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'LIKE A PEELING ON THE WATER':[1] SONGS OF DISLOCATION AND DISPLACEMENT IN THE PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND GAELIC CONTEXT

'S muladach a tha mi
'M Murray Harbour 's mi gun Bheurla

(I am depressed / In Murray Harbour, not speaking any English)

So opens 'Gearan air America', composed by a nineteenth-century MacLean immigrant from Raasay in the Inner Hebrides – known locally in the New World as 'am Bàrd MacIlleathain a bh' air a' bhruaich'[2] – some thirty-five years after the event whose bicentenary was commemorated in 2003 in Prince Edward Island, and on the islands of Skye and Raasay, with a series of community arts and academic events which ran under the collective name of 'An Tarsainn'.[3]

Like many other songs and poems of emigration and immigration in the Scottish Gaelic corpus, this one begins with the speaker alone and linguistically isolated: here in the overseas hinterland of English-speaking Murray Harbour, Eastern Kings County, Prince Edward Island. He is obviously anything but a happy camper out in the 'wilderness forest' in which he finds himself.[4] And similar to others who wrote from the same *contra* side of the debate regarding the merits of Highland emigration to British North America – a series of events whose narrative should not be expected to be a 'uniform one', to quote from Kennedy's 'Lochaber No More: a critical examination of Highland emigration mythology'[5] – this MacLean poet attacks both his neighbours and the place he and they inhabit. The former he refers to as *gàrlaoich* ('scoundrels', putting it mildly: 'screaming infants', 'little villains', or 'rogues' by connotative extension),[6] adding *cha tuig mi 'n cànan fhèin*. The latter is depicted as having a whole range of shortcomings: the winter is depressingly cold and half a lifetime long; both men and stock freeze; there's no passable way through the woods but a 'blazed trail'; and the woods themselves are nothing but a swamp, devoid of the *cuthag* and the *smeòrach* which

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he would commonly see and hear at home. And as for the wild animals he does see here, *garbh-bhiast dhubh nan geug*,[7] he's afraid they will kill him outright.

Fundamentally, he finds himself not only alone but resentful of his friends and relatives who had come out and settled here before him for not telling him fully about *cor an àite*.[8] And so he vows pointedly never to add to the stream of emigrants induced to make the crossing over by positive reports sent back from Prince Edward Island: *Cha chuir mi fios gu bràth / A dh'iarraidh chàirdean no luchd-dàimh*. In fact, he goes so far as to question the mental state of anyone even considering emigrating to the place in question: *Cha tigeadh sibh a thàmhachd ann / Ma tha sibh aig ur cèill*.

Closely connected to this poetically enacted engaging in the deprecation of the present place and the consequent longing for the one left back overseas, the speaker expresses a conditional *if only* wish, often encountered throughout post-classical Gaelic poetry by poets who were frequently illiterate in their first language (though not always): *'S nam b' aithne dhomh a sgrìobhadh / Chòir 's gun innsinn dhuibh mo sgeul / Gum fòghnadh leam an fhìrinn / Gus a dhìteadh, 's nach bu bhreug*. Nor is *an fhìrinn*, which the speaker says would be enough for him to condemn the place, without biblical overtones, suggesting as it does 'an Fhìrinn', with a capital *f*, standing in Scottish Gaelic protestant usage for the scriptures. And by figurative extension it then stands for scriptural truth itself, which can here be envisaged as coming, rhetorically, to bolster his almost Old Testament and apparently irrevocable sentencing of the place (another sense of *dìteadh*, 'condemning', being 'sentencing', both highly legalistic in usage).

After then engaging in three stanzas of heightened panegyric of place,[9] where *Alba* is portrayed as an idyllic and now irretrievable past, in stock images of 'water-cress' and 'fresh-water springs', surrounded by 'daisies for the herd' and finished off with edenic 'dew atop the grass' and even 'cuckoos and thrushes' which benignly 'converse in treetops', the speaker moves back, in a rhetorical flourish reminiscent of the language of biblical exile, to *here*, with unconcealed regret and disappointment:[10]

Dh'fhalbh sinn às an àite sin
Gun d' ràinig sinn seo fhèin;
An dùil gum faighte fàbhar ann
'S nach biodh am màl cho treun.

(We went out of that place / And we arrived over here / Expecting some favour could be got / And the rent not be so hard)

So there is therefore an admission of the economic hardship and concomitant hope that led to their initial decision to emigrate (this being only the second time in the song-poem that the speaker involves himself in a collective *we*, usually preferring the solipsism of the lone emigrant and his almost ineffable cultural alienation). But, the expectation first entertained *over there* is soon disappointed *over here*.

And then suddenly from place, in order to explain further another cause of his profound disappointment in and unmitigated estrangement from his present surroundings, the MacLean poet's Prince Edward Island-resident speaker turns to the personal, launching into a biting *ad hominem* frontal assault on the PEI landlord, Cunnard, and his land agent Peters.[11] Cunnard is dispensed with as 'a beast', while for Peters he reserves this morbid wish wound around a less than subtle threat:

'S truagh nach caochladh e
'S gun toireadh e smaoin don eug...
Och gheibh e fhathast dìoladh
Far nach fhaod a chur an cèill.

(It's a pity he wouldn't die / And give a thought to death... / But he'll get his reward [12] / Where it won't be of any use)

Moving on now from this almost breathless attack on, principally, Peters and the place – reminiscent of the later Scottish Gaelic song-poems of emigration and immigration, 'A' Choille Ghruamach', 'Moladh Uibhist' and ''S fhada leam an oidhche gheamhraidh',[13] where place is largely treated as a geo-emotional construct for use in an ongoing debate against emigration from the Highlands and Islands to the New World – we turn the clock back to sometime after 1803

and the sailing of the *Polly* from Portree harbour bound for Prince Edward Island.[14] Here we find an equally robust poetic event speaking for the *pro* side of the debate,[15] highlighting the possible merits of Highland emigration to the overseas island place in question.

And here clearly, talk of the 'flyting' tradition of Scots poetry taken over by Gaelic song-makers, where competing poets engaged in polemical acts of mutual disparagement, is entirely *à propos* and can be applied to various 'pairings', *pro* and *contra* emigration/ immigration found in the song-poem record of Scottish Gaelic migrant writing. This is particularly true of flytings of a deliberately, textually engaged in, contemporaneous nature (e.g. Iain Sealgair's post-1834 *contra* song-poem and his cousin Ailean an Ridse's *pro* response; cf. note 5 below). The point could then be stretched here to include an *after-the-fact flyting*, such as that which will be found, textually, behind and between Calum Bàn's *pro* composition, to be turned to now, and the MacLean Poet's above-discussed *contra* song-poem (though, it must be left here at this level of purely inter-textual interaction and an anachronistic public polemic versus any contemporaneous, personal one).

Indeed, between Calum Bàn Buchanan's[16] post-1803 'Imrich nan Eileanach' and the MacLean poet's post-1838 'Gearan air America' there is a generation difference in time, and as though another world in terms of the place the two poets land in and subsequently go on to inhabit, both poetically and physically. Yet, for all the difference in tone and polemical conclusion in the two song-poems, Buchanan nevertheless manages brilliantly to enact the very themes of spatial displacement and temporal dislocation which form the basis of the later MacLean Poet's work. And it is these themes I propose elucidating here by giving a close textual reading of 'Imrich nan Eileanach'.

Looking first at the spatial representations contained in the work, we are confronted with three distinct theatres of action: first, at home in the Isle of Skye; second, the ship out of Portree harbour and the ensuing sea journey up the north-east coast of Trotternish peninsula and then out into the Minch, predicting the subsequent navigation of the North Atlantic; and finally, the *Island* (PEI) overseas.

But, I would suggest, these three spatial theatres of action are primarily subsumed by, and carried along in, the theme and enactment of temporal dislocation. And in view of this, I choose to divide the poem (though principally a song in its original incarnation: a song-poem), into five distinct temporal theatres of action navigated throughout by constant flashbacks and flashforwards:

I: *The Leaving* (1803);
II: *The Old Order* (1770s etc.);
III: *The New Order* (1790s etc.);
IV: *The Eve of Departure* (just prior to 1803);
V: *The Life in the Island* (any time after 1803).

To sketch out the manner in which the poet uses flashback and flashforward, we would have an ordering of these five different time periods across six distinct narrative movements as follows: I, II, III, IV, back to III again, and then finally on to V. In other words, for a poem about leaving behind and beyond, in both time and space, these dramatisations of temporal dislocation, heightened by a parallel track of spatial displacement, play the pre-eminent role: where the form of the poem not only reflects and invokes, but also informs and clearly provides for its content.[17]

I. The Leaving

We begin here with the speaker on board the *Polly*, as part of a collective whole (in contrast to the solipsistic stance adopted by the speaker in '*A Complaint about America*'):

An àm togail dhuinn fhìn
Mach o chala Phort Rìgh...

(When the time came for us to sail / Out of Portree harbour...)

The poet thus sets us with the speaker in a specific time and place, giving a dramatic representation of the act of leaving by arraying characters in their various roles and in such a way as to highlight

both the shared sense of loss and yet the fundamental and undeniable adventure of the undertaking: the emigration itself.

Regarding the characters, we have, in addition to the speaker, the crowd gathered on land – these importantly being the ones described as *brònach* at the spectacle of the others on board who are leaving – one of whose number is suddenly given name and voice:

Thuirt MacFàid às an Dìg,
'S e ag èigheach rium fhìn...

(MacFadyen from Digg said / Shouting over to me...)

And though we've started in the past tense (*'s iomadh aon a* ***bh'*** *air tìr*) we are now treated to a sixteen-line present-tense caution, immediate and intimate, concerning the best and safest course to sail away from the island. MacFadyen's advice, indeed, plays the role of providing the reader/listener with a litany of topography, and an acute recollection of place: names and markers both on land and at sea known to him and the speaker, and presumably, to all the first-generation listeners of this song.

Leac na Buinne seo shuas,
'S Rubh' an Aiseig ri cluais,
Mol a' Mhaide 's e cruaidh le dòirneig.
Thoir an aire gu dlùth
Cumail àrd os an cionn
Seachain sruth Rubha Hùnais, 's mòr e.

(Leac na Buinne further on / And Rubh' an Aiseig next to it / Mol a' Mhaide hard with boulder / Pay close attention / Keep well above them / Avoid the Rubha Hunais current, it's powerful)

At which point the boat then becomes a character in the poem, personifying the humming excitement of the journey:

'S ann a ghabhadh i 'n uair sin òran;
I a' siubhal gu luath,
'S i a' gearradh ma cluais,
'Dol a ghabhail a' chuain 's i eòlach.

(She would then give a song / Heading quickly along / And tacking around / Going to take to the sea, knowingly)[18]

And it is at this stage only that the speaker marks himself off as distinct from the rest of the shipboard passengers and landward spectators:

Thug mi sùil às mo dhèidh
Null air Rubh' a' Chùirn[19] *Lèith*
Is chan fhaca mi fhèin[20] *ach ceò air.*

(I took one look behind me / Over towards Rubh'[21] a' Chùirn Lèith / And personally saw nothing on it but mist)

So, interestingly, his last sight of the home island he is leaving is shrouded in and disrupted by the very elements of weather so particular to it – invoked also by the MacLean poet from Raasay in his recollection of the abandoned home acre.[22] But it is a disruption which is quickly mediated by the second named character in this first part, indeed the only other passenger on board the *Polly* to be delineated from the silent mass around him and given a voice:

Sin nuair labhair MacPhàil,
'S e ag amharc gu h-àrd,
"'S mòr mo bheachd gur e bàrr a' Stòrr e."

(And then MacPhail spoke out / While looking above / "I'm convinced it's the summit of Storr[23].")

And with this almost positive identification of the last part of the island of Skye to be seen by the speaker, by MacPhail and by the rest of the on-board emigrants, the poet has the speaker flash back to the old order which obtained some time in the last third of the eighteenth century.[24]

II. The Old Order

In this time period, the furthest removed from the moment of composition, we discard the recent past, and the present-tense recounting of the initial stages of the overseas journey from Portree

harbour, to find ourselves instead in a pre-lapsarian world, brought into rosy focus through the use of the habitual past tense: the imperfect tense, the preferred choice for most idyllic remembrance and pastoral elegy, which this certainly is. Inspired by the disrupted sight of Storr, the speaker recalls how often he would seek shelter in its shade:

Nuair a thigeadh a' Màrt,
Bhiodh an crodh anns a' Chàrn,
'S bhiodh na luibhean co-fhàs ri neòinean...
Bhiodh na caoraich da rèir
Ann ri mire 's ri leum,
'S iad a' breith anns a' Chèit uain òga.

(When March would come in / The cattle would be in Carn / And the grasses would grow with the daisies...The sheep would also be there / Jumping, frolicking round / Giving birth to young lambs in May)

But, for all the expected blissful past evoked in this typical though brief Highland pastoral elegy, the poet subverts it almost as quickly as he invokes it by having the speaker flash forward, mercilessly, to the next distinct temporal theatre of action.

III. The New Order

It's a temporal move every bit as abrupt and unforgiving as the events he proposes to confront us with.

Thàinig maighstir às ùr
Nise 'staigh air a' ghrunnd,
Sin a' naidheachd tha tùrsach, brònach.
Tha na daoin' às a' falbh
'S ann tha ['m][25] maoin an dèidh searg',
Chan eil mart aca dh'fhalbhas mòinteach.

(A new master has come / Now into the land / Depressing, upsetting news / The people are leaving / [Their] worldly goods have withered away/ They've not a cow to graze moorland)

Like an incision, the imperfect tense is cut out and discarded in favour of the bare present tense. Though taking place years before the moment of composition, this section is presented as though it were breaking news. The cattle *are* dead, or put towards the rent; and so the speaker ends by asking rhetorically what profit is there for him, personally, in staying on the land: *O nach coisinn mi nì air bròg*an.[26]

At which point, the speaker's question already answered in the negative that it will be of no 'benefit' for him at all to stay, the speaker flashes forward again, now one step closer to the actual act of leaving, to bring us into the fourth distinct temporal theatre of action.

IV. The Eve of Departure

Here tense change operates once more, with the speaker using the future and the relative future tenses to have the listener/reader assist in his decision to leave as though present, there at the moment of its being taken: thereby invoking the same immediacy which was brought into play in section III with the arrival of the new order and its 'new master' which forces the issue of emigration to be dramatised now in section IV:

'S ann a thèid mi thar sàil,
'S ann a leanas mi càch,
Feuch a' faigheamaid àite-còmhnaidh.
Gheibh sinn fearann às ùr,
'S e ri cheannach à grunnd,
'S cha bhi sgillinn ri chunntas oirnn dheth.

(So I'll go overseas / And I'll follow the rest / To see if we could find a place to live / We'll get new land / To be bought outright / And we won't have a penny to owe)

And so we're here brought face to face with the very real desire for free-hold land expressed by so many Highland emigrants to British North America, including the Maritime colonies (although PEI would stay largely in thrall to its tenured land system and, originally, absentee landlords until the 1870s).[27] The speaker makes his decision

to leave for ultimately economic reasons: to better his lot over there, escaping the oppressive new order over here. The optimistic novelty of *fearann às ùr* thus echoes, especially in the syntax of the original, while inverting the wholly negative novelty of the *maighstir às ùr*, occurring only a few lines and years earlier, and interestingly maintaining the notion of 'ground' or 'fundament' tagged on to both. The 'new master', who has come *a-staigh air a' ghrunnd* – literally 'in onto the ground' – is then reflected by the 'new land' which is to be bought outright – *à grunnd*,[28] literally 'from ground', from its very fundament. And so the speaker artfully and strikingly moves us from fundamental class oppression to fundamental economic security in one linguistic twist and one projected act of removal.

And, as though responding, consciously or not, to the complaints of other Gaelic-speaking immigrants such as the later MacLean poet from Raasay, or John MacLean, Tiree, in 'A' Choille Ghruamach', among others, when faced with the choking, shocking presence of the Maritime Canadian forest,[29] the speaker states boldly, in a flourish of inspiration:

'S math dhuinn fasgadh nan craobh,
Seach na bruthaichean fraoich...

(It's good for us the trees' shelter / Rather than the hills of heather...)

Unlike the two MacLean poets, for whom trees are *a' choille ghàbhaidh* or *coille shuampaichean*, the trees here have become transformed into a refuge, not a reason for depression or *dépaysement*: an actual sanctuary from the increasing rapacity of the landlord class of the new order at home. They are almost nature's replacements for the ineffectual clan chiefs, who were often in the past associated metaphorically with various species of trees:[30] chiefs now as useless as heather for protecting or sheltering their suffering charges. Between that reality and the trees, the speaker seems to be saying, 'we'll choose the trees', with all that comes with them: inescapable toil, but also undeniable shelter and a not to be neglected source of fuel.[31]

Then, looking back one final time at this Old World home of landlords and heathered hills, the poet has the speaker flash back, returning to section III, *the New Order*, already powerfully invoked with the previous enactment of the coming of the 'new master'. But, this time, the section is further broken down into two distinct parts. The first of these employs the imperfect tense, the habitual past, almost as though a conscious *pastiche* of the same use of this particular tense in the earlier Highland pastoral elegy with its evocations of a world irrevocably gone. Now what is evoked, and invoked, is instead the grinding loss and unrelenting hardship of Highland rural life: one's continually scraping by under the new order:

Ged a thogamaid nì gu leòr ann,
'S iomadh dosgainn is call
Thigeadh orra nan àm...
Ged a readhamaid[32] *gu fèill,*
'S ged a reiceamaid treud,
'S ged a gheibheamaid fèich[33] *gu leòr air...*

(Though we'd raise enough means [i.e. cattle] / Many misfortunes[34] and loss / Would overcome them in time...Though we'd go to the sales / Though we'd sell off a herd / Though we'd get value enough for it...)

And yet, even given all of that, still haunting them is the clear and unavoidable danger of the landlord's factor who 'will come', and not 'would come', as we might expect by the previously consistent use of the imperfect, habitual past tense (as though a threat once pressing but now no more). Instead, the speaker prefers to say, the factor is a present and constant threat: moreover, one here for some time to come.

Thig am Bàillidh mun cuairt,
Leis na sumanaidh chruaidh,
'S bheir e h-uile dad[35] *uainn dheth còmhladh.*

(The Factor will come round / With the harsh summons / And he'll take from us every thing)

This then forms the substantive part of the accusation levelled by the speaker against the place he has left, both calling for and defending his decision to leave. And it is here, in this second part of section III revisited, that he engages in his only *ad hominem* invective against the present factor in Skye, unnamed,[36] who replaced a certain MacLeod man before him. With the new order, and all it implies, re-witnessed, we stay firmly in the present tense: the factor *is* a 'cruel, arrogant fool' without 'compassion', 'pity' or 'mercy' for the tenantry (*'S e gun iochd ris an tuath / E gun taise, gun truas, gun tròcair*). Also, he's a man more or less unknown (*chan aithne dhomh fhèin cò 's eòl dha*) and devoid of friends, but for one Campbell man from North Assynt. The solipsism of the stance inflicted on, or assumed by, the speaker in 'A Complaint about America' is here in 'The Emigration of the Islanders' indicative of the new class of company men, *apparatchiks* as it were, whose final loyalty is to the unforgiving new order which spawned them, and so reject and in turn are rejected by those around them whom they oppress. Their loneliness and lack of local connections are here the ultimate indictment against their own lack of humanity (and of course the very reason they were sent in to do the new master's bidding in the first place).

Finally then, from this attack against one representative of the new order, the poet flashes forward to the moment of composition, or close to it, by bringing us and his speaker into section V, the final temporal theatre of action.

The Life in the Island

The penultimate stanza of this final section opens with the speaker addressing an unnamed, notional listener, familiarly as *thu*,[37] with an accompanying exhortation to encourage all those who can, back home, to emigrate. And, importantly, he frames this request conditionally: 'But if ever you go / Back overseas'. It's as if he wishes to state explicitly that it's not in fact immediately obvious why any one would, once established on the other side, choose to return: *thall thairis* has become *bhos a seo*,[38] and irrevocably so for the speaker.

Thoir dhaibh cuireadh gun dàil,
Iad a theicheadh on mhàl,
'S iad a thighinn cho tràth 's bu chòir dhaibh.

(Invite them at once / To escape from the rent / And come over as soon as they should)

He then ends this bit of propagandising for emigration by adding one final enticement for any prospective takers:

'N sin cha bhiodh iad an taing MhicDhòmhnaill;
'S ann a gheibheadh iad àit'
Anns an cuireadh iad bàrr,
'S ro-mhath chinneadh buntàta 's eòrn' ann.

(Then they wouldn't be beholden to MacDonald / Instead they could get a place / In which they could plant a crop / Where potatoes and barley would flourish)

With this appeal to something very much like early nineteenth-century class consciousness (where the clan chief, 'Lord' MacDonald, has been rhetorically reduced to plain 'MacDonald' although still in such an overriding position of social, political and economic hierarchical ascendency as to require the tenantry below him to be 'thankful' for their actual survival), coupled with the compelling agricultural argument, the speaker leads us into the final stanza of this remarkable poem: its final verse when sung.

Here then, we are brought immediately up to speed in the present, at the moment of composition, by the speaker who, as at the beginning of this poetic event back in Skye in the first stanza, positions himself within a larger group, a collectivity of which he is once more one undelineated member. How much time has passed since the initial act of leaving in 1803, we will never know: nor is it the point. The poet is not the 'butler of historians',[39] to paraphrase Kundera's comment about novelists, but the maker of his own world in which the speaker, as a collective *we*, surveys what he is now faced with, choosing what to include and what to omit. Principally he's concerned with surveying the bounty of the new land: a survey

that is done with a definite eye to the value of propaganda in encouraging those over *there* to come out over *here* if possible.

'S e seo Eilean an àigh
Anns a bheil sinn an-dràst'[40]...
Bidh an coirc' ann a' fàs
Agus cruithneachd fo bhlàth...
Agus siùcar nan craobh,
Ann ri fhaighinn gu saor...

(This is the Island of plenty[41]/ Where we now live... / Oats grow / And wheat ripens.../ And sugar from the trees[42] / To be got for free...)

And if that isn't enough to provide for the physical sustenance of the people, there's one last alcoholic taster brought out with which to end this remarkably sensual list of the fruits of the earth:

'S ruma daite, dearg, ùr,
Anns gach bothan is bùth,
Cheart cho pailt ris a' bhùrn ga òl ann.

(And fresh, colourful red rum / In every cabin and shop / Just as plentiful as water is drunk there)

After evoking this, the speaker falls silent: over there, or over here, depending on the relative positions of the various listeners and readers.

So, from section I, with the dramatic enactment of the leaving from Skye, to this final section V, with its wilfully sunny picture of life in the new island, the poet, through the agency of his speaker, his various characters both named and unnamed, his three different theatres of place, and the constant flashbacks and flashforwards through narrative time, manages successfully to reproduce at the level of style the dislocations and displacements inherent in any act of emigration which form the very substance and subject of his poem.

And, as we have seen, he manages this with a remarkably conscious manipulation of verbal tense throughout the different

spatial and temporal sections. This manipulation of tense he performs consistently and artfully, whether employing the imperfect, past habitual tense to rework a rosy pastiche of pastoral bliss, or to counter it with the repetitive stress of rural survival; or the simple, historical past tense to recount a single 'one-off' event, such as the initial sailing from Skye, leavened with the present tense for the immediacy rendered the reported speech of his various characters; the conditional tense brought in to array the various benefits migration would bring in its wake; or finally the present/future tenses found in the last stanza, where present and future economic security is invoked.

In the end then, 'Imrich nan Eileanach' is a work conscious of its own opinion-forming role in representing and presenting one side of the debate regarding the worth of removing oneself from the Scottish Highland *here* to the Prince Edward Island *there*. Nor is it in any way shy about trumpeting its ultimate conclusion concerning the polemic in question. Though, for all that it knowingly plays on the sociologically-based discourse of inducement and overt exhortation to emigration, it is more than simply a politico-historical tract propagandising on the matter from the point of view of one who has, fortunately, prospered on the other side, as we have seen. Indeed, it is arguably most successful for what it is: a song, and a poem, to be heard, and ultimately to be read, by an audience and readers on both sides of its central issue regarding displacement and dislocation: by those on both sides of the frequently crossed though often unforgivingly intransigent North Atlantic.

NOTES

1 *Je suis comme une épluchure sur l'eau*, 'I am like a peeling on the water': a statement by an Algerian migrant worker in exile in France, *Le Monde Diplomatique*, June 2003, p. 5. The 'peeling' also plays a role in the first attempts by Highland immigrants on PEI to plant potatoes in partially cleared and burnt fields. *Chuireadh 'ad 'm* peeling *'s gheibheadh 'ad buntàta*, 'They would plant the peeling and they'd get potatoes': the late Ailean 'An Camshron, Caledonia PEI, in interview with Dr K. Nilsen, St Francis Xavier University.

2 Identified as such in the letter accompanying the song's submission to *Mac-Talla*, VII: 11 (1898). The letter also dates the MacLean poet's arrival in PEI

from Raasay: *bho chionn trì fichead bliadhna air ais*, i.e. 'sixty years' before 1898.

3 The 1803 arrival of the 'Selkirk Settlers', PEI's Highland protestant 'Mayfair' moment which would form a beach-head of sorts for a further five decades of intensive Gaelic-speaking Scottish immigration from the Isle of Skye and the Isle of Raasay to Prince Edward Island; cf. Michael Kennedy, 'Is Leis an Tighearna an talamh agus an làn: the Scottish Gaelic settlement history of Prince Edward Island', unpublished PhD thesis, University of Edinburgh 1995.

4 Not to minimise the depth of the poetic enactment of the speaker's post-emigration depression, it's however interesting to consider the 'tradition ... where melancholy is explicitly connected to hightened sensibility ... artistic or intellectual melancholy is not debilitating or paralysing; it is rather productive (Van Gogh ... call[ed] it "active melancholy") and has a reflective, contemplative dimension': Anca Munteanu, 'Visionary & artistic transformations in Blake's 'Visions of the Daughters of Albion', *Journal of European Studies* 36.1: 80.

5 In *Myth, Migration and the Making of Memory*, Harper & Vance eds., Halifax, 1999: pp. 267–97. Kennedy also highlights the 'opinion-forming' nature of the various Gaelic poetic events which, during the very process of emigration and immigration, took either one or the other side in the debate regarding removal, giving as a pertinent example the two contradictory song-poems set in early nineteenth-century Cape Breton Island, composed by two cousins: John MacDonald's post-1834 anti-emigration 'Òran do dh'America' and Allan 'the Ridge' MacDonald's pro-immigration response, 'Chuir thu boilich sìos is bòst' (MacDonell pp. 80–93). Interestingly, the two cousins' arrival dates in Cape Breton are similar to those of the two poets studied in this paper: 1834 for John MacDonald (1838 for the MacLean poet), and 1816 for Allan MacDonald (1803 for Calum Bàn Buchanan). The anti-emigration song-poems thus date from later in the century, when it's possible to point to mitigating factors of increasing scarcity of resources. More research is needed along these lines comparing the economics in question and the resulting poetic responses.

6 The first, second, and third entries in the Highland Society's 1828 dictionary: 'dwarf ' being the fourth.

7 The black bear: confirmed by Dr G. Edward MacDonald, University of Prince Edward Island. This would have been a wholly novel animal to any immigrant from the Scottish Hebrides.

8 As part of a phenomenon of group emigration (cf. C.A. Price's demographic work on 'chain-migration' and 'social movement across space and time': 'Immigration & Group Settlement' in W.D. Berrie (ed.) *The Cultural Integration of Immigrants*, Paris, 1959), considered also in parallel to a core-periphery model, the MacLean poet from Raasay is, as shown above, a latecomer to 'America' (35 years after the initial Selkirk settlement) and one who ends up inhabiting an area culturally peripheral to the centre of Gaelic-speaking PEI in the Orwell Bay, Belfast, Bellevue, Caledonia, Kilmuir areas of Eastern Queens County and Western Kings County, which sustained generations of Gaelic speakers.

9 Unlike Calum Bàn in 'The Emigration of the Islanders', who will quickly subvert the rosy picture of pastoral beauty and Highland bio-diversity by having *his* speaker break the shocking news (as soon as 'young lambs' frolicking round in May are invoked) of the coming of the merciless 'new master'; cf. pp. 8–9 above.

10 Cf. Rompkey's (2004) discussion regarding Newfoundland and a *discours colonial*, 'colonial discourse', which highlights *l'appropriation du territoire ... en évoquant certaines images, les écrivains dépeignent leurs origines européennes avec* ***nostalgie*** [my emphasis] ... *il s'agira souvent d'une simple comparaison*, 'the appropriation of territory ... by evoking certain images, the writers render their European origins with nostalgia ... often it's a question of a simple comparison'; Ronald Rompkey, 'Éléments du discours de la colonisation dans la littérature de voyage à Terre-Neuve', *Études Canadiennes* 57: 28.

11 Again, from Dr G.E. MacDonald: Cunnard was a PEI landlord opposed to long-term leases, though otherwise unremarkable; Peters was known as an exacting agent who travelled the island wearing two pistols at all times.

12 *Dìoladh*: reward, recompense, retribution; a common threat in Gaelic is to say to someone *Gheibh thu do dhìol*, meaning 'You'll get yours'.

13 In order: 'The Gloomy Forest', 'Praise of Uist', and 'I find the winter night long'. These anthemic compositions are what I've referred to elsewhere as *The Big Three*: song-poems of emigration to Canada uniformly negative in tone and dramatisation of life *over there*, sung almost exclusively *over here* (i.e. in the Scottish Gaidhealtachd), written in the 1820s, 1880s and 1930s respectively. The first is by the well-known John MacLean, Tiree, who emigrated to Pictou County, Nova Scotia, in 1819, settling finally in Antigonish County; the second by Allan MacPhee, South Uist (there being some debate as to whether he in fact emigrated to Manitoba in the 1880s); and the third by Murdo MacFarlane, a renowned Lewis poet who spent some time on the Canadian prairies in the late 1920s and early 1930s before then returning home.

14 The name was then four years old: in 1799 it was changed from Saint John's Island, the anglicisation of Île-Saint-Jean (*Eilean Eòin* being the Gaelic version then; though by the late nineteenth century, PEI was referred to by its Gaelic-speaking inhabitants as *Eilean a' Phrionnsa*) which the French explorers had called it after occupying it. The Mi'kmaq called it *Epekwitk*,

'resting on waves', whose pronunciation was modified by non-Natives to Abegweit.

15 A noticeably *collective* poetic event as opposed to the singular stance adopted throughout 'Gearan air America', which opens *in medias res* with the speaker already alone and resentful in the New World.

16 The Rev William Matheson, as noted by Margaret MacDonell in *The Emigrant Experience* (p. 215), maintained that the name should be Mac Bhannain, and that it is now 'anglicised, but misleadingly, as Buchanan'. However, on PEI, the poet and his descendants were and are known in English as Buchanan, whatever the initial mistake or not in the anglicisation of MacMhannain (sic).

17 Although an oral composition (as testified by the accompanying letter to its submission in *Mac-Talla*, 13 April 1895, where the writer, Murdoch Lamont, quotes directly from his *caraid còir*, who took the song down 29 March 1883, both words and melody, from an old man, then 85, who had learnt it from 'the mouth of the author'; Lamont's friend ends by saying, *cha b'urrinn* [sic] *an t-ùghdar aon chuid sgrìobhadh no leughadh*), still the ordering of each discrete part of the song-poem and the shifts in tense speak to a wholly wilful and self-conscious artistry which is difficult to deny on the basis of oral versus written composition alone.

18 I've rendered this line more or less literally here, though in the translation done for 'The Crossing', as a performance piece in the summer of 2003 on Prince Edward Island, I translated it as, 'Going off to the wide-open, intimate sea'. The point being that 'she', the boat, knows her way around the North Atlantic, even though the emigrants on board may well be out of their own locational depth.

19 *Chùirn* is a variant genitive case for the noun *càrn*. I have restored it as it appears in the original, giving the assonance required by the 'comhardadh-breacaidh' type of mid-rhyme with 'null' in the same line and further the modified 'comhardadh-aicill' type of mid-rhyme between *sùil* in the previous line and *Chùirn*.

20 Margaret MacDonell in *The Emigrant Experience*, p. 108, has 'cha'n fhaca mi fhìn'. As elsewhere, I have modernised spelling to conform to GOC (Gaelic Orthographic Conventions), but remained puzzled as to why the poet would use *fhìn* for 'self' instead of *fhèin* which would provide the required assonance with the previous lines' *dhèidh* and *Lèith*. I then consulted the original 1895 *Mac-Talla* issue in which the song-poem first appeared: here it's quite clearly *fèin*, which I've chosen to present as the more common *fhèin*, whose lenition removes the unhappy 'f' sound from the line.

21 Rubha: a point or promontory, e.g. Rubha Shlèite, *The Point of Sleat*, in the south end of Skye.

22 *'S ged a thigeadh latha dubhair oirnn / Le ceò is gaoth tuath 's gun ghrèin*, 'And though a dark day would come over us / With mist and north wind and without sun'; yet for all the mist and sunless sky, the speaker states that at least they wouldn't be out walking in a *coille shuampaichean*, 'forest of swamps' as they are now in the New World.

23 Storr, a solitary pinnacle of rock thrusting up on the east coast of Trotternish, is sometimes called 'The Old Man of Storr', or 'Bodach an Stòrr'. Locals, however, are often heard to maintain that their parents and grandparents referred to it as 'Bod an Stòrr' or 'The Penis of Storr', which does in fact agree with its undeniably phallic shape. The oral tradition has it that a minister suggested replacing 'bod' with the phonologically similar word 'bodach', for the sake of 'decency'.

24 Calum Bàn, born in 1758, would have come to adulthood in the last third of the century, though even then – from the late 1770s onwards – this *rosy* state of affairs would have been, if not already anachronistic in the post-Culloden world, then at best just about to come to its ineluctable end.

25 MacDonell has the possessive pronoun *'m*, 'their', before *maoin*, 'wealth, money, goods'. The original version does not, thus giving in translation, '… worldly goods have withered'.

26 Calum Bàn, we can surmise, was a cobbler as well as a crofter in his native Sartail (Sarsdal), Flodigarry. Interestingly, so was John MacLean, Tiree, whose speaker in 'A' Choille Ghruamach' complains that, in the cold of winter, he goes round in the *mogais chlùdaich*, the 'mocassin stuffed with rags'. The moccasin as trope of dépaysement is common in early emigrant-immigrant song-poems from America and later Canada; it also denotes a certain Highland vestimentary snobbery, as seen in another poem by the Tiree poet, 'Am Mealladh' (*'The Deception'*), where his speaker complains that, at the Sunday service in Nova Scotia, he sees no 'tanned shoes' but only 'moccasins'. The moccasin being an Amerindian word and piece of footwear perfectly adapted to the deep snows of North American winters, the use of it as a marker for how far one has gone from home, and how far one has fallen socially, speaks to a possible source of prejudice and sense of ethnic superiority on the part of the Scottish Gaelic immigrants towards the First Nations of the land which they, as Europeans, have occupied and usurped. The MacLean poet from Raasay too has his speaker remarking on the 'lack of footwear' in PEI, though he doesn't go on to mention or mock what exactly it is he does find himself wearing in the end.

27 Mìcheal Mòr Dòmhnallach, *Big Michael MacDonald*, is one such emigrant-immigrant poet who left his native South Uist in 1772 to settle briefly in PEI (under the 999-year leases offered by Captain John MacDonald of Glenaladale, who fashioned himself a munificent Highland laird: though for all his munificence, still a landlord to whom rent, however nominal, was

owed). He then removed to Judique, Cape Breton, seeking 'grants for land ... rather than accept[ing] the long-term leases offered by Glenaladale' (MacDonell, p. 57).

[28] Though, again, no mention is made of the original Mi'kmaq inhabitants of the island who were on this 'ground' to begin with. They simply do not enter into the economic equations of the Highland emigrant or those of the New World immigrant. Like Caesar, the latter came, they saw and they (or their countries' military forces, merchants and missionaries), conquered. As much as one would like to see some notion of mutual understanding on the part of Gaelic-speaking settlers towards their Amerindian hosts, born out of their own Highland history of economic hardship, linguistic alienation and later dispossession, it's impossible to conjure it out of nothing. The oral tradition on PEI does, however, interestingly provide for some recognition of the debt owed by these Highland immigrants to the Mi'kmaq. In an interview with Dr Ken Nilsen, University of Saint Francis Xavier, the late Allan J. Cameron, Caledonia, PEI, said the following in answer to Nilsen's question, 'Robh Innseanaich mun cuairt nuair a thàinig iad?' ('*Were there Indians around when they came?*'): 'Bha. 'S thug na h-Innseanaich *advice* dhaibh ... mar a gheibheadh iad siùcar'; ('*Yes. And the Indians gave them* advice... *how they could get sugar*'), i.e. sugar from the abundant maple trees, which source of physical sustenance Calum Bàn refers to in his final stanza as one obvious inducement to emigration.

[29] It's a commonplace now to note how the densely-packed North American boreal forest came as something of a surprise to immigrants from the Outer and Inner Hebrides, whether Tiree, Skye or Raasay, which are, especially the first, singularly lacking in any such expanses of uncut trees. To the native Mi'kmaq, the forest and its trees were 'life itself,' as stated by a Mi'kmaq student in anthropology at UPEI in a seminar discussion of this subject (March 2006). The theme of Highland depression caused by the endless woods struck the student as amusingly novel and difficult to understand. In this he would appear to agree with Archibald-Barber who maintains that 'from an indigenous perspective it is the Western tradition that was at first "illiterate" upon entering the New World, overlooking the indigenous semiotic connection to the land,' ('Cognitive Quickenings', *International Journal of Canadian Studies*, 30, 2004, p.118).

[30] See John MacInnes, 'Samhla na Craoibhe', *Sàr-Ghaidheal: Essays in memory of Ruairidh MacKay*, An Comunn Gaidhealach, Inverness.

[31] *Connadh*, Gaelic for 'fuel', is used to refer almost exclusively to 'firewood' in Canadian Gaelic: e.g. *Bheir a-staigh an connadh*, 'Bring in the firewood', heard often by the author in a friend's house in Prince Edward Island; it is also widely testified to in Cape Breton usage.

[32] MacDonell has *rachamaid*, the first person plural imperfect, 'we would go'; the 1895 *Mac-Talla* version has *readhmaid*, which is the more local, north-east coast of Trotternish peninsula dialect variant of the same (Calum Bàn's native dialect) and provides for assonance with the following words *reiceamaid*, 'we would sell', and *gheibheamaid*, 'we would get'.

[33] *Fèich* is the genitive case for *fiach*, 'value, worth, price'. There's no grammatical reason for it to appear as such after the first person plural imperfect *geibheamaid*, 'we would get', though the requirements of assonance with *fèill* and *treud* seem to override grammar in this instance.

[34] *Dosgainn*, apart from general loss and misfortune, refers to the specific loss of cattle, the then marker of worldly wealth, as is shown in this stanza about material gain and loss revolving around cattle, as it does.

[35] Again, *dad*, or 'thing' in MacDonell; the *Mac-Talla* version has *dath*, or 'colour': so, 'he'll take every colour, [all the colour], from us'. This is an interesting variant, opening up a connotative field of health as well as material wealth, etc. In other words, he'll drain them of their very colour; although it's most likely a typo in the original and *dad* is thus the intended reading.

[36] Unnamed by Calum Bàn, though actually identified as a Campbell man from Argyll by Margaret MacDonald, Head Archivist, Clan Donald Centre, Armadale, Isle of Skye.

[37] Instead of the formal or plural *sibh*, acting as *vous* does in French.

[38] *Thall thairis*, 'over there; overseas'. *Bhos a seo*, 'over here'.

[39] 'Le romancier n'est pas le valet des historiens': Milan Kundera, 'Le théâtre de la mémoire', *Le Monde Diplomatique*, May 2003.

[40] MacDonell has *an dràsd'*, 'now'; the original in *Mac-Talla* has *an tràths*, which can be read as an abbreviation for *an tràth-sa*, 'this time': so, literally, the second line reads 'In which we are this time'.

[41] *Eilean an àigh*: MacDonell translates this as 'the isle of contentment'. *Àgh* is, on one level, 'joy'; however, it can also mean 'prosperity' and 'success'. The 'Golden Age' of Highland history, the Gaelic-speaking 'Rìoghachd nan Eilean', which came to an end in the 1490s, is remembered in Gaelic as 'Linn an Àigh'. So, to use *eilean an àigh* is not without evoking certain linguistic parallels with *linn an àigh* in a perhaps conscious move to underline the sustenance, both physical and otherwise, provided by the overseas island (capitalised in the original as *Eilean* though not in MacDonell's translation of it as 'isle').

[42] Cf. note 28 above. Again, the speaker refers here to the thrilling novelty of getting sugar 'freely' from the very trees which would go on to give the speaker in 'A Complaint about America' such feelings of isolàtion and despair; but the Native, the Mi'kmaq who taught the immigrant how to tap this unheard-of source of nature's bounty, is rendered utterly absent from

both the poem and the place. In a piece of mid-nineteenth-century Gaelic prose, from Dr Norman MacLeod's periodical *Cuairtear nan Gleann* (1840–43), entitled 'Canada Uachdarach' (and reprinted in Watson's *Rosg Gàidhlig*, 1929, pp. 102–7), the unnamed author gives a description of tapping maple trees for their sap, which is then made into sugar: *Tha seòrsa chraobhan ann as àbhaist doibh fhàgail gun ghearradh; tha iad so prìseil air son an t-siùcair tha iad a' faotainn asda. Ni iad toll-tora a steach do mheadhon na craoibhe, agus thig an sùgh a mach aisde; tha e a' tuiteam an soithichean, agus an déidh sin tha iad 'g a bhruith, agus a' dèanamh siùcar fallain maith dheth; tha e cho maith ri aon seòrsa cheannaicheas iad, air son feum tighe.* ('There's a species of tree which they usually leave uncut; these are valuable for the sugar they extract from them. They make an auger-hole in the middle of the tree, and the sap comes out of it; it falls into dishes, and after that they cook it, making good healthy sugar out of it; it's as good as any kind they can purchase for household needs'): my translation.

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LANGUAGE SHIFT AND CULTURAL CHANGE IN THE GAIDHEALTACHD – WHAT PROSPECT FOR THE CULTURAL IDENTITY?

The Highlands and Islands enjoy the popular reputation of being culturally distinct and for some ninety percent of the area – most of the Highland mainland and the Hebrides – this is represented by the Gaelic heritage. Features of Gaelic culture have been documented in this area over some six centuries since a Highland/Lowland divide became apparent with the spread of English language and cultural influences across the Lowlands; Fordoun's chronicle of the 1380s distinguished the Gaelic world across geography, language and way of life (Skene 1880). Distinct cultural elements cited in more recent times include language and literature; music, song and dance; a notable appreciation of ancestry, kinship, community and a 'sense of place', vernacular architecture, food and drink, work associated with the land and the sea, folklore, entertainments, sport and pastimes.

This cultural distinctiveness is often invoked by local authorities and a variety of organisations in claiming special status for the area: as an attraction for tourists, as a unique and rich heritage which can be enjoyed by the employees of relocating companies; as the basis for establishing regular cultural exchange visits and cooperative ventures with Ireland and Nova Scotia; and as a reason for special consideration of applications for funding (Visit Scotland 2005; Visit Highlands 2007; Visit Hebrides 2007; Highlands and Islands Enterprise 2007; Government of Nova Scotia 2007). The advantages gained have been held to benefit the population in general: '[T]he Highland Council recognises the educational, artistic, cultural, social and economic importance of Gaelic in underpinning our place in the modern world' (Highland Council 2007). The undoubted importance of Gaelic culture to Scotland as a whole has been officially acknowledged as a cultural expression which 'is significantly in excess of what one might expect from a fragile minority community' (Scottish Executive 2003), attracting an international appreciation disproportionate to the country's size and population. This

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