ORÁN na COMHACHAIG

A Study of Text and Content

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ABSTRACT

The thesis studies the source texts of Ēran na Comhachaig with regard to both form and content. The sources are considered in relationship to each other as well as to the oral tradition from which they were received. An account is given of the background to the poet's life, including aspects of the contemporary environment alluded to in the poem. The discussion of subject matter and style relates Ēran na Comhachaig to other, mostly Gaelic, literature.

Chapter 1 provides background information relevant to an appreciation of the poem. Section A of this chapter is concerned with the life and times of the poet, including a review of traditions and legends of Lochaber and some details of the art of hunting. Section B considers the enduring esteem and affection in which the poem has been held, in the continuing Gaelic tradition of the last four centuries.

Chapters 2 to 6 present the text as found in the five independent sources of the poem, with annotations, expository versions and English translations for each source.

Chapter 7 takes a comparative view of chapters 2-6 and examines factors relating to the divergences between the sources. Verse order is shown to have played a significant part in the development of these divergences. The functions of features such as style and metre are discussed, particularly with regard to the oral transmission of the poem.

Chapter 8 discusses the relationship of Ēran na Comhachaig to other literature. Notable affinities with earlier works are reviewed as well as some comparable features in later poetry.

Indices to place-names and proper names are appended.
Foreword

The central section of the thesis consists of a study of the source texts of Òran na Comhachaig. The relevant texts are held in the Special Collections of Edinburgh University Library, Glasgow University Library and the National Library of Scotland. The staff of these libraries have all been most helpful and courteous in making documents available for my consultation. One of the source manuscripts, from the MacNicol Collection, disappeared from the National Library some years ago but fortunately, before its loss, it was examined by the late Robert Rankin. He kindly permitted me to use the very careful notes that he made from it and with these I have been able to reconstruct Donald MacNicol’s lost manuscript.

In addition I greatly appreciated the conversations I had with Robert Rankin; he shared his enthusiasm for Òran na Comhachaig with me, as he gave me glimpses from past times when he explored the Lochaber countryside.

I am indebted to Ronald Black and William Gillies, who, as my supervisors in the preparation of the thesis, have given me encouragement and advice for rather more years than any of us originally supposed would be required.

Tony Dilworth has been unfailingly patient and helpful with the assorted enquiries I have put to him.

Friends and connections have shown most useful interest in my endeavours and in particular I thank Penny Guthrie for her help with the maps.

For any mistakes and inaccuracies that remain in the thesis I alone am responsible.

Patricia M. Menzies
Edinburgh
May 2001
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**Abbreviations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>AM</td>
<td>Angus Matheson's annotations in his copy of John Mackechnie's <em>Owl of Strone</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BG</td>
<td>Bàrdachd Ghàidhlig, ed. W.J.Watson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DF</td>
<td>Duanaire Finn part 1, ed. Eòin Mac Néill part 2, ed. Gerard Murphy</td>
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<td>MacNicol MS</td>
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<td>ODB</td>
<td>Òran Donnchaidh Bhàin ed. Angus Macleod</td>
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<td>RIA</td>
<td>Royal Irish Academy</td>
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<td>T</td>
<td>Turner MS</td>
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<td>WHFP</td>
<td>West Highland Free Press</td>
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Texts of Óran na Comhachaig (OnC)

Manuscript texts

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<td>MS 73 (1755)</td>
<td>GUL MS.Gen 1042,73</td>
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<td>EUL La 251/La 251*</td>
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<td>MS (1760)</td>
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According to tradition Óran na Comhachaig, hereafter OnC, was composed by Domhnall Mac Fhionnaigh nan Dàn during the time of Raghnall Óg, the 9th chief of Keppoch, who died c.1587.1 Certainly this fits in with the naming of chiefs in the poem, as the last to be referred to is Alasdair Bothloinne, whom Raghnall succeeded in 1554. The dating is discussed by Robert Rankin, who holds the sound opinion that there is no reason to discount tradition and also suggests c.1585 as a date of composition.2 This assessment seems well thought out and acceptable in the absence of further information.

Unsettled Times.

The century after the forfeiture of the Lordship of the Isles was a turbulent one.3 The removal of this power base may have been welcome to the Scottish crown but it was often unable to provide an alternative controlling influence. Clans were jostling each other as many tried to benefit from the void left by the forfeiture and increase their own authority and possessions. At the same time there was felt to be a marked distinction between Highlander and Lowlander; by the time OnC was composed Scotland was no longer bedevilled by a minority but was under the rule of the adult James VI who perceived a need to "civilise the clans".4 OnC was a product of 'Linn nan Creach', before the effects of centralised control were felt in the Highlands. The Keppoch MacDonals were intermittently in contention with the Camerons and in a prolonged state of discord with the Macintoshes. The Keppochs never held their land by charter and were ensnared in the problems resulting from the application of a feudal method of land tenure to a clan system. In 1447 the lands of Keppoch, Glen Roy and Glen Spean were conveyed by charter to Malcolm, chief of Macintosh. A crown charter of 1476 was confirmed in 1562 by Mary,

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1 Josephine Macdonell, An Historical Record of the Branch of the 'Clan Domnuill' called The MacDonells of Keppoch and Gargavoch (Glasgow, 1931), p.27.
Queen of Scots. However, the MacDonalds kept the lands by main force until the end of the 17th century, believing in their right of hereditary possession and their moral obligation to uphold it. Moreover, it was understood that differences were not resolved by peaceful means. Bonds of manrent were much used in the 16th century for procuring mutual assistance and protection but the context was one of potential violence. Thus there was a distinction between murder and the socially obligatory taking of life.

Raiding was probably still regarded as a training for the more serious business of feuding. "The foray (creach) is often alluded to as a laudable method of displaying enterprise". The notoriety of Lochaber raiders became a convention of traditional lore of the Central Highlands. Lochaber's reputation as a wild and lawless place owes much to its craggy terrain, its nooks and high crannies which sheltered many an outlaw. Much as the foray was not derogated as an anarchic pursuit, so outlaws were not necessarily frowned on by locals as long as they were doing their robbing elsewhere.

The Locality of the Poem

Lochaber also provided good hunting ground for such as Domhnall Mac Fhionnaigh. The general area of focus of the poem is south from Glen Roy to Blackwater and east from Ben Nevis to Loch Ossian. Comparing modern maps with earlier available ones a notable difference is the amount of trees. Timothy Pont's maps were compiled around 1610 and show heavy forestation between the mountains and on some slopes near Loch Tréig. Another alteration in the landscape results from damming. Loch Tréig, a particularly deep loch, runs from north to south with Fersit at its northern point. However, it has altered in aspect since 1933 when a dam was built across the River Treig to the north of the loch, thus raising the water level and obscuring certain features of the original topography. There used to

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5 This was doubtless true of other European countries, see J. Wormald, Lords and Men in Scotland (Edinburgh, 1985), p.115.
9 "Loquabria" is marked on the first printed map of Scotland, 1566, see Finlay Macleod, Togail Tir: Marking Time, The map of the Western Isles (Stornoway, 1989), p.16.
10 First published in Joannis Blaeu's Novus Atlas (1654).
be a channel at the north of the loch taking its waters into a smaller loch, an t-Eadarloch. This is marked as "Eddirloch" on Thomson's atlas.\textsuperscript{11} A spit of land called An Deabhadh separated the two lochs and in the much shallower Eadarloch was a crannog or artificial island.\textsuperscript{12} This was the site of a building still known locally in English as MacDonald of Keppoch's council house but usually referred to in Gaelic as 'Taigh nam Fleadh'. When the dam was built the crannog was revealed and examined by Professor Ritchie of Edinburgh University.\textsuperscript{13} He could not date the construction but judged that it had been in use until the 17th century. The island has been known by various names. Duncan Robertson, who was the head keeper at Corrour when Ritchie did his investigation, knew the old name 'Treaty Island'. Before the dwelling was built the island was used as a place to settle differences. The two disputants would swim to the island from opposite sides of the loch to argue their case but if one failed to reach the island he was the loser. It is likely that the building was originally put up as a refuge from raiders and wolves and only later did its use become restricted to occasional gatherings such as feasts and councils.

Ritchie reports that, when draining was done for the dam building, stepping stones were visible between Loch Tréig and Eadarloch. These formed part of the track which led from Rannoch to Glen Spean and according to local experience they are still to be seen in times of severe drought. Wild country Lochaber may be but that is not to say that it was an especially ill-frequented place. It is not lacking in tracks and paths. I have already mentioned the route cutting through the northern end of the loch. The road to the Isles passed close to the southern end on its way from Corrour to Fort William.\textsuperscript{14} Cattle being driven from Skye to markets in Perthshire would be brought to Spean Bridge and then towards the head of Glencoe.\textsuperscript{15} The journey east of the Nevis group to the southern end of Loch Tréig would take them through the Lairig Leacach, a broad pass of which Creag Ghuanach commands a fine view.

\textsuperscript{11} John Thomson, \textit{Atlas of Scotland} (Edinburgh, 1832).
\textsuperscript{12} Lachlan MacKinnon, \textit{Place-names of Lochaber} (1931), p.31.
\textsuperscript{14} R.Steven Campbell, \textit{Central Highlands} (Scottish Mountaineering Club, Edinburgh, 1968), p.131.
In Domhnall's day there was near Inverlaire a mill, built by Angus, 2nd chief of Keppoch. It was on a tributary of the Allt Làire and although it no longer exists in recent years millstones have been pulled out of these waters, suggesting replacements of the original stone. In the house of Ann Macdonell in Spean Bridge I have seen a map drawn up in 1812 and printed in 1832 showing this burn as "Allt a mhullin." This is not marked on John Thomson's map.

The Poet

It is commonly agreed that Domhnall Mac Fhionnlaidh nan Dân was the author of OnC; tradition bearers generally knew the names of composers whose poems they recited. Factual information about him is scarce. However, his grave can be seen in the churchyard of Cille Choirill, Brae Lochaber. Its position gives a view across the River Spean, in accord with Domhnall's request to be buried facing a hill above Fersit known as Chroidhearg.

D.C. Macpherson, who is a chief source of material about Domhnall, came from Bohuntin and so his information was presumably locally derived. Quite different stories are reported concerning Domhnall's domestic life and the circumstances of his composing OnC. Rankin details various such accounts, none of which is recorded earlier than the 19th century. He remarks on a particular verse of the poem which has been curiously interpreted by some editors and translators. It has been suggested that these lines refer to the poet's marriage. This seems unlikely but the opinion could well relate to the version of his life which tells of a young, difficult wife who brings home an old owl to be company for the aging Domhnall. Another story concerning Domhnall's encounter with an owl is that he had gone to some gathering at Taigh nam Fleadh but arrived too late.

16 Ann Macdonell was an authority on local history and tradition in Lochaber.
19 Prior to Macpherson's account (op. cit.) were some comments by John Mackenzie, Sàr-Obair nam Bard Gaelach (Glasgow, 1841), p.17 and also by John Sobieski Stewart and Charles Edward Stewart, Lays of the Deer Forest, 2 vols (Edinburgh, 1848) vol.2, p.393.
20 See p.122, verse T44: Ta bloys do mo bhogha 'nam uchd Le agh maol odhar is ait,
Thusa gionach 's mise gruamach,
'S fhada leam nach buan an t-slat.
On the way back home he heard an owl hooting and this inspired him to composition.\textsuperscript{21} It seems very possible that the stories about the poet developed along with the popularity of the poem and may be considered legendary.

There are different reports of Domhnall's provenance. Lochaber, Badenoch and Braemar are all mentioned and there is a strong opinion that he was connected to the MacIans of Glencoe.\textsuperscript{22} This clan had a great reputation as poets and if "a MacIan could not rhyme his legitimacy was called in question".\textsuperscript{23} Recent local belief in Lochaber indicates that Domhnall was a MacKillop.\textsuperscript{24}

There seems little doubt that he was a great hunter; some of the stories of his prowess may be fanciful but they probably originated in actual skilled performance. Traditions which relate Domhnall to some attested historical figure are perhaps the most likely to have a basis in fact. So tales of the supernatural, which we shall come to later, may be attributed to a tendency to tie local heroes in with local superstitions. However, with regard to the historical aspect, the story of the poet's encroaching on Campbell territory in pursuit of a stag confirms Domhnall not only as a superb Bowman but also a man of quick wits and integrity. His cunning in shooting a specified hind in the furthest away eye establishes him as a measure for the ruthless Black Duncan, 7th Laird of Glenorchy.\textsuperscript{25} His skill earns him his freedom and an invitation of hospitality from Sir Duncan. This Domhnall declines, showing an independent spirit and preferring to return to the environs of Loch Tréig.

The Choice of Land
A preference for upland territory lay at the origins of the Keppoch branch of the Clan Donald. It was long understood that Alasdair Carrach, 1st chief, was given the choice of Trotternish on Skye, or the forest lands of Lochaber.\textsuperscript{26} Whether it was Alasdair or his father

\textsuperscript{21} Macpherson, \textit{An Gaidheal}, vol.5, p.331.
\textsuperscript{22} The Stewart brothers, see n.19 above, concur with Glencoe but say Domhnall was a Henderson.
\textsuperscript{24} Ann MacDonell, see n.16 above, told me this was the view in Spean Bridge.
\textsuperscript{25} Laird from 1583 to 1631; see W.A.Gillies, \textit{In Famed Breadalbane} (Perth, 1938), p.125. For story of Domhnall poaching see Macpherson, \textit{An Gaidheal}, vol.5. p.329.
\textsuperscript{26} J.R.N.Macphail, (ed.) \textit{Highland Papers}, 4 vols (Edinburgh, 1914) vol.1, p.32; see also Alasdair Carrach in Proper Names Index.
Alexander de Yle who made the choice of the inland territory would hardly affect the tradition. This historical partiality for the uplands is reflected in OnC. Several verses contain deprecatory comments on the sea and related pursuits. A remark about shellfish is more complicated as it derogates not only by reference to the marine element but also because eating shellfish was regarded as a very low-grade activity. Iain Lom's use of the shellfish motif to censure the Campbells, "nam beul sligneach", is well known. In a less critical way some caution with regard to the sea may have been quite common; Derick Thomson points out that Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair in Birlinn and other sea poems reveals "some unease with the subject matter. The poet seems to look at the sea with the wonder and distrust of an outsider, while as we saw he empathises with hill and wood and animals." 

**Traditions of Lochaber**

Many old stories, including ones from the Fenian and Ulster cycles, are attached to Lochaber and some have left their trace in the place-names. In Glen Spean is Drochaid Phionghail and near Fersit such names as Meallan Fergus and Allt Fergus are reported. It is locally understood that Fergus Mór mac Eirc had a hunting bothy near Fersit. About eight miles further east the Abhainn Ghuilibinn joins the River Spean and here the story of the Death of Diarmaid has entered the topography, Lochan an Tuirc being named for the site of his encounter with the boar.

Superstition was a vital force in 16th-century Highland society and the composer and audience of OnC would naturally be acquainted with the folklore relating to their district. A focus of supernatural stories was a witch figure and this has some relevance to the poem.

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27 See Chapter 3, verses T16-19.
28 'Latha Inbhir Lochaidh', Bàrdachd Ghàidhlig, ed. by W.J.Watson (3rd edn Stirling, 1959) (hereafter BG), line 5735.
30 This is concerned with the area of Lochaber to which the poem relates. Thus stories of, for example, the Mamore forest are omitted.
31 I have yet to locate these, but one source indicates that there was a tradition relating the name Fergus to the area; see Chapter 6, verse E5.
32 This would support the identification of the Fergus mentioned in Chapter 6, verse E5.
given the meaning and composition of the term 'cailleach oidhche'.

Verses about an unnaturally old owl with concomitant special wisdom must have held associations with Cailleach na Beinne Brice. Calum Maclean got stories about her from John MacDonald of Highbridge in 1951. John the Bard reckoned the Hag of Ben Breck had frequented Lochaber for centuries. She was supposed to have power over a herd of deer that accompanied her, which may be connected both with the belief that deer were fairy cattle and the notion of a great deer-goddess. She seems to have been a manifestation of the Cailleach Bheurr, "the most tremendous figure in Gaelic myth today". That she is very much a Lochaber version is indicated by her song, which reveals the same preference for upland territory noted above, see 'The Choice of Land'.

Song of the Witch of Ben Breck

Witch of Beinn Bhreac, horo!
Great witch of the high wellspring.
I would not let my troop of deer
Troop of deer, troop of deer
Seek mussels on the shore,
Since they'd prefer cold watercress,
Etc.
That's at the foot of the high wellspring.

John MacDonald also tells the story of Domhnall Mac Phionnlaigh's encounter with Cailleach na Beinne Brice. He was out having a bad

33 The word 'witch' here is used to denote a supernatural female being.
34 See also Chapter 8, 'Transfiguration'.
day's hunting when he met the hag, who offered to help him by taking either the nose or the eye from the deer. He asked for the nose to be taken and when the deer had no sense of smell he had greater success. There is also a story of a glaistig meeting Donald MacIan, near Beinn Bhreac. He was in a bothy beside Uisge Chiarainn, lighting a fire. The glaistig arrives and declares, "I was on Uiriallaich when you put the first spark in the tinder and in Coire na Snaige when the wisp took fire." I have found no Uiriallaich or Coire na Snaige but Uisge Chiarainn runs into what is now the Blackwater Reservoir, formerly Uisge Dubh.

Many superstitions are attached to Loch Tréig. It was traditionally the haunt of ferocious water horses and was famous for its eagles. The feathers of these were used to wing the arrows in the stories of Lochaber marksmanship. The legend of the Eagle of Loch Tréig relates to the old system of reckoning dates by the ages of animals. An eagle grey with age sets forth from the rocks above the loch to try and find an animal who remembers such a cold Beltane night. She makes several aged friends on the way to discovering the oldest creature - a trout, who lost an eye in its efforts to keep warm on the coldest night in memory.

Hunting and Deer

"Splendid though the mountains and the deer still are, neither the setting nor the animal is more than a shadow of its former self." In 16th-century Lochaber the trees were more numerous than now and the deer were larger, although both were entailed in a process of diminution that had begun in the iron age with the invention of smelting. The old Highland forests were not entirely dense but of mixed growth with trees of different ages providing glades. This gave

40 Maclean, The Highlands, p.59.
41 MacDougall and Calder, Folktales and Fairy Lore, p.237.
42 See Chapter 6, verse E24, for a reference to Coire na Snaige in the poem.
46 For relevance to other similar stories see Chapter 8, 'The oldest animals.'
48 Ibid.
good shelter and feeding so that wild life, including red deer, flourished. As the trees were destroyed to supply furnaces the deer adapted to the change of conditions and moved up from what used to be lowland forest to open moor and hill. The harsher environment and lack of shelter caused changes in their development and their stature diminished. The destruction of forests in the south drove the smelters north, which was a cause of resentment in the Highlands. There were furnaces all over Scotland. "So inimical was smelting to forestry that in 1556 Elizabeth I banned the process by law in Sussex and in 1563 another act abolished smelting at Ulverston in Lancs." 49 In Scotland in 1535 the death penalty was introduced for a third woodcutting offence. 50 Acres of woodland were also destroyed to provide timber for shipbuilding; the shores of Loch Arkaig were denuded for this reason. 51 Wolves, of which Domhnall Mac Phionnlaigh is reputed to have killed a good number, were such a great problem that forests were burned to flush them out. A pine forest stretching from the western braes of Lochaber to the Blackwater was lost this way. 52

Hunting was a preoccupation of medieval aristocracy with its lingering attributes of a warrior class. Hunting was regarded as a worthy endeavour, mentally and physically challenging and a good training for warfare. Added to this was the idea that "wild beasts retain something which man has lost and which, by implication, he may somehow regain, or at least perceive, in studying, hunting and defeating them." 53 It is hard to find any criticism of hunting; it was regarded as an innocent but useful pleasure. "The hunter has a lucky foreknowledge of Paradise in his waking and his going to rest." 54 This is very much the image presented in the Fenian ballads. Hunting was both an aristocratic pursuit and a powerful link with nature. It was a conventional motif in Gaelic panegyric poetry. 55

49 Op.cit. pp.6-12. In 1610 English miners were brought into Letterewe in Wester Ross to build up the industry.
Two forms of hunting are referred to in the poem; one is the pursuit by the individual hunter with his dog and the other is the driving of deer into a narrow place or enclosure where the hunters wait.\textsuperscript{56} The drive was current in medieval Scotland. This is the method generally described in the Fenian lays, where large numbers of animals are destroyed. 'Eileirg', which has the English form 'elrick', is a name for the place of entrapment in the latter system and the Gaelic 'timchioll' became 'tinchell' in Scots to signify the beaters.\textsuperscript{57} Such a hunt might be on a very grand scale, as were some 16th-century royal hunts, like the one arranged in Atholl for the entertainment of Mary Stuart in 1563.\textsuperscript{58} It is a drive that is referred to in OnC when Keppoch chiefs are described as preparing positions for the chase.\textsuperscript{59} John Taylor, the 'Water Poet', commented on the popularity of this sort of hunt after he had been visiting near Braemar probably not long after the composition of OnC.\textsuperscript{60}

There was a 19th-century misconception of the extent to which convenient arrangements were made for the benefit of aristocratic hunters. When John Leyden visited Glen Roy and surveyed those geological formations known as the parallel roads he reported that they had been "formed for the convenience of hunting when the Scottish court resided at Inverlochy and the whole glen was a royal forest".\textsuperscript{61} Thomas Sinton seems to have held the same opinion.\textsuperscript{62}

Hunting in the Highlands was usually done on foot because of the ruggedness of terrain. In the Lowlands, as in England and France, the hunters in a drive would be on horseback. In either case there were hounds to pursue the deer and pull them down. Hunters were armed but the dogs were the main agents of destruction. Scrope describes the loosing of the dogs, preferably uphill to give them the advantage.\textsuperscript{63} Running obliquely downhill is the deer's speciality.\textsuperscript{64} As the two hounds gain on the stag one of them seizes the hock and slows

\textsuperscript{56} Mentioned in OnC in, for example, Chapter 2, verse M4.
\textsuperscript{57} For 'eileirg' see Chapter 2, M18.
\textsuperscript{59} See Chapter 3, verse T7.
\textsuperscript{61} John Leyden, Tour in the Highlands and Western Islands, 1800 (Edinburgh, 1903), p.193.
\textsuperscript{62} Sinton, Poetry of Badenoch, p.165.
\textsuperscript{63} Scrope, Deer Stalking, p.351; mentioned in OnC, see Chapter 1, verse M20.
\textsuperscript{64} See Chapter 2, verse M32, for reference in OnC.
the animal down so that the second dog can go for the throat. When he is harried the stag turns his head to thrust with his antlers and the dogs must dodge and try again. Thus there may be some darting about to secure a hold. When fastened on to the deer the dogs let it carry them along until it collapses. Hunting scenes of this sort are shown on Pictish stones and are also mentioned as occurring in Jura as late as 1835.

Hunting by an individual also occurs in the poem. Domhnall Mac Fhionnlaigh will have stalked the deer with his hound to do the tracking. This would be a scenting hound rather than a breed with the strength and stamina required to bring down a stag in the manner described above. Then Domhnall’s marksmanship would secure a quick death. Hunting with a bow and arrow continued until after the mid 17th century and for some time was probably more accurate than firearms. The bow was also noiseless, which was a great advantage; the hunter might repeat his shots without causing alarm and scattering the deer.

Part B The Life of the Poem

The sources of the poem with which this thesis is concerned all date from roughly the third quarter of the 18th century, that is about two hundred years after the poem’s composition. Of course it may have been written down before then but there is no evidence of that. What we do know is that OnC was still in the oral tradition in 1947 since that is when Robert Rankin transcribed a recitation of it by the tradition bearer Duncan MacDonald of High Bridge, Spean Bridge. It will be seen from the following chapters that there is a good deal of variation between the sources, but it may be supposed that the preservation of the poem in written form by the 18th-century collectors helped to stabilise the oral form. Certainly the efforts of these collectors and others stimulated a great interest in the poems and stories of Gaelic tradition; the inclusion of OnC in many of the resulting printed anthologies of poetry attests to its popularity. The locations of what were reckoned as complete texts are shown in the bibliography. However, there are also selections from

65 Gilbert, Hunting and Hunting Reserves, p.56.
67 Referred to in OnC, see Chapter 2, verse M25.
68 Scrope, Deer Stalking, p.38.
69 RR, pp.156-65.
One and other material relating to it which indicate the amount of regard it has attracted. There follows a list of publications containing some notable references to, translations of and comments on the poem.

**Selections and Comments**

1. Anne Grant of Laggan.

2. Donald Campbell

3. Donald Macpherson
   Selected stanzas in *An Duanaire* (Edinburgh, 1868).

4. John Blackie

5. Donald Macpherson
   Selected stanzas in *An Duanaire* (Edinburgh, 1868).

6. John Mackie
   Selected stanzas in *An Duanaire* (Edinburgh, 1868).

7. John Mackie
   A free translation in *Celtic Magazine*, vol. 10, 1885.

8. Josephine MacDonell
   Selected stanzas and translation of others in *An Historical Record of the Branch of the 'Clann Domhnall' called the MacDonells of Keppoch and Gargavoch* (Glasgow, 1931).

9. John Mackie
   (ed.)
   Selected stanzas in *The Owl Remembers*, English versions by P. McGlyn (Stirling, 1933).

10. Lachlan MacKinnon
    Selected stanzas in *Cascheum nam Bard* (Inverness, 1953).

11. Annie Mackenzie
    Comments in 'Lochaber Bards' in *Scottish Gaelic Studies*, vol. 10 (Aberdeen, 1963).

12. Ronald Black
    Teaching notes for Edinburgh University Celtic Department.

13. Josephine MacDonell

The thesis does not deal with sound recordings of the poem, which are kept in the School of Scottish Studies, or with the tunes to which it has been sung. However, some text is included in the following Musical Collections.

11. Keith Norman MacDonald
    *Gesto Collection* (1890). Selected stanzas.

13. Francis Collinson
    Some stanzas and comments.

The bibliography of texts is intended to be comprehensive, whereas the list above is a selective one. Taking both into account it is clear that *OnC* has attracted attention at least as far back as the

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70 An unpublished presentation of details about the poem which is a separate teaching item. No.7 in the list above was prepared for teaching purposes as was Donald MacKinnon's *Reading Book for Gaelic Students*, Part 2 (no title page) (part 1 1889).

71 This is due to limitations of space as well as the fact that the recordings relate closely to the written/printed texts.
date of its earliest manuscript form. Some of the items above require
comment.

Anne Grant's translation (item 1) caused her some difficulty so
that she abandoned her plan of "versifying this very singular poem"
although she felt that in prose "the beauty of the diction is
lost".\textsuperscript{72} It is not clear what Gaelic source she used. It appears to
be based on Eigg with some omissions. Indeed some of her remarks
concerning OnC are quite singular. Although she found it compelling
her attitude seems to have been influenced by the Romanticism which
Macpherson's Ossian fed and which found critical expression in
Goethe's Werther. The Scottish Highlands were "where the disciples of
Rousseau supposed they had found an example of a race uncorrupted by
the vices of civilisation".\textsuperscript{73} Her correspondence contains an opinion
of the poet as not only illiterate and solitary but leading a life
tending to "form, as we should suppose, the character of a gloomy,
sordid savage, intent only on procuring food, and devouring it in
solitary safety."\textsuperscript{74} These opinions scarcely impeded her enjoyment of
the poem. The dating she gives is very awry as she places it in the
1770s; the story she has relating to its composition is plausible but
different from the usual: when the hunter/poet grew too old for the
chase he moved down to Strathmashie to stay with relatives. Some
cattle drovers visited him and offered him whisky but "his
taciturnity and sobriety provoked them and they turned him out
thinking he was a spy".\textsuperscript{75} He took refuge in a barn where there was an
owl.

Donald Campbell (2) was a native of Lochaber and claims to have
been born at Creag Ghuanach. He apologises for giving only a few
verses and a "severe translation". He does not give a source and
offers some lines which I have not encountered elsewhere. The
possibility that they might belong to local tradition is interesting
but not now verifiable. Campbell then presents a poem of his own
which has been inspired somewhat by OnC; it is a dialogue between a

\textsuperscript{72} Anne Grant, \textit{Essays on the Superstitions of the Highlanders}, 2 vols
\textsuperscript{73} From the entry on Anne Grant, \textit{Dictionary of National Biography},
\textsuperscript{74} Grant, \textit{Superstitions of the Highlanders}, p.230.
\textsuperscript{75} Ibid.
fairy and a hunter and is intended to be sung to a tune of the 'Song of the Witch of Ben Breck'.

Donald Macpherson (3) explains that he obtained the first three of the five verses given here from a Ronald Macdonald of Achadh nan Comhaichean and the last two from Donald Macdonald in Bohenie. He gives them the title 'Oran na Comhachaid'. They are not in any earlier sources. Macpherson presents the same stanzas in a version of OnC which is apparently based on Eigg and to which he provides an introduction in An Gaidheal. These five verses also occur in Maclean Sinclair's collection Gaelic Bards. Although this was published after either An Duanaire or An Gaidheal it contained material from Hector Maclean's manuscript that had been taken to Nova Scotia by John Maclean, the Tiree bard, in 1819. It seems almost certain that the five verses were preserved by Hector Maclean; the transfer of his manuscript to Nova Scotia would have left no written trace of the verses in Scotland. However, they still existed in the oral tradition from which Donald Macpherson received them and published them in 1868.

John Blackie's rather florid rendering of the poem into English demonstrates considerable enthusiasm for it. He does state elsewhere that in translation he endeavours "to follow the spirited freedom of Dryden and our old masters, rather than the curious literalness which has been lately fashionable." His achievement was appreciated by Keith Norman MacDonald, who reproduced some stanzas which he asserted "would be interesting to English speaking people and give them an idea of the character of the poem and what our early Highland bards could do before the days of plagiarism."

Josephine MacDonell (6) has nine complete verses naming the chiefs of Keppoch, which she got from a manuscript of an old Lochaber

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77 Macpherson, An Gaidheal, p.328.
78 A.Maclean Sinclair, Gaelic Bards 1411-1715 (Charlottetown, 1890).
80 The five verses do not feature in E, which bears upon the question of where Ranald Macdonald obtained his source of OnC; see Chapter 6, p.219.
81 John Blackie, Language and Literature of the Scottish Highlands (Edinburgh, 1876), p.xi.
82 Keith Norman MacDonald, MacDonald Bards from Medieval Times (Edinburgh, 1900), p.6; MacDonald obviously frowns on "plagiarism", but it is not clear what he understands by the word.
version written down by her great uncle. Being a Keppoch MacDonald she may have been primarily interested in references to the clan. Certainly the poem is used to confirm historical details and it is placed in the section on Ranald Óg, to correspond with the time of composition.83

Evidence of Óran na Comhachaig in other works

ÓnC may have had a good deal of relevance to other work but this short section is concerned with direct references and admitted influence. The first of these is in the poem 'Latha Chuil-Lodair agus Coir nan Gaidheal' by John Roy Stewart. His reference to the Comhachaig intensifies the elegiac quality of his last verse:

The ar cinn fo 'n choille
Is éiginn beanntan is gleantanan their oirnn
Sinn gun súgradh gun mhacnus
Gun éisdeachd ri binneas no ceòl;
Air bheag bìdh no teine
Air na stùcan air am bh an ceò,
Mar comhachaig eile
Ag éisdeachd ri deireas gach lò.84

Sir Walter Scott came to OnC by way of Anne Grant's translation and adopts the imagery:

They entered and found to their surprise Elspeth, alone, sitting 'ghastly on the hearth' like the personification of Old Age in the Hunter's Song of the Owl, 'wrinkled, tattered, vile, dim-eyed, discoloured, torpid.85

The relevant lines from OnC are:

A shine chas-aodannach, phéallach,
A shream-shuileach, odhar, éitigh. verse E83 quoted, Chapter 6

The third and last of these examples is from the work of George Campbell Hay, whose influence encouraged Robert Rankin to write his articles on OnC.86 Hay and Rankin, who were school friends, used to walk in Lochaber together with Hay reciting such parts of OnC as were appropriate to the scenery. Hay was fascinated by the poem, which seems to have had an important place in his mental landscape.87 Its influence is well established in one of his own poems:

84 BG, p.90, see also p.285, where Watson relates this to OnC.
86 RR and R Place-names.
Age and the Hunter

Yoke of my neck, this Age comes o'er me
snare of my feet, the gray, the still.
Between the eyes and the light he is standing;
he stands between the deed and the will.
There is the hand that warps the sapling,
that sets the knife to the apple's root;
and, oh, 'twas the crown of all his malice
to snatch the hill from beneath my foot.

He has taken from me the paths of the Cruach
he has rusted my gun like an autumn leaf;
he has taken away from me strength and laughter,
and hand and foot like a heartless thief.

If Age were a man that hands could grapple,
and I could come on him secretly
up on the hill where no man passes,
grass would be reddened ere he went free.88

This may be compared with stanzas E59-67, Chapter 6.

Related Poems

There are several poems of the 18th and 19th centuries that have so much in common with OnC that they may be regarded as imitations reflecting its popularity.89 The first of these is entitled 'Cead do 'n t-seilg' and it is given in the MacDonald Collection as the next item after OnC.90 This version of OnC is declared to be a collation of several manuscripts.91 It seems to be a conflation of M, ML and E but it is lacking a stanza which occurs in all source texts.92 This stanza features in 'Cead do 'n t-seilg', of which there is another version (including the stanza) in Albyn's Anthology.93 It looks as if the MacDonallds edited the stanza out of their version of OnC in order to avoid repeating it in two consecutive poems. The points of correspondence between the poems presumably encouraged the original transfer of the stanza.

88 op.cit. vol.1, p.38.
89 See RR p.136 for more details.
90 A. and A. MacDonald, MacDonald collection of Gaelic Poetry (Inverness, 1911) pp.17-19.
92 See Chapter 2, verse M12.
'Oran Fear Druim a' Chaoin' has several entire verses from OnC. It is possible that material from OnC may have 'floated' within the oral tradition into other poems; or, as is perhaps more likely in some cases, stanzas may have been deliberately transferred during an editing and collecting process. In either event OnC was a favourite pool of reference. There is one line in the poem which turns up in a number of other contexts:

'S aoibhinn leam an diugh na chí' M15 quoted, Chapter 2
This line is given by James Kennedy as part of two poems; one is attributed to an imprisoned poacher and the other is 'Oran Fear Druim a' Chaoin' mentioned above. However, it is not in this latter poem as Mackenzie reports it. Whether or not it originated in OnC, it seems to be employed as a conventional phrase, a 'floating' motif which might increase the resonance of its context. William Ross has a similar line.

Enduring Esteem
A definition of the individuality of OnC may be a hard thing to come by. "The idiosyncratic, the unexpected quirk of sensibility, the unique quality of imagination" are all vital, and yet it is remarkable that a poem embedded to some extent in the subject matter of hunting and regional luminaries can sustain respect and affection for four centuries. The passage of time seems not to touch it. It reminds us that "Humanity does not pass through phases as a train passes through stations; being alive, it has the privilege of always moving yet never leaving anything behind. Whatever we have been, in some sort we are still."

96 Kennedy, Folklore and Reminiscences, p.98.
97 For further discussion of this line Chapter 8, p.351.
98 See Chapter 8, part B, 'More Dialogue'.
INTRODUCTION TO THE TEXTS

The estimated date of composition of \textit{OnC} is 1585, but there is no written evidence of it until the mid 18th century.\(^1\) Subsequently its appearance in various literary collections, both manuscript and printed, attests to its popularity.

There are over 20 occurrences of \textit{OnC} in print, either in selective form, where portions of the total number of extant verses known by the title \textit{Oran na Comhachaig} have been chosen for publication, or in a form offering what the publisher or editor takes to be a complete poem. This includes amalgams of stanzas from different sources. The manuscripts and the printed texts are listed in the bibliography to this thesis. The printed versions fall into 5 groups or families. These are related to 4 manuscripts and 1, the earliest, printed copy. The latter was, like the manuscripts, a product of the enthusiasm for amassing Gaelic literature which inspired the endeavours of the mid to late 18th-century collectors. It is to these five exemplars that the term 'sources' refers. They are named in the thesis according to the collections containing them; the identity of the collectors is known in all cases whereas that of the scribes is not; nor do we know who the collectors' informants were.

The texts

Chapters 2-6 of the thesis contain transcripts of the five sources of \textit{OnC} with explanatory notes on the text, an expository version of the text and a translation into English.\(^2\) Italics indicate quoted parts of the transcribed manuscript and also \textit{sic\text{\textsc{i}}l\text{\textsc{i}}\text{\textsc{\ha{}}}ll} within the transcript; other internal rhyme is mentioned in the notes and metrical terms are, conventionally, italicised. Citations of internal rhyme are enclosed in square brackets. The metrical pattern of each stanza is indicated by the conventional formula; e.g. \(2(7^1+7^1)\).\(^{2+4}\) This type is used for quoted parts of the expository version. Quotations from any other derivation are put within double inverted commas; where the form or translation of a word is discussed without quotation, such a word is put within single inverted commas. Each

\(^{1}\) See Chapter 1, p.1 and RR, p.135.
\(^{2}\) See below, p.19, regarding the term "expository version".
verse is transcribed with its expository text set out on the same page; since the two texts may thus easily be compared with each other, no square brackets are used to indicate insertions in the expository text. The editorial policy described below applies to all the sources. Where a source displays a feature specific to it alone this is mentioned in the chapter relating to that source. The expository text is not a rendering into standard Scottish Gaelic but a rationalisation of the forms presented in each source so that the sources may be more easily read and compared with each other. Thus, editing is kept to a minimum and chiefly applies to capitalisation, word division, punctuation and orthography. Attachment of 'n' or 'm' of the definite article to the following noun is widespread in the sources and sometimes seems to be a residual spelling habit not necessarily related to eclipse or lenition. In all cases word division is editorial. Punctuation is editorial in the absence of punctuation in the source. Certain other features are adjusted automatically without further note. These are:

1. The relative form of the copula is written 'as' for syntactical clarity whereas the sources tend to use 'as/is' indiscriminately.
2. Adjustments are made to comply with the rule 'caol ri caol agus leathan ri leathan'.
3. The longstanding vacillation in the use of 'do' and 'de' is reflected in all the sources. Where a source gives 'do' and it is apparent that the meaning requires 'de', adjustment is made in the expository version. Any ambiguities are commented on as they occur in the relevant source.
4. Orthographical adjustments are applied to the confusions of 'dh/gh', 'mh/bh'. The variations 'st/sd', 'sc/sg' are resolved by the use of 'st' and 'sg'. The proper name 'Alasdair', however, is spelt thus, according to W.J.Watson, whose practice is used as a guide in matters of non-standard forms.

Morphological adjustments are avoided. Variability presented by alternative forms has not been suppressed; for example 'ragha' and 'roghainn' will both be found. The old forms 'croidhe' and 'nois', which are common to all sources, are retained. Other archaic, classical and dialectal grammatical forms are reflected in the expository version and discussed in the notes. This includes
variable renderings of both the independent and the dependent forms of the past tense of the substantive verb 'tha'.

In some cases there may be a difficulty in deciding whether an archaism is a morphological one or an orthographical one; for example, is 'fuidh' being used as an old form or is it a way of spelling 'fo'? The assumption that words such as 'fuidh' and 'uaidh' are old spellings has been avoided by leaving them unchanged.

Dwelly is consulted with regard to orthography; as to meaning, any explanations given in the notes without specific attribution are from Dwelly. Some citations are also taken from his references to Armstrong's Gaelic Dictionary and MacEachen's Gaelic Dictionary.

The translation

The English translation aims for accuracy without contortion and therefore occasional paraphrasing has been found necessary. As the zero copula is a poetic device in English poetry its use in the Gaelic text may be reflected in the translation.3

Place-names in Gaelic are sometimes preceded by the definite article, which may be dropped in the English presentation where customary usage indicates. The spelling of Gaelic place-names in the English version conforms to that on Ordnance Survey maps.

Notes to texts

Chapter 2 presents Maclagan MS 73. It is the second source in chronological order but as it has a greater number of features requiring annotation than the other sources it is given attention first. It is the least accessible as regards handwriting, general legibility, orthography and physical layout. Incidentally, it is unique among the sources in that the beginning of each stanza is indicated by a capital letter, a convention used in earlier manuscripts recording syllabic poetry.4 The other sources use the system of capitalising the initial letter of each line.

3 For example, "Happy the hare at morning for she cannot read the hunter's waking thoughts" from Dog Beneath the Skin by W.H.Auden with Christopher Isherwood (London, 1935).
Chapters 3, 4, 5 and 6 present in turn Turner MS 14, Maclagan MS 2, MacNicol MS and Eigg, the first printed example of the poem.

When an annotation has relevance to more than one source it is not repeated but is subsequently cross-referenced where pertinent.

Place-names.
Not all of the places mentioned in the poem are to be found on modern maps or available old ones. In some cases the names are elusive, perhaps because they are local ones no longer in use. Sometimes a term may be purely descriptive — connoting rather than denoting a location, to use W.F.H. Nicolaisen’s expression. The sources tend not to be systematic in the use of upper case word initials, so the presence or absence of these is of limited help in locating place-names on maps. Ambiguities of this sort are discussed in the relevant notes.

Indexing
Place-names and proper names occurring in all sources are listed in indices to be found at the end of the thesis; in addition cross-references are given to Rankin’s very useful paper on place-names in OnC.

CHAPTER 2

The Maclagan Manuscript 73

The Maclagan Collection of manuscripts in Glasgow University Library was put together by the Rev James Maclagan, 1728-1805. His surname is variously spelt according to different writers; the above form is used here as it is the one found most often in the Manuscript Collection; it is also given in Bàrdachd Ghàidhlig and Fasti Ecclesiae Scoticae. Chapter 4 of this thesis, which presents a manuscript written down by Maclagan, contains some details of his life.

Oran na Comhachaig is contained in the manuscript numbered 73 of the Collection and referred to here as M. It is not attributed to a particular scribe, but its appearance suggests that it was not written by any of the collectors to whose ranks Maclagan and MacNicol belonged. It consists of loose, tattered sheets about 6" across and 7" high. The writing is cramped and often hard to read. Each page containing OnC has been roughly divided into two by a vertical line; the verses are written horizontally across the left hand side of each such division and vertically up the right hand side, apparently to save space. Some typed notes accompanying the Collection suggest that the unidentified hand was very old-fashioned even at the time the manuscript was written. The writer offers both a prologue and an epilogue to the poem. These are given and transliterated in Robert Rankin's paper. The prologue contains some forceful remarks which astonishingly describe the poem as advocating a Calvinist attitude to life. In the epilogue the writer regrets being short of the time which would have permitted him to describe the hunter, his dog and weapons, as well as all the wild animals to be found in the hunter's locality. An 18th-century account of such matters would have been interesting. The writer calls the poem Song of Creag Ghuanach and dates the writing 1st July

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8 Orthographic features suggest a Perthshire provenance.
9 RR has a reproduction of such a page, Plate 4, facing p.125.
1755. This date is quite blotchy, which has led to an occasional misreport of 1725.\textsuperscript{11}

The blots and tears in the manuscript can be troublesome. In such instances I have consulted Jerom (sic) Stone's manuscripts (JS) in Edinburgh University Library,\textsuperscript{12} which appear to be copies of Maclagan MS 73.\textsuperscript{13} The differences between the manuscripts of Maclagan and Stone are small - chiefly orthographical; sometimes a particle is inserted apparently for the sake of sense and pronunciation but sometimes a word is changed or inserted. The likely inference is that Stone was already familiar with the poem when he used Maclagan's manuscript to make a copy for his collection. Sometimes, as he wrote, certain remembered words inadvertently superseded the text in front of him, and sometimes he had recourse to his memory when faced with problems of decipherability. However, the dissimilarities do not argue for regarding JS as a separate source. It is close enough to M for it to be a useful pattern in illuminating the latter's obscurities. I refer also to Robert Rankin's transcript (RR), made at a stage when the manuscript was perhaps a little less damaged than it is now, but I quote only JS where his text has been used in RR to restore gaps in M.\textsuperscript{14}

The writer of this manuscript uses various symbols, some of which seem to belong to the general conventions of writing in this period. There are others, however, whose function is not apparent. Any that seem significant are mentioned. M has a considerable number of archaic and dialectal forms as well as some unusual orthography. Some Scots spelling influence may be noted in the proliferation of double consonants, especially 'll', 'nn', 'rr'. (This was also a feature of the late 17th-century Fernaig Manuscript and occurs occasionally in The Shorter Catechism of 1659.) Intervocalic 'gh', 'dh', 'th', and 'bh' are often omitted. There is great variability with regard to lenited 's'. Different methods of representing it are

\textsuperscript{11} Donald Mackinnon, Descriptive Catalogue of Gaelic Manuscripts in the Advocates' Library in Edinburgh and elsewhere in Scotland (Edinburgh, 1912), p.308.
\textsuperscript{12} MS La 251 and MS La 251* entitled Craig Guanaich, A Poem upon hunting and the Beauties of Nature by a Forrester (sic).
\textsuperscript{13} My scrutiny of the JS MSS confirms this opinion, see RR, p.126.
\textsuperscript{14} id. pp.141-46.
used: 'hs', 'h', 'th' and occasionally 'sh', although this is usually reserved for an unlenited 's' preceding a slender vowel. The first, but not all, instances of such habits are noted. Inconsistent lenition of other consonants is also commented upon.

The spellings 'is' and 's,' are both used for the copula as well as for the abbreviated form of 'agus', which also occurs.

The orthography shows the tendency in Perthshire speech to knock off final syllables. This is a very persistent feature of the manuscript and therefore not all such instances are specified in the notes.
M Stanza 1

Mi mo hsuigh ar shibhri no mbeann
n, taobhs do chean Loch treig
chraig Ghuanich ma niagh a ntsealg
grianan ard a mbiodh no feagh

a. hsuigh transposition of leniting h common in this manuscript.
ar classical Gaelic form consistent in M.
shibhri probably sithbhruigh
Where initial s is followed by a slender vowel this writer generally interposes h (cf. English spelling).
no ma in whatever grammatical function is often spelt no in this manuscript, although na also occurs, apparently indiscriminately.
b. n, an a comma is often placed after a consonant, rather than an apostrophe before, to show contraction.
c. chraig dialectal spelling (Macbain).
Ghuanich this writer frequently puts the letter i in word endings where we would now find 'a', as Ghuanach, see M2.
ma niagh mun iadh
d. grianan ard I take this to be descriptive. It might be a Fenian allusion, especially as it follows upon the connotation of myth supplied by the word sithbhruigh. Grianan was traditionally the Fenian warriors' resting place in Donegal. There may also be a connection with the Cailleach Bheur, the supernatural creature who was also called the daughter of Grianan - the little sun, i.e. the winter sun.15

Mi mo shuidh' ar sithbhruigh nam beann 2(71+71)^2+4
An taobh sa de cheann Loch Tréig,
'Chreag Ghuanach mu'n iadh an t-sealg,
Grianan árd am biodh na féidh.

I'm sitting on the fairy knoll of the mountains
On this side of the head of Loch Treig,
Creag Ghuanach which the chase surrounds,
High, sunny abode where the deer would be.

Loch Tréig, Creag Ghuanach see Place-names Index

M Stanza 2

Craig mo chroidh a chraig ghuanich
craig n, dfuaridh tres gam arach
craig no ndamhf s, no naighn shiulach
craig egagich ular fheurich

b. dfuaridh  
d'fhuaradh lenition is not always indicated by 
this writer, especially where lenited f 
follows d or n. 

cf. M4a, M10a, M20b. 
cf. also Turner manuscript.

tres  
treis

gam  
dha m' (de m')

c. s,  

shiulach  

see M1a.

"aighean siubhlach" has become a conventional phrase which Dwelly quotes.

d. egagich  
eagagach full of crevices < 'eag' 

cf. Beinn Eagagach, Perthshire, translated "hill with little gaps" by James Kennedy.16

Hiding places may be implied.

ular  
i'ular a form of 'iùlmhor', from 'iùl', meaning 'guidance, landmark'.

The endrhyme at b:d appears to consist of long but non-
identical vowels. However, dialectally these vowels may be
very close, the a of arach being raised; see M27.

Creag mo chroidhe a' Chreag Ghuanach, 2(8^2+8^2) 24
Creag an d' fhuaradh tres dha m' àrach, 
Creag nan damh 's nan aighean siubhlach, 
Creag eagagach, i'ular, fheurach.

The rock of my heart is Creag Ghuanach, 
Rock where was gained part of my training, 
Rock of the stags and the fleeting hinds, 
Rock full of crevices, outstanding, grassy.

16 Kennedy, Folklore and Reminiscences, p.40.
M Stanza 3

Chunairc mi doll sheacham
no cajjn s, no fuajjn
thug mi ruaig bhar a ntraa
cha mi graun do nchreig ghuanich

a. Chunairc
   archaicchunkairc
   cf. Irish 'chonnairc' (Macbain).
doll
   use of double consonants noted in
   Introduction.
sheacham
   obsolete prepositional pronoun; for
   spelling see M1a.

b. cajjn
   cathan
fuajjn
   fuathan Use of letter j is notable; influence
   of Scots and suggestion of palatalisation;
   used similarly in the 17th-century Fernaig
   Manuscript compiled by Duncan MacRae.

c.a ntraa
   an t-sratha writer generally omits silent 's'
   and omits 'th' where these letters are used
   to separate two parallel uninflected
   vowels; cf. M12a raa, M3d graun
   but M3b palatalised cajjn/fuajjn.

d.cha
   chaidd
graun
   grathunn

Endrhyme at a:c and b:d.

Chunnairc mi a‘ dol seacham 2(7^2+8^2)^{1+3}, 2^4
Na cathan agus na fuathan,
Thug mi ruaig bhàrr an t-sratha,
Chaiddh mi grathunn do’n Chreig Ghuanach.

I saw going past me
The battles and the horrors,
I took flight from the valley,
I went a while to Creag Ghuanach.

Line b. See Chapter 1, p.2 for the 16th-century attitude to
raiding.
a. Chraig *a nfaoid*  
article understood.

b. *taoill*  
writer might be making this masculine (he does not generally use 'am' as the definite article before nouns with initial f although there is one exception at M50c), but in the light of the spelling habit noted M2b *an fhaghaid* is likely.

c. *no*  
no or n, represents final vowel of preceding word; see also M23b.

gallan  
the noun 'gallan' meaning 'straight, sturdy youth' could, in the genitive, function in apposition to *gaoirr*, i.e. 'of a sturdy (one of a) hound'. All sources which give this word spell it with double 'l' so this is not simply an example of the prevalence of double consonants found in this manuscript. Otherwise 'galan', 'tumult' i.e. 'baying', suits the context; this too is a noun so 'galain' would be envisaged, which is the emendation Watson makes. For the present it is given *gallain* as being the likely intention of the source. JS omits this word, which may be wise.

gaoirr  
gadhair

The metre, especially the endrhyme, is unusual. This may have contributed to JS's reading of "cabhaig" in line d, which might allow the metre to be explained as resembling deibhidhe guilbneach. However, in this manuscript the orthography clarifies that there is endrhyme at a:b:c. No aicill but internal rhyme [iaidh:mhiannach] and [guth:cur].

A' chreag sin mu'n iadh an fhaghaid,  
A' chreag sin mu'n iadh an fhaghaid,  
2(8^2+8^2)^{1/2+3}

Leam bu mhiannach bhith ga tadhail,  
'M ball bu bhinn' guth gallain gadhair  
Bhith 'cur na greigie 'n cumhaing.

That rock which the hunt encircles,  
I loved to be frequenting it,  
Where the voice of a sturdy hound was sweetest  
To be sending the herd into a confine.

Reference to the method of hunting deer using dogs to drive the quarry into a narrow place where they could easily be killed; cf. M9b. Hunting methods see Chapter 1, pp.9-10.
Is binn a hiolair ar a bruachu
s, binn a cuach s, binn a healla
ach s, binn no shin a m bla?ann
dheanidh a nlaoghan brec ballich

a. bruachu u represents old dat. pl. ending -aibh
c. bla?ann tear in manuscript; JS "blaoghan".

'S binn a h-iolair ar a bruachaibh, 2(8^2+8^2)^2^4
'S binn a cuach, is binn a h-eala,
Ach 's binne na sin am blaoghan
Dhe?anadh an laoghan breac ballach.

Sweet-voiced is her eagle on her slopes,
Sweet-voiced her cuckoo and her swan,
But sweeter than that is the sound
The little finely dappled fawn would make.

See Chapter 8, part A, 'The sweetest sounds' for discussion
of this motif.
M Stanza 6

Chraig shin a chraig ghanich
chraig dhuillach lattich chraobhach
tullich ar aluin fhiaghich
s, cian ghabh u uai no mhaorich

b. lattich
shlatach omission of lenited 's', cf. M3c.
d. u
this spelling of thu throughout manuscript;
but see also M43a.
uai no
'uai dh' rather than 'ó' or 'bho', is used
throughout the manuscript. The expository
version retains the word, standardising its
spelling, which is variable in the
manuscript, to uaidh. Here is the dialectal
uai dhn a' -comparable to current colloquial usage
in 'dhan an eilean'.

Although there is no aicill or internal rhyme in the first
couplet there is generally much alliteration.

A' chreag sin a Chreag Ghuanach,
A' chreag dhuilleach shlatach chraobhach,
Tulach àrd àlainn fhiadhach;
'S cian ghabh thu uaidhn a' mhaorach.

That is the rock, Creag Ghuanach,
The leafy, sylvan, wooded rock,
A high, handsome hillock full of deer;
You are far from shellfish.

The preference for land over sea is a motif giving rise to
other notable images in the poem, viz. M7, M50. See Chapter
1, part A, 'The choice of land'.
You were never listening
To the spouting of the whale,
But frequently you heard much
Of the belling of the wild stag.
M Stanza 8

Cha mhis a scaoill n, comunn
Bhi edir mi s, chreg ghuainich
ach a nteug gar uai cheill
S, goirid leam n, ceilli fuair shin

a. scaoill

b. Bhi

this manuscript contains several instances of
bhi, as in Irish.

c.
lack of sense suggests word missing. JS "gar
toirt o cheile".

First couplet has no aicill, although it may have been
present at one time if edir mi was given as 'eadram'.
In line d two words are taken to form endrhyme with line b.
There is a sense of disyllabic line endings even though line
c has a syllable in cheill not reported.

Cha mhis' a sgoil an comunn
Bhi eadar m’s 'Chreag Ghanach
Ach an t-eug gar toirt uaidh cheile,
'S goirid leam 'n céilidh fuair sinn.

It's not I who broke the accord
That was between me and Creag Ghuanach
But death taking us from each other,
Short to me seems the sojourn we had.

This stanza is in no other manuscript but is in Eigg.

Perhaps the verse order has gone astray here. The
introduction of the idea of death is quite sudden and
unusually direct. The speaker can hardly be already dead but
if the theme is a contemplation of the brevity of human life
it jars the tenor of the previous stanzas.
Chi mi lob nan damhf don
agus eleric no nsonn shi
?araon agus n, leitir dhu
?oibhin leam a niugh no chi.

a. lob probably lob 'a puddle', although this writer does sometimes use letter 'o' where 'u' would now be written (see M33a). However, both 'lub, a pool' (Maceachen), and 'lob' suggest a damp declivity.

don

b. eleric eileirg a deer's walk, where deer were driven to be shot; (Macbain, Watson). English forms are 'elrick', 'eldrig', 'eldrick'; see Chapter 1, part A, 'Hunting and deer'.

sonn referring in this poem to deer.

shi sith deer often known as fairy cattle; maybe also an echo of the bardic verse usage in which 'faery' or 'enchanted' was a term of praise.

c. dhu suprascript mark on vowel may indicate 'bh'.

c/d. Considerable tear in lower left corner. RR has "faraon" and "S aobhinn". The manuscript was presumably less damaged when Rankin transcribed it in the 1950s. cf. M15d aobhinn. JS reads "faraon" and "S ionmhuin". Form 'faraon' also occurs at M17c.

d. a niugh an diugh

Chi mi lob nan damh donn
Agus eileirg nan sonn sith,
Faraon agus an Leitir Dhubh
'S aoibhin leam an diugh na chi.

I see the hollow of the brown stags
And the elrick of the faery champions,
Together with the Leitir Dubh;
Joyful am I today at what I see.

Leitir Dhubh See Place-names Index.

This stanza is not in any other source although it bears similarity to v.50 in Eigg:

Chi mi Garbh-bheinn nan damh donn,
Agus Slat-bheinn nan tom sith,
Mar sin agus an Leitir Dhubh,
'S tric a rinn mi fuil 'na frith.

Line M9d recurs in M15, ML49, MN49, E48 and in other poems. This is discussed in Chapter 1, part B, 'Related poems'.
Chi mi dunan a nfeoir
agus garbh dhun mor no nscoir
coir chlari ar a thaobh
m, ball a, minic n, rabh n, tsaoi no dheann

a. dunan can be a plural form of 'dùn', but is more often a diminutive.

b. dhun mor place-names may be intended here and in line a, although no such names are shown on maps. These are probably descriptive or local terms for features beside Coire Claurigh. The maps give Stob Bàin as the nearest named hill to Coire Claurigh (line c) and dhun mor could refer to this or to some of the rocky outcrops between Coire Claurigh and Stob Bàin.

scoir sgór is Dwelly's preferred form but 'sgórr' is also found; the inclination in Lochaber and Perthshire to diphthongise is likely to produce a pronunciation of scoir which rhymes with dheann.\(^17\)

c. chlari current spelling Claurigh (<clàr) reveals the tendency noted in line b.

d. m, ball see M4c.

n, tsaoi refers to stag; t suggests slight intrusion of plosive which may occur passing from alveolar nasal 'n' to alveolar fricative 's'.

Chi mi dünan an fheoir
Agus garbh dhùn mòr nan sgòr,
Coire Chlàraidh air a thaobh
'M ball 'm minig 'n rabh 'n sàoi 'na dheann.

I see the hillock of grass
And the big rough heap of peaks,
Coire Claurigh at its side
Where the hero was often at speed.

Coire Claurigh is west of Lairig Leacach, the pass which runs from the south end of Loch Tréig north west to the Spean valley.

This stanza is not in any other source.

\(^{17}\) Tony Dilworth's suggestion.
M Stanza 11

Coir reuch s, coir dheirg
Coirach bu mhianach leam bi shealg
ta coir beg eill re,n, taobh
se coir nan laogh s, no ndamhf deirg

a. reuch dheirg  riabhach  cf. spelling graun for grathunn at M3d.
the lenition is not due to the writer's making
coir feminine as at line d we read se coir; and
although lenition is not always marked in this
manuscript it appears not to be indicated
superfluously and so may be taken as intended.
This could be a plural noun, meaning 'of red
deer' rather than an adjective; the spelling
deirg for 'dearg' occurs in line d as well as
M17b.

b. coirach  probably for plural 'coireachan' or else just a
slip for the singular.

End rhyme at a:b:d.

Coire riabhach 's coire dhearg
Coireach ' b' mhiannach leam bhith sealg;
Ta coir ' beag eile ri 'n taobh
'S e coir' nan laogh 's nan damh dearg.

Brindled corrie and corrie of red deer,
Corries I would like to be hunting;
There's another little corrie at their side,
It's the corrie of the calves and the red stags.

If the lenition in coir dheirg is a mistake then the term
might not be descriptive. Coire Riabhach and Coire Dearg may
be intended; these are common place-names but, as Rankin
points out, the two occur together in Glen Nevis, near
Polldubh. However, if all the epithets in the verse are
taken as purely descriptive an emphasis on the theme of
hunting emerges. In addition the use of two genitives in the
epithet of line d suggests description without designation.

This stanza is not in the other manuscripts but E47 is quite
similar.

16 R Place-names, p.118.
M Stanza 12

Chi mi coir raa uaim
chi mi chruach s, a bhen bhrec
chi mi sra hoishan no mfiann
chi mi ghrian ar meall no nlec

a. coir raa          Coire Ratha spelling cf. M3c
b. sra hoishan       Srath Oisein

Chi mi Coire Ratha uam
Chi mi 'Chruach is a' Bheinn Bhreac,
Chi mi Srath Oisein nam Fiann
Chi mi 'ghrian ar Meall nan Leac.

I see Coire Ratha below me,
I see Cruach and Beinn Bhreac,
I see Srath Ossian of the Fianna,
I see the sun on Meall nan Leac.

For all these places see Place-name Index.
For association with Cailleach of Beinn a' Bhric see Chapter 1, pp.6-7.
M Stanza 13

Beir mo hsori gu bac no ncraobh
s, do dha th?bh beallich no nscoirr
gus an edir bheallich mhoir
m, ball nach cliunamid gloir no ngall

a. hsori  shoraidh more usually with double r in this
    manuscript; cf. M14, M16.
b. th?bh  smudge; JS reads "thaobh" which suits meaning
    and has assonance with craobh.
d. m, ball  see M4c.
gloir  given the spellings scoirr and mhoir above
    this may be taken as singular, glòr

Rhyme between scoirr and gall, see M10

Beir mo shoraidh gu Bac nan Craobh
'S do dha th?obh Bealach nan Sgór,
Gus an Eadar-bhealaich mhoir
'M ball nach cliunneamaid glòr nan Gall.

Bring my greeting to Bac nan Craobh
And to the two sides of Bealach nan Sgór,
To the great Eadar-bhealaich
Where we used not to hear the speech of Lowlanders.

Bac nan Craobh, Bealach nan Sgór - These are both situated
south west of Ben Alder, between Loch Ossian and Loch Ericht.
In this area are several passes which must have seen
considerable traffic in the 16th century; edir bheallich
presumably refers to one of these although there is nothing
so marked on available maps. Rankin's suggestion that it is
the pass southwest of Meall a' Bhealaich and southeast of
Coire a' Bhealaich seems a good one.19 The OS gives no name
to this pass, which lies north of Bealach nan Sgór mentioned
in line a.

gloir nan gall  Gaelic speakers' resentment of Lowlanders
moving into the Highlands is mentioned in Chapter 1, part A,
'Hunting and Deer'. There is also a parallel with the Fenian
conflict between secular and sacred, in which the heroes
object to the disruption of their happy life style by the
arrival of the church builders (e.g. Acallamh na Senórach);
see Chapter 8, part A, 'The Fenian connection'.

This stanza is found in no other source.

19 R Place-names, p.120.
M Stanza 14

Beir sorri gu binn allair uaim
uai s,i, fuair urram na mbeann
dha thaobh loch ericht a nfeigh
uai s mianach leam fein bi ann

a. sorri   soraidh
   binn       but M12b bhen.
   binn allair Ben Alder.
   Watson gives derivation "alldhobhar, rock
   water" from 'all', a steep rock.²⁰

b. loch ericht spelling coincides with English form,
suggesting a different pronunciation from
that indicated by Dwelly's spelling, "Loch
Eireachd".

²⁰ W.J.Watson, History of the Celtic Place-names of Scotland
(Edinburgh, 1926), p.455.
M Stanza 15

Chi mi coir fhinn no noss
n, taobh bhos do coir mhile
scoirrchoinich na nagh sheang
s, aoibhin leam a niugh no chi

a. no noss

Although there are names associated with hunting in the neighbourhood of Loch Ericht, there is no Coire Phinn on the OS map.

b. mhile

Possibly for genitive of 'meall', 'a mound' or genitive of 'milich', 'a soldier'; but given the reference to deer, it is perhaps more likely to be mhll' genitive of "miol", which can mean "stag" as well as "beast" or "hare" (Dinneen); e is redundant. Cf. ML49.

c. scoirrchoinich

JS gives "S coire Choinnich" but this is inconsistent as for scoirr occurring at M10b and M13b he offers "scaoir". Neither Rankin nor I have found a Coire Choinnich. Rankin suggests Sgùrr Chòinnich Mòr and Sgùrr Chòinnich Beag which are east of Ben Nevis and west of Coire Ratha.²¹ However, scoirr/scoir appears to be this writer's spelling of 'sgór' see M10, M13 and the proper name Choinnich may be meant rather than 'Chòinnich' meaning 'moss'. The focus has been (M13/14) on an area between Loch Ossian and Loch Ericht and there is indeed a Sgór Chòinnich here, see Place-names Index. Moreover, it is beside Bealach nan Sgór, mentioned at M13.

Chi mi Coir' Phinn nan os
An taobh bhos de choir' a' mhil,
Sgór Chòinnich nan agh seang,
'S aoibhinn leam an-diugh na chi.

I see Coire Phinn of the deer
On this side of the stag's corrie,
Sgór Chòinnich of the slender hinds,
Joyful am I today at what I see.

Line d occurred also in M9.

²¹ R Place-names, p.119.
M Stanza 16

Thoir mo horri chum no cloich
m, ball ain, faic me bhos agus hall
gu huisc lavir no nlaogh
buim no naigh maol s, no mang

a. *no cloich* this may refer to an anonymous stone or rock; equally it might be Beinn na Cloiche, south west of Loch Tréig, see note below.
b. *ain,* the dot over the letter i might perhaps be accidental; RR omits it and gives "a n, ".

This could be *am* with first stroke of letter m poorly marked.
c. *huisc lavir* h-Uisge Labhair my reading lavir shows Scots influence; however, RR reads "labir".

Later in the manuscript this is spelt uisg, see M30, although the dropping of the final syllable is consistent.
d. *buim* obsolete form of 'muime' (Dwelly), and Irish (Macbain).

Alliteration in second couplet.

Thoir mo shoraidh chum na Cloich’
M ball am faic mi bhos is thall
Gu h-Uisge Labhair nan laogh
Buime nan agh maol ’s nam mang.

Take my greeting to Beinn na Cloich’
Where I see both this and the far side,
As far as Uisge Labhair of the calves,
Nurse of the hornless hinds and fawns.

From Beinn na Cloiche, which is south of Creag Ghuanach and Abhainn Rath and slightly north west of Beinn a' Bhric, it may well be possible to see across Loch Ossian to Uisge Labhair as there are no large hills in the line of vision; (cf. M12).

Uisge Labhair rises near Ben Alder and joins the River Ossian.

Not in the other manuscripts, but there is a similar stanza at E52 where, however, the places are differently reported.

vv. 14-16 have continuity of theme of hills, deer and place-names in a locality specifically associated with hunting. Here is also an anthropomorphic touch, with the river helping to provide a good environment for the growth of the deer.
Chi mi bein Ebhais ard
agus a nCarn deirg no bunn
uai mullach chi mi faraon
monn facoin agus muirr

a. bein yet another spelling of beinn see M14.
I leave this line as it stands although there may be a word missing; other sources give 'gu h-àrd.
d. monn this could simply be an example of the doubling of consonants noted earlier, see p.23, or it might indicate a dialectal pronunciation.
faoin usually 'lonely' or 'empty', but AM and BG suggest "sloping", for which 'fàn' might generally be expected.22 However, in Duncan Bàn Macintyre's 'Òran Coire a' Cheathaich' we find:
Gheibhte daonnan mu d' ghlacaibh faoine
Na h-aighean maola, na laoigh 's na maing.
(The hornless, young hinds, the calves and fawns / were ever found round thy sloping folds).23

Chi mi Beinn Eabhais árd (6\(^{+}+7\)^{+})+(7\(^{+}+6\)^{+})^{2+4}
Agus an Càrn Dearg 'na bun;
Uaidh 'mullach chi mi faraon
Monadh facoin agus muir.

I see mighty Ben Nevis
And Carn Dearg at its foot;
From its top I see together
Sloping moor and sea.

In Place-names Index see under Nevis and Dearg.

The first couplet has the speaker imagining himself somewhere with a view up to Ben Nevis and then in the second he is surveying the scene from Ben Nevis.

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M Stanza 18

Ni n fagum mhaolchean deirg ? dhiagh
buim a nfeigh ni n, ceoll
coir eilt agus a neiliric chaoll
buim na nlaogh agus na nbo

a. Ni n fagum Nín fágaim the synthetic verb form is preceded
mhaolchean deirg by the negative particle 'nin', which is also
'mhaolchean dearg' used in the Book of the Dean of Lismore.24

'mhaolchean dearg' may be most likely; the
spelling deirg is often used by this writer
for 'dearg', see M11d, M17b. JS gives
"Maolchean dearg". The Macdonald Collection
(the only other location of this stanza) has
"Mhaol Cheann-dearg". 'Cheann' also takes
feminine form in 'a' Cheannmhór' - 'Kenmore'.

Nín fágaim 'Mhaol-cheann Dearg am dhéidh,
Buim 'an fhéidh ag na an ceol;
Coir' Éild' agus an eileirg chaol,
Buim' nan laogh agus nam bó.

I leave not Maol-cheann Dearg behind me,
Nurse of the deer which makes music;
Coire Eilde and the narrow elrick,
Nurse of the calves and of the fawns.

'Maol' and 'meall' in an unstressed position may be
confused. There is a Meall Cian Dearg just to the west of
Loch Tréig which Rankin takes to be the one in question
here.25 However it is quite likely that the source of this
manuscript was unfamiliar with Lochaber and renderings of
some of the place-names may be awry. Perhaps there is a link
(of a mnemonic sort) with similarly sounding Carn Dearg in
the previous stanza.

coir eilt I have found no Coire Eilde on modern maps
although there are plenty of 'Eilde' names not far from Creag
Ghanach, presumably all stemming from Allt Eilde, which
flows into Abhainn Rath at Lub Eilde. There is also Beinn
Eilde near Loch Ericht (M14).
Line a presumably means 'I will not leave out/neglect...'
This stanza occurs in no other source. Line d is similar to
line d of M16.

24 Brendan Ó Buachalla, 'Ni and cha in Ulster Irish', Éiriú, vol.28
M Stanza 19

Dermad cha dean mi m,rann
se?(le?) ghlinn s, a bheann bheag
nois uai dubhairt mi sibh gu leir
gabhaidh mi fein dibh mo chedd

a. m, for 'ann mo'
b. illegible word at beginning. JS reads "Air Re", probably a reduced form of 'air do'.
d. chedd chead

Dearmad cha deán mi 'm rann
Air do ghlinn-sa, a Bheann Bheag
Nois uaidh 'dubhairt mi sibh gu léir
Gabhaidh mi féin dibh mo chead.

I will not be neglectful in my verse
Of your glens, O Ben Bheag
Now since I have named you all
I'll take my own farewell of you.

This stanza is found in Eigg with the couplets transposed. The Maclagan MS 2 and the MacNicol MS have only the second couplet, in a slightly altered form.

See Place-names Index for Beinn Bheag. The farewell to beloved places begun in M13 is continued and the same metre is used throughout these stanzas. The special significance of naming places is discussed in Chapter 8, part A, 'Place-naming'; see also Chapter 7, p.306.
M Stanza 20

An cedd is dorr rinnis riamh
cedd do nfiagh gan rabh mi thoí?
?ha taoill mi cuideacht a mp?itt
gu la bhra cha leig mi coinn

a. dorr
dorra
rinnis
rinn eas old s-preterite, 1st singular past
indicative active.
b. thoí?
ending very faint. JS reads "thoil".
c. ?ha
cha JS reads "cho".
taoill
tadhail
mp?itt
the first vowel is not clear but the other
letters are. JS reads "poitt"; 'póit(e)' would
give no aicill in the second couplet; such a
lack has been encountered before, cf. M4.
However, perhaps this is pàit a form of 'pàthadh',
which has the variants 'pàiteach/paigneach'
(Dwelly, Macalpine) a thirst-quenching, a place
to drink, cf. M9a. This would provide aicill.

Initial vowel probably disappears in recitation.

'N cead as dorra rinnas riamh,
Cead do'n fhiaidh 'g an rabh mo thoil;
Cha tadhail mi cuideachd am pàit,
Gu là bhràth cha leig mi coín.

The hardest farewell I ever made
Was farewell to the deer I took delight in;
I won't visit the troop at their watercourse
Nor till doomsday let slip the hounds.

There is ambiguity in line c which could refer to humans at
drink 'I won't visit company in drinking' as well to deer.
The line occurs in no other source.
M Stanza 21

Eilitt bhirchin bharchin bhallich
our fhiaghich iongach ard
le hogan birach bionach
cronanich ceann reuch derg

a. bhirchin  compound with 'ceann' bhiorcheann
   bharchin  similarly bhàrrcheann
b. our       odhar
  c. hogan    h-ugan cf. spelling smoir for smùr M22b.
   birach    JS "biorach".
   bionach   JS "binneach"; referring to the sharp
             profile of the head; the translation
             'antlered' may best be reserved for males.
   d. reuch   riabhach also M11a.

Much alliteration and a lack of aicill; for comments on
latter see Chapter 7, 'Aicill'. The metre, like a kind of
Séadna, $2(8^2+7^1)2^4$, minus a syllable in line c, has not been
used in this source before.

Eilid bhiorcheann, bhàrrcheann, bhallach, $2(8^2+7^1)+(7^2+7^1)2^4$
Odhar, fhiadhach, iongach, àrd
Le h-ugan biorach, binneach,
Crònach, ceann-riabhach, dearg.

Point-headed, high-headed, dappled hind,
Dusky, untamed, strong-hooved, proud,
With her clear-cut, high-topped neck,
Belling, with brindled head and red.
Is aignment hsioblas i n, raon
codla cha nfiar i san smoir
bansa no plaiddag re taobh
barr n frich ghaganich uir

a. hsioblas
b. cha nfiar

shiubhlas
codla

old form of 'cadal' cf. Irish 'codladh'
JS reads "cho niarr". Certainly chan iarr seems
more likely than 'chan fhicr', although
nowhere in M is there any comparable
introduction of a superfluous 'f'. Moreover,
at M50b iarraidh is spelt iarrid. In the light of
the dialectal rhymes discussed at M27 neither
iarr nor 'fhicr' offers rhyme with raon. I
suspect that this is a mistake and that the
text has shifted; other sources give 'dèan'.
The writer's frequent omission of leniting
'h' is noted at M2b/M4a.

No aicill in first couplet.
Endrhyne at a:c, b:d.

'S aigeantach shiubhlas i 'n raon,
Codla chan iarr i 'san smùr,
B'annsa na plaideag ri taobh
Bàrr an fhraoich ghaganaich ùir.

Spiritedly she travels the uplands,
She does not seek sleep near the cinders,
To a blanket at her side she prefers
The top of fresh knotty heather.

Sleeping outdoors as compared to sleeping in a bed is a
recurring poetic motif, see Chapter 8, part B, 'Elegy and
Hunting'. Also cf. M9, 10 where deer were referred to as
heroes.
M Stanza 23

Ni bhuill ceillie aic ach n, damf s, e a, buim n, feur agus cremh mathair n, laoigh bhailie bhric mhir bean a nfir mhall rascibh ghlain

a. Ni bhuill Irish/Early Modern Sc.Gaelic; modern 'chan eil'.
   ceillie céile cf. M8.
b. n, see note M4c

No aicill in first couplet but internal rhyme [céile:feur]. The second couplet has an unusual rhyme pattern where there is aicill with another rhyme tied in inversely: bhailie bhric mhir : fir mhall rascibh. Endrhyme at a:b:d.

Ni bhuill céile aic' ach an damh (8^1+8^1)+(8^1+7^1)^1+2+4
'Se a buime feur agus creamh
Mathair an laoigh bhailiaich bhric mhir
Bean an fhir mhall-rasgaibh ghlain.

She has no spouse but the stag,
Grass and garlic are her nurse,
The mother of the frisky, dappled, freckled fawn
Wife of the pure husband with limpid eyes.

More alliteration here in praise of the deer cf. M21
The slight personification of deer introduced in M22 is continued in the image of grass and garlic as nurse.
Is glann a loinner n, damf donn
thiocfa uaidh dhairr nam beann
macan no heilt re tom
nach do chrom fui speinshe a cheann

Internal rhyme [éilde: speinns]
Endrhyme at a:c, b:d.

Pure is the pedigree of the brown stag
Who comes down from the rut of the hills,
Little son of the hind by the hillock,
Who never bowed his head under an alcove.

The preference for open air sleep introduced at M22 is emphasised by reference to the deer’s honour.
Is iomad cem a rin mi riamh
shealg a nfeigh agus no hearb
cha nfaic mi dath ar bian
ach glass s, our s, derg

Internal rhyme [ceum:fhéidh] and [dath:glas]
Endrhyme at a:c and b:d but no aicill.

The word order must, of course, stand as given but the metre might have had greater fluency if line c read cha nfaic mi ar bian dath. Indeed, this may originally have been the case, as such a phrase would be typical of Fenian poetry, which has numerous echoes in OnC. Perhaps somewhere in transmission that word order was thought strange and altered to what we find here, thus losing aicill between dath and glass. It will be noticed in the other sources containing this stanza that glass is exchanged for 'riabhach', giving loose aicill with bian.

'S iomadh ceum a rinn mi riamh (7^1+7^1)+(6^1+6^1)^{1+3,2+4}
'Sealg an fhéidh agus na h-earb'
Chan fhaic mi dath air bian
Ach glas is odhar is dearn.

I have always taken many steps
Hunting the deer and the roe,
I won't see any colour on a hide
But grey and dun and red.

The speaker continues his eulogy of deer, claiming to be oblivious of any other animals he might encounter.
M Stanza 26

An fads a bhim beo
agus n, deo an mo chorp
bithidh mi buachallicht nfeigh
sud a mspre gan rabh mo thoill

a. bhim present tense; cf. modern Irish 'bim'.
d. a mspre an spreidh

An fad's a bhim beò
(6^1+7^1)+(7^1+7)^2+4
Agus an deò an mo chorp
Bidh mi buachailleachd an fhéidh,
Siud an spreidh 'gan rabh mo thoil.

As long as I live
With breath in my body
I shall be tending the deer,
That's the flock that was my joy.

This stanza exists in no other manuscript but is in Eigg.

26 'bim' also occurs in the literary language and is called the customary present by Eleanor Knott, Tadhg Dall Ó Huiginn, ITS vol.22 (London, 1922), p.lxxvi.
Buachailleachd dhubhach dherich
s, mithich dhamh tfagaill a taonar
ma ta u sheall gu suthach
seall eill gu dubhach derich

a. dhuich  dhubhach
b. dhamh  classical form of 'dhomh'
c. suthach  subhach
    sheall  seal inconsistent spelling, see next line.
d. eill  eile

Aicill seems to be intended between dherich and tfagaill;
cf. rànan:Meuran at E22, with regard to which Watson notes
that "in Lochaber Gaelic 'bàn' (pronounced bèan) rhymes with
'dèan'."²⁷ So the first vowel of tfagaill is raised [ É : ] At
the same time derich has endrhyme with aonar in which
similarity of register is involved. Evidence of such
pronunciation is provided by the Shorter Catechism of 1659.
This uses various spellings of the vowel sound in the word
'Aon', including 'ao' 'ei' and 'é'.²⁸

Buachailleachd dhubhach, dheurach, ²(7²+8²)²⁺²⁺
'S mithich dhamh t' fhágail ad' aonar
Ma ta thu seal gu subhach,
Seal eile gu dubhach, deurach.

Sad and tearful herding,
It's time for me to leave you on your own
If you are happy for a while,
Another while you are sad and tearful.

This stanza exists in no other source.
The phraseology is slightly strained; line a follows on from
the previous stanza as a reflection on the herding of deer,
but then the syntax changes to an address to this favourite
pursuit. In general meaning it relates to the lament,
starting at M33, that the speaker has grown too old for the
hunt. However, some textual shift may have occurred.
The second couplet is reminiscent of a proverb.
See Chapter 8, p.351 for further discussion.

²⁷ BG, p.336.
Chaoi cha dean mi scallas
ollie mi ? treig mo thean shaith
buinn glann no m fuaran fallain
buim a nfeigh ni n, langann

a. Chaoi
    a chaoidh
    scallas sgallais
b. ollie mi Ólaidh mi but perhaps 'òlain' at one time.
    ? a blot here, a seems likely.
    shaith rare instance of lenited s so spelt in this manuscript.
c. buinn although 'buinne' is feminine in most Scottish
    Gaelic dictionaries (Dwelly, Maclennan, Thomson) it is masculine in Irish (and
    Macalpine) and in much traditional verse; Neil Ross gives masculine and Watson gives both
    genders.\textsuperscript{29}
d. langann JS reads "lan gann" which suggests 'làn gann'.
    But this may be another example of doubling
    consonants as in M16, M17; langan makes sense.

A lack of aicill but internal rhyme [dean:treig] and
[buinn:buim'].
Endrhyne at a:c, b:d.

A chaoidh cha deàn mi sgallais,
Ólaidh mi á Tréig mo theann-shàth,
Buinne glan nam fuaran fallain
Buim' an fhéidh a n an langan.

I will never be disdainful,
I will drink my fill from Treig,
Pure flow of the wholesome springs,
Nurse of the deer that roars.

Deer are still focal and there is a reintroduction of the
place-name Tréig which has not been specified since M1. Water
was also personified as a nurse at M16 and M18.

\textsuperscript{29} Neil Ross, Heroic Poetry from the Book of the Dean of Lismore
M Stanza 29

Is milis mo dheoch e fuaran
? mi ga ibh daonan
? ga deatach no ruar
? glan bric no mfaoin ghleann

The bottom left corner is torn and was so in the 1950s when Rankin made his transcript. Text restored from JS.

a. e suggests á
b. ? JS reads "is".
   ibh originally ibhe which is more likely pronunciation before following consonant.
c. ? JS "deoch".
   ga gun classical spelling gan used in this manuscript, e.g. M30a.
   ruar JS gives the same; apparently a form like ruadhradh from 'ruadh', cf. 'ruadhan'; Dwelly gives: "bùrn glan gun ruadhan, clear water without a brown tinge".
d. ? JS "uisge".

No aicill but endrhyme at a:c, b:d -faoín ghleann being a compound.

'S milis mo dheoch á fuaran 2(7²+7²)₁³,²¹⁴
Is mi ga ibhe daonnan,
Deoch gun deatach no ruadhradh,
Uisge glan bric nam faoinghleann

Sweet is my drink from its spring
And I qua ff it habitually,
A drink without cloudiness or sediment,
Pure trout water of the sloping glens.

This stanza occurs in no other source.
M Stanza 30

Buan n, comun gan bhrit
bhi edir mi agus an tuisg
uisg nam fuar bheann gan mhisg
mis ga oll gan tuirse

a. bhrit  maybe bhristeadh or a loan word from 'breach';
bhris  occurs at M45.
Much dropping of final syllables.

Endrhyme at a:c and b:d.

Buan an comunn gun bhristeadh
Bh' eadar mi agus an t-uisge,
Uisge nam fuar bheann gun mhisge,
Mise ga òl gun tuirse.

Long is the unbroken society
That has been between me and the water,
Water of the cold hills without intoxication,
I'ld be drinking it without sorrow.

This stanza is in no other manuscript but is in Eigg.
M Stanza 31

Chuallis taogh gach ceoil
guth a Ghairm mhoir a teacht
damh shiomanich le gleann
miolchoinn ann agu ass

a. chuallis chualas old s-preterite, 1st person singular.
taogh presumably taghadh cf. M4b and M20c.
ceoil this form of 'ciúil' is indicated by all sources giving a genitive here, i.e. also ML34 and MN34.

b. Ghairm 'gairm' being feminine does not accord with the article or the genitive adjective mhoir so perhaps gadhair is meant; the 'm' may be a writing error, jumping ahead to the next letter.

c. shiomanich Armstrong gives "siomanach, like a rope", so 'twisting/weaving'.

Chualas taghadh gach ceoil, 2(6¹+6¹)²⁻⁴
Guth a' ghadhair mhóir a' teachd,
Damh a' siomanach le gleann,
Miolchoinn ann agus ás.

I heard the best of all music,
The sound of the great hound approaching,
A stag weaving down a glen,
Hounds darting about for a grip on him.

Line d is translated rather freely for clarity. Mackechnie gives this as "dogs attacking him and escaping", suiting the first element of ann agus ás but not quite explaining the second.³⁰ The principal subject of the couplet c/d is damh to which ás, as well as ann, relates. The picture presented is of two hunting dogs pursuing and attacking the stag; this is described in Chapter 1, part A, 'Hunting and Deer'. The translation given by Professor William Gillies in an essay on Sorley Maclean describes the action, "a stag jinking down a glen, with hounds at his throat and haunches".³¹ Derick Thomson gives "Hounds darting in and back".³² Another poetic reference to the same procedure is found in Duncan Bàn Macintyre's Moladh Beinn Dobhrain.³³

³³ "'S na cuileanan gu fulgasgach / Gan cumail air na muinealaibh.
And the whelps tossing to and fro, / are holding them by the necks". Orain Donnchaidh Bhàin, ed. and trans. by Angus Macleod (Edinburgh, 1978) hereafter ODB, lines 3312-13.
Inich ort a thru
is romhaith do luth leis a gheann
shean mhad gad chuir gu heug
s, se meoir dheg ar do cheann

a. Inich probably eineach although from Armstrong Dwelly quotes "ineach".
thru meaning "a wretch" in Maclennnan, "face or fall"
(obsolete) in Dwelly and "a condemned man" in Dinneen, which seems the more likely sense.
b. do luth possibly an old preterite but I find no such verb so take it for a noun.
gheann presumably ghleann intended.
c. mhad mhadadh

Eineach ort, a thrù,
Is ro mhath do lùth leis a' ghleann,
Sean mhadadh gad chur gu h-eug
Is sè meòir dheug ar do cheann.

Honour be with you, doomed one,
Very good is your strength down the glen,
An old hound brings you to death
When you've sixteen tines on your head.

Line d refers to antlers.
Is moladich bhi siobhall bheann
gan bhogh gan sreang gan chu
gan urad no soighd bhi ann
s, gan ?aoc ?an aig an tsuill

a. moladich    muladach
    siobhall    cf. spelling M22 hsioblas.
b. sreang       i.e. bowstring.
d.              very blotchy. JS gives "S gun radharc teann
                air an t-suill"; "teann" makes sense, has
                aicill with ann.

Endrhyyme at a:c, b:d

Is muladach bhith 'siubhal bheann 2(7^1+7^1)^{1+3/2+4}
Gun bhogha, gun sreang, gun chò,
Gun uiread na saighd' bhith ann
'S gun radharc teann aig an t-sùil.

It's sad to traverse mountains
Without bow or string, without dog,
Without as much as an arrow there
And without keen sight in the eye.
M Stanza 34

Mis's, tus a ghaoir bhain
bha sin gra?n re tennall
uaidh scuir sin dhe ar tc bhan (is da? written above)
s, beg ar groich do noilann

b. gra?n presumably graun, cf. M3.
tennall RR reads "cennall" and JS "ceannail"; however what looks at first like a letter c has actually an upstroke which might be mistaken for a comma in the line above.
c. end of line is very obscure; the second of the two words written above is blotched. JS reads "O sguir shin do dhearta bhan is dan". RR has "uaith scuir sin dhe ar tabhann is dann" which is a possibility; tabhann in the original sense of hunting, pursuit (Dinneen, Ó Dónaill) suits the context of the previous stanzas. The hound is too old for the chase but might still be able to bark.
d. oilann probably for ealdhain old age deprives the man and dog of the conviviality connected with the chase.

The metre is reminiscent of deibhidhe where in each couplet there is rhyme between the end words, with the second of these having a syllable more than the first.
Internal rhyme [ghadhair:grathunn] and [tabhann:ealdhain]. No aicill.

Mis' is tus', a ghahair bhain,
Bha sinn grathunn ri tional;
Uaidh sguir sinn dheth ar tabhann 's dàn
'S beag ar gnothach do'n ealdhain

You and I, O white hound
We were for a while engaged in assembling;
Since we ceased our hunting and poetry
Our concern with minstrelsy has been small.

Since the hunter and hound have grown too old for the chase they also miss the associated conviviality, the post-hunt festivities. Line b refers to the rendezvous for the hunt.
M Stanza 35

Hug a choill dhin a nerb
hug ?, tard dhin an fiagh
cha neill coir againn a laoich
uai lui a nai? oirn gu leir

b. ?, blotchy but an seems likely. JS agrees.

b. laoich literally 'hero/champion'; the speaker is
d. addressing the dog with affection and in English
perhaps 'friend' suits better.
There are examples in this manuscript of 'ch'
written where one might now expect 'gh' or 'dh';
see M48, M50. However, at M11 laogh occurs,
so it is reasonable to suppose that the writer
is not using laoich for 'laoigh'.

c. lui luigh a form of 'laigh'.
d. nai? JS "an Aois".

The lack of endrhyme is most unusual- an fiagh may be in
eror for 'na féidh'. There is also some inconsistency of the
article as M50 gives am fiaghich.

Thug a' choille dhinn an earbh, (7^3+6^3)+(7^3+7^3)
Thug an t-àrd dhinn am fiadh,
Chan eil còrr againn, a laoich,
Uaidh luigh an aois oirnn gu léir.

The wood has taken the roe from us,
The summit has taken the deer from us
There is nothing left for us, friend,
Since age has overtaken us entirely.
Age, I am not pleased with you,
I do not know how to avoid you;
You bow down the upright man
Who is gallant and handsome.
Girachi tu ar ? shaoghall  
agus caolachi a chossi  
fagi tu a chean gan deidich  
is ni u eadin a chassa  

a. ?  single blotched letter. a seems likely which is what JS reads.  
b. chossi  cf. Irish 'cosa'. It looks as if this was originally 'chasa(n)' to rhyme with chasadh and the transmission has introduced the apparently more classical chosa.  
d. eadin  eudann this form rather than 'aodann' clearly required for rhyme.  

Giorraichidh tu ar a shaoghal  
Agus caolaichidh a chosa,  
Fàgaidh tu a cheann gun deudach  
Is ni thu eudann a chasadh.  

You shorten his life for him  
And you shrivel his legs,  
You leave his head without teeth  
And make his face wrinkled.
Aois chass edin dhremmi
thremhuill our etich
cuim n, legin dh? s, tu d, lobar
mo bhogh thoir? ar egin

a. edin
dhremmi
cf. M37d eadin.
dhreamaidh "dreamadh, grinning, snarling".

b. thremhuill
shream-shuíl "blear-eye"; th yet another way for
this writer to show a lenited 's';
cf. hs sh h in earlier stanzas. JS makes
this adjectival "Shream-shuileach";
however, a vocative compound noun may be
intended, apposite to Aois.
etich
JS "eitich" éitigh in Dwelly although AM
(p.18) queries this form.
c. dh?
dhream-shuíl, odhar, éitigh,
hard to decipher; JS reads "duit".
d. thoir?
mo bhogh thoir? ar egin;
blot obscuring letter, presumably 't'.

A aos chas-eudainn dhreamaidh,
(7^2+7^2)+(8^2+7)^2+4
A shream-shuíl, odhar, éitigh,
C'uime 'n leiginn duit 's tu 'd lobar
Mo bhogha thoir air eiginn?

Age with twisted face, grimacing,
Rheumy-eye, sallow, dreadful,
Why should I let you, you vile wretch,
Take my bow by force?

lobhar is used as a term of contempt; a literal translation
might suggest ostracisation which is inappropriate here.
M Stanza 39

Bansa mo bhogh a thasci
s, gan fhaicin gu la dili
na thusa aois ga ghlaca
s, mi fein ar bhattu dirach

a. thasci  thasgadh
b. bhattu  final -u represents dative plural ending -aibh

Endrhyrne at a:c, b:d.

B' annsa mo bhogh' a thasgadh 2(7^2+7^2)^1+3,2+4
'S gun fhaicinn gu là dile
Na thusa, aois, ga ghlacadh
'S mi fein ar bhataibh direach.

I'd prefer to put away my bow
And not see it until doomsday,
Than that you, old age, should seize it
While I'm standing with sticks.

This stanza occurs in no other source.
M Stanza 40

Is iomad neach a b'fhearr no uсс
dfaig mi gu tuirsach anfan
dhaoich mi as a hessu
bha no lescich menmnich

a. uсс  thusa
c. dhaoich dhfhaobhaich
   a hessu a sheasamh  cf. M39 -u to show dative ending -aibh
d. lescich fhleasgach

'S iomad neach a b'fhearr na thusa  \((8^2+7^2)+(7^2+7^2)^{\frac{1}{2}}\)
Dh'fhâg mi gu tuirseach, anfhann,
Dh'fhaobhaich mi ás a sheasamh
A bha 'na fhleasgach meanmnach.

Many a one better than you
Have I left sad and weak,
Whom I plundered as he stood,
Who had been a spirited young man.

There is a change of speaker since the previous stanza. This
is the reply of old age.
M Stanza 41

Chuachag bhochd no sroin
noht is bronich do lebue
ma bha u re lin dondill
is beg iongnad ge trom le taignidh

a. chuachag line b confirms this is a vocative.
b. noht nochd
lebue leabaith

c. something seems to be missing. JS has "ann" after u which improves the sense.
dondill Donndail is a form of Donngail, which may be represented Donnail in English; see Proper Names Index. In this manuscript Domhnall is written Donill, see M49 and M51.

Internal rhyme [bhochd:nochd] and aicill in first couplet. dondill and trom le give tolerable aicill.

A chomhachag bhochd na Sroïne
A nochd is brônach do leabaith;
Ma bha thu ann ri linn Donngail
'S beag iongnadh ge trom leat t'aigne.

O poor owl of Strone
Sad is your bed tonight;
If you were around in the days of Donnail
It's small wonder your spirit feels heavy.

Strone, see Sron in Place-name index.
Donnail, see Proper Names Index.

All other sources give this stanza as their first; see Chapter 7, 'M's verse order', for further discussion.

A new voice speaks here to introduce the survivor motif; the theme of an aged individual involved in dialogue to report past events is discussed in Chapter 8, 'Dialogue in Celtic poetry'.
M Stanza 42

Is comhaois mi do ndarraig
bha no failan an s, a choinich
s, iomad shian chuir u tharad
eoin bhig no mala gruamich

a. ndarraig probably not a diminutive; "darag" as 'oak
tree' is given in Cameron's Gaelic Names of
Plants and in Dieckhoff.
c. shian likely to be followed by a.

Although there is endryhme at a:c there is none at b:d, which
is most unusual.

Is comhaois mi do'n daraig
Bha 'na faillean anns a' chòinnich.
'S iomad sian a chuir thu tharad,
Èòin bhig na mala gruamaich.

I am of an age with the oak
That was a young shoot in the moss.
Many a storm have you put past you,
Little bird of the gloomy eyebrow.

The first couplet is the owl's response to the address in the
last stanza and then the previous speaker resumes. The owl
compares her age to that of an oak tree. The old system of
calculating dates by reference to the lives of animals or the
size of trees is discussed in Chapter 8, part A, 'The oldest
animals'.

Although this stanza occurs in all sources M alone includes
line d in this position. Other sources give line d in a verse
M does not record; see Chapter 7, p.314.
Nois uai ta tu aod
dean, s, taosna ris a, ntsagart
inish dhuin gan bhreugan
gach aon sceul ga mbhuill agad

1. tu
   thu spelt u in this manuscript and in
   this intervocalic position ta tu may reflect
   pronunciation.

2. taosna
   t'fhaoisne often occurring in the form 'faoisid';
   JS "tfaoisne"

3. ga mbhuill
   dham bhfuil / dha beil < de a bhfeil classical form.

Nois uaidh ta tu aosda
   \[2(6^2+7^2)^{2+4}\]
Dean-sa t'fhaoisne ris an t-sagart,
Innis dhuinn gun bhreugan
Gach aon sgeul dham bhfuil agad.

Now that you are ancient
Make your confession to the priest,
And tell us without falsehood
Every single story you possess.

See Chapter 8, 'The Fenian connection' for parallels in
Fenian poetry.
Is furas dhomhs sin inshin
gach beart mhilta rinnis
cha rabh mi re misc no stripoch,
no re dorta folla nach ceddicht

a. furas alternative for 'furisda'.
dhomhs the form dhámh (see M27b) is not used here in a stressed position.
b. rinnis rinneas in the context this might be past passive
but the s-preterite (old 1st pers. sing. past indicative), which is used at M20 and again at M45, is more likely.

No aicill in secons couplet.

'S furas dhomhsa sin innsin
Gach beart mhílta a rinnneas,
Cha rabh mi ri misg no striopach
No ri dortadh fola nach ceadacht'.

It is easy for me to tell that,
Every ruinous deed that I did,
I was not into drink or whoring
Or the unlawful spilling of blood.

The second couplet occurs in no other source.
The owl says her confession is of the shortest as she has committed no crimes; a possible hint at clan feuding - see Chapter 1, part A, 'Unsettled Times'.
M Stanza 45

Cha drinn mi braidd no meirle
clag no shermun a bhrist
ar mo threinn cha drinnis ecoin
s, caillich bocht ionric mis.

b. shermun likely to be searmon given the writer's
tendency to put h after s + slender vowel.
cf. M1a, M42c. It is a strong tendency and not
a consistent rule, cf. M33a, but shermun is
paired with clag and this is the only source
which gives clag rather than 'cladh'; once the
reciter or scribe had construed clag as the
first word he may well have inferred a pairing
of words specifying sounds.

Endrhyne at a:c, b:d

Cha d' rinn mi braidd no meirle,
Clag no searmon a bhriasteadh;
Air mo threun cha d' rineas ecoin,
Is caillach bhocd ionraic mise.

I've done no theft or robbery,
No bell or sermon interrupted;
To my brave man I've done no injury,
A poor, innocent, old woman, that's me.

See Chapter 8, pp.348-50 for discussion of some of the
sentiments expressed here.
Chunairc mi Alister Carrich
Nfuill bo bharraill bha Nalbinn
s, minic bha mi ga eisteacht
nuair bhiodh e reitich no sheilg

a. Chunairc see M3a.
b. bo bu variably spelt; cf. M47b.
d. sheilg endrhyme suggests second syllable pronounced.

Chunairc mi Alasdair Carrach,
An fhuil bu bharrail' bha 'n Albainn;
'S minig a bha mi ga eisteachd
'Nuair bhiodh e 'réiteach na seilge.

I saw Alasdair Carrach,
The noblest lineage in Scotland
And I often used to listen
When he was arranging the hunt.

Alasdair Carrach see Proper Names Index.

Line c emphasises the identity of the speaker, owls not being much in evidence during the day as their vision is more suited to nightfall.
Line d refers to hunting techniques, see Chapter 1, pp.9-10.
Chunairc mi Anghus no dhiagh
cha be shud roghin bu taire
an sa nfersa?d bha a thuinnidh
s, amhuillin ar ald larie

a. no dhiagh       na dheaghaidh indicated for aicill with roghin.
                   cf. dhiagh for dhèidh at M18a.

c. nfersa?d        blot, JS reads "fhearsaid".

d. ald larie       Allt Làire.

Chunnairc mi Aonghas 'na dheaghaidh,
Cha b'e siud roghainn bu taire;
Anns an Fersit bha a thuineadh
Anns a'mhuileann air Allt Làire.

I saw Angus after him,
That was not a bad choice either;
In Fersit was his dwelling
In the mill on Allt Làire.

Aonghas see Proper Names Index.
See Fersit and Làire in Place-names Index.
For 'bardic understatement' (line b) see Chapter 7, p.302.
M Stanza 48

Dfhag mi'n, Cinghuisich 'na luigh
namhad no greidh deirg
lamh ghleusd' marbhich a bhradain
bo ro mhaith thabb lafeirg

a. Cinghuisich        Cinn 'Ghiùthaich
b. ghleusd'          this word very blotchy and running into
                     next. JS "ghleusta".
c. marbhich           mharbhadh the ending '-ich' may represent
                     the slightly more forward velar
                     fricative often found in Perthshire
                     speech.  
d. thabb              thapadh

Endrhyrne at a:c, b:d.

D'fhág mi'n Cinn 'Ghiùthaich 'na luighe \((8^2+7^2)+(8^2+8^2)^{1+2\times4}\)
Nàmhad na greighe deirge,
Làmh ghleusd' a mharbhadh a' bhradain,
Bu ro mhath thapadh là feirge.

I left lying in Kingussie
The enemy of the red herd,
A hand ready for killing the salmon,
Very great was his vigour on a day of wrath.

This stanza refers to another chief of Keppoch, Alasdair
Bothloinne who died near Kingussie; see Proper Names Index.
According to the sequence of stanzas from M45 the owl is
still speaking here.

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34 See section on 'cuireadh' in Survey of the Gaelic Dialects of
Scotland, ed. by Cathair Ó Dohartaigh, 5 vols (Dublin, 1997)
(hereafter Linguistic Survey).
M Stanza 49

Dhomhnaill Mhic Fhionnlaidh nan Dàn!
'S minig a mharbh do lámh fiaadh
A sheabhaig uasal nam beann
Nach rabh gann mu'n t-sǔgradh riamh.

Domhnall MacFhionnlaidh nan Dàn!
Often did your hand kill deer,
O noble hawk of the mountains
Who was never meagre in mirth.

This stanza occurs in no other source.

Having recalled the chiefs of Keppoch that she knew, the owl now addresses the poet in the same eulogistic vein.
M Stanz 50

Aoi cha dug u do niascich
no bhi ga iarrid le maothar
s, mor bansa let am fiaghich
s, bhi folm nan sliabh a st?oghar

b. ga referring to 'fish' as a collective noun; better represented by plural in English.
maothar maoghar Dwelly also has "maodhar"
d. folm falbh lenition not marked.
st?oghar a bit blotchy; JS gives "s'd fhoghar"

Endrhyne at a:c, b:d

Aoibh cha tug thu do'n iasgach
No bhih ga iarraidh le maghar,
'S mór a b'anna leat am fiadhadh
'S bhith 'falbh nan sliabh a's t-fhoghar.

You did not cheerfully go fishing
Nor to be seeking them with a fly,
Much more dear to you was the hunting,
And to be roaming the hills in autumn.

The address to the poet continues from M49 but also repeats the sentiments of M7.
Dfag iad Donill a muigh  
na aonar agus tigh no fleidh  
s, gearr bhithis gucag ar bhuill  
luchd a' chrui sud iad a stigh

Endrhyme at a:c:d; it may be that fleidh is intended to be  
part of the rhyme pattern, in which case a:c, b:d.

D'fhåg iad Domhnall a muigh  
'Na aonar agus Taigh nam Fleadh;  
'S gearr bhithea gucag air bhui,  
Luchd a' chruidh siud iad a staigh.

They left Donald outside  
On his own, as well as the House of Feasts;  
It's briefly the bumper froths over,  
There are the cattlemen inside.

The first couplet seems to refer to the story of the poet  
missing a party at Taigh nam Fleadh.\textsuperscript{35} The interpretation  
given above supposes a party disrupted by cattle-lifters,  
which could explain the brevity of conviviality in line c. In  
this line the possibility that ar bhui is for 'air bhoil,  
mad', requires to be considered. However, there is no  
precedent in the manuscript for the use of 'u' where 'o'  
might nowadays be written. Moreover, all sources except T  
have this stanza and give 'air bhui', 'at completion'. The  
word 'gucag' is similarly used by Iain Lom, "Ag òl ghucagan  
fion' air a fàradh".\textsuperscript{36} Rankin's transcription of a recitation  
has the form "guscaig" cf. Dwelly - "gusgan".\textsuperscript{37}

Anne Grant considers the stanza "scarce intelligible  
and untranslateable" and omits it from her rendering.\textsuperscript{38}  
Forbes offers a translation, presumably his own, as for the  
rest he gives Mrs. Grant's.\textsuperscript{39} Watson may have agreed with her  
as the stanza is not included in BG.  
The verse does not seem in sequence with what precedes. There  
have been changes of speaker before but here the poet is  
referred to in the third person.

\textsuperscript{35} See Chapter 1, part A 'The locality of the poem' and 'The poet'.  
\textsuperscript{36} From 'Iorram do Bhàta Mhic Dhomhnaill', Annie Mackenzie, (ed.)  
\textsuperscript{37} RR, p.162.  
\textsuperscript{38} Grant, Superstitions of the Highlanders, p.257.  
\textsuperscript{39} A.R. Forbes, Gaelic names of beasts, birds, fishes insects &  
reptiles (Edinburgh, 1905), p.313, translates line c, "hardly will a  
flower have formed".
M Stanza 52

Ha mi mar bhi oishan n, diagh nam fian
is coissill leis mo chiall s, mo chaill
mi n, diagh gach duin cha uam
mhic muir nach cruaidh an cas

a. bhi see M8b.
   n,diagh an diaidh is closest to the writer's spelling and
   suits this context, but see M18a and M47a where
   rhyme indicated alternative forms.

Tha mi mar bhi Oisean 'n diaidh nam Fiann, \((9^1+8^1)+(7^1+7^1)^2\)
Is cosmhai leis mo chiall 's mo chaill;
Mi 'n diaidh gach duin' a chaidh uam,
Mhic Muire, nach cruaidh an càs!

I am like Oisean was after the Fianna,
Like him is my sense and my disposition;
I am after every one who's gone from me,
Son of Mary, is it not a hard trial!

This stanza occurs in no other source.

This might be the owl as survivor, (see M41), speaking again
with the last line referring back to earlier ones -
M41d- S beag iongnadh gur trom leat aigne and also to
M43b- Deansa t' fhaolisne ris an t-sagart
Equally it might be Domhnall Mac Fhionnlaidh reacting to
events described in M51. For discussion of the status of this
stanza see Chapter 7, p. 322.
This text of *Oran na Comhachaig* is part of the Turner MS, known as number 14, which is in the National Library of Scotland. It was written by William MacMurchy, a Kintyre schoolmaster, tailor and poet who lived c.1700-1778. The manuscript was obtained by Peter Turner, who was an enthusiastic collector. He had been an army corporal before adopting a peripatetic existence, and may have been related to the Turners of Maam in Glenshira. However, he lived as a pauper, wandering about "with his meal bag, cracking jokes and living on the hospitality of the classes who are ever readiest to help each other out in the west."¹ Thomas Sinton reports that old friends of his in Badenoch and Strathspey met "Am bard Mac an Tuairneir", as they called him, on his travels.²

This manuscript was found in the Advocates' Library in 1872 by D.C. Macpherson. The first note of its existence appears in the preface to J.F. Campbell's *Leabhar na Féinne*. It consists of about 170 pages and has Peter Turner's name, probably in his own hand, written and scored out on some of them (e.g. page 45, which also has the date 1808). On page 54 is written 1748, the date generally attributed to the manuscript. Alexander Cameron published a transcription in *Reliquiae Celticae*.³

*Oran na Comhachaig* begins, untitled, at the foot of page 88. Beneath the first verse is written, in a different hand from the main text, "published in the Perthshire collection". John Campbell, the translator, received the manuscript from Peter Turner in about 1808 for the Highland Society of Scotland and his reference on page 88 (and also on pages 100, 119, 126) is to John Gillies's collection of poetry, *Sean Dàin*, published in Perth in 1786.

The handwriting of the text is quite clear but there are anomalies which must be errors of penmanship. The most notable of these I indicate. The mistakes of repetition or omission could be

³ Alexander Cameron, *Reliquiae Celticae*, vol.2 (Inverness, 1894).
either a result of a slip of memory or a skip of the eye in copying. However, there are some errors which seem unlikely to have been produced by the hand not following the memory (or voice) correctly. These do suggest that the manuscript was copied. However, as will be noted, the orthography often reflects a South Argyll dialect of the sort MacMurchy would have used. It is probable then, that he was copying from one of his own documents, or possibly from another local source.

In the expository version, lenition is indicated on occasions where the manuscript appears to take it for granted. The article 'an' is retained before initial 'f' in a masculine noun.
T Stanza 1

A Chomhachg bhochd na Sroine
Anochd is Bronach do leabe
Sma bha thu ann re linn donngail
S beg Iongndh gur trom le taigne

b. leabe     leabaidh
c. thu        leabaidh
d. Iongndh    t not crossed.

re        ri  re usually preferred in this manuscript,
          but not consistent.

beg       presumably accidental omission of vowel
           before d.

thus throughout manuscript.

Internal rhyme [bhochd:nochd] as well as aicill in first
couplet. Passable aicill in second couplet.

A chomhachag bhochd na Sröine  \(2(8^2+8^2)^{2+4}\)
A nochd is brônach do leabaidh,
'S ma bha thu ann ri linn Donngail
'S beag iongnadh gur trom leat t'aigne.

O poor owl of Strone
Sad is your bed tonight,
And if you were around in the days of Donnail
It's small wonder your spirit feels heavy.

Sroine, see Sròn in Place-names Index.
Donngail, see Proper Names Index
T Stanza 2

Gur Comhaois mise don Daraig
0 bha haillain beg sa Choinich
'S ionadh àl a chuir me Romham
'S me Comhachag bhochd na Sroine

a. Daraig
   see note M42a.

b. haillain
   h-aillean; a form of 'faillean', the 'f' treated as prothetic. A comparison of the occasions when this writer begins a word with h shows that such usage is confined to prefixing an initial vowel; there is no habit, such as was found in M, of using 'h' alone to show lenition. See also T13a. Dwelly gives "aillean - elecampane" but this may be too botanically specific for the context.

c. ionadh
   could be a form of 'iongnadh' but as such makes no sense; nor does 'ionad/ionadh' (Irish). Probably iomadh misspelt.
   me
   this spelling for mi used throughout manuscript.

Gur comhaois mise do'n daraig
0 bha h-aillean beag 'sa chòinnich;
'S iomadh àl a chuir mi romham
'S mi comhachag bhochd na Sròine.

Of an age with the oak I am,
Since her shoot was wee in the moss;
Many a generation have I survived,
I am the poor owl of Strone.

4 See T6d, T8d, T11b, T14a/b, T40b.
T Stanza 3

Ach Anois a ta tu aosda
Deansa tfaoisid ris an Tsagairt
Is innis duinne gun euradh
Gach aon Sgeula da bheil agud

a. ta tu with occasional exceptions (Tlc) this manuscript gives 2nd person singular pronoun tu when preceded by a vowel.
   a
to be taken as o here, whereas at T2b o was used.
b. tfaoisid lenition of 'f' not always indicated,
cf. T5c, T9c, also M passim.
d. da bheil for 'de a bheil' - classical form; cf. M43d.

Ach a nois o ta tu aosda
Deans-a tfaoisid ris an t-sagart
Is innis duinne gun euradh
Gach aon sgeula d’ a bheil agad.

But now since you are aged
Do make your confession to the priest,
And tell us with no denial
Every single story you have.

See Chapter 8, 'The Fenian connection', for parallels in Fenian poetry.
T Stanza 4

Sfurasta dhomhsa sin Innse
Gach Aon la Millteach 'a ndrinnas
Cho raibh me Me mionnach na breugach
Ga do bha mo bheul gun bhinnios

b. rinnas  rinneas  old s-preterite cf. M44b.
c. cho raibh variability of spelling cho/cha in this
    manuscript; adjusted to cha; the form
    raibh occurs consistently.
    me  Me  repetition presumably an error.
    na  inconsistent use of this colloquial form of
        no, cf. T5a/b.
d. ga do  'ge do' > ged

'S furasda dhomhsa sin innse,  \(2(B^2+8^2)^{2*}\)
Gach aon là millteach dhan d' rinneas,
Cha raibh mi mionnach no breugach
Ged a bha mo bheul gun bhinnias

It is easy for me to tell that,
Every single ruinous day of all that I did
I did not curse or lie
Although my mouth was not melodious.

The owl seems to be saying that it is easy for her to tell
all because even on her worst (ruinous) days she has not
cursed or lied.
Line d occurs in no other source, although it is found later
in the Macdonald Collection (v.41).
T Stanza 5

Cho drinn me riamh Braid no Meirrle
No Cladh no Tearmunn a bhriseadh
Ri mfear fein Cho drinnios Iomlos$^{luas}$
Gur Cailleach bhochd ionruic mise

a. Meirrle         mèirle

b. rinnios         s-preterite as in previous stanza.

c. luas            inserted above second syllable of final word.

Cha d' rinn mi riamh braid no mèirle  \(2(8^2+8^2)^2\)
No cladh no téarmann a bhriseadh;
Ri m' fhéar fhéin cha d' rinneas iomluas
Gur cailleach bhochd ionruic mise.

I never did any theft or robbery,
Nor violated any tomb or sanctuary;
To my own husband I was not unfaithful,
It's a poor, innocent, old woman that I am.

A Fenian echo; Acallamh na Senórach has more than one story
in which a grave is opened; for this, and the theme of the
faithless wife, see Chapter 8, 'Integrity of the Comhachag',
and 'The Fenian connection'.
T Stanza 6

Sann a bhiadh Cuid dom' Shinnsior
Edar an Innseach sa Nfhearsuid
Sa chuid eile dhiobh 'mamdhéibhidh
A Seinn gu haoibhinn Sa Nfheasgar

b. Innseach form of Innse.
c mamdhéibhidh mum' dhéidhidh for 'mum' dhéidhinn'. Watson
reports hearing 'mu dhéidhinn' sounded as 'mu
dhéibhidh' in Aberfeldy.5 'Mum' dhéidhinn' nowadays
is reserved for the meaning 'concerning me' but it
is comparable with the Irish expression contained in
the phrase "ag teacht faoi mo chéin, coming to meet
me" (Ó Dónaill) and both forms are related to 'fo
dáigin'< 'im dágin'. Here the meaning is 'near me,
approaching me', which is much the same semantically
as 'concerning me'. It is very unlikely that the
writer understands this as a place-name; initial
capitalisation is inconsistent with regard
to nouns (and even verbs), but there is no example
in the manuscript of a manifest place-name with a
lower case initial.6

d. aoibhinn aicill with dhéidhidh indicates spelling
dhéibhidh

'S ann a bhiodh cuid de m' shinnsir
Eadar an Innseach's an Phearsaid,
'S a' chuid eile dhiubh mum' dhéidhidh
A' seinn gu h-aibhinn 'san fheasgar.

There would be some of my forebears
Between Insh and Persit,
And the rest of them near me,
Singing joyfully in the evening.

A lack of sequence between T5 and T6 suggests some loss of
lines. This stanza is not in any other manuscript but is in
Eigg. See Innse and Persit in Place-names Index.

5 W.J.Watson, 'Vernacular Gaelic in the Book of the Dean of
6 Some 19th and 20th century versions (An Gaidheal, A.Maclean
Sinclair, W.J.Watson) give "mu'n Déabhadh"; the rest (Archibald
Menzies, Donald Mackinnon, A.R.Forbes) have "ma'n déathagh". The
exception is John Mackenzie who gives "ma'n Déaghthaigh". An
Déabhadh is the name of a place at Loch Tréig, see Place-names
Index. This is marked 'Deagh' on Thomson's Atlas of Scotland.
However, Eigg, the only other primary source with this stanza, gives
"ma'n déathagh" (E10). So the 18th-century witnesses which are the
subject of this thesis understand a preposition here. It may be that
'An Déabhadh' is the correct interpretation and that some
collectors/scribes failed to recognise this through unfamiliarity
with the area. On the other hand local knowledge might have
encouraged the insertion of a place-name where none had been
intended.
Chunnuic me Alastuir Carrach
Duine 'B' alloil a bha Nalb' e
'S truic a bha me seal ga eisdeachd
'S e re Reiteach an tuim Shealga

a. Chunnuic   spelt chunnaic at T8/10; common interchange
   of letters a and u in unstressed syllables.

b. alloil      for 'allaile'

c. truic       tric

Chunnaic me Alasdair Carrach
Duine b' allail' a bha 'n Alb' e,
'S tric a bha mi seal ga éisteachd
'S e ri réiteach an tuim-shealga.

I saw Alasdair Carrach,
He was the noblest man in Scotland,
And I often listened to him a while
As he arranged the hunting hillock.

See Proper names Index for Alasdair Carrach.
See also endnotes M46.
Chunnaic me Aongas na Dheaghaidh
'S cho be Sud Rogha bu táire
Sann Sa Nfhearsuíid do bhi bhunadh
'S bhiadh a huilion air Eas laradh.

b. rogha old nominative of 'roghainn'
c. do bhi classical form of past tense verb 'to be'
d. a huilion uileann - angle, bend relating to An Fhearsaid; see Fersit in Place-names Index. The spindle shaped sandbank or gravel pit from which the name comes may have had an angle, a pointed bit or spur extending towards the Eas laradh. See end note.

Eas laradh See Làire, Allt in Place-names Index. Although 'eas' generally means 'waterfall' Armstrong gives it the meaning "stream with high, precipitous banks", which would suit the Allt Làire in some of its course. Equally it may refer to one of its tributaries. The spelling laradh reflects a genitive.

Chunnaic mi Aonghas 'na dheaghaidh
'S cha b'e siud rogha bu táire;
'S ann 'san Fhearsaid do bhi bhunadh
'S bhiodh a h-uileann air Eas Làireadh.

I saw Angus after him
And that was not a bad choice either;
It was in Fersit that he belonged
When its spur was on Eas Làire.

See Aonghas in Proper Names.

The topography around Fersit has changed considerably since the 16th century, and indeed, on account of the damming of Loch Tréig, since the early 20th. The early maps show little detail and it is not possible to be certain whether the description given in the notes above is accurate. It may be that uileann in line d is a mistake in transmission and that in fact 'muileann', as occurs in the other sources, was originally meant. Of course, the interpretation uileann suggests an anterior change in the landscape, occurring between the days of Angus of Fersit and the composition of the poem.
Bu lionmhur Creachan is Cogaidh
Ann a Nlochabar san Uair sin
C'àite 'nraibh thusa ga tfalach
Eoin bhig na Malach Gruama

a. Cogaidh old plural of 'cogadh'
b. lochabar this place-name incorporates the old word 'abar' meaning 'confluence'. This is often 'obar/obair' in modern Gaelic pronunciation as far back as the 17th century (Macbain), thus rhyming well with Cogaidh.
c. thusa not crossed
d. malach old genitive of 'mala' (Macbain)

Endrhyne at a:c, b:d.

Bu lionmhor creachan is cogaidh
Ann an Loch Abar 'san uair sin;
C'àite 'n raibh thusa gad fhalach
Eóin bhig na malach gruama?

Numerous were the raids and wars
In Lochaber at that time;
Where used you to hide yourself,
Little bird of the gloomy brow?
T Stanza 10

An uair a chunnaic me na Creachtha
a gabhail Seachad le fuathchas
Thug me ruathar bharr an tsratha
S bha me Grafann a 'nCrag guanach

a. Creachtha old plural of 'creachadh'
b. fuathchas fuathas ch represents palatalisation, see T13b.
c. tsratha second t not crossed.
d. Grafann grathann unusual orthography. There are only two instances in this manuscript of spelling involving intervocalic 'f'; Grafann occurs again at T36 along with tafann, which is the Irish spelling of tabhann In the absence of evidence to the contrary, analogy suggests that the f of Grafann also represents a voiceless fricative /f/ rather than /h/. A bilabial /f/, such as used to be common in Irish and also occurs in some Scottish Gaelic dialects, sounds very close to /h/ on account of its low friction. A writer (perhaps MacMurchy's source), taking down the poem without having seen this word written before, might well use the spelling Grafann.

Endrhyme at a:c, b:d.

'N uair a chunnaic mi na creacha
A gabhail seachad le fuathas,
Thug mi ruathar bharr an t-sratha
'S bha mi grathann an Creig Ghuanach.

When I saw the raidings
Going past in horror,
I made a mad rush from the valley
And spent a while in Creag Ghuanach.

Creag Ghuanach, see Ghuanach in Place-names Index.

7 For distribution of bilabial and labio-dental fricatives see appropriate section in Linguistic Survey.
8 Diarmuid Ó Sé, 'The sporadic sound change 'f' to 'h'', Éiríu, vol.41 (Dublin, 1990), p.133.
T Stanza 11

Creg mo chroidhesi Cregguanach
Creg ga ndfuaras cuid da hárach
Creg na Naighion sna ndamh siùbhlach
Si Chreg Iulmhur Phonnmhur Fheurach

b. Creg ga ndfuaras for 'Creag dhan dfhuaras'
fuaras s-preterite.
cuid da hárach cuid d' a h-àrach
d. Iulmhur see note M2d.

See note on rhyme at M2.

Creag mo chroidhe-sa Creag Ghuanach,
Creag 'an d'fhuaras cuid d' a h-àrach,
Creag nan aighean 's nan damh siùbhlach,
'S i a' chreag iùlmhor, fhonnmhor, fheurach.

Rock of my heart Creag Ghuanach,
Rock from which I gained some of its nurture,
Rock of the hinds and of the fleeting stags,
It's the outstanding, pleasant, grassy rock.
T Stanza 12

A Chreg fa Niathadh an Fhaghuid
Leamsa bu mhiann bhith ga taghailt
'Mbu bhinne guth cinn Gallan Gadhair
A cur Graídh air ghabhail chumhuinn

a. fa in classical Gaelic 'fa' represents either 'faoi/fuidh/fo' or 'mu'. Current Scottish Gaelic would give 'mu' here. O. Irish 'imm' led to 'mu' while from 'uma', with the 'm' often lenited, developed 'fa'.

b. bhith written again and scored out.

c. guth cinn voice in upper register, clear voice (Ó Dónaill).

Gallan perhaps gallain; see note M4c.

d. Graídh greigh

Internal rhyme [iadhadh:mhiann] but no aicill in first couplet.
Endrhyme at a:b:c; cf. M4.

A' chreag fa'n iadadh an fhaghaid, 2(8²+8²)1²+2
Leamsa bu mhiann bhith ga tadhalí¿
'M bu bhinne guth cinn gallain gadhair
A' cur greigh air 'ghabhail chumhann.

The rock around which the hunt would circle,
Myself I loved to be frequenting it,
Where sweetest would be the high voice of a sturdy hound
Sending a herd into the narrow confine.

Hunting methods, see Chapter 1, p.9.

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9 E. Knott, Tadhg Dall Ó Huiginn, p.1xxii.
T Stanza 13

Oluidh me s cha treig me hionnuadh
Uaidhche cho dteid me air Siollan
Si Muime 'Nfheidh do ni Nlangan
A mбуinne deas regheal fionnfhuar

a. **treig** t not crossed.
   **hionnuadh** h-ionnachd (MacAlpine); see note T2b for use of h\+vowel.
b. **uaidhche** spelling suggests an Argyll pronunciation ('-ithe' palatalised) of uaithe (an earlier feminine form than 'uaipe'). The feminine refers to Creag Ghuanach and this description of the hill's delights continues from the last two stanzas. A mountain is thought of as 'possessing' streams so the refreshing water or springs running from it would be one of its own attributes.
d. **dteid** t not crossed.
   **siollan** "turns/spells" (Dwelly, MacAlpine).
   "sioll" root of "seal" (Macbain); hence air siollan 'in rotation'.
   c. **do ni** classical 3rd pers. present indicative.
   **regheal** adjectival prefix 'ro' has also form 'ra', so raigheal rhyming with langan
   **buinne** see M28c.

Change in metre, with end rhyme at a:b:d. Internal rhyme [tréig:téid] and [muime:buinne], as well as aicill.

Olaidh mi 's cha tréig mi h-ionnachd,
Uaithe cha téid mi air siollan,
Si muime 'n fhéidh do-ní 'n langan
Am buinne deas raigheal fionnfhuar.

I will drink and not forsake its coolness,
From it I will not go back and forth,
It's the nurse of the belling deer
The ideal stream, very clear and fresh.

In line b the speaker determines to stay in this spot he is so fond of.
Binn a Hiolaire fa bruacha
Binn a Cuach 'sis binn a Heala
Seachd binne na sin a Mblaodhan
Do ni Nlaoghan beg breac ballach

a. fa see T12a.
   bruacha an old plural.

Binn a h-iolaire f'a bruacha,
Binn a cuach 's is binn a h-eala,
Seachd binne na sin am blaoghan
Do-ní 'n Iaoghan beag breac ballach.

Sweet-voiced her eagle around her brows,
Sweet-voiced her cuckoo and her swan,
Truly sweeter than that is the sound
The little, neatly dappled fawn makes.

See Chapter 8, part A, 'The sweetest sounds', for discussion of this motif.
Eilid bhuilgeann, bhailgeann, bhallach
Oghar eangach uchd re hard,
Trògbhalach thu, biorach, Sgiamhach,
Cronanach ceann riabhach, dearg.

Spotted, white-bellied, dappled hind,
Dusky, swift of foot, breast towards the height,
Hot tempered you are, keen and graceful,
Belling, with brindled head and red.
T Stanza 16

Creg mo chroidhesi Creguanach
An tslatach ghlas dhuiilleach chrabhaich
An Tulach ardu luinn fhiadhuidh
Sgur cian a ghabh i on Mhaorach

a. Creguanach erratic spelling, cf. T10, T11 but also T33.
b. tslatach second t not crossed
c. tulach Dwelly gives masculine; historically feminine, as in MacAlpine and in Irish.
   fhiadhuidh fhiadhaidh gen. of 'fiadhadh' (Dwelly quoting Armstrong's Gaelic Dictionary).

No aicill in first couplet.

Creag mo chroidhe-sa Creag Ghuanach 2(8^2+8^2)^{3/4}
An t-slatach ghlas dhuiilleach chrabhaich,
An tulach ardu luinn fhiadhaidh
'S gur cian a ghabh i o'n mhaorach.

Rock of my heart is Creag Ghuanach,
The sylvan one, green, leafy, wooded,
The high, beautiful, hillock of hunting
And it's far she is from shellfish.

Line d is the first of several which compare the sea unfavourably with the land; see T17-19, also Chapter 1, part A, 'The choice of land'.
T Stanza 17

Deth cha raibh i riamh a geisdeachd
Re Séitil na Muice Mara
Sann is truic a chual' i moran
Do Chronanich an Daimh Allaidh

a. Deth cha raibh might be a form like Irish 'cé go raibh'; or deth can simply be taken to mean 'hence, consequently',< of it'. Either makes sense.

b. Séitil séideil a form of 'séideadh'.

c. truic trice

Deth cha raibh i riamh ag éisteachd 2(8²+8²)²
Ri séideil na muice mara,
'S ann is tric' a chual' i móran
De chrónanaich an daimh allaidh.

Thus she never listened
To the spouting of the whale,
More often did she hear much
Of the belling of the wild stag.

The anthropomorphic treatment of Creag Ghuanach continues from the previous stanza.
T Stanza 18

Aoibhinn an obair an Tsealg
Aoibhinn ameanmna sa beachd
Smor gu bannsa leam a fonn
Na long is i dol fuidh rachd

d. fuidh

fuidh (current Sc. Gaelic 'fo'), to be
distinguished from fa (current Sc. Gaelic
'mu'); see T12, T14; cf. M24d.

rachd

Alexander Cameron in his transcript wonders
whether "trachd" is meant but perhaps rac is
more likely;¹⁰ the short 'a' given by Macbain
provides rhyme here although 'rac' also
occurs. Meaning a mast ring for securing a
sail it functions as synecdoche for sail or
rigging. Alasdair Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair uses
the word in 'Birlinn Chlann Raghnaill':

'beannaigh ar rachdain's ar slat'¹¹
translated by Alexander Nicolson -
'our mast hoops and yards do thou bless'¹²

Change of metre to lines of seven syllables ending on a
monosyllable.

Aoibhinn an obair an t-sealg,
Aoibhinn a meanmna 's a beachd,
'S mor gu b' annsa leam a fonn
Na long is i dol fuidh rac.

Pleasant work is the hunt,
Pleasant its spirit and the contemplation of it,
Its aura is much more dear to me
Than a ship getting rigged.

¹⁰ Cameron, Reliquiae Celticae, p.352.
¹¹ 'RIA Text of Birlinn Chlann Raghnaill', ed. by J.L.Campbell, SGS,
¹² Alexander Nicolson, (ed.) 'The Bark of Clanranald', An Gàidheal,
vol.6, p.55.
Cho do chuir me duil sa niasgach
Bhith ga iarraidh leis a Mhadhar
S mor gu mbannsa leam an Fiadhach
Siubhal na nsliabh ann sa nfhoghar

b. ga see note M50b.
c. an Fiadhach article as in classical Gaelic.

Return to metre of T17
Endrhyme at a:c, b:d.

Cha do chuir mi dül 'san iasgach
Bhith 'ga iarraidh leis a' mhaghár,
'S mór gum b' annsa leam an fiadhach,
Siubhal nan sliabh anns an fhoghar.

I had no desire for fishing,
To be seeking them with the fly,
Much more I preferred hunting,
Roaming the hills in the autumn.
T Stanza 20

Ceol is binne do gach ceol
Guth a Ghadhair mhoir is e teachd
Damh na Shiomanaich le Gleann
Mial-choin a bhith ann is as

Music, the sweetest of all music,
Is the voice of the great hound approaching,
A stag as he weaves down a glen
Hunting dogs going for him and hanging on.

See note to M31 for action mentioned in last line.
T Stanza 21

Gur binn leam torman na Nos
Air uilionn na Ncorrbheann cas
Eilit bhinneach is caol cos
Ni clos fuidh Dhuille re teas

a. torman often used to describe the sound of a musical instrument, but it is applied by Duncan Bàn MacIntyre to the cry of a cock.\(^{13}\)
c. is relative; copula + adjective + nominative noun was a common descriptive device in traditional poetry.

\textit{cos} the classical form for 'cas', 'a foot'. Professor Gillies has asked if 'cos' might also belong to a class of southern Scottish Gaelic.

d. duille \textit{'high-headed'} (Macbain).

duille diminutive 'duilleag' more common now.

End rhyme at \textit{a:c, b:d}.

Gur binn leam torman nan \textit{os}\(\text{ }\)
Air uileann \textit{na Ncorrbheann cas},
Eilit bhinneach as caol \textit{cos}
Ni clos fuidh dhuille \textit{ri teas}.

Sweet to me is the sound of the stags
On the shoulder of steep, stark hills,
A hind with high head and slender foot
Takes ease from the heat under foliage.

\(^{13}\) \textit{ODB, 'Oran an t-Samhraidh'}, line 2654.
T Stanza 22

Cho neil do chéil' aic' ach an Damh 'Se 's Muime dhith 'Mfeur sa nCreamh
Mathair an Laoich bhallbhrec mhir
bean an fhír mhallrosgaich ghloin

There is internal rhyme [chéil:feur], but no aicill in the first couplet. Lines of the first couplet have eight syllables whereas those of the second have seven. Here is another example of end rhyme at a:b:d. Even though ghloin is written this may well have been said 'ghlain'; MacAlpine notes the occurrence in the West Highlands, of the form 'gloine' for 'glaine', the noun. As the word comes from 'glan' the adjective could be treated similarly. MacMurchy may have written ghloin from habit, thus obscuring the rhyme. See note M23 for rhyme pattern in second couplet.

Chan eil de chéil' aic' ach an damh 'Se 's muime dhí 'm feur 's an creamh
Máthair an laoigh bhallbhric mhír,
Bean an fhír mhallrosgaich ghlain.

She has not any spouse but the stag
It's the grass and garlic are her nurse,
The mother of the frisky speckled fawn,
Wife of the pure husband with limpid eyes.
T Stanza 23

"Naigionntach Shiubhlas an Raon
Cadal cha dean i sa nsmur
B'annsa na Plaide re 'taobh
Leaba 'nfhraoch bhagaideach úr

d. 'nfhraoch 'n < dhen

Aicill is likely in both couplets; a southern dialect may give 'raon' and 'dèan' the same vowel. This is discussed at M27.
Endrhyne at a:c, b:d.

'N aigeantach 'shiubhlas an raon
Cadal cha dèan i 'san smùr,
B'annsa na plaide ri 'taobh
Leabaidh 'n fhraoch bhagaideach úr.

The spirited one who travels the upland
Sleep will she not in the cinders,
Liking better than a blanket at her side
A bed of the tufty new heather.
T Stanza 24

Se fear mo Chroidhesi 'nsamhradh
Se 'n fear ceannghorm air gach Bile
Fanaidh gach Damh donn na Dhoire
Re teas goile Greine gile

b. Bile  large/sacred tree (Ó Dónaill).

'It is my dearest one, the summer,
It is the green topped one on every tall tree,
Every brown stag stays in his thicket
Against the bright sun's boiling heat.

This stanza, with its picture of summer crowning the trees in green, occurs in no other manuscript nor in Eigg; this is the only instance of the word bile in the corpus of sources for the poem.
'T Stanza 25

'Sglan re Shloinnadh an Damh donn
A thig o Uilionn na mbeann
Mac na Heilte ris an tom
Nach do chrom fuidh Speinns a cheann

-d. Speinns  speinns' see M24d.

No rhyme in first couplet, but in second there is rhyme
[h-éilde: speinns] as well as aicill.
Endrhyme at a:c, b:d.

'S glan ri shloinneadh an damh donn 2(7^1+7^1)^{1+3/2+4}
A thig o uileann nam beann,
Mac na h-éilde ris an tom
Nach do chrom fuidh speinns' a cheann.

Pure is the pedigree of the brown stag
Who comes from the angle of the hills,
Son of the hind nestling in the hillock
Who never bowed his head under an alcove.
T Stanza 26

Eighidh Damh Bheinne beag
Is eighidh Damh Cheanna creg
Freagraidh gach Damh dhiobh ga cheile
Fa cheann Locha Sleibhe Snaig

a. Bheinne beg lenition suggests this is a place-name;
see Place-name Index. Spelling beg does not reflect genitive.
b. Cheanna creg Cheann na creig
c. ga dha
d. fa see T12a.

Endrhyne at a:b:d.

Eighidh damh Bheinne Beag
'S éighidh damh Cheann na creig',
Freagraidh gach damh dhiubh dha chéil'
Fa 'cheann Locha Sléibhe Snaig.

A stag of Beinn Bheag calls out
And a stag of Ceann na Creige calls out,
Each of the stags answers the other
At the head of Loch Sliabh Snaig.

Cheann na creig occurs only in this source. A place-name seems intended but no such name is located on maps of Lochaber; probably for Beinn na Craige (see E24), as this is an alternative name for Creag Ghuanaich, which is near Beinn Beag mentioned in line a (see Place-names Index). Perhaps, since the source for this manuscript is Kintyre, acquaintance with Eilean Cheann na Creige in West Loch Tarbert may have intruded on the name.

Locha Sleibhe Snaig. I have not found this on maps of Lochaber or anywhere else, although the name has elements of Allt an t-Snaig, south of the Water of Nevis, and Coire na Sleubhaich a little further south-west near Stob Bàn. See also Snaige in Place-names Index.

This stanza is not in the other manuscripts but is in Eigg.
T Stanza 27

Chi me 'nsud a mbeannan ruadh
Gairuid o cheann Locha treig
Cregguanach ambiodh an tsealig
Ngrianan ard a mbiodh na Feidh

a. mbeannan ruadh although this sounds somewhat like a place-name the lower case suggests it is unlikely to be intended as such by this writer (see T6); it seems to be descriptive in apposition to Creag Ghuanach.

b. Locha treig see Tréig in Place-names Index.
grianan ard see note M1d.

No rhyme in first couplet.

Chi mi 'n siud am beannan ruadh
Goirid o cheann Locha Treig,
Creag Ghuanach am biodh an t-sealig,
'N grianan árd am biodh na féidh.

I see over there the red pinnacle
Not far from the head of Loch Treig,
Creag Ghuanach where the hunt would take place,
The high, sunny abode where the deer would be.
T Stanza 28

Chi me Coire ratha uam
Chi me Cruachan sa Bheinn bhreac
Chi me Srath Oisin na bhfiadh
Chi me 'Ghrian air Beinn na nleac

b. Cruachan  Cruachan is a long way from most other locations mentioned, both in this verse and the previous one. This list of places the poet sees seems to be a panorama from near Loch Tréig, probably from Creag Ghuanach. Although Cruachan is visible from distant Ben Nevis, from further east the Mamores and Glen Coe intrude on the view. The similar sounding a' Chruach suits the topography better. The supplier of this source could have been more familiar with the Loch Etive area than with Lochaber and construed the name accordingly. This inference might apply to MacMurchy himself, coming from Kintyre, but as ML and MN have the same place-names as T in this stanza perhaps an anterior source was responsible.

Beinn bhreac  There is a hill of this name near Loch Shira which suits the Cruachan focus, but which, in view of the comments above may be a mislocation; probably Beinn a' Bhric.

c. Oisin  the classical form of the name.

d. Beinn na nleac  no hill of exactly this name but Meall na Lice may be indicated.

In Place-names Index see Coire Ratha, Cruachan, 'Chruach, Srath Ossian, Beinn Bhreac, Meall na Lice.

Chi mi Coire Ratha uam  
Chi mi Cruachan 's a' Bheinn Bhreac,
Chi mi Srath Oisin nam fiadh
Chi mi 'ghrian air Beinn nan Leac.

I see Coire Ratha below me,
I see Cruachan and Beinn Bhreac,
I see Srath Ossian of the deer,
I see the sun on Beinn nan Leac.
T Stanza 29

Chi me Srath Oisin a Chruidh
Chi me Leitir dhubh na nsonn
An gar Choire chregach a Mhaidhm
A minic a rinn mo lamh toll

b. Leitir dhubh
   sonn
   c. minick
   Choire chregach
   a Mhaidhm

smudge on 'b' as if 'g' about to be written. See Place-name Index.

written before Mhaidhm, presumably in anticipation of next line, and crossed out.

See Creagach in Place-name Index

Màm Bàn.

Chi mi Srath Oisin a' chruidh, (714712)+(81812)94
Chi mi Leitir Dhubh nan sonn
An gar Choire Chreaagach a' Mhàim,
Am minic a rinn mo làmh toll.

I see Srath Ossian of the cattle,
I see Leitir Dubh of the stag-heroes
Near to Coire Creagach of Mam,
Where often my hand caused a gap.

Watson suggests line d may mean a gap among the deer or a shot wound in a deer's hide.14 The first idea is more likely; the poet is painting a landscape of an area renowned for its hunting, with a hunter picking off a target from amongst a herd, possibly on a horizon. Fire-arms are not involved and a deer could be felled by an arrow without causing the panic and scattering that would ensue from a gunshot.15

Variants of this stanza occur in two later poems: 'Oran Fear Druim a' Chaoin', and 'Cead do'n t-Sealg'; see Chapter 1, part B, 'Related poems'.

14 BG, p.338.
15 See T41-43, also Chapter 1, part A, 'Hunting and Deer'.
T Stanza 30

Chi me Beinnimhais gu hard
Sa nCarn-dearg an Aice 'buin
An tulach air a mfas a mfraoch
A monadh maol gu nuig a Muir

d. gu nuig archaic, gur uig is generally found;
cf. Irish 'co n-uige'.

Same metre as previous stanza

Chi mi Beinn Nibheis gu h-árd
'S an Càrn Dearg an aic' a buin,
An tulach air am fas am fraoch,
Am monadh maol gu nuig am muir.

I see Ben Nevis high up
And Carn Dearg close to its feet,
The mound where the heather grows,
The bare moor as far as the sea.

See under Nevis and Dearg in Place-name Index
T Stanza 31

A Rannuill mhic Dhonaill na nlann
Gun do bhith is e mo Chreach
'Stric a thuit leat air do thom
Mac na Sonn leis a Choin ghlas

a. na nlann
reference to fighting prowess.
d. Mac nan Sonn
deer.

Probable anacrusis in first line; no rhyme within first couplet.
Endrhyme at a:c, b:d.

Ronald MacDonald of the swords!
My sorrow is that you are no more,
Often there fell by your agency on your hunting knoll,
The great stag, by the doing of the grey dog.

Rannuill mhic Dhonaill: the son of Domhnall Glas was Raghnall Mór, see Proper Names Index.

This stanza occurs in no other manuscript but is in Eigg, although E has a different first line, i.e. 'Alastair croidhe na'n gleann'.
T Stanza 32

Bu Donallach thu gun Mhearachd
Bu tu Buinne geal na Cruadhach
'SMa chuidh tu uainn a Dhaird chatain
Gu mhu dalt thu do Chreig Guanach

a. Donallach address to Raghnall Mór continues from T31.
b. Buinne geal na Cruadhach

Buinne not here used literally as at T13d, can mean "current, torrent" (Dwelly, Maclennan, Ó Dónaill). Dwelly also gives as a rare meaning "sprout, twig" cf. "buinneag" in Macbain. It is likely that the latter sense is being used figuratively as mentioned by RIA and Dinneen, "offshoot, offspring, scion", or "chief, of primal stock". This is a young leader. 'Buinne' in this sense may be the more classical usage. A similar phrase, but not figurative, is found in DF where, although the context is sword making, the indication is not of a 'torrent of steel' but rather a 'stem': "feadh duirn dhi gan da fháobhar / 'na buinne caomhghlas crùadh".16

Cf. ML40 which gives boine
c. Chuidh

Classical form.

Aird Chatain

Appar-ently Ardc-hattan, q.v. Place-names Index. There is no reason Raghnall should not have gone to Ardc-hattan sometime but what is the significance here? He is unlikely to have been buried at the priory there as he was beheaded in Elgin and Keppoch MacDonald chiefs were generally buried at Cille Choirill, Brae Lochaber. Dh'ارد Chatain may be a misconstruction of the original. Perhaps the source of the manuscript was unaware of Raghnall's capture by the captain of Clan Chattan, see Proper Names Index, and suited the words to the Loch Etive bias noted T28.
d. Do

Not emended to 'de' as it is a case where either 'do' or 'de' would carry the same meaning. English syntax works similarly here, allowing the same function to be performed by 'to' and 'of'.

Bu Domhnallach thu gun mhearachd,
Bu tu buinne geal na cruadhach
'S ma chuidh tu uainn a dh' Aird Chatain
Gum bu dalt' thu do Chreig Guanach.

You were a Macdonald without fault,
You were a bright warrior of steel
And if you went from us to Ardc-hattan,
You were a fostering to Creag Guanach.

16 This second line is translated "a fair gray shoot of steel" by Gerard Murphy (ed.) Duanaire Finn, part 2, ITS vol.28 (London, 1933), (together with vol.7 hereafter DF) p.10.
Gu bu Dalt thu do Chreiguanach
Sfad' o chuala me ga Sheanchas
A Mbuinne geal nach raibh éitigh
Sann duit a Gheilladh a mbantrachd

This is bantrachd in the obsolete sense of 'company of women'. It occurs similarly in DF, poem LXII, v.112, to indicate a number of women. However, in SVBDL, line 1024, the usage is very comparable to this verse of OnC:
"fear as teise i n-uair ágha
ichair ghrágha don bhantracht."
(he is a man mightiest in hour of battle
he is a key that unlocks the hearts of
ladies).

Lines a and c contain repetition of phrases from lines b and d of the previous stanza.

Gum bu dalt' thu do Chreig Ghuanach
'S fad o chuala mi ga sheanchas
Am buinne geal nach raibh éitigh,
'Sann duit a gheilleadh am bantrachd.

You were fostering to Creag Guanach
It is long since I heard it being said,
The bright warrior that was not unsightly,
It is to you that their women would yield.

Raghnall Mór is still the subject of praise, which in line c takes the form of understatement.

This stanza is also in ML and MN but the only printed version to incorporate it is the Macdonald Collection of Poetry.
T Stanza 34

Dh'fag me san Rugha so Shios
Fear leis m'bu phudhar mo bháis
Se chuireadh mo chagar a n'cruas
A nCluais a Chabair anSás

a. Rugha

this might be 'Ruighe', but the sense would be doubtful as a shieling is located 'up' rather than 'down'. It seems likely that the writer understood 'rudha'; the preposition 'air' would be expected if the speaker was actually on the promontory, but 'an' could suggest some distance between the speaker and the place. However, as the topic of the stanza is probably Alasdair Bothloinne (see endnote below), other interpretations would be more likely. A misconstruction could have occurred during transmission so that Rugha was interpreted from something like 'ruaidhe' which is what E gives; see E38.

c. chagar a n

elision probable.

Dh'fag mi 'san rudha seo shios
Fear leis m'bu phudhar mo bháis,
'S e chuireadh mo chagar 'n cruas
An Cluais a Chabair an Sás.

I left down here at the promontory
A man to whom my death would have been a disgrace,
It is he who'd make my whisper become loud,
Fixed in the ear of the deer.

The implication seems to be that the speaker hunted under the prerogative of the chief in question, a man to whom honour accrued from the prowess of this hunter/poet whose reputation was in turn boosted through the chief's patronage.

Alasdair Bothloinne, son Raghnall Mór mentioned in T33, seems to be the subject of this verse. He is also referred to in the next stanza, which is linked to this one by having the same opening phrase.
T Stanza 35

Dhfág me nCillúnain Na luighe
Sealgair na graidhe deirge
Lamhdheas a mharbhadh a Bhradain
'S gu mbu romhaith 'nsabaid feirge

a. Cillúnain Watson suggests this refers to the church at
Insh in Badenoch dedicated to St. Adamnan,
so - Cill Eòdhain.\(^{17}\) The parishes of Kingussie
and Innis Eòdhain were united for a time
from 1580.\(^{18}\) This area is some distance from
the Loch Tréig focus of earlier stanzas, but
Alasdair Bothloinne (see Proper Names Index)
died at Kingussie. There is a correlation
with the other manuscripts and E which have
Cinn (or Cill) a' Ghiuthsaich, rather than
Cillúnain. Rankin mentions this difference
between the sources but mistakenly reports T
as quoting Cill Ionain (which occurs in the
MacDonald Collection).\(^{19}\) This may be a typing
error as he elsewhere distinguishes
Cillúnain and Cill Ionain and suggests the
latter may be for Cill Phionain.\(^{20}\)

Endrhyme at a:c, b:d

Dh'fhág mi 'n Cill Eòdhain 'na luighe \((8^2+7^2)+(8^2+8^2)\)\(^{1+3, 2+4}\)
Sealgair na greighe deirge,
Lamh dheas a mharbhadh a' bhradain
'S gu mbu romhaith 'n sabaid feirge.

I left lying in Cill Eodhnain
The hunter of the red herd,
A right hand for killing the salmon
And he was of great excellence in the fight of wrath.

I take the words Dh'fhág mi at T34 and T35 not literally but as
a poetic device indicating that the speaker outlived the
individual being praised.

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\(^{17}\) BG, p.337.
\(^{18}\) Fasti Ecclesiae Scoticaneae, ed. by Hew Scott, vol.6 (Edinburgh,
1926), p.361.
\(^{19}\) RR, p.133.
\(^{20}\) R Place-names, p.116.
Mise' is tus a Ghadhair bháin
O'! 's olc ar turas do neilean
Chaill thus an tafann sa ndan
Is bha sinn grafann re ceanal

b. eilean

The sources present this word quite variably although 'eilean' occurs in later printed versions. D.C. Macpherson takes it to mean the island where Taigh nam Fleadh was built;\(^\text{21}\) (see Chapter 1 p.3). It is rather a vague reference to somewhere so specific. An uncertainty in transmission may have caused a textual shift which was assumed to refer to the story of the poet's visit to Taigh nam Fleadh. T does not contain the stanza naming the Council House, see M51. See also note E59.

c. tafann

The metre is similar to deibhidhe; see note at M34.

No aicill in first couplet; second couplet has internal rhyme [tafann:grafann] and loose aicill.

Mise' is tus a ghadhair bháin
O! 's olc ar turas do'n eilean,
Chaill thus' an tabhann 's an dàn
Is bha sinn grathann ri ceanal.

You and I, white hound
Oh, ill fated is our journey to the island,
You lost the chase and the song
And we were a while in pleasantry.

These wistful reflections indicate some partnership between the poet and the dog, but in line c there is no distribution of loss, the hound losing both chase and song; cf. next stanza. Perhaps the pronoun has fluctuated.

\(^{21}\) Macpherson, An Gaidheal, p.331.
Thug a Choille dhiots an Earb
'S thug a ntard dhiomsa na Feidh
Cho neil ciont' aguinn deth araon
oir luidh an aois oirnn gu leir

c. deth araon  probably elision.

Thug a' choille dhiot-s' an earb
'S thug an t-àrd dhiom-sa na féidh,
Chan eil ciont' againn deth araon
Oir luigh an aois oirnn gu léir.

The wood took from you the roe
And the hill took from me the deer,
We are not to blame for this ourselves
For age has pressed on us completely.

As old age is being developed here as a theme this stanza
might be taken to support the view that eilean at T36b
signifies a graveyard, albeit figuratively.
T Stanza 38

Thus' a Naois cho Neil thu miochair
Giodh nach nach bhfeudamar do Sheachnadh
Cromidh tu 'nDuine 'bhios direach
Dhfasfas gu fionalta gasda

a. miochair usually 'meachair' although the spelling miochair suggests the first vowel cluster is pronounced differently from that in Sheachnadh. Armstrong gives "miachair" which suits the rhyme better, see next line.

b. nach nach error.

bhfeudamar this synthetic verb, showing 'Irish' eclipsis, may be from 'feadar', the word used in other sources, cf. M36b; however, in spite of the fact that MacMurchy's orthography does not always make rhyme clear, see T6d, it would be unusual to write 'eu' for a short vowel. A form of 'feadar' would have aicill with miachair

d. dhfasfas Irish style spelling, f indicating future tense: dh'fhàsas

d. fionalta finealta

Endrhyme at a:c, b:d.

Thus' an aois chan eil thu miachair 2(8^2+8^2)^1+3, 2+4
Giodh nach fheudamar do sheachnadh,
Cromaidh tu 'n duine 'bhios direach
Dh'fhàsas gu finealta gasda.

You, age, you are not cheerful
Though we cannot avoid you,
You bow down the man who is straight,
Who grows genteel and handsome.
Agus giorruichidh tu 'Shaoghal
Agus caoluichidh tu Chasaibh
Is faguidh tu 'Cheann gun Deudach
Is tu eudann a chasadh

b. Chasaibh
old form of dative plural, although that
case is not required here. The form 'cas'
is used here, rhyming with chasadh but see
T21 where 'cos' is used.

d. missing word
probably 'ni'.
eudann
this spelling is required to reflect rhyme
with Deudach and will therefore be
maintained later in the expository
version.

Agus giorraichidh tu 'shaoghal  \(2(8^2+8^2)^{2/4}\)
Agus caolaichidh tu 'chasaibh,
Is fagaichd tu 'cheann gun deudach
Is ni tu 'eudann a chasadh.

And you shorten his life
And you shrivel his legs,
And you leave his head without teeth
And you make his face wrinkled.
Stanza 40

"Siomadh Laoch a b'fhearr na thusa
Chuir me gu tuisleadh sgu hanbhuinn
Sa Dhfadhbhuidh me as a Sheasamh
Tareis e bhith na Phleasgach calma

b. hanbhann the noun h-anbhainne (or anfhainne)
c. Dhfadhbhuidh dh'fhaobhaich

ending reflects pronunciation in
southern dialects of Scottish Gaelic,
(cf. Irish '-aigh').

'S iomadh laoch a b'fheàrr na thusa
Chuir mi gu tuisleadh 's gu h-anbhainn',
'S a dh'fhaobhaich mi as a sheasamh
Tar éis e bhith na fhleasgach calma.

Many a champion better than you
Have I sent to the point of stumbling and frailty,
And whom I despoiled as he stood
After he was a daring young man.
T Stanza 41

Aoís phealleudannach oghar
Bhias’gu Ronnach Boghar Éítich
Creud fa nligfann leat a Lobhair
Mo Bhogha 'bhreith dhiom air éiginn

a. phealleudannach from 'peallach', shaggy and
'aodannach/eudannach', aspected.

c. creud créad < cé réad (cf. dé rud).
ligfann 1st pers. conditional classical form,
cf. mod. Irish 'lig'.
Lobhair see end note M38.

between lines b and c is written and scored out:
Mo Bhogha cho 'Mhuigh see T43

Endrhyne at a:c, b:d.

Aoís phealleudannach odhar (7²+8²)+(8²+8²)¹¹²/²⁴
Bhios gu ronnach, bodhar, éítigh,
Creud fan ligfinn leat a lobhair
Mo bhogha 'bhreith dhiom air éiginn.

Old age shaggy looking, sallow,
Who are slobbering, deaf, ugly,
Why should I let you, you vile wretch,
Seize my bow from me by force?
T Stanza 42

Do labhair an Aois aris
Is righinn ata tu leantuinn
Ris an Bhogh sin a ngcónaigh
Smaith gu foghnadh dhuit a mbata

a. Do labhair classical verb form with perfect particle do.
   aris ò marking expansion of vowel-a rithis.

c. Bhogh final vowel perhaps sounded with consonant following.

c. ngcónaigh an còmhnuidh
   another example of eclipsis, cf. T38b.

Do labhair an aois a rithis,
Is righinn ata tu leantuinn
Ris an bhogha sin an còmhnuidh,
'S maith gu fòghnadh dhuit am bata.

Old age spoke again,
Tenaciously you are clinging
To that bow always,
Whereas the stick would suffice well enough for you.
T Stanza 43

Smaith gu foghnadh dhuit fein bata
Aois phealleud'nahc pleide
Smo Bhogh cho nfaigh thu faghast
San air aighis no air éiginn

b. Aois pleide vocative understood.
  Watson gives "pleide -spite", BG Faclair.
  AM questions John Mackechnie's translation
  "insolent". Dinneen gives the first meaning
  "wrangling, contention", which may be more
  appropriate.

c. bhogh like T42c.
  see T41 where writer started putting down line c
  from this verse in place of 41c. Possibly a
  copying error, the eye seeking the next line of
  v.41 and being misled by Aois phealleudannach in
  v.43.

d. aighis athais 'ease'; cf. Irish "ar áis no ar éicin"
  (RIA); Dwelly gives "tardy, slow" for
  "athaiseach" which is translated in Hebridean
  Folksongs as "deliberately". Intention
  certainly seems involved.

There is no obvious reason for the apostrophe in the second
word of line b, which was given in full at T41a in similar
metrical circumstances. There may be some muddle in
transmission here, since line a of this stanza is the same as
line d of the last and line b is almost identical with T41a.

'S maith gu fógadh dhuit féin bata 2(8²+8²)²
Aois phealleudannach pléide
'S mo bhogha chan fhaigh thu fathast
'S ann air athais no air éiginn

Indeed a stick would do well enough for yourself
Old age, shaggy looking and contentious,
And my bow you won't get yet
Either by design or by force.

22 J.L.Campbell and F.Collinson, Hebridean Folksongs (Oxford, 1969),
p.352.
T Stanza 44

Ta bloigh dom Bhogh' ann a Muchd
Le Agh maol oghar is ait
Thusa gionach 'smise Gruamach
Sfada leam nach buan an t-slat

c. gionach "greedy" usually (Dwelly, Ó Dónaill), but RIA has "gínach" with "laughing" (< gaping) as an alternative meaning.

The first couplet has internal rhyme [bhogha:odhar] and dialectal rhyme giving aicill.

Ta bloigh do mo bhogh' ann am' uchd
Le agh maol odhar is ait,
Thusa gionach 's mise gruamach,
'S fhada leam nach buan an t-slat.

Part of my bow is in my bosom,
A dun, hornless hind is happy,
You are laughing and I am gloomy
Wearisome is it to me that the limb does not endure.

The tight phrasing does not make for clarity but there is a strong sense of regret for the hunting which has meant so much to the speaker. His chest has become a metaphor for his bow so that part of the bow will always be with him even though its lifespan fades as his does. The hunter is worn out with age but so is the bow, which needs a new limb - archer's term for the flexing part. The hind is happy because safe from pursuit.

Some 19th-century commentators on this stanza have understood it to refer to the poet's wife. John Mackenzie states that it is an allusion to his "half marrow"; Keith Norman Macdonald uses the term "crooked rib" and goes on to construe that "the birch rod would not be a bad thing for her". It is doubtful if there is a sexual connotation here but if so it would not appear to refer to the inadequacies of the speaker's wife.

23 John Mackenzie, Sàr-Obair nam Bard Gaelach (Glasgow, 1841), p.17, Keith Norman Macdonald, MacDonald Bards from Medieval Times (Edinburgh, 1900) p.5.
T Stanza 45

Sfada leam o sguir me nfhiadhach
Snach bhfuil ann ach ceo don bhruighinn
Leis a mbu bhinn guth na ngadharyn
'S o bhfuighemuid ol gun bhruiighinn

a. nfhiadhach for 'dhen fhiadhach'.
d. bhruiighinn probably in the sense of 'fighting'.

Divergence of meaning in the Sc. Gaelic and Irish etymologies of 'bruidhinn'.
Macbain gives Irish "bruighinn, a brawl".

No internal rhyme or aicill.

'S fada leam o sguir mi 'n fhiadhach \[2(8^2+8^2)^{2/4}\]
'S nach bhuil ann ach ceò de 'n bhuidheannin,
Leis am bu bhinn guth nan gadhar
'S o'm faigheamaid òl gun bhruidhinn.

Wearisome is it to me since I stopped hunting
And there's been only the mist of the company,
For whom the voice of the hounds was sweet
And from whom we could get drinking without fighting.

Line b ceò metaphor for memory.
T Stanza 46

Nois o Sguir me Shiubhal beann
'S o nach teann 'n Tiubhar cruaidh
'S o nach Seasamh me air Sgeir
Struadh nach bhfuil me ann san Uaidh

a. Shiubhal

lenition caused by preceding 'de'
understood; cf. T45a

c. nach Seasamh me

Seasamh can be a finite verb form,
meaning "stand, stop, endure, last",
(Armstrong).

d. Sgeir

generally 'sea rock' but it does have
other applications; MacAlpine gives
"peat bank" and Armstrong "cliff". Since
this is the second unconventional usage
in the same stanza which is recorded by
Armstrong it may be as well to follow
his meaning for each.

Aicill and internal rhyme [siubhal:iubhar] in first couplet
but none in second.

Nis o sguir mi 'shiubhal beann

'S o nach teann 'n t-iubhar cruaidh,
'S o nach seasamh me air sgeir
'S truagh nach bhfuil mi anns an uaigh.

Now since I stopped travelling mountains
And since the hard yew is not tight,
And since I can't stop on a cliff
It's a pity I am not in the grave.

Line b refers to the yew used for the hunting bow; it has
lost its strength as has the hunter of line c.

This is in no other manuscript or printed version.
The manuscript numbered 2 in the Maclagan Collection in Glasgow University Library (and referred to here as ML), consists of four sheets of paper about 8" across and 7" high, folded over in book form and secured in the centre with a pin. It has 'No. 41' written in the top left corner. The handwriting is of sloping 18th-century style, generally clear and sometimes features the long 's'. It is considered to be the Rev James Maclagan's own writing; a few notes are kept with the collection, some typed, some handwritten, but all clearly dating from early in the 20th century and made by someone ordering and listing the contents. Various papers are here referred to as being in Maclagan's writing.

James Maclagan was born a farmer's son at Ballechin, Perthshire, in 1728. He studied at St Andrew's University, was ordained by the Presbytery of Dunkeld and was minister at Amulree in 1760. In June 1764 he became chaplain to the 42nd Foot Regiment and travelled abroad, seeing service in the American War of Independence. He held this post until 1787, when he took over the parish of Blair Atholl and remained there until his death in 1805. His large collection of Gaelic poetry was begun while he was at school and was a life-long interest.¹ He supplied some material to James Macpherson on the latter's request.² Of the 254 items in the collection some are in his handwriting, some are by various correspondents and others have drifted in. Some documents by the Rev Donald MacNicol are included. The items of poetry were probably not all actively sought out by Maclagan but some were contributed by sympathetic contacts.³ His concern for Gaelic, both language and literature, permeated his many activities. He was responsible for a statistical account of his parish and in it took the opportunity of

¹ Stated by Maclagan in conversation, Leyden, Tour p.260.
² op.cit. p.258.
encouraging the recording of Gaelic derivations and other information in the possession of the seanachies.¹

This text of *Oran na Comhachaig* has the same number and order of stanzas as that found in Macnicol's collection (presented in Chapter 5), and also the Gillies version, but there are numerous lexical differences.⁵ So, although it is known that Maclagan supplied Gillies with poems from his collection he does not seem to have passed him this one.⁶ It is almost certain that Gillies obtained his version from MacNicol. That the Maclagan and MacNicol manuscripts have the same distribution of stanzas suggests that they derive from a common source, whether written or oral.

There are occasional notes, about a dozen in all, inserted in the text of ML in handwriting which is possibly the same as that of the main text. Some of these are in Gaelic and some in English. They do not have the look of emendations but rather glosses or alternative readings. Four of these in Gaelic correspond to MacNicol's text (MN) with which Maclagan was clearly familiar.

This manuscript has a good many echoes of classical forms, although the orthography is sometimes more modern than that of M or T. However, it contains a feature of the literary language which is absent in those manuscripts; it maintains the 'g' of the preposition 'ag' before a consonant in the periphrastic present tense. The manuscript ML has no date. Robert Rankin suggests 1760 or thereabouts.⁷ The archaisms indicate that it might be earlier than any of the printed versions (earliest 1776) which present a more updated aspect.

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¹ *Statistical Account of Scotland* drawn up.... by Sir J.Sinclair (Edinburgh, 1791-99), 'Blair Atholl and Strowan', 1792, p.96.
⁷ RR, p.169.
ML Stanza 1.

A Chothachag bhochd na Sroine
A Nochd is Bronach do leaba
'Sma bha thu ann re Linn Dhonnghail
Cho'n Ingnadh ge trom leat t Aignidh.

Upper case initial letters of nouns and sometimes verbs are found throughout the manuscript but without consistency.

c. re this spelling for ri usually found in this manuscript.
d. Cho iongnadh for cha throughout manuscript.

First couplet has internal rhyme [bhochd:nochd] as well as aicill. Passable aicill in second couplet.

A chomhachag bhochd na Sròine
A nochd is brónach do leabaidh
'S ma bha thu ann ri linn Dhonnghail
Cha'n iongnadh ge trom leat t' aigneadh.

O poor owl of Strone
Sad is your bed tonight,
And if you were around in the days of Donnail
It's no wonder your spirit feels heavy.

Strone, see Sròn in Place-name Index.
Donnail, see Proper Names Index.
Ach anois o ta thu Aoista
Deansa t fhaoisid ris an t Sagart
Is Innis Duine gun Eacoir
Gach aon sgeula ga bheil agad.

a. ta
archaic spelling representing 'tha' may also indicate pronunciation.

Aoista
i has a line through; the inclusion of the palatalising i, which is then scored out, may be an aspect of the connection between ML and MN mentioned earlier. It will be seen that MacNicol's orthography favours the letter 'i' and in some cases this appears to be related to palatalisation. Some Argyllshire dialects have a palatalised 's' in words like 'aosda' and 'posda'. If Maclagan was using a source showing this feature he may have suppressed spelling habits which did not reflect his Perthshire speech.

c. duine
line over n must indicate a double consonant.
In other stanzas double 'n' is written out but 'duine' would not make sense.

d. ga bheil
dha bheil see note M43d.

Ach a nois o ta thu aosda
Dean-sa t' fhaoisid ris an t sagart,
Is innis duinne gun eacoir
Gach aon sgeula dha bheil agad.

But now since you are aged
Do make your confession to the priest,
And tell us without partiality
Every single story you possess.

See Chapter 8, 'The Fenian connection', for parallels in Fenian poetry.
ML Stanza 3

Is fhurasda dhomhsa shin Innseadh
Gach Laethe millte do rinneadh
Cho d'rinneas riamh Braid no Breugan
No Clagh no Tearmad a bhristeadh.
Re m'fhear fein cho d'rinneas Iomluase
Gur Cailleach bhochd Ionruic mise.

a. *fhurasda* lenition not required grammatically; cf. ML36.
shin spelling of this sibilant is erratic in this
manuscript. Often 'h' is used the same way as
in English, cf. manuscript M.

d. *Tearmad* form of 'téarmann'.
e. *rinneas* old s-preterite.

'S furasda dhomhsa sin innseadh $3(8^3+8^2)^{1+4+6}$
Gach latha millte do rinneadh
Cha d'rinneas riamh braid no breugan
No cladh no téarmad a bhriseadh.
Re m'fhéin cha d'rinneas iomluathas
Gur cailleach bhochd ionruic mise.

It is easy for me to tell that,
Every destructive day that was spent
I never did theft or falsehoods,
Nor violated any graveyard or sanctuary.
To my own husband I was not unfaithful,
It's a poor, innocent old woman that I am.

The unusual construction of six lines in the stanza suggests
that some lines are missing. This is confirmed by reference
to manuscripts M and T which both have the lines given above,
almost exactly, and an additional couplet after the first one
making two quatrains altogether. However, the additional
couplet in M is not the same as that in T.

See Chapter 1, part A, 'Unsettled times', for clan feuds, to
which line b may refer.
For other topics mentioned see endnote T5.
ML Stanza 4

Is Co- aoish mise dhan Daraig
A liath a h aillein anns a Choinich
S ioma Linn a Chuir mi romham
S mi Cothachag bhochd na Sroine.

a. aoish see ML3a, shin, for spelling.
b. some elision
   h aillein something very tiny (perhaps bha), then na
   Feiltein written above; cf. MN. 'Faillean'
   seems the likely reading given the variable
   presence of prothetic 'f';
   e.g. eagal/feagal; cf. T2b.

Is co-aois mise dha'n daraig 2(8^2+8^2)^2^4
A liath a h-aillean anns a' chòinnich,
'S iomadh linn a chuir mi romham,
'S mi comhachag bhochd na Sròine.

I am of an age with the oak
Whose shoot turned grey in the moss,
Many an era have I survived,
I am the poor owl of Strone.

Line b, emphasising the age of the tree, does not occur in
quite the same form in other sources. Here it describes a
shoot or sucker which is grey with lichen or one which has
withered.
I remember Alasdair Carrach
The boldest man who was in Scotland,
Often I used to listen
As he arranged the hunting hillock.

Second couplet, see end notes M46.
Alasdair Carrach, see Proper Names Index.

Hunting techniques see Chapter 1, pp.9-11.
ML Stanza 6

S Anas a thaine na Dhiaidh
Cho b' e shin Raghain bu Taire
S ann san Ersaid a bha Bhunadh
Nuair bha mhuilean air Alt Laradh.

a. Anas  Anghus written above.
   dhiaidh  na dheaghaidh indicated for aicill with Raghain.

b. Ersaid  'F' omitted, read Fhearsaid cf. ML4b. letter a
   inserted above r - recommending compliance
   with spelling rule.

c. mhuilean  occurs as masculine or feminine - Thomson
   and Maclennan give both. However, Dieckhoff
   has masculine, which is likely here.
   Laradh  "Laire" on maps, see Place-names Index;
   manuscript spelling shows genitive.

'S Aonghas a thainig na dheaghaidh
Cha b'e sin raghainn bu taire,
'S ann 'san Fhearsaid a bha bhunadh
Nuair 'bha 'mhuileann air Allt Laireadh.

And Angus who came after him
That was not a bad choice either,
It was in Fersit that he belonged
When his mill was on Allt Laire.

See Aonghas na Fearste in Proper Names Index.
ML Stanza 7

S iomadh Cogadh & Creachadh
A Bha 'n Lochabar an Uairsin
S Cait an rabh thusa ga t Fhalach
Eòin bhig na Mala gruamaich:

a. Maclagan uses an ampersand in English manuscripts also.

Endrharyme at $a:c$ and $b:d$.

'S iomadh cogadh agus creachadh
A bha 'n Loch Abar an uair sin,
'S cait' an rabh thusa gad fhalach
Eòin bhig na mala gruamaich?

Much was the fighting and plundering
That was in Lochaber at that time,
And where used you to hide yourself
Little bird of the gloomy eyebrow?

Another reference to clan feuds, as ML3.
ML Stanza 8

Chunna mise na Creachan
'S iad ag dul sheachad 'sam Fuathas
Thug mi Ruaig da Choire Ratha
'S bha mi grathan ann Creig ghuanach
c. da for do

Endrhyme at a:c, b:d.

Chunna' mise na creachan
'S iad ag dol seachad 's am fuathas
Thug mi ruaig do Choire Ratha,
'S bha mi grathann an Creig Ghuanach.

I saw the raids
As they went past and in terror
I took flight to Coire Ratha,
And spent a while in Creag Ghuanach.

Coire Ratha, Creag Ghuanach: see Ratha and Ghuanach in Place-names Index.
ML Stanza 9

Creig mo Chroidhse Chreig ghuanach
Chreg ann dfhuaras greis dom ' arach
Creg na Mang 's nan Aighin Siubhlach
Chreig Iular Aighireach Fheurach.

a. Creig this manuscript has very variable spelling of this word; the writer uses creig/chreig as nominative here at lines a,d although at ML8d, ML40d this is dative spelling as in current Gaelic. Creg/chreg as nominative in lines b,c is also found at ML10a, ML48a. ML41a has chreag as dative.

b. d'fhuaras old first person sing. preterite

c. iular see note M2d.

See note on endrhyime at M2

Creag mo chroidhe-sa 'Chreag Ghuanach,
'Chreag an d'fhuaras greis de m' àrach,
Creag nam mang 's nan aighean siubhlach,
'Chreag iùlar, aighearach, fheurach.

The rock of my very heart is Creag Ghuanach,
The rock where I gained a while of my training,
Rock of the fawns and the fleeting hinds,
The outstanding, blithe, grassy rock.

It may be that this stanza is spoken by the owl, extending her account of Creag Ghuanach, or it could be the poet responding to her mention of that hill in ML8. The next few verses seem to reflect a human hunter's enthusiasm rather than an owl's.
ML Stanza 10

Chreg bu mhian leom bhith ga tadhall
A Chreg mun Iathagh an Fhadhaid
Far am binn guth fallain gathair
Ag cuir greidh throimh ghabhail Chumhaig

d. ghabhail Dwelly gives several meanings including a ship's course; here it is the area deer were driven into in some methods of hunting; cf. eileirg, see Chapter 1, pp.9-11.

Internal rhyme [mhiann:iadhadh] but no aicill in first couplet.
Endrhyme a:b:c; see note M4.

'Chreag bu mhiann leam bhith ga tadhal 2(8^2+8^2)^{1+2+3}
A' chreag mun iadhadh an fhaghaid,
Far am binn guth fallain gadhair
Ag cur greigh thro' ghabhail chumhaing.

The rock I would love to be frequenting,
The rock around which the hunt would circle
Where sweet was a hound's healthy voice
Sending a herd through a narrow confine.
ML Stanza 11

'S Binn a h Iolairin fa Bruachan
'S binn a Cuachan 's binn a h Eala
'S Ceud binne na Shin an glaodhan
a ni 'n Laghan Men -bhreac ballach.

a. fa classical form, see T12a; current form 'mu', but the usage in this manuscript is inconsistent, mu used at ML10b.

b. cuachan often spelt 'cubhagan', but Irish 'cuach'.

'S binn a h-iolairean f'a bruachan 2(8^2+8^3)^{2+4}
'S binn a cuachan 's binn a h-eala,
'S ceud binne na sin an glaodhan
A ni 'n laoghan meanbh-bhreac ballach.

Sweet-voiced are her eagles around her slopes
Sweet-voiced her cuckoos and her swan,
A hundred times sweeter than that is the small cry
Which the little, most finely dappled fawn makes.

See Chapter 8, part A, 'The sweetest sounds', for discussion of this motif.
ML Stanza 12

S binn leom Torghanaich nan oss
Fo uilean nan garbh bheann Cass
An Eilid bhiorach is Caol Coss
A ni Closs fo Dhuile re Teas

b. Fo probably modern fo rather than classical fa as found in MLll.
c. is Caol Coss descriptive formula; see T21c.

Change to heptasyllabic metre.
No aicill in first couplet.
Endrhyme at a:c, b:d.

'S binn leam torghanaich nan os
Fo uileann nan garbh bheann cas
An eilid bhiorach as caol cos
A ni clos fo dhuille ri teas.

Sweet to me is the roaring of the stags
Beneath the shoulder of the rough, steep hills,
[And] the sharp-faced hind with slender foot
Who takes ease from the heat under foliage.
ML Stanza 13

'S aigeannach 'shiubhlas i 'n Fhriogh
Codal cho dean i san Smur
B'eanassa na Plaide fa taobh
Barr an Fhraoich Bhaddonaich Uir.

a. *Fhriogh* frith, "moor" or "deer-forest", seems intended as suitting the context; possible loose aicill with *dean*.
b. *codal* similar spelling in most sources, cf. Irish 'codladh'.
c. *B'eanssa* b'annsa fa for 'mu' as in M1la.

'S aigeannach 'shiubhlas i 'n fhrith, \(2(7^4+7^4)^2\)
Codal cha deán i 'san smúr,
B' ansa na plaide f'a taobh
Barr an fhraoich bhadanaich Úir.

Spiritedly she traverses the moor,
Sleep will she not in the cinders,
Preferring to a blanket around her flank
The top of tufty fresh heather.

Sleeping outdoors as a poetic motif is mentioned in Chapter 8, part B, 'Elegy and hunting'.
ML Stanza 14

Cho'n 'eil Ceile aic ach an Damh
Se 's Muime dhi Feur is Creamh
Mathair an Laoigh Bhall-bhric mhir
Bean an Phir Mhall-roscaich ghlain.

Internal rhyme [céile:feur] but no aicill in first couplet.
Rhyme pattern in second couplet, see note M23.
End rhyme at a:b:d.

Cha'n eil céil' aic' ach an damh,
'Se 's muime dhi feur is creamh,
Màthair an laoigh bhallbhric mhir,
Bean an fhir mhall-rosgaich ghlain.

She has no spouse but the stag,
Grass and garlic are her nurse,
The mother of the frisky speckled fawn
Wife of the pure husband with limpid eyes.
ML Stanza 15

Eilid Bhuireill, Bhaireill, Bhrangach
Odhar Eangach Uchd re h Ard
Damh croch-cheannach biorach, Sciomhach
Cronanach Ceann-riabhach Dearg.

a. Bhuireill cf. "burrail, to romp" (MacAlpine).
   Bhaireill bharrail "excellent" but also "sprightly".
   Bhrangach "snarling"; Macbain gives the etymology
   Scots "branks, a bridle", so 'showing her muzzle'.

b. Uchd re h Ard see T15b.

c. Ceann-riabhach see T15d.

Change in metre. This resembles sédna, see M21.
Internal rhyme [croch-cheannach:Crónanach].

Eilid bhurrail, bharrail, bhrangach
Odhar eangach uchd ri h-ard,
Damh croc-cheannach biorach, sgiamhach
Crónanach ceann-riabhach dearg.

Sportive hind, sprightly and snarling,
Dusky, swift of foot, breast towards the height,
Handsome stag with pointed, antlered head
Belling, with brindled head and red.

ML and MN, which are closely related, are the only sources to
give the adjective 'brangach' here. Adjectives tend to be
unstable and are often reported differently across the
sources (see Chapter 7, p.303). The word 'breangach' is used
in the 18th century by William Ross and also, with regard to
a hind, by Duncan Ban Macintyre. Donald MacNicol, who had
written down Macintyre's poetry for him, could have
associated the word with descriptions of hind, and had
recourse to it when writing out this verse of OnC with its
potentially confusing, alliterative adjectives. This may,
however, be a fanciful suggestion.

8 See Chapter 8, p.371 for the Ross quotation. Also ODB, line 3026,
"Tha maolisleach bheag bhrangach" occurs in 'Moladh Beinn Dóibhrain'.

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ML Stanza 16

O'n La rugadh mise riamh
Bha mi'n Cuideachd Fhiagh is Earb
'S cho 'n fhachadh mi 'dhath air Bian
Ach odhar is Riabhach is Dearg.

c. fhachadh probably for fhaca; the strange spelling is
similar to Jerom Stone's "Cho n fhaiseadh mi"
which he has in place of M25c cha nfaic mi.
ch may indicate preaspiration.

'dhath 'de dhath'

Loose aicill in second couplet.
Endrhyrne at a:c, b:d.

O'n latha rugadh mise riamh 2(7^1+7^3)^2+4
Bha mi 'n cuideachd fhiadh is earb,
'S chan fhaca mi 'dhath air bian
Ach odhar is riabhach is dearg.

Ever since the day I was born
I was in the company of deer and roe,
And I didn't see any colour on hide
Other than dun and brindled and red.

The speaker has always had a close connection with deer and
his perceptions are highly tuned to their characteristics.
Ge mor an Cathabh a t'ann
'S tric a bha m' athair a Shionn
'G eisteachd re Streadhadh nan Sonn
An Damh Donn ga Tafann le Gleann

a. cathabh
   Often "spending, wasting", but the sense of "extravagance" (Armstrong) is appropriate here, as in 'celebration'.
   Transcribed thus also by RR although there is some doubt about the beginning of the word as it is quite faint.

b. shionn
   Obsolete, meaning "here", gives endrhyme with Gleann; shin written above by what could well be the same hand, suggesting annotation by the writer as he copied from another document. MN gives shinn.

c. Streadhadh
   "sreathadh" and "sreothart" all mean "sneezing/snorting"
   Meaning 'stags'.

d. tafann
   For thabhann see note M34. The lack of lenition, which is present in MN, is probably a mistake.

No aicill in first couplet but internal rhyme in both [caitheamh:athair] and [sreathadh:thabhann]
Endrhyme at a:c, b:d.

Ge mor an caitheamh a t'ann
'S tric a bha m' athair a sionn,
'G eisteachd ri sreathadh nan sonn,
'N damh donn 'ga thabhann le gleann.

However great the revelry going on
Often was my father here,
Listening to the champions' snorting,
The brown stag hunted down a glen.

The switch of tense in the first couplet could suggest that the reading t'ann is erroneous.

Taken together with the previous verse this indicates that father's involvement in hunting encouraged the speaker's acquaintance with deer. The father seems to have been sufficiently well-connected to be involved in the most grand hunting expeditions.
This stanza is not in manuscripts M or T or in Eigg. There is a similarity of imagery between the second couplet and ML34, a stanza occurring in all sources.
Loch mo Chroidhe sin Loch Treige
Loch mu faighear Feigh is Earb
Ga bheil an Slios farsuing Reidh
Mar Gu biogh an taobh aig Mnaoi

a. sin written shin elsewhere in this manuscript.
b. mu variable use of mu and fa - cf. ML10, M11, M13.
c. Mnaoi looks as if a mistake was made on the second letter: 'h' changed to n.

There is aicill in the first couplet and also the second where Reidh:taobh match, as in Irish and Argyll speech; cf. M27.
Although there is endrhyme at a:c there is none at b/d. Such a lack would be highly unusual in rainneaghacht type metre. The presence of aicill points away from the likelihood that the text has shifted.9 Intended rhyme at b/d may fairly be postulated and its apparent absence attributed to scribal error or orthographic idiosyncrasy. The other source containing this stanza gives aig Mnaí here (see MN18), which suggests a dative plural. The emendation to mnáibh would supply adequate rhyme with earb and seems justifiable in both ML and MN.

Loch mo chroidhe sin Loch Tréig, 2(71+71)1+3, 2+4
Loch mu 'm faighear féidh is earb
'Ga bheil an slios farsaing réidh
Mar gu' biodh an taobh aig mnáibh.

That's the loch of my heart, Loch Treig,
A loch around which deer and roe are found,
Whose bank is wide and smooth
As the side of women might be.

Like the last stanza this is not in any other source apart from MN. See Chapter 7, p.323.
There is an echo here of the Lewis legend which describes mountains as women lying asleep.
The shores of Loch Tréig referred to must be parts on the east or south as the west is steeply banked.

9 These aspects of metre are discussed in Chapter 7, pp.325-35.
ML Stanza 19

Loch mo Chroidhse 'n Loch
Loch air an Snamhagh an Lach
Gheibhte sud anns Eala Bhan
S bhiogh iad ag snamh mu 'n seach

b. snamhadh iumadh (as in MN19) written above in apparently the same hand. This points to Maclagan's familiarity with either MacNicol's manuscript or the source of it. However, Maclagan presents this slightly different version.

c. Gheibhte first letter muddled and redone.

Loch mo chroidhe-sa an loch,
Loch air an snamhagh an lach
Gheibhte siud ann 's eala bhàn
'S bhiodh iad ag snamh mu 'n seach.

The loch of my heart is the loch,
A loch on which would swim the duck
That would be found there, also a white swan
And they would be swimming one after the other.

This stanza does not occur in manuscripts M or T.
ML Stanza 20

Cho do Ionnusich mise 'n t Iasgach
Bhi ga Iarruigh leis a Mhadhar
'S mor gu b'ionnsa leom am Fiaghach
Bhi Siubhal nan Sliabh as t Phomhar

c. b'ionnsa    cf. ML13c  B'eanusa.

Return to earlier metre.
Endrhyme at a:c, b:d.

Cha do dh'ionnsaich mise 'n t-iasgach
Bhith ga iarraidh leis a' mhaighar,
'S mor gum b' annsa leam am fiaadhadh,
Bhith 'siubhal nan sliabh a's t-Fhoghar.

I did not learn the fishing
To be seeking it with bait,
Much more dear to me was the hunting,
To be roaming the hills in autumn.

Preference for land over sea features again ML48; see also end note M6.
ML Stanza 21

Is Eatoir an Obair an t Shealg
Is Aoibhinn a Mainn is Beachd
S mor gu b' Ionnsa leom am Fonn
Na Lonn is i Dul fa Beirt.

b. mainm  meanmn'
c. b'ionnsa cf. ML13c, B'eannsa
d. lonn    long
   fa  sense indicates fo is intended; much inconsistency of this sort in this manuscript; see ML11a and M13c where fa represents 'mu'
and ML12d fo = fo

Is aotrom an obair an t-sealg,  \((8^1+8^1)+(7^1+7^1)^2\)
Is aoibhinn a meanmn' is a beachd,
'S mor gum b' annsa leam am fonn
Na long is i dol fo beairt.

It is light work hunting,
Pleasant is the spirit and the contemplation of it,
The land is much more dear to me
Than a ship getting under her rigging.

This stanza is metrically isolated; it tallies with the section ML12-M16 both as regards metre and subject, whereas here it accords with its adjacent verses only in the nautical reference.
ML Stanza 22

Giodh nach do Cleachd mi a bhi g 'eisteachd
Re Seitin na Muice Mara
'S minic a Chuala mi moran
Da Chronanaich an Daimh Allaidh

a. giodh  
a  
an old form of ged

b. Seitin  
séidean  
unlikely to be given much force after mi

d. Da  
used for do at ML8, but here for de

Ged nach do chleachd mi 'bhith 'g éisteachd  
Ri séidean na muice mara,
'S minig a chuala mi móran
De chrónanaich an daimh allaidh.

Although I was not used to listening 
To the blowing of the whale, 
Often did I hear much 
Of the bellowing of the wild stag.
ML Stanza 23

Mise 's tusa ghadhair Bhain
Cho'n eídir Linn dhol dan Illian
Chaill Shinn an Tathaich 's an Dàn
' S bha shinn grathann ri Ceanal

b. eídir obsolete, impersonal verb (spelt the same by Dwelly), meaning 'to be able'; takes prep. pronoun with 'le', see note line b. eídir may compare with modern Irish 'féidir', see Dinneen and Ó Dónaill.

b. Linn RR transcribes this "sinn" and in this handwriting 'L's and 'S's are very similar. But 'Sinn' would be the only instance in the manuscript of such a spelling of that word; cf. lines c,d. Linn for leinn fits syntactically. See also MN23.

b. Illian somewhat blotchy with Ilean written above, suggesting the same interpretation as found at T36, i.e. eilean. However, this line is presented variably by the sources, see also M34 and E59.

d. ceanal the gloss sugradh is written above this, possibly in the same handwriting.

Metre a bit like deibhidhe, see M34. Dàn:grathan might form loose aicill, but first couplet has no rhyme.

Mise 's tusa ghadhair bhàin
Cha'n eídir leinn dhol dhan eilean,
Chaill sinn an tathaich 's an dàn
' S bha sinn grathann ri ceanal.

You and I, O white hound
We can't get as far as the island,
We've lost the visit-making and the poetry
And we were a while in pleasantry.
ML Stanza 24

Thug a Choille dhiots ' an Earb
S thug an tArd diomsa na Feigh
Cho 'n 'eil musla dhuinn a Laoich
O Luigh an Aois oirn gu leir.

c. musla for masladh

Thug a' choille dhiots' an earb
'S thug an t-ard dhiomsa na féidh,
Cha'n 'eil masladh dhuinn a laoich,
O luigh an aois oirnn gu léir.

The wood took from you the roe
And the hill took from me the deer,
It is no disgrace to us, friend,
Since age has settled on us altogether.
ML Stanza 25

Aois cho 'n eil thu Meachair
Air Linn nach fheadar do Sheachnadh
Cromaidh tu Neach a bhios Direach
Bha roimhe gu mileanta gasta.

b. fheadar see note at M36b.

Endrhyme at a:b:d.

Aois cha'n eil thu meachair,
Ar linn nach fheadar do sheachnadh
Cromaidh tu neach a bhios direach,
Bha roimhe gu mileanta gasda.

Age you are not kind,
In our view there's no knowing how to avoid you,
You bow down a person who is straight
And was gallant and handsome before.
ML Stanza 26

Agus giorruighuidh tu Shaoghal
Agus Caolaicheadh tu Chasan
'S Fagaidh tu Chlaigean gun Deudach
S dean thu Eadann a Chassadh

d. dean āidh is inserted above and after, making clear that it is for the classical form, 'déan(f)aidh'. Then ní is written right above, possibly as a modern gloss or else noted from MN or another source. Both annotations may be in the original hand.

Agus giorraichidh tu 'shaoghal,
Agus caolaichidh tu 'chasan,
'S fàgaidh tu chlaigionn gun deudach,
'S dèanaidh tu eudann a chasadh.

And you shorten his life,
And you shrivel his legs,
And you leave his skull without teeth,
And you make his face wrinkled.
'S iomadh neach a b fhearr na thusa
D'fhag mise gu tuirseach anbhann
'S a dh'fhaobhaich mi as a sheasamh
Bha roimhe na Fhleasgach Mainmneach

Many a one better than you
Have I left sad and weak,
And whom I despoiled as he stood
Who was a spirited young man before.
Labhair an Aois a ris
'S ruithéann a ta thu leanntail
Air a Bhogha shin a ghiulan
'S maith gu fodhna dhuit an Steaffag.

b. ruithéann  righinn
d. Steaffag  above this are inserted the words a Rod

No aicill in second couplet.

Labhair an aos a rithis, (7²+7²)+(8²+8²)²+4
'S righinn a ta thu leantail
Air a' bhogha sin a ghiulán,
'S maith gu fòghnadh dhuit an steafag.

Old age spoke again,
Stubbornly are you persevering
At carrying that bow,
The stick would be perfectly adequate for you.
Biogh agads' an Steafag
Aois shional na Pleide
'S mo Bhogha Cho'n fhaigh thu fasd
A dh' Athais no thoirt air Eigin.

b. shional a derivative of 'sean', gives aicill with Steafag.
Pleide see note T43.
c. fasd for fathast
d. dh' Athais....see note T43d.

Biodh agads' an steafag $(7^2+7^2)+(8^2+8^2)^2+4$
Aois sheanal na pleide,
'S mo bhogha cha'n fhaigh thu fathast
A dh'athais no 'thoirt air éigin.

Let the stick be for you,
Old age decrepit and contentious,
And my bow you won't get yet,
Taking it by design or by force.
ML Stanza 30

O 's mi fein is fhearr an Airidh
Air mo Bhogha ro mhaith Iudhair
Na thusa Aois Pheallaich odhar
S thu 'n oir an Teallach ad shuigh

b. ro mhaith the byform ramhath suggests itself, giving aicill with Airidh.

Internal rhyme [pheallaich:teallach] in second couplet.

O's mi féin as fheàrr an airidh 2(8^2+8^2)^2+4
Air mo bhogha ramhath iubhair,
Na thusa aois pheallach odhar,
'S thu 'n oir an teallaich ad shuidhe.

Since I myself deserve better
My excellent bow of wood,
Than do you, shaggy, sallow old-age,
Who are seated beside the hearth.

This stanza is not in manuscripts M or T but is in Eigg.
ML Stanza 31

Aois Chon Eadannach odhar
Tha gu Boghar odhar Eitidh
Cuim anleigin leis an Lodhar
Mo Bhogha thoirt diom air Eigin

a. chon          above this is written Dun but it is presumably a gloss for odhar.
c. lodhar        lobhar  see endnote M38.

Endrhyne at a:c, b:d.

Aois chon-aodannach odhar
Tha gu bodhar odhar, éitigh,
C'uime'n leiginn leis an lobhar
Mo bhogha thoirt diom air éiginn?

Old age with the drab dog-face
Who is deaf, sallow and dreadful,
Why should I let the vile wretch
Take my bow from me by force?

(7^2 + 8^2) + (8^2 + 8^2)^{1+3,2+4}
ML Stanza 32

Se Blaigh mo Bhogha sho M’Uchd
Le h Agh maol odhar gur h ait
Ise gionail 's mise gruamach
S fhada leom nach buan an t slat.

a. blaigh form of "bloigh".

b. gional geanail

First couplet has internal rhyme [bhogha:odhar] and aicill that might be regarded as dialectal.

'Se blaigh mo bhogha seo am' uchd
Le h-agh maol odhar gur h-ait,
Ise geanail 's mise gruamach,
'S fhada leam nach buan an t-slat.

Part of my bow is here in my bosom
To the delight of a dun hornless hind,
She is happy and I am gloomy,
I find it wearing that the limb does not endure.

Interpretation discussed at T44 which has only minor textual deviations from ML. ML32c contrasts the hind and the hunter.
ML Stanza 33

'S fhada leom nach Buan a Bhuighean
'S gun ann ach an Ceò dhe 'n Fheoain
O'm Faigheamaid ol is Meadhail
'S leis 'm bu mhiannach Ceòl nan gadhar

b. Fheoain  fheadhainn  spelling suggests pronunciation to rhyme with Bhuighean; this accords with Dieckhoff's description - he says that the 'o' sound in 'fheadhainn' approaches 'u'.

c. Meadhail  above this is a superscription which possibly reads Joy ie.

meadhair may have been intended as it gives better rhyme with gadhar

Dissimilation of l<r in Meadhail could have occurred; all sources containing this line (ML, MN, E) have Meadhail. BG p.254 shows adjustment to "mheadhair".

No aicill but internal rhyme [leam:ann] and [òl:ceòl].

Endrhyme at a:b, c:d.

'S fhada leam nach buan a' bhuidheann 2(8²+8²)₁₂,₃₄
'S gun ann ach an ceò dhe'n fheadhainn
O'm faigheamaid òl is meadhair,
'S leis 'm bu mhiannach ceòl nan gadhar.

Wearisome is it to me that the company doesn't endure
And there's nothing but the wisp of the folk
From whom we had drinking and merriment,
And who loved the music of the hounds.

Line b Ceò used as a metaphor for memory.
ML Stanza 34

Chuala mi mo radha Ceoil
Gairm a ghabhair mhoir ag teachd
Damh ag Shiomanaich le gleann
'S Miolchoin ann is iad as

a. radha racket a form of "rogha/roghainn".
   Ceoil see M31a.

b. Shiomanaich inserted above this is sniomhanaich

Internal rhyme [ragha:ghadhair] and [shiomanaich:miolchoin].

Chuala mi mo raga ceoil
Gairm a’ ghabhair mh6ir ag teachd
Damh ag siomanaich le gleann
Is miolchoin ann is iad as.

I heard my choice of music,
The sound of the great hound approaching,
A stag weaving down a glen
And hounds darting this way and that for a grip on him.

See note M31 for action described line d.
Inneacha Dia ort a Thruth
Cuim n do Chuir thu Cul ris a ghleann
Aon mhada gad Chuir gu h Eug
Agus Se meoir dheug air do Cheann.

a. Inneacha the a this may be an epenthetic vowel; another possibility is a plural form of 'eineach' - Dinneen gives an example of a plural use "ar ionchaibh Sheáin".

Thruth thrù see M32a.

Eineach Dhia ort a thrù, 2(7^1+8^1)^2^4
Cuim'n do chuir thu cul ris a' ghleann?
Aon mhadadh gad chur gu h-eug
Agus sè meoir dheug air do cheann.

May God's blessing be with you, doomed one,
Why did you forsake the glen?
One hound brings you to death
When you've sixteen tines on your head.

Line d refers to the antlers of the deer.
ML Stanza 36

'S muladach Siubhal nam Beann
Gun Bhogha gun Sreang gun Chuth
Gun fiu na Saighde bhi ann
'S gun Fradharc teann aig an t Suil

c/d. fiu /Fradharc I leave these unlenited following Gun;
it may be that the writer was assuming
lenition here or that he did not lenite
'f' after 'gun'. The manuscripts often
have erratic recording of lenited 'f',
cf. ML3a, and see also T3b.

Endryme at a:c, b:d.

'S muladach siubhal nam beann 2(7^1+7^1)^{1+3,2+4}
Gun bhogha, gun sreang, gun chù,
Gun fiu na saighde bhith ann
'S gun fradharc teann aig an t-sùil.

It's sad travelling the mountains
Without bow or string, without dog,
Without as much as an arrow there,
And without keen sight in the eye.

This stanza does not occur in manuscript T or in Eigg but is
in M.
ML Stanza 37

Fagadar Donull a muich
Na aonar a Tigh nam Fleagh
S gearr a bhios gucag air bhuil
Luchd a Chruidh sud iad as tigh.

a. *Fagadar* for 'fàgbhadar', old 3rd person plural preterite.
d. see M51

Endrhyme at *a:c:d*.

Fàgadar Domhnall a *muigh* 2\((7^1+7^2)^1+3^1+4\)

'Na aonar á Taigh nam Fleadh,
'S gearr a bhios gucag air bhuil,
Luchd a' chruidh siud iad a staigh.

They left Donald outside
On his own away from the House of Feasts,
It's briefly the bumper froths over,
There are the cattlemen inside.

Taigh nam Fleadh, see Place-names Index.
Interpretation discussed in note to M51.
ML Stanza 38

Uaibh cho teid mi air Shiullaim
Olaidh mi a Treig mo Thionnshath
Boinne Brisg geal ro ghlan Fallain
O Iong an Fheigh a ni 'n Langan

a. shiullaim  a derivative of 'siubhal' with a verbal construction used as a noun;\(^{10}\)
cf. John MacCodrum's line:
"Fear ri geallaim 's cha toraim"\(^{11}\)
'One prone to promising and not giving'.
There is a superscription straggling.

b. O Iong an Fheigh
I take Iong in a metonymous sense here rather than literally, 'hoof' standing for 'speed'. However, the word may have been corrupted during transmission; see Chapter 7, p.323 for comparison with the other sources; see also endnote below.

No aicill but internal rhyme [téid:Tréig] in first couplet.

Uaibh cha téid mi air siubhlam,  \(2(8^2+8^2)^{2+4}\)
Ólaidh mi á Tréig mo theann-sháth,
Boine brisg geal, ro ghlan, fallain,
O iong an fhéidh a ni 'n langan.

From you I will not go wandering,
I will drink my fill from Loch Tréig,
A lively, bright drop, very pure and healthy,
Judging from the pace of the belling deer.

The verse order may be dislocated as it is not clear how this relates to the previous stanza. See also Chapter 7, p.323.

Ronald Black has pointed out the possibility that iong may be intended literally, as a drinking vessel made from a deer's hoof. In the museum at Kildonan, South Uist are some slippers made from deer's feet, indicating that such material was used for fashioning items of practical use.\(^{12}\)
The word iong occurs in manuscript MN as well as ML, both deriving from a common source. Maclagan and MacNicol may well have comprehended the likelihood of the speaker drinking from a deer's hoof cup.

\(^{10}\) George Calder, A Gaelic Grammar (Glasgow, 1923), p.98.
Mac Ann' re Radhall mor
Mharbhadh ann Bein na Feigh
Nach Dedhadh na aonar am Poit
Mo Dhoigh gur Donullach e.

b. Bein na Feigh féith "bog channel".
so Beinn nam Féith; see Féith in Place-
names Index.

c. Dedhadh conditional form seems intended.

No aicill in first couplet.
Endrhyme at a:c, b:d.

Mac Ann' ri Raghnall mór,
Mharbhadh am Beinn nam Féith,
Nach deidheadh 'na aonar am pòit,
Mo dhoigh gur Domhnallach e.

Son of Anna by Raghnall Mór,
Who was killed at Beinn nam Féith,
Who would not go drinking alone,
By my faith he is a MacDonald.

Line c employs understatement (see Chapter 7, p.302); the
negative assertion emphasises that Raghnall's son enjoyed
company.
Anna, Raghnall Mór and their son, Alasdair Bothloinne, see
Proper Names Index.

This stanza is not in manuscripts T and M.
ML Stanza 40

Gur Donullach e gun mhearachd
Am Boine ro ghlan gruadhach
'S ge ta e 'n Tras ann Tir Chatain
Gur a Dalt e do'n Chreig ghuanach.

b. boinne, variable gender, Dwelly and Thomson give feminine, MacAlpine and Maclennan masculine. This generally means 'a drop' but is also used figuratively as 'a young warrior'; cf. English 'a young blood'. A similar meaning is conveyed in T and E by a figurative use of 'buinne'; see T32. There seems to be an overlap in the use of the two words along with geographic variation. Although Dwelly, Maclennan and Macbain give "current" as the main meaning of "buinne", and "drop" for "boinne", Maclennan and Armstrong say "boinne" can also mean "current", while the Highland Society Dictionary (quoted by Dwelly) gives "buinne" for "drop".

ro ghlan
gruadhach
byform raghlan rhymes with mhearachd
as a cheek ruddy with health.

c. ge ta
ged tha
'n tras
for an dràsda < an tràth seo.

d. Gur a
a apparently an epenthetic vowel.

Gur Domhnallach e gun mhearachd
Am boinne raghlan gruadhach
'S ged ta e 'n tràs an tir Chatain
Gura dalt' e do'n Chreig Ghuanach.

He is a MacDonald without fault,
The warrior so pure and vigorous,
Although he is now in Chattan land
He is fostering to Creag Guanach.

Alasdair Bothloinne still appears to be the subject of praise (but see also Chapter 7, 'Identifying the chiefs of Keppoch', p.315); the reference to Chattan suggests that he spent some time amongst his Macintosh mother's people.
ML Stanza 41

Gur Dalt e do Chreag ghuanach
'S fhada o Chualas an Sheanchas
Am Boine ro gheal nach bheil Eitich
'S an leat a Bhreugnaichear Bantrach.

a. Chreag  variably spelt see ML9.
b. chualas  past passive.
c. Boine  see ML40b.

Gur dalt' e do Chreag Ghuanach,
'S fhada o chualas an seanachas,
Am boinne ro gheal nach eil éitígh,
'S ann leat a bhreugnaichear bantrach.

He is fosterling to Creag Guanach,
It's a long time since the story was heard,
The very bright warrior who is not unsightly,
It's by you that a widow is denied.

This stanza is not in M or in Eigg and the only printed version to give it is the Macdonald Collection. It starts with the last line of the previous verse and still relates to Alasdair Bothloinne.

There is a shift from the third person in line a to the second person in line d.

Line c contains another example of the use of complimentary negative epithet noted at ML39c.

Line d, while continuing praise of the hero, is open to slightly variable interpretation. The word bantrach may be intended in a proleptic sense; the woman is denied her husband by the hero's killing him and leaving her a widow. Alternatively, the honour of her widowhood would be denied if the hero seduced her. The latter meaning corresponds to the variant reading given in T - 'Sann duí a ghéileadh am bantrachd. At the time of composition the audience may have been familiar with stories of this chief of Keppoch and known precisely what the poet was referring to.
ML Stanza 42

Dh'fhag mi san Rugha sa Shios
Fear bu doilich dhomhsa Bhas
'S tric a chuir mo Thagradh ann Cruas
ann Cluas an Daimh Chabraich ann sas

a. Rugha rudha is the likely intention although perhaps a mistaken one (see T34). An alternative explanation is discussed at E38. The subject of the stanza is still Alasdair Bothloinne.

No rhyme at all in the first couplet. Aicill and internal rhyme [thagradh:chabraich] in the second.

Dh'fhág mi 'san rudha sa shios (7¹+7¹)+(8¹+8¹)²
Fear bu duilich dhomhsa 'bhàs,
'S tric a chuir mo thagradh an cruas
An cluas an daimh chabraich an sàs.

I left down here at the promontory
A man whose death was hard for me,
Who often laid my claim firmly
Fixed in the ear of the antlered stag.

Watson (BG p. 337) notes the use of the phrase 'cùir tagradh an cluais' by An Clarsair Dall in Oran mòr Mhic Leoid.
Dh'fhag mi 'n CillIusaich na Luighe
Sealgair na greidhe Deirge
Deas lamh a mharbhadh a bhradain
Bu mhaith e ann an sabaid Feirge.

a. CillIusaich probably a misinterpretation of Cinn a' Ghiùsaich; the same consonantal transference occurs in Eilearnais for Inbhirnis. Alternatively, as the parishes of Kingussie and Insh, or Innis Eoghain, were united about 1580 Cill Iusaich may be intended to specify the actual church at Loch Insh, which is dedicated to Adamnan.¹³
See note T35.

Some elision is likely in line d.
Endrhyime at a:c, b:d.

Dh'fhag mi 'n Cinn a'Ghiùsaich na luighe \((8^2+7^2) + (8^2+8^2)\)²⁺¹³²⁺⁴
Sealgair na greighe deirge,
Deas lâmh a mharbhadh a' bhradain
Bu mhaith e ann an sabaid feirge.

I left lying in Kingussie
The hunter of the red herd,
A hand ready for killing the salmon,
He was of benefit in the wrathful fight.

This is the last stanza in the section starting at ML39 describing Alasdair Bothloinne.

¹³ Fasti Ecclesiae Scoticanae, vol.6, p.361.
ML Stanza 44

Chi mi Coire Ratha uam
Chi mi'n Cruachan's a Bhean bhreac
Chi mi Srath Oissein nam Fiagh
Chi mi ghrion air Màm nan Leac.

Chi mi Coire Ratha uam, 2(7\(^1+7\)^{2/4}
Chi mi 'n Cruachan 's a' Bheinn Bhreac,
Chi mi Srath Oisein nam fiadh,
Chi mi 'ghrian air Màm nan Leac.

I see Coire Rath at a distance,
I see Cruachan and Beinn Bhreac,
I see Strath Ossian of the deer,
I see the sun on Màm nan Leac.

For place-names see appropriate Index and also note on Cruachan at T28.
ML Stanza 45

Chi mi Srath Oissein a Chruidh
Agus Leith -tir dhubh nan Sonn
Is Coire Riabhach a Mhaim
Far an tric an tug mo Lamh Toll.

b. leith leth
Sonn referring to stags as before, ML17.
c. mhaim above this is written lump of a hill

Chi mi Srath Oisein a' chruidh \[2(7^2 + 7^4)^{2+4}\]
Agus Leth-tir dhubh nan sonn
Is Coire Riabhach a' Mhàim,
Far 'n tric an tug mo làmh toll.

I see Srath Ossian of the cattle
And Leitir Dhubh of the hero-stags
And Coire Riabhach of Màn,
Where often my hand caused a gap.

Line d, see end note T29.

Srath Ossian is emphasised by repetition from the previous stanza. The spelling Leitir Dhubh is given in English as this features on OS maps; the more analytical style of the source is kept in the expository version.

Place-names Index see Srath Ossian, Leitir Dhubh, Riabhach a' Mhàim.
ML Stanza 46

Chi mi Beinn Eibheish gu h ard
'S an Carn Deirg na laimh re Bun
Fo Bonn a Chitir am Fraoch
Mona min & a muir.

c. fo this is modern fo as at ML12b.
   fo is unlikely to be for 'bho' as this
   writer uses 'o', see ML38d, ML48d.

d. a muir muir may be masculine, as here, or feminine.
   ampersand as at ML7a

Fraoch and min have long vowels articulated close enough
   together to form aicill.

Chi mi Beinn Eibhis gu h-ård
'S an Carn Dearg na làimh ri bun
Fo bonn a chitear am fraoch,
Monadh min agus am muir.

I see Ben Nevis high up
And Carn Dearg nearby at its foot,
At its base can be seen the heather,
Level moorland and the sea.

In Place-names Index, see Ben Nevis under Nevis and Carn
Dearg under Dearg.
ML Stanza 47

Chi mi shin san Scannan ruagh
Taice re Ceann Locha Treige
'S a Chreig-ghuanach mu'n Iath an t shealg
'S an grianan ard am biogh na Feigh

a. **Scannan ruagh** this sounds like a place-name but none such has been located. The name most resembling it on any map is "Sgainna riuearchd(?)" in the Lairig Leacach, indicated by John Thomson. Some lexical fluctuation may have taken place, cf. T27.

c. **Chreig** another instance of spelling Chreig used for nominative; see ML9 for variability in spelling this word.

d. **grianan ard** see note Mld.

d. **biogh** gh inserted above.

Internal rhyme [sgannan:Taice] but no aicill in first couplet.

Chi mi sin 's an Sgannan Ruadh, (71+71)+(81+81)2+4
Taice ri ceann Locha Tréig,
'S a' Chreag Ghuanach mu'n iadh an t-sealg
'S an grianan árd am biodh ma féidh.

I see that and Sgannan Ruadh,
Near to the head of Loch Tréig,
And Creag Guanach which the chase surrounds
And the high, sunny abode where the deer would be.

Line d see note M1.
ML Stanza 48

Creg mo Chroidhs' a Chreag-ghuanach
's an Tulach shlattach Chraobhach
An tulach ard aluin ghrianach
Is Cian a ghabhas o'n mhaorach.

a. Creg  see ML9 for spelling.
b. Tulach  although Dwelly gives this as masculine it is
  often feminine, as in MacAlpine.
d. ghabhas  probably the relative form rather than a past
  passive or s-preterite; cf. ML50.14

Alliteration but no aicill in first couplet.

Creag mo chroidhe-sa 'Chreag Ghuanach  $2(\theta^2 + \theta^2)^{214}$
Is an tulach shlatach chraobhach,
An tulach àrd àlainn ghriannach
As cian a ghabhas o'n mhaorach.

The rock of my very heart is Creag Ghuanach
And the hillock, sylvan and wooded,
The high, beautiful, sunny hillock,
Which is situated far from shellfish.

For significance of line d see end note M6.

14 These are commented on by Watson, BG, p.398.
ML Stanza 49

Chi mi da mheall nan oss
An taobhsa Bhos do Choire Mhiltich
Scurr Coinich na Damh Seang
S ionmhuin leam an Diu na Chi mi.

a. mheall

after and above this are inserted letters an, in very small writing; cf. MN49.

da mheall nan oss

presumably place-names but identification is not easy as there are several arguable candidates. Rankin suggests Meall Mór and Meall Beag west of Lairig Leacach. These are not far from Sgùrr Chòinnich (q.v. Place names), which may be meant in the next line. Or this may be a misunderstanding of Sgòr Choinnich, which is given in M15. In this case the other places in this stanza can also be assigned to the Loch Ossian area, which was mentioned in ML45.
da mheall nan oss could be Meall Nathrach Beag/Mór which are east of Loch Ossian and near to Sgòr Choinnich. This interpretation may link up with the next place-name, line b.

b. Choire Mhiltich

Possibly intended purely descriptively. Duncan Bàn Macintyre uses the word "mhiltich" several times; e.g. in Oran Coire a' Cheathaich he describes a "Gleann a' mhiltich" which is translated as "Glen of arrow grass" by both Derick Thomson and Angus Macleod. On the other hand, the name might be a corruption of Coire a' Bhealaich, situated just north of Sgòr Choinnich. Meall Nathrach Beag and Mór are indeed this side of it. M15 gives coir mhile which could be another distortion of the same name.

Disyllabic endrhyme indicated, involving two words at line d.

Chi mi dà Mheall nan Os
'N taobhs' a bhos de Choire Mhiltich,
Sgùrr Chòinnich nan damh seang,
'S ionmhuinn leam an diugh na chi mi.

I see the two Meall nan Os
On this side of Coire Mhiltich,
Sgùrr Chòinnich of the slender stags,
Fond I am of what I see today.

15 R Place-names, p.119.
17 ODB, line 2285.
ML Stanza 50

O Chunna mi sibh gu leir
Gabhaidh mi fein dibh mo Chead
An Cead is fhaide ghabhas riamh
Ris an Fhiadh da'n rabh mo Thoil.
Mo Bhogha cho teid air bhar Sgath
'S gu la bhratha Cho leigeas Cóin.

c. ghabhas s-preterite.
d. da'n da has been used for 'do' in this manuscript, see ML8, but the preposition 'aig' is more likely than 'do' here; an interchange of consonants has occurred: aig an rabh > 'g an rabh > da'n rabh.
e. bhar obsolete for bhur
f. leigeas unusual verb form; possibly dialectal, but as it is synthetic it may be an attempt to modernise the classical 1st person singular future 'leigeabh'. Alternatively, it could be an s-preterite used for the apodosis in a conditional sentence.¹⁸

Very similar lines are found in manuscript M where the inclusion of another couplet produces two quatrains. cf. this 6 line stanza with ML3 where the same kind of loss has occurred.

O Chunna' mi sibh gu léir (7¹+7¹)+2(8¹+7¹)⁴¹⁶
Gabhaidh mi féin dibh mo chead,
An cead as fhaide ghabhas riamh
Ris an fhiadh 'g an rabh mo thoil,
Mo bhogh' cha teid air bhur sgath
'S gu là 'bhràth cha leigeas coin.

Since I have seen you fully
I'll make my own farewell to you,
The longest farewell I ever took
Was to the deer I delighted in,
My bow won't move on your account
And till doomsday I would not let slip hounds.

The last couplet recalls verses ML23-ML33 in which old age curtails the pleasure that hunting used to offer.

Donald MacNicol, 1735-1802, was born in Glen Orchy. He graduated from St Andrew's University in 1756 and was minister to the parish of Saddell and Skipness for a few years before being inducted at Lismore in 1766. He gained a reputation for Gaelic scholarship and was one of the persons of note visited by John Leyden. Dr Duncan MacColl of Salen supplied information about MacNicol in 1871. MacColl's father had apparently, as a youth, written down Gaelic material to his dictation. MacColl reports that MacNicol helped Duncan Bàn Macintyre in "getting his poetry into shape", but this may be taken to mean that MacNicol wrote it down for him. In his spirited response to Dr Johnson's record of his visit to the Western Isles, MacNicol took the opportunity of correcting some misapprehensions about the Highlands and the Gaelic language; the work is subtitled to include Observations on the Antiquities, Language, Genius and Manners of the Highlanders of Scotland.

MacNicol amassed a large literary collection, both in Gaelic and English. From the MacDonalds of Ardshiel he acquired a good deal of material, including a manuscript history of the Clan Donald. This formed part of the papers that were lost by MacNicol's son Dugald on a journey to the West Indies.

The Gaelic section of the MacNicol collection contained a considerable number of Ossianic ballads on which J.F.Campbell worked. The collection eventually came into the National Library of Scotland but unfortunately some items (including Òran na Comhachaig) disappeared after they had been consulted by Rev John Mackechnie.

2 Leyden, Tour, p.107.
4 ibid.
5 Donald MacNicol, Remarks on Dr Samuel Johnson's Journey to the Hebrides (Edinburgh, 1779).
7 Campbell, Leabhar na Féinne.
8 Formerly NLS Acc 2152, later renumbered 14840-14869.
I use here a transcript which I have reconstructed from the version published by John Gillies in 1780, adapted according to notes made available by Professor Robert Rankin. He read MacNicol's manuscript in 1970 before its loss and collated it with the Gillies exemplar, which closely resembles it and almost certainly derives from it. Rankin records the document as being in Donald MacNicol's own hand with his signature on the contents' page. It was not dated but other manuscripts in the collection bore the dates 1752, 1766, 1769, 1777.

The MacNicol text (MN) contains, as well as archaic morphology, such as lack of assimilation of consonants and obsolete verb forms, some unusual but inconsistent spelling practices. Double consonants, such as 'ss', 'nn', 'rr' abound; 'bh' has preference over 'mh' to represent the labial/labio-dental fricative. The use of the letter 'h' is widespread and erratic; sometimes it is used after 's' to show a palato-alveolar fricative as in English (and as in the Maclagan manuscript M); sometimes it has no apparent function. Quite often, but not invariably, initial 'tsh' marks lenition. The letter 'i' is used liberally and although this may relate to some extent to MacNicol's dialect, the usage does not conform to a consistent pattern; this letter is also occasionally absent in places where one might expect it. The orthography has a marked tendency to show 'svarabhakti' vowels and 'schwa' is often indicated by '-idh'. These features, and also insertion of 'h' and 'i', are so common in the text that not all such instances are pointed out. I comment on the ones occurring earliest in the poem, and also those of particular interest. These vagaries of spelling are emended in the expository text.

The relationship between the manuscripts MN and ML is discussed in the introduction to Chapter 4.

Coichag bhochd na Shroine

MN Stanza 1

A Choichag bhochd na Shroine
A Nochd as bronich do Leaba
'S ma bha u ann ri Linn Donnaghail
Cha'n iunigh ge trom leat Taigne

a. Choichag An example of the frequent intrusion or substitution of a slender vowel, especially i, in positions not found in present day orthography.

b. Leaba leabaidh.

c. u thu 2nd pers. pronoun variously spelt in this manuscript: u, tu, tus', ussa, thusa, thussa.

D. Donnaghail first 'a' representing svarabhakti.

d. iunigh iongnadh

Internal rhyme [bhochd:nochd] and also aicill in first couplet.
Tolerable aicill in second couplet.

A chomhachag bhochd na Sròine

A nochd as brònach do leabaidh,
'S ma bha thu ann ri linn Donnghail
Cha'n iongnadh ge trom leat t'aigneadh.

O poor owl of Strone
Whose bed is sad tonight,
And if you were around in the days of Donnail
It's no wonder your spirit feels heavy.

Strone, see Sròn in Place-names Index.
Donnail, see Proper Names Index.
MN Stanza 2

Ach anois fon ha u aoist
Diansa 'tfhaosid rish an Tshagairt,
Is innish duinne gun Ecoir
Gach aoin Sgeula ga bhuil agad.

a. fon
   ha
   aoist

bho'n
tha frequent use of h alone to indicate lenited consonant; see MN6a hanig, MN8c Hug
aosd': the spelling aoí in this manuscript often occurs where some other writers would use 'ao' (see aoin, line d and also MN32b.)
MN's use of the spelling ao, where current usage would give 'a', see MN10, appears to have been common as M and E follow the same practice, cf. M4, E13.

Diansa
spelling shows a break in the vowel sound.

b. rish
use of h to show slenderised s, as in English spelling.

Tshagairt
modern orthography requires neither h nor i, although Macalpine gives 'sagairt' as an alternative nominative form.
i may reflect dialect as in aoist MN2a.

c. innish
cf. rish line b

d. aoin
aon

ga bhuil
dha bhuil see note M43d.

Ach a nois bho'n tha thu aosda, 2(8^2+8^2)^2 + 4
Dean-sa t' fhaoisid ris an t-sagart
Is innis duinne gun eucoir,
Gach aon sgeula dha bhuil agad.

But now since you are aged,
Do make your confession to the priest
And tell us without partiality,
Every single story you possess.

See Chapter 8, 'Integrity of the Comhachag', and 'The Fenian connection', for parallels in Fenian poetry.
'S furiste dhoibhsa shin innse
Gach Lathidh milte do reinnidh:
Cha dreinnis riabh Braid na Bregan
Na Claoigh na Tearramad a bhriste
Ri'm Fhear fein cha'd dreinnis Iomluase
Gur Caillich bhochd Iunric mishe.

a. dhoibhsa **dhomhsa** - bearing two of the writer's spelling habits: i. insertion of *i*
   ii. *bh* rather than 'mh'
   It looks at first glance as if 2nd person plural is meant but this would not correspond
   with *aggad* of MN2d; see line f of this stanza where it is clearly the owl who is replying to
   the question in MN2 and see also MN4c *robham*
   use of *h* after *s* before a slender vowel is
   very common in this manuscript; cf. MN2b.

b. Lathidh **latha idh** for schwa.

c. bregan breugan cf. MN2b *dian*, yet not 'briag' here.
   This might indicate that MacNicol's dialect did not use the same vowel in 'breug' as in
   'dean' or it may be due to recognition of rhyme with *Tearramad*. Dieckhoff records both
   'dean' and 'breug' with the same vowel sound:
   a diphthong well represented by the vowel cluster in *dian*.

d. claoigh colloquial form of *no*

d. claoigh considering the writer's spelling this is more likely to be *cladh* than 'claoidh' or 'claidhe'.

d. Tearramad showing svarabhakti, a form of 'téarmann'.

'S furasda dhomhsa sin innse,  \[3(8^2+8^2)^{1+4+6}\]
Gach latha millte do rinneadh
Cha d' rinneas riamh braid no breugan,
Na cladh na *téarmad* a bhristeadh,
Ri m' fhéar féin cha d' rinneas *iomluathas*,
Gur cailliche bhochd *ionruic* mise.

It is easy for me to tell that,
Every destructive day that was spent
I never did theft or falsehoods,
Nor violated any graveyard or sanctuary,
To my own husband I was not unfaithful,
It's a poor, innocent, old woman that I am.

This 6 line stanza was probably originally 2 quatrains of which a couplet was lost. See endnotes ML3.

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MN Stanza 4

'S coishidh mishe do'Darraig
Bha na Faillain ansan Choinich
'Siummad Linn a chuir mi robham,
'Smi Coichag bhochd na Shroine.

a. coishidh mishe  co-aoise mise
b. iummad         iomad

'S co-aoise mise don daraig  \[2(8^2+8^2)^{2+4}\]
Bha 'na faillean anns an chòinnich
'S iomad linn a chuir mi romham,
'S mi comhachag bhochd na Sròine.

I am of an age with the oak
That was a young shoot in the moss,
Many a century have I survived,
I am the poor owl of Strone.
MN Stanza 5

'Scuibhne leom Allastir Carrich
'N Duinne as ailloil abha'n Allabin,
'Sminig a bha mi ga cistichd
'Se ri reitiche 'n Tuim Tsheallaga.

c. cistichd apparently an absent-minded copying mistake; 'eistichd' seems intended, which is the spelling used at MN17c and MN22a. No other word seems to fit the case.

d. Tsheallaga shealga Tsh often shows lenition in this manuscript; cf. MN13a tshiulas, MN26 'Tshaoghil, MN27c tsheissibh, MN38b 'tshion-tshath

'S cuimhne leam Alasdair Carrach
'N duine as allail a bha 'n Albainn,
'S minig a bha mi ga éisteachd
'S e ri réiteach 'n tuim-shealga.

I remember Alasdair Carrach
The noblest man who was in Scotland,
Often I used to listen to him
As he arranged the hunting hillock.

See Alasdair Carrach in Proper Names Index and endnote M46.
MN Stanza 6

'S Aonghas a hanig na dheothidh
  Cha be shin Raoghin bu tairridh;
'Sann san Fhersaid abha Bhunnadh
  Nuair bha Mhullin air Alt Laradh.

a. dheothidh  dheagaidh
d. Mhullin  see note on gender ML6d.
  Laradh  spelling showing genitive.

'S Aonghas a thainig na dheagaidh,
2(8^2+8^2)^2+4
Cha b'e sin roghainn bu tâire;
'Sann 'san Fhearsaid a bha bhunadh
Nuair 'bha 'mhuileann air Allt Lâireadh.

And Angus who came after him,
That was not a bad choice either;
It was in Fersit that he belonged
When his mill was on Allt Lâire.

See Fersit and Lâire in Place-names Index.
See Aonghas in Proper Names Index.
MN Stanza 7

Siurnmad Cogga 's Creicha
A bha 'n Lochabar san uair shin,
'Scait an ro thussa gad fhaíllich
Eòin bhig na mala gruamich.

a. Cogga cogadh
   Creicha creachadh assuming an old plural form of
   'creacha' is not meant, in light of creichan,
   see MN8a.

Endrhyne at a:c, b:d.

'S iomad cogadh is creachadh
A bha 'n Loch Abar 'san uair sin,
'S cait' an robh thusa gad fhaìlach
Eòin bhig na mala gruamaich.

Much was the fighting and plundering
That was in Lochaber at that time,
And where used you to hide yourself
Little bird of the gloomy eyebrow?

Another reference to clan feuds, cf.MN3
MN Stanza 8

Gun facca mishe na Creichan
'Siad aig dol sheichid, 's am Fuathas;
Hug mi Ruaig do Choiridh Raha
'S bha mi Grauthin an Craig ghuanich.

a. Gun **gum** likely in speech cf. MN10b.
b. The punctuation, which differs from that of any other source and affects the meaning, is retained in the expository version.
d. **craig** dialectal form of 'creag' (Macbain)
   **ghuanich** i here is grammatical (dative) unlike those in 2nd syllables of sheichid, grauthin.

Endrhyme at a:c, b:d.

Gum faca mise na creachan
'S iad aig dol seachad, 's am fuathas;
Thug mi ruaig do choire Ratha
'S bha mi grathunn an Creig Ghuanach.

I did see the raids
As they went past, and their horror;
I took flight to Coire Ratha
And spent a while in Creag Ghuanach.

See Ratha and Ghuanach in Place-names Index.
Creig mo Chriodhse chreig ghuanich
Chreig san duair mi greis de m arach
Chreig nam Mang 's nan Aighin shiubhlich
Chreig iular, aighirich, fheurich.

a. creig spelling inconsistent with previous stanza so perhaps latter a mistake.

Chriodhse possibly a mistake for the old form croidhe; cf. MN19.

c. chreig I can see no function for the h here but perhaps repetition of this word in the stanza led the writer into absent-minded conformity.

d. iular see M2d.

See note on endrhyme at M2

Creag mo chroidhe-sa chreag ghuanach, 2(8^2+8^2) 2+4
'Chreag 'san d' fhuair mi greis de m' arach,
Creag nam mang 's nan aighean siubhlach,
'Chreag iular, aighearach, fheurach.

The rock of my very heart is Creag Ghuanach,
The rock where I gained a while of my training,
Rock of the fawns and the fleeting hinds,
The outstanding, blithe, grassy rock.

See endnote ML9 on identity of speaker.
Chreig bu mhian leom bhi ga taoghil
A Chreig mum iathidh an Phaothid
Far am binn Guth fallain Gaothir
Aig cuir Graidh ro Ghabhail chuibhing.

b. mum            mum use of final m/n erratic; cf. MN8a

d. graidh          greigh
    ro            form of 'troimh'
    Ghabhail      see note ML10d

First couplet has internal rhyme [mhiann:iadhadh] but no aicill.

‘Chreag bu mhiann leam bhith ga tadhal,
A’ chreag mun iadadh an fhaghaidh,
Far am binn Guth fallain gadhair
Aig cuir greigh ro’ ghabhail chumhaing.

O rock I would love to be frequenting,
The rock around which the hunt would circle,
Where sweet was the healthy voice of a hound
Sending a herd through a narrow enclosure.
MN Stanza 11

'Sbinn a Hioloran fa Bruachan;
'Sbinn a Cuachan, sbinn a Healla
'S ceid binne na shin an Glaoghan {Blaoghan written above}
A ni'n Laodhan meanibh-bhrec ballich.
a. fa classical form, see T12a. This manuscript,
like ML, shows inconsistent use of fa and mu;
cf. MN10b.
b. Cuachan see ML11b.

Return to the metrical form used MN1-9.

'S binn a h-iolairean f'a bruachan; 2(8^2+8^2)^{24}
'S binn a cuachan, 's binn a h-eala
'S ceud binne na sin an glaodhan
A ni'n laoghan meanbh-bhreac ballach.

Sweet-voiced are her eagles around her slopes;
Sweet-voiced her cuckoos and her swan,
A hundred times sweeter than that is the small cry
Which the little, most finely dappled fawn makes.

See Chapter 8, part A, 'The sweetest sounds' for discussion of this motif.
Gur binn leom Torman nan Oss
Ri Uillin nan Gairbhhean cass;
An Eillid bhirrich as caoil Coss,
Ni Closs fo Dhullich ri Teass.

c. as caoil coss
   as caol cos descriptive formula, see T21c.
d. fo  fo as in modern Gaelic;
   cf. classical form fa for mu MN11a.

Change of metre.
No aicill in first couplet.
Endrhyne at a:c, b:d.

Gur binn leam torman nan os 2(7^{1+7^{1}})^{1+3,2+4}
Ri uilleann nan garbh bheann cas;
'N eilid bhiorach as caol cos,
Ni clos fo dhuilleach ri teas.

Sweet to me is the roaring of the stags
Scaling an angle of the rough, steep hills;
The hind with pointed head and slender foot
Takes ease from the heat under foliage.
MN Stanza 13

'Saigiontich 'tshiulas i'n fhriodh;  
Codal cha dian I san smur;  
Bansidh na Leaba fa Taoibh  
Barr an Fhrroich bhadanich ghuirm.

a. aigiontich  
aigiontach (or 'aigennach')
fhriodh  
frith see ML13a; manuscripts MN and ML use spellings which suggest different dialects but rhyme on the same words, frith: deán, may be envisaged.

c. Bansidh  
an example of the writer's use of '-idh' for 'schwa'.

fa  
see MN11a.

'S aigiontach shiùbhas i 'n fhrioth,  
Codal cha deán i 'san smùr,  
B' annsa na leaba f'a taobh  
Barr an fhraoich bhadanaich ghuirm.

Spiritedly she traverses the moor,
Sleep will she not in the cinders,
Preferring to a blanket round her flank
The top of tufty, green heather.

Sleeping outdoors as a poetic motif is mentioned in Chapter 8, part B, 'Elegy and hunting'.

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MN Stanza 14

Cha neil Cheil aic' ach an Daibh;
She's Muime dhith Feur as Creibh;
Mathair an Laoigh Bhallabhric mhir,
Bean an Phir mhall-roisgich ghlain.

a. Daibh               damh - spelt thus throughout, irrespective of
case, viz. MN15, 17, 34 (nominative sing.)
        MN22, 42 (genitive sing.) MN49 (genitive pl.)
c. bhallabhric svarabhakti vowel written in.

Internal rhyme [chél':feur] in first couplet but no aicill.
End rhyme at a:b:d.
For rhyme pattern in 2nd couplet see note M23.

Cha'n eil chéil' aic' ach an damh,
Se 's muime dhi feur is creamh,
Máthair an laoigh bhall-bhric mhir,
Bean an fhir mhall-roisgach ghlain.

She has no spouse but the stag,
It's grass and garlic are her nurse,
The mother of the frisky speckled fawn,
Wife of the pure husband with limpid eyes.
Eilid bhinnich mheinnibh bhreic, bhrangich, 
Oghir, Eingich, Uchd-re, ard 
Daibh Croichd cheannich, birrich, sciabhich 
Cronanich, Cean-riathich Dearg.

a. bhinnich   see note M21c. 
bhrangich   see ML15 for notes on this word.
b. Uchd-re, ard   unhelpful punctuation; John Gillies's 
printed version gives "Uchd-re Ard" 
ard see T15b.
d. Cean-riathich ceann-riabhach

This metre resembles séadna, see M21. 
Internal rhyme [croc-cheannach:Crònanach]

Eilid bhinneach, mheanbh-bhreac, bhrangach,  \(2(8^2+7^1)^{2+4}\) 
Odhra, eangach, uchd ri árd, 
Dàmh croc-cheannach, biorach, sgiamhach 
Crònanach ceann-riabhach deargh.

Hind of the high head, speckled and snarling, 
Dusky, swift of foot, breast towards the height, 
Handsome stag with pointed, antlered head, 
Belling, with brindled head and red.

See ML15 for note on the word 'brangach'.
MN Stanza 16

Fo'n La ruga mishe riabh
Bha mi'n Cudichd Fhiagh as Earb
'S cha fhaica Dath air Bian
Ach obhir, as Riabhich, as Dearg.

a. Fo'n same spelling at MN2a.

b. fhaica I suspect that the subjunctive fhaicinn is meant, thus providing the verb with a subject.

Loose aicill in second couplet.
Endrhyne at a:c, b:d.

Bho'n là rugadh mise riamh
Bha mi'n cuideachd fhiadh is earb,
'S chan fhaicinn dath air bian
Ach odhar is riabhach is dearg.

Ever since the day I was born
I was in the company of deer and roe,
And I wouldn't see any colour on hide
Except dun and brindled and red.

The speaker is the poet/hunter again.
MN Stanza 17

Ga mor an Cathibh a tann
Strioc a bha M'athair an shinn
Geistichd re Shreothid na Sonn;
An Daibh donn ga habhan le Gleann.

a. ga  
Cathibh  
ge  
caitheamh see ML17a.

b. M'athair  
shinn  
Gillies reads 'Mathair'  
not likely to be 'sin' which is written shin  
elsewhere in this manuscript (MN3a, 7b, 11c,  
23d). Obsolete sionn would provide rhyme with  
Gleann. cf. ML17b.

c. Shreothid  
sonn  
sreothairt; redundant first h, cf. MN1a, Shroine  
the heroes are stags

d. habhan  
thabhann see note M34c.

Internal rhyme [caitheamh: athair] but no aicill in first  
couplet.
Endrhyme at a:c, b:d.

Ge mor an caitheamh a t' ann  
'S tric a bha m' athair an sionn  
'G éisteachd ri sreothairt nan sonn,  
'N damh donn ga thabhann le gleann.

However great the revelry going on  
Often was my father here  
Listening to the champions' snorting,  
The brown stag hunted down a glen.

See endnotes ML17.
MN Stanza 18

Loch mo Chriodhse Loch treig
Loch mu'n faithir Feigh as Earb'
Ga bheil an Slios Farsuing reidh,
Mar gu bigh Tacibh aig Mnai.

b. mu'n  mu'm  although mu is given here as at MN10b cf.
fa at MN11a.
d. Mnai  possibly for dative plural mnàibh which gives
rhyme with Earb', see ML18. Alternatively, there
may be a word missing after Mnai which would
supply rhyme.

Endrhyme at a:c, b:d.

Loch mo chroidhe-sa Loch Tréig  (7^+7^)+(7^+6^)1^+3, 2^+4
Loch mu'm faighear féidh is earb,
'Ga bheil an slios farsuing réidh,
Mar gu' biodh taobh aig mnàibh.

Loch of my heart is Loch Tréig
Loch around which deer and roe are found,
Whose bank is wide and smooth,
As the side of women might be.

See also ML18 for note on metre and endnote.
This stanza is not in M, T or E.
Loch mo Chroidhse an Loch;
Loch air iumigh an Lach
Gheibhte shud ann 's Ealla bhan
'S bithidh iad aig Snaibh ma sheich.

Loch mo chroidhe-sa an loch,  
Loch air iomadh an lach
Gheibhte siud ann 's eala bhàn,
'S bithidh iad aig snàmh mu seach.

The loch of my very heart is the loch,
A loch on which many 's the duck
Would be found there and a white swan,
And they will be swimming one after the other.

Like the previous two stanzas this does not occur in manuscripts M or T. However, it is in Eigg. Metrically all three stanzas hang together, although at the same time slightly apart from the rest of the poem.
Cha’d iunsich mise an Tiasgich,
Bbi ga iarraidh leis a Mhaothir;
’Smor gum bansa leom a Fiaghich
’S bhi shiubhal nan Sliagh ast Phoaighar.

b. Bbi apparently an error in the manuscript, which
   Gillies reproduces.
   Mhaothir mhaghair Dwelly also gives "maodhar"
   a. Fiaghich am fiadhach
   d. Sliagh sliabh

Return to the metre similar to that of first nine stanzas.
Endrhyne at a:c, b:d.

Cha’d ionnsaich mise an t-Iasgach, \[2 (8^2 + 8^2)^{13,2/4}\]
Bhith ga iarraidh leis a’ mhaghair,
’S mor gum b’ annsa leam am fiadhach
’S bhith siubhal nan sliabh a’s t-fhoghair.

I did not learn the fishing,
To be seeking it with bait,
Much more dear to me was the hunting,
To be roaming the hills in autumn.

Preference for land over sea maintained in next two stanzas
and again MN48. See also endnote M6.
"Setrom an Obbir an Tshealg
'Seabhin a meamna 's a Beichd:
'Smor gum bansa leom an Fonn
Na long as i dol fo Beirt.

c. an Fonn like a classical article, but the spelling of articles is inconsistent; see MN20c, MN46c.

'S aotrom an obair an t-sealg,
'S aoibhinn a meanmna 's a beachd,
'S mor gum b' annsa leam an fonn
Na long is i 'dol fo beairt.

It is light work hunting,
Pleasant is the spirit and the contemplation of it,
The land is much more dear to me
Than a ship getting under her rigging.

See endnote ML21, which is in the same verse order.
Gad nach do chleichd mi a bhi' geistichd
Ri Sheitrich na Muicce Maraidh,
'S minig a Chuala mi moran
Do Chronanich an Daibh Allaidh.

Ged nach do chleachd mi a bhith 'g éisteachd
Ri séitrich na muice mara,
'S minig a chuala mi móran
De chrónanaich an daimh allaidh.

Although I was not used to listening
To the spouting of the whale,
Often did I hear much
Of the bellowing of the wild stag.
MN Stanza 23

Mis' a's tus' a Ghaothir bhain
Cha'n eidir Leinn dol do'n Eilean
Chaill' shin an Tathaich san Dan
As bha shin Grauthin ri Ceannal.

b. eidir obsolete impersonal verb taking a prepositional
pronoun with 'le'; the clear use of 'le' here
supports the interpretation of ML23b, q.v.

Eilean eilean looks intended, as at T36, q.v. However,
see also M34 and E59 for different
interpretations of this line.

c. Chaill' apostrophe a mistake
san probably for 'is an dàn' rather than 'anns an
dàn'; both written the same cf. MN46,47 and
MN7,13

A change in the metre to something like deibhidhe, cf. M34
No rhyme in first couplet but loose aicill in c/d.

Mis' is tus' a gadhair bhàin
Cha'n eidir leinn dol do'n eilean,
Chaill sinn an tathaich 's an dàn
Is bha sinn grathunn ri ceanal.

You and I, O white hound,
We cannot get as far as the island,
We lost the visit-making and the poetry
And we were a short while in pleasantry.
Hug Choille dhiots' an Earb,
'S thug an Tard dhiomsa na Feigh;
Cha 'neil Masladh dhuinn, a Laoich,
Fo'n luidh an aois oirn gu leir.

a. **Hug** Gillies gives 'Thuga', and an inter-consonantal vowel before Choille is likely.

d. **fo** as MN2a

Thug a' choille dhiots' an earb,  $2(7^1+7^1)^{2+4}$
'S thug an t-àrd dhiom-sa na féidh;
Cha'n eil masladh dhuinn, a lacich,
Bho'n luigh an aois oirnn gu léir.

The wood took from you the roe,
And the hill took from me the deer;
There is no shame on us, friend,
Since age has settled on us altogether.
MN Stanza 25

Aois chan eil ussa meichir
Air Lein nach heidar do theichne;
Cromidh tu'n Neich a bhios dirich,
Bha roidh gu mileante, gaisde.

a. meichir  meachair; proliferation of letter i already noted, cf. MN7a Creicha
b. heidar  some resemblance to eidir at MN23, but here the same vowel sound is indicated as in meichir and theichne: fheadar, see M36b. Also cf. ML23 and ML25. Lenition see note MN2a
b. theichne  unusual representation of lenited 's'

Endrhyme at a:b:d.

Aois cha'n eil thusa meachaír  
Ar leinn nach fheadar do sheachnadh;
Cromaidh tu'n neach a bhios direach,
Bha roimh' gu mileanta, gasda.

Age you are not kind,
In our view there's no knowing how to avoid you;
You bow down the person who is straight,
And was gallant and handsome before.
Agus giurriche tu 'Tshaoghil
Agus caoliche tu Chassan,
'S fagaidh tu Chlaiggan gan Deudich,
As ni u Edan a chassidh.

b. 'Tshaoghill    'shaoghal see MN5d for spelling.

Agus giorraichidh tu 'shaoghal  \[2(8^2+8^2)^2^4\]
Agus caolaichidh tu 'chasan,
'S fàgaidh tu chlaigionn gun deudach,
Is ni thu eudann a chasadh.

And you shorten his life
And you shrivel his legs,
And you leave his skull without teeth,
And you make his face wrinkled.
MN Stanza 27

'Sioma Neich a'b fhear na ussa
Dhag mise gu tursich annabhan,
'Sa fhaolich mi as a tsheissibh
Bha roidh na Phleisgich meanmich.

b. tursich short 'u' rhyming with ussa
c. tsheissibh sheasamh

'S iomadh neach a b' fhearr na thusa
Dh'fhag mise gu tuirseach anbhann,
'S a dhfhaobhaich mi as a sheasamh
Bha roimhe 'na fhleasgach meanmnach.

Many a one better than you
Have I left sad and weak,
And whom I despoiled as he stood
Who was a spirited young man before.
Labhair an Aois ris a rist 
'Srithin a tha u a leantail
Air a Bhogha shin a ghiulan, 
'Smath gun fonigh dhuit an Sciffag.

d. Sciffag

the initial consonant cluster follows Irish usage- 'sceafog' 'a stick' (Dinneen); 
the form in Scottish Gaelic is 'steafag'.

No aicill in second couplet.

Labhair an aois ris a rithist, 
'S righinn a tha thu a' leantail
Air a 'bhogha sin a ghiulan, 
'S math gum fòghnadh dhuit an sgéafag.

Old age spoke to him again,
Stubbornly are you persevering
At carrying that bow,
The stick would be perfectly adequate for you.
Bithidh agadsa an Sciffag;
Aois tshianail na Pleide;
'S mo Bhogha cha naidh u haist
A Dhathis na thoirt air Eigin.

b. tshianail sheanal see ML29.
Pleide see note T43.
c. haist fhathast

d. A Dhathis..... see note T43d.

Bitheadh agadsa an sgeafag,
Aois sheanal na pléide,
'S mo bhogha cha'n fhaigh thun fhathast
A dh' athais na 'thoirt air éigin.

Let the stick be for you,
Old age decrepit and contentious,
And my bow you won't get yet
Taking it with ease or by force.
O's mi fein as fhèarr an airidh
Air m bhogha ro mhath Jughir,
Na thusa Aois phealllich oghar
'Stu 'n Oir an Teallach ad tshiuigh.

b. *ro mhath* the byform *ramhath* may be meant here, providing *aicill*.

Jughir *iubhair* letter 'j' is not used consistently in this manuscript to represent the first element of the diphthong 'iu'; cf. MN1d *iunigh*, MN3f *Iunric* but MN43a *Jusich*.

d. *Teallach* there is no 'i' here although it might be expected grammatically.

O's mi féin as fheàrr an airidh 2(8²+8²)²+4
Air mo bhogha *ramhath iubhair*,
Na thusa aois pheallach *odhar*
'S tu 'n oir an teallaich ad shuidhe.

Since I myself deserve better
My excellent bow of yew,
Than do you, shaggy, sallow old age
Who are seated beside the hearth.

This stanza is not in M or T but is in Eigg.
MN Stanza 31

Aois chon Edinich Oghar
Ha u Boghar, oghar, Edidh/Etidh
Com an leighin leis an Loghar
Mo Bhothidh thoirt uam air egin.

a. Edinich  eudannach
c. Com an  c'uime' n
   Loghar  lobhar  see end note M38
d. Bhothidh  bhogha  was written in the three previous
   stanzas but here is another example of
   idh for schwa - unless the following sound
   influenced the pronunciation.

Endrhyme at a:c, b:d.

Aois chon-eudannach odhar  \((7^2+8^2)+(8^2+8^2)^{1+3,2+4}\)
Tha thu bodhar, odhar, éitigh,
C'uime 'n leiginn leis an lobhar
Mo bhogha thoirt uam air éiginn?

Old age with the drab dog-face
You are deaf, sallow and dreadful,
Why should I let the vile wretch
Take my bow from me by force?
MN Stanza 32

She Blaogh mo Bhogha sheo' muchd
Le Haoigh maoil oghar gur háit
Ishe gionnail 's mise gruamich 'joyful' above gionnail
'S fadda liom nach buan an Tslait.

a. Blaogh  bloigh
b. Haoigh maoil spelling see MN2a
b. háit   circumflex is not apparently significant.
c. gionnail  geanail

aicill may be intended uchd:aoigh; first couplet also has internal rhyme [bhogha:oghar]

'Se bloigh mo bhogha seo 'm uchd, \((7^1+7^1)+(8^2+7^1)^2+4\)
Le h-agh maol odhar gur h-a'it,
Ise geanail 's mise gruamach,
'S fada leam nach buan an t-slat.

Part of my bow is here in my bosom,
To the joy of a dun hornless hind,
She is happy and I am gloomy,
I find it wearing that the limb does not endure.

Interpretation discussed at T44 which has only minor textual deviations from MN, including a change of pronoun at MN32c.
MN Stanza 33

'S fada liom nach buan a Bhuighin
'S gun ann ach an Ceò dhe'n fheothin
O'n faithimid ol as Meodhail.
'Sleis bo bhianich Ceol nan Gaothir.

b. fheothin               fheadhainn see ML33b.
c. Meodhail               meadhair preferable for rhyme, see note ML33c.
d. bhianich               mhiannach
                          Gaothir          gadhar

Internal rhyme [leam:ann] and [öl:ceòl] but no aicill.
Endrhyne at a:b, c:d.

'S fada leam nach buan a 'bhuidheann $2(8^2+8^2)^{1+2,3+4}$
'S gun ann ach an ceò dhe' n fheadhainn,
O'm faigheamaid öl is meadhair
'S leis 'm bu mhiannach ceòl nan gadhar.

Wearisome is it to me that the company doesn't endure
And there's nothing but the wisp of the folk,
From whom we had drinking and merriment
And who loved the music of the hounds.

Line b 'ceò' metaphor for memory.
MN Stanza 34

Chual a mi mo raoghin Ceoil,
Gairm a Ghaibhir mhoir aig teachd
Daibh aig shiomanich le Gleann;
'S mialchoin ann, 's iad as.

a. Ceoil see M31a

Second couplet has internal rhyme [shiomanich:mialchoin].

c. daibh damh see MN14a.

Chual a mi roghainn ceoil,
Gairm a' ghadhair mhòir aig teachd,
Damh aig siomanaich le gleann
Is miolchoin ann is iad as.

I heard my choice of music,
The sound of the great hound approaching,
A stag weaving down a glen
And hounds darting this way and that for a grip on him.

For action described in line d see note M31.
MN Stanza 35

Inneacha De ort a Thru,
Com 'n do choir u Cul rish a Gleann;
Aoin mhada gad chuir gu Heig,
Agus she Meoir dheig air do cheann.

a. Inneacha see note ML35.
Thru see M32a.

Eineach Dhé ort a thrú,
C’uim ’n do chuir thu cùl ris a’ ghleann?
Aon mhadadh gad chur gu h-eug
Agus sè meòir dheug air do cheann.

May God’s blessing be with you, doomed one,
Why did you forsake the glen?
One hound brings you to death,
When you’ve sixteen tines on your head.
Smuladach bhi shuibhal Bheann
Gun Bhagha, gun Shreang, gun Chuth,
Gun fhiu na Shaide bhi ann
'S gun Fhraoiirc tean aig an Tshuil.

b. Bhagha another variation on the spelling of 'bhogha', cf. MN28c, 31d.

Endr rhyme at a:c, b:d.

'S muladach bhith 'siubhal bheann
Gun bhogha, gun shreang, gun chû,
Gun fhiû na saighde bhith ann
'S gun fhradharc teann aig an t-sùil.

It's sad to be travelling mountains
Without bow or string, without dog,
Without as much as an arrow there
And without keen sight in the eye.
MN Stanza 37

Fagadar Donuil a muigh
Na aonir an Taigh nan Fleigh,
'S gear a mhios Guccag air bhuil;
Luchd a Chruidh, shud iad a staigh.

a. Fagadar for 'fàgbhadar', old 3rd person plural preterite.

b. mhios mh for bh as at MN33d.

Endrhyne at a:c:d.

Fàgadar Domhnall a muigh
Na aonar an Taigh nam Fleadh,
'S geàrr a bhios gucag air bhuil;
Luchd a' chruidh siud iad a staigh.

They left Donald outside
On his own at the House of Feasts,
It's briefly the bumper froths over;
There are the cattlemen inside.

Taigh nam Fleadh see Place-names Index.
Interpretation see note M51
Uaibh cha deid mi air Tshiullaim:
Olaidh mi e Treig mo 'tshion-tshath;
Bonne brisg-gheal, ro-ghlan fallain
Fo Iong ' an Fheigh a ni 'n Langan.

a. Tshiollaim siubhlam Tsh marks slenderised s here but
cf. MN2b and see tshion-tshath below;
for note on grammatical form see ML38a.
b. e á théannshàth tsh used as noted MN2b.
c. Bonne boinne cf. spelling at MN40b.

No aicill; internal rhyme [téid:Tréig] in first couplet.

From you I will not go wandering,
I will drink my fill from Loch Tréig,
A sparkling bright drop, very pure and healthy,
Judging from the pace of the belling deer.

See ML38d and endnote for interpretation of line d.
See Chapter 7, p.334, for comparison with other sources.
Mac Anndigh ri Raonil MMor
A mharaigh am Beinn na Feigh,
Nach dethigh na aonir am Poit
Mo dhoigh gur Doinilich e.

b. mharaigh mharbhadh with the middle fricative elided.
   na Feigh see note ML39c.
   dethigh conditional form, deidheadh

No aicill in first couplet.
Endrhyime at a:c, b:d.

Mac Annaidh ri Raghnall m6r
A mharbhadh am Beinn nam Féith,
Nach deidheadh 'na aonar am póit
Mo dhóigh gur Domhnallach e.

Son of Anna by Raghnall Mór
Who was killed at Beinn na Féith,
Who would not go drinking alone
By my faith he is a MacDonald.

Line c see endnote ML39
This stanza is not in manuscripts T and M.

See Proper Names Index for persons named and their son
Alasdair Bothloinne.
In Place-names Index see Féith, Beinn nam.
MN Stanza 40

Gur Doinilich gun mhearachd
Am Boinnigh ro-ghlan gruaghich,
'S gad ha e'n draist an Tir chattain
Gur a Dailt e don Chraig guanich.

b. Boinnigh  boinne see note at ML40b. igh rather than 'idh' used for schwa here and in MN41.

ro-ghlan  by form raghlan provides good aicill.

b. gruaghich  possibly for 'gruagach' but this writer sometimes uses 'gh' as an alternative for 'dh' e.g. MN10 taoghil, MN11 Glaoghan;
gruadhach as at ML40, is more likely.

Gur Domhnallach gun mhearachd,  \((7^2+7^2)+(8^2+8^2)\)  
Am boinne raghlan gruadhach,
'S ged tha e 'n drasd' an Tir Chatain
Gura dalt' e do'n Chreig Ghuanaich.

He is a MacDonald without fault,
The warrior so pure and vigorous,
And although he is now in Chattan land
He is fosterling to Creag Ghuanach.

See endnote ML40.
Alasdair Bothloinne continues to be the subject in this and the next three stanzas.
MN Stanza 41

Gur Dalit e don Chraig ghuanich
'S fada fo chualas an Sheanchas,
Am Boinnigh ro-gheal nach heil etich
San leat a Bhreighnichir Bantrach.

Gur dalt' e do 'n chreig Ghuanach
{'S fada bho chualas an seanchas,
'M boinne ro-gheal nach eil éitigh
'S ann leat a bhreugnaichear bantrach.

He is fosterling to Creag Ghuanach
It's a long time since the story was heard,
The very bright warrior who is not unsightly
It's by you that a widow is denied.

See endnote ML41 for meaning of line d.
MN Stanza 42

Dhag mi san Ruthidh sheo hios
Feir bu duillich dhoibh'sa Bhas
Strioc a chuir mo Thagra an cruas
An Cluais an Daibh Chabrach an sás.

a. Ruthidh this spelling might suggest rhyme with
duillich however there is a preponderance of
the letter 'i' in this manuscript; cf. MN1d
iunigh iongnadh, MN5d reitiche réiteach, MN10b
iathidh iadadh; so -idh probably signifies a
broad-vowelled syllable; other variants (T34,
ML42) give Rugha, interpreted as rudha; see
note T34 and also E38.

b. dhoibh'sa cf. MN3a

No rhyme in first couplet but internal rhyme [thagradh:
chabraich] as well as aicili in second.

I left down here at the promontory
A man whose death was hard for me,
Who often laid my claim firmly
Fixed in the ear of the antlered stag.

Line c see endnote ML42.
MN Stanza 43

Dhag mi Cill Jusich na luithidh,
Sar Sheallagair na Graidh Deirge;
Deas Laibh a mhairraigh a 'Bhraddain;
Bu mhaigh e an Sabaid Feirge.

a. Cill Jusich see note ML43.
   spelling see MN30b.
b. Sar Sheallagair Rankin notes that Sar is inserted in the
   manuscript, and indeed Gillies's text
   gives 'Sar Tsheallagair'.
c. mhairraigh mharbhadh cf. MN39b.

Endrhyne at a:c, b:d.

Dh 'fhag mi 'n Cill Iusaich na luighe, \(2(8^2+8^2)^{1+3}^{2+4}\)
Sár shealgair na greighe deirge,
Deas lámh a mharbhadh a' bhradain
Bu mhaith e an sabaid feirge.

I left lying in Kingussie,
A mighty hunter of the red herd,
A hand ready for killing the salmon,
He was of benefit in the wrathful fight.
MN Stanza 44

Chi Mi Coire Ratha uam;
Chi mi Cruachan san Bhein bhreic;
Chi mi Shrrath ossin nan Fiagh;
Chi mi Ghrian air maim nan Leic.

b. san n of article has not been elided.
c. Shrrath cf. MN1a
ossin appears to be the classical form, Oisin, as given
at T28.
nan Fiagh second n has not been assimilated; cf. line b.

Chi mi Coire Ratha uam,
Chi mi Cruachan 's a' Bheinn Bhreac,
Chi mi Srath Oisin nam Fiadh,
Chi mi 'ghrian air Mâm nan Leac.

I see Coire Rath at a distance,
I see Cruachan and Beinn Bhreac,
I see Strath Ossian of the deer,
I see the sun on Mâm nan Leac.

For place-names see appropriate index and also note on Cruachan in T28.
MN Stanza 45

Chi mi Shrath Oissin a Chruidh,
Agus Leittir dhuth nan Sonn,
Is Coire riathich a Mhaim
Ann tric an tug mo Laibh Toll.

Chi mi Srath Oisin a' chruidh,
Agus Leitir dhubb nan sonn,
Is Coire Riabhach a' Mhàim
An tric an tug mo làmh toll.

I see Srath Ossian of the cattle,
And Leitir Dhubh of the hero-stags,
And Coire Riabhach of Màm
Where often my hand caused a gap.

In Place-names Index see Srath Ossian, Leitir Dhubh, Riabhach a' Mhàim.
Line d see note T29d.
MN Stanza 46

Chi mi Beinibhais gu hard,
San Carn dearag ha la ri Bunn;
Fa Bonn a chitar am Fraoich
Mona fada, faoin as Muir.

c. Fa see MN11.
d. faoin see note M17.

Chi mi Beinn Nibheis gu h-àrd,
'S an Carn Dearg tha làmh ri bun,
F'a bonn a chitar am fraoch,
Monadh fada, faoin is muir.

I see Ben Nevis high up,
And Carn Dearg nearby at its foot,
Around its base can be seen the heather,
Distant, empty moorland and sea.

Carn Dearg, see Dearg in Place-names Index.
MN Stanza 47

Chi mi shin san Scainnan ruaidh
'n taice ri Ceann Locha Treig
'Sa Chreig ghuanich mun iagh an Tshealg,
'San Grianan ard am bi na Feigh.

a. Scainnan ruaidh  see ML47a.

Internal rhyme [sgannan:taice] but no aicill in first couplet.

Chi mi sin 's an Sgannan Ruadh  \((7^1+7^1)+(8^1+8^1)^{2+4}\)
'N taice ri ceann Locha Tréig
'S a' Chreag Ghuanach mun iadh an t-sealg,
'S an grianan àrd am bi na féidh.

I see that and Sgannan Ruadh,
Near to the head of Loch Tréig
And Creag Ghuanach which the chase surrounds,
And the high, sunny abode where the deer will be.

Line d see note Mld.
MN Stanza 48

Creig mo Chriodhse Chreig Ghuanich
As an Tullich Shlaittich Chraobhich,
An Tullich ard, aluin, Ghrianich,
As cian a ghabhís fo'n Mhaorich.

d. ghabhís  see note ML48
Alliteration but no internal rhyme in first couplet.

Creag mo chroidhe-sa 'Chreag Ghuanach,
Is an tulach shlatach, chraobhach,
An tulach àrd, àluinn, ghrianach,
As cian a ghabhás bho 'n mhaorach.

The rock of my very heart is Creag Ghuanach,
And the hillock sylvan and wooded,
The high, beautiful, sunny hillock,
Which is situated far from shellfish.

See endnote M6.
MN Stanza 49

Chi mi da mheallan nan Oss  
An taibh a bhos do Choir a Mhiltich  
'Scur Coinich nan Daibh sheang;  
'S ionbhin liom an Diu na chi mi.

Chi mi ì Mheallan nan os  
'N taobh a bhos do Choir' a' Mhiltich  
Sgùrr Chòinnich nan đamh seang;  
'S ionmhuan leam an diugh na chi mi.

I see the two little Meall nan Os  
On this side of Coir' a' Mhiltich,  
Sgùrr Chòinnich of the slender stags;  
Fond I am of what I see today.

For places mentioned see notes ML49.
MN Stanza 50

O chunnaic mi sibh gu leir
Gabhadh mi fein dibh mo Chéid,
An Céid as faide ghabhas riabh
Rish an Fhiagh da' n ro mo Thoil.
Mo Bhotidh cha deid air ar Sca:
'S gu la bhrach cha leigis Coin.

b. Chéid    circumflex superfluous.
c. ghabhas  old first person singular preterite.
e. ar Sca    probably for ur sgáth
f. leigis    see note ML50f.

See ML50 for note on six line stanza.

O chunnaic mi sibh gu léir (7¹+7¹)+ 2(8¹+7¹)⁴⁶
Gabhadh mi férín dibh mo chead,
An cead as faide ghabhas riamh
Ris an fhiadh do'n robh mo thoil.
Mo bhogha cha teid air ur sgáth
'S gu là brath' cha leigeas coin.

Since I have seen you fully
I'll make my own farewell to you,
The longest farewell I ever took
Was to the deer I delighted in.
My bow won't move on your account
And till doomsday I would not let slip hounds.

The speaker laments that his hunting days are over.
Ranald Macdonald was born about 1728, the grandson of a minister of Eilean Fhionan and son of the renowned poet Alasdair Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair, who was also a teacher of a English and religion in the service of the SSPCK at Ardnamurchan. In 1744 Ranald took over some of his father's duties so that the latter could devote time to the Jacobite cause.

In 1776, a few years after his father's death, Ranald published Comh-Chruinneachidh Orannaigh Gaidhealach, known as the Eigg Collection. This presents over a hundred poems and was planned as part of a larger anthology; on the last page is the observation "End of volume 1". There was, however, no second volume. Ranald Macdonald almost certainly based the publication on the manuscript collections of Hector Maclean of Grulin and of Alasdair Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair, including some of the latter's own work. It contains Oran na Comhachaig in its first printed form. A reprint made in 1782 bears John Gillies's name as bookseller. A slightly altered version of the Eigg exemplar is included in Sean Dàin which Gillies published in 1786. Patrick Turner brought out a revised edition in 1809. The emendations in this are slight ones, often typographical and orthographical adjustments. It is probable that the version of Oran published by Ranald Macdonald was derived from his father's collection, coloured, perhaps, by some information from the oral tradition. Hector Maclean's manuscript was almost certainly not the source as it contained five verses not in the Eigg Collection.

The 1776 text is reproduced below with a modern letter's substituted for the 18th-century tailed variety. The Eigg Collection (E) exemplar of Oran na Comhachaig was used as a basis for other publications of the poem. The English translation brought out by Anne Grant in 1811 appears to relate to Eigg with omission of verses

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2 See Chapter 1, p.13.
36 and 43. Donald Mackinnon offers the Eigg Óran na Comhachaig in his selection of Gaelic reading material. W.J. Watson consults Eigg for the version of the poem given in his anthology.

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3 Grant, Superstitions of the Highlanders, pp.249-61.
4 Mackinnon, Reading book for Gaelic students, pp.96-106.
5 BG, pp.249-259. Watson's note on p.335, that he gives the version of E, is a broad assessment, as he makes some adjustments, including deviations from E's verse order.
E Stanza 1

A Comhachag bhochd na sroine
A nochd is bronach do leabadh,
Ma bha u ann re linn Donnaghail
Cho n iunadh ge trom leat t' aigne.

c. u for thu throughout document until last 4 verses.
   re possibly for 'rè' but clearly used for ri at E6a.
   cho used inconsistently for cha see E4.
   iunadh iongnadh

A chomhachag bhochd na Sròine,
A nochd is brônach do leabaidh,
Ma bha thu ann ri linn Donnghail
Chan iongnadh ge trom leat t'aigne.

O poor owl of Strone
Tonight your bed is sad,
If you were around in the time of Donnail
It's no wonder your heart feels heavy.

Strone, see Sùn in Place-names Index.
Donnail, see Proper Names Index.
E Stanza 2

'S co-aoise mise do 'n daraig,
Bha na fhaillein ann sa choinnich,
'S ioma linn a chuir mi romham,
'S gur mi comhachag bhochd na stròine.

b. fhaillein as daraig is feminine faillein would be expected; it could be a printing error, or a misinterpretation, since, although it looks wrong as a form of 'faillean', it sounds right if based on the noun form ailean cf. ML4.

d. stròine spelling inconsistent with Ela.

'S co-aoise mise don daraig,
Bha 'na h-aillean anns a' chòinnich,
'S iomadh linn a chuir mi romham
'S gur mi comhachag bhochd na Sròine.

I am of an age with the oak,
That was a young shoot in the moss,
Many an era have I survived,
And I am the poor owl of Strone.
E Stanza 3

Nois o'n a thà u aosda,  
Deansa t aoisid ris an t shagairt,  
Agus innis dhà gun èaradh,  
Gach aon sgèula ga bheil agat.

a. Nois  
this old form of 'nis' may be preceded by anacrusis.

b. t shagairt  
h is used here to neutralise s but now unnecessary; 1809 Eigg edition has an t sagrairt; see also note MN2b.

d. ga bheil  
dha bheil see note M43d.

The accents are all unnecessary.

A nois o'n a thà thu aosda,  
Dèan-sa t'fhaoisid ris an t-sagart,  
Agus innis dha gun euradh,  
Gach aon sgeula dha bheil agad.

Now since you are aged,  
Do make your confession to the priest,  
And tell him without denial,  
Every single story you have.

See Chapter 8, 'The Fenian connection', for parallels in Fenian poetry.
E Stanza 4

Cho d'roinn mise braid no brèugan,
Na claodh na tearmad a bhriste,
Air m fhèin cha d'roinn mi iomluas,
Gur cailleach bhochd iùnraig mise.

a. roinn this spelling of rinn, which is used throughout
the manuscript, reflects the old form 'do-
roinneas'.

b. tearmad form of 'téarmann'
Inconsistent use of no and more colloquial na
v spelling iomluas / iùnraig for the more
current iomluas / ionraic suggests writer's
pronunciation and shows rhyme clearly; cf.Eld.

Cha d' rinn mise braid no breugan,
No cladh no tearmad a hbristeadh,
Air m'fhèin cha d' rinn mì iomluas,
Gur cailleach bhochd ionraic mise.

I committed no theft or falsehoods,
Nor violated any graveyard or sanctuary,
To my own husband I was not unfaithful,
It's a poor, innocent, old woman that I am.

Potential crimes discussed in Chapter 8, 'Integrity of the
Comhachag'.
E Stanza 5

Chonnacas mac a Bhrithe chalma,
Agus Feargus mor an gaisgeach,
Agus Torradan liath na sroine,
Sin na laoich bha domhail taiceil.

a. chonnacas s-preterite.
   Bhrithe 'bhritheimh' bhreithimh

Chunnacas mac a' bhreithimh chalma,
Agus Fearghas Mór an gaisgeach,
Agus Torradan liath na Sròine,
Sin na laoich bha domhail taiceil.

I saw the son of the brave judge,
And great Fergus, the hero,
And grey-haired Torradan of Strone;
Those were the warriors who were stout and strong.

a. mac a'bhreithimh may be a reference to Fintan in the poem
   The Hawk of Achill. He took the role of
   judge in Ireland before the coming of
   St Patrick; 6 for relationship of Fintan to
   OnC see Chapter 8, p.334.

b. Fearghas tradition suggests local association with
   Fergus Mór mac Eirc, who founded the
   Dalriadic colony in Scotland. 7 According to
   some opinions Kenneth Macalpin was descended
   from Fergus, who is sometimes regarded as
   the ancestor of the monarchs of Scots. 8

c. Torradan not yet identified; Torridon in Wester Ross
   is usually Toirbheartan in Gaelic, but this
   might be based on a place-name; there are
   'tòrr' names near Strone on the bank of
   the River Lochy across which is a place
   called Sròn Liath.

This stanza is not in the manuscripts.

6 'The Colloquy between Fintan and the Hawk of Achill', Anecdota
   from Irish Manuscripts, vol.1, ed. by O.J.Bergin, R.I.Best, K.Meyer,
   J.G.O'Keeffe (Dublin, 1907), pp.24-39.
7 See Chapter 1, part A, 'Traditions of Lochaber'.
8 A.A.M.Duncan, Scotland: The making of the kingdom, Edinburgh
E Stanzas 6

Since you've started on storytelling,
There is need to follow you further,
The saying was the three had ceased serving there,
Before Donnail was in Fersit.

Fersit, see Place-names Index

The three persons named in E5 are confirmed in the distant past as pre-dating Donnail. As their identity is not certain it is not clear whether they are ancients of a bygone, possibly mythical, age, whom the owl encountered some time before her sojourn in Strone, or whether their role is to add to the cultural and historical fibre of the poem and the prestige of the Keppoch MacDonalds. Perhaps between the three they fulfil both functions.

This stanza is not in the manuscripts.
E Stanza 7

Chonnaic mi Alastair carrach,
An Duine is alloile bha 'n Albainn,
'S minig a bha mi ga èisteachd,
'S e aig reiteach na'n tom sealga.

I saw Alasdair Carrach,
The noblest man that was in Scotland,
Often I used to listen to him,
As he arranged the hunting hillocks.

Second couplet, see notes M46.
Alasdair Carrach, see Proper Names Index.
E Stanza 8

Chonnaic mi Aonghas na dheaghaidh,
Cho b'e sin raghuinn ba tàire,
'S ann san Fhearsaid a bha thuinidh,
'Sroinn e muileann air allt Larach.

b. raghuinn aicill with dheaghaidh seems indicated.
b. ba this spelling of bu throughout document.
d. allt Larach sic not on maps but showing genitive of Làire, q.v. Place-names Index.

Chunnaic mi Aonghas 'na dheaghaidh,
Cha b'e sin raghuinn bu tàire,
'S ann san Fhearsaid a bha thuineadh,
'S rinn e muileann air Allt Làireadh.

I saw Angus after him,
That was not a bad choice,
It was in Fersit that he dwelt,
And he made a mill on Allt Laire.

Aonghas, see Proper Names Index.
Ba lionar cogadh a's creachadh,
Bha 'n Lochabar ann san uair sin,
Caite am biodh tusa gad' fhalach,
Eoin bhige na mala gruamaich.

a. lionar a form of 'llonmhor'
   a's is conjunction.

b. bhige e has no apparent significance and is probably a
   mistake; it does not appear in the 1809 edition.

Endrhyne at a:c, b:d.

Bu lionar cogadh is creachadh
Bha 'n Loch Abar anns an uair sin,
Cait' am biodh tusa gad' fhalach,
Eoin bhig na mala gruamaich?

Plentiful was the fighting and plundering
That was in Lochaber at that time,
Where used you to hide yourself,
Little bird with the gloomy eyebrow?
E Stanza 10

A's ann a bha cuid do m'shinridh,
Eadar an Innse a's an Phearsaid,
Bha cuid eile dhiu' ma'n dèathagh;
Bhiodh iad aig èabhach sa'n fheasgar.

a. A's
m'shinridh

is verb.

collective noun ending indicated. Dwelly gives "sinnsreadh". 1809 ed. of E has "m'shinsreadh".

b. ma'n dèathagh
m'an deaghaidh cf. Irish 'a n-diaigh' see note T6c.

c. éabhadh

éigheach - spelling may indicate Ranald Macdonald's pronunciation; the less westerly dialect of Lochaber would not sound a labial fricative here (Dieckhoff).

There were some of my ancestors
Between the Inch and Fersit,
The rest were following them;
They'd be calling out in the evening.

This stanza is in T but no other manuscript.

Innse, see Place-names Index.
E Stanza 11

'N uair a chithinnse dol seachad,
Na creachan agus am fuathas,
Bheirinn car beag fàr an rathaid,
'S bhi'inn grathunn sa chreig ghuanach.

c. fàr dialectal form of 'bhàrr' retained.

Endrhyrne at a:c, b:d.

Nuair a chithinn-sa dol seachad
Na creachan agus am fuathas,
Bheirinn car beag far an rathaid,
'S bhithinn grathunn 'sa Chreig Ghuanaich.

When I used to see, going past,
The raids and their horror,
I'd take a little turn off the road,
And be for a while in Creag Ghuanaich.

Creag Ghuanaich, see Ghuanaich in Place-names Index.
E Stanza 12

Creag mo chroidhe-se a chreag ghuanach,
Chreag an d'fhuair mi greis do m'Àrach,
Creag na'n aighin 's na'n damh siùbhlach,
A chreag aidhreach urail ianach.

The rock of my very heart is Creag Ghuanach,
The rock where I gained a while of my training,
Rock of the hinds and the fleeting stags,
The joyful, burgeoning rock where birds dwell.
E Stanza 13

The rock around which the hunt would circle,
I loved to be frequenting it,
When sweet was the voice of a sturdy hound,
Sending a herd to enter a confine.

Hunting methods, see note M4 and Chapter 1, pp.9-10.
E Stanza 14

'S binn na h iolarain ma bruachabh,
'S binn a cuachan 's binn a h eala,
A's binne no sin am blaoghan,
Ni an laoighein mean-bhreac ballach.

a. bruachabh bruachaibh old dative plural.
c. no cf. E4a/b.
d. laoighein diminutive ending ein
   mean-breac meanbh-bhreac

'S binn na h-iolairean mu bruachaibh,
'S binn a cuachan 's binn a h-eala,
Is binne na sin am blaoghan
Ni an laoighein meanbh-bhreac ballach.

Sweet-voiced are the eagles about her slopes,
Sweet-voiced her cuckoos and her swan,
Sweeter than that is the sound
The little most finely dappled fawn makes.
E Stanza 15

A's binn leam toraman na'n dos,
Re uilinn na'n corri bheann cas,
'San eilid bhiorach is caol cos,
Ni foise fuidh dhuilleach ri-teas.

a. A's verb.
c. is caol cos as caol cos descriptive formula, see T21c.

Endrhyne at a:c, b:d.

Is binn leam torman nan dos 2(7^4+7^1)\textsuperscript{1+3,2+4}
Ri uilinn nan corrbheann cas,
'S an eilid bhiorach as caol cos,
Ni fois' fuidh dhuilleach ri teas.

Sweet to me is the sound of the horns
Mounting the angle of the steep, stark hills,
And the hind with pointed head and slender foot,
Takes rest from the heat under foliage.

This is the only source to give torman nan dos; the others have 'torman nan os' and given that the second couplet features a hind, it is likely that the first describes stags, rather than hunting horns, climbing the hills. The theme of the previous stanza is appreciation of the cries of various creatures. See note to T21 for use of 'torman' with animal sounds. The 17th-century Keppoch chief, Gilleasbuig na Ceapaich, uses the line "Bu bhinn leam torman a dos" in his poem 'Moladh na Pioba' and some transmission of O'C, (or even Ranald Macdonald) may have confused the two lines. There is little difference in sound between 'nan os' and 'nan dos'.

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E Stanza 16

Gun do chèil aic ach an damh,  
'S e's muime dhi fèur a's cneamh,  
Mathair an laoigh mhean'-bhric mhir,  
Bean an fhir mhal rosgaich ghlain.

b. a's is conjunction.  
cneamh usually creamh

First couplet has internal rhyme [chèil:feur] but no aicill.  
For rhyme pattern in second couplet see M23.  
Endrhyme at a:b:d.

Gun de chèil' aic' ach an damh,  
'Se's muime dhi feur is creamh,  
Màthair an laoigh mheanbh-bhric mhir,  
Bean an fhir mhall-rosgaich ghlain.

No spouse has she but the stag,  
It's grass and garlic are her nurse,  
The mother of the frisky, speckled fawn,  
Wife of the pure husband with limpid eyes.
E Stanza 17

'Siubhlaich a dh'fhalbhas e raon,
Codal cha dean ann sa'n smuir,
B'fheair leis no plaide fui' thaobh,
Bàrr an fhraoich bhadanaich ûir.

b. codal  cf. Irish 'codladh', 'cadal' in current Scottish Gaelic
c. B'fheair  b'fhèarr

Endrhyme at a:c, b:d.
aicill probably intended in both couplets, cf. T23.

'Siubhlaich a dh'fhalbhas e raon,
Codal cha dean anns an smuir,
B'fhèarr leis na plaide fuidh thaobh,
Bàrr an fhraoich bhadanaich ûir.

Swiftly he would travel an upland,
Sleep will he not in the cinders,
Preferring to a blanket beneath his side
The top of the fresh, tufty heather.
E Stanza 18

Gur h aluin sgeamh an Daimh dhuinn,
Thearnas o shireadh na m beann,
Mac na h eilte ris an t shonn,
Nach do chrom le spid a cheann.

a. Daimh 18th-century practice of capitalising nouns
applied inconsistently throughout the document.
c. t shonn see note E3b.
sonn stag/hero.
d. spid can mean 'shame' as well as 'spite'.
No aicill in the first couplet.

No aicill in the first couplet.

There is a very similar stanza in the poem 'Oran Fear Druim-a' Chaciu'; see Chapter 1, part B, 'Related poems'.

9 Quoted by William Mackenzie, TGSI vol.7, p.72.
Eilid bhinneach, mheargant, bhallach,
Odhar eangach uchd re h-ârd,
Damh togbhalach croic-cheannach sgiamhach,
Cronanach ceann-riadhach dearg.

a. bhinneach see note M21c.
b. re h-ârd see T15b.
d. riadhach riabhach

The metre resembles séadna, see M21.
Internal rhyme [croic-cheannach:Crònanach]

Eilid bhinneach, mheargant, bhallach, \((8^2+7^1)+(9^2+7^1)^2\)
Odhar eangach uchd ri h-ârd,
Damh togbhalach croic-cheannach sgiamhach,
Crònanach ceann-riabhach dearg.

Hind of the high head, sportive, dappled,
Dusky, swift of foot, breast towards the height,
Haughty stag, antler-topped and elegant,
Belling with head brindled and red.
E Stanza 20

Gur gasda a rithe tu suas,
Re leachduinn chrualigh a's i cas,
Moladh gach aon neach an cù,
Ach molams 'n tru tha dol as.

a. rithe ruitheadh
b. leachduinn leacainn spelling shows preaspiration.
   a's conjunction is
b. leachduinn chruaidh is i cas,
Moladh gach aon neach an cù,
Ach molaim-s 'n trù tha dol as.

Gur gasd' a ruitheadh tu suas,  2(7^1+7^1)^2^1
Ri leacainn chruaidh is i cas,
Moladh gach aon neach an cù,
Ach molaim-s 'n trù tha dol as.

Splendidly would you run upwards
Against a hillside hard and steep,
Each and every man may praise the dog,
But let me praise the hapless one who flees.

This stanza is in none of the manuscripts.
Creag mo chroidh-se a chreag mhoir,  
'S ionmhuinn an lon tha fuidh ceann,  
'S annsa an lag tha air a cul,  
Na machthir a's * m'ur na'n gall.

+Daingeach given at bottom of page, presumably to gloss m'ur.  
'daingneach'-'stronghold'

b. lon  
d. a's  
conjunction.

Creag mo chroidhe-sa a' chreag mhór,  
'S ionmhuinn an lon tha fuidh 'ceann,  
'S annsa 'n lag tha air a cul  
Na machair is m'ur nan Gall.

Rock of my heart is the great rock,  
Dear is the meadow below its summit,  
Dearer is the hollow behind it  
Than the plain and rampart of the Lowlanders.

Creag Mhór is a common place-name and might be such here. The lower case letters are not significant as the use of capitals is rather idiosyncratic in this publication. (There are often no capital initials for obvious place-names but they are inconsistently given to nouns, as noted E18.) However, the phrase Creag mo chroidh-se begins not only this verse but also E12 and E27, in both of which it is followed by the words a chreag ghuanach and so the same hill is probably being described here in E21. Highland resentment of the encroachment of Lowlanders was stimulated by matters ranging from the loss of power resulting from the forfeiture of the Lordship of the Isles to the felling of trees further and further north to supply southern requirements. See Chapter 1, part A, 'Unsettled times', and 'Hunting and deer'.

This stanza is in none of the manuscripts.
E Stanza 22

*M'annsachd beinn sheasgach nam fuaran,*

'N riasgach o'n dean an damh rânan,

Chuireadh gadhar is glan nuallan,

Feigh na'n ruaig gu h inbhir-mheorain.

**a. beinn sheasgach nam fuaran** I have found no hill of this name on OS maps. 'Seasgach' occurs in Coire Seasgach (Corrie of the heifers) in Lochalsh but this is too far off to do more than confirm its use as a place-name.\(^{10}\) Beinn Heasgarnich, south of Loch Lyon, is suggested by Rankin.\(^{11}\) This interpretation is supported by the mention of *Inbhir Mheuran* in line d.\(^{12}\) However, Loch Lyon is a considerable distance from Lochaber, (see map A p.384). As *beinn sheasgach* is followed by an epithet it may be treated as descriptive; *inbhir-mheorain* may simply indicate the direction far-running deer might take or may have been introduced in a word shift during transmission of the poem.

**c. is** relative as cf. E15c.

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For rhyme cf. M27.

No *aicill* in first couplet.

Endrhyme at a:c b:d.

*M'annsachd beinn sheasgach nam fuaran,* 2\((8^2+8^2)^{1+3,2+4}\)

'N riasgach o'n dean an damh rânan,

Chuireadh gadhar as glan nuallan

Fèidh 'nan ruaig gu Inbhir Mheuran.

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My dearest is the sedgy mountain of the springs,

The moorland where the stag bellows,

A hound with purest roar would put

Deer to flight towards Invermearan.

This stanza is in none of the manuscripts.

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\(^{10}\) Macbain, Alexander, *Place Names: Highlands and Islands of Scotland* (Stirling, 1922), p.57.

\(^{11}\) R *Place-names*, p.115.

\(^{12}\) ibid.
E Stanza 23

B' annsa leam na dùrdan bodaich,
Os ceann licaig eararadh sil,
Bùirein an daimh 'm bi ghne dhuinned,
Air leacainn beinne 's e ri sin.

a. bodaich translated below as old man although it probably indicates a rustic individual or serf.
b. licaig probably compositing error, which the 1782 edition repeats, but 1809 Turner edition has "lic aig".
d. leacainn note different spelling at E20b.

Séadna type of metre; cf. E19.
No aicill in first couplet.

B' annsa leam na dùrdan bodaich
Os ceann líc' ag eararadh sil,
Bùirein an daimh 'm bi ghnè dhuinnid,
Air leacainn beinne 's e ri sin.

Greatly would I prefer to the humming of an old man
Parching corn over a slab,
The bellow of the stag of sovereign brownness,
On the slope of a hill meeting a storm.

This is not in the manuscripts.

The technique of parching grain is referred to in a number of Scottish literary contexts and this is discussed in an article by Ronald Black.13

13 R.I. Black, 'The fast food of the Gael of old', The Quern-Dust Calendar, WHFP (26/5/95).
E Stanza 24

'N uair bhùiris damh beinne bige,
'S a bhèicis damh beinne na craige,
Freagraidh na daimh ud da cheile
'S thig feigh a' coire na snaige.

The hills and hollows mentioned seem to form a list and I take them as place-names; 'creag, creige' is the spelling used elsewhere in E (see, e.g. E11, 12, 13), so the dialectal form craige, unless a mistake, may suggest a place-name. Considerable alliteration.

'Nuair bhùireas damh Beinne Bige,
'S a bhéiceas damh Beinne na Craige,
Freagraidh na daimh ud d'a chéile,
'S thig féidh a Coire na Snaige.

When the stag of Beinn Bheag bellows
And the stag of Beinn na Craig roars,
Those stags answer each other
And deer come from Coire na Snaig.

To identify the place-names with certainty is difficult. Rankin suggests that Beinn Bheag is Meall Mòr north west of Creag Ghuanach, which is here meant by Beinn na Craig.¹⁴ For Coire na Snaig see Place-names Index. The only manuscript with this is T.

¹⁴ R Place-names, p.116.
E Stanza 25

Bha mi o'n rugadh mi riabh,
Ann an caidribh fhiagh a's earb',
Cha n fhachda mi dath air bian,
Ach buidhe, riadhach, a's dearg.

c. fhachda  fhaca cf. spelling leachduinn at E20b.

Endrhyme at a:c, b:d.

Bha mi o'n rugadh mi riamh,
Ann an caidreabh fhiadh is earb,
Chan fhaca mi dath air bian
Ach buidhe, riabhach is dearg.

Since I was born I've always been
In the company of deer and roe,
I haven't seen any colour on a hide
But yellow, brindled and red.

Second couplet affirms acquaintance with deer exclusively.
E Stanza 26

Cha mi fhin a sgaoil an comunn,
A bha eadar mi 's creag ghuanach,
Ach an aois ga'r to'irt o cheile,
Gur grathunn an fheil a fhuaras.

c. to'irt apostrophe suggests form 'tabhairt'
d. an fheil Mackechnie follows Eigg here but this is
queried by Matheson who suggests
'chélidh'. He may have been accustomed to
hearing this as it is given by Watson, as well
as at M8d, where Watson presumably found it.
d. fhuaras old 1st person sing. preterite.

Cha mi fhin a sgaoil an comunn,
A bha eadar mi 's Creag Ghuanach
Ach an aois gar toirt o chéile,
Gur grathunn an fhéill a fhuaras.

It was not I who broke the accord
That was between me and Creag Ghuanach,
But age took us from each other,
It was for a while that I had conviviality.

M is the only manuscript with this verse.

15 AM p.8.
16 BG, p.253.
E Stanza 27

Si creag mo chroidhe-se chreag ghuanach,
A chreag dhuilleach, bhriolaireach, bhraonach,
Na 'n tulach ard, aluinn, fiarach,
Gur cian a ghabh i o'n mhaorach.

b. A chreag the article is surprising grammatically, but there is a notional break after the three adjectives in this line, before the genitive in line c with its accompanying three adjectives. The anomaly may be related to the use of adjectival groups as a stylistic device; see Chapter 7, 'Adjectives', p.303.

c. fiarach probably feurach; E favours 'ia' spelling; cf. E12d.

No rhyme in first couplet.
Possible elision of second syllable in bhriolaireach.

'S i creag mo chroidhe-sa 'Chreag Ghuanach, 2(8²+8²)²+4
A' chreag dhuilleach, bhriolaireach, bhraonach,
Nan tulach ard, aluinn, feurach,
Gur cian a ghabh i o'n mhaorach.

The rock of my heart is Creag Ghuanach,
The rock full of leaves, cresses and dew,
Of high hillocks, beautiful, grassy,
It's far it has come from shellfish.

Although this stanza is in all the manuscripts they do not have the word bhriolaireach; for use of watercress motif see Chapter 8, p.367.
See Chapter 1, p.6, regarding shellfish.
Not many times have I listened
To the spouting of the whale,
But it's often I heard much
Of the bellowing of the wild stag.
E Stanza 29

Cha do chuir mi duil san iasgach,
Bhi ga iaraidh leis a mhadhar,
'S mor gu 'm b' annsa leam am fiaghach,
'S bhi air falbh na'n sliabh is t fhaghar.

b/d. bhi bhith
d. is t fhaghar as t-fhoghar

Endrhyne at a:c, b:d.

Cha do chuir mi düil 'san iasgach, 2(8^3+8^2)^{1+3,2+4}
Bhith 'ga iarraidh leis a' mhaghair,
'S mór gum b'annsa leam am fiadhach,
'S bhith air falbh nan sliabh as t-fhoghar.

I had no desire for fishing,
To be seeking it with the fly,
Much more dear to me was the hunting,
To be walking the hills in autumn.
'S aoibhinn an obair an t shealg,
'S àit a cuairt ann airde beachd,
Gur binne a h, aidhir 's a fonn
Na long a's i dol fuidh beairt.

a. t shealg similar use of h noted at E3b.
b. àit accent presumably an error.
c. a's conjunction

'S aoibhinn an obair an t-sealg,
'S ait a cuairt an àirde beachd,
Gur binn' a h-aighear 's a fonn
Na long is i dol fuidh beairt.

Pleasant work is the hunting,
Happy its excursion in highest spirits,
Sweeter are its pleasure and its delight
Than a ship getting under her rigging.

This first line as it stands is used as the title for an article on hunting.\textsuperscript{17}

\textsuperscript{17} W.J.Watson, \textit{Celtic Review} vol.9 (Edinburgh, 1913), pp.156-68.
E Stanza 31

Fad a bhithinn beo na mairinn,
Deoth dheth ’n anam ann mo chorp,
Dh’fhanaínn am fochar an fhéigh,
Sin an spreidh ann raibh mo thoir.

\[ (7^2 + 7^2) + (7^2 + 7^2)^2 \]

As long as I might be alive or surviving,
A breath of life in my body,
I would stay in the presence of the deer,
That’s the creature that had my esteem.

M is the only manuscript with this stanza.
E Stanza 32

C'àite an cualas ceol ba bhinne,  
Na mothar gadhair mhoir a' teachd,  
Daimh sheanga na'n rith le gleann,  
Miolchoin a'dol annta 's ast'.  

a. cualas past passive.  

No rhyme in first couplet.  

Càit' an cualas ceòl bu bhinn'  
Na mothar gadhair mhoir a' teachd,  
Daimh sheanga 'nan ruith le gleann,  
Miolchoin a' dol annta 's ast'.  

Where was heard sweeter music  
Than a cry of a great hound approaching,  
Slender stags running down a glen,  
Hunting dogs darting about for a grip on them.  

See note M31d for technique described in line d.
"N uair a bha mi air an da chois,
'S moch a shiubhlain bhos a's thall,
Ach anois on fhuaire mi tri,
Cha ghluais mi ach gu min mall.

b. a's conjunction.

Nuair' bha mi air an dà chois,  \(2(7^1+7^1)^{2+4}\)
'S moch a shiùbhlainn bhos is thall
Ach a nois on fhuaire mi tri
Cha ghluais mi ach gu min mall.

When I was on two legs
Early would I journey hither and thither,
But now, since I've got three
I move only gently and slowly.

This stanza occurs in none of the manuscripts.

This reference to the riddle of the sphinx begins a little

group of three stanzas bemoaning the passage of time.
E Stanza 34

Tha blaigh mo bhogha ' ann am uchd,
Le aogh maol odhar is ait,
Ise geanail 's mise gruamach,
'S cruaidh an diugh nach buan an t-slat.

\[ \text{Tha bloigh mo bhogha ' nam uchd,} \]
\[ \text{Le agh maol odhar as ait,} \]
\[ \text{Ise geanail 's mise gruamach,} \]
\[ \text{'S cruaidh an diugh nach buan an t-slat.} \]

"aicill is probably intended at uchd:aogh"
Internal rhyme [bhogha:odhar]

Part of my bow is in my bosom,
With a dun, hornless hind who is happy,
She is cheerful and I am gloomy,
It's hard today that the limb does not endure.

A continuation from the previous stanza of the theme of the hunter's sorrow at the passage of time. He is too old to do any more than reflect on the hind he might once have hunted. Interpretation is discussed at T44.
E Stanza 35

'S truagh an diù nach beò an fheoghain,
Gun ann ach an ceò do'n bhuidhinn,
Leis 'm ba mhiannach gloir na'n gadhar,
Gun mheoghail gun òl gun bhrithinn.

d. mheoghail alternative form mheadhair may have been intended, giving better aicill, cf. ML33.
bhrithinn spelt "bhruiithinn" in 1809 edition; Mackechnie translates this "speaking" but it may be used in the sense of fighting, see T45.

Endrhyne at a:b:d.

'S truagh an diugh nach beò an fhèadhainn,
Gun ann ach an ceò de'n bhuidhheann,
Leis 'm bu mhiannach glòir nan gadhar,
Gun mheadhair, gun òl, gun bhruidhinn.

It's sad today that the people are not alive,
Nothing's here but the mist of the company
Who loved the voices of the hunting dogs,
No merriment, no drinking, no fighting.
E Stanza 36

Bratach Alastair na' n Gleann,
A strol faramach re crann,
Suaitheantas shoilleir shiol Chuinn,
Nach d' chuir suim ann clannabh Gall.

b. strol 't' between 's' and 'r' sounded in some dialects. Inconsistent use of 't' at E1 and E2.

First couplet has internal rhyme [Alasdair:faramach] but no aicill.
Endrhyne at a:b:d.

Bratach Alasdair nan Gleann, 2(7 1+7 1) 1+2+4
A sròl faramach ri crann
Suaitheantas shoilleir shiol Chuinn,
Nach d' chuir suim an clannaibh Gall.

The banner of Alasdair of the Glens,
Its silk flapping against the staff,
Bright emblem of the seed of Conn,
That paid no regard to descendants of Lowlanders.

Alasdair nan Gleann, see Proper Names Index

Conn: Conn Céadchathach was a mythical Irish king whose reputation as an ideal ruler established him as a model dynastic progenitor. According to the old historiographers a great, great, great, grandson of Conn was Colla Uais who had sovereignty of Ireland, acquired territory in Scotland and founded the Clan Donald.18

This stanza is not in the manuscripts.

E Stanza 37

'S ann an Cinn-ghiubhsaich na laidhe,
Tha namhaid na graighe deirge,
Lamh dheas a mharbhadh a bhradain,
Ba mhath e 'n t shabaid na feirge.

d. 'n t shabaid na feirge

this looks grammatically odd but the suspicion that sabaid has become 'tabaid' dialectally is confirmed by the use of the latter spelling in Turner's 1809 edition of Eigg. MacCodrum employs a similar usage:

Bha gillean is bodaich
A' tabaid 's an sàs.19

(there were lads and carles fighting and grappling).

Endrhyme at a:c, b:d.

'It's in Kingussie is lying
The enemy of the red herd,
A right hand for killing the salmon,
He was skilled in the fight of wrath.

This stanza probably refers to Alasdair (Bothloinne) of Keppoch who died in Kingussie in 1554, see Proper Names Index.

19 W. Matheson, John MacCodrum, line 2583.
Dh, fhag mi san ruaidhe so shios,
Am fear a b' olc dhomhsa bhas,
'S tric a chuir e a thagradh an cruas,
Ann cluais an Daimh chabraich ann sas

a. ruaidhe may be from 'ruamhair' (the fricative being dialectally variable)- so ruaidhe, 'a dug place' i.e. 'a grave'. This corresponds with the meaning given by Watson although he has a different derivation which may well be the correct one. E is the only source to give this particular form of the word; all the manuscripts have rugha or similar; (cf. T34, ML/MN42). The 1809 edition of Eigg gives "ruidhe". Interpretations are variable and I might suggest another one: as the subject seems the same as in the previous stanza, maybe we are to understand Gleann Ruaidh where Alasdair Bothloinne was wounded. Mackenzie's Sàr Obair and the Macdonald Collection both give "Ruaidhe" clearly taking it for a place-name, as in neither anthology are capitals used at the beginning of ordinary nouns.

No rhyme in first couplet.
Second couplet has internal rhyme [thagradh:chabraich] as well as aicill.

Dh'fhàg mi 'san ruaidhe seo shios, (7^1+7^1)+(8^1+8^1)^2+4
Am fear a b'olc dhomhsa bhàs,
'S tric a chuir e 'thagradh an cruas,
An cluais an daimh chabraich an sàs.

I left in the grave down here
The man whose death was dreadful for me,
Often did he put his claim firmly,
Fixed in the ear of the antlered stag.

Line c see note ML42.
For comparison with other sources see Chapter 7, p.320.

20 BG Faclair, Watson suggests the spelling "ruaimhe" to accord with the derivation "rúam, a Rome".
Raonull Macdhomhnaill ghlais,
Fear a fhuair fòghlum gu deas,
Deagh Mhac Dhonuill a chùill chais,
Ni'm beo neach o charaig leis.

d. Ni negative copula.
      o charaig probably for a chomhraig

No rhyme in first couplet.
Endrhyne at a:c, b:d.

Raghnall mac Dhomhnaill ghlais,
Fear a fhuair fòghlum gu deas,
Deagh MacDhomhnaill a' chùill chais,
Ni'm beò neach a chomhraig leis.

Ronald, son of grey Donald,
A man who got a proper education,
A good MacDonald with curly hair,
No-one who fought with him is alive.

The son of Domhnall Glas of Keppoch, was known as Raghnall Mór, q.v. in Proper Names Index.

Not in any of the manuscripts.
Of the other printed versions with this stanza, the one using the earliest witness must be A.Maclean Sinclair's Collection and it gives "a chomhraig" in line d.
Alastair croidhe na'n gleann,
Gun e bhì ann mor a chreach,
'S tric a leag u air an tom,
Mac na sonn leis a choin ghlais.

a. seems to refer back to E36.
d. na sonn na sonn cf. E43.

Endrhyme at a:c, b:d.

Alasdair croidhe nan Gleann,
Gun e bhith ann mòr a' chreach,
'S tric a leag thu air an tom
Mac nan sonn leis a' choin ghlais.

Beloved Alasdair nan Gleann,
That he is no more is a great blow,
Often on the hunting knoll you felled
The son of the champions, by means of the grey dog.

This is in no other source; there is a similar stanza in Turner (T 31) but it relates to Ragnall MacDhomhnaill; T does not have the preceding verse about him.
Alastair Mac Ailain mhoir,
'S tric a mharbh sa bheinn na feigh,
'Sa leanadh fad air an toir,
Mo dhòigh gur Domhnallach treun

No rhyme in first couplet.

Alasdair mac Ailein mhóir,
' S tric a mharbh sa bheinn na féidh,
'S a leanadh fad' air an tòir,
Mo dhòigh gur Domhnallach treun.

Alasdair son of great Alan,
Who often killed deer on the hill,
And would follow far in their chase,
By my faith he is a mighty MacDonald.

Watson states that this is a reference to a MacDonald of Morar. Rankin suggests it is a mistake for Alasdair Bothloinne. The introduction of the Morar branch of MacDonal downs when previous stanzas related to Keppoch is surprising. A transmitter of the poem not familiar with Lochaber may have mistaken Ragnall Mór for Ailein, not realising that Ailein was not a Keppoch MacDonald name. This is the third stanza out of the last four to have a line beginning 's tric a. This might be explained as 'incremental repetition', a term originally coined to discuss a device common in ballads. In each case the words introduce a different line, thus conforming to Jackson's description. However, in this instance the usage seems incidental rather than stylistic. Each of the three stanzas with this phrase has a corresponding verse in T or ML and MN. But there is an indication of textual shift. Of the three stanzas only one is represented in more than one other source, a form of E38 occurring in T and ML/MN. The other two verses each show up in a different form in only one of the other sources. To this lack of consistency between sources we have to add the fact that no source other than E repeats the phrase 'S tric a'. It may be that there was an awareness within the tradition of textual vulnerability here. Perhaps some sort of mnemonic overdrive is at work bringing this phrase to the mind of the reciter rather often; this could cause some words to be lost, by supplanting them, or encourage new phrases to be created and fill a space. For further reference to 'incremental repetition' see Chapter 7. p.305.

21 BG, p.338.
22 RR, p.133.
E Stanza 42

A's Dòmhnullach u gun mhearachd,
Gur tu buinne geal na cruaghch,
Gur càirdeach u do Chlannchattain,
'S gur a dallt u do chreig ghuanaich.

a. A's verb
b. buinne see note T32.
d. gur a a appears to be a detached epenthetic vowel; it is not shown in the 1809 edition.

Is Domhnallach thu gun mhearachd, 2(8^2+8^2)^2
Gur tu buinne geal na cruadhch,
Gur càirdeach thu do Chlann Chatain,
'S gura dalt' thu do Chreig Ghanach.

You are a MacDonald without blemish,
You are the bright warrior of steel,
You are related to the Clan Chattan,
And to Creag Ghuanach you are a fosterling.

The mention of Creag Ghuanach indicates that it is still a Keppoch MacDonald who is being praised. Alasdair Bothloinne's mother was a daughter of Macintosh and Rankin may well be right to identify him as the subject of this verse and the last one.25

E Stanza 43

Ma dh' fhàgadh Domhnall a muigh,
Na aonar a' tigh na fleagh,
'S gearr a bhios gucag air bhuil,
Luchd a chruigh bicidh iad as tigh.

b. na fleagh        cf. E40a.

Endrhyme at a:c:d.

Ma dh'fhàgadh Domhnall a muigh,
'Na aonar á Taigh nam Fleadh,  \[2(7^1+7^1)^1+3+4\]
'S gearr a bhios gucag air bhuil,
Luchd a' chruidh bithidh iad a staigh.

If Donald was left outside,
On his own away from the feasting house,
It's briefly the bumper froths over,
The cattlemen will be inside.

Taigh nam Fleadh see Place-names Index.
For interpretation see note M51.
E Stanza 44

Mi 'm shuidh air sioth bhruth na m beann,
A coimhead air ceann loch a treig,
Creag ghuanach am biodh an t sheâlg,
Grianan àrd am biodh na fèigh.

a. sioth    sith

line d, see note M1.
Chi mi na dubh-lochain uam,
Chi mi chruach a's beinn bhreàc,
Chi mi strath Oissian na m Fiann,
Chi mi ghrian air meall nan leàc.

a. na dubh-lochain plural, so unlikely to be An Dubh Lochan north-west of Fersit; probably the lochs which formed what is now the Blackwater Reservoir.

c. Oissian unusual spelling is modified to "Oisian" in 1809 edition.

Chi mi na Dubh-lochan uam, 2(7^1+7^1)^2+6
Chi mi a 'Chruach is Beinn Bhreac,
Chi mi Srath Oisean nam Fiann,
Chi mi 'ghrian air Meall nan Leac.

I see the Blackwater Lochs afar,
I see Cruach and Beinn Bhreac,
I see Strath Ossian of the Fianna,
I see the sun on Meall nan Leac.

See Place-names Index for Chruach, Beinn Bhreac, Srath Ossian, Meall na Lice.
E Stanza 46

Chi mi beinn iobhais gu àrd,
Agus an càrn dearg re bun,
A's coire beag eile re taobh,
Chit' a's munadh faoin as muir.

a. beinn iobhais  Ben Nevis, see note M17.
b. càrn dearg  see Dearg in Place-names Index.
d. a's  probably conjunction is
  for the word ás this writer puts as,
  see E67c.

d. faoin  see note M17.

Chi mi Beinn Nibheis gu àrd,
Agus an Carn Dearg ri bun,
Is coir' beag eile ri taobh,
Chit' is munadh faoin is muir.

I see Ben Nevis up high,
And Carn Dearg at the foot,
And another little corrie beside,
Would be seen with empty moorland and sea.

Rankin suggests that line c refers to Coire Eoghainn,
asuming Ben Nevis and environs are being viewed from Creag Ghuanach.26 This line does not occur in the manuscripts.

26 R Place-names, p.118.
E Stanza 47

Gur riomhach an coire dearg,
Far 'm ba mhiannach leinn bhi sealg,
Coir' na'n tulachanan fraoich,
Innis na'n laogh 's na'n Damh garbh.

a. coire dearg     I leave this as descriptive although it could be a place-name; see also endnote to M11.

Endrhyne at a:b:d.

Gur riomhach an coire dearg, \(2(7^1+7^1)^{1+2+4}\)
Far 'm bu mhiannach leinn bhith sealg,
Coiire nan tulchannan fraoich,
Innis nan laogh 's nan damh garbh.

Beautiful is the red corrie,
Where we would like to be hunting,
The corrie of the heathery hummocks,
The meadow of the calves and the sturdy stags.
E Stanza 48

Chi mi braidh bhidin nan dòs,
'N taobh so bhos do sgura lith
Sgura chòinich na'n Damh seang,
Ionmhuinn leam an diu na chi.

a. bhidin nan dòs } these names occur only in this source.
b. sgura lith } they sound like place-names but are not

on the maps; however, the second might
be Stob a' Choire Leith on the Grey
Corries, a range which includes Sgurra
Chòinnich mentioned in line c.
Also Rankin met a Lochaber person with
knowledge of similar names, Braigh
Bhinnein nan dos and Sgurra Liathadh.27
c. Sgura chòinich 'Sgurr Chòinnich' q.v. in Place-names
Index John Mackechnie gives "Sgurra
Chòinnich" which AM emends to "Sgurr a'
Chòinnich", puzzlingly as 'còinneach' is
generally reported as feminine.
Mackechnie may be right with "Chòinnich"
as the accents in E are capriciously
placed.

Chi mi bràigh Bhidein nan Dos,  2(71+71)2+4
An taobh sa bhos do Sgurra Lith,
Sgurra Chòinnich nan damh seang,
Ionmhuinn leam an diugh na chi.

I see the brae of Bidein nan Dos
On this side of Sgurra Lith,
Sgurra Chòinnich of the slender stags,
Fond am I of what I see today.

This is the second instance in which E gives the word Dos
where others have 'os'; cf. E15. The other sources to give a
stanza corresponding to E48, M15 and ML/MN49, all have place­
names ending in 'nan os' and they are all difficult to
identify.

27 R Place-names, p.119.
Chi mi strath farsaing a chruidh,
Far an labhar guth na'n sòn, n
A's coire creagach a mhaim,
A' minig an tug mo làmh toll.

b. sòn

c. A's

c. coire creagach
    a mhaim

see Coire Creagach in Place-names Index.
probably Màm Bàn, see Place-names Index.

Chi mi srath farsaing a' chruiddh
Far an labhar guth nan sonn,
Is Coire Creagach a' Mhàim,
'M minig an tug mo làmh toll.

I see the broad valley of the cattle
Where the voice of the stags is loud,
And Coire Creagach of Màm,
Where often my hand caused a gap.

Variants of this stanza occur in two later poems: 'Oran Fear Druim a' Chaoin', and 'Cead do'n t-Sealg'; see Chapter 1, part B, 'Related poems', cf. E18.
Chi mi garbh bheinn na'n damh donn,  
Agus slat bheinn na'n tom sith,  
Mar sin agus u'n leitir dhubh,  
'S tric a roinn mi fuil na' fri.

a. **garbh bheinn** see Place-names Index.  
b. **slat bheinn** likely to be place-name but not traced.  
   **u'n leitir dhubh** misprint for an corrected in 1809 ed.  
   see Place-names Index.

Chi mi Garbh-bheinn nan damh donn,  
Agus Slat-bheinn nan tom sith,  
Mar sin agus an Leitir Dhubh,  
'S tric a rinn mi fuil 'na frith.

I see Garbh-bheinn of the brown stags,  
And Slat-bheinn of the fairy mounds,  
And so too Leitir Dhubh,  
In whose deer-park I often shed blood.

This seems to be a variant of the stanza given at M9.
E Stanza 51

Soraidh gu beinn allta uam,
O' n 'si fhuaire urram na'm beann,
Go slios Loch-eireachd an fhéigh,
Gu'm b' ionmhuinn leam fèin bhí ann.

a. beinn allta  the greeting formula is not likely to be used for a nameless hill and this is probably Ben Alder (see Place-names Index) which has Loch Ericht (line c) to its east. It is usually Beinn Eallair in Gaelic but the spelling allta, 'wild', may be inspired by an idea of the derivation of the name, although see also note M14a.

Soraidh gu Beinn Allta uam,  \[2(7^1+7^3)^{2+4}\]
O' n 's i fhuaire urram nam beann,
Gu slios Loch Eireachd an fhéidh,
Gu'm b' ionmhuinn leam féin bhí ann.

Farewell to Ben Alder from me,
Since she gained the honour of the mountains,
To the slope of Loch Ericht of the deer,
I'd love to be there myself.

M is the only manuscript to give this, but 'Oran Fear Druim a'Chaoin' (cf. E18 and E49) has a verse combining elements of this and the following stanza.
E Stanza 52

Thoirt soraídh uam thun an Loch,
Far am faicte 'bhos a's thall
Go uisge Leamhna na'n lach,
Muime na'n laogh breac 's na meann.

c. uisge Leamhna  River Leven flows into Loch Leven at Kinlochleven.

Thoirt soraídh uam thun an loch,  \(2(7^1 + 7^1)^{2+4}\)
Far am faicte bhos is thall
Gu Uisge Leamhna nan lach,
Muime nan laogh breac 's nam meann.

Take a greeting from me to the loch,
Where could be seen both this and the other side
As far as Leven Water of the ducks,
The nurse of the speckled calves and kids.

M is the only manuscript with a similar stanza, see M16.
It does not have Leamhna but 'Uisge Labhair' which is near
the recently mentioned Ben Alder. Perhaps ducks are not
especially associated with the River Leven but have been
attracted in by their reference in the next stanza.
E Stanza 53

S è Loch mo chroidhese an Loch,
An loch air am bioidh 'n Lach,
Agus iomadh eala bhàn,
'S bhioídh iad a' snàmh ma n seach,

'S e loch mo chroidhe-sa an loch,
'N loch air am bitheadh an lach
Agus iomadh eala bhàn,
'S bhitheadh iad a' snàmh mu'n seach.

The loch of my very heart is the loch,
The loch where the duck would be,
And many a white swan,
And they would be swimming one after the other.
E Stanza 54

Olaídh mi a' Trèig mo theann-shath,
Na dhèidh cha-bhidh mi fui' mhulad,
Uisge glan na m fuaran fallain,
O'n seang am fiagh a ní 'n langan.

No aicill but internal rhyme [Trèig:dhèidh] in first couplet
Endrhyme at a:c, b:d.

Ólaídh mi á Tréig mo theann-shàth, 2(8^2+8^2)^{1,3,2+4}
Na dhèidh cha bhi mi fui' mhulad,
Uisge glan nam fuaran fallain
O'n seang am fiadh a ní 'n langan.

I will drink from Treig my plenty,
After it I will not be melancholy,
The pure water of wholesome springs
From which the belling deer stays lithe.
E Stanza 55

'S buan an comunn gun bhristeadh,
Bha eatar mise 's an t uisge,
Sùgh na mor bheann gun mhisge,
Mise ga öl gun traisgeadh.

'S buan an comunn gun bhristeadh \((7^2+8^2)+(7^2+7^2)\)²⁺⁴
Bha eadar mise 's an t-uisge,
Sùgh nam mòr bheann gun mhisge,
Mise 'ga öl gun traisgeadh.

It's long the unbroken society
That was between me and the water,
The sap of the great hills with no intoxication
And I drinking it without fasting.

M is the only manuscript with this stanza.
'S ann a bha an communn bristeach,  
Eadar mise 's a' Chreag Sheilich,  
Mise gu bràth cha dirich,  
Ise gu dilinn cha teirinn.

b. a chreag sheilich  Rankin suggests two hills to which this might refer but they are in Glen Lyon and the sense that the speaker has Loch Treig in mind carries on from the last two stanzas.28 This impression also points away from Coire an t-Seilich between Glen Roy and Glen Loy. However, Leadh nan Craobhan Seileach is marked just west of Allt Coire Rath in the vicinity of Loch Treig and Creag Sheilich may be related to this and its name restricted to local use; cf. E57d.

c/d inconsistent spelling of gu

Endrhyme at a:c, b:d.

'S ann a bha an comunn bristeach,  
Eadar mise 's a chreag sheilich,  
Mise gu bràth cha dirich,  
Ise gu dilinn cha teirinn.

Indeed the society was broken,  
Between me and Creag Sheilich,  
I will not ever go up,  
She will never descend.

This is in none of the manuscripts.  
In the previous two stanzas the speaker had some fellowship with nature and her elements but now there is a rift.

28 R Place-names, p. 120.
E Stanza 57

O labhair mi sibh gu lèir,
Gabhaighd h mi fhein dibh mo chead,
Dearmad cha dean mi san àm,
Air fiadhach ghleann na m beann beag.

d. beann beag Although there are in a general way many
hills referred to as Beinn Bheag modern maps show none in the
district around Loch Tréig. However, Thomson's Atlas marks
"Bein a beag" beside the Lairig Leacach and just west of
Uisge Lairig. This position corresponds with Meall Mòr and
Meall Beag on OS maps (thus accounting for the plural nam
beann beag). The proximity of Leachd nan Craobhan Seileach,
referred to in notes on the previous stanza, accords with
this understanding of the location. See also Beinn Bheag in
Place-names Index for supporting local knowledge.
I leave the pair of hills plural in Gaelic but revert to
Thomson's method in English.

O labhair mi sibh gu lèir, \(2(7^1+7^1)^{2+4}\)
Gabhaighd h mi fhéin dibh mo chead,
Dearmad cha dean mi 'san àm,
Air fiadhach ghleann nam beann beag.

Since I have named you fully,
I'll make my own farewell to you,
I will not now forget,
Hunting the glens of Beinn Bheag.

Line a. seems to refer back to those places listed in verses
45-56.
This first couplet occurs in MN and ML.
M gives both couplets in reverse order.
The saddest farewell I ever made
Was to hunting for which I had a great love,
I'll not set off with a bow under my wing,
And till doomsday I'll not let slip hounds.
You and I, O white hound,  
Sad is our turn at the minstrelsy,  
We've lost the hunting and the poetry,  
Although we were a while in pleasantry.

The poet still bemoans the passage of time, - not enough of it in minstrelsy.
Thug a choille dhiotsa an earb',
'S thug an t-àrd dhloisma na fèigh,
Cha n eil nàire dhùinn a Laoich,
O'n laidhe an aois òirn le chèil'.

Accents not needed on prepositional pronouns.

d. an acute accent marked on n - presumably a typographical error, which may well be the explanation for some of the other accents in this source.

Thug a' choille dhiots' an earb, 2(7^2+7^2)^{2+4}
'S thug an t-àrd dhloisma na féidh,
Chan eil nàire dhùinn, a laoich,
O'n laigh an aois òirn le chèil'.

The wood took from you the doe,
And the hill took from me the deer,
It is no disgrace for us, friend,
Since age has befallen us together.
E Stanza 61

Aois cha n'eil u meachair,
Ge nach fèadar leinn do sheachnadh,
Cromaidh tu 'n duine direach,
A dh'fhàs gu mileanta gàsda.

b. fèadar the old verb fèadar (see M36b) used impersonally with 'le'. It is noted elsewhere that E has superfluous accents. There may have been some blurring of usage between the word 'féidir', used with the copula to mean 'it is possible', and the defective verb 'feadar', meaning 'know, know how'. (Dinneen and Ó Dónaill give examples of usage.) Within the sources of OnC it seems that both words appear and ML distinguishes between them, cf. ML23 and ML25.

End rhyme at a:b:d.

Aois chan eil thu meachair, (6²+8²)+(7²+8²)²+⁴
Ge nach feadar leinn do sheachnadh,
Cromaidh tu 'n duine direach,
A dh'fhàs gu mileanta gàsda.

Age you are not kindly
Though we don't know how to avoid you,
You bow down the straight man,
Who had grown gallant and handsome.
E Stanza 62

Gearraichidh tu a shaoghal,
A's caolaichidh tu 'chasan,
Fagaidh tu cheann gun deadach,
'S ni u eadunn a chasadh.

a. gearraichidh        giorraichidh

Giorraichidh tu a shaoghal,  \[2(7^2+7^2)^{2+4}\]
Is caolaichidh tu 'chasan,
Fàgaidh tu 'cheann gun deudach,
'S ni thu eudann a chasadh.

You shorten his life,
And you shrivel his legs,
You leave his head without teeth,
And you make his face wrinkled.
E Stanza 63

A shine chas-aodannach, pheallach,
A shream-shuileach, odhar, éididh,
Cha ma 'n leiginn leat a lobhair,
Mo bhogha toirt dhiom airèiginn.

a. A shine changed to 'aois' in Turner's 1809 ed.
   perhaps as reflection of E61a.
b. éididh étigh
c. cha probably misprint; 1809 ed. gives 'cia'
   (cia and cò uime > c'uime)
   a lobhair term of abuse, see note M38.

A shine chas-aodannach, pheallach, \((9^2+8^2)+(8^2+8^2)^2\) +4
A shream-shuileach, odhar, étigh,
Cuime'n leiginn leat, a lobhair,
Mo bhogha toirt dhiom air éiginn?

O old age, crumple-faced and shaggy,
Rheumy-eyed one, sallow and dreadful,
Why should I let you, you leper,
Take my bow from me by force?
O'n 's mi fhin a' fhearr an airidh,
Air mo bhogha ro-mhath iubhair,
No thusa aois bhothar sgallach,
Bhios aig an teallach ad shuidhe.

Since I myself deserved better
My excellent bow of yew wood,
Than do you, deaf and bald old age,
Who are seated beside the hearth.
E Stanza 65

Labhair an aois a rithis,
'S mo 's righinn tha thu leantail.
Ris a bhogha sin a ghiùlan,
'S gur mò ba chuibhte dhuit bàta.

d. chuibhte obsolete, Dwelly.
chùibhde "cuibhe" is a comparative of "cubhaidh" (Maclennan).
bàta bata makes more sense and rhymes with leantail.

Labhair an aois a rithis, \((7^2+7^2)+(8^2+8^2)^2\)
'S mo 's righinn tha thu leantail,
Ris a' bhogha sin a ghiùlan,
'S gur mò bu chùibhdeh dhuit bata.

Age spoke again,
Too obstinately are you persevering
At carrying that bow,
When a stick would be more apt for you.
E Stanza 66

Gabh thusa uaimse 'm bàta.
Aois grànda chaírthidh na plèide,
Cha leiginn mo bhogh' leatsa,
Do mhathas na d'ar, eiginn.

a. uaimse uamsa
bàta see E65d.

b. plèide see note T43.

d. the comma appears to be a mistake.
Later editions of E maintain the punctuation. Both Watson and Mackechnie give "De do mhaithneas no air éiginn". Watson, BG p.339, refers to the version in Reliquiae Celticae - "air aighis no air éiginn", a form of which is given in the other sources, ML and MN, as well as T.

Gabh thusa uamsa 'm bata, \((7^2+8^2)+(7^2+7^2)^2\)
Aois ghrànda chaírthidh na plèide,
Cha leiginn mo bhogh' leatsa
De mhaithneas no air éiginn.

Take the stick away from me,
Old age ugly and swarthy with spite,
I wouldn't let you have my bow,
Willingly or by force.

Old age does not present sufficient cause for the poet to abandon his bow.
Many a champion better than you
Have I left stumbling and weak,
After destroying him as he stood
Who was a spirited young man before.

Old age replies to the poet who spoke in the previous stanza.
CHAPTER 7

The variant sources: a discussion of the texts

There are some obvious physical differences between the sources in respect of legibility and the fact that one source is printed and the others are handwritten. In addition there is much variability according to the quantity of conservatisms included, quite apart from the diversity of orthography. A certain amount of editorial tidying may have taken place in some cases. Probably Ranald MacDonald, preparing a text for publication, wanted it to present a modern aspect on grounds of readability. Conversely, accessibility seems to have been far from the mind of the scribe of M, who was apparently constrained by shortage of writing materials and so compressed his handwriting.

Orthography

As regards orthography, the lack of an orthographic standard meant that there was little chance of consistency in the writing of Scottish Gaelic in the 18th century. William Shaw declared "At present I much doubt whether there be four men in Scotland that could spell one page the same way."\(^1\) Orthographic variability is therefore to be expected and M and MN present the greatest number of idiosyncracies. M, in particular, shows the influence of Scots spelling which was also a feature of the earlier Book of the Dean of Lismore and the Fernaig Manuscript. It is quite possible that M contains remnants of a Scots-based spelling system that was used extensively by the time of the Book of the Dean but of which there survives little other manuscript evidence. The currency of such a system would diminish after the publication in 1567 of Carswell's translation of the Book of Common Order which used the orthography of Classical Common Gaelic.\(^2\)

Some of the renderings may be influenced by the writers' spelling habits and dialect. MN uses the letter j occasionally, and

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\(^1\) William Shaw, An Analysis of the Galic Language (Edinburgh, 1778).
a predilection for the letter i cuts across any adherence to the spelling rule 'caol ri caol is leathan ri leathan'. This was formulated in the publication of the Gaelic New Testament in 1767 but was found to some extent in practice before that. The principle is applied fairly consistently in T, ML and E so that they have a less eccentric aspect than their counterparts. Sometimes several sources show a similar spelling habit so that a norm emerges; for example, 'ao' is often used where we would now find 'a', as in 'tadhal'.

Language
It was observed in the 'Introduction to the Texts' that it is not always possible to distinguish between an orthographic archaism and a morphological one and this may have been a problem for the scribes as well if they were copying the poem. However, in some cases it is clear that it is the form used which is old; for example, the first person singular s-preterite is found in all sources, although not always consistently. T contains the greatest number of old forms, including the synthetic verb form 'fheudamar'. Other sources give 'fheadar' here and some morphological variation may be due to different lines of transmission or different interpretations on the part of the persons writing the poem down.

The presence of the word 'cos' is interesting and a review of this may be illuminating. In T21 and its counterparts 'cos' rhymes with 'clos' or 'fois'. M does not have this stanza. In contrast, T39 and the corresponding verse in ML, MN and E, have the form 'chasan' to rhyme with 'chasadh'; 'cas' and 'cos' thus seem to be used interchangeably to suit the metre. M does give this last verse but the transmission appears to have supplanted the 'cas' form with the older 'cosa', thus giving the rhyme chosa:chasadh. These two non-identical short vowels might have been considered as good a rhyme as that in 'casan : casadh', but in that case why do all the other sources bother to give 'cos' where 'clos' or 'fois' are the rhyming words, and 'casan' where 'casadh' is involved? The agreement between all sources but M is indicative of a change developing during the

3 This is not necessarily due to MacNicol himself but perhaps his source, see note verse ML2a.
latter's transmission. Two possible reasons for this suggest themselves. The person who wrote down M may have recollected the usage in the poem of the word 'cos'; however, the stanza in which it occurs was not available, perhaps already lost, at the time of writing. In consequence 'cos' would be incorporated into the stanza containing 'cas'. The other reason could have been at work either separately or simultaneously: a sense of respect for the poem's reputation and its relationship to older poetry like the Fenian ballads may have favoured the inclusion of old forms. Although 'cos' might be considered a 'southern' form that would not explain its presence in M as this manuscript contains indications of Perthshire and Lochaber speech habits: some final syllables are knocked off, as in M48, for example; there is also the tendency to diphthongise which is noted at M10.4 In fact it is T which shows a tendency towards Irish or southern Scottish Gaelic features, such as past tense verb endings in '-gh/-dh' rather than 'ch', see T40.

The language of the poem is not readily categorised. It is strongly vernacular but there are forms with an archaic aspect which might or might not be classical. It may perhaps best be considered as using pre-modern Scottish Gaelic which the collectors have reflected in varying degrees in their documents. The task of writing down a 16th-century work nearly 200 years after its composition must have entailed some ambiguities. In such circumstances a poem might present more problems than a prose work and it would be natural to view it against the background of associated poetry from the oral tradition. Thematically OnC has some common ground with the Fenian ballads, as will be discussed in the next chapter (see 'The Fenian Connection'). Parallel uses of phraseology and imagery are contained in a number of poems in the Book of the Dean of Lismore and also Duanaire Finn and these correspondences would have been present in the minds of the tradition bearers and the collectors. Some examples of this will be given in the next section 'Style'.

In addition to differences of presentation, the texts contained in chapters 2-6 show variability of a more substantial nature. However, before examining these, matters relating to style and the incidence of place-names will be considered.

4 See use of 'cos' T21.
Style

In choice of words the style is simple and economical without being naive. In the dialogue sections, as well as the descriptions of hunting and landscape, the touch is light, perhaps deceptively so; layers of meaning may be contained in just a few words, as when the owl introduces herself:

Gur comhaois mise do'n daraig
O bha h-aillean beag 'sa chòinnich
'S iomadh àl a chuir mi romham
'S mí comhachag bhochd na Sròine. T2 quoted

Here are several underlying themes: that of the excessively aged individual able to report past events, the old system of reckoning dates by reference to certain trees and animals, and the complex subject of the oak with its connections to the druids and Beltane fire.5

Sometimes a form of metalepsis is employed in which a phrase may have an ostensibly straightforward meaning overlying and representing a more complicated concept. In the following examples an asterisk indicates the source quoted:

'S gearn a bhios gucag air bhuil M51, ML*/MN37, E43.
The glass will not be brimming for long because the contents will soon be drunk but the fact that conviviality is short-lived is merely an aspect of the brevity of human life.

A less literal picture is offered here:

Am minig a rinn mo lèmh toll. T29*, ML/MN45, E49
The 'hand' is not really part of the same frame but is a displaced coefficient. The agency of the hand releasing the arrow from the bow is not synchronous with the presence of the gap in the configuration of deer. This technique imparts a vibrance which bestows a sort of immaterial permanence on the image.

This effect is accentuated by the familiarity the poem's audience would have had with a particular usage of the word 'lèmh'. In various poems from the Book of the Dean of Lismore, this word occurs as a device within synecdoche to describe a sturdy fighter. Thus in the the 'Battle of Ventry' many heroes are described as having a stout arm ready for battle, e.g.:

5 See Chapter 8, 'The oldest animals', p.344.
A poem by Dubhghall Mac an Ghiolla Ghlais has the lines:

lámh badh mhath iorghail i ngreis;
dob ionmhain leis fuileach fiadh.6

(a good hand at quarrel in a fray / he well loved the stag a-bleeding)

A MacGregor patron is praised for the vigour of his 'hand':

urra dhá mh is fear na seilga
a lámh gheal a dheargas ga

(patron of poet bands and famed in the hunt / his white hand that reddeneth spears).

OnC has no descriptions of battles but again the 'hand' is a feature of an image of hunting prowess:

Lamh dheas a mharbhadh a'bhradain

The image of the 'hand' is often combined with litotes in the Fenian ballads:

nochar éar sé neach fá ní,
i ngreis nochar mhin a lámh

(to none did he refuse his store / not gentle was his hand in battle)

The absence of weak 'hand' was a common epithet:

Conall nár lag lámh

(Conall whose hand wasn't feeble)

OnC has instances of understatement, used in the same way as in bardic poetry:

1. Cha b’te siud roghainn bu taire
2. Am bunne geal nach raibh éitigh
3. Nach deidheadh 'na aonar am poit

Understatement is by nature a relatively brief figure of speech and in OnC there is a good deal of terseness in imagery so that a range of meaning and resonance is conveyed with great economy.

Chan fhaca mi 'dhath air bhan
Ach odhar is riabhach is dearg.

The poet who has spent his life in the 'company of deer' is also a hunter but this subject is treated with great delicacy. We witness the pursuit of deer as, in M31 et al., and although one source even has a stanza, E50, where blood is shed, we are never invited to see a dead deer. In this respect the poem differs from the Fenian

6 Translations are from the editions quoted.
ballads where there is often a tally of the numbers of beasts brought down in the hunt.

The impression of simplicity is supported by each verse being syntactically and semantically independent. This is also the case in poems to be mentioned in Chapter 8, such as those in Bulle Suibhne and Duanaire Finn. It is a common feature of oral poetry as it eliminates the need to sustain syntax from one verse to another. However, a hazard of this feature exemplified by the transmission of OnC is that a self-contained stanza is vulnerable to rearrangements of verse order, especially where there is no guiding story.

Adjectives.
Some stanzas which are reported in a broadly similar fashion by all the sources often show variation with regard to adjectives, especially where these come in multiples.

The listing of adjectives is maintained as a stylistic unit across the sources but very often the elements of the unit vary; so although the adjectival group is constant the component words may differ. For example, one of the lines describing Creag Ghuanach occurs with the following variations:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Variation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>M2</td>
<td>Creag eagach, iular, fheurach.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T11</td>
<td>chreaug iulmhoch, fionnmhoch, fheurach.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ML/MN9</td>
<td>Chreaug iular, aighearach, fheurach.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E12</td>
<td>chreaug aighearach, úrail, eànach.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>And also: M21</td>
<td>Eilid bhiorcheann, bhárrcheann, bhallach Odhar, fhiadhaich, iongach, ard Le h-ugan biorach, binneach, Crónanach, ceann-riabhach, dearg.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T15</td>
<td>Eilid bhuirgeann, bhalgeann, bhallach Oghar eangach uchd ri h-árd, Trògbhalach thu, biorach, sgiamhach, Crónanach, ceann-riabhach, dearg.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ML15</td>
<td>Eilid bhuirail, bharrail, bhrangach Odhar eangach uchd ri h-ard, Damh cròc-cheannach biorach, sgiamhach Crónanach ceann-riabhach dearg.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MN15</td>
<td>Eilid bhinneach, mheanbh-bhreac, bhrangach, Odhar, eangach, uchd ri árd, Damh cròc-cheannach, biorach, sgiamhach Crónanach ceann-riabhach dearg.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These last stanzas are given in full as they demonstrate other features in addition to the consistency of adjectival groupings. One such feature is a tendency, although it is no more than that, for the final line of a stanza to show greater stability than the others. Groups of adjectives are often made up of words which alliterate similarly even though the actual lexicon varies. The incidence of alliteration is generally reflected consistently by all sources. It appears that a stylistic feature becomes more firmly established in transmission than its lexical vehicle. Nevertheless, all sources agree on one example where the same epithets are bound up in a particular stylistic device; this is found at M23 et al.:

mathair an laoigh bhallabhric mhír : bean an fhír mhall-rosgaich ghlain.

This inverted rhyme pattern is carried by the same vocabulary in each source. OnC contains traces of stylistic features characteristic of professional bardic poetry, including alliteration and understatement. The panegyric epithet quoted above 'mall-rosgaich', 'of limpid eye', is applied here to a stag rather than a clan chief but it recalls the bardic fondness for compounds.

Repetition

Repetition of words (as opposed to sounds, i.e. alliteration and rhyme) is used as a rhetorical technique.

Chí mi Coire Ratha uam
Chí mi 'Chruach is a' Bheinn Bhreach;
Chí mi Srath Oisein nam Fiann
Chí mi 'ghrian ar Meall nan Leac. M12 quoted

This oft-quoted stanza gains its force not solely from the naming ritual but also from the reiteration of 'Chí mi' at the start of every line. This phrase is used, more sparingly, in adjacent stanzas as well and is instrumental in building up the imposing picture of hills and straths. Incidentally, there is a neat contrast between the repetition of 'chunnaic mi', used in all sources except M to introduce some early stanzas, and 'chí mi' which begins these later verses; 'chunnaic mi' denotes the chieftains of a finite time past, and 'chí mi' pronounces the permanence of the mountains and lochs.
Repetition is a particularly valuable device in oral poetry as the force exerted by it relates directly to the response of the audience. The same word recurs but the effect is not static; a momentum is created which engages the intuition of the listeners. The deliberate repetition of a word or phrase in a poem has a cumulative effect of a linear sort within the bounds of that poem.

Repetition of the incremental sort probably does not occur in the poem although it may be hard to identify with certainty. It is possible that stanzas E38, 40 and 41 are intended to be linked by this form of stylistic repetition (see note E41) but no other source contains a corresponding repeated phrase and stylistic features have been observed to persist across sources.

The re-use of a phrase in different poems is often allusive; it may tap a reservoir of common literary experience so that the listener has a number of lateral points of reference. Certain phrases or motifs connect OnC with other poems and these are noted in Chapter 8.

There is another re-use of a phrase occurring in circumstances which suggest it may not have been originally intended. The line: 'S aoibhinn leam an diugh na chl' is given by all sources except T as the last line of a stanza. In M it concludes two stanzas. One of these, M9 has a stanza similar to it at E50 which, however, lacks this line. There is a good deal of textual fluctuation between M9 and E50 and this, combined with the absence of any corresponding verse in the other sources, indicates loss of text. It is probable that the line 'S aoibhinn leam an diugh na chl' was included in M9 to replace lost material. This is the line which the scribe of M recommends as a refrain to be repeated after every verse. Such a use might not be quite appropriate throughout the poem but it does demonstrate that the line was considered a separate measure or unit. As it does not set a scene or conjure an image it is thematically fairly versatile although of course its incorporation into a stanza requires metrical compatibility. 8

8 See also Chapter 8, part A, 'The Fenian connection'.
Place-names.

Apart from agreeing on a few key places the sources show considerable variability in these names.

Mention is made by all the sources of just a dozen place-names. This includes the arguably pivotal Creag Ghuanach, Loch Tréig, Ben Nevis, Coire Ratha and Srath Ossian. A total of around four times that number may be reached if places not named unanimously are counted. The circumstances of this disparity in agreement vary.

1. A name occurs in a stanza reported by a limited number of sources; e.g. Innse T6 and E10
   Maol-cheann Dearg M18
2. The same place is referred to in more than one way:
   e.g. Cill Eódhainn T35
        Cill/Cinn a' Ghiusaich M48, ML/MN43, E37
3. Transmission has shifted the place, geographically, to a different locality, thus creating two places out of one:
   e.g. Sgór Choinnich M15
        Sgurr Chòinnich ML/MN49, E48
        and
        A' Chruach M12, E45
        Cruachan T28, ML/MN44

None of the sources had any obvious Lochaber connections and unfamiliarity with the place-names may have played a part in confusing renderings. Any specifically local place-name would be particularly susceptible to loss or corruption. A possible example of this is the names containing the epithet 'Snaig' which occur at T26 and E24. A consequence of these hiccups in transmission is that it is now not always possible to identify some of the places reported.

Place-names seem prone to mobility within the text so that a place mentioned in several sources does not necessarily occur in stanzas which correspond to each other; e.g. Leitir Dhubh is in M9 and E50, stanzas with only vague similarities to each other and not represented in the other sources. Leitir Dhubh is also mentioned in T29 and ML/MN45, a stanza absent from M and occurring at E49 with no
reference to Leitir Dhubh. It may not be fruitful to pursue this sort of confusion, although it does demonstrate that the incidence of some place-names in OnC tends to variability rather than stability.

These vagaries do not detract from the effects of place-naming, which are compelling and complex. Naming, particularly calling out a name, confirms the existence of the named thing and establishes a bond between the caller and the one called. In fact, in sources M and E of OnC the act of naming is specified as part of the poet's farewell to the hills:

O labhair mi sibh gu léir

Place-naming also has the power of scenic evocation. Loch Treig and Creag Ghuanach certainly have a crucial status as a particular loch and a particular hill but there is a way of using place-names which has a dynamism outside the geographic location. The technique of naming places to evoke an atmosphere goes back as far as Homer, whose poetry created a national past; in OnC the past of Lochaber is retained by means of place-naming. The landscape being conjured up to the mind's eye is a real one but it is its permanent existence in the imagination which is important, not whether one hill rather than another is meant. The naming is more of an incantation than a eulogy.

Chì mi Coire Ratha uam
Chì mi 'Chruach is a' Bheinn Bhreac;
Chì mi Srath Oisein nam Fiann
Chì mi 'ghrian ar Meall nan Leac.

A stanza such as this almost acquires an actuality independent of the poem. In Donald Meek's words "Even place-names which look, and at one level are, 'real' enough, can be uprooted and invested with a significance far beyond the merely topographical".9

Variability of the Sources

The thesis deals with the sources of OnC which occur in 'hard copy'. However, committing to paper a poem or story which had its creation in the oral tradition imparts new limitations to the work. That which is written is not a record of what is performed but a record

9 Donald Meek, 'Place-names and literature: Evidence from the Gaelic ballads', The Uses of Place-names, ed. by Simon Taylor (Edinburgh, 1998) p.167.
of the substance of what might be performed. It is temporally a one-sided operation with no interaction between supplier and receiver. Even when an oral performer recites to a scribe he is unlikely to do this in the same way as he would to an audience. The relationship between the oral and the written form of the poem has a bearing on the variability of the sources. This variability affects chiefly three aspects of the poem: verse order, text and distribution of stanzas.10

Circumstances of textual change

Some of the textual fluctuations present in the sources may be attributable to the writing process and scribal error. These are inevitably random and therefore of little help in discerning any possible patterns of variability. Fluctuations are likely to result from the transit from the oral medium to the written; this category includes varying interpretations of the same utterance and also regularising or 'improving' activity on the part of a collector. Editing by a scholarly collector, perhaps including conflation to compensate for lost material, would have been an acceptable practice. (As we do not know how the sources were supplied with the material of OnC there is a problem in ascertaining the amount of editorial activity applied to any source; it is certain that Ranald MacDonald used a conflation of manuscripts of The Harlaw Brosnachadh for publication in his Eigg Collection.11 A similar practice may have been applied to OnC as found in E, possibly enhanced by personal recollection.)

In addition there may be variations that occurred within the oral environment. It is this category of textual fluctuation, as well as differences of verse order and number, with which this chapter is primarily concerned. Loss of text and its relocation are examined as well as features such as metre and place-names which might have an influence on the extent of textual change. Certain topics, motifs and phraseology will be seen in Chapter 8 to have

10 'Distribution of stanzas' is concerned with the number and layout of stanzas within a source.
parallels in other poems and stories. Some of these may belong to
the original genesis of OnC and some may have entered during the
oral transmission (this latter category might cover some alternative
place-names). A particular reciter may be reminded of a similar
feature in another song, or a place-name that suits the context, and
so new material is absorbed into the poem, either supplementary or
as a substitute for a loss.

One poem or a fusion of several?
It has been suggested that OnC is in fact several poems which have
become mingled during the course of transmission. Two factors have
been adduced in favour of this view; one is the metrical variety of
OnC. However, the unity of a poem is not necessarily compromised by
the presence of more than one metre and this will be discussed in
the section on metre beginning on page 325. The second factor is the
plurality of themes.

Plurality of themes.
It is certainly true that OnC contains a mixture of themes and if it
is indeed the product of several poems combined then the combining
has been most subtly achieved. Although it is possible to identify
separate themes it is not possible to separate them.

Rankin, for the convenience of discussion, gives a rough
division of the poem into five parts according to topic, pointing
out that these parts overlap and the divisions could be extended. The
following list breaks down his categories slightly further but
overlapping seems unavoidable:
1. landscape 2. deer 3. hunting 4. dialogue with the owl 5.
chiefs of Keppoch 6. old age 7. farewell to places. There are
also subsidiary topics or motifs, such as 'water', 'the survivor
factor' and what may be termed 'social observations', that is
allusions to some aspect of contemporary society. However, in all
sources, the poem presents these subjects in such a way that they

12 BG, p.335. D.S. Thomson, An Introduction to Gaelic Poetry (London,
13 RR, p.125.
14 Deer and hunting are put in separate categories as deer are not
always treated within the hunting context.
fit into the larger theme of 'nature'; aspects of man's relationship with nature form this grand theme, with the geographic limitation of Lochaber. The poem interweaves the subjects in such a way that it is difficult to break it up into sections according to subject. Several topics are generally in focus at once. The dialogue with old age is somewhat exceptional in devoting several verses to one issue alone, namely the dispute of the bow. The topical mingling normally flows quite naturally; the few occasions when the switch from one subject to another seems sudden arise in conjunction with doubts about verse order. In Rankin's words "It seems unlikely that any division of the poem into separate songs could ever command general acceptance".

Relationship between the sources

In parallel to the matter of the unity of OnC is the question of the relationship between the sources. Do they stem from a single origin or are they the result of a convergence of poetic material?

Some aspects of the diversity disclosed in the five sources may reasonably be identified and examined. Distribution of stanzas, verse order and textual variation have already been proposed for discussion. However, attempts thoroughly to disentangle the different sources, to unpick them into separate units and attempt to see how such units mesh together, are not assured of success. Each source is an amalgam in which it is difficult to isolate the units without destroying the whole. The impression is that these different manifestations of the poem possess the same core; that OnC is not a text which has only multiple ways of presenting itself; a 'core' existence may be perceived. A similar condition is described by Walter Benjamin in connection with storytelling in the oral tradition: "that slow piling one on top of the other of thin, transparent layers which constitutes the most appropriate picture of the way in which the perfect narrative is revealed through the layers of a variety of retellings." An examination of the aspects of variation may serve to substantiate the impression of a 'core' poem.

15 RR, p.123.
Verse order.

Amid many small variations in verse order there is one major deviation. M has quite a different starting point from the other sources and consequently a different thematic line-up. This might be seen as evidence for a conflation of several poems. Such poems, related by common authorship and topographical connection, and co-existing in the oral tradition, could have gradually merged. However, they might not necessarily merge according to just one pattern; M may thus be one of various combinations of these related poems existing in the transmission before OnC was recorded by the 18th century collectors. (To look ahead to later printed versions, the only reproduction of M’s starting point of the poem is in the Macdonald Collection, which gives a conflation based on M and ML with some touches of T and E.)

M’s verse order

The most striking variation in verse order between the exemplars is the different starting point employed in M. The other sources all begin the poem with the dialogue between the owl and the poet. They then proceed to descriptions of landscape intermingled with praise of hunting and deer. A farewell to beloved places is then followed by a dialogue with old age. In M praise of the hunt and of beloved places takes up the first half of the poem, regrets of old age come next and the dialogue with the owl last. I suggested above that the merging of several poems into one during transmission might result in the products having several presentations, which could include different verse orders. And yet there is another, more straightforward explanation for M’s verse order.

The ‘ubiquitous opener’

The first stanza of M corresponds to one placed much later on in the other manuscripts, but they do not give the same first line as M:

Mi m’ shuidh’ ar sithhrough nam beann. In fact this line does not occur anywhere in the other manuscripts, although it is in Eigg (E44). It does, however, have analogues in the first lines of other poems:
So 'Mi 'm shuidhe air' seems to be a standard starting point, a 'ubiquitous opener'. Poetic introductions of this sort are found in other languages, for example the phrases in English, Scots and French which posit walks on fine May mornings. As Ruth Crosby points out, such well-known openings are characteristic of poetry intended to be recited aloud. It is the very familiarity of these expressions which helps to engage the attention of the audience. They can function as a kind of trigger to get the recitation under way. Indeed, maybe in the case of M the line was used for exactly that reason - the reciter was not sure how the poem began. It may have been just a brief lapse of memory, but, as the line invites a descriptive passage in which the landscape is surveyed, the thematic sequence of the poem is affected. We are taken into the eulogy of Creag Ghuanach, and so to the terrors of conflict raised in M's third stanza, before being whisked back to the safety of the hill. The 'owl dialogue' is postponed until the end of the poem where it is attached slightly awkwardly. The connection between the owl and Creag Ghuanach is diminished because the subject fleeing from the terrors of conflict is no longer the owl, thus undermining a neat anthropomorphic image. When the poem opens with the 'owl dialogue' the attention of the audience is quite dramatically focussed on the owl while the speaker/poet occupies the background. On the other hand, the 'ubiquitous opener' casts the poet as the main protagonist and invites us, conventionally, to see what he sees. The postponing of the 'owl dialogue' until the end of the poem deprives it of another function. In sources other than M this dialogue acts as an introduction to the subsequent themes. The poem can then be brought

17 BG, p.242.
18 op.cit. p.194.
19 Annie Mackenzie, Oraim Iain Luim, p.6.
20 op.cit. p.108.
to a close by the dialogue with old age so that the descriptive sections on landscape and hunting, and the eulogies to deer and the chiefs of Keppoch are set inside a framework of two dialogues. No such unfolding and shape are to be found in M. I suspect that since the owl is a prophetic bird and a harbinger of death it is intended that her dialogue should begin the poem while old age appears at the end. (See Chapter 8 for the use of dialogue as a literary device.)

It has been noted above that this first line of M, *Mi m' shuidh' ar sithbhrugh nam beann*, occurs also at E44. In fact it opens the same stanza in both E and M. In the other sources the stanza starts as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Line</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chi mi sin an Sgannan Ruadh ML/MN47</td>
<td>Chl mi sin an Sgannan Ruadh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chi mi siud an beannan ruadh T27</td>
<td>Chl mi siud an beannan ruadh</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Between these two exemplars there is no great difference in either sound or sense, herds and hills being part of a landscape. Moreover, neither is very striking. It looks as if this line was prone to instability and in some lines of transmission was superseded by the 'ubiquitous opener', which was so popular in the 17th century. If this line had been in use in the initial stages of the poem's transmission it seems scarcely possible that it could be lost in favour of the more elusive line quoted by T, ML or MN. There is considerable agreement between the sources with regard to lines b/c/d of the stanza. Although the acquisition of the 'ubiquitous opener' in M contributes to a shift in the poem's structure, in E it is simply a case of textual loss and replacement of a line.

Related to the singularity of choice of M's first stanza is the fact that it is in a different metre from that of the following section. Although there are occasional divergences where an unusual metre is used, the general pattern with regard to *rannaigheacht*, the predominating metrical type, is for stanzas to fall into groups of either monosyllabic or disyllabic endings (see section on Metre below). Sources other than M all locate this stanza in a metrically similar group.

The structural differences of M might be considered to include the recommendation given by the scribe in the prologue to the
manuscript. A refrain is suggested to be recited after each verse.\textsuperscript{22} The line ‘S aoibhinn leam an diugh na chi’ is part of this refrain.\textsuperscript{23} It is certainly in accord with the emphasis placed by M’s verse order on the landscape descriptions. But even so it is scarcely suitable to be repeated after all the verses of the poem. It is impossible to say whether this was an actual style of recitation or simply the idea of the scribe, whose enthusiastic observations on the poem are mentioned in the introduction to Chapter 2. James Maclagan, whose collection contains not only the manuscript of M but also that of ML, written in his own hand, unfortunately offers no comment on the derivation of either exemplar.

Loss of text and change of meaning
Under the heading ‘M’s verse order’ it was noticed that difference of verse order can be bound up with difference of meaning; loss of text may also occur. Because the poet is speaking in verse M1 and no new speaker is subsequently introduced, M2 and M3 must also be attributed to the poet. Thus it is he who escapes to Creag Ghuanach from the horrors of war in M3:

\begin{quote}
Chunnairc mi a’ dol seacham
Na cathan agus na fuathan,
Thug mi ruaig bhàrr an t-sratha
Chaidh mi grathunn do’n Chreig Ghuanach.
\end{quote}

In sources T, ML, MN and E the equivalent stanza forms a response by the owl to a question addressed to her in the previous stanza:

\begin{quote}
Bu lionar cogadh is creachadh
Bha ’n Loch Abar anns an uair sin,
Cait’ am biodh tusa gad’ fhalach,
Eòin bhis na mala gruamaich?
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{E9 quoted}

M lacks any comparable stanza; when the ‘owl dialogue’ is eventually recorded in M there is no place for a stanza containing a question whose answer has already been used in a different context. The stanza is thus lost to M, although the last line is relocated. The line is a memorable one and most apt for a succinct citation of an owl. For these reasons it may have remained in the transmission even

\textsuperscript{22} 62 verses are mentioned although only 52 are given; this could be a mistake or it might reflect the writer’s awareness of a greater number of stanzas.

\textsuperscript{23} See Chapter 1, Part B, ‘Related poems’.
though its context went astray. It is brought in at M42 instead of ‘S
mi comhachaig bhochd na Srôine, given by the other sources. However, to
accommodate the sense M has to divide the stanza, giving the first
couplet to the owl and the second to the poet. In the other sources
each speaks in units of stanzas.

Although the most significant variations of verse order occur
in M, other sources also contain interesting fluctuations. Loss of
text may be associated with the location of stanza T6/E10.

Is ann a bha cuid do m’shinnreadh,
Eadar an Inmse ’s an Fhearsaid,
Bha cuid eile dhiúbh m’an deaghaidh;
Bhidh iad ag éigheach sa’n fheasgar. E10 quoted

In each source this is placed in a different position and in neither
case does it seem quite relevant. Doubts about its context may
explain the stanza’s absence from the other sources. It is also
possible that there is some other material missing to which this
verse relates. John Mackechnie appears to have spotted the
incongruity of the stanza as he offers a more plausible sequence by
reversing the order of E9 and E10.24

Identifying the chiefs of Keppoch

Variability of verse order causes different interpretations of
identity throughout the sources. Our understanding of references to
the chiefs of Keppoch is substantially affected by this variability.

In all sources the stanzas describing the first two chiefs
form part of the ‘owl dialogue’. There is then a chronological gap
in the list of chiefs. The next one to be mentioned is the 5th
chief, Alasdair nan Gleann, who features only in E. This gap might
be the result of lost material or it might be intentional; perhaps
the poet was disinclined to introduce the 3rd and 4th chiefs. At any
rate it appears quite deliberate that the first two chiefs are named
by the owl as part of her historical credentials. Her acquaintance
with these chiefs establishes her presence in Lochaber in the early
15th century.

The later chiefs, 7th and 8th, are introduced, in all models
apart from M, by the voice of the poet/hunter. They are described in
terms of their fighting valour and hunting prowess. Given the dates

24 Mackechnie, Owl of Strone, p.5.
of these two (Raghnall Mór died in 1547 and Alasdair Bothloinne in 1554) it is quite likely that the poet knew them, and indeed this is
indicated in T with regard to Raghnall and Alasdair and in ML, MN
and E with regard to Alasdair. We have already seen that M loses one
stanza because its verse order has eliminated a suitable context for
it. M has fewer stanzas on Keppoch chiefs than the other sources and
the same cause may be at work. A verse on Alasdair Bothloinne is
accommodated in the 'owl dialogue' at M48. Two reasons for this are
likely; the preceding stanzas mention the first two chiefs, thus
providing a context; they both begin with the words 'Chunnaic mi'
which may have attracted M48 to this location as it starts with a
similar grammatical formula 'Dh'fhág mi'. However, M offers no more
verses on this subject.

The table at the end of this section shows a cross-section of
the stanzas referring to the later chiefs of Keppoch. In several
cases the subject is not named but his identity is inferred from the
previous verses; shifts of verse order are thus responsible for
different interpretations.

In the case of the five stanzas of ML/MN only one character is
indicated and three of these stanzas are subject to assumptions
stemming from verse order. It is, of course, possible that the
poet's focus was on Alasdair Bothloinne alone. However, T and E each
have a stanza which specifies Raghnall Mór without reference to such
assumptions or textual clues. It is not the same stanza in each
source, that is they are not parallel or 'matching' stanzas; indeed
E39 occurs in no other source and, as if to emphasise the confusion
surrounding these proper names, T31, naming Raghnall, is 'matched'
at E40 with the naming of Alasdair.

T31
A Raghnaill mhic Dhòmhnnaill nan lann!
Gun do bhith is e mo chreach,
'S tric a thuit leat air do thom
Mac nan sonn leis a' choimghlais.

E40
Alasdair credhe nan Gleann,
Gun e bhith ann mór a' chreach,
'S tric a leag thu air an tom
Mac nan sonn leis a' choimghlais.

As the designation given in E40 is more specific than that in
T31 it could have had occasion to supplant T's line. If a reciter
had a rough recollection of T31a but could not quite tie a proper
name to the epithet nan lann he might substitute the similar sounding
nan Gleann, especially if this was an epithet whose subject he did recall.\textsuperscript{25} Equally, E39 begins with Raghnaill Macdhomhnaill and the reciter may have demurred at an immediate repetition and so reverted anachronistically to the chief featured in E36.

So far from these proper names functioning as any fixed reference or stabilising influence, it appears that some displacement of them has been produced through variation in verse order. The very fact that different inferences occur simply from such variation accords with the hypothesis of a 'core' poem. If several witnesses transmit material from an archetype in an order which varies but which does not sound unreasonable, then 'hidden' differences of interpretation are likely to result.

\textsuperscript{25} The tag 'nan lann' may be perceived as a standard term of praise; to quote one example, out of many: "Flath Ghlinne Liomhunn nan lann", \textit{Scottish Verse from the Book of the Dean of Lismore}, ed. by W.J.Watson (Edinburgh, 1937) (hereafter \textit{SVBDL}), poem XXVII, 1.2043.
Variable identity of the Keppoch chiefs.

Identity is shown by colour:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Alastair Bothloinne</th>
<th>Ragnall Mor</th>
<th>Alastair nan Gleann</th>
<th>Alastair mac Allain</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>E</th>
<th>T</th>
<th>ML/MN</th>
<th>M</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>E36</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[E37]</td>
<td>T35</td>
<td>[ML/MN43]</td>
<td>[M48]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;E38&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;T34&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;ML/MN42&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;E39&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;T33&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;ML/MN41&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E39</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E40</td>
<td>T31</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E41</td>
<td></td>
<td>ML/MN39</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[E42]</td>
<td>T32</td>
<td>[ML/MN40]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table above is based on the order of verses in E.
[ ] indicates identification through assumption resulting from verse order.
" " indicates identification from textual information.
Unmarked numbers show stanzas with precise naming.
Distribution of Stanzas

The sources contain a variable number of stanzas:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>M</th>
<th>T</th>
<th>ML</th>
<th>MN</th>
<th>E</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>52</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These stanzas are, however, distributed in very different ways and this runs counter to the suggestion that OnC might be a fusion of several poems. It is not a straightforward case of, for example, E containing 15 verses not present in M. For purposes of reckoning, the six-liners in ML and MN will be counted as two stanzas, and as these sources have the same number and order of stanzas they form one model. The four models have twenty eight verses in common. There are also thirty verses shared by two or three models. However, there is no apparent relationship between the models regarding the distribution of stanzas. Looking at the order of stanzas as listed on the metrical table on page 331, the stanzas in each model fall to some extent into groups, but if the models are compared with each other the groups of corresponding stanzas are not the same. This would also be the case if another source than M was taken as the baseline. A few roughly similar small groupings occur, for example the stanzas on the escape from the forays to the pleasant surroundings of Creag Chuanach:

M2,3,4,5, ~ T11,10,12,14, ~ ML/MN9,8,10,11, ~ El2,11,13,14.

The dialogue with the owl forms another group;

M41,42,43,44 ~ T1,2,3,4 ~ ML/MN1,4,2,3ab ~ El1,2,3,–.

However, there is only one group of stanzas occurring consistently in the same order in all the models. This is the four verses, numbered 34-37 in M, which form part of the section on old age.

That is to say, the stanzas are spread throughout each model in a different layout. This suggests, but does not prove, that the sources are presenting material which comes from a single origin; that they are separate, independent witnesses of an archetype.

26 See above, 'One poem or a fusion of several?' p.309.
Each model contains some stanzas (called 'solitary') which occur in only that model, as shown below:

**Table of 'Solitary' stanzas**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>M</th>
<th>T</th>
<th>ML/MN</th>
<th>E</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>20</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>21</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>22</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>39</td>
<td>23</td>
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<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>49</td>
<td>33</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>52</td>
<td>36</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>39</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>56</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

'Solitary' stanzas

There are altogether twenty two stanzas which are represented in only one model. It may be that this is material which was only witnessed by one line of transmission or else it was available to other lines but subsequently lost to them.

Another possible explanation is accretion; new verses could have been added on during the course of oral transmission or at the stage of redaction. The term 'accretion' is here applied to material which appears to have been added on to the poem by an agent other than the poet. It does not include material which may have been added on without leaving any trace of this process.

From a study of the twenty two 'solitary' stanzas it emerges that very few of them display anomalies which might suggest that they are accretions. However, they generally appear in connection with textual variation and loss.

Metrical irregularities, which may be associated with textual variability, are discussed more fully in the section on metre.

'Solitary' stanzas in M

Three stanzas, M10, M13 and M18, contain place-names. In some circumstances place-names and proper names may be mnemonically helpful and exert a stabilising influence on the text. This factor was sidestepped in the case of the chiefs of Keppoch by variable verse order. Of course, the reciter's familiarity with such names is clearly desirable for the working of this influence. However, when a poem of Lochaber origin is being collected by a Perthshire source such familiarity may be absent so that inaccurate naming results.
M18 contains a likely example of this (see notes to M18 regarding Maol-cheann Dearg.)

There is another feature of verse M18 which may have predisposed it to loss. It forms a congruent part of the section on farewell to beloved places. However, its last line, which has parallelism with line b, is very like the last line of M16.

M16
Thoir mo shoraidh chum na Cloich
'M ball am faic mi bhos is thall
Gu h-Uisge Labhair nan laogh
Buime nan agh maol 's nam mang.

M18
Nín fáigim 'Mhaol-cheann Dearg am dhéidh,
Buim' an fhéidh a-nf an ceol;
Coir 'Fild' agus an eileirg chaol,
Buim' nan laogh agus nam bò.

It is a common pattern for stanzas to begin with a repeated formula, e.g. 'chí mi', 'beir/thoir soraídh'. However, in the case of M16 and M18 the repetition is not obviously stylistic; it may suggest a loss of material resulting in the re-use of a phrase beginning 'buime'.

M27 contains the high-register end-rhyme aonar: deurach. Failure in some lines of transmission to recognise this as rhyme may have destabilised the stanza.

M29 has no aicill which indicates vulnerability to loss. This metrical irregularity is discussed under the heading 'Aicill' in the section on 'Metre'.

M39 is a regular stanza showing no anomalies. However, in subject matter it is very like verses T42/43, (ML/MN 28/29, E65/66) which are not present in M. These verses contain features suggesting instability; T41-43 have repetition of lines, which may indicate faulty transmission, ML/MN28 have no aicill in the second couplet and E66 has an obscure final line. All stanzas, including M39, are in the same metre. So although all lines of transmission record the message, some fragmentation of the medium has occurred. It is possible that M39 was part of a sequence of verses. On the other hand, errors in lines of transmission leading to the other sources could have generated extra stanzas.

The next stanza listed, M49, has a location suggestive of variable verse order and an odd tenor in that it is addressed to the poet. It follows a group of verses on the chiefs of Keppoch and precedes a stanza, common to all sources, disparaging fishing in
favour of hunting. But there is a dislocation here. It is as if the verses on the Keppoch chiefs inspire the reciter to devise some words of praise for Domhnall Mac Fhionnlaigh, who was known to have hunted with the Lochaber notables. This in turn reminds him of another verse on the superiority of hunting which comes in at M50. But whereas M50 continues M49's address to the poet, the equivalent stanza in other sources is in the first person singular and forms part of the poet's appreciation of the landscape and hunting. The theme remains the same but somewhere in the transmission the pronouns have changed to suit the verse order. M50 has a similar theme and metre to M7 and the two stanzas probably belong in the same section of the poem, as indeed they are presented in other sources (T17/19, ML/MN20/22, E28/29).

This final section of M contains a further deviation which leads up to the solitary stanza M52. In M51 the poet is described alone at Taigh nam Fleadh but the pronouns are not synchronised and the use of the third person is at odds with the adjacent verses. A possible explanation is that the supplier of this source was reminded by the eulogy to Domhnall Mac Fhionnlaigh of the Taigh nam Fleadh incident and was reluctant to omit it. After this comes the 'solitary' stanza, M52. The identity of the speaker is not indicated. However, the tone is very forceful and the reference to 'Oisean an déidh na Féinne' is extraordinarily direct. The last line especially is entirely wanting in the subtlety which is a particular quality of OnC. It is as though verse M51, which leaves the poet somewhat equivocally at Taigh nam Fleadh, is judged unsatisfactory as an ending and M52 is devised as a spirited finale. It is very common for Fenian poems, especially those in the form of a dialogue between St. Patrick and Oisean, to finish on a note of Christian supplication. Knowledge of this poetic style, operating with reference to the Fenian allusions contained in OnC, could have prompted a reciter to frame this last verse.27

Two stanzas then, M49 and M52, stand as possible accretions and amongst the others are points of vulnerability which suggest they may have been prone to loss in other lines of transmission.

27 See Chapter 8, part A, 'The Fenian connection'.
‘Solitary’ stanzas in T
T24 contains no anomalies but T46 lacks aicill (see section on 'Metre'). Both verses display a deft descriptive touch found elsewhere in the sections on deer and old age. T46 supplies a natural and apposite ending to the poem, arguably more convincing than any offered in the other sources.

‘Solitary’ stanzas in ML/MN
In ML/MN17 line d has some similarity with ML/MN34c.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{An damh donn 'ga thabhann le gleann} & \quad \text{ML17d} \\
\text{Damh ag slomanaich le gleann} & \quad \text{ML34c}
\end{align*}
\]

This is not repetition of the sort noticed at M16/18; nevertheless the point of comparison is sufficient to raise the question of textual insecurity, which could account for its absence in other models: the sense of repetition leads to suppression of material.

ML/MN18 contains a comparison in the second couplet which is arguably more personal than the usual tenor of imagery in the poem. This seems inadequate evidence for accretion however; indeed there is a questionable endrhyme which might signal vulnerability to loss.

‘Solitary’ stanzas in E
There is scant evidence that these are accretions. E is the sole witness for the three obscure characters mentioned in E5 and E6; they must have carried an archaic aura about them even in 1600. There is no important sequence of people or events to be followed here; just enigmatic pointers to the owl's enduring presence. A brief comparison with T at this point offers some evidence, albeit tentative, that E5 and E6 were indeed lost to other sources. T5 corresponds to E4 and T7 to E7 but there is a want of association between T5 and T6 which could be the result of textual loss.

The four stanzas E20-E23 form part of a eulogy on deer and/or landscape. They accord with their context; indeed E20 and E23 express ideas or images which reveal a sensitivity almost crucial to the poem:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Moladh gach aon neach an cù,} & \quad \text{E20c} \\
\text{Ach molaim-s 'n trù tha dol as.} & \quad \text{E20d}
\end{align*}
\]
There is no obvious explanation for their omission from other sources.

E21 and E22, however, have features which might mark a tendency to textual loss.

E21 begins with the phrase Creag mo chrhidhe-sa which also starts E12 and E27. It was noted with regard to M18 (see 'Solitary stanzas in M' above) that a small loss of material could lead to the recycling of other material to fill the gap and that this in turn can result in a greater loss. The repetition of a phrase, in particular an initial one, may deceive a reciter into suppressing lines through a sense of having already spoken them.

E22 has the dialectal end-rhyme rînan / mheuran which could have had a destabilising effect (cf. M27 in 'Solitary' stanzas in M, above).

The 'solitary' stanza E33 forms part of the section E31-E34 which moves from praising deer and hunting to deploring the restrictions imposed by old age. Although the quotation of the 'riddle of the sphinx' is most relevant the stanza is quite self-contained and strikes a slightly intrusive note, although this may be due to faulty verse order. The adage is so versatile and succinct that it easily lends itself to elaborating a mournful reflection on the ills of old age. The possibility that the riddle was borrowed for the occasion by someone other than the poet cannot be ruled out.

Variation in Length
As regards the variation in length presented by the different sources, accretion appears to play only a small part. More significant is the hypothesis that 'solitary' stanzas represent material which was part of an archetype of the poem but which broke off, or indeed never entered, some lines of transmission. This line of reasoning, of course, entails the possibility that there may have been some such material which was entirely lost.
The final stanzas

Across the sources the final stanzas show variability and often inconclusiveness. In two cases, M and T, the final stanza is 'solitary', suggesting either accretion or textual loss. In ML and MN there is clear textual loss giving rise to six-line verses. There is nothing exceptional about the text of the stanza that E gives last but it offers a rather indeterminate ending. This general lack of certainty regarding the closing stanza is related to variation in verse order and to a concomitant factor, namely the absence of a story. This must surely play a part in the discrepancies of sequence. Without the burden of a story, which dictates a particular chronology, a poem does not restrict a reciter to a single procedure of recollection. Such a poem may be well-loved, and indeed well-remembered, but its landmarks may be connected by more than one route.

Metre

The poem is in quatrains composed in metrical types based on syllabic forms. The metres used are not strictly syllabic but are comparable with òglachas of dán, the looser metre often used by educated, non-professional poets. Most stanzas are in rannaigheacht types of metre, falling into two categories according to whether the endrhyming words are monosyllabic or disyllabic. There is an occasional use of other metrical forms, with one or two based on deibhidhe and séadna, as well as several 'miscellaneous' styles. The occurrence of these is shown on pages 331-32, on the chart setting out the metrical analysis of the sources. As is usual in the òglachas form rhyming vowels are not necessarily identical; indeed, some are quite loosely similar. Occasionally rhyme is dialectal.

Reference was made at the beginning of this chapter to the proposition that the presence of more than one metre indicates that OnC comprises more than one poem. Although in dán direach unity of metre may have been expected, in the informal branch of the tradition different metres could be present in one poem. Poems in mixed metres are to be found in HPBDL, e.g. Poem VI, 'Là dhà ndeachaidh sé dhà chill', and Poem XIX, 'Truagh liom Tulach na Féine'. Examples from the next century include 'Moladh na Pioba' by
Gilleasbuig na Ceapaich, and even the classical elegy on the death of Donnchadh Dubh of Glenorchy, contains in the final stanza a variation from strict *séadna*. Indeed, there are also earlier instances, such as those in some of the poems in *Buile Suibhne*: e.g. 'Binne lem im na tonna' (p.32) and 'A bhen bhenus an biorar' (p.84).

Although *OnC* contains some metrical variety, the sources are almost unanimous in recording this variety. There are only two quatrains which are not given the same metrical form by the different sources. These are discussed in some detail below (see p.291), as they display instability in several ways. An examination of their very irregularity focuses on the metrical unanimity of the sources. This conformity suggests that the sources represent an archetype; they each stem from an origin common to all, rather than being different examples of a conjunction of poetic material.

Among the factors relating to variability of sources metre is a prominent one as it is a powerful cohesive and mnemonic force. Any lexical variations between versions are likely to occur within the framework set by the metre.

Generally in *OnC* there is endrhyme between the first and second couplets. There is, however, a noteworthy minority of stanzas which have double endrhyme, that is rhyme between the first and third lines as well as the second and fourth. There is not apparently any other factor at work in company with this kind of rhyme scheme. Rather it seems to be a decorative 'optional extra'.

The metrical feature *aicill* appears sometimes capriciously but in this case there is a connection with other factors. Indeed, the presence of *aicill* bears upon the relationship between metre and the differences exhibited by the variant texts.

**Aicill**

*Aicill*, whose presence in the second couplet was a common feature of non-deibhidhe types of syllabic poetry, is found in *OnC* generally in both couplets, as was the practice in *óglachas*. It is reasonable to take this as the formula used in this poem since although there is some incidence of *aicill* in only one couplet, usually the second,

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28 Text ed. by W.J.Watson, *An Deó-Gréine*, vol.XII, nos.9-10 (June, July 1917).
this is associated with some other factor. Occasionally this factor
is stylistic and points to the probability that aicill was not
intended. There are two such clear instances and in both all sources
agree.

The first is M23 (T22, ML/MN14, E16) which has no aicill in
the first couplet. However, the last two lines contain an unusual
inverted rhyme pattern which might well have hindered the inclusion
of aicill in the first couplet, especially as this type of
embellishment recalls the style of dán direach with its preference
for single aicill.

The second case is M4 (T12, ML/MN10, E13) which has no aicill
in the first couplet according to any source and no aicill at all
according to M. However, the first three lines rhyme, reminiscent of
a half-verse of the syllabic metre ochtphoclach. The scheme is aaab,
b rhyming with the first line of the next stanza. This happens in
all sources, the rhyme being constant even if there is lexical
change in b.

It is also possible that aicill is intentionally absent in
another case on which all sources concur, that is the first couplet
of M6 (T16, ML/MN48, E27). There are no special features here, apart
from alliteration which does occur elsewhere in the presence of
aicill, namely at M5 (T14, ML/MN11, E14). Nevertheless, alliteration
may accompany some other stylistic device, such as the embellishment
noted above in M23 etc., where aicill is absent. There exists an
association between metre and alliteration in which the latter may
take the place of rhyme.

It is appropriate to mention here the cross section of stanzas
in a deibhidhe style metre. All sources give the same metre and a
poor aicill in one couplet. There is some textual shift so M has
aicill in the first couplet whereas in the other sources it appears
in the second. However, perhaps this is not relevant; unfamiliarity
with the old rhyme schemes may have resulted in the inclusion of
aicill in a metre not customarily associated with it.

A major factor related to lack of aicill is textual
fluctuation. It appears that aicill may be jeopardised by a shift in
the text. Some examples follow:
Example 1.

M31
Chualas tagadh gach ceoil
Guth a' ghadhair mhoir a' teachd
Daimh a' siomanach le gleann
Miolchoin ann agus às.

ML34
Chuala mi mo ragha ceoil
Gairm a' ghadhair mhoir ag teachd
Daimh ag siomanacha le gleann
Is miolchoin ann is iad as.

E32
Càit' an cualas ceòl bu bhinn'
Na mothar ghadhair mhoir a' teachd,
Daimh sheanga 'nan ruith le gleann
Miolchoin a' dol annta 's ast'.

T20
Ceòl as binne de gach ceoil
Guth a' ghadhair mhoir is e teachd,
Daimh 'na shiomanach le gleann
Mìol-choin a bhith ann is as.

MN34
Chualas mi mo roghainn ceoil
Gairm a' ghadhair mhoir aig teachd
Daimh aig siomanach le gleann
Is miolchoin ann is iad as.

The first line in all sources is variable but E alone has shifted the word ceoil forward thus losing aicill. The meaning of the line is pretty constant and is a motif occurring in earlier poetry including Fenian.29 Thus the idea expressed would be known in the poetic tradition outside the context of OnC. It was later used as well by Duncan Bàn Macintyre.30 Indeed, E's difference of word order may be attributable to familiarity with this 18th-century usage, on the part of either the oral transmission or (perhaps more likely) the editor.

Example 2

M24
Is glan a shloinne 'n damh donn
Thiocfa uaidh dhair nam beann,
Macan na h-éilde ri tom
Nach do chromfuidh speinns' a cheann.

T25
'S glan ri shloinneadh an damh donn
A thig o uileann nam beann,
Mac na h-éilde ris an tom
Nach do chrom fuidh speinns' a cheann.

E18
Gur h-álainn sgéimh an daimh dhuinn,
Thèarnas o shreadh nam beann,
Mac na h-éilde ris an t-sonn,
Nach do chrom le spid a cheann.

29 See Chapter 8, part A, 'The sweetest sounds'.
30 See Chapter 8, part B, p.366.
Whereas in the first example aicill was absent in only one source, here it is present in only one. The first couplet shows considerable lexical variation without much change in meaning, but M is the only version to have aicill and this is dependent on the dialect of Lochaber and Perthshire mentioned in the notes to M10. In E the textual fluctuation has spread to the second couplet which has lost the unusual word speinns and with it the internal rhyme with éilde.

Example 3

M25
'S iomadh ceum a rinn mi rianh
'Sealg an fhéidh agus na h-earb'
Chan fhaca mi dath air bian
Ach glas is odhar is dearg.

E25
Bha mi o'n rugadh mi rianh,
Ann an caidreach thiadh is earb,
Chan fhaca mi dath air bian
Ach buidhe, riabhach is dearg.

ML16
O'n latha rugadh mise rianh
Bha mi'n cuideachd thiadh is earb
'S chan fhaca mi'dhath air bian
Ach odhar is riabhach is dearg.

MN16
Bho'n là rugadh mise rianh
Bha mi'n cuideachd thiadh is earb
'S chan fhacainn dath air bian
Ach odhar is riabhach is dearg.

The lexical alternative fhéidh rather than thiadh seems insubstantial but is related to the loss of aicill in M. It was observed in the section on 'Style' that sequences of adjectives tend to remain fixed as a group but often the individual words vary; this seems to be what has happened in the second couplet, both M and T offering different adjectives from those in ML/MN. This is a more probable explanation than that riabhach was deliberately discarded from M on account of making only a poor rhyme with bian. The complete lack of aicill in M, unaccompanied by any notable stylistic features, is quite exceptional.

There is a clear association between lack of aicill and lack of agreement between the sources. An extreme form of lack of agreement is of course, the 'solitary' stanza. It has already been suggested that 'solitary' stanzas relate to a pattern of textual fluctuation and loss. The absence of aicill appears to be part of this development. Of the 'solitary' stanzas M29 has no aicill at all and T46, ML/MN17, E22, E23, and E36 have only one instance. There are no stylistic features attendant on this lack. Unusually T46 has aicill in the first couplet rather than the second, which lends support to the proposition that aicill was an original feature of
the stanza and has been lost through textual distortion. There is a shortage of precedent for making aicill in the first couplet alone and the meaning of the verse precludes the possibility that the couplets have got in the wrong order.

Under this heading one more cross section of stanzas remains to be considered as it presents textual problems which may be linked to the absence of aicill.

T34
Dh’fhág mi ‘san rudha seo shios
Fear leis ‘m bh fhudhar mo bhás,
‘S e chuireadh mo chagar an cruas
An cluais a chabair an sás.

ML42
Dh’fhág mi ‘san rudha sa shios
Fear bu duilich dhomhsha ‘bhás,
‘S tric a chuir mo thagradh an cruas
An cluais an daimh chabraich an sás.

E38
Dh’fhág mi ‘san ruaidhe seo shios,
Am fear a b’olc dhomhsha bhás,
‘S tric a chuir e ‘thagradh an cruas,
An cluais an daimh chabraich an sás.

MN42
Dh’tagh mi ‘san rudha seo shios,
Fear bu duilich dhomhsha ‘bhás,
‘S tric a chuir mo thagradh an cruas,
An cluais an daimh chabraich an sás.

That aicill is uniformly absent in these first couplets is almost certainly not a coincidence. Considering the circumstances where aicill is absent in other stanzas I suspect that there has been some textual fluctuation in the first couplet of all four versions. It is highly unusual for sources to agree on lack of aicill when there are no stylistic circumstances such as mentioned above. In other examples absence of aicill is not common to all sources and is very evidently an element of textual vulnerability. Here it may be reasoned that textual change has already occurred in each variant, thus completely sweeping away aicill, but leaving no positive trace of the lexical fluctuation. The fact that this stanza is not reported by M may be due to its loss from that line of transmission.
Table showing distribution of metrical types throughout the five sources, based on the order of stanzas in M with other sources matching horizontally. Key at foot of next page.

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<td>R₁</td>
<td>52</td>
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Types of metre.

- **R₁** *Rannaigheacht* one-syllabled type.
- **R₂** *Rannaigheacht* two-syllabled type.
- **D** *Deibhidhe* style.
- **S** *Séadna* style.
- Miscellaneous styles.
- **M₁** *aaba* endrhyme
- **M²** *aaab* endrhyme with b matching next stanza's first line.
- **M³** *abaa* endrhyme

The above categories apply to stanzas in which the metre is constant across the sources.

- **V** indicates metrical variation across the sources.
Metrical Variation

As shown on the chart on pages 331-32, detailing distribution of metre, there are just two instances of metrical disagreement between the sources. These contain significant shifts of text.

T45
'S fada leam o sguir mi 'n fhiadhach
'S nach bhuiil ann ach céò de 'n bhuidheann
Leis am bu bhinn guth nan gan gadar
'S o'm faigheamaid òl gun bhruideann.

ML33
'S fhada leam nach buan a' bhuidheann
'S gun ann ach an céò dhe' n theadhainn
O'm faigheamaid òl is meadhair,
'S leis 'm bu mhiannach céol nan gadar.

E35
'S truagh an diugh nach beò an fheadhainn,
Gunn ann ach an céò de'n bhuidheann,
Leis 'm bu mhiannach göir nan gadhair
Gunn meheadhair, gun òl, gun bhruideann.

MN33
'S fada leam nach buan a 'bhuidheann
'S gun ann ach an céò dhe' n theadhainn
O'm faigheamaid òl a's meadhair
'S leis 'm bu mhiannach céol nan gadar.

ML and MN have the same text here, otherwise the textual confusion is extreme, while the meaning remains quite similar. The deviations are so intricate that the only line commonly held by all three models is line b and even here there is variation in the final word. Although ML/MN have some internal rhyme E is the only version to have aicill. The fluctuation of the endrhyme pattern from b:d to a:b:d to a:b:c:d appears related to the shift in the order of lines. There is some alliteration in all cases; in fact the actual sound of the versions is rather similar in spite of metrical and lexical differences. There is an overall sense of a struggle towards a norm which may have been lost. It is possible E might represent the norm although it has a starting phrase at variance with the other models, which all begin with a phrase used in Fenian poetry. In particular it occurs in the first line of the second verse of 'Is fada anocht i nOil Finn' in the version of HPBDL, which seems to be an ancestor of this cross section from OnC.31

Fada liom gach lá dhá dtig;
ni mar sin do cleachtaí dùinn,
 gan deabhaidh gan deànamh creach,
gan bheit ag foighlaim chleas luidh.

(Wearisome to me is each succeeding day / it was not so we used to be / with no fighting, no raiding, / no learning of athletic feats).

31 This verse, no.2 in HPBDL, Poem IV, is related to two separate stanzas as given in the version of DF, Poem LV.
The third line here is echoed in E’s last, however, so that E too contains a Fenian allusion conveyed by the device of repeating the word ‘gun’. Although T is probably using bhruiddhinn in the Irish sense, it overlooks the notion of fighting as part of an ideal existence.

The wear and tear of transmission is likely to be responsible for the metrical differences of the sources in this stanza and the same is true of the only other verse with variable metre, which follows.

M28
A chaoidh cha deán m’i sgallais,
Ólaichd mi á Tréig mo theann-sháth
Buinne glan nam fuaran fallain
Buim’ an fhéidh a ní an langan

M38
Uaibh cha téd m’i air sìubhlaicm,
Ólaichd mi á Tréig mo theann-sháth,
Boinne brisg géal, ro ghlàin, fallain,
O ionsg an fhéidh a ní ‘n langan.

T13
Ólaichd m’i ‘s cha tréig m’i h-ìonnaichd,
Uaithic cha téd m’i air sìollam,
Si muìme ‘n fhéidh do-ní ‘n langan
Am buinne deas raighéal fhoithneach.

MN38
Uaibh cha téd m’i air sìubhlaicm,
Ólaichd mi á Tréig mo theann-sháth;
Boine brisg-gheal, ro-ghlàn, fallain
Bho ionsg’ an fhéidh m’i ‘n langan.

ES4
Ólaichd mi á Tréig mo theann-sháth,
Na dhéidh cha bhi m’i fo mhulad,
Uisg glan nam fuaran fallain
O’n seang am fiadh a ní ‘n langan.

In the case of ML/MN the stanza does not relate thematically to the one preceding it. This may have a connection with lost material as M28 is preceded by a ‘solitary’ stanza and it has been observed above that a stanza’s ‘solitary’ status can be caused by the loss of an equivalent in other lines of transmission.

Amid a good deal of lexical variation, the theme in all sources is the speaker’s commitment to the pure water which also refreshes the deer. However, T alone does not use the word tréig as a place-name. This might be construed as a deviation from the poet’s intention, given the location of the poem. MacMurchy, the scribe of T, is certainly aware of Loch Tréig as he records it at T27. It appears likely that changes in verse order have been responsible for

32 The multiple repetition of the word ‘gun’ is a common poetic figure, which is widespread in Fenian ballads. Although only E contains it at the verse discussed here it also occurs in OnC at stanza M33, ML/MN36.
the variation. In the second line of T13 the word uaithe refers back to the subject of the previous two verses, namely Creag Ghuanach. So in T it is the burns springing from the hillside of Creag Ghuanach which provide the pure drinking water. The other sources, although they have stanzas corresponding to T11 and T12, record them in a different part of the poem. The connection with Creag Ghuanach is thus lost and the transmission, dealing with the concept of pure water which will not be forsaken, interprets 'tréig' as Tréig, so repeating a place-name which has already occurred in all sources apart from T.

Textual differences occur within the shifting around of lines and sometimes auditory ambiguity is involved as in theann-shàth, h-ìonnachd and siollan-siubhiam.

There may be another link here in the chain connecting variable verse order with textual loss and change of meaning. The word uaithe is spelt at T13b uaidhche indicating palatalised 'ithe'. An echo of this is found in M whose corresponding word is chaoidh. Given the context of M28, in which 'uaithe' has no place and probably also a different transmission dialect, 'uaithe' could have shifted to 'chaoidh'.

In ML/MN the meaning of line d is questionable. This might be attributable to 'iong' being a corruption of 'seang' which occurs in the same position in E.

These two metrically variable sets of stanzas just examined have fair conformity of meaning but their very similar lexicons and resonances are conveyed by lines of transmission which have become so convoluted that the metre is confounded. The lines show a tendency to fragment and shift although the focus is maintained. Both sets of stanzas seem to have undergone a good deal of 'jostling' and 'weathering'.

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Heart of Óran na Comhachaig

Earlier in this chapter (see p.310), I remarked on the complexity of the relationship between the sources, and the impression that, in spite of displaying considerable variation, they share an indissoluble 'core'. Investigation of shifts in verse order and the consequences of such displacement bears out this impression. Variation in verse order can occur relatively easily in oral transmission, especially in the absence of a story. Such variation has been observed to produce substantial ramifications in textual interpretation and stability, with all sources showing signs of textual loss. It has been possible to see clearly how some of the variations have developed: for example the textual loss resulting from M's verse order, and the different interpretations regarding the identity of the Keppoch chiefs. The momentum of change has always been working outwards from a common provenance; there is no indication of a coalescence of material, no evidence that the sources are separate, unrelated representations of the same poem.

The comparative distribution of stanzas across the sources, although very different, is consistent with unitary origin. No one source has a monopoly over any particular section of the poem; the distribution is in all cases scattered, suggesting the fragmentation, or loss, of material from a common origin.

Examination of the metrical analysis reveals a striking degree of agreement between the sources. This must be a powerful indicator that they derive from an archetype. There are only two stanzas marring total unanimity in this matter and it is very improbable that the stanzas could have been originally composed in different metres; the causes of metrical divergence are textual shift associated with lexical variation, which in these cases the metre has not withstood.

The variation in the incidence of aicill cannot be explained as the application of an optional metrical component in different models of the same poem. The presence of aicill in both couplets is

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33 RR pp.156-64 has a transcription of Duncan MacDonald's recitation of OnC which he gave in 1947. The text corresponds substantially to E but it has a different verse order for a number of stanzas, demonstrating that nearly 200 years after the poem was established in written form changes of verse order could still take place.
clearly the norm. Occasionally an unusual stylistic device excludes aicill but in all other cases its absence results from textual shift or lexical variation.

In the light of the evidence discussed in this chapter the unitary origin of these sources of OnC appears indisputable. The variations between the sources can be related to divergences within the oral transmission.
CHAPTER 8

Part A: Óran na Comhachaig and earlier works

ÓnC incorporates a number of conventions found in earlier poetry: the dialogue framework, personification, eulogy of nature, the listing of place-names, remembrance of past heroes, and farewell, whether to people, places or life in general. These usages were not, of course, confined to Gaelic poetry and to examine them thoroughly goes beyond the scope of this thesis. The focus must therefore be on the more striking comparisons, and some non-Gaelic instances will be considered first.¹ This is not to suggest that they formed part of Domhnall Mac Fhionnlaigh’s conscious intelligence but rather that his poem was not created in some isolated cultural backwater; there were themes, codes and usages which had a widespread linguistic and geographic domain.

Dialogue

By the 16th century the dialogue or debate already had a long history with classical antecedents. Its uses ranged from the didactic and religious to the narrative and satirical. It was the structure chosen by Erasmus for Colloquia, the Latin textbook he wrote for his pupils which became one of the most celebrated works of the 16th century. Although this kind of dialogue declined as a literary form after the 17th century, its tendentious function was recalled when the Marquis de Sade used it ironically to win a priest away from his faith.²

The dialogue was a pervasive form in medieval literature, both popular and courtly, and the interlocutors might be human or personified figures, such as the body and the soul. A prominent type was the bird-debate. There are numerous exemplars from France, including the 14th century La Messe des Oiseaux and from the previous century Le Fabel dou Dieu d’Amors. This poetic device also extended to poetry north of the English Channel. The best known

¹ Where lines from ÓnC are quoted it has not been found possible always to use the same source on account of variables such as solitary stanzas and textual differences. This font is still used for such quotations.
² D.A.F. de Sade, Dialogue entre un Prêtre et un Moribond (Paris, 1961 edn.).
middle English convocation of birds is probably the Parliament of Fowls, which may well have influenced Richard Holland's The Howlat even if it did not inspire it. However, there is no lack of conversations between two figures - The Thrush and the Nightingale, The Cuckoo and the Nightingale, and in Scots Dunbar's The Merle and the Nachtigall. The presence of an owl is of particular interest of course, and we find this not only in The Howlat but in the major bird dialogue, The Owl and the Nightingale. Sometimes, as in OnC, only one of the speakers is a bird while the other is likely to be the poet. There are several examples in the love-debate poems of Dafydd ap Gwilym; the poet converses variously with a woodcock, a magpie and a thrush.

The dialogue with the Owl of Strone depends upon the conceit of a bird with human speech as do many of these earlier debate poems. As this particular form of personification is closely bound up with dialogue some discussion of personification is included here.

Protagonists of Bird-debates

The depiction of animals as characters was well practised in beast fables, but birds became the main choice for debate-poems, no doubt partly on account of an association between bird-song and human speech. Personification of this sort may stand a little away from allegory; any characteristics traditionally attributed to the birds would be understood at the outset by the audience, irrespective of whether a story is entailed. Although there may be a moral or an outcome, neither is indispensable. The birds can express themselves on matters of human importance while their arguments are silently coloured by the characteristics they symbolise. The Owl and the Nightingale relies on bird folk-lore in much the same way as OnC does.

5 Attributed to Nicholas of Guildford, probably late 12th century.
6 Helen Fulton, Dafydd ap Gwilym and the European Context (Cardiff, 1989), p.204-05.
Since classical antiquity the owl has been associated with wisdom. The Greek goddess Pallas Athene, whose symbol was the owl, had, apart from the gift of wisdom, the power to prolong human life and the gift of prophecy. However, the owl's prophetic powers tend to be focussed on doom and death, so that she is a figure of superstitious dread. Her forward facing eyes and vertical posture which give her a semi-human appearance must contribute to this fear. In addition, the fact that she hunts at night and her unpopularity with other birds can make her something of an outcast. Dafydd ap Gwilym's description is apt:

A'i gwedd, wynebpryd dyn gwâr
A'i sud ellyles adar.
Pob edn syfudr alltudryw
A'i baedd, pond rhyfedd ei hyw?

(With her face / like to a gentle mortal / and her form,
she-fiend of birds. / Each unclean bird of alien kind /
will harass her, is it not strange she lives?)

That the owl of cultural and literary symbolism is female and lacks beauty is understood in the Gaelic term 'cailleach oidhche', as well as the Latin 'strigae', or 'witches', of Roman literature who took the form of owls at night. This is illustrated by Gavin Douglas's words in one of his prologues to The Eneados:

Hornyt Heboud, quhilk we clepe the nicht owle,
Within hir cavern hard I schowt and yowle,
Laithly of form, with crukyt camscho beke,
Ugsum to heir was hir wild eirich screke.

Sometimes the owl's wisdom is interpreted as learning and she may represent a solemn cleric. In both OnC and The Owl and the Nightingale some of these characteristics may be assumed and others are specified. The mournful and solemn nature of the 'Comhachag' is emphasised in two lines of the first verse: (T1 quoted)

A nochd is bronach do leabaidh and 'S beag iongnadh gur trom leat t'aigne.

7 In The Parlement of Foulys we find "The oule ek, that of deth the bode bryngyth" and in later English literature there are innumerable similar references, e.g. in Shakespeare, Spenser, Ruskin.
8 Translations of quotations in this chapter are usually from the work in which the original is cited; in this case the source is Rachel Bromwich, Aspects of the Poetry of Dafydd ap Gwilym (Cardiff, 1986), p.149.
9 Bawcutt and Riddy, 'Prologue VII', Longer Scottish Poems, p.239, lines 105-08.
10 Quotations from OnC given in this chapter are not accompanied by translations as these can be found in the chapter on the relevant source; e.g. in this case Chapter 2, 'The Turner Manuscript'.

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The implication is that it is the burden of experience which makes her melancholy. She is sombre rather than sinister or responsible for evil. When she is called *Eoin bhig na mala gruamaich* it does not convey a criticism. The nightingale disparages her owl interlocutrix on grounds of her gloomy temperament and song, which she calls "grislich".\(^{11}\) Holland describes his *Howlat* similarly:

He grat grysly grym and gaif a gret yowle.\(^{12}\)

The Comhachag too has the characteristic unlovely voice:

\[ \text{Ged a bh a mo bheul gun bhinneas} \quad T4 \text{ quoted} \]

*The Howlat* is not depicted with all the ancient, classical attributes of an owl. His complaint about his appearance is not only unwise but morally reprehensible. He is a late medieval sinner.

Moral superiority is asserted with a degree of self-righteousness by both the Comhachag and the owl of *The Owl and the Nightingale*. This is not to say that the motivations for their attitudes are shared, simply that this kind of self-opinion sits well with traditional owl lore. In fact the Comhachag's denial of guilt on her part brings to mind some Celtic analogues. However, before venturing further in that direction some attention must be given to dialogue where no personification is involved.

**Dialogue in Celtic poetry**

Dialogue was a key structure in medieval Irish literature. The late middle Irish *Buile Suibhne* makes use of it but not in quite the same way as the poems mentioned so far.\(^{13}\) Sections of conversation are interspersed throughout the story, some of them in the prose passages, but more notably in the poems. The dialogues take place between Suibhne and one of the other characters, such as his wife, the cleric or the hag, and all of this is contained within the framework of Suibhne telling his story to St Moling. There are also stretches of verse in the first person without any respondent, and in a way the conversations seem like an extension of this form. This may bear some similarity to the first person mode which is adopted

\(^{11}\) Quoted by Kathryn Hume, *The Owl and the Nightingale* (Toronto, 1975), p.52.
both in the 'Llywarch Hen' poems and the 'Myrddin-Taliesin' poems. In OnC there are two circumscribed dialogues, the one between the poet and the owl, and that between the poet and Old Age, but elsewhere an unidentified first person speaks, giving his unique focus. There is a sense that this is the poet and an implication that it is nature he is speaking to, real nature, not a personification with the power of speech.

In Acallamh na Sénórach a dialogue framework enables the compiler to give shape to a collection of originally oral poems and stories about the Fianna and the locations they visited. The structure of OnC uses the same essentials. The owl is the repository of ancient stories and information which can be related in conversation with the poet in much the same way as Oísean and Caoilte tell St Patrick about the Fenian adventures of long ago. The 'survivor' from the past speaks to a character of the present. The Comhachag confirms herself as a 'survivor':

'S iomadh ál a chúir mi romham' T2 quoted

The device of bringing a legendary hero out of his customary fictional time span in order to talk to St Patrick had already been used in the 11th century with regard to Cú Chulainn. The introduction of the historical saint into a milieu of mythical figures was a way of updating ancient stories for a medieval audience. The presence of St Patrick would also take the stories out of the realm of pure legend and give them a pseudo-historical gloss.

Dialogue used in this way is a major form of presentation in the heroic poems in the Book of the Dean of Lismore. There are a few poems here belonging to the Ulster cycle but it is the Fenian material which offers particular points of comparison with OnC. This is also true of the later collection, Duanaire Finn. This was put

15 This dates from the late 12th century and occurs in various recensions.
16 This is the story known as 'The Phantom Chariot of Cú Chulainn'.
17 See J. F. Nagy, Conversing with Angels and Ancients (Dublin, 1997), for extensive discussion of these matters.
18 Citations will be from Neil Ross, HPBDL.
19 Citations will be from DF, Part 1, poems 1-35, trans. by Eóin Mac Néill; Part 2, poems 36-69, trans. by Gerard Murphy.
together nearly a century after the Book of the Dean of Lismore but they both drew on a supply of oral poetry that was available, and indeed popular, in Scotland and Ireland.\textsuperscript{20} Professor Meek points out that the poems in the Book of the Dean were not ones that had been in circulation long; they were a selection of new compositions produced during a surge in ballad making.\textsuperscript{21} The same would probably be true of Duanaire Finn, which contains only four poems in common with The Book of the Dean in spite of the fact that they drew on the same tradition. An extensive repertory of ballads must have been in oral circulation in the 16th and early 17th centuries and some of this material will have been known to Domhnall Mac Fhionnaigh and his audience. Indeed, a relationship between the ballads and O\textsuperscript{a}C is noticeable in some shared elements of phraseology. An instance of this is the exhortation to speak, an introductory gambit which naturally emphasises the dialogue mode. The Comhachag is encouraged by the poet in these words:

\begin{quote}
Is innis duinne gun euradh
Gach aon sgeula d’a bhéil agad.
\end{quote}

In \textit{HPBDL} Patrick says to Oisean:

\begin{quote}
Innis dhomh roimhe gach sgeal
beannacht ar do bhéal gan ghó
\end{quote}

(Tell me in order all the tidings, and a blessing on thine unlying mouth)

\textit{DF} uses a similar style:

\begin{quote}
Innis a mheic na flatha
do glóir bhlasta is beag mbréige
\end{quote}

(Tell, son of the prince, in clear voice of little falsehood)

and in the next verse:

\begin{quote}
Innis duinn gan dol seachad
narab é in freagra failleach
\end{quote}

(Tell us, without omitting it, let it be no heedless answer)

This convention of enjoining accuracy and truth is also applied to Oisean's naming of hounds:

\textsuperscript{20} Some of the ways in which the Fenian tradition was shared by Scotland and Ireland is discussed by Donald Meek, 'The Gaelic Ballads of Scotland: Creativity and Adaptation', \textit{Ossian Revisited}, ed. by Howard Gaskill (Edinburgh, 1991), pp.18-48.
\textsuperscript{21} op.cit. p.36.
Ader gan dermad gan on
cuid d'anmannabh con na sluagh

(I shall tell, without mistake or omission, some of the names of the hounds of the hosts.)

Thematically this injunction to tell the truth relates to the Fenian code of honesty: the Fianna never told a lie. However, structurally it is used in OnC similarly to the 'ubiquitous opener'. In that case, however, the usage is rather more lyrical, whereas in the conversational gambits quoted above, it is the import of the words which is the common factor, not the precise utterance. James Ross's term 'conceptual formula' offers perhaps the most suitable characterisation which is available for this sort of motif.

Before considering some other parallels between OnC and the Fenian ballads, the middle Irish 'Colloquy between Fintan and the Hawk of Achill' requires mention. This poem consists of a dialogue between a hawk and the mythical seer, Fintan. Since not just one but both of these individuals are 'survivors' there is quite a competition to report stories from across the centuries. Their discourse is a synchronisation of various tales and legends within a Christian framework. Historical authority is also required of Fintan in an earlier text, 'The Settling of the Manor of Tara', which frames a dialogue within a dialogue. Fintan has a pseudo-historical background which enabled him to reach Ireland before the biblical Flood and gain wisdom and experience by adopting a variety of forms. In human shape he became the chief judge of Ireland, but he has also lived as a salmon, an eagle and a falcon.

The Oldest Animals

There is a whole network of stories relating to the Hawk of Achill which itself is a development of the legend of the Oldest Animals. This concerns a method of dating the years by reference to the age

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22 See Chapter 7, pp.311-14.
of various animals, or sometimes trees. Such stories exist in many
versions and many languages, stretching as far as Asia. The examples
found in the British Isles feature a variety of candidates for
supreme longevity, but very common are the oak, the eagle, the deer
and the salmon. Domhnall Mac Fhionnlaoigh and his audience were
almost certainly familiar with the form of this story which is
associated with Lochaber.\textsuperscript{27} It resembles the Irish story of the
eagle Léithin, and if Irish based material was available to Domhnall
he may have known of the figure of Fintan.\textsuperscript{28} Scottish versions of
the story are often set at Beltane and tell of the search for an
animal who can remember such a cold night.\textsuperscript{29} On the night the poet
addresses the Comhachag she compares her age with that of an oak:
Gur comhaois mise do'n daraig (T2). She clearly fits into the
persona of an Oldest Animal, although the Scottish and Irish
tellings of the folk-tale do not name an owl. In Welsh versions of
the story, however, an owl is commonly listed.\textsuperscript{30} The ancient owl,
Cuan Cwm Cawlwyd, is one of the Oldest Animals Culwych encounters on
his quest for Olwen. The traditional association of age-old wisdom
with the owl make her a natural Oldest Animal.

\textbf{Transfiguration}

There is no suggestion that the Comhachag has had different physical
forms. She is a personified, and therefore talking, owl with the
relevant traditional attributes which stop short of skill in shape-
changing. Fintan's transformations have several functions. They are
a way of confirming his great age and also of enabling the
incorporation of mythical elements. Incidentally, it must be his
time as an eagle and a falcon that gave him the power of bird-speak:

\textsuperscript{27} A story called 'Iolaire Loch Tréig'; see Chapter 1, p.8. A point
in common between the oldest animal in this story and Fintan is the
loss of an eye.

\textsuperscript{28} Douglas Hyde, 'The Adventures of Léithin', \textit{Legends of Saints and
Sinners} (Dublin, 1915), p.40.

\textsuperscript{29} Irish versions tend to give a Christian framework to the story
which would make Beltane inappropriate.

\textsuperscript{30} Rachel Bromwich and D.Simon Evans, (eds.) \textit{Culwych and Olwen: An
Edition and Study of the oldest Arthurian Tale} (Cardiff, 1992),
p.143.
Not all transformations which are of interest here are so benign as Fintan's. Suibhne's capacity to fly, connected with his madness, is a punishment. He is an ultimate outcast because he is condemned to pursue a superhuman activity. The medieval correlation between insanity, devils and flying is crucial. Sin could put people in the power of the devil and his minions, who might occupy the human mind, causing insanity, and might cause the subject to be embodied in another form, probably feathered and clawed.

I wish to stress the dark side of medieval and Renaissance religious attitudes not because I think that OnC demonstrates these ideas, but rather the opposite. An awareness of them makes it possible to see that they are absent from the poem. Priscilla Bawcutt observes that Dunbar's poem about the friar of Tungland rests on this devilish aspect of flying. The birds attack the flying friar as if they were mobbing an owl. The 'unnatural' owl, who flies at night, compares with the friar who turns the natural order upside down by the fiendish pursuit of flying. A 16th-century consideration of the Comhachag would probably include the underlying question of whether she represents some diabolical agency; (to which the answer turns out to be negative).

Metamorphosis as punishment was of course a theme of ancient Greek legends, but it can also have a Christian slant. The Christian view of wisdom includes recognition of evil as well as of good. An owl's wisdom could therefore encompass her own wrongdoing before she was exiled into an owl's form. This concept of metamorphosis as penalty underlies a comment made by the deranged Ophelia:

They say the owl was a baker's daughter. Lord, we know what we are, but we know not what we may be.

Hamlet, IV, v.

The concept of the owl as outcast is central to much of the symbolism of literary representations. In The Fourth Branch of the

32 Priscilla Bawcutt, 'Elrich Fantasyis in Dunbar', Breeght Lanternis, p.166.
Mabinogi: Blodeuwedd is changed into an owl by Gwydion as a punishment for her adultery and he addresses her thus:

May there be enmity between you and all the birds / And may it be their nature to harass and dishonour you wherever they may find you.34

There are other references in Welsh poetry to the character, Blodeuwedd.35 A 15th-century poem originally misattributed to Dafydd ap Gwilym features a conversation between a poet and an owl in which the owl begs for peace in which to carry out her penance throughout the long, cold nights.36

Integrity of the Comhachag

One of the sins the Comhachag declares herself innocent of is infidelity. Female infidelity was high on the agenda of topics debated in the 'Argument about Women' which was still a flourishing literary genre in the 16th century.37 Utley's index, which lists material no later than the end of 1568, shows a high proportion of Scots verse in this category. There are pieces of a satirical and ribald nature as well as more seriously moralising approaches, such as Henryson's poem on the punishment of the concupiscent Cressida.38 Gaelic verse of the same genre is contained in the Book of the Dean of Lismore and much of this material presents women in an adverse light, although there is an occasional word of dissent.39 Gerald, Earl of Desmond, has a poem on the side of the defence:

Mairg adeir olc ris na mnáibh!
bheith dá n-eagnach ni dáil chruinn;  
a bhfuaradar do ghuth riamb,  
dom aithne ni hiad do thuill.40

35 These are discussed by Dafydd H. Evans, 'Blodeuwedd', Ysgrifau Beirniadol, vol.20 (Denbigh, 1995), pp.79-89. I am grateful to Nerys A. Jones for interpreting this article for me.
37 Francis L.Utley, The Crooked Rib (Columbus, Ohio, 1944).
38 The Testament of Cresseid was composed in the late 15th century and well known in the 16th; a stanza from it is contained in the Book of the Dean of Lismore.
(Woe to him who speaks ill of women! it is not right to abuse them. They have not deserved, that I know, all the blame they have always had).

The prevalence of verse on the question of women's worth reflects the vigour with which the debate was engaged. It was impossible to contemplate one side of the ' Argument' without being aware of the other. The Complaint against Women is implicit in the exchange between the poet and the Comhachag regarding her need to confess. First there is the assumption that an elderly female must be riddled with blame; then this view is demolished. The Comhachag's credentials are sound and she is an honest transmitter of stories from the past, complying with convention of introductory gambits found in Fenian ballads; see section on 'Dialogue in Celtic Poetry' above.

The Comhachag is a personified bird, not a human sinner condemned to an alien existence. We are invited to think of her as an owl with the appropriate species of relatives:

Bhiodh iad aig éigheach sa'n theasgar. E10 quoted

When she says she has done nothing wrong we are meant to believe her.

The Fenian Connection

The Fenian ballads relate stories with pre-Christian elements assembled into a Christian framework. They echo through OnC in various ways. The most notable features to have emerged so far are the use of the dialogue form and the motif of the 'survivor' enjoined to speak the truth. However, there are some points of comparison that are quite cursory and not at all emphasised. They offer touches of information or colour. There is a line in Eigg which is perhaps reminiscent of the principle of hired military service within the Fenian system:

Gun ràdh 'n triùir bha sin air fòghnadh E6

It is not clear to what extent such a comment might have been intended to call to mind the ways of the Fianna. A shared pool of conventions, themes and imagery was drawn on by the composers of Acallamh na Senórach, the Book of the Dean of Lismore, OnC and Duanaire Finn, which they used creatively in their individual
In the Comhachag's list of crimes she has not committed she mentions two which have a Fenian pertinence. At T5 etc. we learn that, like the Fianna, she never told a lie.

Cha d’rinn mi riamh braid no mèirle
No cladh no tèarmann a bhriseadh

But neither did she break open tombs. This was a crime used as a medium of criticism in anti-panegyric poetry, such as 'Thea's an diabhale na nGoidheal'. However, it is also an activity which occurs in Acallamh na Senórach, occasionally by the agency of St Patrick. Perhaps the Comhachag is distancing herself from Patrician and Christian influences. Quite soon after she is introduced as an age-old, world-weary owl, a priest is mentioned. The juxtaposition of these initial details may prompt the question of whether he is on the model of St Patrick of the ballads. We have the dialogue, we have the disconsolate 'survivor' whose only link now with the past is the stories she has to tell. Perhaps we have the Christian framework? And yet no sooner is the priest suggested than such services as he might offer are shown to be redundant. Attention is called to a priest and to tomb-breaking; the Comhachag dismisses both summarily. That she is not to be viewed as guilty is supported by another parallel in the poem of Earl Gerald mentioned above:

Ní dhéanaid fionghal ná feall,
  ná ni ar a mbeith grainc ná gráin;
  ní sháraighid cill ná clog;
  maír g aedeis olc ris na mnáibh.

(They do no murder nor treachery, nor any hateful deed,
  they do no sacrilege to church nor bell; woe to him who
  speaks ill of women!).

Religion seems scarcely a feature of OnC; certainly there are no direct Christian references. The only exception to this, which,

41 An example of a topographical modification is in the HPBDL version of Diarmaid's Death which is based in Glenshee. The setting is Scottish but Diarmaid is given an Irish epithet: "Seabhac súilghorm Easa Ruaidh", line 985. Donald Meek comments on this use of the Donegal place-name, 'Place-names and Literature: Evidence from the Gaelic Ballads', pp.158-59.


44 See note 40, above, for sources of quotations.
however, is not a particularly convincing one, is in M52. This contains the line *Mhic Muire nach cruaidh an cáis*, but it appears to be a derivative stanza, probably contrived to fill a gap.\(^{46}\)

The tactic of opening graves is connected with the bringing of stories from the past into the present for their preservation. It is also a means by which St Patrick establishes his authority.\(^{47}\) In either a Christian context or a pre-Christian one a grave represents a past life and a present existence in another sphere. Encounters with supernatural creatures from the Otherworld are a theme of Fenian stories. There is no interest in such matters in *OnC*. If the Comhachag has no concerns of this sort surely the aging hunter will have? But in the conversation between the hunter and Old Age there is no positive suggestion of this. All sources except *T* have one line which might possibly be viewed as a Christian connotation:

\[\text{Gu là bhràth cha leig mi coin.} \quad \text{M20 quoted}\]

Actually the note here is elegiac; there is no anxiety about the hereafter and no suggestion of a priestly blessing before death, which is a recurrent feature of the Fenian Christian framework, occurring in such poems as:

'\text{Do-chonnaic mé teaghlach Finn}' \quad \text{HPBDL III}

'\text{Is fada anocht i nOíl Finn}' \quad \text{HPBDL IV, DF LV}

'\text{Lá dhá ndeachaidh sé dhá chill}' \quad \text{HPBDL VI}

'\text{Cumhain liom imtheacht ochtair}' \quad \text{HPBDL XII}

However, Oisean's role not only has points of comparison with the Comhachag's; it is also called to mind in the second dialogue on *OnC*, in which the hunter laments the ravages of old age. The hunter and Oisean have similar grounds for complaint, which are expressed in similar terms. The poem '\text{Is fada anocht i nOíl Finn}' details various restraints imposed by old age but, as in *OnC*, the lack of hunting causes especial regret:

\(^{45}\) However, even if the priest is viewed as a pagan priest he would still have no function.

\(^{46}\) See also Chapter 7, p.320, 'Solitary stanzas in M'.

\(^{47}\) See Nagy, *Angels and Ancients*, p.78, "Most of these miraculously revived figures from the past, as featured in stories about St Patrick and other Irish saints, are brought back into the present not only as a spectacular demonstration of the saint's power, specifically the authority of his summoning voice, but also to talk in their uniquely authorised voices about the past or about the worlds they entered through death".
Gan bhreith ar eilid ná ar fiadh,
ni h-amhlaidh sin budh mhian linn,
gan luadh ar coinnbheirt ná ar coin;
is fada anocht i nOíl Finn.\footnote{48}

(No catching of hind nor of stag, / not thus was my desire; / no mention of prowess or of hound./ Time passes wearily in Elphin tonight.)

In another poem in the Dean's collection, 'Tulach na Féine', Oisean reflects on the lost times of his youth, and the fact that the clerics have taken over a place the Fianna used to frequent. He speaks of his sorrow at the absence of the heroes:

\textbf{Ni fhéadaim beith go subhach,} \hspace{1cm} \textbf{HPBDL Poem XIX,}
\textbf{ni fhaicim mac Cumhaill [ ]} \hspace{1cm} \textbf{ni fhaicim Diarmaid Ó Duibhne,}
\textbf{ni fhaicim Caoilte mac Crunnchon.} \hspace{1cm} \textbf{ni fhaicim mac Lughdhabh,}
\textbf{ni fhaicim an chualacht ghrádaigh.} \hspace{1cm} \textbf{M27}

(I cannot be joyful / I see not the [ ] son of Cumhall / I see not Diarmaid Ó Duibhne / I see not Caoilte son of Crunnchu).

(No wonder that I am mournful / on this hill O Patrick / I see not Mac Lughdhabh / I see not the beloved throng).

In \textit{OnC} the loss of hunting is expressed in like manner:

\textbf{Buachailleachd dhubbach, dheurach,} \hspace{1cm} \textbf{M27}
\textit{'S mithich dhámh t' fháigal ad' aonar}
\textit{Ma ta thu seal gu subhach,}
\textit{Seal eile gu dubhach, deurach.}

The similar use of contrast between the words 'subhach' and 'dubbach' is striking, particularly in the light of some other associations between the two poems. They both focus on the significance of place, which is summed up by the line from \textit{OnC}: "'S aoibhinn leam an diugh na chi". This line, it may be recalled, was recommended by the scribe of M as a refrain to be repeated after every verse. This suggestion, although impractical, indicates that the line may have had a special resonance; it also has parallels in later poetry.\footnote{49} Moreover, that resonance relates to 'Tulach na Féine' in which the theme of the passage of time is centred on a beloved place. [The importance of place is discussed below in the

\footnote{48} Other similarities with this poem are mentioned in Chapter 7, 'Metrical Variation'.
\footnote{49} See below, p.371, for use in a poem by William Ross.
section 'Place-naming', but in this poem it has a particular
dimension which is relevant here.] The encroachment of St Patrick
and his people utterly mars the Hill of the Fian as far as Oisean is
concerned, so that he can no longer conjure up his comrades of the
past and their feats associated with this spot:

Innisim dhuit, a Phádraig HPBDL Poem XIX
dámadh áil liom theacht tharta,
nach féadam a shaoileadh,
a bhfacas d'aoibhneas aca.

(I tell thee, O Patrick / even if I wished to tell of
them / I cannot bring before my mind / all the mirth I
saw among them.)

Prior to this statement there are five consecutive verses beginning
with the words "Ni fhaicim". In two of the verses each line begins
with this phrase. What we find in OnC, of course, is the very
opposite of this; the speaker shows an exceptional facility for
envisaging a favourite landscape. Moreover, his mental pictures are
introduced by the repetition of the words 'Chi mi', (see e.g. T27-
30), which is the precise antithesis of Oisean's phrase. The
diametric opposition is so precise that it is hard to believe that
it is coincidence. OnC and the Fenian ballads may have shared
literary conventions and motifs but this seems to be a deliberate
exercise in allusion by Domhnall Mac Fhionnlaigh. By his converse
use of the phrase "Ni fhaicim" he taps the vein of Fenian material
while simultaneously neutralising it. No debate between the sacred
and the secular can blight his perception of his beloved hills and,
more significantly, given the 16th-century upheavals in the church,
no religious conflict is going to taint his view.

Thus the religious sentiment in OnC is muted and somehow
dissociated.\(^{50}\) What is powerful is remembrance. This is so vivid
that to call it remembrance of things past seems almost insensitive.
Features of the landscape are conjured up with an exclusive, unique
focus that ensures they are not forsaken.

This kind of elegy uses descriptions of nature to indicate a
preference for the old order as against the new - as in the

\(^{50}\) Certain details in the poem which carry allusions to other
literature would be understood as referring to a pagan context, e.g.
the Léithin story, see Chapter 8, p.345. See also p.356, 'The
Elegiac Vein' for comparison with Llywarch Hen.
metaleptic conjunction of deer and blankets, in the first quotation below, or box-beds, in the second:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Codla chan iarr i 'san smùr} & \quad \text{M22 quoted} \\
\text{B'annsa na plaideag ri taobh} & \quad \text{M24 quoted} \\
\text{Bàrr an fhraoich ghaganaich ùr.} & \quad \text{M22 quoted} \\
\text{Macan na h-éilde ri tom} & \quad \text{M24 quoted} \\
\text{Nach do chrom fuidh speinns' a cheann.} & \quad \text{M22 quoted}
\end{align*}
\]

In a more directly critical passage Lowland speech is disparaged:

\[\text{M ball nach cluinneamaid glòr nan Gall.} \quad \text{M13}\]

This compares with the undisguised discord between the heroes of old and the new clerics, as found in Acallamh na Senórach and the Book of the Dean of Lismore. Poem HPBDL XIX, referred to above, has this theme as does HPBDL XX, in which Oisean declares:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Dob fhéarr aonchath laidir} & \quad \text{HPBDL XX} \\
\text{bheireadh Fionn na Fèinne} & \quad \text{HPBDL XX} \\
\text{ná do thighearn crábhaidh} & \quad \text{HPBDL XX} \\
\text{is tú féin lé chéile.} & \quad \text{HPBDL XX}
\end{align*}
\]

(Greater the worth of one stout troop / that Fionn of the Fian used to bring / than thyself and thy Lord of piety together.)

A tendency to look backwards underlies the verses on the chiefs of Keppoch. They are praised and they are missed, but the emphasis is on their absence rather than the pedigree they represent for present incumbents. The early chiefs, Alasdair Carrach and Angus of Fersit, are named and given a brief description, rather like the listing technique used in HPBDL XVII, where Oisean details some of the old heroes, with or without an epithet. This kind of cataloguing, which of course has a common application to place-names, is often used to express nostalgia and is related to the 'sweetest sounds' motif.

The Sweetest Sounds

This motif is a much exercised device within the Gaelic verse tradition, especially where elegy and nature are concerned. In the Fenian literature, as in OnC, it is primarily associated with hunting. It can occur in various degrees of appreciation. The first is the simple affirmation of something pleasant, as in OnC:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Gur binn leam tormán nan os} & \quad \text{T21 quoted} \\
\text{Air uileann nan corrbheann cas.} & \quad \text{T21 quoted}
\end{align*}
\]

Buile Suibhne has a comparable verse of untinged pleasure:
A bhennain, a bhuiredhain,
a bhéiceadhain bintt,
is binn linn an cuicherán
do[g]ni tu 'san ghlintt.51

(O little stag, thou little bleating one / O melodious
little clamourer / sweet to us is the music thou makest
in the glen.)

The convention of delightful sounds in an equally agreeable natural
setting can extend to a list as in CnC:

'S binn a h-íolaír ar a bruachaibh
'S binn a cuach, is binn a h-eala,
Ach 's binne na sin am blaoghan
Dhèanadh an laoghan breac ballach.

This example culminates in a comparison but the principle that all
the items are pleasant is maintained. K.H. Jackson refers to this
style as the List of Pleasant Things, an early example of which is
Taliesin's list.52 The same idea is found in 'Binn guth duine i dTír
an Òir', HPBDL XIII. In another poem, HPBDL XV, Fionn asks the
heroes to tell which are their favourite sounds and they all choose
differently. The superlative, the sweetest sound is recalled by
Oisean and in this case it is a human voice:

Cnú Deireoil cnú mo crídehceol is binne da gcúala
séd is fearr boí a síthbhrugh
an ghein brigmhar bhúadh
(Cnú Deireoil, the nut of my heart / the sweetest music
I have heard / the best jewel that ever was in fairy
mansion / the powerful gifted one)

In CnC the preferred music is consistently in the hunting domain:

Ceòl as binne de gach ceòl
Guth a' ghadhair mhóir is e teachd,
Damh 'na shiomanacht le gleann
Mhol Choine a bhith ann is as.

To Suibhne the sound of the stag is sublime:

Dord daimh dhithreibhe ós aille
bios a Siodhmuine Glinne,
noc[h]an fuil ceol ar talmain
im amnmuin acht a bhinne.53

(The belling of the stag of the desert above the cliffs /
in Siodhmuine Glinne / there is no music on earth / in my
soul but its sweetness.)

51 Buile Suibhne, p.62.
53 Buile Suibhne, p.34.
These are straightforward listings of things agreeable; the notion of the 'sweetest sound' can, however, be used to disparage some other sound, and in the case of HPBDL and DF the slur is cast on church bells ringing or clerics chanting. In the 'Chase on Slievenamon', HPBDL V and DF LVIII, the old traditional sounds of the hunt are more appreciated than the clanging bells of the new religion. 'The bell on Druim Deirg' has the same theme:

Gidh binn leatsa a n-abrait soin  DF LIII
& gidh maith led meanmain
is binne buireach in doimh mhr
no in ceol chanaid na cleirigh.

(Though sweet to thee what they say / and though it please thy mind / the roar of the swift stag is more sweet / than the music the clerics chant).

Suibhne much prefers birdsong to the church bell:

Binne lem im na tonna
mh' ingne anocht cidh it cranna
na gricc-graicc chlogáin chille
an chú do[gni] cúl Banna. 54

(Sweeter to me about the waves / though my talons tonight are feeble / than the grig-graig of the church-bell / is the cooing of the cuckoo of the Bann). 55

OnC has a stanza which disparages human sound by comparing a peasant's humming to a stag's bellow:

B'annsa leam na dúrdan bodaich  E23
Os ceann lic' ag cearradh síl,
Buirein an daimh 'm bi ghnè dhúinnid,
Air leacainn beinne 's e ri sín.

The 'sweetest sounds' motif is unusually expressed here as there is no phrase incorporating the word 'binn'. The human voice is not pleasant to Suibhne either:

Ni charaím an sibheanradh
dogniad fir is mna,
binne liom a celeabradh
luin 'san aird ittá. 56

(I love not the merry prattle / that men and women make / sweeter to me is the warbling /of the blackbirds in the quarter in which it is.)

54 op.cit. p.32.
55 I am grateful to Professor Gillies for pointing out a poem in which the church bell is appreciated; see Gerard Murphy, Early Irish Lyrics (Dublin, 1998), poem no.3, where a tryst with the bell is preferred to a tryst with a wanton woman.
56 Buile Suibhne, p.76.
Several verses follow in which he praises stags and their sounds in the places he travels through:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Ni charuim an chornairecht} \\
\text{atchluinim go tenn,} \\
\text{binn lium ag damhghairecht} \\
\text{damh dá fhiched benn.}^{57}
\end{align*}
\]

(I love not the horn-blowing / so boldly I hear / sweeter to me the belling of a stag / of twice twenty peaks.

Such examples are plentiful; the concept is also obliquely referred to in OnC when the hunter commiserates with his dog about their advancing years:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Chaill sinn an tabhunn 's an dàn,} \\
\text{Ged bha sinn grathunn ri ceanal.}^{58}
\end{align*}
\]

Nostalgia is intrinsic to the 'sweetest sounds' motif, making it a tidy vehicle for bringing together fond reflections of hunting and eulogy of nature or landscape. Early on in OnC (T12), it is used to establish the link between the hunt and Creag Ghuanach. Subsequently there are numerous references to deer and hounds and they become associated with this particular hill. In the verses praising the Keppoch chiefs there is no elegy on account of their death. They are a constituent of the speaker's remembrance of the incomparable past. This is a lament for the speaker's self.\(^{58}\) The poet praises the mountains and lochs which endure, but endure of necessity without him as Old Age approaches.

The Elegiac Vein

There are relevant items of poetry from Scotland in which placenaming is used in conjunction with elegy, but before looking at these some elegiac features of Llywarch Hen may be mentioned. Praise of past heroes, including Llywarch's sons, is a topic here but it is dealt with in a more traditional manner than the praise of Keppoch chiefs in OnC. Llywarch Hen depicts battles and the death of heroes, whereas OnC avoids truths of such a solid, finite nature. What the two compositions do share is the backward look, the naming of people and places and the compact description of nature. Llywarch's awareness of his present bent and weary state contrasts with his

\(^{57}\) op.cit. p.78.
\(^{58}\) An aspect of lament described by Jackson, *Early Celtic Nature Poetry*, p.119.
recollection of earlier achievements. Some twenty stanzas are devoted to regrets of old age; verse 45 is quoted:

Dir gwen gwynt; gwyn gne godre
Gwydd; dewr hydd, diwlydd bre;
Eiddil hen, hwyry dyre.  

(Boisterous is the wind, white is the hue of the edge of the wood; the stag is emboldened, the hill is bleak; feeble is the old man, slowly he moves.)

Llywarch does not, however, spurn the stick as the hunter of OnC does; also there is mention of God although this is not concern for life after death any more than there is in OnC. The past is contemplated simply for its absence, not because it might feature behaviour requiring forgiveness.

Place-naming

Place-naming is ostensibly an uncomplicated literary device, but its effects are far from simple. It has one aspect which is still commonplace in modern use of language: the naming of numerous places within a particular area helps to create that area's atmosphere. In medieval times the spoken word in itself has a special power, which in an oral-based tradition would reside with the poets. Of course, in a contemporary literary society the poets may still have the power but perhaps not the esteem that used to attach to it.

Place-naming is a substantial theme in Gaelic poetry predating OnC and limitations of space must narrow its consideration here. However, of particular interest are some poems in which it has an elegiac function. Place-names in the 'fian' ballads work as an integral device recalling that these were the places the Fianna used to visit, return to and hunt in. Naming these places releases 'fian' associations; the places themselves are felt to contain memories of heroic deeds, of a past that is gone. Ballad IX in HPBDL, 'Caoilte and the Creatures' is focussed on the places Caoilte visits as he speeds round Ireland. Association with place as a motif remains intact when 'fian' lore enters Scottish topography.

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59 Ford, Llywarch Hen, p.78.
60 Jackson, A Celtic Miscellany, p.283.
62 See also Chapter 7, pp.306.
of 'Laoidh Dhiarmaid', *HPBDL XI*, the aura of place with a past is summoned up, quite delicately, in a way that resembles the description of Creag Ghuanach:

*Gleann Siodh an gleann-so rém thaoibh, HPBDL XI*
*í mbinn facíd éan agus lon;*
*mínic rithidis an Fhian*
*ar an t-srath-so i ndiadh a gcon.*

(The glen beside me is Gleann Siodh, wherein are sweet the cries of birds and elks; often used the men of the Fian to run in this glen after their hounds).

This may be compared with:

*Chí mi 'n siud am beannan ruadh  T27*
*Goirid o cheann Locha Tréig,*
*Creag Ghuanach am biodh an t-sealg,*
*'N grianán árd am biodh na fèidh.*

For a more vigorous use of place-naming a 16th-century Scots poem provides one example. The Testament of Duncan Laideus is by an unknown author and relates to the imminent death by execution of the eponymous Macgregor in 1552.63 He had a chequered history, being imprisoned by the 2nd laird of Glenorchy and then escaping in the confusion after Flodden to lead an outlaw's life for the most part, often seeking refuge in Lochaber. The verses are written on blank pages in a manuscript copy of Haye's *Buik of King Alexander* that was in the library of the 7th laird, Black Duncan, who died in 1631.64

There are thus correspondences of time and place between Duncan Laideus and Domhnall Mac Fhionnlaigh.65

There are some obvious differences of approach between *OnC* and *Duncan Laideus*. The latter is forceful in satire and sarcasm; Christian morality is very present and much criticised; the confession at the beginning of the poem is uttered with boastfulness rather than remorse. All this is a far cry from *OnC*. However, with the leave-taking of well-loved places we are nearer home, certainly metaphorically and almost geographically. Transliterations of verses 53 and 54:

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63 Printed in *The Black Book of Taymouth* (Edinburgh, 1855).
64 See also Chapter 1, p.5.
Now good Glendochart for ever more adieu,
That oft has been my partner and my refuge,
Both day and night to me thou wast right true,
And lately when I grew older
And durst no more to be seen upon the field,
As the owl dares not when day is light
Yet thou kept me with thy might and main.

Farewell Glenlochy with the forest free,
Farewell Fernay that oft my friend has been,
Farewell Morinche(?) alas, full of woe is me!
Thou wast the ground of all my woe and trouble,
Farewell Breadalbane and Loch Tay so bright,
Farewell Glenorchy and Glen Lyon both,
My death will be but little harm to you.

So, like the hunter of OnC (in verses E51-58), the cynical Duncan names and takes his leave of the beloved hills and glens which have afforded him greater fellowship than has humankind. Duncan's path of collision with authority has brought him face to face with execution; the hunter's sensibility lacks a comparable bitter edge but the nostalgia has a similar ring. Both speakers see themselves in a special relationship with nature, a close companionship that is destroyed by old age and death.

It is in Deirdre's Farewell to Scotland that calling the names of places obtains a vibrancy of the sort experienced in OnC on hearing a passage such as M12-17.66 John MacInnes describes these place-names in OnC as a "heroic roll call".67 Likewise Deirdre's apostrophe to the hills and glens of Argyllshire highlights the appreciation that this is oral poetry; it requires to be spoken and "pays homage by naming".68 Both poems are concerned with taking leave of places, but these places are evoked with an intensity that keeps the speaker in a never-ending relationship with them. One of the ways this is achieved in OnC is by the repetition of 'Chi mi' before the names. The speaker is not actually seeing the places now, although he has done so often in the past; but his mind's eye sees them and always will. An effect of a similar kind is produced in

67 John MacInnes, 'Panegyric Code in Gaelic Poetry', TGSI, vol.50, p.479. He also emphasises that in OnC the naming is of places in a 'landscape', not in a 'dúthchas', that untranslateable word whose significance he discusses on p.452.
68 W.H.Auden, The Dyer's Hand (London, 1963), p.57. The significance of naming things and places is included in the discussion on the poetic impulse and the awareness of 'sacred things'.
Deirdre’s Farewell by the way the word 'inmain' is used. First the features of the landscape are addressed as 'inmain' and at the end Naoise is 'inmain', the beloved with whom Deirdre leaves. But both the land and Naoise are the beloved; the essential attribute of the beloved is to be loved, which is a kind of possession from which there can be no parting:

\[
\text{Inmain Dùn-fidhgha is Dùn-finn,} \\
\text{inmain in dùn osa cinn,} \\
\text{inmain Inis Draigen de,} \\
\text{is inmain Dùn Suibhne.} \quad \text{Irische Texte p.127}
\]

\[
\text{Inmain Draigen is trén traigh,} \\
\text{inmain a uisce ingainimh glain;} \\
\text{nocha ticfuinn eisde anoir} \\
\text{mana tisuinn lem inmain.} \quad \text{Irische Texte p.129}
\]

(Beloved are Dùn Fidhgha and Dùn Finn / beloved is the stronghold above them / beloved is Inis Draighen / and beloved is Dùn Suibhne).

(Beloved is Draighen with its firm beach, beloved is its water in the pure sand; I should not have come out of it from the east if I had not come with my beloved.)

Part B: Comparable Features in Later Gaelic Poetry

Some of the themes and motifs in 17th and 18th-century Gaelic poetry have aspects of presentation which bear some comparison with OnC. This is, of course, to be expected to some extent since certain themes lend themselves to certain modes. It is not the intention here to investigate any influence OnC may have had, but to observe particularly noticeable points of comparison, especially in the areas of elegy, hunting, old age and dialogue.

Elegy and the 'Survivor'

One of Donnchadh Mac Ruairidh's poems is an elegy on chiefs of Mackenzie in which the speaker laments the fact that he has outlived these heroes. This 'survivor' is an ordinary mortal well stricken in years but the tone of world-weary endurance is worthy of the Comhachag or of Oisean:

69 Jackson, A Celtic Miscellany, p.281.
70 'Fada atà mise an déidh chàich', BG p.234. Watson dates this between 1626 and 1633.
Gun mhiann, gun aighear, gun cheol, verse 5
Ach laigh fo bhron gu brath
Ach gu faighinn bás gun fhios;
Fada atá mise an dèidh chàich.

(Devoid of desire or music or joy / but lying forever morose / till death takes me unawares / long have I outlived them all).

The death of others has left the speaker stranded in life:
Maír atá beò na dèidh verse 7
'S atá gun spéis fo bheul cin
Thug an anshocair mo leòn
Bho nach maireann beò na fir.É5

(Woe to the one who them survives / without respect underlaid by love / the lack of solace has left me hurt / since the men are not alive).

The thematic correspondence with OnC is evident, both as regards the 'survivor' and old age, although the quantity of self-pity may vary.

Elegy and hunting

As mentioned above in the section 'Place-naming', the elegiac note is not necessarily reserved for death. Separation from a place, person or a mode of life can be cause for lament. Hunting as a way of life is the subject of elegy as well as eulogy in OnC and in the Fenian literature; it also functions metaphorically. As a pursuit worthy of a hero it is idealised to the extent that the hunter does no wrong. Equally the deer are creatures without fault. The symbiotic relationship between the hunter and the hunted pertains to the fact that in OnC, although there is hunting there are no dead deer:É2

Bha mi o'n rugadh mi riamh,
Ann an caidreabh thiadh is earb,
Chan fhaca mi dath air bian
Ach buidhe, riabhach is dearg.

The correlation between hunting and guiltlessness provides a standard of virtue. In a song dating to around 1600 and attributed to Ailean Mór the speaker declares his innocence:

71 Translations by Meg Bateman, Gàir nan Clarsach, ed. by Colm Ó Baoill (Edinburgh, 1994) p.81.
72 For the hunter as trope-master see Nagy, Angels and Ancients, p.296.
Cha d’rinn mi fhathast beud no pudhar
Mura leag mi fiadh fo bruthach,
No biast mhaol an caolas cumhang
No dubh-sgarbh an cois na tuinne.\(^{73}\)

(Not yet have I done harm or mischief / unless to fell a
deer on a hill-side / or an otter in slender narrows / or
a shag at the shoreline).

When the Comhachag defends her character, hunting is silently
assumed as a virtue: the owl is an accomplished hunter. Even in the
one source (M44) which mentions the spilling of blood, it is
emphasised that this is not an unlawful instance.

The guiltless deer of OneC are praised in section M20-27, where
their purity and pedigree are stressed (M23, 24). In an elegiac poem
on hunting by An Ciaran Mabach the admiration takes the same focus:

\[
\begin{align*}
B'i mo ghradh-sa a' bhean uasal \\
Dha nach d'fhuaras rimh lochd, \\
Nach iarraidh mar chluasaig \\
Ach fior ghualainn nan cnoc. \\
\end{align*}
\]

(My love the noble lady / in whom fault was never found /
who desired no cushion / but the shoulder of the hill).

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Bean a b'aigeantaich cèile} \\
\text{An âm èirigh ri drìuchd:} \\
\text{Chan fhaigheadh tu beud da} \\
\text{Is cha bu lèir leis ach thù.}\ ^{74}
\end{align*}
\]

(Woman of the most mettlesome partner / when rising with
the dew / in him you’d find no blemish / and he would see
only you).

Some of this is very reminiscent of OneC in which, for example, a
hind is described thus:

\[
\begin{align*}
B'annsa na plaideag ri taobh \\
Bàrr an h-athach ghaganaich ùr. \\
\end{align*}
\]

An Ciaran Mabach’s poem starts with the sleeping preferences of the
erstwhile hunter:

\[
\begin{align*}
Ge socrach mo leaba \\
B'annsa cadal air fraoch.\ ^{75}
\end{align*}
\]

(Though comfy my bolster / I'd sooner sleep on the moor).

\(^{73}\) 'Iomair thusa, Choinnich Cridhe', Ó Baollí, Gàir nan Clàrsach,
p.48. This and the following citations from the same collection are
given with accompanying translations by Meg Bateman.

\(^{74}\) 'Air dha bhith uair an Dùn Eideann', probably composed 1680s,

\(^{75}\) op. cit. p.178.
The trope in OnC invoking the box bed (M24) is a rather discreet way of praising the stag’s superiority to human comforts, compared with the devices of the later poet:

B’e mo ghradh-sa am fear buidhe
Nach suidheadh mun bhòrd,  
Nach iarraidh ri cheannach  
Pinnt leanna no beòir;  
Uisge beatha math dúbailt     
Cha bu diù leat ri òl-  
B’fhearr leat biolair an fhuarain    
Is uisge luaineach an lòin.\textsuperscript{76}

(My love the dun fellow / who would sit at no board / who would not seek to purchase / a pint of ale or beer / a good double-distilled whisky / you would not deign to drink / you preferred the cress of the fountain / and the restless water of the burn).

The symbolic use of hunting as a poetic theme is not entirely absent from the poem, but the hyperbole compresses it to a distant echo.\textsuperscript{77}

Sinton’s anthology contains a number of 18th-century poems on hunting, often including some sort of lament.\textsuperscript{78} The reasons for regret are variable; in poem CVII the subject is the post-Culloden proscription of Highland dress and carrying of firearms. The case is stated as part of a dialogue between a hunter who is the tacksman of Strathmashie, and a deer, the latter obviously having less cause for complaint. The dialogue form is well represented in these poems, the participants being a hunter and either a deer or a gun. Generally the effect is of a relatively superficial literary device, however, not carrying as much impact as the conversations in OnC. Several poems refer to hunting in former times as part of a lament for the loss of a hunting companion. Occasionally place-names are a feature. No quotations are offered because although themes concur with those of OnC the effect produced is so removed as to produce little basis for selection.

\textbf{Elegy and Hunting and Duncan Bàn Macintyre}

The poetry of Duncan Bàn Macintyre is composed with a sensitivity to nature that enables the listener to envisage the mountains and glens

\textsuperscript{76} op. cit. p.180.  
\textsuperscript{77} References to watercress are frequent in Celtic poetry, although little in evidence in OnC; see below, p.365.  
\textsuperscript{78} Sinton, Poetry of Badenoch.
described. He depicts a busier landscape than Domhnall Mac Phionnaigh's, giving the ground many textures and adorning it with assorted vegetation and animals. But whether it is Coire a' Cheathaich, Beinn Dòbhrain or Creag Ghuanach the curve of the land may be envisaged, with the hind pointing her nose on the skyline or the stag lifting his antlers as he bellows.

\[
\text{Eilid bhuigeann, bhailgeann, bhallach,} \quad \text{T15 quoted}
\]
\[
\text{Oghar eangach uchd ri h-àrd,}
\text{Trògbhalach thu, biorach, sgiamhach,}
\text{Crònanach, ceann-riabhach, dearg.}
\]

Donnchadh Bàn gives:

\[
'S \text{ i an eilid bheag bhinneach}
Bu ghuiniche sraonadh,
Le cuinnean geur biorach
A' sireadh na gaoithe.79
\]

('Tis the little hind of taper head / was acutest in
snuffing / with her keen, sharp nostril / exploring the wind).

He also refers to the virtue of deer, the symbol of guiltlessness again:

\[
\text{Leannan an fhir léith}
\text{As farumaiche ceum,}
\text{Nach larraidh a' chléir}
\text{A thoirit pòsaidh dhaibh.80}
\]

(This mate of the grey lad / that has the sprightliest
step / and would not request / the clergy to marry them).

Both poets evince a long-standing, indeed life-long, love of their landscapes and the hunting there:

\[
\text{Creag mo chroidhe a' Chreag Ghuanach,} \quad \text{M2 quoted}
\text{Creag an d'huaradh treis dha m' àrach,}
\text{Creag nan damh 's nan aighean siubhlach,}
\text{Creag eaggach, ùlar, theurach.}
\]

Donnchadh Bàn says of the country around Beinn Dòbhrain:

\[
\text{Phuair mi greis am àrach}
\text{Air áirighnean a b'aithne dhomh.81}
\]

(I earned my living for a time / at shielings that I knew
full well).

Another elegiac usage of the motif occurs in 'Cumha Coire a'
Cheathaich:

---

79 'Moladh Beinn Dòbhrain', ODB lines 2814-17. For this and the following quotations from ODB the translations are Angus Macleod's.
Is duilich leam an càradh
Th' air coire gorm an fhàsaich,
An robh mi greis am àrach. 

(I grieve at the condition / of the green corrie of pasture / where I enjoyed my living for a time).

Common subject matter generates similar use of epithets. Domhnall Mac Fhionnlaigh says of Ben Alder:

Beir soraídh gu Beinn Allair uam,
Uaidh's i fuaír urram nam beann;
Dhà thaobh Loch Eireachd an fhéidh,
Uaidh's miannach leam féin bhith ann.

In Donnchadh Bàn's world it is Beinn Dòbhrain which receives the accolade:

An t-urram thar gach beinn
Aig Beinn Dòbhrain;
De na chunnaic mi fo'n ghréin
'S i bu bhóidiche leam.

(Precedence over every ben / has Ben Dobhrain / of all I have seen beneath the sun / I deem her loveliest).

Whereas Domhnall gives the Comhachag a gloomy brow (A eòin bhig na mala gruamaich) Donnchadh applies the description to a fringe of watercress:

Tha mala ghruamaich de'n bhiolair uaine
Mu'n h-uile fuaran a th'anns an fhonn.

(Around each spring that is in the region / is a sombre brow of green watercress).

Domhnall's phrase 'mala gruamaich' is echoed, deliberately or not, by Donnchadh; however, the latter's employment of it attaches it to a well-known motif. In Scottish and Irish poetry watercress represents an ideal food, which, with water, is all the nourishment required by the wanderer, whether human or deer. It is referred to in this way in the 'Song of the Witch of Beinn Bhreac' (See Chapter 1, p.7) and makes frequent appearances in Buile Suibhne. In the following quotation from Buile Suibhne it is described rather like Donnchadh Bàn's spring:

85 Watercress is mentioned by An Ciaran Mabach above, see p.363. In OnC it is referred to at E27, but not in the manuscripts.
A dhroighnéin, a dhealgnacháin
a áirneacháin duibh,
a bhiorar, a bharrghlasáin,
do bhrú thobair luin.86

(Blackthorn, little thorny one / black little sloe-bush /
watercress, little green-topped one / on the brink of the
blackbird's well).87

The pertinence of a much later verse may excuse a brief deviation to
the 20th century; Sorley Maclean gives his own combination of the
elements mentioned, in a picture of deer eating watercress around a
spring, which is embedded like an eye in the hillside:

Tha cluaineag ann aniomall sléibh
far an ith na féidh lus biolaire;
'na taobh suil uisge mhóir réidh,
fuaran leugach cuimir ann.

(At the far edge of a mountain there is a green nook
where the deer eat watercress,
in its side a great unruffled eye of water
a shape ly jewel-like spring).88

The title of one of Macintyre's poems is used in the version
of OnC published in the Canadian periodical Mac Talla.89 Here OnC is
presented as two poems, one of them beginning "'S mi 'm shuidh' air
sithbrugh nam beann" and entitled 'Cead deireannach nam Beann'.
Donnchadh Bán's poem of this name has a number of topical
correspondences with OnC: praise of deer and nature, old age and a
past mode of life, and farewell to the landscape. However, the
lament is not just for the depredations wrought by the passage of
time but also, and chiefly, for the disappearance of the deer which
have been replaced by sheep. This marks a contrast with OnC.
Domhnall Mac Fhionnláigh preserves his landscape of Lochaber by his
summoning up of the mountains, by the immediacy of his vision.
Donnchadh admits that things are not what they used to be; now it
must be only in his recollections that he walks in the hills while
the mountainy deer are bellowing and sniffing the air. He uses the
elegiac convention, the 'sweetest sounds' motif, with reference to a
herd of deer attended by some black-cocks:

86 Buile Suibhne, p.64.
with the poet's own translation.
89 Mac Talla, vol.8 (Sydney, N.S., 1900).
The healthy aspect of life in the beloved hills enhances the fond memories:

An t-uisge glan 's am fàile
Th' air mullach nam beann àrda
Chuidich e gu fàs mi,
'S e rinn domh sláint is fallaineachd.\textsuperscript{91}

(and the clean rain and the air / on the peaks of the high mountains / helped me to grow and gave me / robustness and vitality)

Water is as vital in OnC, if less prosaic:

Óla idh mi 's cha tréig mi h-ionnachd,
Uaithne cha tèid mi air siollan,
Si muime 'n fhéidh do-mi 'n langan
Am buinne deas raighead fionnfhuar.\textsuperscript{92} T13 quoted

For both poets the absence of hunting companions is a source of regret:

'S fhada leam o sgùir mi 'n fhíadhach
'S nach bheil ann ach ceòd de 'n bhuidheann
Leis am bu bhinn guth nan gadhar
'S o 'm faigheamaid òl gun bhruiddhinn. T45 quoted

From 'Cead Deireannach nam Beann':

Bha mi 'n dé 'san aonach
'S bha smaointean mòr air m'aire-sa,
Nach robh luchd-gaoil a b'òbaist
Bhith siubhal fàsach mar rium ann.\textsuperscript{93}

(Yesterday I was on the moor / and grave reflections haunted me / that absent were the well-loved friends / who used to roam the waste with me).

Some similarity of themes may not be surprising; with a two century gap, Domhnall Mac Fhionnlaigh and Donnchadh Bàn spent years in the hunting of deer in comparable surroundings. Both had knowledge of traditional poems and stories.\textsuperscript{94} The fact that Donnchadh's phraseology is sometimes reminiscent of OnC does not necessarily

\textsuperscript{90} Op.cit. lines 5526-27.
\textsuperscript{91} Op.cit. lines 5532-35.
\textsuperscript{92} The substantial motif of water in OnC cannot be accommodated in this thesis but I hope to discuss it elsewhere.
\textsuperscript{93} Op.cit. lines 5576-79.
\textsuperscript{94} Macintyre has few allusions to earlier material although there is a mention of Caoilte and Cù Chulainn, op.cit. line 3034.
mean that it is imitative. If his words call to mind parallels in OnC this certainly adds resonance to his poetry, but he may be understood to be using "rhetorical techniques that employ an inherited store of imagery".\footnote{John MacInnes, "The Oral Tradition in Scottish Gaelic Poetry", \textit{Scottish Studies}, vol.12, p.40.} This is, of course, what Domhnall Mac Fhionnlaigh himself was doing, as we have noticed particularly with regard to the Fenian ballads.

**Old Age**

Outside a narrative context, as, for example, the case of Oisean, in the earlier poetry discussed, this may not be considered a very favourable subject for poetic composition. Domhnall Mac Fhionnlaigh personifies old age and turns its encroachments into a battle to be fought. Donnchadh Bán has some lines on the matter in 'Cead Deireannach nam Beann' where he describes the usual ill-effects of ageing. However, John MacCodrum, in his poem 'Òran na h-Aoise' uses a pattern which resembles that of Domhnall Mac Fhionnlaigh. He starts by bemoaning the aged condition and then gives it a persona, thereby - since he is not describing a real person -increasing the possibilities of invective without being thought insensitive:

\begin{quote}
Tha gaisgeach nach tiom
Oirnn ag cogadh 's a'strith
Nach urrainn a chaoidh bhith réidh ruinn,
O's treas' e na sinn
Théid leis-san ar claoi'dh
'S cha teasaír g aon ni fo'n ghréin sinn.\footnote{W. Matheson, \textit{Songs of John MacCodrum}, lines 187-92; the translations which follow are Matheson's.}
\end{quote}

(A champion undaunted is warring and striving against us, who can never be at peace with us; since he is stronger than we, we shall be worn down by him, and nothing under the sun can succour us).

In OnC the hunter first of all commiserates with his hound about the restrictions the advancing years impose on mobility, and then Old Age takes the form of an alter ego and an aggressor:

\begin{quote}
'S iomadh laoch a b'fhèàrr na thusa
Chuir mi gu tuisleadh 's gu h-ànbhainn',
'S a dh'fhaobhaich mi as a sheasamh
Tar éis e bhith na fhleasgach calma.
\end{quote}
The figure of Old Age is described in these terms by MacCodrum:

Aois ghreannach bhochd thruagh,
'S miosa sealladh is tuar,
Mhaol sgallach gun ghruaig gun deudach,
Roc-aodannach cruaidh
Preasach craicneach lom fuar
Crùbach crotch gun ghluaisad ceuma;
Thusa lobhair na spioc
Bheir na subhailcean dhinn
Có 's an domhain le 'm binn do shèise?
Aois ghliogach gun chàil,
'S tu 's miosa na 'm bàs,
'S tu tric a rinn tràill de 'n treunfhear.\(^{97}\)

(Cross, sickly, miserable old age / of worst appearance and hue / bare and bald, without hair or teeth / wrinkled-faced, hard / furrowed, baggy-skinned, lean and cold / lame and bent, unable to move a step / thou leper of meanness / that deprives us of the virtues / who in the world thinks thy melody sweet? / Shaky, zestless old age / thou art worse than death / oft di'st thou make a slave of the mighty man).

In their depictions of saggy, decrepit Old Age both poets use the image of the leper:

Aois phealleudannach odhar
Bhios gu roinnach, bodhar, éitigh,
Creud fan ligfinn leat a lobhair
Mo bhogha 'bhlreith dhiom air éiginn.

The leper as unspeakable outsider may be understood as a remnant of medieval anxieties; as a conventional metaphor I have so far encountered it nowhere else.\(^{98}\)

More dialogue

John MacCodrum's poem on the virtues and vices of whisky uses the dialogue form but the speakers are not characterised, they are ciphers or mouthpieces presenting the debate. The dialogue is at once more satirical and more abstract than those in OnC. Personification within a dialogue is more likely to give a framework inviting comparison.

In 'Cumha Coire an Easa' by Am Piobaire Dall, John Mackay, there are some verses of conversation between the corrie and the poet. As the poet is leaving a well-loved district on account of the death of his patron an elegiac tone suffuses the landscape descriptions. Hunting sounds are fondly remembered:

\(^{98}\) The usage is not the same but this is reminiscent of the leprosy inflicted on Cresseid as a punishment; see above, p.347.
'S mi aig bràigh an Alltain Riabhach
'G iarraidh gu Bealach na Fèitheadh,
Far am bi damh dearg na cròic
     Mu Fhèill an Ròid re dol san dàmhair.

'G iarraidh gu bealach an easa
Far an tric a sgapadh fudar,
Far am bi miolchoin an teirbhirt,
     Cur mac na h-èilde gu dhùlan.99

(I am on the bank of Alltan Riabhach / wanting across to
Bealach na Fèitheadh / where the russet stag of the
antlers / around Rood-day makes for the rutting).

(Wanting across to the waterfall gully / where lead-
shot was often scattered / where greyhounds are incited /
the son of the hind held by their baying).

The artifice of giving the corrie a taste for music facilitates the
request for the poet to show his skill on the pipes. By way of
flattery the 'sweetest sound' is invoked:

'S sud ceòl as binne thraigh
Chualas bho linn Mhic Aoidh Domhnaill;
'S grathann a bhios e nam chluasan
     Am fuaim bha aig tabhann do mheòiribh.100

(That is the music of the sweetest sadness / heard
since the time of Mac Aoidh, Domhnall / for a while yet
in my ears it will linger / that swift playing from
your fingers).

Dialogue involving a personified feature of the landscape is a
device also used by William Ross. 'Comhradh eadar am Bard agus
Blath-Bheinn' is a reflection on past times. The poem starts from
the conventional, musing approach of the 'ubiquitous opener':

Mi bhi 'm shuidh' air tulaich fhaoin,
'G am bharc 's a smaointeach fa dheòidh,
'Cluain an domhain, truagh an dàil,
     Gur cobhartach do'n bhàs gach feòl.101

(I sit on a lonely height / gazing, musing, the lay
saith / the world's guile, life's poor respite /
all flesh - are a prey to death).

The Comhachag is encouraged to tell of her experiences:

Is innis duinne gun euradh
Gach aon sgéula d'a bheil agad.

And the mountain is asked for the old stories:

99 Gàir nan Clàrsach, p.208; the translations are Meg Bateman's.
101 Calder, William Ross, p.2. The somewhat old-fashioned
translations of Ross are by Calder.
Concerning what he sees around him the poet uses the motif suggested as a refrain for OnC which seems to have become conventional:\(^{103}\)

\[ O \text{ 's ionmhainn leam na chi mi thall!} \]

There is a poem by William Ross which may not quite belong here as it does not contain dialogue, but it is an elegiac reflection on a landscape which produces a rather different effect from the treatment of this theme in OnC. It offers a farewell in terms and details quite comparable to OnC:\(^{105}\)

\[ \text{Beir mo shoraídh thir a' mhonaidh} \\
\text{A's nam beann corrach, àrda,} \\
\text{Frith nan gaisgeach 's nan sonn gasda,} \\
\text{Tir Chlann-Eachuinn Gheàrrloch,} \\
\text{Gur uallach, eangach, an damh breangach,} \\
\text{Suas tro' ghleannan fàsaisich;} \\
\text{Bi'dh cuach 'sa' bhadan seinn a leadainn} \\
\text{Moch 'sa 'mhadainn Mhàigh.} \]

\[ \text{(Take my farewell to the land of the hill / and the steep and lofty mountains / domain of the champions and fine heroes / land of clan Hector's Gairloch / lively, nimble the snarling stag / up through the glens he speeds / the cuckoo in the thicket sings his tune / early on a morning in May).} \]

The moor with its hills and deer is very like a picture from OnC but the tone is more effusive:

\[ \text{Ged a tha mi siubhal Galldachd,} \\
\text{Cha n-ann tha mo mhi-chuis;} \\
\text{Ged tha mi 'n taobh-s', 'sann tha mo rùin} \\
\text{Do'n chomuinn chiùin nach priobal.} \]

\[ \text{(Although I'm traversing the Lowlands / my attention is not here / although I'm in this place, my affections are with / the company that's easy and giving).} \]

\(^{102}\) Ibid.  
\(^{103}\) With reference to this line see also Chapter 1, pp.16-17, Chapter 7, p.305, Chapter 8, p.351.  
\(^{104}\) Calder, William Ross, p.2.  
\(^{105}\) For similar description of deer see Chapter 4, ML15.  
\(^{106}\) 'Moladh a' bhàird air a thir fein', op.cit. p.68  
\(^{107}\) This translation and the next are my own.  
This is very personal compared with the views expressed in OnC, even when wishes or preferences are stated:

Beir soraidh gu Beinn Allair uam,  
Uaidh's i fuair urram nam beann;  
Dhà thaobh Loch Eiricht an fhéidh,  
Uaidh's miannach leam féin bhith ann.

Domhnall Mac Fhionnlaigh does not really lament what is past or distant; he speaks of it in such a way as to establish its identity, which is the important thing to him. The 18th-century poetry looked at above seems to be the product of social and political change. It carries its frame of reference with it. Even the work of Duncan Bàn MacIntyre, with its thematic similarities to OnC, gives the impression of being more fixed in its time. Of course, OnC has references to historical individuals and circumstances which relate it to a particular era. But it is set apart and taken out of a temporal context by its ostensible simplicity. In the words of John MacInnes: "The observation in it is a kind of obsessive regard, which at times finds expression in a curious understatement."  

The present study shows that there is considerable variation between the source texts of Óran na Comhachaig. A substantial amount of this variation is related to oral transmission, within which fluctuations of verse order have had an important influence. It has been demonstrated that changes in verse order have resulted in textual shift, textual loss and variability in interpretation.

The high degree of metrical unanimity between the sources is a significant indicator of the unitary origin of these sources. This unanimity includes the occasional intrusion of metrical change in a sequence of stanzas; these different cadences may sometimes be broadly classed as óglachas of dán and other times fall into the miscellaneous category. In the latter case some other metrical feature is always present and in both cases the metrical change appears to have been a feature of the archetype.

The theory of unitary origin is supported by two other factors: one is the distribution of stanzas, which suggests fragmentation and loss of material, and the other is the variations in verse order which often reveal the way loss has occurred.

As regards conventions of theme and style Óran na Comhachaig's is in the mainstream of Celtic poetry and also bears comparison with literature from further afield. There are evident narrative and lyrical parallels with the Fenian ballads. However, the use of convention and allusion contributes to the composition of a poem in some ways unlike the poetry from which it gains resonance. Óran na Comhachaig is set apart: it is indeed a reflection of the world Domhnall Mac Fhionnlraighe is picturing for us, a world detached from the passage of time, a world in clear focus, preserved in the mind's eye. It may be the world Iain Crichton Smith is considering in his poem 'Deer on the high hills':

"for stars are starry and the rain is rainy,
the stone is stony and the sun is sunny,
the deer step out in isolated air."

Although OnC does not contain what is generally called a story it does have the distinguishing qualities of the storytelling practice.
so keenly observed by Walter Benjamin.\textsuperscript{110} The storyteller has a
direct relationship with his audience but he does not intrude his
opinion upon what he tells. He sets forth his material to speak for
itself. This characteristic of storytelling is also stressed by
Kenneth Jackson.\textsuperscript{111} The understanding of a story is contained within
the individual listener's assimilation of it. Part of its strength
lies in its isolation from analysis and its capacity for
interpretation according to the perception of the listener. A story
does not need to explain itself. "It resembles the seeds of grain
which have lain for centuries in the chambers of the pyramids, shut
up air-tight, and have retained their germinative power to this
day."\textsuperscript{112}

\textit{OnC} may be a product of the 16th century and yet it stands
outside history. It speaks to us today as much as to its earlier
audiences, although we may not go hunting and certainly not with
bows and arrows. "It is simultaneously mundane, vibrant, unmystical
and limitless."\textsuperscript{113} It "recalls the epoch in which man could believe
himself to be in harmony with nature".\textsuperscript{114}

\textsuperscript{110} Benjamin, 'The Storyteller', pp. 81-107.
\textsuperscript{111} K.H. Jackson, The International Popular Tale and Early Welsh
\textsuperscript{112} Benjamin, 'The Storyteller', p. 90.
\textsuperscript{113} MacInnes, 'The Gaelic Literary Tradition', p. 62.
\textsuperscript{114} Benjamin, 'The Storyteller', p. 96.
Verse numbers are given for each reference to an individual; numbers in brackets indicate a likelihood of identity rather than a specific naming.

(References taken from The Clan Donald by A.J. and A.MacDonald may be treated with caution as its report of the Keppoch MacDonalds has been found unreliable.)

Chiefs of Keppoch

Alasdair Carrach

Traditionally regarded as the first chief of the MacDonalds of Keppoch. There was some conflating of his identity with that of Alexander de Yle, Lord of Lochaber, and also an awareness of a chronological problem, until Andrew B. Macewen demonstrated that Alasdair Carrach was the son of Alexander de Yle. He was probably illegitimate and born about 1390. We know that he fought at the Battle of Harlaw. At Inverlochy in 1431 he supported Donald Balloch and helped rout the royal forces led by the Earl of Mar who had authority to quell northern unrest. His reputation within the clan and established him as a leader worthy to be eulogised as its progenitor. It seems likely then, that it was not Alasdair but his father whose freebooting activities caused problems to the crown in 1398/9.

Aonghas na Fearste

Second chief of Keppoch. He was born c.1415-20. He was described as the son of Alasdair Carrach in a charter of 1463, although A.Maclean Sinclair reports doubts about his legitimacy. He lived at Fersit and tradition has it that he built a mill on a small tributary of Allt Laire at the north end of An Dubh Lochan.

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1 See Lord Lyon Court Report, 27 August 1990.
2 Norman H. MacDonald, The Clan Ranald of Lochaber, p.3
3 Josephine MacDonell, ...the MacDonells of Keppoch and Gargavoch, p.10.
6 J.R.N.Macphail, Highland Papers, vol.4, p.16.
7 Notes & Queries of the Society of West Highland and Island Historical Research, no.14 (Dec.1980), pp.7-12.
10 op.cit. p.209.
11 Celtic Review vol.9, p.49

The Clan Ranald of Lochaber, p.3.
**Alasdair nan Gleann**
E36 E40
Fifth chief, briefly; killed 1498.
Second son of Aonghas na Fearsaid whose first son, Domhnall was killed in 1497. His son Iain Aluin succeeded but was deposed after about a year. Alasdair, designated nan Gleann, was elected chief. His wife was connected through her mother to the MacDonalds of Dunivaig and the Glens of Antrim.

**Raghnall Mór**
T31(>34) ML39 MN39 E39
Seventh chief of Keppoch from c.1513-1547. He was the son of Domhnall Glas and grandson of Alasdair nan Gleann. His name gives the patronymic of the Keppoch chiefs: Mac Mhic Raghnall. He married a daughter of Mackintosh, and according to ML and MN his wife was called Anna. He was involved in the feud between Clan Ranald of Moidart and the Frasers over John Moideartach's claim as chief of Clan Ranald. This was in the area of jurisdiction of the Earl of Huntly, who raised forces to restore order and install the Fraser candidate for the chiefship. The dispute culminated in 1544 at Blàr na Leine, where the Fraser side sustained great losses, inflicted under the leadership of Raghnall Mór and Ewan Allanson. Both of these had given bonds of manrent to the Earl of Huntly. After two years they were captured by William Mackintosh, captain of Clan Chattan. They were tried for treason and beheaded at Elgin, to the dismay of Raghnall's wife, who according to tradition, cursed the descendants of her brother William.

**Alasdair Bothloinne**
(M48) (T34, 35) ML39(>43) MN39(>43) (E37-38, 42)
He was son of Raghnall Mór and was eighth chief from 1547-1554. He was wounded in a skirmish with the Camerons and then reportedly went to Kingussie to seek medical assistance but died there, possibly of poison. According to Norman H. MacDonald Alasdair's wounded foot prevented him from pursuing the defeated enemy, a task undertaken by his brother Iain Dubh. Somerled Macmillan and D.C. Macpherson disagree with this, believing that Alasdair was not in the combat at all that day. However, the fight was at Bothloinne (Bó-loin) in Glen Roy and this provides Alasdair's sobriquet.

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11 op. cit. p. 6.
12 op. cit. p. 7.
13 op. cit. p. 8.
14 Spalding Club Miscellany, vol.4.
15 ibid.
17 Celtic Review, vol.9, p.50.
Other names

Alasdair mac Ailein
-----E41 only, q.v.

Anna
-----ML39 MN39 wife of Raghnall Mór, q.v.

Chattan, Clan
-----(T32) ML40 MN40 E42
Apart from the ill-feeling between the Mackintoshes and the Keppoch MacDonalns noted above (see Raghnall Mór) the two clans were always at risk of conflict because Mackintosh had in 1476 obtained a crown charter to land in Brae Lochaber traditionally held by MacDonald of Keppoch.20

Conn
-----E36 only, q.v.

Donnail/Donnghail
-----M1 T1 ML1 MN1 E1 E6
D.C. Macpherson reports a Donnail living in Fersit before the time of Alasdair Carrach.21 Donnail was an ancestor of Domhnall Ruadh Beag, a renowned Bowman of the Keppoch MacDonalns in the late 15th century, whose descendants, Clann Mhic Gille Mhantrach, were still in the Braes in the 19th century. The name, which is different from Domhnall, has also the spellings Donndail and Donnshuil. Donnghail is used in the expository versions of this thesis and Donnail, being closer to an English spelling, in the English translation.

Fergus Mór mac Eirc
-----E5 only, q.v.

Torradan
-----E5 only, q.v.

20 Confirmed in 1562 by Mary Queen of Scots, see Gregory, History of the Western Islands and Highlands of Scotland, p.64.
21 see above, n.19.
Index to Place-names

Names are listed in English or Gaelic, usually according to which language is used on Ordnance Survey maps. Verse numbers are given for each entry, with brackets showing tentative identification. Where a place is mentioned in only one source an annotation will generally be found in the chapter relating to that source.

Many of the place-names are shown on the accompanying maps by name but it has not been possible to mark all of them in this way. Therefore [numbers] in square brackets are used to refer to some locations on map B, p.385, which represents the poem's centre of focus. Map A, p.384, shows a wider area of reference. On both maps the place-names mentioned in OnC are marked in red; those not mentioned are marked in black.

Alder, Ben
-----M14 E51
Remote hill between Lochaber and the Cairngorms, east of Strath Ossian and west of Loch Ericht; the highest hill in the district.

Ardchattan
-----T32
On north side of Loch Etive, there is a priory here.

Beinn nan Craobh
-----M13

Bealach nan Sgór
-----M13

Beinn Bheag
-----M19 T26 E24 E57
Rankin reports that local sources he talked to knew this as a name for Meall Móir, north-west of Creag Ghuanach.¹

Beinn na Craige
-----E24
Alternative name for Creag Ghuanach.²

Beinn nan Leac
-----T28
See Meall na Lice

Bhric, Beinn a'
Situated between Creag Ghuanach and the Blackwater Reservoir.

Bidein nan Dos
-----E48
Not located

Bothloinne
Not specified in poem but known as the place in Glen Roy where Alasdair son of Raghnall Mór was wounded. It is shown on maps as Bó­ loin, a little west of Bohuntine.

Ceann na Creige
-----T26
cf. Beinn na Creige, E24

Cillúnain
-----T35 q.v.

¹ R Place-names, p.116.
² ibid.
Cill Iusaich
-----ML43 MN43
for Kingussie q.v.

[4] Claurigh, Coire
-----M10

[5] Cloiche, Beinn na
-----M16

[6] Chruach, A'
-----M12 E45
This may be the hill of the same name between Blackwater Reservoir
and Loch Laidon, but another possibility is Cruach Innse to the east
of Lairig Leacach and south of Beinn Clionaig; John Thomson marks
this hill simply "Cruach" and it is close to the geographic axis of
the poem.
Both hills are visible from Creag Ghuanach. George Campbell Hay, who
knew this locality well, also mentions "Cruach" in his poem 'Age and
the Hunter', see Chapter 1, p.16.

[7] Creagach, Coire
-----T29 E49
South of north east end of Loch Ossian and north of Carn Dearg. To
the east lies Mamm Bán, hence Coire Creagach a Mhàlm.

Cruachan
-----T28 ML44 MN44
Mountain near Loch Etive.

[8] Dearg, Carn
-----M17 T30 ML46 MN46 E46
This is Carn Dearg to the south-west of Ben Nevis, as Rankin states.3
From Creag Ghuanach it appears to be at the foot of Ben Nevis.

Dearg, Coire
-----M11 q.v. (E47)

Dubh-lochan
-----E45 q.v.

Eadarloch
-----E18 (M13)
see also Chapter 1, p.2.

Eallair, Beinn
see Alder, Ben

Eilde, Coire
-----M18 q.v.

Ericht, Loch
-----M14 E51
Slanting south-westerly from near Dalwhinnie.

Féith, Beinn nam
-----ML39 MN39
Mentioned as the place where Alasdair Bothloinne was killed, (see
Proper Names Index). We know he was wounded in Glen Roy but I can
find no Beinn nam Féith in this area although there are places with
names incorporating 'feith', e.g. Feith Bhrunachain. However, since
Alasdair died at Kingussie, possibly from poison, perhaps this is the
area to look. South of the River Spey is Féith Mhòr but no Beinn nam
Féith. Whichever region it is in, it may have an alternative name on
the map; or it may be the result of some distortion in oral
transmission. Robert Rankin does not mention it.

Fersit
-----M47 T6 T8 ML6 MN6 E8 E10
Beside the River Tréig, near Glen Spean. An Fhearsaid means the
spindle, usually indicating something like a sandbank and near Fersit
were gravelpits. Fearsaid Riabhach (brindled sandspit) to the east of
the Tréig, is named in contrast to Fearsaid Mhòr, which lies near An
Dubh Lochan between Eadarloch and Inverlair.

3 op.cit. p.118.
Fhinn, Coire
--- M15
Unidentified.
--- E50
Not an uncommon name but very likely a hill east of Loch Tréig.

Ghuanach, Creag
--- M1 2 3 6 8
T10 11 16 27 32 33
ML/MN8 9 40 41 47 48
E11 12 26 27 42 44
A little west of southern end of Loch Tréig, height 618m. Commands fine views past Ben Nevis to the Ardgour hills and south to Buachaile Etive Mór, Meall a' Bhùiridh and a' Chruach.

There is a view, supported by W.J. Watson, that it should be spelt Uanach. A burn called Allt Uanach flows into the loch near this hill. Angus Matheson found it on an old 6" Ordnance Survey map although it is not on the 1" nor on the new series 1:50000 scale. As there is no difference in pronunciation in Uanach and Ghuanach when following Creag it is understandable that confusion has arisen. The spelling Uanach also accords with the most favoured derivation of the name, which is the last of the following suggestions:

1) guanach    Dwelly translates "giddy, light" and quotes "on the nodding rock".
               Macbain translates similarly.

2) uanach     Dwelly gives "abounding in lambs".

3) omhanah    Dwelly, "frothy, abounding in milk"
               Macbain, "omhan, othan - froth of milk or whey".

Colin Livingstone suggests that Creag Uanach and Onich share the derivation 'omhanach'. He describes how in a south-west gale the waves crash onto Onich beach in a great foam. As applied to the hill 'frothy' would be a reference to its fertile slopes. Walter MacFarlane, in his description of Loch Tréig writes, "There is abundance of milk in this Logh in summer harvest and spring tyme. There is no corne lands in this Logh but onlie guid for pasture and feeding of guids." 'Omhanach' seems likely to refer to the quality of a drink known to Martin Martin: "Oon, which in English signifies froath, is a Dish used by several of the islanders and some on the opposite mainland, in time of scarcity, when they want Bread. It is made in the following manner. A quantity of Milk or Whey is boyld in a Pot, and then it is wrought up to the mouth of the Pot with a long stick of wood, having a Cross at the lower end; it is turned about like the stick for making Chocolate and being thus made it is supped with Spoons, it is made up five or six times, in the same manner, and the last is always reckoned best." Anne Grant puts forward yet another interpretation of the name. She entitles her translation of the poem "Creag Guanich or Rock of Security as the name implies". She offers no explanation for this.

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5 AM, p.33.
9 Grant, Superstitions of the Highlanders, vol.1, p.263.
Innse

---- T6 E10

Several possibilities:

a. Insh south of the River Spean, opposite Keppoch on the north bank.

b. Innis Lagach near the Allt Leachdach which flows into the Spean.

c. Low lying ground near Sgurr Innse and Cruach. This is nearer to Creag Ghuanach.

(see Cruach Innse under Chruach).

Invermearan

---- E22 q.v.

Kingussie

---- M48 ML43 MN43 E37

Although this is in Badenoch, distant from Lochaber, it is associated with Alasdair Bothloinne, q.v. Proper Names Index.

Lairé, Allt

---- M47 T8 ML6 MN6 E8

To the west of Loch Tréig, flowing north-east into the River Spean.

Labhair, Uisce

---- M16 q.v.

Leamhna, Uisce

---- E52 q.v.

[10] Leitir Dhubb

---- M9 T29 ML45 MN45 E50

A stretch of land south-east of Loch Ossian.


---- T29 E49 (ML/MN45)

Quoted as a' Mhàaim. South east of eastern end of Loch Ossian.

Màn nan Leac

---- ML44 MN44

Probably Meall na Lice, q.v. John Thomson has Meal na Leachd.

Màol-cheann Dearg

---- M18 q.v.

Meall nan Leac

---- M12 E45

Meall na Lice, q.v.

Meall na Lice

---- (M12 T28 ML44 MN44 E45)

South of western end of Loch Ossian and visible from Creag Ghuanach, although the loch is not.

Meall Mòr

see Beinn Bheag

Meall nan os

---- ML/MN49

see note at ML49

Mhìltich, Coire a' 

---- ML/MN49

Not located but see note ML49

Nevis, Ben / Nibheis, Beinn

---- M17 T30 ML46 MN46 E46

Clearly visible from Creag Ghuanach.

Spelling in these sources variable but elsewhere usually Nibheis or Nimheis. Even on old maps I have not found the 'n' omitted (cf. Timothy Pont "Bin Neves", Herman Moll "Bin Novesh", "Glen Nevish"). However, after 'beinn', spelling the next word with initial 'n' makes little difference in pronunciation.

Ratha (Rath), Coire

---- M12 T28 ML8/44 MN8/44

West of Lairig Leacach, south of Stob Choire Claurigh, this is where the Abhainn Rath rises.

Riabhach, Coire

--- M11 q.v.

Riabhach a Mhàim, Coire

--- ML45 MN45

Probably not the same place as the previous entry, as the focus in ML/MN is not on Glen Nevis but on the Strath Ossian area. However, I have not found a Coire Riabhach here although there is a Luib Riabhach south of Loch Ossian and west of Leitir Dhubh. This is near to Meall na Lice (q.v.), mentioned in the previous stanza. So a Mhàim may refer to Meall na Lice or perhaps to Màn Màn south east of Loch Ossian. Just to the south of Màn Màn is a Coire called Eigheach which might possibly have become confused with Riabhach.

Sgànnan Ruadh

--- ML/MN47

see note at ML47

Sgòr Choinnich

--- ML5 (ML49 MN49)

Slightly south east of the eastern end of Loch Ossian.

[13] Sgùrr Chòinnich Beag/Mòr

--- (ML49 MN49) E48

East of Ben Nevis.

Sgùrra Lith

--- E48 q.v.

Sheasgach, Beinn

--- E22 q.v.

Sheilich, Creag

--- E56 q.v.

Tentative location.

Snaige, Coire na

--- E24 cf. T26

There is no name like this in the Loch Tréig area. Rankin points out Allt an t-Snaige in Glen Nevis near Màn Beag, south of the water of Nevis.\(^{11}\) This is not near Creag Ghuanch, the surmised focus of the stanza. 'Snag' meaning 'tap' or 'knock' is feminine, but masculine when it means 'woodpecker'. The feminine in Coire na Snaige may be consistent with normal use and refer to striking a light, rather than to a woodpecker. Donald Mackenzie mentions 'snag' used this way in a Skye version of the story about a glaistig comparing her rapid travel with the time taken to light a fire.\(^{12}\) She starts from the height of Sgùrr Eige and when the flint is struck she is on the Cuillins.\(^{13}\) In the Lochaber telling of this story (see Chapter 1, p.7), she sets off from Uiriallach, which is not apparent on maps but 'uiriollach' is a high rock and thus a good viewpoint like Sgùrr Eige. She is in Coire na Snaige when the spark catches.\(^{14}\) Rankin was told of a Coire na Snaige on Garbh Bheinn south of Kinlochleven, but neither he nor I have found it.\(^{15}\) The name may be specific to local folklore while general use prefers an alternative.

[14]Srath Ossian

--- M12 T28 ML44/45 MN44/45 E45

Running from north to south towards the north east end of Loch Ossian.

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\(^{11}\) R Place-names, p.116.

\(^{12}\) Scottish Folk-Lore, p.180 'the Glaistig "said that when Mac Ian made the first clink (snag) while striking the flint to light the fire... she was on the Coolin Hills.."

\(^{13}\) Ibid.

\(^{14}\) MacDougall and Calder, Folktales and Fairy Lore, p.237.

\(^{15}\) R Place-names, p.116.
Sròn

--- M41 T1 ML/MN1 E1

Rankin reports that local understanding in the 1930s and '40s was of a shoulder of Creag Ghuanach known as "An t-Sròn". Other possibilities are Sròn na Garbh-bheinne, a little to the south east of Loch Tréig and Sròn na Gall slightly further west.

[15] Taigh nam Fleadh

--- M51 ML37 MN37 E43

Taigh nam Fleadh was the building on the crannog in the Eadarloch to the north of Loch Tréig where the Keppoch MacDonalds held meetings and feasts and which may have been used as a shelter for travellers. See also Chapter 1, p.3.

Tréig, Loch

--- M1 M28 T27 ML/MN18 ML/MN38 ML/MN47 E44 E54

A particularly deep, wind-swept loch with steeply descending sides in a wild, uninhabited part of Lochaber. It runs from north to south with Fersit at its northern point. An Dèabhadh was the area between Loch Tréig and An t-Eadarloch. See also Chapter 1, p.2.

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16 op.cit. p.113.