

CASE STUDY 9

MOLADH MORAIG
(IN PRAISE OF MORAG)

SOURCESPIPE

Campbell Canntaireachd. [CC]	c1815	Vol.1. no. 82.	not used!
'Moraig'			
Donald MacDonald Ms. [DMcD]	c1806-26	no.42. p. 59.	
'Praise of Marion.'			
Angus MacKay Ms.Vol 2 [AMcK]	1826-1840	no. 4 p. 8.	
'Guileagag Mòrag. The Praise for Marion.'			
Piobaireachd Society Series [PS]	1925.	Book 1.p. 22.	

Audio Recordings.Pibroch

Robert Reid.

Privately held.

not used!

Song

- Text 50? Wabon. 1959.

Audio recording.

Wm. Matheson. SA/1954/53

DESCRIPTION.

This could be considered as a sixteen phrase pibroch, according to the CC source if one considers a phrase as consisting of four melodic stresses per phrase where the melodic stresses correspond with the poetic stresses. In DMcD however, after the ninth phrase this method of phrase identification is problematic because each phrase is 'open'. DMcD has bars

? → which follow with three stresses per phrase but which still fit into the mathematical requirements of common time. One might therefore be able to consider DMcD as a twelve phrase setting with an extended last phrase. The CC setting was adopted by AMcK who notated it in 3/4 in contrast with DMcD. The AMcK setting and rhythmic scheme was later adopted as the standard setting by the PS. In the PS notation, there are three equal-value themal notes throughout in 3/4 with two bars to a phrase and in DMcD one phrase is represented within one bar of music. The melodic phrases in the pibroch can therefore be identified by comparing them with the poetic stresses of the song, that is, where four song stresses exist within the melodic phrase.

The melodic range is limited to the lower notes of the pipes throughout most of the tune and does not rise to the upper part of the scale until the twelfth phrase. The first twelve phrases can therefore be regarded as reworkings of the first four phrases, using a double tonic effect to a great extent throughout.

ANALYSIS

The DMcD version is set out below with my notated version of the WM version of the song. From this the melodic relationship between the two versions becomes evident.

Ex.1

→ Text version printed in

DMcD

Song

'S truaigh gun mi 'sa choill nuair bha Mòr- ag ann, Thilg - im aid na cruinn cò bu bhòidheche againn

Ini - ghean a chùil duinn aig a bheil an loinn bhi - maid air ar broinn feadh na ròs - an - an

The salient notational features of the PS version are shown in Ex. 2 along with my notation of RR's performance.

Ex. 2

As one can see from the comparison made between RR and the PS notation on which the mainstream pibroch playing is presumed to be based, the note value differences between the reality of actual performance and the recommended style are great.

Although the PS setting is in 3/4 time, each bar has two rather than three stresses giving four per phrase. The number of stresses per phrase therefore, has probably not changed since the pibroch was first played. The rhythm and tempo would seem to have changed however. When one looks at the RR performance one can see that the Es are greatly extended at the expense of the rhythmic and melodic scansion of the phrase. Although the Es do not receive a melodic stress, the time allocated to them distorts the rhythmic pulse of the tune, setting its rhythm apart from the rhythmic scansion of the song. This hiatus provides another good example of a pibroch which has changed its rhythm to create a quite different melodic and rhythmic scheme from the melody on which it was probably based. This development, which involves a change of rhythm and slowing of tempo, to the extent that the rhythm and points of stress become difficult to identify, is typical of what occurs in the creation of what is recognised as Art music.

The melodic relationship between the DMcD pibroch version and the song is more evident in some places than in others, especially at phrase ends eg. down to the low A at the end of the first and the similar BA low G melodic motif at the end of the second phrase. The song, like the pibroch, has a limited melodic range.

There seems to be little doubt that the Gaelic poet Alasdair MacMhaighstir Alasdair (Alexander MacDonald), composed his poem based on a recognised pibroch and imitated the structure of pibroch to some degree. (see Thomson 1974: 169) Although the rhythmic relationship with pibroch is usually not commented on, the implications are obvious. The rhythmic imitations of pibroch movements *siubhal* and *crunluath* are continued throughout the song, to the same song melody considered here.

The rhythm of the words of the poem imparts sufficient information on what the rhythmic style of the pibroch might have been. The poet was unlikely to have based his poem on a piece of music which had no rhythmic affinity with his language. One would find it difficult to adapt the present day style of the tune to a rhythmic style which suited the bard's poetry unless one was fully conscious of the processes which took place to change the melodies into what they are now. It is unlikely that musicians added long Es and slowed down their pibroch, fully aware of what they were doing, in order to change it into a 'classical' style. Nor is it likely that MacMhaighstir Alasdair was an adept musician who set out to identify a more robust style in one which was accepted in the society of his day. For instance, many of his songs are difficult to sing because of the high concentration of consonants throughout his poetry. It is unlikely, therefore, that he would have been able to adapt the tune Moladh Moraig to accommodate his words if the rhythm was not already extant in the pibroch tradition of his time to which he was attracted.

One question which arises at this stage concerns the existence and title of the pibroch to which MacMhaighstir Alasdair put the words of the song. Was it called 'The Royal Oak that saved Prince Charles', the title which appears in Gesto (1828)? Ross ((CMo vol 18: 28) states:

'Is e Padruig Mór a rinn am port grinn mu'n chraoibh
dharaich a chuir falach air Rìgh Tearlach aig Boxabel, an uair
a bha saighdearan Chromwell air a thòir'.

(Patrick Mor made this lovely tune about an oak tree which
hid King Charles at Boxabel, when Cromwell's soldiers were
pursuing him).

This alternative title probably existed in Skye and it could be that MacMhaighstir Alasdair used this particular tune because of its

political perspective.¹ As well as using another pibroch for his praise on MacCrimmon's pipes, (See CS 6) he set another of his poems, Marbhrann na h-Aigeannach, to an unnamed pibroch also. (Matheson 1938: 324). The trend of writing poetry which attempted to imitate the pibroch rhythm and form was continued from the end of the eighteenth and throughout the nineteenth century with the majority of these poems appearing to adopt the Moladh Mòraig/Beinn Dòbhrain form and melody with similar rhythms.

The pibroch can easily be reinterpreted in the contemporary style of the song by applying the song rhythms to the pibroch version. The effect of playing the tune with the rhythm of the words in mind does not imply a change of stress positions. The tempo is faster though with less accent on the four notes DDCA of the first two bars, as one might hear in modern performance. The phrases become more clearly identifiable as a result as one moves through to the final A or low G.

Variant melody

As Thomson (1974: 187) and others have pointed out, the poet Donnchadh Bàn Mac an t-Saoir (Duncan MacIntyre) may have been strongly influenced by the metre and form of Moladh Mòraig in his Moladh Beinn Dòbhrain (Praise of Ben Dorain). The evidence is stronger when one observes that the melodies are closely related. Matheson starts on a low A instead of a D in Moladh Mòraig, which is very like the beginning of Beinn Dòbhrain. Note that, once again, there are no cadences in the song version and this suggests that the pibroch cadences here are a convention of piping which do not form part of the melody line of the tune. In Ex. 3 below is the first phrase of each song which shows the close melodic relationship between them.

Ex. 3

M. Mòraig.

'S' truagh gun mì sa choill nuair bha Mòr - ag ann.

B. Dòrain.

An t-urram thar gach beinn aig Beinn - dòr - ain.

¹ Charles II was a grand uncle of Charles Edward Stewart.

There is also a close rhythmic relationship which one could show by notating both in the same manner. The difference in singing styles is more subtle than the transcriptions suggest. One has to emphasise therefore that the notation is only a rough guide and could, to someone unfamiliar with the language rhythms, suggest they represented different rhythmic schemes. However, they merely represent two perceptions of the song in an attempt at notating the rhythm using standard musical formats. The first four phrases of Beinn Dòbhrain might be perceived as follows:

Ex. 4

An t-urram thar gach beinn aig Beinn-dòrain, Na chunnaic mi fo'n ghréin, 'Sì bu bhòidheche leam.

Monadh fada réidh, cuile'm faighte féidh, soillearachd an t-sléibh bha mi sòn - rachadh

The above is the writer's own approximate interpretation of a version of the song.

CONCLUSIONS.

The adaptation of the pibroch melody known today as Moladh Mòraig would seem to have started a trend for poets to use the pibroch idiom as a model for a new genre of poetry. This adaptation occurred in the manner of imitation, to various extents, of melody, rhythm and form. Alasdair MacMhaighstir Alasdair's Moladh Mòraig was probably subsequently used, both metrically and rhythmically, as a model by Duncan MacIntyre in his Moladh Beinn Dòbhrain. The pibroch style played today differs substantially in tempo and rhythm from the song versions and is therefore highly unlikely to be representative of the style of the mid-eighteenth century.