

‘Though the hero was bloodied, he was not weak’:
Religious Poetry and Manuscript Context

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I. *M’óenurán im aireclán* and the Problem of Lyric Verse
(a) Translation by Thomas Kinsella (§§1-3):

All alone in my little cell
with no one for company,
I love this place of pilgrimage
now while I still have life.

A hut remote and hidden
for repenting of all sin,
with upright conscience, unafraid
in the face of holy Heaven.

With a body that good habits
made holy, treading it down,
and eyes worn out and tearful
with penance for my desires, ...

(b) Translation by Gerard Murphy (§§1-3):

Alone in my little cell
without a single human being along with me:
such a pilgrimage would be dear to my heart
before going to meet death.

A hidden secluded little hut
for forgiveness of all evil;
a conscience unperverted and untroubled
directed towards holy Heaven.

Sanctifying a body trained in good habits:
trampling like a man upon it,
with eyes feeble and tearful
for the forgiveness of my passions. ...

(c) Translation by Donnchadh Ó Corráin (§1):

All alone in my little cell
with no one in my company:
that would be a sweet retirement
before I go to die.

(d) Ó Corráin, ‘Early Irish Hermit Poetry?’, p. 262:

‘What the poet envisages is neither a hermit nor an anchorite nor a wild holy man of the woods, but a perfectly normal high-ranking clerical retiree of the period – so normal indeed that this poem can be read as **prescriptive verse** rather than as **descriptive personal lyric** in which an individual sets out his spiritual intentions autobiographically.’

II. *Dia mba trebthach: Religious Poetry for Lay Audiences*

(a) ‘The Duties of a Husbandman’, ed. Kuno Meyer; trans. Elizabeth Boyle:

Dia mba trebthach, ba trebor, ba fáilidh fri hóigedu,	ba fūarrach fri cāch; cia tīsāt gach trāth.
In duil is Crīst cech ōigi, ferr umla, ferr āilgena,	aslondath nī dis, ferr eslabra fris.
Ba dechmadach prīmedach, nī farcba nī ar do chúl	do brīathar bad fīr, do dliged ind Rīgh.
A ndoberó ar Dīa sech nī maithe nī māide,	do thriun nō do thrūagh, dāigh fogēba a lūach.
Figell, āine, ernaigthe, nīb ar adbhloss do dōinib,	almsan tan nosgēne, ba ar Dīa gacha ndēne.

If you are a householder, be prudent;
be forbearing to everyone;
make guests welcome,
even if they come at all hours.

Since every guest is Christ
– no trifling saying! –
better is humility, better gentleness,
better liberality towards him.

Pay tithes and first-fruits,
let your word be true;
forget nothing
of the law of the King.

What you give for God’s sake,
to the strong or the weak,
not only do not fail to give it, but boast not of it,
for you will get its reward.

When you perform a vigil,
fasting, prayer, alms,
let it not be for glory before men,
let it be for God, whatever you do.

III. Rules: Diversity of Audience and Conformity of Purpose

(a) ‘Rule of Cormac mac Cuillenáin’, ed. and trans. John Strachan (§12):

Dīn anma, ascnam nime, brīg amra, altrom glaine,
bíad bís iar ndfbdud toile, corp Crīst la fuil Maic Maire.

A protection of the soul, an approach to heaven,
a wonderful power, a fostering of purity,
is the food which is after extinction of desire,
Christ’s body with the blood of Mary’s son.

(b) ‘Rule of Ailbe of Emly’, ed. and trans. Joseph O Neill (selected stanzas):

Apair dam fri mac Saráin, is tromm int aire gebes,
bad léir, bad féig a chubus, cen góí n-úabair, cen feles.

Say for me to the son of Saran, heavy is the burden he takes;
let his conscience be diligent, be keen, without proud lying, without vanity.

Silent and without speech be his work, fewness of words which is not talkative;
let him perform the need of every sick person, together with helping of every sick man. ...

... Without pride, without sin of perversity, smiling without grimace, without laughter,
without vindictiveness towards anyone, without proud arrogance, without pomp. ...

... Let him be gentle, close and zealous; let him be modest generous and gracious; against the
torrent of the world, let him be watchful (?); against the brood of the world, let him be
warlike.

Let him be a serpent in his deftness; let him be a dove with its filial affection; smooth let him
be without fault in vigilance (?), a fortress be his word of watchfulness (?).

Though he get the bitter world, he should not give love to its treasures; let him plough and
distribute; he shall not be too eager – that brings him not past heaven star-beautiful.

The jewel of baptism and communion, commandment and intercession he should receive it;
the confession of everyone who gives it, let it be right closely that he conceals it. ...

(c) ‘Old Irish Metrical Rule’, ed. and trans. John Strachan (selected stanzas):

Comae ríaguil in Choimded; is and ní fogbai báegul:
is ferr ní dichis tairis; céne mares do s[h]áegul.

Preserve the rule of the Lord; therein thou runnest no risk. It is better that thou transgress it
not, as long as thy life lasts.

This is the essence of the Rule: love Christ, hate wealth; piety to thee towards the King of the
sun and smoothness towards men.

Continuance in penitence – wonderful the road – keenness, persistence therein; heed of death everyday; good will to every man. ...

... If there should be anyone who should take the path of repentance, advance a step every day, practise not the ways of a charioteer. ...

... If thou shouldst have a son or householdry that thou determined to part from, thou shalt not seek them, thou shalt not think of them, as though thou were in the earth. ...

(d) *Anmchairdes Mancháin Léith*, ed. and trans. Liam Breatnach (§15):

Sáthor opunn nó remar, is gnáth con-tibi deman, ferr in cosmail cóel fota, dús in n-airsed éc oca.	Sudden or intense work, usually the Devil mocks it; better is the balanced, limited, drawn-out [work], in the expectation of spending his whole life at it.
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IV. *Comad* – a prayer or contemplative aid?

Electronic Dictionary of the Irish Language:

(1) *comad* – verbal noun of *con-ói*, ‘act of keeping, guarding, preserving’

(2) *comad*, n., ‘poem, hymn’ (special use of (1) *comad*)

cf. *comaid*, n. (i, f.), ‘protection, safety’

cf. *lúirech*, n. (ā, f.), ‘breastplate, lorica’

(a) *Comad Manchín Léith*, ed. and trans. Kuno Meyer (selected stanzas):

Dúthracar, a maic Dē bī, bothān derruid dīt[h]rabha	a rī suthain sen, comad hī mo threab.
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I wish, O Son of the living God, O ancient eternal King, for a hidden little hut in the wilderness, that it may be my dwelling.

An all-grey lithe little lark to be by its side, a clear pool to wash away sins through the grace of the Holy Spirit.

Quite near, a beautiful wood around it on every side, to nurse many-voiced birds, hiding it with its shelter. ...

... Six pairs besides myself, praying for ever the King who makes the sun shine.

A pleasant church and with the linen altar-cloth, a dwelling for God from Heaven; then, a shining candle above the pure white Scriptures. ...

This is the husbandry I would take, I would choose and I will not hide it: fragrant leek, hen, salmon, trout bees. ...

(b) *Comad Croiche Críst*, ed. and trans. Kuno Meyer (§§1-3):

I believe in Christ who has arisen and suffered the tree of the cross, and who was three days in a stone sepulchre.

Sad for the side of Mary's Son and for His white limbs to be wounded with a pointed lance for the guilt of Adam's sin!

When the Son of Mary was crucified, darkness went over the world, the sun changed his colour, the earth did not cease from trembling. ...

V. Warriors for Christ in the Book of Ballycummin

(a) *Ídail, ó ro hairgit-sum*, ed. and trans. Elizabeth Boyle (§§9, 23):

... Docūaid dīabul dobertach
san deilb arna dēnam;
romill rēimm na rīgruide
ra sīrluige ra fēgad. ...

... A devil of evil deeds went
into the image after it was made;
it destroyed the succession of kings,
by oath-swearing, by gazing at it. ...

... Barnabus breō bithbūadach,
fursanta in lōcha[i]rn rolēir,
fūair a guin in gēcbile
ar Muir tēiglige Torrēin. ...

... Barnabus, ever-victorious flame,
the illumination of the very bright torch;
the branching tree was martyred
on the tranquil Tyrrhenian Sea. ...

(b) The retoric in *Aided Chonchobuir*, ed. and trans. Johan Corthals (§§1, 5, 7):

Alas that I did not get to meet the High-King: mankind would have seen me in the shape of a harsh warrior.

I would have been seen doing a manly deed, withstanding companies, as a strong man above them protecting and assisting the Lord.

Christ, our heavenly Hero, was not unwilling to be caused to suffer, although He was made of an earthen body, our holy, might Christ.

(c) *Aided Chonchobuir* (version B), ed. and trans. Kuno Meyer:

... he was the first pagan who went into the kingdom of Heaven because the blood which he had shed was a baptism to him ...

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Deus meus, adiuva me.
Tuc dam do sheirc, a meic mo Dé.
Tuc dam do sheirc, a meic mo Dé.
Deus meus, adiuva me.
(Máel Ísu Úa Brolchán, d. 1086)