TWO BARDIC THEMES: THE TRINITY IN THE BLESSED VIRGIN'S WOMB, AND THE RAIN OF FOLLY

THE present article consists of two studies of international themes in Irish bardic poetry. The first study discusses the motif of the Trinity in the Virgin Mary's womb and the Marian poem *Buime trír máthair mhic Dé* attributed to Donnchadh Mór Ó Dálaigh; what appears here attempts to place the theme in the Irish poem in the context of European religious art and poetry (including poetry in Welsh), and also to suggest grounds for attributing the poem to the Donnchadh Mór Ó Dálaigh active about 1400, rather than his more famous namesake who died in 1244. The second study discusses the fable of the Wise Men and the Rain of Folly in the poem *Bíodh aire ag Ultaibh ar Aodh* by Eochaidh Ó hEoghusa (*c.*1568–1612), and shows that Eochaidh's tale, although repeatedly linked by modern scholars with medieval Provençal poetry, has a closer link with Italian printed versions of the story which were widely translated in the sixteenth century, and from which Eochaidh's source presumably derived.

1. THE TRINITY IN THE BLESSED VIRGIN'S WOMB

The theme of the Blessed Virgin containing the Trinity in her womb is widespread in medieval literature and art. The Dutch scholar Johan Huizinga gives a characteristic description of it: 'In the fifteenth century people used to keep statuettes of the Virgin, of which the body opened and showed the Trinity within. The inventory of the treasure of the Dukes of Burgundy makes mention of one made of gold inlaid with gems'. Huizinga goes on to mention another such statue seen at the Carmelite house in Paris by Jean Gerson (1363–1429), Chancellor of Paris University. However Gerson, saying he saw in the statue 'neither beauty, nor devotion', but rather a way of breeding error and profanity, did more than just criticize it. He had the statue destroyed.[1]

The Finnish art historian Yrjö Hirn also refers to the theme, mentioning the celebrated *vierge ouvrante* (with doors at the front) to be seen in the church of Notre-Dame du Mur at Morlaix, on the north coast of Brittany, and other such statues in the Louvre and at Lyon. In addition, Hirn draws attention to the lines 'Salve mater pietatis, / et totius trinitatis / nobile triclinium' from a sequence by Adam of St Victor (*c.*1140), which were so famous that they appear below the *Annunciation* by Fra Angelico in the church of San Marco, Florence.[2]

Huizinga and Hirn between them suggest how well known this motif was in medieval France and Italy. Other evidence for it occurs in English,

[1] J. Huizinga, *The waning of the Middle Ages* (Harmondsworth 1972) 151.
[2] Y. Hirn, *The sacred shrine* (London 1958) 229, 379. On this subject cf. also D. Gray, *Themes and images in the medieval English religious lyric* (London 1972) 237; C. Baumer, 'Die Schreinmadonna', *Marian Library Studies* 9 (1977) 237–72; and M. Estella, *La escultura del marfil en España* (Madrid 1984).

Welsh and Spanish sources, as well as in medieval Latin texts from various European countries. However, it is in Irish that we find the most remarkable literary expression of it, in the following poem by Donnchadh Mór Ó Dálaigh.

Buime trír máthair mhic Dé;
go roibh linn i ló an fhínné
 a radhalta an rí neamhdha
 banaltra thrí dtighearna.

A n-altrom nír dheacair dhí
trí branáin chláir na cruinne
 aobhdha an triar a trí dhalta
 dá riar do bhí an bhanaltra.

Buime an trír-sin Muire mhór
dá n-altrom do bhí an bhanógh
 triur i n-aoncholainn amh-áin
 nó gur aonchrobhaing anbháil.

Ag inghin an fhuilt leabhair
maith do uair a oileamhain
 a hathair i n-ucht Mhuire
 athaidh i gcurp cholluidhe.

An mac do b'fheirr-de i-se
dá oileamhain aicei-se;
 an rí caránta ar a cígh
 baránta í don airdrígh.

An treas cnú don chrobhaing ghlan
teachtaire a hucht an Athar
 fa hé a ionad a huicht-se
 Spiorad Dé ar a diadhaicht-se.

Toircheas na hóighe is é an fáidh
aice do fhuair a thógbháil;
 ag so an tí do fhóir orainn
 trí cno óir a haonchrobhaing.

Triur as ghoire gaol di-se,
triur do hoileadh aicei-se,
 trí leannáin ler luigh Muire
 beangáin fhuil a haonmhuine.

Triur i n-a dtrí daltaibh dhi
trí meic ochta na hóighe;
 gach rí dhíbh ruinn-ne dá roinn
 trí rígh na cruinne an chrobhuing.

Trí heochracha mhúir Muire,
trí tobair na trócuire,
  rí 'n-a aonduine ós gach fhior,
  trí aoghuire dom fheitheamh.

Trí dhalta Mhuire móire
toircheas bronn na banóighe;
  an tí tharla ar úidh gach fhir
  trí gabhla dhúin an Dúilimh.

An triur-soin ón tigh neamhdha
an Tríonóid, ar dtighearna;
  neach do bhí 'n-a bhráthair di
  is í a mháthair 's a mhuime.[3]

'The Son of God's mother is the nurse of three; nurse of three lords, may her great child, the heavenly king, be with us on the Day of Judgement.

It was not difficult for her to nurse them, three champions of the world's chessboard. Her three foster-sons are a beautiful three, their nurse was providing for them.

Great Mary was nurse of these three, the Virgin reared them, three in one single body, so that they were one single magnificent cluster.

Well was he nursed by the girl of the long smooth hair, Mary's own Father in her bosom, for a while in an earthly body.

The Son by whom she was exalted was being nursed by her; the crowned king on her breast, she was the high-king's protector.

The third nut of the holy cluster, a messenger on behalf of the Father, the Spirit of God – because of her piety, her breast was his place.

The Virgin's offspring is the prophet, he was fed by her; here is the one who saved us, – three golden nuts from a single cluster.

Three who are closer kin to her, three who were nursed by her, three lovers Mary lay with, shoots which are of a single shrub.

Three who were her three foster-sons, three beloved sons of the Virgin; each king of them is shared with us, the three kings of the Universe are the cluster.

Three keys of Mary's castle, three founts of mercy, a king who alone is above every man, three shepherds to guard me.

Three foster-sons of great Mary, offspring of the Virgin's womb; the one who has attracted the attention of every man, three pillars of the Creator's stronghold.

This three from the heavenly mansion is the Trinity, our lord; he who was her brother, it is she who is his mother and nurse.'

Donnchadh speaks in this curious, tender poem of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit as 'three in one single body', and 'three foster-sons of great Mary, offspring of the Virgin's womb'. The reference to the Trinity in the Virgin's womb could hardly be clearer: the poem is Irish evidence for the tradition described by Huizinga and Hirn. The continued copying

[3] L. McKenna, SJ, *Dioghluim dána* (Baile Átha Cliath 1938) 29–30; reprinted with the kind permission of An Gúm, Department of Education.

of the poem, and the line *buime trír is í 'na hóigh* by one of at least two poets named Aonghus Ó Dálaigh (sixteenth–seventeenth centuries), suggest that poem and tradition alike remained familiar in Ireland even after the Middle Ages. In the rest of Catholic Europe the devotion seems to have faded with the reforms of the Council of Trent.[4]

However, the link between Donnchadh's poem and the cult of the Trinity in the Virgin's womb has not as yet received proper emphasis. Fr Peter O'Dwyer, for example, has recently glossed the poem by citing numerous medieval statements on the relationship of the Virgin to different persons of the Trinity. The comments he assembles are of great interest. But none of them actually mentions the Trinity in the Virgin's womb. The present article has thus been written to show in detail that Donnchadh's poem is part of a specific popular European devotion, and can be paralleled repeatedly in the poetry and art of Britain and the Continent.[5]

The evidence from beyond Ireland also casts some light on which of the two poets called Donnchadh Mór Ó Dálaigh wrote our poem. The first, 'a poet who never was and never will be surpassed', died in 1244 and was buried at Boyle Abbey in Co. Roscommon; the second, active before about 1400, lived at Finavarra in the extreme north of Co. Clare, between Galway Bay and the Burren. Although literary references to the Trinity in the Virgin's womb go back at least to twelfth-century Latin texts, no other instance of it in art or vernacular literature seems to predate the fourteenth century. This would strengthen the case for attribution to the later Donnchadh. In stanza five the loanword *baránta* 'warrant' (from Anglo-Norman *warant*) also favours the later Donnchadh, as the other instances of *baránta* collected by Risk date from substantially later than 1244, while even the earliest in English, in the Midlands prose text *Seinte Marherete*, cannot be much older than 1250.[6]

When we turn from Ireland to Britain, we find the two most interesting literary examples of the theme are those in Welsh. Of these, the earlier appears in a Marian poem, beginning *Doeth y'th etholes Iesu.* The poem, formerly attributed to Iolo Goch (*c.*1320–*c.*1398), is probably of fourteenth-century date, and is in the style of the *Gogynfeirdd*:

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[4]Cf. *tríar* in the Royal Irish Academy's *Dictionary of the Irish language* (Dublin 1913–76). On Aonghus, see P. de Brún et al., *Nua-dhuanaire* I (Baile Átha Cliath 1971) 181.

[5]P. O'Dwyer, O.Carm., *Mary: a history of devotion in Ireland* (Dublin 1988) 87–8.

[6]L. McKenna, SJ, *Dán Dé* (Dublin 1922) viii–ix, gives information on the lives of the two poets. In *Dioghluim dána*, 624, Fr McKenna leaves the question of which Donnchadh wrote the poem open. On *baránta* see H. Risk, 'French loan-words in Irish', *Études Celtiques* 12 (1968–71) 585–655 and 14 (1974–5) 67–98, especially 73; on *waraunt*, B. Dickens and R. M. Wilson (ed.), *Early Middle English texts* (London 1951) 104.

Yr ysbryd atad, gennad gynnes,
Efo â chwegair a'th feichioges,
A Duw o fewn aeth yn dy fynwes
Fal yr â drwy'r gwydr y terydr tes,
Megis bagad o rad rodres,
Tair cneuen gwisgi, tri y tröes
Yn Dad, drwy gariad y rhagores,
Yn fab qwyn arab araf cynnes,
Yn ysbryd glendyd, glandeg armes.[7]

'The Spirit to you, gentle messenger,
made you conceive with a sweet word.
God entered within your breast
as sunshine's augers pass through glass.
Like a cluster of blessed splendour,
three ripe nuts, turned as three (persons)
into the Father in love excelled,
into the blessed, pleasant, dear, gentle Son;
into the Spirit of Holiness, fair and holy prophecy.'

The description of the Trinity above as 'three ripe nuts' is oddly like
Donnchadh's 'three nuts of gold'. 'Nut' is a favourite endearment of
Irish poetry, but not of Welsh, though *y gneuen wisgi* appears in another
poem by Iolo, about a journey to Scotland (as Richard II's ambassador)
of Ieuan Trefor, bishop of St Asaph 1395–1410. Perhaps the expression
is evidence for Irish influence on Iolo.[8]

The second instance of the motif occurs in an anonymous poem,
beginning *Archwn i Fair a bair byd.*

Da fu'r fun, eiddun addef
Dan ei chnawd, dwyn i chwi nef;
Dwyn ei mab o'i daioni,
A dwyn ei thad a wnaeth hi.
Bu'r Drindod, is rhod yr haul,
A'i hannedd yn y wennaul.[9]

'Good was the maid, desirable dwelling,
she bore heaven to you within her flesh;
from her goodness she bore her Son
and bore her Father who made her.
The Trinity, below the sun's orb,
had its dwelling in the bright radiance.'[10]

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[7] D. R. Johnston, *Gwaith Iolo Goch* (Caerdydd 1988) 139–40. The attribution
of the poem is discussed in H. Lewis et al., *Cywyddau Iolo Goch ac Eraill* [*IGE*]
(Bangor 1925) lx.
[8] On the senses of *cnú* see the RIA *Dictionary*; for *y gneuen wisgi*, Johnston, 284.
[9] *IGE*, 100 (reading *hannedd* for *annedd*).
[10] Cf. J. P. Clancy, *Medieval Welsh lyrics* (London 1965) 162.

The poem may be by Hywel Swrdwal, bailiff of Newtown in Powys between 1454 and 1456, and is certainly in his style.[11] The last two lines of the poem are based on Psalm 18:6, 'He hath set his tabernacle in the sun'. As the Virgin is often described as 'the sun', this verse is frequently applied to her acceptance of the Trinity at the Annunciation.[12]

The English evidence for the cult of the Trinity in the Virgin's womb is more varied than that from Ireland and Wales, and includes poetry, drama and art, even if the literary instances are less impressive than those in the Celtic languages. No doubt much other evidence was lost with the Reformation. One early allusion occurs in the opening lines of a song to the Virgin perhaps by William of Shoreham (c.1325), parish priest of Chart in Kent.

> Marye, maide, milde and fre,
> Chambre of the Trinite.[13]

A fifteenth-century instance comes from an anonymous poem to the Blessed Virgin from manuscripts now in London, Oxford, Cambridge, Edinburgh and Dublin libraries.

> Heil, welle of witt and of merci!
> Heil, that bare Jesu, Goddes sone!
> Heil, tabernacle of the trynyte,
>   *Funde preces ad filium!*[14]

Other evidence for the theme occurs in *Ludus Coventriae*, one of the four great cycles of medieval English drama, which was put together in its present form about 1440, perhaps at Lincoln (and not Coventry, despite its title). In play 11, on the 'Salutation and Conception', occurs the following stage direction:

> here the holy gost discendit with iij bemys to our lady; the sone of the godhed nest with iij bemys to the holy gost; the fadyr godly with iij bemys to the sone; and so entre all thre to here bosom.[15]

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[11] For the style, date, and attribution of the poem see *IGE*, lxiii.

[12] Cf. D. Gray, *A selection of religious lyrics* (Oxford 1975) 101–2. Old Testament quotations in the present article are taken from the Douay version (London 1914); New Testament quotations from *The Navarre Bible* (Dublin 1986–).

[13] R. T. Davies, *Medieval English lyrics* (London 1963) 103, and cf. 371. The poem is § 2107 in C. Brown and R. H. Robbins, *The index of Middle English verse* (New York 1943).

[14] Gray, *Religious lyrics*, 71; Brown and Robbins, *Index*, § 1032.

[15] Quoted in Gray, *Themes and images*, 237–8. Rosemary Woolf discusses the development and provenance of the *Ludus Coventriae* in *The English Mystery Plays* (London 1972) 307–310. Sir Nikolaus Pevsner, *The buildings of England: Bedfordshire and the county of Huntingdon and Peterborough* (Harmondsworth 1968) 209, describes a sculpture of the Annunciation (fifteenth century) at Barnack which in part matches the *Ludus Coventriae* stage directions.

We also have evidence for the theme in English art. Although, as we shall see below, the evidence of the *vierges ouvrantes* should not be used uncritically, the various Continental images had at least one English sister, at Durham. This revered image, 'Our Lady of Bolton' (or Boulton), was opened on solemn occasions for veneration by the laity, above all on Good Friday, when the statue would be opened, the cross of gold within would be revealed, and the faithful in the cathedral would pass before it, falling one by one to their knees. The image occupies a special place in *Rites of Durham*, the celebrated recollections (written long after the Dissolution) of monastic life in the cathedral priory:

> Every principall daie the said immage was opened that every man might se pictured within her, the father, the sonne, and the holy ghost, most curiouslye and fynely gilted.[16]

Other evidence for the theme of the Trinity in the Blessed Virgin's womb occurs in a carol by James Ryman, a Canterbury Franciscan writing about 1492. His application to the Virgin here of the rare word *tryclyn* suggests the sacred wit of Adam of St Victor's *triclinium*, at once 'a chamber' and 'a couch for three'.

> O tryclyn of the Trinite,
> Replete with alle diuinite,
> O flowre of alle uirginitie,
> Ora pro nobis.[17]

When we turn from Ireland and Britain to the rest of Europe for evidence on the present devotion, we find references in Latin texts from Adam of St Victor's time onwards to the Blessed Virgin's womb as 'chamber' or 'temple' of the Trinity. These references have been methodically listed in a German Marian encyclopedia. Amongst the twelfth- and thirteenth-century texts there cited is a treatise by Hugh of St Victor; the pseudo-Ildefonsan *Libellus de corona Virginis*; a sermon by Hélinard de Froidmont on the Assumption; a commentary by St Albertus Magnus on St Luke's Gospel; a sermon by St Bonaventura on the Assumption; and the commentary by St Thomas Aquinas on the Angelic Salutation.[18]

There must also be references to the devotion in medieval French, German, Italian, and other Continental vernaculars; further work on this could be done by scholars with access to the appropriate libraries. A passage from a French Christmas sermon quoted by Huizinga (who calls it proof of heresy) is an example of what can be found:

[16]Quoted in Gray, *Themes and images*, 237. There is an account of the *Rites of Durham* in Dom David Knowles, *The religious orders in England* III (Cambridge 1959) 130–37.

[17]R. L. Greene, *The early English carols* (Oxford 1977) 142; *Index*, § 2575.

[18]K. Algermissen et al., *Lexikon der Marienkunde* I (Regensburg 1967) coll. 1448-9.

> quant pour les pécheurs se voust en vous herbergier le Père, le
> Filz et le Saint-Esprit; par quoy vous estes la chambre de toute la
> Trinité. . . .
>> 'when the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit deigned to take up
>> their abode in you, Mary, for the sake of sinners . . . whereby you are
>> the chamber of the whole Trinity.'[19]

There is also clear evidence for the present theme in medieval Spanish poetry. An early instance appears in an expanded version of the *Ave Maria* by Pero López de Ayala (1332–?1407), statesman, soldier, historian, and prisoner of war:

> Contigo Trinidat allí fue ayuntada,
> la corte celestial en ti fizo morada:
> Madre de Dios, Esposa, Fija fueste llamada:
> bien así de los santos fueste profectizada.[20]

> 'The Trinity was there united with you,
> the court of heaven made its dwelling in you;
> God's Mother, Wife and Daughter were you called;
> well were you prophesied thus amongst the saints.'

A further instance occurs in a poem by Alfonso Álvarez Villasandino (*c*.1350–?1425), born near Burgos, who spent his life as poet-for-hire at the Castilian court:

> Generosa, muy fermosa,
> syn mansilla Virgen santa,
> virtuosa, poderosa,
> de quien Lucifer se espanta;
> tanta fue la tu gran omildat
> que toda la Trinidat
> en ty se ençierra, se canta.[21]

> 'Generous, most beautiful,
> holy Virgin without spot;
> virtuous, mighty,
> dreaded by Lucifer;
> so great was your humility,
> that the whole Trinity
> is enclosed and praised in you.'

A final example occurs in the *Cantiga en loores de Santa Marya de Guadalupe* by Pero Vélez de Guevara (d. 1420), nephew of one noble

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[19] J. Huizinga, *Herbst des Mittelalters* (Stuttgart 1965) 498; the text of *Le déclin du moyen âge* (Paris 1967) 162, differs slightly.

[20] Quoted in Fr L. M. Herrán, *Mariología poética española* (Madrid 1988) 354; cf. A. F. Kuersteiner (ed.), *Poesías del Canciller Pero López de Ayala* (New York 1920) 274.

[21] Herrán, 345; cf. J. M. Azácete, *Cancionero de Baena* (Madrid 1956) 17–18.

poet (López de Ayala), and uncle of another (Íñigo López de Mendoza, Marqués de Santillana).

> Quando al angel dexiste
> sancta fue aquella ora,
> *ecce ancilla*, señora,
> Dios e omne conçebiste. . . .
> Señora so cuyo manto
> cupieron çielos y tierra
> en la trynidad s'ençierra
> Padro, fijo, Spiritu Santo.[22]

'When you said – holy was that hour – *ecce ancilla* to the angel, Lady, you conceived God and Man. . . . Lady, beneath your mantle there fitted the heavens and the earth, [and] Father, Son and Holy Spirit enclosed in the Trinity.'

These instances in Spanish prove that Donnchadh's poem is no oddity. The theme is almost a commonplace of medieval European poetry, even if often expressed in a heterodox way; as Fr Herrán remarks, the Spanish poets sometimes confuse the fact that the Incarnation was the work of the whole Trinity with the strange notion that the Virgin Mary conceived the Trinity. It was thus that the idea of the Virgin as temple or dwelling-place of the Trinity, taught by some of the greatest of the Church's teachers and hymn-writers, was twisted into bizarre errors that would have dismayed them.

Yet the most spectacular aspect of this theme is to be found not in poetry, but in sculpture, in the *vierges ouvrantes* mentioned above. These statues led to real accusations of heresy, both in the Middle Ages and later, as it was maintained that they showed the Blessed Virgin as having conceived, not simply the Son, but the whole Trinity. They were thus destroyed in great numbers in the sixteenth century, and few genuine ones survive; the Spanish scholar Manuel Trens said he knew of only some two dozen. Many of those in modern collections are nineteenth-century forgeries.

Fr Trens has discussed the iconography of the *vierge ouvrante* by reference to Scriptural texts, some of which would apply to Donnchadh's poem: 'All the glory of the king's daughter is within' (Psalm 44:14); 'If a man loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him' (John 14:23); and 'A bundle of myrrh is my beloved to me: he shall abide between my breasts' (Canticle of Canticles 1:12). By 'myrrh' the Fathers of the

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[22]Herrán, 354–5; cf. Azácete, 691. Herrán cites similar passages from later Spanish writers. The Marian shrine at Guadalupe (some 110 miles SW of Madrid) in Estremadura was, incidentally, known in one Celtic country, as the Bishop of Llandaf left money in 1516 for pilgrims from Glamorgan and Gwent to go there: G. Williams, *The Welsh Church from Conquest to Reformation* (Cardiff 1962) 502.

The Virgin of Buiñondo, near Vergara, Guipúzcoa, Spain

The Buiñondo figure with the Christ child removed,
showing a representation of the Trinity in the Virgin Mary's womb

Church understood the Passion, Death and Burial of Jesus: hence the figures of the crucified Christ inside many of these statues.[23]

However, not all *vierges ouvrantes* contain representations of the Trinity. Some open to reveal images of the Joys of the Virgin, or her Sorrows, and even those with the Trinity are not all directly relevant to the present theme. Fr Trens distinguishes two kinds of statues of the Virgin containing the Trinity. With the first of these, doors open from neck to foot of the image of the Virgin to reveal a representation of the Trinity occupying the whole interior of the image. As an example of this Fr Trens cites the statue (fifteenth-century) of the *Mare de Deu de la Santíssima Trinitat* at the parish church of Palau del Vidre in Roussillon, the Catalan province ceded by Spain to France in 1659. The Trinity is there shown in the form of the 'Throne of Grace', with God the Father enthroned and holding the Son, crucified, between his hands; the Holy Spirit appears as a flying dove. Fr Trens notes the same form in the 'Lady of Bolton' described in the Durham *Ritual*.

But it is the second kind of *vierge ouvrante*, in which the Trinity is shown occupying, not the whole body of the Virgin, but her actual womb, which is the exact parallel of our literary texts. These statues are of the greatest rarity since they were, naturally, most open to the charge of heresy. (The Carmelite statue seen by Gerson may have been of this kind.) The only instance known to the present writer is a Spanish one, the *Virgen* of Buiñondo in an *ermita* or shrine at Vergara, a small Basque town some forty miles west-north-west of Pamplona.[24] The Trinity is revealed in the statue, not by the opening of doors, but by the removal of a panel covering the Blessed Virgin's abdomen. The Trinity, a small gold-coloured assemblage, is represented as a Throne of Grace against a blue background covered in gold stars. The Virgin wears a red gown, blue cloak, and a crown; she holds her hands (which have been restored) upwards, palms towards the spectator. The statue, wooden and 36 inches high, was dated by J. A. Lizarralde to the last third of the fourteenth century, but by Fr Trens to the fifteenth.[25]

The evidence from different countries presented above suggests, therefore, that the theme of Donnchadh's poem is in no way peculiar to Ireland, but is part of a widespread European tradition which begins with the great Latin writers of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. In later centuries this theme spread to art and vernacular literature, both at an elite level (the Carmelite house at Paris, Spanish court

[23] Fr M. Trens, *María: iconografía de la Virgen en el arte español* (Madrid 1947) 481–6, 497–502; cf. also L. Réau, *Iconographie de l'art chrétien* II/1 (Paris 1957) 92–3.

[24] The writer thanks the *concejal de cultura* of the Ayuntamiento of Vergara, Doña Anajesús Narbaíza, for help in obtaining the photographs of the Buiñondo sculpture reproduced above.

[25] J. Lizarralde, *Andra Mari* (Bilbao 1926) 54–6. (I thank Clara Fernández-Ladreda for kindly lending me her copy of this text.)

poetry, and perhaps the images in the Duke of Burgundy's treasury and at Durham), and at a more popular one (the *Ludus Coventriae*, the Buiñondo statue). It seems probable that the basis for Donnchadh's poem came to Ireland from the Continent with the Latin learning of the Church, rather than via art or vernacular literature. Though with Donnchadh's poem Irish vernacular tradition, like that of Spain, may have made a heterodox theme of an orthodox one, the sources of the motif are clear enough: even if the theme emerged from the *pair dadeni* of the Irish bards – Gaelic in manner and expression, it still bears the traces of its Continental origins.[26]

2. THE RAIN OF FOLLY

The story of the rain of folly in a poem by Eochaidh Ó hEoghusa (*c*.1568–1612) is one of the more curious passages of Irish bardic poetry. The story describes how, long ago, thirty wise men foresee from observing the skies the coming of a supernatural rainstorm, which will make mad anyone it falls on. When the thirty find the world ignores their warning to take shelter, they protect their own sanity by taking refuge in a cave. After the rain stops, they emerge to discover everyone else has gone mad; but, finding the world now no longer respects their wisdom, the thirty resolve to become as mad as the rest of mankind by going into the rain themselves. This passage occurs in the poem *Bíodh aire ag Ultaibh ar Aodh*, a considered piece of political advice composed by Eochaidh for the benefit of Aodh Mág Uidhir ('Hugh Maguire'), Lord of Fermanagh 1589–1600. The context of the poem has been described in James Carney's *The Irish bardic poet* (Dublin 1967) 26–7, where the poem is dated to the eve of Aodh's 1593 rising against the authorities in Dublin – an insurrection which ended only with Aodh's death in Co. Cork seven years later, during an encounter with Sir Warham St Leger. In his poem, Eochaidh urges caution. Though Aodh's cause is just, the other Irish will not rise with him. They are passive fools, Aodh actively wise; but being odd-man-out makes Aodh, in fact, the fool. And Eochaidh makes his point by telling the story of the philosophers whose wisdom was tantamount to madness.[27]

Celticists have long known that a story similar to Eochaidh's occurs in Provençal, in a poem by Peire Cardenal (*c*.1180–1278).[28] But the

[26] On contacts between Gaelic Ireland and Continental Latin learning in the later Middle Ages, see M. Mac Conmara, MSC (ed.), *An léann eaglasta in Éirinn 1200–1900* (Baile Átha Cliath 1988); and, on such contacts as they affect Welsh and Irish Marian devotion, the present writer's forthcoming book, *Poetry and devotion in Medieval Britain and Ireland*.

[27] E. Knott, *Irish syllabic poetry* 2nd ed. (Dublin 1957) 51–3; cf. L. McKenna, SJ, *Dioghluim dána* (Baile Átha Cliath 1938) 236–40, for the entire poem.

[28] R. J. Cormier, 'The Maddening Rain: a comparison of the Irish and Provençal versions', *Éigse* 11 (1965–6) 247–51, and L. P. Ó Caithnia, *Apalóga na bhfilí 1200–1650* (Baile Átha Cliath 1984) 205–6, are largely based on the material indicated by Eleanor Knott.

Italian versions of the story, though closer to Eochaidh's text than those in Provençal, have apparently been noticed only by Romance scholars.

There is a full study of the Provençal and Italian versions of the legend in Santorre Debenedetti, 'Un riscontro orientale della parabola di Peire Cardinal', *Rendiconti della Reale Accademia dei Lincei* 39 (1920) 224–31. Debenedetti, besides citing an early Buddhist version of the story in the Chinese *Tripiṭaka*, collects variants of the story from the *Facezie* attributed to Arlotto Mainardi (1396–1483), and from the Italian writers Antonio Fileremo Fregoso (d. 1515), Anton Francesco Doni (1513–74), and Ludovico Guicciardini (1521–89). Martín de Riquer, in his anthology *Los trovadores* (Barcelona 1975) 1515, points out a further instance of the story in the Portuguese poet, Francisco de Sá de Miranda (1481–1558). The versions of the tale compare as follows.

In Provençal and Portuguese there are three accounts: in Peire Cardenal; in the poem 'Non estarai per ome qe·m casti' by Guilhem de Montanhagol (*fl.* 1233–58); and in the eclogue *Basto* by Sá de Miranda. All describe a rainstorm which drives everyone it falls on mad. There is, however, no band of philosophers, nobody knows the rain is coming (from observing the heavens or otherwise), and the only person to escape the disaster does so by accident, through being indoors at the time. In Peire the sane man is set upon by the mad and gets home only with difficulty. But in Guilhem and Sá de Miranda the sane man deliberately makes himself mad to join the majority. The moral of the two latter is thus the same as Eochaidh's: when all are mad, you should make yourself mad too.[29]

As regards the Italian versions, we can exclude Fregoso as a source for Eochaidh at once, since he describes not a rainstorm, but a man using a courtyard pool in a bid for power. (Its owner drives his neighbours mad, one by one, by making them drink its poisonous water. But when they are all mad, instead of his ruling them, they overpower him and force him to drink as well.) It is the rainstorm in Arlotto, Doni, and Guicciardini that most closely resembles what we have in Irish.

In its earliest Italian form, in *Le facezie del Piovano Arlotto*, the story tells of 'ten good astronomers' who foresee through their knowledge of science and astrology a terrible rain, whose stench will drive mad those who smell it. The astronomers plot to evade the stench and remain sane in order to gain power over a world gone mad. Without saying anything to anyone, they shut up the doors and windows of their house to keep out the smell on the day the rain is due. The rain stops, the smell goes away. But when the astronomers come out to take power, the mad overwhelm them, and the sane find they must imitate the mad or be killed.[30]

The sixteen lines of this anecdote in *Le facezie* are expanded by A. F. Doni into three pages of exuberant Italian in his *Mondi* (Venice 1552;

[29]Cf. Francisco de Sá de Miranda, *Obras completas* I (ed. M. Rodrigues Lapa, Lisboa 1960) 160–61.

[30]Cf. G. Baccini (ed.), *Le facezie del Piovano Arlotto* (Firenze 1884) 225–6.

many later editions) under the title, 'Come alcuni savi strologatori, avidi di governo e di dominio, son forzati a entrare nel numero de' matti'. Doni does not say how many astrologers watched the skies, but keeps the details of the stench, the secret bid for power, and how the sane had to imitate the mad.[31]

Guicciardini's version (presumably from his *Detti et fatti*, which the present writer has been unable to see) is so short it can be translated in full from Debenedetti's citation. '*The desire to remain sane among the mad is complete madness.* A wise man, seeing that, because of a certain rain that was coming, everyone in his city would go mad and that the mad would think that it was he that was mad (who had kept his wits by staying dry), wisely decided to go out too and go mad with the others, and become wet, saying that he would rather be mad with everyone than be wise on his own.'

Although Guicciardini's *Detti* is the only one of these texts published in an English version before 1593, in James Sandford's *The garden of pleasure* (London 1573) and *Hours of recreation* (1576), the tale does not appear in Sandford's translation. Nor can Guicciardini be Eochaidh's immediate source in any case, since, even though in both these writers the sane choose to become mad (while in Arlotto and Doni the sane merely act as though they were mad), Guicciardini's text is too brief, and mentions no band of philosophers.

Eochaidh's story nevertheless bears a close relation to these Italian texts. The detail of a band of sages foreseeing the rainstorm proves that. We thus have evidence for an unusual literary contact between Gaelic Ireland and Renaissance Italy. We may note that all the above Italian versions had wide circulation. Arlotto's *Facezie* (Florence, c.1515, etc.) was translated into German (Basel 1565) and French (Paris 1573); Doni's *Mondi* into French (Lyon 1578 and 1583); Guicciardini's *Detti* (Venice 1565, etc.) into French (Paris 1571, 1573; Lyon 1574; Antwerp 1594), Spanish (Bilbao 1586) and English. It is, however, less clear whether Eochaidh worked (a) from the kind of oral diffusion of narrative described in Kenneth Jackson, *The international popular tale and early Welsh tradition* (Cardiff 1961); (b) from a written text which he modified; or (c) from a written version of the tale closer to his final narrative than the Italian versions above are. If we are dealing with an instance of (c), a scholar with access to a major library of early printed books and manuscripts may yet present us with the text Eochaidh had before him when he wrote his poem.[32]

University of Navarre, Pamplona, Spain   ANDREW BREEZE

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[31] See A. F. Doni, *Novelle* (ed. G. Petraglione, Bergamo 1907) 95–8.

[32] On the rain of folly, cf. also themes D 1350.1 and J 1714.2 in Stith Thompson, *Motif-index of folk-literature* I–VI (Copenhagen 1955–8).

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