

SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE VERSIFICATION OF THE
RHYMELESS 'LEINSTER POEMS'¹

INTRODUCTION

Despite the comments of Kuno Meyer and James Carney on the versification of the rhymeless poems in the genealogical tract on the pedigrees of Leinster,² we are still left with the problem of the principles on which the verse-lines of these poems are to be defined. According to Meyer the boundaries of the verse-lines can be recognized by the application of freer rules of alliteration (*Bindung*) than those in verse-internal position (*Alliteration*).³ These rules, which on the whole are equivalent to those of *fidrad freccomail* of rhymed poetry (i.e. 'alliteration binding the last word of a stanza to the first word of the next stanza'⁴), were described by him in *Über die älteste irische Dichtung*.⁵ In the poems quoted, however, nearly all the verse-lines are linked by alliteration of the normal type and freer alliteration can hardly have been indicative of the boundary of a verse-line. Although in the title of his monograph Meyer called this poetry 'rhythmical' (*Rhythmische alliterierende reimlose Strophen*), he remarked that no regular alternation of stressed and unstressed syllables, i.e. metrically conditioned rhythm, can be observed.⁶ Finally, he made the important observation that in many of the rhymeless poems the long lines end in a disyllable with the exception of proper names, which may be trisyllabic.⁷ Accordingly, Carney in his remarks on early rhymeless poetry in Appendix 1 to his article 'Three Old Irish accentual poems'⁸ developed a rule that '[in verse dating from the sixth century] disyllabic words with a medial cluster of consonants, generally resulting

¹ I wish to thank Dr J. N. O'Sullivan, Hamburg, for reading and correcting the typescript of this article. ABBREVIATIONS: *ÄID*, K. Meyer, *Über die älteste irische Dichtung* I. Rhythmische alliterierende Reimstrophen (Abhandlungen der königl. preuss. Akademie der Wissenschaften, no. 6, Berlin 1913) 1-61; II. Rhythmische alliterierende reimlose Strophen (Abhandlungen der königl. preuss. Akademie der Wissenschaften, no. 10, Berlin 1914) 1-40; *CGH*, M. A. O'Brien (ed.), *Corpus genealogiarum Hiberniae* (Dublin 1962, 1976); *DIL*, *Dictionary of the Irish language* (Dublin 1913-76); *GOI*, R. Thurneysen, *A grammar of Old Irish* (Dublin 1946).

² C. Watkins in his article 'Indo-European metrics and archaic Irish verse', *Celtica* 6 (1963) 194-249, refers only once to these poems (pp. 236-7, here no. 4). I was not able to use P. Kalyguine, *Jazyk drobnejšej irlandskoj poesii* ['The language of the oldest Irish poetry'] (Moskva 1986). The recent edition of E. Campanile, *Die älteste Hofdichtung von Leinster: alliterierende reimlose Strophen* (Wien 1988), deals only superficially with the metre (pp. 10-11). ADDENDUM: see now also J. Carney, 'The dating of Archaic Irish verse', in *Early Irish literature: media and communication* (ed. S. Tranter and H. Tristram, Tübingen 1989) 39-55.

³ *ÄID* II, 3.

⁴ G. Murphy, *Early Irish metrics* (Dublin 1961) 3 n. 2, 38-9, 86-7. See further F. Kelly, 'A poem in praise of Columb Cille', *Ériu* 24 (1973) 1-34, pp. 4-5; and J. Carney, 'Linking alliteration ("Fidrad freccomail")', *Éigse* 18 (1980-81) 251-62.

⁵ *ÄID* I, 8-10.

⁶ *ÄID* II, 4.

⁷ *ÄID* II, 3-4.

⁸ *Ériu* 22 (1971) 23-80, pp. 53-63.

from syncope, are to be treated as trisyllabic'.⁹ Indeed, the disyllables ending a verse-line always contain a consonant cluster, while, on the other hand, examples of trisyllabic endings with words other than proper names are to be found, e.g. no. 1 *muiredach*, no. 3 *slōgidach*, no. 5 *flaithemdaí*, no. 10 *aidblither* and no. 12 *crōlechtaib* in the poems quoted below. Further, some of the poems were seen by Carney as realizations of the *ochtfhoclach* pattern, which was attained by breaking up pairs of verse-lines into twice three cola of usually – but not always – two stresses followed by a cadence: e.g. *Mōen ōen | ō ba noed, | nī bud noos | ardrīg, / ort rīga, | rout ān, | hua Luirc | Labraid*.¹⁰ But while his analysis seems to work in the example adduced, in others it does not work, and his alternative analysis of these pairs as consisting of four verse-lines – the caesura being considered as the end of a line¹¹ – gives us a better starting-point in these cases. Still, many of the rhymeless poems in the corpus edited by Meyer cannot be analysed in this way, and a new assessment is necessary.

As the interrelationships between the different versions of the tract in which these poems are transmitted have not yet been investigated, I cannot base this discussion on a full critical edition. Instead, for ease of reference, I shall quote and translate the poems according to the text of the manuscript Rawlinson B 502 [hereafter R] as published in *Corpus genealogiarum Hiberniae* except where otherwise stated.¹² Variant readings affecting the metre will be noted from the diplomatic edition of the Book of Leinster [hereafter LL],¹³ the Book of Ballymote [hereafter BB],¹⁴ the Book of Lecan [hereafter Lec.],¹⁵ and the late supplement to the Book of Leinster [hereafter LLfac.].¹⁶ The poems will be divided into three groups: 'cadenced poetry', 'alliterative chain' and 'mixed types'. The corpus used in this article consists of the poems in *CGH*, 17–23, and *CGH*, 70–73, only. I will not refer to the other rhymeless poems edited by Meyer, i.e. the poem *Mōen ōen*,¹⁷ which is preserved in the *dindshenchas*,¹⁸ in the aetiological introduction, as well

⁹*ibid.*, 54 n. 3, brackets mine; see also J. Carney, 'Aspects of archaic Irish', *Éigse* 17 (1977–9) 417–35, pp. 421–30.

¹⁰*Ériu* 22 (1971) 56.

¹¹*ibid.*, 61.

¹²Capitalization and division of lines, however, are not always followed. The cadence is marked by spacing, the caesura by a vertical stroke. Round brackets indicate omissions and square brackets indicate additions *supported by the other manuscript texts*.

¹³*The Book of Leinster formerly Lebar na Núachongbála VI* (ed. A. O'Sullivan, Dublin 1983).

¹⁴Royal Irish Academy facsimile, introduction by Robert Atkinson (Dublin 1887).

¹⁵Irish Manuscripts Commission facsimile, introduction by Kathleen Mulchrone (Dublin 1937).

¹⁶Royal Irish Academy facsimile, introduction by Robert Atkinson (Dublin 1880).

¹⁷*CGH*, 1; *ÁID* II, 10–12.

¹⁸Cf. R. Thurneysen, 'A. Zu irischen Texten', *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie* 11 (1917) 30–34, p. 34.

as in the body of the tract, the poem *Na tri Fothaid*,¹⁹ which describes the position of the three Fothaid in the pedigree of Náuadu Necht, and the three poetic texts concerning the story of Énnae Cennselach and his son Eochu.²⁰ Textual difficulties and the intricacy of their transmission complicate an analysis of their metre, and they will be reserved for a separate treatment.

I. CADENCED VERSE

The poems of the first group have one feature in common: at more or less regular intervals one finds trisyllabic or, according to Carney's rule (see above), equivalent disyllabic words alliterating with the following and – with one exception (no. 6 *máirriḡ ār-choin*) – with the preceding word. The equivalence between trisyllables and disyllables with an internal consonant group, while not necessarily implying a pre-syncope date for the poems, could be explained by a pre-syncope date of the metrical feature of a trisyllabic cadence, which, after the introduction of syncope, applied not only to trisyllables, but also to such disyllables as were – or could have been – created through syncope. In a later publication, Carney made the observation that in *Verba Scáthaige*, a poem with a metrical structure based on trisyllabic line-endings, *otharlige* 'sick-lying' etc. functions as a trisyllable, and explained this feature by the secondary development of the vowel in *-ar*.²¹ Again, for the Old Irish period, this rule can be stated to mean that, after the development of the svarabhakti vowel, it could in this type of poetry be disregarded for metrical reasons. An example of this rule is to be found in no. 5 *Fedelmithe* (< *fed *lmithe*). The fragment no. 7 deviates from the other poems in showing not a trisyllabic, but a disyllabic cadence. It is interesting to note that *Bresual*²² here functions as a disyllable (: *Bēolach*), while in no. 6 it may function as the equivalent of a trisyllable (: *ār-choin*).

The length of the lines demarcated by the cadence ranges in some poems (nos. 1, 2, 3) from 6 to 10/11 syllables, in others (nos. 4, 5, 6, 7) from 10 to 13/14 syllables. All verse-lines show consistent internal alliteration. The alliteration can, however, be interrupted at the caesura: e.g. no. 1 *nairech | fo brōn* and no. 2 *corostar | for sluagu, coibnius | eter*. In some cases the two cola of the longer lines can be further subdivided – in accordance with Carney's first analysis of this metre (see above) – into two shorter cola each, the last colon constituting the cadence. But in other cases such an analysis would lead to awkward subdivisions: e.g. no. 5 *fri fīledu | fāth | fiu dā mac fīala | Fedelmithe*. So it seems better to

¹⁹ *CGH*, 99; *ĀID* II, 14 (cf. K. Meyer, 'Find mac Umail', *Revue Celtique* 32 (1911) 391–5); *LL* VI 25033–25046.

²⁰ *ĀID* II, 19 and 21–2. These texts are not preserved in R owing to a gap (*CGH*, 75). In *Lec.*, which is not referred to by Meyer, they are to be found on f. 92 r b 10 and f. 92 v a 4–14. See also note 41.

²¹ *Éigse* 17 (1977–9) 426; cf. *GOI*, 70–71 § 112.

²² See note 39.

accept that the basic structure of the verse-lines in this poetry consisted of two, and not of four, cola.

The lines consisting of two cola often constitute a syntactic unit, but do not necessarily do so. See the possible case of enjambment in no. 2 *Moriath / macdacht Morca*. After every two lines, however, a sentence boundary is obligatory and even the shortest fragments, except the special case of no. 8, consist of two lines. We can thus regard these poems with Meyer as stanzaic,²³ each stanza consisting of two lines.

The rhythm of the cola on either side of the caesura is not fixed, at least if we apply the rules of natural word-stress in Old and Middle Irish:²⁴ e.g. no. 4 *Mál ad·rúalaid íat[h]u márb* with four stresses, *sélaig sráthu Fómair* with three stresses, and *Di uáchtur Álinne* with two stresses. Carney accounted for such irregularities in the accentual pattern by a special set of rules which would apply to early, non-syllabic poetry.²⁵ But the strict application of his rules to the poems cited below does not always lead to regular stress pattern: e.g. no. 4 *Di uáchtur Álinne* ('A trisyllabic word may be regarded as having a stress on the last as well as on the first syllable') with three stresses, but *trébunn trēn túathmar* ('An accented syllable standing immediately before another may be de-stressed') with two stresses. J. Kuryłowicz criticized Carney's rules²⁶ and substituted another set of rules based on the principle that syntactic groups connected by (morphological) sandhi had only one main stress (substantive + átribute, verb + súbjeet, but vérb + súbjeet + átribute). His rules, however, do not lead to a regular pattern either: e.g. no. 4 *Mál ad·ruálaid íat[h]u márb* with three stresses, *sélaig sráthu Fómair* with two stresses, and *Di uáchtur Álinne* with one main stress. For the present it seems better not to ascribe to the rhythm of this type of versification a constitutive role in the definition of the verse-lines, although rhythm may be relevant as a stylistic feature of its individual realizations. Indeed, if a tendency toward a subdivision of the verse-lines into cola with two stresses can be observed in some cases (e.g. no. 1 and *Móen óen* above), this may be due to the influence of the type here called 'alliterative chain'; cf. the 'mixed types' below. Thus, the term 'cadenced verse',²⁷ used by Charles W. Dunn with regard to the poetry studied by Calvert Watkins,²⁸ very aptly applies to the poems of our first group too.

²³ *ÁID* II, 3.

²⁴ See Murphy, *Early Irish metrics*, 41.

²⁵ *Ériu* 22 (1971) 25 and 35.

²⁶ *Metrik und Sprachgeschichte* (Wrocław 1975) 158-71, esp. 160: 'Alles dies befindet sich im Widerspruch zu der auf den bisherigen Analysen gegründeten Erfahrung, nämlich der allgemeinen Tendenz der Stärkung der metrischen Fugen, nicht zu ihrer Lockerung'.

²⁷ Celtic, in W. K. Wimsatt (ed.), *Versification - major language types: sixteen essays* (New York 1972) 136-47, esp. 136.

²⁸ *Celtica* 6 (1963) 194-249.

No. 8 deviates from the other poems in that only part of the text follows the metrical structure described above. In this text one verse-line is combined with a text in poetic style with no apparent metrical structure.

Examples of this kind of versification are also found in the story of Conchobar's death and, in connection with apparently non-metrical poetic style, in a *roscad* from *Túin Bó Cúailnge*.²⁹ It has a rhymed counterpart in two of the genealogical poems edited by Meyer: *Nída dír dermaid*³⁰ and *Nūadu Necht, nī dāmair anflaith*.³¹ In these poems the cadence of the two lines of every stanza is connected by rhyme. Carney suggested that the distribution of rhyme in the *rannaighecht* metres of syllabic poetry (*ab cd*) originated in the rhymed counterparts of what is here called 'cadenced poetry', the non-rhyming lines being originally those parts of the verse-lines that preceded the caesura.³²

1. *CGH*, 18; *ĀID* II, 7–8³³

Dind Rīg | ruad Tuaim Tenbad,
trīcha(it) nairech | fo brōn bebsait.

Brūisius, brēosuis | bār niad lonn Labraid,
lāth Elgca | hūa Luircc Lōegaire.

Lugaid lōeg | lonn sanb Sētna
sochla Cōel | Cobthach māl muiredach.

Mandrais armu | [athair] athar Ollomon
ort Mōen | macco āin Augaine.

'Dind Rīg (was) red Túaim Tenbad. Thirty nobles (?) died sorrowfully. He crushed (and) burnt them, the bold wise champion Labraid, the warrior of Elg, the grandson of Loegaire Lorc: the calf (= the beloved) Lugaid, the bold, . . . Sétnae, the renowned Coel, Cobthach the chief (and) lord. He destroyed (their) weapons, the father of the father of (Óengus) Ollam. Mōen of the family of glorious Augaine slew (them).'

²⁹The *retoiric* in *Aided Chonchobuir*, *Ériu* 40 (1989) 41–59.

³⁰*ĀID* I, 16 = *CGH*, 8.

³¹*ĀID* I, 39 = *CGH*, 1

³²*Ériu* 22 (1971) 58.

³³R 118 a 9–14, BB 119 b 25–31, Lec. 84 r a 21–6, LLfacs. 377 b 15–19. See also H. Wagner, 'The archaic *Dind Rīg* poem and related problems', *Ériu* 28 (1977) 1–16. The corresponding text in the story *Orgain Denna Rīg* (ed. D. Greene, *Fingal Rónáin and other stories* (Dublin 1955) lines 453–69) differs in many points from the text in the genealogies, and the two versions should not be conflated. Its metrical structure, however, is basically the same. The reading *nairech* in the second line is supported by the genealogical text (except Lec.: *aireath*) as well as by the text in the story (except LL: *fariach*): *náirech* 'diffident, modest', here 'noble' in the positive sense of the basic word *nár* 'noble, modest' > *náire* '*nobility, modesty'? R *macco* (v.l. *mac(c)u*, BB *mac ua*) 'of the family (of)' rather than acc. pl. of *mac*?

2. *CGH*, 18; *ĀID* II, 9³⁴

Ni ce(i)lt ceis | ceol de chruitt Chrapitini
co corostar | for sluagu suanbas.

consert coibnius | eter sceo Máin Moriath
macdacht Morca | mó cech luág Labraid

‘The *ceis* did not conceal the music from Craptine’s harp, so that it covered the hosts with a sleep-death. It strewed affection between Máin and Moriath, the marriagable girl of Muirc (Morc, Morca): Labraid surpasses any price.’

3. *CGH*, 72; *ĀID* II, 18³⁵

Lāmair lergga | lāna slō(i)g slōgidach
scēo lāthaib | Laigniu Labraid

‘Labraid (son of Bressal Beolach) defied battle-fields full of warlike hosts and warriors: (he defied) the Leinstermen.’

4. *CGH*, 20; *ĀID* II, 6–7³⁶

Māl ad·rualaid iat[h]u marb | mac sōer Sētnai,
selaig srathu Fomaire | fo dōene domnaib.

Di uachtur Alinne | oirt trīunu talman,
trebunn trēn tuathmar | Mis-Telmann (*v.l.* Del-) Domna(in)n.

‘A chief has entered the territories of the dead, the noble son of Sētnae. He cleared the meadows of the Fomaire under (or: throughout) the worlds of men. From the summit of Ailenn he slew the leaders of the world. A strong mighty tribune (was) Mis-Delmann of the Domnainn.’

³⁴R 118 a 17, LL VI 39608–612, BB 119 b 34–7, Lec. 84 r a 33 – b 3, LLfacs. 377 b 24–6. R quotes the first line only. Accordingly, I quote the text of LL. Like the foregoing text it appears in the story *Orgain Denna Ríg* (see Greene, *Fingal Rónáin*, lines 384–7) and it is quoted in the commentary on *Amra Choluim Chille* as well (LU 622–5; W. Stokes, ‘The Bodleian Amra Choluimb Chille’, *Revue Celtique* 20 (1899) 30–55, 132–83, 248–87, 400–437, pp. 166, 431). If the boundary of the third verse-line is rightly placed after *Moriath*, implying enjambment between this and the fourth verse-line, the metrical structure is the same as that of the foregoing text, together with which it is attributed to Ferchertne in the story. In accordance with the story, *coibnius*, literally ‘relationship’, may have the more recent meaning ‘affection’ (*DIL* C-290.61 on [*coibne*] and T. F. O’Rahilly, ‘Varia II’, *Celtica* 1 (1950) 328–86, p. 369 [Sc.Gael. *caibhneas* ‘kindness’]). R. Thurneysen’s emendation of *eter sceo M. M. to etirre sceo M. M.* (‘Zur keltischen Literatur und Grammatik’, *ZCP* 12 (1918) 271–89, p. 285) is not necessary: compare in *roscaid*-style *Táin Bó Cúailnge* I (ed. C. O’Rahilly, Dublin 1976) line 1157: *sceó Aihill Medba for Aihill sceó Medba?*

³⁵R 124 b 10–11, BB 132 a 26–8, Lec. 91 r a 20–21, LLfacs. 387 a 25–6.

³⁶R 118 a 32–5, LL VI 39635–9, Lec. 84 r b 28–31, LLfacs. 378 a 19–22.

5. *CGH*, 70; *ĀID* II, 14³⁷

Cathaír cōem Conn | comfebaib fallnatar flaithemdai
fri filedu fāth | fiu dā mac fiala Fedelmithe.

'Beloved Cathaír (and) Conn (Cétchathach), (these) princes rule with equal excellence. They (are) worthy (to be) subject-matter of poets, the two noble sons of the (two) Fedelmid.'

6. *CGH*, 73; *ĀID* II, 18³⁸

Línais Nia nīthach sab | slōgaib cach māirrig ār-choin
co mbaig dorar ndian | dā mac buadaig Bresuail.

'The combative champion Nia filled the slaughter-hound with the hosts of every great king, until a vehement battle struck the two sons of victorious Bresual.'

7. *CGH*, 71; *ĀID* II, 15³⁹

Ān grian grīssach | goires brēoda Bresua(i)l
bres Elgca hūa Luircc | lāthras bith Béolach.

'A bright fiery sun that burns (is) flaming Bresual. A blow on Elg (= Ireland) (is) the descendant of Lorc who has power of disposition over the world, Béolach.'

8. *CGH*, 71; *ĀID* II, 16⁴⁰

Cōeca fichet filed fiu bid nath n-airec fri drauc Fiachaich
Fiachu ferr oen | ilar mbrāithre Bacedo.

³⁷R 124 a 29–30, BB 131 b 36–8, Lec. 90 v d 7–9. On the construction of *fri filedu* (= -a) *fāth* (acc. + acc. for gen. + acc.) see H. Wagner, 'A syntactical feature of archaic O.Ir. poetry', *ZCP* 39 (1982) 78–82. As *fiu* is a predicative adjective, *fāth fiu* 'ein würdiger Gegenstand' (K. Meyer) is impossible. In R *fiala* is a Mid.Ir. nom. du./pl. masc.; BB and Lec. read *fial*, but *do* (*mac*) seems corrupt. Cathaír Már is the son of Fedelmid Fer Aurglas, whereas Conn Cétchathach is the son of Fedelmid Rechtaid.

³⁸R 124 b 12–13, BB 132 a 28–31, Lec. 91 r a 22–4. *baig* is probably 3 sg. s-pret. of *boingid* (OIr. *-bobaig*); see K. McCone, 'From Indo-European to Old Irish: conservation and innovation in the verbal system', in *Proceedings of the seventh International Congress of Celtic Studies* (ed. D. Ellis Evans, et al., Oxford 1986) 222–66, p. 230, on *con·buich*.

³⁹R 124 a 49–51, LL vi 40456–7, BB 132 a 4–6, Lec. 90 v d 46–9, LLfacs. 387 a 11–12. Alternatively *bréo Bresuail* 'the flame of B. = the flaming B.' (v.ll. *b(r)eo bres(u)al*). On *Bresual* see Meyer, *ĀID* II, 4 n. 2: 'Solch alte Formen waren den Gelehrten noch im 9. Jahrhundert aus der älteren Literatur bekannt'. (Cf. Corm. Y 403, 960).

⁴⁰R 124 a 46–8, LL VI 40452–3, BB 131 b 50–51, Lec. 90 v d 37–41, LLfacs. 387 a 8–10. R is supported by Lec. only. LL and the other manuscripts read: *Fiche filed fir* (recte *fiu*, v.ll.) *nath nairec fordarc Fiachraig* (recte *-chaig*, v.ll.) 'Twenty poets, they (are) worthy of inventing poems (on) the famous (?) Fiachu'. On *fiu bid* (pred. + cop.!) compare no. 12 (note 53).

'A thousand poets, they would have been worthy of inventing poems on the dragon Fiachu: Fiachu is better than (any)one of the many brothers of Baccid (=himself).'

II. ALLITERATIVE CHAIN

We have in our corpus only one example to illustrate the second type of versification.⁴¹ It is important for the understanding of the third type. This poem consists of a chain of cola, each colon containing two stressed words, the second of which alliterates with the first of the next colon. The chain ends in a somewhat longer sentence. Thus, this kind of versification is defined by both alliteration and rhythm. It is, of course, amply attested in Old Irish literature and it will suffice to give three examples: *Fochen Conall, / cride licce* etc., from *Scéla mucce Meic Dathó*⁴² in narrative literature; *Ced as fogailsi do duiniu? Nī anse. Foss oc etlai / anbatae mbrīathar* etc., from *Apgitir Chrábaid*⁴³ in didactic literature; and *Mad be rí rofesser / recht flatho* etc.,⁴⁴ (with many deviations) from a legal text. This type has a rhymed counterpart in *Ēnna, Labraid, | lūad cāich, / comarc Bresail | būain blāith* etc.⁴⁵ and *Cū cen māthair, | maith cland* etc.,⁴⁶ as well as in some of the fragments ascribed to Colmán mac Lénéni.⁴⁷ In these rhymed poems the last word of every second colon rhymes with the last word of every fourth colon. The rhymed poems are thus organized in lines of two cola and stanzas of two lines each, and a combination of two such stanzas to a new, four-lined stanza in syllabic poetry may well underlie the *deibhidhe* pattern of rhyme (*ab cd*) as Carney suggested.⁴⁸ If, however, we try to apply such a subdivision to our poem, then the lines *bārcaib di thonnaib* and *Trī huī Baīscnī* – which seem to be divided by a sentence-boundary – would have to constitute one verse-line. This is rather improbable and it seems better to accept that the basic structure of this poem was a mere chain of short cola defined by alliteration and rhythm.

⁴¹The poem *Eochu art arachridethar cathrai* (*ĀID* II, 22; see note 20) may belong to this type as well.

⁴²Ed. R. Thurneysen (Dublin 1935, repr. 1969) 14 § 15.

⁴³V. Hull, 'Apgitir chrábaid: the alphabet of piety', *Celtica* 8 (1968) 44–89, p. 62 § 9.

⁴⁴D. A. Binchy, 'An archaic legal poem', *Celtica* 9 (1971) 152–68.

⁴⁵*ĀID* I, 27 = *CGH*, 4.

⁴⁶*ĀID* I, 53 = *CGH*, 199.

⁴⁷R. Thurneysen, 'Colmán mac Lénéni und Senchán Torpēist', *ZCP* 19 (1933) 193–209; see J. Carney, *Ériu* 22 (1971) 54.

⁴⁸*Ériu* 22 (1971) 54–6.

9. *CGH*, 22; *ÁID* II, 20⁴⁹

Find Taulcha
 tuath-cuire,
 Caílte crothsat
 cres mbodbae
 bārcaib di thonnaib.
 Trī hūi Baíscni
 buadach cuitechta
 cond ar ferga
 filset trī hūi Nuadat Necht.

'Find (and) Taulcha, an evil band, (and) Caílte caused warlike brandishing from ships/strongholds (and) waves/land. The three descendants of Baíscne, a victorious company; they turned on doglike wrath (= warriors), the three descendants of Núadu Necht.'

III. MIXED TYPES

The versification of some of the poems is based on a combination of the first two types. In nos. 10 and 11, the first line of the first stanza is not a cadenced line, but the beginning of an alliterative chain which, from the second line on, develops to a line of the cadenced type. With the lack of alliteration in no. 11 *cōecat bliadnae*, compare no. 6 *māirrig ārchoin*. This gradual development is especially clear in no. 12, which, until the cadence of the third line (*machta*), could be considered an alliterative chain. No. 13 could even be taken as such in its entirety. But *Lergnaid* would have to take the place of a colon, and it would be impossible to account for the consonance between *Lergnaid* and *Aurgnaid*. If, on the other hand, we regard *Lergnaid* as the cadence of a long line, the poem seems to develop from an alliterative chain to a stanza representing an intermediate stage between cadenced poetry and its rhymed counterpart (see above).

The type represented by nos. 14 and 15 (if read according to R) is more complicated. In both poems not only the first, but also the second stanza begins with an alliterative chain which develops to a line with a 'trissyllabic' cadence. Again, no. 15 could be read nearly in its entirety as an alliterative chain, were it not for the clear semantic and syntactic break after *Corpre* and the occurrence of a 'trissyllabic' cadence at the expected places.

No. 16 is wholly adapted to the rhythm of an alliterative chain, but the alliterative pattern is interrupted. Like the rhymed counterpart of the alliterative chain (see above), and unlike no. 9, it is organized in

⁴⁹R 118 a 54 - b 2, LL VI 39659-62, BB 120 b 5-9, Lec. 84 v a 12-15, LLfac. 378 b 51-3. The difficult colon *bārcaib di thonnaib* can be understood if we accept that these words are here used in their basic as well as in their metaphorical meanings (*DIL* s.vv.). R *cond ar* = *conda(i) ar* (see *DIL* F-135.38-45 on *fillid ar*)? The other manuscripts have the meaningless *conda (cota) ferta(i)*.

lines of two cola each. Each line, except the first, ends in a trisyllable or its equivalent. The lines in which its cola are organized have thus partly been adapted to the line endings of cadenced poetry. Finally, the last stanza offers an example of imperfect unstressed rhyme.⁵⁰

10. *CGH*, 19; *ÁID* II, 23⁵¹

Lug scēith scāl finn
fo nimib nī raibe | bid mac [n]Áine aidblither
Airdiu deeib dōen | dron daur-grāinne
glan gablach | hūa Luircc Lōegaire.

‘Lynx of the shield, handsome superhuman being: under the heavens nobody has existed who was as mighty as the son of (Ailill) Áine. A man (who was) higher than gods, a hard acorn, a pure javelin (was) the grandson of Loegaire Lorc.’

11. *CGH*, 70; *ÁID* II, 15⁵²

Doss dáile dāl Temra
toccaid cain | cōemna cōecat bliadnae
ba barr fíne | fial caur Cathaír mōr
mairg Elcgae | atmad a lecht Luaigne.

‘A tree of bestowing (food and drink) – the bestowing of Tara –, of prosperous wealth – provision of fifty years. He was the top of the vine (or: the family), the noble hero Cathaír Mór. It was agreed that this grave (caused by?) the Luaigne was a calamity of Elg (=Ireland).’

⁵⁰See D. Sproule, ‘Complex alliteration, full and unstressed rhyme, and the origin of *deibide*’, *Ériu* 38 (1987) 185–200, pp. 195–200.

⁵¹R 118 a 20–23, LL VI 39620–23, BB 119 b 42–3, Lec. 84 r b 8–10, LLfacs. 377 b 39–40. On *gablach* ‘javelin’ see *DIL* G–5.23–5.

⁵²R 124 a 31–5. *dāl* and *cōemna* are probably nominatives of apposition (*GOI*, 156 § 247c) to the genitives *dáile* and *toccaid*. Accented *i* in the only manuscript preserving this text can stand for long as well as short *i*: *fíne* ‘vine’ or *fíne* ‘family’ or even an intentional pun based on the similarity of both? Compare *doss dáile* ‘a tree of bestowing = a generous champion’ and footnote 49 on *bārcaib di thonnaib*. *atmad* is probably a 3 sg. pret. pass. of Mid.Ir. *at(a)maid* ‘admits, concedes’ corresponding to OIr. **ad-dét* / **addat* from *ad-daim* ‘id’. (cf. Mid.Ir. *ad-rodmat* = OIr. *ad-rodāt*).

12. *CGH*, 72; *ÁID* II, 17⁵³

Māra galgata grith fāebair
 for Cairpri clannaib Cnāmrois hi lerggaib
 Lēcit māra meic hūi Chuind | co noī milib machta
 mair meicc fine āin rīg | Eochu, Eochuid dil Domplēn.
 Daith ruire Raiphtine | ropo Fiachu forderg
 fō scēl scīth scuirset lim | lāithe hūi Chuind crōlechtsaib.

'Great calamities, sharp-edged uproar over the children of Cairpre (Liphechar) on the slopes of Cnámros. The sons of the descendant of Conn (Cétchathach) leave with nine thousand (men) great slaughters behind; great sons of the family of a glorious king (were) Eochu (and) precious Eochaid Domplén; a nimble king was the very red (= warlike) Fiachu Raiphtine. A nice story! It wearies me (that) the warriors of Conn's descendant have unyoked in blood-stained graves.'

13. *CGH*, 20–21; *ÁID* II, 12⁵⁴

Eochu Ferngen . Finteng . Aucha .
 hEriu . orb . Alb . Rogen
 ruad . Donaile dāna . Nār . | Noe . Ladrann Lergnaid .
 Luad Cuar . cāin Māsc | meic Augein Aurgnaid.

'Eochu Ferngen, Finteng, Aucha, Eriu the heir, Alb, Rogen, red Donaile, stout-hearted Nār, Noe, Ladrann, Lergnaid, Luad Cuar, fair Māsc (are) the sons of Augen Aurgnaid.'

14. *CGH*, 21; *ÁID* II, 13⁵⁵

⁵³R 124 a 55 – b 4, LL VI 40463–70, BB 132 a 14–20, Lec. 91 r a 7–11, LLfacs. 387 a 17–21). This fine poem is conspicuous for its artificial word-order: *māra* . . . *machta* (acc. pl. of *machtad*; cf. *GOI*, 196 § 309 below); *Daith ruire*. . . = *Ropo daith ruire Fiachu Raiphtine forderg*; *scīth scuirset lim* . . . = *scīth lim scuirset*. . . . In the text as preserved in the other manuscripts this feature has been eliminated: *marbad* instead of *machta* with loss of the syntactic connection with *māra*; *roFiachu* instead of *ropo Fiachu*; omission of *scuirset*. On R showing admittedly better readings than the common readings of the other manuscripts, see also note 49.

⁵⁴R 118 a 37–40, LL VI 39640–45, BB 120 a 35–9, Lec. r b 34–40, LLfacs. 378 b 6–11 and 21–2. The identification of the proper names of the thirteen sons of Augen Aurgnaid differs in some points from that in Meyer's and O'Brien's editions. It is based on the assumption that the words, which in versions other than R are not used as the basis of a *dindshenchas* introduced by *a quo*, are epithets. It is true that *Lergnaid* is so explained in Lec. only and that it is there introduced by a deviating formula (*diatād*). But in the *dindshenchas* both *Ladru* and *Luad Cuar* are named as sons of Augen Aurgnaid: LL iii 21619–20; as Augen Aurgnaid is there considered to have only six sons (21615) *Luad. Cúar* must be the name of one son. Thus, *Lergnaid* is probably to be taken as a separate proper name.

⁵⁵R 118 a 43–6, LL VI 39650–53, BB 120 a 45–8, Lec. 84 r b 48 – v a 2, LLfacs. 378 b 35–6. *Bāeth* = *baid*? On *-th* for *-d* see *GOI*, 83 § 130.2. For the analysis of *bān-ān* (here taken as a substantive) and *dil-main* (Meyer and O'Brien: *dilman* 'free') see Campanile, *Die älteste Hofdichtung*, 49. For semantic reasons I take *āirme*

Bāeth buide bān-ān dron
 dāna dil-maīn | maicne nAilb āirme.
 Achir būire brūdi de[i]rg
 Dondobur dōel | Gabruan g[r?]inne fur Findubur.

‘Tender favour; vigorous, bright splendour; stout-hearted, precious treasure: we enumerate the sons of Alb: Acher, (the man) of rage, of red destruction; Dondobur, the (sc. dreadful) beetle; Gabrōn, the point (?) against Findubar.’

15. *CGH*, 23; *ÄID* II, 20⁵⁶

Trī meic Ruaid ruirig flaind,
 fiangal Find, Ailill acher, cōem Corpre.
 Caīne dind dem i foat
 Alinn cruind, Cruachu, Temair tōebglan.

‘The three sons of Rúad, (they were) blood-red (= warlike) kings: valiant Finn, keen Ailill, precious Corpre. Gentle steeds, the darkness in which they sleep: round Alenn, Crúachu and fair-sided Temair.’

16. *CGH*, 72; *ÄID* II, 18⁵⁷

Māra mairb māra mairtt
 trī meic trī mārīg.
 Meic Cairpri caīne ānrīg
 Eochu, Eochuid drauc Domplēn
 Deilm ruire ruad Raiptine
 Fiachu fothath fechair forb-dīne.

‘Great (are) the deads, great (are) the slaughters: three sons, three great kings. The sons of Cairpre (Liphechar), the fair glorious king: Eochu (and) Eochuid Domplēn, the dragon. A thunder (was) the king,

as 1 pl. pres. of Mid.Ir. *áirmid* with absolute ending (-*me* = -*mi*) rather than as 2 sg. pres. protot. of OIr. *ad-rími*; cf. O. Bergin, ‘On the syntax of the verb in Old Irish’, *Ériu* 12 (1934–8) 197–214, p. 201. *būire* and *brūdi* (ms *bru di*) may be genitives of *būire* and *brūd* (cf. gen. sg. *bruitha*, Ml. 34a26). The reading *ginne* of R is supported by all manuscripts except LLfacs. (*grinne*): corruption of the common archetype emended by LLfacs.?’

⁵⁶R 118 b 15–17, LL VI 39679–82, BB 120 b 27–30, Lec. 84 v a 42–6, LLfacs. 380 a 13–14. *dind* is gen. pl. (cf. *GOI*, 196 § 309.1) of apposition (*GOI*, 158–9 § 250). *dem i* for *deme i* (*DIL* s.v. *deime*)? Lec. and LLfacs. (LL here illegible) add *olloman* after *foait*: gen. pl. relating to *dind*? If this reading is original, the poem belongs to the same type as nos. 10 and 11.

⁵⁷R 124 b 5–7, Lec. 91 r a 13–15. The older nom. pl. masc. *mair* may be attested in the corrupt version of Lec. (*mair mair mairt marb*). *fo(i)rb* in *forb-dīne* (Lec. *foirb-dīne*) is a Mid.Ir. by-form of *orb*; compare *orbae*, Mid.Ir. *forbba*. Fiachu (S)raip(h)tine is the ancestor of the Uí Néill and the Connachta.

red Raiphine, Fiachu, the foundation (= ancestor) of a fierce race of heirs.'

CONCLUSION

Two basic types of versification have been identified among the rhymeless 'Leinster poems': verse-lines marked by an alliterating trisyllabic or equivalent disyllabic cadence and alliterative chains based on alliteration and rhythm. Both occur together in different combinations as exemplified in our third type. The rules governing the cadence of the first type and the comparison of both types with their rhymed counterparts suggest that this kind of versification is rooted in an older tradition than rhymed poetry. On the other hand, if we accept that it was still in use after the establishment of rhyme, we can thus best account for examples in other Old Irish texts, as well as for some younger verbal forms in our corpus that cannot easily be explained as scribal innovations.⁵⁸ The types observed in this small corpus are, of course, not the only possible types of rhymeless poetry. As Meyer put it: 'Die Metrik dieser älteren Periode ist aber höchst mannigfacher Art und scheidet sich in viele Gruppen von ganz verschiedenem Bau'.⁵⁹ In this regard it was probably not very different from rhymed syllabic poetry.

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⁵⁸ See notes 38 (*baig*), 52 (*atmad*) and 55 (*āirme*).

⁵⁹ *ÄID* I, 4.