

## The nine kinds of love

### The Quern-Dust Calendar — Ragnall MacilleDhuibh

COINNEACH was getting very excited on his programme on Radio nan Gaidheal the other week about some new research on the subject of love. According to the “P&J”, Dr Simon Watts, a senior lecturer in psychology at Nottingham Trent University, had said: “There is no one true or definitive account of love, rather there are a limited and interconnected variety of love stories at work in any particular culture.

“It’s okay for love to differ across relationships and to change its character with the passage of time. It’s equally acceptable for us to change our views of love as we go along.”

I can see why this is being studied. People seem to need two or three long-term relationships these days before they find one that works. Some even decide in the end that humans are a waste of time and that keeping a pet dog is more fulfilling. There’s a lot of dissatisfaction with love, and no doubt many folk need reassurance.

That’s where Dr Watts and his team come in. They asked fifty people to sort sixty statements, each offering a different view of love. By analysing the results they were able to identify “nine experiences of partnership love at work in British culture”, which were duly published in the “British Journal of Social Psychology”. For the record, they are: (1) Trust, recognition and support; (2) Cupid’s arrow love – a passion so intense that anyone struck down loses sight of who they are; (3) hedonistic love; (4) love as ultimate connection and profound feeling – for people who think they have found “the one”; (5) demythologised love – hard work, patience and compromise; (6) love as transformative adventure – an unpredictable roller-coaster ride which can bring great pleasure, but can just as easily go wrong and become unfulfilling; (7) from Cupid’s arrow to role-bound relationship – the familiar rite-of-passage story where love begins as an uncontrollable passion before the couple settle down to marriage and children; (8) from Cupid’s arrow to friendship; and (9) dyadic love, the merging of two people, where both partners put their relationship before their individual needs.

I enjoyed discussing it all with Angus Peter Campbell and John MacInnes on Coinneach’s programme. It made me think – what’s the Gaelic angle? And when I began to cast around in my head for examples from our literature and tradition, they did seem to belong somewhere among the nine categories.

Take “Calum a’ Ghlinne”. Calum was an old drunk from Kinlochewe who had settled in Easter Ross. One day he goes into Dingwall for a boll of meal. He drops into a public-house for a small refreshment and meets a Badenoch drover. Calum is a good singer and they have a grand time. He forgets his meal, and the other man his cows, and eventually Calum’s last sixpence is spinning on the table. “If I had more money,” he says, “I would not go home for a while yet.”

“That’s easily got,” says the drover, “I’ll buy the grey horse from you.”

The horse changes owners, and after a while Calum says, “A *Dhia*, I must go home now.”

“You must,” the drover agrees, “but I can’t see for the life of me how you can face your wife.”

“My wife! She’s the wife who never said, or will say, worse to me than ‘God bless you, Calum’ .  
*Dia leat, a Chaluum!*”

“Aha! She can’t be as good-tempered as that! I’ll bet you the price of the horse and the meal that the welcome you get will be very different!”

“Done,” says Calum.

Off go the pair, bringing witnesses. Calum staggers in and is about to fall into the fire when his wife flings his arms affectionately about him and says: “*Dia leat, a Chaluum!*”

“Ah,” says Calum, “why speak softly? I’ve drunk the money and brought home no meal.”

“Never mind,” says his wife, “we’ll soon get more money, and meal too.”

“But I’ve drunk the grey horse as well.”

“What does that matter, my love? You’re alive and you’re mine. As long as my Calum is sound and healthy I’ll never have cause to complain.”

The drover has had enough. He counts out the money. A few hours later Calum comes back with the horse, and the meal too. As the song says,

*Nam bithinn air féill*

*’S na ceudan mar rium*

*De chuideachda chòir*

*A dh’òladh drama,*

*Gun suidhinn mun bhòrd*

*’S gun tràighinn mo shearrag –*

*’S cha tuirt mo bhean riamh rium*

*Ach “Dia leat, a Chaluum!”*

(“If I were at a fair / Along with the hundreds / Of good-natured company / Who would drink a dram, / I’d sit round the table / And drain my bottle – / And my wife’s told me nothing / But ‘God with you, Calum!’”)

Is this no. 6, the roller-coaster? Not really, because Calum’s wife is so placid. Is it no. 2, a love so intense that she loses sight of who she is, unlike nos. 7 and 8 where Cupid’s arrow turns into role-playing or friendship? Or no. 1, where the magic word “trust” is mentioned? Of one thing I’m sure – when the song was sung in the ceilidh-house it would have been dissected just as we are doing here, and Calum and his improbable wife would have been given a hard time by men and women alike!

Let’s try another example. “Griogal Cridhe” is one of the great love stories. The young chief of the MacGregors is being hunted by the Campbells with bloodhounds. He is married to a Marion Campbell, and on the night preceding 1 August he goes to visit her, perhaps because it’s a good omen to do on a quarter-day what you want to be doing for the next three months. They are caught together in bed, he is dragged off to prison, and on 7 April he is beheaded in person by his 70-year-old enemy Cailean Liath. Imagine the axe shaking as it descends upon his neck. Nursing her child, Marion sings:

*Chuir iad a cheann air ploc daraich  
'S dhòirt iad 'fhuil gu làr:  
Nam biodh agamsa an-sin cupan,  
Dh'òlainn dhith mo shàth.*

(“They put his head on an oaken block / And spilt his blood to the ground: / If I had had a cup there, / I would have drunk my fill of it.”) This looks like no. 4, love as ultimate connection and profound feeling for those who have found “the one”, with more than a touch of the dyadic Romeo and Juliet syndrome, no. 9, the merging together of the partners here being symbolised by the drinking of blood.

No. 9 may be the category that makes great love stories, but no. 4 is the one for which a continuous thread seems to run through Celtic and Gaelic tradition. Long ago Dio Cassius, a contemporary of Julius Caesar’s, jotted down some gossip about a lady who, like her husband Argentocoxus, was a native of Caledonia. Julia Augusta, the wife of Severus, joked with this Scottish woman one day about the free intercourse of her sex with the men of Britain, and she replied with great dignity: “We fulfil the demands of nature in a much better way than do you Roman women, for we consort openly with the best men, whereas you let yourselves be debauched by the vilest.”

Ouch. Two thousand years later, waulking songs recorded in places like South Uist were still full of this theme.

*Tha mi torrach, cuime 'n ceilinn?  
Chan ann bho fhear crìon no goirid.  
Is math as aithne dhomh do shloinneadh.  
Cha Chamshronach, cha Mhac Coinnich –  
Dòmhnallach deas làidir loinneil.  
Bhiodh sibh air toiseach gun fhiamh  
'S bu libh toiseach a dhol sìos  
Agus deireadh tighinn a-nìos.  
Cha déid mise, cha déid mì.*

“I am pregnant, why should I hide it? / It’s not by a man who’s puny or short. / Well do I know your genealogy. / You’re no Cameron or MacKenzie – / You’re a MacDonald, handsome, strong and shapely. / You’d go first, fearlessly, / And would be first to attack / And last to retreat. / To no other will I go, will I go.” What comes across here is a society in which women put themselves in the way of well-born men in the expectation that they and the resulting children will be well looked after. Here it is again:

*Tha mi torrach, tha mi trom –  
Chan ann le balach mo throm  
Ach leis an lasgair dhonn  
Nach dèan seasamh air an fhonn  
No air a’ mhachaire lom  
Gun a bhòtann bhith fo bhonn.*

(“I’m pregnant, expecting – / And not by a lout / But a man of good breeding / Who never stands on the ground / Or the machaire bare / Without boots on his feet!”) It’s as clear an example of no. 4 as you can get – love which is targeted by a single-minded woman at a man not simply for who he is as

a person but for his wealth and status as well. The arrow is not Cupid's but her own, and her child is invariably part of the equation.

Curiously, a song exists which consists of a discussion about sex and marriage between two sisters who appear to have been illegitimate daughters of Cameron of Lochiel and therefore the product of precisely such a liaison. I published it, with a translation, in my book "An Lasair" under the title "Trodan ris an Fheòil" – "Struggling with the Flesh". It's very entertaining. Mairearad wants to be a nun while Marsaili makes the case for tender loving kindness, nice clothes and a good time. Marsaili says:

*Air eagal t' fheirg' no t' àrdain  
Bidh m' àicheadh dhut gu mall –  
Gur truagh na smaointean dh'fhàs annad  
'S gun t' àrach am measg Ghall!  
Gabh fhéin sgeul an easbaig  
Fhuair ar creideamh-ne 'na cheann  
Dh'fhiachainn nach seann òrdugh  
Am pòsadh a bhith ann.*

("For fear of your anger or disdain / I'll say no to you reluctantly – / The ideas you've conceived are sad / Since you weren't reared in the Lowlands! / Just take the story of the bishop / Who established our religion / To show there's nothing ancient / About the institution of marriage.") The date is 1720, which demonstrates that down to Culloden or thereabouts there was a Highland way of doing things. I'm pretty sure that the "bishop" is St Peter and that Marsaili is referring to some story about his having an affair – and therefore a run-in with St Paul, no doubt!

I should add two things: the song is by a man, and he makes Marsaili win the argument.

There was certainly a Highland approach to marriage, and it survived to the 20th century in the form of the *réiteach*. The young men had to court the young women, and there was ample opportunity for that when the girls went up to the shielings in summer and also through "bundling" or *caithris na h-oidhche*. The loss of shielings when sheep came in was the loss of a way of life which produced countless beautiful love-songs.

But marriage was about more than mutual attraction (nos. 2, 3, 4, 6 and 9); it was a business partnership too (nos. 1, 5, 7 and 8). Hence the *réiteach*. The young man came to the young woman's house with his spokesman, who bargained publicly with her father, often using metaphorical language. He might say there was need for new blood in his friend's stock of cattle or sheep, for a plank of special wood in building a boat or a house, for a piece of timber to provide one leg of a couple in the roof, or for yarn to finish a garment.

Customs varied. The women of the house might be brought in and playfully rejected until the right one appeared (the spokesman might even pick one for himself). Or the man's virtues could be brought into question, in which case the spokesman sang his praises, and the girl decided the issue by leaving the room or staying with obvious pleasure. If she stayed, the father said, *Ma tha ise deònach, tha mise ro dheònach, agus mura bi sin mar sin, cha bhi seo mar seo*. ("If she is willing, I am very willing, and if that weren't like that, this wouldn't be like this.") "This" being the whisky and glasses which he produced to seal the contract.

Sounds like a good basis for marriage to me.

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