A CRUX IN AISLINGE ÓENGUSO

PARAGRAPH 3 of Fr. Shaw’s meticulous edition of Aislinge Óenguso 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.
‘Biu oc frepaid ind fir se,’ ol Fingen, ‘d-an-ánaic galar n-ainchis.’
Ad-fiádot a scéla don Boinn.
‘Bíd a freccor céill dia máthair,’ 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.’

One notes the substantial repetition in the first part and the literal repetition in the second part of the two passages: ‘Biu oc frepaid ind fir se,’ ol Fingen, ‘d-an-ánaic galar n-ainchis./Bíd a freccor 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 freccor céill, first gives the MS. reading which it then goes on to discuss:

MS. Bíd oc fírecor ceill dia mathuir. This is not clear and may be corrupt. freccor 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. freccor céill ordinarily has the meaning of Latin cultus, but bid a freccor ceill dia mathuir may mean let his mother take care of him. Cf. tír frecor ceill, 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 freccor céill dia máthair,’ ol Fingen. ‘D-an-ánaic galar n-ainchis.’) is intrusive and should be omitted. This will require the sentence Ad-fiádot a scéla don Boinn to be replaced

1 Francis Shaw, ed., The Dream of Óengus/Aislinge Óenguso (Browne and Nolan Ltd., 1934; reprint Cló Chois Fhárraige, 1977), pp. 47-8.
nearer to the beginning of the paragraph, the opening section of which would then read:

_Tlágair cuicce. Tic iarum in Boann. Ad-fiádot a scéla don Bóinn._

_'Biu oc frepaid ind fir se,' ol Fingen. _'D-an-aínaic galar n-aíchís; ocus timchelltar húait Ériu uile, dúis in n-étar húait ingen in chrotha so ad-condairec 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 _'Bíod a frecor céill dia máthair'_ which, after all, differs considerably from the corresponding _'Biu oc frepaid ind fir se._' The correspondence itself provides the essential clue, since _oc frecor 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 fir 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 _Bíod oc frecor céill dia máthair_ not _Bíod oc frecor céill ind fir se._ Our attention than transfers to _dia máthair_, and again I would think it possible that this originated as a gloss, this time on _Ad-fiádot a scéla_ _don Bóinn._ These two glosses, _oc frecor céill_ and _dia máthair_, occurring in close proximity to one another in the exemplar, were then combined in the meaningless sentence _Bíod oc frecor céill dia máthair_ and incorporated in the body of the text; _d-an-aínaic galar n-aíchís_ 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.

_SEÁN Ó COILEÁIN_

_University College, Cork_