

ON THE EARLY-IRISH PREPOSITIONAL RELATIVE WITHOUT ANTECEDENT<sup>1</sup>

THIS paper takes as its starting-point a difficult sentence in the early version of *Cath Maige Tuired*,<sup>2</sup> which was misunderstood by Whitley Stokes and has continued to fox commentators on the text. It was, as I believe, correctly translated by Gustav Lehmacher, but he offered no discussion of his interpretation and it has been passed over in silence since his day. The sentence in question exemplifies the prepositional relative with suppressed or zero-antecedent, a construction which is used in several other texts, but which has not received due attention. What I propose to do in the body of this paper is, first, to give some general consideration to the relative with zero-antecedent, and, secondly, to discuss some occurrences of zero-antecedent in the prepositional relative construction.

In the account in *Cath Maige Tuired* of the birth of Bres, the Fomorean Elatha comes as a stranger to Ériu and asks if he may have intercourse with her. She replies that she has not summoned him to a tryst (*Ní rud-dálus éim*), to which Elatha's response is

(1) *Tic frisna dáulta* (Stokes 1891:60 § 17; Gray 1982:26 § 17).

They then proceed to have intercourse. Stokes translated Elatha's words as 'Come against the trystings (?)', and Gray's rendering is 'Come without the trysting!' These translations are manifestly unsatisfactory. The 2 sg. imperative of *do-icc* is *tair*; no supporting evidence has been adduced for the imperative use of *ticc*. As for *frisna dáulta*, Stokes' rendering is strained, implying as it does that the preposition *fri* is construed here with the acc. pl. of the rare *dálad*, and that it has the sense 'in defiance of', or the like; Gray's interpretation seems quite impossible. In her note on the sentence, Gray simply asserts that *ticc* is 2 sg. imperative of *do-icc*, while acknowledging that *tair* is 'the usual form'; she makes no attempt to justify her translation of *frisna dáulta*. Fergus Kelly and Gordon Quin, in reviews of her edition, faulted Gray for not discussing the difficulty posed by this sentence. Kelly (1985:185) remarked that he had no solution to offer, while Quin (1985:100) said: 'The text may be defective. The general sense is perhaps "come to meet one with whom no tryst has been made"'.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>References to Thurneysen, except where otherwise stated, are to his *Grammar* (1946). The following abbreviations are used throughout: *CIH* = Binchy, *Corpus iuris Hibernici* (1978); *DIL* = (*Contributions to a*) *Dictionary of the Irish language* (Dublin 1913–76); *LL* = Book of Leinster; *LU* = Lebor na hUidre.

<sup>2</sup>This is the version edited and translated by Stokes (1891) and Gray (1982), and translated into German by Lehmacher (1931); Stokes's numbering of paragraphs is retained by Gray and Lehmacher. It may be added that the episode in which the sentence occurs is not represented in the later version of *Cath Maige Tuired* which was edited by Brian Ó Cuív (1945).

When due allowance is made for the scribe's aberrant spelling, I believe that the text is not defective, and that the sentence was correctly understood by Lehmacher, who translated: 'Wer nicht bestellt ist, kommt von selber'. An observation on Elatha's part that a man with whom a tryst has not been made is coming (of his own accord) fits the context perfectly as a riposte to Ériu's objection to Elatha's suit. The wording of this observation is what concerns us here: *ticc* is 3rd sg. present indicative of *do-icc*, *frisna* is the preposition *fri* with negative particle used in prepositional relative construction, and *daulta* (= *dálta*, OIr. absolute *dált(a)e*) is passive preterite of *dálaid*, used impersonally. *Dálaid fri* means 'makes a tryst with' (*DIL* D-50.12), *frisna daulta* 'with whom a tryst was not made'. The subject of *ticc* is the zero-antecedent of the prepositional relative. The antecedent, if expressed, would doubtless be *fer* or the like; the literal meaning of the sentence is thus '(a man)/(someone) comes with whom a tryst was not made'.

If the text is to be deemed 'defective', it must be on the grounds either that the antecedent goes unexpressed, or that a reflex of OIr. absolute *dáltae* is out of place in this context. Since several early Irish texts, as we shall see, show zero-antecedent with the prepositional relative, this construction cannot in itself be considered ungrammatical. We are left, then, with the form of the passive preterite used in the text.

Thurneysen (§ 492) describes the construction which is predominant in OIr. 'where a preposition is required to express the relation of the antecedent to the remainder of the relative clause':<sup>3</sup> with the exception of *t<sup>n</sup>*, the preposition at the beginning of the clause is followed by *(s)a<sup>n</sup>*, forming a conjunct particle, as in *fris(s)a<sup>n</sup>*; before the negative, however, *(s)a<sup>n</sup>* does not occur, so that the negative corresponding to *fris(s)a<sup>n</sup>* is

<sup>3</sup>It seems that three other constructions were available. One, which has been discussed by Breatnach (1980:2-4), was the use of a relative marker rather than preposition + *(s)a<sup>n</sup>*: see p. 422, below. Another procedure was the use within the relative clause of the prepositional pronoun to indicate the nature of the relationship between the antecedent and the verb of the relative clause: one of the two examples cited by Thurneysen (§ 507 (e)) is *nech suidigther loc daingen dó* 'anyone to whom is established a strong place' *ML*. 87d15 (Stokes and Strachan 1903:294). (Ahlqvist (1985:324) notes that the latter strategy becomes the dominant one in Modern Irish; it may be added that it provides a more likely forerunner than that suggested by Rolf Baumgarten (1985:322) for the Mod.Ir. relative construction of the type *x gur thug sé an leabhar dó*.) A third type was achieved by clefting a relative clause of the foregoing type, fronting the prepositional pronoun, and using a relative form of the copula: *Ni fiadnaise mani taisilbther* (read *taisilbther*) *do bes fiado dognether* 'it is not valid witness unless it be ascribed to him in whose presence the action be done' *CIH* II, 596.19, transl. Stacey (1986:220), following Thurneysen (1928:20). (If we are to read the simple preposition *do* here, the antecedent of *bes* remains unexpressed; but it is probably the prepositional pronoun *dó*, in which case the antecedent is the suffixed pronoun: cf. *nad imfochatar imbi dia ndlig a réir* '[provided] they are not impugned on account of him over whom they are entitled to exercise authority' *CIH* II, 592.35-6, transl. Stacey (1986:213); more literally, '. . . on account of him from whom there is an entitlement (impers. *dlig*) that authority (be exercised) over him').

*frisna*.<sup>4</sup> Since *frisna* is a conjunct particle it would be followed in OIr. by the conjunct form; in construing it with a reflex of the OIr. passive preterite absolute *dáltae*,<sup>5</sup> *Cath Maige Tuired* follows the well attested Mid.Ir. use of such forms in conjunct position,<sup>6</sup> and this is not out of place in *Cath Maige Tuired*, which shows a mixture of OIr. and Mid.Ir. forms. The immediate context, however, of this particular Mid.Ir. usage may cause some unease, as Hull (1968:80) has described omission of the antecedent in comparable sentences as an archaism.<sup>7</sup> As we rely for our text on a single manuscript of the sixteenth century, we cannot be sure that the present state of the sentence is a fair reflection of the original. Neither, on the other hand, would we be justified in assuming that conjunct *-dálad* originally stood in the text. The construction in question is certainly rare, but its attestation is by no means confined to archaic texts.

Thurneysen (§ 496) remarks as follows upon the relative without antecedent: 'When, as sometimes happens, the principal clause contains no antecedent, the relative clause can itself function as subject of the former', and he cites three examples:

- (2) *attá immurgu asbéer* 'there is, however, (something) that I will say' (Wb. 32a22, Stokes and Strachan 1903:704)
- (3) *gonas géntair* '(he) who slays shall be slain' (Thurneysen 1917:86 § 40)<sup>8</sup>
- (4) *ra fitir as lia* 'the majority (lit. 'what is more') knows it' (Wb. 23c21, Stokes and Strachan 1903:647).

A more helpful way of looking at these examples might be to consider them to have a zero-antecedent which can be described in respect both of its role in the principal clause, and of its relation to the relative: thus in (4), the zero-antecedent is subject of *ra fitir* and subject-antecedent of *as*; if expressed it would be *a<sup>n</sup>*;<sup>9</sup> in (3), the zero-antecedent is *nominativus pendens*, so that the literal translation is '(he) who slays, he shall

<sup>4</sup>The *-s* in *frisna* (and in *lasna*) is not, apparently, a remnant of *sa<sup>n</sup>*; cf. *arna*, *cona*, etc. It may be that *frisna* has been modelled on *asna*, but it could also have been influenced by other forms of *fri* with *-s*.

<sup>5</sup>It is true that Thurneysen (§ 713) says the passive preterite absolute form 'may also be used in relative construction', but this would apply only where the relative verb is absolute.

<sup>6</sup>See, for example, Strachan (1895-8:37.895) and O Daly (1943-6:74.1602-9). For a discussion, see McCone (1987:251-2).

<sup>7</sup>Hull was referring to a sequence of three similar examples, one of them being (15) below. Omission of subject-antecedent, on the other hand, he describes as 'idiomatic' (Hull 1968:51), whereas Binchy (1958:47) considers it an archaic construction. For a Mid.Ir. form in this construction, see (6) below and n. 12.

<sup>8</sup>This text can now be consulted in Kelly (1976:67.154).

<sup>9</sup>Stokes and Strachan (1903:647 note b) say, 'cf. for the omission of *an*, Ml. 89d6, 92c5, LU 69a44'; the latter I take to be *ni fil i nHére adchotar dó*, LU 5712 (= *TBC* Rec. I 1396; O'Rahilly (1976:43.1396) translates 'There is no one in Ireland to be got for him', *ibid.*:163).

be slain'; if expressed as a pronoun it would be *int é*; and the antecedent of (2) is subject of *attá*, and object-antecedent of *asbéer*; if expressed as a pronoun it would be *ní*.

As the zero-antecedents in Thurneysen's three sentences are all subjects, they can be described as nominative.<sup>10</sup> In a note published in this journal, M. A. O'Brien (1956:174) says that 'omission of the antecedent is quite common in the nominative' and cites (3) as an example. He goes on to suggest that the line

(5) *Is fíriúthir ad-fíadar*

from *Liadain and Cuirithir* means 'it is as true as anything that is related', an exact parallel to *fíriúthir líbru légtair* 'it is as true as books which are read'.<sup>11</sup> He concludes that 'the accusative (after the equative) antecedent has been correctly omitted', and adds that after *mairg* the omission of an antecedent in the accusative case is the rule. Finally, he cites an example of omission in the genitive case:

(6) *fochertar for iarair gatair ar* [v.l. *ó*] *neich* '... in pursuit of what (or 'anything which') is stolen from someone' (Thurneysen 1891:52.16-17).<sup>12</sup>

In the same year, Gerard Murphy published an edition of the *Liadain and Cuirithir* poem, and he translated (5) 'this is as true as anything told' (Murphy 1956:85).<sup>13</sup> In a note on the translation Murphy (1956:210) adduced some further examples of omission of antecedent, adding that O'Brien had pointed out to him that a phrase such as (5) we may compare the common construction with *mairg*, and citing

(7) *mairg íuras in n-orgain*, 'woe (for him) who shall reave the reaving' (Knott 1936:21.705),

'where the antecedent, if it were expressed, might have been dative (cf. *mairc Iarnaib*, *mairc d'Ultaib*, O'Rahilly 1976:117.3881-2) or accusative (cf. *mairg Ultu*, Watson 1941:14.319)'.<sup>14</sup>

Instances have been adduced, then, of zero-antecedents in the nominative, accusative and genitive, and of a construction where the antecedent might be accusative or dative. Other examples of the dative can

<sup>10</sup>In the excerpt from LU in the preceding footnote, the zero-antecedent is object of *fil*, and hence accusative.

<sup>11</sup>O'Brien cites this from LL, but adds that he has lost the reference. *Fíriúthir lebor léghair* occurs at LL 6192.

<sup>12</sup>*Gatair* shows Mid.Ír. use of *-air*, in place of OÍr. *-ar*; see McCone (1987:197). Breatnach (1980:2 n. 4) gives two further examples of zero-form subject-antecedents in the genitive. In one of them, Thurneysen proposes to supply antecedent *neich*, but Breatnach, rightly as I believe, queries this.

<sup>13</sup>He explains (ibid.:210) that he has 'altered Meyer's and Dr. Pokorny's "It is true as they say" which does not give *fíriúthir* its "equative" meaning'. It is interesting that Greene and O'Connor (1967:74) translate 'it is as true as they say', which implies the interpretation 'it is as true as (what) they say'. Murphy's version assumes that the zero-antecedent is *ní*, Greene and O'Connor's that it is *a<sup>n</sup>*.

be added. Murphy (1956:210) remarked that 'a dative antecedent seems likewise to have been omitted' in

- (8) *ba mire nád dernad* 'it had been madness for one who would not do' (Murphy 1956:85 § 2ab)

Another example from *Scéla Cano meic Gartnáin* is

- (9) *sírechtach nad cluinethar*, '(it is) a sorrowful strain for him who does not hear it' (cf. Binchy 1963:3.83; Ó Fiannachta 1964-6:78)<sup>14</sup>

In (8) and (9) we have subject-antecedent, and this I think is also the way in which we should take the following example:

- (10) *Ni bí bes uaitiu .xx. fri crich anechtair* (*CIH* II, 584.10)

This has been taken by Breatnach (1980:4 n. 15) as an example without antecedent of the usage described by him, whereby relation between the antecedent and the relative clause, of the type which is normally expressed by a preposition, is expressed instead by a relative marker. The function of the relative in this usage is therefore analagous to that of the prepositionless dative in the OIr. noun. The following example may be added to those adduced by Breatnach:

- (11) *Ar nach duine dotarfert-si eter crec 7 aiscid ni raibe diib diambad imairgide cusan laithe-sin* 'for until that day it did not fit any man to whom she offered it either for sale or as a gift' (cf. Stokes 1891:72 § 42; Gray 1982:34 § 42)<sup>15</sup>

where *dotarfert-si* 'she offered it (+ relative)' is marked as relative by the use of Class C infixed pronoun, and since it means 'to whom she offered it', the relative marker is analagous to the prepositionless dative. (10) is not of this type. The antecedent, if expressed, would be prepositionless dative of *lín* or of a noun denoting 'company, host' or the like, and would be dative of accompaniment with *bí*, and subject antecedent of *bes*. The literal meaning would be 'he is not wont to be outside (his) territory (as one of a party) which is less than twenty'.

All of the zero-antecedents which we have been considering are subject-antecedents, except for that in (3), which is *nominativus pendens*, and is resumed in the personal ending of *géntair*, and that in (2), which is an object-antecedent; another example of the latter type is

- (12) *baíthum imma-rordamais* 'I should have had (literally, 'there was to me') something on which we could ponder'

<sup>14</sup> *Sírechtach* is not copied correctly in the manuscript (see Binchy 1963:3.83; Ó Fiannachta 1964-6:78), but the emendation is secure.

<sup>15</sup> This example shows that the usage was not altogether 'confined to the archaic language (and poetry)', and it also exemplifies the construction with an active verb (see Breatnach 1980:4).

cited by Murphy (1956:210) from Meyer's *Liadain and Cuirithir* (1902:20.12). The zero-form of the genitival antecedent is exemplified in

- (13) *As-loí at-chúas a scél* 'He whose tale has been told goes away'  
(O Daly 1975:44.120)<sup>16</sup>

If the antecedent were expressed, we might expect this to read *as-loí inti asa scél ad-chúas* (cf. Thurneysen, § 507(c)). Breatnach (1980:2) has shown, however, that OIr. had the type *a Rí rínter flaiti* 'O King whose lords are numbered', so that we can envisage *as-loí inti ad-chúas scél*. More than that it would be dangerous to say, unless further examples turn up. One is nevertheless tempted to speculate that the possessive pronoun here compensates for the lack of an expressed antecedent.

We can now return to the zero-antecedent of the prepositional relative such as we saw in (1); there the antecedent is nominative, being the subject of *ticc*. We have another example in (11): . . . *ni raibe diib diambad imairgide*, lit. 'there was not (one) of them to whom it was fitting', where the antecedent is subject of *raibe*. We may compare

- (14) *A mmarb immorro ni fil úadib-seom ónach ric* [v.l. *rí*] 'but there is not (one) of them who cannot take them dead' (O'Rahilly 1976:24.774)<sup>17</sup>

where, however, the antecedent is object of *fil*. The zero-antecedent is *nominativus pendens* in the following example from *Appitir Chrábaid*:

- (15) *Lasná bia comalnad a thimnai, ní mbia bith-bethu for nim* 'He who shall not fulfil his commandment will not have eternal life in Heaven' (Hull 1968:60.20)

The antecedent is dative or accusative in

- (16) (*Is*) *mairg dian iongnais Cana* 'Alas (for her) from whom Cano is absent (lit., 'is an absence')' (Binchy 1963:8.208)<sup>18</sup>

<sup>16</sup>The readings are *is lóí atchúas a scél* (LL) and *is lor itcuass don scél* (G 7). O Daly's rendering is 'He whose tale had been told goes away', but in using the pluperfect and in omitting to enclose the sentence in inverted commas, she misses much of the point. Lugaid Mac Con is in exile at the court of the king of Scotland, and he has hidden his identity from his host. An Irishman comes to the court, and tells the King of Lugaid's sad plight. Lugaid's reaction betrays his identity, and the King says to him that a surge of kin-love has come to him. He adds the words in (15), and the narrator informs us that Lugaid went out.

<sup>17</sup>For the idiom *ro-icc* + agential *ó* 'is able', see *DIL* R-91.52, and compare late Mid.Ir. and Mod.Ir. *ticc/tig le* with the same meaning. *Ricc/rí* is impersonal here; the infixed pronoun implied by *nach* is neuter and resumes the *nominativus pendens*, *marb*.

<sup>18</sup>Binchy (1963) reads *mairg diamognais Cana* and reports that Eleanor Knott suggested reading *Mairg nech diam ingnais C*. 'Alas for anyone from whom C. is absent'. Ó Fiannachta (1964-6) must be correct in reading *Mairg dian iongnais C.*, and the missing syllable can be supplied by adding *is*.

The antecedent would seem to be dative in

- (17) *Níp sén ó timmarnad* 'No luck to him by whom the command was given' (O Daly 1975:46.142)

The zero-antecedent is genitive in this example from *Uraicecht Becc*:

- (18) *Aes ciuil . . . 7 fodana olceana . . . is a hincaib aga mbiad is as direnaiter* ' . . . it is on the basis of the honour of the one who employs them (lit., of him whom they are) that penalties are paid to them' (*CIH* V, 1617.11–19; similarly VI, 2333.36–2334.7).<sup>19</sup>

The third manuscript of *Uraicecht Becc* offers a different reading: *is a hinchaib caich oca mbiat no beta hae* (*CIH* 2281.37). Here an antecedent *cāich* is supplied,<sup>20</sup> and for good measure there is an explanatory gloss (*no beta hae* 'or to whom they belong'), written (in capitals) as part of the main text.

In his account of the ways in which genitival relation is expressed in OIr., Thurneysen (§ 507(d)) states: 'If the substantive to be qualified by the gen. is itself governed by a preposition, the relative particle (*s*)*a*<sup>n</sup> . . . attached to the preposition can function as the genitive of the relative, but is then separated from its noun by the verb', and he cites *lasna cumachtgu foa mbiat . . . mām* 'by the mighty under whose yoke they are' *MI*. 59d7 (Stokes and Strachan 1903:198), noting that the non-relative would be *biit fo-a mām*. The equivalent of 'under the yoke (of those) under whose yoke they are' occurs in *Críth gablach*:

- (19) *tar cenn tara tindnagar cenn* 'on behalf of (the one/anyone) on whose behalf it is handed over' (*CIH* II, 565.25; similarly III, 781.32–3, 952.13–14).

In his edition of the text, Binchy (1941:11.285) inserts *neich* before *tara*, and says in a note that the insertion 'seems required by the sense', but the probability is that here, as in (18), we have a genitive zero-antecedent in prepositional relative construction.

<sup>19</sup>This can be added to the examples of zero-antecedent in this text mentioned by Binchy (1958:46–7): cf. n. 7 above.

<sup>20</sup>For the use of *cách* as antecedent in the sense 'he (who)', see *DIL* C–5.29.

Brian Ó Cuív's work has always been distinguished by its thoroughness, and in concluding this contribution in his honour, I have to confess that my search through the texts has been very far from exhaustive; yet enough examples came to hand to indicate something of the versatility with which the prepositional relative could be used with zero-antecedent, and to vindicate Lehmacher's translation of the sentence with which we began.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> A version of this paper was given as a lecture in the Department of General Linguistics at Helsinki University in March 1989. I am grateful to Dr Anders Ahlqvist, who was then Acting Head of the department, for his helpful comments.

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