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Abstract
This article is the first analysis of Gaelic sources relating to the involvement of Scottish Highlanders in warfare in North America from the opening of the French and Indian War to the end of the American Revolution. A careful reading of these primary sources — almost totally unknown to historians — can provide a unique window on the sentiments and reasoning of Highlanders regarding these conflicts. This analysis of contemporary Gaelic poetry demonstrates that there is a high degree of continuity and consistency in the ideological framework of the lines of political argumentation from the Jacobite era through the end of the American Revolution.

Keywords
Scottish Highlanders, Scottish Soldiers, Highland Loyalists, American Revolution, Scottish Gaelic Poetry, Jacobitism

Introduction
Some historians have been baffled by the choices made by Scottish Highlanders fighting on behalf of the British Crown during the American Revolution. Why, they ask incredulously, would a people first of all fight for an exiled prince with little hope of winning in Scotland, be severely punished by Hanoverian King George for their actions, and then fight a hopeless battle as British Loyalists in America a generation later? Some have gone so far as to assume that the Highlanders were too simplistic, irrational, or docile to abandon their allegiance to the British Crown rather than throw their weight behind the American revolutionaries.
American historians have been at a loss to explain the loyalty of the Highlanders to the royal cause during the American Revolution. Since many had fought and suffered for the Pretender, and almost all were victims of the recent changes in Scotland for which the government was responsible, one might suppose they would have welcomed an opportunity for revenge.¹

A recent best-selling account of Scots in America, made for a popular market, again touches on this theme of irony:

Recent immigrants, particularly those from the Highlands, tended to choose the Crown. Remarkably, even some of those who had fled in the wake of the Forty-Five remained loyal to the government that had done so much to drive them from their homes.²

The difficulty in understanding the reasons why Highlanders made the choices they did goes back to the American Revolution itself. A correspondent who identified himself only as “Scotius Americanus” wrote a lengthy appeal in the *Virginia Gazette* to Highland immigrants, urging them not to take the side of Britain in the conflict and warning that they were already seen as complicit supporters of tyranny. “Your enemies have said you are friends to absolute monarchy and despotism, and that you have offered yourselves as tools in the hands of administration, to rivet the chains forging for your brethren in America.”³ A letter written in Philadelphia to a gentleman in London attests the near universal support for the Revolution: “Believe me, Sir, these are the sentiments of all degrees of men in British America, a few tattered Scotch Highlanders excepted, who have lately emigrated, and whose ignorance, feudal notions, and attachment to names, keeps them servile and wholly at the beck of their Chiefs.”⁴ Loyalist General Donald MacDonald wrote a letter to American Revolutionary General James Moore shortly before the Battle of Moore’s Creek in 1776, stating that his Highlanders were “not that deluded and ungrateful people which you would represent them to be.”⁵
Duane Meyer seems to have been the first to try to reconstruct the experience from the Highland point of view. Most of his primary source materials were official statements from either the representatives of the British Crown or the American Patriots stating or seeking the support of the Highland immigrants in the conflict. Such texts may or may not reflect the sentiments of the ordinary, Gaelic-speaking Highlanders at that time. While Meyers often attempts to fill out his description of the experiences of the Highlanders in both Scotland and America by quoting poetry, almost all of this poetry was in fact composed by Edinburgh literati in English well after the fact, and cannot be said to reflect contemporary Gaelic attitudes accurately. Even the conclusion of this chapter leaves the reader thinking that the Highlanders were incapable of making sound judgments:

Although the eighteenth century Highlanders were not always consistent in their attitude toward the House of Hanover, they were remarkably consistent in choosing the losing side in civil wars. In three separate conflicts they took up arms. In each war they were defeated. After each defeat they suffered from retributive legislation.

Perhaps it is not surprising that to date little has been done to trace the development of the framework of political argumentation in Gaelic poetry into the era of the wars of British North America, as this corpus is small and scattered. While what accidentally survives of the poetry composed in and about America is fragmentary and perhaps not representative of all that was once in circulation, it does contain a great deal of useful information about contemporary perceptions and attitudes.

These were, of course, complex historical events to which people responded in various ways and it can be dangerous to make too many assumptions or generalizations. What is surprising is that so few historians have been willing to take Gaelic texts
seriously and try to determine the sentiments and reasoning of Highlanders from such primary sources. While these texts, especially poetry, need to be used with caution, they are nonetheless a vital and under-exploited resource for historical research.

**The Jacobite Panegyric Code**

The Fernaig Manuscript was compiled in the late seventeenth century by Donnchadh MacRath of Inverinate of Kintail and contains fifty-nine poems in Scottish Gaelic. It has recently been shown that the poetry in the Fernaig Manuscript was composed by men familiar with the mainstream political and theological arguments in the second-half of the seventeenth century. This confirms that Gaelic poetry has a legitimate role in analyzing perceptions and responses to politics.

The most important systematic analysis to date of the Gaelic songs of the ’Forty-Five and what they tell us about the perceptions and political worldview of their authors and audience is an article by Professor William Gillies. This article, which appeared in the journal *Scottish Studies* in 1991, delineates the political rhetoric in the surviving Jacobite poetry. This material covers the geographical span of the Gàidhealtachd – from Braemar to Sutherland to Argyll — and both “high” and “low” literary registers, and thus is an essential resource for understanding these events from the perspective of those involved. Gillies emphasizes the utility of the Jacobite poetry as a window into the beliefs, hopes, fears, and loyalties of Gaeldom during this important era: “the Gaelic songs of the time can tell us a great deal about the psychology and the motivation of Highland Jacobitism.”

While this poetry deals with national affairs, and indeed international affairs, and touches upon the relationship between church and state, the rhetoric to a large degree
reflects the experience of a strongly patriarchal kin-based society whose small, local units were frequently engaged in various forms of conflict against one another. These literary conventions have been coined the “Gaelic Panegyric Code” by John MacInnes and have been delineated and cataloged by him in detail.\textsuperscript{11}

For the purposes of this article I assume that the thematic analysis of Jacobite poetry has been sufficiently covered in the aforementioned articles. I have devised the following schema based on the aforementioned analysis of Gaelic Jacobite poetry in order to delineate the rhetorical conventions relevant for the discussion in this paper.\textsuperscript{12} The alphanumeric codes of this schema will be used to gloss lines of poetry (on the lines corresponding to the English translation) that employ these themes.\textsuperscript{13}

In summary, the schema consists of six major themes, labeled A through F.

A. The Social Contract
   1. Moral Imperatives
      a. What is còir (‘proper’)
      b. What is ceart (‘right, just’)
      c. What is dligheach (‘necessary, obligatory’)
      d. To be dìleas (‘faithful, loyal’)
   2. Familial Metaphors
      a. Parent - child relationship
      b. Be honorable to fellow family members
   3. Military contract between patron and soldier

B. Precedent and Tradition
   1. Follow heredity and tradition
   2. Follow legendary Gaelic heroes
   3. Follow Biblical examples

C. Win cliù (‘renown’) and be the talk of poets

D. Signs of divine kingship

E. The Wheel of Fortune fated to turn in favor of Gaels

F. Denouncement of Enemies

The role of the leader as the protector, provider, and law-giver for his dependents is particularly salient in Gaelic poetry. The rhetorical framework abounds in terminology and metaphors drawn from clan society reinforcing the social contract (label A), speaking
of the duties inherited from the past and prescribed by honor and shame, of what is côir (‘proper’), ceart (‘right, just’), and dligheach (‘necessary, obligatory’). It also explicitly applies the analogy of familial bonds to those between king and British citizens (label A.2) and rejuvenates the soldier-client relationship by demonstrating the rewards (especially in terms of land-holding) given for faithful military service (label A.3).

The general principle that Gaels follow their hereditary precedents is also articulated, sometimes implicitly by drawing upon figures from the past (label B), whether they originate in Gaelic legend or Biblical texts.

In a self-referential way, the poets promise the soldiers that their actions will provide the subjects for song, winning them cliù (‘fame’) and the praise of poets (label C).

The archaistic symbolism of divine kingship (label D) makes a frequent appearance: the land flourishes under the proper king and deteriorates under an unjust king. It is interesting in this regard to note that in 1745, the year of Charles’ return, harvests really were unusually good.15

As long as they are honorable and upright Christians (and duty to king was a vital aspect of these qualities), the poets stated confidently that Wheel of Fortune would eventually turn in favor of the Highlanders (label E); it was merely a matter of making an earnest effort.16

The vituperation of enemies is an important aspect of asserting self-righteousness, dehumanizing enemies, and establishing moral boundaries (label F). Terence McCaughey has remarked on the way in which the term “rebel,” used to denounce the Jacobites, was turned around by them to denounce the enemies of Prince Charles, as well as used as a
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proud title of distinction. Later poets were to decry the leaders of the American
insurrection as “rebels” and to cast on them the same invectives that were previously used
against Hanoverian enemies. Further motifs will be added to the schema in the course of
discussion, as they do not appear in Gaelic poetry of the Jacobite era.

It is often repeated that the “Gaelic Muses were all Jacobite” and we do indeed
have an impressive legacy of Gaelic poetry supporting the aspirations of the exiled
Stewart line from all over the Gàidhealtachd, including areas nominally protestant and
under chieftains loyal to the Hanoverian kings. It must be remembered, however, that
although little pro-Hanoverian Gaelic poetry has survived, it did once exist. We must
not allow the fervor of Jacobite poetry to convince us that Gaelic rhetoric was specific to
one dynasty rather than generally developed to legitimize a hereditary ruling élite,
especially the monarch. This is underscored by the pro-Hanoverian poetry discussed in
this article that was composed by those who had been engaged in Jacobite activities
(including poetry) during the ’45.

The conventions employed by Gaels when discussing choices for political and
military action do not, in the main, change to any great degree from the Jacobite period to
the end of the American Revolutionary War. It is, rather, a matter of determining how
their relationship to King George changes so that he becomes their new object of
affection, pride, and loyalty. I hope to demonstrate these processes at work by quoting
from this corpus, highlighting the motifs articulated in the poetry, and suggesting how
these experiences affected the Gaelic political worldview.

It must be noted that no poetry has survived that can be said with certainty to
originate in the Highland communities of North Carolina or New York from this period.
Most of the poetry used as evidence in this article was composed in Scotland or by men fighting in British regiments in America. Nonetheless, Highland communities remained relatively intact despite emigration to North America, which reached its peak in the decade before the commencement of the American Revolution. Links between Gaels in America and Scotland remained strong, and it is not too much to assume that this poetry might provide evidence for why Highland immigrants in America chose to remain faithful to the British Crown, like their relations still in Scotland.

As a short aside, let me also note that some poets continued to fan the flames of resistance against the Hanoverian line up to the time of the American Revolution, holding out hope for a Jacobite comeback and even taking side with the American rebels, at least in their rhetoric. What survives of such poetry is small and I wish for the time being to set it aside.

**Gaels in the French and Indian War**

One of the key figures in the social transformation of this period was Simon Fraser (1726-1782). His father, the 11th Lord Lovat, was beheaded for his part in the Jacobite Rising of 1745. The Lovat estate was forfeited to the government but his son went out of his way to recover the family heritage. He was granted a full pardon from the government in 1750, was made a burgess of Inverary in the same year, and was recognized by the Scottish Bar as a lawyer in 1752, joining the prosecution against Seumas a’ Ghlinne that year. The government initially refused the offer of his military services, but in 1757 the young heir won the argument that he would be able to raise a regiment among his clansmen. In less than two months Fraser was able to raise some 582 men.
A song ostensibly in praise of Fraser was composed before the Fraser Highlanders left for Nova Scotia in 1757 to participate in Lord Loudon’s expedition to take Louisbourg. The song contains regret for Fraser’s departure with the young men of the area and conveys concern that their deeds are well-chosen and successful. One stanza refers to the attempts by Charles Edward Stewart to take advantage of Britain’s vulnerability during this conflict and summon Jacobite holdouts for another rising. Neither Fraser nor what remained of the clan chiefs, however, had any intention of ruining their chances at peaceful co-existence within the United Kingdom. The verse refers to a belief that those who wait at home for the return of the warriors are held “hostage” to their honorable action.

B’e ur dualchas fo armadh mòr chliù;  
Fhuair sibh urram nach tràig  
Neach a thig as bhur diedh  
Eadar madainn is an-moch tri cauir!  
Ach sibh-s’ tha ’n iomall na h–Eòrp’  
Dol a thionndadh bhur cot’  
Thug ur luaineis gu lot ur Dùthch’ sibh;  
Bithidh bhur talla fo mhùir’  
Gus an till sibh le clìù  
’S ioma maighdean fo àmhghar bruìte. 24

Your inheritance is great fame in arms;  
You have won glory which will not fail anyone who succeeds you,  
Thrice from morning to night! 26  
But you who are on the edges of Europe who go to turn your coat,  
Your inconsistency wounds your country!  
Your halls will suffer with leprosy, And many a maiden afflicted and grieved  
Until you return honorably. 25

The Fraser Highlanders were engaged in combat at the Battle of the Plains of Abraham and the Battle of Sillery in Quebec and we are lucky enough to have a song that appears to be an eyewitness account of the action. In contrast to the anxiety of the previous song, this piece swaggers with self-confidence:

O ghilean bithibh ullamh, le armaibh guineach,  
Gu làdir, urranta, an onair an Rìgh;  
Mun tig oirme fada, bidh an Rioghachd seo againn,  
O lads, make ready, with death-dealing weapons,  
Strong, intrepid, in honor of the King, This country will be ours before too long.
Is thèid sinn dhachaidh do Bhreatann a-rìs. And we will return to Britain again.

A Dheagh Mhic Shimi na h-Àirde O excellent Fraser of Lovat,
Leat a dh’èireadh buaidh-làrach; You are capable of victory in battle,
Tha thu fuileachdach, dàna — You are ravenous and bold —
Cha b’e d’ àbhaist bhith crion; It was never your custom to be stingy; B.1
Gum faiceam thu ’d àite, May I see you in your proper place,
Le piseach, ’s mòr-ghràsan, With prosperity, and great Divine favor,
Aig Manachainn na h-Àirde In Beauly of the Aird,
Ann an àite Mhormhair Sim, Occupying Lord Simon’s place. B.1
O ghilean bithibh... O lads…

While the substance of the song is not significantly different from that of earlier clan poetry, apart from the enemy being French and the marked appearance of heavy siege artillery, the soldiers now call “Britain” home, rather than their more specific locale. None of this verse from the experience of the Fraser Highlanders attempts to explain the rationale of fighting on behalf of the British Army, but rather implies that they are making a concerted effort to regain pride and status in the eyes of the authorities.

Andrew MacKillop has recently argued against the hypothesis that Highland troops were exploited as a means of winning over erstwhile Jacobites, stating the fact that the “majority of Highland units actually went to families with little or no need to rehabilitate themselves” and pointing out additional reasons why other possible sources of fighting men were passed over. 28 While this may be an accurate analysis of the view of the élite, Gaelic vernacular verse from all around the Gàidhealtachd states time and again that the Highland soldiers will atone for their association with Jacobitism by British military service. This motif of atonement for previous sins will be added to the thematic schema of this paper as label G.
A verse from a song from Badenoch celebrating the return of those soldiers who survived and did not choose to settle in Quebec confirms this desire to win the favor of the King:

'S gun iarr sinn saoghal maireann do ’n Rìgh tha ’s a ’ chathair
'Shliochd rioghal mhic Ailpein bha ’n Albainn o chian.
Gur mòr thug e ’fhàbhar do laochraidh nan Garbh-chrioch
Air sgàth na buaidh-làrach air àrthaich Quebec.29

We will wish the King who is on the Throne a long life,
He is of the royal stock of MacAlpine who was in Scotland of old.
He has shown great favor to the Highland warriors
As a result of the victory on the slaughter-field of Quebec.

Gaelic scholar James McLagan composed an ode for the Black Watch when they prepared to fight in the French and Indian War, c. 1756. His father had been chaplain to the regiment, and he was later to become their chaplain as well. The poem is a long exhortation to the Highland troops, appealing to their sense of tradition as warriors, decrying French aggression, uniting the soldiers with British interests, and assuring them that they could redeem themselves by exploiting their ancient martial virtues. It also contains a surprisingly archaic cosmological motif, that of the Tree of Life:

“Mas òg-laoich sibh a thug gaol,"
Their òighean nan aodann gràdhach,
“Bithibh treubhach ’s buidhnihb saors’
Do mhnathaibh ’s chloinn bhur càirdean […]”

“If you are devoted young soldiers,”
The maidens of loving countenance will say,
“Be valiant and win freedom For the women and children of your relations. […]”

'N sin gabhaidh Craobh na Sìth’ le freumh
Teann-ghreim de ’n doimhne-thalmhainn
Is sinidh geugan gu ruig nèamh,
Gach àird le sèimh-mheas ’s geal-bhlàth.
Bidh ceilear èibhinn eun ’na meanglain
'S daoine le’n cloinn a’ sealbhachadh,
Toradh ’s saothair an làmh gun

Then the roots of the Tree of Peace will Take a firm hold of the earth’s depths And its branches will stretch to Heaven, Delicate fruits and white blossoms in every direction.
The merry music of birds in its branches, Families taking residence, The produce of their labor unfailing Under its soft shadow. […]
haoim
Fo dhubhar caomh a dearbh sgàil. [...]

Bidh cunh’ o'n Rìgh is buidh’cheas tir
'S clìù gach linn gu bràth dhuibh
'Dhion còir bhur tir’ o shannt a’ mhilltir
'S a dhearbh mòr-bhrìgh nan Gàidheal; [...]  

The King’s reward and the gratitude of the land,
And fame will be yours forever,  
For protecting your land from the despoiler’s greed  
And proving the Gael’s great worthiness; [...]  

Ni ’r deagh ghiùlan Deòrsa ’lùbadh
'S bheir e dhuinn ar n-èideadh,
An t-èideadh surdail bha o thùs ann
O linn Adhaimh ’s Eubha;
'S ma bheir e ’n tràth-s dhuinn mar a b’ àbhaist
Ar n-inbh’, ar n-airm, ar n-èideadh,
’S sinn saighdean ’s fearr a bhios ’na bhalg
’S e ’n t-ioc nì Alba dha fhèin dhinn.30  

Your excellent conduct will convince King George to return our uniform,
The cheerful ancient uniform
Since the age of Adam and Eve;  
And if he gives to us our prestige,
weapons, and clothing now, as was our custom,
We will be the best arrows in his quiver,
We will be Scotland’s payment to him.  

From the perspective of the poetry, at least, it was in the process of forging the age-old bond between social leader and dependents with military obligations that the Gaels generally stopped waiting for Charles and learned to love George. The central government had distrusted the Gaels so much as to attempt to keep them continually beyond the pale and to burden them with various regulations and punishments.

Progressive clans such as the Campbells and the MacKenzies had acted as agents of the central government in the Highlands, but poets belonging to such clans had made no attempt to hide their suspicions and resentment of the authorities. Now, however, as soldiers, Gaels enjoyed a sense of participation in the Empire.

Hunter-soldier-poet Donnchadh Bàn Mac an t-Saoir, for example, fought on the Hanoverian side in the Battle of Falkirk, yet he composed a bitter protest about the Act of Proscription and lamented that Charles was not able to take George’s place on the throne.
His poem from c. 1767, when he joined the Edinburgh City Guard, contains a note of resignation:

_Bidh sinn uil’ aig Rìgh Deòrsa_  
’S cha ghòraiche dhuinn  
_O’s ann aige tha ’n stòras_  
_Is còir air a’ Chrùn;_  
_Bheir e ’m pàigheadh ’nar dòrn duinn_  
_’S chan tìrr oirn dad d’a chionn [...]_

We will all belong to George  
And we are not foolish for it,  
For he is the one with the provisions  
And right to the Crown;  
He will give payment to us  
And won’t ask anything for it […]

_A.1.a_  
_A.3_

_Chan eil trioblaid r’a chunntadh_  
_Air muinntir an Rìgh_  
_Ach mireag is sùgradh_  
_’S bhith gun chùram do nì;_  
_Ged a dh’òlainn na galain_  
_A h-uile car a thèid diom_  
_Cha troideadh mo bhean rium_  
_’S cha leig i an t-aran am dhìth. 31_

There are no troubles to recount  
Regarding the King’s people  
But only joy and merry-making  
And a lack of care about wealth;  
Even if I were to drink a gallon  
Every time I moved onwards  
My wife would not argue with me  
Or make me go without bread.

_A.3_

This poem contains the echo of the warrior who fights for the chief who provides him with sustenance and the drink of the communion of war, as well as the implication that it is much easier to live in the service of George than to face the poverty and oppression of Jacobite holdouts. These themes are much expanded in his song to King George III composed sometime after 1760.32 The song emphasizes George’s _còir_ (“right, title”) to the Crown, his just dealing with nobility and common orders, his affection for the Gaels in return for their faithful service, the prosperity of the land in his reign, and the victories of his Empire throughout the world.

In 1772 Simon Fraser petitioned the government for the return of his family estates and was rewarded with them in 1774, ten years before other forfeited estates were restored. A poem attributed to Lachlann MacShuine celebrates the return of the Lovat Estates, delighting in the newfound friendship of King George won through loyal military service. It ends by denouncing the jealous politicians in London who did not wish him
well by casting animal epithets at them and by ridiculing their ineptness in the manly art

of warfare.

Every aspect of your behavior

Earned praise since you were young

Although the Wheel of Fortune

Was for a while quite cross with you

When the country rose

In the foolish intrigue,

The youth were agile

In dispersing George’s encampment

[...]

It is truly a reason for joy

With the King’s command to confirm it

That your entitlements are written down

Despite the ill-will of your enemies;

O excellent, handsome Fraser

You struck blows in the combat,

You brought justice out of the injustice

And you have left your relations

joyous. [...]

You have done honor to our Kingdom

And that is true, without doubt,

And you have made a true friend

Of the very King who once disliked you

[...]

Now where will the filth of the

Hairy vultures go?

Who sat in the place of the Jocks [?]

By perverting justice;

Those men who could not withstand
gunshot

And who could hardly bare a blade,

Although they used rumors to keep

Their favors at court for a while.

But the truth will appear

And let awards be according to deeds;

Often it will wither, like the rank grass,

From the weeds of the dunghill;

But the wheat will rise up

Despite the wild weather’s winds

And that was proved in this case

By all that I have heard.
Gaels in the American Revolutionary War

A number of the soldiers who fought during the French and Indian War were given land grants in America for their services and formed a bridge for a massive influx of Highlanders from 1768 to the beginning of hostilities. Besides these, there were early settlements predating Culloden in North Carolina, New York, and Georgia, the first two of these drawn primarily from protestant Argyllshire. Due to the historical experience of these settlers in Scotland and North America, it is little wonder that they were predisposed to continue in their course of allegiance to the Crown rather than risk losing what they had just managed to gain by loyal military service. The poetic evidence confirms that most Gaels were eager to prove their loyalty and worth to the Crown in combat and that they expected to be rewarded accordingly.

A poem by Maighriread NicGriogair of Struan (Atholl, Perthshire) gives us information about her brothers who settled in America shortly before the Revolution:

*Dèidh dhut gabhair gu socair*  
*Ann am probhans New York*  
*An taobh òrdugh is fòrtain,*  
*Nìn ’s daoine mu d’ dhorsan*  
*Fearann saor air a chosnadh*  
*B’ fheudar èirigh am brosnach ’Righ Alba.*  

After you had settled down  
In the province of New York  
On the side of order and good fortune,  
People and wealth about your home  
Good land being worked,  
You had to go out to fight for the King of Scotland.

*S fhadh ’n úine, cóig bliadhna*  
*S tha e ’nis le riadh ann*  
*On a thòischich miothlachd;*  
*On a thòischich Righ Deòrsa cho dioltach*  
*Tagradh còir air na criochan*  
*Mar chaithdòrach ’riamh dha*  
*S fhada beò e mas diolar dha an t-eanach.*

Five years is a long time  
And it is now longer than that  
Since trouble began;  
Since King George so forcibly began  
Claiming sovereignty over the territory  
As he was ever ordered to do;  
He will live long before fame will be won for him.
Her brothers appear to have resettled in Nova Scotia after the Revolution. At the same time that Highland soldiers were being recruited into British military forces, economic conditions in the Highlands had become quite oppressive. The fact that the Empire needed the soldiers who now had little choice but emigration was a frequent complaint in songs of this period.

Duncan Lothian, another Perthshire poet, prematurely celebrated the victory of the British forces over the American revolutionaries (c. 1777) and implied that the Gaels could make a significant contribution to the conflict on account of their ancient pedigree as conquering heroes:

*Tha an t-Eilean Fad a chean againn*  
'S New York am baile mòr sin  
'S chaidh 'n teicheadh air na Reubaltaich  
'S na ceudan air an leònadh [...]*

*Long Island is already in our possession*  
*And that great city of New York,*  
*The Rebels were driven out*  
*And hundreds have been wounded. [...]*

*Nach fad' on tha na Gàidheil*  
*Ag áiteach na Roimm' Eòrpa;*  
*Nuair choisinn iad le'n claidheamh*  
*Bha naidheachdan gu leòr ann. [...]*

*The Gaels have long been*  
*Inhabiting the continent of Europe;*  
*When their swords bought them victory*  
*They were the topic of much conversation. [...]*

*‘S e Gathulas dàna*  
*Chaidh ‘n Spàinn' ghabhail comhnaidh,*  
*Is thog e bruthach-àirigh ann*  
*Mar bhaile-tàmh do 'sheòrsa [...]’*³⁵

*It was bold Gathulas*  
*Who went to live in Spain,*  
*And he built a hill-side cottage*  
*As a dwelling place for his people [...]*

The victory of Gathulas is understood to provide an exemplar to the Gaelic soldiers then in America. Later in the song the poet warns that the valuable Gaelic warriors might not be available for the Empire to draw upon if circumstances at home did not change for the better.

The pre-Culloden Gaelic settlements in North Carolina were reinforced by recent emigrants who hardly had time to settle down before they were drawn into the conflict.
The name of only one of the Loyalist poets, Iain mac Mhurchaidh, is left to us. While still in Kintail, Scotland, he composed bitter and angry protests against the money-grubbing landlords, encouraging his neighbors to emigrate with him. While he railed against such harsh treatment there is nothing to suggest that he objected to the hierarchical structure inherent in the society that created him or that he was willing to renounce the authority of the British Crown. Like many other Highlanders in North Carolina he joined Loyalist forces and his compositions were said to inspire his fellow countrymen so much that American “rebels” treated him with great severity.

The rallying-cry of the Highlanders at the Battle of Moore’s Creek in North Carolina in February 1776 was said to be “King George and broadswords!” The defeated Loyalists were captured and imprisoned in Philadelphia. In a song apparently composed in prison, Iain mac Mhurchaidh complained that he had done nothing criminal or wrong:

\[
\text{Ach mi sheasamh gu dìleas} \quad \text{Except that I stood loyally} \quad A.1.d \\
\text{Leis an Rìgh bhon bha ’chòir aige.} \quad \text{For the King, because he is in the right.} \quad A.1.a
\]

There is a tradition that a number of renegade Highlanders had joined the Scotch-Irish rebels and that before the two armies gathered for the Battle of King’s Mountain in 1780, Iain mac Mhurchaidh composed a song to try to convince his misguided countrymen of their error. His description of the punishment of traitors calls to mind the treatment of Highlanders after Culloden and produces the sense of anxiety that similar punishment could be meted out again:

\[
\text{Siud an rud a dh’èireas:} \quad \text{The following is what will happen} \\
\text{Mur dèan sibh uile gèilleadh} \quad \text{If you do not all surrender} \\
\text{Nuair thig a’ chuid as trèine} \quad \text{When the strongest forces arrive} \\
\text{Dhe’n treud a tha thall;} \quad \text{Of those men who are now yonder;} \\
\text{Bidh crochadh agus reubadh} \quad \text{There will be hanging and injury}
\]
Several regiments were gathered in the Highlands to fight for the Crown in America, including MacDonald’s Highlanders, the old 76th regiment, who surrendered at Yorktown in 1781 while under the command of Lord Cornwallis. We have a song composed for one of these regiments, most likely the Argyll Highlanders, when they departed for America.

On choisinn iad buaidh dhuinn
Na chuir sinn thar chuan uainn
’S gun d’ lean iad ri’n dualchas gu calma
’S beag mo chiram gun diobair sibh
An cogadh no sri
No gun coisinn sibh mi-chliù do Albainn [...].

As those of you we sent out previously
Have won victory for us
And as you have stuck bravely to your heritage
I have little reason to worry you will desert
Whether in war or in strife
Or that you will bring ill-repute upon Scotland. [...]

’S e mo ghuidhe le dùrachd
Nuair bheir sibh ur cùl rinn
Gun cluinnear ur clìù a bhith ainmeil
Gun seasamh sibh dilis dhuinn
Onair ar sinnsir…

It is my sincere wish
When you depart from us
That your fame will be heard,
That you will defend loyally
For us the honor of our ancestors…

The most long-winded rhetoric about the Revolution was composed by Duncan Kennedy of Kilmelford, Argyll, a schoolmaster, publisher of hymns and collector of Ossianic verse. From internal evidence his song seems to have been written a couple of years before the Treaty of Paris brought a conclusion to the Revolution in 1783. It draws heavily upon the ideology of kinship and upon Biblical allegory to indict the American rebels:

An cuala riamh comhrag nas brònaich’
na th’ann

Has any battle sadder than this ever been heard of
When George had to go and injure his own children?

He who had protected them in his bosom from enemies’ quarrels

And who clothed and fed them when they were young and frail? […]

Their evil could well be compared to the heavy-drinking, prodigal son whose manners were unwise:

Although he was affectionate to his father with joy and love,

Nothing would suffice for him but to have his father’s entire fortune. […]

How great their misfortune since they have rebelled:

The land is barren and the cattle are dying off […]

They are thus on the way of grievous injury to King George

And of greedily devouring all that they owe to him. […]

Who, then, would pity the violent, blood-stained people

That ravaged and oppressed their own parents?

They would slay their brothers in the battle-field without remorse

While their sisters are heartbroken in a flood of tears […]

But the day will yet be seen which will not be merry

For the black(-hearted) rebels who would not keep justice,

On their knees weeping, offering submission to King George.

Repeals and Reconciliation

The Highlanders had proved their loyalty in the conflicts in America, and the London establishment began to acknowledge their debt to these efforts. The London
Highland Society began actively promoting Gaelic poetry and the music of the bagpipe at annual gatherings from 1781 onwards; the Act of Proscription was repealed in 1782, allowing civilian men to wear kilts and the tartan again; the Disannexing Act of 1784 rewarded some of the old Jacobite families with their traditional estates. There are numerous Gaelic songs commemorating all of these events.

It is, I believe, instructive to see how the poets commemorated these legislative acts to see what they believed had been achieved, why the measures against them were relaxed, what they believed their new relationship with king and state had become, and how clear literary allusions to Jacobite songs give a sense of closure to historical events.

There are three basic responses in this poetry. The first is that the Jacobite Rising of 1745 should be forgotten and regarded as a regretful aberration, a foolish mistake now atoned for (forms of the word gòrach “foolish” appear frequently in this poetry, as we have already seen in the poetry of Lachlann MacShuine and Donnchadh Bàn above). The second theme states that since the Gaels have proven their loyalty as British soldiers and their hereditary leaders have been given their lands back, things can return to “normal” (as they were before the ’45) in the Highlands. The third theme is, alternatively, a desire for the Highlands to become mainstreamed into British life, since the Highlanders have proven themselves as capable and deserving as any of the king’s subjects of his affections and favor.

The following poem celebrates the repeal of the Act of Proscription and thus probably dates from 1782. It begins with a roll-call of the clans (the “allies” motif of the Gaelic panegyric code), and continues by stressing the new mutual friendship of the king:
We are all willing to depart with George
Since we have come to an accord $G$
Although we were fleetingly foolish
At the outset of the troubles;
Since we have promised to be faithful
We will be steadfast to him;
Not all of the strength in Europe
Could stand a day against us […] $A.1.d$

If violence comes to King George
I sincerely hope
That when the Gaels rise together
That justice will be at hand […] $A.1.a$

Donnchadh Bàn Mac an t-Saoir also has a poem celebrating the repeal, but it is more a personal salute to the Duke of Montrose (who was a crucial proponent of the legislation) than a statement about its wider cultural or political ramifications. $47$ William Ross, on the other hand, while he begins with a panegyric on Montrose, sings spiritedly about the possibility that the lifting of the ban will lift the ardor and self-confidence of the Highlanders themselves, even implying the possibility of revolting against the Hanoverian rulers. $48$

The material from the 1784 repeal is even more interesting. The first poem here examined was composed by Alasdair Cameron, who seems to be the very same poet who composed a Jacobite drinking song to Cameron of Lochiel after the victory at the Battle of Falkirk. He was later the first official poet of the Highland Society of Scotland. $49$ This later Hanoverian song is also written as a drinking song, in which each of the heroic chieftains is toasted (like an intoxicating variation on the “allies” motif), until at the end the poet imagines that the Gaelic community has been reintegrated by his invocation:

Now that you have received what is proper,
Each young, manly, generous hero:
Rebuild your habitations

$A.1.a$
theud.

And be mindful of celebration and

minstrels.

Every old custom will come into use

And be strongly, generously, with a welcome,

Harping skills, with bardic craft,

To be sung on each dear location [...]

Poet Margaret Cameron (originally from Lochaber, but latterly resident in

Perthshire) also rejoiced at the return of the estates, hoping that Cameron of Lochiel
could restore his land and tenants from the damage she perceived to have been done
during the management of the Forfeited Estates, particularly by commissioner Henry

Butter. Her book opens with this poem:

'S e naidheachd ùr fhuair mi 'n dràsta
O làimh Rìgh Deòrsa anns na
Gàsaidibh
Rinn mo chridhe ris mòr-ghàirdeachas
Gach oighre dligheach bhith faighinn
àite.
Chaill ar sinnsir sud le 'n gòraich
'S cha chion aithne bh'orr' na foghlum
Mhàin nach gèill e iad le 'm beò-
shlàint
Ach le Teàrlach an aghaidh Dheòrsa.
Chaidh chuid do'n Fhraing 's cuid
do'n Òlaint
Chaidh cuid 's an fhairge sios le
dòilinn
Chaidh cuid eile reubadh beò dhiubh
As leth a' Phrionnsona dh'fhalbh air
fògradh
Nis o fhuair sibh an Righ co dileas
'S gun d'thug o'n Bhòrd dhiubh litir
sgriobhta
Air an fhearran bh'aig ar sinnsir
Chaoidh chan fhàig sibh e gu dilinn [...]
Dh'fhalbh do ghiùsaich 'na duslach
fhàsaich

The latest news I have just had
From the hand of King George,
appearing in the Gazettes,
My heart welcomes it greatly,
That every proper heir will have his
place.
Our ancestors lost all with their foolishness
It was not due to a lack of learning or experience
Just that it would not yield them alive
Except to Charles against George.
Some went to France, some to Holland,
Some went down in the sea in storm
Some others were torn apart
On behalf of the Prince who went into exile

Now since you have found the King so faithful
That he has given you a letter from the office
For land once possessed by our ancestors
You will never ever leave him [...]
Your pine-wood has become a dusty desert
Donnchadh Bàn Mac an t-Saoir’s song about the Act follows much this same pattern, regretting the foolishness of the Jacobite Rising, claiming that the King and his Highland followers are now in accord with one another, he has made loyal followers (dílsean) of his former exiles, and that “thaìníg còir agus dh’fhalbh an eucoir [justice has come and injustice has gone].” The poem that he composed and entered in the Highland Society’s Gaelic competition in the year 1785 also contains some comments about the Act, hoping that the Highlands will be revitalized (e.g., now no tenant need be in distress since the old social system has been restored).

Poetess Maighrired NicGriogair (mentioned above) composed a song celebrating the return of hereditary estates to Colonel Alexander Robertson of Struan (the 15th chief) in 1784. She opens her poem by recounting the loss of Culloden, her verses clearly bearing the influence of Iain Ruadh Stiubhart’s Culloden songs. The rejoicing at the return of clan lands, then, emphasizes that the whole regrettable Jacobite affair has come to a conclusion.

'S do lath-sa, Chùil-lodair,
Dh'fhàg dochainn aig na Gàidheil
'S liuthad fearann
Chaill an earras 's an àiteach
B'èiginn teicheadh air astar
Cian fada o'n càirdean
'S iad gun mhànas gun aitreabh
Mur déant' an taic anns an Fhraing
dhoibh [...]  
'S iomad bean bha 'na bantraich

It was your battle, Culloden,
That left the Gaels wounded,
Many lands
Lost their wealth and their habitations
It was necessary to flee into exile
Far away from their relations
Without a manse, or dwelling
Had France not given them support
[...] 

Many a wife who was a widow
A poet whose name appears as Ioin Donn, a resident of Glasgow, wrote and printed a poetic pamphlet in 1785 celebrating the repeal of the Proscription and Forfeited Estate Acts. I believe that this is the same poet whose two poems appear at the end of the Turner Collection, where he is named as Iain Brùn, seanchaidh do Phrionnsa nan Gàidheal “learned-man to the Prince of the Gaels.” While it would be easy to assume that this title refers to being in the service of Prince Charles, it was claimed that he held the office (official or unofficial) of Royal Genealogist to King George IV.

In any case, the poem in the pamphlet begins by celebrating the kilt and associating it with famous historical figures. He goes on to lament the fall of the Stewarts and their followers:

\[
\begin{align*}
B' iad oighreachan nan Stiubhartach & \quad \text{Let me state, it was the Stewart heirs} \\
Deireamsa fhuaire an droch ghnàthach' & \quad \text{That were treated roughly} \\
Luchd chaiteamh an trusgair rioghail & \quad \text{The people who wore the royal clothing} \\
\quad & \quad \text{Our taxes were few in their day.} \\
Bu tearc ar cisean 'nan làithibh. & \quad \text{For three hundred and forty-three years}
\end{align*}
\]
The poem continues by praising the heroic ancestor of the contemporary Duke of Montrose, whose political influence was understood to be instrumental in the repeal of the Act of Proscription:

It is now time, the poet implies, to leave the Jacobite past in the museum of history and to embrace the status quo of the British polity:

- Let us now forget about every fact that is bitter to hear.
- Let us recite a poem of praise in unity for the clothing that was our custom.
- Let us give thanks to God of Peace who governs everything as he pleases through Providence who has brought back, through our ancestor’s estates to our relations.
- Long live the King and the nobles who have shown us mercy, peace and justice who have made us as other Britons in both islands and mainland.
- Another joy is close at hand: we will have the Scriptures in our own tongue and we will have cities in our land that had nearly become a desert.
- The Gaels will not emigrate and will no longer be as thralls,
Bidh saibhreas is pailteas 'nar dùthaich
'S oighreachan mo rùin 'nan àros.

We will have wealth and plenty in our land
And the heirs I adore in their homes.

Thugamaid taing do'n Rìgh ta againn
Guidheam fallain 's fada beò e —
A thoirt air ais na bhuin a sheanair
O theaghlachd bu shine na Hanòver.

Let us give thanks to our current King
I wish him health and long life —
For giving back what his grandfather took away
From a family older than that of Hanover.

A poem by an obscure Scottish poet, Domhnall MacCoinnich, on these events appears to have been composed as an entry in a competition for an organization he names as Luchd Ath-Bheòthachaidh na Bardachd Ghàidhealach (“Revivers of Gaelic Poetry”). The poem, it must be said, is a conscious attempt to use archaistic words and antiquarian devices. It is interesting that he opens by referring to a meteor in the sky, read as a sign of the fulfillment of a prophecy. This is clearly an allusion to the star that signified the birth of Charles, but the motif has been co-opted by the Hanoverians:

Ghluais fair chuan, o thuath, an-uiridh
An comh-uair air fuasgladh dhuinne
Riolunn luath mar luaidh a gunna
Sgaoil i buaidh mu’r cruachaibh mullaich
Beachdaichibh an ceann na bliadhna
Gur teachdaire bh’ann o’n Trianaid
Dol seachad ’na deann ’san iarmailt
Dheachdnadh gum bu teann ar miann oirnn.

Last year, across the ocean, there moved
A speedy meteor, like a shot from a gun,
The hour has been revealed to us
It has spread its influence around our hills
Take note at the end of the year
That it was a messenger from God Going quickly by in the skies
That would inspire us to hold to our hopes.

’N fhàsinnneachdsa nis co-lionta
Tha Gàisidean tric ’gan sgrìobhadh
Gach àite bheil mic no siolach
Nan Gàidheal, thoirt fios nam fitheach dhoibh […]

The prophecy is now fulfilled
The gazettes frequently are being written
In every place where there are Gaels
To give them foreknowledge […]

Tha na Dée a-nis an sith riunn
Cha bhi euradh mios no ni oirnn

The Gods are now at peace with us
We will not be denied respect or wealth
This poem, then, brings closure to grievances by reclaiming the harbinger of the Gaels’ salvation, the star anticipated by Gaelic prophetic tradition. The previous star that heralded Charles Edward Stewart, implies the poet, was not the true star; the new star pointing to George of Hanover should instead be heeded, heralding a new peace and a new relationship between the Highlands and the rest of the United Kingdom.

Conclusions

I have claimed, judging from what survives from the period between the last Jacobite Rising and the American Revolution, that there is a high degree of continuity in the ideological framework of Gaelic poetry. This is essentially the rhetoric of the Gaelic
panegyric code created during the era of traditional clan society when endemic warfare reinforced the primacy of aristocrat-warrior relationships.

I should qualify this claim with the observation that the post-Culloden Hanoverian poets generally seem to have worked themselves into a rut of merely magnifying the old conventions on an Imperial scale; they tended to drone on about the relationship between ruler and soldier-client, the might of the Hanoverian dynasty, and George’s right to the Crown. There is little effort to explain the ideology of Empire, the consequences of invasion and conquest, or the compromises necessarily made by the Gaels in the Imperial Order. This poetry is essentially an attempt to reconcile the loyal Gaelic soldier with the new scheme of things, to fuse him to the new embodiment of authority and to celebrate uncritically the military gains accomplished by Highlanders on behalf of the Empire.

One occasionally finds in the poetry celebrating soldiers and military participation overweening pride in the boldness and manliness of Gaelic troops in comparison with their fellow Britons, but generally gone from military poetry are the disparaging remarks about the Lowlanders and the English (generically *luchd na Beurla*). On the other hand, people throughout the Gàidhealtachd (including Presbyterian ministers!63) continued to sing Jacobite songs with great delight.

The only genre of Gaelic poetry in which resentment towards *luchd na Beurla* is expressed frequently and systematically is in protests against the Clearances. These poems, significantly, express a sense of betrayal regarding the fact that despite being loyal to the British order at home and on the battle field, the Gaels are being evicted from their lands. The implicit contract of military service in return for land-holding is made explicit in this context. If the King is the sovereign of the domain, and people are doing
their duty to him in exchange for occupying the land which is ultimately in his sovereignty, then their being forced from it is a breach of an ancient social contract.

The continuity in the Scottish Gaelic political literature discussed here demonstrates the malleability of Jacobite rhetoric. Poets composing in changed political circumstances could use terms such as ceart and còir, of course, just as easily in reference to Hanoverian leadership as previous generations had used them to support the Stewart cause. The overwhelming reorientation of the Scottish Gaelic literati toward the Hanoverians contrasts strongly with the productions of the Irish literati, who show no such change of heart. This represents a major cleavage in Jacobitism between the two sides of Sruth na Maoile, a divergence that could only widen as Scottish Highlanders committed themselves to the role of soldiers of the Empire, whether they fought to reinforce its authority in North America or Ireland.

Despite the force and conviction of a sizeable corpus of pro-Imperial material, there is also evidence of criticism of and protest against Empire and the military in Gaelic poetry, and grappling with these complexities was to spur on the innovation of Gaelic poetry in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

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Endnotes

3 Virginia Gazette 23 November 1775.
5 The Celtic Monthly 8 (1900): 107.
7 Ibid., 161.
8 There is one potentially importance source which I have not been able to consult. The Scottish Gaelic Union Catalogue (item 1975) lists Pàraig MacGhilleain, Dann Gàidhealach (1784), as being housed in the General Record Office in Edinburgh. Neither the GRO nor the National Library of Scotland, however, know anything of its whereabouts.
12 I have left out motifs that were only relevant to the Jacobite Risings and did not re-occur in the American context.
13 Damhnait Ní Suaird’s taxonomy has appeared since the time that I devised my own schema. While hers is more complete and detailed for Jacobite poetry as a whole, mine is more specifically tailored to the corpus at hand.
14 Gillies, 21-2; Ní Suaird, 122-9.
15 Gillies, 23.
16 Ibid., 26; Ní Suaird, 104, 116.
18 Gillies, 20-1.
For some of this surviving material, see *We’re Indians Sure Enough: The Legacy of the Scottish Highlanders in the United States.* (Richmond: Saorsa Media, 2001): 52-6, 114-118.


The stanza seems to me to be slightly corrupt in terms of rhyme, especially in comparison with other stanzas, and I believe that a couple of minor shifts of words have fixed all but rhymes with *trì* and *cuairt* and *àmhghar*. Given the political nature of statements made in it, it arouses my suspicion but not sufficiently to warrant excluding it entirely.


This seems to be an allusion to a legendary feat of one of his Fraser ancestors.

Newton, *We’re Indians Sure Enough*, 103-4, 125, 126.


MacLeod, 26-33.


Newton, *We’re Indians Sure Enough*, 57-8.

For biographical information about Iain mac Mhurchaidh see Margaret MacDonell (ed.). *The Emigrant Experience.* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982): 26-32. I have pointed out that there is a great deal of evidence that suggests that he is not the author of all of the poems attributed to him while in North Carolina in Michael Newton, “In Their Own Words,” 14-23.


*The Celtic Monthly* 8 (1900): 134.

This song seems to have been modeled on an earlier song, *Is fhada mi ‘m ònaran* (see Michael Newton, *We’re Indians Sure Enough*, 283, note 94; Michael Newton, “In Our Own Words,” 20-1). The “standard” song text might reflect the conflation of two traditions, one holding that Iain mac Mhurchaidh was in prison, the other that he was an outlaw on the run (*fo’n choille*).

Newton, *We’re Indians Sure Enough*, 143; MacDonell, 52.

Newton, *We’re Indians Sure Enough*, 142; MacDonell, 50.

Newton, *We’re Indians Sure Enough*, 147, 148.

Newton, *We’re Indians Sure Enough*, 151, 152, 154, 157, 158.

This is my hypothesis because the song is entitled *Òran mu Bhreacan an fhèilidh a bhith air a thoir air ais do na Gàidheil* (“A Song about the Kilt having been returned to the Gaels”) and because there is no reference to the return of the heritable estates.
Defined in MacInnes.


MacLeod, lines 3484-3571.


Ibid., 256. It is curious that Campbell did not mention the booklet of poetry composed by Alasdair Cameron, unless this is another active poet of the same name from the same area, which does not seem likely. See also Ronald Black, “The Gaelic Academy: The Cultural Commitment of the Highland Society of Scotland,” *Scottish Gaelic Studies* 14 (1986): 7.


Marairead Cham’ron. *Òrain Nuadh Ghàidhealach*. (1785): 1, 2.

MacLeod, lines 3572-3707.

Ibid., lines 4296-4300.

Macintosh, 53-5.

According to the information provided by “Fionn” (Henry White) in *The Celtic Monthly* 19 (1911): 105, he was born at Inverchaolain in 1739 and died in Edinburgh in 1821. His last poem is dated 1799.

Ibid.


Ibid., 17.

Ibid., 18, 23, 25.

As their comments were printed in the booklet, Rev. Donald MacNicol of Lismore and Rev. Charles Stewart of Strachur would seem to be members of this society, which is likely to have been related in some way to the Highland Society of Scotland (see Black, “The Gaelic Academy,” 16).


Personal communication, John MacInnes.