EARLY MODERN TECHNICAL VERSE FROM NLI G 3

BY
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The following poem consists of a brief discussion of conjugated forms of the copula and infixed pronouns (both of which are termed *sealbhadh* by the bardic grammarians) and their effects on subsequent radical consonants. On the whole, this amounts to a treatment of nasalisation.\(^1\) The poem is of interest for several reasons. It stands as one of very few extant examples of educational or mnemonic verse emanating from the bardic schools.\(^2\) The order in which the consonants are dealt with, that of the Ogam alphabet (*beith luis nion*), with one exception, attests to the pervasiveness of that system in the schools.\(^3\) The anonymous author’s comments on the pronunciation of nasalised *r* are also of interest.\(^4\)

The poem is transmitted in NLI G 3 (f. 74ra-b13), written in the first half of the fourteenth century by Adhamh Ó Cianáin.\(^5\) It occurs in a section of the manuscript containing other linguistic and metrical material.\(^6\) The scribe has divided the poem into quatrains but does not punctuate to distinguish between lines except in the case of q. 6b. The text contains a small number of superscript scribal glosses which expand certain contractions, illustrate points dealt with in the poem, and, in one instance, provide correction.\(^7\) There is also a later copy of

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\(^1\) Although not stated in the text, nasalisation follows only the 3 sing. m., 1 plur. and 2 plur. persons. For the forms of *sealbhadh* see *IGT V* §§125 (= McKenna 1940), 126; *BST* App. I: *GGBM* 1218-38.

\(^2\) Other examples are McKenna (1947), Breatnach (1941) and three poems in NLI G 3, 74ra-77v (see n. 6).

\(^3\) The order is broken by not treating *n* until q. 7; the latter quatrain may have occurred after q. 3 in the original. Ó Cúiv (1983, 3 n. 5 = 1973, 116 n. 5) regarded the present poem as reflecting the order of the Ogam alphabet, but made no reference to the position of the quatrain dealing with *n*. On the importance of the Ogam alphabet in schools of the Early Modern period, see Ó Cúiv (1966).

\(^4\) See 6c and n.

\(^5\) Ó Sheághdfa (1967, 13) suggested 1344 as a probable date for the manuscript. Nicholls (2000, 158) has suggested that NLI G 2 (which originally formed a single volume with G 3) was compiled at dates ‘between 1328 and 1350’ (his conclusion is, presumably, based on the points raised in Nicholls 1985, 445 n. 1, where, however, the date of writing is given as about 1340). For a discussion of the manuscript, see Carney (1969) and for the scribe, see Ó Muraíle (2005) 397-402.

\(^6\) This section, which begins at f. 52rb with a text on the letters of the alphabet (ed. Ahlgqvist 1987) and extends to the end of the manuscript, includes *IGT V* and *MV IV* (ed. Thurneysen 1891, 106 and 1912, 73-7). The present poem precedes three Early Modern poems dealing with technical, grammatical and metrical topics (see n. 2).

\(^7\) Expansions of contractions occur at 3a, 4c, 5c, 6a, c; examples occur at 2a, 3a; the correction occurs at 4a.
the text by Tadhg Ó Neachtain (TCD 1289 (H.1.15), 621) which is of no independent value.

The metre is deibhidhe. Three quatrains represent the variety of this metre known as deibide nguilibreach in which fully stressed end-rhyme (comhardadh) occurs in the opening couplet (qq 4, 6, 8) and airdrîn rhymes and fully stressed end-rhymes are perfect (skán) with one possible exception (7ab). Alliteration is sporadic, ornamenting twenty-four of the thirty-six lines (1c, 2b, c, d, 3a, c, 4a, c, 5a, c, d, 6a, b, c, d, 7a, b, 8a, b, c, 9a, b, c, d). Internal rhyme does not occur.

A diplomatic text and critical edition of the poem are presented below. In the first expansions are indicated in italics; lenition marks are represented by italicized h; tall e is represented by underlined e; faded letters are enclosed in angular brackets; the end of a line in the manuscript is indicated by a vertical line, and hair strokes are reproduced. In the critical text spelling has been normalised. Two glosses which provide illustrative examples are also rendered in the critical edition. Major emendations are enclosed in square brackets and discussed in the notes.

**DIPLOMATIC TEXT**

[1] Aèes dàna fsiuchtìd dàmh
\[\text{gachfìdh idìll incealbhadh} \]
\[\text{goibrìth nimellfaidheàr mhì} \]
gacur salbhìd na cìll

dàmh

[2] Sealbadh b. igdol a.m.\(\text{'}\)
\[\text{iseadh ordlaighheas ugdùr} \]
\[\text{selbadh J.l iluis fiddhèn} \]
isas ansàil ganaithlìm

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\[\text{gl. 'i misi roman'} \]
\[\text{\textit{Written at the end of preceding line.}} \]

[3] S. fèarn gàn \(\text{f.c eile}\)
tèd \(\text{am\textsuperscript{b}bet\textsubscript{h}í semidh'à} \]
s.h. isoil nachslíûn
\[\text{isìnntì dal ì toîtim} \]

indesairidh \(\text{\textit{m}}\) do gachfìthùirt\(\text{\textit{r}}\)
\[\text{s.t. agdol an.d.\(\text{\textit{b}}\)} \]
\[\text{isfís ìs nasealbhàitbh} \]

[5] S.c. in g.g. glan
cùiridh in
dl \(\text{\textit{madchcoir}l} \)
\[\text{sealbhàir} \]
s.m.\(\text{\textit{b}}\) f.m.\(\text{\textit{1}}\) nachmàll
\[\text{dtìdhìdh eli nochontògh}h\textit{h}h\textit{an}l \]

[6] S.g. ing.n.\(\text{\textit{g}}\) nglan
\[\text{iseadh tèdh} \]
\[\text{isturas g} \]
tèd \(\text{s.s. inr.\textit{4} nguîr bh} \)
\[\text{fìthear fill an} \text{achr}l \text{firs} \text{nàid}ml \]

[74rb]

doghe\(\text{c} b.\) ha\(\text{a} \)
\[\text{ál} \text{this againd} \]
gan \(\text{cons} <\text{air}> l \) rompu \(\text{acht madh} \text{n.} \)
\[\text{fèadhìl teagaid arenfìd} \]

[8] S. na baìnindsgì mfìr 
\[\text{ind\textsuperscript{d}esa} \]
\[\text{fàrs gachneich} \]
\[\text{soil bìs} \text{gobrìth do} \text{buradh} \]
\[\text{roimplì ìs ì roimh} \text{fìnllrug} \]

\(\text{gl. 'em' (\textit{?})} \)
\(\text{gl. 'tair e a} \text{bòr'} \)
\(\text{\textit{Written at the end of preceding line.}} \)
\(\text{gl. 'no agol'} \); the 'd' is separated from the 'o' owing to the intervening spirant asper
\[\text{\textit{over the 'c' in 'tocht'.}} \]
\(\text{\textit{Written at the end of preceding line.}} \)
\(\text{gl. 'uir'} \)
\(\text{\textit{Written at the end of preceding line.}} \)

\(\text{There is a faint dot above a} \text{ which may represent lenition.} \)
\(\text{gl. 'uin'}} \)
\(\text{\textit{Written at the end of preceding line.}} \)
\(\text{gl. 'uir'} \)
\(\text{\textit{Written at the end of preceding line.}} \)

\(\text{b is very faded.} \)
\(\text{\textit{Written at the end of preceding line.}} \)
[9] Leanfadh éigsí ghlan á grindhlí níreagar daigh nadhéaslingh nígebh tuainigh is nígebh ga acht leanfadh sundl naseálbhitha. Aaes. dan. a. l q-q Written at the end of preceding line

**CRITICAL TEXT**

1. A aos dána, is aithnigh da-thgach fiodh i dtéid an sealbhadh; go bráth ní meallfaidhean mé 'gá chur 's a fhiodh 'na chéile.

2. Sealbhadh beith ag dol i muin is eachd ordaighneas ughdaire; sealbhadh luis i luis fo-dhéin, i sás as an gan aithléim.

3. Sealbhadh fearn gan fhearn eile téid i mbéithe sibhichte; sealbhadh [soille] i soil nach slim is iante do-fi toitim.

4. Sealbhadh duir ag dol i nion innéasaidh mé do gach fhiochr; sealbhadh tme ne ag dol i nduir is fis[idh] is na sealbhthaibh.

**TRANSLATION**

1. Men of poetry, I know each letter into which a form affected by sealbhadh changes, I will never be led astray when combining it and its (resulting) letter with one another.

2. The sealbhadh of b becomes m, that is what authorities prescribe; the sealbhadh of l becomes l itself, it remains trapped in a snare.

3. The sealbhadh of f without another f becomes lenited b; the sealbhadh of s becomes unsmooth s, it merges with it.

4. The sealbhadh of d becomes n, I will tell all men; the sealbhadh of t becomes d, this should be known in the matter of the sealbhtha.

5. We change the sealbhadh of c into bright, pure g, if it is properly affected by sealbhadh, (and) the sealbhadh of n into inelegant (?) m, it serves no other letter.

6. The sealbhadh of g becomes clear ng, it is a brief journey; the sealbhadh of r becomes 'rough' r, scarcely a poet does not find this truly difficult.

7. The sealbhadh of all the syllables preceded by no consonant except for n, you would find I have that knowledge, they begin on the same letter.

8. The infixed pronoun for a feminine noun is a consideration which I will cite finally, s always and forever precedes it (i.e. a feminine noun) and the plural.

9. I will pursue pure, exact knowledge, I will engage in neither battle nor affray (?), I will take up neither axe nor spear but I will pursue here the sealbhtha.
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**Notes**

1b i dtéil an seilbhdh. In quatrains 1-7 seilbhdh seems to mean ‘a form affected by (the relevant persons of) conjugated forms of the copula and infixed pronouns’. The usual construction is réid seilbhdh x y (e.g. ÍGT V 125).

2. j. mese ra mbarr. The gloss may be translated ‘I pierced him’ or ‘I shot it (i.e. him)?’

2b ordalighais. Since the relative clause in this line consists of object antecedent (eafht) and plural subject (ughard), a plural verbal form (ordaligh) is expected. A small number of examples of verbs which do not agree in number with a plural subject occur, however, for which see Snag IV §7.30 (for the example cited at p. 420.25 in Snag, the MSS (RIA 2, RIA 1387) actually have the plural verbal form asaidh.

c seilbhdaia bus (MS seilbhda 1) In expanding letter-names in genitive position I have followed the inflection attested in the poem Feadhla an oghaim aithidh dunh, ed. Breathnach (1941). The following letters are established by metre: l, s, d, c, m (ibid. 20a; 11b, d, 15a; 51d; 18c; 33c). In many cases the genitive form does not differ from the nominative; Breathnach suggested that the letter-names might remain uninflected metri gratia, ibid. 48 (18a).

d i sás anas. The prepositional phrase i sás functions as antecedent to the relative form of the verb anaidh. Further examples of this type of syntax are found in Mag. 3640-41, 3770, 4453 and RIA 2, 141 1. 30 (q. 17d). Alternatively, we might read i[s] sás.

gan anáidh. Literally ‘without a second jump’. 3a fearn gan feosra (MS E.4m?) else I take this phrase as a circumlocution for a single (unmutated) f (fearn lom) with reference to the practice of doubling f to indicate nasalisation, cf. Snag I §4.3, 4.4, 4.25. The scribal expansion of the abbreviation may be explained as due to homoeoteleuton with superior anáidh (q. 2d). Nominative inflection here and in 5a (as evidenced by absence of subsequent nasalisation) is perhaps to be connected with the licence advertised to below (9a n.).

c seilbhdh [soile] i soil (MS s.h. isoi) Context indicates s is intended for scribal .h. Pádraig Ó Mícháin has suggested to me that the scribe may have miscopied a conjunctural ‘s.s.h. soil’ from his exemplar.

d lúin do’ns’t oitjín. I suggest the meaning ‘assimilates, is assimilated to’ for this phrase.

4b do gach. We would expect dó gach, cf. BST 189.6-10, GGBM 1876-8.

d is fisidh. (MS isif) MS text wants a syllable. I suggest the scribe may have omitted a suspension stroke. However, I have no metrical examples to confirm the form fisidh, a late form of the verbal of necessity of re-fisidh, for which see DL s.n. fisidh. Possibly we should read agus fisidh.

5a geal (MS g.). The expansion of the contraction is not certain. It might also abbreviate glun (gen. pl.), cf. gort glunach NLI G 3, 75v (q. 6d). It is possible, however, that the reading represents digraphy, cf. 6a n. below.

b inn I take this to be the 1 plur. personal pronoun. On the use of accusative forms of personal pronouns in nominative position, see Snag IV §9.1 and TD 1.5x. It might also represent the 3 sing. m. prepositional pronoun i; however, a phrase cuirdh i with active voice seems syntactically inappropriate in the context.

c muin nach mail ‘ineligent (?) m’ The meaning of mail is unclear. I take it in the complimentary sense given in DL M 50.84-51.3. It is perhaps a comment on the nasal pronunciation of m, cf. GGBM 101-3 (mbl).

6a Note the digraphy in the MS.

**Abbreviations**

**BST**
Lambert McKenna, Bardic syntactical tracts. Dublin 1944.

**DDóna**

**DMU**

**EIM**
Gerard Murphy, Early Irish metrics. Dublin 1961.

**EIV**

**GGBM**
Partháin Mac Aogáin, Graimnéir Ghualailge na mBrathar Mionann. Baile Átha Cliath 1968.

**IGT**
Osborn Bergin, Irish grammatical tracts I-V, Supplement Éiriú 8-10, 14, 17 (1916-55).

**Mag.**

**O’R. Poems**

**TD**
REFERENCES


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