

ONOMATOPEIC INTERJECTIONS IN EARLY IRISH¹

IN language, onomatopoeic interjections are generally a feature of informal speech, and are less common in higher registers. In modern English, for example, they are frequent in children's comics: pain is expressed by *ouch!*, dismay by *EEK!*, defiance by *yah!*, awe by *wow!*, disgust by *bah!*, grief by *boo-hoo!*, mirth by *ha-ha!*, disappointment by *aw!*, appreciation of food by *mmm!*, anger by *grrr!*, etc. In Latin and Greek, onomatopoeic interjections are commonest in the portrayal of comic or informal speech in drama.² Sanskrit drama similarly employs many such interjections, often in the mouths of people of lower rank.³

By contrast, the surviving Early Irish texts contain relatively few onomatopoeic interjections. Consequently, this category of word is excluded in Thurneysen's *Grammar of Old Irish*,⁴ Pedersen's *Vergleichende Grammatik*⁵ and Dottin's *Manuel d'irlandais moyen*.⁶ In later accounts of Irish dialects there are some short treatments of onomatopoeic interjections, such as that by

¹This article is based on a paper entitled 'Uch!, ub! and other onomatopoeic interjections in Early Irish' which I gave at the School of Celtic Studies *Tionól* on 21 March 1986. On 16 November 1989 an expanded version of part of this lecture was given at the Centre for Advanced Welsh and Celtic Studies, Aberystwyth, with the title 'Uch!, ub!: war-cries and cries of grief in Irish and Welsh'. I wish to express my gratitude to those who have over the years discussed these forms with me, and stress that all errors and misjudgements are entirely my own responsibility.

²For example, Terence's comedy *Adelphoe* (ed. R. H. Martin, Cambridge 1976; repr. 1993) contains a wide range of onomatopoeic interjections, including *ah*, *au-au*, *ehem*, *em*, *eho*, *ei*, *heia*, *hem*, *hui*, *oh*, *ohe*, *oho*, *phy*, *uae*, *uah*, and *uaha*. Among Greek comedies a similar wealth of interjections is provided, for instance, in Aristophanes's *Thesmophoriazusae* (ed. Alan H. Sommerstein, Warminster, England, 1994): ᾄ, ᾄ-ᾄ, αῖ, αἰ-αῖ, ἄταταῖ, ἔ-ἔ, ἔᾶ, εὐοί, ιαταταῖ, ἰή, ἰώ, μὦ-μὦ, ὄ-ὄ-ὄ, παπαπαῖ, ὦ.

In his *Institutiones grammaticae* the sixth-century grammarian Priscian of Caesarea criticized the view that the interjection should be treated as a part of speech in Greek. The Irish glossator on his work expanded on the matter in the eighth-century Codex Sangallensis no. 904: *.i. indinteriecht nadrann insce la grecu sed apud aduerbium numerant atarimet comroir[c]nich inna grec la ranna insce ol sũide as rann insce lalainnori* 'i.e. the interjection, which is not a part of speech with the Greeks, but (which) they reckon with the adverb. Erroneous persons of the Greeks reckon it with the parts of speech because it is a part of speech with the Latins' (Whitley Stokes and John Strachan (ed.), *Thesaurus Palaeohibernicus* ii (Cambridge 1903; repr. Dublin 1987) 75 gloss 26b6). I quote the translation provided by Rijcklof Hofmann, *The Sankt Gall Priscian commentary. Part I* (Münster 1996) vol. 2, p. 119.

³For brief accounts of interjections in Sanskrit, see Arthur M. MacDonell, *A Sanskrit grammar for students* (3rd ed. Oxford 1927) 157–9 § 181; W. D. Whitney, *A Sanskrit grammar* (5th ed. Leipzig 1924) 417 §§ 1134–5.

⁴Rudolf Thurneysen, *A grammar of Old Irish* (Dublin 1946, repr. 2003).

⁵Holger Pedersen, *Vergleichende Grammatik der keltischen Sprachen* i–ii (Göttingen 1908–13).

⁶Georges Dottin, *Manuel d'irlandais moyen* i–ii (Paris 1913).

de Bhaldrathie in his *Gaeilge Chois Fhairrge: an deilbhíocht*.⁷ Equally brief accounts of onomatopoeic interjections in Medieval Welsh are to be found in Evans's *Grammar of Middle Welsh*⁸ and Morris-Jones's *Welsh grammar*.⁹ For Medieval Breton, see Hemon's *Historical morphology and syntax of Breton*.¹⁰

In this article, I concentrate on onomatopoeic interjections which I have noted in Old and Middle Irish texts, and with their derivatives in formal language. I have provisionally arranged them in alphabetic order, though these parts of speech often use sounds which are outside the normal sound-system of a language, and are in consequence especially variable in spelling. For example, the English clicking-sound of disapproval is an imploded [ʔ], a sound which is not used elsewhere in the language. It is represented by a variety of spellings. The commonest is *tut-tut*, which appears in the *Oxford English Dictionary* (hereafter *OED*) s.v. *tut*. Other attempts to represent this sound in conventional English orthography include *tch-tch*, *tck-tck*, *tchick-tchick*, *tsk-tsk*, and *tchek-tchek*. P. G. Wodehouse devised the remarkably expressive past tense *he t'chk-t'chked* in one of his comic novels.¹¹ Similar variation can be observed in the representation of the English silencing interjection, variously spelled *hush!*, *shh!*, *shush!*, *shish!*, *h'ssh!*, etc. These spellings attempt to represent a lengthened /ʃ/ which is not used elsewhere in the English sound-system. Similarly, the variant spellings *sist*, *ist*, *sit* (no. 21 below) do not represent three distinct pronunciations /ʃist/, /ist/, /ʃit/, but are rather to be treated as attempts to render a silencing interjection which cannot be fully represented in Early Irish orthography. Because of the anomalous features of many interjections, there has been a tendency to explain them as loan-words, but in my view this is generally unnecessary: see discussion below on *éché*, *én*, *fé*, *gib-gab*, *gic-goc*, *hé-hé*, *ub* (and *abó*). On the other hand, there is little doubt that the later Irish *ailliliú* of joy derives from the biblical (*h*)*alleluia*.¹²

A comprehensive survey of onomatopoeic interjections in world languages has not been carried out. However, the evidence from the study of various unrelated languages indicates that some interjections are instinctive and universal.¹³ Thus, the *ha-ha*, *hee-hee* or *ho-ho* of mirth is recorded all over the world. The interjection *poo* is likewise universally associated with disgust. In childish English the noun *poo* refers to 'faeces', and the same element is doubled to form

⁷Tomás de Bhaldrathie, *Gaeilge Chois Fhairrge: an deilbhíocht* (Baile Átha Cliath 1953, repr. 1977) 238.

⁸D. Simon Evans, *A grammar of Middle Welsh* (Dublin 1964, repr. 2006) 245 § 279.

⁹J. Morris-Jones, *A Welsh grammar: historical and comparative* (Oxford 1913, repr. 1930) 450–1 § 223.

¹⁰Roparz Hemon, *A historical morphology and syntax of Breton* (Dublin 1975) 314 § 212.

¹¹P. G. Wodehouse, *The mating season* (1949; repr. Penguin Classics 2001) 107.

¹²See discussion under *alla* below.

¹³Priscian observed: *interiectionum autem pleraeque communes sunt naturaliter omnium gentium uoces* 'interjections are for the most part by nature common words of all peoples'. This is rendered by the Irish glossator on Codex Sangallensis no. 904: *.i. ataat alaaili interiecta and itcoitchena docach cenil* 'there are some interjections common to every nation' (Stokes and Strachan, *Thesaurus Palaeohibemicus* ii 62 (gloss 10a1) = Hofman, *The Sankt Gall Priscian commentary. Part 1*. vol. 2, p. 49).

the verb *to pooh-pooh* of conventional English.¹⁴ Other onomatopoeic interjections have different applications and usages in different cultures. For example, a hissing sound may be used to express disapproval in a theatre or other public venue in Europe.¹⁵ In other cultures, however, hissing is used to express respect or admiration. Captain Cook records his surprise that the natives of the New Hebrides expressed their admiration by hissing like geese.¹⁶ In Azerbaijan a staccato /ɔ-ɔ-ɔ/ may be used to express enjoyment of food rather than the familiar *mmm*.¹⁷ It should also be observed that—to a greater extent than other parts of speech—there is considerable variation between individual speakers in their use of interjections.

I should stress that the following list has no pretensions to completeness, and is merely an attempt to make a preliminary collection of these fascinating but elusive parts of speech. I omit sounds made by inanimate objects, such as *ding-dang* (of a bell),¹⁸ *gricc-gráicc* (of a bell),¹⁹ *stip* (the sound of corn-stubble burning),²⁰ and *tot* ‘splash’.²¹

1. abb-abb-abb.

See under **ub** below.

2. ahé, ahæ.

This interjection (in the spelling *ahæ*) is used in the ninth-century Milan Glosses to explain the word *hem* in the Latin commentary on Psalm 117.²² The gloss provides three different explanations of the word, the first of which is *.i. interiacht ebraide* ‘i.e. a Hebrew interjection’. However, *hem* is in fact well attested as an interjection in Latin, with most examples coming from the plays of Terence and Plautus.²³ It is mainly used as an interjection of surprise, either in a good or bad sense.

¹⁴*OED* s.v. *pooh-pooh*. See also Julius Pokorny, *Indogermanisches etymologisches Wörterbuch* (hereafter *IEW*) i (Bern 1959) 848 s.v. *pŕ, peŕe-* ‘faulen, stinken’.

¹⁵*OED* s.v. *hiss* (2).

¹⁶Edward B. Tylor, *Primitive culture* i (1871, 4th revised ed., London 1903) 196.

¹⁷Stephen Kelly (personal communication).

¹⁸John O’Donovan (ed.), *Annála ríoghachta Éireann: annals of the kingdom of Ireland by the four masters, from the earliest period to the year 1616* ii (Dublin 1856, repr. 1990) 786 s.a. 1015. Kuno Meyer, ‘Mittelir. *ding dang*’, (Zur keltischen Wortkunde X, *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie* 13 (1921) 191–2 § 244) takes it to be an early loan from English, but it could just as well be a native formation.

¹⁹J. G. O’Keeffe (ed.), *Buile Súibhne* (Mediaeval and Modern Irish Series I, Dublin 1931; repr. 1975) 17.486 § 22, 18.490 § 23.

²⁰George Calder (ed.), *Auraicept na n-Éces: the scholars’ primer* (Edinburgh 1917) 132.1701.

²¹E. G. Quin et al. (ed.), (*Contributions to a*) *Dictionary of the Irish language, based mainly on Old and Middle Irish materials* (Dublin 1913–76, compact ed. 1983) (hereafter *DIL*) s.v. *tot*; J. Vendryes (par les soins de E. Bachellery et P.-Y. Lambert), *Lexique étymologique de l’irlandais ancien* (hereafter *LEIA*) *lettres TU* (Dublin, Paris 1978) (T-119) s.v. *tot*; Calder, *Auraicept na n-Éces*, 124.1612.

²²Whitley Stokes and John Strachan (ed.), *Thesaurus Palaeohibernicus* i (Cambridge 1901, repr. Dublin 1987) 449.12–13 (MI. 131c3).

²³Charlton T. Lewis and Charles Short, *A Latin dictionary* (Oxford 1879, repr. 1966) s.v. *hem*.

The only other instance of *ahé* recorded in the *Dictionary of the Irish Language* is from the Old Irish tale *Togail Bruidne Dá Derga*.²⁴ Ingcél asks Fer Rogain about how the reign of King Conaire was regarded: *Cid ahé libse a fathius ind fir sin i tír Erend?* The form *ahé* is glossed *.i. dno* ‘i.e. indeed, then’ in Mael Muire’s hand in the *Lebor na hUidre* (LU) version of the tale,²⁵ and this explanation is followed in Stokes’s translation ‘What then deemst thou, of that man’s reign in the land of Erin?’ This seems more likely than Knott’s suggestion in her Notes (p. 83) that *ahé* should be taken as equivalent to *a at* ‘its properties, tokens’.

In Old Irish orthography *h* is normally silent.²⁶ In this instance, however, it clearly represents an actual *h*-sound: /ahe:/, cf. *DIL* H 1.20–22. Interjections consisting of a disyllable with an *h* preceded by a short vowel are widespread in language, e.g. English *oho, aha, ahoy, ahem*, Latin *aha, ehem, eho*, Sanskrit *ahā, ahē*.

3. *alla, alla-alla, aill, ale, aili, ole.*

Many languages use a hailing or challenging interjection of the type *alla*, etc. It can be compared with Greek *ἀλαλή, ἀλαλά* ‘loud cry, war-cry’, Lithuanian *alúoti* ‘hails’, and Old Church Slavonic *ole!* ‘hail!’.²⁷ There are numerous instances of this hailing or challenging interjection in Early Irish sources. It occurs doubled in the Old Irish tale *Fled Bricrenn*. Cú Chulainn is on watch in Cú Roí’s fortress at midnight. He hears an approaching noise and shouts *Alla-alla! . . . cíá fil alla? Mástat carait conná ’musnágat, mástat námaid co ’mmosralat* ‘Hello, hello! who is there? If they are friends let them stay still, if they are enemies let them flee’.²⁸ Those who approach shout a defiant response and so are immediately killed by Cú Chulainn.

In other contexts, *alla* or *ale* commonly expresses surprise, often accompanied by disapproval or dismay. In the Stowe version of the *Táin Bó Cúailnge* King Conchobar takes Cú Chulainn’s arm after he has attacked the youths on the playing-field of Emain, and says *ale, a mhic bic . . . at-ciu ni foilli imbre an macraid* ‘hey, young boy . . . I see that it is not gentleness that you inflict on the youths’.²⁹ There is also dismay in Bricriu’s reaction when his fortress is tipped up, causing him and his wife to fall into a cess-pit: *Aill amai . . . tancatar námaid a ndún* ‘Woe! . . . enemies have come into the fortress’.³⁰ Again, in Recension I of the *Táin* the fearsome warrior Nad Crantail is impaled by a spear thrown up in the air by Cú Chulainn which comes down through the top

²⁴Whitley Stokes (ed.), ‘The destruction of Dá Derga’s hostel’, *Revue celtique* 22 (1901) 166.5 § 66; Eleanor Knott (ed.), *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* (Medieval and Modern Irish Series VIII, Dublin 1936, repr. 1975) 18.595 § 66.

²⁵R. I. Best and O. Bergin (ed.), *Lebor na hUidre, Book of the Dun Cow* (Dublin 1929, repr. 1992) 215.7008.

²⁶Thurneysen, *Grammar of Old Irish*, 19–20 § 25.

²⁷*IEW* i 29 s.v. *alā*.

²⁸George Henderson (ed.), *Fled Bricrend: the Feast of Bricriu* (Irish Texts Society II, London 1899) § 84 106.3–4 = LU 274.9090–91.

²⁹Cecile O’Rahilly (ed.), *The Stowe version of Táin Bó Cuailnge* (Dublin 1961) 28.824.

³⁰Henderson, *Fled Bricrend*, § 25 30.16–17 = LU 255.8380–81.

of his head. He addresses Cú Chulainn with admiration: *Amai ole! Is tú láech as dech fil i nHerind* ‘Ho, indeed! You are the best warrior in Ireland’.³¹

This interjection may also be used in a weaker sense, where an appropriate translation is usually ‘indeed’.³² In the Stowe *Táin*, Mac Roth says mockingly to Daire: *Ale . . . cibe raidhit eclacha do druim do leanna-sa 7 do bidh, na tabair dot aoídh ina dott aire é* ‘Indeed, whatever harlots say on the strength of your drink and your food, pay no heed or attention to it’.³³ In Recension I of the *Táin*, Fergus mac Róich complains to the people in his tent that his noble foster-son Cú Chulainn is to be killed. The people ask: *Maith aile, cia na máidenn ón?*, which C. O’Rahilly translates ‘Why, who makes such a boast?’.³⁴

This interjection is often associated with the particle *amae*, *amai*, whose etymology is obscure.³⁵ The interjection *fé*, *fáe* is also regularly associated with the particle *amae*: see no. 10 below.

The interjection *alla*, etc. is to be distinguished from the various reflexes of the biblical exclamation of joy, (*h*)*alleluia!* Vendryes suggests that the noun *aille* ‘act of praising, giving thanks, grace before meals’ comes from this source.³⁶ The later borrowing *ailliliú*, *ailliliú* is well-attested as an exclamation of surprise or pleasure, and in the chorus of songs.³⁷ In his article, ‘The Irish war-cry’, David Greene takes the Modern Irish *ailliliú* of sorrow to be another use of the same interjection.³⁸ He quotes Sir James Ware’s reference to the *aleleu* ‘which the meer Irish women are accustomed to repeat with howlings and clapping of hands at the funerals of their friends’,³⁹ and also compares Derricke’s attribution of the cry *lullalowe* to Irish warriors on being put to flight.⁴⁰ However, it seems more probable that these are cases of the ululating cry of sorrow or defeat which is widespread in language,⁴¹ rather than derivatives of the biblical (*h*)*alleluia!*

³¹Cecile O’Rahilly (ed.), *Táin Bó Cuailnge* Recension I (Dublin 1976, repr. 2006) 45.1467 = LU 179.5768.

³²This usage can be compared with that of the Sanskrit interjection *alele* (Monier Monier-Williams, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary* (Oxford 1899) s.v.).

³³O’Rahilly, *Stowe version of Táin Bó Cuailnge*, 5.145–7.

³⁴O’Rahilly, *Táin Bó Cuailnge*, Recension I 82.2692 (trans. p. 198).

³⁵Pedersen, *Vergleichende Grammatik der keltischen Sprachen* ii 188 § 514 (7), suggests a connection with *amein*, *amin* ‘thus’.

³⁶*LEIA: lettre A* (A-34) s.v. *aille*.

³⁷Patrick S. Dinneen, *Foclóir Gaedhilge agus Béarla: an Irish-English dictionary* (Dublin 1927, repr. 1996) s.v. *ailliliú*; Niall Ó Dónaill, *Foclóir Gaeilge-Béarla* (Baile Átha Cliath 1977, athchló 1998) s.v. *ailliliú*.

³⁸David Greene, ‘The Irish war-cry’, *Ériu* 22 (1971) 167–73, at p. 168.

³⁹Walter Harris (ed. and trans.), *The whole works of Sir James Ware concerning Ireland* (Dublin 1764) ii 164.

⁴⁰John Small (ed.), *The image of Irelande with a discoverie of woodcarne by John Derricke, 1581* (Edinburgh 1883) 67.

⁴¹*IEW* i 1105 s.v. *ul-*, *ulul-*.

4. babb.

In his Glossary, the tenth-century scholar Cormac Úa Cuilennáin defines the element *babb* as an *interiacht adbligthe*, lit. ‘an interjection of aggrandisement’.⁴² It occurs in an etymological gloss on *Babbgither*, the name of the noblest pig in Ireland (*nī raibe i n-Ēre muc bud grátu*), which belonged to Bres mac Eladain.⁴³ From the limited context it seems best to take *babb* to be an interjection expressing favourable astonishment, which might be translated ‘wow!’ or ‘whew!’ in reaction to the impressive size and appearance of the pig.

5. bú, buo, boo.

In the Middle Irish grammatical tract *Auraicecht na n-Éces* the author quotes the principle *nomen de sono factum est* ‘the name has been made from the sound’,⁴⁴ and advances the theory that the word *bó* ‘cow’ is from *bú*, *buo*, the Early Irish equivalent of English *moo!*, and that *géd* ‘goose’ similarly derives from *gō*, a sound representing the honking of geese.⁴⁵

Irish *bó* is cognate with the words for ‘cow, bovine’ in the other languages of the Indo-European group, e.g. Sanskrit *gáuh*, Greek *βοῦς*, Latin *bōs*, English *cow*, etc. These words can be traced back to a common root *g^hou-*, but this is not generally held to be of onomatopoeic origin.⁴⁶ On the other hand, modern scholarship is at one with the author of *Auraicecht na n-Éces* in taking Irish *géd*—like many bird-names—to be of onomatopoeic origin.⁴⁷

6. cú.

The Middle Irish tale *Buile Šuibhne* contrasts the *cú* made by the cuckoo with the harsh clanging (*gricc-gráicc*) of the church bell: *Binne lem . . . ná gricc-gráicc chlogáin chille / an chú do[ní] cúí Banna* ‘Sweeter to me . . . than the *gricc-gráicc* of the church bell is the *cú* which the cuckoo of the Bann makes’.⁴⁸ The name of this bird (*cuí*, gen. sg. *cuach*) derives from its call.⁴⁹

7. é.

There is evidence of an interjection of grief, *é*, which was probably pronounced /e:/. It is attested in a poem on the triumph of Patrick Sarsfield by Dáibhidh Ó Bruadair: *Is é nach maireann géag don ghaisceadh / céile Chaisil chairéisigh* ‘Alas, that the fair branch of valour, the spouse / Of the elegant

⁴²*DIL* s.v. *aidbliugud* suggests ‘hyberbolic (?) interjection’.

⁴³Kuno Meyer (ed.), *Sanas Cormaic: an Old-Irish glossary compiled by Cormac Úa Cuilennáin. Anecdota from Irish manuscripts* iv (ed. O. J. Bergin, R. I. Best, Kuno Meyer, J. G. O’Keeffe, Halle 1912, repr. Llanerch, Wales, 1994) 12 § 118.

⁴⁴Calder, *Auraicept na n-Éces*, 132.1699–1700.

⁴⁵*Ibid.* 124.1614; 246.4697.

⁴⁶*IEW* i 482–3 and references.

⁴⁷*Ibid.* 407.

⁴⁸O’Keeffe, *Buile Šuibhne* 18.491 § 23; cf. 17.484–6 § 22.

⁴⁹*LEIA: lettre C (C-9)* s.v. 2 *caí*; *IEW* i 627 s.v. *kuku*.

Caiseal, is not alive now'.⁵⁰ The pronunciation of earlier attestations given at *DIL* s.v. 5 *é* is more uncertain. Thus, a poem in the Middle Irish *Metrical Dindshenchas* has *Hé do díl a dáirfír* 'Woe for thy fate, thou caitiff'.⁵¹ Likewise, an explanatory gloss on Old Irish *he* in the *Amra Choluimb Chille* has *Nó dano is interiecht feghair ann .i. truag .i. is truag atát aittrebhaide in betha ro bo lesseom* 'Or then, it is an interjection that is seen there, i.e. *hé* "alas", i.e. sad are the inhabitants of the world which he possessed'.⁵² In both cases, the pronunciation may have been intended as /e:/. However, because of the likely use of /h/ in the interjections *ahé* and *ha*, there is also the possibility that /he:/ is intended.

DIL also gives the *he he* of amusement under the headword 5 *é*, but I suggest under *hé-hé* below, that the pronunciation would have been /he: he:/.

8. *eché, éché, éche*.

There is an instance of this interjection in the Old Irish tale *Fled Bricrenn*.⁵³ It serves to emphasise Cú Chulainn's contempt for Conall Cernach's horses and chariot: '*Eché*' for Cú Chulainn, '*foritir cach amglicu techradu . . .*', which might be translated "'Ha"! said Cú Chulainn, "everyone knows the stupidity of your horses . . .".

This interjection also occurs in the Old Irish tale *Togail Bruidne Dá Derga*.⁵⁴ In his edition Stokes translates 'lo', following the gloss *.i. ni dorcha .i. is follus* 'i.e. it is not dark, i.e. it is manifest'.⁵⁵ It is likely that the spelling represents some such sound as /e: he:/. The D iv 2 version of the tale has *hé hé*,⁵⁶ which I suggest below represents /he: he:/.

The Egerton 1782 version employs here another interjection, *ailli*,⁵⁷ which is discussed under no. 3 *alla*, above. For the substitution by a later redactor of one interjection for another, we can compare a passage in the Story of the Death of Máelodrán where the Rawlinson B 512 version has *Sta-ta! nachandúsaig* 'hush! lest thou wake him', while the Rawlinson B 502 version has *Sit-sit! arnachandusca*.⁵⁸

⁵⁰John C. Mac Erlean (ed.), *Duanairé Dháibhidh Uí Bhruadair* iii (Irish Texts Society XVIII, London 1917) 152 § xvii.

⁵¹Edward J. Gwynn (ed.), *The Metrical Dindshenchas* iii (Todd Lecture Series X, Dublin 1913, repr. 1991) 154.25.

⁵²Whitley Stokes (ed.), 'The Bodleian Amra Choluimb chille', *Revue celtique* 20 (1899) 164 § 19 = LU 22.611–13.

⁵³Henderson, *Fled Bricrend* 42 § 34 = LU 258.8490.

⁵⁴Knott, *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* 17.554 = LU 214.6976. Knott gives *éce* as the Yellow Book of Lecan reading, but it occurs at the bottom of a page and is badly smudged (Robert Atkinson (ed.), *The Yellow Book of Lecan, a collection . . . in part compiled at the end of the fourteenth century*. Photo-lithographic reproduction (Dublin 1896) p. 95a52). It could just as well be read as *éche*.

⁵⁵Stokes, 'The destruction of Dá Derga's hostel', *Revue celtique* 22 (1901) 59 § 62 = LU 214^b.

⁵⁶Knott, *Togail Bruidne Da Derga*, Appendix, p. 54 (l. 554) = Stokes, *Revue celtique* 22, 58 fn. 17.

⁵⁷Stokes, *Revue celtique* 22, 58 fn. 18.

⁵⁸See discussion under no. 22 *sta*, etc. below.

DIL s.vv. *éche*, *ecce* raises the possibility that this interjection is from Latin *ecce* ‘behold’.

9. *én*, *enn*.

This interjection is attested only in the phrase *én a maic*, which occurs three times in *Togail Bruidne Dá Derga*.⁵⁹ All instances are at the beginning of rhetorics uttered by the three red horsemen who rode in front of King Conaire to the hostel of Dá Derga. Their action breached one of the *geissi* or supernatural prohibitions laid upon the king, so his son Lé Fer Flaith rode after them to call them back. He was addressed by each of them in turn, with prophesies of battle and death. In his edition Stokes translates ‘lo my son!’,⁶⁰ and this interpretation is followed with a query by Knott.⁶¹ But the context demands a more negative meaning for this interjection, so I would translate ‘woe, o youth!’. This is supported by the H 3. 18 glossed extract which has *é a maic .i. truang a maic*.⁶² Possibly, therefore, *én* is to be regarded as a nasalised realisation of /e:/ *é* ‘alas’ discussed at no. 7 above.

On the other hand, in O’Mulconry’s Glossary *enn* is classed as an *interiec[t]io osten[den]tis* ‘interjection of demonstration (?)’, which would appear to support the meaning ‘lo!’.⁶³ In his note on this form, Stokes describes it as ‘meaning obscure’,⁶⁴ and in a footnote compares with a query Latin *en* and Greek ἦν, both interjections meaning ‘lo!’.⁶⁵ I believe, however, that Paul Russell and Padraic Moran are correct in identifying *enn* with the Irish interjection *én*.⁶⁶

Note further the variant readings *inni a meicc*,⁶⁷ *einne a maic*.⁶⁸ Might the latter stand for some such sounds as [ē: e:]? But what of *inni*?

10. *fé*, *fáe*, *fé-fé*.

The interjection *fé*, *fáe* expresses sorrow or fear and can be compared with Greek οὐαί, Latin *vae*, Gothic *wai*, OEng. *wā*, Welsh *gwae*, etc.⁶⁹ *DIL* s.v. 1 *fé* (c) provides a number of instances of this interjection. These include *fé scél* ‘alas for the news’⁷⁰ and *fáe ritt* ‘alas for you’.⁷¹ On a few occasions it

⁵⁹Knott, *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* 10.304, 317, 328 = LU 209.6790, 6799, 6806. See *DIL* 2 *én*.

⁶⁰Stokes, ‘The destruction of Dá Derga’s hostel’, *Revue celtique* 22 (1901) 37 § 32, 38 § 34, 39 § 35.

⁶¹Knott, *Togail Bruidne Da Derga*, Glossary, p. 120 s.v. *én*.

⁶²Stokes, *Revue celtique* 22, 418; Knott, *Togail Bruidne Da Derga*, Notes p. 79.

⁶³Whitley Stokes (ed.), ‘O’Mulconry’s Glossary’ no. 395 (in Stokes and Meyer, *Archiv für celtische Lexikographie* i 253).

⁶⁴*Ibid.* 297.

⁶⁵*Ibid.* 253 fn. 1.

⁶⁶<http://www.ascn.cam.ac.uk/irishglossaries/>.

⁶⁷Stokes, *Revue celtique* 22, 392–33.

⁶⁸Stokes, *Revue celtique* 22, 418; Knott, *Togail Bruidne Da Derga*, Notes, p. 79.

⁶⁹*IEW* i 1110–11 s.v. *uai*.

⁷⁰Kuno Meyer (ed.), *Über die älteste irische Dichtung* ii (Berlin 1913) 17 § 3.

⁷¹O. Bergin, R. I. Best, M. A. O’Brien (ed.), *The Book of Leinster, formerly Leabar na Níachongbhála* (hereafter LL) iii (Dublin 1957) 707 f. 161a in top margin.

is associated with the interjection *amae* (see under *alla* above), e.g. *fe amae*,⁷² *fe fe amai*.⁷³ Under 1 *fé* (b) *DIL* provides instances of the use of *fé* as a noun meaning ‘grief’. These are mostly in variants of the set phrase *ba fé ille* 7 *ba fé innunn* ‘it was woe on one side and woe on the other side’, referring to casualties in battle.

The status of the form given under 1 *fé* (a) in *DIL* is uncertain. According to Cormac’s Glossary, *fé* was the word for a rod which was used among the pagans to measure bodies for burial.⁷⁴ Cormac derives it from Latin *vae* ‘alas’ (*fé ab eo quod est uae*), but also makes a (rather farfetched) link between this interjection and the rod.⁷⁵ He explains that everyone hated to hold this rod in his hand, and that anything that was hateful to anyone was compared to it. From this came the proverbial phrase *fē fris* ‘woe to it’ (*unde in prouerbiu uenit fē fris*) as the rod which is called *fé* is fearful (*amail is n-adētc[h]ide in flesc cui nomen fē*). A possible instance of *fé* in the sense of ‘rod’ is to be found in the poem on Loch Dacháech in the *Metrical Dindshenchas*. In his edition, E. J. Gwynn reads ll. 51–3 as *toirsech bass de, rothoimsech fe, fri cnes rígfér* ‘weary was the palm thereby, with frequent smiting—alas! upon the flesh of royal men’.⁷⁶ In the Glossary, however, Gwynn emended his reading, in the light of a comment by Kuno Meyer,⁷⁷ to *rothoimsed fé fri cnes rígfér* ‘a measuring rod has been measured against the flesh of royal men’.⁷⁸ He here follows the reading indicated by a glossed quotation from this poem in H 4. 22 f. 37a (O’C 2018): *ro toimsed fe (.i. in tslat tomuis) fri cnes rigfer*. Pokorny derives *fé* ‘rod’ from **uīā*, containing the root *uei-* ‘to bend’.⁷⁹ He compares the Old Irish verbal stem *fe-n* (**ui-ne-*), as in *ar-fen* ‘fences out’, *imm-fen* ‘fences around’, *fíthe* ‘fenced, woven’, Welsh *gwialen* ‘rod, stick’.

In the Middle Irish tale *Cath Maige Tuired*, this interjection occurs in the spell (*cétal*) chanted by Lug to the men of Ireland before the great battle against the Fomorians: *Fó! Fó! Fé! Fé!*⁸⁰ These sounds are clearly intended to have a magical effect on the martial prowess of the men of Ireland.

11. fuit, fuit-fuit, uít.

The instinctive sound which people make when they are suffering from the cold is exceptionally difficult to represent in conventional orthographies,

⁷²Myles Dillon (ed.), *Serglige Con Culainn* (Medieval and Modern Irish Series XIV, Dublin 1953, repr. 1984) 3.66 = LU 105.3279.

⁷³Kuno Meyer (ed.), ‘The expulsion of the Déssi’, *Ériu* 3 (1907) 141.197–8.

⁷⁴Meyer, *Sanas Cormaic* 49–50 § 606.

⁷⁵The rod is stated in Cormac’s Glossary to be a *flesc idaith* which is taken in *DIL* s.v. *fé* to mean ‘rod of yew’. However, *idaith* is classified in the tree-list in the law-text *Bretha Comaithchesa* as a less valuable tree than *ibar* ‘yew’. In my article, ‘The Old Irish tree-list’ (*Celtica* 11 (1976) 107–24, at 115), I tentatively suggest that *idaith* means ‘wild cherry’ (*Prunus avium*).

⁷⁶E. J. Gwynn, *The Metrical Dindshenchas* iii 186.

⁷⁷Kuno Meyer, *Bruchstücke der älteren Lyrik Irlands* (Berlin 1919) 54 § 119.

⁷⁸E. J. Gwynn, *The Metrical Dindshenchas* v (Todd Lecture Series XII, Dublin 1935, repr. 1991) 253 s.v. *fé*.

⁷⁹*IEW* i 1120–21.

⁸⁰Elizabeth A. Gray (ed.), *Cath Maige Tuired: the second battle of Mag Tuired* (Irish Texts Society LII, London 1982) 58.592 § 129; cf. 60.634 § 133.

because it consists of variable puffing and blowing noises, sometimes with sustained vibration of the upper lip. The most realistic which I have come across is the Norwegian *huttutu!* which seems much more convincing than the conventional *brrrr!* of English.

Most attestations of the Early Irish interjection *fuit* or *fuit-fuit* occur in the context of cold. Thus a poem in the Middle Irish tale ‘*Uath Beinne Étair*’ starts off with the words *Fuit, fuid! Fuar inocht Mag lethon Luirc* ‘Brrr, brrr! Cold tonight is the broad plain of Lorg’.⁸¹ Likewise, a poem in *Buile Súibhne* contains the stanza:

As fuit, fuit damh ó nach mair
mo chollán i n-eidhnechaibh,
feraidh mór do síonaibh air
agus mór do thoirneachaibh.

‘It is cold, cold to me since my body
does not live in ivied places,
much bad weather comes upon it
and much thunder’.⁸²

An association between *fuit* and cold is also found in glossaries. In Cormac’s Glossary, *fuit* is explained as *fuacht* ‘cold’,⁸³ and in O’Davoren’s Glossary the word *brat* ‘cloak’ is given the etymological gloss *.i. ba ar fuit* ‘i.e. good for cold’.⁸⁴ It is probable that the interjection *uit* is to be taken as a variant of *fuit*. The only attestation is in the marginal entry *uit mo chrob* in Codex Sangallensis 904 p. 176b.⁸⁵ Stokes and Strachan translate ‘Alas! my hand’. As there is no context, it is uncertain what afflicts the scribe’s hand, but it could well be the cold. What appears to be a different use of the interjection *fuit* is attested in Recension I of the *Táin Bó Cúailnge*, where Fergus recounts the boyhood deeds of Cú Chulainn. He describes how Cú Chulainn met him in the doorway of the fortress when he was severely injured. Evidently shocked by his appearance, Cú Chulainn exclaims ‘*Fuit! Dia do bethu, a popa Fergus*’.⁸⁶ In her edition, Cecile O’Rahilly translates ‘Hey! Welcome! master Fergus’ (p. 138) and comments in the Notes that she treats *fuit* here as a ‘blank interjection’ which takes its colour from the context (p. 249). I feel, however, that the translation ‘alas!’ given by Strachan in his *Stories from the Táin* is preferable.⁸⁷ Cú Chulainn may be regarded as shivering with pity or horror at his fosterfather’s injuries.

⁸¹ Kuno Meyer (ed.), ‘*Uath Beinne Étair*’, *Revue celtique* 11 (1890) 130.21–2.

⁸² James J. O’Keeffe (ed.), *Buile Súibhne* (Medieval and Modern Irish Series I, Dublin 1931, repr. 1975) 21.585–8.

⁸³ Kuno Meyer (ed.), *Sanas Cormaic* 22 § 249 s.v. *culpait*.

⁸⁴ Whitley Stokes (ed.), ‘O’Davoren’s Glossary’, *Archiv für celtische Lexikographie* ii (ed. Stokes and Meyer, Halle 1904) 243 § 289.

⁸⁵ Whitley Stokes and John Strachan (ed.), *Thesaurus Palaeohibernicus* ii xxi.8.

⁸⁶ Cecile O’Rahilly (ed.), *Táin Bó Cúailnge*, Recension I 16.489.

⁸⁷ John Strachan, *Stories from the Táin* (Dublin 1908, 3rd edition revised by Osborn Bergin 1944) Glossary, p. 76.

12. *gib-gab, giba-gapa, gipa-gapa.*

Many languages contain contemptuous expressions which purport to represent the sounds made by foreigners. Thus the Greek word βάρβαρος (borrowed into Latin as *barbarus*) ‘foreigner, non-Greek speaker’ is of onomatopoeic origin, and refers to the incomprehensible babbling made by speakers of unfamiliar tongues.⁸⁸ Though not strictly an interjection, I include here the onomatopoeic *gib-gab* (v.ll. *giba-gapa, gipa-gapa*), which occurs in the early Middle Irish tale *Airec Menman Uraird mac Coisse*.⁸⁹ The text has *nirbo gib-gab na gcennaighi* ‘it was not the babbling of the merchants’, which doubtless refers to foreign traders conducting their business in languages other than Irish. In Modern Irish *giob-geab* is used in a jocular sense of ‘chat, gossip’.⁹⁰

Kuno Meyer compares *gib-gab* with the Northern English and Scottish dialectal form *giff-gaff*, and takes it to have been introduced into Irish through contact with Northern English traders.⁹¹ However, the earliest attestation of the phrase (with the meaning ‘mutual giving, give and take’) is not until 1549, and in the sense of ‘interchange of remarks, promiscuous talk’ it does not appear until 1787.⁹² The Irish spellings indicate that the form was pronounced with a /b/, which does not tally with the /f/ of *giff-gaff*. As in the case of *gic-goc* below, it seems more likely to be a native formation.

13. *gic-goc, gig-gog.*

The early Middle Irish tale *Airec Menman Uraird mac Coisse* uses the onomatopoeic *gic-goc* (v.l. *gic-gog*) in the phrase *nirbu gic-goc Gallgaidhel* ‘it was not the stuttering of the Norse-Irish’.⁹³ This expression may be intended to convey the awkward mixture of languages employed by those of hybrid Norse-Irish race, or it may simply refer to the harshly-accented Irish which they spoke. In his review of Meyer’s *Wortkunde*, Marstrander suggested that *gic-goc* (*gig-gog*) is actually a borrowing from Norse *gigga* ‘to stagger’ and *gogga* ‘to mumble’.⁹⁴ The scenario envisaged is apparently that the Norse-Irish applied the terms *gigga* and *gogga* to their halting attempts at speaking Irish, and that this phrase was taken into the language and used by the author of *Airec Menman Uraird mac Coisse*. One might compare the adoption of the

⁸⁸IEW i 91–2 s.v. *balbal-*.

⁸⁹Mary E. Byrne (ed.) ‘*Airec Menman Uraird mac Coisse*’, *Anecdota from Irish manuscripts* ii (ed. O. J. Bergin, R. I. Best, Kuno Meyer, J. G. O’Keefe, Halle 1908, repr. Llanerch, Wales, 1994) 72.9 § 29.

⁹⁰Dinneen, *Foclóir Gaedhilge agus Béarla* s.v. *geab*; Ó Dónaill, *Foclóir Gaeilge-Béarla* s.v. *giob*; Seoirse Mac Clúin, *Caint an Chláir* i (Baile Átha Cliath 1940) 504 s.v. *giob-geab*.

⁹¹Kuno Meyer, ‘Zur keltischen Wortkunde V’, *Sitzberichte der preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften* (Berlin 1914) 630–631 § 78.

⁹²OED s.v. *giff-gaff*.

⁹³Byrne, ‘*Airec Menman Uraird mac Coisse*’ 72.6 § 29.

⁹⁴Carl Marstrander, ‘Remarques sur les Zur Keltischen Wortkunde’, *Revue celtique* 36 (1915–16) 383–4. He provides further details in his *Bidrag til de norske sprogs historie i Irland* (Kristiania 1915) 10–11, 131.

Irish word *barróg* ‘speech-impediment, lisp’⁹⁵ into English as *brogue* ‘a pronounced Irish accent’.⁹⁶ On the other hand, there is the difficulty that Norse *gigga* refers to clumsy movement rather than speech, and there seems no reason for the Norse-Irish to have walked as well as talked in an awkward manner. Furthermore, the expression *gic-goc* (*gig-gog*) is similar to a number of onomatopoeic words or phrases in the later language referring to various squeaking, faint or silly sounds, whether made by humans or animals, e.g. *gíog* ‘squeak, chirp’, *giog* ‘a very slight sound’, *gíoglach* ‘squealing (of mice)’, *gíog guag* ‘a silly prater’, *gíoc-bíoc!* ‘peep-bo!’.⁹⁷ It seems to me, therefore, that Middle Irish *gic-goc* is more likely to be a native expression than a Norse loan.

14. gó.

See under *bú* above.

15. ha.

In his recent edition of the Irish glosses in Boethius’s *Consolatio Philosophiae*, Pádraig Ó Néill notes the occurrence in gloss 9 of the interjection *ha* ‘indeed’.⁹⁸ He takes it to be an Irish word rather than the Latin interjection *ha* of joy or derision, which would not suit the context. His view is supported by the fact that the previous gloss 8a, *uch*, is also an interjection, and undoubtedly Irish. As in the case of *ahé* and *hé-hé*, it is probable that the *h* was actually pronounced: /ha/ or /ha:/.

The only example of this interjection noted in *DIL* s.v. *há* is as a variant in the Irish version of the Old French *chanson de geste*, *Fierabras*. The Laud 610 version has *ha há a cristaighi*,⁹⁹ corresponding to *o a cristaide* ‘O Christian’ of the Egerton 1781 version and *a a a cristaide* of the H 2. 7 version.¹⁰⁰ The context indicates a hailing or challenging interjection.

16. hé-hé.

The instinctive double interjection expressing joy or amusement is represented in very similar forms in languages throughout the world, e.g. English *ha-ha!*, *hee-hee!*, Latin *ha-hae!*, *he-hae!*, Sanskrit *hī-hī*. The interjection *he-he* is attested once in Old Irish, in the Palatine ms 68 Glosses on the Psalms.¹⁰¹ The Latin text has *euge euge* ‘rejoice, rejoice’, which is glossed *he he sirson sirson* ‘ha-ha! happy! happy!’.

As in the case of *ahé* and *ha*, it is likely that the *h* would have been pronounced in this interjection: /he: he:/. *DIL* s.v. *he* takes *hé hé* in the

⁹⁵Dinneen, *Foclóir Gaedhilge agus Béarla* s.v. *barróg*; Ó Dónaill, *Foclóir Gaeilge-Béarla* s.v. *barróg*.

⁹⁶OED s.v. *brogue*.

⁹⁷Dinneen, *Foclóir Gaedhilge agus Béarla* s.vv.; Ó Dónaill, *Foclóir Gaeilge-Béarla* s.vv.

⁹⁸Pádraig Ó Néill (ed.), ‘Irish glosses in a twelfth-century copy of Boethius’s *Consolatio Philosophiae*’, *Ériu* 55 (2005) 1–17, at p. 8.

⁹⁹Whitley Stokes (ed.), ‘The Irish version of *Fierabras*’, *Revue celtique* 19 (1898) 50 § 67, fn. 8.

¹⁰⁰Stokes does not give this reading, which is found in the Trinity College Dublin MS H 2. 7 (no. 1298) p. 442.

¹⁰¹Stokes and Strachan, *Thesaurus Palaeohibernicus* i 3.16.

seventeenth-century text *Pairliament Chloinne Tomás* to be an English loanword,¹⁰² but the Palatine ms 68 gloss shows it to have been present in the earlier language.

17. ia.

The interjection *ia* seems to be employed to express defiance in the Middle Irish tale (mainly in verse) beginning *A bairgen atá i ngábud* ‘O loaf, thou art in danger’.¹⁰³ An obstreperous servant of the King of Munster demanded a second loaf of bread from an old woman of Leinster who was baking for the ploughmen. She refused his request on the grounds that the loaf was protected by the King of Leinster: ‘*Ia ón ómm*’, *ar in chaillech*, ‘*ro gab a commairgi fort in bairgen so; úair atá for commairge ríge Lagen*’ “‘Oh! indeed,” said the old woman, “This loaf has got its protection against thee, as it is under the protection of the King of Leinster.” This is the only attestation of *ia* as an interjection given in *DIL*.¹⁰⁴ For the interjection *óm(m)*: see no. 20 below.

18. mem(m).

It is likely that there was an onomatopoeic interjection in Old Irish representing the sound of a kiss, sometimes spelled as *mwah!* in English. No such interjection is attested in the surviving Early Irish texts, but the derivative neuter noun *mem* occurs in the phrase *mem n-áise* ‘a willing kiss’ in a law-text on offences within marriage.¹⁰⁵ According to this passage, if a wife willingly kisses a man other than her husband, she must pay him half the bride-price and half his honour-price (*lethcoibhchi 7 letheneclann uaithi*). This word is also attested in glossaries with the meaning *.i. póc* ‘i.e. kiss’.¹⁰⁶

19. míu, *meó.

The regular sound which a cat makes is represented in various languages by similar spellings, e.g. English *meow*, etc. A fragment from the lost Old Irish law-text *Catslechta* refers to a kitchen cat by the name of *Méone*, i.e. ‘little meow’.¹⁰⁷ In O’Davoren’s Glossary, we find the spelling *Meoinne*, which is explained *.i. ainm caiti. míu ina inde no meoan ina inde .i. meghel ina inde* ‘i.e. the name of a cat . . . i.e. “meow” in its essence, or mewling in its essence or bleating in its essence’.¹⁰⁸ The fem. noun *mēigel*, *mēidel* (with derivatives *mēid[h]lech*, *mēig[h]lech*, *mēigellach*) is well attested of the sound made by cats, goats or sheep. The initial *mē-* is clearly of onomatopoeic origin.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰²N. J. A. Williams (ed.), *Pairlement Chloinne Tomás* (Dublin 1981) 34.1053.

¹⁰³T. P. Nowlan, ‘The quarrel about the loaf’, *Ériu* 1 (1904) 134 = LL i 225.6690.

¹⁰⁴*DIL* s.v. *ia*.

¹⁰⁵D. A. Binchy (ed.), *Corpus iuris hibernici* (hereafter *CIH*) (Dublin 1978) i 146.5.

¹⁰⁶See *DIL* s.v. *mem(m)*; *LEIA*: *lettres MNOP* (M-34) s.v. *mem(m)*.

¹⁰⁷*CIH* i 110.18.

¹⁰⁸*CIH* iv 1516.8–9 = Stokes, ‘O’Davoren’s Glossary’, 417 § 1246.

¹⁰⁹*LEIA*: *lettres MNOP* M-28 s.v. *meigel*.

20. om(m), óm.

Interjections with *m* have a wide variety of functions in language. In English *mmm* (also written *yum*) indicates relish on the consumption or anticipation of food. A similar sound, but with a different intonation, expresses agreement and may also be written *mmm*. Another *m*-interjection serves as a meaningless filler between phrases, and is typical of a halting style of speaking, as in English *um*.¹¹⁰

In Old Irish *om(m)* is well attested in the sagas—particularly in the *Táin Bó Cuailnge*—as a filler or affirmative in reported speech, and can be translated ‘indeed, truly’. For example, the Book of Leinster version of the *Táin* quotes King Ailill as saying to his wife Medb: *Is maith ben ben dagfír* ‘happy is the woman who is the wife of a good man’, to which she replies: *Maith om* ‘she is indeed’.¹¹¹ It may be used in combination with other interjections or particles. In Recension I of the same tale, an unnamed warrior responds to Cú Chulainn’s request to stay with the words *Nád anéb om ale* ‘Indeed I shall not stay’.¹¹² Here *om* and *ale* (see under *alla*, etc. above) are combined for emphasis. In one version of the tale *Feis Tighe Becfoltaig* a wife greets her husband with the words *Fochen om eim* ‘welcome indeed’.¹¹³ In this case the interjection *om* is combined with *éim*, classed in *DIL* as ‘a particle of asseveration or affirmation’, and treated as a by-form of *ám*.¹¹⁴

This interjection is sometimes spelled *óm(m)*, and *LEIA* suggests that this is a variant caused by confusion with the long vowel of the particle *ám*.¹¹⁵ However, I suggest that the use of the accent here indicates the long drawn-out nature of the *m*-sound rather than an actual lengthened vowel.

21. sist, ist, sit, sit-sit.

Triads of Ireland no. 137 reads *Trí bráithir úamain: ist!, sta! coiste!* ‘three brothers of fear: hist! hush! listen!’¹¹⁶ The third element in this triad, *coiste*, is 2sg. imperative of *con-túaisi* ‘is silent, listens’. The first and second elements are onomatopoeic interjections. In the Book of Lecan version, the third element is omitted, giving a duad *Dá bráthair omain: ist!, sta!*¹¹⁷

¹¹⁰*OED* s.v. *um*.

¹¹¹Cecile O’Rahilly (ed.), *Táin Bó Cuailnge from the Book of Leinster* (Dublin 1967, repr. 2004) 1.4–5.

¹¹²C. O’Rahilly, *Táin Bó Cuailnge*, Recension I 66.2180, trans. p. 185.

¹¹³Ernst Windisch (ed.), ‘Coimbert Conculaind dana innisi síos secundum alios i. Feis tige Becfoltaig’, in *Irische Texte mit Wörterbuch* (ed. Windisch, Leipzig 1880) 144.15. Another version has *Focean ám dhuit* (Kuno Meyer (ed.), ‘Feis Tighe Becfoltaig’, *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie* 5 (1905) 501.25).

¹¹⁴*DIL* s.vv. *ém, ám*; *LEIA*: lettre A (A-64) s.v. *ám*.

¹¹⁵*LEIA*: lettres MNOP (O-22) s.v. *omm* ‘sans doute par confusion avec *am, ám*’.

¹¹⁶Kuno Meyer (ed.), *The Triads of Ireland* (Todd Lecture Series XIII, Dublin 1906) 18 § 137. I have altered Meyer’s translation slightly, and placed the three elements in the order in which they appear in the majority of the mss.

¹¹⁷Nine leaves of the Book of Lecan (including its version of the *Triads of Ireland*) are now bound with the Trinity College Dublin ms H 2. 17 (no. 1319). See E. J. Gwynn and T. K. Abbott, *Catalogue of the Irish manuscripts in the Library of Trinity College, Dublin* (Dublin 1921) 113.

This interjection is found in a variety of spellings. In the ten MSS of this triad, five have *ist*, three have *sist*, and two have *sit*. There are also occurrences of the doubling of this interjection. In the Rawlinson B 502 version of the Story of the Death of Máelodrán, we find the phrase *Ata ina chotlud. Sit-sit, arnachandusca* ‘He (Máelodrán) is asleep. Hush lest thou wake him’.¹¹⁸ It is also attested in O’Clery’s Glossary, where it is glossed *éisd, éisd* ‘listen, listen’.¹¹⁹ The single form of this interjection is given in Ó Dónaill’s *Foclóir* under the headword *sist*, with a variant *sit*.¹²⁰ His translation is ‘psht!’. Compton Mackenzie must have heard the double interjection *ist-ist* in the Gaelic of Barra, as he uses it in his comic novel *Whisky galore*. In his Glossary he provides the pronunciation ‘isht, isht’, and explains it as equivalent to English ‘hush, hush’.¹²¹

Similar spellings of this interjection are widespread in language, e.g. Welsh *ust*, Latin *st*, Russian *st’*, English (archaic and dialect) *hist*, *whist*, *whisht*. The noun *síst* (also *sist*) ‘respite, period of time, delay’ may possibly derive from this onomatopoeic interjection; one can compare the use of English *hush* as a noun meaning ‘stillness’. As we have seen, words of onomatopoeic origin tend to be variable: this may account for the variation in the length of the *i* in this noun.¹²²

Mention should also be made here of the onomatopoeic formation *sit-sait* (*sidsad* v.l.), which is attested only in the Middle Irish prose tale *Bórama*. It is used in the context of the sound of a host of men and animals approaching in the dark: *Co cualatar Airgialla sitsait 7 broscur in mórsluaig 7 rámtéan na grega, 7 tenmedach na damraide fana fenaib*.¹²³ Stokes translates: ‘until the men of Oriel heard the din(?) and noise of the mighty host, and the snorting of the horses, and the straining(?) of the oxen under their wagons’. In this vivid passage, the author is clearly trying to convey something of the variety of sounds made by an advancing host, accentuated by the darkness. I would guess that he used *sit-sait* to express the rustling or swishing sounds made by the warriors’ garments.

¹¹⁸Kuno Meyer (ed.), *Hibernica Minora, being a fragment of an Old-Irish Treatise on the Psalter, with translation, notes and glossary, and an appendix* (Anecdota Oxoniensia, Oxford 1894) 78.23 (trans. p. 80); David Greene (ed.), *Fingal Rónáin and other stories* (Dublin 1955, repr. 1993) 52.996.

¹¹⁹Arthur W. K. Miller (ed.), ‘O’Clery’s Irish Glossary’, *Revue celtique* 5 (1881–1883) 46.

¹²⁰Ó Dónaill, *Foclóir Gaeilge-Béarla* s.v. *sist*.

¹²¹Compton Mackenzie, *Whisky galore* (1947; repr. Penguin Books, London, 1957) 26, 301 (glossary to ch. 2).

¹²²No etymology is proposed in *LEIA: lettres RS* (S-120) s.v. *síst*.

¹²³Whitley Stokes (ed.), ‘The *Borama*’, *Revue celtique* 13 (1892) 88 § 106 = LL v 1299.38683. In LL there is a letter before *sitsait* which is rubbed and difficult to read. In his Facsimile Joseph O’Longan transcribed it as ‘*thsitsait*’ (Robert Atkinson (ed.), *The Book of Leinster . . . now for the first time published from the original manuscript in the Library of Trinity College, Dublin, by the Royal Irish Academy* (Dublin 1880) p. 304a44). Another possibility would be to take the rubbed letter to be an *i* with an *n*-stroke over it, and read ‘*in sitsait*’. This would agree with ‘*in sidsad*’ of the Book of Lecan version (Kathleen Mulchrone (ed.), *The Book of Lecan: Leabhar Mór Mhich Fhír Bhisigh Leacain* (Facsimiles in colotype of Irish manuscripts II, Dublin 1937) f. 307vb25 = p. 614b25).

22. *sta, sda, ta, sta-ta, tath, taith.*

Even though they appear as separate items in Triad 137, there seems to have been little distinction in meaning between this and the previous interjection. This is demonstrated by the fact that the Rawlinson B 512 version of the Story of the Death of Máelodrán has *Sta-ta! nachandúsaig* ‘hush! lest thou wake him’,¹²⁴ where Rawlinson B 502 has *Sit-sit, arnachandusca* (see previous entry). This interjection may be spelled with or without an initial *s-*. Thus, the Yellow Book of Lecan version of Cormac’s Glossary has *sta! a c[h]aillech, na acaille Senchán* ‘hush! o hag, do not speak to Senchán’.¹²⁵ In the Bodleian version of this glossary, on the other hand, this interjection is spelled *tá*.¹²⁶ In *Togail Bruidne Dá Derga* there are three instances of the expression *tá chéin* ‘hush for a while’,¹²⁷ which occurs in *Togail Bruidne Dá Choca* in the spelling *tath chéin*.¹²⁸ The spelling *taith cein* is attested in an H 3. 18 glossary, where it is explained *.i. cloistighi* ‘i.e. listen ye’.¹²⁹ It is probable that the *-th* here was still pronounced [θ] at this period.

Following Strachan¹³⁰ and Loth,¹³¹ Vendryes takes *tá* to be cognate with *toaid* ‘is silent’, and states ‘il s’agirait de l’adj. **tauso-* en emploi impératif (comme gall. *taw!*)’, doublet de *tóe* (v. à part). Mais le vocalisme fait difficulté: on attendrait **táu* > **tó*’.¹³² However, I would argue that *sta, ta* do not have an etymological origin and belong to the world-wide category of instinctive interjections conveying the warning: ‘be quiet’.

23. *ub, upp, abb-abb-abb.*

In the St. Gall Glosses,¹³³ the Latin interjection of grief *ei* is glossed *.i. interiectio .i. upp*, which I take to be a variant spelling of *ub*.¹³⁴ This interjection can be compared with Med. Welsh *ub, wb, wb-wb* ‘alas’, which gives rise to *ubain* ‘to sob, moan, howl’.¹³⁵ In his article ‘The Irish war-cry’, David Greene points out that both Irish and Welsh have interjections of grief with *-b* (Irish *upp, ub*; Welsh *ub, wb*) and *-ch* (Irish *uch, och*; Welsh *och*). He suggests mutual borrowing, i.e. Welsh *och* from Irish, and Irish *ub* from Welsh.¹³⁶ However, it seems to me that both these interjections are so widely attested in language that it is unnecessary to postulate borrowing.

¹²⁴Meyer, *Hibernica Minora* 78.1.

¹²⁵Meyer, *Sanas Cormaic* 93.12 § 1059.

¹²⁶Whitley Stokes (ed.), ‘On the Bodleian fragment of Cormac’s Glossary’, *Transactions of the Philological Society* (London 1891–93) 182.

¹²⁷Knott, *Togail Bruidne Dá Derga* 14.447, 15.483, 42.1399.

¹²⁸Whitley Stokes (ed.), ‘Da Choca’s Hostel’, *Revue celtique* 21 (1900) 320.17 § 48.

¹²⁹*CIH* iii 950.12.

¹³⁰John Strachan, ‘Notes and Glosses in the Lebor na h-Uidre’, in Whitley Stokes and Kuno Meyer (ed.), *Archiv für celtische Lexikographie* i (Halle 1900) 28 no. 264.

¹³¹J. Loth, ‘Notes étymologiques et lexicographiques, no. 34’, *Revue celtique* 32 (1911) 199.

¹³²*LEIA: lettres TU* (T-2) s.v. *tá*.

¹³³Stokes and Strachan, *Thesaurus Palaeohibernicus* ii 147.28.

¹³⁴Other instances of *pp* for */b/* include *app* for *ab*, *appaiddh* for *abaid*.

¹³⁵Stefan Zimmer, *Studies in Welsh word-formation* (Dublin 2000) 300 § 45.

¹³⁶David Greene, ‘The Irish war-cry’, *Ériu* 22 (1971) 167–73, first footnote.

I would compare the Old Irish *ub* of grief with the *hobou* referred to by the English historian Fynes Moryson, writing in the early seventeenth century. He remarks of the Irish in his *The manners and customs of Ireland*: ‘They are by nature very clamorous, upon every small occasion raising the *hobou* (that is a doleful outcry), which they take one from another’s mouth till they put the whole town in tumult’.¹³⁷ This ‘doleful outcry’ is doubtless the same sound as that rendered by Derricke as *bohbowe* in his *Image of Irelande*.¹³⁸ The accompanying illustration shows Irish warriors being put to flight.

There is often overlap between interjections of grief (*boo-hoo!*) and cries of disapproval, defiance or aggression (*boo!*), cf. *uch* below. In the tenth-century comic tale *Aisling Meic Conglinne*, the anti-hero Mac Conglinne uses the interjection *abb-abb-abb* where, in the view of both editors of this text, the context suggests defiance.¹³⁹ I would link his cry, which is uttered at the top of his voice (*a n-uachtar a chind*), with the various onomatopoeic formations in *-b-* expressing aggression. Some of these occur in the writings of English authors when describing the cries of Irish warriors. In his *Faerie Queene* (1590), Edmund Spenser links them with the war-pipes: ‘They heard a noyse of many bagpipes shrill and shrieking *hububs* them approaching nere . . .’.¹⁴⁰ He uses a similar form in his *View of the present state of Ireland* (1596) in an explicitly military context: ‘they come running with a terrible yell and *hubbabowe*, as yf heaven and earth would have gone together, which is the very image of the Irish *hubbabowe*, which theyr *kerne* [= *ceithearn* “warband”] use at theyr first encounter’.¹⁴¹ *OED* s.v. *hubbub* provides many instances from sources of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries where such forms are associated with belligerent Irish or Welsh crowds. In an attestation of 1555, the noise made by African tribesmen going drinking is compared with an ‘yrishe *whobub*’, and in 1586 J. Hooker defines the *hubbub* as a ‘hue and crie’ according to the custom of Ireland. In seventeenth-century Welsh contexts *hubbub* is used of the rallying-cry for the assembly of able-bodied men. The *Mercurius Civicus* of 1645 refers to a *hubbub* being raised in Glamorgan with the result that five thousand men were gathered together by the next morning. The threatening nature of a Welsh *hubbub* is also clear from the *New Letanie*, published in 1646, which asks for deliverance from ‘Irish Rebels and Welsh *hubbub*-men, from Independents and their Tubmen’. Another variant (*OED* s.v. *hubbuboo*)

¹³⁷C. Litton Falkiner (ed.), *Illustrations of Irish history and topography, mainly of the seventeenth century* (London 1904) 312.

¹³⁸John Small (ed.), *The image of Irelande with a discoverie of woodcarne by John Derricke, 1581*, p. 67.

¹³⁹Kuno Meyer (ed.), *Aislinge Meic Conglinne: the Vision of MacConglinne, a Middle-Irish wonder tale* (London 1892) 85.29; Kenneth Hurlstone Jackson (ed.), *Aislinge Meic Con Glinne* (Dublin 1990) § 61 33.1035 (and note on p. 66). Greene, on the other hand, (‘The Irish war-cry’, 167) argues that *abb-abb-abb* here expresses surprise, and compares the interjections of surprise *ábobú* (Dinneen, *Foclóir Gaedhilge agus Béarla* s.v.) and *bubú* (De Bhaldraithe, *Gaeilge Chois Fhairge: an Deilbhíocht* 238).

¹⁴⁰R. Morris (ed.), *The works of Edmund Spenser* (London 1869, repr. 1910) 216 book III, canto X (XLIII).

¹⁴¹Morris, *ibid.* 632.

is quoted from eighteenth-century Scotland: ‘every now and then [they] break out into a hideous Howl or *Ho-bo-bo-boo!*’.

Greene considers various etymological explanations of the Irish war-cry or rallying cry *abó!*, *abú!*¹⁴² It is first attested from the Calendar of Justiciary Rolls of the early fourteenth century, which records that a group of men were charged with frightening the inhabitants of a village in Co. Kildare with the words *Fennock-abo*, the rallying cry of the O’Tooles.¹⁴³ An enactment of Poyning’s parliament of 1495 outlawed the use of such cries as *Butler-abo* and *Crom-abo*.¹⁴⁴ This demonstrates that these martial cries with *-abo* were prevalent among the gaelicized Normans of Ireland, as well as the native sept. In his *View of the present state of Ireland*, Spenser took these cries to be of Irish origin, referring to the famous O’Neill cry of *Landargabowe* (*Lámh dhearg abó*) ‘up the Red Hand’. He concludes ‘and to theyr ensample, the old English also which there remayneth have gotten up theyr cryes Scythian-like, as the Geraldins *Croum-abowe* and the Butlers *Butleaur-abowe*’.¹⁴⁵

Greene rejects as untenable the explanation given in Dinneen’s *Foclóir Gaedhilge agus Béarla* that *abú* derives from *go buaidh* ‘to victory’, on the grounds that the preposition *go* never loses its initial consonant in anglicised forms. He likewise points out the semantic and phonological difficulties in interpreting it as a borrowing from French *à bout* ‘to the end’. This French phrase is not used in this sense, and the final *-t* would be expected to survive in Irish as *-d*. The explanation which Greene favours is that proposed by Lord Justice Pelham in a letter to Queen Elizabeth I written on 28 December 1597. He justifies his decision to outlaw the Earl of Desmond on the grounds that he ‘in all his skirmishes and outrages since the proclamation crieth *Papa abo*, which is the Pope above, even above you and your Imperial crown’. Greene points out that ‘up’ and ‘high’ are regular formants in partisan cries in many languages, e.g. ‘Up Mayo!’, *Hoch der Kaiser!*, *Arriba España!*, etc. He suggests that *abo* is an apocopated form of Middle English *abofe* ‘above’, and compares the Dutch rallying cry *Orange boven!* ‘Orange above, on top’. While the semantics of Greene’s case cannot be faulted, I believe that an onomatopoeic origin for *abó* is more likely, and that the regular spelling became fixed by convention from a wide range of martial booing noises.

24. uch, uch-uch, och, ach.

Pain or grief elicits various noises involving exhalation and velar friction. These are obviously impossible to represent with any degree of accuracy in conventional orthographies. Early Irish uses *uch*, *och*, or—less commonly—*ach*.¹⁴⁶ The variation in the initial vowel presumably reflects different tongue

¹⁴²Greene, ‘The Irish war-cry’, 169–71.

¹⁴³*Fennock* is for Irish *feannóg*, *fionnóg* ‘scald-crow’, the emblem of the O’Tooles.

¹⁴⁴*Crom-abo* refers to Crom Castle, the seat of the Fitzgeralds.

¹⁴⁵Morris, *Works of Edmund Spenser*, 632.

¹⁴⁶In O’Mulconry’s Glossary *ach* is associated with physical pain: *.i. interiecht galair* ‘i.e. an interjection of sickness’ (Stokes, ‘O’Mulconry’s Glossary’ no. 82 (in Stokes and Meyer, *Archiv für celtische Lexikographie* i 238)).

and lip positions during the production of these sounds. Interjections of this type are widespread in language, e.g. Welsh *och*, Breton *ach*, German *ach*. In the English of Scotland and Ulster, the ubiquitous *och* has been weakened to express mild surprise, disapproval or uncertainty.

As well as being used as an interjection expressing pain or grief, *uch* in Early Irish has been put into service as a masculine *u*-stem noun in the sense of 'sigh, groan, lamentation' with a gen. sg. *ucha*.¹⁴⁷ There is also a considerable number of derivatives with various suffixes. The archaic poem *Amra Choluimb Chille* contains the form *uchtat* 'small groan'¹⁴⁸ with the diminutive suffix *-t(h)at*.¹⁴⁹ With other suffixes, *uch* etc. forms nouns with the general meaning 'sigh, lamentation, complaint', e.g. *uchad*, *ochad*; *uchán*, *ochán*, *achán*; *uchbad*, *ochbad* (*ochfad*); *ochsad* (*oxad*); *uchlán*, *ochlán*, *achlán*. It is most probable that Welsh *ochain* 'to groan' (and the further derivatives *ochenaïd*, *uchenaïd* 'sigh, groan') similarly derives from onomatopoeic *och*.¹⁵⁰

The interjections *uchán*, *ochón*, *uchacán*, etc. likewise derive from *uch*, *och*. They belong particularly to the ritual of keening for the dead.¹⁵¹ The Early Modern Irish lament attributed to Gormlaith contains the interjections *uchagán* (five times), *uch* and *ach*.¹⁵² Such forms are also employed in religious verse, as in the Middle Irish poem beginning *Uch, a Dē! uch aniu is uch anē* 'Alas, o God! alas today and alas yesterday'. It contains the forms *uchán* (§§ 2, 3, 5, 6) and *uchacán* (§ 3).¹⁵³

We have seen above that interjections in the *ub* group are used both to represent grief, and as war-cries. We find the same cross-over in the *uch* group. Triad 112 gives one of 'the three speeches which are better than silence' as *uchán ríg do chath*, which Meyer translates as 'inciting a king to battle'.¹⁵⁴ A gloss (not quoted by Meyer) in the eighteenth-century manuscript H 1. 15 provides the explanation *.i. och mor do chur as ag brostughadh catha* 'i.e. he

¹⁴⁷DIL s.v. 1 *uch* II.

¹⁴⁸Stokes, 'The Bodleian Amra Choluimb chille', *Revue celtique* 20 (1899) 158 § 7 = LU 19.537. Calvert Watkins, 'Indo-European metrics and archaic Irish verse', *Celtica* 6 (1963) 228, translates *uchtat* as 'small groan' (following a suggestion by D. A. Binchy). This explanation is closer to the accompanying gloss than Stokes's interpretation of *uchtat* (*uctot*, *hochtot*, *huchtat*, vll.) as 3pl. pres. indic. 'they groan'.

¹⁴⁹Thurneysen, *Grammar of Old Irish* 175 § 274.

¹⁵⁰This explanation is adopted by Morris-Jones, *Welsh grammar* 389 § 203 ii (3, 4) and by Zimmer, *Studies in Welsh word-formation* 300 § 45. It is preferable to the etymological derivation put forward in Henry Lewis and Holger Pedersen, *A concise comparative Celtic grammar* (Göttingen 1937, repr. 1961) 338 § 45. Lewis and Pedersen hold that Welsh *ochenaïd*, *uchenaïd* 'sigh' contains the root *an-*, as in **od-ess-an-* > OIr *osnad* 'sigh'. Cf. Pedersen, *Vergleichende Grammatik der keltischen Sprachen* 295 § 585 (10); 455–6 § 655.

¹⁵¹Breandán Ó Madagáin, *Caointe agus seancheolta eile: keening and other old Irish musics* (Indreabhán, Conamara, 2005) 16–18, 49–51.

¹⁵²O. J. Bergin (ed.), 'Poems attributed to Gormlaith: VI' (in Osborn Bergin and Carl Marstrand (ed.), *Miscellany presented to Kuno Meyer* (Halle 1912) 353; Osborn Bergin, *Irish bardic poetry* (Dublin 1970; repr. 2003) 208 (VI).

¹⁵³Kuno Meyer (ed.), 'Ach und Weh', in Stokes and Meyer (ed.), *Archiv für celtische Philologie* iii (Halle 1907) 233.

¹⁵⁴Meyer, *Triads of Ireland* 14 § 112. The spellings in the mss are *uchan*, *ochán*, *ochand*, *oconn*, and *ochon*.

makes a great *och!* inciting to battle'.¹⁵⁵ Another example of a derivative of *och!* used in a martial context is to be found in the Annals of Connacht. Here the annalist describes how the son of the king of Connacht led his army into the attack, uttering his high king's cry and his warrior's shout (*ro leicc a ochainn ardrig as 7 a grech curad*).¹⁵⁶ The form *ochann* here can hardly be other than a derivative of *och!*

Finally, I have not noted any occurrences in Old or Middle Irish texts of the interjections *ā* 'ah!' and *ō* 'oh!', though they are well-attested in Modern Irish.¹⁵⁷ The interjection *ā* has a wide variety of applications in language. Pokorny lists various ranges of meaning associated with this interjection in the Indo-European languages, including pain, astonishment, grief, anger, mockery and scorn (*IEW* i 1). Like *ē* (*IEW* i 281) and *ō* (*IEW* i 772), *ā* serves also as a hailing interjection. In the Celtic languages this has developed into the vocative particle *a*.¹⁵⁸ In Old Irish this leniting particle is obligatory, except in some instances before *mo* 'my'.¹⁵⁹ In the mss it is sometimes spelled *á*, but this seems to be a graphic convention rather than an indication of length.¹⁶⁰ In Medieval Welsh the vocative particle *a* is optional.¹⁶¹ In Middle Breton the vocative particle *a* is attested, but it was replaced in Early Modern Breton by *o*, which Hemon regards as having been borrowed from French.¹⁶² One can compare the situation in Irish where the use of *ó* as a hailing interjection postdates the Anglo-Norman invasion, and may be an introduction. As we have seen under *ha* above, it is combined with the vocative particle *a* in the variant reading *o a cristaide* (= *ó a christaide*) 'o Christian'.

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¹⁵⁵Trinity College Dublin ms H 1. 15 (no. 1289) p. 949.

¹⁵⁶A. Martin Freeman (ed.), *Annála Connacht: the Annals of Connacht (A.D. 1224–1544)* 116 § 6 s.a. 1256.

¹⁵⁷Dinneen, *Foclóir Gaedhilge agus Béarla* s.vv. *á*, *ó*; Ó Dónaill, *Foclóir Gaeilge-Béarla* s.vv. *á*, *ó*.

¹⁵⁸*LEIA: lettre A (A-3)* s.v. *á*, *a*.

¹⁵⁹Thurneysen, *Grammar of Old Irish* 156 § 248; *DIL* s.v. 1 *a*.

¹⁶⁰See David Greene, 'The mark of length on pretonic vowels', *Celtica* 2 (1954) 339–40.

¹⁶¹Evans, *Grammar of Medieval Welsh* 15 § 19.

¹⁶²Hemon, *Historical morphology and syntax of Breton* 141 § 87.