Poetry in Prose:
Indo-European Poetic Language in Old Irish Verbal Art

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis is intended as an examination of what 'poetic language' entails in terms of both its form and its function, particularly with respect to the Indo-European (and specifically the Old Irish) tradition. The methodology for reconstructing Proto-Indo-European is introduced, and the Indo-European poetic tradition is considered both linguistically and culturally. Both the poet and his audience participate in the poetic culture of the Indo-Europeans, and consequently both are discussed in terms of their respective degrees of competence in the poetic language; the social function and training of the poet in particular are considered. It is argued that Indo-European poetic language, and the poetic forms descended from it, define the norms of the use of language for all artistic purposes. It is shown through the analysis of poetic features in a prose passage from the Old Irish text *Táin Bó Cúailnge* that the language of poetry has influenced the artistic use of language so that even prose composition contains poetic features, resulting in a parapoetic style that is distinct from the stylistically less marked prose more usual in the narrative tradition.

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Introduction

The first question that must be addressed in a discussion of poetic language is what precisely is meant by the term poetic. In simple terms poetic language is connected to artistic expression, specifically in the form of poetry. In the context of modern literature we tend to think of poetry in contrast to prose, but as West points out "prose (*prosa oratoria*) is not a meaningful category where there is no written literature."[1] We also associate poetry with artistic endeavours, but as we shall see the uses of poetic language in Indo-European societies are not restricted to art.

Poetic language must of course be seen not as half of a binary set of linguistic styles, but rather as part of a continuum that ranges from casual speech through a range of stylistic registers appropriate to a variety of 'marked' situations, such as diplomacy, storytelling, ritual and what we would recognize in the modern context as artistic expression. West treats poetic language as being 'marked' language, and contrasts it with 'unmarked' language, language as it is used in "'normal' or everyday speech."[2]

Poetic language (and, more generally, 'literary' language) shows varying levels of markedness, and is sometimes composed in a deliberately obscure style, subject to a

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[1] West 2007: 26.

[2] West 2007: 26.

variety of possible interpretations. In view of this, how can we begin to interpret or understand the *Kunstsprache* of past civilizations from such a great distance? We must try to gain insight into the conventions and motivations that guided the poets in their use of language by the careful analysis of the texts that we have, and, wherever possible, by extensive comparative study.

We are fortunate that the poetry of many early Indo-European languages is well represented among the surviving texts, and this provides ample material for such comparative work. By studying the common characteristics of these traditions we are able to gain insight into the poetic conventions of the proto-culture, and also to assess the development of these conventions in the daughter languages by studying the innovations proper to each individual tradition. In studying the extant texts of these languages it is of vital importance to understand that they are, where not poetry, often the manifestation of an artistic language that is deeply rooted in and influenced by the poetic craft. Chapter One presents a discussion of the Comparative Method, its use in the reconstruction of Proto-Indo-European poetic language, and provides a brief discussion of some of the characteristics that have been recognized as features of this poetic language through the comparison of the various Indo-European poetic traditions.

Chapter Two focuses on the social role of poetry and of the poets who produce it. The importance of poetry in Indo-European cultures cannot be overestimated. As Watkins wrote: "poetry was not a 'frill' in Indo-European society, but a necessity of life, a necessary condition for existence. The spoken word, properly formulated, could produce a physical effect on the world."[3] The Indo-European poet was a central figure in his society. He was an extensively trained and highly valued professional. A discussion of the status, function and training of the Indo-European poet, with emphasis on the Irish *filid*, will provide some context for a discussion of the uses of poetic language.

As linguists our efforts to gain insight into the individual Indo-European languages, and into the proto-language itself, must be guided by an awareness and understanding of poetic language and its importance, while as students of the poetry of these cultures, our study must be rooted in a firm understanding of the structures of the languages and the ways in which those structures could be systematically manipulated for the purpose of artistic expression. Melchert expressed the importance of taking both perspectives into account when he wrote that "poetic language is not a matter of untrammelled invention, but rather the exploitation for artistic purposes of features

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[3] Watkins 1982: 105.

present in natural language. We should accordingly be able to find a basis for putative features of a given poetic tradition in the usage of the corresponding ordinary language."[4] It is only by considering both the forms of stylistically less marked 'ordinary' language and the ways in which poetic language manipulates and interacts with these forms that we can truly understand and appreciate the craft of the poets. Chapter Three offers a discussion of the linguistics of poetic language, and considers the levels of linguistic competence required for both the production and reception of Indo-European poetry.

Chapter Four focuses on Old Irish poetic language and its connections to the Indo-European tradition, and on the uses of poetry and poetic language in the Old Irish narrative tradition. Chapter Five continues this discussion by focussing on the use of poetic language in a passage from the *Táin Bó Cúailnge*. The passage, a description of the Dond Cúalnge, is written in prose, but shows numerous features of poetic language, and a detailed analysis of these features is given.

This thesis is intended as an examination of what exactly it is that we mean by 'poetic language', particularly with respect to the Indo-European tradition. It is hoped that with reference to Old Irish in particular, it will be shown that the language of

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[4] Melchert 1998: 483.

poetry has influenced the artistic use of language so that even prose composition can be demonstrated to show poetic features, suggesting that development of all forms of literary expression has been informed by the standards of poetic usage. Understanding the nature of the firmly poetic substratum (the *Dichtersprache*) underlying all forms of *Kunstsprache* will provide us with insight into written forms of Old Irish narrative.

Chapter One: Poetic Language

1.1: Reconstruction and the Comparative Method

The Comparative Method allows us both to determine the systematic similarities between languages based on typological features, and to recognize what are called the 'genetic' relationships between the languages of a particular linguistic family. Although the Comparative Method predates the development of modern linguistic theory, it has nonetheless "established its usefulness in empirical research with great regularity."[5] This method is the main tool used in the reconstruction of Proto-Indo-European (PIE), and it has allowed us to establish a comparative grammar of the Indo-European (IE) languages. Meillet provides the following definition of a comparative grammar:

> "Une grammaire comparée est un système de rapports entre une langue initiale et des langues postérieures. Poser une grammaire comparée, c'est confronter des états successifs, décrits aussi précisément qu'il est possible, d'une langue qui s'est différenciée avec le temps de manière à présenter des types divers."[6]

The Comparative Method allows us to reconstruct to a certain extent those features of the proto-language that have been preserved among its descendant languages, and by doing so to learn about the developments that the languages have undergone since they

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[5] Hale 2007: 225.

[6] Meillet 1937: 17.

began to branch off from their original point of contact. As Watkins describes it: "the comparative method enables us to reconstruct the principal features of the grammar and the lexicon of this proto-language. The reconstruction, in turn, provides a starting point for describing the history of the individually attested daughter languages – which is the ultimate goal of historical linguistics."[7]

It is one of the most important principles of this method that reconstruction should be based on the evidence of as many branches of the linguistic family as possible, in order to more firmly establish that a particular feature was in fact proper to the proto-language, and not a later innovation. The strongest reconstructions are those that are based on languages that are not closely connected, in order to eliminate the possibility of common innovation among a sub-group like Celtic or Balto-Slavic. A reconstruction based on evidence from Old Irish and Hittite is therefore stronger than one based solely on Sanskrit and Avestan, as they form a sub-group. To cite Campanile: "*Hier möchte ich nur die Meinung äußern, daß eine keltisch-hethitische Isoglosse – z. B. „die dunkle Erde": altir.* domun donn, *heth.* dankuiaz tagnaz *(Abl.), von Meid (1978) entdeckt – eine größere Sicherheit besitzt als jede griechisch-arische*

[7] Watkins 1995: 4-5.

Isoglosse."[8] The essential principle here is that the more languages providing attestations of a particular form, and the fewer the connections between those languages, the stronger the resulting reconstruction.

Reconstructing PIE phonology and morphology involves the comparison of corresponding sound segments and groups of sound segments from the IE languages. We can observe that the *c* of Old Irish corresponds with Greek *κ*, Latin *c*, Gothic *h*, and so on.[9] Such correspondences allow us to further observe that OIr. *cride* 'heart' corresponds to Gk. καρδία, Lat. *cor*, Goth. *hairtō*, Eng. *heart*, etc. Based on these forms we reconstruct the PIE root form **kerd-*, **kṛd-*. Watkins points out that although reconstructed root forms such as these "can be viewed as just a shorthand for the sets of rules of correspondence among the Greek, English and all other cognates [...] the stronger claim, in spite of all cautionary hedges we may put up, is that these reconstructions are a real model, constructed to the best of our ability, of how we think

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[8] Campanile 1987: 22. "Here I would like to express only the opinion that a Celtic-Hittite isogloss - e.g.. "the dark earth": OIr. *domun donn*, Hitt. *dankuiaz tagnaz* (Abl.), discovered by Meid (1978) – possesses a greater certainty than any Greek-Indo-Iranian isogloss." West argued the same point more forcefully when he wrote that "the assumption that 'Homer + *Rigveda* (± Avesta) = Indo-European' is a fallacy that Indoeuropeanists and their camp-followers constantly commit. Indo-Iranian and Greek, together with Phrygian and Armenian, form a subfamily within Indo-European. Features that they share by common inheritance do not necessarily go back to proto-Indo-European, but only to the common ancestor of these languages." (2004: 38).

[9] These are orthographic conventions, not phonetic representations.

certain people talked at a remote period before recorded history."[10] This methodology has allowed us to reconstruct a substantial PIE lexicon, as well as information about its phonemic system, phonology and morphology.

As Campanile points out however, "*il prodotto ultimo della ricostruzione linguistica è semplicemente una parola, mentre ciò che noi vorremmo conoscere, è la complessa realtà storica e sociale che si cela dietro di essa.*"[11] He says also that we must acknowledge

> "*il fatto che troppo spesso i rapporti tra lingua e cultura sono stati visti in maniera meccanica e semplificante, muovendo dalla premessa, generalmente sottaciuta, che l'esistenza di un ricostruito lessema indoeuropeo garantisse adeguatamente l'esistenza del corrispondente denotato in seno alla cultura indoeuropea: è, in realtà, un evidente errore metodologico che ridurrebbe ogni descrizione o storia della cultura a mera silloge di glossari.*"[12]

A study of the reconstructed lexicon will certainly offer some insight into the culture to which it belonged, but it is necessary also to take into account the full context and

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[10] Watkins 1995: 5.

[11] Campanile 1990: 12. "The final product of linguistic reconstruction is simply a word, while what we would like to know is the complex historical and social truth that is hidden behind it."

[12] Campanile 1990: 12. "The fact that the fact that too often the connections between language and culture have been seen in a mechanical and simplifying way, working from then generally unspoken premise that the existence of a reconstructed Indo-European lexeme adequately guarantees the existence of the denoted correspondent within the Indo-European culture: it is, in reality, an obvious methodological error that would reduce every description or history of the culture to a mere compilation of glosses."

implications of the items that we are using for the purpose of reconstruction. All that we know about the Indo-Europeans as a people is based upon this reconstructed language. Benveniste wrote that: "La notion d'indo-européen vaut d'abord comme notion linguistique et si nous pouvons l'élargir à d'autres aspects de la culture, ce sera encore à partir de la langue."[13]

Naturally, there are serious limitations to how much we can actually discover about the proto-language, and through it the proto-culture, but by focussing on particular literary genres and ways of expressing certain ideas, we can, as Watkins puts it, "reconstruct some of the things the Indo-Europeans talked about, and some of the ways they talked about them in their traditional poetry, some 7000 years ago."[14] The ancient Indo-European languages provide ample material for the comparison of specific cultural expressions and their reconstruction for PIE, and it has been further demonstrated that it is possible to reconstruct more than individual lexical items and a grammatical system for PIE.

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[13] Benveniste 1969: 8.

[14] Watkins 1982: 108.

1.2: Reconstruction and Poetics

The presence of fixed groups of words in languages, generally in poetic contexts, makes is possible for us to successfully reconstruct phrases. The most famous of these, which by its discovery brought focus to such word-groups, was the equation made by Adalbert Kuhn in 1853 between the Greek phrase κλέος ἄφθιτον and the Sanskrit *śráva(s)...ákṣitam*: 'imperishable fame'.[15] This observation opened the reconstruction of PIE poetic language as a viable avenue of research. The reconstruction of these set phrases is dependant on the fact that much of what we are using for the purpose of reconstruction, and therefore what we are reconstructing, is poetic language.

When applying the Comparative Method to specific expressions or word groups, the essential question to be answered is: what exactly are we reconstructing? Watkins wrote that "the 'output' of the study of Indo-European poetics is the reconstruction not of a poetic text, but of a tradition."[16] Although we can never explicitly hope to reconstruct a Proto-Indo-European poem, we are able to reconstruct some of the forms and conventions of this poetry through the comparative study of various metrical

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[15] Watkins 1995: 13-14 provides a discussion of Kuhn's work in this area, and his two 1853 papers.
[16] Watkins 1982: 108.

traditions, poetic phrases such as the above-mentioned formula 'imperishable fame', and other stylistic features that we find are common to the descendent poetic traditions. There have been various approaches to such reconstructions. Some have argued for the necessity of as exact a correspondence between the forms as possible, and would exclude from consideration even different grammatical forms of the same lexical items, while others argue for allowing the replacement of an etymologically unrelated form providing that the semantic range of the expression is preserved.[17] In terms of the substitution of grammatical forms, we may recall Jakobson's statement that "a difference in grammatical categories does not necessarily represent a difference in the state of affairs referred to."[18]

Campanile argues for reconstructing sequences of meaning rather than specific lexical items. He discusses the corresponding formulas meaning 'to speak', which describe the speech act as 'bearing voice'[19] (Ved. *vācam bharante* = Av. *vācəm baraiti*) and maintains that these equations must be viewed in less rigid terms than phoneme-to-phoneme or morpheme-to-morpheme correspondences. By allowing other grammatical forms to be included in the data for the reconstruction, we can take into account other

[17] Campanile 1987 provides a discussion of this debate.

[18] Jakobson 1968: 598.

[19] Campanile 1993: 2.

variations within the same traditions, such as Ved. *vācam bibharti*, and by allowing for lexical substitution we can recognize *semantically* cognate forms in other traditions, such as Gk. ἔπος φέρειν 'to bear a word' and OIr. *dobeir guth* 'to give voice'. This, as he says, demonstrates that "nous devrons renoncer aux habituels astérisques et reconnaître que la locution poétique indo-européene pour 'parler' se caractérise comme une séquence de deux signifiés: ce qu'il nous est possible de reconstruire, ce sera donc la séquence *porter* + *voix*, avec la valeur de 'parler'."[20] Thinking of reconstruction in terms of the signified rather than the signifier allows us a far greater range of information about, to paraphrase Watkins, *how* the Indo-Europeans talked about things and a deeper insight into specifically *what* they talked about.

In Watkins' 1995 discussion of the Indo-European dragon slaying formula, which he reconstructs in its most basic form as consisting of the three elements HERO SLAY (*g^{w}hen-) and SERPENT,[21] he makes the point that

> "the semantic constituents of the basic theme may undergo paradigmatic (commutational) variants: for the HERO's name there may appear an epithet (e.g., slayer); for SLAY we may find KILL, SMITE, OVERCOME, BEAT, etc.; for the SERPENT (ADVERSARY) we may find MONSTER, BEAST, but also HERO$_2$ or ANTI-HERO. The constituents may undergo syntagmatic variants [...] HERO and ADVERSARY may switch

[20] Campanile 1993: 3.

[21] See also Watkins 1987.

> grammatical roles [...] the WEAPON may be promoted to direct object and the ADVERSARY assigned a marginal role in the utterance [...] the WEAPON may also be promoted to grammatical subject of the verb SLAY or equivalent."[22]

Throughout these different transformations of the formula its essence survives unchanged, and we are able to reconstruct the core idea of a Proto-Indo-European myth, and therefore an important poetic theme.

It is critical that we focus on the semantics of these expressions and the larger semiotic system into which they fit, rather than their specific representations, and remember that, as Meillet wrote: "les moyens d'expression n'ont avec les idées qu'une relation de *fait*, non une relation de *nature* et de *nécessité.*"[23] In order to truly understand the range of poetic expression, we must remember that this freedom to replace specific lexical items in a phrase without altering the relationships between its components or its essential meaning is a fundamental property of language. It is necessary to take such replacement processes into consideration, as they are a valuable tool available to the poets.[24]

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[22] Watkins 1995: 302. I have omitted the specific examples that Watkins provides of these variations on the theme.

[23] Meillet 1937: 15.

[24] For a discussion of these processes and the flexible nature of formulae, see Hainsworth 1968.

1.3: Indo-European Poetic Language

We may consider several different aspects of poetic language, different features of poetry, that are part of the repertory of tools of the Indo-European poet. Watkins points to the traditional division of the study of poetic language along the lines of formulaics, metrics and stylistics.[25] The first of these, formulaics, was discussed in the preceding section, as the methodology for the reconstruction of PIE poetic language began to be established with the study of formulaics.

Once shown to be effective for the reconstruction of more than phonemes, morphemes and lexemes, the Comparative Method was applied to the study of metrical traditions, and Meillet established the link between the earliest Greek and Vedic metres. He wrote that:

> "Le védique et le grec ancien sont les seules langues qui puissent fournir, sur la structure des vers indo-européens, des témoignages immédiatement valables. Malgré des différences notables dans le détail, les deux langues sont comparables entre elles, et elles conservent l'essentiel du type indo-européen. Toutes les autres offrent des innovations telles qu'une comparaison de mètres est exclue."[26]

With respect to the claim that the non-Greek or Indo-Iranian metrical systems had been so transformed that they could offer nothing to a comparative IE metre, Meillet was

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[25] Watkins 1995: 12.

[26] Meillet 1923: 12.

proven wrong. A third tradition to contribute to the reconstruction was provided by Jakobson when he demonstrated that the Slavic metres also preserved the Indo-European metre. Through the comparison of various Slavic poetic forms Jakobson was able to reconstruct a Common Slavic decasyllabic line, which confirmed the evidence of the Greek and Vedic traditions.[27] Soon after, in two papers in the early 1960s, Watkins demonstrated that the metre of early Old Irish poetry, and so the Celtic metre, was also a reflex of the same common poetic tradition. [28] West later included the Italic and Germanic metres, among others, in his discussion of the IE metre.[29]

The application of the Comparative Method to these metrical traditions has led to the reconstruction of the following features for the common metre:[30] The lines were isosyllabic, with the shorter lines consisting of 7-8 syllables, and the longer 10-12, and the possibility of variation through acephaly or catalexis. In these lines we find an alternation of long or heavy syllables (that Meillet termed *temps fort*) and short or light syllables (*temps faible*). The basic rhythm consisted of *temps fort* (¯) separated by

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[27] Jakobson 1952. See especially pages 459-463 for the discussion of the contribution of the Slavic metre to Indo-European poetics.

[28] Watkins 1961 and Watkins 1963.

[29] West 1973.

[30] Mainly following Watkins 1995: 19-21.

temps faible (˘ or ˘ ˘). The equation of ¯ = ˘ ˘ was a Greek innovation.[31] In the longer lines, there was an obligatory caesura either before or after the fifth syllable, while the shorter lines lacked a fixed caesura. The longer lines consisted of 3 cola, with the alternation of long and short syllables being free in the initial, partially fixed in the internal, and fixed in the final. The shorter lines had only two cola, with a free initial colon and a fixed cadence. The final syllable was an anceps. Watkins[32] notes that the short line can be derived from the long line simply by the suppression of the internal colon. The lines were arranged in strophic style.

The question of the relationship between metrical constraints and the use of formulas is an important one in understanding the structures of Indo-European poetry. G. Nagy states that "although meter cannot be regular without regular traditional phraseology, traditional phraseology can be regular even without regular meter." [33] Independently, formulas encode important items of cultural information, but they also become an essential tool of the poet because these set phrases can be demonstrated to fit into specific metrical positions in the line. A simple definition of the formula is that it consists of a coherent concept expressed in a specific sequence of sound and rhythm.

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[31] Meillet 1923: 43 ff.

[32] Watkins 1963: 217.

[33] Nagy, G. 1974: 143.

Beyond the inherited formulas and the specifics of IE metre, many other stylistic features have been shown to be common to the poetry of the Indo-European languages, and thus are reconstructed for PIE poetic language. In defining what is encompassed by the term 'stylistics' Watkins refers to "all the linguistic devices which in Jakobson's phrase are 'what makes a verbal message a work of art'." [34] This encompasses word-order, word-selection and phonetic devices such as rhyme, alliteration, and ring composition. A thorough discussion of the devices of Indo-European poetry is obviously well beyond the scope of the present work, but a survey of some of the more common poetic features of the Indo-European languages, and therefore more firmly reconstructed for the proto-poetic language, follows:

Ring composition: Ring composition is a technique by which a particular text, or part of a text, starts and finishes with the same sound or word or phrase. It is "the beginning and ending of a discourse, or complex utterance longer than a sentence, with the same or equivalent word, phrase, or just sound sequence."[35] It is a particularly important component in Irish poetry. For example, the poem[36] that begins with the line ***Rānacsa,***

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[34] Watkins 1995: 21.

[35] Watkins 1995: 34.

[36] From *Serglige Con Culainn,* 'The Wasting Sickness of Cú Chulainn'. All translations are mine unless indicated otherwise. The full text of the poem is edited and translated in Murphy 1956: 106-111.

rem rebrad rān "I came, upon my glorious escapade" ends with the line *ar gnāis in bale ránac* "for frequency in the homestead to which I came."[37] Watkins offers several examples from Greek, including the following from the scene in the Odyssey in which Odysseus is recognized by his dog Argos. Here we find the same three elements in each line, in the same order. The scene begins with ἂν δὲ **κύων** κεφαλήν τε καὶ οὔατα **κείμενος** ἔσχεν, **Ἄργος**[38] 'the dog raised his head and ears, lying there, Argos, . . .', and ends with ἔνθα **κύων κεῖτ' Ἄργος**[39] 'there lay the dog Argos...'

Kennings: West states that the term kenning "denotes a poetic periphrasis, usually made up of two elements, used in lieu of the proper name of a person or thing."[40] Watkins defines a kenning as "a bipartite figure of two nouns in a non-copulative, typically genitival grammatical relation (A of B) or in composition (B-A) which together make reference to, 'signify', a third notion C."[41] Among the examples of kennings provided by Watkins are the following two for 'sea': OIr. *nemed mbled*

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[37] The word *gnāis* is perhaps best translated in this context by the idiom "to be a regular", i.e. a frequent presence in the household.

[38] Od. 17.291-2.

[39] Od. 17.300.

[40] West 2007: 81.

[41] Watkins 1995: 44.

'whales' sanctuary', and OE *hron-rād* 'whales' road'. In OE we have also *swan-rāde* 'swans' road'[42].

Merisms: Merisms, or 'polar expressions' as West calls them,[43] are expressions in which the individual components are meant to express the totality of a concept. Watkins defines a merism as "a bipartite noun phrase consisting of two nouns in a copulative relation (A and B), two nouns which share most of their semantic features, and together serve to designate globally a higher concept C, i.e. to index the whole of a higher taxon C."[44] He lists among his examples of merisms Hitt. *ḫalkiš* ZÍZ-*tar* "barley (and) spelt", meaning 'cereals', and the English "oats, peas, beans, and barley grow,"[45] in which we find the designation for 'cereals' – oats and barley, and the designation for 'legumes' – peas and beans. A well-attested Indo-European merism denoting wealth is found in the expression 'cattle/herds and men,'[46] attested in Ved. *góbhiḥ … vīráiḥ,* Av. *pasu.vīra, pasəuš vīrāaṭcā,* and *pasūš vīrəṇg,* Umbr. *ueiro pequo,* Lat. *pecudesque virosque,* etc., and also in the semantically equivalent 'four-footed and two-footed,'[47]

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[42] Beowulf l. 200.

[43] West 2007: 99.

[44] Watkins 1995: 45.

[45] Watkins 1995: 47.

[46] Watkins 1995: 15, 42 and West 2007: 100.

[47] Watkins 1995: 15, 42 and West 2007: 100.

attested in Ved. *dvipáde (ca) cátuṣpade (ca)*, Av. *bizaŋgranąm … caθβarəzaŋgranąm*, Umbr. *dupursus peturpursus*, etc.

Epanalepsis: Epanalepsis, as West describes it, is "the figure in which a word or a whole phrase from one verse is picked up in the next."[48] He provides, among others, the following example[49]: *sunvānó hi ṣmā yájati áva dvíṣo / devā́naam áva dvíṣaḥ* "for the soma-presser turns away enmity / (turns) away the gods' enmity." In Old Irish we have entire poems composed in this style. In the *Lebor Gabala Erenn* we have the following example of this type (showing also ring composition): [50]

A[i]liu īath nhĒrenn	I seek the land of Ireland
hĒrmach muir mothach	coursed be the fruitful sea
Mothach sliab srethach	fruitful the ranked highland
Srethach caill cīthach	ranked the showery wood
Cīthach aub essach	Showery the river of cataracts
Essach loch lindmar	Of cataracts the lake of pools
Lindmar tōr tipra	of pools the hill of a well
Tipra tūa[i]th ōenach	of a well of a people of assemblies
Ōenach rīg Temrach	of assemblies of the king of Temair (Tara)
Temair tōr tūathach	Temair, hill of peoples
Tūatha Mac Mīled	Peoples of the Sons of Míl
Mīled long libern	Of Míl of ships, of barks,
Libern ārd Ēriu	The high ship of Ēriu
Ēriu ārd dīglass	Eriu lofty, very green
Dīchetal rogāeth	An incantation very cunning

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[48] West 2007: 106.

[49] RV 1.133.7. West's translation.

[50] Ed. and trans. (modified) MacAlister 1937: 114-117.

Rogaes ban Breise	The great cunning of the wives of Bres
Breise, ban Buaigne	Of Bres, of the wives of Buaigne
Be adbul Ēriu	The mighty lady Eriu
Ēremōn artus	Erimón harried her
Īr, Ēber ailsius -	Ir, Eber sought for her –
Ailiu iath Ērenn	I seek the land of Ireland.

Polyptoton: Polyptoton is the repetition or juxtaposition of the same word in a different case. The repetition of a noun or adjective is most frequent, but there are also many cases that involve verb forms, "especially with an opposition of active and passive action."[51] Among the examples given by West are:

RV 8.84.8 *nákir yám ghnánti, hánti yáḥ* 'whom none slay, (but) who slay'

Il. 4.451 ὀλλύντων τε καὶ ὀλλυμένων 'killing and being killed'

An excellent example from Old Irish occurs in the text *Audacht Morainn,*[52] §62: *Tarbflaith, to-slaid side to-sladar, ar-clich ar-clechar, con-claid con-cladar, ad-reith ad-rethar, to-seinn to-sennar.* "The bull-ruler strikes and is struck, wards off and is warded off, roots out and is rooted out, attacks and is attacked, pursues and is pursued."

In the Indo-European traditions we find a specialized poetic vocabulary consisting of words that are either archaic, or were never found in unmarked speech.

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[51] West 2007: 111. See also Watkins 1995, Chapter 31: "The slayer slain: a reciprocal formula", p. 326ff. for a discussion of these and other similar expressions.

[52] Ed. and trans. Kelly 1976.

West states that the "Indo-European poets no doubt had at their disposal a professional vocabulary that included rare, choice, archaic, or artificial words."[53] We find also that they had specific poetic grammatical forms that were not used in other contexts. In Latin, for example, we find the poetic form of the third person plural of the perfect tense ending in *–ere*, in contrast to the more usual, unmarked form in *–erunt.* These marked forms must be recognized as separate from the 'unmarked' language of every day speech in our reconstruction of the PIE lexicon. As Watkins says: "'Language' is in Indo-European languages most readily accessible in the lexicon; hence the attention to hierarchization of vocabulary into aesthetically marked and unmarked forms."[54] The often deliberate obscurity of poetic language requires its own linguistic forms. In the Irish *Auraicept na n-Éces*, a distinction is made between different types of language, based on their level of "complexity and markedness."[55] Watkins sets these levels of increasing markedness and obscurity out as follows:[56]

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[53] West 2007: 162.

[54] Watkins 1995: 182.

[55] Watkins 1995: 182.

[56] Watkins 1995: 182.

			(-)	(+)
(-)	gnáthbérla:	senbérla	ordinary:	old
	bérla Féine:	bérla na filed	professional:	poetic
(+)	bérla tóbaide:	bérla fortchuide	selected:	concealed

This formalized distinction between marked and unmarked language is common throughout the Indo-European traditions. We find that many cultures differentiate between the unmarked 'language of men' and the marked 'language of the gods'. Watkins[57] offers a discussion of examples from Greek, Hittite, Vedic, and Old Norse demonstrating this contrast. There are numerous examples of distinctive poetic lexicons in modern English literature also, of course, though often now restricted to children's literature. One need only mention Lewis Caroll's *Jabberwocky* or Edward Lear's *The Quangle Wangle's Hat* to illustrate the point that the vocabulary of poetry can in fact be very far removed from that used by most speakers of English on a daily basis.

The fact that poetic language is in so many ways set apart from unmarked language raises the joint questions of production and reception. Watkins states that "the total effect of all forms of poetic technique is going to be a *distancing* of the poetic message from ordinary human language."[58] The poets must be able to operate within

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[57] Watkins 1995: 38-39. See also West 2007: 160-162.

[58] Watkins 1995: 183.

this linguistic tradition, which means that they must acquire the full range of the poetic language of their culture. We must also remember, however, that the poet depends on his audience, and his audience must be capable of understanding his message. They too, therefore, must acquire the poetic language of their culture, though in a more passive and non-productive sense than the poet himself. We must consider then the linguistic competence of both the poet and his audience, and the question of the acquisition of poetic language. We must also consider that the great importance of poetry and its wide range of functions in Indo-European cultures require a correspondingly wide range of comprehension on the part of individuals. Both the poet and his audience participate in the poetic culture of the Indo-Europeans, and both must be considered in a study of that culture.

Chapter Two: Poetic Culture

2.1: The Social Function of Indo-European Poetry

Of primary importance to the study of poetic culture is an awareness of the place of poetry within its society. Watkins wrote that "the concept and nature of Indo-European poetic language cannot be separated from that of the society in which it operated."[59] We find that among Indo-European peoples poetry is used to encode a great variety of cultural information. A survey of the genres of poetry found in the Indo-European languages can give us a sense of this range. Beyond the epic genre used to convey myth, history, legend, etc., we find also prayers, praise poetry, legal tracts, genealogical material and other culturally significant material. As Campanile put it:[60]

> *"Was wir indogermanische Dichtung nennen, war vielmehr die Summe des ganzen Wissens einer Gesellschaft, das mündlich überliefert worden war. Die Züge, die unsere westliche Tradition der Dichtung zuschreibt (Gefühl, Inspiration, Individualismus, Beteiligung usw.) und die die romantische Ästhetik besonders unterstrichen hat, waren für sie nur eine Nebensache,*

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[59] Watkins 1995: 105.

[60] Campanile 1987: 26. Quoted in translation in Watkins 1995: 69: "What we term Indo-European poetry was rather a society's sum of knowledge, which was orally transmitted. The features which our western tradition ascribes to poetry (feeling, inspiration, individualism, participation, etc.), and which the aesthetics of romanticism has particularly underscored, were for Indo-European poetry only a side issue, although they were present. The main thing was to preserve and increase cultural elements which presented something essential to the well-being, collectivity, and stability of society. We are speaking of the magic spells which heal the sick, the legal formulas which settle disputes, the prayers which extort worldly goods from the gods, the genealogies which give to people consciousness of their past and pride in it, the eulogies which legitimize rulers by the celebration of their greatness."

> *wenn sie auch da waren. Die Hauptsache war die Bewahrung und die Vermehrung von kulturellen Elementen, die für das Wohlsein, die Geschlossenheit und die Stabilität der Gesellschaft etwas Wesentliches darstellten; wir sprechen von den Zaubersprüchen, die die Kranken heilen, von Rechtsformeln, die die Streitigkeiten beilegen, von den Gebeten, die den Göttern die irdischen Güter abnötigen, von den Genealogien, die den Menschen das Bewußtsein ihrer Vergangenheit und den Stolz darauf geben, von den Eulogien, die die Herrscher durch die Zelebration ihrer Größe legitimieren.*

Essentially, the power of the poetic word was to bring order to the world, and to maintain its stability. Benveniste wrote that the poet is "*lui-même un dieu. Un poète fait exister; les choses prennent naissance dans son chant.*"[61] In a pre-literate culture it was the linguistic systematization of this information that allowed it to be preserved, transmitted, elaborated upon, and used as a model for new creations. The burden of those responsible for this material was immense, as was the respect accorded to them.

2.2: The Indo-European Poet

The poet can be defined by his social function and is set apart by his training. Gamkrelidze and Ivanov stated that: "In reconstructing Indo-European society we assume the existence of a social class of priests, concerned with all of the diverse

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[61] Benveniste 1969: 40. This is, surprisingly, the only reference that I can find to the poet in a book on Indo-European cultural institutions.

spiritual, legal, religious and ritual activities."[62] It is in this class that we must locate the Indo-European poet. In 1938 Dumézil began to develop the idea of the tripartite division of Indo-European society, the existence of a social division along the lines of three main functions: the sacred, the martial and the agricultural/artisanal. Dumézil later expanded on these basic functions, writing in 1958 that is was now possible to describe the sacred function in such a way as to more fully express its nature as:

> *"d'une part le sacré et les raports soit des hommes avec le sacré (culte, magie), soit des hommes entre eux sous le regard et la garantie des dieux (droit, administration), et aussi le pouvoir souverain exercé par le roi ou ses délégués en conformité avec la volonté ou la faveur des dieux, et enfin, plus généralement, la science et l'intelligence, alors inséperables de la méditation et de la manipulation des choses sacrées."*[63]

It falls to the poet to express this set of relationships, this sense of the ordering of the world, and on some level to enforce and reinforce them through the power of the spoken word. Campanile described the Celtic and Indian (and thus the Indo-European) poet as "*il conservatore e il professionista della parola: egli è per definizione competente in tutti gli ambiti ove la parola è, o è ritunuta essere, operativa.*"[64] To speak

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[62] Gamkrelidze and Ivanov, 1995, v. 1: 701.

[63] Dumézil, 1958: 19.

[64] Campanile, 1977: 32. Quoted in translation in Watkins 1995: 69: "the preserver and the professional of the spoken word. It is he who is by definition competent in all the areas where the word is, or is considered, operative".

of the word as 'operative' calls to mind the use of words of power in ritual or prayer, and so in this respect the creation of the poet is identical with the prayer of a priest or the words uttered by a ritual practitioner. While the role of the poet develops and changes drastically over time, at the earliest stage of its existence the role of the poet is not likely to have been that far removed from that of the priest, or seer, or any other whose function it is to speak to or for the gods. The central power of the poet resides in the speech act, and if this power is essentially theirs it seems only right to connect them with all acts of powerful speech, such as ritual, prayer, and the pronouncement of legal judgements.

At a fundamental level we find in both the poet and the priest the ability to use words both to express and to affect their reality, the ordering of their world. On a secular level we find this same power operating in human law, and so we often find the legal profession linked to the poetic one. In Ireland, for example, many legal texts are preserved in poetic form, and from what we know of the training of jurists it had much in common with the training of the poets. Binchy argued that "there is every reason to believe that the professional jurists, even after they had hived off from the parent order

of *filid,* retained much of its organization, including the division into 'grades'." [65] We know that the poets, particularly those of the higher grades, were expected to have some familiarity with the law. We are told in the Irish text *Uraicecht na Ríar* that an *ollam* (the highest grade of poet) *is éola i mbrithemnacht fénechai,* "is knowledgeable in the jurisprudence of Irish law,"[66] a statement that is glossed *.i. gach ni da-roich, .i. da-roich filidheact dhe* "everything of it which appertains, i.e. which appertains to poetry". This would indicate an early stage at which the poets were involved in the enactment of the law, particularly that part of it which governed their own activities. In the case of early Celtic societies, both poetry and law were among the functions of the Druidic class. Caesar tells us of the druids that *nam fere de omnibus controversiis publicis privatisque constituunt, et, si quod est admissum facinus, si caedes facta, si de hereditate, de finibus controversia est, idem decernunt, praemia poenasque constituunt,*[67] "for they settle almost all public and private disputes, and, if a crime is committed, if a murder is done, if a succession or border is contested, they judge those, they assign rewards and penalties." He tells us also that those who studied at the Druidic schools *magnum ibi*

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[65] Binchy, 1958: 45.

[66] Ed. and trans. Breatnach 1987: 102-103.

[67] Caesar, De Bello Gallico VI.13.

numerum versuum ediscere dicuntur,[68] "are said to learn there a great number of verses." The connections between religion, ritual, poetry and law are strong, and it is not always possible, or even necessary, to differentiate the practitioner of one from another. Indeed, we can find elements of all of these roles within a single social unit in many early Indo-European societies, such as the Brahmins of India or the Druids of the Celts. It becomes necessary to ask where we draw the line between poet and priest or seer or jurist, and in fact whether such a line even existed clearly.

The complexity of poetic language, its multifunctionality in Indo-European society, and the status accorded to those capable of operating creatively with this language, taking full advantage of its possibilities, provides us with some information about the abilities of the Indo-European poet. This naturally raises the question of how these abilities and the associated knowledge were acquired. We find a particularly great wealth of information about the training, legal status and social obligations of the poet in the Celtic, and especially the Old Irish, context.

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[68] Caesar, De Bello Gallico VI.14.

2.3 The *Filid*

Much of what we know of the poet in the early Indo-European cultures survives actively in Irish society into the seventeenth century, and in some aspects even beyond. One of the most essential elements of Indo-European poetic culture is the relationship between the poet and the patron. This relationship is one of mutual dependence, supported by a system of exchange. The poet, through his art, glorified his patron and offered him a form of immortality, and in return was richly rewarded for his efforts. *Tecosca Cormaic* states that one of the things that "is best for a king" is *airmitiu ḟiled* "honouring poets."[69] Watkins points out a number of phonetically linked pairs that refer to the two sides of this exchange: OIr. *clú* and *cnú*, "fame" and "nut" or "jewel", as a metaphor for the reward given to the poet in exchange for bestowing fame upon his patron; OIr. *dúan* and *dúas*, "poem" and "reward for a poem"; Gk. νίκη and τιμή, "victory" and "recompense of honour."[70]

Just as the poet could bestow honour, fame and a sort of immortality - κλέος ἄφθιτον, upon his patron, he could also destroy the reputation of a patron who

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[69] Ed. and trans. Meyer 1909a: 2-3. §1.17.

[70] Watkins 1995: 30. See also Watkins 1976, in which he refers to the Irish poetic tradition as "the longest continuous tradition of encomiastic poetry in the world." (272)

defaulted on his side of the contract through satire. A famous Irish quatrain illustrating this runs:[71]

ro-cúala	I have heard
ní tabair eochu ar dúana	he does not give horses for poems
do-beir a n-í as dúthaig dó	he gives what is natural to him
bó.	a cow.

The deployment of satire was a serious business. Satire was considered to be an even more potent force than praise. In *Bretha Nemed* IV[72] it is stated that *do-renar aor a molad, ar as íreiu ro-said aor oldas an moladh*, "satire is compensated for by means of praise for satire reaches further than praise." The *Uraicecht na Ríar* states that *atáat a secht con-láat cach n-aír: i scáth aide caislechtai scoth, is treairiut i cuairt éscai – aidbsiu in sin; aidech n-aicetail, congain comail, corruguinecht*: "there are seven things which compose any satire: in the shade of a smooth flowery *ad*[73], in the three periods in the circuit of the moon – that is how it is announced; harmonious (?) reciting, magical wounding, sorcery."[74] It is clear that the power of the word was still, to use Campanile's word, *operativa*, and that the poet was expected to use his abilities

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[71] Murphy 1956: 90.

[72] Ed. and trans. in Breatnach 1987: 36-38.

[73] Breatnach (1987: 138) gives the following note: "From the gloss we should expect some word for (a type of) 'tree' or 'bush' in the main text here." The gloss specifies *.i. fo scat sciath cen deilgi fuirre 7 barr dluth trom uirre*: "under the shade of a whitethorn, without any thorns on it and a dense heavy top on it."

[74] Breatnach 1987: 114-115.

responsibly. The misuse of satire was considered to be a punishable offence in Irish law. Kelly offers a discussion of the illegal satirist,[75] introduced by the statement that "satire can be legally used by a *fili* to exert pressure on a wrongdoer to get him to obey the law. However to satirize anyone without just cause is a serious offence, requiring the payment of the victim's honour price."[76] Satire and praise are two sides of the same coin, and two of the most effective tools that a poet has at his command.

The greater the skill, and therefore poetry, of the poet, the greater his status and his reward will be, and though the importance of artistic inspiration to the creative process cannot be discounted, we must also bear in mind what Bergin said of the Irish poet, which holds true also for the Indo-European poet:

> "The Irish *file* or *bard* was not necessarily an inspired poet. He was, in fact, a professor of literature and a man of letters, highly trained in the use of a polished literary medium, belonging to a hereditary caste in an aristocratic society, holding an official position therein by virtue of his training, his learning, his knowledge of the history and traditions of his country and his clan."[77]

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[75] Kelly 1988: 49-51.

[76] Kelly 1988: 49.

[77] Bergin 1970: 4.

The training of the poet is therefore of crucial importance. If he was expected, particularly in pre-literate times, to learn, retain, and add to the poetic repertory, we must consider how he acquired his ability to do so.

We can reach back even further than the Old Irish material for information about Celtic poetic culture to what Caesar tells us about the training of the Druids: [78]

> *Magnum ibi numerum versuum ediscere dicuntur. Itaque annos nonnulli vicenos in disciplina permanent. Neque fas esse existimant ea litteris mandare, cum in reliquis fere rebus, publicis privatisque rationibus Graecis litteris utantur. Id mihi duabus de causis instituisse videntur, quod neque in vulgum disciplinam efferi velint neque eos, qui discunt, litteris confisos minus memoriae studere.*
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> There [in the Druidic schools], they are said to learn by heart a great number of verses. For this reason some remain twenty years in training. Nor do they think that it is right to entrust these [verses] to writing, although usually in remaining things, public and private matters, they use Greek letters. They seem to me to have instituted this for two reasons, because they do not wish the training to be spread publicly, nor do they wish that those who are learning study less by memory because they are relying on writing.

Caesar's account of druidic training is not unique; several records of the education of the Irish poets show us the development of this training over the course of the next eighteen centuries. The Irish text *Auraicept na n-Éces*[79] (The Scholars Primer)

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[78] De Bello Gallico VI.14.

[79] Ed. and trans. Calder 1917 and Ahlqvist 1982.

is a text describing the training process of the *filid.* Its canonical parts have been dated to the seventh century. It details a curriculum of learning that covers a period of no less than seven years to reach the highest grade of poet, *ollam*, and a total of twelve years for full mastery of all the knowledge that a master poet should have.[80] The *fili* is, of course, not functionally the priest and dispenser of justice as the Druid was, and so one can imagine that this contributed to the reduction of the training period. In addition, though the poets were still expected to learn through extensive memorization, they were also expected to be literate and so they studied grammatical and metrical tracts – the *Auraicept* being one of the prime examples. Campanile summarizes the studies of the Irish poet as follows:

> *Essi consistono sostanzialmente in un enorme numero di racconti e poesie appresi a memoria, nello studio degli elementi formali della poesia (metrica, grammatica, lessico poetico, retorico etc.) e nell' approfondita conoscenza di materie che certamente oggi non connetteremmo alla poesia: magia, medecina, diritto, toponomastica, storia, tradizione locali, genealogie.*[81]

A third and thoroughly remarkable account of the training of Irish poets occurs in the 1722 *Memoirs of the Marquis of Clanricarde*, where it is said that "the course [of

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[80] Calder 1917: xxi.

[81] Campanile 1977: 29. "They consist substantially of an enormous number of stories and poems, memorized, of the study of the formal elements of poetry (metrics, grammar, poetic lexicon, rhetoric, etc.) and in a profound knowledge of materials which today we would certainly not connect to poetry: magic, medicine, law, place lore, history, local tradition, genealogy."

their training] was long and tedious, as we find, and it was six or seven Years before a Mastery or the last Degree was conferred."[82] Clanricarde's account informs us that even at this late date, a century after the collapse of the Gaelic order and at a time when the decline of the Irish language and traditional culture was well underway, many of the older traditions that formed the poetic culture were being maintained: training as a poet was still reserved for those descended from poets, students were still expected to memorize all the forms of Irish poetry, and once trained were expected to record in verse the "Marriages, Births, Deaths, Acquisitions made in war and Peace, Exploits and other remarkable things"[83] of their tribes and chiefs. Clanricarde also recounts the physical structure of the Schools themselves, describing low huts with a minimum of furniture and without windows, as darkness was necessary for the concentration of the students. He tells us that though the size of the schools varied from tribe to tribe, depending on how many poetic families there were, some schools were "more or less frequented for the difference of Professors, Conveniency, with other Reasons, and

[82] Quoted in Bergin 1970: 7.

[83] Quoted in Bergin 1970: 7.

seldom any come but from remote parts, to be at a distance from Relations and other Acquaintances that might interrupt his Study"[84].

There is a definite continuity of tradition between these three accounts, and it has implications not only for the study of Celtic poets, but also for the study of Indo-European poets. As Campanile wrote: "*Und auf diese Gattung von Dichtung konnte man sich nur durch lange Lehrjahre vorbereiten: Was uns die mittelirischen Verslehren über die Bildung des irischen Dichters aussagen, ist großenteils auch für den indogermanischen gültig.*"[85]

2.4 The Audience

In light of the great complexity of the poetic art and the years, even decades, of training required to achieve mastery of both its form and content, we must consider what a contemporary audience would have made of the performance of a particular piece of poetic art. How many of the aural features of a particular piece would the audience immediately be able to identify, recognize and appreciate on the first hearing?

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[84] Quoted in Bergin 1970: 6.

[85] Campanile 1987: 26. Quoted in translation in Watkins 1995: 69: "For this kind of poetry one could prepare oneself only by years of study; what the Middle Irish Metrics texts tell us about the training of the Early Irish poet is basically valid for the Indo-European one as well."

How many during subsequent performances? Certain features cannot fail to strike the ear, like the repetition of **τα**, **τε**, and **ον**, in Il 1.70:

ὅς ἤδη **τά τ'ἐόντα τά τ'ἐσσόμενα** πρό **τ'ἐόντα**
who perceived what is and what will be and what has been

Likewise the alliteration in the line *rānacsa, rem rebrad rān*[86] is immediately obvious. Would an audience, however, have recognized the ring composition between *rānacsa* in the initial line and *ránac* in the final, eighteen quatrains, sixty-four lines later, unless they knew to listen for it? Returning to the topic of the poetic lexicon, and of obscure poetic language, to what extent would it have been used for an audience that could not follow it? In ritual contexts the intended audience is the god or gods to whom the ritual is devoted, and so the comprehension of the human listeners is of secondary importance. This cannot be said of the varying forms that constitute the Homeric dialect. We must assume a degree of education in the poetic language on the part of the audience. The layman may not himself possess the degree of linguistic competence required to actually articulate in the poetic language, but he must have a passive knowledge of it that is sufficient to allow him to recognize and value appropriately the artistry of the poet. The acquisition of poetic language on the part of both the poets and their audience is an

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[86] See note 34.

interesting and important question from the perspective of linguistic research into the grammar of the Indo-European languages and PIE.

Chapter Three: Verbal Art: The Linguists and the Poets

Anyone who has spent any amount of time reading poetry, whether modern poetry in their own native language or poetry composed millennia ago in Vedic or Greek or centuries ago in Old Irish, cannot help but be aware of the stylistic differences between the 'unmarked' language of daily life and the more complex language of poetry. When asked to comment upon the month of April in a casual situation, one simply does not say something like "April is the cruellest month, breeding / Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing / Memory and desire, stirring / Dull roots with spring rain."[87] Nor is one likely to say "Whan that Aprill with his shoures sote / The droghte of Marche hath perced to the rote / And bathed every veyne in swich licour / Of which vertu engendred is the flour; etc."[88] Similarly, a speaker of Old Irish would not likely, in unmarked conversation, have described Winter in the following terms: *Gáeth ard úar / ísel grían / gair a rrith / ruirthech rían* "A high cold wind, low the sun, short its course, a strong-running sea."[89] What we see in these passages of poetry is a language marked by the poet's desire to express something beyond the mundane realities of everyday existence, and to use appropriate language that goes beyond the ordinary to express this:

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[87] T.S. Eliot, *The Waste Land.* 1-4.

[88] Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales.* 1-4.

[89]The full poem appears in Murphy 1956: 160.

the intensity and complexity of the language reflects the intensity and complexity of the insights that it expresses.

These passages of verbal art are eloquent and beautiful, but from a linguistic perspective this is uninteresting. What is of interest is the question of what, specifically, *linguistically,* sets poetic speech apart from 'normal' utterances. In the context of Indo-European poetry we must bear in mind that we are, for the most part and certainly at the formative stage, dealing with *speech* and not writing. We must also look beyond the features of Indo-European that have been discussed thus far, the metrics, the specialized lexicon, the phonetic features, and consider the status of poetic word-order in our description of poetic language. Poetry is a linguistic playground when it comes to word order as much as it is when it comes to semantic sense. As Watkins describes it "the poetic act of communication is at once a distillation and a complication of the rules governing speech acts of natural language."[90] One of the typical features of poetic language is the inversion of expected word order: adjectives that would normally precede their noun follow it instead, as in "delphiniums blue and geraniums red,"[91] subjects may follow their verbs, as in "On either side the river lie

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[90] Watkins 1982: 111.

[91] A. A. Milne, 'The Dormouse and the Doctor', *When We Were Very Young.*

long fields of barley and of rye,"[92] and expressions that might be ordinarily avoided as redundant are used, as in "Ah! comme la neige a neigé!"[93] In Old Irish, where the unmarked word order is verb initial, we find frequent verb final constructions in the poetic language. For example:

ar mind	*n-axal*	***n-accallad***
our hero	with-apostle	**conversed**

"Our hero used to hold converse with the apostle."[94]

mairg	*Ulltu*	*mad ol*	*Boïnn*	***bet***[95]
woe	to-Ulaid	if beyond	Boyne	**they-are**

"Woe to the Ulaid if they are beyond the Boyne."

Everything that we conclude about the (relatively) unmarked word order of a language based on the prose texts[96] must be re-evaluated when we turn to the poetic ones. Pinkster has said that poets "move on the boundaries of what is grammatically possible,"[97] and where the poets go, their audience must follow. A modern reader of

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[92] Alfred, Lord Tennyson, *The Lady of Shalott.*

[93] Émile Nelligan, *Soir d'hiver.*

[94] Cited in Watkins 1963: 219.

[95] Cited in Watkins 1963: 226.

[96] Prose word order is, of course, marked by comparison to speech, but in terms of what we may think of as deliberate or composed language, it is less marked than poetic language. We must again emphasize though that the range of markedness expressed in both poetry and prose is far more complex than sets of binary oppositions.

[97] Pinkster 2007.

poetry has the luxury of reading and rereading a single passage as many times as they wish in order to fully receive and appreciate the complex poetic forms on display. In dealing with Indo-European poetry however, particularly that of the period during which the conventions of poetic language that we have identified as part of this tradition were being formed, we are not dealing with poetry that was meant to be read, especially read alone and slowly. Indo-European poetry was a social affair; it was dynamic, active – even interactive, as the poet-performer could respond to the energy and reaction of his audience, as any artist does in a performance situation. The question of composition in performance is still debated in many contexts, as is the question of memory and the exact nature of the role that it plays in dealing with large texts like the Ṛg Veda or the Homeric corpus, but there can be no doubt that Indo-European poetry was meant to be heard, and so we must consider what may be termed the 'aurality' of the text, and the ability of the audience to process the complexities of poetic syntax. If the audience was able to process these marked structures, which often seem to run counter to our understanding of the syntactic rules at play in a particular language, we must take this into account in our attempts to describe the grammars of these languages.

What then is the relationship between poetic language and unmarked language? There are two aspects to this question: 1) how does the production of poetic language

differ from the production of unmarked or less marked linguistic forms, and 2) how does the reception of poetic language differ from the reception of less marked forms? With respect to the first question we must consider whether the production of poetic language by someone who is trained in its use is necessarily a more difficult or self-conscious process than the production of casual speech. Can a poet, trained for years in the forms of poetic speech, use those forms as instinctively as he does 'unmarked' speech? Or, as Jakobson formulated the question: "Are the designs disclosed by linguistic analysis intentional and premeditated in the creative work of the poet?"[98] There are good reasons to believe that poetic language can be produced by a competent poet (both ancient and modern) with little or no premeditation. The Triads of Ireland list *dichetal di chennaib*, which Meyer translates as 'improvisation',[99] among the "three things that constitute a poet." Breatnach translates the same phrase as 'extempore chanting' when it appears in *Bretha Nemed* IV.[100] As Jakobson put it, with reference to modern poets: "a conscious deliberation may occur and assume a beneficial role in poetic creation" but the question remains of "whether in certain cases intuitive verbal

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[98] Jakobson 1970: 302.

[99] Meyer 1906: §123.

[100] Breatnach 1987: 37.

latency does not precede and underlie such conscious consideration."[101] He refers to the Russian poet Velimir Xlebnikov who 'confessed' that he had had no awareness or intention of producing the complex phonetic patterns that are found in the opening lines of his poem 'The Grasshopper'[102]. On the one hand the formal training of the *filid* would no doubt have instilled a greater awareness of the features of poetic language that they were expected to produce, but on the other that same training would have certainly led to an instinctive and unconscious command of these forms.

Concerning the second part of our question, regarding the reception of poetic forms, we must recognize that whether or not the poets were composing as they performed, the audience was certainly understanding the poetry as it was performed. Without an audience the poet cannot function, and so although the more intricate complexities of the language may not have been observed when initially heard, the syntax at least must have been comprehensible to the hearer. The Indo-European poet is particularly dependant on his patron, and so we must assume some familiarity with poetic language on the part of their patrons in particular. In Ireland we even have the idea that the king should himself be a poet. In *Tecosca Cormaic*, in a list of the proper

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[101] Jakobson 1970: 302.

[102] Jakobson 1970: 303. Jakobson provides a detailed analysis of the 'underlying phonemic machinery' of the lines.

qualities of a chief, we find the instruction *rop fili* 'let him be a poet'[103]. We have also the tradition of games, played by non-poets, in which one person would begin a quatrain and the other was expected to finish it. In the story *Fingal Rónáin,*[104] for example, the participants in this game are Mael Fothartaig, the king's son, and the king's wife, who is known only as Echaid's daughter.

If a poet could spontaneously produce structures in this poetic language, and there is good reason to believe that this was possible, and a listener was able to process and correctly interpret those structures, then they must have been a part of their linguistic knowledge. Watkins writes that "we may consider poetic language as a sort of grammar, in our case an Indo-European grammar, which distinguishes levels of sound and meaning."[105] This sub-grammar is based on the standard grammar of the language, but stretches its phonetic, lexical and syntactic properties to their fullest potential. In analysing the grammar of these languages, and in particular in attempting to describe their syntactic processes, it is vital to take the poetic language into account for it is here that we find the broadest expression of the linguistic competence of the speakers of the language. In studying poetic language, as Jamison puts it, in order "to

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[103] Meyer 1909a: §6.12.

[104] Ed. Greene 1955.

[105] Watkins 1995: 28.

understand the syntactic constructions, it is necessary to take account both of the metrical impulses that drive syntactic movement rules and of the formulaic cross-referencing that must have allowed the poets and the audience to interpret superficially unusual constructions."[106] A linguistic study of a language simply cannot afford to neglect its poetic forms without ignoring an essential display of the 'borders of what is grammatically possible'. Ford described the poet as "one who transcends his world, who crosses the boundaries of both this world and the other, crosses gender borders, dissolves the boundaries between animal and human."[107] The poet transcends also the boundaries of ordinary language, redefining its limits and relentlessly exploring the realms of linguistic possibility.

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[106] Jamison 1998: 295-6.

[107] Ford 1999: xxiv.

Chapter Four: Old Irish Poetry

Old Irish is a rich source of information about poetic language because the poetry, like the language, preserves many archaisms but shows also significant innovation. The Old Irish texts offer also contemporary commentaries on poetic language and descriptions of poetic conventions. It is important to consider some of the different styles of poetry and their history, and it is even more important to consider some of the contexts in which poetry was used in the Irish literary tradition, in order to appreciate the range of Old Irish poetic language.

4.1 Old Irish Poetic Language

Old Irish poetic language is characterized by a complex relationship between phonetic/prosodic features and rhythm. Some of these features will be discussed as they are used in the following quatrain, a poem found in the marginalia of the St. Gall Priscian:[108]

Is acher ingáith innocht
fufuasna fairggae findfolt
ni ágor réimm mora minn
dondláechraid lainn ua lothlind.
Bitter is the wind tonight

[108] Edited in TPH ii: 290.

It churns the sea's white hair
I do not fear the coursing of the clear-voiced sea
By the fierce warriors from Lothlainn.[109]

In this poem we have the alliteration of *f* in the second line, *m* in the third, and *l* in the fourth. The metre of the quatrain is *deibide*, and so we find ab cd rhyme.[110] *Deibide* end rhyme occurs between a stressed and an unstressed syllable; in this case we have ab rhyme between *nocht* and *-fólt* and cd rhyme between *minn* and *–lind*. We have also internal rhyme between *réimm* and *lainn*. In addition *aicill* rhyme, that is rhyme between a line-final word and an internal word of the following line, is present between *minn* and *lainn*. We also find an example of marked word order in the second line of the poem: the preposed genitive *fairggae* (of-sea) *findfólt* (white hair). These and other phonetic/prosodic features are used in a variety of (mainly syllable-counting) metres.

In *Early Irish Metrics* Murphy describes three styles of poetry that developed successively in Ireland. The first is "rimeless non-stanzaic alliterative verse, without syllabic equality in the lines."[111] This is essentially the strophic style commonly known as *rosc* or *retoiric*. The second style is that of "rimed stanzaic verse containing a fixed

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[109] DIL: "The name of some part of Scandinavia; Norway, sometimes Denmark."

[110] Rhyme in Old Irish is based on consonant quality, thus voiceless stops form a class of rhyming consonants, as do the resonants, and so on. See Meyer 1909b and Murphy 1961 for discussions of the features of Irish syllabic poetry.

[111] Murphy 1961: 1.

number of syllables in corresponding lines, and a riming foot of fixed rhythm at the end of certain corresponding lines."[112] The third style develops quite late (the sixteenth century), and consists of "richly assonated stanzaic verse in which syllabic equality of corresponding lines is not strictly adhered to, but in which an equal number of feet (each marked by a strong stress, and often with a fixed rhythm – iambic, trochaic, dactyllic) is to be found in corresponding lines."[113] Murphy points out that the periods during which these styles developed and were in active use overlap, and that the styles themselves also have shared characteristics, resulting in what can be termed "intermediate types of verse."[114]

As mentioned in Chapter One, Watkins has shown that the metre of the early Old Irish poems is a direct reflex of the Common IE metre, though transformed, naturally, by the development of the language itself. Based on both the Indo-European metres and the changes in the Irish language Watkins begins by "reconstructing forward,"[115] asking: "If this Indo-European verse form were to appear in the earliest Irish, what characteristics should we expect?"[116] In Old Irish the contrast between long

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[112] Murphy 1961: 1.
[113] Murphy 1961: 1.
[114] Murphy 1961: 1.
[115] Watkins 1963: 217.
[116] Watkins 1963: 217.

and short syllables has been replaced by a contrast between stressed and unstressed syllables, and so a cadence 'x x x is expected, to replace the earlier ˘ ˘ x. Watkins offers the analogy of Czech, which, "presenting the same features, would suggest a transference of quantity to stress as the expression of *temps fort.* The Czech octosyllable has substituted a cadence 'x x x for the Common Slavic ˘ ˘ ¯."[117]

Irish also underwent a high degree of apocope and syncope[118] in a short period of time,[119] drastically changing the prosody of the language. At the most basic level, these changes led to shorter words, and therefore shorter poetic lines. Watkins predicts that the inherited longer line will now be the length of the IE short line, and that Old Irish will also have an "ultra-short" line, reflecting the IE short line.[120]

Watkins makes the following predictions for an inherited Irish metre:

1- A line with a fixed number of syllables: 7-8.

2- A free initial sequence.

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[117] Watkins 1963: 218.

[118] Watkins remarks on "the loss of final syllables, and the regular syncope of the remaining even syllables." 1963: 217.

[119] McCone 1996: 105: "Containing as they do examples of retained as well as of lost or truncated final syllables, Ogam inscriptions indicate a date in the fifth and sixth centuries for a number of cataclysmic changes responsible for the transformation of Irish from a basically old Celtic typology inherited from Proto-Indo-European to a rather different system in which the modification of initial and final consonants as well as of internal syllables played a key morphological role."

[120] Watkins 1963: 218.

3- A fixed cadence (based on stress, not length).

4- A fixed or slightly variable caesura.

5- A final anceps consisting of either a stressed or unstressed syllable, bearing in mind that due to the prosody of the language (strong word-initial stress), a final stressed syllable will mean a final monosyllabic word.

As Watkins goes on to demonstrate, we do in fact find precisely this metre (the 'heptasyllabic'[121]) in the oldest of the Old Irish poems. By the period that the poets were producing vast metrical tracts and detailing their craft with great precision, there had been significant further innovations in the tradition, such as required alliteration, end rhyme, internal rhyme, assonance, and consonance. The oldest poems however show no fundamental features except for those predicted by Watkins.

This is illustrated in the following example from the *Amra Choluim Chille.*[122] The poem was composed in honour of St. Columba after his death. It is dated to the early seventh century, and marks the beginning of both Old Irish literature and European vernacular literature:

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[121] Watkins 1963: 218. Watkins refers to Bergin's statement (1937: 284) that the "unrimed heptasyllabic verse with trisyllabic ending" was "one of the earliest metres."

[122] Watkins (trans.) 1963: 219.

ar mind n-axal n-accallad x 'x 'x x 'x x x

Our hero used to hold converse with the apostle.

We see here a line of seven syllables with a caesura and the predicted final cadence 'x x x with an unstressed anceps. This [4|3] pattern represents the basic form of the line, but many variations on it are attested. Among the other examples that Watkins gives is the following line:[123]

mairg Ulltu mad ol Boïnn bet

Woe to the Ulaid if they are beyond the Boyne.

Here we have an octosyllabic line with a final cadence 'x x 'x.

We find also the alternation of longer and shorter lines in Irish, as we do in the cognate IE traditions. In the following example from a legal text, we find the alternation of the heptasyllabic line with a shorter pentasyllabic line, with the cadences 'x x x and 'x x 'x respectively:

ní nais tír for imrumach
mani fotha selb

Thou shalt not bind land on a vagrant / if ownership does not sustain him.[124]

In this text we find also "octosyllabic and heptasyllabic lines in almost equal proportions; the two alternate in no discernable pattern, and are simply treated as

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[123] Watkins (trans) 1963: 226.

[124] Watkins (trans) 1963: 230.

identical."[125] As we would expect based on the cognate poetic traditions, Old Irish poetry can be arranged κατὰ στίχον or in a variety of strophic structures such as the native *rann*, a four-line strophe.

In contrasting these older forms with the later forms of the Classical Old Irish metres, which are rhyming syllabic metres showing the aforementioned features of assonance, consonance, etc., the question of the origin and development of the later metres is raised. Some scholars have attributed the rise of these metres to Latin influence, or even argued that they are derived from Latin metres. Murphy wrote that the syllabic metres could "best be explained as imitation by vernacular poets of the Latin hymns sung by seventh-century Irish monks."[126] Watkins argues against this position however, and demonstrates that these metres could without difficulty be derived from the native heptasyllabic. He discusses the Classical *deibide* metre, which is characterized by the strict patterns of rhyme described above, and gives the following examples from two different poems. First, from the Lament of Créide:[127]

it é saigte gona súain
cech thrátha i n-aidchi adúair

These are the arrows that slay sleep / at every hour of the cold night.

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[125] Watkins 1963: 227.

[126] Murphy 1961: 12.

[127] The full text of this poem can be found in Murphy 1956: 86.

Here we have rhyme between *súain* and *adúair*, with the rhyming syllable in the first line stressed (*súain*), and the rhyming syllable in the second line unstressed (*-dúair*), giving the cadences 'x x 'x and 'x x x. Second, from the Lament of the Old Woman of Beare:[128]

is labar tonn mora máir
ros-gab in gaim cumgabáil
Noisy is the wave of the great sea / the winter has taken its rising.

Here we have the same pattern of rhymes and the same cadences as in the preceding example. As Watkins points out, texts such as these are in fact identical to the older heptasyllabic metre, but with the added feature of rhyme, and there is no need to assume a Latin origin for the metrical structures themselves.

The *rosc* style, as the clearest inheritance of Indo-European poetic form, deserves further attention.[129] Breatnach, in his 1984 discussion of the 8th c. legal text *Bretha Nemed*, which is composed in both *rosc* and prose, provided the following frequently quoted description of *rosc*: "Old Irish texts appear in three forms: prose, rhyming syllabic verse and *rosc*. The simplest definition of *rosc* is that it is neither of

[128] The full text can be found in Murphy 1956: 74.

[129] Watkins 1995 devotes a chapter (Chapter 24: "Early Irish *rosc*") to this.

the other two."[130] *Rosc* is in fact a form of poetry, but not one that conforms to the classical forms of rhyming syllabic verse. Breatnach elaborates by explaining that though there are numerous subtypes of *rosc*, the exact natures of which have yet to be fully explored, these can be grouped into the following three main categories of *rosc*:[131]

I- Type I consists of syllabically regular lines with a fixed cadence and alliteration.

II- Type II consists of lines that show a regular number of stresses per line, rather than a regular number of syllables, as well as alliteration.

III- Type III is heavily alliterative, but the lines do not appear to have any fixed number of syllables or stress patterns. Breatnach explains that in dealing with this type of rosc, he inserts line breaks based on units of meaning, an editorial decision supported by the patterns of alliteration in the texts.

Generally speaking, the language of *rosc* has traditionally been associated with Archaic Irish. It demonstrates various features that are not found in prose, but can be

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[130] Breatnach 1984: 452.

[131] Breatnach 1984: 452.

found in the later poetic language of the texts in rhythmic syllabic verse. Among the features that Breatnach discusses are:[132]

i- The use of preposed genitives.

ii- The frequent occurrence of tmesis and Bergin's Law constructions (i.e. conjunct verb forms being used separate from or even without a preverbal element, in clause medial or final position).

iii- The omission of a conjunction meaning 'and' (i.e. parataxis).

Examples of these features from rhyming syllabic verse include:[133]

i- showing preposed genitive, from the poem *Pangur Bán:*

fuachaidsem	*fri*	*frega*	*fál*
he points	at	of-wall	enclosure
a rosc,	*a nglése*	*comlán*	
his eye	of-brightness	full	

He points at the enclosure of the wall / his eye full of brightness.

ii- showing tmesis, from the poem Murphy titles "The Scribe in the Woods":

Debrath[134]	*nom-*	*Choimmdiu-*	*coíma*
	PCLE-me	the Good Lord	protects

The Good Lord protects me.

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[132] Breatnach 1984: 453.

[133] The full text of these poems can be found in Murphy 1956: 2-3 and 4-5

[134] Melia 2005: 285 translates this expression as "God's Doom!"

Breatnach also mentions the frequent use of kennings and calls attention to the following examples from *Bretha Nemed*:[135]

> *caomtechtaid rurech*: "companion of the great king" = St. Paul
> *dilgud grinde*: "dear word of exactness" = St. Jerome

These occur in passages in the *Bretha Nemed* that are translations from the Latin *Collectio canonum Hibernensis*, which is significant for our understanding of the uses of *rosc*. As Breatnach points out, when *rosc* co-occurs with prose the *rosc* is generally assumed to predate the prose. *Rosc* has also often been taken to be 'exclusively oral', and as previously stated, *rosc* tends to be associated with Archaic Irish. This text forces us to reconsider these views. Firstly, it demonstrates that *rosc* continued to be used as a style of composition until at least the middle of the 8th century – well after the Archaic Irish period. [136] As it is a direct translation from Latin, this text also demonstrates that *rosc* was not an exclusively oral medium. Finally, because the same passages of the text were translated into both *rosc* and prose respectively within the *Bretha Nemed*, the *rosc* cannot soundly be argued to predate the prose. For these reasons Breatnach argues that not only is *rosc* not an adequate criterion for dating a text as being rooted in the

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[135] Breatnach 1984: 453.

[136] Watkins)1995: 264) comments that "it is clear that Irish compositions in *rosc* of the late ninth century are direct continuations of a very specific poetic tradition which we can observe fully developed in Ireland in the late sixth century."

Archaic Irish period, it should not be seen as being tied to chronology at all. Rather, *rosc* is a style of composition, albeit an old one, that was used continuously into at least the 8th century, and was considered to be a productive tool for the translation of ecclesiastical material.

It is clear that the *rosc* texts form a poetic tradition that is distinct from the classical rhyming syllabic verse, and predates it. The full recognition and understanding of *rosc* as a distinct type of poetry, from which the later rhyming syllabic metres were possibly derived, will no doubt provide great insight into both the Irish and Indo-European poetic traditions.

4.2 Poetry in the Narrative Tradition

The poetic tradition that predates Christianity in Ireland was a purely oral one. With the introduction of Christianity to Ireland came a writing system and a tradition of literary language, and the effect of these different influences must be kept in mind when considering the form in which the Irish narrative tradition has been imparted to us. Dooley writes that "it has always been perceived that Irish saga tradition in general, and the *Táin* especially so, stands at a particularly complex point of medieval Irish literary history. It shows the marks, or has been seen to bear the signs, of a stretch across a

crucial divide in Irish cultural history – namely the twinned paradigms of the pagan/Christian and oral/written transition."[137] We must consider also the development of a poetry/prose divide. Prose, which may not be "a meaningful category where there is no written literature,"[138] certainly gains significance once written literature develops. The narrative style that is found in the texts is one that alternates between prose and poetry within the body of a tale. McCone points out that "in most early literatures such as those of India, Greece and Rome there is almost always a clear divide between prose and verse texts, whereas certain types of early Irish narrative are quite prone to intersperse prose narrative and dialogue with verse put into the mouths of the characters themselves."[139] In the manuscript forms we find that the prose and poetry are written continuously, without line breaks to indicate the poetic forms. The poetic passages tend to be marked in the margins by the symbols ϕ or .r. (for *retoiric* or *rosc*), but this is by no means consistent. The poetry is often announced formulaically by a phrase such as OIr. *is and as-bert* X 'it is then that X said', or Lat. *ut dixit* X 'as X said'. Verbs of singing also occur: OIr. *cachain* or *ro-chan*, Lat. *cecinit.*

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[137] Dooley 2006: 23.

[138] West 2007: 26.

[139] McCone 1990: 37.

The type of alternation between prose and poetry that is sometimes found in other Indo-European traditions, particularly in Sanskrit, has often been connected to the Irish style. West refers to texts in which "the prose provides the narrative or explanatory frame,"[140] however the comparison of this style to the Irish is not valid however. As McCone points out,[141] in the other traditions the prose tends to be exegetical, and the poetry is inserted in order to illustrate a point, while this is far from being the case for the Irish material. In fact, in the Irish tradition the poetry can itself serve an exegetical function.

Poetry in the narrative tradition is used to represent important speech acts. Generally these represent monologues, but dramatic dialogues are also common. There are a number of types of speeches that we find commonly given in verse; among these are prophecy, lament, curse/satire, praise poetry and poetry offered in answer to a question, in order to explain and emphasize the importance of the subject of the poem. In the following chapter an analysis of a passage from the *Táin Bó Cúailnge* (TBC)[142] will be presented, and so I will take that text as the source for my discussion of the uses of poetry in the narrative tradition.

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[140] West 2007: 61.

[141] McCone 1990: 37.

[142] References are to O'Rahilly's 1970 edition of the LL TBC, unless otherwise indicated.

In the *Táin* we find that the speech acts of the characters (whether the characters in question are poets or not) are frequently represented in poetic form, most often in the pivotal dramatic scenes. Nagy refers to the "competition and overlap between the fictionalized images of the hero and poet, the former breaking into song with remarkable frequency, the latter speaking and acting with heroic panache."[143] In a society in which the poetic word carries a great weight, a prophetic and even a reality-altering power, it is possible that the importance of preserving the exact words of such speeches is a part of the reason why they take poetic form. We find passages of prophecy, such as that spoken by Feidelm when the armies of Ireland are about to set out to make war on Ulster (lines 204ff.) in the *Táin.* In her speech Feidelm predicts doom for the armies of Connacht; she describes the coming of Cú Chulainn and the havoc that he will wreak upon the enemies of Ulster. The passage foretells the eventual fate of the army, and functions almost as a ritual invocation of the hero. In one version of the text[144] Medb asks Feidelm: *In fil imbass forosna lat?* "Do you have the *imbas forosna*?" This is given in Triad §123[145] as one of *tréde neimthigedar filid,* three things

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[143] Nagy 2005: 13.

[144] Recension I, ed. O'Rahilly 1976, l.44.

[145] Ed. and trans. Meyer 1906.

that constitute a poet. Given this explicit link between the poet and the abilities of the seer, it follows that prophetic speech acts would take poetic form.[146]

The ability of the poetic word to shape reality, and thus the importance of indicating alterations of the physical world in poetic form, is indicated in the *dindsenchas*[147] material present in the text. Explanations for place names and the renaming of places after key events in the narrative are often given in poetic form. In the *Táin*, such a poem is given following a confrontation between Cú Chulainn and four men from the opposing army during which the four were beheaded and their heads placed on the four prongs of a branch that Cú Chulainn had cut and then planted in the earth to block the passage of the enemy army. When this is discovered the name of the place is changed to Áth nGabla to commemorate the event, and Fergus says: *bid Áth ṅGabla a ainm co bráth din gabuil se ifec[h]tsa*, "Áth nGabla will be its name forever because of this forked branch."[148] Fergus then recites a poem, effectively formalizing the renaming. It begins with the lines *Áth ṅGrena, claímchlaífid ainm / do gním Chon rúanaid rogairb*, "Áth nGrena, it will change its name / because of the deed of the

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[146] For a discussion of the prophetic knowledge of the poet and the *imbas forosna* as ritual, see Nagy 1981-2.

[147] Place lore.

[148] Lines 601-602.

strong very fierce Hound," and ends with the lines *Bid Áth nGabla a ainm co bráth / din gabail atchí 'sind áth*, "Áth nGabla will be its name forever / because of the forked branch that you see in the ford." The poem tells the story of the event that led to the renaming of the place.

Dialogue is also frequently given in verse, highlighting the dramatic nature of a scene. In the *Táin* we find many different verse dialogues, such as that between Cú Chulainn and his foster brother Fer Diad, whom he is forced to engage in single combat. The tradition of fosterage was extremely important in Ireland,[149] and continued even into the eighteenth century. The relationship between foster brothers could be as close as that between blood-related siblings, or even closer. The scene in which Cú Chulainn meets Fer Diad is one of the longest in the LL TBC,[150] and much of the speech contained in this segment of the text is given in poetic form. The first dialogue takes place between Fer Diad and Medb, who is attempting to convince Fer Diad to fight against Cú Chulainn.[151] The second occurs between Cú Chulainn and Fergus, who has come to warn him that it is Fer Diad who will come to fight against him in the

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[149] This is another example of the systems of exchange and reciprocity that characterized Indo-European and Irish society.

[150] Lines 2606-3596; this is one fifth of the text, which runs almost 5000 lines. Poetry represents over half of the thousand or so lines that form this episode.

[151] ll. 2638-2714.

morning.[152] This poem closes with a line that warns of the coming danger, reaffirms the importance of poetry, and recalls the Indo-European poetic theme of κλέος ἄφθιτον: *Arm cruaid catut cardda raind / bíd acut, a Chú Chulaind*, "a weapon hard, harsh, worthy of a song / have it with you, o Cú Chulainn."[153] A third dialogue occurs between Fer Diad and a servant who warns him that no good can come from his combat against Cú Chulainn, and a fourth exchange occurs when the servant again tries to warn Fer Diad, who insists that he will fight.[154] Finally Fer Diad and Cú Chulainn come face to face and three more poetic dialogues take place.[155] In this scene we have also several monologues, consisting mainly of laments for Fer Diad delivered by Cú Chulainn after having killed him. The high rate of poetic speech in this passage is an indicator of the heightened emotion and dramatic tension of the piece.

Poetry is also often used in order to answer important questions, or to explain a significant event/person/object. One example of this in the *Táin* occurs when Fergus explains a ring that Cú Chulainn has made from an oak sapling, marked with an ogam

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[152] ll. 2739-2682.

[153] In the Stowe recension, Cruaidin Cotatcenn is given as the name of Cú Chulainn's sword at lines 4975-6.

[154] ll. 2805-2828, 2860-2883, 2890-2913.

[155] ll. 2947-3017, 3071-3086, 3187-3222.

inscription and put around a standing stone.[156] Fergus begins by formulating the question himself: *Id in so, cid sluinnes dún? / In t-id cid imma tá a rún? / Is cá lín ra lád co se, / inn úathad nó in sochaide?* "Here is a ring. What does it mean for us? / The ring, what secret is around it? / What is the number of those who many put it here? / a few or many?" He then goes on to answer his own questions by explaining the warning of the ring, the implications of its presence, and how it came to be there. This can be connected with the common narrative technique of Indo-European poetry that West discusses[157] under the heading "Questioner's suggestions negated in turn." Here we have the questions asked in sequence and then answered in sequence by the same speaker.

Although the representation of speech is the main use of poetic language in the text, a secondary use is also present. The use of poetic devices such as alliteration, the use of formulae and *dúnad* can also be found in the prose portions of the text. Though these passages may not be poetic in form, i.e. metrical, they are nonetheless poetic in nature, and we should take prose passages showing poetic features into account in a study of poetic language, or a description of poetic sub-grammar.

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[156] The incident begins at line 456; the poem is ll. 478-501.

[157] West 2007: 107-108.

We find just such a passage in the *Táin* when the Dond Cúalnge[158] is described. The description offers a list of the attributes of the bull, and should be connected to the common type of Indo-European poetry known as catalogue poetry. The following chapter will focus primarily on this description of the Dond Cúalnge in the LL recension of TBC. It will be shown that although this passage is written in prose and is clearly not metrical, it nonetheless contains many features typical of both Old Irish and Indo-European poetic language, demonstrating that prose texts can be a rich source of information about poetic language.

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[158] The Brown [Bull] of Cúalnge. The *Táin Bó Cúailnge* describes the invasion of Ulster by the armies of Connacht and the other provinces of Ireland. In the LL version, the reason for this invasion is given as the desire of Medb, Queen of Connacht, to own the Dond Cúalnge.

Chapter Five: Poetry in Prose: An Analysis of Poetic Language in the Description of the *Dond Cúalnge* from the LL *Táin Bó Cúailnge*[159]

5.1 The Text:

The *Táin Bó Cúailnge* is found in eight manuscripts, representing three main recensions. These are:[160]

TBC I: The oldest recension is found in *Lebor na hUidre*[161] (LU), Egerton 1782[162] (W), and the Yellow Book of Lecan[163] (YBL). None is complete, and each represents an independent text (i.e. not a copy of one of the others), but they do present overlapping passages. The O'Curry MS. I[164] partially represents this recension, but also contains material from TBC II.

TBC II: The second recension is that of the Book of Leinster[165] (LL), and is found also in a modernized and expanded version in RIA MS. C vi 3, known as the Stowe[166] version of the text.

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[159] A preliminary version of this chapter was presented at the CMLL SIP Graduate Symposium, Concordia University, April 2006.

[160] Following O'Rahilly 1970: xiv ff.

[161] Ed. Best and Bergin 1929.

[162] Ed. Windisch 1913.

[163] Ed. Strachan and O'Keefe 1912.

[164] Ed. Ó Fiannachta 1966.

[165] Ed. O'Rahilly 1970.

[166] Ed. O'Rahilly 1978.

TBC III: The third recension is fragmentary and found in Egerton 93[167] and in H. 2.17.[168] This recension is more recent than the others and follows both TBC I and II at various points in the text, but also contains material that is not found in either of the other two recensions.

The description of the Dond Cúalnge occurs in the LL recension of the *Táin* on page 69a of the manuscript[169] (lines 1320-1333 of O'Rahilly's 1970 edition), and is found in a similar form in the Stowe version. This description does not occur in any of the main texts of TBC I, nor in the Egerton 93 TBC III material. It is, however, found in both H. 2.17 and O'Curry; these versions of the text show substantial differences from the TBC II text. The Stowe, O'Curry and H. 2.17 versions of the text are provided in Appendix I.

The Text:

1320 Aill do búadaib Duind Chúalnge and so .i. coíca samaisce no daired
1321 cach laí. Bertís láegu riasin trá[t]h arnabárach & do neoch ná
1322 bered lóegu díb, no scaíltis imma lóegu, dáig ní ḟulṅgitis compert
1323 Duind Chúalnge accu. Ba do búadaib Duind Chúalnge coíca do
1324 maccáemaib no bítis ic clessaib cluchi cacha nóna ara cháemdruim.
1325 Ba do búadaib Duind Chúalnge cét láech no dítned ar thess ⁊ ar

[167] Ed. Nettlau 1893 and 1894.

[168] Ed. Thurneysen 1912.

[169] LL is MS 1339 at Trinity College Dublin. Photographs of the manuscript are available at http://www.isos.dias.ie/english/index.html. The *Táin* begins on page 53 b and ends on page 104b of the manuscript.

1326 uacht ba foscud ⁊ ba imdegail. Ba do búadaib Duind Chúalnge ná
1327 laimed bánanach *nó* bocánach *nó* genit glinni tascud d'óentríchait
1328 chét friss. Ba do búadaib Duind Chúalnge crandord dogníd cacha nóna
1329 ic tiachtain ar ammus a liss ⁊ a léis ⁊ a machaid, ba leór ceóil ⁊
1330 airfiti dond ḟir i túasciurd ⁊ i ndesciurd ⁊ in n-etermedón tríchait
1331 chét Cúalnge uili in crandord dogníd cacha nóna ic tiachtain dó ar
1332 ammus a liss ⁊ a léis ⁊ a machaid. Conid ní de búadaib Duind
1333 Chúalnge in sin.

Translation:

Some of the attributes[170] of the Dond Cúalnge are here: that is, that he used to bull fifty heifers each day. They used to bear calves before that same time on the next day, and as for any that did not bear calves to him, they used to burst on account of the calves, because they could not endure the begetting of the Dond Cúalnge among them. It was one of the attributes of the Dond Cúalnge that fifty boys used to play feats of strength each afternoon upon his fine back. It was one of the attributes of the Dond Cúalnge that he used to shelter one hundred warriors against heat and against cold, he was shade and he was protection. It was one of the attributes of the Dond Cúalnge that spectres and spirits and ghosts of the glen dared not enter the same canton with him. It was one of the attributes of the Dond Cúalnge that he used to make a lowing each afternoon while coming to his yard and his shed and his enclosure, it was enough music and delight for the men in the North and in the South and in the middle cantons of all Cúalnge, the lowing that he made each afternoon while coming to his yard and his shed and his enclosure. So these are some of the attributes of the Dond Cúalnge.

This passage contains a number of poetic devices, which will be discussed in depth in the following section, that set it apart from the more usual, less marked prose of narrative.

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[170] The word *búaid* (pl. *búada*) can mean victory or triumph, but in the present context is best translated as attribute, quality, excellence or gift.

5.2 The Analysis

5.2.1 *Dúnad*

As discussed in Chapter One, ring-composition is a feature common to both Indo-European and Old Irish poetry. The Irish word for ring composition is *dúnad,* meaning 'closing' or 'shutting', and in the poetic context it refers to the technique of ending a poem with the same word or phrase with which it began. Ring composition is, to quote Watkins, "a signal of demarcation: a series of sentences that is thereby symbolically transformed into a finite set, a closed text or text segment."[171] This is exactly the role filled by the phrases '*Aill do búadaib Duind Chúalnge and so'* and '*Conid ní de búadaib Duind Chúalnge in sin,'* which begin and end our passage. They are marked by the contrasting demonstratives *so,* which refers to what will follow, and *sin,* which refers to what has already been said.[172] The first phrase thus serves a cataphoric function and signals the information that is about to be conveyed, while the role of the second phrase is anaphoric, referring back to what has preceded it. These two phrases set the passage apart from the surrounding text and mark it as an integrated unit.

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[171] Watkins 1982: 110.

[172] GOI §475.1 a and b.

Besides 'X *do búadaib Duind Chúalnge*', which will be discussed more fully below, we find other repeated phrases or formulae in this passage. The phrase *crandord dognid cacha nóna ic tiachtain ar ammus a liss ⁊ a léis ⁊ a machaid* [173] occurs twice within the same sentence, at lines 1328-1329 and 1331-1332, forming a small *dúnad*. The phrase is spelled out fully both times in O'Rahilly's edition, however the scribe of the LL manuscript elected not to write out the phrase fully the second time. We can compare the palaeographical details of the first and second occurrences, as they appear in the manuscript:

c*r*andord dognid ca*cha*nóna iṭṭiac*h*tai*n* *ar* ạ*nn*ṃ*us* ạliss ⁊ aléis ⁊ a machaid

c*r*andord dognid ca*cha*n*ó*n*a* .ic̈.dö.ä.⁊ä.⁊ä.

The second repetition of this phrase does not in fact appear in the corresponding text of the Stowe version.

5.2.2 The attributes of kingship:

The phrase '*do búadaib Duind Chúalnge*' both opens and closes our passage, but it also recurs an additional four times as '*Ba do búadaib...*' within the passage, each time introducing a new set of attributes. Based on these the text can be divided into

[173] "a lowing each afternoon while coming to his year and his shed and his enclosure"

five thematic sections, as follows: fertility, martial training, shelter, spiritual protection, and entertainment. These reflect the attributes of a contented and well-ruled kingdom. McCone provides the following description of Irish kingship:[174]

> "At the heart of early Irish kingship theory lay the notion that a kingdom's welfare in both the social and natural spheres was intimately bound up with the sovereign's physical, social and mental condition. Medieval Irish literature abounds in descriptions attributing peace, social stability, good weather, abundance of crops, livestock and so on to the 'sovereign's truth' or *fír flatha*. Conversely, other passages record the catastrophic consequences such as strife, bad weather, pestilence and famine liable to result from the *gáu flatha* or 'sovereign's lie'."

1-Fertility: We are told of the extraordinary virility of the Dond Cúalnge. The idea that the fertility of the land reflects the rule of a fit king is well documented in the Irish tradition. I offer only a few examples: In the Triads of Ireland[175] we are told that one of the *tréde neimthigedar ríg*, the "three things that constitute a king" is *roimse inna flaith*, "fertility during his reign". In *Tecosca Cormaic*,[176] in answer to the question *cid as dech do ríg?* "what is best for a king?", Cormac lists, among other things, *torud inna*

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[174] McCone 1990: 108.

[175] Ed. and trans. Meyer 1906: Triad 202.

[176] Ed. and trans. Meyer 1909a: §1.19, 23-24.

flaith "abundance during his reign," and *iasc i n-inberaib / talam torthech* "fish in river-mouths / earth fruitful." In *Audacht Morainn*:[177]

Is tre f. fl[178]*. ad- manna mármeso márfedo –mlasetar.*
Is tre f. fl. ad- mlechti márbóis –moínigter.
Is tre f. fl. ro-bbí(?) cech etho ardósil imbeth.
Is tre f. fl. to- aidble (uisce) éisc i struthaib –snáither.
Is tre f. fl. clanda caini cain-tussimter. (deraib dethe).

"It is through the justice of the ruler that abundances of great tree-fruit of the great wood are tasted. It is through the justice of the ruler that milk-yields of great cattle are maintained (?). It is through the justice of the ruler that there is (?) abundance of every high, tall corn. It is through the justice of the ruler that abundance of fish swim in streams. It is through the justice of the ruler that fair children are well begotten. (with tears (?) of ...?)."

2- Martial training: We are told that the back of the Dond Cúalnge is of such great width that fifty boys were able to use it as a practice field while playing their games and practicing their feats. We should understand these to be games that train the boys as warriors, that allow them to develop their martial competence. We can draw a parallel with an earlier passage in the *Táin* that indicates a connection between the king and the training of boys to be warriors. Conchobor, king of the Ulaid, whose reign is often described as ideal, is said to spend one third of his day *ic fégad na maccáem ic imbirt*

[177] Ed. and trans. Kelly 1976: §17-21.
[178] fir flathemon

chless cluchi 7 immánae, "watching the boys playing feats, games and hurling."[179] The connection of the bull to the martial training of young warriors should be considered in this light. The training of the boys represents also the physical, military, protection of the territory. Listed among the things which are 'best for a king' in *Tecosca Cormaic* is *drong claidebbémnech ar choimét cacha túaithe,* "a sword smiting troop to protect every tribe,"[180] and it is stated in *Audacht Morainn* that *cíallflaith, ar-clich side críche sceo túatha,* "the wily ruler defends borders and tribes."[181]

3- Shelter: The size of the Dond Cúalnge is so immense that he is able to act as shelter against the heat and the cold for one hundred warriors, protecting them from bad weather. The provision of shelter is an act of hospitality, and the suitability of a king is judged in part by his hospitality and his ability to provide for his people. West points to a number of traditions in which "the king is seen as a protector of the people."[182] In this passage we find the Dond Cúalnge literally housing one hundred warriors. For more pastoral imagery, we can think also of the image of the king as the

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[179] LL TBC ll. 743-745.

[180] Ed. and trans. Meyer 1909a: §1.29

[181] Ed. and trans. Kelly 1976: §60.

[182] West 2007: 421.

'shepherd/cowherd' of his people: Ved. *jánasya gopā́* 'cowherd of the people', Gk. ποιμένα λαῶν 'shepherd of peoples', OE *folces hyrde* 'herdsman of people' and OIr. *tír dianad buachail* 'land of which he is the shepherd'.[183]

4–Protection: We are told that the fearsome presence of the Dond Cúalnge keeps supernatural entities out of whatever canton he is present in. West points out that "justice and right were conceived as being not merely a function of human society, but an alignment of the cosmic order."[184] As we have seen, a part of this ordering falls to the poets, but a part of it is also a function of the king. The king was responsible for maintaining not only the human order of his kingdom, but also the natural one. As previously cited[185] McCone wrote that "strife, bad weather, pestilence and famine" could result from the rule of an unfit king. We see this maintenance of the natural order reflected in the unwillingness of supernatural, or unnatural, elements to enter into any territory that contained the Dond Cúalnge.

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[183] West 2007: 421. Watkins 1995: 45.

[184] West 2007: 422.

[185] McCone 1990: 108.

5 – Entertainment: We are told finally of the musical lowing of the Dond Cúalnge that gives pleasure to all who hear it. We have seen already that the king was expected to honour poets, and that he should himself be a poet. The function of the poet was not primarily one of providing entertainment, at least not among the higher grades, but the lower grades were expected to perform in this way. The king, however, was expected to keep his people entertained. Among the qualities listed as being 'best for a chief' in *Tecosca Cormaic* we have the following: *rop soche fri gnáis, / rop grían tige midchúarto, / rop airitid dála 7 airechta* "let him be brilliant in company, / let him be the sun of the mead-hall, / let him be an entertainer of a gathering and assembly."[186]

The passage presents an idyllic picture, with the attributes of the bull reflecting all that the land should experience under a good ruler: fertility, boys learning to be warriors, shelter, safety from supernatural forces, and entertainment. We can further see in these attributes the representation of Dumézil's three functions: fertility and shelter represent the agricultural/artisanal, the training of the boys and the protection of the territory represent the martial function, and the musical entertainment can be

[186] Ed. and trans. Meyer 1909a: §6.32-39.

connected with the function of poets and bards, who, as seen in Chapter Two, continue the Indo-European sacred function.

5.2.3 Behaghel's Law

In the description of the Dond Cúalnge we find three examples of Behaghel's Law. Behaghel's Law ("*das Gesetz der wachsenden Glieder*"[187]) is a technique common to many Indo-European poetic traditions, and its typical form is of three conjoined elements, with the last qualified in some way. As West describes it "this is the rule that shorter phrases tend to be placed before longer ones, both in prose and in verse, so that the sentence gains rather than loses weight as it develops."[188] Numerous examples can be found in all the Indo-European traditions. A well-known and often cited example from Greek is Iliad 2.532-533:

Βῆσσάν τε Σκάρφην τε καὶ Αὐγειὰς ἐρατεινάς
Τάρφην τε Θρόνιόν τε Βοαγρίου ἀμφὶ ῥέεθρα
and Bessa and Skarphe and lovely Augeiae
and Tarphe and Thronium around the streams of Boagrius

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[187] Behaghel 1909: 139.

[188] West 2007: 117. See also West 2004 for a detailed discussion of the particular type of Behaghel's Law construction that consists of "three names, of which the third is furnished with an epithet or other qualification." (33).

There are plentiful occurrences of such constructions in Old Irish. An example from the LL TBC is *de cholchaib 7 chorthib 7 táthleccaib móra* 'with stones and rocks and great flagstones', which occurs five times that I have observed (and there may be others), at lines 3909, 3920, 3929, 3941 and 3959 of O'Rahilly's edition.

The three instances of Behaghel's Law found in this passage are, in the order in which they appear: '*bánanach nó bocánach nó genit glinni*', '*a liss 7 a léis 7 a machaid*' and '*i túasciurd 7 i ndesciurd 7 in n-etermedón tríchait chét*'. Although in the case of *a liss 7 a léis 7 a machaid* the final element is not in fact characterized, it is nonetheless of greater prosodic weight than the preceding elements, being the only disyllable in the set. Watkins treats the English merism 'oats, peas, beans and barley grow' as being in conformity with Behaghel's Law for this same reason.[189]

The *bánanach nó bocánach nó genit glinni* case is particularly striking, as it recurs in a slightly extended form elsewhere in the *Táin*.[190] We find it in the following passages:

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[189] Watkins 1995: 47.

[190] The discussion will be based on LL. See Appendices II and III for all corresponding occurrences in Stowe and the TBC I and III texts.

1 - From the description of the Dond Cúalnge - LL ll. 1326-1328:

Ba do búadaib Duind Chúalnge ná laimed ***bánanach nó bocánach nó genit glinni*** *tascud d'óentríchait chét friss.*

It was one of the attributes of the Dond Cúalnge that spectres and spirits and ghosts of the glen dared not enter the same canton with him.

2- from the *Breslech Maige Murthemne so sís* section (first occurrence – Cú Chulainn challenges the army) - LL ll. 2130-2134:

Crothais a scíath 7 cressaigis a ślega 7 bertnaigis a chlaidem, 7 dobert rém curad asa brágit coro [f]recratar ***bánanaig 7 boccánaig 7 geniti glinni*** *7 demna aeóir re úathgráin na gáre dosbertatar ar aird, coro mesc ind Neamain forstin tślóg.*

He shook his shield and he brandished his spears and he waved his sword and he gave the cry of a hero from his throat so that the spectres and spirits and ghosts of the glen and demons of the air answered to the terror of the cry that he had uttered, so that the Nemain spread disorder upon the host.

3- Also from the *Breslech Maige Murthemne so sís* section (Cú Chulainn's helmet) - LL ll. 2255-2259:

Is and sin ro gab a chírchathbarr catha 7 comlai[n]d 7 comraic imma chend as[a] ṅgáired gáir cét n-óclách do śíréigim cecha cúli 7 cecha cerna de, dáig is cumma congáiritis de ***bánanaig 7 bocánaig 7 geiniti glinne*** *7 demna aeóir ríam 7 úasu 7 ina thimchuill cach ed immatéiged re tesitin fola na míled 7 na n-aṅglond sechtair.*

It is then that he put his crested helmet of battle and strife and combat upon his head, from which used to cry the cry of a hundred warriors with a long scream from each corner and angle of it, for spectres and spirits and ghosts of the glen and demons of the air alike used to cry from it, before him and over him and around him, each place that he went, with the shedding of the blood of warriors and champions besides.

4- From the encounter with Fer Diad - LL ll. 2845-2849:

Is and sin cinnis in cur cetach clessamnach cathbúadach claidebderg, Cú Chulaind mac Sualtaim, ina charpat. Gura gáirsetar imme ***boccánaig 7 bánanaig 7 geniti glinne*** *7 demna aeóir, dáig dabertis Túatha Dé Danand a ṅgáriud immi-sium combad móti a gráin 7 a ecla 7 a urúad 7 a urúamain in cach cath 7 in cach cathroí, in cach comlund 7 in cach comruc i téiged.*

> It is then that he mounted, blow-dealing, feat-performing, battle-wining, red-sworded hero, Cú Chulainn mac Sualtaim, into his chariot. So that around him shrieked spirits and spectres and ghosts of the glen and demons of the air, for the Túatha Dé Danann used to raise a cry around him so that the fear and terror and horror and fright that he inspired would be greater in each battle and in each combat, in each contest and in each conflict into which he went.

5- During the combat with Fer Diad -LL ll. 3326-3329:

Ba sé dlús n-imaric darónsatar gora gársetar ***boccánaig 7 bánanaig 7 geniti glinni*** *7 demna aeóir do bilib a scíath 7 d'imdornaib a claideb 7 d'erlonnaib a sleg.*

> So close was their encounter that spirits and spectres and ghosts of the glen and demons of the air screamed from the rims of their shields and from the hilts of their swords and from the butt-ends of their spears.

In every occurrence following the first in the description of the Dond Cúalnge, the element *demna aeóir* has been added and the conjunction *nó* 'or' has been replaced with 7 'and'. In certain cases we find also that the order of the two initial elements has been reversed, though only in LL. For example, at lines 2845 and 3326 we find *boccánaig 7 bánanaig 7 geniti glinne.* This variation nonetheless preserves the construction's consistency with Behaghel's Law, as well as the pattern of alliteration.

Interestingly, the Stowe text does not show this variant word order. Although statistically speaking the phrase occurs more frequently with the *demna aeóir* element than without it, there are several good reasons to believe that the original core phrase consisted only of the first three elements *bánanach nó bocánach nó genit glinni.* As it is, stylistically speaking, a Behaghel's Law construction, it is a more natural candidate for poetic usage. More significant however are the words of the phrase themselves. While *bánanach, bocánach,* and *genit glinni* are etymologically Celtic words, *demna* is borrowed from Lat. *daemon,* and *aeóir* from Lat. *aēr.* The fact that this final component is non-native argues for its being a later addition to the phrase. Also of significance is an attestation of the phrase from another source. The text *Cogadh Gaedhel re Gallaibh,*[191] also found in the LL manuscript, presents us with the following passage:

Ro eirgetar am bananaig, ocus boccanaig, ocus geliti glinni, ocus amati adgaill, ocus siabra, ocus seneoin, ocus demna admílti aeoir, ocus firmaminti, ocus siabarsluag debil demnach.

> There arose moreover spectres, and spirits, and ghosts of the glen, and injuring hags, and phantoms, and ancient birds, and destroying demons of the air and of the firmament, and ominous phantom hosts of demons.

Although the element *demna aeóir* is found in the passage, it is further elaborated by the addition of *admílti.* Moreover, *demna admílti* is treated as the main constituent,

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[191] Ed. Todd 1867: 174-175.

and these 'destroying demons' are characterized as both *aeoir* 'of the air' and *firmaminti* 'of the firmament'. It is important also to note that *demna aeóir* is separated from the core phrase *bananaig, ocus boccanaig, ocus geliti glinni* by several elements, namely *amati adgaill, siabra,* and *seneoin.* This lends further weight to the argument that in *bánanach nó bocánach nó genit glinni* we have a basic poetic formula that could be elaborated upon.

An additional attestation of this phrase occurs in "The Chase of Síd na mBan Finn and the Death of Finn,"[192] from the Egerton 1782 manuscript:

7 ro-gáir etar ***bánánaigh 7 bocánaigh*** *7 badhba bēlderga* ***7 ginite glinne*** *7 demna aieóir 7 arrachta folūaimnecha na firmaminti hi comór*ad *áigh 7 irgaili ós cinn in rí[g]fēinned ga[ch] sligi*d *da ṅgab*ad *isin cath...*

> Among them shrieked spectres and spirits and red-mouthed *Badhba* and ghosts of the glen and demons of the air and spectral flying creatures of the firmament as they waged war and strife over the head of the *fían*-chief wherever he went in the battle.

Here we find the insertion of *badhba bēlderga* between the first two elements of the phrase, *bánánaigh 7 bocánaigh,* and the final element *ginite glinne.* This again demonstrates the essential flexibility of formulae, which has been discussed previously

[192] Ed. and trans. (adapted) Meyer 1910: §40.25-27.

as an important tool available to the poets; it is clearly also a technique that the creators of prose texts also made use of.

5.2.4 A poetic verb form?:

The Old Irish verbal system is characterized by a distinction between absolute and conjunct forms in many moods and tenses. These forms are found in complementary distribution, and that distribution is syntactically conditioned. The absolute forms appear in clause initial position and the conjunct forms appear in 'initial' position only when preceded by a preverb, or when used in clause medial or final position. In line 1321 we find the form *bertís* in initial position. As an imperfect and therefore conjunct verb form, we would expect to find *bertís* in either non-initial position or accompanied by the preverb *no*. This is in fact what we find in the Stowe version of TBC: *"No berdís ríasan trat[h]..."* (l. 1359). Although this unusual placement of a conjunct verb form in the LL TBC could be ascribed to a simple scribal error, the omission of the preverb, the initial b does appear to be slightly pronounced, possibly indicating a capital, in the manuscript. Another explanation for the presence of this form is that it is another example of the use of poetic conventions in this prose passage. Although in prose a conjunct form would not appear in this position, the

omission of the preverb *no* in poetry, and the use of imperfect conjunct forms as absolute forms, is not uncommon.[193]

5.2.5 Cataloguing *búada*:

For the purposes of stylistic comparison, it is worth examining another way in which the *búada* of an individual may be presented. Earlier in the text of the LL TBC, the *búada* of Cú Chulainn are listed (ll. 548-53):

548 *... - Ra bátar trá ilbúada*
549 *ilarda imda for Coin Chulaind: búaid crotha, búaid delba, búaid*
550 *ṅdénma, búaid snáma, búaid marcachais, búaid fidchilli 7 branduib,*
551 *búaid catha, búaid comraic, búaid comluind, búaid farcsena, búaid*
552 *n-urlabra, búaid comairle, búaid formaim, búaid ṁbánaig, búaid*
553 *crichi a crích comaithig.*

Cú Chulainn had indeed many gifts, plentiful and abundant: the gift of beauty, the gift of form, the gift of build, the gift of swimming, the gift of horsemanship, the gift of *fidchell* and *brandub*, the gift of battle, the gift of combat, the gift of fighting, the gift of seeing, the gift of speaking,[194] the gift of counsel, the gift of hunting, the gift of laying waste,[195] the gift of raiding a neighbouring border.

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[193] GOI §580. "The Imperfect Indicative: In prose this is always conjunct, since it is preceded by the particle **no** in the absence of any other preverb; where (in poetry) **no·** is omitted, the same verb forms are used for the absolute."

[194] *urlabra* (< *ar-labrathar*) is used for the speaking in the legal sense of speaking or pleading on behalf of someone.

[195] I have followed O'Rahilly's translation of *banach* here, however DIL indicates that this word apparently means "sexual intercourse with a woman... '*der Sieg im Verwüsten*'." 'The victory in devastating'.

This passage presents a more direct catalogue or list of attributes or qualities than the description of the Dond Cúalnge. Here also though, we continue to find a deeper structure that displays affinities with poetic language. This catalogue is not simply a list of attributes presented in indiscriminate order, rather we have sub-groupings of triads, some of which are alliterative, while others are Behaghel's Law constructions. The first set, *búaid crotha, búaid delba, búaid ṅdénma,* describing Cú Chulainn's physical attributes, represents what could be termed innate qualities, as could the gifts described in the fourth set, *búaid farcsena, búaid n-urlabra, búaid comairle*, which expresses his wisdom. *Farcsena* in this context seems to mean 'perceptive' or 'insightful'. The second set, *búaid snáma, búaid marcachais, búaid fidchilli 7 branduib*, presents acquired skills that are fitting diversions for a warrior. Here the heaviest element, the conjoined *fidchilli 7 branduib*, is placed last, creating a Behaghel's Law construction. The final element of the sequence, another Behaghel's Law construction, *búaid formaim, búaid ṁbánaig, búaid crichi a crích comaithig*, also lists skills that are typical diversions of warriors when they are not engaged in outright war. The third and central set of attributes, *búaid catha, búaid comraic, búaid comluind,* are those most relevant to the context in which the description is given: war. Three main sets of skills are represented in the catalogue:

A- Innate qualities or abilities: beauty and wisdom.

B- Acquired skills representing the diversions of warriors.

C- Attributes that are central to Cú Chulainn's function as a hero.

The order in which the subgroups are presented is also significant, with the central position in the catalogue occupied by Cú Chulainn's heroic attributes. The pattern forms a type of ring composition A B C A B, with the variation that A and B maintain their order.

5.3 The Parapoetic Style

It seems clear that although the description of the Dond Cúalnge is not poetry on the level of metre, it is in every other way entirely permeated by the conventions of poetic language, so that we may call it parapoetic and differentiate it from the less marked prose that is more frequently used in the narrative. This is not the only such passage however, as can be seen in the catalogue of the attributes of Cú Chulainn. There are many more such passages that can be identified and demonstrated to show poetic features. In Chapters Two and Three the question of audience reception was raised. It is something that must again be considered in the present context. The audience of this 'text', whether we think of it as we have it in manuscript form or in its alternate

existence (or rather the alternate existences of its component parts) in the oral tradition, would have recognized the presence of poetic forms in these prose passages, and although we cannot be sure what information these poetic cues might have conveyed to the audience, their presence in the text certainly would have affected its reception. Dooley points out that "there is plenty of evidence that the medieval scholars responsible for the forms of the *Táin* as we have them intended to keep a careful control of their narrative and sought out specific effects in their presentation of the saga."[196] This is surely true at the level of language, and so the question is raised of why we find poetic language in prose, and why in the specific passages in which we find it. Obviously there is no simple answer to this question, and it is one that requires further study. There are two main factors to be considered that would have influenced and contributed to the development of this parapoetic style.

The first is that an author/scribe trained in the poetic schools, or at least familiar with poetic language, would have been accustomed to expressing himself in this type of language. In a 'marked' context, such as the composition of a narrative prose text, the author may consciously, or even unconsciously, have drawn on his main source of 'marked' language: poetry. The Irish poetic tradition, until the introduction of Latin

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[196] Dooley 2006: 40.

texts, was the standard form of *Kunstsprache*, the primary model for 'marked' Irish language, and so the foundation upon which the expansion of 'marked' styles was built. The second important consideration is the audience, and what their expectations of a narrative would have been. An audience accustomed to the structures of poetic language would continue to expect to hear poetic forms.

As to the question of why these passages in particular show poetic features, we can return to Watkins' comment that we can "reconstruct some of the things the Indo-Europeans talked about, and some of the ways they talked about them in their traditional poetry, some 7000 years ago."[197] It is possible that the specific subject matter of the parapoetic passages is what triggers the use of the poetic sub-grammar in their composition. In this context the crucial point is that the way that people talked about their history and their heroes, the way that they told their stories, had traditionally been through poetic language. This changed in time, and the styles of 'marked' language available for artistic creation multiplied, but the starting point can be found in Indo-European poetic language, and it must be recognized as a powerful influence on the development of the prose narrative traditions.

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[197] Watkins 1982: 108.

Conclusion

In maximally general terms we may define poetic sub-grammar as the grammar that applies to the form of any given language as it is used in the creation of verbal art. The poetic form of language can be thought of as a sub-section of language, or even as a dialect, that is shared by the poets but intelligible to all. A poet will devote years to gaining fluency in this language and acquiring full mastery of its forms, and these will become as natural and instinctive as those of any other form, or register, of language. As we have seen, poetic language has its own grammar and lexicon of forms, and although many of the poetic features that we have discussed may be found in prose, they find their fullest expression in poetic language, where they are used by the poets in order to create the rhythmic patterns necessitated by metrical constraints.

The forms of poetic language defined and determined all verbal art for the Indo-European poets and their audiences, and continued to play a pivotal role in the development of the prose style. We have seen that the presence of poetic language in Old Irish prose indicates the complex connection between the two styles, and makes obvious the oversimplification involved in the definition of poetry in purely metrical terms. Through the study of the relationship between Old Irish poetry and parapoetry we can gain important and valuable insight into the linguistic and cultural processes

involved in both the creation and reception of verbal art. These insights will in turn contribute to the effort to reconstruct a comparative sub-grammar of Proto-Indo-European poetic language, and ultimately what we can reconstruct through the study of poetic language is culture. I conclude with a quote from Watkins that encapsulates the crucial importance of the study of poetic language and culture:

> "We do not talk about Indo-European poetics because of a tender-minded interest in 'lit'rature', but because as historical linguists we want to go beyond basic things like sound-correspondences, and try to understand the underlying semantic and semiotic systems of a reconstructed language and culture."[198]

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[198] Watkins 1982: 107.

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Abbreviations:

Av.	Avestan
DIL	Dictionary of the Irish Language
Eng.	English
GOI	A Grammar of Old Irish, = Thurneysen 1946.
Gk.	Greek
Goth.	Gothic
Hitt.	Hittite
IE	Indo-European
Lat.	Latin
LGE	Lebor Gabala Erenn
LL	Lebor Laigen (The Book of Leinster)
LU	Lebor na hUidre, =Best and Bergin 1929.
OE	Old English
OIr.	Old Irish
Rec. I	=O'Rahilly 1976
RV	Ṛg Veda
PIE	Proto-Indo-European
TBC	Táin Bó Cúailnge
TPH	Thesaurus Palaeohibernicus, =Stokes and Strachan 1975
Umbr.	Umbrian
Ved.	Vedic
W	Egerton 1782
YBL	Yellow Book of Lecan

Appendix I: The Description of the Dond Cúalnge: Text from the Stowe, H. 2. 17 and O'Curry MSS.

Stowe 1358-1369

1358 Do buadhaibh in Doinn Cuailingne. Ba da buadaibh *caoga*
1359 samaisce no doir*edh* cec[h] laoi. No b*er*dís ríasan trat[h] cetna
1360 (arnamarach)[199] ┐ do neoch nach ber*edh* a loaga diob i n-aimsir
1361 thechta, no sgoiltis iompo, daig ni fuilngitis compert in Doinn
1362 Chuailnge aca. Ba do buadaibh in Doinn (Chuailnge) nac[h]
1363 lamdis bananaigh no bocanaigh no giniti glinde tascadh i n-aontrica
1364 cet fris. Ba do buadaibh in Doinn Chuailnge go mbiod *caoga* mac
1365 iga ccluichi fair cecha nona. Ba do buadhaibh in Doind Chuailnge
1366 crandordan do-ghniodh gacha nona ic tarraincc ar amus a les
1367 ┐ a machaid ba lor do ceol ┐ oirfit*edh* don fir a tuaiscert ┐ i ndescert
1368 ┐ i n-eidirmedhon tricait cet Cuailnge. Con*adh* ni do buadaibh
1369 in Doinn Cuailnge ind sin.

H. 2. 17 1529-1543

Caega bo no samaisg is*ed* do·daired g*ach* laei. Mina·b*er*dais laeghu re cenn nomaidhi, do·diansgaildis umpo, doigh amhi*n*dudh tairb hidhi ra·caemnagair eisen. Buaidh in Duinn Cuailghni im̃, go·toillfidis tri .l. ad m*æ*c midhaisi ara taebdruim ag buanfach ┐ ag buanoire*cht*us ┐ ag bigire*cht*. Ni·chuired so*n* de iad ┐ ni·cumsgaighed fuithib. B*uaidh* eile do b*uadhaibh* in D*uinn* C*uailghni*, in tan do·b*er*edh a aighidh reime ara lias *no* ar m*æ*chad, rob*adh* lor do cheol ┐ d oirfidiudh do*n* fir thuaisc*er*tach ┐ do*n* fir deisc*er*tach, do*n* fir oirtherach ┐ don fir iartharach isa tricha c*et* i·cluinti uile é. Gurab araill do bhuadhaib in D*uinn* C*uailghni* sin.

O'Curry 147-160

147 ... Focherd
148 de na tri cóecae meic no bítis oc cluichi fair di g*res* ┐ marb*ais* da
149 trian na macraide ┐ conceclaid burach hi Tír Margene hi Coailgni
150 re techt. Coecae samuis*ci no* alacht*ad* ce*cha* diea, *no* doithtíss
151 résin trath cetnae; do neoch na doith*ed* a lloegae no taithmigdis

[199] O'Rahilly notes that this is omitted from Stowe and H, and is supplied from the P ms.

im na loegae dáig ni forfhaelangdar compert in Doind Chuailgni occaiph. Ba dia cobthaib beoss c*et* laeg no doemeth ar thess ⁊ foacht ima fhoscc*ad* ⁊ imdegail. Fa dia cobthaib béus nach cuimccitis pananoig ⁊ poccanaigh ⁊ geineite glinde tasccnam di aon trichat c*et* fris. Fa dia cophtoib péus crandordan dognith cechae nonae ac toidecht ar amus a liss ⁊ a machae ocus pa lor d'oirfitt*ed* don fir a tuasc*iu*t ⁊ a ndesc*iu*t ocus a n-eit*i*medhon trichae c*et* Cuailccne atacomnaic. Conid di copthoib an Doinn Cuailccne and sin.

Appendix II: Occurences of *bánanaig ⁊ boccánaig ⁊ geniti glinni*, presented in the order in which they appear in the text of LL.

1 – from the description of the Dond Cúalnge

Stowe ll. 1362-1364

Ba do buadaibh in Doinn (Chuailnge) nac[h] lamdis **bananaigh no bocanaigh no giniti glinde** tascadh i n-aontrica cet fris.

O'Curry ll. 154-156

Fa dia cobthaib béus nach cuimccitis **pananoig ⁊ poccanaigh ⁊ geineite glinde** tasccnam di aon trichat cet fris.

2 – from the Breslech Maige Murthemne so sís section (first occurrence – CC challenges the army):

Stowe ll. 2168-2171

Crothais a sgieth, bertaighis a cloidem, cresaighis a shlegha. Tucc a glaod churadh asa bragait gurro fregratar **bánanaigh ⁊ bocanaigh ⁊ giniti glinne ⁊ demna aeóir** é re huathghrain na gaire do-rinde, gurro mesg in Neamain .i. an Badb, forin sluagh.

LU ll. 6282-6285 (= Rec.I ll. 2081-2085)

Crothis a scíath ⁊ cresaígis a slega ⁊ bertnaigis a chlaidem. ⁊ dobert a srém caurad asa brágit coro recratár **bánánaig ⁊ boccánaig ⁊ geniti glinni ⁊ demna aeóir** re úathgráin na gáre dosbertatár ar aird. Cordas mesc ind Némain forsin tslóg.

Egerton 93 §119[119]

⁊ dobert arrem churadh asabraighid gorarɛgradar **banánaigh ⁊ bocánaigh ⁊ genidi glinni ⁊ demhna aér** réhuathgrain nagraine dhoberadh araird gordasmɛsg anemain f(or) inslógh.

O'Curry ll. 1176-1180

Croithis a slega ⁊ cresaiges a sciath ⁊ bertaiges a claideb. Dobert reim curad asa braghaitt corro freg[r]atar **bananaig ⁊ boccanaig ⁊ genite glinne ⁊ demhnai aieoir** re huath[gra]in na gairiu dosmbertatar os aird cor mebaid indemuin forsin slúagh.

3- Also from the Breslech Maige Murthemne so sís section – CC's helmet

Stowe ll. 2292-2297

Ro gab a ciorcat[h]barr cat[h]a ⁊ comraic ⁊ comlainn ima cend asa ngairedh gair cet n-oclaoch (do síréaigeamh) cech cúil ⁊ cech cerna dhe daig is cuma congairdis de bananaigh ⁊ bocanaigh ⁊ giniti glinne agus demna aeoir roime ⁊ uasa ⁊ 'na | timciol cech eadh ina ttéughadh fri testin fola na miledh.

YBL ll. 1920-1926

Is andso rogab a chírchathbarr catha ⁊ c[h]omraic ⁊ c[h]omlaind ima chend, asa ngaired gāir chét nōclach do sírégem cecha cúli ⁊ cecha cerna de, dāig is cumma congairtis de bánánaig ⁊ boccánaig ⁊ geniti glinne ⁊ demna aeóir ríam ⁊ úaso ⁊ ina imt[h]imchiull cach ed notéged re testin fola na mmíled ⁊ na nananglond sechtair.

LU ll. 6434-6439

Is and so ro gab a chírchathbarr catha ⁊ comraic ⁊ comlaind ima chend asa ngaired gair chét n-oclách do sírígem cecha cúli ⁊ cecha cerna de. Daig is cumma congairtis de bánánaig ⁊ boccánaig ⁊ geniti glinne ⁊ demna aeóir ríam ⁊ úaso ⁊ ina imtimchiull cach ed no téged re testin fola na mmíled ⁊ na n-ananglond sechtair.

4- From the encounter with Fer Diad

Stowe ll. 2843-2848

As ann sin teid in cur cetach cleasamhnach cathbhuadach cloidemhruadh ina charpat, gurro gairsit uime bananaigh ⁊ bocanaigh ⁊ ginite glinne ⁊ demhna aeoir, uair do-berdís Tuatha De Danann a ngairiugadh uime ar gomadh moide a grain ⁊ a eagla ⁊ a uruath in cech cath ⁊ in gach catrae ⁊ in cech comlonn a ttecchedh.

5-During the combat with Fer Diad

Stowe ll. 3143-3145

Ba hé dlus an imairg gur gaireatar bananaigh ⁊ bocanaigh ⁊ geniti glindi ⁊ demna aeóir do bilibh a sciet[h] ⁊ do iomdornaibh a cloidemh ⁊ d'urlandaibh a slegh.

Appendix III: Table of corresponding occurences of *bánanaig 7 boccánaig 7 geniti glinni*

	LL	Stowe	YBL	LU	W	H. 2. 17	Egerton 93	O'Curry
1	1326-1328	1362-1364	-	-	-	-[200]	-	154-156
2	2130-2134	2168-2171	-	6282-6285	-	-	§119[119]	1176-1180
3	2255-2259	2292-2297	1920-1926	6434-6439	-	-	-	-
4	2845-2849	2843-2848	-	-	-	-	-	-
5	3326-3329	3143-3145	-	-	-	-	-	-

The line numbers given are for the entire sentence in which the phrase is found.
LL and Stowe are presented first because they contain ALL the attestations.

[200]Although H. 2. 17. does contain the passage describing the Donn Cúalnge, it does not contain the phrase *bánanaig 7 boccánaig 7 geniti glinni.*