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NUAIR A BHA GÀIDHLIG AIG NA H-EÒIN:

AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE ART AND ARTIFICE OF
AVIFAUNAL MIMESIS AS A MODE OF ARTISTIC EXPRESSION
IN GAELIC ORAL CULTURE FROM THE SEVENTEENTH
CENTURY TO THE PRESENT

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Abstract

This investigation will interrogate the mimetic faculty of modern Gaelic oral culture, focussing particularly on mimesis as an artistic device. The imitation of nature in Gaelic is perhaps most frequently associated with the folksong tradition, in which non-lexical vocable refrains are frequently deployed for the purposes of emulating a particular sound quality pertinent to an individual species or natural phenomenon, such as the call of the seal or the breaking of waves. The most common of these, however, imitate birds.

For the purposes of this analysis, imitation is understood to mean both the acoustic replication of a primary sound object (in this instance birdsong) or alternatively the figurative imitation of a given image implied by the use of metaphor. To this end, the present study will be divided into three sections, delineated in terms of genre. Chapters one and three will address the faculty of acoustic bird imitation, the former focusing on the sonance and semantics of mimetic children's rhymes and the latter examining the use of voice in dialogue segments attributed to birds in traditional Gaelic storytelling. In addition, the second chapter will look at the bird metaphor and its deployment as a vehicle for both praise and vilification in Gaelic poetry, interrogating the semiotic meanings such associations invoke.

In summation, it will be argued that the imitation of birds in Gaelic oral culture can be read in a wider context as a form of artistic escapism 'in which the ordinary features of our world are brought into focus by a certain

exaggeration … a framing of reality that announces that what is contained

within the frame is not simply real' (Davis, 1999: 3).

Contents

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Introduction

In his expansive survey of Scotland's music, John Purser has noted 'the connection between bird-song and music' in Gaelic oral culture which, Purser suggests, is 'embedded in what is perhaps our oldest surviving music' (Purser, 1992: 24). As one of the more musical species, it is perhaps appropriate that birds should provide such a strong influence on Gaelic musical composition.

In terms of artistic stimuli and creative output, bird imitation can take a number of forms in Gaelic. Perhaps the most conspicuous of these can be found in the non-lexical mimetic vocables employed by many folksongs, and particularly work-songs, in order to build and maintain a particular rhythm or proprioceptivity. One example of this can be found in a comically benign satirical folksong from St. Kilda, which uses a sequence of non-lexical syllables to imitate 'the lively skirl of seabirds': '*Inn ala oro i, o inn al ala*; / *Inn ala oro i, uru ru-i uru ru-i* / *Inn ala oro i, o inn al ala*.' (Ferguson, 2006: 18-9). Another example described by Alexander Stewart (Nether Lochaber) in explication of a St. Kildan rowing song records the refrain as:

> one of the wildest and *eeriest* I ever listened to afloat or ashore, the burden or refrain particularly being manifestly an imitation, and a very successful imitation too, consciously or unconsciously, of the loud discordant clamour of a flock of sea-fowl over a shoal of fish on which they are in haste to gorge themselves to repletion, as is their habit. (Stewart, *The Scotsman*, 28/03/1877)

Unfortunately, Stewart's version of this song is given in English translation only, with no accompanying musical notation, which offers little clarification on the

technique. A third possible example of non-lexical mimesis in a St. Kildan folksong is discussed briefly as an appendix to this study (see appendix two).

For the purposes of this investigation, however, the analysis of lexical bird imitation will take precedence over the use of non-lexical syllables. Of particular interest are the deployment of acoustic devices such as onomatopoeia and sound-symbolism in replication of the sonance, pace and tonality of birds' vocalisations. In general terms, this form of mimesis can be found in both the storytelling tradition, in which the dialogue of anthropomorphised bird characters are acoustically impersonated by the narrator, and in the many nonsense rhymes and games collected under the aegis of Gaelic nursery lore.

In addition to the acoustic imitation of birds' vocalisations, however, the use of avian metonymy and the bird metaphor as a vehicle for expounding certain human characteristics also appears to be a well developed artistic device in Gaelic oral culture. Textually evident since at least the Medieval period, during which time there appears to be little ostensible difference between Scottish and Irish literary traditions, such tropes often find their most apposite expression in the highly codified diction of poetic encomium and opprobrium.

In acknowledgement of each of these artistic specialisms, therefore, this inquiry will follow a tripartite structure divided between both figurative and acoustic forms of mimesis. The first chapter will address the sonance and semantics of aural mimesis as they are presented in a variety of nonsense rhymes and games pertaining to birds. In this analysis, the recurrence of particular sound

segments and patterns will be identified which may reveal some degree of sound-symbolic significance to acoustic forms of mimesis in Gaelic.

The second chapter will follow with an analysis of the rhetoric of praise and dispraise in Gaelic poetry, focussing particularly on what John MacInnes has styled 'kennings', in this instance the bird metaphor. The use of recurrent bird tropes and images will be addressed in both panegyric and invective verse forms in order to highlight the interconnectedness of these two discrete genres.

Finally, using anthropomorphised bird characters as an exemplar chapter three will interrogate literary records of Gaelic oral folktale narration with a view to re-accessing their paralinguistic dimension. Indicia which suggest a particular inflection or tone of voice in impersonation of bird characters in many tales may offer some insight into the performance aspect of a number of folktales which now only exist in written form. In each of the above examinations, the principal concern will be a focus on material from the modern period (i.e. from the seventeenth century onwards).

Source Materials

As delineated above, a number of areas will be addressed during the course of this inquiry, necessitating an analysis of a variety of source materials. Of particular relevance for the examination of the folktale and oral narratives are the collections of John Francis Campbell, published under the title *Popular Tales of the West Highlands*. Campbell's collecting methodology and translation policy often attempt to preserve something of the Gaelic idiom and mode of diction, an approach which has occasionally been criticised as unliterary:

His translations also abound in bald and barbarous literalities, one continued train of English solecisms - gross defects which are intolerable in English composition and which might have been easily avoided without altering or damaging the 'Tales' in any degree whatever but rather improving them materially by making the translations smack a little of the English idiom, as there is then no room whatever for doubting, or suspecting the genuineness of the 'Tales' seeing the Gaelic original of each and its English version are printed side by side. (anon. quoted in *NLS* MS268.15)

The use of vernacular, rather than literary Gaelic in Campbell's collections also adds weight to his assertion that 'I begged for the very words used by the people who told the stories, with nothing added, or omitted, or altered' (J. F. Campbell, 1860-2, I: xxi). Other collections of folktales and oral narratives, such as John MacPherson's *Tales from Barra told by the Coddy* (1960), Wendy Wood's *Tales of the Western Isles* (1952) and *Waifs and Strays of Celtic Tradition* (1889-95) are only published in English translation, and are therefore only referred to with regard to their more general features. The perceived disparity in terms of quality between these materials and audio records preserved in the School of Scottish Studies Sound Archives will also be addressed with a view to re-accessing some of the paralinguistic features of Gaelic oral literature.

In addition to analysing Gaelic folktales, this inquiry will also interrogate the use of the bird metaphor as a vehicle of both vilification and praise in modern Gaelic poetry. A wide range of poetry collections are extant, including chronologically specific bilingual anthologies such as Donald Meek's *Caran an t-Saoghail* (2003) and Ronald Black's *An Lasair* (2001) amongst others. These latter sources offer more extensive contextual and historical analysis, including reliable

transcriptions and translations, and will be treated preferentially over older monolingual Gaelic publications.

Finally, a number of collections of Gaelic nonsense rhymes such as Alasdair Mac Neacail's *Oideas na Cloinne* (1947) and the Scottish Council for Research in Education's *Aithris is Oideas*: *Traditional Gaelic Rhymes and Games* (1964) are of particular value in terms of the sonance and semantics of aural mimesis, addressed more fully in chapter one. The audio field recordings of Alan Lomax on Barra in 1951 (*SSS SA*1951.9-10) are also of use in this regard.

The *Carmina Gadelica* Polemic

Perhaps one of the most important collative resources for the purposes of this study is Alexander Carmichael's *Carmina Gadelica*, a primary collection which, according to Carmichael 'forms a small part of a large mass of oral literature written down from the recital of men and women throughout the Highlands and Islands of Scotland' (Carmichael, 1928-71, I: xxv). Scepticism over the veracity of this material, first articulated by Robertson (1971-6), hinges on the dichotomy between 'folklore' as cultural record and as culturally motivated political propaganda: a debate which has concerned the genre since William Thoms invented the term in 1846.[1]

In a letter to John Francis Campbell dated 9th April 1861 from Carbost in Skye, Carmichael elucidates on his collecting methodology (at this time, Carmichael among many others was working for Campbell in collecting and preparing material for the latter's *Popular Tales of the West Highlands*):

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[1] In a letter to *Athenaeum* under the pseudonym Ambrose Merton, dated 12th of August.

> I am exceedingly desirous of getting every tale as full and as complete as I possibly can. In consequence of this and in consequence of always getting some additional words or expressions I have written and rewritten all the tales I now send you at least five or six times. (*NLS Adv*. 50.2.1.332-a)

This process appears to be in direct contrast to John Francis Campbell's stated objectives which reassures readers of his *Popular Tales of the West Highlands* 'I have altered nothing … these really are what they purport to be – stories orally collected in the West Highlands since the beginning of 1859' (J. F. Campbell, 1860-2, I: xii).

Carmichael's motives in collating and altering 'original' material, however, appear to be born from a political agenda which seeks to promote and elevate the status of Gaelic culture in the Victorian mind. In a letter to fellow folklore collector Father Allan McDonald dated 15th March 1898, he states plainly:

> I had another secret hope in my soul - that by making the book up in as good a form as I could in matter and material, it might perhaps be the means of conciliating some future politician in favour of our dear Highland people. For example, had the book been in the hands of Mr. Gladstone some twenty years ago, who knows but it might have interested him still more in our dear loveable people. These aspirations come in upon me and waylay me to my sore detriment. (Carmichael in J. L. Campbell, 1956: 261)

One could argue that Carmichael's tone here is somewhat condescending ('our dear Highland people', 'our dear loveable people') however the admission 'by making the book up in as good a form as I could in matter and material' should not be misread as a pretence for duplicity and fraudulence. After the initial publication of

Carmina Gadelica Carmichael prepared an apologia for his work, which may have been intended to form part of the introduction to a planned third volume (Stewart, 2006: lii), contesting:

> Had space and means at my disposal I would have given all the different versions with all their different and innumerable divergences and incongruities. This plan would have suited my mind but not my means as it would have filled many instead of few volumes.
>
> I collated all the versions I possibly could [...] [b]ut all these combined were nothing to the work and the worry of connecting and collating and combining all the different and divergent versions into one.
>
> I am more than conscious that I have not succeeded although I have again and again gone over the ground and over the work. (*EUL CW* MS365.3-4)

Despite this, however, a number of divergent versions of prayers and folksongs have been included in the first two volumes of *Carmina Gadelica* (i.e. those which Carmichael saw into print), and some of these will be addressed during the course of this investigation.

One of Robertson's (1971-6: 230) main reservations in terms of this material concerns the apparently persistent use of uncorroborated 'archaisms' in *Carmina Gadelica*, calling for a close interrogation of Carmichael's Gaelic text which should then be supported by fresh translations. A pertinent illustration of this in terms of the present analysis can be found in a St. Kildan waulking song, prepared for publication by James Carmichael Watson on the 21st of July 1932, in which a number of unusual words feature prominently. The second to fifth verses of the published version are cited below with the parallel manuscript rendering of the same.

Dhèanainn dhuit an cuaran iteach,	*Dheanain dhuit an cuaran iteach*
A luaidh 's a liosdaidh nam fearu,	*A luaidh 's a liosdaidh nam fearaibh*
Agus o iorrach a' chuain.	*Agus o iorrach a chuain.*
Bheirinn dhuit a' mhogais phrìseil,	*Beirrin dhuit a mhogais phriseìl*
'S am ball sinnsir bh'aig mo sheanair,	*'S am ball inneir bh' aig mo sheanair*
Agus o iorrach a' chuain.	*Agus o iorrach a chuain.*
Mo ghaol sealgair a' bhigein,	*Mo ghaol sealgair a bhigein*
'S moiche thig thar linne choimhich,	*Is moiche thig thar linne choimhich*
Agus o iorrach a' chuain.	*Agus o iorrach a chuain.*
(Carmichael, 1928-71, IV: 114)	(*EUL CW* MS244.29)

'I would make the feathered brogue for you, / You dearest and most importune of men, / And oh, a boat on the ocean. / I would give you the precious moccasin, / And the family heirlooms of my grandfather, / And oh, a boat on the ocean. / My love the bird-hunter, / And earliest over the terrible sound, / And oh, a boat on the ocean.' (My own translation based on Carmichael, 1928-71, IV: 114).

A number of words and phrases require some clarification here. For instance, the word '*mogais*' used on the fourth line of the above selection requires some explanation. Carmichael translates this as 'anchor' (Carmichael, 1928-71, IV: 115), however the translation as 'moccasin' given here is supported by an earlier publication of Carmichael's on traditional footwear, in which he states that the '*mogaisean* of the Highlanders should be identical with the moccasins of the Red Indians' (Carmichael, 1894: 149). Dwelly's only source for *mogais* as 'anchor' is Carmichael (Dwelly, 2001, s.v. *mogais*) and the glossary of obscure words and expressions compiled and edited by Angus Matheson as volume six of *Carmina Gadelica* lists '*mogais*' as meaning a 'footless stocking', noting that Father Allan

has '*mogaisean*' as 'home-made gloves' (Carmichael, 1928-71, VI: 108). Although a variant '*mogan*' is given, no mention is made of a possible translation as 'anchor'.

Further possible evidence against Carmichael's translation can be found in a St. Kildan lament composed by the niece of Neil MacDonald, who died whilst hunting fulmar, preserved by the Reverend Neil MacKenzie. In the opening to the second verse, the speaker regrets: '*'S truagh nach bu mhi bh' air ceann t'acair / Nuair chaidh thu às t' fhaicill*' ('Pity that I was not your anchor / When you were in danger') (MacKenzie, 1911: 338, item 14; my own translation). In this example the more usual '*acair*' ('anchor') (Dwelly, 2001: s.v. *acair*) is used instead of Carmichael's '*mogais*'.

A number of other words in Carmichael's St. Kildan song also require attention. In the manuscript text, Carmichael has written '*iubhrach?*' in square brackets after the first line, which reads '*Agus o iorrach a' chuain* [*iubhrach?*]' (*EUL CW* MS244.29). In the final published version this line is left untranslated, however it is clear that Carmichael assumed *iorrach* to be a variant of *iubhrach* (a 'cutter' or similar 'sailing vessel of tidy build') (Dwelly, 2001: s.v. *bàta*). This would make more sense than adjectival *iorrach* ('quiet' or 'undisturbed') (Dwelly, 2001: s.v. *iorrach*).[2]

Other variations between the manuscript and printed versions occur, however these appear to be largely cosmetic. The substitution of '*beirinn dhuit*' with '*bheirinn dhuit*' given on the fourth line of the above segment and the replacement of '*inneir*' ('manure') (Dwelly, 2001: s.v. *inneir*) with '*sinnsir*' ('family' or 'ancestors') (Dwelly, 2001: s.v. *sinnsir*) make sense grammatically and lexically,

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[2] MacLean translates this line 'And oh the quiet of the ocean' (MacLean, 1961: 327-8).

and do not detract from the essential meaning of the piece. These substitutions, as Amy Murray puts it, 'set it down not as it is, but as he thinks it should be' (Murray, 1936: 111).

From an anthropological perspective, the first two lines of the above segment are also worthy of comment: '*Dhèanainn dhuit an cuaran iteach, / A luaidh 's a liosdaidh nam fearu*' ('I would make the feathered brogue for you, / You dearest and most importune of men,') (Carmichael, 1928-71, IV: 114; my own translation). The speaker of this song is clearly female, however a number of commentators on St. Kildan culture have noted that cobbling and tailoring were traditionally the preserve of the men of the island.

> All the women's dresses are made by the men, who also make their *brogan* or shoes, for every female possesses a pair, although she prefers going barefoot; and I am not surprised at this, as the shoes, although substantially made, are as hard as box irons, and not unlike them in shape. (Sands, 1878: 37)

Despite this, however, the 1851 census (taken fourteen years before Carmichael's visit) lists eight of the women as 'weaveress' (Seton, 1878: 148-9). In addition, Lachlan MacDonald (a former native of St. Kilda recorded as part of the School of Scottish Studies' Dialectical Survey in 1975) mentioned that in the early twentieth century women made the '*drògaidean*' ('dresses') (Dwelly, 2001: s.v. *drògaid*) (*SSS SA*1975.215; my own translation).

Finally, Calum Ferguson elaborates on the '*ball sinnsir*' alluded to above, suggesting that the St. Kildan '*lon*' ('rope') (Dwelly, 2001: s.v. *lon*) is intended.

> The most precious *ball-sinnsir* (heirloom) a father could leave to his eldest son was his *lon*, considered to be worth at least two of St. Kilda's best cattle. It was expected to last for two generations, and if there were no sons, it was bequeathed to a daughter. (Ferguson, 2006: 76).

In contrast to '*mogais*', it is possible that '*lon*' is a St. Kildan dialectical word. Dwelly records that the *lon* was a rope made 'of raw hides, used by the inhabitants of St. Kilda, by which a man is lowered down a precipice in search of wild-fowl or their eggs' (Dwelly, 2001: s.v. *lon*).

In consideration of the inconsistencies alluded to above and enumerated more fully in Robertson's analysis, it is perhaps prudent to devise a methodology by which Carmichael's material may be scrutinised. To this end, where possible material from *Carmina Gadelica* will be cross-referenced against manuscript material from the Carmichael-Watson archive collection held at Edinburgh University Library, offering new translations and interrogating editorial changes which appear to be at variance with the integrity of the text in question. In addition, comparisons with analogous material recorded orally and preserved by the School of Scottish Studies Sound Archive may assist in providing corroborative or alternative versions, allowing for a contextual analysis. In each case, as with other material quoted from external sources, texts will be cited verbatim, with no editorial intervention in terms of correcting grammar or updating spelling to comply with modern orthographical standards.

In a note concerning his own working methodology, Carmichael admits that to be 'of a romantic disposition, I know, is a fault, and a fault that all practical men gravely condemn, but still I cannot help it, and I suppose it is a fault, with which I

must live and die.' (*NLS Adv.* 50.2.1.303-a.4). To this end, John MacInnes' (2006: 491) assertion that '*Carmina Gadelica* is not a monumental exercise in literary fabrication nor, on the other hand, is it a transcript of ancient poems and spells reproduced exactly in the form in which they survived in oral tradition' can be seen to be both a balanced and accurate summation, allowing for a scholarly analysis of material previously excluded from much of the academic discourse centring around Gaelic oral culture.

An Ethno-Ornithological Approach

In his discussion on the theory of mimesis, Lacan warns that the artifice of imitation reveals less about the object being imitated than it does about the inherent partialities and predilections of the imitator.

> Whenever we are dealing with imitation, we should be very careful not to think too quickly of the other who is being imitated. To imitate is no doubt to reproduce an image. But at bottom, it is, for the subject, to be inserted in a function whose exercise grasps it. (Lacan, 1981: 100)

To Lacan, mimesis underpins the tension between subject, object and signifier (or image), in which the subject is the imitator, the object is the entity being imitated and the signifier / image is the imitation itself.

According to this approach, the various occurrences of bird imitation in Gaelic oral culture should be able to be read both in terms of the semiotics and semantics of mimesis, and in terms of the socially constructed and culturally mediated perceptions of the imitator. For instance, a short, didactic children's narrative recorded by Alexander Carmichael in volume one of *Carmina Gadelica* illustrates how children's perceptions of the corvids can be coloured from an early age. An

oystercatcher ('*trìlleachan*'), curious about the world and wishing to travel, abandons his nest. On returning, he discovers it has been plundered, and 'in great distress' cries out:

> 'Co dh' ol na h-uibhean? Co dh' ol na h-uibhean? Cha chuala mi riamh a leithid! Cha chuala mi riamh a leithid!' Who drank the eggs? Who drank the eggs? I never heard the like! I never heard the like! The grey crow listened now on this side and now on that, and gave two more precautionary wipes to her already well-wiped bill in the fringy, friendly moss, then looked up with much affected innocence and called out in deeply sympathetic tones, 'Cha chuala na sinne sinn fhein sin, ged is sinn is sine 's an aite,' No, nor heard we ourselves that, though we are older in the place. (Carmichael, 1928-71, I: 171-2). [3]

Not only does this apologue admonish the perfidiousness of the crow ('*feannag*'), it also warns against the dangers of leaving children unattended. It is also tempting to look for historical allegory, and certainly the themes of duplicity, displacement and the loss of family find close parallels with the period of enforced migrations in the eighteenth to nineteenth centuries.

Carmichael's choice of syntax in explication of the above folktale is also significant in terms of mimesis. The fact that the dialogue portions of the narrative are cited in Gaelic as well as in translation, together with the repetition of the oystercatcher's cries, implies that the speech elements above are acoustically significant, and perhaps intended to be mimetic (see chapter three). This interpretation is supported by the contrast between voiced and voiceless velars /k/ and /g/ with broad vowels /o/ in the oystercatcher's cries and the predominance of

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[3] This same story is recorded by Father Allan MacDonald (*GUL* MS Gen 1090.29 item 86) and alluded to by Forbes (1905: 258). Carmichael's implication that this narrative originates in Uist raises the possibility of a common source, as Father Allan collected material in South Uist whilst serving there in his official church capacity before being transferred to his own parish in Eriskay.

the voiceless palato-alveolar fricative, or slender /s/, with palatalised /ɲ/ and slender

vowels /i/ and /e/ in the crow's response.

A number of mimetic proverbs reflect a similarly contumelious sentiment

towards the corvids, illustrating how euphemistic references to these birds may be

used derogatorily in a social context. For example the phrases '*Ma 's olc am

fitheach, cha 'n fhearr a chomunn*' ('If bad be the raven, his company is no better')

(Nicolson, 1881: 307) and '*Ge dubh am fitheach, is geal leis 'isean*' ('Black as is

the raven, he thinks his chicken fair') (Nicolson, 1881: 195) use the raven

('*fitheach*') as a deprecating metaphor intended to be applied to human referents.

The semiotic significance of animals has been studied by Marques (2002),

whose approach presupposes that cultural interpretations of local ecology are

formed both by direct stimulus from the environment, and emotive reactions to such

stimuli. This antipathy towards the corvids in Gaelic culture may be linked to what

Miranda Green has called a 'perceived chthonic symbolism', arguing that with their

'black plumage and their habit of feeding off dead things' (Green, 1992: 126) the

raven ('*fitheach*') and crow ('*feannag*') are apposite signifiers of the otherworldly.

The corvids are also among the birds listed as an 'abomination' in Leviticus (11:15)

and 'unclean' in Deuteronomy (14:14). In this regard, the above imitation '*Cha

chuala na sinne sinn fhein sin, ged is sinn is sine 's an aite*,' can be interrogated

semiotically as an exposition of the cultural perceptions and preconceptions of

Gaelic ethno-ornithology in which the corvids have become synonymous with the

amoral or the uncanny.

To this end, the same Lacanian methodology can be applied to other species and imitations highlighted in the course of this study in order to uncover similar culturally mediated ethno-ornithological presuppositions and interpretations.

Chapter One

Sound and Metrical Patterning in Aural Mimesis

The 'direct and intimate observation of nature' (Thomson, 1988: 113) which, Thomson argues, underpins Alasdair Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair's ostensible familiarity with both vernacular and classical poetic traditions, is a thematic drive common to many genres of Gaelic oral performance. Duncan Ban MacIntyre's '*Moladh Beinn Dòbhrainn*' (Black, 2001: 266-79), for instance, compounds pathetic fallacy with the language of panegyric in the same way that Father Allan McDonald uses the rhetorical apostrophe in praise of Eriskay in '*Eilein na h-Òige*' (Black, 2002: 172-85).

In this chapter, the Gaelic appetency for the nature-trope will be interrogated with regard to the performance of lexical bird imitation, or the process whereby articulated elements of human speech are understood to be construed or abstracted from certain birds' cries. Using syntactical and acoustic devices in impersonation of ethological phenomena, aural bird imitation is perhaps most frequently associated with an arguably more prosaic form of poetic composition, namely children's nonsense rhymes.

Much of the material analysed in this chapter will be drawn from audio field recordings held by the School of Scottish Studies Sound Archive, supported by literary sources which contain analogous or complementary material. An unusually rich resource for the purposes of this inquiry are the recordings of Alan Lomax, son of the American ethnomusicologist and folksong collector John Lomax. Based in London between 1950 and 1958 for the purposes of making an ethnographic survey

of European folk music under the auspices of Columbia Records, Alan Lomax visited Barra in 1951 in order to record 'the pre-Christian choral songs of the Hebrides' (Lomax, 2003: 181). One of his main sources for this material was Annie Johnson, sister of Calum Johnson, whom Margaret Fay Shaw describes as

> a native of Barra whose knowledge of songs and stories was fathomless … I had known her from my days on South Uist when she came to judge the *Mod* in Daliburgh. I had visited her house in Castlebay where she was a schoolteacher, and she had taken me to hear singers, especially the women famous for their *luadhadh* or waulking songs … Annie Johnson was the most fascinating teller of ghost stories and fairy tales. (M. F. Shaw, 2002: 113-4).

In her employment as a school teacher, Johnson would have been ideally placed to learn many of the traditional children's rhymes and imitations which Lomax recorded from her.

In addition to field recordings, a number of literary sources also document the mimetic faculty of many Gaelic nonsense verses. *Aithris is Oideas* (*SCRE*, 1964), a collection of traditional Gaelic nursery rhymes and games, draws on material previously published in Gaelic medium periodicals with limited publication runs and out of print bilingual volumes, and as such is an important collative resource. Furthermore Mac Neacail's *Oideas na Cloinne* (1947) and volume four of Alexander Carmichael's *Carmina Gadelica* include imitations of a number of different species of birds pertinent to this analysis, the latter amalgamated under the title '*Gloir nan Eun*' ('the Speech of the Birds').[4]

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[4] One example in imitation of the corncrake ('*traona*'), which may relate to the superstition that after this bird begins to sing 'all danger of frost injuring crops [is] thought to be past' (Forbes, 1905: 254), illustrates the need to access Carmichael's published material both with reference to the Carmichael-Watson manuscript collections and analogous material drawn from other sources. In the final

Pulling apart the various sound segments and metrical structures that shape and sustain mimetic nonsense rhymes in Gaelic oral culture, this present analysis seeks to isolate the recurrent acoustic patterns and onomatopoeic devices which underpin the artifice of aural mimesis. Perhaps one of the most extrusive forms of this is sound-symbolism.

Sonance and Semantics: Towards a Theory of Phonaesthesia

Strong metrical patterning and the alliterative / assonantal repetition and reduplication of sounds and phrases appear to be typical attributes of aural mimesis in Gaelic nonsense rhymes generally. A deconstructive analysis of these, however, reveals a significant degree of meta-linguistic conformity, often referred to as sound-symbolism, or 'the process whereby certain vowels, consonants, and suprasegmentals are chosen to consistently represent visual, tactile, proprioceptive properties of objects, such as size or shape' (Hinton, Nichols, and Ohala, 1994: 4); in short, some measure of form / meaning correspondence.

As Richard Rhodes has argued, sound-symbolism, or phonaesthesia, 'is different from true onomatopoeia in that the submorphemic pieces in question have some measure of paradigmatic support, i.e. they occur in groups sharing a correlation between structural parts and acoustic reference' (Rhodes, 1994: 280).

published edition of *Carmina Gadelica*, Carmichael's imitation of the corncrake is given as '*A Dhia nam feart, / A Dhia nam feart, / Cuir biadh sa ghart! / Cuir biadh sa ghart!*' ('Oh God of the powers, / Oh God of the powers, / Put food in the field! / Put food in the field!') (Carmichael, 1928-71, IV: 22); whereas the manuscript version merely reads '*a rìgh nam feart, cur bì sa ghart*' ('oh powerful king, putting food in the field') (*EUL CW* MS131-B.91; my own translation) without repetition (I have also considered that *bi* in this instance could be *bith* ('life') instead of *biadh* ('food'), which may read 'put life in the corn' instead of 'put food in the field'.). In this case, however, the differences do not detract from the essential focus or meaning of the imitation, impacting only on the metrical structure. Nor is it currently possible to state with certainty whether Carmichael was working from more than one version as some of the Carmichael-Watson papers are no longer extant.

Inter-linguistic and inter-cultural experiments in this field indicate that certain sensations, such as size or movement, are often perceived to correlate with the auditory properties of specific sound segments in many languages, what John Ohala calls the 'frequency code' (Ohala, 1994: 325-47). In summation,

> high tones, vowels with high second formants (notably /i/), and high-frequency consonants are associated with high-frequency sounds, small size, sharpness, and rapid movement; low tones, vowels with low second formants (notable /u/), and low-frequency consonants are associated with low-frequency sounds, large size, softness, and heavy, slow movements. (Hinton, Nichols and Ohala, 1994: 10)

Thus Ohala suggests that words denoting or connoting 'smallness' tend to exhibit disproportionate incidence of vowels and consonants with high acoustic frequencies (the Gaelic slender vowels /i/ and /e/); whereas words denoting or connoting 'largeness' more often use segments with low acoustic frequencies (the Gaelic broad vowels /a/, /o/ and /u/). Furthermore, Ohala elaborates:

> In consonants, voiceless obstruents have higher frequency than voiced because of the higher velocity of the airflow, ejectives higher than plain stops (for the same reason) and dental, alveolar, palatal and front velars higher frequencies (of bursts, frication noise and/or formant transitions) than labials and back velars. (Ohala, 1994: 335).

If the resonances of vocalisations can carry an impression of form as the above research appears to suggest and support, then it may be of value to investigate whether the same sound-symbolic patterns can be recognized in the lexical imitation of birds in Gaelic nonsense rhymes.

Diminutive Symbolism

Diminutive symbolism in Gaelic nonsense imitations can be observed in the patterned deployment of vowels and, to a lesser extent, consonants. In general, the high frequency (or slender) vowels /i/ and /e/ are found to be most common, along with largely plosive consonants, such as the voiceless velar plosive /g/, voiceless bilabial plosive /b/ and voiceless velar plosive /k/, and to a lesser degree the voiceless dental plosive /t/ and nasals /m/ and /n/. An example of this can be found in an imitation of the robin ('*brù dhearg*') (one of the passerine bird family) which uses a combination of the above sound segments to acoustically mirror the 'repeated, sharp, high "tic"' (Sample, 1996: 77) of this bird's aposematic alarm call.

Big, big, bigean,	Cheep, cheep, cheepie,
Co a chreach mo neadan?	Who plundered my nestie?
Ma 's e gille beag e	If he is a wee lad
Cuiridh mi le creig e;	I'll put him over a cliff;
Ma 's e gille mor e	If he is a big lad
Cuiridh mi le lòn e;	I'll put him in a bog;
Ach ma 's fear beag gun	But if he is a wee man
cheill e,	without sense,
Gun gleidheadh Dia d' a	May God keep him for his
mhathair fein e.	own mother.

<div align="center">(Mac Neacail, 1947: 9; my own translation)</div>

In addition to the anticipated plosive sounds, the above also deploys a number of palatised consonants such as /g′/ (in '*big(ean),*' '*gille*' and '*creig*' etc.), /r′/ (in '*cuiridh*' and '*mhathair*') and /l′/ (in '*gille*' and '*cheill*').

The passerines (perhaps more frequently referred to in English as the song birds) are characterised by diminutive stature and conspicuously complex vocal runs, and we can see similar phonaesthetic devices employed in imitations of other birds of this genus. For instance, an imitation of the wren ('*dreathan-donn*') begins:

'Thig, thig, thig a dhiol-déirce, / Thig, thig, thig a ghille-frìde' ('Come, come, come beggar, / Come, come, come pimpled lad') (*SCRE*, 1964: 13; my own translation), the latter addressee being a pun with *'gille-Brìghde'* ('oystercatcher') (Dwelly, 2001: *gille-Brìghde*). Again the use of high frequency slender vowels /i/, /e:/ and /i:/, and palatalised consonants /g′/, /d′/, /k′/ and /l′/ are prominent, and may have some diminutive sound-symbolic implications.

In his address to the Gaelic Society of Inverness on the names of birds, Charles Fergusson notes that among the passerine family, the song thrush ('*smeòrach*') 'is the favourite, and reckoned the sweetest singer.'

> All our bards, late and early, delight in comparing their sweet singers to the mavis [song thrush], which is the highest praise they can give …
> One of the most ancient styles of composition in the Gaelic language, and a very favourite with most Highland bards, is that in which they represent themselves as the "smeòrach," or mavis of their respective clans, to sing the praises of their chiefs and clans. (Fergusson, 1885-6: 31)

Several examples of this kind of composition survive, such as John MacCodrum's *'Smeòrach Chlann Dòmhnaill'*. It is interesting to note that interspersed between stanzas MacCodrum includes a non-lexical refrain, perhaps an acoustic imitation of the song thrush's warbling tune, which also corresponds in some measure to the sound-symbolic diminutive patterning pre-empted above.

Hoilibheag hilibheag hò aill il ò,	*Hoilibheag hilibheag hò aill il ò,*
hoilibheag hilibheag hò rò ì,	*hoilibheag hilibheag hò rò ì,*
hoilibheag hilibheag hò aill il ò,	*hoilibheag hilibheag hò aill il ò,*
Smeòrach le Clann Dòmhnaill mi.	I am Clan Donald's mavis.
	(A. L. Gillies, 2006: 245)

Again the use of high frequency vowels /i/ and /e/ are significant, as well as the velar plosive /g/. Another example of this kind of composition can be found in the poetry of MacCodrum's contemporary, Alasdair mac Mhaightir Alasdair, in his '*Smeòrach Chlann Ràghnaill*', which uses an identical sequence of vocables (see MacDonald, 1924: 180-9).

A number of nonsense rhyme imitations of the song thrush are also extant. One example collected by Alexander Carmichael emulates an exchange between parent and fledgling birds, using breviloquent dialogue in simulation of the 'varied and … rhythmic repetition of phrases' characteristic of passerine birds (Sample, 1996: 80). The consistent reiteration of speech also serves to build pace and urgency, reflecting the emotional concern evinced by the parent bird.

'Ille ruaidh bhig!	Little red lad!
'Ille ruaidh bhig!	Little red lad!
Tobhad dachaidh!	Come away home!
Tobhad dachaidh!	Come away home!
Tobhad dachaidh!	Come away home!
A luaidh, gu d' dhinneir!	My dear, to your dinner!
'D é gheobh mi?	What shall I get?
'D é gheobh mi?	What shall I get?
Boiteag 's blaigh bàirnich!	A worm and a scrap of limpet!
Boiteag 's blaigh bàirnich!	A worm and a scrap of limpet!
Geas ost! Geas ost!	Hurry up! Hurry up!
'N oidhche tighinn!	The night's coming!
'N oidhche tighinn!	The night's coming!
'S an dorchadh!	And the darkness!
	(Carmichael, 1928-71, IV: 20-1)

In this instance, the use of largely slender vowels /i/, /e/ and /e:/, plosives /t/, /d/ and /g/ and the palatalised consonants /l′/, /g′/ and /n′/ compliments the brevity of

dialogue in the creation of an obstruent phonation which is acoustically reminiscent of the 'succession of constantly changing notes' characteristic of warbling (*OED*, s.v. warble). The use of '*tobhad*' instead of the more conventional '*trobhad*' ('come') (Dwelly, 2001: s.v. *trobhad*) is also interesting from a mimetic perspective, although it is possible that this abridgement is merely a dialectical variant. The same device may be behind the use of '*Geas ost!*' ('Hurry up!') above instead of the more accustomed '*Greas ort!*'. Another version of the song thrush imitation collected by Father Allan McDonald and published by Amy Murray in *Father Allan's Island* has '*Troth'd dhach'! / Troth'd dhach'!*' ('Come home! Come home!) (Murray, 1936: 57-8), illustrating another contraction which may have mimetic significance.

A third version of the song thrush imitation has been recorded by Alan Lomax from the recitation of Annie Johnson. At seven lines, Johnson's version is half the length of Carmichael's, however the latter makes more extensive use of repetition with the result that both imitations can be seen as broadly cognate (with the exception of the last stanza of Carmichael's version, which has no equivalent in Johnson's).

Iain 'ic 'ille Mhoire bhig	Wee John Morrison
thig dhachaigh! thig dhachaigh!	come home! come home!
C'arson? C'arson?	How come? How come?
Go d' dhìnneir, go d' dhìnneir!	For your dinner, for your dinner!
Dè 'n dìnneir?	What's for dinner?
Aran cruaidh, cuilcire coirce,	Stale bread, oat grass,
agus meug leis, meug leis.	and whey with it, whey with it.

(*SSS SA*1951.10.7; my own translation)

Whilst both imitations differ in length, the prevalence of occlusive sound segments, particularly palatal and velar plosives in the third and sixth lines above, is consistent; as is the predominance of largely high frequency slender vowels.

Whilst song thrush imitations are more commonly associated with more benign compositions such as children's nonsense rhymes and verses, one song thrush imitation recorded by Alexander Forbes demonstrates a very different flavour. According to Forbes 'some ardent seceders in or after 1843' employed the mimetic faculty as a form of propaganda, in which the song thrush is said to sing:

An eaglais shaor 's i 's fhearr, The Free Kirk's best by far,
An eaglais shaor 's i 's fhearr, The Free Kirk's best by far,
Na 'moderates,*' na* 'moderates,*'* The Moderates, the Moderates,
Cha 'n fhiach iad, cha 'n fhiach iad! Are worthless, are worthless!
             (Forbes, 1905: 304)

The use of high frequency slender vowels here is more ambiguous, however the repetition of the voiceless palato-alveolar fricative /ʃ/ (reinforced by the change from iambic meter to the double-stressed spondee in the first two lines) suggests some sound-symbolic basis to the imitation. In addition, the use of mimesis to communicate a socio-religious message is not unprecedented in Gaelic, indeed the reprimand may be deemed more potent when delivered by the voice of an animal, conveying some form of natural mandate or sanction (see W. Gillies, 1977: 42 for an analysis of animals as the voice of invective in the *Book of the Dean of Lismore*).

Another example of this kind can be found in imitation of the lark ('*uiseag*') , a bird with well documented religious associations,[5] which repeats: '*Is minig, minig,*

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[5] For instance the name '*uiseag Mhoire*' ('Our Lady's Lark') used by Father Allan in his poem '*Eirisgeigh Mhic Iain 'ic Sheumais*' on lines forty-one to two: '*Uiseag Mhoire shuas cha léir dhomh,*

minig, / A thig Criosd an riochd a' choigrich' ('It's often, often, often, / That Christ comes in the guise of a stranger') (*SCRE*, 1964: 11; my own translation). Again the reduplication of slender, high frequency vowels, palatal /g′/ and nasals /m/, /n/ and /x′/ combine in acoustic imitation of this bird's 'repeated fluting notes' (Sample, 1996: 71).

The subtext of hospitality as a sacred obligation repeated here is common in Gaelic poetry from the medieval period onwards (Black, 2002: 13) and is similarly reflected in a number of Father Allan McDonald's religious verses. For example in '*Cumha do Mhaighstir Seòras*' the reader is reminded '*Gur ionann Mac Dhé 's luchd feuma*' ('as one are God's Son and the needy') (Black, 2002: 232-3). The Rev. Donald MacQueen of Kilmuir encapsulates this sentiment when he writes: 'Of all virtues their hospitality was the most extensive; every door and every heart was open to the stranger and to the fugitive; to these they were particularly humane and generous … and looked on the person who sought their protection as a sacred *depositum*, which on no consideration they were to give up.' (MacQueen quoted in Pennant, 1772, III: 745-59).

One final example of diminutive symbolism can be found in imitation of the yellowhammer ('*buidheag*'), which contains a strong didactic element in promotion of conservation. Addressed to a '*ghille bhig chrìn*' ('mean little boy') the yellowhammer warns: '*Na creach mo nead, na creach mo nead,/ No théid thu dhíth, no théid thu dhíth*' ('Don't plunder my nest, don't plunder my nest, / Or you'll be in

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/ *Foghlam ciùil an cùirt nan Séraph*'.('Our Lady's Lark is invisible on high, / Learning music in Seraphs' court') (Black, 2002: 128-9), exhibiting a perceived congruence between the lark's habit of singing 'while gradually rising vertically on fluttering wings to become a speck in the sky' (Sample, 1996: 71) and angelic symbolism.

trouble, or you'll be in trouble') (Mac Neacail, 1947: 11; my own translation). In contrast to this however, Fergusson has noted of this species:

> This beautiful bird is of very evil repute in the Highlands where it is counted a very meritorious deed to harry its nest, from the old superstition that this bird is badly given to swearing; also that it sang on Calvary during the time of the crucifixion. (Fergusson, 1885-6: 39).

The association with profanity may be extrapolated from ethno-ornithological observations. According to ornithologist Geoff Sample, the 'languid song of the Yellowhammer, repeated at intervals for long periods with its insect-like building repetition of notes' typically consists of 'a rhythmic series of repeated notes ending in a drawn-out, high-pitched wheeze' (Sample, 1996: 100-1). This latter sound quality may be reflected by the use of '*dhíth*' above, which combines the palatal approximant /j/ with the stressed high frequency front vowel /i:/ in order to elongate the final syllable. The coarseness of the yellowhammer's 'high-pitched wheeze' (ibid.) in comparison to the tunefulness of other passerines may underlie the perceived offensiveness, hence Fergusson's observation.

In terms of diminutive sound-symbolism, therefore, the same sound patterning can be observed. The high frequency front vowels /i(:)/ and /e(:)/ predominate in the above examples, and are particularly strong in the repeated phrases of passerine bird imitations. The palatalised consonants /k'/, /g'/ and /l'/ are also consistently deployed in creating a modulated series of high frequency stops intended to acoustically reproduce the frequently stilted and brief outbursts of passerine birdsong, as anticipated by Ohala's frequency code.

Augmentative Symbolism

In contrast to diminutive sound-symbolic patterns, augmentative phonaesthesia in Gaelic nonsense rhymes often employ low-frequency back vowels, such as /a/, /o/ and /u/, with fricatives and, to a lesser extent, rhotic consonantal combinations. Perhaps contrary to expectation, however, there is some degree of similarity in consonantal sound-symbolism with diminutive bird imitations, most notably the palatalised /g′/ and voiceless velar plosives /k/ and palatalised /k′/, which appear to be universals indicative of avifaunal mimesis in Gaelic generally. An example of these patterns and combinations can be found in an imitation of the pigeon recorded by Charles Fergusson in a paper addressed to the Gaelic Society of Inverness, who writes:

> We have in Gaelic . . . many old nursery rhymes which cleverly imitate the cry of different birds. That about the ring-dove closely imitates its cooing – Cha ’n ann de mo chuideachd thù, cha ’n ann de mo chuideachd thù, ars an calman – You are not of my flock, you are not of my flock, said the pigeon. (Fergusson, 1885-6: 57)[6]

The use of low-frequency vowels above is pronounced, particularly the elongation of the line-final close back rounded vowel /u:/ in acoustic emulation of cooing. In addition, the metrical stresses of the Fergusson's example fall on the syllable containing the voiceless velar fricative /x/ and the voiced post-alveolar affricate /dʒ/

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[6] In Gaelic ethno-ornithology, there appears to be little or no distinction made between the pigeon and the dove. In an early poem by Alasdair mac Mhaighstir Alasdair, '*Marbhrainn a rinneadh do Pheata Coluim, a Mharbhadh le Abhag*', references to the dove from the Book of Genesis in the fourth to eighth stanzas of mac Mhaighstir Alasdair's elegy are contradicted by the description of a pigeon's plumage in the twelfth stanza: '*Bhiodh t' èideadh do mhìn-iteacha gorm / Air nach drùidheadh an driùchd*' ('your clothing consisted of smooth blue feathers / which the dew would not penetrate') (MacDonald, 1924: 18 – 19). In addition, Dwelly lists both 'pigeon' and 'dove' as legitimate translations for '*calman*' (Dwelly, 2001: s.v. *calman*) and Forbes treats them under the same heading in his *Gaelic Names of Beasts, Birds, Fishes, Insects, and Reptiles* (Forbes, 1905: 266-7).

which highlight the almost stertorous vocalisations typically associated with the pigeon ('*calman*').

In Alexander Carmichael's version of the pigeon imitation (also quoted in *SCRE*, 1964: 12-3), the above declamation is prefaced by a non-lexical exordium.

Gu rù ! Gu rù ! Gu rù !	Gu-roo ! Gu-roo ! Gu-roo !
Chan ann da m' chuideachd thù!	Not of my kin are you!
Chan ann da m' chuideachd thù!	Not of my kin are you!
	(Carmichael, 1928-71, IV: 22-3)

Again Carmichael's rendering accentuates the close back rounded vowel /u:/ both in the lexical and non-lexical portions of mimesis. The escalating syllabic beats in the above examples, however, perhaps suggests that consistency of patterning and reduplication are more crucial to the artifice of mimesis than an accurate reproduction of the intended sound object: Carmichael's imitation contains lines of six syllables and Fergusson's repeats lines of seven syllables, whereas the pigeon's typical display vocalisations habitually run to no more than five (Sample, 1996: 66).

In terms of lexical content, it is also interesting to note that the stylised phrase '*Chan ann da m' chuideachd thù*' ('not of my kin are you') (Carmichael, 1928-71, IV: 22-3) is a fitting representation of the pigeon's call, as the competitive and territorial nature of these birds in the wild is thought by many ornithologists to be the motivation behind many of their display-calls (Goodwin, 1983: 29-30). An alternative opening line to the pigeon imitation is also indicative of this observation: '*Tha mo chùl riut, tha mo chùl riut*;' ('I've turned my back on you, I've turned my back on you;') (MacNeacail, 1947: 10).

Congruous uses of augmentative phonaesthesia can be found in imitation of domestic fowl. For instance an imitation of the hen ('*cearc*') recorded by Carmichael in volume four of *Carmina Gadelica* which contrasts the '*Chearc bhuidhe ghòrach*' ('foolish yellow hen') against the '*Bhuidheag bhuidhe bhòidheach*' ('Beauteous yellow Goldfinch'), uses largely broad vowels and fricative consonants perhaps to subliminally reinforce the disparity of size between passerine and fowl.

'Bhuidheag bhuidhe bhòidheach,	'Beauteous yellow Goldfinch,
Bheir mise latha Domhnach,	I will spend a Sunday
Sguabadh do sheòmair,'	Sweeping out thy chamber,'
Ors a' Chearc bhuidhe ghòrach.	Said the foolish yellow hen.
	(Carmichael, 1928-71, IV: 1)

In this instance, the naïve alliteration on the first line amplifies the childish inelegance of the hen's speech, placing emphatic stress on the voiced labio-dental fricative /v/. The tight rhyme scheme (A-A-B-A)[7] and regularity of scansion and meter (6,7,6,7) can also be interpreted as a deliberate attempt to acoustically replicate cadenced clucking vocalizations.

Another imitation of the hen recorded by Alan Lomax from the recitation of Annie Johnson quips '*Gog, gog, gog, gog, gog, gog, gaoir! / Beiridh mise ch' uile latha 's cha bheir an crodh-laoigh*' ('Cluck, cluck, cluck, cluck, cluck, cluck, ouch! / I lay every day unlike the cattle') (*SSS SA*1951.10.9; my own translation); and a third imitation recorded on the same reel from the dictation of Kate MacLeod repeats '*rug, rug, rug a dhà!*' ('I've laid, I've laid, I've laid two!') (ibid.; my own

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[7] Normally Gaelic rhyme demands only the same vowel sound on the stressed syllable which would render the above as A,A,A,A; however here there is an unusual use of full 'English' rhyme, hence A,A,B,A.

translation). Again a combination of predominantly (or, in the case of the latter example, exclusively) low-frequency vowels, velar plosives /g/ and rhotic consonantal sounds are used.

Modern Gaelic poetry also exploits this image of domestic fowl. For example, Donald MacIntyre's '*Aoir Mhusolìnidh*' satirises the eponymous dictator using an extended rooster ('*coileach*') metaphor.

'S e mar choileach gnù-cheannach,	Like a rooster was he, po-faced and
gruamach,	grim,
A ghoireadh air a dhùnan gu	Who'd crow with such pride on his
h-uallach,	dunghill,
Le guib a spuirean cùil	The points of his hind claws
A' sgròbadh an smùir	Scratching the dust
'S e bogadh na stiùrach gu tuasaid	While he ruffled his tail for the fight
Le gog is guli-gùg	With a cock-a-doodle-doo
De ghoileam gun tùr –	Of complete ballyhoo –
Ge b' oil leam, cha chunntainn na	Though disgusted, I'd not heed what
chuala mi	I heard
'S a choilleag 'na spùt	With his words tumbling out
À goile gun ghrunnd	From a bottomless stomach
	(Black, 1999: 162-3)

The non-lexical imitation of the rooster's crowing on the sixth line of the above selection is acoustically echoed throughout the stanza with the continued reduplication of broad vowels together with the velar plosive /g/ sounds, which perceptively carries the sound-metaphor along 'the astonishing rip of the poem's rhyme and rhythm' (Black, 1999: 744). The consistent use of sound patterning here would tend to suggest some familiarity with the efficacy of sound-symbolism in MacIntyre's verse (the use of the domestic fowl metaphor in opprobrium is addressed more fully in chapter two of this study).

Another instance of augmentative sound-symbolism can be found in Annie Johnson's imitation of the grouse ('*cearc fhraoich*'), which adds the use of the close back unrounded compound vowel sound /ɯT:/ to the low frequency broad vowel spectrum of augmentative phonaesthesia. In addition, the interplay between the high frequency plosive consonants /k/ and /b/ against the low frequency rhotics and fricatives help to create an acoustic effect not dissimilar to the hen above.

Laighibh! laighibh! laighibh!	Lie down! lie down! lie down!
caomhnaibh, caomhnaibh bàrr an fhraoich,	save, save the tips of the heather,
chan fhaigh sibh gu la ach na fhuair sibh,	you won't get any more until the day comes,
chan fhaigh sibh gu la ach na fhuair sibh,	you won't get any more until the day comes,
caomhnaibh, caomhnaibh bàrr an fhraoich,	save, save the tips of the heather
laighibh! laighibh! laighibh!	lie down! lie down! lie down!

(*SSS SA*1951.10.9; my own translation)

Like Johnson's imitation of the song thrush above, this rhyme simulates the parent bird admonishing the gluttony of its young.

The audio recording of the above imitation is also interesting in terms of paralinguistics. The command '*laighibh*' which bookends the rhyme is articulated with an indistinct enunciation, essentially muffling the medial and final consonantal sounds. Similarly the lenition of '*fuair*' and '*fraoch*' have the effect of largely suppressing many of the occlusal and spirantal sound segments, giving the grouse imitation more of a nasal sonority which accentuates the low frequency broad vowel combinations.

A corresponding sound pattern can be identified in another imitation of the grouse ('*cearc fhraoich*'), this time recorded in Mac Neacail's *Oideas na Cloinne*.

Cò a bhrathadh? cò a bhrathadh?   Who would spy? who would spy?
Cò a dh'fhaodadh? cò a dh'fhaodadh? Who might it be? who might it be?
Cò a bhagradh? cò a bhagradh?   Who would threaten? who would
                                                              threaten?
Mo chlaidheamh, mo chlaidheamh.   My sword, my sword.
                              (Mac Neacail, 1947: 10; my own translation)

Again the close back unrounded compound vowel /ɯT:/ and other low frequency broad vowels play against the voiceless velar plosive /k/ and fricative compounds /v/ in imitation of the soft, crooning calls noted as appurtenant to the grouse. In addition, the latter example from Mac Neacail is consistent with the male grouse's 'status display'.

> Competition, involving what have been called 'song substitutes', is for a higher status stance, which seems to carry more right to mate with the attendant females (for the males) and make its occupier more desirable to females. (Sample, 1996: 50).

Thus, as with the pigeon discussed earlier, the lexical content of some mimetic nonsense rhymes may also reflect some degree of ethno-ornithological observation, as well as an ostensible acoustic similitude.

In terms of augmentative sound-symbolism, therefore, similar sound patterns emerge. The low frequency back vowels /a/, /o/ and /u/ predominate in the above examples. In addition, the voiced labio-dental fricative /v/, voiceless velar fricative /x/ and rhotic /r/ also exhibit a disproportionate occurrence in imitations of larger birds.

Exceptions

As Childs points out, Ohala's 'frequency code serves as a default mode for sound-meaning correspondences. If no language-specific associations override it, then the frequency code will operate.' (Childs, 1994: 192). When dealing with mimetic nonsense rhymes, however, it is perhaps apposite to add mimetic imperatives to Childs' 'language-specific' exemptions. In this sense, the 'frequency code' may be seen as a guiding principle for mimetic sound-symbolic associations, rather than a universal law.

To this end, there are a number of exceptions to the 'frequency code' in Gaelic nonsense rhymes. For instance an imitation of the lark ('*uiseag*') (typically characterised by diminutive sounds) uses largely low frequency broad vowels and rhyming couplets to infer aural mimesis. This said, the stressed line final vowels which carry the rhyme tend to be slender, as in '*théid mi*', '*dìth*' etc.

Suas anns na neòil théid mi, théid mi,	Up into the clouds I'll go, I'll go,
Le fonn 'nam chrìdhe gun deireas gun dìth,	With a tune in my heart without want without need,
Dòirtidh mi mo òran le ceilearadh grinn,	I'll sing my song with a happy warble,
Air lag is air làidir, air slàn is air tinn,	On the weak and the strong, the healthy and the ill,
Clann bheaga nan daoine a dh'éisdeas ri mo cheòl,	Little children of men who listen to my music,
Ma thachras mo nead riubh an lagan an fheòir,	If you should happen upon my nest in a hollow in the grass,
Cuiribh le coibhneas dìon air mo linn,	Protect my offspring with kindness,
Is seinnidh iad fhathast dhuibh leadanan binn.	And they will continue to sing you sweet litanies.

(Mac Neacail, 1947: 9; my own translation)

The irregular metrical structure and extrusive alliteration here also serves as an acoustic reminder of the '*leadanan binn*' ('sweet litanies') promised in exchange for the protection of the lark's young. The opening lines '*Suas anns na neòil théid mi, théid mi, / Le fonn 'nam chrìdhe*' ('Up into the clouds I'll go, I'll go, / With a tune in my heart') also acknowledge the lark's habit of singing during flight alluded to earlier (see the lark in diminutive symbolism above).

Another exception to the sound-symbolism principle can be found in an imitation of the song thrush recorded by Alexander Carmichael in volume four of *Carmina Gadelica*. Again the use of low frequency broad vowels is markedly perceptible.

Dhomhaill mhóir bhochd!	Poor big Donald!
Dhomhaill mhóir bhochd!	Poor big Donald!
Dhomhaill mhóir bhochd!	Poor big Donald!
Tha 'm pathadh ort!	You are thirsty!
Tha 'm pathadh ort!	You are thirsty!
Sgob as e!	Drink it off!
Sgob as e!	Drink it off!
Chuile diod!	Every drop!
Chuile diod!	Every drop!
	(Carmichael, 1928-71, IV: 22-3)

Again the use of the voiced labio-dental fricatives, voiceless velar fricative and post-alveolar affricate (more typically found in augmentative symbolism such as the pigeon and domestic fowl imitations discussed above) illustrate the extent of divergence from more conventional sound-symbolic segments.

Perhaps the most apparent exception in terms of atypical augmentative sound-symbolism can be found in imitation of the eagle ('*iolair*'), which repeats '*Glig, glig, glig, ars an iolair 's e mo mhac sa 's tighearn oirbh*' ('*Glig, glig, glig*, says the

eagle, it's my son who is lord over you all') (Fergusson, 1884-5: 247). In this instance the use of high frequency slender vowels combined with palatal plosive /g′/ and palatalised /l′/ would more usually be associated with diminutive symbolism, however the onomatopoeic '*glig*' may also be a pun on '*glic*' ('wise') (Dwelly, 2001: *glic*) which would marry with the popular perception of the eagle as a dominant bird (see chapter two for an expansion on the significance of the eagle in panegyric verse). Despite the occurrence of more typically diminutive sound segments, the eagle naturally has a high-pitched vocalization, making this imitation more acoustically or mimetically accurate than Ohala's frequency code predictions might appear to suggest.

Examples such as these, whilst important to recognise, are fairly uncommon in Gaelic aural mimesis. Of fifty-six avifaunal mimetic rhymes recorded variously in Mac Neacail (1947), Carmichael (1928-71, IV) and *SCRE* (1964), only five fail to conform with the conventions of Ohala's 'frequency code'. Despite these infrequent exceptions, therefore, the sequence of phonemes and concomitant perceived elements of semantic meaning, or phonaesthemes, outlined above appear to support some degree of sound-symbolism in terms of the sonance and semantics of mimetic nonsense rhymes in Gaelic. To this end, phonaethemes which suggest diminution are frequently characterised by high frequency slender vowels such as /i/ and /e/, whereas phonaesthemes which suggest augmentation can often be seen to exhibit a greater incidence of low frequency broad vowels such as /a/, /o/, /u/ and the /ɯː/ compound broad vowel. Consonantal deployment can be more ambiguous,

however palatalised plosives would appear to be a little more common in diminutives and fricatives slightly more usual in augmentatives.

A Hypothesis of Metrical Symmetry

In acknowledgement of the apparent uniformity of sound-segmental deployment seen above, recent scholarship into the metrical patterning of children's rhymes from many cultural and linguistic backgrounds has suggested that 'children's rhymes around the world have strikingly similar metrical patterns' (Arleo, 2006: 39), which may point towards a degree of intercultural metrical isochrony. The argument, based largely on early research by Brailoiu (1973), Burling (1966) and Hayes and MacEachern (1998), proposes that this symmetry is particularly evident in children's counting rhymes, and uses examples from both English and French oral traditions to support a 'hypothesis of metrical symmetry' (ibid.). In general terms, Andy Arleo concludes that children's rhymes tend toward symmetry firstly in the sense that the 'number of beats in a given metrical unit (i.e. hemistich, line, stanza) tends to be even', and secondly the 'number of lines in stanzas tends to be even' (Arleo, 2006: 45).

Arleo's hypothesis, however, appears to have little application in terms of avifaunal mimetic rhymes in Gaelic. In reiteration of the examples given above, Carmichael's imitation of the song thrush begins with two lines of three beats, decreasing to three lines of two beats, and increasing back to three beats on the final line, totalling an odd fifteen beats over five lines.

'Ille ruaidh bhig!	Little red lad!
'Ille ruaidh bhig!	Little red lad!

Tobhad dachaidh!	Come away home!
Tobhad dachaidh!	Come away home!
Tobhad dachaidh!	Come away home!
A luaidh, gu d' dhinneir!	My dear, to your dinner!

<div align="right">(Carmichael, 1928-71, IV: 20-1)</div>

Similarly Annie Johnson's imitation of the hen can be divided into two lines, each with an irregular number of beats (four on the first line, increasing to seven on the second), and Katie MacLeod's version repeats the same line of three beats. [8]

The only Gaelic counting rhyme which could be interpreted as imitating birdsong also appears to be at variance with Arleo's hypothesis of metrical isochrony. Recorded by Alan Lomax from the recitation of Annie Johnson, the following is probably intended as a meta-game, counting children into groups before yet another game begins, using three lines of three beats in dactyl meter, which decreases and escalates again during the mimetic non-lexical coda which follows, in contrast to the pattern expected by the 'hypothesis of metrical symmetry'.

Iteagan, iteagan, uighean,	Feathers, feathers, eggs,
Iteagan, iteagan, eòin,	Feathers, feathers, birds,
Iteagan, iteagan, uighean,	Feathers, feathers, eggs,
O 's e mo nighean a nì 'n ceòl.	Oh it's my girl that makes the music.
Da-u, da-u, deir-a-ra-bho,	*Da-u, da-u, deir-a-ra-bho,*
Da-u, da-u deir-a-ra-bho rò,	*Da-u, da-u deir-a-ra-bho rò,*
Da-u. da-u deir-a-ra-bho rò,	*Da-u, da-u deir-a-ra-bho rò,*
'S e mo nighean a nì 'n ceòl. (x2)	It's my girl that makes the music. (x2)

<div align="right">(SSS SA1951.10.7; my own translation)</div>

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[8] The inherent difficulties in distinguishing between rests, line pauses, breath pauses and stanza breaks in primary oral material has led to the exclusion of this type of material from the above survey, unless corroborating written versions have been found.

In this instance, the mimetic vocables are predominantly composed of broad vowels, which, according to the theory of phonaesthesia above, may indicate an imitation of a larger bird.

Although in general the number of lines in many Gaelic nonsense rhymes appears to be consistently even, in contrast to Arleo's hypothesis the number of beats can be irregular and are often odd in number. As a caveat to his research, Arleo states that his theory 'does not propose an absolute universal law', but instead attempts to 'make predictions regarding the number of beats per line and the number of lines per stanza that can be tested empirically, language by language and genre by genre' (Arleo, 2006: 53). A survey of fifty-six mimetic rhymes recorded variously in Mac Neacail (1947), Carmichael (1928-71, IV) and *SCRE* (1964), however, reveals that only eight, or fourteen percent, conform to Arleo's predictions.

It is not possible under the remit of this present research to further test the veracity of Arleo's hypothesis with relation to all nursery lore in Gaelic, however it is important to note that in terms of avifaunal mimetic rhymes their ostensible rigidity of metrical structure and aural patterning do not readily submit to a hypothesis of intercultural / international isochrony.

Bird Imitation and Musical Instruments

In dealing with poetry and song as cultural artefacts, ethnomusicologist Alan Merriam has argued that scholars 'must consider two aspects [i.e. both vocal and instrumental] and be prepared to use either or both as the possibilities present

themselves' (Merriam, 1964: 278). Consequently a number of sources which attest to the use of musical instruments in imitation of birds will be addressed.

In his note on the Brent goose ('*gèadh-got*'), Martin Martin records 'the piper of St. Kilda plays the notes which it sings, and hath composed a tune of them, which the natives judge to be very fine music' (Martin, [1703] 1994: 141).[9] In addition to this, Carmichael tells us that according to tradition 'pipers could play and whistle many imitations of the song of the swan, the long-tailed duck, the lark, the merle [blackbird] and the mavis [song thrush], and other birds of our western coasts' (Carmichael, 1928-71, IV: 24-5). Unfortunately, however, neither of these sources explain how this imitation is accomplished.

'*Cath nan Eun*' ('The Battle of the Birds'), a *pìobaireachd* which, according to one tradition, may date to 'the Battle of the North Inch of Perth in 1396' (*TPS*, 1936, VII: 196), could offer some insight. As with the examples of vocal mimesis above, the melody is composed of short repetitive segments which, according to the Reverend Neil Ross 'was an imitation of the song of the lark' (Ross, 1924-5: 169), adding:

> It is said that the Macrimmons in composing a warlike piece were in
> the habit of taking their cue from the turbulent conditions of nature.
> The voice of the thunder, the brawling cataract, the scream of the eagle,
> the fury of a tempest, the roar of the Atlantic on the rocks of Skye –
> these were their monitors and object lessons. (Ross, 1924-5: 166)

The mimetic faculty of the bagpipe has been acknowledged in the composition a number of other airs: for example, the well-known '*Fuaim na Tuinne ri Duntroin*'

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[9] This contradicts a statement made later in which he holds that the Jews' harp was the only instrument known on the island (Martin, [1703] 1994: 438).

is, as eponymously indicated, an imitation of the sound of water (*TPS*, 1936, VI: 176 - 7).[10]

Charles Fergusson cites a further congruence between the passerine birds and *pìobaireachd*. In a note on the blackbird ('*lòn dubh*'), Fergusson attributes the popular connection between this bird and the despondency of grief firstly to 'its sombre colour' and secondly, and perhaps 'more especially' to 'its sweet plaintive song, the rapid warbling notes of which the Highlanders likened to some of their most mournful piobaireachd laments' (Fergusson, 1885-6: 32). In contrast to this, Fergusson notes that the calls of the song thrush 'resembled the salute or welcome class of piobaireachd' citing the proverb '*An smeòrach ri failte, 's 'n lon-dubh ri cumha*' ('The song thrush sings a salute, and the blackbird sings a lament') (ibid.; my own translation) in attestation. Such correspondences, whilst not conclusive, are an important connection between musical instruments and the mimetic faculty, suggesting an adjunctive dimension to the art of acoustic imitation.[11]

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[10] Another example of instrumental mimesis may also be implied by the use of the Gaelic *tromb*, or Jews' harp. Fox points out that this instrument is capable of a greater range than one might at first assume, classifying it along with other rustic instruments such as 'hunting horns, bird calls, and bells' (Fox, 1988: 15), to which Schmidt adds that certain notes may be 'compared with the swan songs heard by our ancestors' (Schmidt, 1988: 127). Unfortunately, however, the paucity of evidence in this area of Gaelic scholarship requires that this theory must remain tentative.

[11] Despite the fact that the Gaelic musical tradition is primarily concerned with acoustic mimesis, there is some evidence to suggest that physical bird mimicry may have been practiced as a component of several Hebridean dances. For example '*Cath nan Coileach*' ('the cock-fight'), a traditional reel, is said to represent 'the circling of fighting cocks before the actual combat' (*CDnE*, 1995: 101). Similarly '*Ruidhleadh nan Coileach Dubha*' ('the Reel of the Black Cockerels'), as eponymously indicated, invites a similar interpretation: 'The dance involves a mime of 'blackcocks' ('*coilich dubha*') and 'ducks' ('*lachan*'). The dancing couple are the 'blackcocks' while the kneeling couple are the 'ducks'.' (*CDnE*, 1995: 103).

Conclusions

The sound-symbolic correlations outlined in the course of this inquiry, whilst perhaps more pronounced in nonsense rhymes, do not appear to be exclusive to the performance of lexical bird imitation. Research concerning sound-symbolism in Gaelic is still very much in its infancy, however in general terms, slender vowels often (although not exclusively) appear to be associated with diminution: '*beag*' ('small') (Dwelly, 2001: s.v. *beag*), '*crìon*' ('little', 'trifling') (Dwelly, 2001: s.v. *crìon*), '*meanbh*' ('diminutive') (Dwelly, 2001: s.v. *meanbh*) (see also Ó Maolalaigh, 1998: 30-8 for a study of diminutive sound-symbolism in Gaelic place-names); whereas broad vowels are more frequently related to augmentation: '*mòr*' ('great', 'large') (Dwelly, 2001: s.v. *mòr*), '*dòmhail*' ('bulky') (Dwelly, 2001: s.v. *dòmhail*), '*tomultach*' ('large', 'gigantic') (Dwelly, 2001: s.v. *tomultach*).

The manipulation of the Gaelic lexicon in acoustic imitation of birdsong is not the only form of avifaunal mimesis in Gaelic oral culture however. The following chapter will now address the use of kennings, or bird metaphors used with application to human referents, in the conventionalised and codified language of poetic composition from the seventeenth century onwards.

Chapter Two

Mimesis and the Bird Metaphor in Gaelic Verse

In an address to the Gaelic Society of Inverness analysing the rhetoric of praise in traditional Gaelic verse, John MacInnes identified a discrete and tralatitious mode of diction 'codified in sets of conventional images, most densely concentrated in the heroic elegy composed at the point of crisis brought about by the death of a leader', which employs the poem as 'a piece of propaganda for Gaelic nationalism' (MacInnes, 2006: 265). According to MacInnes, one of the most extrusive tropes in poetic encomium is the use of 'kennings', a figurative form of mimesis which uses literary devices such as simile and metaphor in order to establish an abstract or conceptual convergence of images.

Metaphor seems to be integral to the language of poetry, and in panegyric and invective verse may also function as a mode of enculturation in which certain images are understood to convey specific meanings or associations. As MacInnes points out, the use of conventionalised language in oral performance will not only admit a manifest or literal interpretation, but will also convey a body of sub-textual meanings or associations,

> producing a densely woven texture of imagery in which every phrase, indeed almost every word, is significant. Even the shortest utterance sets off a train of memories of linked epithets …Once these conventions were established, even an oblique reference would be intelligible in the very same terms. The commonplaces work thus for anyone who through song has known the rhetoric from childhood (MacInnes, 2006: 275).

Thus the commonplaces which MacInnes refers to act as a kind of poetic shorthand, in which underlying connotations can be extrapolated contextually.

In Gaelic praise poetry, one of the most frequent uses of metaphor is as simile. Occasionally regarded as a distinct figure of speech, simile can be seen more accurately as a sub-classification of metaphor with the important distinction that the latter omits the comparative preposition '*mar*' ('like' or 'as') (Dwelly, 2001: s.v. *mar*), whereas the former, in literary theorist David Punter's words, 'does not seek to conceal its artificiality' (Punter, 2007: 5).

Used consistently, metaphors can often become semantically intransigent, perhaps even codified into an homologous syntax (Ricoeur, 1991), what MacInnes styles the 'panegyric code' (MacInnes, 2006). However, in addition to panegyric and elegiac verse, a distinct code of symbols and tropes can also be identified by a deconstructive analysis of satirical poetry in Gaelic. A complete enumeration of the various conventions and commonplaces which underpin what may be called the 'vituperative code' is beyond the scope of this present inquiry, however it is hoped that an interrogation of the specific use of kennings in this regard will provide a basis for future research in this area.

MacInnes concludes that the special 'rhetoric of praise', or panegyric code, was regarded by 'bards and singers … as an inheritance.' (MacInnes, 2006: 265). In addition, Derick Thomson has noted that the 'theme of Nature has an ancient history in Gaelic poetry' (Thomson, 1988: 105), pointing toward the same assumption in terms of genre. Highlighting their roots in the classical poetry of the Medieval period, it is the aim of this chapter to establish the avifaunal mimetic

comparative, or bird metaphor, as an intrinsic component of the conventionalised language of Gaelic panegyric and invective verse.

The Panegyric Code

McCaughey has noted that much of Gaelic praise poetry, 'insofar as it involves metaphor of animals, is largely in terms of "noble" animals (paralleled by "noble" trees) *liomhan, dragan, grìobh, beithir, tigear* – animals which are either geographically remote or mythical' (McCaughey, 1989: 109). In terms of bird metaphors, however, it is more common to find examples of birds of prey, such as the eagle ('*iolair*') or hawk ('*seabhag*'), or birds with conspicuous plumage, such as the peacock ('*peucag*') or the swan ('*eala*'), depending on context and the imagery required.

An example of this kind can be found in '*Beir Soraidh Bhuam le Deagh Rùn Buaidh*', thought to have been composed by the Reverend James MacLagan around 1756, which likens the 'gallant warriors fighting for their families' to hawks: '*Ri leanailt ruaig mar ghaoith bho thuath / No seabhag, luaths nam fèil fuar*' ('Driving the rout like a northern wind, / Or a hawk, is the speed of the kilted men') (Newton, 2001: 121-5). Similarly in the nineteenth century, Alexander MacDonald's poem '*Cogadh a' Chrimea*' establishes Sir Colin Campbell's military prowess by comparing him to '[*s*]*eabhag san speur*' ('a hawk in the sky'), a bird of prey which naturally dominates flocks of smaller birds.

Gun robh e mar sheabhag san speur	He was like a hawk in the sky
Feadh ealtainn gan sgapadh bho chèil',	causing the bird flock to scatter,
Gearradh nan ceann dhiubh gu smearail,	in manly style lopping their heads off

Le spionnadh a ghàirdeannan treun.   by the strength of his mighty
                                                                                                   shoulders.
                                                                        (Meek, 2003: 306-7)

Such images are reinforced by emotive phrases: Sir Campbell's 'manly style' is expounded '*Le spionnadh a ghàirdeannan treun.*' ('by the strength of his mighty shoulders.') (ibid.).

On one level, these images can be interpreted as visceral symbols of masculinity; employing animals which are naturally dominant within their environment to animate their aggressive and authoritative associations. However the hawk ('*seabhag*'), thought in Athole folklore to be the 'king of the birds' (Fergusson, 1884-5: 251-2), also inspires a number of latent associations which give 'added depth and complexity to the image' (MacInnes, 2006: 285). For instance, with the fastest hunting dive of any bird species (Ratcliffe, 1993: 145-6, 275), the hawk is an apposite metaphor for 'swiftness and nobility' (Fergusson, 1884-5: 253); however its habit of feeding almost exclusively off of other birds, including, on occasion, its own young (Ratcliffe, 1993: 116-159), adds a more ruthless and voracious undertone almost imperceptibly alluded to in the line '*Feadh ealtainn gan sgapadh bho chèil*'' ('causing the bird flock to scatter') (Meek, 2003: 306-7) above.

In addition to the hawk , the eagle ('*iolair*') metaphor is also frequently used as an exaggerated representation of heroic virtue. An early eighteenth-century elegy by Sìleas MacDonald of Keppoch for '*Alastair á Gleanna Garadh*' compares the eponymous hero to '*Fìreun ás an eunlainn as àirde*' ('An eagle from the highest eyrie') in addition to a number of other conventionally heroic animals, which builds a substantial catalogue of praise motifs.

Bu tu 'm bradan anns an fhìoruisg',	You were the salmon in fresh water,
Fìreun ás an eunlainn as àirde –	An eagle from the highest eyrie –
Bu tu leòghann thar gach beathach,	You were a lion above all beasts,
Bu tu damh leathann na cràice.	You were the broad stag of the
	antlers.
	(Black, 2001: 102-3).

Similarly Alexander MacKinnon's grim portrait of '*Blàr na h-Òlaind*' ('the Battle of Holland'), which evokes such images as '*Nuair a dhlùth na h-airm ri chéile, / Dubhadh na speuran le'n deathaich*' ('When the two armies met, / The skies were blackened by their smoke') (Black, 2001: 354-5), reinforces adjectives such as '*fuilteach, mòrbhuilleach, gruamach*' ('bloody, hard-hitting and cruel') (Black, 2001: 356-7) with a typically panegyric description of the Highland soldiers.

Greasad air an adhart san àraich	Swiftly forward in the battlefield
Ghluais na saighdearan nach pillte	Moved the unturnable soldiers
Mar iolairean guineach gun choibhneas	Like wounding eagles for unkindness
Nach b' fhurasta chlaoidh le mìomhodh.	Hard to defeat with discourtesy.
	(Black, 2001: 356-7)

The conceit of the last line '*Nach b' fhurasta chlaoidh le mìomhodh*' ('Hard to defeat with discourtesy') is interesting, almost certainly intended as obloquy against the military prowess of the opposing French army.

Eòghann MacLachlainn's elegy '*Marbhrann do Mhr Seumas Beattie*' extends the metaphor, still relying on the same structure of equivalence.

Do bhantrach bhochd mar eun tiamhaidh,	Your poor widow is like a bird that is doleful,
Ri trùadh thùirse, 's a siathan mu h-àl;	in sad sorrow, her wings covering her brood;

> *A neadan creachte, is i dòineach*   her nest is plundered, and she is
>   mourning
> *Ma gaol a sholair an lòn daibh*   her beloved, who for each meal
>   *gach tràth;*   found their food;
> *On dh'imich fìreun na h-ealtainn*   since the eagle of the flock has
>   departed,
> *Tha an t-searbh dhìle tighinn thart'*   the terrible flood pours down
>   *às gach àird;*   from each point;
>   (Meek, 2003: 214-5)

In this instance, the absence of the paternal influence, '*fìreun*' ('eagle') (Dwelly, 2001: s.v. *fìreun*), whose hunting prowess was relied upon 'for each meal', has caused the 'terrible flood' of grief. In MacLachlainn's use of the panegyric metaphor, a perceptible sense of despair for the mother bird, who is no longer able to provide for her brood, is translated into the human grief of the subject's wife Jane Beattie (née Innes) and their six children. MacInnes notes of this kind of image 'unprotected people are frequently likened to bees from a plundered hive, a wounded bird separated from the bird-flock, or a bird that has lost its brood, or motherless lamb, or combinations of these figures.' (MacInnes, 2006: 284). The contrast between this and the eagle metaphor, therefore, only serves to heighten the potency and emotiveness of MacLachlainn's verse.

A contextual analysis of each of these illustrations sees the eagle used variously to symbolise the competent leader, the fierce hunter, the brave warrior, the familial provider, or any combination of these traits. However in his *Popular Tales of the West Highlands*, John Francis Campbell records a fable which subverts the assumed meliority of the eagle.

> The Eagle and the Wren once tried who could fly highest, and the victor
> was to be king of the birds. So the Wren flew straight up, and the Eagle

flew in great circles, and when the Wren was tired he settled on the Eagle's back.

"C' AITE BHEIL THU DHREOLAIN?" URS' AN IOLAIR.

"THA MISE AN SO OS DO CHEANN," URS' 'N DREOLAN.

"Where art thou, Wren?" said the Eagle.

"I am here above thee," said the Wren.

And so the Wren won the match.
(J. F. Campbell, 1860-2, I: 277)[12]

Despite this, concepts and authorities can only be subverted once they have been established and accepted in some way, and the moralistic drives of children's fables are innocuous enough not to undermine the symbolism behind traditional panegyric poetry. The warning here does not so much challenge the prestige of the eagle as caution against complacency.

Another protrusive symbol frequently referred to in love poetry, a sub-category of panegyric, is the plumage of the swan ('*eala*'). For instance Uilleam Ros' '*Feasgar Luain*' which is thought to date around 1782 or perhaps slightly later, praises the beauty of Marion Ross using a number of images drawn from nature.

Dhiùchd, mar aingeal, ma mo choinneamh,	There appeared, like an angel, before me,
'N ainnir òg bu ghrinne snuadh:	the young maid of finest mien:
Seang shlios fallain air bhlàth canaich	lithe, healthy form, with skin as white
No mar eala air a' chuan;	as cotton-grass or swan on sea;
	(Thomson, 1993: 148-9)

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[12] The capitalisation of the Gaelic dialogue portions here would tend to suggest that some form of mimetic inflection or impersonation is intended (see chapter three for an expansion of this argument). In this case, it is also possible that the subsequent capitalization of 'URS' AN IOLAIR' and 'URS' 'N DREOLAN' are printing errors.

Later in the same verse, Ros compares his subject to a '*ghath grèin' am madainn Chèitein*' ('ray of sun on May morning') and a '*Reul nan òighean, grian gach còisridh*' ('virginal star, sun above all') (ibid.), extending the comparative nature metaphor throughout the verse.

'*Mo rùn geal òg*', a Jacobite song thought to be a lament composed by Christiana Fergusson for her husband William Chisholm around 1746, uses a similar language of praise.

Bu tu 'm fear mòr bu mhath cumadh	You were big, you were shapely
O d' mhullach gu d' bhrògan,	from your head to your feet,
Bha do shlios mar an eala	your side like the swan
'S blas na meal' air do phògan,	and like honey your kisses,
	(Thomson, 1993: 184-5)

Similarly John MacKay's '*Beannachadh Bàird*' composed in 1730 on the marriage of Sir Alexander MacKenzie to his cousin Janet praises the latter's beauty with reference to the swan: '*Tha slios mar eala nan sruth / 'S a cruth mar chanach an fheòir*' ('Her side's like the swan of the streams / And like bog-cotton of grass is her form') (Black, 2001: 124-5).

Contextually, the straightforward interpretation of the swan metaphor sees its applicability as a symbol of purity, chastity and virtue, '*mar aingeal*' ('like an angel') in Uilleam Ros' terms (Thomson, 1993: 148-9). The white plumage of the swan is compared to the skin of the '*slios*' ('side' of the body) (Dwelly, 2001: s.v. *slios*), a word with underlying connotations of whiteness and luminosity: to be '*sliosmhor*' is to be 'glossy' or 'polished' (Dwelly, 2001: s.v. *sliosmhor*). Swans are also an apposite symbol of fidelity in a partner (ornithologists have noted their propensity toward monogamous relationships) perhaps explaining their popularity

as a comparative metaphor in amatory verse. Without specifically employing MacInnes' terminology, Donald Meek describes such material as employing 'a code of description which is used time and again within the tradition' (Meek, 2003: 246).

'*Ora Ceartais*',[13] an unusual charm recorded by Alexander Carmichael and published in volume one of *Carmina Gadelica* (Carmichael, 1928-71, I: 52-3), also employs the swan metaphor. A manuscript rendering attributed to Catherine Macintosh, a crofter from Staoligarry, South Uist, given the alternative title '*Eolas Ceartais*' and collected on the 20th of May 1875, is cited below.

Is dubh am bail ud thall,	Dark is yonder town,
Is duibhe na bheil ann,	And darker those therein;
Is mis an eala bhan,	I am the white swan,
Banruin os an ceann.	Queen above them.
Falbhaidh mi an ainme Dhe,	I will go in the name of God,
An rioc feidh, // iarrainn // an rioc each,	In likeness of deer, // iron // in likeness of horse,
An rioc nathrach, an rioc righ,	In likeness of serpent, in likeness of king,
Is treasa leam fhèin no le gach neach.	Stronger is it with me than all others.

<div align="center">(EUL CW MS131-A.413; my own translation)[14]</div>

In terms of the tenor of metaphor, Larson has identified an ambiguity regarding the gender of this charm's narrative voice (Larson, 1999: 255). The fourth line '*Banruin os an ceann*' ('Queen above them') would appear to imply a female speaker, yet the seventh line would appear to contradict this: '*An rioc nathrach, an*

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[13] This charm may be an abridgement of the more substantial '*Ora nam Buadh*' (Carmichael, 1928-71, I: 6-11). Uniquely, two manuscript versions of this charm are extant, one in Carmichael's own hand (*EUL CW* MS241.49-50) and another in Jessy Campbell's (the sister of the noted folklore collector John Gregorson Campbell) which was sent to Carmichael in 1888 (*EUL CW* MS425.174-7). At seventy lines, the former is significantly longer than Campbell's, which is a more moderate twenty-eight.

[14] In the published version under the title '*Ora Ceartais*' Carmichael appears to have edited this text. For instance the dialectially more common '*fin*' is inserted in place of '*fhèin*' here, and the hypercorrect '*rioc*' is amended to '*riochd*'.

rioc righ' ('In likeness of serpent, in likeness of king'). According to Carmichael, the entire charm should have been spoken by a man.

> The litigant went at morning dawn to a place where three streams met. And as the rising sun gilded the mountain crests, the man placed his two palms edgeways together and filled them with water from the junction of the streams. Dipping his face into this improvised basin, he fervently repeated the prayer, after which he made his way to the court, feeling strong in the justice of his cause. (Carmichael, 1928-71, I: 52-3).

Carmichael refers to the masculine pronoun four times in the above description, and also overtly states 'the man placed his two palms …' (ibid.), dismissing the possibility of a change in speaker.

One explanation for this apparent discrepancy could be tralatitious, whereby a confusion has arisen through the process of oral transmission: although Carmichael explicitly states that '*Ora Ceartais*' was traditionally spoken by men, his source (Catherine Macintosh) was female. According to Reynolds, both Gaelic and Scots oral traditions employ a species of composition which was not 'massively male dominated. It includes separate forms of cultural production which may have been exclusive to one or other sex, and it also has great areas of uncertainty.' (Reynolds, 2006: 176-7; see Lord, 1995: 212-37 for more on the concept of the transitional text).

Another explanation, however, may be that the shift in gender from one stanza to another may imply a shift in narrative persona. The assumption of a literary

mask in first person narrative is not unusual in Gaelic oral material;[15] and in this context cross-gender identification is not without precedent (Simms, 1989: 400-11). A comparable gender ambiguity can also be observed in a poem from the MacLagan manuscripts attributed to '*Nighinn Mhic 'ic Raonuill a bhean féin*' and thought to have been composed around 1689, which includes the line '*Mi mar Mhac-Duibhne bha 'n Eirinn*' ('I am like Mac Duibhne who was in Ireland'), subverting the previously established femininity of the speaker (Kennedy, 1897-8: 172; my own translation).

For Iain Lom, the assumption of a female persona is a literary device which is particularly evident in his laments. In '*Cumha Alasdair mhic Cholla*' he assumes the voice of the eponymous hero's beloved, indicated in lines ten and eleven: '*Cha robh, ghràidh, 's cha bu chubhaidh, / Thu buain bhàirneach air rubha,*' ('You were not, my beloved, gathering limpets on a headland, / nor would it have been a fitting occupation for you') (MacKenzie, 1964: 34-5). Similarly in '*Fogradh Raghnaill Oig*', line twenty-seven implies a female speaker '*Ged a dh'innseadh tu sgeul do leapach dhomh*' ('although you would relate your bedside secrets to me') (MacKenzie, 1964: 2-3).

The apparent shift in gender in '*Ora Ceartais*' can also be interpreted as strengthening the composition's associations with alterity and the uncanny, similarly suggested by the manuscript title which substitutes '*Ora*' with '*Eòlas*' ('charm'), conveying more of a subliminally eidolic aspect. Metamorphic inferences in the second stanza, '*An rioc feidh, // iarrainn // an rioc each / An rioc*

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[15] See Ó Baoill (1990) for a discussion on abrupt person-shifting in both Irish and Scots Gaelic poetry generally.

nathrach, an rioc righ' ('In likeness of deer, // iron // in likeness of horse, / In likeness of serpent, in likeness of king') (*EUL CW* MS131-A.413; my own translation), reinforce this sense of the imaginal or the abstruse. The reference to '*iarrainn*' ('iron') inserted mid-way along line six also compliments a supernatural reading, supplemented by numerous folkloric correspondences depicting iron as a protection against malignant spirits (see Black, 2005: lxxxviii-ix).

The narrative persona in '*Ora Ceartais*' / '*Eòlas Ceartais*', if indeed this is what is intended, could be seen to intensify the mimetic symbolism of the charm: the ostensibly male speaker adopts or imitates a female voice, who in turn imitates the swan. If one were to accept this hypothesis, then the masking device of '*Ora Ceartais*' / '*Eòlas Ceartais*' could be understood in terms of the speaker's desire to become 'other' in order to more effectively consociate with the zoological references which follow.

A typical substitute for the white plumage of the swan in love poetry is the seagull ('*faoileag*'), such as Donnchadh MacDhunlèibhe uses in '*Muile nam Mòr-bheann*' in which the speaker's sweetheart is described '*Do shlios mar an fhaoileann, taobh na mara, / Do ghruaidh mar an caorann, sgaoilt' air mheangan*' ('Your side is like the seagull hard by the ocean, / your cheek like the rowan, displayed on a twiglet') (Meek, 2003: 252-3). '*'S mòr mo mhulad*' ascribed to the Laird of Crandart and dating from around 1770 employs this mode of description to the same effect:

Far am bheil a' ghruagach chùl-donn	To see the brown-haired maiden,
Is i gu sùil-ghorm cruinn.	elegant, with eyes so blue.
Do shlios mar aoilean, do ghruaidh	side white as seagull, cheek

mar chaorann,	like rowan,
Do mhala chaol fo thuinn.	slender eyebrow arched.
	(Thomson, 1993: 190-1)

Again the whiteness of the seagull's plumage serves as a visual prompt which invites the listener or reader to connect the image invoked to notions of chastity and virtue.

Finally, the peacock ('*peucag*') is also occasionally referred to in Gaelic love and praise poetry. For example, ''*N rèir a bhruadair mi 'm chadal*' recorded in Ewan MacDiarmid's manuscript anthology of 1770 describes a woman seen in a dream as having '*maise na peucaig*' ('the peacock's rare beauty') (Thomson, 1993: 178-9). Similarly Uilleam Ros' battle of verses in '*Òran eadar am Bard agus Cailleach-mhilleadh-nan-dàn*', which could also be read as a battle of the sexes, elaborates:

'S i mo leannan an fheucag	My love is a peacock
Air na ceudan thug bàrr,	who over hundreds excels,
Gnùis shoilleir, caol mhala,	fair-faced, slender-eyebrowed,
Sùil thairis, ghorm, thlàth,	with warm, soft blue eyes,
Beul mìn mar an t-sirit	lips soft as a cherry
O 'm milis thig fàilt,	from which welcome sounds sweet,
Gruaidh dhearg mar an caoran,	cheeks red as the rowan –
Siud aogais mo ghràidh.	that's what my love looks like.
	(Thomson, 1993: 164-5)

The images invoked here are all very conventional, particularly '*Gruaidh dhearg mar an caoran*' ('cheeks red as the rowan'), a recurrent phrase found in several of the examples cited earlier. As with the swan and the seagull, the plumage of the peacock appears to be the operative image here: its famous tail display feathers used

to symbolise ostentation, finery and ornament. In her response to this image, the eponymous '*Cailleach*' retorts:

> *Mur b' e iteach na feucaig* Were it not for the feathers
> *Cha bhiodh spèis dhi no diù …* a peacock wouldn't attract …
> *Chuir a h-iongnan 's a casan* its claws and its legs
> *Mì-dhreach air a mùirn,* detract from its image,
> *Ged tha spailp às a h-èideadh* though its clothing is foppish
> *Gur eun i nach fiù.* it's a bird of no worth.
>   (ibid.)

The old woman's rejoinder warns against the seductiveness of the superficial, 'deflating his own romantic, poetic conceptions about the ideal loved-one.' (Thomson, 1993: 161).

McCaughey has speculated that connections between the imagery used in panegyric and invective poetry from the modern period and those of older sources point toward a code of diction 'shared with/inherited from *fili*' (McCaughey, 1989: 108). In terms of panegyric, the evidence for this appears to be broadly supportive. For instance the hawk metaphor is frequently deployed in Medieval Gaelic verse as a vehicle for encomium. The elegiac '*A Phaidrin do Dhúisg mo Dhéar*' composed by Aithbhreac inghean Coirceadail, the wife of Niall Óg MacNéill of Gigha, uses the hawk metaphor twice in praise of her late husband.

> *Béal asa ndob aobhdha glór,* Mouth of the most delightful voice,
> *dhéantaidhe a ghó is gach tír*:   whose whims were conceded in
>   every land,
> *leómhan Muile na múr ngeal,* lion of Mull of the white walls,
> *seabhag Íle na magh mín.*   hawk of Islay of the smooth plains.
>   (McLeod and Bateman, 2007: 116-7)

And later:

> *Seabhag seangglan Sléibhe Gaoil,* Bright slender hawk of Sliabh Gaoil,
> *fear do chuir a chaoin ré cléir;* man who showed kindness to the
>   Church,
>
> *dreagan Leódhuis na learg ngeal,* dragon of Lewis of the sunny slopes,
> *éigne Sanais na sreabh séimh.* salmon of Sanas of the peaceful
>   burns.
>   (ibid.)

In this imagery one is reminded of the escalating list of epithets used by Sileas MacDonald of Keppoch in her elegiac depiction of '*Alastair á Gleanna Garadh*'. Similarly an unattributed poem whose style of composition 'represents an intermediate point between the formal court poetry of the late Middle Ages and the vernacular praise poetry that became dominant in the seventeenth century' (McLeod and Bateman, 2007: 373) stresses the Biblical authority of the hawk metaphor.

> *Seabhag as uaisle thèid sna neulaibh,* Noblest hawk that flies the heavens,
> *Crann air chrannaibh;* tree crowning the forest,
> *Mac rath do chum Dia gu h-ealamh* son of fortune God made expertly,
> *Don chlèir ullamh.* prepared for the poets.
>   (McLeod and Bateman, 2007: 374-5)

In the twentieth century, this same image is employed by Iain Crichton Smith in his poem '*Do Ruaraidh MacThomais*', which describes '*seabhag òir san adhar àrd ud / mar Dhia a' sealltainn ann an sgàthan*' ('a gold hawk in that tall sky / like God looking in a mirror') (MacAulay, 1995: 186-7). It is interesting to note that these symbols retain their potency, despite being proscribed as an 'abomination' in the Book of Leviticus (Leviticus, 11:16).

The eagle makes a less frequent appearance in Medieval and classical Gaelic verse, however a litany in praise of the trinity dating to around the tenth century uses the eagle along with a number of other panegyric animals in glorification of divinity (Clancy, 1998: 163), perhaps referring to the eagle image in the Book of Exodus:

> *Chunnaic sibh na rinn mi ris na h-Eiphitich agus cionnus a ghiùlan mi sibhse mar air sgiathaibh iolairean, agus a thug mi a m' ionnsuidh féin sibh.*
>
> Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bear you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself.
>
> <div align="right">(Exodus, 19:4)</div>

The eagle symbol is also used in '*Òran na Comhachaig*' by Domhnall mac Fhionnlaigh nan Dàn to suggest wilderness and beauty (see McLeod and Bateman, 2007: 396-7).

The swan is also frequently referenced in classical Gaelic verse. For example, an elegy in praise of the Virgin Mary attributed to Muireadhach Albanach Ó Dálaigh and dating from the first half of the thirteenth century sees the speaker address the Virgin as '*a ghéis ghlan*' ('splendid swan') and notes her '*ucht bhán*' ('white breast') (Bergin, 1970: 93-100; see Clancy, 1998: 276-81). Gille-Brighde Albanach uses a similar metaphor in describing Cathal Crobhdherg Ó Conchobair (then king of Connacht) which likens him to '*craobh sheangmhór, / aobh na géise 'na ghealghruadh*' ('a tall slender branch, / in his bright cheek is the beauty of the swan') (Ó Cuív, 1969-70: 198).

The swan metaphor is repeated again in the song ' *'S Luaineach mo Chadal a-Nochd'* which is thought to have been composed by Eachann Mòr MacGill'Eathain around the beginning of the sixteenth century, and is believed to address his wife Mòr.

> *Mar chobhar an uisge ghlain,*   Like foam on a pure loch,
>   *Mar shlios eala ri sruth mear,*   like a swan's flank by a running
>   stream,
> *Glan leug mar an cathadh-cuir,*   a bright jewel like drifting snow,
>   *Dh'fhàs mi gun chabhair ad chean.*   I have grown helpless with lack
>   of you.
>   (McLeod and Bateman, 2007: 292-3)

The images of helplessness and loss associated with swan imagery will be discussed in relation to Alasdair mac Mhaighstir Alasdair's '*Moladh Mòraig*' in terms of the vituperative code below.

McCaughey's observation, therefore, that the poetic 'metaphor of animals' is largely in terms of 'animals which are either geographically remote or mythical' (McCaughey, 1989: 109), would appear to require a degree of revision where birds are concerned. In the depiction of typically masculine traits such as bravery in battle or skill in hunting, the above analysis has demonstrated that there is an enduring tradition of employing birds of prey, typically the hawk and eagle, as a metaphoric vehicle of praise. Equally when virtues such as piety, chastity or purity are to be conveyed, often birds with particularly arresting or conspicuous plumage, such as the swan, seagull and peacock, are employed.

MacInnes has posited that these images 'find their origin and evocative power in the network of relationships in a society in which status and function and role,

male and female, were clearly defined and yet interacted upon each other to a high degree' (MacInnes, 2006: 317). The aesthetic ideology of the panegyric code is clearly delineated by concepts of social normativity, expressing archetypal figures as symbols of the imagined ideal, however as MacInnes points out this does not constrain the individuality of expression. The 'evocative power' of Gaelic praise poetry rests largely on this conventional intertextuality, which 'confers strength, clarity and classical normality on it' (ibid.).

The Vituperative Code

Some bird metaphors can demonstrate a considerable dexterity in their ability to inform both the language of panegyric and invective. A similar code of symbols and conventional images can be identified in Gaelic satire, pointing to the fact that the animal metaphor is as much an agent of vilification as of praise.

Ronald Black has argued that the language of invective is 'a more or less systematic inversion of praise motifs' (Black, 2001: xxiii), and certainly the tropes and metaphors conventionally associated with panegyric can be manipulated to satirical effect. For example in Matheson and MacLeod's *'Moladh Chabair Féidh'*[16] the typically panegyric eagle ('*iolair*') metaphor is turned on its head by employing it as a vehicle for vituperation. The further association with domestic fowl is also interesting in this regard.

Chan eil ian sna speuran	There's not a bird in the skies
As bréine na 'n iolaire ...	More offensive than the eagle …
...An t-ian gun sonas 'g iarraidh donais, …	The wretched bird in search of evil,

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[16] The authorship of this poem is contested, see Black, 2001: 412-6.

Bidh na coin a' sabaid rithe;	All the dogs fight with her;
S breun an t-isean i air iteig,	She's a putrid chicken on the wing,
Gun fhios càit an stadadh i –	Goodness knows where she'd land –
Mas olc a lean i h-àbhaist,	If she's stuck to her bad habits,
Cha b' fheàrr far na chaidil i.	Where she slept was no better.
	(Black, 2001: 116-7)

The apparently haphazard arrangement of the eagle's eyrie appears to be the substance behind the final two lines of the above selection. It is also interesting to note that the eagle in this instance is female, as opposed to the male image often adopted in praise poetry.

Another innovative deployment of the swan ('*eala*') metaphor can be found in the poetry of Alasdair mac Mhaighstir Alasdair, as what ethno-ornithologist Steven Feld has termed a 'sound metaphor' (Feld, 1990: 33).

O guiliugag, guiliugag,	*O guiliugag, guiliugag,*
Guiliugag Mòrag!	*Guiliugag Mòrag!*
Aice ata 'chulaidh	She has the equipment
Gu cuireadh nan òighfhear.	To invite the young men.
B'e 'n t-aighear 's an sulas	What joy and delight
Bhith sìnte ri t' ulaidh	To lie stretched by your treasure
Seach daonnan bhith fuireach	Instead of always abiding
Ri munaran pòsaidh,	By the trifles of wedlock,
D'am phianadh 's d'am ruagadh	Tortured and driven
Le buaireadh na feòla	By carnal temptation,
Le aislingean connain	While libidinous dreams
Na colna d'am leònadh	Of the flesh rack me
	(Black, 2001: 126-7)

Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair's prurient descriptions of Mòrag above, '*Aice ata 'chulaidh / Gu cuireadh nan òighfhear*' ('She has the equipment / To invite the young men') presumably referring to the euphemistic allusion to her '*ulaidh*'

('treasure'),[17] are continued throughout '*Moladh Mòraig*', steadily growing more salacious in the second and third verses:

Aice ata 'chroiteag	She has the tightest
As toite san Eòrpa;	Fanny in Europe;
A ciochan geal criostail	Her white crystal breasts
Nam faiceadh tu stòit iad	Seen in their prominence
Gun tàirneadh gu beag-nàir	Would lure to immodesty
Ceann-eaglais na Ròimhe –	The Pontiff of Rome –
	(ibid.)

The traditional colours associated with love and praise poetry, and particularly with the swan metaphor, are also subverted. The whiteness of the tenor's skin, formerly denoting chastity and virtue, becomes a licentious description of her '*ciochan geal criostail*' ('white crystal breasts'); the redness of her cheek (compared to rowan berries in the examples cited earlier) becomes the '*theinne dearg sòlais*' ('red fire of rapture'), '*Mar an lasair-chlach dhathte*' ('Like the colourful fire-stone') (Black, 2001: 126-9).

In terms of sound-metaphor, however, references to the swan made later in the same poem, '*Cho min ri clòimh eala / 'S cho geal ris a' ghaillinn / Do sheang-shlios sèimh fallain*' ('As soft as swan's down / And as white as the snowdrift / Is your soft lithe wholesome body') (Black, 2001: 130-1), suggest that the vocables used in the opening stanza '*O guiliugag, guiliugag, / Guiliugag Mòrag!*' are significant from an acoustically mimetic perspective. Non-lexical imitations of the swan recorded in later sources also contain similar vocable refrains. For example a folksong imitation recorded by Alexander Carmichael begins:

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[17] Black's translation of '*ulaidh*' as 'treasure' here may be a little demure. It is also possible that the more graphic and vivid 'pack-saddle' is intended (Dwelly, 2001: s.v. *ulaidh*), a reading supported by the sustained use of pejorative and risqué language throughout this piece.

Guiliog ì! guiliog ò!	*Guiliog ì! guiliog ò!*
Guiliog ì! guiliog ò!	*Guiliog ì! guiliog ò!*
Guiliog ì! guiliog ò!	*Guiliog ì! guiliog ò!*
Guth na h-eala, guth an eòin!	Voice of the swan, voice of the bird!
	(Carmichael, 1928-71, IV: 26-7)

Similarly Alexander Forbes notes that '[v]arious "swan" songs are extant; one mournful, strangely wild and plaintive air and ditty runs:- Guileag i, guileag o, sgeul mo dhunaigh, guileag i' (Forbes, 1905: 339).[18]

The vocable '*guiliugag*' and its variants, although non-lexical in the strictest sense, may convey a latent or hidden meaning through an acoustic similarity to the word '*guil*' with connotations of weeping, crying, lamenting or mourning (Dwelly, 2001: s.v. *guil*). This interpretation would appear to marry with Forbes' 'ditty', which uses the vocable '*guileag*' (-(e)ag being a diminutive ending) to punctuate the '*sgeul mo dhunaigh*' ('story of my loss') (Forbes, 1905: 339; my own translation).[19] In terms of Alasdair mac Mhaighstir Alasdair's usage, '*O guiliugag, guiliugag, / Guiliugag Mòrag!*' (Black, 2001: 126) almost certainly refers to the speaker's longing to be free of the confines of a monogamous relationship:

'S mur bithinn fo ghlasaibh	And were I not fixed
Cruaidh-phaisgte le pòsadh	Into tight bonds of wedlock
Dh'iobrainn cridhe mo phearsain	I'd lay the heart of my person
Air an altair-se Mòraig –	On this altar of Morag –
Gun lìobhrainn gun airteal	Without sadness I'd place it
Aig stòilibh a cas e	At the stools of her feet
'S mur gabhadh i tlachd dhiom	And if it didn't please her

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[18] Various other versions of this construction are extant, including one recorded by Calum Johnson and recorded in the School of Scottish Studies Sound Archive (see Blankenhorn, 1980: 30-1).

[19] It is also possible that the vocable '*guileag*' is a pun on '*luinneag*' (a 'song' or 'ditty' with similar connections to a 'mournful song or sound') (Dwelly, 2001: s.v. *luinneag*). '*Turas mo chreiche thug mi Chola*', ostensibly a seventeenth century waulking song of uncertain authorship, uses '*luinneag*' to mean the vocalisation of the swan: '*an eala bhàn as binne luinneag*' ('the white swan of the sweetest whooping') (Ó Baoill and Bateman, 1994: 114-5).

<div align="center">

Cha b' fhad an-sin beò mi. I'd not live much longer.
(Black, 2001: 128-131).

</div>

The same mood of longing and grief is carried throughout '*Moladh Mòraig*' in words like '*murtachd*' ('sultry') (Dwelly, 2001: *murtachd*) (Black, 2001: 130), '*mulaid*' ('dejection', 'melancholy') (Dwelly, 2001: s.v. *mulad*) (Black, 2001: 132) and '*ghuin*' ('pain', 'wound') (Dwelly, 2001: s.v. *guin*) (Black, 2001: 132).

In contrast to Black's assertions, however, the inversion of praise motifs are not the only manner in which vituperation can be articulated in Gaelic verse. For instance, referring to a rumour that King James VII and II's wife has given birth to another man's child, Iain Lom compares the infant to the chick of a buzzard ('*clamhan*'), which is then described as defiling the royal 'nest'.

gun cuirte isean a' chlamhain	the buzzard's chick was put
an nead clannach an fhíréin,	in the prolific nest of the eagle,
mac muice a' bhalaich	the swineherd's young boar
shalach fala nan Rìghrean	to contaminate royal blood
	(MacKenzie, 1964: 206-7)

A number of contrasts are set up here. For instance, the buzzard, a carrion bird which does not kill its own prey, is the antithesis of the eagle often used in panegyric as a symbol of the keenness of the warrior or the puissance of the commander (see above). Similarly, the buzzard is equated with *mac muice a' bhalaich* ('the swineherd's young boar'), a metaphor which stresses the disparity between the social classes, which is held up against the 'royal blood' of the 'prolific' eagle.

The buzzard vehicle can similarly be seen in Rob Donn's '*Òran nan Casagan Dubha*' which also presents the buzzard as a contaminating influence '*Tha mi faicinn bhur truaighe / Mar nì nach cualas a shamhail, / A' chuid as feàrr de bhur seabh'gan / Bhith air slabhraidh aig clamhan.*' ('Your misery, I see, / is quite unprecedented, / when the best of your hawks / are now chained to a buzzard.') (Thomson, 1993: 114-5). This usage almost certainly relates to the proverb '*Cha deanar seobhag de 'n chlamhan*' ('You cannot make hawks of kites') (Nicolson, 1881: 95).

Fergusson attempts to explain the Gaelic vilification of the buzzard, which he calls 'a very lazy, cowardly bird' who 'as he is a carrion-eating hawk' will 'devour all sorts of rubbish' (Fergusson, 1884-5: 258-9). Fergusson also adds that one of the Gaelic names for the buzzard is '*bleidir*', which can also mean a 'beggar' or a 'coward' (Dwelly, 2001, s.v. *bleidir*), strengthening the connotations of this bird with the image of the social pariah.

Metaphors which use the raven ('*fitheach*') or crow ('*feannag*') act in a similar way to the buzzard, as evinced by a number of anti-shepherding songs which began to appear towards the end of the eighteenth century. Ailean Dall MacDougall's '*Òran do na Cìobairibh Gallda*' is an attack on lowland shepherding for displacing traditional Gaelic customs. The lowlander's 'zeal for buying and selling lambs, and polluting the environment with their filthy habits of smearing sheep with tar and castrating lambs with their teeth' (Meek, 2003: 403) are probably what John MacLachlan has in mind in '*Och! Och! Mar tha mi*' when he states: '*Chan fhaic mi 'n-diugh ann ach cìobair stiallach, / 'S gur duibhe mheuran na*

sgìath na ròcais.' ('I see nothing there today but an unkempt shepherd, / and his fingers blacker than the crow's wing') (H. C. Gillies, 1880: 34; my own translation).

Alasdair mac Mhaighstir Alasdair uses the raven metaphor to great effect in a number of his satirical verses. For example the iconic '*Òran nam Fineachan Gàidhealach'* uses the image of carrion birds feeding from corpses in order to build an emotive description of the battlefield after hostilities have ceased.

'S mór a bhios ri corp-rùsgadh	Many will be the spoilers
Nan closaichean 'sa bhlàr,	Of corpses on the field,
Fithich ann, a' rocadaich,	Ravens cawing,
Ag itealaich, 's a' cnocaireachd,	Fluttering and loitering,
Cìocras air na cosgarraich	Kites ravenous
Ag òl 's ag ith' an sàth;	To drink and eat their fill;

(MacDonald, 1924: 84; my own translation)

There is an ambiguity over whether ravens and buzzards are literally meant in this description, or if the '*corp-rùsgadh'* ('spoilers') refer to people. The close end-rhyme on the third, fourth and fifth lines of the above selection also gives the impression of an unfolding catalogue of atrocities. A similar sentiment is expressed by mac Mhaighstir Alasdair in reference to King George: '*'S e chàirdeas ruinn 's a dhàimh / Gaol fithich air a chnàimh;'* ('The care and kin he shows / Us, is a raven's for his bone;') (J. L. Campbell, 1984: 100-1).

Domestic fowl are also quite frequently exploited in Alasdair mac Mhaighstir Alasdair's Jacobite poetry to symbolise the enemy as an object of ridicule '*'S ann a mhaoim sibh mar chearcan, / a tàrsainn as bho 'n Fhear ruadh.'* ('When you upon the Fair One's approach / Fled like hens in your headlong flight') (MacDonald, 1924: 322). A similar imagery is employed by him in '*Brosnachadh Eile do na*

Gaidheil' to convey the indignity of Highlanders who, post-1746, must wear Lowland dress:

Gun lomar mar ghiadh sinn	Like a goose in the kitchen
A spìonar 'sa chitsinn,	We'll be plucked till we're naked,
'S gun sparrar oirnn briogais mar	And trousers be thrust on us
mhùtan;	for clothing;
Gach aodach is tartan,	Our dress and our tartan
Gum feannar sinn asda,	Will both be stripped from us,
'S gun sparrar oirnn casag gu	And black coats forced on us
bùirt oirnn.	to mock us.
	(J. L. Campbell, 1984: 140-1)

The stark image of the goose ('*géadh*') plucked in the kitchen is an austerely emotive, almost emasculating illustration of the proscription of regional dress. The use of inflammatory language such as '*sparrar*' ('thrust', 'forced') (ibid.) and '*bùirt*' ('mock') are a further incitement to political and military resistance as eponymously suggested. Mairearad nighean Lachlainn duplicates this simile in reference to the MacLeans: '*Clann Ghille-Eoin air an dìobradh / iad gun iteach gun lìnnidh / ach mar gheòidh air an spìonadh*' ('Clan Maclean are outcast / without feathers without young[20] / but they are like plucked geese') (Watson, 1932: 137; my own translation).

Finally, the passerine song bird family, more commonly imitated benignly in children's rhymes, can also serve as a vehicle of invective metaphor. In this regard, Donald Black has noted that on the island of Lismore the phrase '*Cho faoin ris na h-eòin*' ('As daft as the birds') (MacIlleDhuibh, 2006: 197-9) has become a customary aphorism referring to a person engaging in childish or immature

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[20] '*lìnnidh*' conveys more of a sense of a brood or clutch of young chickens. (Dwelly, 2001, s.v. *lìnnidh*).

behaviour. An analogous use of the passerine metaphor can be found in Mac a'

Phearsain's '*Òran do Ghlaschu*', in which the lapwing ('*adharcan-luachrach*') is

used to represent the flamboyant ostentation of 'city women' (see *SCRE*, 1964: 13

for an imitation of the lapwing intended as a mimetic nursery rhyme).

Chì mi cail' a' chinn ghuanaich	I see the light-headed lassie
Le falt-ceannaich a fhuair i an-dè,	with a wig which she bought yesterday,
'S a' bhonaid thall cùl a cluasan,	her bonnet perched at the back of her ears,
Mar tha air adharcan-luachrach an t-slèibh;	like the lapwing of the upland plain;
Ged as stiùireanach, caol-chasach,	though she's trim-tailed and slim-legged,
Astarach, aotrom a ceum,	with a step that's swift-moving and light,
Cha bhiodh a pògan ach searbh leam,	I would regard her kisses as bitter,
'S fiaclan tilgte dhaoin' marbh ann a beul.	with the cast teeth of the dead in her bite.
	*(*Meek, 2003: 106-7)

Here, the physical attributes of the '*cail' a' chinn ghuanaich*' ('light-headed lassie')

are enumerated in terms of bird symbolism: she is '*stiùireanach*' ('trim-tailed') and

'*caol-chasach*' ('slim-legged'), and her movements are '*[a]starach, aotrom*' ('swift,

light'). The physical similarity with the lapwing comes from the description of the

subject's wig and hat, which are '*thall cùl a cluasan*' ('perched at the back of her

ears'), which, to the speaker, is reminiscent of the bird's crest feathers.

The perceived finery and ornament of the Glasgow women and the drunken

behaviour depicted in the same verse are contrasted against the Gaelic islanders in

the closing stanza: '*'S nan deànadh Gàidheil an tùrn ud, / Bhiodh ian ainmeil nan*

dùthaich na dhèidh’ (‘if Gaels behaved in like manner, / they would gain, in *their* country, great fame’) (ibid.).

Invective of this kind can be related to proverbial material drawn from a wider social experience. An instance of this is quoted by McCaughey, who writes that

> the tendency to flatter attributed to the Campbells is indicated by use of a bird-reference, thus: “*Is ionann sud ’s do shliochd Dhiarmaid, ged bu bhialchar na guib ac*” “The case of Diarmaid’s descendants is just the same as theirs, through their beaks are full of flattery” (McCaughey, 1989: 111).

The perceived conceit of the passerine birds is also recorded by Nicolson. For instance the mimetic aphorism ‘*Is bigid e sid, is bigid e sid, mar a thuirt an dreathan, an uair a thug e làn a ghuib as a’ mhuir*’ (‘’Tis the less for that, the less for that, as the wren said, when he sipped a bill-full out of the sea’) (Nicolson, 1881: 218) contrasts the size of the wren (‘*dreathan-donn*’) (one of the smallest birds) with the vastness of the sea in order to create a comic dichotomy which reveals the fallacy of arrogance and pride. Another take on this saying is also recorded by Nicolson: ‘*Is mòid i sid, mu’n dubhairt an dreaghan-dónn, ’n uair a rinn e dhileag ’s a’ mhuir mhóir*’ (‘It’s the bigger of that, as the wren said when he added a drop to the sea’) (Nicolson, 1881: 281). In this latter example, the disparity is made more explicit: the ‘*dileag*’ (‘drop, small quantity of water’) (Dwelly, 2001: s.v. *dileag*) is compared to the ‘[*m*]*uir mhóir*’ (‘great sea’).

As with the panegyric code, the imagery and tropes associated with satirical verse in Gaelic can be related to older Gaelic material from the Medieval period and before, ultimately resting on analogous depictions of many of the vituperative birds

in the Bible. For instance raven imagery is used to great effect in a fragment of bardic poetry found in an eighteenth-century English language manuscript collection of Walter Macfarlane of Arrochar. Although the written evidence dates to within the modern period, McLeod and Bateman have speculated that this piece 'may be no later than the second half of the seventeenth century, but … may equally be much older' (McLeod and Bateman, 2007: 163).

Clann Ghille Eòin na mbratach badhbha	Clann Ghill'Eathain of the crow-marked banners,
borb ri a mbiodhbhaidh	savage to their foemen,
's mairg don tsluagh ar feadh na Fódhla	woe to the host throughout Ireland
'gan dáil diomdha.	who meet with their displeasure.
	(McLeod and Bateman, 2007: 162-3)

The raven banner is similarly used in Artúr Dall Mac Gurcaigh's '*Dál Chabhlaigh ar Chaistéal Suibhne*' to symbolise savagery, vengeance and mercilessness: '*badhbh Shuibhne is a threóir toghtha, / duille shróill chorcra ós gach crann*' ('Suibhne's raven, with its power enabled, / a red satin pennant on every mast') (McLeod and Bateman, 2007: 222-3; see Clancy, 1998: 242 for another occurrence of the raven image in this regard).

The passerine birds also share a long history in vituperative composition, as evinced by Niall Mòr MacMhuirich's '*Èatroman Muice a Hó*', a bawdy satire of *piobaireachd*.

Pìob sgreadain Iain MhicArtair	Iain MacArtair's shrieking pipes
Mar eun curra air dol air n-ais	are like a peewit flying backwards,
Làn ronn 's i labhair luirgneach,	full of spittle, loud and lanky,
Com galair mar ghuilbnich ghlais.	a diseased belly like a grizzled curlew.
	(McLeod and Bateman, 2007: 280-1)

The 'shrieking' of the peewit ('*curracag*') and the 'loud' calls of the curlew ('*guilbneach*')'full of spittle' are reminiscent of the 'long bubbling trills' to 'plaintive whistles' (Sample, 1996: 60) which modern ornithologists have noted in relation to their calls. The songbirds also have strong associations with *piobaireachd* in more modern compositions (see chapter one for an expansion of this theme).

Many of the birds metaphorised by the vituperative code are found to have comparably pejorative representations in the Bible. For instance, the raven, crow, lapwing and buzzard are all described as an 'abomination among the fowls' in the Book of Leviticus (11:14-20). Similarly the raven in the Book of Genesis (8:6-9) has become proverbial in Gaelic oral culture in the term 'raven messenger', as applied to one who is 'sent on a message, who is slow in returning, or does not return at all' (Forbes, 1905: 325).

Miranda Green has speculated that this antipathy may be attributed to a 'perceived chthonic symbolism' in which the corvids' 'black plumage and their habit of feeding off dead things' (Green, 1992: 126) qualifies them as apposite signifiers of the uncanny and otherworldly (see chapter three for a discussion of this feature in relation to traditional Gaelic storytelling). This would also agree with early representations of the blackbird ('*lòn dubh*') in Gaelic poetry, which is often related to mourning, grief and loss (see McLeod and Bateman, 2007: 186-7). An instance of the bird metaphor in a St. Kildan folksong (ostensibly a lament) which makes a similar comparison is given as an appendix to this study (see appendix one).

With these correspondences in mind, the assertion that the language of invective can be considered 'a more or less systematic inversion of praise motifs' (Black, 2001: xxiii) appears to be somewhat inequitable. The mutability of many panegyric metaphors for the purposes of vituperation would tend to support this argument; however the use of additional metaphors using largely carrion birds, domestic fowl and passerine song birds suggests instead that invective has its own syntax and tropic conventions which allow for the subversion of motifs drawn from other genres. Perhaps, then, is would be pertinent to pursue McCaughey's argument in which 'the language of *moladh* and of *díomoladh*' can be said to 'presuppose one another' (1989: 109), thus acknowledging an intertextual dialogue between the panegyric and vituperative modes.

Unfortunately a more comprehensive examination of the various features and structures which characterise the vituperative code in Gaelic is beyond the scope of this present research, however it is hoped that the above analysis of kennings in this regard has illustrated the importance and merit or such an analysis.

Conclusions

The use of kennings in traditional Gaelic verse forms can be related to a wider social phenomenon of '*far-ainmean*' ('nicknames') (Dwelly, 2001: s.v. *far* and *ainm*) in which metaphor becomes metonymy. Examples of this can be found in a number of sources, including an example cited by Martin Martin in relation to his visit to Skye. Martin relates that an infant 'left by his mother in the field, not far from the houses on the north side of Loch Portree' was carried away by an eagle to the south side of the loch. Bystanders,

on hearing the infant cry, ran immediately to its rescue, and by good providence found him untouched by the eagle, and carried him home to his mother. He is still living in that parish, and by reason of this accident, is distinguished among his neighbours by the surname of Eagle. (Martin, [1703] 1994: 320).

In contrast to this, Buxton has noted an instance of metonymy in which an inhabitant of Mingulay received the cognomen '*an Sgarbh*' ('the cormorant') (Buxton, 1995: 96), suggesting that the use of '*far-ainmean*' may mirror the use of the bird metaphor in terms of panegyric and invective conventions. As this research is restricted to occurrences of avifaunal mimesis as a form of artistic expression, however, a more complete analysis of this social phenomenon is unfortunately outwith the scope of this present inquiry (see Friseal, 1974-6: 87-96 for more discussion on the phenomenon of '*far-ainmean*' generally).

In summation of his inventory and analysis of Gaelic panegyric conventions, MacInnes infers that the code of symbols used in expression of praise and dispraise can be said to reflect an 'attitude to the world … it bears the Gaelic sense of social psychology, of history, of geography' (MacInnes, 2006: 266). The persistence of certain kinds of metaphors in implication of particular traits demonstrates this: the eagle ('*iolair*') and the hawk ('*seabhag*') represent the hunter, the provider, the commander, qualities which were greatly esteemed as maintaining social order, with 'the group of warrior-hunters at the top' (MacInnes, 2006: 265; see Knott, 1960: 63-5 for a discussion of kennings in the poetry of Tadhg Dall and the classical Irish tradition generally). Conversely the imagery associated with the carrion birds represent the very antithesis of this ideal.

As literary theorist David Punter points out, metaphor is 'inextricably involved with linguistic and cultural choices, hierarchies' which invite the reader or listener 'into a pre-established framework of correspondences' (Punter, 2007: 57-8, 28). In this regard, an analysis of the use of kennings in the codified language of Gaelic poetic expression can be further interrogated as an important window into the social perceptions and historical continuities of Gaelic oral culture more generally.

Chapter Three

Bird Imitation in Gaelic Oral Narratives & Literature

The Gaelic folktale is primarily an oral performance; as Mallan has argued 'both teller and listener create the story … The storyteller's face, voice, body and personality help to convey meaning and mood.' (Mallan, 1991: 5). The orality of the folktale is of particular relevance for mimesis, where vocal tone and inflection often conveys the imitation. In an insight into one of his informants, Janet Campbell (a nurse from Lochskiport, South Uist), Alexander Carmichael notes:

> The reciter had many beautiful songs and lullabies of the nursery,
> and many instructive sayings and fables of the animal world. These
> she sang and told in the most pleasing and natural manner, to the
> delight of her listeners. Birds and beasts, reptiles and insects, whales
> and fishes talked and acted through her in the most amusing manner,
> and in the most idiomatic Gaelic. (Carmichael, 1928-71, I: 60-1)

As with Mallan, Carmichael's description gives equal stress to speech and action: 'Birds and beasts … talked and acted through her'.

The deliberate manipulation of vocal tone or inflection in imitation of birds' cries reflects both the anthropomorphosis of birds in terms of the folktale's narrative and the theriomorphosis of the narrator in terms of its performance. In this way the imitation of human characteristics and abilities by non-human entities habitualises the unfamiliar or the fantastical, functioning as an empathic aid for the tale's readers or listeners; whilst at the same time the theriomorphosis of the narrator maintains a certain narrative distance crucial in perpetuating the artifice of the tale.

John Francis Campbell recognises the use of the mimetic voice in his introductory analysis to *Popular Tales of the West Highlands*, highlighting the use of onomatopoeic language as an aid to mimesis.

> In the prose tales, when animals speak, they talk in their natural key …
> The little birds speak in the key of all little birds (ee); they say, "beeg, beeg." The crow croaks his own music when he says, "gawrag, gawrag." When driven to say, "silly, silly," he no longer speaks the language of nature. (J. F. Campbell, 1860-2, I : lxvi-lxvii)

Campbell appears to be making a point regarding translation here: the Gaelic '*gòrach*' ('silly' or 'foolish') (Dwelly, 2001: s.v. *gòrach*) is acoustically similar to the onomatopoeic '*gròc*' ('to croak') (Dwelly, 2001: s.v. *gròc*) often used with anaptyxis in reference to the vocalisations of the corvids. The subsequent loss of orality in published collections of folktales highlights the difficulty in re-accessing their paralinguistic dimension, or those attributes ancillary to the 'text' of the story but which nevertheless have a bearing on the mode of performance or delivery of the tale. This deficiency will be addressed more fully in the analysis to follow.

In addition to investigating the mimetic voice in Gaelic oral records, this chapter will also address the connection between birds and the supernatural in many tales. This is particularly evident in '*Cànain nan Eun*' ('the Language of the Birds'), transcribed by Hector MacLean from the recitation of Janet Currie, South Uist, on the 12th of September 1860. In this tale, a prophecy uttered by a chaffinch functions as a semi-Oedipal plot device which causes the king to banish his son and instruct him to be drowned; an event which drives the remainder of the narrative.

In a number of instances the supernatural powers of birds may be unlocked when consumed. For example in '*Cànain nan Eun*' the protagonist Alasdair is sent by his father to learn the language of the birds. After three years of learning in order to attain '*ionnsachadh os cionn feadhnach eile*' ('an education better than others had') (MacKay, 1931: 160-1), Alasdair returns to their island for a final time '*a's bha e 'gan itheadh a's 'gam marbhadh*' ('and he began killing and eating them') (MacKay, 1931: 162-3) in order to absorb the birds' preternatural powers. A number of other tales reflect the belief that aviophagy confers supernatural talents or abilities and will be addressed in greater detail below.

In investigating the above two consanguineous types of source material will be utilised: the oral and the literary. Material classed under the former will be drawn from the extensive audio archives preserved by the School of Scottish Studies Sound Archive housed at Edinburgh University; the latter from largely published records of oral dictation.

The oral literature debate promulgated by Walter Ong (1982) is of particular relevance when dealing with these latter textual records of oral performance. Ong has argued that the term 'oral literature' is etymologically inappropriate when dealing with tralatitious materials, and is based on the 'relentless dominance of textuality in the scholarly mind' (Ong, 1982: 10); adding that although words are grounded in oral speech,

> writing tyrannically locks them into a visual field forever … a literate person cannot fully recover a sense of what the word is to purely oral people. In view of this pre-emptiveness of literacy, it appears quite impossible to use the term "literature" to include oral tradition and

performance without subtly but irremediably reducing these somehow to variants of writing. (Ong, 1982: 12)

As a synthesis of orality and literacy, however, published records of oral performance may properly lay claim to the term in the sense that they are literary versions of oral material. This distinction highlights the polarity between what, for the purposes of this analysis, will be termed 'oral literature' (or written records of oral tales) and the performance of 'oral narratives' (or audio recordings of oral recitations).[21]

Anthropomorphosis and Metamorphosis

Before proceeding with a discussion on the paralinguistics of traditional Gaelic storytelling, it is first necessary to contextualise the use of the mimetic voice in terms of the characters this technique portrays.   Anthropomorphosis, or the attribution of human abilities and characteristics to non-human entities, is a well established fallacy in Gaelic oral narratives and literature. With reference to birds, this is often accomplished by the assumption of human speech; for example in '*An Dreathan Donn*' ('The Wren'), recorded from the dictation of Alasdair Stewart of Lairg by Hamish Henderson, the eponymous wren is able to speak both to different species of animals (such as the sheep and the fox) and to humans (*SSS*

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[21] Ong's argument that the word 'literature' is etymologically inappropriate (*literae* refers to 'the realm of letters', and therefore to writing) is countered by the use of 'narrative', from the Latin verb *narrare* ('to tell'), which refers principally to 'the *action* of relating or recounting' (*OED*: s.v. literature & narration; emphasis added).

*SA*1957.40).[22]   The tale begins with the wren pleading with a sheep '*nach leigeadh tu staigh na do chlòimh mi gu madainn*' ('will you not let me into your wool until morning') (*SSS SA*1957.40; my own translation); to which the sheep answers '*trobhad a bhròinein*' ('come you poor thing') (ibid.; my own translation).   Later in the tale, the wren speaks to a farmer '*dh'innis e facal air an fhacal dha gun deach a' chaorag a mharbhadh*' ('he told him word for word how the sheep had been murdered') and in exchange for information on the perpetrator the wren offers '*bheir mi dhuit ... casg fìon thàinig a staigh air a' chladach*' ('I will give you … a cask of wine that came ashore') (ibid.; my own translation).

Another form of anthropomorphosis is realised by means of mimicry of human action.   In a version of the tale '*Cath nan Eun*' ('the Battle of the Birds') published only in translation, the wren is not only able to communicate with humans, but is also able to perform human tasks.

> There was once a farmer who was seeking a servant, and the wren met him, and he said, "What art thou seeking for?" "I am seeking a servant," said the farmer. "Wilt thou take me?" said the wren. "Thee, thou poor creature; what good wouldst thou do?" "Try thou me," said the wren. So he engaged him, and the first work he set him to was threshing in the barn. The wren threshed (what did he thresh with? - a flail to be sure), and he knocked off one grain. (J. F. Campbell, 1860-2, I : 48)

The absurdity of the imagery employed here succeeds in contrasting the diminutive stature of the wren (one of the smallest birds) with the human sized flail, which is further compounded by the explanation in parentheses.   Although the function here

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[22] My transcription of this tale differs from Donald A. MacDonald's (1971-2: 108-16). For example in the quotations given I have '*gu madainn*' instead of '*go ma duinn*' and '*nach leigeadh*' instead of '*nach ligeadh*'.

is clearly amusement, this form of mimesis is indicative of an anthropomorphic understanding which accepts that the rational boundaries between human and animal are less relevant in the reality of the folktale (Muhawi & Kanaana, 1989: 6). Later in the same story a raven ('*fitheach*') 'takes out a book, and gives it to his companion with a warning not to open it till he gets home to his father's house' (J. F. Campbell, 1860-2, I : 49); an unrealistic action which nevertheless is accepted as a subliminal reference to the raven's perceived association with precognitive abilities (see the discussion of birds and the uncanny later in this chapter).

The same fallacy can be observed in a fable collected by John Francis Campbell intended to illustrate the resourcefulness and prudence of the fox. Spotting a family of wrens 'threshing in a barn', the fox conceives of a plan in order to attack the group without causing them to take flight.

> "It is no use to kill one son," he [the fox] said to himself, "because the old cock will take warning and fly away with the seventeen. I wish I knew which is the old gentleman." 23
> He set his wits to work to find out, and one day seeing them all threshing in a barn, he sat down to watch them; still he could not be sure.
> "Now I have it," he said; "well done the old man's stroke! He hits true," he cried.
> "Oh!" replied the one he suspected of being the head of the family, "If you had seen my grandfather's strokes, you might have said that."
> The sly fox pounced on the cock, ate him up in a trice, and then soon caught and disposed of the eighteen sons, all flying in terror about the barn. (J. F. Campbell, 1860-2, I : 271)

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23 According to Carmichael, the St. Kildans called the wren '*an duin uasal ...* because he comes out so rarely and looks so smartly dressed', adding that 'they take his appearance as an indication of a good day' (*EUL CW* MS131a.459). In a version of this tale recorded by John Gregorson Campbell the fox says '*'S fhurasda buille an t-sean laoich aithneachadh*' ('It is easy to distinguish the stroke of the old hero himself') (J. G. Campbell, 1895: 120) losing the correlation with St. Kildan tradition.

To this tale, Campbell adds as a postscript 'there is something like it in the Battle of the Birds, where the wren is a farmer threshing in a barn' (ibid.), however this comedic image of a wren or family of wrens threshing grain appears to be the only parallel.[24]

Another tale in Campbell's collection (transcribed by Hector Boyd who learned it from Donald McKinnon of Laidhinnis, Barra) tells the story of a woman who gives birth to a hen ('*cearc*'). As the hen grows older, it 'used to be going to the king's house every day to try if she could get something that she might give to her mother'. After being spotted by the king, the hen challenges the king's wives to an unusual contest.

> *"Leumaidh mi o sparr gu sparr, 's an clobha, 's buthal na poite, slaodadh rium."*
>
> *Dh' fhalbh e staigh 's dh' innis e siud do'n bhanruinn. Chaidh 'fheuchainn ris a' chirc 's rinn i e. Cheangail iad am buthal san clobha rithe, 's leum i thar tri sparrannan, 's thainig i air làr. Cheangail iad am buthal san clobha ris a bhanruinn an sin, 's dh' fhalbh i 's thug i leum aisde, 's ghearr i faobhar an da lurga aice, 's thuit i, 's chaidh an t-ionachainn asde. Bha ceithir banruinnean aige 's chuir a' chearc as doibh, air fad, leis an obair seo.*

> "I [the hen] can spring from spar to spar, with the tongs and the hook for hanging the pot trailing after me."
> He [the king] went in and he told that to the queen. The hen was tried, and she did it; they tied the pot-hook and the tongs to her, and she sprang over three spars (rafters), and she came down on the ground. Then they tied the pot-hook and the tongs to the queen, and she went and she took a spring out of herself, and she cut the edge of her two shanks, and she fell, and the brain went out of her. He had four queens, and the hen put them all out with this work.
> (J. F. Campbell, 1860-2, III: 103 & 94-5)

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[24] The anthropomorphosis of the wren in this tale is interesting when considered along with the theriomorphic appellation '*dreathan donn*' ('wren') (Dwelly, 2001: s.v. *dreathan donn*) 'as applied to human beings' which is understood to mean 'a weakly, imbecile, trifling person, in whatever he takes in hand to do.' (J. G. Campbell, 1895: 122).

Again, the peculiarity of this segment of narrative is reinforced by means of a series of contrasts: avian against human, the ridiculous against violence, royalty against the impoverished and so on. Later in the tale, however, it is revealed that the hen is a woman disguised by a '*cochall*' ('husk', 'mantle' or 'skin', Dwelly, 2001: s.v. *cochull*) which the king's son removes. The woman is forced to remain as such reasoning 'if I get another cochall they will think that I am a witch' (J. F. Campbell, 1860-2, III: 95; see Bourke, 1999: 50-1 for a discussion on the '*Cailleach na gCearc*' ('Henwife') in Irish oral storytelling traditions).

In this instance the concept of metamorphosis is introduced: the hen's '*cochall*' successfully masks her humanity from infancy.[25] A number of similar examples are also extant. For instance, one tale entitled '*Sgoil nan Eun*' ('the School of the Birds') recorded by John Francis Campbell from the dictation of John Brown (no date or location are given) and published in the *Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness* depicts a fuller's son who is able to change himself into various creatures, including birds. In the form of an angel fish ('*mannach beag*'), the fuller's son is able to evade his captors by means of a series of transformations.

> *Fhuair am Manach e fhein a thiormachadh air cloich anns an lon, 's leum e na sheobhag do na speuran; san sud a mach da sheobhag dheug as a dheigh. 'S cha d' rug iad air. Cam gach rathad do 'n t-seobhag ach a dol os cionn tigh an righ; 's bha iongantas fuasach air a h-uil' aon riamh a dha dheug do sheobhagan a bhi a ruith na h-aoin.*

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[25] The '*cochall*' of this tale is reminiscent of similar tales in which seals are thought to be able to take their skins off and transform into human women. An example of this can be found in the tale '*Bean Mhic Odrum*' (MacCodrum's Wife') recorded from Donald MacDougall, North Uist, in 1968 (MacDonald, 1971-2: 258-9; cf. *SSS SA*1968.212-B1 and Bruford, 1994: 365; for more on this tale type generally, see Earls, 1992-3: 131).

> The angel fish (*mannach*) got itself dried on a stone in the pool, and it flew as a hawk up in the air. Out at once went twelve other hawks after it, but they did not overtake it. Crooked was every way for the hawk but above the king's house. Every one wondered to see twelve hawks chasing one hawk.
>
> (J. F. Campbell, 1890-1: 67)

In this instance, the transformations of the fuller's son acts as a metaphor for the escapism provided by the act of storytelling itself, offering an alternative to the unavoidable imperatives of society and normativity. In '*Sgoil nan Eun*', the chase scene concludes with the fuller's son transforming into a grain of malt and his pursuers transforming into twelve cockerels ('*coilich*'). Resuming his own shape first, the fuller's son is then able to kill the cockerels, and subsequently marry the king's daughter.

Another avimorphic tale recorded by John Francis Campbell occurs as a variant of '*Righ Og Easaidh Ruagh*' ('The Young King of Easaidh Ruadh') transcribed by Hector Urquhart from the dictation of John Campbell of Strath Gairloch in 1859. Recorded in bilingual note form, this tale relates the story of a widow's son who, in pursuit of his sweetheart, rests at a house thatched with bird's feathers.

> He went in and found no man, but two great fires on the fire-place (CHAGAILT) on the floor. SUIL DA DUG E, glance that he gave he saw a falcon coming in with a heath hen in her claws, and the next glance it was, GILLE BRIAGH BUIDH, a braw yellow lad, who spoke as in the Islay version, entertained him and told him in the morning to call on SEABHAG SUIL GHORM GHLENNA FEIST – the blue-eyed falcon of Glen Feist. (J. F. Campbell, 1860-2, I : 19).

It is perhaps significant that the above notation refers to the falcon using the feminine pronoun before transforming into a 'braw yellow lad' (ibid.). Although it is possible that this observation merely reflects the fact that '*seabhag*' is grammatically female (Dwelly, 2001: s.v. *seabhag*), it is not unreasonable to surmise that a shift in gender is intended to be concomitant with the shift from bird to human. This latter reading is supported by the description of the falcon carrying 'a heath hen in her claws', which is reminiscent of the image of a mother bird returning to the nest to feed her young (for a discussion of sex-shifting in Gaelic folktales see MacKay, 1925: 172-3).

Bird transformation is not an uncommon device in the Gaelic folktale tradition: of the one-hundred and sixty-three tales and their variants published in John Francis Campbell's *Popular Tales of the West Highlands*, thirty-four include instances of animal metamorphosis,[26] of which exactly half are avimorphic.[27] Many of the tales which employ these devices preface their account with a superficial explanation of their more fantastical elements. For example Neil MacLellan's tale '*An Gadaiche Dubh*' ('the Black Thief') is preceded by an apologia which attempts to disguise fantasy as history.

> *an naidheachd a tha mise dol a dh'innse, thachair i bho chionn iomadh bliadhna. Thachair i nuair a bhruidhneadh na cearcan agus na coilich agus a dh'innseadh a' chòmhchag sgeulachd, agus cha b'ann an dé a bha sin.*

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[26] Specifically tales no. 1(var.2), 2, 2(var.2), 2(var.4), 2(var.6), 2(var.7), 2(var.8), 3, 3(var.2), 4(var.2), 4(var.4), 7(var.5), 10(var.1), 10(var.3), 10(var.4), 12, 28(var.5), 30(var.4), 30(var.9), 30(var.10), 33, 38, 41, 41(var.2), 41(var.3), 42, 44, 46, 51, 52, 58, 64, 84 and 86.

[27] These are tales no. 1(var.2), 2, 2(var.2), 2(var.4), 2(var.7), 2(var.8), 3, 3(var.2), 4(var.2), 4(var.4), 10(var.3), 30(var.4), 38, 51, 52, 58 and 64.

the story that I'm about to relate happened many years ago.   It happened when the roosters and the hens could talk and the owl told tales, and that was hardly yesterday.

(J. Shaw, 2000: 306-7)

Similarly Calum Johnson introduces his tale 'The Fox and the Wolf and the Butter' with the formulaic 'Long, long ago, when all creatures spoke Gaelic …' (Bruford, 1994: 41; cf. *SSS SA*1965.10-B4).[28]

In many instances, the pseudo-historical period when animals could speak is considered to have been a golden age akin to the pre-fall state of bliss described in the Book of Genesis (Goodrich-Freer, 1903: 232). There are a number of biblical references to talking animals, for example in the Book of Numbers the prophet Balaam speaks to a donkey who pleads with him to stop beating it (Numbers 22: 28-30). Perhaps more famously the serpent in the garden of Eden speaks to Eve, enticing her to eat the forbidden fruit (Genesis 3: 1-5). There is also an interesting reference to King Solomon having learned the language of the birds in the Qu'ran (27:16), however there is no evidence to suggest that this would have been available to, or known by, Gaelic speakers before the twentieth century.

The inability of humans to understand the language of animals in the modern period can also be explained by recourse to Biblical accounts, both in terms of mankind's fall from grace, and by presenting a parallel to the fall of the tower of Babel (Genesis 11:9). This apparent congruence with Biblical times (also reflected in the later hagiographies of Celtic saints, particularly the voyage of Saint Brendan in which he lands on the island of the birds and is able to speak bird language) lends

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[28] A variant of the 'King of the Birds' folktale recorded by Alexander Carmichael begins 'When all the birds of the air spoke (Gaelic of course) they met in council to elect a king' (*EUL CW* MS131a.448). Unfortunately no information on the name, date or location of the informant is given.

an authority of age to the narrative, reinforced by the narrator's assurances in the preface to the tale.

In addition to Biblical intertextuality, many anthropomorphic and metamorphic bird tales may also share some commonality with Old and Middle Irish sagas (as well as Welsh material from a similar period) in which many characters 'could take on the form of birds' (Ó hÓgain, 1990: 35). A full analysis of the various intertextual points of contact suggested here would repay further scrutiny, but is unfortunately beyond the scope of this present analysis.

Theriomorphosis, or the Mimetic Voice

One difficulty in dealing with largely textual source material is the loss of paralanguage, i.e. the non-verbal elements of communication such as intonation, voice quality and pitch (Hill, 1958: 408-9). Mallan suggests that 'the storyteller connects more directly with the audience through eyes, gesture, voice and proximity' (Mallan, 1991: 6); qualities which are not easily conveyed in written records. A number of imitations recorded by Alan Lomax from Annie Johnson and Kate MacLeod illustrate the importance of recording a tale's paralinguistic dimension, particularly where mimesis is concerned.

> The black-backed gull and the ordinary gull, the common gull, are out on the hills. And the black-backed gull has come from foreign lands, and he asks the other gull that's up on the hills: 'what's doing, what's the food, what's the food here among the hills?' And the other one answers:
>
> *dubh-bhlian*
> only the bare flank, the black ... you know, the diaphragm, that's all.

And the other one says, the black backed gull says

is math ann e
that's good enough he says, that's good enough.

The mimetic dialogue above is quoted in Gaelic: '*dubh-bhlian*' (the 'black flank' or 'flesh') attributed to the common gull ('*faoileag*'); and '*is math ann e*' ('that's good enough') attributed to the black-backed gull ('*faoileag a' chinn-dhuibh*'). Both phrases are articulated with a nasal inflection intended to emulate the gulls' cries, whereas the earlier dialogue is recounted only in English medium and voiced in the speaker's normal vocal register without any mimetic intonation.

Another tale fragment recorded by Alan Lomax from the dictation of Kate MacLeod representing a conversation between a hooded crow ('*feannag-ghlas*') and a crab reinforces the point that animal dialogue in Gaelic fables and folktales needn't always be inflected mimetically.

'*Thig a' mach,*' *ars an fheannag, 'gun cumainn còta dhut.*'
'*Gu dè an còt?*' *ars am partan.*
'*Còta-dearg, còta-dearg,*' *ars an fheannag.*

'Come out,' says the crow to the *partan,* ''till I shape a coat for you.'
'What kind of a coat?'
'Red coat, red coat (*còta dearg*)' says the crow.

You see, the inner coat next to the shell of a crab or a *partan* is called the 'red coat' in Gaelic you speak about the *còta dearg*, you speak about the *còta dearg*, it lies next to the shell. And when the crow breaks the shell you see the *còta dearg* is underneath. The crow breaks it you see . . . to feed, to get a feed.

From the recording, it is clear that only the phrase '*còta-dearg*' spoken by the hooded crow is intended to be mimetic (also reflected by the use of repetition, a common feature of imitative children's rhymes discussed in chapter one). The crow's earlier dialogue '*Thig a' mach … gun cumainn còta dhut*', and the crab's response '*Gu dè an còt?*' are both articulated conversationally as reported speech; whereas the mimetic phrase '*còta dearg*' is enunciated with a more guttural phonation impersonating the hoarse ventricular voice of the hooded crow.

The sound segments used to represent the black-backed gull, common gull and hooded crow above also conform to the analysis of phonaesthesia proposed in the first chapter of this investigation in relation to mimetic children's rhymes. The nasal modulation adopted by Johnson in enunciation of the gull imitations compliments the use of predominantly low frequency broad vowels /a/ and /o/ in suggesting an impression of size. Similarly the use of the plosive consonants /k/, /t/, /g/ and palatalised /d′/ in imitation of the hooded crow help to simulate an occlusal phonation in order to convey an acoustic impersonation of discordant croaking.[29]

Many of the sources for traditional Gaelic storytelling are recorded solely in literary format however, largely recorded between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Despite this loss of orality, using the above audio recordings as a guide it is occasionally possible to detect a number of paralinguistic indicia which can offer some insight into the performance aspect of traditional storytelling techniques.

[29] It is not clear from the above examples whether these imitations are excerpted from longer tales, or if the explicatory prefaces have been fabricated later out of a need to contextualise the mimesis. John Shaw articulates the same ambiguity with regard to the explicatory segments of folksongs, in which the preface to the performance is treated 'as an integral part of the song by the singers' (J. Shaw, 2000: 14 & 24).

Often this takes the form of descriptions of the narrators themselves, as in the depiction of John MacDonald and his father by Hector Urquhart: 'they do not simply tell the story, but act it with changing voice and gesture, as if they took an interest in it, and entered into the spirit and fun of the tale' (Campbell, 1860-2, I : 174-5). Similarly John Gregorson Campbell describes one informant reciting the tale '*An Dreathan Donn*' ('The Wren').

> On another occasion the wren and his twelve sons were going to the peatmoss, when they fell in with a plant of great virtue and high esteem. The old wren caught hold of the plant by the ears, and was jerking it this way and that way, hard-binding it, and pulling it, as if peat-slicing … Under the severe strain the plant at last yielded, and all the wrens fell backwards into a peat pond and were drowned […]
> The old man from whom this story was heard, that in winter time, when knitting straw ropes for thatching, he could get all the boys of the village to come to assist him … on the understanding that the story of "The wren and his twelve sons" would be illustrated at the end. One after another of the boys sat on the floor behind him, and he having a hold of the straw rope was able easily to resist the strain till he chose to let go, then all the boys fell back and the laughter that ensured [sic] was ample reward for their labour. (J. G. Campbell, 1895: 121-2)

Physically miming the actions of a tale helps to invest its listeners / participants in the process of theriomorphosis, thus offering a more direct engagement with the narrative.

Paralinguistic indica may also be detected in the transcriptions and translations of the tales themselves. For instance '*Cath nan Eun*' ('The Battle of the Birds') in John Francis Campbell's *Popular Tales of the West Highlands*, collected from John MacKenzie in 1859 and transcribed by Hector Urquhart, appears to use capitalisation in order to suggest a mimetic tone of voice. In order to win the hand

of a giant's daughter, the prince of *Na Cathair Shiomain* must perform three

Herculean tasks: to clean the giant's byre; to thatch it with birds' down with no two

feathers of the same colour and to retrieve five unbroken eggs from the nest of a

magpie on top of a fir tree. In the course of these labours, he is assisted by the

giant's daughter, who loses a finger in the process. On completion of the tasks, the

giant's daughter helps the prince to escape her father's fury. However, on returning

home the prince forgets his new wife, and is forced into remembering by a silver

pigeon ('*calman airgiod*') and a golden pigeon ('*calman òir*'), who address him:

> *Thubhairt an calman òir ris, na'm biodh cuimhn' agad 'nuair a chairt mi 'm bàthaich, CHA 'N 'ITHEADH TU SIUD GUN CHUID A THOIRT DHOMHSA. A rithist thuit tri gràinnean eòrn' eile, 's leum an calman airgiod agus ithear siud mar an ceudna. "Na'm bitheadh cuimhn' agad 'nuair a thubh mi 'm bàthaich CHA 'N ITHEADH TU SIUD, GUN MO CHUID A THOIRT DHOMHSA," ars' an calman òir. Tuitear tri ghràinnean eile, 's leum an calman airgiod, agus ithear siud cuideachd. "Na 'm biodh cuimhn' agad 'nuair a chreach mi nead na pioghaid, CHA 'N 'ITHEADH TU SIUD GUN MO CHUID A THOIRT DHOMHSA," ars' an calman òir. "Chaill mi 'n lùdag 'gad' thaidhairt a nuas, agus tha i dhìth orm fathast." Chuimhnich mac an rìgh, 's dh' aithnich e co a bh' aige.*

> Said the golden pigeon to him, "If thou hadst mind when I cleared the byre, thou wouldst not eat that without giving me my share," says the golden pigeon. Again fell three other grains of barley, and the silver pigeon sprang, and he eats that, as before. "If thou hadst mind when I thatched the byre, thou wouldst not eat that without giving me my share," says the golden pigeon. Three other grains fall, and the silver pigeon sprang, and he eats that. "If thou hadst mind when I harried the magpie's nest, though wouldst not eat that without giving me my share," says the golden pigeon; "I lost little finger bringing it down, and I want it still." The king's son minded, and he knew who it was he had got. (J. F. Campbell, 1860-2, I : 46-7 & 37)

The phrase '*cha 'n 'itheadh tu siud gun mo chuid a thoirt dhomhsa*' ('thou wouldst

not eat that without giving me my share') is stressed using capitalisation, suggesting

that in common with the dialogue portions accentuated in the audio recordings detailed above, this phrase may have been mimetic when spoken by the narrator. This is certainly the interpretation preferred by Wendy Wood in her *Tales of the Western Isles*, a reworking of a number of Campbell's folktales, which instructs the reader with reference to the above exchange to 'say it like a pigeon's coo' (Wood, 1952: 127).[30]

Earlier in this same tale, the giant must cut his way through a black thorn wood. Speaking to a hooded crow, the giant decides to leave his axe and wood knife behind. In response, the hooded crow threatens '*MA DH' FHAGAS … goididh sinn' iad*' ('IF YOU DO … we will steal them') (J. F. Campbell, 1860-2, I : 44; my own translation). Again the unusual capitalisation in the Gaelic transcription implies mimesis, a reading which is supported by Campbell's footnote which asserts that the 'principal Gaelic vowels bear some resemblance to the cawing of a hoodie. They are all broad A.' (J. F. Campbell, 1860-2, I : 33).[31] Campbell's observation is also interesting from a sound-symbolic perspective, similarly addressed above.

'*Ursgeul na Feannaig*' ('The Tale of the Hooded Crow'), transcribed by Hector MacLean from the dictation of Ann MacGilvray in April 1859, provides another example of the use of broad vowel sounds and plosive consonants in

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[30] An alternative version of this tale recorded by John Dewar has a golden cockerel instead of two pigeons at the final recognition scene. The cockerel asks: '*Geog, geog geōa, An cuimhne leat an latha chuir mi m' bathach falamh air do shon?*' ('*Geog, geog geōa,* Dost thou remember the day that I emptied the byre for thee?') etc. (J. F. Campbell, 1860-2 I : 57). The opening syllables are an onomatopoeic rendering of the cockerel's clucking (Dwelly, 2001: s.v. *gog*).

[31] In the tale '*Murchag a's Mionachag*' Campbell adds the note 'the speech of the Hoodie is always a very close imitation of his note. In another version she says, "CUIR CRIADH RIGHIN RUADH RIS--Put tough red clay to it;" and the gull said, "CUIR POLL BOG RIS--Put soft mud to it;" which is rather the speech of some other bird' (J. F. Campbell, 1860-2, I : 161).

imitation of the hooded crow's call. The eponymous '*feannaig*' ('hooded crow') (Dwelly, 2001: s.v. *feannaig*) asks the same question to three sisters: '*Am pòs thu mise*' ('Will you marry me?') (J. F. Campbell, 1860-2, I : 67; my own translation). The first two refuse him, however the third accepts adding '*'s bòidheach am beathach an fheannag*' ('a pretty creature is the hoodie') (J. F. Campbell, 1860-2, I : 67 & 63). In his translation, however, Campbell gives the hooded crow's question both phonetically, and in English: 'M-POS-U-MI, Wilt thou wed me?' (J. F. Campbell, 1860-2, I : 63); again possibly using capitalisation as an indication that the auditory value of '*Am pòs thu mise*' is mimetically significant.[32]

In his introduction to *Popular Tales of the West Highlands* Campbell states 'I begged for the very words used by the people who told the stories, with nothing added, or omitted, or altered' (J. F. Campbell, 1860-2, I : xxi), adding that in many cases 'I have myself heard the same incidents repeated by their [the reciters'] authorities' (J. F. Campbell, 1860-2, I : xv) in order to verify their authenticity. Both of these assertions intimate that the use of capitalisation and phonetic translations are intended to be an unvarnished reproduction of the narrator's use of voice, and not a later embellishment incorporated at the transcription or translation stages: given the examples cited from audio sources discussed earlier, it is reasonable to assume that the same use of voice is recognisable here.

Alan Bruford has highlighted the importance of studying 'not only words but gestures, asides to the audience, tones of voice for different characters, and every

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[32] The repetitive phrase '*'S fhad' o b' e e*' ('It's long since it was') is translated in a similar manner in the fable '*An Fheannag 's am Madadh Ruadh*' ('The Hoodie and the Fox'), also transcribed by Hector MacLean (J. F. Campbell, 1994, II: 315). The persistence of low frequency broad vowels in each of these examples adds further weight to the theory of phonaesthesia proposed elsewhere in this investigation.

trick of the trade used in this very dramatic art-form' (Bruford, 1994: 27); in short the paralinguistic dimension of traditional Gaelic folktale narration. Informed by comparable tales recorded in a purely oral format, one may gain an insight into the mimetic voice as it may have been used in the recitation of folktales now preserved only in published, literary sources. The manipulation of vocal tone, quality, pitch and volume in imitation of birds' cries compliments and illustrates the anthropomorphosis of bird characters in oral narratives, reflecting the theriomorphosis of the tale's narrator in the imaginational 'time and space set apart from the rest of life' (Muhawi and Kanaana, 1989: 6) in which the folktale operates.

Birds and the Uncanny

In the Gaelic folktale tradition birds are often used as subliminal anticipators of the supernatural or the uncanny. As discussed in the introduction to this inquiry, flight is an apposite metaphor for the unattainable or the unfamiliar, and is tied in with the psychology of escapism. This longing for alterity can also be observed in the '*Ora nam Buadh*' / '*Ora Ceartais*' charms discussed in the previous chapter, encapsulating the figurative adoption of otherworldly powers or attributes.

In the tale '*Cànain nan Eun*' ('The Language of the Birds'), recorded from the dictation of Janet Currie of Stoneybridge, South Uist on the 12th of September 1860 by Hector MacLean, an old French knight sends his only son Alasdair to '*Eilean nan Eun*' ('Island of the Birds') to '*dh'ionnsachadh cainnt nan eun*' ('learn bird language') in order to attain '*ionnsachadh os cionn feadhnach eile*' ('an education better than others had') (MacKay, 1931:160-1). The implication behind this conclusion is revealed only gradually during the course of the narrative: after the

first year of learning, Alasdair's father asks him: '*Gu dè a th' agam an ceann bliadhna airson thu bhith an Eilean nan Eun?*' ('What and how much have I profited for thy having spent a year in the Isle of the Birds?'); to which Alasdair offers the enigmatic reply '*Chì mi (rud)*' ('I can see [a thing]'). Asked the same question after a second year, Alasdair replies '*Chì mi rud, a's cluinnidh mi rud*' ('I can see a thing, and I can hear a thing'). After a third year, upon being asked the same question, Alasdair answers '*Chì mi rud, a's cluinnidh mi rud, a's tuigidh mi rud*' ('I can see a thing, and I can hear a thing, and I can understand a thing') (MacKay, 1931: 160-3). Alasdair's apparently evasive answers are clarified somewhat by MacKay's interpretation that to 'know bird language, and to turn oneself into a bird, must have been an important branch of the science of magic' (MacKay, 1931: 181); therefore the ability to understand the language of the birds becomes synonymous with occult or mystical learning.

This interpretation is supported by Alasdair's ability to understand and interpret a prophecy uttered by a 'chaffinch'[33] later in the narrative.

> *An là'r-na-mhàireach, leum glaisean dh'an uinneig, a's e 'ceileireadh. Thuirt na Ridire an so ri a mhac,*
> *"Gu de tha e ag ràdh?"* […]
> *"Ma ta, ma's eudar domh a fuasgladh, is e bha glaisean ag ràdh gu'm bi sibhse a'fuasgladh barr-iall mo bhròige fhathasd le ur fiaclan, a's gu'm bi mo mhàthair a'cumail a' bhasain rium, a's an siorramhdair 'na dòrn."*

> On the morrow, a chaffinch flew up to the window, warbling. At this the Knight said to his son,
> "What is it saying?" […]

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[33] MacKay translates '*glaisean*' as 'chaffinch', however it is equally possible that a 'sparrow', a 'green linnet', or 'lark' is intended (Dwelly, 2001: s.v. *glaisean*).

"Well, then, if I must solve it, what the chaffinch said was this, that you shall yet loosen the latchet of my shoe with your teeth, while my mother holds the basin for me with a towel in her hand."

(MacKay, 1931: 162-3)

The precognitive abilities ascribed to many birds in Gaelic popular culture will be discussed more fully elsewhere, however in '*Cànain nan Eun*' Alasdair's ability to interpret the bird's prophecy serves to illustrate the apparent synonymy between the knowledge of bird language and occult learning.

The same association is made in '*An Chaora Bhiorach, Ghlas*' ('The Sharp Grey Sheep'), a Cinderella tale type recorded from John Dewar in which a bird of unidentified species reveals the rightful owner of a golden shoe by exposing her half sister as a fraud. When the latter trims the tips of her toes in order to force the shoe to fit, the bird calls '*Tha'n fhuil 'sa bhròig 's tha chos bhoidheach sa' chùil aig cùl an teine*' ('The blood's in the shoe, and the pretty foot's in the nook that is at the back of the fire' (J. F. Campbell, 1860-2, II : 291 & 288). Speculating on the paralinguistic qualities of the bird's speech, Campbell offers that the 'words in Gaelic have a sound that might be an imitation of the note of a singing bird; the vowel sounds are *ui* and *oi*, and there are many soft consonants' (J. F. Campbell, 1860-2, II: 288-9). The same may be said of the raven ('*fitheach*') in '*Ridire Ghrianaig*' ('the Knight of Grianaig') who often repeats '*Tha fios agad air na tha seachad, ach cha 'n 'eil fiòs agad air na tha romhad*' ('Thou hast knowledge of what is behind thee, but thou hast no knowledge of what is before thee') (J. F. Campbell, 1860-2, III: 27 & 10), referring to the well-known alliterative proverb '*Tha fios fithich agad*' ('You have a raven's knowledge') said of a person thought

to possess 'knowledge more than is natural ... supernatural knowledge' (Nicolson, 1881: 358).

'*Na Tri Bantraichean*' ('The Three Widows') transcribed by Hector MacLean from the recitation of Hector Boyd, a fisher-man from Barra, plays on these associations. The protagonist Dòmhnull sells a bird which he claims to have supernatural powers.

> *Thàinig an duin' uasal gos an dorusd 's dh' fhoighnichd e dé bh' aige 'na achlais an siud. Thuirt e go 'n robh fiosaiche. "De 'n fhiosachd a bhios e 'dianadh?" "Bidh a h-uile seòrsa fiosachd," ursa Dòmhnull. "Bheir air fiosachd a dhianadh," urs' an duin' uasal. Dh' fhalbh e agus dh' fhàisg e e's thug an t-ian ràn as.*

> The gentleman came to the door, and he asked what he had there in his oxter. He said that he had a soothsayer. "What divination will he be doing?"
>   "He will be doing every sort of divination," said Dòmhnull. "Make him do divination," said the gentleman.
>   He went and he wrung him, and the bird gave a RAN.
>   (J. F. Campbell, 1860-2, II : 225 & 218-9)

Campbell's capitalisation of, and choice not to translate, the Gaelic '*ràn*' is probably indicative of a mimetic inflection, as noted above; however there also appears to be a pun intended between '*ràn*' ('a shriek' or 'cry') (Dwelly, 2001: s.v. *ràn*) and '*rann*' (a 'riddle' or 'verse') (Dwelly, 2001: s.v. *rann*).[34]

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[34] A similar parody of the supernatural powers of birds may be in evidence in the 'Story of the Thrush' as told by the Coddy in *Tales of Barra*. Speaking to a man, the thrush calls '*Iain mac Iain, 's-tu-tha-tioram, 's-tu-tha-tioram, 's-tu-tha-tioram*' ('Iain son of Iain, you-are-dry, you-are-dry, you-are-dry'), enticing him to take a dram of whisky (MacPherson, 1992: 99; my own translation). After convincing him, the thrush then calls '*Iain mac Iain, gabh-balgam-eile, gabh-balgam-eile, gabh-balgam-eile*' ('Iain son of Iain, take-another-gulp, take-another-gulp, take-another-gulp') (ibid.; my own translation). Finally, 'when there was not much left in the bottle', the thrush calls '*Iain mac Iain, cuir-crìoch-air, cuir-crìoch-air, cuir-crìoch-air*') ('Iain son of Iain, finish-it, finish-it, finish-it') (ibid.; my own translation). These mimetic cries may be a distortion of an imitation of the black-throated diver, prevalent in both North and South Uist, which is thought to presage a drought: '*Deoch! deoch! deoch! / An loch a traghadh! / Deoch! deoch! deoch! / An loch a traghadh! / Burn!*

In a number of tales supernatural abilities are thought to be absorbed by humans from birds after consuming them. For example in '*Cànain nan Eun*' referred to above, when Alasdair returns to the island of the birds in order to escape his father's vengeance, he kills and eats all of the birds that have taught him occult lore as they approach him.

> *An uair a bha na h-eòin 'ga aithneachadh, is ann an sin a bha iad a' tighinn timchioll air, a's bha e 'gan itheadh a's 'gam marbhadh, chor 's ma bha an còrr uaidh de chainnt nan eun, gu'n d'fhuair e na tri bliadhna eile e.*
>
> When the birds recognised him, they began to come all round him, and he began killing and eating them, so that if he wished for any further acquaintance with bird language, he obtained it during those other three years.

<div align="right">(MacKay, 1931: 162-3)</div>

The seemingly casual comment '*chor 's ma bha an còrr uaidh de chainnt nan eun, gu'n d'fhuair e na tri bliadhna eile e*' ('so that if he wished for any further acquaintance with bird language, he obtained it during those other three years') demonstrates the belief that the birds' preternatural abilities are conferred on Alasdair as they are consumed by him.

A similar aviophagial motif may be observed in the tale '*Gruthan an Eòin 's an Sporan Òir*' ('The Bird's Liver and the Sporran full of Gold') transcribed by Hector MacLean from the dictation of Roderick MacLean of Barra in 1859-60, in

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burn! burn! / Mo luth 'm fhagail! / Burn! burn! burn! / Mo luth 'm fhagail!' ('Drink! drink! drink! / The loch is drying! / Drink! drink! drink! / The loch is drying! / Water! water! water! / My strength failing me! / Water! water! water! / My strength failing me!') (Carmichael, 1928-71, II: 336). In the Carmichael-Watson papers, however, this imitation is given merely as '*Deoch, deoch, deoch! / Thoir dhomh deoch! / Tha 'n loch a thraghadh*' (Drink, drink, drink! / Give me a drink! / The lake is drying') (*EUL CW* MS131-A.189; my own translation).

which two brothers discover a bird described as '*fuathasach briagh*' ('wonderfully beautiful') which they take to a gentleman's house.

> *Dh'fhaighnich an duine uasal, de an t-eun a bha aige 'na achlais. Thuirt e gu 'n robh eun a rug e air o cheann ghoirid. "Leig 'fhaicinn e," ars an duine uasal. Leig am balach 'fhaicinn an t-eun. Rug an duine uasal air an eun, sheall e air a uchd, agus spìon e ite as. Bha e air a sgrìobhadh air uchd an eòin, ge b'e dh' itheadh a chridhe, gu 'm faigheadh e 'n aon bhean a b' fhearr a bha ri 'fhaotainn, 's ge b'e dh' itheadh a ghruthan, gu 'm faighteadh sporan òir fo a cheann a h-uile latha dh' éireadh e.*

> The gentleman enquired what bird it was which the boy had there, tucked under his arm. He said that it was a bird which he had caught a little while ago. "Let me see it," said the gentleman. The lad showed him the bird. The gentleman took hold of it, looked at its breast, and plucked a feather from it. It was written on the bird's breast, that whoever should eat its heart should get the best wife there was to be got, and that whoever should eat its liver a sporran full of gold would be found under his head every day he rose.
>
> (MacKay, 1925: 159-60 & 152)

The specific reference to the bird's heart and liver are significant from a folkloric perspective. Father Allan McDonald recorded a belief in Eriskay which states '[i]f a man lick the liver of an otter three times with his tongue while the liver is still wet with blood immediately after the otter is killed the tongue of this person is supposed and believed to have the power of healing burns and scolds' (*GUL* MS Gen.1090/28.47; see also *GUL* MS Gen. 1090/28.50 and Martin, [1703] 1994: 190 for folklore relating to the liver of the spotted ling). A similar belief may also have existed concerning animal's hearts, as a proverb recorded by Nicolson suggests: '*Ma dh' itheas tu cridh' an eòin, bidh do chridhe air chrith ri d' bheò*' ('If you eat the bird's heart, your heart will palpitate forever') (Nicolson, 1881: 388).[35]

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[35] '*An Gruagach Ban, mac Righ Eireann*' ('The Fair Gruagach, son of the King of Erin') also makes reference to a hawk's liver and heart (see J. F. Campbell, 1860-2, II : 433 & 423).

Unlike Alasdair in '*Cànain nan Eun*', the powers conferred in the tale of '*Gruthan an Eòin 's an Sporan Oir*' are not specifically bird related; however their supernatural connotations serve to illustrate the relationship between the almost Eucharistic consumption of birds with the psychology of the uncanny in Gaelic popular culture.

Conclusions

The fantastical and fabular genres of storytelling in post-Enlightenment Europe have mostly been associated with children's genres; a migration which is perhaps symptomatic of the rejection of irrationality and the imaginative in literature more generally since this time (Cosslett, 2006: 1-9). This trend is also in evidence in Gaelic storytelling: John Francis Campbell notes that 'children of all sizes listened to them', but adds that many traditional Gaelic tales 'have been despised by educated men … The clergy, in some places, had condemned the practice, and there it had fallen into disuse;' (J. F. Campbell, 1860-2, I: xxvii & xxi), pointing towards the diminishing number of traditional story-tellers in the late nineteenth century. Despite this, however, of the one-hundred and sixty-three tales and variants published by John Francis Campbell in *Popular Tales of the West Highlands*, sixty seven (or thirty eight percent) contain talking animal characters or animal transformations.[36]

The investigation into vocal manipulation for the purposes of mimesis outlined above highlights the importance of audio-visual recording in the analysis

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[36] These are tales no. 1, 1(var.2), 1(var.3), 2, 2(var.2), 2(var.3), 2(var.4), 2(var.5), 2(var.6), 2(var.7), 2(var.8), 3, 3(var.2), 4, 4(var.2), 4(var.3), 4(var.4), 4(var.5), 4(var.6), 8, 9, 10(var.3), 11, 12, 13, 14, 14(var.2), 16, 17a (fables 1, 3-5, 7-9, 11-13, and 18-21), 17(var.3), 17(var.6), 39, 40(var.3), 41, 41(var.2), 41(var.3), 43, 44, 46, 46(var.4), 51, 52, 58, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 70, 71, 72, 76 and 81.

of orally collected material, and in the critical scrutiny of oral traditions more generally. The pre-eminence of these materials should not disqualify the examination of published transcriptions of orally collected material however: as the above investigation has sought to demonstrate, a number of paralinguistic allusions can be identified which may reveal aspects of vocal or physical performance, thus augmenting the inquiry into mimesis in oral narratives and literature more generally.

Research into the connections between birds and the uncanny in the Gaelic folktale tradition inevitably highlights areas of concomitance with popular folklore in which birds are thought to be able to predict certain events such as immanent deaths or meteorological phenomena, touched on above. Unfortunately a more complete analysis of the various semiotic meanings ascribed to particular birds' cries in folkloric terms is beyond the scope of this present research into bird imitation as an artistic phenomenon, but would, however, repay investigation at a future date.

Conclusion

This dissertation has been primarily focused on an analysis of the intangible elements of modern Gaelic culture, i.e. folksong, poetry, storytelling, music, nursery lore and so on. In relation to these, avifaunal mimesis (or the replication / reduplication of a particular sonance or figurative quality pertaining to birds) can be read as an instrument (or perhaps a symptom) of orality in which nature is used as a point of reference, a stimulus to anamnesis.

Walter Ong has argued that there are 'certain basic differences … between the ways of managing knowledge and verbalization in primary oral cultures (cultures with no knowledge at all of writing) and in cultures deeply affected by the use of writing' (1982: 1). In primary or largely oral cultures the storage and transmission of information is frequently dependant on the capacity of human memory. The relative fixity of the written word, however, makes the cultivation of memory and mnemonic aids less relevant.

> Heavy patterning and communal fixed formulas in oral cultures serve some of the purposes of writing in chirographic cultures, but in doing so they of course determine the kind of thinking that can be done, the way experience is intellectually organized. In an oral culture, experience is intellectualized mnemonically. (Ong, 1982: 36)

Evidence for the mnemonic codification of ethno-ornithological data in Gaelic oral culture can be found in the mimetic rhymes discussed in chapter one of this inquiry, in which the acoustic imitation of an individual bird's vocalisations is accompanied by a lexical summation of a particular trait or perception associated with it. For instance the territorial impulse of the pigeon ('*calman*') is evinced by the stylised

phrase '*cha 'n ann de mo chuideachd thù*' ('you are not of my flock') (Fergusson, 1885-6: 57, see page twenty-two of this inquiry), and the perceived maternal instinct of the song thrush ('*smeòrach*') is expounded by various imitations of its calls:

> *'Ille ruaidh bhig!*   Little red lad!
> *Tobhad dachaidh!*   Come away home!
>   (Carmichael, 1928-71, IV: 20-1)

> *Iain 'ic 'ille Mhoire bhig* Wee John Morrison
> *thig dhachaigh! thig dhachaigh!* come home! come home!
>   (*SSS SA*1951.10.7; my own translation)

Perhaps the most salient example of this kind can be found in Annie Johnson's imitation of the oystercatcher ('*trìlleachan*') which simultaneously impersonates the bird's cry and lexically describes its more prominent physical features: '*trilleachan, trilleachan*: *gob dearg, gob dearg*' ('oystercatcher, oystercatcher: red beak, red beak') (*SSS SA*1951.10.9).[37]

  The faculty of mimesis in Gaelic presents a constellation of familiar images, acoustic devices and metaphors which describe an Aristotelian relationship between art and nature in Gaelic oral culture, in which birds can be seen to operate as a symbol of otherness or alterity. As Armstrong suggests, perhaps some subliminal or 'sub-conscious impulse may be responsible for the tendency in many cultures

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[37] As each of these examples illustrate, another aspect which features heavily in aural mimesis is the use of repetition: '*thig dhachaigh! thig dhachaigh!*', '*gob dearg, gob dearg*' etc. According to Andy Arleo, the use of repetition or reduplication is common in oral folk traditions generally, 'since they ease the burden of memorization' (Arleo: 2006: 52). In avifaunal mimesis, however, it also serves a subsidiary function, mirroring the 'repetitive motifs' (Sample, 1996: 11) of articulation common to many birds' vocalisations.

from the Palaeolithic to the present day to represent human figures with avian characteristics'. Armstrong continues,

> Certain characteristics of birds have always impressed men – their swift motion, sudden apparition and disappearance, and the suggestion of communion with higher powers implicit in their powers of flight. (Armstrong, 1958: 19-22).

It is possible that a similar latent drive or catalyst lies behind the Gaelic appreciation for, and imitation of, birdsong, particularly in those instances when escapism appears to be the crucial preoccupation.

In Gaelic oral culture, the relationship between some birds and suggestions of 'communion with higher powers' is stated explicitly. For instance both Bannerman (1986) and Ross (1951) note that the Beaton family's famed medical skills are popularly attributed to their association with ravens, whose language they were reputed to have understood. Alexander Forbes also records that it was 'in a raven's second nest that Coinneach odhar, the famed seer of Brahan, found the magpie stone which conferred the prophetic gift on him.' (Forbes, 1905: 324; see also Black, 2005: 149-50). The supernatural subtext underpinning each of these perceptions suggests that Armstrong's speculations may not be unfounded. The imitation of these characteristics may denote an unconscious aspiration to alterity on the part of the imitator / speaker, an artistic escapism which looks beyond the confines of normativity and the constrains of the here and now; what Lacan calls the unattainable object of desire, or '*objet petit a*' (Lacan, 1981).

We can see this sentiment encapsulated in a vignette from the sixteenth century entitled '*Cumha Ghriogair MhicGhriogair Ghlinn Sreith*' composed by Mòr Chaimbeul, wife of the eponymous Griogair Ruadh.

> *Is truagh nach robh mi an riochd*   If only I had the flight of
> *   na h-uiseig,*   the lark,
> *Spionnadh Ghriogair 'na mo làimh* Griogair's strength in my arm,
> *Is i a' chlach a b' àirde anns a'*   the highest stone in the
> *   chaisteal*   castle
> *A' chlach a b' fhaisge don bhlàr*.   would be the closest to the ground.
>   (MacLeod & Bateman, 2007: 418-9)

Caimbeul's hyperbole reveals a preternatural implicity framed by a desire to assume '*riochd na h-uiseig*' (ibid.), more literally translated as 'the form of the lark'. The song bird is an antithetic image here indicative of delicacy and femininity (see depictions of the lark in chapter one), which is then contrasted against the inflated strength of Griogair depicted as capable of destroying the walls of Taymouth Castle.

Analogous tropologies can be identified in more modern poetic compositions, possibly alluding to an established or recurrent motif. For instance in '*Mo Rùn Geal Dìleas*' (a song of uncertain attribution)[38] the speaker expresses a desire to assume the form of a seagull ('*faoileag*') in order to visit his lover in a distant land.

> *Is truagh nach robh mi an riochd*   How sad that I were not in the guise
> *   na faoilinn*   of seagull
> *A shnàmhadh aotrom air bhàrr*   That would sail lightly on the crest
> *   nan tonn;*   of the waves;
> *Is bheirinn sgrìobag don eilean*   and I would make a visit to the isle
> *   Ileach,*   of Islay,
> *Far bheil an ribhinn dh'fhàg*   where lives the maiden who made
> *   m' inntinn trom.*   my spirit low.
>   (Meek, 2003: 386 & 470)

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[38] The reference to Islay above has given rise to speculation that this poem may 'have been composed by MacLean of Torloisk, Mull, who as a tacksman visited Islay, where he was captivated with the charms of Isabel of Balinaby' (Whyte, 1881: 221).

In this instance, the speaker's aspiration to alterity which the seagull image embodies, compliments the theme of unrequited love consistent throughout the remainder of the verse (the seagull image is also repeatedly used in Gaelic love poetry and elegies to signify purity and virtue: see chapter two).

Another instance of the aspiration to alterity motif can be found in the well-known waulking song '*He Mandu*' recorded by James Ross and Francis Collinson from the recitation of Nan MacLeod et. al. of Leurbost, Lewis, in March 1955.

Nam biodh agam	If I had
Sgiath a' ghlaisein,	A sparrow's wing,
Iteag an eòin,	A bird's power of flight,
Spòg a' lachain,	A wild duck's foot,
Shnàmhainn na caoil	I would swim
Air an tarsuinn,	Across the straits,
An Caol Ileach	The Sound of Islay
'S an Caol Arcach;	And the Sound of Orkney;
Rachainn a steach	I would go
Chon a' chaisteil	Into the castle
'S bheirinn a mach	And bring out
As mo leannan.	My sweetheart.

(*SSA SA*1955.1-B9; my own translation)

The imagery invoked here is very similar to that employed in '*Cumha Ghriogair MhicGhriogair Ghlinn Sreith*' above, particularly with reference to the image of the songbird retrieving a distant lover from imprisonment in a castle. In addition, the reference to Islay above is similarly reminiscent of the visit to Islay in '*Mo Rùn Geal Dileas*'.

In each of the above instances, an aspiration to become other is mitigated by the suggestion of attaining the unattainable via preternatural means, i.e. adopting

the form of a bird and thus gaining the power of flight. Dòmhnall Ruadh Choruna's treatment of this apparent motif, however, makes the correspondence overtly, encapsulating the speaker's desire to escape the harsh reality of first world war Europe to a romanticised memory of home.

Nam bithinn mar eun air sgiathan ealamh	If I were a bird
A dhèanadh cabhagach leum,	that would briskly lift on fast-beating wings,
Shìubhlainn an iar 's cha dèanainn fantail	I would head west and would not tarry on this
San t-sliabh na b' fhaide le cèinnt…	foreign heath any longer…
'S cha tiginn gu làr gu bràth gu anail	and I wouldn't alight ever for rest
Gu 'n tàrrainn fearann nan geug.	until I got to the land of heroes. (MacAulay, 1995: 50-1)

In this instance, the imagery of the battlefield, '*Le boladh a' bhàis toirt plàigh le galair, / 'S gun àite falamh gun uaigh*' ('the stench of death bringing plague and disease, / and not a corner without its grave') (ibid.), is contrasted against the natural landscape of the Hebrides, described with reference to 'noble' animals such as the swan and stag.

Gun amhaircinn bhuam mun cuairt an sealladh	I would gaze around me at the view
Bu luachmhoir' agam fon ghrèin –	I treasure most under the sun –
Na lochan 's na bàigh fo chràgheoidh 's eala,	the lochs, the bays with their shelduck and swans
'S an àird a' ghleanna, damh fèidh.	and, in the upper reaches of the glen, the stag. (ibid.).

The disparity between these images is made more astringent by the return from escapist fantasy to the bleak reality of the trenches in the final stanza, in which the

speaker must keep watch '*Far chùl a' pharapaid ann / Mus tigeadh gas bàis a thàrradh m' anail*' ('from behind the parapet / in case of deadly gas coming to choke me') (MacAulay, 1995: 52-3).

Michael Davis in *The Poetry of Philosophy* has argued that mimesis is 'a stylizing of reality in which the ordinary features of our world are brought into focus by a certain exaggeration'. Davis continues,

> Imitation always involves selecting something from the continuum of experience, thus giving boundaries to what really has no beginning or end. Mimêsis involves a framing of reality that announces that what is contained within the frame is not simply real. (Davis, 1999: 3)

In this way, the poet is able to use metaphor and the artistic aesthetic in order to overcome the mundane, attain the unattainable or escape the insufferable. The same basic impulse underpins the bird metaphor in Gaelic panegyric and vituperation, in which the tenor is identified 'in terms of what it is not … as formed by the other' (Punter, 2007: 87), and may carry similar implications in terms of the escapism or aspiration for otherness inherent within both the storytelling tradition and the play theory of children's games. To this end, the tenor is recapitulated in terms of something else (the vehicle, in this instance the bird metaphor), establishing a complex series of associations and hierarchies which asserts both similarities and differences crucial to understanding the underlying ethno-ornithological perceptions of Gaelic oral culture more generally.

Avenues for Further Research

This investigation cannot claim to be comprehensive in the field of bird imitation, and therefore for the sake of brevity certain aspects of avifaunal mimesis have not been addressed. To this end, a number of possible avenues for further research present themselves. For instance, Ronald Black has highlighted the 'need to study how the rhetoric of panegyric flowered into other codes' (Black, 2002: 23), using, one could argue, a very deliberate verb denotation to suggest the importance of the nature trope in this regard (see chapter two for more on natural imagery in the panegyric and vituperative codes).

Of particular relevance and interest may be an analysis of mimetic seabird fowling on St. Kilda as attested by a number of sources. For instance, Norman Heathcote, a naturalist and photographer who visited the archipelago in 1898 with his sister ostensibly for the purposes of documenting the local flora and avifauna of the region, observed and recorded a mimetic lure designed to catch puffins ('*budhaigirean*'): 'The natives talk to them all the time in puffin language, and while the bird is trying to make out what they are saying, he finds his neck has got entangled in the noose' (1900: 175). In clarification of 'puffin language', he adds that the 'puffin's vocabulary is said to consist of "Oh! Oh" but I don't think this expresses the sound. It struck me as being more like the lowing of a distant cow, and would be better rendered by the French "on".' (ibid.).

John Sands, visiting some twenty years before Heathcote, recorded an analogous imitation of the puffin expressed by the vocables 'oh! oh!' with the last syllable 'being long drawn out' (Sands, 1878: 47), and George Seton, whose evidence is based largely on Sands' first-hand experience, also expresses the

puffin's cry in these terms (Seton, 1878: 163-4); however despite the fact that Sands' information is derived from 'Donald Og, who was a good cragsman in his day' (Sands, 1878: 54), neither Seton nor Sands overtly link their puffin imitation to mimetic fowling.

In addition to vocal mimesis, a number of sources relate the use of physical mimicry in guillemot ('*langaidh*') fowling on St. Kilda. The following account, quoted by George Seton, illustrates the technique.

> A man with a white cloth about his neck is let down from the summit of the crags at night, and hangs, like the weight of a clock, immediately before the nests. The birds, attracted by the bright colour, mistake the intruder for a projecting portion of rock, and settle upon him in great numbers, a freedom which the cragsman resents by quietly dislocating their necks. In this manner, three or four hundred are sometimes taken by a single fowler in the course of a night. (Morgan, 1861, quoted in Seton, 1878: 191 and Connell, 1887: 129; see also Sands, 1878: 48; Kearton, 1897: 92 - 93; Heathcote, 1900: 182 and Cheape, 2002: 103 - 104)

Neil MacLeod also mentions this method in the eighteenth century (*NLS Adv.* MS 21.1.5 ff 183-5). The 'white cloth', in these depictions, is understood to mimic 'a projecting portion of rock' (Seton, 1878: 191); however a number of other depictions have the 'men lay on their backs outside their doors in misty weather with bared (i.e. white) breasts' (Baldwin, 2005b: 124; cf. Moray, 1678: 927-9), which reads more like mimicry of the white breast plumage of the guillemot itself. This interpretation is supported by the Rev. Neil MacKenzie (minister on St. Kilda from 1830 to 1844) who writes:

> Just before the earliest dawn he [the fowler] hides himself as close to the edge of the rock as possible, and holds up something white, as a

handkerchief, on the rock beside him. The first comer seems to think that this is a still earlier arrival, and settles down beside it. It is at once pounced upon, killed, and held up in a sitting attitude in order to induce the next comers to settle down beside it. (MacKenzie, 1841: 148)

Norman MacQueen, a St. Kildan fowler interviewed in 1961 as part of the School of Scottish Studies dialectical survey, asserts that the technique practiced in the twentieth century has the first guillemot taken stretched across the fowler's chest with its white feathers exposed. Any subsequent birds enticed onto the cliffs in this manner could subsequently be dispatched as in the account reported by MacKenzie above (*SSS SA*1961.18).

The discrepancies between each of the above reports are similarly reflected in varying depictions relating to the number of birds which could be caught using this technique: from Wigglesworth's (1903) ambitious five-hundred in a single night to Connell's (1887) more prudent thirty. The white sheet or bared chests recounted above may also be understood as what Marcel Mauss describes as a 'poorly executed ideogram' (1972: 68) in the sense that the efficacy of the lure is not predicated upon its ability to deceive the imitator, but rather is based on the most simplistic yet efficacious artifice available to the fowler.

Another area which would repay further investigation are the semiotic meanings ascribed to many birds' vocalisations, particularly those which pertain to meteorological predictions. One example of this belief speaks of Donald Gillies, a former St. Kildan living at Larachbeg in the mid 1960s, who, according to Thornber, 'was wonderfully skilled in forecasting and predicting a change of weather'.

> Each morning he would take careful note of the sky and the position of the clouds. He would look out for seagulls coming inland and watch their movements as they flew across the fields. He would listen to the different notes of the oystercatchers and other shore-line birds. I remember one morning in midsummer we heard a curlew call from across the other side of Loch Aline. Donald at once exclaimed, 'She is crying for rain,' meaning it was going to rain. Despite the scornful remarks of his companions to the contrary as they laboured under a cloudless sky in their shirt-sleeves, his prediction proved correct, and by that afternoon there was a torrential downpour! (Thornber, 1990: 280-2; cf. Martin, [1703] 1994: 430 & Macaulay, 1764: 162ff)

Alexander Carmichael also records a number of similar imitations thought to predict weather patterns throughout the Hebrides (Carmichael, 1928-71, II: 336).

An alternative semiotic meaning ascribed to some birds' cries interprets their vocalisations as an auspicious portent, particularly with relation to fatal or funereal eventualities. For example returning to St. Kilda, the call of the cuckoo ('*cubhag*'), a bird often deemed to be contemptible or somehow tenebrous in Gaelic oral culture (Fergusson, 1885-6: 54), was thought to presage the death of the factor or similarly authoritative figure. According to Martin, the cuckoo is 'very rarely seen here, and that upon extraordinary occasions, such as the death of the proprietor Mack-Leod [sic], the steward's death, or the arrival of some notable stranger' (Martin, [1703] 1994: 424). In addition to these, Anne Ross has noted a belief in '*an t-eun bàis*' ('the death bird') also known as '*an t-eun sìth*' ('the spirit bird'), which appears to indicate a similar connotation (see Ross, 1963: 218 & 221; see also Lysaght, 1996: 105-7 which links the image of the death omen with the crow in traditional Irish folklore).

The escalation of literary interest in St. Kilda from the 1870s onwards, precipitated for the most part by the concentrated newspaper campaigns instigated

by John Sands in the *Scotsman*, allows for a focused scholarly analysis of material relating to the archipelago from the late nineteenth century onwards. As an appendix to this analysis, two previously untranscribed and untranslated Gaelic songs recorded by Alexander Carmichael on his visit to St. Kilda in May 1865 will be analysed both in terms of their general features and more specifically with reference to bird imitation (see *EUL CW* MS113.55 for Carmichael's travel diary to St. Kilda which records his immediate first impressions of the island group and its inhabitants).

Appendix I

There follows a transcription of a St. Kildan folksong found in the Carmichael-Watson manuscript archive at Edinburgh University Library which I have not been able to locate in any other source. For the sake of brevity, it has not been possible to fully analyse the mimetic faculty of St. Kildan culture, however it is hoped that the following transcription and discussion (in addition to those in the second appendix) may make this material more readily available, and therefore allow for further research at a future date. My transcription is followed by a translation and brief discussion of the folksong's more general features, focussing particularly on the mimetic bird metaphor in the first verse.

Transcription from *EUL CW* MS131-B.560

'S tu d' ghurrach dubh fo'am shios
  Do   Do
  Do   Do leathann, laidir
Luasg nam Bairneach fo'am shios

Ceann an taodain leig thu sios
  Do   Do
  Do   Do fa mo sgaoil
'S nam faodainn gun tige tu nios!

A Tentative Translation

And you a black hatchling below me
  Do   Do
  Do   Do broad, strong
The swaying of the Limpets below me

The end of the rope that let you down
  Do   Do
  Do   Do beyond my reach
And if I could only get you back up!

Discussion

Below this, Carmichael has noted 'Composed by a St. Kilda woman whose [paper torn] ~~went~~ fell down the rocks [paper torn]' (*EUL CW* MS131-B.560). It seems probable, therefore, that the '*ghurrach dubh*' ('black hatchling') is a metaphorical reference to the St. Kildan woman's husband / brother / father / partner / friend whom has fallen beyond her reach of the rope. The translation of '*gurrach*' as 'hatchling' is supported by Dwelly (see Dwelly, 2001: s.v. *gurrach*), who cites Alexander Forbes as additional provenance. The capitalisation of '*Bairneach*' ('limpets') on the fourth line appears to be insignificant (Carmichael often capitalises animal and plant names in the material from *EUL CW* MS131 as this material appears to have been intended for publication as a guide to the flora and fauna of the Hebrides and their associated folklore), however it may also imply that '*Luasg nam Bairneach*' is a place-name instead of an image intended to convey the precariousness of the speaker's addressee, however neither Heathcote (1900) nor Coates (1990) allude to this in their respective studies on St. Kildan toponymy.[39]

The second verse begins with '*Ceann an taodain leig thu sios*' ('The end of the rope that let you down'). The St. Kildan word for rope is *lon* (Dwelly, 2001: s.v. *lon*) which indicates that '*taodain*' ('rope') here is used primarily for the purposes the mid-line rhyme with '*faodainn*' on the last line (the same appears to apply with regard to '*ghurrach*' and '*Bairneach*' in the first stanza). Calum Ferguson also notes that in St. Kilda dialect the word '*ruig*' ('reach') (Dwelly, 2001: s.v. *ruig*) is

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[39] Coates refers to a place-name on *Mullach Sgar* called '*Clash na Bearnaich*', which he translates as 'furrow of the notch' (if, indeed, a feminine noun *beàrnach* and be inferred). Coates supports this translation, arguing that it 'is unlikely to have to do with G *bàirneach* 'barnacle' … since it is well away from the water's edge' (Coates, 1990: 118).

often pronounced as to '*leig*' and transcribed as such (Ferguson, 2006: 55), however this would not appear to apply here.

It is also interesting to speculate whether or not the adjectival description on the third line '*leathann, laidir*' ('broad, strong'), and the qualifying statement '*fa mo sgaoil*' ('beyond my reach') are intended to fall at the end of their respective lines, or replace the second hemistitch. Unfortunately Carmichael's transcription is not clear enough to state with certainty, however if the latter were intended one might expect the second 'Do' on lines three and seven to have been omitted in favour of the additional text.

Appendix II

The following folksong similarly found in the Carmichael-Watson manuscript archive at Edinburgh University Library and untreated by other sources, appears to be a satire ostensibly composed by an unnamed woman which casts aspersions on the subject's ability to hunt.

Transcription from *EUL CW* MS131-A.315

Ho-ro-achan, hi-ri-achan
Bu tu sealgair a' Bhigein
Nuair thigeadh an ro-achan   [*reothadh*]
Ho ro achan, hi ri achan
Bu tu sealgair na Faochaig
Ri aodan nan go'achan   [*geo'achain(n)*]
Ho-ro
Bu tu sealgair na Bairnich
Nuair thraighadh an ru'achan.   [*ruthachan*]

A Tentative Translation

Ho-ro-achan, hi-ri-achan
You were the hunter of little birds
When the frost came
Ho-ro-achan, hi-ri-achan
You were the hunter of whelks

On the face of *geo'achain*
Ho-ro
You were the hunter of limpets
When the water ebbed from the headland.

Discussion

The use of the past tense throughout ('*Bu tu sealgair…*') casts this song in the mode of a lament or elegy, which is immediately subverted by list of prey which the subject is reputed to have hunted: 'little birds', 'whelks' and 'limpets' contrast

strongly against the more traditional noble beasts (such as the stag). The use of 'whelks' and 'limpets' in association with the ebbing tide on the last line above recall the similarly sardonic proverb '*Bhuain e maorach an uair a bha 'n tràigh ann*' ('He gathered shell-fish while the tide was out') (Nicolson, 1881: 61).

It is interesting to note that the phrase '*sealgair a' Bhigein*' ('the hunter of little birds') also appears in the St. Kildan waulking song discussed in the introduction to this study and published in volume four of *Carmina Gadelica*, which reads: '*Mo ghaol sealgair a' bhidein, / 'S moiche thig thar linne choimhich*' ('My love is the hunter of the bird, / Who earliest comes over foreign sea') (Carmichael, 1928-71, IV: 114-5). In this instance, however, it is clear that '[*b*]*igein*' ('rock pipit', 'golden crested wren', 'meadow pipit' or any other 'little bird') (Dwelly, 2001: s.v. *bigein*) is not used derogatorily as it appears to be in the folksong above. In addition the qualifying statement '*Nuair thigeadh an ro-achan*' ('When the frost came') (*EUL CW* MS131-A.315) above is almost certainly intended to imply incompetence: the end of autumn and the beginning of winter is the wrong time of year for fowling.

The vocables interspersed throughout this folksong are reminiscent of those found in work songs, including traditional hunting songs. In this instance, the repetition of '*achan*' may be a pun on '*ochan*', which carries implications of lamentation and grieving (see Dwelly, 2001: s.v. *ochan*). This would also support the argument that this song is a parody of an elegy, highlighted above (see also Larson, 1999: 53 for a closer analysis of the use of waulking songs as a subversion of the more measured pace of love poetry and laments). It is also possible that the

vocables '*hi-ri-achan, ho-ro-achan*' may be intended as a form of non-lexical bird imitation.

Carmichael's notes in square brackets after lines three, six and nine appear to be his own attempt to make sense of the line final abridgements '*ro-achan*', '*go'achan*' and '*ru'achan*' respectively, which appear to have been deliberately arranged to form an A-B-A rhyme scheme. Although '*reothadh*' ('frost') (Dwelly, 2001: s.v. *reothadh*) and '*ruthachan*' ('headland' or 'promontory') (Dwelly, 2001: s.v. *rudhan*) appear to be fairly unambiguous, '*geo'achain(n)*' may require some further investigation, and could relate to a place-name. Coates (1990) records thirty place-names on *Hirte* which include '*geò*' ('creek' or 'cove'), and several others in the outer islands and stacks as well. It is also interesting to note with reference to '*ro-achan*' above that Coates records '*na Roàchan*' as a place-name on Boreray which is applied to the 'gullies below a ridge above Clais na Runaich' (Coates, 1990: 74).

Another St. Kildan folksong similar to the above is also recorded in the Carmichael-Watson archive (*EUL CW* MS244.80), entitled '*Oran Irteach*', which carries the note 'From a woman in St Kilda, May 1865. Composed by a woman in St Kilda when her husband went over the rocks.' The same context and format are adopted.

Ho rothachan hi ritheachan	*Ho rothachan hi ritheachan*
Hey eile ho ruthachan	*Hey eile ho ruthachan*
Bu tu sealgair a bhigein	You were the hunter of little birds
N' uair thigeadh an rothachan	When the frosts came
Ho rothachan hi ritheachan	*Ho rothachan hi ritheachan*

Hey eile ho ruthachan   *Hey eile ho ruthachan*

Bu tu sealgair an isean   You were the hunter of chicks
N' uair thigeadh an rothachan   When the frosts came

Ho rothachan hi ritheachan   *Ho rothachan hi ritheachan*
Hey eile ho ruthachan   *Hey eile ho ruthachan*

Bu tu sealgair na faoileig   You were the hunter of seagulls
Faobh nan rothachan   The bounty of the frosts

Ho rothachan hi ritheachan   *Ho rothachan hi ritheachan*
Hey eile ho ruthachan.   *Hey eile ho ruthachan.*
                                           (EUL CW MS244.80; my own translation)

In the abvoe translation it is assumed that '*rothachan*' (ibid.) carries the same meaning as '*ro-achan*' in the earlier version, and therefore refers to '*reothadh*' ('frost') (Dwelly, 2001: s.v. *reothadh*). Another possible translation as 'little wheel' (Dwelly, 2001: s.v. *roth*) appears unlikely. Again the satire is realised by the use of animals which are not suitable for hunting or eating: i.e. 'little birds', 'chicks' and 'seagulls'.

In both of these versions, however, the strong sense of rhythm (supported by the vocable chorus) suggests that both of these items are waulking songs. The speaker of the song is ostensibly female, and the satirical subject matter reflects the 'frank and outspoken' (Larson, 1999: 57) tone which Heather Larson notes as a typical attribute of this genre. If this hypothesis is correct, the waulking song rhythm could be interpreted as a further subversion of the apparently elegiac language adopted by the songs' respective speakers.

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CW   Carmichael-Watson Collection (held by Edinburgh University Library)
EUL   Edinburgh University Library
GUL   Glasgow University Library
IPA   International Phonetic Association
NLS   National Library of Scotland
OED   Oxford English Dictionary
SA   Sound Archive (School of Scottish Studies)
SCRE Scottish Council of Research in Education
SSS   School of Scottish Studies
TPS   The Piobaireachd Society

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