

“We Would Know Again the Fields . . .”:
The Rural Poetry of Elizabeth Campbell, Jane
Stevenson, and Mary Macpherson

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Most standard anthologies of Victorian poetry have included almost nothing written by the nine-tenths of nineteenth-century Britons who were not middle- or upper-class. If one superimposed this pattern on collateral scarcities of writings by non-English non-men, one could remove the “almost.” This article is about Victorian Scottish working-class women poets.¹

In this article I survey part of the vastly different terrain of Victorian “people’s poetry” and characterize it as an interesting and valuable alternative area of study, whose attractions and virtues vary somewhat from those of the poetry of better-known Victorian writers. The women I will consider were not—indeed could not have been—the skilled-craft “labor aristocrats” who led the Chartist movement. But their life situations as farm workers, servants, nurses, textile factory workers, seamstresses, and raisers of many children created their own forms of political awareness and motivated their struggles for access to education and means of publication. My conclusions are based primarily on an examination of the Glasgow Mitchell Library’s collection of Scottish poets and other sources. Thus far I have identified more than forty working-class Scottish Victorian women poets who each published a book, and several others whose poems appeared only in newspapers or anthologies. I chose Scottish working-class women in part because of the tone of self-respect and aspiration that pervades their writings and in part because their writings seem to have been relatively well preserved by a small number of democratic supporters of “people’s literature” from 1860 to 1900. They provide one regional sample of the hundreds of poor and little-educated British women who managed to write and occasionally publish poetry in this period.²

More precisely, I will consider the work of three rural- and village-based women poets—Elizabeth Campbell; Jane Stevenson, the “Rustic Maiden” of Kilmarnock; and Mary Macpherson—all of whom were little-educated, or educated in later life. I will trace parallels between their writing and those of other poets of their time and class and conjecture how the work of these Victorian proletarian women poets might best be read. Many critics have tended to read such poems as repetitive, “transparent,” and therefore unartistic, and consign the verses of such women to the edge of literary history. The

three writers I will discuss here did share many traits with their contemporaries and fellow “people’s poets,” of course. But each was noteworthy, even remarkable, and my aim will be to individuate and interpret these works as expressions of the consciousness of sensitive and imaginative people, whose lives we can still attempt to reconstruct.

Such attempts at hermeneutic *Verstehen*, of course, are multiply difficult across divides of class and time. We do not have much access to what it felt like to be an ordinary working woman in Victorian Britain, or what a poor orphan or mother and farmworker might have loved, hated, admired, and hoped for. I will argue nonetheless that these poems offer insight into their authors’ fears and their opportunities for mental freedom, and that they give testimony about the dislocations they suffered and the ways in which they coped with pervasive loss and early death. This broader, gender-nuanced view of “the working class” and of working-class poetry might also give us a more comprehensive overview of Victorian poetry as a whole. Such a view would consider more inclusive varieties of verse forms—orally transmitted songs and narratives among them—and broaden the range of poets’ regions and life situations in corresponding ways. Such a theory, finally, would have to reexamine issues of local audience, mode of publication, and editorial censorship and redefine what “political” meant in more nuanced and inclusive ways. For one must approach these traces with a sleuth’s sense of the censorship and elisions imposed by the circumstances of their publication. Even more than their middle-class counterparts, poor writers had to accommodate their work to the preferences of patrons and editors, for they were typically unable to publish any of their work without the patronage and sponsorship of local ministers and editors of regional newspapers and anthologies.

Sympathetic readers and members of the local establishment also supported such efforts, either by direct donation or by subscription, but all these forms of mediation carried with them particular problems and constraints. The ways in which intervention of nineteenth-century clergymen might have affected the selection of poems for publication, for example, seem clear. But equally paternalist and potentially stultifying were the preoccupations of many local newspaper editors, who preferred poems on conventional and predictable topics—the rigors of winter, for example, the importance of Burns, and the need to complete the Wallace Tower at Stirling. All the editors, anthologists, and commentators I have found were also male, of course, as were most of the wealthier readers and patrons. So gender-based assumptions about social proprieties in a notoriously patriarchal culture compounded other problems these women faced, as did class-based preoccupations and prejudices. Whatever anger or pain these Scottish proletarian women may have felt about issues that would now be called “feminist”—domestic violence or rape, for example—we are unlikely to hear about it

directly in their poems.

Details of local and regional conditions must also be borne in mind. Like late-twentieth-century changes in the “third world,” these local cataclysms brought marginal employment, sporadic violence, and the disruption of geographical stability and family ties. Nineteenth-century Scotland, in particular, was poorer and more rural than England, and industrialization closed down on it like the jaws of a vise. Rural impoverishment and brutal Highland “Clearances” drove people from the countryside, overwhelmed strong regional cultures, and propelled hundreds of thousands of people into squalid, hastily assembled industrial areas and newly engorged cities such as Glasgow, or into permanent exile overseas.

Despite all this, and partly because of it, Scottish cultural nationalism and a tradition of “humble-life” poetry continued to inspire the work of “people’s poets,” and their writings furnish examples for a broadened study of proletarian verse. Workers with more access to formal education and organizations that promoted Chartism, trade unionism, and suffrage-agitation did indeed write poetry about electoral or Chartist politics. But the deepest political response of the truly poor and little-educated was their poetic testimony to the subjective toll that economic changes and upheavals wrought in their lives.

Unlike political treatises, moreover, poetic appeals for empathy, understanding, and solidarity could argue through language, wit, emotion, and subjective testimony. For this reason, Scottish women’s assigned positions as keepers of “traditions” and preservers of families may have made them more able to make such appeals. Older women especially were storytellers, teachers, and advice-givers, and several poor rural Scotswomen spoke quite firmly in these poetic modes. These working-class women poets recorded the effects of oppressions and disruptions on their lives, but they also defended a sense of cultural identity in the face of these threats and resisted the psychic toll of the changes they observed in the lives and consciousnesses of ordinary people. The writings of Elizabeth Campbell, Jane Stevenson, and Mary Macdonald Macpherson are deeply “political” in this wider sense. One of them—Macpherson—even “incited” the Gaels of Skye to armed resistance.

The situations of Campbell, Stevenson, and Macpherson also exemplified in nuanced ways some of the limitations other women encountered in attempts to publish their work. Elizabeth Campbell printed her verses as leaflets for sale, without editorial help, but the enthusiast for “people’s literature” who later collected them censored her more idiosyncratic and unorthodox poems. Jane Stevenson, the “rustic maiden” of Kilmarnock, paid directly for the printing and binding of her own poems, but the printer omitted all but one page of her prefatory autobiography in collation, and only one copy of the volume has survived. A sympathetic Skye landowner paid a

scholar to transcribe Mary Macpherson's Gaelic oral poems, but the scribe managed to preserve only eight or nine thousand lines of the twelve or thirteen thousand she had composed in her head.

The very marginality of these women's work also blunts some of the familiar indictments mentioned above of working-class writers' alleged cooptation, conventionality, "escapism," and other betrayals of class and/or feminist consciousness. Some of these judgments are blurred in any case by a certain sampling bias and concomitant vagueness about the class situation of the poets under discussion. Many of the better-known nineteenth-century "working-class" poets, men and women—Gerald Massey, for example, Edwin Waugh, and Eliza Cook—arguably came from the lower middle-class. They also attracted fairly wide middle-class audiences and might alternatively be considered members of an elite working-class subculture.

Other comparably doctrinaire criticisms pay little attention to the specific circumstances of working-class poets' lives, or impose arbitrary criteria that are seldom inflicted on these writers' middle- and upper-class contemporaries. How many Victorian critics, for example, would examine the more affirmative passages of "In Memoriam" as "escapist" expressions of Tennyson's desire for "inauthentic" forms of class transcendence? In any event, the unschooled women I will describe in this essay were not exactly marred by middle-class cooptation and literary success. Only a few of the poor Scotswomen I have studied wrote strictly religious verse or "escapist" romantic ballads, and the work of the others was filled with concrete personal reflections, filtered through the direct and indirect forms of censorship I have mentioned. They sometimes articulated the sources of their emotions in relatively simple ways, but the tone of their work was neither emulative nor insincere.

The poor and little-educated women who struggled to define themselves as poets also did so because they felt a sense of vocation and because they had something to say. The expressive power and urgency of their work emerged from several sources: their personal admiration for stories, songs, dreams, portents, and other forms of imaginative expression that moved them; their desires to commemorate personal loss and grieve for the dead, their own children among them; and their need to reflect on larger moral or political dilemmas they found disturbing, even insoluble. Above all, they wished to express their pervasive sense of the vulnerability and fragility of their own lives and those of their fellows and sisters.

Elizabeth Duncan Campbell (1804-1878)

Elizabeth Campbell's poems are notable for several reasons. Her 1875 *Songs of My Pilgrimage*, a retrospective edition with an introduction by the populist poet and editor George Gilfillan, was one of two volumes of nine-

teenth-century Scottish poetry I found published by an older woman who lived most of her life in a rural environment.³ Prefaced by a dignified picture of the elderly Campbell in a white bonnet, a sample of her handwriting, and a beautifully worded autobiographical memoir, *Songs of My Pilgrimage* thus tells us more about Campbell's life than is known about most other working-class poets of the period.

Earlier, between 1862 and 1867, Campbell published four small paper-bound booklets of poems in Arbroath, but *Songs of My Pilgrimage* omits most of these poems, among them several of her most distinctive. These earlier verses were more uneven in meter, grammar, and orthography, but Gilfillan replaced expressions of anguish and social commentary with more conventional, prosodically smoothed poems, in standard English, about romantic episodes and fairy visions and quasi-patriotic effusions about "My Tramp to See the Queen," "Prince Charlie," and "The Royal Wedding." He also excised poems about the Crimean War and American slavery, as well as many interspersed criticisms of the Queen, her ministers, and arrogant local officials, but several strong lyrics of distress and grief remained: "The Graves of My Sons," "The Death of Willie, My Second Son," and "My Infant Day and My Hair Grown Gray." Perhaps Gilfillan considered the omitted poems no longer topical, or perhaps he simply wanted Campbell to gather "lighter" work to soften the grimmer poems that remained. Whatever the motives, the result is a small paradigm of the pattern of middle-class-patronage-cum-bowdlerization mentioned above.

What sort of life did Elizabeth Campbell lead? She was born Elizabeth Duncan at Quarreyhead, Edzell, north of Dundee, the sixth of eight surviving children of a ploughman. A midwife's error led to an eighteen-month illness and her mother's death when Elizabeth was three; she described the bleak aftermath in her memoir, "The Life of My Childhood":

I never knew the loss of my mother. Her death was to me like a dream. The morning she died my elder sister milked the cow, and gave us our porridge with the new milk out of doors by the side of the turf stack, and I have never thought any feast half so grand since. Truly God tempers the wind to the shorn lamb. My infant heart felt not the great loss. God hid it from my knowledge.

These were the lonely days for me and my two little sisters that could not dress ourselves. Mary herded the Castle cows, and came home at night. Agnes and Barbara and I wandered like forlorn crows from morn to night, weep, weep, weeping, as motherless children do. (pp. xi, ix)

Elizabeth had only a single quarter-session of schooling and began work away from home as a cowtender and whingatherer when she was seven, a move whose sharp pain she remembered clearly more than sixty-five years later: "I could not tell how miserable I felt in that strange ugly hovel—me that had such a strange love for the beautiful" (p. xii).

Campbell's father was stern, and the farmer's wife who employed her from age seven was physically abusive, but her memoir records her ecstatic delight in natural beauty, eager love of learning, and lively interest in all animals, even insects: "the scenes of my childhood are yet bright in my memory. I love to think about them still more and more as I totter down the brae" (p. xvi). Like Wordsworth, she also puzzled over the diminution of this childhood wonder:

When I was a little child how my thoughts blundered—
I thought mounds were mountains and one mile an hundred;
But I found I was wrong as the years crept on—
My fancies like fairies took wings and were gone.
(*"The Fairy King's Wedding,"* p. 26)

By contrast, she could not "attempt to tell about my after life; it would take far too long" (p. xvi). This "after life," in fact, was dominated by poverty, toil, constant moves, and the death of family from occupational accidents and other causes. Elizabeth Duncan worked as a cow- and sheepherder, a handloom weaver, a farm servant, a house servant, and a cook in Edinburgh and elsewhere.⁴ Sometime after 1830, she married William Campbell, a flax-dresser, moved to live with him in Brechin, and when her sons were young worked "fill[ing] pirms to four weavers" (p. xvi). The family later moved to Arbroath, and she tried to supplement the family income there by selling her verses.

As a mother of eight, her adult life was dominated by the intermittent ill health of her husband and the after-effects of an accident that apparently left him unable to work and led eventually to his death. All four of her sons died, two in infancy and two from occupational accidents as adults. In her summary she remarks that "my life has been full of toil and sorrows so many and so deep that I never could tell them" (p. xvii).

Campbell grieved most deeply for her favorite son, Willie, who survived the Crimean War but died at thirty-five, mangled in an unfenced hair-teasing machine for making furniture. Willie was in the first contingent of British soldiers to enter Sebastopol; Campbell's early poems recorded her fear that he would not survive, and she returned many times in her early booklets to the agony and injustice of war ("The Absent Soldier," "A Dream," "The Mother's Lament," "The Windmill of Sebastopol," "Bill Arden," "The Crimean War," "The Attack on the Great Redan, and Fall of the Malkhoff," "The Amber Cloud," "Spring").

In the opening poem of the first booklet, "The Attack on the Great Redan, and Fall of the Malkoff," for example, she proclaimed that "Lord Aberdeen's counsel all there reaped shame," and asked pointedly: "When their hour comes to die, and their spirits to fly, / Will their titles and proceedings cover their sin?" (*Songs of My Pilgrimage*, p. 1). In other poems, she

reproved the Queen's heedless ministers, dreamt of battlefield carnage, and expressed sympathy with the fates of Russian soldiers ("The Windmill of Sebastopol") and British deserters ("Bill Arden"). The whole murderous toll preoccupied her:

I think it's a pity that kings go to war,
And carry their murd'rous inventions so far;
Since Adam did blunder such blunders have been,
And I weep for those that's the victims of kings.
I weep for the coward, I weep for the brave,
I weep for the monarch, I weep for the slave,
I weep for all those that in battle are slain;
I've a tear and a prayer for the souls of all men.
(*"The Crimean War"*)⁵

In "The Death of Willie, My Second Son," Campbell described her emotions as she identified Willie's body at the morgue:

No sound came from his sealed lips when death dealt him the blow,
I wept and kissed his gory brow—nigh bloodless as the snow—
I tucked him in his white shroud and hid him in the ground,
I saw how deep in earth he'll sleep with many a gory wound!
Hard pressed on fields of battle, thrice shipwrecked on the sea,
Oh, lo! from many a distant isle he wandered home to me. . . .
His ever welcome footsteps and voice I'll no more hear,
No more tales in my ear he'll pour my heart to chill or cheer;
O! Nellfield lonely graveyard, I'll often think of thee,
Where Willie sleeps 'mong strangers, by the silvery flowing Dec.
(p. 128)

Her four daughters suffered their own misfortunes, but Campbell did not describe their fates in detail. After the death of her husband in the late 1860s, she moved with one of them to Lochee, near Dundee, the home of George Gilfillan.⁶

Something of Campbell's repressed intensity of character emerged in another early poem, "The Summer Night," perhaps an account of the psychological origins of her poetry. In this poem, the speaker had visited her childhood home on a summer evening, after a thundershower had passed:

My eyes reached the spot, where once stood my father's cot,
'Mid broom, 'side a purple heath;
With dim and misty eyes, like stars in disguise,
I trembled and pressed back my breath.
There all I could see was an old ash tree,
'Twas hallowed, 'twas gloriously green;
Still as death as it stood, and no breath stirred the wood,
As the setting sun brilliant did sheen.

I stepped very slow, with a heart full of woe,
 From wounds that death can but heal;
 I wept like the cloud, and praised God aloud,
 Who else would have cared for my tale?
 I passed a brow that shut the scene from my view,
 And the glory that over it shone;
 Lit up every tree, and flower on the lea,
 All so calm, all so still, but my moan.⁷

A common form of older women's poems was the "retrospect," in which a physical return to a decayed or destroyed homestead quickened a sense of loss, but also the sensibility that turned it to verse. The cottage of Campbell's girlhood had faded into garden, its beauty heightened by pain, and the long-orphaned poet knew her tears and prayers would have no earthly auditor. The specific occasions for her griefs could not be conveyed, or even fully known, but the memory of beauty and love remained ("the glory that over it shone"), as did her unquenchable need to express its transience ("All so calm, all so still, but my moan"). This is a direct rural expression of Pater's "desire of beauty quickened by the sense of death," and the poem's elegiac restraint recalls comparable qualities in the work of Christina Rossetti and Emily Brontë.

Indeed, Campbell's poems showed marked empathy for suffering in many forms, some of them modest. Two of the most intense passages of her memoir, for example, described her girlhood glimpse of the beauty of a moth and her horror at the shooting of her family's dog. Respectful affection for animals pervades Scottish proletarian poetry, but Campbell bitterly protested the animal's needless suffering: "Poor silken-haired 'Cherry!' I could feel no more though I saw a man or woman shot than I felt when 'Cherry' was shot for old age. It seemed to me like a murder when I saw her life-blood ebbing away in little streams from every pore where the small shot entered her side" (pp. xi, xii).

Campbell's ready identification with victims of pain and abuse also appeared in her antislavery poems. Abolitionist views were influential in Scotland during this period, and Campbell was one of several working-class poets of the period who wrote antislavery lyrics;⁸ but her expressions of empathy in poems such as "Kidnapped Slaves" and "Francis the Slave" were heartfelt and detailed. The hero of the latter poem, for example, is sadistically beaten, flees to a serpent-infested swamp, and finally escapes over the sea to Britain:

He fled from Virginia in grief, shame, and pain,
 Where his race long has wretched in slavery's chain,
 From the hour they are born till death end their pain
 Few hopes of hereafter amid them remain.

Adieu, old Virginia, to your slave-trodden shore,
'Tis the wish of my heart I may see thee no more;
With my back that's been beaten, and my frost-bitten hands,
I'll defy the proud tyrant and all his commands.⁹

Several details in the poem may have derived from Harriet Beecher Stowe's second abolitionist novel, *The Dismal Swamp*, but some may have come from the experiences of people Campbell had actually met, for a number of black people whose histories have been sketchily traced lived in nineteenth-century Glasgow.¹⁰

Several of Campbell's earlier self-published poems are dramatic monologues. "A Prison Cell," for example, recorded the mind-states of an unjustly imprisoned man:

My head ached, I fainted and fell,
When they lock'd me up in a prison cell.
And perjurers swearing away my good name,
That shock pass'd away like a horrible dream,
And with it the lightness of my youthful mind,
And sad was the sorrow that brooded behind.¹¹

Campbell also wrote ballads of righteous anger and rhythmic lyrics of sarcastic disgust. In "The Schoolmaster," for example, she denounced a local worthy who had turned her away from his house when she asked him to support the publication of one of her booklets:

Then your jealous e'e cared not to see
One so meanly bred as me,
Earn fame of high degree,
That stamps the poet's roll.
Ye're like John Graham of Claverhouse,
Vice Cardinal Beaton's tool,
He sported the face of an angel,
But a demon possessed his soul.¹²

These un-tranquilly recollected emotions also vanished from Gilfillan's edition.

Many of Campbell's poems recorded special delight in natural phenomena, such as comets and rainstorms, and she also enjoyed tales of deceitful fairies, presumably another natural force. This middle-aged mother of eight also published several poems, for example, in which a young woman is attracted to assorted handsome fair-haired men. One of these men, not surprisingly, has deserted her:

[Love's] tale was false, and filled with care
My heart, once gay and free;
But that sweet voice and face so fair

Shall aye be dear to me.
("First Love," p. 112)

Campbell's moralism was not simplistic, and she could even find interesting traces of treachery and violence in potted patriotic histories. In "A Visit to Wallace Monument," for example, the speaker brooded on Wallace's sometime-ally Robert the Bruce's well-known capacity for betrayal:

Was't to save his life or his country,
In the hour of his bitterest need,
That a crime so chill and wintry
Crossed his mind momentary,
In his heart why found it an entry,
To sever the old man's head?

There's a flaw in every history, a crook in each human lot,
Sin solves that sad mystery, and murder's the darkest spot . . .¹³

There is, indeed, "a flaw in every history." Campbell's meager education and orthodox religious upbringing also did not render her markedly pious. She did indeed identify deeply with the "sublime" in nature and hoped to see her friends in heaven, but she also seems to have found other consolations of religion in a flawed world rather limited and expressed consistent empathy for victims of injustice in all forms she could discern.

Above all, she felt a deep empathetic resonance with nature, and her sense of its loss echoed Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey" and "Elegiac Stanzas," though her social world recalled the ambiance of the "Descriptive Sketches" and "Lyrical Ballads." Indeed, her rhythms in moments of heightened emotion overtook grammar—transcended it, if you like—and vibrated with the declamations of excited speech. In these quasi-Wordsworthian cadences, a lyrically gifted empathetic survivor reflected keenly on the effects of poverty, war, accidents, and other traumas, and recorded her efforts to find consolation in what remained.

Jane Stevenson: The "Rustic Maiden" of Kilmarnock

Similar preoccupations with dislocation, marginality, and injustice appeared in the *Homely Musings by a Rustic Maiden*, printed for the author in Kilmarnock in 1870. An attribution to "Miss Stevenson (Cushing)" is pencilled in the Mitchell Library's copy, presumably by a collector, and the poet's unmarried name is confirmed by the title of a poem, "Written in Memory of John Stevenson, my Brother, who died at Woodside in 1850." A binder's error cut off the preface after the first page, in the middle of a passage that described Stevenson's girlhood herding cows. One of ten siblings, Stevenson remembered that "to my youthful imagination the beauties of poetry appeared particularly charming: and I soon got a number of the old popular

songs by heart, chanting them to some tune of my own." When her sisters derided her for her desire to write, she wrote in secret, at times in a mode she described as follows: "I suppose it is not prose, and I am not such a judge of poetry as to know whether it may be called poetry or not, or some kind of a mixture of both."¹⁴

Stevenson shared with Elizabeth Campbell a common pleasure in fairy stories ("The Fairy Dale," "The Fairy Park and Ancient Mount"), an intense love of her natural surroundings, and a desire to celebrate "ordinary" lives—in Stevenson's case, of emigrants, ploughmen, engineers, itinerant prophets, a Highlander deprived of grazing lands ("Donald M'Donald, or My Sweet Highland Home"), and even a stray dog ("The Wandering Dog"). Stevenson's large farm family was also disrupted by a parent's death, and the loss of relatives and breakup of her home were abiding griefs. In "Written on the Death of My Father, and the Prospect of Then Leaving My Birthplace," for example, she mourned her father's death, and the consequent dispersal of her family of six brothers and three sisters. In another poem, "The Homes of My Fathers," she narrated her arduous journey on foot to her ancestral home, and it appears from an attached prose account of the trip that she had lost contact with her surviving relatives and may never have made this retrospective journey again.

Poetic recollections of her original home also appear in "Garnock Water," "My Birthplace," and "Home." She anticipated the skepticism of an all-too-likely "cold critic."

This is a sketch of such a picture I would paint you,
And that picture would be home;
But I must cease, and should this paper chance
To fall into the hands of some cold critic,
They may laugh and wonder why a girl
(Surely an enthusiast) should thus descant
Upon a spot wherein they saw no loveliness;
At least indifferent when compar'd with others,
And surpassed by thousands in our native land
That never had a pen once lifted up, to tell their worth,
Or set their beauty forth.
I may be prejudic'd, this is my birthplace,
Spot where I have spent my life from earliest infancy;
Nurs'd up amongst the scenes I have describ'd,
And seldom mixing with mankind in mutual converse.
A wild and solitary thing have thus contract
A love for things inanimate;
Or like the Swiss or Laplanders who love their country
And their native hills, though wild and bleak,
And when transplant to climes more warm and sunny,
Fairer far to other eyes than theirs,

Will sigh, and pine, and sometimes die
Of broken heart.

(pp. 29-30)

These might be the responses of a Brontëan “wild and solitary thing” or one of Wordsworth’s shepherds. Stevenson’s irregular rhythms added onomatopoeic dignity to her blank verse, and the deliberate use of shortened lines is quite effective.

Like Campbell, Stevenson also took special interest in all those sentient beings—even animals—that subsist on the edge of what we are pleased to call human society. In “The Wandering Dog,” for example, a stray’s alienation and uncertain future echoed the fates of displaced humans:

Dog, who is thy master?
Where’s thy home?
Does no one care for thee,
As o’er the country thou dost roam? . . .
Hast thou a memory? or hast thou now forgot?
Where was thy home? was not it a pleasant spot? . . .
Did no one stroke thy head and say,
My bonnie dog, my bonnie Tray?
Poor dog, I pity thee,
A wanderer thou art;
And all may pity thee
Whoe’er have felt that loneliness of heart—
Will creep o’er those who once have had a home,
Where peace and plenty was;
And then are forced to roam.
By lot of changeful fortune thrown,
On a cold world to wander all alone—
Nor ever meet a face, but faces that are strange,
And finds this world is but a place
Of never ceasing change.

(pp. 40-42)

Stevenson treated another wanderer with respect in “The Prophetess, Or Seer of Visions,” whose murky portents and tone of authorial reverence opened on a world of dreams and intuitions of apocalypse. The poem’s speaker recalled her offer of food to a stranger, a tall, middle-aged woman from Inverness who had left her family to warn others of impending doom. Did the woman fear her people might be rendered homeless by the Clearances or other evictions? Was she a soothsaying “traveller” (gypsy)?¹⁵ Was she deluded? Whoever or whatever she was, she claimed prophetic insight for her warnings of social upheaval:

I’m one that’s gifted with a sight,
That none in Britain has beside;

Visions I see, and voices too, I hear
 Speaking to me, as if behind my ear.
 I pray'd, and pray'd that I might have a sign.
 'Twas no delusion strange, a working in my mind,
 That still those visions I should see, those voices hear,
 Speaking quite audibly as if behind mine ear—
 Warning of troubles and distresses great,
 Ready upon our native land
 Of Scotland forth to break.

(pp. 104-05)

Clergymen and others might dismiss such “visions” outright, and Stevenson herself was uncertain about this one’s exact interpretation. But she insisted that poor women and other wraiths might be bearers of prophetic wisdom:

This is no fiction that I tell,
 Were all her prophecies but half as true
 As is this tale I've told to you,
 Then we had need to be upon our guard,
 If the sad stroke of this calamity
 We possibly may blunt or ward. . . .
 But great disasters soon enough may come,
 Without a prophetess foretelling them.

(pp. 109-10)

Wordsworth, when he walked the hills of Cumberland, also encountered displaced and bereft wanderers who seemed to possess an obscure wisdom. Stevenson’s older woman, she seemed to suggest, might be what Icelanders called a “*sending*”—a messenger from another realm of experience. The poem’s sense of ominous impending changes reflected poorer Highlanders’ anxieties at physical dispossession and cultural loss, but the *sending*’s very apocalyptic opacity and quasi-biblical images also evoked atemporal alternative realities that are uninterpretable in words. Like the messianic Lakota visions and ghost dances before Wounded Knee, such “prophecies” actually provided interpretive allegories for the destruction of a way of life.

No one named Stevenson appeared in anthologies of the region, and she seems to have been unable to publish more of her experimental “musings” on the irrevocability of loss, the beauty of ordinary landscapes, and the mystical interstices of ordinary life. She was obviously a woman with few patrons, but she gave distinctive voice to the displaced and seldom-heard, and bore expressive witness to the healing power of poetic empathy.

Mairi Nic a'Phearsain, Mary Macdonald Macpherson (1821-1898)

Mairi Nic a'Phearsain (Mary Macpherson) or Mairi Mhor nan Oran, “Big Mary of the Songs,” is the only woman generally included in histories of

nineteenth-century Gaelic secular literature of the Highlands,¹⁶ and her literary career was remarkable from any point of view. “Big Mary” could read English and Gaelic, but she never learned to write, and she may have been the only oral-narrative British woman poet of the nineteenth century whose works are extant, thanks to Lachlan Macdonald, a sympathetic Skye landowner, who paid for their transcription and publication.¹⁷

Despite their quality, only a few of her poems have yet been translated into English, among them “Brosnachadh nan Baidheal” (“Incitement of the Gaels”); “Soraidh leis an Nollaig ùir” (“Farewell to the New Christmas”); and “Nuair bha mi òg” (“When I Was Young”).¹⁸ The “songs” she composed and performed helped elect Highland Land Law Reform Association candidates in 1885, and these representatives then agitated for the Crofters’ Holdings Act, whose passage in 1886 gradually suppressed the violent waves of evictions that marred Scottish history for more than a century. Macpherson’s sarcastic and bluntly realistic poems decried the human loss and dispersion of the Clearances, but her retrospective grief and social vision were also arresting in more personal and immediate ways.

Mary Macpherson was born Mary Macdonald at Skeabost on Skye in 1821. Her parents, John Macdonald and Flora Macinnes, had returned to Skye after twelve years in Glasgow, where, Alexander MacBain reports, “they settled on their refusal, with many other Skye people, to proceed to some bogus settlements exploited for them in Canada” (p. xi). Mary did not attend school on Skye, but did acquire “ample experience in the management of cattle and all that pertains to the conduct of a house in the olden days, from cooking to cloth making, and, further, in storing her mind with the lays and lyrics of her native isle” (p. xi). Like Campbell, she was married relatively late (at twenty-seven), to Isaac Macpherson, an Inverness shoemaker whose parents lived on Skye, and she lived with him in Inverness until his death in 1871. To support her four surviving children and herself, she then took the unusual step of moving to Glasgow to enroll at fifty in the Royal Infirmary, where she studied five years and earned diplomas in nursing and obstetrics. She practiced midwifery in Glasgow, Greenock, and other nearby towns, and continued to return to Skye each year until 1882, when she moved into Woodside Cottage, a rent-free dwelling in Skeabost offered by her friend Lachlan Macdonald, and lived there until her death at seventy-six in 1898. In the frontispiece-photograph to her volume of poems, a stout, smiling middle-aged woman sits in a furpiece, feathered cap, and long fur stole, and other photographs in the volume show her carding, spinning, and “warping the Highland tartan.”

Mary Macpherson composed no poems until 1872, eighteen months after her husband’s death, when anger at “certain miscarriages of justice” (p. xiii) roused her to verse denunciations of the oppressors of her people. She com-

posed songs on behalf of the land reformer Fraser-Mackintosh in an 1874 election in the Inverness Burghs, and when the Voting Act of 1884 widened the franchise to include many crofters, her verses helped elect Land Law Reform Association candidates throughout the Highlands in the 1885 and 1886 elections mentioned above. Her friend and patron Macdonald paid the Gaelic scholar John Whyte to transcribe 8000-odd lines of her poems, and Alexander MacBain edited and introduced them for publication in 1891. MacBain tells us that she could recite “at least half as much more of her own,” and she also held in her memory another eight or nine thousand lines of unpublished verses by other Skye and Western Island poets.

Macpherson’s poems may be seen against a larger background of Gaelic folk narratives and verse by women. Of the hundreds of songs collected by Alexander Carmichael and informants such as Frances Tolmie for the *Carmina Gadelica*, many are songs of traditional women’s activities, such as waulking or weaving, lullabies or birth songs, and lyrics and dramatic monologues in a female voice.¹⁹ Macpherson’s poems included elegies, as well as laments at the social and physical changes on Skye, praises of Land League activists, and active appeals to Skye crofters to resist their landlords’ exactions. “Incitement of the Gaels” and its quasi-allegorical companion piece, “Farewell to the New Christmas,” for example, were highly sarcastic and dramatic set pieces, which effectively exhorted victims of eviction to stand their ground.

Some commentators who have assessed the political arguments of her verses and other land agitation poems have found them lacking in “party consciousness, or [sense] of a struggle against a widespread political system.”²⁰ Political poetry can appeal to personal experience and vision, however, and one such vision appeared in Macpherson’s moving and introspective poem, “Farewell to the New Christmas.” Its speaker returned to her home on Skye from exile in Glasgow:

I left the lovely Isle of Skye,
more than two score years ago;
and now the custom’s altered there,
and sad for me to tell the tale.

Bowed with sadness many a Gael,
bred up in the Land of Mists,
smothers now in urban streets,
from city dust and reek of coal.

(Watson, p. 489)

The enclosures and forced evictions have changed everything, leaving “where once the honest people lived, / only the great sheep and their lambs.” Sheepdogs snarled where people once paused to rest, and her grandparents’ cottage has fallen into ruin. She finally reached her former home, found the

well that her father had dug and named, now full of sludge, and experienced a brief epiphany of despair:

I reached the well of Iain Bàn
that my beloved father named,
the stones whereon he laid his hands,
are left a legacy to me.

I stood a while above it there,
the tears came raining from my eyes,
as I recalled the dear-loved folk,
earthed now in their eternal sleep.

Then all my senses ebbed away,
death's pallor came upon my cheek;
but there I cupped my hand and drank,
and felt my being made anew.

(Watson, p. 491)

Fortified by her symbolic healing experience to speak on others' behalf, her spirits revived further when "my dearest people gathered, / made for me warm welcome then," and she felt again the restorative power of verse:

Tears ebbed away as I began,
to sing the melodies I knew,
that bring my spirit to its peace—
for danger sometimes lies in grief.

(Watson, p. 493)

Still more memories returned in the company of her neighbors: the beauty of "orchis flowers"; a lively Christmas feast; impromptu games played with a meal-bag ball; and "a bumper lipping to the brim, / that put a thunder in the head" (no temperance-advocate she). As she recalled toasts of Christmas past, a visionary voice "behind her" praised her friend and patron, and called "her people" to resistance and return:

I heard a voice behind me say,
as one just risen from the grave—
"Is not Lachlan Og in Ord
as leader at his people's head?"

We would know again the fields,
the cornstacks standing in the yard,
if but the spirit of the folk
could rise again in hand and heart.

(Watson, p. 495)

This remarkable poem abounds in concrete, evocative, and politically resonant images—a well of healing; flowers of love; a cup of strong liquor; a voice from the dead. It is essentially a crofter vision of Blake's "Jerusalem," medi-

ated by a William Morris-like “spirit of the folk.”

In “When I Was Young,” another retrospective poem, Macpherson began with a Wordsworthian embrace of a beautiful Skye dawn (“and I in Os. . . .”):²¹

Bringing to mind with a joy and sorrow
that I cannot quite put into words,
every change to mind and body,
since I left the glen.

(Kerrigan, p. 89)

Rich details flowed through her mind (“every bog and hummock and hollow / reminding me of when I was young”), and she contemplated an epiphanic profusion of flowers:

When I'd climbed the Sithean's shoulder
I rested a while beside the burn,
my thoughts were skipping and jumping,
my eyes on the beauty of every flower,
the dandelion and pale-yellow primrose
the thistle royal and marigold,
dew sparkling on every grass blade,
reminding me of when I was young.

(Kerrigan, p. 89)

Macpherson's blend of Wordsworth's “Daffodils” with her own version of “splendor in the grass, and glory in the flower” was inherently place-specific, and she mourned the fate of forced emigrants all the more when she boarded ship to return “home” to Glasgow:

When I turned my back on the fragrant island,
and boarded the steam-ship which has no jib,
when she blew her horn and began her churning
and made her way from the Isle of Mist,
my heart was broken, my eyes tear-filled,
leaving for a land without cheer or song,
where I see no thistle nor joyful daisy,
no heather nor rushes on brae or lawn.

(Kerrigan, p. 91)

“Incitement of the Gaels,” Macpherson's best-known poem, memorialized both the islanders' resistance in the 1882 “Battle of the Braes” and another confrontation in 1884 and urged voters to sweep away their persecutors and choose pro-crofter candidates in the upcoming elections of 1885 and 1886. Landlords' agents had torched crofters' homes during a series of removals in the Outer Hebrides, Tiree, and Skye between 1881 and 1888 and forced their inhabitants to board emigrant ships. The geologist Archibald Geikie saw such an eviction during a visit to Skye and described it as follows:²²

a strange wailing sound reached my ears at intervals on the breeze from the west. On gaining the top of one of the hills on the south side of the valley, I could see a long and motley procession winding along the road. . . . It halted at the point of the road opposite Kilbride, and there the lamentation became loud and long. . . . It was a miscellaneous gathering of at least three generations of crofters. There were old men and women, too feeble to walk, who were placed in carts; the younger members of the community on foot were carrying their bundles of clothes and household effects, while the children, with looks of alarm, walked alongside. . . . When they set forth once more, a cry of grief went up to heaven, the long plaintive wail, like a funeral coronach, was resumed, and after the last of the emigrants had disappeared behind the hill, the sound seemed to re-echo through the whole wide valley of Strath in one prolonged note of desolation. The people were on their way to be shipped to Canada.²³

Such evictions and land seizures provoked rent strikes and destruction of landlords' livestock and boundary markers during the "Crofters' War" or Highland Land War, which flared highest from 1882 to 1886, but smouldered on until 1930. Local authorities often summoned militia to enforce eviction orders, and Macpherson triumphantly cited "The Battle of the Braes" when the crofters managed to unite and beat them back.²⁴ Seasonal employment for men often left women and children to face the police and militiamen alone, and the "Battle's" casualties were twelve policemen and seven women of the Braes (Kerrigan, p. 343).

Macpherson began her concrete "Incitement of the Gaels" with a direct appeal for support of the Land Law Reform candidates, then mocked the inequities of land access and fishing rights. Skye's inhabitants were under siege:

If someone lifts a creel with an oyster,
or in the open sea they find a clam,
they'll be apprehended and locked away
under the law of the land. . . .

The landowners offered to pay a reward
to the young men if they'd leave the township,
but it was only the withe where the fish had hung
the wretches got when they were starving.

(Kerrigan, pp. 93, 95)

William Neill's translation reads: "The landlords offering a bounty / if they'd only leave the township, / got a bare hook and no fish. / Left those miscreants with nothing" (Watson, p. 489). The grim image of the empty hook graphically represents both Macpherson's anger and her hopeful prophecy of the evictors' fate.

Sometimes, of course, the landlords brought the Caledonian counterparts of what American union activists called "gun-thugs":

This talk may seem a little harsh,
but often the truth is bitter to say,
a fleet of battle-ships and troops with arms
set off to safeguard the law of the land.
(Kerrigan, p. 93)

Such a “fleet” arrived in 1884 under the command of William Ivory, Sheriff of Invernesshire. Ivory liked to compare himself to Satan and his militia to “angels,” but in this case he and his hosts were driven off of Skye with flaming swords.

. . . Ivory shouted in a rage
to the poor wretches, his troop of angels
“Over this lot we’ll never win the day,
they are the ones who have the advantage.”
(Kerrigan, p. 95)

Macpherson’s concluding, quasi-biblical malediction then “incited” its auditors to continue their resistance.

An interesting aspect of Macpherson’s poem is her disgust with suborned poets and rhetoricians who have misused their art and prostituted their native tongue:

I could name them one by one,
who sang against the owners of the land
and turned their coats upon their backs
and ate the words which had been their art.
Who went with books, declaiming loudly
to the young men working the homelands,
“Why stay here when you can reap honey
from the top of the grass in Manitoba?”
(Kerrigan, p. 95)

Such denunciations of hack poets obliquely suggest that some of Macpherson’s apparent *agraphia* might have been a matter of refusal rather than inability.

In any event, it is striking to remark how quickly and effectively this activist Scottish woman poet seized the tiny crenellations of opportunity created by the “spirit of the folk” and newly widened (male) suffrage. This vigorous rural “New Woman,” who had educated and supported herself in the “city dust and reek of coal,” had no doubt about the identity of her enemies, and she actively sought—and found—an audience among Western Island electors and among humanitarians who were aghast at the havoc the Clearances had wrought.

All three working-class women poets I have considered defied the stereotypes I canvassed briefly in the essay’s opening pages. None was simplistically

moralistic. All had a capacity for acute social criticism. All professed rather undoctrinal versions of the traditional religious beliefs of their region. And all addressed economic issues directly, insistently, and in a variety of verse forms. Elizabeth Campbell, for example, struggled to express a small part of the overwhelming immediacy of natural beauty and human distress and the squalor, brutality, and despotism of slavery and war. Jane Stevenson, the marginal "rustic maiden" of Kilmarnock, grieved most immediately for her long-dispersed family and its bleakly beautiful abandoned homestead. But she also enlarged her mourning to embrace the collective loss of all the dispersed who wander over the earth. Mary Macpherson, finally, memorialized the beauties of a lost island and declaimed Gaelic verses in active political defense of what remained.

None of these rural poets could alter the basic circumstances of their lives, and it is beyond our imaginative powers to envision how they might "know again the fields." But all three deeply responded to the stark dislocations and upheavals of their periods and regions, and the anger and consoling eloquence of their verses witnessed the resonance and evocative power of committed poetic speech.

NOTES

¹ A handful of pioneering anthologies and critical studies of Victorian working-class poetry do exist. Their editors concentrated primarily on poems by Chartists, artisans, and writers from the industrial north of England, and one might infer from their choices that very few working-class women wrote poetry and that those who did chose sentimental and domestic themes and were swayed in large part by religious ideologies and preachments about the evils of drink. Women poets did often support temperance causes and shared a cross section of the religious views of their time, but I have argued here and elsewhere that these positions make contextual sense and should not serve as grounds for trivialization of their work.

General discussions of working-class writings and culture include Martha Vicinus, *The Industrial Muse: A Study of Nineteenth-Century British Working Class Literature* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1974); Patrick Joyce, *Democratic Subjects: The Self and the Social in Nineteenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); and Julia Swindells, *Victorian Writing and Working Women: The Other Side of Silence* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985). Relevant anthologies include Peter Scheckner, ed., *An Anthology of Chartist Poetry: Poetry of the British Working Class, 1830s-50s* (Rutherford, New Jersey: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1989); Brian Maidment, ed., *Poorhouse Fugitives: Self-Taught Poets and Poetry in Victorian Britain* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987); and Brian Hollingsworth, ed., *Songs of the People: Lancashire Dialect Poetry of the Industrial Revolution* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1977).

Studies of working-class women poets appear in Susan Zlotnik, "A Thousand Times I'd Rather Be a Factory Girl," *Victorian Studies*, 35, No. 9 (1991), 7-27; my

"Cauld Engle-Cheek: Working-Class Women Poets in Victorian Scotland," *Women Poets Special Issue*, ed. Linda Hughes, *Victorian Poetry*, 33, No. 1 (1995), 53-74, and "Oor Location': Victorian Women Poets and the Transition from Rural to Urban Scottish Culture," *Victorian Urban Landscapes*, ed. Debra Mancoff and Dale Trela (New York: Garland Publishing Co., 1996), pp. 133-56; and Susan Alves, "A Thousand Times I'd Rather Be a Factory Girl: British and American Working-Class Women's Poetry," Diss. Northeastern University 1996.

² Among anthologies that include poetry by Scottish working-class women are Catherine Kerrigan, ed., *An Anthology of Scottish Women Poets* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1991), and Tom Leonard, ed., *Radical Renfrew: Poetry from the French Revolution to the First World War, by Poets Born, or Sometime Resident in the County of Renfrewshire* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1990). Angela Leighton and Margaret Reynolds's *Victorian Women Poets: An Anthology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995) includes six poems by Ellen Johnston; and Isobel Armstrong, Joseph Bristow, and Cath Sharrock's *Nineteenth-Century Women Poets* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996) includes one poem by Ellen Johnston and four by Janet Hamilton.

³ Elizabeth Campbell, *Songs of My Pilgrimage*, ed. and intro. George Gilfillan (Edinburgh: Andrew Elliot; Printed by John Leng and Co., Dundee Advertiser Office, 1875). Subsequent references are cited parenthetically in the text.

⁴ One of her more prosperous early employers took her to France for two years, where she learned enough French to tend to household needs. The Revolution of 1830 unfortunately took her employers back to Scotland: "and so I lost my travels and my grammar lessons," in Campbell, "Life of My Childhood," *Songs of My Pilgrimage*, p. xvi.

⁵ Campbell, *Poems*, Fourth Series (Arbroath: Printed for the Author, 1867), p. 24.

⁶ Campbell's death certificate records her death of "mortification from Burn/Nervous Debility" on 24 December 1878, after an illness of thirteen days. She lived at 3 Marshall Street in Lochee and was the widow of William Campbell, Flaxdresser, and daughter of James Duncan, Ploughman. Alex Patterson, her son-in-law, who lived at Yeaman's Lane, Lochee, provided this information, but did not know the name of his wife's maternal grandmother.

⁷ Campbell, "The Summer Night," *Poems* (Arbroath: Printed for the Author, 1862), p. 14.

⁸ Note, for example, Janet Hamilton's "To Mrs. H. B. Stowe, On the Occasion of Her Visit to Glasgow, April, 1853," in *Poems, Essays, and Sketches* (Glasgow: Maclehose, 1880), pp. 352-53.

⁹ Campbell, "Francis the Slave," *Poems* (1862), pp. 23-26.

¹⁰ *Who Belongs to Glasgow?* Glasgow City Libraries, 1990.

¹¹ Campbell, *Poems*, Third Series (Arbroath: Printed for the Author, 1865), p. 28.

¹² Campbell, *Poems* (1867), p. 28. Viscount John Graham Dundee of Claverhouse (1648-89), a Scottish soldier known as "Bonnie Dundee," led the first Jacobite rising in Scotland in 1689, but was killed at Killiecrankie at the moment of victory. He was loathed by Presbyterians for his ruthless suppression of Scottish Covenanters.

¹³ Campbell, *Poems*, Second Series (Arbroath: Printed for the Author, 1863), pp. 17-19.

¹⁴ Jane Stevenson, *Homely Musings by a Rustic Maiden* (Kilmarnock: Printed for the Author, 1870), p. 5. Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically in the text.

¹⁵ Gypsies remain a little-studied subgroup of nineteenth-century Scots. In *Charms of the Gaels: Hymns and Incantations, with Illustrative Notes on Words, Rites and Customs, Dying and Obsolete; Orally Collected in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland* by Alexander Carmichael, ed. C. J. Moore, intro. John McInnis (Edinburgh: Floris Books, 1994), Alexander Carmichael described a gypsy informant:

["The Wicked Who Would Me Harm"] and other poems were obtained from Isabella Chisholm, a travelling tinker. Though old, Isabella Chisholm was still tall and straight, fine-featured and fresh-complexioned. She was endowed with personal attraction, mental ability and astute diplomacy of no common order. . . she had the gypsy habits and the gypsy language, variously called "Cant," "Shelta," "Romany," with rich fluent Gaelic and English. She had many curious spells, runes, and hymns, that would have enriched Gaelic literature, and many rare words and phrases and expressions that would have improved the Gaelic dictionary.

¹⁶ See Nigel MacNeill, *The Literature of the Highlanders* (London: Lamley, 1898); Charles Withers, *Gaelic Scotland: The Transformation of a Culture Region* (London: Routledge, 1988); and Derick Thomson, *An Introduction to Gaelic Poetry* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1974). Though less well-known, Mary Mackellar wrote religious and secular poems in both Gaelic and English.

¹⁷ Mairi Nic a'Phearsain [Mary Macpherson], *Dain Agus Oran: Ghaidhlig*, Alastair Mac-Bheathain (Inbhirnis: A. Agus U. Mac-Coinnich, 1891). Macpherson's poems were transcribed by John Whyte and published in Inverness with an introduction by the editor Alexander MacBain [Alastair Mac-Bheathain].

¹⁸ Meg Bateman's translations of "Incitement of the Gaels" and "When I Was Young" appear in Kerrigan, *An Anthology of Scottish Women Poets*, pp. 88-95; subsequent references to the Kerrigan edition will appear parenthetically in the text. William Neill's translations of "Farewell to the New Christmas," "When I Was Young," and "Incitement of the Gaels" appear in *The Poetry of Scotland: Gaelic, Scots, and English*, ed. Roderick Watson (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995), pp. 484-97; subsequent references to the Watson edition will appear parenthetically in the text. In "Gaelic Poets of the Land Agitation," *Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness*, 49 (1977), 309-76, Donald Meek provides partial prose translations for fifteen more Macpherson poems (pp. 363-70). "Ibhri Agus Na Croitearan" ("Ivory and the Crofters"), which Meek believes was composed by Macpherson, appeared in the 12 March 1887 *Oban Times*. Its last stanza reads: "Isn't the law of the land really pitiful, when it would seize, like slaves, infants two months old, who are considered less valuable than the dog by the fireside—this is Ivory's justice in the land of the high mountains" (Meek, pp. 357-58).

¹⁹ Carmichael, *Charms of the Gaels*. Examples from Carmichael's collection include nos. 109-113, 200, 212, 217-26, 503, 506, 509, 515, 517, 519-26, 527, 528, 533, 535, 541, 547, 551-55, 559, and 561.

²⁰ See Withers, p. 351. Meek's "Gaelic Poetry of the Land Agitation" finds most of Macpherson's poems mundanely direct. He translated several, however, and annotated thirty-two of them in *Mairi Mhor Nan Oran: Taghadh d'a h-òrain le eachdraidh a beatha is notaichean*, deasaichte le Domhnall Eachann Meek (Gairm, Glaschu, 1977).

²¹ Present-day Ose lies on route A863 along the west coast of central Skye, near

Lock Caroy.

²² The scene is also reminiscent of contemporary paintings, such as Richard Redgrave's "The Emigrant's Farewell," and Thomas Praed's "The Last of the Clan."

²³ Sir Archibald Geikie, *Scottish Reminiscences* (Glasgow: J. Maclehose and Sons, 1904), pp. 226-27. See also Alexander MacKenzie, *The History of the Highland Clearances* (Glasgow: P. J. O'Callaghan, 1914).

²⁴ See Withers, pp. 371-84.

