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**ROB DONN MACKAY:
FINDING THE MUSIC IN THE SONGS**

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ABSTRACT AND LAY SUMMARY

This thesis explores the musical world and the song compositions of eighteenth-century Sutherland Gaelic bard Rob Donn MacKay (1714-1778). The principal focus is musical rather than literary, aimed at developing an analytical model to reconstruct how a non-literate Gaelic song-maker chose and composed the music for his songs. In that regard, the thesis breaks new ground in at least two ways: as the first full-length study of the musical work of Rob Donn, and as the first full-length musical study of any eighteenth-century Scottish Gaelic poet. Among other things, it demonstrates that a critical assessment of Rob Donn merely as a “poet” seriously underestimates his achievement in combining words and music to create a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts. The study also illustrates how widely melodic material circulated in eighteenth-century Scotland through aural transmission, easily crossing between languages and between instrumental and vocal music.

The thesis includes a musical biography, a review of sources and commentary on Rob Donn, an introduction to relevant theoretical concepts in ethnomusicology and related fields, and a survey of eighteenth-century Scottish music, followed by several chapters analyzing the music of one hundred songs by topic (elegies; social and political commentary; love, courtship and weddings; satire and humor; and praise, nature and sea songs). The study shows that Rob Donn borrowed tunes for 67 of these songs from earlier sources (45% from Gaelic song, 25% from Scots song, 12% from English or Irish song, and 18% from instrumental tunes). It then provides evidence that he composed the melodies of 33 songs, examining in detail how he adapted earlier musical models and created musical settings to reinforce aspects of his poetic message. It also analyzes the musical features of all 100 songs, providing charts summarizing their vocal range, musical meter, scales and tonality. The thesis is accompanied by two appendices, one containing 121 musical settings of the 100 songs, and the other containing their complete texts with English translations (most translated here for the first time).

SIGNED DECLARATION

I hereby confirm that this thesis has been composed entirely by myself and contains solely the result of my own work. The contents have not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification, although 13 of the 100 songs analyzed here were discussed in my MSc thesis presented to the University of Edinburgh in 2011. None of the work has been published to date, although I have presented several related conference papers, some of which may be published in the future.

Dated: _____

Signed: _____

Ellen L. Beard

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|----------|--|
| ACG | An Comunn Gàidhealach |
| AF | Angus Fraser Collection |
| CPC | Caledonian Pocket Companion |
| ER | Elizabeth Ross Manuscript |
| Gesto | Gesto Collection |
| HSS | Highland Society of Scotland |
| HVA | Highland Vocal Airs (Patrick MacDonald Collection) |
| ICTM | International Council for Traditional Music |
| NLS | National Library of Scotland |
| Sed. Bk. | Sederunt Book (official minutes of HSS) |
| SEM | Society for Ethnomusicology |
| SF | Simon Fraser Collection |
| SGS | Scottish Gaelic Studies |
| SMM | Scots Musical Museum |
| TGSI | Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness |

PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Once upon a time, when I was an American teenager, my mother told me that we were descended from a poet laureate of Scotland named Rob Donn. I was very dubious, but a seed had been planted. A few years later, in the library at the University of Chicago, I found a book called *An Introduction to Gaelic Poetry* that confirmed his existence (although not the elevated title). And there the matter rested for several decades. Later, as I was contemplating retirement from my legal career, I realized that if I wanted to read his poetry I would have to learn Gaelic, which took me first to the traditional music program at Sabhal Mòr Ostaig and then to the department of Celtic and Scottish Studies at the University of Edinburgh.

For guidance and encouragement on this pilgrimage, I am greatly indebted to all the dedicated staff at both institutions, particularly my PhD supervisors Dr. Anja Gunderloch in Celtic and Dr. Katherine Campbell in ethnomusicology, and Dr. John Purser in Skye. Special thanks go to Dr. Ulrike Hogg at the National Library of Scotland for advice and copies of relevant manuscripts, to Bethany Lawson for access to the Highland Society archives at Ingliston House (and to Ronald Black for cataloguing them many years ago), and to Dr. Jake King for the map of MacKay Country. I am grateful to Professor William Gillies for advice on texts and translations of Rob Donn, and to Dr. Virginia Blankenhorn, Allan MacDonald, and Morag MacLeod for advice on musical settings. I am also indebted to the late Ailsa Smith for access to family documents and oral history regarding her grandfather Hew Morrison, to Willie and David Morrison for oral history from Durness, and to Gillebrìde MacMillan and Christine Primrose for their efforts to explain the aesthetics of traditional Gaelic singing. Although this study is not based on fieldwork, the generosity of these and many other persons in sharing their knowledge and the insights I gained as a participant-observer in the contemporary Gaelic song community (by singing in a Gaelic choir and competing at Mòds) have greatly enriched an understanding otherwise based only on the printed page. I am sure I was never an easy pupil, since I questioned everything I was told, but thank you all — *mòran taing dhuibh uile* — for persevering.

CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION

As Colm Ó Baoill said recently about another Gaelic song-maker: “The words should not be judged without their tune: if we do not know the tune we do not know the whole artefact.”¹ This is equally true for my subject, Sutherland Gaelic bard Robert (Rob Donn) MacKay (1714-1778), but it remains a principle honored more in the breach than the observance in the realm of Gaelic scholarship. That is, despite the consensus that most Scottish Gaelic poetry before the twentieth century was in fact song,² this awareness has produced a surprising dearth of musical scholarship or performing editions of the work of individual song-makers.³ Rob Donn has perhaps fared better than many, as a songbook with music for forty-five of his 220 songs was published in 1899.⁴ In general, however, poetry anthologies and editions of individual poets still follow the pattern established in the eighteenth century of publishing only verbal texts, supplemented at times with tune names and occasionally with melodies but usually devoid of musical analysis.⁵ As William Gillies wrote in 2002:

[T]here is very little criticism that is expert in musicological and literary terms at the same time. This is not defensible nowadays, if it ever was. For the tune and phrase structure, tempo and rhythm and mode are another key part of the overall coding of

¹ Colm Ó Baoill, *Màiri nighean Alasdair Ruaidh: Song-maker of Skye and Berneray* (Glasgow: SGTS, 2014), p. 17.

² See, e.g., Ronald Black, *An Lasair: Anthology of 18th Century Scottish Gaelic Verse* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2001), p. 1; Donald MacAulay, *Nua-Bhàrdachd Ghàidhlig* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1987), p. 46; Derick Thomson, ‘The Song-makers and their Songs’, in *An Introduction to Gaelic Poetry*, 2nd edn (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1989), pp. 57-98.

³ Although excellent, well-researched modern song collections exist, such as *Songs of Gaelic Scotland*, ed. by Anne Lorne Gillies (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2005), and *Fonn: The Campbells of Greepe*, ed. by Mary Ann Kennedy (Stornoway: Acair, 2013), these do not focus on the work of individual poets.

⁴ *Songs and Poems by Rob Donn Mackay*, ed. by Adam Gunn and Malcolm MacFarlane (Glasgow: The Celtic Monthly, 1899).

⁵ The pattern began with the first published Gaelic poetry collection in 1751, by Alexander MacDonald (Alasdair mac Mhaighstir Alasdair), *Ais-Eiridh na Sean-Chánoin Albannaich* (Edinburgh: 1751), which listed tune names only. The musical coverage of more recent poetry anthologies ranges from printed tunes, in Colm Ó Baoill and Meg Bateman, eds., *Gàir nan Clàrsach: An Anthology of 17th Century Gaelic Poetry* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 1994), to no discussion of music at all, in Black, *An Lasair*. In editions of individual poets for the Scottish Gaelic Texts Society, only William Matheson and Colm Ó Baoill have included musical analysis, as in Matheson’s *The Blind Harper: The Songs of Roderick Morison and His Music* (Edinburgh: SGTS, 1970) and Ó Baoill’s *Poems and Songs by Sileas MacDonald* (Edinburgh: SGTS, 1972), and only Ó Baoill’s most recent edition, *Màiri nighean Alasdair Ruaidh*, approaches a balanced consideration of poetry, biography, and music.

very many Gaelic poems, as the naming of tunes and the provision of vocables in early MS and printed collections should warn us.⁶

The purpose of this case study is to redress that balance.

A related issue concerns orality and literacy, since Rob Donn and most other seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Gaelic poets were not literate and composed their songs in a fully aural/oral context.⁷ But what does that actually mean for their creative process? In particular, where did they get the tunes to which their songs were set, and what was the relationship between the music and the words? These issues are particularly salient for Rob Donn, since his first editor, Mackintosh Mackay, claimed that “most of the airs to which he composed are original”, and later commentators made similar although less far-reaching claims.⁸ And even in the rare instances where such tunes are identified, how can we test such claims? These are just a few of the methodological issues confronting a student of eighteenth-century Gaelic song, but they illustrate the scope of the challenge it poses. Because written records are limited, sound recording did not exist, and “one cannot do fieldwork in the past,” the nature of the evidence will often permit only tentative conclusions.⁹ In the words of musicologist Peter Jeffrey, “[r]e-envisioning a culture of the past means not only seeing clearly the evidence that survives, but imaginatively filling in the gaps where the evidence is missing.”¹⁰

Accordingly, this study is an exercise in historical ethnomusicology, designed to develop a methodology for reuniting the music and words of an eighteenth-century Gaelic bard and reconstructing his compositional practices. For Rob Donn, the project had two complementary aims. The first was to undertake the preliminary work for a new edition of his songs, a scholarly edition or a performing

⁶ William Gillies, ‘On the Study of Gaelic Literature’, in *Litreachas agus Eachdraidh: Rannsachadh na Gàidhlig 2*, ed. by Michel Byrne, Thomas Owen Clancy and Sheila Kidd (Glasgow: Glasgow University Department of Celtic, 2006), pp. 1-32 (p. 22).

⁷ Thomson, *Introduction to Gaelic Poetry*, p. 117.

⁸ *Songs and Poems in the Gaelic Language*, by Robert Mackay, ed. by Mackintosh Mackay (Inverness: Kenneth Douglas, 1829), p. xlii; *Sàr-Obair nam Bàrd Gaèlach*, ed. by John Mackenzie (Glasgow: MacGregor, Polson, 1841), p. 208; *Prose Writings of Donald MacKinnon*, ed. by Lachlan MacKinnon (Edinburgh: SGTS, 1956), p. 245; Ian Grimble, *The World of Rob Donn*, 2nd edn (Edinburgh: Saltire Society, 1999), p. 42.

⁹ Richard Widdess, ‘Historical Ethnomusicology’, in Helen Myers, ed., *Ethnomusicology: An Introduction* (London: MacMillan Press, 1992), pp. 219-31 (p. 219).

¹⁰ Peter Jeffrey, *Re-envisioning Past Musical Cultures: Ethnomusicology in the Study of Gregorian Chant* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 120.

edition or both. The fruits of that labor are contained in the two appendices: Appendix I, the tune settings for 100 songs, and Appendix II, the texts and translations of those 100 songs. The second aim was to undertake the musical and contextual analysis contained in the thesis itself, informed by considerable reading in fields ranging from ethnomusicological theory to eighteenth-century Scottish history. In other words, the aim was to reconstruct the musical world of Rob Donn.

The research questions that guided the study are listed below (Section A), followed by a short biographical sketch of the bard (Section B) and an overview of the methodology, sources, and structure of the thesis (Section C).

A. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

(1) What was the musical world of Rob Donn? That is, what kinds of music did he hear — at home and on his travels — that provided the musical materials from which he drew in his own creative work?

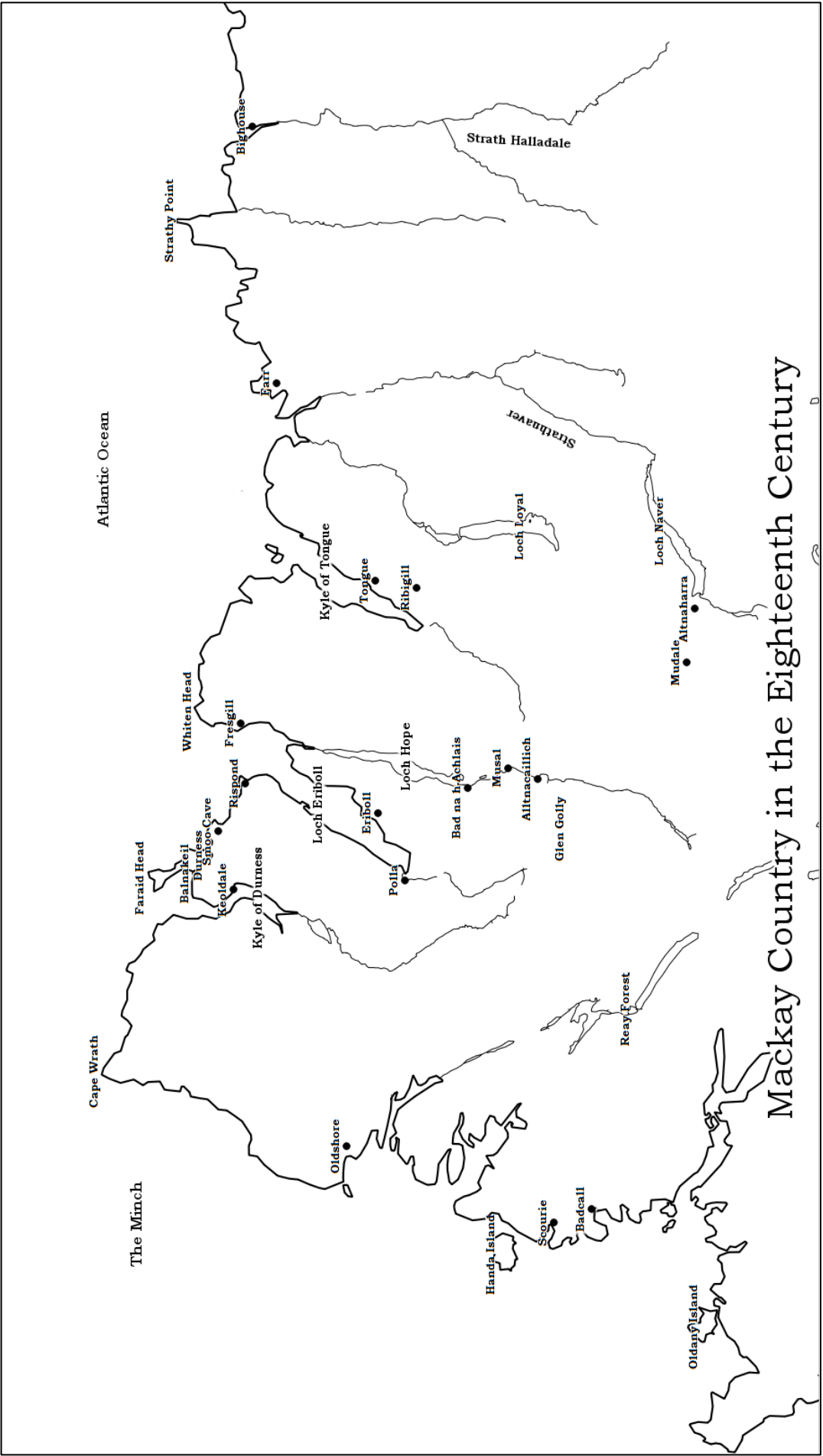
(2) To what extent is it possible to identify, locate and reconstruct as Gaelic songs the melodies to which Rob Donn's songs were sung during his lifetime?

(3) What conclusions can be drawn about the nature of his work as a composer? For example:

(a) When he borrowed or adapted existing tunes, what were his sources and how and why did he use them?

(b) To what extent did he compose his own melodies, for which songs, and under what circumstances?

(c) Are there patterns in the sources or characteristics of the tunes that correspond to the topics of the poetry or the social function of the songs?



Mackay Country in the Eighteenth Century

B. BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Because historian Ian Grimble has already published a thorough and well-contextualized biography of Rob Donn, this section of the thesis will present only a brief biographical sketch, drawing upon the work of Grimble and others, plus textual evidence from the poetry, to highlight aspects of Rob Donn's life most relevant to music.¹¹

1. MUSICAL INFLUENCES

Rob Donn, a poet and singer, was born into the vibrant oral culture typical of the eighteenth-century *Gàidhealtachd*. The son of a small tenant farmer in Strathmore, near Loch Hope in northwest Sutherland, he had little or no opportunity to obtain a formal education or become literate in Gaelic, English or music (although there is some evidence that he attended school just long enough to begin learning his letters).¹² Nevertheless, his biographers make clear that he received in good measure what Ronald Black calls the education of the *cèilidh*-house.¹³ In his community, people commonly “spent the winter evenings in social intercourse, meeting alternately in each other's houses, where songs were sung, ancient heroic ballads were recited, and stories of ghosts and fairies filled up the intervals.”¹⁴ As might be expected, his earliest influence was his mother, who reportedly possessed “a lively temperament” and “a good stock of folklore in the shape of stories of the *Feine* and of songs of bygone days.”¹⁵

After demonstrating a precocious talent for verbal repartee and versification, Rob Donn was taken at the age of 6 or 7 into the family of John MacKay of Musal, Iain mac Eachainn, working initially as a herd-boy in a capacity somewhere between that of servant and foster son.¹⁶ Iain mac Eachainn, a tacksman and distant relative

¹¹ The first edition of this biography, *The World of Rob Donn* (Edinburgh: Edina Press, 1979), was followed by an expanded posthumous edition including the Gaelic texts of the poetry previously printed only in English. Ian Grimble, *The World of Rob Donn*, 2nd edn (Edinburgh: Saltire Society, 1999). In this thesis, all further references to Grimble are to the 1999 edition.

¹² *Songs and Poems in the Gaelic Language by Rob Donn*, ed. by Hew Morrison (Edinburgh: John Grant, 1899), pp. xii, xviii. See App. II, #86 for the evidence on rudimentary literacy.

¹³ *An Lasair*, pp. xii-xiv.

¹⁴ Morrison, p. xiii.

¹⁵ Morrison, p. xv.

¹⁶ Grimble, p. 10; Morrison, p. xviii. Rob Donn was not treated exactly like Iain mac Eachainn's own children, as he did not receive their educational opportunities, and he complained bitterly about Iain's wife, calling her a hard task-mistress. Morrison, pp. xviii, 237-39; Grimble, pp. 11-13. On the other

of Lord Reay, was himself a poet and patron of the arts, although he later gave pride of place to Rob Donn:

| | |
|--|--|
| Tha m' obair-sa air dol gu làr, Thèid i bàs do dhìth nam fonn, Ach leis gach brìtheamh dan eòl dàn | My work has fallen to the ground; It will perish for want of airs. But with every judge who has a knowledge of poetry |
| Bidh cuimhne gu bràth air Rob Donn. | Rob Donn will be remembered forever. ¹⁷ |

John MacKay was a large-scale cattle dealer and grazier in the north, and Rob Donn apparently remained in his employment in various aspects of the cattle business, at least intermittently, until the older man's death in 1757.¹⁸ As a result, Rob Donn traveled extensively throughout the Highlands and attended the cattle fairs in the south of Scotland and the English markets, including Crieff, Falkirk and Carlisle.¹⁹ This gave him ample opportunities to meet people from elsewhere in Scotland and beyond, including cattle drovers, residents of other Gaelic-speaking districts and English speakers at the southern markets, and to hear and learn the music they played and sang.²⁰

At home in Durness Parish, Rob Donn was extremely fortunate in his proximity to one of the most remarkable musical families in eighteenth-century Scotland, the MacDonalds.²¹ Rev. Murdo MacDonald, parish minister in Durness from 1726 until his death in 1763, was “an accomplished musician, a ‘most melodious and powerful singer,’ and composed many Gaelic airs” (unfortunately not identified).²² Rob Donn paid tribute to these talents in his elegy:

| | |
|---|---|
| An duine thigeadh a suas riut, Ann an guth 's ann an cluasaibh, Cha 'n fhacas riamh is cha chualas, Is 's e mo smuaintean nach cluinn. | The one to compare with you For voice and ear Has never been seen or heard of And in my opinion he will not be heard of. ²³ |
|---|---|

hand, he and Iain later referred to one another as “my father” and “my son”, and regarded each other with great mutual affection and esteem. Mackay, pp. xlvi-xlvii and note.

¹⁷ Grimble, pp. 107-08. Rob Donn returned the compliment profusely in his heartfelt elegy for his patron. Grimble, pp. 112-17.

¹⁸ Mackay, pp. xv-xvi; Morrison, pp. xvii, xxi; Grimble, p. 112.

¹⁹ Mackay, p. xvi; Morrison, p. xxi.

²⁰ A. R. B. Haldane, *The Drove Roads of Scotland* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 1997), pp. 44, 141-42.

²¹ See William Donaldson, *The Highland Pipe and Scottish Society, 1750-1950* (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 2000), p. 43 (describing this family as “leading tradition-bearers in Highland music during the second half of the eighteenth century”).

²² *Fasti Ecclesiae Scoticae*, ed. by Hew Scott, 8 vols (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1928), VII, p. 102.

²³ App. II, #71, verse 8.

Rev. MacDonald encouraged his eleven children to pursue their studies in music, teaching them the elements himself before sending them to Kenneth Sutherland, manager of the Balnakeil estate, for instruction on the violin.²⁴ Two of his daughters excelled on that instrument. Flora (1736-1805), who later married Rev. John Touch, minister of St. Cuthbert's Chapel-of-Ease in Edinburgh from 1766 to 1808, reportedly composed airs to several of Rob Donn's poems (again not identified).²⁵ Another daughter, who died a Mrs. Gordon in Golspie, was known locally as Fiddlag and often played reels and strathspeys for dances at the manse of Kildonan when Donald Sage was growing up there in the 1790s and early 1800s.²⁶

More important for their legacy to Scottish music — although perhaps not for their direct influence on Rob Donn, who was almost a generation older — were two of Rev. MacDonald's sons, Patrick and Joseph, whose ground-breaking musical collections will be discussed in more detail in Chapter IV. Both were excellent all-round musicians, thoroughly familiar with the traditional music of their own community and sufficiently trained in “modern” or classical music to be able to transcribe what they heard into staff notation and to explain the musical principles upon which it was based. Patrick (1729-1824), later minister of Kilmore in Argyll, lived for some years with his grandfather in Pittenweem, and attended the University of Aberdeen beginning in 1747, but returned regularly to Durness to visit his family.²⁷ His primary instrument was the violin, which he used in his collecting to test his musical transcriptions with his sources.²⁸ He was also proficient enough that he once performed at a concert in Edinburgh as a last-minute replacement for the Italian maestro Stabilini, “somewhat to the scandal of his clerical brethren” in town for the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland.²⁹

Even more musically talented was Patrick's younger brother Joseph (1739-1762), whose promising life was cut short by a fever in India during his brief career

²⁴ Morrison, pp. 20, 28; *The Patrick MacDonald Collection*, ed. by Christine Martin (Skye: Taigh na Teud, 2000), p. 4.

²⁵ Morrison, p. 20; *Fasti* VII, p. 102; *Fasti* I, p. 22.

²⁶ Donald Sage, *Memorabilia Domestica* (Wick: W. Rae, 1889), p. 136. Sage lived from 1789 to 1869. *The Companion to Gaelic Scotland*, ed. by Derick S. Thomson (Glasgow: Gairm, 1994), p. 254.

²⁷ Donaldson, p. 44.

²⁸ *HVA*, p. 6.

²⁹ Donaldson, p. 44.

with the East India Company.³⁰ In Durness, Joseph studied psalm precenting, violin and bagpipe, as well as the flute and oboe.³¹ In his teens, he attended grammar school in Haddington, and studied with the violinist and composer Nicolo Pasquali, then resident Italian maestro in Edinburgh, where he heard both classical and traditional music.³² He returned to Durness about 1758, where he avidly collected traditional music until his departure for India in 1760.³³

Given the dates of their common residence in Durness Parish, we can safely assume that Rob Donn heard all the traditional Highland music that the MacDonald family heard, performed and recorded in that community during his lifetime. In fact, Joseph MacDonald probably learned many of the tunes he notated for eventual publication in Patrick's *Highland Vocal Airs* from the singing of Rob Donn himself.³⁴ The bard may also have heard the MacDonald brothers play vernacular Scots music learned in their periods of residence in the Lowlands, or even the occasional Italian air brought back from Edinburgh and Aberdeen, as four volumes of Corelli were among the effects of Joseph MacDonald on his death in India.³⁵

While there is no evidence that Rob Donn himself played any instrument, one of his best friends was Lord Reay's piper, George MacLeod. The piper features in several of Rob Donn's poems, including the following lines:

| | |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| Thèid mise an dèidh Sheòrais, | I will go in search of George |
| Oir is còir dhomh bhith 'm fagus da, | Because I ought to be in his company, |
| Oir 's bràithrean ann an ceòl sinn, | Since we are brothers in music, |
| An còmhradh beòil 's am feadaireachd. | In the language of mouth and chanter. ³⁶ |

This verse shows that Rob Donn considered himself a musician and viewed the roles of the singer and the piper as analogous.

In addition to secular song, fiddle and pipes, another important musical element in Rob Donn's life was the metrical psalm tunes he heard at church, led by a precentor and sung and ornamented by the congregation. Although Rev. MacDonald could have acted as his own precentor, his precocious son Joseph was

³⁰ *Fasti* VII, p. 102; Grumble, pp. 211-14.

³¹ Donaldson, pp. 20-21.

³² Donaldson, pp. 23-24.

³³ Donaldson, pp. 24-25.

³⁴ Grumble, p. 281.

³⁵ Donaldson, p. 25.

³⁶ App. II, #95, verse 1; see also Grumble, pp. 95-96, 129-34, 149, 159.

leading the psalms in Durness by the age of eight.³⁷ More often, however, the precentor was the local schoolteacher, and the musical efforts of the incumbent in Tongue, John Sutherland or Iain Tapaìdh — also a poet — elicited some of Rob Donn’s most vitriolic satire.³⁸

| | |
|---|-------------------------------------|
| Cìod a bhuinte bh’ aig a Sgrìobtur, | Who would deal with the Scripture |
| Ri do chiotaireachd chealgach, | With your hypocritical awkwardness, |
| No bhi làimhseachadh firinn, | Or handle the Word of God |
| Gus an aoir a bhi cearbach[?] ³⁹ | Like a clumsy satire? |

As if that were not enough:

| | |
|---|---|
| Bhi dol mearachd ’s an t-seinn dhuinn, | To go astray singing to us |
| Air gach aon latha-sàbaid, | On every single Sunday, |
| Gu ’n d’ thug sud air luchd t-èisdeachd, | That made your listeners realize |
| Gu ’n robh t’ èibheachd ’n a gràin doibh. ⁴⁰ | That your shouting was loathsome to them. |

But even if Rob Donn was a better singer than the schoolmaster, he could not act as precentor because he was not literate and could not read out the line, a situation which may have contributed to his annoyance.

In his late forties, Rob Donn had another opportunity (voluntary or otherwise) to travel and expand his musical repertoire while serving in the first Sutherland Fencible Regiment from 1759 to 1763.⁴¹ This regiment was recruited locally for home duty during the Seven Years’ War, under the leadership of the Earl of Sutherland as Lieutenant-Colonel and Hugh MacKay of Bighouse as Major.⁴² According to Grimble, “[l]ocal tradition suggests that Rob Donn was invited to join the colours as a source of entertainment to officers and men, and that he enjoyed exceptional freedom while he wore uniform.”⁴³ In his songs, Rob Donn mentions visiting Dunrobin Castle (home of the Sutherland earls), Inverness, Aberdeen, Dundee and Edinburgh.⁴⁴ The regiment also did garrison duty in Stirling and Perth; it saw no active service and was disbanded at the end of the war in 1763.⁴⁵

The Letters of Service for raising the regiment, signed by the King on 11 August 1759 and directed to William, Earl of Sutherland, authorized him to recruit a

³⁷ Donaldson, pp. 20-21.

³⁸ Grimble, p. 203, Morrison, p. 112.

³⁹ Morrison, p. 115 (my translation).

⁴⁰ Morrison, p. 113 (my translation).

⁴¹ Grimble, p. 222.

⁴² Grimble, p. 215.

⁴³ Grimble, p. 215. Nevertheless, the poet did not particularly enjoy the experience, commenting later “ri bhuir n-arm cha bhi mi” (your army’s not for me). App. II, #36, verse 2.

⁴⁴ Grimble, pp. 216-17.

⁴⁵ Angus Mackay, *The Book of Mackay* (Edinburgh: Norman Macleod, 1906), p. 204.

battalion “in the counties of Sutherland and Caithness, and in Places adjacent known to be well affected.”⁴⁶ In addition to various officers and privates, he was specifically authorized to recruit eighteen drummers and two pipers; drums were military issue but not pipes.⁴⁷ The regiment included a total of 1050 men, many recruited from the MacKay country, including Strathnaver (then part of the Sutherland estate) and the parishes of Farr, Tongue and Durness.⁴⁸ As there was no formal provision for a regimental bard — and Rob Donn was plainly unsuited to military discipline — he was presumably paid as an ordinary private but permitted to play an extraordinary role.⁴⁹

2. SOCIAL AND MUSICAL ROLES

During his lifetime, Rob Donn played a number of social and musical roles, most of which can only be touched on here. He was a loving husband and father, a good friend, a pillar of the church, a poor subsistence farmer, a cattleman, a soldier, a deer-hunter, a social critic, and a general thorn in the side of the rich and powerful. He was also a poet, an entertainer, a composer, and a singer — even if neither he nor his contemporaries necessarily separated those roles into the components just listed.

Rob Donn spent the first two-thirds of his life in the small valley of Strathmore, near Loch Hope, in the part of Durness Parish known as West Moine, also the home of his employer and patron Iain mac Eachainn. After at least one earlier romantic disappointment, in about 1740 he married Janet MacKay — apparently a raven-haired beauty with many admirers — and the couple had thirteen children, of whom five sons and three daughters lived to adulthood.⁵⁰ Janet must have been about a decade younger than her husband, if we assume she was 45 when she gave birth to their youngest child in 1769.⁵¹ This means that she gave birth

⁴⁶ Eric Mackay, ‘The First Sutherland Fencible Regiment, 1759’, *Celtic Monthly*, 7 (1898-1899), 107-09 (p. 108). Because the Seven Years’ War began barely a decade after Culloden, fencible regiments were recruited only in securely Hanoverian Sutherland, Caithness and Argyll. *Ibid.*, p. 107.

⁴⁷ Eric Mackay, p. 108.

⁴⁸ David Stewart, *Sketches of the Character, Manners and Present State of the Highlands with Details of the Military Service of the Highland Regiments*, 2nd edn, 2 vols (Edinburgh: Constable, 1822), II, p. 303; I. H. Mackay Scobie, *An Old Highland Fencible Corps* (Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1914), p. 24.

⁴⁹ See Morrison, pp. xxvii-xxviii (anecdote describing the reaction of a new officer to Rob Donn’s nonchalance when discovered roaming freely when he should have been at drill).

⁵⁰ Morrison, pp. xx-xxi, xxxi; “Bonnie Janet”, App. II, #38.

⁵¹ Morrison, p. xxxi. Morrison edited and published the Durness parish records beginning in 1764, when Rev. John Thomson became minister after the death of Rev. MacDonald. *Parish Register of*

almost every two years for a thirty-year period. She also managed the household and worked elsewhere at various times during her marriage — as a nurse in Tongue, in the dairy at Balnakeil, and as a midwife or nurse on “interesting occasions.”⁵² According to an 1828 interview with an elderly man who knew Rob Donn and his family:

His wife, Janet Mackay, was a remarkably sensible woman, and so active in her habits, that she kept their concerns at home quite in order, when Robert was absent. She was a fine singer, and it was delightful to hear them in the winter evenings sing together. Two of the daughters had some turn for composing verses, and occasionally amused their father, by quick replies to his impromptus, composed to any passing incident.⁵³

Among the poems that mention Janet, the most revealing is the following:

| | |
|---|--|
| Cha bhac ise Rob o 'mhiannaibh, 'S cha bhac es' a crìondachd fèin. | She will not hinder Rob from his purposes, And he will not obstruct her prudence. ⁵⁴ |
|---|--|

Another interesting aspect of Rob Donn’s life was his relationship to the church, a sort of “holy alliance” with the minister and kirk session to denounce immoral conduct (usually but not always sexual).⁵⁵ In the words of Ronald Black: “At that time there were two kinds of public censure. One was denunciation from the pulpit, along with any action taken by the kirk session; the other was bardic satire.”⁵⁶ As this topic is discussed at length by Grimble, I mention it only in passing, but it is noteworthy how often Morrison’s notes document a proceeding before the kirk session involving the same parties satirized by Rob Donn.

Of course, the bard’s social criticism was by no means limited to sexual misconduct. In addition to more light-hearted commentary on various topics, he often challenged the authorities (sacred and secular) and sometimes crossed the invisible line beyond which his social superiors would no longer tolerate his sallies. As documented by Grimble, these instances included his Jacobite verse, his spirited

Durness 1764-1814, ed. by Hew Morrison (Edinburgh: Scottish Record Office, 1911). As no equivalent records exist for the first fifty years of Rob Donn’s life, many dates have had to be reconstructed (or guessed) by his biographers.

⁵² Morrison, pp. xlvi-xlvii; Grimble, pp. 48-49.

⁵³ Mackay, p. lviii. This is presumably a translation and paraphrase of an interview conducted in Gaelic by Mrs. Mackay Scobie of Keoldale with Roderick Morrison (Rory Chearvaig), then “aged 83 and a most extraordinary chronologist.” Mackay, pp. xlvii-xlviii.

⁵⁴ App. II, #100, verse 6.

⁵⁵ Several poems on this topic are discussed in Chapter VIII.

⁵⁶ *An Lasair*, p. xxxvi.

defense of his own poaching, and poems directly criticizing community leaders such as Lady Reay, Hugh of Bighouse, and Colonel Hugh MacKay.⁵⁷ He was certainly hauled before the authorities more than once, discharged from at least one position of employment, and eventually forced to move from his home in Strathmore to the coast — although only one of those incidents resulted unambiguously from his speech (Jacobite verse) rather than his conduct (usually poaching).⁵⁸

It is clear from Grimble's biography, the notes of Rob Donn's editors, and the poems themselves that Rob Donn was never a professional poet or musician in the sense that he made his living from his art. This is a reflection of social and economic organization, not ability, as no one in his community — with the possible exception of George MacLeod, Lord Reay's piper, discussed at greater length in Chapter IV — earned his living as a full-time poet or musician. Nevertheless, as ethnomusicologists have observed, all societies recognize varying levels of individual musical skill and some recognize degrees of professionalism or specialization among their musically-talented members.⁵⁹ Rob Donn was a specialist as a poet, singer and musician — a first among equals — but he was not the only person in his community who performed any of those roles.

One puzzling question is the extent, if any, to which Rob Donn was paid for his services in composing verse or in entertaining groups at various social occasions. He must have been paid while serving in the Sutherland Fencibles — ostensibly for military services but actually for entertainment. In addition, since many of his songs mark rites of passage such as births, weddings and deaths, he may have been paid in some instances to compose a poem and/or to entertain the assembled guests.⁶⁰ His elegy for Kenneth Sutherland suggests that he did not refuse to accept payment when offered:

⁵⁷ See Grimble, pp. 89-95 (Jacobite verse); 161-70 (poaching); 244-46 (Lady Reay); 124 (Hugh of Bighouse); Morrison, pp. 249-51 (Col. Hugh MacKay).

⁵⁸ In addition to the references in the previous footnote, see Grimble, pp. 170-72 (eviction from Strathmore); Morrison, pp. xxviii-xxix (discharge from employment).

⁵⁹ Alan P. Merriam, *The Anthropology of Music* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1964), pp. 123-25.

⁶⁰ For example, one poem mentions in passing that the piper and the bard are expected to contribute to social occasions such as wedding celebrations. App. II, #52. In that context, of course, Rob Donn's role was not just to compose and recite verse for a particular occasion, but also to sing and to entertain his audience.

| | |
|--|---|
| Ged tha cuimhneachain call' ann, | If it memorializes your loss, |
| 'N uair nach fhaidh mi ort comain ni 's mò, | While I will no longer expect recompense, |
| Bidh mi feuchainn mo chomais, | I will be trying my best |
| Gu bhi 'g iomradh air d' alladh 's do chliù. | To celebrate your fame and your reputation. ⁶¹ |

On the other hand, he viciously attacked Iain Tapaiddh for accepting payment to compose a false elegy for Gray of Rogart.⁶² And since it is unlikely he was ever paid by the victims of his satires, his remuneration must have been occasional rather than regular.

Several of Rob Donn's poems show that he considered himself an expert judge of both poetic and musical ability. On the negative side, he lampooned Iain Tapaiddh for shortcomings in both respects and criticized another unfortunate in the following words:

| | |
|--|--|
| 'S suarach mi mu t' fhuaim 's an ridhil, | I am unimpressed by your sound in the reel, |
| 'S ceàrr thu air fidhioll 's air dàn. | And you go astray on fiddle and in song. ⁶³ |

On the positive side, he praised Rev. MacDonald glowingly for his musical abilities and deferred in a late elegy to a younger poet, George Morrison of Ardbeg, Eddrachillis, who later composed an elegy for Rob Donn himself.⁶⁴

Once he even referred to his own process of composition:

| | |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| Na 'm b' e gibhtean mo chinn-sa, | If I were gifted myself, |
| Chuireadh fonn dhomh air m' inntinn. | A tune would come to my mind. ⁶⁵ |

Unfortunately, this is not particularly helpful. He was gifted, and tunes did come to his mind, but the question is where they came from.

Another factor in Rob Donn's popularity during his lifetime was his temperament. Despite his outspokenness and flashes of indignation, he seems to have been both kind-hearted and convivial, giving advice to young neighbors on their trials and tribulations, and enjoying a dram at the inn with his friends.

According to his first editor:

It scarcely requires to be told, that his society was courted, not alone by his equals, but still more by his superiors in rank. No social party almost was esteemed to be a party without him. No public meeting of the better and the best of the land was felt to be a full one, without Rob Donn being there.⁶⁶

⁶¹ App. II, #70, verse 9.

⁶² App. II, #19; Morrison, p. 184.

⁶³ App. II, #81, verse 4.

⁶⁴ See Morrison, p. 54; App. II, #79, verse 15. The elegy to Rob Donn is printed in full in Morrison, pp. li-liv, and excerpted with English translation in Grimble, pp. 277-81; the melody is in *AF*, p. 45.

⁶⁵ App. II, #83, verse 9.

⁶⁶ Mackay, p. xxxvi.

Hew Morrison makes a similar point:

The poet, especially in his later years, was frequently from home. His company was much sought after and his presence was in request in every part of Sutherland and Caithness. If business took him away in the earlier part of [his] life, pleasure and social duties [later] increased their demands, especially after his return from the Fencibles.⁶⁷

According to Morrison, when Rob Donn died in 1778 at the age of 64, “there were few dry eyes in the vast concourse that surrounded his grave.”⁶⁸

C. METHODOLOGY, SOURCES AND STRUCTURE OF THESIS

The methodology for this study was designed to answer the three research questions as fully as possible given the limitations imposed by time, space, available materials, previous scholarship, the interdisciplinary nature of the inquiry, and my own academic background.⁶⁹ Because Rob Donn left such a huge corpus of poems — 220 in three published editions — the initial and most time-consuming task was to compile, organize and edit into usable form those songs for which music could be identified. This proceeded in a number of steps. First, I prepared a concordance of all the poems in the three editions, in Grimble’s biography, and in recent poetry anthologies with English translations. Second, I provisionally identified those poems I expected to be able to match with tunes, including 45 published with music by Gunn and MacFarlane, 60 with tune names listed by Hew Morrison, a few with tune names identified in other poetry collections, and several whose choruses or opening lines suggested other songs whose tunes I knew or hoped to find. Eventually, I located one or more tunes for a total of 100 poems, all included in this thesis.

The third step in assembling the corpus was to locate tunes and tune sources by working in concentric circles beginning with Rob Donn’s previous editors. As described further in the next chapter, I searched diligently but with limited success

⁶⁷ Morrison, p. xlvi.

⁶⁸ Morrison, p. l.

⁶⁹ Regarding the last point, I am neither a fluent Gaelic speaker nor a fully-trained musicologist, but a musically literate second-career researcher with considerable solo and choral experience as an amateur singer (classical in the United States and Gaelic song in Scotland). Before beginning my PhD research, I completed the first two years of the BA in Gaelic and traditional music at Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, as well as an MSc in Celtic and Scottish Studies at the University of Edinburgh, where I audited classes in Gaelic poetry and traditional music.

in Malcolm MacFarlane's papers at the National Library of Scotland for either the sol-fa manuscripts or any other information about John Munro (who collected most of the tunes printed by Gunn and MacFarlane) or his sources.⁷⁰ I also interviewed a granddaughter of Hew Morrison and reviewed some of his papers in her possession, but was unable to obtain any information about his tune sources either.⁷¹ The next concentric circle took in the earliest published music with a Sutherland Gaelic connection, the collections of Patrick MacDonald (1784) and Simon Fraser (1816).⁷² I then expanded the Gaelic circle by date (before 1900) and geography (anywhere in the Highlands), consulting sources such as Elizabeth Ross (1812), William Gunn (1848), Angus Fraser (before 1870), and Keith Norman MacDonald and Frances Tolmie (1895).⁷³ Finally, if none of those sources produced suitable tune settings, I consulted more recent song collections published by An Comunn Gàidhealach (various dates) and Anne Lorne Gillies (2005).⁷⁴

Because a number of the tunes identified by Morrison and others had non-Gaelic titles, I then investigated other Scottish tune sources, including instrumental tunes using the Gore Fiddle Index and the Glen collection at the NLS, and song settings in large, well-indexed and annotated eighteenth-century collections such as James Oswald's *The Caledonian Pocket Companion* (1745-1760) and James

⁷⁰ Papers of Malcolm MacFarlane, NLS Acc. 9736.

⁷¹ Interviews conducted by Ellen Beard with Mrs. Ailsa Smith on 26 September 2013 and 21 November 2013, two CDs on file in Celtic and Scottish Studies Archives, University of Edinburgh (SA numbers to be assigned).

⁷² These are the original publication dates; I have relied on later editions and/or reprints with additional notes, specifically *The Patrick MacDonald Collection*, ed. by Christine Martin (Skye: Taigh na Teud, 2000); and *The Airs and Melodies Peculiar to the Highlands of Scotland and the Isles*, ed. by P. S. Cranford (Nova Scotia: Mel Bay Publications, 1982).

⁷³ These are also original publication or collection dates; I have relied in each case on a more recent edition or reprint, usually with additional notes. *The Elizabeth Ross Manuscript*, ed. by Peter Cooke, Morag MacLeod and Colm Ó Baoill (Edinburgh: Celtic and Scottish Studies, University of Edinburgh, 2011), <<http://www.ed.ac.uk/schools-departments/literatures-languages-cultures/celtic-scottish-studies/>> [accessed 1 August 2015]; *The William Gunn Collection of Pipe Music* (Glasgow: National Piping Centre, 2003); *The Angus Fraser Collection of Scottish Gaelic Airs*, ed. by Christine Martin (Skye: Taigh na Teud, 1996); *The Gesto Collection of Highland Music*, ed. by Keith Norman MacDonald (Somerset: Llanerch Publishers, 1997).

⁷⁴ ACG, *Còisir a' Mhòid 1-5* (Glasgow: MacLaren, 1896-1953). I did not investigate twentieth-century archival recordings (although one is included from an earlier stage of this project) because they seemed unlikely to provide much information about the repertoire of eighteenth-century Sutherland. In that respect, as in others, I was guided by the historical approach of Mary Anne Alburger in her research on Simon Fraser, where she deliberately chose not to consider versions of his songs published or recorded after 1816. Mary Anne Alburger, 'Making the Fiddle Sing: Simon Fraser of Knockie and his *Airs and Melodies Peculiar to the Highlands of Scotland and the Isles*', 2 vols (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Aberdeen, 2001), I, p. vi.

Johnson's *The Scots Musical Museum* (1787-1803).⁷⁵ In that regard, I made no systematic effort to consult music manuscripts or to locate the earliest printed version of any of these tunes, although I relied heavily on the tune histories compiled by John Purser for the *CPC* and by John Glen for the *SMM* whenever possible.⁷⁶ This was partly for reasons of time and partly because many early manuscripts are settings for instruments such as the lute or virginal that Rob Donn would never have heard.⁷⁷ Also, as described in later chapters, a borrowed melody often undergoes subtle recomposition in an aural/oral context, particularly when adapted to words in another language. Therefore, my aim was simply to determine whether a particular melody existed in some form during Rob Donn's lifetime, and then to find and set a version with some likelihood of resembling, at least in outline, something he could have heard and sung.

After assembling and organizing this corpus of texts and tunes, the next task was selecting, translating, typing and annotating the 100 song texts for Appendix II. On the advice of Professor William Gillies, all but one of the Gaelic texts are taken from the same source, the 1899 Hew Morrison edition.⁷⁸ As discussed in Chapter II, this is the most complete edition of the texts, with the most poems (220), the least censorship, and detailed historical notes in English. If available, translations were taken from Grimble (fifteen poems in full and others in part) and modern anthologies (four poems). The remaining translations are my own (sixty-two poems in full and nineteen in part), with review and corrections by my supervisor, Dr. Anja Gunderloch. The poems are reproduced in Appendix II, numbered from 1-100 in alphabetical order by Gaelic first line, with side-by-side texts and translations, accompanied by footnotes that identify the principal published sources of the text, the source of the translation, and background information compiled primarily from

⁷⁵ Charles Gore, *The Scottish Fiddle Music Index* (Musselburgh: Amasing Publishing House, 1994), allows one to locate individual tunes in original eighteenth- and nineteenth-century published music books located in the Glen Collection at the National Library of Scotland and elsewhere. For Oswald, I relied on the edition by John Purser, *The Caledonian Pocket Companion by James Oswald*, ed. by John Purser (Retford: Nick Parkes, 2006 & 2007) [2 CD-ROMs]. For *The Scots Musical Museum*, I used the facsimile edition by Donald A. Low, *The Scots Musical Museum 1787-1803: James Johnson & Robert Burns*, 2 vols (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1991).

⁷⁶ Purser, *CPC*; John Glen, *Early Scottish Melodies* (Edinburgh: 1900).

⁷⁷ See, e.g., the manuscripts listed by John Purser in *Scotland's Music* (Edinburgh: Mainstream Publishing, 2007), pp. 375-76.

⁷⁸ The only exception is the pibroch song "Isabel MacKay" (#44), where I have taken both the words and music from Gunn and MacFarlane so they match.

Rob Donn's previous editors. This does not purport to be a scholarly edition of the poems; its purpose was merely to enable me (and the non-Gaelic reader) to understand the texts well enough to analyze (or appreciate) their relationship to the corresponding music.

The last step in preparing the corpus was to create the 121 song settings in Appendix I. Each of the 100 poems is set to at least one melody, with one verse and the chorus (if any) beneath the music in Sibelius 7 staff notation.⁷⁹ The editorial principles, text and tune sources, and specific editorial changes to the music are all described in detail in the introduction and notes to Appendix I. In general, the song settings in Gunn and MacFarlane are reproduced exactly, except barring of notes, the exclusive use of the grave accent in the Gaelic texts, and hyphenating all multi-syllable words.⁸⁰ Otherwise, I changed the music in my printed sources only to the extent necessary to extract a melody line that fits the words of Rob Donn's song. In that regard, I generally followed the methodology used by Mary Anne Alburger in her edition of Simon Fraser by removing all bass lines, harmony, dynamics and expression markings, as well as most grace notes and any extended melismatic passages and variations plainly designed for the violin.⁸¹ I also transposed a number of melodies down into a vocal range that sits comfortably in the soprano voice and on the treble staff (without too many sharps or flats), divided all words into syllables, and changed note values as necessary to fit the words and word stresses while retaining the original meter and melody line (e.g., by replacing a crotchet with a dotted quaver plus a semiquaver or vice versa, or adding or deleting upbeats or passing notes).

Usually, this process of matching tunes and texts worked well enough to create a song that made sense musically and metrically and could actually be sung (setting aside the matter of fidelity to eighteenth-century performance practice). The greatest challenge (after learning Sibelius) was to determine whether and how the word stresses of the Gaelic verses fit the musical meter of the tunes. Other than the

⁷⁹ The song settings were created in Sibelius 7 Academic music notation software (Avid Technology, 2011) and then converted into graphics for insertion into this thesis in Microsoft Word 2010.

⁸⁰ In that regard, the barring and the grave accents both follow modern rather than nineteenth-century practice. The hyphenation was done primarily to test the degree of fit between Rob Donn's words and various possible tune settings, although it will also help any singer who is not fluent in Gaelic to place the syllables in roughly the right place.

⁸¹ Alburger, II, pp. 59-67.

settings from Gunn and MacFarlane (where this work was already done), the process was largely trial and error, informed by musical instinct and basic familiarity with the language. Sometimes it was easy. Sometimes the text and tune simply did not fit, and those tunes or variants were almost always rejected. In other cases, I had to experiment with variables such as how many syllables of text to put in the anacrusis before the first full bar, or which lines of text to repeat in order to reach the end of the words and the end of the music at the same time in a manner that respected both. If a complete unit of the text (verse and chorus, if any) was longer than the available tune, I simply repeated the tune (which usually worked, unless the verse and chorus were in different meters). If the tune was longer than the text (often the case, for example, in violin arrangements), I extracted the basic melody in four- or eight-bar segments from somewhere near the beginning and ignored the variations. While different choices regarding all these matters might well be made by another music editor, by the end of the process I was reasonably satisfied with the result, at least for present purposes.

Therefore, Appendix I in its entirety is the answer to my second research question — to what extent is it possible to identify, locate, and reconstruct as Gaelic songs the melodies to which Rob Donn's songs were sung during his lifetime? The short answer is: to a considerable degree. I started with 220 poems, of which 45 had published musical settings, and ended up with 100 poems and 121 musical settings (including alternate tunes and variants). And even if these settings do not represent exactly what Rob Donn sang, they suffice to demonstrate that this type of musical reconstruction is feasible for other eighteenth-century Gaelic poets. In that respect, the study provides a model for future comparative research as well as a basis for a new performing edition of Rob Donn.

Once both appendices were substantially completed, the thesis itself could be written. Chapter I, the introduction, includes the research questions, a biographical sketch, and an overview of the methodology, sources, and organization of the thesis. Chapter II is a literature review of sources and commentary on Rob Donn. Chapter III surveys theoretical and disciplinary perspectives in ethnomusicology and related fields on topics such as composition and transmission of melodies in an aural/oral context. Chapter IV addresses the first research question — what was the musical

world of Rob Donn, or, what kinds of music did he hear that provided the musical materials from which he drew in his own work? In the absence of any prior comprehensive survey of music in the eighteenth-century Highlands, this chapter ranges widely, including studies of contemporaneous music in the Lowlands, Gaelic song, pipe music and fiddle music.

Chapters V through IX are the analytical core of the thesis, designed to answer the third research question concerning the nature of Rob Donn's work as a composer in the oral tradition. The 100 songs are divided into five chapters according to the subject matter of the poetry: Chapter V discusses elegies, Chapter VI social and political commentary, Chapter VII love, courtship and weddings, Chapter VIII satire and humor, and Chapter IX praise, nature and sea songs. Each chapter follows the same basic format, beginning with a brief description of each poem, including its topic, themes, and approximate date (if known). The second section describes the tune setting(s) for each poem, including sources, musical characteristics and any likelihood that it was composed by Rob Donn, while the third section contains a broader discussion and analysis of the musical settings for all the songs in each chapter. Finally, the conclusion in Chapter X sums up and compares the findings and themes of Chapters V to IX and suggests topics for further research and analysis.

Appendix I, the song settings, is preceded by a table of contents, list of sources and abbreviations, statement of editorial principles, and a brief note on each song identifying its title, first line, text source, tune source, tune name, and the "editorial changes to melody" between my setting and its musical source. Appendix II, the texts and translations, is also preceded by a table of contents and a brief note on methodology and sources. All songs are numbered consistently throughout the thesis and both appendices from 1 to 100; poems with multiple musical settings are distinguished, for example, as #20(1) and #20(2). Multiple settings were included in two circumstances: when I found different tunes in different sources, and when I found multiple variants of the same melody and decided to set more than one to compare them (e.g., #88, with settings by Patrick MacDonald, Simon Fraser, and John Munro). In general, however, I did not set obvious variants of the same melody, a task more suited to a detailed musical evaluation of the published tune

sources than to my purpose of identifying the basic melodies that Rob Donn used for his songs.

Given that background, we turn now to Chapter II, a literature review of sources and commentary on Rob Donn, arranged in chronological order from the 1770s to the present.

CHAPTER II. SOURCES AND COMMENTARY ON ROB DONN

Although this thesis is primarily about music, the present chapter is an exception, a traditional literature review of sources and popular and scholarly commentary on Rob Donn. Since these are predominantly literary, not musical, the chapter will reflect the very bias that the remainder of the study is intended to rectify. The survey is presented in chronological order and includes a brief description of manuscript sources for the texts, early publication efforts, biographical material, editions of his work, poetry anthologies, and articles in magazines and journals — but no PhD theses, as this is the first.¹ The conclusion summarizes the current state of scholarship on Rob Donn, including the tasks undertaken for this thesis and those remaining for the future. A stemma illustrating the early sources and publications follows this page.

A. THE FIRST HALF-CENTURY

During the first half-century after Rob Donn's death, the major focus of those who knew and admired his work was simply to get it into print. The first plea for publication was contained in the elegy composed for Rob Donn by his friend George Morrison of Eddrachillis:

| | |
|--|--|
| B'e mo thoil gum b'i 'n innleachd | I wish there were a means |
| Gu cumail cuimhn' ort a leant' | To preserve a lasting memory of you, |
| Do chuid òran a sgrìobhadh | To transcribe your songs |
| 'S an cur sìos ann am <i>print</i> ; | And set them down in print; |
| Nuair a bhiteadh gan leughadh, | Then, when they were read, |
| 'S iad cho ciatach 's cho greant', | Excellent and incisive as they are, |
| Bheireadh breitheamhnan fiùghail | Eminent judges would give you |
| Dhuit deagh bhiùthas mar <i>rent</i> . | The tributes you deserve. ² |

That call was repeated in Rev. John Thomson's 1790 submission to the Old Statistical Account, with no hint of progress:

The celebrated Gaelic bard, Robert Doun, was of this parish. His songs are well known, and discover uncommon force of genius. It is a pity that they have not been printed, to secure them from mutilation, corruption, or oblivion.³

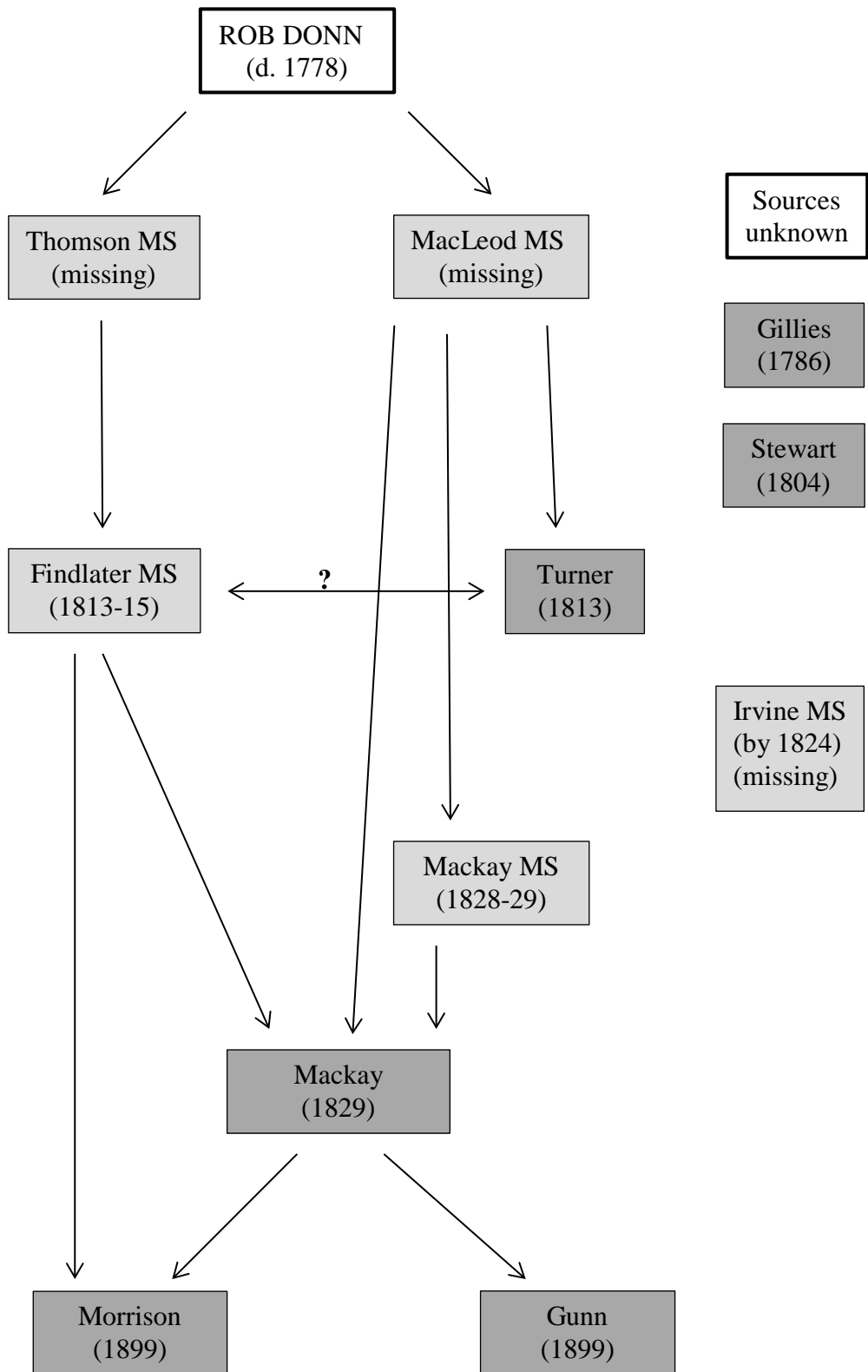
¹ The information presented here on manuscript sources and early publication efforts is far from complete, but is included as a starting point for future research.

² The text and translation (slightly rephrased) are from Grimble, p. 279.

³ *The Statistical Account of Scotland*, ed. by John Sinclair, 21 vols (Edinburgh: 1791-1799), III, pp. 584-85;

<<http://stat-acc-scot.edina.ac.uk/link/1791-99/Sutherland/Durness/3/584/>> [accessed 3 August 2015].

STEMMA OF ROB DONN SOURCES



As Morrison explained in 1899, two manuscript collections of Rob Donn's verse had been made directly from the mouth of the bard:

Two manuscript collections of his songs were made during his lifetime and to his own dictation. One of these was written by the Rev. Aeneas Macleod, who was minister of Rogart from 1774 to 1794. It was this manuscript that was used for the most part by Dr Mackintosh Mackay in preparing the first edition of the poems. The other manuscript collection was by one of the daughters of the Rev. John Thomson, who was minister in Durness from the death of the Rev. Murdoch Macdonald to 1811. This collection had the advantage of being written with the poet himself at hand to consult, but on the other hand it was revised by the Rev. William Findlater. It also was in the possession of Dr Mackay at the same time as the Macleod MS. It is to it that many emendations in the present edition are due.⁴

Morrison also states:

The Rev. William Findlater, parish minister of Durness at that time, was appointed the first editor of the poems, and he bestowed much time and care upon revising the collection of poems written by his sister-in-law, Miss Thomson, from the bard's own recitation. Mr. Findlater was unwilling to act unless he had power to reject such of the poems as he thought proper. Some differences arose over this, but when it was decided to introduce the name Mackay as that of the poet, he not only declined the editorship, but withdrew from the committee which was promoting the publication.⁵

Unfortunately, this is the only explanation provided by any of Rob Donn's editors regarding their textual sources for the poems. The first excerpt indicates that Mackintosh Mackay had access to both the MacLeod and Findlater manuscripts, and that Morrison himself had access to Findlater's. But Morrison provides no dates for the collection or editing of these manuscripts; nor does he identify the sponsor or membership of the "committee which was promoting the publication" mentioned in the second excerpt above.

Both the Aeneas MacLeod manuscript and the original Janet Thomson manuscript now appear to be lost.⁶ Nevertheless, it is possible to piece together some of their history from records of the Highland Society of Scotland, catalogued by Ronald Black, as well as the surviving portion of the Findlater manuscript at the National Library of Scotland.⁷ Other now-lost manuscripts may also have been

⁴ Morrison, p. xliv. The unnamed daughter was evidently Janet Thomson (1766-1785), the only one old enough to perform this task during the bard's lifetime. *Fasti* VII, p. 102.

⁵ Morrison, p. xxxii.

⁶ NLS catalogue record, MS 1669.

⁷ Ronald I. Black, 'The Gaelic Academy: The cultural commitment of the Highland Society of Scotland', *SGS*, 14, pt. 2 (1986), 1-38; Black, 'The Gaelic Academy: Appendix: The Ingliston Papers', *SGS*, 15 (1988), 103-21; NLS MS 1669 (Findlater).

compiled independently from oral sources between Rob Donn's death and the publication of the Mackay edition in 1829; where known, they are also noted below.

Aeneas (or Angus) MacLeod (1744-1794), minister of Rogart in Sutherland from 1774 until his death, was apparently the principal recorder of Rob Donn's verse. *Fasti* describes him as: "A man of considerable erudition and brilliant parts. He was an intimate of the poet Rob Donn from whose recital he prepared the manuscript for the edition of the poems edited in 1829 by Dr Mackay."⁸ In 1793, Sir John Sinclair presented a proposal to publish MacLeod's collection to the Highland Society of Scotland.⁹ A committee was appointed, but MacLeod died less than a year later and the matter languished.¹⁰

In the meantime, a number of Rob Donn's poems were published in two early anthologies of Gaelic poetry. The Gillies collection (1786) included his two pibroch songs (#44 and #97 in this thesis).¹¹ The Stewart collection (1804) printed twenty of Rob Donn's poems plus George Morrison's elegy and identified tunes for seven.¹² Neither identifies sources; Gillies's cover page says only that his poems were "transmitted from gentlemen in the Highlands of Scotland", and the Stewarts' cover page says only that their material was "collected in the Highlands and Isles."¹³

In 1809 the Highland Society resurrected its publication project, with John Campbell, its "Gaelic Translator", reporting excitedly that some 240 of "the manuscript poems of Rob Donn, the celebrated Bard of the north have been put into my hands" and that "[t]he Bard's son says that he has already procured two hundred subscribers."¹⁴ In 1810 Patrick Turner was engaged to transcribe the poems for the press, apparently from MacLeod's manuscript, and the transcriptions were

⁸ *Fasti* VII, p. 98. Since Rob Donn was living in Durness in the years before his death in 1778, and MacLeod began his duties at Rogart in 1774, their recording sessions may have taken place earlier when they were in closer proximity. MacLeod received his MA from Aberdeen in 1764 and was licensed by the Presbytery of Caithness in 1769 (*ibid.*), so he may have been living and working as a tutor or missionary in northwest Sutherland at some time between 1764 and 1774.

⁹ HSS Sed. Bk. 2, pp. 283-84 (6 December 1793).

¹⁰ HSS Sed. Bk. 3, p. 14 (20 November 1795), p. 83 (2 December 1796).

¹¹ *Sean Dain, agus Orain Ghaidhealach*, ed. by Eoin Gillies (Perth: 1786), pp. 198-201.

¹² *Cochruinneacha Taoghta de Shaothair nam Bard Gaëleach*, ed. by Alexander and Donald Stewart (Edinburgh: 1804), pp. 29-79, 103-07, 242-80, 419-25. The twenty poems include my #1, 20, 23, 24, 32, 51, 56, 59, 66, 67, 70, 71, 72, 74, 77 and 78, plus four others included in Morrison beginning on pp. 32, 43, 94, and 421.

¹³ In "'Merely a Bard?'" William Ross and Gaelic Poetry', *Aiste*, 1 (2007), 123-69 (p. 128 n. 17), William Gillies described the Stewart collection as "fieldwork-based", implying — like the word "collected" — at least some reliance on oral sources.

¹⁴ Letter of 20 July 1809 from John Campbell to Lewis Gordon, HSS MS A.i.6(2).

completed and at the printer when Turner and the Society discovered that James MacKay had not kept his side of the bargain to obtain subscribers and account for the money received.¹⁵ James had either lied about finding subscribers or spent the money himself; in either case the project imploded, and he died about 1812 in Edinburgh.¹⁶

However, Turner's efforts may not have been entirely wasted, as it is reasonable to infer that he worked from his copy of the MacLeod manuscript in preparing his own collection of Gaelic poetry for the press in 1813.¹⁷ He may also have transcribed some material from the oral recitation of James MacKay, although the correspondence referenced above seems to imply that he was working from a manuscript (presumably MacLeod's, as it was still in the possession of the Highland Society). In either case, Turner's transcription also appears to be lost. His 1813 anthology includes eleven Rob Donn poems, none of which had been published by either Gillies or Stewart.¹⁸ Given Turner's access to the MacLeod manuscript as well as James MacKay, his language and spelling may be closer to the original Sutherland Gaelic than Mackintosh Mackay's in 1829, a point certainly worth exploring by any future editor.¹⁹

Another lost manuscript that merits a brief mention was compiled by Alexander Irvine, minister of Little Dunkeld from 1806-1824.²⁰ His collection of seventeen Rob Donn poems, catalogued by Mackechnie in 1973, is of particular interest because it contains the only reference I have found to Rob Donn's education: "Went to Ereboll school. Master John McKay."²¹ The remainder of the prefatory note in Mackechnie contains other slightly garbled facts about the bard's

¹⁵ Relevant correspondence from 1810 (in chronological order) can be found in HSS MSS A.i.6(15), A.i.15(f), A.i.6(9), A.i.15(d), A.i.6(10), A.i.17, no. 22, A.i.15(e), A.i.17, no. 23, A.v.1, no. 2a (printed prospectus), and A.v.1, no. 2c (printed specimen poem).

¹⁶ James was likely in his 60s at this time, as he was Rob Donn's eldest son, married in 1774. Morrison, p. xxxi; Black, 'Gaelic Academy', p. 18.

¹⁷ *Comhchruinneacha do dh'Orain Taghta, Ghaidhealach*, ed. by Patrick Turner (Edinburgh: 1813).

¹⁸ Turner, pp. 350-71. These include my #5, 14, 19, 43, 50, 82 and 92; three others printed in Morrison, beginning on pp. 65, 197, and 414, and one short verse on p. 370 of Turner that does not appear in Mackay or Morrison.

¹⁹ Compare, e.g., Mackay, pp. 92-94, with Turner, pp. 353-54.

²⁰ *Fasti IV*, p. 159.

²¹ John Mackechnie, *Catalogue of Gaelic Manuscripts in Selected Libraries in Great Britain and Ireland*, 2 vols (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1973), I, p. 342, describing NLS Acc. 3184(a)-(r) (missing). NLS MS 14878 contains three Rob Donn poems that were originally part of NLS Acc. 3184. For a more detailed account of this material, see Ulrike Hogg, 'The Life and Papers of the Rev. Dr Alexander Irvine', *SGS*, 28 (2011), 97-174 (pp. 148-49, 154, 161).

life and verse that suggest indirect oral transmission to Irvine, although that is speculative unless the manuscript itself reappears.

We next consider the transcriber of a manuscript that does survive (in part), William Findlater (1784-1869), John Thomson's successor as minister at Durness. Findlater was missionary at Eriboll from 1807 to 1811, married John Thomson's daughter Mary in 1810, and ministered in Durness from 1812 to 1865, joining the Free Church in 1843.²² According to Ulrike Hogg, manuscript librarian at the National Library of Scotland, MS 1669 is in Findlater's hand and the paper is watermarked 1813-1815.²³ Although a note at the beginning of the manuscript claims it is "reputed to have [been] taken down from the mouth of the celebrated Gaelic poet Rob Donn by a daughter of the parish Minister – John Thomson", Hogg has suggested that Findlater may have copied some of the contents directly from Turner's 1813 publication.²⁴ This hypothesis is supported by the title of one of the Sally Grant poems, which is almost verbatim in MS 1669 (quoted here) and Turner: "Oran do Shali Grannta, maighdean uasal bh' ann Ionmhurnis ri linn na ceud Ressimaid Chataich bhi anns a bhaile sin, & mas fìor, am Bard gu 'n robh na h-oifigich a coimhstrith uimpe."²⁵

But neither the Highland Society records catalogued by Black nor any other source I have examined explains who was sponsoring Findlater's or Mackay's work on Rob Donn. Since Morrison refers to a committee, it does not seem to have been a freelance project. Three possibilities come to mind. One is the Highland Society of Scotland itself, assuming either (1) that its surviving records are incomplete, (2) that the relevant records were not at Ingliston when Black prepared his catalogue, or (3) that Black did not catalogue every reference to Rob Donn in the material he examined. A second possible sponsor is the Highland Society of London, and a third is Sir John Sinclair and friends.²⁶ It is clear that Sinclair retained an interest in

²² *Fasti* VII, p. 103.

²³ NLS catalogue record, MS 1669.

²⁴ NLS MS 1669; personal communication from Dr. Ulrike Hogg, Curator (Gaelic, Early Modern & Music Manuscripts), NLS, 10 June 2015.

²⁵ NLS MS 1669, fol. 30(45)r; compare Turner, p. 363. The spelling differs slightly but the long title is the same.

²⁶ Sinclair (1754-1835) was a prolific author and correspondent whose papers are archived in a number of locations. Rosalind Mitchison, 'Sir John Sinclair', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, <<http://www.oxforddnb.com>> [accessed 24 July 2015]. He was also a member of the Highland Society of London and wrote a history of that organization at its request. See John Sinclair,

Rob Donn, because in 1821 he asked the Society (probably in disgust) to return his manuscript.²⁷

The remaining snippets of evidence concern Mackintosh Mackay himself. In 1828, while he was working on the HSS dictionary project, one of the books or manuscripts he acknowledged borrowing was “Mackay’s Songs & Poems 1 vol”.²⁸ Presumably this refers to a version of the MacLeod manuscript. There is also an extant manuscript in Mackay’s handwriting in the George Henderson collection at Glasgow University Library that contains thirteen poems (some incomplete) later published in his 1829 edition.²⁹ This appears to be a partial working draft for his own use (not a fair copy for the publisher, as Mackechnie believed) because it is messy, incomplete, and contains notes in English reminding him, e.g., to compose an anecdote that was actually printed in Gaelic.³⁰ But most important is the fact that Mackay actually finished the task begun more than fifty years earlier by Aeneas MacLeod.

B. THE MACINTOSH MACKAY EDITION (1829)

Mackintosh Mackay (1793-1873) was born in Eddrachillis, Sutherland, a grandson of the Christine Brodie featured in some of Rob Donn’s early poems, and edited the HSS Gaelic dictionary and various religious publications in addition to his ministerial duties in Scotland and Australia.³¹ His 1829 edition contains 205 poems by Rob Donn, prefatory notes, a few explanatory footnotes, an index of first lines, a 58-page “Memoir of Rob Donn”, mostly biographical with some discussion of editorial principles and critical evaluation of the poetry, and a 10-page glossary of “Provincial or unusual Words” setting out in turn Rob Donn’s terminology, the standard Gaelic equivalent and the English translation. All of this material has

An account of the Highland Society of London, from its establishment in May 1778, to the commencement of the year 1813 (London: B. McMillan, 1813). As Sinclair had returned from London to Edinburgh in 1819, it seems more likely that any manuscript of Rob Donn’s poems still in his possession upon his death in 1835 would be in Scotland rather than London, but so far my inquiries to the Sinclair family and the Highland Society of London have not borne fruit.

²⁷ HSS Sed. Bk. 6, p. 358.

²⁸ HSS MSS, A.iv.5, A.iv.10.

²⁹ GU MS Gen 1090.14.30(a-m).

³⁰ Mackechnie, I, p. 372; GU MS Gen 1090.14.30(f).

³¹ Alan Bell, ‘Mackay, Mackintosh’, in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, <<http://www.oxforddnb.com>> [accessed 28 August 2013]; Thomson, *Companion*, p. 175.

proven invaluable to later editors and biographers, in part because they lacked equivalent access to manuscript sources and oral history.

Nevertheless, Mackay's edition has a number of shortcomings. These include, first of all, his failure to specify his sources "o chruinneachadh sgriobta a rinneadh [...] o bheul a' bhaird fein" (from a written collection that was made from the mouth of the bard himself).³² Similarly, while he refers to "the task assigned us of preparing the work for press", he does not say by whom that assignment was made; and while he indicates that the book was "published by subscription chiefly from among the bard's own countrymen", it contains no list of subscribers.³³ The memoir relies largely on anonymous oral history and the editor's personal knowledge as a native son, although he does attribute one anecdote to the bard's (unnamed) daughter, and reprints an 1828 letter from a Mrs. Mackay Scobie of Keoldale reporting on her interview with an 83-year-old man named Roderick Morrison who knew the bard and his family.³⁴

Two other notable omissions are English translations and music for the songs. The former is easily explained by an intended readership who knew Sutherland Gaelic, while the latter probably reflects a lack of musical training or interest on the part of the editor (or his sponsors), although it is possible that his Sutherland readers also knew the tunes from oral transmission. He does claim (incorrectly) that "most of the airs to which [Rob Donn] composed are original" and identifies melodies for three songs.³⁵

While both translations and music can be supplied (in varying degree) by later editors, more troubling are two other editorial issues — dialect and censorship — that Mackay addressed in his introductory memoir. Regarding the former, he wrote:

³² Mackay, title page. Of course, this may have been well known at the time by the small circle of persons interested in reading Rob Donn's poetry. For example, in 1826, George Sutherland Taylor complained that "a copy of his works collected by the late Rev. Mr MacLeod, of Rogart, from the bard's recital, was, we understand, promised to the public some time ago." George Sutherland Taylor, 'Rob Donn' (1826), reprinted in *Old-Lore Miscellany of Orkney, Shetland, Caithness and Sutherland* 4, ed. by Alfred W. and Amy Johnston (London: 1911), pp. 48-52, 83-87 (p. 50).

³³ Mackay, pp. xliii-xliv.

³⁴ Mackay, pp. xx, lvii-lxi. See also Chapter I, "Social and Musical Roles".

³⁵ Mackay, p. xlii. The three songs he mentions are the first Christine Brodie song set to "Farewell to Lochaber", the lament for Rev. Murdo MacDonald set to "a highly beautiful and original air", and "Iseabail NicAoidh" set to the pipe tune "The Prince's Salute." Mackay, pp. xxv, xxxii, xlv.

But it must be remembered that the dialect in which he composed, had its own very peculiar modifications of utterance and pronunciation, as well as of phraseology; and what may appear as a metrical blemish to many a reader, was not really so either in the bard's ear, or to those who heard his songs. Their pronunciation of words made the rhyme unimpeachable, even admirably good, when to others it may appear deficient. It has been found altogether impossible to remedy this, in the task assigned us of preparing the work for press. [...] Where alterations have been found practicable, reducing the author's vocables to the allowed standard of Gaelic orthography, no opportunity has been omitted of doing this: but the substitution of a more generally current word or phrase, instead of one pertaining to the author's dialect, has been very rarely attempted.³⁶

Unfortunately, unless Mackay's original manuscript sources can be found (in a form not already heavily edited), it may be impossible to determine how much he actually departed from Rob Donn's dialect. Although a detailed comparison could be made between Mackay's edition and other extant sources, and a trained dialectologist familiar with eighteenth-century Sutherland Gaelic might be able to reverse-engineer a few of the poems on a conjectural basis, those tasks are beyond the scope of this thesis and the expertise of its author.

The remaining issue is deliberate censorship, which becomes obvious when a verbatim comparison is made between certain texts in the Mackay and Morrison editions. Of the 100 songs that are the subject of this thesis, I identified 21 that contain either explicit or extramarital references to sexuality. Within that "X-rated" subgroup, Mackay eliminated one song in its entirety, "The Grey Buck", a satire about fornication.³⁷ Elsewhere he altered or omitted particular words or stanzas referring to private body parts, e.g., by removing all references to the "male member" in "Briogais Mhic Ruaraidh".³⁸ In "The Wedding in Oldshore" and "Faolan," respectively, he substituted the bracketed words for the preceding words in italics:

A' sparradh Uilleim Ghobha,
Ann an gobhall [Stigh an coinneamh]
Shìne-an-Tàilleir.³⁹

Thrusting William Smith
Into the crotch of [Inside to meet]
Jean of the Tailor.

'S ann ghabh i mòr ghràin ri
cuid [ainm] Iain Bhàin.⁴⁰

She took great loathing to
the private parts [name] of Iain Bain.

³⁶ Mackay, pp. xliii-xliv.

³⁷ See App. II, #57.

³⁸ Compare Mackay, pp. 221-24 (10 verses; asterisks in verse 9) with Morrison, pp. 151-55 (11 verses; no asterisks in verse 10).

³⁹ Compare Mackay, p. 245, to Morrison, p. 429.

⁴⁰ Compare Mackay, p. 180, to Morrison, p. 255.

Mackay also consistently censored words for excretory functions, such as *mùn* (pee), *breim* (fart), and *cac* (shit).⁴¹ As he explained quite unapologetically:

In the task assigned us, of preparing his compositions for the public eye, we have to acknowledge the blame or merit of having suppressed a few of the bard's humorous sallies, which seemed to us of immoral tendency, or at least unworthy of record. To those who will feel disposed to censure this suppression, we tender no apology whatever. The interests of morality are more valuable, in our estimation, than the gratification of such individuals, and their censure of this liberty on our part, we will consider no misfortune, however loud it may be. And independently of such consideration, we viewed it as justice to our author's memory; as it is also now to remark, that very few, not more than six or seven short pieces, were found necessary thus to be dealt with.⁴²

Fortunately, he did not have the last word in this matter, as the Morrison edition appears to contain most of this suppressed material.

Not surprisingly given the comments just quoted, Mackay considered Rob Donn's work uneven in character, preferring his "peerless" elegies to his sometimes "uncouth" satires.⁴³ In his view, the poetry exhibited qualities of "nerve and strength, of mind and sentiment, a manly vigour of intellect, a soundness and perspicuity of good sense [...] wit and humour, when he is playful—elevation of sentiment, when he is solemn—soundness of principle and moral feeling, when he is serious."⁴⁴ Despite this praise, a patronizing tone can be detected when he describes Rob Donn as a "child of nature" whose poetry is the work of "unaided, uncultivated genius", an "illiterate" to whom the formal rules of Gaelic poetry were "utterly unknown."⁴⁵ This assessment reveals his ignorance of the training and accomplishments of nonliterate bards in the Gaelic tradition as well as the evidence of the poetry itself, which show that Rob Donn did compose within a tradition containing formal rules regarding stanzaic structure, rhythm, end-rhyme, internal rhyme and alliteration, as well as genres, concepts, conventions and intertextual borrowing from earlier poetic models.⁴⁶

⁴¹ See, e.g., Mackay, pp. 154-55.

⁴² Mackay, pp. xlvii-xlviii.

⁴³ Mackay, pp. xlvi, lii.

⁴⁴ Mackay, p. xlvi.

⁴⁵ Mackay, pp. xl-xli.

⁴⁶ See generally Thomson, *Introduction to Gaelic Poetry*, pp. 156-217. For examples of Rob Donn's use of models from earlier Gaelic poetry, see App. II, #35 and #49, discussed in Chapters VII and IX respectively.

Related to this alleged lack of sophistication is Mackay's claim that Rob Donn rarely chose a subject except by "chance", and that he "never took more than an hour or two to compose either his best, or his longest songs."⁴⁷ The former claim is largely true if one defines "by chance" to mean in reaction to current events from the personal to the national level. But the latter claim is largely false; even if he composed many of his satires and humorous verses on the spur of the moment, many other poems (including his elegies and social and political verse) are carefully constructed to make an argument or tell a story in a linear and convincing way. As later chapters will show, his rhetoric was by no means that of an amateur and was firmly rooted in Gaelic tradition.

On the other hand, Mackay's pride as a native son ran away with him when he claimed that Rob Donn's pibroch song "Iseabail Nic Aoidh" was composed before either Alexander MacDonald's "Mòrag" poems or Duncan MacIntyre's "Beinn Dòbhrain."⁴⁸ According to both Derick Thomson and Ronald Black, the first pibroch songs were MacDonald's, composed in the 1730s, and MacIntyre's was composed in the 1750s or 1760s.⁴⁹ Rob Donn's first pibroch song was composed in the 1740s, so it falls midway between the other two.⁵⁰

C. NINETEENTH-CENTURY COMMENTARY

In 1831, *The Quarterly Review* published a sixteen-page review of Mackay's edition of Rob Donn, written by its editor John Gibson Lockhart, the author, literary critic, son-in-law and biographer of Sir Walter Scott.⁵¹ Because the reviewer was unacquainted with Gaelic, he relied heavily on Mackay's memoir for the poet's biography and on English translations of some of the poems by an anonymous "friend" (perhaps Mackay himself). Admitting that poetic merit can never be judged in translation, he wrote that the "satirical pieces have stood the trial the worst", the

⁴⁷ Mackay, pp. xli-xlii.

⁴⁸ Mackay, p. xlv.

⁴⁹ *Gaelic Poetry in the Eighteenth Century: A Bilingual Anthology*, ed. by Derick S. Thomson (Aberdeen: Association for Scottish Literary Studies, 1993), p. 32; *An Lasair*, pp. 426, 490.

⁵⁰ Grimble, p. 97.

⁵¹ [John Gibson Lockhart], 'Rob Donn's Poems', *Quarterly Review*, 45 (1831), 358-74; NLS Acc. 13236/55 (listing anonymous contributors to *The Quarterly Review*); Thomas C. Richardson, 'Lockhart, John Gibson', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, <<http://www.oxforddnb.com>> [accessed 6 June 2012].

Jacobite pieces were but “middling,” and the elegies “on the whole, disappointed us” although one or two were “excellent.” He was most impressed by the love songs, some of which he praised as “truly and exquisitely beautiful.”⁵² Those assessments were followed by English translations of two elegies and two love songs, whose pedantic quality may help explain his tempered enthusiasm.⁵³

Aside from an honorable mention by William Findlater in the *New Statistical Account*, noting Mackay’s 1829 edition and the controversy over Rob Donn’s surname,⁵⁴ the next commentary is that of John Mackenzie, who included thirty-two Rob Donn songs in his 1841 anthology despite his view that:

As a poet, he cannot be placed in the highest rank. He is deficient in pathos and invention. There is little depth of feeling, and very slender powers of description to be found in his works; and, when the temporary and local interest wears away, he can never be a popular poet.⁵⁵

Mackenzie complained that the satires are often “too indelicate for publication” and “such as no good man ought to have produced against his fellow creatures”, and described the elegies as “more distinguished for sober truth, than poetical embellishment. He hated flattery.”⁵⁶ He also identified nine tunes, one of which (“Am Boc Glas” or “The Grey Buck”) he called “the first of the Sutherlandshire pipe jigs,” an “excellent” tune of the poet’s own composition, adding that “[h]e also composed several other popular airs of great merit.”⁵⁷

In 1871, Mackay republished his earlier edition of Rob Donn with minor revisions.⁵⁸ It contains the same number of poems and the censored material from the 1829 edition remains censored, but the 1871 edition is shorter, omitting much of the memoir, the index of first lines, and the glossary. Thus it provides no new information and is considerably less useful than the original.

⁵² *Quarterly Review*, p. 367.

⁵³ For example, the chorus of the mock-elegy to Ewen is translated: “Long and very long, | Long enough is it, | Since thou hast lain wasting under disease, | Without any one regretting thy sorrow. | If thy time has passed away, | And thou hast not employed it aright, | Perhaps a week may yet be vouchsafed to thee — | Prepare thy soul for her journey!” *Quarterly Review*, pp. 369-70.

⁵⁴ *The New Statistical Account of Scotland*, 15 vols (Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1845), XV, p. 93; <<http://stat-acc-scot.edina.ac.uk/link/1834-45/Sutherland/Durness/15/93/>> [accessed 3 August 2015].

⁵⁵ *Sàr-Obair*, pp. 183-215 (p. 187).

⁵⁶ *Sàr-Obair*, p. 187.

⁵⁷ *Sàr-Obair*, p. 208.

⁵⁸ *Orain le Rob Donn*, ed. by Mackintosh Mackay, 2nd edn (Edinburgh: MacLauchlan & Stewart, 1871).

The most thoughtful nineteenth-century commentary on Rob Donn appears in two Gaelic essays written by Donald MacKinnon for the periodical *An Gaidheal* in 1877, five years before his appointment as the first professor of Celtic at Edinburgh University.⁵⁹ Although MacKinnon was from Colonsay in Argyll, he spent three years early in his career as a schoolmaster in Lochinver, Sutherland, which may have triggered his interest in Rob Donn, his “favourite poet”.⁶⁰ Anticipating Black’s depiction of the education of the cèilidh-house, MacKinnon made a distinction between literacy and learning among early modern Gaelic poets (“mur a robh sgoil aca bha foghlum aca, agus bha ionnsachadh aca”).⁶¹ By word of mouth, Rob Donn learned “bàrdachd agus seachas a dhùthcha”, “eachdraidh” and “deas-ghnàthan nan Gàidheal”, and “fiosrachadh earbsach [...] mu thimcheall cùisean agus modh-riaghlaidh na rìoghachd ’nan latha fèin” (poetry and tradition, history and customs of the Gael, and accurate information about current events and politics).⁶²

MacKinnon also made insightful comments on two controversial aspects of Rob Donn’s poetry, its bawdiness and its dialect. Acknowledging that the language of some of Rob Donn’s poems is “salach, neò-ghlan” (filthy and unclean), he insisted that his thoughts and his teachings were always “glan”, “fìor” and “fallain” (sound, true and wholesome).⁶³ But he forcefully criticized Mackay’s censorship:

Ach tha e gann leam a chreidsinn gum faighear cuid d’ a bhàrdachd ’na leabhar mar a chuir e fèin ri chèile e, ged tha an Dr Mac Aoidh ag ràdh gun do sgrìobhadh i o bheul a’ bhàird fèin [...]. Tha an t-Ollamh Mac Aoidh ag aideachadh gun d’ fhàg e còig no sia de òrain Rob Dhuinn gun chlà-bhualadh air son an sailche no am beag luach. Tha mi meas gun do ghabh an duine ainmeil so air fèin dleasdanas nach buineadh dha. Is ann do ’n bhàrd fèin a bhuineas a ràdh co dhiùbh a thèid no nach tèid roinn shònraichte d’ a shaothair a chumail air ais o ’n t-sluagh.⁶⁴

MacKinnon also considered Mackay’s glossary inadequate:

⁵⁹ MacKinnon, pp. xvi, xix, xxvii.

⁶⁰ MacKinnon, pp. xiv, xxiv.

⁶¹ MacKinnon, p. 239; see *An Lasair*, pp. xiii-xiv.

⁶² MacKinnon, p. 239 (my translations).

⁶³ MacKinnon, pp. 239-40.

⁶⁴ MacKinnon, p. 240 (“It is hard for me to believe that we have gotten some of the poetry in his book as Rob Donn himself composed it, even if Dr. Mackay says it was transcribed from the bard’s dictation. [...] Dr. Mackay admits that he did not print five or six songs because of their smut or unworthiness. In my estimation, this well-known gentleman arrogated to himself a right that did not belong to him. It is up to the poet himself to say whether or not particular parts of his work will be withheld from the public.”)

Nam biodh an Dr Mac Aoidh cho eòlach air Gàidhlig an Taobh Deas agus a bha e air Gàidhlig an Taobh Tuath, dh'fhàgadh e mach as a' "Chlàr" iomadh focal a chuir e ann; agus chuireadh e ann iomadh focal a dh'fhàg e mach.⁶⁵

Regarding the poetry itself, MacKinnon believed that no other Gaelic poet could compare to Rob Donn for his elegies, satires and humorous verse — and certainly none could equal him for his honesty.⁶⁶

Chan 'eil aon d' ar bàird, saoilidh mi, a sheas an còmhnaidh cho dìleas is cho danarra air taobh na còrach agus an aghaidh na h-eucoir, mar a bha e fèin a' tuigsinn còir agus eucoir, agus a sheas Rob Donn.⁶⁷

While others (such as Mac Mhaighstir Alastair, Donnchadh Bàn and Dùghall Bochanan) could claim pride of place for love poetry, nature poetry, and religious poetry, each had his own gifts, and Rob Donn's were a penetrating intellect and an abiding interest in human and social relationships.⁶⁸

Tha mi meas gu airidh cùisean an t-sluaigh—an aighear agus am bròn, an gaol agus am fuath—air an seinn cho math ri dòighean fhiadh agus dath bheanntan.⁶⁹

MacKinnon also identified several factors that he believed had diminished Rob Donn's reputation outside the MacKay country. First is his dialect, which was unfamiliar beyond his own district and affected the rhyme of the verses when pronounced in southern Gaelic.⁷⁰ Second is the local and ephemeral subject matter of many songs, which make them hard for outsiders to appreciate.⁷¹ Third is the fact (or the assumption) that he never revised his work after he composed it.⁷² Fourth — and perhaps most intriguing — is his view of the bard's attitude to language itself:

Bha cluais-chiùil mhath aige. Rinn e gu tric am fonn cho math ris an òran; ach cha robh uiread meas aige air fuaim nam focail agus a bha aig mòran d' ar bàird. Is e

⁶⁵ MacKinnon, p. 244 (“If Dr. Mackay had been as familiar with southern as with northern Gaelic, he would have left out many words he put in his glossary, and he would have put in many words he left out.”)

⁶⁶ MacKinnon, pp. 243, 246.

⁶⁷ MacKinnon, p. 242 (“In my view, no other Gaelic bard consistently stood so diligently and resolutely on the side of justice and against injustice, as he understood [them], as did Rob Donn”).

⁶⁸ MacKinnon, pp. 246-47, 250, 253.

⁶⁹ MacKinnon, p. 253 (“I consider the affairs of the people — joy and sorrow, love and hate — just as worthy of being sung as the habits of the deer and the colors of the mountains”).

⁷⁰ MacKinnon, pp. 243-45.

⁷¹ MacKinnon, p. 244.

⁷² MacKinnon, pp. 247-51.

brìgh nam focal agus maise an fhuinn ris am bu mhò bha Rob Donn ag amharc,
agus chan 'eil mi cinnteach nach e bha ceart.⁷³

Donald Sage (1789-1869) also criticized Mackay's 1829 edition, which he described as "singularly defective" in its approach to the issue of dialect:

The editor was anxious to give Rob Donn universal publicity in the highlands by correcting his Gaelic; but being, unfortunately, no poet himself, he, in his attempts to improve the poet's Gaelic, has strangled his poetry.⁷⁴

A. Maclean Sinclair wrote in 1892 that Rob Donn "was a man of unquestionable genius [...] one of the ablest poets of the Highlands" who "had the courage of his convictions", "uses very impolite, very improper expressions," and was "probably the most sarcastic of the Gaelic bards."⁷⁵ Nevertheless, he published only one of his songs, the elegy to Ewen.⁷⁶ In 1894, *The Celtic Monthly* published a short biography of the poet, assessing his work as follows:

Although we cannot claim for Rob Donn the highest place among the Gaelic bards, it would be no exaggeration to say that few excelled him. His satire was keen without being vindictive; his humour (except in a very few instances) racy, without being indelicate, and his wit natural and unforced.⁷⁷

D. THE HEW MORRISON EDITION (1899)

Morrison's is the most complete edition of Rob Donn's poetry, containing 220 poems, fifteen more than the Mackay edition, including nine he identifies as "not previously published".⁷⁸ Hew Morrison (1849-1935) was born in Torrisdale, Sutherland, and trained and worked as a schoolteacher before his appointment as Chief Librarian of the Edinburgh Public Library, where he served from 1887 to 1922.⁷⁹ His edition is the most accessible for an English reader because the preface, biographical sketch, song titles, table of contents and explanatory notes are all in English. The poems themselves are in Gaelic only, accompanied by an index of first

⁷³ MacKinnon, p. 245 ("He had a good musical ear. He often composed the tune as well as the verse; but he placed less value on the sound of the words than many of our bards. Rob Donn usually emphasized the substance of the words and the beauty of the tune, and I am not sure he was wrong").

⁷⁴ Sage, p. 38.

⁷⁵ A. Maclean Sinclair, *The Gaelic Bards from 1715 to 1765* (Charlottetown, PEI: Hazard & Moore, 1892), p. 164.

⁷⁶ Maclean Sinclair, pp. 165-67.

⁷⁷ W. Drummond-Norie, 'Famous Highland Bards', *Celtic Monthly*, 2 (1894), 240-42 (p. 242).

⁷⁸ Morrison, pp. 453-56.

⁷⁹ Interview conducted by Ellen Beard with Ailsa Smith on 26 September 2013; 'Mr. Hew Morrison', *Celtic Monthly*, 1 (1892-1893), 132; Thomson, *Companion*, p. 205.

lines and a two-page glossary of Sutherland Gaelic words with English translations. Most important for my research, he provides tune names for 60 of the songs.

Morrison's description of the sources and publication history of Mackay's edition has already been quoted in full. His own principal sources were the Mackay edition itself and the Findlater manuscript; I have a photocopy of Morrison's marked-up copy of the published Mackay edition from his granddaughter, Ailsa Smith, and the portion of the Findlater manuscript now at the National Library of Scotland was donated by his estate.⁸⁰ Otherwise, he is rather cagey about his sources for the remaining poems, leaving open the possibility that they were oral, written or both:

The additional poems and stanzas in this volume may be accepted as genuine. They have been selected with every possible care from a large miscellaneous collection made in the course of many years.⁸¹

Morrison also differed from Mackay on the issue of censorship; in his own words:

This edition of Rob Donn's Poems was undertaken by the Publisher with the view of providing as complete a collection as possible of the poet's works. It contains several pieces not included in either of the former editions, and some of them were never previously published.⁸²

As a result, he included at least one complete poem (#57) and stanzas of five others that had been censored by Mackay in whole or in part.⁸³ And while even Morrison could not bring himself to print the word *cac* in full,⁸⁴ as a librarian and archivist he may have felt a greater duty to preserve the accuracy of the historical record than did the good minister, who was more concerned with setting a moral example.

The most disappointing aspect of the Morrison edition for my purposes is that it provides no information about his tune sources, and his granddaughter was unable to fill that gap from his personal papers or her own knowledge — although

⁸⁰ The Findlater manuscript, NLS MS 1669, contains 33 poems on 82 pages; its original pagination indicates that 15 pages are missing at the beginning. The Hew Morrison manuscript, a copy of which is in my possession, is an annotated copy of Mackintosh Mackay's printed edition, containing 233 pages, with textual emendations, English notes, and directions to the printer. However, it does not contain any of the poems Morrison added to Mackay's collection, or any of the prefatory matter or appendices printed in 1899. This suggests it was his first draft, and supports the inference that he worked from the Mackay edition, not from the original MacLeod manuscript.

⁸¹ Morrison, p. xlv.

⁸² Morrison, "Editor's Preface".

⁸³ See App. II, #16, 21, 52, 53, 96, and Morrison, pp. 293-95.

⁸⁴ Morrison, p. 368.

she did tell me that her grandfather was tone-deaf!⁸⁵ Otherwise, Morrison's introduction contains a biographical sketch of the bard and several pages of documentary evidence to support his position that Rob Donn's surname was Calder, not Mackay.⁸⁶ Placing Rob Donn in the "very front rank of poets", Morrison wrote that his "elegies have never been equalled for pathos and good feeling," "his humour is rarely vulgar if we take his time and circumstances into account," and "[b]y his satires he ruled the whole country round".⁸⁷

E. THE GUNN AND MACFARLANE EDITION (1899)

This selected edition, published in the same year as Morrison's, was co-edited by Sutherland-born Adam Gunn (1859-1925), Free Church minister at Durness, and Gaelic polymath Malcolm MacFarlane (1853-1931), who acted as music editor.⁸⁸ Unlike previous editions, it was designed as a songbook, containing 118 Gaelic texts with tunes for 45 in staff notation and sol-fa. It also contains a preface, table of contents, twelve very dated English translations from various sources, background notes on twelve melodies by MacFarlane, a biographical sketch of the bard by Rev. Thomson Mackay, an essay on Rob Donn's dialect by Gunn, a glossary of Sutherland Gaelic words, and a reply to Hew Morrison on the then-heated controversy over the bard's surname.

The publisher, John Mackay of *The Celtic Monthly* in Glasgow, had evidently come into possession of "a manuscript collection of airs of Rob Donn's songs noted down in the Reay Country by the late John Munro, a native of the district."⁸⁹ I have been unable to locate the original manuscript, Malcolm MacFarlane's copy, or any particulars on John Munro himself, despite searching laboriously through MacFarlane's papers at the National Library of Scotland, as well as investigating other possible sources of information on John Munro, John Mackay,

⁸⁵ Interview by Ellen Beard with Ailsa Smith on 26 September 2013.

⁸⁶ Morrison, pp. xxxii-xxxvii. This dispute had already been waged in the newspapers before 1899, as illustrated in a series of newspaper clippings collected by Morrison and preserved by his granddaughter.

⁸⁷ Morrison, pp. xxxvii, xxxviii, xlix.

⁸⁸ Thomson, *Companion*, pp. 117, 188. Further biographical information on Adam Gunn can be found in *The Fasti of the United Free Church of Scotland, 1900-1929*, ed. by John A. Lamb (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1956), p. 502, and on Malcolm MacFarlane in *The Celtic Monthly*, 23 (1915), pp. 221-24.

⁸⁹ Gunn and MacFarlane, preface.

and *The Celtic Monthly*, such as the Mitchell Library in Glasgow.⁹⁰ MacFarlane wrote elsewhere that he remembered Munro “dimly” as a “diligent collector” and “solfaist” who lived in Glasgow in the 1870s, “a gifted musician [who] probably knew more about Gaelic music than any Highlander of last generation.”⁹¹

Combining this information with the history of the tonic sol-fa movement, founded in the 1840s and growing in popularity through the 1870s, suggests that Munro did his collecting some time during that period, perhaps in the 1850s and 1860s.⁹²

Thirty-six of the melodies in Gunn and MacFarlane are from the Munro collection; the other nine are identified either by title or published source.

Aside from their interest in music, Gunn and MacFarlane explained their principles of selection as follows:

It is doubtful if the inclusion of every composition alleged to have been made by Rob Donn has tended to increase the bard’s reputation as such. Keeping this in view only the principal compositions, and such of the minor pieces as were necessary to display the style and range of subject which were his, are reproduced.⁹³

This approach allowed the editors to censor Rob Donn’s racier poems and passages without admitting they were doing so, omitting, for instance, “Bean Innse-mheiridh” (#9) and “Òran do Dhaibhidh” (#21), and following Mackay in expurgating “Briogais Mhic Ruaraidh” (#16) and “Faolan” (#96).⁹⁴

Gunn also commented on the issue of Rob Donn’s dialect and the emendations of his first editor.

By [1829] the standard of Gaelic orthography was fixed; and as the vernacular of the Reay country differed widely from the accepted standard, his learned Editor took pains to present the work as nearly as possible in the conventional form. This was done with the best intentions on the part of the Editor, whose desire was to make the compositions of the bard intelligible to the general reader, and, what was of no less consequence, to encourage a uniform system of Gaelic orthography. However successfully this might be done in *prose* compositions, it is impossible to carry it out in *poetry*, without detriment to the rhyme. The substitution of the southern form of the word for the native vernacular, grates harshly upon a musical ear, and often completely destroys the *assonance*. It is well known, however, that Dr. Mackintosh Mackay did not add to his other accomplishments the possession of a musical ear; it does not appear to have occurred to him, indeed, that his laudable

⁹⁰ Papers of Malcolm MacFarlane, NLS Acc. 9736.

⁹¹ Malcolm MacFarlane, ‘Half a Century of Vocal Gaelic Music’, *TGSI*, 32 (1925), 251-72 (pp. 261-62); ‘Our Musical Page’, *Celtic Monthly*, 8 (1899-1900), 100.

⁹² Bernarr Rainbow and Charles Edward McGuire, ‘Tonic Sol-fa’, in *Oxford Music Online*, <<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com>> [accessed 5 May 2015].

⁹³ Gunn and MacFarlane, preface.

⁹⁴ Gunn and MacFarlane, pp. 29, 37-38.

desire for a uniform system of orthography, resulted in innumerable metrical blemishes.⁹⁵

Those blemishes were then blamed unfairly on the bard, who in fact possessed a “very accurate ear” and “composed, to a very large extent, the airs to which his songs are sung.”⁹⁶ Gunn and MacFarlane themselves adopted the following editorial principles:

In this edition an attempt is made to remedy these defects by adhering more strictly to the native dialect, than the previous editions had done. It is not, however, to be understood that the Reay Country dialect has been adhered to in every particular. To insist too strongly on preserving the actual pronunciation of words in the written speech would involve a very wide departure from the orthography to which readers are now long accustomed. [...] Accordingly our plan has been to depart as little as possible from the earlier editions, and to do so only where the rhyme clearly required the Reay Country form of the word.⁹⁷

In other words, they apparently changed only those vowels that affected the rhyme scheme while leaving the balance of the text as edited by Mackay.⁹⁸

F. TWENTIETH-CENTURY COMMENTARY

In 1900, Adam Gunn published six Rob Donn poems (without music) not included in the earlier editions, supplied to him by Ann Murray, the bard’s great-grand-daughter.⁹⁹ The longest, “Òran nam Beanntaichean”, is largely a list of local place names, another praises a dairymaid with whom the poet carried on “a mild flirtation [...] although he ought not, for he was engaged to another”, and the rest are mere snippets on various topics.¹⁰⁰

In 1912, Donald Maclean praised Rob Donn as “the greatest of the satirists” composing Gaelic poetry between 1745 and 1830, with “the best aptitude in searching analysis of character and motives” but concerned himself primarily with defending the bard’s moral character.¹⁰¹

⁹⁵ Gunn and MacFarlane, p. 111; see generally pp. 111-15.

⁹⁶ Gunn and MacFarlane, p. 111.

⁹⁷ Gunn and MacFarlane, p. 111.

⁹⁸ Gunn and MacFarlane, pp. 111-12. For example, they changed the word “òranach” in Mackay, p. 57, to “amhranach” (no doubt Rob Donn’s original pronunciation), so it would rhyme with “sanntachas”, “gheamhradh” and “dannsaireachd”. Gunn and MacFarlane, p. 32, verse 1.

⁹⁹ Adam Gunn, ‘Unpublished Songs of the Reay Country’, *Celtic Monthly*, 8 (1899-1900), 62-64, 87-88.

¹⁰⁰ Gunn, ‘Unpublished Songs’, pp. 64, 87-88.

¹⁰¹ Donald Maclean, ‘The Literature of the Scottish Gael (Continued)’, *Celtic Review*, 8 (1912), 51-74 (pp. 72-74).

W. J. Watson included only two Rob Donn poems in his anthology, “Cead Fhir Bhioguis do’n Fhrith” (Bighouse’s Farewell to the Forest) and “Marbhrann Iain Mhic Eachainn” (Elegy to Iain Mac Eachainn).¹⁰² He placed Rob Donn with Mary MacLeod and Duncan Bàn MacIntyre as the outstanding unlettered poets in the Gaelic tradition,¹⁰³ and complimented his powers of memory in composing “Òran a’ Gheamhraidh” (Song to Winter), “an exact counterpart, line for line and phrase for phrase, of MacDonald’s ‘Òran an t-Samhraidh’ — a notable illustration of the mental grasp of Rob Donn, if, as we are told, he could not read the original on which he worked.”¹⁰⁴

John Lorne Campbell included both Rob Donn’s Jacobite songs in his anthology: “Òran do Phrionnsa Teàrlach” celebrating the rising, and “Òran nan Casagan Dubha” criticizing the Disclothing Act that followed.¹⁰⁵ His assessment of the poetry repeats several now-familiar criticisms.

The merits of Rob Donn’s poetry have been much disputed. He has suffered alike from the overpraise of his fellow-countrymen and the detractions of critics who did not perceive that the bad rhymes with which his verse appears at first sight to abound were due to the attempts of his editors to clothe the Reay dialect in the standard literary orthography. Most of his poems depend upon parochial incidents for their point, and have but little interest for the general reader. He had a considerable talent for versification, but his poetry shows small inspiration and not much depth of feeling or thought which, considering his circumstances, is not surprising.¹⁰⁶

Campbell tried to improve the rhymes by respelling even more words than Gunn and MacFarlane, a doubtful strategy that made the text harder to follow for the general Gaelic reader. To his credit, Campbell included music in staff notation for the songs whenever he could find it.

Sorley MacLean was distinctly unimpressed by Rob Donn, a view that remained constant throughout his lifetime. As he wrote in an early essay:

Generally I have no very high regard for Rob Donn’s poetry. [...] As John Mackenzie pointed out long ago, his realism is not lit up by great feeling or imagination.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰² *Bàrdachd Ghàidhlig: Specimens of Gaelic Poetry, 1550-1900*, ed. by William J. Watson (Inverness: Northern Counties, 1918); 3rd edn (Stirling: Learmonth, 1959), pp. 76-85.

¹⁰³ Watson (1959), p. xxi.

¹⁰⁴ Watson (1959), p. xxiv.

¹⁰⁵ *Highland Songs of the Forty-Five*, ed. by John Lorne Campbell (Edinburgh: John Grant, 1933); 2nd edn (Edinburgh: SGTS, 1984), pp. 230-45.

¹⁰⁶ J. L. Campbell, p. 228.

¹⁰⁷ Sorley MacLean, *Ris a’ Bhruthaich*, ed. by William Gillies (Stornoway: Acair, 1985), p. 36.

Later he described Rob Donn dismissively as the author of “humanist sermo-pedestrian verse [...] a worldly-wise, humourous, rather satirical moralist, with however a courageous sense of honour”.¹⁰⁸ But MacLean was temperamentally a romantic, not a satirist, and despite his opinion that “Gaelic song before 1800 has everything except complexity of explicit thought”, he failed to recognize that very quality in Rob Donn.¹⁰⁹

In 1971, Donald John MacLeod praised Rob Donn as “the greatest pre-20th century Gaelic writer.”¹¹⁰ MacLeod acknowledged that Rob Donn’s “tone of righteous indignation” is common in Highland Presbyterianism, and that he was “temperamentally and intellectually equipped to compose, in Gaelic, social satire with a philosophical basis”.¹¹¹ Nevertheless, he considered the conciseness of Rob Donn’s poetry atypical of “a basically unwritten (and therefore discursive) literature like Gaelic bardic poetry.”¹¹² Instead, he thought the bard’s perspective so “unorthodox, if not unique, in the Gaelic context” that “its source must be looked for elsewhere”, in the satires of the contemporary English poet Alexander Pope, even suggesting that “[t]he fact that Rob Donn wrote satire at all is arguably an influence of Pope’s work.”¹¹³ While I defer to the article by Natasha Sumner (discussed below) for an evaluation of the possible influence of Pope,¹¹⁴ MacLeod’s arguments seem questionable on other grounds as well, by underestimating the importance of satire within Gaelic tradition itself and by disregarding the presence of both conciseness and discursiveness in Rob Donn’s verse.

The remainder of MacLeod’s article is devoted to an overview of Rob Donn’s poetry. Each genre is illustrated by short quotations, although he neither cites their sources nor translates the excerpts into English. Among other things, he notes the “prominently ribald nature” of Rob Donn’s humor, the premium he places

¹⁰⁸ MacLean, p. 131.

¹⁰⁹ MacLean, p. 111.

¹¹⁰ Donald John MacLeod, ‘The Poetry of Rob Donn Mackay’, *SGS*, 12 (1971), 3-21 (p. 3). Technically, of course, Rob Donn was not a writer at all.

¹¹¹ MacLeod, pp. 7, 8.

¹¹² MacLeod, pp. 5-6.

¹¹³ MacLeod, pp. 3, 6.

¹¹⁴ Natasha Sumner, ‘How Popean was Rob Donn?: A study in intertextuality’, *Aiste*, 4 (2014), 96-113.

on generosity, the philosophical nature of his elegies, his frequent use of parody, and his “refreshingly [...] un-Romantic” temperament.¹¹⁵ As to style, he observes:

The economy and precision of his language is one of the most distinctive features of Rob Donn’s poetry. Strings of epithets—so common in bardic eulogy, invective and nature-description—are very rare in his work, as is ornamental language.¹¹⁶

That description cannot be faulted, but it is hard to reconcile his statement that Rob Donn’s “work did not become a part of the mainstream of the Gaelic tradition” with its strong representation in nineteenth-century poetry anthologies, the articles by MacKinnon, and its continuing popularity in the song tradition, as reflected in the Munro collection as well as various Mòd publications.¹¹⁷ And even if Rob Donn did not suit all tastes, his poetry never dropped out of the academic canon and maintained its presence in the newer anthologies discussed below.

Derick Thomson, the pre-eminent Gaelic literary scholar of the second half of the twentieth century, described Rob Donn as “a poet of great stature,” whose satires are “quite unsparing of rank or class,” and whose elegies are “more reflective and more concerned with spiritual values than were the elegies of tradition.”¹¹⁸ He agreed with MacLeod that Rob Donn was an innovator whose work “unfortunately has been much neglected, although his reputation is in the ascendant again.”¹¹⁹ Thomson’s anthology includes a Jacobite song (“Òran nan Casagan Dubha”), the elegies to Iain mac Eachainn and the Rispond Misers, and the popular song “Gleann Gallaidh”, accompanied by English translations and notes.¹²⁰ While Thomson dismisses some of Rob Donn’s verse as “trivial” or “parochial” in interest, he also credits Ian Grimble for demonstrating Rob Donn’s value as a source of social history, as well as “an important peak in achievement in Gaelic poetry.”¹²¹

¹¹⁵ MacLeod, pp. 11-19.

¹¹⁶ MacLeod, p. 19.

¹¹⁷ MacLeod, p. 20; ACG, *Còisir a’ Mhòid 1: The Mòd Collection of Gaelic Part Songs 1896-1912* (Glasgow: MacLaren, n.d.), pp. 11, 46; ACG, *Còisir a’ Mhòid 5: The Mòd Collection of Gaelic Part Songs 1938-1947* (Glasgow: MacLaren, 1953), p. 4; ACG, *Òrain a’ Mhòid 1* (Glasgow: MacLaren, 1924), pp. 13, 14, 15; ACG, *Òrain a’ Mhòid 4* (Glasgow: MacLaren, 1927), pp. 4, 12; ACG, *Òrain Aon Neach* (Inverness: 2008), pp. 5, 8; ACG, *Òrain Aon Neach* (Inverness: 2010), p. 9.

¹¹⁸ *Introduction to Gaelic Poetry*, pp. 194-95, 199.

¹¹⁹ *Introduction to Gaelic Poetry*, p. 194.

¹²⁰ *Gaelic Poetry in the Eighteenth Century*, pp. 111-31.

¹²¹ *Gaelic Poetry in the Eighteenth Century*, p. 109; *Introduction to Gaelic Poetry*, p. 204.

G. THE IAN GRIMBLE BIOGRAPHY

Grimble's biography, *The World of Rob Donn*, is by far the most important work of scholarship on the bard to appear in the twentieth century, one I have relied upon heavily throughout this study. Ian Grimble (1921-1995) was a historian who developed his interest in the northern Highlands at the University of Aberdeen, where he earned a PhD in 1964 and became acquainted with Derick Thomson.¹²² His biography is effectively a hybrid of three books — a personal biography of the bard, a social history of his community, and numerous excerpts from the poems themselves, in modern Gaelic spelling with English translations.¹²³ The organization of the book is also a hybrid between the chronological and the topical, whose chapter headings illustrate its scope: early years, influences, candid commentator, distant thunder, early elegies, administrative stresses, animals, commerce and professions, military service, sweeping change, disintegration, and post mortem. For my purposes, the thoroughness of Grimble's work from the standpoint of biography and social history means that further research in those areas is not a priority.

Grimble's presentation of the poems and translations, however, does not substitute for a new edition. Although the translations were revised by Derick Thomson, and the Gaelic texts prepared in modern orthography by Ian MacDonald and John MacInnes for the 1999 edition, they include less than a third of the poems (69 out of the 220 in the Morrison edition), and often only part of each.¹²⁴ Also missing is the music for the songs. While Grimble discusses Rob Donn's musical influences, he does not discuss the music itself, and mentions only a couple of tune sources in passing. In that respect, then, he adds nothing to the information compiled for the two 1899 editions.

¹²² Grimble's 1964 PhD thesis, 'The survival of a Celtic society in the Mackay country formerly called Strathnaver in Northern Scotland from the sixteenth century', formed the basis for his subsequent Strathnaver Trilogy, which also included *Chief of Mackay*, 2nd edn (Edinburgh: Saltire Society, 1993); and *The Trial of Patrick Sellar*, 2nd edn (Edinburgh: Saltire Society, 1993). Thomson composed an elegy for Grimble, published in Ruaraidh MacThòmais, *Sùil air faire* (Stornoway: Acair, 2007), pp. 146-47.

¹²³ In fact, the publisher of the original 1979 edition refused to print the Gaelic texts, including only translations; the Gaelic texts were not included until the second edition, after Grimble's death. Grimble (1999), p. viii.

¹²⁴ Grimble, p. viii.

H. TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY COMMENTARY

Ronald Black included three Rob Donn poems with translations in his 2001 anthology: “Is trom leam an àirigh”, “Spiocairean Ruspainn”, and “Turas Dhaibhidh do dh’Arcaibh.”¹²⁵ He describes Rob Donn’s work as “a powerful blend of the rhetorical strengths and moral values of traditional Gaelic verse and the newer down-to-earth social realism of Presbyterianism.”¹²⁶ Nevertheless, he considers Rob Donn’s poetry an “acquired taste”, finding his Sutherland dialect difficult and his subject matter too often focused on “obscure individuals.”¹²⁷ Overall, he echoes the familiar judgment that Rob Donn has greater value for social history than for literature: “Much of it is not great poetry but important poetry.”¹²⁸

In a 2002 lecture on the state of the discipline, William Gillies created a “to-do” list for scholarship on Scottish Gaelic poetry, much of which has obvious relevance to Rob Donn.¹²⁹ In addition to his comments on music, already quoted, he bemoans the neglect of “the vernacular tradition of *bàrdachd* from the seventeenth century to the nineteenth”, many of whose major figures still lack a standard edition of the sort published by the Scottish Gaelic Texts Society.¹³⁰ In the future, he adds, such editions will need fuller “historical-biographical and linguistic support systems in order to cater for the needs of a present-day readership,” a problem particularly acute for Rob Donn given his dialect and subject-matter.¹³¹ In 1899, Morrison and Gunn could assume the existence of a readership who knew Sutherland Gaelic; that is no longer the case.

In a 2007 article on Rob Donn’s elegies, Donald MacAulay introduces his subject as “a highly gifted poet; a skilled verse-maker with immediacy of communication and the gifts of wit and eloquence.”¹³² He then uses illustrations to show that, while adhering to many of the virtues in the older panegyric code, Rob Donn revises their order of importance, placing greatest emphasis on “social virtues,

¹²⁵ *An Lasair*, pp. 142-45, 234-37, 280-85.

¹²⁶ *An Lasair*, p. 430.

¹²⁷ *An Lasair*, p. 431.

¹²⁸ *An Lasair*, pp. 430, 478.

¹²⁹ Gillies, ‘On the Study of Gaelic Literature’.

¹³⁰ Gillies, pp. 12, 18.

¹³¹ Gillies, p. 20.

¹³² Donald MacAulay, ‘Reconstructed Heroes? The Portrait of the “Virtues” in the Panegyric Verse of Rob Donn’, in *Fil Suil Nglais: A Grey Eye Looks Back*, ed. by Sharon Arbuthnot and Kaarina Hollo (Ceann Drochaid: Clann Tuirc, 2007), pp. 73-82 (p. 73).

highlighting the centrality of human interaction and assigning to charitableness, obligation, humaneness — of attitude and deed — the prime value within this interaction.” This “wider concern and passion for humanity [...] together with his courage to express his convictions and his exceptional poetic gifts, make his a commanding voice.”¹³³

In a recent article, Natasha Sumner responds to MacLeod’s 1971 claims regarding Pope’s influence on Rob Donn’s satire, arguing that MacLeod’s assessment is “problematic in its assumptions about the nature of literary influence, as well as the implicit value it places in the conventions of one cultural-linguistic body of literature over another.”¹³⁴ Among other things, she points to the implausibility of stylistic influence (such as finely balanced, antithetical couplets) in a context of oral translation from English to Gaelic, and the absence of specific “intertextual points of contact” between the two poets of the sort present in the seasonal poems of Mac Mhaighstir Alastair and Rob Donn.¹³⁵ She also takes issue with MacLeod’s view that Rob Donn’s satire was a complete departure from the “mere invective” of older Gaelic satire, observing that “[t]he vast majority of village poetry from the period, in which one might expect to find a large store of occasional satire, was never copied down, inhibiting our ability to perform a comparative study.”¹³⁶ This seems quite likely in an oral context, where topical material is sensitive if not inflammatory in its own time and place, but apt to be quickly forgotten thereafter.

Finally, notice should be taken of a series of short columns written by Donald William Stewart for the Sutherland community magazine *Am Bratach* in 2014-2015.¹³⁷ These articles, intended for a general readership to commemorate the bard’s 300th anniversary, survey Rob Donn’s life, his patrons in the local church and gentry, the nature of Gaelic satire, and the social role of the poet. Stewart writes aptly that Rob Donn was a song-maker “with a penchant for dramatic, attention-grabbing melodies”, that because of editorial tinkering “the Rob Donn we read in

¹³³ MacAulay, p. 82.

¹³⁴ Sumner, p. 97.

¹³⁵ Sumner, pp. 99-100, 108-09.

¹³⁶ Sumner, pp. 102-03.

¹³⁷ Donald William Stewart, in *Am Bratach*, ed. by Donald MacLeod, September 2014, p. 8; October 2014, p. 14; November 2014, p. 14; December 2014, p. 14; January 2015, p. 17; February 2015, p. 17; March 2015, p. 17.

print is not the original Rob Donn”, and that translating Rob Donn “is the equivalent of listening to a stand-up comedian and having to explain every one of the punchlines.”¹³⁸ Nevertheless, some of his chronology is confused, and other comments reveal insufficient familiarity with his subject matter.¹³⁹ In particular, if Rob Donn “didn’t aspire to the status of a published writer”, as Stewart argues, why did he spend untold hours of his time dictating 240 of his poems to Aeneas MacLeod and Janet Thomson?¹⁴⁰ The Iain Tapaiddh poems and others show clearly that Rob Donn understood the advantages of literacy and participation in “the world of readers”, even if they were not his immediate or principal audience.¹⁴¹ Stewart also recommends that “[a]ny potential editor of Rob Donn will have to return to the original manuscripts, comparing them with later recordings of the songs made in Mackay Country.”¹⁴² While this would be excellent advice if the original manuscripts could be located, I have no reason to be optimistic on that score.

I. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The preceding survey has addressed four aspects of the scholarship on Rob Donn, each of which can be identified with a separate discipline within Celtic studies: textual editing, biography, literary criticism, and music. The first of these is the most fundamental — compiling, editing, translating and annotating a critical edition of the texts. That task is well beyond the scope of this thesis, although a few preliminary steps have been taken, including, in this chapter, the identification of manuscript sources, a partial reconstruction of early publication efforts, and a critique of the four published editions (including Grimble). In addition, Appendix II

¹³⁸ *Am Bratach*, February 2015, p. 17.

¹³⁹ For instance, he implies that Rob Donn’s clash with Lady Reay over the marriage of a pregnant maid occurred when he was living in Balnakeil after 1763, leading to the bard’s “downfall” and the exile of his family. *Am Bratach*, January 2015, p. 17. While the chronology is admittedly confusing, this seems to conflate three separate incidents. The first incident with Lady Reay and a pregnant maid (Barbara Miller) occurred decades earlier, when Rob Donn was still living in Strathmore; she was married off to the weaver James MacCulloch. Grimble, pp. 190-201. The second incident, Rob Donn’s removal to Fresgill near Whiten Head for poaching, probably occurred in the late 1750s. Grimble, p. 170. The third incident, which may have occurred in the 1760s, involved another maid (Catherine Mackay), who had previously borne an illegitimate child and was married off to the piper George MacLeod (perhaps by then a widower). Morrison, pp. xxviii-xxix, 288-95; Grimble, pp. 129-34.

¹⁴⁰ *Am Bratach*, March 2015, p. 17.

¹⁴¹ App. II, #48, verse 3.

¹⁴² *Am Bratach*, February 2015, p. 17.

contains translations of all 100 poems included in the thesis (most never previously translated into English), with footnotes identifying the location of each in Mackay, Morrison, Gunn and MacFarlane, and Grimble and providing background information culled from those sources and others.

The survey also highlights several recurring issues never fully resolved by previous editors and perhaps now beyond our collective grasp. Underlying these is the fundamental difficulty of achieving fidelity to the words and meaning of an oral poet who died over two centuries ago, where the original manuscripts taken from his dictation are apparently no longer extant, and where the printed versions of his poems have been subjected to considerable alteration by editors whose agendas are obvious but whose methods are neither transparent nor adequately documented. Unless the MacLeod manuscript can be located, by far the greatest challenge will be that of dialect — first reconstructing what Rob Donn probably said by slotting the known details of Sutherland Gaelic into his rhyme schemes, and then deciding how to represent this in an edition designed to serve the needs of everyone from linguists to intermediate Gaelic learners. But only slightly less formidable is the challenge of contextualizing Rob Donn's verse, as so many of the individuals and incidents he describes are unlikely to appear in standard historical records.

This brings us to the second pertinent discipline, biography. Here Rob Donn has been well served by the work of Grimble, his predecessors and collaborators. In fact, Grimble's work was so thorough that the biographical and historical sections of this thesis are largely restricted to the topic of music, which he — like Rob Donn's editors — discussed only in passing. Otherwise, Grimble left only a few gaps that could be filled by additional research into persons who do appear in documentary sources, such as John Gray of Rogart and the SSPCK schoolmaster John Sutherland,¹⁴³ as well as members of the local gentry and the civil and religious authorities.

The third discipline is literary criticism, again largely beyond the scope of this thesis. As William Gillies and others have pointed out, ideally a standard edition of the poetry should precede and inform literary criticism, but this has never inhibited comment by those able to read the original, and commentators have

¹⁴³ See App. II, #92, #19.

expressed a variety of opinions on Rob Donn over the years. Sometimes they agree — that his strengths were elegy and satire, that he spoke truth to power, and that his abiding interest was human behavior and relationships. But often critics reveal less about Rob Donn’s mental world or his place in Gaelic literature than about their own cultural biases or prevailing paradigms. In the nineteenth century, these ranged from Mackintosh Mackay’s determination to suppress immoral verse,¹⁴⁴ to the recurrent myth of spontaneous utterance by illiterate bards.¹⁴⁵ More recent scholarly articles, including those by MacAulay, MacLeod and Sumner discussed above, have addressed particular questions of literary influence, such as the panegyric code of traditional Gaelic praise poetry or the influence of the English satirist Alexander Pope. But Grimble’s is the only book-length study since the nineteenth century, and his focus is more biographical and historical than literary.

This brings us at last to the fourth discipline, music. For Rob Donn we are unusually fortunate that previous editors have identified tune names or melodies for some one hundred of his songs. Nevertheless, the provenance and reliability of that information is problematic, and there is no musical analysis in the Rob Donn editions themselves except brief historical notes on a dozen songs by Malcolm MacFarlane. Otherwise, Rob Donn’s musical sources and creative output must be pieced together from other sources, with a degree of certainty somewhere between historical reconstruction and informed speculation. That is the task of the remainder of this thesis.

¹⁴⁴ Mackay, p. xlvii.

¹⁴⁵ Mackay, p. xlii; MacKinnon, pp. 247-48; Stewart, *Am Bratach* (October 2014), p. 14.

CHAPTER III. THEORETICAL AND DISCIPLINARY PERSPECTIVES

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the overall conceptual framework that will guide the subsequent analysis of the songs, an undertaking necessarily complicated by the interdisciplinary nature of the research and the sometimes irrational boundaries between the relevant disciplines. Although Charles Seeger argued for decades that, if linguistics is the study of all language, then musicology should be the study of all music, the “binary oppositions placed between the fields of ethnomusicology and historical musicology” continue to bedevil musical scholarship.¹ Historical musicology is diachronic but “until the end of the twentieth century focused almost exclusively on Western art music.”² Ethnomusicology addresses music in social context but is largely synchronic and based on field work in contemporary societies.³ Anglo-American folk song scholarship discusses melodic classification and transmission but deals mostly with ballads and other English-language material of anonymous authorship.⁴ The field of oral poetry considers theoretical issues such as composition but generally concerns texts rather than music.⁵ So despite considerable overlap in methodology and subject matter, these fields developed along parallel scholarly paths during most of the twentieth century, resisting sporadic efforts to articulate shared goals such as “the identification of musical materials, confronting the social nature of those materials and exploring the mechanisms involved in their realization and perception.”⁶

¹ Charles Seeger, ‘Foreword’, in Mantle Hood, *The Ethnomusicologist* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1971), p. vi; Jonathan McCollum and David G. Hebert, ‘Advancing Historical Ethnomusicology’, in *Theory and Method in Historical Ethnomusicology* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2014), pp. 361-83 (p. 361).

² McCollum and Hebert, ‘Foundations of Historical Ethnomusicology’, in *Theory and Method in Historical Ethnomusicology*, pp. 1-33 (p. 5). For a brief overview of the study of Western art music, see Joseph Kerman, *Musicology* (London: Fontana Press/Collins, 1985), pp. 11-30.

³ For an excellent history of the field, see Bruno Nettl, *Nettl’s Elephant: On the History of Ethnomusicology* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010). Recently, instead of historical studies, “ethnographies of contemporary popular music are widely regarded as the ‘cutting edge’ of the field of ethnomusicology.” McCollum and Hebert, ‘Foundations of Historical Ethnomusicology’, p. 3.

⁴ The early history of the field is described in D. K. Wilgus, *Anglo-American Folk-Song Scholarship since 1898* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1959). Since then, folk song scholarship has moved away from the classification of entire melodic repertoires and closer to its sister discipline ethnomusicology. Bruno Nettl, *The Study of Ethnomusicology: Thirty-One Issues and Concepts* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2005), p. 130.

⁵ For a short introduction, see Julie Henigan, *Literacy and Orality in Eighteenth-Century Irish Song* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2012), pp. 3-14.

⁶ Jim Samson, ‘Analysis in Context’, in *Rethinking Music*, ed. by Nicholas Cook and Mark Everist (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 35-54 (p. 53).

Accordingly, this theoretical overview will be selective rather than comprehensive, emphasizing only the concepts, definitions and insights relevant to my own research questions. Section A will review Anglo-American folk song scholarship, particularly as it concerns classification and transmission of melodies. Section B will discuss ethnomusicology, especially its historical dimension, while Section C will address briefly the largely non-musical field known as oral poetry or orality and literacy studies. Finally, Section D will discuss musical composition in an aural/oral context, drawing primarily on insights developed by ethnomusicologists.

A. FOLK SONG SCHOLARSHIP

The classic definition of folk music was adopted by the International Folk Music Council in 1954:

Folk music is the product of a musical tradition that has been evolved through the process of oral transmission. The factors that shape the tradition are: (i) continuity which links the present with the past; (ii) variation which springs from the creative impulse of the individual or the group; and (iii) selection by the community, which determines the form or forms in which the music survives.⁷

This definition is based on the evolutionary approach to folk song articulated by Cecil Sharp in his 1907 book, *English Folk Song: Some Conclusions*, with its three formative principles of continuity, variation, and selection. Although Sharp did not formulate a theory of oral composition, he recognized the role of individual invention, both intentional and unintentional, in creating new variants of old tunes.⁸ He also made numerous observations on the musical characteristics of English folk song, including its modes, scales, cadence types, common intervals, rhythm and melodic forms.⁹

While Sharp has been criticized for various shortcomings — from disregard of individual creativity to overstating the musical isolation of the rural peasantry — his influence was both far-reaching and long-lasting.¹⁰ Among other things, he was

⁷ Quoted in Cecil J. Sharp, *English Folk Song: Some Conclusions*, 4th edn (Wakefield: EP Publishing, 1972), pp. xvi-xvii.

⁸ Sharp, pp. 24-41.

⁹ Sharp, pp. 47-108.

¹⁰ See James Porter, 'Muddying the Crystal Spring: From Idealism and Realism to Marxism in the Study of English and American Folk Song', in *Comparative Musicology and Anthropology of Music*,

a founding member of the Folk Song Society, established in England in 1898, whose journal made a seminal contribution to Scottish Gaelic song scholarship when it published the Frances Tolmie collection accompanied by Annie Gilchrist's modal analysis in 1911.¹¹ Sharp established what James Porter calls the "dominant tradition" of "analysis and classification" in later Anglo-American folk song studies, culminating in the comparative work of scholars such as Samuel Bayard and Bertrand Bronson and their successors on tune families and melodic classification, whose methods are described below.¹² Sharp and his successors also expanded the study of folk song and ballads from literary texts to music, notably through such major publication projects as Bronson's collections of tunes for the Child ballads and the Greig-Duncan collection from northeast Scotland.¹³

Because this type of scholarship was developed to analyze entire melodic repertoires, its definitions and other methodological tools are well-suited to the task of analyzing the 100 songs and 121 melodies compiled for this thesis. Beginning with the most fundamental of those definitions, a "melody" is a sequence of pitches in a particular rhythm, or "pitched sounds arranged in musical time in accordance with given cultural conventions and constraints."¹⁴ For eighteenth-century Gaelic song, it is most useful to think of a melody as the tune coextensive with a single stanza or verse (*rann*), or a separate refrain (*sèist*) if one exists whose tune differs from the verse. A "motif" is the "smallest melodic-rhythmic unit"; it "requires a minimum of two distinct pitch levels."¹⁵ Intermediate between these two is the "phrase," which can be viewed as a grouping of motifs or as a section of a melody.¹⁶ For example, in a four-line song, each line can be considered a phrase, although each phrase may also contain smaller recurrent musical units that can be described as

ed. by Bruno Nettl and Philip V. Bohlman (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1991), pp. 113-30.

¹¹ Porter, 'Muddying the Crystal Spring', pp. 113-15; Frances Tolmie, *One Hundred and Five Songs of Occupation from the Western Isles of Scotland* (Somerset: Llanerch Publishers, 1997).

¹² Porter, 'Muddying the Crystal Spring', p. 114.

¹³ Francis James Child, *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, 5 vols (Boston, MA: Houghton, Mifflin, 1882-1898); Bertrand Bronson, *The Traditional Tunes of the Child Ballads*, 4 vols (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1959-1972); Patrick Shuldham-Shaw and Emily Lyle, *The Greig-Duncan Folk Song Collection*, 8 vols (Edinburgh: Mercat Press, 1981-2002).

¹⁴ Alexander L. Ringer, 'Melody', §1, in *Grove Music Online*, <<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com>> [accessed 9 June 2012].

¹⁵ Ringer, 'Melody', §4.

¹⁶ Ringer, 'Melody', §4.

motifs. Another common subdivision in the folk song context is the “strain,” usually eight bars long and covering two lines of a rhyming couplet.¹⁷

A traditional melody often exists in more than one “variant”, defined simply as “[o]ne of a number of differing forms of a folklore item.”¹⁸ In oral transmission, without a fixed text, song variants arise naturally over time from the vagaries of human memory, unconscious individual or cultural preferences, and the conscious choices of the singers who transmit the songs. In the words of Bayard:

I take it to be inevitable that folk artists will alter tunes learned and transmitted by ear in the direction of the idiosyncrasies of music-making most habitual and familiar to their ears and congenial to their acquired artistic tastes.¹⁹

Based on extensive study of British-American folk song, Bayard identified eight recurring types of melodic variation: (1) a long melodic jump up or down; (2) a strong alteration in tempo or pace; (3) a marked alteration in rhythm or “contraction or prolongation of tune-line or phrase”; (4) a change in mode; (5) the influence of other melodies; (6) repetitiveness (e.g., repeating only half of a tune to simplify the phrase structure from ABCD to ABAB); (7) transposition of tune-phrases or strains; and (8) “corrupt rendition, the result of faulty learning and bad performance of a tune.”²⁰ Some of these changes occur when an existing tune is adapted to a different text, with a different number of syllables in each line or a different meter; at this point the concept of variation begins to shade into composition.

Scholars have used a number of devices to classify folk songs, including verbal content based on title, theme, or shared texts.²¹ Songs can also be classified by geography or culture, delimiting a broad area such as British-American folk song, or smaller areas such as English, Lowland Scots, Welsh, Irish, and Scottish Gaelic song, within which melodies and words are shared to various degrees.²² Both these approaches are used in this study, the former in grouping Rob Donn’s songs by topic, and the latter in tracing their melodic origins.

¹⁷ Samuel P. Bayard, ‘Prolegomena to a Study of the Principal Melodic Families of British-American Folk Song’, *Journal of American Folklore*, 63 (1950), 1-44 (p. 20).

¹⁸ Wilgus, p. 438.

¹⁹ Bayard, ‘Prolegomena’, p. 17.

²⁰ Bayard, ‘Prolegomena’, pp. 17-19.

²¹ James Porter, *Genre, Conflict, Presence: Traditional Ballads in a Modernizing World* (Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2009), p. 109. The classic example, of course, is the Child ballads.

²² Bayard, ‘Prolegomena’, p. 33.

Another analytic tool used by folk song scholars to classify melodies is the concept of mode, based on the church modes of the Middle Ages and Greek nomenclature. A “mode” is “[o]ne of a number of diatonic octave scales differing in the position of major and minor seconds.”²³ Those most commonly encountered in Scottish folk song are the Ionian (the major scale, with half steps between intervals 3-4 and 7-8, playable on the white notes of the piano starting on C); the Dorian (with half steps between 2-3 and 6-7, playable on the white notes starting on D); the Mixolydian (with half steps between 3-4 and 6-7, playable on the white notes starting on G or the bagpipe); and the Aeolian (with half steps between 2-3 and 5-6, playable on the white notes starting on A).²⁴ But not all melodies use a full diatonic or heptatonic (seven-tone) scale. Some are pentatonic, using only a five-note scale, or hexatonic, using a six-note scale.

This use of mode was pioneered by Sharp and by Annie Gilchrist, in her “Note on the Modal System of Gaelic Tunes” accompanying the 1911 publication of the Frances Tolmie collection.²⁵ It was later developed in greater detail by Bertrand Bronson, illustrated by his “mode star”, which depicts visually the relationships between various modes and scale types (pentatonic, hexatonic and heptatonic) and shows how tunes can shift from one mode or scale to another merely by changing, adding or omitting a single note.²⁶ In oral transmission, tunes do not always remain in the same mode, and one often finds “the ‘same’ tune — that is, a recognizable variant of the melodic *idea* — appearing in another mode.”²⁷ While Bronson’s approach to modes has been subject to criticism, I found it quite useful in comparing variants of songs for this study.²⁸

²³ Wilgus, p. 434. A “diatonic scale” is simply a “succession of tones with intervals of major and minor seconds.” Ibid., p. 431.

²⁴ Francis Collinson, *The Traditional and National Music of Scotland* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966), pp. 11-17.

²⁵ Annie G. Gilchrist, ‘Note on the Modal System of Gaelic Tunes’, in *One Hundred and Five Songs of Occupation*, pp. 150-53.

²⁶ Bertrand Bronson, ‘Folksong and the Modes’, *Musical Quarterly*, 32 (1946), 37-49.

²⁷ Bertrand Bronson, *The Singing Tradition of Child’s Popular Ballads* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), p. xxxv.

²⁸ See Norman Cazden, ‘A Simplified Mode Classification for Traditional Anglo-American Song Tunes’, *Yearbook of the International Folk Music Council*, 3 (1971), 45-78, and Bronson’s reply, ‘Are the Modes Outmoded?’, *Yearbook of the International Folk Music Council*, 4 (1972), 23-31. Why Cazden thought his approach was simplified is beyond my comprehension.

Another descriptive device often used by folk song scholars is the concept of “melodic contour,” defined as “[t]he ascending and/or descending movement of a tune, determined by the pitches of its stressed tones.”²⁹ While the basic concept is simple enough, the mechanics of its application have led to a great variety of approaches, described in a 1976 article by Charles Adams.³⁰ They include: (1) verbal or symbolic narration (e.g., level, rising or falling); (2) typologies based on word lists or graphics (e.g., an arch or a diagonal line); (3) graphs of various sorts; and (4) his own newly invented table. None of these systems seems particularly helpful; as Adams himself admits, since “musical notation is itself a form of symbolic description,” translating from one set of symbols into another that is less familiar and often less clear “gives too little information to be of much practical use.”³¹ Nevertheless, it may be helpful to use a few visual words in comparing, say, the first four bars of each of several possible variants, as long as the notated melodies are also available for reference.

The last concept to be discussed here is the “tune family”, defined by Samuel Bayard in 1950 as “a group of melodies showing basic interrelation by means of constant melodic correspondence, and presumably owing their mutual likeness to descent from a single air that has assumed multiple forms through processes of variation, imitation, and assimilation.”³² He estimated that at least 35 tune families exist in the shared British-American repertory, as well as others that are present only in subdivisions of that repertory, such as Scottish Gaelic.³³ In his view, these tunes have a life of their own quite independent of their words. “They are capable of travelling about, of being varied, of undergoing influences and attractions from other music, and of being elaborated or simplified by various performers no matter what their textual associations may be.”³⁴ Furthermore, they are quite willing to cross linguistic boundaries, as demonstrated, for example, in Porter’s case study of the tune “Lillibulero.”³⁵

²⁹ Wilgus, p. 434.

³⁰ Charles R. Adams, ‘Melodic Contour Typology’, *Ethnomusicology*, 20 (1976), 179-215.

³¹ Adams, p. 180.

³² Bayard, ‘Prolegomena’, p. 33.

³³ Bayard, ‘Prolegomena’, pp. 13, 38.

³⁴ Bayard, ‘Prolegomena’, p. 4.

³⁵ Porter, *Genre, Conflict, Presence*, pp. 115-28.

Bayard identified a number of musical factors that he found useful in analyzing resemblances and possible kinship among tunes in an oral tradition.

The sorts of resemblance we look for, to guide us in disentangling separate tunes one from another, are those of tonal range; of rhythm; of melodic progression, or melodic line; of order (or recurrence) or corresponding musical phrases; and order (or recurrence) of stressed notes or tones. These various kinds of resemblances are not of equal importance or dependability. Pre-eminent among them are the correspondences in melodic line and in the place and succession of the stressed tones throughout the compass and course of individual melodies. [...] If these latter two are relatively constant per phrase, we can be comparatively well assured that we are dealing with a group of cognate or closely related melodic items.³⁶

In contrast, consistent differences in intervals, melodic outline, and stressed tones suggest that two melodies belong to different tune families.³⁷

Bayard, Bronson, and Seeger all used this approach in analyzing tune families of various sizes.³⁸ For instance, in Seeger's analysis of the Barbara Allen tunes, he first transcribed a large number of variants in skeletal form, transposed them so their stanza finals all fell on the G above middle C, lined up the musical phrases to match the words, and aligned the variants vertically for purposes of comparison.³⁹ He then classified the tunes by rhythm and by pitch, including in the latter intonation, pitch levels and contours (for the overall melody and component phrases), tonal center (tonic or key), mode, accented beats, phrase endings, and trademark formulas (such as the Scotch snap).⁴⁰ Eventually he identified two unrelated versions, or groups of variants, apparently reaching the same conclusion as Chappell a century earlier that: "Under this name the English and the Scotch have each a ballad, with their respective tunes and a comparison will show that there is no similarity between the tunes."⁴¹

In 1984, James Cowdery published a thoughtful reevaluation of Bayard's tune family concept, based largely on his fieldwork with traditional musicians in

³⁶ Bayard, 'Prolegomena', p. 6.

³⁷ Bayard, 'Prolegomena', p. 12.

³⁸ Samuel P. Bayard, 'Two Representative Tune Families of British Tradition', *Midwest Folklore*, 4 (1954), 13-33; Bronson, 'Melodic Stability in Oral Transmission', *Journal of the International Folk Music Council*, 3 (1951), 50-55; Charles Seeger, 'Versions and Variants of the Tunes of "Barbara Allen"', in *Studies in Musicology, 1935-1975* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), pp. 273-320.

³⁹ 'Barbara Allen', pp. 278-81.

⁴⁰ 'Barbara Allen', pp. 300-09.

⁴¹ 'Barbara Allen', p. 313. See William Chappell, *Popular Music of the Olden Time*, 2 vols (London: Cramer, Beale & Chappell, 1855-1859), II, p. 538.

Ireland.⁴² Cowdery offered three principles with which to analyze the relationships among tunes in a particular repertoire, which he called outlining, conjoining, and recombining. Tunes grouped by the outlining principle show similarities in their overall melodic contour. Tunes grouped by the conjoining principle have sections in common, while other sections differ. The recombining principle highlights the fact that smaller melodic segments or motifs can be combined or recombined in many ways, so that two tunes may contain common elements although their overall melodic contours and sections do not correspond.⁴³ Cowdery further suggested that this recombining principle explains how traditional musicians actually compose, drawing from a “melodic pool” of motifs to “make new melodies which still conform to the traditional sound.”⁴⁴ These are the basic definitions and concepts I will use in analyzing the music for Rob Donn’s songs.

B. ETHNOMUSICOLOGY

The discipline of ethnomusicology, a term first coined by Dutch scholar Jaap Kunst in 1950 to replace the older term “comparative musicology,” has now largely incorporated (if not displaced) the folk song scholarship just described.⁴⁵ In the mid-twentieth century, however, “folk music” still referred to the music of rural, illiterate European peasants, studied by folk music scholars, and “primitive music” was that of non-literate cultures elsewhere, such as Africans and American Indians, studied by ethnomusicologists and anthropologists.⁴⁶ Each group had its own professional association, the International Folk Music Council, established in 1947 (later renamed the International Council for Traditional Music), and the Society for Ethnomusicology, established in 1955.⁴⁷ As described by Philip Bohlman, the ICTM reflects “a European disciplinary preference for musical folklore and the

⁴² James R. Cowdery, ‘A Fresh Look at the Concept of Tune Family’, *Ethnomusicology*, 28 (1984), 495-504.

⁴³ Cowdery, pp. 496-98.

⁴⁴ Cowdery, p. 499.

⁴⁵ Jaap Kunst, *Musicalogica: A Study of the Nature of Ethno-musicology, its Problems, Methods, and Representative Personalities* (Amsterdam: Indisch Instituut, 1950). In fact, not just the older term but “the comparative method [itself] would eventually all but disappear from ethnomusicology”.

McCollum and Hebert, ‘Foundations of Historical Ethnomusicology’, p. 9

⁴⁶ Philip V. Bohlman, *The Study of Folk Music in the Modern World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), pp. ix-x.

⁴⁷ Helen Myers, *Ethnomusicology: Historical and Regional Studies* (London: MacMillan Press, 1993), p. 7.

predilection of many scholars to write on their own musics,” while the North American-based SEM “has concerned itself less with the object of study than with the development of new methodologies and the encouragement of interdisciplinarity between the humanities and the social sciences.”⁴⁸ More recently, the fields of folk music and ethnomusicology have tended to converge, as shown by this 1993 description:

Ethnomusicology includes the study of folk and traditional music, Eastern art music, contemporary music in oral tradition as well as conceptual issues such as the origins of music, musical change, composition and improvisation, music as symbol, universals in music, the function of music in society, the comparison of musical systems and the biological basis of music and dance. Western art traditions are not ruled out, although few studies in this area have been conducted by ethnomusicologists. In general, music in oral tradition and living musical systems are the realms that have most appealed to scholars in this field. Nevertheless most ethnomusicological research also involves history, and for many studies history is the focus. Often ethnomusicologists study cultures other than their own, a situation that distinguishes this field from most historical musicology.⁴⁹

The best-known short definition of ethnomusicology is Alan P. Merriam’s “music in culture,” a formulation that clearly reveals his own background and training as an anthropologist.⁵⁰ In his classic 1964 theory text, *The Anthropology of Music*, Merriam outlined three objects of study for the ethnomusicologist: (1) musical concepts, (2) musical behavior, and (3) musical sound.⁵¹ The first object of study, “concepts,” poses questions such as “what is music?” and “where do songs come from?”, emphasizing the need to elicit a society’s (or a performer’s) own views of music and musicmaking, which may be quite different from those of the Western-trained ethnomusicologist.⁵² Those two perspectives can be labeled in various ways: insider versus outsider, “folk” versus “analytical” (Merriam’s terms), or “emic” versus “etic” (the now-common terms adapted from linguistics by

⁴⁸ Philip V. Bohlman, ‘Ethnomusicology, §III: Post-1945 developments’, §5, in *Grove Music Online*, <<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com>> [accessed 5 June 2012]. Nettl, on the other hand, claims that the organizations are now quite similar. *Nettl’s Elephant*, p. 168.

⁴⁹ Myers, *Ethnomusicology: Historical and Regional Studies*, p. 3.

⁵⁰ *Nettl’s Elephant*, pp. 60-61.

⁵¹ Merriam, p. 32.

⁵² Merriam, pp. 63, 77.

anthropologist Marvin Harris).⁵³ I will return to this distinction in more detail later when I discuss composition.

Merriam's second object of study, "behavior," includes techniques of playing or singing, the social and economic role of musicians, and processes of learning music.⁵⁴ It also includes the "uses" of music in accompanying social activities — such as work, healing, hunting, the harvest, the life cycle, politics, religion, and dance — and the broader "functions" of music — such as emotional expression, aesthetic enjoyment, entertainment, enforcing social norms, and allowing people to sing what they are not permitted to say.⁵⁵

Merriam's third object of study, "sound", requires the ethnomusicologist to provide a detailed technical description and analysis of the particular music he or she is studying.⁵⁶ Since this calls for skills more likely to be possessed by musicians than by anthropologists, a somewhat ironic situation has arisen in which, according to Bruno Nettl, 80% of ethnomusicologists come from music backgrounds but most of the intellectual leadership in the field has come from anthropology.⁵⁷

In 1987, ethnomusicologist Timothy Rice proposed another three-part theoretical model for the field, adapted from anthropologist Clifford Geertz, which asks "how do people historically construct, socially maintain, and individually create and experience music?"⁵⁸ This model is obviously relevant to a historical study of an individual musician and his musical world and happily co-exists with Merriam's more static structural functionalism, allowing one to single out any of Merriam's three categories (concept, behavior and sound) and analyze it from a historical, social, or individual standpoint, depending on the research questions one seeks to answer.⁵⁹

Another leading figure in post-war American ethnomusicology was Mantle Hood, whose influential 1971 text *The Ethnomusicologist* places greater stress on

⁵³ Merriam, p. 31; Thomas N. Headland, Kenneth L. Pike, and Marvin Harris, eds., *Emics and Etics: The Insider/Outsider Debate* (Newbury Park, CA.: Sage Publications, 1990), pp. 22, 48.

⁵⁴ Merriam, pp. 103-63.

⁵⁵ Merriam, pp. 209-27.

⁵⁶ Merriam, pp. 14, 56.

⁵⁷ *Nettl's Elephant*, p. 119.

⁵⁸ Timothy Rice, 'Toward the Remodeling of Ethnomusicology', *Ethnomusicology*, 31 (1987), 467-88 (p. 473).

⁵⁹ Rice, pp. 471, 478.

music and less on anthropology than Merriam's. Hood emphasized the intensive musical training required to be an effective ethnomusicologist, starting with a degree in music, adding skills in transcription, notation, and musical analysis, and learning not just to hear and comprehend but also to perform unfamiliar styles of music.⁶⁰ In essence, he advocated the musical equivalent of a language immersion course, with the goal of becoming "bi-musical" rather than bilingual.⁶¹ The Merriam and Hood approaches are now combined in training ethnomusicologists, all of whom are expected to read anthropology and social theory as well as to study performance as participant-observers.⁶²

Within this discipline, the subfield most relevant to my research is historical ethnomusicology, another term for studying the folk music of the past.⁶³ Nettl admits that its accomplishments remain limited, as there is no established "comparative method to deal with the reconstruction of musical forms" similar to the methods used by historical linguists to reconstruct extinct languages like proto-Indo-European.⁶⁴ British ethnomusicologist Richard Widdess has described its aims as "the uncovering of historical events, and the study of their relationships in terms of processes of change, taking into account all available evidence, including that of sociomusical continuity and change observable today."⁶⁵ Other types of evidence he mentions include early sound recordings, oral history, and written documents of various kinds, including non-musical literature (such as song texts) with references to music, treatises on music theory, and notated music, all of which must be viewed critically rather than accepted at face value.⁶⁶ Because of this heavy (but not exclusive) reliance on written documents, historical ethnomusicology must apply methods of textual criticism from other disciplines, including: (1) bibliographical research (i.e., author, date, and provenance of each source, its method of transmission, the processes of editing, compilation and interpolation, the function and purpose of the source, and its relation to earlier and later sources); (2) interpretation of the notation (including its relationship to actual performance); (3)

⁶⁰ Hood, pp. 27-40, 55-119, 301-10, 320-36.

⁶¹ Myers, *Historical and Regional Studies*, pp. 7-8.

⁶² Nettl's *Elephant*, p. 168.

⁶³ See Widdess, 'Historical Ethnomusicology', pp. 219-31.

⁶⁴ Nettl, *Thirty-One Issues*, p. 70.

⁶⁵ Widdess, p. 220.

⁶⁶ Widdess, pp. 219-21.

transcription into modern Western notation (if necessary); (4) musical analysis, and (5) synchronic and diachronic comparison of melodies and texts.⁶⁷

While Merriam's tripartite model (concept, behavior, and sound) is equally valuable in understanding the vernacular music of the past, the nature of the available evidence differs considerably in a historical context and requires a level of inference and reconstruction unnecessary in fieldwork with living performers. With regard to musical concepts, I cannot ask Rob Donn what he thinks about any aspect of music, much less to describe his compositional processes. But the song texts themselves occasionally discuss music, and often musical concepts can be inferred from relationships between poetic genres and tune types or sources which reveal the bard's assumptions about the type of music considered appropriate for various purposes.

With respect to musical behavior, a great deal of general historical information is available on the role of music in traditional Gaelic society, and evidence about Rob Donn and his circle can be found in the accounts of his editors and biographers as well as in the poems themselves. Much of this information comes originally from oral tradition still extant in the nineteenth century but mediated since that time by a succession of editors, whose agendas must also be evaluated.

Regarding musical sound, I have access to written versions of tunes from the eighteenth century to the twenty-first, most of which have probably undergone some changes through transmission and editing (although Joseph MacDonald may well have transcribed some of the tunes published by his brother Patrick in 1784 directly from the bard). Otherwise, it seems safe to say that Rob Donn and his neighbors sang, as they spoke, in eighteenth-century Sutherland Gaelic, and that their singing style, described by Patrick MacDonald as "wild, artless, and irregular", may have resembled later recordings of traditional singers from other parts of the *Gàidhealtachd*.⁶⁸ Beyond that it is difficult to venture, as dialect and singing style are beyond the scope of this thesis and are probably the most difficult features to reconstruct in the absence of sound recordings.

⁶⁷ Widdess, pp. 222-28.

⁶⁸ *HVA*, p. 5.

Those obstacles, however, should not be allowed to obscure the wealth of musical evidence we do have for eighteenth-century Gaelic song, especially when compared to older music such as medieval chant, another musical tradition that emerged only gradually from orality to literacy.⁶⁹ Nor are the inevitable epistemological problems limited to music, as noted by eminent musicologist Leo Treitler:

Historians of all subjects have ever occupied themselves with reconstructions and hypotheses that come down essentially to informed and reasoned imagining about how the surviving evidence came to be how it is. [...] As for the history of chant, unless one assumes that the pieces we have in writing were all composed at the time they were initially written down — something no one has suggested — they are clues to practices with which they are continuous, no matter how well or badly we exploit them as such.⁷⁰

In other words, any surviving record (whether written or audio) of something as inherently ephemeral as music is only a snapshot in time and space, and the historian must analyze those snapshots to recreate the underlying processes of composition, transmission and performance.

Before concluding this section, it seems appropriate to mention aspects of two recent books that may indicate pertinent trends in their respective disciplines. One of these, McCollum and Hebert's 2014 survey of historical ethnomusicology, is remarkable for its silence on the history and methods of the folk song scholarship discussed in the first part of this chapter, suggesting that it has fallen so far out of fashion as to disappear even from histories of the discipline. The other book, Ó Baoill's 2014 edition of *Màiri nighean Alasdair Ruaidh*, offers more hopeful signs by asking a series of questions that go to the heart of historical ethnomusicology:

Did Màiri sing her songs at gatherings of MacLeod leaders? [...] Or would she teach her songs to some kind of 'professional' to sing there? Would women be allowed to sing such songs at such a gathering? What voice quality would be expected of the singers? Would the company at such gatherings join in with a soloist in the singing of refrains? Would any musical instrument be involved? How did these songs filter down from the clan aristocracy to the common people and into the cèilidh-house tradition of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries? How accurate are the musical notations we have (including those given in the present collection)? Over the centuries following Màiri's time how faithfully were her original texts preserved, and could the different tunes a particular song was set to be interchanged

⁶⁹ Leo Treitler, *With Voice and Pen: Coming to Know Medieval Song and How It Was Made* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); <www.oxfordscholarship.com>.

⁷⁰ Treitler, 'Preface', p. 6 of 9.

freely? Are eighteenth-century written sources any more reliable than twentieth-century sung performances?⁷¹

These are all excellent questions, of precisely the type I have tried to answer here for another Gaelic song-maker, whose life is fortunately better documented than those of his seventeenth-century predecessors.

C. ORALITY AND LITERACY STUDIES

Another potentially relevant discipline in studying a non-literate bard like Rob Donn is oral poetry, sometimes known more broadly as orality and literacy studies. As described by leading proponent John Miles Foley, oral poetry differs from its written relatives in composition, performance and reception.⁷² Foley acknowledges that music often “signals” a performance of oral poetry:

The vocal and instrumental melodies the singer used to summon the traditional context of oral poetry [...] serv[ed] initially as an instrumental overture and throughout the performance as a continuing nonverbal reminder of the historical and cultural “wavelength” for the event.⁷³

But treating music only as a “signal” rather than an intrinsic part of the communication, and calling a sung performance a “poem” rather than a “song” both relegate music to a very peripheral position. Oddly, this seems to be a general tendency in the field, making it almost as text-based as traditional literary studies. That is, despite the fact that much of what it studies is song, its disregard of music results in ignoring the actual sound of the oral material its scholars purport to be trying to understand. Nevertheless, the field offers some insights that facilitate cross-cultural comparison and suggest other reflections on literacy and aurality in music.

The foundational concept in the field of oral poetry is “oral-formulaic theory,” an analysis of epic poetry developed by Milman Parry and Albert Lord to describe Homer and a tradition of oral poetry still being performed in the former Yugoslavia in the 1930s.⁷⁴ They argued, in essence, that Homer was an oral poet, who used fixed epithets and formulaic phrases that could be combined

⁷¹ Ó Baoill, *Màiri nighean Alasdair Ruaidh*, p. 20.

⁷² John Miles Foley, *How to Read an Oral Poem* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002), p. 38.

⁷³ Foley, *How to Read an Oral Poem*, p. 86.

⁷⁴ See generally John Miles Foley, *The Theory of Oral Composition: History and Methodology* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press: 1988).

extemporaneously to fit Greek hexameter, enabling a bard to compose a new version of an epic poem every time he sang or recited it.⁷⁵ James Ross argued persuasively that this theory is largely inapplicable to Scottish Gaelic verse, which exhibits a greater variety of metrical structures and does not generally take the form of verse epics.⁷⁶ That is, while Gaelic poetry contains a great deal of formulaic diction (as in the panegyric code), the formulas are conceptual rather than metric, and are typically adjusted to fit different metrical settings.⁷⁷ Ross also expressed doubt that Gaelic singers would modify song texts each time they performed them, noting the “distinct reverence in the Highlands for traditional texts,” and the belief that “a good tradition-bearer is one who does not reformulate or alter what he has heard.”⁷⁸ On the other hand, as Lillis Ó Laoire has discussed in an article based on his fieldwork in Ireland, this preference for verbatim repetition does not preclude some degree of variation in actual performance, although serious memory lapses and changes in verse order are considered incorrect by informed listeners.⁷⁹ It may also be relevant that his example was apparently an anonymous love song, where more interpretive freedom might be accepted than in the performance of a song by a known poet; all of these matters would benefit from further study in a Scottish Gaelic context. Although Rob Donn himself was well-known for his ability to compose extemporaneous verse, I have seen no indication that he recomposed poems once they were finished (except to defend himself from charges of sedition), and his poems are usually quite short, certainly in comparison to Homeric epic.⁸⁰

More broadly, some orality and literacy theorists such as Walter Ong claim that the development of writing altered not just the means of verbal communication but also the fundamental characteristics of human thought.⁸¹ According to Ong, orally based thought is additive rather than analytic, redundant rather than precise, limited in originality, agonistically toned, participatory rather than objective, and

⁷⁵ Foley, *The Theory of Oral Composition*, pp. 23-28.

⁷⁶ James Ross, ‘Formulaic Composition in Gaelic Oral Literature’, *Modern Philology*, 57 (1959), 1-12.

⁷⁷ Ross, pp. 4-7.

⁷⁸ Ross, p. 12.

⁷⁹ Lillis Ó Laoire, ‘The Right Words: Conflict and Resolution in an Oral Gaelic Song Text’, *Oral Tradition*, 19/2 (2004), 187-213.

⁸⁰ Mackay, p. xlii; Grimble, pp. 89-95.

⁸¹ Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (London: Methuen, 1987); see also Treitler, Chapter 8, p. 9 of 11.

situational rather than abstract.⁸² “Orally managed language and thought is not noted for analytic precision,” in part simply because it is harder to edit words that are not in written or printed form.⁸³ All the features listed by Ong can be found somewhere in Rob Donn’s poetry, particularly in satires and other occasional verse that can jump annoyingly from one subject to another without a unitary theme or overall conceptual structure. This is the trait that must have led Donald MacKinnon to bemoan Rob Donn’s lack of editing, but MacKinnon himself was a reader not a listener, and there is no reason to believe that these organizational deficiencies were perceived as such by the bard’s original audiences.⁸⁴

It should also be remembered that while Rob Donn was not personally literate, neither did he live in a world of “primary orality,” defined by Ong as “the orality of cultures untouched by literacy.”⁸⁵ Such cultures foster “personality structures that in certain ways are more communal and externalized, and less introspective than those common among literates.”⁸⁶ Anthropologists refer to such societies as shame cultures in contrast to guilt cultures. Rob Donn was an extrovert, and his satires undoubtedly enforced social norms by shaming the offenders. But he was also deeply influenced by what Ong calls the internalization of conscience resulting from Calvinist Presbyterianism, despite his inability to read the Bible himself.⁸⁷ His poems reveal a strongly internalized ethical code incorporating subjects from sexual conduct to obligations to the poor, as well as “round” characters rather than the “flat” characters Ong describes as typical of primary oral culture, more commonly encountered in earlier Gaelic panegyric verse.⁸⁸ Thus Rob Donn’s poetry, like the society in which he lived, was profoundly transitional between tradition and modernity.

Overall, the best cross-cultural survey of oral poetry is the seminal work by cultural anthropologist Ruth Finnegan, who often discusses musical context despite

⁸² Ong, pp. 37-49.

⁸³ Ong, p. 104.

⁸⁴ MacKinnon, pp. 247-51.

⁸⁵ Ong, p. 6.

⁸⁶ Ong, p. 69.

⁸⁷ Ong, pp. 152-53. Even if Rob Donn had been able to read, the New Testament was not translated into Scottish Gaelic until 1767, eleven years before his death, and the Old Testament was not fully translated until 1801. Donald E. Meek, ‘Bible, Gaelic translations of’, in Thomson, *Companion*, p. 23.

⁸⁸ Ong, pp. 151-52.

disclaiming competence to analyze specific musicological features.⁸⁹ Among other things, she comments upon the frequency with which different types of poetry are sung, chanted and spoken. Shorter pieces — the catch-all category known as “lyric poetry” — are typically sung, while longer pieces — such as epics, dirges, sermons, and panegyric odes — are more likely to be chanted or declaimed, sometimes with instrumental accompaniment.⁹⁰ Spoken verse is less common; her examples include prayers and children’s rhymes.⁹¹ Since Rob Donn’s corpus is mostly lyric poetry, Finnegan’s classification supports the view that most of it was sung, even if we cannot identify tunes for all the poems.

Another recurring issue Finnegan discusses is the degree to which an oral poet speaks for himself or for the community at large. In her view, this is an empirical question and one cannot simply assume the latter.⁹² For example, an oral poet may be employed or subsidized by an elite, whose views he is expected to reflect.⁹³ He may be paid to compose a poem for a particular purpose, such as an elegy. He may support or criticize the status quo, reinforcing existing community norms or protesting injustice.⁹⁴ Often people can express in poetry and song what they are not otherwise allowed to say, and poets may have a special impunity from the normal consequences of insulting others.⁹⁵ Rob Donn himself performed many different roles as a poet, from paid entertainer in the Sutherland Fencibles, to community poet commemorating births, deaths, and humorous incidents, to a distinctly individual voice of social and political dissent. All are aspects of oral poetry, and none is unique to the *Gàidhealtachd*.

Finnegan also describes other features of the composition and transmission of oral poetry with obvious relevance to the Gaelic song tradition. Every society has both active and passive tradition-bearers, some who create or recreate and others who memorize and pass on.⁹⁶ Composition is often by named individual poets,

⁸⁹ Ruth Finnegan, *Oral Poetry: Its Nature, Significance and Social Context* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), p. xxii n. 1.

⁹⁰ Finnegan, pp. 13, 118.

⁹¹ Finnegan, p. 119.

⁹² Finnegan, p. 205.

⁹³ Finnegan, pp. 188-90, 206.

⁹⁴ Finnegan, pp. 44-45, 226-28, 233.

⁹⁵ Finnegan, pp. 191, 224.

⁹⁶ Finnegan, pp. 57-58.

whose identity is preserved in oral tradition.⁹⁷ Her most important point is that the very existence of oral literature depends on performance, on verbal delivery to someone else who either memorizes it or writes it down and then communicates it to others.⁹⁸ In a society like rural eighteenth-century Scotland, where a small literate elite lived adjacent to a non-literate majority, Rob Donn was fortunate that members of that elite made the effort to record so much of his poetry from his own dictation. But other songs may have been lost, such as occasional verse composed to entertain the Sutherland Fencibles. Like Burns' *Merry Muses of Caledonia*, this type of material was probably not considered suitable for a general audience including women, children and ministers.⁹⁹

One historical context in which ideas of orality and literacy have proven especially fruitful is medieval studies, relevant here because many features of medieval society persisted in eighteenth-century Sutherland. In both cases, an educated elite literate in one language (Latin or English) lived in close proximity to a non-literate peasantry that spoke a different language, so a great deal of communication had to be translated not only from one language to another but from written to oral form and back again.¹⁰⁰ While this situation gave the elite considerable power, it also meant that cultural mediators like ministers and schoolmasters needed sophisticated verbal skills to exercise that power effectively. Thus Murdo MacDonald preached in Gaelic but kept his diary in English; and John Sutherland taught English in school but composed poetry in Gaelic.¹⁰¹ These men functioned in a society with a larger component of orality than our own, and they interacted directly and repeatedly with many persons like Rob Donn whose frame of reference was almost entirely oral.

In such a society, where computer databases and vast indexed libraries of printed books had not yet affected the process of information retrieval, "one's education had to be remembered", and human memory was highly prized as the

⁹⁷ Finnegan, p. 80.

⁹⁸ Finnegan, p. 134.

⁹⁹ Robert Burns, *The Merry Muses of Caledonia*, ed. by James Barke and Sydney Goodsir Smith (London: Panther, 1970).

¹⁰⁰ A good example is Rob Donn's song about an incompetent Lowland notary, App. II, #76.

¹⁰¹ Grimble, p. 75.

essential bridge between the oral and the literate.¹⁰² This is the central insight of Mary Carruthers' magisterial work on the medieval mind, *The Book of Memory*, which explains how even highly educated clerics and scholars were trained and expected to memorize large quantities of verbal material and to compose new texts mentally, reducing them to writing only in final form.¹⁰³ This was also the practice of the Irish bardic schools,¹⁰⁴ and equally effective techniques for memorization and mental composition must have been utilized by non-literate vernacular poets such as Donnchadh Bàn and Rob Donn who composed lengthy poems in response to earlier models by the literate Alasdair mac Mhaighstir Alasdair.¹⁰⁵

In the field of medieval chant, Leo Treitler has explored the topic of oral composition in terms that could apply to all folk song:

Like the practitioners of any traditional music the singers of chant composed their melodies following overall formal models and patterns and calling on specific formulaic units of melody at appropriate points, all of these having emerged from the practice itself, and all as native and natural to the singers as their mother tongues. [...] In any case uniqueness and originality seems not to have been singled out by them as a special value, as it has been in other cultures. Many of the melodies cluster in types marked by common features. [...] Differences between individual melodies of a type can very often be recognized as responses to details of the words they were made to intone. The makers of chant followed quite specific principles in adapting melodies to words, paying attention to all parameters of language — semantic, syntactic, and phonetic.¹⁰⁶

This description of chant as “sung language” matches precisely the aesthetic of traditional Gaelic singers and the footnote in every Mòd publication: “Gaelic stresses and vowel values take precedence.”¹⁰⁷

The last study to be discussed here is Julie Henigan's recent book, *Literacy and Orality in Eighteenth-Century Irish Song*. Although her emphasis again is more textual than musical, the close cultural parallels with eighteenth-century Scotland cannot help but produce several pertinent observations. For instance, she notes that seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Irish poets “clearly intended [their poems] to be

¹⁰² Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 8.

¹⁰³ Carruthers, pp. 1-11, 194-95.

¹⁰⁴ Thomson, *Companion*, pp. 258-59.

¹⁰⁵ Examples are Donnchadh Bàn's pibroch song “Moladh Beinn Dòbhrain”, based on Alasdair's pibroch poem “Moladh Mòraig”, and Rob Donn's seasonal poem “To Winter”, based on Alasdair's seasonal poem “To Summer”. Thomson, *Introduction to Gaelic Poetry*, pp. 187, 195.

¹⁰⁶ Treitler, Chapter 6, p. 2 of 67.

¹⁰⁷ Treitler, Chapter 6, p. 2 of 67; ACG, *Òrain Aon Neach* (Inverness: 2015), pp. 4-16.

sung, as is evident from the many indications in manuscript of tunes to which the poems are to be performed. The melodies they used were frequently well-known and eminently singable.”¹⁰⁸ Regarding composition, she states:

As Breandán Ó Madagáin has pointed out, this does not mean that the poets were necessarily skilled composers, but that they were practised at wedding words to music. He quotes Dinneen’s description of this process, in the case of both literate and illiterate song-writers, who painstakingly corrected their words until they fit the melody, droning all the while, until the song was ready to sing.¹⁰⁹

For keens and laments, Henigan writes that a single melody and its variants are often used for multiple laments so as to function like a “‘tune family’: a pool of related tunes which, while varying in details, features a limited and closely related number of melodic possibilities and ‘a general kinship in structure.’”¹¹⁰ A similar pattern will be seen in some of Rob Donn’s elegies, discussed in Chapter V.

Finally, Henigan makes another observation that may explain why the dichotomy between orality and literacy has limited explanatory value in the study of music. “Current-day singers of traditional songs, whether born into a singing community or not, also tend to learn both words and melodies primarily by ear: while they, too, may copy the words or use books to refresh their memories, their principal reference tends to be aural.”¹¹¹ But this is true of all music, whose essence is sound. I would argue that no musician ever composed, learned or performed any music without listening to the way it sounded, whether mentally, aloud or both. Otherwise, why would any musician need to practice or rehearse or even tune? Music is inherently aural, whether produced by instruments or by the voice, and notation provides at most a memorial device for learning and remembering a sequence of sounds which can be fully apprehended only when heard.

D. COMPOSITION

The topic of song composition is examined separately here because it constitutes the central research question in this study and cuts across all the disciplines just discussed. But first we must define the terms “song” and “compose”, as both have a wide enough semantic range to create considerable

¹⁰⁸ Henigan, p. 39.

¹⁰⁹ Henigan, p. 40.

¹¹⁰ Henigan, p. 77.

¹¹¹ Henigan, p. 194.

ambiguity. Therefore, I will define “song” to mean “a human vocal utterance containing both words and music” (my definition) and “compose” (from its etymology) to mean simply “put together”. The latter is the first meaning of “compose” in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, and although (or perhaps because) it is listed there as obsolete, it fits quite well the various processes involved in creating new texts and/or music in a predominantly oral/aural context.¹¹² In medieval usage, as Treitler explains:

Compositio and *componere* [...] are verbal commonplaces [...]. Their reference is always to an act of *putting together* or *making* a melody or *adapting* a melody to a given text [...]. There is not the least sense that this act necessarily entails writing, a linkage [...] so habitual in our time that ‘writing’ and ‘composing’ are treated as synonyms. Writers of the Middle Ages make no distinction between written and oral composition [...]¹¹³

This was also true for verbal texts, as explained by Carruthers; in both cases, the act of composition was largely mental.¹¹⁴

There remains the separate question of the relationship between music and words; that is, when we speak of composition, what exactly is being composed? Here several possibilities come to mind, although two can be discarded as irrelevant for present purposes: composition of words only (poetry) and music only (instrumental music). Another possibility is composing new music for existing words, but this can safely be disregarded because — with a single exception¹¹⁵ — we have no evidence that Rob Donn ever created tunes for other poets. In that respect his practice differed from that of medieval church musicians and modern composers of art songs, who typically begin with a given text and create a new melody.¹¹⁶ Rob Donn reversed this process, adding new words to an existing melody or one that he recomposed or created.

This practice raises the question whether a person who puts new words to an old tune should be considered a “composer” at all in the strictly musical sense. Merriam takes the position that “the setting of words to music constitutes a form of composition,” and that “[c]omposition of texts is quite as important as the

¹¹² “Compose”, definition I, in *Oxford English Dictionary*, <<http://www.oed.com>> [accessed 3 July 2015].

¹¹³ Treitler, Chapter 2, p. 27 of 38.

¹¹⁴ Carruthers, pp. 194-95.

¹¹⁵ The exception is “The Grey Buck”. See App. II, #57, n. 123.

¹¹⁶ Treitler, Chapter 2, p. 11 of 38.

composition of the sound structure.”¹¹⁷ According to McKean, it is “the norm for traditional Gaelic song-makers to make new words to old tunes.”¹¹⁸ This is what Burns did, as well as the Irish song-makers discussed by Henigan and her sources.¹¹⁹ One way to conceptualize this issue is to imagine a spectrum of musical creativity. Regardless of which is “given” and which is “added,” a level of musical sensitivity is required to fit words and music together so the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. This skill is consistently attributed to Burns, and his accomplishments in that regard are undoubtedly on a higher aesthetic plane than those of someone who sings or creates new words for every song in his repertoire to the same tune.¹²⁰ But as later chapters will show, Rob Donn, unlike Burns, did compose new music for many of his songs, so his creativity extended to a wider domain.¹²¹

We turn now to a small sample of the extensive literature on composition in the field of ethnomusicology. One approach to this topic is to distinguish two perspectives, the emic and the etic. The former represents the concepts of the creative artist (and others) inside the culture, while the latter represents his or her behavior as observed and analyzed by the ethnomusicologist.¹²² As one might expect, these explanations are often widely divergent.

Beginning with the emic perspective, most societies recognize, to varying degrees, three major sources of individual songs: the supernatural, individual composition, and borrowing.¹²³ Music is often considered a pathway to or from the divine: it is ubiquitous in religious rituals and the very word “music” comes from the ancient Greek Muses. Music has supernatural power, mediating between the human and supernatural worlds, and songs are given to people as a source of that power.¹²⁴ Such beliefs were common among Native American tribes, particularly in

¹¹⁷ Merriam, p. 184.

¹¹⁸ Thomas McKean, *Hebridean Song-maker: Iain MacNeacail of the Isle of Skye* (Edinburgh: Polygon: 1997), p. 121.

¹¹⁹ H. T. Kirby-Smith, *The Celestial Twins: Poetry and Music through the Ages* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999), pp. 196-99; Bertrand Bronson, *The Ballad as Song* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), pp. 306-07; Henigan, p. 39.

¹²⁰ For a detailed study of Burns as songwriter, see Catarina Ericson-Roos, *The Songs of Robert Burns: A Study of the Unity of Poetry and Music* (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1977).

¹²¹ See Grimble, pp. 281-82.

¹²² Nettl's *Elephant*, p. 63; *Emics and Etics*, pp. 16-18, 22.

¹²³ Merriam, p. 77.

¹²⁴ Bruno Nettl, *Blackfoot Musical Thought: Comparative Perspectives* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1989), pp. 128-32.

connection with the vision quest practiced by Plains Indians. As described by Nettl in his monograph on Blackfoot musical thought:

It is well known that in many North American Indian cultures, people dream songs or learn them from spirits in visions. To the Blackfoot, visions once accounted for most songs, and the songs that came about in this way were new songs; it's the Blackfoot idea of musical creation.¹²⁵

This concept of musical creation, however, raises a number of questions for the ethnomusicologist as outside observer. Again to quote Nettl:

How did a vision produce a song that conforms so closely in style to that of the total repertory or, more specifically, to that of a particular genre or song series in a ceremony? And what of the fact that some visions appear to have produced songs that are really innovations to the repertory, while others impart songs that already exist in the repertoires of other visionaries?¹²⁶

From an emic perspective, those questions must be approached by asking what is a new song, and in what ways must a song differ from others to be considered a different song. Is it a new tune? Is it new words or vocables? Or is it simply a separate act of creation, even if the product of that act is identical in sound to something that already existed in the culture?¹²⁷

Ethnographic fieldwork shows that similar beliefs regarding musical creativity persisted well into the twentieth century among both Native Americans and Scottish Gaels, although belief in supernatural origins is generally accompanied by a recognition that music also comes from other sources. For example, in Judith Vander's work with five Shoshone women singers of different ages, while almost all said that some songs originated in dreams or visions, they also described other methods of composition.¹²⁸ These included combining parts of old songs, modifying older songs, improvising, inspiration by the wind or a butterfly, a car wheel or a drum, or just making up new songs.¹²⁹ And songs were often learned from others, within the family, within the tribe, at boarding school, or more recently with a tape recorder at intertribal powwows.¹³⁰

¹²⁵ *Blackfoot Musical Thought*, p. 56.

¹²⁶ *Blackfoot Musical Thought*, p. 98.

¹²⁷ *Blackfoot Musical Thought*, pp. 98, 102.

¹²⁸ Judith Vander, *Songprints: The Musical Experience of Five Shoshone Women* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), pp. 13-14, 28-30, 66-67, 103.

¹²⁹ Vander, pp. 68, 103, 105, 130-32, 141.

¹³⁰ Vander, pp. 23, 36, 43, 57-58, 152, 208-10.

I have dwelt on these Native American case studies because they contain descriptions of composition that are remarkably similar to those based on roughly contemporaneous interviews with traditional Gaelic bards Calum Ruadh Nicolson and Iain MacNeacail of Skye, as well as further examples of contact with the Otherworld discussed by Michael Newton in his article on creativity in Scottish Gaelic tradition.¹³¹ Calum Ruadh described in 1968 how a fairy named Deirdre from Dun Cana visited him in his sleep and told him to make a song for her, and it would win first prize at the Mòd.¹³² Iain MacNeacail said that his songs “come” to him unbidden, often while he is walking.¹³³ But Calum Ruadh also acknowledged a degree of musical borrowing, explaining that his first song used “an old tune” of a Skye soldier returning from the Peninsular War.¹³⁴ He further explained that “I never composed any song on anybody else’s tune, perfect as you know but — I take bits of it.”¹³⁵ Iain MacNeacail was less explicit, perhaps because, as McKean commented, usually he was not even aware when two songs had the same melody!¹³⁶

Considering these case studies from an outsider perspective, how did the two ethnomusicologists explain the process of song composition by the two Skye bards? In the *Scottish Tradition* booklet on Calum Ruadh, Thorkild Knudsen provides almost no information on actual tune sources (except the tune from the Peninsular War). However, he did manage to elicit an emic description of how Calum composed. He hums the song to himself, beginning with the first line. Then he goes back to the start and keeps going until he finishes a verse. If he hasn’t got it properly, he goes over it again until he gets all the words to suit the ones he already had, and the hardest part is “to get the last two lines to be — to run with the rest

¹³¹ Thorkild Knudsen, *Scottish Tradition 7: Calum Ruadh, Bard of Skye* (Edinburgh: School of Scottish Studies & Greentrax Recordings, 2010); McKean, *Iain MacNeacail*; Michael Newton, ‘Bha mi ’s a’ chnoc: Creativity in Scottish Gaelic Tradition’, in *Proceedings of the Harvard Celtic Colloquium*, 18/19 (1998-1999), pp. 312-39, <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/20557349>> [accessed 25 June 2011].

¹³² Knudsen, CD booklet, Tracks 10a & e. (He does not say whether he actually won first prize at the Mòd.)

¹³³ McKean, pp. 113, 117.

¹³⁴ Knudsen, CD booklet, Track 2.

¹³⁵ Knudsen, CD booklet, Track 10c.

¹³⁶ McKean, p. 122.

properly.”¹³⁷ Arguably, this passage implies that Calum started with some kind of tune in his mind, giving him something to hum and providing a metrical framework for the words of the new song, which he then composed and revised orally. But it is also possible that he made up the tune at the same time as he made up the words; this is not clear.

By contrast, McKean provides a far more explicit etic description of Iain MacNeacail’s compositional process:

[MacNeacail] does not select a tune beforehand. Instead, he has a song text in mind which serves as a rhythmic — and by extension melodic — model. His stanza forms and metres are therefore dictated by the stock of poetic models at his disposal, not the body of tunes he has to work with.¹³⁸

MacNeacail does not perceive melodies as unique; rather, any tune could be “correct” if it suited the words, rhythmically and emotionally.¹³⁹ As McKean explains:

He does not deliberately compose original melodies; his tunes are usually reworkings of traditional melodies that undergo a subtle recomposition during the process of song-making.¹⁴⁰

According to Anne Dhu Shapiro, this process *is* composition in the world of the traditional song-maker, and may be responsible for many of the variants that make up tune families.¹⁴¹

These case studies from twentieth-century North America and Gaelic Scotland illustrate many of the processes described in the more general literature on musical composition. Ethnomusicologists (like medievalists) generally take the position that there is no essential difference between composition in a literate and an oral context, and that notation, while permitting the development of more extended musical structures, merely reflects musical ideas after the fact.¹⁴² Nettl describes what he calls three continuums that apply to all composition, written and oral: (1) inspiration and perspiration in rearranging and manipulating the units of a particular

¹³⁷ Knudsen, CD booklet, Track 10b.

¹³⁸ McKean, p. 121.

¹³⁹ McKean, p. 119.

¹⁴⁰ McKean, p. 120-21.

¹⁴¹ Anne Dhu Shapiro, ‘Regional Song Styles: the Scottish Connection’, in *Music and Context: Essays for John M. Ward*, ed. by Anne Dhu Shapiro (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Department of Music, 1985), pp. 404-17 (p. 411).

¹⁴² John Blacking, *How Musical is Man?* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1973), p. xi; Merriam, pp. 165-66; Nettl, *Thirty-One Issues*, pp. 30-31.

musical vocabulary; (2) composition and improvisation, which he considers two aspects of the same process; and (3) the three stages of precomposition, composition, and revision.¹⁴³ This analysis largely parallels one in a standard mid-twentieth-century textbook on musicology, which describes composition as a three-stage process involving preparation, inspiration, and revision.¹⁴⁴

The key point is that any composer works with an existing set of musical materials, modifying them in various ways according to individual ability and inclination as well as the rules of musical grammar or norms of musical style available within the culture.¹⁴⁵ What is “given” and what is “added” depends on the culture; in traditional music, the “given” is larger than the “new.”¹⁴⁶ Thus musical genius can be described as “the ability to do something significantly innovative, and do it very well,” but not so new as to be unacceptable to one’s audience.¹⁴⁷ For in oral tradition, without an audience the music dies.

In conclusion, this chapter has outlined the theoretical and disciplinary perspectives that inform the subsequent musicological analysis of Rob Donn’s songs. The first section introduced the tradition of Anglo-American folk song scholarship, particularly a series of definitions and analytical tools useful in dissecting and comparing folk song melodies. The second section described the fundamental concepts of the field of ethnomusicology, including its three objects of study, musical concepts, behavior and sound. The third section highlighted a few potentially relevant themes in the field of orality and literacy studies, including the role of song melody in communicating and transmitting oral poetry. The final section focused on the process of song composition, drawing from general works and from case studies of recent Native American and Scottish Gaelic song-makers. We turn next to a description of the musical world of Rob Donn.

¹⁴³ Nettl, *Thirty-One Issues*, pp. 28-30.

¹⁴⁴ Glen Haydon, *Introduction to Musicology* (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1941), pp. 104-05.

¹⁴⁵ Blacking, p. 106; Nettl, *Thirty-One Issues*, p. 34.

¹⁴⁶ Nettl, *Thirty-One Issues*, p. 32.

¹⁴⁷ Nettl, *Thirty-One Issues*, p. 40.

CHAPTER IV. THE MUSICAL WORLD OF ROB DONN

Historians describe eighteenth-century Scotland as a time of Jacobite risings,¹ foreign wars and the struggle for Empire,² emigration to the New World,³ agricultural improvement,⁴ the Industrial Revolution,⁵ the transformation of clan chiefs into landlords,⁶ and the extension of English literacy and decline of Gaelic.⁷ In the history of ideas, they consider topics such as the Scottish Enlightenment,⁸ the Ossian controversy,⁹ the birth of folk-song collecting,¹⁰ and the relationship between what was then called “Italian” and “Scottish” music.¹¹ All of those developments influenced the life and work of Rob Donn, despite his linguistic and geographical distance from the metropolitan centers of his day. Rob Donn composed songs about the ’45, military recruitment in Sutherland and soldiers killed in foreign wars, emigration to Jamaica, greedy drovers and tacksmen, errant schoolmasters, and even the advantages of literacy (which he lacked). He was personally employed in two

¹ Murray Pittock, *Jacobitism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 1998); Chris Tabraham and Doreen Grove, *Fortress Scotland and the Jacobites* (London: B. T. Batsford, 1995).

² T. M. Devine, *Scotland's Empire 1600-1815* (London: Allen Lane, 2003); Andrew Mackillop, *'More Fruitful than the Soil': Army, Empire, and the Scottish Highlands, 1715-1815* (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 2000).

³ Douglas J. Hamilton, *Scotland, the Caribbean and the Atlantic World, 1750-1820* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005); James Hunter, *A Dance Called America: The Scottish Highlands, the United States and Canada* (Edinburgh: Mainstream Publishing, 1994), pp. 11-95.

⁴ T. M. Devine, *Clearance and Improvement: Land, Power and People in Scotland 1700-1900* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 2006); Malcolm Bangor-Jones, 'Sheep farming in Sutherland in the eighteenth century', *Agricultural History Review*, 50 (2002), 181-202; Eric Richards, *The Highland Clearances* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2000), pp. 32-118.

⁵ Anthony Cooke and Ian Donnachie, 'Aspects of Industrialisation before 1850', in *Modern Scottish History 1707 to the Present, Volume I: The Transformation of Scotland, 1707-1850*, ed. by Anthony Cooke et al. (Edinburgh: John Donald, 2007), pp. 130-54.

⁶ James Hunter, *Last of the Free: A History of the Highlands and Islands of Scotland* (Edinburgh: Mainstream Publishing, 1999), pp. 184-232; T. M. Devine, *Clanship to Crofters' War: The Social Transformation of the Scottish Highlands* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), pp. 1-53.

⁷ Bob Harris, 'Communicating', in *A History of Everyday Life in Scotland, 1600 to 1800*, ed. by Elizabeth Foyster and Christopher A. Whatley (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), pp. 164-90; D. J. Withrington, 'Schooling, literacy and society' in *People and Society in Scotland, I, 1760-1830*, ed. by T. M. Devine and Rosalind Mitchison (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1988), pp. 163-87 (pp. 163-74); C. W. J. Withers, *Gaelic in Scotland, 1698-1981* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1984), pp. 42-76.

⁸ Arthur Herman, *How the Scots Invented the Modern World* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2001), pp. 62-107, 189-226.

⁹ Matthew Gelbart, *The Invention of "Folk Music" and "Art Music": Emerging Categories from Ossian to Wagner* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 60-66.

¹⁰ Gelbart, pp. 153-90.

¹¹ David Johnson, *Music and Society in Lowland Scotland in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), pp. 187-200.

eighteenth-century “growth industries”, the cattle trade that fed the industrializing cities to the south, and the military during the Seven Years’ War. In the cultural domain, educated, bilingual ministers such as Murdo MacDonald served as translators and intermediaries communicating music, poetry, news and ideas from the wider world, and his sons Patrick and Joseph, both pioneering collectors and analysts of Scottish Gaelic music, grew up as Rob Donn’s neighbors in Durness. Likewise, ministers and others with university training were exposed to the ideas of the Enlightenment, and those who worked to transcribe and publish Rob Donn’s songs may have been motivated in part by the popularity or controversy surrounding James Macpherson’s Ossian publications.¹² This was the wider historical context, then, for Rob Donn’s life and creative work.

To situate Rob Donn within this larger picture, it may be helpful to visualize three concentric circles on a map, containing people, ideas, languages, music and so on. The largest circle, described above, includes all of Britain, Europe and the Empire. The intermediate circle is the *Gàidhealtachd*, the Gaelic-speaking Highlands and Islands, while the smallest circle is *Dùthaich MhicAoidh*, what Grimble called “The World of Rob Donn” in northwest Sutherland. The last two circles extended not just synchronically or horizontally on a map, but also diachronically or vertically in time, with lines of transmission anchored firmly in the oral tradition of the past. And while Rob Donn drew most heavily on the two inner circles, the Gaelic tradition and his own community, he was also influenced by events and ideas, music and song in the outermost circle. To extend the visual metaphor, imagine a map of eighteenth-century Scotland, with soldiers, black cattle and drovers, schoolmasters and others traversing the landscape, and arrows at the periphery pointing to and from England, Europe, North America and the Caribbean. These were the vectors for ideas and music, passed on by word of mouth, heard, committed to memory, and transformed by this intelligent, creative but illiterate cattleman.

This chapter will explore the musical world of Rob Donn, including its concepts, behavior and sound (in Merriam’s tripartite terminology). All were evolving throughout the eighteenth century, although some urban innovations (such

¹² Macpherson’s Ossian poems were published in 1760-1763. Thomson, *Companion*, pp. 189-90.

as those in church music) did not affect rural parishes like Durness in his lifetime.¹³ The first four sections survey, in turn: (a) music in eighteenth-century Scotland; (b) Gaelic song; (c) pipe music; and (d) fiddle music. Those instruments (voice, pipes and fiddle) were selected because they are most frequently mentioned in Rob Donn's poems and biography, and they were the principal instruments (respectively) of Rob Donn, Joseph and Patrick MacDonald. Finally, section (e) will discuss two SGTS editions and a PhD thesis that provide partial models for my own analysis.

A. MUSIC IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY SCOTLAND

1. CONTEXT

Today we tend to set up binary categories and treat them as mutually exclusive opposites: art versus traditional music, vocal versus instrumental music, Highland versus Lowland music, or Gaelic versus Scots song. Those kinds of music were all present in eighteenth-century Scotland, even if (as Gelbart shows) the conceptual categories came later.¹⁴ But more important here is the extent to which they overlapped and influenced one another, as musical cross-over was the norm in eighteenth-century Scotland. This occurred both within the literate sphere, when a composer such as James Oswald "consciously developed a native style within a classical framework",¹⁵ and within the oral tradition, when Gaelic poets such as Rob Donn and Donnchadh Bàn used pipe tunes for songs.¹⁶

The fullest description of this musical world is David Johnson's *Music and Society in Lowland Scotland in the Eighteenth Century*. Although Johnson excluded the Highlands from his coverage,¹⁷ the music of the Lowlands affected musical life in Durness and other points north, and a supplementary soundscape for the Highlands can be constructed from other sources. What Johnson calls "folk" and "classical" music co-existed happily among upper and middle-class Scots, particularly in urban areas. In Edinburgh, public concerts began in the 1690s, the Edinburgh Music Society was established by 1701, and music publishing began in

¹³ Johnson, *Music and Society*, p. 179.

¹⁴ Gelbart, pp. 6-11.

¹⁵ Purser, p. 205.

¹⁶ Allan A. MacDonald, 'The relationship between pibroch and Gaelic song' (unpublished M. Litt. thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1996), p. 239.

¹⁷ Johnson, *Music and Society*, p. 4.

1725.¹⁸ For art music, the first half of the eighteenth century (when the MacDonald brothers received their musical training) fell within the period we now call the Baroque (1600-1750), largely dominated by Italian musical influences.¹⁹ As a result, many professional musicians in eighteenth-century Scotland were Italian, with names such as Barsanti, Corri, Pasquali, and Stabilini.²⁰ Scots who aspired to be professional musicians — such as William McGibbon, James Oswald, and William Thomson — typically straddled the worlds of art and traditional music, and often moved to London to make a living.²¹

The most popular instrument in eighteenth-century Scotland was the violin (which had arrived from Italy in the late seventeenth century), but it was not alone.²² Gentlemen amateurs played the violin, cello, recorder and flute, ladies played keyboard instruments, the cittern (an early guitar), and the viola da gamba (an early cello), and both sang.²³ Typically men played in public, often in ensembles, and women played at home; boys could attend burgh music schools and the daughters of the aristocracy received private tuition.²⁴ These middle- and upper-class amateurs could usually read and write music notation, and often transcribed or copied tunes (including traditional music) for their own use in music manuscripts, many of which still exist.²⁵ In traditional music, however, the instrumental tastes of the Highlands and Lowlands diverged. While the fiddle had replaced the Border bagpipe as the principal Lowland folk instrument by 1800,²⁶ the pipes remained important in the Highlands (alongside the fiddle), replacing the harp and developing into the instrument we know today.

¹⁸ Johnson, *Music and Society*, pp. 11, 13, 34.

¹⁹ Donald J. Grout and Claude V. Palisca, *A History of Western Music*, 5th edn (London: W. W. Norton, 1996), pp. 268-70.

²⁰ Johnson, *Music and Society*, pp. 54-59; Purser, p. 202.

²¹ Johnson, *Music and Society*, pp. 18-19, 51, 140; Purser, pp. 204-08.

²² David Johnson, *Scottish Fiddle Music in the Eighteenth Century* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1984), p. 4.

²³ Johnson, *Music and Society*, p. 24.

²⁴ Johnson, *Music and Society*, pp. 24-29. Of course, in Durness boys had to be tutored at home as well, or sent away to school for musical and other instruction. This was the case for Patrick and Joseph MacDonald, although their sisters may have been tutored entirely in private. See Donaldson, pp. 20-62.

²⁵ Johnson, *Music and Society*, pp. 99, 112.

²⁶ Johnson, *Music and Society*, p. 101.

In the far north, in the rural and dispersed communities of Durness and Tongue parishes, the social context for music-making necessarily differed from that in Edinburgh. Looking first at Lord Reay and his kindred before descending through the social ranks, neither Rob Donn nor his biographers suggest that the chief's family or the Bighouse family was particularly musical.²⁷ Lord Reay employed a piper, George MacLeod, a friend of Rob Donn's and a possible instructor to Joseph MacDonald, so the chief's role as a patron should not be discounted.²⁸ Two other tacksmen and relatives of the chief played more active musical roles. Kenneth Sutherland, factor at Keoldale, taught violin to the MacDonald children, and Iain mac Eachainn, Rob Donn's employer, was a poet who enjoyed and appreciated music, although he may not have played or composed music himself.²⁹ Titles in the pipe collection of William Gunn (from Kildonan in east Sutherland) also demonstrate the traditional role of these gentry as patrons and dedicatees of musical composition: "Baintearn Bhiogais/Lady Bighouse's Reel", "McAoidh 'n òich a rugadh Seonaid/The Birth of Lord Reay's Daughter", "Morar M' Aoidh/Lord Reay's Jig", "Porst-Siubhal Iain Ic Eachinn/John M'Kay of Skerray's Favourite, a quickstep" and "Porst-mor Iain Ic Eachinn/John M'Kay of Skerray's Favourite, a reel".³⁰

Without a doubt, the musical center of gravity in Durness for most of Rob Donn's lifetime was the manse at Balnakeil during its long tenancy (1726-1763) by Murdo MacDonald and his talented family. Patrick and Joseph MacDonald are widely recognized as pioneering collectors, analysts, and mediators between the oral musical traditions of the *Gàidhealtachd* and the literate, more cosmopolitan musicians resident in the Lowlands and the homes of the Highland gentry.³¹ Just as other ministers and their families played a key role in transcribing and preserving Rob Donn's poetry, the MacDonalds performed the same service for his music. That was possible because these ministers and their families were bilingual and "bi-

²⁷ Actually, there were four Lords Reay during Rob Donn's lifetime, but this statement applies to all. Grimble, p. 236.

²⁸ Donaldson, p. 21.

²⁹ Morrison, p. 28; Grimble, pp. 106-08.

³⁰ Wm. Gunn, pp. 13, 49, 8, 74, 36.

³¹ Other examples in the Highlands include Eliza Ross in Raasay and the Maclean Clephane sisters in Mull. See Keith Sanger, 'A Letter from the Rev. Patrick MacDonald to Mrs. Maclean Clephane, 1808', *SGS*, 26 (2010), 23-34.

musical”, an “aristocracy of learning” in the eighteenth-century Highlands.³² It was also facilitated by the leadership and pastoral roles they played in their communities, by what social historian Stana Nenadic, citing Rob Donn, calls “the pivotal social role that ministers could play through their connections both up and down the social hierarchy.”³³

Turning finally to the *tuath*, the class of Gaelic-speaking small tenant farmers to which Rob Donn himself belonged, the available evidence suggests that their musical culture was typical of that found throughout the Highlands. Groups of people sang “Luinigs”, usually with solo and choral parts, “either at work, or for recreation.”³⁴ Families and neighbors entertained themselves by singing at home during the long winter evenings.³⁵ Weddings were celebrated with a piper and a bard.³⁶ Rob Donn repaired to the local *cèilidh* house in Tongue with the piper George MacLeod to recover from a tiring day in court being prosecuted for his Jacobite verse.³⁷ Psalms were sung in church, led by a precentor (often the musically incompetent Iain Tapaiddh).³⁸

Somewhat less clear is the extent to which music was routinely shared in gatherings involving all social ranks. Many of Rob Donn’s elegies and other songs were composed to honor gentry, tacksmen and ministers or their relatives, and were presumably performed in some setting for them or their families. His editors emphasize that his company was in great demand in local high society during the latter decades of his life.³⁹ Nonetheless, it is hard to imagine that all his satires were originally performed in the presence of their victims, especially the aristocratic ones. For instance, while Rob Donn probably sang the songs teasing his own daughters directly to them,⁴⁰ it is unlikely he did the same when he condemned Lady Reay for forcing his friend the weaver to marry her pregnant maid “as a screen for the sinners

³² Myers, *Historical and Regional Studies*, pp. 7-8; John MacInnes, *Dùthchas nan Gàidheal: Selected Essays of John MacInnes*, ed. by Michael Newton (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2006), p. 435.

³³ Stana Nenadic, *Lairds and Luxury: The Highland Gentry in Eighteenth-century Scotland* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 2007), p. 36.

³⁴ *HVA*, p. 6. The standard spelling is *luinneag*.

³⁵ Mackay, p. lviii.

³⁶ App. II, #52, 54.

³⁷ Grimble, pp. 95-96.

³⁸ Morrison, pp. 112-15.

³⁹ Mackay, p. xxxvi; Morrison, p. xlvi.

⁴⁰ See, e.g., App. II, #96.

of the big house.”⁴¹ In any case, his songs apparently spread like wildfire (or gossip, which they often were), and the effectiveness of that oral transmission is demonstrated by the number of poetic flytings in which he engaged, even over considerable distances in the case of Iain Tapaigh after he moved from Tongue to Invershin.⁴²

Another aspect of musical cross-over during the eighteenth century was the frequency with which traditional melodies migrated from the voice to the fiddle or pipes, or from instrumental music to song. Allan MacDonald has argued that many *pìobaireachd* melodies began as Gaelic songs, and that eighteenth-century bagpipe performance practice was closer to the rhythms of Gaelic speech and song than are the standardized *pìobaireachd* settings that developed later.⁴³ William Lamb has proposed a similar theory about the relationship between eighteenth-century Gaelic song and fiddle music, arguing that “the rhythmic qualities associated with the strathspey (i.e. dotted notes, Scots snaps and common time) are so profusely represented in the Gaelic song corpus that the strathspey must have developed as part of that tradition.”⁴⁴ Further evidence of the contribution of Gaelic song to instrumental music is William Gunn’s 1848 pipe collection, whose index is full of eighteenth-century Gaelic song titles.⁴⁵ For example, “Am Boc Glas” was composed by Rob Donn in the 1770s, “An Gille crùbach anns a’ ghleann” is attributed to fiddler Niel Gow (1727-1807), “Am Muilen dubh” (anonymous) was first published in 1757, and the text of “An Obair nodha Shasunnach” was composed by George MacKenzie early enough in the eighteenth century to inspire a reply by Sileas na Ceapaich.⁴⁶

This exchange of melodies between the voice and other instruments took place initially within the oral tradition and later when tunes were written or printed, often in arrangements for the violin by classically influenced musicians. For

⁴¹ App. II, #30; Morrison, p. 214; Grimble, pp. 190-97.

⁴² See App. II, #19.

⁴³ Allan MacDonald, pp. 10-11.

⁴⁴ William Lamb, ‘Reeling in the Strathspey: The Origins of Scotland’s National Music’, *Scottish Studies*, 36 (2013), 66-102 (p. 88); see also Lamb, ‘Grafting Culture: On the Development and Diffusion of the Strathspey in Scottish Music,’ *Scottish Studies*, 37 (2014), 94-104.

⁴⁵ Wm. Gunn, ‘Foreword’ and ‘Index’.

⁴⁶ Morrison, p. 408; William Lamb, *Keith Norman MacDonald’s Puirt-à-Beul* (Skye: Taigh na Teud, 2012), pp. 153, 155; *An Lasair*, pp. 18-29, 372-75.

example, the collections of vocal airs by Patrick MacDonald (1784) and Simon Fraser (1816) had no words and were designed to be played on instruments; Fraser's settings especially reflect the stylistic influence of the violin.⁴⁷ In the late eighteenth century many folk songs were rewritten for instruments, including new second strains, to meet the demand for new dance tunes.⁴⁸ Processes of borrowing and conscious imitation also worked in reverse, from instruments to the voice. In the mid-eighteenth century, poets Alasdair mac Mhaighstir Alasdair, Rob Donn, and Donnchadh Bàn all composed pibroch songs using existing pipe tunes. And later in the century, Robert Burns wrote new words for many existing fiddle tunes.⁴⁹

Burns and Johnson also used a number of Gaelic song melodies in *The Scots Musical Museum*, providing the classic example of tunes that crossed the language barrier from Gaelic to Scots.⁵⁰ But while melodies can be heard, hummed, or played on the fiddle whether connected to words in Gaelic or English, the stress patterns of the two languages are different enough to influence the rhythm of melodies that originated as songs.⁵¹ According to MacFarlane, the use of Gaelic tunes for Scots songs explains the otherwise puzzling frequency of words such as “lad”, “O”, “man” and “boys” at the ends of lines in Scots songs where no such interjections existed in the original Gaelic.⁵² This means that rhythmic and stress patterns can help to identify the linguistic and geographic origins of melodies, as Lamb has shown for the strathspey.⁵³ Another useful tool for melodic classification is the Highland bagpipe scale (G, A, B, C#, D, E, F#, G, A).⁵⁴ Any tune that is limited to those nine notes (even if transposed) has spent at least part of its life as a bagpipe tune (or was composed in conscious imitation of one). Singers and fiddlers, on the other hand, can utilize larger ranges as well as semitones, so one can infer that music with those characteristics was created or adapted for instruments other than the pipes.

⁴⁷ Alburger, II, pp. x-xiii.

⁴⁸ Johnson, *Music and Society*, pp. 122-23.

⁴⁹ *The Songs of Robert Burns*, ed. by Donald A. Low (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 4.

⁵⁰ MacFarlane compiled a list of forty-nine such melodies in ‘Gaelic Airs to Lowland Songs’, *Celtic Monthly*, 2 (1894), 64, 88, 118, 139, 160.

⁵¹ John Shaw, ‘Language, Music and Local Aesthetics: Views from Gaeldom and Beyond’, *Scottish Language*, 11/12 (1992/1993), 41-46.

⁵² Malcolm MacFarlane, ‘The Influence of Gaelic Music on Lowland Song’, *Celtic Monthly*, 2 (1894), 18-20 (p. 19).

⁵³ Lamb, ‘Reeling in the Strathspey’; ‘Grafting Culture’.

⁵⁴ Collinson, p. 167.

2. SOUND

The remainder of this section will summarize what Collinson calls “the native idiom” in Scottish traditional music, especially its melodic patterns.⁵⁵ While commentators argue convincingly that Gaelic speech rhythms left an identifiable imprint on pipe music, fiddle music and even Scots song, the distinction between Highlands and Lowlands is less clear-cut for matters such as scales and modes. Collinson identified five features he considered common in Scottish traditional music on both sides of the Highland line: (1) gapped scales; (2) indeterminate keys; (3) melodic “thumbprints” such as the double tonic; (4) grace-notes; and (5) the Scots snap.⁵⁶

Beginning with the first, Collinson found both pentatonic melodies (usually the first, second, third, fifth and sixth degrees of the scale) and hexatonic melodies (adding either the fourth or the seventh) well represented.⁵⁷ Among the heptatonic scales, he found the Ionian, Mixolydian, and Aeolian modes common in both Highland and Lowland music, but the Dorian mode prevalent only in Gaelic music.⁵⁸ John Glen made a similar observation, that “the basis or foundation of the Scottish scale consists of the first, second, third, fifth and sixth intervals of the modern gamut, with the flat seventh afterwards added.”⁵⁹ Peter Cooke’s analysis of 93 Gaelic song airs in the 1812 Eliza Ross manuscript found that fifty are pentatonic and another thirty-seven are hexatonic.⁶⁰ Cooke added that the Tolmie collection and the waulking songs published by Campbell and Collinson were also mostly pentatonic or hexatonic, with the latter slightly predominating.⁶¹

The second musical feature identified by Collinson is indeterminate keys, meaning either that the tonic is hard to identify because the tonality shifts during the

⁵⁵ Collinson, p. 4.

⁵⁶ Collinson, pp. 4-31.

⁵⁷ Collinson, pp. 4-10.

⁵⁸ Collinson, pp. 11-17.

⁵⁹ Glen, p. 2.

⁶⁰ Peter Cooke, ‘Some Thoughts on the Song Melodies in Elizabeth Ross’s Collection of “Original Highland Airs,” 1812’, in *A Guid Hairst’: Collecting and Archiving Scottish Tradition*, ed. by Katherine Campbell et al. (Maastricht: Shaker, 2013), pp. 103-21 (p. 106).

⁶¹ Cooke, p. 106.

course of the melody, or that the tonic is reasonably clear but the tune refuses to end on it.⁶² Glen agreed:

Many of our Scottish tunes terminate in intervals other than their keynotes, but however uncouth such tunes may sound in the ears of those accustomed to modern or classical music, should they try to alter or attempt to make those melodies conform to the general rule, they would simply spoil the character of the airs, and make themselves ridiculous.⁶³

Cooke found the same pattern in the Eliza Ross collection, observing that 60% of the airs feature prominent use of a secondary pitch, often the sixth, that the tonality is often shifting or ambiguous, and that the final note is often not the tonic, but another pitch that makes the tune cycle back for another verse or refrain.⁶⁴

The third musical feature Collinson identifies is what he calls melodic “thumbprints”, particularly the double tonic, a sequence of two triads, the second of which is a tone below the first. Sometimes both are major triads, and sometimes the upper is minor and lower is major. In either case, this is a pattern that arises from the bagpipe scale (e.g., A major and G major, or E minor and D major). This structuring device is not limited to bagpipe tunes but also appears in Scottish fiddle music, which has been heavily influenced by the pipe repertoire.⁶⁵ It also appears in many songs, such as Rob Donn’s pibroch song “Iseabail NicAoidh”, which uses a double tonic in E minor and D major.⁶⁶

The fourth characteristic Collinson identifies is frequent use of grace notes, including descending notes with large intervals characteristic of pipe ornamentation.⁶⁷ Finally, anticipating Lamb’s analysis, he points to the Scots snap, which he describes as very common in both Gaelic music and the strathspey.⁶⁸

Although Collinson seems to posit the existence of a single “native idiom” for Scottish traditional music, encompassing Highlands and Lowlands, voice and instruments, Cooke makes a more nuanced argument distinguishing these components within the tradition. For example, in deciding to analyze only the Gaelic song melodies in the Eliza Ross collection, he excluded the reels, jigs and

⁶² Collinson, pp. 19-23.

⁶³ Glen, p. 2.

⁶⁴ Cooke, pp. 107-09.

⁶⁵ Collinson, pp. 23-26; Johnson, *Scottish Fiddle Music*, pp. 18-19.

⁶⁶ App. I, #44.

⁶⁷ Collinson, pp. 26-27.

⁶⁸ Collinson, pp. 28-31.

puirt-à-beul because they “mostly belong to a pan-Scottish tradition and also may be affected by the melodic and harmonic possibilities of the bagpipes and fiddle.”⁶⁹ Elsewhere, he observed that a particular heptatonic tune was composed by a drover, whose travels as far south as England would have exposed him to a great deal of non-Highland music.⁷⁰ Rob Donn was also a drover who listened to instrumental music, so these factors no doubt influenced his ear as well.

B. GAELIC SONG

Since no one (to my knowledge) has ever written a scholarly survey of eighteenth-century Gaelic vocal music, this section will be a composite. It will begin with the contemporary observations in the preface to Patrick MacDonald’s *Highland Vocal Airs*, published in 1784. Next it will review previous scholarly approaches to Gaelic song, including history, literature, classification of song types, poetic meter, melody, and comparison with neighboring song traditions. Finally, it will discuss studies of particular song types, including psalmody, waulking songs, and *puirt-à-beul*.

1. PATRICK MACDONALD

Before relying on the unsigned preface to *Highland Vocal Airs*, it is necessary to consider who actually wrote it, a matter of some dispute.⁷¹ It seems clear to me that Patrick MacDonald wrote most of it himself, as he describes in detail the work of his brother Joseph, prints a letter from Joseph to their father, and carefully explains his own collecting and editorial methods. No one else would have had that information in its entirety or been in a position to explain it so thoroughly and sensitively. On the other hand, the preface refers to “the assistance he has received from his friends” in adding accompaniments to some of the tunes.⁷² The division of labor was clarified to some degree by an 1808 letter from MacDonald to Mrs. Maclean Clephane, published by Keith Sanger in 2010, where MacDonald explained:

I only took down the simple airs — but their Correct arrangement, with the Excellent Basses adapted to them were by that Prodigy of musical Knowledge Dr Young —

⁶⁹ Cooke, p. 105.

⁷⁰ Cooke, p. 116.

⁷¹ See, e.g., Donaldson, p. 46.

⁷² *HVA*, p. 7.

together with a Scientific & Explanatory Preface to them by him to the first Edition of them.⁷³

This suggests that Walter Young (minister of Erskine, son of David Young, rector of the grammar school attended by Joseph MacDonald in Haddington) may be responsible for the part of the preface beginning on page 7 of the reprint with the words “The airs, which differ most in their structure from the modern music” and continuing to the end of the long paragraph concluding at the top of page 8.⁷⁴ That section — an explanation, using terminology from eighteenth-century music theory, of the historical development from gapped scales, often in the “minor mode”, to “modern music” with a “regular bass”, “counterpoint” and “passages by semitones” — will be disregarded here.⁷⁵

Other parts of the preface (probably written by Patrick MacDonald himself) describe two types of vocal airs, “slow plaintive tunes” and “Luinigs” or work songs.⁷⁶ The former were reportedly “sung by the natives in a wild, artless and irregular manner”:

Chiefly occupied with the sentiment and expression of the music, they dwell upon the long and pathetic notes, while they hurry over the inferior and connecting notes, in such a manner as to render it exceedingly difficult for a hearer to trace the measure of them. They, themselves, while singing them, seem to have little or no impression of measure.⁷⁷

He lists eighteen such airs (including “Keapach na fasach”, his #61, used by Rob Donn), which he wrote out in “equal bars” for his published collection despite the fact that his brother Joseph had tried to transcribe them as actually sung. Patrick believed that airs of this sort were probably “the most genuine remains of the ancient harp-music of the Highlands”.⁷⁸

MacDonald’s other subdivision, “what the country people call Luinigs”, seems to be comprised of what we now call work songs, “sung, when a number of persons are assembled, either at work, or for recreation,” although it may also have included what we now call *puirt-à-beul*:

⁷³ Sanger, p. 29.

⁷⁴ Sanger, p. 25; *HVA*, pp. 7-8.

⁷⁵ *HVA*, p. 7.

⁷⁶ *HVA*, pp. 5-6.

⁷⁷ *HVA*, p. 5.

⁷⁸ *HVA*, p. 5.

They are generally short: their music is regular, and the cadences are distinctly marked. Many of them are chorus songs. Particular parts of the tune are allotted to the principal singer, who expresses the significant words: the other parts are sung in chorus, by the whole company present. These pieces being simple and airy, are easily remembered, and have probably been accurately preserved.⁷⁹

MacDonald also described aspects of performance practice applicable to both types of song. Regarding ornamentation, he said:

The notes, which are used as appoggiaturas, are not only the next in degree, above or below the principal note; but are frequently two, three, or more degrees distant from it. These last are, for the most part, below the principal note, and ascend to it; they are often however above it, and descend. [...] In singing, these grace-notes are, for the most part, executed rapidly, so that, although their effect is felt, they are but obscurely perceived.⁸⁰

As to tempo, “the vocal airs, in the following collection, are to be performed rather slow. Even those which are marked brisk, are seldom to be executed so quick, as the modern Allegro songs of the same measure.” In contrast, the “country dances may be played as quick as the performer chuses.”⁸¹ These remarks suggest that, when sung, even the tunes in his collection that appear to be reels, in cut time and marked “brisk” (e.g. his #14 and #15), were not sung as fast as competitive or concert versions of *puirt-à-beul* today.⁸²

2. SCHOLARLY APPROACHES

We turn next to a brief survey of previous scholarly approaches to the study of Gaelic song. The broader eighteenth-century musical context has already been described. As no music historian seems to have focused specifically on Gaelic song in the eighteenth century, we will begin instead with the seventeenth.⁸³ This makes sense for several reasons. First, since Rob Donn was born about 1714, the earliest songs he heard would have been from the previous century.⁸⁴ Second, several of the songs whose melodies Rob Donn used have texts that are datable to events (mostly

⁷⁹ *HVA*, p. 6. Examples of tunes that might be classified today as *puirt-à-beul* include the vocal airs numbered #63, 152, and 184, as well as the dances tunes numbered #6, 24, and 31. *HVA*, pp. 71, 73-75.

⁸⁰ *HVA*, p. 6.

⁸¹ *HVA*, p. 6. This was well before the invention of the metronome, which allowed tempo to be specified more precisely.

⁸² *HVA*, p. 18.

⁸³ Although John Purser includes a few eighteenth-century Gaelic songs in his survey of Scottish music from rock gongs to James MacMillan, this does not amount to a detailed study of the subject. Purser, pp. 154-55, 164, 179-81.

⁸⁴ Morrison, p. xv.

violent) during the seventeenth century. These include “Gilderoy”, commemorating the execution of the red-haired outlaw Patrick MacGregor in 1636,⁸⁵ “Keapach na fasach”, concerning the Keppoch murders in 1663,⁸⁶ “Ged is socrach mo leabaidh”, composed by An Ciaran Mabach during a visit to Edinburgh in the 1680s,⁸⁷ and “Murt Ghlinne Comhann” on the Massacre of Glencoe in 1692.⁸⁸

Third, the secondary sources on seventeenth-century Gaelic song are more extensive than their eighteenth-century equivalents. This is because Colm Ó Baoill, who edited the standard modern anthology of seventeenth-century Gaelic verse and several editions of seventeenth-century Gaelic poetry for the SGTS, provides far more information about tunes and song types than the scholars who edited the principal collections for the eighteenth century itself.⁸⁹ As Ó Baoill explains, the professional syllabic verse dominant at the inception of the seventeenth century had been almost completely replaced at its end by “the new, fundamentally non-literate, song tradition in vernacular Scottish Gaelic,” where verse had regular stresses and a clear beat that could easily be set to music in measured time.⁹⁰ Although Rob Donn himself composed verse exclusively in the latter form, syllabic verse may have left some residues in eighteenth-century Gaelic song. One is the peculiar fact that many waulking songs, despite their need for a strong beat to accompany the work, use texts with syllabic meter, leading to the frequent “wrenched accent” in which the musical stress and the word stress do not coincide.⁹¹ It is also possible that some older, recitative-like melodies, originally used to accompany syllabic verse, survived into the eighteenth century as the “slow, plaintive airs” that Patrick MacDonald considered the legacy of Highland harp music.

Ó Baoill’s anthology makes several other contributions to an understanding of Gaelic song. Emphasizing that most seventeenth-century Gaelic verse was “song, rather than mere poetry”, he located and printed tunes for 22 of the 43 songs in the

⁸⁵ Anne Dhu McLucas, ‘From Scotland to America: “Gilderoy” in Scottish and American Tune Books and Traditions’, in *Emily Lyle: The Persistent Scholar*, ed. by Frances J. Fischer and Sigrid Rieuwerts (Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2007), pp. 169-85 (p. 169); App. I, #53.

⁸⁶ *Gàir nan Clàrsach*, pp. 144-46; App. I, #74.

⁸⁷ *Gàir nan Clàrsach*, pp. 176-81, 232; App. I, #35(1).

⁸⁸ *Gàir nan Clàrsach*, pp. 190-91; App. I, #45(1) & 70.

⁸⁹ Compare Ó Baoill’s *Gàir nan Clàrsach* with Thomson’s *Gaelic Poetry in the Eighteenth Century* and Black’s *An Lasair*.

⁹⁰ *Gàir nan Clàrsach*, p. 2.

⁹¹ *Gàir nan Clàrsach*, pp. 27-28; A. L. Gillies, pp. xxix-xxx.

anthology.⁹² He states that many waulking songs (presumably meaning their texts) can be dated to the seventeenth century, and some to the sixteenth.⁹³ Finally, he discusses the structure, development and performance practice of three-line strophic verse, common in both the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (discussed later in Chapter IX).⁹⁴

The second approach to Gaelic song is the literary, by which I mean looking at song texts without considering their music. From this standpoint, the eighteenth century has generally been well-served, even if some major poets — notably Rob Donn and Alasdair mac Mhaighstir Alasdair — still lack complete critical editions. This bias towards words was especially evident in Derick Thomson, as neither the eighteenth-century chapter in his *Introduction to Gaelic Poetry* nor his collection *Gaelic Poetry in the Eighteenth Century* (emphasis added) contains any discussion of music. At least his successor, Ronald Black, was aware of this shortcoming, commenting that, where Sorley “MacLean assesses traditional song as song, Thomson assesses it as poetry on the page.”⁹⁵ Nevertheless, Black’s efforts to remedy this deficiency in his own anthology were limited to small print and endnotes:

Most of our poems are in fact songs and most of the tunes are known. Readers who wish to pursue the music can do so using the references given in the notes; the volumes published by the Scottish Gaelic Texts Society (SGTS) are particularly helpful, many of them containing a specific section devoted to airs and metres.⁹⁶

In general, as Chapter II demonstrates, nineteenth-century editors had a stronger interest in song melodies than their successors — perhaps because they were closer to the oral tradition in which the songs were still sung.

A third approach to Gaelic song is classification. As a formal scholarly endeavor, this has been remarkably unsuccessful, although the Mòd and Gaelic song tutors have working categories that they use unproblematically. In 1957, James Ross published an article carefully listing and numbering thirty-three categories of Gaelic song (plus a catch-all category for those left over), based on his review of

⁹² *Gàir nan Clàrsach*, p. 45.

⁹³ *Gàir nan Clàrsach*, p. 26.

⁹⁴ *Gàir nan Clàrsach*, pp. 29-32.

⁹⁵ *An Lasair*, p. xviii.

⁹⁶ *An Lasair*, p. 1.

some 2000 sound recordings then in the School of Scottish Studies Archives.⁹⁷ These were songs, but were presented and analyzed entirely as texts without music.⁹⁸ He also used non-analogous conceptual categories for the main headings of his classification, including: (1) theme, (2) structure, (3) aetiology, and (4) function.⁹⁹ If his sole purpose was to create a labeling and filing system for the Sound Archive, this approach might make sense, but nothing with that many categories is workable for the general student of Gaelic song.

At the opposite numerical extreme is William Matheson's historical classification of Gaelic song into two categories, *iorram* and *amhran*.¹⁰⁰ As explained in the booklet accompanying his recordings: "These CDs are designed to illustrate two categories of vocal music once cultivated in the courts of the Scottish Gaelic aristocracy, from whence it passed into the stream of popular oral tradition."¹⁰¹ Matheson believed that *iorram* was the type of meter used by the bards, in which a "stanza consists of a variable number of lines of two stresses, rounded off with a line of three stresses to mark the end of the stanza."¹⁰² His second category, *amhran*, supposedly used by the minstrels, was "distinguished from *iorram* by the fact that there is a fixed stanza form with a concern for symmetry. This is reflected in the music, which can be analysed in terms of ABBA and similar structures."¹⁰³

But while Ross's system is overly complex, Matheson's is too simple. Blankenhorn has explored Matheson's method in reconstructing these songs in considerable detail, but for my purposes it suffices to say that his own notes indicate that most of the *iorram* date from the seventeenth century, and most of the *amhran* date from the eighteenth.¹⁰⁴ While Rob Donn did use strophic meter (what Matheson calls *iorram*), he generally did not use stanzas of variable length within the same song. It follows that Matheson's categories are too broad — and

⁹⁷ James Ross, 'A Classification of Gaelic Folk-Song', *Scottish Studies*, 1 (1957), 95-151.

⁹⁸ Ross, 'A Classification', p. 95.

⁹⁹ Ross, 'A Classification', pp. 96-99.

¹⁰⁰ William Matheson, *Scottish Tradition 16: Scottish Bards and Minstrels* (Edinburgh: Greentrax, 2000).

¹⁰¹ Matheson (CD booklet).

¹⁰² Matheson (CD booklet).

¹⁰³ Matheson (CD booklet).

¹⁰⁴ V. S. Blankenhorn, 'The Rev. William Matheson and the Performance of Scottish Gaelic "Strophic" Verse', *Scottish Studies*, 36 (2013), 15-44.

historically inapposite — to be used for the internal classification of eighteenth-century Gaelic song.

This brings us to a fourth approach, the metrical. Although analysis of poetic meter has occupied a number of scholars (notably W. J. Watson and various SGTS editors), only Matheson and Blankenhorn (particularly the latter) have tried to develop a broader analysis of song meter and song structure.¹⁰⁵ As Blankenhorn explains, Scottish Gaelic stanzaic verse has three concurrent systems of organization: (1) the accentual system (rhythm); (2) the ornamental system (rhyme, etc.); and (3) the performance system (music, and the order in which portions of the text are actually sung and by whom).¹⁰⁶ While the first two generally coincide, the performance system can depart considerably from the way in which the words appear on a page, particularly in waulking songs and songs with varying numbers of lines in each stanza.¹⁰⁷ This kind of analysis — often necessary to reunite texts and music — can be obtained (or reconstructed) only from a living or recorded oral tradition. Thus it is quite appropriate to consult twentieth-century recordings to help reconstruct eighteenth-century performance practice.

A fifth approach to Gaelic song is the melodic. Other than Collinson's overview, this sort of analysis has focused on particular song collections, none limited to the eighteenth-century but all containing material that would have been in oral circulation at that time. The earliest is the 1812 Eliza Ross collection, analyzed by Cooke et al. and previously discussed; it contains ten tunes used by Rob Donn. The second is the Frances Tolmie collection, published in 1911 but collected over many years during the second half of the nineteenth century. After analyzing all 105 songs in the Tolmie collection, Annie Gilchrist concluded that only about a dozen were heptatonic (none fully corresponding to the modern major or minor scale) and the remainder either pentatonic or hexatonic, the latter slightly predominating. She also found the most common pentatonic scale equivalent to C major without the third and seventh (rather than the fourth and seventh), and devised her own system

¹⁰⁵ Watson, 3rd edn, pp. xxxvi-lxiv.

¹⁰⁶ V. S. Blankenhorn, 'Verse structure and performance in Scottish Gaelic vernacular poetry', in *Rannsachadh na Gàidhlig 6*, ed. by Nancy R. McGuire and Colm Ó Baoill (Aberdeen: University of Aberdeen, 2013), pp. 53-92 (pp. 54-56).

¹⁰⁷ Blankenhorn, 'Verse structure', pp. 64-80.

to explain the development from pentatonic through hexatonic to heptatonic scales.¹⁰⁸

The third analysis of this type is Collinson's, based on the three volumes of waulking songs he edited and published with John Lorne Campbell under the title *Hebridean Folksongs*.¹⁰⁹ Following a standard classification of scales and modes, he tabulated his totals as 74 hexatonic, 61 pentatonic, 34 heptatonic, and eight with fewer than five notes.¹¹⁰ While this count was based only on waulking songs, he was "inclined to think that these relative proportions would be found" elsewhere in Scottish music, although dance music contains more hexatonic scales and fewer pentatonic scales than vocal music.¹¹¹

A sixth approach involves comparing Scottish Gaelic song to Lowland song and Gaelic song in Ireland. Malcolm MacFarlane did both, publishing a series of articles in *The Celtic Monthly* and giving a lecture on the topic at the Pan-Celtic Congress in Dublin in 1901.¹¹² A century later, Virginia Blankenhorn also compared Gaelic song in Scotland and Ireland, contrasting metrical and structural aspects of the two song traditions.¹¹³

All these approaches — historical, literary, classificatory, metrical, melodic and comparative — offer ways to analyze Gaelic song, as do the broader contextual approaches outlined earlier in the chapter for eighteenth-century Scottish music as a whole. We turn next to a few song types that have been analyzed in more detail.

3. PARTICULAR SONG TYPES

One highly distinctive type of Gaelic vocal music is psalmody, the sacred music of the metrical psalms traditionally sung in worship in Presbyterian churches in the *Gàidhealtachd*. This music and its social and religious context were central to Rob Donn's musical world, as shown most memorably in the satires he composed on the incompetent precentor Iain Tapaidh.

¹⁰⁸ Gilchrist, pp. 150-53. The Tolmie collection contains no tunes used by Rob Donn.

¹⁰⁹ *Hebridean Folksongs*, ed. by John Lorne Campbell and Francis Collinson, 3 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969-1981). Volume I is based on a collection of song texts made by Donald MacCormick with translations by Allan MacDonald.

¹¹⁰ Collinson's method is explained in Volume I, pp. 205-13; his totals are in Volume III, p. 313.

¹¹¹ *Hebridean Folksongs* III, p. 313.

¹¹² MacFarlane, 'The Influence of Gaelic Music on Lowland Song'; 'Gaelic Music in Scotland', *Celtic Monthly*, 10 (1901-1902), 59-60, 183-85.

¹¹³ Blankenhorn, 'Verse structure', p. 69 (chart).

The Gaelic psalm tunes were not unique to the Highlands but were borrowed from the 1635 Scottish Psalter (a compilation of some 200 melodies).¹¹⁴ A shortened version, published in 1666 as *The Aberdeen Psalter* and reprinted in 1671 as *The Twelve Tunes for the Church of Scotland*, became the official repertoire of psalm tunes for the next fifty years.¹¹⁵ The twelve tunes (listed alphabetically) were Abbey, Common, Duke's, Dundee, Dunfermline, Elgin, English, French, King's, London, Martyrs, and York.¹¹⁶ In 1882, Thomas MacLauchlan wrote that six psalm tunes were then in use: Dundee, Elgin, French, Old London, Martyrs, and York.¹¹⁷ Since this repertoire was obviously conservative, we can safely assume that Rob Donn heard, at most, twelve psalm tunes, although his least favorite precentor may have sung everything in a monotone or to a single tune. According to Johnson, this situation was not unique to the Highlands, as the precentor's job was often combined with other church duties such as reading scripture and secretary to the kirk session, and musical training and abilities declined generally in Scotland in the second half of the seventeenth century.¹¹⁸

Thus the role of the precentor in reading out the line of a psalm before the congregation sang it was not unique to the *Gàidhealtachd*; it was merely preserved there the longest. The practice developed to facilitate congregational participation in worship in the early seventeenth century when few Scots could read in any language.¹¹⁹ In the north, however, congregations began to slow down and “embroider the tunes with complicated melodic variations,” and different voices could change notes at different times as long as they reached the principal notes more or less together.¹²⁰ In the cities, this type of singing was considered hopelessly old-fashioned and was abolished in the 1750s by a musical reform committee in

¹¹⁴ Johnson, *Music and Society*, p. 165.

¹¹⁵ Johnson, *Music and Society*, pp. 166-68.

¹¹⁶ Johnson, *Music and Society*, pp. 166-67.

¹¹⁷ Thomas MacLauchlan, ‘The Music of the Highlands’, in *A History of the Scottish Highlands, Highland Clans and Highland Regiments*, ed. by John S. Keltie, 2 vols (Edinburgh: T. C. Jack, 1882), II, pp. 105-10 (p. 108).

¹¹⁸ Johnson, *Music and Society*, pp. 171-72.

¹¹⁹ Morag MacLeod, notes to *Scottish Tradition 6: Gaelic Psalms from Lewis* (Edinburgh: Greentrax, 1994).

¹²⁰ Johnson, *Music and Society*, pp. 172-73; *Gaelic Psalms* (CD booklet) .

favor of choirs singing in four-part harmony, but there is no reason to believe such musical innovations affected Durness Parish in Rob Donn's lifetime.¹²¹

Another highly distinctive Gaelic song type is the waulking song, a work song traditionally sung by groups of women engaged in the long, tiring, labor-intensive process of shrinking woolen cloth. These songs are characterized by a strong beat, vocables, alternate solo and unison choral parts, and a good deal of repetition. The words can be adapted from older texts on almost any topic or extemporized on the spot, often teasing the unmarried women in the group about the local bachelors.¹²² The fullest scholarly study of this repertoire was conducted by Campbell and Collinson based on 177 songs recorded in the mid-twentieth century and published in three volumes under the title *Hebridean Folksongs*.

This study was large, detailed and painstaking in its analysis of various aspects of the songs. In addition to Collinson's analysis of the scales and modes, already mentioned, the authors analyzed the form of the tunes, the waulking pulse, musical variation, and characteristic rhythms.¹²³ Perhaps the most inventive aspect of their work concerns the structure and function of the vocables, which documents two primary purposes for these syllables.¹²⁴ One is mnemonic, as traditional singers identify these songs by their refrains, not by title (if any) or first line (which often varies).¹²⁵ This works because, "while short conventional groups of up to three or even four syllables may occur in different songs, actual duplication of a whole musical phrase of these syllables is so rare as to be practically non-existent."¹²⁶ The other purpose of the vocables is to indicate rhythm (although not pitch); this works because the conventional syllables alternate between long and short vowels.¹²⁷ They even devised an exercise to test the ability of readers to identify musical rhythm from various combinations of vocables alone, and it is quite possible to do so if one

¹²¹ Johnson, *Music and Society*, pp. 174-79.

¹²² Purser, pp. 145-47; Peter Cooke et al., eds., *Scottish Tradition 3: Waulking Songs from Barra* (Edinburgh: Greentrax, 1993), booklet.

¹²³ *Hebridean Folksongs* I, pp. 214-26.

¹²⁴ *Hebridean Folksongs* I, pp. 227-37; *Hebridean Folksongs* III, pp. 318-23.

¹²⁵ *Hebridean Folksongs* I, pp. 227-28.

¹²⁶ *Hebridean Folksongs* I, p. 233.

¹²⁷ *Hebridean Folksongs* I, p. 230.

has some familiarity with Gaelic sounds and the use of vocables in a few waulking songs!¹²⁸

A third type of Gaelic song recently examined in some depth is *puirt-à-beul*. In his introduction to a new edition of Keith Norman MacDonald's 1901 collection, William Lamb gives a working definition of the genre as understood today: "essentially tunes for dancing, and generally in the form of strathspeys, reels and jigs", sung rather than played, whose "words were sometimes chosen as much for their sound as for the message that they conveyed."¹²⁹ The origins of these tunes are in some dispute; K. N. MacDonald himself believed they had been handed down from the time of the Druids.¹³⁰ According to Lamb, the earliest written appearance of the phrase *puirt-à-beul* occurs in an 1815 travelogue by Alexander Campbell, author of *Albyn's Anthology*, where he describes residents of North Uist singing and dancing at the same time.¹³¹ But while the term was used by K. N. MacDonald in 1901, it was not used by Patrick MacDonald in 1784 or by Thomas MacLauchlan in 1882, both of whom used only the term *luinneag* (which Patrick MacDonald described as songs sung for work or recreation, and MacLauchlan described as "ordinary lyrics").¹³² Thus, as Lamb suggests, the term *puirt-à-beul* seems to be more recent than the music to which it now refers.¹³³

I am less convinced, however, by a simple equation of *puirt-à-beul* with dance music, either historically or functionally. If we break down the components of Lamb's definition as (1) tunes for dancing, (2) generally strathspeys, reels and jigs, (3) sung rather than played, and (4) with humorous or nonsense words, it becomes evident that the four components need not always coincide. In the case of Rob Donn, at least twenty of the songs whose tunes I identified are strathspeys, reels and jigs, often marked to be sung at a lively tempo, and containing humorous, gossipy or satirical words.¹³⁴ On the other hand, they usually tell a story, are not

¹²⁸ *Hebridean Folksongs* III, pp. 318-23.

¹²⁹ *Puirt-à-Beul*, p. 17.

¹³⁰ *Puirt-à-Beul*, p. 35.

¹³¹ *Puirt-à-Beul*, p. 22.

¹³² *HVA*, p. 6; MacLauchlan, p. 107.

¹³³ *Puirt-à-Beul*, pp. 22-25.

¹³⁴ Several of these tunes are included in *Puirt-à-Beul*: "Null thar nan Eileanan", p. 36; "Fhear nan Casan Caola", p. 90; and "John Roy Stewart", pp. 45, 77. Other tunes used by Rob Donn that probably would be classified today as *puirt-à-beul* (if sung with words) include "Mrs MacLeod of

particularly repetitive, and contain few vocables. Nor is there any particular evidence they were used for dancing, and such a use seems especially unlikely when they were first composed and transmitted, partly because they had so many words, and partly because neither the author nor his listeners would have waited to repeat the song until the next dance.

Returning to K. N. MacDonald, Lamb divides the collection into five general topics (in descending order of frequency): satire, love, animals, drinking, and praise.¹³⁵ Since most of the songs are humorous, humor was not used as a category.¹³⁶ The tunes are described as catchy and fairly repetitious, usually in a two-part musical structure such as AABB, although MacDonald often used instrumental rather than vocal settings.¹³⁷ Lamb also identifies the oldest written version of each tune that he was able to locate, as well as the oldest pipe version, MacDonald's likely source, and available audio versions, generally on Tobar an Dualchais.¹³⁸ This information adds significantly to the value of the collection as a research tool.

C. BAGPIPE MUSIC

Bagpipe music was also a central part of Rob Donn's musical world; his songs contain references to piping, and he is credited with composing the melody of a pipe jig, "The Grey Buck", that is still in the piping repertoire.¹³⁹ George MacLeod, Lord Reay's piper, was a friend of the bard and was probably Joseph MacDonald's first piping teacher.¹⁴⁰ Rob Donn also heard pipe music when he served in the Sutherland Fencibles from 1759 to 1763. This section will provide an overview of that music (from the standpoint of a non-piper), addressing in turn the instrument, its music, George MacLeod, Joseph MacDonald, and eighteenth-century military music.

Raasay", "Iseabail mhin mheall-shuileach dhubh", "The Grey Buck", and "Robaidh dona gòrach". App. I, #28, 47(2), 57, 94.

¹³⁵ *Puirt-à-Beul*, pp. 18-19.

¹³⁶ *Puirt-à-Beul*, p. 18.

¹³⁷ *Puirt-à-Beul*, p. 19.

¹³⁸ *Puirt-à-Beul*, p. 144.

¹³⁹ Morrison, p. 408; Roderick D. Cannon, *The Highland Bagpipe and Its Music*, 2nd edn (Edinburgh: John Donald, 2002), pp. 110, 146.

¹⁴⁰ Roderick D. Cannon, *Joseph MacDonald's Compleat Theory of the Scots Highland Bagpipe (c. 1760)* (Glasgow: The Piobaireachd Society, 1994), p. 1.

As Hugh Cheape explains, two different kinds of bagpipes were played in eighteenth-century Scotland.¹⁴¹ Bellows pipes of various sorts, also popular in England and Ireland, were essentially a chamber instrument, designed for indoor use with other instruments.¹⁴² To facilitate this versatility, playing techniques and mechanical improvements were developed to extend the pipe range to more than two octaves and to make it possible to play a chromatic scale.¹⁴³ One form of this instrument, the Union pipe, was patronized by the Highland Society of London until the 1820s, and bellows pipes could be ordered from Edinburgh pipemakers as late as 1843.¹⁴⁴

The Highland bagpipe, in contrast, is a mouth-blown pipe with a fixed scale of only nine notes, from G above middle C to high A, roughly in the key of A major with a minor seventh (G A B C# D E F# G A), plus one bass and two tenor drones, also on A.¹⁴⁵ Cheape believes that the bagpipe was adopted in Gaelic Scotland in the sixteenth century, during which it gradually began to replace the harp or clàrsach as the prestige instrument of the clan chieftains.¹⁴⁶ The piping dynasties (MacCrimmons, MacArthurs, MacKays, Rankins, and MacGregors) emerged a little later, in the seventeenth century.¹⁴⁷

The Highland pipe chanter is capable of producing three different pentatonic scales (in A, G and D), each with a distinctive character because of its relationship to the fixed drones on A.¹⁴⁸ Older pipe music is often pentatonic or structured around a double tonic.¹⁴⁹ According to Cannon, the key of G was most common in pibroch and some reels and jigs; the key of A is common in all pipe music, and the key of D (the only one that allows a full diatonic scale) is more common in marches and nineteenth- and twentieth-century music.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴¹ Hugh Cheape, *Bagpipes: A National Collection of a National Instrument* (Edinburgh: National Museums Scotland, 2008), pp. 53, 116.

¹⁴² Cheape, pp. 79-82.

¹⁴³ Cheape, pp. 84-85.

¹⁴⁴ Cheape, pp. 53, 116.

¹⁴⁵ Cannon, *The Highland Bagpipe*, pp. 28-29.

¹⁴⁶ Cheape, pp. 40, 42.

¹⁴⁷ Cheape, pp. 44, 67.

¹⁴⁸ Cannon, *The Highland Bagpipe*, pp. 37-38.

¹⁴⁹ Cannon, *The Highland Bagpipe*, pp. 38, 42.

¹⁵⁰ Cannon, *The Highland Bagpipe*, p. 42.

Pipe music is generally divided into *ceòl mòr* (big music) and *ceòl beag* (small music). The former, also known as *pìobaireachd* (piping), anglicized as pibroch, is the classical music of the Highland pipes, taking the form of a theme (*ùrlar* or ground) and variations.¹⁵¹ The main period of its composition is thought to be 1600-1740, which overlaps with the first twenty-five years of Rob Donn's life. Since *ceòl mòr*, largely panegyric in nature, was heavily dependent on aristocratic patronage, it could not survive the dramatic social changes after Culloden, and the piping schools had all closed by the 1770s.¹⁵² There is some speculation that *ceòl mòr*, including its melodies and theme and variation structure, was influenced by the music of the harp; Patrick MacDonald's thoughts on this subject were quoted earlier in this chapter, and Angus Fraser expressed the same view in the mid-nineteenth century.¹⁵³

In the traditional history of *ceòl mòr*, the principal strongholds of *pìobaireachd* composition and teaching were Skye, where the MacCrimmons were pipers to the MacLeods of Dunvegan and the MacArthurs were pipers to the MacDonalds of Sleat, and to a lesser degree Mull, where the Rankins were pipers to the MacLeans of Duart.¹⁵⁴ But there was another piping dynasty in the northwest mainland, the MacKays of Gairloch, whose most celebrated member was Iain Dall MacKay, Am Pìobaire Dall (1656-1754), a piper and Gaelic poet.¹⁵⁵ According to Grimble, his family came from the MacKay country, and Iain Dall's mother may have been an illegitimate daughter of the first Lord Reay. Iain Dall's father, Ruaridh, was piper to Uisdean, Chief of MacKay, father of the first Lord Reay. As the story goes, in 1609 young Ruaridh was accompanying MacKay and his guest, MacKenzie of Gairloch, at the start of the latter's journey home from Tongue. After an "altercation" at a ferry, in which Ruaridh injured the groom of another traveler, "his Chief recommended he should travel on with the Laird of Gairloch to escape

¹⁵¹ Cannon, *The Highland Bagpipe*, p. 55.

¹⁵² Cannon, *The Highland Bagpipe*, pp. 54, 100; Cheape, pp. 3, 59.

¹⁵³ 'Introduction' to *AF*; see also Cheape, p. 63; Purser, p. 156; Cannon, *The Highland Bagpipe*, p. 103.

¹⁵⁴ Cheape, pp. 67-72. Joseph MacDonald, from Durness, confirmed this traditional origin on the cover page of his 1760 piping tutor, which claims to contain "all the Terms of Art in which this Instrument was originally taught by its first Masters & Composers in the Islands of Sky and Mull." *Compleat Theory*, p. 25.

¹⁵⁵ Cheape, pp. 72-73.

prosecution.”¹⁵⁶ As a result, this distinguished family became the MacKays of Gairloch, but retained its connections to the far north, and Iain Dall’s poem “Cumha Choire an Easain” was probably set at a waterfall in the Reay forest not far from Rob Donn’s Gleann Gallaidh.¹⁵⁷

Of the 250 pibroch titles identified by Cannon, only a few have personal or place names connected to the Reay country.¹⁵⁸ The former include “Bratach Chlann Aoidh” (The MacKays’ Banner); “Cumha Dhòmhnail Duaghail Mhic Aoidh” (a lament for the first Lord Reay, who died in 1649), “Iseabail Nic Aoidh” (Isabel MacKay, the air for Rob Donn’s song of the same name, also known as “Fàilte a’ Phrionnsa”), “Port Ùrlar Mhic Eachainn” (Mac Eachainn’s ground, probably composed for Rob Donn’s employer Iain mac Eachainn), and “Spaidsearachd Chlann ’ic Aoidh” (The MacKays’ March – although Cannon suspects Angus MacKay of adding this title in the nineteenth century).¹⁵⁹ Those with local place names include “Cumha Thighearna Arnabuil” (Lament for the Laird of Arnaboll, a farmstead on the west side of Loch Hope), and “Ceann Drochaid’ Innse-bheiridh” (which Cannon translates as “The End of Isheberry Bridge”). Since the latter also appears in Joseph MacDonald, it is probably the same place as the residence of the adulterous wife in Rob Donn’s satire “Bean Innse-mheiridh”, but I have not located it on a modern map.¹⁶⁰ In any case, the relative paucity of local titles is consistent with the traditional view that the major centers for composition of *ceòl mòr* were elsewhere.

The other subdivision of pipe music, *ceòl beag*, includes everything from song airs to marches to dance music. According to Cannon, reels (in 2/2 time) and jigs (in 6/8 time) were the characteristic dance music for the pipes, while the strathspey with its dotted rhythms was borrowed later from the fiddle.¹⁶¹ Bagpipes were used for marching in the early eighteenth century, and the type of march known today as the “quickstep” (in 2/4 time, with semiquaver runs and a three-note

¹⁵⁶ Grimble, pp. 285-86.

¹⁵⁷ Grimble, pp. 287-88.

¹⁵⁸ Roderick D. Cannon, ‘Gaelic Names of Pibrochs: A Classification’, *Scottish Studies*, 34 (2006), 20-59 (p. 21).

¹⁵⁹ *Gaelic Names of Pibrochs: A Concise Dictionary*, ed. by Roderick D. Cannon (February 2013), <<http://www.cl.cam.ac.uk/~rja14/music>> [accessed 29 November 2014].

¹⁶⁰ Cannon, *A Concise Dictionary*; Morrison, p. 418; *Compleat Theory*, p. 62, n. 30.6.

¹⁶¹ Cannon, *The Highland Bagpipe*, pp. 105-13.

beat at the end) was well-known by 1700, although it was called “Scotch measure” until about 1750, and then a “hornpipe” before it acquired its modern nomenclature.¹⁶² Quicksteps could also be composed in 6/8 time, such as “Over the Water wi’ Charlie”, used by Rob Donn for his farewell to Rupert MacKay.¹⁶³ Other types of *ceòl beag* include retreat marches (in 3/4 time) and adaptations of song airs.¹⁶⁴

Both *ceòl mòr* and *ceòl beag* were largely unwritten traditions until the early nineteenth century, taught by masters to apprentices, sometimes with the help of vocables called *canntaireachd*.¹⁶⁵ The oldest collection of *ceòl beag* in staff notation is the twenty-four “North Highland Reels or Country Dances” published by Patrick MacDonald in 1784, mostly “written from the playing of a bagpipe performer, from that district.”¹⁶⁶ While these unnamed tunes are all in the bagpipe scale (except for a few G#s), they lack grace notes, so cannot reveal much about contemporary piping style.¹⁶⁷ The earliest published music in pipe notation dates from the 1820s through the 1840s, of which the 1848 collection by William Gunn is most relevant to Rob Donn and his circle.¹⁶⁸ This means that bagpipe music was first written down considerably later than Gaelic song airs and fiddle tunes (both of which appeared in significant numbers in the eighteenth century), a situation that has led to decades of controversy among pipers about the way earlier bagpipe music was actually played.

Leaving that question to the experts, we turn to the two pipers who were known associates of Rob Donn, George MacLeod and Joseph MacDonald. Cannon has compiled the available information about George MacLeod, including some from Rob Donn’s poems. He identifies three MacLeod pipers in Tongue and Durness, the eldest of whom was George MacLeod, Rob Donn’s friend and probable contemporary, who had gray hair by 1750 and was appointed an officer of the kirk session in 1766. There was also a Donald MacLeod, piper to Lord Reay in 1760,

¹⁶² Cannon, *The Highland Bagpipe*, pp. 122-25.

¹⁶³ Cannon, *The Highland Bagpipe*, p. 128; App. I, #83.

¹⁶⁴ Cannon, *The Highland Bagpipe*, pp. 129, 144.

¹⁶⁵ Cannon, *The Highland Bagpipe*, pp. 67-69.

¹⁶⁶ HVA, p. 8.

¹⁶⁷ HVA, pp. 55-60, 74-75.

¹⁶⁸ Cannon, *The Highland Bagpipe*, p. 47.

and his son George MacLeod, who was Pipe-Major of the Reay Fencibles from 1796 to 1798 and succeeded his father as piper to Lord Reay. This suggests that Rob Donn's friend George was the father of Donald and the grandfather of the younger George.¹⁶⁹

Given the prevalence of hereditary piping families in the *Gàidhealtachd*, it is quite likely that these men all were related. On the other hand, there is no mention of MacLeods in the usual list of piping dynasties except as patrons of the MacCrimmons in Skye. So I have another hypothesis. The elder George MacLeod is described as lame, and MacLeods had lived in Assynt, between Durness and Gairloch, since at least 1650 (when one of them betrayed Montrose to the great disgust of Iain Lom).¹⁷⁰ If George was born lame or injured in youth and had signs of musical talent, he could have been sent for training as a piper, perhaps even with Iain Dall MacKay in Gairloch, and later employed by Lord Reay. Certainly there was a well-established tradition of blind persons being singled out for musical training to enable them to support themselves in an honorable career without the benefit of sight.¹⁷¹ A person who was lame might face similar difficulties unless he was literate, a rare accomplishment in Rob Donn's community in the early eighteenth century.

There is one further piece of information regarding George MacLeod, a 48-bar melody in *The Angus Fraser Collection* titled "Seòras Leòdach (George MacLeod the piper)".¹⁷² It looks like it could be a pipe jig, mostly in regular quaver triplets in 6/8 time, with an ABA structure and the words "Cli-a-lu" (a piping term?) at the beginning of the B section (bar 17). However, it is not in the Highland bagpipe scale. The range is a tenth, from E to G with no sharps or flats, and it sounds as if it is in C major, although all the cadences are on Gs.¹⁷³ This could

¹⁶⁹ *Compleat Theory*, pp. 1, 109 n. 16.

¹⁷⁰ *Gàir nan Clàrsach*, pp. 13, 130, 134.

¹⁷¹ The two best-known examples are the poet-musicians Ruaidhri Morison, An Clàrsair Dall (c.1656-c.1714), and Iain MacKay, Am Piobaire Dall (1656-1754). *Gàir nan Clàrsach*, pp. 198; 206; see also Anja Gunderloch, 'Imagery and the blind poet' in *Litreachas agus Eachdraidh: Rannsachadh na Gàidhlig* 2, pp. 56-82. The seventeenth-century poet Eachann Bacach was lame, as his nickname indicates, but only because he was wounded at the Battle of Inverkeithing in 1651. Colm Ó Baoill, *Eachann Bacach and other MacLean poets* (Edinburgh: SGTS, 1979), pp. xlv-xlv; *Gàir nan Clàrsach*, pp. 13-14.

¹⁷² *AF*, p. 20.

¹⁷³ By cadences, I mean long notes at the ends of phrases, not piping cadences.

mean that someone else (perhaps one of the MacDonald children) composed the piece to be played on the fiddle or another instrument as a tribute to George MacLeod. If MacLeod himself composed it, perhaps he played the fiddle as well as the Highland bagpipe, or he may have composed it for someone else to perform.

Today, of course, the most famous Reay country piper is Joseph MacDonald, although he never played the pipes professionally and died young in Calcutta. Because his c. 1760 manuscript, *Compleat Theory of the Scots Highland Bagpipe*, was not published until 1803 (by his brother Patrick), and was not properly edited and annotated until Cannon published a new edition in 1994, its actual influence on piping practice in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was quite limited.¹⁷⁴ Cannon identifies several features of Joseph's *pìobaireachd* style — faster tempos, different piping cadences, and melodies that were closer to the way the tunes would have been sung or played on another instrument — which had disappeared from mainstream piping by 1800.¹⁷⁵ He thinks that Joseph's style was probably old-fashioned even when he wrote his treatise in 1760, as “it is easier to see how Joseph MacDonald's style could have evolved into the [Angus] MacKay style, than to see how the reverse could have happened.”¹⁷⁶ He adds:

Perhaps the simple truth is that Joseph's teachers, far away in the remotest corner of the Highlands, were out of touch with the latest developments. Perhaps also, Joseph was aware of the possibility of change, and deliberately sought out the oldest teachers.¹⁷⁷

Be that as it may, this was the pipe music Rob Donn heard. MacDonald mentions several types: marches, gatherings, laments, jigs and reels.¹⁷⁸ The most interesting comments for a non-piper are those dealing with keys and “tastes” (the latter an obvious translation of the Gaelic *blas*).¹⁷⁹ MacDonald describes A major as the key for most “martial marches”, as well as the key for “rural pieces” when it includes the high G.¹⁸⁰ He identifies G major (without a C) as the typical key for

¹⁷⁴ *Compleat Theory*, pp. 2-5.

¹⁷⁵ *Compleat Theory*, pp. 20-21.

¹⁷⁶ *Compleat Theory*, p. 21.

¹⁷⁷ *Compleat Theory*, p. 21.

¹⁷⁸ *Compleat Theory*, p. 7.

¹⁷⁹ *Compleat Theory*, p. 103.

¹⁸⁰ *Compleat Theory*, pp. 67, 69.

laments, providing an example that he describes as “Lamentable; & obvious to a Competent Judgement. In this style have many Laments been Composd.”¹⁸¹

After a diatribe against the bellows pipe, which he thought was used to play music for which it was ill-suited, MacDonald discussed pipe reels and jigs (in even quavers and semi-quavers) used for dancing, which he carefully distinguished from violin reels with dotted rhythms.¹⁸²

The Pipe also Plays all the Violin Dancing Musick (within its Compass) very well, but as they deviate from its proper Style (a great Many of them) they cannot be So properly Cut, & chiefly on account of the Small dote & Tick [showing dotted quaver and semi-quaver] as this never is peculiar to the Pipe. See Examples of a Barr of a Pipe Reel & that of a Violin.¹⁸³

This shows that MacDonald did not consider “violin reels” (i.e., strathspeys) a different type of tune, but rather a style of playing more suited to the violin.¹⁸⁴ As an example of a pipe reel, he gives a 16-bar version of “Port Mòr Iain 'Ic Eachainn”, probably composed for Rob Donn’s employer.¹⁸⁵ He also planned to append a collection of pipe music to the treatise, but unfortunately this was either never completed or lost.¹⁸⁶

Rob Donn also heard (and contributed) music when he served in the Sutherland Fencibles from 1759 to 1763, but it is difficult to identify precisely what it was because most sources on Highland military music tend to begin their coverage at the beginning of the nineteenth century or later.¹⁸⁷ The earliest potentially relevant information concerns the Reay Fencibles, raised for service during the Napoleonic Wars in the 1790s, and described by military historian Captain I. H. Mackay Scobie:

Although not recognised by the authorities, the pipers were an important part of a Highland regiment and were held in great esteem by both officers and men. A piper attended all fatigue parties, and accompanied the men to and from market on market-days. At night a piper played to the officers during dinner. Marches and quicksteps were only permitted when on the march, strathspeys and reels for

¹⁸¹ *Compleat Theory*, p. 69.

¹⁸² *Compleat Theory*, pp. 76-77, 86.

¹⁸³ *Compleat Theory*, p. 86.

¹⁸⁴ *Compleat Theory*, p. 86, n. 49.3.

¹⁸⁵ *Compleat Theory*, p. 90 & n. 52.1. Cannon suggests it may have been composed for his grandfather, but the latter was Iain mac Iain, not Iain mac Eachainn. Grimble, p. 9.

¹⁸⁶ *Compleat Theory*, p. 2; Donaldson, p. 28.

¹⁸⁷ The most comprehensive of these surveys is Diana M. Henderson, *Highland Soldier: A Social Study of the Highland Regiments, 1820-1920* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1989), pp. 234-62.

dancing. Piobaireachd or Ceol Mor (big music) was the recognised music at all other times. Drums and pipes were never played together.¹⁸⁸

All we know for certain is that the First Sutherland Fencibles had two pipers, and that the regiment as a whole was recruited from the lands of the Earl of Sutherland and Lord Reay. If we draw the reasonable inference that the pipers came from the same district, they presumably played music they already knew, although perhaps in different proportions in accordance with military needs. But even if Rob Donn heard mostly familiar tunes from the pipers in his own regiment, those tunes were no doubt etched into his memory by constant repetition, and he probably heard pipers from other regiments or non-military pipers when he was off duty listening to music at local fairs or markets.

D. FIDDLE MUSIC

Although we know that the violin was cultivated in eighteenth-century Durness by the MacDonald family at the manse and the factor Kenneth Sutherland at Keoldale, they belonged to the educated classes, and it is less clear how widely the instrument was played by the non-literate, Gaelic-speaking peasantry. Rob Donn mentions the fiddle in three poems. One treats it as an alternative to the pipes for entertainment at weddings.¹⁸⁹ A second is in the voice of a young man who prefers the lass with the yellow petticoat to the clàrsach or fiddle.¹⁹⁰ The third, a satire recounting the attempts of William Bain's son to find a bride, includes the lines:

| | |
|--|---|
| 'S suarach mi mu t' fhuaim 's an ridhil, | I am unimpressed by your sound in the reel, |
| 'S ceàrr thu air fidhioll 's a air dàn; | And you go astray on fiddle and song; |

This is significant because the poem is datable to the 1740s, and the fiddle-playing suitor, despite courting the daughters of the local gentry, owned no land or stock and worked as a baker and farm-servant.¹⁹¹

David Johnson has written extensively about fiddle music in eighteenth-century Scotland, although he concentrates on the Lowlands, including the urban

¹⁸⁸ Scobie, p. 58 n.1.

¹⁸⁹ Morrison, p. 319.

¹⁹⁰ App. II, #18.

¹⁹¹ App. II, #81.

music scene in Edinburgh and the big houses in the countryside. In those settings, fiddle players were literate, middle-class professionals or landed gentry, who could read music and write out their own music manuscripts, and who played and enjoyed art and traditional music alike.¹⁹² In that context fiddle music was “progressive” not “traditional”, changing every twenty years or so with new influences from the Continent (such as harmony and sonatas) and new arrangements of indigenous material (such as bagpipe pieces and reels, hornpipes, strathspeys and jigs).¹⁹³

Since “Italian techniques never caught on at all in many parts of the country, particularly in the north”, we will concentrate here on the largely indigenous fiddle repertoire inherited from the seventeenth century.¹⁹⁴ This early stratum of fiddle music had many features in common with the song and bagpipe repertoires. Many tunes were based on five-note scales (without the fourth and seventh), and others were based on two chords (the double tonic).¹⁹⁵ Johnson adds that “most Scottish tunes at this time [1700-1720] could be performed in three ways: (a) as songs; (b) as accompaniment to dancing; and (c) as instrumental recital pieces.”¹⁹⁶ Seventeenth-century Scots songs usually had only one eight-bar strain of music, repeated as necessary to fit the words; while fiddle settings from the late seventeenth century onwards added a second strain, often just a higher or slightly modified variant of the first.¹⁹⁷

The next stage in the development of fiddle music, present by 1720-1745 in Edinburgh, was the addition of harmony and/or variations to older Scots tunes.¹⁹⁸ This was easier to attempt than achieve, because features such as “gapped-scale melodic shapes, double-tonic sequences, and a habit of ending the melody on a note other than the stated tonic” all conspired to defeat efforts at classical harmony.¹⁹⁹

As Johnson wrote:

Scottish folk-tunes of the period give a preliminary, but misleading, appearance of being amenable to classical harmonization; when the crucial moment comes,

¹⁹² Johnson, *Music and Society*, pp. 99, 111-12.

¹⁹³ Johnson, *Scottish Fiddle Music*, pp. 2, 34-35, 119-24, 192, 212-14.

¹⁹⁴ Johnson, *Music and Society*, p. 119.

¹⁹⁵ Johnson, *Scottish Fiddle Music*, pp. 16-19.

¹⁹⁶ Johnson, *Scottish Fiddle Music*, p. 14.

¹⁹⁷ Johnson, *Scottish Fiddle Music*, p. 15.

¹⁹⁸ Johnson, *Scottish Fiddle Music*, pp. 34-39.

¹⁹⁹ Johnson, *Music and Society*, p. 150.

however, they have a way of slipping out of the arranger's grasp and running away, chuckling to themselves.²⁰⁰

Bagpipe music was also transcribed for the fiddle from the early eighteenth century. According to Johnson, these transcriptions usually remained in the bagpipe range, although occasionally they were transposed for the fiddle while retaining their nine-note scale.²⁰¹ This means that tunes originally played on the pipes can be identified more readily in eighteenth-century fiddle collections, by far the largest source of printed music from that period.²⁰² Johnson's detailed description of these fiddle styles is also useful to an investigator of eighteenth-century song airs trying to strip away the labors of instrumental arrangers to identify the underlying melodies.

Lamb has examined another aspect of fiddle music, the possible origin of the strathspey (or dotted reel) as a hybrid musical form combining older Gaelic song rhythms with the new technical possibilities presented by the modern violin.²⁰³ He argues that the strathspey developed in the first half of the eighteenth century on a cultural boundary or diffusion zone along the Highland line, between English and Gaelic speakers, and between gentry who could afford to buy violins and their neighbors who remained immersed in Gaelic musical culture.²⁰⁴ Although Lamb was careful to limit his place-name study to tune titles from 1700 to 1783 (the year before publication of Patrick MacDonald's collection), the absence of Sutherland place names from early published fiddle collections surely does not prove the absence of cultural contact in the north.²⁰⁵ What it does prove is that eighteenth-century collectors and publishers did not visit places as remote as Durness unless they were living there anyway. In fact, the MacDonald brothers were studying the violin in Durness and the Lowlands and absorbing both art and traditional music from the second quarter of the eighteenth century, and Joseph conducted his fieldwork in the north from 1758 to 1760, placing them well within the period studied by Lamb.

²⁰⁰ Johnson, *Music and Society*, p. 150.

²⁰¹ Johnson, *Scottish Fiddle Music*, p. 119.

²⁰² A list of these collections can be found in Gore.

²⁰³ Lamb, 'Grafting Culture', pp. 94-97.

²⁰⁴ Lamb, 'Grafting Culture', pp. 97-101.

²⁰⁵ Lamb, 'Grafting Culture', p. 97 (suggesting that intercultural contact occurred in Strathspey "in the early to mid-eighteenth century — while it did not, in other parts of the Highlands").

Another setting where Rob Donn no doubt heard fiddle music was the cattle trysts in Crieff, Falkirk, and Carlisle that he attended regularly as a young man in the service of Iain mac Eachainn. As John MacInnes notes, “trysts were always important social occasions, involving many more people than just those who came to buy and sell cattle.”²⁰⁶ Haldane paints a lively picture of the Falkirk Tryst, a cacophony of English, Gaelic, lowing cattle, barking dogs, dealers, drovers, bankers, purveyors of food and drink, “gamblers, ballad singers, fiddlers and beggars.”²⁰⁷ Katherine Campbell adds that fairs and cattle-markets were “important performance occasions for travelling fiddlers,” where people, money and drink were in ample supply to reward their musical efforts.²⁰⁸ Another opportunity for drovers to hear music from other parts of Scotland was on the road; the journey from Caithness to Carlisle with a cattle drove took four weeks, and the journey from Durness or Tongue was probably no shorter.²⁰⁹ On the way, Rob Donn would have met other drovers and travelers and their hosts at stances and inns, and probably shared music as well as food, drink, and news.²¹⁰ These expeditions must have expanded his musical repertoire considerably, as well as contributing some of the English vocabulary with which he sprinkles his Gaelic songs.

E. TWO SCHOLARLY MODELS

The final section of this chapter will examine two partial scholarly models for the analysis in this study. One model, used in critical editions of Gaelic poets by the Scottish Gaelic Texts Society, begins with the poetry and then locates tunes associated with the song texts. I will discuss the two examples of this approach most relevant to Rob Donn, Matheson’s edition of *An Clàrsair Dall* (c. 1656 – c. 1714), and Ó Baoill’s edition of *Sileas na Ceapaich* (c. 1660 – c. 1729).²¹¹ While both these poets lived a half-century earlier than Rob Donn, he was probably

²⁰⁶ John MacInnes, ‘Oran nan Dròbhairean (The Drovers’ Song)’, *Scottish Studies*, 9 (1965), 189-204 (p. 202).

²⁰⁷ Haldane, pp. 141-42.

²⁰⁸ Katherine Campbell, *The Fiddle in Scottish Culture: Aspects of the Tradition* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 2007), pp. 1, 3, 6.

²⁰⁹ Haldane, p. 53.

²¹⁰ Haldane, p. 44.

²¹¹ William Matheson, ed., *The Blind Harper: The Songs of Roderick Morison and his Music* (Edinburgh: SGTS, 1970); Colm Ó Baoill, ed., *Poems and Songs by Sileas MacDonald* (Edinburgh: SGTS, 1972).

familiar with their songs and used some of the same melodies. The other scholarly model, used in Alburger's PhD thesis, works in the opposite direction; starting with the Simon Fraser collection of Gaelic vocal airs, published in 1816, it locates and sets the associated Gaelic song texts. Again, while the Fraser collection was published almost forty years after Rob Donn's death, the melodies date largely from the eighteenth century, and several were used by Rob Donn.

Matheson's edition of *An Clàrsair Dall* contains the standard SGTS editorial apparatus for the texts, an unusually detailed section on "Airs and Metres", plus a separate section on "Instrumental Music."²¹² Matheson describes his subject, Roderick Morison, as "our only example in Gaelic Scotland of the minstrel, skilled in the arts of poetry and music, and singing his own songs to his own accompaniment."²¹³ Unlike Rob Donn, both his words and his music were preserved at first entirely through oral tradition, "taken down, as they apparently were, not from himself but from others, and, except in one case, presumably long after he was dead."²¹⁴

Matheson makes one flat assertion with which I intend to take issue after reviewing the evidence of Rob Donn's songs:

The claim has sometimes been made for several of the Gaelic bards that they composed the airs of their own songs, but for this there is no evidence whatever. It is doubtful whether conscious composition ever contributed much to the development of Gaelic vocal music. Even the Blind Harper, musician though he was, seems to have made little or no contribution in this respect. The existence of variants, widely distributed in time and space, suggests that he simply made use of airs already existing in his repertoire.²¹⁵

But as discussed in the previous chapter, musical composition need not be "conscious" to be composition, and traditional musicians frequently use motifs or phrases from existing melodies to create something that is new in varying degrees. Although Matheson never defines what he classifies as a variant, his examples show that he uses the term very inclusively, applying it to melodies or parts of melodies that appear quite different to me.²¹⁶

²¹² *The Blind Harper*, pp. 149-74.

²¹³ *The Blind Harper*, p. lxxiii.

²¹⁴ *The Blind Harper*, p. lxxv.

²¹⁵ *The Blind Harper*, pp. 152-53.

²¹⁶ An example is his first song, "Oran do Iain Breac Mac Leòid", where he says the air is "[i]n the form ABB¹A¹, where A¹ is a variant of A and B¹ is a variant of B." *The Blind Harper*, p. 153. Since

Matheson provides texts for seven songs by An Clàrsair Dall and tunes for five. Two of his sources are pipe laments from the *Kilberry Book of Ceol Mor*, “Cumha Craobh nan Teud” and “Corrienessan’s Salute”, which he does show convincingly to be variants (as several bars are identical and others almost so).²¹⁷ He further claims that the melody for Rob Donn’s “Is trom leam an airigh” is a variant of An Clàrsair Dall’s “A cheud Di-luain de’n ràithe”; this will be discussed in Chapter VII.²¹⁸ Matheson also prints four purely instrumental melodies that may have been composed by his subject (although he does not explain why he believes Morison was capable of composing instrumental melodies but not song melodies).²¹⁹

Despite his attention to sources and variants, Matheson does not discuss the tonality or style of these pieces, how their topics or titles relate to their music, or how Morison might have chosen or composed their tunes. Nor is there any musical description of the four instrumental pieces, or any discussion of how they relate to any other music of the same or earlier periods. Matheson’s analysis tends to leap from the very general (comparing the roles of the *filidh*, the bard and the minstrel) to the very specific (identifying two melodies that he considers to be variants), with little in the way of explanation to connect these levels, or to suggest the process by which a musician like An Clàrsair Dall actually worked. For those reasons, he provides only a limited model for this thesis.

Ó Baoill’s edition of *Sileas na Ceapaich* provides texts for twenty-three poems and tunes for nine.²²⁰ Tunes were identified in one of three ways: (1) directly, when a source provides a tune title, text, or accompanying notes that match the poem; (2) by reference, when a source states that a poem is sung *air fonn* (to the tune) of another named song; or (3) by analogy, when the refrain or first line of a poem contains phrases that are also present in other songs with known tunes.²²¹ All

he treats every two bars as one phrase (p. 154), this would mean, for example, that bar 7 is a variant of bar 1, despite the fact that they have only one note in common out of eight (the first, an octave apart) and a completely different melodic contour.

²¹⁷ *The Blind Harper*, pp. 155, 157. This paragraph uses his Gaelic spelling.

²¹⁸ *The Blind Harper*, pp. 158-59; 161-62.

²¹⁹ *The Blind Harper*, pp. 169-74.

²²⁰ *Sileas MacDonald*, pp. 223-47.

²²¹ An example of the first is No. V (pp. 230-31), where the notes in the Angus Fraser music MS identify the author; an example of the second is No. II (p. 225), where the Turner collection identifies another tune by name; an example of the third is No. IV (pp. 226-29), which has an identifiable refrain.

these methods were used in my research. For example, Rob Donn was particularly fond of the tune “Tha mi nam chadal, na dhùsgadh mi”, used by Sileas for her song “Do dh’arm Rìgh Sheumais”, and used by Rob Donn for three songs.²²² I have also set Rob Donn’s Jacobite song “The Black Cassocks” to the tune Sileas used for her elegy “Alasdair à Gleanna Garadh”, partly on the basis of Ó Baoill’s statement that it seems to be “the only extant tune which will fit poems of this metre” as well as Angus Fraser’s comment (quoted by Ó Baoill) that “other bards both before and after her day used the air exclusively in heroic or battle songs.”²²³

Some of the melodies printed by Ó Baoill are based on his own transcriptions from recordings in the School of Scottish Studies, while others are from an assortment of printed and manuscript sources. Among other things, he discusses a problem I also encountered in setting three-line strophic verse to music — whether all three lines should be repeated to make a six-line stanza, or whether only the third line should be repeated to make a four-line stanza. In the example he discusses, his textual sources provided inconsistent directions.²²⁴ Of course, this may be the kind of question to which there is no single correct answer, as the pattern of repetition may depend on the melody the singer decides to use.

Nevertheless, while Ó Baoill’s treatment of the airs was helpful concerning methods of finding, matching and setting tunes and texts, it is not a full musical analysis of the type that would be done by an ethnomusicologist or a music historian. Even more than Matheson’s book, it follows the standard SGTS model for a critical edition of a poet, devoting by far the most attention to the texts and banishing the music to an addendum.²²⁵ Thus, his edition again provides only a partial model for my work.

Alburger’s PhD thesis on Simon Fraser offers a different kind of scholarly model. It has two parts: a biographical sketch of Fraser’s family, life and work, and a song edition of airs from his 1816 collection. The biographical component will not be discussed here, but the song edition was an important model for my own

²²² *Sileas MacDonald*, pp. 234-36; App. I, #9, 62 & 93.

²²³ *Sileas MacDonald*, p. 241; App. I, #45(2).

²²⁴ *Sileas MacDonald*, p. 237.

²²⁵ In all fairness, this is not the case in his most recent SGTS edition, on Màiri nighean Alasdair Ruaidh, but it will not be discussed here in detail because her tunes do not seem to overlap with Rob Donn’s.

work. The projects are similar in describing a social and musical milieu and seeking to reunite poems and melodies that had become separated. In essence, her project was the mirror opposite of mine, because she worked from a single music collection, finding and setting Gaelic poems by various authors, and I worked from a single edition of a single poet and found and set music from various sources. The projects also differ in their protagonists — Simon Fraser was literate, a violinist, collector, and publisher, while Rob Donn was non-literate, a singer, poet, and composer in the oral tradition. For that reason, evaluating the work of Rob Donn requires a scholar to ask different questions than evaluating the work of Simon Fraser.

Nevertheless, particularly since my music background is more limited than Alburger's, I was guided by a number of her editorial principles in making my own song arrangements. First, just as she relied only on the music in Fraser's 1816 edition rather than earlier or later versions of the same songs, I relied almost entirely on eighteenth- and nineteenth-century printed (or manuscript) music collections (the earlier the better if reasonably accessible), to try to get as close as possible to melodies Rob Donn might have heard.²²⁶ Second, I generally followed her practice of removing harmony, dynamics, and ornaments in converting instrumental settings to vocal settings.²²⁷ Third, I transposed a number of melodies (especially those set for violin) into a singable range for a soprano voice.²²⁸ Fourth, I followed her approach in adding and subtracting unstressed notes to make the music fit the Gaelic words, although overall I believe I made fewer changes to my source melodies than she did.²²⁹ This was partly due to caution on my part and an interest in comparing variants. In some cases she had more reconstructing to do because Fraser had arranged his melodies more heavily than many sources I utilized; in other cases her task may have been more challenging because she set some seventeenth-century poems in syllabic meter, a situation I did not face.²³⁰

Given this background, we turn now to an examination of the one hundred songs themselves.

²²⁶ Alburger, II, p. vii.

²²⁷ Alburger, II, pp. xiv-xvi.

²²⁸ Alburger, II, p. xvi.

²²⁹ Alburger, II, pp. xvi-xvii.

²³⁰ Alburger, I, p. 13.

CHAPTER V. ELEGIES

The remainder of the thesis is organized in five topical chapters (plus a conclusion), each of which discusses a category of Rob Donn's songs. Each chapter follows the same format, beginning with the poems, then the individual melodies, and finally a general discussion and analysis of the music, including tune sources and evidence for original composition. The conclusion, among other things, will compare the music in all five chapters using the same criteria. Each song has a unique number from #1-100, used here and in the two appendices.

A. THE POEMS

Rob Donn composed a total of nineteen elegies, including thirteen with known tunes.¹ From the standpoint of subject matter, the thirteen sort themselves neatly into three groups: four elegies to promising young men; six elegies honoring community leaders; and three that can be broadly classified as satirical. This section will present a brief description of each poem, including its subject and major themes, in order to provide a basis for analyzing the relationship between the poetry and the musical settings chosen by the bard. To the extent possible, the poems are discussed in chronological order within each group.²

1. ELEGIES FOR YOUNG MEN

The four elegies dedicated to young men (#41, 56, 26, and 79) are Rob Donn's most conventional, probably because their subjects had not lived long enough to distinguish themselves fully as individuals in their careers or personal lives. Three (#41, 56 and 79) were composed for sons of local MacKay tacksmen who died young of natural causes; the fourth (#26) was composed to honor a young Major MacLean who died in military service in Germany. Common themes include the suddenness and cruelty of the news, premature death without heirs, the loss to family and friends, the ancestry of the deceased, and the intelligence, education, abilities and character of the subject.

¹ All nineteen appear together in Morrison, pp. 1-66.

² Sometimes the chronological order is approximate, as not all the poems can be dated, although this is less a problem for the elegies than elsewhere. The available information on dating is compiled in the footnotes to each poem in Appendix II.

Insofar as possible, the bard also singled out at least one or two notable features in each individual. The elegy to Hugh MacKay (#41), a son of the Tutor of Farr who died in 1746, praises him for being admitted to communion and for his budding poetic abilities under the tutelage of the master:

| | |
|---|---|
| 'S beag a dh'fhoghnadh do chainnt dhomh | Only a little discussion with me |
| Gu do rann dheanamh soilleir. | Sufficed to make your verse clear. ³ |

The next poem (#56), composed a few years later for another Hugh MacKay, the heir to the Bighouse estate in Strath Halladale, is the most personal in this group and is titled *cumha* (lament) rather than *marbhrann* (elegy) in Mackay's edition.⁴

Because Rob Donn worked for his father, the bard probably knew him the best, praising among other things his appearance, his gifts as a storyteller, and the loss to the community of capable leadership in the next generation.

| | |
|--|---|
| An tuigse gheur, a thogail sgèil, | The keen understanding that told a tale, |
| 'S a' ghibht' a b' fheàrr g' an | And the most gifted in shaping |
| cuimseachadh, | them; |
| 'S tu 'n seud bu làin', tigh'nn thuig gach la, | You were the perfect jewel, learning every day, |
| 'S an t-slige b' àillte cumaidhtidheachd. | And the shell of fairest proportion. ⁵ |

The elegy to the fallen war hero Major MacLean (#26), who died in Germany in 1762 during the poet's own military service, is unusual largely because Rob Donn probably knew him only by reputation, but considered it appropriate to compose a beautiful elegy in Gaelic to supplement a previous tribute in English.

| | |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| Gur h-e 'n t-aobhar mu 'n d' shìn mi, | The reason I made the effort |
| Ri bhi 'g innseadh do bheusan, | To describe your virtues |
| Do chur beagan 's a' Ghàidhlig, | Was to put a little in Gaelic |
| De 'n chuir càch anns a' Bheurla. | Of what others put in English. ⁶ |

But Rob Donn makes no attempt to describe the battle or the martial virtues of its hero, concluding simply:

| | |
|------------------------------------|---|
| Cuiridh bith-bhuantachd imrich | Eternity will transform |
| An saoghal cuimrigeach cailte, | The fallen, troubled world |
| Mu 'n tuit leat ach tearc leithid, | Ere befalls again but rarely |
| Mhic Illeain do shaighdeir. | The likes of MacLean, soldier. ⁷ |

The last elegy (#79) also commemorates a man the bard may not have known well, John MacKay of Oldany, another son of the Tutor of Farr who died in

³ App. II, #41, verse 6. The poem ends with a poignant reminder of the unrelated but manifold losses in the year of Hugh's death, 1746.

⁴ Mackay, p. 311.

⁵ App. II, #56, verse 5.

⁶ App. II, #26, verse 3.

⁷ App. II, #26, verse 8.

1773.⁸ He was the only husband and father in this group, so his elegy might have been commissioned by his wife or another family member.⁹

2. ELEGIES TO COMMUNITY LEADERS

The six elegies to community leaders (#70, 72, 74, 71, 67, and 59) are more individualized, although common themes can still be found. The subjects are praised for love of God and neighbor, for modesty, reason, eloquence, grace and wisdom, for good judgment and sound advice, for justice and compassion in administering the affairs of men, and (where appropriate) for diligence and faith in preaching the affairs of God. The earliest of these elegies (#70), composed around 1750 for Kenneth Sutherland, tacksman and factor in Keoldale, is a rarity in Gaelic literature in praising a factor for his honesty and fairness in collecting rent, for rescuing the tenantry in every need, and for seeking no bribes for himself. Sutherland was also a violinist who provided music lessons to the MacDonald children, but Rob Donn's elegy is silent on this point, an omission consistent with the view that the violin was adopted first in the homes of the gentry out of earshot of our bard.¹⁰

The next elegy (#72) praises two community leaders who died in 1755, Rev. John Munro, the minister in Eddrachillis, and Donald MacKay, the schoolmaster in Farr. Known as “‘S e mo bheachd ort, a bhàis” or “The Song of Death”, this poem is less a personal tribute to the departed than one of Rob Donn's general meditations on death, combining anger at its depredations with a sermon to the living to follow the example of these good men if they expect an eternal reward.¹¹ The third elegy (#74), composed in 1761 to Donald, the fourth Lord Reay, praises him for sweetness of disposition and generosity to his tenants, considering him a good Christian despite the fact that he apparently died of syphilis (“an crìon pheacadh biasdail” –

⁸ Grimble, p. 261.

⁹ App. II, #79, verse 12.

¹⁰ Morrison, p. 28; Lamb, ‘Grafting Culture’, p. 96.

¹¹ The strong religious component in many of the elegies is unmistakable, although not a topic I plan to address. In general, the poems suggest that Rob Donn believed in salvation by works, not by faith alone, and was concerned far more with this life than with what might follow. However, there is no question that the Bible and Christian doctrine were central parts of his intellectual framework, given his regular church attendance and inability to read independently. It would certainly be worthwhile for a student familiar with the various strands of eighteenth-century Highland Protestant theology to explore to what extent the religious doctrines implicit in Rob Donn's poetry reflect or diverge from what he is likely to have heard from the pulpit.

the carnal sin), leaving no competent heirs and an estate burdened by debt.¹² The bard also expresses his fears for the future, as he did in the elegy for his employer Iain mac Eachainn four years earlier:

| | |
|---|---|
| Bha daoine àrda do d' shinnsear, | There were outstanding men among your forbears, |
| An cliù, 's an inntinn, 's an cèill, | In reputation and intellect and wisdom, |
| Bha 'g an giùlan mar rìghribh, | Who conducted themselves as kings |
| A thaobh an innleachdan fèin: | In the paths of their abilities. |
| Cha d' thàinig duine dhiubh 'n àird riut, | Not one of them was your equal |
| Ann am blàth's ri luchd feum', | In kindness to those in need, |
| 'S fhusa 'dhùrachd na 'earbsadh, | And it is easier to wish than to feel confident |
| Gu 'n tig ni 's feàrr 'n ad dhèigh. | That better will come after you. ¹³ |

The central community leader during Rob Donn's lifetime, the saintly Murdo MacDonald, minister of Durness from 1726 until his death in 1763, was honored by two poems, a long formal elegy (#71) and a shorter lament (#67) composed a year later at the request of his son Patrick.¹⁴ Both are heartfelt and unstinting in their praise of his manifold talents, diligent teaching and Christian character, and both refer to the musical ability he passed on to his children:

| | |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| An duine thigeadh a suas riut, | The one to compare with you |
| Ann an guth 's ann an cluasaibh, | For voice and ear |
| Cha 'n fhacas riamh is cha chualas, | Has never been seen or heard of |
| Is 's e mo smuaintean nach cluinn. | And in my opinion he will not be heard of. |
| Ged bu bheartach do chràbhadh, | Although rich in piety, |
| Bha do mheas air gach tàlann, | You showed appreciation for every talent, |
| 'S tu a thuigeadh na dàinte, | And well did you understand the songs |
| 'S am fear a dheanadh na rainn. | And the one who composed the verses. ¹⁵ |

The final elegy in this group (#59) was composed for William, the 18th Earl of Sutherland, who died young in 1766 leaving an infant daughter who would later become infamous for the Sutherland Clearances. The Earl had been Rob Donn's commanding officer in the Sutherland Fencibles just a few years earlier, and the bard considered it his duty to compose an elegy in his honor:

| | |
|--|-------------------------------------|
| Chrìoch mi sgur do na dàintibh, | I made an end of composing poetry |
| Chionn mo thàlann bhi gèilleadh; | Because my talent was forsaking me; |
| Ach cha 'n fhuil'ngeadh mo nàdur | But my nature would not allow me |
| Dhomh, bhi 'n am thàmh air an aobhar-s', | To remain silent on this theme — |

¹² Grimble, pp. 242, 274.

¹³ App. II, #74, verse 15. The elegy to Iain mac Eachainn, considered one of Rob Donn's finest, is printed and translated in full by Grimble, pp. 112-17; it is excluded here only because its melody is unknown.

¹⁴ Morrison, p. 26.

¹⁵ App. II, #71, verse 8.

Ceannard Teaghlaich Dhun-Robain,
'N a luidhe 'n Abaid Dhun-èidin,
Gun aon fhocal aig filidh
Dhèant' 'n a shiorrumhachd fèin da.

The head of the family of Dunrobin,
Lying in the abbey in Edinburgh
Without one word from a poet
Composed for him in his own country.¹⁶

But in this case Rob Donn proved to be a terrible prophet, describing the Sutherland family as “a’ sior leasach’ an fhearainn, gun bhonn gearain aig tuath orr’” (always developing their land, without giving their tenants reason to complain).¹⁷

3. SATIRICAL ELEGIES

The last three elegies (#77, 51, and 92) can be loosely categorized as satirical, despite significant differences in theme and tone. On its face, the elegy to Ewen of Polla (#77) is not satirical at all but another philosophical meditation on death, composed in 1754 shortly after the death of Prime Minister Pelham. The satire comes entirely from the accompanying story, since Ewen was not actually dead and was quite incensed when Rob Donn pontificated in his presence:

Thug thu Pelham à mòrachd,
'S fhuair thu Eòghann 's a' Pholla.

You took Pelham from greatness
And you got Ewen at Polla.¹⁸

But the song does not actually criticize Ewen for any failings, moral or otherwise; he was simply a poor old man troubled by asthma and living alone in his last days who provided Rob Donn with an occasion for contemplation and verse.

The next satirical elegy (#51), to the Rispond misers, is among Rob Donn's best known and most anthologized. Probably composed about the same time as the elegy to Ewen, it criticizes two bachelor brothers for their lack of charity and for wasting their lives, hoarding their wealth to no purpose since they left no heirs and refused to share what they had with the poor.

Daoine nach d' rinn briseadh iad,
Is e fiosrachail do chàch;
'S cha mhò a rinn iad aon dad,
Ris an can an saoghal gràs;

These men broke no commandments,
As far as we can trace,
Nor did their deeds show anything
Of what the world calls grace;¹⁹

As in the other elegies discussed so far, the tone is serious and didactic, but here the deceased are held up as counterexamples to be avoided rather than models to be emulated.

¹⁶ App. II, #59, verse 2.

¹⁷ App. II, #59, verse 9.

¹⁸ App. II, #77, verse 2.

¹⁹ App. II, #51, verse 4 (translation by Derick Thomson).

The third satirical elegy (#92), composed in 1766 for the drover Gray of Rogart, could not be more different in tone. John Gray was a landowner in Rogart, Sutherland, and a major player in the cattle business in the north, so Rob Donn was quite familiar with his business ethics.²⁰ The elegy is funny, vituperative, and gleeful, calling Rogart the chief of the rogues, and describing the joy of the people of Sutherland and Caithness that death had finally cheated the man who cheated the rest five hundred times (presumably by underpaying them for their cattle).²¹ Alone among the thirteen elegies discussed here, it contains not a hint of mourning, but is purely a celebration full of jubilant invective. The first verse is illustrative:

| | |
|---|--|
| Tha rògairan airtnealach, trom, | Rogues are dispirited and sorrowful, |
| 'N taobh bhos agus thall do na Chrasg, | On both sides of the Crask, |
| O 'n chual iad mu 'n cuairt an | Since they heard about their Chief's final |
| Ceanncinnidh, | journey, |
| Gu 'n do dh'eug e an Siorramachd Pheairt. | That he died in Perthshire. |
| Dh' aindeoin a dhreachdan 's a cheilg, | Despite his tricks and his deceit, |
| Cha do chreid duine riamh a bha ceart, | No one ever believed in the truth |
| Aon smid thàinig mach air a bheul, | Of one word that came out of his mouth, |
| 'S cha mhò chreid e féin Rìgh nam | And no more did he believe in the |
| feart. | Lord Almighty. ²² |

B. THE MELODIES

This section will examine each melody individually according to a standard format: source, meter, tempo (if specified), range, scale, structure, tonality, and other remarks. The melodies themselves are available for reference in Appendix I. Discussion of the music as a whole will follow in the last section.

1. ELEGIES FOR YOUNG MEN

The melodies for these four elegies are found only in Gunn and MacFarlane, collected from the oral tradition by John Munro about a century after they were composed. Song #41 (to Hugh MacKay, son of the Tutor) is in 4/4 time, marked “Gu muladach” (mournfully), with the range of a tenth, in a hexatonic major scale (with no fourth) in Db. It has eight bars, each bar with exactly the same rhythm but different notes, moving within the compass of a fifth or a sixth. The effect is that of a funeral march, with slow, mournful footsteps carrying a coffin, where the moving

²⁰ See ‘Copy of the Examination of John Gray of Rogart, a Highland drover, in 1746’, in *The Lyon in Mourning*, ed. by Robert Forbes, 3 vols (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1975), III, pp. 144-51.

²¹ App. II, #92, verses 3 & 4.

²² App. II, #92, verse 1.

notes occur in the first half of each bar and then slow almost to a standstill in the second half.

Example 1. Elegy to Hugh MacKay

1 Gu muladach

Hùis - tein, sor - aith le t'iom - radh, O'n chaidh t'iom - char air fàr - adh;

Hùis - tein òig sin mhic Reab - airt, Tha do leab - aith 's na clàr - aibh;

Anns an dearbh bhar - ail ag - ainn, Cha b' ann ab - uich a bha thu;

Ach 's e brith - eamh nan ui - le 'Ghlac 's a chum - adh a b' fhearr thu.

The bars alternate between major and minor triads, each based on a degree of the pentatonic scale (bars 1, 5 and 8 in Db major; bars 2 and 3 in Bb minor; bar 4 in Eb minor; and bars 6 and 7 in F minor). This seems to combine two of the compositional techniques David Johnson identified in early eighteenth-century music — tunes based on a five-note scale and tunes based on two chords.²³ Transposed from Db into G major, the tune fits what Joseph MacDonald described as the typical *blas* for laments (even the absent fourth, which would be a C# on the pipes), although its highest note (F in bar 2, B if transposed) would be outside the pipe scale.²⁴

Song #56 (to Hugh MacKay of Bighouse) is in 3/4 time, marked “Gu muladach”, with the range of a ninth and a hexatonic Mixolydian/Dorian scale (without a third) in D. It has longer lines and a greater sense of movement than #41. Although it is structured on a double tonic in E minor and D major and suits a drone accompaniment in D, it does not quite fit the pipe scale. Lachlan Macbean claimed that Rob Donn composed the music as well as the words, although he is not an entirely reliable source, as he made the same claim for another tune (#72) that is

²³ Johnson, *Scottish Fiddle Music*, pp. 16-19.

²⁴ *Compleat Theory*, p. 69.

clearly based on an earlier melody.²⁵ On the other hand, I have no evidence to the contrary, and the fact that the song is a lament for a valued young friend, rather than a formal elegy for an acquaintance, may have motivated Rob Donn to compose its music as well as its words.

Song #26 (to Major MacLean) is in 4/4 time, marked “Gu muldach”, with an octave range and a hexatonic Mixolydian/Dorian scale (without a third) in E. It has eight bars, each in the same rhythm, which is identical to the “funeral march” rhythm in #41, #59(1) and #77(1), although the melodies differ. The tune, with a double tonic in F# minor and E major, would fit the Highland pipe scale if transposed down a fifth. Since this elegy was composed in 1762, it could have been influenced by a pipe tune Rob Donn heard in the Fencibles, but his use of this rhythmic matrix predates his military service.

Song #79 (to John MacKay of Oldany) is in 3/4 time, again marked “Gu muldach”, with the range of a tenth, and uses the same hexatonic major scale as #41 (without a fourth), this time in D. The poem is in three-line strophic meter, with the third line repeated, so the song has ten bars, with a stress on each downbeat. Again, the tonality has the feel of a double tonic in E minor and D major with a drone on D. If the passing note on the low C# in bar 6 is changed to an E as in bar 4, and the tune is transposed into G, it also fits the bagpipe scale in Joseph MacDonald’s *blas* for a lament. However, the melody itself seems more vocal than the others in this group, with even crotchets and wide intervals moving freely throughout its entire range, especially in bars 5 through 10.

2. ELEGIES TO COMMUNITY LEADERS

The tunes and tune sources for the six elegies in this group are more varied than those in the previous section. Although several appear in the Munro collection, two are borrowed from classic seventeenth-century Gaelic laments: “Murt na Ceapaich” by Iain Lom (1663) and “Murt Ghlinne Comhann” (1692), while another shares a tune with a broadside ballad and a poem by John MacCodrum published in 1751. These settings show that Rob Donn had good musical taste and

²⁵ Lachlan Macbean, ed., *The Songs and Hymns of the Scottish Highlands* (Edinburgh: MacLachlan & Stewart, 1888), Pt. II, No. 13.

borrowed melodies of suitable dignity and character as well as known associations for his listeners.

The Stewart collection informs us that the elegy for the factor Kenneth Sutherland (#70) was sung to the tune “Murta Ghlinn Comhann”.²⁶ Like Morrison, the Stewarts do not explain how they know this, but it does fit. The tune itself was apparently well-known, and is published in sources including Simon Fraser and *Còisir a’ Mhòid*.²⁷ I have used the Mòd setting because it fits Rob Donn’s words more easily, and Fraser’s version, although probably related, is not at all suited for the voice. My setting is in 6/8 time, with a range of an octave and a fourth, and uses a hexatonic Aeolian scale (with no second) in B, creating a tonality of B minor. The tune has sixteen bars, with a similar rhythm in each two-bar phrase and frequent descending lines and intervals, and all four cadence bars feature repeated notes, as if to emphasize the immobilizing effect of sorrow.

The most intriguing aspect of this tune, however, is what happens when the dotted crotchets are turned into crotchets and it is reset from 6/8 into 4/4 time, as shown below:

Example 2. Murt Ghlinne Comhann



Once this is done, it becomes evident that the rhythm is quite similar to our “funeral march”, so that Rob Donn may have used it as his metrical template for at least four other elegies. Any minor differences in note-values between the two time-signatures would have been meaningless in traditional Gaelic singing (which follows word-stresses), and either Munro or the Mòd music committee (or both) probably regularized the rhythm anyway. Thus Rob Donn seems to have used the tune “Murt Ghlinne Comhann” for one elegy and its rhythmic structure for four others.

²⁶ Stewart, p. 66. The poem and a version of the melody can be found in *Gàir nan Clàrsach*, pp. 190-99.

²⁷ *SF*, p. 20, #57; ACG, *Còisir a’ Mhòid 2: The Mòd Collection of Gaelic Part Songs 1913-1925* (Glasgow: MacLaren, n.d.), p. 21.

As discussed in more detail in my MSc thesis, the 1755 elegy to Rev. John Munro and Donald MacKay (#72) uses another well-known tune, “The Pearl of the Irish Nation”, a broadside ballad whose text was probably first published (without a tune) between 1700 and 1710.²⁸ The same melody was used for a song by the Gaelic poet John MacCodrum, “Òran na h-Aoise”, published by Alasdair mac Mhaighstir Alasdair in 1751.²⁹ By the time it appeared in various collections of Gaelic music, including Patrick MacDonald’s in 1784, it was called “Oran an Aoig – The Song of Death”, the title of Rob Donn’s song rather than MacCodrum’s.³⁰ Nevertheless, a trace of the earlier connection remained in the fact that MacDonald placed the melody in his section of “Western Isles Airs” with the label “Skye”, where MacCodrum, although born in North Uist, had been appointed bard to Sir James MacDonald of Sleat in 1763.³¹ Given the dates and the resemblance between the two Gaelic titles, it seems most likely that Rob Donn borrowed the tune from MacCodrum’s song.

Because the published melodies are so similar, I have set only the Munro version from Gunn and MacFarlane. The meter is 6/8, the tempo “Gu mall” (slowly), the range a tenth, and the scale hexatonic Ionian/Mixolydian (without a seventh) in A. It has sixteen bars, with an AABC structure, and each cadence bar (4, 8, 12 and 16) has an ascending fourth or third within the A major triad, which provides the overall tonality. This song was also well-known at one time; Burns used the tune for his song “Farewell, thou fair day”, and Rob Donn’s version was sung at the 1972 Mòd.³²

According to the Stewarts, the 1761 elegy for Lord Reay (#74) was set to the tune of another classic seventeenth-century Gaelic lament, “Ceapach na Fàsach”,

²⁸ Ellen L. Beard, ‘An Ceòl sna h-Òrain: Twelve Songs by Rob Donn MacKay’ (unpublished MSc thesis, University of Edinburgh, 2011), pp. 15-20. For “The Pearl of the Irish Nation”, see Stewart, p. 242; “The Word on the Street,” <<http://digital.nls.uk/broadsides/broadside.cfm/id/15678>> [accessed 5 July 2011]; and P. W. Joyce, *Old Irish Folk Music and Songs* (London: Longmans, Green, 1909), p. 25.

²⁹ *The Songs of John MacCodrum*, ed. by William Matheson (Edinburgh: SGTS, 1938), p. 325.

³⁰ *HVA*, p. 48, #162; *AF*, p. 21.

³¹ Thomson, *Companion*, p. 161.

³² See *SMM* II, #385; see also *AF*, p. 32, *The Caledonian Muse* (London: c. 1800), p. 31; Macbean, Pt. 1, No. 7. Macbean evidently had access to the John Munro melodies, as the Rob Donn tunes in his 1888 collection are the same as those published in 1899 by Gunn and MacFarlane. The Mòd version can be heard at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/alba/oran/orain/s_e_mo_bheachd_ort_a_bhais/> [accessed 5 July 2011].

from Iain Lom's poem on the Keppoch murders in 1663.³³ This seems appropriate, as both are laments for a dead clan chief, so Rob Donn must have chosen the melody for that reason.³⁴ Versions of the tune appear in several early collections; I have set the one from Patrick MacDonald, as most likely to be familiar to Rob Donn.³⁵ My setting is in 9/8 time with the range of a ninth; the scale is hexatonic Aeolian/Dorian (without a sixth) in E. It has eight bars, with a similar rhythm in each; the two cadence bars (bar 4 & 8) are identical, with a pattern of semiquavers just before the final cadence on the tonic. The tonality is a double tonic in E minor and D major; bars 2 and 6 end on D, while bars 4 and 8 end on E.

Rob Donn composed two tributes to his beloved minister, Murdo MacDonald, an elegy (#71) following his death in 1763, and a lament (#67) a year later, both with melodies collected by Munro. The elegy is in 9/8 time, the tempo "Gu trom, muladach" (heavy and mournful), the range a tenth, and the scale heptatonic Aeolian in D. The tonality is a double tonic in D minor and C major. It has sixteen bars, with a structure AABC, and each bar has the same rhythmic pattern with long notes on beats 1 and 3. The melodic contour contains mostly descending phrases, except in bars 9-12. Atypically, the accented syllables in the poetry are on the second beat of each bar instead of the first, and on quavers rather than longer notes; this may be a flaw in the transcription.

Two origins have been suggested for this melody. According to Matheson's notes on the Patrick MacDonald collection, #33 (perhaps understandably untitled by MacDonald) is "'Se do bhàs Mhaighstir Mhurachadh; Caraid agus nàmhaid an uisge-bheatha: RD p. 1: JMC 328".³⁶ The first reference is to Rob Donn's elegy (my #71) that appears on the first page of Gunn and MacFarlane. Here I agree with Matheson that the melody in *Highland Vocal Airs* is a variant of the one collected by Munro. It is also in 9/8 time, in 16 bars with an AABC structure (if we use the first repeat and ignore the second), and the melodic contours are similar in several bars, including the repeated notes just before three of the four cadences.³⁷

³³ Stewart, p. 29. See *Òrain Iain Luim*, ed. by Annie M. Mackenzie (Edinburgh: SGTS, 1964), pp. 82-93, 379.

³⁴ The background of the Keppoch murders is described in *Gàir nan Clàrsach*, pp. 14-15.

³⁵ *HVA*, p. 25, #61; *SF*, p. 11, #31; *AF*, p. 55.

³⁶ *HVA*, pp. 21, 70.

³⁷ *HVA*, p. 21.

Matheson's second reference is to a lighthearted song by John MacCodrum, versions of which appear in his own SGTS edition of that poet and in Simon Fraser.³⁸ The only similarity I perceive between Munro's elegy and Simon Fraser's song is that both have 16 bars in 9/8 time; Matheson's own setting of the MacCodrum song is actually in 6/8 rather than 9/8 time. Both MacCodrum settings are quite major and cheerful in tonality, in distinct contrast to both versions of the elegy. While the meter of the two poems is close enough that either text can be sung to any of the four melodies, it is impossible to imagine why Rob Donn would have chosen a melody with such undignified associations for his tribute to the person he most revered. Thus I am not convinced by Matheson's suggested relationship.

A more likely model for Rob Donn's #71 is "Ceapach na Fàsach" (#74), which he used just two years earlier for his elegy to Lord Reay. Both are in 9/8 time, with the same rhythm but a different melody, the same compositional technique he used for the "funeral march" elegies based on "Murt Ghlinne Comhann". This borrowing may also explain the apparent mismatch between the poetic and musical stresses in #71, noted earlier. But Rob Donn did more than compose a new melody; he extended it from eight bars to sixteen to create a longer overall structure. Symbolically, this adaptation demonstrates that — for Rob Donn, at least — the true leader in Durness Parish in the mid-18th century was not the chief, but the minister.

The lament (#67) is shorter and simpler in structure, in 4/4 time, marked "Gu muladach", with a range of an octave and a fourth (using the lower optional notes in the last bar). The tune is hexatonic, Ionian/Mixolydian (without a seventh) in B, with a predominantly major tonality. It is in eight bars, with an AABC structure, repeated for the chorus, and each bar has a similar rhythmic pattern. Among the elegies, only this one and Ewen's (#77) choruses. Mackay states that Rob Donn composed the "highly beautiful and original" air for this lament on the first anniversary of Rev. MacDonald's death.³⁹ I have no evidence to the contrary, and the circumstances of its composition lend credence to these accounts that Rob Donn was inspired to create both the words and the melody to honor his esteemed friend.

³⁸ *John MacCodrum*, pp. 328-29; *SF*, p. 21, #60.

³⁹ Mackay, p. xxxii.

The last elegy in this group (#59) was composed in 1766 to honor William, the 18th Earl of Sutherland, whom *The Celtic Monthly* later called “the last of the good earls”.⁴⁰ Although two different melodies have been preserved for this song, the one in the Munro collection (#59(1)) is most likely to be Rob Donn’s because it uses the “funeral march” rhythm from “Murt Ghlinne Comhann” as well as some very specific word-painting in the first verse. The meter is 4/4, the tempo “Gu muladach”, the range a ninth, and the scale heptatonic in D major. It has eight bars, each in the same “funeral march” rhythm, with frequent descending phrases and a few large leaps — a descending minor seventh in bar 1, a descending octave in bar 7, and an ascending octave in bar 5. The tonality is based on the double tonic, in E minor and D major, and would fit the bagpipe scale if the sevenths were flattened.

The internal evidence that Rob Donn composed this melody is the word-painting in the first verse, which is autobiographical and has nothing to do with the Earl of Sutherland.

| | |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Rugadh mis’ anns a’ gheamhradh, | I was born in the winter |
| Measg nam beanntaichean gruamach; | Among the lowering mountains, |
| ’S mo cheud sealladh do ’n t-saoghal, | And my first sight of the world, |
| Sneachd is gaoth mu mo chluasaibh; | Snow and wind about my ears; |
| O ’n chaidh m’ àrach ri aghaidh | Since I grew up looking upon |
| Tìr na deighe, gu tuathail, | A land of ice, a northerly land, |
| Rinn mi luathaireach tuiteam, | I declined early |
| ’S rinn mo chuislidhean fuaradh’. | And my veins chilled. ⁴¹ |

The melody contains an ascending octave leap between the words “chaidh” and “m’ àrach” (I grew up or was raised) and a corresponding descending octave leap in the middle of the word “tuiteam” (declined or fell). This is unlikely to be accidental, suggesting that the melody was composed at the same time as the words. In a sense, this is Rob Donn’s own swan song, with a striking and haunting melody to match its words.

The other, apparently unrelated, tune for this elegy (#59(2)) is found in the Angus Fraser collection. It is in 3/4 time, with an octave and a fourth range and a Dorian scale in D. The tune has sixteen bars, with all even-numbered bars and all odd-numbered bars in the same rhythm. Some of the melodic material is repeated, as bars 1, 5 and 13 are the same, as are bars 3-4, 11-12 and 15-16, and the same leap

⁴⁰ ‘The Sutherland Clearances’, *Celtic Monthly*, 15 (1906-1907), 11-14 (p. 11).

⁴¹ App. II, # 59, verse 1.

of a seventh occurs between bars 5-6 and 13-14. The tune begins with a diminished triad, which gives it a spooky flavor, and the implicit harmony seems to be in D minor, with F and G major triads. Since the two melodies have no obvious relationship, either rhythmic or melodic, it may be that the Munro tune was sung in the Reay country and the Fraser tune in East Sutherland, although this is entirely speculative. But whatever the origins of the latter, it seems reasonable to infer that #59(1) was Rob Donn's.

3. SATIRICAL ELEGIES

Unlike most of the preceding songs, the three satirical elegies each have two melodies, of which only one pair (#92) seem to be variants. There is no obvious reason why this should be so, unless the nature of the poetry made them more likely to circulate outside the MacKay country and to pick up other melodies along the way. This seems as good an explanation as any, since many of the other elegies (to young men and community leaders) would probably have been most valued and thus best preserved in their own district, while the satires could well have appealed to a wider audience.

The first melody for the elegy to Ewen (#77(1)) was collected by Munro and uses the "funeral march" rhythm already discussed. The meter is 4/4, the tempo "Gumladach", the range a seventh, and the scale heptatonic Dorian in F#. The structure is eight bars, repeated for the chorus; the tonality is a double tonic in F# minor and E major. Because this melody is so similar to the others in the "funeral march" group, it must be Rob Donn's original.

The other melody for Ewen (#77(2)) is really just a fragment, recorded by John MacLean in 1950 and available on *Tobar an Dualchais*.⁴² John MacLean (1909-1970), originally from Raasay and later rector of Oban High School, contributed a variety of material to the Canna Collection and the School of Scottish Studies, and his brother Sorley wrote that their father knew a lot about Rob Donn.⁴³ This suggests that the tune was passed down through the MacLean family. The meter is free but more or less in 3/4, the range a ninth, and the scale hexatonic, Dorian/Mixolydian (without a third); I have set it in D. Since the recording is only

⁴² See <<http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/51932/1>> [accessed 5 July 2011].

⁴³ See <<http://tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/person/803>> [accessed 2 August 2011]; Sorley MacLean, 'My Relationship with the Muse', in *Ris a' Bhruthaich*, p. 7.

eight bars, it provides music for only half the verse and must be repeated three more times to fit the verse plus the chorus. It is a lovely melody, with several large leaps — an ascending seventh in bar 1, a descending and then ascending sixth in bars 5 and 6, and a descending fifth in bar 7. Perhaps because of the leaps, it reminds me of “Mo rùn geal òg” (which MacLean also recorded), whose melody dates to 1746 at the latest and probably before 1600.⁴⁴ However, it has no relationship to Munro’s melody, either in rhythm or melodic contour.

The elegy for the Rispond misers (#51) also has two unrelated melodies. The one collected by Munro (#51(1)) is in 2/4 time, “Gu muladach”, with the range of a tenth, in a hexatonic major key in D (with no fourth but a major seventh). It contains sixteen bars with a predominantly dotted rhythm. The tonality is primarily in D major (with 14 Ds) with a secondary tonality in B minor (the relative minor, with 8 Bs, including two cadence notes). If transposed into G, it fits Joseph MacDonald’s *blas* for a lament, but it exceeds the bagpipe scale by one note. MacFarlane described the tune as “a variant of that which forms the basis of ‘Guma Slàn a chì mi,’ ‘Mali bheag òg,’ ‘The Harp that once in Tara’s Hall,’ and many others.”⁴⁵ At least the first two of these were extant in the Scottish Gaelic oral tradition in the eighteenth century, although I see no particular resemblance.⁴⁶

John Mackenzie, on the other hand, said the Rispond Misers was sung to “Latha siubhal slèibhe dhomh” (#51(2)), another great Gaelic war-horse of a song associated with a poem by Lachlan MacKinnon (1665-1734) of Scalpay, Skye.⁴⁷ There is no question that Rob Donn knew this melody, as he used it for another song, and its huge leaps make it far more dramatic than the tune in Munro. As similar versions appear in the MacDonald and Angus Fraser collections, I have set the former, as the source is earlier and closer geographically to Rob Donn.⁴⁸ The tune itself is in 4/4 time, with the range of a tenth, using a heptatonic scale, Aeolian in D. It has eight bars, of which bars 1 and 3 and bars 5 and 7 are the same, with a

⁴⁴ A. L. Gillies, p. 188.

⁴⁵ Gunn and MacFarlane, p. 101.

⁴⁶ For example, Sìleas na Ceapaich used the song “Mo Mhaili Bheag O” for her 1715 poem “Do Rìgh Seumas.” *Sìleas MacDonald*, pp. 226-29. “Gu ma slàn a chì mi” is in the 1816 Simon Fraser collection, p. 29, #78.

⁴⁷ *Sàr Obair*, p. 212; *An Lasair*, pp. 367, 375-76.

⁴⁸ *HVA*, p. 38, #128; *AF*, p. 14.

predominantly dotted rhythm, and large leaps in five of the eight bars. The tonality fits a double tonic in D minor and C major (with 15 Ds, 8 Cs and 11 Es).

In my opinion, these two melodies are not related. Although their dotted rhythm is similar, so that Rob Donn could have used “Latha siubhal” as a metrical model, their melodic contours and tonality are virtually opposites. Given the local bias in the Munro collection and the wide popularity of “Latha siubhal”, it is more probable that the Munro tune was Rob Donn’s and the other tune was adopted later (or elsewhere). In addition, there may be some word-painting in the first verse of the Munro tune, where the word “ìosal” (low) is on the lowest note of the song (D in bar 2), and the descending sixth at the beginning of bar 5 is on the word “fallain” (healthy), which would sound like “fallen” in English, the fate of the misers a few days later. There is nothing comparable in the other melody, so the Munro tune is a better fit for Rob Donn’s words .

The last elegy, to Gray of Rogart (#92), also has two melodies, but here they seem to be variants. The tune in Munro (#92(1)) is in 6/8 time, marked “Moderato”, with the range of a ninth and heptatonic scale, Dorian in G. It has twelve bars with an AABC structure; the tonality is G minor with an occasional double tonic shift to F major. It has 17 Gs, 16 Bbs, 11 Ds, and 8 As, with three cadences on G and one on A. The tune in Angus Fraser (#92(2)) is in 3/4 time, with the range of a tenth, and uses a hexatonic scale (without a sixth), Dorian/Aeolian in G. It has 24 bars with an AABC structure; the tonality is G minor, with shifts to the double tonic on F major. It has 21 Gs, 8 Bbs, 14 Ds, and 10 As, with the cadences on the same notes.

Since these formal features are quite similar (as twelve bars in 6/8 time are the functional equivalent of twenty-four bars in 3/4 time), and the notes for the words “riamh a bha ceart” are identical in each version, I think it is safe to say that these are variants. However, the tune in Angus Fraser is more interesting, with more leaps and a slightly larger range, making it more gratifying to the singer. It also sounds a bit older, probably because it is hexatonic, so the Munro tune may have evolved from something closer to the one in Angus Fraser.

C. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

In 1829, Mackintosh Mackay wrote: “Perhaps Rob Donn never took more than an hour or two to compose either his best, or his longest songs.”⁴⁹ In 1970, William Matheson wrote: “The claim has sometimes been made for several of the Gaelic bards that they composed the airs of their own songs, but for this there is no evidence whatever.”⁵⁰ Both these gentlemen were wrong, and both — native Gaelic-speakers as well as university-trained scholars — should have known better, as if creativity in their own cultural tradition was based on emanations from the Celtic twilight rather than thoughtful, conscious craftsmanship. Apparently neither had seriously studied the words and music of Rob Donn’s elegies, or they would have reached very different conclusions.⁵¹

Probably the best rebuttal to these claims is Rob Donn’s elegy to Murdo MacDonald (#71), ten 16-line verses of carefully-crafted panegyric, beginning with an apology:

| | |
|--|--|
| ’S ged chaidh dàil ann do mharbhrann, Labhraidh balbhachd ri cèill. | And although your elegy has been delayed, There is eloquent reason for the silence. ⁵² |
|--|--|

This implies that Rob Donn took as much time as he needed to compose and refine an outstanding elegy for his admired friend, a task that he took very seriously. As he explained:

| | |
|---|---|
| Fìor mhasgall chionn pàidhidh, No stad gealtach le gàbhadh, Bhrìgh mo bheachd-s’ ann an dànaibh, ’S mi nach dèanadh, ’s nach d’ rinn: Ach na ’m biodh comain no stà dhuit, Ann a t’ alladh chur os àird dhuit, Co na mis’ do ’m bu chàra, ’S cò a b’ fheàrr na thu thoill? | Outright flattery for payment Or caution through fear of danger Never was or will be The basis for the opinions in my poetry. But if it could be a tribute or service to you To raise your fame on high for you, Who should do it more than I, And who could deserve it more than you? ⁵³ |
|---|---|

Rob Donn demonstrated similar care and deliberation in setting this extended elegy to 16 bars of music. As already discussed, he borrowed the 9/8 meter, the specific rhythm, the small intervals, and the tonality (an Aeolian/Dorian scale with a minor/major double tonic) from “Ceapach na Fàsach”, a well-known 8-bar lament

⁴⁹ Mackay, p. xlii.

⁵⁰ Matheson, *The Blind Harper*, p. 152.

⁵¹ Grimble (p. 280) makes the same point about the texts of the elegies but does not discuss the music.

⁵² App. II, #71, verse 1.

⁵³ App. II, #71, verse 2.

for a clan chief whose melody he had used two years earlier in his elegy for Lord Reay. But he did not borrow the melody itself, as neither the overall melodic contours nor any two individual bars are the same as his model. While he may have borrowed melodic motifs from elsewhere, this sort of composition using existing musical materials is not surprising from someone with a good ear who had been composing verse since childhood and music since he was a young man.

This compositional method is also consistent with some of the techniques discussed in Chapter III on ethnomusicological theory. For instance, according to Thomas McKean's study of Iain MacNeacail of Skye:

He does not select a tune beforehand. Instead, he has a song text in mind which serves as a rhythmic — and by extension melodic — model. His stanza forms and metres are therefore dictated by the stock of poetic models at his disposal, not the body of tunes he has to work with.⁵⁴

Rob Donn seems to have done something similar in borrowing metrical models for some of his elegies from well-known Gaelic songs. But McKean also said that MacNeacail did not “deliberately compose original melodies”, did not perceive melodies as unique, and usually was unaware when two songs had the same melody.⁵⁵ None of those statements can be applied to Rob Donn.

Another compositional technique that Rob Donn probably used was that of drawing on a cultural stock of short melodic motifs that he then combined in new ways. This is the method Calum Ruadh described to Thorkild Knudsen: “I never composed any song on anybody else's tune, perfect as you know but – I take bits of it.”⁵⁶ Cowdery calls this technique “recombining”, in which traditional musicians draw from a “melodic pool” of motifs to “make new melodies which still conform to the traditional sound.”⁵⁷ Such motifs are undoubtedly present in bagpipe music, for instance, as documented by Simon McKerrell,⁵⁸ but identifying them in 100 Rob Donn tunes or the universe of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Gaelic song would be a daunting prospect.

⁵⁴ McKean, p. 121.

⁵⁵ McKean, pp. 120-22.

⁵⁶ Knudsen, CD booklet, Track 10c.

⁵⁷ Cowdery, ‘A Fresh Look’, pp. 498-99.

⁵⁸ Simon McKerrell, ‘The Concept of Mode in Scottish Bagpipe Music’, in *The Highland Bagpipe: Music, History, Tradition*, ed. by Joshua Dickson (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), pp. 279-300.

Given this background, the next task is to review the evidence for original composition and borrowing in the thirteen elegies as a whole. As we have seen, three melodies are direct borrowings: #70 from “Murt Ghlinne Comhann”, #74 from “Ceapach na Fàsach”, and #72 from “Òran na h-Aoise”. We also have convincing evidence that Rob Donn based six other songs on metrical models from existing *òrain mhòra*, although he apparently composed his own melodies for each. Four elegies (#26, 41, 59 and 77(1)), composed over a twenty-year period from 1746 to 1766, use the “funeral march” rhythm from “Murt Ghlinne Comhann”. The elegy to Rev. MacDonald (#71), just discussed, uses a metrical model from “Ceapach na Fàsach.” And the elegy to the Rispond misers (#51(1)) probably borrowed its metrical model from “Latha Siubhal Slèibhe Dhomh” (51(2)), although for that reason it could be — and apparently was — sung to both.

That leaves four songs whose melodies have no other known source. Two of these are explicitly claimed as original to Rob Donn: the lament for young Hugh of Bighouse (#56) and the lament for Murdo MacDonald (#67). The two are not particularly similar: #56 is in 3/4 time, with a dotted rhythm, Mixolydian/Dorian scale, and minor/major double tonic tonality; and #67 is in 4/4 time, with mostly even crotchets and semi-quavers, an Ionian/Mixolydian scale, a larger range and a major tonality. What they do have in common is that both are laments, not formal elegies, for individuals that Rob Donn knew very well. We know that Patrick MacDonald requested the lament for his father, and Hugh of Bighouse may well have requested the tribute to his son and heir, so these personal factors could have inspired Rob Donn to compose new melodies as well as words.

The remaining two songs (#79 and #92) are those for which we have no information except the melodies themselves. The elegy for John MacKay of Oldany (#79) is in three-line strophic meter, which is not compatible with either the 4/4 funeral march rhythm or the 9/8 rhythm from “Ceapach”, so its 3/4 melody was either composed from scratch or borrowed from another, unknown source. The satirical elegy to Gray of Rogart has two variants, one collected by Munro (#92(1)) and the other preserved by Angus Fraser (#92(2)). Like #79, it is in triple time with mostly even crotchets and a double tonic, but the melodies have no particular

similarities. Unless someone else can recognize either of these melodies, it seems as likely as not that Rob Donn composed them as well.

In sum, Rob Donn may have composed the music for as many as ten of the thirteen elegies discussed in this thesis, although two other possibilities should be mentioned. One is that some of the earlier melodies could have been composed by members of the MacDonald family (Murdo, Patrick, Joseph or Flora) while they were still living in Durness, although identifying them would only be possible if a cache of their compositions were discovered for comparison.⁵⁹ Another theoretical possibility is that each of the six tunes based on a metrical model from a well-known melody was actually sung to that melody by Rob Donn, and subsequently diverged via oral transmission to produce the six very different tunes collected by Munro a century later. In my view, this seems almost impossible, and well beyond the type of unconscious variation discussed by Sharp and Bronson and other folk song scholars. It is more likely, for instance, that the Rispond Misers continued to be sung in the Reay country to Rob Donn's original tune, while singers in other areas preferred to sing it to the tune of "Latha siubhal", which Mackenzie described as "the third best air in Scotland".⁶⁰ This seems more plausible than a gradual unconscious transformation from one into the other.

The next task is to summarize the musical characteristics of the melodies discussed in this chapter. For that exercise I have included only one tune for each elegy, the one I consider most likely to be Rob Donn's.⁶¹ Six tunes are in 4/4 (or 2/4) time, five are in 3/4 (or 6/8), and two are in 9/8. Ten tunes are hexatonic and three heptatonic; none is pentatonic (although these totals could be skewed due to the nature of my sources, including one Mòd arrangement). Six of the tunes use a scale with a major third, of which three are in Joseph MacDonald's *blàs* for a lament. Five tunes use a scale with a minor third (Aeolian, Dorian or indeterminate), and two lack a third and must be classified as Mixolydian/Dorian. Nine of the thirteen are based on a double tonic with a minor triad above and a major triad one tone below. Of the remaining four, three are predominantly major in

⁵⁹ See *Fasti*, VII, p. 102; Morrison, p. 20.

⁶⁰ *An Lasair*, pp. 375-76. The top two are not identified.

⁶¹ That means the Munro tunes for #51, 59, and 77, and the Angus Fraser tune for #92; the others have only a single melody.

tonality, and one is minor, but none uses a full diatonic major or minor scale, with each degree of the scale and a sharpened seventh. As illustrated in Summary Charts 5 -7 in Chapter X, the elegies as a group thus exhibit slightly different musical features from most other song types discussed in this thesis, including a somewhat higher incidence of triple meter (Chart #5), fewer heptatonic scales (Chart #6), and a lower incidence of major thirds (Chart #7).

In conclusion, two more general observations are in order. First, none of the thirteen elegies uses the same melody, despite the fact that re-using tunes was a common practice among Gaelic poets, including Rob Donn himself when working in other genres. Second, none of the elegies borrows the melody of a non-Gaelic air, despite the fact that this practice was also common among Gaelic poets. This means that Rob Donn considered elegies to be special or different in some way. Many of his elegies have a strong religious component, and death was not treated lightly even in the satires. He may have believed that anyone who deserved a personal elegy also deserved a unique melody, as a tribute to the dead or a way of ensuring that his poetry would be remembered by the living. Some of the elegies may even have been commissioned with the expectation that the bard would compose both words and music.

Rob Donn also believed (as he said in his elegy to Major MacLean) that elegies to Gaels should be composed in Gaelic, and he may have felt the same way about their melodies — that only music from within the Gaelic tradition of Highland bagpipe laments, elegies for chiefs, and *òrain mhòra* was suitable for serious elegies. As Peter Cooke wrote, based on his study of the Eliza Ross collection:

Gaelic song-makers and singers were well aware of musical differences between their tradition and those of the Lowlands [...] and while recognizing and often adopting 'exotic' features of the fashionable Lowland musical styles, they were also prepared to shun them to make a point.⁶²

I would submit that Rob Donn did precisely this in his elegies, whether this was the expectation of his listeners or his own aesthetic choice or both.

We turn next to his social and political commentary.

⁶² Cooke, 'Some Thoughts', p. 119.

CHAPTER VI. SOCIAL AND POLITICAL COMMENTARY

The nineteen songs in this chapter illustrate the views of the bard on the social and political issues of his day. Beginning with five poems on the '45 and its aftermath, it includes five poems on marriage and the status of women, three concerning poaching and theft, and six that address other socio-economic issues, including class, patronage, tenancy, child labor, literacy, and aging. Unlike the elegies discussed in the last chapter, these songs do not represent any single literary or musical genre. Instead, they epitomize Rob Donn as social critic, whose voice is sometimes direct and sometimes veiled in satire, but always illuminating to the social historian.

A. THE POEMS

1. JACOBITE VERSE

During the last Jacobite rising of 1745-1746, the secular and religious authorities in the MacKay country were firm supporters of the Protestant Hanoverian government, and Rob Donn himself was not directly involved in the fighting, most of which took place far to the south.¹ So despite his remarkably candid Jacobite sympathies, he was able to maintain a degree of critical distance almost impossible to imagine, for instance, in the combatants Alasdair mac Mhaighstir Alasdair or Iain Ruadh Stiùbhart, although perhaps closer to the mixed feelings of Donnchadh Bàn at the Battle of Falkirk.² Rob Donn's poems on Jacobite themes will be discussed in chronological order, from the optimism of 1745 to the bitterness following the punitive legislation of 1747.

The first poem (#5), dated by Morrison to December 1745,³ is a traditional *fàilte* and *brosnachadh* (welcome and incitement) to Prince Charles Edward Stuart, joyful in tone and combining pre-Christian imagery of the fertility of the land with Biblical comparisons to Solomon, Samson, Absalom and even Christ himself,

¹ See Grumble, pp. 75-96.

² For the combat roles of the three poets, see *Alexander MacDonald: Bard of the Gaelic Enlightenment*, ed. by Camille Dressler and D. W. Stiùbhart (Kershader: Islands Book Trust, 2012), p. 144; *An Lasair*, pp. 440-42, 448-50; Anja Gunderloch, 'Donnchadh Bàn's *Òran do Bhlàr na h-Eaglaise Brice* — Literary Allusion and Political Comment', *SGS*, 20 (2000), 97-116.

³ Morrison, p. 79 n.1.

proclaiming that the same star that marked the birth of Jesus welcomed the advent of the Prince.⁴ It ends with the unambiguous plea:

| | |
|---|--|
| A nis, a Theàrlaich Stiùbhairt, | But now, Prince Charles Stewart, |
| Na 'm biodh 'n crùn a th' air Rìgh Seòras | If King George's crown were on your |
| ort, | head, |
| Bu lionmhor againn cùrtearan, | We'd have plenty of courtiers |
| Bhiodh tionndadh ghùn is chleòcaichean. | Changing their gowns and robes. |
| Tha m' athchuing ris an Ti sin, | And 'tis my prayer to Him above, |
| Aig a' bheil gach ni ri òrduchadh, | Who has the ordering of all things, |
| Gu 'n tearn' e o 'n cheilg ac' thu, | That he preserve you from their treachery. |
| 'S gu 'n cuir e 'n seilbh do chòrach thu. | And restore you to your rightful inheritance. ⁵ |

Like Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair's more warlike "Òran don Phrionnsa", this poem expresses the hope of Jacobite sympathizers during the early days of the '45.⁶

The next poem (#34) is the most lighthearted, composed following the incident in March 1746 when a ship carrying a cargo of French gold for the Prince's army ran aground in the Kyle of Tongue and was captured by Lord Reay.⁷

Although this loss was actually a major setback for the Jacobite war effort, Rob Donn's song focuses almost entirely on its local consequences, when some of the gold was scavenged by nearby residents. One such opportunist was the subject of this song, who "committed only a little perjury" when he swore to the Chief that he did not count the gold he retrieved (and returned only in part).⁸ Rob Donn gently advised him to stop being so greedy and try to remember the Prince, who needed the money more than he did.⁹

The third poem (#61), probably composed later in 1746, is a much angrier satire attacking a local merchant named John Macallan who was a double agent at Culloden. As Grimble notes, the stanzas alternate between praise and dispraise, reflecting the two-faced character of their subject:

| | |
|---|---|
| Fiosaich' breugach nan lùb, | Lying informer, |
| Dèanamh sgèil air gach taobh, | Betraying both sides, |
| Eadar Teàrlach 's an Diùc, an Cuileodair. | That of Charles and the Duke at Culloden. ¹⁰ |

⁴ Regarding fertility imagery, see Wilson McLeod and Meg Bateman, *Duanaire na Sracaire: Anthology of Medieval Gaelic Poetry* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2007), pp. xxxvii-xxxviii ("bardic praise is best understood as an affirmation of the subject's 'fitness for rule', demonstrated in thought which is ultimately a pre-Christian schema linking a temporal lord with the regenerative powers of the earth.").

⁵ App. II, #5, verse 8.

⁶ See Thomson, *Gaelic Poetry in the Eighteenth Century*, pp. 41-43.

⁷ See Grimble, pp. 84-85; App. II, #34, notes.

⁸ App. II, #34, verse 3.

⁹ App. II, #34, verse 1.

¹⁰ App. II, #61, verse 16; Grimble, p. 187.

For Rob Donn, such conduct was dishonorable and far worse than openly supporting either side.

The last two poems, probably composed in 1748, express Rob Donn's indignation at government policies in the aftermath of Culloden, particularly the Disarming and Disclothing Acts of 1747.¹¹ "The Black Cassocks" (#45) is by far his most incendiary expression of Jacobite views, sixteen 8-line verses producing a summons to Tongue House to be cross-examined for sedition. Not only did he criticize a whole series of government policies that humiliated and punished loyal and disloyal Highlanders alike — the Disclothing Act, the decommissioning of Highland officers, the window tax, and the Disarming Act — he called explicitly for Charles to return "a dhìoladh latha Chulodair" (to avenge the day of Culloden).¹² But — as the story goes — he quickly composed a more neutral closing verse on his way to court, commenting very evenhandedly:

| | |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| Fhuair sinn Rìgh à Hanobhar, | We acquired a King from Hanover, |
| Sparradh oirne le h-Achd e; | Established over us by statute. |
| Tha againn Prionnsa 'n a aghaidh, | We have a Prince opposing him |
| Is neart an lagha 'g a bhacadh. | In defiance of the law. |
| O Bhith tha h-urad 'n ad bhreitheamh, | O God who judges all, |
| Gun chron 's an dithis nach fac thu,— | Who sees neither as faultless, |
| Mur h-e a th' ann, cuir air aghairt | Put forward, if he is not in place, |
| An t-aon a 's lugha 'm bi pheacadh. | The one whose sins are less. ¹³ |

Although Rob Donn received no further punishment, he could not resist chastising his chastisers in a brief poem (#95) called "The Court at Tongue" that Grimble links to this incident:

| | |
|---|--|
| A' chùirt bha ann an Tung' againn, | The court we had in Tongue — |
| Gur fada 's cuimhne 'n cleachdaidhnean; | Long will we remember its proceedings — |
| Bha britheamh agus clèireach ann, | A judge and a clerk were there |
| Gun reuson no gun cheartas ac'. | Without reason or justice in them. ¹⁴ |

So Rob Donn, as usual, had the last word.

2. MARRIAGE AND THE STATUS OF WOMEN

Although women feature prominently in every category of Rob Donn's verse (except the elegies), the five poems discussed here all concern aspects of their general social and economic status. The first (#93), probably composed early in his marriage, is structured as a travelogue in which the poet visits a series of married

¹¹ See *An Lasair*, pp. 455-58.

¹² App. II, #45, verse 13.

¹³ App. II, #45, verse 16.

¹⁴ App. II, #95, verse 2.

neighbors and enumerates their complaints about their absent spouses. He begins, with his usual frankness, by protesting his own sexual and culinary deprivation while his wife is away nursing for a year at the “big house” in Tongue.¹⁵ Whether she was working as a wet-nurse, an infant nurse, or assisting an invalid, it is doubtful she had much choice about accepting the position, any more than Rob Donn could have chosen to decline his later recruitment into the Sutherland Fencibles. In any event, she had to work, and they were not the only married couple in the 112-line song who were separated by the demands of gainful employment. Grimble comments that the poem “reveals the freedom of speech and movement that women enjoyed in a society in which private morals were closely supervised by the ministry,”¹⁶ but Rob Donn’s last verse hints at a darker side to this cheerful picture:

| | |
|---|---|
| Innsidh mi dòigh dhuibh, nach còir | I’ll tell you the habit you’d best try to |
| dhuibh a a sheachnadh, | cultivate: |
| Gun bhi fad as an dùthaich, no dùr | Don’t stay away too long or be surly in |
| aig bhur dachaidh; | your house; |
| Cha ’n ainmeil sìor chairbheist, ’s cha | Continual flogging’s infamous and blows |
| seirbheis na stracaidhnean. | achieve nothing. ¹⁷ |

In other words, wife-beating was apparently common and to some degree tolerated.

The next three poems are not precisely datable, but seem to reflect a period some two decades later when the bard has had ample opportunity to consider the conduct of his married neighbors, the difficulties of young bachelors seeking wives, and the marital prospects of his own daughters. “Am Bruadar” or “The Dream” (#23) is Rob Donn’s longest poem, twenty-five 8-line verses in the form of a mock religious vision, where men and women line up separately at the Pearly Gates to complain bitterly about their spouses. The poet, as the self-appointed voice of Providence, is very much on the side of the women, telling the men to count their blessings, consider the burdens imposed on women by poverty, pregnancy and ill-health, and reflect on their own selfish behavior.¹⁸

“The Young Lovers” (#32) is a humorous expression of sympathy for the trials and tribulations of young men seeking to marry but stymied equally by the flightiness of young girls and the materialism of their fathers. In the poet’s words:

¹⁵ App. II, #93, verses 1-4; Grimble, pp. 48-53.

¹⁶ Grimble, p. 51.

¹⁷ App. II, #93, verse 14.

¹⁸ App. II, #23, verses 6, 13-14, 21.

| | |
|--|--|
| An duine meanmach, 's e toimhseil, ainmeil, Cha chluinn thu 'ainm ach mar fhear gun diù; 'S nach fhaic thu fèin, air son iomadh reusoin, Gu 'n deach' an sprèidh os ceann cèille 's cliù. | The imaginative man, who is sensible and well-respected, He is dismissed as a man without worth, And can't you see for yourself, for many reasons, That stock is placed above intelligence and reputation. ¹⁹ |
|--|--|

These lines reflect the economic reality of marriage in the bard's society, a reality he was forced to accept up to a point, as in the poem to his daughters (#39) where he speculates on the material advantages that would accompany marriage to the sons of the local weaver. Nonetheless, at least his daughter Kirsty married for love, with her father's approval, choosing as her husband the son of the same Anna Morrison who had rejected the bard for another suitor and may have lived to regret her choice.²⁰

“The Three Janets” (#100) — which actually describes six women of that name — was composed sometime in the 1770s, when Rob Donn and his wife Janet were both working for Iain mac Eachainn's son Colonel Hugh MacKay, now returned from Jamaica and living in sin in the mansion house at Balnakeil with his housekeeper Janet Sutherland.²¹ One verse refers to Rob Donn's wife and the secret of their successful marriage:

| | |
|---|--|
| Cha bhac ise Rob o 'mhiannaibh, 'S cha bhac es' a crìondachd fèin. | She will not hinder Rob from his purposes, And he will not obstruct her prudence. ²² |
|---|--|

Several other Janets are mentioned briefly, including the capable wife of the double agent at Culloden. But the poet's real targets are clear:

| | |
|--|---|
| Shaoil leam 'n uair thigeadh an Còirneal, Nach biodh an còrr r' a chur an cèill; 'S e chuir a' chorc anns gach òrdugh, An droch Sheònaid bh' aige fèin. | I thought when the Colonel came, The rest needed no description; He disobeyed every order With his own wicked Janet. ²³ |
|--|---|

For his part, the Colonel patiently tolerated this criticism from the companion of his youth, eventually marrying his Janet and retaining Rob Donn in his employment until the latter's death, when he led the mourners at his funeral.²⁴

¹⁹ App. II, #32, verse 10.

²⁰ See Morrison, pp. xx, 434; Grumble, p. 25.

²¹ Morrison, pp. xxxi, 249-51; Grumble, p. 261.

²² App. II, #100, verse 6.

²³ App. II, #100, verse 10.

²⁴ Grumble, p. 265; Mackay, p. xxvi.

3. POACHING AND THEFT

Like many other Gaelic bards who lived in a rural environment, Rob Donn was extremely fond of deer hunting, regardless of whether it was technically legal. This propensity developed early, while he was still living as a herdboyc with Iain mac Eachainn (see #37), and later resulted in at least two prosecutions and his eventual eviction from his home at Bad na h-Achlais to the coast.²⁵ In two songs (#7 and #43), the bard does not deny his actions but instead attacks the hypocrisy of his accuser, a noted poacher before entering law enforcement, and sanctimoniously advises the local gentry to reflect upon the fifth petition of the Lord's Prayer ("Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us").²⁶ Nor does he express the slightest remorse, adhering to the time-honored proverb: "Breac à linne, slat à coille 's fiadh à fireach — meirle nach do ghabh duine riamh nàir' aiste" (A fish from the pool, a wand from the wood, a deer from the mountain — thefts no man ever was ashamed of).²⁷

The other song in this group (#64) concerns a young woman named Christian MacLeod accused of stealing grain during the harvest on Lord Reay's farm in Balnakeil, probably when the poet was also working there in the 1770s. The poem is structured as a dialogue between Rob Donn and his friend Arthur Cormack, in which the two argue, respectively, the case for the defense and the prosecution. Again, Rob Donn does not directly deny the girl's actions but instead attacks the credibility and motives of her accuser, Lord Reay's grievance, and pleads for compassion to protect her future reputation.²⁸ He also relies on the Biblical story of Ruth gleaning the leftover sheaves in the field of Boaz, arguing that this precedent justifies Kirsty's conduct.²⁹ Although Kirsty may have taken grain because her family was hungry, this is not directly stated; nor do we know how the issue was resolved. In any case, the poem illustrates the economic vulnerability of the tenantry even before the Clearances; it also suggests that — like Walter Scott — Rob Donn could have combined a legal career with his poetry had he been born into different circumstances.

²⁵ Grimble, pp. 160-71.

²⁶ App. II, #43, verse 7.

²⁷ *Gaelic Proverbs*, ed. by Alexander Nicolson (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 1996), p. 76.

²⁸ App. II, #64, verses 9-11.

²⁹ App. II, #64, verses 5-6.

4. OTHER SOCIAL COMMENTARY

“The Hard Task-Mistress” (#37) was composed when Rob Donn was still in his teens living and working as a farm servant in the home of Iain mac Eachainn. The cause of his suffering was Iain’s wife, “an Teine-fionn” (the White Fire), who was exacting in her demands and prone to anger when they were not met. Child labor was no doubt universal except at the highest social ranks; Iain mac Eachainn’s own daughter Isabel worked at the shieling and watched the cows and calves, and the poem mentions another boy who was apprenticed to the smith.³⁰ But even if Rob Donn exaggerated his youthful sufferings, he could hardly wait for the autumn and the liberty of the deer hunt, including the company of the man who later prosecuted him for poaching:

| | |
|--|---|
| Agus Iain Mac Naoghais, Duine suidhichte, teann e, Cha bu bhreugach m’ a thimchioll, Ged a thiomsaichinn rann da. Duine foghainteach, slionsmhor, ’S deas thig crios agus lann da; Sùil chinnteach ri gunna, Do luchd-tuinidh nam beanntan. | And Iain Mac Naoghais A determined, rigid man, There is no flattering him By composing him a verse; A brave, showy man who comes Sporting belt and blade; A sure eye with a gun For the dwellers of the mountains. ³¹ |
|--|---|

The song to James MacCulloch (#30), probably composed in the 1740s, concerns a forced marriage arranged by Lady Reay between her pregnant maid and the bard’s friend the weaver, who allowed himself to be entrapped in a compromising situation to provide a “screen for the sinners of the big house.”³² Both Rob Donn and Rev. MacDonald formally rebuked all parties concerned, although the bard’s language was no doubt more sexually explicit:

| | |
|--|---|
| Ged robh na ceudan turraban Ad chulaidh ’s i air faist, ’S ann ortsa thig na pàisteachain, Gu pàigheadh ’n airgid-bhaist. | Although hundreds were fucking Your piece tethered there, You will be responsible for the children When it comes to paying the baptismal fees. ³³ |
|--|---|

In this case, Rob Donn considered his friend a victim and the woman a nymphomaniac, but this begs the question of the extent to which a young female domestic servant could resist the sexual advances of higher-ranking members and guests of the household and still retain her employment. The weaver’s economic

³⁰ App. II, #24, #44; #37.

³¹ App. II, #37, verse 7.

³² App. II, #30, verse 8; Morrison, pp. 214-17; Grimble, p. 190.

³³ App. II, #30, verse 7 (translation by Grimble).

position is less obvious, but he probably rented his home and depended for much of his income on wool from the Reay estate.

“The Polla Flitting” (#28), while lighter in tone, describes another consequence of economic insecurity, where an elderly tenant was being forced to vacate the house his own hands had built in favor of a new tenant.³⁴ Although the circumstances are not specified, he obviously did not want to leave, and the song describes in dialogue form an escalating situation in which an armed crowd had gathered and violence was threatened.³⁵ Whether or not this was an actual eviction, Rob Donn did not condone the manner in which it was handled, particularly the lack of compassion and neighborliness towards the departing tenant.

The next poem (#66), probably composed about 1750, honors Iain mac Eachainn upon his retirement from his career as a drover. While it is primarily a meditation on aging, the references to Hugh of Bighouse, Iain’s business partner and successor, hint at the changing values of the tacksman class during Rob Donn’s lifetime:

| | |
|--|--|
| Ach, Hùistein, cluich a rèir do chèille, | Play your hand, Hugh, as your good sense directs you. |
| Dèan-sa t’ fheur ri grèin ’n a teas-a, | Make hay while the sun shines brightly-a, |
| ’S cuimhnich nach ’eil neart an daoineibh, | And remember that men possess no powers |
| Nach toir beagan tìom air ais uath’. | That a little time will not strip from them. ³⁶ |

The bard’s true opinion of Bighouse only becomes explicit on another occasion, when Hugh invites him to admire a new coat, and Rob Donn responds:

| | |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| Ach chan eil putan innt’ no toll | There is not a button nor a buttonhole in it |
| Nach do chost bonn do dhuine bochd. | That hasn’t taken money off a poor man. ³⁷ |

“To Dr. Morrison” (#1), which Grimble dates to the 1760s, examines the vicissitudes of patronage, in this case the relationship between a doctor and his aristocratic employer. While it is somewhat reassuring to know that Lord Reay employed a doctor whose services could also be obtained by other members of the community, the poem indicates that his position was just as vulnerable to the whims of his superiors as that of the local farm servants. Although the circumstances are

³⁴ App. II, #28, verses 1, 6.

³⁵ App. II, #28, verse 8.

³⁶ App. II, #66, verse 3.

³⁷ Grimble, p. 124.

not spelled out, Rob Donn implies that the doctor was at fault; in any case, he had no recourse for dismissal.³⁸

The final song, “Briogaiseag” (#76), illustrates both the overall economic dependency of farm servants and the specific disadvantages they suffered from illiteracy. A cowherd and his wife had been dismissed from their employment by Lord Reay’s factor after losing a brown mare in a quagmire, and the wife hired a notary to write a letter of appeal on their behalf. Unfortunately, the letter was illegible and the husband had to go in person to plead his case anyway. Rob Donn was disgusted but evenhanded in condemning all the parties at fault:

| | |
|--|---|
| Is olc a leig thu an làir dhonn, 'N talamh toll a shluigeadh i, Ged a ghabh thu peann is ainnc, A sgrìobhadh cainnt nach tuigeadh iad. Ged bhithinn gun fhearann, gun fhonn, Gun duin' a' sealltuinn idir rium, 'S mi nach earbadh gnothach trom Ris an Nòtair ghalld' aig Briogaiseag. | It's a shame that you let the brown mare Into the hole in the earth that swallowed her, Although you took pen and ink, Writing words they could not understand. If I were homeless, without land, Without anyone at all to support me, I certainly would not entrust serious business To Briogaiseag's Lowland notary. ³⁹ |
|--|---|

Since the reference to a Lowland notary implies a letter written in English, it is no wonder that Gaelic-speaking tenants were motivated to learn to read and write English to protect themselves against abuse.

B. THE MELODIES

1. JACOBITE SONGS

The melody for Rob Donn’s welcome to Prince Charles (#5) appears only in the Munro collection, the same source that Campbell used in *Highland Songs of the Forty-Five*.⁴⁰ The meter is 6/8, the tempo “Gu smearail” (vigorous), the range a ninth, and the scale hexatonic (without a sixth) Aeolian/Dorian in G. It has sixteen bars, with ascending octave leaps in bars 9 and 14; the overall tonality is minor with a double tonic in G minor and F major. Whatever its origins, the tune exemplifies the bard’s frequent practice of setting cheerful and celebratory words to a minor melody.

According to Morrison, the satire on the Jacobite gold-digger (#34), the most lighthearted song in this group, is set to the popular Gaelic air “Faillirinn, illirinn,

³⁸ App. II, #1, verses 1, 4, 7.

³⁹ App. II, #76, verse 2.

⁴⁰ J. L. Campbell, p. 306.

illirinn, O.”⁴¹ This melody, discussed at greater length in Chapter VII, suits Rob Donn’s words if sung at a fairly rapid tempo. The meter is 2/4, the range a ninth, the scale heptatonic Dorian in F, the structure 16 bars, and the tonality a double tonic in F minor and Eb major. In this case it functions as a “service tune” communicating the bard’s poetry through a melody well-known to his listeners.⁴²

According to Morrison, the satire on the double agent at Culloden (#61) is set to the familiar love song “Barbara Allen”.⁴³ Here the compositional process becomes visible, since “John Macallan” must have reminded Rob Donn of his namesake, enabling the bard to structure his song around whichever version of that ubiquitous ballad he happened to know. Undoubtedly this was easier for him to do than for me to reconstruct, but eventually I was able to set his words (in three-line strophic meter) to the Scottish version of the tune in Oswald’s *Caledonian Pocket Companion* by repeating every verse in full.⁴⁴ The meter is 4/4, the range a ninth, the scale hexatonic (without a sixth) Aeolian/Dorian in A, the structure eight bars, and the tonality minor, with a double tonic in A minor and G major. Again, the melody works quite well if the tempo is lively rather than lugubrious, making it another example of Rob Donn’s effective use of a service tune, this time a Lowland one.

“The Black Cassocks” (#45) is by far the weightiest of Rob Donn’s Jacobite songs, an angry political protest and extended lament for a way of life being crushed by government edict. Given its text and context, one would expect it to be paired with a suitably elevated melody, but the evidence for its original tune is sketchy. Undeterred, I have set it to two possible melodies, both of which transport us back instantly to the earlier Gaelic world of elegy and *òrain mhòra*. The first is “Murt Ghlinne Comhann” (#45(1)), already discussed at some length in the previous chapter. This melody suggested itself because the first line of one version of the earlier song, “Làmh Dhè leinn a shaoghail” is easily transformed into Rob Donn’s opening “Làmh Dhè leinne, dhaoine”, and the overall meter fits.⁴⁵ The tune is also a

⁴¹ Morrison, p. 224. My setting is from Macbean, Part II, No. 22.

⁴² See Shapiro, p. 414.

⁴³ Morrison, p. 240.

⁴⁴ *CPC* II, p. 27.

⁴⁵ The text in *Còisir a’ Mhòid 2*, p. 21, begins as quoted above; the text in *Gàir nan Clàrsach*, p. 192, opens with the phrase “Mìle marbhaisg air an t-saoghal!”.

likely candidate because it would have conveyed powerful associations to listeners with its parallels to an earlier massacre of innocent civilians ordered by the Hanoverian government.

The other tune I have set is “Alastair à Gleanna Garadh” (#45(2)), the melody used by Sileas na Ceapaich for her c. 1721 elegy to the chief of that name.⁴⁶ According to the Stewarts, Rob Donn’s poem is sung to “Mi bhi ’g amharc Srath Chuaiche”, a lament composed by Iain Lom for the Marquis of Huntly upon his execution in 1649.⁴⁷ Turner states the reverse, that “Cumha Morair Hunndaidh” is sung to “Oran na’n casagan dubha” by Rob Donn.⁴⁸ Unfortunately, the tune seems not to be printed anywhere with any of these titles, and John Lorne Campbell was unable to find it.⁴⁹ Nevertheless, as Ó Baoill explains:

Mr. John MacInnes informs me that there are many wide variants of this tune, which has been a popular mould for Gaelic poetry from the 18th century till the present day; it seems also to be the only extant tune which will fit poems of this metre [...]. The tune is usually called *Alasdair a Gleanna Garadh*, this poem being apparently the oldest known poem set to it. But Angus Fraser says (*Notes*, p. 68): “other bards both before and after her (Sileas’) day used the air exclusively in heroic or battle songs”.⁵⁰

Since Rob Donn’s song is unquestionably heroic — it calls for another rising — and the meter fits his words, I had no hesitation in setting his poem to this powerful and evocative melody.

My musical setting (#45(2)) is based loosely on the version of the tune used by Anne Lorne Gillies for another song with the same melody, Donnchadh Bàn’s “The Battle of Falkirk.”⁵¹ Although her setting is in speech rhythm (for a different text) without bar lines, I set Rob Donn’s words in a syncopated 6/8 meter. The range is an octave and a fourth, the scale hexatonic (without a sixth) Aeolian/Dorian in E, the structure sixteen bars, and the tonality largely minor with a double tonic in E minor and D major. To my ear, this is one of the greatest Gaelic melodies, and it conveys a sense of forward thrust and menace that is absent in “Murt Ghlinne Comhann”. Also, since Rob Donn used the Glencoe melody elsewhere, one would

⁴⁶ *Sileas MacDonald*, pp. 70-75, 163-65, 240-41.

⁴⁷ Stewart, p. 419; *Òrain Iain Luim*, pp. 48, 254, 377-78.

⁴⁸ Turner, p. 53.

⁴⁹ J. L. Campbell, p. 293.

⁵⁰ *Sileas MacDonald*, p. 241.

⁵¹ A. L. Gillies, p. 175.

expect his editors to have commented if he used it again here. So my vote is for Glengarry, if only on aesthetic grounds.

The last song in this group (#95) is very different in tone, and there is some question whether it was composed after Rob Donn's court appearance for sedition (as Grimble argues) or on another occasion (as Mackay and Morrison state).⁵² In either case, Rob Donn was disgusted with the powers that be, and more than ready to adjourn to the inn for a stiff drink and some musical diversion. According to Morrison, "The Court at Tongue" was sung to "Johnie's Grey Brecks", a lively tune that appears in *CPC*, *SMM*, and a number of fiddle books published in the eighteenth century. It may even have started as a fiddle tune, since the song version in *SMM* as well as the Oswald version and the fiddle version I set (from Aird) all have a two-octave range (beyond the scope of most untrained voices), but it fits Rob Donn's words and can be sung.⁵³ The meter is 2/4, the scale hexatonic (without a seventh) Ionian/Mixolydian in A, the structure 16 bars, and the tonality shifts between B minor, A major and D major.

In short, the melodies for these five Jacobite songs are as different as their texts. Only the first could have been composed by the bard. The others are borrowed from various sources, although only one, "The Black Cassocks", may be drawn from the great treasury of *òrain mhòra* that Rob Donn used for his elegies. This musical eclecticism sets the pattern for the remainder of this chapter, in which the mood and musical character of the songs varies widely despite the serious nature of their subject matter.

2. MARRIAGE AND THE STATUS OF WOMEN

The haunting melody of Rob Donn's song of frustrated marital love, "Tha mi nam chadal, na dùisgear mi" (#93, "I am sleeping, let me not be wakened"), has long antecedents in both Ireland and Scotland, although its earliest datable use was by Sìleas na Ceapaich in her 1715 poem "Do dh' Arm Rìgh Sheumais", obviously based on an earlier poem with the same refrain.⁵⁴ In Ireland, the tune was first published

⁵² Grimble, pp. 95-96; Mackay, p. 240; Morrison, p. 426.

⁵³ *CPC* II, p. 32; *SMM* I, #27; James Aird, *A Selection of Scotch, English, Irish and Foreign Airs*, 6 vols (Glasgow: 1782), I, p. 21.

⁵⁴ *Sìleas MacDonald*, pp. 234-36. Other Scottish Gaelic poets have used the same model and the same chorus. Ailean MacDougall, *Òrain, Marbhrannan, agus Duanachan, Ghaidhealach* (Inverness: 1829), pp. 177-81; Duncan Campbell, *A New Gaelic Song-Book* (Cork: 1798), pp. 58-62.

by Neal in 1724 as “Ta mem ma Chulla ’s na doushe me,” and later by Edward Bunting in 1840 as “Táim i mo chodhladh is ná dúisigh mé”, noted from an Irish harper in 1792.⁵⁵ The earliest published version in Scotland is in Stuart’s 1728 collection of *Musick for Allan Ramsay’s Collection of Scots Songs*, where it is called “Chami mo Chattle”, clearly the same title as the Irish song despite the remarkable variety of Gaelic spellings.⁵⁶ Later in the eighteenth century, Scots versions of the tune were published in the *Caledonian Pocket Companion* as “Cold frostie morning” and in the *Scots Musical Museum* as “Cauld frosty morning.”⁵⁷ Purser and MacFarlane agree that the tune is most likely Irish in origin, and Sileas na Ceapaich could even have learned it from a visiting Irish harper.⁵⁸

Of the two versions specifically connected to Rob Donn’s poem, the earlier appears in the Patrick MacDonald collection under the title “Tha mise fo mhulad”, suspiciously similar to the first line of Rob Donn’s song (“Tha sinn fo mhulad ’s a’ coimhead a chèile”).⁵⁹ It is clearly the same melody, although the musical structure is misleading because the notations for the repeats and the chorus do not match Rob Donn’s text. However, if the two- and three-bar phrases are rearranged, they fit the melody reasonably well, as illustrated by the setting in my MSc thesis.⁶⁰ The other setting, taken by Gunn and MacFarlane from Simon Fraser, is the only one I have included here (mostly because it is more gratifying to sing than my rather pedestrian reconstruction of the MacDonald tune). Presumably Gunn and MacFarlane were not aware of the version in Patrick MacDonald, which for some reason they did not use as a source.

The Fraser/MacFarlane setting is in 3/4 time, marked “Gu trom” (heavily), with a range of an octave and a fifth and a heptatonic scale with a variable seventh, making it Ionian/Mixolydian in E. It contains 32 bars with an AABC structure and the refrain at the end of the A and C sections. The tonality is mostly double tonic in F# minor and E major, but it shifts in bars 17-18 and 21-22 when the D natural

⁵⁵ Purser, notes to *CPC* IV, #16; *Sileas MacDonald*, p. 235; *Bunting’s Ancient Music of Ireland*, ed. by Donal O’Sullivan and Mícheál Ó Súilleabháin (Cork: Cork University Press, 1983), pp. 144-46.

⁵⁶ Purser, notes to *CPC* IV, #16.

⁵⁷ *CPC* IV, #16; *SMM* I, #227.

⁵⁸ Purser, notes to *CPC* IV, #16; Gunn and MacFarlane, pp. 101-02. See *Sileas MacDonald*, pp. 108-15, for references to the harp.

⁵⁹ *HVA*, p. 23, #42.

⁶⁰ Beard, ‘An Ceòl sna h-Òrain’.

changes to D sharp. This may be an embellishment by Simon Fraser, but it is very effective musically, even if it is not the version most likely to have been sung by Rob Donn.

According to Stewart and Mackenzie, “Am Bruadar” or “The Dream” (#23) is set to the well-known melody “Latha siubhal slèibhe dhomh”, which takes its name from an older poem by Lachlan MacKinnon with its own allegorical dream sequence.⁶¹ While this model could have appealed to Rob Donn because he wanted to use a similar literary device, its principal attraction must have been its powerful melody, which enabled him to make a dramatic proto-feminist statement on the topic of gender relations, which contemporary male poets usually relegated to humor and satire. The melody exists in two variants, which are similar enough in rhythm, cadences, melodic contour and tonality that they probably diverged orally: #23(1) is the version of Rob Donn’s song from Munro, and #23(2) the version of “Latha siubhal” from Patrick MacDonald. Since the Munro version is an inferior setting with octave leaps on weak beats and other features that detract from the sweep of the melody, it seems more likely that Rob Donn actually sang his song to something like the version in Patrick MacDonald (in 4/4 meter with a range of a tenth, a heptatonic Aeolian scale in D, and a double tonic in D minor and C major). Perhaps Munro had a musically challenged informant; this is not the only instance in which an alternate setting, or even another tune, is more convincing than Munro’s.

The next song, “Òran nan Suiridheach” or “The Young Lovers” (#32) is set to Rob Donn’s favorite service tune, “Lochaber No More”. This melody, also known as “Lord Ronald My Son”, appears in virtually every eighteenth- and nineteenth-century collection of Scottish folk songs, some of which are listed in the footnote below.⁶² Rob Donn also used it for “Glen Golly” (#36) and his song about Donald Fraser’s dog (#87), so it was obviously versatile. It has sixteen bars in 3/4 time, a “Moderato” tempo, a range of an octave and a fourth, a hexatonic scale (without a fourth) Mixolydian in F, and a double tonic in G and F major.

⁶¹ Stewart, p. 41; *Sàr-Obair*, p. 194; *An Lasair*, pp. 28-37, 367-68, 375-77.

⁶² In *AF* (p. 58), it appears under the title “Òran na Suiridhe”. Other examples of the same melody include *CPC* II, p. 15; William MacGibbon, *A Collection of Scots Tunes* (Edinburgh: 1746), p. 1; *SMM* I, #95 & #327; and *HVA*, p. 17, #112.

The melody for the song “To the Poet’s Daughters” (#39) appears only in Munro, with a vocable chorus that is unusual for Rob Donn; it is short, just eight bars, and repeats for the verse and the chorus. The vocables suggest a waulking song, and while neither Morag MacLeod nor I was able to identify it, it may never have been recorded anywhere else.⁶³ Perhaps he used a waulking song because he was contemplating the marriage prospects between his daughters and the sons of the weaver and the amount of cloth they would have to work if such a union came to pass. The tune is in 6/8 time, the tempo “Gu h-eutrom” (lightly), the range a ninth, and the scale hexatonic (without a sixth) Aeolian/Dorian in E, with a double tonic in E minor and D major.

According to Morrison, “The Three Janets” (#100), is sung to “Hielan’ Donnul kissed his Katie”.⁶⁴ This tune appears in nineteenth-century fiddle collections and the Greig-Duncan collection, although both these sources are post-eighteenth century.⁶⁵ If Rob Donn actually used this tune, it might explain his reference (in verse 4) to “the grieve named Donald”, even though his wife was not named Janet. The version I have set (from Lowe) is an eight-bar strathspey divided into chorus and verse, in 4/4 time with an octave range and a heptatonic scale in F major. Since Rob Donn’s song is from the 1770s, his use of such a melody could reflect a period when fiddle tunes in major keys had spread to the far northwest mainland to join older modal reels and double-tonic pipe tunes.

To review, the five songs in this group include two set to *òrain mhòra*, “Tha mi nam chadal” (#93) and “Latha siubhal slèibhe dhomh” (#23), one set to “Lochaber No More” (#32), one apparently set to a waulking song (#39), and one set to a strathspey (#100).

3. POACHING AND THEFT

Although Rob Donn’s two poaching songs cannot be dated based on textual evidence alone, their contrasting musical settings suggest that #7 concerns an earlier offense when the bard still had a sense of humor on the subject, and #43 depicts a second prosecution when he was threatened with eviction or more serious

⁶³ Email from Morag MacLeod to Ellen Beard dated 25 March 2014.

⁶⁴ Morrison, p. 249.

⁶⁵ Joseph Lowe, *Lowe’s Collection of Reels, Strathspeys and Jigs* (Edinburgh: Patterson & Roy, 1844), III, p. 9; *Greig-Duncan*, VIII, pp. 250-51, 402-03.

punishment. The tune for “To John MacKay” (#7), found only in Munro, is in 2/4 time, marked “Moderato”, the range a ninth, the scale hexatonic (without a seventh) Ionian/Mixolydian in A, and the overall tonality in A major. Because the poem is in three-line strophic meter, it is set to music in four 7-bar phrases with one metrical stress per bar, with an AABC structure and a total of 28 bars. This asymmetrical structure plus the dotted rhythms give the song a rollicking quality as if the bard’s tongue is firmly in his cheek.

The other poaching song, “To Lord Reay’s Factor” (#43), begins with the same chorus as the elegy “To Ewen” (#77). This is a very lugubrious melody, in the Dorian mode with the “funeral march” rhythm, and its use here may imply that it was composed about the same time (when the melody was fresh in the bard’s mind) and that he was now more worried about his predicament (unless, of course, he was merely being sarcastic). As noted in Appendix II, Rob Donn’s editors disagree on the date of this song and the date of his actual eviction for poaching.⁶⁶ But since “To Ewen” was composed in 1754, and this poem thanks Iain mac Eachainn (who died in 1757) for coming to the poet’s aid, the tune itself adds to the weight of the evidence dating the poem to the mid-1750s. While this type of musical dating cannot be conclusive, it is useful in the absence of more reliable information because it is consistent with the way Rob Donn often composed, working from a sort of free association with known tunes and texts.

“Christian MacLeod” (#64), the dialogue song about the girl accused of stealing grain, is linked with two different melodies. The first (#64(1)) is from Munro, eight bars in 4/4 time with the recurrent “funeral march” rhythm, marked “Moderato”, with a range of an octave and a fourth. The scale is heptatonic Aeolian in D and the tonality double tonic in D minor and C major. Morrison identifies another tune called “A chinn donn aluinn”, apparently the melody in the Eliza Ross manuscript titled “A nighean chinn duibh aluin.”⁶⁷ Since this is a lovely melody and fits Rob Donn’s words, I have set it as #64(2). It is also in 4/4 time, the range a ninth, the scale hexatonic (without a second) Aeolian in F, and the tonality double tonic in F# minor and E major. While the Ross melody seems related to one

⁶⁶ App. II, #43, note 1.

⁶⁷ *ER*, p. 88, #14.

collected by Margaret Fay Shaw in South Uist with an identical chorus and some parallel melodic traits (such as frequent descending fifths), it has no obvious relationship to the tune collected by Munro.⁶⁸ In this situation, it is difficult to say which tune came first. The Munro melody carries one of Rob Donn's signatures, although for that very reason it could have been borrowed later from another song with the "funeral march" rhythm. On the other hand, Rob Donn could have heard the Eliza Ross song from a Skye drover, and its appealing melody would have better served his propaganda purpose in defending the reputation and extolling the charms of a young woman than a tune that sounded like a dirge.

To summarize, all three songs in this group have melodies collected by Munro that could have been composed by Rob Donn. "Christian MacLeod" also has an unrelated melody from the Gaelic tradition that is better suited to its text.

4. OTHER SOCIAL COMMENTARY

According to Morrison, "The Hard Task-Mistress" (#37) was sung to the tune "Gillean an Fhèilidh" ("The Lads of the Kilt"), a sprightly tune that appears in a number of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century instrumental collections as well as the Eliza Ross manuscript, from which my setting is taken.⁶⁹ As Peter Cooke notes, the words that gave their name to the tune date only from the 1790s, and the earliest printed version of the melody appeared in 1775.⁷⁰ Since Rob Donn's song was composed much earlier, about 1730, he probably used a version of the tune in oral circulation by another name, perhaps a pipe jig. The tune in my setting is eight bars in 6/8 time, the range a ninth, the scale hexatonic (without a seventh) Ionian/Mixolydian in G, and the tonality double tonic in A minor and G major.

The next two songs (#28 and #30) use the same melody, "Mrs MacLeod of Raasay", a lively reel which is deservedly popular as a fiddle tune, a pipe tune, and two puirt-à-beul, "Mac a' Phi" and "Stad a Mhàiri Bhanarach".⁷¹ Rob Donn

⁶⁸ Margaret Fay Shaw, *Folksongs and Folklore of South Uist* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 118.

⁶⁹ Morrison, p. 237; *ER*, p. 83, #3. It also appears in Wm. Gunn, p. 84; and *Gesto*, p. 117, among others.

⁷⁰ *ER*, p. 28, #3.

⁷¹ Morrison, pp. 163, 214. *Ceòl nam Fèis*, ed. by Valerie Bryan (Portree: Fèisean nan Gàidheal, 1996), p. 64, calls it "[a] very old pipe reel, composer unknown" related to the two puirt. Fiddle settings include *Edinburgh Repository of Music* (Edinburgh: c. 1818), I, p. 6; and George Cameron,

probably composed both poems about the same time, perhaps in the late 1740s when he was still living at Bad na h-Achlais near Polla (#28) and had to leave the strath to visit James MacCulloch in Ceannabeinne (#30).⁷² To my ear, this jaunty tune is better suited to the lighter satire of “The Polla Flitting” (#28) than the deep anger and condemnation voiced in “James MacCulloch” (#30), but the latter may be another example of a familiar melody used as a service tune when it was fresh in Rob Donn’s mind. The tune itself is an eight-bar reel, in 4/4 time with an octave range, whose most notable feature is the repeated pattern of octave leaps in bars 1, 3, and 5. The scale is hexatonic (without a fourth) but otherwise major with a sharpened seventh, so it could be played on the pipes in the key of G. My setting is in D, with a double tonic on E minor and D major.

The song in the voice of the aging Iain mac Eachainn (#66) is found only in Munro and thus could have been composed by the bard himself to honor his patron’s retirement from his career as a drover around 1750. The meter is 6/8, the tempo “Gumuladach”, the range a tenth, and the scale hexatonic (without a fourth) major in D, including a single sharpened seventh. This is the same pattern Peter Cooke found in the Eliza Ross manuscript, which contains several examples of essentially pentatonic melodies with one “exotic” note.⁷³ The structure is sixteen bars, AABC, with a double tonic in E minor and D major. To my ear, the frequent repeated notes (in bars 1, 3, 5, 7, 9, and 11) and the steady rhythm (alternating crotchets and quavers, long and short) create a distinct impression of the halting, plodding footsteps of an old man, mentioned expressly in the poem (“S ged a dh’fhàs mo chasan mall”/ “Although my steps have become slow”), which could support an inference that the bard composed the music and the words together.

“To Dr. Morrison” (#1) dates to the 1760s and appears only in the Munro collection, so the tune was either composed by the bard or borrowed from an unknown source. The meter is 6/8, the tempo “Moderato”, the range a ninth, and the scale heptatonic in Eb major, with an implied “classical” harmony utilizing the tonic, dominant, and subdominant chords. Despite its sobering message about the

Cameron’s Selection of Violin Music (Glasgow: 1854), I, p. 47. A pipe version appears in Wm. Gunn (p. 65) under the title “Gille nan car” or “The Deceitful Lover”, which could be an older name.

⁷² See App. II, #30, verse 3 and note 1.

⁷³ Cooke, ‘Some Thoughts’, p. 111.

vicissitudes of patronage, it is a cheerful little tune with an 8-bar chorus and a 16-bar verse, a good example of a circular melody that ends on a note other than the tonic (here the fifth, Bb).⁷⁴ The melody also features several descending intervals of a fifth or sixth (in bars 1, 5, 10, and 17), which could be deliberate musical illustrations of the doctor's metaphorical fall from grace, compared to tripping and falling on the doorstep in verse 3 of the poem.⁷⁵ Again, this provides some evidence that Rob Donn composed the words and the music simultaneously.

According to Morrison, "Briogaiseag" (#76), the last song in this group, is sung to the tune "Fear nan casan caola".⁷⁶ This is a lively 16-bar pipe reel and *port-à-beul* that appears in William Gunn and Lamb, the latter of whom connects it to a tune in MacGlashan (1786) with the title "O But Ye Be Merry".⁷⁷ I have used Lamb's setting (transposed down): the meter is 4/4, the range a ninth, and the scale heptatonic Mixolydian in D; the tonality shifts between D, C and G major. The melody is a perfect vehicle for Rob Donn's satire, showing how such tunes could be a continued source of inspiration within a living oral tradition.

To review, the six songs in this group include two from Munro that could have been composed by the bard (#1 and #66), two set to "Mrs MacLeod of Raasay" (#28 and #30), and two set to other instrumental tunes with Gaelic titles, "Gilleán an Fhèilidh" (#37) and "Fear nan Casan Caola" (#76).

C. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

Because the songs in this chapter were chosen for their value as social history, there was no reason to expect any particular musical similarities, and that has proven to be the case. Overall, the nineteen songs include three probably set to *òrain mhòra*, six that appear only in the Munro collection, four apparently set to Gaelic song melodies, two apparently set to Scots song melodies, and four apparently set to fiddle tunes.⁷⁸ Each of these groups will be discussed below.

⁷⁴ See Glen, p. 2.

⁷⁵ App. II, #1, verse 3.

⁷⁶ Morrison, p. 346.

⁷⁷ Wm. Gunn, p. 52; *Puirt-à-Beul*, p. 90, #64.

⁷⁸ In this as well as subsequent chapters, it should be kept in mind that all descriptions of tune sources by cultural, linguistic or instrumental origin are highly tentative, based on easily available information such as tune titles and settings in printed publications, as well as tune histories compiled

Beginning with the *òrain mhòra*, it would not be surprising if Rob Donn's angry Jacobite diatribe, "The Black Cassocks" (#45), was set to a heroic melody with well-known antecedents in the Gaelic tradition, a description that fits both my settings, "Murt Ghlinne Comhann" and "Alasdair à Gleanna Garadh". Perhaps more surprising is that his two long poems sympathizing with the plight of married women (#23 and #93) are also set to Gaelic *òrain mhòra*, "Latha siubhal slèibhe dhomh" and "Tha mi nam chadal" respectively. The only material difference is that the last two are not laments, a distinction replicated in Rob Donn's own subject matter. But all four are great music with impressive poetic and musical pedigrees within the Gaelic tradition, so there must be a reason that Rob Donn chose them.

In my view, that reason is suggested simply by the length of the poems — "The Black Cassocks" (#45) is 128 lines, "Oh! I sleep and wake me not" (#93) is 112 lines, and "The Dream" (#23) is 200 lines, Rob Donn's longest poem. This allows us to conclude that the bard had something important he wanted to say on each of these subjects, something he thought deserved extended poetic exposition, and something he thought deserved a suitably elevated and dramatic melody. However, while "The Black Cassocks" is regularly anthologized as an example of Jacobite verse, the two poems about women have been largely ignored in modern literary criticism, except by Grimble, who recognized the feminist tendencies in "Oh! I sleep and wake me not".⁷⁹

The melodies for six songs appear only in Munro's collection and thus could in theory have been composed by Rob Donn. They include the Jacobite song welcoming the Prince (#5), both poaching songs (#7 & #43), and the songs for Iain mac Eachainn (#66), the bard's daughters (#39), and Dr. Morrison (#1). Unlike some of the elegies, these songs have few common musical features — five have a range of a ninth, four are in 6/8 time, and four use a double tonic; three are basically minor and three are basically major; three have choruses and three do not. Their

by earlier scholars. No claims are made about the ultimate origin of any of the tunes Rob Donn borrowed.

⁷⁹ Thomson discusses "The Black Cassocks" in *Introduction to Gaelic Poetry*, pp. 195-96, and includes it in his anthology, *Gaelic Poetry in the Eighteenth Century*, pp. 111-17. Black's anthology *An Lasair* includes a love song, an elegy and a satire by Rob Donn (pp. 142-45, 234-37, 280-85). Grimble discusses "The Black Cassocks" on pages 89-95 and "Oh! I sleep and wake me not" on pages 33, 49-53, and 201.

subject matter and style also vary considerably, although four of the six concern the bard or his family.

Examining the Munro songs individually, the only possible musical “signature” in the song to the Prince (#5) is its octave leaps, a dramatic feature Rob Donn favored which may illustrate his own vocal range and agility. The first poaching song (#7) uses asymmetrical 7-bar phrases to fit the 3-line strophic meter while preserving the forward motion of the song; this is not unique but may be unusual enough to provide some support for inferring the simultaneous composition of the words and the music.⁸⁰ The second poaching song (#43) uses the same melody and funeral march rhythm as the mock-elegy “To Ewen” (#77), so if Rob composed one, he must have composed the other. The song to his daughters (#39) takes the form of a waulking song, complete with vocable chorus, suggesting that it could be an actual waulking song from eighteenth-century Durness Parish. Since Rob Donn set at least one other waulking song (#6, “Hè, hoirionnan, o”) whose chorus is not attested in *Hebridean Folksongs*, it may be that some waulking song melodies were local or regional during the eighteenth century when women did not travel as much as men. In the other songs, the evidence for original composition lies in the possible word-painting described earlier — the descending intervals depicting the doctor’s fall from grace (#1), and the repeated notes echoing the halting footsteps of the aging drover (#66). None of this proves that Rob Donn composed any of these tunes, of course, but it illustrates the type of evidence that may be relevant when considering oral composition in a historical context where the composer is not available for interview.

The four Gaelic song melodies are “Faillirinn, illirinn” (#34), “A nighean chinn duibh alainn” (#64(2)), “Gilleann an Fhèilidh” (#37) and “Fhear nan Casan Caola” (#76); Rob Donn also used four other tunes that seem to be instrumental in origin (#28, 30, 95 and 100). Most were used for satires; the only exception is “Christian MacLeod” (#64(2)), which may have used a love song melody to create sympathy for the girl accused of stealing grain. The two Scots song melodies, “Lochaber no more” (#32) and “Barbara Allan” (#61), were well-known service tunes that Rob Donn used on more than one occasion.

⁸⁰ For other examples, see *Gàir nan Clàrsach*, pp. 101, 135, 163.

In conclusion, the nineteen tunes in this chapter include twelve that are hexatonic and seven heptatonic; eleven in duple time (2/4 or 4/4) and eight in triple time (6/8 or 3/4); eleven with major thirds and eight with minor thirds; and three-quarters (14 of 19) with a double tonic construction. Otherwise, the melodies show that Rob Donn drew from a wide variety of musical sources, vocal and instrumental, Gaelic and pan-Scottish, and may have composed as many as six of the nineteen tunes. This pattern will be fairly typical of the songs in the remaining chapters, including the next, on songs of love, courtship and weddings.

CHAPTER VII. LOVE, COURTSHIP AND WEDDINGS

The twenty-seven songs in this chapter concern love, courtship and weddings; marriage itself and extramarital sex are treated elsewhere. The songs are divided into three groups: (1) ten love songs in the voice of the lover; (2) eleven courtship songs in the voice of the poet; and (3) six wedding songs. The love songs are the most personal, ranging in tone from youthful ardor to bitter disappointment; the courtship songs show the bard at work dispensing unsolicited advice to the lovelorn; and the wedding songs are predominantly humorous and satirical. Overall, the texts demonstrate Rob Donn's abiding interest in individual human beings and their relationships, and his empathy, insight and sound judgment towards men and women alike.

A. THE POEMS

1. LOVE SONGS

The ten love songs include four involving Rob Donn himself, three in the voices of other men, and three in the voices of women. The best known are the three love songs he composed for his first love, Anna Morrison, who married another while he was away taking a drove of cattle to Crieff, probably in the late 1730s. The first of these (#35) is a charming lyric that Morrison calls "A Drover to his Sweetheart":

Ged is socrach mo leabaidh,
Cha 'n e 'n codal bh' air m' ùigh,
'S tric mo smuaintean a' gluasad,
Do 'n Taobh Tuath leis a' ghaoith;
'S mòr a b' annsa bhi mar-riut,

Ann an gleannan nan laogh,
Na bhi cunntadh nan Sàileach
Ann am pàirceachan Chraoibh.

Although my bed is comfortable,
I did not want to sleep;
Often my thoughts steal
On the wind towards the northern Highlands.
How much better I should prefer to be beside
you
In the little glen of the calves,
Than to be counting the Sàl cattle
In the parks of Crieff.¹

As I have discussed elsewhere in more detail, this early poem was modeled textually and musically on a song composed by Archibald MacDonald, An Ciaran Mabach, probably in the 1680s, titled "Air dha bhith uair an Dùn Èideann."²

¹ App. II, #35, verse 1.

² Ellen L. Beard, "Textual and Musical Affinities in Rob Donn's "Ged is Socrach mo Leabaidh", *Rannsachadh na Gàidhlig 2012* (Glasgow: Glasgow University Celtic and Gaelic, forthcoming); see *Gàir nan Clàrsach*, pp. 176-81, 232.

The next song (#78), “Is trom leam an àiridh” (Sad is the Sheiling), is Rob Donn’s most popular love song, expressing his disappointment and frustration upon learning that the fair Anna had married another in his absence. Despite its obvious phallic imagery, illustrated below, the song is still sung regularly in the men’s solo competitions at the Mòd:

Anna bhuidhe ’n Dhòmhnuille, na ’m b’ eol duit mo nì,
 ’S e do ghaol gun bhi pàight’ leag a mhàn uam mo chli;
 Tha e dhomh à t’ fhianuis, cho gnìomhach ’s ’n uair chì,—
 Diogalladh, ’s a’ smùsach, ’s gur ciùrrt tha mo chridh’.
 Air gach trà, ’s mi ann an strì,
 A’ feuchainn r’ a àicheadh, ’s e fàs rium mar chraoibh.

Fair Anna, Donald’s daughter, if you knew my condition,
 It is unrequited love for you that deprived me of my strength.
 It remains as lively with me as in your presence,
 Teasing and provoking, wounding me to the heart.
 At every hour I am in turmoil
 Trying to deny it, while it grows in me like a tree.³

In the third Anna Morrison song (#86), the bard uses satire to recover from his broken heart by teasing Anna about her multiple suitors, each of whom is identified by an initial:

Bha I, N, D; bha E, two *Angus*,
 U, R, O, gu *poly gamos*.

There were I, N, D; there was E, two of Angus,
 U, R, O, polygamously.⁴

This verse shows that Rob Donn — although uniformly described as illiterate — had some familiarity with letters and their sounds. The initial “I” probably referred to Iain, or John Murray, the man Anna married.⁵ “N” could have been Neacal or Niall, “D” could have been Daibhidh or Dòmhnall, “E” could have been Eachann, “U” could have been Uilleam or Ùisdean, and “R” was the poet Rob. “O” is less obvious; it could have referred to an Owen (although the Gaelic spelling is usually Eòghainn). “Two Angus” is in English, presumably to rhyme with “polygamous”, a word he must have learned from Rev. MacDonald or someone else with a superior formal education. Part of this educational mystery may be dispelled by an entry in Mackechnie’s *Catalogue of Gaelic Manuscripts* that refers to a now-lost manuscript by the Rev. Dr. Alexander Irvine (1773-1824) stating that Rob Donn “Went to

³ App. II, #78, verse 3; ACG, *Òrain Aon Neach* (2008), p. 8.

⁴ App. II, #86, verse 8.

⁵ Grimble, p. 23.

Ereboll school.”⁶ If this is correct, and he attended just long enough to begin learning his letters, this brief taste of formal education may help to explain this poem and his other comments on the advantages of literacy.⁷

Rob Donn probably also composed a love song to his wife Janet before their marriage (#38), although oddly none of his editors identifies it as such. Using a refrain based on the waulking song “Dhèanainn sùgradh”, the verses praise her beauty, list her many suitors, and protest her unwillingness to choose among them, echoing the bard’s last song to Anna Morrison. The first and last verses are as follows:

| | |
|---|---|
| Gum bheil Seònaid bòidheach, greannair, Co nach dùraigeadh bhi ’n gleann leath’, Faileas fithich air a ceann-dubh, Bràghad fionn a ’s gille na ’n gruth. | Janet is lovely and charming, Who wouldn’t want to be in the glen with her? Image of the raven on her black hair, Pale throat whiter than the curds. |
| Bha mi uair air bharail bargain, ’S tha mi nis air call na dh’ earb mi; Tha mi fèin a’ gabhail farbhais, Gur e dath dearg a ’s feàrr na dath dubh. | I once expected a marriage contract, And I have now lost what I relied on; For my part, I have concluded That the color red is preferable to black. ⁸ |

Eventually, of course, Janet accepted the bard’s proposal, and there is no reason to believe that the song was addressed to anyone else.

The next pair of early love songs was composed in the voices of Christine Brodie, daughter of the minister in Eddrachillis, and Hugh MacKay, son of Iain mac Eachainn, when Hugh left to seek his fortune in Jamaica.⁹ Hugh’s poem (#98) expresses his regret and sorrow at leaving Christine, and her poem (#17) expresses her love and sense of loss, as well as her determination to hide her feelings for the sake of her reputation. But her final verse suggests that Rob Donn was doubtful about their future prospects:

| | |
|---|---|
| Tha mi ’g athchuing’ ort bhi tigh’nn, Mu ’n dean a’ ghrian milleadh ort, Mu ’m faigh thu biadh ni tinneas duit, ’S mu ’m faic thu òigh nì mire riut. | I am praying that you will come back Before the sun harms you, Before you take food that makes you ill, And before you see a girl who flirts with you. ¹⁰ |
|---|---|

Unlike the songs just discussed, which date to the period around 1740, the remaining love songs cannot be dated. Three (#6, #40 and #90) involve young

⁶ Mackechnie, I, p. 342.

⁷ See App. II, #48 & #76.

⁸ App. II, #38, verses 1 & 10.

⁹ Grimble, pp. 57-62.

¹⁰ App. II, #17, verse 4.

couples whose desire to marry is being obstructed by relatives. “A Maid to her Lover” (#6) is in the voice of an angry young woman whose beloved threatens to go to sea if her father continues to prevent their marriage, and contains a series of place names describing landmarks for sailors.¹¹ “To a Young Friend” (#40) is largely in the voice of a despondent young man, but also includes contains a short dialogue between the girl and her father where she tries unsuccessfully to obtain his consent.¹² In “The Inconstant Lover” (#90), narrated by the two young people in turn, it is the man’s relatives who obstruct the marriage by sending him to Holland, leaving the milkmaid to lament her abandonment.¹³ In each case, the bard clearly sympathizes with the young lovers rather than their parents.

The last love song (#18), “Nigheanag a’ Chòta Bhuidhe” (The Lass with the Yellow Petticoat), seems to be based on an older song already in circulation in Gaelic and Scots. According to MacFarlane:

A song with the title ‘Nighean donn a’ chota bhuidhe’ is well known in the West Highlands. ‘Lassie wi the Yellow Coatie’ was at one time current in the Lowlands.¹⁴

Morrison makes a similar remark:

A very inferior version of this song was published in Marion Cameron’s Collection in 1805. Rob Donn was probably acquainted with that version, and improved it as we have it here.¹⁵

This apparently refers to the Gaelic text first published by Margaret Cameron in 1785 with words similar to Rob Donn’s but six verses rather than nine.¹⁶ The antiquity of the words is attested by the reference to the clàrsach, an instrument mentioned nowhere else by Rob Donn and described by Patrick MacDonald in 1784 as “seldom heard” for “upwards of a century.”¹⁷ Although versions with Scots words appear in the Greig-Duncan collection, one dated to 1816, they contain no comparable references to harps or place names ranging from Lewis to Edinburgh, suggesting that the Gaelic words are older and suffered from downward social

¹¹ App. II, #6, verses 6-10.

¹² App. II, #40, verses 7-10.

¹³ App. II, #90, verse 3 & note.

¹⁴ Gunn and MacFarlane, p. 101.

¹⁵ Morrison, p. 203 n.1.

¹⁶ Margaret Cameron, *Orain Nuadh Ghaidhealach* (Edinburgh: 1785), pp. 64-65.

¹⁷ Cameron, p. 65; *HVA*, p. 6.

mobility when translated into Scots.¹⁸ Rob Donn’s reworking of an older text also explains his departure from his usual satirical tone and practice of referring specifically — often by name — to particular individuals and incidents. Instead, the words here are both sentimental and generic.

2. COURTSHIP

The eleven songs in this group all speak in the poet’s voice. While only two can be dated, most seem to represent the bard as an experienced married man giving the benefit of his accumulated wisdom to the next generation. Five of the songs are directed to young men, four are addressed to women (including two of mature years), and two address couples. From the standpoint of social history, these poems indicate that most people married young and that widows and widowers generally remarried, sometimes fairly quickly. Rob Donn accepted this, although occasionally he took the position that an individual would be better off remaining single if the intended partner was someone he considered beyond the pale.

Of the five courtship songs concerning young men, the earliest (#81) is a satire composed in the 1740s about William Bain’s son, apparently a farm servant depicted as running from house to house throughout the MacKay country seeking a wife among the daughters of the local gentry. In “The Young Man and the Widow” (#69), Rob Donn encourages a young man to court a widow (of unspecified age), offering to accompany him on a visit and suggesting how welcome his suit would be:

| | |
|---|---|
| <p>’S duine sona, saoghalt’ thu, Mu ’n e ’s gu dean i taobh riut, Cha bhi dad do shaothair ort, Ach sìneadh ris ’n a àm.</p> | <p>You are a lucky, worldly man, Regarding what she will do by your side, It will be no effort for you Except extending it at the time.¹⁹</p> |
|---|---|

The next three songs strike a more serious note. One (#2) replicates Rob Donn’s own situation as an impecunious young drover and advises another Rob to persevere in seeking his own *Seònaid* despite their lack of material wealth:

| | |
|--|---|
| <p>Ma ni thu caochladh o ’n tè a ’s caomh leat, Cha bhi thu sìthicht’ ged fhaigh thu meall;</p> <p>Cuir seòl air bargan, ’s bi beò an earbsa, Gu ’n tig an sealbh air a dhara ceann.</p> | <p>If you turn away from the one you love, You will be unhappy even with a pile of goods;</p> <p>Arrange an engagement, and live in trust That good fortune will come thereafter.²⁰</p> |
|--|---|

¹⁸ *Greig-Duncan*, IV, pp. 380-83, 566-67.

¹⁹ App. II, #69, verse 1.

²⁰ App. II, #2, verse 5.

This advice — to marry for love not for cattle — is repeated in songs #85 and #91, and Rob Donn even offers to accompany a young man named Angus (#91) to speak to the minister and to hunt and fish and gather eggs with him to obtain the wherewithal to start his married life.²¹ The same theme appears in two songs involving young women. In a satire Morrison calls “The Grey Heifer Tocher” (#60), the bard roundly condemns a young man who insulted a girl by rejecting a marriage contract because he wanted another yearling calf added to her dowry. Likewise, in “The Herd and the Weaver” (#33), a late poem dating to about 1770, he advises a girl she would be better off with the red-haired cattleherd than the weaver with his twenty cows.

The poet also addresses with considerable sympathy and sensible counsel the situation of older women still hoping to marry. “The Old Maid to Her Lovers” (#10) speaks in the voice of a woman who mourns the loss of her youthful charms and regrets that she refused to consider a non-literate spouse in her younger days. “Marion and her Lover” (#88), a parody of a popular love song, advises its subject in the strongest possible terms not to consider marrying her lazy, drunken, disgusting suitor:

| | |
|---|--|
| <p>A Mhairiread, cha chòir dhuit Bhi gòrach no fiata, Tha marbhaist ni 's leòir dhuit, An còmhnuidh 'g ad iarraidh; Ni 's araidhe cha 'n eòl domh, 'S ni 's bòidhche cha b' fhiach thu, Na 'n gille dubh ciar-dhubh, Tha triall 'n ad ghaoith.</p> | <p>Marion, it is not seemly for you To be foolish or impulsive. You have more resources than you need, The dwelling you desire; I know of nothing you deserve less — As to propriety or beauty — Than the dark, black-haired lad Who travels in your wake.²²</p> |
|---|--|

Unfortunately, we have no way of knowing whether any of these persons actually followed Rob Donn’s advice or instead resented it and did precisely the opposite.

The last two courtship poems involve couples whose plans Rob Donn heartily endorsed. “The Little Couple” (#84) is a gently humorous love song congratulating a man and woman who were both so short that their offspring could easily be lost in the grass. “The Widower and the Old Maid” (#63) praises the impending marriage of an older pair, the best dairymaid and the best hunter between

²¹ App. II, #91, verses 7-9.

²² App. II, #88, verse 2. For Rob Donn’s model, see Watson, pp. 50-52.

Tongue and Stoer.²³ Even if this was a marriage of convenience, Rob Donn does not condemn it, perhaps because he respected both parties:

| | |
|--|---|
| 'S e mo bheachd air bhur bargan, | My opinion of your agreement |
| Gu 'm bi e sealbhach gu leòir, | Is that it will be quite prosperous. |
| Cha tig gainne gu bràth oirbh, | No shortage will ever reach you |
| Do dh' ìm, do chàise no do dh' fheòil. | Of butter, of cheese or of meat. |
| 'S e sud turas is ciallaich', | That is the most prudent course |
| Rinn duine riamh a bha pòsd', | Ever embarked upon by one who has been married, |
| 'N ath bhean thèid e a' dh' iarruidh, | That the next wife he seeks |
| Gun bhi neo-chiallach, no òg. | Is neither lacking in prudence nor young. ²⁴ |

In general, then, Rob Donn's position was that couples should be free to marry for love unless one had a serious character defect. In that case, he felt absolutely no reluctance to meddle by publicly advising the innocent party to beware. This is consistent with the view of social historians that marriage for love was more common in the lower than the higher ranks of eighteenth-century Scottish society:

Although we know too little about the expectations and realities of married life among the lower classes, there are tantalising hints that love was an important ingredient. For the upper ranks, romantic love as a factor in marriage appears to have been rare, but not unknown.²⁵

But since the 74 references in the book chapter just quoted contain no Gaelic material at all, social historians would be well advised to read Rob Donn before lamenting their lack of sources regarding married life among the lower classes.²⁶

3. WEDDINGS

The undisputed masterpiece among Rob Donn's humorous wedding songs is #16, "Briogais Mhic Ruaraidh" (Macrory's Breeks), composed at the wedding of Isabel MacKay in 1747. As Morrison explains:

This, one of the sprightliest songs in the language, was composed almost on the spur of the moment. The occasion was the wedding in Musal of "Isobal Nic Aoidh," daughter of John Mackay (MacEachainn) and John, son of Kenneth Sutherland of Cnocbreac. The poet had not been invited to the wedding, as he was not on the best of terms with the family at the time. Being missed by the guests, he was sent for to Bad-na-h-Achlais, where he then resided. Conversing with the messenger by the way, he learned that

²³ App. II, #63, verses 1-2.

²⁴ App. II, #63, verse 4.

²⁵ Deborah A. Symonds, 'Death, Birth and Marriage in Early Modern Scotland', in *A History of Everyday Life in Scotland, 1600 to 1800*, pp. 83-107 (p. 99).

²⁶ Symonds, pp. 103-107.

Macrory had lost his “breeks.” When, shortly after his arrival he was called upon for a song, he gave this as it now stands.²⁷

As the bard pokes fun at various guests in turn for their possible roles in the crime, the narrative creates a vivid picture of the breeks dancing merrily away with their owner in frantic pursuit. The chorus is as follows:

| | |
|---|---|
| An d’ fhidir no ’n d’ fhairich, no ’n cuala sibh, | Did you divine or detect or hear |
| Cò idir thug briogais Mhìc Ruairidh leis? | Who on earth carried off the trousers of Rory’s son? |
| Bha bhriogais ud againn an àm dol a chadal, | Those trousers were here when we went to sleep, |
| ’S ’n uair thàinig a’ mhaduinn cha d’ fhuairidh i. | And when morning came they were gone. ²⁸ |

Rob Donn also composed at least three shorter humorous songs (#15, #52 and #62) describing other weddings, the last of which (#62) can be dated to about 1770.²⁹ Since none is particularly memorable, they may represent only the residue in print of a much larger body of occasional verse he was invited or expected to compose at every wedding he attended, comparable in function to the toast at a wedding supper.

The last two songs (#47 and #54) describe a wedding that did not happen — in fact, a wedding that did not happen twice! Isabel was engaged to a man named Iain Mackenzie but in love with another nicknamed Rob Buidhe or Rob Tiugh; as Morrison explains:

Isabel jilted a young man for Rob’s sake, but a twelvemonth later she and her former lover agreed to get married. Just as the marriage ceremony was about to proceed Rob appeared again, and Isabel went off with him for the second time.³⁰

Obviously this situation provided great scope for the comic talents of our bard, who composed a song on each occasion. The first (#47), modeled on an earlier Gaelic song discussed in the next section, features the chorus:

| | |
|--|---|
| Iseabail mhìn mheall-shuileach dhubh, Char thu mi ’s ghabh thu Rob tiugh; | Gentle Isabel of the alluring dark eyes, You tricked me and took fat Rob; |
| Iseabail mhìn mheall-shuileach dhubh, Rinn thu ’n diugh mo thrèigeadh. | Gentle Isabel of the alluring dark eyes, Today you forsook me. ³¹ |

²⁷ Morrison, p. 151.

²⁸ App. II, #16.

²⁹ App. II, #62; Morrison, p. 417.

³⁰ Morrison, p. 171.

³¹ App. II, #47.

The second (#54) describes the anger of Isabel's father and the jilted bridegroom (who may well have arranged the marriage against Isabel's wishes), but ends by expressing sympathy for Isabel:

| | |
|---|---|
| Thubhairt Iseabail, 's i clisgeadh, "Ciod a' nis a ni mi, Gun toir e m' alladh sios do Ghalladh, | Isabel said, fearfully, "What shall I do now, He will carry my reputation down to Caithness, |
| 'N dèigh mo gheallaidh fhaotainn." Thuirt Rob Buidhe 'n sin, is e tighinn, | After receiving my promise." Then yellow-haired Rob came to her and said, |
| "Ghaoil mo chridhe, caochail, Is greas do chas, gu tàirsinn as, Air t' ais o 'n fhear nach caomh leat." | "Love of my heart, change, And hurry your foot to fly away From the man you do not care for." ³² |

So once again Rob Donn gave the last word to the young lovers.

B. THE MELODIES

1. LOVE SONGS

As explained elsewhere in greater detail, the bard's earliest known love song, "A Drover to his Sweetheart" (#35), has two alternative melodies, one connected to a Gaelic song with the same opening line ("Ged is socrach mo leabaidh") by An Ciaran Mabach and the other the Scots song "Logie o' Buchan" identified by Morrison.³³ My setting of the former (#35(1)) is from Frances Tolmie's appendix to the *Gesto* Collection, sixteen bars in 3/4 time with the range of a tenth, a heptatonic scale in A major, and a double tonic in B minor and A major.³⁴ My setting of "Logie" (#35(2)) is from *The Scots Musical Museum*, eight bars in 6/8 time with the range of an octave and a fifth, a pentatonic scale (with no fourth or seventh except one passing note), and a double tonic in D minor and C major.³⁵ As I have previously argued, the fact that Rob Donn followed An Ciaran Mabach's textual model makes it likely he also borrowed his melody. Nevertheless, since the text fits both tunes, it could have been sung to "Logie" by 1899 or Morrison could have been wrong; since Morrison does not identify his tune sources, it is impossible to know.

³² App. II, #54, verse 3.

³³ Beard, 'Textual and Musical Affinities'.

³⁴ *Gesto* appendix, p. 18; App. I, #35(1).

³⁵ *SMM* II, #358; App. I, #35(2).

The next Anna Morrison song, “Is trom leam an àirigh” (#78), has only one melody, and every editor except Matheson has credited Rob Donn with its composition.³⁶ Matheson claims, without explanation, that Rob Donn’s tune is a variant of the air for An Clàrsair Dall’s song “A’ cheud Di-luain de’n ràithe”, particularly the version in the Angus Fraser manuscript.³⁷ The only way to evaluate this claim is by a direct comparison of the two melodies, set out below in the same key:

Example 3. A’ cheud Di-luain de’n ràithe³⁸

Example 4. Is trom leam an àirigh³⁹

There is no question that these melodies have some features in common, perhaps enough to place them in a single tune family. Both are essentially

³⁶ See, e.g., Stewart, p. 526; *SF*, p. 101, #24. In fact, Stewart (p. 526) prints another poem with the note “Air fonn – ’S trom leam an Airigh, Le Rob Donn.”

³⁷ Matheson, *The Blind Harper*, pp. 158-59.

³⁸ *AF*, p. 58 (staccato marks omitted).

³⁹ Gunn and MacFarlane, p. 8.

pentatonic, constructed on the notes E, G, A, B and D (although “A’ cheud Di-luain” also has an F# in bars 13, 21 and 31). They share a double tonic in E minor and D major with most principal cadences on E and frequent use of G (the minor third) on downbeats. Both are in 2/4 time with a large range, although Rob Donn’s is larger. Two short melodic motifs also occur in both: a similar descending pattern from B to E at the end of each tune, and frequent use of the ascending pattern BDE.

On the other hand, the overall structure of the two melodies is distinct and they contain no identical bars or phrases. “A’ cheud Di-luain” is comprised largely of quavers and stepwise motion with few large leaps, while Rob Donn’s tune uses more descending patterns, longer notes and larger leaps, especially the dramatic sequence in bars 17-20 that brings all motion to a complete halt on the low B, followed by an octave leap and rapid ascent to the high G two bars later. In Simon Fraser’s words, this passage “is avowedly Rob Donn’s [...] imitating a sneering laugh at his own folly, for trusting so much to the faith of womankind, if a preferable match offers.”⁴⁰ This is word-painting with a vengeance, and there is nothing remotely comparable in the other tune.

The question is whether the similarities in the tunes outweigh the differences sufficiently to make them variants or to deprive Rob Donn of the honor of composing the melody of his most famous love song. This depends on how one defines and applies the terms “variant” and “compose” within a folk tradition. In the version of An Clàrsair Dall’s melody in the Patrick MacDonald collection, the kinship to Rob Donn’s melody is more evident than in Angus Fraser’s version.⁴¹ This suggests the tunes are variants, and that Rob Donn probably knew the earlier melody, although it is hard to say whether the influence was unconscious or an example of intentional remodeling. This is a close case, but I would credit Rob Donn at least with recomposition.

The last Anna Morrison song (#86) has two unrelated melodies, one collected by Munro and the other identified by Morrison. The Munro tune (#86(1)) has eight bars in 6/8 time, including a 4-bar verse and 4-bar vocable chorus, with the range of a tenth, a hexatonic scale (without a fourth) but otherwise in D major with

⁴⁰ *SF*, p. 101, #24.

⁴¹ *HVA*, p. 49, #166.

a sharpened seventh, and a double tonic in E minor and D major. The most salient feature of the simple melody is the octave leap in bar 5; this is one of Rob Donn’s favorite gestures and may identify the melody as his own. The tune identified by Morrison (#86(2)) is “Tibbie Fowler”, a well-known Scots song that appears in a number of early collections; I have set the version from *The Scots Musical Museum*.⁴² Like the Munro tune, it is eight bars, but the 4/4 meter means that it is actually twice as long, so Rob Donn’s verse and chorus must both be repeated to fit the melody. The range is an octave and a fifth, the scale hexatonic (without a sixth) Aeolian/Dorian in F, and the tonality double tonic in F minor and Eb major, with a strathspey rhythm (although I had to reverse some of the dots to fit the Gaelic words). The most pertinent feature of “Tibbie Fowler” is its humorous text, which describes another young lady being courted by an exaggerated number of suitors. While that similarity may have recommended it to some bilingual person as an appropriate vehicle for Rob Donn’s song, I am not convinced that person was the bard, as the Munro setting is simpler, fits like a glove, and was sung to me unsolicited by Willie Morrison, who grew up in Durness in the 1940s and 1950s.⁴³

The melody for “Bonnie Janet” collected by Munro (#38) is obviously based on the waulking song “Dhèanainn sùgradh ris an nighinn duibh” (a love song to a boat), with which it shares a refrain. The Munro version contains eight bars (a 4-bar verse plus a 4-bar chorus) in 4/4 time, marked “Gu h-eutrom” (lightly), with a range of an octave and a fifth and a rhythm that alternates between even quavers, triplets and dotted quavers/semiquavers (but no snaps). The scale is heptatonic Aeolian in A and the tonality double tonic in A minor and G major. Unlike other waulking songs used by Rob Donn (such as #6 and #39), this one is still sung widely throughout the *Gàidhealtachd*.⁴⁴ That is significant because it shows that Rob Donn knew these tunes (even if men were supposedly personae non gratae at waulkings),

⁴² *SMM* II, p. 452, #440. The tune history is described in Glen, pp. 197-98, and Robert Chambers, *The Songs of Scotland prior to Burns* (Edinburgh: 1862), p. 130; the latter also provides the Scots words (pp. 131-32).

⁴³ Personal communication from Willie Morrison, Inverness (2014).

⁴⁴ It appears, e.g., in *Am Filidh*, ed. by Seumas Munro (Edinburgh: 1840), appendix, pp. 6-7, #13; M. F. Shaw, pp. 234-36; *Eilean Fraoich: Lewis Gaelic Songs and Melodies*, ed. by Comunn Gàidhealach Leòdhais (Stornoway: 1998), pp. 81-82; and A. L. Gillies, pp. 41-44.

and because his use of a well-attested waulking song in this instance supports the inference that others he borrowed were also at one time in the local repertoire.

According to Morrison, Hugh MacKay's love song to Christine Brodie (#98) was sung to a tune called "Suidhidh mi gu socrach 's oll' mi", which I have been unable to find, but Mackay connects it to "Farewell to Lochaber", Rob Donn's favorite service tune.⁴⁵ I have set it to the version of the latter used by Gunn and MacFarlane for "Glen Golly" (#36).⁴⁶ This not ideal because the 8-bar melody must be repeated four times to fit the 32-bar verse, but at least it uses a version of the tune that appears in other Rob Donn songs. The meter is 3/4, the range a ninth, the scale hexatonic (without a seventh) Ionian/Mixolydian in F, and the tonality double tonic in G minor and F major.

Two early melodies have been recorded for Christine's reply to Hugh (#17), one from Munro and one from Angus Fraser. A copy of the Munro melody (#17(1)) is in Malcolm MacFarlane's papers but was omitted from the published songs, perhaps because it contains only eight bars and the song requires sixteen.⁴⁷ The meter is 4/4, the range an octave, the scale pentatonic in Eb (with no fourth or seventh but a major third and sixth), and the tonality double tonic in F minor and Eb major, with ascending leaps of a sixth and a seventh. The Angus Fraser melody (#17(2)) has sixteen bars with an ABCB structure, so the second half of the chorus and verse use the same music. The meter is 4/4, the range a tenth, the scale heptatonic Mixolydian in C, and the tonality double tonic in D minor and C major, but the melody is not particularly interesting because each line is basically an ascending and descending scale.⁴⁸

"A Maid to her Lover" (#6) is one of the songs Rob Donn probably set to the tune and vocables of a waulking song not recorded elsewhere. The tune collected by Munro consists of sixteen bars, verse and chorus, with the structure ABCB, where C is comprised of vocables and B repeats the words and music of the second line of each verse. The meter is 6/8, the tempo "Moderato", the range an octave, the

⁴⁵ Morrison, p. 278; Mackay, p. xxv.

⁴⁶ Gunn and MacFarlane, p. 24.

⁴⁷ Papers of Malcolm MacFarlane, NLS Acc. 9736/144 (two lines of sol-fa copied by MacFarlane and marked "Is olc a dh'fhag an uiridh mi | R. D. | Munro | Gleus Eb").

⁴⁸ Another lovely melody, better known today, was composed by Eilidh Mackenzie of Gress, Lewis in 1991. *Ceòl nam Fèis 2*, ed. by Valerie Bryan (Portree: Fèisean nan Gàidheal, 2000), p. 21.

scale hexatonic (without a seventh) Ionian/Mixolydian in Ab, and the tonality double tonic in Bb minor and Ab major. While it is theoretically possible that Rob Donn himself composed the melody and vocables as well as the words, that seems unlikely given his tendency to use existing melodies for occasional verse and Campbell and Collinson's description of the function of vocables in waulking songs as unique mnemonic markers for known melodies.⁴⁹ In that cultural context, if he wanted his listeners to remember and sing this type of song, a familiar melody had obvious advantages.

"To a Young Friend" (#40), another tune collected by Munro, has a suitably mournful pentatonic melody with a minor third and seventh and no second or sixth. The meter is 2/4, the tempo "Moderato", the range an octave and a fourth, the structure ABCB in sixteen bars, and the tonality double tonic in C minor and Bb minor. It also contains several musical features favored by the bard: a large range, four descending fifths, and a sequence of three crotchets with repeated single-syllable words in bars 7-8 and 15-16.

According to Morrison, the unhappy love song "The Inconstant Lover" (#90) was sung to the cheerful tune "The Campbells are Coming".⁵⁰ Purser describes this as a pipe march played by the Argyle Highlanders in 1716, and William Gunn provides the Gaelic title "Bha mi air Banis a'm Baile Ineradhra" (Inverary Wedding), so perhaps one of the young people was a Campbell, or the tune occurred to Rob Donn because the wedding plans were interrupted by the prospective bridegroom's military duties.⁵¹ My setting is from Oswald in 6/8 time with the range of a tenth and sixteen bars divided between the verse and a chorus comprised primarily of vocables. The scale is hexatonic (without a fourth) but otherwise in D major with a sharpened seventh, and the tonality double tonic in E minor and D major; in Gunn's pipe setting, of course, the range is only a ninth.

"The Lass with the Yellow Petticoat" (#18) appears without words in a number of eighteenth-century instrumental collections; I have reproduced the song

⁴⁹ *Hebridean Folksongs* I, pp. 227-28.

⁵⁰ Morrison, p. 362.

⁵¹ *CPC* III, p. 14 (including tune history); Wm Gunn, p. 76; App. II, #90, verse 4.

setting used by Gunn and MacFarlane.⁵² The meter is 2/4, the tempo “Gu h-eutrom”, the range an octave, the scale hexatonic (without a seventh) Ionian/Mixolydian in A, and the tonality double tonic in B minor and A major. The sixteen bars include a chorus and verse with the same music, an attractive but repetitive melody with an AA¹AA¹ structure that makes it suitable for audience participation. As already discussed, the words and the tune were probably both adapted from an earlier song.

2. COURTSHIP SONGS

Beginning with the courtship songs about young men, the Munro melody for the satire “William Bain’s Son” (#81) could be original to the bard since the triplets in the chorus seem to illustrate so vividly the youth running from house to house in search of a wife. The meter is 4/4, the tempo “Gu h-eutrom”, the range an octave, and the scale pentatonic (with a major third and sixth and no fourth or seventh) in Eb, with a double tonic in F minor and Eb major. While the entire tune, verse and chorus, is only eight bars with a simple AA¹BB structure, it works well with the light-hearted, satirical narrative.

The tune for the bawdy comic song “The Young Man and the Widow” (#69) could also be Rob Donn’s; unfortunately, the only version I have found is the Mòd arrangement for four male voices, copyright 1937, from which I have extracted the melody.⁵³ The meter is 4/4, the range an octave and a fourth, the scale pentatonic in F (with a major third and sixth and no fourth or seventh), and the tonality double tonic in G minor and F major. The AAB structure contains twelve bars, with the first four bars sung twice for the chorus and a 4-bar verse in a lower tessitura. The rhythm is mostly dotted (without snaps), and the three ascending sixths in the melody evoke for this listener a suitably energetic picture of two men setting off briskly on a walk over the mountains to the home of the unsuspecting widow.

The melody for the song to the young drover “Rob Mac Eachainn” (#2) appears only in Munro; the musical structure is ABB in twelve bars with three 4-bar phrases where the second half of each verse is repeated in the last four bars. The

⁵² Gunn and MacFarlane, p. 70; see also *CPC* VIII, p. 13 (including tune history); Aird, I, p. 68; Alexander MacGlashan, *A Collection of Reels, consisting chiefly of Strathspeys* (Edinburgh: 1786), p. 34. The earliest source identified by Purser in *CPC* is the 1734 Drummond Castle manuscript, NLS Acc. 7722.

⁵³ ACG, *Còisir a’ Mhòid* 5, p. 4.

meter is 3/4, the tempo “Moderato”, the range a ninth, and the scale hexatonic (without a sixth) Aeolian/Dorian in A, with a double tonic in A minor and G major. The only noteworthy feature of this setting is the fact that the stressed syllables are consistently on the second beat of each measure rather than the first. Since this peculiarity also appears in a few other Munro settings, either he or MacFarlane may have put the bar lines in the wrong place (perhaps to avoid a three-note anacrusis before the downbeats), but I have not moved them because I decided to reproduce all the Gunn and MacFarlane settings as published.

According to Morrison, the song for the young man pining away for the maiden at the shieling (#85) is set to “Throd mo bhean ’s gun throd i rium”, a plaintive melody whose exaggerated pathos acts as a foil for Rob Donn’s sensible advice to stop being a fool and ask for the girl’s hand in marriage.⁵⁴ I have set the version from Simon Fraser (who may have added the variable seventh, the F# in bars 1 and 5), repeating his first four bars for the chorus and the verse.⁵⁵ The meter is 4/4, the range an octave and a fourth, the scale hexatonic (without a sixth) Aeolian/Dorian in G, and the tonality double tonic in G minor and F major. The melody exhibits the wide range and octave leaps often favored by Rob Donn, although the vocable chorus is somewhat unusual in a song whose rhythm precludes its classification as a work song.

The McLagan manuscript states that “Angus Be Bold” (#91) was sung to “Woo’d and married and a’”, a popular Scots tune that appears in numerous early collections; I have set the version from Oswald.⁵⁶ It is in 9/8 time (unusual for Rob Donn), with a range of an octave and a fourth and an ABA¹B¹ structure in eight bars. The scale is hexatonic (without a sixth) Aeolian/Dorian in C, with a double tonic in C minor and Bb major, creating a suitably mournful effect; the two sharpened sevenths (B naturals) in bars 4 and 8 were probably added by Oswald as accent notes, as the melody works perfectly well if they are left as B flats.

The two courtship songs addressed to young women are described by Morrison as sung to contrasting melodies, one cheerful and the other doleful. The

⁵⁴ Morrison, p. 234.

⁵⁵ *SF*, p. 22, #63.

⁵⁶ James McLagan, *McLagan Collection of Gaelic Manuscripts*, MS Gen 1042/5 (University of Glasgow); *CPC X*, p. 5.

satire “The Grey Heifer Tocher” (#60) was sung to “Flowers of Edinburgh”, a lively reel with a long tune history and various titles recounted by Purser and Glen.⁵⁷ My setting is Oswald’s, with eight bars in 4/4 time, an octave and a fourth range, a hexatonic scale (without a fourth) in G major, and a G major tonality. “The Herd and the Weaver” (#33) was sung to “Logan Water”, a lugubrious ballad tune whose setting I have taken from *The Scots Musical Museum*.⁵⁸ It is sixteen bars with a chorus and verse of eight bars each, in 4/4 time with the range of an octave and a fifth, and a heptatonic Aeolian scale in G (with one sharpened seventh accent note in bar 10). Rob Donn may have chosen this melody for its exaggerated pathos or simply as a service tune; in either case there is something of a mismatch between the tune and the words.

If Rob Donn actually set “The Old Maid to her Lovers” (#10) to “Oh, as I was kist yestreen”, as Morrison indicates, the bard evidently knew more English than his editors generally assume, since the burden of his song is the singer’s regret for the suitors she rejected in her now-receding youth.⁵⁹ I have set the version from *The Scots Musical Museum*; although it is not a perfect fit since a number of syllables must be sung on two notes, the irony of the juxtaposition could well mark it as Rob Donn’s.⁶⁰ The structure is ABCB in sixteen bars, verse and chorus, with three octave leaps in the latter. The meter is 6/8, the range a ninth, the scale hexatonic (without a sixth) Aeolian/Dorian in E (although two sharpened sevenths occur in bars 8 and 10), and the tonality double tonic in E minor and D major.

Partly as an exercise to compare and evaluate my principal tune sources, I made four settings of “Marion and her Lover” (#88), the song advising another old maid not to marry “an gille dubh, ciar-dhubh.” This, of course, is the title of a well-known Gaelic love song that appears in numerous publications, some of which are listed in the footnote.⁶¹ Morrison claims it was sung to a different melody, “Flowers of Edinburgh”, a reel discussed earlier as a setting for “The Grey Heifer Tocher”

⁵⁷ Morrison, p. 252; Glen, p. 63; *CPC* III, p. 21 (including notes).

⁵⁸ Morrison, p. 386; *SMM* I, #42.

⁵⁹ Morrison, p. 210.

⁶⁰ *SMM* II, #319.

⁶¹ *HVA*, p. 42, #142; *SF*, p. 25, #70; *ER*, p. 82; Donald Campbell, *A Treatise on the Language, Poetry and Music of the Highland Clans* (Edinburgh: Collie, 1862), appendix, p. 11; *Gesto*, appendix, p. 50; Alfred Moffat, *The Minstrelsy of the Scottish Highlands* (Glasgow: Bailey & Ferguson, n.d.), pp. 44-45; A. L. Gillies, pp. 333-36.

(#60).⁶² This is not convincing. As my setting (#88(2)) indicates, Rob Donn's words can be sung to that tune if a number of syllables are sung on two notes, but it would be highly inconsistent with his normal compositional practice. As we have seen repeatedly, when he borrowed the words of a familiar refrain, he usually borrowed the tune that went with it; doing otherwise would only have confused his non-literate listeners, who expected to hear them together, and made it harder for them to remember and repeat the song. But even if Rob Donn himself used the tune for "An gille dubh, ciar-dhubh", it is theoretically possible that his words had become attached to "Flowers of Edinburgh" by 1899. The best way to test that hypothesis is to examine Munro's setting (#88(1)), also published in 1899, and compare it to other versions of both tunes.

That examination reveals that Munro's melody is an obvious variant of "An gille dubh, ciar-dhubh", in particular the versions in the Patrick MacDonald and Simon Fraser collections, which I have set in the same key as #88(3) and #88(4) respectively.⁶³ The three tunes are so similar that I will not belabor the comparison with excessive detail. All are essentially pentatonic (CDEGA) with a double tonic in D minor and C major. The Munro and MacDonald versions are twelve bars (an 8-bar verse and a 4-bar chorus) in 4/4 time; the Simon Fraser version is 24 bars because each of his bars in 3/4 time is only half as long as the others. The principal pitches and melodic contours also generally track one another, the only notable difference being the tendency of the violinists MacDonald and Fraser to shift some passages (such as the last three notes of the chorus) up an octave and extend the range to high G.

The only reasonable conclusion to draw from this analysis is that when Munro did his collecting from the local oral tradition in the second half of the nineteenth century, this song was still sung to the melody that internal evidence makes the most likely candidate for Rob Donn's original tune. It follows that Morrison's attribution of a different tune is unreliable. Although the evidence here is unusually strong, based as it is on multiple tune sources as well as the text, it puts into question the trustworthiness of Morrison's other tune identifications,

⁶² Morrison, p. 311.

⁶³ *HVA*, p. 42; *SF*, p. 25.

particularly when the melody recorded by Munro is unrelated. This is not a problem I have been able to solve by establishing any kind of general rule; instead my approach has been to examine all the available evidence for each song, including dating, the degree of fit between Rob Donn's words and Morrison's tune (metrical and thematic), and concordances from other early tune sources.

Rob Donn's comic song about the miniature couple (#84) has two different tune settings. One (#84(1)) was taken by Gunn and MacFarlane from *A' Chòisir Chiùil*, where it was used for a poem by Neil MacLeod with the title "O! Tha mo Dhuil riut".⁶⁴ MacFarlane explains as follows:

The first part of this tune was taken down from the singing of an Oban boy, at one of the Mòds of the Highland Association, by Mr. Archibald Ferguson, leader of the St. Columba Gaelic Choir, Glasgow. The words then sung were not unlike those accredited to Rob Donn. The latter part of the air was added by Mr. Ferguson.⁶⁵

Since Neil MacLeod was born in 1843, the first Mòd was in 1892, and Archibald Ferguson published *A' Chòisir Chiùil* in 1913, part of this melody was composed more than a century after Rob Donn's death, and part of it was transcribed about the same time as the tune for a different song.⁶⁶ The only connection to Rob Donn is the words of the chorus, "Hèi, tha mo rùn duit" (Rob Donn) and "O! tha mo Dhuil riut" (MacLeod). If anything, this suggests that MacLeod borrowed Rob Donn's metrical model and melody for his own song, but it does not tell us what Rob Donn's tune was, unless we assume that some fragment was preserved orally and sung by a boy in Oban around 1900. The melody, sixteen bars in 2/4 time, is hexatonic (without a sixth) Aeolian/Dorian in G (with a double tonic in G minor and F major), but its entire range is only a sixth, unusually small for Rob Donn and another reason to doubt its connection to our bard. The tune identified by Morrison, on the other hand — the Jacobite "Wha'll be King but Charley?" — at least must have existed in the eighteenth century, even if it seems an odd choice for a love song.⁶⁷ I have used Simon Fraser's setting (#84(2)), sixteen bars in 6/8 time with a

⁶⁴ *A' Chòisir Chiùil*, ed. by Archibald Ferguson (Glasgow: 1913), p. 51.

⁶⁵ Gunn and MacFarlane, p. 101.

⁶⁶ Thomson, *Companion*, pp. 48, 183.

⁶⁷ *SF*, p. 108, note #136.

range of an octave and a fourth, a heptatonic Aeolian scale in G, and a double tonic in G minor and F major.⁶⁸

According to Morrison, “The Widower and the Old Maid” (#63) was sung to “Faillirinn, illirinn, illirinn, O”, another melody with a complex history.⁶⁹ In fact, there are two songs that use these vocables in their chorus, and while the textual similarities have been noted,⁷⁰ no one seems to have compared them from a musical standpoint, even Anne Lorne Gillies, who printed and discussed both (separately) in her *Songs of Gaelic Scotland*.⁷¹ The song known as “Thig trì nithean gun iarraidh” (Three things come without asking) by the Laird of Reilig’s daughter, has lyrics collected by McLagan between 1750 and 1805, possibly from Wester Ross, and a melody printed by Donald Campbell in 1862.⁷² That melody does not fit Rob Donn’s words, however, because it has five word stresses per line and Rob Donn’s poem has only four. The other song appeared initially with a religious text, “The Strathmore Meeting”, by Anne Mackenzie of Coigeach in Wester Ross (the second wife of a man who lived from 1738 to 1829), and a melody transcribed by Eliza Ross in Raasay in 1812.⁷³ Finally, Ewen MacLachlan of Aberdeen (1773-1822) learned the melody, first verse and chorus from some “north country students” in Aberdeen, and composed the remaining verses to create the love song that became known as “Ealaidh Ghaoil”.⁷⁴ This melody does fit Rob Donn’s words because both have four stresses in each line. I have set the version printed by Lachlan Macbean in 1888, sixteen bars in 2/4 time with the range of a ninth, in a heptatonic Dorian scale in F minor with a double tonic in F minor and Eb major.⁷⁵

This history, however, does not explain the origin of the tune, or even whether it should be considered one melody or two. For purposes of comparison, the chorus of each song is set out below, both from Anne Lorne Gillies (pp. 368 and 404, respectively) with the first transposed up one tone to place them in the same range:

⁶⁸ *SF*, p. 55, #136.

⁶⁹ Morrison, p. 221.

⁷⁰ W. Gillies, “‘Merely a Bard?’”, p. 143.

⁷¹ A. L. Gillies, pp. 368-72, 404-06.

⁷² A. L. Gillies, p. 370; D. Campbell, appendix, p. 6.

⁷³ *ER*, pp. 31-32, 90.

⁷⁴ *ER*, p. 31.

⁷⁵ Macbean, #22.

Example 5. Thig trì nithean gun iarraidh

1
Air fail - i - rinn ill - i - rinn uill - i - rinn o ho-ro laoidh, 's cruaidh

4
fhor - tan gun fhios a chuir mi - se fo chuing do ghaoil.

Example 6. The Strathmore meeting

1
Air fail - i - rinn, ill - i - rinn, uill - i - rinn ò, air

3
fail - i - rinn, ill - i - rinn, uill - i - rinn ò, air

5
fail - i - rinn, ill - i - rinn, uill - i - rinn ò, gur

7
bòidh - each an com - ann th' aig coinn - eimh 'n t-Srath - mhòir.

Common features of these melodies include the vocables, an identical dotted rhythm in 6/8 time, heptatonic scales with the same range, a ninth, and a possible geographic connection with Wester Ross. The principal structural difference reflects the different number of word stresses per line of text; Example 5 has two three-bar musical phrases and Example 6 has four two-bar phrases. The tonality is also different, as Example 5 has a major third (D Mixolydian with a double tonic in D major and C major), and Example 6 has a minor third (D Dorian with double tonic in D minor and C major). Nevertheless, both melodies rely heavily on C and D for principal notes (downbeats and cadences), and tonality can shift without depriving a melody of its identity.⁷⁶

Therefore I would classify these melodies as variants and suggest that one or more prototypes must have been circulating in the northwest mainland by the

⁷⁶ Bayard, 'Prolegomena', p. 18.

eighteenth century when Rob Donn composed his song. The four-stress version of the vocable chorus may have been a waulking song (which could account for its use by two female composers), and it could easily have been extended to fit a five-stress metrical structure simply by adding another “illirinn” before the “O”. The reverse is also possible, i.e., that a five-stress minor tune was changed into a four-stress major tune in order to serve as a waulking song. Either process would be consistent with the incremental nature of composition — Sharp’s continuity, variation and selection — in a predominantly oral context.⁷⁷

3. WEDDING SONGS

The tune for “Briogais Mhic Ruaraidh” printed by Gunn and MacFarlane (#16) is taken from the William Gunn collection of pipe music, where it carries Rob Donn’s title.⁷⁸ It is sixteen bars long, with an 8-bar chorus and 8-bar verse, structured AAB¹, in 6/8 time and marked “Gu h-aighearach” (merry). The range is a ninth and the scale heptatonic Dorian in E with a double tonic in E minor and D major, so it would fit the pipe scale except for two notes in bar 7 (Gs in my setting), which would be C#s on the pipes. This form of the melody has become completely identified with Rob Donn’s song, appearing with only minor variations, for example, in Simon Fraser and *Am Filidh*.⁷⁹ But a more distant variant (identified by Matheson) appears in the Eliza Ross manuscript with only six bars in the chorus (insufficient for Rob Donn’s words), prompting her editors to ask: “Could this tune be a version of some older song with the same title, which survived in Raasay for decades despite the likely popularity of Rob Donn’s song?”⁸⁰ MacFarlane also suggested the existence of musical and textual precursors:

A tune unlike this one is given in Hogg’s ‘Jacobite Relics’ under the same name. Another is given in ‘Am Filidh.’ The theme of MacRory’s breeks has probably been sung before Rob Donn’s day, as there are versions in other parts of the Highlands; and in the Lowlands there is ‘Rab Roryson’s bonnet’.”⁸¹

Also, the existence of a musical model of some kind can probably be inferred from the circumstances of Rob Donn’s composition, eleven verses and a chorus during a

⁷⁷ Sharp, p. 21.

⁷⁸ Wm. Gunn, p. 70.

⁷⁹ *SF*, p. 59, #147; *Am Filidh*, appendix, p. 1.

⁸⁰ *ER*, pp. 32-33, 91 (#20).

⁸¹ Gunn and MacFarlane, p. 101.

short walk between Bad na h-Achlais and Musal on his way to the wedding. In any case, it is Rob Donn's song that has survived, another example of Sharp's principle of "selection".

The melody printed by Gunn and MacFarlane for "Illeachan" (#15) is attributed to the Gesto collection, which contains nothing with a similar title.⁸² Instead, MacFarlane seems to have adapted a Jacobite tune with the title "Thearlich na'n Tigudh Tu" (If Charlie would only come), identified in Gesto simply as a "Strathspey. Pipe tune".⁸³ Versions of this tune appear with similar names in the Patrick MacDonald, Simon Fraser, and William Gunn collections; Fraser adds:

This reel to Prince Charles was struck up by Lord Lovat's minstrel, at celebrating intelligence of some of the Prince's successful movements in the south.⁸⁴

But as none of these sources provides any link between the tune and Rob Donn's text, I suspect that MacFarlane combined them on his own. His melody is in 4/4 time, marked "Gu sunndach" (joyfully), the range a ninth, the structure eight bars (a 4-bar chorus and a 4-bar verse), and the scale heptatonic Dorian in F#, with a double tonic in F# minor and E major. While the Gesto and Patrick MacDonald versions are in dotted rhythm, the Fraser and Gunn versions use mostly even quavers, so the tune apparently could be played in either rhythm.

According to Morrison, "The Wedding in Oldshore" (#52) was sung to "Null air na h-eilleanan", a reel known variously as "Null thar nan Eileanan", "Over the Isles to America", "To America We Go" and "Jenny Cameron's Reel".⁸⁵ As Lamb notes, this seems to be the tune for the dance called "America" recorded by James Boswell on his visit to Skye in 1773 as a mark of emigration fever, although Keith Norman MacDonald thought the tune was older than the mid-eighteenth century words.⁸⁶ I have set the latter's version as edited by Lamb, consisting of sixteen bars with an AABB structure, in 4/4 time with the range of a ninth, a heptatonic Mixolydian scale in D and a double tonic in D major and C major.⁸⁷

⁸² Gunn and MacFarlane, p. 56.

⁸³ *Gesto*, p. 149.

⁸⁴ *HVA*, p. 44, #147; *SF*, pp. 79, 111, #191; Wm. Gunn, p. 63.

⁸⁵ Morrison, p. 429; *Puirt-à-Beul*, pp. 36, 145; Wm. Gunn, p. 10.

⁸⁶ *Puirt-à-Beul*, pp. 36, 145.

⁸⁷ *Puirt-à-Beul*, p. 36.

Based on its refrain, “Richard’s Wedding” (#62) was obviously sung to one of Rob Donn’s favorite tunes, “Tha mi nam chadal”, which he also used for a satire about adultery (#9) and his extended litany of absent spouses (#93). Since it is hard to perceive anything these poems have in common, the tune may have served only to provide a metrical and musical structure, i.e., as a service tune. Or the refrain may imply that the poet would rather remain asleep — i.e., oblivious — to whatever unpleasant situation he is describing in the remainder of his text, an implication also present in his likely prototype, the 1715 poem by Sìleas na Ceapaich “Do dh’ Arm Rìgh Sheumais.”⁸⁸ The general topic of when and why Rob Donn used certain tunes more than once will be addressed in the conclusion of this thesis.

Turning finally to the two songs about the wedding that did not happen (twice), we discover another instance in which Morrison’s tune attribution is contradicted by internal evidence and by Munro, the song Morrison calls “Isabel and Rob” (#47) and connects to the tune “John Roy Stewart”.⁸⁹ Since Rob Donn’s chorus begins with the words “Iseabal mhìn mheall-shuileach, dhubh”, it immediately calls to mind the title of the song “A Mhàiri mhìn mheallshùileach dhubh” that appears in the Eliza Ross manuscript and the Tolmie appendix to the *Gesto* collection (where it is identified as “by Mc. Leod Raasay”).⁹⁰ Peter Cooke and his co-editors list a number of other concordances, including a text in the 1806 Inverness Collection set to the tune “Phegie mhin mhel-shuileach.”⁹¹ While it is gratifying to know that so many young ladies in the *Gàidhealtachd* had bewitching eyes, it does not help us trace the song, although Rob Donn’s text must predate by at least three decades any of the sources cited by Cooke.

The next step is to look at the Munro version (#47(1)), which is plainly a variant of “Mhàiri mhìn” unrelated to “John Roy Stewart.”⁹² Munro’s version is eight bars in length, a 4-bar chorus and 4-bar verse, in 4/4 time, marked “Gu h-eutrom”, with the range of a tenth, a hexatonic scale (without a third) Mixolydian /Dorian in D, and a double tonic in D minor and C major. Rhythmically, it is a

⁸⁸ *Sìleas MacDonald*, pp. 44-49, 234-36.

⁸⁹ Morrison, p. 171.

⁹⁰ *ER*, p. 118; *Gesto* appendix, p. 66.

⁹¹ *ER*, pp. 47-48.

⁹² “John Roy Stewart” itself will be discussed later in connection with songs #58 and #80.

mixture of even quavers and triplets, with only a few dotted quavers and no Scots snaps. I have also set the Eliza Ross version (#47(2)) in the same key to illustrate its similarity to Munro. The two melodies are plainly variants, with the same structure, range and tonality, although a few notes differ and the Ross tune is pentatonic (without a third or a sixth) and features a strathspey rhythm and no triplets.

In short, the sheer number of these textual and musical variants makes it likely that the tune and the key phrase of the chorus were circulating in oral tradition before the time of Eliza Ross or Rob Donn. On the other hand, “John Roy Stewart” is not a good fit for Rob Donn’s text because the melody does not correspond well to the word stresses. And since Munro recorded a different but well-attested tune from the oral tradition that does fit Rob Donn’s text, I can only conclude once again that Morrison was probably wrong.

The tune of the song describing Isabel’s second attempted wedding (#54) appears only in Munro. It is sixteen bars with an AABB structure, in 4/4 time marked “Gu siubhlach” (swiftly or with motion), with a strathspey rhythm and an octave and a sixth range. Since this is unusually large even for Rob Donn (and well beyond the pipe range), it may have originated as a fiddle tune; it also has a sharpened seventh and a diatonic major scale (without a fourth), although the basic tonality remains double tonic in F minor and Eb major. Although someone familiar with the Scottish fiddle repertoire might recognize it, I cannot; it could even have been composed by one of the violinists in the MacDonald family.

C. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

The music for the twenty-seven songs in this chapter can be classified in various ways, none of which is entirely satisfactory. From the standpoint of tune sources, ten songs have tunes associated primarily or exclusively with Rob Donn which could be his own compositions.⁹³ Another ten songs were set to existing melodies with Gaelic words or titles (although some also have Lowland

⁹³ The songs are #2, 6, 16, 17, 40, 54, 69, 78, 81, and 86(1). Eight were collected by Munro, “Briogais Mhic Ruaraidh” (#16) is from William Gunn, and “Thèid mi cuide riut” (#69, The Young Man and the Widow) is from a Mòd arrangement.

connections).⁹⁴ Four songs were apparently set to melodies of well-known Scots songs, and three apparently set to instrumental tunes.⁹⁵ However, there is no particular correlation between the three song types in this chapter (love, courtship and weddings) and the four tune sources just listed, because Rob Donn drew upon all these sources for each type of song.⁹⁶ So this kind of analysis tells us very little except to emphasize once again the breadth of his musical resources.

Perhaps a better approach is to divide the songs initially into two groups based on the nature of their tunes. Borrowing from piping terminology, I will call the first group *ceòl beag*, comprised of thirteen relatively fast, light, and/or rhythmic tunes including five reels, three marches, two jigs, one strathspey, and two waulking songs, a category that includes but is somewhat broader than the conventional *puirt-à-beul*. The second group will be called *ceòl meadhanach*, comprised of fourteen slower, more reflective or plaintive melodies that a fiddler would call slow airs and a singer would simply call songs or *òrain*; the term itself is borrowed from the Campbells of Kilberry, who used it in 1909 to refer to pipe tunes (mostly song arrangements) midway between pibroch (*ceòl mòr*) and quick marches or dance music (*ceòl beag*).⁹⁷ The third group in this classification is *ceòl mòr* and the vocal equivalent *òran mòr* (classic Gaelic song melodies), both of which appear elsewhere in Rob Donn's work, although not in this chapter. These terms are useful here because they describe large musical categories and apply to both vocal and instrumental music, even if they are not generally applied to song.

When this sorting mechanism is employed, a pattern emerges in the relationship between the texts and their music. All but one of the wedding songs are set to dance music, three reels (#47, 52 and 54), one strathspey (#15) and one jig (#16).⁹⁸ This reflects the festive nature of the occasion as well as the type of music

⁹⁴ Those songs are #18, 35(1), 38, 47, 52, 62, 63, 84, 85, and 88. "The Lass with the Yellow Petticoat" (#18) and "Wha'll Be King but Charley" (#84) also have Scots words and titles.

⁹⁵ According to my classifications, the Scots songs are "Oh, as I was Kist Yestreen" (#10), "Logan Water" (#33), "Woo'd and married and a'" (#91), and "Farewell to Lochaber" (#98), and the instrumental tunes are "Thearlaich, nan tigeadh tu?" (#15), "Flowers of Edinburgh" (#60), and "The Campbells are Coming" (#90).

⁹⁶ The only exception is that none of the Scots song melodies was used for a wedding song, probably because they are all slow instead of lively.

⁹⁷ Cannon, *The Highland Bagpipe*, pp. 144-45 (discussing *The Kilberry Book of Ceòl Meadhanach*, published by John and Archibald Campbell of Kilberry in 1909).

⁹⁸ The exception is #62, set to "Tha mi nam chadal".

actually played or sung for the accompanying dancing. The courtship songs include two reels and two marches; the reels (#60 and 81) are used for satires, and the marches (#69 and 84) for songs with a strong element of humor. The love songs include two waulking songs, a jig and a march. Both the waulking songs (#6 and 38) have a strong satirical component, the jig (#86) is humorous, and the march (#90) is an anomaly because it combines an upbeat melody with a sorrowful text. Therefore, twelve of the thirteen tunes I have classified as *ceòl beag* are settings of festive, satirical and/or humorous texts. Although this correlation is not surprising (and will appear again in the next chapter on satire and humor), it demonstrates etically the emic expectations of Rob Donn and his community regarding song aesthetics and the conceptual unity of words and music.

The other half of the pattern consists of the fourteen slower, more reflective melodies, including four (#2, 17, 40 and 78) potentially composed by Rob Donn, six (#18, 35(1), 62, 63, 85, and 88) apparently from the Gaelic song tradition, and four apparently (#10, 33, 91 and 98) from the Scots song and ballad tradition. The four Scots song airs were all used for songs about unhappy, failed or languishing courtships. The four slow airs possibly composed by the bard are used for two sad love songs (#17 and 78) and two songs giving advice to lovelorn young friends (#2 and 40). Finally, the six melodies connected to the Gaelic song tradition include three settings of happy love songs (#18, 35(1) and 63), two advice songs (#85 and 88), and one song (#62) describing an inauspicious wedding. Again, a correlation between slow airs and depressing subject matter is unsurprising, although it is worth noting that all the Scots song airs discussed in this chapter fall into this category.

The next topic for consideration is the ten songs with otherwise unattributed melodies that Rob Donn himself might have composed. Of the six in the *ceòl beag* category, there is some reason to believe that three were borrowed, in whole or in part. The first is the waulking song (#6) with the chorus “Hè, hoirionnan, ò”; since the tunes and vocables of waulking songs were so closely identified, there is no reason to believe that a man, in particular, would have invented a new set of both when he could have borrowed them from an existing song.⁹⁹ The second is the jig “Briogais Mhic Ruaraidh” (#16), where the variant in the Eliza Ross manuscript

⁹⁹ *Hebridean Folksongs I*, pp. 227-28.

suggests that Rob Donn took phrases and motifs of an older tune and rearranged them to make a better tune.¹⁰⁰ The third is the reel “To Isabel” (#54), whose unusually wide range (an octave and a sixth) and sharpened seventh suggest a possible origin as a fiddle tune.¹⁰¹ This leaves the march “The Young Man and the Widow” (#69), the reel “William Bain’s son” (#81), and the jig “Ann Morrison” (#86(1)) as possible compositions by the bard. All are short (8 to 12 bars), with a verse and chorus, jaunty little circular tunes that end on the fifth or sixth, leaps of a sixth or more, and bits of word-painting in #69 and #81 (previously discussed) that suggest the tunes and texts might have been composed together.

Of the four potentially original compositions in the *ceòl meadhanach* category, “Is trom leam an àirigh” (#78) has already been discussed at length. “To Rob Mac Eachainn” (#2) has no “signature” features, but the other two melodies (#17(1) and 40) are both pentatonic with a number of leaps, and “To a Young Friend” (#40) has a feature that appears elsewhere in the bard’s work (#89), a one-syllable word repeated on three crotchets at the end of a line or phrase. These three melodies were all collected by Munro, although a different (perhaps related) tune for the Christine Brodie song also appears in Angus Fraser (#17(2)). Nevertheless, my instinct (after long immersion in this material) is that these melodies could be Rob Donn’s, although I could easily be convinced otherwise if someone can unearth their forerunners.

In summarizing the formal musical characteristics of these tunes, I have again chosen only one setting of each song, based on my opinion of the version most likely to have been sung by Rob Donn.¹⁰² Of those twenty-seven tunes, thirteen are hexatonic, nine are heptatonic, and five are pentatonic. Sixteen are in duple meter (4/4 or 2/4), ten are in triple meter (6/8 or 3/4) and one is in 9/8 time. Fourteen have scales with a major third, twelve with a minor third, and one (#47(1)) without a third, but almost all (except #60 and possibly #33) are structured around a double tonic rather than a standard major or minor tonality with tonic, dominant and

¹⁰⁰ *ER*, pp. 32-33.

¹⁰¹ Nor was the tune a fiddle arrangement, which might explain these features as later accretions; it was collected by Munro (presumably) as a song.

¹⁰² For the songs with multiple settings, this means I have included #17(1), 35(1), 47(1), 84(2), 86(1), and 88(1).

subdominant chords. As a result, all the tunes — whether borrowed or original — are typical of the Scottish folk idiom as described by Collinson and Cooke.¹⁰³

In conclusion, we have now analyzed elegies (Chapter V), social and political commentary (Chapter VI), and songs concerning love, courtship and weddings. The subject matter has thus moved gradually from the more to the less serious, a shift that is also reflected, quite properly, in the music. The next chapter, on satire and humor, will take us much further in that direction as we consider the type of song poetry for which Rob Donn was perhaps best known.

¹⁰³ Collinson, pp. 4-30; Cooke, 'Some Thoughts'.

CHAPTER VIII. SATIRE AND HUMOR

Because Rob Donn was such a prolific composer of satire and occasional verse, many of his satirical and humorous songs are discussed elsewhere in the thesis under headings appropriate for their subject matter. The twenty-six poems in this chapter, ranging in tone from vitriolic satire to gentle amusement, will be examined in four groups: satire contests, extramarital sex, insults and humor.

A. THE POEMS

1. SATIRE CONTESTS

These nine poems have their origins in flyting contests between the bard and his neighbors, where Rob Donn responds in verse to earlier poems, insults or behavior that he found offensive. The difficulty we face is that only Rob Donn's side of these exchanges has been preserved, and many of the incidents are now hopelessly obscure. Nevertheless, the texts are valuable because they confirm that Rob Donn was not the only poet in his community, and that topical satire functioned as a type of local journalism, communicating news, gossip, insults, and opinions in an oral context, regardless of the aesthetic quality of the poetry.

Rob Donn's favorite target of abuse was John Sutherland (Iain Tapaiddh), the SSPCK schoolmaster at Ribigill near Tongue from 1744 to 1753. Iain Tapaiddh seems to have been a near-contemporary of Rob Donn because he lived until 1800, serving fifty years as an SSPCK schoolmaster in Sutherland, first in Tongue and then at Invershin in the parish of Creich.¹ In addition to teaching duties, Iain acted as kirk session-clerk and psalm precentor and pursued an avocation as a bard.² As Grimble put it: "Sutherland himself composed poetry, whose quality can only be assessed by the fact that not a line of it has been preserved in the Mackay country."³ Rob Donn, in contrast, left a total of ten Iain Tapaiddh satires, some of which seem motivated primarily by resentment of the schoolmaster's superior education, social status, and appearance, despite his inferior ability to carry a tune, shoot a gun, assess the value of livestock, and compose poetry. While I hope to discuss all ten Iain

¹ A. S. Cowper, *SSPCK Schoolmasters, 1709-1872* (Edinburgh: Scottish Record Society: 1997), p. 100.

² Morrison, p. 331 n. 2.

³ Grimble, p. 50.

Tapaidh satires in a future article, this chapter addresses only the four with known tunes.⁴

Two of the poems (#75 and #89) concern (among other things) an incident in which the schoolmaster physically attacked an older man, the local maltster, for unexplained reasons. As Rob Donn said: “No thruaighe mu dh’ fhuilingeas bàrd e” (only a pitiful poet would suffer it).⁵ By the third poem (#48) their satire contest was fully joined, as Rob Donn answered a poem by Iain Tapaidh comparing him to the false prophet Balaam and revealed his resentment of the schoolmaster’s privileged education:

| | |
|---|--|
| Cha b’ fhiach do ghnothuch chur an leabhar, A dh’ iarradh cobhair cuilbheirt, Gu ’m faic a’ chléir, gu ’n chuir iad féin thu, Anns a cheum nach b’ fhiù thu; | Your business is not worth putting in a book, That would invite help with deception, That the clergy will see, who themselves put you In the rank you do not deserve. |
| Fhir a shaothraich dheanamh aoire, Cha robh saoil fir céill’ ort, Coimeas t’aoire ris na daoine Bh’ anns an t-saoghal leughant’. | Man who labored to make a satire, You did not think like a man of sense, Comparing your satire to the people Who were in the world of readers. ⁶ |

This reference to “the world of readers” may be the most poignant line in Rob Donn; he knew what he was missing, and it was more than just a temporary advantage in a satire contest.

The last Iain Tapaidh poem to be considered here (#19) dates to a later period when the schoolmaster was living in Creich. After Rob Donn composed his scathing satirical elegy (#92) on the drover John Gray of Rogart, who died in 1766, his relative and heir, Captain Robert Gray of Creich, commissioned John Sutherland to write a response (unfortunately not preserved) praising both men.⁷ This infuriated Rob Donn and inspired a brilliant piece of invective in return, beginning with these verses:

| | |
|--|---|
| Chiad fhear a shiùbhlas do Chata, Thoir fios gu Iain Thapaidh nan rann, Nach bòidheach ’s nach dealbhach a choluinn, 'S gur mi-thapaidh ’n t-anam a th’ ann; | First man who travels to Sutherland, Take word to Clever John of the verses, Isn’t his body handsome and shapely, And deformed the soul within it; |
|--|---|

⁴ Ellen L. Beard, ‘Satire and Social Change: The Bard, the Schoolmaster and the Drover’, *Northern Scotland*, 8 (2016) (forthcoming).

⁵ App. II, #75, verse 5.

⁶ App. II, #48, verses 2 & 3.

⁷ App. II, #92, notes.

| | |
|--|---|
| Mhol bladaidh nan glog-shùilean mìodhoir, Bha tur air a' lìonadh le sannt, An sgròg-thoineach cab-phliadach, griamach, 'S bu dearbhta do cheud e bhi meallt'. | The flatterer of the avaricious hollow eyes, Completely filled by greed, Praised the shrivel-assed, splay-footed, lichen-covered old person, And was proved to a hundred to be false. |
| 'S e chanas gach breitheamh a 's àirde, Gu 'n robh an fhìor bhreug ann do bhus; 'N uair a shaoil leat a thogail mar chraoibh, 'S ann a rinn thu a chrìonadh mur lus; Cluinnear 's gach àite m' ur timchioll, Ur n-alladh 's ur n-ìomradh aig cus, Cha chreid duin' ac' thus' mach o esan, 'S cha mhol duin' ac' esan ach thus'. | And each highest judge will say, That the real lie was in your mouth; When you thought to raise him like a tree, You made him wither like a weed; One hears everywhere around you, Your excellence and renown among many, Not a man among them will believe you except he, And not a man among them will praise him except you. ⁸ |

He concludes by warning Iain Tapaiddh to mend his ways, or he will end up spending eternity with the Devil, Rogart and Rob Gray.⁹

Rob Donn conducted another ongoing flyting with a man nicknamed the Geigean, also a Sutherland, during the 1760s or 1770s when he was living and working at Balnakeil.¹⁰ One short poem (#13) responds to a song criticizing Rob Donn's brothers; another (#68) replies to a poem insulting and slandering a young woman, and the third (#11) is a dialogue song in which a friend of the bard suggests he is losing his touch by failing to respond to the Geigean's latest sally.¹¹ "Rob the Hunter" (#58) replies to a satire against a generous housewife, and "To the Granges" (#22) insults four brothers named Campbell for reasons that remain unclear despite twelve eight-line verses plus a chorus. But even if some of this verse suffers from loss of its original context, it must be taken into account in any overview or representative sample of Rob Donn's work, if only for the information his choice of tunes and meters provides about his technical work as a composer.

2. EXTRAMARITAL SEX

The seven songs in this group illustrate Rob Donn's role as avid collaborator with the local clergy in publicly shaming those who engaged in sex outside of marriage, although a few of the songs are more humorous than censorious, closer to salacious gossip than moral condemnation. "The Wife of Inchverry" (#9) is on the

⁸ App. II, #19, verses 1 & 2.

⁹ App. II, #19, verse 8.

¹⁰ App. II, #11, note.

¹¹ Morrison, p. 425; Mackay, pp. 231, 279.

lighthearted end of this spectrum, describing a woman who twice married older men for their money while enjoying frequent visits from a local joiner:

Siùbhlaidh e 'n oidhche, gun soillse, gun ghealach,
Oir is saor a tha ann, cha chum bantrach dorus ris,
Tollaidh e diomhair, tha sniomhair is fairche aig'.

He will travel by night, without light, without moon,
Because he is a joiner, a widow cannot close her door to him,
He will perforate it secretly — he has an auger and a hammer.¹²

While “Mary Oag and her Lover” (#46) comments on a love triangle whose details are now (perhaps mercifully) obscure, “The Dominie and Kitty” (#12) graphically depicts a schoolmaster who was a Peeping Tom:

| | |
|--|---|
| Cha 'n 'eil litir anns a' Bhìobull, A 's trice chi thu le do shùil, Na na h-ainmeanna bh' aig Cèitidh, Anns an làine bh' air a glùn. | There is not a letter in the Bible That you see with your eye more often, Than Kitty's private parts, In the shift that was on her knees. |
| Nach bu ghrànd' an sealladh, Dominie 'G èiridh lomnochd as a' chùil, Ged bha bhriogais aige leathann, Bhris an leathair bha 'n a cùl. | Wasn't the sight disgraceful, the Dominie Rising uncovered from the hiding place, Although his trousers were wide, The leather tore in the back. ¹³ |

“Davie” (#21) concerns a serial fornicator named David Sutherland, who had become involved with four women, two of whom were pregnant, and three of whom were noted in the records of the Kirk Session in 1765.¹⁴ “The Grey Buck” (#57) describes a comparable situation a decade later, when a man named Donald MacKay enlisted in the army and sailed for the East Indies in 1778 after being accused of fornication with six different women over a four-year period.¹⁵ “John Donn and Catherine Phail” (#8) concerns an illegitimate birth, while “William Mackay and Elizabeth Roy” (#94) criticizes the wedding plans of one of the women who had previously borne an illegitimate child to David Sutherland. While these poems vary somewhat in tone, several are quite harsh in condemning the conduct of the men and women involved, with no discernible sympathy towards the plight of unwed mothers. Except for the Peeping Tom, however, all these poems seem to involve

¹² App. II, #9, verse 2.

¹³ App. II, #12, verses 1 & 2. Although the word “ainmeanna” does not appear in the dictionaries I have consulted, the gist of the matter seems clear.

¹⁴ Mackay, p. 114; Morrison, p. 344.

¹⁵ Morrison, p. 408.

consensual conduct by adult members of the same social class, unlike the forced marriages with pregnant maids discussed in Chapter VI.

3. INSULTS

The five short poems in this section are nasty but amusing bits of personal invective commenting on persons or incidents that incurred Rob Donn's displeasure, often in matters of personal hygiene. "The Red Well of Ruspín" (#53) is typical:

'N uair a fhuair mi 'n t-sùileag,
Cha robh h-àileadh cùbhraidh,
'S ann a tha mi 'n dùil,
Gur h-e am mùn 'na bh' ann.

When I received the drinking vessel,
Its smell was not fragrant,
And I suspect
That it had urine in it.¹⁶

"To Donald" (#4) criticizes a man who eats porridge with his bare hands, "The Worthless Fellow" (#73) satirizes a gluttonous young man incompetent at both stockbreeding and courtship, and "To Faolan" (#65) directs its subject to put his finger up his own *tòn* after he told the bard's wife that Rob Donn was drinking at the inn instead of planting potatoes. Finally, "The Stranger at the Dance" (#3) satirizes a disgusting human specimen covered with scabs and insect larvae who paid unwanted attentions to one of the bard's daughters at a dance in Rob Donn's home, showing him in the role of protective *pater familias*.

4. HUMOR

The next five poems are gentler in tone and include two brief parodies of other Rob Donn songs. "To a Cronie" (#25) was composed at the request of a drunken friend on the model of the dialogue song for the daughters of Iain mac Eachainn (#24), dating it to the 1740s, while "The Poet's Wife" (#31) was composed on the model of his praise song to Sally Grant (#50), probably soon after his return from the Sutherland Fencibles in 1763. Two poems concern an older man named John MacLeod, who apparently disappeared for such a long time that his wife assumed he was dead and remarried, only to discover upon his return that she was an unwitting bigamist (#42).¹⁷ Although neither Rob Donn nor his editors explain how this delicate situation was resolved, the other poem (#27) describes MacLeod as an elderly man receiving the attentions of various unmarried women

¹⁶ App. II, #53, verse 1.

¹⁷ App. II, #42 and notes.

while the eligible bachelors were away at war, so perhaps his deserted wife was stuck with her second husband, regardless of her own preference in the matter.

The last poem (#96) elaborates on the same theme as #27, the purported attractions of an unsightly man when his better-favored rivals are away in military service. In this lighthearted piece of ribaldry, Rob Donn accuses his own wife, his daughters Kirsty and Mary, and four other women of being attracted to Faolan.

These two verses are representative:

| | |
|--|---|
| Tha bean-an-tigh' againn leth-cheud do bhliadhnaibh, 'S tha i cho liath ri caora, 'S ged nach 'eil fiacaill idir 'n a ceann, Cha lughad a geall air Faolan. | Our housewife is fifty years old, And she is as gray as a sheep, And although she has no teeth at all in her head, Not small is her desire for Faolan. |
| Bheirinn mo mhionnan na 'm bithinn 'n am eilldeir, Gu bitheadh am <i>fine</i> air aotrom, Ged bhitheadh ceithreair dhiubh torrach is trom, A' sparradh an clann air Faolan. | I would give my word if I were an elder, That the fine on him would be light, Even if four of them were pregnant, Breeding the children of Faolan. ¹⁸ |

And so on. This is the type of poem that was published by Mackay and Gunn and MacFarlane only in bowdlerized form (if at all), as discussed in Chapter II and the notes to Appendix II of this thesis, as well as my unpublished conference paper, “Rob Donn and His Editors: Sexuality and Censorship” (University of Edinburgh, November 2013).

B. THE MELODIES

1. SATIRE CONTESTS

The first Iain Tapaiddh satire about the maltster (#75) is in three-line strophic meter but is easily set to the tune identified by Morrison, “Over the Water wi’ Charlie”, if each verse is repeated.¹⁹ I have used the version from Oswald’s *Caledonian Pocket Companion* for this song; the version from *The Scots Musical Museum* is used for #83 (in Chapter IX).²⁰ Purser provides additional tune history and several alternative titles dating to the late seventeenth century, tracing the melody to an Irish tune called “Shanbuie”, the “anglicised spelling for Séan Buí,

¹⁸ App. II, #96, verses 7 & 14.

¹⁹ Morrison, p. 337.

²⁰ *CPC* IV, p. 7; *SMM* I, #187; App. I, #75 & #83.

meaning Yellow Jack and a follower of William III”, explaining that tunes were often renamed when appropriated by opposing political factions.²¹ My setting is eight bars in 6/8 time with an octave range, a heptatonic scale in D major, and a double tonic in E minor and D major.

The next Iain Tapaidh satire (#89) — involving the maltster and sundry other mishaps — was sung to “O’er the Hills and far away”, another popular tune with long antecedents.²² According to Purser, the melody appears in the Atkinson manuscript of 1694-1695, and the refrain and title come from a song called “The Recruiting Officer” first published in 1706.²³ Setting Rob Donn’s words to the chorus in *The Scots Musical Museum* reveals how cleverly he adapted Gaelic word stresses to a melody designed for English words by using one-syllable Gaelic words, repeated three times, at the end of each line to replace the words “far away”, an effective compositional technique for creating a memorable satire in an oral context.²⁴ The tune itself is eight bars in 4/4 time with the range of a seventh, hexatonic (without a seventh) Ionian/Mixolydian in G, with a double tonic in A minor and G major, and circular, ending on the second.

According to Morrison, the third Iain Tapaidh satire (#48) was sung to “The Auld Wife ayont the Fire”, a suggestion I rejected, partly because the octave leap at the end of the second bar seemed inappropriate, but mostly because I found another song with the same Gaelic words as Rob Donn’s first line whose tune is a better fit.²⁵ Its title is “Moch sa mhadainn ’s mi làn airteal”, with text, translation and melody published by Donald Campbell in 1862.²⁶ Although Campbell’s text is undated, the words are those of a timeless Gaelic love song (evidently a pre-Victorian one), and the fact that Rob Donn used the same first line almost guarantees that he used the same melody. My setting is eight bars in 4/4 time, the range a tenth, the scale hexatonic (without a seventh) Ionian/Mixolydian in D, and the tonality double tonic in E minor and D major. This is another circular tune, ending this time on the sixth.

²¹ *CPC* IV, p. 7, notes.

²² Morrison, p. 334.

²³ *CPC* VII, p. 23, notes.

²⁴ *SMM* I, #62.

²⁵ Morrison, p. 331. The tune for “The Auld Wife” is in *SMM* II, #435.

²⁶ D. Campbell, pp. 206-09, appendix, p. 6.

The tune Morrison identifies for the last Iain Tapaidd satire (#19) — “I Care for Nobody” or “The Jolly Miller” — is a perfect fit for Rob Donn’s song, and could even have been chosen because he thought its refrain summed up the schoolmaster’s cavalier attitude towards the truth.²⁷ Chappell traces the melody to a song in thieves’ cant called “The budgeon it is a delicate trade” published in 1725, with a verse about “The Jolly Miller” incorporated in a ballad opera by 1762.²⁸ Since versions of the song have been recorded from Aberdeenshire to Hampshire, Rob Donn may have heard it somewhere on his travels.²⁹ I have set the version from Chappell, sixteen bars with an AABA structure, in 6/8 time, with an octave range and a heptatonic scale in G minor.

Rob Donn took a different approach for his two songs to the Geigan (#13 and 68), setting both to the same tune, “There’s Nae Luck about the House.”³⁰ Glen notes that the tune was published in a collection of country dances in London in 1752, which would predate Rob Donn’s songs by about two decades, further suggesting that it “evolved out of ‘Up an’ waur them a’, to which it bears a strong resemblance”.³¹ Although neither of Rob Donn’s texts has any obvious relationship to the Scots song, they fit my setting from *The Scots Musical Museum*, and using the same tune for both suggests they were composed about the same time for successive episodes of a continuing dispute.³² My setting of #13 is sixteen bars with an ABA¹B¹ structure, in 2/4 time with an octave range, the scale hexatonic (without a sixth) Aeolian/Dorian in E, and a double tonic in E minor and D major. The setting of #68 is the same except in length; because Rob Donn’s verses are longer, I used all 24 bars from the source, including the chorus. The other song about the Geigan (#11), a dialogue between Rob Donn and his friend Arthur Cormack, is set to the Scots melody “Logan Water”, discussed in Chapter VII as a setting for #33.

“Rob the Hunter” (#58) is set to “John Roy Stewart”, a ubiquitous eighteenth-century instrumental tune that may or may not be connected to the Gaelic

²⁷ Morrison, p. 184.

²⁸ Chappell, II, pp. 666-68.

²⁹ Peter Kennedy, *Folksongs of Britain and Ireland* (London: Oak Publications, 1984), pp. 514, 533.

³⁰ Morrison, pp. 425, 285.

³¹ Glen, p. 70.

³² *SMM* I, #44.

poet and Jacobite officer of that name.³³ The tune appears in various collections as a reel and a strathspey, a fiddle and a pipe tune, and Lamb has documented links with several *puirt-à-beul*, tracing one related melody, “Dainty Davie”, to the Playford collection published in 1703.³⁴ I have set the version printed by MacGlashan in 1778 under the title “John Roy Stewart’s Reel”, eight bars in 4/4 time with the range of a tenth and a hexatonic scale (without a seventh) Ionian/Mixolydian in C.³⁵ Unusually, the tonality seems to shift between C major and A minor (i.e., the relative minor rather than the traditional double tonic). Rob Donn uses the same melody for one of his songs to Sally Grant (#80), discussed in Chapter IX.

According to Morrison, “The Granges” (#22) was sung to a tune called “Bonnie Prince Charlie”, but the tunes I found with similar titles (of which there are no doubt others) are in 4/4 time and do not fit Rob Donn’s words.³⁶ The tune collected by Munro and printed in Gunn and MacFarlane (#22(1)) is in 6/8 time, as is the tune identified by Mackenzie, “Crò nan Gobhar” (The Goat Pen), of which Munro’s is a variant.³⁷ I also set the version from the Simon Fraser collection (#22(2)), which he described as “long known as a Scotch dance.”³⁸ It is a 6/8 jig in sixteen bars, verse and chorus, with the range of a tenth and a hexatonic scale (without a fourth) that is otherwise in D major (except one sharpened fifth probably courtesy of Fraser), and a double tonic in E minor and D major. The Munro version is generally similar, although its range is only a ninth and its scale is heptatonic, making it closer to the pipe version in William Gunn, noted below.³⁹

In short, all nine of the flyting songs were set to borrowed tunes.

2. EXTRAMARITAL SEX

Based on its refrain, “The Wife of Inchverry” (#9) was sung to one of Rob Donn’s favorite tunes, “Tha mi nam chadal”, also used for #62 and #93 (previously

³³ Morrison, p. 433. For the poet, see *An Lasair*, pp. 435-36, 440-44, 448-52.

³⁴ For example, it appears as “John Roy Stewart” in Gow & Sons, *The Complete Repository*, 4 vols (Edinburgh: c. 1800), I, p. 26; and as “Sud an gaol a bh’ agad orm” in Wm. Gunn, pp. 38-39. Lamb’s discussion is in *Puirt-à-Beul*, pp. 45, 77, 148, 160.

³⁵ Alexander MacGlashan, *A Collection of Strathspey Reels* (Edinburgh: 1778), p. 30.

³⁶ Morrison, p. 166; see “Thearlich na’n Tigudh Tu” in *Gesto*, p. 149, and “Prionns Tearlach/Prince Charles” in *SF*, p. 79, #191.

³⁷ Gunn and MacFarlane, p. 85; *Sàr-Obair*, p. 206.

³⁸ *SF*, pp. 8, 101 (#22).

³⁹ Wm. Gunn, p. 20.

discussed). “Mary Oag and her Lover” (#46) was set to “The Birks of Aberfeldy”, perhaps hinting that young Mary had strayed too often to their equivalent in the treeless landscape of northwest Sutherland.⁴⁰ This tune dates at least to the Atkinson manuscript of 1694-1695; I have set the version from *The Scots Musical Museum*.⁴¹ The setting is eight bars in 4/4 time, with the range of a tenth and a double tonic in E minor and D major. The scale, although strictly speaking heptatonic in D major, is almost pentatonic, with one seventh in bar 2 and one fourth in bar 6.

“The Dominie and Kitty” (#12), the song about the Peeping Tom, was set to “Roy’s Wife of Aldievalloch”, a strathspey with well-known Scots words that was also popular as an instrumental tune.⁴² According to Glen, the melody was originally a dance tune dating at least to the mid-eighteenth century and known as “Ruffian’s Rant” (in Bremner, 1759) and “Coig na Scalan” (in Cumming, 1780).⁴³ Since the latter is a Gaelic title, Rob Donn may have heard it as a *port-à-beul* whose words are now lost. My setting is from *The Scots Musical Museum*, an 8-bar strathspey in 4/4 time, with chorus and verse, a wide range (an octave and a fourth), a hexatonic scale (without a seventh) Ionian/Mixolydian in C, and a double tonic in D minor and C major.⁴⁴

“Davie” (#21), with its chorus “Hei ’m fear dubh”, was undoubtedly based on Alasdair mac Mhaighstir Alasdair’s Jacobite waulking song “Hè an clò dubh” or “Am Breacan Uallach”, a compositional technique Rob Donn used repeatedly when a few words in a chorus or opening line of another song provided him with an appropriate tune.⁴⁵ My setting, from Angus Fraser, is sixteen bars with an AABC structure, chorus and verse, in 2/4 time, with the range an octave and a fourth, a hexatonic scale (without a seventh) Ionian/Mixolydian in F, and a double tonic in G minor and F major.⁴⁶ “William Mackay and Elizabeth Roy” (#94) also features a

⁴⁰ Morrison, p. 359.

⁴¹ *CPC* VII, p. 16; *SMM* I, #113.

⁴² Morrison, p. 357. “Roy’s Wife” appears, for instance, as a fiddle tune in Niel Gow, *A Third Collection of Strathspey Reels* (Edinburgh: 1792), p. 13, and as a vocal duet in *Select Melodies of Scotland*, ed. by George Thomson (Edinburgh: 1822), II, p. 21.

⁴³ Glen, p. 168.

⁴⁴ *SMM* II, #342.

⁴⁵ The text of the prototype can be found in J. L. Campbell, pp. 155-63, 302.

⁴⁶ *AF*, p. 41.

chorus modeled on an obvious source, “Robie dona gòrach”, a tune that dates at least to the MacFarlane manuscript of 1740.⁴⁷ I have set the version from Patrick MacDonald, sixteen bars, verse and chorus, in 4/4 time, with the range an octave and a fourth, a heptatonic scale in F major, and a double tonic in G minor and F major.⁴⁸ “John Donn and Catherine Phail” (#8) is set to “O’er the hills and far away” (already discussed).

The most intriguing song in this group is “The Grey Buck” (#57), a pipe jig whose tune both Mackenzie and Morrison attribute to the bard himself. According to Mackenzie:

The tune is excellent and may justly be entitled the first of the Sutherlandshire pipe jigs. It was the poet’s own composition.⁴⁹

Morrison takes the position that Rob Donn composed the tune but not the words:

This poem, although ascribed to Rob Donn in Mackenzie’s *Beauties of Gaelic Poetry*, is not usually reckoned as his. Many of the people of the bard’s native district aver it is not Rob’s. There can be little doubt, however, that the song is Rob Donn’s, and one of the very latest of his productions.⁵⁰

If Morrison’s informants were correct, several possibilities come to mind:

(1) that Rob Donn composed the tune earlier strictly as a pipe jig, perhaps for one of the MacLeod pipers; (2) that Rob Donn composed the tune earlier with different words in mind (perhaps for one of the 120 poems not included in this thesis); or (3) that Rob Donn composed the tune in the mid-1770s to accompany the contemporaneous words of another poet on the subject of the Grey Buck. The tune itself appears without words in William Gunn as “Am Boc Glas” and in Gesto as “Boc liath nan gobhar”, both translated as “The Grey Buck”.⁵¹ It has remained in the piping repertoire; in 2002, Cannon identified “The Shaggy Grey Buck” as an old pipe jig that is still “highly regarded” but was “extensively reset in the twentieth century”, although the connection with Rob Donn seems to have been lost.⁵²

Although I tried to set Morrison’s words to the tune in Gesto (#57), this was not entirely successful because the vocables Morrison provides for the chorus (bars

⁴⁷ Morrison, p. 326; David Young, *Walter MacFarlane Manuscript (1740)*, NLS MS 2085, p. 89.

⁴⁸ *HVA*, p. 45, #152.

⁴⁹ *Sàr Obair*, p. 208.

⁵⁰ Morrison, p. 408.

⁵¹ Wm. Gunn, p. 60; *Gesto*, p. 101.

⁵² Cannon, *The Highland Bagpipe*, p. 146.

1-8) do not fit the tune, although the words provided for the verses (bars 9-16) fit perfectly well. This suggests either that Morrison garbled the vocables, or that the melody to which they were sung is not in Gesto. So although the first half of my setting probably does not reflect anything Rob Donn would have sung, it was the best I could do. The tune itself is sixteen bars in 6/8 time, the range a ninth, and the scale hexatonic (without a third) Dorian/Mixolydian in D, with a double tonic in D minor and C major.

In short, six of the seven tunes in this section were borrowed.

3. INSULTS

Of the five songs in this group, the most fascinating for the historical detective is “The Red Well of Ruspín” (#53), in which Rob Donn castigated the sanitary habits of residents of Rispond who relieved themselves uphill from their well. Rob Donn’s chorus begins “Sud e ’n tobar ruagh”, and my suspicions regarding his possible source were initially roused by a melody titled “Giolla ruoidh” in the 1740 MacFarlane manuscript.⁵³ In modern Gaelic spelling this is “Gille ruadh” (red-haired lad), so Rob Donn’s substitution of the words “tobar ruadh” for “gille ruadh” parallels his substitution of “fear dubh” for “clò dubh” in #4 and #21, a handy technique for composing a sarcastic parody. The Gaelic title of the original song was anglicized to “Gilderoy”, the title under which it appears in the Balcarres lute manuscript (c. 1690) and many later sources, detailed in the article by Anne Dhu McLucas already noted.⁵⁴ As she explains, the original *gille ruadh* was Patrick MacGregor, an outlaw who was executed in Edinburgh on July 29, 1636, with five cohorts and who contributed some of the raw material for Walter Scott’s novel *Rob Roy*.⁵⁵ He also became the inspiration for a broadside ballad in Scots, published in the 1690s, whose tune was published widely in the early eighteenth century.⁵⁶

McLucas argues that the Gilderoy tune is related to (or the source of) the tune known as “The Jolly Miller” (#19), instead of the thieves’ song identified by

⁵³ NLS MS 2084.

⁵⁴ McLucas, pp. 169-85.

⁵⁵ McLucas, p. 169.

⁵⁶ McLucas, pp. 169-72.

Chappell.⁵⁷ What she does not discuss — of more relevance here — is the likelihood that “Gille ruadh” originally had Gaelic words composed by the outlaw’s MacGregor relatives, transmitted orally in the *Gàidhealtachd* over the next century or so until Rob Donn happened to be thirsty while passing through Rispond. This seems quite plausible to me, creating a scenario in which a song with a single origin was carried into the future by two streams of tradition, one oral and Gaelic, the other written and Scots.⁵⁸ Perhaps Rob Donn even heard both.

Such a postulated divergence could explain why my setting (#53) from *Orpheus Caledonius* does not quite fit Rob Donn’s words, some of which I had to repeat and rearrange to construct a singable text.⁵⁹ On the other hand, the mock epic pretensions of this melody make it quite funny when contrasted with the subject matter of Rob Donn’s text, a juxtaposition he could well have intended. The tune is sixteen bars, chorus and verse, with a range of an octave and a fourth, using a heptatonic Aeolian scale in G and a double tonic in G minor and F major (except three sharpened sevenths — F#s — in bars 1, 5, and 13).

“To Donald” (#4) uses the same melody as #21, again transforming the chorus from “Hè, an clò dubh” into “Hei, am fear dubh.” “The Worthless Fellow” (#73) is set to “Andrew with his Cutty Gun”, a tune whose Scots words first appeared in Ramsay’s 1724 *Tea-table Miscellany* with a tune first published by Oswald in *The Caledonian Pocket Companion*.⁶⁰ It was also popular as a fiddle tune, and my setting is from Aird — sixteen bars with an AABC structure, chorus and verse, in 2/4 time, the range an octave and a fourth and the scale hexatonic (without a sixth) Aeolian/Dorian in E, with a double tonic in E minor and D major.⁶¹ In addition to its large range, this tune has several ascending leaps (in bars 3, 7, 9, and 15), one of Rob Donn’s favored musical gestures. “To Faolan” (#65) uses the same melody and chorus as #6 (discussed in Chapter VII), probably derived from a waulking song.

⁵⁷ McLucas, pp. 173-77.

⁵⁸ See Hamish Henderson, ‘Under the Earth I Go’, in *Borne on the Carrying Stream: The Legacy of Hamish Henderson*, ed. by Eberhard Bort (Ochertyre: Grace Note Publications, 2010), p. 25.

⁵⁹ *Orpheus Caledonius*, ed. by William Thomson, 2 vols (London: 1733), II, p. 107, #47.

⁶⁰ *CPC* VI, p. 4 (notes).

⁶¹ Aird, II, p. 14.

The last song in this group, “The Stranger at the Dance” (#3), is the only one whose melody Rob Donn may have composed, in whole or in part. The tune is from the Munro collection, and Henry Whyte and Malcolm MacFarlane described it in 1897 as a “Song and Melody by Rob Donn.”⁶² Two years later, MacFarlane seems to have changed his mind:

This tune is a variant of “John Anderson, my Jo” and the “Cruiskeen Lawn” — a melody which has found its way into Welsh and Norse music as well as into Scotch and Irish. The probability is that it is of Irish origin. This is the only known instance of Scottish Gaelic words being adapted to it. The chorus is un-Gaelic and suggests borrowing from a current song with English words.⁶³

The vocables in the refrain are “Fal al dal al dar à, Fal da rà là rà”, but MacFarlane does not identify any other song that uses them. They certainly do not appear in “John Anderson, my Jo”, nor do I find its melody particularly similar to Rob Donn’s. Thus, although Rob Donn may well have borrowed the vocables and even the tune, I have not identified a likely source, and MacFarlane’s comments seem more speculative than conclusive.

Nevertheless, the structure of this song is worth analyzing briefly because it is one Rob Donn used elsewhere. The poem is comprised of seven lines, of which lines 1, 3, 5 and 6 contain the words, and lines 2, 4 and 7 repeat the vocable refrain. Here, with a melody in 2/4 time, the result is a 28-bar tune with four bars of music for each line of text. In other instances, such as the three songs with the refrain “Tha mi nam chadal” (#9, 62 & 93) and the two songs (#31 & 50) with the refrain “An ribhinn, àlainn, èibhinn, òg”, the poem has eight lines, with lines 1, 3, 5, 6 and 7 containing the verse and lines 2, 4, and 8 the refrain. This may be an Irish structural device (based on MacFarlane’s commentary and the origins of “Tha mi nam chadal”), but it also seems related to the tendency for waulking songs to intersperse vocables in the text rather than separating the verse and the chorus. Whatever its origins, the device appealed to Rob Donn, as he used it with some frequency.

Returning to the tune in Gunn and MacFarlane, it is 28 bars in 2/4 time, marked “Gu beothail” (lively), with the range of a tenth. Following the poetic structure described above, the melody is the same in lines 1 and 3 (bars 1-4 and 9-

⁶² Henry Whyte and Malcolm MacFarlane, ‘Poetry and Music’, in *Sutherland and the Reay Country*, ed. by Adam Gunn and John Mackay (Glasgow: The Celtic Monthly, 1897), pp. 283-320 (p. 314).

⁶³ Gunn and MacFarlane, p. 101.

12), as well as each incidence of the refrain (bars 5-8, 13-16, and 25-28), resulting in an overall structure that could be described as ABABCDB. The scale is hexatonic (without a sixth) Aeolian/Dorian in G, with a predominant tonality in G minor that sometimes shifts to F major and Bb major. The melodic contour contains two ascending leaps (in bars 1-2 and 9-10) but otherwise uses relatively small intervals.

In short, four of the five tunes in this section were borrowed and only the last might have been composed by Rob Donn.

4. HUMOR

The first two songs in this group, #25 and #31, are intentional parodies of other Rob Donn songs (#24 and #50 respectively) and thus use the same melodies (both discussed in Chapter IX). The other three songs could be Rob Donn's own, if only because their tunes have no other obvious sources. The bigamy song that Morrison calls "John MacLeod" (#42) is titled "Agus o Sheann Duine" in Gunn and MacFarlane, who use the tune from William Gunn where it is called "Fire fara a sheann Duine, 's fhada leam a tha thu agum. My old man is long a-dying".⁶⁴ It appears with the same title, "The auld Man is long a dying", in a more elaborate fiddle arrangement published by MacGlashan in 1778.⁶⁵ Since that is the year of Rob Donn's death, the fact that the tune was known that early and consistently thereafter in both Scots and Gaelic by a title based on his poem provides some reason to believe that he composed its melody. My setting (originally from Gunn) is eight bars in 4/4 time, marked "Gu beothail", with an AABB¹ structure, the range of a ninth, a hexatonic scale (without a fourth) that is otherwise in C major, and a double tonic in D minor and C major.

The tune for the other song about John MacLeod (#27) is more elusive. According to Morrison, it was sung to "Fear Chulchairn", also known as "The Maid of Isla."⁶⁶ However, in none of the versions I have examined does that tune fit the words of Rob Donn's chorus, although the second part fits the verse.⁶⁷ In contrast, there is a sol-fa melody in MacFarlane's papers titled "Gaol curraic. R.D. Munro" that fits perfectly, as it should because "Gaol currachd" is the first phrase of Rob

⁶⁴ Wm. Gunn, p. 37.

⁶⁵ MacGlashan (1778), p. 34.

⁶⁶ Morrison, p. 329; *SF*, p. 114.

⁶⁷ See, e.g., *Edinburgh Repository*, I, p. 90.

Donn's chorus.⁶⁸ But neither the text nor the tune was included in Gunn and MacFarlane, probably because of its risqué text:

| | |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| 'S e mo bharail, do thaobh nàduair, | It is my opinion, as a matter of nature, |
| Gu 'm bheil gnè anns na fir mhaol', | That the character of bald men |
| Cheart cho meamnach ri fir eile, | Is just as lusty as other men, |
| Chaoidh na 'm fanadh iad cho chaol. | Forever lamenting that they remain so small. ⁶⁹ |

The irony of this, of course, is that Morrison printed the text, so the only result of this censorship was to suppress the catchy tune that went with it, a tune that I would not classify as a variant of “Fear Chulchairn”, although the second half (the part that fits Rob Donn's verse) has a similar melodic contour. Accordingly, I have set only the Munro tune, eight bars in 4/4 time with the range of a ninth, a heptatonic Aeolian scale in B, and a tonality that seems to shift between the chorus (F# minor and E major) and the verse (B minor and A major). If that musical analysis is correct, perhaps Rob Donn did adapt the verse and chorus from two different sources, one of them related to “Fear Chulchairn”.

The tune for the last song in this section, extolling the much sought-after “Faolan” (#96), appears only in the Munro collection and was described by Whyte and MacFarlane as “A Love-Song and Melody by Rob Donn”.⁷⁰ It is a 16-bar melody, chorus and verse, in 6/8 time marked “Gu h-eutrom, aighearach” (lightly, humorous). The range is a ninth and the scale hexatonic (without a seventh) Ionian/Mixolydian in A, with a double tonic in B minor and A major.

In short, Rob Donn may have composed all three of the melodies analyzed in this section (as well as the tunes for the two parodies to be discussed in Chapter IX).

C. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

In composing the twenty-six songs in this chapter, Rob Donn seems to have drawn almost equally on his four principal tune sources: seven from the Gaelic song tradition,⁷¹ six from the Scots song tradition,⁷² six instrumental melodies,⁷³ and

⁶⁸ NLS Acc. 9736/144.

⁶⁹ App. II, #27, verse 7.

⁷⁰ Whyte and MacFarlane, p. 315.

⁷¹ They are #4, 9, 21, 48, 53, 65 and 94. “Hè, an clò dubh” is used twice, for #4 & 21.

⁷² They are #8, 11, 19, 46, 73 and 89. “O'er the hills and far away” is used twice, for #8 & 89.

seven melodies that may be his own.⁷⁴ Unlike the last chapter, there is also some correlation between his tune sources and his subject matter. Specifically, all nine melodies for the flyting songs were borrowed, including five from instrumental dance tunes, three from Scots songs (one also known as a reel), and apparently only one from a Gaelic song. The tunes of the seven songs about extramarital sex come from all four sources, but the tunes of three of the five insult songs seem to come from the Gaelic tradition, and five of the seven melodies Rob Donn may have composed are in the humor category. This pattern may be entirely coincidental, or perhaps Rob Donn took more time to compose some of the humorous songs (including their music), while he created the topical satires more rapidly in response to a particular incident and found it easier to use a ready-made melodic framework.

As might be expected for settings of humorous and satirical songs, twelve of the twenty-six tunes are reels, strathspeys and jigs, and another three are waulking songs, all grouped together in Chapter VII as *ceòl beag*. Of the eleven melodies I have classified as *ceòl meadhanach*, four are arguably his own compositions, while four are from Gaelic and three from Scots songs. Most are fairly cheerful melodies that border on the *ceòl beag* classification, especially if played instrumentally at a quick tempo, but a few are not, including “Tha mi nam chadal” (#9), “Logan Water” (#11), and “Gilderoy” (#53). The first two might be characterized as service tunes, as each is used for at least one other song, but “Gilderoy” must have been chosen deliberately as musical satire to juxtapose the heroic melody and the scatological verse. The seven tunes that Rob Donn may have composed himself include a strathspey (#3), a reel (#42) and a jig (#57), two recycled original melodies (#25 & 31), and the two humorous songs about unattractive men hotly pursued by numerous women (#27 & 96).

One noteworthy aspect of the songs in this chapter is their relatively late date, since a large proportion seem to have been composed during the last fifteen years of Rob Donn’s life, after his return from the Sutherland Fencibles in 1763. This may be attributable in part to his living situation in Balnakeil, the largest

⁷³ They are #12, 13, 22, 58, 68 and 75. “There’s nae luck about the house” is used twice, for #13 & 68.

⁷⁴ They are #3, 25, 27, 31, 42, 57 and 96. Two of these (#25 & 31) are parodies of other songs he composed, with the same melodies.

village in Durness Parish, a better observation post for human behavior and a better locus for preserving songs in the memories of his neighbors than his more isolated homes at Bad na h-Achlais and Fresgill. But his circumstances had also changed in other ways; as a married man with a large family, a quarter of a century after the Forty-Five, he no longer had reasons to compose love songs or Jacobite verse, and he may have become tired of fighting every battle against injustice with the righteous indignation of youth. This could help to explain why his outlook on the human condition, always amused and cynical, drew him increasingly to humorous and satirical verse in later life.

Another feature of the songs in this chapter is their greater tendency to recycle tunes that Rob Donn used elsewhere, either for other satirical verse or for more serious songs. This implies that, for satire and humor, he considered the words more important than the tune, which served mostly as a vehicle for spreading the latest slander or outrage in the most memorable way. Indeed, using a familiar tune furthered this goal because it helped the bard's listeners remember and repeat the words and extend the chain of oral transmission.

In terms of musical characteristics, seventeen of the tunes in this chapter are hexatonic and nine heptatonic; none is pentatonic. Nineteen tunes use duple meter (4/4 or 2/4) and seven use triple meter (6/8 or 3/4). Seventeen of the scales have major thirds, eight have minor thirds, and one lacks a third. Twenty-one of the twenty-six tunes have a typical double tonic construction, but five do not; two of those are minor (#11 and #19), one has different double tonics in the chorus and verse (#27), and two seem to have tonalities that shift between a major triad and its relative minor (#3 and #58). Compared to Chapter VII, this indicates a higher percentage of tunes with major tonality and duple meter, perhaps because Rob Donn used more reel and strathspey settings. But the distinctions are small, and some are probably influenced by the musical taste and ear of later collectors and arrangers (including my own), a point that must be kept in mind when considering all the song settings in this thesis.

In conclusion, we have now surveyed Rob Donn's elegies, social and political commentary, songs of love, courtship and weddings, and humorous and

satirical verse. The next chapter will discuss three smaller categories of verse: praise songs, nature poetry, and sea songs.

CHAPTER IX. PRAISE, NATURE AND SEA SONGS

This chapter will examine three distinct categories of Rob Donn’s verse: praise, nature and sea songs. While the number of songs in each category is relatively small — eight praise songs, three nature songs, and four songs about sea journeys — several are illuminating historically, metrically or musically. For instance, the praise songs include Rob Donn’s two pibroch songs; the nature songs include a seasonal song based on a model by Alasdair mac Mhaighstir Alasdair; and two of the sea songs illustrate approaches to the musical setting of poems in three-line strophic meter. While this thesis can only touch on these topics, all provide considerable scope for further research from a comparative perspective. Because of this diversity, each song type will be discussed separately: pibroch songs, other praise songs, nature songs, and sea songs.

A. PIBROCH SONGS

1. THE POEMS

Rob Donn created only two pibroch songs, both in praise of young women, Isabel MacKay (#44) and Anna MacKay (#97). Despite strong similarities in metrical and musical structure, they were probably composed two or three decades apart, although we have far less information about Anna than Isabel. Isabel MacKay, a daughter of Iain mac Eachainn who grew up in the same household as the bard, is mentioned in three other poems. In “Town and Country Life” (#24) and “Is trom leam an àirigh” (#78), she is still a young girl at the shielings, and “Briogais Mhic Ruaraidh” (#16) describes the high jinks at her wedding in 1747.¹ This song must be the third of the four, dating to the mid-1740s, as it depicts Isabel as a young lady of marriageable age stranded alone at the edge of the deer-forest with the cows and invites eligible bachelors to make her an offer of marriage.

| | |
|--|---|
| Is’bal Nic-Aoidh aig a’ chrodh laoigh, | Isabel MacKay with the calving cows, |
| Is’bal Nic-Aoidh, ’s i ’n a h-aonar; | Isabel MacKay all alone; |
| Seall sibh Nic-Aoidh aig a’ chrodh laoigh, | Look at MacKay’s daughter with the |
| | calving cows, |
| Am bonnaibh na frìdh, ’s i ’n a h-aonar. | At the foot of the deer forest all alone. |
| Duine ’sam bith th’ air son a’ chluich, | Any man who is in the game, |
| De chinneadh math, le meud a chruidh, | Of good family, with a portion of cattle, |

¹ Grimble, pp. 11-17, 36-37, 97-103.

Deanadh e ruith do Riothan nan Damh,
Gheobh e bean-tigh 's cuireadh e rithe.

Let him run to Riothan nan Damh,
He will get a wife and make her happy.²

Despite its metrical complexity, the text is repetitive and not particularly interesting, telling us much less about Isabel herself than the dialogue song with her sister (#24) or even “Is trom leam an àirigh” (#78), which describes her as “Iseabail a’ bheoil mhilis, mhànrnach, bhinn” (honey-mouthed Isabel, melodious, sweet).³ Here she is depicted as a passive, lonely, pitiable figure longing for a husband, a rather odd image for a praise song. But since it is clear from other contexts that Rob Donn liked and admired her, perhaps this song is better characterized as a *brosnachadh* directed to potential suitors.

Anna MacKay, in contrast, is described as an independent-minded young woman who stubbornly refused every suitor recommended by her parents and insisted on marrying the young man she loved, a cattleherd named Aodh living alone at the shielings near Aisir (Oldshore).⁴ Those shielings still appear on the Ordnance Survey Map for Cape Wrath (Landranger #9), just inland from Oldshoremore and Kinlochbervie, a location supported by the bard’s reference to “‘M Bealach Eadar-dhà-bheinn” (the pass between two mountains) and the proximity of the hills Meall Dearg and Poll Buidhe. Typically, Rob Donn decided to visit the young couple to see how they were faring in their new married life and memorialized his observations from the standpoint of a father with daughters of marriageable age:

'S suarach an t-uidheam,
Do ghruagach no nighin,
Bhi pronnadh 's a bruidhean,
Is cab oirre gàireachdaich.
Triall chun na h-uirge,
Gun gnothuch no guidhe,
A' mhealladh le bruidhean,
Pàisteachain bà-bhuachail.
Ma tha agaibh do chridhe,
Na philleas mo bhruidhean,
Thèid mis' air an t-slighe,
Is feuchaidh mi 'n t-àite,
An robh sibh 'n ur dìthis,
'N ur luidhe 's 'n ur suidhe,
'S mu 'n ruitheadh beul duibhe,
B' fheàrr gun a chlàistinn.

Inadequate is the preparation
For a young woman or girl,
To be distributing and speaking
And her mouth laughing.
A journey of hope,
Without business or intercession,
Enticing with speech
A child of a cattle-herder.
If you have any heart,
What will repay my words,
I will go on the path,
And I will investigate there,
Whether the two of you,
In your lying and in your sitting,
And before the black mouth runs,
It would be better not to hear it.⁵

² App. II, #44, “Urlar” and “Siubhal B”.

³ App. II, #78, verse 1.

⁴ App. II, #97, verses 2 and 4.

⁵ App. II, #97, verse 3.

This empathy with the challenges facing young women helps date the poem to the last decade of Rob Donn's life, as his daughters Isabel and Christine were married, respectively, in 1770 and 1773.⁶ The greater sophistication of its text and a glance at a map also support a late date for this song, as a foot journey to Aisir was more feasible from Durness than from any of Rob Donn's earlier homes.

The opposite position is taken by Bridget Mackenzie, who argues that Isabel's song is later because it is "a serious attempt to reproduce the piobaireachd form", while Anna's song was "an early, experimental attempt to reproduce in words the piobaireachd form, which he does not seem to have understood fully."⁷ Mackenzie must be a piper because she simply assumes that the bard's overriding purpose was to imitate a pipe tune. Instead, I consider it more likely that his first song was the strict imitation, and his later return to the genre was conducted with the creative freedom of the old master.

2. THE MUSIC

Regardless of their dating, both pibroch songs are modeled on the structure of *ceòl mòr*, the great music of the Highland bagpipe. This structure is easily seen in "Isabel MacKay" (#44) because the song is written out in sections with music and appropriate headings in Gunn and MacFarlane.⁸ Disregarding repeats, those sections are: (A) "Ùrlar" — 8 bars in 6/8 time; (B) "Siubhal" — 8 bars in 6/8 time; (C) "Siubhal" — 5 bars in 4/4 time; (D) "Crunluath" — 4 bars in 4/4 time; and (E) "Crunluath" — 5 bars in 4/4 time. In addition, certain bars are marked "repeat ad lib." within every section except the *ùrlar*, each section is repeated at least once, often with separate first and second endings, and the *ùrlar* is repeated periodically throughout the song. I have used this setting in its entirety in my appendices.

Anna's song (#97), on the other hand, had to be reconstructed, as both Mackay and Morrison printed the words without any musical guidance, and Gunn and MacFarlane did not include it at all.⁹ Nevertheless, as shown below, with one exception each verse of Anna's song can be sung to the rhythm of a section of Isabel's:

⁶ Grimble, p. 198.

⁷ Bridget Mackenzie, *Piping Traditions of the North of Scotland* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1998), p. 196.

⁸ Gunn and MacFarlane, pp. 88-89.

⁹ Mackay, pp. 285-86; Morrison, pp. 306-08.

| <u>Anna MacKay</u> | | <u>Isabel MacKay</u> |
|--------------------|---|---|
| Verse 1 (6/8) | = | (A) <i>Ùrlar</i> (6/8) |
| Verse 2 (4/4) | = | (D) or (E) <i>Crunluath</i> (4/4) ¹⁰ |
| Verse 3 (4/4) | = | (C) <i>Siubhal</i> (4/4) |
| Verse 4 (9/8) | ≠ | (B) <i>Siubhal</i> (6/8) |

Therefore, after consulting with piper Allan MacDonald, I set Anna’s song to the melody of Isabel’s, modifying it only in verse 4 where the three word stresses in each line require a 9/8 meter.¹¹ Probably Rob Donn did exactly the same thing.

According to Gunn and MacFarlane, “Isabel MacKay” is set to the *piobaireachd* tune “Fàilt’ a’ Phrionns” (The Prince’s Salute), which the Gesto collection dates to the Jacobite Rising of 1715.¹² My setting of both songs is in E Dorian, with a heptatonic scale and a double tonic in E minor and D major. With the range of a ninth, the melody is easily transposed to fit the pipe scale with a double tonic in A and G. And because the *ùrlar* of the simplified *piobaireachd* setting of “Failte Phrionnsa” in Gesto is almost identical to the *ùrlar* of “Isabel MacKay” in Gunn and MacFarlane, one can trace a plausible line of descent from the 1715 pipe tune to Isabel’s song in the 1740s to Anna’s song in the 1770s, although the reality may have been more complex.

3. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

The broader questions raised by these songs concern the origin of pibroch song as a genre and why Rob Donn happened to compose two of them when he did, although any attempt to answer these questions encounters the usual split between Gaelic literary and musical scholarship. Thomson and Black both credit Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair with composing the first pibroch song, “Moladh Mòraig”, probably in the 1730s, although it was not published until 1751.¹³ In Thomson’s words:

This seems to be the first attempt to produce a metrical equivalent to *ceòl mòr*, and it was to be emulated by Duncan Bàn Macintyre in his *Moladh Beinn Dòbhrain*, as well as by other later poets.¹⁴

¹⁰ Sections (D) and (E) in “Isabel MacKay” are almost identical, so the rhythm is the same.

¹¹ Allan MacDonald, email communication dated 12 February 2014.

¹² Gunn and MacFarlane, p. 88; *Gesto*, p. 56.

¹³ Thomson, *Gaelic Poetry in the Eighteenth Century*, p. 32; *An Lasair*, p. 426.

¹⁴ Thomson, *Gaelic Poetry in the Eighteenth Century*, p. 32.

According to Black, MacIntyre's poem, the acknowledged masterpiece of the genre, was composed between 1751 and 1766.¹⁵ Comparing these dates, Rob Donn composed "Isabel MacKay" when "Moladh Mòraig" was likely in oral circulation but not yet published, and before "Moladh Beinn Dòbhrain", while his song for Anna likely post-dated both. On the other hand, since Rob Donn used a different tune and metrical structure than MacDonald and MacIntyre, this is not the type of direct borrowing we will see later in Rob Donn's poem "To Winter" (#49). In other words, if Rob Donn was inspired to compose a pibroch song by Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair's example, his inspiration was on a conceptual level, while Donnchadh Bàn borrowed his tune, structure and even part of his rhyme scheme from the older poet.¹⁶

These musical links are traced more fully by Allan MacDonald in his thesis on the relationship between *pìobaireachd* and Gaelic song, which uses "Moladh Mòraig" and "Iseabail NicAoidh" as two of its case studies. He suggests that Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair set his poem to a pibroch tune called "The Royal Oak that saved Prince Charles" dating from the mid-seventeenth century, and that Donnchadh Bàn used essentially the same melody for "Beinn Dòbhrain", as did other subsequent poets.¹⁷ For "Iseabail NicAoidh," MacDonald shows that Rob Donn's song can be sung to either of two related pibroch tunes, one known today in the piping repertoire as "The Prince's Salute" and the other known as "Isabel MacKay." He further argues that the latter tune may actually be older than either "The Prince's Salute" (1715) or Rob Donn's song (c. 1745) "because it appears under a range of different titles related to events which pre-date the eighteenth century."¹⁸ But he does not suggest that the Mòrag melodies and the Isabel melodies are related to each other.

More generally, according to MacDonald: "There are upwards of fifty pibrochs which can probably be identified with Gaelic song(s)."¹⁹ As discussed in Chapter IV, some of these may have begun as songs and then been adapted as pibrochs, while others probably traveled in the opposite direction long before Mac

¹⁵ *An Lasair*, p. 490.

¹⁶ Thomson, *Introduction to Gaelic Poetry*, p. 171.

¹⁷ Allan MacDonald, pp. 248-49.

¹⁸ Allan MacDonald, p. 242.

¹⁹ Allan MacDonald, p. 276.

Mhaighstir Alasdair but were simply never written down. If so, part of his reputation as an innovator may be based on the advantages of literacy and early publication, both of which Rob Donn lacked, as did his predecessors among the pipers and singers of Gaelic oral tradition. The existence of so many pibroch songs also illustrates the limitations of a purely literary scholarship that considers only the poems composed by a few canonical poets.

Before leaving this topic, a word or two may be in order regarding the place of Rob Donn's two pibroch songs in the current song repertoire. From a literary standpoint, Anna's song (#97) is far superior to Isabel's (#44) in terms of intellectual content and metrical complexity, and both poems were printed by Gillies in 1786.²⁰ Nevertheless, the appealing Anna has disappeared without a trace from the later song repertoire, while Isabel is still celebrated by pipers as well as soloists and choral singers at the Mòd.²¹ Perhaps the simpler, more repetitive text of Isabel's song made it easier to remember, and the fact that it shared its name with a *pìobaireachd* gave both a competitive advantage.

B. PRAISE

1. THE POEMS

In addition to the pibroch songs, Rob Donn composed four other songs praising women and two praising animals (although none for men, whom he generally praised only in the form of elegies). Probably the earliest is his song for Christine Sutherland, Lady Reay (#29), the second wife of Donald MacKay, fourth Lord Reay, composed about the time her husband succeeded to the title in 1748.²² The bard praises her for two contributions to the welfare of her adopted clan, using her influence to secure a seat in Parliament for her husband's brother, and helping a local deserter escape from a military search party by plying his captors with drink.²³ Rob Donn describes the latter feat in his usual graphic fashion:

²⁰ E. Gillies, pp. 198-201.

²¹ For example, it was a prescribed solo in the men's gold medal competition at the 2008 Mòd. ACG, *Òrain Aon Neach*, p. 5.

²² Grimble, pp. 123-24.

²³ Grimble, pp. 125-29.

The animal songs show another side of the poet, revealing a genuine fondness towards other living creatures that appears again in his poem “To Winter” (#49). “Donald Fraser’s Dog” (#87) is undatable, describing a puppy who adopted the bard and followed him everywhere. In “The White Horse of Tarbert” (#14), datable to the last fifteen years of Rob Donn’s life, he complains bitterly that he has been reduced to pulling his own plow after losing two horses he received as gifts from wealthier neighbors:

| | |
|--|---|
| Cha ’n ’eil mis ’n am àraidh do dhaoin’ uails’, | To the gentry I am no worthy specimen, |
| Ach ’s aobhar-thruais gu dearbh mi, Le bean is clann, ’s nach ’eil mi saobhir, ’S each gun oighr’ air falbh uam. | But an object of commiseration indeed, With a wife and children and little wealth, And having lost a horse without an heir. |
| Tha mise ’m bliadhn’ air seòrs do rian, Nach robh mi riamh, ’s nach earbainn, | This year I am reduced to shifts I never adopted before and would not recommend — |
| Mo phears’ fo phian, ’s mo chroit fo chliabh, | My body in pain, my back beneath a creel, |
| Is cnap na cliath ri m’ earball. | And the straw rope of the harrow at my tail. ³¹ |

A sorry situation indeed for the aging poet, but he cheerfully praises both the horse and its previous owner, George MacKay of Handa:

| | |
|--|--|
| Bu ghasda mo phonaidh air an t-sràid Gu marcach speiseal iomchainn; ’S b-fhiannuis e air tarruing fèill’ Nach robh e riabh ag iomradh. Fear Eilean S-Handa air a chrann, ’S b’e ’n toirein teanntadh cuimseach, Air glasaich ghleann gun bhaile gun chàrn, ’S gun cheannair ann ach inighean. | My pony was excellent on the street For carrying a handsome rider, And he bore witness approaching the fair That he had never been worked excessively. The Laird of Handa at the plough, A ploughman he was, sedate, unerring, On the lea-field of the glen, without township, without cairns, None leading the horse save a lassie. ³² |
|--|--|

This is the same George we will meet again as a ship captain in “Trip to Stornoway” (#82).

2. THE MUSIC

According to Morrison, “To Lady Reay” (#29) was sung to “John of Badenoin”, a tune Glen describes as “a strathspey, first printed in Alexander M’Glashan’s ‘Collection of Reels’, etc., 1786” with Scots words by the Reverend John Skinner.³³ The melody is actually older; according to Simon Fraser, it is based on a Gaelic air known as “Cia iad na Dèe ’s na duile treun”, which is the first line of a lament composed by Iain Ruadh Stiùbhart for an unidentified Lady Mackintosh,

³¹ App. II, #14, verse 1.

³² App. II, #14, verse 4.

³³ Morrison, p. 106; Glen, p. 154.

probably in the 1730s, whose air was published by Patrick MacDonald in 1784.³⁴ Since Rob Donn composed his song in 1748, he may have learned the melody from Stuart's lament, although the tune itself may well be older unless Stuart himself composed it. Because "John of Badenoin" and "Cia iad na Dèe" are clearly variants, and I have set another song (#82) to both, Lady Reay's song (#29) is set only to MacDonald's version of "Cia iad na Dèe". This is an 8-bar melody in 4/4 time with a large range, an octave and a fourth, a hexatonic scale (without a seventh) in C, and a double tonic in D minor and C major.

The praise song for Mary MacKay of Bighouse (#20) has two melodies which do not seem related despite an identical metrical structure dictated by the poetry (sixteen bars in 9/8 time comprised entirely of even quavers except on cadences). Morrison identifies the tune as "Tha lidhe 's an abhuinn 's an allt", a melody that appears in William Gunn and in the "North Highland Reels or Country Dances" section of the Patrick MacDonald collection.³⁵ I have set MacDonald's tune as #20(2); it has the range of a ninth, a heptatonic D major scale, a double tonic on E minor and D major, and a circular melody that ends on the second. The other melody (#20(1)) is from the Eliza Ross manuscript, with the range of a tenth, a Dorian/Mixolydian hexatonic scale (without a third) in G, and a double tonic in G minor and F major. While the Eliza Ross melody is very close to "Tam Glen" in *The Scots Musical Museum*, it seems unrelated to "Tha lidhe 's an abhuinn 's an allt", and since the latter appears in two early collections by Sutherland-born musicians, it is more likely to have been sung by Rob Donn.³⁶

The better-known of Rob Donn's two songs for Sally Grant (#50) contains the internal refrain "An rìbhinn, àlainn, èibhinn, òg" repeated three times in each verse. I have reproduced only the tune collected by Munro, which is closely related to variants with that title in the Patrick MacDonald and Simon Fraser collections, leaving little doubt that this is the melody Rob Donn sang.³⁷ The more interesting question is whether he composed it, in whole or in part, and here the evidence is

³⁴ *SF*, p. 111; *Sàr-Obair*, p. 269; *HVA*, p. 34, #106; Neil MacGregor, 'John Roy Stuart: Jacobite Bard of Strathspey', *TGSI*, 63 (2002-2004), 1-124 (pp. 14-17).

³⁵ Morrison, p. 298; Wm. Gunn, p. 59; *HVA*, p. 56, #8, p. 74, note 8.

³⁶ ER, pp. 69, 158-59; *SMM* I, #296.

³⁷ Gunn and MacFarlane, p. 20; *HVA*, p. 29, #86; *SF*, pp. 69, 110 (#170).

more equivocal. Morrison claims that “Sally Grant” was sung to “O’er the Hills”.³⁸ This cannot be literally true, as the words and notes do not match well enough to sing without considerable modification, but they probably should be characterized as variants. The easiest way to see this is to compare a transposed version of “O’er the Hills and Far Away” from *The Scots Musical Museum* (#62) to “Sally Grant” as printed in Gunn and MacFarlane (p. 20):

Example 7. O’er the Hills and Far Away

Example 8. Sally Grant

There is no question that Rob Donn knew the tune “O’er the Hills” because he used it in its original form for two other songs (#8 and #89). But what he did here was considerably more sophisticated — he changed the placement as well as the notes of the two-bar phrases, so that only the fourth phrase of the original verse and chorus has strong parallels to his refrain “An rìbhinn, àlainn, èibhinn, òg.” Specifically, the identical bars 7-8 and 15-16 in “O’er the Hills” are transformed into

³⁸ Morrison, p. 280.

the identical bars 3-4, 7-8, and 15-16 in “Sally Grant” by removing the quavers but leaving the sequence of crotchets intact. Elsewhere the transmutations are greater. That is, Rob Donn extends the melodic arc in bars 1-2 and 5-6 to D rather than stopping at B, and he varies his bars 9-14 more than the comparable bars in “O’er the Hills”. But the tonality (major, almost pentatonic, with no seventh and an occasional fourth), the melodic contours of the phrases, and even the circular ending on the second are the same in both, so it seems fair to treat “O’er the Hills” as Rob Donn’s model for “Sally Grant”.

But was this musical composition? I would argue that it was. As discussed in Chapter III, any composer works with an existing set of musical materials, modifying them according to individual ability and inclination within the rules of musical grammar available in his own culture, and that is what Rob Donn did here.³⁹ Comparing these two melodies may also tell us something about Morrison as a musical source — that he had some memory for tunes, but it was not always complete or 100% reliable. The other song in praise of Sally Grant (#80) is set to the reel “John Roy Stewart”, also used by Rob Donn for his satire on “Rob the Hunter” (#58).⁴⁰ I have used the same setting from MacGlashan, eight bars in 4/4 time with the range of a tenth and a hexatonic scale (without a seventh), Ionian/Mixolydian in C.⁴¹

According to Morrison, “Donald Fraser’s Dog” (#87) was sung to Rob Donn’s most versatile service tune, “Lochaber No More”; I have set it to the same version that Gunn and MacFarlane used for “Glen Golly”.⁴² “The White Horse of Tarbert” (#14), in contrast, has two apparently unrelated melodies. The setting from Munro (#14(1)) is in 3/4 time and does not always fit the Gaelic word stresses. For instance, in bar 2 the preposition “do” (to) is on a downbeat followed by the noun “dhaoin” (people, a diphthong) on an unaccented quaver. Also, the long notes consistently fall on the second beat of each bar rather than the first. So the bar lines may be in the wrong place, or the time signature or note values may be wrong, but I have adhered to my general practice and reproduced the setting as printed in Gunn

³⁹ Nettle, *Thirty-One Issues*, p. 34.

⁴⁰ Morrison, p. 283.

⁴¹ MacGlashan, p. 30.

⁴² Morrison, p. 354; Gunn and MacFarlane, p. 24.

and MacFarlane without alteration. The tune is sixteen bars in 3/4 time, the tempo “Moderato”, the range an octave and a fourth, the scale hexatonic (without a seventh) Ionian/Mixolydian in F, and the tonality a double tonic in G minor and F major.

The tune that Morrison identifies, “Loch Erroch Side” (#14(2)), fits the words from a metrical standpoint, but I doubt that Rob Donn ever sang it.⁴³ Glen suggests that “Loch Erroch Side” was composed by Alexander MacGlashan, who published it in 1786, although it was later claimed by Niel Gow.⁴⁴ If MacGlashan composed “Loch Erroch Side” in the 1780s, Rob Donn would not have heard it because he died in 1778. On the other hand, if the tune was actually traditional, or composed earlier by MacGlashan and widely circulated, Rob Donn could have heard it, but that would not explain why a different tune was preserved in the MacKay country. MacGlashan’s version (#14(2)) is eight bars in 4/4 time, with the range of a tenth, a hexatonic scale (without a fourth) otherwise in C major, and a double tonic in D minor and C major.

In considering these two melodies, it is helpful to imagine the bard slowly dragging a plow through a stony field, feeling sorry for himself but trying to lighten the load by composing a humorous song. Under these circumstances, “Loch Erroch Side” with its running quavers and semiquavers seems an unlikely choice. In contrast, the uneven rhythm and dotted crotchets of the Munro tune seem to mimic the struggles of the aging poet to pull the plow, so it seems a more likely setting given the circumstances of its composition. If this is correct, then Rob Donn may have composed the tune as well as the words, a possibility that gains some support from the similarity of its rhythm to #56, an elegy that may also be an original composition.

3. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

Because the structure of this thesis places Rob Donn’s elegies and praise songs in different chapters, this may be a suitable place to comment on their relationship. Traditionally both genres were used for panegyric verse directed to clan chiefs and military heroes, with similar imagery whether the subject was dead

⁴³ Morrison, p. 340.

⁴⁴ Glen, pp. 82-83.

or alive.⁴⁵ As John MacInnes notes in his seminal article, the high age of this poetic tradition was c. 1600 – 1745.⁴⁶ This is identical to the period in which most pibrochs are thought to have been composed, when the clan system remained capable of supporting both poets and musicians.⁴⁷ By the eighteenth century, the subjects of praise were shifting to include sexy young women like “Mòrag” and mountains like “Beinn Dòbhrain,” and some of those poems adopted a structure based on the musical form of the *pìobaireachd*. This raises several questions. First, was there a panegyric code for music that specified particular melodies or musical styles for praise poetry? If so, was it different or the same for elegies and other panegyric? Did it vary depending on the object of praise, e.g., a man or a woman, a clan chief or a mountain or a dog? Second, to what extent and in what circumstances did that code survive the wreckage of Culloden? That is, were the same kinds of melodies still being used for praise songs in the second half of the eighteenth century and later? None of these questions can be answered definitively until the type of analysis here is extended to a wider range of poets and songs, but Rob Donn’s choices are at least illustrative of those available to Gaelic composers of his generation.

In that regard, there is no overlap between the melodies Rob Donn used for his elegies and those he used for other panegyric verse. He used the pibroch form in two praise songs for young women but did not use it for his elegies, which relied instead on *òrain mhòra*, including laments for earlier clan chiefs and music in a similar style. Of the other praise songs, the only one that might be classified as *òran mòr* is the song for Lady Reay (#29), set to the same tune as John Roy Stewart’s lament for Lady Macintosh, “Cia iad na Dèe”. Although I cannot trace the melody any earlier than the 1730s, it must have had associations that made two contemporary Gaelic bards use it for poems praising aristocratic women married to clan chiefs. It is also worth noting that the same melody was considered appropriate for a lament and a praise poem for two women of similar social status, despite the very different circumstances of their composition and the nature of their texts.

⁴⁵ John MacInnes, ‘The Panegyric Code in Gaelic Poetry and its Historical Background’, *TGSI*, 50 (1978), 435-98.

⁴⁶ ‘The Panegyric Code’, p. 459.

⁴⁷ Cannon, *The Highland Bagpipe*, p. 100.

The other five praise songs seem to exhibit the usual range of tune origins: a Gaelic song (#20(2)), an instrumental tune (#80), a Scots song (#87), and two songs (#14(1) and #50) possibly composed by Rob Donn. Excluding the pibroch songs, five of the six praise songs are hexatonic and only one heptatonic; three are in 4/4 time, two in 3/4 and one in 9/8; and all contain a double tonic. The other feature shared by all six (unlike the pibroch songs) is a major tonality, which gives them a cheerful cast in keeping with their texts. They also would have been performed more rapidly than the elegies, which Gunn and MacFarlane usually direct to be sung “Gu muldach” (mournfully). In contrast, Gunn and MacFarlane mark #50 “Gu h-aotrom” (lively) and #14(1) “Moderato”; the reel “John Roy Stewart” (#80) would also have been sung in a lively manner in imitation of the dance to which it refers.

C. NATURE

1. THE POEMS

Unlike his contemporaries Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair and Donnchadh Bàn, Rob Donn was not a nature poet, as only three of the hundred poems discussed here can be placed in that category.⁴⁸ Although many songs contain references to his love of deer-hunting and wandering in the hills, those activities did not generally inspire him to compose the type of purely descriptive nature poetry that was becoming popular in the eighteenth century. So in some respects the most puzzling aspect of these poems is why he composed them at all.

For “Town and Country Life” (#24), his inspiration was evidently his reflections on the differing characters of two young daughters of Iain mac Eachainn — Isabel, who loved the outdoor life of the sheilings, and Mary, who would rather be in town. Despite the dialogue form, it is clear that Isabel speaks for the bard:

| | |
|--|---|
| <p>Cha ’n ’eil seòmar aig Rìgh Bhreatainn, ’S taitneich’ leam na ’n Càrn, Oir tha e uaignidheach do ghruagaich, ’S ni e fuaime ’n uair ’s àill; Feur is coille, blàth is duille, ’S iad fo iomadh neul, Is is’ is <i>echo</i> mar na teudan,</p> | <p>The King of Britain has no chamber More delightful than the Cairn is to me, For it is private for a young girl And there are sounds when you desire them; Grass and trees, blossom and leaf, And many hues upon them, And she and echo like harp strings</p> |
|--|---|

⁴⁸ At least one other nature poem was not included in the major editions of his work, “Òran nam Beanntaichean”, a poem that “makes honourable mention of every hill and glen and knoll and corrie where he was wont in early days to follow the deer.” Gunn, ‘Unpublished Songs’, p. 64.

Seirm gach tèis a 's feàrr.

Playing the loveliest airs.⁴⁹

This is one of Rob Donn's earliest poems, whose air of innocence and promise reflects a world before the cumulative blows of Culloden and the many deaths commemorated in Rob Donn's elegies — as well as those not so commemorated, including Isabel's own in 1748.⁵⁰

“Glen Golly” (#36), Rob Donn's most popular sing-along, praises the bard's favorite glen, just as “Moladh Beinn Dòbhrain” praises Donnchadh Bàn's favorite mountain.

Ged a gheibhinn gu m' àilghios,
Ceann-taile MhicAoidh,
'S mòr a b' annsa leam fanadh
An Gleanna-Gallaidh nan craobh.

Though I got all I wanted
Of Mackay's Kintail land,
I would much rather wait here
In Glen Golly of the trees.

Fonn diasach, 's mòr a b' fhiach e,
Gu fiadhach, 's gu nì,
Aite sìobhalt ri doinionn,
Is nach criothnaich a' ghaoth.

Land of worth and of seed-corn,
Fit for hunting and for stock,
A place sheltered when storms come,
Not shaken up by wind.⁵¹

Grimble argues that Rob Donn composed Glen Golly only after he was evicted from the straths for poaching, and the last two lines support that dating, as the bard would have been buffeted by storms and wind at Fresgill near Whiten Head at the mouth of Loch Eriboll.⁵² In fact, it was probably composed even later, after his return from the Sutherland Fencibles, based on the line “ri bhur n-arm cha bhi mi” (your army's not for me).⁵³

Rob Donn's poem “To Winter” (#49) is unique in his output because it is deliberately crafted in a formal and foreign style modeled on the seasonal poem “To Summer” by Alasdair mac Mhaighstir Alasdair. I suspect this was not the bard's own idea but rather a commission or challenge set for him by a literate acquaintance after the publication of Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair's *Ais-eiridh na Sean-Chànoin Albannaich* in 1751, which included his seasonal poems to summer and winter.⁵⁴

Derick Thomson observed that Rob Donn's poem is “clearly based on Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair's poem on summer, with the appropriate inversions being made

⁴⁹ App. II, #24, verse 2.

⁵⁰ Grimble, pp. 13-17, 97.

⁵¹ App. II, #36, verses 3-4.

⁵² Grimble, pp. 170-72, 179.

⁵³ App. II, #36, verse 2.

⁵⁴ Thomson, *Companion*, p. 184.

[...] implying quite a feat of memory for a person who did not read.”⁵⁵ But there is no reason to assume that Rob Donn heard the earlier 152-line poem only once; it could have been read, recited or sung to him repeatedly, perhaps even a verse at a time as he composed. This idea is suggested in part by the relationship between Alasdair’s verses and Rob Donn’s, which suggests our bard got bored with the exercise before he finished it:

| <u>AMA Verse</u> ⁵⁶ | <u>Rob Donn Verse</u> ⁵⁷ |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1 | 1 |
| 2 | 3 |
| 3 | 2 |
| 4 | 5 |
| 5 | 4 |
| 6 | 6 |
| 7 | 7 |
| 8 | 11 |
| 9 | — |
| 10 | 12 |
| 11 | 8 |
| 12 | 10 |
| 13 | 9 |
| 14-19 | — |

The verses Rob Donn omitted were elaborations on two themes — birdsong (verses 9, 17-19) and flowery meadows (verses 14-16) — neither abundant in northwest Sutherland in the winter. Otherwise Rob Donn’s poem is full of reverse images, as a comparison of two verses will show:

AMA “To Summer”

[5] Am mìos lusanach, mealach,
 Feurach, failleanach, tlàth;
 ’S e gu gucagach, duilleach,
 Luachrach, dìtheineach, lurach,
 Beachach, seilleineach, dearcach,
 Ciurach, dealtach, trom, blàth;
 ’S i mar chùirneanan daoimein,
 Bhratach bhoillsgeil air làr.

[5] *Month of plants honey-laden,
 Grassy, sprouting, and warm;
 Buds and foliage in plenty,
 Flowers and rushes not scanty,*

RD “To Winter”

[4] Mhìos chaiseanach, ghreannach,
 Chianail, chainneanach, gheàrrt’,
 ’S i gu clachanach, ciurrach,
 Cruaidhteach, sgealpanach, puinneach,
 Sneachdach, caochlaideach, frasach,
 Reòtach, reasgach, gu sàr;
 ’S i na caoirneinean craidhneach
 Fad na h-oidhche air làr.

[4] *The month surly, gloomy,
 Mournful, angry, barren,
 Hailing, destructive,
 Niggardly, hard-hitting, bruising,*

⁵⁵ Thomson, *Introduction to Gaelic Poetry*, p. 195.

⁵⁶ A. MacDonald and A. MacDonald, *The Poems of Alexander MacDonald* (Inverness: 1924), pp. 20-27.

⁵⁷ App. II, #49.

*Bees and wasps in abundance,
Heavy mists all around,
While a diamond-decked carpet
Flashes bright on the ground.*

*Snowy, fickle, showery,
Frozen, perverse, oppressive;
It is the sheep-dung decaying
All night on the ground.*

[13] O! 's fìor-èibhinn ri chluinntinn,
Fann-gheum laoigh anns a' chrò;
Gu h-ùrail mion-bhallach àluinn,
Druimfhionn, gearr-fhionnach fàilidh,
Ceannfhionn, colg-rosnach, cluas-dearg,
Tàrr-gheal, guaineiseach, òg;
Gu mogach, bog-ladhrach fàsmhor,
'S e leum ri bàirich nam bò.

[9] Ach nach dao-chail 's a' gheamhradh
Fann ghèim gamhna chion feòir,
Gnùgach, caol-dhromach, feursnach,
Tioram, tàrr-ghreannach, àsruidh,
Biorach, sgreamhanach, fuachdaidh,
Siltean fuaraidh r' a sròn,
'S i gu sgrog-laghrach gàgach,
Fulang sàrach' an rèòt.

[13] *Sweet to hear the soft voices
Of the calves in the fold;*

*Lively, close-spotted, fair,
Gentle, while, with short hair,
White-faced, bright-eyed and red-eared,
Lively, playful, aye growing,
Shaggy, soft-hoofed, and frisking
To the mothers' deep lowing.⁵⁸*

[9] *How pitiful in winter
The feeble lowing of a yearling calf
without hay;*

*Sulky, lean-backed, worm-infested,
Parched, bristly-breasted, forlorn,
Noisy, disgusting, chilled,
Cold drippings from its nose,
Shriveled hoofed ones with torn skin,
Worn out by suffering in the frost.⁵⁹*

These verses illustrate two important distinctions between Rob Donn and Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair. First, from a formal standpoint, while Rob Donn was perfectly capable of creating long strings of descriptive adjectives — apparently a competitive sport among eighteenth-century Gaelic poets — he did not ordinarily choose to do so. Second, there is a vast cultural distance between the romantic images of the schoolmaster (“a diamond-decked carpet”) and the realistic observations of the cattleman (“sheep-dung decaying”). This is indigenous nature poetry shorn of all sentimentality.

2. THE MUSIC

The melody for the dialogue song “Town and Country Life” (#24) appears in the Angus Fraser and Munro collections in virtually identical form, indicating that it preserved its integrity in two streams of oral transmission, the Fraser family and the MacKay country.⁶⁰ For that reason, I have reproduced only the Munro version, a 16-bar melody in 2/4 time, marked “Moderato”, with the range of an octave and a fifth, a hexatonic scale (without a fourth) that is otherwise in B major, and a double

⁵⁸ Text and translations from MacDonald and MacDonald, pp. 20-25, verses 5 & 13.

⁵⁹ Text and translations from App. II, #49, verses 4 & 9.

⁶⁰ *AF*, p. 18 (“An gleann 's am baile margaidh”); Gunn and MacFarlane, p. 74.

tonic in C# minor and B major. Rob Donn used the same melody in a brief parody (#25), previously discussed.

This is another intriguing case study in folk composition because it appears that Rob Donn created the tune by consciously or unconsciously manipulating the melody of “Roy’s Wife of Aldievalloch” (discussed earlier as a setting for #12) to create a distinct but recognizable variant. To facilitate comparison, “Roy’s Wife” (from *SMM* #342) and Rob Donn’s song (App. I, #24) are printed here in the same key signature and time signature:

Example 9. Roy’s Wife of Aldievalloch

Example 10. Town and Country Life

The resemblances between these two melodies appear mainly at the level of the individual bar or half-bar. Specifically, Rob Donn’s bars 1 and 3 are similar to Roy’s bars 5 and 7, while Rob Donn’s bars 5 and 7 correspond to Roy’s bars 1 and 3. The even-numbered bars share only motifs and contours: the descending pattern at the beginning of bar 2, the sequence DCDE in bar 4 (an octave higher in Rob Donn), the ascending pattern at the beginning of bar 6, and the pattern that first

descends and then ascends in bar 8 to end (more or less) on a C. Other parallels also exist, such as the fact that every odd-numbered bar begins on a G. But the differences are also typical, as Rob Donn extended the range twice to high G and placed most of his cadences on higher notes than “Roy’s Wife”, creating a more expansive melody that shows once again his large vocal range. This is a good example of the compositional technique Cowdery calls “recombining”.⁶¹

The other two nature poems have borrowed melodies. “Glen Golly” (#36) is set to “Lochaber No More”/“Lord Ronald My Son”; I have reproduced the version from Gunn and MacFarlane.⁶² As one would expect, Rob Donn’s “To Winter” (#49) uses the same tune as its model, Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair’s “To Summer”, the popular Scots melody “Through the Wood, Laddie”.⁶³ I have set the version from *Orpheus Caledonius*, published in 1733, which Derick Thomson suggests was known to Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair when he composed his seasonal poems in Ardnamurchan in the 1730s and early 1740s.⁶⁴ My setting is sixteen bars in 3/4 time, with a range of an octave and a sixth, a heptatonic scale in Eb major, and a double tonic in F minor and Eb major.

3. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

The three nature songs in this section include one by Rob Donn (#24) based on a Scots song and two (#36 and #49) with melodies borrowed from Scots song, although this simplifies the transmission process and the nature of his sources. As discussed in Chapter VIII, “Roy’s Wife” has connections with instrumental music and a Gaelic title as well as Scots words. “Lochaber/Lord Ronald” is known as a Scots song and ballad tune, but must have been well-established throughout Scotland because Rob Donn used it repeatedly as a service tune. And while “Through the Wood, Laddie” was best-known as a Scots song, Rob Donn borrowed it indirectly via a Gaelic song by Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair. This type of secondary borrowing was probably quite common, allowing a melody to jump the linguistic barrier only once and then continue circulating on both sides.

⁶¹ Cowdery, pp. 498-99.

⁶² Morrison, p. 314; Gunn and MacFarlane, p. 24; App. II, #36.

⁶³ Morrison, p. 206; Derick S. Thomson, *Alasdair Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair: Selected Poems* (Edinburgh: SGTS, 1996), p. 85.

⁶⁴ *Orpheus Caledonius*, I, #4; Thomson, *Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair*, pp. 27, 30-31.

It also raises the issue of the extent to which members of the bilingual elite with Lowland educations, such as Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair, were responsible for the initial transfer of these tunes into Gaelic oral tradition. Derick Thomson suggested just such a process:

There is some argument as to whether some [Scots and English airs] may already have been in circulation in Gaelic communities, but the weight of the evidence seems to point to Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair having been strongly influenced by his non-Gaelic reading, and no doubt by his city friends and experience, in choosing a number of airs which were featuring in publications of the early decades of the eighteenth century, such as William Thomson's *Orpheus Caledonius* and Allan Ramsay's *Tea-table Miscellany*, to name two of the most popular of these.⁶⁵

But Thomson acknowledged that no one (including himself) had conducted a systematic collection of the airs, so this is another topic in need of further investigation.⁶⁶

Returning to Rob Donn's nature songs, the three melodies include two that are hexatonic and one heptatonic, two in 3/4 time and one in 2/4; all three share a major tonality and a double tonic. We turn next to his sea songs, one of which (#82) could also be classified as a nature song.

D. SEA JOURNEYS

1. THE POEMS

Rob Donn composed four songs about sea journeys with themes ranging from personal adventure (#82) to humor (#99), emigration (#83) and satire (#55). I grouped them together partly to investigate whether they shared any metrical or musical features related to the term *iorram* used by Mackay to title the two poems (#55 and #83) in three-line strophic meter.⁶⁷ Because so much scholarly ink has been spilled on this topic, it seemed worthwhile at least to describe the circumstances in which Rob Donn used this meter and the ways in which he set it to music, while disclaiming any intent to undertake a broader analysis.⁶⁸ But first I will describe the songs.

⁶⁵ Thomson, *Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair*, p. 27.

⁶⁶ Thomson, *Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair*, p. 28.

⁶⁷ Mackay, pp. 97, 160.

⁶⁸ See, e.g., Roibeard Ó Maolalaigh, 'On the Possible Origins of Scottish Gaelic *iorram* "rowing song"', in *Litreachas agus Eachdraidh: Rannsachadh na Gàidhlig*, pp. 232-87 (summarizing earlier scholarship); Blankenhorn, 'The Rev. William Matheson'.

“Trip to Stornoway” (#82) is an exciting narration of Rob Donn’s own sea journey on a ship captained by George MacKay of Handa, when a storm overtook the party at Stoer Point and required them to run the Minch without the pilot they had planned to pick up at Lochinver. Unfortunately the poem cannot be dated, but it sounds like a young man’s adventure, so it could be earlier than Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair’s “Birlinn Chlann Raghnaill”, which Black dates to the period 1751-1770.⁶⁹ It also shares several features with “Birlinn” — chronological structure, runs of adjectives, vivid description of a storm at sea, praise for the captain and crew, and thanks to the divine helmsman for their safe arrival — even the word *birlinn* itself.⁷⁰ Two verses provide a flavor:

| | |
|--|--|
| <p>’S a’ mhaduinn ’s ann a b’ èigin duinn, ’N uair dh’ èirich gaath gu searbh, Ar cùlaobh thoirt do ’n tìr, ’S ar ceart aodann thoirt do ’n fhairg’, Fo steallaidhnean, ’s fo thunnsgaidhnean, Na tonnan mòra, borb, Cnocach, copach, sideach, gleannach, Glupach, liopach, gorm.</p> | <p>In the morning we were obliged, When the wind rose harshly, To turn our backs to the land And our faces directly towards the sea, Subjected to the drenchings and the beatings Of the furious great waves, Mountainous, foamy, stormy, deep-valleyed, Sucking, thick-lipped, blue.</p> |
| <p>’N uair chaidh i air a h-adhairt, ’S a h-aghaidh air a h-iùl, Bu chuimseach, gleusd’ na Leòdaich, Mu na sgòidean aig na siùil. Bu toigheach, cuimhneach, làidir, Bha Pàdruig air an stiùir, ’S bha Seòras ruadh na Tairbird ann, Le seirbheis uiread ’s a bha ’n trìuir.</p> | <p>As she made headway Forwards on her course, The MacLeods were unerring and expert About the sheets of the sails. Watchful, mindful, powerful Was Patrick at the helm, And George Roy of Tarbert was there Doing the work of three.⁷¹</p> |

The next poem, “Neil Mackay and his Crew” (#99) can be dated to the years 1757-1759 when Rob Donn was living at Fresgill.⁷² The text indicates that Neil was the proverbial sailor with a girl in every port, sadly deprived of his many opportunities for dalliance when storm-bound at Geò na Gaoithe (Windy Creek), the residence of the bard:

| | |
|--|--|
| <p>Tha mi fèin ’s mo sgioba, Gabhail mòran eagail, Giorag gu ’m bris rioban, Air a’ chulaidh fhada; Ciod a chuir mi idir Dh’ fhuireach fo na creagan,</p> | <p>Myself and my crew Are in great fear That our ropes will part In the long coble. What on earth made me Lie to under the rocks,</p> |
|--|--|

⁶⁹ *An Lasair*, p. 470.

⁷⁰ The complete text of “Birlinn” with translation can be found in MacDonald and MacDonald, pp. 370-401. Rob Donn uses the term in verse 1, line 5 of his poem, reprinted in App. II, #82.

⁷¹ App. II, #82, verses 3 & 4.

⁷² Grimble, p. 170.

'S nach 'eil àit an tig mi,
Nach bi leannan agam?

As there is not a place I come to
Where I haven't a sweetheart?

Thubhairt Niall MacAoidh,
'S mis' th' air dol am mugha,
Ann an Geoth-na-gaoith',
Fo na creagan dubha;
'S a liuthad maighdean rìomhach,
A tha fo chumha,
Air son nach 'eil mo bhirlinn
A' tigh'nn do Smudha.

Said Neil Mackay,
I am going to perdition
In the Windy Creek
Beneath the black rocks.
Many a beautiful maiden
Is lamenting
Because my galley is not
Arriving at Smoo.⁷³

The other sea songs are both *iorram* in three-line strophic meter. “Rupert MacKay” (#83) is an emigration song, again undatable, composed upon the departure of a local tacksman’s son to make his fortune in Jamaica, where he later died.⁷⁴ Although Rob Donn never mentions the slave plantations, he knew the risks of ocean travel and tropical fevers:

Soirbheas sona air a' chuan duit,
Taghadh cala gun fhuadach,
O na maireannan gluasadach, gàireach.

Good luck to you on the ocean,
Choice of harbor without being storm-driven
By the moving, roaring seas.

Na robh feartan aig fuachd ort,
Na toir teas dhuit a chuartaich,
Na bu treise luchd t' fhuath na luchd
t' fhàbhoir.

May the forces of cold spare you,
May fever not envelop you,
May those who hate you not be stronger
than your supporters.⁷⁵

The last poem, in the same meter, is the satire “Davie’s Trip to Orkney” (#55), a humorous tale of a ship blown off-course and the lucky survival of a passenger his neighbors had hoped to see no more:

Bha do nàbaidhean toigheach,
Anns gach bàgh 'g iarraidh naidheachd,
'S leis a' chràdh bh' orr', chan fhaigheadh
iad deur.

Your loving neighbors were searching
For news in each bay
With such grief that no tear could they
manage,

Ach o 'n chual iad thu thilleadh,
O na cuantaibh, gun mhilleadh,
Shìn an sluagh ud air sileadh gu lèir.

But when they heard you'd returned
From the oceans unharmed,
Those people all started to cry.⁷⁶

Considering all four sea songs, there is no correlation between verse structure and subject matter, as eight-line stanzas and three-line strophic meter are each used for one serious and one humorous song.

⁷³ App. II, #99, chorus & verse 1.

⁷⁴ Grimble, p. 97.

⁷⁵ App. II, #83, verses 4 & 5.

⁷⁶ App. II, #55, verses 5 & 6.

2. THE MUSIC

Morrison reported that “Trip to Stornoway” (#82) was sung to “John o’ Badenoin”, and Munro also collected a melody.⁷⁷ Since “John o’ Badenoin” is based on the older Gaelic melody “Cia iad na Dèe”, I have included three settings here for purposes of comparison: #82(1) from Munro, #82(2) a setting of “Cia iad na Dèe” from Patrick MacDonald, and #82(3) a setting of “John of Badenoin” from George Thomson and Haydn.⁷⁸ These are plainly variants. All are 8-bar tunes in 4/4 time with a strongly dotted rhythm, a double tonic, and a range of at least an octave and a fourth. Two are pentatonic and one is hexatonic, two have a major feel and one minor, and some bars differ more than others, but the overall melodic contours are very similar, particularly between Munro and Thomson. Since Patrick MacDonald’s setting of “Cia iad na Dèe” is the oldest of the three, it is probably closer to what Rob Donn himself knew, while the melody recorded by Munro in the mid-nineteenth century could have shifted towards the instrumental versions of “John o’ Badenoin” that had become popular in the intervening years.⁷⁹

“Neil Mackay and His Crew” has two documented melodies, one collected by Munro (#99(1)) and the other (#99(2), “Dance to your Daddie”) identified by Morrison.⁸⁰ In this case, I do not believe they are variants or that Rob Donn used the tune “Dance to your Daddie.” The Munro melody has a rollicking rhythm like a strathspey in 3/4 time that suits Rob Donn’s theme of the peripatetic sailor and lover. It contains sixteen bars with an AABC structure, is marked “Gu h-eutrom” (lightly), and has an octave and a fourth range, a heptatonic Dorian scale in F, and a tonality that seems to shift between C minor and F minor. The melody is so idiosyncratic that Rob Donn must have composed it at the same time he composed the words, while entertaining Neil and his crew at Fresgill during a howling storm.

“Dance to your Daddie” (#99(2)), in contrast, is the melody of a children’s song from the other end of Scotland, described by John Pringle about 1800 as “a very old Tune, Sung on the Border to Children when Nursing.”⁸¹ It is an 8-bar tune (which I had to repeat in sections to fit Rob Donn’s text), in 3/4 time with only an octave range, a

⁷⁷ Morrison, p. 156.

⁷⁸ Gunn and MacFarlane, p. 66; HVA, p. 34, #106; G. Thomson, *Select Melodies of Scotland*, p. 28.

⁷⁹ See, e.g., Aird, III, p. 212; MacGlashan (1786), p. 23. It also appears as a song in *SMM I*, #285.

⁸⁰ Gunn and MacFarlane, p. 81; Morrison, p. 177.

⁸¹ John Pringle, *A Collection of Reels, Strathspeys, & Jigs* (Edinburgh: 1801), p. 22.

hexatonic scale (with a major third, no sixth and a minor seventh) in F, and a double tonic in G minor and F major. When this setting is compared to Munro's, similarities include the time signature, a flowing melody, and repeated notes at the beginning of several bars. Differences include the tonality (minor in Munro and major in Pringle), the melodic contours and the range, as well as the descending seventh leaps in bars 9-10 and 11-12 of the Munro tune. It is also hard to imagine how and where Rob Donn would have heard a nursery song from the Borders, unless it was played as a fiddle tune at the Crieff or Falkirk Tryst; it seems more likely that Morrison heard it after he moved to Edinburgh and confused it with a song from his childhood.

According to Morrison, the emigration song "To Rupert MacKay" (#83) was sung to "Over the Water wi' Charlie", a tune Rob Donn also used for one of the Iain Tapaiddh satires (#75) in three-line strophic meter.⁸² He may have chosen it here because it sounds like a boat song and its title refers explicitly to a sea journey. My setting of #83 is from *The Scots Musical Museum*, eight bars in 6/8 time with the range of a tenth, a hexatonic scale (without a fourth) otherwise in D major, and a double tonic on E minor and D major. The text fits the tune if each verse is repeated in full, so that each two-stress line uses one bar, the last phrase in the third line has its own bar, and every stressed syllable falls on either the first or fourth beat of a 6/8 bar. This strategy can also be extended to longer verses in triple meter (as in #72) if each three-line component is set to four bars in 6/8 time.

Setting "Davie's Trip to Orkney" (#55) was more difficult. The tune name provided by Morrison, "Ian Macailein", was puzzling until I realized it referred to Rob Donn's song "John Macallan" (#61) about the double agent at Culloden, set to the tune "Barbara Allen". After some effort, I managed to set both texts to the version of "Barbara Allen" in *The Caledonian Pocket Companion* by repeating each verse in full to fit an 8-bar melody in 4/4 time.⁸³ This worked better for #61 than for #55, because the latter has more syllables per line, so I remain somewhat doubtful whether this is really the tune Rob Donn sang. In any case, the overall strategy for the reconstruction was the same as for the 6/8 songs discussed in the previous paragraph, fitting each two-stress line into a bar and giving the last phrase of the third line a bar of its own, so that

⁸² Morrison, p. 131.

⁸³ *CPC* II, p. 27. I would also like to acknowledge the expert advice of Dr. Virginia Blankenhorn in facilitating my efforts.

each stressed syllable falls on either the first or third beat of a 4/4 bar. The tune contains eight bars with the range of a ninth, a hexatonic scale (without a sixth), Aeolian/Dorian in A, and a double tonic in A minor and G major.

3. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

After grouping Rob Donn's four sea songs in the hope of uncovering common patterns, I found instead the usual variety of musical sources, meters and tonality. Regarding tune sources (considering only the Munro tunes for #82 and #99), we seem to find one Scots ballad (#55), one Gaelic song (#82(1)), one Irish song (#83), and one likely composition by Rob Donn (#99(1)). Two of the scales are hexatonic, one heptatonic and one pentatonic; the time signatures include two in 4/4 time, one in 6/8 and one in 3/4. Two of the tunes have a major third and two a minor third; three of the four have a double tonic and the fourth a tonality that shifts between two nonadjacent minor triads.

In terms of poetic meter, Rob Donn used asymmetrical three-line strophic verse in seven of the 100 poems in this thesis, only two of which are sea songs but all of which could be classified as either praise or satire.⁸⁴ He also composed two sea songs that are not in this meter. Whether Rob Donn himself called any of these songs *iorram* is unknown, although in 1829 his first editor gave that title only to the songs (#55 and #83) that feature both three-line strophic meter and a nautical theme.⁸⁵ This seems consistent with the eighteenth-century usage described by Ó Maolalaigh and Ó Baoill, in which the term *iorram* was frequently but not consistently applied to verse in three-line strophic meter, often panegyric in nature or used as rowing songs.⁸⁶

The question here is how those songs were set to music, which is problematical because each verse has an uneven number of lines (three) and the lines have differing numbers of word stresses (two, two, and three). The first verse of "Rupert MacKay" (#83) is a typical example, with the bold lettering showing the word stresses and the italics showing the "extra" phrase in the third line that sometimes behaves like a square peg in a round hole to the would-be musical arranger:

⁸⁴ They are #7, 55, 61, 72, 75, 79 and 83, and appear in every chapter except Chapter VII on love, courtship and weddings.

⁸⁵ Mackay, pp. 97, 160.

⁸⁶ Ó Maolalaigh, pp. 233-37; *Gàir nan Clàrsach*, pp. 29-31.

Slàn is maireann do Rhùpard,
 Chaidh air 'aineòl gun chùram,
 Air bhàrr mara fuidh shiùil air na clàraibh.

Blankenhorn describes the problem as follows:

In music, as in verse, the ear appears to prefer a line containing an even, rather than an odd, number of strong beats. The difference is that, in most cases, the rules of music seem to require melodic units to contain either four such beats, or a multiple of four.⁸⁷

That was the case in Rob Donn's musical world, as a perusal of Appendix I will show the vast majority of the melodies in 8-bar components with the same number of beats in each bar.

This describes the problem, but what are the solutions? I found two, which I hope are the same as Rob Donn's. The first, used for five songs, is to repeat each verse in full (or combine two verses, etc.) to spread six lines of text over eight bars of music and "normalize" the musical meter. This works in either 6/8 or 4/4 time because each two-stress line fits into a single bar and the "extra" phrase at the end of the third line has a bar to itself. The example below is from #83:

Example 11. Rupert MacKay

3
 5
 7

This is the approach I used in four reconstructions (#55, 61, 75 & 83) when setting Rob Donn's verses to the tunes identified by Morrison. The same pattern appears in

⁸⁷ Virginia S. Blankenhorn, *Irish Song-Craft and Metrical Practice since 1600* (Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press, 2003), p. 374.

Munro's setting of #72, in which each verse has twelve lines of poetry comprised of four three-line segments.

The alternative approach (reflected in two Munro settings, #7 and #79) is to put one stressed word in each bar and tolerate musical stanzas with unusual numbers of bars. For example, #7 contains four groups of seven bars, each group corresponding to three lines of strophic meter. In #79, where only the third line (containing three stresses) is repeated, the result is a ten-bar stanza. This approach works in 2/4 or 3/4 time because each bar is shorter and contains only one stress, resulting in seven-bar units; it also appears in some of Ò Baoill's musical settings of seventeenth-century strophic verse.⁸⁸

As a successful poet, singer and composer, Rob Donn must have been fully cognizant of the metrical, musical and stanzaic structure of his songs, but there is nothing in the poems that indicates how he might have conceptualized or verbalized these matters. It is also possible that he (and Munro's informants) sang many songs in a speech rhythm not easily represented in the straitjacket of musical notation, which may explain the oddly placed stresses in some of Munro's settings in Gunn and MacFarlane. But if Patrick MacDonald could regularize the rhythm of the tunes he published in order to make them comprehensible to a wider audience, I make no apology for doing the same, particularly since this is not a thesis about eighteenth-century performance practice.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ *Gàir nan Clàrsach*, pp. 101, 135, 163.

⁸⁹ *HVA*, p. 5.

CHAPTER X. CONCLUSION

This project began with three ambitious research questions: (1) what was the musical world of Rob Donn? (2) can his poems be reunited with their melodies? and (3) how did he compose his songs? The first question is examined in the musical biography of the bard in Chapter I, the historical overview of eighteenth-century Scottish music in Chapter IV, and the detailed findings on tune sources in Chapters V – IX. The results of the second inquiry are presented in Appendix I and inform the analysis in Chapters V – IX. The third question is addressed in the survey of theoretical literature in Chapter III and again in Chapters V – IX. What emerges from this painstaking examination is a remarkable musical achievement by a talented and creative individual, a traditional Gaelic song-maker who composed both words and music in a fully aural/oral context.

Before summarizing my research findings, a few caveats are perhaps in order. The first concerns the nature of our sources on Rob Donn, discussed more fully in Chapter II. Although research on song texts was incidental to the aims of this project, it appears that none of the original manuscript sources for Rob Donn's words are still extant. A similar situation exists for the music. That is, although Gunn and MacFarlane printed music for 45 songs, mostly transcribed from a nineteenth-century sol-fa collection by John Munro, I was unable to locate either Munro's original manuscript or MacFarlane's copy (except for two melodies that were not included in the published edition). While I have some confidence (based on my scrutiny of MacFarlane's papers, his comments on Munro, and the overall consistency of Munro's settings with other early sources) that Munro was an accurate transcriber and MacFarlane a careful editor, neither assumption can be fully verified. The reliability of the tune attributions in Morrison is more doubtful, as I have been unable to identify his sources at all — whether books, childhood memories, friends and acquaintances, or even his own notion in 1899 of a nice tune that might fit Rob Donn's words. The only way of testing his tune identifications was experimental, by trying to set the words to the music. But even when this worked (as it usually did, more or less), there is no guarantee that the tunes Morrison identified (or Munro collected) were those sung by Rob Donn.

A second caveat concerns the origins of the tunes that Rob Donn borrowed. Because this project was designed to reconstruct, compare and analyze a large body of songs by a single poet, the time available for research into the underlying tune sources was necessarily limited, so I relied largely on printed eighteenth- and nineteenth-century music collections and tune histories already compiled by other researchers. Nevertheless, I hoped somewhat naively to be able to classify the melodies that Rob Donn borrowed or adapted by national origin (Gaelic, Scots, Irish or English) and by their previous form as songs or instrumental tunes. As anyone familiar with Scottish traditional music knows, such an endeavor is highly fraught because, for example, an instrumental tune (reel, jig or strathspey) could also be a Gaelic *port-à-beul* or a vehicle for a song with Scots or English words, and sorting out which came first in a long, branching chain of predominantly oral transmission is difficult if not impossible. But even if my tentative classifications are incomplete and sometimes wrong, they still serve a useful purpose by showing the diversity and richness of the many strands comprising Rob Donn's musical world.

The last caveat concerns the nature of the evidence that Rob Donn composed the melodies for a third of these 100 songs. In some cases, I have been able to show in great detail the musical changes he made to an earlier melody he used as a model in composing a new song. At the other end of the spectrum are tunes for which the evidence of original composition is no more than the absence of evidence for borrowing.¹ Thus in some cases I probably counted melodies as composed by Rob Donn that were not, although in other cases I may have counted a melody as borrowed — for example, because it looks and sounds like a waulking song or a fiddle tune — that was actually Rob Donn's own. All of these caveats should be kept in mind when considering the findings presented below.

A. BORROWED MELODIES — CONTINUITY AND SELECTION

The title of this section incorporates two of the three features (continuity, variation and selection) that Sharp believed were characteristic of all orally-

¹ In that regard, if readers familiar with Scottish traditional music recognize additional tune sources, I would welcome their comments.

transmitted folk music.² For my purposes, musical “continuity” means roughly what it did to Sharp — the preservation and reuse of familiar melodies, often with new words suitable for new occasions. But unlike Sharp I define “selection” to mean, not approval or rejection by a mass of anonymous listeners and singers, but rather intentional borrowing, a choice made by a creative artist, poet and song-maker to use an existing melody for a new song on a particular topic.³ This is what Robert Burns did for almost all his songs, and it is what Rob Donn did for two-thirds of the 100 songs analyzed in this thesis.⁴ Both drew deeply from the same inexhaustible well, the *tobar an dualchais* of Scottish traditional music, instrumental and vocal, Scots and Gaelic.⁵

Summary Chart #1 shows Rob Donn’s possible tune sources for the 67 songs with borrowed melodies, grouped by chapter and subject matter:

SUMMARY CHART #1: SOURCES OF BORROWED TUNES

| <u>Chapter</u> | <u>Gaelic song</u> | <u>Scots song</u> | <u>Other song</u> | <u>Instrumental</u> |
|--|--|-------------------|-------------------|---------------------|
| V. Elegies | 2 (<i>òran mòr</i>) | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| VI. Social & political commentary | 7 (2 <i>òran mòr</i> 2 PAB ⁶ 1 waulking 2 other) | 2 | 1 | 4 |
| VII. Love, courtship & weddings | 11 (3 waulking 2 PAB 6 other) | 4 | 1 | 4 |
| VIII. Satire & humor | 7 (3 waulking 3 PAB 1 other) | 6 | 5 | 1 |
| IX. Praise, nature & sea songs | 3 (3 <i>òrain mhòra</i>) | 5 | 0 | 3 |
| TOTALS: | 30 (45%) | 17 (25%) | 8 (12%) | 12 (18%) |

² Sharp, p. 21.

³ Sharp, pp. 38-40.

⁴ Low, ‘Introduction’ to *SMM*, p. 10.

⁵ Tobar an Dualchais, <<http://tobarandualchais.co.uk>>.

⁶ “PAB” means *puirt-à-beul*.

A number of patterns are visible from this summary and others become evident after breaking down its components. Looking first at the totals — and mindful of previous caveats — 45% of the borrowed tunes are from the Gaelic song tradition, 25% from Scots song, 12% from Irish or English song, and 18% from instrumental tunes (although the latter are hard to distinguish from the *puirt-à-beul* listed as Gaelic songs or the lighter examples of Scots song). Melodies of *òrain mhòra* from the Gaelic tradition were borrowed for somber elegies (#70 & 74), serious social and political commentary (#23 & 45), and praise songs (#20, 29 & 82).⁷ The two pibroch songs (#44 & 97) both praise young women. *Puirt-à-beul* (#16, 22(1), 37, 48, 52, 76 & 94) and light instrumental tunes (#15, 28, 30, 54, 58, 60, 80, 90, 95 & 100) were used most often for satire and humor (including some classified here as social and political commentary or wedding songs). Seven songs (#4, 6, 21, 38, 39, 47 & 65) used melodies I have classified as waulking songs, sometimes for poems about women (#6, 38, 39 & 47) and sometimes as service tunes for brief satires (#4, 21 & 65).

The seventeen Scots song tunes were employed in various ways, some predictable and others ironic. In the former category, slow airs (such as #10, 33, 91 & 98) were used for love and courtship songs, and lighter melodies (such as #12, 13, 46, 68 & 73) for satires. In other cases, Rob Donn must have intentionally chosen a lugubrious ballad tune for a comic song to intensify the humor. Examples include using the tune “Gilderoy” for his satire on a filthy well (#53), the tune “Logan Water” for a flyting song (#11), and the tune “Lochaber No More” (in #87) to extol a puppy. Not infrequently he chose a Scots song with words related to his own theme, suggesting that he had at least a working knowledge of English; examples include using “Oh, as I was kist yestreen” for a song about an old maid (#10), “Woo’d and married and a” for a song about an unhappy courtship (#91), and “Over the Water wi’ Charley” for an emigration song (#83). He also used two well-known ballad tunes, “Lochaber No More” and “Barbara Allen”, essentially as service tunes for songs on various topics, with four settings of “Lochaber” (#32, 36, 87 & 98) and two of Barbara Allen (#55 & 61).

⁷ #82 is classified as a sea song but praises the captain and crew for a safe voyage.

The handful of Irish and English tunes that Rob Donn borrowed were probably either effectively pan-British or already “naturalized” into Scottish Gaelic oral tradition when he adopted them. For instance, he probably learned the lovely Irish melody “Tha mi nam chadal” (used in #9, 62 & 93) from a Jacobite song by Scottish Gaelic bard Sìleas na Ceapaich, and “The Jolly Miller” (used in #19) had versions set from Aberdeenshire to Hampshire.⁸ The tune “O’er the hills and far away”, which he used for two satires (#8 & 89) and a model for one original composition (#50), was first published in *The Recruiting Officer*, a 1706 play by Irish writer George Farquhar set in Shrewsbury, and later in John Gay’s *The Beggar’s Opera*, which premiered in London in 1728.⁹ So none of these melodies can be claimed exclusively for any particular part of Britain or Ireland, and Rob Donn could have heard them either at home or on his travels as a drover and soldier.

Another quantifiable aspect of Rob Donn’s compositional practice was his use of the same tune for more than one song, illustrated in Summary Chart #2:

SUMMARY CHART #2: TUNES USED MORE THAN ONCE

| <u>Tune title</u> | <u>RD song #</u> | <u>RD song genre</u> |
|--------------------------|------------------|------------------------|
| ROB DONN MELODIES | | |
| Town and Country Life | #24 & 25 | #25 is a parody of #24 |
| Sally Grant | #50 & 31 | #31 is a parody of #50 |
| To Ewen | #43 & 77(1) | satire & elegy |
| GAELIC SONGS: | | |
| waulking songs: | | |
| Hè an clò dubh | #4 & 21 | satires |
| Hè, hoirionnan ò | #6 & 65 | love & satire |
| òrain mhòra: | | |
| Latha siubhal | #23(2) & 51(2) | commentary & elegy |
| Cia iad na dè | #29 & 82 | praise & journey |
| Murt Ghlinne Comhann | #45(1) & 70 | Jacobite & elegy |
| other: | | |
| Faillirin, illirinn | #34 & 63 | satire & courtship |

⁸ Sìleas MacDonald, pp. 234-36; P. Kennedy, p. 533.

⁹ Henigan, p. 46.

SCOTS SONGS & BALLADS:

| | | |
|------------------|-----------------|------------------------|
| Barbara Allen | #55 & 61 | satires |
| Lochaber No More | #32, 36, 87, 98 | service tune (used 4x) |
| Logan Water | #11 & 33 | satire & courtship |
| Nae Luck | #13 & 68 | satires to same person |

IRISH SONGS(?):

| | | |
|----------------------------|------------|------------------------|
| Tha mi nam chadal | #9, 62, 93 | service tune (used 3x) |
| O'er the hills & far away | #8 & 89 | satires |
| Over the water wi' Charlie | #75 & 83 | satire & journey |

INSTRUMENTAL TUNES:

| | | |
|-----------------------|----------|-------------------|
| Faillt' a' Phrionns' | #44 & 97 | praise (pibroch) |
| Mrs MacLeod of Raasay | #28 & 30 | commentary/satire |
| John Roy Stewart | #58 & 80 | satire & praise |

As this chart counts only one melody for each of the 100 songs (the one I consider most likely to have been sung by Rob Donn), subtracting all the duplicate and other multiple uses of each tune leaves a total of 78 unique melodies. Only rarely did Rob Donn use the same tune more than twice. The exceptions are “Lochaber No More”, used four times, and “Tha mi nam chadal”, used thrice, which I categorize as “service tunes” following Anne Dhu Shapiro because they serve as vehicles for songs on a variety of unrelated topics.¹⁰ Excluding the three instances where Rob Donn reuses one of his own melodies (usually for a parody or satire), we are left with sixteen borrowed tunes (Gaelic, Scots, Irish and instrumental) that he chose to reuse for one reason or another.

This is the data, but what does it tell us about the way Rob Donn worked? That is, how did he select the tunes he borrowed, and why did he use some more than once? Often he followed recognizable genre conventions, as when he composed new elegies to the tunes of old laments, sad new love songs to the tunes of mournful old ballads, or light-hearted satires to reels, jigs and strathspeys. In some cases the explanation is simple free association and verbal substitution, as when he used the waulking song “Hè an clò dubh” for two satires with the chorus “Hei ’m fear dubh” (#4 & 21), “Barbara Allen” for a satire about “John Macallan”

¹⁰ Shapiro, p. 414.

(#61), “Robaidh dona gòrach” to vilify “Uilleam dona gòrach” (#94), or “Gilderoy” (*an gille ruadh*) to satirize “an tobar ruadh” (#53). In other cases, as he said himself, a tune would just “come to my mind”, whether because he had heard it recently, used it for another song, or considered it appropriate for some other reason, metrical, verbal or functional.¹¹ In one case we know he used the same tune twice for satires aimed at the same person (#13 & 68), perhaps as part of a rapid-fire flyting contest. Otherwise he must have reused tunes either because they were widely known in his community or his own personal favorites. On occasion, he may even have chosen a melody because he knew it was liked or detested (respectively) by the object of his praise or satire; but any instances of that sort are now of course unrecoverable.

B. NEW MELODIES — VARIATION, RECOMPOSITION, CREATION

The title of this section contains three terms that represent a spectrum of musical composition in an aural/oral context. “Variation” is the term used by Sharp to describe relatively minor and generally unconscious changes to a traditional melody, usually by a singer who changes a few notes here and there, alters the mode, or modifies the rhythm to fit new words.¹² “Recomposition” is a term used by McKean and Shapiro to describe the process by which a traditional bard begins with a metrical and melodic model and changes it (consciously or unconsciously) as he or she composes a new song with new words.¹³ Depending on the extent of the changes, this concept could overlap at one end with Sharp’s “variation”, and at the other end with the technique Rob Donn used in composing new elegies with the “funeral march” rhythm, borrowing the meter but changing the notes. “Creation” of a new melody can be seen as a larger departure from the “given”, a melody with no obvious model on the level of phrase, line or verse, although it may use shorter musical motifs common to a particular musical tradition.¹⁴ As we have seen, Rob Donn’s melodies occupy most of this spectrum from the inherited to the new.

¹¹ App. II, #83, verse 9.

¹² Sharp, pp. 24-35.

¹³ McKean, pp. 120-21; Shapiro, p. 411.

¹⁴ See generally Nettle, *Thirty-One Issues*, pp. 32, 34; Cowdery, *The Melodic Tradition of Ireland* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1990), pp. 87-94.

Having reviewed the 67 borrowed tunes, we turn now to the 33 that Rob Donn can arguably be credited with composing, listed in Summary Chart #3:

SUMMARY CHART #3: ORIGINAL MELODIES

| <u>Chapter</u> | <u>Songs</u> | <u>Total</u> |
|--|--|---------------------------|
| V. Elegies | #26, 41, 51(1), 56, 59(1), 67, 71, 77(1), 79, 92 | 10 out of 13 (77%) |
| VI. Social & political commentary | #1, 5, 7, 43, 66 | 5 out of 19 (26%) |
| VII. Love, courtship, & weddings | #2, 17(1), 40, 69, 78, 81, 86(1) | 7 out of 27 (26%) |
| VIII. Satire & humor | #3, 25, 27, 31, 42, 57, 96 | 7 out of 26 (27%) |
| IX. Praise, nature & sea songs | #14(1), 24, 50, 99(1) | 4 out of 15 (27%) |
| TOTAL | 33 songs out of 100 | 33% “new” melodies |

Before commenting on these findings, it is appropriate to review the nature of the evidence that supports my inference of original composition. In six cases (#26, 41, 51(1), 59(1), 71 & 77(1)) — all elegies discussed in Chapter V — I have shown that Rob Donn borrowed a metrical model from another Gaelic lament or *òran mòr* (“Murt Ghlinne Comhann”, “Ceapach na Fàsach” or “Latha siubhal”) but created a new and unique melody for each song. In three other cases, I have demonstrated how Rob Donn used shorter motifs from familiar tunes (“Roy’s Wife”, “O’er the Hills” and “A cheud Di-luain de ’n ràithe”) to create, respectively, “Town and Country Life” (#24), “Sally Grant” (#50) and “Is trom lean an àirigh” (#78).

Another type of internal evidence for original composition is word-painting, where Rob Donn seems to have used either a particular rhythm or particular musical intervals or both to reinforce an aspect of his poetry. Since we cannot do fieldwork in the past, we cannot ask Rob Donn whether this was intentional, but to me it suggests a deliberate compositional process. For example, in the first verse of “The

Rispond Misers” (#51(1)), he placed the word “ìosal” (low) on the lowest note of the melody and the word “fallain” (which means healthy in Gaelic but in context must be a bilingual pun on the English word “fallen”) on a descending sixth, an interval not present at that location in his metrical model (compare #51(2)). A similar example occurs in the first verse of his elegy for the Earl of Sutherland (#59(1)), where he uses an ascending octave for the words “chaidh m’ àrach” (I was raised) and a parallel descending octave for the word “tuiteam” (fall or decline) one line later. This is a sophisticated compositional technique that I believe to be deliberate. Other examples include his use of descending intervals to illustrate a young doctor’s fall from grace (#1), a laborious rhythm to accompany his own agony while pulling a plow (#14(1)), a halting rhythm to illustrate the footsteps of his aging patron (#66), the ascending intervals in “Thèid mi cuide riut” (#69), the bawdy song about two men marching off to court a widow, and the running triplets of the courtship song (#18) with the chorus “Sud e ’na ruith o thigh gu tigh” (there he is running from house to house). In my view, all these examples provide persuasive evidence that Rob Donn composed the words and the music together.

These types of internal evidence account for a total of seventeen of the 33 tunes I have classified as original compositions (including three where Rob Donn reuses one of his own melodies). For the other songs, the evidence is weaker. In several cases (#3, 56, 57, 67, 96), a nineteenth-century editor (Mackintosh Mackay, Hew Morrison, Malcolm MacFarlane, Lachlan Macbean and/or John Mackenzie) states flatly that Rob Donn composed the melody, and I have no reason to believe otherwise. Often (as in #2, 5, 7, 27, 40, 79 & 92), the melody is found only in the Munro collection, or in Munro and another early collection such as Angus Fraser where it is clearly a variant. In two of these songs (#7 and 79), the melody also has an unusual number of bars (twenty-eight or ten, respectively), suggesting that it may have been composed to fit Rob Donn’s poem in three-line strophic meter. Occasionally a melody appears in early instrumental collections with a title that reflects Rob Donn’s words, implying at least a strong association between the two.¹⁵

¹⁵ The best example of this is “John MacLeod” (#42), the song about the man who made his wife an unwitting bigamist. In MacGlashan’s fiddle collection (1778), p. 34, it is titled “The auld Man is long a dying”, and in Gunn’s pipe collection (1848), p. 37, it is titled “Fire fara a sheann duine, ’s fhada leam a tha thu agum. My old man is long a-dying.”

The remaining three songs (#17(1), 86(1) and 99(1)) all have tunes in the Munro collection as well as a different tune in another source, and I have decided for reasons explained individually for each that the Munro tune is more likely to have been sung and thus possibly composed by Rob Donn.

Returning to the findings in Summary Chart #3, the most striking concern the elegies, for three-quarters of which Rob Donn composed original melodies, compared to only one-quarter in each of the other genres. Moreover, he never used the same tune for more than one elegy, again unlike his compositional practice in any other genre, shown in Summary Chart #2.¹⁶ As we have seen, Rob Donn borrowed three melodies for elegies from other Gaelic laments or *òrain mhòra*, and based another six on metrical models from those sources while composing his own melodies. This demonstrates very convincingly that Rob Donn (and presumably his community) believed that anyone who deserved a personal elegy also deserved a unique melody, but one with suitable dignity and known associations within the Gaelic lament tradition.

Aside from the ten elegies, the other tunes classified as original compositions in Summary Chart #3 include one Jacobite song and four categorized as social commentary; four love songs and three courtship songs but no wedding songs; seven classified as satire and humor; two praise songs, one nature song and one sea song, a list covering almost every topic in his oeuvre. The musical affinities of these tunes seem equally varied and resistant to meaningful generalization. As already discussed, Rob Donn radically reworked three tunes from various sources to create new melodies including his best-known love song, “Is trom leam an àirigh” (#78), the nature song “Town and Country Life (#24), and the praise song “Sally Grant” (#50). Other melodies I have classified as original use strong instrumental rhythms, such as #7 (a strathspey used for a satire), #27 and #42 (reels used for humorous songs), and #57 (the pipe reel “The Grey Buck” used to satirize a promiscuous soldier). My own favorite is perhaps #99(1), “Neil Mackay and His Crew”, a sort of strathspey on steroids with a dotted rhythm in 3/4 time that pokes fun at the peripatetic sailor with a girl in every port.

¹⁶ In three cases, however, he seems to have used the same tune for an elegy and a song in another genre.

Except for the elegies, then, there is no obvious pattern that would help us to understand why Rob Donn composed or recomposed new melodies for some songs and borrowed melodies for others. Nor have I found any significant musical differences between the melodies he composed and those he borrowed; all fit comfortably within Collinson's description of the "native idiom".¹⁷ Thus Rob Donn's achievement as a composer is consistent with Blacking's definition of "originality" as "an expression of innate exploratory behavior with the accumulated materials of a cultural tradition".¹⁸ Or in Nettl's words: "What is 'given' to the creator of music is the building blocks and the rules of what may be done with them; innovation consists of how the options are exercised."¹⁹

C. ALL MELODIES: MUSICAL CHARACTERISTICS

Another way to approach these 100 melodies is by analyzing their formal musical characteristics such as range, meter, scale degrees and tonality. The results of that analysis are presented in the next group of charts, although two caveats are again in order. First, the 100 melodies do not represent a contemporaneous collection transcribed by a single fieldworker or arranged by a single editor according to consistent editorial principles, so no accurate comparison can be made of features such as modality. And even if that problem were avoided by looking only at the Munro melodies, the results would not tell us precisely what Rob Donn himself sang more than a century earlier. The second problem is lack of comparative data. Although Peter Cooke has done a considerable amount of musical analysis on the Eliza Ross collection,²⁰ similar analyses are needed for other large collections of eighteenth-century Scottish vocal airs such as the Patrick MacDonald collection and *The Scots Musical Museum*. Until that is done, it is impossible to assess the extent to which Rob Donn's melodies (borrowed or original) were typical of contemporary musicmaking in the *Gàidhealtachd* and beyond. All I can offer in that regard is an overall impression that his tunes were

¹⁷ Collinson, p. 4.

¹⁸ Blacking, p. 106.

¹⁹ Nettl, *Thirty-One Issues*, p. 34.

²⁰ Cooke, 'Some Thoughts'.

representative in most respects — if only because he borrowed so freely from all types of music that he heard.

Summary Chart #4 compares the vocal ranges of the 100 songs by chapter, separating original from borrowed melodies. The chart itself lists all tunes with a range greater than a ninth (the bagpipe range); tunes with larger ranges are enumerated thereafter.

SUMMARY CHART #4: RANGES EXCEEDING A NINTH

| <u>Chapter</u> | <u>Rob Donn</u> | <u>Borrowed</u> | <u>All tunes</u> |
|--|------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|
| V. Elegies | 6 of 10 = 60% | 2 of 3 = 67% | 8 of 13 = 62% |
| VI. Social & political commentary | 1 of 5 = 20% | 5 of 14 = 36% | 6 of 19 = 32% |
| VII. Love, courtship, & weddings | 4 of 7 = 57% | 11 of 20 = 55% | 15 of 27 = 56% |
| VIII. Satire & humor | 3 of 7 = 43% | 10 of 19 = 53% | 13 of 26 = 50% |
| IX. Praise, nature & sea songs | 4 of 4 = 100% | 5 of 11 = 45% | 9 of 15 = 60% |
| TOTALS | 18 of 33 = 55% | 33 of 67 = 49% | 51 of 100 = 51% |

Altogether, 51 of the 100 songs have a range exceeding a ninth, 30 have a range exceeding a tenth, and ten have a range exceeding an eleventh (an octave and a fourth).²¹ This confirms my belief that Rob Donn must have had a large vocal range, as there would be no reason for him to compose songs that he could not communicate to others by singing himself. Overall, however, the range of his own tunes did not differ materially from those he borrowed. The only comparative data I have found on vocal range is in Campbell and Collinson, who found no melodies in their collection of Hebridean waulking songs whose compass exceeded an

²¹ It is unclear why a smaller proportion of the tunes in Chapter VI (social and political commentary) should have a large range; this may just be a quirk based on the sources.

eleventh.²² This supports my view that Rob Donn's melodies were to some degree exceptional, although a solo singer would typically have more leeway in this respect than a group.

The remaining comparison charts (on musical meter, scale degrees and tonality) do not separate original from borrowed melodies. Summary Chart #5 concerns meter:

SUMMARY CHART #5: MUSICAL METER²³

| <u>Chapter</u> | <u>Duple</u> | <u>Triple</u> | <u>9/8</u> | <u>Mixed</u> |
|--|--------------|---------------|------------|--------------|
| V. Elegies | 6 = 46% | 5 = 38% | 2 = 15% | — |
| VI. Social & political commentary | 11 = 58% | 8 = 42% | — | — |
| VII. Love, courtship, & weddings | 16 = 59% | 10 = 37% | 1 = 4% | — |
| VIII. Satire & humor | 19 = 73% | 7 = 27% | — | — |
| IX. Praise, nature & sea songs | 6 = 40% | 6 = 40% | 1 = 7% | 2 = 13% |
| TOTALS | 58% | 36% | 4% | 2% |

This chart reveals that duple and triple meter were used for every type of song, although duple meter was more common overall, and some differences can be noted between poetic genres. 9/8 meter was used only for the elegies for Rev. Murdo and Lord Reay (#71 & 74), for one courtship song (#91) and one praise song (#20). Mixed meter is represented only by the two pibroch songs (#44 and 97), although one or two other songs (those where I had the most trouble matching the words and the tunes) may also have been sung with verse and chorus in different meters. In general, triple meter is slightly more common in songs on serious topics,

²² *Hebridean Folksongs* II, p. 265, & III, p. 313.

²³ As used here, duple meter includes 2/4 and 4/4 time, while triple meter includes 3/4 and 6/8 time. The 9/8 tunes are listed separately because this meter is relatively rare.

while duple meter predominates in satire and humor, probably because the latter are often set to reels and strathspeys, which by definition are in duple meter.

The next chart illustrates the number of degrees of a diatonic scale used in each melody — seven (heptatonic), six (hexatonic) or five (pentatonic).

SUMMARY CHART #6: SCALES

| <u>Chapter</u> | <u>Heptatonic</u> | <u>Hexatonic</u> | <u>Pentatonic</u> |
|--|--------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| V. Elegies | 3 = 23% | 10 = 77% | — |
| VI. Social & political commentary | 7 = 37% | 12 = 63% | — |
| VII. Love, courtship, & weddings | 9 = 33% | 13 = 48% | 5 = 19% |
| VIII. Satire & humor | 9 = 35% | 17 = 65% | — |
| IX. Praise, nature & sea songs | 5 = 33% | 9 = 60% | 1 = 7% |
| TOTALS | 33% | 61% | 6% |

In short, a third of the melodies are heptatonic, a majority are hexatonic, and only a handful are pentatonic. By way of comparison, Peter Cooke calculated that over half of the song melodies in the Eliza Ross collection are pentatonic, and the collections of Frances Tolmie and Campbell and Collinson are also characterized by higher percentages of gapped scales (either five or six tones) than I found in my more assorted collection of melodies for Rob Donn.²⁴ In that regard, it may be significant that all the pentatonic melodies (#17(1), 40, 78, 81, 82(1), and 88(1)) I have identified for Rob Donn are from the Munro collection, suggesting that some of these differences are attributable simply to my sources.²⁵ But other explanations are also possible. For example, Rob Donn borrowed a number of instrumental tunes

²⁴ Cooke, 'Some Thoughts', p. 106.

²⁵ Actually, the Munro version of "An gille dubh, ciar-dhubh" (#88(1)) is not strictly pentatonic as it includes two passing notes outside that scale, and other versions are heptatonic. In the case of "Cia iad na dè" (#82(1)), again only Munro's version is pentatonic and other versions are hexatonic.

and *puirt-à-beul*, which Cooke excluded from his analytical sample of the Eliza Ross collection.²⁶ In addition, the other three collections just cited are all from the islands, and the prevailing musical influences in the northwest mainland may have been somewhat different, especially when filtered through the ears of a well-traveled drover.

The last comparison chart concerns the issue of tonality. Because the tunes are from various sources, in various modes, with various degrees of the scale present or absent, this chart takes a simplified approach, considering only whether the tune has a major or minor third in its principal key (and thus a predominantly major or minor feel) and whether it is constructed upon a double tonic (explained following the chart).

SUMMARY CHART #7: TONALITY

| <u>Chapter</u> | <u>Major third</u> | <u>Minor third</u> | <u>Absent third</u> | <u>Double tonic</u> |
|--|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| V. Elegies | 6 = 46% | 5 = 38% | 2 = 15% | 9 = 69% |
| VI. Social & political commentary | 11 = 58% | 8 = 42% | — | 14 = 74% |
| VII. Love, courtship, & weddings | 14 = 52% | 12 = 44% | 1 = 4% | 25 = 93% |
| VIII. Satire & humor | 17 = 65% | 8 = 31% | 1 = 4% | 21 = 81% |
| IX. Praise, nature & sea songs | 11 = 73% | 4 = 27% | — | 14 = 93% |
| TOTALS | 59% | 37% | 4% | 83% |

A good example of the double tonic construction is the *ùrlar* of “Iseabail Nic Aoidh”, shown below:

²⁶ Cooke, ‘Some Thoughts’, p. 105.

Example 12. Iseabail NicAoidh (*ùrlar*)

Is'-bal Nic - Aoidh aig a' chrodh laoigh, Is'-bal Nic- Aoidh, 's i na h-aon - ar;
Fine

Seall sibh Nic - Aoidh aig a' chrodh laoigh, Am bonn-aibh na fridh, 's i na h-aon - ar.

Here the basic tonality of the excerpt is a pentatonic scale in E (EF#ABD), as shown by the repeated Es and Bs in bars 1-2 and 5-6 and the final E in bar 8, which shifts to a secondary tonality using a D major triad (DF#A) in bars 2-4 and bars 6-7.

Because the scale is pentatonic, the minor third on G in the middle of the E triad is implied rather than present (probably because this was originally a pipe tune with the double tonic in A minor and G major, and a C natural cannot be played on a Highland bagpipe). Otherwise, it is a classic use of a double tonic with a minor triad above and a major triad one tone below. All but one of the 83 double tonic tunes in this corpus follow that pattern, which is common in bagpipe tunes due to the limited scale of the instrument but also influenced a great deal of eighteenth-century vocal and fiddle music (as described in Chapter IV). However, the tonal center of double tonic melodies is not always the fundamental note of the upper (or minor) triad, or the tunes would always sound minor. Sometimes the tonal center is the base of the lower (or major) triad, so the tune as a whole sounds major. That is why 59% of the tunes in Summary Chart #7 are in the column “major third”, as I determined (partly by ear and partly by examining their musical structure) that each was predominantly in that “key.”

Returning to the contents of Summary Chart #7, there seem to be no significant differences in tonality between the various genres of poetry. In particular, almost half (46%) of the elegies, which we might expect to be minor, in fact have a major third. On the other hand, almost a third (31%) of the songs classified as satire and humor, which we might expect to be major, actually have a minor third. Some of this can be explained by the diversity within each group (e.g., satirical as well as sorrowful elegies) but not all. Instead, it is evident from the

corpus as a whole that Rob Donn did not automatically equate minor with sad and major with happy.

D. HOW DID ROB DONN COMPOSE?

Another Scottish song composer named Robert once described his own compositional method as follows:

[U]ntill I am compleat master of a tune, in my own singing, (such as it is) I never can compose for it. — My way is: I consider the poetic Sentiment, correspondent to my idea of the musical expression; then chuse my theme; begin one Stanza; when that is composed, which is generally the most difficult part of the business, I walk out, sit down now & then, look out for objects in Nature round me that are in unison or harmony with the cogitations of my fancy & workings of my bosom; humming every now & then the air with the verses I have framed: when I feel my Muse beginning to jade, I retire to the solitary fireside of my study, & there commit my effusions to paper.²⁷

This is *not* how Rob Donn composed, but a comparison is instructive.

First, Rob Donn began not with a tune, but with a theme, a person, an incident, or a topic of current interest. Second, he thought of an appropriate tune, whether complete, a metrical model, or merely a snatch of melody he would later expand. Third, he composed the words, probably humming or singing the tune while outdoors working or walking cross-country. Rob Donn did not have the luxury of a private study or the education to put pen to paper, but these were not his only differences from Burns. Rob Donn was more a journalist or editorial commentator than a lyric poet like Burns or contemporary Gaelic nature poets; he did not stroll aimlessly seeking “objects in Nature [...] in unison or harmony with the cogitations of [his] fancy & workings of [his] bosom.” Also unlike Burns, Rob Donn often composed both words and music for his songs. This means his compositional process was necessarily more complex, analogous to composing both words and music for an art song, or writing both libretto and music for an opera.

Despite numerous examples in previous chapters, it is hard to reconstruct exactly how he did this. It is possible that he had a mental filing system for songs and tunes, organized somewhat like the medieval memory banks described by Carruthers in *The Book of Memory*, from which he could retrieve melodies at will. But it seems more likely that the process was largely unconscious, and a tune or

²⁷ Quoted in Low, *The Songs of Robert Burns*, p. 31.

musical motif would simply “come to mind.”²⁸ Or perhaps some of both. But in either case, despite the conventional wisdom that Gaelic singers and bards did not mentally separate the words and music of their songs,²⁹ Rob Donn must have done so or he could not possibly have reassigned and manipulated the components of both in so many ways. In particular, he must have known the difference between reusing an existing melody in full and reusing a metrical scheme but modifying the tune, because he did both repeatedly and systematically in his elegies. And the fact that he used 78 unique melodies, thirty his own, for the 100 songs in this thesis proves that he operated on a vastly different creative level from someone like Iain MacNeacail who was not even aware when two songs had the same melody.³⁰

E. TOPICS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

For Rob Donn himself, a great deal of work remains to be done to make his songs fully accessible to scholars of literature, music and social history, to Gaelic students, teachers and singers, and to members of the Scottish diaspora and others who may be motivated to study Gaelic and Gaelic song (as I was) by a half-forgotten ancestral connection or an interest in Scottish traditional music. A scholarly edition of Rob Donn has apparently been on the wish list of the Scottish Gaelic Texts Society for some time. But since Rob Donn was so prolific, the 100 songs discussed in this thesis amount to fewer than half of the 220 poems published by Morrison in 1899, not to speak of a few others published by Adam Gunn in 1900 and any others yet to be rediscovered.³¹ Also, while I made some effort to identify the principal manuscript sources for the texts, I made no attempt to find, much less analyze, all published and unpublished versions of the 100 poems. Rather, I relied on a single source (Morrison) for the Gaelic texts, identified the location of each poem in the three other principal editions, translated the poems not previously translated, and compiled a few items of background information for each poem. Those tasks would have to be repeated for the remainder of the poems, and the entire corpus subjected to the more detailed analysis typical of SGTS editions. Ideally this

²⁸ App. II, #83, verse 9.

²⁹ See, e.g., Blankenhorn, *Irish Song-Craft*, p. 346.

³⁰ McKean, p. 122.

³¹ Gunn, ‘Unpublished Songs’, pp. 62-64, 87-88.

project would enlist the services of a specialist on Gaelic dialects, enabling at least some of the poems to be reconstructed in an approximation of eighteenth-century Sutherland Gaelic so they would actually rhyme and would sound more like they did to Rob Donn when he composed them.

On the musical side, no doubt a musicologist could find a few more tunes used by Rob Donn and supply more complete tune histories and concordances by investigating additional sources including early manuscripts and later sound archives. But in my view a more valuable project would be to publish a performing edition of some or all of the 100 songs in this thesis, with the music in staff notation, the complete Gaelic text in modern orthography, a full translation into English, and perhaps an accompanying CD. This would make the songs available as songs to singers, music teachers, and Mòd arrangers; and modern texts and translations would greatly expand the number of Rob Donn's poems accessible to everyone from intermediate Gaelic students to non-Gaelic readers (including professional historians).

More broadly, it would be useful to have studies similar to this one for other individual eighteenth-century Gaelic poets, such as Alasdair mac Mhaighstir Alasdair and Donnchadh Bàn, focusing on the musical aspect of their work as well as the texts of their poetry. Only then could meaningful comparative studies be conducted considering the role of music in the work of "canonical" eighteenth-century poets, comparing the music of their songs to that of waulking songs and other anonymous vocal music associated with women, or comparing their music to the tunes collected by Johnson and Burns for *The Scots Musical Museum*.

Another worthwhile project would be the one recommended by Mary Anne Alburger in her PhD thesis — to study the Patrick MacDonald collection as she did Simon Fraser's in order to identify and set the texts of the Gaelic songs for which he printed only the music.³² Some may be lost, but others appear again and again in printed song collections, and some can probably also be found in twentieth-century sound archives. In fact, based on my experience with both collections, reconstructing Patrick MacDonald's melodies should be easier (or at least more historically accurate) than working with Simon Fraser's, because the MacDonald

³² Alburger, I, p. 90.

brothers were more scrupulous in recording what they heard and made fewer editorial changes to their material.³³ If the MacDonald collection were reconstructed in this way, we would then have three roughly simultaneous song collections to study, compare and sing — those of MacDonald (1784), Elizabeth Ross (1812) and Simon Fraser (1816). This would be of tremendous value in any effort to reconstruct eighteenth-century performance practice for Gaelic song, perhaps by comparing these written sources to archival recordings of traditional Gaelic singing. All of this remains to be investigated.

As this study has shown, the musical world of Rob Donn was rich and varied, full of songs, pipe and fiddle music that crossed freely between languages, between voice and instruments, and between drovers and drawing rooms. Despite his lack of formal education, musical or otherwise, Rob Donn was able to take that musical heritage and reshape it as an effective and memorable vehicle for his own songs. That musical accomplishment was recognized by his contemporaries and reflected by his nineteenth-century editors, but had disappeared entirely from the consciousness of Gaelic scholars by the twentieth century. The evidence was always there, hiding in plain sight; it just needed someone to put it together.

We conclude by repeating the words of musicologist Leo Treitler: “Historians of all subjects have ever occupied themselves with reconstructions and hypotheses that come down essentially to informed and reasoned imagining about how the surviving evidence came to be how it is.”³⁴ That is the task of scholars, in traditional music as in other fields. The task of musicians is to keep the music alive, and I hope this project will contribute to both.

³³ Compare Malcolm MacFarlane’s comments on the Simon Fraser collection in ‘Half a Century of Vocal Gaelic Music’, p. 260 (complaining the tunes were “treated instrumentally and spoiled for the voice”), with Patrick MacDonald’s detailed explanation of his own collecting and editorial principles in *HVA*, pp. 4-8.

³⁴ Treitler, *With Voice and Pen*, ‘Preface’, p. 6 of 9.

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