

The
NAUGHTY
Little Book of
GAEELIC



All the Scottish Gaelic You Need
to Curse, Swear, Drink, Smoke
and Fool Around

MICHAEL NEWTON
Illustrated by Arden Powell

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GAELIC

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Editor's Note

The content herein is uncensored and does not reflect the ideas or opinions of the author, illustrator, editors or publisher. It includes graphic and/or suggestive language not suitable for all readers. Contemporary readers may be offended by some expressions of gender and sexuality.

Ro-ràdh / **Foreword**

Scottish Highlanders, and their descendants all over the world, are no better and no worse than any other people where “sinful” behaviour is concerned. Standards of morality and social conventions changed dramatically during the 19th century, and most of the people engaged in recording and commenting upon Highland life and tradition during this period were puritanical ministers and priests who left out the distasteful or racy bits that would not meet with the approval of “respectable” British society. That left us all the poorer for understanding these aspects of Scottish Gaelic culture in the past, and this practice of self-censorship has tended to remain in place to the present.

There are many good and useful books for those learning Scottish Gaelic which provide a wide range of vocabulary to express many aspects of daily life – except, for the most part, the topics covered in this book. Ironically, these are precisely the subjects needed for a great many daily conversations and for expressing the full range of human activity. If they aren’t available in Gaelic, people will simply use English.

I have taken these materials from a range of sources and communities, from Gaelic books printed in 18th-century Scotland and from Gaelic speakers in 21st-century Scotland and Nova Scotia. Some of these materials are now archaic and are no longer in general circulation, and some are specific to certain religious traditions (that is, particular to Catholic or Protestant communities). So, while this collection does not represent any one Gaelic community at any one time, and does not claim to be complete or exhaustive, it does shed light on the linguistic resources within the Gaelic language for discussing a wide range of topics. I present them in the hopes that they will illuminate the past, present and future of Scottish Gaelic life in its entirety and inspire readers to continue enriching the language.

I would like to acknowledge a number of people who offered their help, knowledge and insight in many different ways: Virginia Blankenhorn, Goiridh Dòmhnallach, Iain MacAonghuis (John MacInnes), Ailean MacDhòmhnail (Allan MacDonald of Glenuig/Edinburgh), Lodaigh MacFhionghain (Lewis MacKinnon), Seonaidh Ailig Mac a’ Phearsain (John A. Macpherson), Trueman Matheson and Maureen Williams.

— *Michael Newton, 2014*

Cursing

Cursing here refers to wishing ill of a person or thing, often by calling upon the assistance of non-human agents such as God, the Devil and other “supernatural” beings.

These curses cover a range of ill will or anger: some of them express violent rage, while others can even be used teasingly. Subtleties of degree are hard to capture in translation and out of context – use with caution!

Unlike the fixation on sexual activity in English, Gaelic curses and insults are oriented around death, suffering and damnation.

Terminology

The verb “to curse, to damn”

mallaich

a’ cur mallachd air

Nouns related to “curse” or “verbal insult”

aoir – satire, caricature

bearradair eachd – insulting language

càineadh – putting down, slagging off

contrachd / cundrachd – curse

droch cainnt – bad language

droch ghuidhe – ill wish

gearradh-cainnte – invective, cutting language

guidheachan – invocation of ill will toward someone

mallachd / mollachd – curse



Bàs an fhithich ort!

May you suffer the death of the raven!

Curses

Adharc 'nad chliathaich!

May a horn enter your side!

A dhonas is a dhòlas ort!

May you suffer evil and sorrow!

Àireamh na h-Aoine ort!

May you be cursed by counting on Friday! (Counting cattle on a Friday was taboo; doing it exposed a person to the ill will of the fairies.)

An-agmaigh ort!

May you suffer shame!

An dunaidh 'nad chliathaich!

May disaster enter your side!

An-uair ort!

May bad weather befall you!

Bàs an fhithich ort!

May you suffer the death of the raven! (It was believed that ravens were killed by their own young.)

Bàs dunach ort!

May you suffer the death of disaster!

Bàs gun sagart ort!

May you die without a priest!

Bealach millidh ort!

May you go into the mountain pass of destruction!

Beul sìos ort!

May you have a down-turned mouth!

B' fhearr leam gun robh thu ann an h-Irt!

I wish you were in St. Kilda!

Buinneach o'n teine ort!

May you suffer diarrhea from the fire! (It was believed that if diarrhea made contact with fire it would be much worse.)

Burn dubh ort!

Black water on you! ("Black water" is a euphemism for depression.)

Cadal na caorach anns an dris ort!

The sleep of the sheep in the brambles to you!

Cadal an deargain air a' ghreidil dhut!

The sleep of the flea on the griddle to you! (This is a reference to a story about a flea that fell asleep on the bottom of the griddle and only awoke when it was put on the fire.)

Car tuathal t' aimhleis ort!

May you take an unlucky turn for the worse!

Contrachd ort!

Curses on you!

Dia 'nad aghaidh is 'nad aodann, bàthadh air muir is losgadh air tìr, crogan sgithich eadar do chridhe is t' àirnean!

May God be against you and in your face; may you suffer drowning at sea and burning on land; may a branch of hawthorn be thrust between your

heart and your kidney!

Dì-bìdh ort!

May you lack food! (This was commonly directed toward those better off who oppress the poor.)

Dìol Bhaltair an Gàdhaig ort!

May you suffer the fate of (Lord) Walter (Comyn) of Gaick, Badenoch! (He was believed to be ripped to pieces by eagles.)

Droch bhàs ort!

May you have an evil death!

Droch bhealach ort!

May you travel an evil mountain pass!

Droch caoidh ort!

May you suffer an evil moan!



Buinneach o'n teine ort!

May you suffer diarrhea from the fire!

Droch ceann ort!

May you suffer an evil end!

Droch ciall ort!

May you suffer bad sense!

Droch comhdhail ort!

May you encounter an evil omen!

Droch coinneamh ort!

May you have an evil encounter!

Droch crìoch ort!

May you come to an evil end!

Droch crann ort!

May you have bad luck!

Droch dhìol ort!

May you suffer a bad fate!

Droch fhuil ort!

May bad blood be on you!

Droch iùil ort!

May you suffer ill guidance / navigation!

Droch sgeul ort!

May there be bad news about you!

Droch sgillinn ort!

May an evil shilling (bad luck) find you!

Droch sgioram ort!

May you suffer an evil stumbling!

Droch shiubhal ort!

May you suffer an evil journey!

Fraighean falamh do d' bhus!

May your mouth encounter empty food storage!

Gaoth gun dìreadh ort!

May unbeatable winds overcome you!

Geòlach ort!

May you wear death bandages!

Gonadh ort!

May you be wounded (by the evil eye)!

Guma h-olc dhut!

May evil befall you!

Guma h-anmoch dhut!

May you wander in darkness!

Gum bu droch dhruighleach dhut!

May you only have bad dregs!



Gun toir am Fear Mór leis thu!

May the Great Man (the Devil) take you with him!

Gun gabh a' bhochdainn thu!

May poverty take you!

Gun gabh an Riabhach thu!

May the Brindled One (the Devil) take you!

Gun sgath am Fear Mór thu!

May the Great Man (the Devil) destroy you!

Gun toir am Fear Mór leis thu!

May the Great Man (the Devil) take you with him!

Is oil leam nach robh do luath fo charn!

I think it's too bad that your ashes are not lying under a cairn!

Ith do chac!

Eat your shit!

Leibid ort!

May ineptness befall you!

Losgadh do chridhe ort!

May you suffer the burning of your heart!

Losgadh dubh do dhunach ort!

May you have the black burning of your disaster!

Manadh do chrochaidh ort!

May you have the premonition of your hanging!

Marbhphaisg ort!

May you wear a death-shroud!

Mallachd Phàdraig ort!

May Patrick's curse be on you!

Mìoloinn ort!

May you suffer wretchedness!

Miothlachd ort!

May you suffer discontentment!

Na h-uilc is na h-uirchill ort!

May you suffer evils and diseases!

Nasg is bràighdean ort!

May you wear the collar of captivity!

Pathadh nan caorach ort!

May you have the thirst of the sheep! (That is, may you be dead.)

Pòg mo thòn!

Kiss my arse!

Rach a h-Irt!

Go to the island of St. Kilda!



Saighead dhubh do ghonaidh 'nad thaobh!
May the black arrow of wounding enter your side!

Saighead dhubh do ghonaidh 'nad thaobh!
May the black arrow of wounding enter your side!
Siubhal Artair ort!
May you depart like Arthur (who never returned)!

Siubhal na Samhna dhut!

May you depart like Halloween!

Spriolag ort!

May you wear a corpse's headband!

Thoir Ifrinn ort!

Go to Hell!

Tòn air eigh dhut!

May your arse fall on the ice!



Tòn air eigh dhut!

May your arse fall on the ice!

Swearing

Swearing here refers to the use of “salty” language and the uttering of profanities, or euphemisms to avoid certain words or names (such as the Lord’s name). Most of these are exclamations that are usually cried out in surprise, anger or pain.

Terminology

Nouns related to profanity

mionnan — strong language (for example, taking the Lord’s name in vain)

speuradh — using profanities

tapag — involuntary exclamation, usually words with a sexual connotation

Expletives and Exclamations

A Leabhaire!

O Book (the Bible)!

A mhic an damnaidh!

O son of damnation!

A mhic an Diabhail!

O son of the Devil!

A mhic an Riabhaich!

O son of the Brindled One (the Devil)!

A mhic Ifrinn!

O son of Hell!

A mhic an uilc!

O son of evil!

An ainm an àigh!

In the name of joy!

An Diabhal fhéin!

The Devil himself!



Bod an Donais!
The Devil's penis!

An Donas Dubh!
The Black Evil (i.e., the Devil)!

A Mhuire Mhàthair!
O Mother Mary!

A thrustair nan seachd sitigean!
O nasty man of the seven middens!

Bod a' chac!
Penis of the shit!

Bod an Donais!

The Devil's penis!

Bod ort!

A penis for you!

Iasg is feòil!

Fish and flesh! (This is a euphemism allowing the speaker to avoid saying *Iosa* [Jesus])

Iutharnaich riabhaich na galla!

O brindled hell-dweller of the bitch!

Mo chreach-sa thàinig!

My ruination has come!

Pit air iteig!

Flying vagina!

'S e plàigh a th' annad!

You are a plague!

Snuff and Tobacco

Scottish Highlanders were already noted in the 17th century as being exceedingly fond of snuff. So renowned were they for their love of the weed that wooden statues of them were set outside of London snuff shops similar to the “Cigar Shop Indians” better known in North America. Snuff boxes and horns were commonly given as expensive presents. A snuff-mull that dates from about 1715 was carved from ivory in the shape of a Scottish Highlander.

The renowned Gaelic poetess, Màiri nighean Alasdair Ruaidh, composed a poem of thanks to John MacLeod of Bernera sometime in the late 1600s when he presented her with a snuff-mull. Martin Martin, a native of Skye who wrote about the Western Isles of Scotland in the late 17th and early 18th centuries, mentions that the people of the island of Barra were so fond of tobacco that they tried to grow it on the island! The existence of a term referring to the agitation of a person needing a fix of tobacco – recorded in the 19th century – suggests the degree to which tobacco had become entrenched in Highland life: *Tha an turach air* (He is agitated because he needs his tobacco).

On the other hand, anti-smoking songs can also be found in Gaelic by the mid-19th century in both Scotland and Canada.

Terminology

a' gabhail toit — taking a smoke

a' smocadh — smoking

snaoisean — snuff

tombàc(a) — tobacco (a Native American word borrowed into many European languages, including Gaelic)

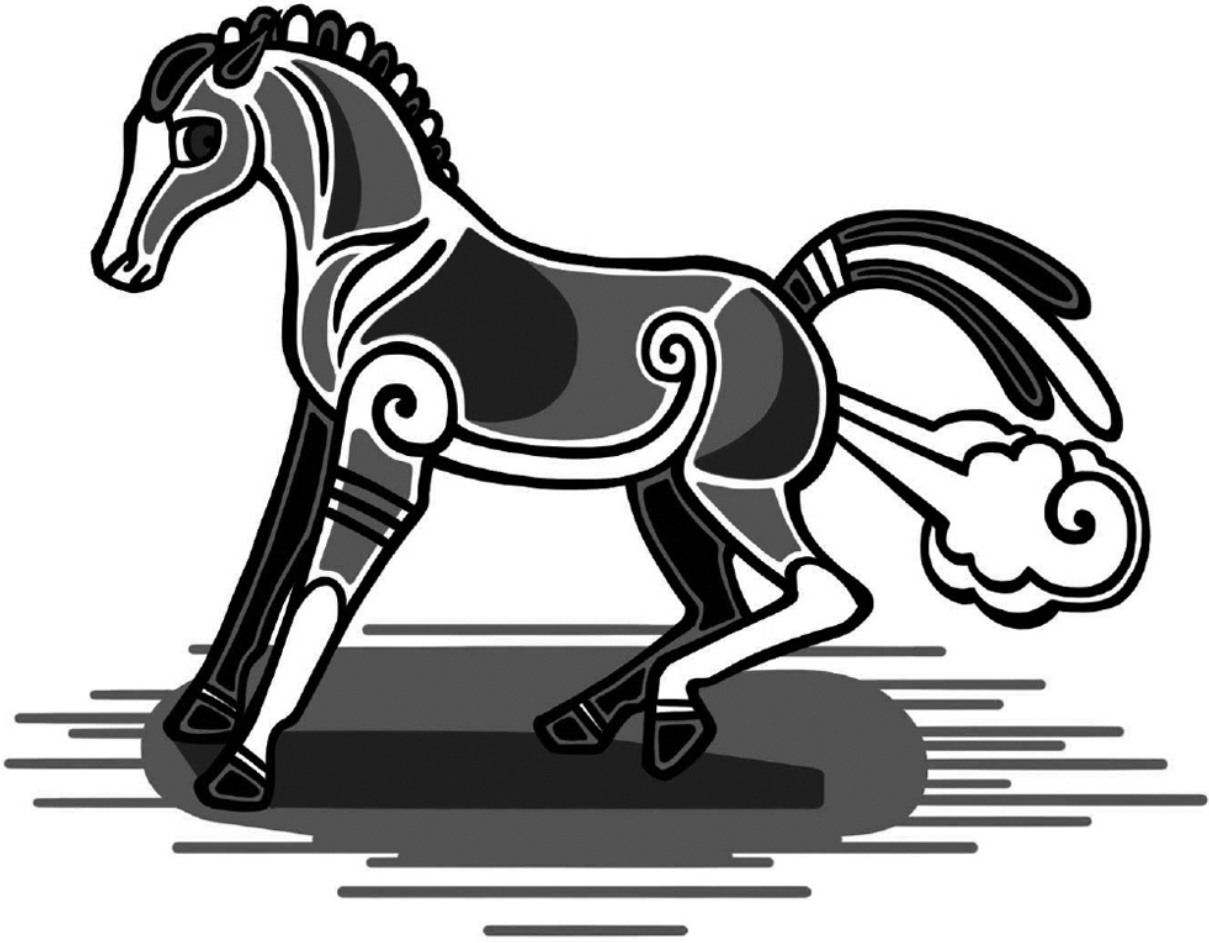
Proverbs

Am biadh a theachdas os cionn gach bìdh: snaoisean.

The food that can follow all others: snuff.

Chan fhacas fear-faoighe riamh gun tombàc.

A gentle beggar was never seen without tobacco.



“Altachadh an t-Snaoisein” / “Ode to the Snuff Box”

Ode to the Snuff Box

This is a Gaelic poem in praise of a snuff box that was originally printed in 1780 but may be older.

*Fàilt’ ort fhéin, a bhogais
'S do chleite mhath maille riut:
Tombàca math biorach donn
Chuireas braim á gearran.*

*Air a lomadh,
air a phronnadh,
Air a chur ri teine;
Seachnaidh e an t-sròn*

*'S ruigidh e an t-eanchainn;
Bheir e an t-anam 's a' chaillich
A chaill e bho chionn seachd bliadhna.*

*Chan eil airc fuail
na tionndadh bramaich
No gnè galair
tha 'n aorabh duine
Nach cuir e às
a dheòin no a dh'aindeoin.*

*Seo ort, a shròn,
Freagair, a thòn!
Math am pliobairnich, snaoisean –
Amen, a bhogsa.*

Welcome to you, O box
And your good powder along with you:
Good, sharp, brown tobacco
Which causes a workhorse to fart.

Stripped, crushed and roasted:
It will sidestep the nose
And reach the brain:
It will revive the spirit of the old woman
Who lost it seven years previous.

There is no disease of the blood
Or repeated swelling
Or any nature of sickness
In a person's constitution
That it will not destroy
With or without its co-operation.

This is for you, O nose,
Make your response, O buttocks!
Snuff is great stuff –
Amen, O box.

Ode to the Tobacco Pipe

This song-poem in praise of the smoking pipe was composed by an anonymous Canadian Gael in Glengarry County, Ontario, in the 19th century. It seems to have been in response to those who disapproved of the use of tobacco, and indeed the poet seems to express some reservations toward the end of the poem.

*'S i mo ghaol a' phìob-thombàca
Ged tha mi 'saoithreach 'gad lasadh;
Mur fàgadh tu m' aodann cairtidh
Ghabh mi tlachd dhiot thar gach nì.*

*'S toigh leam thu 's a' mhadainn reòta
Chuireadh tu blas feadh mo phòran;
'S nuair a thachradh duine còir rium,
Dh'fheòraichinn deth "An gabh thu 'phìob?"*

*Ged bha càch a' sìor chur sìos ort
'S mise nach creideadh an sgeula:
Ged bha mulad 'gam liathadh
Thogadh tu gach fiabhras diom.*

*Chan eil cailleach, chan eil bodach, –
Ged bha fiamh is fraoch gu trod orr' –
Nach tionndadh gu sìth bho 'n chogadh
Nuair gheibheadh iad toit dhe 'n phìob.*

*'S bho 'n shìn mi riut an eòlas
'S tu mo thoil-inntinn 's mo shòlas;
The smoking pipe is my beloved
Even if lighting you keeps me busy;
If it weren't that you leave my face smoked
You would be my joy above all other things.*

I like you in the frozen morning
You would fill my pores with sensations;
And when a congenial fellow encountered me,
I would ask him, "Do you smoke the pipe?"

Even though everyone always puts you down
I would not believe their story:
Even if sorrow was turning me grey
You would lift every sickness from me.

There is no man or woman –
Even if they were heated for a brawl –
Who would not turn from battle to peace
When they would get a smoke from the pipe.

Ever since I began to get to know you
You have been my comfort and entertainment;
'S chan eil ionndrainn an sùgh an eòrna
Nuair théid do cheò air feadh mo chinn.

An àm dol a chadal 's an oidhche
Chan iarrainn caidreabh ri maighdinn;
Nan cumadh tu toit is greim rium
Chan fhaighneachdainn gu dé 'phrìs.

Shaoil mi, nuair a bha mi gòrach
Nach dèanadh do chaidreabh gò dhomh;
Ach thug e tarraing air mo phòca
Na chaidh 'nad sgròban sìos.

Ach nuair chuir mi suas de chunntas
'S ann chithinn gnìomh ùr dhomh:
'S chosd mi tuilleadh mòr is punnd riut,
'S cha robh dh'ùine ann ach mìos.

Com na fialachd, nach iarr airceas,
Làmh a riarachadh an tombàca:
Am fear nach fiach 'na bheul a bhlas dheth
Saoilidh e gur creach gach nì.
I do not miss the juice of the barley
When your smoke fills my head.

At night, when it is time to sleep
I would not seek out the company of a maiden;

If you would supply me with smoke and a grip
I would not ask the price.

I thought, when I was naive
That your company would do me no harm;
But it took a toll on my pocket,
All that which went down your tube.

But when I took full account,
Indeed, I saw the matter anew:
I spent well over a pound on you,
Even though it was barely a month.

The embodiment of generosity, that lacks not,
Is the hand that passed out the tobacco:
The man who will not try a taste of it himself,
He will think that everything is a disaster.

Drinking

Scientists have established that many different species intentionally ingest substances that alter their state of consciousness. Archaeologists have traced the human invention of alcohol back to at least the year 10,000 BCE.

Alcohol has a long history in Gaelic culture and was important for several purposes and contexts. First, offering it is an act of generosity, hospitality and social cohesion. Second, it was a means of commemorating and even communicating with the ancestral dead – the modern toast is a dim echo of that tradition. Third, it was a means of invoking an altered state of consciousness, a “high” which intensified the pleasant social conviviality of the occasions on which it was shared among hosts and guests. Fourth, it imparted warmth and energy quickly to people living in a cold climate.

While alcohol has its comforts and its delights, these sometimes come at a cost, especially if taken to excess. Gaelic tradition does not condone unrestrained drunkenness, but instead endorses good health and moderation. Indeed, as demonstrated below, some Gaelic poets criticized the effects of excessive drink generations before the Temperance Movement.

Terminology

Types of drink

deoch an dorais — departing drink at door (see below)

deoch-cuimhneachain — toast in memory of deceased

deoch-eòlais — drink to form acquaintance

deoch-maidne — morning drink (whisked egg, milk and whisky)

Being in a state of drunkenness

Tha e air an dallanaich. — He is blind drunk.

Tha e air an daoraich. — He is getting drunk.

Tha e air mhisg. — He is on a bender (getting drunk).

Tha an deoch air. — He is drunk.

Tha goileag air. — He is drunk.

Tha smùid air. — He is happily drunk.

Bha e air smùid mhór a ghabhail. — He went on a big drinking binge.

Drinking and drinkers

misgear — drunkard

pòite — excess drinking

pòitear — hard drinker

Names for Liquor

briuthas — homebrew

a' ghealach gheal — white moon(shine)

mac an Tòisich (or *mac na Tòiseachd*) — whisky, by association with Ferintosh, Ross, which paid no duty for distilling

mac na bracha — the son of the malt – i.e., whisky

mac na praisich — the son of the still – i.e., whisky

poit-dhubh — black still (illegal liquor)

uisge-beatha — the water of life; the origin of the English word “whisky”

The Four Drams of the Morning

The term *sgailc* (forceful blow, thump, slap) was used metaphorically for a dram of whisky. Those who could afford it would start the day with a series of four small drams to get them started, the alcohol acting like fuel to warm them up. These four drams accompanying the stages of awakening were called:

sgailc-nid — a nest-dram, taken while still in bed

friochd-uilinn — a nip of the elbow, taken while beginning to arise



Deoch an Dorais
The Door Drink

deoch cas rùisgte — a bare-footed drink, taken after getting to one's feet but before getting dressed

deoch bhleith — a ground-meal drink, taken while waiting for porridge to be served

The Effects of Drink (Two Proverbs)

Aon ghloine: chan fheairrde is cha mhisde e;

Dà ghloine: is fheairrde, is cha mhisde e;

Trì gloineachan: is misde is chan fheairrde e.

One dram: not the better or the worse from it;
Two drams: the better and not the worse from it;
Three drams: the worse and not the better from it.

*Aon ghloine: chan fheairrde is cha mhisde mo chorp no m' anam e;
Dà ghloine: is fheairrde mo chorp e is cha mhisde m' anam e;
Trì gloineachan: is misde m' anam e is chan fheairrde mo chorp e.*

One dram: neither my body nor my soul is the better or the worse from it;
Two drams: my body is the better from it, and my soul is none the worse;
Three drams: my soul is the worse from it, and my body is none the better.

Advice and Wisdom

An uair a bhios an deoch a-staigh, bidh an ciall a-muigh.

When drink is inside, sense is outside.

'S e an suidhe docharach anns an taigh-òsda as fhearr.

Give preference to the uncomfortable seat in the tavern (so that you don't stay too long).

uair air mhisg is uair air uisge

alternate between drinking alcohol and water

Deoch an Dorais / **The Door Drink**

The custom of drinking upon departing from company was associated with *Clann Donnchaidh* (and also known as *deoch Cloinn Donnchaidh*) and is first mentioned by this name in the late-17th-century *Collection of Highland Rites and Customs*. This tradition was made famous in the anglophone world by an original song of this name that was sung by popular singer Harry Lauder in 1911. The oldest variant of this of which I know goes as follows.

Deoch an dorais,

Deoch an t-sonais

Deoch an deagh thurais;

Nì sona, gun robh againn,

Nì dona, cha bu dual;

Air ghaol sìthe 's air eagal conais,

Thugadh Deoch an Dorais dhuinn.

The door drink,
The happy drink,
The drink of a good visit;
We had good things here,
Bad things are not our custom;
For the love of peace, and for fear of quarrelling,
Let the door drink be given to us.

The following modern variant was given to me by Gaelic scholar John MacInnes.

*Deoch an dorais,
Deoch an t-sonais
Deoch an deagh thurais;
Nì dona, chan eil againn,
Nì math, bu mhath leinn;
Air ghaol sìthe, is air eagal conais,
Thoiribh deoch an dorais dhuinn.*

The door drink,
The happy drink,
The drink of a good visit;
We have nothing bad here,
Only the good things we would like;
For the love of peace, and for fear of quarreling,
Give us the door drink.

John explained that the door drink could be used by the host as a polite means of calling an end to a night's visit.

Duncan Lothian's Door Drink

This toast was composed by 18th-century Gaelic poet Duncan Lothian of Perthshire in the same tradition as the *deoch an dorais* ditty above.

*Slàn do d' mhnaoi ghil,
Slàn do d' mhacaibh
Slàn do d' theach o'm binne ceòl;*

*Slàn do d' shràidibh geala gainmhich
Slàn do d' bheanntaibh o'm bi ceò;
Bhon a thàrladh dhuinn bhith sona,
Is beairt dhona nach tig ruinn:
Air ghaol sìthe, is air eagal conais,
Thugar deoch an dorais dhuinn!*

Farewell to your fair wife,
Farewell to your sons,
Farewell to your home which emits the sweetest music;
Farewell to your fair, sandy lanes,
Farewell to your mountains which emit mist;
Since we happen to be happy
An ill deed does not suit us:
For the love of peace and for fear of quarreling
Let the door drink be given to us.

The Finger Lock

Highland bagpipers still play a tune commonly called “The Finger Lock” in English, which derives from an old Gaelic *piobaireachd* whose original words describe an addiction to excessive drink and its effects. The words and tune are traditionally ascribed to Ragnall mac Ailein òig, a Clanranald aristocrat who played both bagpipes and *clàrsach* (Gaelic harp). He is believed to have lived between about 1662 and 1741. The following are the words of the ùrlar (ground or theme of the tune).



“A’ Ghlas-Mheur”
“The Finger Lock”

*Òl, òl, òl; òl, òl, òl; òl, òl, òl;
Òl, òl, òl; òl, òl, òl; òl, òl, òl;
Òl air an daoraich, òl, òl, òl;
Òl, òl, òl; òl, òl, òl; òl, òl, òl.*

*Òl air an daoraich, òl, òl, òl;
Òl mar a dh’fhaodas, òl, òl, òl.*

*Òl air an dallanaich, òl, òl, òl;
'S òl air an daoraich, òl, òl, òl.*

*Bho dhallanaich gu dallanaich
Gu dallanaich na daoraich.*

*Òl air mhisg, òl air mhisg,
Òl air mhisg, òl air mhisg.*

*'Chuid nach òl sinne dhe,
Òlaidh na gillean e.*

*Òlaidh na gillean e
Iarraidh na gillean e.*

*Òlaidh sinn, òlaidh sinn,
Pàighidh sinn, òlaidh sinn.*

*Mach, a-mach, a-mach, a-mach,
Fear nach pàigh an taigh, a-mach!*

*Òlaidh sinn ar boineidean
Ged lomadh air na maolaibh.*

*Òlaidh sinn na gartana
Th'air na casan caola.*

*Òlaidh sinn na breacana
Ged bhiomaid ris a' ghaoith.*

Drink, drink, drink; (x3)

Drink, drink, drink; (x3)

Drink until drunk; drink, drink, drink;

Drink, drink, drink; (x3).

Drink until drunk, drink, drink, drink;

Drink as you can, drink, drink, drink.

Drink until blind drunk; drink, drink, drink;

And drink until drunk; drink, drink, drink.

From blind drunkenness to blind drunkenness
To the blind drunkenness of drunkenness.

Drink while drunk, drink while drunk
Drink while drunk, drink while drunk.

What we don't drink of it
The lads will drink.

The lads will drink it
The lads will want it.

We will drink, we will drink,
We will pay, we will drink.

Get out, out, out,
He who will not pay the house, get out!

We will drink our bonnets,
Even if the bare patches would be exposed.
We will drink the kilt-garters
That are on our slender legs.

We will drink the plaids
Even if we would be exposed to the wind.

A Thousand Curses on Drunkenness

Although there is a very long tradition of the use of alcohol in feasting and the celebration of masculine culture – especially the bond between the war leader and his band of followers – we can expect an equally long tradition of a critique of the excesses of alcohol, as typified by this 18th-century example.

*Mile marbhphaisg air a' mhisg
Dh'fhàg i mi fo dhrip gu bràth;
Dithist chuir i dh'Ifrinn shìos:
Mi fhéin 's Niall mac Dhomhnaill Bhàin.
Bheireamaid na mionnan móra
Nach òlamaid deur gu bràth;*

*Ach nar cluinneamaid fuaim nan stòp
Leanaidh ar tòn ris an làr.*

A thousand curses on drunkenness;
It has left me forever ensnared;
It has sent two people to Hell below:
Myself and Niall son of Fair Donald.
Let us take serious oaths
That we shall never drink another drop;
Let us not hear the sound of drinking vessels
Or may our arses stick to the ground.

Anti-Whisky Quatrain

This is a very old quatrain casting doubt upon the virtues of whisky – a word borrowed into English from the Gaelic *uisge-beatha* (the water of life).

*Chan uisge-beatha ach uisge-bàis:
An t-uisg' a chràidh mo chridh' 'am chom,
An t-uisge dh'fhàg mo cheann-sa liath,
An t-uisge dh'fhàg na ceudan lom.*

It is not the water of life but the water of death:
The water that vexed the heart in my body,
The water that has left my head grey,
The water that has left hundreds of people poor.

Sex

The relatively large size of human genitalia (in contrast to those of other mammals) indicates that evolution reflected and reinforced a strong human interest in sex, even if cultures have surrounded it with taboos to prevent us from taking our natural instincts too far.

Since entering the Gaelic world in the 5th century, Christianity has been trying to reshape moral standards and social behaviour. Although religion had a profound influence, the Gaels were never a prudish people. There was a Gaelic – indeed, a Celtic – tradition of composing poems in praise of genitalia (male and female) which spanned several centuries, one example of which is given below.

Religious pressures on secular Gaelic society increased dramatically from the late 18th century onward and drove sexual material underground. Even the church's pathological desire to control behaviour and compile catalogues of sins and punishments acknowledges the overwhelming power of human sexuality.

Terminology

Genitalia

bigein — genital (male or female)
boicionn — foreskin or vaginal folds
breall — lump, glans (male or female)
croiteag — genitals, especially female
gobhal — crotch

Female Genitalia

bodach beag a' bhàta — the little old man of the ship (clitoris)
brillean — clitoris
camas — bay, harbour (the space between the thighs)



bodach beag a' bhàta
the little old man of the ship (clitoris)

cìrean coilich — rooster's comb (vagina)

clais — furrow (vagina)

duille — leaf (vagina)

earball — tail (vagina)

faighean — scabbard (vagina)

geòbag — vagina

geosg — vagina

péiteag — vagina

pit — vagina

ròmag — female genitals

Male Genitalia

acainn cungaidh — healing tool (penis)

bagais — testicles

ball-fearghais — manly limb (penis)

ball odhar — pale limb (penis)

bigealais — penis

bod — penis

brioglach — foreskin

clach(an) — testicle(s)

clag — bell (penis)

cliospairneach — penis

cluigean — male genitalia

cnapan — knob, lump (penis)

corc — knife (penis)

crann — erection

crom odhar — the bent pale one (penis)

Domhnallan Dubh — Little Black Donnie (penis)

dos — bagpipe drone (penis)

gille — lad, servant (penis)

gogan — penis

magairle(an) — testicle(s)

slat — rod (penis)

Expressions for Sexual Activities

almadh — copulation

An d' fhuair thu criomag? — Did you get some action?

bioranachadh — copulation

bobhdach — copulation

bogadh — dipping, bobbing (copulation)

breileanachd — copulation

caith — ejaculate

Chaidh e air a muin. — He mounted her.

cleamhnas — copulation

coinbheineadh — fondling, groping

collainn/cullainn — copulation

crògairreachd — fondling, groping

dàir(ich) — copulation (most commonly used of animals, and hence very vulgar)

fannadh — masturbating

feis — sex

fùcadh — fulling, milling, waulking (copulation)

gurrach — hunkering (copulation)

maistreadh — churning butter (copulation)

marcachd — horse-riding (copulation)

muineadaireachd — copulation

obair na h-oidhche — night work (copulation)

piteireachd — copulation

pòg Sgalpach — French kiss

reitheachas — ramming, rutting (copulation)

seinn na clàrsaich — playing the harp (copulation)

slataireachd — copulation

stoigeanachadh — copulation

Feelings and States

dàrail — horny, randy (now most commonly used of animals)

fadhar — horny, randy

muineal — horny, randy

musaidh — horny, randy

Tha an dàir oirre. — She is in heat. (This has crude and derogatory overtones.)

Tha e air theas air a son. — He has got the hots for her.

Other Terms

bainne — milk (sperm)

breallach — impotent

cnatan — sperm

drabasta — obscene, smutty, lewd

drabastachd — obscenity, sexually explicit material

draosta — obscene, smutty, lewd

draostachd — obscenity, sexually explicit material

siol-ghinidh — sperm

stuth — stuff (sperm)

uachdar — cream (sperm)

Sayings, Idioms and Doggerel

cho cinnteach is a tha bod 's an each

as sure as the horse has a penis

cho tioram ri pit a' chlamhain

as dry as the buzzard's vagina

cho trang ri triùir ann an leabaidh

as busy as three in bed

Is iomadh rud a nì dithis dheònach.

Two willing people can do many things.

Mur téid mise ort, tha mi an dòchas nach téid nas mios' ort.

If I don't get you, I hope nothing worse does.

Sgaoil i rium a clàrsach ghiogailteach.

She spread her tickly harp for me.

Thuir am bodach ris a' chaillich, "Thig mi air do mhuin."

Thuir a' chailleach ris a' bhodach, "Tha mi coma coma cuin."

The geezer said to the old woman, "I'm coming to mount you."

The old woman said to the geezer, "Any time at all."

Quatrain on a Lecherous Priest

Ding, dang, dearaidh,

Buail do chlag, a chléirich –

'S ma tha ding eile ann,

Cuir an toll eile e!

Ding, dong, derry,

Strike your bell, O priest –

And if there is another "ding" in it,

Put it in another hole.

Quatrain on Flirtation

B' fhearr leam dol an cùil le caileig

No dol a throd ri sgiùsair caillich:

Teangaidh bheumach gheur is i tana

Is pòinsean 'na beul mar ghath nathrach.

— *Coinneach MacCoinnich*

I would rather be in a corner with a lassie
Than go to argue with a scourge of a matron:
A sharp, lashing, flog of a tongue
With poison in her mouth like a snake's stinger.



Quatrain on Flirtation

Quatrain on MacAlasdair's "Dirk"

*Tha biodag aig MacAlasdair,
Dh'itheadh i mar ghearradh i,
Tha biodag aig MacAlasdair*

Tha biodag leobhar mhór aige.

MacAlasdair has a “dirk”;
It would eat as it would cut,
MacAlasdair has a “dirk”
He has a big dangling “dirk.”

Quatrain on Rory’s “Coat”

*Bha ’n còta deas,
Gu tioram deas,
Bha còta deas aig Ruairidh,
Bha còta bean na bainnse
Gu tioram teann aig Ruairidh.*

The fine “coat,”
Fine and dry,
Rory had the fine “coat”;
The bride’s “coat,”
Tight and dry, Rory did have.

A Busy “Equestrian”

*Thuir Mairi Dhùghallach ri Grace,
“Seo agaibh Iain mór nan each
'chur nam ban an òrdugh.”
Thuir Grace ri Mairi Dhùghallach
“Tha mo ghobhal-s’ air a rùsgadh!
Faigh uil an ròin domh!”
Said Mary MacDougall to Grace,
“Here, ma’am, is Big John of the Horses
To take care of the women.”
Said Grace to Mary MacDougall,
“My crotch has been stripped bare!
Get me some seal oil!”*

The Bawdy “Blacksmith”

Gur e an gobhainn biorach odhar,

*Gobhainn Cille Chreanain;
'S olc a chàraich e mo chlobha,
Gobhainn Cille Chreanain;
Gur mór e 's gur odhar e.*

He is the pointy, pale blacksmith,
The blacksmith of Kilchrenan;
He screwed up my tongs,
The blacksmith of Kilchrenan;
He is big and pale.

Not Tonight, Dear

Còmhradh eadar Eòin MacLeisg agus a bhean:

Bean: Éirich, a Eòin!

Eòin: Chan éirich e le deòn...

Bean: Tha e bog: dèan cruaidh e! Chan eil e cruaidh leòr!

Eòin: Is iomadh té air an cuir e o-chòn.

A conversation between John MacLazy and his wife:

Wife: Get it up, John!

John: It won't rise willingly.

Wife: It's flaccid: make it hard! It's not hard enough!

John: It makes many women complain.

Stanzas on Ravishment

*Ma choinnicheas caileag òg mi,
'S gun dòigh aic' air gluasad,
Bidh mise 'ga turraman
'S a' gurrach air a h-uachdar.*

If a young girl encounters me,
And she has no means of escape,
I will wobble her
And hunker on top of her.

*Chuir e làmh air pit na caileig,
'S shaoil leis gur e 'n t-ìm bh' aige:*

'S spairt e 'n rud ud innte.

He put a hand on the girl's vagina,
And thought that he had butter:
And he thrust that thing in her.

*Thog mi orm gu brocail
'S beul an an-moich agam;
Cha b' ann crom mar bhodach
Ach gu fada caol.*

I went at it like a badger
In the early evening;
Not flaccid like an old man
But long and slender.

*Bhith ruith nan caileag cùl nam preas,
'S e 'm féile beag as docha leam;
Bhith ruith nan caileag cùl nam preas,
'S e 'm féile beag as àill leam.*

For chasing the girls behind the bushes,
I prefer the little kilt;
For chasing the girls behind the bushes,
The little kilt is my dearest.

Sexual Riddle

There are many riddles in Gaelic tradition in which something is described but encoded in double meanings which must be “decoded” to figure out what the thing really is. Riddles are a sort of verbal pun play. The following riddle describes sexual activity in terms of euphemisms.

*Nuair a thigeadh tràth-nòin
Bhiodh a taigh-sa 'na fhròig:
Le dorchadas mór, gun léirsinn,
Bhiodh a' chaile 'na steòc,
'S a dà làimh m'a glùn mór
Ag amharc air éibhleag eadar dà fhòid.*

When high noon came
Her house would be a dark cranny;
In total darkness, unseeing,
The girl would be idly gazing
With her two hands around her big knee
Looking at a burning ember between two sods.

In Praise of an Excellent Penis

This is the oldest surviving poem in vernacular Scottish Gaelic in praise of genitalia, although there are earlier examples in Classical Gaelic and Irish. This poem was composed by the renowned arch-poet-propagandist of the 1745 Jacobite Rising, Alasdair mac Mhaighstir Alasdair, and printed in his self-published 1751 volume of poetry.

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

There is a lucky limb stretched against you
That has made a thousand conquests:
An excellent penis that is leathery, well-equipped,
Sharp-pointed, piercing, firm,
Lubricated, sinewy, chanter-like,
Strong, durable, long-enduring,
Vigorous, powerful, joyous,
That would not jilt either soft or hard (body).

Sources

The materials in this book were drawn from a wide variety of sources and informants, both oral and written. Several printed sources were particularly important:

Black, Ronald, ed. *The Gaelic Otherworld*. Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2005.

Campbell, John L., ed. *Gaelic Words and Expressions from South Uist and Eriskay*. Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1972.

Dwelly, Edward. *The Illustrated Gaelic-English Dictionary*. 1901-1911.

Nicolson, Alexander. *A Collection of Gaelic Proverbs and Familiar Phrases*. Edinburgh: Maclachlan and Stewart, 1881.

Cursing

Many of these curses were originally printed in the following:

Anon. "Gaelic Expressions of Wish and Adjuration." *The Highland Monthly* 3 (1891): 400-407.

Campbell, John L. "The Rev Dr Kenneth MacLeod's Collection of Gaelic Asservations, Exclamations, and Imprications." *Scottish Gaelic Studies* 17 (1996): 71-81.

Clachan [pseud.] "Gaelic Terms Expressive of Affection and Terms of Invective." Series in *An Deò-Gréine* 7-8 (1917-1918).

Swearing

Discussion of Gaelic terminology about types of verbal expressions can be found in John Shaw, "The Ethnography of Speaking and Verbal Taxonomies: Some Applications to Gaelic," in *Celtic Connections: Proceedings of the Tenth International Congress of Celtic Studies*, 309-23, ed. Ronald Black, William Gillies and Roibeard Ó Maolalaigh (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 1999). The exclamations were taken from a mixture of printed and oral sources.

Snuff and Tobacco

I published a 19th-century Gaelic anti-smoking song in *Warriors of the Word: The World of the Scottish Highlanders*. Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2009, 357-58.

There was also a versified debate about the merits and vices of tobacco between two 19th-century Cape Breton poets. Their poems are given in *Smeòrach nan Cnoc 's nan Gleann*, collected by Bernard Gillis and Dr. P. J. Nicholson, ed. Hector MacDougall (Glasgow, 1939, 78, 142).

“Ode to a Snuff Box” was taken from *The History of the Feuds and Conflicts among the Clans* (Glasgow: Printed by J. & J. Robertson, for John Gillies, Perth, 1780), 136-37. The text is poorly written and there are a couple of terms which are difficult to interpret.

“Ode to the Tobacco Pipe” appeared in *The Glengarrian*, September 24, 1897.

Drinking

For more about the functions and associations of alcohol in Scottish Gaelic culture, see Michael Newton, *Warriors of the Word: The World of the Scottish Highlanders* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2009).

Information about the four drams of the morning is taken from R. MacDonald, “A dictionary ramble,” *Scottish Language* 13 (1994): 82-87.

The two variants about the effects of one, two and three drinks appeared in *Litir do Luchd-Ionnsachaidh* 547 (January 8, 2010) by Ruairidh MacIlleathain, which he collected from the Gaelic tradition of Caithness.

The older *Deoch an Doruis* was taken from *The Celtic Monthly* 5, vol. 18 (May 1910): 97.

“The Finger Lock” (*A' Ghlas-Mheur*) is taken from *An Gàidheal* 3 (1874): 74-75.

“A Thousand Curses on Drunkenness” was originally printed in *The History of the Feuds and Conflicts among the Clans* (Glasgow: Printed by J. & J. Robertson, for John Gillies, Perth, 1780), 137.

The anti-whisky quatrain was published in *Co-chruinneacha Dhan, Orain, &c* (Inverness: Friseal, 1821), 182.

Sex

Many of the terms in this section were contributed by friends in Scotland and Nova Scotia. Many other terms, and most of the quatrains, were taken from the rare booklet H. Welter, *Gaelic Erotica* (Paris, 1907). Several other terms were gleaned from recent editions of neglected Gaelic materials, particularly:

Black, Ronald. *An Lasair: Anthology of 18th-Century Scottish Gaelic Verse*. Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2001.

———. “A Bawdy New Year’s Rhyme from Gaelic Scotland.” *Scottish Studies* 35 (2010): 1-35.

Some others are also taken from:

Black, Ronald. Review of *The Wedding Poems of Dáibhí Ó Bruadair*, *Scottish Gaelic Studies* 27 (2010): 128-35.

Wentworth, Roy. *Gaelic Words and Phrases from Wester Ross*. Self-published, 1996.

There is a good general discussion of the Celtic poetic tradition of the praise (and dispraise) of genitalia in Sharon Arbuthnot, “A Context for Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair’s *Moladh air Deagh Bhod*,” in *Rannsachadh na Gàidhlig 2000*, ed. Colm Ó Baoill and Nancy McGuire (Aberdeen: An Clò Gàidhealach, 2002).

“Quatrain on Flirtation” was originally printed in Coinneach MacCoinnich, *Òrain Ghaidhealach* (Edinburgh, 1792), 140.

Moladh air deagh bhod, “In Praise of an Excellent Penis,” was printed in Alexander MacDonald, *Ais-eiridh na Sean Chánoin Albannaich* (Edinburgh, 1751), 158.

About the Author and Artist

Michael Newton has a PhD in Celtic Studies from the University of Edinburgh. He has written many articles about Scottish Gaelic tradition, culture, history and literature in Scotland and in North America, and written and edited several books, including *We're Indians Sure Enough: The Legacy of the Scottish Highlanders in the United States* (2001), *Calum and Catriona's Welcome to the Highlands* (2006), *Warriors of the Word: The World of the Scottish Highlanders* (2009) and *Celts in the Americas* (2013).

Arden Powell has a Bachelor of Arts in English from St. Francis Xavier University. Arden is a freelance illustrator, an aspiring writer and a graphic novelist, and when not wasting the days away on the Internet, occasionally actually finds the motivation to make art.

Also by Michael Newton

Warriors of the Word: The World of the Scottish Highlanders. Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2009.

Sgeulachdan an Dà Shaoghail. Glasgow: Sandstone Press, 2007.

A Handbook of the Scottish Gaelic World. Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000.

Bho Chluaidh gu Calasraid / From the Clyde to Callander: Gaelic Tales, Songs and Traditions from the Lennox and Menteith. Revised edition. Glasgow: Grimsay Press, 2010.

“We’re Indians Sure Enough” : The Legacy of the Scottish Highlanders in the United States. Self-published, 2001.

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Scotia 27: Proceedings of Highland Settlers conference, 2003.