

PERSON-SHIFTING IN GAELIC VERSE

Ghabh air fògradh do'n Spàint
Fear m'èolais 's mo dhàimh;
Cha cheileadh tu pàirt dhe t'aighe orm.

(‘There went into exile in Spain my companion and kinsman; you would not conceal any of your thoughts from me.’)

THE above stanza, lines 1–3 in the late A. M. Mackenzie’s *Orain Iain Luim*, dates from before 1640 and contains an instance of abrupt person-shift, that is, it opens with reference to its subject in the third person, and then shifts, within the stanza, to addressing the subject directly.

Shifting of person between two successive stanzas is quite common in many different literatures – the twenty-third (twenty-second) Psalm being a good example – including the Gaelic of Ireland and Scotland, but this *abrupt* person-shift, within the stanza, seems exceptionally common in some areas of Gaelic verse. The purpose of this article is to identify these areas, in a very impressionistic way based on limited reading, and to make some suggestions as to how this practice may have come into being and spread in the poetry. Due to shortage of space only a few stanzas from the evidence adduced can be quoted in full here.

1. SCOTTISH GAELIC PRAISE POETRY

It seems to me that in the traditional sung praise poetry of Scotland, especially between 1640 and c.1800, there is quite a startling percentage of stanzas (of various lengths) containing person-shifts. The stanza quoted above is the earliest example for which I can find a reasonably firm date, but after that it is very easy to find examples, in the work of practically all the known poets of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

A comprehensive listing of stanzas containing this person-shift is for me unattainable, but the following list of references is offered to illustrate how the feature occurs over this long period in the work of so many poets:

- 1649 (Watson 1959: lines 5396–5403) Pòl Crùbach.
- 1651 (Ó Baoill 1979: lines 460–67).
- post* 1663 (Mackenzie 1964: lines 1174–81).
- c.1683 (Matheson 1970: lines 1–8).
- c.1685 (MacDonald 1984–6:449, last stanza) ‘Bàrd Eireannach’.
- c.1690 (Watson 1934: lines 397–402).
- 1707 (Mackenzie 1964: lines 2840–45).
- 1715 (Watson 1959: lines 3371–95) a series of five stanzas each containing an instance of person-shift; Sìleas na Ceapaich.
- ?c.1730 (Maccallum 1821:127) An Aigeannach:

'S e mo rùn an t-òg fearail ùr aithneachail àrd –
 Mo bheannachd gu bràth le dùrachd dhuit –
 'S a nàdar math beannaichte ceanalta tlàth:
 'S neo-ainniseach ceàrn do dhùthcha-sa. . . .

1747 (Campbell 1984:106 lines 9–16) Alasdair mac Mhaighstir Alasdair.
*c.*1750 (*ibid.*:238 lines 25–32) Rob Donn.
 1782 (*ibid.*:282 lines 25–32) Uilleam Ros.
 1785 (MacLeod 1952: lines 3620–27) Donnchadh Bàn.
*?c.*1800 (*ibid.*: lines 5944–9).

Due partly, at least, to events like the defeat at Culloden and the Highland Clearances, there is somewhat less praise poetry in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and in what there is, it is my impression that abrupt person-shifting is a little less common than in the earlier centuries. Examples, however, are not hard to find right through the period and include:

*?c.*1825 (Macdonald 1911:181 st. 1):

Gu bheil uaisl' anns a' ghille
 Tha de chinneadh nan Leòdach,
 Ciùin suairc ann am bruidhinn,
 'S gun d'fhuair thu 'n t-urram thar mhòran. . . .

*?c.*1850 (Maclean Sinclair 1904:74 st. 1):

'S ann air Di-ciadain thain' an sgeul
 A dh'fhàg na ceudan cianail:
 An t-aon là deug de mhìos a' Chèitein
 Dh'eug am fear bu mhiann leinn.
 Bha tuireadh bròin air aois is òig'
 A ghabh gnè eòlais riamh ort;
 Bhon dhùin am bàs do chaomh-shùil tlàth
 Tha iad gach là fo iargain.

1880 (*ibid.*:115 st. 1).
 1903 (Camshron 1932:327 st. 3).
 1917 (*ibid.*:304 st. 1).
*c.*1930 (Caimbeul 1978:58 st. 1) in a satire.

There are a few cases where the result of this person-shifting is ambiguity, at least for a modern reader. Thus we find this stanza composed by Iain Lom about 1664 for Sir James MacDonald of Sleat (Mackenzie 1964: lines 1353–5):

Bha Dòmhnall an Dùin ann,
 Do mhac oighre 's mòr cùram:
 'S e do stoighle fhuair cliù measg nan Gàidheal.

Who is addressed in the third line? Sir James or his son Dòmhnall?

Examples of our person-shift are considerably harder to find in the period before 1640, but then there are fewer praise poems in the vernacular from that period. As Mac Aonghuis has pointed out (1986:99), the heroic verse which flourishes in the work of Iain Lom, and others coming after him, had not yet fully evolved. There do seem to be some instances in the sixteenth century, such as lines 6747–50 and lines 6883–6 of *Bàrdachd Ghàidhlig* (Watson 1959), but in both these cases the earliest primary sources we have are considerably later. In other apparently early instances which I have noted, it is likewise at least uncertain that we are dealing with genuine sixteenth-century instances of abrupt person-shift in vernacular verse.

2. SCOTTISH GAELIC LOVE SONGS

Abrupt person-shifting from the sixteenth-century is much easier to attest in love songs, which obviously have much in common with praise poems. Love songs are usually fairly difficult to date, but a good few of those which are waulking songs are now generally agreed to have come into being in the sixteenth century. Most of them, however, are not in stanzaic form, so that the decision whether a person-shift is 'abrupt' or not, is very much an arbitrary one. Sixteenth-century examples where I would call the change 'abrupt' include the following section of a song in *Hebridean folksongs* II (Campbell and Collinson 1969–81: lines 1078–81):

A Dhia! 's gaolach lium an gille,
 Dh'am bheil deirge, 's gile 's duinnead,
 Dalta nam bàrd thu 's nam filidh (?),
 Ogha an fhir o'n Chaisteal Thioram. . . .

Other similar instances may also be found (*ibid.*: II, lines 227–36; I, lines 132–7). What may be another early example is in *Fear a' Bhàta* (Mackenzie 1904:377):

'S tric mi sealltainn o'n chnoc as àirde,
 Dh'fheuch am faic mi fear a' bhàta:
 An tig thu 'n-diugh na an tig thu màireach?
 'S mur tig thu idir gur truagh a tà mi.

This song is in stanzaic form. Abrupt person-shift continues to be quite commonly used in love songs, both stanzaic and non-stanzaic, right through the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Alasdair mac Mhaighstir Alasdair (c.1698–c.1770; Macdonald 1924:222 lines 23–32) and Uilleam Ros (1762–?1791; Calder 1937:60–62 lines 25–67) both

use it in love songs. Niall MacLeòid has the following opening stanza in a poem he first published in 1883:

Gu ma slàn do'n rìghinn òig
 Tha tàmh an eilean gorm an fheòir;
 'S e dh'fhàg mo chridhe trom fo leòn
 Nach fhaod mi 'n còmhnaidh fuireach leat (MacLeòid 1975:28).

And another instance appears in a love song of c.1935 in *Bàrdachd a' Bhocsair* (Caimbeul 1978:72 lines 21–4).

3. IRISH PRAISE POETRY

Poetry praising political leaders is a good deal less common in the Irish vernacular than in Scottish Gaelic. This is largely due to the divergent political and cultural courses taken by the two countries after c.1600. In particular, little datable Irish seventeenth-century song has survived, whereas the Scottish song tradition provides most of the instances listed above under (1).

From the work of Dáibhí Ó Bruadair, I have been able to note three instances of person-shift within the stanza in a poem of c.1655 (Mac Erlean 1910–17: I, no. VI stt. xviii, xxvi, xxviii). The first of these reads:

Ní fhághaim chum amhairc leath ná tréana
 cáile an mharcaigh ghartha ghaothghlic
 do b'fheárr fá seach gach beart ná Phoebus
 a ghrádh ach gairid cairt do shaoghail.

(Mac Erlean translates the second couplet: 'Brighter far was every deed of his than Phoebus, Except, alas! so brief, O love, was thy life's charter!') Other arguable instances are also found in Ó Bruadair (Mac Erlean 1910–17: II, 180 st. xii; and III, 88 st. xviii).

On the whole the Irish literate post-Classical poets seem to use abrupt person-shifting only very occasionally. I can find no instance in the praise poetry of Aogán Ó Rathaille, and the only important Irish poet who seems to favour our feature to any extent is Seán Ó Tuama (1706–1775). I have noted seven instances of it in his work in Ó Foghludha, *Éigse na Máighe*, mainly in poems praising priests and poets (Ó Foghludha 1952:76 lines 25–8; 100 st. 1; 125, last stanza; 127, last stanza; 140, first stanza; 145, last stanza; 190, no. 84 st. 1).

Apart from these, the only other Irish instances I have noted are:

1691 (Ua Duinnín 1902a: lines 497–500):

Slán bearrtha dom bhráthair, do Bhrian an ghrinn,
 Ráib ághmhar do shárhuil na Niall is Choinn;
 Lámh láidir is náireach in iathaibh Flainn
 An cháin chráite-se tharla do ghiall do chinn.

c.1738 (Ó Tuama and Kinsella 1981:174 lines 17–20, 33–6) Seán Clárach
Mac Domhnaill.
1844 (Beckett 1987:68 lines 17–20).

Doubtless a good few more instances can be found, but the pattern seems likely to be one of much thinner distribution than is claimed under (1) and (2) above.

We may be justified in regarding as an instance of abrupt person-shifting that occurring in Pádraig Mac a Liondain's lament on the death in 1733 of his friend Séamas Dall Mac Cuarta. This poem (Mag Uidhir 1977:37) is not divided into stanzas but consists of eighty-two rhyming three-stress or four-stress lines. Lines 74–5 stand out from the rest in being addressed directly to the deceased Séamas. In a similar Ulster poem of one hundred and fifty-three lines on the death in 1649 of Eoghan Rua Ó Néill (Ó Muirghéasa 1915:17), the passage in the second person runs from line 42 to line 58 and is considerably less marked.

4. IRISH PRAISE SONGS

Person-shift seems to be significantly more frequent in songs of a more local character, songs which belong primarily to the oral tradition. Most of these date from after 1800.

?pre-1800, Co. Mayo (Ó Concheanainn 1978:15 lines 1–4; cf. p. 77).
1803, Co. Donegal (Ó Heochaidh 1965:84 st. vi = Mac Seáin 1973:81):

Tá sé ocht gcéad déag, gan bhréag, is a trí le rá
Ó gineadh ó Shíol Éabha aonMhac Rí na nGrást;
Ó d'éirigh an t-éag do bheir Seán – is tú ab fhearr,
A fhíorscoith Gael – sa chré, is trua le rá!

1809, Co. Cork (Freeman 1920–21:201 stt. 5–6).
1811, Co. Donegal (Ó Muirghéasa 1915: no. 93 st. 1).
19th century, Co. Cork (Ní Annagáin agus de Chlanndiolúin 1927:34
st. 4).
?1814, Co. Donegal (Mac Seáin 1973:77 st. 3).
?c.1820 (Hyde 1903:164):

Mo léan an flaith fialmhar ar lár
'S é bheireadh ó gach ceard an chraobh,
'S ó chualaiigh mé tuairisc do bháis
Gur faide liom lá ná bliain. . . .

?c.1830, Co. Galway (Costello 1919:21 st. 1).
1856, Co. Kerry (Ó Dubhda 1933:94 st. 2).

Another instance occurs in a lament for a cat in *Duanaire Duibhneach* (ibid.:118 st. 1). It is noteworthy that seven of the nine songs listed above are laments. A similar percentage of laments occurs in the Scottish nineteenth-century list under (1) above.

5. IRISH RELIGIOUS POETRY

Religious poetry is, to a considerable extent, a form of praise poetry, but I have found very little use of abrupt person-shift in Scottish religious poetry. My only good instance is in a religious poem of (possibly) 1682 in the *Macdonald collection*:

'S math mo dhòigh a Mac Muire,
Thaobh aithreachais chuir orm cràdh;
'S mòr sòlas a' chruinne
on là dhòirteadh leat t'fhuil air ar sgàth (Macdonald
1911:69 st. 5).

In Ireland, however, where perhaps a greater body of religious verse is extant, instances are a little easier to find. They are, nevertheless, very sparse in comparison with the categories examined under (1) and (2). In the two hundred and seventy stanzas of religious verse by Tadhg Gaelach (1715–95) in Ó Foghludha's 1929 edition, I have found no abrupt person-shifts. In Hyde's *Abhráin diadha* I was able to find person-shifting in only one poem, a reproach to a priest 'who married a wife and forsook his religion'. But that poem has four instances (Hyde 1906: II, 164 stt. 1, 5, 7, and 166 st. 4). Among the sixty-three poems (etc.) in Ó Muirgheasa's *Dánta diadha Uladh* (1936), I have found instances only in no. 5 (st. iii), no. 6 (st. xix) and no. 15 (st. i). Stanza xix of no. 6 is:

D'iarr Sé deoch ná ba mhór A ghéibheann
Is tugadh dhó domblas an draguin chraosaigh,
Acht míle glóir Duit, a Ardrí naofa,
Thóg Tú Do lámh dheas is rinne Tú fíon de (Ó Muirgheasa 1936:88).

6. IRISH LOVE POETRY

Here again, as under (3) above, we must distinguish between the work of the named and generally literate poets and that of the traditional song-makers. In the former case, our feature is well enough attested, but it is certainly not a prominent feature. Examples I have noted are:

Aogán Ó Rathaille (Dinneen and O'Donoghue 1911:168 st. 2).
Aindrias Mac Craith (Ó Foghludha 1952:183 lines 9–16).
Tadhg Gaelach Ó Súilleabháin (Ó Foghludha 1929: stt. 291, 292):
the following lines are from st. 292:

Le daershearc grinn gan bhréig don mhnaoi
Do thraoch mo chroidhe le grádh dhí;
A spéirbhean mhín ná déin so linn
Acht saor arís ón mbás me. . . .

Peadar Ó Doirnín (de Rís 1969:17 lines 21–4).
Eoghan Rua Ó Súilleabháin (Ua Duinnín 1902: lines 2354–61).
Richard Cantillon, Co. Kerry, c.1750 (Petrie 1855:183 st. 5).

Art Mac Cumhaigh (Ó Fiaich 1973:115 lines 41–8).

Thomas O Connellan (O'Sullivan 1927:43 st. 1) *Mairi San Seoirse*, noted from a Co. Derry source.

7. IRISH LOVE SONGS

It is in the love songs of the 'folk' tradition that our feature most often occurs in Ireland. It is important to note how an instance may be found in one version of a love song, but another version of the same song may have no person-shift. For example, in a Co. Galway version of *Sail Óg Rua* we find this stanza (Costello 1919:30):

In aois a sé déag
 Sea fuair mé féin í,
 An bhean ar lig mé léithe mo rún go hóg,
 Ach, a stóir mo chléibhe,
 'S tú d'fhág liom féin mé
 Agus chuaigh sa gcré uaim i do chailín óg.

But in a similar stanza in a Co. Clare version (Gunn 1984:129) there is no person shift:

In aois a sé déag fuair mé féin í
 Agus ba ródheas an féirín í do réice le fáil;
 Ba chumtha a béilín agus clár a héadain
 Agus a dhá súil a bhí mar réalta roimh thaca lá.

Other instances of person-shift within the stanza are very frequent in Mrs Costello's collection (1919:12 st. 1; 26 st. 3; 34 st. 3; 36 st. 5; 38 st. 4; 57 st. 4; 89 st. 2; 90 st. 4; 91 st. 1; 104 st. 2; 113 st. 4; 115 st. 1; 116 stt. 2, 5; 131 st. 2; 138 st. 7). There are instances in de h-Íde's *Abhráin ghrádha* (1933: 23 st. 3; 24 lines 13–20; 44 st. 5; 71 st. 2; 78 st. 1; 79 st. 1 *Bríghid Bheusach*; 105 lines 5–12; 112 st. 1). Another instance is in Hyde's *Abhráin diadha* (1906: II, 172 st. 3), and another in his *Songs ascribed to Raftery* (1903:322 lines 21–4). In Timony's Co. Mayo collection, *Gaelic songs of the West* (which, like *Amhráin Mhuighe Seóla*, is not confined to love songs), we have many examples (Timony 1906: 11 st. 1; 12 st. 2; 16 st. 2; 24 st. 3; 25 st. 1; 30 st. 2; 31 st. 4; 47 stt. 1, 3, 4; 51 st. 4; 52–3 st. 1; 70 stt. 1, 2). What may be a Co. Leitrim instance occurs in the first stanza of a song in O'Sullivan (1927:114):

Ar bhruach na Sionainne thug mo chroí taitneamh dhi,
 Idir Cluain Meala agus clárthaí Mumhan;
 Beo nó marbh mé is dóigh gur leatsa mé
 Is lig faoi do bhrataibh mé, a staraí na lúb.

I note an instance in *Úna Bhán* in *Nua-dhuanaire* I (de Brún, Ó Buachalla, Ó Concheanainn 1971: 71 lines 21–4), and in *Nua-dhuanaire* III we have instances (Ó Concheanainn 1978: no. 41 lines 17–20; and no. 42 lines 1–4).

The density of occurrence in Ulster love songs is somewhat less, but person-shifting is common and I have noted the following:

Co. Donegal

(Ó Baoighill 1944: 21 st. 3; 23 st. 5; 27 st. 4; 34 chorus; 40 st. 1) the last of these is:

Is fada liom uaim í ar uaigneas 'ach baile i mbíonn sí
Is le 'ach ógánach suairc a ghluaisfeadh in aice na dí;
Dá dtigtheása anuas ar chuairt fá bharr na gcraobh
Le gairm na gcuaich go ngluaisfinn leatsa mar mhnaoi.

Mac Seáin 1973: 23 st. 2; 31 st. 6; 85 st. 1.

Ó Muirgheasa 1934:334 st. iv.

South-east Ulster

Ó Muireadhaigh 1977:37 st. 1; 40 st. 3; 41 st. 5.

Ó Muirgheasa 1934:132 st. i.

Ó Buachalla 1975:57 st. 1; 59 st. 1; 73 st. 1.

Another Ulster instance may be the song printed in O'Sullivan (1927:64 st. ii).

Southern instances include:

(O'Daly 1849:51 st. 1 [in an Irish-English macaronic]; 268–70 last stanza; 346 last stanza).

Ní Annagáin agus de Chlanndiolúin 1927:37 st. 3.

Ó hÓgáin 1980:76 lines 33–40.

I have found five Co. Cork person-shifts in Freeman's collection in the *Journal of the Folk Song Society* (Freeman 1920–21:111 st. 2, 113 st. 2, 143 st. 4, 255 st. 1, 279 st. 1), four of them in stanzas where the poet tells of speaking to a lovely girl, using first the third person and then the second. In these cases, the person-shift could be accounted for by understanding an omitted phrase meaning 'I said'. The following is from his collection:

Is ar mh'amharc na béithe sea chlaochlaigh mh'aighe
Agus dúrtsa gurbh fhada liom a scéal gan clos
Ach ar eagla nárbh aon bhean shaolta do theangmhaigh liom
Is gurbh eagal domhsa a hanmheas dá dtéinn thar a toil;
Ainnir mhilis mhodhúil bhinn chiúin chaoín charadaigh,
Iontaobh mh'anam ort is ná bí docht
Is déan aithris dúinn cad é an chúig' chughainn as ar thaistealais;
A riúin, cad is ainm duit nó cad é do thoisic?
(Freeman 1920–21:113 st. 2)

We may thus query the propriety of including these four instances with the other abrupt person-shifts we have been discussing, for the

latter cannot be accounted for so easily. The same explanation, a missing 'I said', might also account for a person-shift in *Londubh an Chairn* (Ní Annagáin agus de Chlanndiolúin 1927:31 st. 1), and for that in the following stanza in *Ceol ón Mumhain* (de Noraidh 1965:54):

Ar maidin ar nóin is mé siúl go pras
Do dhearc mé chugham an chúilfhionn deas:
D'fhisoraíos den ainnir a rún di ar fad
Nú an éalófá liom a rún gan stad?

8. CLASSICAL PRAISE POETRY

In seeking to explain the widespread use of abrupt person-shifting in modern verse, the first obvious step is to seek forms of it in earlier verse. And it does occur in classical professional syllabic verse, the largest body of which is praise poetry, for both the living and the dead. I have done only a hasty reading of published material, but the following list of instances I have found may be enough to suggest that the feature is perhaps more common here than it is in modern Irish literate praise poetry, (3) above, though nothing like as common as in Scottish praise poetry.

1260 (Williams 1980:156 st. 69).
1343 (McKenna 1947: lines 1111-14).
1444 (Ó Donnchadha 1931:78 lines 69-72):

Mo theisd ar Aodh na n-arm nua:
mín Aodh acht gur gharbh a ghleo;
ní rug do bhreith nár dhú Dia
acht tú fán lia 'sar mbeith beo.

15th century (McKenna 1939-40: no. 5 st. 11; 8 st. 28; 23 st. 23).
1487 (Watson 1937: lines 853-6).
c.1585 (Greene 1972:214 st. 38):

Ní maoite do Mhág Uidhir
a chlú dá mhéd molfuidhir;
fagháil clú 's nár éimidh ort
ad tfhéinnidh, a Chú Chondacht.

?c.1595 (McKenna 1951: lines 2327-30).
?c.1600 (Mac Airt 1944: lines 7018-21).

In addition of these, I have noted three further cases in *Leabhar Méig Shamhradháin* (McKenna 1947: lines 1293-1300, 2271-8, 4265-72) where the stanza containing the person-shift follows a stanza in which the poet purports to quote words of praise previously addressed to the subject. The second of these instances is from a poem of the period 1303-1343:

A-dubhartsa ris im runn
 rádh nach aithbhearthor orum;
 ‘Neach fad chló ní bhéara bás
 méara acht gé dheach tú, a Thomás.’
 Tomás mhac Briain is báidh leam
 a theisd ag éigsibh Éireann;
 Brian dámadh olc a eineach
 ní bhiadh ort n-a impeidheach.

(McKenna translates: ‘In my verse I said to him – and none can challenge the saying: “Death shall never seize a man of thy glory; even when thou diest, O Tomás, thou shalt still live on”.

‘I love to think of the repute in which Tomás, Brian’s son, is held by Éire’s poets; if Brian’s generosity had not been so great, it would not be urging thee now’.)

Similar instances, of person-shift within a stanza which follows one containing a ‘quotation’, occur in *Aithdioghluim dána* (McKenna 1939–40: no. 7 stt. 14–15; and [in a religious poem] no. 98 stt. 14–15). Another occurs in a lament of 1414 in *Dán na mBráthar Mionúr* (Mhág Craith 1967–80: no. 3 stt. 11–13), though there a further stanza may perhaps separate the ‘quotation’ from the stanza containing the person-shift.

The fact that there are at least six such instances, where our person-shift occurs in a stanza following one containing what amounts to a different kind of person-shift, may suggest that this juxtaposition is not fortuitous; we are reminded of other Classical poems in which stanzas in the second person are introduced, immediately following a similar ‘quotation’, into what has hitherto been a third-person poem (e.g. Mac Cionnaith 1938: 305 stt. 37–8; 331 stt. 14–15; 361 stt. 12–13; McKenna 1939–40: no. 11 stt. 11–12; no. 30 stt. 30–31; McKenna 1931: 79 stt. 14–15; O’Sullivan 1987: lines 213–20, 721–8). It seems conceivable that such ‘quotations’ in verse may have something to do with the origins of person-shifting as a feature of praise poetry.

As an appendix to this section, we may note a stanza from the Book of the Dean of Lismore (Bergin 1970: 101 st. 4), where Muireadhach Albanach Ó Dálaigh uses person-shift in praising his marriage-bed.

The later syllabic verse of Ó Bruadair includes the following stanza in a poem of 1687 (Mac Erlean 1910–17: III, 56 st. xxx):

Oighre dreagain Dúna Lóich
 ceannuightheoir dréacht is daorchróich
 do chur fann i bhfeart romchailg
 sis beart nach gann do ghaolairg.

(Mac Erlean translates: ‘Heir of the dragon of famous Dún Lóich, Buyer of saffron most precious and poems, It hath pained me to see thee laid

weak in the grave, An event that distresses not slightly thy friends'.) Here the English translation conceals the fact that the subject is referred to with *oighre* and *ceannuightheoir* in the nominative case, not the vocative, so that the most obvious course is to read the first couplet with the preceding stanza, which deals with the subject in the third person. But these nouns might also be held to be in apposition to the person of the possessive *do* in the third line – in which case the whole quatrain is in the second person.

It might, however, be argued that our feature could originate in ambiguities such as this. Similar ambiguities (where a stanza may or may not be read as containing a person-shift) occur also in stress-based poems (e.g. Dinneen and O'Donoghue 1911: 190 lines 21–4; 202 lines 73–6; Ó Muirgheasa 1936: 110 st. xxviii [Mac Cuarta]; Mackenzie 1964: lines 771–8).

9. CLASSICAL RELIGIOUS VERSE

I am indebted to Ms V. M. Bateman for directing my attention to many of the following instances of person-shift within the quatrains of religious verse (McKenna 1922: no. vii st. 13; Mac Cionnaith 1938:185 st. 11; McKenna 1939–40: no. 56 st. 13; 65 st. 29; 67 st. 19; 70 st. 10; 70 st. 12; 80 st. 9; 82 st. 15; 88 st. 19; 98 st. 15). In no. 70 of *Aithdioghlaim dána* (McKenna 1939–40), the work of Muireadhach Albanach, the following is st. 10:

A-tá colum uichtgheal álainn
 againn a-muigh – móide ar ngnaoi;
 a-tá uan fionn ag ar bhfoghnámh,
 duan liom do lomradh gach laoi.

In no. 82, a poem to Mary by Aodh Ó Ruanadha c.1600, st. 15 contains an ambiguity of referent which is reminiscent of the ambiguous stanza by Iain Lom noted under (1) above:

Do dhearbhasdair dhí deightheisd cách
 leigeas a luach;
 do chuir do bhuime a clú ós chách
 's tú buinne ós bhruach.

(McKenna translates: 'The whole world, though neglecting the value of her help [?], has experienced how well she merits her fame; Thy mother has won glory above all; Thou are an overflowing stream'.) Over all, the frequency of occurrence of our feature in this religious verse seems to me to match its frequency in Classical praise poetry (8).

10. EARLY GAELIC POETRY

To cover all the possibilities it is necessary to seek instances in pre-1200 poetry, and here our feature turns out, on a limited reading, to be very rare. Perhaps this is not surprising, since we have little of what

is unquestionably praise poetry from that period, little love poetry (see Knott 1960:35) and none of the 'conventional religious verse of the four centuries after 1200' (Greene and O'Connor 1967:195).

For this early period, I have found only three instances of person-shift within the stanza, and two are doubtful. None occurs in a poem directly comparable with the modern poems we have been discussing. One is the famous *Caillech Bérrí* elegy, which has been dated *c.*800 and would thus seem to contain the earliest instance of the feature (Greene and O'Connor 1967:51 st. 5):

Rop ed mo choirm cóidin meidg
 ropo toil Dé cecham-theirb;
 oc do guidisiu, a Dé bí,
 do-rata cró clí fri feirg.

But this is a difficult and uncertain stanza (Murphy 1956:80 st. 24).

The second instance is in a well-known poem in *Fingal Rónáin* (?*c.*900; Greene 1955:9 lines 213–16). In this edition, the interpretation of the quatrain seems to be that the hound Doiléne is addressed with a verb in the second person, and then referred to with the third person possessive pronoun (*a cend*, 'her head'). But the text is extremely doubtful (*ibid.*:15), and two quite different translations have been published (Greene and O'Connor 1967:97 lines 3–4; Rayner 1988:47 lines 24–7).

The best instance is in a poem, perhaps of the twelfth century, in which the poet's bereavement is compared with the destruction of a blackbird's nest (Greene and O'Connor 1967:154 st. 2):

An t-olc fhuairsean a-nossa
 ní cian uaidh ó fhuarassa,
 maith m'aithne ar do labhra, a luin,
 a haithle th'adhbha d'argain.

Another editor (Knott 1957:29 st. 2) reads the unique manuscript a little differently, but the person-shift remains.

11. CONCLUSION

On the basis of the very impressionistic picture here presented, we can tentatively hold that the practice of person-shifting within the stanza exists in Classical poetry of the period 1200–1650, and possibly even in older verse. It is not infrequent in Classical praise poetry and religious poetry (though I have found no instances in the *Dánta grádha*). In the modern vernacular literatures it becomes extremely common in Scottish praise poetry and love poetry (1, 2) and in Irish love songs (7). One link between these types is that all three are basically non-literate song-poetry.

Our feature might have started life as a poetic 'device', intended to convey intense personal feeling for the subject. It can be taken as a

stronger form of the simple person-shift occurring commonly between stanzas. We have no reason to assume that it was 'invented' on a single occasion in Gaelic, and then spread. It could quite easily have arisen quite independently in different contexts in the history of Gaelic literature, and it occurs in other cultures too. Abrupt person-shifting occurs frequently in the religious introductory sections ('proems') of Greek non-stanzaic epic poetry as far back as Hesiod (c.700 BC; Norden 1956:163). And the following is a stanza from an English Christmas carol of the fourteenth or fifteenth century:

On Esterne Day he gan up ryse
 To techyn hem that wern onwyse.
 Jhesu, for your woundes five,
 Ye ben our help and our socour (Greene 1977: no. 16).

In Gaelic literature, even in those places and times where it is commonest, we can hardly call our feature a 'convention', for we have no hint that there was any explicit general agreement among poets concerning its use. Perhaps, as is suggested under (8), it arose out of ambiguity in verse, or perhaps, under (7), out of loss of an implicit link between two parts of a stanza. Perhaps it arose from different causes in different situations. But its frequency of occurrence, without any predictability of occurrence, is strongly reminiscent of the thematic 'code' of Scottish vernacular praise poetry described by John MacInnes (1976-8:435-98). There may also have been available, to vernacular songmakers in Scotland and Ireland, a parallel stylistic 'code' on which poets could draw and which included abrupt person-shift, a feature rare or unknown in many other literatures. It seems not impossible (though it is far from certain) that our feature reached this vernacular stylistic 'code' from an earlier 'code' used, rather more sparingly, by the professional syllabic poets.

It might also be argued that the same stylistic 'code' included the store of textual and conceptual formulas and devices which James Ross has identified in Scottish oral poetry (1956-7:8-17; 1959:2-9). It is, of course, impossible to explain with absolute conviction the prevalence of our stylistic feature in certain areas of Gaelic verse. As Professor D. S. Thomson expresses it to me in a letter, when we seek an explanation for the frequency of abrupt person-shift in Gaelic poetry 'it may be that what we should be looking for ultimately is a habit of mind . . . which later hardens into a sort of convention'.

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