

## ‘A LINE IN AOGÁN Ó RATHILE’

**I**N *Celtica* 1/2 (pp. 328–30), under the above heading, T. F. O’Rahilly published an emendation to l. 6 of Aogán Ó Rathaille’s well-known lyric ‘Gile na Gile’. As edited initially in 1846 by John O’Daly, the line in question ran:

bhaineas an chruinne do ruinne le rín sguaba.<sup>1</sup>

In a later edition (1849) the same editor emended the line to:

bhaineas an chruinne dá ruithne le rín-sguabaidh’.<sup>2</sup>

Dinneen, in his first edition of *Dánta Aodhagáin Uí Rathaille*, edited the line thus:

bhaineas an chruinne dá ruithne le rínn-sguabaigh.<sup>3</sup>

In the second edition the editors, Dinneen and O’Donoghue, emended that reading to:

bhaineas an ruithneadh den chruinne le rinn-scuabaibh.<sup>4</sup>

O’Rahilly was dissatisfied with those readings and claimed, ‘that we can with some confidence restore the line in *Gile na Gile* thus:

bhuineas an cruinneac don rinneac le rinn-sguaba

i.e. as she moves along, the tips of her tresses sweep the dew from off the grass.’<sup>5</sup>

The basis — the only basis — for O’Rahilly’s ‘restoration’ was that the phrase ‘cruindiuic don rindiuc’ occurred in a fifteenth-century copy of the medieval compilation *Acallam na Senórach*. The passage in which the phrase occurs reads:

<sup>1</sup>J. O’Daly, *Self-instruction in Irish* (Dublin 1846) 39.

<sup>2</sup>J. O’Daly, *Poets and poetry of Munster* (Dublin 1849) 23. O’Daly translated the line as ‘descended to the earth, and swept the dewy flowers’.

<sup>3</sup>P. S. Dinneen (ed.), *Dánta Aodhagáin Uí Rathaille*, Irish Texts Society III (London 1900) 18. Dinneen translated the line as ‘That robbed the earth of its dew by their full sweeping’.

<sup>4</sup>P. S. Dinneen and T. O’Donoghue, *Dánta Aodhagáin Uí Rathaille*, Irish Texts Society III, second ed. (London 1911) 18. They translated the line as: ‘that robbed the earth of its brilliancy by their full sweeping.’ In a footnote (p. 19), they also gave the variant *do bhuinios an chruinne don ruinne* ‘that robbed brilliancy of its perfection’ and commented: ‘This form is pretty frequent, and may be the correct form’.

<sup>5</sup>T. F. O’Rahilly, ‘A line in Aogán Ó Rathile’, *Celtica* 1/2 (1950) 329.

Assa findairgit imma chois, 7 in cos tecmad re talmain dó is  
uimpi ro buí in t-assa, 7 ni benadh a cruindiuc don rindiuc  
.i. a drucht do barr an feoir.<sup>6</sup>

O'Rahilly also pointed out that Sylvester O'Halloran stated in 1772 that a copy of *Acallam na Senórach* was once in the possession of Aogán Ó Rathaille.<sup>7</sup>

O'Rahilly's emendation has been generally accepted since and has, accordingly, been applied by later editors of the poem.<sup>8</sup> That unquestioning consensus notwithstanding, the emendation raises major methodological questions. The words *cruinniuc* and *rindiuc* are two of a small group of nouns in Old Irish which incorporate the diminutive suffix *-uc* (Welsh *-awc*). The formant was not a productive one however, even in Old Irish, and it did not survive in the later language; neither did any of the words in which the formant occurs.<sup>9</sup> The phrase *ní benad a cruindiucc don rindiuc* is not a common one in early Irish literature. In fact, as far as I can make out, the example quoted above from *Acallam na Senórach* is unique and occurs only in that text. The idea of walking so lightly as not to remove the dew from the grass is, of course, a common trope in Irish literature, both prose and verse, but where it occurs in other texts the words used to convey the idea are the more familiar ones 'drúcht' and 'féar':

nicon berat a drúcht dind fhéar ar áthi 7 imétrumí imtháncatar . . . MU  
565-6;

ní bhenfadh a drucht do bharruachtar an fheóir ar éttroma 7 aerrdhacht  
an chéme nochingedh, Buile S. 14 § 12;

ní thíscaadh a drúcht do rind ind fheóir, FB § 88;

a dlaoifholt ag baint drúcht den fhéar 's a lonradh ag géilleadh don  
*fleece*;<sup>10</sup>

<sup>6</sup>W. Stokes and E. Windisch, *Acallamh na Senórach*, *Irische Texte* IV, i 12.385-6; Franciscan Library, Killiney, MS A 4, 7b. A similar phrase occurs in a later version of the text: *Ba háith urettrom réim ro-asdair an rígh-mhíleadh, oir ba deacmhaic a mheas go tllalfadh a chruinneacc don ruinneacc ar aithe 7 ar ettroma an aistir 7 an imtheachta baoi faí* (N. Ní Shéaghda (ed.), *Agallamh na seanórach* i, Leabhair ó Láimhscríbhneibh VII (1942) 33).

<sup>7</sup>S. O'Halloran, *Introduction to the study of the history and antiquities of Ireland* (Dublin 1772) 363. This claim has never been confirmed and there is no extant evidence to support it. Furthermore there is no evidence that the MS (n. 6) in which the phrase occurs was ever in Ó Rathaille's possession. See M. Dillon, C. Mooney and P. de Brún, *Catalogue of Irish manuscripts in the Franciscan Library Killiney* (Dublin 1969) 10-12.

<sup>8</sup>See, for instance, S. Ó Tuama and T. Kinsella, *An duanaire* (Dublin 1981) 150.

<sup>9</sup>*DIL* s.vv. *cruinniuc*, *drisiuc*, *manuc*, *rindiuc*; K. Meyer, *Zur keltischen Wortkunde* ii-iii (Berlin 1912-19) §§ 33, 58.

<sup>10</sup>In an *aisling* (*Maidean dar ghabhas liom féin, cois abhann i ngaortha glasmhín*), attributed in the MSS (RIA 23 F 18: 66, 23 O 26: 61) to Ó Rathaille.

Tharla mé ar ógmhnaoi go moch ar éirí lae,  
 ba shoilbhir seang an síogáí 's a grua ar dhath na gcaor,  
 ba cheolmhar binn an daonnaí mar lon ar bharr na gcaobh,  
 drúcht an fhéir ar ar shiúil sí, scuab sí rena céibh (TCD  
 H.4.20: 217);

shiúlfainnse ar an ndrúcht leat is ní bhrúfainn leat an féar;<sup>11</sup>

cha fhroisinn aon driùchda, 's mi dlùth air do shàilibh.<sup>12</sup>

It is obvious that the forms *cruinniuc* and *rinniuc* did not survive very long in Irish; the fact that a fifteenth-century scribe considered it necessary to gloss the words (n. 6 above) suggests that by that period they were not familiar. O'Rahilly was convinced, however, that those archaic forms should be restored to the line in question since 'it seems clear that Aogán borrowed the phrase from *Acallam na Senórach*'.<sup>13</sup> The evidence of the MSS does not support that contention.

'Gile na Gile' seems to have been one of the most popular of Ó Rathaille's poems — if the number of extant copies can be taken as an index of popularity. Over sixty copies of the poem survive (no other poem of his generated as many extant copies) and they range in date from 1725 to the second half of the nineteenth century. Given the number of copies and their geographical spread (Cos. Clare, Cork, Kerry, Kilkenny, Limerick, Louth, Waterford) it is not surprising that they provide myriad *variae lectiones*. For the line in question, the eighteenth-century copies of the poem provide the following readings:

1. BL Add. 29164: 61. 1725  
 an chruinne don ruinne<sup>14</sup>
2. NLI G 31:171. 1729  
 do bhaineas an chruinne don rinne le rinnsguabadh
3. NLI G 114: 143. 1740  
 bhainios an chroinne don ruinne le raoin sguabadh
4. RIA A iv 2: 74. 1751–7  
 bhaineas an rinne don chruinne re rionsguaba
5. MN M 95: 27. 1754–5  
 do bhuinios an chruinne don ruinne le rín sguabadh
6. BL Add. 31877: 107. 1755–1800  
 do sgriosann an cruinne don roinne le righn sguabadh
7. RIA 23 L 24: 557. 1766–7

<sup>11</sup>J. Hardiman, *Irish minstrelsy* i (London 1831) 300; cf. S. Ó Tuama, *An grá in amhráin na ndaoine* (Dublin 1960, repr. 2001) 147.

<sup>12</sup>J. L. Campbell, *Highland songs of the Forty-Five*, Scottish Gaelic Texts Society XV (Edinburgh 1933, repr. 1984) 52.

<sup>13</sup>O'Rahilly, 'A line in Aogán Ó Rathile', 329.

<sup>14</sup>This, the earliest extant copy of the poem, is mostly illegible but these words can be read with some difficulty. It is not very clear whether the initial *c-* is lenited. MS 5 (MN M 95: 27) was written by the same scribe (Seán Ó Murchú na Ráithíneach).

- do sgriosan an chroinne don rinne le ríghin sguabaibh
8. RIA 23 M 16: 209. 1767–76  
do bhuinnios an chruinne don rinne le rinnsguabaibh
9. RIA 23 O 64: 27. 1771  
bhainios an chruinne don rinne lé rín sguabadh
10. MN C 102 (h): 47. 1771–7  
do sgriosann an cruinne don roinne le ríghnsguabadh
11. RIA 23 I 26: 96. 1772  
bhaineas an rinne don chruinne re rionsguaba
12. RIA 23 O 51: 9. 1772–3  
nnios an chruine don ruinne le rinn sguabadh
13. NLI G 330: 76: 1774  
do sgriosan an chruinne don roinne le righnn sguabadh
14. TCD H. 6. 21: 151. 1774–81  
do sgriosann an chroinne don rinne le ríghinnsguabadh
15. RIA 23 B 38: 101. 1778–9  
bainios an chruinne dhon rinne le ríghinsguabadh
16. MN M 54 (b): 135. 1781  
bhainios an chruinne don rinne le rinnsguabadh
17. RIA 23 L 13: 22. 1782  
do sgriosann an chruinne don rinne le ríghion sguabaibh
18. MN 57 (a): 28. 1785  
bhainnios an chruinne dhon rinne lé ríon sguabadh
19. RIA 23 M 47 (d): 80. 1789  
do sgriosan an chruinne do rinne re rín sguaba
20. RIA 23 C 57: 162. 1796  
do sgriosan an chruinne don rinne le rínsguabúdh
21. RIA 23 G 21: 366. 1796–800  
do bhaineas an chruinne don rinne le ríghin sguabaibh
22. RIA 23 G 21: 490. 1796–1800  
do bhuinnios an chruinne don rinne le ríghiansguabaibh
23. RIA 24 L 4: 7. 18th century  
do sgriosan an chruinne don ríghinne le ríghin sguabaibh
24. RIA 24 L 2 (f): 14. 18th century  
do sgriosan an chruine don ríghinne le ríghin sguabaibh
25. UCC T 1: 427. 1795–1807  
do bfangach an chruinne don ringe ré na rínsguabaibh.

Later (nineteenth-century) copies of the poem replicate the above readings and provide three further variants. These are:

- i. bhainnis an chruinne don ruainne (MN R 69: 169);
- ii. bhaineas an chruinne dá ruithne (UCC M 63: 288, RIA 24 L 12: 349);
- iii. do sgriosan an chruinneach don rine ( RIA 23 E 1: 51).

It would seem that by this time some of the scribes did not understand

the phrase and to make it intelligible substituted the hitherto unattested forms *ruainne/ruithne* and *cruinneach*.<sup>15</sup>

The most telling feature of the above evidence, it seems to me, is that though both lexical (*scrios/bain-*) and morphological (*-eann/-eas*) variation occur in the initial verb and that morphological variation occurs in the final noun (*scuabadh/-aibh*), the variation in the crucial central phrase is minimal and primarily orthographical. Leaving the three late and obviously inappropriate variants (*ruainne, ruithne, cruinneach*) aside, the MSS provide three main readings for the phrase. These are:

A: an cruinne don . . .

‘An cruinne’ is obviously a mistake for ‘an chruinne’. It is found only in two of the early MSS (6, 10) and is not repeated in any other copy.

B: an chruinne (chruine/chroinne) don rinne (roinne/ruinne/ruine/rine-/righinne/ringe)

‘An chruinne’ is the reading of some of the earliest copies (1, 2, 5, 8) and is the most common form found in the MSS, both in eighteenth-century (13, 15–23, 25) and nineteenth-century copies;<sup>16</sup> *cruine* (12, 24), *croinne* (3, 7, 14) are orthographical variants. ‘Rinne’ is found in some of the earliest copies (2, 7, 8, 9) and is the most common form in the MSS, both in eighteenth-century (14–22) and nineteenth-century copies;<sup>17</sup> *roinne* (6, 10, 13), *ruinne* (3, 5, 12), *ruine/rine*,<sup>18</sup> *righinne* (23–4),<sup>19</sup> *ringe*<sup>20</sup> are orthographical variants.

C: an rinne don chruinne

This reading would seem to be due to a transposition of the two nouns in the phrase. It is not very common, being found only in two eighteenth-century copies (4,11) and two later MSS.<sup>21</sup>

Neither of the forms which O’Rahilly ‘restored’ (*cruinneac, rinneac*) are attested in any copy of the poem. As is evident, the

<sup>15</sup> ‘Ruainne’ can be rejected on metrical grounds, ‘ruithne’ for semantic reasons; I am not aware of a noun \*‘an chruinneach’.

<sup>16</sup> See also MN R 69: 169, M 12: 341, C 15:11; Jesuit Library I L 7: 155; UCC M 63: 288, T 18: 16, T 62: 176; Cambridge University Library Add. 6558: 60; Harvard Gaelic MS 1: 76; RIA 23 F 18: 64, 23 O 26: 59, 23 C 8: 97, 23 E 12: 181, 24 B 9: 36, 24 L 12: 349; UCD F 22: 14, F 33: 222; UCG 14: 71b, 45: 20; NLW A 7: 361, A 25: 33.

<sup>17</sup> See also MN M 12: 341, C 15: 11; Jesuit Library IL 7: 155; Cambridge University Library Add. 6558: 60; RIA 23 F 18: 64, 23 O 26: 59, 23 C 8: 97, 24 B 9: 36, 23 E 12: 181; UCD F 22: 14, F 33: 222; NLW A 7: 361.

<sup>18</sup> RIA 23 E 1: 51; UCG 14: 71b; Harvard Gaelic MS 1: 76.

<sup>19</sup> ‘Righinne’ in NLW A 25: 33; ‘righinne/righne’ (< *righin*) would not be suitable on either metrical or semantic grounds.

<sup>20</sup> UCG 45: 20; UCD F 22: 14; UCC T 1: 427.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. ‘bhaineas an rinne don chruinne le ríonsguabadh’ (RIA 23 K 51: 23); ‘do sgríos an ruinne don cruinne le ríghinn sguabaibh’ (RIA 23 Q 2: 123).

paleographical evidence provides no textual choice (apart from orthographical variants): *cruinne* and *rinne* are the forms established by the MSS. The evidence also suggests that most of the scribes had no problem with the phrase. The words did exist, although they are not very well attested. *Cruinne* (< *cruinn* + *ne*) 'dew' is found in several glossaries and, more importantly, in another eighteenth-century poem:

is leabhair go bróig a hór-fholt bhaineas  
an chruinne don bhfeor 's an reodh don bhán.<sup>22</sup>

*cruinne* .i. drúcht *dew* P. O'C.

*Rinne* (< *rinn* + *ne*) 'grass' is found, it seems, only in glossaries and dictionaries:

*rinne* .i. féar TCD H.4.22: 67a;  
*rinne* .i. féar O'C 2065 (RIA MS 1250f: 858);  
'ruinne no ruinnecc, rinne no rinnecc .i. feur'.<sup>23</sup>

All the available evidence — paleographical, textual, linguistic — suggests that the original version of the line in question contained the words *cruinne* and *rinne*. O'Rahilly himself, ironically enough, admitted as much. Having pointed out the existence of *cruinne*, in another poem (n. 22), he continued:

In this use of *cruinne* in the sense of 'dew' we doubtless have a reminiscence of Aogán's line. This suggests the probability that the earlier poet, writing from memory, employed *cruinne*, and perhaps *rinne* also, instead of the correct forms.<sup>24</sup>

The 'correct' forms, according to O'Rahilly, were *cruinneac* and *rinneac* but he did not explain why these archaic forms should be imposed on an eighteenth-century poem, regardless of the textual evidence. Neither did he explain how the MS forms *cruinne* and *rinne* were not 'correct'.

Applying normal editorial criteria and orthographic normalisation I would edit the line in question thus:

<sup>22</sup>P. Ua Duinnín (ed.), *Amhráin Sheagháin Chláraigh Mhic Dhomhnaill* (Dublin 1902) 43.1040–1041.

<sup>23</sup>J. O'Donovan, *An Irish-English dictionary* (Dublin 1877), Supplement, s.v. *rinn*. It is not clear whether *cruinne* and *rinne* are original formations or whether, at some stage, the suffi x *-ne* replaced the original suffi x *-uc*. If *-ne* is a singulative suffi x rather than a diminutive, the words should, perhaps, be translated as 'dew-drop' and 'blade of grass' respectively.

<sup>24</sup>O'Rahilly, 'A line in Aogán Ó Rathile', 329. This is echoed by R. A. Breatnach (*Studia Hibernica* 1 (1960) 148 n. 77): 'Possibly the poet himself was responsible for the corruption.' Dinneen and O'Donoghue pointed out that *an chruinne don ruinne* 'is pretty frequent, and may be the correct form' (n. 4 above).

bhaineas an chruinne den rinne le rinnsuabadh

and translate as ‘that removes the dew from the grass with sharp sweeping’. This corresponds in most respects to the line as initially edited (n. 1) by John O’Daly who, it is worth pointing out, claimed that he edited his version ‘from an autograph’.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>Which I have copied from an autograph . . . The author of the following poem wrote his name at foot, Aedhgán Ó Rathaille’ (O’Daly, *Self-instruction*, 39). O’Rahilly (‘A line in Aogán Ó Rathille’ 328 n. 1) pours scorn on O’Daly’s claim.