



Highland Canon Fodder: Scottish Gaelic Literature in North American Contexts

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Abstract

The assessment of the influence of Scottish literature and literary practice abroad, especially in the context of Scottish diasporas, has generally focused on fiction in English, particularly in the form of the novel. Missing from this approach is a large body of Scottish Gaelic literature, primarily oral poetry, which has been composed in a sustained literary tradition that extends from the medieval period in Scotland to the present day in North America. This article reviews the evidence for Gaelic literary continuity in the North American diaspora in terms of the literary conventions that have determined the forms of literary production, the iconic figures and literary culture signifiers invoked by authors, and the statements made by authors in their texts that reflect self-consciousness about the tradition in which they worked and to which they belonged.

Keywords

Ethnic literature, Diasporic literature, Celtic literature, Scottish literature, Scottish Gaelic, Scottish Gaelic literature

One of the most recurrent motifs in Scottish historiography is that of the plucky emigrants who “punched above their weight” and made a greater contribution to the wider world than we might expect from their relatively small numbers. It is little surprise that a small nation asserting its self-worth might highlight the importance of its achievements beyond its own borders and the impact of its ideas on larger entities whose existence and prestige are not as subject to dispute. This interpretative lens is evident in Scottish literary criticism concerned with the reception of Ossian in Europe, the use of Walter Scott’s novels as models for historical fiction in India and North America, and Burns’ use of the vernacular as a model for regional inflections of anglophone literatures around the world, to name just a few examples.¹

Voices can be excluded at any stage in the history of a nation, but as notions of erasure, repression and self-realization are central to re-assertions of Scottish nationhood, it is crucial that

those formulating the study of Scottish national literature(s) set a course for scholarship which is truly representative of all of the literary expressions of all of Scotland's peoples on their own terms, without replicating the exclusionary paradigms of the past (Sassi 2005: 20-25). All too often, even to the present, Gaelic is marginalized in (or even omitted from) scholarship about Scottish literature, presumably because "literature" refers primarily to printed texts in English (or Scots) taking their most evolved form in the novel. Scottish poet George Campbell Hay remarked on this neglect in an article about Gaelic literature written in 1944:

Air a' cheud dol a mach, is pàirt chudthromach de'n litreachas Albannach litreachas na Gàidhlig. Tha fhios gum biodh a nàimhdean, uair a bh' ann, ag cumail a-mach nach b' e agus a' dèanamh a h-uile oidhirp gu a cumail á cùirt nuair a bhiodh litreachas na h-Albann ri bhreithneachadh. [...] Chan eil ach sùil a thoirt air cor is còir na Gàidhlig an Éirinn gu faicinn gu dé cho mór is a tha an t-astar a th' againn ri chur as ar déidh. (Hay 1944)

First of all, Gaelic literature is an important element of Scotland's literature. Obviously, there was a time when its enemies asserted that it wasn't and making every effort to keep it 'out of court' when Scottish literature was being analyzed. [...] We only need to take a cursory glance at the state and entitlements of Gaelic in Ireland to see how great the distance is that we still need to go. (My translation)

Although there are notable examples of recent studies of Scottish literature which have integrated Gaelic texts into historical and critical analyses and the trend is toward greater inclusiveness, silences and exclusions in many works continue to allow a large corpus of Scottish Gaelic literary material to be ignored when discussing the history and nature of Scottish literature. This is particularly true in examinations of the international influence of Scottish literature which almost inevitably look for signs that authors of fiction are following the precedents set by the novels written by Scott, Hogg, Livingston, and so on.

The role of literature in cultural commemoration goes well beyond the mere aesthetic appreciation of the verbal virtuosity of a given community, however defined. Literature has long been a privileged medium through which the past has been imagined and the cultural achievements of peoples have been legitimated, measured, and celebrated, as is manifest in the creation of literary studies as an academic discipline in formal institutions of learning.

The value that literature comes to have in the late nineteenth century is a function of its new, narrower identification with the class-specific quality of taste. Furthermore, literature was also regarded as having the utilitarian value of producing social cohesion around the dominant culture. ... The development of "literature" and of

literary traditions is thus connected to the rise of nationalism. Moreover, the new conception of literature cannot be separated from the concurrent development of the related notions of “civilization” and “culture.” (Shumway 1994: 14, 15-16)

The dominance of a hegemonic anglocentric master narrative in the formation of the British state was accompanied by the political and social disenfranchisement of Celtic-speaking communities within the polity and the downgrading and even denial of their cultural norms and intellectual accomplishments during the crucial period of the formation of national institutions of learning (Durkacz 1983; Craig 2007; Stroh 2011: 292-97). Surprisingly little has been done to redress these biases and exclusions despite the maturation of postcolonial studies and its application to literary expression in particular (Stroh 2011: 29-39, 331-39; Boyd 2013: 309-11).

North American literary scholars have hardly attempted any discussion in modern reference works, canonical compilations, or major research publications of the literary expressions produced by generations of Scottish Gaels in the (so called) “New World.”² While Native Americans have successfully challenged their exclusion from the canons of North American literature on similar grounds (differences in language, medium, and literary forms), there has not been sufficient scholarship about the Scottish Gaelic literary tradition in North American settings to call these implicit presumptions into question.

All too often Gaels have been made to feel by anglophones that Gaelic has an underdeveloped literary tradition or lacks one altogether, an assertion made by such esteemed authorities as Samuel Johnson (Ferguson 1998). Gaels often internalized the assumed inferiority of their literature along with many other aspects of their culture. An article with the authoritative title “The Literary Aspect of the Keltic Settlement in the Counties of Stormont and Glengarry,” written by a respected figure of that community (in Ontario), begins by dismissing the possibility that Gaelic had a literary tradition worthy of consideration:

Starting with the fact that, except a few Gaelic songs without any striking merit, no literary work has been produced in that section, it might be concluded, at the first blush, that the undertaking is to build where no foundation has been laid. Further consideration forcibly suggests that the annals of the settlement present materials for history and fiction, and though little use has been made of them, nevertheless the mine is there, full of the richest veins. (MacDonald 1884-87: 122)

In other words, MacDonald assumes that while the Gaels had produced no “real” literature, their historical experiences were full of material that could be mined by a proper

author (notice how strikingly modern is his terminology of capitalist production). The unfortunate problem is that MacDonald is using anglophone yardsticks to assess literary merit, which has been a recurring obstacle in the evaluation and celebration of Gaelic achievements for many generations.

By reclaiming and employing native standards, especially in terms of literary practice, we can regain a much more positive and self-affirming view of Gaelic literary activity. This seems to be what Alexander Fraser had in mind when he read a paper to the Royal Society of Canada in 1903, even while he lapses into the racialist essentialism of his day:

The printed literature of the Scottish Gael is not extensive, but a Gaelic literature there is, which will compare favourably with the literature of many other countries, and, if taken with that of its kindred branches, is of very respectable proportions indeed. The Kelts are a poetical people; the clansman lived in an atmosphere of poetry and romance; every village had its bard, every family its ready singer. ... When the Scottish Gael found a lodgement in Canada, the songs of his race were not forgotten. That body of song was the common heritage of the Kelt, the world over, but the soul of song did not live on in the poetry of the past only; it found its muse in the dense forest, on the rivers and lakes, and at the happy firesides of the settlements. Here in Canada, therefore, Gaelic poems and songs were composed in the style of the older minstrelsy. (Fraser 1903: 49, 53)

There is indeed a continuous history of practice connecting the genres, literary conventions, literary devices, motifs, and themes of Gaelic diasporic literature to medieval Scotland. Not only this, but North American Gaels did at times comment on their literary lineage, its importance in expressing their sense of identity and historical experience, and its connection to linguistic vitality.

This paper will discuss the influence that Scottish Gaelic literary tradition has exerted on the literary expressions of Highland immigrant communities in North America, using examples of oral narratives and poems which can only be fully understood and appreciated within the context of the long history of Gaelic literature. Such materials demonstrate that the exercise of “tracing the influence of Scottish literature” should not be limited to printed anglophone fiction but should include the literary expressions of immigrant Gaels who continued to practice and develop their hereditary tradition in North America and have been conscious of its norms and standards even if they choose to develop them creatively according to new needs and circumstances.

Literary Composition and Conventions

Being engaged in a literary tradition means, amongst other things, being aware of the literary conventions and precedents set by previous authors, making conscious use of tropes and structures (like meter) according to literary norms and standards, and exploiting familiarity with the phrasal patterns and formulae of an inherited corpus. Even processes of rejection and transformation require consciousness of such previous literary activity, knowledge of a body of work associated with a community and the competence to evaluate literary aesthetics to determine what is appropriate or inappropriate in a composition.

Gaelic literature abounds in inter-textual allusion and it is the normal practice for poets to recycle metrical structures and song airs. Some literary items can only be fully appreciated by an audience who knows an original (or at least preceding) text or form which forms the model for the new but which contrasts with it in some important aspect. A humorous example of this is the song-poem “Mo Bhrùid Geal Òg,” a mock-heroic elegy for a horse that was driven to death when its rider mistakenly took a funeral party for a Fenian raid in Nova Scotia, probably in the 1870s. This song is modeled on the celebrated lament to a warrior killed at Culloden commonly known as “Mo Rùn Geal Òg” (Black 2001: 174-79, 444-47) and derives much of its humor from the contrast between these two subjects and circumstances, the deformation of literary tropes to suit the praise of a work horse, and hyperbole that exceeds the audience’s ability to suspend their disbelief:

*Tha mo bhàta gun aodach,
Bidh mi daonnan 'ga h-iomradh;
Tha meadhan air sgaoileadh
An darna taobh dhìth gu h-iomlan;
Tha am bogha gun ghaoisid
Is gur tric mi faotainn air t' iorball
A dh'fhàs gu camlubach dualach
Is cha bhiodh am buachar m'a thimcheall
Mo bhrùid geal òg. (Creighton and MacLeod 1979: 82-4)*

My boat has no sailcloth and I have to constantly row it; the middle part of it has come apart, one side of it completely (apart); the bow lacks horsehair that I frequently plucked from your tail that grew twists and curls and never had shit around it, my fair young brute. (My translation)

The Royalist and Jacobite episodes from the mid-seventeenth through the mid-eighteenth centuries had, to be sure, stimulated the production of a great amount of stirring Gaelic literature in the heroic mold, and, as in Scotland, these items were frequently chosen as models for new song-poems in immigrant communities, especially songs invoking community solidarity and celebration. Alexander Fraser's address about Gaelic folk-songs in Canada may allude to the reuse of Jacobite airs, themes and choruses in new songs addressing the contemporary challenges of Gaeldom:

the mountaineers, by tens of thousands, sought homes in Canada and the United States. This was at a time when Gaelic poetry was at its best, and when the vanishing echoes of the Jacobite muse were re-awakened by the social upheaval caused by the depopulating of the glens. (Fraser 1903: 50)

A song urging the Gaels of Antigonish county to vote for John Sparrow David Thompson in the 1885 election (Newton 2015: 477-79) is modeled on a stirring Jacobite anthem by Alasdair mac Mhaighstir Alasdair heralding the arrival of Prince Charles (Campbell 1984 [1933]: 48-51). The author of the former song, Alasdair "the Ridge" MacDonald, must have hoped to leverage the energy of the prophetic Jacobite voice.

Gaelic literary continuity is manifest in the large-scale structures and rhetorical modes of song-poems. One of these is what John MacInnes has deemed the "roll call of the allies" (MacInnes 2006: 290-91), the listing of real and potential allies as a means of celebrating and strengthening solidarity through aural performance and the building or destroying of reputation (and thus the subject's social capital). While this is not as common as we might expect in immigrant poetry, it is a rhetorical strategy found in some song-poems glorifying communal achievements and urging voters to stand behind a particular political candidate. A great example of this is a poem composed in 1902 to pay tribute to the election of William Duncan MacLeod to represent Glengarry in the Ontario Parliament. Just as the Highland exemplars often extend the invitation of allegiance to those outside conventional boundaries of kinship and clanship, this piece begins inside Gaeldom but extends the political network to integrate those outside that dividing line:

*Camshronaich bho thìr nan Abrach;
Clann an Linnein bho Chinn Tàile;
Clann MhicGilleMhaoil, na gaisgich
Nach eil tais, a dh'aindeoin tàire.*

*Chaidh leis Frangaich agus Sasannaich,
Éireannaich bho Eilean Phàdraig;
Foilleill cha robh an aidmheil:
Chuidich iad a chur an àirde.*

Camerons from the land of Lochaber people;
MacLennans from Kintail; MacMillans, the warriors
who are not faint-hearted, despite ill-will (of enemies).
The French people and the English joined him, and
the Irish people from Patrick's isle; their denomination
was not traitorous: they helped to elect him. (Newton 2015: 494-95)

Modern anglophone literature places a very high premium on innovation, individuality and distinctiveness, but this is not the case in Gaelic song-poetry, at least in the traditional mold. It is normal and commonplace for poets to reuse song airs and choruses, to borrow phrases and devices, and to echo formulae from other songs. Not only is this conventional practice, but a poet may do this intentionally so that some set of expectations or associations are evoked through inter-textual allusions. An excellent example of this is a song composed to a mountain in Cape Breton by Iain MacMhuirich when he was aged and living in Sydney. Iain is here deliberately echoing a poem of nostalgia by popular poet Donnchadh Bàn Mac an t-Saoir who said his last goodbye to his old mountain haunt in Argyllshire:

*Bha mi an-dé am Beinn an Fhuarain
Sealltainn air gach bruaich is còs
Far am bu tric rinn mi gluasad
Nuair a bha mi uallach òg;
Ach a-nis tha 'Bheinn air caochladh
'S chan eil daoine tighinn 'na còr;
Chunnaic mise i uair dha m' shaoghal
Bhiodh mo luchd-gaoil ann ri spòrs. ... (Teachdaire nan Gàidheal 2.7 (1926): 12)*

Yesterday I was on Beinn an Fhuarain
looking at every slope and hollow where I often used to travel
when I was young and light-stepping;
but the mountain has changed now and no-one comes near it;
I saw a time in my life when the people I loved
used to come for fun. ... (My translation)

Gaelic literary continuity is also evident at a smaller scale in the form of motifs, oral formulae, and other tropes. Good poets can extend what is a minor literary device into a rhetorical framework which encompasses the entire structure of a piece. An ideal example of this is the song “An Sgiobair Ùr,” composed by Aonghus Y. MacGilleFhaolain of Cape Breton to celebrate the election of Angus L. Macdonald as the Premiere of the province of Nova Scotia in 1933. This song was modeled on an anonymous waulking song dating to the mid-seventeenth century in praise of Mac Mhic Ailein, Captain of Clanranald (Ó Baoill and Bateman 1994: 120-3), which, like many songs of its kind, conveys his suitability as a leader by depicting him in charge of a Hebridean galley. Although the underlying analogy of the ship of state has certainly been implicit in this literary device for centuries, the Cape Breton poet extends this conceit and uses it effectively for describing the duties of a modern politician:

*Sgiobair ùr air luing na Mór-roinn
Deagh MacDhomhnaill th' air an stiùir.
Chuireas oirre gleus gu astar
Le deagh acfhuinn agus criù.
Chumas i gu seasgair tioram
Anns an iomairt air an lunn. ... (Creighton and MacLeod 1979: 209)*

A new captain on the ship of the province, goodly MacDonald who is at the helm.
Who will prepare her for gaining speed with good equipment and crew.
Who will keep her comfortable and dry in the enterprise on the waves. ... (My translation)

Also of note in this poem is how the social realities of an ethnically diverse province are reflected in Macdonald's ancestral credentials:

*Cha lean mi do shloinneadh mórail
Foghnaidh gur e MacDhomhnaill thu. ...
Fuil na Frainge mar an ceudna
Glan a' sìoladh 'nad ghnùis.
Cha tuirt mi, nan leanainn céin thu
Nach tug thu á Éirinn driùchd. ...*

I will not follow your noble lineage,
it will suffice that you are a MacDonald.
French blood likewise flows clean through your visage.
I wouldn't swear that I couldn't find Irish drops
if I were to trace you far back in Ireland. (My translation)

Scholars such as John MacInnes have discussed in great detail how Gaelic literary practice and instincts have been shaped and informed by the medieval professional literati whose primary function was tied to the praise of their patrons and the dispraise of rivals (MacInnes 2006: 28-29, 266, 281). This rhetorical mode pervades the work of Gaelic poets to the present, whether their subjects are people, places or things, and the sense of being engaged in this same set of practices is quite palpable in the literary production of Gaelic North America.

The work of poets was meant to be performed for an audience to convince them of a particular viewpoint and there are a number of examples of versified debates in which one poet's song-poem of praise prompts another poet to respond with a song-poem arguing the opposite stance, not unlike the practice of "flyting" in Lowland Scots. There are examples of poets arguing about merits of the "Old Country" in comparison to the "New World," debating the merits of the landscape of the frontlands of Cape Breton in comparison to the rearlands, disputing the virtues of the Temperance Movement against the convivialities of social drinking and the dangers or the benefits of tobacco, and so on. These too, I would argue, demonstrate that Gaelic poets consciously employed inherited literary genres and modes to express the concerns of their communities in contemporary circumstances.

Iconic Figures and Literary Cultural Signifiers

Any well established literary tradition has a set of literary tropes which repeated use has invested with particular significance and associations. It will also likely have a gallery of role models and accomplished practitioners whose past excellence sets precedents and expectations for those composing creative expressions in the present. These features too are abundantly evident in the Gaelic literary production in North America.

Poems asserting the importance of the Gaelic language often make reference to iconic poets, demonstrate an awareness of a literary canon and exhibit implicit respect for the achievements of the Gaelic literati. An excellent example of this is a poem in praise of Gaelic composed in 1882 by Eóghann Siosal, then living in Hamilton, Ontario. The poet takes pride in the accomplishments of past Gaelic poets to validate the expressive power and historical role of the language in Scotland:

*A' chainnt taitneach gun dad meang oirr'
Anns an do dh'fheuch na bàird bha greannmhor:
Uilleam Ros is Iain Manndach,*

*Ailean Dall nan rann is MacLachlainn.
 Sheinn an Dòmhnallach cliù Theàrlaich;
 Mac an t-Saoir, sheinn cliù nan àrd-bheann;
 Sheinn Rob Donn gu fonnmhor àlainn
 Is sheinn Iain Lom mu bhlàir is mu bhatail.*

The enjoyable language that has no blemish,
 in which the poets who were lively strived:
 William Ross and Stammering Iain,
 Blind Allan [MacDougall] of the verses and [Ewan?] MacLachlan.
 [Alexander] MacDonald sang the renown of [Prince] Charles;
 [Duncan Ban] Macintyre sang the renown of the high mountains;
 Rob Donn [MacKay] sang musically and beautifully,
 and Iain Lom [MacDonald] sang about conflicts and battles. (Newton 2015: 399-401)

These poets are not only from three different centuries (the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries) but belonged to widely dispersed parts of the Highlands, demonstrating the conceptual unity of Gaelic literary tradition. Siosal extends the territorial and chronological reach of tradition by including Eóghann MacColla (“Bard Loch Fine,” as he was known in Gaelic), a poet who had been born in Scotland but emigrated to Canada in 1850. MacColla played a prominent symbolic role in Gaelic immigrant life as a renowned resident poet (Newton 2015: 401-06). Siosal’s poem thus testifies to the vitality of Gaelic literature and its continuity in North America.

Perhaps the most iconic literary characters continued to be Fionn, Oisean and the rest of the Fian band. These mythic figures were understood to embody Gaelic virtues but also to illustrate all too real human foibles (Newton 2009: 58, 120, 169, 327-28). The degree to which Gaels identified with them is remarkable and it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that these literary figures also offered the basis for an oppositional culture and otherwise scarce role models for radical defiance.

An interesting example of their symbolic role is the poem in praise of the newspaper *Mac-Talla* submitted to the 24 June 1893 issue by Aonghas MacAoidh of Rhode Island. Like a string of previous odes to Gaelic newspapers and columns (Newton 2015: 377-80, 389-98, 406-10), *Mac-Talla* is personified as a champion of the Gaelic culture in the heroic mold. The act of literary creation for the immigrant community is likened to the building of a chieftain’s hall in

which songs of praise had been sung in past ages.

*Biodh càch a' seinn an cuid ealan
Mu dheibhin nan gleann 's nam beannaibh
Ach molaidh mise Mac-Talla
Tha 'cur anam 'na mo chainnt.
Guma slàn don Ghàidheal ghaisgeil
'S aoibhinn leam an sgeul a chlaistinn
Do thalla, 'ga dhèanamh farsuing
Ged a thàchdas e 'm fear galld'.
Dèanta fada, farsuing àrd e,
Biodh a bhallachan gun sgàineadh
Gus an cinnich e le Gàidhil
Cho làidir ri fàrdach Fhinn.*

Let everyone else sing their songs about the glens and the mountains,
but I choose to praise *Mac-Talla* who keeps my language alive.
Good health to the valiant Gael,
hearing his tale brings me good cheer;
may you make your halls spacious even if it chokes off the non-Gael.
Let it be long, expansive and lofty;
let there be no breakage in its walls so that the Gaels may develop it to be as strong as
Fionn's abode. (Newton 2003: 111)

Unsurprisingly, there are semantic slippages between literacy and orality in this ode: although *Mac-Talla* was a printed periodical, it is depicted as a stronghold and center of patronage for oral literature, and indeed many items transcribed from living informants appeared on its pages. *Mac-Talla* is portrayed as conveying tales for people to hear (rather than read), and the meaning of this name/word itself – “echo” – asserts the importance of the oral medium. The protective space offered to Gaelic is depicted as taking away the air and breath of the non-Gael, the common enemy of Fionn and the Fian in the old tales.

An interesting linguistic detour seems appropriate here while on the topic of Fenian literature. The late Professor Kenneth Nilsen told me that the Gaelic word he heard used in Nova Scotia for the porcupine – an animal alien to the British Isles – was *torc nimhe* “poisonous boar.” Boars have been extinct in Scotland since about the thirteenth century, but an animal known by this term plays an important role in the popular folk tale about the death of Diarmad and the love triangle between Fionn, Gràinne, and Diarmad. This masterpiece of Gaelic oral literature seems

the most likely vehicle for transmitting the term into North America, making it accessible to Gaelic speakers to be reapplied to a new species.

Just as remarkable is a pair of references to the poet known as “Ó Maoil Ciaráin” in nineteenth-century Gaelic song-poetry from Antigonish County, Nova Scotia. Ó Maoil Ciaráin likely lived in the fourteenth century, possibly on the Isle of Skye, and a lament he composed to his son has been called “one of the masterpieces of medieval Gaelic poetry” (Clancy 1998: 311). It is most likely the enduring influence of this poem that made his name a byword for a father mourning the loss of his son. The first of these allusions in North American poetry of which I am aware is contained in an elegy composed by Iain Domhnallach for a man who drowned in 1856 in Nova Scotia. The distress of the victim’s father, Raonall, is described by way of comparison to the earlier poetic figure:

*... Gum bheil Raonall air liathadh
'S e mar choltas Maol Ciarain;
'S beag an t-iognadh e chrìonadh
Gum bheil an cridhe air a shnìomh às... (Casket 27 August 1857)*

... Raonall has gone grey and resembles Maol Ciarain; it is not a surprise for him to shrivel up, as his heart has been wrenched out of him. ... (My translation)

Another allusion to this literary icon appears in an elegy composed by Domhnall MacGillÌosa to Iain MacGilleathain the next year when he was drowned in the Antigonish river (also in Nova Scotia):

*...Tha athair 'na Mhaol Ciarain
'Ga iarraidh gu deurach;
'Se dh'fhàg a lot cho piantail
'Ga iasgach le spéicean... (Casket 23 April 1857)*

... His father is a Maol Ciarain, seeking him tearfully; the thing that makes his wound so painful is his fishing him out with a shaft. ... (My translation)

Needless to say, literary allusions are chosen carefully and these poets would have only chosen to compare their subjects to Ó Maoil Ciaráin to evoke grief if his name and the story associated with him were known to the audience. This is one of many strong testimonies to the continuity of historical memory in the Gaelic literary tradition in the North American diaspora.

Song-poetry is understood in Gaelic society to be an effective medium for a range of personal and social purposes: to mold public opinion about social and political issues, to shame people for transgressing cultural norms and expectations, to commemorate communal experiences and achievements, and so on. All in all, poets and their compositions have an inherently social role in Gaelic society although their effectiveness depends on the eloquence and artistry of the text. That Gaels were conscious of these high standards and capacities is manifest in self-deprecating formulas such as “*Nam bu bhàrd mi... (if I were a poet...)*” that appear in song-poems, especially at the beginning or end of those on a weighty topic such as death or other communal losses. This self-effacement is also likely to reflect an awareness of the decline of the professionally trained poetic orders of the past.

Reflexive Commentary on Literary Activity

The final category of evidence I wish to examine concerns texts that reflexively and self-consciously comment upon the role, significance and continuity of literary practice in Gaelic communities in North America. This kind of textual self-awareness seems to have become more common with the decline of the vitality of Gaelic and the growing concern of at least a segment of the Gaelic community about its cultural and linguistic future (McLeod 2003: 91-5). As song-poetry has been the primary medium for artful cultural expression for public consumption in Gaelic communities for many generations, it is not surprising to find texts that reflect on this existential crisis and harken back to the literary accomplishments of “bardic culture heroes” of the past.

Domhnall Gobha MacGilleFhaolain (of Cape Breton) composed an elegy for a miner who joined the California gold rush and died there in 1857. This song-poem is an excellent example of how the older Gaelic panegyric code could be extended and developed for non-élite subjects but it also comments fairly explicitly on the role of song-poetry in communal grieving and commemoration:

... *Cuim nach sgaoilte do ghnìomh*
Ann an eachdraidh 's am beul luchd dàin?
Sgeula 's cruaidhe bho'n Iar,
Thu bhith 'd shìneadh air sliabh fo'n chlàr. ...
Tha na Gàidheil an Iar
'Gad chumha 's gum b' fhiach thu e ...

*Och, a dhaoine! Cha bhreug
 Tha mi 'g innse dhuibh sìos le m' dhàn ...
 Aonghuis òig a' chùil duinn
 'S goirt do chuideachd, 's e brìgh mo sgeòil:
 Do mharbhrann 'ga seinn
 'S tusa 'ad shìneadh air beinn an òir. ...*

Why shouldn't your achievements be transmitted in history and in the mouths of singers? The saddest news [story] to come from the West [is] that you lay stretched out on the hillside in the coffin. ... The Gaels of the West are mourning you and well do you deserve it. ... O people! It is no lie that I am recording for you in my poetry ... O young Angus of the brown hair, your companions grieve, that is my tale, your death-song is sung as you are stretched out on the mountain of gold. (Newton 2001: 192-94)

Another poem composed by Domhnall Gobha to the Gaelic poets of Nova Scotia demonstrates that he is aware of the high status afforded to other literary traditions in the wider anglophone world, especially those composed in English, Latin and Lowland Scots. He asserts, however, with a discernible note of defensiveness, that they pale in comparison to that of the Gaels in their native tongue. While Domhnall Gobha is alert to the reputation of Burns, it is surely significant that he places him in an entirely different literary tradition than that of the Gaels.

*Ge bu leòmach Jenny Lind,
 'S i an dùil gun robh i binn gu leòr,
 Cha b' fhearr i na sgreuchail thasg'
 An taice ris na Gàidheil chòir'.
 Tha Virgil cliùiteach 's an Ròimh
 'S Burns sònraichte am measg Ghall;
 Ach dh'fhàs na rannta creimneach truagh
 Bhon thog na baird ruadha an ceann.
 Bha an Dòmhnallach is Mac an t-Saoir
 Beuraidh faobharach 'nan cainnt;
 Ach aos-dàna Chùil a Tuath
 Thug e buaidh orra gun taing.
 Ma gheibh a' Bhanrighinn a-mach
 Talantan nam fear ud is an luach
 Cuiridh i steamer gun dàil
 Gan toirt sàbhailt bharr a' chuain. (MacLellan 1891: 6; Dunbar 2008: 93)*

Although Jenny Lind is lavish and she believes that she is plenty musical, she is no better than the howling of a ghost in comparison to the fine Gaels.

Virgil is famous in Rome and Burns is distinguished amongst the Lowlanders; but their verses have become rough and crude since the red-haired [Gaelic] poets have appeared.

[Alasdair mac Mhaighstir Alasdair] MacDhomhnaill and [Donnchadh Bàn] Mac an t-Saoir were sharp-tongued and edgy in their language; but the poets of the northern nook [of Cape Breton] have outdone them nonetheless.

If the Queen finds out the talents and worth of these men she will send out a steam-boat immediately to bring them safely across the ocean. (My translation)

Like poems discussed previously, Domhnall Gobha names several iconic Gaelic poets from the eighteenth-century Highlands before moving forward to his own era in Canada. His conceit that the superlative poetic abilities of the Nova Scotian Gaels are worthy of royal patronage may only be hyperbole meant to test our suspension of disbelief, although the note of self-confidence is striking.

While the oral dominant nature of the literary tradition was not an inherent problem for Gaels, the underdeveloped state of Gaelic print culture was certainly perceived as a shortcoming by anglophones and Gaels became increasingly and painfully aware of this perception. The Gaelic periodical *An Gàidheal* was founded in Toronto in 1871 by Aonghus MacNeacail. The very first page of the first issue implies that the periodical hopes to provide a corrective for the negative stereotypes about Gaelic literacy and literary activity:

Tha an Gàidheal òg so a cur failte chridheil air gach co-bhrathair Gaidhealach, air feadh an t-shaoghail fharsuing, a thuigeas an canain a tha e labhairt.

Bha e na fhìor dhuilichinn linne, bho chionn fada, nach robh paipeir na leabhar sam bith de'n t-sheorsa so aig na Gaidheil nan cainnt mhaithreil (eadhon an Alba fhein) ni a tha na Goill gu minig le tair a cur an ceill, mar dhearbhadh nach 'eil an cainnt no na sgrìobhuidhean againn airidh air an cur a mach no 'n cumail air chuimhne ann an leabhraichean no paipeirean naigheachd agus nach robh anns na Gaidheil ach sluagh fiadhaich, borb, aig nach robh suim da leithid.

This young Gael sends a heart-felt welcome to each fellow Gael throughout the wide world who understands the language that he speaks.

We have considered it a true hardship, for a long time, that the Gaels did not have any newspaper or book of this kind in their mother tongue (even in Scotland itself), a situation that English-speakers frequently express with contempt as proof that our language and our literature are not worthy of putting out or recording in books or in newspapers, and that Gaels are merely a wild and barbarous people who placed no importance in such matters. (My translation)

The first (and probably only) issue of the Gaelic periodical *An Sgrùdair*, apparently edited by Rev. Niall MacAoidh of St. Elmo, Glengarry, Ontario in 1894, states very similar intentions:

... *Tha e air a mheas le beagan de chairdean na Gailig ann an Gleannagarraidh gum biodh e ro iomchuidh oidhirp a dheanamh air son a' Ghailig a chumail beo. Mar a bi muinntir a' leughadh Gailig gu tric bidh iad cunnartach air fas meirgeach ann an litreachas na Gailig...*

Gu dé a' mhisneach a tha aig foghlumaich litreachas na Gailig a leantuinn, agus oidhirp a dheanamh air sgrìobhadh innte mur a cuidich luchd-leughaidh leo? Agus is ni cinnteach mur a bi canan air a sgrìobhadh agus air a leughadh nach bi i fada beo.

...

... Some of the friends of Gaelic in Glengarry thought it would be very appropriate to make a concerted effort to keep Gaelic alive. If people do not read Gaelic regularly they will be in danger of becoming rusty in Gaelic literature...

What encouragement will students have to follow Gaelic literature, and to make the effort to write in it, if a readership will not help them out? And it is a sure thing that if a language is not written and read, it will not live long. ... (My translation)

Those who worked to preserve Gaelic oral literature understood that cultural continuity in immigrant communities is difficult to maintain without historical and literary memory. A statement of this nature appears in the preface to the Gaelic poetry anthology *Fàilte Cheap Breatainn*:

The object of the present work is not to make money, but simply to preserve a record of songs and sentiments which otherwise would fade into fast forgetfulness. In fact the publication of such a work as this in this country is much more of a pecuniary burden than a profit. But if I save from oblivion anything of historical interest or poetic merit, and especially if I put in permanent form any tribute to the memory of deserving men who have gone before us, my aim shall have been accomplished. (MacLellan 1891: viii)

These kinds of aims were commonly written into the constitutions of Gaelic societies; most of them simply copied their mission statements from the Highland Society of London, originally established as the “Gaelic Society of London” in 1778 (Newton 2010: 66). The Gaelic-centric goals of these organizations were difficult to maintain over time given that Gaelic tended to weaken quickly over successive generations who were increasingly unable to uphold linguistic and literary ideals. Periodic conflicts between members caused them to revise constitutions or priorities, or even break off and form new organizations (Newton 2003: 98-101; 2015: 423-31).

In his address in 1892 to the newly founded Comunn Gàidhealach New York, Domhnall MacMhuirich, formerly of Glasgow, expresses joy that Gaels of the city had banded together to sustain their ancestral inheritance, especially in the form of language, literature and music:

*Tha mi toilichte cluinntinn gum bheil fìor Ghàidheil a-measg a' chomainn seo tha déidheil air litreachas, cànan, is ceòl ar n-athraichean, agus seann chleachdainnean Gàidhealtachd na h-Alba chumail beò agus ged tha sinn fada air falbh bho thìr nan àrd bheann, bitheamaid duineal, grunn-dail, cairdeil agus bàigheil ri càch a chéile.
(Oban Times 2 May 1892)*

I am happy to hear that there are true Gaels in this society who are passionate about keeping the literature, language, and music of our ancestors, and the ancient traditions of the Scottish Highlands, alive, and although we are far away from the Highlands, let us be brave, well-grounded, friendly and caring to one another. (My translation)

Literary activity seems to have been a particular interest to members of Comunn Gàidhealach Inbhir-Nis (in Cape Breton), which was active in the 1920s. Poet Calum MacGillÌosa composed a song for the society in memory of Donnchadh Bàn Mac an t-Saoir and his poetic legacy which comments upon the importance of the literary imagination in maintaining linguistic vitality and cultural allegiance:

*Fhir a rugadh an Druim Liaghairt
Bu tu fhéin an Gàidheal ciatach
'S tha sinn móran ann ad fhiachan
Air son briathrachas do bheòil. ...
Ged tha sinn an so an dràsda
Ann an Albainn Nuaidh a' tàmhachd
Dh'aindeoin drip an t-saoghail, 's ànradh,
Cha bhi Donnchadh Bàn air chall.
Théid sinn a Bheinn Dòrain còmh' riut
O'n an tric a rinn thu tòrachd ...
'S iomadh cuideachd àluinn uasal
Bheireadh cuireadh dhut o d' bhuadhan;
B' e do dhòigh bhith 'g gabhail dhuanaig
Nuair chuirte mu'n cuairt an dram.
Caithidh sinn nochd na h-uairean
Togail cliù is onair suas dhuit ... (Gillis et al. 1939: 52-3)*

O man who was born in Druim Liaghairt, it is you who is the attractive Gael and we are greatly in your debt for the utterances of your mouth. ...

Although we are now living in Nova Scotia, [and] despite the commotion of the world, and hardship, Donnchadh Bàn won't be lost [to our memory].

We will go to Ben Doran along with you, as you often went after it ...

There's many a handsome and noble company who would offer you invitations because of your talents; it was your custom to sing ditties when the dram was sent around.

Tonight we will spend the hours praising and honouring you ... (My translation)

MacGillÌosa assures us that literature is a vehicle of the imagination that will be able to bridge the gap between Donnchadh Bàn and the contemporary audience, a rift not only of geography (between Scotland and Nova Scotia) but also of economic development (urbanization) and experience. It's also interesting how MacGillÌosa asserts the prestige of Donnchadh Bàn, and of Gaelic poetry by association, through the validation of the many high-status groups who sought the company of this poet. Perhaps this reveals self-consciousness about the vulnerability of Gaelic which organizations such as this sought to address.

Probably the longest and most elaborated literary statement in North America about the development of Gaelic came from the pen of Aonghas MacAoidh, a frequent contributor to *MacTalla*. While I would not rank this poem as having great artistic merit, that is not particularly important: MacAoidh is praising the work of the Gaelic literati in maintaining the language and its literary tradition, and he is doing so in the language and literary medium itself. The medium is certainly part of the message here.

(1) *Gur dlùth mo smaoin*

Air na laoich bu ghaisgeile

A rinn bhuainn aomadh

An taobh nach faicear leinn;

A chosg an tìde,

Gun suim de bheartas,

Ach a dh'fhàg an inntinn

Mar dhìleib againne.

(2) *Gu balbh 's an uaigh*

Is ged is fuar an leabaidh i,

Cha d'thug i buaidh

Air na h-uasail ghaisgeil ud:

Tha guth am buadhaibh

'S na cluasan againne

Cho binne 'ga luaidh

'S a bha nuair 's an d'abradh e.

- (3) *B' e rìgh na còisir*
An Leòdach tighearnail
Tha nis' mar lòchran
A' seòladh slighe dhuinn;
An Tormod òg thu,
Mac còir an Sgitheanaich :
Tha cainnt a bheòil
A' toirt sòlas cridhe dhuinn.
- (4) *'S an eilein riabhach*
Mun iadh na cladaichean,
Bha Mac Dhunléibhe
Is bu treun an gaisgeach e;
Bidh cuimhne bhlàth air
Mar bhàrd is mar eachdraiche;
Ged thugadh pràmh air
Le smàig nan Sasunnach.
- (5) *'S an eilein Ìleach,*
Mas cuimhne cheart e leam,
Bha 'n sgoilear grinn
A thug dhuinn am faclair;
Bu mhath an nì
Ri mo linn, nan tachradh e,
Gun drei'dh clach chuimhne
Bho's cinn an Ailpeinich.
- (6) *Tha fear 's an àireamh*
Is cha b' àite 'n deireadh dha,
Is a dh'fheumas dealradh
Gu bràth nar n-eileamaid;
A dh'oidich Sàr Obair —
Chinn air bardaibh:
Mac Coinnich Ghearrloch,
An Gàidheal eireachdail.
- (7) *Bha 'n t-Ollamh Stiùbhart*
Air thùs nan gaisgeach sin,
A thug dhuinn pùngar
Is gur mùirneach againn e
Le facail shùbailt
Nam buadhar lùthaidh
Is nan gnìomhar ionnsaicht',
Mo rùn am Peartach ud.

(8) *Rinn Collach suairce*
Le bhuaidhaibh fiosrachail
Dhuinn moran buannachd
Feadh chluan ar litreachais;
Is chuir fearaibh uasal
A chinnidh uaimhrich
Le caithream suas da
Clach shuain mar thigeadh dha.

(9) *A dh'aindeoin ceilg*
Agus feirg nan Sasunnach,
Cha d'chuir iad balbh
Air an t-seirbhis ghaisgeil ud;
Bha uaislean calm' ann
Nach d' thug mi 'n ainm dhuibh
Bha 'n t-Ollamh Foirbeis
Is Professor Blackie ann.

(10) *Mac Mhuirich tàireil:*
Chan àgh a ghuidhir dha;
'S e 'ghaol air Mammon
A dh'àraich bruidhinn air;
Tha iad ag ràdha -
Mu[n] d' fhuair e fàbhar -
Tha 'n leabhar cearr ris
'S a bhàrdachd guidheachan.

(11) *Is beag an t-ioghnadh,*
Is an aois a laighe orm,
Ged re'adh mo smaoin
Thun an taobh a chaidh iad;
Ach 's fearr bhith éibhneach
'S an t-saoghal mhathasach
Is sgur de'n caoidh
Is na saoidh am flathanas.

(12) *Mhic-Talla chairdeil*
Nach àicheadh bruidhinn rium
Ged fhuair roimh Àdhamh
'S gach àird, do thighearnas;
Gur òg a bha mi
Mu d' thaigh a' mánran
Is tu seinn nan dàn leam
An Gàidhlig Sgitheanach. (Mac-Talla 6 March 1897)

- (1) My thoughts are firmly on those most heroic leaders who have left this world for the side we cannot see; who spent their time without any financial reward but who left their intellect as a heritage for us.
- (2) There is silence in the grave, and though it is a cold bed, it did not achieve victory over those noble warriors: the voice of their talents is as sweet in our ears to rehearse as when it was first spoken.
- (3) The king of the choir is the lordly MacLeod who is now like a torch showing us the way; you are the young Norman, goodly young son of the Skye-man: what he says gives us solace of heart.
- (4) In the dappled island, which is surrounded by seashore, was [William] Livingston, and a mighty hero was he; he will be warmly remembered, as a poet and as an historian; although he was oppressed by the tyranny of the English.
- (5) In the Island of Islay, if I remember correctly, was the elegant scholar who gave us the dictionary; it would be a good thing if it were to happen in my lifetime for a memorial to go above the MacAlpine man [Neil MacAlpine].
- (6) There is a man in this company, and he should not be in last place, and he needs to be highlighted forever amongst us; he fostered excellent work that nurtured our poets: [John] MacKenzie of Gairloch, the comely Highlander.
- (7) Professor [Alexander] Stewart was in the vanguard of those heroes, he gave us a grammar and we have it joyfully, with flexible vocabulary of the vigorous adjectives and of the learned verbs – the Perthshire man is my hero.
- (8) A civil man of Coll [Evan MacColl?] with his learned talents has given us many rewards throughout the field of our literature; and noble men of his proud lineage with celebration erected for him a gravestone as becomes him.³
- (9) Despite the treachery and the anger of the English, they did not mute that heroic service; there were strong leaders there whose names I haven't given you yet – Professor [Alexander Robert] Forbes was there, and Professor [John Stuart] Blackie.
- (10) Shameful [James] Macpherson: his wish was not for its prosperity; it was his lust for Mammon which caused him to speak out; they say – before he found favor – that the book is false to him and (there are) curses in his poetry.
- (11) It is little wonder with old age heavily on me, that my thoughts have gone in a certain direction; but it is better to be merry in the bountiful world, and to desist from crying, while the elect are in Heaven.
- (12) O kindly *Mac-Talla*, who would not reject my conversation, although every location before Adam was under your power; in the days of my youth I was murmuring around your house as you sang the poems with me in the Gaelic of Skye. (My translation)

The structure of this poem, being an enumeration of Gaelic culture heroes, might be considered a development of the “roll-call of the allies” structural device mentioned previously. Instead of the warriors that formed the subjects of older generations of panegyric, however, these heroes are champions of intellectual and linguistic battlegrounds who resist the antagonistic forces of the anglophone world (note his frequent evocation of English subjugation) and its

economic allure. Gaelic poets are expected to censure those who transgress the cultural norms of the community and towards the end of the poem MacAoidh denounces James Macpherson as a self-aggrandizing con-artist.

MacAoidh ends the poem on a positive note, invoking the conceit that Gaelic was spoken in the Garden of Eden and recalling happy days of his youth when Gaelic oral tradition was strong. The family of the editor of *Mac-Talla*, Eòin MacFhionghain, had emigrated from the Island of Skye and MacAoidh is clearly applauding his efforts to keep the newspaper running despite a chronic lack of subscribers (a frequent note of complaint on the editorial page). I believe furthermore that MacAoidh is implying that there is a succession of literary authority in North America that leads from Scotland to the editor of *Mac-Talla* and those who appear in the pages he edits. Besides praising the resilient literary victors, then, MacAoidh provides something of a “literary charter” to vindicate Gaelic’s independent development in immigrant communities (an idea also present in other poems previously discussed above).³

This poem is also interesting for how it expresses local and national identities and the tensions between them. It manifests a strong sense of regionalism (Gaelic specific to Skye, for example), but the distinction between Scottishness and Gaelicness is never explored, nor the existence of (and long-standing conflicts with) Lowlanders. Only the enmity of the English is present, echoing poetry of the Jacobite era which preserves what John MacInnes has deemed the “notional unity” of Scotland as a primordially Gaelic nation (MacInnes 2006: 4-8, 24, 42, 266-72).

Gaelic poets in North America expressed a complex set of identities in their poetry. For some, especially the least mobile (in economic and geographical terms), identity is highly local and little attempt is made to generalize beyond the original or newly-settled community. Other poets express a strong pan-Gaelic identity, recollecting key experiences and cultural signifiers shared by the communities of the Highlands and Western Islands and stressing difference from the anglophones of the Lowlands and England. Yet others – especially those from the highest economic and social ranks – secured privilege and power through conspicuous service to the British Empire, attempting to carve out a special role for the Gaels in it and minimize any fundamental ethnic incompatibilities. This usually entailed overplaying symbolic forms of ethnicity and relegating the Gaelic language and its literary production to the past (Newton 2015: 68-120, 504-10).

Conclusions

I have demonstrated that Gaelic literary activity in North America is derived directly from a long lineage that has its roots in medieval Scotland. Not only did the authors of these cultural expressions follow closely the precedents established by centuries of trained literati, they were consciously aware of their social roles, of how Gaelic literature embodied linguistic vitality and continuity, and of how their literary interventions affected communal self-esteem and cultural reproduction. While song-poetry has surely been the most robust literary genre with the greatest continuity, immigrant Gaelic communities also produced other genres which have yet to be researched to any degree, especially short stories and dramas (Newton 2013: 127-29). It will be necessary to investigate these artistic experiments before the full story of Gaelic literary activity in North America can be written definitively.

Understanding Scottish literature in all of its diversity and complexity will mean not only being inclusive in terms of language but also in terms of medium and genre. It is too narrow and ethnocentric to assume that only written texts in the form of the novel can constitute great literature: Gaelic-speaking audiences have had quite different practices and norms, and it is clear that their verbal arts served them effectively over a very long period. By accepting Gaelic literary practices on their own terms and as thoroughly Scottish as those of any other linguistic group in the nation, we can further substantiate the idea that Scottish literature continued to serve an important role in immigrant communities in North America – and indeed, it still does, even if in a much attenuated form. The decision of Scotland’s Royal Highland Mod to award the Bardic Crown in 2011 to Loidh MacFhionghain (aka Lewis MacKinnon) of Nova Scotia for his Gaelic verse was a symbolic acknowledgement of this ongoing literary engagement and cultural continuity.

Theresa Meléndez has argued that oral literature deserves consideration in the formation of national canons at the very least because it comprises such a large proportion of a people’s cultural production: “Any definition of literature cannot be considered adequate or complete if it excludes the expressive systems of the majority of its people” (Meléndez 1990: 80). This consideration is particularly important for minoritized people whose marginalization has precluded the development of literacy and effective means of self-representation (in literary and textual terms) in the formal organs of the nation-state.

There are few literary exercises as contested, and as emblematic of problems of exclusion and privilege, as the construction of canons of literature. Paul Lauter observes how power and authority are necessarily implicated in the constitution of a canon of the literature of the United States and the study of it:

We derive aesthetic and historical theories from a selection of works, often lifted from their historical contexts and quite limited in outlook and even form. In general our choice of these texts is rooted in assumptions based on the particular characteristics of our class, race, and sex, reshaped, to be sure, by the powerful influence exerted – especially over those of us from minority or ethnic origins – by the professors of the dominant culture. From this limited set of texts we project standards of aesthetic excellence as well as the intellectual constructs we call “literary history.” ... In the study of marginalized literatures, however, we need to reexamine – even suspend – our assumptions about formal hierarchies and concentrate on discovering the formal conventions that emerge from those literatures themselves rather than from our training as literary practitioners. Conventions of composition and language are, after all, largely culture-specific as well as hierarchic. (Lauter 1990: 12, 22-3)

Similar concerns should be on the minds of those constructing canons and formulating theories to represent Scottish literary production, especially given that scholarship about Scottish Gaelic literature has been very slow to develop exactly because of the political exclusion and cultural marginalization of its speech community in institutions of higher learning and in other formal contexts.

Since the Civil Rights era scholars in the North American academy have utilized the concept of “white privilege” to explain how individuals and institutions have, by default, retrenched and reinforced the advantages of people classified as “white” as the unmarked group to whom benefits and social developments “naturally” accrue. This includes the “production of knowledge” within the academy itself, which, in the past, prioritized the interests and cultural expressions of English-speaking peoples. Revealing and addressing the asymmetrical access to and exercise of power and privilege – in short, issues of social justice – is understood by most humanists in the North American academy to be at the core of their mission.

There has not been an equivalent movement to unseat anglophone privilege in the British academy and to challenge the biases and exclusions in the scholarship produced by it where indigenous communities speaking Celtic languages are concerned (Boyd 2013; Newton et al. 2013). That work on Scottish subjects – history or literature, for example – can be considered

authoritative and yet exclude the Gaelic sources about their topics, as well as their Gaelic dimensions, reveals the institutional entitlement of English (in its various forms) and the marginalized status of Gaelic. These shortcomings have inevitably been transmitted to the practice of related disciplines outside of Britain.

A complete account of Scottish literature cannot afford to leave Gaelic texts unheeded and unexamined but will need to engage these sources and perspectives on their own terms. North American scholars have well-honed tools to examine and appraise both the literary texts themselves and the processes by which they have been integrated into or segregated from the scholarship of the academy, should this body of material catch the attention of those engaged in Scottish Studies. Doing so will help restore an important but long disenfranchised voice to the literary history of Scotland and to a fuller appreciation of its continuing legacy in immigrant contexts.

Endnotes

¹ These and similar issues were discussed in talks and plenary addresses at the first World Congress of Scottish Literatures in 2014, where I first delivered a version of this paper.

² The only exceptions of which I am aware are the short entries in *Encyclopedia of Literature in Canada* (New 2002) and *The Canadian Encyclopedia* (entry for “Ethnic Literature”) online at: <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/articles/ethnic-literature> An online search through the journal *Canadian Literature* using the keyword “Gaelic,” for example, results in only a handful of book reviews but not a single article on the subject; searches through the journals *Studies in Canadian Literature*, *American Literature* and *Early American Literature* produce no results at all. This is not surprising as there does not seem to be a single faculty member in Canada or the United States engaged in Scottish Gaelic literary studies.

³ Eóghann MacColla (Evan MacColl), who I believe is alluded to as “Collach” in stanza 8, was also seen as a personification of the succession of the literary tradition from Scotland to North America. See further discussion in Newton (2015: 401-05).

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