

A NOTE ON THE CLASSIFICATION
OF SOME OLD IRISH VERBS

IN Thurneysen's classification of the present-stems of the Old Irish verbs, there is a little sub-class (B V; Thurneysen 1946:357) which consists of a few present forms that in the common opinion had a suffix *-nu-* in the pre-documentary period. This suffix, which represents the weak grade of Indo-European **-neu-* and was originally proper to plural and dual forms only, is reconstructed in the whole paradigm in accordance with the well-known tendency to generalize the weak grade in ablauting paradigms (Watkins 1962). However, it must be stressed that this *-nu-* does not appear directly in any paradigm (we have just spoken of the pre-documentary period), and its existence is supported only by a phonetic argument, since no other suffix that could reasonably be hypothesized (e.g. **-nā-*, **-nē-*, and so on) could account for the phonetic structure of these verbs.

This way of reconstructing historical facts (i.e. the Indo-European background of Celtic verbs and their history from Indo-European to our texts) on the ground of a phonetic detail is rather dangerous, for it either puts comparison aside or makes use of it only *a posteriori* to confirm results that have already been achieved by internal reconstruction, whilst in my opinion the right procedure ought to be the reverse of that: firstly to prove through comparison that the verbs of class B V come from Indo-European *neu-*verbs and then to state that they form a coherent class from both the Indo-European and the Irish standpoint.

In the present work, which I submit to the judgement of the undisputed master in the field of Celtic studies, I should like firstly to analyse the verbs of this class from the etymological standpoint in order to state whether they represent the real heirs of a homogeneous Indo-European verb-class (i.e. the *-neu-*class) or other explanations have to be envisaged, and then to examine how they can be classified within the framework of the Old Irish present system.

The etymological observations that follow are as concise as possible:

(1) *do·lin* (pl. *du·linat*) 'flows'

'*li-n-* ist idg. **pl̥-neu-*': this etymology (Pedersen 1913:556) has received general approval and seems to find good support in some verbal forms from other Indo-European languages, i.e.

(a) OInd. *pr̥ṇuyāt* (opt.) 'to fill, to nourish'

(b) OInd. (*vy-ā-*)*pr̥ṇoti* 'takes care of'

(c) Av. *fra-pərənaoiti* 'makes liable'

(d) Arm. *lnum* 'I fill', *hetum* 'I pour'

In reality, it is not difficult to see that none of these forms proves anything for the existence of a *-neu-*present in the Indo-European period, because:

(a) *pr̥nyāt* is a late *hapax* which has occasionally replaced the regular form *pr̥nyāt* in accordance with the well-known Indian tendency to give *-no*-doublets to the *-nā*-verbs and vice versa (*vr̥nāti/vr̥noti*, *kṣinoti/kṣināti* and so on).

(b) OInd. (*vy-ā-*)*pr̥noti* does not come from the same root as *do·lin*; more probably (Mayrhofer 1956 s.v. *vyāpṛtaḥ*) it comes from the root **per-*, which is found in Lat. *experiri*, *peritus* and Gr. *πεῖρα* 'experience, experiment'.

(c) Av. *fra-pərənaoiti* too, because of its meaning, has to be kept apart from the verbs that come from the root 'to fill'; it comes probably from the same root as OInd. (*vy-ā-*)*pr̥noti*.

(d) The suffix *-nu-* is productive in Armenian and consequently *lnum* and *hetum* cannot give us any proof of preserving something really ancient; on the contrary, their pre-forms **plēnu-* and **pelnu-* disagree with the structure of the Indo-European *-neu-*verbs; therefore we can safely conclude that they both are late innovations (cf. Klingenschmitt 1982:245-6).

To sum up. We can take it for granted that in Indo-European only two presents were formed from the root 'to fill': an athematic present (Lat. *replet*, Gr. *πίμπλημι*, Av. *pāfrāiti*, Ved. **pīprāti* (s. Narten 1969:153) and a *-nā*-present (Ved. *pr̥nāti*, Got. *fullnan*, with *-ll-* from *fulls*): a present **pl̥neuti* never existed in Indo-European.

(2) *ara·chrin* 'decays, fails'

As has been said elsewhere (Campanile 1982), there are no good arguments for believing that *·crin* was originally a *nu*-verb; on the contrary we must observe that:

(a) It is etymologically connected with Ved. *śṛṇāti* 'crushes' (< **kr̥neH₁-ti*).

(b) The old aorist of *·crin* is (*do·*)*cer*, which is identical with Ved. *aśarīt*; they both come from **(e-)kerH₁t*.

(c) The adjective *crin* 'old, decayed' (**kreH₁-no-*) also presupposes a *set*-root and can be compared with Ved. *śirṇa-* (past part. of *śṛṇāti*) < **kr̥H₁-no-*.

Watkins (1958:91), speaking of this verb, observes that in Old Irish there is 'hesitation' between **-na-* and **-nu-* in verbal forms. We can take a step forward and maintain that *·crin* is an evident innovation that eliminated an ancient **kr̥na-* (< **kr̥-nH₁-*); but a verbal theme **ker-w-* (with a present **kr̥-neu-ti*) never existed in Indo-European: only **ker-H₁-* existed, sure traces of which are still to be found in Old Irish (*do·cer* and *crín*).

(3) *ro·cluīnethar* 'hears'

It is difficult to discern why this verb was put into class B V, for it clearly presupposes a double suffix *-n-yo-* (and consequently can be compared, from a formal point of view, with Gr. *κλίνω* < **kli-n-yo-*, *πλύνω* < **plu-n-yo-*, ORuss. *krenju* 'I buy', and so on).

However, there can be no doubt about an Indo-European present **k̑l-neu-ti* 'hears', which is preserved in Ved. *śṛṇoti* and Av. *surunaoiti* (*srunauti*), the root-vocalism of the latter being influenced by past part. *sruta-*. And it is the undoubted existence of this Indo-European present that induced Thurneysen to put *ro-cluinethar* into class V B (the *-nu*-class!); but at § 595 of his *Grammar* he states correctly that '[*ro-cluinethar*] is inflected like B II'. The necessary consequence of this statement is that from the Old Irish standpoint it is actually a verb of that class.

(4) *at-baill* 'dies'

Since Thurneysen himself observes that this verb is 'inflected wholly like B I', we cannot put it into class B V; moreover it must be underlined that its Indo-European archetype was surely no *-neu*-verb, because Gr. *βάλλω* (with which, in our opinion, *at-baill* is etymologically connected) presupposes a theme with laryngeal, as proved by the aorist *ἔβλη*. Therefore we can suppose that *at-baill* was originally a *-nē*-present (Strunk 1967:42-5) which later was thematized.

(5) *marnid* 'betrays'

What has been said apropos of *at-baill* can be repeated apropos of *marnid* too. Since it corresponds to Ved. *mṛṇāti* 'crushes' (past part. *mūrṇa-*), we can safely suppose that it was originally a *-neH*-verb which later was thematized, which excludes every possibility of an old *-neu*-present.

(6) *ro-finnadar* 'gets to know'

Thurneysen maintains that an old present-stem **wi-n-d-* (cf. Ved. *vindati* 'finds') was transformed into **wi-n-d-nu-* by analogy with *-gnin-* 'knows' (see 7). This hypothesis is rather improbable because these verbs differ from each other in essential points, namely:

- (a) *ro-finnadar* is deponent, *-gnin* is not.
- (b) *ro-finnadar* has an old preterite/present without reduplication (*ro-fitir*; cf. Ved. *veda*, Got. *wait*, Gr. *φοῖδα*), *-gnin* has a normal reduplicated preterite.
- (c) *ro-finnadar* has an *s*-subjunctive and an *s*-future, *-gnin* has an *a*-subjunctive and a reduplicated future.

These divergent elements make it unlikely that analogy has worked on a single point only; Thurneysen's explication has an *ad hoc* flavour.

Therefore we can safely follow Pedersen's (1913:523) and Marstrand's (1924:32) analysis and reconstruct an old **wi-n-d-na-* with double nasal infix, a kind of formation which is surely post-Indo-European but finds analogy in other languages too (cf. Gr. *λαμβάνω*, *μανθάνω* etc.).

(7) *-gnin* 'knows'

There is no doubt that this verb is etymologically connected with Ved. *jānāti*, Av. *paiti-zānāti*, Lit. *žinóti* and so on, but, as Pedersen

(1913:547) remarked, 'das *-ni-* der Wurzelsilbe ist sehr schwer zu erklären' because it is self-evident that OIr. *gni-* cannot come directly from **ǵneH₃-/ǵnH₃-*.

As far as I know, only Marstrander (1924) has maintained that *gnin* is the regular outcome of **-gnā-nu-t* (today we can write it as **gnH₃-nu-t*) when the accent fell on the prefix, an explanation which, in my opinion, is rather improbable because it is contradicted by forms such as:

foscad/foscud 'shadow' < **u(p)o-skātu-*
imram/imrum 'voyage' < **imm-rāmu-*
ingnad/ingnud 'unknown' < **ṅ-gnātu* (dat.)

Consequently we can but suppose that *gnin* was the product of an analogical process; but in this case the *Hebung* of /i/ does not prove that once there was a /u/ in the following syllable (because /i/ too can result from analogy) and thus there is no reason to reconstruct a pre-documentary present-stem **gni-nu-*.

We can conclude that *gnin* is no doubt a verb with an old nasal suffix, but this suffix is likely to have been **-nō* (**neH₃-*) originally, in accordance with the structure of its theme.

The result of these brief observations is rather disconcerting. In class B V there is actually one present form (*ro-cluinethar*) which presupposes an Indo-European *-neu-*present, but it belongs properly to Class B II; none of the others comes from an Indo-European *-neu-*present. Moreover, we might remark that several verbal themes that formed *-neu-*present in Indo-European, in Old Irish give present-forms which belong to classes other than B V, even when they preserve the nasal element:

Ved. *kṣiṇoti* 'destroys', Gr. *φθίνω* (F)ω, but OIr. *tinaid*
 Ved. *strṇoti* 'spreads', Gr. *στρώννυμι*, but OIr. *sernaid*
 Ved. *dunoti* 'burns', but OIr. *doīd*
 Ved. *aśnoti* 'reaches', Av. *qšnaoiti*, but OIr. *ro-icc*

Before we draw some general conclusions we have still to clarify a point which can be of considerable relevance to our discussion.

We have seen that neither *crin-* nor *lin-* comes from Indo-European *-neu-*present; nevertheless their root-vocalism seems to suggest that at some point of their history they became *-nu-*present, even if they were not so originally. In this case we could admit the existence of an Old Irish *-nu-*class and we should add only that it is of late origin and probably modelled upon some authentic and old *-nu-*present which disappeared progressively.

On the contrary, I maintain that this hypothesis, too, would be wrong. We must observe that the regular development of **p̄neH₁ti* and **k̄^wṛneH₁ti* should give OIr. **.len* and **.cren*, which would be

homophonous with *·cren* 'buys' and *·len* 'follows'. It was just in order to avoid this dangerous homophony that, in our opinion, these present forms were both reshaped according to their subjunctives *·cria* and **·lia*. This reshaping can be paralleled with what we observe in *ernaïd* 'bestows' (with its vocalism modelled upon the subj. *·era*) instead of **renaïd*, and in *sernaïd* 'strews' (with its vocalism modelled upon the subj. *·sera*), instead of **srenaïd*.

However, this state of affairs does not prevent *ernaïd* and *sernaïd* from belonging *pleno iure* to class B IV both diachronically (if we define this class as the class of the Indo-European *-nā*-presents) and synchronically (if we define it as the Old Irish present-class characterized only by a suffixed nasal that disappears in the other tenses). But the same conditions are fulfilled by *·crin* and *·lin* too: they are both old *-nā*-presents and in Old Irish their nasal does not appear outside of the present.

Our general conclusion is that class B V should be discarded and that the verbs it consists of should be put into other classes: *ro·cluïnethar* into B II, *at·baill* and *marnid* into B I, *ro·finnadar*, *·crin* and *·lin* into B IV; as far as *·gnin* is concerned, we have seen that it does not come from an Indo-European *-neu*-present and is likely to be the product of analogy; however, since it does not behave differently from *·crin* and *·lin* it can be safely placed into the same class with them.

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