic titles are translations from English and that the orthography suggests that there were two translators. The English title is "A Collection of Ancient and Modern Gaelic Poems and Songs Transmitted from Gentlemen in Highlands of Scotland to the Editor. Perth. Printed for John Gillies, Bookseller. MDCCLXXXVI." The Highland Society's Report on Ossian, p.58, states that "About the year 1786, Mr. John Gillies bookseller in Perth published a pretty large collection of Gaelic poetry, ancient and modern. Mr. Gillies, though an entire stranger to the Gaelic tongue, was very zealous in the preservation of its monuments, and his collection has considerable merit. But it is evident, from the manner in which it is printed and arranged, that it was not prepared for the press with sufficient accuracy or attention. Hence many words, and even some lines, are altogether unintelligible."

These strictures, so far at least as non-Ossianic poetry is concerned, are unnecessarily harsh: most of the text is perfectly intelligible at first glance. Maclean states that "The work Was edited by the Rev. Dr. James Maclagan of Blair Atholl, assisted by others."¹

Who these others were, or who were the supposed translators

1. ibid.

of the title, is unknown. Nor are the gentlemen in the Highlands identifiable who transmitted the poems to the editor. But it is generally recognised that the Maclagan MSS are the main source of the Gillies Collection, and it is a reasonable inference that these gentlemen were some of Maclagan's correspondents or helpers. It is an interesting conjecture that one of these may have been Donald MacNicol: this question will be decided when all the MacNicol-Maclagan contacts have been analysed in detail. As this has not yet been done, Gillies' Collection is allowed to stand here as a primary source, dated 1786.

Classification

There are 119 items, grouped as follows: Heroic ballads (some spurious) 28; Encomia 25; Love poems 18; Choral songs 13; Moralistic 7; Satire and Humorous pieces 7; Drink 3; Nature 3; Pipes 2; Religious 2; Miscellaneous 11.

Authors

There are twenty-seven occasions on which authors are named or on which attribution is clearly indicated.

Manuscript Transmission and Relationships

For this, v. remarks supra on the MacNicol-Maclagan axis.

Since Maclagan was undoubtedly associated with Gillies' work, his career may be given to compare it with those of others of the group.

He was born 1728, at Ballechin; educated St. Andrews University; ordained by the Presbytery of Dunkeld 1760; became chaplain of 42nd Foot; died 1805. He married a

daughter of Rev. James Stuart of Killin, translator of the New Testament; he himself translated part of the Scriptures for the S.P.C.K.¹

Gillies' Collection presents a fairly wide range of poetry. In this the obvious comparison is with the MacNicol MSS, with which it shares a certain amount of material. Equally, an obvious contrast is with the Eigg Collection. This is the same kind of contrast as we have already drawn in discussing Eigg and MacNicol.

Gillies' Collection, since it is a printed work, is useful in extending this contrast in terms of editorial approach, and also in helping to define more clearly the related roles of editor and collector in Gaelic literature at this period. We may speculate on the probability that Donald MacNicol, in spite of the relatively eclectic nature of his collecting activities, would have adopted a more restricted approach as an editor; and, furthermore, that his editorial attitude would have been much the same as that exemplified in Gillies. This is all the more likely if James Maclagan was the editor, or one of the editors, of Gillies' Collection. At all events, we may assume that the editor of Gillies drew on a body of texts (Maclagan MSS, and possibly others) comparable in range and variety with the MacNicol MSS.

While the tradition of choral songs, for example, is to some extent reflected in the Gillies Collection, other categories which appear in the MacNicol MSS are poorly represented, or not at all. As far as obscene, or coarse compositions are

1. Fasti, Vol. IV, p.145.

concerned, this is understandable. But editorial exclusiveness (even if a considerable range of the verse may be trivial as poetry, which is not necessarily always true, by any means) has led to a biased view of Gaelic poetry.

We may note in passing that Gillies contains a certain amount of pseudo-Ossianic poetry; but even Eigg contains Miann a' Bhard Aosda, and MacDonald provides an English prose translation, and a lengthy "Introduction" in its defence.¹

1. Eigg, pp.1-5 for text; "Introduction", pp.359-363; translation, pp.363-369.

The Irvine MSS

The MSS of the Rev. Dr. Alexander Irvine (1772-1824) of Perthshire are in the National Library of Scotland. Irvine made an important collection of Ossianic poetry, which was used by J. F. Campbell in his Leabhar na Feinne. As these ballads are housed separately from the remainder of Irvine's papers (unlike, e.g. the MacNicol MSS) they are not referred to further.

The rest of Irvine's collection may be treated in a more summary fashion here than the previous main collections of this period. While it is of considerable interest in itself, it continues in a modified way the pioneer campaign. It can be regarded as rounding off our sample of eighteenth century collecting, but standing in a somewhat detached relationship to the central group, much as the Turner MS stands at the other end of the period.

A connection with earlier work is obvious in two important groups of poems, those by Iain Lom and those by Sìleas na Ceapaich, both of which have been discussed and printed: the former by Dr. Annie MacKenzie¹ and the latter by Kenneth MacDonald² and Colm Ó Baoill.³

Dating

Alexander Irvine was born in Garth in 1772, educated at Fortingall School and St. Andrews; ordained by the Presbytery of Mull in 1792; removed to Rannoch in 1799; admitted to

1. Annie MacKenzie Orain Iain Luim p.XVII.
2. Kenneth MacDonald Unpublished Verse by Sìlis Ni Mhic Raghnaill na Ceapaich in Carney and Greene Celtic Studies, p.76 ff.
3. Colm Ó Baoill Bàrdachd Shìlis na Ceapaich p.XXVI

Fortingall in 1805; admitted to Little Dunkeld in 1806; made a D.D. of Edinburgh in 1812; and died in 1824, aged 52. He revised and "prepared for translation" the quarto edition of the Gaelic Bible issued by the S.P.C.K.¹

Although a considerably younger man than Maclagan and MacNicol, Irvine was thus professionally very much involved in the same kind of literary activities, translation of the Scriptures into Gaelic as well as collecting Gaelic poetry.

His papers bear dates ranging from 1800 to 1821. An interesting light is thrown on the collection by a letter from Irvine's son to his own son in 1867. The relevant part runs as follows: "Say to Mr. McNeill that the poems he refers to were for by much the greater part taken down by my father from the recitation of Mr. MacDonald of Dalchoisnie grandfather of the late Sir John MacDonald in the period between 1800 and 1804. It may have been a year or two earlier but certainly not later. The old gentleman had an extraordinary store of similar poetry, which my father had not time to take down. He had acquired it from his father and grandfather, who had gotten and preserved it in the same way, in their memory ... There are a fragment or two among the poems taken down by my father from other old people in Rannoch at the same time as the others, but I can't say which they are ... Old Dalchoisnie had a vast store of songs, some of which were taken down by his son Robert ... And both sets of poems, the heroic taken down by my father and the lyrics jotted by Robert, were but a small part of what the old man could repeat."²

1. Fasti, Vol. IV, p.159.

2. For the full text of the letter, see K. MacDonald in Carney and Greene, loc.cit.

This part of the collection, then, could not have been begun before 1799, the year in which Irvine went to Rannoch. It contains the 'heroic' songs of Iain Lom and Sileas; the 'lyrics', which must have been collected at that time and later, tend to be of a more local and ephemeral type of verse, of the kind now expected of a township bard. This is probably due to Irvine's predilections as much as to his slightly later date. Stewart, and more particularly Turner, did not at any rate publish this sort of material. But again this may indicate a difference between the roles of collector and editor.

There is, however, one section of the collection which is of considerable interest in that it contains songs composed by Rob Donn, taken down from his daughter. At the end of the notebook which contains them, there is the following note:

"These poems were taken from Janet McKay Dr. to Rob McKay before Duncan McIntyre poet This 22 of Decr. 1800 - at No. 17 Thistle(?) Street Edin."

This daughter of Rob Donn is not mentioned by Hew Morrison in his (standard) edition of Rob Donn.¹ The place of meeting is of interest in itself, for Duncan McIntyre was, of course, Duncan Ban. There Janet MacKay dictated 18 of her father's poems. All show some degree of variation from the printed texts; and a considerable degree of variation from Morrison's text, particularly in the sequence of verses. Most of the poems are shorter than Morrison's versions, but they are of great value linguistically to the student of Rob Donn in that

1. Hew Morrison Songs and Poems by Rob Donn (Edinburgh, 1899) v. esp. p.XXXI.

they reflect more faithfully the colloquial Gaelic of Durness - and probably that Rob used the English words (there are examples in the received text as well) here rather than the Gaelic shown in Morrison's version. The following verse, for instance (the sixth of the Trip to Stornoway, p.156 ff. in Morrison) shows some characteristic variations.

1. Morrison

Ach sheall an t-Iùl fhear tròcaireach
 Air ur n' eigin-sa na thìom,
 'N uair nach feudtadh bòsd
 A chur á seòldair, no a saoir;
 O dhruim na mara mòr-chlusaich,
 'S i seòladh stigh 'na caoir,
 'S dhe bàrr nan tonnan sròthanach,
 Gu'n bhuaill i sròn ri tìr

2. Irvine

Nach be pilat trocarach
 Bhuaill orn so na thim,
 Nuair nach fheuda bòsd
 Chuir a seoltaran na saoir;
 O Dhruim na mara morchleasach,
 Sinn seola stigh na caoil, (caoir superscript)
 Dhe top nan tonna stròthanach,
 Bhuaill (sgaile superscript) a stròn ri tìr.

The presence of such a text, straight from the oral tradition of the poet's family, yet showing such marked divergence from what is taken as the canonical text of Rob Donn (based

upon two copies taken down during the poet's lifetime)¹ is an indication that we are moving away from the relative stability of textual tradition represented in the pioneer collections. It is also an indication that textual mutations are not necessarily a matter of age - i.e. distance in time of our sources from the authors - but also of different lines, or levels, of transmission. This may seem to involve us in paradox, summed up in J. C. Watson's statement² concerning the variant of Cumha do Shir Tormod taken down in 1861 in Skye, which "bears clear signs of having been curtailed and corrupted by oral transmission, though it contains some lines that may be closer to the original than the received text."

Recapitulating at this stage, we can say, then, that if the "received text" had from a stage close to the poet's time developed in such a wayward manner, the efforts of successive editors of, for instance, Scottish Gaelic Texts' poetry publications would have been fruitless. Yet it is possible, as these editors have shown, to reconstruct an 'original', even with the proviso that the poet's words were "taken down, as they apparently were, not from himself but from others, and, except in one case, presumably long after he was dead; so that, in some respects, the language is as much theirs as his - an amalgam that offers but a doubtful basis for linguistic conclusions."³ What applies to the Blind Harper applies, at least

1. MacKinnon Catalogue p.321.
2. Watson Mary MacLeod p.141.
3. Wm. Matheson The Blind Harper p.LXXV.

in degree, to all our earlier vernacular poets.

To those who know the Scots Gaelic vernacular tradition in poetry intimately, further discussion of this point will seem laboured and unnecessary. But in view of the manifest scepticism of folklorists and scholars of oral poetry, it seems worth exploring the question, particularly as the mere existence of written collections of poetry, made at a relatively early date, is invariably used as an argument that the so-called oral tradition in Scots Gaelic poetry must have been seriously interfered with and stabilised.¹

Before we go on to do so, we may, for the sake of clarity, admit that if this is so, it would be unsafe to build any theories concerning the nature of oral poetry upon much, perhaps indeed the major share, of what we have assumed to be oral in Gaelic. For we have seen in our survey of the pioneer collections that editors and collectors did influence each other. We have seen also how these contacts extend into the nineteenth century; as, for example, where the Stewarts had access to Eigg. These ramifications could certainly be traced further. It would require a study of immense detail (and entirely impracticable here, if only on the grounds of maintaining some balance in our discussion) to demonstrate, through mannerisms of orthography, textual idiosyncrasies, and the like, how far the process extends, both synchronically and diachronically; or to investigate the possibility of editorial collation and emendation carried out before the texts were prepared in the fair

1. This is based upon personal experience in discussion with Continental scholars of oral poetry.

copies that our sources offer us. If we attempt to check from current oral tradition, we find the influence of Sàr Obair nam Bard, as already mentioned, or even that of Sinclair's Oranaiche. There is, for instance, a text printed in the latter book (p.383 ff) Oran do Lachlann Og Mac Ionmhuinn leis an Aigeannaich Nighean Dhonuill Ghuirm. It has been recorded once only by the School of Scottish Studies, in Tìree: this 'oral' version from an extremely good informant, Donald Sinclair, Baile a' Phuill, is certainly influenced by the Oranaiche, whose text is in turn influenced by a text in Gillies, p.128 ff. It is also found in MacNicol in an almost identical version.

To be set against this is the fact which our survey also brought out, viz., that in spite of interaction between collections, we get a firm impression of independent seams of tradition, which we assume to be oral, being worked by each collector. But once any influence by one collection on another is established, a certain doubt is cast upon the 'purity' of all the contents. Thus we must make the point strongly that in early collections and current oral tradition alike, where material exists in common, absolutely unequivocal evidence of the purely oral is very much more elusive than a superficial knowledge might lead us to think. In the later collecting era, the situation is rather different. A text such as that of Mac Codrum's Tàladh Iain Mhùideartaich, first published in the Oranaiche in 1879, to which it was contributed by the Rev. John Macrury¹ from oral tradition, we can accept as uninfluenced

1. Rev. Archibald Macdonald "Some Hebridean Singers and their Songs" in T.G.S.I., Vol. 15, p.256.

by the stabilising effects of written tradition, for there is no evidence of any such between the poet's time and that of the collector. Nearer our own time, as a source for the same poet's songs, we have an example of "One man in Uist [who] knows no less than seventeen of MacCodrum's songs in whole or part, and his knowledge is quite obviously independent of books, as his versions differ occasionally from the hitherto published texts and contain some readings found only in the Maclagan MS."¹

What we have surveyed so far of Gaelic poetry, then, is a tradition which is oral in composition, which can be wholly oral by transmission also, but which at certain stages may be influenced by the written word. It would cause us to adjust our perspectives further if there is evidence that poets whose work appears in the pioneer collections were not necessarily illiterate, and this question we must now discuss.

1. W. Matheson MacCodrum p.XXXIII.

Oral versus Written: the Eighteenth
Century Attitudes and the Evidence.

The conventional view makes a simple disjunction between the literate, classical poets and the illiterate vernacular bards. We trace literacy in vernacular Gaelic largely to the work of voluntary schools,¹ and in so doing perhaps obscure the fact that the orthography used is one which has been adapted from the orthography of the schools of poetry. How early did this begin, and is there any evidence that poets were affected? By 1659, the language of the Shorter Catechism is vernacular Gaelic - "the spoken language of Scotland with some rather half-hearted attempt at keeping up the fiction of a standard literary language different from the spoken one."² In other words, a full century before organised collection began, the old orthography had already been put to use for the vernacular.

Our assumption that this process completely by-passed the bards is in the main founded on the argument from silence. There is indeed a tradition in Lochaber that Iain Lom was literate, but when it is investigated closely, even the kernel of this amounts to no more than the 'fact' that he could sign his name (a fact which is pivotal in the development of the saga of the Murder of the Heirs of Keppoch). In this connection we may observe that it is possible that John MacCodrum was

1. V. J. L. Campbell Gaelic in Scottish Education and Life, p.56 ff.
2. Thomson Adtimchiol an Chreidhimh, p.XXXIX.

literate also to the same degree,¹ as was Duncan MacIntyre,² whom even Donald MacNicol (an exponent, as we shall see presently, of bardic literacy) calls "altogether illiterate."³ Thus, whether or not we hear nowadays that Iain Lom or any other bard was literate, such traditions have little significance. What is really telling is the absence of contemporary evidence of verse in a bard's autograph. On these grounds the conventional assumption of illiteracy remains intact.

But it is not really quite as simple as that. We have a long testimony from the hand of one of the pioneer collectors, the Rev. Donald MacNicol, that argues a continuity of written tradition in Gaelic poetry from the earliest times to his own day. As this attitude is arguably representative of the class of eighteenth century educated Gaels to which he and the other early collectors belonged, it cannot but have had some effect on their collecting and probably also on their editorial methods. MacNicol's argument was published as a response to the remarks of Dr. Samuel Johnson on the authenticity of Ossian. Of all the relevant eighteenth century writers, Johnson made the most trenchant observations, not

1. Matheson MacCodrum p.XXXI-XXXII. Matheson ibid. Note, remarks: "It was not uncommon for otherwise unlettered men to be able to write their name in block letters."
2. MacLeod Macintyre, p.XXXIV.
3. v. Appendix 2.

only upon Gaelic poetry but also upon the nature of Gaelic society and what was happening to it. As is well known, he was MacPherson's severest critic, and throughout his journey to the Hebrides displayed considerable eagerness not only to discover the truth about Ossian but also to learn all that could be ascertained about Gaelic poetry in general. His conclusions are particularly valuable for two reasons. First he obviously has asked very searching questions and he expresses himself with characteristic force and clarity. This enables us to see the problems as they confronted men of that age. Secondly, the passages recorded by himself and James Boswell, relative to these points, enables us to reconstruct something of the attitudes held by the Gaelic speaking clergy and others with whom Gaelic poetry was discussed. MacNicol's detailed arguments corroborate what we might otherwise only suspect to be the educated Gael's point of view.

Apart from being occasionally couched in highly intemperate language, Johnson's judgments are essentially those of modern scholars, with one fundamental qualification.¹ He apparently never once realised that the Scoto-Irish classical Gaelic tradition existed. Thus he is able to say that when they heard of manuscripts that were, or had been, in someone's possession, these turned out to be, they had reason to believe, not Scottish Gaelic but Irish. "Martin mentions

1. Johnson Journey to the Western Islands. The passages alluded to are provided here in Appendix 2.

Irish, but never any Earse manuscripts, to be found in the Islands in his time." Johnson is certainly blameworthy in not investigating what Martin's common usage signifies, as, e.g. "The North-West Isles ... [their] Language, which is Irish."¹ But in general, Johnson's ignorance as an outside observer seems to have been compounded by the native Gaelic ignorance of the detailed processes of Gaelic history. Hence all his statements are to be understood as referring specifically to vernacular Scottish Gaelic. In the light of this, remarks about the nation being wholly illiterate, the language never having been written, not one manuscript in the world a hundred years old, are all intelligible. In fact, taking the late seventeenth century Fernaig MS as the conventional starting point of the vernacular manuscript tradition, Johnson (writing in the 1770s) has made an extraordinarily accurate assessment, even though his "hundred years" may be only a figure of convenience.

We may now set out his main points very briefly and note how MacNicol deals with them.²

1. Martin Description, p.336.
2. Donald MacNicol's Remarks on Johnson's tour is an unjustly neglected work. As it is now apparently unobtainable, a number of passages from it are provided in Appendix 2. MacNicol's argument is long and detailed, but though perfectly coherent as a whole, tends to attack the same points from different angles. For ease of reference, the relevant passages from Dr. Johnson are given first. Where there are no footnote references to MacNicol's Remarks, the passage quoted or referred to will be found in the Appendix.

1. Insofar as any evidence exists, Bards and Senachies belong to the past; both classes were illiterate and their compositions have perished.

MacNicol declares that their existence and literacy is not a matter of mere oral tradition; charters of great families bear witness concerning them. The seanchaidh at the coronation of Alexander III is mentioned. Both classes received their literacy solely through Gaelic. Professional bards as well as amateur bards and senachies, who through particular genius or love of poetry and antiquities follow these paths, still exist. The MacEwens, MacVurichs, the Ollamh Muileach and Ollamh Ileadh, MacCodrum, the Bard Mathanach, and Iain Lom are all cited.

2. Gaelic is not a written language.

MacNicol lists MSS that he knows or has heard of, e.g. MacEwen elegy on the death of Sir Duncan Campbell, Brosnacha Catha Chlann Domhnuill, MSS in possession of the Highland Society in London e.g. An Duanaire Ruadh and An Leabhar Dearg. Some of these MSS, he says, had been written more than five hundred years previously.

3. There is no standard orthography: there is no standard language to base it on.

MacNicol claims that on the contrary Gaelic has "a regular and established standard ... well known to many gentlemen of taste, candour and curiosity" who are not native Gaels. General Sir Adolphus Oughton, an Englishman, and Sir James Foulis, a Lowland Scot, are cited. They cannot be suspected of national partiality for Gaelic; there is also the

implication that unlike native Gaels who may be held to use their own particular dialect, these learners of the language must have had access to a standard orthography.

Gaelic, like all other languages, has different dialects; there is also a "written diction, which pervades all dialects, and is understood in every island." This written diction can draw upon "a poetical dialect, as well as one suitable to prose only"; these never encroach upon each other, and yet both are "perfectly understood by the most illiterate."

Contrary to Johnson's assertion that those who learned only Gaelic have always been illiterate, many such have at all times been able to read and write and "correspond regularly in the Gaelic language."

4. The uncertainty of oral transmission.

Although MacNicol's thesis is the unbroken literacy of the Scottish Gaels, he allows that transmission was "oftener by oral tradition". This poetic tradition was part of the very fabric of Gaelic society, handed down from generation to generation not only by bards and senachies "but by the general voice and consent of a whole nation". Many of the 'laity', so to speak, were active in composition and transmission; this critical audience provided an indispensable element in ensuring accurate transmission; the nature of society with the leisure conferred by pastoral and hunting pursuits and the absence of urban entertainments; the control of rhyme in poetry and in prose the guidance of a skilfully constructed plot: all these factors combine to produce a kind of transmission of which Johnson is ignorant. MacNicol adds, as an example of the

strength of memory developed among illiterates, that the Poet Macintyre knows thousands of lines of poetry.

5. Irish versus Scottish Gaelic MSS.

MacNicol has already named several MSS (v. under heading 2). The learning necessary for writing (and reading) them might have been acquired in one of the regular schools for the education of bards. Johnson acknowledges that there were regular schools or colleges in Skye, and other places, for the education of pipers. It is unlikely that the more important art of poetry was neglected. In the previous two centuries, however, these schools had greatly declined. When this happened, the bards began to attend similar schools in Ireland, "contracted much of the Irish poetical style, and a fondness for talking the Irish dialect of the Celtic language." In consequence of this, even some Gaels have mistaken some of the writings of these Irish educated bards for real Irish. An example is a MacEwen elegy of 1630 on Sir Duncan Campbell of Glenurchy. It is in many places unintelligible to most Highlanders, yet earlier poems (e.g. a manuscript poem¹ by Maclean's bard in praise of the Earl of Argyll in 1529) are free from these Irish obscurities. The situation has been complicated to such an extent that the Irish have sometimes claimed as their own various poems by Scottish Gaelic poets.

This view of the relations between Scottish and Irish

1. This is presumably a version of An Duanag Ullamh; v. Watson Bardachd Ghàidhlig, Note on p.339. It dates from 1555-1558. The date 1529 may be a misprint; Eigg, p.253, has 1569.

Gaelic is to us, in the perspective of modern scholarship, rather extraordinary. Yet there is no reason to believe that MacNicol is being in any way disingenuous. He does counter Johnson's claim that Martin always refers to Irish manuscripts by explaining the use of 'Irish' to denote Scottish Gaelic; the fact that he does not leave it at that point of logical sufficiency, but constructs such an elaborate framework of history suggests that, once again, we have to place this whole account in a larger cultural context. In the first place, MacNicol was one of a band of literary men: if we assume that he represents the whole group (his references to Ranald MacDonald, for instance, imply that they discussed the matter of his Remarks) we can see immediately why he and his friends should subscribe to these views.

It is as certain as these things can be that no member of the older bardic families would have for a moment denied the Irish-Scottish connection, or failed to distinguish between his own mandarin verse and that of the commonalty, or have thought of his classical Gaelic as 'corrupted' by Irish. In the century before MacNicol, we find the Rev. John Beaton, an Episcopalian and a representative of the older Gaelic intelligentsia, well aware of the classical Gaelic tradition. He had himself probably been educated in a bardic school.¹ But the class to which MacNicol belonged was a quite different order. Largely composed of clergymen, Presbyterian in denomination and Whig in

1. Campbell and Thomson Edward Lhuyd in the Scottish Highlands, pp.12-22; p.77 ff.

politics, formally educated in Scottish universities, and native Gael in speech, this was really a new Gaelic intelligentsia of the post-1745 society. Their non-Gaelic formal education gave them a historical perspective and a context within which, as native Gaels whose society had been defeated, they could interpret their history anew. In the synthesis they produced, certain elements can be isolated. The development of Gaelic by the church, and particularly the work of the Synod of Argyll, at least from 1659, when the Shorter Catechism appeared, provides the background. As Presbyterian Whigs, these clergymen had a vested interest in keeping Protestant Scotland untainted by Papist Ireland. For that reason, perhaps also influenced by Alexander MacDonalld's sense of history and ideas of Highland-Lowland co-operation, and no doubt through a natural desire to resolve the tensions of their bi-culturalism, an independent tradition of pan-Scottish, Gaelic-based culture had to be traced.

"In Scotland," MacNicol says, "Gaelic was long the common language, not only of the whole country, but likewise of the court. All the pleadings in the courts of justice, as well as in parliament, were anciently in Gaelic; and we have undoubted testimonies, that even so very lately as in the parliament held at Ardchattan in Argyleshire, in the reign of the great Robert Bruce, it was the language in which all their debates were carried on."¹

1. Remarks, p.256 cf. W. J. Watson Bardachd Ghàidhlig, p.288. Note on 1.2646, for the identical information from the Maclagan MSS.

"Before the time of King Malcolm Cean More, as may be judged by his very name, no other language but the Gaelic was spoken in Scotland."¹ Similarly Ranald MacDonald dates the decay of Gaelic from the era in which English was introduced into the country and made fashionable at court.²

But they go beyond this, partly under the influence of Edward Lhuyd, whose work gave Gaelic the wider context of comparative Celtic philology. MacNicol quotes Lhuyd that "about two-thirds of the Scots Gaelic is the same with the Welsh."³ Thus fortified, he can claim that Gaelic was "the language of the Celtic nations ... who extended their dominion over all the countries between Cape Finisterre and the mouth of the river Oby ... " and that "Gaelic was formerly the general language of all Europe."⁴ He also speaks of "the gradual decline of the Celtic, once the delight of all the courts of Europe."⁵ Ranald MacDonald expresses identical views in the opening sentences of his preface: "The Gaelic Language, now struggling for existence in a narrow corner, was once the mother tongue of the principal states of Europe. It was, in particular, and for a considerable length of time, the only language spoken by our ancestors, the ancient

1. Remarks, p.441.
2. V. Appendix I.
3. Remarks, p.465.
4. Remarks, p.454-6.
5. Remarks, p.441.

Caledonians."¹ MacNicol also observes, "The Caledonians always called their native language Gaelic ... "²

What we have here, then, is a coherent historical view. Gaelic derives from the Caledonians, into whose society the art of writing was introduced as early as into any neighbouring country, and both history and imaginative literature were produced. Irish is closely related to Gaelic, and Welsh is related also; but it is the Albion dialect of Celtic which had pre-eminence.³ As in other nations much of our early history was in verse. "Accordingly many of our poems consist of descriptions of battles, deaths of heroes, and concise narratives of other historical facts."⁴ This indicates a certain criterion of selectivity that the pioneer collectors would tend to use in representing the essential tradition of Gaelic poetry; all the more since our early records suffered greatly by the ravages of Edward I and Cromwell.⁵

How widely was this view shared? MacNicol tells us that he has personal knowledge of those "from whom the Doctor received a great part of his intelligence"⁶ concerning bards,

1. V. Appendix I cf. Alexander MacDonald's views, ibid.
2. Remarks, p.432.
3. A number of contributors to the Report on Ossian realise that the older Gaelic hand was both Irish and Scottish, but they draw no conclusion from this concerning a common culture. V. Report, Appendix, e.g. p.43, p.95, p.276.
4. ibid. p.427
5. ibid. p.426
6. ibid. p.411

etc., and that he has authority to say that the problems involved (different bardic status in different times or households) were explained to Johnson as set out in the Remarks. It is reasonable, therefore, to accept MacNicol as the spokesman of that whole group, cleric and lay, with whom Johnson came in contact. In 1764 we find the Rev. Donald MacQueen alluding to "the Teutonic language, which is a branch of the Old Celtic" and the Rev. Niel MacLeod in Mull mentioning "Irish imitations of the works of Ossian."¹ We might expect Ranald MacDonald, with Catholic relatives, an ancestral connection with the Glens of Antrim, contact with the MacVurichs and with a highly literate uncle who also knew the MacVurich MSS, to have had a somewhat different perspective;² but on the evidence of his Preface, he is an exponent of the "Caledonian" theory also. Even Hugh MacDonald of South Uist does not distinguish between vernacular bards like MacCodrum, the MacRuaris and Clann Mhic Gille Riabhaich on the one hand and the classical MacVurichs on the other.³ This however was in 1800 when the MacVurich tradition had come to an end. It is noteworthy that among the contributors to the Highland Society's Report on Ossian, only one, the Rev. Dr. John MacPherson of Sleat emphasises the importance of "constant

1. Report on Ossian, Appendix, p.33 and p.22. James MacPherson's claims that Fingal and his band were Scots not Irish alluded to by MacLeod, is part of the same system of 'history'.

2. ibid, p.461

3. ibid, p.40

intercourse between the Irish of Ulster and the Scots of the Western parts of Caledonia".¹ Around 1743 Dr. MacPherson had known the last Irish-taught MacVurich, and is thus one of the links between the old Gaelic world and the mid-and-later-eighteenth century educated Gaels.¹ But in contrast to clergymen such as John Beaton, MacPherson is a 'modern' antiquarian.²

It is interesting to observe that although the attitudes of what we call a 'new' Gaelic intelligentsia are Scottish-centred, and to be explained as part of the effects of post-Reformation, post-Revolution Settlement, post-Jacobite processes changing Gaelic society; yet there is sufficient vigour within Gaelic society, and a sufficiently strong sense of that national identity to which we have previously referred, to enable the members of this intelligentsia to come to terms with history without referring to the "primitivist" theories of Lowland Scots such as Kames and Monboddo. And although MacNicol, and no doubt others, knew of the work of William Camden,³ there is no hint of the antiquarian "druidism" or any of the "Noble Savagery" which by the eighteenth

1. ibid, p.17 and p.6, cf. D. S. Thomson The MacMhuirich Bardic Family in TGS, Vol. 43, pp.276-304; esp. p.301.
2. The Rev. Dr. John MacPherson of Sleat (1713-1765) could be considered to be the senior member of the eighteenth century Gaelic clergy. His posthumously published Critical Dissertations on the Origin, Antiquities, Languages, Government, Manners, and Religion of the Ancient Caledonians, their Posterity, the Picts, and the British and Irish Scots (London, 1768) owes something to Innes as well as to other earlier historians and antiquaries. It was known to MacNicol.
3. Remarks, p.486

century dominated English antiquarian concepts of the Celts.¹ Their indifference or even hostility to Ireland may have been influenced by Thomas Innes, whom MacNicol mentions.² For Innes is a thorough-going supporter of the "Caledonians" and equally he is highly sceptical of the claims of the Irish bards. But whether this is so or not, the Scottish-centred point of view is to be seen as part of the process of assimilation of the Gaelic Community into Lowland Scotland, at this stage in history beginning to affect a particular, upper stratum of Gaels, educated in Scottish Universities.

We have seen that Hugh MacDonald, South Uist, does not distinguish between classical and vernacular schools of poetry. MacNicol's remarks on schools of poetry in Scotland (the Maclagan MSS contain the same information) may refer to schools of classical poetry: the reference to Skye, for instance, may reflect some memory of the Ó Muirgheasáin family, though MacNicol assigns it to the MacVurichs. But he probably heard

1. V. Piggott Celts, Saxons and the Early Antiquaries, esp. pp.16-19. MacNicol was aware of contemporary "Primitivism" and uses it obliquely to counter Johnson's arguments about the barbarian bard. But it is never part of his primary thesis. V. Remarks, p.468; p.491-2.
2. Remarks, p.416 and p.458. Thomas Innes A Critical Essay V. Book 1, Chap. III, Art. 1 - "Of the Antiquity of the settlement of the Picts in Britain; that they were the same as the Caledonians, and the most ancient and first known inhabitants of the northern parts of the island" p.43. V. Book 2, p.231 ff, for a discussion of Scots, Milesians, etc. James MacPherson's remark that "The Milesian fables of [Scotch and Irish historians] bear about them the marks of a late invention" may also owe something to Innes. V. Temora, pp.27-8.

also of schools of vernacular poetry, or at any rate of vernacular poets meeting to discuss the craft of verse and young bards learning techniques.¹ In this connection it may be relevant that the 'thesis [which] James the Sixth gave to some poets as a trial of skill in their profession' is certainly not classical Gaelic. (MacNicol's version is duplicated in Dr. Hector Maclean's MS, in a hand different from the rest of the manuscript.) It runs as follows:

SUBJECT

Snamhaid an Lach is an Fhaoilin
Da chois chapail chaoilin chorr

ANSWER

'D fhuaras Deoch a Laimh Ri Alba
A Cup Airgid agus Oir;
An Aite nach do shaoil mi fhetin -
'S da chois chapail chàoilin chorr.

The poet who performed best was to get one cupful of wine from the king's own hand, and another cupful of gold as his reward."² Now this verse was known in oral tradition in Skye, where it was firmly associated with the wandering band of rimsters and satirists A' Chliar Sheanchain. MacNicol is probably drawing here, directly or indirectly, on traditions of these lower orders of wandering bards, for such traditions must have been circulating strongly in his day. If MacNicol heard of them,

1. There are still references to this in oral tradition.
2. Remarks, p.436.

he would certainly be the more encouraged to believe that Scottish bardic schools taught Scottish Gaelic undefiled by Irish. Such a conclusion would fit neatly into the historical framework subscribed to by educated Gaels.

In a similar way the continuous written tradition of Gaelic is a prop of the historical framework. Theoretically it does not matter to MacNicol and his colleagues whether the orthography is used for a standard literary language or for dialect. But what is MacNicol in fact thinking of when he claims that a standard language and standard orthography exist in Gaelic? In view of his strictures on Irish influences in bardic diction he can scarcely mean classical common Gaelic, though he would probably accept a modified, vernacularised form of that, purged, to his mind, of Irish corruptions. Obscurities of language, attributed to Irish influence in the MacEwen elegy, are on another occasion, as when he discusses "the history of the sons of Usnoth",¹ ascribed to the age of the material. On this view, then, the standard language is a medium which changes gradually, in the normal way, through the ages and the orthography is modified pari passu. In writing down Gaelic verse, MacNicol and the other pioneer collectors were participating in this process, using a certain degree of individual freedom but essentially drawing upon an inherited orthography. Johnson claimed that each man spelt according

1. Apparently Nat. Lib. MS 53. V. MacKinnon Catalogue p. 158 ff. and Celtic Review Vols. I-IV. V. Remarks, p.434 and p.460.

to his own perception of the sound. This is corroborated by William Shaw in the introduction to his work An Analysis of the Gaelic Language, published in 1778: "At present I much doubt whether there be four men in Scotland that could spell one page the same way; for it has hitherto been left to the caprice and judgment of every speaker, without the steadiness of analogy or direction of rules." He dismisses the books of poetry that have appeared by his time as "wretchedly orthographed."¹ All this, however, is only relatively true. We find a good deal of variant spelling and inconsistency in the orthography of our basic collections; by the early nineteenth century this has been reduced in Stewarts' and Turner's collections. William Shaw reserves his praise for the work of Rev. Alexander MacFarlane who translated Baxter's Call to the Unconverted. Shaw in effect bases his own orthography on what already appeared and attempts to reduce it to rule. Thus, in spite of his strictures, it is obvious that underlying the inconsistencies of earlier attempts there is a basic system.

MacFarlane's work appeared in 1750, a year before Alexander MacDonald published his book of poetry. In addition to the book, there is the important National Library of Scotland MS 63, which is now accepted as being in MacDonald's hand.² We have noted that the Turner MS belongs to 1743-48.

1. Analysis, pp. X-XI.
2. MacKinnon Catalogue, p. 212. The hand is 'bold and clear, and probably also among the last written in the old Gaelic script in Scotland.' J. L. Campbell who reprinted the MS in SGS Vol. 4, pp.70-84 and pp.153-204 calls the spelling 'weird ... [but] with a certain rough consistency.' It is in fact perfectly adequate. For facsimile V. SGS Vol. 4, facing p.169.

We have also observed a manuscript (Maclagan MS 73) which is early eighteenth century. Is it possible to trace this adaptation of the orthography still farther back?

We know that the classical orthography was not rigid and that scribes varied in their command of it. In language, even Carswell, though secure within the classical tradition, shows some slight local, Scottish influence.¹ If the meagre evidence at our disposal will support any conclusion, we may say that it points to a process, unorganised and probably often enough not consciously directed at all, in orthography, parallel with that in which elements of structure and imagery were transmitted from classical to vernacular poetry. Towards the end of the seventeenth century, we find in a manuscript written by Eoghan MacGilleoin, following two poems in classical Gaelic, the poem Is maith mo leaba, is olc mo shuain,² in a corrupt and defective syllabic metre and linguistically demotic enough to be largely intelligible to a speaker of vernacular Gaelic. It could well be that some of the poetry in the Fernaig MS, for instance, came to MacRae in written form and in such an orthography.

We should expect this process of adapting the orthography to begin in bardic families or among those who were in close

1. V. Angus Matheson 'Bishop Carswell' in TGSI, Vol. 42, pp. 182-205; T. F. O'Rahilly Irish Dialects p.132; and R. L. Thomson Foirm na nUrnuidheadh pp.XLIX-L.
2. National Library MS 36. V. MacKinnon Catalogue, p.116-117. It is printed in J. F. Campbell Leabhar na Feinne, p.211. The MS was written in 1690-1; the subject, Archibald, Earl of Argyll, was beheaded in 1685.

proximity to them. And indeed we do find two vernacular poems by Neil MacVurich in Eigg.¹ But we cannot say whether the MacVurichs themselves wrote these down or whether Alexander or Ranald MacDonald were the original scribes. Similarly the poem on the birth of Prince Charles Edward (20th December 1720) by John MacLachlan of Kilbride,² representative of a learned family with antiquarian interests, may have been written down by the author himself.³ If we follow Professor Thomson's arguments, the Harlaw Brosnachadh, mentioned by MacNicol more than once, may be the earliest metrical text in vernacular Scottish Gaelic. Thomson's analysis finds nothing against a fifteenth-century dating: the manuscripts do not go back so far, but a version of the poem in MacLagan MS 97 claims to be "a true copy from an old MS in galic character." This conceivably could go back to a fifteenth century source.⁴

MacNicol claims, as part of the continuity of literacy, that literate Gaels correspond regularly in Gaelic.⁵ To whatever extent such correspondence existed, one would suppose that by the eighteenth century the language used would not be

1. Eigg, pp.73-5; pp.75-8.

2. Stewart, p.456 ff.

3. For the MacLachlans, V. D. S. Thomson "Gaelic Learned Orders and Literati in Mediaeval Scotland" in SS, Vol. 12, pp.57-78; esp. p.63. Cf. MacNicol Remarks, p.485.

4. D. S. Thomson The Harlaw Brosnachadh in Carney and Greene, op. cit., pp.147-169.

5. Remarks, p.470.

strictly classical. In 1800 John Leyden saw Ossianic ballads "in the handwriting of the Rev. Mr. MacArthur of Kilmore in Mull, whose father could not read or write the English language or character, though he corresponded constantly with his son in the Irish character while he studied at St. Andrews."¹

As the father was a native of Glenlyon,² where we have no evidence of bardic schools in the early eighteenth century, we cannot but entertain a suspicion that the actual language used was more vernacular than classical.

From such disparate items of information we can only register impressions rather than formulate conclusions. Nothing that we have seen supports MacNicol's view that the bards of the past were in general at least capable of writing their compositions. On the other hand, we have assembled enough evidence to prove a continuity of literacy, which implies that some bards, e.g. the author of Is maith mo leaba, is olc mo shuain, might have been literate. Theoretically, the poem by Maclean's bard in praise of the Earl of Argyll, which MacNicol knew of in manuscript,³ might have been

1. Tour in the Highlands, pp.258 ff.
2. D. Campbell Reminiscences pp.70-1. The Rev. MacArthur was born about 1734: Fasti, Vol. 4, p.115. A contemporary, the Rev. Dr. Archibald MacLea, born 1738 in Dull, Perthshire, uses a formalised vernacular Gaelic in his MS sermons (in the writer's possession). The language of the MacArthur correspondence was probably similar. Cf. also the 1811 Gaelic letter of Ewen MacLachlan to his father. D. S. Thomson "Unpublished Letters by the Poet Ewen MacLachlan" in SGS, Vol. XI, p.202-236; esp. pp.210-212.
3. Remarks, p.438.

composed by a literate poet. Equally, it might have been written down at a much later date. There must, however, have been degrees of proximity to classical learning. If bards ever did act as literary retainers to the filidh in Scotland,¹ they would certainly be in a position to learn from their masters. But bards were not necessarily of one order.

An exhaustive study of the entire complex of relationships between the classical and vernacular tradition would probably fail to demonstrate any smooth transitions. It is well enough known that the vernacular bards are indebted to their classical brethren for the imagery of panegyric.² Yet this panegyric strain retains a fresh, unbookish rhetorical assurance. At the other end of the spectrum, so to speak, Ossianic poetry, in the gradual process of development from classical to vernacular, loses both elegance of form and often intelligibility as well. The continuity of literacy which we have examined here is only another aspect of these transmissions. The orthographic development is characterised by intermittent and spasmodic movements. It is possible that from the MacVurichs, through Alexander MacDonald, to Ranald MacDonald and the other pioneer collectors, we can trace one unbroken strand; from the purely ecclesiastical side, through MacFarlane, perhaps another strand, leading back also to the old Gaelic classical tradition as practised in the families

1. V. Early Irish Literature, ed. Carney, p.64.
2. V. J. C. Watson Mary MacLeod, pp.XXI-XXVI.

of MacEwen and MacMarquess.¹

In a sense, as we can now see, Johnson and MacNicol can both be justified up to a point: it is partly a matter of selection of evidence, partly a matter of cultural experience and the intuitions formed thereby. What is important for this study is that the collectors' beliefs concerning Gaelic cultural history would inevitably justify them in approaching their materials with the ordinary methods of literary scholarship and editorial policy.

To Johnson anything purely oral was ephemeral. To MacQueen and his kind, admitting the primacy of the oral was tantamount to endangering the whole sense of Gaelic identity and historical continuity. Yet, cut off as they were from their own medieval and classical past, they were probably unable to confront Johnson with a coherent argument. MacNicol's acknowledgement of oral transmission, though hedged with qualifications, probably followed much discussion of these points with Johnson's informants. Very interestingly, MacNicol never concedes that variants exist that are so far removed from each other as to constitute virtually separate poems. But in the course of assembling their great collections, MacNicol and his friends must have accepted oral transmission as a basic fact of the tradition of Gaelic poetry.

We can now, in the light of the cultural atmosphere that we argue existed, set down the factors that probably affected the collectors' approach and their implications.

1. V. R. L. Thomson Adtimchiol an Chreidimh, p.XXXIV and p.XL.

1. Many of our early historical records were destroyed; many of our senachies were also bards: thus, as in all other nations in early times and in like circumstances, it may be supposed that much of our ancient history was in verse. "Accordingly, many of our poems consist of descriptions of battles, deaths of heroes, and concise narratives of other historical facts."

We would therefore expect to find, as indeed we do, a large quantity of what may loosely be called heroic poetry. The Preface to Eigg expressly mentions the elegies on the deaths of prominent men.

2. Authors are named in the tradition; they are literate.

3. Transmission may be through written or oral means: the first being the "collateral security" of the second. In either case, transmission is strict and conservative.

The implications are: (1) that the further removed from themes of history (battles, heroes, etc.) the less valuable is the poetry; (2) poems by named authors, other things being equal, are preferred to anonymous poetry; (3) poems whose variants display the lineaments of an original, or can be shown to have an individual identity, are preferred to poems whose paraphrasable content is more elusive, or whose individuality is merged in scores of similar compositions in the normal folksong manner.

To a high degree, all this is borne out by the collections themselves. The bulk of the poetry has a historical, heroic complexion and the choral songs, almost always anonymous and highly protean, are rare. But anonymity as such,

if the poem fits the heroic criterion, is clearly of little importance. We have one example of a poem which, according to tradition, Ranald MacDonald would have published had he known of its existence, and it is anonymous.¹ But a certain emphasis upon the known, 'literate' author probably restricted collection, especially if collectors adopted the method of asking their informants for songs or poems of a named poet. Such an approach would certainly restrict modern collecting; there is no reason to suppose the eighteenth century situation was different in that respect.

We now look at one particular poem, and note the collectors' treatment of it. The poem is the text of the song on the Battle of Killiecrankie in 1689. The text exists in four collections, viz. Stone, Gillies (from MacLagan), MacNicol and Eigg. Gillies has two versions, the rest one. The author was one of the MacDonalds of Glencoe, generally accepted to have been Aonghus mac Alasdair Ruaidh.² In the collections Eigg has the ascription:³ Le Inis M^CAlasdair Ruaidh; MacNicol has Le Alastair M^CInnish a Gleann-cobhin corrected to Le Innish MacAlastair Ruaidh a Gleann-cobhin;⁴ one version in Gillies has Le Aonghus MacAlastair Ruaidh o Ghleann Cumhan;

1. Carmina Gadelica, Vol. IV, p.353
"Dar a chuala Raghall Dubh an t-òran, thubhairt e,
'Is bochd nach robh e agam mus do chuir mi mach an
leabhar'."
2. Clan Donald, Vol. III, p.593.
3. Eigg, p.188 ff. for text.
4. Cf. J. L. Campbell Songs of the Forty-five, pp.8-9
for other instances of this confusion.

the other has Le Eoin M^CAlasdair Ruaidh, while in Stone the poem is anonymous, suggesting straight away divergent lines of transmission. But when the texts are collated, it becomes clear that Eigg, MacNicol and the two Gillies versions belong together. There are 23 stanzas in all the versions, in the same sequence. Of the two Gillies texts, however, one, which we may call G1¹ is closely related to Eigg; the other, G2² shares a number of readings or constructions with MacNicol, but occasionally stands alone against the other three. In some cases, MacNicol agrees with Eigg/G1 against G2.

Eigg and G1, apart from superficial orthographical differences, provide identical readings. What is more, we can isolate a sufficient number of idiosyncrasies to make it certain that either they both derive from a common written source, or one derives from the other. If the latter, then Eigg has a better claim to be the exemplar, the orthography of G1 being somewhat more consistent. In addition, Eigg, Verse 3, has Dunachaille for Dunchailean of G1 (the latter presumably a correction, if Dunachaille is not one of the many printer's errors in Eigg).

The following are only a selection of identical readings or spellings. More normal spellings are usually duplicated, but are not listed here. Yet the two texts are not exact replicas: apart from orthographical differences and

1. Gillies, p.270 ff.
2. Gillies, p.142 ff.

misprints, e.g. V. 11, teighhail, G1 teipail.

Verse 1 ratreate

3 rèlain

danguing.

4 Dh fhalbh do bhrathair. - na ùr-às

5 Bhaig gach duinne na speachlair.

Gad thug ro mhead do nairidh

Bras is ardan

Oig ghaiste na feile

6 Ort a dhubailt na rancan

7 Chìte am fòlais gach fàilin

'S gur thainn duine a coim e

Ar deigh bhi pronadh.

There is a slight difference in Eigg here: the

last line reads: N deigh. Both metrically

defective.

8 Nach d'eithidh am pusadh

Thuit le luaith e san àm ud

Buala

Thoirt a mach an a d bhanse

ba dual

9 cluìdhe sìn cailtich

12 'S geul bu dona

13 Caradh uaislin chintire

Mud thuit fhear mà cial

iargain a chuigh e

14 Air dol a siòs mar an ranach

15 Identical, including some words with capitals,

except Eigg fòn: others no accent;

Eigg taor: others daor.

16 On la a ghinnidh gu h' aite u

17 chuìs thuins gail

An aoghaidh chrombail 's lambeat

18 fhir aird e seille

Iarla Mhacabh

Commande

19 tuitfhear na h apuin

bhrai'ribh

hailigin bhoigheach

Luighid an athaidh

20 Chail u t ànaisdir fearrain

21 Bha u aili diagh reibhich

22 triuir Iar-o mhic Raonuil

23 Mar 's a bhuil le dhurachd,

Mac Iain Stiùart 's M^cNeichdin.

In verse 7, which ends pronadh, there is a corruption which involves the loss of the riming phrase of three syllables, the assonance being carried by the penult. This clearly is not due to faulty oral transmission. There is one reading (Verse 8, where Eigg has shaunlaich and G1, G2 and MacNicol have shant(a)ich) which resembles oral variation but is easily explainable as miscopying.

G2 is a much less corrupt text in a less archaic orthography. Against the opening couplet of MacNicol, Eigg and G1:

'S e Latha Rinnruari (spelt variously)

A dh fhag luanich mo dhùsgadh

G2 opens:

'Se do latha Raoìn-ruairidh

Dh'fhag luaineach am dhuisc mi.

The variation is generally of this degree and nature. Cruces are made intelligible, e.g., G1 and Eigg, V. 1: Cha bu leoghain thaobh cuil iad and MacNicol Cha bu leoin a thaibh Cuil iad becomes 'S nach bu leon o'n taobh cuil doibh. On the face of it G2 appears to be the product of good oral transmission. Significant variations from G1 and Eigg, in some of which G2 agrees with MacNicol, are:-

V. 6 G2 : Truadh gun chomus relibha

MacNicol: Si gun Chommis Relibhidh

G1, Eigg: U. gum.fhuasglidh sa tiom sa

V. 14 G2 : Sud an tigheadas rimheach

G1, Eigg: Sud an soinn) Eigg a bha uasal

)
sonn) G1 Nach d fhuair riamh
an scainneal

V. 21 G2 : Bha thu aillidh deas treubhach

MacNicol: Bha u ailidh deas treibhich

G1, Eigg: Bha u aili diagh reibhich

V. 22 G2 : Gu'm bu Bharraichte tir thu

MacNicol: Gum bu Bhariche Tir u

G1, Eigg: Gum bu mhairiche fior u

Such variations between the two groups are of the kind commonly found in oral transmission. In two places the Eigg/G1 reading is probably nearer the original, viz., V. 4, 'Dh fhalbh do bhrathair na ùr-às where G2 has na ùr-ros and MacNicol has Urose; and V. 16, Bho t oige gud shinne where G2 has

O t oige gu d6 fhineadh. In this last instance MacNicol goes along with Eigg/G1 with Fo'd T'oige gu'd Shinnigh.

In some other places, MacNicol agrees with Eigg/G1 also, e.g., V. 1 chunntas for chunntadh of G2; V. 2 Bann for Gu'm b'ann of G2; V. 7 'S toissich Latha ghil shollist: for Eigg's 'S toisich latha ghil sholaist and G1's 'S toisich latha ghil sholais, G2 has 'N t6s an latha ghil sholuis. These and other similar readings are of no significance except that they are all acceptable as ordinary oral variation. But one or two forms suggest the influence of writing: V. 5 ghaiste for ghasda; V. 6 Eigg Oirt a dhubailt na rancan: G1 Ort ... dhubailt: MacNicol Oirt a dhubilt na rancan; the spelling dainguing/daingiong for daingeann; and the variation Tir/fior - the last two noted above.

Ghaiste and daingiong may be merely orthographic convention; dhubailt as a modal form, active or passive, is highly idiosyncratic but is perhaps just possible as a spoken form; the variation Tir/fior might perhaps be explained as oral variation, but at least as likely is the miscopying of capital T or F. MacNicol, for instance, frequently uses capital letters within the line, and his F and T are easily confused.

In V. 20, Eigg/G1 have luighid an athaidh and G2 lughad an athadh; MacNicol had originally ro mheid: this is emended superscript to Lughthid.

Apart from the Eigg/G1 connection, none of this is sufficient to build a case on; it is merely sufficient to arouse suspicion that more than conservative oral transmission links

all these variants. We can only conjecture that the collectors, holding the cultural prejudices which we have discussed, went some way towards producing what they felt was the original. If so, it is not a thorough process - the sheer magnitude of such a task would probably make this impossible - and thus we can have, e.g., two variants of the nature of G1 and G2 in the MacLagan Collection, and both openly published in Gillies. Behind, say, the Eigg version of Latha Raoin Ruairidh, there may have been a written version of the late seventeenth century (cf. the late seventeenth century MS poem cited Is maith mo leaba). Or we may conjecture a longish period of oral transmission, with a written version produced perhaps around the mid-eighteenth century, from which Eigg and G1 both derive.

But when we turn to the remaining variant, we are confronted with an altogether different situation. Instead of the superficial variations of the four versions we have been studying, with an underlying unity of twenty-three stanzas, neatly following each other in the same line and verse sequence, we have in Jerome Stone's collection a variant of thirty-seven verses. It opens in the same way as G2; in those readings in which G2 differs from Eigg/G1 and MacNicol, G2 and Jerome Stone agree.

Vs. 1-3 of Stone correspond in sequence with the other versions, but with differences which are acceptable as oral variation. V. 1 displays the nature of these.

Stone

Se do La Rinroridh

Dhfhag luaineoch am dhuisg mi :

Mheud so thuit do Chloinn Domhnuill,

Cho bu lion o'n taobh cuil doibh,
 Toirt amuigh an ratreata,
 Coishne ceata le Diobhail;
 S ge bu tearna go leir doibh,
 Bha Bas Chlephair re chuntadh
Eigg

S e Latha Rinruari
 A dh fhag luanich mo dhùsgadh;
 Mu thuitim chlann Dobhnuil,
 Cha bu leoghain taobh cuil iad,
 Thug sibh mach an ratreata
 Choisin ceitibh le diugh bhail;
 Ga bu tearnadh gu leir dhibh,
 Bha bàs Chleibhir ra chunntas.

From V. 4 onwards, the sequence is quite different.
 Where correspondences can be traced in the remainder of the
 poem, we may have the following relationships:

Stone, V. 19,11. 1-4:

On a thog thu n ceud chloidheamh
 Gun agha gun fhailig,
 Bu mhor do chuid tionsgail
 Naghaidh Chromhail is Lambeirt.

which corresponds to -

Eigg, V. 17,11. 1-4:

On la a ghlac u do chloidheamh,
 Gun athadh dod nàmhaid,
 Bu mha do chuis thuins gail,
 An aoghaidh chrombail 's lambeat.

but 11. 5-6 of Stone's V. 19 have a connection, not with the corresponding lines in Eigg, V. 17, but with 11. 1-2 of Eigg, V. 16. Thus:

Stone, V.19,11. 5-6

Chaill thu 'n tim sin do Dhaoine

Ann an Abhar Riogh Tearlach

Eigg, V. 16,11. 1-2

Chaile u raodha do dhaoine,

Ann an adhbhar a bhrathair

The last two lines of Stone's V. 19 correspond with nothing in Eigg.

Without pursuing these comparisons and contrasts into unnecessary detail, it is clear that, in terms of using the Stone variant as a contributory source in order to produce an "original", this, which is the oldest dateable variant, has to be taken almost as it stands and the group we have examined has to be rejected, or vice versa. Viewed against the Stone variant, all of the other group seem excessively neat and symmetrical, offering the tantalising possibility that G2, which contains something of all the others, including Stone, may be a prepared text, produced, perhaps in co-operation, by more than one editor. More examples of this might be produced, though it is impossible to be dogmatic about any of them.¹ If this surmise is correct, however, the early collectors were acting much in the same way, and with the same

1. D. S. Thomson. An Introduction to Gaelic Poetry, p.311 suggests that one of the versions of An Duanag Ullamh shows "signs of emendation and interpolation".

principles, as modern editors. Like modern editors, also, they were not concerned to "improve" the text in the sense of producing "finer" or more "poetic" language, nor were they concerned with removing "uncouthness". One of the reasons is that heroic poetry at any rate had its place in the higher ranks of society. While its language shows regional speech-forms, the editors do not regard that as provincial dialect; and even if they did, they could not substitute standard literary forms, their attitude to the older classical language being what we have already seen it was.

While it is appropriate to notice the possibility of editorial intervention by the early collectors, it is equally necessary to stress the undoubted fact of conservative transmission, exemplified for instance, by the MacCodrum texts, already referred to, available in Uist in the thirties.¹ Yet as we have seen also, transmission can vary, as in the case of Rob Donn's poetry.² If we take the entire field of Gaelic oral poetry into consideration, we shall find that there are extremes of mutability and (relatively speaking) stability. What MacNicol calls history in verse - the heroic poetry - is the most stable, therefore its variants are those most easily arranged in a hierarchical order, leading towards an original. Individual poems seldom lose their identity completely. At the other extreme are the choral songs, the elements of which seem to dissolve and combine again continuously in new

1. Matheson MacCodrum p. XXXIII.

2. V. chap. 3.

formations; though even here, as we shall see later, we can sometimes trace the features of an "original" as well. It cannot be wholly accidental that the most mutable forms of Gaelic verse are those least dependent on written sources. In heroic poetry also we may meet, exceptionally, a kind of transmission reminiscent of that of the choral songs.

For instance, among contemporary Gaelic speaking tinkers, Iain Lom's A bhean leasaich an stòp has been combined with Neil MacVurich's Och a Mhuire mo dhunaidh, and with another, unidentifiable, song. This kind of variation is almost certainly old and completely outwith the ambit of the collections; we may call it secondary transmission. It would no doubt tend to happen outside the social class to which poets (if, like Aonghus mac Alasdair Ruaidh, author of Latha Raon Ruairidh, they were aristocrats) and their patrons belonged. It is noticeable that where there are traceable connections between present day crofters and the old aristocracy, a much purer transmission appears to have been maintained. We may call this primary transmission. The mixture of songs, exemplified by the tinkers' version of Iain Lom and MacVurich, would be unthinkable, for instance, in the repertoire of the late Duncan and Neil MacDonald of South Uist whose family had Clanranald connections.¹

The adage traditionally ascribed to John MacCodrum, and still current in the oral tradition of Uist, is relevant here,

1. Information from D. J. MacDonald; this is endorsed by W. Matheson. (D.J. MacDonald, South Uist, son of Duncan, the famous seanchaidh.)

both as expressing recognition of uncertain transmission and enunciating the principle that the text of a poem was meant by the author to be fixed:¹ Is math a dh'fheumadh òran a bhith air a dhèanamh: is iomadh fear-millidh a th'air.

The most conservative primary transmission, then, would take place within the relatively small, well-knit social class, to which the pioneer collectors themselves (with the exception of Stone) belonged. This class, whose members were so much the subjects of these poems - and whose ancestors were so involved in the events they celebrate - had a vested interest in the poetry. This was the vehicle which carried their sense of political history and national identity. Unlike classical bardic poetry, these poems were immediately intelligible; hence non-poets would learn and transmit them, and we have an example of such transmission in the case of MacDonald of Dalchochnie, who recited poems for Alexander Irvine.² Where bards regularly undertook their circuits from one patron's house to another, their influence would be felt in stabilising oral tradition, but by the eighteenth century the bardic cuairt was probably rarely undertaken, and an important link between families distant from each other had been broken.³

1. In opposition to much current opinion concerning the nature of oral poetry.
2. V. Chap. 3, p.110.
3. The cuairt is implied in the song attributed to Iain Lom Do Mhac Fhionghuin an t-Sratha, MacKenzie Orain Iain Luim, p.72 ff; the importance of bards, harpers, etc, in keeping families in touch with each other is explicit in Sìleas na Ceapaich's Slàn a chaoidh le ceòl na clàrsaich, Ó Baoill Bardachd Shìlis na Ceapaich, p.108 ff.

Nevertheless, even when that control existed, textual variation was inevitable. In this connection, a parallel may be drawn with the highly conservative tradition of pibroch, in which marked divergences nevertheless occur. But within narrow limits certain variations are accepted. One may hazard a guess that a certain amount of textual variation was similarly allowable, and that in spite of MacNicol's "critical audience", this did not offend critical taste so long as the main outline of the message - the essential features of the "original" - remained unimpaired. The freedom of interpretation which is acceptable in music (especially in a non-traditional kind, where the interpretation is a consciously worked out process) or the latitude allowed in producing the text of a play offer the best comparisons in a modern context. Dr. John MacPherson's observations on oral variants of Ossianic ballads seem to bear this out: "The oral editions given by the several persons who have rehearsed the very same parts of Ossian's poems in my presence, are far from being exactly the same. Some of these rehearsers omitted several whole stanzas, which others repeated before me. Some of them inverted the order of whole sentences, and whole stanzas. Others differed greatly from the rest in the expression, here and there in the sentiments, in the versification, in the names of the heroes, and scenes of action; and that, too, without doing any considerable hurt to the merit of the poem, all things considered."¹

In all our investigation of literacy and the collectors'

1. Report on Ossian, Appendix, p.13.

attitudes towards it, with a consequent effect on their treatment of material, we discovered only that while there is a tradition from the later seventeenth century of adapting the classical orthography to vernacular Gaelic, this tradition is intermittent and experimental.¹ Even so, we cannot say that in the example we choose, the song on Raon Ruairidh, there may not be a written version going back very near the date of composition (1689 or soon after) which underlies, say, the variant in Eigg. To generalise from this, we may say that the influence of writing, although elusive and often impossible to demonstrate, appears to have been sufficiently strong in shaping the corpus of Gaelic verse in our basic sources in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, to force us to call this verse not "Oral" but simply "Traditional".

Had the influence of writing been wholly absent, we should probably have a far wider range of textual variation, in

1. In this process of experimentation, it was the "ecclesiastical orthography" that finally won the day. It is fascinating to observe in other streams of orthographical tradition the mode in which conventions from the older classical orthography merge with these drawn from Scots. E.g., Sh is used to represent palatal S. Broad and slender endings, e.g., are fairly consistently rendered by the slender only: thus, -ichd, -idh, -igh, -it, -ig. Sometimes this is possibly based upon the use of i in Scots to represent a long vowel, a process developed after the fifteenth century Scots vowel change, e.g. Barbour's sare becomes sair (the process being compounded by the loss of diphthongal quality in ai in words from Norse and French) and the use of i is then generalised as a sign of length. So oig for òg. Sir Walter Scott is sometimes blamed for introducing a perverse spelling of Gaelic; in fact he probably learnt this from Alexander Stewart of Invernahyle, Donald MacNicol's uncle, and from other Gaelic speaking acquaintances of that class.

which lines and whole stanzas might be transposed as a matter of course, as we have seen in the Stone versus Eigg, MacNicol, Gillies variants of Raon Ruairidh. As Dr. John MacPherson observed, this can happen "without doing any considerable hurt to the merit of the poem¹" because the poetry is not built with a rigid logical structure. Far from being a drawback, this structural and rhetorical flexibility gives it a high survival value: in oral transmission it is not so much liable to become fossilised as to renew itself through its variants.

1. V. supra p. 152.

APPENDIX 2.

Extract from Dr. Samuel Johnson's

Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland (1775), pp.154-161.

Soon after I was told by a gentleman, who is generally acknowledged the greatest master of Hebridian antiquities, that there had indeed once been both Bards and Senachies; and that Senachi signified the man of talk, or of conversation; but that neither Bard nor Senachi had existed for some centuries. I have no reason to suppose it exactly known at what time the custom ceased, nor did it probably cease in all houses at once. But whenever the practice of recitation was disused, the works, whether poetical or historical, perished with the authors; for in those times nothing had been written in the Earse language.

Whether the Man of talk was a historian, whose office was to tell truth, or a story-teller, like those which were in the last century, and perhaps are now among the Irish, whose trade was only to amuse, it now would be vain to inquire.

Most of the domestick offices were, I believe, hereditary; and probably the laureat of a clan was always the son of the last laureat. The history of the race could not otherwise be communicated, or retained; but what genius could be expected in a poet by inheritance?

The nation was wholly illiterate. Neither bards nor Senachies could write or read; but if they were ignorant, there was no danger of detection; they were believed by those whose vanity they flattered.

The recital of genealogies, which has been considered as very efficacious to the preservation of a true series of ancestry, was anciently made when the heir of the family came to manly age. This practice has never subsisted within time of memory,

nor was much credit due to such rehearsers, who might obtrude fictitious pedigrees, either to please their masters, or to hide the deficiency of their own memories.

Where the Chiefs of the Highlands have found the histories of their descent is difficult to tell; for no Earse genealogy was ever written. In general this only is evident, that the principal house of a clan must be very ancient, and that those must have lived long in a place, of whom it is not known when they came thither.

Thus hopeless are all attempts to find any traces of Highland learning. Nor are their primitive customs and ancient manner of life otherwise than very faintly and uncertainly remembered by the present race.

The peculiarities which strike the native of a commercial country, proceeded in a great measure from the want of money. To the servants and dependents that were not domesticks, and if an estimate be made from the capacity of any of their old houses which I have seen, their domesticks could have been but few, were appropriated certain portions of land for their support. Macdonald has a piece of ground yet, called the Bard's or Senachie's field.

Of the Earse language, as I understand nothing, I cannot say more than I have been told. It is the rude speech of a barbarous people, who had few thoughts to express, and were content, as they conceived grossly, to be grossly understood. After what has been lately talked of Highland bards and Highland genius, many will startle when they are told that the Earse never was a written language; that there is not in the world an Earse manuscript a

hundred years old; and that the sounds of the Highlanders were never expressed by letters, till some little books of piety were translated, and a metrical version of the Psalms was made by the Synod of Argyle. Whoever therefore now writes in this language, spells according to his own perception of the sound, and his own idea of the power of the letters. The Welsh and the Irish are cultivated tongues. The Welsh, two hundred years ago, insulted their English neighbours for the instability of their Orthography; while the Earse merely floated in the breath of the people, and could therefore receive little improvement.

When a language begins to teem with books, it is tending to refinement; as those who undertake to teach others must have undergone some labour in improving themselves, they set a proportionate value on their own thoughts, and wish to enforce them by efficacious expressions; speech becomes embodied and permanent; different modes and phrases are compared, and the best obtains an establishment. By degrees one age improves upon another. Exactness is first obtained, and afterwards elegance. But diction, merely vocal, is always in its childhood. As no man leaves his eloquence behind him, the new generations have all to learn. There may possibly be books without a polished language, but there can be no polished language without books.

That the Bards could not read more than the rest of their countrymen, it is reasonable to suppose; because, if they had read, they could probably have written; and how high their compositions may reasonably be rated, an inquirer may best judge by considering what stores of imagery, what principles of ratiocination, what comprehension of knowledge, and what delicacy of elocution he has known any man attain who cannot read. The state

of the Bards was yet more hopeless. He that cannot read may now converse with those that can; but the Bard was a barbarian among barbarians, who, knowing nothing himself, lived with others that knew no more.

There has lately been in the Islands one of these illiterate poets, who hearing the Bible read at church, is said to have turned the sacred history into verse. I heard part of a dialogue, composed by him, translated by a young lady in Mull, and thought it had more meaning than I expected from a man totally uneducated; but he had some opportunities of knowledge; he lived among a learned people. After all that has been done for the instruction of the Highlanders, the antipathy between their language and literature still continues; and no man that has learned only Earse is, at this time, able to read.

The Earse has many dialects, and the words used in some Islands are not always known in others. In literate nations, though the pronunciation, and sometimes the words of common speech may differ, as now in England, compared with the South of Scotland, yet there is a written diction, which pervades all dialects, and is understood in every province. But where the whole language is colloquial, he that has only one part never gets the rest, as he cannot get it but by change of residence.

In an unwritten speech, nothing that is not very short is transmitted from one generation to another. Few have opportunities of hearing a long composition often enough to learn it, or have inclination to repeat it so often as is necessary to retain it; and what is once forgotten is lost for ever. I believe there cannot be recovered, in the whole Earse language, five hundred lines of which there is any evidence to prove them a hundred

years old. Yet I hear that the father of Ossian boasts of two chests more of ancient poetry, which he suppresses, because they are too good for the English.

Excerpts from Donald MacNicol's

Remarks on Johnson's Journey, pp 406-499.¹

(p.406-8) Let us suppose, however, in the mean time, were it only for argument's sake, that, some centuries ago, there were few or no written authorities among us; what would be the consequence? Not surely that general one which Dr. Johnson so unlogically affirms, namely, that 'one generation of ignorance effaces the whole series of unwritten history.' One or more chiefs, at a particular time, might, as he says, be careless, not very knowing, or kept busy by turbulence and contention; but I see no reason to conclude from thence, that the whole of the chiefs, and all the generation of men then living, should be so too. Unless, therefore, contrary to all probability, we are to suppose this much, our traveller's inference cannot follow, and his argument amounts to nothing. For if there could not be a whole generation of ignorance at once, the whole series of unwritten history could not be effaced.

At the same time, I am not inclined to lay more stress upon mere vague tradition than other men. I am certain I would trust it as little as the scrupulous Doctor himself, and perhaps even a little less than he would, when it might seem to lean to a favourable purpose. In defending the vulgar doctrine of the Second-Sight, he had no better foundation to rest upon; and yet he finds no difficulty in telling us upon that head, that when we are unable to decide by other reasons, we must be content to yield to the force of such testimony.

Tradition, however, in the liberal sense of the word, has in all ages been deemed of some weight; and the best writers have often appealed to it, not only when other evidence has been

1. v. Bibliography for edition.

wanting, but likewise as an auxiliary proof. The tradition regarded by the Highlanders, in matters of any consequence, was of that nature which could not easily deceive them. It was so closely interwoven with the custom and constitution of the country, that it could not be separated from them; and it was handed down from one generation to another, not by bards and senachies only, but by the general voice and consent of a whole nation.

It was not of that vague and uncertain nature which Dr. Johnson represents it to be; nor of that weak and unmanly kind, which he himself has admitted, on particular occasions, as sufficient. But one thing is perfectly evident, that when tradition is for the country, the Doctor rejects it; and when it operates on the other side he admits it as proof. Such a partial mode of representation speaks for itself.

That the Highlanders were not so liable to be imposed upon by the flattering compositions and tales of their bards and senachies, as our traveller would insinuate, is beyond all dispute. Besides those who were employed in those professions, there were multitudes in the country who spent most of their leisure hours in hearing, recording, and rehearsing the achievements of their ancestors and countrymen. Among these, there were many who composed poems in a strain equal to the bards themselves; and such private persons were always a check upon the bards and senachies by profession, to prevent their deviating from the truth.

Though the bards and senachies are no longer retained as formerly, this custom in the country is not yet discontinued. I myself, as well as thousands still alive, have seen and heard instances of what I have just now mentioned. (p.408).

(p. 416-7) Mr Innes, who, in general, is no great friend to the bards, tells us, that in the thirteenth century, at the coronation of Alexander the Third, a Highland bard pronounced an oration on the genealogy of the kings of Scotland. As this happened in the year 1249, before the destruction of so many of our records by Edward the First of England, and in the presence of the three estates of the kingdom, assembled on that occasion, we may naturally suppose the bards and senachies of those times to have been pretty accurate in their accounts; otherwise, it must have been difficult to find one who would venture to undertake such a task. At so public a solemnity there must have been many present who could have contradicted him, if he erred in his narration; and amidst the multitude of written testimonies then existing, he was sure of being detected, supposing none of his auditors had been able to correct him.

(pp. 420-7) But though there had really been no bards or senachies for such a length of time, and though the Gaelic had really been an unwritten language, there is no reason for supposing that all the ancient compositions perished immediately with their authors. I have already shown, that the practice of recitation was not formerly confined to the bards and senachies alone, and that it is not altogether disused even in our own times. It must therefore follow, that many of their works would still be preserved by this means only, even after the bards and senachies, by profession, might cease to exist.

There is no necessity, however, for trusting to this argument alone, I may hereafter take an opportunity of showing, that the Gaelic has not always been an uncultivated language; which

will weaken one part of the foundation on which Dr. Johnson builds. In the mean time, I shall produce some facts to evince, that the domestic offices in question existed much later than he is willing to allow; and that, I presume, will go nigh to sap the remaining part of his fabric.

It is not necessary, nor will I pretend exactly to say, when the office of senachie, as distinct from that of bard, fell into disuse. By this I mean only the senachie by profession; for as to senachies from choice, and for the amusement of themselves and friends, they have always existed; and there are several, and those not contemptible ones, both of the better and lower sort of people still living in the country. It will be enough to show, from well-known facts, that the regular profession of bard, who occasionally likewise officiated as senachie, has not been so long out of fashion.

The Macewens had free lands in Lorn in Argyleshire, for acting as bards to the family of Argyle, to that of Breadalbane, and likewise to Sir John Macdougall of Dunolly, in 1572. The two last of the race were Airne and his son Neil.

I have now before me an Elegy upon the death of Sir Duncan Dow Campbell of Glenurchy, composed by Neil Macewen. The date, which is 1630, is in the body of the poem. How long he lived after this, I cannot take upon me to say; but as there is much of the history and genealogy of the family interwoven with the performance, he must certainly have been both bard and senachie.

John Macodrum in North Uist, who is still alive, and not a very old man, had a yearly allowance from the late Sir James Macdonald of Slate, which, I believe, may be still continued by the present Lord Macdonald. I have, in my possession, many of

his compositions, which are far from being destitute of merit.

I have likewise, in my hands, some poems, composed by one bard Mathonach; in one of which he acknowledges to have received gold from the earl of Seaforth, at parting on board the ship that was to carry his benefactor out of the kingdom, after the battle of Sheriffmuir, in the year 1715. Another of his poems is in praise of Lord Lovat, who made him a present of a gun. Whether he was retained in the official quality of bard, by either of those noblemen, I cannot pretend to determine.

Many of my readers know, that one of the most remarkable bards of modern times, was John Macdonald, descended of the family of Keppoch in Lochaber. He was commonly called John Lom; and sometimes John Mantach or Mabach, from an impediment in his speech. He composed as many poems as would fill a pretty large volume. A great number of them are still extant, and many of them are in my possession. Most of his compositions have great merit.

He lived from the reign of Charles the First to the time of king William. But what may startle Dr. Johnson not a little, Charles the Second settled a yearly pension upon him, for officiating as his bard. As many of his poems mention the chief transactions of the times, as well as the names of the princes, chiefs, and nobility, whose achievements he sung, they carry their dates in their bosoms, and fix the era in which they were composed. He lived to an extreme old age, so that there are still a few people of very advanced years who remember to have seen him.

But to come more closely to the point. I wish the Doctor may preserve his temper and patience when I inform him, that Neil

Macvurich, descended of the famous race of Macvurichs, bards and senachies to the Clanronald family, is still alive, and enjoys free lands from Allan Macdonald of Clanronald, as his bard and senachie. This man writes the Celtic or Gaelic character, which was taught him by his predecessors, but he understands no other language or character whatever.

This piece of intelligence must equally surprise and gall our traveller; but, as the thing is true, there is no help for it. There is no fact whatever more certain or better known; and it could be attested by the most reputable people in that part of the kingdom, if the evidence of 'Highland narration,' which the Doctor has so often reprobated, could be admitted as satisfactory. But what is still more, he might easily, while in the country, have had the last and best proof of what is here asserted, even ocular demonstration. He might have seen the bard Macvurich, and others, with his own eyes; and he might likewise have had the same unerring testimony for the existence of many manuscripts in the Gaelic language, for several centuries back.

This mode of information, however, the Doctor always avoided. It would not have answered the purpose with which he had set out. His plan was laid; and he never wished to see or hear any thing that could induce him to alter it. As, therefore, he was determined to write in the very manner he has done, he has this one claim to virtue at least, that he did not choose to write against conviction.

These instances are but a few of many that might be given; but, I flatter myself, they will prove sufficient to satisfy the public, if not even Dr. Johnson himself, that his Hebridian antiquarian, if such there was, has grossly misinformed him;

and consequently, that the ingenious syllogism, which he has formed upon that information, however agreeable to mode and figure, is not agreeable to truth.

Unless the Doctor would have every testimony rejected but his own, I hope I have given reasons for believing, that there have been always regular bards and senachies in the country, and that there are still some of both; that the practice of recitation has not yet ceased, and that the Gaelic has not been an unwritten language; and of course, that the Doctor's conclusion, from the opposite premises, does not necessarily follow, namely, that 'the works of the ancient bards and senachies, whether poetical or historical, perished with the authors.'

In addition to what has been said, I can assure the reader, that many poems of the bards I have already mentioned, as well as of several others, are in my own possession; and that many other gentlemen, in different parts of the Highlands, have likewise large collections, among which there are productions of very old dates. These are always open to the inspection of curiosity, when a stranger signifies a desire to see them; and a considerable number of them have been lately published, in a moderate volume, for the satisfaction of such as may not have an opportunity of visiting the country, and seeing the originals.

In regard to our historical works of any long standing, I have already mentioned, that they suffered greatly by the ravages of Edward the First, and of Cromwell. The Doctor still continues to reproach us with the want of them, though he knows by what means there is such a deficiency in our national annals; and that the unhappy divisions among ourselves, at those two periods, gave an easy opportunity to those inveterate enemies to the

antiquities of Scotland, to destroy some part of our records, and carry off another.

As it now appears, that many of our senachies were also bards, it may naturally be supposed, that much of our ancient history was in verse. The same practice obtained in all other nations, in the early ages, and in the like circumstances. Accordingly, many of our poems consist of descriptions of battles, deaths of heroes, and concise narratives of other historical facts.

(p 428-9) If the son of the last bard had a genius equal to the office, there is no doubt, but among a friendly and generous people, it would be reckoned an act of justice to prefer him to another; but if he was found deficient in that respect, it is evident from the practice of the country, that he could not succeed. There were regular schools for the education of bards, called, in the Gaelic language, Scoil Bhairdeachd, in which the youth, or candidates for the profession, underwent a long course of discipline; and, after all this preparation, such as were found incapable were always rejected. From this it would seem, that those who had the superintendency of those schools paid a strict regard to the judicious rule of the ancients, Nascimur poetæ. But more of this hereafter.

In page 173 he still goes on. 'The nation was wholly illiterate. Neither bards nor senachies could write or read.' I wish the Doctor had fixed the period to which he alludes; but that, like all other points accompanied with a charge, he prudently leaves undetermined. But let him choose what time he pleases, it will be easy to show the fallacy and unprincipled

presumption of these assertions.

The early introduction of learning into Scotland is acknowledged by all the histories of Europe. In the first ages of Christianity, for our traveller, I suppose, does not carry his observations back to the times of the Druids, our learning, no doubt, was chiefly confined to the priesthood.

(pp 431-9) As to the Doctor's Erse, it has a filthy sound, and I must reject it, as never being a word of ours. It is only a barbarous term introduced by strangers, and seems to be a corruption of Irish. The Caledonians always called their native language Gaelic; and they never knew it by any other name.

If we go back to so early a period as the institution of the monasteries or abbacies of I, or Iona, Oronsay, and Ardchat-tan, &c., it is not to be doubted, but the use of letters was known in those seminaries, as well as in other places of the like kind in Europe. Were there no positive proofs of the fact now existing, it would be absurd to the last degree to deny it. Our monks must have understood the learned languages; and they must likewise have wrote them.

This much being granted, or rather self-evident, I can see no reason to prevent them from writing in their own language, more than the religious in all other countries. The Gaelic was the language in which they usually conversed; it was that into which it behoved the learned ones to be translated; and I well know it is the language by which my own lessons or exercises at school have been often explained to me, before I had acquired English enough to understand them otherwise. I shall proceed, however, to more positive proofs.

Of what has been written at Iona, I have heard, in particular, of a translation of St. Augustine De Civitate Dei, and a Treatise in Physic, which is very old. The former was in the possession of the late Mr. Archibald Lambie, minister of Killmartine in Argyleshire; and the latter was preserved in the Advocates' library at Edinburgh, where, no doubt, it is still to be seen.

Two brothers of the name of Bethune were famous for the profession of physic, in the islands of Islay and Mull; and they were designed, from the places of their residence, *Olla Ilich and Olla Mulich. They were both educated in Spain, and were well versed in the Greek and Latin languages; but they did not understand one word of English.

Olla Ilich lived in the reign of James the Sixth, and held free lands of his Majesty, as one of his physicians. He wrote a Treatise in Physic, in the Gaelic character, with quotations from Hippocrates. This manuscript was seen at Edinburgh some years ago, by a gentleman of my acquaintance, in the possession of Dr. William Macfarlane.

One Dr. O'Connachar of Lorn, in Argyleshire, wrote all his prescriptions in Gaelic; and his manuscript has been seen by many gentlemen still alive in that country.

There are, at present, two very old manuscripts in the possession of a gentleman in Argyleshire. One of them contains the Adventures of Smerbie More, one of the predecessors of the family of Argyle; who, as appears from the genealogy of that family, lived in the fifth century. The Doctor, perhaps, will not be

* Olla signifies a doctor or professor in any science, particularly in physic.

much pleased to hear, that the other contains the History of Clanuisneachain, or the sons of Usnoch, a fragment in Fingal.

The same gentleman is likewise possessed of Prosnachadh Catha Chlann Domhnuill, * at the battle of Harlaw in 1411, composed by Lachlan More Macvurich, the bard. This performance is in exact alphabetical order, like the Doctor's famous Dictionary. It contains four epithets upon every letter of the alphabet, beginning with the first letter, and ending with the last. Every epithet upon the same letter begins with that letter; which proves to a demonstration, that some of the bards at least, were not unacquainted with letters in that age. ! touche!

In the body of the genealogy of the Macvurich bards, this piece is mentioned, as the production of the beforenamed Lachlan More. Since I began these Remarks, the poem has been published by Mr. Macdonald in his collection, where it may be seen by the curious.

So far were the bards from neglecting learning, that, as I have already observed, they had poetical schools (Scoil Bhairdeachd) regularly established at Inverness, in Skye, and other places. In these they went through certain exercises, or pieces of trials, which were prescribed to them. Such as did not acquit themselves to the satisfaction of the proper judges, were rejected, as unqualified for the office; and this often happened, after many years study and preparation.

Their subject, or thesis, was often proposed to them without any previous warning.⁺ It was generally a sentence, though,

* A speech to cheer up the Macdonalds, when beginning the battle.

+ Bishop Leslie observes, page 54, that, "illis (pueris) exempla illustrium virorum, ad quorum se imitationem fingerent, rythmi cujusdam et carminis concentu, ad voluptatem illustrata proponere."

sometimes, but a single word; and, at other times, it was altogether unintelligible, like the Barbara, celarent, Darii, ferio, &c. in logic. Of this last sort was the subject which James the Sixth gave to some poets, as a trial of skill in their profession.*

I can assert from as good authority as Dr. Johnson can pretend to, that, during even the later periods, some of the Macvurich (or Macpherson) race of bards kept an academy in Skye, where they taught the Greek and Latin languages, as well as the Gaelic art of poetry.

If any ingenuous sense yet remains with the Doctor, he must necessarily feel sore at this account of the Scotch bards. Ignominy and disappointment stare him, at once, in the face. His impudent assertions are disproved, and his darling purpose defeated. He must therefore be doubly stung, if he is capable of shame from falsehood, or of chagrin for the failure of his project.

But this forgery of our traveller, in asserting that the bards were so very illiterate, seems the more extraordinary, as he acknowledges that there were regular schools or colleges in Skye, and other places, for the education of pipers. His admit-

* SUBJECT.

Snamhaid an Lach is an Fhaoilin
Da chois chapail chaoilin chorr.

ANSWER.

'D fhuaras Deoch a Laimh Ri Alba,
A Cup Airgid agus Oir;
An Aite nach do shaoil me fhetin
'S da chois chapail chaoilin chorr.

The poet who performed best was to get one cupfull of wine from the king's own hand, and another cupfull of gold as his reward.

ting this fact gives additional strength to what has been advanced concerning the academies of the bards; as it is not very likely, that a people, who were so attentive to an inferior art, should neglect the cultivation of genius, for a more important profession. It must be confessed, however, that the schools of the bards began to be considerably upon the decline, within these last two centuries. Whether their not meeting with the usual encouragement was owing to their presuming too much on their own importance, to the introduction of new customs, or to their profession not appearing so necessary after the revival of letters, it is not material to inquire: nor need we be more surprised, that the race of bards is now almost extinct, than that we hear no longer of the harpers, scialachies (tale-tellers), and jesters of former times, or that even the bagpipe itself is approaching to the eve of its last groans. Our great people, like those of other nations, have found out new modes of amusement and expense, which probably, in their turn, will soon give way to others.

Upon the decay of their own seminaries at home, the bards went to Irish schools of the same kind; the consequence of which was, that they contracted much of the Irish poetical style, and a fondness for talking the Irish dialect of the Celtic language.

Many of our own countrymen, who were ignorant of this fact, have mistaken some of the writings and compositions of those Irish bred bards, for real Irish. Among the performances of this kind now extant, there are several which we would not hesitate to conclude to be true Irish, if we had not the most convincing proofs to the contrary.

We have a striking instance of this in the Elegy on Sir Duncan Dow Campbell, which has been mentioned above, and was com-

posed by the bard Macewen in 1630. This poem is in many places, altogether unintelligible to most Highlanders; though other productions of a much earlier date, as being composed in the Albion dialect of the Celtic, are perfectly understood. In particular, there is a manuscript poem by Maclean's bard, in praise of Colin earl of Argyle, in 1529, a complete century before the Elegy, which is entirely free from the obscurities to be found in that performance. But Macewen was one of those bards who resided some time in Ireland. His poem is in the Gaelic character, and in his own hand-writing; and it is still preserved, among the papers of the family of Breadalbane, at Taymouth.

Besides adopting much of the poetical language of Ireland, the bards who went to that country for education wrote many things in imitation of Irish pieces. This has given occasion to that people to claim, as their own, various compositions, which were in reality the productions of Scotch bards.

(pp 454-5) It will not easily be believed, that the Gaelic, which was the language of the Celtic nations, can be so very rude a speech as the Doctor represents it; or that a powerful people, who extended their dominion over all the countries between Cape Finisterre and the mouth of the river Oby, could be so very barbarous, and have so few thoughts to express. Conquest generally civilizes either the victors or the vanquished. It is of no consequence to inquire, what were the manners of our Celtic ancestors before they left their native homes. One thing is evident, that, after mingling with other nations, there appears no reason why their Scotch descendants should be more barbarous than their other tribes.

(pp 460-2) Among the old manuscripts of considerable length, I took notice particularly of two. One gives the history of Smerbie More, one of the ancestors of the Duke of Argyle, who lived in the fifth century, according to a manuscript genealogy of that illustrious family; and the other contains the history of the sons of Usnoth. They are both in the Gaelic language and character, and are so very old as to be difficult to be read. They are in the possession of Mr. Macintyre of Glencoe, near Bunaw in Argyleshire.

But as the Doctor may think it too great a trouble to travel again to the Highlands for a sight of old manuscripts, I shall put him upon a way of being satisfied nearer home. If he will but call some morning on John Mackenzie, Esq., of the Temple, Secretary to the Highland Society at the Shakspeare, Covent-Garden, he will find in London more volumes in the Gaelic language and character than perhaps he will be pleased to look at, after what he has said. They are written on vellum in a very elegant manner; and they all bear very high marks of antiquity. None of them are of so modern an origin as that mentioned by the Doctor. Some have been written more than five hundred years ago; and others are so very old, that their dates can only be guessed at, from the subjects of which they treat.

Among these are two volumes which are very remarkable. The one is a large folio manuscript, called An Duanaireadh Ruadh, or the Red Rhymer, which was given by Mr. Macdonald of Glenealladel in Muideart to Mr. Macdonald of Kyles in Cnoideart, who gave it to Mr. Macpherson. It contains a variety of subjects, such as some of Ossian's Poems, Highland Tales, &c. The other is called An Leabhar Dearg, or the Red Book, which was given to Mr. Macpherson by the bard Macvurich. This was reckoned one of the most

valuable manuscripts in the bard's possession.

Since I began these Remarks, I have been informed by Mr. Macdonald, the publisher of the Gaelic poetry, that his uncle, Mr. Lachlan Macdonald in South Uist, was well acquainted with the last of these manuscripts; and as that gentleman is a great master of the Gaelic language and character, his opinion concerning its antiquity, from the character and other circumstances, is the more to be relied upon.

To finish this head at present, let me next inform the Doctor, that the bard Macvurich alone is in possession of a greater number of Gaelic manuscripts than the Doctor perhaps would choose to read in any language. At the earnest and repeated request of Mr. Macdonald, the publisher just mentioned, the bard has been at last prevailed upon to open his repositories, and to permit a part of them to be carried to Edinburgh, for the satisfaction of the curious, and the conviction of the incredulous. I myself have seen more than a thousand pages of what has been thus obtained, as have hundreds besides; and Mr. Macdonald assures me, that what he has got leave to carry away, bears but a very small proportion to what still remains with the bard.

It seems almost unnecessary to mention that all those manuscripts are in the Gaelic language and character. Some of them have suffered greatly by bad keeping; but many more by the ravages of time. The character of several is allowed by all, who have seen the manuscripts, to be the most beautiful they had ever beheld.

(pp464-5) In the same page, our author proceeds, 'Whoever, therefore, now writes in this language, spells according to his own percep-

tion of the sound, and his own idea of the power of the letters. The Welsh and the Irish are cultivated tongues. The Welsh, two hundred years ago, insulted their English neighbours for the instability of their orthography; while the Erse merely floated in the breath of the people, and could therefore receive little improvement.'

Nothing can be more false than what is here said of the uncertainty of Gaelic orthography. It has a regular and established standard, as is well known to many gentlemen of taste, candour and curiosity, who, though not natives of the Highlands, have been at much pains to become acquainted with our language. I shall only appeal to two respectable evidences, namely, General Sir Adolphus Oughton and Sir James Foulis. These gentlemen will give a very different account of the matter from that which is exhibited by Dr. Johnson; and yet they cannot be suspected of any national partiality for the Gaelic, as Sir Adolphus is an Englishman, and Sir James a South-country Scot.

This much, together with the proofs already given of so many manuscripts, treatises, and books in the Gaelic language, is sufficient to show what truth is in the Doctor's assertion, that our language has merely floated in the breath of the people. It would be unnecessary, therefore, to enlarge upon this branch of his doctrine.

In allowing the Welsh and Irish to be cultivated tongues, our author seems not aware that he is paying an indirect compliment to the Gaelic at the same time. The Welsh has ever been acknowledged to be a dialect of the Celtic or Gaelic; and Mr. Lhuyd, a learned and worthy Welshman, who travelled over all the Highlands, says, in a letter of his to Mr. Rowland, author of

Mona Antiqua, and published towards the end of that work, that "about two-thirds of the Scots Gaelic is the same with the Welsh." As to the Irish, it is well known to every proper judge to have a still greater affinity to our language; for the Albion and Irish Gaelic differ not perhaps so much from each other as any two dialects of the Greek.

(pp.470-3) His remarks upon the different dialects of the Gaelic seem hardly to merit notice. If that circumstance be a defect, it has been the fate of all languages, even the most polished. The Greek had many dialects; and, I believe, there is not a province in France, or a county in England, at this day, that has not many words and modes of pronunciation which are not well understood in others. The inconveniency, however, has the same remedy in the Gaelic as in other languages; there is a written diction, which pervades all dialects, and is understood in every island.

In page 180, he says, 'In an unwritten speech, nothing that is not very short is transmitted from one generation to another. Few have opportunities of hearing a long composition often enough to learn it, or have inclination to repeat it so often as is necessary to retain it; and what is once forgotten is lost for ever.'

Having already given so many proofs that the Gaelic is not 'an unwritten speech,' I might save myself the trouble of any particular remarks upon this passage; but as there is something specious in the argument, which might impose upon unwary readers, a few collateral observations may not be improper.

Though nothing had ever been written in the Gaelic, the manners and customs of the Highlanders were peculiarly adapted for

preserving the various productions in their language. The constant practice of recitation, which is not yet altogether disused, gave them 'opportunities of hearing a long composition often enough to learn it;' and their desire to amuse themselves in the solitudes of hunting, or a pastoral life, as well as to bear their part in social entertainments, gave them 'inclination to repeat it' as often as was necessary to retain it.

In this manner did the inhabitants of every village and valley supply to themselves the want of the more fashionable amusements of towns and cities, and wear off the winter evenings alternately in each other's houses; and in this manner have many things, 'not very short,' partly written and partly not written, been 'transmitted from one generation to another.'

By these means, there was no great danger of any thing being so far forgotten as to be 'lost for ever;' for if any one person should forget a particular part, there were always thousands who remembered the whole. Besides, in poetical compositions, it is well known that the memory is greatly assisted by the cadence and rhyme; and as to such pieces of any length as we have in prose, they are the more easily retained, as they generally consist of a variety of episodes, depending on each other, and highly adapted to captivate the fancy.

Among the latter kind are our tales, which are, for the most part, of considerable length, and bear a great resemblance to the Arabian Nights Entertainments. One of those, in particular, is long enough to furnish subject of amusement for several nights running. It is called Scialachd Choise Ce, or Cian O Cathan's Tale; and though scialachies, or tellers of tales by profession, are not now retained by our great families, as formerly, there

are many still living, who can repeat it from end to end, very accurately.

This cannot appear improbable to those who consider, how much the memory is strengthened and improved by frequent use. When duly and constantly exercised, it is capable of surprising exertions; and we have sometimes read of instances, which amount even to prodigies.

I myself once knew a man, who, I am certain, could repeat no less than fifteen thousand lines; and there is now living one Poet Macintyre, who can repeat several thousands. This man is altogether illiterate, though not a despicable poet. Besides remembering many of the compositions of others, and likewise of his own not yet published, he lately dictated, from memory, as many songs composed by himself, as fill a small volume of one hundred and sixty-two pages, and amount to upwards of four thousand lines.

(pp. 498-9) It has upon the whole appeared, that the knowledge of letters was introduced into the Highlands and Hebrides, in as early a period of time as into any of the neighbouring countries. That one of the first uses made of those letters was the recording of works of genius, as well as public events. That, as a collateral security for handing down the compositions of the poet, as well as the facts related by the historian, there were bards and senachies, educated in academies, and retained afterwards by the principal families in the Highlands and isles. That those bards and senachies were not an illiterate race of men, apt to corrupt poetry and mistake facts. That both of them could, and actually did, write the Gaelic language, without receiving their knowledge

of letters through the medium of any other tongue. That the bards and senachies were so far from becoming extinct some centuries ago, that a few of them still exist. That, besides the regular and retained bards and senachies, there were many other persons, who executed the duties of their offices, through a particular turn of genius, or an attachment to the antiquities and poetry of their country. That of these several still exist; and many more were existing a few years ago. That the business of the established bards and senachies, as well as of those who followed the professions of both through pleasure, was to transmit poetry and history to posterity, sometimes by writing, but oftener by oral tradition. That the poems of Ossian have been handed down by these means, from age to age, to the present times. That, in old times, no doubt of their authenticity was ever entertained; and that there are still existing many hundreds, nay, many thousands, who are ready to attest their coming down to them, from antiquity, with all the proofs necessary to establish an indubitable fact.

Bards in their Social Context

MacNicol tells us that Gaelic poetry was composed and transmitted by professional bards and gifted amateurs alike. "Beside those who were employed in (the) professions, there were multitudes in the country who spent most of their leisure hours in hearing, recording, and rehearsing the achievements of their ancestors and countrymen. Among these, there were many who composed poems in a strain equal to the bards themselves."¹ In fact, we can trace the amateur poet back to the earliest recorded phase of our poetry. One of the earliest vernacular poems we possess, Caismeachd Ailein nan Sop, said to date from 1537, is ascribed to An Cléireach Beag, Laird of Coll;² one of the finest poems in Gaelic, Oran na Comhachaig, was composed by Domhnall mac Fhionnlaigh, probably around 1600, who flourished not as a professional bard but as a hunter.³ These two poems are in different metrical forms; we can, indeed, find amateurs, of both sexes, working in all the main metrical traditions. But we have equally early attributes to professional bards; nor were they either, it would appear, confined to a particular metrical tradition. This undifferentiated mass of verse has to be reduced to some kind of order before any stylistic analysis can be attempted. One possible approach is to seek a reflection of the structure and

1. Remarks, p.408

2. V. Maclean Sinclair Gaelic Bards, Vol. I, pp.7 and 8.

3. Rankin ibid.

order of society in the poetry.

Now there is a persistent myth, which is held both within the Gaelic community and outside it, that what is popularly known as "clan society" was a primitive democracy in which a paternalistic chief safeguarded the interests of all who lived on the clan land. In turn, the chief was supported by this extended family in peace and war. The reality is rather different. It may be that there was an openness of communication within the community, at least in later times, i.e. from the seventeenth century onwards, and that that gave an intimate tone to the poetry. But the important point is that far from being any kind of primitive democracy, "clan society" was in fact highly stratified. To the extent that it was held together by the priveleges and obligations of kinship, we may, without undue cynicism, say that it was not religion but genealogy that provided the opiate of the people. The economic reality is clear from the evidence of rent-rolls and judicial surveys. In them we find the clan chief as proprietor; holding land on lease from him is a stratum of gentlemen (the tacksmen); holding from the tacksmen, or occasionally direct from the chief, is the mass of common tenants. These are seventeenth and eighteenth century documents;¹ we cannot use them as

1. V.L. MacDonald The Crofter Question, and The Past and Present Position of the Skye Crofters (Judicial Rentals of MacLeod, MacKinnon and MacDonald lands in Appendices) for a representative account of economic structure from 1664 to the late nineteenth century. cf. Cregeen "The Tacksmen and their Successors" in SS, Vol. 13, pp.93-144. For a succinct account of "The Clan and its Members", v. Skene Celtic Scotland, Vol. 3, pp.323-325.

direct evidence for the structure of society in earlier centuries, but any differences that existed would be of degree only: all the references to Gaelic society make it clear that stratification was always of fundamental importance. One piece of evidence suggests, indeed, that it was more rigorous at an earlier stage. In a "Description of the Isles of Scotland", written between 1577 and 1595, we read that MacLeod of Lewis "may raise ... 700 men ... by thame (i.e. not counting) that labouris the ground, of the quhilkis nane are chairgit or permittit to gang to ony oisting or weiris in all the haille Isles, but are commanded to remane at hame to labour the ground". Similarly, the inhabitants of St. Kilda are all of this class. Although it is not specified in the case of other clan lands, that this was the common situation is made clear in the general summing up of the description: "And in raising or furthbringing of their men (to war) ... na labouris of the ground are permittit .. except only gentlemen that labouris not ...".¹

At least up to the seventeenth century, then, and so far as the Isles are concerned, we have a class of serfs who provide economic support for the aristocracy. There may have been social gradations, however, in both these strata;² and there may

1. Printed in Skene op.cit., Vol. 3, Appendix III, pp.428-440. V. esp. p.429; p.431; pp.439-40.
2. With a limited amount of land to share out among the aristocracy, a certain downward movement, through loss of economic status, was inevitable. E.g. the MacVurich historian remarks that Godfrey son of John of Isla's descendants are "a few poor people in North Uist". V. Reliquiae Celticae, Vol. 2, pp.210-11. But the kinship was nevertheless remembered, and we may find in a song a member of the plebs claiming: Is mise 's cairdiche dha na h-uaislean. This feeling would act as a bond of loyalty.

have been some distinction between the Isles and the mainland.¹ At any rate, by the seventeenth century some social reorganisation had apparently taken place everywhere: in all the rent-rolls we have a more or less undifferentiated commonalty (though land holdings varied in extent, and a small "cottar" sub-class formed part of the plebs). This may have taken place as political and military pressures (perhaps beginning with the Montrose campaigns) brought the clans into the forefront of national events.

Up to sixteenth century, on this analysis, we might expect to find that the rigorously stratified society would be reflected in poetry, with clear distinctions between aristocratic and plebeian strains. But with the reorganisation in which the serfs were given more priveleges, or perhaps were forced into a fighting role, we would expect that they would participate to some extent in the system of aristocratic values also. Military virtues, clearly, would feature strongly in this system. Equally, the sense of Gaelic identity - of "nationhood" - held by the aristocracy could not fail to involve the new weapon-bearing class. We shall argue later that this is indeed the case, but that nevertheless there is a spectrum in Gaelic poetry in which these older distinctions can still be discerned.

The "gentlemen quilk labouris not" may be described as a relatively small group of aristocratic warriors and hunters, who indulged in the traditional aristocratic pastimes of

1. The existence of the Lordship of the Isles may have impeded a development which had taken place earlier on the mainland.

fighting, hunting, cattle-raiding, and the like.¹

In an elegy composed in the early seventeenth century in Lewis, the mother of a famous hunter, Iain Ruadh mac Dhubhghaill, of the MacAulays of Uig, who had been drowned, praises her son for his utter neglect of those menial occupations that pertain to cultivation of the land.

Cas a shiubhal nam fuar bheann,

Ghabh thu roghainn bha uasal,

'S tu gun treobhadh no buailtean air dòigh.²

The same contempt for agriculture and the peasants who are engaged in it is expressed by the Ciaran Mabach (of the MacDonalds of Sleat) in a song which is largely in praise of hunting.

1. Martin's remarks: "Every Heir or young Chieftain of a tribe, was oblig'd in Honour to give a publick Specimen of his Valour, before he was own'd and declar'd Governor or Leader of his People ... This Chieftain was usually attended with a Retinue of young Men of Quality ... It was usual for the Captain to lead them ... to bring by open force the Cattel they found in the Lands they attack'd ... This Custom ... was not reputed Robbery ... They (the Retinue) were well trained in managing the Sword and Target, in Wrestling, Swimming, Jumping, Dancing, Shooting with Bows and Arrows, and were stout seamen ... The Chieftain is usually attended with a numerous Retinue when he goes a hunting the Deer, this being his first Specimen of manly Exercise." Martin, pp.101-107. But while these were their traditional activities in their own lands, they might also be participants in the culture and political activities of the south, e.g. clan chiefs are found as members of the Privy Council of Scotland: from the north, particularly the MacKenzies. The second Lord of the Isles was educated at Oxford (Mitchell, History p.312) and even the notorious reiver Colla nam Bó attended St. Andrews (information from Rory MacDonald, Esq., Glencoe).
2. V. Celtic Magazine, Vol. 2, pp.478-485. The elegy is on pp.484-5. V. also Maclean Sinclair Gaelic Bards, Vol. 1, pp.27-8.

Agus Uiginnis riabhach

An tric an d'iarr mi an damh donn

Bhith fo bhinn aig na bodaich

Dh'am bu chosnadh cas-chrom.¹

We do not expect, nor do we, in fact, find any comparable attitudes expressed by the common people. Indeed even after the society had broken up and its natural leaders (sometimes but not invariably Anglicised) had turned against the commonalty, through the Clearances, we still find the old sense of community, with its loyalty to these leaders, expressing itself. In these terms, therefore, Gaelic society is very markedly aristocratic.

Beside this model of social stratification we can set up a model of stratification of poets. This has two aspects. So far as a professional hierarchy is concerned, we have a reasonably detailed account in Professor James Garden's letter to John Aubrey, in 1693.² This allows us to see the whole order, as it were in cross-section. The highest grade is the filidh: "He thats extraordinarie sharp ... i.e. ane excellent poet, these frequent onlie the company of persons of qualitie and each of them hes some particular person whom he owns his

1. This is a traditional text; for slight variants, v. Stewart, p.485 ff. and Maclean Sinclair, op.cit. p.66. Barrow quotes Boswell's report of James ("Ossian") MacPherson's remark on Gray's Elegy: "Hoot! To write panegyrics upon a parcel of damned rascals that did nothing but plough the land and sow corn!" and adds, "One suspects that something of this attitude might be found in the Highlands in the thirteenth as well as in the eighteenth century." Kingdom of the Scots, p.368.
2. SGS, Vol. 8, pp.22-26. V. Appendix 3 for the relevant part of the letter.

master. When anie of these travels abroad and comes to a house he tells whose phili he is and then is welcomed and treated according to the qualitie of his master ... " The different ranks of the "whol caball ... called Chlearheanachi" (i.e. Cliar Sheanchain) are given. It is also noted that the Bard is "a little poet or a rhymmer" and that "the inferior sort of them are counted amongst the beggars ... " We shall have occasion to return to this whole description; meantime we should note that the account is not at all as coherent as it appears to be on the surface. It was written by a student of divinity from Strathspey, probably Robert Stewart;¹ Garden calls it "an account of the Bards such as they are at present in these parts, and such as they were within the memory of my informer's father (who is an aged man of ninetie seaven years.)" In other words, this is probably a composite description of the order of poets as that existed in 1693, and as it existed much earlier in the century. Its relevance at the moment lies in its allowing us to show that the makers of poetry range from the top of society to the bottom. The second aspect of social stratification as reflected in poetry concerns the actual corpus of verse that has been preserved, especially in the primary collections. In spite of the range of poetic grades presented in the Garden-Aubrey letter, we are unlikely to have secured what failed to pass the shibboleth of aristocratic taste. In this connection, we may observe that the vernacular, so-called "bardic" verse of Mary MacLeod and Iain Lom displays such rhetorical assurance as

1. V. Campbell and Thomson op.cit., p.93.

to make it the product of a well-established tradition. Yet where in our collections are the songs of their poetic ancestors? Since some of the songs of Mary MacLeod and Iain Lom are still known traditionally, three centuries after their time, singers of, say, 1774 ought to have known these earlier compositions. One possibility at any rate is that the bards who shaped the tradition for these, and others, formally, and surely to some degree in the use of imagery, belonged to a professional hierarchy where their status was not high enough to win them aristocratic approval.¹

It will be obvious enough from all this that the difficulties in finding a principle with which to make clear-cut divisions in the body of Gaelic verse are immense. The most fruitful approach that has come to my notice is that set out in the chapter on Airs and Metres in Rev. Wm. Matheson's The Blind Harper.²

This analysis sets up structural categories in such a way that the problems liable to arise in a study devoted primarily to content, imagery, or treatment by individual poet, are set aside. The metrical traditions which he distinguishes are in the main sufficiently conspicuous to allow them to be used by purely literary critics. But the distinctions are finally made

1. This still leaves unanswered this question: If even some of the heroic, panegyric imagery used by Mary MacLeod existed in earlier bardic poems, would that not suffice to make them aristocratic enough for inclusion in the collections? There is an unsolved mystery here.
2. For the relevant part of the text, v. Appendix 3.

possible by a profound knowledge of Gaelic musicology: where there is any dubiety as to which tradition a given text belongs, the final appeal is to the musical differentia.¹

The three traditions of "bardic metres", dàn, and òran are complemented by one other major category, viz., the choral songs. These are not mentioned in the passage cited simply because they are not relevant to the Harper's art.²

Matheson observes that by the Harper's time (floruit c. 1656-1714)³ the traditional system of poetry and music was in decay. Since our collections contain very little pre-seventeenth century poetry, it follows from this that the main developments which have shaped all these traditions took place in what we can only term the 'pre-historic' period of Gaelic poetry. If the different traditions at one time had their own, more or less mutually exclusive, conventions, we can expect that by the era in which most of our outstanding vernacular poets flourished, some blurring of frontiers, some intermingling of the different strains must have occurred. As Matheson observes, the

1. Where melodies are available, either from collections of music, or from oral tradition, these have been checked in cases of quoted texts which are not immediately recognisable on metrical grounds as belonging to the category in question. I am indebted to colleagues at the School of Scottish Studies for help in this connection.
2. In lectures in the Celtic Department at Edinburgh, in the course of which these structural categories were described, the Rev. Wm. Matheson included the Choral Songs.
3. Matheson ibid. p.XL and p.XLII.

eulogistic content of the Harper's poetry is doubtless part of that process. We may note also that names such as dàn and òran, presumably at one time used, at least by the exponents of the arts themselves, as strict technical terms, are used quite vaguely in the collections, and so to the present day in poetry and colloquial usage.¹ Thus, the syllabically based Oran na Comhachaig ought technically to have the title of dàn. In the Garden-Aubrey letter, the very lowest grade of bard composes dàn, but it is doubtful if any conclusion is to be drawn. Luinneag, which, as we shall see, denoted choral songs, is extended in usage in the collections, though only within certain limits, and is less generalised there than in modern speech. Matheson's "non-symmetrical stanza" type, associated with the bard, has no equivalent term, used colloquially or technically. Some of these songs, however, have iorram in the title.

These distinct categories have been produced, then, in a stratified society and reflect to some extent that stratification; but just as the differences of class became less clear cut with the disappearance of serfs, so do the marks of class distinction become more blurred in poetry. This is not, of course, due to that one reason alone: it is part of the long and involved process of the breakdown of Gaelic society, which the disappearance of caste foreshadows. In this process the orders of

1. This is a process which must have gone on through the ages, from at least the major reorganisation due to the introduction of Christianity. Cf. Murphy Early Irish Metrics, p.27: "Dàn 'craft', which originally was applied to the craft of poetry rather than to a poem, is also later used commonly to denote a poem."

poets participated. To take a convenient example, we find one culmination in the poetry of Neil MacVurich. Born c. 1630, and trained as a filidh, he shows, in extreme old age, that he could use a vernacular "bardic metre" with perfect facility. The example composed in 1715,¹ judged by its rhetorical skill, is unlikely to have been his first composition of that kind.

At this point it is convenient to introduce the problem that underlies the use of the term "bardic", viz., in Scottish Gaelic society who was the professional bard and what did he do?

Gerard Murphy's celebrated study, "Bards and Filidh"² supplies the framework within which the functions and mutual relationships of these orders are still discussed. The thesis of Murphy's study is that the relatively inferior bard, specialising in panegyric, had his function usurped by the filidh in the reorganisation brought about by the Norman Conquest. Valuable as this clarification is, it is important to bear in mind that it is a formula, which if used uncritically can gloss over the complications which must have accompanied such a process. We have the evidence of the Book of the Dean of Lismore to prove that dán díreach developed in Scotland as in Ireland; the type of learned seanchas poem exemplified by the Duan Albanach³ seems to have disappeared.

1. Eigg, pp.73-78.

2. Éigse, Vol. 2, pp.200-207.

3. V. Chap 1.

To that extent, if Murphy's formula is valid for Ireland it is valid for Scotland also. Yet the thousands of lines of poetry in Scottish Gaelic devoted to the panegyric of clan and chief is enough to show that the parallel between the two countries cannot be extended too far.¹

While we need not accept in detail the jurists' distinctions concerning the grades of bard, both sóerbaird and dóerbaird,² we have seen in the Garden-Aubrey letter that not all bards were of the same status. So far as Irish bards appear in the records, their position seems to be limited to that of literary retainers to the filidh;³ from this position we can envisage them developing into common song-makers. In Scotland we shall presently see that the bard functioned in a similar position. But from that situation, he developed into a maker of poetry of a socially much more important kind. Theoretically, there is no compelling reason to make us believe the Scottish development was as simple as that. The bard as literary retainer may

1. In vernacular Irish, the clan panegyric is absent, both as a special form and as a system of imagery. The general movement in Irish poetry seems to shift from dán díreach to amhrán. Thus in the early eighteenth century, "when the distinction that distinguished file from song-writer had largely disappeared", we find filidh like Egan O'Rahilly or Eóghan Ruadh Ó Súilleabháin becoming "song-making filidh", just as Neil MacVurich turns to the vernacular. But MacVurich's eulogistic content is different and he uses a specifically Scottish metre. V. Murphy "Notes on Aisling Poetry" in Éigse, Vol. I, pp.41-50.
2. Murphy Early Irish Metrics, pp.26-7. Murphy himself believed that there could be "traditional foundation for some at least of the subdivisions of these two main classes of baird ... "
3. V. Knott in Early Irish Literature, ed. Carney, pp.61-65.

have existed only in certain places, or at certain times. In the reorganisation of the arts that took place after the Anglicisation of the dynasty, some of the higher grades of bard may have seized the initiative and raised their social status. It may also be that some members of filidh families not only took over a panegyric function, as in Ireland, but also took over certain of the metrical forms, hitherto regarded as specifically bardic, as well. This, of course, is completely speculative, but the alternatives are limited: we have to suppose that the descendants of hereditary poetic families who at one time flourished under the patronage of the royal court and that of the great men of the kingdom, either all became makers of dán díreach panegyric, or simply died out, or merged into some of the lower grades of versifiers.¹ Since we are dealing with prehistory, one hypothesis may be as good as another; but just as Neil MacVurich in the eighteenth century takes over bardic verse-form and language, so, too, perhaps did earlier poets, especially in the southern and eastern reaches of the country where patronage must have been less freely available than in the areas under the influence of the Lordship of the Isles. It is, of course, no accident that the learned orders dealt with by Thomson² are based on the western and northern areas of Scotland in later medieval times, within or

1. There is possibly a parallel here with the history of some of the Gaelic tinkers. In the Garden-Aubrey letter, the lowest grade of bard is classed with beggars. Now the tinker's Gaelic cant, A' Bheurla Reagair(t), is clearly connected with Béarla Eagoir or Béarlagair na Saor, and there are faint vestiges of tradition among these tinkers that their ancestors were men of learning.

2. In Scottish Studies, Vol.12, pp.57-78.

near the sphere of the Lordship's patronage. The conventional view assumes that the Book of the Dean¹ is a stray survival of a great corpus of Scottish dán díreach. It may indeed be so; but it is interesting that, so far as filidh families are concerned, the three who are most prominent in Scotland, and who survived longest - the MacVurichs, the Ó Muirgheasáin, and the MacEwens - are, the first two certainly, the third possibly, in the nature of fresh reinforcements from Ireland. All this suggests that the redefined relationship of Scotland to Ireland, discussed above,² was of crucial importance in the development of more purely Scottish poetry. The change of cultural orientation, which made Scottish Gaels look to Ireland as the centre of Gaelic learning, would diminish the artistic and social status of the poets who continued to work the now peripheral areas of verse; but, by the same token, they could develop their art (for instance, moving from one vernacular tradition to the other) without the restraints that a flourishing order of Scottish filidh families could impose upon them. If a clan chief kept a bard, but there was no filidh attached to that household to keep the bard in his proper place, this is what we might expect to happen. The rise of smaller clans in the somewhat anarchic situation that followed the final forfeiture of the Lordship of the Isles in 1493, meant that, even in the west of Scotland, a clan chief who could not afford a

1. V. W. J. Watson SVDL, p.XVIII. In fact, even the Book of the Dean has a certain western bias.
2. In Chap. I. "The Historical Background."

filidh might keep a bard. Thus even the Morrison brieves in Lewis, a very small "clan", are said to have kept a bard.¹ Such a bard could scarcely be of a very high grade, even within that order. In the asymmetrical measures that characterise the vernacular bardic tradition, there is more than one metrical sub-category. It is possible that the more complex and highly wrought of these were developed by the higher grades of bard, while the simplest belonged originally to the lower. The curious use of aos-dàna² as a title for certain individual vernacular poets may reflect a gradation in which aos-dàna inherited something of the tradition of the sóerbaird. At the other end of the scale, MacDonald's bard (he was also the piper, indicating a low grade)³ probably in the early seventeenth century, uses as one of his metres a form reminiscent of the choral songs.⁴

Hugh MacDonald tells of: "Donnacha Mac Ruari ag a robh achadh nam bard ann an Troternis mar fhearann oidhreachd ...

1. Information from Donald Morrison, Ness, Lewis, a descendant of the brieves.
2. V. Angus Matheson, Gairm 2, p.343 ff; Gairm 3, p.33 ff. and p.124 ff.
3. V. Matheson MacCodrum, p.256-258; and p.62 ff. for a poem which expresses the contempt of the older orders of artists for the pipes. This attitude, of course, disappeared. William MacMurchy in Kintyre (fl. c. 1750), probably of the MacVurichs, was described in 1861 as "a superior piper and a poet" and in 1780 as "a musician and an amateur of ancient poetry." A poem which is almost certainly by him is in òran metre. V. SGS Vol. XI, p.26 ff.
4. Celtic Magazine, Vol. 7, pp.19-23.

a shliochd fein agus sliochd a shinnsear ar sloinidh clann a bhaird ... " and says that: "Nuair a chuir MacLeoid bhuidh mac Ille Riabhich agus a ghabh e fear eile na àite, thug MacDhonnail, ged a bha bard aige fein, fearran dha ann an Cille-mhoire an Troternis, ris an can iad baile mhic Ille Riabhich gus an diudh!"¹ These are both hereditary families, and both of them may have been classed as fairly high-grade bards, perhaps operating without the restraints imposed upon them by the filidh. The reference to MacLeod's dismissal of Mac Gille Riabhaich and replacement of him by another poet is presumably to the coming of an Ó Muirgheasáin.² Until that time, the bard would be the recipient of whatever privilege was available. Hugh MacDonald's phrase may be of no significance, but in view of the development of aos-dàna in an honorific sense (which MacDonald must have known of) it is interesting to find him saying of these bardic families: "gad thachra do h aon dhiu gun e fein a bhi na bhard, bha mar fhiachaibh cuimhne chumail ar seanachais agus ar bardachd nan aos-dàn a bha an roimhe."³

Where filidh and bard were both attached to the same household, however, the situation would be rather different. We have one document which sets this out in plain terms. Writing to Robert Wodrow in 1701-2, the Rev. John Fraser, minister of Tiree, says: "They had Bardi, poetici, and Seneciones,

1. Report on Ossian, Appendix, p.40. V. SGS Vol. V, pp.101-105; Vol. VIII, pp.27-52.
2. The earliest poem on record is the elegy to Ruaidhrí Mór (ob. 1626) by Eóin Óg Ó Muirgheasáin.
3. Report on Ossian, ibid.

peculiaire to every family, and symphoniaci; the Bard's office was to rehearse what was compiled by the Poets; the poets versified with admirable art, and in such a high and lofty stile, and such exact measures, and variety of measure, as may justly be compared with Homer or Virgil. Ther Bards were sometimes allowed to compose some Rhythmi, but not to medle any higher. The Seneciones were such as medled with history, and the true stateing of Genealogys, and descents of familys, whose records were so sacredly kept, that it's admirable how farr back they could recurr. The Symphoniaci made songs and sung songs."¹

Fraser was an Episcopalian, born in Mull in 1647.² He was thus, like the Rev. John Beaton, of the older order of Gaelic clergy, well aware of the pre-eighteenth century cultural set-up, and his testimony is, accordingly, of great value. His division of artists into such specific categories is striking. As a native of Mull, Fraser would have known of two men whose practice of poetry he could not have overlooked in writing to Wodrow.³ Under the patronage of the Macleans, the office of

1. Printed in Campbell and Thomson Edward Lhuyd in the Scottish Highlands, p.34.
2. Fasti, Vol. 4, pp.19-20.
3. In another study (SGS, Vol. XI, pp.3-25) I interpreted ~~Fraser~~'s description differently and argued that rhythmi must have been demotic dàn. I am indebted to the Rev. Wm. Matheson for constructive criticism of that interpretation, and agree that, in view of the large quantity of stressed poetry which survives, and also because of the presence of a bard in Mull who worked in that tradition, it is inconceivable that ~~Fraser~~ could have omitted these matters from his account.

filidh had been held by the Ó Muirgheasáin "Poetici"; it was a long-standing relationship, for the family had been in Mull from the fifteenth century.¹ The Rev. John Maclean says that "the last of them that was imminent in that office, called Muldonish M'Eoin ... died about 40 years ago."² There is no record of a successor. Contemporary with this filidh, we have a representative of the "Bardi" in the person of Eachann Bacach,³ one of those bards who bear the title of aos-dàna. In his song to Sir Lachlan Maclean of Duart, A' Chnò Shamhna, he indicates a life-long familiarity with the chief's household:

Bha mi tathaich do chùirte

Seal mun b'aithne dhomh an t-urlar a dh'fholbh.

Maclean Sinclair reports a tradition that "he had a small annuity from Sir Lachlan Maclean of Duart."⁴ On that evidence, we can take it that Eachann Bacach was the bard as Maol-domhnaigh mac Eóin was the filidh.

We might be tempted to think from the Garden-Aubrey letter that in such a situation the bard might be kept in an inconspicuous position. But, on the contrary, Eachann Bacach is an aos-dàna and very much a master in his own right. It may be that where a family of filidh were very securely established for

1. Information from Rev. Wm. Matheson.
2. Campbell & Thomson op.cit., p.33. As Maclean wrote in 1702, Ó Muirgheasáin died c. 1660.
3. V. Maclean Sinclair The Maclean Bards, Vol. I, p.28 ff. A' Chnò Shamhna is printed on p.37 ff.
4. Maclean Sinclair Gaelic Bards, Vol. I, p.41.

several generations (as the Ó Muirgheasáins were), and where there was a very clear-cut division of artistic labour, so that the position of the filidh was never threatened, this might occur. We may note that in an even more complicated situation, Mary MacLeod functioned as a leading exponent of bardic craft; although as a woman, she "was precluded from undertaking the duties of bard and enjoying the emoluments of office ... "¹ Is it an accident that both these bards were attached to households in which the filidh was an Ó Muirgheasáin? Might there, for instance, be a contrast between the Ó Muirgheasáins and the MacVurichs, the latter a family who produced the vernacular Brosnachadh long before Neil MacVurich had invaded the bardic province? Doubtless we have to take individual genius into consideration. But, particularly in an aristocratic society, we have also to take birth into account. Eachann Bacach's family, according to tradition, were closely connected with the chief's family, probably supplying members of his léine-chneas, the comitatus: it is said that seven of his brothers were killed defending Eachann Ruadh nan Cath at Inverkeithing (where he himself received the wound that caused his lameness) and that one of them, Niall Buidhe, was an outstanding warrior.² For reasons unconnected with poetry, therefore, Eachann Bacach would have enjoyed a high social standing. Once again, is it an accident that bards like Iain Lom and Mary MacLeod were both connected with the

1. Matheson v. Appendix 3.

2. V. Maclean Sinclair MacLean Bards, Vol. I, p.28.

aristocracy: the former a scion of the house of Keppoch,¹ the latter a descendant of the fifth chief of the MacLeods and connected on the maternal side with Clan Ranald?²

Rev John Fraser?
 ?

If the Rev. John Maclean is thinking only of the situation in Mull, then we have to visualise Eachann Bacach acting as Ó Muirgheasáin's reacaire, as bards acted in Ireland.³ For what it is worth as a subjective impression, it must be said that to have the warrior poet cast in that role is difficult to accept. It is easier to believe that Maclean is thinking of other places and perhaps other times also. At all events, professional bards did work outside the stressed metres: Maclean's bard in the previous century produced, in An Duanag Ullamh, a highly accomplished poem in vernacular dàn. Just as with the stressed metres, such rhetorical assurance must have a considerable period of practice behind it. W. J. Watson dates the poem 1555-58; Professor Thomson would put it between 1516 and 1525;⁴ this tradition must begin in the early sixteenth century at least, or even before that. The vernacularisation of dàn could have begun in different ways (for instance, through aristocratic amateurs writing úgláchas) but

1. MacKenzie Orain Iain Luim, p.XXI.
2. Wm. Matheson in TGSI, Vol. 41, pp.11-25.
3. V. Knott, ibid.
4. Thomson Introduction to Gaelic Poetry, p.106. As the evidence is not yet published, I have hesitated to use this date in discussing the continuity of literacy in Chap. 4.

an obvious bridge between classical and vernacular Gaelic was provided by the bard in his capacity as reacaire reciting "what was compiled by the Poets"; as Maclean says. The metre of the Duanag Ullamh is a demotic snéadbhairdne, a metre found again in 1685 in a vernacular elegy for the Earl of Argyll by An t-Aos-dána MacShithich, presumably another professional bard.¹ MacBeathaig, the piper-bard whom we have already mentioned, uses this metre too. Also in the seventeenth century is an anonymous poem in snéadbhairdne in honour of Alasdair mac Colla.² Donnchadh Bàn uses it for his Rainn Gearradh-Arm, a panegyric to the chief of the Macintyres.³ I believe it is true to say that it was regarded as a metre of some dignity, or suitable for dignified subjects, by later composers.⁴ For instance the nineteenth century Skye Duan a' Chaisteil - celebrating the building of Armadale Castle - is in the same metre.

At all events, the evidence that bards did use this metre seems conclusive. We may hazard a guess that there is a

1. Eigg, p.318 ff.
2. Gillies, p.85 ff. Interestingly, there is extant a classical crosántacht, with verse in snéadbhairdne, in honour of Alasdair mac Colla. V. SGS, Vol. II, p.75 ff. Cf. the use of the same metre in crosántachta by Dáibhidh Ó Bruadair. V. Duanaire Dháibhidh Uí Bhruadair, ed. J. C. MacErlean, Part 1, pp.92-117; Part 3, pp.50-97. London, 1910-17.
3. MacLeod Macintyre, p.234 ff.
4. This is an impression gained by discussing such subjects with singers and seanchaidhean. Some of them were probably influenced by the fact that most of MacDonald's Birlinn is in this metre.

tradition stemming from the bard's office as reacaire as well as a tradition of stressed metres. Against that background, we must now ask how all this squares with the circumstantial description of orders of poets in the Garden-Aubrey letter.

First, it is to be noted that a bard of the calibre of Eachann Bacach, An t-Aos-dàna Mac Shithich, or the composer of An Duanag Ullamh, could hardly be described as "a little poet or rhymmer" whose ordinary duty is no more than to utter a Beannachadh Baird upon entering a house, i.e. "the Bard's salutation qch is onlie a short verse or rhym touching the praise of the master and mistris of the house."¹ This, apparently, was performed by the highest kind of bard. We must conclude, therefore, that the bards known in Strathspey differed in status from, say, Eachan Bacach, or even Mary MacLeod.

Now we have already observed that the description in the letter probably derives from both the divinity student and his ninety-seven year old father. Although, at the beginning of the account, 'bard' is defined precisely as a species of poet, the word is later used as a generic term:² "He thats extraordinarie sharp of these bards is named phili"; and, "These bards ...

1. Cf. Martin Martin's note on Beannachadh Baird. If anyone left a convivial company he was obliged before resuming his seat to make an apology for his absence in rhyme: this "is call'd Beanchiy Bard, which in their Language signifies the Poet's congratulating the Company." Martin, pp.106-7. Here, too, it was clearly a "short verse"; but the term may also have denoted longer compositions; e.g. Am Piobaire Dall's panegyric to Sir Alexander MacKenzie of Gairloch (Stewart, p.225 ff.) is entitled Beannachadh Baird in Sàr-Obair, p.96.
2. Just as in Ireland Spenser knows only 'Bards'. V. Knott ibid.

were thus ranked, the first were termed philies ... the second degree ... Skealichin or Sheanachin", etc. This detailed break-down refers to 'former times', though whether these lay within the aged father's memory or not is not mentioned. It is also said that "there were likewise 9 or 10 sometimes 11 or 12 women to travel together, who as they came to anie house two & two together sang one of those songs these philies had made, they had ordinarlie a violer with them who played on his fiddle as they sang, when they had done singing, then they danced, these were named avranich, i.e. singers".¹

The specific grades that are detailed seem acceptable enough for 'former times', with the exception of this band of women singers and dancers, apparently singing a dán díreach in classical Gaelic to the accompaniment of a fiddle. There is an element of the bizarre about it. The impression we get is that the situation in the chief's hall, in which the reacaire recites the poem to the accompaniment of the harp, is here reproduced at a vulgar level.

One possibility is that the word phili here actually denotes not a classical but a vernacular poet, and that the term survived to mean, in this context, no more than the highest grade of bard - somewhat akin, indeed, to the survival (with a shift in denotation) of the term aos-dána, or even the survival of file into modern Irish as the only colloquial word for poet. We simply lack the evidence to draw a firm conclusion. It may

1. V. W. J. Watson in SVDL, p.66 ff. In the poem Mór an feidhm freagairt na bhfaighdheach women are mentioned; v. pp.70-73.

be relevant, however, to point out that the oral tradition of the last hundred years or more distinguished between bards in general and A' Chliar Sheanchain; the latter being regarded as little more than a degenerate rabble of inferior rhymsters, 'Smart Alecks', and satirists.¹ If the philies were composers of classical dán, the statement "some made panagyrics onlie, others made onlie satyrs" is curious. In oral tradition the most famous specialist in satire is Aonghus nan Aoir, to whose name were doubtless attached numerous stray satirical verses, just as prophecies were attached to the name of Coinneach Odhar. In Skye, Aonghus nan Aoir was sometimes regarded as merely a member of A' Chliar Sheanchain. The verses ascribed to him in MacNicol are in vernacular Gaelic.² It is interesting to note

1. The tradition of the burdensomeness of the poet-bards is so ancient in Gaelic tradition that we ought not, perhaps, to base too much on this; nevertheless, modern oral tradition may reflect a genuine division. In the 1579 enactment of the Scots Parliament against "bairdis or utheris siclike rynnaris about", those who have a fixed abode are exempted. (V. Acts of the Parliament of Scotland, Vol. III, p.139). For popular attitudes to A' Chliar Sheanchain, v. W. J. Watson in Celtic Review, Vol. IV, pp.80-88. v. Matheson Blind Harper, pp.XLII-XLIII for the Harper's unfavourable attitude to them. In Skye and Uist an older generation used commonly phrases such as Cho leisg/ladarna/lionmhor ris a' Chléir Sheanchain; Iad 'nan Cléir Sheanchain m'an teine. "Those who proponed enigmaes & othere difficult questions" suits the traditional descriptions admirably.
2. V. TGSI, Vol. 26, pp.458-466. V. also Highland Monthly, Vol. II, pp.432-3. In the oral tradition of the writer's family in Skye, Aonghus nan Aoir had the appellation of Bard Bhilidh, the significance of which was not known to my informants. It is obscure to me.

that writing contemporaneously with Garden's student, Martin Martin notes that the filidh "furnish such a Stile ... as is understood by very few;"¹ whereas there is no hint of any such barrier in the account from Strathspey.

This review of the evidence for the status and function of bards succeeds only in showing that 'the bard' has no single, fixed role; rather, the role varies according to historical and cultural circumstances. But what we can claim is that his contribution to the development of a distinctive vernacular tradition of Scottish Gaelic poetry is crucial. Moreover, we can distinguish his use of dàn as a tradition that comes to him from the filidh; and now, with the establishment of the category of òran as "a musical tradition that is international",² we can distinguish his use of that minstrel tradition also. This means that we can isolate the non-symmetrical 'strophic' metres as the essential tradition of the professional bard, and that other types of versification are to be regarded as contingent.

Bards were sometimes hereditary, though not necessarily so.³ Where they were not, their social status might have been

1. Martin, p.116.
2. Matheson. V. Appendix 3.
3. V. supra, Hugh MacDonald's remarks about the Clann MhicGille Riabhaich and the MacRuaris. On Eachann Bacach's connection with the cùirt of the Macleans, Rev. Wm. Matheson observes: "This might mean that his father held some position there, though it would be rash to suppose that he too was a bard. Indeed, the little evidence there is suggests that one further difference between the bard and the filidh was that, while the office of filidh was hereditary, that of the bard was not." Personal communication.

all the higher for other reasons, such as aristocratic descent or traditional membership of their family in the luchd-taighè. Obviously the closer their relationship to the chief and the fine, the stronger were their reasons for acting as spokesmen in justification of that society. But whatever position they occupied, either in the poetic hierarchy or in society in general, the bardic role, would seem, on the evidence, to involve at all times an obligatory element of panegyric. From one point of view this can properly be regarded as a limitation. It circumscribes sensibility and institutionalises poetry. But from another point of view it is an advantage. The problem of defining the essence of the poetry of any given people is inherently very difficult; nor is it necessarily any the less so in a society with a primitive technology, where the essential tradition may be religious, and obscure in its workings - as anthropologists have often found. Panegyric, by definition, must meet the customary expectations of society. Where the panegyrists are themselves closely bound into the social structure, either through membership of the dominant group or through a development of society which forces different classes into a close relationship with each other (as we suggested happened with the disappearance of a serf class, probably under the pressure of external events) then we have a concentrated expression of the fundamental values of that society available for analysis. The element of flattery is of course unavoidable, but it is beside the point that an individual's actions may belie his society's highest expectations.

This "bardic tradition" permeates Gaelic society, diversifying itself in complex modes. In that process, its origin in a bard-to-patron relationship is never entirely lost to view. But having once established what the professional offices entailed, MacNicol's gifted amateurs (to return to the observation with which this chapter opened) are as relevant to our enquiry as those "employed in (the) professions."

APPENDIX 3.

Extract from Letter to John Aubrey from James Garden, 1693.

A Bard in common Irish signifies a little poet or a rhymer, they use to travel thorow countries and coming into ane house, salute with a rhyrn called in Irish Beanacha p baird, i.e. the Bard's salutation qch is onlie a short verse or rhyrn touching the praise of the master and mistris of the house. The inferior sort of them are counted amongst the beggers and the rhyrn wherewith they salute each house is called Tdaan ni, nu lak i.e. a verse the conclusion qrof asks a little meal as wages. Tdaan signific- ing a verse and u lak a handful or such little quantitie of meal. This inferior sort, ortherwise called beggers makes few or no verses or rhymys of their own, but onlie makes use of such as hath been composed by others, and when they narrate any of these, it is called Dt a an buailt, which is the same as the Latin Chrambes decocta Irished. He thats extraordinarie sharp of these bards is named phili, i.e. ane excellent poet, these frequent onlie the company of persons of qualitie & each of them hes some particular person whom he owns his master. When anie of these travels abroad & comes to a house he tells whose phili he is & then is welcomed & treated according to the qualitie of his master. When his master dyes he makes ane epitaph or a song to his praise called Maru Rhiin i.e. lines or rhymys upon the defunct. These bards in former times used to travel in companies, sometimes 40, 50, 60 persons between men, wives & childrene, and they were thus ranked, the first were termed philies, i.e. poets, & they were divided thus - some made panagyricks onlie, others made onlie satyrs. The second degree consisted of those called Skealichin or Sheanachin, i.e., narrators of antiquitie and old historie especialie geneologies of great persons & families, Skealich or

Sheanachi properlie signifieing ane historian. The third order contained [those] named Kreahkirin, i.e. such as could discourse, on anie short & transient subject, told newes and such modern things Kreahkish, properlie signifieing anie discourse, & the 4. consisted of those named Kheahkirin, i.e. such as proponed enigmas & othere difficult questions Kheahkir, intimating one that delights to invade others with subtilities & ambiguous questions. The whol caball was called Chlearheanachi, i.e. a companie of historians "chlear" from Klear, a companie, & heanachi from Sheanachis ane historie. These haunted onlie great mens' houses, & comeing near anie town, sent one of their sharpest to salute the house with a new made rhym in praise of the familie, whereupon there quarters were assigned & provision sent them & dureing there abod (which would sometimes be 2 or 3 moneths) one or two of them came in each night to the famalie to make good companie by telling stories makeing rhymes & such drolleries, the day they were to remove, the Laird of the place either came to there quarters or els called them to some other room, where being gathered & silence commanded the sharpest phili amongst them started up & repeated such verses & lines as they had composed since they came there touching the praise of the Laird & ladie of the place, there descent, heroick acts & valiant deeds of there predecessors &c. He that thus rose up & narrated was termed here Skolli dt aan, i.e. their best scholer & quickest composer of verses, & so haveing ended they receaved wages according to the Laird's degree & qualitie & then marcht.

There were likewise 9 or 10 sometimes 11 or 12 women to travel together, who as they came to anie house two & two together sang one of those songs these philies had made, they had ordinarlie a

violer with them who played on his fiddle as they sang, when they had done singing, then they danced, these were named avranich, i.e. singers.

Extract from Note on Airs and Metres

from Rev. Wm. Matheson's The Blind Harper, pp.149-152.

There are three types of metre in Scottish Gaelic verse that have significant associations with the poets, bards and musicians of former times. These formed a professional order known collectively as cliar or dàmh, many of whose members held office in the households of the Gaelic aristocracy. Within this order there was a hierarchy, status in which had a bearing on the type of metre used. The highest position, socially and economically, belonged to the filidh (Ir. file) in virtue of his long and arduous training in the poetic schools. Apart from his other accomplishments, the mere ability to read and write put him in a class by himself. His language derived from the written rather than from the spoken word, a literary language (becoming rather archaic in relation to changing usage) which was common to the educated classes of society in Scotland and Ireland. Metrically, his medium was syllabic verse or dàn (Ir. dán), in which, within a fixed number of syllables to the phrase, stress varied in accordance with variations of speech rhythm. In its musical aspect, dàn was a chant sung in free rhythm with a constant shifting of the musical accent as determined by variations in the number and position of stresses. This chanting could be accompanied on the harp,

but what the nature of the accompaniment was there is now no means of knowing. In the Blind Harper's time this particular tradition had a representative at Dunvegan in the person of Donnchadh Ó Muirgheasáin.

One of the significant differences between the Scottish and Irish traditions is that, whereas in Ireland the bard disappeared from view at an early date, in Scotland he survived and indeed more than held his own vis-à-vis the filidh. This is why it is only in Scottish Gaelic that a considerable quantity of the type of verse composed by the bards is extant. The subject matter is eulogy and elegy, the language is the vernacular, and the metre stressed, with a non-symmetrical stanza that may vary in length from one stanza to the next, this last clearly an archaic feature. This type of metre has sometimes been described, rather misleadingly, as strophic, but in fact there is no ready-made term for it in English, and if there was one in Gaelic it has either been forgotten or has lost its significance as a technical term.

Some of the Scottish Gaelic chiefs are known to have maintained a bard as well as a filidh, but many more seem to have been content with a bard alone. It is possible, but perhaps not very likely, that in some establishments there was a filidh but no bard. This possibility is of some relevance to the situation at Dunvegan in the Blind Harper's time. As already shown, the office of filidh was held by Donnchadh Ó Muirgheasáin. Of a bard there is not a trace, either in the estate records or in the form of encomiastic verse ascribed to him. But it would be unsafe to generalise from this one instance. There was, in fact, a most gifted representative of the bardic tradition composing eulogies and elegies to the MacLeods at the time in question. This was

Mary MacLeod (Màiri nighean Alasdair Ruaidh). As a woman, Mary MacLeod was precluded from undertaking the duties of bard and enjoying the emoluments of office. But the evidence suggests that by reason of her output of eulogy and elegy she was considered to have arrogated the role of bard to herself, and to have done so despite opposition from chief and clan. (No doubt this is the background to the story of her so-called exile.) It is notable that she did not compose a eulogy of the Blind Harper's patron Iain Breac, nor an elegy when he died; and this may have been because she knew that he would have disapproved. On the other hand, the fact that Sir Norman MacLeod of Berneray figures so prominently in her verse may be due in part to his having shown himself more tolerant of her deviation from accepted social convention.....

The Blind Harper belonged to yet another tradition, distinguished from that of bard and filidh by its own metrical and musical conventions. As might be expected, it was a tradition in which more attention was focussed in performance on the music to which verse was sung; and the technical term for verse so performed was in fact "song" - in Gaelic amhran or òran. This is in stressed metre, and is distinguished from bardic verse by its symmetry, with a stanza consisting usually, though not always, of four phrases (but often written as eight lines). There is a corresponding symmetry in the music, the melody (sometimes compared in this respect to an arch) usually rising after the beginning and falling again towards the end; and adding up typically to eight bars or some larger multiple of four. Structurally, the amhran air is of the tectonic type, built up as a pattern of

phrases, for example, two phrases A and B, arranged in the form AABA. Such a pattern contributes to a sense of measure in the music, though traditional singers often handle the measure with considerable rhythmic freedom.

The type of air just described is found, not only in Gaelic Scotland and Ireland, but also in Lowland Scotland, England, and on the continent of Europe. Furthermore, variants of individual airs can also be very widely distributed. Consideration of the origins of amhran is not to the present purpose; but obviously there can be no adequate study of the question which does not take these facts into account. In short, amhran belongs to a musical tradition that is international. It has historical affinities with the mediaeval chanson, and in Gaelic there may have been a time when it was considered suitable only for the more personal and informal themes of life, in particular the theme of love. By the Blind Harper's day, however, the traditional system of poetry and music was in decay; the conventions distinguishing one tradition from another were no longer so strictly observed; and this may be why he was free to use amhran for what were considered to be the poet's greatest and most solemn themes, namely, eulogy and elegy.

The Bardic Tradition and its Conventions

We owe to W.J. Watson the first detailed account of Scottish Gaelic metrics.¹ The analysis is synchronic and diachronic. Diachronically, Watson makes two major divisions: metres that he derives from syllabic verse and metres of 'non-classic origin.' Synchronically, he divides his first category into Dàn dìreach and what he calls 'Strophic Measures', the latter defined thus: "In it we have a series of similarly constructed lines (or "phrases") ended off by a shorter line of different structure."² This definition allows him to group together, e.g. the following.

1. An Oran Brathann:

Tha sealladh aig mo shùilean
Thug eallach dhìom is dùiseal,
'S tha m'aire nis air sùgradh
Le cùirteir nam flath.

which he compares (rightly) with this from the Book of Leinster:

Cid Domnall na Carpre
na Níamán án airgne
gid iat lucht na bairddne
rot fíat-su ~~gid~~ acht.³

1. Bardachd Ghàidhlig, Introduction, pp.XXXVI-LXIV.
2. ibid, p.XLVI.
3. ibid, p.XLVIII. For this reading v. The Book of Leinster, ed. R. I. Best and M.A. O'Brien, vol. 2 p. 335 (ll. 10128-10131).

2. Caismeachd Ailean nan Sop:

Is mithich dhùinne, mar bhun ùmhlachd,
dàn bùrdain a chasgairt dhuit:

A fhleasgaich bhrìoghmhoir fhliuchas pìosan
le d'dhibh phrìseil neartmhoraich.¹

3. Mary MacLeod's song:

Ri fuaim an taibh,

'S uaigneach mo ghean,

Bha mi uair nach b'e sean m' àbhaist.²

To anyone who knows the language, the movement of these three examples is so very different that their inclusion in one category can only be explained by too rigorous an application of an abstract metrical rule.³ It is the last quotation, from Mary MacLeod, that exemplifies the asymmetrical bardic metre. The essential form is a repeated line of two stresses, followed by a line of three stresses. The asymmetry is noted by Watson: "In certain poems the rhyming phrases of the strophe are repeated six times or more ... (In) Thriall bhur bunadh gu Phárao ... the number of phrases varies between five and eight - if the text is sound⁴ ... (In) A mhic an fhir ruaidh ... the measure

1. ibid, p. XLVII. V. further p. 273, infra.

2. ibid, p. LII.

3. In this application, Watson appears to get into some confusion, e.g. by introducing cumha as a sub-category into his 'Strophic Measures', although cumha is also one of the categories of his 'Measures of Non-classic Origin.' Ibid, p. LIV.

4. ibid, p. LIII-LIV.

changes in course of the poem.¹ In other words, it is noticeable in the scansion of the text on the written page.

Watson derived these strophic metres² from the 'older' syllabic poetry. He observes: "They lent themselves readily to rhythm, and were probably the first of the syllabic metres to be adapted to stress. With us, these measures are used chiefly in labour songs ... In several cases ... the connection between these metres and the old syllabic verse is clear; in others it is not traceable directly, partly, no doubt, because the old strophic measures have not been fully recorded, partly because the modern measures, once they came into vogue, developed independently."³ He sees the influence of labour songs in specific features: "The imperfect assonance which is so common at the beginning of strophic poems, reflects their vogue as labour poems; the halting rhythm indicates the initial stiffness of the quern, oars, etc."⁴

This is mere assumption. It is true, however, that a number of strophic poems are called iorram in the collections,⁵ but this refers to the form⁶, and though the form may indeed

1. ibid, p.LI-LII.

2. We shall use 'strophic' from now on specifically to denote the asymmetrical metres. Watson derives his whole category of 'Strophic Measures' from syllabic verse.

3. ibid, p.XLVI.

4. ibid, p.LIV.

5. And Alexander MacDonald uses a strophic metre for the oar-song (Iurram) in the Birlinn. Eigg, pp.150-152.

6. E.g. Not all of Iain Lom's poems called Iorram have to do with ships.

have been used for an oar-song, amongst other purposes, the alterations in rhythm are not necessarily derived from that.

The first writer to connect the strophic metres with another tradition of older poetry was Donald T. Mackintosh, who, noting the semantic range of iorram, argues that "The root idea underlying iorram (iomar) seems to be 'rhythm'. One of its earliest significations probably was the native accentual poetry which preceded the Bardic syllabic metres."¹

If this is the origin of our strophics, we have to allow for considerable development and modification of rosc through the centuries, which is only what we might expect, under the influence of other traditions.² One of these developments would be the introduction of rhyme. In the simplest and most popular form of strophic metre, viz., two lines each of two stresses, followed by a line of three stresses, the last ending with a monosyllable or dissyllable, the form may have been regularised under the influence of one or more forms of òran.³ A separate and contrasting line of development may perhaps be seen in the Fàth Fìth collected by Alexander Carmichael.⁴ If this phrase is indeed a corruption of Faeth Fiada (and the associated beliefs seem to support the connection⁵) we might expect that the metrical structure of the charm would have some connection with rosc also. It consists of a succession of double stressed lines: a form attested in other charms; but in the manner of modern Irish rosc⁶, the

1. SGS, Vol.VI, pp.24-26.

2. v. SGS, Vol.XI, pp.22-23 and SS Vol.XII, ^{p.34} for some other remarks on this. V. also P. Mac Cana in Celtica Vol.7, pp.65ff.

3. v. SGS, *ibid*, pp.16-17. This, however, is a question that only musicologists can answer, and it awaits investigation.

4. Carmina Gadelica, Vol.II, pp.22-25.

5. v. MWHT, Vol.I, p.460, and references. v. also RIA Contrib. s.v. raid and féth.

6. e.g. Caoine ar Mhac Fíinín Duibh in Éigse Vol.XIII, pp.221-224.

strophe is not rounded off by a longer line. There are instances of this longer line in some charms: usually these appear irregularly,¹ but some examples are remarkably like the strophic metre of songs in its simplest form.² But part of the Old Irish Faeth Fiada, the Lorica of St. Patrick, is more reminiscent of a highly developed strophic metre, such as Eachann Bacach uses in A' Chnò Shamhna, e.g.

fri tinchetla saíbfháthe
 fri dubrechtu gentliuchtae
 fri saíbrechtu heretecdae
 fri himchellacht nidlachtae
 fri brichtu ban agus gobann agus druad.³

and

Is mór pudhar an ràith-sa,
 Is trom an dubhadh-sa dh'fhàs oirnn;
 Gura cumhang leinn t'fhardach,
 An ciste-luighe nan clàran,
 Is fhada as cuimhne leinn càradh nam bòrd.⁴

If there is in reality any connection between strophic metres and the structure of some charms, part of the explanation may lie in the association of bards with different levels of society. Some of the original bardic heritage might thus pass into the religious lore of the common people, where it survived on a popular periphery, retaining some of the structural irregular-

1. v. e.g. Carmina Gadelica, Vol. I, pp. 2; 26; 70; 104; 179.

2. E.g. ibid, pp. 212-215.

3. v. K. Mulchrone Bethu Phátraic, Vol. I, p. 158. For this reading v. W. Stokes and J. Strachan Thesaurus Palaeohibernicus, Vol. II, p. 357.

4. Text as in Watson Bardachd Ghàidhlig, p. 205.

ities of early rosc, because this area of verse lay largely outside the sphere of influence of song.¹

In the collections there are several thousand lines of poetry in strophic metre. It is obviously impracticable, therefore, to analyse the entire corpus. The selection that is dealt with here is not random: after all the extant texts had been studied, those which seemed to display normative features were marked, as were those that appeared to deviate from the norm; and on that principle the selection was made.

We may begin with one of the earliest dateable texts. This is a poem on the Rout of Glen Fruin, in 1603,² from the Maclagan MSS.³ The poem is anonymous but clearly by a MacGregor bard. It opens with a complaint about his state:

Tha mo chiabhan air glas'adh,
 Tha mo ghruaidhean air seacadh,
 Tha fiabhrus is fadachd 'gam leòn.

This is explained by his desolation concerning the fine to whom all poets would repair and who had fed him while he was still a little boy. He rounds this off with a striking image:

1. Such charms as have survived are not sung. In the writer's family, charms were recited, not sung, as least as far back as the eighteenth century. It is possible, however, that originally they were intoned. A churning charm like Am Maistreadh a rinn Moire is still chanted.
2. v. Gregory History, pp.303-304. The battle was fought between the MacGregors and the Colquhouns, the latter supported by the burghers of Dumbarton, luchd nan ad dubha, and luchd chleòc.
3. Maclagan MS 236. It is printed in SGS, Vol.VIII, p.17. I have normalised the orthography in the quotations.

B'iad m'airm iad, b'iad m'aodach,

B'iad mo chuilibheire caol iad,

B'iad mo bhoghannan daor air dheagh neòil.

Then there comes the only direct address to the patron; the bard had been present at the battle:

An robh do bhràithrean is t'athair

Far an d'fhàg iad 'nan laigheluchd chleòc

The next strophe addresses the fine again: when the bows of yew were bared and they raised the battle cry of Bad giuthas - then luchd nan ad dubha fell wounded. The poem ends with a reference to the surge of battle as the MacGregors drove their enemies through Glen Fruin: maidhm ...

Aig mo ghaoil 's aig mo dhìslibh

It ends with a compliment to the victorious warriors:

'S gun eagal gun umhail gun leòn.

This is a short composition in the simplest form of the metre, yet it has immense vitality and panache; indeed, because of its simplicity, combined with perfect ease of expression, it produces a wonderfully lyrical effect. The fact that it is not merely the patron who is addressed, but that the bard is an active participant in the social group and claims at least to have been a spectator of the battle, all combine to give an impression of its being something much more than a mere praise-poem in celebration of a violent massacre. Even if the bard is a professional, following the mandatory conventions of panegyric, these conventions themselves are directed to express not merely the bonds of economic obligation, but the far deeper emotional bonds of loyalty. In general terms, this is true, indeed, of all the vernacular bardic poetry; and it is salutary to be reminded of it at

the start, in view of the preconceptions we might hold concerning the limitations of 'panegyric'.

The next poem is a MacGregor composition also: Soighdean Ghlinn Liobhunn.¹ Like the previous poem, it is anonymous. It, too, is in three lined strophes, but ends the stanza on a trisyllabic rhyming phrase. That and changes of movement, from the relatively plangent rhythm with which it opens:

A Mhic an Fhir Ruaidh

to e.g. Coin air iallaibh

along with subtle alterations in vowel length and quality, give it much greater metrical variety. In imagery it is considerably more developed.

The poem opens with a direct address to the great man, who has fallen in battle and bereft him. The style of address, A Mhic an Fhir Ruaidh is simultaneously honorific and intimate. After the patron's valour and the bard's loss are mentioned in two lines, there follows a series of stanzas in which the dead man's prowess as a hunter and warrior are delineated. In the frith his well proven culverin; his fierce hounds; his mighty pikes; his bows and arrows, expertly fashioned with Irish silk thread, Galway wax, etc., by the finest craftsman; in meeting his enemies he would never hesitate or yield. He is then addressed with the title of Triath na Sròine,² and the next series deals with his household, its magnificence and hospital-

1. Gillies, p.83 ff. The title is as given there. v. also Watson Bardachd, p.239 ff. Watson, ibid, p.332, considers it to belong probably to 1600-1625.
2. Watson ibid, p.332. "MacGregor of Glenstrae, whose residence was at Stronmilchon ..."

ity, including his generosity to poets. Ale and wine are being quaffed, tables played, ladies are laden with jewels; the series ends:

A bhile a h-Eirinn,
 Sin ort sgeula :
 Thig cóig ceud a shealltainn ort.

The poem is rounded off with three stanzas in which the personal relationship is implied in one brief, wistful phrase:

An t-òg as deis' thu
 Dh'fhalbh mu fheasgar -
 Ghabh mi cead 'san anmoch dhiot.

The generosity of this young man who is the best of the kinsfolk (he is spoken of as if he were still alive) is alluded to once more; then the bard regrets that he had not been with him,

Dol fo sparradh Ghallbhodach.

The poem, then, is a series of self-contained vignettes, expressed with extraordinary economy and vividness. This is a highly developed art in which no unnecessary word is used nor one single word wasted. The vignettes are grouped in sequences, but within the sequence transposition of strophes would be possible without the essential communication being impaired. The return to the subject's generosity in the penultimate strophe gives a hint of another kind of rhetorical flexibility, which allows the bard to mingle these conventional images or topics¹ in overlapping series.

The two MacGregor poems are demonstrably similar in their

1. 'Topic(al)' is used here and elsewhere simply as a synonym for 'commonplace'.

clan setting, in the bard's complaint, the references to weapons and heroism, and the implication that the author was, or could be, involved in battle. But the contrasts between them are more obvious. Saighdean Ghlinn Liobhann is a much more detached and formal composition, and its focus is more on one individual and his household; the focus of the poem on Glen Fruin shows loyalty to one individual but it is a sense of involvement in the whole fine which is dominant. There is more direct passion in the Glen Fruin poem; greater elegance and subtlety of craft in the poem from Glen Lyon.

Both poems, however, were composed in connection with loss in battle, although the Rout of Glen Fruin was in fact a victory for the MacGregors. In each case we sense some threat to the author's circumstances. While the Glen Fruin poem, in its opening image, and in the cri de coeur of B'iad m'airm iad, etc., certainly expresses grief, neither poem is a true elegy; it would seem rather as if the poets, especially the author of Saighdean Ghlinn Liobhann, were less concerned with direct personal feelings about the man or men who fell than with the social order to which they all belonged. Yet there is enough personal feeling in these particular cases to make us think that the poet is constrained to speak this way because this is the proper convention to follow. Individual emotion must not obtrude. We also feel that the poems are not so much a lament for the passing of this style of life (not "the end of the world") as devices for reinforcing it by a recital of its virtues: almost as if the authors might have felt that this bardic rehearsal would help to avert the threat. Perhaps the very fact that the subject is spoken of as if still alive emerges

from a desire to sustain morale. These speculations may be facile, but they are not irrelevant in considering the total picture that the bardic poetry presents.

It is noticeable that neither poem is concerned with other clans and that both of them refer to the Lowland enemy.

In fact, between them these two early seventeenth century compositions touch on a considerable number of rhetorical topics which we shall see in slightly different form in other poems. It is possible that in them we have examples of the professional bard's art, representative of a stage in the development of this tradition before it became greatly involved in celebrating inter-clan relationships as well, and before it had taken over and assimilated the imagery of dán díreach to the extent that we find it in Mary MacLeod. Or perhaps we should assume that these poems were selected because they are not representative, not at any rate average products, but, particularly Saighdean Ghlinn Liobhann, outstanding examples from that stage of development. As the authors' names have not been transmitted, we can hardly argue that it was aristocratic birth that made the bards eligible for a place in the collections.

There are some resemblances in the quality of imagery in the vignettes of Saighdean Ghlinn Liobhann and the quality of imagery that we find throughout this bardic poetry. By quality here is meant clarity and lucidity, but there is specifically an emphasis on tactile and auditory images (giving an exquisite sense of surface, movement, and outline) with less emphasis on purely visual realisation. For instance, it is often sufficient to talk simply of iubhar where in a given òran we might find

Bogha dhe'n iubhar agus rudhadh na gréin' ann

But it is only a tendency. There are numerous examples of description, of personal beauty, for instance, or of the tableware of gold and silver, where the flash of light and colour is arresting. In Iain Lom's description of the host moving on a career of slaying and burning across the lands of Argyll:

Gum bi'n t-sreath so dol seachad
 Air na gràineagan glasa,
 'S fiamh fionn an òir laiste 'nan déidh.¹

this is used to great effect. We have one descriptive touch of this visual imagery in the MacGregor poem. The arrow-heads are:

Cinn bhreac sgiathach
 Air dhath dialtaig

Whether we should try to account for the discrepancy between the topical range of this poem and that of the poetry of Mary MacLeod and others by regarding it as a matter of different stages of development is difficult to say without more evidence. It is possible that the three lined strophic poems tended towards a greater simplicity, or a more limited range, of imagery also. Other early three lined strophic poems such as the Cumha composed to Murdoch MacRae of Inverinate, in 1620, by Am Bard Mac Mhurchaidh Mhic Iain Ruaidh² or the Cumha composed to Iain Ruadh MacDhubhghaill in Lewis by his mother in the early seventeenth century³, have affinities with Saighdean Ghlinn Liobhann in

1. MacKenzie Orain Iain Luim, p.42. From now referred to as Iain Lom.
2. Maclean Sinclair Gaelic Bards, Vol.I, p. 25 ff.
3. ibid, p.27 ff.

that the range of imagery is fairly restricted. But this limitation would not apply, at least to the same extent, to the three lined strophic poems of Iain Lom. We are probably safe in saying that the simplest form did have its own simpler conventions of rhetoric from the beginning¹, but the fact that it was structurally simple and therefore a more widely used form had its effect also; a point to which we shall return later.

It is noteworthy that the bards of the MacGregor poems do not elaborate a number of topics which classical Gaelic poets use prominently, such as personal beauty or wisdom in council. J.C. Watson has observed how much the "spirit and atmosphere of Mary MacLeod's panegyric is on the whole that of the classic poetry";² while the conventions in which the MacGregor bards and Mary worked are fundamentally the same, the greater elaborateness of the latter's verse may be explained by her closer contact with the filidh. In the light of these remarks, we must now consider some of her poems.³

Excluding the choral songs ascribed to Mary MacLeod, there are twelve compositions printed by Watson of which eight are in strophic metre. These may be taken seriatim: separate stanzas are indicated by full stops; but if the topic runs over into two or more stanzas these are treated as one.

Marbhrann do Fhear na Comraich. Six lined strophes.

1. As a matter of craftsmanship, the simpler the form the more difficult it is to build up a theme and sustain it.
2. Watson Mary MacLeod, pp.XXI-XXVI.
3. They are taken in the order in which they appear in Watson's edition.

The poetess is melted with grief; a retrospect to the subject sitting at the board. Personal beauty; descent; fair of speech. Unblemished stock; royal descent. Address by name and territory; swords and ships possessed by kin. Personal beauty. Scion of apple-tree; reference to place-name; horseman; literacy. End of gladness of poetess; physician helpless. Tree has fallen; grain has showered to earth; folk unprotected. Company assembles, not for wedding; subject in satin shroud. Horseman; leader of host. No music for subject; coffin; men bereft of music and tables. Folk like bees robbed of honey.

An Talla am bu ghnàth le MacLeoid. Three lined strophes.

No mirth or music for poetess in hall. Retrospect to drinking in hall. Melancholy change. Address by name; temperate speech. Hunting. Bowman. Dress. Arrows and skill with bow. Farewell to subject. Hospitality. Tables and harp. Tales of Fiann and of hunting told in hall.

Marbhrann do Iain Garbh. Irregular strophes: 5 to 8 lines.

The poetess' anguish; personal beauty and valour of subject who will never be seen in (Raasay) territory. Hunter; generosity. Valour; personal beauty; seamanship. Hunter and gun. Territory; honorific address by patronymic. Swordsman. Bowman. Bereavement of wife and brother. Tree kenning.

Crònan an Taibh. Three lined strophes.

Poetess' depression. Retrospect to hall and piping. Fickleness of world (3 vv.) Hall of wine-cups and hospitality. Haunt of poets. Personal beauty. Descent. Learning. Harp. Tree kenning. Dignity of kin; loyalty to king. Descent. Praise of wife. Address to wife.

An Cronan. Irregular strophes : 5 to 7 lines.

Message of joy makes poetess compose. Extended expression of happiness. Generosity to poets and others. Giver of drink in gold and silver vessels. Sapling; generous by heredity. Mildness towards tenantry. Generosity to poets; warrior. Exhortation to follow hereditary virtues: mildness, liberality, valour, tenacity in pursuit. Descent; reference to ships; loyalty to king. Allies.

Do Mhac Dhomhnaill. Irregular strophes : 5 to 7 lines.

The poetess has found and will keep this jewel, the subject. Treasure is not silver, etc. but wise knight; honorific address. My little copse, ship, theme of many a story. Apple-tree. Household: wax candles; wine. Literacy; silk-clad girls in household. Allies. Right to half Scotland.

Marbhrann do Shir Tormod. Irregular strophes : 5 to 8 lines.

Poetess sleepless, bereft of music, in court where she used to listen to recital of tales. Subject in coffin; who was generous; theme of poets and minstrels of Ireland. Sweetness of speech; beauty; liberality. Poetess' gladness gone. Descent; subject prized territory, personal beauty, valour, mastery without injustice. Wisdom in dispensing justice. Coffin. Horseman; bears sword. Conviviality. Splendid dwelling. Descent. Ally. Bereavement of dependents. Compliment to wife. Storm breaks ship. Personal relationship of poetess to subject.

Cumha do Shir Tormod. 3 lines strophes.

Poetess weeps this night; cannot rest. She is hopeless and joyless. She continuously thinks of subject. Kin: ships, generosity, music. She thinks of him always, in vain. Coffin

and shroud. Personal beauty. Successor grieved: has lost rudder, choicest of flock, best of pilots. Hunter; loyal to king. Kin in gloom. Warrior. Household in gloom where feasting was frequent.

It is perfectly clear from these lists of topics that all these poems consist of complicated permutations of the same commonplaces. It is also clear that they do not follow any particular order: the poetess will reintroduce the subject's descent, generosity, especially to men of art, personal beauty, etc., several times, producing 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. For instance, a word such as Siol will link itself with the name of a man, of a patronymic, of a kin; this in turn leads the mind on to epithets such as nan long, nam bratach, na féile, nan corn 's nam pios, etc. All these evoke different sets of new images interlocking with each other. Once these conventions were established, even an oblique reference would be intelligible in the very same terms. The commonplaces work thus for anyone who through song has known the rhetoric from childhood; they work with a similar effect upon the imagination of a critic who does no more than familiarise himself with the written texts; and we can take it for granted that the audience in the chief's hall was able to respond, though not, of course, necessarily in this self-conscious analytic manner, to all the nuances of each statement. What the bards have produced here is therefore a coherent system of rhetoric of great resonance and evocative power. Nor is it designed to be merely an enclosed universe of poetic discourse.

Every commonplace of the system focuses upon a particular facet of aristocratic life, including relationships to those who provide both imaginative (or spiritual) and economic support for the aristocracy.

Although the commonplaces do not necessarily run in un-repeated sequences, or always appear in the vignette forms of Saighdean Ghlinn Liobhann, for instance, a certain amount of grouping of like with like is inevitable. For example, an evocation of the warrior with his bow is likely to be followed by a description of other weapons. But references to battle or leadership may touch on these images, fully developed or merely hinted at, in subsequent verses. In this manner, the strophes seem to run before the mind's eye like waves, each reflecting light and colour from those that have passed and those that are yet to come.

There appears, however, to be one set convention. In elegy, the poet's grief or the wretchedness of his state invariably opens the poem. Although they are not truly personal elegies, the two MacGregor poems have this, and it is very obvious in Mary's poetry. There then follows a flash-back to the state which death has altered, frequently expressed in an image which evokes a sense of the solidarity of the company to which the bard and patron belonged, and of their festivities. In Saighdean Ghlinn Liobhann, the direct contrast is with the warrior-hunter's life, not with the more elegant aspect of life in the chief's hall; it is markedly otherwise in Mary's poetry, and this no doubt reflects the reality of the respective situations. But it is also a matter of choice of convention, and the contrast may be drawn in abrupt lines or suggested subtly by a

reference to the news of death coming while the poet was involved in the customary festivities.

Six of Mary MacLeod's strophic poems are elegies, two are addresses to living clan chiefs: An Crònán, composed when she heard that news of Norman MacLeod's death was false; and Do Mhac Dhomhnaill, composed to Domhnall Gorm Og of Sleat. The eulogies, as a glance at the tabulated commonplaces will show, display precisely the same kind of imagery; the tone and atmosphere are different, naturally, and that is determined immediately by the opening of each:

An naidheachd so an dé
Aighearach è ...

and:

Tha ulaidh orm an uamharrachd,
Mo ghibhte phrìseil uasal thu,
Mo leug bu lìonmhor buadhan thu ...

These opening conventions of eulogy of the living are as vividly optimistic as elegiac openings are pessimistic: the dearth of drink, music, gaiety, in the latter are opposed by references to abundance of them in the former. In the Crònán, for instance, the phrase Moladh do'n léigh probably derives from the same matrix as supplies the references to the 'helpless physician' in Marbhrann do Fhear na Comraich and other poems. Again, a eulogy may begin Deoch slàinte ... followed by an honorific address. To this extent the images of eulogy and elegy function in obverse relationship to each other, but the coin is the same.

This means that on the level of analysis on which this study is conducted, we can concentrate on the rhetorical conventions, examining the explicit purposes of the poem only when some unusual feature requires to be noted, or when the rhetoric

clearly deviates from the norms that we can already see emerging. Although the lists of topics in Mary MacLeod's strophic poetry are designed to simplify its textual complexities, we can usefully reduce these now to a smaller number of categories, and from there demonstrate how they are realised in a sample of actual poems by a variety of authors.

Since, as we have seen, the images are interlinked in such a dense texture, the categories cannot be mutually exclusive; they provide guide-lines towards organising the material, but other descriptive headings could quite as easily be adopted. At all events, the following heads have been found useful: Address to subject; personal beauty; social roles; allies; household; rites and trappings of burial. For reasons which will become clear, we begin with the topic of 'Allies.'

Allies

It will be remembered that the MacGregor poems were limited, in their clan references, to the MacGregors. But in An Crònán we find Mary MacLeod introducing another convention:

Tha na Gàidheil gu léir
 Cho càirdeach dhuit féin,
 Is gur feairrde thu gu t'fheum
 Sir Domhnall a Sléit';
 Ceannard nan ceud,
 Ceannsgalach treun ròghlic

Thereupon she introduces a list of allies of the Clan MacLeod: Clan Ranald, the hosts of Glen Garry, the men of Knoydart, Frasers, MacKenzies and Macleans. How old this convention may be is impossible to say: certain bards, or bards of certain clans, may have always tried to reinforce the sense of security of the clan in such a manner; it would be natural that the mutual loyalties of the Lords of the Isles and their vassals would be thus expressed. But in the post-Lordship centuries, the inter-clan obligations were not governed by loyalty to an accepted authority, but depended rather on changing circumstances and different alignments of power, sometimes secured through 'dynastic' marriages. J.C. Watson says that "some of them would have done less ... than Mary would have us believe."¹ But it is precisely this point which requires to be stressed: in these circumstances the need for propagandist appeals was

1. Watson ibid, p.133.

all the greater, and it is reasonable to suppose that as clans were drawn more and more into general Scottish and British politics, the convention of listing or calling upon allies would inevitably develop. The convention might always have existed as a compliment to families closely related to the subject of a eulogy and have developed from there. But the descent of the MacDonalds from the Lords of the Isles gave them the greatest claims in this respect. In her song Do Mhac Dhomhnaill, Mary puts it in full-blown form:

Tha deagh ghàrd air th'ainmealachd,
 Do chàirdean an t-Iarl Earra-Ghàidhealach,
 Mac Coinnich is Morair Tairbeirt leat,
 Gleann Garadh 's fir nan Garbhchrìoch leat,
 Is an Colla is cha bu chearbach e,
 Is na Camshronaich o Lòchaidh.

To which she adds: MacAoidh, Siol Airt is Chuinn is Chormaic, Na Collanan, an Caiptein Mùideartach, Siol Torcuill, Clann Fhionghuin 's fir an t-Sratha, Frisealaich, Granndaich, Rothaich.

She can even go beyond the Gaels, for this MacDonald's mother was Lady Mary Douglas, daughter of the Earl of Morton:¹

Dh'éireadh leat na Dubhghlasaich

Then she introduces the Gaels of Ireland:

Nan tigeadh airc no éiginn ort
 Gun éireadh feachd á Eirinn leat;
 Iarl Antruim nan each ceumnach leat,

1. Watson Gaelic Songs of Mary MacLeod, p.136. (Referred to from now on as Mary MacLeod)

Is an sliochd sin Mhic Féilim leat ;
 Nan cluinnte foirm air fheumalachd
 Gun éireadh leat am mór-shluagh.¹

She returns to the MacDonalds and introduces the Macleans before closing her poem with the old claim of Clan Donald.²

Gun éireadh leat gun amharus
 Feachd Iain Mhóir 's Iain Chathanaich,
 Is an dream dhíreach Leathanach,
 Is fir Chinn-tíre is Latharna,
 Is gur maig luchd beurla chaitheadh ort
 Is na maithean ud an tòir orr':

Gur cian 's gur fad an aimsir
 O'n chuala mi aig seanchaidhibh ;
 Nar thàinig sibh do na talmhaintean-sa
 Gur gnìomh a chaidh a dhearbhadh gun
 Robh tigh is leth na h-Albann air
 A shealbhachadh an còir dhuibh.³

This is a commonplace of MacDonald poetry; so Iain Lom, who works downwards, as it were, emphasising the old obligations of vassals of the Lordship:

Sliochd nan curaidhean talmhaidh
 Leis 'n do chuireadh cath Gairbheach;
 Fhuair mi uiread dh'ur seachas
 Gu robh 'n turus ud ainmeil,

1. Mary MacLeod, p.80.
2. v. SGS, Vol.11, p.77 n. on 'Tigh is leth Albann' and 'old division'.
3. Mary MacLeod, p.80.

Gu robh taigh is leth Alba fo'r cìs.

Is iomadh neach a fhuair còir uaibh

Ann's an am ud le'r gòraich;

B'ann diubh Rothaich is Ròsaich,

Mac Coinnich 's Diùc Gòrdon,

Mac Gill'Eathain o'n Dreòllainn 's Mac Aoidh.¹

In Iain Lom's opinion these clans owed their status to the reckless generosity of the Lords of the Isles: hence their obligations were all the greater. The poet is using the convention here in a rather different and more sophisticated way; manipulating it to make a political point in the complex situation into which Clan Donald had been drawn through their involvement in the affairs of the kingdom. But like other conventions it is inherently capable of being used obversely: here it is poised between the positive and negative poles of usage.

The commonplace of Allies has been taken first in order to show how history has ordained its form. There are two aspects of this: as is self-evident, the more complicated a clan's relations were with other clans, the more delicate, and possibly complex, would be the use of the convention, and the greater the demands made on it. History has also ordained that it can only attain its fullest development in poetry associated with Clan Donald; and we were able to give an example of that from Mary MacLeod. The pan-Gaelicism of the convention obviously gives it a unique status among the other commonplaces of Gaelic poetry. As is to be expected, the connection with Ireland features in MacDonald (and other) poems, as when Iain Lom talks

1. Iain Lom, p.148.

of his own kinsmen:

Mheud 's a chunnaic mi féin diùbh
 Teachd air luingeas a Eirinn
 De shliochd gasda Chuinn Cheudaich nam pìos.¹

But it is usually the Scottish Gaels alone who are listed, as when Mairghread Ni Lachainn says:

Agus car thu MhacLeoid,
 Mhic Ailein, Mhic Eoin,
 Eachann Ruadh nach 'eil beò ...

or:

B'fhiach do chairdean a sloinneadh;
 Mac Dhomhnaill 's Mac Coinnich
 'S MacLeoid o'n taobh eile ...²

There is no essential difference made between relatives and allies; in many cases a blood kinship could in fact be traced.

The topic finds a natural place in Jacobite poetry, but perhaps the most striking use of it there, and certainly the most poignant, is in John Roy Stewart's poem after Culloden, where it is the harsh reality of lack of allies that introduces it.

Bha iad iomadaidh uainn,
 De gach fine mu thuath,
 Fir nach tilleadh ri h-uair na feuma;
 Feachd chóig bhrataichean sròil,
 Bu mhath chuireadh an lò,
 Bhith 'gar dìth anns a' chomhdhail chreuchdaich;

1. Iain Lom, p.68

2. Turner, p.10 and p.2.

Iarla Chrombaidh le 'shlògh,
 Agus Bàrasdal òg,
 Is Mac Fhionghain le 'sheòid nach géilleadh.

Clann Ghriogair nan Gleann,
 Buidheann ghiobach nan lann,
 Fir a thigeadh a nall nan éight' iad.

Is Clann Mhuirich nam buadh;
 Iadsan uile bha uainn,
 'S e sin m'iomadan truagh r'a leughadh.

A Chlann Domhnaill mo ghràidh,
 Leam is cruaidh mar a bhà,
 Nach do bhrùchd sibh le càch do'n teugmhail.¹

1. J.L. Campbell Songs of the Forty-Five, pp.176-178.

Address to Subject

The individual exists in bardic tradition in a network of relationships: family, ancestors, and allies. In the manner of classical bardic panegyric, some poems contain a complimentary reference to the subject's wife also. The normal place for this is towards the end of the poem: it is a touch of urbanity (comparable with references to non-warlike qualities in the hero, such as an ability to write, or piety) which involves the community more fully in the poetry. But the wife's ancestry is valued also:

Fhuair thu gibht bho shìol Leòid
 Nam brataichean sròil,
 Nan cupa nan corn 's nan cuach.
 Ghlac thu 'n éiteag mar mhnaoi,
 Cha robh 'n léirsinn ud claon,
 'S glan do chéile ri d' thaobh 's gur suairc:
 Beul binn thogadh fonn,
 Slios mar eala nan tonn,
 Caol mhal' air nach crom a gruaim.¹

The subject himself is invariably addressed by name, patronymic, or traditional style and title, which may involve the name of his dùthchas, a territorial style. As this is the traditional patrimony of the clan, we may include in this topic the use of place-names of that whole territory. When Mary MacLeod says of Iain Garbh:

1. Iain Lom, p.74.

Mo bheud is mo chràdh,
 Mar a dh'éirich dà,
 An fhear ghleusta ghràidh,
 Bha treun 'san spàirn;
 Is nach faicear gu bràth an Ratharsaidh.¹

there is an emphasis, strengthened by the fall of the stress, on the place-name: it is as if it suddenly leapt into focus and the loss to the territory and the fine is driven home.

The style may be:

A Dhomhnaill an Dùin,
 Mhic Gill-easbuig nan Tùr²
 A dheagh mhic Chaluim nan tùr a Ratharsaidh³
 A Ruairidh aigeanntaich àird
 O Chomraich ghreadhnaich an àigh⁴

Some of these epithets are fixed traditional phrases, so that if certain chiefs' names come to mind their territorial styles come to mind also, in the manner of patronymics, e.g. MacMhic Ailein á Mùideart, Mac Mhic Alasdair Chnòideart, MacLeoid as na Hearadh.

The patronymics link naturally with illustrious ancestors and the established lines of descent: this is so prominent

1. Mary Macleod, p.26.
2. Iain Lom, p.14.
3. Mary Macleod, p.28.
4. ibid, p.16

a feature that it could be made into a rhetorical category on its own.

Siol Airt is Chuinn is Chormaic ...

Na Collanan cìosail airmailteach¹

Lochlannaich threun

Toiseach bhur sgéil,

Sliochd solta bh'air freumh Mhànuis.²

Thu á sliochd Olghair

Bu mhór morghail³

Cha b'e an t-iasad a bh'ann⁴

Ach sìol nan Rìghrean o'n Spàinnt

Ogha dileas mo ghràidh

Do dh'Iain Dubh a bha'n làimh,

Sliochd nan Iarlachan ard;

'S fhad o thriall sibh o'n Spàinnt⁵...

The pride in blood is quite explicit. It is not 'blue blood' but fìonfhuil, a term which doubtless carries a hint of the aristocratic drink as well. Iain Lom laments of Sir Donald of Sleat that:

1. ibid, p.78.

2. ibid, p.48.

3. ibid, p.92.

4. Turner, p.169.

5. ibid, p.11.

thàinig laigse air t'fhionfhuil.¹

The blood may also be:

D'an fhuil rìoghail gun smal.²

Nobility of blood is very frequently associated with quick temper, pride, sense of honour, courage and hauteur.

'S beag an t-iongnadh an t-ardan

Dhol ad bhathais cho làidir,

'Sa liuthad sruth ard as 'n do leum thu.³

In A' Chnò Shamhna, Eachann Bacach says of Maclean:

Cha dath uaine bu bhlàth dhuit

An uair a bhuaileadh an t-ardan ad phòr.⁴

But ardan may be overweening. The sole fault in Alasdair mac Colla, according to Iain Lom, was:

Ach a mhiad 's a bha 'n ardan 'na shròin.⁵

The warriors of the clan may be styled collectively, e.g. Fir a' Bhràighe (the Brae of Loch Abar), Fir Mhuile. The chief's style may involve the name of his homestead combined with an epithet, e.g. MacGriogair o Ruadhshruth chnò; or the homestead or territory may appear without the chief's name, e.g., Cill Ma-Ruibhe fo sgéith a' chuain; Uibhist bheag riabhach nan cràgheadh; or the chief place of the clan may be given its emotional charge by the context:

1. Iain Lom, p.146.

2. ibid, p.72.

3. Turner, p.158.

4. Watson Bardachd, p.206.

5. MacKenzie ibid, p.37.

'S goirt an naidheachd so chualas

O'n là chruinnich do shluagh ann an Aros.¹

All these stylistic devices are clearly involved in each other. We may link them also with names of battles, of which the most important is Cath Gairbheach, with its association with the Lordship of the Isles. Latha Allt Eireann; Raon Ruairidh, Inbhir Chéitein: such names have an evocative power of the same order as "Thermopylae" or "Trafalgar" or "Ratisbon" or "Wounded Knee" in other ethnic, national or imperial contexts; but in Gaelic this power has been drawn into the central stream of poetry.

The style of address to the subject in eulogistic verse, carrying with it overtones of all these epithets, may be extended to non-Gaels who have been involved in battle on the Gaelic side. Thus James Graham of Claverhouse is addressed by Iain Lom as:

A shàr Chléibhears nan each

Bu cheann féadhn' thu air feachd ...²

and a Stewart woman from Strathspey calls Prince Charles Edward Prionnsa Tearlach nam baiteal.³

In this manner, non-Gaelic heroes are drawn into the native system of naming and celebrating: the process mediates between an alien, hostile world and an intelligible order, endowing their names with potency in its own terms.

1. Turner, p.4.

2. Iain Lom, p.192.

3. Turner, p.158.

Through the convention of "Allies", there is generated in tradition a sense not only of the friendly territory of the clan to which the bard belongs, but also a sense of a more extended territory which at the least is potentially friendly; or if it is potentially hostile, according to the circumstances of a given time, its hostility is capable of being subdued by a rehearsal of great deeds enacted in alliance. The native Gael who is instructed in this poetry carries in his imagination not so much a landscape, not a sense of geography alone, nor of history alone, but a formal order of experience in which these are all merged. The native sensibility responds not to landscape but to dùthchas. And just as 'landscape', with its Romantic aura, cannot be translated into Gaelic, so dùthchas and, indeed, even dùthaich, cannot be translated into English without robbing these terms of their emotional energy. Dùthaich Mhic Leoid, for instance, is but poorly represented by the "Land of MacLeod" or "MacLeod's Country."

In the poetry composed in strophic metres, we seem to find, on the explanation advanced here, the origin of this attitude. But the purpose and style of the bardic tradition ensures that place-names are kept in their proper, functional place: it is in other verse traditions that they are allowed to achieve their full potential.

Social Roles

The subject of a praise-poem has clearly defined obligations and accomplishments which enable him to discharge his duties to his people. He is a warrior, ruthless to his enemies and tenacious in pursuit but mild to his friends. He is generous in dispensing gifts and liberal in supplying drink to warriors and men of art. He is a hunter of specific animals and birds. He is a horseman and seaman. He is a wise counsellor, he may be a courtier at the royal court; he is, like his ancestors, a Royalist, which in the context means a Jacobite.

All these topics, like the others we have been considering, appear in so many different contexts that certain aspects of them could as easily be taken under the other headings. For instance, the subject's prowess as a horseman may be expressed in epithets applied in addressing him and rehearsing his noble descent, for, like all other virtues, this, too, is hereditary.

Sliochd nan Rìgh 's nan long siùbhlach
Nan ceannbheairt 's nan each cruidheach.¹

It may be a description of the individual:

Marcaich sunndach nan seang-each
Mór, cruidheach, gorm strannach²

or:

Marcaich deas nan each seang
Bheireadh roid asd' is srann.³

1. Turner, p.5.

2. ibid, p.278.

3. ibid, p.10.

Rob Roy is called:

Sàr mharcaich nach fann

Air cursain (sic) nan srann;

Sréin mhaiseach 'nan ceann b'e t'aidhir e.¹

Possession of fine horses ready for battle is indicated by
Neil MacVurich:

Is cha bu lothugan cliathta

Gheibhte ad stàbull 'gam biathadh,

Ach eich chrùidheacha shrianach ...²

The contrast between the aristocratic war-horse and the plebeian animal fit only for the churl's occupation of agriculture is involved in this praise.

Praise of the subject as seaman is even more intermingled with other topics. It is an ancestral virtue:

Sìol nan Colla bha treun

Stiùireadh loingear fo bhréid³

We may have a double image:

Agus marcaich nan stuagh

Ri là frionasach fuar⁴

But in the poetry of strophic metres, generally speaking, there is not the same direct praise of the individual as seaman as there is, for instance, of him as hunter. We have:

1. Stewart, p.302.

2. Watson Bardachd, p.144 . The horses were in fact probably an improved breed. v. ibid, p.301, Note.

3. Turner, p.169.

4. ibid, p.9.

A Shir Lachainn nam bàrc,
 Chuireadh luingeas air sàil,
 Leis an togar an cabhlach acuinneach,
 Nuair a nochdadh sibh sròl
 Ris na caol-chrannaibh stòir,
 'S maireg a thachradh g'a dheòin ri'r lahraichean.¹

It is in fact usual to have the subject presented as a warrior in charge of a ship rather than as a seaman himself. So, when an t-Aos-dàna Mac Mhathain addresses the chief of the MacKenzies on the occasion of a voyage, it is the skill of his crew that is celebrated.² Much the same applies to Iain Lom's songs.³ This is primarily because the subjects are of a high social status and the poems reflect the reality of their behaviour; but it may also be due to the convention of the bardic tradition: other traditions⁴ of verse tend to give this role greater prominence. Convention also seems to circumscribe slightly the descriptions of the subject as hunter. In other traditions⁴ one finds the kinds of animals and birds named that are fit for aristocratic sport.⁵ In the strophic metres, one will find:

Bu tu sealgair a gheòidh ...
 Bu tu sealgair an fhéidh⁶

1. Maclean Sinclair, Gaelic Bards, Vol.1, p.44.
2. v. Sàr Obair, p.77 ff.
3. v. Iain Lom, pp. 102; 148.
4. Essentially Oran and Luinneag.
5. Most of them are the modern game birds and animals.
6. Watson Mary MacLeod, p.26.

but it is essentially as an arms bearing warrior-hunter that the hero appears. He is accompanied by his hounds, attended by his retinue, and he carries the weapons that are equally the weapons of battle. Hence, these descriptions are frequently juxtaposed, or delineate him as warrior and hunter in the same sentence.

Saighdean Ghlinn Liobhann, as mentioned above, moves immediately from the bard's expression of grief to a retrospect of the hunt:

A Mhic an Fhir Ruaidh
 Bha gu misneachail cruaidh,
 Do thuiteam 'san ruaig cha b'fheairrde mi,
 A' triall 's tu dìreadh
 Ri cois frìthe,
 Bhiodh cuilbheir dìreach dearbhte leat.
 Coin air iallaibh,
 Garg an gnìomhan,
 B'e do mhiann bhith sealgaireachd,
 Pìc 'nad dhòrnaibh
 Is mill na's leòr oirr':
 Is ann le treòir a tharraingear i.

Then follows a detailed list of weapons until the bard introduces:

An saoi nach maoimeadh
 Air thùs feadhna ...

(maidhm[eadh] is the common term used to express 'giving way, breaking' in the face of attack.)

So Iain Lom, in a poem which is motivated by his sense of

outrage at Argyll's attitudes, and is certainly not a detached or stylised panegyric, nevertheless feels that it is relevant to touch on this topic:

Le luchd nam feadanan dùbhghorm
 D'am bu fhreagarrach fùdar,
 'N uair a spreigeadh na h-uird ri spuir gheura;
 Bheireadh dùsgadh le h-ainiochd
 Air ùdlaich' an langain,
 Garbh stùcach mór eangach an t-sléibhe.¹

From a verse which is concerned with Maclean's prowess in battle, and which ends:

Cha tigeadh lagbhuille meirbh as do dhòrn

Eachann Bacach moves easily into:

Nàile, chunnaic mi aimsir,
 Is tu ri siubhal na sealga,
 Cha bu chuing ort an garbhlach;
 Pìc de'n iubhar cha d'fhàs i
 Chuireadh umhail no spàirn ort;
 Cha bhiodh fuidheall a tàirrne,
 Nam biodh luthadh 'na crannghail
 Chuireadh siubhal fo eàrr-ite an eòin.²

Hunting is but another aspect of the martial life as that is understood in the Gaelic context.

In contrast to these aspects, we find sometimes the subject's ability to write being praised:

1. Iain Lom, p.182. The poem is Tùirneal a' Chnatain.

2. Watson Bardachd, p.207.

Bu tù an sgoilear gun dìobradh,
 Meòir as grinne nì sgrìobhadh,
 Uasal faidhidneach cinnteach,
 Bu leat lagh an taigh-sgrìobhaidh¹...

He is:

Macant' maighdeanail ùr,
 Faicheil faidhreachail ciùin²

This is the urbane side of the tradition: it is undoubtedly important in that it implicates other aspects of society in bardic verse, and balances the descriptions of ruthlessness towards the enemy. But it remains, taking tradition as a whole, in a secondary position, and is doubtless an accretion.

The role of the subject as warrior, then, is the apex.

The exemplar is:

Fear mór curanta làidir
 Bh'aig gach duine mar sgàthan³

He is just to his tenantry:

Cha bu spùillear air tuath.⁴

Fasan bu dual:

Fantalach buan,

Socrach ri tuath⁵

Of one of the greatest warriors in Gaelic history, Alasdair Mac Colla, Iain Lom says:

1. Mary MacLeod, p.16.

2. Iain Lom, p.134.

3. Iain Lom, p.162.

4. ibid, p.164.

5. Mary MacLeod, p.64.

Leat bu mhiann a bhith agad
 Claidheamh cùil a' chinn aisnich
 Le fhaobhar cruaidh sgàiteach geur gorm,
 Cha bu tais 's cha bu tlàth thu,
 Marcachd suas roimh 'n bhragàda,
 Air each aigeannach àrd nan ceithir bròg.
 Cha bu chladhaire truid thu,
 Dol an aghaidh an trupa,
 Ceum air th'adhart 'nan uchd b'e do nòs¹.

We can take that sketch as a brief summary of the almost countless sentiments of the same kind that the poetry of the bardic tradition contains. Through epithets, references to battle, ancestry, physical strength, weapons, loyalty, and so on, and taking these in all their direct and oblique references, and in all possible permutations, the bards produce a glorification of the warrior that permeates these poems of a brief, late manifestation of an heroic age.

He is the leader, ceannard nan gaisgeach. His retinue are continually mentioned:

'S iomadh òganach treuchach,
 Is glac chrom air chùl sgéith' air,
 Thig a steach leat o sgéith Meall na Làirge,
 Is a fhreagradh do t'éigheach,
 Gun eagal gun éislean,
 'N uair a chluinneadh iad féin do chrois-tàraidh.²

1. Iain Lom; p.34.

2. ibid, p.106.

The loyalty of the comitatus is a key topic. It is interesting to find it as late as 1812 in an elegy to a man who was killed, not in battle, but by an accidental shot. The motif of revenge of the leader's death is here also (as are the majority of the topics of bardic poetry).

Nam b'e iomairt no eucoir
 Leis an rachadh do chreuchdadh,
 Air mo làimh nach biodh t'éirig gun phàigheadh.
 'S lìonmhor curaidh deas dealbhach,
 Rachadh ullamh g'a dhearbhadh,
 Sheasadh duineal fo airm an am tàirnge.
 'S ann diubh fìor shliochd do thaighe
 Rachadh sìos leat gun athadh,
 Dhèanadh gnìomh an am crathadh na stàilinn.¹

The relationship between ceannard and luchd-taighe, sliochd an taighe, na h-òganaich is throughout a focus of loyalty; through the convention of Allies, this focus is widened to encompass an ideal loyalty of all the clans to each other.

In the convention of listing weapons carried by the subject there are stock descriptions, e.g. Spàinteach gheur nan trì claisean and scores of verses such as:

... an cuntart nam blàr,
 Bhiodh airm ghuineach ad làimh, fhir òig.

1. "Cumha do Shiom og, Mac Mhic Dhughail Mhor-thir, a mhill-eadh ann am bliadhna 1812, le urchair thubaisteach o ghunna fhein; Le Iain Mac Ghillebhrà, piobaire fir Ghlinn Aladail." Turner, p.264 ff.

Bhiodh sgiath bhreac nam ball dlùth
 Air gàirdein gaisgeil mo rùin,
 'S paidhear dhag ort nach diùlt ri h-ord.
 Bhiodh lann thana gheur ùr,
 'S i gun smal oirr' o'n bhùth,
 Gearradh chlaighe is smùis o'n fheòil.¹

In these the breacan, if it is mentioned, is clearly the warrior's dress, always in close conjunction with the conventional weaponry:

Nuair a rachadh tu 't'èideadh
 Fo bhreacan am féile,
 Thigeadh claidhe fo d'sgéith ort,
 Cuilbheir caol air dheagh ghleusadh ...
 Bhiodh fir Shasunn ag éigheach na h-ainneart.²
 Nuair a rachadh tu 't'èideadh
 Fo bhreacan am féile,
 Gum bu cheannard roimh cheud mìle sluaigh thu.³

In the bard's depiction of this loyal, closely organised fighting unit, dress and weapons alike both function as symbols that command society's highest respect and approval.⁴

The whole concept of leadership and loyalty is given an extra dimension by Jacobitism, from the Montrose wars to the Forty-Five. The subject is always rioghail, i.e. loyal to the king. Since the great bulk of our poetry is within and subseq-

1. Turner, pp.168-9.

2. ibid, p.173.

3. ibid, p.280.

4. The development of this in the transference of loyalty to a British and Imperial context is obvious.

uent to that period, we might say that Jacobitism is one of its architectonic devices, exercising a real if usually somewhat distant control - an exact reflection of its control upon the order of society.

The heroic subject's obligations are equally prominent: they are, in poetry, always discharged.¹ Leaders are, typically:

Luchd a dh'iomairt an òir,
 'S iad a dhioladh an t-òl,
 Leanadh fad air an tòir
 Ann an cumasg nan stròl²...

These duties bring us to the topic of Household.

1. J.C. Watson points out that Mary MacLeod's elegy to Roderick, the seventeenth chief, confined praise to ancestors, etc. "a signal contrast to her silence regarding his personal qualities." Watson op.cit. p.122. Given the convention, this eloquent silence is more powerful than invective! There is not one descriptive commonplace regarding his household: an extraordinary omission.
2. Turner, p.9.

Household

A set piece describing the chief's household is not obligatory and there is a shading of emphasis in descriptions of the chief's or leader's generosity and hospitality at the table.¹ Some bardic poems pay greater attention to the drinking and music and tàileasg, etc. Others develop, with greater sophistication, the domestic scene and the less warlike aspects of the hero. One may contrast in this respect Iain Lom's elegy for Alasdair mac Colla² and his song to Domhnall Gorm Og:³ the former dwelling entirely on martial prowess, the other introducing talla nam pìos with its wagers, its music of violin and harp, tàileasg, bagpipes, drinking, wax candles blazing, bards' contests, gold, and minstrels from Tara to Iona. Yet this is still very much a scene of carousal for the warrior. In Oran do Shir Domhnall Shléite⁴ he brings in a new motif:

An uair bu sgìth de luch-theud e,
 Gheibhte Bìobull 'ga leughadh
 Le fìor chreideamh céille,
 Mar a dh'òrdaich Mac Dhé dhuibh,
 Is gheibhte teagasg 'na cléir' uaibh le sìth.

Eachann Bacach says much the same:

Thug càch teist air do bheusan:
 Bha gràdh is eagal Mhic Dhé ort,
 Bha fàth seirce 'gad chéile ort,
 Bha rogha deiseachd is deilbh ort,

1. Like all topics, the liberality of the subject may be introduced several times in passing references.
2. Iain Lom, p.14 ff.
3. ibid, p.34 ff.
4. ibid, p.146 ff.

Cha robh ceist ort mar threunfhear;
 Bhiodh na Sgriobtuir 'gan leughadh
 Ann ad thalla mun éireadh do bhòrd.¹

There is no doubt, however, but that it is the sharply cut scenes of conviviality, with the blaze of light and the gold and silver vessels, that remain in the memory. This is particularly so when the 'short line' which appears in some of the earlier strophic metres is used.²

Bidh cruit is clàrsaich
 'S mnà uchd-àillidh
 'N tùr nan tàileasg gearr;

Foirm nam pìoban
 'S orghain Lìteach,
 'S cùirn 'gan lìonadh àrd;

Céir 'na drillsean
 Ré fad oidhche,
 'G éisdeachd strìth nam bàrd;

Ruaig air dhìsean,
 Fòirn' air thìthibh,
 'S òr a sìos mar gheall;

Aig ogh' Iarl Il'
 Agus Chinn-tìre
 Rois is Innse Gall.

1. Watson Bardachd, p.209

2. v. SGS, Vol.XI, p.12; SS, Vol.XII, p.37. It appears in Saighdean Ghlinn Lìobhann, and in some of Mary MacLeod's and Iain Lom's songs. Iain Lom p.18.

The vivid perfection of this art, still undimmed through the passage of centuries, is an index of the rhetorical energy which lies in the strophic poetry and which cannot have failed to make it a most efficient vehicle in spreading its message.

Personal Beauty

As this is a poetry addressed to men we might expect specifically masculine qualities to be praised. In fact, apart from epithets like tréine is lùth, the physical attributes are of the kind that could fit either sex. Good figure, chalk-white teeth, blue eyes, golden hair are the stock conventions. The verse is full of epithets such as: sùil-ghorm; gruaidh mar am fìon; gruaidh dhearg mar an caorann; cùl bachlach (nan dual glan); ciabhfhalt cleachdach (gu làr) snuadh glan; deud chailc; cùl nan clannfhalt teudbhuidhe; corp glégheal.

A few examples of slightly different wording will suffice:

B'i mo ghràdh do ghnùis aobhach

Dhèanadh dath le t' fhuil chraobhaich¹

Caol mhala gun ghruaim,

Beul meachar o'n suairce gràdh²

Is glan an lasadh bha ad ghruaidh

Fo ghruaig chleachdaich nan dual òr-bhuidh³

Bu tu am fear curanta mór

Bu mhath cumadh is treòir⁴

Gur gile do thaobh

Nan sneachd air an raon⁵

1. Iain Lom, p.12.
2. Iain Lom, p.14.
3. Mary MacLeod, p.46.
4. Mary MacLeod, p.26.
5. Stewart, p.304

Luchd nan cùl fionna cas fàinneach¹

Fhuair mi m' àilleagan ùr

Is e gun smal air gun smùr;

Bu bhreac mìn-dearg do ghnùis,

Bu ghorm laghach do shùil,

Bu ghlan sliasaid is glùn;

Bu deas daingean an lùb ghléasta thu².

These are all designed to project an image of "gentlemen that labouris not." The aristocrat may be a ruthless warrior, but there is nothing harsh or rugged about his physical appearance. These qualities belong to the peasantry: the subject of the bardic panegyric is a cynosure of fashion: sgàthan sambuill na h-uaisle³. It is unusual to find a description such as Iain Lom uses of Alasdair mac Colla:

Fhir na gearrghruaige duibhe.⁴

It is noteworthy that a man praises and describes other men in warm, intimate terms: an uninhibitedness which is not uncommon in, and may be characteristic of, this type of society.

1. Turner, p.4.

2. Mary Macleod, p.16.

3. Turner, p.265.

4. Iain Lom, p.34.cf. Alasdair's overweening hauteur.

Alasdair seems to be cast in the role of the Achilleus of this poetry.

Rites and Trappings of Burial

What seems an excessive preoccupation with death of the hero and the imagery of the grave functions in the poetry as a harsh reminder of the loss to the clan. It also serves to remind us of the social importance of the rites of death in a society where ceremonial occasions were associated with elemental issues. This is, superficially at any rate, a Christian society, and Christian burial was important. But one senses also in Gaelic tradition (and in Gaelic society to the present day) an enduring pagan concern with the body as almost a sentient thing. The influence of classical poetry is discernible in Mary MacLeod (and others):

Fo bhuird an cistidh
 Chaidh grunn a' ghliocais:
 Fear fiùghant miosail ...
 Chaidh ùr fo lic air m'eudail.¹

There is a concentration on the act of sealing the coffin:

Och a Mhoire mo chall!
 Thu bhith 'n cistidh nan crann
 Air a sparradh gu teann²

It is the finality of the act that is emphasised here: the carpenters' preparations become an isolated and almost sinister image of it.

1. Mary Macleod, p.90.

2. Turner, p.9.

'N chiste ghiuthais chaoil bhàin
 'N déis a h-uigheam aig càch,
 An taigh-fiodha fo bhlàgh nan òrd.¹
 Ach fhuair mi m'ailleagan òg
 Mar nach b'abhàist gun cheòl,
 Saoir ri càradh do bhòrd ...²

Failure to recover the body makes the loss even greater:

Mhic Mhuire mo leòn
 Thu bhith an innis nan ròn is nach faighear thu.³

Or the proper rites (keening, etc.) which involve the community are lacking e.g.,

Och, 's mis' th'air mo sgaradh
 Nach tug iad thu thairis ...
 Dhol fo dhìon anns a' charruig,
 Do reilig nam Manach,
 Far 'm bheil do chairdean 'nan laighe
 Mar ri t'athair 's n' d' sheanair,
 Far am faodamaid teannadh mud' charnan.⁴

There is a rather different image which occurs from time to time: that of graves being dug and shovels ready for the task. It is an image, usually, of pessimism and defeat, but it may involve the enemy too.

1. Iain Lom, p.164.
2. Mary Macleod, p.18.
3. ibid, p.26
4. Turner, pp.7-8.

'S tric ar n-uaighean 'gan cladhach,
 'S uainn ar n-uaislean 'gan taghadh¹

An Raon Ruairidh nam bad

'S lìonmhor uaigh is corp rag;

Mìle sluasaid is caib 'gan léidigeadh²

As we have had occasion to notice once or twice, the tradition presents us with a topic in its positive and negative aspects, e.g., loyalty-treachery, support/desertion by allies. The preoccupation with death from one point of view expresses the negative aspect of the intensity and vividness of life as the bards present it. But because this is altogether a celebratory tradition, death also is due its proper formalities - in poetry as in the society which the poetry reflects.

1. Turner, p.265

2. Iain Lom, p.192.

Kennings¹

The heroic virtues are expressed in a variety of kennings for the warrior: he is bile, crann, craobh, (especially abhall farsaing/freumhach, darach, and other 'noble' woods²), craobh-chosgair/chomhraig/as airde san doire/shìochaint; fiùran, gasan, fleasgach, slat; ursann-chatha, sonn. He may have a bird of prey kenning seabhag fìrinneach/shuairc/uasal, an t-seabhag threun, seabhag an t-sluaigh; òg rìoghail na h-ealtainn. He is often leómhann: Ard leómhann; leómhann fireachail/garg/c(h)lisgeant.

When the hero's protection of the fine and luchd-taighe has been removed by death, the images of disaster will frequently reflect the same system, though some conventions are specific to this situation, or relate to other areas of the tradition.³

The kenning most commonly involved is the tree or forest.

Thuit a' chraobh as a bàrr,
 Fhrois an gràinne gu làr,
 Lot thu an cinneadh is chràdh
 Air an robh thu mar bhàrr ...⁴

The image of the tree or forest stripped of its foliage occurs throughout:

1. This is not a topic, of course, but presentation in a separate section, thus, seems best for clarity.
2. W. J. Watson Bardachd, p.297. Note on l. 3494
3. V. infra, on the 'ship' metaphor for the fine.
4. Mary MacLeod, p.18.

Mo chreach léir Clann Mhic Dhubhghaill
 'S iad mar choill air a rùsgadh;
 Có nis sheasas an cùis an am gàbhaidh.¹
 Gur mi a' chraobh air a rùsgadh,
 Gun chnothan gun ùbhlán,
 'S a snodhach 's a rùsg air a fàgail.²

Or the sapling has been hurt:

Gun do chiùrradh am faillean
 Bh'air freumh dhùthchais nan meangan;
 Craobh a b'ùire measg dharag a' ghàrraidh.³

The unprotected people are like bees from a plundered hive:

An uair a thionail an sluagh
 Is ann bha an t-iomsgaradh cruaidh
 Mar ghàir sheillean am bruaich
 An déidh na meala thoirt uath ...⁴

The same image is combined with that of motherless lambs

by Eachann Bacach:

An uair a bhuaill an gath bais thu
 Is truagh a dh'fhàg thu do chàirdean
 Mar ghàir sheillean air làraich
 An déidh am mealannan fhàgail;
 No uain earraich gun mhàthair,
 Is fhada chluinnear an gàirich mu'n chrò.⁵

1. Turner, p.266.
2. Iain Lom, p.10
3. Turner, p.265.
4. Mary Macleod, p.20.
5. Watson Bardachd, p.207.

Or the bard is like a wounded bird separated from the
bird-flock:

Is eun bochd mi gun daoine

Air mo lot air gach taobh dhìom:

Is tric rosad an aoig air mo chàirdean

This verse is developed with the use of another recurrent image,
that of the bird which has lost its brood:

Gur mi an gèadh air a spìonadh

Gun iteach gun linnidh ...¹

A favourite device is the image of the ship caught in a storm.

Is i fhras nach ciùin

A thàinig as ùr,

A shrac ar siùil

Is ar cairt mhaith iùil,

Is ar taice cùil ...²

Gun do chaill mi mo stiùir

'S mo chrann taic' anns gach cùis³

Nis shracadh ar siùil,

Dh'fhalbh ar cairt, bhrìst ar stiùir⁴

All these images are drawn from experiences that were
known intimately: the behaviour of disturbed or stricken creat-
ures, the flourishing or withered tree, the crop lodged by rough
weather; winds, floods, tempests. But the songs that describe
a ship under way (for instance, in some of Iain Lom's splendid

1. Iain Lom, p.10.

2. Mary MacLeod, p.94

3. Turner, p.277.

4. ibid, p.12.

iorram verse) and the topical references to seamanship give these descriptions of a ship at the mercy of wind and tide an added resonance. Once again, this is an example of the involvement of this poetry in the rest of experience. When Mary MacLeod describes Iain Garbh's fate, all these dimensions are present:

Mo bheud is mo bhròn
 Mar a dh'éirich dhò,
 Muir beucach mór
 Ag leum mu d'bhòrd,
 Thu féin is do sheòid,
 An uair reub ur seòil,
 Nach d'fheud sibh treòir a chaitheadh orra.¹

The idea of the ship of state has a peculiar force, therefore, in Gaelic. Iain Lom's Dia 'na fhear-stiùiridh air t'ardraich² in his poem to the newly-crowned Charles II is the same basic image as An t-Aos-dàna Mac Mhathain's Bidh Dia man cuairt dad' sheòl.³ The ship, with its crew and complement of warriors, is in reality a microcosm of society in its martial, and even convivial, aspect.

'N uair bhiodh càch cur ri gnìomhadh
 Bhiodh mo chuid-sa dheth dìomhain
 Ag òl gucagan fìon air a fàradh⁴

All this gives an underlying complexity to the summing up of a poem (where the loss to the kin, the widow and orphans and the

1. Mary MacLeod, p.28.

2. Iain Lom, p.76.

3. Sàr Obair, p.76 In these expressions, some form of a Beannachadh Luinge may reinforce the emotion involved.

4. Iain Lom, p.102.

injunction to the heir to maintain the ancestral customs, usually find a place):

Ge bu lìonmhor ort frasachd,
 Chum thu dìreach do mhacaomh,
 Do bhréid rìomhach gun sracadh;
 Cha do dhìobair ceann-slaite thu,
 On 's e Crìosda b'fhear-beairt dhuit:
 Is sin an Tì a leig leat an taod-sgòid.

A mhic, ma ghlacas tu an stiùir so,
 Cha bu fhathas gun dùthchas
 Dhuit bhith grathann air t'urnaigh;
 Cuir d'a caitheamh an Triùir oirre;
 Cuir an t-Athair an tùs oirre,
 Biodh am Mac 'na fhear-iùil oirre,
 An Spiorad Naomh 'ga giùlan gu nòs.¹

The examples chosen in order to demonstrate the rhetorical structure of the bardic tradition have been taken from the seventeenth and eighteenth century, with one exception² from the nineteenth. What we have seen thus far is a poetry of chief and clan, which we have analysed and presented as a complex panegyric mode involving the dominant social order. The period c.1600-1745 is probably the high age of the tradition: within that period, we find that formally it is restricted to panegyric: there is no religious, moralistic, or love poetry composed in strophic metres, although imagery and sentiments

1. Watson Bardachd p.209.

2. Turner pp.264-8. It is dated 1812.

that carry a hint of all three may be used. Nor is it really a poetry of satire in anything but the broadest sense of that term. This rhetoric precludes satire much in the same way as the rhetoric of religion precludes blasphemy: both are specifically designed to justify a given order. As W.J. Watson noted,¹ even Iain Lom is "simply bitter against sliochd nam beul cam";² but he is bitter within a coherent social and political framework. When we leave this high age of bardic poetry, however, we find these measures put to different uses. Towards the end of the eighteenth century, it was possible for Ailean Dall, though himself a professional bard,³ to compose a love song in strophic metre. While the craftsmanship is adequate enough, the lists of feminine attributes remain inert: the form was clearly not designed for this kind of communication. Nevertheless, this was probably something of a deliberate aberration, for it is true that in traditional use it always retained some link with panegyric, even if the rhetoric might have become rather thin.⁴ It was in use, in the three lined strophic form, until very recently, and it is possible that a township bard from Skye or Uist might still be composing in that simplest form.

Throughout the nineteenth century this seems to have been the only form in which it survived. We suggested above that the simplest form might have been associated with a simple

1. Bardachd, p. XXVI.
2. v. Chap.1. Note the style of Iain Lom's flytings.
3. To MacDonell of Glengarry. He died in 1829.
4. v. e.g. Cha b'e sgioba na faiche, a St. Kilda song: Carmina Gadelica, Vol.IV, p.112.

rhetoric also. It is certainly noteworthy that from a relatively early stage we can find the three lined metre being used rather on the periphery of the 'universe of discourse' that we have been discussing. One of these is the song¹ (still sung by the Gaelic speaking tinkers) attributed to Domhnall Donn, Mac Fir Bhoth-Fhionntain. But even here, the topics of the bardic tradition colour the verse. The opening line Mìle mollachd do'n òl, is the negative aspect, as is the treachery by which the bard was seized. He curses the gun that misfired and praises as his ideal weapons the sword and the shield. There is, finally, an appeal to kinsmen or allies, but purely a personal appeal. There is no tradition that Domhnall Donn was a professional bard and it is inherently unlikely. A mid-seventeenth century song² in the same form of strophic metre, which is also by an amateur (Murchadh Mór Mac Mhic Mhurchaidh, Fear Aicheallaidh) employs certain of the topics deliberately, some positively, some negatively, in a panegyric to the 'mare', his ship. We can see the connection with the iorram tradition that appears in Iain Lom's poetry; but this is conspicuously a personal, lyrical poem that is to be regarded as an off-shoot from the main bardic tradition. In the first half of the nineteenth century the three lined metre was used in Duanag a' Chìobair,³ a love song. In contrast to Ailean Dall's love poetry, this form gives no impression of forcing the content into a wrong mould. The same judgment can be applied to the

1. Stewart, p.351 ff.

2. Eigg, p.185 ff.

3. Oranaiche, p.239 ff.

older love song which probably supplied the model:

'S mór mo mhulad 's chan àicheam
 Mu'n sgeul ùr tha mi clàistinn,
 'S mi tearnadh stigh bràigh Uisge Spé¹

Yet a poem with which both of these are closely connected, and from which they may, indeed, derive, is equally eloquent, but in the rhetoric of the bardic tradition. This is Iain Lom's Glacadh Morair Hunndaigh:²

Mhuire 's muladach tha mi
 Mu gach sgeul tha mi clàistinn,
 'S mi bhith teàrnadh le bràigh' Uisge Dhé.

The existence of flexible forms of this kind helps to explain the processes by which separate traditions of verse begin to merge into each other.

1. Sinton Poetry of Badenoch, p.46 ff. Duanag a' Chiobair is printed on p.69 ff.
2. Iain Lom, p.44 ff.

Oran and its Conventions

The first generalisation that requires to be made is that the eulogistic conventions which we have discussed in the bardic tradition are reproduced in essentially the same basic terms in òran. It is the surface manifestations that are different. We can take all the topics listed, and analyse them in the minutest possible way; and we shall find, throughout the tradition of òran, that facets of every topic are present in a highly developed, sophisticated form. This does not mean that the use of òran for the composition of panegyric is necessarily very much older than the oldest dateable examples, i.e., the second half of the sixteenth century and the beginning of the seventeenth. Given the development of the conventions in one tradition of vernacular verse, it is a comparatively simple matter to transfer them into different metrical forms. As the òran is an international form with "historical affinities with the mediaeval chanson"¹, and as the situation of the bard provided a more suitable ground for the development of panegyric, we may take it for granted that the òran tradition is the borrower. Matheson notes² in connection with the affinities of the form with mediaeval chanson, that Ó Tuama's study of popular Irish love-song³, the metres and music of which belong to this tradition, indicates that "in Gaelic there may have been a time when it was considered suitable only for

1. Appendix 3. V. p. 213. Supra.

2. ibid.

3. An Grá in Amhráin na n-Daoine; V. esp. pp. 1-13.

the more personal and informal themes of life, in particular the theme of love."¹ The òran tradition as a whole certainly includes a very large proportion of love-songs, of which we have examples ranging in time in our sources from the pioneer collections to present day compositions by bards in thecrofting townships.

The form of òran shows considerable variation from sixteen lines (at least as printed) to a simple quatrain form, sometimes accompanied by a vocable refrain. Occasionally there are forms which do not fall metrically into multiples of four lines, e.g. Tàladh Iain Mhùideartaich.² Both longer and irregular forms belong to the earlier part of the c. 1600-1974 period; it is the quatrain form, very often a love-song, which has best survived to the present day. This tendency was already manifest by the mid-nineteenth century, as is demonstrated by the contents of Sinclair's Oranaiche.³

From the standpoint of eulogistic verse, the high age of this tradition also, like bardic verse, is from about 1600 to the end of the eighteenth century: the events of 1745-46 and the subsequent destruction of much of the distinctive fabric of Gaelic society are as relevant here as in our study of the bardic tradition. The survival of simpler forms, and the persistence of other themes apart from panegyric, illustrates the tendency; it may also be the case that these

1. Appendix 3, ibid.
2. Matheson MacCodrum, p.116 ff; pp.338-339. The stanza has 7 lines.
3. V. supra, p.60.

simple forms, and especially love-songs, flourished among the common people before òran became coloured by the eulogistic verse of the bards.

The earliest example in our collections is Caismeachd Ailein nan Sop, in Dr Hector Maclean MS.¹ Ailein is said by Maclean to have died in 1551. He also says that the Caismeachd was composed in 1537. If this tradition is correct, we have here an interesting example of a panegyric òran which does not display the topics of bardic verse in more than the most rudimentary form. It opens:

Is mithich dhùinne, mar bhun umhlachd,
 dàn bùrdain a chasgairt dhuit;
 A fheasgaich bhrìoghmhoir fhliuchas pìosan
 le d' dhibh phrìseil neartmhoraich.

The 'tree' kenning and the praise of the dispenser of drink are thus prominently expressed. The body of the poem, however, consists of verses of panegyric description of Ailein's fleet of bàrcan, with a reference to:

Is iomadh lùireach an ceangal ri h-eàrraich
 Is bogha dearg Sasunnach.

Maclean Sinclair is of the opinion that dàn bùrdain in this poem "is a bantering song, a song composed in good humour, but containing some gentle touches of sarcasm". The author was Hector Maclean, afterwards Laird of Coll: he had made certain uncomplimentary remarks about Ailein, who took him

1. Printed in An Gàidheal, Vol. IV p.76, and by Maclean Sinclair in Gaelic Bards, Vol. I, p.5 ff. q.v. for biographical detail and glosses on the text.

prisoner but released him after Hector had composed a poem that pleased his captor. This is presumed to be the Cais-meachd. Ailein himself was also an aristocrat, being a son of Lachlan Catanach Maclean of Duart.

The tradition therefore leads us to believe that this was meant to be a personal compliment, composed perhaps with a slight element of facetious exaggeration, in a popular form.

It is altogether different when we come to the monuments of the next century. Mary Macleod has three compositions in òran, Luinneag Mhic Leòid, Cumha do MhacLeòid, and Luinneag do Iain mac Shir Tormoid.¹ The first, composed in exile, opens with the convention which expresses the author's dejection.

Is mi am shuidhe air an tulaich

Fo mhulad 's fo imcheist.

So in the Marbhrann to Rob Roy, in strophic metre:

Rinn mi suidh' aig a' charn,

Ghabh mi mulad nach gann²

But the lines immediately following have a hint of a distinctive tone in òran, which the evidence adduced in the course of this chapter will confirm, and which makes its use of eulogistic convention somewhat different from that of the bardic songs.

1. Mary Macleod, pp.36 ff; 52 ff; 82 ff.

2. Stewart, p.301.

Is mi ag coimhead air Ile,
 Is ann de m' iongnadh 's an am so;
 Bha mi uair nach do shaoil mi,
 Gus an do chaochail air m'aimsir,
 Gun tiginn an taobh so
 Dh' amharc Diùraidh á Sgarbaidh.

What is to be noted here is the slightly fuller development of the opening motif: as we have shown, in bardic verse the development is almost always more abrupt and the personal utterance more circumscribed. The more fluid rhythm of òran, and the change of balance from one line to another, either demands, or gives an opportunity for, a more leisurely exposition. In strophic metres one line follows another in a declamatory sequence: we expect (though we do not invariably find) each line to make a self-contained statement. In òran the natural phrase, no doubt following the musical structure, appears to require two lines and may run over into others. It is only a tendency, but it gives the rhetoric of òran its own distinctive quality.

There are several directions in which these rhythms can lead the discourse. They can give a gentle tone, or a tone of resignation, to a poem; they may be subtle and sinuous; used with a richness of vowel sounds to produce a grave eloquence; or they may give an impression of firm statement without the peremptoriness of the bardic metres. In other words, òran is capable of a range of expression, of depth and of freshness; when the developed imagery of the bardic tradition became assimilated to the form, a sophisticated art

emerged. As an example of the statement of a controversial point, expressed with proper politeness but without reservations, these two verses are typical:

Mhic Iain Stiùbhart na h-Apunn,
 Ged is gasda an duine òg thu,
 Ged tha Stiùbhartaich beachdail,
 Iad tapaidh 'n am fòirneirt,
 Na gabh-sa meanma no aiteas
 Anns an staid ud nach còir dhuit:
 Cha toir thu: ì dh' aindeoin
 Is chan fhaigh thu le deòin i.

 Cuime an tigeadh fear coigreach
 Do tha gradh ur n-oighreachd?
 Gar nach 'eil e ro dhearbhta
 Gur searbh e ri éisdeachd;
 Ged tha sinne air ar creachadh
 Mu chloinn mhac an fhir fhéilidh:
 Sliochd Ruairidh mhóir allail,
 Is gur airidh iad féin oirr".¹

Thus Mary Macleod expresses, with complete clarity and economy, the feeling of Siol Tormoid, for whom she is the spokesman, concerning the succession to the chiefship, which might conceivably be claimed by Robert Stewart of Appin through his wife. The same vitality of argument could not be sustained in any of the other available traditions of Gaelic verse. The pace would be too slow in some; in others the coherence

1. Mary Macleod, p.58

would be impaired.

We have to keep this in mind as we look at some examples of eulogistic convention in òran. Iain Lom's exultation over the victory determined the choice of form in Là Inbhir Lòchaidh; the horrific style of his addresses help to make his poem a strange complex of dignity and savageness:

Iain Mùideartach nan geòl soilleir,
 Sheòladh an cuan ri là doilleir,
 Ort cha d' fhuaradh bristeadh coinne:
 'S ait liom Barra-breac fo d' chomas.

The intensity, as always, grows when Alasdair mac Colla is mentioned: here it is increased by the incremental repetition:

Alasdair nan geurlann sgaiteach,
 Gheall thu 'n dé a bhith cur as daibh ...
 Alasdair nan geurlann guineach,
 Nam biodh agad àrmainn Mhuile ...
 Alasdair mhic Cholla ghasda,
 Làmh dheas a sgoltadh nan caisteal¹ ...

In his address to the Marquis of Atholl, the same bard uses the more ample frame of another òran metre to add details that the strophic metre could not tolerate.

Slàn a chì mi thu, Mharcuis,
 Dìreach maiseach gun chromadh;
 An t-sùil ghorm tha 't ard mhala
 Nach d' fhàs gu ballachail bronnach;

1. Iain Lom, p.24

Cheart cho chinnte 's tha 'm bàs deth,
 Ged tha thu tràth-s' as mo sheolladh,
 Gu bheil mulad fo d' chom ort
 Mu bhàs Ghoud Iarla Mhoireabh.¹

The very fact that the òran allows greater freedom is perhaps a limitation in some set pieces of description. There is less immediacy and vividness for instance in this evocation of the festive hall than we get in the strophic metres, where, at least in the best examples, the physical scene is presented with a wonderful directness:

Bu ro mhaith b'aithne dhomh t'aighear
 'N am dhuit gabhail gu d' sheòmar:
 Bhiodh foirinn air tàilisg
 Is dà chlàrsaich an comhstri,
 Gus am freagradh am balla
 Do mhac-talla nan òrgan,
 Fìon dearg Spàineach 'ga losgadh
 'N cuid a dh' obair nan òrcheard.
 Nàile! chunna mi uair thu
 Bu bhuaidheil do chòisridh,
 Teachd a mach le d' gheàrd rìoghail
 Air na grìneacha gorma;
 Luchd nan casagan sìoda
 Ghlacadh pìcean gu h-eòlach,
 Bheireadh gleus an adbhans orr'
 Ann an am dol an òrdugh.²

1. ibid, p.166.

2. ibid, p.49.

The juxtaposition of these two verses, with the movement from one associated scene to the other, brings into focus the reason why the descriptions, at one level, are so much less arresting than their bardic equivalents. What governs them is not the sensuous delight in the physical qualities but the personal nostalgia of the poet. There is a reflective detachment (which is not at all remoteness); here the past and imperfect tenses of the verb, combined with the plangent rhythm, calls forth an entirely different emotion from:

Coinnlean geala de'n chéir
 'S iad an lasadh gu geur
 Urlar farsaing mun éigte 'n t-òl¹

and from that of numerous other descriptions of the same kind, where an emphasis on nouns and adjectives, and a different rhythm, work together to produce a totally dissimilar effect. This element of personal reflectiveness is not so apparent in the use of other topics, except that the more flowing lines do not always so effectively present a conventional epithet. The metre of Là Inbhir Lòchaidh, for instance, can do it.

A line like

Iain Mhùideartaich nan seòl soilleir

gives the epithet sufficient stress; it is only the end of the following verse that makes the style and title prominent. The conventions seem 'conventional' in the pejorative sense:

1. ibid, p.136

Is e mo ghaol-sa an sliochd foirmeil
 Bh'air sliochd Olghair is Ochraidh;
 O bhaile na Boirbhe
 Is ann a staidhleadh tu an toiseach;
 Gur iomadh fuil mhórdha
 Bha reòta 's a' chorp ud:
 De shliochd àrmunn Chinn-tìre
 Iarla Ile agus Rois thu.¹

A description of the warrior as hunter, however, may be adequate enough, although again it does not have the power of the laconic phrases of, say, Saighdean Ghlinn Liobhann.

An uair a théid thu do'n fhireach
 Is mo mhath cluinneas am fiadhach leat,
 Le do lomhainn chon ghleusta
 Ann do dhéidh 'n uair a thriallas tu:
 Sin is cuilbhir caol cinnteach,
 Cruaidh dìreach gun fhiaradh ann;
 Bu tu sealgair na h-éilde,
 A' choilich is na liath-chirce.

Much the same applies to the use of related descriptive topics:

Thigeadh sud ann ad làimh-sa
 Lann Spàinteach ghorm dhias-fhada,
 Is paidhir mhath phiostal
 Air crios nam ball snìomhaineach.²

1. Mary Macleod, p.58.

2. ibid, p.85-6.

The amplitude of òran can, however, be seen to good effect in non-lyrical, matter of fact, descriptions:

Bu fhliuch a' mhadainn a thog sinn ar breacain
 'S a chaidh sinn air astar gus an taigh 'gan robh chairt;
 'N uair rinn sinn éirigh gun d'rinn sinn ar éideadh
 Is chaidh sinn 'nar leum fo na cnapanna-saic;
 'S bu lughaid ar n-airtneal 'n uair thàinig am feasgar,
 'N uair loisgeadh an lasag bu lìonmhor srada;
 O cheann Loch Iall gun d'rinn sinn triall,
 'S 'n uair chrom a' ghrian gun d' rinn sinn stad.¹

Here the buoyancy and variety of the rhythm allow the poet to unfold his narrative without lapsing into a pedestrian strain. But the form also allows a lyrical development through the expression of personal emotion. An example is Maighread Ni Lachainn's lament for Allan Maclean.² Like any other òran in the general panegyric mode, composed at the death of a great man, it presents a paradigm of the conventions, but here and there a flash of personal emotion appears to inject fresh energy into this poetess' always elegant craftsmanship.

The lament for Allan is a poem of twenty stanzas of eight-lined stanzas; the quotations that follow show both the standard topics and the personal touches. The opening statement

1. Iain Lom, p.184.

2. Turner, p.13 ff.

It should be noted that Maighread is capable of doing this in highly developed strophic metre also, e.g., Gaoir nan Ban Muileach, but it is more obvious in her òrain. The fact that she is a woman is relevant, e.g., in her treatment of the topic of the rites of burial.

has an implicit tenderness:

Chunnaic mise thu Ailein,
 'S tu gu h-aimideach gòrach,
 Mun do ghlac thu 'n gnìomh fearail,
 Na mun d' rinneadh dhiot Còirneal.
 Marcaich ùr na steud brasa,
 Thu bhith 'n tasgaidh 's na bòrdaibh;
 Och 's mis' th' air mo sgaradh
 Caoineadh Ailein 's nach beò e.

... Bu mhath cumadh dhuit sléisde,
 Sùil, beul agus sròine;
 Gum bu cheannard air feachd thu
 Thoirt doibh smachd agus òrdugh.
 Air 'ur dol do Dhun-Eideann
 Thug sibh réite leibh dhachaidh,
 Ghlac Rìgh Seumas air làimh sibh,
 's dh' iarr a' Bhanrìgh a steach sibh ...
 Càit an robh iad 'san t-saoghal,
 N'an taobh so do fhlaithes?
 Mac samhailt nan daoine
 Chan fhaodar am faighinn;
 Mach o ghathan na gréine
 Ann an speuraibh an adhair;
 'S nach iarramaid air son sgàthan
 Ach cead bhith 'n àite 'gan amharc,
 Càit a bheil iad an Albainn,
 Na thall anns an Olainn,
 Leithid cinne mo mhàthar
 Mach o ardan Chlann Domhnaill?

Maighread ends with a striking formula:

'S tric gach aon neach a' faighneachd
 Ciod e t' aois a Ni Lachainn:
 'S ciod e 'm fàth dhomh siod innse
 'S nach creid sibhs' e 'n lorg m' fhaicinn?
 Chan 'eil fiacaill am dheudach
 Nach do Leum as mo chlaigeann:
 A' sìor iargain nan daoine
 Ris an glaidhte na gaisgach.

This poetess has several images, which seem to be entirely her own, drawn from nature. Related to this is the splendid ending of a verse in her song to Sir Hector Maclean, who died in Rome in 1751.¹

Tha do chaistealan geala
 Is do thallachan prìseil,
 (Far 'm biodh òl agus aighear,
 Aig luchd a chaitheadh an fhìona)
 Fo luchd adaichean dubha -
 Sgeul tha dubhach le m' inntinn:
 'S truagh nach robh iad 'sa Chaillich
 Ann an caithreim an lìonaidh.

A' Chailleach is a headland in the north-west of Mull. Maighread follows this with a series of allusions to a Seannduine corrach/làidir and a Baintighearn òg eile, explained by Maclean Sinclair as Ardnamurchan Point and

1. Maclean Sinclair Maclean Bards, Vol. I, p.205 ff. Turner, p.18 ff. The texts given in these two sources are slightly different from each other; I have given the one I know from tradition.

Coire Bhreacain respectively. Such a freedom of development, with so fanciful an extension, would be impossible in the bardic tradition.

For sustained level of excellence, however, we go to the poetry of the man who specialised in òran, viz., Ruaidhri Mac Mhuirich, An Clàrsair Dall. His training as a harper, and his knowledge of songs, Irish as well as Scottish, associated with the harp, would no doubt have helped his development as a poet also, but this cannot in any way detract from his individual genius. The Harper brings a polished, and frequently sonorous, eloquence to òran; this may not be unique in a verse tradition which prizes craftsmanship so highly, but there seems to be in Ruaidhri's poetry a propriety of rhythm, quantity and quality, maintained consistently throughout his work. It can hardly be doubted that his mastery of the complementary arts of verse and music is relevant. If there is any exception to be made, it would apply, interestingly, to his handling of the bardic, strophic metre, which he uses once in the extant corpus of his work. But even there his genius is obvious.

The Harper uses the bardic topics frequently:

Thig claidheamh socrach stàilinn duit
de'n t-seòrsa 's fearr 'sa' bhùth,
'S e fulangach o bharrdheis
gu ruig a cheannbheart duirn;
faobhar air a' gheurchruaidh sin
nach gabhadh leum no lùb,
lann air dhreach na daolaig,
'S i air taobh deas-làimh mo rùin.
Is iad siod na h-airm a thaghainn duit,
'S tu 'n deaghaidh an ratreut:
paidhear dhag nach diùltadh
agus fùdar gorm d'an réir;¹

- the list proceeds in the usual manner.

1. Matheson, The Blind Harper, p.8. *The Harper fl. c.1656-c.1714.*

The topics of descent, generosity, trappings of burial, the tree kenning: these are all introduced, e.g.

Ruaidhri reachdmhor rùn-mheanmnach
tartrach tairbeartach teannta,
do shìn-seanair on tàinig
cha b'ion d'a nàmhaid dol teann air ...¹

Is anns an lìonbhrat air fhilleadh
dh'fhàg mi spionnadh nan anfhann,
ceann-uidhe luchd-ealaidh ...²

Maide dh'fhàs 'na chraoibh thoraiddh
fo bhlàth onarach àlainn
ann an lios nan crann euchdach -
bha tlachd nan ceud anns gach àit air ...³

These are sufficient to show to what extent the Harper's poetry uses the eulogistic framework. But indirectly, an expression of the customary expectations of Gaelic society permeates all his verse. What gives the poetry a further distinctive quality is the personal tone of his utterances, developing a feature that we have already seen in the eulogistic use of òran, as he judges his society by the yardstick of its received values, in fluent, extended discourse. The Harper's professional (though not economic) independence⁴ of the MacLeod chiefs, his chequered relationship with them, and, it must be, an independent habit

1. ibid, p.54.

2. ibid, p.50.

3. ibid, p.56.

4. Matheson, ibid, p.XLIX.

of mind, all combined to exploit the opportunities which this verse convention offered.¹ In the composition which has survived to become his most popular song, Oran Mór Mhic Leòid,² amplitude of form, an orotund diction, and that reflective detachment which we have elsewhere³ seen detracting from the immediacy of physical description, here contrive to produce a variety of effects in the measured criticisms of a chief who has failed his people. Not least of these is the retrospect of the household: the pace and dignity of the statement give perfect expression to regret for a vanished age.⁴ The poet has been describing the sound of the bagpipe:

1. Matheson observes that he is "remarkable for the degree of self-disclosure found in his songs, in marked contrast to the impersonal manner of contemporary eulogy and elegy. He does not hide himself behind a public mode of utterance; when occasion demands, private griefs and anxieties are freely expressed. But how far this was his own individual achievement it is hard to say. If we knew more about the different traditions of poetry and the conventions by which they were governed, it might simply be that the minstrel was allowed to adopt a more familiar tone than the bard or filidh." ibid, p.LXXIII. The elaboration, relatively speaking, which we have noted in the topics of òran as opposed to those of the bardic tradition, indicates that the form at any rate, allowed a comparative freedom.
2. The title appears first in Sàr Obair (v. Matheson, ibid, p.131), a work which certainly helped to spread it. The term Oran-mór was used in oral tradition, not as a connotation but as a denotation; thus Oran-mór na Féinne for a certain Ossianic ballad; Oran-mór Sgoirebreac for a song of the luinneag class.
3. Iain Lom, p.49.
4. It is an extended description, too long to quote in full.

An tràth chuirte 'na tàmh i
 le furtachd 'na fardaich féin,
 dhomh-sa b'fhurasd' a ràdh
 gum bu chuireideach gàir nan teud,
 le h-iomairt dhà-làmh
 cur am binnis do chàch an céill:
 rìgh, bu shiubhlach ri m'chluais
 an lùthadh le luasgan mheur.

Anns an fheasgar na dhéidh,
 an am teasdadh do'n ghréin tràth-nòn',
 fir ag cnapraich mu'n chlàr
 is cath air a ghnàth chur leò;
 dà chomhairleach ghearr
 gun labhairt, ge b'ard an glòir,
 's a rìgh, bu tìtheach an guin
 do dhaoine gun fhuil, gun fheòil.

The poem goes on from this to allude to the dance, the music of the violin, the fleasgaich and their companions:

is mnàì fhionna 'n fhuilt réidh.¹

The Harper belonged to the group of poets whose patron was MacLeod of Talisker and whom the Rev. William Matheson has aptly named the 'Talisker circle.'² Another was Lachlan MacKinnon, of Strath, in Skye. Like the Blind Harper and his 'Echo' who has deserted MacLeod's hall when the clamour of feasting has been banished by a niggardly chief, so Lachlan, in an òran poem,

1. The Blind Harper, p.62.

2. ibid, p. LXI ff.

Latha Siubhal Sléibhe dhomh¹, meets and converses with Iochd is Gradh is Fiùghantas who are now homeless wanderers under the new dispensation. These rhetorical devices, which are handled with great skill, have a sophistication all of their own:² in that sense they represent a further move away from the topical norms of the bardic poetry, but they are nevertheless used to comment, from another point of view than the bard's, upon the same order of society. The values of both verse traditions are identical. Lachlan, in his poem, makes his allegorical figures address himself in the bardic commonplaces.

Another member of the Talisker circle was John Maclean of Mull.³ In a poem to MacLeod of Talisker,⁴ in the òran metre popularly known through Moladh Cabar Féidh, he pays graceful compliments to the family, drawing upon the commonplaces of bardic panegyric in very general terms, e.g. praise of generosity, drink, compliments to the lady of the house, a prediction that the little son will be an outstanding man. But the entire tone of the poem is unbardic and unmilitary: it is in fact a charming expression of thanks in verse to a man's host and hostess. It begins with rather a high-flown expression:

Air sgéith na maidne 's luaithe
 Gu tuath thoir mo bheannachd bhuan
 A dh'ionnsaigh 'n fhir nach fuath leam;
 Gu 'Uaisle, Fear Thalasgair ...

and celebrates, as the central theme, the atmosphere of domestic

1. Sàr Obair, p.81 ff.
2. There is possibly a connection with the medieval tradition of allegory, but I have been unable to trace it.
3. The Blind Harper, p.LXIII.
4. No.9 in Dr. Maclean's MS; printed in Maclean Sinclair Maclean Bards Vol.I, p.128 ff.

elegance and goodwill.

There is, however, one topic of bardic panegyric which appears in òran in a highly developed form. This is the convention of listing allies. As we shall have occasion to discuss it later, it will suffice to say here that in Iain Dubh mac Iain mhic Ailein's Oran nam Fineachan Gàidhealach,¹ it is the theme of the whole poem. Iain Dubh has another òran poem, composed at the same time (1715) which is of considerable interest for it is a vision, partly of foreboding, but basically an incitement to rise in the Jacobite campaign of 1715.

Chunnaic mise 's mi 'm chadal,
 Gnè aisling do bhruadar,
 Gu'n do ghabh mi do dh'eagal,
 Nach do theap mi tigh'n uaithe;
 Thug mi sealladh 's na speuran,
 'S ghlac maoin mi le fuathas;
 Bha Mar ann 'sa 'n leum sin,
 Na éideadh geal cruadhach.²

We may note in passing that classical references are very un-bardic. The important point, however, is that we may have a momentary surfacing here of a sub-literary stream connected with the Irish Aisling poetry, which is also in the song tradition.³ The differences are too great to establish a connection, but it is difficult to believe that the Scottish poem is a completely independent phenomenon.

1. Sàr Obair, p.72 ff.
2. Turner, p.138 ff. It is headed 'Am bruadar le Iain Dubh Mac Iain 'Ic Ailein mu chor na Rìoghachd, bliadhna 1715.'
3. v. Gerard Murphy Notes on Irish Aisling Poetry in Éigse, Vol.I, pp.40-50.

The motif of the dream is fairly common in Scottish Gaelic poetry, especially the lover's dream. This normally concerns a real person, and usually serves as an opening for a poem though it may also be worked into the body of the text. The woman the poet has dreamt about is inaccessible or faithless or is to marry another, e.g.

Chunna mi brùadar a chuir smuairéan gu leòr orm -
 Bha mi am chadal is dhùisg sud mi -
 An leannan a bh'agam an nochd dol a phòsadh¹
 Ann an chadal chunnacas agam
 Ribhinn ghasda thlachdmhor òg,
 Mur bhreug m'aisling bha i m' ghlacaibh
 Sìnte seachad gun bhreith sgeòil ...²

Although the theme of love is found in all the main verse traditions, òran is the primary vehicle for romantic love poetry. By 'romantic' is meant, broadly speaking, the amatory tradition which was first given a special form in Languedoc at the end of the eleventh century and which spread throughout Europe.³ It is a complex tradition, in both psychological and literary terms, displaying its own national characteristics as well as an underlying uniformity.

The uniformity involves a certain idealisation of the loved one, tenderness, nostalgia, jealousy, and celebration. In Gaelic,

1. Gillies, p.205.
2. Maclean Sinclair Clàrsach na Coille, p.199. A woman's love song in three-lined strophic metre in the same collection (p.214 ff.) opens with the same motif:
 An raoir bhruadar mi 'n aisling
 Bhith mu bhruachaibh mo leapa ...
 cf. the interesting love poem in the same metre Bruadar an Domhnuich, printed in the Oranaiche, pp.94-95.
3. There is an immense body of description and criticism: in English, C.S. Lewis The Allegory of Love is still one of the most useful texts.

it shades off into other modes; it is enough at present to say that the òran tradition is not intensely erotic and does place considerable emphasis on the celebratory aspects. A song by one of the MacKenzies to the grand-daughter of the Laird of Applecross¹ demonstrates the typical manner of praise.

Is cianail m'aigne on a' mhaduinn
 Ghabh mi cead d'an rìoghain;
 Tì chomh thaitneach riut chan fhaic mi
 Ann an dreach no fiamhachd.
 Bu thrìan do m' lòn do bhriathraibh beòil
 A' teachd mar cheòl á sìothbhrugh,
 Is an t-seirc ata 'nad bhràighe bàn
 A thaisg mo ghràdh gu dìomhair,
 Cìochan corrach, lìonte soluis
 Air do bhroilleach réidhghlan,
 Do sheangshlios fallain mar an eala
 No mar chanach sléibhe ...

The girl's virtues are listed as exhaustively as possible:

Is tu fiàlaidh glic 's do chiall gun dig
 Air dìomhaireachd na reultan.
 ... Gur bachlach, dualach, casbhuidh, cuachach,
 T'folt man cuairt an òrdugh;
 Is ann tha gach ciabh mar fhàinn' air snìomh
 Is gach aon air fiamh an òir dhiubh.
 Inghin aingil na rosg malla
 Is nan gruaidh glan tha nàrach,

1. Oran le William Mac Coinnich, do inghein Choinnich ruaidh
 mhic fir na Comraic. Eigg, p.42 ff.

Da shùil ghorm mheallach fo d'chaol mhala

'S gach aon a mhealladh gràidh dhiubh ...

She is mar ghealach ... an tùs éirigh; her singing voice mar an smeòrach chéitin; her teeth: 'Se chrùn do thlachd deud mùirn mar chailc; she is like Venus; she possesses iochd, cliù, loinn. These lists of physical qualities and attributes of mind and spirit may be found duplicated in hundreds of similar romantic òrain. This particular poem ends:

Mi cian o d'chaidreabh, is buan dhomh fhaidead,

Dh'fhàg sud m'aighe pianail;

Osna ghnàth gun fhois gun tàmh

A fhrois gach blàth do m' fhìonfhuil.

Is e bhrosnaich deòir is a chlaoidh mo threòir

An rìoghuinn òg so thriall bhuainn;

Is tu 's trom a dh'fhàg mi, òigh mo ghràidh,

Le d'bhròn ata mi cianail.

A large proportion of such romantic poems are compositions inspired by lack of success in the suit or by the absence of the beloved, who may be betrothed or married to another. In this respect they provide a parallel with the bardic tradition in which a praise poem is so often an elegy or is inspired by the absence of the subject from his territory. There are other connections also. This tradition of romantic òran is in fact a panegyric of love, and while it has its own descriptive commonplaces, there are demonstrable links between these and the commonplaces of the bardic tradition. In the same poem:

Ur rìoghain thlàth 's ro rìoghail gnàs

Do dhìlsean gràidh tha lìonmhor;

A gheug nam buadh ge cian mi bhuait

Na géill-sa chluain luchd mìoruin.

This is to be compared with the convention of kin and allies: the security of the group is being emphasised.¹ We have also the reference to the tree kenning, while the topic of luchd mìoruin, a commonplace of courtly love, may appear in bardic panegyrics as the negative aspect of loyalty to the subject, or as a contrast to the ideal solidarity of the fine and the luchd-taighe, e.g.,

Do luchd muinntir fo mhìghean
Aig tuaileas luchd mìoruin ...²

The 'greenwood' setting of the courtly love tradition also appears, e.g.,

'S truagh nach robh mi 's mo leannan
Anns a' ghleannan an uaigheas,
No 'sa' bhadan bheag choille
Far an goireadh na cuachan;
Thu sìnt' ann am bhreacan,
Dlùth paisgt' ann am shuanaich,
Gu faighte le deòin,
A ghaoil, do phòg is cha b'fhuathach.³

Such general conventions of the European romantic tradition cannot all be borrowed in their entirety, but are much more likely to have been grafted on to a native stock.⁴ This does not concern us here, except that their presence endorses the international cast of the òran tradition. In contrast to these

1. So dìleas and dìlsean in bardic verse, e.g. Gun thu 'n caidreabh do dhìlsean, Turner, p.7.
2. Eigg, p.273. From a poem in strophic metre to Sir Ewen Cameron by Domhnall Bàn Bard.
3. ibid, p.332.
4. v. SS, Vol.XII, pp.29-43; esp. pp.39-40.

we can set the conventions that confer a native quality upon the romantic tradition. In the catalogue of attributes and topics that follows, drawn from the whole available range of love songs in this mode, that contrast will become obvious.

The lover dreams of his beloved; tosses sleepless on his bed: Chan fhaodar liom cadal; an àite cadail air mo leabaidh; a' carachadh is a' tionntadh. Love had taken away his appetite: Ochoin is truagh a mheath i mo chàil. Love has given a wound aiceid ro bhuan nach leighis; cha dèan lighich bonn feum. It is a fever: fiabhrus mòr ard / mìo-nadarra. It is a fatal disease: Cladhaichear m'uaigh; Is e an t-seirc tha t'eudann a ghreas gu h-eug mi // Mar doir cléir domh còir ort. The lovers desire to be dead together: Is truagh a ghaoil gun mi mar riut// Fo sparradh na déile.

Is truagh nach robh mise
 Gun fhios air do chùlaibh
 An am togail na lice
 Agus bristeadh na h-ùrach;
 Chan iarraim do chistidh
 Ach mo shlios a bhith dlùth riut ...

There are songs of male and female authorship: sometimes a song of unrequited love is answered in an accompanying song or verse¹ of explanation or regret. There are, naturally, different conventions. The girl's voice and speech are binne na ceòl nan

1. e.g. Eigg, pp.331-334. These 'dialogues', of which some are constructed (presumably an artificial form in certain instances at least) with verse and verse about, may reflect an old tradition of mumming or similar performance.

teud, etc. Her breasts are corrach, soilleir, glégheal, gléghlan. Body and skin are réidhghlan, gile na an gruth/ an fhaoilinn/ am bainne, mar ghath gréine. Thighs are usually seangshlios fallain mar an eala. Calves are dealbhach, deas, dùmhail. Feet are shapely also: troigh chuimir; frequently nach feur a lùbadh / nach lubradh am feòirnean. Hair (fair or brown, less often black) frequently called cùl, is bachlach, duallach, fàinneach, cuachach, sniomhain, sniomhanach, òrbhuidhe, casbhuidhe, or has fiamh an òir / nan teud. Brows are mala chack, mar ite an lóin-duibh. Eyes are gorm, mar dhearcagan; meallach. Teeth are deud mar chailc, snaighte mar na dìsnean / ìbhridh. Cheeks are craobhach, air dhath nan ubhal, mar chaorann. Lips are tana, dearg, daíte. Breath is cubhraidh, mar fhàileadh ubhlan. Kisses are air bhlas fìon, mar an caineal, blas na meala, mar bhiolar uaine, fionnar. Hands and fingers are meòir fhada, chaol, dhìreach, mar shlait, bas ionmhain chaoin nan geal mheur caol, glac gheal mheur fhàinneach fhìonalta. Dress: bròg chuimir, bhileach, dubh do bhrògan, stocainn gheal (the contrast may be highlighted); gùn 'san fhasan, especially dol dh'an chlachan Dì-Domhnaich.

The girl's accomplishments are dwelt on; singing or dancing: Do chàs lùthar, ceum siubhlach; as binne gabhas òran; embroidery: do mheòir ri cur greus, teòm air gnìomh nam ban, ann an cleachdadh an t-sìoda, cur an t-sìod an ordugh, cur/thàirng-eadh rìomhadh air bàn, as grinne dh'fhuaigheas. She is praised for her handwriting: meòir gheal a nì sgrìobhadh; meòir as grinne thu air an sgrìobhadh.

She is modest, wise, generous, but not extravagant, urbane, high-spirited, and womanly: banail, fialaidh, pailt, glic, nàrach,

ciallach, uallach, suairce, modhail, ciùin, gun ardan, siobhalta,
nach dugadh beum, nach labhradh gòraiche/breug.

She is pious: a bheir sgeul fìor as a' Bhiobull, leis an leabhar am Biobull.

In some songs she is banarach na buaile, nighean a th'aig na gamhna.

She has her own kennings: geallach, reul, ròs, neòinean, sobhrach, canach, neònaid, geug, craobh, bile.

These last three in particular remind us of the warrior kennings we have already seen in eulogistic verse and they may appear in similar extended form:

Chan ann mar chraoibh an coill gun sgoinn

A dh'fhàs an loinn bhean àlainn so;

No mar lus am fàsach faoin

A bhiodh feadh fraoich nan Ardbheannan:

Ach slat de'n abhal a bha daor

Ri'n d'fhuairear saoth'r a' ghàradair,

'S i ùrar, dìreach, dosrach, caomh

'S a h-ubhlan maoth a' fàs oirre.¹

This is from a nineteenth century song from Perthshire composed by Archibald Campbell (known locally as Baldy a' Chlagain) who was working as a farm servant in Glen Ogle at the time he made it.² This serves to remind us of the social distribution of such compositions. Nevertheless, social stratification

1. Oranaiche, p.211.

2. Information from the late John MacMillan (Iain Mór na Cruaiche) Strathtay, a native of Rannoch. The melody is a variant of The bonnie, bonnie banks of Loch Lomond, both doubtless drawing ultimately on the same international musical tradition.

is evident in romantic òran, from the level of the song to the Laird of Applecross' grand-daughter to that of songs that address the girl who tends the cattle (banarach na buaile, etc.) But even in the latter we may expect to find aristocratic compliments. Campbell's song is in that strain throughout:

'S tu 'n fhìorfhuil uasail nach robh suarach
 Dhuit bu dual o d'sheòrsa sin
 'Na sruthain mheara, ghlana, uaibhreach
 Dìreadh suas ad phòraibh-sa;
 Os glan an ìr' o'n deach do bhuaineadh
 Cha robh snuadh an fhòlaich oirr.'

Aristocratic descent and 'good blood' is prominent.

'S tu air do bhuain á freumh nam buadh
 Do'n treunfhuil uasail steudail.¹

'S glan t'fhìorfhuil air lasadh.²

'S i 'n fhìorfhuil uasal o thìr nam fuarbheann
 A bhiodh 'sa' ghruagaich d'an dugainn spéis,³

and in the eighteenth century, the girl will play 'tables' with her lover:

Bheirinn greis leat air thàileasg.⁴

This species of description, then, has a wide spread, socially and chronologically. The poet, even if he is infatuated, works according to rule; one author at least states it with a certain bluntness:

Tòisichidh mi aig do chasan.⁵

1. Eigg, p.440.

2. ibid, p.292.

3. Oranaiche, p.224.

4. Eigg, p.292. A double entendre seems unlikely in spite of the classical poem on the 'game of love.'

5. Oranaiche, p.230.

That the rhetoric may extend beyond love poetry is clear from a song addressed as a compliment to Marian MacMarcus, a minister's wife in South Kintyre. This draws with great freedom upon the catalogue we have listed and adds:

Is cinneadh do mhathar uile
 Curaidhean do Chlann Domhnaill:
 Làidir, duineil, creuchdach, fuilteach
 Is furachail mar leòghain ...¹

In poetry of female authorship, the lover is presented in essentially the terms of praise that the bardic tradition uses, but modified to fit the romantic circumstances.

Tha mo chion-sa do'n fhleasgach
 Dhonn leadanach bhòidheach
 Do'n fhine nach strìochdadh
 Do dh'fhìonfhuil Chlann Domhnaill.²

While the lover is not usually praised overtly as a warrior, this is often implied. He is a horseman, hunter, seaman, he can drink copiously and pays freely for others; he is great, well-shaped, with tressed hair. As is to be expected, his physical beauty is dwelt upon, the terms being sometimes identical with those used for women, e.g. gorm shùilean meallach, chaoin mhala, mar chanach an t-sléibhe.

M'ulaidh is mo ghràdh thu,
 Gur ràithe gach oidhch' ad dhéidh,
 Làmh stiùiridh a' bhàta
 Ga sàbhaìadh as gach beud.

1. Oranaiche, p.226.

2. Eigg, p.333. This verse reappears in two other songs, in slightly variant form: v. Maclean Sinclair Clarsach na Coille, p.203. The other, Thig an smeòrach as t-earrach is unpublished.

Pòitear a's taigh-thàirne thu'
 A phàigheadh am measg nan ceud,
 Giomanach nan ardbheann
 Cha slàn a bhiodh mac an fhéidh.¹

Mar gheala bhradan do chosan ...
 Bha do shlios mar an eala
 'S blas na meala air do phògan.
 T' fhalt dualach, donn, lurach
 Mu do mhuineal an òrdugh
 'S e gu camalubach, cuimir
 'S gach aon toirt urram d'a bhòidhchead.

Bu tu iasgair na h-abhann ...
 Agus sealgair a' mhonaidh
 Bhiodh do ghunn' air dheagh ghleusadh ...
 Bu bhinn liom tathunn do chuilein
 Bheireadh fuil air mac éilde ...
 Bu tu pòitear na dibhe ...²

There is a social and chronological graduation in these songs: it is the natural counterpart of what we referred to in songs composed by men, and in exactly the same way we will find 'aristocratic' commonplaces in a 'plebeian' song. But examples of any kind of song composed by women become fewer as we move through the nineteenth and into the twentieth century, with the exception of evangelical Presbyterian hymns.

1. Eigg, p.280.

2. Stewart, p.442.

This poetry, then, is an exceedingly rich tradition of a special kind of panegyric. It is a celebratory tradition in which we can isolate the native elements that have been injected into the stream of European romantic poetry, which itself probably mingled with a pre-existing native erotic poetry. What gives Gaelic romantic òran its distinctive character is precisely the 'panegyric of love': it does not by any means obscure the other elements, but rather orders them in a framework of society and art.

This framework is in part identical with the panegyric framework we have already analysed in general eulogy, both bardic and òran. In part it is an analogous system, particularly in love poems to women, where we have social roles complementary to those of the male ideal. A detail of complementarity is worth a comment. A girl's clothes are noted and celebrated rather than described, just as a warrior's breacan is noted in bardic poetry. In the 'greenwood', as we have seen,¹ or on the mountainside, the warrior's breacan is also both actual form and symbol of protection of the girl.

Just as the encomiastic imagination expressed both in strophic metres and in òran deploys itself in a wide range of situations, affecting the living and the dead, so does romantic encomium range from a song of infatuation through elegy (for such is the last poem quoted above) to a set piece of praise of a

1. Eigg, p.332, quoted above. The motif in Burns' O wert thou in the cauld blast of sheltering the girl in his 'plaidie' may be connected. In love-songs, the lovers are together 'san uaigneas. This is a phrase which also has the religious connotation of 'private devotion'; it was given an almost mystical intensity in the period of the Evangelical Revival.

woman with whom the poet is not at all in love but merely wishes to compliment in the appropriate social terms.

If the arguments that have been used so far in attempting to trace an imaginative and intellectual framework in Gaelic poetry are valid, we must handle them in the realisation that while the bardic tradition is the dominant influence, making the topics of praise in Oran derivative from it, this domination involves slow and unconscious processes in which all the separate streams of song (including the strictly bardic) must have developed and evolved together. It cannot, in other words, be reduced to a simple, linear chronology: a matter of a bardic tradition having been formed and subsequently having shaped all the rest. But that having been said, it is salutary to note that even ^{William Ross,} the poet who is traditionally regarded as the foremost of Gaelic love poets, talks of himself in an image from the field of battle:

Tha mise ri osnaich 'na déidh
 Mar ghaisgeach an déis a leòn
 Na laighe 'san àraich gun fheum
 'S nach déid anns an t-sreup nas mò.¹

Behind this lies a world in which love 'bruises the kidneys':

Bidh àirnean brùit aig pàirt ...²

'Sann tha toiseach mo ghalair
 Mu m' sgamhan 's mi m' àirnean³

1. Sàr Obair, p.297.

2. Bigg, p.241.

3. ibid, p.331.

- phrases that rouse in the memory the warriors' expressions:

Ach an drùdhadh rinn an claidheamh mu t'àirnean¹

Gu rachadh saighead 'nan àrnaibh

Gus an teàrrail i 'n fhuil asd.²

It is, however, equally salutary to recollect that when Iain Lom laments

... nach éighear mi 'n caidreabh nam bràithrean³

he is using a word which connotes the affection of lovers:

Mo mhiann bhith an ceartuair air bheag cadail

Ann ad chaidreabh greannmhor.⁴

It is possible to trace interaction and ramification into the capillaries of this whole rhetorical system. The compliments to the piety of the ideal girl and the piety of the ideal warrior's household would find a place in the religious attitudes of Gaelic poetry, though this is of peripheral importance in our present analysis. Related to this, however, is the moralising plaint concerning the fickleness of this world which is distributed throughout - with the exception of the choral songs. A stricken bard and a stricken lover will both use it. There is a focus on the death, coffin and grave in bardic panegyric: there is a less formalised expression in the European amatory tradition of the lover's death-wish. To develop this theme would lead us away from a distinctive Gaelic rhetoric and involve us in the general medieval fascination with death and the macabre. It is worth mentioning it in passing,

1. Iain Lom, p.10.

2. ibid, p.224.

3. ibid, p.102.

4. Eigg, p.239.

however, to remind ourselves that this is a European poetry, no matter how 'local' our branch of it may be.

We have space to deal with one local growth. We noted the importance of the warrior-lover as seaman, and the existence of the ship as a microcosm of society. The ship survives as an important figure to the present day in romantic òran. It will have heroic overtones: long ard nan trì chrannaibh, but it may be introduced in an invitation to elopement. A ship under sail is fo bhréid: like a woman. Love songs composed by sailors, for instance at the wheel, during the night-watch, continue though the sailing-ships have gone. A ship herself may be the 'girl' of the love-song, e.g.

Mo rùn-sa mhaighdean
 Tha aoibhinn ceanalta,
 Ghoid bhuam mo shnuadh
 'S a dh'fhàg gruaidhean tana orm,
 Tha t'ìomhaigh bhòidheach
 Air dhreach na ròsan,
 'S gur lìonmhor òigear
 Bhios an tòir air Ealasaid -
 Mo rùn-sa mhaighdean.

The song is unpublished,¹ but apparently the author was a Skyeman. Local singers there interpret the ìomhaigh as the ship's figurehead.² Duncan Bàn's songs to his gun Nic Còiseam³

1. Known to the writer from childhood.
2. This is probably a mere rationalisation, but there may have been stories involving figureheads to influence the explanation. cf. 'The Shepherd's Son' (a Skyeman) who fell in love with a figurehead. MWHT, Vol.II, p.230 ff.
3. MacLeod, Macintyre, p. 16 ff; p.226 ff.

are another extension of the same basic sensibility; both weapons and ships are central symbols of celebratory poetry.¹

All these sets of imagery find their origin and evocative power in the network of personal relationships in a society in which status and function and role, male and female, were clearly defined and yet must have interacted upon each other to a high degree. It could be at times a society in which relationships might be savage, but there is no evidence that they were cold or aloof.² This makes it all the more important to investigate those aspects of life in which the gentler emotions are predictable, and to relate the treatment of them to other modes of literary expression.

The range that has been described does not exhaust the functions of the òran form in Gaelic (as we shall see later in another context) but those analysed above are the essential ones from the point of view of this study.

1. There is scanty information from oral tradition on names of ships and weapons. Domhnall mac Iain Sheumais' sword and ship were both named. cf. Iain Lom's An Dubh Chnòideartach (Iain Lom, p.104) and Alasdair MacKinnon's An Dubh Ghleannach Sàr Obair, p.346.
2. Aspects of this are commented upon, in a rather pejorative and somewhat bewildered tone, by Burt. v. Letters from a Gentleman in the North of Scotland, Vol.II, p.105 ff.

Dàn

In this context, dàn is the equivalent in demotic terms, vernacular in language and freed from the constraints of the strict rules of composition, of classical Gaelic dán. It may not be immediately recognisable as such in written form, for the distinctive isosyllabism of classical dán is a contingent quality in the vernacular. What it does possess is an irregularity of rhythm when it is spoken as stressed verse: thus it still bears the marks of its ancestry - "stress (varying) in accordance with variations of speech rhythm."¹ Nevertheless, this is not in itself an absolute criterion, for there exist similarly freely stressed songs which are musically òran. In actual fact, the number of instances in which even a reader (without access to a melody) may be unable to say whether a poem is dàn or not are probably few; but in the final analysis an appeal must be made to the music. The characteristic symmetry of òran melody is unmistakeable.²

The characteristic structural unit of dàn is the quatrain. But another form, of considerable importance in Scottish Gaelic verse, also appears: an eight lined stanza, the origin of which is obscure.

We have referred several times in the course of this study to the vernacularisation of classical dán, e.g., in remarks on the Fernaig MS and in our analysis of the Turner MS. This process may have begun in different ways, through the bard

1. V. Appendix 3, p. 210 supra.

2. In the verbal structure also, these texts of òran that show an irregularity of rhythm end with a regularly stressed phrase.

acting as reacaire, or through aristocratic amateurs composing ógláchas. We have for this the evidence of the sixteenth century Duanag Ullamh, ascribed to Maclean's bard, and poems from the first half of the seventeenth century ascribed to upper class authors, e.g., Na trí lámha bu phailte, attributed to the Laird of Raasay who died c. 1616.¹ The latter no doubt continues the tradition of composing in dàn which we see in the Book of the Dean in the poetry of the Chief of the MacNabs and the Countess of Argyll.

The themes of dàn tend to be restricted to fairly easily defined categories: primarily encomia, love, religion, and nature. In this dàn reflects the preoccupations of the classical Gaelic poets, acting in both public and private roles. It is appropriate to begin with the poem that MacNicol singled out in his Remarks as an instance of a truly Scottish Gaelic production, viz., An Duanag Ullamh, composed in the sixteenth century by Maclean's bard to the Earl of Argyll,² in demotic snéadhbhairdne.

It opens with an address to the subject, but not the direct address of the bardic tradition of the strophic metres: this is a third person address, emotionally more formal and mannered. Thereafter a series of kennings is introduced:

Seabhag as uaisle théid 'sna neulta

Crann air chrannaibh ...

Abhall uasal farsaing frèimheach ...

1. From the Fernaig MS; v. Watson Bardachd, pp.236-7.
2. V. Watson Bardachd, p.259 ff; Notes 339 ff. Watson dates it 1555-1558.

Crann as ùire dh'fhàs troimh thalamh ...

Dias abaich chruithneachd 's i lomlàn ...

These are qualified by supporting phrases such as Do'n eòidh moladh, 'S as mò maitheas: formal, dignified expressions which with the third person 'address' immediately set the tone of the poem. In the third stanza there is introduced the couplet:

Mac rath do chum Dia gu h-ullamh

Do'n chléir ealamh.

It reminds us at once of the involvement of the House of Argyll in the politics of the Scottish state-established religion: this is not a parallel with the convention of the piety of a chief's household.

The next sequence of verses consists of the 'ship' topic: Mac Cailein has a loingeas laden with warriors. The set piece describing the raising of sails and securing of stays is essentially the same topic as appears in the bardic tradition; it is also reminiscent of folktale runs, and foreshadows MacDonald's Birlinn (in the same metre); but although it cannot but demonstrate the vitality of all realisations of this topic:

An steud ro-luath, sruth 'ga sàiltibh

'S muir 'ga bualadh

it is, with due propriety, subdued to the over-all measured dignity of the poem.

Then comes the list of Allies, not a detailed list but summing up Uaisle Innse Gall an coimhlion, and extending the formula not only to cover Alba but even to 'dewy France' (an Fhraing bhraonach). A conceptual unity of the Gaels is

being sketched.

The poem ends with a pious invocation: may the Holy Trinity protect the King of Loch Fyne.

This is clearly, then, exactly of the same thematic and topical order as we have seen in other verse traditions. What gives it a different nature as a work of art is fundamentally the measure: the rhythm and shape of any poem is part of the total, complex statement that poem makes; but here, as we have observed, the distancing device of the address gives us our bearings immediately. Consonant with that is the absence of the warriors' and lovers' sense of caidreabh. To point the contrast, we have only to take our minds back to the phrase in the bardic poem on the Rout of Glen Fruin: aig mo ghaoil 's aig mo dhìslibh. Such a statement in the context of An Duanag Ullamh would sound vulgarly intimate.

We may conveniently take as our next example a poem in the same metre, composed to another Earl of Argyll, who was executed in 1685, by An t-Aos-dàna Mac Shithich on the occasion of the Earl's death.¹ We first notice the kennings: Garg an leómhann, an crann dligheach treun talmhaidh, blàth a dh'fhàs; the topical allusions: taigheadas greadhnach, Iarla duasmhor Earra-Ghàidheal, an taic bhur mìoruin, mo thruaighean nochd do luchd leanmhain, fine ... nan steud meara brugh ... fo thùirse, mnàì a' caoidh, bhàsaich luchd ciùil, chaidh an taon thairis, ghluais (a' ghaoth) an fhiùbhaidh/dh'fhuadaich i na h-eòin le stoirm ... o'n choill, is iomadh marcach a thuit ... is dh'éirich, mar stiùir Maois a chabhlach.

1. Watson Bardachd, p.172 ff. V. Eigg, p.138 ff.

Again, the panegyric framework is demonstrable; and, like the Duanag, the form confers dignity and gravity. Apart from these stylistic considerations, however, the resemblances are to be qualified. Stylistically, the movement of both poems (and this applies in greater or less degree to all dàn), is comparatively slow: a feature which derives from the quasi parlando effect of the isosyllabic model, in which strong stresses come irregularly. This allows a poet to 'tell' the poem rather than 'say' it - in other words, it gives an opportunity for exposition. Where a strophic metre, were it used for exposition of an intensely felt experience, would tend to lead to clamorousness or even harangue; or where an òran metre, with its greater fluency, might give an impression of intimate address; the dàn is paced in such a way that it can be intimate or detached according to the circumstances. This is perhaps especially true of snéadhbhairdne¹ with its contrapuntal lines. The present elegy is a discourse to an audience and it has a strong religious emotion, which sometimes intensifies to fervour: in some places, it brings to mind an English style of evangelical politics.² Given the strong Presbyterian background, the comparison may not be far-fetched.

1. It is difficult to say sometimes which metre(s) a demotic dàn is derived from: e.g. some of the very loosely constructed poems with a long line followed by a short may be related to snédbairdne, sétnad mbacach/ngairit, dechnad cummaisc, etc.
2. As in old-fashioned Nonconformist Radicalism.

Ròighainn nan Albannach uile

De 'n ard fhine;

A dhaoine, nam biodh spéis do dhuine

Is beud a mhilleadh.

Dhaoine, ge do fhuair sibh àite

Os cionn Cùirte

Is olc a chuir sibh gliocas Alba

Gu sùrd milte ...

A veiled minatory obiter dictum:

Theagamh gun tig là nach fhasa

Dhuibh d'a dhìoladh

followed by:

Fhuair an fhuil uasal a ceusadh

Mar fhuair Iosa:

Ge nach coimeas sud r'a chéile

Feudar innseadh.

The poet can clearly become intimate in his tone, but it is the intimacy of the preacher. The blend of political and religious homily needs no emphasising.

This elegy rallies the Campbells as strongly as any bardic song, and in the same manner:

A dhream Dhuibhneach ...

Dhream bheadarrach bhuadhach bhàdhach

Mheadhrach mhùirneach ...

using also the evocative power of dùthchas and place-name:

'S nach tadhail an t-Iarla Duibhneach

'S an Dùn Adhrach.

But the verses that precede show how these profoundly impressive panegyric markers are set in an intellectual and historical grid of 'Alba' very different from the tigh is leth Alba of Clan Donald. Although the state has perpetrated an outrage against Mac Cailein and against Sliochd Dhiarmaid Mhic Ua Duibhne, and thereby brought peril upon all, the security of the Campbell involvement in the real affairs of Scotland is expressed all the more eloquently because of it.

Có chumas còir ris an anfhann

Is e 'na chruadhaig,

No chumas casg air gach anghràth

Tha teachd nuadh oirnn?

Có chumas còir ris an Eaglais?

Dh' fhàs i dorcha;

No chumas suas ar luchd teagaisg

Ris na borbaibh?¹

Có chumas an creideamh cathardha

Suas gu treòrach,

Is nach d' fhuair 'Gille-easpuig cead éisdeachd

An taic còrach?

It is impossible to conceive of an expository statement being made with a similar artistic inevitability in any other form but dàn.

As a complete contrast in spirit we may cite briefly another poem in the same metre, the anonymous song to Alasdair mac Colla.² It is a brief praise poem about his heroism

1. Borb here may carry a hint of 'wild Scots'.

2. Watson Bardachd, p.209 ff. Gillies, pp.85-6.

(just as Iain Lom concentrates on his warrior aspect) but within its compass the predictable topical points are made. The poet draws on the lore of the Fiann, making parallels between the hero and Fionn, Goll and Oscar. Alasdair's allies are listed briefly. This is triumphant, warrior panegyric:

Do mhac-samhail mar ealtainn a dhubhbheinn
 Dol tríd choille dharaich
 No mar fhrois mhóir a' reubadh tuinne
 Air druim cuain mara.

It is at the opposite pole from Mac Shithich's poem, though the fundamental system of praising is the same.

In the elegiac use of dàn, we can include poems rather like Dunbar's Lament for the Makaris: Donnchadh MacRaoiridh's plaint, left alone after the deaths of great men; MacLeod of Raasay's lament for the 'generous hands' that are gone; or Alasdair MacKenzie's poem with a somewhat similar theme.¹ ~~MacKenzie~~ loved ships, and women, and wine; now he is left without these and without any of his high-born friends:

Iomadh duine uasal an Ros ...
 Is mise 'nan déidh gun phrìs.

In the quieter tones of dàn there is less involvement with the fine, and the whole network of relationships in a 'clan and country' politics, than we find in bardic verse. The poets of dàn are less spokesmen for the fine, and less concerned to ensure the continuation of the traditional order through a rehearsal of its virtues; their elegies disclose

1. Watson Bardachd, p.234 ff; p.236 ff; p.230 ff.
 All from Fernaig MS.

rather the strength of the personal relationship, though this is set, quite explicitly, in the context of the same order of society.

It is partly a matter of epoch; but in the seventeenth century, ascriptions lead us to believe that dàn is definitely linked with high social status, and the authors may have felt that the overt political propaganda of the bardic tradition was slightly beneath their dignity. It is more befitting to adopt a tone of sic transit gloria mundi - even though this is the world that constituted their support. In that sense, dàn discloses something of the luxury of personal poetry by a leisured class.

We can see the dignity and profundity of feeling that dàn is capable of very clearly in An Ciaran Mabach's elegy to MacDonald of Sleat.¹ It has intense emotion, and a poignancy of personal loss. Nevertheless, the conventional topics constitute the whole frame of the poem. They include one topic which we have seen in romantic òran, the lover's death-wish, but it is noteworthy that there is no mention of allies.

Chan iarrainn tuilleadh de'n t-saoghal,
 Laighinn le daolaibh an fhòid
 Ann an leabaidh chumhaing chaoil,
 Sìnte ri taobh do chuid bhord.

The storm has overtaken him at sea: an t-anrath cuain, gàirthonn nan sìon. The ship, the household without music, poets, drink, tàileasg, hunting: without these the poem would have

1. Bardachd, p.179 ff. Eigg, p.21 ff.

no fabric, but a living pulse of emotion gives them a singularly different functional energy from that which they discharge in the other traditions.

Is mór mo smuainte - chàch cha léir -
Leam fhéin, is mi gabhail mu thàmh ...

Cha robh stiùir no seòl no slat,
No ball beairte a bha ri crann,
Nach do thrus an an-uair uainn:
Mo thruaigh-sa, an fhras a bh'ann.

Taigh mór thathaicheadh na slòigh
Gun òl gun aighear gun mhiadh,
Gun chuir 'ga chaitheamh air bord:
Mo dhòlas, Athair nan sìon.

The invocation to God, in the context, is not a mere pious phrase.

The religious poems in dàn are conventional enough in their theology and piety, which does not make them less beautiful as poetry; they tend to be expressions of resignation after, in some instances at least, a life lived among the flesh-pots - as Alasdair MacKenzie for one implies. In his Tà cogadh oirne do ghnàth he introduces the figure of the warrior-Christ, sorely wounded in battle. But:

Beiridh mo Chaiptean-sa buaidh
Ceannard sluaigh le'm pillear tòir ...¹

and the weapons of Faith, Prayer and Love are given to us to wield. In such figures, conventional piety becomes part of

1. Bardachd, p.233.

the world that panegyric celebrates.

A very different poem, which is instinct with religious feeling, is the moving elegy by Murdoch MacKenzie to his grandson.¹ It is also full of touches that renew our contact with the images and symbols that map out the world of this society.

Gliocas seanar bh'aig mo ghaol ...

Seachas filidh, subhailc saoi,
geamnidheachd is bàidh ri bochd.

Thuit m' fhiùran, duilleach fo bhlàth,
gun fuireach ri fàs a mhios ...

Chraobh a b' àillte bha mo lios
Ùr fo bhlàth gun dol air ghais ...

Air a dhearcadh 'n clàr fo lic ...

We have noted the evocative use of place-names in the other traditions. A poem which concentrates on the virtues of the territorial dùthchas is Oran do Thighearna na Leirge,² in Kintyre, addressed to a chief who proposed to sell this dùthchas/dùthaich.

Eadar Allt Pàraig fa dheas
Is Allt na Sionnach 's leth fa thuath,
Fearann as àillidh fo'n ghréin:
Is duine tréigte thug dha fuath.

The place-names mark the bounds of An Learg. This kind of critical address is never found in the bardic tradition, nor is its rhetoric adapted to it:

1. TGSI, Vol. XLV, p.160-2. (Dornie MSS).

2. Bardachd, p.176 ff. From National Library MS LXII.

Is e am mìorath a dhall do shùil

Dol a reic do dhùthaich air òr.

The fine are scattered shepherdless lambs, bees without a queen:
those who were as faithful to the chief as his own very flesh.

The poem sets out the virtues of this land:

A magha mìn as blaithe fonn,

A gcinn torrach trom gach pòr;

Eadar monadh maol is tràigh,

Am binn bàireach laogh is bò.

Is binn a maighdeanna 'na buailtibh,

Is binn a cuach am barr a tuim;

Is binn a smeòrach nach claon fonn,

Is nuall na dtonn ri slios a fuinn.

This is, in fact, a species of Nature panegyric. There is another Kintyre poem which is entirely devoted to it.¹ It is a pre-Romantic mode of description, concerned with the fertility of territory. Its ancestry is shown if we compare this:

A glinn as binne dùrdan srutha,

Seinn troimh shrathaibh fasgach feurach,

Luibheach craobhach meangach duilleach,

Caorach cnuthach subhach smeurach.

with this from Deirdre's praise of "Gleann na Suan":

Gleann cuachach smólach lonach,

Buadhach an fhorais do gach sionnach,

Gleann creamhach biolrach mongach,

Seamrach sgothach barrchas duilleach.²

1. Bardachd, pp.183-6.

2. O'Rahilly Measgra Dánta, Vol.II, pp.122-3. cf. The poem in praise of Arran, op.cit. Vol.I, pp.59-60, to take two poems that have a Scottish connection.

The poem on Kintyre incorporates most, if not all, of the features that a nature panegyric can celebrate: climate, sea, hills, glens, flocks and herds, the abundance of milk and its products, trees, berries, herbs, crops, various animals and birds, birdsong, pure water, trout and salmon, and hunting deer with hounds. The list of animals and birds includes those considered to be an aristocratic hunter's proper quarry, e.g. deer, seal, otter, swan, goose, duck, moorfowl.

Then harbours and ships are mentioned, and the crowning glory of that region, viz. Clann Domhnaill na féile is an t-suaircis. The nature panegyric is thus rounded off with a straightforward reference to the topic of the fine.

The dàn called Cumha Choire an Easa,¹ by the Piobaire Dall, both expresses the poet's own involvement with a scene of nature more directly than does the poem on Kintyre and also introduces - with a good deal of sophistication - his complaint about his own situation, which is that of a man of art who has lost his patron.

This is done by casting part of the poem in the form of a dialogue between himself and the Corry. The dialogue form, which we have already noted in love poetry, is, in fact, a simple form of verse drama, and as such is used in this nature poem with conspicuous success. The poet is able to suggest his reduced circumstances with delicacy and perhaps a hint of irony when he makes the Corry say:

Measar dhomh gur tu mac Ruairidh
Chunna mi mar ris a' Chòirneal;

1. Eigg, p.16 ff. ; Watson Bardachd p. 119 ff.

An uair a bha e beò 'na bheatha

Bu mhiann leis do leithid 'na sheòmar.

- and when he himself answers:

Is lìonmhor caochladh teachd 'san t-saoghal

Agus adhbhar gu bhith dubhach;

Ma sheinneadh 'san uair duit fàilte

Seinnear an tràth so dhuit cumha.

This is among other things an indirect way of bringing the poet's plight to a patron's attention. In the third and fourth verses the author remembers with sadness that the Corry used to be the scene of great hunting expeditions. The second part of the poem is a typical piece of nature panegyric. The Piobaire Dall was another member of the Talisker circle,¹ and we are now reminded of the convention of dialogue between the Harper and Echo, and between Lachlan MacKinnon and Iochd is Gràdh is Fiùghantas. Cumha Choire an Easa is thus illustrative of a fascinating evolution in Gaelic poetry.

A sensibility which is remarkably near (if not actually of the same essence as) the sensibility of European Romanticism in its involvement with landscape is manifested in Oran na Comhachaig.² The territory is not a clan dùthchas, but an extension of dùthchas: the straths and the mountains that are drenched with memories of the warrior society in its hunting aspect. Here, too, caidreabh is used: An caidreabh fhiadh agus earb. This is another microcosm of society; and the poet (neatly, for our purposes)

1. Matheson The Blind Harper, ibid.

2. Bardachd, pp.249-259.

contrasts the hunt with the ship, which we have already defined as a social microcosm.

Is aoibhinn an obair an t-sealg,
 Aoibhinn a meanmna is a beachd;
 Gur binne a h-aighear 's a fonn
 Na long is i dol fo beairt.¹

The place-names are allowed to develop into a heroic roll-call:

Chì mi Coire Ratha uam,
 Chì mi a' Chruach is Beinn Bhreac,
 Chì mi Srath Oisein nam Fian,
 Chì mi a' ghrian air Meall nan Leac.

It is impossible to imagine this poem - which is one of the greatest poems in Gaelic - without its place-names; and it is only in the measures of dàn that they could function with this power.

Structure and rhythm and paraphraseable content all give the poem classical strength and gravity; in the intensity of feeling, through a kind of spontaneous combustion of nature panegyric, a diamond-hard emotion, a native creation of Romanticism without Weltschmerz, is produced.

Chì mi bràigh Bhidein nan Dos
 An taobh so bhos de Sgurra Lìth,
 Sgurr a' Chòinnich nan damh seang:
 Ionmhuin leam an diugh na chì.

The love poetry in dàn shows unmistakably that it is of that stock that Flower described so eloquently in characterising the Irish dánta grádha. "The subject is love, and not the

1. Bardachd, p.254.

direct passion of the folksingers or the high vision of the great poets, but the learned and fantastic love of European tradition, the amour courtois, which was first shaped into art for modern Europe in Provence, and found a home in all the languages of Christendom wherever a refined society and the practice of poetry met together. In Irish, too, it is clearly the poetry of society. To prove this, we need only point to the names of some of the authors of the poems: in Ireland, Gerald the Earl, Magnus O' Donnell (the chief of his clan) ... in Scotland, the Earl and Countess of Argyle..."¹

We have already alluded to it in connection with òran; and it is unnecessary to quote poems here, for they take us to the periphery of what, according to our thesis, constitutes the map of Gaelic verse. It represents one of the levels at which amour courtois came into Gaelic: from dàn the conventions probably moved into the òran tradition. But at a lower level of chanson, òran was doubtless affected more directly. We may, however, cite as a good (and interesting) example Tha bean an crìch Albainn fhuar / Ge fada bhuam i gur gearr.²

All the poems hitherto quoted or cited are in a quatrain structure. Only in Scottish Gaelic, it would appear, did an eight-lined stanza form of dàn develop. It is remarkable in that, wherever it appears, it is always sung to a variant of the same tune. Its popularity was such that it is still used by at least one bard at the present day - Calum Ruadh Nicolson

1. O'Rahilly Dánta Grádha, pp. xi-xii.

2. TGSI, Vol.XLV, p.151 (Dornie MSS).

in Skye - who may well be the last traditional poet to use a dàn form in any dialect of Gaelic.

The eight-lined dàn does not display quite the same properties of measured dignity that the quatrain form possess. It is a quicker metre, and its range coincides more with that of eulogistic òran. Bards have used it for elegy, for celebrations of battles (e.g. Duncan Macintyre's two songs on the Battle of Falkirk¹ and Corporal Alexander MacKinnon's Blàr na h-Olaind and Blàr na h-Eiphit),² and for religious subjects.

It first appears in Sìleas na Ceapaich's lament for Alexander of Glengarry,³ a poem which has the distinction of containing the longest list of kennings and related images in Scottish Gaelic verse - itself a token of the extent to which this dàn form, from its first appearance, has been drawn into the central stream of encomiastic poetry.

Bu tu 'n lasair dhearg 'gan losgadh,
 Bu tu sgoltadh iad gu 'n sàiltibh;
 Bu tu curaidh cur a' chatha,
 Bu tu 'n laoch gun athadh làimhe;
 Bu tu 'm bradan anns an fhìor-uisg,
 Fìreun air an eunlaith 's àirde;
 Bu tu 'n leómhann thar gach beathach,
 Bu tu damh leathan na cràice.
 Bu tu 'n loch nach fhaoidte thaomadh,
 Bu tu tobar faoilidh na slàinte;
 Bu tu Beinn Nibheis thar gach aonach,

1. Macleod Macintyre p.1 ff.; p.408 ff. 2. Sàr Obair pp.342-346.

3. v. Ó Baoill Bardachd Shìlis na Ceapaich, p.70 ff; Watson Bardachd p128 ff.
 v. Ó Baoill p.240-1 for some other poems in this metre.

Bu tu chreag nach fhaoidte theàrnadh;
 Bu tu clach uachdair a' chaisteil,
 Bu tu leac leathan na sràide;
 Bu tu leug lòghmhor nam buadhan,
 Bu tu clach uasal an fhàinne.

Bu tu 'n t-iubhar thar gach coillidh,
 Bu tu 'n darach daingean làidir;
 Bu tu 'n cuileann 's bu tu 'n draigheann,
 Bu tu 'n t-abhall molach blàthmhor;
 Cha robh do dhàimh ris a' chritheann
 Na do dhligheadh ris an fheàrna;
 Cha robh bheag ionnadh de 'n leamhan;
 Bu tu leannan nam ban àlainn.

With such a description, we have come back full circle to the bardic matrix; only the elaborateness of the kennings, developed as a set piece of decorative images, make it clear that the poem is not held by the constraints of the true bardic utterance.

The Choral Songs and their Conventions

The category of Choral Songs appears at first sight to have a unique place in Gaelic; and while that impression becomes modified in the course of a critic's analysis and appreciation of its content, it remains a most remarkable corpus of poetry. What we have been studying up to now are verse traditions in which men and women have both participated; but the world that their poetry projects is, with certain reservations, as in òran, a male world. The choral songs are essentially the women's contribution, and in this poetry we view the order of society that is reflected in the other traditions of verse through their eyes.

The temptation is therefore all the greater to linger on those aspects that are distinctive, to the neglect of what the category shares with the rest of Gaelic poetry. This will be resisted here, but it is hoped that enough of the sheer poetic power of the songs will make itself felt by the way. Without that realisation, the change in quality that a topic, a traditional epithet, even a single word, can undergo from its placing in one context rather than another, will not be manifest.

The choral songs differ structurally from the others. They are constructed in single lines (which in singing may be broken up into half-lines) or couplets, accompanied by a refrain of meaningless vocables, a mixture of vocables and words, or words only.¹ These are the songs which until very recently accompanied the women's communal waulking of tweed, and before

1. V. Ross The Sub-Literary Tradition in Scottish Gaelic Song Poetry in Éigse, Vol. VII, pp.217-239.

then communal reaping with the sickle. Work-songs must therefore have always constituted an important strand in this tradition. But certain compositions, identical in structure and drawing upon the same stock of imagery seen to have been (in certain variants, times, and places) kept apart from work-songs. An example is the Skye song, Oran mór Sgoirebreac, which in Skye during the nineteenth century was never used as a work-song, although a fragmentary variant was a waulking song in South Uist.¹ The texts of the songs make few references to actual work and many are laments, which seem to be out of place in the exuberant gatherings associated with communal tasks. It is therefore likely that these òrain-luaidh are composed of different strands. As an actual living tradition of work-song, they have attracted compositions whose original structure is different (quatrains, for instance) and still recognisable in their work-song setting. Similarity of content can usually be shown, and may be adduced as a reason for their becoming associated with songs of choral structure. There is one important exception to this, however: Ossianic ballads were used also. A small minority, from internal evidence, are of male authorship, and some could have been composed by men or women. A sub-group are attributed to Fairies: for instance, composed by fairy lovers; others are attributed to humans who had been seized by the fairies. In the latter case, the song is said to have been heard coming from beneath the ground or from the fairy knoll.

There is an important amatory strain, erotic rather than

1. V. SS, Vol. VI. pp.235-43.

romantic, in the tradition. When we observed, in discussing romantic òran, that European amour courtois most likely grafted itself on to a native stock of erotic poetry, this strain in choral songs could have provided it. Generally speaking the songs are anonymous, and there are very few attributions to authors of any social status.¹ In earlier centuries, in the pre-history of the choral songs (which is longer than for other traditions because the main written sources are twentieth century) women of all classes may have participated freely in composing them and there is some slight internal evidence for that; but references to herding cattle, the sheiling life, reaping, etc., give the impression that the settings at any rate are plebeian. In addition, we have songs of complaints by girls of the tuath made pregnant or jilted by high-born men. As there is no reason to believe that the form is anything but an ancient native one, this could mean that the tradition came down in society, but there is no evidence on which to ground such a hypothesis. The unequivocal fact that they have been used as work songs, however, and that this must always have been a function of the tradition, allows us to suggest that here we have some of the poetry of the serf class who were not allowed to bear weapons. Some of the songs of male authorship might therefore derive from that class.²

1. V. Ó Baoill Bardachd Shìlis na Ceapaich, p.252.
2. Songs of male authorship are not discussed below, as they do not add anything significant.

Certain speculations concerning the origin of other elements have been discussed elsewhere,¹ and cannot be repeated here except as brief statements. It is suggested that the following strands combined to form the tradition:

1. A tradition of danced song.²
2. A tradition of song used to greet a victorious warrior: this would be panegyric, in some instances erotic. It is conceivable that the use of Tàladh, e.g. Tàladh Dhomhnaill Ghuirm may indicate this as much as 'lulling to sleep.'
3. A tradition of song performed in connection with fertility rites held during an óenach on sites of ancestral burial grounds.³ The laments in the tradition would thus be connected with cluichi cáinte.

To this we may add two further hypotheses.

1. Since the Fairies are the dead (whatever other accretions fairy lore may have gathered) the 'fairy songs' of choral tradition would be in the same complex of descent as those associated with óenaige.

2. If Murphy's theories⁴ are accepted that lore of the Fiana flourished, in Christian times, among the peasantry until taken up by the filidh in the twelfth century, and if we accept that

1. V. SS Vol. XII, pp.29-43 and TGSI, Vol. XLVI, pp.44-65.

2. Since these papers were published, some musicologists have informed me that certain melodic patterns are more like the music of dance than the music of work-songs. There also exists some factual information from field-work, which is not relevant to this thesis.

3. Cf. the singing and dancing of cantilenae in churchyards in medieval Europe.

4. V. Early Irish Literature, ed. Carney, pp.145-193; esp. pp. 145-157. References to Duanaire Finn, Vol. III, where the argument is worked out in detail, are given.

the choral tradition is an ancient native one, we can consider the possibility that the attraction of Ossianic ballads (broken up into singable components) is due to an ancient connection between the ballad content and this choral form, i.e. another example of grafting a fresh shoot on an old stock of the same nature. We may have some relics of a linear descendant of an Ossianic choral song in, for instance, "Oisean's song/warning to his mother"¹. These, and others, may be, in the form in which we have them, an amalgam of Ossianic choral song and Ossianic balladry.²

It may be relevant (cf. Point 1 above) that Oisean's mother was a deer-fairy.

If Murphy's theory that Fionn, etc., are euhemerised deities is accepted, the pre-Christian cultic origins of some strand of choral song may be brought nearer possibility.

These choral songs we have discussed so far were apparently known generically as Luinneag. There is another class, with a different structure, which may also be considered to be choral songs.³ These are in the form of couplets, which are repeated in singing to make a quatrain, i.e. the second couplet of the first stanza becomes the first couplet of the second

1. V. Campbell Leabhar na Féinne, pp.198-200.
2. Analysis of these structures is difficult; they cannot be reshaped in ballad form - but this is obviously inconclusive.
3. V. TGSI, Vol. XLVI, ibid. where luinneag is discussed, and detailed arguments suggesting a connection between the two groups have been put forward.

stanza, and so on to the end of the song. Men and women composed in this form, but, from internal evidence, women authors are rather more numerous. We have a number of attributions to authors, mostly women; and, it should be noted, women of high social status. It is possible that we have in these songs the choral tradition of the upper class of Gaelic society.

We may now consider some features of the first type. A mhic Iain mhic Sheumais¹ was composed, according to Uist tradition, by Donald of Eriskay's fostermother, helped by a band of girls who sang the chorus. It may be an example of a song addressed to a victorious warrior. It is one of the few examples of the type that are dateable: the battle of Càirinis was fought in 1601. Donald was wounded:

Bha fùil do chuirp uasail
 Air uachdar an fhearainn ...
 'S cha do ghabh thu 'm bristeadh,
 Làmh leigeadh na fala.

This is a straightforward panegyric. Then follows a series of statements that are not pathetic fallacy but conceits of a kind common in classical dàn.

Bho'n là thug thu'n cuan ort,
 Bha gruaim air na beannaibh,
 Bha snigh' air na speuran,
 'S bha na reultan galach,
 Bha'n raineach a' ruadhadh,
 'S bha'n luachdair gun bharrach,

1. Oranaiche, p.131 ff.

Mu mhac Iain mhic Sheumais,

Duine treubhach, smearail.

It closes with a statement emphasising nobility:

'S cairdeach a Rìgh Leódhuis,

Mo leóghann glan, uasal ...

'S cairdeach tha mo leanabh,

Shìol Ailein Mhic Ruairidh.

This is a song whose text has survived relatively unimpaired in oral tradition. Even in K.C. Craig's collection,¹ in which the interchange of lines and passages that characterises the choral tradition has gone very far,² it is quite near the Oranaiche text.

In general, however, it is difficult to use the concept of an 'original' in the choral tradition. It is as if the 'secondary transmission' which we described above³ was the typical mode in choral song. If the pioneer collectors had provided as many examples from this as from the other traditions we would be able to draw firmer conclusions. But what they do give leads us to believe, that a constant interchange from song to song (which may have been caused or increased by use in work) is an old phenomenon.

We have already seen the address to the subject in A Mhic Iain mhic Sheumais. This form with patronymic, sometimes with

1. Orain Luaidh Mairi Nighean Alasdair, pp.2-3. Hereafter referred to as Craig.
2. The late Paisley bard, Donald Macintyre, a nephew of Mairi informed me that his mother, who had inherited the same song tradition, was considerably more conservative in this respect.
3. v. Chap. 4 p.150. We could use a concept of a 'matrix' rather than an 'original.'

a territorial style, is typical. Or it may be Oganaich òig, a fhleasgaich a' ghunna. The style is frequently intimate and affectionate: Ailein duinn a chiall 's a thasgaidh, M'eudail mór Mac mhic Ailein.

Allies as such are rarely mentioned. In choral songs the stress is on the kin and blood-relationship; the subject may be a lover or a child, more often than not in these songs an illegitimate child. If the father is of noble blood the mother may boast.

'S car thu a dh'Iarla Ile
 Bheir a' chis as na batail;
 'S car thu Chloinn Domhnaill
 Na ròiseol 's nam bratach;
 'S car thu Mhac Dhubhghaill
 O thùr nan clach s'waighte¹.

Chan ann le balach mo throm
 Ach leis a' lasgaire dheas dhonn.

Toiseach bainne tighinn am chiochan
 O'n òg as glan sìoladh fala².

Gura cardeach mo leanabh/leannan
 Dha na falannan uasal:
 Do Mhac Leòid anns na Hearadh
 'S do Mhac Alasdair Ruaidh thu ...
 Car thu a Dhomhnall Gorm Sléiteach
 Làmh a reubadh na cuantan.³

1. Where no reference is given, the quotations are from unpublished songs known from boyhood.
2. Campbell and Collinson, Hebridean Folksongs, p.84.
3. Craig, p.27; Hebridean Folksongs, p.142-4.

In the negative aspect, a woman says:

Tha dhìth orm cairdean,
Mo chinneadh mòr rìoghail
Nan sìneadh 's na blàraibh.

The focus on the personal relationship rather than on any political implications (in the widest sense) is characteristic of all the topics in this tradition. The warrior is most often lover as well, and he is presented as hunter, horseman and seaman in the clarity of passion. There are few exceptions to this rule; and predictably Alasdair mac Colla figures in one of them:

Alasdair mhic Colla ghasda
As do làimh-sa dh'earbainn tapadh:
Mharbhadh Tighearna Ach' nam Breac leat,
Thìodhlaiceadh e lùib a bhreacain -
Ged is beag mi bhuaill mi clach air...

The song ends with almost the identical words that Iain Lom uses in his bardic poem:

Alasdair mhic Colla ghasda,
Làmh dheas a sgoltadh nan caisteal

The song with vocables, says:

Alasdair 'ic ò hò
Cholla ghasda hò hò
Lamh sgoltadh nan hò hò
Tùr 's nan caisteal chall éile.¹

The lover is usually addressed or spoken of with frank intensity, or with a lyrical delicateness which extends to the

1. MacDonald Collection, pp.40-42. Loch nam breac in text.

setting.

Do phòg mhilis bha duilich a diùltadh ...

Coisich a rùin, lùb nan geallamh,

'S minig a laigh mi fo t'earradh;

Ma laigh cha b'ann aig a bhaile,

Mullach nam beann fad o'n t-sealladh ...

Ri solus na reul is soills' na gealaich,

Sìoban nam beann sìor dhol farrainn ...

Alasdair òig, mhic 'ac Neacail,

B'fhearr liom fhin gum beirinn mac dhut,

Cóigear no sianar no seachdar ...

Bheirinn cìoch is glùn an asgaidh,

Thogainn suas air barraibh bas iad,

Air mo ghualainn fhìn gum faict' iad;

'S rachainn leotha a Leódhas dhachaidh,

Go baile bòdhach a' chlachain,

Do thoigh ùr an ùrlair fharsainn,

Dh'fholte fìon aig bord a' bhaistidh,

Dh'fholte fìon dearg is fìon datht' ann.¹

This is altogether a different mode of address from that of romantic òran. That example and the next show the characteristic movement to a topic that emphasises the lover's aristocratic qualities:

Tha mi torrach dùmhail trom

Leis an lasgaire dheas dhonn

1. Craig, p.8.

Nach danns air an ùrlar lom
 Gun an lobhta làir fo bhonn.
 Truagh nach fhaicinn fhìn do long
 Air a luchdachadh gu trom
 Le òr dearg, le airgead pronn,
 Bu lium fhìn an luchd 's an long.¹

We have repeatedly drawn attention to the way in which topics are introduced and reintroduced in other traditions. In choral song this process is carried to such an extreme that the entire corpus appears to be a kaleidoscope of images, forming new patterns - which are different songs - with every movement. The lover is the hunter:

Bu tu sealgair a' chathain
 Théid do'n athar a' ruaiseadh,
 Agus nàmhaid ròin theilich
 Thig o sgeirean a' chuain ghlais,
 'S na circeige duinne
 Bheireadh gur as an fhuarniod.²

Sealgair sithn' o fhrìth nan ardbheann
 'S a' ròin léith o bheul an t-sàile
 'S an earbag bheag a dh'fhalbhas stàtail.

and the lover is dressed:

Le crios iallach, uallach airgid.

He is a horseman:

Marcaich nan each seanga siubhlach / crùidheach, seanga

1. ibid, pp.13-14.

2. Hebridean Folksongs, p.78.

But there are no extended descriptions of him in this role.

We find rather descriptive hyperbole:

Bheireadh a' fìon dha chuid eachaibh

'S a chuireadh crùidhean òir fo'n casan.

As seaman, however, he is quite as prominent as he is in the hunter's role. The choral tradition casts him in the part of an active seaman, rather than that of the leader of a warrior crew.

Bha mo leannan air a' stiùir...

As do làimh gun earbainn m'anam

Dol timcheall rubha ri gaillinn,

Fhad 's a mhaireadh bìth 'na darach

No buill chaola ri crainn gheala,

No giuthas os cionn na mara

Le siaban 's le tràghadh mara.¹

Formalised descriptions of ships are numerous.

Chì mi am bàta seach a' rubha

Is i 'na siubhal fo làn éideadh

As always in Gaelic verse, these are full of energy. There may be a positive and explicit joy:

Is ait liom am bàta 'na gabhail

A' toirt a cinn dh'an t-seann chuan domhain

In the next two examples there is a good contrast drawn between a typical description of a clan chief's boat and Prince Charles Edward's ship.

Thug Clann Nèill druim a' chuain orr'

1. Hebridean Folksongs, p.90.

Le longannan loma luatha,
 Le 'n ulagan cruinne cruaidhe,
 Le 'm brataichean gorma 's uaine:
 Mo leannan-sa air bord a fuaraidh,
 Làmh cheangal nam ball 's ga' fuasgladh.

The royal ship is more splendid, befitting the attitude to the true King and to Jacobitism.

Mac mo Rìgh air tighean do dh'Albainn
 Le long an t-seoladair ghreannmhair,
 Le stiùir òir le dà chrann airgid,
 Siùil rithe dhe'n t-sìoda Fhrangach
 'S ulagan òir as gach ceann dheth.¹

Descriptions of personal beauty are of the same order as in romantic òran, but considerably less elaborate: this tradition does not often use strings of descriptive adjectives; it is the personal emotion which is important: phrases such as Se mo ghràdh do chùl ceutach² are much more common than Gruag leadanach theudach dhuilleach.³

The lover's literacy is sometimes referred to, as elsewhere; place-names mark out territory; there are passages which celebrate the fertility of a territory; there is an emphasis on rites of burial: we have here, in fact, exactly the same topics as we have now seen throughout all the traditions. We sometimes meet a phrase or a concept that makes an immediate connection with another tradition. In a choral song we hear:

1. Craig, p.35.

2. ibid, p.112.

3. Carmina Gadelica, Vol.V, p.20.

Chì mi luingeas air caol Ile
 Tighinn a dh'iarraidh Cairistiona :
 Chan ann go bainis a dhèanamh
 Ach a cur 'san talamh ìseal,
 Fo leacan troma go dìleann.

and we remember Mary MacLeod's lament for the Laird of Applecross:

Chaidh do bhuidheann an òrdugh,
 Cha b'ann mu aighear do phòsaidh
 Le nighean Iarla Chlann Domhnaill ...

Is ann chaidh do thasgadh 'san t-sròl fo d'léine.¹

It is the intensity of utterance, and the abrupt changes in the emotional focussing, that makes the choral songs so different, even when the topics are identical. They do, however, have another dimension also: a passionate jealousy:

'S truagh, a Rìgh! nach fhaicinn ise
 A taobh leòinte 's a glùn briste,
 'S gun aon léigh fo'n ghréin ach mise!
 Chuirinn creuchd am beul gach niosgaid,
 Air mo làimh gun dearbhainn misneach!
 Bhristinn cnàimh 's gun tàirninn silteach,
 Chuirinn ùir air bruaich do lice,
 Gus an càirinn thu 'san islig
 'S gus an dùininn thu 'sa chiste.²

The images of that fierce poetry are drawn from battle and burial. The léigh is the physician who is powerless when the great man's hour of death comes or when a hapless lover is in

1. Mary MacLeod, p.18.

2. Hebridean Folksongs, p.50.

love's fever: his role is given a strange meaning here, as is the warrior's misneach.

Finally, there is the topic of Household. There is one particular realisation of it which brings out the vividness and the joyousness of the art of these songs: the old renew their youth:

Dhomh-sa b'aithne beus do thalla
 'San fheasgar chiùin fhiathail earraich -
 Muc 'ga ròsladh, bó 'ga feannadh,
 Lòmhnachean òir air coin sheanga,
 Fiamh an duin' òig air an t-seannduin',
 Fiamh na maighdin air a' chaillich,
 Gruagaichean 'gan toirt do dh'fhearaibh,
 Fir òga danns' air am bainis,

The other tradition¹ which may be choral also, at least in origin, has a range which extends into some of the panegyric territories that we have already explored. Two famous examples are the MacGregor songs printed by W.J. Watson: Clann Griogair air fògradh and Mac Griogair a Ruadhshruth.² Another is Mi 'm shuidh air an fhaoilinn, one of the laments for Iain Garbh of Raasay, attributed to his sister. Yet another is the anonymous song Gura muladach sgìth mi. All of these, and the rest of the category, can be shown to be based upon the same topical system: what is more they seem to blend elements from the Dionysian and Apollonian³ matrices of Gaelic poetry. They have great formal beauty and depths of complicated passion. The last mentioned,

1. v. pp. 327-8 supra.

2. Bardachd, p.237 ff : p.241 ff.

3. For these terms v. EPP, p.41.

composed by a woman, makes a fitting comment upon the kind of society which the rhetoric of Gaelic verse is designed to maintain and defend. It is a community in which a sense of individuality is sustained in a network of the kin within a known and named territory. The exquisite delicateness of attitude seems to extend even to the description of the brindled moorfowl that her lover hunts. The expression is all the more poignant for being made when the security of this society, for her personally, has collapsed.

Gura muladach sgìth mi

'S mi liom fhìn 'san tìr aineoil,

Mi 's na h-Eileanan Diùrach,

'S mór mo dhùil ri dhol thairis.

Mi gun phiuthar, gun bhràthair,

Gun mhàthair, gun athair:

Mi gun duine dhe m' dhaoine

Ris a faod mi mo ghearain.

Chì mi 'm bàta troimh 'n chaolas -

Tha mo ghaol-s' oirre dh'fhearaibh;

Tha mo leannan 'ga stiùireadh,

Lùb ùr a' chùil chlannaich.

Lùb ùr a' chùil chubhraidh,

'S toigh liom fhìn do chaol mhala.

Bu tu leannan nam maighdeann,
Anns an oidhche 'gam mealladh,

Is tu ag iarraidh a pòigeadh
Eadar dheòin agus dh'aindeoin.

Bu tu sealgar a' choilich
Is moiche goireas 'sa' mhaduinn,

Is na circeige riabhaich
Dh'am bu bhiadh a' fraobh meangain.

'S na faighinn-sa m'ordugh,
Bu leat móran do dh'fhearann :

Bu leat Muil' agus Ile,
Cinn-tìr agus Arainn.

The text lies dead on the page, for this is essentially song; like so much of Gaelic poetry, divorce of words and melody destroys its energy - and that is particularly true of choral song. But it can still be seen as an epitome of this tradition's handling of the topics.

Conclusion

The evidence presented in the foregoing pages is adduced to demonstrate that Gaelic poetry possesses a coherent rhetorical system. It is essentially an oral tradition but one in which the influences and controls of writing are discernible. But in spite of vicissitudes of history and cultural fashion, distance in time between the author and the source we use, and the preconceptions of collectors, the traditional system survives unimpaired. It is, I believe, true that this system could be shown to be still functional, though in very complex modes, in the highly 'literary' poetry of contemporary Gaelic, but for reasons of space alone such a continuation of our study is obviously impracticable. Until this century, however, it is the patterns that we have seen, admittedly modified by historical circumstances and the attrition of a Gaelic identity, which give Gaelic poetry its distinctive qualities. The bases which we have investigated are very clearly related to social organisation, which is itself controlled by a wider political context.

We saw that as early as Mary Macleod's time the topic of Allies is already a fully developed pan-Gaelic diplomatic formula of Clan Donald's claim to ceannas nan Gàidheal. That this flows from the Lordship of the Isles goes without saying, but there is a deeper groundswell. We suggested in Chapter 1 that the shift of resistance to the anglicisation of Scotland from the east of the country to the west did not break the sense of continuity in Gaelic history: in other words, the Gaels remembered that they were the original inheritors. Although the Lords of the Isles themselves never advanced a claim to the

whole of Scotland so far as I am aware, such a concept must have existed in the background. We find it hinted at in classical dán to Alasdair mac Colla:

Cíos is cána ar urleith Alban
 aimsir oile,
 biaidh sin ag an droing mar dhlighe
 nó an roinn roimhe.¹

A century later, Burt had this to say of the Gaels:

" ... they have an adherence to one another as Highlanders, in opposition to the People of the Low-Country, whom they despise as inferior to them in Courage, and believe they have a right to plunder them whenever it is in their Power. This last arises from a Tradition, that the Lowlands, in old Times were the Possession of their Ancestors ...

When I mentioned this Tradition, I had only in view the middling and ordinary Highlanders, who are very tenacious of old Customs and opinions; and (now) I would be understood that it is very probable such a Notion was formerly entertained by some, at least, amongst those of the highest Rank."²

The attitude that Burt describes was obviously widespread throughout Gaelic society; it finds its formulation in Thomas the Rhymer's prophecy which must have been already well-known before the Montrose wars gave it a new dynamic: Iain Lom refers to it casually as an established tradition.³ In 1715 Sileas na Ceapaich is more explicit:

1. SGS, Vol.II, p.76.
2. Burt Letters, Vol.II, pp.106-107.
3. v. Iain Lom, pp.28; 52; 212.

Tha Tòmas ag innse ann a fhàistinn
 Gur Clanna Gàidheal a bhuidhneas buaidh ...
 Nì Sasunn strìochdadh ge mòr an inntleachd,
 Dh'iarraidh sìth air an Rìgh tha uainn.¹

MacCodrum carries on the tradition in his Moladh Chlann Domhnaill.² The prophecy is, incidentally, still current.³

With this background, Iain Dubh mac Iain mhic Ailein, before the Rising of 1715, gives the convention of listing allies a new significance when he devotes an entire poem to the topic in Oran nam Fineachan Gàidhealach:⁴ Fir Albann involves maithe na Gallachd; thereafter comes Clan Donald, and the list includes even the Campbells. There was little doubt which side the Campbells would take in reality: Iain Dubh is therefore making it plain where their loyalty morally lies, and his statement is not just an empty gesture. It may be that Iain Dubh was given to uttering 'polite, meaningless words'; it is quite certain that Alexander MacDonald was not. When we find MacDonald composing a poem of the same name⁵ (a conscious reference to the 1715 poem) in 1745 and also including the Campbells, with an even more elaborate address, there must be a fundamental theory of history involved. Loyalty to the true king might be an

1. v. Ó Baoill Bàrdachd Shìlis na Ceapaich p.42; Watson Bardachd, p.283.
2. Matheson MacCodrum p.124 ff.; p.290 n.
3. That a Lowland poet was chosen as the prophet is interesting, as is his presence among the Gaelic ancestral dead in Tom na h-Iubhraich.
4. Watson Bardachd, p.149 ff.
5. A. & A. MacDonald Poems of Alex. MacDonald, p.76 ff. The title is in the 1751 edition.

adequate explanation, but that has to be set in the context of Gaelic history, and particularly that of the previous hundred years, during which time this prophecy must have been discussed throughout the length and breadth of the land. Alexander MacDonald was not a homo religiosus in the sense that some psychologists of religion use that term. He had indeed an intense visionary faith, but it was historical and political; and it is inconceivable that his deagh shoisgeul feadh nan Garbhchrioch was not at least in part inspired by Thomas the Rhymer's prophecy that the dispossessed Gaels would come into their own again. It is notable that MacDonald avoids the strophic metre of the bardic tradition.¹ It may be that, even in its more elaborate forms, he considered it to be too bound up with clan-centred panegyric: he is, by contrast, a national poet. At all events, both he and Iain Dubh each composed his Oran nam Fineachan in the òran metre which, as we have seen, had already been developed with fewer constraints.

We have suggested in Chapter 2 that the failure of the hopes pinned on the '45 led to a concentration on literary activities. The particular development exemplified in Oran nam Fineachan could go no further. In terms of military traditions, there was another transference of loyalty. We noted that in the topic of warrior's weapons, the breacan was sometimes included in the list of trappings. The 'Disclothing Act' of 1747, which presumably recognised the status of the breacan as a warrior's

1. Watson Bardachd, p.XLVI, suggests, no doubt rightly, that he "probably agreed with O'Bruadair ... in reckoning this form of metre to be more suited to a gráidéigeas (strolling bard) than to a poet who took himself seriously." He uses it in the iorram of his Birlinn.

dress, had a profound effect on morale.¹ Only in the Independent Companies, the precursors of the Highland Regiments, was the dress allowed. The anonymous song Soraidh leis a' Bhreacan Ur shows one of the effects:

Soraidh leis a' bhreacan ùr!
 O 's ann dha thug mi mo rùn;
 B'ait liom e an cùl nan glùn,
 Ann am pleatadh dlùth mun cuairt.
 Chuir mi bhriogais ghlas fo m' cheann
 An àite an éilidh bhig a bh'ann,
 Gos bhith coltach ris a' Ghall
 Tha an taobh thall do dh'Uisge Chluaidh.

The young man laments that no girl will look at him; he remembers the associations of the kilt with hunting:

An am bhith dìreadh a' mhunaidh
 Is e an t-éileadh beag bha lurach
 and knows how he can regain dress and morale.

Nuair a théid mi fhìn dh'an arm
 Gheibh mi éileadh 's sporan garbh,
 Boineid bhiorach mhollach ghorm,
 Slat do ribein stoirm mu m' chluais.

The scores of songs that celebrate Gilleann an Eilidh down to the Second World War canalise the emotions developed in the poetry that we have analysed.

The sense of dùthchas, in its military aspects, is also drawn upon in these songs:

1.v. J.L. Campbell Songs of the Forty-Five for the; pp.219-21, Note.

Seinneam cliù na fear ùr,
 Gillean glùn-gheal nam breacan...

Seinneam cliù na dh'fhàg Port-rìgh ...
 Seinneam cliù na dh'fhalbh á Sléit ...

Their dress is:

Eideadh sunndach nan gaisgeach

The fertility of a dùthaich is the native base upon which Alexander MacDonald built his nature poetry. This still remains in a pre-romantic mode, and under his influence and that of his contemporaries and successors, is still a living form of Gaelic ^{verse,} celebrating an island or a parish or, to take what is traditionally regarded as the greatest monument in all this genre, a mountain - in Moladh Beinn Dobhrain. Duncan Bàn's poem is a panegyric to a mountain, expressed in an uncannily precise adumbration of a later art form, precisely in the terms of visual documentary, so that without altering a word, the poem could be used as the 'commentary' of a film.

In Uist, the late Roderick MacKay¹ celebrates his native island, and its fertility, with an occasional reference to laoich, who are gillean an éilidh.

... Far a fàs an t-eorna as fhearr
 Gu dìsach, gràinneach, dualanach,
 Dh'àraich iomadh laoch gun sgàig
 'S na baird a b'fhearr a chuala sinn
 Bidh e tighinn gu m' chuimhne ghnàth
 Gach coibhneas bàigh a fhuair mi ann.

1 Ruairidh Mac Aoidh, Diteagan a Tìr nan Oig, pp.17-20; v. esp. p.18 and p.20.

Tha a cuid sliabh mar bha iad riamh
 Gu fasgach, feurach, fuaranach
 Cnocach, gleannach, sgorach, grianach
 Lusach, riasgach, cruachanach
 Far a faigh a' chaora diol
 'S gun éis gum biadh i h-uan orra
 'S bheir iad daonnan dhan an fhiadh
 A dheoch, a bhiadh 's a chluasagan

Love poetry also still¹ displays some of the rhetorical topics of good descent ~~and~~ accomplishments; and beauty is codified in the traditional terms. It is worth noting that even William Ross, whose sensibility is so distinctly personal, is securely in the rhetorical tradition of romantic love poetry.

We have seen that this fabric of poetry, which still remains, however parochial or anachronistic it may seem in the context of the modern world, first took shape in a panegyric tradition. The development of panegyric into a pervasive style is only to be explained in terms of a society under pressure, indeed fighting for survival, and to a considerable extent isolated from the great innovating movements of post-medieval Europe.

Gaelic panegyric is therefore not merely the direct celebration of great men in life and death, although it is of course that. It is also a system which forces the poet to develop his theme in such a way that his imagery participates in the symbolism that expresses those qualities which are necessary for survival of the society. This is the reason why the warrior's role is the apex. We can see how the system works with centripetal compulsions, ever bringing us back to this central symbol: the warrior who is the protector and rewarder. All else is

1. Modern village bards use the topics.

made ancillary to this, each role taking its own place in the hierarchy. Religion also is subordinated to the main principle, serving to support the household of a dead protector of the people.

The four traditions which we have studied are simply four currents in one river, each with its own distinctive sound. The bardic rhetoric is declamatory and terse; òran is euphonious and plangent; dàn is deliberate and grave; and the choral songs are intense and ecstatic. There is indeed a danger of labelling them in this way, not only because there is a certain amount of intermingling at the edges, but because rhetorical properties are only part of a poem. Yet if they can be defined, these seem to be their differentiae. It has been remarked by some scholar of ballads that the difference is in the tune and that it is a difference of thought as well.¹ This is a singularly apt maxim to apply to these different ways of looking at the same kind of world, with a concentration upon the same fixed points.

The symbolism is codified in sets of conventional images. It is certainly true to say that these are ornamental, but they are much more than 'decorative' or even 'literary'. They enshrine the mores of the community; and it is interesting to note that they are usually concentrated most densely in a heroic elegy, precisely at the point when the community is in greatest peril through the loss of its protector: a situation in which the solidarity of its members must be reaffirmed. The topic

1. Probably W.P. Ker, but I have failed to trace the reference.

of Burial, with its associated rites, is a part of that. The imagery has also wider uses. It may, for instance, be used in the equivalent of a diplomatic note: an example being the Blind Harper's plea to members of surrounding clans not to 'lift' his cattle.¹

It is noteworthy that in the poetry we have investigated, even in the bardic tradition, the praise poem as a direct address by an individual poet to his patron, merely in anticipation of reward, is not common. The authors seem to be concerned not so much with personal reward (although they may have both expected and received it) as with the wider issues of the social and economic health of the fine.

The rhetorical system, then, projects a model of society. The codes of imagery express a sense of history through the use of genealogy and the naming of important events; they express a sense of geography through these same events, such as great battles, and territorial place-names. Implicit in both is a sense of social and national coherence and personal identity. Genealogy and place-names alike are both grids through which experience is given order. What is to a stranger an expanse of empty countryside was in the past to the native community, what to a degree it still remains: a dynamic, perhaps even a heroic, territory populated with figures from history and legend. Even the sea - cuan sruthach nan ròd -

1. Matheson The Blind Harper, p.32 ff. This idea of the use of the proper style of address, with traditional epithets and complimentary phrases, as a diplomatic 'sweetener' before adverse criticism was expressed, was endorsed, without prompting, by a Glengarry bard in conversation some years ago.

was part of the map. To the extent that poets used and reinforced these systems, their break-up, in the crumbling of the traditional rhetoric of Gaelic poetry, involved a crumbling of the whole Gaelic identity. In this connection, it is to be observed that the only system that 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 system had been largely broken. Nevertheless, this was too reclusive and other-worldly a psychology to provide in literature an adequate strategy for a wide range of human experience. It failed to displace the older intellectual framework: indeed, the two systems remained in mutual hostility.

One of the important implications of our whole argument is that rhetoric is part of Gaelic society; as such, by ordaining how human relationships are to be expressed, it controls them. The norms of behaviour are established in a society which does not tolerate cultural anarchism; the rhetoric is an aesthetic ideology which, logically, allows the poet only to celebrate or denounce. Both activities may display a broad spectrum of expression but both can be reduced analytically to the traditional categories of moladh versus diomoladh. The latter ranges from invective to coarse or good humoured flyting; but it does not encourage - perhaps actually precludes - satire in any sophisticated sense. (A parallel which must not be pushed too far occurs in an anecdote told by a politician in an

emergent African state who pointed out that democratic government was impossible where the only phrase for 'Leader of the Opposition' meant 'Chief of the Enemies'.)

The aesthetic ideology does allow love poetry, sometimes of great intensity, to emerge; but that is because the elemental passions cannot be stifled. Love is subordinated to the social demands to a certain degree, but its divisive, heretical tendencies are observable: in certain instances it has elements of the Greek atē - the tragic madness.

The non-traditional cast of Rob Donn's poetry has recently received some close attention.¹ The influence of Alexander Pope is doubtless important. But it is also relevant that Rob Donn's area had known a form of evangelical Presbyterianism controlled and modified by a still relatively intact, secure Gaelic society, from the seventeenth century. That fact may be in turn connected with the peripheral situation, so far as the Lordship of the Isles and Clan Donald were concerned, of Dùthaich Mhic Aoidh. It is at all events demonstrable that the rhetoric we have studied has left fainter traces in this northern verse than we find elsewhere; and physical and psychological distance from ceannas nan Gàidheal is probably the reason.

Traditional Gaelic rhetoric is not, then, primarily concerned to explore the eccentricities of the individual imagination nor with exaggeration of the individual perceptions. The expression is controlled by social norms and deviations are more likely to be regarded as such than to be valued as an

1. V. e.g. D. J. MacLeod in SGS, Vol. XII, p.3 ff.

original point of view. Since every intellectual framework is by definition limited, this system is limited also. But far from weakening poetic expression, it confers strength, clarity and normality on it. It often concentrates the art so that the mundane may take on a symbolic intensity.

Furthermore, Gaelic rhetoric does not obscure the contribution of the individual genius. Our concern in this study has not been with the individual genius but with the terms within which he has worked. It is perfectly possible to read or listen to Gaelic poetry as individual works or as the voices of individual authors; but to do so is like reading Spenser's Faerie Queen or the Roman de la Rose and neglecting the allegory.

ABBREVIATIONS

- EPP = Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics ed. Alex Preminger.
- FM = Fernaig MS.
- MWHT = More West Highland Tales ed. J.G. MacKay.
- SGS = Scottish Gaelic Studies
Vols. 1 - Oxford, 1926-58;
Aberdeen, 1961-
- SS = Scottish Studies
Vol.1 - Edinburgh, 1957-
- SVDL = Scottish Verse from the Book of the Dean of Lismore
ed. W.J. Watson.
- TGSI = Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness
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