Na Garbh-Chrìochan:
Alasdair mac Mhaighstir Alasdair and Translation Ethics

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Contents

Foreword

What follows is a two-part thesis on translations of the poetry of Alasdair mac Mhaighstir Alasdair. It consists of a creative component, in the form of my own translations, and a translation methodology as a critical component. Senate regulations of the University of Glasgow require Creative Writing researchers provide a thesis inclusive of both creative and critical components, but in order for it to be complete, these pieces must contain at least 60,000 words in total, demonstrate an appropriate ratio and relationship between the creative and critical components, and must reflect three years' research and creative practice as approved by the researcher's supervisors. This thesis meets these criteria.

Alasdair mac Mhaighstir Alasdair (c.1698-1770), often Anglicised 'Alexander MacDonald', was an 18th-century Scottish Gaelic poet whose work influenced important Scottish writers, such as Donnchadh Bàn Mac an t-Saoir (Duncan Bàn MacIntyre) and Somhairle MacGill-Eain (Sorley MacLean). Recently in Ireland, works such as *Aois Fir* by Liam Ó Muirthile (2015) may draw on his influence (Ó Muircheartaigh). While his legacy as a Jacobite and Catholic underlines his identity today, mac Mhaighstir Alasdair began his career in 1728 with the SSPCK, a Presbyterian mission in Scotland that sought to evangelise the Presbyterian faith but also exterminate Gaelic and Catholicism throughout the Highlands (Stiùbhart 16). It was during this time that he completed a Gaelic-English 'vocabulary' or proto-dictionary, the first of its kind (Black, *The Ardnamurchan Years* 25-26). He also penned some of his most important poems during this period, several of which are included in this thesis. It cannot be verified when mac Mhaighstir Alasdair converted to Catholicism[1], but soon after Charles Stuart landed on the banks of Loch Shiel to raise his Standard, mac Mhaighstir Alasdair became Gaelic tutor to the Prince (Campbell 36). During Culloden he fought as a captain in the Clanranald regiment, and his political poetry passionately endorses the restoration of the Stuart throne (36). While he is remembered as a poet, the distinction between poetry and song in Gaelic is fluid until the 20th century, and some of mac Mhaighstir Alasdair's compositions are still performed as songs today, at the Mòd, by trad bands, and one song featured on the hit TV series *Outlander*.[2] mac Mhaighstir Alasdair is nevertheless rarely known outside of scholarly circles, even in the Gàidhealtachd; the creative part of this thesis seeks to remedy that.

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[1] Black, *The Ardnamurchan Years*, 35: 'Around 15 May [1745] … [his] teaching days, his Ardnamurchan years, were over, and he now openly embraced Roman Catholicism.'

[2] McCreary, 'Moch sa Mhadainn'.

My approach to translation reintroduces mac Mhaighstir Alasdair to a 21st-century Anglophone readership; specifically, one with little-to-no knowledge of the Gaelic language, culture and history, and perhaps one with little interest in Scotland and/or Gaelic. The translation methodology, as such, serves to stoke interest in mac Mhaighstir Alasdair and acts as a primer, from which one can get a glimpse of a much-neglected, much-censored, and much-marginalized poet. The methodology leverages a subversive translation approach that stresses a personalized interpretation, written in a transatlantic English idiom with Scots and Gaelic inflections. The methodology will be analysed in greater depth in the thesis itself. The idea of an authoritative or 'proper translation' (i.e. that a work should be translated like x or y) is what is being subverted, but an ethics of representing mac Mhaighstir Alasdair's authorship tempers the method. The approach varies between close readings of the Gaelic, as well as deliberate mis-readings and experiments with vocabulary, register, and delivery. Liberties, in turn, attempt to represent mac Mhaighstir Alasdair's artistry from a 21st-century Anglophone perspective. Some 18th century images and tropes (rosy cheeks for beauty, speciesism for animal intelligence) are nowadays cliché or distasteful. To leave these untouched for a project that seeks to render poetry for a 21st-century readership is a contradiction if aesthetics are the priority.

The goal, if nothing else, is to widen awareness, to provoke conversation, and to restore mac Mhaighstir Alasdair's name to the broader literary conscious. Any future reader who deems this project inadequate will not be discouraged; rather, they will be encouraged to do better, in service of one of Scotland's best and most complicated writers.

Style Guide

All Gaelic is written in regular font format, with the exception of book titles, individual poem titles, or speech, which will be italicized.

‘Alasdair mac Mhaighstir Alasdair’ is the name by which the Gaelic community refers to the poet ‘Alexander MacDonald’, an Anglicised form of his name. Throughout the thesis he will be referred to as the former, with ‘mac’ adhering to patronymic conventions, whereby it remains lowercase even at the start of sentences where ‘Mac’ might be expected under normal circumstances.

‘bho’, as appended to some poem titles, means ‘from’, and throughout marks out a poem whose translation takes greater liberties than others.

Citations are written in MLA 8.

Praised Be Morag

Ùrlar

Pity not being in the wood.
When Morag was there
we joined those sunny bonny
brown-haired girls
for a laugh, guessing the cutest of us,
a coin toss to know.
Yet we outshined them all,
immortalized among wild rose—
on our stomachs, lying to each other,
lying to ourselves.
Our playfight became our foreplay.
Our sun cups delicately
picked from split rock. We took off
like deer over the deer-moor,
deep into headlands.
We got lost. We got so lost.

Moladh Mòraig[3]

Ùrlar

’S truagh gun mi sa choill’
Nuair bha Mòrag ann,
Thilgeamaid na cruinn
Cò bu bhòidhch’ againn;
Inghean a’ chùil dhuinn
Air a bheil a loinn,
Bhiomaid air ar broinn
Feadh na’ ròsanan;
Bhreugamaid sinn fhìn,
Mireag air ar blìon,
A’ buain shòbhrach mìn-bhuidh’
Na còsagan;
Theannamaid ri strì
’S thadhlamaid san fhrìth,
’S chailleamaid sinn fhìn
Feadh na’ strònagan.[4]

[3] Gaelic text drawn from Mackay and MacPherson, *An Leabhar Liath*, 2016.

[4] The penultimate and final lines in translation have switched positions. The reader will see similar instances of ‘line flipping’ occur throughout ‘Moladh Mòraig’. The translation here ends on the two being lost instead of the concrete image of the headlands, which signals finality – an edge by which limits are drawn. ‘Unfinished business’, the opposite of finality, is suggested by this introductory piece. After all, he is *not* in the wood with Mòrag. Ending on the concrete image thus felt too strong, and besides, the rest of the poem is adumbrated when ‘chailleamaid’ is emphasized. Loss is fundamental to the whole sequence’s conceit, and I want to ensure readers not only sense it, but feel it from the outset. Furthermore, the rhyme between ‘strònagan’ and ‘còsagan’ couldn’t be reproduced in the English convincingly, which allowed flexibility in respect to line flipping. For the first publication of this version see mac Mhaighstir Alasdair, *Dastram/Delirium*, 2023.

Ùrlar

Eyes like blue dewberry
in a film of dawn,
her facial blush lovely
as flowering citrus;
as flour stoneground
her powdery top, and under—
her soft pubic song.
She is sun and centre
to our planetary orbit.
Star untarnished,
Vesta among virgins.
Despite all other leading lights,
only in her, a mirror,
can beauty self-identify.
Flower that stirs,
jewel that blazes sight.
Morag is human clay?
I cannot believe my eyes.

Ùrlar

Sùil mar ghorm-dhearc driùchd
Ann an ceò-mhadainn,
Deirg’ is gil’ nad ghnùis
Mar bhlàth òirseidean;
Shuas cho mìn ri plùr,
Shìos garbh mo chulaidh-chiùil,
Grian na planaid-cùrs’
Am measg òigheannan;
Reula glan gun smùr
Measg na’ rionnag-iùil,
Sgàthan-mais’ air flùr
Na bòidhchid thu;
Àilleagan glan ùr
A dhallas ruisg gu ’n cùl;
Mas ann do chrèadhaich thù
’S adhbhar mòr-iongnaidh.

Ùrlar

Not since I first rooked
into manhood, coming-of-age,
have I laid eyes on so fine a thing.
There were others, of course,
like gentle Maili[5]
whose smile filled with rowanberry.
But she only sang
capricious airs. Peigi was too late
in years, otherwise
she would have had my heart.
Marsaili, however… not quite there,
yet always there. A nutter.
Lili's eyelids glowed
but she, nor any other, has the deeper
stare that Morag has—a stare
warm enough to bathe in.

[5] Retention of Gaelic nomenclature of people and musical terms, as can be seen throughout the poem, is an attempt to disrupt or inflect the English. Disruption of the English alerts the reader to intercommunicative elements between the source text and the translation.

Ùrlar

On thàinig gnè de thùr
O m’ aois òige dhomh,
Nìor facas creutair dhiubh
Bu cho-glòrmhoire:
Bha Maili ’s dearbha caoin,
’S a gruaidh air dhreach nan caor,
Ach caochlaideach mar ghaoith
’S i ro òranach;
Bha Peigi fad an aois—
Mur b’ e sin b’ i mo ghaol;
Bha Marsaili fìor aotrom
Làn neònachais;
Bha Lili a’ taitne’ rium
Mur b’ e a ruisg bhith fionn;
Ach cha bu shàth bùrn-ionnlaid
Don Mhòraig s’ iad.

Siubhal

No I don’t care, I don’t care
for any of them but Morag
whose elegance and dress
epitomize the whole lass
o’ pairts. No ornament
collected can replace her
inner good, yet an ornament
no less, she’s uncollectible,
even among that uncommon
prayer spanning Lewis to Mull.
She greets *Halò!*
with a human halo,
and from top to bottom
embodies perfect form.
Younger than her years
she’ll luringly reach out
to spirit a touch
and be touched,
if you say please.
O, she’s such
a tease.

Siubhal

O, ’s coma leam, ’s coma leam
Uil’ iad ach Mòrag:
Rìbhinn dheas chulach
Gun uireas’aibh foghlaim;
Chan fhaighear a tional
Air mhaise no bhunailt,
No ’m beusaibh neo-chumanta
Am Muile no ’n Leòdhas;
Gu geamnaidh, deas, furanach,
Duineil, gun mhòrchuis,
Air thagha’ na cumachd
O ’mullach gu ’bròg aibh;
A neul tha neo-churraidh
’S a h-aigne ro-lurach,
Gu brìodalach, cuireideach,
Urramach, seòlta.

Siubhal

Give it up, give it up
for Morag, who in one wink
can tweak the boys to disobey
that silly *always*
of wedlock. To stretch out, lay
not only with her, but her treasure…
The pleasure was all mine.
Hot dreams of the body ravish.
Stalk and score.
Temptation is sick.
Yet right before my eyes
her neckline, candlelit: and I'm
consumed by
a whinfire of thought.

Siubhal

O guiliugag, guiliugag,[6]
Guiliugag Mòrag!
Aice a ta ’chulaidh
Gu curaidh nan òigfhear;
B’ e ’n t-aighear ’s an sòlas
Bhith sìnte ri d’ ulaidh
Seach daonnan bhith fuireach
Ri munaran pòsaidh.
Dam phianadh ’s dam ruagadh
Le buaireadh na feòla,
Le aislingean connain
Na colna dam leònadh;
Nuair chithinn mu m’ choinneimh
A cìochan le coinnil,
Thèid m’ aign’ air bhoilich
’S na theine dearg sòlais.

[6] Onomatopoeia for a swan’s warble but here mimics sexual noise. The two Reverend MacDonalds in their 1924 translation claim it is a meaningless word to express rapture (MacDonald and MacDonald 214). I have imitated Ronald Black’s version of it as an interjection (Black, ed., *An Lasair* 438–439). Only the preposition of mine interacts with that of the following ‘siubhal’: ‘Give it *up*’ leads to ‘hands *down*’ in an attempt to create coherence between the two. Mine differs in that the interjection is only uttered twice in English, whereas in the Gaelic original it occurs thrice. Repeating this three times in 21st-century English seems excessive since so much of today’s creative writing culture challenges excessive or superfluous language. Numerous examples can be pointed to, but Nick Hornby, in his *Polysyllabic Spree*, references: ‘… the secret of good writing: cut it back, pare it down, winnow…’ (Hornby 7). Such liberties in the target text might better appeal collectively to a readership that favours spareness, and when the source text’s meaning or delivery haven’t been substantively skewed, the change is at worst benign.

Siubhal

Hands down, hands down
Morag is the most snug
in Europe. A crotch thatched
and breasts
so whitewashed
would scandalize
the Pope.
Lily of the valley
her pigment,
but her breasts reappear
variously red, ready and set.
Ample in-hand
they ache
to be kneaded,
to know love alone
shirks all
blessing of clan and kin,
and in turn, you'll be needed then.
Your spirits renewed;
for as her desire grows
so do you…

Siubhal

O fairigean, fairigean,
Fairigean Mòrag!
Aice a ta 'chroiteag[7]
As toite san Eòrpa;
A cìochan geal criostal,
Na' faiceadh tu stòit' iad
Gun tàirneadh gu beag-nàir'
Ceann-eaglais na Ròimhe;
Air bhuige 's air ghile
Mar lili na' lònan;
Nuair dhèanadh tu 'n dinneadh
Gun cinneadh tu deònach;
An deirgead, an grinnead,
Am mìnead 's an teinnead,
Gum b' àsainn chur-spionnaidh
Agus spioraid à feòil iad.

[7] One of mac Mhaighstir Alasdair's (in-)famous instances of sexual language. Often translated as a superlative ('she has the tightest pussy in Europe') my line retains the grammar but is quieter. Sexual language nowadays may not carry the shock and eroticism it did in the 18th-century. It risks falling flat. In attempt to retain the eroticism, I counterintuitively opt for understatement. Derick Thomson argues that '*c*roiteag' refers to a 'small hillock' and indirectly to female genitalia (*Selected Poems* 137). By extension 'crait ministeir' ('minister's hillock') means 'glebe' in mac Mhaighstir Alasdair's *Vocabulary* (mac Mhaighstir Alasdair, *A Galick and English Vocabulary*… 167). I wonder if there is an additional possibility, linked to a pun: that of 'croit' denoting a 'croft'. It is pronounced similarly to 'crotch'. A loanword in common legal use with the rise of the Clearances and later Crofters' Rights, 'croit' seems to have entered the language around the time mac Mhaighstir Alasdair published this poem. It was a new loanword from Scots that meant 'croft', legally denoting a small landholding. It is sometimes used erroneously as shorthand to mean the type of house sitting on a croft. My version of the line, then, and the whiteness of Morag's breast, which follows, tries to envelop all of this as a short conceit. Morag is described as tight, and indeed, croft land can be thought of as tight or 'snug', as can a croft house, which was historically whitewashed. It is a stretch to argue that mac Mhaighstir Alasdair *definitely* intended the pun here, but because 'crotch' was already common in Scots and English, which mac Mhaighstir Alasdair spoke fluently, both 'croit' and 'croiteag' share some variation of the pronunciation of 'crotch', in which case there are grounds to consider the pun.

Ùrlar

Now let’s raise the tone.
In the dawn of our abandon
Phoebus brightened the seas.
The deer-forest steamed
and deep in it, in the rutting,
our doe-and-roebuck chase
round saplings was dizzying,
the hill and spinney
of it all. We made love,
and we made love again,
again, fucked and flourished
till there was nothing
left to give, and finishing
we laughed together—
out of breath our laughter.

Ùrlar

Thogamaid ar fonn
Anns an òg-mhadainn,
’S Phebus a’ dath nan tonn
Air fiamh òrainsean:
Far cèill’ cha bhiodh conn
Air sgàth dhoire ’s thom,
Sinn air dàireadh trom
Le ’r cuid gòraileis;
Dìreach mar gum biodh
Maoiseach ’s boc à frìth
Crom-ruaig a-chèile dian
Timcheall òganan;
Chailleamaid ar clì
A’ gàireachdaich leinn fhìn,
Le bras-mhacnas dian sin
Na h-ògalachd.

Siubhal

Delirium! Delirium
from her, a girl blonde,
lurid: how she snuffs out
her own flint-spark glow,
and in one white bite
hewn from snow.
As sex and excess,
as body and beauty,
so Dido, so Venus,
so Morag ravishes
my seasons,
my genius
spent.
A girl with sharp agency
can pierce the heart
clean through.

Siubhal

O dastram, dastram,[8]
Dastram Mòrag!
Rìbhinn bhuidh', bhasdalach,
Leac-ruiteach ròsach;
A gruaidhean air lasadh
Mar an lasair-chlach dhathte,
'S a deud mar a' sneachda,
Cruinn-shnaighte 'n dlùth òrdugh;
Ri Venus cho tlachdmhor
An taitneachdainn fheòlmhor,
Ri Dido cho maiseach,
Cho snasmhor 's cho còrr rith';
'S e thionnsgain dhomh caitheamh
'S a lùghdaich mo ràithean,
A bhallag ghrinn laghach
Chuir na gathan sa 'm fheòil-sa.

[8] Peter Mackay and Iain S. MacPherson do not translate 'dastram' for their version (Mackay and MacPherson 153). Ronald Black interpolates 'O three cheers', a substitute phrase (Black, ed., *An Lasair* 129). The two Rev. MacDonalds claim dastram to be a coined word and leave it untranslated (MacDonald and MacDonald 218). Therefore, mine seems to be the first attempt at translating the word within the poem, and for the type of translation I desire, one with more resonance for the current reader of English-language poetry, translating this word, along with 'guiliugag' above, is necessary. mac Mhaighstir Alasdair may have coined a word borrowed from the Irish 'daistir imm-' meaning for one to become 'mad, furious' (dil.ie). This phrase, which mac Mhaighstir Alasdair bundled into one word phonetically, likely comes from 'Dáistir immum go seinnim píob', literally 'I am seized/surrounded with passion to play the pipes'. There is the later Scottish Gaelic equivalent: 'Dastaram gu seinnim pìob'. The word expresses both passion and madness, yet has also been glossed more soberly as one being 'proud' (i.e. 'I am proud to play a pipe'). mac Mhaighstir Alasdair's phrase is exclamatory (e.g. 'dastram!'). Gaelic has other words denoting delirium ('mearan/breisleach') but given the context, I felt 'delirium' particularly well suited to 'dastram', in meaning and appearance. With thanks to Tiber Falzett and Allan MacDonald for getting me to this point, and for approving of my translation. See also Cannon, *Gaelic Names of Pibrochs*, p. 27.

Siubhal

If I wasn't shackled,
keyless in wedlock, I'd lay
my inmost heart at Morag's altar,
her feet like a bridal stool's.
No regrets, no second thoughts
except to displease her
would equal death.
Respect. All my respect, Morag.[9]
In the tease and heat
of a Sunday barely begun,
you licked me clean.
The blood turning in my veins:
my sin, your communion.

[9] mac Mhaighstir Alasdair's source text switches from second to third person throughout the sequence, while mine switches from third person to second with this line. Oscillating points of view were literary enactments of 'ceòl mòr', but in English, they lack that immediacy because few people understand 'ceòl mòr' musically, let alone as a poetic formula. Oscillating points of view, in other words, might feel overly busy or cluttered in English no matter what technical bravura is employed to justify them, so I use a single shift, like a volta, emulating his original whilst imbuing the sequence in translation with a meaningful technical development.

Siubhal

’S mur bithinn fo ghlasaibh,
Cruaidh-phaisgte le pòsadh,
Dh’ìobrainn cridhe mo phearsainn
Air an altair-se Mòraig;
Gun lìobhrainn gun airtneal
Aig stòlaibh a cas e,
’S mur gabhadh i tlachd dhiom
Cha b’ fhad a sin beò mi.
O! ’n urram, an urram,
An urram do Mhòraig!
Cha mhòr nach do chuir i
M’ fhuil uil’ às a h-òrdugh,
Gun d’ rug oirr’ ceum-tuislidh
Fo imeachd mo chuislean,
Le teas is le murtachd
O mhochthrath Didòmhnaich.

Siubhal

Sidereal lass, cloudless you dazzle
in unfussy cool. In swansdown—
a smooth muted whiteout,
your waist. Cute nook
among waste. I mean it.
You are untouched earth,
if not a flourish of limbs—
nimble, intricate, tender. Fair
enough, sapling. You susurrate
instead of brag. Keep secrets
when you've been bad.

Siubhal

’S tu reula nan cailin,
Làn lainnir, gun cheò ort;
Fìor chòmhnard, gun charraid,
Gun arral, gun bheòlam;
Cho mìn ri clòimh eala,
’S cho geal ris a’ ghaillinn;
Do sheang-shlios sèimh fallain,
Thug barrachd air mòran.
’S tu Bànrigh nan ainnir,
Cha sgallais an còmhradh;
Àrd, foinnidh nad ghallan,
Gun bhallart, gun mhòrchuis;
Tha thu coileant’ nad bhallaibh,
Gu h-innsgineach, allamh;
Caoin, meachair’, farast’,
Gun fharam, gun ròpal.

Ùrlar

Free me, annul my word.
I have given more love
than I should,
but I would give more.
As love succumbs to madness
the strength to suffer
is outweighed.
A lover of madness then—
the madman
you have made of me.
You unmade me. You
taker of my heart, my resolve.
My undertaker,
you lay down over me
like clay in the kirkyard.

Ùrlar

B’ fhèarr gum bithinn sgaoilt’
Às na còrdaibh sa;
Thug mi tuilleadh gaoil
Is bu chòir dhomh dhuit;
Gun tig fo dhuine taom,
Gu droch-ghnìomh bhios claon—
Cuireadh e cruaidh-shnaoim
Air on ghòraich sin:
Ach thug i seo mo chiall
Uile uam gu trian:
Chan fhaca mi riamh
Tional Mòraig seo.
Ghoid i uam mo chrìdh’,
’S shlad i uam mo chlì,
’S cuiridh i sa chill
Fo na fòdaibh mi.

Siubhal

My question answered
by what I behold: a woman
whose breasts surrender
to white. Yours are turrets,
your nipples peace,
but my willingness
to thole the impossible
prospect of us
diminishes with each
minute lost. Your cherry
mouth candied mine, a kiss
vermillion as rose
and as red as Cupid's
swift-tipped arrows.
You left me
ruined, my coat
shot through.

Siubhal

Mo cheist agus m’ ulaidh
De chonnairc mi d’ sheòrs’ thu,
Le d’ bhroilleach geal-thuraid
Na’ mullaichean bòidheach;
Chan fhaigh mi de dh’fhuras
Na nì mionaid uat fuireach,
Ged tha buarach na dunach
Dam chumail bho d’ phòsadh.
Do bheul mar an t-sirist,
’S e milis ri phògadh,
Cho dearg ri bhermilion
Mar bhileagan ròsan:
Gun d’ rinn thu mo mhilleadh
Le d’ Chupid dam bhioradh,
’S le d’ shaighdean caol biorach
A rinn ciorram fo m’ chòta.

Siubhal

I notice sadness grows
with your absence, Morag.
The millstone of me launched below
the swelling sea drags
love's sailing.
No one in this whole world
rivals my otherworldly girl.
Your hair day-bright breaks the heart.
Kinky curls, blowout of curls
and waves,
every ring and satin tress
uncoils, loops back as silken
rope fastened round my neck.
Swirls, jewellery, starch.
Yours are all the rage.

Siubhal

Tha mi làn mulaid
On chunnaic mi Mòrag;
Cho trom ri clach-mhuilinn
Air lunnaibh da seòladh:
Mac-samhailt na cruinneig
Chan eil anns a’ chruinnidh;
Mo chrìdh’ air a ghuin leat
On chunnaic mi d’ òr-chùl
Na shlamagan bachallach,
Casarlach, còrnach;
Gu fàinneagach, cleachdagach,
Dreach-lùbach, glòrmhor;
Na reultagan cearclach
Mar usg’raichean dreachmhor,
Le fùdar san fhasan,
Grian-lasta, ciabh òr-bhuidh’.

Siubhal

Your edges soft
as bog cotton,
posh cinnamon
your kiss,
and the Phoenix
rarely rises in
a coat on-fleek
as yours is.
With happiness
only a lass has,
stuck-up nor staid,
you're more
flawless than
your flaws convey.
If you saw yourself
as I see you,
in Sunday's best
among the good-folk,
you might do
a double take:
you're heaven sent
with such shapes
and such gifts
as only God
could give are
without fail why
Earth is so bonny.

Siubhal

Do shlios mar an canach,
Mar chaineal do phògan,
Ri Phenix cho ainneamh
’S glan lainnir do chòta;
Gu mùirneanach, banail,
Gun àrdan, gun stannart,
’S i còrr ann an ceanal,
Gun ainnis, gun fhòtas.
Na’ faicte mo leannan
Sa mhath-shluagh Didòmhnaich,
B’ i coltas an aingil
Na h-earradh ’s na còmhradh;
A pearsa gun talach,
Air a gibhtean tha barrachd,
An Tì a dh’fhàg thu gun aineamh
A rinn de thalamh rud bòidheach.

Ùrlar

Sick off the sweetmeat we make of each other…
When Mammon stands
oblique to man, his sleight of hand
and ours together
move seamlessly. We hold the body as love
and love the body in vain.
Daft as we are decadent,
we take for granted everything,
so I was convinced
till you so clearly gained higher ground
where scale and excellence
are restored—
yours, Morag, yours:
the one fair god
to which I am drawn
with a cleft heart.
Long gone.

Ùrlar

Tha saoghal làn de smaointinnean feòlmhor,
Mamon bidh dar claonadh
Le ghoisnichean;
A’ cholann bheir oirnn gaol
Ghabhail gu ro-fhaoin,
Air strìopachas, air craos
Agus stròdhalachd:
Ach cha do chreid mi riamh
Gun do sheas air sliabh
Aon tè bha cho ciatach
Ri Mòraig s’;
A subhailcean ’s a ciall
Mar gum biodh ban-dia,
Leagh i ’n crìdh am chliabh
Le ’cuid òrrachan.

Siubhal

You hide
your thoughts.
What good is done
holding your tongue—
a rare chanter
melody of a lilting girl,
equally rare in
mainland and isle.
Complete and comely
and soothing and sudden
as you are, my wife,
if she discovered us,
would bury me
alive: love severed,
all my worth worthless.
Still, no runoff
beyond Loch Shiel[10]
and no snow atop
Cruachan's hind-field
starves this fire
of mind.

[10] Placing the translation presents an opportunity for a proto-psychogeography reading. By this I mean that a place's social strata influenced the way mac Mhaighstir Alasdair invoked the location. In this passage, for example, he mentions 'Seile' and 'Cruachan'. 'Seile' is Loch Shiel and Ronald Black speculates specifically Island Finnan, where mac Mhaighstir Alasdair taught at a school (Black, *The Ardnamurchan Years* 16, 18). Island Finnan as a location would have partly determined the passage's direction. Consider 'bùrn Seile siud' and 'cruachan'. The island has no freshwater stream of its own. 'Bùrn' in Gaelic translates to 'freshwater', hence Derick Thomson's suggestion of the loch itself (*An Introduction to Gaelic Poetry* 170). Yet that ignores the 'siud' of the phrase. 'Siud' generally means 'yonder' or 'far over there'. If strict definitions are taken into account, bùrn cannot merely be Loch Shiel because the loch's water is near as well as far from Island Finnan. Peter Mackay and Iain S. MacPherson in their translation render 'bùrn' as 'snow water', which connects to mac Mhaighstir Alasdair mentioning snow on the 'cruachan' (Mackay and MacPherson 165). Since 'cruachan' is a hilltop or summit, the snow atop it explains the meltwater and subsequent runoff, which yields credence to mac Mhaighstir Alasdair's use of 'siud'. But on what summit? Island Finnan has only hills, certainly nothing outstandingly cruachan-like, and besides, the loch is surrounded by high points. Beinn Rèiseapol, however, rises highest and nearest to Island Finnan, and its summit can be described as 'cruachan'. All things considered, Island Finnan situates connection. Pilgrims during the medieval period travelled by Loch Shiel or over Rèiseapol on pilgrimage to Island Finnan. It later became a burial site for mac Mhaighstir Alasdair's own clan. It represents, then, not only a private trysting place but cultural euphoria. Mòrag may have been more than a paramour. Charles Stuart, after Culloden, was given the codename 'Mòrag', and note above that she was the 'best in Europe'. Catholic Gaeldom, the ancient order by divine decree, which mac Mhaighstir Alasdair zealously championed; the Stuart throne: all were interrelated through sexual intercourse on the island. But if no longer together, if lost, the corollary is a break from euphoric interconnection.

Siubhal

Ur comhairle na ceilibh orm,
Ciod eile their no nì mi?
Mun rìbhinn bu tearc ceileireadh
A sheinneadh air an fhìdeig;
Chan fhaighear a leith'd eile seo
Air tir-mòr no 'n eileanaibh,
Cho iomlan is cho eireachdail,
Cho teiridneach 's cho bìogail.
'S nì cìnnteach gur nì deireasach,
Mur ceilear seo air Sìne,
Mi thuiteam an gaol leth-phàirteach,
'S mo cheathrannan am dhìobhail:
Chan eil de bhùrn an Seile siud,
No shneachd an Cruachan eilidneach,
Na bheir aon fhionnachd eiridneach
Don teine a ta nam innsgin.

Siubhal

All ears as my spirit,
charmed by your chanter, lifts
out toward the lyrical air
and with a spring in my step
I stepdance the ùrlar,
when your fingers take the lead
they take me on down
the scale, swinging lower
to keep pace, a lower melody
freely arranged to a four-
three-two-one whole bass
drone… Wow! Execution,
commandment through ceòl mor,
through huge sudden sound,
a standing ovation as
the house is brought down
to its knees. A long sharp
delicate keen, then sullen trill
hypnotic, undisrupted,
warbling over broad hill
like thunder after a storm,
your footfall in time.
Even after your performance,
ever after: resonant, straight, true,
the crùnluath of your fingers,
ringing in my ears still.

Siubhal

Nuair chuala mi ceòl leadanach
An fheadain a bh’ aig Mòraig,
Rinn m’ aigne dannsa beadarach,
’S e freagra’ dha le sòlas:
Sèimh-ùrlar socair, leadarra
A puirt, ’s a meòir a’ breabadaich;
B’ e siud an oirfeid eagarra
Don bheus na creaga mòra.
Ochòin! A feadan bailleagach,
Cruaidh, sgailleagach, glan, ceòlmhor,
Nam binn-phort stuirteil, trileanta,
Rèidh, mion-dhìonach, bog, ro-chaoin;
A’ màrsal còmhnard, stàiteil sin,
’S e lùthmhor, gràsmhor, caismeachdach,
Fìor chruinn-lùth brisg, spalparra,
F’ a cliath-lùth bras-chaoin, spòrsail.

Siubhal

Heads turn and worship and study
this girl who delights in having eyes
all over her. Her chanter sings:
music to my ears. Improvisational flash.
Song-possessed fairy-licks
storm with bliss and intonation.
No surprise she’s a formalist,
trained to stir you up
just to shut you down. Crazy how
one fingertap can skirl such a central tune.
Her most intricate pattern,
a musical star chart. Finger-fast attack,
clean, slick, effortless. Her
pinkie bursts off yet somehow plays on.
Dizzying, splendid curls of pipe song.

Siubhal

Chinn pròis is stuirt is spracalachd
Am ghnùis nuair bheachdaich guamag,
A’ seinn an fheadain ioraltaich,
B’ àrd iolach ann am chluasaibh;
A suain-cheòl, sìthe mireanach,
Mear-stoirmeil, pongail, mionaideach,
Na b’ fhoirmeile nach sireamaid
Air mhireid, ri h-uchd tuasaid.
Om buille meòir bu lomarra
Gu pronnadh a’ phuirt uaibhrich!
’S na h-uilt bu lùthmhor cromaidhean
Air thollaibh a’ chruinn bhuadhaich;
Gun slaoid-mheòirich, gun rongaireachd,
Brisg, tioram, socair, collaideach;
Geal-lùdag nan geàrr-chollainnean,
Na’ crap-lùth loinneil, guanach.

Ùrlar

Your hair,
interlace unending,
illuminates as I touch
and comb out the truth.
One tangible belief:
spirals, plaitwork
and insular rings
that lavishly uncurl
over your sharp brow.
Let's share more
wine, brimful
to drink our thirst,
and we'll come down
hard on those holier-
than-thou: uncouth,
cool and *fuck all*.
Make for the spillway,
the glug of us
with each whisky,
tearing off old shirts
and everything just
to dress ourselves
in each other.[11]

[11] See the first *Ùrlar* where the final two lines were flipped. More drastically I have split the stanza and switched the bottom and top halves. The original stanza ends on the image of the hair. For similar reason to the first *Ùrlar*, after translating the passage, the ending seemed stronger being less concrete.

Ùrlar

Chaisgeamaid ar n-ìot’
Le glainn’ fhìon a sin,
’S bhuaileamaid gu dian
Air glòir shìobhalta;
Tuilleadh cha bhiodh ann,
Gus an tigeadh àm
A bhith cluich air dam
Air na tìthean sin;
Dh’òlamaid ar dram,
Dh’fhògradh uainn gun taing,
Gach nì chuireadh maill’
Air bhith mìog-chuiseach;
Maighdean nan ciabh fann,
Shnìomhanach nan chlann;
Mala chaol, dhonn, cham,
Channach, fhìnealta.

Crùnluath

I left you and you left
a burr of whispers in my head,
a beehive of sex and nectar,
blocked up my nose
as I inhale lenten rose,
everything a blear
and so pained with squinting
I require a telescope.
Mountain and mite both are
indistinguishable to me,
inmate to my own body
and so pained with dreaming,
I worry what fortune
befalls the unfortunate.
Dead asleep then
from all that mental noise
suddenly I leap
into a joyous flash-
back, re-awakened by
my place between your legs…

Seven times, seven times
we drew from each other
a furious joy then peace of mind
felt nowhere else but the Fold.
Yet who do I discover there in bed
but Sìne, her grainy shock of blonde.
The woman I'd married all along.
Not you, Morag,
but almost-you. Her hand reaches
to coax me back up, to stroke
and strengthen the husband she loves:
not only thrust but one who must.
Through all her hex and hand
she raises her man, a standing stone.[12]

[12] Much in the translation has changed. In the source text *he* does the parting (dhealaich mi) from *her* 'wooing' (d' bhrìodal), whereas in my translation the parting is mutual, and the 'wooer' de-emphasized. The repetition of 'so pained with' doesn't occur in the source, nor does the mite. Perhaps the largest change to this section, however, is the 'standing stone' insertion. The source uses what may be a military image, that of the penis being 'steel' (cruaidh). The humour of that image falls flat in translation, and humour here is crucial. Standing stones are an erroneous association with Gaeldom, yet counterintuitively playing into that association yields humour. It achieves the literary 'impact' the source achieved, but loses the full scope of the original word, its military undertone. Some elements will be in lost in translation. Perhaps undertones are less important than their euphemistic function since the euphemism is what 'packs the punch', so to speak. Steel lacks immediacy. It isn't intuitively euphemistic, whereas a tall pointed stone is. Though my decision to use standing stone is an imposition in meaning, my image does mac Mhaighstir Alasdair's literary achievement justice by euphemistic immediacy, which fits within my larger translation system. Besides, military associations with Gaels are themselves now cliché. The television series *Outlander*, not to mention Scotland's own tourist sector, do a good job at caricaturing Jacobites as sword-wielding Highlanders (Culloden – Exhibitions). If the fear over the

Crùnluath

Mo cheann tha làn de sheilleneaibh
O dhealaich mi ri d’ bhrìodal,
Mo shòrn tha stopte a dh’elebor,
Na deil, le teine diombais;
Mo shùilean tha cho deireasach
Nach faic mi gnè gun telescop,
Is ged bhiodh meudachd beinnidh ann
’S ann theirinn gura frìd’ e.
Dh’ fhalbh mo chèidse corporra
Gu dochaireach le bruadar,
Nuair shaoil mi fortan thachairt dhomh,
’S mi ’m thorroichim air mo chluasaig;
Air dùsgadh às a’ chaithream sin
Cha d’ fhuair mi ach ion-faileas dheth,
An ionad na maoin bearraideach
A mheal mi gu seachd uairean.

Ach ciod thug mi gu glan fhaireachadh
Ach carachadh rinn Cluanag;
’S cò seo, o thùs, bu Mhòrag ann,
Ach Sìne an òr-fhuilt chuachaich;
Nuair thùr i gun do lagaich mi
’S gu feumainn rag chur stailcidh ann,
Gun d’ rinn i draoidheachd cadail dhomh,
Rinn cruaidh fìor rag dam luaidh’.

source-text image being corrupted with a cliché is what is in question, it is not clear a military image would be any less cliché.

I have to return a petty vow.
I have to turn over to her for now.
But I'll be thinking of you,
Morag. You the one
to receive my lips, through her:
a go-between, a means to an end.

Bha chleasachd sa cho fìnealta,
’S cho innleachdach mun cuairt dhi,
Nach faodainn fhìn thaobh sìobhaltachd,
Gun dligheadh crìon thoirt uam dhi;
Gun thionndaidh mi gu h-òrdail rith’,
’S gun shaoil mi gum b’ i Mòrag i,
’S gun d’ aisig mi na pògan dhi
’S cha robh d’ a còir dad uaith’.

Birlinn

I
Prayer and Rally

Hear my prayer and rally
for the crew and for the galley,
and for the legacy of Clanranald.

Beannachadh Luinge

Maille ri brosnachadh fairge, a rinneadh do sgioba is
do bhirlinn tighearna Chlann Raghnaill.[13] [14]

[13] Gaelic text drawn from Thomson, *Selected Poems*, pp. 139-153, and Riach, *The Birlinn of Clanranald*.. Thomson omits some of the prose such as the above 'Maille ri…'.

[14] Parts of 'Birlinn Chlann Raghnaill' are prefaced with prose, and three of the prefaces, such as this one at the beginning, perform an extra function in insinuating narrative shift. This one introduces a series of 'blessings' for the birlinn and the crew, and a 'sea-incitement' (or what I call here a 'rally') to stoke crew morale. I have re-written this and the two other aforementioned prefaces into verse. They are not 'translations' or 'versions' *per se*, but renderings of the three prefaces' function. Lyricizing them creates stylistic continuity as well as emphasizing narrative shift between the poem's three main 'sections'. Lyricizing them, in other words, points to an implicit function of 'sectioning' that sets them apart from the poem's other, more functional prefaces. While the source text did not consist of three main sections, there is good reason for the translation to contain them. It is not immediately apparent that section one, for example, foretells what will happen during section three, but with discrete sections, readers begin to see textual continuation. My version includes a section number for added emphasis. Furthermore, 'Birlinn Chlann Raghnaill' seems to have been written with regard to a 'listening' audience for whom the poem would have been performed. Prose prefaces would have aided listeners with the narrative, which might otherwise have been unclear due to mac Mhaighstir Alasdair's penchant for rich description. Prefaces are not unique to Gaelic at all, but they exemplify the transition between oral and literary culture in Gaelic. They also help a listening audience navigate the structural arc of longform performance poetry. They occur throughout 'Birlinn Chlann Raghnaill' alongside recycled and repeated imagery (e.g. the sails being 'speckled', or the oars damaging the palms of the rowers). mac Mhaighstir Alasdair describes high swells as 'glens' of the sea, whereby two 'walls' of water crash into the birlinn from both sides. Such repetition operates as mnemonic device for a listening audience who would recall descriptions while the narrative unfolds. An English translation can, and perhaps should, call attention to these various tools to encourage development of critical discussion since the poem is not well known outside of Gaelic. This means that if a translator perceives a specific systematic arrangement, rather than gloss over it, that arrangement should be evident throughout the translation; not to suggest that it is the right way to read the poem, but to present it in a way that feels coherent, or challenges preconceived notions, so a discussion can emerge around it. This is what I hope to have achieved in my structural changes. See 'Birlinn Chlann Raghnaill' section of the critical supplement for a fuller discussion.

Three Prayers

i

God bless
this sea-vessel,

which from the very first day,
it seems, was shouldered
by Clanranald. Lowered to the bay,
our war-torn heroes are heroes
beyond war, beyond the gale
and the ghost-note of air;
far out beyond incisive breakers
shattering over a rocky shore,

may you, sacred
cubed God,

harbour us, moor us to the hush.
It was you flooded earth
and pressed into cardinal points
a compass of wind that skirls
after all. So keep us, father,
our kyle-slicer and steel,
craft and crew, in your safekeep.
Sails, rigging, anchor, rudder.

Fix our tackle
like your only son

to the mast, a seaborne crucifix,
and each mast-ring also
that secures the sail-yards, and all
the moss-fir and heather ropes
be blessed: halyard and stay
flawless as you refuse us
our failure, our drift off-course.
Cartographer of every berth

under the sun, we bask
in your direction.

Beannachadh Luinge

Gum beannaicheadh Dia long Chlann Raghnaill
A’ cheud là do chaidh air sàile,
E fèin ’s a thrèin-fhir da caitheamh,
Trèin a chuaidh thar maitheas chàich.
Gum beannaich an Coimh-dhia naomh
An iùnnrais, anal nan speur,
Gun sguabte garbhlach na mara,
G’ar tarraing gu cala rèidh.
Athair, a chruthaich an fhairge
’S gach gaoth a shèideas às gach àird,
Beannaich ar caol-bhàirc ’s ar gaisgich,
’S cum i fhèin ’s a gasraidh slàn.
A Mhic, beannaich fèin ar n-acair,
Ar siùil, ar beartean, ’s ar stiùir,
’S gach droineap tha crochte ri ’r crannaibh,
’S thoir gu caladh sinn le d’ iùl.
Beannaich ar racain ’s ar slata,
Ar crainn ’s ar teudaibh gu lèir
Ar stagh ’s ar tarraing cùm fallain
’S na leig-s’ ann ar cara beud.
An Spiorad Naomh biodh air stiùir,
Seòlaidh e ’n t-iùl a bhios ceart;
’S eòl da gach longphort fon ghrèin,
Tilgeamaid sinn fèin fo ’bheachd.

ii

Our silver lick:
piercing swords, Spanish steel.
Chests of mail impenetrable.
Hands plate-steel,
and plate-steel necks. Bless us,
our arms, lord. The vaunting mavis
is our ancestral shield.
Each piece of weaponry in full.
We carry ourselves on our shoulders.
Our starry yew-bows
tuned-up taut to be battle-drawn,
our birch arrows
could pin the grubbiest badger
without splintering. *Ever*.
Blades and pistols, sure,
but we're kilted in excellence
for warring and winning and for
this boat, this birlinn.

Beannachadh nan Arm

Gum beannaicheadh Dia ar claidhean
’S ar lannan Spàinteach geur, glas,
Ar lùirichean troma, màillich
Nach geàrrte le faobhar tais,
Ar làmhannan cruadhach ’s ar gòrsaid,
’S ar sgiathan eun-dealbhach, dualach;
Beannaich gach armachd gu h-iomlan
Th’ air ar n-iomchar ’s ar crios-guaille;
Ar boghannan foinealach iubhair
Ghabhadh luthadh ri uchd tuasaid,
’S na saighdean beithe nach spealgadh,
Ann am balgan a’ bhruic ghruamaich.
Beannaich ar biodag ’s ar daga
’S ar n-èile gasd’ ann an cuaichean
’S gach treallaich catha is còmhraig
Tha ’m bàirc Mhìc Dhòmhnaill san uair seo.

iii

You cannot be simple, cannot bend.
Let trouble be met by courage. The seam
strapped to the ship's clinkered frame
may crack, but if just four planks remain,
if under you she still swims, still she swims:
a near-wreckage of tholepins starring water.
And whatever havocs you may face
you must, and by violent tides stand up
perseverant. If the effort is true, huge seas
astonished by the strength in you will bow,
their proudest wave become your windfall.
So it is on land. You confront your rival,
and coming to terms with your determination
he sidles back, little by little the offensive
sacrificed in favour of safer contact.
Same with the mighty sea. Suffer it
with wrath and alacrity, and at long last
it submits, as the God of All commands.

Na biodh simpleachd oirbh, no taise,
Gu dol air ghaisge le cruadal,
Fhad ’s a mhaireas ceithir bùird dhith
No bhios càraid shùdh dhith fuaighte;
Fhad ’s a shnàmhas i fo ur casaibh
No dh’ fhuir’eas cnag dhith an uachdar,
Dh’ aindeoin aon fhuathais gam faic sibh
Na meataicheadh gart a’ chuain sibh.
Ma nì sibh cothachadh ceart
’S nach mothaich an fhairg’ sibh dìblidh
Gun ìslich a h-àrdan ’s a beachd
’S d’ ur cosnadh sgairteil gun strìochd i.
Do chèile-còmhraig air tìr,
Mur faic e thu cinntinn tais,
’S dòich’ e bhogachadh san strì
Na cinntinn idir nas brais’.
Is amhail sin ata ’mhuir mhòr:
Coisinn i le colg ’s le sùrd
’S gun ùmhlaich i dhuit fa-dheòidh
Mar a dh’ òrdaich Rìgh nan Dùl.

Sea-Incitement

[15]We draw out and towards safer water,
a sailing place,
manoeuvre our dark craft. Each oar shaft
and blade thrust out:

flush with the horizon, feathered clean.
Precision in grain.
Handles solid and shaped to our hands.
Seasoned ease

makes for swift rowing. So let us
when we set off
embrace the open water growing rough
around us.

Rhythm in our palms, the hurt and rush
of casting sparks.
Every stroke a flint-strike and with
every strike

[15] I struggled with this section for three reasons: 1). The setting and present activity; 2). Its use of the future tense; and 3). The conceit being largely that of a future event. To write about a future event, at length, is an unfamiliar stylistic choice for me and in order to translate it, I needed to understand its broader function within the poem. This passage, like the following one, serves to amp-up or 'rally' the crew. It conveys what they *will* do during their journey, thus rousing their spirits. I sought a current analogy in the 'hype man' of a rap performance, rousing the crowd before the 'main act' begins, in an attempt to understand mac Mhaighstir Alasdair's design and purpose of this passage. It is nevertheless impossible to know what he intended, so this is very much my own interpretation. Added difficulty arose with the scene being depicted by an omniscient narrator, rather than as one of the crew. Distance is created despite the minute detail of the imagery and I couldn't under why. As will be revealed, I put the narrator onboard the birlinn to shrink this perceived distance. There is an argument to be made that narrative distance is freeing, but it can feel detached or impersonal, and the hyperreal specificity of nautical equipment feels more believable with less narrative distance. Starting with 'àite seòlaidh' or 'sailing place', the crew leave from the southeastern coast of South Uist and because of the coastline, they have to guide the birlinn carefully over reefs and through narrow rocky inlets (none of which are described in the poem), then station the ship at a sailing place, temporarily, to ready it for the high seas. Guiding the birlinn out protects it along the way, and because mac Mhaighstir Alasdair assumes this practice to be understood by his audience (which during his time, it would have been), he merely mentions the sailing place in the poem. To me, thinking about a current audience, unfamiliar with nautical practice, it felt amiss to translate without context. Therefore, this is an instance of me adding information in an attempt to 'fill in the gap of knowledge', as it were; the first line of my translation being more or less invented. It is worth noting now, although a fuller discussion occurs later in the critical supplement, that mac Mhaighstir Alasdair's aesthetic decisions may not have been finalized, since the poem was 'published' posthumously. One wonders if he would have changed his approach to this passage. Iain Crichton Smith, in translating 'Birlinn Chlann Raghnaill', skipped over this first section altogether, perhaps because of its strangeness.

Brosnachadh iomraidh gu ionaid seolaidh

Gun cuirt an iùbhraich dhubh dhealbhach
An àite seòlaidh:
Sàthaibh a-mach cleathan rìghne,
Liagh-lom, còmhnard;
Ràmhan mìn-lunnacha, dealbhach,
Socair, aotram,
A nì ’n t-iomradh toirteil, calma
Bos-luath, caoir-gheal;
Chuireas an fhairge ’na sradaibh
Suas sna speuraibh,

a sunshower. [16] Seas clotted to foam
will cool
your burning singular lunge. Lean
salt-bleached oars,

their sharpest blow beats to smithereens
all toppling swells
and waves overflowing. Blue welling
like a wound.

Aye, such drill and draw could level
the whole ocean.
Oars fastened will stretch, draw and bend
as the blood

leaves your grip. Taut pinewood
oars in-hand
and everyone a Vitruvian man with arms
carved, sculpted,

and hair stippling muscle. In unison you
fall and rise
and escaping waves, prove your oars' design.
A spirited oarsman,

first among the bow, will sing out and
his iorram surge
through your shoulders. Thus this ship glides
the cold sea-glen

and by the sickle of her prow scales
two walls
of water collapsing to white. Roar, thrash.
Cabes bracing

[16] 'Teine-sionnachain' – In contemporary Gaelic use this word can mean 'will o' the wisp' and mac Mhaighstir Alasdair didn't include it in his 1741 *Vocabulary*. Will o' the wisps are typically associated with inland or tidal water, like bog or lake, whereas this image happens offshore on the sea. Perhaps it was mac Mhaighstir Alasdair's intention to develop the image? To translate it piece by piece, 'teine' denotes 'fire' and 'sionnachain' may be used is many senses to denote that strange vision as a result of the mixture of water and light, like a half-rainbow or ghostly glow. What's more is the event is 'lasadh' or 'kindled', so its fiery quality is central. 'Sionnachain' can be scientific, as bioluminescence, but that seemed wrong too. I decided on 'sunshower' for two reasons: 1) because it seems a plausible enough phenomenon in the islands given their shifting weather patterns, and the word as it is used in English carries a connotation of surprise; for while it is a common enough event, people remark on the suddenness of sunshowers; 2) because the following line 'Mar fhras èibhlean' does describe a shower of embers. In a way, I'm trying to consolidate the two lines into one. John Gregorson Campbell wrote about the Hebridean phenomenon of 'teine sith', or 'fairy light' (*The Gaelic Otherworld* 3). I had considered this possible connection to mac Mhaighstir Alasdair's 'teine-sionnachain'. However, even if the connection is valid, it may recall the present-day English use of 'fairy lights', decorative string of holiday lights – a connection I want to avoid. mac Mhaighstir Alasdair's idea would not have been appropriately conveyed if I had used 'fairy light'.

’Na teine-sionnachain a’ lasadh
Mar fhras èibhlean.
Le buillean gailleacha tarbhach
Nan cleath troma,
A bheir air bhòc-thuinn thonn-anfaich
Lot le ’n cromadh;
Le sginean nan ràmh geal tana
Bualadh chollainn
Air mhullach nan gorm-chnoc gleannach,
Gharbhlach, thomach.
O, sìnibh, tàirnibh is lùbaibh
Anns na bacaibh
Na gallain bhas-leathann ghiùthsaich
Le lùths ghlac-gheal:
Na fuirbidhnean troma treuna
A’ luigh suas orr’
Le ’n gàirdeanan dòideach, fèitheach,
Gaoisneach, cnuacach,
Thogas ’s a leagas le chèile,
Fo aon ghluasad,
An gathan liagh-leabhar rèidhe
Fo bhàrr stuaghan;
Iorghaileach, garbh an tùs clèithe
Ag èigheach shuas orr’
Iorram a dhùisgeas an spèirid
Anns na guaillean,
Sparras a’ bhirlinn le sèitrich
Roimh gach fuar-ghleann,
Sgoltadh na bòc-thuinne beucaich
Le saidh chruaidh chruim,
Dh’ iomaineas beanntainean bèisteil
Roimh ’dà ghualainn.

the oars will crack. Thrash and roar,
breakers against
the boat planks smash. The oars drubbed.
Your blistered

grip reopened. Every fit thick rower will tear
through spumy surf
to no end. Oakplanks, caulking, iron
cast in violence.

Nail heads missing after the clash.
The water
from all sides threatening the last laugh.
Hence the oar-team:

to brave it, rave through it, strive forward
and face
the music. Seas could shatter a crew
front-to-back

but you, a powerhouse on deck, will clear
the livid spindrift.[17]
Imperilled you tirelessly turn the tide,
and the tide

turns in you: perilous, alive.[18]

[17] 'Na cuartagan cùl-ghlas' – 'the grey-backed swirls' I translated as 'livid spindrift'

[18] 'Gun sgìos, gun airtneal gan lùbadh / Ri uchd gàbhaidh' – There's a tight, hermetic rhyme here that is entirely lost in translation. In fact, to translate this ending to capture aesthetic, a very powerful one in the Gaelic, would distort the meaning, and vice versa, to the point of sounding ridiculous in English. 'Uchd' is a 'top bank', while 'gàbhaidh' is 'danger' or 'peril'. Perhaps the meaning of this phrase is similar to the English 'fever pitch', 'danger zone', or 'point of no return'. I have resolved to convey his idea of expert handling of rough seas by the men through a chiasmus technique. The men will, indeed, be in a dangerous situation, as prior imagery details, but they are men who live for danger and so tempt it—a *raison d'être* if you will.

Hùgan le cuan, nuallan gàireach,
Heig air chnagaibh,
Faram le bras-ghaoir na bàirlinn
Ris na maidibh,
Ràimh gam pianadh ’s bolgain fhal' air
Bois gach fuirbidh,
Na suinn làidir, gharbha, thoirteil
’S coip-gheal iomradh,
Chreathnaicheas gach bòrd dhe 'darach,
Bìth is iarunn;
’S lannan dan tilgeil le staplainn
Chnap r’a sliasaid.
Fòirne fearail a bheir tulgadh
Durrgha, dàicheil,
Sparras a’ chaol-bhàirc le giùthsaich
An aodann àibheis;
Nach pillear le frìth nan tonn dubh-ghorm,
Le lùths ghàirdean;
Siud an sgioba neartmhor, sùrdail
Air chùl àlaich,
Phronnas na cuartagan cùl-ghlas
Le rinn ràmhachd,
Gun sgìos, gun airtneal gan lùbadh
Ri uchd gàbhaidh.

Iorram

Then, sixteen of us seated at the oars guide the ship downwind towards the sailing place.[19] *Calum Garbh, son of Ranald of the Seas, from the bow-oar cries out a iorram. He sings thus:*

Prepare, dear elect.
You appear elite but must
demonstrate that first thrust[20]

first. Be fast, be fearless,
be gallus as ever through
billowing grey. Sea and sky

converge up ahead, palm lines
stitched to the bone of
your grip, long dazzling

wake swirling from the last
oar bank. Departure.
Laddish chanting turns

to shameless laughter.
We'll egg each other on.
Blame the man at the bow,

the song in his mouth.
Wood dust from oarlocks
gnaw at the oars and

the oars, wrestled by swells,
gnaw at our palms. They
never heal. The brow,

the cheek scoured,
haemorrhaging sweat.
Onward, stretch, draw

oar blades of pine and
our oar team[21] in time.
What crosscurrents

disturb our journey will
become our journeywork.
This vessel well-lined,

---

[19] 'Gu ionad-seòlaidh' – See 'àite seòlaidh' above. 'Ionad' used interchangeably with 'àite' indicates 'location'.

[20] Others have translated 'tulgadh' as 'rocking' (MacDiarmid, ed. *The Golden Treasury* 70). I translate it as 'first thrust / first' on the basis of connotation: 'the initial drive in rowing'. The sense is the boat accelerates from this 'initial drive' and thus rocks as a result.

[21] 'Iomraibh còmh-luath' – This fragment is raised a few lines in translation to rhyme 'time' with 'pine' and develop the oar image. The idea of a 'team' relates to còmh-; MacDiarmid translated it 'row as one' (71). Below I imitate mac Mhaighstir Alasdair's sonic patterns, such as 'bacaibh' and 'bhasaibh', with 'journey' and 'journeywork'; literal meaning is not a priority.

Ann sin, an dèidh do na sia feara deuga suidh air na ràimhaibh, chum a h-iomradh fon ghaoith gu ionad-seòlaidh, do ghlaodh Calum Garbh mac Raghnaill nan Cuan iorram oirre, 's e air ràmh-bràghad, agus is i seo i:

A nis, on rinneadh bhur taghadh,
'S gur coltach dhuibh bhith nur roghainn,
Thugaibh tulgadh neo-chladharra dàicheil.

Thugaibh tulgadh neo-chearbach,
Gun airtneal, gun dearmad,
Gu freasdal na gailbhinne sàil-ghlais.

Tulgadh danarra treun-ghlac
A righeas cnàmhan is fèithean,
Dh' fhàgas soilleir o cheumannan àlaich.

Sgobadh fonmhor gun èislean
Ri garbh-phrosnachadh 'chèile
'S iorram ghleusd' ann am beul fir a bràghad.

Cogall ràmh air na bacaibh,
Leòis is rùsgadh air bhasaibh,
'S ràimh da snìomh ann an achlaisean àrd-thonn.

Biodh bhur gruaidhean air lasadh
'S biodh bhur bois gun leòb chraicinn
Fallas mala bras-chnapadh gu làr dhìbh.

Sìnibh, tàirnibh is luthaibh
Na gallain liagh-leabhar ghiuthais,
'S dèanaibh uidhe roimh shruthaibh an t-sàile.

Cliath ràmh air gach taobh dhith
Masgadh fairge le saothair,
Dol 'na still ann an aodann na bàirlinn.

oar banks on both sides.
The seas they stir separate
and curl away in waves,

the widening of the wake.
Clear strokes ringing clear.
Unswerving, fierce

drive her, drive further.
Look to each other to inspire.
As blood replenishes

so your arms empower
this ship's oaken shell,
which takes off

and in near-showmanship
drifts, flourishes
through the wildest

sea-chutes. Wave after
wave split by the hull
till suddenly

the waters rise: two walls
collapse to one harsh *whoosh*.
Grey seas folding grey,

seams of suds insewn.
Currents will moan, rush
to burst the bilge but

onward, stretch, draw.
Flex the spine of the oar.
Align it with yours

straining to grip. The red
of the wood grain leeches
to your fingertips. Aye,

your sweaty brow may
blind you, but put that
headland behind you.

Bid farewell to Uist
of the Sheldrakes.
Let us hoist our sails.[22]

[22] My last two lines invert mac Mhaighstir Alasdair's. Uist and sheldrakes are not widely known, so ending 'let us hoist our sails' feels more affirmative. As discussed elsewhere, these translations aim to be an entryway for

Iomraibh còmh-luath, glan, gleusda
Sgoltadh bòc-thuinne beucaich,
Obair shùnntach, gun èislein, gun fhàrdal.

Buailibh cothramach, treun i,
Sealltainn tric air a chèile,
’S dùisgibh spiorad nur fèithean ’s nur gàird’nibh.

Biodh a darach a’ collainn
Ris na fiadh-ghleannaibh bronnach
’S a dà shliasaid a’ pronnadh gach bàirlinn.

Biodh an fhairge ghlas thonnach
Ag at ’na garbh-mothar lonnach,
’S na h-àrd uisgeachan bronnach a’ bàirich.

A’ ghlas-fhairge sìor chopadh
Steach mu dà ghualainn thoisich,
Sruth ag osnaich o shloistreadh a h-eàrrlainn.

Sìnibh, tàirnibh is lùbaibh
Na gathan mhìn-lunnach chùl-dearg
Le iomarcaidh smùis air garbh-ghàirdean.

Cuiribh fuidhibh an rudh’ ud,
Le fallas-mhailghean a’ sruthadh
’S togaibh seòl rith’ o Uibhist nan cràdh-ghèadh.

a general Anglophone poetry readership, so ending on more familiar terms aids in that endeavour. Terms like ‘hoisting of sails’ leave fewer questions.

II
The Crew

We reach the sailing place
beyond rock-pierced water,
then straight away stow

the oars, sixteen in total,
framing the deck to leave
space for the sheet-ropes.

All seaworthy sailors
elected by the laird himself,
no salt can stain or plague

our pledge to Clanranald.[23]

[23] Again, this is very loosely based on the Gaelic original, with some invention. It prefaces the 'Crew Sketches' section below. Note that I put mac Mhaighstir Alasdair on-board, to shrink some of the aforementioned 'distance' in his voice, as I believe this reinforces the personal investment (Clanranald being his familial clan) he had in such a journey. It also makes more intimate both the celebration of clanship and the storm experience overall.

Dh’ iomair iad an sin i gu ionad-seòlaidh

’S an sin nuair thàrr iad an t-seòlaid
Gu fìor ghasda
Shaor iad na sia ràimh dheuga
Steach roimh ’m bacaibh;
Sgathadh grad iad shìos r’a sliasaid
Sheachnadh bhac-bhrèid;
Dh’ òrdaich Clann Raghnail d’a uaislean
Sàr sgiobaire-cuain bhith aca
Nach gabhadh eagal roimh fhuathas
No gnè thuarapaidh a thachradh.

I. ENTER HELMSMAN[24]

He takes charge of the rudder.
Ready to go. A force to be reckoned with
on the roughest seas.
No trough or crest could capsize
one so central and with such control
as he, shaped-to-the-helm
-and-short-enough-to-get-it-telt
-by-stature-alone.
Tough, coarse, pithy, fit,
watchful but wary of wariness.
Delicate in touch, but in thought
he plumbs deeper down.
Soaring, roaring tempests dumbed
by the ship's narrow prow, [25]
while the ship, without the smallest tilt,
swimmingly stays its course.
Quick work. Sail-sheet, clew
adjusted by eye, his tacked windward. [26]
Not one thumb's inch
from the right track is lost on him
despite the sea, its coming rush and crash.

[24] 'Suidheadh', passive form of 'sit', but used as crew introduction. 'Enter' in the title is my substitute.

[25] The second line down deviates from the original. Adjective stacking, so fundamental to Gaelic, is hard to translate into English with any verve. It can speed up pace, as I have attempted in the first half of line 9. But to translate mac Mhaighstir Alasdair's every adjective falls flat compared to his sonic achievement in Gaelic. For example, what does it mean for the helmsman to be 'fuasgailt'? One translation is 'unrestrained' but in English that makes little sense. Why would a lack of restraint be desirable at the helm? Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair would contradict himself by later describing the man as 'watchful'. Thomson, more plausibly, translates 'fuasgailt' as 'loose-limbed' but this still stifles the reading experience. Conflating the mentality of the first, and the physicality of the latter, I translated 'fuasgailt' as 'Ready to go', hoping the phrase conjures the dexterity required during tense conditions. Another stumbling point here was how to translate 'màsach' ('large-buttocked' or 'broad-hipped')? The idea is that the helmsman's physique aids his handle of the ship, but for those unfamiliar with the historical sailing practice in the Hebrides, the connection between buttocks/hip size and having a handle on the boat will not be self-evident. Elsewhere mac Mhaighstir Alasdair describes the man as stocky or squat, and much of the adjectival description reinforces a 'strong and pertinent man' image, done with boastful praise. Three other translations have used 'broad-beamed' for this word. I strayed from it because 'broad-beamed' is uncommon in both English and Scots. A unified connotation threads the adjectives together, and instead of describing him as large-buttocked, I say he's shaped like the helm: that is, round and short, and this directly links his body type to the boat, suggesting he would then have a handle on the ship.

[26] 'Ga rian' – translated by both Thomson and MacDiarmid as 'adjust'. Nowadays this would be 'rianachadh' so the 'rian' could tie into the current use, and the 'ga' is a personal pronoun which refers to the boat, but 'rian' can also be translated as 'control' if considered separate from 'rianachadh'. Etymologically, there is a broad sense in which 'adjust' and 'control' correlate, given that 'adjusting' ropes on a boat is an attempt to establish 'control' over both the sail and the boat. Getting a sense of the action here in relation to 'amharc' or 'sight/observation' has presented translation difficulties.

Dh' òrdaicheadh, an dèidh an taghadh, a h-uile duine a dhol an seilbh a ghrama àraidh fèin, 's 'na cho-lorg sin, ghlaodhadh ris an stiùireamach suidhe air an stiùir anns na briathran seo:[27]

Suidheadh air stiùir trom-laoch leathann,
Neartmhor, fuasgailt
Nach tilg bun no bàrr na sumaid
Fairge uaithe;
Clàranach taiceil, làn spionnaidh,
Plocach, màsach,
Mìn-bheumanach, faicleach
Furachail, làn nàistinn;
Bùnnsaidh, cudthromach, garbh, socair,
Solta, lùthmhor,
Eirmseach, foighidneach, gun ghriobhaig
Ri uchd tùilinn;
Nuair a chluinn e an fhairge ghiobach
Teachd le bùirein,
Chumas a ceann caol gu sgibidh
Ris na sùghaibh,
Chumas gu socrach a gabhail
Gun dad luasgain,
Sgòd is cluas ga rian le amharc,
Sùil air fuaradh;
Nach caill aon òirleach na h-òrdaig
D'a cheart chùrsa
Dh' aindeoin bàrr sumaidean mara
Teachd le sùrdaig;

[27] As can be seen from the English version above, the prose heading in the Gaelic source text is longer than the English target text. In other parts of the target text, some of the prose prefaces have been incorporated into the poems themselves. Each decision concerns reception. It isn't always clear why mac Mhaighstir Alasdair gives some of the crew prose prefaces, and others none. The Teller-Of-The-Waters, for example, is not only prefaced, but the helmsman narrates his section, and his alone, where just before him, the Lower Halyard has no preface. A general poetry readership may find these differences to be a stumbling point. The translation seeks to reduce stumbling points, not to misrepresent mac Mhaighstir Alasdair, but to be an alternative reading in lieu of a critical analysis of textual circumstances. 'Birlinn Chlann Raghnaill' was 'published' posthumously, so one may argue that the poem is unfinished, or in draft stage, in which case, the translator then has an opportunity to come up with their own solution. The central point here, however, is that this translation seeks to present a coherent aesthetic experience, and as is organized, the translation has an intuitive system which in a literal translation it would lack.

Steadfast he will steer, if steer he must,
hard against the flaw-wind keening
the boat through, every bit.

Given to giving up?
Not him. The grey sea's kiss,
its head-butt, may break
the gunwales but not his spirit,
turning ship to headship
all by the tiller tucked under-arm.
A challenge to whitecaps:
timed, anticipated, they amass
jagged from the depths,
tall sea-glens, like doldrums

folding north. He dodges
sudden gusts, when
the sheet-rope should strain

but never does, as if threading us and our promise
full sail through surf, through scattering waves
and sea spray, and through no space smaller
than a sail's corner-ring [28] somehow
he navigates everything.

[28] This is a play on 'threading the eye of the needle'. The original talks about control and accuracy: 'Cheanglas a gabhail cho daingean'. Rather than translate the line as a separate idea, I joined it with an earlier image, 'fuaradh cluaise', what I've translated as 'corner ring' which sits on the corner of a sail. Nowadays this word is used to mean 'earring', if that helps in imagining its minuteness. Just above it, 'our promise' is my addition entirely. I want to stress the idea of how much depends on so little a thing as the 'fuaradh cluaise' and the act of accurately threading the ropes. In fact, much of this depiction of the helmsman has been changed, appended, or omitted, for a number of reasons. However, it is my hope that the thrust of it, the centre, is preserved in details. mac Mhaighstir Alasdair describes the helmsman's accuracy as falling within 'the inch of the thumb' or 'aon òirleach na h-òrdaig', and this marvellous, unique detail cannot be adjusted. The ending is entirely different than the original but uses some of mac Mhaighstir Alasdair's material. Quite simply it couldn't be translated literally, as it sounded far too mechanical.

Thèid air fuaradh leath’ cho daingean,
Masa h-èiginn,
Nach biodh lann no reang d’a darach
Nach toir eubh asd’;
Nach taisich ’s nach tèid ’na bhreislich
Dh’ aindeoin fuathais;
Ged a dh’ atadh a’ mhuir cheann-ghlas
Suas gu chluasaibh,
’S ged a bhristeadh e ’na dheannaibh
Steach mu ghuaillibh;
Nach b’ urrainn am fuirbidh chriothnachadh
No ghluasad
O ionad a shuidhe, ’s e treunant,
’S ailm ’na asgaill,
Gu freasdal na seana-mhara ceanna-ghlais
’S gleanna-gharbh ascaoin;
Nach criothnich le fuaradh cluaise
An taod-aoire,
Leigeas leatha ruith is gabhail
’S làn ’na h-aodach,
Cheanglas a gabhail cho daingean
’M bàrr gach tuinne,
Falbh dìreach ’na still gu cala
’M bàrr gach buinne.

II. ENTER RIGGER

Even he, our star muscle, wields
a fistful of caution. Sunwise
adjustments make our rigging his
masterwork no storm
can deconstruct, no calm disclaim.
Tension anticipates circumstance.
The yardarms. Mast. The whole
apparatus calibrated.
Apparent wind, he detects it,
the one furling sails, he seconds.
And if ropes do tear,
their horsehair-strength tested,
he’s there. Quick recourse is this rigger
to the rig. Gives what he can give.

Dh’ òrdaicheadh a mach fear-beairte

Suidheadh toirteal-laoch garbh-dhòideach
An gloic beairte,
A bhios staideil, làn de chùram,
Graimpidh, glac-mhor;
Leigeas cudthrom air ceann slaite
Ri h-àm cruadhaich,
Dh’ fhaothaicheas air crann ’s air acfhainn,
Bheir dhaibh fuasgladh,
Thuigeas a’ ghaoth mar a thig i
A-rèir seòlaidh,
Fhreagras mìn, le fearas-bheairte,
Beum an sgòid-fhir;
Sìor chuideachadh leis an acfhainn
Mar a dh’ fhaodas,
Mura fàillnich buille-bheairte
Reamhar ghaoisid.

III. ENTER MAIN SHEET

Two large arms take to the deck and through
each forearm, muscle gives way to pelt:

His skin is thick, fists are broad and bone
with fingers thrawn from trimming

that harsh jar of sheeting in, then sheeting out
during harsh weather, he sees it coming

in downdraughts, in windblasts tightens rope,
rope slackened after the winds pass.

Chuireadh air leth fear-sgòid

Suidheadh fear-sgòid air an tobhtainn,
Gàirdean làidir
Nan ruigheannan gaoisneach, fèitheach,
Reamhar, cnàmhach;
Cràgan tiugha, leathann, cliathnach,
Meur-gharbh, cròcach,
Mach ’s a-steach an sgòid a leigeas
Le garbh-sgròbadh;
An àm cruadhaich a bheir chuig’ e,
Gaoth ma shèideas,
’S nuair a nì an oiteag lagadh
Leigeas beum leis.

IV. ENTER HEADSAIL

Strength and stut-at-sea, his[29]
corner-cleat-mastery tacks

windward, lifting, lowering
the sail, held fast to belaying

pins and forecasts, fair wind
never failure. Tempests may

intimidate with a boom
yet he remains resolute,

so steeply heeling the ship over,
sweeping water, his upwind trim.

[29] 'Stut' is a Scots verb, meaning 'to prop' (dsl.ac.uk). It is used for taiceil (denoting 'firm' and 'supportive').

Dh’ òrdaicheadh air leth fear-cluaise

Suidheadh fear cnaparra, taiceil,
Gasda, cuanda,
Làimhsicheas a’ chluas neo-lapach
Air a fuaradh,
Bheir imrich a-sìos ’s a-suas di
Chum gach urracaig,
A-rèir ’s mar a thig an soirbheas
No bàrr urchoid,
’S ma chì e an aonrais ag èirigh,
Teachd le osnaich
Lomadh e gu gramail, treunmhor
Sìos gu stoc i.

V. ENTER LOOKOUT

He rises, weatherwise
from the bow. This seafarer
offers us safety
in knowledge, cardinal points,
and for the helmsman
the horizon, by foresight alone,
is deciphered.

The right path, his mental map.
A visionary catching sight
of landmarks, he
becomes our lodestar,
through all weather
our godsend.

Dh’ òrdaicheadh don toiseach fear-eòlais

Eireadh màirnealach ’na sheasamh
Suas don toiseach
’S dèanadh e dhuinn eòlas seasmhach
Cala a choisneas,
Sealladh e an ceithir àirdean
Cian an adhair,
’S innseadh e do dh’ fhear na stiùireadh
’S math a gabhail,
Glacadh e comharra-tìre
Le sàr shùil-bheachd,
On ’s esan as dia gach sìde
Is reul-iùil duinn.

VI. ENTER LOWER HALYARD

Zing makes him
vital, restless, built
beyond frisson,
but careful
enough, exacting
and accurate,
in fact, to adjust
the sails when
needs must.
Quintessential
obsessive he
throws himself
back, the whole
man, each
humongous pull
on the halyards
clasped by
two weighty fists,
which reach,
and the oak planks
of the deck
receive. Never
fasten rope to cleat,
but rather braid
cunningly a slip,
so in a quick
simple *zip*
the downhaul
can be slackened.
With humming pegs
under wind
pressure, sails can tear,
the vessel halt…
Best be prepared.

Chuireadh air leth fear air calpa na tàirne

Suidheadh air calpa na tàirne
Fear gun soistinn,
Snaomanach fuasgailteach, sgairteil,
Foinnidh, solta;
Duine cùramach gun ghriobhag,
Ealamh, guamach,
A bheir uaipe ’s dhi mar dh’ fheumas,
Gleusda, luaineach,
Laigheas le spadhannan troma,
Treun air tarraing,
Air cudthrom a dhòid a’ cromadh
Dh’ ionnsaigh daraich;
Nach ceangail le sparraig mun urracaig
An ròb frithir
Ach gabhail uime daingeann, seòlta
Le lùb-ruithe,
Air eagal, nuair a sgarar an t-abhsadh,
I chur stad air,
Los i ruith ’na still le crònan
Bhàrr na cnaige.

VII. ENTER TELLER-OF-THE-WATERS

The helmsman speaks[30]
a few words: Stationed in earshot
this teller of fast seas pins a gimlet stare,
sharpened to air. Prudent,
shrewd. He cautions
without cowardice. I tolerate nothing less.
He knows winter by the threat
of weather, a turning wind. [31] Whether
it blows from bow or stern
he shouts straightway, advance warning.
Startles us from sleep if the risk demands.
And may he never hold his tongue.
Let him cry out, demystify the waters,
ready us to pierce through—
our bowsprit taking aim. Let him be one
intercessory voice that breaks news
of the waves before the waves break,
be revelation, be all a helmsman must hear.
Disarray, riot, terror
fled by trusting in him alone,
this teller-of-waters, like no other.

[30] The italicized lines are a very brief version of mac Mhaighstir Alasdair's prose subheading.

[31] 'Fuaradh Froise' was, according to the Digital Archive of Scottish Gaelic (DASG), collected in South Uist to mean a 'very strong wind before a rain shower which would happen most often between January and February' (Dasg.ac.uk). The blog also mentions mac Mhaighstir Alasdair's use of the word in 'Òran don Phrionnsa' to signal winter weather. 'Fuaradh Froise' is an important phrase for several reasons. It not only signals when the poem takes place, but it further anchors the poem in South Uist, even as the crew are leaving. Interestingly on Latha Fèill Brìde, or St Brigit's Day, when the crew depart, if the weather was bad, winter was predicted to be shorter (Maclean, Winter Solstice Gaelic Companion). Maclean tells us that people would hope for bad weather at this time, and so it is interesting mac Mhaighstir Alasdair has his crew set sail during bad weather. Of course, towards the end of the storm section, the birlinn and crew survive. Does mac Mhaighstir Alasdair truly believe this wisdom, or was he playing into traditional belief, and thus adumbrating the plot of the narrative? Answering this question is beyond the scope of this thesis, but it adds a possible dimension to the poem's underworking.

Chuireadh air leth fear-innse-nan-uisgeachan agus an fhairge air cinntinn tuilleadh is molach, agus 's thuirt an Stiùireamaich ris:

Suidheadh fear-innse gach uisge
Làimh ri m' chluais-sa,
Is cumadh e shùil gu biorach
An cridhe an fhuaraidh.
Tagham an duine leth-eagalach,
Fiamhach, sicir,
'S cha mhath leam e bhith air fad
'Na ghealtair riochdail.
Biodh e furachair nuair chì e
Fuaradh froise,
Cia dhiùbh bhios an soirbheas 'na deireadh
No 'na toiseach;
Gun cuireadh e mise am fhaicill
Suas gam mhosgladh;
Ma nì e gnè chunnairt fhaicinn
Nach bi tosdach;
'S ma chì e coltas muir-bhàite
Teachd le nuallan
Sgairteas cruaidh ceann-caol a fiodha
Chumail luath ris;
Biodh e àrd-labhrach, cèillidh,
'G èigheach bàirlinn,
'S na ceileadh e air fear na stiùireadh
Ma chì gàbhadh.
Na biodh fear-innse-nan-uisgean
Ann ach esan:
Cuiridh griobhag, briot is gusgul
Neach 'na bhreislich.

VIII. ENTER BAILER

Someone to flush bilgewater
from the vessel's gut. A steward
unfussed and never feart
as anguished ocean roars.
Shivering, numb;
dispirited by sea spray? *Never*.
Never any weakness in welts.
Neck and chest lashed by cold

hurling down. Hail, but he
brandishes an old brown bailer's bowl:
its large drum
filled with sea that fills the boat.
He'll cast out gallons,
hands darkened
from burden and ritual, his back
straining for every last drop

and for every knot of her.
The ship even if riddled with leaks
kept beautifully dry,
dry like the planks in an ex-fill cask.
Swells all around would drown us,
if not for him.
Though summoned to bail the bilge
he'll ladle our galley clean.[32]

[32] This 'ending' line in the translation I drew from mac Mhaighstir Alasdair's original prose subheading: 'Dh' òrduicheadh…'

Dh' òrdaicheadh a mach fear-taomaidh, 's an fhairge a' bàrcadh air am muin, rompa 's 'nan dèidh.

Freasdladh air leaba na taoma
Garbh laoch fuasgailt
Nach fannaich gu bràth 's nach tiomaich
Le gàir chuaintean;
Nach lapaich 's nach meataich fuachd sàile
Na clach-mheallain
Laomadh mu bhroilleach 's mu mhuineal
'Nam fuar-steallaibh,
Le crumpa mòr cruinn garbh fiodha
'Na chiar dhòidibh,
Sìor-thilgeadh a-mach na fairge
Steach a dhòirteas;
Nach dìrich a chaoidh a dhruim lùthmhor
Le rag-eàrlaid,
Gus nach fàg e siola an grùnnd
No 'n làr a h-èarrlainn,
'S ged chinneadh a bùird cho tolltach
Ris an ruidil,
Chumas cho tioram gach cnag dhith
Ri clàr buideil.

IX. ENTER BACK-STAYS

Two men of Canna stock.[33]
Thickset, brolic, hard

under hair they'll haul
huge back-stays,

bravery and strength
harmoniously in balance,

and through the marrow
of large arms they channel

the charge during weather,
open and close

the sails, as needed.
They help keep us centred.

Massive, fast, tactful.
Two men, remember them:

Duncan, son of Cormac,
Iain, son of Iain.

[33] The ending is used here as the intro, and the preamble, to an extent, is incorporated. I avoided grouping at the end clan members and their being from Canna, simply because in translation it felt bottom-heavy to do so, since most Anglophone readers are unfamiliar with Clanranald. The clan, by contrast, would have felt the inclusions relevant and honourable at the time. Indeed Clanranald, both the chieftain and his people, feature throughout the poem. This observation gives rise to an important question: Are Clanranald the perceived audience of the poem? mac Mhaighstir Alasdair belonged to Clanranald, was a cousin to Flora MacDonald, and was a frequent visitor to South Uist. The poem begins with a dedication to the Clanranald chief. But is this reason to assume his readership is Clanranald? We simply do not know. He was made baillie of Canna, then part of the Clanranald estates. Furthermore, there is a legend that he composed 'Birlinn Chlann Raghnaill' on Canna. If he did compose a majority of the poem there, that may explain the dedication to Clanranald. mac Mhaighstir Alasdair, after Culloden, could not teach in the highlands due to Penal Laws. ('As a Catholic convert, the Penal Laws [made] it impossible for him to earn a living [...] as a teacher. He was reduced to going round his tacksman relatives and fellow-fighters, begging for a piece of land to eke out a living' (Foxley xii). He was trained as a lawyer at the University of Glasgow, but never graduated from the program. The idea that he could serve in a local governance role seemed justified, due to his legal training, literacy, scholarship and more. However, mac Mhaighstir Alasdair allegedly had a falling out with the Clanranald chief and left Canna (Moidart.org.uk). Ronald Black likewise points to tension since Clanranald remained inactive in the '45 (Black, ed., *An Lasair* 472). All things considered, we may tentatively propose that the composition of the poem began with honouring the chief, but after a falling out, completion of the poem, and whatever that might entail for an audience, shifted in scope. Black speculates the poem is satirical. Whatever the intention, obviously mac Mhaighstir Alasdair had a Gaelic audience in mind, who would have been familiar with his clan and the importance of their legacy, and who perhaps had personal affiliation with some of its members.

Dh’ òrduicheadh dithis làidir ghramail gu draghadh nam ball chùl-aodaich, ’s coltas oirre gun tugte na siùil uatha le ro-ghairbhid na sìde.

Cuiribh càraid làidir, chnàmh-reamhar,
Ghairbhneach, ghaoisneach,
Gu freasdladh iad tàirneant, treunant
Buill chùl-aodaich,
Le smùis is le meud lùiths
An ruighean treuna
’N àm cruadhaich a bheir orra steach
No leigeas beum leis,
Chumas gu sgiobalta a-stigh e
’Na teis-meadhon,
Dh’ fhòghnadh Donncha MacCarmaig
’S Iain mac Iain,
Dithis starbhanach theòma, ladarn,
Dh’ fhearaibh Chanaigh.

X. ENTER RESERVES

For any one man seated, there is another,
there is failure and fast seas
can delete crew. Just in case,
replacements will be needed, [34]
six—

psyched, slick, agile and
alive they'll flit, lickety-split,
ready the deck like wild
upland hares, chased by hounds,
like springtime squirrels
scuttle up tree trunks
they'll scale cables
of pole-taut hemp. Order
begins with sparkling pluck,
with hands-on experience: *theirs*,
in slackening both
sails and ropes.
They passionately, tirelessly will
perfect Clanranald's galley.

[34] Reworking of the preamble.

Thaghadh seisear gu fearas-ùrlair, an earalas gu fàilnicheadh aon fhear de na thuirt mi, no gu sgrìobadh anfadh na fairge mach thar bòrd e, 's gu suidheadh fear dhiubh seo 'na àite.

Eireadh seisear ealamh, ghleusda
Làmhach, bheòtha
Shiùbhlas 's a dh' fhalbhas 's a leumas
Feadh gach bòrd dith
Mar gheàrr-fhiadh am mullach slèibhe
'S coin da còpadh;
Streapas ri cruaidh-bhallaibh rèidhe
Den chaol-chòrcaich
Co-ghrad ri feòragan Cèitein
Ri crann rò-choill;
Bhios ullamh, ealamh, treubhach,
Falbhach, eòlach,
Gu toirt dhi 's gu toirt an abhsadh
'S clabhsail òrdan:
Chaitheas gun airtneal, gun èislein
Long Mhic Dhòmhnaill.

III
Through the Inner Seas[35]

[35] This section has been, in previous translations, subtitled variously as 'The Storm' or 'The Voyage'. My title refers to the waterbody through which the crew would have travelled, so readers can follow along geographically. This area is officially named in English 'The Inner Seas Off the West Coast of Scotland' by the International Hydrographic Organization, as a designated marine area (marineregions.org). Perhaps by extension, 'Inner Seas' could also be read as an emotional designation, one that draws on the IHO designation, but also on the tension of the piece. Geographical references aid the reader unfamiliar with the area. We know from the poem that the crew leave South Uist, and via the Sound of Islay arrive in Ireland, but a familiarity with Scotland's west coast is required for these place names to be meaningful to readers. Giving them an overall topography adds to and helps construct their individual mental map of the journey.

All set for sailing. Tackle in working order,
each rock-hard soul worked to certainty:
fearless, doubtless, unyielding.

We take our appointed places,
and with sunrise and St Bridget's Day
hoist our sails up high. From Loch Eynort,

south from South Uist, we journey forth.

Do bha h-uile goireas a bhuineadh do seòladh nis air a chur ann an deagh riaghailt, agus theann a h-uile laoch tapaidh, gun taise, gun fhiamh, gun sgàthachas, thun a' cheart ionaid an d' òrduicheadh dha dol, is thog iad na siùil ann an èirigh na grèine La Fhèill Brìghde, a' trogbhail a-mach bho bhun Loch Aoineart an Uibhist a' Chinn a deas.

The sun to auburn
unhusks, burns
furiously through:
an openwork sky.
Cloud and dark
regather gloom.

Aquamarine clots[36]
the sky's dun
underside, subdued,
dour, then colour,
every dye in a tartan
radiant on the air…

[36] The original Gaelic word 'tonn-ghorm' translates as 'wave-blue', but the clouds are the subject of the description. The sense is that the world is so distorted, the sky takes on aspects of the sea.

’Ghrian[37] a’ faoisgneadh gu h-òr-bhuidh
As a mogal,
Chinn an speur gu dùldaidh, dòite,
Làn de dh’ oglachd,
Dh’ fhàs[38] i tonn-ghorm, tiugh, tàrr-lachdann
Odhar, iargalt;
Chinn gach dath bhiodh ann am breacan,
Air an iarmailt:

[37] ‘Ghrian’ is seldom the way a sentence begins in Gaelic. Given the lenition, however, we do know this line either begins in the vocative or with a definite article. If the former, it should read ‘O sun…’ in translation. There is no other ‘thu’ (or ‘you’) in this section to address the sun, so there is little reason indeed to think the sun is being addressed. Because of the time period and drawing on other translations, it seems clear the definite article is used; i.e. ‘A’ ghrian’. The definite article A’ has been omitted for stylistic reasons, to preserve syllabic flow. An equivalent in English would be ‘Tis. Crichton Smith ignores this in translation, beginning the line simply with ‘Sun’ (*From Clanranald’s Galley* 29). MacDiarmid, on the other hand, retains the definite article (79). He relied on Sorley MacLean who ‘agreed to help him’ translate the poem (Nicolson 27). Thomson follows Crichton Smith by beginning the line with ‘Sun’ (*An Introduction to Gaelic Poetry* 176).

[38] ‘Cinn’ from ‘a’ cinntinn’ is a verb: ‘grow, increase, vegetate, prosper’; while ‘Fàs’ also has a sense of ‘growth’ (Dwelly 194). mac Mhaighstir Alasdair in his own vocabulary uses ‘cinn’ to mean ‘becoming something’ (mac Mhaighstir Alasdair, *A Galick and English Vocabulary*… 156). He uses ‘cinn’ twice as a beginning word in the first two stanzas, in addition to ‘fàs’. From this, I read a beginning, a growing, an adumbration of the journey itself since what follows is a storm. He has prepared us for it. This natural, atmospheric confirmation of hardship and challenge ahead should reinforce the reality he himself was experiencing psychologically. I use ‘regather’ for ‘*cinn*’ in the first stanza, to suggest the storm clouds are regathering, and so too the challenge up ahead, the crew, having just lost at Culloden, are about to experience a regathering of hardship. MacDiarmid translated their differences as follows: ‘cinn’ = grew and ‘fàs’ = turned. Smith jettisoned the ‘fàs’ translation altogether but translated ‘cinn’ as growing. With ‘clot’, I hope to convey a gathering in a manner similar to blood. Notice the tense: mac Mhaighstir Alasdair’s original uses past tense, signalled by ‘dh’ preceding ‘fàs’, whereas present tense makes the scenes more immersive by being present, immediate action – as if it were happening *now*.

Clouds hurled by squalls
soar into dispersal.
A rainbow half-shattered
toward the western rim.

Storm warning.
As sharper winds bring weather
so crew gear up. The harsh grate
of hauling rope. Huge sails, [39]
speckled, wind-swollen, snap.
Steep towering masts
bleed their purest resin
yet tension fastens them,
garrotted by cordage
looped through
iron hooks, eyelets, bolt-rings.
We adjust every bit
of standing rigging at once.
Together sit, each to man
the roles for which we are meant. [40]

[39] By the time mac Mhaighstir Alasdair wrote the poem, 'the age of the birlinn had passed' and he was likely trawling descriptive data from other poets, but is thought to have had a 'basic knowledge of how such a boat was sailed (Parsons 29).

[40] ''S shuidh gach fear gu freasdal tapaidh / 'Bhuill bu chòir dha'— A literal translation of these lines is: 'Every man sat dutifully courageous / (as) members should' - 'gu freasdal' is an adverb form of 'serving' (mac Mhaighstir Alasdair, *A Galick and English Vocabulary*… 146). The second line connotes a sense of moral obligation among 'members', or 'bhuill' (Dwelly 62). Overall we have a sense that the crew, as obliged by their assigned places on the boat, and their feelings of membership and kinship, will work together to see the journey through.

Fadadh-cruaidh san àird-an-iar oirr’,
Stoirm ’na coltas,
’S neòil shiùbhlach aig gaoith gan riasladh,
Fuaradh-frois’ oirr’.
Thog iad na siùil bhreaca,
Bhaidealacha, dhìonach,
Shìn iad na coilpeinean raga,
Teanna, rìghne
Ri fiodhannan arda, fada
Nan colg bìth-dhearg;
Cheangladh iad gu gramail, snaompach,
Gu neo-chearbach
Roimh shùilean nan cromag iaruinn
’S nan cruinn fhailbheag;
Cheartaich iad gach ball den acfhainn
Ealamh, dòigheil;
’S shuidh gach fear gu freasdal tapaidh
’Bhuill bu chòir dha.

Windows in the sky fly open
livid with wind
        and rainbands,[41] and underneath
An Cuan Barrach[42]
        like a black-green blanket cast
across us, cloaked in dark.

The frazzled rough
becomes rough
                to forecast,
currents that surge up
to ridge and gorge
collapse
                like an avalanche,
                a spumy sea-beast
                scowls wide

                craquelure of cyan.

[41] 'Bannail' are 'bands', while 'iargailt' is something like 'strife' or 'storm' (as in 'force', not weather). As the word 'rainband' lacks the war connotation, it gains a contextual sense that might be lost otherwise, as rainbands can be associated with hurricanes. mac Mhaighstir Alasdair describes particularly bad weather, but in an area so prone to bad weather one might wonder why he decided to hyperbolize? Could there have been an extraordinary weather system at that time? The cailleachean or 'hags' was an idiom for destructive weather, often in early spring (MacNeill, *The Silver Bough*, 124). Could mac Mhaighstir Alasdair be describing the 'cailleachean'? It should be noted that the cailleach generally speaking has broad associations throughout the pan-Gaelic world, but that in Scotland she is numerously associated with '… wild weather, especially the storms of winter, the storm clouds and the boiling winter sea' (Ó Crualaoich 154).

[42] Location added to aid readers through the journey's geography.

’Sin dh’ fhosgail uinneagan an adhair
Ballach, liath-ghorm
Gu sèideadh na gaoithe greannaich
’S bannail, iargailt’;
Tharraing an cuan a bhrat dùbhghlas
Air gu h-uile,
Mhantal garbh, caiteanach, ciar-dhubh,
’S sgreataidh buinne;
Dh’ at e ’na bheanntaibh ’s ’na ghleanntaibh,
Molach, robach,
Gun do bhòc an fhairge cheigeach
Suas ’na cnocaibh.[43]
Dh’ fhosgail a' mhuir ghorm ’na craosaibh
Farsaing, cràcach,[44]

[43] The third stanza has been reversed with the second in my version.

[44] Here, he paints a portrait nearly impossible to translate: the sea is a large open mouth and a trap, like a spring trap with serrated teeth for catching prey. I use ‘scowl’. This is emphasized with ‘farsaing’, as in ‘deep’ or ‘wide’, then with ‘cràcach’, or ‘horned’ like the crescent of the moon, but also ‘branched’. Since it is a portrait I use ‘craquelure’. ‘Cràcach’ is onomatopoeia, and craquelure in old paintings does branch. This couplet is not a couplet in mac Mhaighstir Alasdair’s original but has been arbitrarily made so by me.

Waves meet
but when they pass
through each other,
their interference is warfare.
Certainly to stare in the face
this maelstrom
is the measure of us
as oarsman.
Waves backlit turn,
their flickering lure aflame—
each licked crest
shrieks loudest when they take
you by surprise.
Frontline swells jealously wail
while backups
excruciate. The higher
the waters, the lower
our sails, slackened
so we may rise
and from the murk
emerge. Swift, efficient.
Efficient, swift.
We equally
reverse all sails,
draw them topmast.
We must
prepare for the ship's de-
scent: for when she plumbs
the troughs,
she plummets.

An glaicibh a chèile ri taosgadh,
’S caonnag bhàsmhor;
Gum b’ fhear-ghnìomh bhith ’g amharc an aodann
Nam màm toinnte,
Lasraichean sradanach sionnachain
Air gach beinn diubh,
Na beulanaich àrda, liath-ghorm
Ri searbh bheucail,
Na cùlanaich ’s an cladh dùldaidh
Ri garbh gheumnaich;
Nuair a dh' èireamaid gu h-allail
’M bàrr nan sonn sin
B’ èiginn an t-abhsadh a bhearradh
Gu grad-phongail;
Nuair theàrnamaid le ion-slugaidh
Sìos sna gleanntaibh
Bheirte gach seòl a bhiodh aice
’M bàrr nan crann dith;

Waves pang
with fury ring
before they
appear, in every
        ear a warning:
        quieter waters
        that feedback
        to an oceanic
                death knell,
                hell to navigate
                as the ship from
                jagged heights

hurtles off—

Na ciasanaich àrda chroma
Teachd sa’ bhàirich,
Mus tigeadh iad idir nar gaire
Chluinnt an gàirich,
Iad ri sguabadh nan tonn beaga
Lom, dan sgiùrsadh,
Chinneadh i ’na h-aon mhuir bhàsmhor,
’S càs a stiùireadh;
Nuair a thuiteamaid fo bhàrr
Nan àrd-thonn giobach

Freefall
a splashdown just short
of the shelly seafloor. [45]

[45] I felt separating this image from the page above reinforced the action in the poem, almost cinematically.

Gur beag nach dochainneadh a sàil
An t-aigeal sligneach.

Ocean stirring, disturbing its own.
Seal and whale are both harrowed.
Pandemonium. Somehow the boat

wake leaves an observable stream
of grey matter. Brain tissue. Scum.
Pandemonium. The beasts scream:

Rescue us, the unknown,
from stormy turbulence.
All sea life for sea death
pallid, upturned, afloat.

An fhairge ga maistreadh ’s ga sluistneadh
Roimh a chèile,
Gun robh ròin is mialan-mòra
’M barrachd èiginn;
Anfhadh is confadh na mara
’S falbh na luinge
Sradadh an eanchainnean geala
Feadh gach tuinne,
Iad ri nuallanaich àrd, uaimhinneach,
Searbh-thùrsach,
’G èigheach gur ìochdarain sinne
Dragh chum bùird sinn.
Gach mion-iasg a bha san fhairge
Tàrr-gheal, tionndaidht’,
Le gluasad confadh na gailbhinn
Marbh gun chùnntas;

Fathoms re-surface, shellfish and stones
trammelled as icy waters churn
the waters burn, brimming with anger
with whole turmoil and bloom
foul, feculent, a creaturely bloodshed,
a red tide, immense sea-beasts
(their dorsal horns and the sweeping Y
of their tails) breach the waves
in maimed pods of shock, slack-jawed
they shriek and freakishly aghast
click our shared fear: we clinch our teeth [46]

[46] This last line is not at all a translation but my own addition.

Clachan is maorach an aigeil
Teachd an uachdar,
Air am buain a-nìos le slacraich
A’ chuain uaibhrich;
An fhairg' uile ’s i ’na brochan
Strioplach, ruaimleach,
Le fuil ’s le gaorr nam biast lorcach
’S droch dhath ruadh oirr’,
Na biastan adharcach, iongnach,
Pliutach, lorcach,
Làn cheann, ’s iad ’nam beòil gu ’n gialaibh,
’S an craos fosgailt.

The spectral deep
seethes with fluke
and fin
as grasping ocean
giants reach us
through cries
so tragically shrill we turn

away and still hear them
scream—

some fifty
soldiers raving
or a crew at sea
deafened to sound
reasoning in the
tumult and storm
of the mind. [47]

[47] See footnote 31

An àibheis uile làn bhòcan
Air an cràgradh,
Le spògan 's le earbaill mhòr-bhiast
Air a màgradh.
Bu sgreamhail an ròmhan sgriachaidh
Bhith da èisdeachd,
Thogbhadh iad air caogad mìlidh
Aotrom cèille:
Chaill an sgioba càil an claisneachd
Ri bhi 'g èisdeachd
Ceilearadh sgreadach nan deomhan
'S mothar bhèistean.[48]

[48] From 'An aibheis […]' to 'nan deamhan […]' all three stanzas can be read as depicting PTSD in a post-Culloden context. I have tweaked my language to be less of a translation and more of a re-writing in order to accommodate this interpretation. 'Deamhan' enters the language as a loanword from the Greek 'daimonion'. I use the word interpretively, as Socrates did, to mean 'gods' and 'inner voice' (Jowett 24c-31d). Often taken to mean 'consciousness'. Therefore, the screams here are of the 'mind'. It is interesting to consider why demonic images feature. At first it seemed hyperbolic, but could play into genuine nautical superstition. The more I reflected on the 'sounds', however, in combination with the crew's fright, the more I thought about triggers for PTSD. In a poem written post-Culloden by a soldier who had fought on the losing side, sound can present as a driver that sends one into a frenzy. A crew flees its legacy and culture, centuries-old, for a last-ditch effort—to join the final Stewart-sided clan in Ireland. And in desperate circumstances: a storm. I think it strange that the crew would persist despite the ominous forecast. If it worsens before they leave, why not wait? Yet, there is nothing to wait for in a post-Culloden Highlands and Islands, or so it is implied. The crew have no choice, then, but to set out. The storm raises emotions and crew members are susceptible to triggers. The poem mentions monsters and beasts, but no such thing exists in the waters, aside from whales, which were alarming to sailors but no more alarming than sustained crosscurrents. Granted, I am sympathetic to the genuine terrors that arise with stormy seas, while trying to take into account praiseworthy seamen who have seen it all, and thus balance the imagery against nautical experience. The sight of a whale during a storm may startle, but subjectivity here suggests more, as if what befell the Essex of later Moby-Dick horrors almost affected those on 'Birlinn Chlann Raghnaill' (King). The crew however were spared, we come to find, the worst of what the Essex experienced. So is there another explanation behind the descriptive drama? War trauma can explain heightened emotional states as a result of sounds produced by storm and whale, and sounds here do reflect the crews' sustained trauma. Indeed, sound is fundamental to the drama in the 'storm section'. For a culture so dependant on sea-going, the crew would presumably have been well-acquainted with high seas, as the crew sketches tell us. Yet even the best are subject to unprecedented circumstances, which mac Mhaighstir Alasdair, who was a soldier, could only describe in familiar psychological terms, like devils and beasts. But war imagery features, such as when the wake behind the boat is described as brains spilling out. When interpreted as PTSD symptoms, this image works strikingly. The sea-beasts themselves, 'bloodied' by the storm and 'maimed', outside the context of PTSD, comes across as distinctly odd without PTSD, which may partially answer Alan Riach's bafflement at the journey, when he writes that, 'No explanation for this voyage is given' ("Location and Destination…" 22). There is, however, in mac Mhaighstir Alasdair's diary in the *Lyon in Mourning*, an account that serves as a real-life basis for 'Birlinn Chlann Raghnaill': 'They set sail for Uist. The wind blew pretty reev (i.e. smart or strong) from south-east, that in weathering the point of Arisaig the bowsprit broke in pieces… It was a most terrible dark night, attended with a violent tempest and some flashes of lightning, and wanting a compass they could not be sure how they steered their course. But at daybreak they providentially found themselves within few leagues of their wished for harbour, and landed at Rossinish in Benbecula' (Forbes 323). The 'beast' in question in my version is the mind, which the poem, but not the diary entry, allows for as an interpretation.

High seas
against the birlinn
slam, as if a whale
had sideswiped
the prow. Lapstrakes,
an oak resonance

in high winds;
a westerly
renews its bitter
putdown. Must we
endure such
elemental torture

half-blind by spray,
bleared always
by half-light?
Bewilderment
may be thunderous,
but lightning is worse

as rigging intercepts:
ropes of smoke
after the flash,
the fetid reefing sails
singed assault
our lungs.

Upper winds
and fire and
water and earth
under. All culminate
uncontrollably
to one.

Foghar na fairge, ’s a slachdraich
Gleachd r’a darach,
Fosghair a toisich a' sloistreadh
Mhuca-mara;
’Ghaoth ag ùrachadh a fuaraidh
As an iar àird,
Bha sinn leis gach seòrsa buairidh
Air ar pianadh;
Sinn daillte le dall-cheò fairge
Sìor dhol tharainn,
Tàirneanach aibheiseach rè oidhche
’S teine-dealain,
Peileirean beithrich a’ losgadh
Ar cuid acfhuinn,
Fàileadh is deathach na riofa
Gar glan-thachdadh;
Na dùilean uachdrach is ìochdrach,
Rinn a cogadh:
Talamh, teine ’s uisge ’s sian-ghaoth
Ruinn air togail.

*

Sudden dissipation.[49] The ocean,
failing to overwhelm us, takes pity.
Shy, smiling, apologetic light
reveals damages:
no mast stands but inverted, tilts,[50]
no sail intact, yard unsplit,
or ring linking yard and mast
left without one flaw.
Stays set off, the oars hacked.
Shrouds and halyards torn to shreds.
Equipment skint, all
clank and clunk. Each gunwale
no less than the rower's bench has
confessed, the damned thing near-totalled:

[49] This part of the line, and the space designated by an asterisk above, are my own invention. mac Mhaighstir Alasdair paints highly dramatic scenes whose lyrical pitch is almost unsustainably high and without any slow diminishing afterwards to counterbalance it. Suddenly the sun just appears. This may be a misreading on my part, but I felt in an English version, some device was needed to draw on the suspense, to leave the reader guessing what happens to the crew, and allow the poem to breathe before moving into the sudden sunlight. Certainly this meteorological phenomenon is common off the westcoast of Scotland, where a storm can seemingly diminish in seconds, but I felt some reformatting, and the 'sudden dissipation', helped cue narrative shift for the reader unfamiliar with the poem's larger context.

[50] The masts being 'bent' is confusing. Masts can be 'inverted': Inversion means that the mast creates a negative bend (the spreader area moving aft) until the mast buckles backwards. When the spreader area tries to move aft, the masthead wants to move forward, but this movement is prevented by a tight backstay (www.seldenmast.com)

Ach nuair dh' fhairtlich air an fhairge
Toirt òirnn strìochdadh,
Ghabh i truas, le fàite-gàire,
Rinn i sìth ruinn.
Ged rinn, cha robh crann gun lùbadh,
Seòl gun reubadh,
Slat gun sgaragh, rac[51] gun fhàilinn,
Ràmh gun èisl' air,
Cha robh stagh ann gun stuadh-lèimneadh,
Beairt gun ghaiseadh,
Tarraing no cupladh gun bhristeadh,
Fise, faise!
Cha robh tobhta no beul-mòr ann
Nach tug aidmheach,[52]
Bha h-uile crannghail is goireas
Air an lagadh;

[51] 'Ràc' – a ring that keeps the yard to the mast (www.faclair.scot)

[52] 'Aidmheil' is the verb to 'admit' or 'confess' (www.faclair.scot). Aidmheach is a related form. Having endured the storm, the sudden relief of sunlight is a metaphor, as if having gone to confession: one sees clearly all that has happened. The sailing bench has borne 'witness' to the storm in his version, which conveys the functional meaning of mac Mhaighstir Alasdair's line. Catholicism for mac Mhaighstir Alasdair was probably not a deep spiritual conviction but rather a sort of 'vehicle' to restore the native throne in the person of the Bonnie Prince, as well as to revive Gaelic. If Catholicism is seen as a cultural vehicle, like the birlinn itself, then the removal of Catholic connotation in translation is a crime against mac Mhaighstir Alasdair. Father Charles MacDonald claims mac Mhaighstir Alasdair 'continued a Catholic when it might have been to his temporal advantage to return to either of his former denominations' (*Moidart: Among the Clanranalds* 132). MacDonald reinforces this claim by referring to Moidart tradition, according to which his brother Angus and sister-in-law aided in mac Mhaighstir Alasdair's conversion. Of course, we could counter that mac Mhaighstir Alasdair's brother and sister-in-law might have offered similarly utilitarian reasons for conversion, if mac Mhaighstir Alasdair was swithering. Through Protestantism, he had stable career opportunities, but at the expense of what? Not his spiritual afterlife. It would have been at the expense of Gaelic and traditional culture since mac Mhaighstir Alasdair taught Highland students English and Anglican religion. Charles MacDonald adds that mac Mhaighstir Alasdair's descendants were 'staunch Catholics'. The most convincing thought is what mac Mhaighstir Alasdair endured being Catholic (Foxley xii). After mac Mhaighstir Alasdair's book was allegedly burned in 1751, 'Alasdair came back to the Highlands, shunned by his Edinburgh friends who might have suffered a similar punishment to Robert Drummond' [Edinburgh printer, thrown in jail for ten days and banished from the city and from his house for a year]. 'As a Catholic convert, the Penal Laws [made] it impossible for him to earn a living in the area as a teacher. He is reduced to going round to his tacksman relatives and fellow-fighters, begging for a piece of land to eke out a living. And he is lucky to finally get some, for after the enclosures of the post-Culloden era, there isn't any to be had.'). Motivations for conversion are hard to pinpoint in lieu of written evidence. Nevertheless, in translation, the text's 'Catholic-ness' remains vital detail: a triune God is asked to help the clan at the beginning of this poem. The first poem of his only book argues (perhaps a little tongue-in-cheek) on behalf of Gaelic as possessing a Christian link. See 'Manifesto' below, a version of 'Moladh an Ùghdair don t-Seann Chànain Ghàidhlig'. Omitting that link betrays mac Mhaighstir Alasdair's poetics.

beam-knee, tackle, rigging, rib.
Across gunwales,
their slatted outer layer, disarray
scores an erratic grain.
Footboards destroyed. Helm, rudder.
Creak and kink of every last
bollard, and treenails rattled free.
A near deckless deck,
nails unnailed, washers washed
right off, and with each rivet tweaked
for the worse, no part makes up the whole.

Cha robh achlaisean no aisean
Dhith gun fhuasgladh,
A slat-bheòil ’s a sguitichean-asgaill
Air an tuairgneadh;
Cha robh falmadair gun sgoltadh,
Stiùir gun chreuchdadh;
Cnead is dìosgan aig gach maide
’S iad air dèasgadh;
Cha robh crann-tarrann gun tarraing,
Bòrd gun obadh,
H-uile lann bha air am barradh
Ghabh iad togail;
Cha robh tarrann ann gun trochladh,
Cha robh calpa ann gun lùbadh,
Cha robh aon bhall bhuineadh dhì-se
Nach robh nas miosa na thùbhradh.

Seas level out
to halcyon silence
        and the sound
Caol Ìle
growing windlessly;
        that cold
acid snap of weather
into thin air
vanished by decree
        and for us left
a frosty glass plate
to skate across.

Thanks be to God,
maker of all
        and Clanranald,
        for sparing us
our brutal end.

Ghairm an fhairge sìoth-shaimh ruinne
Air crois Chaol Ile;
’S gun d’ fhuair a’ gharbh-ghaoth shearbh-ghlòireach
Ordugh sìnidh.
Thog i uainn do dh’ ionadaibh
Uachdrach an aeir,
’S chinn i dhuinn ’na clàr rèidh mìn-gheal,
An dèidh a tabhuinn.
Thug sin buidheachas don Ard-rìgh
Chum na dùilean
Deagh Chlann Raghnaill a bhi sàbhailt
O bhàs brùideil.

So let us
        let down
our threadbare square
canvas sails,
        speckled and like
trees felled
to the galley deck,
        our masts in
immaculate crimson
brought down,
        our slender oars
        slid out
into sunlight.
Such conifer finish,
        MacVarish's cut,
is the harvest of
        Eilean Fhianain like
nowhere else.

’S an sin bheum sinn na siùil thana,
Bhallach, thùilinn;
’S leag sinn a crainn mhìn-dhearg, ghasda
Fad a h-ùrlair,
’S chuir sinn a mach ràimh chaol bhasgant[53]
Dhaite, mhìne
Den ghiuthas[54] a bhuainn MacBharrais[55]
An Eilean Fhìonain,[56]

[53] ‘Bhasgant' in current Gaelic orthography is ‘boillsgeanta’: ‘brilliant’, ‘bright’, ‘sunny’, ‘vivid’.
[54] ‘Giuthas’: the current Gaelic word unqualified by ‘bàn’ seems to be broad enough in meaning. ‘Fir’ and ‘pine’ have both been translated. I use ‘conifer’ to allow for either.
[55] ‘MacBharrais’ = MacVarish: One Donald Mòr MacVarish, according to Charles MacDonald in his *Moidart: Among the Clanranalds*, is said to have died ‘fifty years ago’. Is this the son of the poem’s MacVarish? He apparently hewed stone crosses on St Finnan’s Isle. Charles MacDonald didn’t arrive in Moidart until 1859/-60, and he died in 1892. The book was published posthumously in 1898, but the writing of it was started earlier, some time after 1860. If we accept anecdotal evidence, that puts Donald Mòr MacVarish’s death circa 1810 at the very earliest, but probably later, whereas mac Mhaighstir Alasdair died circa 1770. A correlation can be drawn in skill and name to the MacVarish of mac Mhaighstir Alasdair’s poem. The MacVarish family were a subset of the MacDonald’s and dwelled alongside them, between Morar, Barra and Ardnamurchan (Dye).
[56] Known as ‘Eilean Fhianain’, or St Finnan’s Isle, or the Green Isle, in Loch Shiel. More than a millennium of families, religious leaders, nobility and others, have been buried here. mac Mhaighstir Alasdair may have had a school here, and it is said he was to have been buried here before a gale diverted the removal of his remains from his croft in ‘Sannaig’ to the kirkyard in Arisaig, where he was left to an unmarked grave. Charles MacDonald suspects mac Mhaighstir Alasdair has either misremembered the location of the pines/firs mentioned towards the end of ‘Birlinn Chlann Raghnaill’, or by poetic license, due to a fondness for ‘Eilean Fhianain’, he had relocated their source there, when in fact they likely belonged to a neighbouring isle, ‘Camustroloman’, where firs still existed during Charles’s time, and still exist today. ‘Camustroloman’ exists on no map today, but is rather spelled ‘Camus Drollaman’, and ‘Eilean Camus Drollaman’. Just northeast from the Green Isle there are currently firs here and a house. The name is cryptic but I wonder if our current leads are a corruption of the ‘Coille Druim an Laoigh’, just next to it, where ‘laoighean’ means ‘pith’ or ‘marrow’. Gordon Barr hints that this is a place he might have trysted with women. Apparently a bloomery has been found here. Could this, then, be the MacVarish location (*Moidart Place Names* 8, 12)?

We press onward, unfailingly we must,
rocking, rowing our way to Carrickfergus

where a promising harbour, higher up,
awaits; and where we toss out our anchor

to green perch and reassurance, it’s there
we’ll feast, we’ll drink, we’ll remain.

Rinn sinn an t-iomradh rèidh tulganach
Gun dearmad,
’S ghabh sinn deagh longphort aig barraibh
Charraig Fhearghuis.
Thilg sinn acraichean gu socair
Anns an ròd sin,
Ghabh sinn biadh is deoch gun airceas
’S rinn sinn còmhnuidh.

At Allt an t-Siùcair

I cross into summer. Ripe dawn[57]
grass necklaced with dew
like glass rosary beads.
Richard and Robin redbreast
are a belter as one takes bass,
the cuckoo in blue dress
with a proud head toss
cries from her perch

cuckoo cuckoo. She rivals
the soloist mavis atop her post,
steaming, song-drunk indeed, but
the wren whose beak is a chanter reed
wins. Poor chaffinch, a perfectionist
doubled over. Blackcock
and hen under their breath
both pity him, while trout in

close succession riff
staccato off water and the water
like sunny glass shatters
with joyousness. Vivace
they play a tablature of flies,
break nature's laws. By scales of light:
agility jewelled,
gill-brilliant, blue.[58]

[57] The first line of the source text has been integrated into my target text's title. 'Allt an t-Siùcair' ('Sugar Burn') originally had a longer name. Derick Thomson claims the current one is a misnomer since mac Mhaighstir Alasdair titled the poem: 'Do bhail' arrait ann an Ardnamòrchuan, do 'n ainm Coiremhuilinn, agus do dh'aultan a tha rith roimh a bhaile sin, do 'n gairir, Ault-an-tsiucar' ('To a certain township in Ardnamurchan, namely Corrie Mill, and to a streamlet that runs through that township, known as the Sugar Burn.') However, Ronald Black refers to it as a 'dedication', not so much a formal 'title' (*The Ardnamurchan Years* 31). See Thomson, *An Introduction to Gaelic Poetry*, p. 164.

[58] Three stanzas per page to allow dense imagery and sounds space to resonate.

Allt an t-Siùcair[59]

A’ dol thar Allt an t-Siùcair
air madainn chùbhraidh Chèit,
is paidirean geal, dlùth-chneap
den drùchd ghorm air an fheur;
bha Richard ’s Robin brùdhearg
ri seinn ’s fear dhiubh na bheus,
’s goic mhoit air cuthaig chùl-ghuirm,
’s gug-gùg aic’ air a’ ghèig.

Bha smèorach cur na smùid dhi
air bacan cùil leath’ fhèin;
an dreathan-donn gu sùrdail
’s a rifeid-chiùil na bheul;
am breacean-beithe ’s lùb air,
’s e gleusadh lùth a theud,
an coileach-dubh ri dùrdan
’s a’ chearc ri tùchan rèidh.

Na bric a’ gearradh shùrdag,
ri plubraich dhlùth le chèil’,
taobh leumnaich mear le lùth-chleas,
a bùrn le mùirn ri grèin;
ri ceapadh chuileag siùbhlach,
le’m bristeadh lùthmhor fhèin:
druim lann-ghorm, ’s ball-bhreac giùran,
’s an lannair-chùil mar lèig.

[59] Gaelic text drawn from MacDonald and MacDonald, *The Poems of Alexander MacDonald,* 1924.

Clear sunny blossoms cluster round trees,
daises, marsh marigolds,
and striped honey-loving honey bees
buzz port à beul.[60] Sepals
clean-licked, their crystallized wild
is viscous dewdrops, sap
under grass awns
secreted at the tip.

If ever nectar or pollen run dry
let our roses feed the still air,
the creek, Allt an t-Siùcair:
sweetwater, crisp white-
wine water, clear water ringing clear,
sparkling-in-spate, rapid as rapids crash,
every herb, every watercress
thick along banks grows

beside the rose. Pure
sharp water free of iron slime,
scum or muck. For both fields
that bound it: flux and
spiritual rush. Red and gold
buzzing bees tickle gold thistles
and together build honeycomb,
all waxy cell and store.

[60] My addition. Too good to resist.

Mil-dheoghladh sheillean srianach
le crònan ’s fiata srann,
’nan dìthean baglach, riabhach
mu d’ bhlàithean grianach chrann;
straibh-dhriùchdain dhonna, thiachdaidh
fo shìnean cìochan t’ fheòir,
gun theachd-an-tìr no bhiadh ac’,
ach fàileadh ciatach ròs.[61]

Gur milis, brisg-gheal, bùrn-ghlan
meall-chùirneineach ’s binn fuaim,
bras-shruthain Allt-an-t-Siùcair
ri torman siùbhlach, luath;
gach biolair ’s luibh le ’n ùr ròis
a’ cinntinn dlùth mu bhruaich,
’s e toirt dhaibh bhuadhan sùghmhor
g’ an sùgh-bheathchadh mu’n cuairt.

Bùrn tana glan gun ruadhan,
gun deathach, ruaim no ceò
bheir anam fàs is gluasad
da chluanagan mu bhòrd;
gaoir-bheachainn bhuidhe ’s ruadha
ri diogladh chluaran òir
’s cìr-mheala da chuir suas leò
’n cèir-chuachagan ’nan stòr.

[61] ‘gun theachd-an-tìr no bhiadh ac’,
ach fàileadh ciatach ròs.’

(without subsistence or food [at them]
but [they have] the pleasant smell of rose)

The meaning is hard to understand, but it seems to be a ‘nature for nature’s sake’ remark. Ac’ suggests an abbreviated form of aca, a prepositional pronoun meaning ‘at them’. But what does ‘them’ signify? It appears, at first, to refer to the seillean/bee but that doesn’t make sense either as the bee does subsist on the pollen of blooming roses. Bypassing a strict signifier, however, the meaning of the couplet opens up to be something potentially aesthetic and instructive: (Even) without food and drink, there is (always) the pleasant smell of rose. My version tries to capture this more ‘open’ meaning.

Mooers moo out loud round
the cattle fold. Music
to my ears, theirs
a solace, a tall call called back,
the sharp response
of spotty white-headed calves.
The milkmaid spancels,
the cowherd joins

and in a harmony of milk
the bleating wee things
are all milked, whole foamy pails drawn:
milk spilt, calves soaked,
their chucks flecked
with cream curds. Stalks
dangle honeycomb like lamps
and from every branch

the sweet smell of sweet fruits,
a firlot: pear, apple.
Dewy leaves along the midrib
drip, droop and
the young dumb from mouthing it:
honeycomb, lips
honeyed to hard light
are sticky, stick shut, but shine.[62]

[62] Some insertions of my own in these three stanzas.

Gur sòlas an ceòl cluaise
àrd-bhàirich bhuar mu ad chrò,
laoigh cheannfhion bhreaca ghunach
ri freagradh, ’s nuallan bhò;
a’ bhanarach le buaraich
’s am buachaill’ dol nan còir,
gu blaoghan a’ chruidh ghuaillfhinn
air cuaich a thogas cròic.

Bidh lòchrain-mheala lùbadh
nan sràbh, ’s brùth air gach gèig
de mheasan milis, cùbhraidh
nan ùbhlan is nam peur;
na duilleagan a’liùgadh,
is fallus-cùil diubh fèin,
is clann a’ gabhail tùchaidh
’gan imlich dlùth le’m beul.

B’e ’n crònan t’easan srùlach
an dùrdail mhùirneach Mhàigh;
’s do bhoirchean daite sgùm-gheal
tiugh flùireanach, dlùth, tlàth;
le d’ mhantal de dhealt ùr-mhìn
mar dhùbhradh cùil mu d’ bhlàth;
’s air calg gach feòrein t’ùr-fheòir
gorm neamhainn dhriùchd a’ fàs.

Water tiered as small falls
streaming May, colorful froth-laced banks
thicken to wildflowers fresh, dense
with new dew. If shade vignettes
the edges, blossoms blossom
and the meadow grass
grows blue, every grass blade,
and on every blade of grass, dew:

diamond that pure sparkles, spray stippling
light on earth as it is in heaven,
carpet *par excellence*,
so fine Whitehall's gardens
are jack-squat by comparison.
Changeable leafy green, this brae's
explosive life and light. Primroses like
candles in candlesticks

finish off any remaining shade.
A muffled swan warbles its swan song
and long-tailed ducks
at the mouth of Allt an t-Siùcair
surf, swim. Their slick knack for it, for singing
loud and proud with bent windpipes
like a bent note leaves a bagpipe:
music mild, light. Magic.

Do bhrat làn shradag daoinein;
do bhraon ni soills' air làr;
An carpet 's gasda foidh-neul,
gun cho fine an Whitehall;
mu d' bhearradh gorm-bhreac, coillteach,
an cinn an loinn le àl;
na sòbhraichean mar choinnlean
'nan coinnlearan a'd sgàth.

Bidh guileag eala tùchan
's eòin bhùchuinn am bàrr thonn
aig ionmbhar Allt an t-Siùcair
snàmh lùth-chleasach le fonn,
ri seinn gu moiteil, cùirteil,
le muineil-chiùil 's iad crom,
mar mhàla pìoba 's lùb air,
ceòl aoifidh ciùin nach trom.

'S grinn an obair ghràbhail
rinn nàdur air do bhruaich;
le d' lurachain creamhach, fàsmhor,
's am buicean bàn orra shuas;
gach saimir, neòinean 's màsag
mìn bhreac air làr do chluain,
mar reultan reòt' an deàrrsaidh
'na spangan àluinn, nuadh.

Place-shaped banks
spick and span. Thriving wild garlic
under the white fuzz above,
the nutgall – hazel bud
swollen to knot. Clover, daisy,
a small red berry each and the folds
all starred with them sparkle like iceblink
in pristine detail.

Tree crowns darken
with rowanberry, the corymbs
there, and here auburn nuts
cluster and unhusk overhead.
Plump brambles, blackcurrants
bend the branches. The weight
of ripening. The ache, tang and gush
sustained by a drying sun.

My garden dares Paradise to be so complete,
the best collection
of any coille. Grain growing through grasslands
is windfall blown from the ground up,
that seed-rich tender grass
run riot but never overrun. So fat and lavish
it spurts from stems,
and from the back bursts.

Bidh croinn ’s am bàrr mar sgàrlaid,
de chaoraibh àluinn ann;
is cnothan bachlach, àrbhuidh
a’ faoisgneadh àrd mu d’ cheann;
bidh dearcan ’s suibhean sùghmhor
trom-lùbadh an luis fhein,
caoin, seacaidh, blàsda, cùbhraidh,
ag call an drùis ri grèin.

’S co làn mo lios ri Pàrras
de gach cnuas is feàrr an coill’;
’na rèidhlich arbhar fàsaidh
bheir piseach àrd is sgoinn;
pòr reachdmhor, minear, fàsmhor
nach cinn gu fàs ’na laoim,
cho reamhar, luchdmhor càileachd
’s gu’n sgàin a’ ghràn o dhruim.

Do thacar mara ’s tìre,
bu teachd-an-tìr leis fèin;
’nan treudan, fèidh ad fhrìthean,
’s ad chladach ’s mìlteach èisg;
’nad thràigh tha maorach lìonmhor,
’s air t-uisge ’s fìor-bhras leus
aig òganacha rìomhach
le morghath fìor-chruaidh geur.

Yield of sea and field.
Itself a yield-field, sustenance.
Deer over the deer park
and over shoal and shore run,
and with shellfish the beaches teem,
and on the water a face
revealed through sun glitter:
a fisher lad wielding

his hard sharp fishing spear.
Horses at the green source,
their herd's replenished flash.
As their lowing is heard,
so my thirst grows. Roebuck, doe
and their red-eared marked young
graze in secret then
bound down the watery ground.

Oxen, cows, calves, roe
belong all to this allt-song[63]
of glens buzzing with the hunt,
a rough tree country spruced up.
Bonny dewy bog cotton white on white
softens the hillsides through
soft, gentle, pillowy tufts; through
uplands, the brown grouse flock.

[63] As with 'coille' in the previous sequence, 'allt' here inflects the English in a way relevant to the content. Aside from it directly invoking one of the poem's central and enduring images, its vowel sound braids tightly with 'song' and echoes, and alliterates with, 'all', creative a cohesive nod at mac Mhaighstir Alasdair's own sonic properties. A similar Gaelic word, bruaich, could work in a similar way, but it doesn't quite afford the same tight-knit aesthetic opportunities, nor does the word's meaning directly correlate with the poem's title and imagery.

Gur h-ùrail, sliochdmhor, cuanta
greigh each air d’ fhuarain ghorm,
le ’n ìotadh tarruinn suas riut,
le cluintinn nuall do thoirm;
bidh buicean binneach ’s ruadhag
’s mìnn mheanbh-bhreac, chluas-dearg, òg
ri h-ionaltradh gu h-uaigneach,
’s ri ruideis luath mu d’ lòn.

Gur damhach, aghach, laoghach,
mangach, maoiseach, d’ fhonn;
do ghlinn le seilg air laomadh,
do gharbhlach-chraobh ’s do lom;
gur h-àluinn barr-fhionn, braonach
do chanach caoin-gheal thom,
’na mhaibeanan caoin maoth-mhìn
’nad mhòintich sgaoth chearc donn.

B’e siud an sealladh èibhinn,
do bhruachan glè-dhearg ròs,
’s iad daite le gath grèine
mar bhiosgnich leug-bhuidhe òir;
b’e siud an geiltreadh glè-ghrinn,
cinn dhèideag am measg feòir,
de bharran luibhean ceutach,
’s fuaim bhinn aig teud gach eòin.

That unreal sight: when sunlight
over the rose bank slides,
scarlet undarkened, splashed glint and gold.
That delicate balance: flowerheads
of ribwort among grass,
lovely wildflower heads
and the harmonic ring
of every bird.

Lily is flower-king
to which flowering rose canes bow.
Delicate petals garland,
its white sunstruck crown.
Its scent wafts off water and
as Allt an t-Siùcair curves
it constellates with lily
starring dark earth.

Washed sorrel and flowering rush
tap into grace. Flowers lure
then fall to little
goldleaf cups. Thickets decked out
with the round wreaths
and twists of birds' nests.
Grassy tufts prop tormentil
and dog violet up.

O, lilidh, rìgh nam flùran!
thug bàrr-mais air ùr-ròs gheug,
’na bhabaidean cruinn, plùr-mhìn
’s a chrùn geal, ùr mar ghrèin;
don uisg ud, Allt an t-Siùcair,
’s e cùbhraidh da bho bheud,
’na rionnagan m’a lùbaibh
mar reultan-iùil nan speur.

Do shealbhag ghlan ’s do luachair
a’ bòrcadh suas mu d’ chòir;
do dhìthein lurach, luaineach
mar thuairneagan den òr;
do phris làn neada cuachach,
cruinn, cuarsgagach aig d’ eòin;
bàrr-braonain ’s an t-sàil-chuachaig
’nan dos an uachdar d’ fheòir.

B’ e siud an leigheas lèirsinn
do loingeas brèid-gheal, luath
’nan squadron seòl bhrèid-chrom,
a’ bòrdadh geur ri d’ chluais,
’nan giùthsaichean beò-ghleusta
’s an cainb gu lèir riu shuas,
’s Caol Muile fuar ’ga reubadh
le anail-speur bho thuath.

That healing glance:
your swift ships with white sails
sail squadrons, sails-wide.
They tack, turn. Trace the shore's ear.
Its curve outlined
by crafts of pine, their canvas
sails like flags unfurled
to the wind: one sky-breath exhaled
from the north and through

Caol Muile, they move.
To evict me from spring-fed ecstasy,
the best-mixed stream
the north of Europe can offer, it's wrong.
Just a mugful of the stuff
and a dram of brandy
packs a sweet, dizzying punch.
Folk all reeling. I thought you

were nurturer to every right,
undaunted by embittered stars.
Protector. You were
the wing of the north,
godsend to flock and field.
Sunny country, a second canticle
to the sun. Fierce pride,
a drover riding high on hot-blood.

Is cruaidh a bhàirlinn fhuair mi[64]
bho'n fhuaran 's blasda glòir;
an caochan is mò buadhan
a tha fo thuath 'san Eòrp;
lìon ach am bòla suas deth,
's de bhrandaidh fhuair na 's leòir,
am puinse milis, guanach
a thàirneas sluagh gu ceòl.

Muim-altruim gach pòir uasail
nach meath le fuachd nan speur;
tha sgiath o'n àirde tuath oirre
dh' fhàg math a buar 's a feur;
fonn deiseireach, fìor uaibhreach,
'na speuclair buan do'n ghrèin;
le sprèidh thèid duine suas ann
cho luath ri each 'na leum.

Is aol is grunnd d'a dhailean
dh'fhàg Nàdar tarbhach iàd;
air ma meinn gun toir iad arbhar,
's tiugh starbhanach ni fàs;
bidh dearrasanaich shearr-fhiaclach
'ga lannadh sìos am boinn
le luinneagan binn nìghneag,
an ceòl is mìlse rainn.

[64] 'Bhàirlinn' has been glossed as both a 'summons' and an 'eviction from' the burn. The two Rev MacDonalds gloss it as the former (MacDonald and MacDonald 53). Ronald Black glosses the latter (Black, ed., *An Lasair* 32). It is unclear what precisely the MacDonald's meant by 'summons', but Dwelly's dictionary supports Black's reading, which shifts the celebratory voice of the poem to slight pathos (though, in terms of form, panegyric is retained to the very end) (Dwelly 61). I sided with Black's reading because of the evidence, but also because of the complexity it brings the poem. Praising a corrie and burn for the sake of praise, and at such a great length, could be read as mechanical unless counterbalanced and subverted, a technique mac Mhaighstir Alasdair seized upon because it allowed him to demonstrate Gaelic's literary legacy as well as develop it. Like a volta in the longest sonnet ever, the vocal shift adds an emotional register that takes us by surprise, but also justifies its design. Why praise corrie and burn? Because he is leaving them, because he has to, having been evicted, and according to the narrative voice, unjustly so. Intentional or not, such an illustration of eviction, we now know, becomes prophetic, as Coire Mhuillin and its environs (the setting of this poem) were some twenty years later to be cleared, with only a few foundational stones left behind as vestiges. It now makes up part of the larger clearance settlements of the Highlands and Islands. 'Bhàirlinn' illustrates the inhumanity of landlordism, and any pathos that occurs as a result, does so not through a confessional voice, but through the burn and place. Concrete imagery, all hyperlocal, concentrates the injustice. Here is a perfect world according to mac Mhaighstir Alasdair, one to which he has strong ties, a life, a career. Yet a landlord single-handedly has decided he is unfit to stay. mac Mhaighstir Alasdair describes this decision as 'cruaidh' ('severe', 'harsh') but I have translated it as 'wrong' to bring out its inhumanity.

Fertile lime-strewn dales
are natural gifts. Left unassisted
they run to seed, only loss is reaped.
No! Let there be life,
a sharp-toothed whistle
at the foot of the hillside
from that running stream
where girls sing runs of rhyme:

corrie of the juiciest earth,
corrie that's best of all,
wee corrie to Allt an t-Siùcair,
our wee fallow secret corrie,
though fallow it's fouthy,
and fouthy it thrives,
as honey and milk spill out,
and water milky as sugar;

corrie of foals and lambs,
the stray heifer and kid,
corrie as the glen
is green, is fast milk
and calving cries,
the cuckoo-through-Maytime
corrie, of wood and rush,
of trout in the otter's mouth

An coire ’s fheàrr ’san dùthaich,
an coire ’s sùghmhoir’ fonn,
’s e coirean Allt an t-Siùcair,
an coirean rùnach, lom;
’s ge lom, gur molach, ùrail,
bog, miadail ’s dlùth a thom,
’m bheil mil is bainne brùcadh
’s uisg’ ruith air siùcar pronn.

An coire searrachach, uanach,
meannach, uaigneach àidh;
an coire gleannach, uaine,
bliochdach, luath gu dàir;
an coire coillteach, luachrach
an goir a’ chuach ’sa Mhàrt;
an coire ’m faigh duin’ uasal
biast dhubh is ruadh ’na chàrn.

An coire brocach, taobh-ghorm
torcach, faoilidh, blàth;
an coire lonach, naosgach,
cearcach, craobhach, gràidh;
gu bainneach, bailceach, braonach,
breacach, laoghach, blàr,
an sultmhor mart is caora,
’s is torach laoimsgir bàrr.

laying on rock (the laird's
catch), badger-and-boar
corrie, so friendly, warm
and green, hen-and-snipe
corrie, of trees-and-marsh
corrie, of love of the rain
and smirr, and the milk-
white face of the fawn;

where the winter slaughter
of cow outnumber their mete,
the trout and sheep, corrie
of some fifty lamb with lambkin,
their bellies swell, skin
a soft wan; they are fare
and cloth for the lonely glen,
and for the brink, this corrie

rough but rare carries more
than enough good; corrie
of wild ducks, of drakes, of
curlew and young shore geese,
cock and monarch, sunup to
sundown, corrie of competition
and growth, grazings, groves,
and the thickest butter and cheese…

I guess it's time I leave.[65]

[65] The format and some vocal changes toward the end were adopted to bring out the shift in context. The content, however, remains largely faithful to the original. 's tìm dhomh sgur 'g an àireamh' ('It's time for me to stop this number' but perhaps also '… to stop recounting' what is no more.) This line has been relocated to the end and slightly altered to accommodate my new reading of the poem.

An coire ’m bi na caoraich
’nan caogada le ’n àl;
le’n reamhrad gabhail faoisgneadh
an craicinn mhaoth-gheal, thlàth;
b’ e sud am biadh ’s an t-aodach
’nad fhaoin-ghleann is a’d àird;
an coire luideach, gaolach,
’s e làn de mhaoine gràis.

An coire lachach, dràcach
am bi guilbnich, ’s tràigh-gheòidh òg;
an coire coileachach, làn-damhach,
is moch ’s is anmoch spòrs;
’s tìm dhomh sgur ’g an àireamh –
an coire ’s fàsmhor pòr
gu h-innseach, doireach, blàrach,
’s ìmeach, càiseach bò.

Dream of the Prince[66]
after the Gaelic

Here he comes now out of exile.
Our arms are wrapped in cloak and welcome.

His arrival thrills. This son of our rightful king
has looks to kill. A striking side view
with slick sword and plaited shield. My knight
in shining armor from overseas
is a tall, graceful rider whose caracole stuns any
light horse insurgence.
Rarest appearance, his skyful glare of March:
a rainbow's sklinter, the rain-grey rush.

One swing of that sword
would scythe our enemy, like an oat field.

[66] This is perhaps the most controversial move in this thesis: creating two 'dreams' from one original poem. It has been published in mac Mhaighstir Alasdair, *Dastram/Delirium*, 2023. These dreams attempt to free up the tone of propaganda for two reasons. One, despite the source text being excellent aesthetically, with a strong ending, the poem follows a song-lyric structure that does not transmit well to poetry on the page. Two, form aside, the poem's merit hinges on recycled Jacobite imagery to inspire its audience. In other words, mac Mhaighstir Alasdair had a target audience in mind, and because my translation is a primer for a current Anglophone audience, one that differs from his audience, there is a discrepancy in political sympathies. As stated throughout, I want this translation to introduce a version of mac Mhaighstir Alasdair to new readers who may have no opinion on his politics, but who are interested in his writing, voice and style. Splitting the poems and giving them a new implied form in translation emphasizes the formal properties, and thereby deemphasizes the political directness, while still representing its attitudes and ethos. The main reason for splitting the poem into two 'dreams' is the turn that occurs in the source text, signalled by the ending of the first 'dream'. The Prince's genteel attraction coupled with great strength is a typical trope for Jacobite poetry and these characteristics make up the first half of the poem, and correspond to the first dream in translation. As a coherent conceit in the 21st century, it is hard to understand the shift from the Prince's appearance to an assumption that the he will inspire a people, let alone lead them to victory over the Hanoverians, and this theme characterizes the second half of the poem, and corresponds with the second dream in translation. Separated physically but thematically joined, the power of mac Mhaighstir Alasdair's rhetoric better speaks for itself, which is the function of the poem: to persuade and incite. 'Dreams' suit the mindset, too, since he either wrote the source text just after the '45 to inspire yet another uprising, or prior to it, alongside 'Oran Nuadh' ('A New Song') and 'Oran nam Fineachan Gàidhealach' ('Song of the Highland Clans'), both which were read to Prince Charles Stuart in Paris before his arrival in Glenfinnan. Derick Thomson thinks the latter (*Alasdair Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair's Political Poetry* 35).

***bho* Oran Do'n Phrionnsa**[67]

O, hì-rì-rì, tha e tighinn,
O, hì-rì-rì, 'n Rìgh tha uainn,
Gheibheamaid ar n-airm 's ar n-èideadh,
'S breacan-an-fhèilidh an cuaich.

'S èibhinn liom fhìn, tha e tighinn,
Mac an Rìgh dhlighich tha uainn,
Slios mòr rìoghail d'an tig armachd,
Claidheamh us targaid nan dual.

'S ann a' tighinn thar an t-sàile
Tha 'm fear àrd as àille snuadh,
Marcaich' sunndach nan steud-each
Rachadh gu h-eutrom 'san ruaig.

Samhuil an Fhaoillich a choltas,
Fuaradh froise 's fadadh-cruaidh;
Lann thana 'na làimh gu cosgairt
Sgoltadh chorp mar choirc' air cluain.

[67] Gaelic text drawn from Campbell, *Highland Songs of the Forty-Five*, 1997.

Dream of Victory
after the Gaelic

Beneath the pipe's baleful blast,
all under one banner, renewed spirit
unfurls, suffuses us: dispossessed

then enriched by the passion to run
the rabble out, and as the cannons call
each switchback and beinn respond

thunderously. Their coda rings our ears
and the earth cracks open… Poor lad
on that day, still in his fancy dress[68]

or uniform. Coat as red as a fox.
What is that broken over his head?
A cocked hat, like charred cabbage.

[68] An insertion to set up the humorous tone in the final line more efficiently. The final line in translation risks coming off as a straightforward simile, so adding a preparatory bit of humour cues the reader to voice and expectation, that a quip is coming. See mac Mhaighstir Alasdair, *Dastram / Delirium*, 2023, in which this version featured. The liberties taken in 'Oran do'n Phrionnsa' should indicate a distinct change in approach to translation, as indicated by 'bho' in the Gaelic titles. Everything prior to 'Oran do'n Phrionnsa' retains a closer proximity to the source.

***bho* Oran Do'n Phrionnsa**[69]

Torman do phìoba 's do bhrataich
Chuireadh spiorad bras 'san t-sluagh,
Dh' èireadh ar n-ardan 's ar n-aigne,
'S chuirte air a' phrasgan ruaig.

Tairneanach a' bhomb 's a' chanain
Sgoilteadh e 'n talamh le 'chruas,
Fhreagradh dhà gach beinn 's gach bealach,
'S bhodhradh a mhac-tall' ar cluas!

Gur mairg d'an èideadh 'san là sin
Còta gràndʼ de 'n mhàdur ruadh,
Ad bhileach dhubh us cocàrd innt'
Sgoiltear i mar chàl mu 'n cluais!

[69] Gaelic text drawn from Campbell, *Highland Songs of the Forty-Five*, 1997.

Another Dream of the Prince[70]

I awaken to dawn and laughter's song.
There is much joy. The Prince has come.
The Prince has come to the motherland,

and for the motherland – cheers to him.
Cheers, Charlie! Cream-of-the-crop king.
Cream-of-the-crop, my king, for returning

and for remaining all smiles and modesty.
His modesty and smile generously blush,

and he blushes nobility all the same.
All the same, so exceptional in charm.
Charm that rises higher for the good.

Till the good heart of him sails home,
Lairds await, both feet on the ground.

[70] I included this to demonstrate what I deem to be mac Mhaighstir Alasdair's lesser poetry, as it comes across in translation. It is not particularly interesting, although it has a distinctive use of repeated lines, whereby the third and fourth line of a quatrain become the first and second of the following quatrain. Rather than imitate mac Mhaighstir Alasdair's form, I invoke a similar idea of line endings reiterated as line beginnings of each subsequent line. Twenty-four lines were attempted. The imagery is purely recycled Jacobite tropes, in which case the song's popularity may be primarily among Jacobite sympathizers, though the song's melody is lovely. Derick Thomson believes the song to have been written around the time of the Disarming and Disclothing Acts, 1747, and he mentions that its attribution to mac Mhaighstir Alasdair has been disputed (*Alasdair Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair's Political Poetry* 20).

***bho* Oran Eile Do'n Phrionnsa**[71]

Moch sa mhadainn 's mi dùsgadh
'S mòr mo shunnd 's mo cheòl-gàire
On a chuala mi 'm Prionnsa
Thighinn do dhùthaich Chlann Ra'ill.

On a chuala mi 'm Prionnsa
Thighinn do dhùthaich Chlann Ra'ill
Gràinne mullaich gach rìgh thu
Slàn gum till thusa, Theàrlaich.

Gràinne mullaich gach rìgh thu
Slàn gum till thusa, Theàrlaich
'S ann tha 'n fhìor-fhuil gun truailleadh
Anns a' ghruaidh is mòr-nàire.

'S ann tha 'n fhìor-fhuil gun truailleadh
Anns a' ghruaidh is mòr-nàire.
Mar ri barrachd na h-uaisle
'G èirigh suas le dèagh-nàdar.

Mar ri barrachd na h-uaisle
'G èirigh suas le dèagh-nàdar.
Is nan tigeadh tu rithist
Bhiodh gach tighearn' nan àite.

[71] Gaelic text drawn from Campbell, *Highland Songs of the Forty-Five*, 1997.

Manifesto[72]
after the Gaelic

That ultimate aim

for every language
under the sun to advance thought
in constant dialogue

our hivemind be
pared to clarity
the rùn of our heart-
beat beat on and on

deeds and burden
unite us as loss
replaced with promise
that when the calf
of our song is sacrificed
God is reached
through Gaelic
our highest register

man alone is the sole
creature capable
of speech and through
God's gift and will
we enact His mouthpiece

this He withheld
from other minds

so marvellously rare
a thing resembles
nothing else
just imagine
life without voice
lifeless inside your head
the tongue of silence
were Gaelic dead

[72] Part of the intro poem of mac Mhaighstir Alasdair's book (*Ais-Eiridh*… 1–3*)* Peter Mackay describes it as a 'manifesto' ("Negotiations of Barbarity…" 35). My version experiments with register. Gaelic is praised in earnest, but counterbalanced with playful braggadocio. Some of the claims, like Gaelic's biblical link, were espoused by 18th-century thinkers (*Adhamh Agus Eubh…*) This book claims that Gaelic was the language of the Garden of Eden.

bho Moladh an Ùghdair don t-Seann Chànain Ghàidhlig[73]

Gur e ’s crìoch àraidh
Do gach cainnt fo’n ghrèin
Ar smuaintean fàsmhor
A phàirteachadh ri chèil;
Ar n-inntinnean a rùsgadh
Agus rùn ar crìdh
Le ’r gnìomh ’s le ’r giùlan,
Sùrd chur air ar dìth,
’S gu laoigh ar beòil
Iobradh do Dhia nan dùl;
’S e h-àrd chrioch mhòr
A bhi toirt dhàsan cliù.
’S e ’n duine fèin
’S aon chreutair reusant’ ann,
Gu’n d’ thug toil Dè dha,
Gibht le bheul bhi cainnt;
Gu’n d’ chum e seo
Bho ’n uile bhrùid gu lèir,
O, ghibht mhòr phrìseil
Dheilbh ’na iomhaigh fèin!
Na ’m beirteadh balbh e,
’S a theanga marbh ’na cheann
B’ i ’n iargain shearbh i,
B’ fhearr bhi marbh na ann.

[73] Gaelic text drawn from MacDonald and MacDonald, *The Poems of Alexander MacDonald,* 1924.

languages were shattered
throughout historic Babel
but from Adam's throat
Gaelic fought unrivalled

its eloquence
the upheld moral ground
to which all aspire still
unbeaten
unbeatable

Gaelic's worldwide port of call
grew watertight before
The Flood

survival is radical voice
shared never lost
let alone
to any blowhard
Lowlander's lowblow[74]

bodach and esquire
had Gaelic
dukes and rulers
had Gaelic
Scotland
had Gaelic

the verdict was in
when the king's court
were witness
Gaelic finesse calmed all
clanjamfry

famed Malcom
Canmore knew
gentleman and
simpleton too
Gaelic was Scotland
Highland and *lo!*
laicized and cleric
were equal under
Gaelic's yoke

any mouth
with a moving tongue
since Eden

[74] Alasdair's famous 'Is mì-run mòr nan Gall' is accurately translated 'the great ill-will of the Lowlander'.

’S de iomadh cànain
Bho linn Bhàbel fhuair
An slochd sin Adhaimh
’S i Ghàidhlig a thug buaidh.
Do’n labhradh dhàicheil,
An turam àrd gun tuairms’,
Gun mheang gun fhàillinn
Is urrainn càch a luaidh.
Bha a’Ghàidhlig ullamh
’Na glòir fior ghuineach, cruaidh
Air feadh a’ chruinne
Mu ’n thuilich an Tuil-ruadh;
Mhair i fòs,
’S cha tèid a glòir air chall,
Dh’aindeoin gò
Is mì-run mòr nan Gall.
’S i labhair Alba,
’S Gall-bhodacha fèin,
Ar flaith ’s ar prionnsan
’S ar diùcanna gun èis.
An tigh-comhairl’ an righ,
’Nuair shuidheadh air binn a chùirt,
’S i Ghàidhlig lìobhaidh
Dh’ fhuasgladh snaoim gach cùis’.
’S i labhair Calum
Allail a’ chinn mhòir;
Gach mith is maith
Bha ‘n Alba, beag is mòr.
’S i labhair Goill is Gàidheil,
Neo-chlèirich is clèir,
Gach fear agus bean,
A ghluaiseadh teanga am beul.

Gaelic the fruit
on Eve's lovely lips
and on Adam's
the lust

’S i a labhair Adhamh
Ann a Phàrras fhèin,
’S bu shiùbhlach a’ Ghàidhlig
O bheul àlainn Eubh!

Jacobite Tweed[75]
after the Gaelic

Prince Charming, I dread your shirtless lack.
Europe casts a shuttle of cloth for you

and not till it's slipped on will our troubles cease.
Embroidered, tailored, and it will meet

deadlines prior to Michaelmas. As discussed,
Scotland will lend its own waulker's hand

if ever there was one. Yours will be russet,
struck with a song of ichor and urine.

I myself will assemble a dream-team from Sleat,
sisterhood second-to-none on a ridged frame

and aye, the bonniest in Christendom. Women,
an entourage that would never lose focus,

Clanranald's squad, alongside the Glengarry
girls, will join up, berserk, undisrupted.

The Keppochs, tireless, will be night-watchers
as Glencoe's weavers weave violence:

yellow, red, green. Add Antrim and everyone will
waulk miraculously as Christ on water.

So let them, like they never have before, go
hand-to-hand, with a sting of blood drawn

from little boy George, that courtesan's son.
Aye, let's not repeat Culloden either.

What a disaster, our retreat! Let us restore you,
Charles, Prince Charming, to your uniform.

May our peace-kiss blow the enemy to smithereens.
More fabulously dressed than king or queen,

who would not walk beside you to the very end?
A thousand curses to any fair-weather friend!

[75] An adaptation of the song, 'Clò Mhic Ille Mhìcheil', or 'Carmichael's Tweed'. Alasdair employs one of the tropes of traditional panegyric code, the 'ally list'. 'Prince Charming' adds a relatable flamboyance, and in general, Alasdair's voice is skewed as both demotic and camp by this version, to show how versioning can fall short. Other anachronisms occur. 'Nach do rinn fùcadh na thìom dhut' would be rendered more accurately 'Who wouldn't waulk for you when it was time'; the song's refrain/chorus 'Hug air clò Mhic Ille Mhìcheil' is omitted in an attempt to adapt the song to written poetry. The final couplet has also been omitted.

***bho* Clò Mhic Ille Mhìcheil**[76]

Òganaich ùir a' chùil teudaich,
's oil leam eudach a bhith dhìth ort.
Chuir 'n Roinn-Eòrpa clò am beairt dhut,
's gu 'n tig e às cha bhi sìth ann.
Bith i fighte, cùmte, luaidhte,
mus tig buain na Fèill Mhìcheil.
Bheir Alba cuideachadh luadhadh
ma tha gruagaichean san rìoghachd.
Gum bi do chlò ruadh-sa luaidhte
le gaoir, fuil is fual ga shlìobadh.
Nì mi fhèin dhut sgioba clèithe
den phòr as gleust' tha sa Chrìosdachd.
Gun tig bannal oirnn à Slèite,
's air do chlèith-s' gun dèan iad dìcheall.
Gun tig ann gruagaichean Chlann Ràghnaill,
còmhlan dàicheil nach dèan dìobradh.
Thig sgiob' eil' à Gleanna Garadh
luaidheas gu faramach dìonach.
Gun tig nìghneagan on Cheapaich
a bheir caithris air mun sgìthich.
'S buidheann mhaighdeann à Gleann Comhann,
fùcadairean coimheach, rìoghail.
'S gheibh sinn sgioba eil' à Eirinn,
o Iarl' Anntraim nan steud rìomhach
Dèanaibh an luadh-làmh gu guineach
's thugaibh fuil air mac na strìopaich!
Na b' ionnan seo 's an luadh dosgach
bha 'n Cùil Lodair nuair a phill sinn.
Cuireamaid na èideadh Teàrlach,
sracamaid an àird ar dìchill.
Mìle marbhphasig air na brùidibh
nach do rinn fùcadh na thìom dhut.

[76] Gaelic drawn from Gillies, *Songs Of Gaelic Scotland*, 179.

To Duncan Campbell's Daughter[77]
after the Gaelic

You were Johnny-on-the-spot to slag off the clans.
Well done. They'd fallen on hard times already,
but none harder than when they fell

disembowelled, bellies full of lead…
Cameron's and Donald's men would have
left you earless if things were different. And yes,

I received your letter. No wax. Not that it matters.
You stash more than enough on your own,
underneath your sash, or round

your arsehole, that faecal-blown
mouthpiece. And yes, it's undeniable how
beating the pelt of you clean from this summer

to next spring, through winter, autumn, you'd still be
tufted as the ol' badger's bottom: your womb
a winnowing fan, a strapless pouch

your chest, your snout a piglet's
for snuffing insects. You sow swineherds
and after fucking them, they fuck back in disgust.

Your busted harp has split-ends for gut-strings.
Though luthiers may re-string the frame
such an instrument does not sing.

You insert a key for fine tuning.
If anything, you're taking the piss.

[77] An adaptation, not a translation. I change the title to remove the first line and include some context, move around names, adjust details. The voice is very 'American thug', and therefore not mac Mhaighstir Alasdair's voice, again to show the limits of versioning. Ronald Black identifies the woman as Mrs Campbell of Barr in Morvern, later Craignish. She was a zealous Hanoverian, and apparently a prolific poet, until this poem silenced her (Black, ed., *An Lasair* 438–439).

***bho* An Litir gun Chéir Oirr'**[78]

A nighean Donnchaidh duibh, nòtair,
Bha thu gòrach nuair thòisich
Thu dhiteadh Clann Chamshroin
’S Clann Dòmhnaill a’ chruadail –
Mur rachadh na fir ud
A mhilleadh le luaidhe,
Gun tugadh na gillean
Dhe chinne na cluasan

Fhuair mi do litir,
Cha robh idir a’ chéir oirr’ –
’S beag a ruigeadh i leas i,
Bu phailt agad fhéin i:
Bha i agad am falach
Fo bhanna do léine,
Thall air do chùlaibh
Bhon fheadan mhùgach a’ séideadh.

Sann agad tha ’n t-seiche
Nach robh idir staingte –
Ged bhithte ga bualadh
O thoiseach an t-samhraidh
Gu deireadh an earraich,
An fhoghair ’s a’ gheamhraidh,
Bhiodh i cho molach
Ri dronnag an t-seann-bhruic.

Tha brù ort, a thrustair,
Mar ghuit no mar chriathar,
Tha ciochan do bhroillich
Mar sporan gun iallan;
Tha soic mar a’ mhuc ort
A thrusas na biastan –
Bidh gràin air a’ chràin
A nì dà uair do chliathadh.

Sann agad tha chlàrsach
Tha grànda ri fhaicinn,
Gun innte de theudan
Ach gaoisid air pabadh;
Ged rachadh a gleusadh
Cha seinn i ach glagach,
Nuair théid an crann ciùil innt’
Se mùn a thig aiste.

[78] Gaelic text drawn from Black, *An Lasair,* 162.

Penis Bookmark[79]
after the Gaelic

Luck
extends to you
a placeholder that
thousands of places
have been held by,
a good bookmark
triangle-tipped,
cut of cardstock
or wrinkled gloss,
a chanter-ish kiss
though sweet, fit
and durable and
enduringly sleek:
pure *joie de vivre*
only when we pick
up where we left off.

[79] Not at all a translation but an adaptation of the poem's theme, thematic structure, and some adjectives. The poem draws on a tradition of bragging about the penis, such as Dafydd ap Gwilym's 'Cywydd y Gal'/ 'Poem to the Penis'. It is a piece of light verse, but I felt the humour might fall flat if translated literally and according to the same conceit, so I decided to adapt elements of it to achieve a similarly humorous effect for the 21st century. See mac Mhaighstir Alasdair, *Dastram / Delirium*, 2023, in which this adaptation featured.

bho Moladh air Sàr-Bhod[80]

Tha ball-ratha sìnte riut
A choisinn mìle buaidh:
Sàr-bhodh iallach acfhainneach
Rinn-gheur sgaiteach cruaidh
Ùilleach feitheach feadanach
Làidir seasmhach buan
Beòdha treòrach togarrach,
Nach diùltadh bog no cruaidh.

[80] Gaelic text drawn from Newton, *Naughty Little Book of Gaelic*, p. 45.

An Ethical Defence of the Subversive Translations of Alasdair mac Mhaighstir Alasdair's 'Moladh Mòraig' and 'Birlinn Chlann Raghnaill'

Abstract

The 18th-century Scottish Gaelic poet Alasdair mac Mhaighstir Alasdair aimed at empowering the Gaelic language through his poetry. His book *Ais-eirigh na Sean Chànoin Albannaich* (1751) sought to revive Gaelic against encroaching influences south of the Highland line. English translations of his work, then, seemingly occupy a contradiction in function, as both aid and threat: an aid, by preserving and promoting a version of his culture, and a threat, by reaffirming its minoritized status. 'The modern language and culture carry mac Mhaighstir Alasdair's stamp', so the stakes could not be higher for his translator (Stiùbhart 37).

A detailed examination of the first ùrlar of his poem 'Moladh Mòraig', and of the structure and context of his epic 'Birlinn Chlann Raghnaill' are considered under the practice of 'subversive translation', a term based on Helen Gibson's usage. Much conventional translation is rooted in imperialistic thinking according to Eric Cheyfitz. Christopher Whyte, meanwhile, warns that English translations seek to 'dispense with' Gaelic originals (Whyte 69). Are English translations of Gaelic so inherently chauvinistic? Bilingual self-translation is not obviously 'imperialistic', so there is a question of when imperialistic tendencies arise in the translation process.

Two approaches to Anglophone translation post-Robert Lowell will contextualize my approach. Urgency around minor-to-major translation will respond briefly to Venuti's 'foreignizing/domesticating' dilemma and Deleuze's and Guattari's 'minor literature'. I propose a subversive approach with reference to eadar-mhìneachadh ('inter-explaining/interpreting') and Sophie Collins' 'intimacy' approach. Given the colonial tendencies of some Anglophone translation, Susan Sontag and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o will provide an ethical counterbalance.

The outcome seeks to minimize harm done to mac Mhaighstir Alasdair's source text. A schema re-created from David Bellos will structure praxis.

I

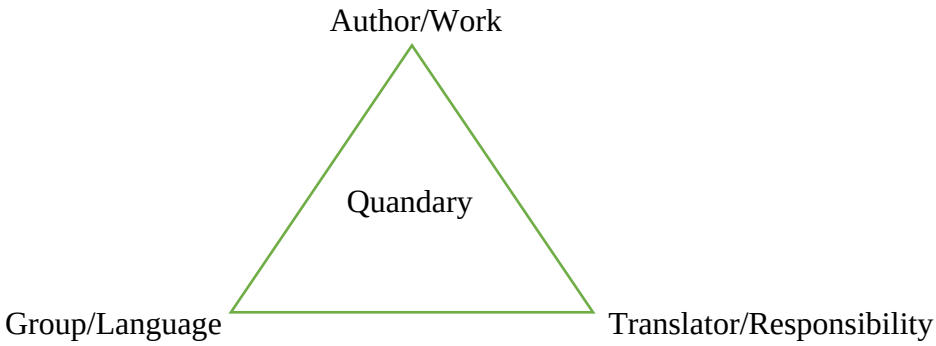
After Culloden in 1746, the poet Alasdair mac Mhaighstir Alasdair sought to empower[81] the Gaelic language and culture by his own revolutionary verse with the publication of his 1751 collection, *Ais-eirigh na Sean Chànoin Albannaich* ('The Revival of the Ancient Scottish Language'). His aim was not the proto-Romanticism of high ideals of the individual, but rather an enactment of the historical status of the 'ollamh filidhean', '… scions of aristocratic houses [and/or] warrior-bards' who wielded considerable political influence in medieval Ireland and Scotland (MacInnes 26). Indeed, the title of his collection points to his self-perceived inheritance of this 'refurbisher' role (24).

Growing uncertainty around the present community viability of Gaelic leads to corresponding uncertainty around the need of English-language translations of its literature (Ó Giollagáin). Aonghas Pàdraig Caimbeul has expressed reservations about his own work being translated into English out of a desire 'to protect it' (Glass). Caimbeul's position that an untranslated work is a protected work does not mean that he is against translation *per se*, but rather the pretext that Gaelic should be put into English in order to remain relevant within the wider literary conscience. What is implied by this stance is untranslated Gaelic works being imbued with cultural immunity; that works existing in Gaelic alone exist as they ought to, uniquely, even defiantly. Translation may, therefore, facilitate the encroachment of English, in which case a moral quandary arises: translate mac Mhaighstir Alasdair and risk further erosion to Gaelic's importance, or leave mac Mhaighstir Alasdair untranslated and inaccessible to readers who have no or insufficient command of the language. Add Gaelic's dwindling speaker numbers to the equation, and the pros of translation seem to outweigh the cons. But the preface to *Ais-eirigh* is unequivocal: he seeks a 'translation into English, [with] critical observations […] to render the work useful to those that do not understand Gaelic' ("Preface", *Ais-Eiridh*). At the same time, what if mac Mhaighstir Alasdair's readership takes issue with English translations of his and other Gaelic poetry? Wilson McLeod specifically dismisses the 'packaging' of Gaelic into English, writing that enface English translations

[81] 'Empower' may require clarification. In the English preface to *Ais-Eiridh*, mac Mhaighstir Alasdair presents his work for two reasons, the second of which, he hopes, will 'raise in others a desire to learn something of [Gaelic]', a language which contains the 'charms of poetry and rhetoric' as well as 'pleasure and persuasion' that have led to the 'gradual advancement' of 'all other languages'. He is effectively establishing the grounds for his neighbouring Anglosphere to value Gaelic and its merits as equal to that of English (the claims are made in English after all), and thus elevates or empowers Gaelic's cultural-linguistic status amongst a group who thinks otherwise. Moreover, if we consider the book's title, it too can be thought of as signalling empowerment, since Gaelic as has an ancient pedigree in need of aiseirigh or 'revival'. (If not needed, then why 'revive' or 'resurrect' it?) From the language of his preface, then, we can infer his intentions to empower Gaelic, with his own poetry being exemplary of its tradition and innovation (*Ais-Eiridh*... v).

subordinate Gaelic originals, if not push them into existential limbo (McLeod 149-151). English translations, then, must justify their entire system in order to avoid subordinating their source, and this only makes sense. Why would an English translation want to be associated with a subordinate literature?

Less discussed is the responsibility of the translator to anticipate some of the burden the minority-language author and the group to which they belong must endure. Critical analyses, public discourse, publishing formats and more all play into what has been described as a translator's 'constrained autonomy', the demands of which are 'textual and extra-textual action' (Jones 711–728). This action, in other words, describes not only a translator's responsibility to fundamental tasks, like lexical traceability or an author's voice, but also to secondary tasks, like the various means by which the translation is presented to the public. The outcome is a threefold tension between author/work, group/language, and translator/responsibility within which the aforementioned moral quandary exists, as pictured:



Presumably the tension, and therefore the quandary, would cease to exist if any one of the variables at each point of the triangle were omitted. Remove the translator, and the work remains in the source language, untampered with; remove the group, and the author and translator work together according to agreed-upon terms, and so on. The quandary thus arises relative to the presence of all three variables, and by extension, is resolved relative to them. Only when the quandary is resolved can there be a possibility of fulfilling mac Mhaighstir Alasdair's ambitions.

II

A late 20th-century Anglophone strain of poetry translation practice will be recounted to build a context against which I translate Alasdair mac Mhaighstir Alasdair. I bring an American perspective and an intermediate level of Gaelic literacy to the project, as well as a

track record of poetry publication. Specifically I wish to begin with Robert Lowell, and Seamus Heaney as a successor, since both have furthered a continuum of poetry translation called 'imitation' or 'versioning', terms that dominate Anglophone poetry translation, and have done since Lowell's *Imitations* (1961), but which are recasts from John Dryden. I will then present 'subversion' or 'subversive translation' as an approach that draws on imitation but differs from it. I claim to use a form of subversive translation that employs Gaelic terminology for its framework, and I will compare my process to that of others who fit within that framework.

'Literary' and 'non-literary' translation should be distinguished first, where the former prioritizes style, imagination, and human complexity, while the latter favours clarity, information, and factual exactness (Newmark 8). The latter deals with non-literary texts (e.g. financial documents) whereas the former deals with literary texts almost exclusively.[82] Moreover, a literary translation not only interacts with literary texts, and their stylistic elements, but aims to reproduce to an extent the text's stylistic elements in a target language, the stakes of which are even higher for poetry, since poetry's form is a system unto itself beyond word choice or semantic meaning.[83] 'I went for a morning walk' may effectively mean the same as 'A saunter through the day dawning took I', but if both were translations of the same line, their differences need to be explained.[84] To account for these dynamic stylistic, emotional and human elements in translation is essential to literary translation.

Imitation or versioning (used interchangeably here) are subcategories of literary translation – a poetry-centric translation approach, due to poetry's aesthetic, formal and subtextual demands. The mid-20th century American poet Robert Lowell, in the introduction to his *Imitations*, describes imitation as trying to 'do what the [translated] authors might have done if they were writing their poems now and in America' (Lowell xi). His approach, in other words, embodies more than what texts themselves present on the page. Complete authorship, down to one's aesthetic tendencies, sociohistorical prejudices, and more, factor into his versioning technique, which has become foundational.

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[82] Where some 'literary non-fiction' is situated within the spectrum presents ambiguity.

[83] For poetry, stylistic persistence and lexical fluidity in translation raises a philosophical question. How is it that words change, but style remains? Indeed, what is it that actually persists if words generate style, but not the other way around? A literary text's phonemes and graphemes may not persist in translation. For Gaelic to English, 'agus' will become 'and', for example. But style may persist. A sonnet translated into a sonnet, for example. However, if words generate style, but words change, style must change too, unless style exists beyond words as a separate, emergent phenomenon, expressed by words, but not determined by them.

[84] There are exceptions, such as a literary translator sacrificing some stylistic elements to capture others. In such instances, it is the job of the literary translator to address intent.

Before discussing what versions and their system entails, it is beneficial to briefly recount the origin of Lowell's approach. As stated above, Lowell is repurposing concepts first introduced by John Dryden in his preface to *Ovid's Epistles* (1680). Dryden divides translation into three modes: 'metaphrase', 'paraphrase' and 'imitation' (Dryden 3-17). Metaphrase is word-for-word, or 'literal' translation, paraphrase is latitude that works to maintain an author's 'sense', and imitation assumes 'liberty… taking only some general hints from the original'. Imitation for Dryden was an emergency resource, reserved for extreme cases, and was discouraged as standard practice due to the liberties involved.[85] Lowell, by contrast, makes imitation a standard despite the problems that arise with potential liberties. His express purpose was to avoid the stylistic flaws normally associated with poetry translation, such as the target text sounding unnatural. Lowell, then, emphasises the artistry of the outcome in the target language, the reading experience, rather than the translation strategy, which is Dryden's emphasis. For Lowell, imitation is at liberty to exercise both caution and risk based upon a set of criteria (e.g. knowledge of author, of culture, of source language etc.), but Dryden disagrees, warning that imitation is 'for a translator to show himself' at the expense of the 'memory and reputation of the dead' (Dryden 17). Imitation inevitably does wrong to the source for Dryden, no matter how artful its outcome.

Ethics are at the centre of this debate, but still more clarification of terms is required before addressing them and the broader implications of imitation. Dryden specifies the 'memory and reputation of the dead'. His translation framework appeared as a preface to the Roman poet Ovid who lived centuries before Dryden. Imitation often pertains to deceased authors, but could pertain to living authors who permit an imitation of their works (as was the case between Robin Robertson and Tomas Tranströmer whose reaction to Robertson's versions 'could not have been warmer') (Robertson xiii).

Deceased writers were being revived by both Dryden and Lowell, but their intentions nevertheless differed, and intention matters because it alleviates some of Lowell's ethical responsibility. Is it Lowell's intention strictly to commemorate and represent Mallarmé, Rilke, and Montale, for example, in his imitations of them? No. Lowell indulges in Dryden's

[85] Note that in the *Dictionary of Translation Studies*, 'version' adheres to Dryden's definition, whereby it is a 'term commonly used to describe a target text… that departs too far from the original to be termed a translation' (Shuttleworth and Cowie 195). One problem with this and Dryden's definition is what and who constitutes 'too far'. Lowell admitted that he had been reckless, but without self-admission, we do not, and seemingly cannot, create a 'bar standard' for identifying translation apart from version. Arbitrators from varying cultural backgrounds would have to possess consistent authority over diverse texts in order to carry out the job. It seems inherently problematic to label a text a 'translation' or 'version' outside of the 'literal/literary' translation dilemma.

feared liberties. His imitations have been described as a work that '[uses] the non-English writer as a kind of quarry for [his] own poetry' (Raffel 20-27). While he could be accused of complete disregard, rather than complete accountability, of a source text's authorship, to do so unfairly characterizes Lowell's foremost intention: not to be a translator of Mallarmé, Rilke, and Montale, but to be a poet that translates them. His aim is to make new poetry in English from their poetry in French, German and Italian – translation, in other words, as poetry practice. Lowell states that he made versions 'when I was unable to do anything of my own' (Lowell 196). To accuse him of misrepresentation, then, may be fair on certain grounds, but the accusation is hard to make if those grounds are missing or are unclear. Without them, the accusation itself has little basis beyond what a translator should do, and Lowell never claimed to be a translator in the strict sense.

Imitation, to summarize, is a literary form of translation for poetry whose priority is to make poetry in a target language out of poetry in a source language. The source for imitation is often a deceased poet or, if alive, one who permits imitation of their work. But what about the complete authorship Lowell sought to imitate? Again, he draws on Dryden who himself took imitation to be 'an endeavour of a later poet to write like one, who has written before him' (Dryden 14). Lowell in a sense tests out Dryden's assumptions, but imitation for him appears inadvertently to illustrate the impossibility of poetry translation that Dryden sets out. Liberties are inevitable, and the greater the poet the greater the liberties, as Dryden himself admits of Pindar, whom he describes as 'wild' and 'ungovernable' (Dryden 15).

One condition for imitation Lowell does raise, however, is voice. Voice is paramount to poetry and lends conviction to a translation, and to complete authorship, when it appears provisional. The problem is whose voice? If a source text's voice *can* be imitated in a target, why question it? Poetry resorts to and often depends on tools like metre, rhyme etc., and how they are employed sheds light on an author's bravura, but not necessarily authorship. Voice does. Voice is the sum of parts in a poem (poets.org). Metre and rhyme play into it, but content does too. The angle of the content, the conceit(s) – they and the technique and form feed into voice. The more a source text's voice is compromised in translation, the harder that voice is to hear and read. Lowell admits to this. In his imitations, his voice alone '[runs] through many…' (Belitt 128-141). For one, his claim to the poems being translated is diminished, which he accepts. But even imitation is hard to see because we are potentially reading more Lowell than we are Mallarmé, Rilke, and Hugo.

If voice alone makes up the single criterium for imitation, hasn't Lowell broken his one rule? Viv Kemp argues that Lowell's imitations are a 'synthesis of influence' that can

'renew possibilities', but the grounds for that argument are not self-evident (Kemp). 'Possibility' can only be measured against limits, because it is only so within certain limits. What are they – what are the limits that demonstrate Lowell has renewed possibilities? It turns out that the possibilities of imitation are to disregard rules. In fact, Lowell's system is not a system, but anti-systematic poetry translation. Fidelity to the non-English source is less important to him than making art in English derived from the source. So the ethics presented by Dryden are irrelevant, whatever the imitation's alleged impact on the 'memory and reputation of the dead'.

Seamus Heaney versioned along very similar lines, enthusiastically described by Michael Bartholomew-Biggs as a '[reallocation] of his Irish, and non-Irish, themes, obsessions, humour, tragedy, searching, philosophical doubting, tension and apprehension of culture and history to the poets he's written new poems for', the essential phrase here being 'new poems' (Bartholomew-Biggs). An unsympathetic variation of that sentiment downplays Heaney's methodology. For example, his Beowulf has been belittled in one word as 'Heaneywulf' by many an Anglo-Saxonist (Chickering 160–178). Both the praise and the dispraise, however, point to Heaney making the translations his own, and as with Lowell, this was always the intention. For example, Beowulf's very first word 'Hwæt' – previously translated 'Hark' or 'Lo' – Heaney rendered 'So', he claimed, because '… in Hiberno-English… 'so' came naturally to the rescue… [obliterating] all previous discourse and narrative, and at the same time, [functioning] as an exclamation…' (Heaney xvii–xxx). While hwæt is something of an exclamation or interjection, the essence of Heaney's defence rests on its 'Hiberno-English' origin, which came 'naturally' to him. His decision to translate 'hwæt' into 'so', in other words, reinforces his desire to make the poem his own, even when it might be deemed flippant. Heaney also makes Hrothgar's hall 'bawn', in reference to his own childhood 'Mossbawn', and it has been argued that we should not be surprised by these decisions, since similar linguistic interconnectivity had been a tendency of Heaney's from a young age (Chickering 160–178).

In a review of *Day by Day*, Heaney refers to Lowell's 'belief in the creative spirit, yet contrary and disruptive to his fidelity…' and this inner dilemma seems to illustrate Lowell's inability to adhere faithfully to a poetry translation system (Hart). But although much has been written of Heaney's indebtedness to Lowell, it is worth briefly exploring their differences, as regards poetic imitation, in an effort to retrace the practice's later 20th-century trajectory. For one, Heaney did not translate, as Lowell did, to free himself from a creative rut or as a distraction (Hupp). Rather translation made up a substantial body of Heaney's work,

and to a degree, he could read some of the languages from which he was translating, whereas Lowell could not (Hupp). With Heaney, there is a sophistication and accountability that is harder to apply to Lowell, on those grounds alone. But even they are not entirely consistent, such as in Heaney's rendering of 'Pangur Bán':

> Pangur Bán and I at work,
> Adepts, equals, cat and clerk.
> Tr. Seamus Heaney (Poetryfoundation.org)

> I and Pangur Bán, my cat,
> 'Tis a like task we are at;
> Tr. Robin Flower (Hull 132)

Flower's version was more or less the authoritative one during Heaney's lifetime. Moreover, Flowers was a Celticist who had Irish, and who worked on his version directly from the source. Heaney's version, rather, used Flower's as a bridge. It modelled Flower's sonically, for one. Both have strong end-rhymes with a similar metre. But Heaney's version adds information that was absent in Flowers' version. Is this additional description unwarranted? If we take the fidelity of Flowers' version at face value, we read what Heaney has emphasized, and that is the cat's and the monk's 'like task', hence Heaney's 'equals' insertion, subsequently fleshed out with 'cat and clerk'. The 'adept' addition may be unwarranted in one sense (in simply being Heaney's invention and not the source's), but in another sense what it does is cue, for readers without Irish, the 'mood' or 'tone' of the poem. From the first two lines, it might not be immediately obvious what that mood is, but the poem finds a brotherhood or camaraderie between the pet and monk – both are worthy of the task, which is a heartwarming sentiment, reinforced by 'adept'. With it, the translation has a secondary, poetic sense beyond lexical traceability. Furthermore, Heaney prepares the reader for his intentions and liberties merely by first publishing the translation in Poetry Foundation, one of the Anglophone world's most esteemed poetry outlets. It was for a general audience, in other words, who reads contemporary poetry – not necessarily for translation scholars or Celticists. Heaney's forward to the poem, too, indirectly suggests his indebtedness to Flower, so as with Beowulf, we should not be surprised by his methodology. It is an imitation derived from a bridge that pays 'artistic' respect to the original.

Perhaps Heaney resembles Lowell after all, though Lowell pushes the extent of customization of the source in translation further than Heaney does:

I'm like the king of a rain-country, rich
but sterile, young but with an old wolf's itch,
Tr. Robert Lowell (Poetryfoundation.org)

I'm like the king of a rainy country, rich
but helpless, decrepit though still a young man
Tr. Richard Howard (Poets.org)

For Lowell, most of the second line, with the exception of the lexical item 'young' does not match the Howard version, and Howard read French, and his version is considered faithful. Lowell creates an interesting rhetorical contrast with 'young' and 'old wolf' but that contrast did not exist in the Baudelaire line, and therefore constitutes liberty alone with little warrant.

It is beyond the scope of this thesis to extensively analyse the nuances of Lowell's and Heaney's respective methods, but the excerpts do demonstrate their shared tendencies within the scope of imitation to add, insert and create anew. What results is something like a hybrid, a composite of translator and translated, whose conceit has been expanded upon. A 'strangeness' emanates from the fact that the imitation's origins lie in a source, and that the concept of translation has been present in the poet-translator's mind. As is always the concern with poetry translation, readers may ask what the limits or justifications are for additions, lest the translation so skew the original that the two no longer share common ground, but I hold that the translator's intentions must be relevant for that fear to have any bearing. It is particularly urgent to consider imitation given its influence on several prominent poet-translators today, in particular Scottish poets. Robin Robertson, who was publicly challenged for his versions of the Swedish poet Tomas Tranströmer (Orr). Others, such as Don Paterson, Robert Crawford, and Kathleen Jamie, engage in imitation. Paterson has versioned numerous major-language poets, while Jamie and Crawford have versioned Gaelic poetry.[86]

II

Imitation opens the possibility of translation, with an emphasis on voice, but while fewer parameters allow for more liberty, the liberties may come at the expense of why the original poem is worth translating in the first place. For translations between major languages, this outcome can be defended on certain grounds, as was mentioned above, and a

[86] See Robin Robertson's versions of Tranströmer (Robertson, *The Deleted World*.) Don Paterson's are found in various books (e.g. *Orpheus*, Faber & Faber, 2006). Kathleen Jamie's version of Ian Macdonald is "Once." *Poetry*, vol. 190, no. 1, 2007, pp. 44-45. http://www.jstor.org/stable/20607687, and Robert Crawford's version of a bardic poem can be found at www.poetryarchive.org/poem/clan-donalds-call-battle-at-harlaw/

translation's source text can endure speculative or playful impacts by being written in a language with a healthy amount of speaker numbers that can read and defend the source. But for translations from minoritized languages, especially those translated into major language neighbours, the risks of harmful intrusion onto a source text are greater, and the smaller the literacy numbers for that language, the higher the risks. It is worth asking if imitation has a set of additional limits when applied to minority language poetry.

Dryden's ethical concerns may, in fact, be most relevant in the case of minoritized-to-major language translation – an unanticipated outcome since Dryden himself thought of translation in colonial or imperialistic terms. He nodded to Cicero's imperialistic overtones, translation being 'fetched or imported material' that is 'carried across'. Latin translators were not only encouraged to take liberties but, in Bartsch's words, were highly esteemed in doing so, translation being conducted as 'an exercise in control' that 'Romanized' foreign literature, and in turn mastered or conquered a text (Bartsch 30-39). Dryden likewise was a Latinist who believed translation could elevate English literature to rival the classics: 'On equal terms… Our English palace opens wide in state' (Tomlinson 9-10). Paraphrase for him was a middle way that balanced extremes when 17th-century England reflected tensions of a post-Cromwellian civil unrest. The era had an 'overriding desire to get things into English… morally to reinforce English… [as] England was suffering terrible schisms of Civil War' and responses to the era's social turmoil, like John Dryden's, espoused aesthetic systems related to these desires, to bring about balance and control (9-10).

Eric Cheyfitz, in *The Poetics of Imperialism*, traces imperialist attitudes from the 16th century onward, in conjunction with colonial enterprise in the Americas. Translators would 'translate onto' First Nations languages concepts for which there initially were no translations. George Puttenham's *The Arte of English Poesie* saw translation as 'a kinde of wresting of a single word from his owne right signification …of some affinitie or conveniencie…' where the use of 'wresting' suggests usurpation of the culture being translated, the act of which can serve as a translator's 'conveniencie'. Abraham Fraunce's *The Arcadian Rhetoric* (1588) speaks of 'turning' a word from its 'naturall signification … as that it seeme willinglie ledd' implying one culture need be led by another (Cheyfitz 36-37). Cheyfitz argues '… to think metaphorically within the confines of translation is to think imperialistically' where meaning is 'carried across' from lesser nature to greater nature (142).

Translation tropes would be benign if one culture did not come at the expense of another. Contextual similarities, however, do exist between Dryden's Restoration and mac Mhaighstir Alasdair's Enlightenment. War plagued both, and both writers sought to empower

their respective cultures through writing. Likewise, mac Mhaighstir Alasdair's classical learning is frequently cited as having advanced Gaelic culture. But the two differ in one respect: mac Mhaighstir Alasdair was not a Scottish patriot, whereas Dryden was indubitably an English patriot. mac Mhaighstir Alasdair was a Gael, whose relationship to Scottish public life is summarized: Is mì-run mòr nan Gall ('The great ill-will of the Lowlander').[87] Centuries of persecution directed at the Gaels by the Scottish crown meant mac Mhaighstir Alasdair served subjects of a crown. Dryden served a crown. Likewise mac Mhaighstir Alasdair's ambitions to bolster Gaelic never directly came at the expense of another culture unlike Dryden's ambitions to bolster English.[88]

We are thus left with a question for Anglophone translation of whether imperialistic tendencies *inherently* exist not only in literary translation, but its subcategories, not least imitation which, as we have seen, does willingly obscure a source text by the liberties of the poet-translator. Cheyfitz believes that, if imperialism is inherent, it can be attenuated or resolved by 'denaturalizing' what is deemed 'proper' in translation (Cheyfitz 142). For this thesis' purpose, then, the relevance is in exploring an alternative method of translating mac Mhaighstir Alasdair into English, and the ethics of that method. Cheyfitz feared the impact of English translation on First Nations cultures. As mac Mhaighstir Alasdair's own Clanranald leadership established colonial enterprises in the Canadian Maritimes, is it fair to draw on Cheyfitz? Emphasis should be laid on a double Highland past of 'colonized and colonizer' but even still, overlap between the experience of First Nations peoples and the experience of Gaels as a result of colonization can be observed through 'linguistic indigeneity' (Kehoe 199–217). To adapt Franke Wilmer's definition of indigeneity, a language is indigenous when it has a 'traditional basis' and when it was 'politically autonomous before colonization';[89] in the aftermath of colonization, indigeneity 'struggles for the preservation of cultural integrity' (Wilmer 97). By 'traditional basis' I mean that a language has persisted intergenerationally within a geographic area, but with unofficial or recently official

[87] See 'Moladh an Ùghdair don t-Seann Chànain Ghàidhlig' below, translated as 'Manifesto'.
[88] It is true that Gaels individually, while their own culture was being decimated, participated in the UK's colonial enterprises, but as a cultural stimulus, mac Mhaighstir Alasdair's poetry is not itself 'colonial' or 'imperial' in outlook. Dryden, by contrast, was for a large part of his career 'willing to conflate the success of British imperialism with his own literary goals'. Dryden's imperialism would become 'ambivalent' over time, but his position nevertheless stands in direct contrast with mac Mhaighstir Alasdair's (Davidson 370-371).
[89] While a firm date for when Gaelic territories were colonized cannot be established, Gaelic was once a prestige language, after which several 'external' influences (external to Gaelic culture) not only diminished the language's status, but actively suppressed it. Three events are sometimes linked to a decline in Gaelic: the 12th century under St Margaret, the forfeiture of the Lords of the Isles in 1493, and the Statutes of Iona in 1609, among others (Watson 69–84).

recognition by the state it inhabits. Of course language alone determines neither culture nor identity, and place-specific claims for indigenous languages can vary over time,[90] but Gaelic's indigeneity claim falls in line with this definition and for centuries its existence has been threatened down to the present day (Alfred and Alfred 85).

The aim of this meditation is to understand if poetry translation from a minoritized language to a majority language is inherently imperialistic. Self-translation potentially demonstrates the limits of such a claim. While the relevance of self-translation is strictly hypothetical, since my versions of mac Mhaighstir Alasdair are obviously not self-translation, scrutinizing it provides an opportunity to find weaknesses to the claim that imperialism is *inherent* to minoritized-to-major poetry translation.

By imperialism being 'inherent', I mean that the attitudes exemplified, for example, by Cicero ('fetched or imported material', 'an exercise in control') are deeply rooted to minor-to-major language translation. Christopher Whyte, in writing about Somhairle MacGill-Eain's self-translations, holds the view that the problem with self-translation is the perception of it, that if 'we have the poet's own translations, the originals can be dispensed with…' (Whyte 70). As discussed above, for a major-to-major language translation, the urgency around this concern is less important. It has problems of its own, but generally speaking as long as the source text's readership is large, dynamic and diverse, the source text will continue to be read directly. The real urgency around minor-to-major language translation, by contrast, is that 'the intellectual class in Scotland through their ongoing refusal to acquire basic literacy in Gaelic…' leaves MacGill-Eain's source texts unread, or viewed as unnecessary because the English target text is considered to be equivalent (70). Whether or not the texts *are* equivalent matters less, in other words, than having a sizeable 'intellectual class' in Scotland who are literate in Scottish Gaelic to debate things like equivalence. The urgency, then, around the question of self-translation, and translation in general, for mac Mhaighstir Alasdair, is an ethical one inextricably linked to the larger socio-ideological context of Gaelic having an equal status to English in Scotland. An unequal status for Gaelic

[90] The Gaelic language should be seen as indigenous language, which constitutes only the language itself being 'indigenous'. Linguistic classification does not automatically impart indigeneity on its speakers—a crucial point that distinguishes the experience of First Nations peoples versus the experience of the Gaels (Armstrong et al. 64-83). It is germane to consider Màiri Sìne Chaimbeul's discussion of Iain mac Mhurchaidh, whose alleged 18th-century 'sympathies' to the plight of First Nations peoples should be clarified. Upon immigrating to what is now the United States, Iain mac Mhurchaidh, according to Chaimbeul, used the First Nations peoples to 'illustrate the reduced and primitive circumstances in which [he], his family and his friends [found] themselves' (Chaimbeul 84). Such a view is not mutually exclusive to the one that Gaels were and are a colonized people with threatened indigeneity, but it helps to stress the differences between the respective colonial experiences of First Nations peoples and Gaels.

means that translating the language into English risks perpetuating that unequal status, and the perpetuation of inequality is implicitly an imperialistic act because it reinforces dominance of one language over the other.[91] Indeed, MacGill-Eain himself felt that the English versions of his poems, even if self-translated, should not be treated as poems in their own right.[92] He likely stressed this distinction because the translation was a lesser item – an act of utility to get meaning across to a public who could not read Gaelic. To hold that item as equivalent to the Gaelic original, at the expense of MacGill-Eain's own wishes, significantly diminishes the original, both in scope and literary merit, which reinforces an imperialistic outlook.

This is one way to view self-translation, but it risks seeing the Gaelic intelligentsia as univocal. Self-translation can be equivocal, however, when considering Aonghas MacNeacail and Meg Bateman who see themselves as working between Gaelic and English, a fact to which Whyte himself attests (Whyte 67-68). MacNeacail in particular rejects homogeneity claims when he says that 'we must accept that [a small Gaelic] readership will be no more homogenous than any other reading public', [but that] 'the most popular Gaelic author will quickly recognise that writing solely in their native language is not a commercially viable venture' ("Rage Against…" 54-58). He points to the impracticality from a market perspective of writing in Gaelic alone. Claims around a homogenous readership also echo those made within larger discussions of a 'minor literature' and the bilingual writer, as conceived of by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. They define a minor literature not as one that '… come[s] from a minor language; it is rather that which a minority constructs within a major language' (Deleuze and Guattari 29). Minor literatures encompass a twofold worldview that is fluid. The hierarchy of state expression is challenged by minor literature, yet at the same time, so is an essentialist view of minority expression, when it borrows from and interacts with a major neighbour. In other words, there is no single readership in Gaelic because of what changes Gaelic, like all languages, has experienced, in addition to its

[91] Similar contexts, it must be remembered, worried mac Mhaighstir Alasdair during his own lifetime. After all, he felt Gaelic needed a 'revival', hence the title of his book. But there is an essential difference. He obviously felt the book's translation into English would benefit Gaelic culture, stating so in his introduction. Likewise, the introduction itself was written in English despite the poems being written in Gaelic. So to think of the two languages as necessarily antagonistic, or translation as inherently imperialistic, would have been extreme to mac Mhaighstir Alasdair. Assertions of this nature are therefore valid only insofar as early trends of linguistic erosion are inherently linked to current ones. Otherwise they risk being anachronistic.

[92] Aonghas MacNeacail says of MacGill-Eain that 'it is I think significant that when Sorley does a reading of poetry he always begins by explaining the images, then he reads the Gaelic original, and follows that up by reading the English translation, which he always stresses is not to be taken as a poem in itself' (qtd. in Krause 72).

particular sociohistorical vulnerabilities. Various authors will present various viewpoints. As a result, ‘defining a language as minor or major is not about size but approach; crucially, even languages considered small can aspire to major uses’ (Hulme) mac Mhaighstir Alasdair, in the preface to *Ais-Eiridh* demonstrates this very point by requesting a translation of the book into English so that ‘the public’ can ‘discover the progress of genius… amongst this people’ (i.e. Gaelic speakers) (mac Mhaighstir Alasdair 1–3). The wider public is at the heart of his concerns. Their reception of Gaelic language and culture need changing, for which English translation could be the vehicle. As has been mentioned already, the first word in the book’s title ‘Ais-Eiridh’, points to mac Mhaighstir Alasdair’s self-perceived role in ‘resurrecting’ Gaelic culture and its language, in line with the culture’s global lineage, to which he refers in the book’s preface. National and international perceptions of a language match similar concerns among major languages, which are concerned with strength and reception. Moving back to MacNeacail, beyond public status, there are creative benefits to Gaelic interacting with English, and to being a bilingual writer. He points to ‘The process of renewal and experiment… [the denial of] which can only ultimately destroy what [Gaelic writers] would most dearly wish to conserve’ (“Being Gaelic…” 152-57). Overly protective measures, then, may prevent linguistic and literary development, and mac Mhaighstir Alasdair espoused this view when he evolved Gaelic poetry by drawing on Scots and English-language writers like James Thomson and Allan Ramsay (“… Nature Poetry and Its Sources”).

Are we confronted by a false dilemma when reading Whyte’s perception of self-translation? Self-translation can be an embrace of hybridity that gives voice to a fluctuating identity, as was certainly the case for MacNeacail, and could indisputably be the case for Whyte who is a polyglot. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o sees hybridity as the launchpad for what he calls a ‘globalectic’, that which ‘looks at nature, society, thought, not as a hierarchy of power relations… but as a network of give-and-take… [where] translation is the common language of languages, [contra] languages seen in terms of hierarchies of power and dominance’ (wa Thiong'o 54). A globalectic perspective, along with MacNeacail and Bateman’s views, attenuates considerably the idea that self-translation necessarily perpetuates imperialistic contexts. On a very basic level, MacNeacail’s translation of his own poem into English, for example, is not an imperialistic act if he believes in and espouses the idea of dual identity and intercultural embrace; i.e. the globalectic perspective. Nor is it self-erasure, by virtue of hybrid identity. In other words, what translation *does* ambiguates what translation *is* by its varied translators, and thus the claim to an inherently imperialistic function, even if the political odds are against minoritized languages, is attenuated in light of these circumstances.

III

Claims contra inherent imperialism in translation can be pushed further by demonstrating what might be called an 'accommodationist' perspective, one that draws on the advantages of imitation and versioning, as practiced by Lowell and Heaney, but also seeks to find neutral ground for Whyte's and MacNeacail's disagreement.

Corrina Krause, to reinforce Whyte, points to a prominent but secondary problem of Gaelic in translation when place names and personal names are adapted to suit the tastes of the target culture, which is almost always English (Krause 90). An example of this is when Alasdair mac Mhaighstir Alasdair becomes 'Alexander MacDonald' or when Allt an t-Siùcair becomes 'The Sugar Burn', as a matter of course. Naming adaptation by default is the result of colonial activity according to Krause who echoes fears over translation's imperialistic function. Furthermore the socio-ideological and ethical burden of the role of translation is signalled, 'If the very act of using a language in original writing is political action and therefore has a great reality-shaping impact on a language and a culture, [in which case] the same must be true for translation' (90). Such a claim especially pertains to mac Mhaighstir Alasdair who saw his work as reviving Gaelic language and culture. The reality-shaping impact should be qualified. If a translation is deemed tentative, its impact on the source is indirect and temporary at best. Moreover, the reality-shaping is hard to describe in qualitative terms. Is the presence of English and Scots motifs in mac Mhaighstir Alasdair's poetry necessarily negative or positive? Likewise, as has been argued, translations of Gaelic into English are not necessarily imperialistic. They may be benign, in some cases, beneficial to Gaelic's reception. Translation may have a reality-shaping impact, but to assume that Gaelic has an existence unshaped by external forces attributes a crystallized status to Gaelic, one that exists in a 'pure form', and certainly this claim is problematic. The goal, then, is not to deny translation impact, but to signpost, through various means, a tentative impact that is not an equivalent of the source, but an interaction with or expansion of the source.

The approach I offer falls under the subversive translation heading (ST) and prioritizes interpretative (or indirect) engagement with Alasdair mac Mhaighstir Alasdair's source text rather than translational (or direct) engagement with his text. I maintain that a globalectic is only possible for poetry translation if the target text does more than operate as a utilitarian alternative (thereby avoiding MacGill-Eain's trap of his Gaelic text being closely tied to a lesser English version). For a target text to pull more weight it must take liberties associated with imitation, and simultaneously create a responsive, respective engagement

between target and source so as to facilitate intercommunication without masquerading as an equivalent. With respect to Krause, secondary concerns around names are accounted for, as place names and personal names are retained in their original Gaelic.

First I will define subversive translation and connect it to 'interpretation' as I use it. I will then contrast my approach with imitation in general. A practical schema based on David Bellos will be supplied to guide incidental decision making. My approach will consider Guttari's and Deleuze's idea of 'collective enunciation' and Lawrence Venuti's 'foreignizing' tenet, but it will draw on Sophie Collins' view of intimacy. Ultimately the approach seeks to restore poetry translation to its tentative function, one declared so by the translator for transparency, especially to minor-to-major language translations.

Subversive translation is used here as an extension of the second of Roman Jakobsen's three-part system; namely, that it is 'an interpretation of verbal signs by means of some other language', one which dismisses the concept of 'full equivalence' between languages (Jakobson). He argues that, for poetry, 'only creative transposition is possible' but never touches on what that transposition entails (Jakobson). I borrow Helen Gibson's usage of subversive translation as employing 'non-standard language… [that] challenges Standard English,' but the power dynamics are softened by Sophie Collins' translation as 'intimacy', or 'a mutual, consensual, and willing exchange between author and translator, source and translation, without necessarily invoking any existing principles' (Gibson 106), (Collins 331–345).[93] Ultimately, subversive translation is collaborative in that it encourages individual divergences, so long as they uphold the source according to evident markers which can be held accountable. Rody Gorman, when making his own translations of mac Mhaighstir Alasdair, lists three core claims to develop a scenario in which subversion is relevant: 1) that mac Mhaighstir Alasdair's verse resists "worthwhile translation"; 2) that mac Mhaighstir Alasdair's voice can be conveyed in English; and 3) that the translation results in major liberties (Gorman 70). I loosely draw from the them, but my use of subversive translation is less a technical methodology and more an 'accountability act' that represents a text through translation, yet accepts the failure in worthwhile translation as sufficient in its own right.

Below, I will demonstrate how my and Gorman's usage of subversive translation differs, but I raise his criteria here and now to leverage it as a stepping off point for my own methodology. I take 'worthwhile translation' to mean a conventional translation that

[93] This action itself as described by Collins is not possible for working with deceased authors, but the sentiment, elaborated on below, and what I call 'personalization', by extension, is what interests me.

authoritatively represents all sonic, formal and rhetorical elements of mac Mhaighstir Alasdair's poetry in English without significantly skewing its meaning. The authority of 'worthwhile translation' is what I wish to subvert because of a few problems it raises. Perhaps the biggest is *who* decides a minor-to-major language translation is authoritative? What individual, or what editorial body authorizes it? According to Mackay, a translator of Gaelic inevitably faces near-anarchic circumstances, in which 'village poets' (bàird-bhaile) invent their own 'villages':

> There used to be a distinction made in Gaelic between village poets, who were embedded in their communities […] and university poets, who bore their learning […] like a flag or a shield […] (and had no clear community […]). As the poet Rody Gorman says, we're all village poets now. The difference is that we can choose and create villages for ourselves […] ("Eadar-Theangachadh Baile")

Circumstances of self-created villages and hierarchical breakdown counter the notion of authorization, destabilizing it before authorities can consolidate the power structure from which declarations can be made about what translations are worthwhile and what are not. Authority being uncertain in the formal sense, that either leaves Gaelic community, a general plural authority, or non-Gaelic speaking authority which lacks the grounds for worthwhile translation. The input of the Gaelic community is certainly the sole option to look to, but even that is rightly complicated by the fact that communal input is heterogenous. But the translation that uses communal input cannot be 'worthwhile' either, because then it must grapple with being authoritative, which is circular in reasoning. Additionally, 'Deleuze and Guattari suggest that minor literatures are defined by their ability to offer a collective enunciation of a community… and it is through translation that this enunciation becomes truly collective' (Hulme). Translation reinforces a hybrid experience whereby mac Mhaighstir Alasdair's source text is paired with my target. I join him, but at the same time, in creating a translation that has multiple voices (his, as a bilingual author, and mine, as a reader and interpreter), the translation becomes something new that moves away from 'the community' from which the source originates. My own voice in the translation will be further elaborated on below, but in light of the circumstances, the very novelty, the 'newness' of the translation, means that it is tentative, because of what that newness represents: a creative development that is inaccurate or takes liberties. In turn, it resists authoritative claims on

behalf of Gaelic sources because, by definition, it cannot be an equivalent, having such evident differences from the source.[94]

General ethical discourse in translation often concerns impact. In the past, fidelity to a source text, as 'fair' representation of meaning, was considered a bar standard. Venuti argues, '… attention [is] given to the impact of the translation or adaptation on the receiving culture, a relation that can be construed as properly ethical' (Venuti 230–247). What the translating language contains of the source material demonstrates the translation's ethics. For Gaelic, one of the most notorious and complicated examples of how a translation impacted its receiving culture was James MacPherson's renderings of Gaelic balladry into English. It has been argued that the translations helped construct 'imagined communities' for the entirety of Britain, and popularized as well as falsified aspects of Gaelic culture for an international audience (Davis 132–50). The source was sparse in much of his translations. So 'attention' is ethical because translation foreseeably does more harm than good, the stakes being higher for the pairing of major and minoritized languages, and minoritized languages, in particular, are susceptible to misrepresentation. MacPherson's case illustrates is that 'attention' goes both ways, since his translations to a degree misguided the receiving culture and misrepresented the source culture.

Subversive translation, as I use it, is counterintuitive in that it disavows its ability to be authoritatively impactful—an attitude better attributed to more conventional translation approaches. It accepts that a good translation depends merely on a translator's adherence to their self-assigned system, and therefore resists being good beyond that system. Furthermore, because it resists generalized 'goodness' in translation, subversive translation likewise resists generalized 'badness'. It is punk in that it disrupts institutional assumptions of translation, betting on more loss than gain from such assumptions, and thereby limits the impact of translation in hopes of restoring it to its more tentative function. By 'institutional assumptions' what I mean is the prescribed ways of thinking about poetry translation, whether they are Robert Frost's idea of poetry itself being lost in translation or Lawrence

[94] On the contrary, there are limits to translation *necessarily* being a creative development. If translation activity is more or less restricted to the dynamic of one language into another (e.g. Gaelic into English, rather than Gaelic into another language) the creative advantages of translation may be limited, or worse, may backfire in further establishing the dominance of English over Gaelic. This seems be Christopher Whyte's anxiety more than the general debate of the merits of self-translation. The Anglophone translator when confronted with this scenario may have an additional duty to at least promote the source text beyond their translation of it, to attempt to get the source into other languages, for example. However, it is beyond the scope of this thesis to fully discuss this subject.

Venuti's idea that a translator should be invisible so the original writer can be more visible (Urschel).

A resistance to strongly prescribed tenets stems from their inevitable vagueness. The theoretical aim of Venuti's 'foreignizing' tenet is for translators to point to the source text's language and culture within the target text (Venuti 16). The practical application of that depends on any number of shifting criteria. One might be distance in time. Generally speaking, am I, a 21st-century translator, supposed to translate mac Mhaighstir Alasdair, an 18th-century poet, into 18th-century English? To do so would point to his time period, and thus better represent part of his 'voice', but the translation's reception among today's readership would be limited in being parroted. Fluency, according to Venuti, 'domesticates' sources and masquerades as equivalents, thus committing textual violence (16). But parroting can be fluent. My 18th-century English may read convincingly yet my praxis fulfil Venuti's criterion. My larger responsibility to poem and poet would then ultimately constitute a disservice by limiting their reception with respect to mac Mhaighstir Alasdair's artistry. To more fully demonstrate his artistry means re-interpreting it for the 21st-century, which requires having a 21st-century hand in the interpretation.

The ethical component of my methodology, in turn, is grounded in an active 'personalization' of mac Mhaighstir Alasdair's work. Susan Sontag sees literary translation as an '[extension of] our sympathies […] to secure and deepen the awareness (with all its consequences) that other people […] really do exist' (Sontag). Being sympathetic, naturally I want to share mac Mhaighstir Alasdair's work, *his* poetics, *his* voice, *his* culture, with others. My sympathies go further, too. His circumstances and hardships, as an underrepresented author, can only be remedied by an expansion of the public awareness of he and his work, and translation can provide that. So my motivation at the most fundamental level is sympathetic. If translation begins with my own reading of him, as it does for every one of his translator's, what I propose is that a personalized interpretation will best reflect my sympathies for his work. In order to 'personalize' his work, what I mean is that it is modulated, transposed, or reiterated according to how I myself hear his voice, see his imagery, or understand his lyrical conceit.

Similarly Sophie Collins speaks about 'intimacy' in translation '…[describing] work that exhibits such closeness, meaning that an intimate translation might be one that exhibits a heightened contextualization of its source text for the reader' (Collins 331-345). 'Closeness' does not necessarily mean a proximity to meaning, but rather a propinquity to an entire work, which amounts to a 'contextualization' of that work, one that is emotionally invested in the

work. For intimacy, the dominance of the receiving culture is subverted, which corresponds with Venuti's concerns, but Collins emphasizes 'fluctuations in tone' that better resemble fluidity in translation (331-345). As an American who has benefitted from residing in Scotland, my English-language target will be heteroglossic. It incorporates an American idiom sensitive to the various differences in idiom in Scotland, and as such it is less a contrivance and more an imperative that desires a thoroughgoing, rounded expression that encapsulates the 'between-ness' of moving toward translation. Gaelic place and personal names sit confidently with the English and Scots, and literary devices, such as 'locative subversions', or mac Mhaighstir Alasdair's 'heroic' voice that praises crew in 'Birlinn Chlann Raghnaill', are respected despite my own aesthetic hesitations around them. Fluidity here is present to demonstrate intimacy in translation, and sympathy for the source text.

Collins claims intimacy endorses 'linguistic experiment' as well as 'collaboration' to include the translator's presence in the translation (331-345). Where collaboration is concerned, it is harder to demonstrate in translations of a historical author, but input from the Gaelic community does constitute a collaboration. Input in this project has been received foremost from Gillebrìde MacMillan, a Gaelic speaker, poet and singer from the isle of South Uist, who served as an advisor on the project. Beyond him, others were consulted in formal and informal capacities, such as through conferences (in particular the *Knots, Thorns and Thistles* translation conference at Aberdeen University, May 2022, and at the *Third World Congress of Scottish Literatures* at Charles University, June 2022) and through correspondence and conversations with native and fluent speakers alike. 'Community input' should not be confused for 'collective translation'. The process simply crowdsources insights into words, excerpts and grammar that add nuance to my approach and benefit me as a Gaelic learner. Collaboration as presented invites input into creative liberties in translation, but it also provides context, historical data, and other resources, from which I can base my translation decisions so that they are sociohistorically grounded. What results is a personalized take that has been guided by those with better knowledge of the language, and whose perspectives diversify and counterbalance my own, thereby lending a plural hand to my translation.

To discount this personal element means the translation puts emotional interaction with the source at risk of falling flat. At the same time, in a personalized translation, mac Mhaighstir Alasdair's artistry supersedes my own fixed ways of handling language because it is *his* artistry, *his* own existence on the page, that moves me to sympathize with his work and the world it embodies. Personalized interpretation, then, is not merely translational but inter-

relational, participating in an active back-and-forth of what the text gives and what the translator returns to it in an interpretation. Indeed, translation is unique only when it has been personally invested in, on behalf of the source author, and would otherwise lack the very basis that gives rise to sympathy in the first place.

As a personalized interpretation, the impact of subversive translation is tentative largely because the translator's subjective interaction with the source conveys more than it mirrors meaning and poetics in translation. Moreover conveyance occurs as a result of an emotional, individual, and personal response to the text that seeks to account for that response in tandem with the source text that elicited it. Emily Wilson in regards to her *Odyssey* sought to make a translation that 'evoked an experience like the original using the language of the people who will read it' (Wilson, quoted in Thurman). The experience is in part her creation, since it is like the original (but not equivalent to it), and she has a readership in mind in order to shape language that generates that experience. This is how I use 'interpretation': recreating what might have been a Gaelic readership's experience from the 18th century for a current-day Anglophone poetry audience. There is an imaginative leap to this, but one based on an impression the source makes on me as a translator, along with other contextual influences. The humour, the immediacy, the lyricism, in other words, of mac Mhaighstir Alasdair's source text are imitated by a proxy that is functionally similar but semantically and formally dissimilar.

Interpretation is generally thought of as an explanation, paraphrase or adaptation, but Matthew Reynolds cautions the poetry translator here:

> 'If a translation adopts the figure of interpretation more vigorously… it may be a move away from the automatism of word-for-wording, an endeavour to imagine what really matters in the poem… [or] it may issue in something uninterestingly flat and clear, that is simply 'an interpretation'… the source may seem to require a more imaginative response: translation as interpretation in the musical or actorly sense; and perhaps something beyond that, interpretation fading into new creation… The difference is not so much in the degree of departure from the words of the source, as in the attitude with which it is done…' (Reynolds 58–72).

He fears the ambiguity of what interpretation entails for poetry translation, because it could irresponsibly render the source text, or fail to be as exciting, in merely being an explanation of it, so the attitude of the translator should establish a relevant but meaningful relationship to its source if it seeks to be interpretive.

I use interpretation to adapt the sonic experience of mac Mhaighstir Alasdair's 18th-century Gaelic into a current transatlantic English. Sound has particular relevance to mac

Mhaighstir Alasdair because he wrote when Gaelic was largely an oral language and when the distinction between poetry and song was less crystallized than it is now (Withers 36–46).[95] This latter point cannot be emphasized enough, as mac Mhaighstir Alasdair poems, such as 'Òran do'n Phrionnsa,' were sung, and are effectively song lyrics bound to a melody. Indeed, to think about text as isolated from its musical composition is to think about something already one-degree removed from the way it would have been experienced for quite some time. An interpretation in such instances may imaginatively interpolate to account for this removal in time and medium. What was an 18th-century song-poem that was sung becomes a 21st-century poem that is read or recited from the page, in virtue of the sonic experience. So interpretation as I use not only works between languages, but between extra-textual factors of this nature.

Of course, not all of mac Mhaighstir Alasdair's poems are songs, but generally poetry's form serves a similar purpose to song in that broader meaning is enveloped by form. In the Interpretive Theory of Translation 'the original form is to be interpreted, rather than reproduced...' in which case 'the notional elements and formal values are to be extracted from the original linguistic envelope and re-expressed differently in the other language' (Lederer 176). What results is not a formal equivalent or match of the source, but a substitute – one that overlaps in meaning but differs enough in form to encourage what is needed to create a proxy experience in the target language. Personalised interpretation thus justifies liberties often associated with versions or imitations, but without necessarily divorcing 'tone' and 'meaning' like Lowell does when prefacing *Imitations* he claims that 'he had been reckless with meaning but laboured to get the tone right.' This becomes a false dilemma. Meaning from the source text is inferred through an interpretation of the source's form.

Lastly, Gaelic terminology may accommodate this view of interpretation. Where Rody Gorman is a stepping off point for translating mac Mhaighstir Alasdair, by his emphasis on voice, his method of eadar-theangachadh, or 'intertonguing', which comes from the Gaelic for 'translation', should be distinguished from this method of eadar-mhìneachadh, or 'interexplanation', which comes from the Gaelic for 'interpretation'. Gorman's method reveals the layers of meaning in Gaelic words, and the shifty relationship between Gaelic and English, by a composite translation in English. For example, in his *Sweeney* (2024), bainne

[95] Similarly, in the 'Introduction' to *An Lasair*, Ronald Black talks about the prominence of the cèilidh house in the absence of schools in the Highlands and compares the cèilidh-house and schools, with the former imparting knowledge by 'oral transmission…'(Black, ed., *An Lasair* xiv). John MacInnes points to Gaelic poetry written down since the 18th century as '… neglecting the musical component of the tradition – for all these poems were sung or chanted' (MacInnes 235).

becomes ‘milkdropcurrent’ (Giles and Gorman). Slippery lexical layers (buinne is ‘current’, boinne is ‘drop’, and bainne is ‘milk’) from changing orthography over time are encapsulated by the one composite word, but the function is to disrupt fluency in English, thereby testing Venuti’s foreignizing tenet (Giles and Gorman). My method, by contrast, unpacks meaning from the source form by giving it a substitute form in English. For example, ‘Òran do’n Phrionnsa’ becomes two poems that split the original in half, and because the lyric is being read as a poem, rather than listened to as a song, it is outfitted as a free-form poem without a verse-chorus structure in strict rhyme. Whereas Gorman finds an innovative way to comment on the relationship between English, Gaelic and Irish, my method strives to approximate mac Mhaighstir Alasdair’s artistry, to adapt it.

As a point of contrast, whereas English ‘translation’ stresses a ‘carrying across’ of cultural meaning, as if a single event, the Gaelic eadar-theangachadh and eadar-mhìneachadh stress ‘middle-meaning’ or meaning that arises continuously by source and target in conversation. Both are gerunds whose coming-into-being is understood as an ongoing process that has yet to resolve. By definition, then, they are provisional.

Below, a practical schema, selectively sourced from much longer discussions by David Bellos, will map out the core criteria of my subversive translations. Bellos speaks to translation in general, whereas my schema speaks to poetry in literary translation:

> 1. *Find matches, not equivalences* for a source text, the distinction being that ‘matches’ differ from the source, whereas ‘equivalences’ attempt to resemble it.
> 2. *Translations are substitutes* for source texts. They are tentative adaptations that create a new experience of a source text’s meaning. They do not replace source texts.
> 3. *Style survives translation* because it is greater than the sum of its parts. Voice is inherently related to style but it wavers as style is reconfigured by the translator.
> 4. *Sameness of information and force* follows as the delivery of information in a target language that must point to the source (Bellos 1. 308, 2. 37, 3. 287-290, 4. 319).

All four criteria will help ground subversive translation, but the latter two require extra clarification. As regards 3. words have denotative meaning between languages, whereas

works do not. This is why ‘word-for-word’ translation sounds mechanical – it bears in mind only a small part of the whole: denotative meaning, which can be traced by connecting words in translation. A whole work, by contrast, especially poetry, is connotative. Numerous lexical layers, voice changes, adherence to and challenge to form, and other components are implicit or suggestive by their very nature. Furthermore, because the majority of these components are individually implicit, as parts to a total whole, their suggestive nature grows in being individual pieces as well as interconnected pieces. More connotative material than denotative material is contained in the whole work. Connotation thus outweighs denotation.

Connotative meaning in poetry is generated by ‘style’, which not only consists of formal elements, like rhyme and metre, but how those elements are implemented. The connotative meaning of a work depends on the stylistic dynamic throughout. In turn, the overall, unique stamp of that style is a poet’s ‘voice’. Poetic device and stylistic elements are separable, but their subtle patterns, or break from those patterns, within a work are how an author’s voice emerges. For the first ùrlar of mac Mhaighstir Alasdair’s ‘Mòraig’ sequence, which will be examined in more detail below, end-rhyme is a stylistic device used to make a compact music, with double ‘nn’ rhymes giving way to single ‘n’ rhymes, and broadly, that sound dominating the first half of the poem, then in the second half switching to a thin ‘i’ sound:

> Inghean a’ chùil dhuinn
> Air a bheil a loinn,
> Bhiomaid air ar broinn
> Feadh na’ ròsanan;
> Bhreugamaid sinn fhìn,
> Mireag air ar blìon,

These rhymes steadily develop from broad to slender vowels. The last line almost mirrors one four lines up not only in rhyme but metre, the exception being ‘Feadh’ in the last line:

> Na còsagan;
> Theannamaid ri strì
> ’S thadhlamaid san fhrìth,
> ’S chailleamaid sinn fhìn
> Feadh na’ strònagan.

Intricately woven internal rhymes and assonance with the ‘-aid’ of the conditional create a sonic density unique to mac Mhaighstir Alasdair but which hearkens back to more complex bardic metres of the past.

Gorman claims mac Mhaighstir Alasdair’s voice can be translated (Gorman 70). But voice, because it is the total expression of style, wavers when the style experiences liberties in translation. It becomes a hybrid of translator and source interacting. I have personalized the ùrlar to encapsulate its wistful tone in translation. Indiscrete rhymes now thread the music. They are less evident and consistent (my translation being freer) than the source’s rhyming, but the music remains compact:

> Yet we outshined them all,
> immortalized among wild rose—
> on our stomachs, lying to each other,
> lying to ourselves.
> Our playfight became our foreplay.
> Our sun cups delicately

The ‘all’ half-rhymes with ‘wild’, and ‘lying’ and ‘our’ braid the music as an implied structure, with a half-rhyme connecting ‘foreplay’ and ‘delicately’. In effect, style has *survived* translation, although very imperfectly so.

Because style survives translation, the information which has been ‘stylized’ will have a delivery to it, which brings us to 4. The sameness of information has no bearing on a literary translator if the sameness of force is not equally weighed. The reason being that force conveys or delivers information—force being inseparable from information—and thus ‘sameness’ (not to be confused with ‘exactness’) must be sustained between texts. Of course, in poetry, information is implied as much, if not more, than it is supplied, so sameness is negotiable in translation in that what is implied can become supplied and vice versa. There is a larger discussion here in regards to historical and lesser-known poetry in translation. Charles Martin in his translation of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* (in-)famously depicted a poetry slam between the Muses and daughters of Pierus as a way of accounting for a verbal challenge in Ovid’s original (Ovid). Poetry slams, as we presently think of them, obviously did not exist in Ovid’s time, but through a contemporary reconstruction, Martin’s decision can achieve sameness of information alongside sameness of force. Given the schema and ethical attitudes, subversive translations that represent mac Mhaighstir Alasdair’s poetics and

how he responded to Gaelic culture seem attainable. More detailed examples of how ST is applied will follow with an investigation of the first ùrlar of 'Moladh Mòraig'.

Moladh Mòraig (1751)

This is one of his more notable poems for its racy content and innovative use of 'ceòl mòr', an elevated form of bagpipe music. mac Mhaighstir Alasdair with this poem popularized literary ceòl mòr for other significant writers, such as Donnchadh Bàn Mac an t-Saoir and Rob Donn. The poem is said to have been composed in the 1730s, but its publication debut was with *Ais-eiridh* (1751), mac Mhaighstir Alasdair's first and only collection (McLeod and Newton 289). Ostensibly the poem depicts infidelity with a woman, Mòrag, whom the author praises throughout, hence the title in English, 'In Praise of Mòrag'. It has a surprise ending which sees the author awaken from a dream to his wife, Sìne, who arouses him to perform his conjugal duties…

Ceòl mòr, or 'big music' in Gaelic, as a literary form consists of interconnected stanzas labelled ùrlar ('ground') and siubhal ('variation') respectively, where ùrlar serves as a slow, foundational melody and siubhal a variation thereon, with several instances of each. These sections culminate with the 'crùnluath' section which might commonly be translated 'accelerando', but which etymologically means 'crùn-' (crown) and 'luath' (quick); in other words, 'speeding to conclusion' or conventionally 'quickest speed' (*Piobaireachd* 42-63). Ceòl mòr not only structures the poem as an adapted literary form, but in parts it features as both mac Mhaighstir Alasdair's recollection of his affair and his celebration of the pipes as being central to Gaelic culture.

If the poem imitates and invokes pipe music, how should the translation sound as a result? Generally speaking, form impacts sound in poetry. Iambic pentameter, for example, conventionally measures a sonnet's sound, and rhyme scheme and placement of a volta contribute to a conventional matrix or template of a sonnet. Not necessarily so for literary ceòl mòr as mac Mhaighstir Alasdair uses it. Lines abide by a carefully constructed metre, but the metre is not of a 'fixed form' variety, like that associated with a sonnet or villanelle. Rather, as Derick Thomson states, 'the metrical structure of the poem, [is] imitative, to some degree, of the structure of ceòl mòr' (*An Introduction to Gaelic Poetry* 169). Lines within one ùrlar are not all the same length, and line length varies between ùrlaran. Importantly, the metre changes in the sibhual sections. The ùrlar and sibhual sections are distinct musically, which a translation might in turn reflect. It is helpful to think of these differences by way of

analogy, and thus, while making my translation, the differences between ‘common time’ and ‘half-time’ in music were useful, where ‘common time’ establishes a tempo and ‘half-time’ doubles it:

Sùil mar ghorm-dhearc driùchd Ann an ceò-mhadainn; Deirg’ is gil’ nad ghnùis Mar bhlàth òrainsean.	Eyes like blue dewberry in a film of dawn, her facial blush lovely as flowering citrus;
-Ùrlar ii	-Ùrlar ii
O, ’s coma leam, ’s coma leam Uil’ iad ach Mòrag: Rìbhinn dheas chulach Gun uireas’aibh foghlaim;	No, I don’t care, I don’t care for any of them but Morag: whose elegance and dress epitomize the *whole lass o’ pairts*.
-Sibhual i	-Sibhual i

The sibhual is much swifter, and less steady, than the ùrlar, and thus exemplifies half-time. Note also that the rhyming patterns vary both in the source and target texts; in later instances rhyme is tossed altogether. mac Mhaighstir Alasdair’s rhymes occur largely by his own elaborate design. A translation that attempts to take stock of them has a daunting task on its hands. My translation abstains, but in stages develops a similarly stable music. Here is how my drafts of this ùrlar developed:

Ùrlar	*First Draft*
’S truagh gun mi sa choill’ Nuair bha Mòrag ann, Thilgeamaid na cruinn Cò bu bhòidhch’ againn; Inghean a’ chùil dhuinn Air a bheil a loinn, Bhiomaid air ar broinn Feadh na’ ròsanan; Bhreugamaid sinn fhìn, Mireag air ar blìon, A’ buain shòbhrach mìn-bhuidh’ Na còsagan; Theannamaid ri strì ’S thadhlamaid san fhrìth, ’S chailleamaid sinn fhìn Feadh na’ strònagan.	A pity I wasn’t in the woods When Morag was there: We would cast lots To see who was most beautiful, Brown-haired daughters Bright, fetching, We would lay beside them On our stomachs in the roses, We would entice each other Playing with our groins; Picking delicate, yellow primrose From rock crevices, We would get into playfights, We would abscond over the moor. We would lose ourselves all over the headlands.

Second Draft

Pity being in the wood without Morag there
We used to have a crack about who was cuter
We used to flip coins in order to find out
And with those sunny bonny brown-haired girls
We used to lay on our stomachs among roses
We used to entice and lie and fondle each other
And picking delicate yellow primroses
From the rock's small fissure things changed
As our foreplay became our playfight
We would wander through the deer forest
And we would lose ourselves deep in the hills

Final draft

Pity not being in the wood.
When Morag was there
we joined those sunny bonny
brown-haired girls
for a laugh, guessing the cutest of us,
a coin toss to know.
Yet we outshined them all,
immortalized among wild rose—
on our stomachs, lying to each other,
lying to ourselves.
Our playfight became our foreplay.
Our sun cups delicately
picked from split rock. We took off
like deer over the deer-moor,
deep into headlands.
We got lost. We got so lost.

Third Draft

Pity being in the wood
alone. When Morag was there
we would follow
those sunny bonny brown-haired girls
and have a crack about who was cutest,
flipping coins to find out.
Yet we outshined them all,
immortalized among wild rose—
on our stomachs
lying to each other,
lying to ourselves.
We would tease
then touch, fondle
then tussle. We turned
through vast open,
the nook picked clean
of the delicate
sun cups we gathered.
We even disappeared once
deep in headlands.

Key Points

1. Retained 'locative' convention is discussed below.
2. Gaelic conditional tense becomes English past tense. The English conditional does not point to the past like the Gaelic conditional does.
3. 'Casting lots' was updated to 'coin toss' for modern audience.
4. Pathos (e.g. 'outshined', 'lying to ourselves') reinforces what is no more.
5. 'Playfight' and 'foreplay' is fused to one line.
6. 'Frìth' is developed as a conceit (i.e. 'deer over the deer-moor') for readers unfamiliar with it.
7. Two ending lines were flipped because the idea of loss is signalled by the negative locative at the beginning. I felt flipping the last line emphasized that.

Does the translation reflect the theory? In an attempt to answer the question, this ùrlar will serve to exemplify subversive translation and its consequences, and while including all four iterations allows for transparency, the final draft is the one under assessment.

If we consider the schema's first criterium, matches in the translation can be found, but the beginning couplet deserves extra comment. Gaelic poetry between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries often begins with a 'locative' convention to give a sense of space and place (Black, ed., *An Lasair* xx). Ronald Black points to Iain Lom's 'Mi 'n so air m'uilinn / An àrdghleann munaidh (I am here on my elbow / In a high moorland glen), but he gives other examples (xx). Another is Coinneach MacCoinnich's 'Ged a tha mi 'n-diugh gun spèis / 'S mi 'n Dùn Èideann gun taice' (Although I am today without respect / and I am in

Edinburgh without support) (298). Locative conventions occur at the beginning of poems, often as the first couplet, and function as an introduction. mac Mhaighstir Alasdair's locative is written in the negative, resisting or subverting the convention. He uses the locative to locate himself within the continuing lineage of Gaelic poetry but simultaneously demonstrates an innovation, or development of that lineage.

Anglophone readers unfamiliar with Gaelic poetry might be confounded (for, if he is not in the wood, where is he?). My initial solution was to render the couplet as a positive statement but to retain its pathos: 'A pity being in the wood / alone…'. But a positive rendering would fulfil that convention and thus backfire, taking away from mac Mhaighstir Alasdair's innovation. Indeed, the negative locative serves a clear purpose: the whole ùrlar, and indeed the whole poem sequence, may arguably develop from this couplet. For example, we discover at the ùrlar's end that he and Mòrag lose themselves ('chailleamaid sinn fhìn') in the excitement of surreptitious love. mac Mhaighstir Alasdair being 'lost', by extension, has disappeared, perhaps why he is not in the wood. The negative also reinforces the whole of 'Moladh Mòraig' being a dream (i.e. not only is mac Mhaighstir Alasdair lost in thought, but asleep, as the poem's crùnluath reveals, he is locked in his subconscious, dreaming about a kind of no-place.)

Matches are negotiated along a sliding scale of data that are fundamental and trivial to the source. The negative locative, for example, is fundamental to the source because of how it sets up the poem and how it asserts mac Mhaighstir Alasdair's place in the Gaelic canon. Rendering the locative positive would call all that into question. 'For a laugh', by contrast, is not a match *per se* but contextually clarifies the activity at-hand for readers new to the poem and may thus be deemed a 'match' in a secondary sense, translating the piece's mood. 'For a laugh', being my own insertion, functions in a similar way to 'adepts' in Heaney's 'Pangur Bán'. In isolation, it is trivial to the source, having a minimal negative or positive impact. Such liberties are permitted under my ethical system, because they attempt to reveal authorship and flesh out context or mood which may be compromised in translation. In other words, such 'creative leaps' bear the author in mind. They grow the non-Gaelic reader's awareness of mac Mhaighstir Alasdair and his authorship.

Readers may remember, in 2017, when VisitScotland launched a marketing campaign that rendered 'còsagach' into 'hygge' attempting to tap into the growing popularity around 'hygge', the Danish for coziness and consolation as a life philosophy (Simpson). mac Mhaighstir Alasdair's use of còsagan is a plural noun but is translated by me as 'split rock' from which he and Mòrag collect sun cups. Compare my translation to the one by Peter

Mackay and Iain S. MacPherson in *An Leabhar Liath* where yellow primroses are gathered from còsagan or 'crags' (Mackay and MacPherson 145). Then compare that to Am Faclair Beag's definition, which is a 'small crevice' or 'small cell'—a 'nook', by extension, which offers 'seclusion and security'. We can retrace VisitScotland's line of thought to see how the definition was pushed and spun off as a Gaelic equivalent of the Danish. As the schema proposes, subversive translation rejects equivalents in favour of matches. Incidentally còsagan/split rock has a trivial impact on the source text, but as the VisitScotland campaign demonstrates, calling too much attention to a word's extended meaning can be misleading. My use of subversive translation considers a word's extended meaning along with its broader poetic function in the source, which in this case helps build the setting's image. A similar denotative range has been conveyed, but the word's connotative range isn't emphasized.

The placement of 'the brown-haired girls' in my translation ought to be addressed. mac Mhaighstir Alasdair's source text depicts he and Mòrag joining them to lay in the roses, whereas my target text introduces them earlier to partake in the amorous game of Cò bu bhòidhch' againn ('Which of us was most beautiful'). Without historical context, said game seems a strange thing for two people to play. Why, in courting a love interest, would mac Mhaighstir Alasdair possibly insult Mòrag with a game whose outcome could favour his own appearance to hers? If the couple joined a group who were already playing the game, the stakes for insult are lower, becoming impersonal, juvenile flirtation, since others are involved. Furthermore, in the source text the brunettes have a 'radiance' to them ('an loinn'); so, by extension, do the couple when they 'outshine' the broader group in translation. The amorous game results in the couple winning together, which makes sense for wooing a potential lover. Sans a historically documented game, *a fortiori* this reading seeks to clarify any perceived strangeness in mac Mhaighstir Alasdair's game. (Put another way, if knowledge of an actual game existed, the translation could incorporate it or substitute it with an analogous, better-known game.) According to the schema, such licence is another example of how the target ùrlar will only ever match the source and never be an equivalent. High-level correspondence between mac Mhaighstir Alasdair's poem and mine is achieved: both texts play an amorous game, but the original game is 'inter-explained' or interpreted (eadar-mhìneachadh) for readers who have not scrutinized the context of the game.

Similarly problematic is translating 'frìth' into current English. Historians of the British Isles may trundle out 'royal forest' or 'kingswood' in a push for accuracy. H.C. Darby in his *Domesday England* describes such a wood as a 'game preserve', or land used for hunting deer (Darby 195). We are closer to a definition, but of course southern England is by

no means the fjord-like country of western Scotland where mac Mhaighstir Alasdair lived most of his days. English may nevertheless be the source of the word. John MacInnes describes frìth as being ‘mar is trice muigh sna monaidhean’ (‘usually out on the upland moors’) and as ‘àite seilge’ (‘a hunting place’), but then claims that ‘’S ann on Bheurla a thàinig am facal air tùs’ (‘The word was derived from English’) (MacInnes 494). No firm evidence is provided for when the loanword entered Gaelic, but MacInnes speculates it was ‘nuair a dh'atharraicheadh cainnt na cùrtach an Alba o Ghàidhlig gu Beurla nan Gall, timcheall air deireadh an aona ceud deug agus an linn as dèidh sin’ (‘when the prestige language of the court of Scotland shifted from Gaelic to Lallans at the end of the 11th century or the century thereafter’) (494).

Frìth, the way mac Mhaighstir Alasdair used it in this passage, may be untranslatable in English. mac Mhaighstir Alasdair was bilingual in Gaelic and English, and if read aloud here, it sounds like ‘rìgh’ (rìgh is Gaelic for ‘king’ and sounds like ‘ree’ in English). The word has been lenited so the ‘fh’ is silent. Is this an opportunity to pun? Because the concept of the frìth is a loanword denoting a royal hunting ground of deer, is mac Mhaighstir Alasdair obliquely commenting on royal landholdings? Such a reading may be reinforced by the fact that ‘Morag’ was a codename for the Bonnie Prince (discussed more below), which in turn would appear to be a subversive remark about the throne being occupied by false claimants in the form of the Hanoverians. He and Morag in this reading are desecrating its royal claim. A second, more tenuous pun could be observed by reading frìth without lenition, as he uses the word elsewhere in the poem. Pronounced a bit like the English word ‘free’, the frìth lay at the outer edges of civil society, which allows for a double entendre. It was the one place to which mac Mhaighstir Alasdair and Mòrag could abscond and be free of the eyes of societal judgement. Because the word entered Gaelic from English, evidence of how frìth functioned in English reinforces how mac Mhaighstir Alasdair may have used it in ‘Moladh Mòraig’. Scott Kleinman discusses the use of ‘frið’ in ‘Anglo-Saxon legal language and argues that its adoption as a term for the royal forest prompts reflection about the legal basis for social freedoms and prerogatives’ (Kleinman 19). He points to Laʒamon’s *Brut*, a 13th century alliterative poem, wherein ‘… the transformation of the frið amounts to a larger transformation of jurisprudential culture in which social freedoms are authorized not by past custom but by royal decree’ (38). The word in early English connoted freedom to hunters as being granted by the king. It was a social privilege, being a decree, but freedom was inextricably linked to hunting in English law. Furthermore, the association of freedom to hunt and borderlands was not so uncommon either: ‘Amid the territorial free-for-all that ensued

(notably along the border with Wales near Laʒamon's home), social prerogatives were constantly asserted and contested in the royal forest…' (40). Not that the frið necessarily denoted a borderland on the fringe of court society, but the word can accommodate that outlier image, among others. The word was used by Laʒamon after the Norman conquest, so MacInnes' theory about when the word entered into Gaelic is warranted in turn. Although the imagery of dense tree cover differs from the moorland of Ardnamurchan, the function of a royal hunting ground for deer carries over, and it may well have been placed on the outskirts. There is further evidence for this reading, in 'fri-' being the Germanic cognate for 'free' (although this is complicated by 'friend' sharing the cognate). Whatever the likelihood that mac Mhaighstir Alasdair was, in fact, punning on 'fhrìth' in this ùrlar, or in his broader use of frìth throughout poem, there is evidence to suggest the word was more than a coincidental setting for Morag and the poet to tryst.

I have resolved to translate frìth in this ùrlar as 'deer-moor' and added to it by describing the two lovers as 'taking off like deer' to better crystallize mac Mhaighstir Alasdair's imagery. The puns are lost, but the idea of subversive freedom is encapsulated in the translated image. This decision points to the schema's second criterium in that it is a substitute for a concept, but one that lacks the subtle ingenuity of the original. Furthermore, while I have read extra meaning into the word frìth, more than exists semantically, the location of frìth not only begins 'Moladh Mòraig', but as discussed, toward the end we discover the poet dreaming, thereby establishing that he is on the outskirts of consciousness:

'S mi 'm thorroichim air mo chluasaig; Air dùsgadh às a' chaithream sin Cha d' fhuair mi ach ion-faileas dheth,	Dead asleep on my pillow then from all that mental noise suddenly I leap into a joyous flash- back, reawakened…
-Crùnluath	-Crùnluath

Once more, the connection between frìth and the outskirts is itself a peripheral reading, but being a dream-sequence with a locative/dis-locative frame, the poem may have been composed by mac Mhaighstir Alasdair to nudge the reader into a similar mindset; or at the very least, he was subconsciously in that mindset himself while composing the poem. For all we know, it was an actual dream or tryst he recorded.

Line length in the target text differs from the source to attempt to reproduce the faster pace implied by 'crùn-luath'. 'Torroichim', apparently a mac Mhaighstir Alasdair neologism for 'deep sleep', I translated as 'dead asleep'; 'caithream', 'applause' or 'triumph', through I modernized it as 'mental noise'. Likewise 'ion-faileas' becomes 'flashback'. It is tempting to

classify the poem along the lines of the Irish-language aisling, wherein a beautiful woman comes to a man while he is asleep, facilitating prognostication of certain states of affairs. No ostensible politics characterizes this poem, but it has been speculated that, rather than a female muse, Mòrag is a codename for the Bonnie Prince who, fleeing the Hanoverians, was said to have dressed undercover as a woman.[96] The name is used in other songs, such as 'Agus Hò Mhòraig', also composed by mac Mhaighstir Alasdair, and a song that has been popular since the 18th century, ''S i luaidh mo chagair Mòrag' (*Elizabeth Ross…* 35). This latter song has similar imagery and sentiment to mac Mhaighstir Alasdair's 'Moladh Mòraig', and in the Ossian Collection in the National Library of Scotland, said song is titled 'Moladh Moraig' (*Cochruinneacha…* 354). However, it is labelled a 'Luinneag' or 'waulking song', which suggests that it either emerged as a version of the mac Mhaighstir Alasdair poem, or that mac Mhaighstir Alasdair adapted traditional material for his poem. All uses of the name Mòrag from this period should be treated equally as possible codes for Charles Stewart. As such, the poem may yield a political reading. Imagery in the crùnluath, such as 'cruaidh fìor rag' ('truly sharp steel'), may euphemistically be weaponry, and while the pipe motifs throughout are an invocation of Highland art music, the Highland pipes themselves were military instruments. Jacobite art depended on codes to share and express their sentiments for the cause, and while the possibility certainly arises here, mac Mhaighstir Alasdair authored several poems that refer to the Bonnie Prince directly ("Secret Codes"). Why the sudden necessity to hint at Stewart support in this poem when other poems are outward propaganda, all of which are published in the same book?

Birlinn Chlann Raghnaill (1776)[97]

'Birlinn Chlann Raghnaill', or in my version 'Birlinn', is the most celebrated of mac Mhaighstir Alasdair's poems. Sometimes it is described as an allegory, and the first 'people's

[96] Another poem attributed to mac Mhaighstir Alasdair, 'Ailein, Ailein', wherein the Bonnie Prince's codename is 'Mòrag', has been used to argue this point. Such an argument, however, is controversial for two reasons. One, mac Mhaighstir Alasdair's psychosexual state would require further analysis as a result; and two, especially in light of 'Moladh Mòraig''s follow-up poem, 'Mì-Mholadh Mhòraig', or the 'Dispraise of Morag', wherein mac Mhaighstir Alasdair's wife rebukes him for praising Morag, so the poet proceeds to scurrilously satirize his muse. Both would have to be accounted for if this were some veiled homoerotica (Black, *Ardnamurchan Years* 18).

[97] The poem was published posthumously by mac Mhaighstir Alasdair's son, Raonull MacDhomhnuill, or Ronald MacDonald, who compiled it within the so-called 'Eigg Collection'. See *Comh-chruinneachadh Orain Gaidhealach*: dasg.ac.uk/corpus/textmeta.php?text=170. The poem appears under the title 'Beannachadh Luinge Chlann Raonuill'.

epic' (Black, ed., *An Lasair*, 470), (Bateman 79). The poem's scope greatly exceeds a compact summary in numerous ways. Alan Riach emphasizes description of the ship, or 'birlinn', as being among the poem's chief motifs; namely, its 'component parts…', durability, and certain technical terms that belong to the birlinn affirming it as a unique, vernacular, sailing vessel once used in the western Hebrides. Riach describes the 'last third of the poem' as being an 'astonishing, terrifying' voyage, the part of the poem which Iain Crichton Smith translated as 'The Storm' (Riach, *Birlinn of Clanranald* 3) (Smith 29).

Derick Thomson speculates a composition date of 'very close to the year 1750, after the poet's recovery from the trauma of the '45…' Whether the speculated 'trauma' is personal or cultural is unanswerable, since mac Mhaighstir Alasdair left no strong personal psychological evidence at the time. Thomson adds that the poem may be in part 'a celebration of the warrior qualities of the clan' and believes there is 'no question of the poem describing an actual voyage' (*Selected Poems* 136–137). Personal and cultural trauma are not mutually exclusive, and so there is latitude in likening the 'Storm' section to mac Mhaighstir Alasdair's possible struggles with PTSD, a condition which until the 20th century went undiagnosed. In the section, the crewmen startle from whale shrieks, or experience hallucinatory lightning or 'fireballs' hitting the ship, and mac Mhaighstir Alasdair even describes the birlinn's wake as 'brains spilling out'—an extraordinary image considering the context. There is yet more if the ship itself becomes an allegory or ship of state, the last vestige of the old order decimated by war as they sail to Carrickfergus in Antrim, 'where the Gaels of Scotland originated', if not symbolically to unify Scottish and Irish Gaeldom (Bateman 79-80).[98]

Where does the translator begin with such a project? There is much to discuss in translating 'Birlinn Chlann Raghnaill', from the forms and meters employed (such as variations on the séadna, iorram, and many others), to what might be called the poem's 'etymological identity' (by which I mean, its near-absence of English loanwords – in all likelihood a deliberate decision). What I would like to focus on, however, is higher level: namely, structure and context. Indeed, because mac Mhaighstir Alasdair drew on tradition and convention which, to most readers, is less familiar than that which emerged over millennia from the Mediterranean (and latterly influenced the English-language canon), structure and context present initial challenges that can change the whole trajectory of a translator's decision-making process.

[98] Intriguingly this is the location where William of Orange landed in Ireland.

Let us consider the sections and how these might be reproduced in an English-language edition; by which I mean, how the whole poem proceeds from start to finish, and how readers who have otherwise not engaged with Gaelic poetry before would best experience the poem. 'Birlinn Chlann Raghnaill' in the first and subsequent editions is a long poem in sections. They run as follows:

Beannachadh Luinge
Beannachadh Nan Arm
Brosnachadh Iomraidh
Iorram
(A list of crew beginning with 'An Stiùireamach', or 'The helmsman', and amounting to eight sub-sections)
'The storm' section (which is not itself titled)

Furthermore, several sections are accompanied by prose insertions that function as explanation or an implied narrative. As has already been stated, the poem was published posthumously by mac Mhaighstir Alasdair's son as part of a larger anthology of Gaelic poetry, so whether this running order was deemed by mac Mhaighstir Alasdair to be in draft form or to be complete can only be speculated on by translators and editors.

For my version of the poem, I propose a tripartite structure as follows:

I

Beannachadh Luinge
Beannachadh Nan Arm
Brosnachadh Iomraidh
Iorram

II
(A list of crew beginning with 'An Stiùireamach', or 'The helmsman', and amounting to eight sub-sections)

III
'The storm' section (which is not itself titled)

The reasons are disclosed below. Before I expound on the translated structure, it is worth considering some questions. Should the translator add sections? What is the virtue of doing so? I will argue it is to better establish an apparent thematic blueprint, but what are the implications of adding one? Despite Riach's observation that the 'Storm' section consists of the poem's 'last third', it is not self-evident that mac Mhaighstir Alasdair, nor any later editor for that matter, demarcated the poem into thirds as such. Nor am I implying that phrases such

as ‘the last third’ thus requires the poem be divided into thirds. Rather, I am merely observing a referential trend and extrapolating from it a helpful way to think about the poem’s structure. Imposing discrete sections (such as by a numbering system) is nevertheless a liberty that requires justification. If the translation occurs in three parts, each part must be accounted for within the larger system of composition. A second section does appear to be with the crewmen, or the crew ‘sketches’, as Derick Thomson describes them[99], differing in content and style from the first section, which is a series of episodes that bless the ship and armour, then incite the crew for the journey ahead.

The purpose of thinking about ‘Birlinn Chlann Raghnaill’ as sections of a larger whole serves two functions for subversive translation as I use the term. The most obvious is practical, the way such thinking compartmentalizes a translator’s overall strategy in relation to longform translation. The other is aesthetic; namely, the way such thinking develops the poem by way of its independent units, or even how those units break down further, so that managing the poem as a single work becomes more a matter of fitting together pieces within pieces, like nesting matryoshka dolls. I will focus on the aesthetic function. The argument for this goes: if the whole poem is treated piece by piece, and pieces stand on their own as distinct entities, reassembled, the total work compiled will at least be as strong as its nested parts. Success of the whole in translation is thus *contingent* on the success of its parts.

Is this ‘contingency’ to organizing ‘Birlinn Chlann Raghnaill’ fair? Success of translated parts does not at all guarantee the success of the total work in translation, because of how the total work may ‘exist’ in and of itself. In other words, the total work’s existence might be greater than the sum of its parts, such as by having a ‘flow’; that is, how the poem develops gradually in steps, which might sound less smooth and more uneven if sections are overemphasized, being dealt with piece by piece.

How flow is impacted pertains to the poem’s alleged narrative, its transitions and arc. The poem is almost programmatic, with little storyline aside from the program itself. Its narrative could be linear, because the action unfolds in a chronological manner, yet narrative in medias res may also categorize the narrative since the poem begins with the men preparing to sail, for reasons undisclosed. Arguably, the narrative beyond the structure of the poem is unclear. I call this ‘displacement of narrative’ because, in the storm section, a boat journey occurs, in which case the poem’s narrative could be summarized, and often is, as a stormbound crew crossing from Scotland to Ireland. Yet at the same time, that summary

[99] ‘giving sketches of individual crew-members and their functions’ (*An Introduction to Gaelic Poetry* 174)

leaves out the majority of the poem. The crew sketches and blessings are not inherently apart of said narrative, or if they are, they preface it. For example, the beannachaidhean (or 'blessings') do not tell a story in their own right, but they may be said to enact Catholic convention as practiced in western Scotland at the time of composition. The brosnachadh and iorram, meanwhile, are multifunctional in that together they describe preparing the ship and crew for a long journey; they are also compositional nods on mac Mhaighstir Alasdair's part to earlier Gaelic poetic conventions. Angus MacLeod, for example, points to a potential model in the c. 1558 'Birlinn' by the 'Mull Bard' (MacLeod 69). While they and the clan sketches serve an important literary role, the narrative associated with them is at most implied. Rather, these pieces are more a system of heroic and literary ritual, and description of the clan's greater ethos and their world (ship, weather, and departure date), after which the journey from Scotland to Ireland then follows. Furthermore, to reinforce the claim of narrative displacement, it is worth asking if where the sections sit within the poem is necessary to understanding the poem. Certainly, the blessings and storm belong at the beginning and end, respectively, because of how they operate. The crew must act fast once on the water. Blessings, then, must take place on land, beforehand; likewise, the storm section concludes in Ireland, so the poem must end there. But what about the placement of the crew sketches? Couldn't they occur on land after the blessings, before the boat is moved out to its sailing place? The placement of the crew sketches as mac Mhaighstir Alasdair left it is arguably of symbolic importance. The sketches occupy the centre of the poem, and thus may be considered the heart of the poem, attesting to its commemorative quality. However, while the symbolic importance of the sketches may be reduced by switching their placement, it is not clear if this interchangeability muddles the narrative. Interchangeability, in other words, may not be necessary to the narrative trajectory because it would proceed more or less the same. Similarly, the sketches crucially humanize circumstance, making the outcome of the journey *their* outcome alone, as opposed to another clan's, but whether they develop the narrative remains unclear, hence its vagueness.

Meg Bateman points to the poem's allegorical quality by relating it to how boats appear in Classical Gaelic religious poetry as implicitly allegorical objects (Bateman 79-80). Ronald Black likewise sees 'Birlinn Chlann Raghnaill' as redemptive, an allegory for Clanranald and Gaeldom's survival as they weather '… the dangerous waters of the '45' (qtd. in Mack). It must be remembered, though, that Derick Thomson felt the poem had some basis in fact, such as in adapting elements of 'Prince Charlie's tempestuous crossing to Uist in late April 1746, as found in mac Mhaighstir Alasdair's journal' (*Selected Poems* 137). Not that

any real journey would preclude an allegorical construction, but rather allegory is herein grounded by some actual experience, thus the two—realism and allegory—blend to create aesthetic tension.

Does 'sectioning' the poem accommodate narrative displacement and allegory? How sectioning is applied in my translation will be discussed below, but there is more to the principle. Since the majority of the poem is not action but preparation that leads to action, the sections must do more to justify their design than to simply propel a plot. In other words, if poetic convention, form, and any developments upon them, are to stand in place of narrative, then the decision of how to transition between sections in translation takes on extra weight. The importance of mac Mhaighstir Alasdair's poetics cannot be underestimated. Formulaic constructions, known as 'runs', common to Gaelic heroic folktales, organize his 'Iorram' and 'Sea-Incitement', which occur together in the first section (136). These runs contain recycled imagery that might sound unnecessarily repetitive to the point of excess, but their respective roles defy such assertions, functioning twofold as 'ideological' and 'operative'. Ronald Black notes how 'Birlinn Chlann Raghnaill' has an absence of a Lowland Scottish and English lexicon when, previously in his output, mac Mhaighstir Alasdair had made ample use of such incorporated material:

> In his earlier poetry mac Mhaighstir Alasdair showed himself open to the minutiae of contemporary English influence: translations, loanwords, classical deities, even a pastiche of a verse from Allan Ramsay's Tea-Table. By the 1750s he appears to have decided that this was all rather superficial, and the only English influence of any kind to be discerned in his greatest poem, 'Birlinn Chlann Raghnaill', is theoretical (Black, 'Alasdair Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair and the New Gaelic Poetry' 119).

By 'theoretical' Black means that if English influence on 'Birlinn Chlann Raghnaill' is present, it is not obvious lexically or semantically. The poem holds fast to material and forms which might be deemed 'ur-Gaelic', and thus everything 'un-Gaelic' was jettisoned to avoid ideological inconsistency.[100] English loanwords are absent, and Gaelic poetics reach to the past. The 1558 Mull Bard has been mentioned already, but Black also sees Murdoch Matheson's 'Òran don Iarla Thuathach, Triath Chlann Choinnich' as a predecessor (Black, ed., *An Lasair* 471-472). But mac Mhaighstir Alasdair's compositional techniques and influences were not entirely ideological. They were operative in that they would have aided

[100] With the proviso that much of the poem's lexicon is etymologically Norse, it is not clear whether mac Mhaighstir Alasdair intended this or not (Henderson 228, 266).

transmission of the poem to an audience much more familiar with this type of poetry than with what mac Mhaighstir Alasdair had previously authored. In fact, a great deal of what might be described as 'curious' to current poetry readers today, such as repeated motifs and imagery, would have been considered best practice among 18th century Gaeldom, for aiding oral performance.[101] Gaelic literacy in the second half of the 18th century was limited to learned and religious figures, so if 'Birlinn Chlann Raghnaill' was popular among common folk, it would have been performed and recited to them, the poem's forms acting as mnemonic device.

Just to ensure an audience's ability to follow along, performance and public engagement with the poem were also aided by prose passages that structure the narrative, even if that narrative was vague. The prose passages are transactional, almost signposting where one is located in the poem, be that during incitement passages, with the celebrated seamen, or onboard the ship as it voyaged through the storm. Take this one passage during the incitement section:

> An sin, an dèidh do sia feara deuga suidhe air na ràimhaibh, chum a h-iomradh fon ghaoith gu ionad-seòlaidh, do ghlaodh Calum Garbh mac Raghnaill nan Cuan iorram oirre, 's e air ràmh-bràghad, agus is i seo i:
>
> (Then, after the sixteen men were seated at the oars, to guide the ship downwind to the sailing place, Crazy Calum, son of Ranald of the Seas, from the bow-oar, cried out a iorram [a rowing song], and this is it:)
>
> *my translation, mostly literal.

mac Mhaighstir Alasdair names Calum Garbh, as if the audience are familiar with him already, and mentions the practice of guiding the ship to the 'ionad-seòlaidh' or 'sailing place', as if the practice and location were well-known. The confusion for current readers not aware of 18th-century sailing practice is deciphering the action therein. What is the sailing place and why do the men need to transfer the boat to it? The sailing place is an established spot presumably further out on calm water away from Loch Aineort, a sea-loch with shallow reefs and narrow channels, on Uist's jagged eastern shoreline, from which the crew depart in the poem. Archaeologist Kevin Grant remarks that 'Loch Aineort (or Loch Eynort) is a deep inlet on the eastern coast of the island of South Uist… [that has a] direct connection with… Birlinn Chlann Raghnaill…' ('And in Every Hamlet a Poet' 30-45). He continues:

[101] Black, 'the New Gaelic Poetry' 119: 'Most of it was recited rather than sung – an innovation in terms of [vernacular Gaelic poetry].'

> The choice of the setting in Loch Aineort is no coincidence; this was a place that was meaningful and personal for the poet. The Clanranald of the poem was MacMhaistir Alasdair's chief patron, and two of the poet's brothers farmed on Clanranald's lands… The loch appears now to be quiet, isolated, and uninhabited, but it was once the principal harbour for South Uist: a busy place that boasted a tax collecting house, an inn, and several slipways… (37)

The evidence for the ionad-seòlaidh's proximity to Loch Aineort is harder to establish, but if the loch was the principal harbour at the time of the poem's composition, by extension, we can infer that the ionad-seòlaidh was near the loch. Going back to the rest of the prose passage in the incitement section, once the crew reach the ionad, the point is to steady the boat, unfurl sails, get into position, and ensure all aboard are ready for the stormy journey ahead. Aside from the passage's meaning, its *function* perhaps matters more to readers of the target text. If this passage were omitted, for example, the transition from the previous movement to this one might be hard for the audience to follow. The prior one has very similar imagery and motifs; elemental challenges of wind and waves the crew are to face at sea are dramatized so the crew can be incited and roused much in the same way warriors are roused before battle. Without some information insertion separating the two and designating their differences, the audience might construe this new piece as a continuation of the last. Because mac Mhaighstir Alasdair recycles imagery and motifs to establish familiarity, the likelihood of getting lost in the narrative is even higher. Prose passages therefore serve to clarify. As Derick Thomson notes above, mac Mhaighstir Alasdair was also paralleling Gaelic heroic tales from the past, in an attempt to compose his own poem within that larger tradition. But his prose insertions merely guide the reader, as the boat is guided by the crew. Take the 'crew sketches' section:

> Dh' òrdaicheadh a mach fear-beairte
> *(The rigger was ordered out)*
>
> Chuireadh air leth fear-sgòid
> *(The main sheet was sent)*

A 'rigger' is the role of one who deals with a ship's tackle, and a poem celebrating the importance of this responsibility follows its header of prose, while the 'main sheet' deals with sheet ropes and, indeed, has his own little poem, too. The prose may be unremarkable lyrically, but both serve a practical function, such as titles, in signposting crew members whose responsibilities will sometimes overlap. In other words, prose passages in 'Birlinn

Chlan Raghnaill' follow a convention of practicality. They are briefs, like a set of clarification points, that keep the audience or reader up to speed with the progress of the poem. From the perspective of a historical poetics, they are interesting, too, insofar as the assumptions they make about the audience who at one time may have been familiar with crew members. But these passages, in another sense, also resemble a play's stage directions, and for mac Mhaighstir Alasdair's translator they can be leveraged in such a way for today's reader.

A translator's impositions obviously must account for a huge swathe of structural and contextual factors. But what latitude does a translator have here? How might the poem's structure and context themselves be translated, and what are the consequences of certain choices? Because of the overriding concern to make 'Birlinn Chlann Raghnaill' more accessible to a readership which does not have Gaelic literacy, and/or is not well-acquainted with historical Gaelic poetry, interrogation of the poem's 'edges', like structure, can help make translations more accessible. Formatting and thematic patterns, or the already-mentioned functionality of passages and their transitions may all be inconspicuous in a source text but are nevertheless important to reader engagement. They serve as a kind of literary 'metadata' that translators can tweak before the standard concerns like a text's literal meaning are broached. Moreover, the relevance to mac Mhaighstir Alasdair, who is more often encountered in anthologies than in a collected or selected works, couldn't be greater since factors like formatting are more limited in anthologies than in individual works.

To address 'Birlinn Chlann Raghnaill''s sections in translation, it appears the primary thematic structure is tripartite. Three main sections are already implicit, as outlined above, and as mac Mhaighstir Alasdair has done with incidental prose headings, organizing the overall translation with a tripartite structure echoes his organization method. Yet not one translation, from Hugh MacDiarmid's 1935 translation to Alan Riach's 2015 version, and none before them, have added a tripartite structure despite referring to it in criticism. One potential obstacle presents itself in the first third of the poem. The section is thematically varied. Two blessings occur before the incitement and iorram, and categorizing it all as having a unified function requires justification. There is a passage between the blessings and the incitement, however, which operates as a kind of unifying segue:

> Na biodh simpleachd oirbh, no taise
> Gu dol air ghaisge le cruadal…
>
> Dh' aindeoin aon fhuathais gam faic sibh

> Na meataicheadh gart a' chuain sibh.
>
> (Do not be simplistic, or hesitate[102]
> To go bravely with courage…
>
> Despite the first[103] fright you see
> Do not let the threatening sea daunt you)[104]

This passage thematically threads together the blessings and incitements by switching the mode of expression from communication with God to communication with the clan, but it occurs within the arms blessing and thus develops the message. Here an analogy of land-battle (not excerpted above) is employed for navigating rough seas as warning to both crew and audience, and therefore sets the stage for inciting and rousing spirits so the crew are able to overcome the nautical challenges ahead.

Given the poem's implicit organization of three sections, I have decided to structure my translation according to them. Each section has been numbered, and numbers occur on a separate page of their own, so as to give the reader a sense of pause, like a new chapter in a novel. Additionally, each section has been titled in such a way so as to summarize its content (e.g. the first section, 'Prayer and Rally'). With these sections so ostensibly organized by number and name, it is thought the reader can better engage with each section, and better conceive of each as an independent entity, adhering to commonalities of form and theme, and being distinguished from the other two. Furthermore, the prose insertions throughout my translation have in some instances been changed relative to their section of the poem. For example, those that directly follow a new section in mac Mhaighstir Alasdair's source text have been converted to poetry in my target text:

> Bha h-uile goireas a bhuineadh do' n t-seòladh a nis air a chur ann an deagh riaghailt, agus theann a h-uile laoch tapaidh, gun taise, gun fhiamh, gun sgàthachas, thun a' cheart ionaid an d' òrduicheadh dha dol; is thog iad na siùil ann an èirigh na grèine, La Fhèill Brìghde, a' trogbhail a-mach bho bhun Loch Aoineart an Uibhist a' Chinn-a-deas.
>
> All set for sailing. Tackle in working order,
> each rock-hard soul worked to certainty:
> fearless, doubtless, unyielding.
>
> We take our appointed places,

[102] Literally 'tais' is 'soft' in this context, but connotes 'softness' in mental fortitude.
[103] 'aon' is literally 'one' but for semantic meaning I use 'first'.
[104] More or less a literal translation.

and with sunrise and St Bridget's Day
hoist our sails up high. From Loch Eynort,

south from South Uist, we journey forth.

Not only is form changed, but content, too, while at the same time still conveying, and in some cases stressing or elaborating on, themes of the source text. Here the translation operates as a preamble in sharp contrast to mac Mhaighstir Alasdair's more transactional prose. These structural switches from prose to poetry reinforce the poems sections by acting as markers or indices in verse, but they also create a smooth transition from section pause to the start of a new section.

The 'crew sketches' can be interpreted in two ways, from which the two surrounding sections may be differentiated. One, is as a series of vignettes, a sort of a roll-call of individuals who all have their own poem. Two, is as a poem sequence; that is, a single composition made up of shorter parts. The distinctions between the two are slight, but they matter in terms of poetics and in relation to other sections. I translate them as a series of vignettes. The pieces are comparatively lyrical, portraying an individual and his skill, rather than focussing on broader, more longform topics. Importantly, their individuality is also described, rather than that of clan and crew, and although the group is concern throughout the poem, their respective individuality is what mac Mhaighstir Alasdair celebrates here. One man's skill as independent from the other's does not go without notice, so much so that a weaker link could weaken the whole, even if collectively they are stronger. In turn, to echo individuality, each member is accorded an individual poem in translation. Perceived individuality need not be mutually exclusive to the crew in the 'crew sketches' because, in the end, they are individuals within crew and clan. Indeed, mac Mhaighstir Alasdair himself alludes to this when he writes:

'S shuidh gach fear gu freasdal tapaidh
'Bhuill bu chòir dha.

Each man sat to serve alertly
(As) a member should.[105]

Each man is a 'member' of the whole. Not only that, but a moral injunction binds them. It is what they ought to do as individuals. Collective work, shared hardship: these lead to the

[105] My literal translation.

outcome of survival, but poetically, each individual deserves our attention so that we know them apart from the clan.

If read as individual vignettes, the weight of the surrounding two sections is disproportionately larger than the crew squeezed between them. mac Mhaighstir Alasdair's framed 'Birlinn Chlann Raghnaill' this way because the crew were the fulcrum of the whole piece. Without them, preparation and journey were inconsequential being in service to seeing the crew and their culture survive. Yet formally, pinning them amidst the lengthier prep and journey sections presents a potential structural imbalance to the translator.

To level out the imbalance in form, I experiment with breaking up the first and last sections, to reflect the 'lyrical format' of the crew. As mentioned above, the crew are not only treated as individual pieces in translation, but as individual pieces that stand on their own aesthetically. They are 'lyrical' in being condensed emotional evocations, rather than mere members, and as a translator, I reorganize the other sections into similarly short lyrics to not only better correspond with the form of the crew sketches, but to also give the reader a chance to focus closely on the relationship between the target and the source texts, as having less on the page allows for greater scrutiny of what does exist on the page. For example, in the first section, the two blessings have their own pages, rather than run together on one page with a label separating them. In the last section, the crew do not leave Uist and arrive in Antrim with one long poem; in my translation their journey becomes several self-contained lyrics, each a particular instance of the journey:

> The sun to auburn
> unhusks, burns
> furiously through
> an openwork sky.
> Cloud and dark
> regather gloom.
>
> Aquamarine clots
> the sky's dun
> underside, subdued,
> dour, then colour –
> every dye in a tartan
> brightening the air.

So begins the crew's storm-bound voyage in my translation, all on its own page, whereas in Iain Crichton Smith's translation, for example, the text continues, so that each page is a column of quatrains, stacked to mirror mac Mhaighstir Alasdair's original text:

Sun unhusking to gold-yellow
from its shell,
the sky growing seared and lurid,
amber bell.
Thick and gloomy and dun-bellied,
surly curtain,
vibrating with every color
in a tartan.

Rainbow in the west appearing
tempest-born,
speeding clouds by growing breezes
chewed and torn (Smith 29).

The rainbow in my translation appears on the page following the initial one above:

Clouds hurled by squalls
soar into dispersal.
A rainbow half-shattered
toward the western rim.

And this instance of the journey continues, ends, then another on the following page occurs, and so forth. Broken up in this way, each broad section resembles each in weight, duration and focus, so that the reader may approach 'Birlinn Chlann Raghnaill' with implicit structural balance. Few compositional parallels of the poem exist for readers who are curious about its structure. Meg Bateman writes that the poem '… is quite unlike earlier long poems in the Gaelic tradition' (Bateman 81). Some, like the 'Birlinn' by the 'Mull Bard', have already been mentioned, but their overlap is thematic, or in other cases, only certain parts, as opposed to the whole poem, overlap with others in Gaelic. Bateman, in this regard, references the 'launching runs' of 'Ridire na Sgiatha Deirge', and earlier Irish books, such as *Agallamh na Seanórach*, but she then marks out the 'crew sketches' for being '[t]he most startling departure from the Gaelic tradition' (82). So unique a poem will challenge new readers and translators because its form is virtually unparalleled within its own language, let alone in English. Contextual comparisons are hard to achieve for many readers. Outfitting the translation with structural balance therefore bypasses immediate questions that may arise in an attempt to prioritise the initial reading experience in the target language.

White space around printed text, and other visuospatial elements, should be addressed because they affect the way poetry is read and are related to structural changes. Daniel Pinder

claims that '… for some readers at least, information pertaining to a text's visuospatial presentation arguably becomes pivotal in determining how the text is both read and interpreted within a wider contextual sense' (Pinder 211–224). The way lines are broken in a free verse poem, for example, can signal meaning or a shift in emphasis, and textual organization therefore nudges the reading experience. Pinder believes a text's visuospatial elements helps readers recognize an author's intentions, thus adding to the facilitation of communication between author and reader. Moreover, he seeks to strengthen the connection between text and authorial intentions through 'relevance theory', which argues on behalf of the role of inference in communication (Wilson and Sperber 607–632). When two people communicate, one conveys intentions through language to another (in addition to other forms of communication, like gesture). Utterances and thoughts have potential external or internal inputs that are relevant to them, and these inputs are inferred. In poetry, where a great deal of meaning is not literal but connotative or metaphorical, the way a poem's lines are arranged and how much white space they occupy will impact the reception of that meaning. By extension, the visuospatial elements of translations not only keys the reader into a translator's interpretation of a source text, but how the source and target texts interact with each other. Even if the reader of a translation doesn't speak the language of the source, the differences and relationship of the two texts can be, in part, by their respective visuospatial elements.

Likewise, a page's blank space, or its 'functional white', is said to help situate a poem, or 'allow a poem to exist in a specific position on the page', which in turn counterbalances print with silence and breathing room so as not to overwhelm readers with sound and language (White). By extension, the final layout of a translated text can affect how source and target texts interact, either by appearing perpendicular to each other on one page, by being printed enface between two pages, or with the source text taking pride of place throughout the book and the target set within a notes section after a piece's conclusion. My translation is presented enface to stress interaction between source and target texts. It is worth noting that, if the poem was composed largely with oral performance in mind, then decisions around functional white, being a concern of print culture, do not directly meddle with mac Mhaighstir Alasdair's intentions, even if the poem was first made public through print. It might even be argued that any discussion of functional white as regards 'Birlinn Chlann Raghnaill' helps us reconsider transmission and reception of the poem for today's readers.

Converting the first and last sections of poem into lyrical sequences allows for instances to exist in their own right, and thus visuospatial elements and the presence of

functional white sees the text re-shaped according to its content. The following is an example from the third section, after the crew and ship enter the storm:

> Waves pang
> with fury ring
> before they
> appear, in every
> ear a warning:
> quieter waters
> that feedback
> to an oceanic
> death knell,
> hell to navigate
> as the ship from
> jagged heights
>
> hurtles off—

The stanzas stagger forward to imitate the rise and plunge of the boat over storm waves, and then, on the last line, the narrator is suddenly blind to the crew's whereabouts, after the boat drops from the lip of a wave. In this way there are similarities to Garry MacKenzie's *Ben Dorain: A Conversation with a Mountain*, which recasts Donnchadh Bàn Mac an t-Saoir's *Moladh Beinn Dòbhrain* with a distinctly dynamic visuospatial layout. Translation latitude in my version of 'Birlinn Chlann Raghnaill' creates a distance between source and target texts, but the majority of *Ben Dorain* is original work, not translation. Elsewhere I have pointed out where MacKenzie's translation ends and begins (Strickland):

> Is aigeannach fear eutrom
> Gun mhòrchuis
>
> *(Over there is a stag who knows his mind,*
> *A deep one who doesn't need to brag.)*

The second line of English is a version of Mac an t-Saoir's couplet above, 'aigeannach fear' translated as 'deep one' and 'gun mhòrchuis' as 'doesn't need to brag' (lit. 'without pomp'), but the first line is entirely MacKenzie's own (Strickland). Isolating mac Mhaighstir Alasdair's source text as comparison with my target text helps gauge the 'closeness' of their relationship:

> Nuair a thuiteamaid fo bhàrr
> Nan àrd-thonn giobach

(When we would drop under the crests
Of the rough, lofty waves)[106]

'Jagged heights' corresponds with 'rough, lofty waves' and 'ship… [hurtling] off—' is a synecdoche of the ship 'dropping under the crests': the ship drops off both, but rather than describe the ship being 'under' the lip of the wave, the em dash symbolizes it. Both MacKenzie and I create a distance from the source text, but his text is further away in form and content from the source than mine, as I attempt to keep the content of my translation closer to the source. The difference is overall a matter of degree.

A publishing house may have formatting standards, but it is a translator's responsibility to anticipate standards and work with them to best represent a source text, rather than arbitrate onto it. This is part of the already mentioned constraints put on a translator. In working with Broken Sleep Books to release 'Moladh Mòraig', for example, enface formatting was the press' standard practice, but they were otherwise flexible. They accommodated my desire to increase white space on the page, rather than stack stanzas, as has been done by previous editions of the poem (Mackay and MacPherson 144–145). Stanzas in my 'Moladh Mòraig' translation present as individual poems, the white space encouraging the reader to focus on each stanza and compare it with the source's stanza. This is not to say that white space automatically directs the reader to the Gaelic text, but rather that reflection on the source-and-target relationship for each ùrlar and siubhal is encouraged because each ùrlar and sibhual are isolated. In other words, with less material on each page to focus on, greater scrutiny can be given to each page. The same idea applies to 'Birlinn Chlann Raghnaill', whereby the differences and commonalities between source and target overlap. In a way, there is an element of transparency here. Instead of pretending similarity, the enface alignment stresses differences while allowing the relationship between the two texts to be viewed. If the target, for example, obviously looks different from the source, then seeing them as one and the same is not possible. Furthermore, the enface alignment with the text broken down into smaller lyrics leverages white space in the translation to reinforce action and meaning in the source, and with a different format this opportunity would have been sacrificed. There are numerous formatting options, such as stacking both texts on one page, or converting the target text to notes in the back of a book, so the source is featured

[106] A literal translation for the purposes of illustration; not an excerpt.

throughout. The point is that formatting principles, however, do have an impact on the reading experience and on the ethics of representing a source text.

The aim of arguing on behalf of format is to encompass another, and perhaps lesser explored facet of a translator's responsibility to a source text, which Peter Cole discusses as an ethics of translation:

> … it's worth pausing for a moment over the word 'responsibly'. One needs in translating, and especially in translating works from the distant past, to respond and be responsible not only to the original poem… but also to the body of knowledge that has accrued around it… The responsible response will inevitably encode a complex, integrated sense of duration… And in crossing centuries… factoring in thousands of elusive elements that come into play, the straightforward algebra of equivalence won't do (Cole 6).

The 'thousands of elusive elements' do incorporate a translation's format. Much of my discussion around structure and context in translation stems from the 'body of knowledge that has accrued around' mac Mhaighstir Alasdair's original poem. The translated 'Birlinn Chlann Raghnaill', with its dispersed 'sections within sections' comprises many interworking parts, like the vessel the crew sail, each part being accorded its own page. This complex system arises from a highly contextualized reading of the original so that the reader does not have to make educated leaps on their own, but rather observe symbolic overlap between crew and vessel and concept. My approach seeks to curate distinct content per page to better assist clarity in theme and meaning for an audience who, unacquainted with mac Mhaighstir Alasdair's aesthetic background and cultural heritage, might otherwise be juddered out of a masterpiece. Likewise, restructuring in translation to better serve coherence could be described as an attempt to factor in these 'thousands of elusive elements', not least the original's and translator's voices in tandem, over several centuries, and from two very different cultures.

Conclusion

This thesis sought to raise apparent moral tensions around translation approaches to Alasdair mac Mhaighstir Alasdair's poetry as exemplified in the first ùrlar of 'Moladh Mòraig' and the structure and context of 'Birlinn Chlann Raghnaill'. Subversive translation has been proposed as a tentative solution to those tensions. When retracing 20th-century

translation practice after Robert Lowell, subversive translation draws on the advantages Lowell established but includes more of an ethical reading of its source text. The subversive translation of mac Mhaighstir Alasdair into English attempts to minimize potential future harm to the text by personalizing it in translation, with a strong emphasis on interpretation as used by the Gaelic word ‘eadar-mhìneachadh’. Subversive translation in this is an inter-explanation, an interpretation that fosters correspondence between the two texts. My target text retains Gaelic names and embraces ceòl mòr terminology, such as ùrlar, sibhual, and others in ‘Moladh Mòraig’, whilst also exploring a transatlantic English idiom that interacts with or includes Scots. In ‘Birlinn Chlann Raghnaill’, sectioning brings about changes that inflect or modulate themes implicit in the source text, so that they are more explicit, and a play in format establishes respectful distance between source and target. Major liberties serve strictly to ‘flesh out’ pathos or emotional resonance otherwise lost in translation and can be justified by their relationship to the source text, e.g. ‘taking off like deer’ ties into ‘frìth’. Lastly my translation underwent a peer-review process that incorporated input from several fluent and/or indigenous Gaelic speakers in a formal and informal capacity. The collaborative nature of this translation, therefore, aspires to address all three points of the moral quandary as set out above. The result arguably provides another look at Alasdair mac Mhaighstir Alasdair.

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