The Flowering Thorn
Mckean, Thomas
Published by Utah State University Press

Mckean, Thomas.
The Flowering Thorn: International Ballad Studies.
Project MUSE. muse.jhu.edu/book/9249.

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Simon Fraser’s *Airs and Melodies* [1816]: An Instrumental Collection as a Source of Scottish Gaelic Songs

Mary Anne Alburger

From the Highlands and Islands of Scotland to Nova Scotia, collectors of Scottish Gaelic songs, such as Francis Tolmie (1998), Margaret Fay Shaw (1955), and John Lorne Campbell (1990), had the singer and the song as the focus of their attention. As their publications have shown, these songs, some of which originated hundreds of years ago in Scotland, remained part of an oral tradition still vigorous during the twentieth century.

One of those who collected music for Gaelic songs many years earlier was fiddler and composer Simon Fraser (1772/3–1852), born in the parish of Abertarf, near Loch Ness, Inverness-shire, the only son of Captain John Fraser, late of the 78th, or Black Watch, regiment, and his wife. In 1794–95 he published his first collection of music, *Thirty Highland Airs, Strathspeys, &c* (Edinburgh), mostly his own compositions. In February 1795 he joined the Fraser Fencibles, a local Highland regiment raised to fight in Ireland and active during the rebellions of the United Irishmen, remaining until it was disbanded in 1802. He rose to captain and was particularly successful at recruiting, “his enthusiasm as a Highlander and his passion for the native Celtic music being highly captivating” (*Inverness Courier*, 22 July 1852: 1). Following military service, he returned to a tenancy at Knockie, near his father’s family home, where he became a sheep farmer. Poor advice led to financial ruin around the time *Airs* was published. By then he and his wife, Jane, had three young children. Simon also had an older illegitimate son, Angus (or Æneas) Fraser, or Watson, (1800–72), born to an Inverness servant girl. After twenty-five years in the Army, he was discharged on medical grounds as unfit for service. He went to live with his father, and spent the rest of his life trying to get Simon’s remaining manuscript music and compositions published.

During the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, when Simon was preparing his collection, scholarly interest in Highland traditional song focused on the words (the poetry), or the music, but, unlike Tolmie, Shaw, and Campbell, seldom on both. Simon Fraser’s *Airs and Melodies Peculiar to the Highlands of Scotland and the Isles* (hereafter *Airs*) [1816] was always intended to display the music, not the words. Although Fraser included some of his own compositions
in the 232 tunes, and referred to contemporary as well as older Gaelic songs in his endnotes, the collection was essentially instrumental, set for violin, piano, and cello. Fraser made a conscious choice not to publish Gaelic words for the melodies, for, as he saw it, “many of the words attached to these airs are known to be objectionable in point of delicacy or loyalty, or frequently both;—indeed, numbers of them are unworthy of notice but for the melody” (Fraser 1816: 4).

Despite this declared stance and although he never claimed to be a singer, Fraser’s introduction and comments on the tunes, and the music’s Gaelic and English titles, have enabled me to find many of the poems referred to in Fraser’s texts, and, in this ongoing research, to recover examples of the song repertoire (largely no longer current) by fitting these words to his melodies, which were originally presented as he probably played them on the violin. The information in *Airs* also demonstrates his father’s and grandfather’s varied song repertoires (dating to at least the beginning of the seventeenth century), as well as Fraser’s own eclectic tastes. Examples include a wide variety of song types, several in the older stressed meters (where the melody varies rhythmically to meet the requirements of the poem’s structure), and one which seems to have been designed to be declaimed at pitch, rather than sung to a recognizable melody.

**Gaelic Song**

Ballad scholars are no doubt aware that Gaelic songs are not usually included in ballad study. The songs, their form and function, share little, if any, of the Anglo-Scottish ballad tradition. As Anne Dhu Shapiro wrote, there are “undeniable differences in the total text and music complex of Gaelic and Lowland songs. The rhythm, syntax, and accentuation of the two languages are different; the poetic and conceptual heritage of the two linguistic traditions differs as well” (1985: 407).

James Ross, writing in 1957, was more specific: “While much of Gaelic song, particularly from the earlier period, shares features that we find in the ballad, such as ‘stress on the crucial situation,’ and ‘letting the action unfold itself in event and speech,’ it lacks the important third constant of telling the story ‘objectively with little comment or intrusion of personal bias.’” The story, Ross explained, “may be recognized as a classical ballad plot, but it is told not by a detached observer, but by a participant” (127; the widely known “A’ Bhean Eudach” [The Jealous Woman], parallels “Binnorie” [Child 10] and is usually considered the most complete example of a ballad plot in Gaelic song).

Nevertheless, the songs discussed in this essay do share with ballads the common features necessary for oral transmission as formulated by Cecil Sharp:
variation, through the musical variants which Fraser recorded of songs still known; continuity, through the music for songs he recorded which are still sung; and selection, through those he recorded which no longer exist in tradition. This article follows Bertrand Bronson's approach, exemplified in *The Ballad as Song*, but widens it to include other poetry, not only ballads, which “had been traditionally sung” (1969: vii). Although the elements of “song,” and “poetry” as understood here may be discussed separately, it is important to remember that they seem to have been originally considered inseparable, one and the same.

**Gaelic Poetry**

The complex and strict metrical rules of the early “classical” poetry of the literate professional (*fìlidh*), the often archaic language, and the internal and end rhymes of poems such as the eulogy, the elegy, the panegyric, and the complaint do not have direct English equivalents—traditional or otherwise—nor do they seem to have been melodies as they are usually understood. Because of their complexity—there are “about three hundred” metrical systems (Watson 1976: xvii)—it is generally thought that these compositions were declaimed at varying pitches as surviving musical examples, one of which is included, seem to indicate.

By the early seventeenth century, when the seat of political power moved to London with James I and VI (of England and Scotland, respectively), the role of the *fìlidh* had already begun to diminish, as had the effectiveness of the clan system. New poets emerged who, though they might know and follow many of the constraints of the rigorous older poetry, began to use less complex rhyme schemes and were prepared to abandon the arcane meters and archaisms, along with the old orthography shared with Irish Gaelic.

This newer style of vernacular poetry, accounting for the texts of the majority of the song melodies Fraser collected, is referred to as “modern” Scottish Gaelic poetry (although many of the old features, such as strong assonance and internal rhymes, remained important), which flourished “between 1640 to about 1830” (Watson 1976: xix). Some of these songs are still found in oral tradition, although it is increasingly likely that their production may have been influenced by secondary communication, the reinforcement of text or music directly or indirectly by manuscript or printed sources, or aural sources, such as recordings and other mechanical media.

**Words without Songs**

The major scholarly works on Gaelic poetry edited and published during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries understandably concentrated on trying to
interpret the language and decipher obscure texts. Music was of no concern. The main exceptions are studies by the late William Matheson, School of Scottish Studies, University of Edinburgh, himself a singer, and Colm Ó Baoill, University of Aberdeen. More typical was the approach of William Watson, who, in Bàrdachd Ghàidhlig (1918), ignored performance elements, such as choruses, vocables, and rolling stanzas, which had they been considered, would perhaps have shed light on the texts in question.

Paralleling the work of the early Anglo-Scottish ballad collectors, much of the Gaelic scholars’ research focused on the work of those who had created early manuscripts of Gaelic poetry, helping to preserve the language and art by writing down the words which they and their friends knew or by copying others’ manuscripts. Written Gaelic was nonstandardized well into the nineteenth century, always in flux, a language which could be as individual as each writer and his dialect—even today standard orthography is not acceptable to all. During the eighteenth century, individuals, by necessity, had to create their own orthographies, however curious. In the older poetry, they also had to deal with a vocabulary of archaic words, many of which still puzzle scholars.

By the time Fraser’s Airs was published, some of the collected Gaelic poetry which relates to his work was already in print, for example, that of Alasdair Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair (1751) and collections by his son, Ronald MacDonald of the Isle of Eigg (1776), James Gillies (1784), Alexander and Donald Stewart (1804), and Patrick Turner (1813), among others. As with Percy’s and Herder’s eighteenth-century compilations (1996, 1990), the words lacked music, either because it was thought immaterial, or because the music was in common circulation.

Signposts to Tunes and Service Tunes
In the Gaelic-speaking world, from the time of the first published songs, sources of suitable music were provided alongside the poetry. Alasdair Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair, whose Ais-eirigh (Mac-Dhonuill 1751) was the first published book of Gaelic poetry, set a precedent by suggesting melodies already in print to which twenty-one of his own poems could be sung. These were mostly English and Scottish airs, some from William Thomson’s two-volume Orpheus Caledonius (1733); others were popular song melodies arranged for violin and continuo by the Edinburgh violinist and composer William McGibbon (ca. 1697–1752). Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair does not seem to have chosen the music because the English title or lyrics expressed a similar sentiment or the melodic line was attractive, but because it had a rhythmic pattern to serve as a model for the performance of the song. For his poem “Oran Morair Mhic-Shiomoin” [An Elegy on Lord
Lovat], for example, he suggested the tune “Hap Me with Thy Petticoat,” found in Thomson’s *Orpheus Caledonius* (1972, 1: 21), which may seem a puzzling choice but one which suits the poem’s meter (Campbell 1984: 106–15, 300).

After Patrick MacDonald’s *A Collection of Highland Vocal Airs* appeared in 1784, later poetry collections commonly gave exact page numbers and titles from MacDonald as sources for the song melodies. Alexander and Donald Stewart’s *Cochruinneacha* (1804) prefaced Màiri nighean Alasdair Ruaidh’s poem “Luinneag Mhic Leòid” with “for the air, see Mr. MacDonald’s Collection of Highland Vocal Airs, page 28, [number] 163.” In MacDonald the melody is given simply as “A Skye Air,” with the title “Hithi-ùil-agus O-hithil-O-hòrino,” which corresponds to the vocables of the chorus as they appear in the Stewarts’ version of Màiri’s song. In other cases, the MacDonald reference acted as a service tune, citing music for another song by another poet, as with another poem by Màiri nighean Alasdair Ruaidh, directed to be sung to the tune for quite a different poem, one by Rob Donn.

Simon Fraser’s name appears in the subscribers’ lists of several books of Gaelic poetry, so he may have had easy access to printed texts while he was working on *Airs*, although I have as yet found no evidence that he actually used any of the printed poems as sources of titles for the melodies in his collection. A list of other books (which date from 1770) to which he could have had access can be found in his son Angus Fraser’s papers at the National Library of Scotland (Fraser: Papers).

*Printed Sources of Music for Gaelic Songs Prior to *Airs*

The first traditional Gaelic melodies (including “MacIntosh’s Lament,” a version of a pibroch dated about 1526), some with transliterated Gaelic titles, were published in London by Scottish musician and composer James Oswald in *The Caledonian Pocket Companion* from the 1740s on. These had probably been picked up from passing singers or musicians, in what could be considered an informal type of fieldwork.

Music publishing in Scotland had only recently begun, with music for songs from Allan Ramsay’s *Tea-Table Miscellany* (Stuart 1726–27). As public balls and dancing assemblies became increasingly popular, published collections of dance music increased, with hundreds appearing during the boom years from the 1780s through the 1820s. Many were what I describe as “first-generation” collections (those containing music published for the first time) from native Gaelic speakers, such as Donald Dow’s *A Collection of Ancient Scots Music* (1778) and the hundreds of arrangements of Gaelic songs by Gaelic-speaking musicians as dance
Early Fieldwork-Based Printed Collections of Music for Gaelic Songs

A Collection of Highland Vocal Airs (1784) was the first specifically of Gaelic songs. (At the time, ‘Highland’ was used to describe anything having to do with Scottish Gaeldom.) The music was collected through fieldwork and from correspondents by Argyll-based Rev. Patrick MacDonald (1729–1824) and his brother Joseph (1739–1763). 7

The breadth of interest can be seen in the Highland Vocal Airs subscribers’ list, which includes James (Ossian) Macpherson, Dr. Charles Burney, Mrs. Boswell of Auchinleck, Professor Gordon of King’s College, Aberdeen (whose daughter Anna is better known as Mrs. Brown of Falkland), Dr. James Beattie, Aberdeen (later professor of moral philosophy at the University of Edinburgh), “Mr. Cramer” and “Mr. Abel,” “musician, London” (highly regarded players and composers), and nobles including the Duke of Buccleuch and the Duke of Atholl, alongside others in the forefront of artistic and intellectual pursuits.

It was more than thirty years later that the words and music of Gaelic songs were published together, concurrently with Simon Fraser’s Airs, in Alexander Campbell’s Albyn’s Anthology (1816, 1818). Gaelic-speaking Campbell, assisted and encouraged by his onetime music pupil the author Walter Scott, had traveled, like the MacDonalds, to collect the material for his book, assisted by a grant from the Highland Society of Scotland. A case could be made for Campbell being the first Scottish ethnomusicologist since, when he undertook his fieldwork, he followed the guidelines of the society’s Music Committee:

The Committee shall furnish Mr. Campbell with such instructions in regard to the mode of proceeding in the Collection as may appear proper….

2. Nor with Captain Fraser [who had also applied to the society for funding];
3. Should go through the district of Argyle Inverness & as many of the accompanying islands as possible;
4. To collect unknown tunes and give them without improvement or alienation;
5. To record any historical notes collected with the tune;
6. To note the place where the tune was got and the person from whom it was got;
7. The instrument on which the tune is played;
8. To note down the words adapted to the tune (Royal Highland and Agricultural Society of Scotland Archives; henceforth RHASSA).

Valuable as it was, his publication was marred by poor production values: inelegant music notation and ill-set Gaelic, due in part to his having commissioned alternative poems in English which took precedence over the Gaelic melodies, whose text settings appear as rather hasty afterthoughts.

**Songs without Words**

Although Simon Fraser had also contacted the Highland Society for funding and presumably been issued similar guidelines, he provided notes as requested on “where the tune was got and the person from whom it was got,” and “historical notes collected with the tune,” but not “the words adapted to the tune.” He may have honestly believed that the Gaelic words were “objectionable in point of delicacy or loyalty” (Fraser 1816: 4), but there may be a simpler explanation.

According to the records found thus far of his communications with the Highland Society, he first contacted them for financial support in 1815 (RHASSA, 28 February 1815). By that time his father John, the main source of the vocal music in *Airs*, had been dead for five years. Simon’s large collection must have been started well before his father’s death, and, since he was a violinist, it is likely that, from the beginning, he only recorded the music since that was what he intended to publish, along with his own compositions. By the time he saw the guidelines, it was too late, and any opportunities he may have had to collect the words for songs he had not troubled to learn had been lost.

This situation is similar to the one which Hugh Shields found in his study of nineteenth-century ballad fieldwork in Ireland (1993), which may shed light on the way Fraser and other musicians viewed their involvement:

> Serious amateurs with archival instincts may lack the very rudiments of technology and, though certainly literate, it is unusual for them to be literate enough in music to write down airs. On the other hand, collectors of the past, when they *could* write music, sometimes took interest in it which so far outweighed their interest in words that they overlooked the words or perhaps commented on them only...to complain. (Vallely 1999: 131)
Fraser’s main access to his song repertoire was through his father, John, who died on 14 April 1810 (Inverness Courier, 20 April). Simon recalled a night that he and his father spent with his uncle, who sat “with one or two select friends, exhorting from [John] the songs and anecdotes of which this work [Airs] consists, and the party in the highest glee imaginable. That very night added considerably to the work” (Fraser 1816: 2).

In turn, John’s principal informant was his father, Angus Fraser (ca. 1707–77). Angus was “one of the most extensive graziers and cattle-dealers in the North” (Fraser 1816: 2), who was in partnership with his cousin, MacKay of Bighouse, in Sutherland, for a time the landlord of the Gaelic poet Rob Donn. A successful businessman, Angus brought cattle from Sutherland, in the far north, to be fattened on good grazing near Loch Ness before being driven to markets in the Lowlands. Through his travels, which included his work as a justice of the peace, Angus was acquainted with a wide number of other Gaelic-speaking men who were also singers.

Fraser wrote of his predecessor Angus Fraser,

that in point of song, independent of being a man of good education, [he] stood almost unrivalled (the late Alex. Fraser of Culduthel, the most sprightly singer of Highland song known in the North, alone excepted). They were, however, inseparable, as the best deer hunters and sportsmen of their day, and remarkable for a social and convivial disposition, anxious and interested to acquire a notion of the peculiarities and sentiments...of the different districts through which the one so frequently traveled, as well as to obtain the music and words of their best songs. (Fraser 1816: 1)

Throughout his work, Simon emphasized the paramount importance and veracity of the oral tradition of which he was part. Writing again of Angus, Simon said, “The nature and magnitude of his business led him to every corner of the Highlands and Islands...[and] the airs were sung and retained with great accuracy by my father, who added very considerably to the collection through contact with brother Caledonians from every quarter of the North, while on service during the first American war” (Fraser 1816: 2). It was Angus Fraser’s friends, though, whom Simon mentioned most often and whom he considered, along with his grandfather, most influential, whose song versions became a “standard, formed a century ago, by three neighboring gentlemen of Nairnshire, eminent
performers, Mr. Rose of Kilravock, Mr. Campbell of Budyet, and Mr. Sutherland of Kinstearny” (Fraser 1816: 107). Other gentlemen included Alexander Fraser of Leadclune and Lachlan MacPherson of Strathmashie. 

The association of traditional Gaelic songs with the landed gentry would have been perfectly familiar to Gaelic mother-tongue speakers, who were aware that their singers and poets came from all social classes, but might have surprised some Anglophone antiquarians, who at this time associated traditional song most closely with “the illiterate of the preceding age” (Withrington and Grant 1982: 345).

The Poets
Unlike Anglo-Scottish ballads, the Gaelic repertoire still includes the names of many of the poets who contributed to the genre, some from as early as the sixteenth century. It is also possible to date many of the poems from internal evidence. Some can be identified with battles or other historic events, or with the dates of the chieftains whom the poets praised, satirized, or mourned. Fraser often gave a précis or paraphrase of the poem and recorded the names of some of the best-known poets, among them:

- Alasdair Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair (Alexander Macdonald), ca. 1700–ca. 1770, a literate, well-read scholar who prepared the first Gaelic/English vocabulary for schools in 1739, held a commission in Prince Charles Edward Stewart’s Jacobite army, and was a cousin of Flora MacDonald, who helped save the prince’s life after the Battle of Culloden.
- Donnchadh Bàn Mhic-an-t-Saoir (Duncan Ban MacIntyre), 1724–1812, an Argyllshire forester who served in another’s place on the Jacobite side in the 1745–46 rebellion (the ‘45), and later joined the Edinburgh City Guard.
- Màiri nighean Alasdair Ruaidh (Mary MacLeod, of Skye), ca. 1615–1707, thought to have been a nurse to the children of the clan chief.
- Rob Donn 1714–1778, a cattleman in Sutherland.

Lesser poets include Dughall Bochannan (Dugald Buchanan), 1716–1768, a Perthshire-born catechist and hymnist, whose judgment-day poem, “Laiodh an t-Slaighnear” [Praise to the Savior], may be the longest modern poem in Scottish Gaelic, and Lachlan MacPherson of Strathmashie, ca. 1723–ca. 1798, of whom Fraser wrote, “the world is indebted for suggesting, urging, and aiding his friend [James Macpherson] in the publication of the Poems of Ossian” (Fraser 1816: 2).
Simon Fraser’s Airs as a Source of Melodies for Songs.

Unlike Patrick MacDonald’s collection, Simon Fraser’s repertoire never became a popular resource for song melodies. The most obvious drawbacks to using it this way were made clear by the antiquarian William Stenhouse: “In Captain Fraser’s Gaelic Airs, lately published, a set of this tune [“An Gilleadh dubh”] appears in two strains [sections], loaded with trills, crescendos, diminuendos, cadences ad libitum, and other modern Italian graces. This gentleman professes, however, to give the airs in their ancient and native purity, but ex uno disce omnes! [sic]” (Stenhouse 1853: 131). Fraser was naturally trying to present the traditional melodies in what he thought was the most up-to-date violin style, although, to be fair, the florid decorations which Stenhouse so disliked were already behind the times. Fraser (or his arranger) also tried, time after time, to force basically pentatonic melodies into classical, harmonically correct, major or minor keys to which they were quite unsuited. This, in turn, led to unmusical harmonizations, which distort and haunt many of the settings. Fraser may have had assistance from Nathaniel Gow (son of the famous fiddler Niel Gow, 1727–1807), violinist and publisher, for whom he wrote “Mile taing’ an Udair” [The Editor’s Thanks to Mr. Nathaniel Gow] found in Airs (Fraser 1816: 103).

Nevertheless, a few scholars have used music from Airs, among them Adam Gunn and Malcolm MacFarlane (Orain agus Dùn le Rob Domn Mac-Aoidh, 1899); John Lorne Campbell (Highland Songs of the Forty-five, 1984); and Colm Ó Baoill (Bàrdachd Shìlis na Ceapaich and Gàir nan Clàrsach, 1972 and 1994), while William Matheson referred to Airs but chose to use music from the Angus Fraser manuscript (Matheson 1970) thought to have belonged to Simon’s son.

Fitting the Words to the Music

The common-sense method William Matheson describes takes for granted that the editor will have to make some alterations to the music, beginning with the need to find the true bar lines of the melody, those which will be appropriate to the stress of the poem:

When the position of the barlines is identified, the task of setting syllables to related notes presents no great difficulty. It need only be remarked that, to accommodate the words, some dotted crotchets require to be replaced by two or three notes, as the case may be, of the same total time-value. The opening bars of the second and succeeding stanzas [of “Thrìall bhùnadh gu Phàro,” the poem being discussed], as so often happens, are different from the
corresponding bars of the first stanza. The latter has seven lines, but some other stanzas are shorter, and it is a question of determine Ing by ear which phrase or phrases in the music should be left out. There are also some eight-line stanzas, and here the only recourse is to think of a variation on the existing musical phrases that chimes with the rest. (1983: 131)

The major editorial problems for someone working with the music in *Airs* arise from the difficulties Fraser had when he attempted to transcribe music which was not the same in each verse, where the rhythm needed to change as the stress of the poetry altered. This aspect of oral transmission, basic to Fraser’s collection, was of course allied to whatever skills he had as receiver and transcriber. He at least had what seems like optimum facilities in which to work. At home at Knockie, he could listen to his father or other visiting singers, active sources, with his violin at hand, along with an organ (perhaps played by his wife), lined paper on which to write, his aural memory, and his musical literacy. Presuming that Fraser learned the tunes on his violin first, how easily he learned and transcribed the songs depended on how familiar he already was with the melodies and perhaps how well the singer could repeat the same song until he was satisfied that the tune was correct. Whatever the present editorial puzzles, it is clear that Fraser did the best that he could.

The music used in my editions is based solely on that found in *Airs* (see appendix). Wherever possible, the words fitted to the music come from poems printed earlier than *Airs* [1816]. This provides texts which are contemporary with Fraser’s own song sources. Although there are a few poems which I have only been able to find in print later than 1816, it is certain that poems published after *Airs* could have had no effect on Fraser’s descriptive notes to the songs, or on his music. The music examples given below are, as far as possible, as printed in *Airs*. Only the first two verses of each song are provided here. Any editorial alterations are summarized in Notes to the Music, at the end of this article.

*The Range of the Repertoire*

Gaelic songs are difficult, if not impossible, to categorize scientifically. Perhaps emulating those ballad scholars who have tried to develop thematic catalogues, James Ross made a credible attempt (1957), but such research can produce more problems than it solves since the poets’ intentions and methods of achieving them are, by their very nature, multipurpose and overlapping. There is a wide choice of subjects and types of songs in Fraser’s collection. Here is a small selection:
Complaints       | Lullabies   
Dialogue songs  | Martial songs  
Drinking songs  | Panegyrics   
Elegies         | Religious songs   
Eulogies        | Rowing songs   
Historical songs | Satirical songs   
Humorous songs  | Sentimental songs   
Laments         | Songs associated with hunting   
Love songs      | Songs associated with marriage   

_Evidence of Oral Transmission_

Of the poets mentioned here, only Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair was literate. The others, as far as is known, were nonliterate Gaelic speakers. Their poems were circulated orally/aurally or written down directly from a spoken or sung source—what I will call a transforming interaction, one where the medium of communication is altered—or copied from someone else’s manuscripts, either to be kept for the writer’s own reference, passed on to others, or used as the basis for publications. Rob Donn’s poems, for example, were written down by Rev. Æneas Macleod, minister of Rogart, Sutherland, and by a daughter of the nearby Durness minister, Rev. John Thomson (Morrison, 1899: xliv). After appearing individually in many books of Gaelic poetry, his poems were finally collected and published in 1829, more than fifty years after his death.

Simon Fraser’s personal repertoire of Gaelic songs was the matching half, the music, rather than the words, collected from his father, and his friends. As he described the melodies he had collected, “it is well known that I never left my own or my father’s house to acquire them, as no exertion of mine could equal the deposit left with me” (Fraser 1816: 3). His music, although not printed with the words, can still be considered part of a living source connecting his present and past vocal repertoire with our present and past, which has ultimately produced a printed artifact, representing his musical and linguistic knowledge, sensibilities, likes and dislikes, caught at the moment in time, 1816, when _Airs_ was published. As the writer of the best-known quotation about Fraser said, perfectly describing his role in relation to traditional Gaelic music, “I never knew anyone who could make the fiddle speak Gaelic so beautifully” (MacKay 1874). 

Appendix: Some Songs from Fraser’s Airs

Of the first song, “Bodhan airidh ’m braigh Rannoch,” Fraser wrote, “The shealing in the braes of Rannoch is also [as is his song number 53] given as acquired from the same gentlemen [his father John Fraser, grandfather Angus Fraser and his friends], and more recently sung by Colonel John Ross of the 86th regiment” (Fraser 1816: 108). A sheiling was a temporary wooden hut, thatched with heather, built each spring in the higher pastures where the cattle were moved for better grazing. The song describes the beauty of the setting and is nostalgic about the life shared there. The chorus comes from Watson, 1976: 192; the verses, Gillies, 1786: 242.

“Eiridh na Finnacha’ Gaelach,” which Fraser describes as “The Rebel War Song” (see Fig. 2, overleaf), is a political song associated with the Jacobite rising of 1715 by the Isle of Eigg poet Iain Dubh mac Iain mhic Ailein (John MacDonald, ca. 1665–ca. 1725). The words are from Ó Baoill, 1994: 23–24. Fraser’s note reads, “There are few collections of Gaelic songs but begin with this rebel war song, so that it is well known, and contains a verse in praise of the virtues and valor of each of the Highland clans who joined in the rebellion, but anticipating more than they seemed capable of performing” (Fraser 1816: 108).
Fig. 2. “Eiridh na Finnacha’ Gaelach” (Fraser 1816: 11, no. 2).

The third song, ‘Mi m’ shuidh n’ deireadh Bata”[Sitting in the Stern of a Boat], is one which Fraser obviously knew well: No. 161 is the composition of the Reverend Mr. M’Leod, who, the Editor [Fraser himself] thinks, was minister of Bracadale, in the Isle of Skye, before the last incumbent, and afterwards removed to Argyllshire, being an adieu to his native country. The Editor’s father was extremely fond of this air, as characterizing two friends in early life, very partial to
him, and whom he highly esteemed, Major M’Leod of Balmeanach, and Colonel MacLeod of Talisker. The composer gives a most poetical description of his sailing from Skye, whilst every well-known object, one by one, gradually recedes from his sight, till, at last, no trace of Skye is visible, except the “Bhan Bhein,” or white mountain, and, when it vanishes in the misty vapor, he concludes with a benediction on all he has left behind him, worthy of a genuine poet (Fraser 1816: 114–15). The words are from R. MacDonald, 1776: 341.

Fig. 3. “Mi m’ shuidh n’ deireadh Bata” (Fraser 1816: 76, no. 161).
Notes
1. Henceforth, “Gaelic” refers to Scottish Gaelic.
2. All information about Simon Fraser, his collection, and his family, if not otherwise referenced, may be found in Alburger 2001.
3. The original title page is usually missing from Airs, having been covered over or removed when the volumes were leatherbound. The title in current use is from the frontispiece, which reads, The Airs and Melodies Peculiar to the Highlands of Scotland and the Isles, communicated in an original, pleasing & familiar style, having the lively airs introduced as medleys, to form a sequence to each slower movement, with an admired plain harmony, for the piano forte, harp, organ, or violoncello, intended rather to preserve simplicity, than load with embellishments. It is unusual that he does not mention the violin, which he played, although the melodies perfectly suit the range of the instrument, and he includes other technical instructions relevant to the violin.
4. See Watson for more information about “classical” poetry.
5. Gaelic personal names are often allied with patronymics, or other means of distinguishing people of the same name. The poet known as Alasdair Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair [Alasdair son of Master (or Teacher) Alasdair] is the same person as Alastair Mac-Dhonuill, usually translated into English as Alexander MacDonald.
6. The Aberdeen publication of Forbes’s “Cantus” in the seventeenth century was an anomaly; see Alburger 1996: 17.
7. Joseph’s seminal work, A Compleat Theory of the Scots Highland Bagpipe, also collected in the field, vanished at his death in India in 1763, but was rediscovered and published by his brother Patrick (of Highland Vocal Airs) in 1806; see Alburger 2004.
8. The Highland Society (now the Royal Highland and Agricultural Society of Scotland) volumes are identified by title.
9. The designation “of,” as in “of Strathmashie,” indicates which property the person held, usually as tacksman or wadsetter, whose land was gifted by the clan chief, and signaled someone of the landed gentry; the name of the property often remained associated with the person as a courtesy even if the property (Knockie, in Simon Fraser’s case) was no longer held.
10. The titles of Fraser’s melodies are given here as originally printed with the music, rather than as they appear in his index. His English versions of the titles follow in brackets.
11. Fraser’s note to this song (no. 157) mentions that “Mrs. Fraser, wife of the Editor, frequently performed it [the song] on the organ” (Fraser 1816: 114).

Notes to the Music Examples
Fig. 1. “Bodhan airdh ‘m braigh Rannoch”. The melody has been transposed down a fourth. The original key signature had two flats. The slurs are editorial; grace notes, pauses, and repeats are omitted. Notes with asterisks were originally a semitone higher.
Fig. 2. “Eiridh na Finnacha’ Gaelach”. Syllables within brackets are epenthetic vowels, pronounced, but not written, between certain consonants. They, and the notes to which they are sung are editorial, included here since they influence the rhythm of the poetry, and thus the music.
Fig. 3. “Mi m’ shuidh n’ deireadh Bata”. The original slurs have been altered without notice. Notes above the staves show where the original rhythms differ from this edition.

References
Simon Fraser’s Airs and Melodies (1816) 335


Fraser, Angus. Papers, National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh, Scotland, Adv. MS.73.1.5 f.7r.


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Mac-Dhonuill, Alastair. 1751. Ais-eiridh na Sean Chánoin Albannaich; no, An Nuadh Oraínaigh Gaidhealach. [The Resurrection of the Old Scottish Tongue; or, The New Gaelic Songster]. Ris am bheil coimh-cheangailte, eider-theangair am mineachadh ann am Beurla gach cruagha fhacall a tharlas ann an leabhar. [Included in which is a dictionary with English meanings for every difficult word in the book]. Duneidiunn [Edinburgh]: Go feim an ughdair [For the author].


Royal Highland and Agricultural Society of Scotland Archives, Ingliston, Scotland.
Volumes consulted: “Sederunt Books: 1815–18”; “Draught of Minutes &c. 1815–1818,” containing “Minutes of Sub Committee of The Highland Society, 28th February 1815 (cited as RHASSA in the text; volumes have no manuscript numbers but are identified by title).