

POETICS AND THE BARDIC IMAGINATION*

1.

THE divide that separates ‘bardic poetry’ of the classical Modern Irish period from the poetical tradition of Middle Irish that precedes it is sufficiently wide that it is possible by comparing them to narrow down the advent of the new medium historically with remarkable precision. As is well known bardic poetry is the product of a twofold process of standardisation. For pronunciation and grammar it is based mainly on the usage current in the second half of the twelfth century, with a jettisoning of most of the archaic and artificial features that are the mark of Middle Irish. On the prosodic side it continues the long-established tradition of syllabic metres but fixes stringent rules for the use of ornament in these (rime, assonance, consonance, and alliteration), in a manner so defined that the progress of the regularisation can be monitored to within a short few years before 1200. The process also appears to have involved a move to drastically reduce the number of actual metres practised vis-à-vis the multiplicity permitted in what went before. It is commonly accepted that the introduction of *dán díreach* or ‘strict metre’ — the term used to describe the new phenomenon — can only have arisen as a consequence of a decision taken by professional poets acting together. As Brian Ó Cuív has put it: ‘My interpretation of the evidence is that some time towards the end of the twelfth century an influential body of [poets] produced the linguistic foundations of classical Modern Irish and at the same time agreed to impose the discipline of *dán díreach* — one might be tempted to call it a prosodic straightjacket — on their profession.’¹ This assessment, it may be observed, makes no mention of the literary dimension of bardic poetry, although Ó Cuív seems unlikely to have thought to diminish it, considering that innovation is no less prominent in matters of content and literary conventions than in the prosody and idiom of the classical style. Truth to tell of course bardic poetry’s literary qualities have tended to fall beneath the radar in commentary concerning its beginnings, not to mention its later history. (On a previous occasion when addressing a Harvard University audience my topic was a critical examination of a seventeenth-century poem of supplication which I conducted by drawing on an awareness of the inheritance of medieval rhetorical theory as a means towards a more complete and satisfying appreciation of the aesthetic qualities

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¹ Brian Ó Cuív, ‘Some developments in Irish metrics’, *Éigse* 12/4 (1968) 273–90 (290).

of such poetry.² The purpose of the present paper is to penetrate more deeply behind the scenes in search of this inheritance.)

The contention that influential poets might have convened towards the end of the twelfth century to determine jointly on issues affecting their profession is plausible when considered in the light of occasional testimony concerning such professional gatherings from the seventh to the seventeenth centuries. But something in the way of direct evidence of a convention to launch *dán díreach* is provided by the well known seventeenth-century historian Dubhaltach Mac Fhir Bhisigh in the short treatise we have from him on Irish writers entitled *Ughdair Éireann* in the Oxford manuscript Rawl. B. 480, ff. 55r-66v.³ At one point he supplies a list of Ireland's principal poetic families (*áos dána Érenn*), closing it with an addendum consisting of three couplets in *deibhidhe* metre. Here the 'five heads of kin who are guardians of our profession' are named, Ó Duineachair, Ó Dearcáin, Ó Cillín, Ó Coirrdhearcáin, and lastly Ó Diarmadán 'of the pure poems / upon cold mountainya Lagán of the Ulstermen'.

*Atáid cúigear ceann fine / le coimhead ar ccerdi-ne,
Ó Duineachair, Ó Dearcáin, / Ó Cillín, Ó Coirrdhearcáin,
Ó Diarmadán na nduan nglan / ar shliabhLagán fhuar Uladh.*

Then follows the comment that 'people belonging to me say that it was those heads of kin who began the poetry which is practised by poets up until now, although it is less esteemed today' (*Aderid áos leam fén gurob íad na cinn fhine-sin do thosaigh an dán leantur le háos dána gus anois, gidh neamh-ordharca aníú*).⁴ Mac Fhir Bhisigh does not give the source of the couplets cited, nor have I seen other evidence in the records to connect the surnames mentioned with the practice of poetry (with the exception of an Ó Cillín in the seventeenth century who was possibly an acquaintance of Dubhaltach's).⁵ Still experience tells us that we ought not to be over-sceptical of the tradition. Certainly it bolsters the theory of bardic poetry as a product of a collective deliberation by experts, and the association with Ulster in the final couplet (whether applying to Ó Diarmadán only or to the group as a whole, which seems open from the context) may also be significant.

The historical and socio-political environment in which *dán díreach* comes into being is generally identified by reference to two momentous and broadly consecutive event-sequences. These are the twelfth-century reorganisation of the Irish church and the Anglo-Norman invasion which followed in the aftermath (1169), transforming Ireland into a 'trembling sod' (*fót crithaig*)

² Pádraig A. Breatnach, 'The aesthetics of Irish bardic composition: an analysis of *Fuaras iongnadh, a fhir chumaim* by Fearghal Óg Mac an Bhaird', *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies* 42 (Winter 2001) 51–72.

³ Edited from the unique copy by James Carney, 'De scriptoribus hibernicis', *Celtica* 1 (1950) 86–110.

⁴ *Ibid.* 92, ll. 136 f.

⁵ Aonghus Ó Cillín, a Connacht poet patronised by the Dillon family of Co. Mayo, for whom see Katharine Simms, 'Irish Bardic Poetry Database', <http://www.bardic.celt.dias.ie/> (s.n.).

of warfare as the annals testify. Neither happening can be classed as directly causal for our purposes, but there is no gainsaying that such root-and-branch changes as were implemented in church organisation affected the professional lives of poets in the period. Reforms introduced between the late eleventh and mid-twelfth century culminated in the acknowledgement of the primacy of the see of Armagh (1152). A steep decline ensued in the influence of many old monastic centres, which for long had been both the mainstay of church organisation and a principal prop of those engaged in the vernacular tradition of secular learning. From 1142 onwards in particular this eclipse was rapidly hastened by the development of a network of foundations by monks of the Cistercian Order introduced into Ireland by St Malachy/Máel Máedóc Ua Morgair (d. 1148). The ethos of the Cistercian movement precluded any continuation of a role for monasteries such as they formerly had fulfilled in support of learning. Whether through coincidence, or as a direct consequence of the altered circumstances, or a mixture of both, it is around this time of reform of the ecclesiastical environment that lay families learned in poetry (*filidheacht*) and history (*seanchas*), many of them lay holders of hereditary ecclesiastical offices and connected to the older centres now diminished, begin to be documented in annalistic and other sources. From this circle a new professional class emerges quickly into view, masters of schools and newly attached as office-holders in *filidheacht* and *seanchas* to powerful families, their compositions transmitted with names ascribed and marked by a self-confidence and sense of superior status that only the very suddenness of their ascent could justify. We should perhaps expect to find among these families those five founders of *dán díreach* mentioned in the tradition cited by Mac Fhir Bhisigh — but in fact we do not. Of the surnames only one, Ó Cillín (mod. *Killeen*), is later traceable with any assurance. According to McLysaght a branch of that family was located at Ballykilleen, Co. Mayo, and another is identified as ‘an arenagh [*airchinnech*] family of Clonmacnois’.⁶ We saw of course that the couplets cited seem to associate the group with Ulster (*ar shliabhLagán fhuar Uladh*),⁷ which might be taken to mean not that the experts named were Ulstermen, but that they assembled in Ulster from where the promulgation may have issued. In which case, what suggestion is more plausible than that the convention at which they assembled would have taken place at the fulcrum of Ulster’s newly affirmed primacy, the city of Armagh. Under the old regime of course the lay abbots of Armagh were often also learned office-holders bearing the title of *fer léighinn*.⁸ Ought we to speculate further then that the assembly and deliberations of the poets at this time came about at the instigation of newly-installed ecclesiastical administrators? Clearly there

⁶ Edward MacLysaght, *The surnames of Ireland* (4th edition, Dublin 1985) 181.

⁷ The placename Lagán (Lagan) occurs in townlands in counties Armagh, Cavan, Louth and Monaghan; see *General alphabetical index to the townlands and towns, parishes and baronies of Ireland. Based on the Census of Ireland for the year 1851* (Dublin 1861, repr. Baltimore 1992) s.n.

⁸ Concerning this background, see Gerard Murphy, ‘A poem in praise of Aodh Úa Foirréidh, Bishop of Armagh (1032–1056)’ in Sylvester O’Brien, O.F.M. (ed.), *Measgra i gcúimhne Mhichíl Uí Chléirigh* (Dublin 1944) 140–64.

is a danger at this point of venturing too far from the realm of twelfth-century reality to feel secure.

2.

What I have just outlined is as it were a variation on the standard account of the emergence of bardic poetry in the late twelfth century, whereby its establishment presents as a collective act of self-regulation by the poets (with or without ecclesiastical encouragement) in response to a great upheaval which threatened to extinguish ancient privileges. The principal drawback inherent in such accounts, however, is their limitations: they contextualise the development, but they do not explain it. More importantly perhaps their effect is to cast the medium of bardic poetry itself from the very outset in the character of a ‘homogenised product’ (in James Carney’s phrase); a ‘cultural phenomenon’ articulating ‘a collective sense of identity’;⁹ — a ‘corporate literature’, no less (according to the recent *Cambridge history of Irish literature*),¹⁰ with all that that implies for any prospect of adjudging as an Irish ‘littérature d’imagination’ what comes after in the four or five succeeding centuries after 1200, depending on whether we are referring to the continuing practice of bardic poetry up until approximately 1600 in Ireland, or in Scotland where it survives until 1745. What I wish to advocate here is an alternative to the view of bardic poetry as a kind of by-product of medieval language planning and metrical regularisation, and to approach it as a literary movement in its own right that arose out of a threefold shared striving after purity of language, prosodic perfection and imaginative expression. Strictly speaking when looked at from this perspective the origins and *ultima ratio* of bardic poetry belong within the confines of a system of poetics embracing both technical aspects of the correct use of language and metre on one hand and rhetorical and stylistic precepts and techniques on the other. A remarkable amount of material specifically dealing with metrical and grammatical usage is extant both from the Middle Irish tradition immediately preceding the rise of bardic poetry and from Classical Irish itself; and a considerable volume of scholarly commentary on each of these *corpora* is available. But the same sources also include occasional explicit references to rhetorical or stylistic aspects of poetic expression which so far have been ignored to a large extent, while a wide range of implicit rhetorical data remains to be elucidated through critical analysis and close reading directed at the actual poetry itself. The regulatory system such a combination of explicit and implicit components will bring to light, as I believe, has much in common with — and may owe something to — the *ars dictaminis* or theory of composition which Latin scholars on the continent of Europe were aiming to create from the late

⁹ James Carney, ‘Literature in Irish, 1169–1534’, in Art Cosgrove (ed.), *A new history of Ireland II* (Oxford 1987) 688–707 (694).

¹⁰ Mark Caball, ‘The literature of later medieval Ireland, 1200–1600: from the Normans to the Tudors. Part I: poetry’, in Margaret Kelleher and Philip O’Leary (ed.), *The Cambridge history of Irish Literature I* (to 1890) (Cambridge 2006) 74–109 (76).

eleventh century onwards at the great cathedral schools of France and northern Italy, and at centres in England a little later. The record of this movement is preserved in numerous treatises of varying length in prose and verse directed towards the young (*ad rudium doctrinam* that is) and which were compiled to supplement oral instruction in the arts of writing verses and/or letter-writing. Manuals specifically concerned with the former category — the *dictamen metricum* (also called the *ars versificandi*) which is the particular focus of our interest — commonly approach their subject as comprising some or all of the following: prosody (the alphabet of vowels and consonants; syllables and feet; and description of the various metres); figures of diction (*ornamenta*, colours, tropes); invention and composition (*inventio* and *dispositio*); and finally solecisms and faults of style (so-called *vitia* or *barbarismi*). Examples, models and set-pieces to be imitated form part of the staple content also. It is important to be aware, I think, of the varying extent to which particular elements are made the subject of treatment in these sources, however. Much more space is normally devoted to the embellishment of diction and the choice and arrangement of words in the individual verse (and distich) than aspects of structure and composition, for instance, a consideration which underscores both the elementary objectives of such handbooks and the fact that they are usually intended to complement but not to substitute for a taught programme. The more comprehensive and ambitious of the twelfth- and thirteenth-century handbooks, such as the *Ars versificatoria* of Matthew of Vendôme, written in prose before 1175, and the *Poetria nova* of the Englishman Geoffrey of Vinsauf, modelled on the preceding, composed in verse about 1210, both of which were edited with commentary by Edmond Faral in 1924, are expressly intended for the use of both pupils and teachers.¹¹ In each case issues of strictly metrical technique are subordinate, and the real focus is on poetic diction.¹² Apart from serving that primary didactic purpose, however, these works contribute more generally to the culture of the epoch in which they were written. This is because they pluck *poetria* out of its traditionally subordinate status as the ancillary of either grammar or rhetoric — twin components (with dialectic) of the so-called *trivium* — and assign to it the status of an independent subject of professional study. The prestige of its practitioners, the poets themselves, is thereby elevated so that as *docti* they are

¹¹ Edmond Faral, *Les arts poétiques du XIIe et du XIIIe siècle* (Paris 1924, repr. 1971); ‘Ars versificatoria’ (Matthew of Vendôme) pp. 109–93 [= hereafter AV, accompanied by references to numbered book and section (editorial) followed by page-reference]; ‘Poetria nova’ (Geoffrey of Vinsauf) pp. 197–62. For the dates mentioned see Faral, op. cit. 3, 16 (respectively). Recent research has proposed a date ‘probably during the 1160s’ for Matthew’s work (Carsten Wollin, ‘Beiträge zur Werkchronologie und Rezeption des Matthäus von Vendôme’, *Sacris Erudiri* 45 (2006), 327–52 (350)). Some refinements of Faral’s dating for the works of Geoffrey Vinsauf are made by Martin Camargo, ‘From *Liber versuum* to *Poetria nova*: The evolution of Geoffrey of Vinsauf’s masterpiece’, *Journal of Medieval Latin* 21 (2011) 1–16 *passim*. (A translation of AV, with abridgements, has been published by Ernest Gallo, ‘Matthew of Vendôme: introductory treatise on the art of poetry’, *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 118/1 (February 1974) 51–91.)

¹² For discussion, see Paul Klopsch, *Einführung in die Dichtungslehren des lateinischen Mittelalters* (Darmstadt 1980) (esp. 109 f.).

set to enjoy the same esteem that expertise confers as of right in the practice of other branches of the curriculum of both the *trivium* and the *quadrivium* that made up the complement of the seven liberal arts (*septem artes*).

It is not by any means far-fetched to perceive a parallel between the changing circumstances and practices among school theoreticians on the continent and the response of their professional counterparts in Ireland in the run-up to the advent of bardic poetry in the twelfth century. This is not to assert that the literary movement in Ireland was triggered by direct influence or a process of borrowing from abroad, however. An argument cogently made in the context of the study of the medieval Latin arts of poetry some years ago by the American scholar W. D. Patt is that the *ars dictaminis* was not ‘a localized product’ that ‘spread to the rest of Europe from individual centres which successively dominated the field’ — Bologna, Orléans, Paris. Rather it constitutes ‘a cultural development’ both firmly rooted in rhetorical tradition as represented in works by Cicero, Horace, Donatus and Isidore, and emerging out of it by ‘a long, gradual process of change through adaptation and changing needs’. This development, Patt argues, occurred ‘more or less simultaneously in Italy, France, Germany and perhaps other parts of Europe as well’.¹³ The species of spontaneous dissemination of intellectual culture postulated here may well provide the framework in which to explain and accommodate a few shared elements of European rhetorical tradition traceable among explicit references to aspects of poetic composition and expression in Irish sources from the eleventh century onwards, and which I wish to document briefly in what follows. But whether Patt’s wider analysis is accepted or not, it is well to remind ourselves that there is no shortage of confirmation from the eleventh and twelfth centuries of actual cultural commerce between Ireland, France, and Germany, and of course England. For example, the founder of the Cistercian Order, St Bernard of Clairvaux, records in his life of the great reformer of the Irish Church, St Malachy, his friend, whom we have already mentioned, that he introduced chanting and psalmody at the canonical hours into his churches ‘after the fashion of the whole world’.¹⁴ Moreover, a quantity of manuscript evidence showing the activity of Irish scribes at various continental centres is extant, Paris and Chartres among them, and not to mention the newly-founded Schottenklöster at Regensburg (*Ratisbona*) and Würzburg (*Herbipolis*), with their strong links to Munster and Cashel, in the first half of the twelfth century especially, concerning which I have myself written in some detail in an article published in *Celtica* (1980).¹⁵ In this context I may add that the Benedictine foundation

¹³ W. D. Patt, ‘The early “ars dictaminis” as response to a changing society’, *Viator* 9 (1978) 133–55 (153, 139).

¹⁴ *Vita Malachiae*, Migne, *PL* 182, col. 1079B, cap. 1, 7: *Hinc est, quod hodieque in illis ad horas canonicas cantatur et psallitur juxta morem universae terrae*; cf. H. J. Lawlor, *St Bernard of Clairvaux’s Life of St Malachy of Armagh* (London 1920) 17–18.

¹⁵ Pádraig A. Breatnach, ‘The origins of the Irish monastic tradition at Ratisbon (Regensburg)’, *Celtica* 13 (1980) 58–77. See also idem, *Die Regensburger Schottenlegende. Libellus de fundacione ecclesie Consecrati Petri. Untersuchung und Textausgabe* (Münchener Beiträge zur Mediävistik und Renaissance-Forschung, Band 27) (Bei der Arceo-Gesellschaft, München 1977).

Kloster Prüfening in Regensburg, located close to the Schottenkloster of St Jakob, is the origin of a twelfth-century volume which was recently described as ‘le plus fameux des manuscrits d’*ars dictandi* que nous possédions’. This manuscript is Munich, Clm 14784, with contents that include instructional works by Alberic of Montecassino (late 11th cent.), whose *Dictaminum radii* is commonly recognised as the prototype of the twelfth-century *ars dictaminis*, and in addition an early copy of portion of one of the most comprehensive manuals of its kind, the *Liber artis omnigenum dictaminum* of Bernard of Bologna, composed before 1145, still unpublished but comprising a *Dictamen metricum*, a *Dictamen rhythmicum* and a *Dictamen prosaicum*.¹⁶

3.

Just as the mainly twelfth-century Latin tracts we have been discussing are in a certain sense school records, the metrical and grammatical literature extant from Old, Middle, and Early Modern Irish sources, adverted to a little earlier, also constitutes a body of teaching materials intended to supplement oral training for aspiring poets (*filid*), while of course not offering more than a very incomplete picture of what such programmes could and did entail. The bulk of the earlier stratum of this material, from Old and Middle Irish that is, to deal firstly with it, was edited by Thurneysen as *Mittelirische Verslehren*, tracts I-IV.¹⁷ These are almost entirely metrical in content, with one exception. Tract II in the series (MV II)¹⁸ described by the editor as ‘ein Lehrbuch für den *fili*, den gelehrten Dichter’, goes back to the eleventh century in its present form (although with a core dated to the early tenth century),¹⁹ and its relevance to this discussion lies both in the date so close to the emergence of the Latin handbooks already mentioned, and inasmuch as it contains what I choose to see as a small primarily rhetorical component that merits attention. The tract proper as it now is sets out the curriculum in accordance with a twelve-year study-cycle, and it is exceptional in documenting not merely metres to be studied (rhyming syllabic forms as well as earlier *rosca*) but aspects of grammar

¹⁶ Anne-Marie Turcan-Verkerk, ‘Le *Liber artis omnigenum dictaminum* de maître Bernard (vers 1145): états successifs et problèmes d’attribution (Première partie)’, *Revue d’Histoire des Textes* n.s. V (2010) 99–158 (136). For the manuscript’s provenance, see comment by Franz Josef Worstbrock, Monika Klaes und Jutta Lütten, *Repertorium der artes dictandi des Mittelalters. Teil 1. Von den Anfängen bis um 1200* (München 1992) 27: ‘Aus St. Emmeram in Regensburg, Prüfening Herkunft, 2. Hälfte 12. Jh.’

¹⁷ R. Thurneysen, ‘Mittelirische Verslehren [I-IV]’, *Irische Texte [=IT]* 3, 1. Heft (1891) 1–182, reprinted in Rudolf Thurneysen, *Gesammelte Schriften [=GS]*, 3 vols (Tübingen 1991) II 340–521.

¹⁸ *IT* 3, 1 (1891) 29–66 (text), 110–23 (commentary) [= *GS* II 368–405 (text), 449–62 (commentary)].

¹⁹ For dating considerations, see R. Thurneysen, ‘Zu irischen Handschriften und Litteraturdenkmälern’, *Abhandl. d. Königl. Gesell. d. Wissensch. zu Göttingen, Philol.-hist. Klasse, N.F. Band XIV. Nro. 2* (Berlin 1912) 1–96 (XI. ‘Zu den Mittelirischen Verslehren, D: Die Abfassungszeit der Verslehren’ 78–89 (esp. 83) [= *GS* II 663–71 (668)]). Thurneysen detected three separate reworkings, with the last dated to the eleventh century. (Cf. Donncha Ó hAodha, ‘The first Middle Irish metrical tract’ in H. L. C. Tristram (ed.), *Metrik und Medienwechsel. Metrics and Media* (Tübingen 1991) 207–44 (esp. 207–08).)

to be mastered and the number of tales to be learned at each stage. It is preceded by a short introductory segment ('Einleitung') which does not belong to the original core,²⁰ and of which copies are transmitted in two manuscripts, the Book of Ballymote (Dublin, RIA ms no. 536 (23 P 12), f. 164rb24 ff) (= B) and Oxford, Bodleian Library ms Laud 610 (f. 81vb9 ff) (= L).²¹ This segment is imperfectly reproduced in Thurneysen's edition of 1891, owing to the fact that while he had access to B, the readings of L available to him for it were incomplete. Kuno Meyer subsequently published the opening portion (1908) as transmitted in L, while omitting a third of the text at the end.²² A fresh examination of both manuscript versions of this 'Einleitung' shows that because they share a number of obvious corruptions they probably go back to a common source. The L manuscript gives a slightly fuller text, but the additional material is in important respects unsatisfactory, and there will be reason to comment concerning this in detail at a later stage. The subject-matter of the segment is the 'Sixteen divisions of poetry' (*.ui. hermailí deg na filideachta*) and it is in two parts, the first listing by name the sixteen different elements (the 'name-list'), and the second relating the elements accompanying these with a brief explanation or illustration (the 'explanatory list'), which Thurneysen elucidated.²³ The majority of the sixteen divisions may be categorised as prosodic or grammatical — three are concerned with metrical closure (*dúnad*), for example — apart from the following, which I identify as having primarily rhetorical and stylistic connotations, albeit not altogether exclusive of the prosodic in some instances, and which I number in order of their occurrence in the name-list (orthography as in B with minor modifications): (5) *cobfige celle* 'sewing together of sense'; (7) *duinedighlaimm* 'description of the person'; (8) *sreth im(m)uis* 'strewing of inspiration'; (9) *coir molta* 'suitable praise'; (13) *imgabail emhiltusa* 'avoidance of tediousness'; (14) *soc(h)raide raidh* 'beauty of speech'; and (15) *dilmaine labartha* (v.l. *dilmaine ráid* L) 'license of utterance'.

Before commenting on what each of these categories might signify, I need to offer a context for such consideration by briefly outlining the other principal sources relevant to the tradition of technical instruction in Irish syllabic verse, especially as applying to the phase of it we call *dán díreach*, and with an eye to the evidence for stylistic and rhetorical material in particular. But from the earlier stratum one other witness remains to be mentioned which predates MV II, namely the so-called *Trefhocal* (lit. 'Three utterances') tract. This is thought to have been composed in the middle of the tenth century although it is possibly a little later in its present form (copies in Book of Leinster, Book of Ballymote, and Book of Uí Maine).²⁴ *Trefhocal* documents a list of 'the twelve faults of discourse' (*da locht dég na hirlabra*,

²⁰ *IT* 3, 1 (1891) 29–32 (text), 110–111 (commentary) [= *GS* II 368–70, 449–50].

²¹ Both manuscripts are available in digital form at isos.dias.ie (B), and <http://image.ox.ac.uk/show?collection=bodleian&manuscript=mslauidmisc610> (L).

²² Kuno Meyer, 'Sechzehn Teile der Dichtkunst', *ZCP* 6 (1908) 262–63.

²³ *IT* 3, 1 (1891) 120–22 [= *GS* II 459–61].

²⁴ The tract was edited (without translation or commentary) by George Calder, *Auraicept na n-éces: the scholar's primer* (Edinburgh 1917) 258–69; for the LL text, see R. I. Best, Osborn

Book of Ballymote f. 179rb18–19), followed by an elaborate account of some recognised twenty-five apparent licences, including exemptions from the same twelve faults, and verses to illustrate. Apart from a couple showing a possible overlap with rhetorical material identified in MV II, notably *dimbrigh* ‘understatement’ and *forbrigh* ‘hyperbole’ (to be mentioned below), most faults listed in *Treffhocal* can be classified as concerned with syllabic structure and ornamentation or with anomalies of grammar. Kaarina Hollo has discussed particular elements, and has pointed to an overlap with a list in the Old Irish *Bretha nemed dédenach*.²⁵ The contents were later incorporated in eleventh- or twelfth-century commentary on *Auraicept na nÉces*, showing them to have retained their interest for the schools up until the formation of classical bardic poetry.²⁶

Turning at this point towards those sources that illuminate the Classical Irish tradition, *Irish grammatical tracts* as edited by Bergin (1916–55), along with *Bardic syntactical tracts*, edited by McKenna (1944), are the first port of call.²⁷ But even the editors’ title-descriptions reveal that neither corpus is primarily concerned with prosody or composition, even if the metrical examples illustrating the grammatical and syntactical content are an essential ingredient. The age of these texts is fixed not primarily by transmissional considerations (most manuscripts are late) but by the fact that the language they document is attested in bardic verse from its formation about 1200, and the citations supplied are assigned to the period between *ca.* 1200–1550. The texts themselves probably descend from earlier recensions which developed incrementally when extra data was added from time to time. The most extensive are the tract on Declension (IGT II), consisting of noun-paradigms with each head-word being followed by lists of similarly declined nouns and illustrative quotations, and the tract on Irregular Verbs (IGT III), which is similarly organised. These two are prime witnesses to the linguistic and metrical transformation wrought by *dán díreach*. But part of the interest of two others of these tracts (IGT I, V) is the striking proof they provide of continuity both in the use of the syllabic metres themselves and in the principles applied to technical instruction in them, which we saw exemplified in Middle Irish sources and their antecedents. To take firstly IGT V, a text

Bergin, M. A. O’Brien and Anne O’Sullivan (ed.), *The Book of Leinster*, 6 vols (Dublin 1954–83) (= *LL*) II. 4999–5225. For discussion of content, see Kaarina Hollo, ‘Metrical irregularity in Old and Middle Irish syllabic verse’, in Anders Ahlqvist, Glyn Welden Banks, Riitta Latvio, Harri Nyberg, Tom Sjöblom (ed.), *Celtica Helsingiensia. Proceedings from a symposium on Celtic Studies*, Commentationes Humanarum Litterarum 107 (1996) 47–56 (esp. 47–48 with references). Concerning the tenth-century date, see Liam Breatnach, ‘An edition of *Amra Senáin*’ in Donnchadh Ó Corráin, Liam Breatnach and Kim McCone (ed.), *Sages, saints and storytellers. Celtic studies in honour of Professor James Carney* (Maynooth 1989) 7–31 (21).

²⁵ Hollo, ‘Metrical irregularity’ 49–51.

²⁶ Cf. Calder, *Auraicept* I. 1928 ff. See Brian Ó Cuív, ‘The linguistic training of the mediaeval Irish poet’, *Celtica* 10 (1973) 114–40 (115).

²⁷ Osborn Bergin, *Irish grammatical tracts* I ‘Introductory’ *Ériu* 8 (1916) (suppl.); II ‘Declension’ *Ériu* 8 (1916) (suppl.), *Ériu* 9 (1921–23) (suppl.), *Ériu* 10 (1926–28) (suppl.); III ‘Irregular verbs’, IV ‘Abstract nouns’ *Ériu* 14 (1946) (suppl.); V ‘Metrical faults’ *Ériu* 17 (1955) (suppl.); Lambert McKenna, *Bardic syntactical tracts* (Dublin 1944).

preserved in a fourteenth century manuscript (Nat. Lib. of Ireland, ms G 3), where the heading is ‘Here are the faults commonly met in every metre of poetry’ (*Aig seo na lochta is coitcheand teagaid in gach aisdi don dan*).²⁸ It opens with a long list of fault-names, and then proceeds to illustrate a majority of these, some with explanatory comment, others without. Not all fault-names are attested elsewhere, leaving doubt in some instances as to their nature. But included are at least six if not seven of the twelve faults in *Trefhocal*. As in the latter those identifiable are mainly either concerned with syllable count or ornamentation, or points of grammar. An exception is the fault cited in IGT V as *agallaim is faisnes* lit. ‘addressing and talking about’ (with illustration at §§ 23, 73), which has been discussed by Patrick Sims-Williams in the context of the well-attested stylistic figure ‘Person-switching’.²⁹ Dr Hollo has proposed to equate it with a fault covered by licence in the *Trefhocal* tract called *ecnairec fri frecnairc* ‘absent in respect of present (?)’, noting however that both names are mentioned together in the still earlier *Bretha nemed* source.³⁰

The other tract to be mentioned, which Bergin called ‘Introductory’ (IGT I), is cast as a manual for the ‘uninitiated’ (*áos fann* p. 1, *na soidél(aigh)* p. 2), purporting to give an overview in its opening paragraphs of ‘the many chief branches whose basis is the prime study of poetry’ (*príomhghabhlaín iomdha dana funndameannum príomhfhoghlúim an dána*, p. 2). This account lists a large number of topics, both grammatical and metrical, although by no means all of these come up for discussion in the body of the tract. Also occurring at the beginning is a list of faults of which a half-dozen are shared by IGT V; others which are absent from the latter are present in *Trefhocal*; while a further number could be among the unverified items occurring in those sources under different names. The observation made in respect of items in the other lists as being mainly metrical or grammatical holds true for IGT I also. However, the possibility that some designations can have had an inherent rhetorical dimension must be left open, as seen from the fact, for example, that *agallaim is faisnes* (just mentioned) though designated a fault in IGT V features in the work of highly respected composers of bardic poetry nonetheless, confirming the principle that one man’s fault can be classed as a figure by another.³¹

To round off this brief catalogue I must refer to what is in fact the only truly comprehensive manual for instruction in the grammar and prosody of

²⁸ IGT V § 1 (259).

²⁹ Patrick Sims-Williams, ‘Person-switching in Celtic panegyric: figure or fault?’, in J. F. Nagy and L. E. Jones (ed.), *Heroic poets and poetic heroes in Celtic tradition: a Festschrift for Patrick K. Ford*, CSANA Yearbook 3–4 (Dublin 2005) 315–26 (317).

³⁰ Hollo, ‘Metrical irregularity’ 49–50; cf. Sims-Williams, ‘Person-switching in Celtic panegyric’ 317–18. As noted in the *Dictionary of the Irish Language* (Dublin 1913–76) s.v. *écnairc* (49:50 ff.), O’Clery’s Glossary renders the term as ‘*an aimsir do cuaidh thort* “the time which is past”’, but ‘the sense is not well supported’; however, *frechnairc* is registered with the meaning ‘present tense’ (*DIL* s.v.), and hence it seems conceivable that the phrase *e. fri f.* could refer to inconsistency in the use of tense, making it correspond with the fault mentioned as *clæn comhaimsearda* in IGT V § 1, but left undefined (translated ‘anachronism’ *DIL* s.v. *comaimserdae*).

³¹ Cf. Sims-Williams, ‘Person-switching’ 316 f.

Classical Irish to have come down intact. This is the treatise *Rudimenta Grammaticae Hibernicae* preserved in two seventeenth century manuscripts and composed by the well-known poet, friar, and author of a catechism in Irish, Giolla Brighde Ó hEódhusa (d. 1614) (hereafter *RGH*).³² The contents are set out at the beginning:

Hoc opusculum dividitur in quatuor partes. In prima agitur de litteris et syllabis; in secunda de partibus orationis; in tertia de syntaxi seu constructione; in quarta de arte poetica (RGH ll. 2–4)

‘This little work is divided into four parts. In the first there is treatment of letters and syllables; in the second of the parts of speech; in the third of syntax and construction; in the fourth of the art of poetry.’

Attention is often drawn by scholars to the innovative aspect of the second part, in which the author applies to the declensional system of Irish the five-declensional pattern of Latin. We are concerned here with the fourth part of *RGH* only, which unlike the three preceding is in Irish, not Latin. Its subject is as the subtitle states (ll. 2270–72): *An ceathramhadh rann thráchdas ar ealadhain an dhána Gaoidhealda* ‘the fourth section which treats the art of Irish syllabic metre’. While there is some evidence of a dependence on IGT I or a common source in this (*RGH* several times adverts to the teachings and practices of past authorities — *na seinfhilidh* l. 2610, *na filidh oirrdhearca* l. 2854), by contrast with that text, Ó hEódhusa’s is a model of compositional planning and pedagogical clarity, addressing itself to the aspiring practitioner throughout, and treating in sequence issues of the alphabet, vowel quantities, consonant classes, syllable values, metrical ornaments, and the main syllabic metres, after which a short exposition of the loose form of *dán díreach* known as *ógáchas* follows. An obvious formal resemblance may be remarked here to the *artes poetriae* of an earlier era, the influence of which is also traceable in other vernaculars long after the decline of Latin as a vehicle of poetry in the centuries prior to the Renaissance.³³ A final short chapter (cap. xxix), running to a little over two printed pages, and to which our interest is restricted, deals specifically with ‘the faults it is proper to avoid in poetry’ (*Dona béimeannuibh as cóir do sheachna san dán*). As with the sources already discussed this is mainly a mixture of metrical elements and solecisms to be avoided, identically named in many instances, but some with explanations given which are not found elsewhere, others identifiable but named differently, and others still not otherwise attested. Exceptionally, it adverts explicitly on a few occasions to rhetorical pitfalls, explaining these in simple terms obviously with an eye to the requirements of the uninitiated. Thus *an t-eimhealtas* ‘tediousness’

³² Edited by Parthalán Mac Aogáin, *Graiméir Ghaeilge na mBráthar Mionúr* (Dublin 1968) 3–106.

³³ For comment on continuity in the vernacular tradition, see Martin Camargo, ‘*Tria sunt*: The long and the short of Geoffrey of Vinsauf’s *Documentum de modo et arte dictandi et versificandi*’, *Speculum* 74 (1999) 935–55 (947–48).

is defined as ‘saying one word often when it is not polished’ (*aonfhocal do rádh go meinic, an tan nach biaidh tlachd air*, l. 2848); and *an fairb(h)rígh* ‘hyperbole’, is ‘flattery without cause’ (*aibhéil gan résún*, ll. 2854–55). We have already identified avoidance of the first (*imgabail emhiltuis*) in MV II as being among the ‘Sixteen divisions of poetry’, while the second (sc. *forbrig*) was encountered in *Trefhocal* (above p. 103) and is exemplified also in IGT V (§ 150). In *RGH* references to such topics are deliberately kept to a minimum because, as the author announces, a fuller treatment is being reserved for a rhetorical treatise still to be written (*fa chomhair na reoirice as mian liom do sgríobhadh*, l. 2891). If only he had lived long enough to write it, we might add!

4.

Gathering in this admittedly small harvest of explicit references to rhetorical style and placing it beside the handful we earlier singled out from MV II in particular, it is now opportune to take stock of the material as a whole, and of the extent to which a shared inheritance can be identified in the Latin *artes versificandi* also. Drawing both traditions close together, to begin with, is of course the understanding that goes back to Aristotle, whereby all poetry is epideictic, its themes either praise (Lat. *laus*, Ir. *moladh*) or blame (Lat. *vituperatio*, Ir. *áer/ao(i)r*). With this in mind two out of the seven divisions of poetry singled out earlier from the opening segment of the MV II tract may be considered first. (9) *Coir molta* (‘Angemessenheit des Lobes’, in Thurneysen’s rendering) is an element listed and defined in both the B and L copies of the ‘Einleitung’ in terms of ‘praising a warrior as a warrior’ (*molad laích do láech*).³⁴ The phrase echoes (perhaps by abbreviation) a fuller definition instanced in the Book of Leinster copy of the *Trefhocal* tract in connection with the requirement for ‘colour and properties’ referred to by the collocation *co ndath 7 tothocht*; the explanatory gloss on *tothocht* here reads: *.i. amal beit a bésa corop amlaid moltair .i. molad laich do laech 7 molad clerich do chleriuch* (LL ll. 5105–06), i.e. ‘as may befit his manners, so let him be praised: praising a warrior as a warrior, praising a cleric as a cleric’.³⁵ The identical principle is elaborated on in the twelfth century by Matthew of Vendôme in portion of the *Ars versificatoria* dealing with the properties of appropriate description in the context of eulogy and blame. Praise of a pastor of the church should emphasise his constant faith and appetite for virtue (*in ecclesiastico pastore fidei constantia, virtutis appetitus... debent ampliari*),³⁶ while the prince or emperor is to be lauded more for the rigour

³⁴ *IT* 3, 1 (1891) 30 (i), 121 [= *GS* II 369, 460].

³⁵ The sources are associated in commentary by Thurneysen, *IT* 3, 1 (1891) 121 [= *GS* II 460]: ‘*Coir molta* ... LL 37^c, 16 *tothocht* (*tothucht*) genannt. Der Dichter soll jeden gemäss seiner Art preisen, den Krieger als Krieger, den Geistlichen als einen Geistlichen, etc.’ The collocation was incorporated into late commentary on *Auraicept na nÉces*, where the definition is expanded: ... *.i. moladh laich for laech, molad cleirigh for clerech, molad mna for mnai* (ed. Calder, ll. 5257–58).

³⁶ *AV* I § 65 p. 133.

of his justice (*in principe sive in imperatore rigor justitiae assignandus est cum augmento*).³⁷ In this section Matthew goes on to identify as the supreme object of the art of poetry ‘description’: *in peritia describendi versificatoria facultatis praecipuum constat exercitium* ‘the chief pursuit of the poetic faculty lies in the skill of describing’;³⁸ and by way of illustration his account incorporates metrical set-pieces describing the Pope, Caesar, Helena, etc.³⁹ In subsequent paragraphs the same author expands on the need for descriptive accuracy, particularly as applied to the ‘eleven attributes of the person’ (name, nature, physical and spiritual attributes, and so on), each defined in turn. This particular subcategory of *descriptio* has its equivalent in MV II in the element of (7) *duinediglaím* ‘Genau Beschreibung der Gestalt des Menschen’ (Thurneysen), glossed in the explanatory list as being ‘a capturing of the beauty of a person, as in “the eyebrows black, the hair fair etc.”’ (*i. diglaím delba in duine, amail rogab: Da brae dubae folt buide 7rl*).⁴⁰ The illustration is elementary, but not more so than the formulation, couched as a negative instruction, but applying to the same rhetorical technique (not named and somewhat more broadly conceived), in Ó hEódhusa’s *Rudimenta* (ll. 2531–33): *Cuimhnigh a mholadh iomchubhaidh do chur re cois gach focail. Ná habuir ‘leomhanta’ re mnaoi, ‘sgothach’ re muir, ‘maighreach’ re coill, nó a leithéide oile* ‘Remember to assign its appropriate adjective to each word. Do not say “lion-like” of a woman, or “flowery” of the sea, or “full of salmon” of a wood, or such like’.

Other elements already singled out from MV II may, I suggest, collectively be grouped together as stylistic, even if an obstacle in the way of categorisation is posed by some problems of transmission in a few instances, to be mentioned at the end. (5) *Cobfige célle* ‘Zusammenweben des Sinnes’⁴¹ is the correct name-form as it occurs in both the initial and the explanatory lists in the B manuscript. (MS L gives the first word corruptly as *comgne* (name-list) *comge* (explanatory list), respectively.)⁴² The element embodies the requirement whereby a quatrain should constitute a unit of meaning. The explanation (again correctly transmitted by B but not by L) is to the effect that ‘an utterance is of one meaning from beginning to end of the quatrain, i.e. that there should be no deviation in it’ (*i. co rob inunn ciall día nasneis ó thosach*

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *AV I* § 73 p. 135. For comment see Faral, *Les arts poétiques* 76.

³⁹ *AV I* §§ 50 (p. 121), 51 (p. 122), 56 (p. 129).

⁴⁰ *IT 3*, 1 (1891) 30 (g), 121 [= *GS II* 369, 460]. A comprehensive discussion of the descriptive profile of kings and heroes in Irish poetic tradition has recently been published by Damian McManus, ‘Good-looking and irresistible: the hero from early Irish saga to classical poetry’, *Ériu* 59 (2009) 57–109 (for comment on the citation from MV II given here, see p. 57 n.). Gordon Ó Riain suggests that the phrase *Da brae, etc.* may be a verse (heptasyllabic); the proposal seems strengthened by the abbreviation following, which, as Roisin McLaughlin has pointed out elsewhere in the present volume of *Celtica*, is ‘commonly used to mark citations’ (above p. 21 n. 15).

⁴¹ Thurneysen, *IT 3*, 1 (1891) 30 (e), 121 [= *GS II* 369, 460].

⁴² Meyer, ‘Sechzehn Teile der Dichtkunst’ 262–63.

co diaid in raind .i. na raib claen and 7rl).⁴³ In the Latin tradition unity of meaning linking the hexameter to the pentameter in the elegiac distich, along with the requirement to avoid a continuation that would extend one distich into the following (*transgressio*), are both principles insisted on by Matthew of Vendôme and other contemporaries.⁴⁴ To my knowledge MV II is alone among Irish sources in its acknowledgement of the equivalent principle. (8) *Sreth im(m)uis* is defined in both copies of the ‘Einleitung’ only by reference to an illustrative quatrain in which each line consists of a succession of alliterating words (*Slatt sacc socc simend saland* etc.).⁴⁵ A similar feature is dealt with towards the end of the *Ars versificatoria* at a point where Matthew is drawing on the authority of Isidore of Seville’s *Etymologiae* for the distinction between schemes and tropes.⁴⁶ Isidore under the heading *de schematibus* cites the figure of *paromoeon*, and by way of illustration chooses an instance from the *Annales* of Ennius, with which we compare the form of that from MV II: *O Tite tute Tati tibi tanta tyranne tulisti*.⁴⁷ But the actual name MV II employs in this instance (‘strewing of inspiration’) as it seems to me points to a much broader range of meanings by far than the alliterative usage exemplified would indicate.

This same caveat applies arguably more emphatically even to the definitions accompanying the remaining triad of stylistic ‘divisions’ it falls to mention, namely (13) *Imgabail emhiltusa*, (14) *Sochraide ráid*, and (15) *Dílmaine labartha* (above p. 102) — but with the important difference in these cases that we have not two, but only one manuscript witness to rely on. As signalled already, Thurneysen and Meyer each published incomplete versions of the L text of the ‘Einleitung’, the former by not having access to all its main variants, and the latter by omitting to publish the concluding part (about one third of the entire segment), presumably because this corresponded with the conclusion previously published from the Book of Ballymote (B). Two important related observations regarding the longer of the two versions (L) must be made. First is that the opening few lines are clearly misplaced, inasmuch as they consist of explanatory notes dealing with a series of four elements which I number as 13–16 so as to correspond with the position of their occurrence in what I refer to above as the name-list (after the words *sé hernaili dég na filidhechta*) in both B and L, and which accordingly do not properly belong at the beginning of the text but rather in the explanatory

⁴³ *IT* 3, 1 (1891) 30 [*GS* II 369]; B’s reading *día nasneis* contrasts with L’s *dianais* (missing final syllable supplied by Meyer, ‘Sechzehn Teile der Dichtkunst 263, viz. *n-aisn[ēis]*).

⁴⁴ Cf. *AV* IV § 34 p. 188: *Quippe hexameter et pentameter sociale et indivisum habent officium; further ibid. § 37 (ibid.) amplius ad tertium versum non est facienda sententiae transgressio, ne longum yperbatum incurratur*. Cf. Klopsch, *Einführung in die Dichtungslehren des lateinischen Mittelalters* 127, 139.

⁴⁵ Thurneysen (*IT* 3, 1 (1891) 121 [*GS* II 460]) defines as ‘Verbindung aller Wörter eines Verses durch Alliteration’.

⁴⁶ *AV* III § 3 f., p. 168.

⁴⁷ W. M. Lindsay (ed.), *Isidori Hispalensis Episcopi Etymologiarvm sive originvm* (Oxford 1957) I xxxvi, 14. Cf. *AV* III § 10 p. 169: *Paranomeon est per principia trium dictionum immediate positarum ejusdem litterae vel syllabae repetita prolatio*.

portion that commences after the name-list. Put differently — and here is the second of my observations — these opening lines in L must in fact constitute the detached end of the segment as a whole, which is missing without trace in B. These differences between the manuscripts notwithstanding, however, it is also evident that B and L are ultimately derived from a common archetype, for reasons I must also briefly outline. One is the fact that in both B and L the last item in the name-list of divisions, i.e. item (16), which in L is called *tucait dechraigthe* ('cause of distinction'), whereas in B the first word is corruptly omitted,⁴⁸ stands out as an exception in that it alone of the items in this portion of the text is accompanied by an explanatory definition. This, moreover, cannot properly belong to the actual lemma, as its content concerns rules for metrical closure (*dúnad*), whereas the actual division-name makes clear that it embodies a point of grammar.⁴⁹ The other factor showing the unity of the tradition is that the text in both is made to end in identical fashion imperfectly, whereby the order in which the final items are dealt with, viz. **12 10 11**, shows disturbance vis-à-vis their sequence as given in the name-list. It remains to ask whether the combination of shared anomalies and corruption identified in B and L may be adjudged to limit or even to undermine the reliability of some or all of those definitions for which L is the unique witness, namely the four items in its opening lines (**13–16**), which are demonstrably misplaced, and which include the three specifically relevant to our deliberations remaining to be discussed (**13–15**). As regards our numbered item **16** ([*tucait*] *dechraigthe*), it was observed already that at the point where it occurs in the body of the name-list in both B and L it is accompanied, alone among the entries, by an explanatory comment, and that this comment (relating to metrical closure, and not to a point of grammar as one expects) is misplaced. By contrast, when *tucait dechraigthe* occurs in the opening lines of L as the final item of four explained, it is in conjunction with an illustrative phrase comprising of the copula and the three singular pronouns, viz. *is sí, is hé, issed*.⁵⁰ This as it is of a grammatical nature seems perfectly apposite to the division-name it is applied to. However, going on to consider

⁴⁸ See next note.

⁴⁹ The item (16 in the numbering applied here) in the form in which it occurs at the conclusion of the name-list in the two manuscripts is as follows (vertical marks line break, bold type indicates a verse). MS L (f. 81vb23–26): 'tucait dechraigthe .i. comm | ad isind iarcomarc in fhocail toissech amail | ro gab lassin filed **Dondchad dia fich dom | un 7rl** .i. corop Dondchad rissin for dunad | '; MS B (f.164rb30/31): 'Ocus dechraigh | tí .i. corap isind iarcomarc in focl- tusech amail ro | ngab lasin filid. **Donnchad dianfich domun**.7rl. co | rob Donnchad risin for dunad'. In transcribing from B, Thurneysen (*IT* 3, 1 (1891) 29 fn. 8 [= *GS* II 368]) gives the MS reading of the second word in a footnote as 'dechusaightf', thereby mistaking ligature *r* for the *us*-compendium. This leads him to emend in the edition by substituting the word '*Saighidh*' (showing that he held the explanation supplied as applying to that term). In commentary (*IT* 3, 1 (1891) 120–21 [= *GS* III 459–60]) he cites two quatrains from the poem *Do dhligheghaibh dunta na nduan* to show that the three terms *saigid*, *ascnam* and *comindsma* (items **1, 2, 4** as they occur in the name-list according to the numbering applied here) are concerned with aspects of metrical closure. The excerpt cited in B and L as a *Musterbeispiel* (marked in bold above), viz. *Donnchad dianfich domun* (*daigtech*), is from a poem that occurs elsewhere in MV (I, II) (reference *ibid.*).

⁵⁰ The full form of the manuscript reading is: (L, f. 81vb15) 'Tucait deoch- issi ishe issed'. The second word is abbreviated by a horizontal stroke through the upper part of the shaft of *h*, but

the additional items remaining, there is no such obvious appositeness in the similarly formulated distinction-making clauses found in conjunction with the two items **13**, **14**; nor is there anything compellingly apposite applying to the illustration of the third **15**, which purports to identify a malapropism.⁵¹ Taking these considerations together, I think it is not over-adventurous to detach from the three divisions I have listed as being relevant to this discussion the variously grammatical and solecistic content of the illustrations applied and to conclude that we are justified in treating each in turn, as it were, *sub specie rhetoricae et styli*.

(**13**) *Imgabail emhiltusa*, as noted earlier, appears somewhat narrowly defined in Ó hEódhusa's *Rudimenta* as applying to frequent repetition of a banal word (*aonfhocal do rádh go meinic, etc.*, above p. 106). On the other hand the actual designation seems altogether broad enough in its range of meanings, as Thurneysen's rendering confirms ('Vermeiden der Weitschweifigkeit'),⁵² to encompass otiose vices such as tautology and pleonasm, for example, widely condemned in the *ars dictaminis* tradition, or expressions the use of which poets should avoid as a blight on metrical grace (Matthew of Vendôme cites as his examples the words *porro, autem, quoque*),⁵³ not to mention prolixity in general.⁵⁴ (**14**) *Sochraide ráid* 'Schönheit der Rede', which might answer to *venustas orationis* or the like, evokes qualities of felicity nowhere documented in the sources we have considered. The nearest we come to finding an expression of what is intended is perhaps in references to its very antithesis. These occur here and there among the lists of *lochta* and *béimeanna*, including those relating to cacophony, viz. *seirbhe fhoghair* 'distastefulness of sound' (*RGH* I. 2850), also called *seirbhe ráidh* 'distastefulness of utterance' (*IGT* I p. 32 § 145), or alternatively *soine mhailísi foghair* 'distinctive ugliness of sound' (*ibid.* p. 2 § 2, l. 16). It is characterised more generally by Ó hEódhusa when he refers to 'rough, savage, ill-sounding and unready speech' (*scabiosa et horrida*

the appropriate expansion (sc. *deochraigthe*) is not in doubt in view of the *plene* reading in l. 23 (preceding note).

⁵¹ The full manuscript readings are (numbering and punctuation supplied): (L, f. 81vb9–15) (**13**) '[Im]gabail emeltusa .i. issed 7 isé cend | in fhír 7 issí cend na mná'; (**14**) 'Soch | raidi raid is hí in gobur ar | rob emilt a rád is hé in gobur 7 is hí | in gobur'; (**15**) 'Dílmaine [raid] .i. in lestar uscú do rádh, | ar rop e a haicned in lestar cosin uisce | do rád'. (Cf. Meyer, 'Sechzehn Teile der Dichtkunst' 262.) Concerning (**15**), it should be remarked that the word 'raid' is absent after 'dílmaine' on its first occurrence (f. 81vb13) but is present in the name-list further down the page (col. b23) (corresponds to 'labartha' in B), from where I have supplied it here. The partial overlap between the wording to illustrate '[im]gabail emiltusa' and the formula illustrating 'tucait deochraigthe' in L (above n. 50) is noteworthy.

⁵² Cf. *DIL* s.v. *emiltus emeltus* 'avoidance of prolixity'.

⁵³ *AV* II § 46 p. 167: *Sunt autem quaedam dictiones panniculosae quae quasi anathematizatae et indignae ceterarum consortio a metrica modulatione debent penitus absentari; ut istae 'porro, autem, quoque' et sincategoremata, id est consignificantia, quae, quia totius metri derogant venustati, a metro penitus debent eliminari.*

⁵⁴ Presumably for some instructors *emheltus eimhealtas* could have embraced the fault referred to by the term *forbrigh fairb(h)righ* 'hyperbole' (mentioned in the *Trefhocal* tract, *RGH* and *IGT* V, see above pp. 103, 106); further comment below. Compare, besides, the expression *ró molta* 'excessive praise', for references to which see *DIL* s.v. *ró* (80. 3–5).

oratio ... male sonans et debilis, *RGH* ll. 1304–5). This can be contrasted with the same writer’s overall definition of syllabic metre (*dán*) in the opening sentence of part IV of the *Rudimenta* in which he identifies music as an inherent element: *Asé as dán ann comhrádh múisiocdha iar na eagar do réir na siolla, na bhfocal 7 na gceathramhan bhíos ag freagra a chéile a nuimhir 7 a bhfoghar* (ll. 2275–77) ‘*dán* (i.e. syllabic verse) is musical speech arranged according to the syllables, words and lines which correspond to each other in number and in sound’.⁵⁵ (It is uncertain whether the term *múisiocdha* is used literally or figuratively here, however.) Finally, according to Thurneysen (who was apparently guided by the illustration, cited above n. 51), (15) *dílmaine labartha* (al. *dílmaine ráid*) means ‘Richtige Anwendung der Sprache’; but a possibly preferable rendering is ‘license of utterance’ since *dílmaine* ‘freedom, license’ (from adj. *dílmain*, etymologised by O’Rahilly as from *dí-* and Mid. Ir. *loman* ‘a rope, leash’)⁵⁶ seems likely to refer to figurative language use, as represented by the various rhetorical colours, tropes and figures such as metaphor, allegory, antonomasia, etc., concerning which a wealth of comment is provided throughout the Latin corpus of the *dictamen metricum*, and in which those qualities reside of exaltation and mystery that are the essence of the poetic art in Irish, as in any language.

5.

This survey has yielded no more than a glimpse through a glass darkly of what a programme of instruction designed to cultivate graceful utterance and imaginative expression from about the eleventh century onwards entailed. Clearly any one of the topics examined could have provided scope for a much wider programme of rhetorical poetics than the sum of their parts allows us to envisage. To take a single instance, a module of instruction focussed on the avoidance of *eimhealtas* ‘tediousness’, which according to Ó hEódhusa involved repetition of words in a riming context, could be expected to have embraced treatment of some permitted uses of word-repetition, if only because *repetitio* is one of the more important colours dealt with in eleventh and twelfth-century Latin sources.⁵⁷ In bardic poetry also it is a manifold and favourite device of imaginative embellishment. However, regulation of it in IGT and other sources is documented exclusively in prosodic terms subject to strictures and licenses bearing such names as *cáoiche* ‘blindness’, *breacadh* ‘speckling’, and *caitheamh énfhocail* ‘use of the same word’, each of them referring to the employment of a word to rime with itself. In the early eleventh-century preface to *Amra Choluimb Chille*, on the other hand,

⁵⁵ For a similar definition from the same period see Mac Aogáin (ed.), *Grainéir Ghaeilge na mBráthar Mionúr* ll. 3374–76.

⁵⁶ T. F. O’Rahilly, ‘Etymological notes. II.’ *SGS* 2/1, 13–29 (17–19).

⁵⁷ Cf. Faral, *Les arts poétiques* 96: ‘... on notera que souvent chez les poètes le même mot rime avec lui-même; mais il est extrêmement rare qu’il soit pris les deux fois dans le même sens: aussi est-ce seulement en apparence que la répétition constitue une négligence; *c’est plutôt une recherche et une finesse*’ (my emphasis).

repetition is recognised as a rhetorical figure, as seen from a comment on its occurrence in that poem's opening line, *Día Día da-rrogus re tías ina gnúis*, to the effect that doubling of the first word occurs 'because of the adulation and the eagerness of the praise' (*ar abéla nó ar lainne in molta*); and the writer goes on to affirm that in Holy Scripture four species of repetition are found, illustrating these, and adding that the Irish have their own name for the feature, viz. *atherruch i nguth ngnath immorro lasin nGoedel a ainm sin* 'Return to a usual sound is the Gael's name for it'.⁵⁸ The term *aitherruch i nguth ngnáth* is found elsewhere also, in MV III for instance — another text usually dated to the same period approximately (eleventh century) — confirming the expression as a usage of the schools. The example demonstrates, if proof were needed, that our concept of the scope of rhetorical expression must recognise that topics defined in purely prosodic terms may possibly contain an unexpressed dimension also which may or may not be recoverable.⁵⁹

Mention of what is or may be implicit in these sources recalls the point made earlier concerning them, and applied also to the various twelfth- and thirteenth-century Latin *artes dictandi et versificandi*, as constituting materials to supplement school instruction. In both Latin and Irish tradition an often repeated precept is to learn by example. IGT I says the apprentice 'must have command of many examples from the authors and experts in poetry' (*dlighidh sé ... deismireachd iomdha do bheith aigi ... ó ugdaraibh 7 ó shaoithibh an dána*, p. 2 § 2, l. 18); and Ó hEódhusa referring to the metres described by him addresses the same constituency with the words 'Anyone wishing to improve his knowledge of them, will learn them by reading the old books' (*Gibé len feirde nisa mhó dh'eolas d'fhágháil ann, múinfidh an léagthóireachd na seinleabhar dó iad*, ll. 2749–50). We will obviously search in vain among the Irish sources for explicit treatment of topics we might regard as crucial such as literary invention or compositional structure or even how to begin a poem. But in this respect Irish as a field of study is no more poorly served by its sources — not *much* more so at any rate — than medieval Latin is, since even the more substantial of the Latin manuals, as observed, tend to emphasise the narrower aspects of composition like choice of words and their arrangement in the line, rather than the arrangement of subject according to a coherent structure or the advantages of one manner of commencement over another.

⁵⁸ Whitley Stokes, 'The Bodleian Amra Choluimb chille' *Revue Celtique* 20 (1899), 30 ff., 132 ff., 248 ff., 400 ff. (144–45).

⁵⁹ In this context it is worthwhile recalling the fact already adverted to that in the 'Einleitung' to MV II at least three of the sixteen 'divisions' listed are concerned with aspects of metrical 'closure', namely (1) *saigid* (2) *ascnam* (4) *comindsma* (above n. 49). At an earlier time even this feature could assume more than purely prosodic status, however. It is referred to in the Milan Glosses in the context of commentary on Ps. VIII, a text that begins and ends with the words *Domine, dominus noster*. The commentator remarks: '... As this psalm begins with praise and admiration of the lord, it is thus moreover that it is concluded, even as the poets with us do' (*amal as homolad 7 adamrugud inchoimded intinscana insalmsa isamlaid forcentar dano amal dundgniat indfilid linni cid insin*) (text and translation from John Strachan and Whitley Stokes, *Thesaurus palaeohibernicus*, 2 vols and Suppl. (Cambridge and Halle 1901–10, repr. Dublin 1975) I 51).

Is this tantamount to demonstrating that such issues had no place in the training of the Irish bardic poet? The question takes me back to my earlier contention that elucidation of the poetics of bardic literature involves not just analysis of the metrical and grammatical tracts with a view to identifying the small rhetorical component they contain, but a heuristic reading of the poetry itself, aimed at understanding the aesthetics of what I propose we call the ‘implicit’ *dictamen*. Much is known already to confirm that poets were aware of taxonomies governing matters as diverse as the various poetic genres (elegy, eulogy, poems of supplication and complaint, threats of satire, birth-odes, and so on) and the themes, motifs and literary devices appropriate to each — for elegy the graveside vigil, for example; for eulogy the various *signa* of liberality, descriptions of the person, and the battle-roll; not to mention also inventiveness in the fixing of poem-titles, the use of echoes and reverberations, choosing an apologue, and the extended figurative purple patch placed at the beginning, middle or end of the poem, of which I have made a particular study and in which, contrary to a view previously held, the originality of the imagery is seen by the poet as the paramount objective.⁶⁰ Above all, in the finest bardic poems attention is paid to compositional congruity, whereby the argument develops from one quatrain to the next by processes of lexical linking and conceptual coupling, each element in the overall structure being made to cohere, and embellished by a choice of figures (chiasmus and antithesis, parallelism, repetition, anaphora, to cite just the commonest) and an overall linguistic artistry. Although a minority, poems with these qualities are the best evidence available of the impact of poetics on the bardic imagination.

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⁶⁰ Pádraig A. Breatnach, *Téamaí taighde Nua-Ghaeilge* (Maigh Nuad 1997) 97–129.