

## A CRUX IN AISLINGE ÓENGUSO

PARAGRAPH 3 of Fr. Shaw's meticulous edition of *Aislinge Óenguso*<sup>1</sup> concludes with a messenger or messengers being sent to Boann, mother of lovesick Óengus, so that she may come to speak with him. Paragraph 4 as edited then begins:

*Tiagair cuicce. Tic iarum in Boann.*

*'Bú oc frepaid ind fír se,' ol Fingen, 'd-an-ánaic galar n-ainchis.'*  
*Ad-fíadot a scéla don Boinn.*

*'Bíd a fíreccor céill dia máthair,' ol Fingen. 'D-an-ánaic galar n-ainchis; oculus timchelltar húait Ériu uile, dús in n-étar húait ingen in chrotha so ad-condairc do macc.'*

One notes the substantial repetition in the first part and the literal repetition in the second part of the two passages: *'Bú oc frepaid ind fír se,' ol Fingen, 'd-an-ánaic galar n-ainchis.'* / *'Bíd a fíreccor céill dia máthair,' ol Fingen. 'D-an-ánaic galar n-ainchis.'* Apart from the repetition, which would in itself suggest that the second of these passages is but a doublet of the first, there is the added difficulty of interpretation. As pointed out by Fr. Shaw, the manuscript requires to be significantly emended in the second instance without yielding a very satisfactory result even then; his note, which refers to *a fíreccor céill*, first gives the MS. reading which it then goes on to discuss:

MS. *Bid oc fíreccor céill dia mathuir.* This is not clear and may be corrupt. *fíreccor céill* is never construed with a prep. but is always followed by the gen. For this reason the emendation of *oc* to *a* seems to be necessary. Even with this emended reading the meaning is not quite clear. *fíreccor céill* ordinarily has the meaning of Latin *cultus*, but *bid a fíreccor céill dia mathuir* may mean *let his mother take care of him*. Cf. *tír fíreccor céill, agriculture*. Ml. 137 c 1.

Nor is the problem altogether one of repetition or of grammatical construction. It seems peculiar that Fingen should first refer to Boann in the third person (*dia máthair*) and then proceed immediately to address her directly (*timchelltar húait . . . dús in n-étar húait . . . do macc*). I suggest that the second passage (*'Bíd a fíreccor céill dia máthair,' ol Fingen. 'D-an-ánaic galar n-ainchis.'*) is intrusive and should be omitted. This will require the sentence *Ad-fíadot a scéla don Boinn* to be replaced

<sup>1</sup> Francis Shaw, ed., *The Dream of Óengus/Aislinge Óenguso* (Browne and Nolan Ltd., 1934; reprint Cló Chois Fharráige, 1977), pp. 47-8.

nearer to the beginning of the paragraph, the opening section of which would then read:

*Tíagair cuicce. Tic iarum in Boann. Ad-fíadot a scéla don Boinn. 'Bíu oc frepaid ind fír se,' ol Fingen. 'D-an-ánaic galar n-ainchis; ocus timchelltar húait Ériu uile, dús in n-étar húait ingen in chrotha so ad-condairc do macc.'*

This is rather drastic surgery and some explanation is required as to how the repetition came about, particularly as to the origin of the discarded sentence '*Bíd a freccor céill dia máthair*' which, after all, differs considerably from the corresponding '*Bíu oc frepaid ind fír se.*' The correspondence itself provides the essential clue, since *oc freccor céill*, the reading which the manuscript would indicate, would serve as a fairly satisfactory gloss on *oc frepaid* and, I suggest, originally so served; furthermore the logical complement, *ind fír se*, would, in that event, supply the following genitive required by the verbal noun. But, it will be objected, the text, as we have it, still remains *Bíd oc freccor céill dia máthair* not *Bíd oc freccor céill ind fír se*. Our attention then transfers to *dia máthair*, and again I would think it possible that this originated as a gloss, this time on (*Ad-fíadot a scéla*) *don Boinn*. These two glosses, *oc freccor céill* and *dia máthair*, occurring in close proximity to one another in the exemplar, were then combined in the meaningless sentence *Bíd oc freccor céill dia máthair* and incorporated in the body of the text; *d-an-ánaic galar n-ainchis* was, at the same or at some later time, repeated for good measure, giving rise to total confusion. At what particular stage the mistake occurred, or how many editors wrestled with the problem before the single surviving manuscript copy came to be lodged in Egerton 1782 at the beginning of the sixteenth century, we now have no way of knowing. Nor, of course, can we prove that this is what really happened; but if not an altogether convincing hypothesis it may at least be found to be a reasonably plausible one.

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