

Pulling down the Pulpit to make way for the Stage: An Exploration of *Anna Chaimbeul* and *Roghainn Nan Daoine*

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In her seminal article on the Gaelic plays of Tormod Calum Dòmhnallach (Norman Malcolm MacDonald), Michelle Macleod asserts that 'drama became an art form based in the Gaelic community which encouraged participation and gave writers a guaranteed outlet for their work. In some respects the place that Gaelic drama held – and to a degree continues to hold – is similar to that traditionally held by 'bàrdachd baile' ('village poetry'); it is an art form which grows and develops in the community.' (Macleod 2008: 407) It is this emphasis on community, both in the process of creating Gaelic drama and in the subject matter of the drama itself, which is the focus of this article. Two Gaelic plays – *Anna Chaimbeul* ('Anna Campbell') by Tormod Calum Dòmhnallach and *Roghainn nan Daoine* ('The People's Choice'), a play developed by John Wright, Muriel Ann MacLeod and Toria Banks – will provide examples of 'enacted' community, while two important themes – folksong and religion – will be explored in the context of this 'enacted' community life. Michael Newton has stated that 'Highland life was accompanied by the oral tradition, especially song, from the lullaby of the newborn to the lament of the deceased.' (2009: 102) The fact that the Church also provides this comprehensive coverage of all aspects of life (and death) in its traditions and observances means that the secular activity of folksong and religious belief are ideally placed as community foci which significantly impact on community life, and, in relation to the plays, the lives of the characters and the narrative. Thus, they have been chosen as central issues to be explored in this essay because they permeate the overall pattern of both plays. While the two plays may at first appear to be markedly different in subject matter, stylistic approach and the time period in which they were composed, this article will explore the common threads which subtly link them together and will highlight these plays, taken both together, as being indicative of a progression and expansion in the genre of Gaelic drama from the 1970s to the present. Firstly, the definition of community in Gaelic culture will be briefly explored, in order to contextualise the standpoint from which these community-driven plays emerge. Because of the nature of Gaelic drama, which has been described as the 'forgotten genre' in Gaelic literature, (Macleod 2011) it is also necessary to introduce each play in some detail; with so few plays in print, Gaelic drama is perhaps not as well-known, at least in printed form, as it should be. Therefore, significantly, Gaelic drama could also be described as a community-based genre of literature for the simple reason that knowledge of these plays among Gaelic speakers often depends on the chance of seeing the plays performed, rather than having the option of reading the plays in published form. The remainder of the article will focus on the theme of community in both plays, comparing and contrasting the content and design of the plays in relation to characterisation, music/sound, staging and the theme of 'testimony' or 'witness'.

## Defining Community in Gaelic Culture

In his introduction to *Contested Communities: Experiences, Struggles, Policies*, P. Hoggett explores the meaning of community, theorising that the term has been associated with the hope and wish of reviving closer, more harmonious bonds between people that were attributed to past ages. (1997: 5) This attitude could certainly be applicable to Highland communities; with the disintegration of clan society in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, it was the formation of the crofting community in the 19<sup>th</sup> century which, to some extent, gave a strong voice to Gaelic culture and language. It is also necessary to address the intersection between crofting communities and religion at this stage. Allan MacColl has recently explored the religious aspect of anti-landlord feeling and successfully argued that during this key period in Highland history, rather than being hostile to the protest movement, evangelical Presbyterianism with its Christian social teaching, actually influenced the way in which crofters criticised and attempted to curb the power of the landlords who had almost unlimited freedom to evict their tenants and raise rents, at least before the Crofters Act of 1886. (MacColl 2006)

From the early 20<sup>th</sup> century onwards there have been competing definitions of community, including meanings related to geographical area, groups of people living in particular places, and community as an area of common life. (Smith 2001) Elizabeth Frazer's approach to community – that it is something which should be viewed as a 'value', relating to feelings of solidarity, commitment, mutuality and trust – indicate that 'community' can be a positive experience for those who participate within it. (1999: 76) Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (1991) offers the most significant case for the exploration of the processes that influenced nationality and the sense that communities and nations are formed in people's minds (i.e. 'imagined'), an idea which continues to be useful for those who are attempting to understand the changing cultural landscape of the Gàidhealtachd. However, the most suitable theory of community that can be applied to Gaelic communities can perhaps be found in the work of Anthony Cohen – he argues that communities are best approached as 'communities of meaning', with people constructing 'community symbolically, making it a resource and repository of meaning, and a referent of their identity.' (Cohen 1985: 118) With the Gaelic word for 'community' – 'coimhearsnachd' – meaning both 'neighbourhood' (referring to geographical locality as well as to a group of people) and 'neighbourly conduct', it is entirely possible that the Gaels have grasped the sort of approach put forward by Cohen who suggests that 'community' can be responsible for regulating behaviour in groups of people, and can encompass similarity and difference, in that a group of people need to have something in common with each other and that once they are 'in communion' a boundary then exists between those who are part of that community and those who are not. (1985: 12) Peter Mewett has explored this idea in the context of relationships within a Lewis community, with particular emphasis on how the secular and religious interact on a community level (1982) – to be 'in community' or 'in communion' can itself become an exclusionary act, with those on the outside experiencing the stigma of exclusion. (Smith 2001) This situation will be explored later in relation to both plays, which employ the dramaturgical use of music and song and the theme of testimony,

processes which give rise to both positive and negative manifestations of experience of community for certain characters. Frazer's description of the *experience* of community as 'euphoric' is also significant within a Gaelic cultural context. She writes:

On occasion or at such times members experience a centred and bounded entity that includes the self as such; they engage in exchanges and sharing that are personalized; the orientation to each and the whole engages the person and, as some are tempted to put it, his or her soul. It is from such occasions that 'the spirit of community' or 'sense of community' is achieved....The aspiration to community is an aspiration to a kind of connectedness that transcends the mundane and concrete tangle of social relationships. (Frazer 1999: 83)

The Gaelic oral tradition can be viewed as a symbol of this sort of 'exchange' within a community – the work songs, and in particular, the *òrain-luaidh* or waulking songs, of which there are allusions in both *Anna Chaimbeul* and *Roghainn nan Daoine*, were group compositions with group choruses. The cèilidh-house was of central importance to community life, providing a platform for the oral tradition, which covered a wide spectrum of occasions and genres. Michael Newton states that 'a wide variety of sources from nineteenth- and twentieth-century Highland communities testify to the common institution of the cèilidh 'house-visit, gathering' and its central place in keeping oral tradition alive amongst the common orders of Gaelic society.'(2009: 102) It provided a venue for social and political issues arising within the community and Newton underlines its significance in that context; 'as the cèilidh was a local institution, based in a community, run by and for the members of that community, it could be tailored to their needs, concerns and resources.'(2009: 106) By extension, the importance Gaels placed on the cèilidh-house serves to emphasise the community gaze in Gaelic society, something which is covered in both plays, and which will be explored in a later section of this article under the theme of testimony. If the cèilidh-house is viewed through the lens of Frazer's theory of community i.e. it provides the space where 'transcendence' – this meeting between people – can happen to form a sense of community, it could be argued that the Church also provides this platform. Perhaps the most significant theoretical distinction between 'coimhearsnachd' and 'coimhthional' ('congregation'), and what moves community into the realm of congregation is that in a religious setting, the transcendence that is reached i.e. that sense of 'belonging' between people, has the addition of God being experienced as part of the community/congregation. This kind of spiritual moment of community transcendence will be explored later with the discussion of psalm singing at a pivotal moment in *Roghainn nan Daoine*. Of course, while both a secular and religious sense of community has its place in Gaelic culture, by the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Puritan model of the 'inner community' meant that this focus was sometimes at the expense of the other community pursuits of music and song. (Newton 2009: 218) Donald Meek has also discussed secular and religious community oppositions:

In Catholic communities, the attitudes of the 'faithful' to secular Gaelic culture are noticeably less polarized than those of evangelicals in Protestant communities . . . The Roman Catholic communities are regarded as being more sympathetic to Gaelic culture generally. Thus, it is argued, traditional songs and stories are more likely to flourish in Roman Catholic communities, and a substantial body of material, gathered from the 1930s in South Uist and Barra, would tend to support this view. But the collection of oral traditional material was more actively pursued in the Catholic communities than in Protestant ones in the earlier part of this century, and this has tended to colour the interpretation of the evidence. . . .

It is thus apparent that despite what we may say about the positive contributions of the churches to Gaelic culture across the years, the negative image provided by the secular poets such as Ruaraidh MacThòmais coincides closely with certain aspects of evangelical self-definition and cultural activity (or inactivity). On the one hand, the perspective is born of antipathy towards the Protestant church and especially its (allegedly) insensitive evangelical wing; on the other, the desire of certain religious bodies to emphasize their spiritual purity and their separation from the world leads to a playing down, or even a renunciation, of involvement with the cultural heritage. (1996: .53; 64)

It is clear that both the secular and religious aspects of community provide a certain element of tension in the recent cultural history of Gaelic Scotland, and these are symbolically incorporated into the plot and staging of *Anna Chaimbeul* and *Roghainn nan Daoine* in the form of cèilidh-house and church scenes. The interconnectedness and tension between these different locations is underlined from an anthropological standpoint by Mewett, who indicates that the Church controls the secular Lewis community by providing 'a model of secular behaviour against which the person's actual behaviour can be judged.' (1982: 102) The Church is akin to a 'pressure group' within the community, maintaining the operation of a moral consensus, and a sense of public testimony in the form of taking communion, reserved for 'God's Elect' or those who 'have the *cùram*'. (Mewett 1982: 120-121) In both plays, religious pressure is exercised upon specific characters (and interestingly, these same characters often symbolise secular Gaelic culture, e.g. the fiddler in *Roghainn nan Daoine*). Thus, the significance of the 'community gaze', and how the secular and religious interact in this context, is a major aspect of the drama in both *Anna Chaimbeul* and *Roghainn nan Daoine*, and will be studied in more detail later in this essay.

### *Anna Chaimbeul*

*Anna Chaimbeul* was written by Tormod Calum Dòmhnallach (1927-2000), a playwright who has not been given the full recognition that he deserves in the field of Gaelic literature and scholarship. He was brought up in Tong in the Isle of Lewis and

*Anna Chaimbeul* is perhaps one of his best-known plays. It was first performed in the late 1970s, being first written for Point Players. (Macleod 2008: 409) It could be argued that its popularity may be based upon the accessibility of its subject matter; it is a highly stylised modernist interpretation of the story behind 'Ailein Duinn', a song which deals with a tragedy, which is well-known in oral tradition, involving a sea-captain Allan Morrison. It was believed that in the spring of 1768 he left Stornoway in his boat, to go to Scalpay for the *rèiteach*<sup>1</sup> – he was planning to marry Anna Campbell, daughter of Campbell of Scalpay. However, his vessel was caught in a storm and he and the rest of his crew drowned. Anna died afterwards from a broken heart and when her family were crossing in boats from Scalpay to Rodel, for her burial, they were also caught in a terrible storm. Anna's ghost appeared to them, urging them to give her body to the sea and her coffin was thrown overboard. The bodies of Anna Campbell and Allan Morrison are said to have been later found together on a nearby island. (Black 2001: 493)

'Ailein Duinn' is a haunting song and Dòmhnallach's play represents and adheres to this general atmosphere. The play centres on Anna rather than Allan and with this decentring of the protagonist, the story is subtly altered in its focus. In a tradition such as Gaelic, which places such emphasis on an oral tradition in which the nature of mythic and legendary figures are so easily recognised and, by extension, solidified in cultural memory due to songs and stories being re-sung, retold and kept alive, it is perhaps understandable that playwrights have begun to explore ways in which these characters and stories can be reinterpreted for modern audiences in relation to current social and gender-specific issues.

The play features Anna Chaimbeul, a Seanchaidh and a Chorus. The Seanchaidh introduces the story, with the Chorus taking up the well-known song and miming the actions of the storm and the drowning of Allan. There are exchanges between Anna and the Seanchaidh as she tells of how she waited for Allan's boat (some of these exchanges again employ lines of the song). Later in the play, the Seanchaidh and Anna interact as Anna acts as a 'vessel' for the voice or spirit of Allan, who also tells his story. Of course, in a piece of drama as opposed to a song or poem, details can be expanded and the story can be developed and re-imagined; Allan asks to be examined by the Seanchaidh in the role of a confessor so that his soul can be at peace. He tells of an affair with a Spanish woman, Juanita, whom he met while waiting to return from overseas with his cargo; the silk and Spanish red wine mentioned in 'Ailean Duinn' are developed further in the play as Allan's cargo as a merchant or trader. This is a play about the love between two people but there is also the sense of coming to terms with one's own shortcomings. The Chorus take up the second part of the story with the Seanchaidh, demonstrating how the ghost-version of Anna achieves her destiny of being with Allan by persuading the Crew/Chorus to throw her coffin into the sea during the storm. The play ends with Anna, not clothed as a corpse but as a bride, alone on the stage singing the lines of 'Ailein Duinn' before tearing off her veil and throwing it to the audience.

## *Roghainn nan Daoine*

*Roghainn Nan Daoine* is a contemporary piece of physical theatre performance dealing with the story of the Free Church in Lewis, developed by John Wright, Muriel Ann MacLeod, Toria Banks and actors from Theatre Hebrides. The seven-strong company toured Scotland during May and June of 2010 and the play was performed in Gaelic with simultaneous translation to English provided on individual headphones for the audience. *Roghainn nan Daoine* intertwines two powerful stories, one of a young island woman's struggle with matters of principal and living with the choices she has made, the other with the desperate social and political circumstances which provoked the emergence of a new spirituality-based belief system in the 1840s, which still has meaning and impact today. Joyce MacMillan, in a review of the play for *The Scotsman*, wrote that 'At the core of the event, there's an astonishing and powerful story, full of resonances for the 21st century; the story of how the bitter experience of economic injustice, clearance and famine gradually drove the people of Lewis into the hands of a harsh but populist religious fundamentalism, that sided with them against landowners.' (10 June 2010) The play is split into thirteen sections; the Church of Scotland, New Religion, Growing Up, Women's Choices, Haymaking, Displaced People, Sheep and Shepherds, Disruption, The Free Church Takes Hold, Potato Famine, Communion, Eviction and The End. Interspersed with these sections the actors frequently come out of character and play themselves, discussing the staging and the storyline. Joyce MacMillan also observed in her review that the number of characters required the actors to play them using many different voices, including 'chunky blokes putting on headscarves to play elderly women', which hinders the tone that the overall play is aiming for. (10 June 2010) On the other hand, the number of characters and the actors' task of moving between these characters, taking on very different roles in the process, is perhaps deliberately engineered by the playwrights to illustrate the challenging nature of community as something of a multi-cellular organism. The audience witness the events in which the Free Church took hold, against a backdrop of famine and clearance, with lengthy examples of sermons, examples of the reciting of the catechism, a communion service and a particularly strong peak in the play in which the congregation rise up and walk out of the Established church, singing their Gaelic psalm from outside the walls. However, there is a family drama which is playing out simultaneously alongside the social and religious timeline. It centres around two sisters, Catriona and Dolag and their grandmother. Dolag eventually marries the fiddler in the story who comes to represent what is lost from the community – music and the oral tradition – after the church grows in strength. In contrast, he becomes a shadow of his former self, a drunkard and a depressive. Catriona, the other sister, grows up with her friend Iain, and they are eventually engaged. Before they can get married, he is called up to his regiment and, after his return from war, their relationship breaks down, when an English woman arrives on the island and it becomes clear she is carrying his child. Catriona makes the decision to give Iain up, so that he can be a father to the unborn child – she turns to religion and never marries anyone else. Later in the play she becomes ill with a fever. Iain has become a factor, evicting the families in the community from their homes. Filled with remorse about the mistakes he has made in life, Iain and Catriona have an emotional exchange. Catriona later dies, Dolag and her husband and family make the decision to emigrate to Canada to begin a new life and Iain, in a final

conversation with the grandmother, decides to leave the island for the mainland, where he has the prospect of a job in London.

### Voicing Community in *Anna Chaimbeul* and *Roghainn nan Daoine*

The characters drive the narrative in both plays and the scripts, with their particular emphasis on explanation of the storylines through the voices of specific characters ensure that the audience is always aware of what is going on. This, in itself, is an act of community; there is a sense of communal intimacy here – the audience are never left in the dark and, on several occasions, are actually granted special access to the drama. In *Anna Chaimbeul* it is the Seanchaidh who fulfils this main role. The definition for ‘Seanchaidh’ in Dwelly’s dictionary is ‘reciter of tales or stories, antiquarian, one skilled in ancient or remote history, historian, recorder, keeper of records, genealogist.’ (1994: 798-799) The Seanchaidh in *Anna Chaimbeul* is true to this definition. At the beginning of the play he comes to the front of the stage and directly questions the audience:

SEANCHAIDH An cuala sibh am fear seo? An cuala sibh an sgeul aig Ailean Donn agus Anna? Tha fhios gun cuala.

’S e Seanchaidh a th’ annamsa. Seanchaidh. Chan eil mòran againn air fhàgail. (NicLeòid 2016, 65)

STORYTELLER Did you hear this one? Did you hear the story about Dark Allan and Anna? I know you did.

I am a storyteller. A historian. There’s not many of us left.

He begins to tell the story but it is these first words which indicate his role most succinctly; he speaks to the audience as if they are gathered in the cèilidh-house rather than in a theatre and, by doing this, the audience are immediately transported from a ‘formal’ setting to a closer, more informal setting in which they are more involved. By including the audience in this way, the character of the Seanchaidh underlines his role as spokesperson for the community in the retelling of the song, ‘Ailein Duinn’. It is also significant that he asks if the audience have heard the story (rather than reading about it). Like the participants of the cèilidh-house, a piece of drama ensures that everyone leaves with the knowledge of the story, because they are watching the story unfold and listening to it i.e. no skill in written Gaelic is either assumed or needed. As a progression of this point, it may be that what is being witnessed in relation to *Anna Chaimbeul* and other plays like it, is a development of the oral tradition. While the Seanchaidh, in his traditional role would have recited a tale or piece of history, a Gaelic theatre audience are receiving more – they are still being treated to an oral rendition of a story but, in *Anna Chaimbeul*, they do not need to visualise the events for themselves because the action is also being enacted in front of them.

This immediacy and closeness is achieved in *Roghainn nan Daoine* in a different way. In the absence of an official Seanchaidh figure, the group of actors take his place and the barrier between audience and actors is again broken down, not by the actors directly addressing those watching, but by their slipping out of character and becoming themselves in snippets of comical exchanges between scenes. For example, at the start of the play, the actors<sup>2</sup> discuss how it will look if they take down the scenery of the pulpit during the play. This is perhaps the most overtly self-conscious part of a play which is already so informed and influenced by religion. For the purpose of this article, excerpts from the play have been reproduced directly, with no editorial changes, from the bilingual script used by the Theatre Hebrides actors in 2010. Any spelling irregularities and discrepancies in this excerpt and those that follow throughout the article have been retained from the original script.

- |    |   |  |
|----|---|--|
| W  | Fuirich, fuirich, fuirich, fuirich....a bheil coir againn a chùbain a thoirt sìos?            | Wait, wait, wait, wait... are we supposed to be actually pulling down the pulpit?  |
| M  | Uill fèumaidh sinn sealladh tìre a dheanamh leis an set. 'Se sin a tha sinn a deanamh.        | Well we need to be make a landscape with the set. That's what we're doing.         |
| D  | A cleachdadh a chùbain?   | Using the pulpit?  |
| BK | Seadh uill. Tha e ag radha rud èiginn, nach eil?  | Yeah, well. It's a bit of a statement, isn't it?                                   |
| W  | A bheil thu a smaoinichadh gur e sin beachd dhaoine?  | Do you think that's what people are thinking?                                      |
| BK | Uill 'se sin a smaoinichins.  |  |
| M  | Dè tha e a ciallachadh a rèist?   | Well, it's what I'd be thinking.   |
| W  | Uill, tha e ag radha...   | What does it mean then?  |
| BK | Uill tha e cuir as do'n eaglais.  | Well, it says...   |
| C  | Tha. Ana creideamh.   | Well it's destroying the church.   |
| M  | Mar bhall de'n luchd èisteachd chaneil mi de'n bheachd gun tèid sin troimhn' inntinn agsamsa. | Yes. Anti-religion.  |
| C  | Ma nì sinn luath e cha mhothaich duine.   | As a member of the audience I don't think that that's going to go through my mind. |
| W  | Tha sin a rèir 's mar a bheir sinn as a chèil e.  | If we just do it quickly, no-one will notice.                                      |
| C  | Uill 'nam be rud èiginn cinnteach a   | But it depends how we dismantle it.  |

- W bhitheadh sinn a deanamh, agus chan e dìreach, och tha fios agad .....
- M Dìreach a gabhail grèim air agus ga bhriseadh.
- BK 'Nan cuireadh sinn na pìosan de'n chùbain comhladh agus gun togadh sinn mar eisimpleir, chaneil fhios agam, 's dòcha taigh, an uairsin dh'fhaòdair a radha gu bheil thu a toirt an rud as urrainn dhuit bho'n eaglais agus 'ga thoirt a steach do'd chùisean làitheil
- W Fèumaidh sinn an sealladh tire airson an turas a dheanamh, mar a thuirt mi.
- BK Tha sin ag radha rud eiginne eile.
- C Tha gu dearbha.
- BK Mun talamh a bharrachd air togalaichean
- M A bheil sinn ag radha rud eiginne an seo... 's dòcha nach eil a chùbain cho cuidromach ris an sealladh tire neo gu bheil e gu bhi air a thoirt a steach ann.
- D A bheil sinn ag radha gu bheil an eaglais a deanamh a choimhearsnachd? An e sin a tha sinn ag radha, gu bheil an eaglais a deanamh an dùthaich mar a thà i?
- M Tha a choimhearsnachd a deanamh an eaglais. A Choimhearsnachd agus an talamh. Tha an talamh a toirt seachad na bun stuthan.
- Chan e , 'se th'ann. Uill tha na trì co cheangailt' ri chèile, nach eil? Talamh, Eaglais, Cùbain, bla, blà, blà...
- So y'know if it was something positive that we were doing and wasn't just a case of, y'know...
- Just grabbing it, and wrecking it.
- If we were to take the bits of the pulpit and build it into, I don't know, for example, a house, then there's the implication that you're taking what you can take from the church and bringing it into your everyday life.
- We've got to make the landscape for the journey scene. Like I said.
- That says something else.
- Yes it does.
- About the earth rather than buildings.
- I mean are we saying something a bit...are we saying the pulpit's not as important as the landscape, or that it's going to be subsumed...
- Are we saying that the church makes the community? Is that what we're saying, that the church makes the land what it is?
- The community makes the church. The community and the land. The land provides the raw materials...
- No, it's that. Well all three are, well they're interconnected together aren't they? Land. Church Pulpit. Blah blah blah.<sup>3</sup>

The actors' comments are important here; there is a very definite positioning of themes of church, community and landscape and the actors, by the very nature of their seemingly 'off the cuff' and light-hearted exchange, show how the institution of the church has interacted in history within an island community like Lewis. However, on a meta level this exchange is also very telling because, by troubling themselves

about how it will look to the audience if the actors 'pull down the pulpit', they are assuming (in a very postmodern way) that the audience is 'in on the joke' and have prior knowledge of the religious issues which beset this community. Again, this assumed knowledge is not a far cry from the cèilidh-house, in which people would be conversant with social and political issues that would often arise in stories and songs. The playwrights are exploiting the fact that the play is performed in Gaelic (albeit with simultaneous translation through earphones into English) and therefore, will be attended by a largely Gaelic-speaking or at least Gaelic-centric audience, thus making it possible to be confident about what information the audience will bring into the theatre. The fact that the audience are even discussed by the actors in their hearing give them a greater sense of their involvement in the play.

### The Dramaturgical Use of Music and Song in *Anna Chaimbeul* and *Roghainn nan Daoine*

Both *Anna Chaimbeul* and *Roghainn nan Daoine* include reference to the strong Gaelic tradition of music and song. Obviously, the clearest example of this tradition in *Anna Chaimbeul* is the song, 'Ailein Duinn' itself<sup>4</sup>, which is the central theme of the whole play. While this song, on a first hearing, appears to be of an intensely personal nature – a tragic love song which only involves two people – there is an element of community underlying this lament because it is also a waulking song, which would traditionally have been sung by a group of women as a way of maintaining the beat as they waulked or softened newly woven tweed on a large table or similar surface. These songs were thought to be communal in composition; the verses would usually have been sung by a soloist, with the chorus being sung by the whole group.<sup>5</sup> Fragments of the waulking song in *Anna Chaimbeul* are sung three times in the process of the whole play and tellingly, two out of three of these instances are of a communal rather than personal nature. 'Ailein Duinn' is first of all sung as a waulking song by the chorus and accompanies their miming of a boat at sea:

*An toiseach tha luchd an luaidh nan suidhe timcheall a' bhùird ag iomradh. An uair sin tòisichidh iad a' luadhadh a' chlò. Tha iad uile a' seinn. Bu chòir luchd an luaidh a bhith nan suidhe air being air cùl a' bhùird agus a' coimhead air an luchd-èisteachd.*

CÒISIR (glè ìosal) Ailean Duinn, o hì shiubhlainn leat  
Hì rì rì rì rìò, hoireann o ho iri  
Ailean Duinn, o hì shiubhlainn leat.  
*a-rithist*  
'S gur e mise air mo sgaradh  
Chan eil sùgradh nochd air m' aire  
Chan eil sùgradh nochd air m' aire  
Ach fuaim nan siantan 's meud na gaillinn.  
*a-rithist*

*Tha an Seanchaidh ag aithris fear-faire, a' gluasad le ruithim an òrain agus na mara. Nuair a seinnear an dàrna rann, nochdaidh Anna. Tha trusgan fada, geal gun cheangal oirre. Teichidh an Seanchaidh agus thig Anna gu meadhan an àrd-ùrlair.*

*Tha i ag aithris coiseachd còmhla ri Ailean fhad 's a ghabhar an t-òran. (NicLeòid 2016, 66)*

To begin with the waulkers are sitting around a table rowing. Then they begin waulking the tweed. They are all singing. The waulking chorus should be sitting on a bench behind the table looking at the audience.

CHOIR (very quietly) Brown-haired Allan, o hì I would go with thee

Hì rì rì rì rìo, hoireann o ho iri

Brown-haired Allan, I would go with thee.

*again*

I am tormented

I have no thought for merriment tonight

I have no thought for merriment tonight

But only for the sound of the elements and the strength of the gales.

*again* (trans. Shaw 1977: 259)

The Storyteller mimes a watchman, moving with the rhythm of the song and the sea. When the second verse is being sung, Anna appears. She has a long, loose white shawl around her. The Storyteller leaves and Anna comes to the middle of the stage. She is miming walking with Allan while the song is being sung.

In the latter stages of the play it is sung by the chorus when they are grieving over Anna's death and takes on the style of a psalm with a precentor leading the rest of the chorus. Tormod Calum Dòmhnallach has succeeded in his play in providing a 'new reading' of 'Ailein Duinn', not as a personal loss of a lover but as a community drama, in which there are far more characters. By implementing the chorus in the rendition of the song on these occasions, Dòmhnallach reminds the audience that personal tragedy is shared by the community in this context – e.g. Allan was not alone on the boat and more than one man drowned on the way to the rèiteach and, as well as the sense of loss in the family and community after Anna dies, there is also the shared experience of the crew/family during the storm on the way to Anna's burial.

The music in *Roghainn nan Daoine* is perhaps subtler in its execution but it is, nevertheless, fully present as a signifier of community life. Due to the theme of the play, the use of music/song is mostly religious, and Gaelic psalms are employed to highlight the growing strength of the people in their belief in the Free Church. The very nature of Gaelic psalm singing or 'lining out' could be interpreted symbolically, since the style stems from the 16th-century Reformation of the church, which

established the Protestant Christian faith and which encouraged worship in a person's native tongue, rather than Latin, and expressions of worship by individuals as well as the clergy and choir. Because of the low level of literacy, a call-and-response style evolved in Protestant churches. Each line of the psalm is 'put out' by the precentor or leader. The congregation then joins in gradually and slowly sings those words, but with varying degrees of ornamentation and at varying speeds. Although each singer is singing the same tune, the effect is of a continuous sound with different chordal effects being created.<sup>6</sup> This heightening of power, which can be heard in Gaelic psalms, is best illustrated in Section 8 ('Disruption') of the play, in the following stage directions:

*From outside the church, the company begin to sing a Psalm. The Minister remains on the pulpit and it is taken down around him. He gets down, and goes off.*

*The rest of the company, including a precentor take the stage and sing the psalm in call and response. They are resolute and joyful. As the music swells it starts to develop into a storm.*

*We see the Minister to one side, a blanket round his shoulders and his feet in a bowl of hot water. The new Free Church congregation sing on, now in a torrential storm of their own making.*

#### Psalm 46 (selected verses)

God is our refuge and our strength,  
In straits a present aid;  
Therefore, although the earth remove,  
We will not be afraid:  
Though hills amidst the seas be cast;  
Though waters roaring make,  
And troubled be; yea, though the hills  
By swelling seas do shake. (Theatre Hebrides 2010)

However, the influence of call and response style of the Gaelic psalms is not always so overt in the play. There is a case which can be made for this influence pervading the secular sections of the play too. In Section 10, which deals with the Potato Famine, we can see what appears to be a mimicking or mirroring of this 'lining out' in the form of gossip:

#### **Famine Gossips 1**

*The same Old Woman (W) and her Friend (F) who appeared in Section 2 arrive, as before, but in some distress. Granny (G) and the girls just stay sitting.*

Kirsty, Kirsty, Kirsty  
Kirsty, Kirsty.

W	Oh a Chiorstaidh, a Chiorstaidh, droch naigheachd, droch naigheachd...	Kirsty, Kirsty, Kirsty Kirsty! Terrible news, terrible news...
F	Uamhasach, uamhasach	Terrible, terrible.
W	Tha na beathaichean aig Seann Sheòrais a bàsachadh.	All of old Alec-Dan's animals are dying.
F	A'bàsachadh.	Dying.
G	A'bàsachadh	Dying.
W	A bàsachadh leis a ghoirt.	Starvation.
G	Chan eil an còrr buntata againn!	We've no more potatoes.
W	Och mo thruaighe cha bhi sinne fada as an dèidh. a Chiorstaidh, mur a tachair miorbhuil. Chaneil fuil again airson na maragan. Chaneil buntata ann airson dad. Chan eil dad ann airson ithe!	And we won't be long after them, Kirsty, unless something happens. There's no blood for the oatmeal. No blood! No potatoes for anything. No potatoes! Nothing to eat. Nothing! (Theatre Hebrides 2010)

This may be a comment on how completely the influence of the church has pervaded the community. One does not need to look far in other genres to witness this (e.g. Sorley MacLean's 'sermon style' in some of his poetry may be the clearest proof that while he has no trouble rejecting the belief system, he may find it harder to shake off the influence of style that goes hand in hand with this belief). (MacInnes 2006) The Section 10 dialogue cited from *Roghainn nan Daoine* may be an example of this same church rhetoric from the genre of drama. The absence of music is also a powerful indicator of a change in the customs and habits of the community in *Roghainn nan Daoine*. It can be no coincidence that when the Free Church really becomes prominent in the lives of the characters in the play, the fiddler's music, which was more of a definite feature in the earlier stages of the play, recedes and eventually falls silent. In Section 9 ('The Free Church takes Hold') the stage direction and dialogue between Crofter A and Crofter B is very effective in emphasising this point:

A	Amadain na croich! Thèid thu dh'ifrinn mur a sguir tha a chluiche an ceòl ann Diadhaidh sin, leis an ionstrumaid Shàtanach a th'agad an sin!	Filthy fool! You'll go to hell playing that filthy bloody music with that filthy devil's instrument!
B	Ceart sin e thoir bhuaithe e!	Right, that's it – take it off him!

A Sèall tha an ceòll air a thoirt thairis agus 'na annam bochd. Ach bheir thu taing dhuinn fhathast! See the music's possessed him. Poor tormented soul! You'll thank us in the end.

*(Tha am fìdheal briste agus an fhìdhleir 'ga coimhead.)*

*The fiddle is broken. The fiddler looks at it. (Theatre Hebrides 2010)*

The introduction in Alexander Carmichael's *Carmina Gadelica* shows that this change in Lewis communities was a reality and is not just a dramaturgical device in the play:

'And have you no music, no singing, no dancing now at your marriages?' 'May the Possessor keep you! I see that you are a stranger in Lewis, or you would not ask such a question,' the woman exclaimed with grief and surprise in her tone. 'It is long since we abandoned those foolish ways in Ness, and, indeed, throughout Lewis. In my young days there was hardly a house in Ness in which there was not one or two or three who could play the pipe, or the fiddle, or the trump. And I have heard it said that there were men, and women too, who could play things they called harps, and lyres, and bellow-pipes, but I do not know what those things were.' 'And why were those discontinued?' 'A blessed change came over the place and the people,' the woman replied in earnestness, 'and the good men and the good ministers who arose did away with the songs and the stories, the music and the dancing, the sports and the games. that were perverting the minds and ruining the souls of the people, leading them to folly and stumbling.' 'But how did the people themselves come to discard their sports and pastimes?' 'Oh, the good ministers and the good elders preached against them and went among the people, and besought them to forsake their follies and to return to wisdom. They made the people break and burn their pipes and fiddles. If there was a foolish man here and there who demurred, the good ministers and the good elders themselves broke and burnt their instruments...' (1900: xxxv-xxxvi)

Carmichael's detailed description of his conversation with this woman from Ness is, to a certain extent, a subtle political statement which highlights to his readership the extent to which Gaelic culture has been irrevocably altered in places such as Lewis – the indignation of the woman adds a human element to the factual information which is most effective in demonstrating how the transformation and removal of certain secular traditions was enacted by those from within the community, thus underlining the element of self- or community- reinforcement.

## Testimony and the Community Gaze in *Anna Chaimbeul* and *Roghainn nan Daoine*

Lastly, the power of testimony in relation to two characters in these plays highlights the power that community exerts over the individual. One of the strongest parallels between *Anna Chaimbeul* and *Roghainn nan Daoine* is that they both include a character who steps outside the community by making a choice. In both cases this choice centres on an affair with women who are outside their communities – in *Anna Chaimbeul*, Dòmhnallach adds a new tension to the story of ‘Ailein Duinn’ by writing in an affair that Allan has with a Spanish woman. In *Roghainn nan Daoine*, Iain has an affair with an English woman while he is stationed away from his island and this results in a child and the breaking of the engagement between Iain and Catriona. In both plays these transgressions are played out in front of the audience in the form of a testimony of sorts; in *Anna Chaimbeul*, Allan (voiced by Anna) uses the Seanchaidh as a confessor figure to relieve his conscience and it is not difficult to imagine the Seanchaidh in a religious role as a priest offering absolution:

SEANCHAIDH	Innis dhomh dè tha thu ag iarraidh
ANNA	Ceasnaich mise!
SEANCHAIDH	Carson?
ANNA	Bheir mise dhut teisteanas.
SEANCHAIDH	Mas e sin a tha thu ag iarraidh. Nì mise Ceistear. ... Innis dhomh. ... Cò às a thàinig thu? (NicLeòid 2016: 68)

STORYTELLER	Tell me what you want.
ANNA	Interrogate me!
STORYTELLER	Why?
ANNA	I will give you witness.
STORYTELLER	If that is what you want. I will be the Inquisitor (Catechist) ... Tell me ... Where did you come from?

In *Roghainn nan Daoine* a very personal exchange between Iain (I) and Catriona (C) comes near the end of the play:

C	Uill? A bheil thu gun fhacal Iain? Bheil dad idir agad ri radha air do shon fhèin? Ay.'Nad sheasamh an sin agus a slaòdadh mo Sheanmhair a mach as a dachaigh, 'sa toirt an taigh as a chèile...	Well? Lost for words Iain? Nothing to say for yourself? Ay. You stand here dragging my grandmother out of her house, dismantling her home...
I	Och, gheibh i dachaigh eile ge ta.	She'll be re-housed.
C	Dè a tha ri tachairt nuair a tha thui air do thilgeil a mach as do dhachaigh?	What happens when you're thrown out of your house? What happens when you're on your

I Dè a tha tachairt 'nuair a tha thu air leabaidh tinneis? Dè thachras 'nuair a dhùnas do shùilean agus nach fhosgail iad a chaòidh tuilleadh? Na smaoinich thu air an sin?

C Tha mise a coimhead air adhairt ris an latha sin.

I Gun dad ach dòrchadas!

C Tha fadachd orm gun tig e!

I Teine is pronnasg. Cha bhi am pian a tha thu a faireachdain an duigh na rud 'sam bith a nì thu ruimsa ri chomas ris a phian a dh'fhairicheas tu air latha do bhàis! Oh, Iain 'sann ann a tha thu dol mar a dèan thu aithreachas!

C A bheil thu do'n beachd nach do rinn mi aithreachas a h-uile donas latha bho'n dh'fhàg mi thusa? Tha e air a bhith... 'S tusa a chuir cùl ruimsa. Bha mise deiseil boireannach is pàisde fhàgail airson a bhi comhla ruitsa. Ach cha leigeadh tu leam, agus is dòcha gu robh sin ceart, ach seàll mar a tha mi a nis! A deanamh seo! Cha b'urrainn peanas na bu mhiosa a bhi ann.

I Seadh Iain, b'urrainn. Seachainn e agus tionndaidh ri Criosd.

C Saòillidh mi gu bheil mi air a dhol seachad air an sin! Eh?

I Chaneil Iain, tha a ghràdhsan gu leòr air do shon.

C Eadhon air mo shonsa?

I Eadhon air do shonsa. Bi aoibhneas ann an làthair ainglean Dhè airson aon pheachach a nì aithreachas nas motha na airson naochad 'sa naoi fìreann aig nacheil fèum air aithreachas. Fadaidh tu aithreachas a

sick bed? What happens the day you close your eyes and you never open them again? Have you thought about that?

It's a day I look forward to.

Nothing but darkness/

I welcome it.

Fire and torment. Whatever you do to me whatever pain you feel today is as nothing compared to what you will feel on the day of your death. Oh Iain, it's where you are headed if you don't repent.

Do you not think I've repented every fucking day since I left you? It's been... You're the one that turned your back on me. I was ready to leave a woman and a child to be with you. You wouldn't allow it, and maybe that's right, I don't know, but to end up like this. Doing this. There couldn't be a worse punishment for a man.

Yes, Iain, there could. Avoid it. Turn to Christ.

I think I've gone a bit beyond that, eh?

No Iain. His Grace is sufficient.

Even for me?

Even for you. There shall be joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth more than over ninety nine just persons which need no repentance. You can repent today.

dheanamh an duigh.

Can *you* ever forgive me?

An toir thu fhèin mathanas dhomh ma tha?

Iain, I forgave you a long time ago. I pity what you have become. But there is one that cares for you, Iain. Cast all the care of your weakness upon Him. Cast all the care of your guilt upon Him. (Theatre Hebrides 2010)

Iain thug mise mathanas dhuit bho chionn fhada. Tha mi duilich airson mar a tha thu! Ach tha fear ann aig a bheil curam dhiot, Iain. Tilg d'eallach trom air Dia 'se nì do chumail suas. 'Nad ainmhidheachd tilg d'eallach airsan, agus cuideachd do chionta.

In this instance, Iain's testimony is also tinged with religious symbolism but this time it is Catriona's passionate adoption of Free Church doctrine which offers Iain absolution. It is perhaps a deliberate irony that the religion in which she has found solace after her disappointment in Iain's betrayal is, in this exchange, that which he goes on to reject. Thus, he betrays Catriona twice – once in the sphere of love and again in the form of the rejection of her religion. It is clear in both plays that relationships with outsiders have put pressure on both Allan and Iain and the relationships with their lovers within their own community. In *Anna Chaimbeul*, the fact that Allan's confession, which goes into specific detail regarding his other lover, is voiced through Anna lends it a degree of poignancy while also adding a certain amount of discomfort for the audience, who are witnessing the scene.

SEANCHAIDH Dè rinn sibh? Thu fhèin agus Señorita Perez.  
Juanita...  
ANNA Chaidh sinn còmhla ri chèile.  
SEANCHAIDH Chaidh sibh còmhla ri chèile?  
ANNA Chaidh mise còmhla ri Juanita.  
SEANCHAIDH Chaidh sibh còmhla ri chèile.  
ANNA Chaidh. Chaidh sinn còmhla ri chèile.  
SEANCHAIDH Fad oidhche?  
ANNA Fad oidhche. Oidhche Shathairne.  
(NicLeòid 2016: 70)

SEANCHAIDH What did you do? Yourself and Señorita Perez.  
Juanita...  
ANNA We went together.  
SEANCHAIDH You went together?  
ANNA I went with Juanita.  
SEANCHAIDH You went together.  
ANNA We went together.  
SEANCHAIDH All night?  
ANNA All night. Saturday night

This dialogue between Seanchaidh and Anna/Allan is slightly reminiscent of one of the literary precursors of Gaelic drama, the *còmhradh*, in which, according to Sheila Kidd, 'one figure acts as informer or instructor with the other character(s) asking questions in order to elicit further information.' (2000: 67) The fact that the *còmhradh*'s influence comes from the practice of reciting catechisms as dialogue between people (MacLeod 2011: 57) neatly ties it back to the theme of testimony in *Anna Chaimbeul*, in which Christian confession and attestation of faith are never far from the surface in both the style and content of the characters' discourse.

While it may be an oversimplification to suggest that this 'insider/ outsider' tension is the main pivotal point in the plays or that the writers of these plays are commenting on the danger of venturing outside the community of one's birth, it is significant that the conscience of each man is relieved only once a public declaration of the wrongdoing is voiced out loud. By extension, the religious connotations of these confessions show how closely connected the secular and religious appear to be in the lives of these communities. While it appears that the characters are playing out the personal relationship between two lovers, the issues, repercussions, and outcomes affect far more people than just the individuals within the pivotal relationship in both plays. These men appear to be giving a testimony in front of both their community on the stage and the audience off the stage; if testimony means a public recounting of experience – a basic facet of communal life – then the fact that in both plays these testimonies are offered to actors and audience alike, bringing with it an attempt to obtain peace for the speaker, shows yet another example of the blurring between actors and audience and an affirmation of the cèilidh-house formula once more.

## Conclusion

*Anna Chaimbeul* and *Roghainn nan Daoine* are two rather different plays – the former seems to naturally fall into the category of modernism while the latter is set firmly in the postmodern. As well as the difference in cultural movement/literary period, there are forty years between the plays in relation to date of writing and, while *Anna Chaimbeul* is set in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, *Roghainn nan Daoine* is set a century later, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. However, dating aside, there are clear parallels between these plays. They both make use of diverse and adventurous forms of presentation and performance, and their clearest connecting point is the theme of community; this constant strongly informs the plays' narratives, staging and characterisation. While it may come as no surprise that the most natural literary successor to the cèilidh-house, the genre of Gaelic drama, should appear to tackle the issues of community on so many levels, what is perhaps also significant is that the writers of *Anna Chaimbeul* and *Roghainn nan Daoine* choose as their focus the most powerful signifiers of community in a Gaelic context – folksong/music and religion. While these two community foci may not always have existed comfortably together throughout history, there can be no denying that they do correspond well in a dramatic context, providing a Gaelic playwright with not only a source of tension in a performance, as the uneasy relationship between the secular and the religious is

explored through drama, but also with a sense of realism and shared experience (both between characters on the stage and between actors and audience). This is the pivotal moment when, rather like the pulpit in *Roghainn nan Daoine*, the stage is symbolically dismantled to make way for the community.

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Endnotes.

<sup>1</sup> For a fuller exploration of the Gaelic ritual of the marriage pledge or engagement, the rèiteach, which is itself a dramatic performance in the form of a community folk tradition (Macleod 2011, p. 56), see (Martin 2007, pp. 200-224).

<sup>2</sup> W (Walker), M (Màiri), D (Davey), BK (Kenny) and C (Catriona).

<sup>3</sup> *Roghainn nan Daoine* (unpublished script, 2010). I am grateful to Muriel Ann Macleod for her help in obtaining the script of *Roghainn nan Daoine*.

<sup>4</sup> The story of 'Ailein Duinn' was recorded by Rev A. Maclean Sinclair in *The Gaelic Bards from 1715 to 1765* (1892, p. 253). While the song has survived in the oral tradition in many different versions,

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most recently it has been published in *Hebridean Folksongs I* (Campbell 1969, pp. 44-49, pp. 161-162) and *Folksongs and Folklore of South Uist* (Shaw 1977, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, pp. 258-61).

<sup>5</sup> See (Newton, M. 2009, p. 159, p. 251).

<sup>6</sup> See (Thomson, R. L. 1983, p. 244). Also (MacLeod, M. 1994).