Early modern poetry in transcript: A bardic miscellany

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Introduction

The study of bardic poetry was first placed on a scientific footing through the labours of Osborn Bergin and Eleanor Knott little over one hundred years ago. Others have continued in their footsteps to the present day with the result that over 60% of the extant corpus of bardic poetry had appeared in print in one form or another in 1987. This figure has, of course, increased in the intervening years. Nevertheless, a substantial proportion of early modern verse still remains unedited, while some published pieces would benefit from new editions. The work under review, henceforth Miscellany, aims at making available in print transcriptions of precisely five hundred previously unpublished poems, twenty-two of which are preserved in manuscripts housed in British libraries. The publication arose from a project initiated at the suggestion of Cathal Ó Háinle and led by Damian McManus and Eoghan Ó Raghallaigh with the assistance of others based at Trinity College, Dublin to prepare a digital corpus of bardic poems (pp xxix, xxxii). Miscellany came about as an offshoot of that project and contains five hundred out of a total six hundred and fifty poems transcribed, leaving roughly one eighth of the corpus in manuscript (p. xxix). The source drawn upon for each poem represents the earliest available to the transcribers and, where multiple copies are extant, each text is presented on the basis of a single witness only (see p. xxix and further comment below).

Miscellany consists of four components, some of which have been designed for use in close connection with Dr Katharine Simms’ online bardic poetry database at bardic.celt.dias.ie (see p. xxix). These components are as follows: (i) an alphabetical table of contents; (ii) a brief introduction; (iii) a transcription of each poem; (iv) a short section of

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1 A bardic miscellany: five hundred bardic poems from manuscripts in Irish and British libraries. Edited by Damian McManus and Eoghan Ó Raghallaigh. Léann na Tríonóide/Trinity Irish studies no. 2. The Department of Irish, School of Languages, Literatures and Cultural Studies, Trinity College, Dublin, Dublin 2010. Pp xxxii + 710. ISBN 978-0-9546882-1-9. €50 (individuals) / €100 (institutions).

notes offering ‘suggested better readings’, miscellaneous items such as glosses present in the manuscripts and ‘editorial comments on the layout etc. of poems, change of metre and such like’ (p. 703). The table of contents also provides the following information (p. v): (a) the number assigned to the poem in Miscellany and in Simms’ database respectively; (b) the first line in normalised spelling; (c) the name of an addressee and/or poet where available; (d) the source from which the poem has been taken, and frequently (e) details relevant to the genre of poem in question and dating (e.g. ‘28/160 Ad-chiú aisling im iomdhaídh, political, to Aodh Ó Néill by Aonghas Mac an Bhaird, mid. 17th century [RIA 3 (23/L/17), 39a]’. The transcriptions are presented with a heading which details the number of the poem, gives the first line in normalised spelling, cites the source and identifies the metre (usually given in Modern Irish orthography, e.g. deibhí for deibhidhe) and notes whether the poem is dán díreach, brúilingeacht or ógláchas.

The publication will be assessed here under the following headings: (1) Selection of poems for inclusion and sources; (2) Transcriptions; (3) ‘Light’ editing; (4) Miscellaneous issues, and (5) General assessment. A large number of poems has been sampled as the basis for this review. However, it will be useful only to cite a limited selection of illustrative material which may be regarded as representative.

(1) Selection of poems for inclusion and sources

Selection of poems

We are told that the publication includes ‘[a]lmost all of the unpublished poems’ (p. xxix) with some exceptions. Chief among these are poems in the Book of the Dean of Lismore in addition to other pieces which are preserved in copies which are damaged or present problems of legibility and have been omitted ‘[f]or purely aesthetic reasons’ (with some leeway in the latter instance) (pp. xxix-xxx). A further criterion, defined simply as ‘needs checking’, will be found in an alphabetical index of the poems in Simms’ database on the website of the Department of Irish, TCD, but is nowhere mentioned in the introduction although poems with this label are not included.\(^3\) In addition, it is stated that ‘[a] number of

\(^3\) http://www.tcd.ie/Irish/assets/doc/DATABASEINDEX.docx (Accessed 15 December 2017). See, for example, the poems beginning Cuirdeas na Muire gan bhrón which is excluded from Miscellany for this reason as is the poem Triar do thoghas ós iath Mogha which was ‘transcribed from digital photo printout’ and ‘needs checking’.
poems ... were also excluded ... because they are accessible in unpublished theses’ (p. xxx). The reader who is curious to establish the precise meaning of this statement is assisted by the availability of the online index of poems just mentioned. The information to be gleaned from that source reveals that the remark adverts to three theses completed at TCD between 1992 and 2008. Needless to say, once the decision had been made to exclude poems edited in theses, the failure to take account of those submitted to other universities raises questions on which further comment will not be necessary here.

Not only does Miscellany include poems edited in unpublished theses, it also incorporates items which have, in fact, already appeared in print; for instance, the poems beginning Dia do bheatha, a abhlann án, Deacair comhairreamh [sic Miscellany] a chreach, Aonar dhuit, a Bhriain Bhanbha, An síoth duir, a rí Fionnghall, Mo mhallacht ort, a shaoghalt. No explanation is offered for the inclusion of these poems. That some are found in what might be considered to be relatively obscure places cannot have been a consideration as poems published in similar places have not been incorporated.

The inclusion of such poems goes hand in hand with the omission of others. A number of poems found in the Book of Úi Mhaine and TCD H 2. 7 (no. 1298/1) may be mentioned by way of illustration. Four poems have been transcribed from the Book of Úi Mhaine in Miscellany no. 13, 345, 445 and 457, and we are told that ‘some poems found only in ... the Book of Úi Mhaine ... were considered too important to be excluded’ in spite of the condition of that manuscript in places (pp xxix-xxx). This comment notwithstanding, a fifth poem beginning Fidhbaidh cubra clanna Néill has been omitted, although it presents few problems of legibility compared, say, to parts of no. 445 transcribed from the same source.

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5 Tomás Ua Nualláin, ‘Anecdota from Murphy MSS., Maynooth’, Irish ecclesiastical record, 24 (1908), 394-5; Ó Rhionn, ‘Cathríom Dhonnchaidh mhic Thaidhg Rua Úi Cheallacháin’ in Etienne Rynne (ed.), North Munster studies: essays in commemoration of Monsignor Michael Moloney (Limerick, 1967), 505-25; Albertus Johannes Goedheer, Irish and Norse traditions about the Battle of Clontarf (Haarlem, 1938), 45-50; W. J. Watson, ‘An unpublished poem to Angus MacDonald of Dun Naomhaig’, An Gaidheal, 19 (1923), 36-8; Eugene O’Curry, Lectures on the manuscript materials of ancient Irish history (Dublin, 1878), 566-9; now re-edited in Eoin Mac Carthaigh, Mo mhallacht ort, a shaoghalt (c. 1655): dán is a sheachadhadh’, Ériu, 53 (2013), 41-77. Publication details for the first three poems are also given in R. I. Best, Bibliography of Irish philology and of printed Irish literature (Dublin, 1913), 145, idem, Bibliography of Irish philology and manuscript literature (Dublin, 1942), 101 and Rolf Baumgarten, Bibliography of Irish linguistics and literature, 1942-71 (Dublin, 1986) 193, 528 respectively.

6 Fidhbaidh cubra clanna Néill, Book of Úi Mhaine, f. 5r; a copy is also found in TCD H 2. 7, 196-205.
similar case is encountered in poems found in H 2. 7 where some have been included (Miscellany nos. 12, 447-8, 453), while others, which occur in the same section of the manuscript, have been omitted for no apparent reason. Certainly, the criteria given in the introduction for exclusion of material do not apply here, and this makes them a surprising omission to say the least. These and other poems seem, in fact, to have been entirely overlooked as they are not listed in the online index of bardic poems referred to earlier. It should be added that the reader will be unaware of the context in which some of the poems which have been included occur (namely part of a prosimetrical text; described simply in the Catalogue of the Irish manuscripts in the library of Trinity College Dublin as ‘followed by alliterative prose’). Furthermore, with regard to the two manuscripts under discussion, it may be noted that the poem beginning A eolcha [sic Miscellany] Éireann airde (no. 13) is transcribed from the Book of Uí Mhaine. This is contrary to the editors’ policy of using the earliest manuscript available to them since there is a copy in TCD H 2. 7, the relevant portion of which is thought to pre-date the Book of Uí Mhaine. (Incidentally, it may also be noted that TCD H 2. 7 is said to represent a fragment of the Book of Uí Mhaine in Miscellany (e.g. p. xxv); this idea originated with O’Donovan, but has long since been debunked).

Sources

It has been observed that the policy adopted with regard to poems preserved in multiple copies is to reproduce only the earliest to which the editors had access. Accordingly, there is an inherent danger, if employing Miscellany as a source, that users may be tempted to ignore other copies. Indeed, there are some worrying indications that this has already begun to take place in the field. However, the reader interested in the poems will unavoidably have to consult all copies in the first instance and it must be conceded that this points to a major shortcoming of Miscellany.

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7 For the poems not included, see T. K. Abbott and E. J. Gwynn, Catalogue of the Irish manuscripts in the library of Trinity College Dublin (Dublin, 1921), 78, 337; John Bannerman, ‘Senchus Fer nAlban: part 1’, Celtica, 7 (1966), 144.
8 See n. 3 above.
9 Abbott and Gwynn, Catalogue, 337.
By way of illustration a single example will suffice for the present. This is poem no. 2 which begins *A chorpáin, cuimhnigh do chríoch* and is transcribed from TCD H 5. 10 (no. 1382). It is presented, as in that manuscript, as a poem of twenty-one quatrains, the metre of which is described in * Miscellany* as ‘Rannaíocht Mhór, Ógláchas > Deibh, Ógláchas’ (p. 1). This is intended to indicate that the metre changes to *deibhidhe* from q. 17 onwards. Q. 16 ends with a *dúnadh*, however, and qq. 17-21, in fact, represent a separate poem, beginning *Trí naimhde a-tá ar mo thí*, which is transmitted as an independent composition in RIA 23 I 40 (no. 6), 5. (There the final word of the poem is ‘eantri’ which supplies a *dúnadh* and is accompanied by a catchword reproducing part of the first line.)\(^{13}\) The conflation of this poem with another in H 5. 10 and the reproduction of both as a single item in Miscellany illustrate one significant hazard of relying on a single copy where others are extant.

A further concern in this regard is that poems preserved in multiple copies have not been treated differently from those occurring in single witnesses as far as the process of ‘light’ editing is concerned. That is to say alterations have been made without consulting other copies as will be seen in section (3) below. In addition, the practice of using single copies has not been carried out consistently in a handful of instances observed. So, in the case of the poem beginning *Sanntach sin, a cholann chriadh* (no. 411) we are told that a second manuscript has been employed ‘to fill in gaps’ (p. 583; cf. p. xxiv).\(^{14}\) This is in stark contrast to the poem beginning *Cóir foighide re feirg nDé* (I hope to publish an edition of this at a future date.) It is reproduced in Miscellany no. 109 from the Tinnakill *duanaire* (TCD H 3. 19; no. 1340). An *exemplum* which is found in other copies (e.g. National University of Ireland, Maynooth, B 9) has been omitted from the copy in H 3. 19 by the scribe or by the scribe of his exemplar. The reader of Miscellany is, at any rate, sure to be perplexed by the reference in q. 6 to a tale (*sgéal*) which is not told.

(2) Transcriptions

\(^{13}\) Q. 21 of poem 2 in Miscellany ends with ‘air an tríúr do sharaig goch áon[ní?]’ (compare ‘eantri’ [sic leg.], the reading of 23 I 40, mentioned above). Q. 16 ends mā tá, echoing the initial *A* of *A chorpáin, cuimhnigh do chríoch*.

\(^{14}\) Related issues include the fact that: (i) we find that two or three copies are listed on pp vi, xiv, xxiv for the poems beginning *A theachtaire thig on bhFraince*, *Éinphéisd ag milleadh Mhumhan* and *Sgéal doiligh ar Mhuire mhóir* (no. 24, 206 and 424), although there is no indication that more than one copy has been used (pp 19, 270, 590); (ii) names of authors are also sometimes included, or noted as variants, on the basis of other copies (e.g. no. 93 and 109), although the sources for these attributions are not identified and a complete list from all copies is not given (e.g. no. 292).
The primary criterion for assessment of a work of this nature is the extent to which the transcriptions accurately represent the text of the manuscripts. The reader is told that ‘[a]ll [poems] ... faithfully reproduce the texts of the manuscripts’ (inside leaf) and that McManus and Ó Raghallaigh worked closely together ‘checking and rechecking all transcribed texts’ (p. xxix). In order to establish the fidelity with which the texts have been reproduced, a large number of poems has been sampled and checked against the manuscripts, as noted earlier.

Before introducing this selection, it may be appropriate to mention that, while one naturally presumes that all poems were transcribed in house at the institutions in which they are held, one instance can be pointed to where this was clearly not the case. This pertains to Miscellany no. 113, the poem beginning Comhardadh cionnas is cóir which is preserved in National Library of Ireland manuscript G 3.¹⁵ This manuscript has been digitised on ISOS, but some text close to the outer margins of the relevant folios is not visible on the digital images. The reason for this is that the photographer was unable to capture the entire folio in all instances as is sometimes the case with manuscripts which are tightly bound. However, the relevant text is, with one exception, fully visible when one consults the manuscript at the National Library and presents no difficulties as regards legibility. Yet, in Miscellany, text which is not visible on ISOS has been supplied through conjecture by the editors and enclosed in square brackets accompanied by question marks.¹⁶ The fact that the editors have guessed right in these particular instances is of no consequence. Had they consulted the manuscript, the text could have been placed confidently before the reader.

We way now turn our attention to the detail of the transcriptions. A number of shortcomings in Miscellany in the reproduction of manuscript texts, and in other matters, have already been registered in print by several scholars.¹⁷ These have been welcomed recently by McManus who adds an equally welcome handful of corrections to mistakes in

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¹⁵ The poem is edited in Gordon Ó Riain, ‘Early modern technical verse from NLI G 3 (II)’, Celtica, 27 (2013), 55-78.
¹⁶ Ibid. 55 n. 2.
Miscellany. A brief selection of representative material will be presented below under the headings of (a) **Major errors** and (b) **Erroneous word division**. Some brief discussion of (c) **Minor errors** will also be included. The examples presented may be supplemented by referring to the works mentioned above.

(a) **Major errors**

There are numerous instances of mistranscription and misexpansion of manuscript abbreviations.

(i) The poem beginning *Aonar dhuit, a Bhriain Bhanbha* was edited in 1938 by A. J. Goedheer on the basis of two manuscript copies known to him and accompanied by translation and notes as indicated earlier (p. 00 above). It includes the following reference to a battle in which Brian Bóraimhe was involved which is transcribed in *Miscellany* as follows:

\[
\text{Do-rad ár Bealuigh Leachta} \\
\text{Brian ár mbinne rabharta} \\
\text{dár marb(adh) Ó Maolmuadh mac Broin} \\
\text{an rí do bhí air DeasMumhuin} \\
\]

*Miscellany* no. 50 q. 6

The round brackets in the third line indicate that the enclosed letters ‘should be ignored’ (p. xxxi), thus representing an emendation to *dár marb* (which can only be rendered as ‘when he killed Ó M.’). The reasoning behind this emendation, the reader deduces for himself, is that the transcription of this line in *Miscellany* would be a syllable too long if allowed to stand. The poem has been transcribed from RIA 23 C 18 (no. 493), but the word Ó does not, in fact, occur there in the line under discussion, nor is it present in the copy of the poem in RIA F vi 2 (no. 253) which was also used by Goedheer. The line in question was reproduced correctly by Goedheer who rendered it: *dár marbadh Maolmuadh mac Broin* ‘when was killed Maolmuadh son of Bran’. This is in accordance with accounts of the killing of Maol Muadh mac Broin in which the slayer is either not specified or it is stated that he was killed by Aedh

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Gebenneach or Murchadh mac Briain. However, in the emended text of *Miscellany* Brian himself is made to kill an ‘Ó Maolmuadh mac [sic] Broin’ which is apparently interpreted as a surname in light of the capitalisation of Ō and despite the fact that that word is not followed by the genitive case.

Other instances of phantom words which are not present in the manuscripts, but appear in *Miscellany* include (highlighted here): **dib** tug da ceile sealaideacht (no. 13 q. 3b); lór **an** linn *agus* lór damhsa (no. 330 q. 2c); can luas as *duain* (: luagh) [n]a dheadaig (no. 457 q. 24c). **21**

(ii) Omissions are also encountered. So, an entire quatrain has been omitted from each of the poems beginning *An ullamh fós feis [na] Teamhrach* (no. 46), preserved in the Book of the O’Conor Don, and *Cia as gairde ór gabhadh Éire* (no. 93), preserved in NLI G 992 (the source of the transcription), RIA 23 D 14 (no. 1) and 23 L 17 (no. 3). The omitted quatrains will be found in the manuscripts of the respective poems between qq. 29 and 30 and 24 and 25 of *Miscellany*. **22**

(iii) *Fuarais th’iarraidh [a] Éire* (no. 253) is a poem for Óinrí Ó Néill (d. 1489) which is preserved in RIA 23 F 16 (no. 2). The poet states that, although Ireland has had many kings, she had not received the one she was waiting for until Óinrí came to the fore. This is expressed in q. 5cd as follows: [...] nach bhfuí sí / a híarraidh uainn go hénrí ‘that she has not received from us what she sought for until [she received] Óinrí’. **23** This is given a somewhat different rendition in *Miscellany*, however, which makes the specific Óinrí into merely ‘anything’, misreading: nach bhfuí ñí sí / a híarraidh uainn go hénní.

(iv) *A-tá sunn rulla na ríogh* (no. 55) q. 10ab reads Conall do cuir bairi athuair (?) / ar Cana go lín a sluagh. Suprascript *s* is used to indicate that ‘there are problems with syllable-count’ (p. xxxi), here the line is a syllable too long. The question mark is employed only to ‘indicate problems with the text’ (ibid.), but would appear to be redundant as the supposed problem

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**20** See James Henthorn Todd, *Cogadh Gaedhel re Gallaibh* (London, 1867), cxxxvii-cxxxix.

**21** In the last instance, the asterisk refers the reader to a note on p. 710 where ‘dual’ is given as a ‘suggested better reading’. In fact, the manuscript reads ‘dual na’ (with suprascript l) for ‘duain [n]a’. There are a number of such notes. To cite just one other instance, no. 27 qq. 1b, 2a has ‘fera’ (with a note on p. 703 to emend to ‘feasa’) where the manuscript actually reads ‘fesá’.

**22** Book of the O’Conor Don, f. 128r; NLI G 992, f. 17r.

**23** The line also conceivably contains an instance of word play based on éinrí ‘one king’.
has already been flagged by the superscript letter. For ‘athamur’, the manuscript has ‘ath’ followed by a suspension stroke, a reading which should be expanded as ‘a-tuaidh’ ‘from the north’ and which, in turn, rhymes with sluailg (sic leg.). This reading provides the correct syllable count as the initial unstressed ‘a’ in ‘a-tuaidh’ is elided after the final vowel in ‘bāiri’.

(v) Táth aoinfhir ar iath Maineach (no. 457) q. 31ab has Mac Dallain Lung Laghach'/ mac finnLuind Feradhach. These lines list ancestral figures of the poem’s honorand, but both are a syllable short as transcribed. A stroke occurs above the letters g and d in ‘Lug’ and ‘Luid’, respectively, which has been interpreted as an n-stroke in Miscellany. It should in fact be regarded as a suspension stroke and the relevant words expanded as Lugaid and Luideach (leg. Luighdheach, IGT II §122). The reference is to Feradhach mac Lugdach meic Dalláin in the genealogy of Uí Mháine. Additional errors in the same transcription include reproducing the word ‘clann’ / ‘cloinne’ incorrectly as cleath in qq. 33a, 33c, 34b, 38b, but correctly as clann in q. 38d. Furthermore, q. 33a is read as ‘Cle[th] Madadain mac ’man aigh (?)’ where the manuscript clearly has ‘Clann madadain macní a aigh’ (hair strokes over the letter i are reproduced here for clarity).  

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24 Compare also no. 50 q. 35c where ‘fhiud’ (clear in the manuscript), which leaves the line a syllable too long and where the question mark should presumably be replaced by superscript s. The reading of the manuscript is merely a spelling for fhiú with superfluous dh and the line contains the required number of syllables as the following unstressed short vowel is to be elided (dobrai [sic] an déth ré righ Banba).  

25 The manuscript (Book of Uí Mháine, f. 111r) reads ‘feradhach (f with suspension stroke) feradhach’ in an instance of dittography. This has been passed over in Miscellany. Such items are sometimes not recorded in the volume (e.g. RIA 23 C 18, 71 corresponding to no. 50 q. 27ab (lines written after 26ab and struck through), 29a (gan expuncted); Book of Uí Mháine, ff. 111r-111v corresponding to no. 457 qq. 26c (erasure), 59b (erasure), 67a (dittography), 73d (erasure), 75b (erasure). At other times, such items are noted, as at e.g. no. 108 q. 31d (where ‘f’, which is struck out in the manuscript, is enclosed in round brackets; the employment of round brackets fails to indicate that the words are in fact expunged in the manuscript since we are told that round brackets are used editorially to ‘enclose letters which should be ignored’ (p. xxxi); no. 457 q. 39c (‘dsaga’ enclosed in brackets), and on p. 710 (ad no. 457 qq. 22d, 24a, 62a) where it is stated that words are ‘deleted’ (of these words, only one is erased in the manuscript (recorded as ‘fae deleted after first word’, where, however, the erasure occurs at the end of the line preceding ‘fae’), perhaps the note is intended to indicate an editorial intervention in the case of the other words). Note also the reproduction of a scribal signature at no. 335 immediately following q. 38d (on the signature, see Catalogue of Irish manuscripts in the Royal Irish Academy Fasc. 25, 3093, 3108-9).  


27 Similar instances in other transcriptions include no. 50 q. 22ab ‘Do chath (Brian a hEachtga án / cheithre catha ’na chómhdhái)’ where ‘chath’ is to be expanded as ‘chuaidh’ (compare Goedheer, Irish and Norse traditions, 48 who reads ‘Dochuaidh’ correctly); cf. also ibid. qq. 4b (meathach (: Cathuigh) meathuidh; 49d (ga(ch) for go, as in Goedheer, 46, 50).
(vi) *Misi a Aimi ar h’inchaibh fein* (no. 335) q. 3a is misread as ‘[…]b fich d’[fh]eirghi ruind’ (apparently interpreted as including the word *fearg* in spite of the lenited *g*) where the manuscript has ‘[…] h’fich d’eirghi ruind’ ‘your enmity rising against me’.

(b) *Erroneous word division*

(i) *A eólcha [sic leg.] Éireann airde* (no. 13) is reproduced from the Book of Úi Mhainé (see comments at p. 00 above). It provides a list of kings of Ireland. Q. 13c is reproduced in *Miscellany* as follows: Crimthand Nua gan eact gan tar. The Book of Úi Mhainé (f. 80v) divides the words ‘Nua gan eact’ of *Miscellany* as ‘nuaga neact’ and the line is to be understood as listing the two kings Crimthand and Nuada Neacht.28

(ii) *Táth aoinfhir ar iath Maineach* (no. 457) q. 20cd: a sodh’ as dir da drongaib / fin caol ar[a] urlonnaib. The superscript *r* above ‘sodh’ indicates that there is a problem with rhyme (p. xxxi), here *sōdh* and *caol* do not rhyme, while [a] has been supplied in the second line for the syllable count. However, *caol* should have been presented as ‘’ca ol’ (‘being drunk’) which provides rhyme with *sōdh*, the correct number of syllables (leaving no need to supply [a]), and makes perfect sense in the context of *fion* ‘wine’. Additional instances in the same poem are found at, e.g., qq. 70b ‘dol o mairg (feinnigh Faithleann)’ for ‘do lomairg’ (‘lo’ is added above the line) and 73b ‘(glor gach filid) a tigearnais’ for ‘(glor gach filid) at ingnais’ (: glais), the last example also involving misinterpretation of an *n*-stroke as a suspension stroke.

(iii) *A-tá sunn rulla na ríogh* (no. 55) q. 6ab: Cairbre as Énna laemda / Angoil 7 Bogaine a mbrathair. The first line is hypometric, while the number of syllables envisaged by the editors in the second line is unclear. There is also no end-rhyme. The lines of the couplet have been incorrectly divided and *a ngoil* ‘their valour’ made into a personal name (although *bráthair* is singular; it refers to *Bogaine*). The couplet should read ‘Cairbre as Énna laemda a ngoil / agus Bogaine a mbrathair’. Note also, for example, ibid. qq. 16bc, 24c: tuc do Cairbre Congloine (for ‘co ngloine’); is do duthaigh Cairpri iarsin (for ‘iar sin’); no[ch]a dlihtear dib d’o[i]neoch (for ‘noch a ... do neoch’).

(iv) *Aonta deise ag dion Laighean* (no. 51) q. 14ab: A n-airrge thiar do termaigh / grian. The transcription is presented as containing a third plural possessive pronoun or the preposition *i*

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(‘their sea’ / ‘into a sea’?) for ‘An airrge (= An [fh]airrge) thiar do tirmaigh / grian ...’ ‘The sun caused the sea to dry up in the west’.

(v) Cia so agras cóir um Chruachain (no. 99) q. 34c: mar ta do coir ac Leth Luachra. A placename apparently consisting of two elements, Leth Luachra, is introduced here for ‘a cleth (Luachra)’ ‘o scion of Luachair’.

(vi) Ní leis féin a bhfaghann Aodh (no. 368) q. 14a: B[o?]than úaisleadh ar ghort nGall. The manuscript has ‘Botha núaisleagh’.

It will be clear that most of the instances presented above also involve redividing the text of the manuscripts. Thus they amount to silent emendations.

(c) Minor errors

The category of minor errors encompasses marks of lenition and length which have either been omitted or reproduced mistakenly, on the one hand, and, on the other, italicisation of abbreviations which is either wrongly present or absent. For instance, tall e is marked in italics in no. 5 qq. 3b, 14d, 18a in spite of the policy laid out on p. xxx that that letter is not distinguished from ‘regular’ e. In no. 457 q. 27c ch is in italics, perhaps because it was added above the line, although this is not normally done for comparable material. Further examples have not been reproduced here so as not to increase the length of this review unduly. This is not, however, to suggest that such errors are unimportant. Indeed, it may be observed that errors of this kind are often so numerous as to combine to constitute a major flaw in their own right.

Assessment of transcriptions

It should be stressed that the examples introduced thus far are intended to be representative only. Their number could have been greatly increased, but enough will have been presented

29 RIA A iv 3 (743), 692. Cf. fál nuaisleagh in Seán Mac Airt, Leabhar Branach: The Book of the O’Byrnes (Dublin, 1944), no. 25 q. 3 l. 2707.
at this point. Many of the errors have a significant bearing, not only on the textual make-up of the poems, with implications for metrical and linguistic issues, but also on matters of interpretation and understanding. It is only fair to stress that a number of the transcriptions examined are relatively accurate and due acknowledgement must be made of this fact. Such instances include the poems beginning *An ullamh fós feis [na] Teamhrach* and *Cia as gairde ór gabhadh Éire*, where, however, it has been noted that quatrains have been omitted (see p. 00 above). R. A. Bretnach once remarked that ‘all of us who stare too intently and too long at a text are subject to occasional attacks of momentary blindness’, and one would, of course, be prepared to overlook an occasional slip in a work of this kind. However, the nature of the errors and the widely varying quality of transcriptions, as indicated above, are a cause for concern. In light of this, the accuracy of the transcriptions cannot be taken for granted and the reader will have to consult the manuscript as a matter of course. This is all the graver when taken in conjunction with the consideration that the reader will, in any event, have to consult other manuscripts in the case of poems which are extant in multiple copies.

(3) ‘Light’ editing

Another criterion according to which *Miscellany* may be assessed has to do with a policy of ‘very light’ editing adopted by the editors. The approach is described as follows: ‘The plan was to present as accurately as possible the text of the manuscripts, not a restored text’ (p. xxxi). This is commented on in further detail: ‘Finally, the director, who did the light editing, would be first to acknowledge the inconsistencies in this work, especially in regard to the use of square brackets to supply missing lenition, and in indentifying [sic] metrical shortcomings. It is to be hoped that these inconsistencies together with the challenge of interpretation will encourage scholars to take up the task of providing the complete editions which these poems richly deserve’ (ibid.). It will already be apparent from section (2) of the present review that one will have far more to do than simply interpreting and correcting inconsistencies, while the extent to which setting right such inconsistencies represents an incentive to embark on work of this kind is questionable.

According to the introduction (p. xxxi), light editing consists in the main of capitalisation and punctuation, such as hyphenation in compound verbs (e.g. *a-tá*).
supplying an apostrophe in the likes of m’anam. Hyphens are also inserted before infixed pronouns, e.g. ro-d len at p. 179 (q. 15d), a practice which readers of Old and Middle Irish will find unusual. Beyond such matters of presentation, editing is said to extend to the marking of metrical deficiencies by introducing certain suprascript letters, in addition to the use of round and square brackets to indicate that letters are to be removed or inserted (on which, see below).

The impression conveyed by the editors’ description of the method is that the texts have been, more or less, left as they are in the sources. This is surely the correct approach in a work of this kind. However, while it is true that little has been done with the texts, there are instances where the kind of emendation one would encounter in a restored text has been carried out or is suggested in the notes. But where it is done rarely, it is done in a rather slapdash manner, and it is questionable whether these poems do not deserve more than a haphazard treatment. So, for instance, in no. 27, there are notes to emend the text in four instances (qq. 5ab, 10d, 32a, 38a), all of which are unnecessary interventions as discussed below. On the other hand, there are numerous instances where textual difficulties in the same poem have gone unnoticed (9cd, 14ab, 16cd, 18cd, 19bcd, 23cd, 27c, 30d, 35ab, 36b, 41cd, 46cd) — I should add that this list is based on a cursory reading and may not be complete. Furthermore, it has not been observed that there is no dúnadh in the source of the transcription of the poem under discussion (Book of the O’Conor Don). That that text is incomplete is confirmed by the fact that another copy in RIA 23 L 17 (no. 3) has 11 quatrains after the point at which the Book of the O’Conor Don ends, the last of which supplies the dúnadh. (Compare p. ix where it is noted that poem no. 93 is incomplete but that there is a ‘longer version’ in another manuscript.)³¹ Overall, there is no consistency at all in the marking of metrical deficiencies (most go unnoticed) or in the introduction of suggested readings. Most of these emendations are insubstantial and would be made by anyone familiar enough with Classical Irish verse to be able to deal with the transcriptions in Miscellany, but if the intended reader requires such assistance, what is he or she to do in the majority of cases where no intervention or flagging has been undertaken as an aid?

Additional problems which present themselves are that: (i) in cases where more extensive emendations have been made, they are without authority as there is no explanation

³¹ Note also the comments on p. xxxi where it is stated that a suprascript x ‘marks an otherwise unmarked closure or dúnadh’. If I understand this correctly, it is intended to mean instances where the poem lacks a dúnadh in the source of transcription.
or discussion of them; (ii) as has already been observed, the treatment of poems in multiple copies is no different to those preserved in single witnesses (for example, in no. 110 q. 27a ‘thuigsin’ is emended to ‘samhla’, but other copies read aithghin; see further below); (iii) there are cases where portions of a manuscript text may be faded, illegible, torn or otherwise damaged, sometimes with total loss of text. This notwithstanding, the same practice of ‘light editing’ is adopted in such instances when supplying suggested readings, while the reader is not informed that whole words may have been supplied through conjecture. So, for example, in no. 335, qq. 30b, 31b, 36b read ‘buaidh crotha ar do cnos [mínréidh?]’; ‘a Aimi an earla geg[aigh?]’; ‘Caitilin do-clos [a morchlú?]’ (hypermetric). The words enclosed in brackets cannot be discerned in the manuscript and it may also be noted that, in the second instance, one wonders what word was understood by the editors at the end of 31a ‘ain’ (= aoin) and if it was felt that there was deibhidhe-rhyme between it and the suggested reading, géagaigh (Treas fochain uabair gac ain / a Aimi an earla geg[aigh?]).

Returning to the point made at the outset of this section, there are numerous questionable or unnecessary emendations. These include emendations to non-classical forms such as that in no. 330 q. 31a where ‘gus’ is read in place of agus for syllable count (recte is) and no. 292 q. 29a where ‘[a]-riamh’ is read for syllable count (the other copies have a substantially different reading in this line). A sample of other instances may now be presented.

(i) The poem beginning Aithnidh an gcrích-se a chlann Néill (no. 34) is reproduced from UCD-OFM A 25. There are additional copies in RIA 23 F 16 (no. 2), 23 L 17 (no. 3) and 23 O 78 (no. 1387). Q. 14 cd of that poem is given as follows in Miscellany: gein d(d)e[n] fein a bhoigchneas bhán / scoiltios go léir an Leamhán. I do not know what meaning could be derived from this text. A 25 reads the initial words as ‘geind de fein’ corresponding to ‘ging de féin’ (23 L 17, 101b; 23 O 78, 15) and ‘ginn de feain’ (23 F 16, 144a). In each copy, one recognises the proverb given by O’Rahilly as ding de féin a sgoitseann an leamhán ‘a wedge of itself splits the elm’. O’Rahilly, incidentally, cites the line from the present poem, and

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33 Similar instances in no. 376 are noted in Ó Riain, ‘Táinig an tráth nóna’, 185 n. 80.
34 Only the forms agus, is and ’s are given in Lambert McKenna, Bardic Syntactical Tracts (Dublin, 1944), 216.5-7, 8a.23, and 11b.15-17.
35 Thomas F. O’Rahilly, A miscellany of Irish proverbs (Dublin, 1922), 95 §299.
describes the proverb as ‘well-known in Southern Irish’; he also notes variants from Ulster
and Scotland where the oak tree replaces the elm.\(^{36}\)

(ii) The poem beginning *Abair riom, a Éire ógh* (Book of the O’Conor Don) or *Abair riom, a
Éire, a ógh* (RIA 23 L 17 (no. 3) and 23 O 78 (no. 1387)) is printed from the Book of the
O’Conor Don. The other copies differ significantly from the Book of the O’Conor Don in
places. There are suggestions in the notes to Miscellany to emend the text at no. 27 qq. 5ab,
10d, 32a and 38a. It may be observed that the text of the Book of the O’Conor Don for which
emendations are suggested is shared by the other copies of the poem in all but one instance
(the exception is 38a, in a quatrains uniquely found in the Book of the O’Conor Don). The text
of Miscellany reads as follows with the emendations suggested in the notes enclosed here in
brackets after the asterisked words:

(a) *Cuairt ar Fhóidla an fuinn *leagglóin (leargglóin) / *ma (ó) tuc Padraic primegnáidh;
(b) ní bhiam duit da *dergsgnoghadh (dheirmhniughadh);
(c) *Bú (biaidh) snuíadh corcra ar barr slechtaíbh;
(d) *Murnimh (múinim) leighius do Leith Cuinn.

It will be clear that these emendations are rather severe. This is all the truer in light of the fact
that the readings in such cases are shared with the other copies. In fact, in each instance the
suggested emendation is entirely unnecessary:

(a) *leagglóin* is a compound of *leag* and *glan* ‘of pure/precious stones’ and rhymes with -
eagnaidh (compare no. 110 q. 3c where a similar compound, *leiggil*, is allowed to stand);
(b) *má* may be interpreted in the sense ‘as indeed (in fact) is’; *dhearsgnoghadh [sic leg.]*
makes sense in the context (‘expounding’);\(^{37}\)
(c) *Bú* represents the future form of the copula, *budh*, as is required by the syntax of the
couplet (leg. *budh snaadhchorcra ar (ó LO) bhar sleachtaíbh, gach machaire a

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\(^{36}\) Ibid. See also Tomás Ó Máille, *Seanfhocla Chonnacht* I (Baile Átha Cliath, 1948), 187 §1244 and Niall Ó
Dónaill, *Foclóir Gaeilge-Béarla* (Baile Átha Cliath, 1977), s.v. *ding*. For *geind* in A 25, see *Dictionary of the
Irish Language, based mainly on Old and Middle Irish materials* (Dublin, 1913-75), s.v. *genn*.

\(^{37}\) On *má*, see Cuthbert Mháig Craith, *Dán na mBráthar Mionúr* II (Baile Átha Cliath, 1980) 391 s.v. *má* and
Lambert McKenna, *Aithdioghluim Dána* II (Dublin, 1940) 250 no. 65 26c n.; on *dhearsgnoghadh*, see
Mhuircheartaigh ‘every plain will be of distinguished appearance owing to your tracks, o Muircheartach’;

(d) Mur nim leighiuis ‘like poison as (lit. of) a cure’. The idea is that of unpleasant medicine, and it may be observed that the line occurs in the context of a metaphorical reference to the honorand as liaigh ‘physician’ (Book of the O’Conor Don f. 297, q. 39cd (not in LO) gach ní is lochta ar liaigh oile / molta ar úa mBriain mBóroimhe ‘everything which is to be faulted in any other physician is to be praised in the descendant of Brian Bóroimhe’).

(iii) Iomdha riocht i dtéid Teamhair is found in RIA 23 L 17 (no. 3). In the poem a conceit is adopted whereby Tara is said to have had many different, local incarnations throughout Ireland such as Cashel and Cruachu. That is to say Tara is equated with residences associated with kingship in other parts of the country. Q. 7ab of that poem is read in Miscellany no. 283 as ‘[F?]ás as almsa don éigse / nír fhás dá adhbha is uaisle’. The manuscript clearly reads ‘Nás’ for ‘[F?]ás’, although one will not find this out anywhere in Miscellany. The tentative emendation is certainly a disimprovement as it misses the point by doing away with the equation of Tara with Naas, one of the great royal residences often mentioned in poems in praise of patrons’ houses.38 The couplet may be rendered ‘Naas which is alms to the poets / there has not arisen two nobler dwellings (i.e. Naas and Tara)

(iv) Mór ar cách comoin an Choimdelheadh (no. 345) q. 83cd toirnid (?) *fedh (MS fégh) ar crois in Comdhi[odh] / sen dod bhois ar dt[oir]neamh thu. The asterisk leads the reader to a note on p. 708 which suggests reading ‘seadh’ for ‘fedh’. The quatrain addresses a man who goes to hear mass and may be regarded as giving a series of instructions. The manuscript reading may be retained and the couplet rendered ‘genuflect (toirind), behold the cross of the Lord / after genuflecting bless yourself with your palm’.39

As in the case of section (2) above, instances such as those presented here inform on textual questions as well as those of interpretation and comprehension.

38 For the residences, see, for example, Láimhbheartach Mac Cionnaith, Dioghlaim Dána (Baile Átha Cliath, 1938), no. 68 qq. 7-13. For comparison of patrons’ houses to residences including Naas, see Pádraig A. Breatnach, Téamaí taighde Nua-Ghaeilge (Maigh Nuad, 1997), 104-9.
39 Further instances include q. 86a ‘Dia [e]adrom tra(th) is tine iffirn’ (for a personal form of the preposition idir with initial a, see adrad in IGT II 2060); q. 65a ‘larmeirgi is cai [i]nar cintaib’, unstressed [i] would be elided after the preceding vowel, leg. larmeirgi agus cai ‘nar cintaib), and no. 13 q. 14a Ag sin an [t-loctur, where the emendation to nominative an t-ochtur is unnecessary as ag sin may be followed by the accusative case.
(4) Miscellaneous issues

Many other issues arise in the work under review. However, only a selection can be offered here.

(i) Dating: It was noted earlier that the table of contents to the volume often includes information relevant to dating. This would appear to have been based on Katharine Simms’ database. However, in that resource it is indicated if there is some doubt as to the certainty of the date. In Miscellany there is no indication that the dating may be in question.

(ii) Metrics: There appears to be some confusion as to the nature of ógláchas of deibhidhe. So, for instance, the metres of no. 13 and no. 55 are described as ‘deibhí for the most part, ógláchas’ and ‘mixture, mainly deibhidhe, ógláchas’ respectively. These definitions represent a misunderstanding of the nature of the looser form of this metre. In that form end-rhymes may be of equal syllabic length. The salient feature of the metre is that the end-rhyme is between adjacent lines (ab and cd respectively). This type of deibhidhe is termed deibide nguilibnech in the Middle Irish metrical tracts and is identified as ógláchas of deibhidhe in the seventeenth-century prosodies printed by Mac Aogáin in Graiméir Ghaeilge na mBráthar Mionúr.\(^{40}\) This misunderstanding leads to some unusual word divisions in, e.g., no. 50 qq. 5c ann-sin (: Íomhair);\(^{41}\) 18b Locha Dáriach (: ttriath); 48a (Brian) béil bhinn (: Eirinn).

Other metrical issues arise in the poem beginning Seacht ngrádha fileadh fuair Aonghus [leg. –as?] (no. 419). This is a poem in brúilingeacht. It has been divided into quatrains in Miscellany, although poems of this kind regularly have extended verses. The divisions in such poems can be established on the basis of the end-rhymes and verse initials are sometimes indicated in the manuscripts. The presentation of this poem contrasts with no. 327, for example, which is also in brúilingeacht, but is presented in the form of 23 extended verses as opposed to quatrains. What the definition of no. 304 as ‘brúilingeacht without alliteration’ means is obscure to the present reviewer.

\(^{41}\) For ann sin, see Osborn Bergin, Sgéalaigheacht Chéitinn (Dublin, 1931), 81 l. 70 n.
(iii) Proper names: Proper names may go unnoticed, for example, Gaibhnenn, Shiodhmhoill, nDoigre, Fhinn, Thaidhean, Aidne and Cláir in the following: Do cumadh a cceirdca gaibhnenn, foirenn shiodhmhoill a sith Lir, do s[e]nnedh ceol mur cheol ndoigre,42 sgiath fhinn nach facus re dáigh (no. 46 qq. 11a, 19b, 21c, 24b); do buain glais do ghéig thaidhean (no. 98 q. 9b); is fiadh clethbain aidne d’fis (no. 99 q. 20d), bile clár ro ba cara (no. 184 q. 12b).

(iv) Orthography and normalisation: The practice of normalising initial lines as titles for each poem is taken to extremes in no. 12 (beginning A Eoghain ra haichheadh t’airm in H 2. 7, 228), where the preverbal particle (rolra) is ‘normalised’ as do (A Eoghan [sic], do haithheadh t’airm). A practice that amounts to normalisation is also encountered in the transcriptions sometimes. For instance, lenition is not generally supplied where words are written plene, although examples do occur, while e[i] is found for e and a[o]i for ai on occasion.43 Note also the unusual looking cuirfe[idh] in no. 53 q. 2b; various representations of the surname Mhág Craith, MaCraith (no. 27), Ma[g] Craith (no. 375), Mac [C]raith (no. 306), and the suggestion to read ‘sloingid’ as ‘sloindidh’ in no. 13 q. 1b (according to the note on p. 703), where -dh represents normalisation, but nd does not, at least not for Early Modern Irish.

(v) Expansion of abbreviations: A letter is not uncommonly supplied in square brackets where that letter could simply have been included as part of the expansion of a manuscript abbreviation, e.g. no. 457 q. 11a cloinn[e] for cloinne; no. 55 qq. 7d, 24b Con[all]/Con[aill] for .con., which could have been expanded Conall or Conail as required in the context, and ig[h]lid[h] (e.g. no. 457 qq. 11ac, 25b, 28c, 29a, 39a, 48c, 61d as against ibid. qq. 2cd, 9cd, 12c, 13d, 28d etc. where h has not been supplied).

(vi) Various points: (a) Treatment of explicits: The treatment of catchwords at the ends of poems which repeat all or part of the initial line is unusual. What appears to be the normal practice is that one, or sometimes two words, are reproduced followed by ellipsis, e.g. ‘Nior ... ’ for ‘Nior tógbadh éruic íosa’ (no. 376). The ellipsis occurs whether or not text found in the manuscript has been omitted in Miscellany, e.g. ‘Da chuireadh ... ’ (no. 144) (only these

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42 See Dictionary of the Irish language s.v. Doigre where this line is cited as an example of the personal name.
43 See e.g. no. 215 q. 19d ghealmhuig[h]; no. 99 qq. 3b f[ei]djm, 8d t[i]dh, 11a d’e[i]js, 18bd ma[o]ith, Fra[o]ich etc. as against ibid. 5a ngemil[ib], 11a Felimidh, 11bd hAi, fai, etc. Note also no. 345 q. 71c gre[i]m (MS grefn) (: beim).
two words form the catchword), or even if the catchword is relevant to establishing the first line (e.g. no. 21, 110, 383, 389).

(b) Mór ar cách comaoín an Choimhdheadh (no. 345) q. 30b is marked as lacking linking alliteration between a and b, although it has been suggested by McManus elsewhere that this is compensated for by a triple alliteration in line a.\(^44\) Perhaps this should have been mentioned in a note.

(c) Slán do na saoithibh sealga (no. 431) is attributed tentatively to ‘Gofraidh Fionn Ó Dálaigh?’. There is no attribution in the manuscript and the reader who does not recall that it has been suggested elsewhere that the poem may possibly be his will puzzle over the attribution.\(^45\)

(d) An English translation is reproduced in the notes p. 704 but the translation mentioned on p. 705 (ad no. 151) is not.

(e) A curious slash appears on p. 55 before poem no. 53.

This list represents only a small selection of examples.

(5) General assessment

The purpose of the book is, according to the introduction, ‘to present the texts in a form in which, it is hoped, they can be read and enjoyed as literature’ (p. xxx). This is in distinction to the digital corpus which ‘it is felt ... will be used mainly as a tool for research’ (ibid.).

Attempting to judge the level of a reader’s enjoyment of the transcriptions in Miscellany as literature is a somewhat subjective matter and falls largely outside the scope of an academic review of a work of this nature. Nevertheless, it might be suggested that Miscellany will make for very challenging reading indeed. In support of this, one has only to point to the absence of the usual aids which accompany any good modern edition (a text established on the basis of multiple copies, where more than a single manuscript witness is


extant, including a critical apparatus, commentary on the subject matter, historical and literary background, notes and translation). The reader will readily be able to decide this issue by comparing the transcriptions in *Miscellany* with such editions. Certainly, anyone who has ever edited a bardic poem from multiple or single manuscript copies will be aware of the great time and effort which must first be expended on textual matters, and the many readings required, before one can hope to achieve an appreciation of the overall literary merits of any given piece. Raising this point is not, it might be added, to judge *Miscellany* for what it is not in light of the stated purpose that the transcriptions ‘be read and enjoyed as literature’. Indeed, the errors and other matters discussed above show that the editors did not always understand the poems, so how can a more casual reader of literature?

*Miscellany* represents something of an unhappy half-way house. It is not an anthology which the scholar and general reader can enjoy as literature in the same way that they might use Gerard Murphy’s *Early Irish Lyrics*.\(^{46}\) Nor is it a generally reliable scholarly tool such as Binchy’s *Corpus iuris Hibernici* which provides, with little intervention, ‘[a]ll the materials on which to base a new critical edition’, as conveniently summarised recently by Ní Dhonnchadha.\(^{47}\) We are told in the introduction to the work that limiting of *Miscellany* to single copies was due to concerns of time and resources (p. xxix). One wonders if the editors would not have been better advised to present the text of the manuscript copies, taking the time to reproduce them carefully and accurately, while also taking other copies into account (perhaps publishing them in separate volumes over a number of years), and leaving the next stage entirely to future editors and investigators. As it is the attempt to present a diplomatic edition combined in places with an edited version has resulted in the production of neither.

Transcription is a time-consuming and painstaking task which is far from merely mechanical. In *Miscellany* it appears to have been rushed and not properly checked in many places, while the work of adding suggested readings and marking metrical deficiencies has been conducted in a haphazard way. In addition, the exclusion of other copies of the poems is an insurmountable obstacle to the usefulness of the work. As it stands, it will be clear that *Miscellany* cannot be used without recourse to the manuscripts, in cases of either single or multiple copy transmission. It is also clear at a minimum that the whole work would have


benefitted from a process of peer review prior to publication and it is deeply regrettable that all this has to be pointed out by a reviewer. No one can derive any pleasure from such a state of affairs, but, unfortunately, the most generous description that could be offered of *Miscellany* is that of the curate’s egg.