Voice of the Immigrant Bard:

Social Commentary in Scottish Bardic Compositions in Nineteenth Century Nova Scotia

by

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ABSTRACT

The poetry of the Scottish emigrant bards in the nineteenth century provides integral insight into the experience of the immigrant Scots in Nova Scotia. This thesis explores the role of the Scottish emigrant bards as social commentators; that is, how the narrative and bardic elements present within poetry reflects the identity and experience of the immigrant Scot. I have selected the poetry of three prominent immigrant bards to Nova Scotia: John MacLean, John the Hunter MacDonald and Allan the Ridge MacDonald. I show that the bards in question used traditional bardic elements, structure and language to exercise their role as social commentators, influencing their audience in Scotland and in Nova Scotia. Their commentary focuses on a variety of topics, including emigration, loss of homeland or nostalgia, anger towards those who influenced or forced emigration, and the experiences of pioneer life in Nova Scotia. I employ the following methodology in *Voice of the Immigrant Bard*: first, I explore briefly the history of bardic tradition in Scotland and how the role of the bard changed over the centuries. Secondly, I outline the sociopolitical circumstances in Scotland in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that led to the mass exodus of Scots from the Highlands and Islands. Finally, presenting the bards chronologically according to the dates of the poetry, I use textual analysis to identify the traditional bardic elements (such as praise, dispraise, and the panegyric code) that are meant to sway their intended audiences, and serve as both an expression of their own experiences and that of the immigrant Scot.

DEDICATION

For my granny,
who dreamed of a university education,

and for my father –
tha thu daonnan nam chridhe.

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INTRODUCTION

S' toigh leam a' Ghàidhlig, a bàrdachd 's a ceòl,
Gur tric thog i suas sinn 'n uair bhiodhmaid fo leòn.
'S I dh'ionnsaich sinn tràth ann an làithean ar n-òig',
'S cha thréig i gu bràth sinn go'n téid sinn fo'n fhòid.

- Iain Campbell of Ledaig, *Is Toigh Leam A' Ghàidhealtachd* (Creighton & MacLeod, 2)

Bardic composition retains a distinct prestige within Scottish literature. As Scottish Gaelic scholar Michael Newton stipulates, "Song-poetry has arguably been the most respected and admired form of literary expression in Gaelic society and the poet one of the most influential figures in any Gaelic community" (Newton 2015, 15). The influence of these poets is especially evident in the compositions of Scottish emigrant bards, which present a unique and valuable first-hand perspective on the experiences of Scottish pioneers in Nova Scotia. Through use of traditional elements of their bardic heritage and eloquent expression of their own personal experiences of the New World, the bards offered commentary on the myriad aspects of emigration and immigration. The purpose of this thesis is to identify the role of selected Scottish emigrant bards as social commentators: that is, how the narrative and bardic elements present within the compositions chosen reflects the identity and experience of the immigrant Scot. The works of the three bards selected for this study express multiple responses to emigration, providing insight into the sociopolitical situation in Scotland in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as well as the complexities surrounding the decision to emigrate. Additionally, the song-poetry to be analyzed represents the diverse responses of Scottish immigrants to the rigours of pioneer life in Nova Scotia. The bards' commentary presents varying degrees of hope, disillusionment, nostalgia or longing for homeland, and anger toward those who treated others poorly and forced emigration; these positive or negative responses to their new environment were largely dependent upon the individual's economic status in Scotland prior to emigration. The intricate blend of traditional bardic elements and structure combined with purposeful

selection of musical setting and conceptual intent reveals the role of the bard as commentator and advocate to be an integral part of Scottish social structure.

My initial chapter outlines the bardic tradition in Scotland, situating the role of the bard in an historical context and discussing their use of poetry and song not only as a method for preservation of history, genealogy, and clan identity, but also as social commentary on events surrounding the composer himself. Specifically, I discuss the historical background, common elements of composition, the roles of the bard in Scottish culture, and how this role differed between the height of the bardic order and the decline of the clan system that followed. A description of praise and dispraise (including the genre of flyting described briefly in Chapter 2) is included to delineate the main elements of bardic composition. Further, a brief discussion of the homogeneity of music and poetry in bardic composition (namely, the importance of considering Gaelic poetry as songs) is included as necessary for understanding the role of such bardic compositions in Gaelic culture.

The second chapter delineates the history of sociopolitical circumstances in the Highlands of Scotland that resulted in widespread emigration in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Specifically, I discuss the results of the 1745 Jacobite Rising and the Acts of Proscription that followed, as well as the changing economic state of Highland lands being utilized for sheep farming. All of these events ultimately culminated in what is known as the Highland Clearances, or the extensive emigration of Highlanders from Scotland to the New World. Additionally, I provide a brief outline the history of settlement in Nova Scotia and discuss the challenges that immigrant pioneers experienced in the initial years.

The third chapter is a combination of the biographies and analyses of the pertinent poetry of three immigrant Nova Scotian bards: John MacLean, John the Hunter MacDonald, and Allan the Ridge MacDonald. The three bards I have selected represent the most prominent Scottish immigrant bards to Nova Scotia of the early to mid-nineteenth century, their works being thus the most readily-translated songs available. Specific texts were selected for their

representations of commentary on the topics of emigration, the circumstances in Scotland, and experiences of the New World. I then discuss the content of each bard's composition(s), the elements of praise or dispraise found within them, and how each work represents the experience of Scottish pioneers to the New World as well as the personal experiences and social circumstances that affected the perceptions of each bard.

I do not speak or read Gaelic; I have been reliant upon the translations and scholarly analysis of others regarding the texts chosen in order to create my own contribution to Gaelic Scholarship. Despite this, my goal within this thesis is to analyze the social and political commentary present within the text itself, and in this regard, translation and analysis have been sufficient to provide insight and varying perspectives. The comprehension of the original Gaelic texts would have been beneficial but were not crucial to my objective. Were I to focus on the literary and musical elements present within the texts chosen, I would require Gaelic language skills in order to adequately analyze the Gaelic texts and their relationship to the tunes chosen.

Despite the interdependent nature of music and verse in bardic composition, this work focusses on textual analysis and the use of bardic elements to provide social commentary and expression of the immigrant's experience. It does not include an analysis of melodic components of the songs, primarily due to the elusive nature of the oral tradition. Identifying the melodies, or airs, proves to be immensely difficult with bardic composition; as Margaret MacDonell indicates, "the elusive nature of the oral tradition and more especially the decline of the Gaelic-singing tradition among third and fourth generation Gaels abroad render the search for such airs almost fruitless" (MacDonell 1982, 187). Accordingly, only a limited number of airs have been preserved through publication, such as those printed in collections of fiddle music, or printed as accompaniment to a different song (Rankin 2005, 189). Others have been transcribed in twentieth century fieldwork, recorded from contemporary singers after having been passed

down through generations.[12] One difficulty with the notated versions available is the changing nature of rhythm in the various verses, as "the rhythm of the air changes in each verse to match the rhythm of the changing words" (Rankin, 189). In all of the airs I have accessed, the rhythm and melody are given for one verse and a chorus, if applicable. The notated music that is provided thus give an idea of the rhythmic quality of the air, but the interpretation of the rhythmic changes is not transcribed. The same can be implied for the melodic aspects of the musical notation; the basic structure of the melody is given, but any performative embellishments (possibly to underline specific phrases or words) are not recorded in the transcription.

The nature of the oral tradition makes researching the Gaelic singing tradition (and accurate transcription itself) problematic; by definition, the oral tradition is fluid, variable and constantly changing. In keeping with the deficits of transcribed melodies as outlined above, the melodies collected from the twentieth century Gaelic singers or even notations published in the nineteenth century are thus not entirely representative of the tune that the composing bard would have known. The modern ideas of accuracy, exactitude, and even intellectual property in an oral tradition were non-existent; even in what remains of the Gaelic singing tradition in Cape Breton, this idea of the performer's creative license is still prominent, as "singers' styles are individualistic and do not adhere to a strict model of the 'correct' air of a song" (ibid). What is collected now or in the twentieth century has changed significantly from the nineteenth century; various musical and rhythmic elements may have been added, dropped or altered, making identification of the "original" version (the version familiar to the composer in the nineteenth century) impossible to determine.

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[1] For examples of twentieth century collections of songs from the field in Nova Scotia, see John Lorne Campbell's *Songs Remembered in Exile* or Helen Creighton and Calum MacLeod's *Gaelic Songs in Nova Scotia*.
[2] The transcribed melody to MacLean's *A'Choille Ghruamach* can be found in Creighton and MacLeod 1979, 296-297, as it was collected in the field for Creighton and MacLeod's original publication in 1964. A melodic transcription for *Moladh Albainn Nuadh* (the same tune to John the Hunter's *Oran Do Dh'America*) is available in Rankin 2005, 191. I was unable to locate the melody for MacLean's *Seann Albainn Agus Albainn Ur*.

The limited availability of melodic notations in printed sources is made evident within the four song-poems represented within this work. Melodies for only three of the four compositions were found; the transcribed melody for John MacLean's *Seann Albainn Agus Albainn* Ur was not available. Given the interrelated nature of John MacLean's *A' Choille Ghruamach* and *Seann Albainn Agus Albainn Ur* (discussed at length in Chapter 3), musical analysis of one of these and not the other would include only half of the story, thus dismissing the integral connectivity between these two songs. Finally, the sheer amount of expertise and familiarity with the Gaelic singing tradition required to accurately discuss the musical components within these song-poems is a study unto itself. These factors, combined with the issues outlined above and my interest in exploring the 'voice' of the individual bards and their textual responses to immigration, put musical analysis outside the scope of this work.

Selected Literature Review

The Bardic Heritage: From Courtly Beginnings to Vernacular Virtuosity

The researching of a tradition that spans centuries necessitates a plethora of varied scholarly resources. Of utmost value to this project, however, have been the works of Scottish Gaelic scholar Michael Newton. *Seanchaidh na Coille (Memory-Keeper of the Forest)* is an extremely thoroughly-researched anthology of poetry, organized by thematic content, and containing historical topical overviews and analyses of a myriad of poetic contributions (as well as anecdotal prose by contemporary Scots pertinent to the subject matter). This source has been relevant for the majority of my work, as it includes information on John MacLean and Allan the Ridge. Newton's *Warriors of the Word: The World of the Scottish Highlanders* offers a comprehensive overview of Highland history, identity, tradition and society. More specific to the bardic tradition section itself, this work contains a chapter on "Literature and Oral Tradition," outlining the bardic tradition as it changed to the vernacular and discussing representative selections of bardic poetry. While these works have provided me with valuable overviews to this

topic, their focus in scope is much broader than my goal in this chapter, which is to identify the transformation in bardic tradition from court poet to the much broader social commentary of the emigrant bards.

Further resources include English and Scottish Studies scholar Roderick Watson's book on the literature of Scotland, which contains an in-depth description of the bardic tradition throughout its history, including discussion of flyting and the transition to vernacular Gaelic poetry (Watson 2007). Celtic scholar John Shaw has written two pertinent articles, the first of which discusses the Nova Scotian bards of the emigrant era, specifically referencing all three bards selected for this work (Shaw 1996). Shaw's 2007 article provides an overview of the oral tradition of Gaelic poetry in Scotland and stresses the importance of the relationship between music and verse (Shaw 2007). (In that vein, nearly every source that deals with Gaelic poetry attests to the vital importance of considering poetry as song and meant to be performed as such.) These works have provided me with additional detail and background information on the evolution of the bard's history in Scotland.

Another valuable resource for this chapter have been entries in John T. Koch's *Celtic Culture: A Historical Encyclopedia*. Koch's work contains five volumes and entries on a myriad of aspects of the Celtic culture, whether Welsh, Irish or Scottish. Of specific value within these volumes have been the entries on the "bàrd baile" (Sheila Kidd), a description of the village poet in the Scottish Highlands, and "Scottish Gaelic poetry" (Anja Gunderloch), which details the genres of eulogy and elegy (included in the study in Chapter 1). Additionally, twentieth century Gaelic scholar John MacInnes (2006) discusses in detail the role of the panegyric code in Gaelic poetry. Each of these focus on a specific aspect of Gaelic poetry, and together they have enabled me to provide a more thorough overview of the elements of bardic composition.

Of Uprisings and Reprisals in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries: The Highland Clearances and Pioneer Life in Nova Scotia

The sociopolitical history of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in Scotland is crucial to the understanding and analysing of the immigrant bardic compositions on which this thesis is based, requiring the use of the following works as research for this essential historical aspect. The literature I have selected offers a broad perspective of immigrant Scots, from the 1773 voyage of the *Hector* and the initial wave of Scottish immigrants in the 1770s to the gradual decline of the Clearances in the 1850s.

Journalist and author Donald MacKay is primarily concerned with the events surrounding the departure and arrival in Nova Scotia of the *Hector,* the first immigrant ship of Highlanders in 1773 (MacKay 2001). MacKay's work discusses events leading up to the Highland Clearances, the Clearances themselves, and the conditions that the first Scottish pioneers experienced upon arrival. The chronological history of the decades following is continued by historian Lucille H. Campey (2007), in *An Unstoppable Force: The Scottish Exodus to Canada*, and *After the Hector: The Scottish Pioneers of Nova Scotia and Cape Breton (1773–1852).* This work focuses specifically on the lives of Scottish pioneers in Nova Scotia and Cape Breton. She discusses the "growing popularity" of Cape Breton and Nova Scotia in general as an immigration destination for the Scots, (Campey 2007, 109), as well as the simultaneously impoverished yet resilient pioneers who inhabited Cape Breton (Campey 2007, 109). These works have provided me with historical background on the events that led to emigration, as well as the initial circumstances experienced by Scottish pioneers to Nova Scotia.

Similarly, Celtic scholar Charles W. Dunn examines both the events that led to the Clearances and widespread emigration, and the resulting thriving Scottish culture that took root and prospered in Nova Scotia (Dunn 1953). Dunn's perspective is unique, however, in that his work focuses on bardic poetry as evidence of personal experiences and he cites passages of immigrant poetry and prose alongside his own descriptions. Dunn thus points to the

"transplantation" of Scottish "folk-culture" and the "flourishing of the old tradition" in Nova Scotia (Dunn 1953, 34, 58). Finally, D. Campbell and R.A. MacLean's *Beyond the Atlantic Roar: A Study of the Nova Scotian Scots* presents an historical and sociological perspective on the Scots of Nova Scotia from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Their book provides additional detail on the pioneer experience and considers the sociological implications of education, culture, religion and politics in developing Gaelic communities in Nova Scotia. The combination of poetic focus and sociological considerations have provided additional perspective to my own historical narrative in Chapter 2.

The Voices of the Bards: John MacLean, John the Hunter MacDonald and Allan the Ridge MacDonald

The literature selected as representative of each of the three bards I have chosen is a combination of information found in academic theses, books written specifically on the bards themselves, anthologies of Nova Scotian and Gaelic poetry, and scholarly journal articles. Maureen Lonergan wrote two masters' theses pertaining specifically to the bards I am studying. Her 1974 thesis contains a section on John MacLean and Allan the Ridge MacDonald, and includes biographies and pertinent compositions for each bard. Additionally, the introduction provides a concise history of bards in Scotland and of genres of Gaelic bardic poetry. Lonergan's second thesis is a more comprehensive anthology of the poetry of John MacLean and provides original Gaelic and English translations of thirteen of MacLean's poems, as well as notes to accompany each composition. I have utilized these texts as secondary translation references and as additional biographical information.

An anthology of the Gaelic poetry of Allan the Ridge MacDonald, Gaelic scholar Effie Rankin's 2005 book categorizes MacDonald's works into three chronological periods. Her work also includes a comprehensive biography of Allan the Ridge and outlines the "poetic legacy" of the Lochaber region from which both Allan the Ridge and his cousin John the Hunter

emigrated. Rankin's treatise on the poetry of Lochaber includes information on the role of the bard as chronicler of clan history and legend and the use of the elemental tropes of eulogy and elegy. Similarly, Kevin MacDonald, in the introduction to *MacDonald Bards from Medieval Times* (1900), presents a history of bards in Scotland before offering biographies and selections of poetry on each of the historical MacDonald bards. Allan the Ridge and John the Hunter MacDonald are discussed briefly by MacDonald on pages 55–56. As another anthology devoted to an individual's work, Alexander MacLean Sinclair's *Clàrsach Na Coille* (1881) is a comprehensive collection of his grandfather John MacLean's Gaelic poetry, and comprises over one hundred of the bard's compositions. Although his collection does not provide English translations of the compositions of John MacLean, Sinclair provides an extensive biographical memoir of the bard in English. These sources have been essential in accumulating biographical information for the relevant bards and, in the case of Effie Rankin's book, for analytical perspectives on Allan the Ridge's poetry.

Unlike John MacLean and Allan the Ridge, for whom information is much more plentiful, sources for biographical information or even transcriptions of the poetic compositions of John the Hunter are scarce. Where compilations of Gaelic poetry may at least mention the other two bards, John the Hunter is often omitted, except perhaps with a mention as progenitor of his cousin Allan the Ridge's response in rhyme, *Moladh Albainn Nuaidh* (In Praise of Nova Scotia). In this thesis, I have accessed information from Maureen Lonergan William's entry in the online *Dictionary of Canadian Biography* concerning John the Hunter MacDonald, brief references to John the Hunter in Effie Rankin's work above, as well as a very brief section in *Mabou Pioneers*.

The contributions of Robert Dunbar to Gaelic scholarship have been invaluable in my analysis of the works of John MacLean. His 2006 dissertation contains translations, notes and critical assessments of forty-four of MacLean's secular compositions, including the two represented here. Additionally, his 2008 article "The Poetry of the Emigrant Generation"

provides discourse on emigrant compositions with a wider scope; MacLean is also represented within this article, as are both John the Hunter and Allan the Ridge. Dunbar's work represents the only analytical literature on *Seann Albainn Agus Albainn Ur* in English that I have been able to find and is thus integral to my own interpretations of MacLean's composition. As MacLean's *A' Choille Ghruamach* is quite popular within the corpus of emigration poetry, there are far more references to this poem within the literature I have selected than there are to the three other compositions discussed in Chapter 3.

Margaret MacDonell's anthology of emigrant poetry has been a point of reference for all three bards throughout my research process (1982). An anthology of the immigrant bards to the New World, MacDonell categorizes bards by location, including examples from The Carolinas, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, Ontario and the Northwest Territories[3]. Her introduction includes an analysis of the socio-political history that preceded the Clearances. Each section of the book provides a brief biography of the bard in question, as well as pertinent examples of their poetry that relates to immigration. This book was an essential resource for me in the beginning stages of my research and aided me in the selection of the three bards I have chosen.

Two essays are of particular interest to the bardic compositions represented in this thesis. The first of these, "On Remembering and Forgetting: Highland Memories within the Maritime Diaspora," written by historian Rusty Bitterman, explores "how the Highland past was remembered and how it was forgotten," and specifically discusses the role that bardic poetry played in preserving the experiences of immigrants (Bitterman 1999, 255). Bitterman references the elements of "loss and hope," or eulogy and elegy, that are contained in the bards' compositions. The second essay is written by Scottish Studies scholar Michael Kennedy, entitled "Lochaber No More: A Critical Examination of Highland Emigration Mythology." Kennedy's work emphasizes the distinctly varied experiences of new immigrants, pointing to the

[3] MacDonell's texts were chosen as available in collections in Harvard University and St. Francis Xavier University libraries (MacDonell 1982, 17). Other reasons for including or excluding specific locations are not given.

contrasting elements of lament and hope present in the works of immigrant bards, and "[cautioning against the expectation that] the narrative of Highland migration [is a] uniform one" (Kennedy 1999, 269). Kennedy specifically cites the works of Allan the Ridge, John the Hunter and John MacLean within his essay. These two essays are crucial perspectives on the influence of bardic poetry within the immigrant era and have provided additional context for my analysis of the poetry.

CHAPTER 1. THE BARDIC HERITAGE:

FROM COURTLY BEGINNINGS TO VERNACULAR VIRTUOSITY

Sheas iad an dùthaich 's gach cùis agus càs,
Duais-bhrathaidh cha ghabhadh ged chuirt' iad gu bàs;
'S ged shàraicht' an spiorad 's ged leigte an ceann,
Bha'n cridhe cho caingeann ri carraig nam beann.

- Iain Campbell of Ledaig, *Is Toigh Leam A' Ghàidhealtachd* (Creighton & MacLeod 1979, 2)

The bardic tradition within the British Isles boasts a longstanding and distinguished history. Adulations of Celtic "professional praise poets who served Celtic chieftains" are found in multiple Greek and Roman texts dating back to the first century (Williams 2006, 169). Irish schools, having established the bardic hierarchy in the eighth century, were integral to the development of similar bardic schools in Scotland. Ireland and Scotland shared the linguistic commonality of Classical Gaelic, in which the various forms of poetry were composed. Celtic scholar Thomson avers that the tradition of bardic composition was widespread in Scotland: "[W]herever a Gaelic Chief held established court, from the thirteenth century to the sixteenth, and…until the late seventeenth, there was likely to be some bardic activity" (Thomson 1990, 21). Thomson attests to the wide variance of bardic activity, indicating that some courts, such as that of the Lord of the Isles, might boast a myriad of bards, while others were visited by traveling poets on a rotational "circuit". This circuit, he stipulates, was an essential and defining element of the bardic system, making possible a vast exchange of bards between Ireland and Scotland (Watson 2007, 23). Additionally, the circuitry of bards within Scotland provided interconnectivity between clans, leading to improved political relationships and a sense of a unified identity (ibid, 21).

By the thirteenth century, the bardic system was deeply entrenched as a part of Scottish culture, with Scotland boasting bardic colleges of its own. Scottish literature scholar Roderick Watson describes this "exclusive professional class" as an esteemed hierarchy of educated and competent poets who "produced learned and very highly wrought syllabic verses" (Watson 2007, 23). Sources detailing the descriptions of the Irish bardic order are more numerous than those

in Scotland; however, considering the interconnectivity of bards between Ireland and Scotland, it can be assumed that the hierarchies of each were quite similar. Bardic composition was highly venerated in both countries. Additionally, the role of the bard as the oral archivist of clan history and a chieftain's prestige further underlines their social value. Particularly in the smaller courts of clan chieftains, where literacy was not commonplace, bards served to emphasize the unity of clan and loyalty to its chieftain.

Elements of Bardic Poetry: Praise and Dispraise

The functional forms of traditional bardic composition are myriad; however, these can be bifurcated into two main branches of praise and dispraise poetry. Praise poetry included two genres, depending whether its subject was living or dead: either eulogy or elegy, respectively. A glorifying accolade of the strengths and assets of a patron, eulogy "strives to present the most perfect and positive image of its subject," often detailing the genealogy and clan history relating to the individual (Gunderloch 2006, 1580). Eulogies were comprised of a wide variety of adulatory elements, including "praise of a horse, a bow, the chief's ancestry his land, his valour or the beauty of his lady…lament for a leader's death or for the passing of glory" (Watson 2007, 24). Additional components are identified as the patron's skill in battle, "his generosity, hospitality, education, character qualities, and his love of feasting, hunting and gaming" (Coira 2012, 323).

Elegy, while sharing the exalting elements of eulogy, is contrasted from eulogy by its denotation of death. Not only is it a composition for the departed, but elegy also possesses a distinct capacity in terms of bereavement (Gunderloch, 1580). Elegy provided a practical function in aiding the process of grief. Addressing the immediate loss, however, was not the only objective. Elegy also served to immortalize the subject in verse, providing an enduring and recurring memorial tribute that could rekindle the remembered spirit of the departed for generations after. Clancy identifies elegy as a "more lasting, memorable genre" than eulogy for

the very reason of commemoration: "[Within elegy], the basic forms of praise are retained, but made retrospective, and through that retrospect the subject's heirs… could continue to invoke his presence in reiteration of the verse" (Clancy 2007, 67). This was one of the primary reasons for sponsorship of the bards across the centuries: "Patronage of the custodians of poetry was the most effective means of ensuring the immortality of one's ancestors and oneself" (Newton 2009, 83). Eulogy and elegy were integral to a bard's role, and verse written to commemorate and even immortalize his patron – his lineage, history and accomplishments – were defining elements in his repertoire.

The elements of praise poetry described above are indicative of a complex system of rhetoric that John MacInnes dubbed "the panegyric code," referring to the constant reintegration of phrases and "conventional images" that "are introduced and re-introduced until a densely woven texture of imagery is produced in which every phrase, every word almost, is charged with significance" (MacInnes 2006, 28). The common use of this imagery meant that its use would bring older poetry to an audience's recall; the layering of imagery thus resulted in a complicated web of meaning and of historical and cultural references. MacInnes extrapolates on the importance of the panegyric code and its integral nature to Gaelic society:

> What the bards have produced here is therefore a coherent system of rhetoric of great resonance and evocative power. Nor is it designed to be merely an enclosed universe of poetic discourse. Every commonplace of the system focuses upon a particular facet of aristocratic life…. The ramifications of the system eventually extend throughout this society. (ibid, 275)

The complex interweaving of imagery in the panegyric code was integral to the bardic repertoire and is, as MacInnes infers, also integral to understanding "the entire Gaelic experience in Scotland" (ibid, 317). While the classical system of bardism began to decline in the sixteenth century and the subject matter turned away from the patron, elements of the panegyric code were still evident in the vernacular poetry of the nineteenth century (Watson 2007, 25). *Oran*

Do Dh'America by John the Hunter MacDonald displays these panegyric elements in references to hunting (see Chapter 3 for discussion of this poem).

In contrast to the often-obsequious nature of praise poetry, the use of dispraise, or satire, could be an elemental weapon for or against the patron. The bard could wield verbal invective as a weapon that carried the same immortalizing power as that of eulogy. Welsh scholar Caerwyn Williams indicates that satire "can only be understood as the counterpart of eulogy. If the latter could establish and strengthen a man's fame and honour, the former could diminish and destroy it" (Williams 1972, 32). Particularly in medieval times, the destructive capacity of bardic satire was not dismissed, but instead considered a powerful force deserving of respect and even dread, due to the longevity of their compositions:

> The Irish in particular were thought to have an almost magical power in their command of satire and invective, and the professional poets, or bards, were feared because of this. This was an understandable fear, since the bards were historians as well as entertainers, their words would last long after they were dead, a generous brave prince or king would have a good reputation, a stingy cowardly one would also not be forgotten. It was widely believed that there was a mysterious power in the words of a poet, that it was not advisable to get on the wrong side of one. (Morgan 1990, 26–27)

The words of the poets held inimitable power and spoken or written insults brandished by a bard could not easily be dismissed. Michael Newton stresses that the bards "were not just sycophantic flatterers," but could "withhold their approval or explicitly disapprove of actions and policies," and were thus extremely influential in the social hierarchy of the time (Newton 2009, 99). This concept coincides with the idea of the bard as "social commentator," which was not limited to the classical era but continued in the centuries following.

A distinctive and influential development of satirical composition was that of flyting, or verbal contest between two respective poets. The *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* defines flyting as a Middle Scots word meaning "to scold, quarrel, or vituperate", "a contest in

verse between two poets in which they insulted each other employing as much metrical expertise, wit, and outrageous invention as they could muster" (Greene 2012, 493). This contest was usually face-to-face, performed in public, often had comedic elements and was meant to display the virtuosity of each performer. The genre of flyting prevailed particularly in Scotland, where this duel of wits was not only highly-prized but flourished so strongly that the Scots were foremost in its art in Europe. As Watson suggests:

> The genre [of flyting] owes more to oral contests in medieval Gaelic verse than it does to the European canon, and its heavily patterned hyperbolic abuse and its delight in the grotesque show the other side of the bardic praise poems. (Watson 2007, 59)

In an essay on the flyting of Robert Burns, Scottish Studies scholar Kenneth Simpson identifies the highly valued aspect of witty invective being the entire point of the exchange:

> Flyting, as both social phenomenon and literary genre, is part of the Scottish tradition of reduction. In Scotland the value of expending expressive energy on reduction, insult, or humiliation has never been questioned. In sixteenth-century Scottish poetry Kurt Wittig found 'dozens of vituperative poems…in which merely to let fly at someone appears to be valued for its own sake.' (Simpson 1998, 151)

Flyting, in particular in Scotland, was an element of bardic satire that continued after the classical bardic tradition declined. Allan the Ridge MacDonald's *Moladh Albainn Nuaidh* is an example of flyting representative of the nineteenth century bards (see Chapter 3).

Vernacular Bardic Composition

With the declining court and clan system in Scotland in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the focus in the Highlands turned to vernacular forms of Scottish Gaelic. Although this shift moved away from the classical bardic composition with its reliance on education and aristocratic focus, the celebrated bard continued as an integral and vital part of Scottish culture. Similarly, "aspects of the bardic style, particularly set phrases and favorite epithets, were to

survive in a looser and more vernacular form for centuries to come" (Watson, 25). These "epithets" signified elements of the panegyric code that had been in place for centuries. Watson identifies the vernacular shift further, reiterating that, although significantly changed, the core elements of bardic composition remained:

> The formal patterns of bardic verse were finally changing, and syllabic metres, high diction and learned historical allusions were giving way to a more colloquial Gaelic with metres based on stress and strophic stanzas of various lengths… This had been a gradual change, which can be traced to the previous century, and, after all, the modes of eulogy, elegy and bardic satire were to continue unabated into the next (Watson 2007, 152).

It is this new vernacular style of bardic composition that takes precedence in the following chapters. While the situation of bards in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries differed drastically from their counterparts in earlier periods in history, the role of the bard as orator, chronicler and "intermediary" or social commentator remained distinctive (Kidd 2006, 173).

The changing political landscape of the Highlands resulted in a change of relationship between bard and benefactor; no longer was he employed by a clan leader or patron (Thomson 1990, 156). This was a defining aspect of the shift in bardic composition. As Watson indicates, "the old aristocratic tradition was dying," and with this came the deviation of focus from service to the clan chieftain to service of the community as a whole (Watson, 198):

> The new poets were writing for a more popular audience, and, as ordinary people themselves, were open to new influences and a wider range of subjects than ever before… [Poets] called [their] verses 'songs', and specified, like Burns, the airs to which they could be set. From now on the term 'bard' lost its strict technical sense and came to mean simply a composer of poems. (Watson 2007, 198-199)

In addition to this shift in focus, the definition of the bard as an individual was changing. Formal education became a thing of the past, and a bard no longer needed to be of a specific

social station in order to flourish. With the vernacular tradition developing, the variety of possible subject matter was also wide open. Bardic songs became more universal; the bard was reaching a much broader audience, and the capacity for creativity and commentary increased. Duncan MacInnes attests to the value of the contributions of the vernacular bards, calling it an "ideal synthesis" of the classical elements and the wide scope of the vernacular:

> It was [the vernacular bards], amidst all the complexities and vicissitudes of Gaelic history… who preserved a conceptual unity for the Gaels of Scotland. To concentrate thus on the vernacular poetry is not at all to discount the contribution of the poets of classical Gaelic, in whose works much of the rhetoric was formulated. (Newton 2006, 272)

Classical elements continued, albeit in shifted focus, and with a wider audience and endless scope of subject, the vernacular bards were exceptionally influential in their communities.

One illustration of the influential role of the vernacular bard is the *bàrd baile*. Sheila Kidd defines this term as "a poet working within a defined Highland locale and composing poetry which is generally traditional in form, and which relates to that community" (Kidd 2006, 173). These poets' performance venues were typically the ceilidh-house, a distinctively Gaelic type of pub, where ale poured amidst local gossip and pertinent news and artistic forms of social dance, storytelling and song performance were a defining feature. The latter two are contributions of the local bard, who served an important role in providing amusement and diversion from the rigors of Highland life and, as Kidd avers, provided an elemental function as a conduit of "social commentary" as an "intermediary between the community and change" (ibid). The content of the *bàrd baile*'s compositions thus varied widely, and included subjects of "homeland, war, love, local and national events, new technology, religion, philosophy, humour, and songs relating to individual members of the community" (ibid, 174). As they had in the songs of their predecessors at the peak of the tradition, traditional themes and styles of bardic composition proved elemental in the roles of bards for centuries after:

> Just as elegy, eulogy, [and] satire… featured within the repertoire of the clan poets of earlier centuries, they also feature within the songs composed by nineteenth and twentieth century local poets, who drew upon them all in fulfilling their role as social commentators. (ibid)

Through musical and poetic composition, the local bard provided a largely oral community with an enduring perspective on current events and everyday life. Folklorist Thomas McKean attests to the value of the *bàrd baile* in Gaelic society:

> [T]hese unpaid, unofficial poets were the *de facto* spokesmen and -women for their communities and as such wielded considerable power over both their neighbours and public opinion. For this society a song was, and to some extent still is, very much a functional and practical piece, an essential element of communication seamlessly integrated with other types of human expression. (McKean 1992, 3, italics original)

The term *bàrd baile* is a controversial one among scholars, as it infers a limitation on the poet to the realm of his immediate community and perhaps a lack of broader influence or experience. Gaelic scholar Ronald Black points out the value in considering the compositions pertinent to the community as *bàrchachd baile*, or "village poetry", instead of simply referring to the bard as the "village poet." He infers that the connotation of "village poet" signifies a restricted or confined viewpoint on the part of the poet himself:

> [The term *bàrd baile*] seek[s] to imply…that such a person is a laureate of a small community and therefore narrow in his (or her) view of the world. In practice, however, such poets have typically fought a war, sailed seven seas or otherwise sweated blood far and wide for a living, and their view of their community is by no means uncritical or lacking in global perspective. (Black 2006, lxi)

This idea of a bard's broad experience applies to the poets I discuss in the following chapters, as each had varied careers in Scotland and were also adventurers in terms of pioneering in Cape

Breton. Each sailed across the Atlantic and poured sweat, blood and tears into carving out a life in his new homeland.

The Nineteenth Century Bard: The Emigrant Bard as Social Commentator

The role of the bard as social commentator is perhaps best exemplified in the works of emigrant bards. Socio-political changes in Scotland and the challenging experiences of pioneering in British Nova Scotia are prominent themes in nineteenth century bardic repertoire and form the core of the poetry discussed in the following chapters. The centuries old tradition had changed, but core elements of bardic composition remained and were utilized, like their historical counterparts, to influence audiences in both New and Old Worlds. This role of social commentator remained an integral aspect of Gaelic poetry:

> Like the 'panegyric code', both the code of dispraise and of praise for the New World was meant to shape perceptions, both amongst the New World Gaels and those of friends and neighbours who stayed behind in Scotland, and in the case of the latter, to shape choices, as well. What emerges in the codes of dispraise and praise is a profound and serious debate involving two fundamental questions: did we err in coming to the New World, and, would those left behind in Scotland err if, in spite of the difficulties of life in the New World, they followed us? The poets are not merely giving vent to private emotions, but are exercising their time-honoured role as spokespersons for the wider community. (Dunbar 2008, 32)

These two fundamental questions are addressed by all of the compositions in the works discussed. John MacLean and John the Hunter both expressed regret for having journeyed across the Atlantic and encouraged others not to make the same mistake. John MacLean eventually shifted his perspective, acknowledging the positive aspects of emigration available for the majority of immigrant Highlanders, and was joined by Allan the Ridge, who emphatically defended the New World and shunned the cruelties of the socio-political circumstances in

Scotland. Robert Dunbar comments on the importance of the social commentary in Gaelic poetry and its role in the critical situation brought about by emigration:

> Gaelic poetry was used by poets of the emigrant generation in much the same fashion as it had traditionally been used in the Old World – to define and reinforce the values of their society, particularly at times of crisis – and for the poets of the emigrant generation, there was no greater crisis than that brought on by the departure from the Old World and the challenge of rebuilding Gaelic communities in the New. (Dunbar 2008, 25)

The bards each utilized varying elements of praise and dispraise to influence their communities, both in the New World and in the Old. Additionally, the function of the bard as commentator on changing worlds and emigration was not only restricted to their contemporary audience; their perspectives on life in Scotland and in Nova Scotia provide unique first-hand accounts that shape the viewpoints of historians and Celtic scholars today.

A Word on Music

The combination of poetry and music in bardic compositions is not to be minimized. While the text may be the most obvious means of interpretation, it is but one element in a woven fabric of cultural identification and serves to communicate only a part of the story. The tradition of Scottish Gaelic communities, both in Scotland in the eighteenth century and in Canada in the nineteenth century, was primarily an oral tradition that often involved the telling of stories and the singing of songs. Michael Kennedy confirms this, stating that "sung poetry was the chief form of Gaelic literary expression" (Kennedy 1999, 270). The musical nature of Gaelic poetry is stressed throughout scholarly literature on the subject. Heather Sparling explains that "Gaelic literature consists of poetry that is almost invariably sung," while Michael Newton stresses that "Gaelic poetry should be understood primarily as song meant to be performed for, and heard

audibly by, a live audience" (Sparling 2003, 154; Newton 2015, 15). Additionally, John Shaw identifies the critical connection between music and poetry in Gaelic culture:

> From the outset it should be mentioned that with very few exceptions the oral poetry of the Gaels, at present and for a number of centuries, has been conveyed and transmitted *through song*, and the two remain inseparably linked in the consciousness of contemporary Gaels. (Shaw 2007, 4, italics original)

Music and language in Gaelic poetry were intertwined so closely as to be nearly one and the same; even the "Gaelic words for 'verse'… have implications of melody" (McKean 1992, 4). The music also serves as a form of rhetoric similar to the panegyric code, as verse is often composed to familiar airs, referencing earlier works by other bards and reminding the audience of these previous compositions; in this way, the tune can be a strategic element of commentary itself. Michael Newton suggests that this utilization of familiar tunes underlines the nature of community in Gaelic poetry:

> The constant recycling of form and content blurs the concept of individual ownership and authorship and reinforces the sense of participation in an inherited collective art form. This has been particularly true of the vernacular tradition, which has been sustained by active participation of the entire community. (Newton 2009, 86).

Music is therefore a defining element of Gaelic poetry and an aspect of the intended communal nature of the compositions themselves.

Sparling affirms the importance of music in Scottish narrative in her work on Gaelic folksong in modern Cape Breton (Sparling 2003). Her discussion of the Gaelic eight-line song is of particular relevance to my study as each of the bardic texts I consider are composed of eight-line stanzas. Sparling's explanations prove that it is the *combination* of both musical performance and dense text that make this particular type of work unique:

> Eight-line songs are unusual in that they do not have a chorus, whereas almost every other Gaelic song type and structure does. The lack of chorus… elevates a song's status, largely

> because it indicates that the song must be listened to. Without a chorus, the audience must pay attention to the lyric content… Every word [must] be understood and the singer is judged partially for his or her ability to deliver the text clearly. The combination of minimal lyric repetition and numerous verses create a dense text. (Sparling 2003, 161)

It is imperative to consider the cultural significance of bardic composition as synonymous with musical performance. This thesis, however, does not include analyses of the airs to which the texts were set. Given the implication of Newton's work on the strategic use of familiar music as settings for new poetry, this would require an extensive analysis of the historic background on each air to determine which music was selected in which performance context, not to mention an entire additional corpus of study on the nature of Gaelic music to understand the myriad of implications and rhetoric present in the simple selection of a tune. The melodic analyses alone would provide ample subject matter for a future research study, and as such are outside the scope of this thesis.

CHAPTER 2. OF UPRISINGS AND REPRISALS:

THE HIGHLAND CLEARANCES AND PIONEER LIFE IN NOVA SCOTIA

Gur a mise tha tùrsach,
Ag caoidh cor na dùthcha,
'S nan seann daoine cùiseil
Bha cliùteach is treun;
Rinn uachdarain am fuadach,
Gu fada null thar chuantan,
Am fearann chaidh thoirt uapa,
'S thoirt suas do na féidh.

- Henry White, *Fuadach Nan Gàidheal* (Creighton & MacLeod, 58)

Dèan cadalan sàmhach, a chuilean mo ruin
Dèan fuireach mar thà thu, 's tu 'n dràst an àit' úr…
Gur h-ann an American tha sinn an dràst
Fo dhubhar na coille nach teirig gu bràch.

- Iain Mac Mhurchaidh, *Dèan Cadalan Sàmhach* (Campbell 1999, 59)

I. Historical Background of Scotland, Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries

An overview of the socio-political history of Scotland in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries is useful for comprehending the complex experiences of Scottish emigrants to Nova Scotia and necessary for understanding references in the poetic compositions discussed below. Additionally, commentary provided in bardic composition supplies a social outlook on emigrant experiences and on history itself; each provides perspective on the other. As historian Rusty Bitterman indicates,

> We can see in the poetry of the emigrants who made their way to the Maritimes in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries the bards' grief and outrage over changes that violated their sense of a just order. (Bitterman 1999, 255)

Compositions by the three bards selected for focus are discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3. Additional works by other bards are included within this chapter to provide a broader representation of the bardic discourse on the sociopolitical events of the eighteenth century.

Central to the changes occurring in the clan system across the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries is the Jacobite cause, a movement intended to restore the exiled Stuart kings to the Scottish throne. The objective was to overthrow the Hanoverian King William of

Orange (and in later risings, his descendants), who had gained power by deposing James the VII and II in 1688. The Jacobite Rising supported first James Edward (dubbed the Old Pretender and son of James VII and II) and then his son Charles Edward (styled the Young Pretender, but better known as Bonnie Prince Charlie). There were five attempts in total, with the most prominent being the year after the Glorious Revolution in 1689 (in favour of James VII and II himself), the Jacobite Rising of 1715 (in favour of the Old Pretender), and the notorious 1745 Rising led by Charles Stuart, the Young Pretender. The last of these prompted harsh reprisals from the English throne, resulting in dire consequences for the entirety of the Scottish people (whether supporters of the Jacobite cause or not), but especially those in the Highlands, where sympathy to the Stuart cause was most widespread (Britannica, s.v. "Jacobite").

With the overwhelming defeat of the Jacobites at Culloden in 1746, the Jacobite Cause was extinguished and English attempts to prevent any future uprisings were severe. Scottish Highlanders, whether loyal to the Crown, sympathizers to the Jacobite Cause, or neutral to either side, were considered by the English to be a unified threat. The attempts to eradicate Scottish cultural identity were evidenced in two Acts of Parliament passed in the years following Culloden, which stripped Highlanders of their cultural identity, right to self-defence and self-sustenance, and, ultimately, their way of life. Passed in 1746, the Act of Proscription forbade Highlanders not only the possession of arms, but also the wearing of Highland dress (MacKay 2001, 10). Weapons were outlawed, which meant that Highlanders were forbidden means of self-defence and that deer-hunting for sustenance was more difficult. The Highland bagpipes were also banned, as these were considered by the English to be a weapon of war. The wearing of traditional Highland dress was a violation of English law; Highlanders were "barred from wearing tartan, kilt or plaid, and had to wear the clothing of the [English]" (ibid). A first offence would result in imprisonment, the second in deportation to the Colonies. Contemporary bards, utilizing their role as social commentators, protested this affront to their cultural heritage:

Displeasing to me is

This act which King George made;

That took our arms and clothes from us

Which had always equipped us;

For their plaids and their tartans,

In which young folk were active

We must now wear trousers and long coats,

And carry sticks in our hands.

(John Maclean of Inverscadale, *Song After the Battle of Culloden Against the Disclothing and Disarming Act of 1746*, Campbell 1990, 256-258)

While the Act of Proscription was clearly an English oppression of Highland identity, it was the Act of Abolition of Heritable Jurisdictions that proved detrimental to the Highland way of life. As Donald MacKay stipulates, England's primary objective was to "integrate Scotland, and particularly the Scottish Highlands, more fully into the rest of the kingdom. Despite the Act of Union [in 1707], clan chieftains had retained considerable judicial and military powers over their followers" (MacKay 2001, 11). These powers were to see the most drastic change; after the Act of Abolition was passed, Highland chiefs no longer retained the sovereignty they had previously possessed. They effectively became lairds in the English sense, barred from their traditional roles as dispensers of justice or leaders of warriors. Instead of shepherding a community of clansmen on common ancestral lands, they instead were given title of an estate that was required to turn a profit:

> [The Act] saw the extinction of the clan system proceeded at an unprecedented pace… In a matter of a few generations, communal land use lost out to individualistic control; and social organization was rooted in martial values, reciprocity and a subsistence ethic was swept aside and replaced by commercial mores and practices… Confronted with the

> pressures and opportunities of a new economic order, there was little to prevent them from deploying their land assets in new ways. (Bitterman 1999, 253)

The Act of Abolition ensured that the centuries-old Highland clan system was no longer viable, paving the way for the amalgamation of events that led to the mass exodus of common people from the Scottish Highlands: the Highland Clearances.

In order to escape English oppression in the early years after Culloden, some Highlanders had chosen exile in the form of emigration. However, thousands more were forced to emigrate due to the changing socio-political landscape that resulted from the passing of the English laws described above. While English influence and oppression of traditional Scottish identity held a significant role in the eradication of the Highland way of life, it was the clan chieftains, newly turned into English lairds, who were the greatest impetus for emigration. Lands that had once been communal were no longer; once rented out for clan members to live on and grow a subsistence living, these lands were now being looked at in terms of monetary gain:

> The old order passed and with it the traditional bonds of kinship and affection between chief and clan, while in its wake the new order gave rise on an unprecedented scale to evictions, exploitation and emigration. (MacDonell 1982, 7)

The exponential increase in rents and turning out of families who had lived on the land for generations allowed lairds to install new, more profitable tenants. Sheep-farming was a more lucrative use of land than renting it to tenants for their sustenance crops. The mercenary and often unethical behaviour by lairds who exchanged fealty for economic gain is repeatedly and bitterly castigated in Gaelic songs of the period:

> The coward who now rules us
> Evicted his own, few remain
> He prefers sheep in the hills
> To a kilted retinue.

There is no cordial agreement,

No hearing for the poor man;

If one does not raise sheep in the glens

He brings himself to penury.

(Donald Chisholm, *I Was Young in Strathglass*, MacDonell 1982, 67)

The *Canadian Boat Song*, an anonymous composition published in 1829, similarly laments this treatment of tenants:

When the bold kindred, in the time long vanish'd

Conquer'd the soil and fortified the keep,

No seer foretold the children would be banish'd,

That a degenerate lord might boast his sheep. (Dunn 1953, 12-13)

The outrage expressed by Scottish bards concerning the dereliction of tenants by their lairds was not limited to the beginnings of the Clearances in the late eighteenth century, but was "echoed again and again in songs of subsequent decades as other bards explained outmigration in terms of unsought and unwelcome changes [and] condemned the profit-oriented behaviour of landlords" (Bitterman 1999, 254-55). Poet Rory MacKenzie expressed his ill-will toward the landlords in the early years of the nineteenth century, some sixty years after the Acts were passed:

If it be sheep-walks which will replace men,

Scotland will then become a wasteland for France.

When the arrogant Bonaparte comes with his heavy hand,

The shepherds will be badly off, and we will not grieve for them.

(Rory MacKenzie, *The Emigration*, MacDonnell 1982, 117)

The Acts passed by the English were a means of oppression of Scottish Highlanders, but it is the exploitation of the Highland Scots by their own people that was so detrimental. Michael Newton identifies the importance of considering that economic circumstances not as an anonymous

entity, but instead as bearing the faces of those who in the past held their clan's protection and wellbeing as part of their honour:

> The focus of many texts is on 'economic conditions', stating them to be objective facts and processes that can be stated to run to logical conclusions, with both landlords and Highland peasantry being equally the 'victims' of forces beyond their control. Such an outlook, however, neglects the fact that the economy is a cultural institution in which human agency is involved… Standard interpretations absolve landlords and government from blame and ignore the harnessing of prejudice and racism to justify the forced removal of Gaels from their homes 'for their own good'. (Newton 2009, 38)

There were few options available for the Highlanders; being forced from the land they had tilled for generations, only two choices were left. Either they could join the masses of Lowland Scots in the burgeoning commercialism of the industrial revolution occurring in the south of Scotland, or they could emigrate, leaving homeland behind entirely. Both options necessitated a great deal of sacrifice. The first choice meant abandoning their traditional ways of life and becoming industrial workers within the Lowland cities; the second, while promising prosperity, the possibility of owning their own land, and the opportunity to carry on their traditions in a new land, obliged them to leave behind their homeland forever. While many chose the first option, emigration from the Highlands and Western Isles of Scotland to various parts of the New World was a significant movement, beginning in earnest in the 1770s and continuing well into the 1850s (Kennedy 1999, 269).

Oppression of the Highlander did not end with proscription and being expelled from their ancestral lands; agents promoting immigration to British North America proved to be a source of unscrupulous profiteering at the expense of Scottish emigrants. Emigration agents[4] pursued land sale profits in British North America at the expense of those seeking resettlement,

[4] Where these purveyors of land sales and transportation are discussed in literature concerning the Clearances and immigration to Nova Scotia, they are consistently referred to as "emigration agents" (Campey 2007, 55, 57; Dunbar 2006, 53, 210, 326; MacDonell 1982, 13; Newton 2015, 125-128).

and often did not deliver on promises made. Land prices were "low" at sixpence per acre; however, the depiction of rich, fertile land as ripe and ready for taking was not a reality (Campey 2007, 24). Settlers arrived in the New World to experience hardship, scarcity of supplies, and land that was far from ready even for the building of homes, much less for agricultural endeavours. For initial arrivals to Nova Scotia aboard the *Hector* in 1773, the scope of work required to clear the land and the unavailability of promised supplies to see them through that first winter proved heart-breaking (ibid). It was not only these first pioneers of the *Hector* to experience these situations; Campbell and MacLean assert that "the passage of the ship *Hector* was but the beginning of heartbreak and misery to which so many would be exposed on future voyages from Scotland" (Campbell and MacLean 1974, 36). Indeed, Allan the Ridge, John the Hunter and John MacLean all experienced similar uphill battles, although their responses differed, as I will discuss below.

II. Nova Scotia: Settlement and the Pioneer Experience

Scottish claim to the lands of what would become the Canadian province of Nova Scotia dates to 1621, when James VI and I granted Sir William Alexander the title of Lieutenant-General of "lands lying between New England and Newfoundland" (Willson 1911, 11). The first Scottish settlements date from 1629, but did not last, as Acadia was returned to the French in 1632; permanent Scottish settlement of the province was not to occur until the latter half of the eighteenth century (Campbell and MacLean 1974, 35). The French had established the first permanent settlement at Port Royal in the early seventeenth century, battling with England for control over Acadia until their defeat in the Seven Years' War. The English proceeded to round up the French Acadians and deport them to the southern states, making room first for settlers from New England before offering homesteads to Scots (Bruce 1997, 114, 124) The first large group of Scottish settlers came aboard the *Hector* in 1773, heralding the beginning of a vast migration of Scottish émigrés to Nova Scotia. Another influx of British subjects was to come to

Nova Scotia as a result of the American Revolutionary War. Loyalists came to Nova Scotia in the tens of thousands; the migration of Loyalists to the Maritimes has been referred to in terms of a deluge or flood (Bruce 1997, 137; Campey 2007, 35). Those loyal to the British Crown were not only English patriots seeking to remain under British rule but included Scots from New York, New Jersey, and North and South Carolina. The majority of Loyalists settled in mainland Nova Scotia, with only a few hundred pioneering in Cape Breton (Campbell 1948, 169; Campey 2007, 35-39).

For both Loyalist and immigrant, pioneering in Nova Scotia was exceedingly challenging. Michael Newton describes the myriad of hurdles that new immigrants had to conquer, including "draining swamps, learning about unfamiliar species, protecting themselves, their produce and their livestock from hostile predators, [and] surviving in harsh climates" (Newton 2015, 186-187). The primary obstacles, however, were the dense, thick forests. Clearing the trees was the first priority, and this was no small task. In an 1897 text *Leabhar nan Sonn,* which discusses Gaels of Canada (translated and quoted in Newton 2015, 193-194), author Alasdair Friseal provides an excellent depiction of the toil required of Scottish pioneers to wrest a living from the lands of Nova Scotia:

> The forest was thick and dense to cut down with the axes, tree after tree, millions of them; then it was burnt, both branch and trunk, for there was no way to sell much of it; the seed was scattered throughout the stumps and crops raised in the ashes, without needing to plough or delve. Year after year, this went on, each succeeding year seeing more land cleared, homesteads improved, and barns equipped richly. All of this took time, labour and human strength, and if the land was tamed, it was, more often than not, at too great of a cost. Let us not think that a rich, hospitable country was waiting for the Gaels when they originally came to Canada. It was with the sweat of their brows and the strength of their bodies that they made a bountiful land of it, carrying a heavy load in the heat of summer and in the biting cold of the winter, until they became infirm and broken

> women and men, their energy and vigour totally destroyed. (Alasdair Friseal, *Leabhar nan Sonn*, 86)

From the pioneer perspective, turning oppressive and looming forest into cultivable land fit for homesteading was a task that Newton has dubbed "heroic in scope" and a "herculean undertaking" (Newton 2015, 187). The difficulties of the initial years after immigration were documented in John MacLean's archetypal emigration poem *A' Choille Ghruamach*, as I will discuss below.

Despite disheartenment and the burdensome labour required to prosper in the New World, the majority of Highland settlers experienced new opportunities for wealth and prosperity that had not been offered to them in Scotland. Disillusionment may have been prevalent, particularly among those who had been accustomed to a life of relative ease and status in Scotland; hope, however, was also pervasive, especially for those who had experienced poverty and exile:

> Those whose only home had been a one-roomed stone cottage and whose only farm had been a rented patch of stony ground dreamed of broad, fertile fields; those who had been subjected to the caprice of a heartless landlord looked forward to land of their own; those who had lived in fear of political enemies yearned for personal liberty; those who had suffered persecution for their religious faith thirsted for freedom of worship. (Dunn 1953, 16)

The New World promised a richness of life that, although hard-won through onerous exertion, proved a reality for many of the emigrants that left the Highlands. Immigration to Nova Scotia and the rest of British North America continued well into the late nineteenth century, although the surge from the Highland Clearances petered out in the 1850s. Many Scottish pioneers demonstrated a remarkable hardiness and adaptive nature, rising to the formidable challenges presented to them and eventually finding prosperity as a result of their efforts.

The poetry of the three bards chosen to represent this period in Nova Scotian immigration history represents a variety of perspectives on the myriad aspects of immigration, from the culture shock of initial arrival and the brutal labour required for success to the loneliness of a new country and longing for the homeland to staunch praise for the glory of Nova Scotia. It is important to consider the apparent social status of these bards in comparison to the majority of Scottish immigrants to Nova Scotia; these bards, while displaying varying degrees of privilege amongst all three, came from a social place of prominence and comparative wealth than their immigrant counterparts, as shall be seen in the following chapter. John MacLean and John the Hunter MacDonald were each employed by distinguished lairds, and were privileged enough that the decision for emigration was made out of choice, and not out of necessity. Allan the Ridge's economic situation is somewhat less clear, and it is likely that this bard experienced more of the poverty common during this period than the other two bards. It is perhaps for this reason that his praise of Nova Scotia is so vigorous and unbending, making his song-poem unique among the four represented below.

CHAPTER 3. THE VOICES OF THE BARDS

Thoir mo shoraidh thar an t-sàile,
Null gu tìr nam beanntan àrda…
Far am biodh an ceòl ,s am mànran
Aig an òiridh chridheil, chàirdeil,
Far am biodh na h-òrain Ghàidhlig
'N uair a bhiodh na h-àireamh cruinn.

- Unknown, *Thoir Mo Shoraidh Thar An T-Sàile* (Creighton & MacLeod, 102)

I. John MacLean (1787-1848)

Dubbed the most celebrated Scottish bard to emigrate to Canada, John MacLean was a prolific poet, singer and song-collector (MacDonell, 68). He was born in 1787 on the isle of Tiree, the most western isle in the Inner Hebrides on the west coast of Scotland, located in Argyllshire (Lonergan 1977, vi). His grandson, Alexander MacLean Sinclair, an eighteenth century Gaelic scholar who published several collections of Gaelic compositions, including his grandfather's poetry, wrote two similar biographies of John MacLean. In Sinclair's memoirs of John MacLean, written as prefaces to collections of poetry featuring the bard's work, he describes his grandfather's youth eloquently:

> In his boyhood, John Maclean was very fond of the society of old men, and listened with the greatest attention to their conversations. In the sports and amusements which are often so attractive to young persons he took no delight. He could learn very easily; he read all the books that came in his way, and he remembered whatever he heard or read. He delighted especially in history and poetry. He went several years to school, learning to read and spell both English and Gaelic, to cipher and to write. He was an excellent reader and a good pen-man. (Sinclair 1901, 8-9)

An avid appreciation for literature and history of clan and culture is perhaps the reason why MacLean was not as successful in his occupational pursuits (of which he had several); he was far more interested in poetic composition than in industrial labour. He was initially apprenticed at the age of sixteen as a shoemaker but was reported to be a poor employee and instead bent on composition and "very given to reading" (Sinclair 1901, 9). MacLean's disinterest in the cobbler

profession was evident in the fact that he spent only one year as a journeyman shoemaker in Glasgow before returning to Tiree in 1808, the same year the young bard was married to Isabel Black. His tenure in the militia was a brief sojourn of six months; the Laird of Coll wrote to his Colonel "suggesting a substitute," whereupon MacLean was discharged in Glasgow in January of 1811 (Lonergan 1977, vii). He returned to Tiree, where he again took up his cobbler's tools and tried his hand at "small-scale merchandising" (Sinclair 1901, 9).

Sources do not specify exactly when MacLean began to serve as bard to Alexander MacLean, the Laird of Coll. This likely occurred sometime in the early 1800s, as Dunbar stipulates MacLean composed "panegyric poetry in honor of his patron, the Laird of Coll" during this time (Dunbar 2006, 6). Regardless, his role as bard to MacLean of Coll was significant enough to earn him the title in Scotland of *Am Bàrd Tighearna Chola* (Bard of the Laird of Coll). This title, though possibly simply "honorific," was significant in that it was the last "example of the use of a traditional style of this kind in the Highlands" (Cregeen & MacKenzie 1978, 8; Lonergan Williams, *DCB*). It is unclear whether MacLean earned enough support from the Laird to set aside his cobbler and merchandizing occupations, or whether these served as subsidiary income in addition to his bardic duties. Given MacLean's negative disposition towards practical occupations, however, it is likely that these endeavours were a financial necessity.

Alexander MacLean, the fourteenth Laird of Coll, was described as "a thorough Highlander and a worthy man who treated his tenants with goodwill and kindness" (Lonergan 1974, 45). This description is in stark contrast to many other lairds during the period of the Highland Clearances; as I noted above, many were described as money-hungry and disregarding of their tenants, often turning out crofters in order to make way for the profits of sheep farming. A critical element in this positive perspective of the Laird of Coll might be simply that he employed the services of John MacLean; as outlined previously, a defining element in a bard's role was to shape others' perception of his patron. In light of this, however, it is also important

to remember that the bard was not a sycophantic flatterer of his patron. The Laird of Coll likely had benevolent qualities that were merely underscored in MacLean's bardic verse.

MacLean allotted a large portion of his time to collecting songs in the Highlands (Cameron 1932, 38). According to Lonergan, he recorded his findings in a manuscript that accompanied him on his voyage to Canada in 1819. The manuscript contained nearly five hundred fifty poems composed by others, and an additional ninety-four composed by himself (Lonergan 1977, vii). In 1818, just one year prior to embarking for Canada, MacLean published a collection of poems, which he dedicated to the Laird of Coll. This work was a collection of twenty-two of his own poems, and thirty-four composed by others (Sinclair 1881, xvi).

Soon after publication of this collection, John MacLean decided to emigrate to the New World. His friends in Tiree "resolutely opposed his purpose" and attempted to dissuade him, but to no avail (Sinclair 1901, 10). The Laird of Coll was away when MacLean made his decision. When the Laird heard of MacLean's choice, he wrote a letter attempting to persuade him to remain in Scotland; however, MacLean had already embarked by the time it arrived. It would likely have had little effect at any rate, as according to all accounts, MacLean was stubborn and adamantly bent on his chosen course of action.

Sinclair describes MacLean's idealization of life in the New World, which explains his determination not to remain in Tiree:

> He had formed a very high opinion of the new world; he expected to become in it, in a short time, if not as rich, yet as independent as the Laird of Coll. In his vivid imagination he saw himself in America… cultivating a farm which he could call his own; his children not going off to the fishing, but living around him in good circumstances. (Sinclair 1901, 10)

Unlike other emigrants from the Highlands of Scotland of this period, MacLean did not leave Scotland out of necessity. He was not impoverished, but rather "enjoyed popularity and prosperity" in his role as bard (Lonergan 1974, viii). Lonergan stipulates that it was instead a

desire for economic independence, and the poetic freedom of expression when not tied to a Laird's expectation, that caused him to emigrate.

MacLean entered into an emigration agreement with Colonel Simon Fraser who accompanied him to Nova Scotia. They sailed from Tobermory in early August of 1819, aboard the *Economy*, arriving at Pictou, Nova Scotia around the first of October of the same year. MacLean settled first at Barney's River, clearing woods for farmland, planting potatoes, and building a log house. He called his new farmstead *Baile a' Chnoic* (Hill Farm) (Lonergan 1974, ix). His first years in Nova Scotia were fraught with the hardship and difficult labour that was ubiquitous for immigrant pioneers of that period. For MacLean, however, who had envisioned himself as something much nearer to a prosperous laird on his own sprawling estate, the arduous, backbreaking labour and the state of impoverishment he experienced during those first years were enough to send him spiralling into despair. Instead of the comparative life of luxury he knew as bard to the Laird of Coll, his chief concern was now providing sustenance for his family. Sinclair aptly describes the opposition of MacLean's reality in contrast to his expectations:

> In Scotland he knew nothing of hard work or poverty, but now he had to work hard. He had to cut down the tall trees, to cut them up into junks about twelve feet long, to make piles of these longs and burn them; and to plant potatoes in his new ground with the hoe. In [Argyllshire] he enjoyed the society of several persons of distinction, but in Pictou there was no [L]aird of Coll… to ask him to sing his songs. In Tiree he saw the blue sea everyday, but in Barney's River he could see nothing but the huge mountains, the tall trees and the blue sky. In Caolas there were scores of neighbours quite near him; but in Bail-a-Chnoic, his nearest neighbour, Kenneth Cameron, a native of Lochbroom, lived a distance of more than two miles from him. (Sinclair 1901, 12)

MacLean clearly faced gruelling difficulties and crushing disappointment, yet it was perhaps because of these circumstances that he eventually became famous in Nova Scotia for his

composition: *A' Choille Ghruamach*, detailing his experiences during his first pioneer years, became his most famous work. It was written during this initial period of settlement and clearly illustrates MacLean's anguish and disheartenment on arrival. On hearing this song performed at a wedding in Tobermory, MacLean's friends were so concerned that they offered him money to return to Scotland. Even the Laird of Coll wrote to him, begging his return and "offering to give him a piece of land free of rent" (Sinclair 1901, 12). Surprisingly, given the forlorn and poignantly distressing expressions in this composition, MacLean refused their offers. Lucille Campey suggests that, by this point, MacLean had "mentally…passed the point of no return" (Campey 2008, 1). Regardless, his experiences and sentiments after immigration appear to have been widespread among immigrant Scottish pioneers (Campey 2008, 1), echoing the ordeals of many Highland settlers.

Despite his rather disparaging account of Nova Scotia in *A' Choille Ghruamach*, MacLean's feelings for his new country gradually warmed. His poem *Seann Albainn Agus Albainn Ur* (Old and New Scotland, written four years later, in 1825) contains reconciliatory overtures, and his *Am Bàl Gàidhealach* (The Gaelic Ball, written in 1826), a celebration of immigrant Gaelic culture in Nova Scotia, is an unequivocal tribute to the joys of Gaelic festivity and a display of MacLean's adaptation to his new life. Historian Charles Dunn wrote of MacLean's change of heart concerning Nova Scotia over the years that followed his arrival:

> As he continued in the new land, his dissatisfaction slowly vanished; he found that there were compensations for his change of environment. He began to mingle with his pioneering neighbours and felt as much pleasure in their kitchens as he had at the aristocratic tables of the Highland lairds and chieftains in Scotland. His attitude towards life became more serious, and he turned his poetic ability to the composing of hymns as well as secular pieces. When he died in 1848 one of his Highland companions in Nova Scotia wrote an elegy on his death which reveals the extent to which the once dissatisfied

Bard had succeeded in adapting himself to the life and society of the New World. (Dunn 1953, 59)

In 1829, MacLean and his oldest son cleared a new plot of land close to James River Station in Antigonish County, a scant six miles from his original homestead, and built a log house in 1830. The family moved to their new home, *Gleann a'Bhàird* (Glen Bard), in early 1831 (Sinclair 1901, 13). It was at this point that the bard attained something of his original idealistic hopes for the New World; with his children now grown and able to work the land, he was no longer required to commit himself to the labour of subsistence living but could focus on his compositions, on the singing of songs, and his renewed passion for camaraderie with friends and neighbours.

MacLean lived the remainder of his life at *Gleann a'Bhàird*, his composition flourishing with the independence from servitude to a laird. While his compositions still reflected the traditional style, he "increasingly… cultivated a popular type of poetry, inspired by the people and scenes around him" (Cregeen & MacKenzie, 9) and his compositions eventually expanded to include a wealth of religious poetry and hymns. MacLean passed away in 1848 of sudden apoplexy and is buried in the cemetery at Glen Bard. A cairn was established in 1961 in MacLean's honour, decorated with the first stanza of *A' Choille Ghruamach* incised upon it.

Poetry of John MacLean

A 'Choille Ghruamach / The Gloomy Forest[5]

Originally titled simply "Song for America,"[6] this composition is perhaps the most well-known of all Gaelic immigrant poetry. It is most often referred to by text from its first line, "A' Choille Ghruamach" (or "The Gloomy Forest" in English references), but is also known by the

[5] English translation from Dunbar 2006, Appendix I, Song 28. Additional translations consulted are as referenced. For the Gaelic text and English translation of the poem in its entirety, see Appendix, pp. 97-100.
[6] Dunbar's dissertation uses the title *Oran Do Dh'Aimeireaga* (A Song to America); however, as this poem is most often referred to as *A' Choille Ghruamach* within other literature, I have chosen the more popular title (as well as to avoid confusion with John the Hunter's own *Oran Do Dh'America*).

title “Am Bàrd an Canada” (“The Bard in Canada”), a testament to John MacLean’s importance as a bard both in Scotland and in Canada (Dunbar 2006, 99). It is the first of MacLean’s compositions in Canada, written around 1821. According to Dunbar, the “archetypal status” of “The Gloomy Forest” and its influence on later poets is evidenced by the use of the title “Song for America” in their compositions of denigration, with John the Hunter’s *Oran Do Dh’America* being one example (Dunbar 2006, 313). Like John the Hunter, MacLean’s prospective picture of himself in Nova Scotia was rather auspicious, of such a dream-like state that was instantly shattered upon his arrival in Nova Scotia:

> [He saw] himself as a laird on his new estate with his children settled comfortably around him. It was indeed a rude awakening when he found himself face to face with the endless gloomy forest from which he must carve out a livelihood. (MacDonell 1982, 70)

The first two stanzas of *A’ Choille Ghruamach* clearly illustrate MacLean’s “rude awakening” and his despondency during the initial years after immigration is evident. The first stanza in particular attests that his misery and melancholy has robbed him of what has been his one constant throughout his life, the skill and joy of his bardic composition:

> I am all alone in the gloomy forest,
> My thoughts are restless, I can raise no song;
> I have found this place to conflict with nature,
> Since all my mental skills have forsaken me;
> I am unable to construct a song here,
> I get despondent when I try my hand;
> I’ve lost the Gaelic as I once had it
> When I lived in that other land. (*A’ Choille Ghruamach,* 1-8)

Dunbar identifies three claims that MacLean makes in this initial stanza, all of which are interrelated. The first of these, as mentioned above, is his creative ability. The second is his

capacity for thought, as he attests that his "mental skills have forsaken" him.[7] Finally, MacLean's misery has divested him of even his grasp of his native tongue; his first language, a steadfast representation of both personal history and cultural identity, has deserted him. Dunbar identifies the dynamic influence behind these three claims, stipulating that the composition alone proves them each untrue, and points to MacLean's exceptional use of meter, "richness of language, rigour… of argument" and the compelling nature of his emotional candour (Dunbar 2006, 321). He underlines, however, the potently persuasive nature of MacLean's three assertions as a "rhetorical device":

> For a gifted and highly respected poet to fear the loss of his most prized mental faculties due to the loneliness of his new environment would convey a very powerful message to his audience. Such claims also convey powerfully the poet's highly troubled emotional state; his sense of despair was undoubtedly deeply felt. (Dunbar 2006, 321)

Having published a collection of poems just prior to embarking to Nova Scotia, MacLean's status in Scotland as a prolific bard was indisputably recognized, particularly among the friends, neighbours and relatives whom he left behind in Tiree, and to whom MacLean sent his soon-to-be acclaimed composition. Their dismayed response, described above, underlines the strength of MacLean's rhetorical claims.

MacLean continues his poem in the same vein, adding to his list of assertions. Not only is he without inspiration and separated from the roots of his culture, but he finds himself unbearably isolated and desperately homesick for the familiarity of his native Scotland:

> I cannot get my thoughts in order,
> Though I once knew how to make a verse;
> What's increased my sorrow and decreased my solace
> Is having no one with whom I converse

[7] Kirkconnell's translation is perhaps more telling, describing Nature as robbing MacLean "of all the gifts [he] once possessed" (Kirkconnell 1948, 158-159).

Each day and night, and in every task

I keep remembering time and again

The land that I left, hard by the ocean,

Though I [am] now on the top of glens. (*A' Choille Ghruamach,* 9-16)

This lament is an exemplary display of Romantic nostalgia, a theme of disheartening and desperate longing for the homeland forsaken. It was considered by eighteenth century contemporaries as a condition likened to a physical illness: "The sufferers' excessive preoccupation with and desire to return to the place of their birth could produce melancholy, sadness, love of solitude, silence, loss of appetite…prostration of strength, and a hectic fever" (Shields 2012, 766–67). Nostalgic themes were prevalent in the works of both emigrant bards and of those who remained in the homeland. In British North America, nostalgia was particularly widespread in the works of Gaelic bards, as they frequently cited emigration as the cause for a "living death from which the prospect of actual death offers no relief," given that the poet would not be buried with his ancestors in his homeland (Shields 2012, 772). MacLean's initial stanzas are typical of such nostalgic sentiment, portraying his disillusionment at his imposing surroundings and his desperate longing for the hills of Scotland.

John MacLean was far from the only Gaelic bard to despair upon arrival in the New World; his tirade in *A' Choille Ghruamach* is echoed again and again in other bards of the immigrant era[8] (MacDonell 1982). Pioneering in the New World was a daunting and formidable enterprise faced by the settlers. MacLean was no different in this respect and despaired multiple times in various poems of the crippling nature of both the physical work and the mental diminution that resulted from it. In his third stanza of *A' Choille Ghruamach*, he outlines the isolation of his new home, the lack of provisions and the overwhelming and "frightful" prospect of wresting arable soil away from the impregnable forest:

[8] See Kenneth MacDonald's *Oran Do America / Song for America* (MacDonell 1982, 98-101) and the anonymous MacLean from Raasay's *Gearain Air America / Complaint About America* (ibid, 118-125).

I'm not surprised that I am doleful,

I have my home in the back of beyond,

In the middle of a wilderness, on Barney's River,

With nothing better than threadbare potatoes;

Before I till the soil and harvest a crop

And dig the frightful forest from its root

By strength of my arms, I will be exhausted,

And long in decline, before I raise my brood. (*A' Choille Ghruamach,* 17-24)

MacLean's fears are evident in these words and quite substantial, and he despairs that his decision to emigrate will be the undoing of both himself and his household. Not only is he anxious about the immediate concern of providing enough to sustain himself and his family, but he is troubled by the exorbitant physical labour and the toll it is taking on him. He is worried that he will be "long in decline" before his time from the "hopeless toil" of clearing land:

In many pursuits I'll lag behind,

Before my livelihood makes any wealth;

The work will be difficult before I prosper,

Before I make ready the land for the plough;

Putting fire logs on top of each other

I'll inflame some muscles that were in my back,

And every part of me looking so blackened,

I'll compare myself to the chimney sweep. (*A' Choille Ghruamach,* 89-96)

As we have seen, such overwhelming labour was common for Scottish immigrants and *A'Choille Ghruamach* is thus a tribute to the disheartened state of many new arrivals in Nova Scotia.

MacLean's depiction of his experiences animates the forest as a foreboding, threatening entity. His description of having to "dig the frightful forest from its root" (line 22)[9] generates imagery of an aggressive, dangerous beast that must be conquered in order to survive. In a later stanza, MacLean describes the vastness that is his timbered adversary: "On your arrival, you will see little / But a towering forest that blocks off the sky" (47-48). Indeed, such a massive stretch of wooded wilderness would seem suffocating to one accustomed to walking in the wide-open moors and heather hills of Scotland, particularly those of the Hebridean islands, where trees are sparse and peaty moorland is the primary feature of the landscape. MacLean even calls Nova Scotia "the land of the trees where there's no freedom" (87), underlining the concept of the thick forest as a prison he has unwittingly wandered into, a dark, potentially lethal captor that has pillaged his talents, his vivacity and even his longevity.

This depiction of nature with dismal and bleak metaphor is a common thread in nineteenth century poetry. John Shaw, in his article "Brief Beginnings: Nova Scotian and Old World Bards Compared," points to the contrast between eighteenth and nineteenth century poets in this regard; where the former "utilized sharp, detailed, unadorned descriptions, devoid of personal comment," the latter employed "romantic, humanized and less specific view of nature, where the natural world was used as a setting for a pervasive sense of human desolation" (Shaw 1996, 350). Shaw attests that to the nineteenth century poets, "nature contains a soul which speaks to the poet" (Shaw 1996, 350). MacLean's depiction of the forest as an entity exemplifies the latter description of nature in composition. Additionally, it hearkens also to the concept of nature spirits common in Celtic folklore, such as water creatures or spirits of the trees. Such creatures often have a dark and malevolent character, bent on the destruction or consumption of the unsuspecting human that strays into their clutches. Dunbar similarly equates MacLean's depiction of the forest as "a metaphorical descent into a sort of spiritual

[9] Also translated by Kirkconnell as "the wood must be uprooted from its lair" (Kirkconnell, 161).

darkness," indicating that the dark murkiness of the forest "gives clear expression to John MacLean's state of mind" (Dunbar 2006, 314).

In discussing tree imagery present within Gaelic poetry, Michael Newton identifies a crucial distinction: despite the vast prevalence of such symbolism within Gaelic literature, there is little physical correlation between the imagery and the natural arboreal environment in Scotland's Highlands and Islands. He writes: "many areas have had little or no tree cover for centuries; few non-élite Gaels are likely to have been mobile enough to have experienced a variety of tree types; and humans have intervened in diverse ways in the depletion and/or regeneration of woodlands and specific trees" (Newton 2014, 167). This is integral in understanding the differing responses of immigrant bards to the awesome, spreading forests of Nova Scotia. Some revelled in the beauty and physical diversity of the forested landscape, while all others could see, like MacLean, was the overwhelming amount of labour required to make the land liveable (Newton 2014, 169; Newton 2015, 187). Additionally, Newton underlines the importance of the use of tree imagery in immigrant poetry, indicating that the function is decidedly not an "aesthetic evaluation," but instead a device used to express "personal feelings and experience": "Poets used arboreal images and metaphors as rhetorical devices and environmental backdrops upon which to project messages about their own individual aspirations and concerns" (Newton 2014, 169). This is in keeping with the function of a bard as social commentator, documenting personal experience and using imagery to make a point. MacLean's use of tree imagery in *A' Choille Gruamach* is such a rhetorical device.

Another theme and element of social commentary present within MacLean's composition is the antagonism present toward the emigration agents. This is a typical theme in many immigrant bardic compositions during the period of the Highland Clearances. Projecting the promised land flowing with milk and honey, agents pledged potential settlers bountiful land and financial success. The price may have been fair, but the easy prosperity envisioned by countless immigrants vanished upon realizing that their welfare, and in some cases their very

survival, would depend on the backbreaking task of carving a livelihood out of the heavily forested soil. This realization resulted in extreme bitterness toward their malefactors. Juliet Shields, in discussing John MacDonald's *Song for America*, asserts that the "promises of the emigration agents… led Highlanders to anticipate 'an isle of contentment' instead of the disappointing 'land of snows and sere grasses' that MacDonald found on the other side of the Atlantic" (Shields 2012, 772). MacLean not only addresses this topic in *A' Choille Gruamach*, but also in a later poem, *Sean Albainn Agus Albainn Ur*, which I discuss below. His sense of outrage at having been exploited by the emigration agents is distinctly evident and MacLean expresses his fury at the deception perpetrated upon himself and his fellow Scottish immigrants in *A' Choille Ghruamach*. He devotes three stanzas to describing the despicable, nefarious ploys perpetrated by the emigration agents, and identifying the extreme contrast between the rosy-hued paradise promised and the starkness of harsh reality:

> This is the land in which there is hardship
> Unknown to those who are coming over the sea;
> What evil tactics were used by the enticers
> Who by their yarns, took us over here;
> If they make a profit, it won't be lasting,
> It will not raise their status, and little wonder to me,
> While every cursed wretch is pursued
> Since they settled upon eviction as a stratagem.
>
> A firm promise will then be offered,
> The reputation of the place will be enhanced;
> They will claim that your relations
> Are happy and wealthy, in need of nothing;
> Every misleading story will be laid before you,

To see if you'll crave to seek it out;

If you arrive safely, when you see them,

The swells are no better than yourselves.

When those drovers come to get you,

It is with lies that they succeed,

Without uttering a truthful word,

Their heart condemning what their mouths say;

They make pretences that this land possesses

The most precious gem under the sun;

On your arrival, you will see little

But a towering forest that blocks off the sky. (*A' Choille Ghruamach,* 25-48)

MacLean's description of his and others' malefactors has a distinctive element of bardic composition: that of dispraise. Having felt deceived by his own emigration agent, MacLean embraces the centuries-old tradition of the bard with fervour and wreaks his revenge in immortal verse. He lambastes the agents with such epithets as "enticers," "cursed wretches" and "drovers," indicating that they employ "evil tactics," "misleading stories," "lies" and "pretences" by "enhancing" the reality of the land and life they are describing to potential émigrés from Scotland. Towards the end of his composition, MacLean desperately entreats his audience to "pay no attention to… the false prophets who will tempt you / With no regard for you, only after your gold" (127-128).

MacLean's composition was a commentary on the socio-political effects of the Highland Clearances and the potentially damaging effects of emigration. Like the censorious poetry of the classical bards, MacLean's condemnations were long-lived and effective; the combination of dispraise and social commentary by MacLean proved to be compelling to other potential émigrés, and his composition had lasting "discouraging effects on emigration" (MacDonell 1982,

71). Once its verse was received in Scotland, *A' Choille Gruamach* is reputed to have "caused many families to reverse their decision to migrate to [Canada]" (Newton 2015, 21).

MacLean's commentary on his new surroundings was not originally intended to influence his immediate neighbors but was written to inform his acquaintances and relations in Scotland. As such, he was still fulfilling the role of social commentator in his home of Tiree, despite being thousands of miles away across the Atlantic. Additionally, elements within his composition also serve as a response to his peer immigrant bards; while MacLean's initial stance on emigration was shared by many other immigrant bards of the period, there were also those who lauded emigration and waxed poetic on the benefits of North American life. Dunbar iterates that those immigrant bards who were pro-emigration often compared leaving Scotland to the biblical narrative of Exodus, citing that the freedom of the New World was as the Israelites being delivered from bondage into the Promised Land. MacLean, on the other hand, compares them to the plagues of Pharaoh:

> I cannot enumerate them in verses,
> Every odious beast that rears its head,
> And plagues as numerous as came to Pharaoh,
> For the slaves when he drowned his men. (*A' Choille Ghruamach,* 77-80)

MacLean's description of seasonal difficulties such as the heat of summer, animals and stinging insects is decidedly opposite to these pro-emigration compositions. Instead of finding milk and honey, he compares Nova Scotia "to the horrors of Egypt, thereby turning the rhetoric of praise motif on its head" (Dunbar 2006, 316). Despite this rather obvious comparison of Nova Scotia to the slavery of Egypt, it is interesting to note that, for the generations that followed, *A' Choille Ghruamach* stood as a tribute to the stalwart, hardy and enduring nature of the Gaelic pioneers of Nova Scotia. As Dunbar stipulates, "for the descendants of the emigrant generation, the 'gloomy forest' is home, and the vast majority would be of the view that their ancestors did not err in coming to the New World" (ibid, 323). Indeed, even the later poems of John MacLean

would indicate that the bard himself came to be reconciled with his new situation. Specifically, *Seann Albainn Agus Albainn Ur* can be interpreted as MacLean's own admission of this reconciliation, an idea that will be explored hereafter.

At the end of *A' Choille Ghruamach*, MacLean returns to the theme of nostalgia present his first two stanzas. While much of his work expresses disillusionment, disappointment, outrage and the desire to return home, the beginning and ending stanzas are particularly illustrative of lament. As musicologist Ellen Rosand indicates, lament has existed in music and art forms since antiquity. It is "an emotional climax followed by a resolution of the action, it was a soliloquy, a moment of particularly intense expression within the movement of a narrative structure" (Rosand 1979, 346). In the case of *A' Choille Ghruamach*, the bard brackets a lugubrious narrative of his circumstances with stanzas that are more typical of the "intense expression" of lament than the rest of his account. The initial two stanzas are self-reflective, looking inward to MacLean's emotional state and his nostalgic longing for the past and his homeland. Thereafter, his perspective turns outward to the physical causes of his misery: the sinister forests, deception of the emigration agents, drudgery of work and climate, and an outline of the drastic and tangible differences between his new and old life. He returns, however, to his introspective stance in his final two stanzas, depicting his utter grief and anguish:

> Though I should be diligent in writing it,
> I would need a month on it or more,
> Before I could express all that is on my mind,
> And present it to you in my own words;
> A subconscious sadness has filled my being
> Since I must submit here all my life long,
> With little pleasure in this constricting forest,
> And no one asking if I'll sing a song.

That wasn't the custom in my old days,

At every table, I'd love to chat;

In hearty spirits, in jovial company

Spending our time without a care;

When I turned away from you, I missed you dearly,

And my eyes shed tears in copious floods,

Early that Thursday as we passed Caolas,

The ship under sail and the wind off the coast. (*A' Choille Ghruamach,* 129-144)

It is in his lament, both at the beginning and at the end of the work, that MacLean mourns the languishing of his art as a bard. His initial stanza outlines his grief at his lack of inspiration for composition and a sense that his Gaelic wanes, while latter stanzas express lament for his status as a bard and the company that he enjoyed in such a position. With his homestead at Barney's River being quite isolated, MacLean experienced extreme loneliness, evidenced by the final line of his penultimate stanza: "no one asking if I'll sing a song" (136). Effie Rankin affirms this, referring to MacLean's "repeated expressions of loneliness and isolation" throughout his works (Rankin 2005, 21). No longer was he a central part of Scottish community, celebrations or ceremonies, in which he would provide entertainment, singing and telling history and genealogy in verse and song, and be celebrated for such. Instead he has become an unwilling labourer, toiling for survival. MacDonell describes John MacLean as "a poet at heart and ill-fitted by temperament for any kind of ordinary occupation" (MacDonell 1982, 68). She outlines the string of MacLean's attempts at other, more practical vocations in Scotland; MacLean had no satisfaction in any of these attempts but relished in his bardic capabilities. It is little wonder then that he laments so acutely the loss of what for him was his heart and soul, the bardic tradition of poetry, history and composition.

Seann Albainn Agus Albainn Ur / Old and New Scotland[10]

John MacLean's composition *Seann Albainn Agus Albainn Ur*, or *Old and New Scotland*, is a fictitious exchange between himself and the rather notorious emigration agent Colonel Simon Fraser. MacLean's role as social commentator is quite evident in this work, as he directly takes on the agent in this imagined dialogue. He clearly outlines his grievances against Colonel Fraser, against which the Colonel continually defends. The Colonel's answers, however, are not entirely satisfactory; he makes some excellent arguments, to which MacLean capitulates, yet Fraser's failure to affirm or acknowledge MacLean's grievances leaves the reader feeling a lack of full resolution.

Dunbar asserts that *Seann Albainn Agus Albainn Ur* is a representation of MacLean's reconciliation to the New World (Dunbar 2006, 324). Indeed, the very fact that the bard composed such a fictitious dialogue with such vigorous arguments suggests that he had become accustomed to his new circumstance, and had an altered perspective compared to his earlier *A' Choille Ghruamach*. This idea of reconciliation or acceptance is a common perception of MacLean's later compositions; MacDonell describes it as a "tradition" that MacLean came to "regret the devastating description of *A' Choille Ghruamach* and tried to atone for its discouraging effects on emigration" in other compositions (MacDonell 1982, 71). When one considers the perspective of descendant generations on *A' Choille Ghruamach* as a tribute or testament to the resiliency of the pioneers (as discussed above), this "tradition" makes sense. Historian Charles Dunn also identifies a distinct shift in MacLean's perspective on his new home in the years after his arrival, as has been discussed previously:

> As he continued in the new land, his dissatisfaction slowly vanished; he found that there were compensations for his change of environment. He began to mingle with his

[10] English translation from Dunbar 2006, Appendix I, song 29. For the Gaelic text and English translation of the poem in its entirety, see Appendix, pp. 100-104.

> pioneering neighbours and felt as much pleasure in their kitchens as he had at the aristocratic tables of the Highland lairds and chieftains in Scotland. (Dunn 1953, 59)

This shift speaks to MacLean's adjustment to a new environment. And while MacLean's voice as bard within *Seann Albainn Agus Albainn Ur* capitulates to some of the arguments of the Colonel, even bidding goodbye to his homeland, he does not renounce his earlier statements within *A' Choille Ghruamach*. His assertions of misery, the rigours of pioneer life, and the heartbreaking difficulty of leaving friends and the familiar behind are never adequately addressed by the Colonel, leaving these aspects of the argument undefeated. MacLean's grandson, A. MacLean Sinclair, provides a brief comment on this poem in *Clàrsach na Coille* but indicates only a partial satisfaction with Nova Scotia on his grandfather's part. He follows this immediately by saying that the poem "does not contain a word of exaggeration. The first settlers in Nova Scotia endured much hardship" (MacLean Sinclair 1881, 110). This commentary seems to underline that MacLean's reconciliation is not complete. The Bard likely felt his original composition was too harsh but remained staunch in his assertions of the difficulties he and others experienced. Rather, his intent is to communicate to his audience in Scotland that immigration is not a poor choice, and that for many of the thousands who experienced poverty and extreme hardship in Scotland, immigration to Nova Scotia provided the possibility of economic prosperity. MacLean's concession is not so much a rescinding of his previous stance or an apologetic on behalf of Fraser, but instead a recognition of important aspects that were not considered or represented in his initial composition. He wants to repair the damage made to the idea of emigration with his countrymen, and perhaps preserve the value of his own role as social commentator in ensuring that he speaks the truth.

MacLean styles himself "The Bard," asserting his role as social commentator and spokesperson. In his dialogue with Colonel Fraser in this poem, MacLean speaks not only for himself but for the multitude of immigrant Scots. Although he capitulates to some of Fraser's arguments, his persona is still that of advocate or vindicator; he simultaneously holds the

Colonel (as a representative for the emigration agents) to account and also readdresses his previous claims in *A' Choille Ghruamach*, acknowledging the poem's lack of perspective in adequately representing the wider Scottish community.

Using himself as an example of exhaustion, of having been deceived, and of desolation and disillusionment, MacLean as "The Bard" lists his grievances against the Colonel, of which there are several. The Colonel continually rebuffs each one, often with what seems to be an ill-suited cheerful optimism, indicating that brighter times are close at hand, and MacLean has only to wait and enjoy the benefits of his labour, poverty and times of despair. For each offense rebuffed, MacLean responds with a starker perspective of pioneering life in British North America, and the sometimes dire and desperate circumstances in which immigrant Scots found themselves. He is no stranger to these circumstances and is quite blunt with Fraser in his responses. Fraser often appears as one refusing to hear, as somewhat cold-hearted and unfeeling, but refusing also to acknowledge the truth of the difficulties and suffering that the pioneers experienced. Despite this, MacLean (speaking now as Fraser in this imagined conversation), makes some compelling arguments to which he (as Bard) concedes. The composition ends with the Bard acknowledging the universally human struggle to be content, and he bids farewell to Scotland, having decided to be content with his circumstances.

Integral to interpreting this poem is an understanding of the real Simon Fraser's role in early immigration. Colonel Simon Fraser was an infamous emigration agent within the Highlands of Scotland.[11] Situated with enterprises in both Fort William in Scotland and in Pictou in Nova Scotia, Fraser's placement was exceedingly appropriate for an emigration agent. Fraser was even nicknamed 'Nova Scotia,' and was attributed with "having single-handedly 'peopled' Nova Scotia with the emigrant Scots who sailed on his ships," a fact which Dunbar asserts is

[11] Born in Scotland, Colonel Simon Fraser emigrated to Canada himself around 1784, beginning the conveyance of emigrants to Pictou around 1790 and continuing for approximately the next thirty years (Campey 2007, 57; Dunbar 2006, 325). It is unclear where Colonel Fraser received his military commission, although his father was Captain John Fraser of the 82nd Regiment, who had received 700 acres of land at Pictou Harbour as a result of his services in the American Revolutionary War (Dunbar 2006, 324-325). Dates of birth and death are not listed in available sources.

rather exaggerated (Campey 2007, 56; Dunbar 2006, 325; Harper 2004, 116). Campey elaborates on Fraser's background and success thus:

> Through his contacts with various influential tacksmen, who held large leaseholds on Highland estates, he knew where the zeal to emigrate was particularly strong. Having come with his parents in 1784, to live at Fraser's Point near Pictou, he knew about pioneer life and could describe conditions in Nova Scotia from personal experience. He personally supervised shipping and embarkation arrangements and, on some occasions, actually accompanied emigrants across the Atlantic to their final destinations, always in Nova Scotia. (Campey, 57)

Despite his success as an emigration agent, Fraser was often portrayed as a villain, a deceiver, and a swindler. Campey describes Fraser as "an irresponsible rogue," who "persuaded unsuspecting and vulnerable people to emigrate, took their money and profited from their foolishness and misfortune" (Campey 2007, 55). Despite his personal experience of pioneering in Nova Scotia, Fraser did not adequately prepare his clients for arrival in Nova Scotia, neither in terms of mental preparation nor the practical. While he often promised provisions, land and tools upon arrival, immigrants aboard Fraser's ships arrived exhausted, hungry, and without land or provisions to sustain them through the first difficult years. Regardless of this, however, Campey avers that Fraser was not a charlatan and that he "was a much-maligned person," who was castigated by those in Scotland who were anti-emigration (Campey 2007, 103).

John MacLean signed an agreement with Colonel Simon Fraser on July 29, 1819 and sailed for Nova Scotia a few days later. Dunbar makes an important observation in asserting that, although MacLean's shock and grievances upon arrival in Nova Scotia were completely legitimate, he likely had little cause to object to the conditions he experienced during passage or the state he and his family arrived in, as Dunbar cites the good health of passengers and "the kind treatment" provided by Fraser as captain (Dunbar 2006, 327). This is a critical point, as many émigrés experienced horrendous passage conditions, particularly in the initial years of the

emigration rush (Harper 2003, 199). Regardless of his safe passage, however, MacLean's disillusionment on arrival was extreme and, as outlined above, his animosity towards the inauthenticity of emigration agents' promises was acute. While *A 'Choille Ghruamach* does not single out Fraser himself as the source of MacLean's disillusionment, it castigates emigration agents as proponents of lies and self-serving greed. It is obvious that MacLean is expressing outrage from his own experience, despite the Colonel not being named explicitly in this earlier poem. Through his use of dialogue in *Seann Albainn Agus Albainn Ur* MacLean gives the Colonel the opportunity to respond to his accusations, yet MacLean presents both facts and his own experience in his counterarguments. Fraser repeatedly defends himself by indicating that MacLean's prosperity is simply around the corner, and MacLean must simply bide his time before reaping the rewards of wealth and ease.

Written approximately four years after *A 'Choille Ghruamach* and approximately six years after MacLean's arrival (c. 1825), *Seann Albainn Agus Albainn Ur* is MacLean's response to this earlier composition. The intentional connection between the two poems is apparent; he uses the same eight-line stanza form that he had for *A 'Choille Ghruamach*, and the initial three stanzas reiterate briefly the three major grievances listed in the previous poem: namely, his loss of creative ability, capacity for thought, and grasp of Gaelic. MacLean's opening stanza is especially redolent of the earlier composition, citing his "great sorrow" and his experience of having lost "creativity," "mirth and conversation" (4-5). Instead of indirectly referring to the emigration agents as a unified class, he directly identifies Colonel Fraser within the second stanza, expressing that he is "indignant with the Colonel" and accusing Fraser of leading him and others astray:

> I am indignant with the Colonel
> Who at the start led me here;
> With much lively talk and boasting,
> He painted a false picture throughout the country,

Telling us that our relations there

Were better off than had been reckoned,

And that we would never be in want

If we were to safely journey there. (*Seann Albainn Agus Albainn Ur,* 9-16)

MacLean includes others in his accusation of Fraser's transgressions by his use of the plural "we" and Fraser's promises having been spread "throughout the country". This is significant, as in his previous composition, MacLean was speaking to his audience with such pronouns as "I" and "you"; by utilizing such terms as "we" in speaking about the situation surrounding the agents, MacLean presents himself as united with all Scots through the immigrant experience. He continues, reiterating the difficulties of pioneering and the disillusionment he experienced, this time outright advising against emigration, to which he only alluded in his original composition. His third stanza admonishes the listener that, unless an immigrant is either a well-to-do individual who can afford to pay others to do the back-breaking labour or willing and able-bodied to wield an axe for himself, it is better not to emigrate at all:

A man who is unable to work with an axe

And is unable to carry his dignity,

He'd be better to stay in Scotland,

Before he set out on the seas. (*Seann Albainn Agus Albainn Ur,* 21-24)

MacLean's choice of dialogue for this poem is intriguing. While the remainder of the composition is primarily a dialogue between himself and the Colonel, MacLean begins by addressing the listener and not the Colonel directly, establishing a connection between this new composition and his earlier *A' Choille Ghruamach* and ensuring that the audience is reminded of it. After he has established this connection, Colonel Fraser suddenly enters and the composition switches to dialogue between the Bard and the Colonel, instead of the Bard's soliloquy to his audience. It is interesting that MacLean does not pose an invitation to Colonel Fraser; rather, Fraser's entrance gives the air of an interruption, with the Colonel eagerly voicing

his perspective and defense, repainting the rosy picture that had convinced MacLean to emigrate initially.

In his rather abrupt interruption, Fraser scarcely acknowledges MacLean's grievances, indicating MacLean's difficulties only fleetingly before whisking on to more bright promises: "Though you are in want right now / You'll make the best of it in time" (25-26). His recognition of MacLean's hardship is perfunctory, glossing over the years of difficulty MacLean had experienced, and repeating the lavish promises of wealth and prosperity that he had used to inspire MacLean's emigration. Fraser pledges the coming abundance of livestock which will proliferate and guarantee wealth – the prosperity he assures will result in MacLean's dismissal from memory all that has come before:

> You'll have plenty of food and clothing,
> And the felling of trees will be forgotten;
> You'll then be prosperous and at ease,
> And poverty will be long forgotten. (*Seann Albainn Agus Albainn Ur,* 29-32)

Fraser's assurances indicate not only that the benefits to come will far outweigh the hardship experienced by MacLean and others like him, but also that the heavy labour, scarcity of supplies and disillusionment of these experiences will not be remembered. Fraser's interruption is a rather abrupt dismissal and even rejection of MacLean's opening stanzas, disregarding MacLean's hardship nearly to the point of scorn. MacLean's portrayal of Fraser thus likely has a dual purpose. First, MacLean could be attempting to portray accurately the dismissal that he may have experienced regarding his hardship, whether by Fraser, his ilk or MacLean's countrymen, new or old. Secondly, Fraser's dismissive attitude ensures that the Bard cannot remain rooted in his miserable outlook; without commiseration from the Colonel, he is forced to consider the arguments Fraser presents.

MacLean's response to Fraser's interruption is to underline the dire state he feels he is experiencing. As a bearer of oral tradition, he utilizes an old proverb, comparing himself to a starving sheep that will perish in the harshness of winter:

Sheep will be dying with hunger,

It looks like she will wither;

Before she gets the summer hay,

The winter will finish her off;

That is what has befallen me. (*Seann Albainn Agus Albainn Ur,* 33-39)

This response to Fraser's dismissal is dramatic, but MacLean utilizes hyperbole in the same manner with which Fraser responded to his initial stanzas. Where Fraser mostly dismissed his complaints and painted pioneer life with golden hues, MacLean points again to the darkness of despair, overwhelm and exhaustion, indicating that one individual can only take so much before it becomes his demise. He follows this assertion and ends his stanza by blatantly accusing Fraser of prevaricating: "Don't be offering your obligatory deceptions" (line 40). This is also reminiscent of MacLean's earlier composition, where he refers to the agents' promises as blatant lies.

Fraser's response at this juncture is his only direct refutation of MacLean's personal accusations against him. Throughout the composition, he responds to MacLean's accusations not with outright rebuttal but with an insistent, candid optimism. At this point in the poem, however, he refutes the idea of having intentionally lied to anyone, saying that "his reports are not falsehood," and offers what he sees as validating proof of his previous accounts. This is critical and effective as MacLean, in his representation of the Colonel, quietly admits that Fraser had not intended deception. Had he portrayed Fraser as consistently refuting all listed grievances, it would have affirmed Fraser's untrustworthiness entirely and presented the Colonel as a villain. Fraser's persistent optimism is quite dismissive, yet he does not outright deny MacLean's hardships, a point that Dunbar deems "significant" (Dunbar, 328).

Fraser's evidence to underline the truth of his claims is to point to MacLean's neighbors, acknowledging the hardship that these men had experienced in the beginning, but noting that with hard work and "prudence," "They became wealthy because of it / Though they had arrived in need" (47-48). MacLean responds by averring that while wealth may be the experience of a select few, the rest are in debt and at risk of losing everything they have worked for. He likens poverty to an "affliction" on the pioneers, and reminds Fraser that debt often lands these men in prison, with the sheriff "[emptying] all their pockets / He'll take with him his share like a drover / He won't ask them what is their price" (55-56). His use of the term 'drover' recalls *A' Choille Ghruamach* and through this recollection he underlines an intentional connection to his previous perspective *(A' Choille Ghruamach,* line 41; Dunbar 2006, 328). Fraser acknowledges that MacLean speaks the truth regarding the fate of the men MacLean is describing:

> Some of them are as you say,
> I cannot deny that it is true;
> Men who were exceptionally merry,
> And who were of a proud disposition,
> Have fallen unknowingly into debt;
> It isn't so easy to climb out
> Since their world has changed,
> And a reversal has come over the prices. (*Seann Albainn Agus Albainn Ur,* 57-64)

Fraser's acknowledgement of MacLean's truth is a point that Dunbar asserts as a "very effective rhetorical device," stating that in both compositions, "John MacLean accuses emigration agents… of deceiving the emigrant Gaels, and by attributing such candour to the Colonel, John MacLean effectively undermines his own charges" (Dunbar 2006, 329). Yet while Fraser does acknowledge the truth in MacLean's arguments, he does so rather tongue-in-cheek. In Dunbar's translation, the Colonel describes these men in lines 59-60 as "exceptionally merry" and having "a proud disposition"; Lonergan's translation of these lines read as "People who were overly

fond of sporting / And who were of an impractical mind" (Lonergan 1977, 63). Fraser acknowledges the truth of MacLean's statements, but infers that it is at least partially their own fault, allegedly due to their lack of wits. In portraying the Colonel's response this way, MacLean is simultaneously acknowledging Fraser's awareness of the situation and underlining his personal detachment from the pioneering Scots.

Bypassing these criticisms of his fellow pioneers, MacLean turns instead to his own experience, agreeing with Fraser's assertion of the changing world and saying that he is the one who has suffered as a result:

Their world has changed greatly,
And I myself might say so;
I've been deceived in an unexpected way,
It has prematurely aged me;
Coming to the forest, far from people,
Felling the trees where they stand,
Although I got land cheaply there,
Painfully I laboured to cultivate it. (*Seann Albainn Agus Albainn Ur,* 65-72)

In this stanza, MacLean contends that the difficulties experienced in his first few years of pioneer life were so harrowing as to bring him to a state of early senescence. This "untimely old age" is a circumstance he did not expect to find himself in and one he defines as trickery, returning again to his accusation of deception (Lonergan 1977, 63). He continues, describing precisely what brought him to this physical and mental decline, reiterating not only the arduous toil of clearing the massive forest, but also voicing the isolating nature of the backwoods, once again reiterating the loneliness he expressed in *A' Choille Ghruamach*. He does, however, acknowledge that the land he received was free, but underlines once more the painstaking, burdensome and exhausting industry required to make it liveable.

Fraser's response is no longer tongue-in-cheek; instead, he denies MacLean's claim outright. He says unequivocally that he does not deem clearing the land difficult labour, and moves immediately to the rewards of pioneering by pointing out that MacLean labours instead for his own wealth and will no longer have to cope with a landlord:

I wouldn't reckon it is hard work,
And you'll never again be subject to a landlord
Who threatens to put you in exile
If you don't give the surplus to him;
It won't be in his power to raise the price,
You won't see the bailiff with a summons;
So what is it that you would be missing
Since you came to this blessed country. (*Seann Albainn Agus Albainn Ur,* 73-80)

MacLean's representation of Fraser at this point is the beginning of the capitulation Dunbar references. MacLean's personal experience in Scotland was one of comparative affluence; he did not experience the bitter impoverishment or eviction at the hands of a laird that thousands of other Scots were subjected to. Unlike many of his countrymen, MacLean was relatively wealthy, held a position of status as bard to the Laird of Coll, and made his decision to emigrate of his own free will. In this respect, Fraser's case that MacLean is not subservient to a landlord and has no fear of eviction, exile or prison is the Bard acknowledging the place of refuge that Nova Scotia had become for the masses of desperate Highlanders and Islanders who were evicted from ancestral lands. To one who had slaved on rented land in Scotland for a subsistence living, the very concept of owning one's own land would have been paradisiacal; this is something that MacLean did not previously acknowledge in *A' Choille Ghruamach*. Most telling is that, in this poem, he does not directly counter Fraser's arguments, but instead turns to his longing for the companionship of the noblemen which he had enjoyed in Scotland; his lack of argument is silent

concession (Dunbar 2006, 329). This concession is underlined in the words MacLean gives to Fraser in response:

> Though it was good to be amongst the nobles,
> It is better for them to be far from you;
> Your countrymen who are in their service,
> Have no better name than the slaves;
> Slippery is the stone at their doorsteps,
> Unless you walk in a gentle manner;
> If you were to fall without knowing it,
> The fellowship would be broken. (*Seann Albainn Agus Albainn Ur,* 89-96)

By having Fraser speak these words, MacLean again acknowledges his privileged status in Scotland in comparison to his fellow immigrants. He is stipulating that, although he misses his prestige in Scotland, his experience in that respect was not a common one, and the majority of Highlanders and Islanders endured what was tantamount to slavery.

In addition to MacLean's capitulation in voicing Fraser's response in such a way, Dunbar asserts that the second half of his stanza alludes to a purported fallout between MacLean and the Laird of Coll that had occurred while the bard was still in service to the Laird. He extrapolates on the importance of this reference:

> MacLean's audience would have been aware [of this], and he is clearly exploiting this to make the point that even a person of his social prominence, a member of the minor MacLean aristocracy, and a celebrated poet to the Laird, is not free from the uncertainty of landlordism that existed in Scotland. (Dunbar 2006, 330)

MacLean's response to Fraser's admonishment is that the gentry are economically successful and well-received among the wealthy of Scotland. Dunbar infers that this is yet another concession, indicating that the Bard is "further undermining his own cause" (ibid, 330). MacLean is thereby reiterating that his experience of immigration was far different than most

others', and what he misses from his life in Scotland was not necessarily shared by the majority of those who chose to emigrate in the same period. This is further underlined in Fraser's next response, which delineates exactly what the vast majority did experience:

> Though there is pleasure in those glens,
> The King's excise tax must be paid;
> He may not take a fish from a pool,
> Nor a deer from the highest moor;
> If he kills a bird in the grove,
> He will be condemned as a thief;
> They will bring him in to judgment,
> He'll be convicted and will be subjected to a fine. (*Seann Albainn Agus Albainn Ur,* 105-112)

Dunbar indicates that MacLean can gain no more ground from this point forward, suggesting that he is "thrown back on lamenting the hardships of his present situation in the New World, hauling firewood through the deep snows" (Dunbar 2006, 331). However, MacLean's intent throughout this composition is to repair the inaccuracies of representation that were present in his first composition. By this juncture in this poem, MacLean has made these reparations; he has now adequately represented his countrymen and -women and the difficulties that they faced, and by putting these words in the mouth of the Colonel, has admitted his error. Yet the one thing that MacLean refuses to concede is the overwhelming difficulty of pioneering in the New World; this, to him, is a crucial element required for fair representation of the Scottish immigrant experience. Land there may be, but it is arduous and exhausting, physically and mentally, to turn it to one's favour; this fact was universal for immigrants.

Fraser's response to the Bard's description of the struggles he has experienced is to acknowledge that making a good living requires labour, and he admonishes the Bard for his censure of Nova Scotia:

Though you could travel throughout Europe,

And you could enquire in every Kingdom,

You will not see a man without a store,

Making a good living there by being idle;

I do believe that you were foolish

When you started to condemn it;

It has provided many a man with assistance

Who was a poor soul when he arrived. (*Seann Albainn Agus Albainn Ur,* 137-144)

MacLean perhaps most blatantly cites his errors in his previous composition by having Fraser call his condemnation of the bounty of the New World "foolishness". MacLean further outlines this foolishness, giving Fraser a Biblical narrative to remind his audience of his previous reference in *A' Choille Ghruamach*:

In order to satisfy your nature,

It's no use for you to be fighting it;

That's the step you cannot deny,

Since our ancestors failed;

Though Adam had plenitude,

He still wanted a tree in the garden;

The fruit left him in the mercy of death,

When he took part of it from his wife. (*Seann Albainn Agus Albainn Ur,* 153-160)

MacLean reverses the imagery of *A' Choille Ghruamach*, where he compared the difficulties of pioneering and the harsh climate to being a slave in Egypt. In referring to Eden in this poem, however, he atones for what he admits has been a misrepresentation, reclaiming the idea of the Promised Land for his countrymen (Dunbar 2006, 332).

MacLean gives the Bard a final response of two stanzas, which contain two critical points: 1) humans struggle to be content and often complain, no matter their station, and 2) the Bard makes a choice to acquiesce to his new life, and bids farewell to Scotland (ibid):

What I shall do henceforth as a choice
Is to stop disagreeing with you so vehemently;
Mankind wishes to satisfy his longing,
Between being lofty and lowly:
I hear a complaint from the Duke
As well as those who pay him tribute,
And from the beggar who wears tattered clothing,
And from the man who wears the King's crown.

I will not go further in relating,
Before they grow tired of it hearing it,
Before they find fault with my Gaelic,
I will not [be] speaking or telling it;
For better or worse, if I'm not removed,
In this place, hardship will yield;
A farewell from me to the land of the Gaels,
That I will never forget. (*Seann Albainn Agus Albainn Ur,* 161 – 176)

In the penultimate stanza, MacLean points out a struggle that is evident for all of émigrés: that, regardless of station, whether duke or serf, beggar or king, humankind uniformly complains of its lot and struggles to find contentment. Having admitted his privileged life in Scotland relative to the majority of people who emigrated, MacLean here recognizes his capacity for malcontent and makes a clear choice for the opposite. His final stanza outlines this choice; no longer will he be composing songs in defamation of his new homeland, but instead he chooses to hope that

"hardship will yield," and acquiesces to the fact that he is in Nova Scotia to stay. He bids a final farewell to the country of his birth and promises to hold it close in memory.

Throughout his initial years in Nova Scotia, MacLean wrestled with the theme of emigration, both physically and mentally, as evidenced within the two compositions given here. Having experienced first-hand the rigorous and exhausting nature of pioneer life, he utilized his role as bard to express his personal feelings regarding the circumstances that surrounded emigration. In his initial composition, *A' Choille Ghruamach*, MacLean's commentary strongly urged those in Scotland to remain there and not to immigrate, citing the deceptions of the emigration agents and the soul-wearying labour required to succeed in Nova Scotia. His second composition on the theme of emigration was the product of much reflection, created after time had permitted becoming more accustomed to the changes in landscape and climate, and considering the experiences of other immigrant Scots who were less privileged than he had been. Dunbar comments on MacLean's significance in terms of the theme of emigration within the bardic tradition:

> In [*A' Choille Ghruamach*], he created the archetypal anti-emigration song. In this poem, he has forcefully answered his own creation. While other poets of the emigrant generation would revisit the debate… John MacLean has fully canvassed the themes and has come to a resolution that is both characteristic and representative of that to which the vast majority of New World Gaels and their descendants ultimately came. (Dunbar 2006, 333)

MacLean's role as social commentator is evident throughout these poems, but particularly in his second composition, as he acquiesces the fact that his earlier poem did not adequately represent truth for many of his fellow immigrants. Despite this, however, it is fascinating to consider that, although *Seann Albainn Agus Albainn Ur* represents MacLean's acquiescence to life in Nova Scotia and a more accurate portrayal of the immigrant experience, it is *A' Choille Ghruamach*, in all of its strident and severe criticism of the country, that has remained the most memorable and

become the most famous of MacLean's poems and among the most famous of the poetry of the immigrant generation.[12]

II. John the Hunter MacDonald (1795–1853)

Little is recorded of John the Hunter's youth in Scotland. He was born in Lochaber in 1795, and descended from the Bohuntin MacDonalds, "a sept especially gifted in the composition of Gaelic poetry" (Lonergan Williams, *Dictionary of Canadian Biography)*. The leaning to the poetic profession was evident at a young age, and John the Hunter was later "noted…for his historic and legendary lore" (Donald n.d., 581). Change would have been the constant theme during his youth, as the peaking Highland Clearances wrested neighbour, family and friends from their homes and sent them seeking a more beneficial and lucrative life in the New World. Having grown up with his cousin, Allan the Ridge MacDonald, another significant change would come in 1816, when Allan the Ridge and his family sailed for Nova Scotia. John the Hunter was only twenty-one when his cousin emigrated, and he lingered in Scotland a further eighteen years before joining his cousin in the New World.

According to Lonergan Williams, John the Hunter was employed as both "a civil engineer and deerstalker on the estate of an English landlord and acted as a guide or [*ghillie*] to parties of hunters" (Lonergan Williams, *DCB*; Donald, 581). His mastery of marksmanship and hunting skills gained him his name, *Iain Sealgair*, or John the Hunter (Donald, 581). He seems to have taken extreme pride in these skills; he could be said to even have possessed an air of arrogance concerning his excellence, as he was known to startle standing game into motion prior to taking aim, presumably to heighten the challenge and prestige of the kill (ibid). It was, perhaps, this arrogance that explains his bemoaning of the loss of the deer (and the relative ease

[12] *A' Choille Ghruamach* is cited in the majority of literature that discusses immigration to Nova Scotia, almost without fail; MacDonell does not include this poem in her anthology but writes that its "significant omission" is due to its "not fit[ting] easily into a collection of less celebrated compositions" and having been translated and published repeatedly elsewhere (MacDonell 1982, 17).

of a well-known prey) in his *Oran Do Dh'America*, in a land where new, foreign and much larger prey was available for the hunt. This will be discussed in further detail below.

The reasons for John the Hunter's immigration to Nova Scotia are not recorded. Unlike Rankin's depiction of Allan the Ridge's circumstance prior to his emigration, John the Hunter was not acquainted with poverty. Lonergan Williams avers instead that he was "quite wealthy and that two wooden buckets would not hold his money upon arrival in North America" (Lonergan Williams, *DCB*). As such, it is strange that John the Hunter would leave what was a luxurious employed position and his beloved hunting grounds for the unknowns of Canada. Perhaps his cousin Allan the Ridge professed the beauty, relative luxury and the joy he found in his new country; perhaps John the Hunter succumbed to the appeal of greener pastures. His *Song for America* indicates that this was likely the case, as he writes of the "right to property, gold and riches" that he dreamed would await him (*Oran Do Dh'America*, line 77). Whatever the case, John the Hunter sailed away from Tobermory on board the *Seonaid* (Janet) in 1834, at the age of thirty-nine, together with his wife Mary and his siblings Angus and Christie MacDonald.

Upon arrival in Nova Scotia, John the Hunter lived for a short time in Mabou Ridge where his cousin Allan the Ridge had settled, before settling permanently in Southwest Mabou (Lonergan Williams, *DCB*). John the Hunter's negative first impressions of the New World were not alleviated by his first winter there, which was "long remembered as the winter of the big snow" (ibid; MacDonell, 80). It was shortly after arrival that he penned *Oran Do Dh'America* (Song for America), the composition for which he is most well-known, and a composition that is rife with bitterness at his decision to leave Scotland and discontent with this new foreign country. Unlike John MacLean, who expressed similar dismay and disillusionment upon his arrival in 1819, John the Hunter did not adjust to his new surroundings. Lonergan Williams refers to another of his poems, composed some six years after his arrival, as "permeated with feelings of self-reproach and nostalgia" that were unchanged from his initial composition

(ibid).[13] From all accounts, it seems that John the Hunter spent his remaining years with his wife in Southwest Mabou, disillusioned and extremely remorseful at his decision to emigrate from Scotland. The bard "died without issue" in 1853, and perhaps this childless state and the loss of bequeathing his heritage and vocation was a considerable augmentation to his misery (Donald, 581).

Poetry of John the Hunter MacDonald

Oran Do Dh'America / Song for America[14]

John the Hunter MacDonald's *Oran Do Dh'America* (Song for America) was composed circa 1834, not long after his arrival, and is identified as a dispraise poem (Dunbar 2006, 297; 2003, 32). His choice of title for this song-poem is quite telling, as "Song for America" was the original title of John MacLean's compelling and archetypal emigration song *A' Choille Ghruamach*. The reuse of title, air and style was a quintessential feature of bardic composition for centuries, and John the Hunter's use of a similar title was not only an acknowledgement to MacLean but a bardic statement of dispraise in and of itself. His dispraise differs from MacLean's, however, in his trenchant depiction of loss; while MacLean waxes lyrical on the arduous difficulties of life in the New World, John the Hunter says nothing of labour and little of the climate, but instead focuses on all that he left behind in Scotland, the finality of the separation and the misery that is his as a result. Michael Kennedy attests to the lasting value of John the Hunter's poem as an example of nostalgia and longing for homeland:

> The images he created more than a century and a half ago of struggling to survive, with eyes blinded by tears, in an inhospitable new environment, while longing for the country

[13] This poem is unnamed in Lonergan William's reference in the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, and the inferred composition has not been located in sources available, either in Gaelic or translated to English.
[14] Text and translation for *Oran Do Dh'America* found in MacDonell's *The Emigrant Experience* (1982), 80-87. Additional translations consulted are as referenced. For the Gaelic text and English translation of the poem in its entirety, see Appendix, pp. 105-107.

> and heritage left behind, strike a powerful chord with Scots and those of Scottish descent overseas today. (Kennedy 1999, 268)

These elements of longing for homeland are evident throughout John the Hunter's composition.

John the Hunter's poem does not only bear similarity to MacLean's in title, but in stylistic content as well. While the prevalent themes differ from MacLean's, John the Hunter echoes MacLean's style in identifying three specific losses. MacLean claims the loss of his skill for composition, his mental capacity, and the ease of his native tongue; John the Hunter delineates his losses as that of homeland, of clan and kin, and of the joy of hunting. While MacLean's verse repudiates his claims in exemplifying that his skills are undoubtedly still intact, John the Hunter's composition displays no such recantation, symbolic or otherwise. In fact, his prevailing theme is that of substantial and permanent loss, paired with deep regret at abandoning his homeland, and, with it, all that was familiar and good. This is underlined by the repeated use of the Gaelic verb *fàg*, which MacDonell translates as 'to have left behind': "I left my homeland, I left my heritage; / My joy was left behind" (9-10). Gaelic Scholar Malcolm MacLennan's entry in his *Gaelic Dictionary* for *fàg* is perhaps more telling, as it defines the term not only as to leave, but also to "abandon, forsake, relinquish," which is much more communicative of loss (MacLennan 1997, 149). These two lines are a summation of John the Hunter's poem, identifying the three losses he discusses at length throughout his work.

The sense of John the Hunter's loss is pervasive throughout all fourteen stanzas. Indeed, *Oran Do Dh'America* is unique within the poems represented within this thesis, as it is by far the most eulogistic and elegiac. The grief felt at the loss of homeland is most poignant here, and John the Hunter, true to eulogistic idealism, presents a utopian perspective on his country and fellow Scots. Elegiac components are also present in the finality of John the Hunter's words; his references to the idealistic qualities of Scotland and fellow Scots are in the past tense, as though Scotland itself has undergone a sort of death. This concept is perhaps the most telling of his loss of homeland; by leaving Scotland, the land itself and all it represents no longer exists for John

the Hunter but is instead buried in the past across the Atlantic. In this sense, the concept of elegy is relevant and effective, for as Celtic scholar Anja Gunderloch indicates, "elegy…deals with the death of its subject and [possesses] a cathartic function" (Gunderloch 2006, 1580). In addition to his references in the past tense, the imagery utilized is reminiscent of death and graves. John the Hunter brackets his composition with grave imagery in the opening and final stanzas, compounding the idea of loss and the finality of his emigration from the homeland. In the second stanza, he speaks of leaving the comfort found in "the land of valleys and cairns" (14). While a cairn can be a man-made pile of stones or a naturally occurring "rocky hill or mountain," in Scotland it is also synonymous with a burial mound (MacLennan 1979, 73; Britannica Academic, s.v. "burial mound"). This image of death and burial is echoed in his final to stanzas, as John the Hunter first wishes he had died himself instead of leaving Scotland, and mourns that he will not be buried with the generations of his family that rest in Lochaber:

> Alas, Lord, that I did not die
> Before I left Scotland,
> Before I turned my back on my dear homeland
> And thereby lost my vigour.
> If God had received my restless soul
> At the time, I would not have suffered loss,
> And my body would have been buried in the grave
> On the heights above the glen.
>
> At St. Carrail's churchyard, the most beautiful cemetery
> That I ever knew;
> A pretty, sunny, smooth enclosure,
> Where hundreds now lie.
> Angels' Grove, Sunday's Dell,

Where those of my kind have lain for years,

Alas, Lord, that I am not among them

As I ardently long to be. (*Oran Do Dh'America,* 97-112)

Beginning and ending his composition with necropolis symbolism underlines the acute loss sustained by émigrés. Robert Dunbar speaks to the severity of this upheaval, using the term 'trauma,' and citing John the Hunter's composition as an example:

> One would expect that the trauma induced by the actual physical break with the homeland would be a significant theme for a people so deeply and intimately bound to particular places and with such a profound sense of intergenerational solidarity as the Gaels, and this does emerge in some of the poetry of the emigrant generation. John the Hunter MacDonald…ends his poem 'Oran do dh'Aimearaga' by expressing his wish that he could be buried back in the churchyard of St. Cairrail's in the Braes of Lochaber. (Dunbar 2008, 62)

The "intergenerational solidarity," or ancestral links, is a connection to the "hundreds" of MacDonalds that lie in St. Carrail's; to be buried apart from scores of one's ancestors is a loss of identity and heritage, not only as a MacDonald but also as a Scot, where clan was fundamental to the sense of self.

This idea of clan and heritage is evidenced in John the Hunter's third and fourth stanzas, being the second of the three losses identified. He first paints his countrymen and then clan MacDonald idealistically, enlisting eulogistic tropes and outlining their virtues in detail.

I left the tartaned company,

Handsome of figure and mien;

Trim warriors, elegant, strong,

Lads of fresh countenance;

Serene men, sturdy, able, and handsome,

High colour in their cheeks;

Kilted hosts, in time of need

Victory was assured them.

The MacDonalds would be in splendid array,

They were not wont to retreat;

The kilted gartered troop, with tartan coats,

With their new, dark blue bonnets,

And plaid hose to their heels,

Always first in rank.

Truly, they were gallant men who would never yield in life,

Valiant in combat of swords. (*Oran Do Dh'America,* 17-32)

This depiction of Scots is rather rosy and picturesque. While it was a typical eulogistic element to present the subject idealistically in bardic compositions, John the Hunter's representation of his countrymen is lacking a sense of realism. This is, however, an element used to highlight his loss, particularly when contrasted with his portrait of his new fellow citizens in Nova Scotia. Although he displays unmitigated appreciation for the beauty and uniqueness of the Scots of his homeland, his depiction of the residents of the New World is permeated with disdain:

Now all that was has ceased to be;

I am bound, brought low,

In the land of snows and sere grasses.

It is not what I have been accustomed to,

Looking at swarthy folk,

Ugly, drab, dull,

With wide trousers, the loutish long coat,

An unattractive style.

You'll see groups of them drinking

At the store if you go there.

They are rowdy and boastful,

Intoxicated by drink;

Their place untidy, mud under their feet,

Glass flagons raised to their heads,

Peeling off and tearing their jackets

Like a pack of tinkers. (*Oran Do Dh'America,* 57–72)

A decidedly unflattering description, these two stanzas stand in stark contrast to John the Hunter's idealistic portrait of his fellow Scots. The severe disparity between the two images underlines the bard's loss of kinship; his sense of belonging among his people is no more. While Scots in Nova Scotia were not few and far between, gone were his days of being surrounded solely by Scots, much less only by his own clan. Nova Scotia had changed hands repeatedly over the last two hundred years and was now a mixture of Loyalist English and Americans, German, French and Irish. Scots were also prevalent in British North America, particularly after the beginning of the Highland Clearances in 1770 and the arrival of the *Hector*. In the early years of the nineteenth century, however, John the Hunter was in a land of shared identity, where every culture present was fighting to replant their upturned roots. His heritage, so much a part of his own personal identity, sense of community and national identity, was no longer reinforced at every turn, but instead battling with the myriad of ethnicities that made up Nova Scotia in the early nineteenth century. This loss perhaps coloured his perception of his neighbours, as the contrast between Scots and the peoples of Nova Scotia is stark, drastic, and perhaps hyperbolic in his poems. Where John the Hunter lauds the colourful splendour of the "fresh-faced" kilted retinue, he despises the "loutish," "swarthy" and "unattractive" dress and demeanour of the Nova Scotians. The Scottish company are portrayed as dependable and honourable warriors, while Nova Scotians are castigated for their inebriation, dirtiness and

dishevelment. The irony lies in the fact that his description is not unlike how many Englishmen described the Scots in times past, with their unorthodox dress and propensity for whisky, and their simplistic or even (in their minds) uncivilized way of living.

John the Hunter's choice of words in describing his life and surroundings in Scotland are reminiscent of familiar comforts, safety and ultimately, identity. In contrast, his cousin Allan the Ridge, in his flyting mockery of John the Hunter's poem, ruthlessly (and truthfully) points out the dire circumstances in which Scotland's people lived, citing relentless poverty, thieving and merciless overlords, and the misery that abounded as a result. John the Hunter, however, far away from such troubles, could perhaps only see the problems directly in front of him, and thus turned his face eastward to view those more positively. While Allan the Ridge thunders righteously of injustice and poverty, John the Hunter pines for the familiar comforts of "beloved kinsmen," of homeland, of heritage. Injustice and poverty there may have been in Scotland, but this was the land of his ancestors, where clan and culture were the essence of life, and part of his very identity.

An important consideration when discussing John the Hunter's reactions to the New World is his status in Scotland. Well-educated and employed by a wealthy English laird, he was clearly not impoverished. This evidence of social status and wealth is a factor which is atypical of the majority of emigrants, as "the less articulate and well-connected arrivals were primarily concerned with the realistic business of survival;" nostalgia was most prevalent amongst the middle-class bards like John the Hunter, but was not pervasive, as is evidenced by Allan the Ridge's response song-poem discussed below (Shaw 1996, 344; Dunbar 2008, 60). This class difference between the majority of his fellow immigrants and himself would have heightened the disparity between John the Hunter's experiences in Scotland and in the New World, and thus his perception of his new countrymen. He could not identify with the poverty and hardship that were so widespread, both in his native Scotland and among new immigrant pioneers in Nova Scotia. Many Highland Scots had lived their entire lives in blackhouses, a construction of peat

with thatched roof and dirt floor, with the stock animals brought inside during the winter to avoid freezing and provide extra warmth. For individuals accustomed to such a life, the transition to British North America was perhaps far less drastic in terms of hard work, simple living and working to till the soil. Dunbar asserts that both John the Hunter and his cousin Allan the Ridge were members "of the Gaelic aristocracy" (Dunbar 2008, 60). Furthermore, much like John MacLean some fifteen years earlier, John the Hunter was convinced prior to arrival that easy wealth and prosperity would be the lot of all immigrants, stating that he thought "Not a penny would I need / Rather a right to property, gold and riches / Would be the lot of everyone there" (76-78). Finally, as a hunting guide on his former employer's estate, he would have not associated with the poor but with the friends of his laird. To thus suddenly be surrounded with what to his mind was ill-mannered society when he expected the supposed newly wealthy to evoke the mannerisms of the gentry would surely have been a rude awakening and perhaps somewhat shocking.

In tandem with the loss of his gentrified countrymen, John the Hunter identifies a third and related loss, that from which he gained his name: the joy of "stalking the young deer" (38). He reminisces of the happiness and satisfaction he experienced in hunting in the wilds; the loss of this joy is so palpable that it compels the bard to commit several stanzas to the subject. He describes at length the frequent adventures he enjoyed as a hunter:

> Often did I climb through the pass
> With my gun ready in hand.
> It was my delight then to hunt among the bens
> With my slender hound alert on the precipice,
> Roaming the dells on the wild moors,
> Stalking the young deer.
> Often did I fell him with my lead
> Though swift was his stride.

On a fine morning it was my delight
To set out with my dog at my heels,
With my double-barreled gun which would not fail
When I took aim.
To convert lead and gunpowder to smoke
Was to me a pleasant pursuit,
Among the winding rails on the mountain heights,
Home of the slender stag.

My joy and my delight,
Were the bellowings of the deer,
And at Holy Rood to approach
The one of fairest hue;
To traverse the glades and hunt them on the moors,
When their pelts were darkest.
Many a time I riddled the young roe
Before sunrise. (*Oran Do Dh'America,* 33-56)

This third loss is interrelated with both of the previous two; his love for the land is closely interwoven in his vivid description of hunting, and his role as a hunter and guide was one that not only gave him the privilege of spending his days hunting with the wealthy of Scotland, but also gave him status and renown among his clan. Additionally, the imagery utilized in the stanzas above are the rhetoric of the hunter depiction in the panegyric code. John MacInnes discusses the code imagery of the hunter as often being depicted as a warrior: "It is essentially as an arms-bearing warrior-hunter that the hero appears. He is accompanied by his hounds, attended by his retinue, and carries the weapons that are equally the weapons of battle"

(MacInnes, 281). According to this description, John the Hunter portrays himself as the legendary hero that was, frequently referring to his hounds and his joy in his guns.

This loss of hunting is a devastating one for John the Hunter, especially considering that for the bard it was a loss of personal identity. When one considers the practical point of view, however, the intensity of his grief and the extent of his loquacity on the subject is somewhat curious. While it is true that white-tailed deer were non-existent in Nova Scotia at the time of his arrival (not being introduced until the late nineteenth century), British North America held a far more diverse array of game than Scotland (Patton 1991). Moose, caribou, wildcats, fox, mink and the occasional black bear were among furs exported to the British Isles in the first half of the nineteenth century (Gwyn 2003, 85). A conservational ban on moose-hunting was eventually put in place, but not until 1843, several years after John the Hunter's arrival (ibid, 75). It is thus peculiar for a self-proclaimed and publicly renowned avid hunter to so liberally bemoan the loss of a lesser prize and not even mention the much larger game opportunities now available to him. The hunting grounds were indeed new, the prey unfamiliar, but to a professional hunter this could mean also a new challenge to test one's skill and could even be construed as a positive aspect of emigration.

The nostalgic longing for hunting is a feature of dispraise in bardic composition. Dunbar discusses this briefly, and continues to cite John the Hunter's poem as a prime example:

> In the poetry of dispraise, nostalgia for the social aspects of their former existence, such as the enjoyment of the Gaelic arts of song, poetry and conversation, lubricated by drink, and the old chiefly pursuits such as the hunt of the deer and the fishing of trout and salmon, heightened the poets' sense of loneliness. (Dunbar 2008, 58)

John the Hunter's voluble verses on his longing for the hunt are thus a distinct bardic element of dispraise, particularly when one considers MacLean's poem from which he drew his title. MacLean bemoaned his profound loneliness, the loss of the "jovial company" he enjoyed, and perhaps most obviously in the three claims he set out in his first stanza, the loss of his artistic

skill. Having been employed as bard to the Laird of Coll and even published volumes of poetry, MacLean's identity was wrapped up in his bardic composition; for John the Hunter, it was his skill as a deerstalker and huntsman that was his renown and, clearly, his sense of self. It is perhaps no wonder then that the loss of hunting is such a pervasive theme throughout John the Hunter's work, despite the wealth of game opportunities in the New World.

John the Hunter's use of dispraise is decidedly different from MacLean's. In *A' Choille Ghruamach*, MacLean enumerates the adversities and hazards of life in the New World and castigates the emigration agents, strongly encouraging others to beware of their tricks and advising them to stay in Scotland; his use of dispraise is pronounced and quite unmistakable. John the Hunter, however, is more concerned with the losses he has experienced, and is extremely overt in his nostalgia for the homeland. His dispraise centers not on the arduous work of pioneering or the schemes of emigration agents (much to his cousin's Allan the Ridge's chagrin), but instead focusses on what Nova Scotia is not: Scotland. His depiction of his three losses are all interwoven; each one is laced with references to the others. Homeland is defined in terms of not only physical attributes but also within the spectacle of the "tartaned company" and the beauty of the spaces in which he hunted; his kin and clan were of "the land of heroes," as well as the company which he kept while hunting, and the people he wishes to lie beside in final rest.

III. Allan the Ridge MacDonald (1794–1868)

Allan the Ridge MacDonald was born in 1794 at Allt-an-Srothail in Lochaber to Mary Campbell and Alexander MacDonald (MacDonald 1900, 55; Rankin 2005, 7-8). While sources offer little information on Allan the Ridge's youth, it is certain that his education in Gaelic was "exceptional in scope" (Rankin, 10). Effie Rankin describes the process of such an education in the eighteenth-century Highlands:

> Parents, relatives and other clan members would be involved in this instruction, both in the home and in the wider community. Especially important in this unique learning process was the traditional Highland *ceilidh* house which in many ways took on the role of colleges elsewhere. Young and old, male and female, were regularly exposed to a comprehensive range of subject matter which included history, genealogy, poetry, folklore and much more. Relying as it did on oral transmission, the *ceilidh* house became a remarkable training ground for the memory. (Rankin 2005, 10)

Coupled with such an exceptional educational experience, Allan the Ridge came by his bardic capabilities naturally, as his family were known for their "knowledge of clan history and genealogy" (Lonergan 1974, 74). Allan the Ridge more than lived up to this aspect of his heritage, as Lonergan indicates:

> Few were so well versed in the poetry and folklore of the Highlands as Allan the Ridge, being favoured as well with a remarkable memory and a genuine love of the Gaelic language and traditions. (Lonergan 1974, 74)

Effie Rankin concurs with this assessment, outlining Allan the Ridge's role as a bard and bearer of tradition and clan identity:

> As a traditional poet, he was obliged primarily to chronicle the history of his clan and chieftains, while emphasizing their past triumphs and lamenting their losses. With its inevitable concentration on ancient rivalries and feuds, this poetry was essentially one of retrospect. Despite the fact that many of the ancestral powers of most clans had been eroding for years before the devastating losses at Culloden Moor in 1746, Keppoch and its people fiercely cherished the past and relied on their poets to continue to proclaim the old values of ancestral pride and chivalry. (Rankin 2005, 7)

This would suggest that Allan the Ridge was a heraldic example of what remained of traditional bardic poetry in the Highlands, in a period when the clan way of life had been disintegrating for decades.

One possible reason for the limited information available on Allan the Ridge's life in Scotland is the simple fact that he emigrated at a young age. Compared to John MacLean and John the Hunter MacDonald, who were both in their thirties when they emigrated, Allan the Ridge was only twenty-two when he and his family set sail for Nova Scotia (Rankin, 11; Lonergan 1974, 71). The family's causes for emigration were myriad. They had experienced first-hand the effects of the Culloden and the Highland Clearances that followed. In his hometown of Lochaber, life was difficult after the defeat at Culloden in 1746 for, as the clan MacDonald had been loyal to the Stuart cause, "many clansmen were reduced to impotent and impoverished dependants" (Rankin, 11-12). Effie Rankin indicates that Allan the Ridge's father, Alisdair Ruadh, may have been "relatively secure of circumstance" due to his role as a cattle drover, but this circumstance shifted after the end of the Napoleonic Wars, when the "demand for beef fell dramatically," possibly having a detrimental effect on the MacDonald family's financial resources (Rankin, 13). It was thus with great hope and eager expectancy that Allan MacDonald's family left in 1816 to pursue a new life in Nova Scotia.[15] The anticipation and trepidation are eloquently expressed in Allan the Ridge's poetic chronicling of the crossing *Tighinn do dh'America* (Coming to America), where he displays his already proficient compositional skills. Rankin describes this brief poem as "a remarkable song which resonates with the dynamic energy of sailing ships and stormy seas" (ibid, 17).

After arriving in Pictou, the family soon set out for Cape Breton, settling "on the South West Ridge in Mabou and it was from this location that the distinctive 'Ridge' appellation came to be associated with their name" (ibid, 18). Allan the Ridge married Catherine, daughter of Muireach MacPherson, and although the exact date is uncertain, their first son, Alexander, was born in February of 1823 (ibid, 20). Alexander the Ridge MacDonald would continue on the family heritage of bardic composition after his father.

[15] Rankin notes that the family apparently "seized the first available opportunity to sail, when wartime restrictions on travel were removed" (Rankin, 13). This would suggest not only eagerness but perhaps an element of desperation as well.

Unlike MacLean, whose poetry depicts extreme isolation, Allan the Ridge had friends and family from Lochaber who had immigrated to Nova Scotia prior to his arrival. His immediate family included his parents, which meant that, contrary to MacLean's experience, Allan the Ridge was not the patriarch of his family in a new and unfamiliar land. Perhaps it is these two factors, combined with the adversities present in Lochaber, that lent Allan the Ridge the positive disposition regarding Nova Scotia that is present in his composition *Moladh Albainn Nuaidh* (In Praise of Nova Scotia). Although the rigorous nature of pioneer life was universal and the MacDonalds of Mabou would have experienced similar difficulties as John MacLean, it did not have the detrimental effect on Allan the Ridge as it did MacLean, as Allan the Ridge's poetry includes little mention of hardship.

Rankin attributes Allan the Ridge's contentment and success in Nova Scotia to the strong community of individuals that had been "transplanted from Lochaber" (Rankin, 28). In *A' Choille Ghruamach,* MacLean lamented his loss of fluency in Gaelic composition and his isolation, interdependent factors that exacerbated each other. Rankin describes Allan the Ridge as having the opposite experience, citing that members of the community could respond to the bard "with a verse or two, undoubtedly stimulating his inspiration and providing the necessary audience for his creative endeavours" (ibid). She extrapolates, depicting this community as a "cheerful bardic fraternity [that] flourished…in the early years… It was a stimulating environment for poets, musicians and storytellers where an appreciative and discerning audience was always eager to interact, to appraise and to encourage" (ibid). Such a wealth of community, especially one so responsive to the bardic arts, would undoubtedly have had an enormously positive impact on Allan the Ridge's perspective on his new country.

Allan the Ridge eventually left Mabou in 1847 due to poor farming conditions, settling in Antigonish County (Dunbar 2006, 282; Rankin, 31). His compositional fervour continued, with numerous songs on a variety of subjects being composed over the decades. He passed away of palsy on April 1, 1868 (Rankin, 37). Robert Dunbar attributes to him the honorific of being "one

of the great emigrant poets," equating him with John MacLean (Dunbar 2006, Appendix II, 226).

Poetry of Allan the Ridge MacDonald

Moladh Albainn Nuaidh / In Praise of Nova Scotia[16]

Allan the Ridge's *Moladh Albainn Nuaidh* is in direct response to John the Hunter's *Oran Do Dh'America* and is even set to the same air (Rankin 2005, 159). Effie Rankin underscores the importance of understanding the song as such a response, putting it in the category of a flyting poem, and not simply a "conventional praise of place" (ibid). Flyting, or a dispute between bards, was a common form of poetry in the bardic history of Scotland (see Chapter 1). John Shaw ascribes to this poem the honorific of being one of the "earliest exchanges of flyting recorded in the New World" (Shaw 1996, 343). While not as long-winded as his cousin's fourteen-stanzaed poem, Allan the Ridge nonetheless matches the eight-line style with eight stanzas of his own, and unashamedly castigates his cousin for his disparagement of Nova Scotia in what Michael Kennedy refers to as a "violently opposed assessment of a shared event of great significance" (Kennedy 1999, 269). As Effie Rankin states, the passion present within Allan the Ridge's response is affecting and persuasive:

> Allan the Ridge was incensed at his cousin's unflattering description and one finds a searing anger in his reply; he is totally focused on repudiating each one of the Hunter's complaints, his intellect and imagination are in harmony and quick-silver wordplay is the end result. [H]is passionate defence remains an outstanding one. (Rankin 2005, 30)

In addition to the passion present in Allan the Ridge's composition, his use of similar structure and tune is also highly strategic; as Michael Kennedy argues:

[16] Text and translation for *Moladh Albainn Nuaidh* found in Rankin 2005, 76-81. For the Gaelic text and English translation of the poem in its entirety, see the appendix of this thesis, pp. 107-108.

> Any time John the Hunter's song was sung, listeners would immediately be reminded of Allan the Ridge's alternative offering, even if it were not actually sung at the time (as it undoubtedly was on more than one occasion). In this way, Allan the Ridge effectively countered and undermined the influence of John the Hunter's sentiment. (Kennedy 1999, 270)

Not only vituperative with his words, Allan the Ridge employed a clever and calculated play on the cultural traditions of poetry performance, such that his cousin's poem and his own response would be forever linked in the minds of Gaels.

Allan the Ridge begins his poem by affronting his cousin for his "loud boasting" and "offensive language" in the latter's description of the New World. He assiduously reminds John the Hunter that he was not the only one who came from Scotland; Allan the Ridge spent the first twenty-two years of his life in Lochaber, the same region as John the Hunter. He points this out rather sternly in his first stanza, having determined to set the record straight and provide a realistic portrayal of both Scotland and Nova Scotia:

> You have boasted loudly
> Of great subjects in your verse,
> I find your language offensive
> For I was well acquainted yonder:
> In chilly Scotland, though it be distant
> A small loss I consider it
> Harsh conditions caused the sorrow
> Of its poor inhabitants there. (*Moladh Albainn Nuaidh,* 1-8)

Allan the Ridge promptly delves into a thorough and blunt description of the bald facts in Scotland, stripping John the Hunter's reminiscences of their flowery underpinnings and staunchly presenting the starkness of reality in their place. He reminds his cousin of the anguish and hardship that existed for the "poor inhabitants" of Scotland (8). Taking each of John the

Hunter's professed losses (which Allan the Ridge regards as romanticized depictions of Scotland) as well as his effronteries with Nova Scotia, Allan the Ridge disputes each point in turn.

Beginning with John the Hunter's description of the "tartaned company" and the gentry that he spent much of his time with as a deerstalker on his laird's estate, Allan the Ridge condemns the gentry with vituperative language, describing their miserly and uncharitable treatment of their tenants, and even accusing the overlords of slavery:

> The gentry got it for themselves
> To increase their pleasure;
> They have tenantry like slaves
> In dire distress:
> Though one might wear tartan to a fair,
> Resplendent once in a while,
> The rest of the time a wretch he'll be
> Fearful, wretched and poor. (*Moladh Albainn Nuaidh,* 9-16)

He rebuffs John the Hunter's idyllic depiction of the Scots in "splendid array," indicating that "resplendence" of tartan there may have been, but its incidence was occasional, while the remainder of the time the average man lived a life of penury. This is in stark contrast to John the Hunter's rosy view of the colourful tartanry being rampant in Scotland; Allan the Ridge is reminding his cousin of the misery experienced by majority of Scots. He attests that even marriage is not a source of joy, comfort or respite from the hardships of that country. Instead, a man must endure the worry, stress and shame of trying (and often failing) to provide for his family:

> A cause of sorrow to one who marries
> For he has no options,
> His wife and young child all alone

In a leaking hut of sods:

He will be a filthy, black vagabond

Driving herds for others,

They will be starving, he will be penniless

Going about with empty pockets. (*Moladh Albainn Nuaidh,* 17-24)

This type of squalor and destitution is blatantly omitted from John the Hunter's accounts. Allan the Ridge assails John the Hunter for having nothing but pity for himself and disdain for those around him, and for his flagrant disregard for the welfare of the majority of his native countrymen. His phrase "a leaking hut of sods" refers to the blackhouses that were common housing in Scotland. He is perhaps referencing the blackhouses again in line 21 by describing the inhabitant as a "filthy, black vagabond," yet this remark is also reminiscent to John MacLean's complaint about the arduous labours where he states that "every part of me look[s] so blackened / I'll compare myself to the chimney sweep" (*A' Choille Ghruamach*, 95-96). This reminder of *A' Choille Ghruamach* would not be unsurprising, given that John the Hunter's poem hearkened to MacLean's composition in title, style and theme of dispraise. In the same vein, Allan the Ridge comments upon John the Hunter's own expectations of wealth upon arrival in the New World, referencing John the Hunter's lines "Thinking that in the new world / Not a penny would I need; / Rather a right to property, gold and riches / Would be the lot of everyone there" (*Oran Do Dh'America*, 75-78). Allan the Ridge points to the truly "penniless" and impoverished, underlining that John the Hunter's lot is not to be lamented, but envied: "they [he and his family] will be starving, he will be penniless / Going about with empty pockets" (23-24).

This idea of John the Hunter's comparative affluence is again reiterated as Allan the Ridge moves on to his cousin's effusive mourning for the loss of deer-hunting. Allan the Ridge reminds his cousin of his complacency in his rather elevated position; as a deerstalker and *ghillie* on a laird's estate, John the Hunter was free to employ his skills purely for sportsmanship, where others less fortunate hunted deer for sustenance and were punished for

it. For the average person in Scotland, killing a deer to feed one's family was a violation of law that would likely soon find the offender whipped and exiled, a fact to which Allan the Ridge quickly calls attention:

> Though you brag greatly about the stag
> Should you kill it for your use,
> Even though its meat be poor and dry
> You will be prosecuted:
> They will swiftly grab you by the neck
> And put a whip to your cheek,
> You will be banished overseas
> Since you were hunting deer. (25-32)

Allan the Ridge's depiction of hunting, rather than being John the Hunter's joyful, privileged pastime of sport or an exhibition of prowess and skill, is instead a telling portrayal of the wide chasm between the wealthy gentry and the starving common man. Reminiscent of the ancient tale of Robin Hood in Sherwood Forest, killing a deer is only for the privileged, and for even a starving individual to try to feed himself warrants brutal and tyrannical punishment. Such a forceful reprimand combined with the reminders of the pitiful plight of his fellow man is surely meant to induce shame in John the Hunter. His effluence in devoting several stanzas to his lament over deerstalking is also contrasted with Allan the Ridge's solitary stanza, which depicts nothing of the glory of the deer but blatantly outlines the predicament of the starving poor.

In his fifth stanza, Allan the Ridge addresses John the Hunter's nostalgia for Scotland and his loss of homeland, doing so entirely without sympathy. He instead reiterates his previous lambasting of the few wealthy who exploit the many in poverty, and even criticizing the immigrants who lament leaving Scotland:

> The land you left is a land without charity
> Without compassion for tenants,

But they are anguished for leaving it

And distressed at the sea-crossing:

Poor people, the seed of cotters

Without stock or cattle

Too bad some condemned the wonderful land

Where they became gentlemen. (*Moladh Albainn Nuaidh,* 33-40)

Allan the Ridge's distaste for nostalgic yearning for the old country is not limited to his cousin's poetic expression but includes even the poor tenants for whom he is so vehemently advocating. His experience of both Scotland and Nova Scotia is so vastly different from the opinions expressed by John the Hunter and others as well, and he is bewildered at emigrants who are "anguished" at what he sees as a country that is politically and socially ruthless and unforgiving. Effie Rankin identifies Allan the Ridge's portrayal of Scotland and Nova Scotia as one of callous apathy and privileged liberty, respectively:

> The cold of Scotland is a figurative cold, one much more damaging to the human spirit, for it is a coldness and lack of compassion towards the poor and downtrodden. The lot of the common man in Scotland was often one of much misery and filth and degradation. By contrast, Nova Scotia has freedom from tyranny, it is a fine and fertile place, peopled by kindly settlers; moreover, it has all the necessities of life, plus some luxuries. (Rankin 2005, 30)

It seems that the staunch pride in and longing for the land of one's birth that is so redolent in the expressions of many immigrants to the New World is unfathomable for Allan the Ridge, whose obvious compassion for the common man darkly colours his memories of his native land. In this he includes more than just his cousin, for he is baffled that the poor of his country, who are now rich in comparison in the New World, would bemoan the loss of Scotland, which he sees as the place of their captivity and bondage. He admonishes those who constantly turn their gaze back across the Atlantic, descrying their lament for home and country when opportunity and

prosperity beckon in the New World: “Too bad some condemned the wonderful land / Where they became gentlemen” (39–40). According to Dunbar, the above stanza is a commentary on the “desertion of the old values,” or the clan system in which the people were provided and cared for by their chieftain; he indicates Allan the Ridge’s “logical conclusion” about the current sociopolitical state in Scotland was that it “necessarily [led to] emigration” (Dunbar 2006, 297; 2003, 40).

Allan the Ridge’s composition, although titled “In Praise of Nova Scotia,” up until this point is instead a staunch dispraise of Scotland. His dispraise is a strident bardic commentary on the sociopolitical environment in Scotland, making no comment on the beauty of the country, decidedly refuting any nostalgic longing on his part and criticizing those who do experience it (ibid, 310). His final three stanzas turn to the praise of his new country; however, he makes no adulations regarding the natural beauty of Nova Scotia. According to Lonergan, this is typical of Allan the Ridge’s poetry as she stipulates that “if he noticed the beauty of his surroundings, it is not reflected in his work” (Lonergan 1974, 87). Instead of natural beauty, he continues his commentary on sociopolitical matters, citing the virtues, possibilities and prosperity available to immigrants in the New World:

> Now that you have come overseas
> To this fine place,
> You will lack for nothing all your days
> As all things fare well for us:
> You shall have honey from the flowers
> Sugar and also tea,
> Much better than the land you left
> To the rabble as a deer-forest.
>
> …Here you will find lasting gold,

Unbounded right to land,

All you would want upon your farm,

Of property and cattle. (*Moladh Albainn Nuaidh,* 41-48, 53-56)

Where John the Hunter expresses his disappointment that he is not basking in king-like glory, with the "right to property, gold and riches" (77), Allan the Ridge points out that in the New World, those who were poor now "lack for nothing all [their] days" (42). He recounts in detail the amenities of land and community, the ready availability of goods and commodities, the opportunity to own land instead of renting, to drive one's own cattle. Even his citing of sugar and tea is of no small import, as Effie Rankin avers that these were "luxuries in pioneer days" (Rankin 2005, 160). To Allan the Ridge, all of these are clearly equal to richness and prosperity, infinitely preferable to the "deer-forests" of Scotland. As MacDonell indicates, "the song is a brave attempt to demonstrate that emigration opened the door to freedom and security, privileges which were now beyond the reach of hundreds of Highlanders in the old country" (MacDonell, 89).

Finally, Allan the Ridge turns to his cousin's outright defamation of and dislike for the New World's inhabitants (already a mosaic of multiculturalism), pledging their goodness and virtues in abundance:

You were wise and did not err

Neither was your opinion vain,

Coming to the land of fine men

Kindly, gentle and civil…

You will get rum and wine and beer

In the store should you visit

You will see a goodly company of men

Drinking there on occasion:

Brave, manly and generous ones

Who will share the drink,

Each one travels on his saddled horse

How I'd love to be among them! (*Moladh Albainn Nuaidh,* 49-52, 57-64)

Parodying John the Hunter's eighth and ninth stanzas, which ridicule and disparage the New World citizens enjoying a drink at the general store, Allan the Ridge instead points out the wide variety of drink available, this ready to be consumed in the "goodly company of men," whom he clearly esteems and whom he infers drink there only "on occasion" (59–60). This company are depicted as "brave, manly and generous" folk who will happily share a drink with a newcomer; moreover, and clearly the mark of importance for Allan the Ridge, these men are not beset by poverty, but instead each man is wealthy enough to have horse and saddle for himself (61–63). Dunbar infers that this "reference to the saddled horse" is significant, indicating that "the possession of both a saddle and a horse would be yet another marker of the relative prosperity of the New World Gaels" (Dunbar 2008, 69). Additionally, Allan the Ridge's final line is full of critical references to John the Hunter's closing statement. John the Hunter had vehemently expressed lament that he longed to be lying in death with his clan in St. Cairrail's cemetery instead of alive in Nova Scotia: "Alas, Lord, that I am not among them / As I ardently long to be" (*Oran Do Dh'America*, 111-112). Allan the Ridge turns this phrase brilliantly to serve his own composition by professing "How I'd love to be among them!" (64). He thus underlines not only his disdain for his cousin's disparaging remarks about their new compatriots, averring his own desire to share the company of Nova Scotians, but also that his will to live is intact and thriving. In a similar vein, his entire composition uses the present tense; there is no reference to death or the grave at all. Allan the Ridge is adamant that the New World is a haven, a glorious land of plenty with prosperity for all.

CONCLUSION

The contributions of the three bards discussed above each offer complex insights into the experience of the immigrant Scot. Each bard, representing his own unique experience, provides important commentary on the sociopolitical situation evident in Scotland, the choice of emigration and pioneer life in Nova Scotia. As such, each bard explores the two "fundamental questions" identified by Robert Dunbar (cited in Chapter 2): namely, "did we err in coming to the New World, and, would those left behind in Scotland err if, in spite of the difficulties of life in the New World, they followed us?" (Dunbar 2008, 32). Each bard's answer to these questions varies from his counterparts', in some ways quite dramatically, as has been seen. The answer for this could lie in each bard's respective status in Scotland, and how this status shaped their perspective on the New World. The wealthiest of these, John the Hunter MacDonald, who allegedly brought with him a rather substantial sum of money, was the individual who expressed the deepest regret for having emigrated and pined most deeply for his homeland. John MacLean, who had similar views of grandeur in Nova Scotia prior to arrival and similarly expressed regret for leaving Scotland, eventually came to find peace and contentment in his new home. Interestingly, it is Allan the Ridge MacDonald, likely the least financially privileged of the three, who stalwartly defends the virtues of Nova Scotia and even staunchly dispraises Scotland. The bard's status in Scotland, therefore, seems to have an influence on his perspective of the rigorous ways of pioneering life in Nova Scotia.

John MacLean's despondency upon arrival in the New World prompted him to create what would become the archetypal anti-immigration poem, *A' Choille Ghruamach*, a detailed description of the arduous nature of pioneer life. This was a heartfelt, evocative expression of despair that had negative ramifications on emigration in Scotland. This poem was a stance that MacLean himself eventually expressed misgiving for in *Seann Albainn Agus Albainn Ur*, which stressed the importance of considering the individual's social status when judging the benefits of choosing emigration.

John the Hunter's poem *Oran Do Dh'America* offers the most nostalgic, eulogistic and elegiac of the four poems represented, describing at length the acute regret he experienced over the loss of his homeland without any acknowledgement of potential benefit, and is thus also an anti-emigration poem. Allan the Ridge MacDonald responded with vehemence to John the Hunter's stance in his own *Moladh Albainn Nuaidh*, refuting each of John the Hunter's claims of loss effectively with his use of rhetoric and proudly proclaiming his pro-immigration stance in a compelling representation of bardic flyting. Additionally, the communal or interweaving nature of bardic composition has been explored: John MacLean responded to his own *A' Choille Ghruamach* in his later poem *Seann Albainn Agus Albainn Ur*; John the Hunter's *Oran Do Dh'America* was in some ways tributary to John MacLean's earlier poem; Allan the Ridge's composition *Moladh Albainn Nuaidh* was a direct challenge of John the Hunter's song.

The voice of the immigrant bards represents a critical and essential historical perspective on the mass immigration of Scots to Nova Scotia. These works were designed to "define and reinforce the values of their society" as well as sway public opinion (Dunbar 2008, 25). The method of presentation also played an extremely influential role; as a sung tradition, these compositions were performed by singers at social gatherings, where the tunes and tropes used brought a myriad of reminders to the audience, and the commentary within the song provided fuel for discussion amongst the audience for a long time following the event itself. As conduits of social commentary, the four poems discussed here each express varying opinions on the topics of emigration, loss of homeland, and pioneer life in Nova Scotia, and were effective in influencing the bards' audiences in Scotland and in the New World. The utilization of traditional elements are diverse in even this small representation of Gaelic poetry, evidencing that certain elements were used to convey a particular message to their intended audience, while other elements underscored a response to previous compositions. The combination of bardic elements, structure, language and intent provides unique insight into the role of bard as commentator and advocate for immigrant Scots in the nineteenth century.

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APPENDIX: POETRY

A 'Choille Ghruamach
Fonn/Air: *Coire Cheathaich*[17]
Composed at Barney's River, Nova Scotia

Gu bheil mi 'm ònrachd 's a' choille ghruamaich,
Mo smaointinn luaineach, cha tog mi fonn;
Fhuair mi 'n t-àite so 'n aghaidh nàduir,
Gu 'n thréig gach tàlanta 'bha 'nam cheann;
Cha dean mi òran a chur air dòigh ann,
'N uair 'ni mi tòiseachadh bidh mi trom;
Chaill mi 'Ghàidhlig seach mar a b' àbhaist dhomh
'N uair a bha mi 's an dùthaich thall.

Cha 'n fhaigh mi m' intinn leam ann an òrdugh
Ged bha mi eòlach air dèanadh rann:
'S e 'mheudaich bròn dhomh 's a lughdaich sòlas
Gun duine còmhl' rium a nì rium cainnt.
Gach latha 's oidhche 's gach car a nì mi
Gu 'm bi mi cuimhneachadh anns gach àm
An tìr a'dh'fhàg mi 'bha 'n taic an t-sàile,
Ged tha mi 'n dràsd ann am bràighe ghleann.

Cha 'n ioghnadh dhomh-sa ged tha mi brònach,
'S ann tha mo chòmhnuidh air cùl nam beann,
Am meadhon fàsaich air Abhainn Bhàrnaidh
Gun dad is fear na buntàta lom.
Mu 'n dèan mi àiteach 's mu 'n tog mi bàrr ann
'S a' choille ghàbhaidh 'chur ás a bonn
Le neart mo ghàirdein, gu 'm bi mi sàraicht'
A's treis air fàilinn mu 'm fàs a' chlann.

'S i so an dùthaich 's a bheil an cruadal
Gun fhios do 'n t-sluagh a tha tigh'nn a-nall:
Gur h-olc a fhuaras oirnn luchd a' bhuairidh
A rinn le 'n tuairisgeul ar toirt ann.
Ma nì iad buannachd cha mhair i buan dhaibh,
Cha dèan i suas iad, 's cha 'n ioghnadh leam,
'S gach mallachd truaghan a bhios g' an ruagadh
Bho 'n chaid am fuadach a chur fo 'n ceann.

Bidh gealladh làidir g'a thoirt an tràth sin,
Bidh cliù an àite g'a chur am meud,
Bidh iad ag ràitinn gu bheil 'ur càirdean
Gu sona, saibhir gun dad de dh'éis;
Gach naidheachd mheallta g'a toirt gu 'r n-ionnsuidh,
Feuch an sanntaich sibh dol 'n an déigh:
Ma thig sibh sàbhailt' 'n uair chì sibh iadsan,
Cha 'n fheàrr na stàtachan na sibh fhéin.

The Gloomy Forest
John MacLean
c. 1821[18]

I am all alone in the gloomy forest,
My thoughts are restless, I can raise no song;
I have found this place to conflict with nature,
Since all my mental skills have forsaken me;
I am unable to construct a song here,
I get despondent when I try my hand;
I've lost the Gaelic as I once had it
When I lived over in that other land.

I cannot get my thoughts in order,
Though I once knew how to make a verse;
What's increased my sorrow and decreased my solace
Is having no one with whom I converse
Each day and night, and in every task I do
I keep remembering time and again,
The land that I left, hard by the ocean,
Though I [am] now on the top of glens.

I'm not surprised that I am doleful,
I have my home in the back of beyond,
In the middle of a wilderness, on Barney's River,
With nothing better than threadbare potatoes;
Before I till the soil and harvest a crop
And dig the frightful forest from its root
By strength of my arms, I will be exhausted,
And long in decline, before I raise my brood.

This is the land in which there is hardship
Unknown to those who are coming over the sea;
What evil tactics were used by the enticers
Who by their yarns, took us over here;
If they make a profit, it won't be lasting,
It will not raise their status, and little wonder to me,
While every cursed wretch is pursued
Since they settled upon eviction as a stratagem.

A firm promise will then be offered,
The reputation of the place will be enhanced;
They will claim that your relations
Are happy and wealthy, in need of nothing;
Every misleading story will be laid before you,
To see if you'll crave to seek it out;
If you arrive safely, when you see them,
The swells are no better than yourselves.

[17] Dunbar 2006, Appendix II, 148
[18] Lonergan 1977, 118

‘N uair ‘théid na dròbhairean sin g’ ar n-iarraidh
‘S ann leis na briagan a nì iad feum;
Gun fhacal fìrinn a bhi g ‘a innseadh
‘S an cridhe dìteadh na their am buel;
Ri cur am fiachaibh gu bheil ‘s an tìr so
Gach ni is prìseile ‘tha fo ‘n ghréin;
‘N uair thig sibh innte gur beag a chì sibh
Ach coille dhìreach ‘toirt dhibh an speur.

‘N uair thig an geamhradh a’s àm na dùbhlachd,
Bidh sneachda ‘dlùthadh ri cùl nan geug;
‘S gu domhain dùmhail ‘dol thar na glùine,
Ge maith an triùbhsair cha dèan i feum
Gun stocaidh dhùbailt’ ‘s a’ mhocais chlùdaich
Bhios air a dùnadh gu dlùth le èill;
B’ e’m fasan ùr dhuinn a cosd le ‘fionntach
Mar chaidh a rùsgadh de ‘n bhrùid an dé.

Mu bi mi eòlach air son mo chòmhdach
Gu ‘m faigh mi reòta mo shròn ‘s mo bheul;
Le gaoth à tuath a bhios neamhail fuaraidh
‘S gu ‘m bi mo chluasan an cunnart geur.
Tha ‘n reothadh fuath‘sach, cha seas an tuagh ris
Gu‘m mill e chruaidh ged a bha i geur:
Mur toir mi blàths di gu ‘m brist an stàilinn,
‘S gun dol do ‘n cheàrdaich cha gheàrr i beum.

‘N uair ‘thig an samhradh ‘s a’ miosa céitean
Bidh teas na gréine gu ‘m fhàgail fann;
Gu ‘n cuir i spéirid ‘s a’ h-uile creutair
A bhios fo éislean air feadh nan toll;
Na mathain bhéisdeil gu ‘n dèan iad éiridh
‘Dhol feadh an treud ‘s gur-a mór an call;
‘S bidh ‘chuileag ìnneach gu socach, puinseant’,
Ga m’ lot gu lionmhor le roinn a lann.

Gu ‘n dèan i m’ aodann gu h-olc a chaobadh,
Cha ‘n fhaic mi ‘n saoghal ‘s ann bhios mi dall;
Gu ‘n at mo shùilean le neart a cungaidh,
Ro-guineach drùidhteach tha sùgh a teang’.
Cha ‘n fhaigh mi àireamh dhuibh ann an dànachd
Gach beathach gràineil a thogas ceann,
‘S cho liugha plàigh againn ‘s bh’ air rìgh Phàraoh
Air son nan tràillean ‘n uair ‘bhàth e ‘n camp’.

Gur h-iomadh coachladh ‘tigh’nn air an t-saoghal
‘S ro-bheag a shaoil mi ‘n uair bha mi thall;
Bu bheachd dhomh ‘n uair sin mu ‘n d’ rinn mi gluasad
Gu ‘m fàsainn uasal ‘n uair thiginn ‘nall.
An car a fhuair mi cha b’ ann gu m’ bhuannachd
Tigh’nn thar a’ chuain air a chuairt ‘bha meallt’
Gu tìr nan craobh anns nach ‘eil an t-saorsainn,
Gun mhart, gun chaora, ‘s mi dh’aodach gann.

When those drovers come to get you,
It is with lies that they succeed,
Without uttering a truthful word,
Their heart condemning what their mouths say;
They make pretences that this land possesses
The most precious gem under the sun;
On your arrival, you will see little
But a towering forest that blocks off the sky.

When winter, and the time of darkness comes,
Snow packs together behind the branches,
Deeply and thickly, to above the knee,
No matter how good the trouser, it will not suffice,
Without doubled stockings in a ragged moccasin
Which will be tightly bound with thongs;
It was our new fashion, to wear them hoarily,
As though just skinned from the beast yesterday.

If I’m not careful about my clothing
I will find my nose and mouth frozen;
With a northern wind that is cold and biting
My ears will be in sharp danger;
It’ll be so awful, the axe won’t stand it,
It will spoil the blade, though it was sharp;
Unless I warm it, the steel will fracture,
Without going to the smithy, it will cut no mark.

When summer comes, and the month of May,
The heat of the sun will leave me weak;
It puts strength into every creature
Which had been drowsy in all the hollows;
The beastly bears, they too will rise
To go through the herd, causing massive loss;
And the taloned insect, its poison snoutily
Wounding me profusely with the barb of its lance.

It will make my face come up lumpy
I’ll not see the world, I will be blind;
My eyes will swell with the strength of its poison,
Its tongue’s juice venomous and penetrating;
I cannot enumerate them in verses,
Every odious beast that rears its head,
And plagues as numerous as came to Pharaoh
For the slaves when he drowned his men.

Many a change is coming over my world,
That I scarcely imagined when in that isle;
It was my intention before I left it,
That when I came here I’d reach a noble style;
The misfortune that hit me has brought no profit,
Coming over the ocean on a deceptive course,
To the land of the trees where there’s no freedom,
No cattle or sheep and few clothes on my back.

Gur h-iomadh ceum anns am bi mi ‘n déis-làimh
Mu ‘n dèan mi saibhir mo theachd an tìr;
Bidh m’ obair éig’neach mu ‘n toir mi feum aisd’
‘S mu ‘n dèan mi réiteach air son a’ chroinn.
‘Cur sguinn an teinntein air muin a chéile
Gu ‘n d’ lasaich féithean a bha na ‘m dhruim,
‘S a h-uile ball dhiom dubh, salach, sealltainn,
Bidh mi ga m’ shamhlachadh ris an t-sùith.

Ge mór an seanachas a bh’ aca ‘n Albainn
Tha ‘chùis a’ dearbhadh nach robh e fìor;
Na dollair ghorma cha ‘n fhaic mi ‘falbh iad
Ged ‘bha iad ainmeil a bhi ‘s an tìr.
Ma nìtear bargain cha ‘n fhaighear airgiod,
Ach ‘s éiginn ainmeachadh anns a’ phrìs;
Ma gheibhear cùnnradh air feadh nam bùithean
Gu ‘m pàighear ‘null e le flùr no ìm.

Cha ‘n fhaic mi margadh no latha féille
No iomain feudalach ann an drobh
No nì ‘ni feum dhuinn am measg a chéile;
Tha ‘n sluagh ‘n an éiginn ‘s a’ h-uile dòigh.
Cha chullaid fharmaid iad leis an ainbheach,
A reic na shealbhaicheas iad an còir.
Bidh fear na fiachan a’s cromadh cinn air
G’a chur do ‘n phrìosan mur dìol e ‘n stòr.

Mu ‘n tig na cùisean à tigh na cùrtach
Gu ‘n téid an dùblachadh aig a’ mhòd;
Tha’n lagh a’ giùlan o làimh na *jury*
Gu ‘n téid an spùinneadh ‘s nach fiù an còrr,
Bidh earraid siùbhlach air feadh na dùthca
G’ an ruith, le cùnntasaibh air an tòir;
Gur mór mo chùram gu ‘n tig e ‘m ionnsaidh,
Cha ghabh e diùltadh ‘s bidh diùbhail òirnn’.

Cha ‘n fhaigh mi innse dhuibh anns an dàn so,
Cha dèan mo nàdur a chur air dòigh
Gach fios a b’ àill leam ‘thoirt do na càirdean
‘S an tìr a dh’fhàg mi, ‘rinn m’ àrach òg.
Gach aon a leughas e tuigibh reusan,
‘S na tugaibh éisdeachd do luchd a’ bhòsd;
Na fàidhean bréige a bhios g’ ur teumadh,
Gun aca ‘spéis dhibh ach déigh ‘ur n-òir.

Ged bhithinn dìchiollach ann an sgrìobhadh
Gu ‘n gabhainn mìosa ris agus còrr
Mu ‘n cuirinn crìoch air na bheil air m’ inntinn
‘S mu ‘n tugainn dhuibh e le cainnt mo bheòil.
Tha mulad dìomhair an déigh mo lìonadh
Bho ‘n ‘s éiinn strìochdadh an so ri m’ bheò,
Air bheag thoilinntinn ‘s a choille chruinn so
Gun duine faighneachd an seinn mi ceòl.

In many pursuits I’ll lag behind,
Before my livelihood makes any wealth;
The work will be difficult before I prosper,
Before I make ready the land for the plough;
Putting fire logs on top of each other
I’ll inflame some muscles that were in my back,
And every part of me looking so blackened,
I’ll compare myself to the chimney sweep.

Though great the talk they had in Scotland
Matters prove that it wasn’t true;
The green dollars, I don’t see them tendered,
Although they were reputedly in this land;
If they make a bargain, they won’t get money,
Though it must be named in the price;
If they get a bargain in any of the shops
It is paid for with butter or flour.

I see no market or a fair day,
Nor the driving of cattle in a drove,
Or anything to help them amongst each other,
As they are in hardship in every way;
They’re not to be envied as they’re indebted,
Selling whatever they own in their possession;
The indebted man will hold his head down
Put in prison if he doesn’t repay all his goods.

Before the lawsuits emerge from the courthouse,
They will be doubled at the trial;
Law that’s delivered by the hand of the jury
Demands he be plundered, as he’s worth no more;
The travelling sheriff will be about the country
Chasing and harrying them with their accounts;
My great worry is that he’ll come my way,
He can’t be denied, and we’ll be ruined.

My Gaelic fails me when I try to tell you,
Nor can my nature arrange in form
All I’d wish conveyed to my relations
In the land I left, where I was once a boy;
Each one who reads, let him heed reason,
Pay no attention to the people of the boasts,
The false prophets who will tempt you,
With no regard for you, only after your gold.

Though I should be diligent in writing it,
I would need a month on it or more,
Before I could express all that is on my mind,
And present it to you in my own words;
A subconscious sadness has filled my being
Since I must submit here all my life long,
With little pleasure in this constricting forest,
And no one asking if I’ll sing a song.

Cha ‘b e sin m’ àbhaist an tùs mo làithean,
‘S ann bhithinn ràbhartach aig gach bòrd;
Gu cridheil, sunndach, an comunn cùirteil
A’ ruith ar n-ùine gun chùram oirnn.
‘N uair thug mi cùl ruibh bha mi g’ ar n-ionndrainn,
Gu ‘n shil mo shùilean gu dlùth le deòir,
Air moch Di-ardaoin a’ dol seach an caolas,
‘S an long fo ‘h-aodach ‘s a ghaoth o ‘n chòrs’.[19]

That wasn’t my custom in my old days,
At ever table, I’d love to chat;
In hearty spirits, in jovial company,
Spending our time without a care;
When I turned away from you, I missed you dearly,
And my eyes shed tears in copious floods,
Early that Thursday as we passed Caolas,
The ship under sail and the wind off the coast. [20]

[19] Gaelic Text: Sinclair 2004, 344-348.

[20] English Translation: Dunbar 2006, Appendix I, Song 28.

Seann Albainn Agus Albainn Ur (Còmhradh eader am Bàrd agus an Còirneal Friseal)
Fonn/Air: *Miosa deireanach an Fhoghair*[21]

Am Bàrd
'S mòr mo mhulad 's cha lugh' m' éislean,
Cha 'n 'eil éibhneas a tigh'nn dlùth dhomh;
Bho 'n a thàinig mi do 'n tìr so
Gu bheil m' inntinn air a mùchadh;
Chaill mi mo shugradh 's mo sheanachas
Bho 'n a dh' fhalbh mi as mo dhùthaich:
Toiseach a cheud mhios' de'n Fhoghar
Sheòl sinn air adhart 'n ar cùrsa.

Gur-a diombach mi de 'n Chòirneal
'Rinn mo threòrachadh do 'n dùthaic s'
Le mòran brosgail is bòilich
'S e 'cur sgleò dheth gu luath-shiùbhlach,
'G innse dhuinn gu 'n robh ar càirdean
Innt' na b' fheàrr na bh' air a chunntas,
'S nach biodh uireasbhuidh gu bràth oirnn
Nan tigeamaid sàbhailt aon uair.

Gu 'n do dh' aithnich mi o'n uair sin
Gu 'm bu chruadalach a chùis dhomh
Teannadh ri réiteach na coille
'S gun mi goireasach g'a ionnsaidh.
'M fear nach dean obair le tuaigh
Is nach urrainn an uaisle 'ghiùlan
B' fheàrr dha fuireach ann an Albainn;
'S gun an fhairge gharbh a stiùireadh.

An Coirneal
Ged tha uireasbhuidh an dràst ort
Gheibh thu ceann an àird ri tìm air,
'N uair a bhios an crodh 's na caoraich
Air na raointean dhuit a cinntinn;
Bidh tu pailt am biadh 's an aodach,
'S théid leagadh nan craobh air dìochuimhn';
Bidh tu sona, saibhir, socrach,
Cha 'bhi bhochduinn 'cur ort mì-ghean.

Am Bard
Chuala mi an tùs, mo làithean
Sean-fhacal tha làn de fhìrinn:
'Chaora bhios 'dol bàs le gorta
'Réir gach coltais ni i crìonadh
Mu 'n tig am feur ùr 's an t-sàmhradh;
Cuiridh an geamhradh gu crìch i:
'S ann mar sin a dh' éireas dhomhsa,
Na bi 'cur do sgleò dhomh 'm fiachaibh.

Old and New Scotland
(Song between John MacLean and Colonel Fraser)
c. 1825[22]

The Bard
Great is my sadness, not less my sorrow,
It does me no good to report it;
Since I have come to this land
My creativity has been smothered;
I have lost my mirth and my conversation
Since I set out from the country;
At the start of the first month of autumn,
We sailed out on our course.

I am indignant with the Colonel
Who at the start led me here;
With much lively talk and boasting,
He painted a false picture throughout the country,
Telling us that our relations there
Were better off than had been reckoned,
And that we would never be in want
If we were to safely journey there.

I have recognised since that time
That matters have been difficult for me,
Starting to level the forest
Ill prepared for the task;
A man who is unable to work with an axe,
And is unable to carry his dignity,
He'd be better to stay in Scotland,
Before he set out on the seas.

The Colonel
Though you are in want right now,
You'll make the best of it in time;
When the cattle and sheep
Are multiplying in your fields,
You'll have plenty of food and clothing,
And the felling of trees will be forgotten;
You'll then be prosperous and at ease,
And poverty will be long forgotten.

The Bard
I heard a proverb once before,
That is like a true comparison for it;
Sheep will be dying with hunger,
It looks like she will wither;
Before she gets the summer hay,
The winter will finish her off;
That is what has befallen me,
Don't be offering your obligatory deceptions.

[21] MacLean Sinclair 1881, 103.

[22] Dunbar 2006, 324.

An Coirneal
Cha sgleò a th' agam ga sheanachas
Ach cùis a dhearbhas mi fior dhuit;
Na fir a chi thu 's an àite
B' aithne dhaibh do chàs 'n nair shìn iad.
'N uair a réitich iad am fearann
Thug iad aire dha le crìonnachd;
Rinn iad beairteas air a thàileamh
Ged-a thàinig iad 's e dhith orr'.

Am Bard
Cha 'n 'eil ach beagan diubh beairteach
Ged tha pailteas diubh fo fhiachan;
Tha bhochduinn an déigh an leònadh,
'S tric iad fo chòmhlaidh a' phrìosain.
Bidh am siorram air an tòrachd,
'S 'n uair a ni e'm pòca 'sgriobadh,
Bheir e leis an cuid mar dhròbhair,
'S cha 'n fheòraich e ciod is pris dhaibh.

An Coirneal
Tha cuid dhiu mar tha thu 'gràitinn,
Cha 'n fhaod mi àicheadh nach fior e;
Daoine 'bha tuilleadh a's spòrsail
'S a bha mòr-chuiseach nan inntinn,
'Thuit gun fhios dhaibh ann an ainbhfiach,
'S cha 'n 'eil e cho soirbh dhaibh dìreadh
Bho na dh' atharraich an saoghal
'S thàinig caochladh air na prìsean.

Am Bard
'S mòr a dh' atharraich an saoghal,
'S mise 'dh 'fhaodadh sinn a ràintinn;
Thug e car dhomh nach do shaoil mi:
Chuir e 'n aois mi na bu tràithe
Tigh'nn do 'n choille fad o dhaoinibh
'Leagadh nan craobh as an làraich,
Ged a fhuair mi fearann soar
Is goirt a shaoithreachadh gu àiteach.

An Coirneal
Cha chunnt mi gur obair churaidh e
'S nach bi uachdaran gu bràth ort
A mhaoidheas do chur air fògradh
Mur-a dean thu 'n còrr 'thoirt dhasan:
Cha bhi 'n comas neach do dhaoradh,
Cha 'n fhaic thu 'm maor leis a' bhàirlinn,
Gu de 'nis a bhiodh tu 'g ionndrainn
Bho 'n thàinig thu 'n dùthaich àghmhoir.

Am Bard
'S iomadh rud a tha mi 'g ionndrainn
Nach dean 's an àm so bonn stàth' dhomh
'N am bithinn ann an tìr mo dhùthchais,
Far an robh mi 'n tus mo làithean,

The Colonel
It isn't lies that I have to relate,
But something that will prove me correct;
The men you see in this place,
They knew your hardship when they arrived;
When they had levelled their land,
They paid attention to it with prudence;
They became wealthy because of it,
Though they had arrived in need.

The Bard
There are only a few who are wealthy,
Though many of them are indebted;
Poverty has come to afflict them,
And often they pass under the prison gates;
The sheriff will be on their heels,
When he empties all their pockets,
He'll take with him his share like a drover,
He won't ask them what is their price.

The Colonel
Some of them are as you say,
I cannot deny that it is true;
Men who were exceptionally merry,
And who were of a proud disposition,
Have fallen unknowingly into debt;
It isn't so easy to climb out
Since their world has changed,
And a reversal has come over the prices.

The Bard
Their world has changed greatly,
And I myself might say so;
I've been deceived in an unexpected way,
It has prematurely aged me;
Coming to the forest, far from people,
Felling the trees where they stand,
Although I got the land cheaply there,
Painfully I laboured to cultivate it.

The Colonel
I wouldn't reckon it is hard work,
And you'll never again be subject to a landlord
Who threatens to put you in exile
If you don't give the surplus to him;
It won't be in his power to raise the price,
You won't see the bailiff with a sommons;
So what is it that you would be missing
Since you came to this blessed country.

The Bard
There are many things for which I long,
That will do me no good at this time;
If I were in the land of my heritage,
Where I had been in my young days,

Gheibhinn meas am measg nan uaislean,
Bha mu ‘n cuairt dhomh ‘n Earraghàidheal.
B’fheàrr gu’n d’ fhuirich mi ri m’ bheò innt,
‘S nach tàinig mi chòmhnaidh ‘n bhràighe s’.

An Coirneal
Ged bum hath ‘bhi ‘measg nan uaislean,
‘S e-bhi fada bhuath’ is fear dhuit;
An luchd muinntir ‘tha nan seirbhis,
Cha’n àird ‘an ainm no na tràillean.
‘S sleamhainn an leachd aig an dorsaibh
Dh’fheumadh tu ‘coiseachd gu fàilidh;
Nan tuiteadh tu uair gun fhios dhuit,
Rachadh bristeadh air a’ chàirdeas.

Am Bard
‘S iomad fear stòrasach, stochdail,
Tha gle-shocrach a toirt mail daibh;
‘S iad inntinneach fad’ an t-samhraidh
Le ‘n cuid anns na gleanntan fàsaich.
‘N uair a théid iad ‘dh ionnsaidh ‘mhargaidh,
Gheibh iad airgiod ‘s cha bhi dàil ann;
‘S nam faiceadh tus’ iad air tilleadh
Chunntadh iad gini ri d’fhàirdein.

An Coirneal
Ged tha toileachadh ‘s na glinn sin,
Tha cuspunn an rìgh r’a phàigheadh:
Cha ‘n fhaod iad iasg thoirt a linne
No fiadh o’n fhireach a’s àirde.
Ma mharbbas iad eun ‘s an doire
Théid an coireachadh mar mheirlich,
Is tàirnear a staigh gu binn iad,
Théid an dìteadh ‘s cuirear càin orr’.

Am Bard
‘S furasda dhaibh sin a phàigheadh,
Seach mar ‘tha mi anns an tìr so;
Cia liuth’ latha bho Fheill-Màrtuinn
‘Fhuair mi sàrachadh is mi-mhodh!
Gur tric a’ chuing air mo mhuineal
‘Tarruinn a’ chonnaidh le dìchioll,
‘S a sneachda dhomh mu na cruachain,
‘S cuid de dh’uairean bidh mi ‘n iosal.

An Coirneal
Tog do mhisneach ‘s na biodh bròn ort,
Ged tha sin an còmhnaidh sgìth leat,
Bidh tu fhathast, ma ‘s a beò thu,
Cho dòigheil ‘s is math le d’ inntinn.
Gu de dh’ iarradh tu ach fhaotuinn,
Fearann soar is coir bho ‘n rìgh air,
‘Bhios an déigh do bhàis mar oighreachd
Aig do chloinn ma bhios iad crìonnta.

I would find respect amongst the nobles
Who surrounded me in Argyll;
Better had I stayed there for good,
Before I came to live in the brae.

The Colonel
Though it was good to be amongst the nobles,
It is better for them to be far from you;
Your countrymen who are in their service,
Have no better name than the slaves;
Slippery is the stone at their doorsteps,
Unless you walk in a gentle manner;
If you were to fall without knowing it,
The fellowship would be broken.

The Bard
Many a wealthy, rich man
Finds no trouble in giving them rents;
They are merry throughout the summer
With their share in the desolate glens.
When he goes to the market,
He’ll get the money without delay;
And if you were to see him returning,
He would count a guinea for your farthing.

The Colonel
Though there is pleasure in those glens,
The King’s excise tax must be paid;
He may not take a fish from a pool,
Nor a deer from the highest moor;
If he kills a bird in the grove,
He will be condemned as a thief;
They will bring him in to judgment,
He’ll be convicted and will be subjected to a fine.

The Bard
It is easy enough for him to pay it,
Compared to me in this land;
Several days from Martinmas,
I suffered harassment and bad manners;
Often the yoke is about the neck,
Hauling the firewood diligently,
And with the snow up to one’s thighs,
And from time to time I’ll be very low.

The Colonel
Raise your courage and don’t be sorrowful
Though you’ll always be tired of that;
You will still be, if you survive,
So very joyful and sound of mind;
What could you want but to get
Cheap land with full title from the King to it,
That will be an inheritance after your death
For your children if they are prudent.

Am Bard
‘N uair a chunntas mi mo shaothair,
Bidh e ni ‘s daoire na fhiach domh,
‘S tric nam fhallas mi ‘ga réiteach,
‘Cur mhaidean r’a chéil’ nan teintean,
Gur coltaiche mi ‘s an uair sin
Ri fear á toll-guail a dìreadh;
Bidh mi cho dubh ris na tràillean
‘Tha aig stàtachan nan Innsean.

An Corneal
Ged-a shiùbhladh tu ‘n Roinn-Eòrpa
‘S a bhi fòraich anns gach rìoghachd
Cha ‘n fhaiceadh tu fear gun stòras
A tigh’nn beò innt’ le ‘bhi diomhain,
Tha e gòrach dhuit bhi càineadh
Tìr an àigh so is ga dìteadh;
‘S iomadh aon dha ‘n d’rinn i fuasgladh
Bha na thruaghan a tigh’nn innte.

Am Bard
Cia mar ‘dh’ fhaodas mi a moladh
‘S gun mi toilicht’ ann am inntinn,
Bho na thig toiseach na dùlachd
Bidh a’ chùis na h-aobhar claoidh dhomh.
Ag éiridh ‘s na mad’nean reòta
Gu ‘m bi crith air m’ fheòil ‘s air m’fhiaclan.
‘S gaoth a tuath le fuachd gam leònadh
Mar-a bi mo chòmhdach cinnteach.

An Coirneal
Airson toileachadh do nàdair
Cha ‘n ‘eil stàth dhuit a bhi ‘strìth ris;
Sin an ceum nach téid thu dh’àicheadh,
Bho na dh’fhàilinnich ar sinnsreadh.
Ged-a bha pailteas aig Adamh,
Bha craobh ‘s a’ ghàradh a dhìth air;
Dh’fhàg am meas fo iochd à bhàis e,
‘N uair a ghabh e pàirt o’n mhnaoi dheth.

Am Bard
‘S e ni mi tuilleadh mar roghainn
Gun chur ad aghaidh na ‘s dìne,
Tha an duine ag iarraidh àilgheis
Eadar e ‘bhi àrd is iosal:
Cluinnidh mi gearann o’n Diùca
Cho math riusan ‘tha toirt cìs’ dha,
‘S o’n bhaigeir ‘tha cosg na lùirich
‘S bho ‘n fhear a tha crùn an rìgh air.

Cha lean mi na’s fhaide ‘n seanachas
Mu ‘n cinn iad searbh dheth le chluinntinn
Mu ‘m faigh iad coire do m’ Ghàidhlig,
Cha bhi mi ‘gràitinn no ‘g innse.

The Bard
When I take account of my labour,
It will be more costly than it was worth to me;
Before I clear and level it,
And put together in its hearth,
I was like, at that time
A man who is climbing out of a coalpit;
I was black as the slaves
Who are at the swells in the West Indies.

The Colonel
Though you could travel throughout Europe,
And you could enquire in every Kingdom,
You will not see a man without a store,
Making a good living there by being idle;
I do believe that you were foolish
When you started to condemn it;
It has provided many a man with assistance
Who was a poor soul when he arrived.

The Bard
How on earth can I praise it,
When I am so unhappy here,
Since the start of winter arrived,
It has been a cause of vexation to me;
Rising on the frozen mornings,
There is a shiver in my flesh and teeth;
And the north wind wounding me with its cold,
If my clothing isn’t secure.

The Colonel
In order to satisfy your nature,
It’s no use for you to be fighting it;
That’s the step you cannot deny,
Since our ancestors failed;
Though Adam had plenitude,
He still wanted a tree in the garden;
The fruit left him in the mercy of death,
When he took part of it from his wife.

The Bard
What I shall do henceforth as a choice
Is to stop disagreeing with you so vehemently;
Mankind wishes to satisfy his longing,
Between being lofty and lowly:
I hear a complaint from the Duke
As well as those who pay him tribute,
And from the beggar who wears tattered clothing,
And from the man who wears the King’s crown.

I will not go further in relating,
Before they grow tired of it hearing it,
Before they find fault with my Gaelic,
I will not [be] speaking or telling it;

Olc air mhath ‘s mar bhios mo chàradh
‘S an àite so, ‘s éigin striochdadh.
Soraidh bhuam gut ìr nan Gàidheal
Nach leig mi gu bràth air diochuimhn. [23] 176

For better or worse, if I’m not removed,
In this place, hardship will yield;
A farewell from me to the land of the Gaels,
That I will never forget. [24] 176

[23] Gaelic Text: MacLean Sinclair 1881, 103–110.

[24] English Translation: Dunbar 2006, Appendix I, Song 29.

Oran Do Dh'America
Fonn/Air: *As mo chadal, cha bheag m'artneul*[25]

Mo shoraidh bhuam an diugh air chuairt
Thar chuan do bhràigh' nan gleann,
Gu tìr nam buadh, ge fada bhuam i,
Tìr nam fuar bheann àrd.
'S e tigh'nn a thàmh do 'n àit s' as ùr
A dh'fhàg mo shùilean dall.
'N uair sheòl mi 'n iar, a' trial bho m' thìr,
A rìgh gur mi bha 'n call.

Dh' fhàg mi dùthaich, dh'fhàg mi dùthchas;
Dh'fhan mo shùgradh thall.
Dh'fhàg mi 'n t-àite bàigheal, caomh,
'S mo chàirdean gaolach ann.
Dh'fhàg mi 'n tlachd 's an t-àit' am faict' i,
Tìr nam bac 's nan càrn.
'S e fàth mo smaointinn bho nach d'fhaod mi
Fuireach daonnan ann.

Dh'fhàg mi cuideachda nam breacan
B'àlainn dreach 'us tuar;
Armuinn ghrinne, làidir, inich,
Gillean bu ghlan snuadh;
Fir chalma, reachdmhor, gharbh, 's iad tlachdmhor,
Bu dearg daite 'n gruaidh,
Luchd an fhéile 'n àm an fheuma
Leis an éireadh buaidh.

Biodh Dòmhnullaich 'nan éideadh gasd',
Cha cheum air ais bhiodh ann;
Luchd fhéile ghartan, chòtan tartain,
'S osain bhreac nam ball.
'S nam boineid ùra, dubh-ghorm, daite,
Air tùs am mach 'nan rang.
B'iad féin na seòid nach géill 's iad beò,
Bu treun 's a' chòmhrag lann.

'S tric a dhìrich mi ri màm
'S mo ghunna 'm làimh air ghleus,
Mo mhiann 's an àm bhith siubhal bheann
'S mo chuilein seang air éill;
Dìreadh ghlacagan 's a' gharbhlach,
Sealg air mac an fhéidh;
'S tric a leag mi e le m' luaidhe,
Ged bu luath a cheum.

[25] Rankin 2005, 159
[26] MacLean Sinclair 1904, 43

Song for America
John the Hunter MacDonald
c. 1834[26]

My greeting today over
Across the ocean to the Braes [of Lochaber][27],
The land of heroes, far distant from me,
Land of cold, high bens.
It was coming to dwell in this new world
That blinded my eyes.
When I sailed westward, leaving my country,
Lord, I did so at great loss.

I left my homeland, I left my heritage;
My joy was left behind.
I left the friendly, hospitable land,
And my beloved kinsmen there.
I left comfort and the place where it can be found,
The land of valleys and cairns.
I am now distressed because I did not choose
To remain there forever.

I left the tartaned company,
Handsome of figure and mien;
Trim warriors, elegant, strong,
Lads of fresh countenance;
Serene men, sturdy, able, and handsome,
High colour in their cheeks;
Kilted hosts, in time of need
Victory was assured them.

The MacDonalds would be in splendid array,
They were not wont to retreat;
The kilted gartered troop, with tartan coats,
With their new, dark blue bonnets,
And plaid hose to their heels,
Always first in rank.
Truly, they were gallant men who would never yield in life,
Valiant in combat of swords.

Often did I climb through the pass
With my gun ready in hand.
It was my delight then to hunt among the bens
With my slender hound alert on the precipice,
Roaming the dells on the wild moors,
Stalking the young deer.
Often did I fell him with my lead
Though swift was his stride.

[27] Brackets as are inserted into MacDonell's translation, p. 81.

Air maduinn chiùin bu mhiannach leam
Bhith falbh ‘s mo chù ri m’shàil,
Le m’ ghunna dùbailte nach diùlt
‘N uair chuirinn sùil ri h-eàrr.
Luaidhe ‘s fùdar ‘chuir ‘nan smùid,
‘S i cheàird dh’an tug mi gràdh,
Feadh lùbaibh cam air àird nam beann
‘S am bi damh seang a’fàs.

B’e siud m’ aighear-sa ‘s mo shòlas
Crònanaich nam fiadh,
Mu Fhéill-an-Ròid bhith tigh’nn a chòir
An fhir bu bhòidhche fiamh;
Bhith falbh nam bac ‘gan sealg ‘s na glacaibh,
‘N uair bu daite am bian.
‘S tric a tholl mac na h-éilde
Seal mu’n éireadh grian.

A nis ‘s ann thréig gach cùis a bh’ann
Mi ‘n seo ‘s mi ‘m fang fo chìs
An tìr an t-sneachda ‘s nam feur seachte
Cha b’e a chleachd mi-fhìn;
A bhith faicinn dhaoine cairtidh,
Grannda, glas, gun bhrìgh,
Le triùsair fharsuinn, sgiùrsair casaig,
‘S cha b’e ‘m fasan grinn.

Chi thu còmhlan ac’ ag òl
‘S an stòr ma theid thu ann,
Iad ri bòilich ‘us ri bòsd,
‘S iad gòrach leis an dram;
An àite rapach, poll fo’n casan,
Stòpan glas ri ‘n ceann,
Rùsgadh dheacaid dhiubh ‘s ‘gan stracadh,
‘S iad mar phaca cheàrd.

‘S truagh, a Rìgh, gu’n d’chuir mi cùl
Ri m’ dhùthaich le m’ thoil fhìn,
Le bhith an dùil ‘s an àit’ as ùr
Nach faicinn turn ‘gam dhìth;
Ach coir air fearann, òr, ‘us earras
Bhith aig gach fear a bh’ innt’.
Bha chùis gu baileach òrm am falach,
‘S mheall mo bharail mì.

Thug mise cion ‘n uair bha mi òg
Do bhith an còir nam beann,
‘Us saoilidh càch gu’n robh mi gòrach
‘S gun iad eólach ann.
An spéis a thug mi dhamh na cròic
Cha téid ri m’ bheò á m’ chom;
Bho’n dh’fhàg mi tìr na seilg ‘s nan sàr
Tha m’aigneadh cràiteach, trom.

On a fine morning it was my delight
To set out with my dog at my heels,
With my double-barreled gun which would not fail
When I took aim.
To convert lead and gunpowder to smoke
Was to me a pleasant pursuit,
Among the winding rails on the mountain heights,
Home of the slender stag.

My joy and my delight,
Were the bellowings of the deer,
And at Holy Rood to approach
The one of fairest hue;
To traverse the glades and hunt them on the moors,
When their pelts were darkest.
Many a time I riddled the young roe
Before sunrise.

Now all that was has ceased to be;
I am bound, brought low,
In the land of snows and sere grasses.
It is not what I have been accustomed to,
Looking at swarthy folk,
Ugly, drab, dull,
With wide trousers, the loutish long coat,
An unattractive style.

You’ll see groups of them drinking
At the store if you go there.
They are rowdy and boastful,
Intoxicated by drink;
Their place untidy, mud under their feet,
Glass flagons raised to their heads,
Peeling off and tearing their jackets
Like a pack of tinkers.

Alas, Lord, that I turned my back
On my country of my own free will,
Thinking that in the new world
Not a penny would I need;
Rather a right to property, gold, and riches
Would be the lot of everyone there.
The true state of affairs was hidden from me,
And my presumption deceived me.

In my youth I was fond of
Frequenting the bens;
Others may think that I was foolish,
But they are not acquainted there.
My love for the antlered stag
Will never leave me.
Since I left the land of the chase and gallant men,
My spirit is anguished, weary.

Cha chluinn mi dùrdan maduinn dhrùchd
Am barraibh dlùth nan sliabh;
Cha loisg mi fùdar gorm o'n stùc
'S cha chuir mi cù ri fiadh.
Bho'n chuir gach cùis a bh'ann rium cùl,
Dha'n tug mi rùn gu dian,
'S tìm dhomh bhith na's tric air m'ùrnaigh
'S leanachd dlùth ri Dia.

'S truagh, a Rìgh, nach robh mi marbh,
Mu'n d'fhàg mi Albainn thall,
Mu'n d'chuir mi cùl ri tìr mo ruin,
'S e dh'fhàg mo shùgradh mall;
Na'n gabhadh Dia ri m' anam bhuam
'S an uair cha robh mi 'n call,
'S mo chorp a thìodhlaiceadh 's an uaigh
A bh' air a'bhruaich 's a' ghleann.

Cille Choraill, Cill' as bòidhche
Air 'n d'chuir mi eòlas riamh;
Lagan bòidheach, grianail, còmhnard,
Far 'm bheil còmhnuidh chiad.
Tom nan aingeal, glac an Dòmhnuich,
'S an robh mo sheòrs' bho chian;
'S truagh, a Rìgh, gun mi 's a'chòmhlan
Mar bu deòn le m' mhiann.

I do not hear murmuring on a dewy morning
In the thick mountain copse.
I do not shoot blue powder from the ledge
Nor set hound upon the deer.
Since all that used to be is no longer mine,
That which I always loved,
It is time for me to pray more often
And follow God more closely.

Alas, Lord, that I did not die
Before I left Scotland,
Before I turned my back on my dear homeland
And thereby lost my vigour.
If God had received my restless soul
At the time, I would not have suffered loss,
And my body would have been buried in the grave
On the heights above the glen.

At St. Cairrail's churchyard, the most beautiful cemetery
That I ever knew;
A pretty, sunny, smooth enclosure,
Where hundreds now lie.
Angels' Grove, Sunday's Dell,
Where those of my kind have lain for years,
Alas, Lord, that I am not among them
As I ardently long to be.[28]

[28] Gaelic Text and English Translation: MacDonell 1982, 80–87.

Moladh Albainn Nuaidh
Fonn/Air: *As mo chadal, cha bheag m'artneul*[29]

Chuir thu bòilich sìos is bòsd
Air cùisean mòr nad' ran,
Searbh a' ghlòir leam cainnt do bheòil
Oir bha mi eòlach thall:
An Albainn fhuar, ge fada bhuam i
Suarach leam an call,
B'e fàth an gruaim an càramh cruiaidh
Bh'air truaghain bhochda bh'ann.

Fhuair na h-uaislean i dhaibh fèin
Gu'n aoibhneas a chur suas;
Tha clan na tuath aca nan *slèibhean*
Ann an èiginn chruaidh:
'S ged theid fear gu fèill le bhreacan
Ann an dreach corr' uair
Chuid eile'n tìm bi e na chìleig
Sgàthach, dìblidh, truagh.

'S aobhair bròin do dh'fhear a phòsas
'S e gun dòigh ann dhà,
Ach bean na h-ònar's isean òg
Am bothan fròga ch, fail:
Bi e na ròmachan dubh, dòite
Ag iomain dhròbh do chàch,
Bi iadsan gortach's esan bochd
A' falbh le phòchan bàn.

Ge mòr do bhòsd a fear na cròic
Ma ni thu leòn dhut fhèin,
Ged is staoigeach, tioram fheòil
Bi tòireachd as do dhèidh:
Thèid breith air amhaich ort gu grad
Is gad a chur ad' mhèill,
'S d'fhògairt thar a'chuain air falbh
Chiunn' thu bhi sealg an fhèidh.

'Si'n tìr a dh'fhàg thu'n tìr gun chàirdeas
Tìr gun bhàigh ri Tuath,
Ach gu tùrsach iad ga fàgail
'S ànraidh thar a'chuain:
Daoine bochda, sìol nan coitear
Bha gun stoc gun bhuar,
'S mairg a chain iad tìr an àigh
'S an d'fhàs iad nan daoin'uaisl.

Nis o'n thàinig thu thar sàile
Chum an àite ghrinn,
Cha bhi fàilinn ort ri d'latha
'S gach aon nì fàs dhuinn fhìn:

[29] Rankin 2005, 77.

In Praise of Nova Scotia
Allan the Ridge MacDonald
c. 1835[30]

You have boasted loudly
Of great subjects in your verse,
I find your language offensive
For I was well acquainted yonder:
In chilly Scotland, though it be distant
A small loss I consider it
Harsh conditions caused the sorrow
Of its poor inhabitants there.

The gentry got it for themselves
To increase their pleasure;
They have the tenantry like slaves
In dire distress:
Though one might wear tartan to a fair
Resplendent once in a while
The rest of the time a wretch he'll be
Fearful, wretched and poor.

A cause of sorrow to one who marries
For he has no options,
His wife and young child all alone
In a leaking hut of sods:
He will be a filthy, black vagabond
Driving herds for others,
They will be starving, he will be penniless
Going about with empty pockets.

Though you brag greatly about the stag
Should you kill it for your use,
Even though its meat be poor and dry
You will be prosecuted:
They will swiftly grab you by the neck
And put a whip to your cheek,
You will be banished overseas
Since you were hunting deer.

The land you left is a land without charity
Without compassion for tenants,
But they are anguished leaving it
And distressed at the sea-crossing:
Poor people, the seed of cotters
Without stock or cattle
Too bad some condemned the wonderful land
Where they became gentlemen.

Now that you have come overseas
To this fine place,
You will lack for nothing all your days
As all things fare well for us:

[30] Dunbar 2006, 297.

Gheibh thu mil air bharr nan lusan
Siùcar agus tì,
'S fheàrr dhut sid na'n tìr a dh'fhàg thu
Aig a'ghràisg na frith.

'S tu rinn glic's nach deach am mearachd
'S cha robh do bharail faoin,
Tighinn do dhùthaich nam fear glana
Coibhneil, tairis, caomh:
Far am faigh thu òr a mhaireas
Còir air fearann saor,
Gach nì bu mhath leat bhith mu d'bhaile,
Earras is crodh laoigh.

Gheibh thu ruma, fìonn is beòir
'S an stòr ma thèid thu ann
Chi thu còmhlan dhaoine còire
'S iad ag òl san àm:
Daoine dàna, fearail, fialaidh
Riaraicheas an dram,
Gach fear dhuibh trial air each le dhìollaid
'S bu mhiann leam bhith nan ceann.

You shall have honey from the flowers
Sugar and also tea,
Much better than the land you left
To the rabble as a deer-forest.

You were wise and did not err
Neither was your opinion vain,
Coming to the land of fine men
Kindly, gentle and civil:
Here you will find lasting gold,
Unbounded right to land,
All you would want upon your farm,
Of property and cattle.

You will get rum and wine and beer
In the store should you visit
You will see a goodly company of men
Drinking there on occasion:
Brave, manly and generous ones
Who will share the drink,
Each one travels on his saddled horse
How I'd love to be among them![31]

[31] Gaelic Text and English Translation: Rankin 2005, 76–81.