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'*CO-AINM NA TACA SEO AN-UIRIDH*': DUGALD MACNICOL'S CARIBBEAN LAMENT FOR ARGYLL

Nigel Leask and Peadar Ó Muircheartaigh

The focus of this essay is Dugald MacNicol's Gaelic song "*Co-ainm na taca seo an-uiridh*" ("On this day a year ago"), written on the Caribbean island of St Lucia, on 15th November, 1816. It is the eighth in a series of Gaelic songs composed between 1810 and 1816 by MacNicol (1791–1844), an army officer who spent most of his adult life stationed in the West Indies. A native Gaelic speaker from Argyll, Dugald was the eighth son of the celebrated Rev. Donald MacNicol of Lismore (1735–1802), who had died when Dugald was still a boy. After his father's death Dugald was raised by his mother Lilias Campbell and his uncles in the town of Inveraray, and at the family's farm of Achlian between Dalmally and Loch Awe. In November 1809, sponsored by Colonel Charles Turner of Maam in Glenshira near Inveraray, he obtained a commission as an ensign in the Royal West India Rangers, in which Turner was a lieutenant-colonel (another notable Highland soldier, David Stewart of Garth, held the same rank).[1]

Despite the miltary distinction of its colonels and "Royal" designation, the Rangers were one of the British army's three penal or "punishment" battalions, its ranks composed of white deserters, defaulters, or criminals. MacNicol's long military sojourn in the Caribbean is explained by Roger Buckley, who writes that the Rangers were "condemned to perpetual service in the West Indies, unlike the other regular regiments, which served only five years in the region before being withdrawn to other stations."[2] As an impoverished minister's son from a numerous family, a "non-pay" commission in such a tainted regiment might have been Dugald's best option in 1809, as service in the disease-ridden tropics was an unattractive prospect for officers with better financial backing and social connections. After the Rangers were disbanded in 1819, he remained in the West Indies as a half-pay officer until 1827, when he was able to purchase a captaincy in the socially-prestigious First Royals (Royal Scots Regiment).[3] It has been assumed that Dugald served his whole military career in the Royals: the New Army List for 1840 certainly shows him as having been commissioned into the First Royals in November 1809.[4] Consultation of the relevant Army Lists for 1809 and 1810 however reveals that this was not the case: either Dugald had carefully airbrushed out his early years of service in the unrespectable Rangers, or the Army Lists contain a retrospective error.

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[1] PRO Army Lists, "Royal West India Rangers," WO65/61, 312.

[2] Roger Buckley, *The British Army in the West Indies: Society and the Military in a Revolutionary Age* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 1998), 232. Thanks to Domhnall Uilleam Stiùbhart for generously sharing his research on Dugald MacNicol's military career, and for challenging our initial assumption that he was commissioned into the Royal Scots in 1809.

On 28th March 1810 Dugald sailed from Greenock for Barbados, and saw service (mainly garrison duty) in Dominica, Guadeloupe, and St Lucia during his years with the Rangers, and also after 1827 in Ireland and Canada with the Royal Scots.[5] There was nothing remarkable about MacNicol's military career, attested by his glacial progress up the ranks from ensign in 1809 to half-pay major in 1841, when he retired from the army just a few years before his death in Scotland in 1844.[6] He didn't see much action in the Caribbean during the Napoleonic war, although as an officer in the Royals he saw action during the Canadian rebellion of 1837. He may have witnessed "Bussa's Revolt" in Barbados at Easter 1816, one of the biggest uprisings of enslaved people in the British colonies in the decades before emancipation, but there is no evidence to confirm that.[7] Judging from his will, drawn up in Inveraray in 1843, he nevertheless managed to accrue a considerable fortune in the West Indies, which permitted him to purchase a commission in a more respectable regiment in 1827. Like most British sojourners in the West Indies he was an owner of enslaved people: the Barbados slave register shows that in May 1823 he owned two enslaved boys and a woman, probably in domestic service; in

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[3] "Military Promotions," *Morning Post,* 14 November, 1827.

[4] *New Annual Army List* 1840 NLS (159) [106422890] https://digital.nls.uk/british-military-lists/archive/106422890.

[5] For MacNicol's service after 1827, see *The Regimental Records of The Royal Scots (The First or Royal Regiment of Foot),* compiled by J.C. Leask and H.M. McCance (Dublin: Alexander Thom, 1915), 387, 417, 423.

[6] See *New Army Annual List,* 1842, 100 https://digital.nls.uk/british-military-lists/archive/105933860.

[7] See Hilary Beckles, "The Slave-Drivers' War: Bussa and the 1816 Barbados Slave Rebellion," *Boletín de Estudios Latinoamericanos y del Caribe,* 39 (December 1985): 85-110.

1836 he was compensated the sum of £19 8s 4d for the emancipation of "George, a Black Antiguan."[8] However, there is a more positive side to the story of Dugald's private life. Despite dying a bachelor, in his will he left a considerable sum of money (£1,350) to his "esteemed friend" Joanna Franklin in Barbados, described as "a free mulatto," and the couple's seven surviving children, the eldest of whom was born in 1817.[9] Unusually, Joanna was also appointed as an executrix of the will, suggesting a lengthy relationship of trust and respect.[10]

Unquestionably the most remarkable feature of MacNicol's life, distinguishing him from the many other Scottish "sojourners" in Britain's Caribbean colonies at this time, is the fact that he wrote a journal in Gaelic, covering his life in Argyll just prior to embarking for the West Indies, as well as the early years of his military career (1809-1813). This provides an important context for the eight Gaelic *òrain* he composed about the same time, and a few years afterwards.[11] Despite the first three being headed as written in Argyll, in fact all but the first seem to have been written in the West Indies, though they have disappointingly little to say about military service, or indeed any aspect of life in the Caribbean. In this respect, despite his location "yonder awa," MacNicol partakes of the silence concerning slavery characteristic of much Scottish writing of the period: as Michael Morris notes, "slavery ... hangs like a shadow over the scene, present only in the reader's knowledge of historical context."[12] While the manuscript of MacNicol's journal is preserved in the National Library of Scotland, the poems attributed to him in the MacNicol papers survive only in the transcriptions made by Dr George Henderson, published in the *Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness* in 1908-11: since that date, the original papers have disappeared.[13] The eighth poem "*Co-ainm na taca seo an-uiridh*," the main focus of this essay, was to be found on a single folio.[14]

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[8] Barbados 2671, *Legacies of British Slave-ownership database*: http://wwwdepts-live.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/claim/view/2825. Thanks to Ernest Wiltshire for a copy of the entry in the Slave Register, at https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/person/view/2663 [accessed 20 December 2020]. Thanks also to Prof. Jerome Handler for his assistance with the research on Barbados, and to Prof. Richard Drayton for putting us in touch.

[9] On the baptismal certificate of their first child, Mary Eliza Franklin, St Michael's Parish, Barbados, 18th July 1817. Thanks to Patricia Stafford of Bridgetown, Barbados for this information, and for all her other support and assistance.

[10] Will of Major Dugald MacNicol, Probate Court of Canterbury, National Archive, Kew, PROB 11/2039/174.

[11] NLS MS. 14850 [no.1], Acc. 2152 [1].

[12] Michael Morris, "Yonder Awa: Slavery and Distancing Strategies in Scottish Literature," in T.M. Devine, ed., *Recovering Scotland's Slavery Past: The Caribbean Connection* (Edinburgh University Press, 2015), 43; and see David Alston's important study *Slaves and Highlanders: Silenced Histories of Scotland and the Caribbean* (Edinburgh University Press, 2021). Alston devotes a chapter to relationships between "free coloured" women (like MacNicol's "esteemed friend" Joanna Franklin), and Scots men in Guyana in the same period (162-86).

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Although the work of a serving army officer, MacNicol's *òrain* have little in common with the Gaelic verse of this period written by soldiers (although usually not of the officer class) like Iain MacMhurchaidh, Duncan Campbell, or Alasdair MacFhionghain. Such military verse has been well studied by a number of recent scholars.[15] Often praising officers of the Gaelic gentry and aristocracy, its patriotic rhetoric reflects a modernised version of the "panegyric code," indicating a distinctively Gaelic mindset, as discussed in John MacInnes's important study.[16] Closer affinities are perhaps evident with the poems of Gilleasbuig Stiùbhart, Uilleam Ruighe 'n Uidhe and Alasdair Mac Iain Bhàin, whose works (according to Ruairidh Maciver) present a "recurring theme of homeland," a characteristic shared with "emigrant verse of the late 18th and 19th century." However MacNicol has less to say about the actual conditions of military service than any of these poets.[17] Matthew Dziennik has noted that Highland Regiments, such as MacFhionghain's 92nd (the Gordon Highlanders) or Campbell's Rothesay and Caithness Fencibles, could be spaces of Gaelic cultural confidence rather than of marginalisation for 18th century Gaels.[18] Although MacNicol's regiment, the Royal West India Rangers, had two distinguished Gaelic-speaking lieutenant-colonels in the shape of Turner of Maam and Stewart of Garth, neither are mentioned in his journal, probably because they were serving elsewhere, and there were few if any other Highland officers.[19] This helps explain Dugald's sense of cultural isolation, especially his poetic complaint about the lack of Gaelic-speaking community in Barbados in Òran 4: "*'S far nach faic mi duine nì furan ri m' ghlòir*" ("where I see no one who welcomes my tongue").[20] In this essay, we discuss MacNicol's West Indian *òrain* (especially "*Co-ainm na taca seo*") in relation to other Gaelic poems of emigration and exile written in this period: given their anomalous quality, and with due acknowledgement of their colonial context, our interpretation will centre on teasing out two of their key Gaelic terms/concepts, namely *cianalas* and *suairceas*. Although Dwelly's *Dictionary* explains *cianalas* as "melancholy, sorrow, homesickness," and *suairceas* as "urbanity, affability, kindness, civility," neither term is defined easily, and the meaning of each is better determined by exploring the poetic contexts of its occurrence.

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[13] Journal: NLS MS. 14850 [no.1]; George Henderson, "Làmh-sgrìobhainnean Mhic-Neacail," *Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness* 27 (1908-1911), pp. 340-409.

[14] John Mackechnie, *Catalogue of Gaelic Manuscripts in Selected Libraries in Great Britain and Ireland*, 2 vols (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1973), I: 326, describes the folio: "Paper. 8 and 1/8th x 4 and 3/4th ins. Fol. 1 torn from a note-book."

[15] See, e.g.: Michael Newton, *We're Indians Sure Enough: The Legacy of the Scottish Highlanders in the United States* (Auburn, N.H: Saorsa Media, 2001); Matthew P. Dziennik, *The Fatal Land: War, Empire and the Highland Soldier in British America*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015); Joseph A. Flahavie, "Duncan Campbell: A Scottish-Gaelic Bard in 18th Century Cork," *Journal of the Cork Historical and Archaeological Society*, 113 (2008): 80-89; Ruairidh Iain Maciver, *The Gaelic Poet and the British Military Experience, 1756-1856* (unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, University of Glasgow, 2018).

[16] John MacInnes, "The Panegyric Code in Gaelic Poetry and its Historical Background," *Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness*, 50 (1976-78), 435-98.

[17] Maciver, *The Gaelic Poet*, 145-153 (145).

[18] Dziennik, *The Fatal Land*, 206-7.

Cianalas and the Gaelic Caribbean

Dugald's sense of linguistic isolation is supported by Sheila Kidd's proposal, in one of her seminal scholarly studies of Gaelic-speaking Scots in the Caribbean, that his are "the only extant Gaelic songs known to have been composed in the West Indies," despite a significant Gaelic-speaking population in Jamaica and some of the other islands (although not in Barbados).[21] Comparing MacNicol's Gaelic journal with the songs, Kidd writes that

> the fun and hilarity which pervade the [journal] are replaced by the sadness and home-sickness which is characteristic of much of the verse of the Highland diaspora, reflecting the use of song and poetry as a means of channelling and addressing these emotions.[22]

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[19] For Turner, see wikipedia, *s.v.* "Charles Turner (British army officer)"; for Stewart, see Charles Irvine Robertson, *The First Highlander: Major-General David Steward of Garth* (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 1998), 54-61.

[20] Henderson, ""Làmh-sgrìobhainnean Mhic-Neacail," 362-363.

[21] Sheila Kidd, "Gaelic Books as Cultural Icons: The Maintenance of Cultural Links between the Highlands and the West Indies," in *Within and Without Empire: Scotland Across the (Post)colonial Borderline*, ed. Theo van Heijnsbergen and Carla Sassi (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2013), 56. See also Kidd's "Turtaran is Faclairean: Ceanglaichean eadar Gàidheil na h-Alba agus Gàidheil nan Innseachan an Iar," *Aiste* 3 (2010): 19–48, and Michael Morris, *Scotland and the Caribbean, c. 1740-1830* (London: Routledge, 2015), 152-168.

[22] Kidd, "Gaelic Books," 48-9.

Kidd quotes from Òran 4, “*Òran a rinneadh ann am Barbadoes*” (“A song composed in Barbados”), dated 12 August 1810, dedicated to a nostalgic celebration of Dugald’s home and family in Argyll, describing high jinks at Hogmanay with his male companions and girl friends, and concluding with a rather self-pitying contrast between his former life and present conditions in Barbados:

> *Is mithich dhomh bhith tearnadh gu deireadh mo sgeòil*
> *’S mi ’n so ann an eilean gun cheileir gun cheòl.*
> *Far nach cluinn mi ’ghuileag ach druma ’chinn mhóir*
> *’S far nach faic mi duine nì furan ri m’ ghlòir.*
> *Dh’fhalbh mo neart ’s mo spiorad, tha ’mhisneach air chall*
> *Dh’fhalbh na h-uile cridhealas a bh’ ann am cheann.*
> …
> *’S mì-chàirdeil am fearann g’ an ’tàinig mi féin*
> *Far nach faic mi caraid a dh’fharraid’ mo m’ dhéigh.*
>
> It is time to be coming to the end of my tale
> I am here in an island without melody or music.
> Where I hear no strains except the regimental drum
> And where I see no one who welcomes my tongue.
> My strength and spirit have failed me, my courage is lost
> All the cheerfulness which was in my mind has gone.
> …
> Unfriendly is this land to which I have come
> Where I see no friend who asks after me.[23]

Sheila Kidd argues that this shows “the poet’s more sombre reflections on his situation and on his feelings of cultural dislocation,” like most of Dugald’s other West Indies songs.[24] The dominant tone of *cianalas* also accurately describes the mood and contents of MacNicol's *òrain* 1-7, written between 1810 and 1816. These combine the office of love-songs praising the charms of several young Highland women (“*Peigi*” in *òrain* 1, 5, 7; “*Mairi*” in *òrain* 2, 4, 6; and “*Beti bla*” in *òran* 3), with celebrations of male companionship, drinking and rough shooting around Achlian, nostalgic memories of his family, and praise of the hills and glens of Argyll. The social warmth and enjoyment of home makes a strong contrast with Barbados: “*’s mì-chàirdeil am fearann g’ an ’tàinig mi féin*” (“Unfriendly is this land to which I have come”). Judging from the tone of these songs, it is hard to believe that Dugald would spend most of the remainder of his life in Barbados, entering a love-match with a free woman of colour and fathering at least seven children, whose descendants still live in the Caribbean, or scattered across North America.

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[23] The Gaelic text is that of Henderson, “Làmh-sgrìobhainnean Mhic-Neacail,” 362–3, with slight modification. The translation is our own.
[24] Kidd, “Gaelic Books,” 50.

Gaelic Emigration Poetry

In order to be fully intelligible, the emphasis on *cianalas* in these uniquely surviving productions of a Gaelic-Caribbean muse need to be placed in the broader context of the Gaelic poetry of emigration in the long 18th century. In an important essay addressing both Gaelic and anglophone Scottish poetry of emigration, Juliet Shields proposes that “while the earlier ... songs employ the conventions of Gaelic elegy (a form), the later ones eschew elegy for nostalgia (a mood or affective state)” corresponding to the Gaelic notion of *cianalas*.[25] Discussing songs by John MacCodrum (North Uist), Malcolm Buchanan (*alias* Calum Bàn MacMhannain, Skye and Prince Edward Island), and John MacDonald (*alias* Iain Sealgair, Lochaber and Cape Breton), as well as poems by the anglophone romantic poets Anne Grant of Laggan and Felicity Hemans, Shields finds that “representations of emigration changed between 1770 and the 1830s, becoming increasingly sentimental as they were influenced by English language-representations of the Highlands, and as forced emigration began to replace voluntary emigration.”[26]

The positive image of America as a destination in earlier songs is exemplified here by John MacCodrum’s “*Òran do na Fògarraich*” (“A Song to the Exiles”) which represents emigration to South Carolina from Uist in the 1770’s as “more detrimental to the landlords than to their tenants.”[27] Compared to the *Gàidhealtachd,* America is a land of milk and honey:

Cuiribh cùl ris an fhearann
Chaidh thairis am màl oirbh
Gu dùthaich a’ bhainne,
Gu dùthaich na meala,
Gu dùthaich an ceannaich sibh
Fearann gu’r n-àilgheas

Abandon the land
Whose rent’s gone too high for you
For the realm of the milk,

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[25] Juliet Shields, “Highland Emigration and the Transformation of Nostalgia in Romantic Poetry,” *European Romantic Review*, 23:6 (2012): 765–84 (768).

[26] *Ibid.,* 768.

[27] *Ibid.,* 769. Unlike the other poets, MacCodrum himself never emigrated.

> For the realm of the honey,
> For a realm where you'll buy
> All the land you desire.[28]

Half a century later, however, Shields finds this kind of optimism being replaced by a nostalgia-infused image of the "old country" influenced by romanticism, exemplified by Lochaber poet John MacDonald's "*Òran do dh'America*" ("Song to America").[29] Here the mountains of his homeland are contrasted with "*tìr an t-sneachda 's nam feur seachte*" ("the land of snows and sere grasses") in which the poet finds himself, as he compares "his brave kinsmen to the inhabitants of his new home": "*Iad ri bòilich 'us ri bòsd, / 'S iad gòrach leis an dram*" ("rowdy and boastful, / intoxicated by drink").[30] For MacDonald, not unlike MacNicol in the lines quoted above,

> emigration has not merely induced homesickness but is a kind of living death from which the prospect of actual death offers no relief, as he knows he must be buried far from his kinsmen.[31]

Such an argument about the permeation of nostalgia from anglophone romanticism into Gaelic emigration poetry is well-taken, although not unproblematic. Donald Meek for instance, while recognizing that "Gaelic literature cannot be isolated from developments elsewhere in Scotland," has argued that "the codes and signals of the poetry of *cianalas* ('yearning for home') were already well established in [Donnchadh Bàn Mac an t-Saoir's / Duncan Ban Macintyre's] '*Cead Deireannach nam Beann*' ('Last Leave-taking of the Bens')," a poem composed in 1802 by an elderly Gaelic poet of limited literacy, whom we might not expect to be influenced by anglophone romantic nostalgia of the kind discussed by Shields.[32] Meg Bateman has warned against

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[28] Text and translation from Ronald Black, *An Lasair: Anthology of 18th Century Scottish Gaelic Verse* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2001), 290-291; see also William Matheson, ed., *The Songs of John MacCodrum , Bard to Sir James MacDonald of Sleat* (Edinburgh: Scottish Gaelic Texts Society, 1938), 196–203. The relevant discussion is in Shields, "Highland Emigration," 769.

[29] MacDonald emigrated to Cape Breton in 1834.

[30] Quoted here from Margaret MacDonell, *The Emigrant Experience: Songs of Highland Emigrants in North America* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982), 84–85.

[31] Shields, "Highland Emigration," 772.

[32] Donald E. Meek, "Gaelic Literature in the Nineteenth Century," in Susan Manning et al., ed., *The Edinburgh History of Scottish Literature: Enlightenment, Britain and Empire (1707–1918)* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 253–266, 256; Meek, ed., *Caran an t-Saoghail (The Wiles of the World): Anthology of 19th Century Scottish Gaelic Verse* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2003), xxviii.

> dismissing all romantic stances in Gaelic as a projection of Lowland and European Romanticism. Gaelic literature can demonstrate the possession of many such features from the earliest times."[33]

There are also notable exceptions in the poetry of emigration itself which complicate the idea of a transfer of nostalgia from anglophone romanticism. Take for example two nearly contemporaneous *òrain* by Tiree bard John MacLean, "*Òran do dh'Ameireaga*" ("A Song to America") and "*Craobhsgaoileadh an t-Soisgeul san Tìr seo*" ("The Propagation of the Gospel in this Country"), which present strikingly contrasting views of emigration to Novia Scotia. If the first, composed circa 1820, laments exile in the "*coille ghruamach*" ("gloomy forest") of the New World, the second, written just a few years later, finds providential purpose in the settlers' civilizing and proselytising mission:

S e 'n-diugh gu tìreil blàth;
Gun d' ullaich am Fear-saoraidh e
Do dhaoine bha nan càs

it is now warm and snug;
the Saviour has prepared it
for people in their plight.[34]

The shift of mood away from nostalgia between the first and second of Maclean's poems might be taken to reflect a process of colonial settlement, as well as a providentialist celebration of his new homeland.[35]

This is supported by Michael Kennedy's argument for "a strong and largely unequivocal tradition of Gaelic poetry," written by immigrants in Nova Scotia, rather than poets at home, "that condemns the new order in Scotland and praises the immigrant's experience in the New World."[36] Any such structure of feeling however remains elusive for Dugald MacNicol, writing not as a settler in Canada, but as a junior officer serving in a penal regiment in the West Indies, whose verse appears (despite being the work of a minister's son) to lack any faith in the providential role of Britain's colonial mission. The presiding mood of *cianalas* in MacNicol's *Òran* 4 discussed above might also be attributable to the material conditions of impoverished Scottish and British sojourners in the Caribbean, seeking to make money out of the slave economy (or else, like MacNicol, to pursue a military career), but with the firm intention of returning home with full purses at the end of their term of service. In light of the high mortality rate linked to tropical service, and the grim diurnal realities of living in a slave society (of course immeasurably grimmer for enslaved Africans), Caribbean sojourners like Dugald MacNicol might be forgiven for showing little emotional investment in the prospect of settling in a colonial society so different from those imagined by MacCodrum in Uist or experienced by MacLean in Canada.[37] The poetics of *cianalas* might therefore be conditioned as much by geography and social location within the British colonial world as by literary fashion, whether derived from anglophone romanticism or Gaelic tradition.[38]

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[33] Meg Bateman, 'The Environmentalism of Donnchadh Bàn: Pragmatic or Mythic?," in Christopher MacLachlan, ed., *Crossing the Highland Line: Cross-Currents in 18th century Scottish Literature* (Glasgow: ASLS, 2009), 126-36 (135). See also Thomas Clancy, "Gaelic Literature and Scottish Romanticism," in Murray Pittock, ed., *The Edinburgh Companion to Scottish Romanticism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), 49-60.

[34] Donald E. Meek, ed., *Caran an t-Saoghail,* 72–3.

[35] *Ibid.*, 64-79.

[36] Michael Kennedy, "'Lochaber No More'; A Critical Examination of Highland Emigration Mythology," in Marjorie Harper and Michael Vance, eds, *Myth, Migration and the Making of Memory: Scotia and Nova Scotia c.1700-1990* (Halifax and Edinburgh: Fernwood Publishing, 1999), 267-297 (283).

MacNicol's "*Co-ainm na taca seo an-uiridh*": From *Cianalas* to Social Critique

In this light it is significant that "*Co-ainm na taca seo an-uiridh*" ("On this day a year ago"), the eighth poem in MacNicol's sequence, makes a decisive break with the *cianalas* of the earlier songs, at least after its initial stanza. Nostalgia is replaced by a mood of trenchant social critique aimed not at conditions in Barbados (which the same year had seen the brutal suppression of Bussa's Rebellion) but at the poet's native Argyll. The poem's place of composition is given as "P Island, St Lucia," referring to the British base at Fort Rodney on Pigeon Island, off the north-west coast of the Caribbean island. The date given for composition, 15th November, 1816, coincides with the period of the conception of MacNicol's first child with Joanna Franklin, a Barbadian free woman of colour, so it is tempting to detect a change of mood concerning his adopted West Indian domicile, but more evidence would be required to substantiate such a view, and other factors may also have played a role. At any rate, in this poem Argyll no longer appears as the site of an idealised boyhood to which the poet longs to return, but as a place blighted by misrule, inflated rents, and scarcity.

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[37] In 1787 James Murray lamented from the Caribbean "I am still alive & that is all—Sickness at home is very bad, but nothing to what a man must expect to suffer here," quoted in Douglas J. Hamilton, *Scotland, the Caribbean and the Atlantic World, 1750–1820* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), 112: see also Kidd, "Gaelic Books," 55.

[38] Cf. Meek, "Gaelic Literature in the Nineteenth Century," 262–263.

The song implies that responsibility for this sad condition can be laid at the door of George Campbell, 6th Duke of Argyll (1768–1839), who inherited the title in 1806 after the death of his father John, 5th Duke (1723–1806). Duke George was widely regarded as a shadow of the 5th Duke, who had devoted himself to completing the building of the new Inveraray Castle, improving his estates, and serving as founding President of the Highland Society and the British Fisheries Society. Eric Cregeen writes of the 5th Duke that "in an age of soaring rents, social disruption and growing emigration, he displayed a consideration for the tenancy and a moderation in rents that only too few lairds emulated."[39] Dugald's own father Dr Donald MacNicol had been presented to the parish of Lismore in 1766 by the 5th Duke, and the MacNicol family moved within the orbit of his patronage.

Duke George, in contrast, was, in Phlip Gaskill's words, "a dandy, a rake and a spendthrift familiar to the Prince of Wales, whose only interest in his inheritance was to discover how much money could be squeezed from it to feed his pleasures and pay his debts."[40] The 6th Duke included among his friends the playboy Tom Sheridan, and his marriage to Caroline Villiers in 1810 had involved a scandalous double divorce.[41] Although visiting Inveraray with his fashionable set to hold lavish summer house parties, he was firmly based in London, and when residing in Scotland was more interesting in improving his own ostentatious palace at Rosneath on the Clyde estuary. Mounting debts, exacerbated by the post-war financial collapse and declining agricultural and kelp prices, drove the Duke to virtual ruin: his trustees raised half a million pounds in assets to pay his debts, £400,000 in land sales, the rest in timber.[42] When the English political author Nathaniel Wraxall visited Inveraray in 1813, he was horrified by what he saw:

> At present, every Part of the House, Grounds, & Park, exhibits Signs of Decay and Neglect. The Absence of the Duke, & his pecuniary Embarrassments, render Inveraray silent & melancholy

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[39] Eric Cregeen, "A West Highland Census of 1779: Social and Economic Trends on the Argyll Estate," *Northern Scotland*, 5 (2014): 75-105 (76).

[40] Philip Gaskill, *Morvern Transformed: A Highland Parish in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 23.

[41] Ian G. Lindsay and Mary Cosh, *Inveraray and the Dukes of Argyll* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1983), 310.

[42] *Ibid.*, 312. Underlying the effects of absenteeism and the relentless extraction of wealth, David Alston traces "a common mentality of control linking estate management in Scotland and plantation management in the Caribbean," commenting also that "There was, however, no similarity between the treatment of Highland tenants and the brutalities of slavery": *Slaves and Highlanders*, 231, 229.

> ... The Walks, Fences, Bridges, & other surrounding Buildings, are tending fast to Dilapidation or Ruin.... Nothing seems to be going on either of Business, or of Pleasure.... It must however be owned that the Absence of the Duke of Argyle, & his present Situation, throw a Gloom over Inveraray. [43]

This is exactly the condition of Inveraray represented in MacNicol's song. As mentioned above, the date of the song's composition is given as 15th November 1816, so the first lines, "*Co-ainm na taca seo an-uiridh / Bha mi mullach Sròn Sìora*" ("On this day a year ago, / I stood atop Stron-Sirra"), announce that the song commemorates the anniversary of Dugald's visit home a year earlier as aide-de-camp of General Fitzroy Maclean, coinciding with and following the final defeat of Napoleon at Waterloo in June 1815. Yet there is nothing triumphalist about the poem composed to commemorate his homecoming. MacNicol describes the prospect view from the promontory of Stron-Siorra overlooking Loch Fyne to the now decaying town of Inveraray. From his position atop Stron-Siorra, MacNicol's poet "reads" the landscape: as here, the steadfastness of hill or mountain is often employed as a trope in nineteenth-century Gaelic poetry to represent "*saoghal an t-seann dualchais*" ("the world of the old culture") in contrast with the mutability of the land beneath it.[44] The second part of the first *rann* provides a haunting, Shelleyan metaphor for Dugald's sense of the scattering of his own kin, the "unprotected people" of MacInnes's panegyric code: [45]

Barrach ball-bhreac is caorann
'S a' ghaoth gan sgaoileadh air crìonadh
B' iad siud coimeas nan daoine
Bha san t-saoghal rim linnsa.

Autumnal tree tops, and scarlet rowans,
Withered leaves driven by the wind
Brought to mind the people
Scattered abroad in my own times.

This is a social and cultural landscape that has lost heart as a result of absenteeism, misrule, and forced emigration. The absentee Duke as Clan chief (*Mac Cailein Mòr*) and the Clan Campbell gentry, rather than providing *suairceas* (“kindness and civility”: but see the next section) to their kinsfolk, have abandoned their social trusteeship:

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[43] Quoted, *ibid.*, 313.

[44] Dòmhnall Meek, "'*Nuair Chuimhnicheam an Cuilithionn'*: Àite Samhlachail na Tìre is Cruth na Tìre ann am Bàrdachd Ghàidhlig na Naoidheamh Linn Deug," in Wilson McLeod and Máire Ní Annracháin, eds, *Cruth na Tíre* (Dublin: Coiscéim, 2003), 1–37 (14, 17).

[45] MacInnes, "Panegyric Code," 458, notes that within classical Gaelic panegyric poetry "the unprotected people" can be described as "the flourishing or withered tree."

> *Chì mi thall fo Dhùn Chuaiche*
> *Caisteal fuar falamh dùinte*
> *Far am bu chòir bhith le suairceas*
> *Diùc is uachdaran dùthcha.*
>
> I see yonder beneath Dun-na-Cuaiche
> A castle, cold, empty and shuttered:
> Where should be dwelling in kindness and civility
> The Duke and lord of this land.[46]

Here Inveraray Castle figures as the polar opposite of the praiseworthy household of a Highland chief: all the features of warmth and generosity are absent, as is the duke himself. MacNicol’s song may allude here to the late 17th century “Blind Harper” Ruaidhri MacMhuirich’s well-known “*Òran do Mhac Leòid Dhùn Bheagain*” (“A Song to MacLeod of Dunvegan”), with its evocation of Dunvegan Castle after the death of his patron Iain Breac, now subjected to the neglect of his heir Ruaidhri:

> *Chaidh a’ chuibhle mun cuairt,*
> *Ghrad thionndaidh gu fuachd am blàths:*
> *Gum faca mi uair*
> *Dùn ratha nan cuach ’n seo thràigh*
>   *... Dh’fhalbh an latha sin uainn,*
> *’S tha na taighean gu fuarraidh fàs*
>
> The wheel has gone round,
> The warmth has abruptly turned cold:
> But here I have seen
> A Fort flourishing with cups now dry
>   ... that day has passed
> And the buildings are deserted and cold.[47]

Published in the Eigg Collection of 1776, this poem would have certainly been in Dugald’s father’s library in Lismore.[48]

Shortly before Christmas 1809, having recently obtained his commission from Colonel Charles Turner of Maam, Dugald’s journal records him having spent the night at the manse of his kinsman, Dr Charles Stewart (*ca.* 1754–1826), minister of Strachur, on the eastern shore of

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[46] The song’s full surviving text with translation is in the appendix to this essay.

[47] Colm Ó Baoill, ed., *Gàir nan Clàrsach / The Harp’s Cry: An Anthology of 17th Century Gaelic Verse*, transl. by Meg Bateman (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 1994), 198–206 (198).

[48] W. Matheson, *An Clarsair Dall: Orain Ruaidhri Mhic Mhuirich agus a Chuid Ciuil / The Blind Harper: The Songs of Roderick Morrison and his Music* (Edinburgh: Scottish Gaelic Texts Society, 1970), 87.

Loch Fyne across from Inveraray, maybe seeking spiritual counsel from him *in loco parentis* immediately prior to his departure for Barbados.[49] Writing six years later, MacNicol now evokes only grieving womenfolk in the silent household: “*Tha Srath Churra an-diugh sàmhach / Gun ach mnai ann ’s iad brònach*” (“Today Strachur is silent / The dwelling only of broken-hearted women”). MacNicol’s gendering of Strachur might be read as an instance of the tactical self-feminisation outlined by Silke Stroh in *Uneasy Subjects*, a cultural feminisation opening to the kind of social critique understood by fellow Gaels.[50] In this regard one might think of the women of Strachur as a further metaphor for the “unprotected people” and of the Duke’s negligence.[51] Turning his gaze to a nearer feature of the landscape, Dunderave Castle, Dugald is pained by the ruinous condition of the 16th century stronghold, constructed on the rocky shore of Loch Fyne: “*’S gur a h-oil leam a ghràitinn / Dùn Dà Ràmh a bhith as t-seòl ud*” (“And it gives me pain to tell of / Dundarave in such a state”). This is especially heart-breaking considering its former splendour:

Caisteal dubh nan stuagh àrda
’N robh na h-àrmuinn a chòmhnaidh
Clann Mhic Neachdainn bhon bhràighe
’S beag tha dias dhiubh air forfhais.

Black castle of the high ramparts
Home of warrior heroes
Clan MacNaughton from the Braes
Hardly a trace of them is now seen.

Dùn Dà Ràmh (Dunderave Castle) had been constructed in 1598 as the seat of Clan MacNaughton, replacing an earlier MacNaughton stronghold known as Dubh Loch Castle in nearby Glen Shira, evacuated after the clan was nearly wiped out by plague in the mid-16th century (hence Dugald's reference to “*Clann Mhic Neachdainn bhon bhràighe*”). Clan MacNaughton, struggling against the expansion of their more powerful Campbell neighbours, had fought on the Stuart side at Killiecrankie in 1689, but after the Jacobite defeat at Dunkeld their estates were confiscated. In the early 18th century, Dunderave Castle and the MacNaughton lands became the property of the Williamite Campbells of Ardkinglas, in whose hands the castle was abandoned, and rapidly descended into ruins. Visiting Dunderave in 1822, just six years after the composition of Dugald's song, Dorothy Wordsworth wrote:

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[49] Journal, 18. Rev. Charles Stewart of Strachur, one of Dugald’s father’s closest friends,was a contributor and composer of songs in the MacNicol song collections.

[50] Silke Stroh, *Uneasy Subjects: Postcolonialism and Scottish Gaelic Poetry* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2011), 122–3.

[51] MacInnes, “Panegyric Code,” 458.

> Walls of the Fort not shattered, but decaying. A small publick-house under the shadow of it. Potters at the door—fine China displayed—and women, young and old, making bargains ... Dunderawe Castle wild, and even grand, backed by the Kinglass Hills.[52]

By 1822, steam boats tourists from Glasgow were exploring sites like Dunderave associated with a heroic, lost Gaelic past, a bathos that possibly resonates in Dugald's verse.

Of interest here though is Dugald's motive for identifying so strongly with Clan MacNaughton: there can be no doubt but that these lines refer to the historical Clan MacNaughton of Dunderave, yet Henderson's footnote reports that *Neachail* (i.e. MacNicol) is the form found in Dugald's original (but now-lost) manuscript. Given Dunderave's strong historical associations with the MacNaughtons, and the absence of any obvious link between them and Dugald's own Clann Neacail (more often connected with Trotternish in the Isle of Skye), this might simply be dismissed as an error.[53] More significant perhaps is the poet's search for an alternative Gaelic identification (he was after all a Campbell on his mother's side) with the Jacobite MacNaughtons, opening up a set of historical affiliations ideologically opposed to the Dukes of Argyll, a point to which we will return in conclusion.

The final two stanzas adopt the tone of rural complaint associated in anglophone poetry of the period with Goldsmith's *The Deserted Village* (1770), although the next section will suggest that Dugald draws mainly on traditional Gaelic models to develop his social critique. We should note that the 6-line final *rann* breaks the 8-line pattern of the others, leaving the final two lines without syntactic closure, demonstrating that the poem is incomplete, its final two lines lost.

Bhon a thàinig an t-sìochaimh

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[52] Dorothy Wordsworth, "My Second Tour in Scotland (1822)," in E. De Selincourt, ed., *Journals of Dorothy Wordsworth*, 2 vols (London: Macmillan, 1952), II: 367.

[53] In fact Dugald's family belonged to a separate, Argyll branch of the MacNicols who had flourished in Glenorchy and Glen Shira from the 16th to the 19th centuries. Interestingly, the most recent clan historians record an "alternative version of the Argyll MacNicols put forward by Niall, Duke of Argyll" as "a branch of the family of MacNachtan of Dunderave," but they dismiss this as "purely speculative." See W. David H. Sellar and Alasdair Maclean, *The Highland Clan MacNeacail (MacNicol): A History of the Nicolsons of Scorrybreac* (Waternish, Skye: Maclean Press, 1999), 25.

Tha gach nì air dol tuathal
'S mo chreachan 'n rìoghachd!
Tha na cìsean glè chruaidh oirnn:
Gun de phrìs air na caoirich
Na phàigheas saothair na tuatha
Bidh am fearann gun àiteach
Bhon chaidh am màl far a luacha.

Since the coming of peace
Everything is gone awry
Woe for the Kingdom!
The taxes fall heavily on us:
The sheep fetch no good price at market
To recompense the farmer's labours
The land now lies fallow
Since rents were racked above their value.

We know from his journal that Dugald's uncle Dugald Campbell was tacksman of Achlian, and his brother Donald of the farm of Socach (*Fear an t-Sochaich*) in Glenorchy: the furloughed officer from Barbados would have known first-hand about the blight suffered by Argyllshire tacksmen and tenants, a result of the 6th Duke's mounting debts and the post-war economic depression. While MacNicol connects the collapse of Argyll society to "the coming of the peace" in 1815 (*"bhon a thàinig an t-sìochaimh"*), the economic depression of the post-war years simply exacerbated existing hardships in the Argyll lands caused by mismanagement and absenteeism. The 6-line final stanza announces how this triggered a catastrophic breakdown in social relations, namely the traditional affordance of hospitality to the poor and indigent so highly valued across the *Gàidhealtachd*:

'S iomad tuathanach tlachdmhor
Bha gun airceas air cùinneadh
Bheireadh modh do luchd-astair
Agus atamachd buird daibh

Many's the bonny farmer
With no lack of silver
Would welcome the wayfarer
Indulging him at his table.

The absence of *suairceas* in an empty and cold Inveraray Castle referred to at line 15 ("*Far am bu chòir bhith le suairceas*") has been transmitted down the social scale, rupturing the social tissue of clanship: and the song concludes abruptly:

Air droch càradh san àm seo
Leis a' ghanntar tha as dùthaich ...

> In these times of neglect,
> With the scarcity afflicting the country ...

Such lack of generosity, laid at the door of the absentee 6th Duke, is the polar opposite of the praiseworthy quality of Highland chiefs in the panegyric tradition of Gaelic poetry so comprehensively studied by John MacInnes.

Loss of *Suairceas* and Lament for Argyll

This importance of *suairceas* in the social commentary of Gaelic poets was well-established, and some further remarks will place Dugald’s song in its larger Gaelic context. Peter McQuillan has demonstrated how in Irish poetry “the seventeenth century saw significant conceptual extensions of *suairceas* and … central to these extensions was an idea of aesthetically pleasing social conduct.”[54] For these poets, the word had come to be used “to include evaluations of social, political and cultural change,” especially in regard to the large-scale replacement of the Gaelic elite and the thorough Anglicisation of the remaining elite. This demographic and social sea-change brought about a cultural disconnect between the highest levels of society and everyone else, and the absence of *suairceas*. The scale of social upheaval which was a focus of Irish poets in the seventeenth century found no obvious parallel in seventeenth-century Scotland. Nonetheless, it is significant that when faced with the fundamental change in Highland social structure which occurred in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Scottish Gaelic poets too invoked the concept of *suairceas* in the sort of social commentary which was expected of them.[55] As with their Irish counterparts, eighteenth and nineteenth-century Scottish poets deployed the concept in panegyric praise poetry, either to forewarn publicly the Gaelic aristocracy of their duties to their people or, increasingly as time went by, as in the case of Dugald MacNicol, as a form of stinging social criticism which carried a wide range of meaning immediately comprehensible to Gaelic audiences.

Some earlier examples of the poetic deployment of *suairceas* will elaborate MacNicol’s usage here. In a poem dated to the opening of the eighteenth century, the praise-poet Màiri nighean Alasdair Ruaidh reminds a potential Chief of Clan MacLeod “what is due to tradition.”[56] In doing so, she connects the qualities of *suairceas* (here in its adjectival form *suairc*) with the panoptic concept of *dùthchas*, which may incorporate the genealogy of an individual with their connexion to the land.[57] Evident here is an expectation concerning the clan chief's generous patronage of the poet, in a formulation typical of Gaelic panegyric:

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[54] Peter McQuillan, “‘*Suairceas*’ in the Seventeenth Century,” *Field Day Review*, 2 (2006): 94–109 (95).

[55] Ronald Black, *An Lasair: Anthology of 18th Century Scottish Gaelic Verse* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2001), xix.

[56] J. Carmichael Watson, ed., *Gaelic Songs of Mary MacLeod* (London and Glasgow: Blackie, 1934), 127-128. See also the more recent edition and translation

Fiùran na cluain
Dhùisg 'san deagh uair,
Is dùth dhuit dol suas
An cliù 's ann am buaidh:
Is dùthchas do m' luaidh
Bhith gu fiùghantach suairc ceoilbhinn.

> Sapling of the meadow, that hast awaked in the good hour, it is native to thee to increase in fame and prowess; it is my dear one's heritage to be generous, courtly, with sweet music around thee.[58]

Over half a century later, the Kintyre poet Uilleam MacMhurchaidh, also likely to have been serving in the army overseas, placed his hopes of return to Kintyre with the Gaelic aristocracy. MacMhurchaidh extols the virtues of a number of Argyll families who might come to his aid but reserves *suairceas* for attribution to the Campbells and the MacDonalds. In the case of the MacDonalds, for example, they are:

Ard shliochd Chollaidh chath-bhuadhaich:
Chuirte naimhdean fudh smachd
Le fior luchd cleachdaidh gach suairceis,
Sheasamh còir an luchd leanmhuinn,
Bheireadh tearmunn do'n truaghan.

The high progeny of Colla Battle-winner:
Their foes were subjected
By true men who practised every kindness,
Maintaining the right of their followers
They would bring sanctuary to the wretched.[59]

Again, MacMhurchaidh ties the notion of *suairceas*, and its hereditary quality, to the land and the duty it entails to one's followers. As was also the case with Màiri nighean Alasdair Ruaidh, MacMhurchaidh's attribution of the term serves not only as praise, but as a subtle reminder to his noble addressees of their social obligations, including those owed to the poet.

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by Colm Ó Baoill, *Màiri nighean Alasdair Ruaidh: Song-maker of Skye and Berneray* (Edinburgh: Scottish Gaelic Texts Society, 2014), 126–7.

[57] MacInnes, "Panegyric Code," 452.

[58] Text and translation from Watson, *Gaelic Songs of Mary MacLeod*, 64–65.

[59] Text and translation with minor adaptations from W. M. Conley, "A Poem in the Stewart Collection," *Scottish Gaelic Studies*, 11.1 (1966): 28, 30.

While *suairceas* is an object of praise for Gaelic poets, conversely its absence can be the occasion for stern reproach to those who fail to live up to their obligations. This is exemplified by John MacCodrum's "*Òran do na Fògarraich*," addressing the decline of the tacksman class in Uist in the 1770s, a poem mentioned above in relation to emigration. Recognising that the decline of the tacksman class "heralds the end of a mainstay of Gaelic society," MacCodrum lays the blame at the feet of the "*uachdarain ghòrach*" ("foolish landlords"), though he stops short of naming the target of his ire, his patron.[60] This was Sir Alexander Macdonald of Sleat (ca. 1745–1795), who lacked what William Matheson has called his predecessor Sir James Macdonald's "Gaelic outlook."[61] MacCodrum draws on the concept of *suairceas* to publicly critique the unnamed chief:

Seallaibh mun cuairt duibh
Is faicibh na h-uaislean
Gun iochd annt' ri truaghain,
Gun suairceas ri dàimhich;
'S ann a tha iad am barail
Nach buin sibh do' n talamh
'S ged dh'fhàg iad sibh falamh
Chan fhaic iad mar chall e.

> Look around you and see the nobility without pity for poor folk, without kindness to friends; they are of the opinion that you do not belong to the soil, and though they have left you destitute they cannot see it as a loss.[62]

The connection between the social community addressed by MacCodrum and the land ("*an talamh*") may pass unrecognised by Macdonald of Sleat, but is made explicit here by the poet; Macdonald and others like him have contravened long-standing conventions binding chief, people and land:

Chaill iad an sealladh
Air gach reachd agus gealladh
Bha eadar na fearaibh
Thug am fearann-s' o 'n nàmhaid:
Ach innseadh iad dhomhsa,
'N uair théid sibh air fògradh,
Mur caill iad an còir air
Gun dòigh air a theàrnadh.

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[60] William Gillies, "The Mavis of Clan Donald: Engaging with John MacCodrum," in Anders Ahlqvist and Pamela O'Neill, eds, *Germano-Celtica: A Festschrift for Brian Taylor* (Sydney: Sydney Series in Celtic Studies 16, 2017), 143-144.

[61] Matheson, *Songs of John MacCodrum*, 315.

[62] Text and translation from Matheson, *Songs of John Macodrum*, 202-203.

> They have lost sight of every law and promise that was observed by the men who took this land from the foe: but let them tell whether they will not lose their right to it, without means of saving it, when you go into exile.[63]

Panegyric praise is here turned on its head; Macdonald is being obliquely censured for having lost sight of his obligations to his people.[64] Dugald MacNicol's invocation of *suairceas* and its absence makes a similar criticism, enforced by the collocation of *còir* ("just, proper"), underlying the duke's connection to the land as *uachdaran dùthcha*.

Closer to MacNicol's own time, the traditional association between the quality of *suairceas* and an appreciation of *dùthchas*—both features of the idealised Highland chief—is distilled, through a more conventional militaristic prism than is evident in MacNicol's verse, in the opening lines of a song of lament for Lord Cluny, the chief of Clan Chattan. The poem was composed in 1832 by an anonymous poet of the Black Watch, upon Cluny's departure from the Black Watch in Malta:

> *O! teannaibh dlùth orm, a shliochd nan stuchd-bheann,*
> *'S gach cridhe rùnach do 'n dùchas gràdh,*
> *Gach Gaidheal uasal a mhothaich suairceas,*
> *Òg-Thighearna Chluaini, a b'uaisle gnàths.*

> Oh come close to me, progeny of the craggy-mountains, and every heart beloved of the native land, every noble Gael who felt kindness from the young Lord Cluny of the most noble manner.[65]

Indeed, as late as the 1870s, long after the cultural transformation of the Highland elite, Iain Mac a' Ghobhainn in the song "*Òran Luchd an Spòrs*" ("Song on Sportsmen") uses the same image of traditional Gaelic leadership and its proper association with the quality of *suairceas* to highlight his dissatisfaction with contemporary circumstances contrasted with a praise-worthy past:

> *Dh'fhalbh uainne na ceannardan uasal*
> *Anns an robh suairc agus fìrinn;*
> *Thàinig 'nan àite luchd fuadain;*
> *Chuir iad don-bhuaidh air an tìr seo.*

> The noble chieftains have left us,
> in whom were kindness and honesty;
> in their place imposters have arrived;

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[63] *Ibid.*

[64] MacInnes, "Panegyric Code," 452.

[65] Anonymous, *Focail air Turus na Ban-Righ do Bhaideanach 's a' Bhliadhna 1847: Maille ri Orain Gaidhealach nach raobh air an clodh-bhualadh* (Inverness: Mackintosh & Co., 1850), 6. Translation our own.

> they have had an evil influence on this land.[66]

One might dismiss the employment of *suairceas* here as a hackneyed cliché; certainly, from the second half of the eighteenth century onwards, the panegyric code can become a strait-jacket for Gaelic poets. Nonetheless, as MacInnes comments, the diagnostic literary elements of clan panegyric were most densely concentrated "when it was most necessary to reaffirm the traditional values of the community."[67] In McQuillan's summation, with reference to the Irish context, the poet

> prizes those characteristics that define the culture that the poet appreciates, the socio-cultural values for which the poet-patron nexus stands. The poet laments the blow to these values and the "silence" which has been brought about on account of that.[68]

Although apparently without a patron for his poetry, and writing from a colonial posting in the Caribbean, Dugald MacNicol belonged to a family and class which had benefitted from the advocacy and patronage of the dukes of Argyll in the recent past. The "silence" perceived by McQuillan's Irish poets is analogous to the coldness perceived by Dugald MacNicol in the halls of Inveraray Castle in the early nineteenth century. In this sense, MacNicol demonstrates the dexterity of the late-medieval panegyric code and its dynamic but enduring currency among nineteenth-century Gaelic poets.

Conclusion

Finally, in relation to the concept of *suairceas* discussed above, it is instructive to compare MacNicol's lament for Inveraray in "*Co-ainm na taca seo an-uiridh*" with one of the best-known contemporary Gaelic poems of social complaint by another Argyllshire poet, Iain MacLachlainn's "*Dìreadh a-mach ri Beinn Shianta*" ("Climbing up Ben Shiant"). This was probably composed between 1828 and 1830, just a decade or so after Dugald's poem. Like MacNicol, MacLachlainn take a prospect view as the basis of his indictment of clearance and landowner mismanagement, which is clearly stated in the poem's opening six lines:

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[66] Text and translation from Donald Meek, ed., *Tuath is Tighearna / Tenants and Landlords: An Anthology of Gaelic Poetry of Social and Political Protest from the Clearances to the Land Agitation (1800–1890)* (Edinburgh: Scottish Gaelic Texts Society, 1995), 99, 222.

[67] MacInnes, "Panegyric Code," 436.

[68] Peadar Mac Cuillin [Peter McQuillan], "Gnéithe de na Focail *suairc* agus *suairceas* sa 18ú haois," in Aidan Doyle and Siobhán Ní Laoire, eds, *Aistí ar an Nua-Ghaeilge in ómós do Bhreandán Ó Buachalla* (Dublin: Cois Life, 2006), 206: our translation.

Dìreadh a-mach ri Beinn Shianta,
Gur cianail tha mo smuaintean,

A' faicinn na beinne 'na fàsach
'S i gun àiteach air a-uachdar;

Sealltain a-sìos thar a' bhealaich,
'S ann agamsa tha 'n sealladh fuaraidh.

As I climb up towards Ben Shiant,
My thoughts are filled with sadness,

Seeing the mountain as a wilderness,
With no cultivation on its surface.

As I look down over the pass,
What a chilling view I have![69]

As MacLachlainn surveys the peninsula from the holy mountain of Ben Shiant, blame for the terrible clearance of arable farmland which had supported twenty-six families and its deterioration into uncultivated and uninhabited sheep walks is placed squarely on the Lowland proprietor of Ardnamurchan, Sir James Riddell, representative of the "new elites" who had purchased Highland estates from their traditional proprietors.[70] While MacLachlainn's attacks on Riddell are based largely on moral grounds, a different, anonymous, song from the first half of the nineteenth century is more forthright in blaming his pedigree, "*Òran Di-moladh do Riddell Àird-nam-Murchan*" ("Song in Dispraise of Riddell of Ardnamurchan"). The anonymous poet's final stanza singles out Riddell's non-patrician and Lowland social origins as a particular source of grievance to his evicted Gaelic tenants:

Ged a dh'fhalbh ar cinn-fheachda,
Gur peacadh an tùirn
Ma leigear ar creachadh
Fo mheachainn a' Chrùin,
Le maighstirean tuatha
Nach buainticheadh cliù,
'S le balach gun chèireadh,
Nach èighear 'na dhiùc.

Although our [old] army leaders have gone,
It would be a sinful turn of events

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[69] Text and translation from Meek, *Tuath is Tighearna*, 57, 192.

[70] See Tom Devine, *Clanship to Crofter's War: The Social Transformation of the Scottish Highlands* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), 75. Meek, *Tuath is Tighearna*, 60, however, indicates that the Linlithgow-based Riddell family had purchased the estates of Ardnamurchan and Sunart as early as 1768, following their annexation after the Forty-Five.

> If we were allowed to be plundered
> At the will of the Crown,
> Under masters of the land
> Whose fame would not last,
> And by a lad with no wax seal
> Who will never be proclaimed a duke.[71]

Sorley Maclean comments pertinently on the attack here on the "*balach gun chèiridh*," and the collapse of traditional clan hierarchy:

> if the author had lived to the mid-nineteenth century, he would have seen the bluest of Highland blood devastating Sutherland, Ross, Lochaber, Perthshire, Argyll, Mull and Skye.[72]

In this sense, MacNicol's "*Co-ainm na taca seo an-uiridh*," despite anticipating MacLachlainn's topographical perspective on a blighted cultural landscape, has more in common with the Gaelic traditionalism of the latter poem than with "*Dìreadh a-mach ri Beinn Shianta*." The blight afflicting Inveraray and its traditional clan society cannot be laid at the door of an incomer like Riddell of Ardnamurchan. Rather, it is the direct result of the loss of *suairceas* by the 6th Duke of Argyll himself, "*Mac Cailein Mòr*," the hereditary chief of Clan Campbell, who has failed in his social obligations and in protecting his people, especially in the light of the economic fall-out of "*an t-sìochaimh*," the peace following decades of military conflict with France.

Maybe this helps explain MacNicol's symbolic identification, in the poem's fourth stanza, with Clan MacNaughton of Dunderave as an alternative genealogy for his critical perspective on the tragic devastation of traditional Gaelic society in Argyll, and in the Highlands at large. Tragic, because of the MacNaughtons, "*'S beag tha dias dhiubh air forfhais*" ("Hardly a trace of them is now seen"): but the act of poetic identification here is tantamount to a "dispraising" of the spendthrift chief of Dugald's people on his mother's side, the Argyll Campbells. Unfortunately, with the final stanza of "*Co-ainm na taca seo*" left hanging, we also lose the final trace of Dugald MacNicol's small corpus of Caribbean *bàrdachd*, which we have followed from the evocation of *cianalas* discussed by Sheila Kidd and Juliet Shields to trenchant social critique based on the loss of *suairceas*, surprisingly out of step with the triumphalist mood of the post-Waterloo British empire. At the same time, the historical record indicates MacNicol's settlement into a new life and mixed-race family network, in the multi-ethnic world of Barbados, a colonial modernity only obliquely referred to in "*Co-ainm na taca seo an-uiridh*," his lament for the breakdown of traditional Gaelic values at home in Argyll. [73]

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[71] Text and translation from Meek, *Tuath is Tighearna*, 59, 194. Although previously dated to "the middle of the 18th century," Meek confidently proposes the later date on the basis of external evidence (p. 60).

[72] Sorley Maclean, "Poetry of the Clearances," in William Gillies, ed., *Ris a' Bhruthaich: The Criticism and Prose Writings of Sorley Maclean* (Stornaway: Acair, 1985), 55.

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[73] In addition to those named above, we would like to thank the following for comments or advice in the preparation of this article: Wilson McLeod, Andrew Mackillop, Stephen Mullen, and participants in Glasgow University's History of Gaelic Scotland research group convened by Martin MacGregor, especially Sheila Kidd and Sìm Innes.

Appendix

The following text is based on that printed by Henderson with some small degree of normalisation to bring it more in line with contemporary Gaelic orthography. It is set alongside our own translation. Readings from Henderson's edition (see fn.13 above) from which we have departed are marked "H" in the notes while original manuscript readings, where Henderson gave them, are indicated with "MS." A small number of textual issues are also dealt with in the notes. The air given by Henderson, "*Moch sa mhaduinn Didòmhnaich* etc.," may correspond to the tune collected in 1968 by Alan Bruford from the Rev. William Matheson: https://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/track/75902?l=gd.

Henderson divides the song into 5 verses of eight lines each (with the last verse missing 2 lines). MacKechnie, in his catalogue of the MacNicol manuscript material in the National Library of Scotland (fn. 14 above), describes the poem as consisting of 9 ½ quartains.

Air fonn: Moch sa mhaduinn Didòmhnaich etc.
(P. Island. St Lucia, 15 Nov. 1816)

1

Co-ainm na taca seo an-uiridh	On this day a year ago
Bha mi mullach Sròn Sìora[74]	I stood atop Sron-Shirra,
A' coimhead baile Inbhir Aora	Viewing the town of Inveraray
Thall air taobh Locha Fìne:[75]	Yonder on the banks of Loch Fyne:
Barrach ball-bhreac is caorann	Autumnal tree tops, and scarlet rowans,
'S a' ghaoth gan sgaoileadh air crìonadh	Withered leaves driven by the wind
B' iad siud coimeas nan daoine	Brought to mind the people
Bha san t-saoghal rim linnsa.	Scattered abroad in my own times.

2

Nuair a sheall mi mun cuairt domh	Taking in the prospect
Gum bu chruaidh leam rin cunntas	It came hard upon me to count
A liuthad talla duine uasail	How many gentlemen's houses
A bha san uair ud gun smùid dhiubh;	Were without smoke in their chimneys.
Chì mi thall fo Dhùn Chuaiche	I saw yonder beneath Dun-na-Cuaiche
Caisteal fuar falamh dùinte	A castle, cold, empty and shuttered:
Far am bu chòir bhith le suairceas	Where should be dwelling in kindness and civility
Diùc[76] *is uachdaran dùthcha.*	The Duke and lord of this land.

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[74] H: *Stron-Shira*. On this placename element, see William J. Watson, *The History of the Celtic Place-names of Scotland* (Dublin: Irish University Press, 1973), 477.

[75] H: *Locha Fine*.

[76] H: *Diùchd*.

3

Tha Srath Churra an-diugh sàmhach	Today Strachur is silent,
Gun ach mnai ann ’s iad brònach	The dwelling only of broken-hearted women
’S gur a h-oil leam a ghràitinn[77]	And it gives me pain to tell of
Dùn Dà Ràmh a bhith as t-seòl ud:	Dundarave in such a state:
Caisteal dubh nan stuagh àrda	Black castle of the high ramparts
’N robh na h-àrmuinn a chomhnuidh	Home of warrior heroes
Clann Mhic Neachdainn[78] *bhon bhràighe*	Clan MacNaughton from the braes
’S beag tha dias dhiubh air forfhais.	Hardly a trace of them is now seen.

4

Bhon a thàinig an t-sìochaimh[79]	Since the coming of peace
Tha gach nì air dol tuathal	Everything has gone awry
’S mo chreachan ’n rìoghachd!	Woe for the Kingdom!
Tha na cìsean glè chruaidh oirnn:	The taxes fall heavily on us:
Gun de phrìs air na caoirich[80]	The sheep fetch no good price at market
Na phaidheas saothair na Tuatha	To recompense the farmer’s labours
Bidh am fearann gun àiteach	The land now lies fallow
Bhon[81] *chaidh am màl far a luacha.*	Since rents were racked above their value.

5

’S iomad tuathanach tlachdmhor	Many’s the bonny farmer
Bha gun airceas air cùinneadh	With no lack of silver
Bheireadh modh[82] *do luchd-astair*	Would welcome the wayfarer
Agus atamachd buird daibh:	Treating him at his table.
Air droch càradh san àm seo	In these times of neglect,
Leis a’ ghanntar tha as dùthaich[83]	With the scarcity afflicting the country

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[77] H: *gh’ràitinn*.
[78] MS: *Neachail*.
[79] MS: *fon*; H: *an t-siocaidh*; MS: *t’shicaidh*. We take this to represent the feminine noun *sìochaimh* (“peace”), the form of which is discussed by Ó Baoill, *Màiri nighean Alasdair Ruaidh*, 72.
[80] H: *do phrìs*; H: *air a caoirich*.
[81] MS: *fon*.
[82] H: *mogh*.
[83] H: “Stanza 5 has no more lines in the manuscript.”