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*William Gillies*

## “No bonnier life than the sailor’s”: A Gaelic Poet Comments on the Fishing Industry in Wester Ross

The Revd Dr. George Calder’s presentation of the poetry of the Gairloch bard, William Ross (1762-90), omits three poems of those made available in the nineteenth-century editions of the poet’s works by John Mackenzie.<sup>1</sup> Calder saw his mission as Ross’s editor as being “to set the poet’s history and character in the light of truth and in a form worthy of his genius” (*Gaelic Songs*, p. xviii). In his view

Ross’s supersensitiveness was vulnerable and became a broad mark for satire and lampoon. The temptation to exploit him and his unhappy love affair was too strong to be resisted by the frivolous and the envious. Some gay jester with a native turn for satire has sharpened his pen to such purpose that parodies on Ross’s songs...have been mistaken for Ross’s own. Even John Mackenzie was so influenced by tradition and general opinion that the first two editions [of Ross’s poems] contain three of these parodies (*Gaelic Songs*, pp. xvii-xviii).

In fact, to exclude them is rather like excluding the *Merry Muses* from the canon of Burns’s work. They are unlike Ross’s love-songs, for sure; but much

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<sup>1</sup>*Gaelic Songs by William Ross*, ed. George Calder (Edinburgh, 1937). Henceforth *Gaelic Songs*. Mackenzie’s *Orain Ghaèlach le Uilleam Ros* was first published in Inverness in 1830 or 1833; the second (corrected and slightly enlarged) edition was published in Glasgow in 1834. *Gaelic Songs* was based mainly on the 1834 edition (see p. x).

less unlike some of his satirical and humorous pieces. There is no objective reason to exclude them.<sup>2</sup>

In two cases the grounds for omission appear to be sexual subject-matter: one of them is addressed to a girl who (he alleges) rejected his advances, and the other to a randy traveling companion.<sup>3</sup> The third, the poem which concerns us, has what I would call an erotic context, but does not contain explicit references to sexual (as opposed to amorous) goings on. It does, however, draw attention to a slightly risqué side of late-eighteenth-century Highland life; as such, it may have been deemed by Calder to be derogatory to the Highland character, and hence deserving to be suppressed. There is also a smattering of sexual *double entendre* present in the poem. This, if Calder had deemed it intrusive enough, could have resulted in our poem being placed in the same quarantine as the other two. The reader should be the judge of the extent and tenor of this element.

To the present-day literary scholar with an open-minded curiosity about the social background of Gaelic literature, glimpses of the impact of new forces like mining or iron-working or, as here, the fishing industry are at a premium, precisely because most poetic comment on these phenomena perished with the traditional way of life whose break-up they precipitated. That is why Ailean Dall's *Óran do na Ciobairean Gallda* ("Song to the Lowland Shepherds") is so important; it outweighs a score of conventional, contextually inscrutable poems about "the glen where I was young," both for the social historian and for the scholar of Gaelic literature.<sup>4</sup>

Our poem has an additional claim to scholarly interest. It is composed as though it were articulated by a southern sailor, and is said to mimic his dialect as well as his sentiments. There is therefore a linguistic as well as a social "edge" to the poem, which adds to the case for rescuing the poem from obscurity and presenting it in edited form with translation and annotation.<sup>5</sup>

The context of the poem may be gathered, or so I assume, from the following statement by Thomas Pennant, who visited Wester Ross during his Highland tour in 1772:

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<sup>2</sup>I deal with the textual basis for William Ross's poetry in an essay entitled "'Merely a bard'? William Ross and Gaelic Poetry," to appear in *Aiste*, 1 (2007).

<sup>3</sup>These poems are to be found at pp. 78 and 92 in the 1830 edition and pp. 126 and 147 in the 1834 edition.

<sup>4</sup>See the edition and commentary in Hugh Cheape, "A Song on the Lowland Shepherds: Popular Reaction to the Highland Clearances," *Scottish Economic and Social History*, 15 (1995), 85-100.

<sup>5</sup>It is to be found at p. 95 in the 1830 edition and at p. 151 in the 1834 edition.

The parish of *Gair-loch* is very extensive, and the number of inhabitants evidently encrease, owing to the simple method of life, and the conveniency they have of drawing a support from the fishery... At present the fish are sold to some merchants from *Campbeltown*, who contract for them at two-pence farthing a-piece, after being cured and dried in the sun... This trade is far from being pushed to its full extent; is monopolized, and the poor fishers obliged to sell their fish at half the price to those who sell it to the merchants.<sup>6</sup>

I suggest that the southern mariner is in the employ of a shipmaster who transports fish for these Campbeltown merchants or men like them.

A further perspective is provided in James Anderson's *Account of the Present State of the Hebrides and Western Coasts of Scotland* (Dublin, 1786), based on his report to the Treasury Commissioners on the subject of the Fisheries in the Highlands and Islands. He refers to inefficient practices in regard to types of fishing permitted, stating (pp. 184-5) that "it often happens that these busses lie for many weeks without falling in with the herrings; during all which time, the men are entirely idle, and only keeping up expences on the undertaker's head." Again, with reference to restrictive employment patterns, he states (p. 186) that "these hands are thus cooped up idle, for no purpose; and during a throng fishery, as soon as the vessel has completed her cargo, they must leave it to loiter in idleness." The fit between these statements and Ross's analysis in the poem is striking.

The poem's overt message may be summed up as "There's no bonnier life than the sailor's" (stanza 3); for the speaker boasts that men like him suffer no shortage of girls, alcohol or dancing. The poet is not openly judgmental about this state of affairs, though we know that he himself suffered when the girl he loved was swept off her feet by an English sea-captain. In fact, we may suggest that Ross has introduced the element of linguistic mimicry to give him the excuse and vehicle for making a discreet social comment without being forced to choose between, on the one hand, condemnation or, on the other hand, celebration of a facet of contemporary life that must have been as disturbing to many older generation people in Gairloch as it was exciting to the young.

The linguistic form of the poem has determined the nature of the present edition. Mackenzie's editions italicize the anglicisms (or most of them). But the anglicisms are only part of the story. For the poet is really working on two aspects of the Gaelic of his speaker: (1) the relatively high incidence of loan-words from English or Scots, and (2) simplifications and modifications of the phonology and grammar of the Gaelic language itself, as viewed from a north-westerly perspective. Both are part of what makes this brand of Gaelic distinctive, not to say alien. I therefore italicize both the anglicisms and the stigmatized dialectalisms where I have detected them. I print them in general as

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<sup>6</sup>See *A Tour in Scotland and Voyage to the Hebrides 1772*, 3 vols. (Vol. I, Warrington; Vol. II, Chester; Vol. III, London, all 1774), II, 332-3.

they occur in the 1830 edition, with occasional modifications designed to highlight the linguistic point the poet is trying to make. For the rest, I use standard modern Gaelic spellings.<sup>7</sup> The business of editing this poem is not entirely straightforward, because Ross was not a scientific dialectologist describing a specific dialect whose details are fully known to us. Moreover, there appear to be a small number of Wester Ross features in John Mackenzie's editions which could (at least in the present state of knowledge) be attributed to poet, transmission or editor. And in a couple of instances, where 1834 differs from 1830, we can convict Mackenzie of having involved himself in the process of dialectal parody, which warns us that 1830 itself could contain forms inserted by him editorially. However, despite the cumulative effect of these factors, and the degree of general orthographic imprecision that is inherent in any early nineteenth-century Gaelic text, the overall intention and effect are unmistakable.

The English translation does not seek to repackage the linguistic contrasts of the Gaelic in a systematic, "thick" way. That would be challenging, though clearly not impossible if one could hit on a suitable linguistic key into which to transpose the material. However, I have supplied some linguistic notes which aim to elucidate the main inter-dialectal and inter-lingual issues. Fuller exploration, e.g. in an attempt to define more precisely the dialect parodied, the accuracy of the parody, or the degree of editorial interference involved, would require more fine-grained linguistic sifting than can be attempted here, and must be left for another day.<sup>8</sup>

The poem's superscription in the 1830 edition is given, followed by the Gaelic original, with the "southron" words and phrases italicized. I explain the relevant forms in the notes that follow.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>In a small number of cases I have emended the text in the course of editing. These editorial additions are enclosed in square brackets.

<sup>8</sup>I am grateful to Dr. John MacInnes and Professor Roibeard Ó Maolalaigh for commenting on a draft of my edition. Since completing it I have been reminded that Ronald Black has printed and translated the poem as an Appendix to his study "An Emigrant's Letter in Arran Gaelic," *Scottish Studies*, 31 (1993), 63-87 (pp. 76-80). Black presents the poem as "A Lam-poon on Arran Gaelic" and sees it as "one of a series of cathartic songs" inspired by the poet's unrequited love for Marion Ross.

<sup>9</sup>The identifying first line of the tune given is that of Ross's own "Song Between the Bard and the Hag-who-Spoils-Poems" (*Gaelic Songs*, no. 21, p. 126). See Derick S. Thomson, *Gaelic Poetry in the Eighteenth Century* (Aberdeen, 1993), pp. 161-7. The meter (and hence, perhaps, the tune) is identical to that of Ross's "The Maiden's Love for Colin" (*Gaelic Songs*, no. 5, p. 28), whose tune is known.

## ORAN

A rinn am Bard, mar gun deanadh Seoladair  
Deasach è, air dha bhi ann an tigh-dannsaidh,  
anns ann Taobh-Tuath.—Tha'm Bard air dean-  
amh an Oran do rèir Gaelig an t-sheoladair fein.

Air FONN, "Ach gur mis' tha gu duilich," &c.

- 1 Bha mi 'n raoir san taigh dhannsaidh,  
bha iad *tranga* gu leòr;  
bha na h-ionagan glan' ann,  
's iad cho cannach 's bu chòir.  
Cha robh srad air a' *ghealghan*  
o na d'fhalbh sinn o bhòrd  
ach *gràine* beag luaithe  
bha fo *sguadradh* nam bròg.
- 2 Bha na *Màireagan* uil' ann  
is iad air *tionnal* gach taobh;  
ged nach d'èirich a' ghealach  
cha robh maill' air a h-aon.  
B'fhearr sud na bhith 'm breislich  
'cuir a' *Chèti fa-sgaol*,  
no bhith *pump*-adh na *Deònaid*  
air a' mhòr-chuan ri gaoith.
- 3 Chan 'eil beath' ann as bòidhche  
na th'aig seòladair fèin—  
seach gum bi e 'na mharaich'  
bidh na *cailean* [n]a dhèidh; [cailin 1830; càlan 1834]  
bidh na h-ionagan cannach  
'ga leantainn gu lèir,  
'toirt a[m] mionnan gu *sure* iad  
nach bi *trusair* gun fheum.

SONG

A Song that the Bard made, as though a Sailor from the South had made it after being in a Dancing-house in the North. The bard has made the song in accord with the Sailor's own Gaelic.

To the tune of "But it's I who am sorry."

- 1            Last night I was in the dance-house,  
(and) they were busy enough.  
The bright lassies were there,  
as lovely as they ought.  
There wasn't a spark on the fire  
when we rose from the table                    [or disembarked (?)]  
just a little spot of ash  
under the shuffling of the shoes.
- 2            All the Màireags were there,  
having gathered on every side;  
although the moon hadn't risen  
none of them was late.  
That beat being in a lather  
letting the *Katy* go,  
or pumping the *Janet*  
on the ocean in a wind.
- 3            There's no bonnier life  
than the sailor enjoys;  
since he's a sea-farer  
the girls pursue him.  
The lovely lassies  
all follow him together,  
swearing they'll ensure  
a pair of trousers won't be idle.

- 4           An tug thu 'n air' a Rob Tàileir  
               's a chuid *M[h]àireagan* fèin,  
 agus dèidh aig na h-òighean  
               air a phògadh gu lèir?  
 Bidh esan da[n] ruagadh  
               is dam buaireadh le 'bheul—  
 tha e soireanta sòghra'icht',  
               mar gum pòsadh e ceud.
- 5           A[m] fac' thu'n sgiobair bha làimh ris,  
               's a *Mhàireag* r'a thaobh,           [Mharag 1830]  
 a lamh thar a *muineal*  
               's i *bulach* 'na ghaol?  
*Reag* i leis thar Caol *Mhula*  
               agus *tiumal* a' Mhaol,  
 gu bhith *low* 'r-adh a *pheak*-a           [loradh a Phica 1830]  
               'n uair as *dripeal* a' ghaoth.
- 6           “Chan'eil *doubt*,” arsa Màireag,  
               “nach *overhaul*-ig mi ball—  
 ach gille gramail bhith shìos orr',  
               nach toir fiaradh g'a ceann.”  
 Ged a thigeadh na *sgualaichean*  
               cruaidh on a' ghleann,  
 cha bhi 'n sgiobair fo mhi-ghèan  
               ach gun dìobair a chrann.           [gus an ('until') 1834]
- 7           Tha iasgach an sgadain  
               ro-bheag againn san am;  
 on se'n t-*owner* tha cosg oirn,  
               cha bhi'm *brot* oirn air chall.           [cost 1834]  
 Bithidh *grog* againn daonnan,  
               cha bhi aon fhear gun *dram*,  
 's gheibh sinn *nìonagan bòdhcha*  
 gu ar pògadh as taing.



- 4           Did you notice Rob Taylor  
              with his own Màireag group—  
              and the maidens all keen  
              to kiss him together.  
              He chases them round  
              and teases them with his talk;  
              he is affable, amiable—  
              as though he'd marry a hundred.
- 5           Did you see the skipper next to him,  
              with his Màireag by his side—  
              his hand over her neck,  
              she deeply in love with him?  
              She'd sail the Sound of Mull with him  
              and round the Mull of Kintyre,  
              ready to lower his peak  
              when the wind is bustling.
- 6           “There's no doubt,” says Màireag,  
              “I won't slacken a rope—  
              unless there's a sturdy lad on board below,  
              one who won't make her head veer.”  
              Although the squalls should come  
              hard from the glen,                                 [or from the Glen (?)]  
              the skipper won't be unhappy  
              unless his mast gives out.
- 7           The herring fishing is  
              very poor with us at present.  
              Since it's the Owner who pays for us,  
              we don't miss our broth.  
              We always have grog,  
              and nobody lacks a dram,  
              and we get bonny lassies  
              to kiss us into the bargain.

- 8           Gheibh sinn *nìonagan bòdhcha*  
               is mnathan òga gu rèidh—  
               se mo roghainn-s' an nìonag  
               on a bhìos mi ri beud.  
               Thàinig còmhlan dhiu *tharais*  
               air an chala so'n dè,  
               's bha sinn mar riu a' dannsadh  
               fad 's a shanntaich sinn fèin.
- 9           Chan 'eil *shig* 's na puirt Fhrangach  
               nach danns iad air uair,  
               no car an Dùn Èidin[n]  
               gun aig tè san Taobh Tuath.  
               Miann sùil bhith 'gam *fèachadh*           [lèirsinn 1834]  
               's iad a' leumnaich mun cuairt  
               mar ri balaich chinn-fhìdhleach       ['illeach 1830]  
               's sgal pìobain 'nan cluais.           [na pìoba 1834]

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### Notes<sup>10</sup>

#### Stanza 1

*tranga* ScG *trang* is a widely recurrent borrowing from Sc *thrang*. The final *-a* is puzzling, but cf. possibly *bhà na casogan dearga* (Rath 86) for an inflected plural adjective in predicative usage.

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<sup>10</sup>In this section I refer to certain works which elucidate the Gaelic spoken in the most south-westerly parts of the Highlands and the most north-easterly parts of Ireland. These are abbreviated as follows: Ant = Nils M. Holmer, *On Some Relics of the Irish Dialect Spoken in the Glens of Antrim* (Uppsala, 1940); Arg = Nils M. Holmer, *Studies on Argyllshire Gaelic* (Uppsala, 1938); Arr = Nils M. Holmer, *The Gaelic of Arran* (Dublin, 1957); DIL = *Dictionary of the Irish Language, Based Mainly on Old and Middle Irish Materials* (Dublin, 1913-76); Din = Rev. Patrick S. Dinneen, *Foclóir Gaedhilge agus Béarla. An Irish-English Dictionary* (revised edition, Dublin, 1934); Dw = Edward Dwelly, *The Illustrated Gaelic-English Dictionary* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Glasgow, 1920); Kint = Nils M. Holmer, *The Gaelic of Kintyre* (Dublin, 1962); Rath = Nils M. Holmer, *The Irish Language in Rathlin Island, Co. Antrim* (Dublin, 1942); SGDS = *Survey of the Gaelic Dialects of Scotland*, edited by Cathair Ó Dochartaigh, 5 vols. (Dublin, 1994-7).

- 8            We get bonny lassies  
              and young women without hassle;  
              my choice is the lassie,  
              when I get up to mischief.  
              A crowd of them came over  
              by this harbour yesterday,  
              and we were dancing with them  
              as long as we desired.
- 9            There's no jig amongst the French tunes  
              that they won't dance in turn,  
              or a (fancy) step in Edinburgh  
              a northern girl doesn't know.  
              A sight for sore eyes to behold them  
              cavorting about  
              with fiddle-headed boys  
              and the skirl of pipes in their ear.

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*na hìoghnagan* Cf Arg 196, s.vv. *nighean* and *nioghnag*, for comparable forms.

*gealbhan* is the characteristic southerly word for "fire (in the hearth)." See Arg 174, etc.

*d'fhalbh* The *-a-* is guaranteed by the rhyme with *gealbhan*, but the usual Argyll form of the verb is *folbh*. Has the parodist's guard slipped here?

*gràine* (better *gràinne*) is a characteristic southerly word for "a small quantity." See Dw 521, s.vv. *gràinne*, *gràinnean*; and cf. English "a grain of truth."

*sguadradh* is presumably borrowed from Sc *squatter* "to flop around." I have not met it elsewhere in Gaelic.

## Stanza 2

*Màireag(an)* This name-form may be a diminutive to *Màiri*, like *Mòrag* to *Mòr*. Alternatively, the Classical Gaelic form of the name "Margaret" was *Màirghréag*, with forms in *-éad* and simplification of the *-rghr-* sequence taking place in the post-Classical period, as in the usual Modlr *Maighréad* and ScG *Mairearad* and *Maighread*. The form *Màireag* could conceivably be an independent derivative of the Classical form. Whatever its origin, in its usage it appears to stand for "typical (Highland) lass"; cd. Sc "Jeanie" or Eng "Jill/jill," "Moll/moll," etc.

*tionnal* (usually *tional*) seems to carry the imputation that the speaker had lost the distinction between *n* and *nn*. This is a tendency in the “Irish Sea” dialects; see Arg 812, Rath 55, Ant 33.

**cuir** (verbal noun) is usually *cur* in Argyllshire, though *cuir* is found in some more northerly dialects. It is perhaps best taken as non-significant here.

*fa-sgaol* historically and standardly has *sgaoil*, so there is an imputation here that the speaker has lost the distinction between non-palatalized and palatalized final *l*. Arg 83f and Kint 29f support the imputation, while Arr 31 is at odds with it. See further on *muineal* (stanza 5).

**Deònaid** The usual ScG form of the name “Janet” is *Seònaid*. Cf. *Deòrsa* beside *Seòrsa* for “George.” Contrast *shig* for “jig” in stanza 9.

### Stanza 3

**cailean** See Arg 133 for *caile* as the usual South Argyll word for “girl, quean.” The forms in 1830 and 1834 need explanation. (1) Plurals in *-in* are not uncommon in the earliest texts of William Ross, i.e., the Stewarts’ Collection (1804) and Mackenzie’s first edition (i.e. 1830); they tend to be replaced by forms with *-(e)an* in Mackenzie’s second edition (i.e. 1834) and thereafter. (2) Mackenzie used various accents to indicate short vowels when preparing his editions. These were sometimes misread by his printer as grave accents, which actually indicate length. I suspect that this may be the explanation for the anomalous *-à-* of *càlan* (1834). (3) The change from expected \**cailean* to *calan* seems to show Mackenzie tampering with his author’s text to provide an additional example of the simplification of *l*-sounds discussed in stanza 5 (under *bulach*, *Mula*). Could he have been responsible for some other supposed dialectalisms?

**sure** Sc/Eng verbs prefixed with an unstressed preposition are sometimes borrowed into ScG with loss of the preposition: e.g. *accord(ing)* > (*a'*) *còrd(adh)*. Here the word borrowed must have been (*en*)*sure* or (*as*)*sure*.

**trusair** < Sc *trooser*. This word normally has short *u* in ModScG. Here the rhyme is with *sure*, but I am unable to say whether the vowel should be regarded as short or long here. (It has a long vowel in ModIr *siùráil*, *siùrála*, etc.)

### Stanza 4

**soireanta** See Dw *soineannta* (<*soineann* “good weather”); the form of *soireanta* may be influenced by *soirbh* “easy,” *soirbheas* “favorable breeze,” etc. *sòghra'icht* is for *so-ghràdhaichte*, literally “easily loved,” with the not unusual ScG shift of the word-stress from the second to the first syllable (cf. *coileanta* beside *coilionta* “perfect” from *co-lion* “fulfil”).

*bheul* and *ceud* rhyme with *fèin* and *lèir*, i.e. in [e:]. This will have had a “southerly” effect on Gairloch ears, since Wester Ross Gaelic diphthongized historical [e:] as [ia] in these words.

### Stanza 5

*muineal* This is the normal ScG nominative singular form. However, *thar* tended to be followed by the genitive (e.g. *thar na mara* “over the sea”), by analogy with *far* “off (of).” On that basis, Gairloch ears might have expected *-eil* here, so that *-eal* might either have seemed to lack flexion or to have collapsed the distinction between the two *l*-sounds.

*bulach* and *Mula* See on *fa-sgaol* (stanza 2) and *calan* (stanza 3) for this (possibly exaggerated) collapse of non-palatalized and palatalized *l*. Arg 132, Kint 21 and Arr 20 and 31 show that the similarly shaped word *muileann* “mill” had “slender” *l* or “not broad” *l*; while Antr 100 and Rath 161 show the same in *baile* “place, village.”

*reag* usually appears as *readh*, the de-stressed form of the 3<sup>rd</sup>-person singular conditional of the irregular verb *rach* “go.” (Meter and sense confirm that the fully stressed form *rachadh* would not be appropriate here, since the stress falls on *leis*.) See Arr 157 for the forms *raxæg* and *rahæg*, and Rath 119 for *rahæg* and *raæg*, dialectal forms showing the medial *x* becoming *h* or zero and the final *-y* becoming *-g*. On the other hand, it is to be remembered that the change of final *-(e)adh* from *øy* to *æg* is also found in Wester Ross: see SGDS 2.264-5.

*tiumal* Whereas Arg 225 reports the usual ScG form *timcheall* for Islay, see Arr 80 for *tiumal* (with loss of *h* and depalatalization of *m*). Cf. also Rath 241 *tiomall(ta)*, Antr 131 *tiom(ch)all(ta)*.

*maol* This form instead of the expected *Maoil*, parallels *muineal* above.

*pica* See OED *peak* sb.<sup>2</sup>, 4. Naut., b. “The upper outer corner of those sails which are extended by a gaff.” The *-a* should perhaps be associated with the following word, i.e. *an uair* in place of *'n uair*. It is only on the printed page laid out conventionally that l. 7 seems to need a disyllabic ending; the difficulty would disappear if the poem were printed in four long lines.

*dripeal* See on *muineal*, unless this is to be read as *dripeal'* (i.e. for superlative *dripeala* “most bustling”).

### Stanza 6

*overhaul-ig* See OED for the nautical primary meaning of “overhaul,” i.e. “to slacken off a taut rope.” The form is noteworthy. (1) The addition of *-ig* when forming new verbs on imported bases is more characteristic of the northern dialects than the southern ones. (2) The vowel rhyme (on the stressed syllable *-haul-*) is with the long *à* of *Màireag*. (3) The presence of *over-*

(rather than *ower-*) indicates that to our poet this is a loanword from English (as the language of the British Navy and of shipping trade?) rather than from Scots.

***sgualichean*** The assimilation of English or Scots *squa-* into Gaelic as *sgua-* (cf. *sguadradh* in stanza 1) is typical of earlier loanwords which become “naturalized” Gaelic words. Such words are commonly assigned plurals in *-(a)ichean* or *-(e)achan*; cf. *suaile* “swell,” plural *suailichean* “waves, rollers.”

***orr'*** In earlier Gaelic “on her” was *oirthe* or similar, which by normal phonological development gave *orra* (cf. *cairthe* > *carra*). This made “on her” identical with “on them” (*orra* < *ortha* or similar). Some ScG dialects, including the most southerly, tolerated this ambiguity; others, including Wester Ross dialects, maintained the palatalized sound in order to distinguish “on her” from “on them” (see SGDS 2.40-1). The present form could hence have sounded “southern” to Wester Ross ears.

***on a' ghleann*** This development of the preposition *o* into *on*, which is guaranteed by the meter, is a (presumably unnoticed) northerly feature.

### Stanza 7

***cosg*** I am uncertain why Mackenzie changed this form of the verb “to spend” to its alternative (usually spelled *cosd*) in the second edition.

***brot*** A dental stop was usual in loan-words which had a dental fricative in English or Scots.

***bòdhcha*** This form is puzzling. On the one hand, *bòidheach* is very much a ScG word; for Ireland, it is given as “Antrim” in Din, and I have only found it cited in Rath 165 amongst Irish dialect monographs. However, the ending *-a* in a plural adjective of more than one syllable is very much an Irish trait. Possibly this is an imagined form.

### Stanza 8

***tharais*** This spelling, for what is normally *thairis* in all dialects, is presumably meant to suggest the loss of the palatalized variety of *r*, which is indeed a feature of the more southerly ScG dialects. The meaning “by” (as opposed to the standard meaning “over”) may also be significant: see Arg 222-3.

***air an chala*** To write the definite article *an* in full in the dative singular before *ch-* would be standard orthographical practice in Ireland but not in Scotland. It could conceivably have been influenced by this Irish usage; but in Ireland, as in Scotland, the *n* was normally elided in speech.

### Stanza 9

*shig* shows the most widespread Highland English approximation for English or Scots *j*-; cf. the [j] in *silidh* “jelly,” *Seumas* “James,” etc.

*miann sùil* We would expect either genitive singular *sùla* or genitive plural *sùil* here (cf. earlier *mionn sùla* “cynosure”: see DIL, M 144.64-6). The present form, like, *muineal* in stanza 5, may be meant to show either loss of flexion or loss of the palatalized/non-palatalized distinction in *l*.

*feuchadh* In ModScG the verb *feuch* has the meaning “behold” in the imperative, but otherwise means “try.” Also its verbal noun is usually *feuchainn*. Its import here is hence not entirely clear. Perhaps this induced Mackenzie to change it to *lèirsinn* in the second edition, though it is just as awkward to use this abstract noun meaning “vision” as a verbal noun meaning “seeing.”

*cinn-fhidhleach* Mackenzie printed *Chinn-'illeach* and supplied the following footnote in 1830 and 1834: “Ceann-'illeach, *i.e.*, Ceann-fidhle, the name of a ship, alluding to her having a fiddle-head.” While Mackenzie’s nautical reference may be correct, the term “fiddle-headed” was actually in use in eighteenth-century English with reference to human posture and character: see OED. As applied to “lads” here it would presumably mean “gangling,” “shambling” or similar. Not inconceivably, we are meant to observe here how the southerner views the northern lads as “clodhoppers,” while the northern poet mocks the southerner’s English-infiltrated Gaelic.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>The term *ceann-ìleach* occurs in Dw (at p. 179), with the divergent legend, “Sword-hilt of a shape peculiar to those manufactured in Islay.” Although John F. Campbell of Islay also attests to the existence of the term in his boyhood, as we see in his *Popular Tales of the West Highlands* (2nd edn., 4 vols. [Paisley, 1890-93], II, 60-61), where he interestingly translates the phrase as “swords of the head of Islay”), we may suspect that the “Islay-headed sword” is a figment and that the term should really be “fiddle-headed” here too, perhaps referring to a backward-curving, wrist-protecting extension seen on the basket-hilts of some Highland broadswords.