

Táinig an tráth nóna:
old age in Classical Irish religious verse¹

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INTRODUCTION

OLD AGE AND fear of Judgement are common themes in the religious poetry of late medieval and early modern Ireland. These widespread themes are, of course, well attested in other periods and in many other literatures. The purpose of the present paper is: (1) to provide a brief introduction to the topos of old age in Classical Irish religious verse, and (2) to trace the use and development of the word *nóin* in this context.

PART 1: THEMATIC BACKGROUND

*a-tá an bás re béal gach fhir
mar shás re n-éan gan fhaicsin.*

‘death awaits all as an unseen snare the bird.’²

The mood of the texts is marked by the certainty that death must come, although the hour is not known, and the conviction that preparation must be made for the next life, for ‘he who joins in life’s game shall miss the life of

¹Part of the present work was undertaken while in receipt of a postgraduate scholarship from the Irish Research Council for the Humanities and Social Sciences (2004-06) which is gratefully acknowledged. I would also like to express my thanks to Dr Caoimhín Breatnach for his comments on this article and to Professor Pádraig A. Breatnach for helpful remarks at an earlier stage. All translations are by the present writer unless otherwise indicated.

²Text and translation: *DDé* no. 25 q. 10cd (beg. *Gabham deachmhaidh ar ndána*, Donnchadh Mór Ó Dálaigh d. 1244).

peace' (*neach nach tréig báire an bheatha / téid beatha as sáimhe seocha*).³ Keating is typical of the prevalent attitude towards dying presented in religious texts as, for example, in the following passage from his 1631 treatise on death, *Trí Bior-ghaoithe an Bháis*:

Agus is iongnadh an dáil dóibh, nach tuigid gan an bás do shíoth ris an nádúir dhaonna, ⁊ é go laothamhail ag oirleach orra, ⁊ fós é agá sloidhe ⁊ agá snámhchnaoi go fóill, amhail shnigheas gainimh na huaire san urláisde, ionnus gurab ionann dáil dona daoinibh do leith an bháis ⁊ don druing do bhiadh damanta i bpríosún, ⁊ a bhara fá gach aon aca bás d'fhulang diaidh i ndiaidh ar uainibh do réir thoile an ríogh.

‘And it is a strange state for them, that they do not understand that death is not at peace with human nature, since it is daily destroying them, and moreover smiting them and slowly eating away at them, as the sands flow in the hour-glass, so that men’s situation as regards death is the same as those condemned in prison, and each one of them is destined to die one after another in turn according to the will of the king.’⁴

Sin appears easy in the beginning, although a price will have to be paid for it later on:

*A mian don cholainn caithtir
a riar orainn do fhocail
tiocfa fós a Dhé a deacair
tós peacaidh is é socair.*

‘My body’s desires are indulged, for it has imposed its rule on me, but one day its trouble shall come; only the beginnings of sin are easy.’⁵

³Text and transl.: *DDé* no. 7 q. 3cd (beg. *Mairg danab soirbh an saoghal*, Tadhg Óg Ó hUiginn d. 1448).

⁴Bergin (1931) II. 109-15. The editor gives *gainimh* as head word in the glossary, *ibid.* p. 430. The nominative singular of this noun is *gaineamh*, however, see *DIL* s.v. *gainem*. The form here is accordingly most likely to be interpreted as nominative plural with singular verbal form instead of plural as is encountered on occasion, see O’Rahilly (1941) 256-7 (§18), *SNG* IV §7.30 and Ó Ríain (2008) 40 (2b n.).

⁵Text and transl.: *DDé* no. 7 q. 19 (see n. 3). Read *sé* in line *d*.

Christ's wrath owing to the wounds he suffered for the redemption of man's sins is often mentioned. He may be portrayed as a righteous judge who will charge man with his wrongdoings on Judgement Day:

*Tiucfaidh do bhreitheamhnacht bhráthar;
biaidh dár dtagra — ní tráth soirbh;
mac Dé nocha dún a chréachta
go mbé ag súr a éarca oirn.*

'He will come to judge his kinsmen, he will accuse us — no pleasant time — the son of God will not close his wounds till he demand his blood-price from us.'⁶

Unless he is merciful on that Last Day, but a few will attain a place in Heaven:

*Is eagain i n-am na ronna
leis an rígh nach rach a leath
ar lá an toghtha gé tá neimhchion
ortha an lá beirthior an bhreath.*

'Not half mankind, I fear, will, when judged — though no fault can be found with the Sorting Day — go with the Lord (to Heaven).'

⁷

Nevertheless, redemption can be attained at any point prior to death:

*ní chuala gur cuireadh corp
nach fuigheadh uadha a fhurtocht.*

'I never heard that till a man be buried, he could not win salvation from Him.'⁸

⁶Text and transl.: *GB* no. 21 q. 9 (beg. *Lá bhraith an Choimheadh an Chéadaoin*, Giolla Brighde Mac Con Midhe (fl. c. 1230-72 (?)). Read *bhrátha* (sic MS) and *Tiogfa* in line *a* and render 'He will come for the Judgement of Doom'. For themes associated with Judgement Day, see Ryan (2009).

⁷Text and transl.: *PB* no. 8 q. 23 (beg. *Dlighthear don bhráthair bheith umhal*, Pilib Bocht Ó hUiginn d. 1487). Read *racha* (sic MSS) in line *b*.

⁸Text and transl.: *DDé* no. 21 q. 6*cd* (beg. *Cara na héigne Íosa*, Cormac Ruadh Ó hUiginn).

Some deed is required, however, to earn Christ's mercy and to atone for one's sins:

*Gníomh éigin níor fhoráil damh
do chúiteachadh mo chionntadh
gan adhbhar ní bhí buidheach
Rí an talmhan gidh trócuireach.*

'I must do something to atone for my sins; the Lord, though merciful, shows not favour without cause.'⁹

The shortness of life means that one should be ready at any moment to face God's judgement:

*Ní bhí a hoirchill ar m'aire
an toirchim go dtí im ghoire
garr lá Dé ris an duine
má tá uile a ré roimhe.*

'I prepare not for the long sleep till it is near; even if one's life lies before one, God's day is near.'¹⁰

Attempting to gain a place in Heaven by repenting on Judgement Day will be a futile endeavour which comes too late:

*Gidh aoibhneas an domhan [dúinn]
omhan a dhaoi[rmh]eas fa dheoidh
do-gheibh ar ndéara dia Luain
an uair nach géabha Dia ar ndeoir.*

'[Though the world is pleasurable (*lit.* pleasure) for us, his condemnation in the end is to be feared;] it will cause my tears on Monday when God no longer accepts them!'¹¹

⁹Text and transl.: *DDé* no. 15 q. 13 (beg. *Tagair red mhac, a Mhuire, Tadhg Óg Ó hUiginn*).

¹⁰Text and transl.: *PB* no. 21 q. 3 (beg. *Seacht dtroighe mo thír dhúthaigh, Pilib Bocht Ó hUiginn*).

¹¹Text and transl. (with modifications in square brackets): *DDé* no. 23 q. 35 (beg. *Iomdha teachtaire i dtigh Dé, Cormac Ruadh Ó hUiginn*). (Compare the editor's rendering of the first couplet: 'Though the smooth world means pleasure, its fair castle is dangerous in the end'.) *ab*: McKenna misread manuscript 'duinn' as 'mín', which does not alliterate, and 'dhaeirmes' as *dhaoin-leas*; for *dhaormheas* 'condemnation, regret', see *PB* no. 19 q. 20*d*, *AiD* no. 6 q. 24*d*,

Timely repentance is therefore advised:

*A dhuine bhoicht ná bí bog
sul deach an t-anam asad
déine aithrighe i n-am chóir
ós ann caithfidhe an cuspóir.*

‘Poor man! Ere thy soul depart be not foolish! Do penance in time! Thus thou shalt achieve thy end!’¹²

THE THEME OF AGE

*ní linn an lá a-márach
a-tá sinn ag sír-rioth.*

‘to-morrow belongs not to me, for I am passing fast away.’¹³

The desire for repentance, as well as fear of Judgement, is specifically connected to the stages of man’s life in some poems.

YOUTH

Preparation should be made for the next life from an early age:

*Cinnté an bás do bheith ’n-ar gcionn
’s ní headh an uair fá bhfuigheam
moch do caithfidhe ar dá chor
croch na haithrighe d’iomchar.*

‘Certain is death, uncertain its time; for these two reasons the cross of penance should be borne early.’¹⁴

no. 21 q. 3c and Matheson 1964, 3 q. 11c; an alternative rendering of line *b* would be ‘it is to be feared that it will be regretted in the end’; *cd*: For the idea that salvation can be obtained in exchange for a tear, see pp. 180, 188 below and Ó Macháin (2013) 39-40.

¹²Text and transl.: *AÓD* no. 41 q. 7 (beg. *Truagh do thosach a dhuine*, Aonghas Ó Dálaigh).

¹³Text and transl.: *DDé* no. 8 q. 5cd (beg. *Atá sinn ar slighidh*, Tadhg Óg Ó hUiginn).

¹⁴Text and transl.: *PB* no. 23 q. 26 (beg. *Tógbham croch [sic] i ndeaghaidh Dé*, Pilib Bocht Ó hUiginn). Compare Shahar (1995) 63-4.

Nevertheless, the folly and pride of youth may be obstacles to a pious life:

*Do bhí ní beag an mealladh
san chéadaois do chaitheamar
an anumhla gur mheall mé
ceann m'aradhna gun óige.*

‘In early days youthful spirit held my bridle, so that pride led me astray — great deception!’¹⁵

The burden of sin, if not abstained from, grows only heavier over the course of a lifetime:

*Guais nach bear ar chéill choidhche
atám ó aois m'aon-oidhche
ag dol i ndeoidh a chéile
dom dheoin i modh mí-chéille.*

‘I fear I may never have sense. From the first night of my life I have been gradually and wilfully increasing in folly.’¹⁶

*Toil na colla fúm ag fadógh
ar fás orm is eadh bhíos
truagh gurab móide mo mhíghníomh
m'óige uam gá sírshníomh síos.*

‘My burning passions have grown; alas! my sins increase as my youth wears away.’¹⁷

This heavy burden weighs one down:

*Fuair mé an saoghal go socair
a thaobhadh a Dhé is deacair
mar éan is é gan eítíl
mé ar eítibh phréamh an pheacaidh.*

¹⁵Text and transl.: *PB* no. 15 q. 8 (beg. *Maith agus maithfidhir duid*).

¹⁶Text and transl.: *AÓD* no. 39 q. 2 and *ibid.* p. 82 (corrigenda) (beg. *Éisd rem chulpa, a mhic Mhuire*, Aonghas Ó Dálaigh).

¹⁷Text and transl.: *PB* no. 1 q. 20 (beg. *Beag nár sárúigheadh San Froinséis*). Read *oram* in line *b*; the manuscript, TCD H.3.19 (1340), reads ‘guramoidi’ in line *c*.

‘I have found life easy, yet ’tis hard to trust it; I am a bird unable to fly with wings of sin-roots.’¹⁸

A pious youth does not, however, ensure a place in Heaven.

*D’éanduine d’fheabhas a thuigse
ní tugadh fós fíos a bhreath
cia lé mbadh dearbh gan a dhaoradh
Dia ’n-a leanbh dá naomhadh neach.*

‘No man, how wise soever, knows his doom; who can be sure of not being damned, even if God sanctifies him when young?’¹⁹

*Ní bachtar dhí dul tar cheart
buime an mhic gá mó treiseacht
cóir Dé nocha saorfadh sin
an té naomhtar ’n-a naoidhin.*

‘Christ’s nurse — could power be greater? — is not checked from infringing justice; God’s justice would not have pardoned (for his subsequent sins) the man sanctified as a child.’²⁰

Nonetheless, those who do not attempt to assuage God’s anger by practising piety in their youth are guilty:

*Is cionntach nach caithid so
’s giorra an téarma tá rompa
a gcéad-aois re Ceird na ndúl
dá bhféadaois a fheirg d’iompúdh.*

‘’Tis sinful for all who devote not their youth to God’s service, seeing the short time before them in which they may avert His wrath.’²¹

¹⁸Text and transl.: *DDé* no. 7 q. 22 (beg. *Mairg danab soirbh an saoghal*, Tadhg Óg Ó hUiginn).

¹⁹Text and transl.: *PB* no. 10 q. 50 (beg. *Fada gur háitigheadh Éire*, Pilib Bocht Ó hUiginn).

²⁰Text and transl.: *PB* no. 17 q. 3 (beg. *Mó iná a teist trócuire Dé*, Pilib Bocht Ó hUiginn). Read *mheic* in line *b*.

²¹Text and transl.: *DDé* no. 5 q. 9 (beg. *Beag nach táinig mo théarma*, Tadhg Óg Ó hUiginn). Read *atá* in *b* and *ceard* : *fhearg* in *cd*, see v.ll. p. 133.

A short life would be more desirable as it provides less opportunity for sin:

*Tráth a ghrás do ghabháil liom,
don bhás d'fhagháil ní budh am;
ní fheadar nach é budh fhearr
ní ré ghearr as eagal ann.*

‘Now is the time for God’s grace to visit me; ’tis not yet the time for me to die; yet my danger is not shortness of life; perhaps this were even better for me.’²²

OLD AGE

Living sinfully in one’s early years is a cause of regret in later life:

*An corp gur chaith a óige
damh ag déanamh urchóide
níor cuireadh iall ’n-a haird air
mairg do bhiadh mar do bhámair.*

‘Till my body had spent its youth contriving evil against me, leash was not bound rightly on it; woe to all who would live as I.’²³

Yet in spite of admonitions advocating piety in youth, old age is of necessity a time of beginning to practise piety and seeking repentance in earnest for many, however unsuitable that may be.²⁴ For it is only when the body has aged that the temptation to sin is lessened:

*’Nar gceardchain féin
fighe diabhal a dhubhoige
gur chríon an corp
bríogh na locht nocha lughoide.*

...

²²Text and transl.: *AiD* no. 100 q. 31 (beg. *Tearc oidhre díleas ag Dia*). Compare also *IGT* II 1844: *Tuilleadh ré reagar a leas. ní fheadar nach é m’aimhleas* ‘A longer lifespan is required, (yet) I wonder if it is not to my disadvantage.’

²³Text and transl.: *DDé* no. 21 q. 8 (beg. *Cara na héigne Íosa*, Cormac Ruadh Ó hUiginn).

²⁴For old age as a time of atonement, see Shahar (1995) 54-9, 72-5, 77-9.

*Níor fhaomh ar dtús
ní torthach crann 'n-a chríontamhan
amhain don ulc
amhlaidh don churp ar gcríochnaghadh.*

‘Devil’s work was the produce of my smithy; not till my body
withered did my sins wane. / In youth it would not keep from sin;
an old stump is barren; so too the withered body.’²⁵

Approaching death means that it is a time to change one’s ways and renounce
sin; it is certainly no time to commit more transgressions:²⁶

*Beag dár téarma atá gan toigeacht
ní lá dénma doibeart dún.*²⁷

‘Little of my time remains (*lit.* has not come), it is no day for me
to perform misdeeds.’

*Baoghal damh, a Dhé nimhe,
ar dteacht dā dtrian m’aimsire
bheith san trian nach dtáinig dhi
mar a-táimid riamh roimhe.*

‘There is a danger for me, O God of heaven, now that two thirds
of my life are past, that I shall continue to be in the third which is
still to come as I am up to then.’²⁸

*Ní léir duit-si an uagh gā hosgladh,
truagh, a dhuine, an dalladh;*

²⁵Text and transl.: *PB* no. 6 (= *AiD* no. 89) qq. 35, 38 (beg. *Deireadh cairdeasa comháireamh*; see n. 61 below). Read *gceardchaidh* (sic TCD H.3.19, 23v) in 35a which McKenna silently emended to *gceapach* against the manuscripts in his edition in *AiD*. The rhyme *chríontamhan* : *gcríochnaghadh* (MSS *gcríonaghadh*) in 38bd is corrupt both in the edition and in the manuscripts. However, if *-de* in 35d is regarded as forming a *dúnadh*, the present quatrain could be viewed as supplementary where looser rhyme is permitted, see Ó Concheanainn (1974) 240, and the reading of the manuscripts in line *d* might be retained.

²⁶See further Burrow (1986) 150-62, 179-88.

²⁷*JGT* III 69.

²⁸Text and transl.: Ó Háinle (2004) 110 q. 4 (beg. *Múin aithrighe dhamh, a Dhé, Tadhg Óg Ó hUiginn* (?)). Read *tánaig* and *a-támaid* in *cd* (sic National University of Ireland, Maynooth C 97, f. 2v).

*ní tráth peacaidh dhaoibh-si a deireadh,
deasgaidh h'aoisi agad.²⁹*

‘You cannot see the grave being opened, your blindness is pitiful, o man; it is no time for you to sin when you have reached its (*sc.* life’s) end, (left only) with the dregs of your life.’

Baothghalach Mac Aodhagáin asks to be made pure (*eatal*) in his old age in order to atone for his sins, possibly in accordance with Christ’s injunction that ‘unless you be converted, and become as little children, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven’ (Mt 18:3).

*Nim creisineach miodhaoise,
im aoide níorsam geannmaidh,
do dhiunnach mo bhiothchlaoine
gurbam eatal i seantaidh.*

‘I am not pious in middle age, I was not chaste in youth; to cleanse my long perversity may I be innocent in old age.’³⁰

Above all, one must hurry if seeking repentance in old age as repentance cannot be made for a lifetime of sin after death:

*A-tá a ndearnais i ndiaidh th'anma
ó aois leinibh — lór a mhéad;
cionnus thiocfa dhíot, a dhuine,
íoc do chionta uile ar n-éag.³¹*

‘All you have done from childhood — an ample amount — dogs your soul; o man, how will you be able to atone for all your sins after death?’

*Do pháis gidh óg re a haithbhir
ar fód an bháis sul beirthir
— níor thuig mé ar chríon dom chrithribh —
dligthir dhíom, a Dhé, deithbhir.³²*

²⁹Ó Cuív (1950) 290 ll. 133-6 (beg. *Fada mé ar mearughadh sligheadh*, An Bard Ruadh). The metre of this poem is *brúilingeacht* of *deachnadh mhór*, see Ó Cuív, loc. cit., 285.

³⁰Text and transl: *AiD* no. 57 q. 10 (beg. *A athair nua neamhdhasa*). See also Burrow (1986) 95-6, 106-7. Translations from the Bible are from the Douay-Rheims version.

³¹*DiD* no. 26 q. 26 (beg. *Fada deoraidheachd na ndaoine*).

³²*DiD* no. 24 q. 25 (beg. *Éanlá coinne ag cloinn Ádhaimh*). I take *gidh* in line *a* as emphasising the following adjective, for this usage see *O’Hara* l. 3861 n.

‘On account of the blame for your passion, (still) fresh, before it is time for the grave (*lit.* before the grave is caught up with) I must hurry, o God — I had not realised how much my energies (?) had faded away.’

PART 2: THE MOTIF OF ‘NÓIN’

In the poets’ depiction of the theme of old age, the words *nóin* and *tráth nóna* are sometimes employed as metaphors for a late point in life.³³ *Tráth nóna* is defined in *DIL* as ‘orig. *canonical hour of none*, but used also in general sense of *evening*’, while *nóin* is defined as follows:

- (a) in strict sense *the ninth (hour)*, i.e. *the canonical hour of nones* (3 p.m.);
- (b) hence of time only, *mid-afternoon*, often loosely used of the period preceding sunset; freq. in connexion with the chief meal of the day which in the early monasteries was at 3 p.m. and in all classes followed on the labours of the day.
- (c) in late use *noon, midday* (cf. the parallel development of Engl. *noon*). Prob. also in this sense in fig. expressions [citing examples given at n. 57 and 76 below].³⁴

The suggestion made in the Dictionary that figurative expressions are based on the meaning ‘noon, midday’ will be addressed in the conclusion, but first it will be appropriate to examine instances of such expressions.

³³This may be compared to the term *fescor* ‘evening, vespers’ which can also be used in the sense ‘end, wane, decline’, see *DIL* s.v. Also comparable are the terms *iar* and *iarnóin*, examples of which will be found at n. 53, 64 below; cf. also n. 72 below.

³⁴*DIL* s.vv. *tráth* (e); *1 nóin*. The use of *nóin* to refer to a late point in the day is amply illustrated in the following examples: *bháttar occan iomtuarccain ó prim co nóin* ‘they continued the conflict from the beginning of the day till evening’, *AFM* s.a. 1154; *ó aimsir éirghe go nóin, LBrán* l. 6603; *Ar fhion luinge go dtéid trágh / ón chléir do chonnaimh a riar; / dob fhiú foide a n-óil ar fhion / an nóin gá líon troidi ag triall*. ‘He kept their desires from the poets until the shipped wine was exhausted; it was evening when his battle band departed because of the length of their drinking of wine’, *Maguire* ll. 680-83; *Iomdha ag loighe, lór do sgis, / aréir san bhaile a mbímís: / gion gur goire um nóin anocht / loighe dhóibh iná dúsacht*. ‘Many lay down — how weary! — last night in the home where I dwelt, though this eve they are more like to watch than to lie down’, *IBP* no. 38 q. 2.

ORDERING OF EXAMPLES

The examples given below are ordered roughly chronologically as far as has been possible. The dating criteria employed, jointly or severally, are: (1) attribution to a known poet; (2) the date of the earliest manuscript copy; (3) citation in *IGT* II or *BST*; (4) the presence of perfect rhyme in opening couplets of all quatrains in poems in the measure *rannaigheacht* (the replacement of which by imperfect rhyme or assonance may be taken as an approximate indication of date).³⁵ Most of these criteria merely provide a *terminus ante quem* for the composition in question and a few instances remain which cannot be dated with any precision. Nevertheless, charting the examples in this manner may be instructive when considering the history and development of this motif.

THE THIRTEENTH CENTURY

The earliest dateable example adduced here from classical verse occurs in the poem beginning *Meitheal do bhí ag Dia na ndúl*. It is preserved in a single copy in the Tinnakill *duanaire*, TCD H.3.19 (1340), and was edited by Lambert McKenna in *Dioghlúim Dána*.³⁶ The editor suggested that Giolla Brighde Ó hEódhasa (d. 1614) composed the piece on the basis of a supplementary quatrain in which the author gives his name as Giolla Brighde.³⁷ This suggestion cannot be sustained, however, as excerpts from the poem are cited

³⁵(3) Citations in *IGT* II and *BST* seem to be datable to no later than 1505 and 1490 respectively, see Breatnach (2000) 14, Breatnach and Breatnach (2005) 30 and *BST* p. ix; for (4) see Breatnach and Breatnach (2005) 31-2 where it is stated that poems which predate *Cionnas tig Éire gan Aodh*, on the death of Aodh Ruadh Ó Domhnaill (d. 1505), 'tend to show perfect internal rimes in both the first and second couplets of the quatrain' whereas in that poem and in later compositions in the same measure 'the internal requirements of the opening couplet (*seóladh*) are met either by perfect or broken rime (*comhardadh slán nó brisde*) or by assonance (*do réir amuis*)'. A complete study of this feature of *rannaigheacht* and its implications for dating was presented by Professor Pádraig A. Breatnach at a seminar in the Department of Modern Irish, University College Dublin, on 22 April 2005, and is forthcoming in print.

³⁶Ed. *DiD* no. 42. Some of the poem is difficult to read or illegible in the manuscript; there are also some difficulties of interpretation and parts of the translation offered below are tentative. On the Tinnakill *duanaire* see O'Sullivan (1976).

³⁷*Brighid Bhreagh [as] bharr na n-ógh / 'n-a teagh tall gurab mór mé; / gnáth rádh a gille 'gar ngairm / ní nár linne mar ainm é* 'Brighid of Breagha, foremost among virgins, may I be eminent (entering) into her house beyond; I am customarily called her servant (*giolla*), as a name I consider it no disgrace.' *DiD* no. 42 q. 46. It may be preferable to supply the past tense of the copula (*badh*) in line *a* as it is easier to envisage it dropping out through haplography in the course of transmission.

in the grammatical tracts.³⁸ There are only three poets on record during the classical period eligible for quotation in *BST* and *IGT* II who bore the name Giolla Brighde, namely Giolla Brighde Albanach, Giolla Brighde Mac Con Midhe and Giolla Brighde Beag Mac Con Midhe, all of whom were active in the thirteenth century.³⁹ On this basis, two tentative suppositions may be made. The poem may be dated to the thirteenth century and it may be inferred from supplementary quatrains dedicated to Saint Brigit in the work of Giolla Brighde Mac Con Midhe (*fl. c.* 1230-72 (?)) that he is the likeliest candidate for authorship of the present piece.⁴⁰

The poem describes labourers going to work in a vineyard. They are employed at various times of the day, but all receive the same wages in the end. The names of the canonical hours are used to refer to the times of day in the poem:

Meitheal do bhí ag Dia na ndúil
 — *cia ar nach breitheamh rí na ríogh?* —
coibhéis ga roinn ón rígh mhór ga] gan MS, sic leg.
ní lór le droing díbh mar dhiol.

Dream fa phríomh don phobal fhionn
gus an ríogh gan chogar gcam,
lór ríoghdhacht a cheirt 'n-a gceann
dream san bhfíonghort fa theirt thall.

Toradh abaidh fhúair an rí
ón madain ga bhúain do bhaoi leg. mhadain
ní dheachaidh a bhúain do bhreith Dé [sic] deachaidh MS; a] leg. an (?)
tar an té fhúair i leith laoi.

³⁸See McManus (1997) 96; citations include *BST* 45b.27-8 and *IGT* II 379, 773, 1527, 1721.

³⁹For Giolla Brighde Mac Con Midhe and Giolla Brighde Albanach, see *GB* 1-5, Murphy (1943) 90-6, *DBM* II 327-30 and McLeod (2004) 85-9, 176. Ó Cuív (1970) 195 suggested that Giolla Brighde Beag may have been one and the same as Giolla Brighde Albanach. Simms (2007) 89 also notes that Giolla Brighde Albanach or Giolla Brighde Mac Con Midhe are possible authors of the present piece.

⁴⁰Compare: *Guidh leam clann (chloinn MSS) do bheith 'na mbeathaidh, / a Bhrighid ór baisteadh mé; / ná léig t'fhear dána fa dhimheas, / a bhean ghrádhá dhíleas Dé* 'Pray for me, O Bridget after whom I was baptized, that my children should live; do not let your poet into disrespect, O faithful sweetheart of God', text and transl. in *GB* no. 19 q. 29 (= *MDánta* II no. 61 ll. 113-6). See also the supplementary quatrains in *GB* no. 13 q. 81 and no. 21 q. 41.

Tig i gceann nóna dream díbh T...icc amnona MS; leg. *Táinig*
 (?) *um nóna*
 — *nochan ónna earr mo sgeoil;*
nocha sia a-nonn iná nóin
*do-chóidh go Dia an drong fa dheoidh.*⁴¹

‘A band of labourers which the Lord of Creation employed — for whom is the king of kings not judge? — one group of them was dissatisfied that the great king paid an undivided, equal amount.

A group of the blessed people (went) at prime to the king without undue murmuring, it was enough that his just kingdom (*lit.* kingdom of his justice) was destined for them; (another) group entered the vineyard at terce long ago.

Ripe fruit which the king received, was being picked since morning; in God’s judgement (that) harvest did not surpass (that made by) him whom he employed at sext.

One group of them came at nones — the end of my tale is not insignificant; not later than nones did the last group go to God.’

The poet continues, relating that the wages were paid and that the first group complained that others received the same amount as them. He then provides an explanation of the parable he has narrated. The various times of day at which the labourers are retained are equivalent to the stages of a person’s life at which he begins to practise piety. Whether one does so at

⁴¹*DiD* no. 42 qq. 1-4. *2bc*: On the basis of the parable (discussed below), I take it that the satisfaction attributed to the first group was felt prior to payment and refers to their willingness to work. If not, the phrase *gan chogar gcam* and *2c* might be connected with line *d*. However, the murmur associated with the first group was considered problematic by some exegetes, see Wailes (1987) 140-1. Gregory suggested that no real envy was to be attached to the murmuring, while Innocent III held that the murmur was only hypothetical. Others thought that it only applied to part of the first group who did not receive Heaven as a reward. For this reason, it may be preferable to understand the phrase in question as a comment on the lack of true malice to be associated with the murmur; note, however, the phrases *tré éad* and *grúg* in q. 6; *2d*: this line is entered with a query in *DIL* s.v. *2 teirt* ‘the canonical hour of tierce’, the discussion below shows that the query is unnecessary; *3c* is hypermetric, perhaps we should replace *dheachaidh* with *théid* as historical present, for which see *BST* pp. 146-7; in *3d* (and also *9a*) the term *leath laoi* is used for the usual *meadhón laoi* ‘sext’; *4a*: in addition to departing from the MS reading, McKenna’s text for this couplet has three different words rhyming with one another (*gceann : dream : earr*), a fault known as *rudhrach* (*IGTV* §10); see further n. 43 below.

an early or advanced age is irrelevant as all will receive the same reward from God in the end:

*Cia an chéaddrong fhormhála úd
nach éadtrom gcomhdhála ad-chiad?* (adchiam MS)
*dream do chinn crábhadh go hóg
nach sgirr fód go háradh iad.*

*Cia tháinig i leath an laoi
dá nach ráinig neach gan ní?*
dream théid tar bloigh dá n-aois é bloidh MS; leg. bhloidh
do thoigh Dé ón mbaois i mbí. báois MS; leg. bhaois

Cia tháinig i dtráth re sgar leg. ré
dá ráinig mar chách a gcor
a itghe fhíre ghearr ghlan?
dream do sgar críne re col.

Dream [ó nóin] díbh, dream go moch ó nóin] amnoin MS; leg. um nóin
nír shearr a mír dóibh ná a deoch; mhír dheoch MS, sic leg.
cidh óg cidh sean thí 'n-a theach
is í bhreath neamh dá gach neoch.⁴² a breath MS; leg. a bhreath

⁴²*DiD* no. 42 qq. 8-11. 8*b*: line partly translated in *DIL* C 366.30; I am uncertain as to the subject of *ad-chiad*, but it may be the other groups (perhaps on the basis that they go to receive their payment before the first group and see them coming); an alternative would be to render the line as 'they (*sc.* the first group) perceive that it is not trivial with respect to equal distribution'; compare McKenna's tentative interpretation of the line at *DiD* p. 444: 'daoine nach bhfaghann aon chomhthrom san roinn'; 8*d*: translation of line tentative: for *fód* 'vigilance' see *DIL* s.v. 2 *fót*; McKenna (*DiD* p. 444) suggested 'death' as a rendering of *áradh* in the present context, arising from the meaning 'bier' (*DIL* s.v. *árad* b); an alternative interpretation would connect *áradh* in the sense 'ladder' (*DIL* s.v. *árad* a) with the concept of the ladder to Heaven, for which see *AiD* no. 62 qq. 19*d*, 20*b*, 65 q. 11*d*, 82 q. 17*d* and 100 q. 17*a* (*dréimire* in all instances); 9*c*: I interpret *é* as referring to the general proposition that the group enters God's house; 10*b*: The plural possessive adjective in *a gcor* is taken to refer to God and the group, that is to say the agreement between them; alternatively, it could perhaps be understood as referring to *cách*, meaning the same agreement God made with the others; 10*c*: Note the use of the third singular masculine possessive adjective in line *c*, apparently corresponding to *Cia*, and compare McKenna's note on the line (*DiD* p. 444): 'fuair sé a iarratas, 's é sin, comhthrom ronna d'fhagháil'; 11*a*: McKenna (*DiD* p. 491) gives the manuscript reading of *ó nóin* as 'amhain (?)'.

‘Who are those first hired labourers they see not small in number (?). They are those who resolved upon piety in youth (and) whom vigilance does not cause to stumble until death (?).

Who came at sext, no one of whom departed empty handed? A group which enters God’s house, having passed a part of their life, abandoning (*lit.* from) the folly they live in.

Who came at a time before (work) ceased and received (*lit.* to whom came), like the others, (what was stipulated in) their agreement, his just, brief, virtuous request? A group which old age caused to part from sin.

One group at nones,⁴³ one group early, the food and drink he gave them was equal (*lit.* was not better); whether it be young or old who may enter his house heaven is his judgement for all men.’

The ultimate source of this narrative is the parable of the labourers in the vineyard in Matthew’s gospel (20: 1-16):

The kingdom of heaven is like to a householder, who went out early in the morning to hire labourers into his vineyard. And having agreed with the labourers for a penny a day, he sent them into his vineyard. And going out about the third hour, he saw others standing in the marketplace idle. And he said to them: Go you also into my vineyard, and I will give you what shall be just. And they went their way. And again he went out about the sixth and the ninth hour, and did in like manner. But about the eleventh hour he went

⁴³Given the source, the word *nóin* may in fact be used more loosely in this instance than interpreted in the translation above. It might instead be rendered as ‘evening’ and regarded as encompassing a three hour period, ending at the twelfth hour when the labourers receive their reward. In that case, the phrase *i dtráth ré sgur* could be rendered as ‘at the hour before (work) ceased’, thus including mention of the eleventh hour which is otherwise absent. (This discrepancy, if it is to be regarded as such, may have partly led McKenna to read *i gceann nóna* ‘at the end of nones’ and *ó nóin* ‘from nones’ in his edition of *Meitheal do bhí ag Dia na ndúl* (qq. 4a, 11a), thus including, if only indirectly, the eleventh hour.) It may further be noted, perhaps in support of a looser interpretation of *nóin*, that the third hour has been omitted in the explanation of the parable and is possibly to be understood as incorporated with the first hour in the phrases *madan* ‘morning’ and *an chéaddrong fhormhála* ‘the first hired labourers’. The matter requires further investigation and is left open at present as the eleventh hour is omitted from the passage of Keating’s *Tri Bior-ghaoithe an Bháis* cited below.

out and found others standing, and he saith to them: Why stand you here all the day idle? They say to him: Because no man hath hired us. He saith to them: Go ye also into my vineyard. And when evening was come, the lord of the vineyard saith to his steward: Call the labourers and pay them their hire, beginning from the last even to the first. When therefore they were come, that came about the eleventh hour, they received every man a penny. But when the first also came, they thought that they should receive more: and they also received every man a penny. And receiving it they murmured against the master of the house, Saying: These last have worked but one hour, and thou hast made them equal to us, that have borne the burden of the day and the heats. But he answering said to one of them: Friend, I do thee no wrong: didst thou not agree with me for a penny? Take what is thine, and go thy way: I will also give to this last even as to thee. Or, is it not lawful for me to do what I will? Is thy eye evil, because I am good? So shall the last be first, and the first last. For many are called, but few chosen.⁴⁴

The poet's explanation, relating the times of day to different stages of life, is found in the biblical exegetical tradition of the Early Church and has been identified as beginning with Origen (c. 185-c. 254 AD). It is also invoked by such prominent figures as Jerome (c. 342-420), Augustine (354-430), Gregory the Great (c. 540-604) and Honorius Augustodunensis (c. 1090-1156).⁴⁵ Keating provides an explanation of the parable in line with this exegetical tradition in his seventeenth-century *Tri Bior-ghaoithe an Bháis* in a discussion of how the three parts of penance free man from the prison of sin. The teaching is lent the support of precedent by reference to the Book of Revelations and the parable of the labourers in the vineyard among other texts. The eleventh hour of the parable is not mentioned, however. Listing only four hours may derive from a tradition related to the division of the ages of man into four.⁴⁶

⁴⁴This parable and parts of Gregory the Great's homily on it were set texts on Septuagesima Sunday, see Wailes (1987) 7; cf. also Burrow (1986) 62 and Sears (1986) 84.

⁴⁵For discussion of the exegetical tradition, see Tevel (1992), Wailes (1987) 137-44, Burrow (1986) 59-66 and Sears (1986) 80-9. A further connection between the poem and homiletic traditions is possibly found in qq. 16ff. where the poet illustrates contempt for the body, says that he is a field (*gort*) and asks to be ploughed and cleansed by God; this may be compared to part of Augustine's sermon on the parable, for which see *PL* Vol. 38, Sermon 87.

⁴⁶Instances where four hours are given rather than the five of the parable are cited by Burrow (1986) 63, according to whom sext and nones have been conflated in the texts mentioned, cf. Ó Néill (1990) 10 n. 53. Note also that only three groups of labourers are referred to in the 1717

Atá fioghair ag Eóin san .21. caibidil in Apocal. ag teacht leis aní se, mar a n-abair Eóin go bhfacaidh cathair cheathra slios, 7 trí doirse ar gach slios díobh. Go fáthach, is iad na ceathra sleasa, cheathra haosa an duine; 7 na trí doirse ar gach slios trí cotcha na haithrighe bhíos ag an duine ré triall trés na trí rannaibh úd na haithrighe go neamh. Gonadh dá chur so i gcéill atá an fábhailsgéal léaghthar ag Matha san .20. caibidil, mar a nochtann gur chuir an t-athair muinntire drong dá mheithil do bhuaín na fineamhna an chéad-uair don ló. Ionann sin ré a rádh 7 i n-aois mhacaoimh. Do chuir an dara drong an treas uair don ló. Ionann sin ré a rádh 7 an drong bhíos i n-aois ógáin, chuireas Dia do dhéanamh feadhma dhó féin san bhfineamhain .i. i saothrughadh na subháilceadh. An treas drong chuireas amach an seiseadh uair don ló .i. sa meadhón laoi, an drong bhíos i meadhón a n-aoise .i. san aois sheardha. Agus an ceathramhadh drong chuireas amach san naomhadh uair; ar a thrí do chlog i ndiaidh mheadhóin laoi .i. na seanóiridhe. Óir ní fhuil drong dona ceithre drongaibh se ag nach bíd trí doirse, mar atá trí cotcha na haithrighe osluigthe rompa.⁴⁷

‘John has a figure in the twenty-first chapter of the Book of Revelations which supports this, where John says that he saw a four-sided city with three gates on each side. Allegorically, the four sides are the four ages of man; and the three gates on each side are the three parts of penance which man has to travel through (*lit.* through those three parts of penance) to Heaven. And the parable which is read in the twentieth chapter of Matthew illustrates this, where he reveals that the householder sent a group of his labourers to harvest the vineyard at the first hour of the day. That is to say in the age of boyhood. He sent the second group at the third hour of the day. That is to say the group which is in the age of adolescence, which God sends into the vineyard to labour for him that is in cultivating the virtues. The third group which he sends at the sixth hour of the day that is at midday, is the group in middle age that is in the age of manhood.

poem beginning *As mithid damhsa leas mh'anma* where the parable is also related, Ó Murchadha (1961) 21 qq. 4-6.

⁴⁷Bergin (1931) ll. 10230-49; the three parts of penance (*brón-chombrúdh, faoisidin, agus lóir-ghníomh* ‘contrition, confession and satisfaction’) are listed at ll. 10197-8. For the tradition relating the four approaches to the city to the four ages of man, see Sears (1986) 89-90.

And the fourth group which he sends at the ninth hour, at three o'clock in the afternoon (*lit.* after midday) that is the old men. For there is not one of these four groups before which the three gates are not open, that is the three parts of penance.⁴⁸

It is clear from the foregoing that the author of *Meitheal do bhí ag Dia na ndúl* was drawing on the parable of the labourers in the vineyard and on a well-established medieval homiletic tradition concerning it which had its roots in the Early Church. Under the influence of this tradition, he employs the term *nóin*, the ninth hour of the day and the canonical hour of nones, with the connotation of a late point in life, the latest point at which one can seek God. The canonical hours were based on the division of the period of daylight into twelve hours, after which time night began.⁴⁹ The importance of preparing for death before nightfall is therefore implicit in this scheme and is echoed in examples below as well as in a quatrain cited in the Middle Irish metrical tract known as the *Trefocal*:

*Gabam la seisiu soirchi
seotu sochraidi soirthi
ré ndul dún as i fairthi
gleam ar lessu ré n-aidchi*

‘Let us travel with radiant companions seemly smooth ways;
Before we die forthwith let us settle our affairs before night’.⁵⁰

In this light, it may be of relevance to note that *nóin* (rendering Latin (*in sero*) was considered a period for reflection over the events of the day as indicated in a translation of the thirteenth-century Rule of St Francis printed in Louvain by Brian Mac Giolla Coinnigh in 1641 under the title *Riaghail Threas Uird S. Froinsias*:

*Agas dá dteagmhadh go neamhaireach go ttiobhradh áoinneach
aca úair éigin mionna le rith teangadh...an lá céudna im nóin an
tráth bhias ag sgrúadh a choinséis (mar dhligheas a smuaineadh*

⁴⁸For the rendering of *ré triall*, compare Bergin (1931) p. 465 s.v. 3 *ré* 3. I have rendered the terms *aois mhacaoimh* and *aois ógáin* as ‘boyhood’ and ‘adolescence’ respectively on the basis of Gregory’s homily where the corresponding terms are *pueritia* and *adolescencia*, see Burrow (1986) 61-2. The phrase *sa meadhón laoi* could also be rendered as ‘sext’.

⁴⁹Burrow (1986) 66.

⁵⁰Text and translation in Hollo (1996) 51. See also n. 53 (q. 3) and 68 (qq. 4-5) below.

cionnas do chaith an lá) abradh trí Paidreacha ⁊ trí Ave Maria a n-éuraic gach neith dá ndearna go neamhaireach an lá sin.

‘And if it should carelessly happen that one of them should at some time swear through a slip of the tongue...on the same day in the evening when he is examining his conscience (when it is fitting for him to consider how he spent the day) let him say three Our Fathers and three Hail Marys as recompense for all that he did carelessly on that day.’⁵¹

Instances of the figurative usage of *nóin*, divorced from the context of the parable, are presented and discussed in the remainder of this paper.

THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY OR EARLIER

Perhaps the most significant example of the figurative use of *nóin* from the fifteenth century, or from any century for that matter, occurs in the poem beginning *Táinig an tráth nóna* by Maol Eachlainn ‘na nUirsgéal’ Ó hUiginn who flourished in the first half of that century. This work was partially edited by Eleanor Knott in *Irish syllabic poetry* based on the earliest manuscript copy in the Tinnakill *duanaire*.⁵² In it, the poet describes his regret over not having practised a pious life and stresses the urgency in not delaying to do so now. He warns that the aged must hurry if they have procrastinated in setting out on their journey towards God, whereas those who have been pious since their youth have already secured a place in Heaven. In spite of this awareness, the poet undertakes his own journey slowly and vacillates in his resolve. The motif of *nóin* is developed in a sophisticated and highly aesthetic conceit in the opening quatrains of the poem, where *nóin* is juxtaposed with other times of the day.

*Táinig an tráth nóna,
a-nocht nóin ar saoghail;
neimhiongnadh um nónaidh
ceileabhradh dhár gcaomhaibh.*

⁵¹Ó Súilleabháin (1953) 24. A corresponding Latin version of the text printed by the editor reads: *Et qui die aliquo minus caute iurauerit lapsu linguae, prout contingere in multiloquio consuevit, die ipso in sero, cum debet recogitare quid fecerit, dicat tribus vicibus Orationem Dominicam, propter incaute facta huiusmodi iuramenta.*

⁵²Knott (1957b) 33-6. A complete edition of the poem based on all manuscript copies may be consulted in Ó Riain (2008b) 210-57. Knott (90) suggested that the poem may have been based on a Latin original, but provided no evidence to support such a supposition.

*Is beag a fhios agam,
re hiarnóin dá n-anam,
mh'aire cáit i gcuiream
caidhe an áit i n-anam.*

*Ná hanam re hoidhche,
budh haithreach dá n-anam;
a-tá mar eacht oram
an lá do theacht taram.*

*Is urasa a aithne,
madh áil céim i gciana,
an tráth bhus tráth nóna
do chách nach tráth trialla.*

*Rú is cosmhail a gcanam
— ní céim é eidir óghaibh —
fir ar feadh a saoghail
nach sir neamh go nónaidh.*

*Neamh d'fhagháil go héasgaidh
ní hurasa ar aba,
’s nach aisdir cách chuga
tráth an aisdir fhada.*

*D'fhior i n-eirr a aoise
olc d'fhagháil Dé dhúiligh
gan deithbhir do dhéanaimh
do dheighthigh an Dúilimh.*

*Gach aon as a óige
adhras croidhe cunnla
téid tráth don tigh neamhdha —
ag sin fháth na humhla.*

...

*Triall mall go múr nimhe
do-ním, ní nár dhúla,*

*‘s do-nim fhilleadh uadha
re silleadh na súla.*⁵³

‘Evening has come, now is the evening of my life; it is unsurprising to bid farewell to my loved ones in the evening.

If I wait till late evening, I scarcely know where I may set down my burden (or) in what place I may stay (i.e. Heaven or Hell).

Let me not wait till night, I will regret it if I do, it is appointed for me that daytime should pass me by.

It is easy to appreciate that, if one wishes to travel afar, the evening is not the hour for men to make the journey.

What I say applies to men — this is no passage among the chaste — who do not seek Heaven during their lives till evening.

It is not easy to reach Heaven speedily, however, yet not all men journey to it at a (suitable) hour to set out on a long journey (i.e. early).

For a man at the end of his years it is wrong not to make haste towards the Creator’s noble house, in order to reach God the Creator.

Every one from a young age who remains of (*lit.* adheres to a) prudent heart will go at some hour to the heavenly house — that is the reason for humility.

I make a slow journey towards the castle of Heaven — how unfitting — and I turn back from it in the twinkling of an eye.’

⁵³Ó Ríain (2008b) 240-1 qq. 1-8, 10 (with modification). The term *nóin* is rendered ‘evening’ rather than ‘mid-afternoon’ in the translation as the former word better conveys the intended sense and effect in English; it is supported by *DIL*’s definition as ‘often loosely used of the period preceding sunset’ (see n. 34 above) and the use of the word to render Latin (*in sero* also discussed above (n. 51). Knott emended silently to *Tánaig* in 1a presumably on the basis of *Tánaig* in 20d and the metrical fault known as *dúnadh cláen* (*IGTV* §145) in which the quality of the consonants involved in the metrical closure does not match. The reading of the manuscripts has been allowed to stand, however, as instances of the fault occur, see Ní Dhomhnaill (1981) 51 (§3.21) and Ó Ríain (2008b) 246 (1a n.).

Given the use of other general terms for periods of the day and night (*iarnóin*, *adhaigh*, *lá*), the primary meaning of the terms *nóin* and *tráth nóna* here appears to be ‘evening’ rather than having reference to a specific canonical hour. However, the poet avails of the original sense of nones in the final quatrain of the poem, nones being the hour traditionally associated with Christ’s death on the Cross.⁵⁴

*Sleagh do chur ’na chroidhe,
claon do bheith ’na bhrághaid,
cábh ní cóir nach smuainid,
an nóin an tráth thánaig.*⁵⁵

‘A spear cast in his heart, his neck inclined, it is not right that men fail to contemplate (this) when nones has come.’

Other examples of the figurative use of *nóin* are to be found in:

- (1) the work of Cormac Ruadh Ó hUiginn; (2) a couplet cited in *Bardic syntactical tracts*, for which *termini ante quem* of 1473 and *c.* 1490 can be given respectively; (3 & 4) poems which have been associated with the Franciscan friar Pilib Bocht Ó hUiginn (d. 1487).
- (1) Nothing is known about Cormac Ruadh save that he was composing poetry before the year 1473, when poems of his were transcribed by Seanchán Ó Maoil Chonaire in part of the Yellow Book of Lecan, TCD H.2.16 (1318).⁵⁶ The argument of Cormac Ruadh’s poem is that the course of life is a sermon which should be listened to and learned from; he maintains that *nóin* is no time for sinful folly:

*Sgath m’uaille níor fhulair [sic] dhamh
do leigean síos ré séanadh
ní san aois budh nóin do neach
budh chóir a bhaois ar biseach.*

⁵⁴*Encycl. Mid. Ages* II 1026. The death of Christ is listed as having taken place at nones (*nóin*) in the tracts on the hours in the *Leabhar Breac* and in TCD H.3.17 (1336), Best (1912) 144 (§3), 150 ll. 49-52; Best (1907). (Compare the text *In Tenga Bithnua* where it is stated that Christ died at midnight (*i medón aidche*), Carey (2009) 217 §94.14-15 and n.)

⁵⁵Ó Riain (2008b) 242 q. 20. This is followed by a number of supplementary quatrains.

⁵⁶See *DDé* p. viii and Abbot and Gwynn (1921) 94.

‘I must humble, by checking it, the glory of my pride; not in the evening of a man’s life should his folly be corrected.’⁵⁷

- (2) The idea expressed in the following couplet is comparable to that in the line *ní linn an lá a-márach* cited above (n. 13):

*A bhfuil róinn don lá ní leann
ní mó as leam ó nóin a-nunn.*

‘Not mine what remains of today; nor is it mine, the time on from noon.’⁵⁸

- (3 & 4) The first of these examples, which is attributed to Pilib Bocht in the eighteenth-century manuscript NLI G 447, deals with the settling of accounts on Judgement Day and the need to repent beforehand; the poet stresses the importance of receiving forgiveness before *nóin*.⁵⁹ The second example occurs in a poem included in the collection *Philip Bocht Ó hUiginn*, but is not attributed to that poet in the sole manuscript copy, TCD H.3.19 (1340).⁶⁰ Metrical criteria seem to justify the inclusion of this example under the current chronological heading, however, as perfect rhyme, where absent, can be restored

⁵⁷*DDé* no. 22 q. 6 (beg. *Atá an saoghal ag seanmhóir*). *DIL* N 60.86 suggests modifying McKenna’s translation of the second couplet in the following way: ‘not in the noon...be on the increase’; the translation ‘not in the evening of a man’s age should his folly be mending’ is proposed at B 106.20-1. ‘On the increase’ should probably be adopted on the basis of similar ideas expressed in examples cited at pp. 163-4 above. See also *DIL* s.v. 2 *senad* where it is suggested that we should read *seanadh* ‘old age’ in line *b*. The poem is attributed to ‘Tadhg Og’ in NLS Adv. 72.1.39, 27r.

⁵⁸Text and transl.: *BST* 197.11 and n.

⁵⁹The poem survives in three copies: RIA C ii 2 (1235), 25 (fragmentary); TCD H.3.19 (1340), 43 and NLI G 447, 71 (‘Rossmore MS’). McKenna’s 1931 edition in *PB* was based on all copies, but G 447 is not listed in his 1939 edition in *AiD* I. The attribution of the piece to Pilib Bocht in the NLI manuscript was accepted by McKenna in *PB* (p. ix), whereas it is taken to be the work of an anonymous Franciscan in *AiD* I p. 329 (‘Author is unknown but was a Franciscan’). The piece is included in this section on the basis of the attribution in G 447; note also that the earliest manuscript copy (RIA C ii 2) was probably written in the late fifteenth or early sixteenth century, see O’Sullivan 1976, 218 and *RIA Cat.* Fasc. 27, 3418-21.

⁶⁰The editor attributed the poem to Pilib Bocht on the basis of supplementary quatrains dedicated to Michael and St Francis (qq. 52, 53). Such dual dedications were taken as a signature by McKenna (*PB* p. ix). A supplementary quatrain to Mary also occurs in this poem (q. 54). For comments on McKenna’s criteria for ascertaining the authorship of Pilib Bocht, see O’Sullivan (1976) 219. For the manuscript, see n. 36 above.

through emendation in all legible opening couplets of the manuscript text. In the poem, the author shows contempt for the body and illustrates the need to wash away sin before achieving a place in Heaven.

*Ní fhuighe sinn
sioth re n-éag muna fhoghoimne
ó nóin a-nunn
an ghlóir do chum fa ar gcomhairne.*

‘We shall not get the glory He made for us when Life’s evening is over unless we get pardon ’ere death.’⁶¹

*Ní bhacfadh tuar a thighe
dá n-antar ag uan Muire
go nóin do ré nach raibhe
th’aire re glóir nDé a dhuine.*

‘Thy neglect of Heavenly glory till the evening of thy life prevents thee not, my friend, from entering His house if thou hold by Mary’s Lamb.’⁶²

THE SIXTEENTH AND SEVENTEENTH CENTURIES

Examples belonging to these centuries are found in: (5) the work of Fearghal Óg Mac an Bhaire (*fl.* 1567-c. 1620); the poems beginning (6) *Gabh, a Mhuire, an lámhsa id láimh*, and (7) *Braon re ndubadh diomdha Dé*.

- (5) The work of Fearghal Óg Mac an Bhaire (*fl.* 1567-c. 1620) contains an example of *nóin* and also a comparable example of the term *iarnóin* which is relevant in the present context. Copies of the two poems in question are

⁶¹*AiD* no. 89 (= *PB* no. 6) q. 14 (beg. *Deireadh cairdeasa comháireamh*). 14*b*: The text represents the reading of TCD H.3.19, namely ‘sith ré néucc’; for the last two words in the latter MS, RIA C ii 2 reads ‘ré ar nécc’. It may be worth noting the reference to the vineyard in q. 1*bcd*: *cúis mhímhéanma* [sic leg.] / *gan tochta i dtlás / mo lochta ar fás na fíneamhna* ‘my faults in caring my vineyard cause me unceasing dejection’. Compare the differing translations of this and the passage cited above in *PB* pp. 144, 145: ‘We shall not get the glory He made for us unless we get pardon ’ere death some time before evening’ (where a note on p. 215 states ‘*lit.* counting back from evening’); ‘it disheartens me that my faults in caring my vineyard abate not’.

⁶²*PB* no. 12 q. 24 (beg. *Gach oige mar a hadhbhar*).

preserved in the Book of the O’Conor Don written in 1631. In the first the poet asserts that God is deserving of poems in his honour and hopes that he may earn redemption through his poetry. He also expresses faith in the Virgin Mary’s assistance in his case. In the second the poet discusses the idea that the shedding of tears can mollify God’s anger and earn salvation. Christ’s wounded body also represents a source of hope for redemption.

*Maighdean nar bh’iomarcaidh uaill,
an mhaighdean bhionnfhoclach bhúidh
’n-a dál go ndighear iar nóin* dhál MS
sireadh glóir ar mo dhán dúinn.

‘The Virgin who had no excessive pride, the beloved sweet-spoken virgin, may I speed to her in my eventide; may she ask glory for me in return for my poem.’⁶³

*Tuir chothuighthe na córa
m’fhaosamh re hucht n-iarnóna;
is díon mo mhíothaom go moch
bíodh ar a chlíothaobh chréachtach.*

‘May my hope at eventide, and my protection against sin in the morning, be set on His wounded body, a tower to defend justice.’⁶⁴

- (6) In the poem beginning *Gabh, a Mhuire, an lámhsa id láimh*, times of day, including *nóin*, are once again used to describe age in an appeal to Mary to guide the metaphorically blind poet towards the right path before it is too late. The earliest copy known to the present writer is Maynooth M 84 written by Seán Ó Murchadha na Ráithíneach between

⁶³*DiD* no. 38 q. 29; translated in McKenna (1928) 382 (beg. *Mairg nach diognadh dán do Dhia*, Fearghal Óg Mac an Bhaire). 29c: the phrase *iar nóin* might be interpreted as meaning ‘after old age’, that is ‘after the end (of life)’, and listed below (p. 183 f.); the manuscript reading *dhál*, with lenition after masc. poss. pron., might be retained and taken as referring to Christ. For Mary as intercessor, see Ryan (2002-03), Ryan and Gray (2007) and Innes (2010).

⁶⁴*DiD* no. 39 q. 27; translated in McKenna (1928b) 439 (beg. *Mairg nach doirteann a dhéara*, Fearghal Óg Mac an Bhaire). 27b: McKenna renders the phrase *re hucht n-iarnóna* as ‘roimh mo shean-aois’ in *DiD* p. 442; *faosamh* would be more accurately translated as ‘protection, safeguarding’; 27c: *go moch* in line c might refer to a young age or is perhaps to be understood as referring to Judgement which is thought of as taking place in the morning in some texts; see Best (1912) 146 (§7), 156 ll. 115-20 (*tiugnáir*). (Compare *In Tenga Bithnua* where it is stated that the world will end at midnight (*i medón aidche*), Carey (2009) 217 §94.23 and n.)

1738 and 1747 where the piece is without attribution.⁶⁵ The poem was included by McKenna in his collection of the works of Aonghas Ó Dálaigh where it was edited solely from the late eighteenth-century copy in RIA 23 G 23 (256) in which the piece is attributed to ‘Aongus Ua Dála na Diaghachta’.⁶⁶ Attributions to this poet are common in eighteenth-century manuscripts and are often unreliable, but the lack of perfect rhyme in opening couplets seems to suggest that the piece was composed at a date warranting its inclusion in this section.⁶⁷

Sul tí an rabharta ós chionn chuain cígh ccuain M 84
a bhan-chara [bí] ar gach sdiúir
fregam an teagh thall ó nóin
ní cóir an dall gan fhear n-iúil.

...

Olc mo threoir go neamh a-nonn
gan fhear n-eoil dá chur im cheann dá] do; chionn M 84
bheith ó ló ba tairgthe thall budh M 84
do dhall an ró sainnte sionn.

...

Ná han re himtheacht an laoi
re righneas na mban ná bí
cuiridh soin a-mudha mé mhé M 84
gné 's lughá dom choir im chlí. do M 84

‘Ere the flood overflow the shore stand my friend at every helm!
 May we enter our home yonder by eventide! The blind should
 have a guide!

Ill my faring to Heaven yonder if no guide be sent me! I should
 have striven to be there in daylight but excess of greed blinded me!

⁶⁵Ó Fiannachta (1966) 72-8.

⁶⁶The section of the manuscript containing the poem was written between 1794-5 by Micheál Óg Ó Longáin, see *RIA Cat.* Fasc. 6, 675-87.

⁶⁷McKenna inferred that Aonghas Ó Dálaigh lived at the end of the sixteenth century and in the seventeenth century. However, his handling of the evidence has been called into question and the likelihood is that compositions by different authors have been conflated by him; see McGrath (1946) and also Ó Riain (1967) 127-8.

Wait not till the day be spent! Be not slow as women are! The smallest speck of sin in my heart makes me stray.⁶⁸

- (7) An anonymous author, possibly composing in the sixteenth or early seventeenth century to judge by metrical criteria and the date of the manuscripts, is responsible for the next piece. It was entitled ‘God’s wrath threatens’ by its editor and in it God’s anger, which must be appeased, is portrayed as ‘the drop before the dark storm wherein His (full) wrath is displayed’ (*Braon re ndubadh diomdha Dé / dá gcuirthear dá dhiomdha dlaoi*).⁶⁹ Both instances of *nóin* in this piece are axiomatic. However, when considered in conjunction with the term *iar* ‘evening’, the first instance may be regarded as referring to the evening of old age, before which time it is necessary to put one’s affairs in order.⁷⁰ The second instance appears to be proverbial and its meaning was interpreted by McKenna as ‘time weakens all things’. The references to the sun and darkness may reflect the idea, as reported by Gregory the Great, that at the ninth hour, nones, the sun descends from its height.⁷¹

*Clann Éabha ní dóigh dá díol
a gcóir dá léigid go Luan,
guais dóibh sa turadh gan triall,
nóin riamh gan dubhadh ní dual.*

...
*A-tám dom fhuláir, a ógh,
mar as ghnáth gabháil na ngiall,
dlightior géill i ngeimhil ríogh;
bíom féin gut eidhir re n-iar.*

...
*Ní cóir mhall d’agra do b’áil Ní cóir] In ch. MSS; leg. An chóir
nachar hagrath `n-a ham féin
fada a-moigh ar chách do chóir;
ní gnáth um nóin goil sa ghréin.*

⁶⁸*AÓD* no. 6 qq. 3-5.

⁶⁹*AiD* no. 84 q. 1*ab*.

⁷⁰The alternative would be to regard it as having reference to Judgement Day and to include it under ‘Other usages (b)’ below.

⁷¹Sears (1986) 84 and Wailes (1987) 142. Compare n. 88 below and *DDé* no. 26 q. 48.

‘If Eve’s race puts off till Monday the payment of their debt they are not likely to pay it then; ’tis dangerous for them not to travel while it is fine, for evening brings dark clouds.

To take hostages is usual; they should be bound by a king’s chains; I offer myself as one, O Virgin; let thy Son receive me as one before evening.

The world’s debt to Thee is long over-due, the debt which was not called in when it fell due — I do not object to this delay about it! There is never the same heat in the sun at eventide.⁷²

OTHER USAGES

(a) The figurative use of the word is not strictly confined to the didactic religious context we have been discussing, but may be employed in other circumstances to refer to the end of a person’s life. This merely represents an extension of the usage discussed above. The setting is nevertheless religious in the first and second examples presented here. These refer to: (1) John the Baptist’s mother, Elizabeth, who became pregnant at an advanced age. The compound *dubhnóin* is presumably to be understood as referring to this and synonymous with the phrase *i ndeoidh urmhóir a haoise* in the following line. Although the source is biblical (Lk 1: 8-20), the term is simply employed by the poet, Tadhg Óg Ó hUiginn (d. 1448), with reference to Elizabeth’s old age; (2) certain Protestants, mainly Mathghamhain Seidhin (Mathew Seaine), Maol Muire Mág Craith and Uilliam Ó Cathasaigh, who are satirised in a sixteenth-century poem by Eoghan Ó Dubhthaigh (d. 1590) and who, the author thinks, will come to no good end.

⁷²*AiD* no. 84 qq. 2, 9, 21. Copies are found in two seventeenth-century manuscripts, namely UCD-OFM A 25 (written at some time during 1608-28, Walsh 1928, 27) and the Book of the O’Conor Don (1631). *2cd*: Compare *DiD* no. 30 q. 5 and no. 48 q. 35-6; *9d*: for *iar*, see *DIL* s.v. 2 *iar*; *21d*: McKenna’s interpretation of the line is found at *AiD* II, 258; other versions of this axiom are *lughá um nóin a gal* (do ghal MS) *san ghréin* ‘at eventide the sun’s heat grows less’ and *ní léir um nóin gal san ngréin* ‘no beam at eve now bursts from the sun’ in laments on the death of Ruaidhri Mór Mac Leóid in 1626 and on the death of the bishop of Down and Connor in 1673, Macdonald (1958) 30 q. 6*d* and Morris (1914) 267 q. 2*d* (= Ó Muirgheasa 1936, 227 where *nóin* has been altered to unmetrical *neóin*); cf. also *DiD* no. 48 q. 36*d*.

*Máthair Eoin an uair do shir
toirrcheas do thoil an Dhúilimh
tugadh Eoin im dhubh-nóin dí
i ndeoidh urmhóir a haoise*

‘When John’s mother asked a child from the Lord, at midnight
John was given her in her advanced years.’⁷³

*Conchubhar is Mathghamhuin nach cóir —
ní flathamhuil a [nóin] go fíor: nóin] ‘a nionad’ : ‘a cconách’ v.ll.
cuirfidh ar máthair-ne, dár ndóigh,
athain[n]e i dtóin gach athaigh dhíobh.*

‘No princely end shall evil Conor and Matthew have: our Mother
shall put, methinks, live embers to the bottom of each of the boors.’⁷⁴

This is certainly not religious in the same sense that the examples previously considered are and a further two examples of this usage are to hand where the context appears to be largely secular. One is a citation from *Bardic syntactical tracts*, the other tells how the poet heard of the death of Máire Tóibín from a messenger, but initially refused to believe the news. He gradually accepts that she is dead and describes his sorrow which is mitigated only by the knowledge that she is now living in Paradise. The composition has been included among the works of Pádraigín Haicéad, although the attribution is without manuscript authority.

*Ar tteacht nóna neirt G(h)áoidhiol
córa a cheilt a chomhmáoidhiomh.*⁷⁵

‘The evening of the strength of the Gaels having arrived, it is
better to pass over it than to boast of it.’

*Ní duarca rádh ná a rádh gur theasdaigh roimh nóin,
ar dtuar a blátha, dh’áille a hearraigh um thós
mh’uan beag cáidh ...*⁷⁶

⁷³DDé no. 11 q. 16 (beg. *Gabh m’éagnach a Eoin Baisde*).

⁷⁴DBM no. 27 q. 81 (beg. *Léig dod chomhmórtas dúinn*). Mhóg Craith dates the poem to 1578, DBM II 175-6. 81b: While the manuscripts are not harmonious in their testimony, *nóin* may be the metrically superior reading, see *ibid.* 173. Compare the use of *easbart* ‘vespers’ in q. 86 (cf. also qq. 84-5).

⁷⁵BST 199.8/Dd.17. McKenna translated the second line only (BST p. 125).

⁷⁶Ní Cheallacháin (1962) no. 5 ll. 13-5 (= Ó Donnchadha 1916 no. 12) (beg. *A shuairefhir sháimh, ní sámh do reacaireacht sgeóil*). On the lack of attribution in the manuscript, see Ní

‘There is no more grievous assertion than that my just little lamb died before (the) evening (of life), having presaged her bloom by the beauty of her springtime in the beginning.’

(b) In some religious poems, the word *nóin* is not simply used of old age and the end of a person’s life, but has come to have particular reference to Judgement Day; a development which is not noted in *DIL*. This is instanced in an autograph copy of a poem beginning *Mairg chaomhnas a cholann* written after 1649 by Cathal Mac Muireadhaigh (*fl.* 1618-61) when ‘on the brink of the grave’ (*mé re h-ucht na h-uaighe*).⁷⁷ He portrays the body as the enemy of the soul and pities anyone who does not renounce it.

Dia Luain, lá an tionóil, leg. laithe; leg. tionáil sic MS
mar thig ar dtráth nóna,
bheith ann, a Dhé, is dána,
’s mé ar gcall mo chóra. leg. is

‘On Monday, the day of gathering, when our noon-tide comes, to be there, o God, is bold, seeing I have lost my right.’⁷⁸

A poem by Tuathal Ó’n Cháinte beginning *Níor tógb[h]adh éruic Íosa* also contains an instance of this usage. It is preserved in NLS Adv. 72.1.49 which was written during 1618-47 according to Black.⁷⁹ The metre is *rannaigheacht bheag* and for dating purposes it may be noted that perfect rhyme does not occur in all opening couplets. The piece treats of Christ’s sacrifice for mankind and the trust that can be placed in his love, and Mary’s, on Judgement Day in spite of the compensation (*éaraic*) properly due for the crucifixion. Like Cathal Mac Muireadhaigh, Tuathal relates that death is at the door (*ag sin an tég san orsuin*).⁸⁰

Cheallacháin xx-xxi. The latter part of the second line is rendered ‘in the beginning of the beauty of her spring’ in *DIL* T 394.3-4. Compare the editors’ interpretations of this line as ‘tar éis go raibh súil le blátha na haoise uirthi óna áille a bhí a hearrach, .i. a hóige, mar thosach’ and ‘ar chéad amharc a blátha, i dtosach áille a hóige’, Ó Donnchadha (1916) 123 and Ní Cheallacháin (1962) 104. For further discussion of these lines, see n. 87 below; cf. also n. 86.

⁷⁷Matheson (1963) 271 q. 1d. For Cathal Mac Muireadhaigh, see Thomson (1960-3) 298-9.

⁷⁸Matheson (1963) 275 q. 21. The forms *tinál* and *tinól* are listed in *IGT* II §35.

⁷⁹Black (1989) 155.

⁸⁰NLS Adv. 72.1.49, 17r q. 23c. (A transcription of this poem is given in McManus and Ó Raghallaigh (2010) no. 376 where it is not noted that the manuscript is torn and faded at a number of points, nor indeed is any distinction made between letters which are difficult to make

An tóir ar gac táobh tiogfa
um nóin ar an raon rompa
a heóin a tír ag *techta*
ealta a ndeóigh an chích chorcra.⁸¹

‘The host (*sc.* mankind) will proceed on the path before them on all sides in the end (*lit.* in the evening), a flock whose members (*lit.* its birds ... a flock) (will) come ashore (*sc.* in Heaven) after (the event of the wounding of) the bloody breast.’

Further examples occur in a poem which may be dated approximately to the sixteenth century and in three other pieces of indeterminate date. One treats of Judgement Day as a day of danger for Adam’s descendants and an appeal is made to Mary for intercession. The second describes Heaven and Hell, Judgement Day and the need to repent. The third deals with the necessity of preparing for death. The last addresses the body and advises against adhering to the world; rather the glory of the next world should be sought through repentance.

An lá-so lá na dála
an tráth-so ní tráth séana;
mar do thuil an tráth nóna
*ní tráth córa d’fhuil Éabha.*⁸²

out and letters which are supplied through conjecture where parts of the manuscript have been torn away, e.g. 11*d* (all are presented in square brackets). It is only possible here to register some of the shortcomings in that work as found at qq. 6*b*, 11*a*, *b* (here angular brackets indicate letters which are difficult to read): *toilg* for *toisg*; *Len* for *en*; *fi[dh?]e* for *fine*; *Nior ...* for *Nior tógbadh éruic íosa* (explicit). The reason for omitting text and adding an ellipsis in the last instance is unclear, but is also done, for example, at the end of the poem mentioned in n. 83 below where no text has been omitted as the explicit consists only of the two words reproduced ‘*Da chuireadh ...*’).

⁸¹NLS Adv. 72.1.49, 16r q. 8. To the second couplet, compare (i) *AiD* no. 63 q. 35: *Rí dar gcobhair [don] chrann sheoil / an crann do corcradh san chích; / dá láimh ghonta ar iomramh uaídh / sluaigh biodhbhadh go tochta i dtír* ‘The Lord rescued us by the guiding oar empurpled in His breast-blood; He kept plying His two wounded hands till we, His foes, were brought to shore’ and (ii) q. 15*cd* of *Níor tógb[h]adh éruic Íosa*: *do chúaidh go cíogh an álaídh / síol ádhúimh uaibh ar iarraidh* ‘Adam’s race went astray from you until the wounded breast’. The themes and ideas presented in the poem may be compared generally to *AiD* no. 63 and 64.

⁸²*DiD* no. 24 q. 6 (beg. *Éanlá coinne ag cloinn Ádhaimh*); translated in McKenna (1929) 553 as: ‘That day, that muster-day, is no hour for self-defence, it is no rest-time for Eve’s race, for (life’s) evening has flowed by.’ 6*b*: McKenna’s interpretation of *ní tráth séana* differs in *DiD* (p. 437) where he renders the phrase as ‘ní lá sona é’, compare the phrase *ní tráth soirbh* at n. 6 above; 6*c*: translated in *DIL* T 360.29-30, the context of Judgement Day seems to support this interpretation; 6*d* for *ní tráth córa*, compare n. 72 (q. 2*ab*) above and *DIL* s.v. *cóir* 7. The poem is

‘That day, that assembly day, is no hour of happiness, it is no time of recompense for Eve’s race, when evening has descended (?).’

Cennchuidh an ccathroigh nemhdha
 dénuidh toil bhur ttígerna
 beg nach í bhur nóin aniugh
 suil tí cóir an dá chuiriodh.⁸³

‘Acquire the heavenly city, do the will of your lord — it is almost your evening now (*lit.* today) — before the justice of the two invitations comes.’

Creidim bas do bheith im chionn
 creidim nemh *ann* is ifrionn
 is é in trath nona aniogh
 cora do chach a chreidiodh.⁸⁴

found in TCD H.3.19 (1340), for which see n. 36 above, and is assigned to the sixteenth century on the basis of the date of the manuscript and metrical criteria.

⁸³Book of the O’Conor Don, 116r (beg. *Da chuireadh ar cloinn Ádhuim[h]*) q. 22. A second copy is found in the early eighteenth-century manuscript NLI G 448, 42-8, which reads *Ceanneochad an cuireadh neamhdha* in line *a* (p. 46). The present instance of *nóin* could also be interpreted as a reference to old age. However, it is included here on the basis that the context it occurs in refers to Judgement Day and is, perhaps, intended to convey that it is ‘the last hour’ and that ‘the time is at hand’ (cf. 1 Jn 2:18 and Rev 22:10); see also the next example. The two invitations referred to are to Heaven and Hell respectively as explained in q. 3. (A transcription of the copy of this poem in the Book of the O’Conor Don is given in McManus and Ó Raghallaigh (2010) no. 144 with the following errors at qq. 13c, 19a, 20b, 21a, 27d: na fheghain for na afhéghain (a subscript; note also inconsistency regarding the treatment of comparable superfluous possessive pronouns at qq. 4b, 14d, 18a); Aigeóraidh for Aigéuraidh; Brath[L]úain for brathlúain (square brackets may have been employed here to indicate editorial capitalisation, although this is not in accordance with the policy described on p. xxxi); onnsioighter for ionnsioighter; a-ttáithí for a ttáithí (= *i dtáithí*). In this and the other poems referred to below, there are also numerous instances where lenition, length marks and italicisation have either been erroneously supplied or not indicated; it is not feasible to register all of these here.)

⁸⁴Rawl. B. 475 (17th cent.), 109 (beg. *Deunum oirchill ar an écc*) q. 22; *b* ‘bás’ expunged MS; *lit.* ‘I believe that heaven and hell exist’; *d* leg. *chreideamh*. (A transcription of this poem is given in McManus and Ó Raghallaigh (2010) no. 160 with the following errors at 9d, 24a, 25a: d’anshocar for danshocair; ega for ego; d[hru]im (possibly d[h]ruim was intended) for druum; *Denum ...* for *denum oirchill* (explicit). In addition, the suggestion to omit the *r* of *sar* in *cred ’sa(r) n-anom gan oirchill* (3d) is highly questionable; the letter *i* is supplied unnecessarily in q. 12b (*le Dia athof[i]r*); MS *athor* is the genitive of apposition (for which, see O’Rahilly 1941, 246 §2); the employment of round brackets in qq. 9c and 22b fails to indicate that the words are in fact

‘I believe that death awaits me; I believe in heaven and hell; now (*lit.* today) is the evening, it would be more fitting for all to believe this.’

Do les *ar cairde* na cuir;
freagair trath tús an mharguidh;
biaidh fa nóin a ndaoire ag dol leg. *bia*
coir san Aoine acht go n-iarthor.

Doghebtha *ar maduin* co moch
graso ón choimdhe gan chennoch;
gras Dé fa dheuigh a dhuine
*sé ar do dheuir ní diolfuidhe.*⁸⁵

‘Defer not your remedy; initiate the bargain in good time; at eventide you will be brought into bondage if justice is sought for (the crucifixion on) Good Friday.

You would receive grace from the Lord without payment early in the morning; (but) God’s grace at the end, o man, could not be paid for by your tear’.

The same poet continues with a seasonal reference to the winter of old age:

Uras *animthecht* aniogh leg. *urasa*
 sa ló the suil ti an *geimhriodh*
 slighthe *socra* na *gcoig cnedh*
 roid as *docra* fo *dheiradh.* leg. *dheireadh*

...

expunged in the manuscript since we are told that round brackets are used editorially to ‘enclose letters which should be ignored’, see p. xxxi).

⁸⁵Rawl. B. 475, 106 (beg. *A chuirp, cia is comhairleach dhuid?*) qq. 12, 13: 13*d*: for the idea that salvation can be obtained in exchange for a tear, see n. 11 and p. 180 above. A reference to the five wounds of Christ (q. 14*c*) may suggest that the piece was not composed before the fifteenth century, before which time references to the five wounds are rare, see Ryan (2004) 80-1 and (2002); however, this is inconclusive as earlier references to the wounds do occur. (A transcription of this poem is given in McManus and Ó Raghallaigh (2010) no. 5 with the following errors at qq. 12*d*, 13*b*, *cd*, 15*a*: *Aoine* for *aoine* with suspension stroke (not noticed and either representing *Aoinne* or stroke has been written under the influence of following *acht*); *gach* (with a note on p. 703 giving ‘gan’ as a ‘suggested better reading’) for *gan*; *dheuigh* for *dheuigh*; *dheoir* for *dheuir*; *thuideth* for *thuitetur*.)

Na creid dod comhairle fein
 na len ní as mó dod mhiceill
 do ghlór baioisi do bhunadh leg. ghlár
 nár is thaoisi ag arsughadh.⁸⁶

‘It is easy to traverse them today, in the warm day before winter comes, the level paths of the five wounds — roads which are more difficult in the end.

Do not trust in your own counsel; adhere no longer to your foolishness; your incessant, dim-witted chatter is shameful since your age is increasing (*lit.* growing old).’

CONCLUSION

To judge by the examples presented in this paper, the use of *nóin* to refer to old age was a conventional one. This figurative use of the term has been interpreted differently by various editors. Translations include ‘evening’ (McKenna), ‘eventide’ (McKenna), ‘noontide’ (Matheson), ‘noon (McKenna, *DIL*)’ and ‘midday (*DIL*)’, while Cuthbert Mhág Craith rendered the term as ‘end (of life)’. The latter perhaps conveys best the idea intended and encompasses all usages of the term, although something of the sense, and certainly the metaphor, is lost in this translation.

The suggestion in *DIL*, referred to earlier, that the figurative use of *nóin* may derive from the late sense ‘noon’ must be questioned in light of the evidence adduced in the present paper. It is possible that Maud Joynt, the compiler of the fasciculus on the letters N-O-P, was influenced by one of two examples of this usage included in the entry there. This is the example cited at p. 184 above, namely *gur theasdaigh roimh nóin ar dtuar a blátha*, which is translated in *DIL* as ‘she died ere the noon (of life) in the promise of

⁸⁶*ibid.* qq. 14, 17. (The suggestion in McManus and Ó Raghallaigh (2010) no. 5 to read *Urasa n-imthechd[a]* in 14a is slightly less economical than that proposed here, goes against the word division in the manuscript and fails to recognise that *uras* is not uncommonly written *uras*, see *DIL* s.v. *airassa*). For the use of the seasons to refer to the ages of man, see Burrow (1986) 12, 16-19, 29-31 and n. 76 above. Compare also *ní bí errach senduni* ‘the old man’s springtime is past’ in Meyer (1910) 26, 27 (the editor provides the literal translation ‘it is not the spring of the old man’ on p. 27 n. 2) and *Sam oited i rrabamar/do-melt cona fhogamur;/gaim aís báides cech duine,/domm-áinic a fhochmuine* ‘Summer of youth in which we were I have spent with its autumn; winter of age which overwhelms everyone, its first days have come to me’ from the well-known poem beginning *Aithbe damsá bés mara*, Ó hAodha (1989) 313 q. 19.

her beauty'.⁸⁷ In the lines in question *nóin* occurs alongside the term *earrach* which obviously refers to an early stage in a person's life. The juxtaposition of the two terms, along with the meaning 'noon' in later Irish, may have led Joynt to suggest 'midday' as the basis for the figurative meaning of *nóin*.⁸⁸ This is not a necessary interpretation of the lines, however; the term is better taken as referring to the late point in life which the commemorand of the poem will never reach.

'Noon' seems to be quite simply too early a point in the day to allow for the figurative use to be attached to it and is in conflict with the exegetes, Keating and those poets who specify that the term has reference to old age.⁸⁹ The figurative use of the term might then have originated in the Dictionary's sense (b) 'mid-afternoon' or, more loosely, 'the period preceding sunset', a usage which is paralleled by such terms as *iar*, *iarnóin* and *fescor*.⁹⁰ This suggestion accords with the rendering of the phrase *i nóin (bheag) a shaoil* given in Ó Dónaill's *Foclóir Gaeilge-Béarla* (1977) as 'in the evening of his life'. The use of mid-afternoon, or rather evening, as a metaphor for old age is also found elsewhere and is at least as old as the fourth century BC as Aristotle refers to it in his *Poetics*.⁹¹ It is also employed, for example, by the Swedish psalmist

⁸⁷*DIL* N 60.81-3. Ó Donnchadha (1916) 123 interprets the phrase *roimh nóin* as 'i lár a ré, sarar dhruid an t-aos léi'.

⁸⁸*Nóin* may also be used of the evening in Modern Irish, see Ó Máille (1936) 28: *Nóin agus deireadh lae atá ar dheireadh lae le coim na gréine a bheith ag dul faoi* 'The end of the day at sunset is called *nóin* and *deireadh lae*'; cf. also de Bhaldraithe (1986). Note also that in another poem on Máire Tóibín the word is used to refer to a late point in the day when the sun has ceased to shine, Ní Cheallacháin (1962) no. 4 l. 3 (*um nóin laoi*). See also n. 71 above.

⁸⁹For life expectancy and for the various ages, ranging from 35 to 72, at which old age was thought to begin in a number of texts dating from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, see Shahar (1995) 32, 15-18. She suggests (p. 31), however, that in practice 'people began to see themselves as old in their sixties and not in their forties, if only in the upper strata'. Note that the author of the poem beginning *Dona an t-eachsa shuair m'anam* (*AiD* no. 91) gives his age as 76 (q. 10) and that Cú Choigríche Ó Cléirigh refers to a patron's more than seventy years as a long life and says that he is at the end of his years, O'Curry (1861) 568-9: *Fuarais saoghal fada glan, / barr ar sheachtmhoghat bliadhan* 'Thou hast received a life, long and pure, over seventy years' and *in eirr th'aoise* 'at the end of thy age'. Compare also Ps. 90: 10.

⁹⁰For these terms, see n. 33 above.

⁹¹Ed. Halliwell (1995) 105, 107 (transl. 'A metaphor is the application of a word that belongs to another thing: either from genus to species...or by analogy...I call "by analogy" cases were [sic] *b* is to *a* as *d* is to *c*: one will then speak of *d* instead of *b*, or *b* instead of *d*. Sometimes people add that to which the replaced term is related. I mean, e.g....old age is to life as evening to day: so one will call evening "the day's old age", or, like Empedocles, call old age "the evening of life" or "life's sunset."').

Per Olof Nyström (1764-1830) and the English poet Stephen Hawes in *The Passetyme of Pleasure*, which was composed in 1506:

Aftonen är redan inne, / Och min sista sol går ner⁹²

‘The evening has already arrived, and my final sun is setting’

After the day there cometh the derke nyght
For though the day be never so longe,
At last the belles ryngeth to evensonge.⁹³

Evening, and the canonical hours associated with that time, serve as natural metaphors for old age and it is hardly surprising that they might be employed with reference to a late point in a person’s life. Nevertheless, as has been demonstrated, what is likely to be the earliest example of the usage in Classical Irish poetry draws on exegesis on a biblical parable and it seems plausible to suggest that later poems may have drawn on this work. It was highly regarded as no less than eight couplets and one entire quatrain are cited from it in the grammatical tracts and the use, if not also the origin, of the metaphor *nóin* may therefore owe something at least to the original sense of ‘the canonical hour of nones’ and the influence of the homiletic tradition.

⁹²*PsB* no. 475: 1 (p. 323).

⁹³Cited in Gray (1972) 206. See also Woolf (1968) 67-113, 309-55 for a discussion of the theme of death in English religious lyrics of the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries.