

Gaelic Song

Morag MacLeod

Morag MacLeod was born and brought up in Scalpay, Harris. When it came to secondary education, its place in Inverness-shire (Stornoway was in Ross-shire) meant that the choices were Tarbert, Harris, for three years and then Portree or Inverness, or the latter two for six years. Morag went to Inverness Royal Academy, and later to the University of Edinburgh where she graduated with an ordinary MA. She spent a year doing teacher-training at Jordanhill College of Education in Glasgow – the only college which dealt with Gaelic teaching. On completion of that course, however, she joined the staff of the School of Scottish Studies as a music transcriber. She regarded it as a great privilege to be able to visit many islands to record tradition-bearers in connection with that job. When the School took on a teaching role in the early 1970s, Morag took part as a lecturer on Gaelic Song, continuing as such when the department expanded into presenting for a full-time Honours degree, called Scottish Ethnology.

Morag retired in 2001, but continues to assist with Gaelic matters for the School's publications, Tocher and the Scottish Tradition series of cassettes and CDs, much curtailed as those are because of the teaching commitments. She lives in Scalpay.

I have given talks with this title so often that I'm finding it difficult to ring the changes for people who have heard most of it before. The reason that we do find ourselves talking for half-an-hour on Gaelic Song is probably down to the School of Scottish Studies. First there was the feeling that the songs should be collected, then, that they should be studied, and then that lectures should be given about them, as against just singing them and listening to them. I was very fortunate in being employed by the School of Scottish Studies when I was. Today there would be a queue of qualified academics applying for the lowly job of music transcriber, but in 1964 the few Gaelic speakers who had qualifications in music were not interested in Gaelic songs, or in any music except classical music by known composers. But the language

is in a unique position in that the geographical, linguistic and cultural parameters of Gaelic Song are definable. Because of the comparative isolation of those who speak the language, Gaelic songs have not been so influenced by external factors, and styles and themes have remained the same for centuries.

The incidence of songs which probably originated in Ireland confirms our awareness of close communication between the two cultures. This is also obvious in the common themes and details of the tales in each place, and some songs contain elements of those tales. It is wonderful that there are examples recorded in the School of Scottish Studies, going back possibly to the 10th century, of the exploits of Fionn MacColla and his warriors, Cuchullainn and his warriors, Diarmaid, and so on, incorporating Scandinavian tales as well. The patently Irish example I'm going to play for you is not a Fenian or Ossianic ballad. A lot has been written about it, as shown in the notes to versions of the song in *Hebridean Folksongs*.¹ An exchange between two characters in Shakespeare's *Henry V* contains a reference to *Calen o custure me* and it is probable that a song with a similar title was first published in 1584. As a waulking song, the refrain varies from *Chailin òg a stiùir thu mise* (young girl, will you guide me?), to *Chailin òg an stiùirimiche* (young daughter of the steersman). It has generally been concluded that it has developed from *Cailin o Chois t-Siùire mé*, (I am a young girl from the banks of the river Suir). The river Suir is in Munster. We cannot tell where the version sung in South Uist and Barra came from, as there are a few published, but it may well have come through oral transmission from the 16th century song quoted in Shakespeare. This is Mary Morrison from Barra with a group singing *Chailin Oig a Stiùir thu mise*.²

1 Campbell, J. L. and Collinson, F. *Hebridean Folksongs*, 3 vols (Oxford, 1969–81), Vol 2, pp. 43–51. Notes, pp. 200–209.

2 With the facilities presented by *Tobar an Dualchais* you may hear several versions of the song by going to that website. For this song look for *Cailin òg an stiùirimiche*, SA1956.072, sung by Mary Morrison, Barra.

Chailin òig a stiùir thu mise?

Chailin òig an stiùir thu mise? (2) Cailin mise, buachaill' thusa, Chailin òg a hiùraibh oho

Cailin mise, buachaill' thusa, Chailin òg an stiùir thu mise?

Cailin a' ghaoith mhòir 's a' ghailleann mi, Chailin òig an stiùir thu mise?

Cailin a' ghaoith mhòir 's a' ghailleann mi, Chailin òig a hiùraibh oho

Cailin a thobhar 's da thalamh mi

Cailin a thaomadh na feannaig mi

Cailin òig an stiùir thu mise? (2)

B'fheàrrde banchag buachaill aice

Ged nach dean e ach falbh reimhpe

Thèid e mach san oidhche fhraisaich

Cumaidh e na laoigh am fasgadh

Càiridh e suanach fo mhartaibh

Thàinig ise 'n t-ollbhean dhàna

Dhìrich i staighir a b'airde

Sheall i steach air uinneag clàraidh

'Fhir tha staigh, na de mar tha thu?

'Tha mise bochd truagh mar 's àbhaist

Olc le m'charaid 's math le m'nàmhaid.'

Thàinig ise 'n t-ollbhean dhàna...

Young girl, will you guide me? (2)

I a girl, you a young boy, Young girl, a hiuraibh oho

I a girl, you a young boy, Young girl, will you guide me?

Young girl in high wind and storm I, Young girl, will you guide me?

Young girl in high wind and storm I, Young girl, a hiuraibh oho

I am a young girl of manure and earth (?)

I am a young girl to dig the lazybed.³

A dairymaid is the better of a young boy, if only to precede her. He will go out on a wet night; he'll keep the calves in shelter; he'll place a fleece under cattle.

3 My translation. I regret that such a literal translation does poor justice to the original text.

She came, the bold hussy. She climbed the highest stair. She looked in on a partition window.

'You inside, how are you?'

'I am poorly and sick, as always. Bad (news) for my friend, good (news) for my enemy.'

She came, the bold hussy...

Several older songs like that, such as Fenian, Ossianic or Heroic ballads, have been kept in memory because of their use as waulking songs. It is more difficult to find songs with a text relating to historical matters in Lewis and Harris than it is in South Uist and Barra, and when they do occur, it is not unusual to find local texts added. This example is from Christina Shaw from Harris, and however old the song may be, the text is mainly of local provenance.

Tha fadachd orm fhìn i rì

Sèist:

Tha fadachd orm fhìn i rì 's mi ri dol a ghluasad, tha fadachd orm fhìn i rì

Fadachd air muin fadachd orm, i rì gur fhad on uair sin

Chuir iad chon na h-àiridh mi nuair thug mo ghràdh an cuan dhi

Chuir iad mi nam ònar gu mòinteach na Luachrach

'S diombach mi dha d'mhàthair a leig gu sàl cho luath thu

Colach cùl mo leannain-sa ri Ailig Dhomhail 'ic Ruairi

Colach cùl mo ghràidh-sa ri faoileig bhàin nan cuantan

Nuair thig do litir dhachaigh bidh do bheannachd air a h-uachdar.⁴

Refrain:

I am longing, oh dear! as I move to go away, I am longing, oh dear!

Longing upon longing, oh dear! it's been a long time.

They sent me to the shieling when my sweetheart went to sea.

They sent me on my own to the moor of Luachair.

I resent your mother, who let you go to sea so early.

⁴ To be heard on *Orain*, published by Acair, Stornoway, 1980. See also SA1973.44, 48 and 50.

The back of my sweetheart's head is like Alick, son of Donald, son of Roderick.

The back of my sweetheart's head is like the white gull on the ocean.

When your letter comes home, your blessing will be clear on it.

It was in the School of Scottish Studies that I learned about different verse metres and about the melodies attached to them. My colleague, Thorkild Knudsen asked me to ferret out songs in 'syllabic metre'. It took me a long time to recognise it, and I know I made many mistakes, but in the end it is quite simple. It is like blank verse. As they are usually written in stanzas of 8 lines, they are referred to as '8-line syllabic verse' and its distinguishing factor is the number of syllables per line, rather than the number of stresses. This means that the number of stresses can be irregular, so that it is difficult to attach conventional time signatures to the melody when attempting to write it. In syllabic metre, bar lines and time signatures are almost impossible to place and, of course, vary greatly from verse to verse. Over the years, however, the tunes used for this metre have become standardised as close variants, with a lament by Julia Macdonell of Keppoch for Alasdair of Glengarry regarded as the prototype. The poet Duncan Ban Macintyre composed two songs on the Battle of Falkirk (1746), both sung to this tune, so that the texts often get confused. Another example is by Alasdair Mackinnon from Morar on the Battle of Holland (1799).

Blàr na h-Eaglaise Brice

Ged tha mise seo nam chrùban ann an seann taigh ualaidh aognaidh
 Bha mi roimhe mar ri cuideachd, ged a thuit dhaibh mo chur bhupa
 'S tric mi 'g amharc ris an aonach faic mi t-aogasg Iain 'ic Ruairi
 Is na faicinn thu ri tighinn, dh'èireadh mo chridhe fo smuaintean.

Dh'èireadh m'inntinn-sa fo smalan a bhith mar riut, Iain 'ic Ruairi,
 Dh'innsinn dhut na bhiodh air m' aire 's bhithinn farraid na bhiodh uam
 dheth

'N latha sin thug iad na buillean, 's mise chunnaic bhith gam bualadh
 Chaidh teicheadh air taobh Rìgh Deòrsa, 's ann oirnn thàinig am fuathas.

'S e sgeul an uamhais ri innse, gun do theich an rìgh 's a mhuinntir,
 Ghabh iad eagal ro na buillean nuair a chunnaic iad am Prionnsa
 Cha d'dh'fhan duine dhiu ri chèile eadar Dun-Eideann is Struighlea
 'S iomadh bail' anns a robh pàirt dhiu gabhail tàmh air teachd na
 h-oidhche.⁵

Although I am crouching here in an old gloomy, lonely house,
 I was erstwhile with a party, though they happened to dismiss me;
 oft do I scan the moor if, haply I may see your form, John, son of
 Roderick;
 and if I saw your form approaching, my heart would rise out of
 depression.

My heart would rise from melancholy were I with you, John, son of
 Roderick;
 I would tell you all I had in mind and ask for all the news I lacked.
 On that day they struck the blows, I saw them being given;
 King George's side was put to flight, we were terror-stricken.

It was a tale of terror to relate how the king and his people fled;
 they were frightened of the blows as soon as they observed the Prince;
 none of them waited for the others between Edinburgh and Stirling;
 there's many a town where some of them rested when the night came.

Blàr na h-Olaind

'S air mìos dheireannach an fhoghair, 'n dàrna latha 's math mo chuimhne
 Ghluais na Breatannaich air n-aghaidh a thoirt *advance* air na naimhdean
 Thug Abercrombie taobh na mara dhiu le'n canain 's àird a chluinnte
 'S bha 'm *brigade* air gairm gu daingeann cumail aingil ris na Frangaich.

5 Sung by Donald Joseph Mackinnon, Barra. Duncan Ban Macintyre made two songs on this subject, in the same metre, and they are often confused. Mackinnon's text is entirely from *Another Song on the Battle of Falkirk*. For both texts see *Orain Dhonnchaidh Bhàin, (Songs of Duncan Ban Macintyre)*, ed. Angus MacLeod, Edinburgh 1978. See also SA 1956.072 and other examples in *Tobar an Dualchais*. Translation based on MacLeod.

Bha na Frangaich math ri teine gus an teannar goirid bhuapa
Gur ann mar sin a sgrìos iad sinne an-dèis mionaidean na h-uarach;
Bha iad san uair laoiach gun tioma dhol an àite buille bhualadh,
'S bha roinn nan stàilinne biorach sàthadh guineideach mu'n tuairmse.

Mar thionndadh boise shàtht' an loibhne leis na saighdearan nach tillte
Eòin ghuinich air bheag coibhneis, cuileinean nach loinn le mìmhodh
Thàinig iad mar dhearsadh boillsgeil, mar dhealanach air an tig an dìleann
'S thug iad iomain air na naimhdean neul na fala bhrìgh nam pìcean.

The last month of Autumn, the second day, I remember well,
the British moved forward to make an advance on the enemy.
Abercrombie took the seaward side of them with loud cannons, and
the brigade was encouraged to keep close fire on the French.

The French were good marksmen until we were close to them. That
was how they destroyed us after a few minutes. But in time, dauntless
warriors got close enough to strike, and the points of sharp steel
pierced woundingly in their direction.

In a twinkling the line was pierced by the soldiers who could not be
repelled – fierce birds with little mercy, mischievous pups which were
not disciplined. They came like a bright shining, like lightning with a
deluge, and they attacked the enemy, a cloud of blood brought out by
the pikes.⁶

Other types of syllabic verse are still to be found in oral tradition, in
examples of ballads variously referred to as Fenian, Ossianic, or, as a more
general term, Heroic.

I had difficulty in distinguishing a song in '8-line syllabic metre' from
one like the next three examples. Syllabic verse is sung in speech rhythm,

6 Sung by Mrs Archie MacDonald, South Uist, on SA1956.27. Full text in John MacKenzie (ed.) *Sàr Obair nam Bàrd Gaelach (The Beauties of Gaelic Poetry)*, Edinburgh, 1882, p. 344. It is included in Ronald Black (ed.) *An Lasair, Anthology of 18th Century Scottish Gaelic Verse*, Birlinn, Edinburgh, 2001, pp. 354–361. My translation is based on his Notes, pp.521–525.

and many other categories of song sound as if they are in the rhythm of speech as well, but in the following examples the overall rhythm is quite regular, and rhyme is much more important.

Airigh luachrach Uige

'S fhir a shiùibhleas gu mo dhùthaich, 's ann à Uige dh'fhalbh mi
Thoir beannachd dùbailt' null gan ionnsaigh chosgas crùn de dh'airgead
A dh'ionnsaigh Sheoc a tha 's an Uige, ceann-cunntaidh mo sheanchais,
Is tha mi 'n dùil gu faic mi thu man tig an ùir air Armchal

Bu mhath an uairsin a bhith shuas aig àirigh luachrach Uige
Far 'm biodh na h-uain 's na caoraich bhuaidheach ruith mun cuairt gu
siùbhlach
Mi fhìn 's mo chruinneag air mo ghualainn, deamhais chruadhach dùint' aic
Gach fear is tè dhiu ruith man cuairt – bidh Dòmhnall Ruadh le a chù ann.

B'e siud an gleann bu bhòidhche sealladh anns a' mhadainn cheòthach
Le caoraich gheala dhubha 's ghlasa, cuid dhiu tarraing brògach
Bhiodh làir an t-searraich 'n cois gach bealaich, muir ri srannadh
bhogh'nnan
'S a dh'aindeoin gaillinn na fuachd Earraich chan iarr mart ann cròdhadh.

Nuair thig an Geamhradh 's àm nam bainnsean gheibh sinn dràm den
Tòiseachd
Bidh Nollaig chridheil aig clann-nighean 's aig na gillean òga
Bidh mnathan fhèin a' ruith 's a' leum dhiu, 's cuid dhiu 'g eubhach òran,
Srann aig bodaich ann am fodar 's sogan orr' a' stòiridh.

You who visits my homeland, I came from Uig. Carry a double blessing across to them which may cost a silver crown, to Jock, who is in the Uig, the reason for my story – and I expect to see you before the earth covers Armchal.

It would be good then to be up on the reedy shieling of Uig, where lambs and beautiful sheep run around with speed, me with my sweetheart holding closed steel shears, at my shoulder; all the men and women running around; red-haired Donald will be there with his dog.

That glen had a most beautiful view on a misty morning with white, black and grey sheep, some of them leading young ones; there would be a mare's foal in every pass, the sea roaring against rocks; and in spite of storm or the cold of Spring, cattle did not need a fold there.

When Winter comes and weddings, we'll get a dram of whisky (from Ferintosh); girls and young lads will have a merry Christmas; even women will be cavorting, some of them bellowing songs, a murmur coming from the old men as they enjoy telling stories.⁷

The only song I had ever heard before working in the School in what is often called strophic metre was a love song from the 19th century. Each verse has three lines, each with two stresses in the first two lines, and three in the third. There is assonance at the ends of the first two lines with a word in the middle of the third, and assonance between the end syllables of each verse. *Gu bheil mulad air m'inntinn / on là thàinig mi 'n tìr seo / far nach fhaic mo nìghneag dhonn òg.* (My mind is sad since coming to this place where I don't see my dear young girl). Each verse ends with an ò syllable. Two great poets of the 17th century, Mary MacLeod and John MacDonald, developed this metre to its highest point. The type is at the opposite end of the spectrum from syllabic verse, as the rhythm dictates the choice of words and is entirely regular. A distinguishing feature of Mary MacLeod's poetry is that she sometimes used different lengths of verse. The late Rev William Matheson made a special study of such songs and he maintained that the metre should be called **Iorram**, and here is an example sung by him of one of the more complicated sets of verses in a song by Mary MacLeod⁸.

7 Sung by Murdo Campbell, Greep, Skye, on SA1984.001 Text with melody in Martin, Christine (ed.) *Orain an Eilein (Gaelic Songs of Skye)*, Taigh na Teud, Skye, 2001, p. 53.

8 Mary MacLeod (her dates are uncertain, but usually placed at 1615 to 1707) was unofficially the poet of the MacLeods of Harris and Dunvegan. Texts of her songs may be found in Watson J.C. (ed.) *Gaelic Songs of Mary MacLeod*, 1934. Some also appear in anthologies such as MacKenzie, *Sàr Obair nam Bàrd* and Watson, W. J. *Bàrdachd Ghàidhlig*. This recording is from *Gaelic Bards and Minstrels*, a double CD by William Matheson from the School of Scottish Studies Scottish Tradition series produced by Greentrax Recordings, Cockenzie. CTRAX 9016D.

An naidheachd seo 'n dè

An naidheachd seo 'n dè;
 aighearach e;
 moladh dhan lèigh
 thug malairt dam chèill
 nis teannaidh mi fhèin ri crònan.

Beannachd dhan bheul
 a dh'aithris an sgeul
 dh'fhàg fallain mo chrè;
 cha ghearain mi fhèin
 na chailleadh 's na dh'eug
 's mo leanabh nan dèidh còmhshlan.

Nam biodh agamsa fion
 gum b'ait leam a dhìol
 air slàinte do thighinn
 gu d'chàirdean 's gu d'thìr;
 mhic àrmainn mo ghaoil,
 b'e m'àrdan 's mo phrìs
 àlach mo rìgh thògbhail.

Tha mo dhùil-s' ann an Dia
 gur mùirneach do thriall
 gu dùn ud nan clìar
 far 'm bu dùthchas do m'thriath
 bhith gu fiùghantach fial foirmeil.

(5 lines) This message of yesterday, it is joyous; praised be the healer who has turned my spirit towards health. Now I will begin a croon.

(6 lines) Blessed be the mouth that told the tale that has made my body sound; those that are lost, those that are dead I will not lament, for my child is left alive and well.

(7 lines) Had I wine, I would deem it a joy to drink it to the toast of your return to your friends and your own land, son of the warrior of my love; my pride and prize it would be to celebrate my king's brood.

(5 lines) My hope is in God for a happy journey for you to yonder fortress of the poet bands, where my lord's custom was to be generous, free-handed and stately.

Iorram has gone out of fashion, although the Uist poet, Donald John MacDonald (1919–1986) has produced a few examples, to be found in the book of his poems edited by Bill Innes.⁹

When it comes to Minstrels, we should change tack and consider poetic themes rather than metres or verse forms. There were three categories of poet within the households of the Gaelic aristocracy, the very highly trained *fili*, the *bard* and the *minstrel*. The songs we listened to in syllabic verse were by poets who imitated the style of the *fili* without following the strict rules that their predecessors had to learn. Strophic verse or *Iorram* was the prerogative of the *bard*. Minstrels were the harper class, and they did not confine themselves to the chief's house. They learned musical skills from teachers throughout the British Isles and Europe, exchanging melodies, especially with their Irish counterparts. The harper poets who still enjoyed the patronage of their chiefs were obliged to compose eulogies and elegies, but the melodies they used became the vehicle for almost all categories of poetry. Typical of this genre of international melody are stanzas of four long phrases with, often, at least one of those repeated. The Reedy Shieling of Uig, above, is a good example.

Here are two more examples, both with the same tune, a song of unrequited love, from the island of Tiree, and a song of regret for leaving his native place by Donald MacDonald from Bornish in South Uist.

9 Innes, Bill (ed.) *Chì mi. The Gaelic Poetry of Donald John MacDonald*, Birlinn, Edinburgh 1998.

Air moch Diluain

O, moch Diluain gura trom mo smuaintean 's mi fagail Chluaidh 's ri cur suas nan seòl,
 'S ann man a' ghruagaich a rinn mo bhuaireadh dh'fhàg m'inntinn luaineach le cainnt a beòil
 Do ghaol a shàraich 's a rinn mo chràdhlot mar shaighdean cràidhteach an-sàs am fheòil
 Gach là is oidhche gur tu mo chuibhreann, mo reul-iùil thu, mo chliù 's mo cheòl.

Dimàirt a fhuair sinn gu brollach cuain i an t-eithear uallaich bu chruaidhe bòrd,
 Bu trom an iarmailt le frasan fiadhaich 's bha colas ciarganach air na neòil
 Bha thusa nuairsin nad chadal suaimhneach gun ghuth, a luaidh, gu robh mi gun dòigh
 'S fear eil' air uairibh a' deanamh suas riut air son an tuaileis a thog iad oirnn.
 'S a' mheadhan oidhche ga b'ann gha stiùireadh gur tric mi cumhneachadh cainnt do bheòil
 Mo shùil sa chombaist gha cumail dìreach 's an fhairrge mhillteach a' mir ri stròin;
 A sgiathan sgaoilte ri cruas na gaoithe is feadan caoin aice air na ròip
 A gillean aotrom cur rithe h-aodaich 's an sneachd na chaoran air caol nan dòrn.

Oh, my thoughts are sad, early on a Monday morning, setting sail to leave the Clyde. It is about the girl who allured me with her words. Your love has exhausted me, and wounded me sorely, as if sharp arrows were embedded in my flesh; days and nights you are my portion, my guiding star, my good name and my music.

On a Tuesday we got her to sea, the proud ship of hard boards. The sky was heavy, with wild showers, and the clouds looked threatening. You were then sleeping peacefully, with no inkling that I was unhappy, with another man courting you because of the slander they brought against us.

At midnight at the helm, I often think of your conversation, my eye on the compass, keeping her steady, with the destructive sea playing at her bows; her wings spread against the strength of the wind, with a playful whistling in the ropes, her lightsome lads adding sail with the snow in lumps on their wrists.¹⁰

Fàgail Bhòrnais

Gur mi bha gòrrach a' fàgail Bhòrnais, an t-àite 's bòidhche tha 'n-diugh fon ghrèin,
 Gun gheug a fhraoch ann no clach ri fhaotainn, ach talamh maol 's e gu leathan rèidh,
 A' chruit as brèagh' air 'n do dhealraich grian, agus Loch an Iasgair 's e shìos fo ceann
 Am breac cho lionmhor a' dol san lion agam 's na h-eòin ag iathadh mun chladach thall.

Gur ann DiDòmhnach a dh'fhàg mi Bòrnais, bha m'inntinn brònach 's mi sileadh dheur,
 Mì fhìn 's mo phàistean cur cùl ri m'fhàrdraich far'm faighinn blàths agus cadal rèidh,
 Ach tha mi 'n dràst' ann am meadhan fasaich, tha m'inntinn cràidhteach 's cha dèan e feum
 Nach bochd an saoghal mar nì e caochladh; tha mis' am aonar an-seo leam fhèin.

Gur tric mi smaoineachadh air na caoraich a th'air na munaidhean a dh'fhàg mi thall,
 Air Cnoc na Fèille bidh iad nan treudan 's an ciobair gleusta gan cumail thall, Iad fhèin 's na h-ògain dol suas gu Bòrnais, b'e 'n sealladh bòidheach e anns an àm;
 An àm an rùsgaidh bidh 'n airm ga tionndadh, 's bidh chlàimh na dùin air gach taobh dan fhang.

10 Sung by Angus Campbell, Ness, Lewis, SA1967.086. By John Maclean, Tìree, text to be found in Cameron, Hector (ed.) *Na Bàird Thirisdeach, (Tìree bards)* pp. 278–281, Tìree, 1932. My translation.

How foolish I was leaving Bornish, today the most beautiful place in the whole world. It has no heather or stones, just bare earth, broad and smooth. The loveliest croft on which sun ever shone, with the Fisherman's Loch down at its edge; salmon goes into my net, and birds fly along at the shore.

It was on a Sunday that I left Bornish, my mind was low as I shed tears; my children and I turning our backs on our homes where I could get warmth and restful sleep. But I am now in the middle of a desert, my mind is sore, but it is no use. What an awful world, how it changes. I am here all alone.

I often think of the sheep on the hills I left over there. They'll be in flocks on the Hill of the Fair, the skilled shepherd keeping them there, they and the young ones going up to Bornish, what a bonny sight it was at the time; at shearing time there'll be armies of them turning it, and the wool in mounds on either side of the fank.¹¹

Some tunes, known to Scots and English texts, are used again and again for Gaelic songs, for example, *Woo'd an Married an A'*, *The Flowers of Edinburgh*, *Loch Lomond*, *A Man's a Man For A' That*, and so on.

The themes of songs in Gaelic are no different from any other cultural area – love, lament, praise, satires against toothache, rats, noisy cockerels, witty recitals of unusual happenings, such as when electricity and public water supplies were introduced. *Highland Songs of the Forty-five* contains 32 songs about that uprising in the 18th century, and I believe the number of songs in Gaelic about different wars is noteworthy. There is an abundance of songs of homesickness, probably more than in any other culture due, of course, to the number of incidences of having to leave home, to live elsewhere, to take on work as a sailor, or in the shipyards in Glasgow, or even at the fishing in Shetland.

11 Sung by Peggy MacDonald, South Uist. (Private recording by Isabel T. Macdonald). Auth. Donald MacDonald (Dòmhnall Ruadh), Bornish. Listen also to Mary MacDonald SA1951.04, recorded by Dr John Lorne Campbell.

The performers on a commercial CD called ‘In the footsteps of the Bards’ are a group of young singers from South Uist. They sing a song by Marion Maclellan about going to the fishing in Shetland, telling of the hiring of the boat in Loch Carnan in Uist, the man who helped them and the curer who was good to them. But now she would like to go back to Oban. In the last verse she says, ‘I’ll never again go fishing in Shetland. This year will be enough for me. There are so many Irish folk, and the girls are so pretty, just ready for proposals of marriage.’ Is she saying, ‘there’s too much competition here for me?’

Horò tha mi smaointinn

Sèist:

Ho ró tha mi smaointinn air tarraing dhachaigh daonnan
 Gu dùthaich mo ghaoil agus m’èlaid
 Gu monadh nan caoiltean far a bheil mo dhaoine
 Far a robh mi aotrom is gòrrach.

’S ann an Loch a’ Chàrnain a dh’fharadh dhuinn am bàta
 ’S bha feum gu robh Adam nar còmhdhail,
 Am fear ann bha cho finealt ’s e math dha a chuid nìghneag,
 ’S thug e dhuinn ar òinneir ’s an òst-thaigh.

’S ann againn a bha ’n ciùrrair a thàinig gar dùthaich
 Thug e meas is cliù anns gach dòigh dhuinn
 Thug e sinn thar chuantan, air bhàrr nan tonnan uaine;
 Cha d’chuir e sgilinn ruadh as ar pòcaid.

’S mise tha gu cianail ’s an rubha seo am bliadhna,
 Far nach eil an t-iasgach gam chòrdadh;
 Nam faighinn mar bu mhiann leam dheanainn falbh Diciadaoin
 Air stiomair a’ Chrìanain dhan Òban.

’S cha teid mi gu sìorraidh a Shealtainn a dh’iasgach
 Ach foghnaidh a’ bhliadhna seo dhòmhsa,
 Na h-Eireannaich cho lionmhor ’s na caileagan cho brèagha,
 ’S gun dad ann ach gan iarraidh gu pòsadh.¹²

12 Sung by Mary MacMillan, South Uist, on CD, *An Lorg nam Bàrd (In the Footsteps of the Bards)*, a collection of songs from Uist. Translation based on that in the CD booklet.

Horo, I am always thinking of making for home, to the land I loved and knew, to the wooded moorland where my people are, where I was light-hearted and carefree.

It was in Loch Carnan that the boat was hired for us, and it was as well that Adam was with us, he who was so genteel and kind to his girls, and he gave us our dinner in the inn.

We had a curer who came to our land; he gave us esteem and good repute in every way. He took us over oceans on the crest of the green billows, and it didn't cost us a penny.

I am so desolate in this headland this year, where I am not enjoying the fishing, and if I had my wish I'd set off on Wednesday on the steamer from Crinan to Oban.

I'll never again go fishing in Shetland. This year will be enough for me. The Irish are so numerous and the girls so beautiful, and all that is needed is to propose to them.

Waulking songs are unique to Gaelic, and there are hundreds of them. I have heard it said that they were composed prior to the 17th century, but words have been added while the work was going on. Songs with – I think – an instrumental origin were also composed spontaneously. We call them *puirt à beul*, literally tunes out of the mouth, and I would venture to say that this is certainly a genre that is at least at its best in Gaelic, if not quite unique. Some are obviously intended for dandling children, while others have really intriguing texts, and it would be good to know the story behind them. This one is just a song praising a young girl.

Hó ró m'ulaidh thu

Sèist:

Hó ró m'ulaidh thu, m'ulaidh m'aighear air an nighinn

Hó ró m'ulaidh thu 's tu nighean lurach bhòidhich

Dheannainn fhìn gurraban gun aon duine cuide rium,

Chan iarrainn a chuideachd ach an nighean lurach còmhla rium.

M'ulaidh thu, m'aighear thu, nighean an droch athar thu,
'S ged tha e na fhear-taighe dhomh, cha dèan e mathas dhòmh-sa.

Refrain:

Horo my darling, my darling, my joy the girl; horo my darling, you
are a lovable, beautiful girl.

I would crouch, with no partner, I'd wish for no company but the
lovable girl along with me.

My darling, my joy, daughter of the bad father, and although he is the
head of my house, little good is he to me.¹³

A dheó aili aili idil

'S a dheó aili aili idil, chaidh an dileag ud am cheann
O aili é aili ó aili chaidh i ann (2)

Tacan beag air feadh nan nighean 's air a' mhionaid bidh mi falbh'
O aili é aili ó aili bidh mi falbh (2)

'S a dheó aili aili idil, chaidh an dileag ud am cheann
O aili é aili ó aili chaidh i ann

Gheibh sibh mise na mo chadal, gheibh sibh mise na mo shuain
O aili é aili ó aili na mo shuain (2)

'S a dheó aili aili idil, chaidh an dileag ud am cheann
O aili é aili ó aili chaidh i ann.

And oh alli alli idil, that droppie went to my head, Oh alli, ae alli, it
went there indeed. (2)

A short trip amongst the girls, and I'll be going in a minute, oh alli,
ae alli oh alli I'll be going. (2)

And oh alli alli idil, that droppie went to my head, Oh alli, ae alli, it
went there indeed. You'll find me asleep, you'll find me fast asleep, oh
allie ae allie oh allie, fast asleep (2)

13 Sung by Mrs Kate MacDonald, South Uist. See *Tobar an Dualchais*: SA1956.024.

And oh allì allì idil, that droppie went to my head, Oh allì, ae allì, it
went there indeed.¹⁴

As I mentioned at the beginning, when I got my job at the School of Scottish Studies in the early 60s, there were no Gaelic speakers with qualifications in music who might be interested in Gaelic songs. That has certainly changed. Singers can get tuition at the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama in Glasgow, now the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, in the National Centre for Excellence in Music in Plockton in Rossshire, at Sabhal Mor Ostaig in Skye and in Benbecula. Gaelic speakers can specialise in their own music in such places as St Mary's School in Edinburgh and in the Royal Northern College of Music in Manchester. There is a lot of exchange happening between Ireland and Scotland. Gaelic singers travel all over the world and are appreciated by natives of many countries. The material in the School of Scottish Studies is readily available to anyone who asks for it. Tutors who may have no formal qualifications are doing excellent work in schools in the Hebrides. Singers do seem to depend rather a lot on instrumental accompaniment, and sometimes, for me, that accompaniment is obtrusive. Sometimes a song which I know has been learned first from the School of Scottish Studies Archives appears again on a CD, copied from the secondary source, and mistakes are thus perpetuated. But it is lovely to hear younger people showing an interest in traditional versions of songs and singing them with respect. I'm saying nothing of the new raucous music where you cannot hear the words, because I don't claim to understand it. This is an example of what is good enough for me, a song by Alexander MacDonald in praise of Prince Charlie, to the tune Black Jock. It can be heard on the latest CD by Gillebrìde MacMillan, *Air Fòrladh*.¹⁵

14 Sung by Annie Johnston, Barra. See *Tobar an Dualchais*: SA1954.31 or SA1957.07.
15 Gillebrìde MacMillan, *Air Forladh*. Dealas Limited, 2011.

A Theàrlaich mhic Sheumais

A Theàrlaich mhic Sheumais, mhic Sheumais mhic Theàrlaich,
 Leat shiùibhlinn gu h-eutrom 'n àm èighich bhith màrsail,
 'S cha b'ann leis a' phlàigh ud a thàrmaich on mhuic.
 Bheireadh creideamh is reusan oirnn èirigh mar b' àbhaist,
 Leis an àilleagan cheutach 'shliochd èifeachdach Bhàncho,
 Mo ghaol a' ghruaidh àlainn a dheàrsadh orm stuir!
 Thu 'g imeachd gu sùrtail air tùs a' bhataìli
 Cha fhroisinn aon driùchda, 's mi dlùth air do shàilibh,
 Mi eadar an t-adhar 's an talamh a' seòladh,
 Air iteig le aighear, misg-chath agus shòlais,
 Is caismeachd phìob-mòra bras-shròiceadh am puirt.

On èibhinneachd ghlòrmhor an t-sòlais a b' àirde
 Gar lìonadh le spionnadh air slinneinibh Theàrlaich,
 Gun calcadh tu àrdan an càileachd ar cuirp!
 Do làthaireachd mhòrchuiseach dh'fhògradh gach fàillinn
 Gun tionndadh tu feòdar gach feòla gu stàilinn
 Nuair sheallamaid gu sanntach air fabhra do ruisg!
 Do ghnùis torach de chruadal de dh'uaisle 's de nàire,
 Nach taisicheadh fuathas ro luaidhe do nàmhaid!
 'S mur dèanadh fir Shagsainn do mhealladh 's do thrèigsinn
 Bhiodh an crùn air a spalpadh, le d'thapadh, air Seumas,
 A dh'aindeoin na bèiste leis an d'èirich na h-uilc.¹⁶

Charles, son of James, son of James, son of Charles, I'd gladly go with you when the call comes for marching, and not with that horror, the offspring of pigs! Faith and reason would make us rise for him, for the beautiful jewel of the race of Banquo. How I love his fine features that fill me with pride! When you lead with spirit in the forefront of battle, following closely at your heels, I'd not shake a dewdrop.

16 By Alexander MacDonald. Text and translation from Campbell, J. L. (ed.) *Highland Songs of the Forty-five* (Edinburgh, 1984), pp. 52–61. The tune is Black Jock. Learned from singing of the Rev. William Matheson.

Between earth and heaven, I am sailing in the air, on the wings of exultance, battle-drunken, enraptured, while the notes of the great pipes shrilly sound out their tunes.

Oh glorious, joyful, the highest of rapture that fills us with vigour by the shoulders of Charlie, our natural being who fills us with pride! Your magnanimous presence would banish weaknesses. Into steel would convert our flesh's base metal, when we eagerly gaze on your uncovered face! Your face that shows modesty, good birth and valour, undaunted by fear beneath the lead of your enemies, and had not the English betrayed and forsaken you, the crown had been gained for King James with your courage, in spite of the beasts and his vile followers.