CÚ CHULAINN’S BATTLE-SCARS: A NEW INTERPRETATION OF A QUATRAIN IN AIDED GUILL MEIC CARBADA ⊕ AIDED GAIRB GLINNE RIGE.1

DIL s.v. forrind ‘point (of a weapon), barb’ provides three examples.2 One of these is taken from a quatrain preserved in the late Middle Irish prosimetric tale Aided Guill meic Carbada ⊕ Aided Gairb Glinne Rige (hereafter AG). The word in question is found in the final line of the second couplet: ni fail dib ar talmain tend / crecht arna fagbaim fairrend, ‘Of them on the firm earth there is none for which I do not leave a spearpoint’, LL 12881 (trans. Stokes 1893, 423).3 Stokes’s translation of fairrend as ‘spearpoint’ suggests he understood it as a word consisting of for- + rind ‘a point, tip, apex’ (DIL 1 rind), an i-stem. The editors of the Dictionary suggested emending tend ... fairrend to tind ... fairrind,4 presumably on the basis that a palatalised final -nd would be expected for an acc. sg. i-stem and therefore emendation to tind would also be needed to fulfil the requirement for deibide rhyme. In this note I revisit this proposed emendation in the Dictionary and provide a new analysis and interpretation of the second couplet in AG, suggesting that fairrend has a more nuanced meaning than forrind ‘barb, spearpoint’ and that perhaps no emendation is needed.

1 This varium arose from an example and brief observation originally included in a note on n-stems which I submitted to Celtica 30 (2018). I am grateful to that journal’s peer-reviewer who suggested I should expand it for another publication. I am indebted to Liam Breathnach, Damian McManus and the reader of this journal for their many helpful suggestions and corrections, and to Nike Stam for reading an earlier draft. I am of course solely responsible for any remaining errors.

2 Two examples are from the LL recension of the Táin Bó Cúailgne: gen. pl. tríchu farrindi, ‘thirty barbs’ (O’Rahilly 1967, ll. 3345–7, trans. 228–9); dat. pl. dá forrindib, ‘with its barbs’ (O’Rahilly 1967, ll. 3359; trans. 229). In both instances, forrind refers to the ‘barbs’ that protrude from the gáe bolga cast by Cú Chulainn at Fer Diad.

3 There are two extant independent copies of AG, namely, Book of Leinster (TCD MS 1339 (H 2.18; hereafter LL), fol. 107b24–111b45; NLS Adv. MS 72.1.40 (hereafter K), fol. 29a1–37b25. LL was edited, with variant readings from K, and translated by Stokes (1893); for a diplomatic edition and translation of the LL text, accompanied by a diplomatic transcription of the Edinburgh text, see Hannan (1987). Fogarty (2005) provided a critical edition, with LL serving as the base-text, and a translation. For a discussion of the tale’s date of composition, see Fogarty (2005, 6–13). According to Fogarty (2005, 2–4) the copies of AG derive from a shared exemplar. I provide Stokes’ translation throughout this discussion as this is the most easily accessible edition available.

4 See DIL s.v. forrind.
The tale AG recounts Cú Chulainn’s violent encounters with and the subsequent deaths of Goll mac Carbada and Garb Glinne Rige. After having slaughtered Goll mac Carbada, Cú Chulainn returns to Emain only to discover that it is abandoned. While Cú Chulainn was away, Conchobar and the Ulaid go to visit Dún Colptha at Cúailnge, at the invitation of the hospitaller Conall mac Gleó Glaiiss. When Cú Chulainn learns of Conchobar’s whereabouts, he sets out in pursuit of him. Cú Chulainn’s charioteer, Láeg mac Riangabra, gives him a choice of two routes, i.e. a long and easy path or a short and difficult path. Láeg warns Cú Chulainn that he will encounter Garb of Glenn Rige on the short path but Cú Chulainn states that no warrior will deter him from his path. Cú Chulainn meets Garb and the two engage in battle and attack each other violently with spears. Cú Chulainn, overwhelmed by Garb’s force, throws his spear aside and grabs hold of Garb’s arm. He gives the arm a violent shake, ripping it and the shoulder-blade out, causing Garb to yell out in pain. Cú Chulainn demands his sword from Láeg and kills Garb with it. When Láeg asks how the fight was, Cú Chulainn replies: In n-ed bam béo ticfa frim ‘So long as I live it will come against me’ (Stokes 1893, 420–1, §39). I understand this to mean that the wounds inflicted upon Cú Chulainn in the battle will affect him for life.

There follows a reiterative lay (laid) of four quatrains in deibide scaílte. Cú Chulainn utters the first three quatrains, describing his opponent’s ferociousness and the harshness of the fight. In the fourth verse, echoing his earlier advice to avoid the short path, Láeg responds

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5 This is in accordance with Cú Chulainn’s prohibitions outlined at the beginning of the tale, see Stokes (1893, 398, §2).
6 Rogab cách dib guin ; airlech arale dona slegaib slemunchruadib, ‘Each of them began to wound and slaughter the other with the smoothhard spears’ (Stokes 1893, 420–1, §37).
7 DIL defines do-icc with fri as ‘comes against, withstands, opposes, injures’ (DIL s.v. do-icc II, c (i)). However, it also cites examples where do-icc X fri Y can mean ‘X ails, affects Y’. For instance, in the Life of Lasair, Lasair asks a poorly and sorrowful woman what had affected her: ro fiarfaigh Lasair dhi créad tainic fria, ‘Lasair questioned her what had come upon her’ (Gwynn and O’Duighen 1911, 80).
8 The opening couplet of the poem is in deibide nguilbnech. Lines 3c and 4a are one syllable short. This can be remedied by supplying a nota augens in both instances. In 3c, I emend frim-sa, rather than ticfa which has an inanimate subject and therefore is unlikely to have a nota (although this is not impossible, for which see Griffith 2018, 202). In 4a, I emend atrubart-sa, rather than rutt-su, with the nota marking a contrast between speakers, i.e. Lóegaire is speaking here, and not Cú Chulainn. A similar use of the nota augens with a contrastive function is found in §21 of AG (Stokes 1893, 410), where its use signals a change of speaker from Goll to Cú Chulainn. Note the rhyme leiss: d’eisleis (1cd), for which see SNG III, §2.11. For 4c dé (Glinne, 4d), see Bretnach (2003, 135).
smugly as if to say ‘I told you so’. The poem in LL, copied by Hand U (Duncan 2012, 36), is as follows:  

1. Garb Glinni
   olc a fúath is a inni.
   sochaidi dorochair leiss
   nírbó thabarta d’éisleis.

2. Dorat l. crēcht form chness,
   dom leith chlē ocus dom leith dess,
   ē dub díb ar talmain tend.
   crēcht arnā fagbaim fairrend.

3. Ro chomraicsium rād cen fell.
   ēar techta dúin isin glend.
   ticfa frim céin bam beó.
   nírbó chennais ar crūadgleō.

4. Atrubart rut t cen fell.
   ria techta duit issin glend.
   is eōl dam na mbiad duit dē

Stokes (1893, 423) translates the poem as follows:

1. ‘Garb of Glenn,
   evil his form and his sense.
   A multitude has fallen by him:
   he was not given up to neglect.  

2. He inflicted fifty wounds on my skin,
   on my left side and on my right side.

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9 I supply macrons where appropriate.
10 Fogarty (2005, 135) translated this correctly as ‘he was not to be ignored’, taking tabarta as the verbal of necessity.
Of them on the firm earth there is none
for which I do not leave a spearpoint.

3. We encountered, a saying without guile –
after we entered the glen.
So long as I live it will come against me;
not gentle was our hard fight.

4. I said to thee without guile,
before thou didst enter the glen
I know what thou shouldst suffer
from thy combat with Garb of Glenn Rige.’

Of relevance to the present discussion is the second couplet in quatrain 2. K reads as follows: 

ni fuil dim ar talmain teamn / creacht arnach fadbaim fairrenn, fol. 35a36–37.

Stokes (1893, 423) translated arnā fagbaim as ‘for which I do not leave’, the 1sg. pres. ind. of fo-acaib ‘leaves’. One might expect -fācbaim here since the writing of a non-lenited voiced internal /g/ as -g- does not occur frequently in LL, although there are some instances, e.g. tugsat, LL 39440. But K’s fadbaim seen here with confusion of lenited d and g, together with LL’s fagbaim, suggests this is the 1sg. pres. ind. of fo-gaib ‘finds, gets’. 

Talmain: fagbaim is the only instance of internal rhyme in this short poem, which is otherwise in looser deibide. 

Talmain is followed by the attributive adjective tend (DIL s.v. 1 tend), which at first glance appears to be the masculine dative form. The e in fairrend suggests it ends in a broad -nd which would give the required deibide rhyme. But if fairrend is a variant of forrind (i-stem), one would expect a palatal -nd and this would not rhyme with tend. In view of this, the editors of the Dictionary suggested emending LL’s tend [...] fairrend to ‘tind [...] fairrind’. 

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12 SNG III, §2.2. I am grateful to Damian McManus for pointing this out to me.
13 Ó Cuív (1967–1968, 276–7) observes that poems in prosimetric texts generally have less perfect rhyme. He cites another poem of eight quatrains in a looser type of deibide in AG (see Stokes 1893, 404, §10 ), in which the first quatrain is in strict deibide, with internal rhyme in c:d, but the remaining seven quatrains are of a freer type and without internal rhyme.
14 See DIL s.v. forrind.
It could be that LL’s *tend* is a corruption for the feminine dative form *tind*. The scribe may then have written *fairrend* to aid visual rhyme. The emendation would then be justified and provide the required *deibide* rhyme. However, K’s *teann* is clearly a masculine adjectival form, thereby requiring a non-palatal -nn in the final word of the next line.

Rather than taking *fairrend* as a variant of *forrind* ‘point, barb’, *fairrend* could be a variant of the rare word registered in *DIL* s.v. *errend* ‘prick, mark’, seen here with a prosthetic initial f- (SNG III, §3.21) and the alternation of e- and ai- (GOI §823). The neuter nom. pl. of *errend* (likely a u-stem given the non-vocalic ending) is attested glossing *stigmata* in the phrase *ego enim stigmata Iesu in corpora meo porto* in the Wb. Glosses, i.e. *inda errend* i. turmenta *flagillorum*, ‘the marks, that is, the pains of the lashings’, 20d5 (Thes I, 630; translation and interpretation by Ó Néill 2002, 240).

Taking AG’s *fairrend* as the acc. sg. of *errend* ‘mark’ avoids interfering with the manuscript readings, since *fairrend* ends with a broad -nd, thereby providing end-rhyme with the masculine adjectival form *tend*. I give here the quatrain in full, followed by a revised translation of the second couplet:

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Dorat .l. crēcht form chness,
dom leith chlē ocus dom leith dess,
ṇi ḟail díb ar talmain tend._
crēcht arnā fagbaim fairrend.
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‘He inflicted fifty wounds on my skin,
on my left side and on my right side.
There is not a wound anywhere for which I do not find a battle-scar.’

In this quatrain Cú Chulainn states that for each and every wound that Goll inflicted on him in the battle, he now finds a mark or battle-scar. These are not superficial scratches that heal

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15 For the Middle Irish phenomenon of a feminine adjectival form in the accusative or dative singular following a masculine consonantal stem, see O’Brien (1954; 1958); SNG III, §6.4; Kobel (2018). The corruption may have arisen due to the sequence of minims.

16 See Meyer (1905); SNG III, §2.11. I am grateful to Micheál Hoyne for discussing this emendation and indeed for suggesting the reasons for it to me.

17 Stokes (1893, 423) translates *ar talmain tend* as ‘on the firm earth’. I understand this phrase to have a similar meaning as *for bith* ‘anywhere, at all, in existence’ (see DIL s.v. *for*, I (a) and s.v. *bith* I (c)).
within a short period of time, but rather he will be affected by them for life. References to Cú Chulainn’s battle wounds and gashes are found elsewhere in medieval Irish literature. For instance, in *Fled Bricrenn* Emer describes Cú Chulainn’s wonderful physical beauty and attributes, listing his numerous wounds amongst them: *Cáin fo-rondar a chorp hi crú: créicha ina chánchnis, álta ina thóeb liss*, ‘Splendidly is his body reddened with blood, wounds upon his beautiful skin, gashes upon his side’, *FB* §24 ll. 8322 ff.

In conclusion, of the three citations given in *DIL* s.v. *forrind* ‘point (of a weapon), barb’, two are found in *TBC LL* with the sense of ‘spearpoint’. The third is found in the late Middle Irish prosimetric tale *AG* and the editors of the Dictionary suggested emending MS *fairrend* to *fairrind* ‘spearpoint’. However, I have argued that *fairrend* is not a form of *forrind* but that it is a variant of *errend* ‘mark’ and that emendation is not required as a result.

**ABBREVIATIONS**


*SNG* Kim McConé, Damian McManus, Cathal Ó Háinle, Nicholas Williams and Liam Breathnach (eds), *Stair na Gaeilge in ómós do Phádraig Ó Fiannachta* (Maynooth, 1994).

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