

SIR JOHN RHÛS MEMORIAL LECTURE

THE COURT POET IN MEDIEVAL IRELAND

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I

THE court poet in medieval Ireland has been described by several eminent scholars such as John O'Donovan,¹ S. H. O'Grady,² E. C. Quiggin,³ O. J. Bergin,⁴ Eleanor Knott,⁵ Robin Flower,⁶ Gerard Murphy,⁷ James Carney,⁸ and others. Perhaps the description most often quoted is Professor Bergin's:

He was, in fact, a professor of literature and a man of letters, highly trained in the use of a polished literary medium, belonging to a hereditary caste in an aristocratic society, holding an official position by virtue of his training, his learning, his knowledge of the history and traditions of his country and his clan. He discharged . . . the functions of the modern journalist. He was not a song writer. He was often a public official, a chronicler, a political essayist, a keen and satirical observer of his fellow-countrymen.⁹

¹ MS. Catalogue of the Irish MSS. in Trinity College, Dublin.

² S. H. O'Grady, *Catalogue of Irish Manuscripts in the British Museum*, vol. i (London, 1926), 328 ff. The catalogue was almost completely printed between 1889 and 1892: see Introduction by J. P. Gilson.

³ E. C. Quiggin, 'Prolegomena to the Study of the later Irish Bards, 1200-1500', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, v. 1911-12 (1913), 89-142.

⁴ O. J. Bergin, 'Bardic Poetry', *Journal of the Ivernian Society*, v (1913), 153-66, 203-19; Bergin, Preface to L. McKenna, *Aonghus Ó Dálaigh* (Dublin, 1919).

⁵ Eleanor Knott, *The Bardic Poems of Tadhg Dall Ó Huiginn* (Irish Texts Society, XXII [1920], 1922), vol. i, Introduction; *Irish Syllabic Poetry* (Cork, Dublin, 1928); *Irish Classical Poetry* (Dublin, 1957).

⁶ Robin Flower, Introduction to T. F. O'Rahilly, *Dánta Grádha* (Dublin, Cork, 1926), pp. xi-xxxiv; Robin Flower, *The Irish Tradition* (Oxford, 1947), 67-106.

⁷ Gerard Murphy, 'Bards and Filidh', *Éigse*, II/ii (1940), 200-7; Gerard Murphy, 'Warriors and Poets in Thirteenth Century Ireland', ch. 2 in *Glimpses of Gaelic Ireland* (Dublin, 1948).

⁸ James Carney, 'The Féuch Féin Controversy', ch. 7 in *Studies in Irish Literature and History* (Dublin, 1955); James Carney, *The Irish Bardic Poet* (Dolmen Press [Ireland], 1967).

⁹ Bergin, 'Bardic Poetry', 154.

Every word in this description is true, but to appreciate the Irish court poet fully one needs to be reminded that he was also, and perhaps 'most significantly', as Professor Carney affirms, 'the shadow of a high-ranking pagan priest or druid',¹ for, in the words of Professor Knott, 'the bardic profession was built upon the ruins of—or perhaps we might say was a protective metamorphosis of—the ancient druidic order, and was always a craft with its own dues, privileges, and prerogatives, decided by itself'.²

'The shadow of a high-ranking pagan priest or druid' is discernible in the descriptions which the court poets themselves give of their profession, and fortunately there are a number of these, for more than a few poets found it necessary to assert and reassert their rights and privileges. Such a one is Eochaid Ó hEoghusa who held the position of court poet or ollav to three successive Maguires: Cú Chonnacht, Lord of Fermanagh, who died in 1589, his more famous son, Hugh, who was killed in 1600, and Hugh's half-brother, Cú Chonnacht Maguire who fled Ireland with the Earls in 1607.³ In a poem addressed to Hugh, beginning *Mór in t-ainm ollamh flatha*,⁴ 'A chief's ollav is a great title', Ó hEoghusa claims to be nothing less than 'his partner in the government of Clan-Colla', as S. H. O'Grady⁵ puts it, or, in the words of Professor Carney,⁶ 'Prime Minister of Fermanagh', by no means an inconsiderable claim, but even so its extent and nature will not be appreciated, unless it is remembered that the poet made it not only in virtue of his talent and training but also because he was a member of a family which was accustomed to supply the Maguires with court poets, that is, a family which was proud to take its place with the great bardic families, the Ó Dálaigh, the Ó hUiginn, the Mac an Bhaird, the Ó Cléirigh, and others.⁷

¹ Carney, *The Irish Bardic Poet*, 8.

² Knott, *Tadhg Dall Ó Huiginn*, i, p. xli.

³ On 'The Chieftains of Fermanagh' see P. Walsh, *Irish Chiefs and Leaders* (Dublin, 1960), 1–57.

⁴ For the poem see O'Grady, *Cat.* i. 475–6; Carney, *Irish Bardic Poet*, 23–4; Flower, *The Irish Tradition*, 99. The poet's standpoint is succinctly expressed in the words of another, 'Fiach na ríge an t-ord ollamh', S. Mac Airt, *Leabhar Branach* (Dublin, 1944), l. 6704.

⁵ O'Grady, *op. cit.* 475.

⁶ Carney, *op. cit.* 23.

⁷ The importance of these bardic families can hardly be overestimated. Representatives of the Ó Dálaigh family, it has been estimated, have thirty-six entries in the *Annals of the Four Masters* (ed. John O'Donovan, vols. i–vii, 1848–51) between 1139 and 1589, the Ó hUiginn have thirty-three entries up to 1536, and the Mac an Bhaird twenty-two entries between 1173 and 1609.

For Ó hEoghusa, a king, a bishop, and an ollav or court poet are the three whose titles are the noblest, because they have the same *éric*¹ and the same honour-price,² and they also have other equal rights and privileges. Accordingly he expects Maguire to show him the greatest respect and the most lavish generosity. In particular he insists on his right to the place of honour by his side,³ to be the first to give him advice, and to act for him in negotiations.⁴ He also strongly asserts his claim to an estate of land of the best kind and to an abode near his chief's court, otherwise he will not be immune to enemy attacks,⁵ and he will not be readily available to give his advice when it is most needed. However, he is careful to point out that he is not making any claim which has not been granted to other ollavs by their lords in the past; he quotes the ancient practice of the kings of the various provinces of Ireland, and, of course, he does not forget to mention his own superb qualifications: he has been educated in bardic schools in the south as well as in the north of Ireland; his erudition is like the choicest product of the true honey-bee:

Ag gaibhnib glanta ár gcerdcha. fuaras faighredh drithlenta.
a leth Mogha i mínleth Chuinn. togha fírbech ár bfoghluim.⁶

Ó hEoghusa does not touch expressly on the duties and services to be rendered by him to his lord but he leaves it to be inferred that they are such as to deserve all the substantial

¹ On *éric, éraic*, 'wergild', see D. A. Binchy, *Crith Gablach* (Dublin, 1941), 86.

² For the honour-price of king, bishop, and ollav see *Ancient Laws of Ireland*, v (1901), 102, 112, and cf. p. 56. See also Binchy, op. cit. 84-6.

³ For the place of honour see Knott, *The Bardic Poems of Tadhg Dall Ó Huiginn* (Irish Texts Society, XXIII [1921], 1926), ii. 241 (note on § 24).

⁴ For an example of a poet acting on behalf of his chief see O'Grady, op. cit. 153; for poets acting in conjunction with representatives of the Church and promising to satirize O'Connor if he broke the provisions of a treaty, see Carney, *Studies*, 263; M. Dillon (ed.), *Early Irish Society* (Dublin, 1954), 73 f. See also D. R. Hillers, *Treaty-Curses and the Old Testament Prophets* (Rome, 1964).

⁵ For the disadvantages of an estate far from the chieftain's residence see the poem by Eochaidh Ó hEoghusa, 'T'aire riom-sa a rí ó nUidhir', edited by Bergin, *Studies*, xii (1923), 80-2.

⁶ O'Grady, op. cit. 475; *RIA Cat. Ir. MSS.* i. 24 (23 L17, f. 114b). For the symbolism of the bee see S. Mac Airt, *Leabhar Branach*, 339. Ó hEoghusa describes Maguire's court in his poem 'Atáim i gcás idir dhá chomhairle': Knott, *Irish Syllabic Poetry*, 72; L. McKenna, *Dioghluim Dána* (Baile Átha Cliath, 1938, 1969) Poem 70; 'Bardic Poems', XLVIII, *Irish Monthly* (1930), 649 f.; O'Grady, op. cit. 478; Flower, *The Irish Tradition*, 98 f.; Carney, *Irish Bardic Poet*, 21-2. See also Bergin's 'Unpublished Irish Poems' IV, XIV, XIX, XXI (all by Ó hEoghusa) and XXIII [*Studies*, vii-xv (1918-26)], an elegy to him.

benefits of his office. In this he is not alone among Irish court poets; they make much of the learning which they put at the service of their lords and much of the subtle art which goes into the making of their songs for them, but they do not explain why either of these qualifications should earn them such great rewards. Thus Tadhg Dall Ó Huiginn, whose 'fairly prosperous'¹ career ended with his death in 1591, tells Cormac Ó hÉadhra² that in return for his protection and patronage he will compose for him 'the artistic well-wrought lay, the laboriously wrought poem, and another time the single stanza',³ give him knowledge of the 'genealogical branches' of his ancestors and of the tributes taken by them, the course of their triumphs and their exploits. 'I shall tell you . . . of your nobility transcending that of the rest of the men of Ireland.' All this suggests that if Tadhg Dall and Eochaidh Ó hEoghusa were pressed to give a *raison d'être* for their professional activities, their answer would be that they were needed to uphold the claims and preserve the rights of the nobility in Ireland, or in the words of a poem composed c. 1260:

Dá mbáidhtí an dán, a dhaoine,
gan seanchas, gan seanlaoidhe,
go bráth, acht athair gach fhir,
rachaidh cách gan a chluinsin . . .

Dá mbáidhtí seanchas chlann gCuinn,
agus bhar nduana, a Dhomhnuill,
clann bhar gconmhaor 's bhar gclann saor
ann dobudh comhdhaor comhshaor.⁴

Should poetry be suppressed, men; if there is to be no historic lore, no ancient lays—save the name of each man's father—none will be

¹ Knott, *Tadhg Dall Ó Huiginn*, i, p. xxxi.

² Knott, op. cit. i. 218, ii. 144–5; L. McKenna, *The Book of O'Hara* (Dublin, 1951), 54–7.

³ The 'single stanza' is the stanza to the poet's patron usually appended to a poem addressed to another chieftain, and perhaps quite as often deleted when the poem was copied into the *duanaire* of the chief addressed. See Bergin, 'Bardic Poetry', 157; O'Grady, *Cat.* 471; Quiggin, 'Prolegomena', 120; Carney, *Irish Bardic Poet*, 18. For the practice of appending two or three stanzas in praise of the wife of the chieftain addressed see Quiggin, *ibid.*; L. Chr. Stern, *ZCP* ii. 333. In Bergin's 'Unpublished Irish Poems', VI (*Studies*, viii [1919], 255–9), there are two supplementary quatrains in honour of Rory O'Donnell's sister.

⁴ E. Knott, *Irish Syllabic Poetry*, 78–80. Knott, *Tadhg Dall Ó Huiginn*, i. xxvi, n. 1, quotes Edmund Spenser, *Ruines of Time*, 'But such as neither of themselues can sing, / Nor yet are sung of others for reward, / Die in obscure obliuion . . .' See *The Works of Edmund Spenser, The Minor Poems*, ii (Baltimore, 1947), 46.

heard of. . . Should the historic lore of the children of Conn, and thy poems, Donal, be suppressed—then would the children of your dog-keepers be equally noble or equally servile with the children of your nobility.

However, as we should expect and as we shall see, the bardic order did not come into existence and did not maintain itself for more than a thousand years merely to give noblemen a good name and to preserve its memory, and it was certainly not required to make the distinction between noblemen and their servants.

When we read such claims as those made by Ó hEoghusa and his fellow court poets, we tend to think that these poets were peculiar to Ireland, and to Scotland,¹ but unique though they may have been in western Europe at the beginning of the seventeenth century, and for some time after,² we must remember that there had been poets of their description formerly in other countries in this part of the Continent.

In Wales, for example, in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries the court poets were as much part and parcel of the social structure as they were in Ireland: they formed a well-organized and a highly trained literary order whose duties, privileges, and social status were defined in the Laws, although not as clearly nor as free from contradiction as we could wish.³ Like their Irish counterparts they had bardic schools. The fully trained

¹ Gaelic-speaking Scotland formed one cultural area with Irish-speaking Ireland down to modern times. For the poets in Scotland see Derick S. Thomson, 'Gaelic Learned Orders and Literati in Medieval Scotland', *Scottish Studies*, xii (1968), 57 ff., and 'The MacMhuirich Bardic Family', *Trans. Gaelic Society of Inverness*, xliii (1960-3 [1966]), 276-304.

² The court poetry of medieval Ireland, otherwise called 'Irish Classical Poetry', was written for the most part between 1250 and 1650, but examples of it are found both before and after this period. Apparently the tradition lasted longer in Scotland. See Knott, *Tadhg Dall Ó Huiginn*, i, p. xxxviii; Myles Dillon, 'The Archaism of Irish Tradition', Sir John Rhŷs Memorial Lecture, *Proceedings of the British Academy*, xxxiii (1947), 262, where references are given to bardic poems composed in Scotland, one to Allan Clanranald (*ob.* 1715), another an elegy on James MacDonald (*ob.* 1738). Note, however, that D. Hyde, *A Literary History of Ireland* (London, 1901, 21967), 545, refers to a poem 'in perfect Deibhidh metre' composed in Connacht in 1734.

³ J. Lloyd-Jones, 'The Court Poets of the Welsh Princes', Sir John Rhŷs Memorial Lecture, *Proceedings of the British Academy*, xxxiv (1948), 167-97; T. Gwynn Jones, 'Bardism and Romance', *Trans. Cymmrodorion Society*, 1913-14, 207-20; 'Social Life as Reflected in the Laws', *Aberystwyth Studies*, x (1928), 113-15; S. J. Williams and J. E. Powell, *Llyfr Blegywryd* (Caerdydd, 1942), xxvi-xxviii; J. E. Lloyd, *A History of Wales* (London, 1911), ii. 529-30.

poet could look forward to obtaining an official post in the royal court, a post symbolized by a chair which he had to win in competition with another poet.¹ Once he had gained such a chair he was called *pencerdd* and had the right to sing two songs in the court-hall, one a song to God, the other a song to the king, and in addition he was permitted to teach his craft to others. For all this he was well rewarded in gifts, including grants of land. Next to the *pencerdd* in rank was the *bardd teulu*. As the name implies he was primarily the bard of the king's retinue (*teulu*): according to one source it was his duty to sing 'Unbeiniaeth Prydein' to them before they set out for battle. Although there are a few traces of bardic families,² the profession was not hereditary as it was in Ireland. Both *pencerdd* and *bardd teulu* sang or chanted their compositions to their own musical accompaniment or the harp. They were genealogists, historians, and storytellers. They also performed certain mantic functions. Although their primary duty was to eulogize, they could on occasion satirize and prophesy: several vaticinations have survived,³ and Giraldus Cambrensis tells us that there were *awenyddion*,⁴ inspired men who fell into a trance in order to get answers to the questions put to them. Both *pencerdd* and *bardd teulu* fought beside their king whenever the occasion demanded.⁵

In the ninth century court poets called skalds appeared in the Scandinavian countries.⁶ The earliest were Norwegians, but from the end of the tenth century most of them were Icelanders and they were in their heyday in the eleventh, twelfth, and thirteenth centuries. Although their craft demanded great skill there is no evidence that they were trained in special schools or

¹ For the organization of the Welsh courts see Goronwy Edwards, 'The Royal Household and the Welsh Law Books', *Trans. Royal Historical Society*, xiii (1963), 163-76, and cf. D. A. Binchy, 'Some Celtic Legal Terms', *Celtica*, iii. 221-31, esp. 226 ff.

² The clearest example of a Welsh bardic family is that of Meilyr Brydydd: he was court poet to Gruffydd ap Cynan. His son, Gwalchmai, was court poet to Gruffydd's son, Owain Gwynedd, and at least two, possibly three, of Gwalchmai's sons were poets. See J. E. Caerwyn Williams, 'Anglesey's Contribution to Welsh Literature', *Trans. Anglesey Antiquarian and Field Club* (1959), 6-7.

³ M. E. Griffiths, *Early Vaticination in Welsh* (Cardiff, 1937).

⁴ Giraldus Cambrensis, *Descriptio Kambriae*, xvi, Rolls, ed. J. F. Dimock (London, 1868), p. 194.

⁵ J. Lloyd-Jones, *op. cit.* 169.

⁶ See L. M. Hollander, *The Skalds* (Princeton U.P., New York, 1945); A. Heusler, *Die altgermanische Dichtung* (Darmstadt, 1957), 129 ff.; Jan De Vries, *Altnordische Literaturgeschichte*, i (Berlin, Leipzig, 1941), 68 ff.; W. P. Ker, *The Dark Ages* (Mentor Books, 1958), 172-96.

that their profession was hereditary: indeed, although they were professionals and had a privileged position at court and although they were well rewarded for their poetic products—for the most part eulogies of their kings—it is not clear how far they depended for their livelihood on their poetic craft. It is certain that they were not tied to the court: in addition to undertaking responsible missions for their sovereigns they accompanied them to battle and to sea. They declaimed or chanted their poetry but, unlike the Irish ollav and the Welsh *pencerdd*, not to the accompaniment of music. They knew the legendary lore of their race, including the genealogies. They composed satires and maledictions as well as eulogies: satires strung together in answer to compositions of the same kind were called *flytings* and resembled the man-matching in the sagas. Their role in the composition of the prose-sagas is not obvious although many of the sagas recount their doings. However, they must have had a part in the preservation of those lays of the gods and of heroes, called the Eddas, some of which are very ancient, with their origins outside Iceland.

It is reasonable to look on the skald as the literary successor of the Anglo-Saxon *scop*¹ or rather of his counterpart in early Teutonic society, although the evidence for the latter's existence, as the adjective 'Anglo-Saxon' suggests, is mainly derived from the early national poems of England, especially *Beowulf*,² *Widsith*,³ and *Deor's Lament*.⁴ All these poems are anterior to the unification of England under Alfred, all seem to draw exclusively on story-material concerning the Continent, and all seem to be the work of minstrels or *scops*.⁵

Like the ollav, the *pencerdd*, and the skald the *scop* had at court an important post which he might lose to another, or leave to take up a similar post elsewhere. His primary function was to compose and to sing to the accompaniment of his harp songs which would spread the fame of his royal patron. He could also sing songs which celebrated the mighty deeds of

¹ A. Heusler, *op. cit.* 113 ff.; L. F. Anderson, *The Anglo-Saxon Scop* (University of Toronto Press, n.d.).

² A. Heusler, *op. cit.* 192 ff.; R. W. Chambers, *Beowulf. An Introduction to the Study of the Poem* (Cambridge, 1921); Fr. Klaeber, *Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburgh*³ (London, 1950).

³ A. Heusler, *op. cit.* 39 ff.; R. W. Chambers (ed.), *Widsith* (Cambridge, 1912); W. H. French, 'Widsith and the Scop', *PMLA* lx (1945), 623-30.

⁴ Klaeber, *op. cit.*, Appendix IV.

⁵ H. M. Chadwick, 'Early National Poetry', ch. iii, *Cambridge History of English Literature* (London, New York, 1907), vol. i.

ancient heroes: indeed, his mind was full of the traditional and heroic lore which he needed as court genealogist and historian. Like the skald, he was not instructed at a bardic school. His rewards were substantial, gifts of clothes, of gold and silver, and grants of land.

The songs which the *scop* sang of ancient heroes remind us of the Icelandic Eddas, but as the latter were not characteristic of the skald, and to some extent at least anterior to him, one must regard the *Heldenlieder* as peculiar to the *scop*, in contrast to the *Preislieder* which he sang in common with the skald, the *pencerdd*, and the ollav.

It is known that the Irish court poet in early times could and often did discharge the duties of the *senchaid* (historian) and the *scélaige* (story-teller)¹ just as the Welsh *pencerdd* could act the part of *cyfarwydd* (story-teller),² but as the traditional medium for the heroic tale, the kind of story under discussion, in Ireland and Wales, was not verse epic but prose narrative interspersed with verse or rhythmic prose to express dramatic or heightened emotion, these were not, like the Greek *aoidoi*, composing tales in verse. It has been pointed out that the narrative form composed of prose with interposed verse is the first to appear in India,³ and it has even been suggested that it is the earliest form of epic literature known to the Indo-Europeans, and that we have here an interesting case of a parallel survival in Hindu and Celtic literatures.⁴ Some scholars, however, remain sceptical of this and would have us believe that heroic prose narrative is always preceded by narrative in verse.⁵

¹ For the *fili* as story-teller see *Airecc Menman Uraird Maic Coise*, ed. M. E. Byrne in *Anecdota from Irish MSS.*, ii (Halle, 1908), 42. The story is analysed by R. Thurneysen, *Die irische Helden- und Königsage*, i (Halle [Saale], 1921), 21. Cf. the story concerning Forgall, *ZCP* xviii. 416.

² Ifor Williams, *Pedeir Keinc y Mabinogi* (Caerdydd, 1930), 69, 81–2.

³ H. Oldenberg, *Die Literatur des alten Indien* (Stuttgart, 1903), 45.

⁴ E. Windisch, *Táin Bó Cúalnge* (Leipzig, 1905), xlvi–xlix; also *Geschichte der Sanskritphilologie* (Strassburg, 1920), ii. 404; J. Vendryes, 'Sur un caractère traditionnel de la poésie celtique', *Choix d'études linguistiques et celtiques* (Paris, 1952), 225–32.

⁵ Jan De Vries, *Heroic Song and Heroic Legend* (London, 1963), 92; C. M. Bowra, *Heroic Poetry* (London, 1964), 15, 16, 'In Ireland heroic poetry once existed but was gradually displaced by prose'. Cf. H. M. Chadwick, *The Heroic Age* (Cambridge, 1912), 94–6; H. M. and N. K. Chadwick, *The Growth of Literature*, iii (Cambridge, 1940, 21968), 716: 'Some scholars hold that narrative poetry is derived from saga with speeches in character (Type B); but others trace its origin to narrative elements in poetry of celebration (Type D). Both explanations may be correct in individual cases; and we

As the form of Icelandic saga is prose narrative with incidental verse some have argued that this form was derived from Ireland,¹ just as others have contended that the considerable differences between the poetic art of the *scop* and that of the skald are to be attributed to the influence of Irish poetry,² but the authorities differ profoundly on these questions, and, happily, we are concerned at present only with the resemblances between Welsh, Irish, and Icelandic court poetry.

Most of the verse composed by skald, *pencerdd*, and ollav is praise or celebration-poetry and its underlying assumption is that fame and honour are the supreme values. Thus the skald sings:

Kine die, kinsfolk die,
oneself dies the same;
there is nought but Fame which never dies
for him who wins it worthily.³

The *scop* had expressed the same conviction before him:

Let him who can win for himself glory before he dies: that is the best thing which can come to a knight in after times when he is no more.⁴ The Welsh *pencerdd* and the Irish ollav are equally convinced that 'praise' is the only thing that will never die. 'Trennid golud, ni threinc molud', says a very old Welsh proverb: 'Wealth vanishes, praise (fame) does not'. That is why the hero desires fame above everything:

gwawr llafyn esgut klut klot a uynnei.⁵

should not be inclined to doubt that a narrative poem may be derived from a saga without poetry.' Felix Genzmer, 'Vorzeitsaga und Heldenlied' (Karl Hauck [ed.] *Zur germanisch-deutschen Heldensage* [Bad Homburg vor der Höhe, 1961], 102-37), argues that a saga-form of prose and verse must have existed at a very early date in the Germanic literary tradition.

¹ For 'The Irish Hypothesis' see T. M. Anderson, *The Problem of Icelandic Saga Origins* (Yale U.P., New Haven, London, 1964), 56-61.

² Jan De Vries, 'Les rapports des poésies scaldique et gaëlique', *Ogam*, ix (1957), 13-26, where De Vries discusses G. Turville-Petre, 'Um Dröttvaedhi og Irskan Kvedhskap', *Skirnir*, cxxviii (1936), 31-55. See also A. J. Raude, 'Remarques sur les poésies scaldiques et celtiques', *Ogam*, xi (1959), 425-6; Stefán Einarsson, *A History of Icelandic Literature* (New York, 1957), 5-6; G. Turville-Petre, *Origins of Icelandic Literature* (Oxford, 1953), 37-8.

³ The original is in *Hávamál*. See Stefán Einarsson, *op. cit.* 32; B. S. Phillpotts, *Edda and Saga* (London, 1931), 128.

⁴ *Beowulf*, ll. 1387 ff. See Walther Gehl, *Ruhm und Ehre bei den Nordgermanen* (Berlin, 1937); Wilhelm Grönbech, *Kultur und Religion der Germanen*, i (Darmstadt, 1961), 74-113.

⁵ *Llawysgrif Hendregadredd*, gol. John Morris-Jones, T. H. Parry-Williams (Caerdydd, 1933), 193. 23.

It is a belief which the Irish ollavs are never tired of repeating.

Dá measdaoí maith an domhain
is é críoch a gcuilbhair—
ní bhí acht an moladh amháin
ní don domhan acht díoláimh.¹

Secondly, these poems are essentially aristocratic. They celebrate a hero before an audience of heroes, and they are composed by heroes, for, even if we did not know that skald, *pencerdd*, and ollav fought side by side with their lords and that they acted frequently as if they were their peers, we should have to deduce from their poems that they arrogated to themselves the right to confer honour and fame. In the words of the *Gododdin*, *beirt byt barnant wyr o gallon*,² 'the bards of the world adjudge men of valour', or as the Irish poet tells us, 'No man can be famous without an ollav'.³

Thirdly, these poems originally had a social and religious significance,⁴ and even when that significance had been almost completely lost, they continued to form an important part of court ceremonial. Of their social and religious purpose we shall speak later: now it will suffice to say that originally they were declaimed before an assembled audience, and the intricacy of their metres, the richness of their diction, the wealth of their allusion, and the comparative simplicity of their themes, all show that their composers were well aware that part at least of their function was to demonstrate that they were Lords of the Word in a world in which words had not yet lost their magic power.⁵ It is no wonder that modern scholars have been impressed by the artistry of each of these court poets in turn and

¹ Knott, *Tadhg Dall Ó Huiginn*, i, Poem 31, § 8; L. McKenna, *The Book of O'Hara*, Poem 4, § 8. *Díoláimh* (lit. "handless") helpless, ineffective: so the translation given can be completed: 'If the wealth of the world were to be assessed—this is the sum total of the matter—nothing in the world is other than futile except only eulogy.'

² Ifor Williams, *Canu Aneirin* (Caerdydd, 1938), 12. 285.

³ L. McKenna, *The Book of O'Hara*, Poem 14, § 3, 'Córuidé réidhioghadh rind / —ní hé a-bháin, a bhas tséghoinn— / neach nach ordhruic gan ollamh, / a Chormuic, do-chualamar'.

⁴ Jan De Vries, *Altnordische Literaturgeschichte*, i. 33-4: 'Die heroische Poesie war nicht nur Schmuck des altgermanischen Lebens, sondern sie war ein notwendiges Organ der gesellschaftlichen Moral.'

⁵ Grönbech, op. cit. i. 241, 'Der Dichter ist ein großer Heiling . . . Wir sind in unsrer Einseitigkeit geneigt, nur das Ästhetische an seinen Schöpfungen zu betrachten'.

that students of skaldic court poetry are loath to believe that any other poetic creation can be so intricate¹, while students of the Welsh *cynghanedd* or the Irish *dán díreach* are equally convinced that nothing more subtle can exist.² Of course, it may be that we are disposed to be impressed on account of our unfamiliarity with all kinds of oral literature. It is legitimate to assume that court poems were not composed for a single recitation, and that the people who heard them were not satisfied with a single hearing. On the contrary, there is every reason to believe that people who were untouched by the modern itch for novelty and who delighted in hearing over and over again the same stories would gladly listen to the same poems. Moreover, their complex metrical structure was mnemonic and made them easy to remember.³ Hundreds of skaldic verses were handed down by word of mouth before they were finally fixed on parchment, and the fact that they were remembered implies that they were appreciated and more than partially understood.⁴ It is certainly inconceivable that they were intended to be unintelligible, however recondite their language may have been. At the same time, their peculiar sonorous quality, their internal harmony of alliteration and rime make it certain that their appeal was first and foremost to the ear.⁵

¹ Heusler, *Die altgermanische Dichtung*, 139: 'Der "Skaldenstil", verkörpert in der durchschnittlichen Hofstrophe, ist gewiß eine der einsamsten Erscheinungen der Weltliteratur.'

² J. Vendryes, *La Poésie galloise des XII^e-XIII^e siècles dans ses rapports avec la langue* (The Zaharoff Lecture, Oxford, 1930); also 'La poésie de cour en Irlande et en Galles', *Choix d'études linguistiques et celtiques*, 209-24; W. Krause, 'Die Kenning als typische Stilfigur der germanischen und keltischen Dichtersprache', *Schriften der königsberger gelehrten Gesellschaft. 7. Jahr. Geisteswissenschaftliche Klasse*, Heft 1, Halle (Saale), 1930, 1-26.

³ In Saint Olaf's Saga we are told that Gissur, Thorfin Mudr, and Thormod sang songs before a battle, and that 'these songs were immediately got by heart by the army'—Snorri Sturluson, *Heimskringla*, I, *The Olaf Sagas* (Everyman's Library, 722), 359. J. Carney, *Poems on the O'Reillys* (Dublin, 1950), 192, notes that Poems VI-X were 'written down in 1620 from the recitation of a blind man who had memorized them thirty years before', and that 'on the whole the poems illustrate how excellently syllabic poetry could be retained in the memory'.

⁴ De Vries, *Altnordische Literaturgeschichte*, i. 82. K. Reichardt, *Studien zu den Skalden des 9. und 10. Jahrhunderts* (Palaestra, 159. Leipzig, 1928), 5 ff., refutes vigorously the view that the skaldic poems were ever unintelligible to the uninitiated.

⁵ Cf. Thomas Parry, *A History of Welsh Literature* (tr. H. I. Bell, Oxford, 1955), 48, 'The poetry of today is read with the eye, and the eye is the door

Of their effect on the audience who assembled to hear them declaimed one can only guess, but it must have been like that produced by the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey* which Dr. Grönbech describes in these words:

When the singing begins the hall is filled with *kleos* (fame); the great deeds of the past are conjured up and are present before the mind's eye; joy and strength at the same time. The hall fills with friends and relations; the dead as well as the living; the man who hears his own ancestor praised feels flattered; he knows that, when his own life and deeds sound in song and legend, he will not be dead.¹

And this brings us to our final observation in this section.

The audience and its poets were essentially 'backward-looking'.² It is admitted that for mankind generally until comparatively recent times the Golden Age was in the past, but here we have something deeper than a vague hankering after the good old days. Formerly, as Mircea Eliade reminds us, man refused to live in what we should call the historic present: he attempted to regain a sacred time that from our point of view could be homologized to eternity.³

Examples of the retrospective view of life are easy to find in the three traditions.

The story of Hildebrand is known from Germanic sources only in a fragment written about A.D. 800⁴—it is 'the only relic of the great art of heroic song which once flourished in Germany'⁵—but an Icelandic poet of the twelfth or thirteenth of the understanding. The poetry of old was heard with the ear, was recited or sung, and the ear is the gateway to the heart.'

¹ Quoted by De Vries, *Heroic Song and Heroic Legend*, 169. Cf. Priscus (K. Müller, *Fragmenta Historicorum Graecorum* [1841-70], iv. 92): 'The banqueters fixed their minds upon them, some being charmed with the songs, while others were roused in spirit, as the recollections of their wars came back to them. Others again burst into tears, because their bodies were enfeebled by age and their martial ardour had perforce to remain unsatisfied.' Cf. Chadwick, *The Heroic Age*, 84; C. M. Bowra, *Heroic Poetry*, 414.

² On the 'backward look' in Irish literature see Frank O'Connor, *Kings, Lords and Commons* (London, 1970), xi; *The Backward Look* (London, 1967).

³ Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane* (Harper & Row, New York, 1961), 72; L. Renou, *La Poésie religieuse de l'Inde antique* (Presses Universitaires de France, 1942), 9, 'Il n'y a guère de notion de temps pour le poète védique, pas plus qu'il n'y a de notion d'espace: tout est immémorial et tout est présent à la fois'; W. Grönbech, *Kultur und Religion der Germanen* (Darmstadt, 1961), ii. 224.

⁴ For the Hildebrandslied see G. Ehrismann, *Geschichte der deutschen Literatur*, i. Teil (1932), 93, 121-37.

⁵ Bowra, *Heroic Poetry*, 43.

century knew the story and wrote verses on it which supplement the fragment for us: indeed it is from the Icelandic relics and not from the German ones that we learn that Hildebrand had killed his son.¹ Another example will show how easily a convention was established within the skaldic tradition. Bragi Boddason the Old, we are told, on one occasion saved his life by composing a poem to mollify the wrath of the Swedish King Biorn: it was called a 'Head-Ransom' (*Höfuðlausn*). Many years afterwards the skald Egil Skallagrímsson found himself at the mercy of his old enemy, King Eric. He was advised to compose a 'Head-Ransom' to save his life.² This he did and, most surprisingly by modern standards, his life was spared. Moreover, Egil was not the only one after Bragi to save his life in this way.

We are reminded of Taliesin, the Welsh poet whom Welsh tradition assigns to the sixth century. Apparently he offended his patron Urien Rheged at one time, and to regain the royal favour he wrote a poem of appeasement, a *dadolwch*.³ Many centuries afterwards we find the Welsh court poets composing the same kind of poem and calling it by the same name.⁴ Indeed these poets of the twelfth and thirteenth century imitated their sixth-century predecessors so conscientiously that they have been accused of setting out to rewrite their poetry. It is certain that the vocabulary of their predecessors had an 'aura' of its own for them. Thus they refer to the English, their traditional enemy, as *Bryneich*, long after *Bernicea* had been swallowed up in Northumbria and long after Northumbria had been engulfed in England.⁵

¹ G. Turville-Petre, *Origins of Icelandic Poetry*, 14.

² Jan De Vries, *Altnordische Literaturgeschichte*, i. 91, 129-30.

³ Ifor Williams, *Canu Taliesin*, 'Dadolwch Vryen', ix. For examples of the *dadolwch* in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries see *MA (Myvyrian Archaeology of Wales [1870])*, 196b, 234b, 240b.

⁴ T. J. Morgan, 'Arddull yr Awdl a'r Cywydd', *Trans. Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion*, 1946-7, 276-313, and cf. R. Bromwich, 'Y Cynfeirdd a'r Traddodiad Cymraeg', *BBCS* xxii (1966), 30-7. The Welsh court poets certainly regarded their predecessors in the sixth century as their models. Dafydd Benfras (*fl.* 1230-60) in an ode to Llywelyn ab Iorwerth asks God for

Cyflawn awen awydd fyrddin (Fyrddin)
I ganu moliant mal Aneirin gynt
Dydd y cant Odod(d)in. MA 217a.

and further on says:

Mi i'm byw be byddwn dewin
Ym marddair mawrddawn gyssefin
Adrawdd ei ddaed aerdrin ni allwn
Ni allai Daliessin.

⁵ J. Lloyd-Jones, *Geirfa Barddoniaeth Gynnar Gymraeg*, s.v.

Examples of the backward-lookingness of the Irish court poets could be multiplied *ad nauseam*. In the fourteenth century we find Gofraidh Fionn Ó Dálaigh addressing a poem to the patron saint of the Ó Dálaigh family, Colmán mac Lénéni, who lived in the second half of the sixth century (*ob.* 604), and touching on the old controversy between the poets and the church, except that for him it is Colmán and not Colum Cille who is the champion of the Muse.¹ In the beginning of the seventeenth century Tadhg mac Daire mac Bruaideadha, chief poet of Thomond, composed a poem in which he criticized statements made in two poems attributed to Torna, for him a historical, for us a legendary, poet of the fifth century, and thereby aroused poets in all the land to debate the respective merits of the north and south of Ireland in poems which are now collectively called *The Contention of the Bards*.²

If Irish poets of the seventeenth and the preceding centuries tried to keep alive the memory of poets who lived, as they believed, in the fifth and sixth centuries, if Welsh poets of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries imitated their predecessors in the sixth century, it is reasonable to believe that both Irish and Welsh poets of the sixth century were conscious that they too were the heirs of a long tradition, and although we shall never know what that tradition meant to them, it is important that we should look for traces of it.

II

The precursors of the earliest Irish and Welsh poets are to be found among the continental Celts. Most of our information concerning them is derived ultimately from Posidonius of Apamea although his account is preserved for us unfortunately only in the quotations and paraphrases of it by later authors, Athenaeus, Diodorus Siculus, Strabo, and Julius Caesar.³ However, Posidonius apparently referred to three learned classes among the Celts, the druids, seers, and bards, and there is much to commend the suggestion that these belonged to one order, that privileged class of priests of which the Hindu brahmin, the

¹ 'Unpublished Irish Poems', I, *Studies*, vii (1918), 97-9. See R. Thurneysen, 'Colmán mac Lénéni und Senchán Torpéist', *ZCP* xix. 193-207.

² L. McKenna, *Iomarbhágh na bhFileadh. The Contention of the Bards* (Irish Texts Society XX, XXI, London, 1918), pts. i and ii.

³ These have been published and discussed by Professor J. J. Tierney, 'The Celtic Ethnography of Posidonius', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*, lx (1960), 189 ff.

Roman pontiff, and the Celtic druid seem to be most representative, because, apart from the existence of this class in Indo-European society, it is difficult to explain the existence and survival of a remarkable series of correspondences which have been noted by scholars in the religious and legal vocabulary of the Celtic, Latin, and Sanskrit languages.¹

The Celtic bards, according to Diodorus Siculus, were lyric poets who sang to the accompaniment of musical instruments resembling lyres sometimes a eulogy, sometimes a satire.² With the druids and seers they exercised great influence: they could even persuade armies poised for attack to stop hostilities.

According to Athenaeus,³ if we are to accept Professor J. J. Tierney's explanation of the problematic 'companions, called *parasitoi* (parasites)', the Celtic chieftains had, in addition to their bards, a class of honorary heralds (like the Homeric heralds) who opened the proceedings at a council (Caesar's *senatus*) and called on each chief by his honorific genealogy.⁴ It should be noted, however, that in Ireland and Wales the bards were the traditional genealogists and that it was a bard whom Bituitus, son of the king of the Arverni, took with him to sing his praises and those of his royal father when he went on an embassy to Domitius Ahenobarbus.⁵ On the other hand, if Professor Tierney is right in suggesting that these heralds are to be rigidly distinguished from the bards, then we can look upon them as an offshoot of the bardic class and as the prototypes of Celtic court historians.

If the Irish and Welsh court poets could trace their descent to the bards of the continental Celts, the Icelandic skalds and Anglo-Saxon *scops* could also claim that they were the descendants of those poets who composed their ancient songs—according to Tacitus,⁶ their only form of recorded history—for the Germani. Some of these songs must have celebrated the heroes of the past, for Tacitus again⁷ tells us that Arminius, the

¹ J. Vendryes, 'Les correspondances de vocabulaire entre l'indo-iranien et l'italo-celtique', *Mémoires de la Société de Linguistique*, xx (1918), 265–85. Vendryes was following in the footsteps of other philologists, notably P. Kretschmer, *Einleitung in die Geschichte der griechischen Sprache* (Göttingen, 1896), 125 ff.

² Diodorus Siculus, v. 31. Cf. Festus s.v. *Bardus*, 'Bardus Gallice cantor appellatur, qui uirorum fortium laudes canit'; Ammianus Marcellinus xv. 9, 8, 'bardi quidem fortia uirorum illustrium facta heroicis composita uersibus cum dulcibus lyrae modulis cantitarunt'.

³ Athenaeus, vi. 49.

⁵ Appian, *Gall.* iv. 2.

⁷ Tacitus, *Annals*, ii. 88.

⁴ Tierney, *op. cit.* 203.

⁶ Tacitus, *Germania*, iii.

chief of the Cherusci who defeated Varus in A.D. 9, was 'still sung among barbarian peoples'. That the eastern Germani, the Goths, also had their songs, we know from the account given by Priscus of his visit for Attila's court in A.D. 448.¹ There the king had 'two barbarians' who recited poems which they had composed on his victories. Later at Attila's funeral, we are told, a song of lament for him was chanted.² We may assume that the panegyrics and the lament for Attila were added to that corpus of songs which the Goths sang of their ancestors and their heroic deeds,³ songs of the same kind as those sung by their fellow Germani in the west.

The Celts and the Germani were not the only peoples in the ancient world to have such songs. There is evidence for the chanting of epic songs, if not of praise songs, by the ancient Romans in the writings of Cicero⁴ and Dionysius Halicarnassus,⁵ but it is scanty compared with our evidence for Greece with her Homeric epics. There Demodocus at the court of Alcinous and Phemius at the court of Odysseus have all the characteristics of the court poet.⁶ Both are represented as singing of recent events, although Demodocus sings one song on a mythical subject. If we are to regard him as a typical court poet it should be noted that he is regarded as a person of distinction: in *Od.* viii. 483 he is described as ἦρως, a term frequently applied to princes.

That there were court poets in ancient India also, several kinds of them, is well attested, but the most interesting of them to us, as we shall see, is the *sūta* whose special duty it was 'to preserve the genealogies of gods, rishis and most righteous kings and the traditions of great men',⁷ for his origin is placed in the time of the primeval king Pṛthu, son of Vena.

¹ K. Müller, *Fragmenta Historicorum Graecorum*, iv. 72.

² Jordanes, *Getica*, 49, gives a Latin version of the lament, drawing, presumably, on the Greek of Priscus. Cf. E. A. Thompson, *Attila and the Huns* (Oxford, 1948), 148-50.

³ *Getica*, v.

⁴ *Brutus*, 16. 62; *Tusculanae Disputationes*, i. 2, 3, iv. 2, 3; *Leges* ii. 21, 62. But see H. Dahlmann, 'Zur Überlieferung über die "altrömischen Tafellieder"', *Ak. d. Wiss. und d. Lit., Abhandlungen der geistes- und sozialwissenschaftlichen Klasse*, Jahrgang 1950, Nr. 17, Mainz/Wiesbaden, p. 9, who sees in the songs mentioned by Cato according to Cicero, *Tusc. Disp.* iv. 2. 3, 'keine epischen Gesänge großen Umfangs wie die κλέα ἀνδρῶν der Rhapsoden . . . , sondern kurze Lieder lyrischer Form, wie es die Skolien sind.'

⁵ *Antiquitates Romanae*, i. 79, viii. 62. Cf. E. M. Steuart, 'The Earliest Narrative Poetry of Rome', *Classical Quarterly*, xv (1921), 31-7.

⁶ *Odyssey*, viii. 72 ff., i. 325 ff.

⁷ Vāyu -P. 1. 31-2, F. E. Pargiter, *Ancient Indian Historical Tradition* (London, 1922), 15; G. Dumézil, *Servius et la Fortune: essai sur la fonction sociale*

On the evidence that there were court poets among the Celts, the Germani, the Romans, and the Greeks in the west, and among the ancient Hindus in the east of the Indo-European area, we are entitled to assume that these court poets had their predecessors in Indo-European society, and this assumption is raised to a certainty by the evidence which emerges from a comparative study of the mythology, institutions, and language of that society.

As the study of the words Lat. *rēx*, Celt. *rīx*, Skt. *rāj-* suggests, it is more than probable that in Indo-European society the ruler was both king and priest¹ and that he was regarded as a divine figure, perhaps as the descendant of a divine son such as the issue of the marriage of the Heaven-God to the Earth-Goddess.² One may assume that later the priest-king shed his priestly duties on a new official, the priest, that some of the duties of the priest devolved on the jurist and others on the seer, and that the office of seer bifurcated into those of the prophet and the poet.

It is significant that Professor D. A. Binchy, interpreting the Irish evidence, sees the duties of the Celtic priest-king regarding the 'sacred law' devolving first on the druids, later—presumably after the advent of Christianity—on the *filid*, and later still 'on a more specialized caste (doubtless an offshoot from the *filid*) of professional jurists, the brehons'.³ Perhaps it is equally legitimate to assume that in the Celtic society described by Posidonius the *bardoī* were an offshoot of the *uātes*, the *uātes* an offshoot of the druids, and the druids an offshoot of the *rīx*, the Celtic priest-king.

de louange et de blâme et sur les éléments indo-européens du sens romain (Paris, 1943), 53. For the *kavi* and his court poetry (*kāvya*) see Myles Dillon, 'The Archaism of Irish Tradition', 259.

¹ D. A. Binchy, *Celtic and Anglo-Saxon Kingship. The O'Donnell Lectures for 1967-8* (Oxford, 1970), 3-4; É. Benveniste, *Le Vocabulaire des institutions indo-européennes* (Paris, 1969), ii. 9-15, esp. 15, 'Le rex indo-européen est beaucoup plus religieux que politique. Sa mission n'est pas de commander, d'exercer un pouvoir, mais de fixer des règles, de déterminer ce qui est, au sens propre, "droit". En sorte que le *rex*, ainsi défini, s'apparente bien plus à un prêtre qu'à un souverain. C'est cette royauté que les Celtes et les Italiques d'une part, les Indiens de l'autre, ont conservée.' Binchy, loc. cit., reminds us that 'Celtic kingship appears to have affinities with kingship in primitive societies all over the world'.

² F. R. Schröder, 'Mythos und Heldensage', *Germanisch-Romanische Monatsschrift*, N.F. v (1955), 1-21, 'Die zwei Typen des Göttersohnes', op. cit., N.F. xiii (1963), 193-204. Cf. D. A. Binchy, 'Secular Institutions,' in Myles Dillon (ed.), *Early Irish Society* (Dublin, 1954), 56.

³ Binchy, *Celtic and Anglo-Saxon Kingship*, 16.

However, the Celts of Gaul had, apparently as another offshoot of the druid, a priest called *gutuater*,¹ a word which has been derived from **ǵhutu-patēr*,² 'father (i.e. master) of the invocation (to god)' with *gutu-* related to ON. *goði* 'heathen priest', Goth. *gudja* '(orig., heathen-) priest' and to Skt. *hótar-*, Av. *zaotar-* 'sacrificing (also singing) priest'. (Incidentally, if we can equate the Germanic *goði* with the Celtic *gutuater-druid*, there is some justification for the view that *druid*, *uātes*, and *bardos* among the Celts had as counterparts *goði*, *pulr*,³ and *scop-skald* among the Germani.)⁴

This interpretation of *gutuater* as 'master of the invocation (to god)' suggests that the *bardos* 'singer of praise (to men)' had a priestly counterpart, 'the singer of praise (to god)'. Such a differentiation in the functions of the praise-singer has its analogues in other cultures⁵ and is a development which is to be expected in early society, if, as it is reasonable to believe, 'praise of men' as a literary genre originated in the 'praise of gods'. Indeed, on the basis of parallels taken from the literatures of the ancient Hindus and Persians in the East and of the Romans and Scandinavians in the West, Professor Schröder⁶ has argued that two kinds of hymns were composed in Indo-European societies, one praising and glorifying a single mighty act of a god, the other celebrating a number of such acts, and that the first kind was sung to those remote deities who were far removed from men and their affairs, the second to those hero-deities who had taken an active part in the world of men as saviours, dragon slayers, etc. To the second type of hymn he gives the name of *Aufreihlied* and one of his examples is the Virgilian praise-song to Hercules (*Aen.* viii. 287–303) which was based, apparently, on an earlier hymn. In the *Aufreihlied* he finds, with good reason, the origin of the *Fürstenpreislied*. In this connection perhaps it is important to observe that poetry took over from religion not only this type of song but also, among other things, some of the most primitive stylistic characteristics of this and other types,

¹ A. Holder, *Alt-celtischer Sprachschatz*, i, col. 2046, s.v. *gutu-atro-s*.

² J. Pokorny, *Indogermanisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, i. 413, 829.

³ On the *pulr* as his chief's adviser see A. Heusler, *Die altgermanische Dichtung*, 111–12; De Vries, *Altnordische Literaturgeschichte*, i. 29–31.

⁴ Jan De Vries, *Kelten und Germanen* (Bern, Munich, 1960), 85–6, 90–1.

⁵ See I. Goldziher, *Abhandlungen zur arabischen Philologie* (i. Leiden, 1896), *Über die Vorgeschichte der Higá'-Poésie*, 1–105, where the distinction is drawn between the *šá'ir* and the cultic poet, *káhin*.

⁶ F. R. Schröder, 'Eine indogermanische Liedform. Das Aufreihlied', *Germanisch-Romanische Monatsschrift*, N.F. 4 (1954), 179–85.

for Professor Jan Gonda¹ has seen one Indo-European, if not *the* common Indo-European poetic *Stilform* in the carmen-alliteration style, so called because it is characteristic of the Latin *carmen*² or incantation and so of the formulae of religious rites at Rome. Examples of it are not confined to Latin; they are also found in Greek, Vedic, Germanic, and Celtic:³ indeed, if we take its main characteristics to be, on the one hand, the recurrence or repetition of the same sound and, on the other, a symmetry of expression in two or more member parallelisms, it has been the fundamental basis of Welsh and Irish poetics down to modern times.

To return to the *Fürstenpreislied*, the descendant of the *Aufreihlied*, Professor Dumézil has shown us in what circumstances the earliest songs of this type may have been sung.⁴ Proceeding from the fact that among the ancient Hindus there were three modes of promotion to kingship, Dumézil analyses the one illustrated in the case of the primeval king Pṛthu into three acts, first designation by the gods, second recognition by the wise men, third acceptance by the people. In the consecration of the king the essential part was his eulogy by the bards, the *sūtas*, and it is significant that as soon as Pṛthu is consecrated he proceeds to shower gifts on the bards and on the people, thus giving proof that the local Earth-Goddess is once again fertile and that he himself is truly an *vr̥didātr* 'a giver of the means of subsistence'. As the title of his book, *Servius et la Fortune*, suggests, Dumézil has examined Roman as well as Hindu sources for this type of promotion to kingship and has found traces of it in the legend of Servius who, it will be remembered, was made king by the acclamation of the people and was honoured as the institutor of the *census*.⁵

¹ Jan Gonda, 'Stylistic Repetition in the Veda', *Verhandelingen van de koninklijke Nederlandsche Akademie van Wetenschappen, afdeling Letterkunde. Nieuwe reeks*, 65/3 (1959), 51.

² Ernout et Meillet, *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue latine* (1939), s.v. *carmen*.

³ Rüdiger Schmitt, *Dichtung und Dichtersprache in indogermanischer Zeit* (Wiesbaden, 1967), 206-10.

⁴ *Servius et la Fortune*, chapter 1 (pp. 33 ff.) is devoted to 'La consécration du roi Pṛthu et la naissance du panégyriste', chapter 2 (pp. 112 ff.) to 'L'élection du roi Servius et le premier *census*'.

⁵ Professor H. J. Rose has criticized Dumézil's use of the Roman evidence in *Servius et la Fortune* and *Jupiter, Mars, Quirinus* (Paris, 1941) in *The Journal of Roman Studies*, xxxvii (1947), 183 ff. For Dumézil's position *vis-à-vis* Rose's see his *L'Héritage indo-européen à Rome* (Paris, 1949), 49 ff.

The word *census* is derived from an Indo-European root which has given the word *śams-* in Sanskrit, a word which describes the poet's act of praising and is seen in *nārāśamsī*, 'songs of praise to men'.¹

This root has attracted the attention of several Indo-Europeanists. Dumézil's examination of it²—as it is found in Lat., Osc. *cen-*, Skt. *śams-*, Av. *saṃh*, OPers. *θanh*, *θah*, is of special interest to us, for he concludes that it means, explicitly or implicitly, that what is declared is either felt to be true if it is a fact, or judged to be true if it is a judgement, and also that the declaration will at least morally have as its result that the thing declared or judged will be placed or replaced in its proper position in the social or world order. The latter meaning is reflected in the office of *ensor* and the purpose of the *census* at Rome. It is also reflected in the eulogy of the *sūtas* to king Pṛthu.

Unfortunately we do not have an account of a promotion to kingship in the Celtic society of Gaul. We do, however, have Posidonius' description of one historical event in which king and bard meet. Louernius, father of Bituis (Bituitus) who was dethroned by the Romans,

in an attempt to win popular favour rode on a chariot over the plains distributing gold and silver to the tens of thousands of Celts who followed him; moreover he . . . prepared so great a quantity of food that for many days all who wished could enter and enjoy the feast prepared. . . . And when at last he fixed a day for the ending of the feast, a Celtic poet who arrived too late met Louernius and composed a song magnifying his greatness and lamenting his own late arrival. Louernius was very pleased and asked for a bag of gold and threw it to the poet who ran beside his chariot. The poet picked it up and sang another song, saying that the very tracks made by his chariot on the earth gave gold and largesse to mankind.³

¹ See M. Winternitz, *Geschichte der indischen Litteratur*, i (Leipzig, 1908), 197, 261, 399.

² See Dumézil's chapter on 'census' in *Idées romaines* (Gallimard, Paris), 103–8, as well as his observations on 'Nārācāmsī et nr̥cāmsa', 'Védique Nārācāmsa, avestique Nairyōsanha' in *Servius et la Fortune*, 70 ff., 219 ff. É. Benveniste, *Le Vocabulaire des institutions indo-européennes*, ii. 143–8, examining the meaning of the root of Lat. *cen-*, Skr. *śams-*, Av. *saṃh*, OPers. *θanh-*, *θah* concludes that the meaning of OPers. *θātiy* in the Inscriptions of Darius was 'affirmer avec autorité comme étant la vérité; dire ce qui est conforme à la nature des choses; énoncer la norme de conduite', and proceeds, 'Celui qui "parle" ainsi est en position souveraine; et déclarant ce qui est, il le fixe; il énonce solennellement ce qui s'impose, la vérité du fait ou du devoir'.

³ Athenaeus iv. 37; J. J. Tierney, 'The Celtic Ethnography of Posidonius', 248.

I believe that it is not too fanciful to see here parallels with the actions of the Hindu kings and their poets in ancient India.

By his gifts and his banquet to the people Louernius is showing them that as the rightful ruler he is blessed by the local Earth-Goddess and is able on that account to bestow on his followers gifts of gold and silver and unlimited food, and the poet, one of many, we may be sure, by his praise, magnifying his patron's greatness and eulogizing his generosity, is performing his traditional role: he is placing Louernius in his proper place in the social order and ensuring that he remains there. This, of course, does not mean that Louernius and his poet were fully conscious of the import of their actions: they were merely acting each according to his tradition.¹

Of the practice of giving gifts to poets we shall have more to say later. Concerning the banquet, two facts should be mentioned. First, that P. Thieme has pointed out that primitive sacrifices among the ancient Hindus and Persians took the form of meals provided for the gods as guests, that the oldest sacral poetry among them was *Gastmahlsdichtung*, i.e. poetry for the entertainment of a guest at a banquet,² and that there is a connection between the entertaining of guests with a banquet and the singing of heroic songs not only in Rome³ but also in Greece: it will be remembered that when Odysseus had been received and feasted at the court of Alcinous, Demodocus was inspired by the Muses to sing the glorious deeds of warriors, ἀειδέμεναι κλέα ἀνδρῶν.⁴

Second, Irish chieftains down to the end of the Middle Ages made a point of giving public banquets and of inviting the poets to them. Of these banquets the best known are the feast given by William O'Kelly in 1351 and celebrated by Gofraidh Fionn

¹ Dumézil does not refer to the action of Louernius, but he refers (*Servius et la Fortune*, 223-5) to the similar actions of Conchobar son of Ness, who under instruction from his mother and his fosterers and his household stripped every second man and gave his wealth to another in addition to distributing the wealth of his mother in order to win the allegiance of the Ulstermen from Fergus to himself (see W. Stokes, 'The Tidings of Conchobar son of Ness', *Ériu*, iv. 22 ff.) and of Cassibellaunus who won the British kingdom and kept it from his nephews by a show of *largitas* and *probitas*: see Geoffrey of Monmouth, *Historia Regum Britanniae*, iii. 20 (ed. San-Marte, 1854, p. 44).

² P. Thieme, 'Vorzarathustriches bei den Zarathustriern und bei Zarathustra', *Zeitschrift der deutschen morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, cvii (N.F. 32) (1957), 67-96.

³ *Tusculanae Disputationes*, iv. 2, 3.

⁴ *Odyssey*, viii. 73.

Ó Dalaigh in his poem, 'Filidh Éireann go haointeach';¹ the two feasts given by Margaret daughter of Tadhg Ó Cearbhaill in 1433,² and the feast given by Toirdhealbhach Luineach Ó Néill in 1577 and celebrated by Tadhg Dall Ó hUiginn in a graceful poem, 'Nodlaig do-chuamair don Chraoibh'.³ Not only were the poets expressly invited to these feasts, care was also taken that they did not depart empty-handed. All this reminds us, of course, of the various potlatch systems, but the role of fame and honour was as important in them as it was in the court poetry which we are investigating: 'The rich man who shows his wealth by spending recklessly is the man who wins prestige.'⁴

Even if we did not have Posidonius' account of Louernius and his bard, we would still have enough indications to show that the Celtic *bardos* retained many of the characteristics of his Indo-European forerunner.

The connection between the court poet and the king has already been emphasized: it was fundamental in that both derived their peculiar power from the gods and that they derived it partly if not wholly by literal *in-spiration*. The word *bardos* has been derived from a root **g²r̥-d(h)-o* and its meaning legitimately established as 'a singer of praise'.⁵ We have suggested that this singer of praise was an offshoot of the *uātes*. As Lat. *uātes* meant 'prophet' before it came to mean 'poet',⁶ and as it is cognate with OIr. *fáth* 'prophecy', *fáith* 'prophet', as well as with W. *gwawd* 'song, (later) scorn', ON. *oðr* 'song', Professor Thieme⁷ is surely right in maintaining against Professor Wagner⁸ that its Indo-European root is **uat-* 'to blow, to inspire'.

¹ *Ériu*, v. 50-69. Stanza 14 refers to 'the seven grades who form the shape of genuine poesy; the seven true orders of poets'.

² *Miscellany of the Irish Archaeological Society* (Dublin, 1846), 227-8; J. F. Kenney, *The Sources for the Early History of Ireland. Ecclesiastical* (Columbia U.P. 1929, Irish U.P. 1968), 22-3. See also A. S. Green, *Old Irish World* (Dublin, London, 1912), 118.

³ *Tadhg Dall Ó Huiginn*, i. 50 ff., ii. 34 ff., 222.

⁴ M. Mauss, *The Gift. Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies* (London, 1970), 35. See also M. Mauss, 'Sur un texte du Posidonius. Le Suicide, contre-prestation suprême', *Revue Celtique*, xlii. 324-9; H. Hubert, 'Le Système des prestations totales dans les littératures celtiques', *ibid.* 330-5.

⁵ D. M. Jones, 'bardd', *BBCS* xi. 138-40.

⁶ Schanz-Hosius, *Geschichte der römischen Literatur* (1927), i. 14.

⁷ P. Thieme, 'Die Wurzel *vat*', *Asiatica. Festschrift Friedrich Weller* (Leipzig, 1954), 656-66.

⁸ In a paper read at the *Third International Congress of Celtic Studies*, Edinburgh, 1967. Professor Wagner's article in *ZCP* xxxi. 46-57, 'Irish *fáth*,

Another Indo-European root meaning 'to blow, to breathe', **au(e)-*, *auē(i)-*, *uē*, is represented in OIr. *ái* (**auí*) gen. *uath* 'poetic art', cognate with W. *awen* 'poetic muse'; cf. W. *awel* 'breeze', Gk. *ἀελλα*, Aeol. *αὔελλα* 'storm'. Yet another Indo-European root **anə* 'to breathe' is found in OW. *anant* 'bards', OIr. *anamain* a technical term in metrics, OIr. *immus for-osnai* (: *an-*) 'divination which illuminates': cf. W. *anadl*, OIr. *anál* 'breath'.¹

As *immus for-osnai*,² the name of a divinatory rite, suggests, the Celtic poet exercised magical powers just as the Indo-European poet must have done. The root word for the magical and augural language of both poets seems to be preserved in Lat. *canere*, W. *canu*, OIr. *canaid*, and some of their cognates. Their actual power over things is reflected in OIr. *creth* 'poetry', W. *prydydd*, cf. W. *pryd* 'shape, form', OIr. *cruth* 'form', Vedic *kr̥nóti* 'makes', and Balto-Slavic words for 'magic, bewitching': Old Church Slav. *čaro-ději* 'magician', Lith. *kerai* 'magic', *kerėti* 'bewitch'.³

If 'singing' was an aspect of the activity of the Celtic *bardos*, so too was it an aspect of the activity of the Vedic *kārú* 'singer, poet', and it is significant that the Greek cognate of the Vedic word was *κῆρυξ*, Dor. *κᾶρυξ* 'herald', for its meaning gives us reason to believe that the Indo-European poet travelled from court to court: as the vehicle of divine inspiration his person would tend to be regarded as inviolable, and as a welcome visitor in royal courts he made an ideal 'herald' or 'messenger'.⁴

Professor Calvert Watkins of Harvard drew attention to some of these facts a few years ago but his main object was to show that 'the metres of archaic Old Irish poetry are Indo-European in form and function'.⁵ It would be interesting to follow his researches into the origins of Celtic metres as well as those of

Welsh *gwawd*, Old Icelandic *óðr* "poetry" and the Germanic god *Wotan/Oðinn*, appeared after this lecture had been written and deserves more consideration than I was able to give to the paper read at Edinburgh.

¹ On these words see Calvert Watkins, 'Indo-European Metrics and Archaic Irish Verse', *Celtica*, vi. 194-249, esp. 213-17. Pokorny, *Indo-germanisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, 81 f., 38 f. On *anant* see Caerwyn Williams, *BBCS* xxiv. 44-50.

² For references to *immus (imbas) for-osnai* and discussion see T. F. O'Rahilly, *Early Irish History and Mythology* (Dublin, 1946), 323, 339 f., R. Thurneysen, *ZCP* xix. 163 f.; N. K. Chadwick, *Scottish Gaelic Studies*, iv (1935), 97-135.

³ Calvert Watkins, op. cit. 214-15.

⁴ P. Thieme, 'Vorzarathustriches', 85.

⁵ Calvert Watkins, op. cit. 248.

Meillet,¹ Debrunner,² and Jakobson³ into the origins of Greek, Sanskrit, and Slavonic metres in their Indo-European source, but it is more relevant to our present purpose to ask what the Indo-European poet tried to achieve with his metres. Of the answer there can be no doubt: he celebrated and conferred what the Greeks called κλέος and the ancient Hindus *śrávas-*.⁴

We should expect scholars to be able to reconstruct the Indo-European form which underlies Gk. κλέος and Skt. *śrávas-*. What is surprising is that they are able to show that certain Greek and Sanskrit phrases (syntagmata) in which these words occur seem to be derived from synonymous syntagmata in Indo-European, that they seem to be calques, if we may be allowed to extend the meaning of that linguistic term for this occasion. Thus there is reason to believe that the Indo-European poets sang of 'immortal', or to put it as concretely as they did, of 'unfading glory': this was reflected by the Greek poets when they sang of κλέος ἀφθιτον and of ἄσβεστον κλέος and ἀθάνατον κλέος and by the ancient Hindu poets when they sang of *ákṣiti śrávaḥ*, sometimes substituting *ámṛtyu* 'deathless' for *ákṣiti* 'unfading' and sometimes substituting *sámsa-*, cognate with Lat. *cens-* (*censor*, etc.) for *śrávas-*. Once indeed corresponding to the Hom. κλέα ἀνδρῶν the phrase *śrávo . . . nrñám* (synonymous were it not that κλέα is plural and *śrávo* singular) occurs instead of the usual *sámsa*, cf. *nārāsamsī*, the technical name for 'Männerpreislieder'. In some cases the same syntagma occurs in Greek, Sanskrit, and Celtic: e.g. Gk. εὐκλεής (NP εὐκλεής), Vedic *su-śrávas-* (NP *Su-śrávas*), Ir. *sochla*, W. *hyglod*.

In one context in Greek instead of μέγα κλέος (corresponding to Vedic *máhi śrávaḥ*) we have μέγα κῦδος. Apparently κῦδος was a synonym for κλέος, but it seems to have become unintelligible at an early stage even to the Greeks themselves. According to Benveniste, κῦδος was a magical power the possession of which conferred superiority especially in battle where it was a guarantee of victory. Only the gods could bestow it, and those on whom it was bestowed were raised to their ranks for it was a divine attribute—if one may call it that without losing sight of the fact

¹ A. Meillet, *Les Origines indo-européennes des mètres grecs* (Paris, 1923).

² A. Debrunner, 'Das Problem einer urindogermanischen Metrik', *Verhandlungen der 56. Versammlung deutscher Philologen und Schulmänner zu Göttingen . . . 1927* (Leipzig, 1928), 71 ff.

³ R. Jakobson, 'Studies in comparative Slavic Metrics', *Oxford Slavonic Papers*, iii (1952), 62.

⁴ R. Schmitt, *Dichtung und Dichtersprache in indogermanischer Zeit* (Wiesbaden, 1967), 61 ff.

that it was something concrete and tangible.¹ Indeed, it seems to me that the possession of *kudos* must have been originally the precondition to the possession of *kleos*.

Probably the possession of *kudos* among the ancient Greeks was almost synonymous with the possession of *menes* among the Indo-Europeans, a word to which the meaning 'inner impulse to activity' has been given, for it appears that the gods breathed into heroes a good **ménés* (**uésu *ménos*, Hom. μένος ἦψ, Av. *vohu manō*, Ved. NP *Vasu manas-*), an exceptional **ménés* (Indo-European **is₂róm *ménos*, Hom. ἱερόν μένος, Ved. *isiréna mánasā*) or the **ménés* of men (Indo-European **e₂nr₁-ménés*, Gk. NP Ἀνδρομένης, Vedic adj. *nrmānas* 'having the μένος of a man'). With **menes* cf. Skt. *mānas-*, Gk. μένος.²

The same root is found in Lat. *mens*, *mentis*. Perhaps Sir Ifor Williams was too conscious of the Latin word when he explained the Gododdin line,

*gwr gorfynt. gwr edvynt. gwr llawr.*³

'A proud hero (warrior), a wise warrior, a unique warrior.'

Gorfynt has its Irish cognate *format*, and both words can mean 'envy', but W. *gorfynt* has other connotations, and Gk. ὑπερμενής 'exceedingly strong', an adjective applied on occasion to Zeus himself, has some right to be considered side by side with Lat. *mens* in any discussion of its meaning.

The relevance of these facts becomes clearer when we consider them in relation to the function of the court poet.

Every primitive poet was to some extent a shaman or magician, in other words he claimed the ability to exercise power over things, and his poetry was the means to that end.⁴ The early court poet practised his poetry to instil into men those qualities which they prized above all others. Of course, *menos*, *kudos*, *timē*, etc., were the gifts of the gods but the poet in declaring that his patron had them was in a way forcing the hands of the gods: he made these qualities exist, or if they already existed,

¹ Benveniste, *Le Vocabulaire des institutions indo-européennes*, ii. 57-69.

² R. Schmitt, op. cit. 115 ff.

³ Ifor Williams, *Canu Aneirin*, 6. 125.

⁴ Benveniste, op. cit. 11, 41 (on *kraínōn* in the Homeric Hymn to Hermes) 'Le dieu chante l'origine des choses et par son chant "promeut à l'existence" les dieux. Métaphore hardie, mais qui s'accorde au rôle d'un poète qui est lui-même un dieu. Un poète fait exister; les choses prennent naissance dans son chant.' Cf. Renou, *La Poésie religieuse de l'Inde antique*, 16, 'La magie n'est pas absente nulle part, et en un sens le sacrifice tout entier est une opération de magie.'

he made them stronger.¹ In a sense then by affirming the courage and honour of his patron he gave and confirmed courage, he gave and confirmed honour, and in so doing he ensured his fame. The Welsh court poet Phylip Brydydd who flourished in the thirteenth century and who told his prince '*Gwneuthum it glod*', 'I made fame for thee',² could have been translating the words of an Indo-European court poet, but whereas the Welsh poet was thinking primarily of the effect of his songs to his patron on his present and future audience, the Indo-European poet would be thinking of the effect of his songs on the hero whom he was eulogizing: they were strengthening or creating in him qualities of mind and body which would produce the actions of which everyone would soon be talking.

III

To what extent did the Welsh *pencerdd* and the Irish ollav inherit and continue the traditions of the Celtic poets?

Let us look first at the Welsh poets. Their work does not show as many archaisms as that of the Irish poets, but it has the same conservative tendencies.

There were court poets in the court of Maelgwn Gwynedd in north-west Wales in the second quarter of the sixth century and they were panegyrists. Of that, Gildas does not leave us in any doubt.³ Unfortunately, none of their poems survives; we would give much to be able to study the language in which they were chanted. In the third quarter of the same century, if we are to believe the tradition, Taliesin sang the praises of King Cynan Garwyn in the court of Powys before he went north to the court of Rheged to eulogize King Urien.⁴ Of the few surviving poems which have any claim to be regarded as the genuine work of Taliesin, one is a lament, the others are panegyrics, if we include

¹ Dumézil, *Servius et la Fortune*, 67, 'Dans ce texte vénérable, la louange à Agni, la louange à Indra ont même office; par les formules qu'il entend, le loué reçoit la force de faire ce qui lui était d'abord impossible et exactement, dans le cas d'Indra, il redevient lui-même'; F. R. Schröder, 'Eine indogermanische Liedform. Das Aufreihlied', *GRM* xxxv (N.F. 4) (1954), 185, 'Das Wort, d.h. die Loblieder sollen und wollen zugleich den König "stärken"'; J. Gonda, 'Zur Frage nach dem Ursprung und Wesen des indischen Dramas', *Acta Orientalia*, xix (1943), 421 f. 'Das Preiswort und die Schilderung von Krafttaten erzeugen zauberanalogisch Mut . . .'

² 'Y gwneuthum ytt glot glut rwyf gavr ygwrys', *Llawysgrif Hendregadredd*, 232. 26.

³ H. Williams, *Gildae De Excidio Britanniae* (London, 1901), 80-1.

⁴ Ifor Williams, *Lectures on Early Welsh Poetry* (Dublin, 1944), 51 ff.

the *dadolwch* already mentioned. To the north-east of Rheged lay the kingdom of the Gododdin, Ptolemy's *Uotadini*. About A.D. 600 its ruler Mynyddawg Mwynfawr dispatched from his court in the vicinity of Edinburgh a band of warriors to win back from the English the strategically situated Catraeth (Richmond, Catterick). They fought almost literally to the last man but failed in their purpose. However, their praise was sung in a series of elegiac odes by Aneirin and some of these have survived.¹

Tradition has it that there were other Welsh poets in the sixth century, but we have no reason to believe that their songs were different from those of Taliesin and Aneirin, and the extraordinary fact is that for more than a thousand years after them the vast bulk of Welsh poetry is cast in the same mould as theirs, praise of the living and of the dead. Of course there have been other types of poetry but until the loss of independence in 1282 most poets in Wales were court poets and if we allow ourselves the same liberty as they did, to call a mansion a court and a nobleman a prince, there were court poets of a kind well into the seventeenth century.

According to tradition, Taliesin's earliest surviving poem is the eulogy addressed to Cynan Garwyn.² It is in three parts: the first enumerates his gifts to the poet, the second his victories, the third tells of the fame which he has and will have.

If we could regard the first part as an independent poem, it would be a Welsh counterpart to the Vedic '*Dānastutis* or "Praises of Gifts", panegyrics commemorating the liberality of princes towards the priestly singers employed by them',³ and to the Irish *Amra Chonroi*, a composition devoted almost exclusively to the gifts which *Cúroi* is said to have bestowed on his *fili* Ferchertne.⁴

However, the first part is not independent, and the poem as a whole seems to have a definite structure. Indeed, its tripartite nature recalls Dumézil's analysis of the mechanism of early Vedic praise poetry, a mechanism which can be expressed as two variations of the formula *do ut des*, namely *laudo ut des* and

¹ Op. cit. 65 ff.; K. H. Jackson, *The Gododdin* (Edinburgh, 1969).

² Ifor Williams, *Canu Taliesin* (Caerdydd, 1960), Poem I; (English Version, J. E. Caerwyn Williams) *The Poems of Taliesin* (Dublin, 1968), I. For further discussion and a translation of this poem see I. Ll. Foster, 'The Emergence of Wales', in Foster and Daniel, *Prehistoric and Early Wales* (1965), 213-35.

³ A. A. MacDonell, *A History of Sanskrit Literature* (London, 1900), 127.

⁴ 'Amra Chonrói', *Ériu*, ii (1905), 1-14.

dedisti, laudavi (or *laudauerunt*), *da*.¹ Perhaps the second variation is not so very far removed from the structure of the poem. Is Taliesin telling his patron: 'You have bestowed great gifts upon me, [but I have also bestowed great *kleos*, *kudos*, or *menes* on you by my poems]. Your victories testify to that. Your *kleos* will continue and increase [because of my poems]. [I need not tell you, but continue to show your generosity to me.]'

Taliesin's lament on Urien's son and Aneirin's elegiac odes show the influence of Christianity, but they and their Irish counterparts—there are a number of 'Totenklagen', as we shall see, among Meyer's 'Bruchstücke'—are surely representatives of a kind of poem whose origin must be traced to pagan times.

In the beginning the lament or the dirge served the same purpose as the panegyric. It belongs to the same world of ideas as that which gave rise to hero-cults.² In this world the dead are still powerful. That is why the possession of the hero's remains and his grave is a matter of great importance. That is why the hero's goodwill has to be retained and secured by sacrifices at his tomb. In this world, too, the family is a living corporate entity. The solidarity of the primitive family is a fact too well known to call for emphasis here, but it should be remembered that it included not only the living but also the dead members, and that the living felt that they needed the help of the dead and especially of those who could contribute greatly to their well-being and that of their descendants.

Although Aeschylus was a dramatist and not a theologian, there can be no doubt that he touches the nerve of a living belief among the Greeks when he makes Electra in his *Choe-phoroi* (*The Libation-Bearers*) call to her dead father in his tomb:

Be thou the channel of blessings up from thy grave to us,
aided by the gods, by Earth, and by victorious Justice (ll. 147–8).

If, as we believe, the early praise-song was designed to strengthen the living, it could also strengthen the dead.

Many scholars, it should be noted, find it hard to believe that the poems attributed to Taliesin and Aneirin are genuine products of the sixth century, and there are serious difficulties,³ but I have invoked the Welsh evidence because it provides a cor-

¹ *Servius et la Fortune*, 82 ff.

² On hero-worship see S. Czarnowski, *Le Culte des héros et ses conditions sociales* (Paris, 1919); W. K. C. Guthrie, *The Greeks and their Gods* (Boston, 1966), 231 ff.; Jan De Vries, *Heroic Song and Heroic Legend*, 230 ff.

³ David Greene, 'Linguistic Considerations in the Dating of Early Welsh Verse', *Studia Celtica*, vi (1971) 1–11.

rective to the traditional view of the early activities of the *fili*. According to that view, the *fili* was primarily a man of learning: he was an expert in the mysteries of law and religion, he knew the lore of the past and could foretell the future. Indeed, he was as his name suggests, 'a seer',¹ and so 'a knower', for we need not take too spiritual a view of his functions: the early Arabic poet, who was also 'a seer', provided information about such mundane things as when to pitch or break up camp and where to dig for a well.² What the *fili* did not do or did very rarely, according to some scholars, was to compose praise-poetry. This work he left to the *bard*, a minor figure in the Irish poetic hierarchy.³ Later, however, he took upon himself the duties of the *bard* with the result that most of the poems composed between 1250 and 1650 are eulogies. Professor Gerard Murphy sums up at the end of his important article on 'Bards and Filidh':

Under the stress of circumstances the filidh of the end of the twelfth century seem to have turned what had hitherto been a secondary function into a primary function, so that the once neglected praise-poems (originally doubtless considered typical only of bards, or of filidh assuming bardic functions) began to be preserved and held in honour.⁴

I should like to suggest that we are too ready to assume that because the court poet was called *bardos* among the continental Celts he must have been the so-called *bard* in Ireland, and that because the *bard* was overshadowed by the *fili*, the essential

¹ The word *fili* is cognate with W. *gwel-ed* 'to see': Thurneysen, *Heldensage*, i. 66.

² I. Goldziher, *Abhandlungen zur arabischen Philologie* (i. Leiden, 1896), 17-19.

³ e.g. the honour price of a *bard* was half that of a *fili* (Stokes, Windisch, *Irische Texte*, iii. 107); he could not claim anything on the grounds of being a learned man (*Ancient Laws*, iv. 360), and in the *Book of Rights* (ed. O'Donovan [Dublin, 1847], 183; ed. M. Dillon, Irish Texts Society, XLVI [1962], 99) it is expressly stated that he cannot claim what was proper to the *filid*, namely, knowledge about kings and their privileges. Cf. *Éigse*, ii. 202. For the *bard* as a reciter of poetry, i.e. as a *reacaire*, see Bergin, 'Bardic Poetry', 159 n. 4.

⁴ *Éigse*, ii. 207. Cf. E. C. Quiggin, 'Prolegomena', 92, who gives a different view: for him, 'the humbler bard, advancing in dignity, assumed many of the functions of the learned order'. Note that the Arabian poet (*šā'ir*) had his reciter (*rāwī*). Originally the *rāwī* was a student poet to the *šā'ir*: then he became his 'recorder', 'memorizer', and finally his reciter. See C. Lyall, 'Some Aspects of Ancient Arabian Poetry', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, viii (1921), 9-10.

function of the court poet, eulogy, must have been a minor one in early Ireland. We should remember that our knowledge of the continental *bardos* is at best fragmentary—the possibility must not be overlooked that originally he may have been the reciter, not the composer, of court poetry—and it is to be noted that even in Wales it looked at one time as if the court poet would abandon the title *bardd* in favour of *pencerdd*. It is not impossible either that the learning and knowledge on which the early *filid* prided themselves may have been given greater prominence than they had originally, partly because the *filid* inherited the functions of the druids and partly because they had to compete with the ecclesiastical scholars, the *sapientes* mentioned in the Annals. Even Professor Murphy did not deny the evidence that some *filid* composed ‘bardic poetry’ in the early period, but their ‘bardic poems’ appeared to him to be too simple, too devoid of learning to be considered characteristic of their work.¹ However, there can be no doubt that much of the early poetry produced in Ireland has been lost and much of the early court poetry may have been lost precisely because it was too learned, too recondite.

In his collection of fragments of Old Irish Poetry, *Bruchstücke der älteren Lyrik Irlands*,² Kuno Meyer lists 131 pieces of poems which could be regarded as typical products of the court poet, 1–58 under ‘Loblieder’, 59–88 under ‘Spott- und Schmählieder’, 89–131 under ‘Totenklagen’. Even if we have to disregard some of these as spurious or late productions, it is unlikely that most of them fall into that category. Indeed, some of them have all the appearance of authenticity and all the characteristics of the typical product of the court poet. Thus Professor Dillon in his Sir John Rhÿs Lecture quotes one of the praise poems in translation and comments: ‘In form and temper, in purpose, in authorship these Irish encomiums resemble those in the Gupta inscriptions, and it is safe to say that they echo the songs of the Gaulish bards described by Posidonius and Diodorus Siculus.’³

¹ *Éigse*, ii. 204ff.

² K. Meyer, *Bruchstücke der älteren Lyrik Irlands* (Preuss. Akad. der Wissenschaften, Jahrg. 1919. Abhandl. Phil.-hist. Klasse. Nr. 7. Erster Teil. Berlin, 1919).

³ ‘The Archaism of the Irish Tradition’, 262. Murphy, *Éigse*, ii. 205, and Quiggin, ‘Prolegomena’, 99, refer to the poem on Aed, the north Leinster chieftain in Stokes and Strachan, *Thesaurus Palaeohibernicus*, ii (Cambridge, 1903), 295, as an early specimen of bardic poetry, but see *Éigse*, ii. 205 n. 8, on its dating. Professor Binchy is in no doubt that the *filid* were court poets among other things: ‘These *filí* were the custodians of what was called in

One name for a eulogy in Old Irish was *amra*. As we have seen, an *amra* composed on Cú Roi has been preserved: that he was a legendary figure does not deprive it of its value as an example of the genre. Another is the famous *Amra Choluim(b) Chille*,¹ a poem of extraordinary obscurity, which, according to Thurneysen, 'can with certainty be ascribed to the time it says it was composed, namely the death of St. Columcille in the year 597',² and as such the oldest definitely datable work of Irish literature. The language is difficult, perhaps intentionally so, and if the poem is typical of the work of the *fili* in this genre, it is no wonder if many an *amra* has been lost, and it would occasion no surprise to learn that there had been a powerful reaction against their artificial obscurity.

A further proof that the *fili* was the court poet in early Ireland is to be found in the fact that he is traditionally the Irish satirist, for satirizing in the Indo-European tradition is the obverse side of eulogizing. Professor Renou³ has shown that the Vedic root *sams-* can denote an action designed to exercise a baneful effect, a fact reflected in the meaning of Lat. *cens-or*, *cens-us*, and Professor Dumézil⁴ has made brilliant use of the story of Bres in the *Second Battle of Moytura*⁵ to show how the king who does not

Old Irish *senchas*, the ancient lore, the traditions of the race. They had various functions: they had to compose praise-poems for their royal patrons, and also elegies after their death. Some of these court-poems survive: they have been published by Kuno Meyer, and they include some of the oldest Irish in existence. They show, incidentally, that there was a native school of poetry with its own system of metrics before the syllabic metres, which afterwards developed into Dán Díreach, had been taken over from the Latin hymn sequences: hence the study of poetry must have been an old discipline.'—'The Background of Early Irish Literature', *Studia Hibernica*, i. 7-18, 11.

¹ W. Stokes, 'The Bodleian Amra Choluimb Chille', *RC* xx. 31-55, 132-83, 248-80, 400-37; xxi. 133-6; O'Beirne Crowe, *The Amra Choluim Chilli of Dallan Forgaill* (Dublin, 1871). K. Meyer, 'Miscellanea Hibernica', *Univ. of Illinois Studies*, ii. 205, was inclined to agree with Zimmer and accept the traditional dating 'pending a minute linguistic investigation'.

² Binchy, 'The Background of Early Irish Literature', *Studia Hibernica*, i (1961), 18.

³ L. Renou, *Journal asiatique*, ccxxxi (1939), 177-8, quoted by Dumézil, *Idées romaines*, 107.

⁴ *Servius et la Fortune*, 230 ff.

⁵ 'The Second Battle of Moytura', *RC* xii (1891), 52 ff., 306 ff. The quotation is in § 39, p. 71. See also Vernam Hull, 'Cairpre Mac Edaine's Satire upon Bres Mac Eladain', *ZCP* xviii (1930), 63-9; J. Travis, 'A Druidic Prophecy, the first Irish Satire, and a Poem to Raise Blisters', *PMLA* LVII. ii (1942), 912 ff. On the importance of the text of 'The Second Battle of Moytura' for the study of Irish mythology see G. Lehmann, 'Die zweite

provide subsistence for his people, is to be contrasted with the king who provides abundance, and how the former is satirized, the latter eulogized. After Corpre mac Etaine,¹ the poet of the Tuatha Dé had composed a satire, the first of its kind in Ireland, on Bres, 'there was nought save decay on him from that hour'.

There are numerous stories to show the effectiveness of the *fili*'s satire in early times, but satire can only be understood as the counterpart of eulogy. If the latter could establish and strengthen a man's fame and honour, the former could diminish and destroy it, and there have been societies in which life without honour was not only worthless but intolerable. Wilhelm Grönbech in his book on *Kultur und Religion der Germanen* opens his chapter on 'Ehre als die Seele der Sippe' with the words:

Ohne Ehre ist das Leben unmöglich; es ist nicht nur wertlos, sondern läßt sich nicht behaupten. Ein Mann kann nicht mit Schande leben, das bedeutet in der alten Sprache viel mehr als jetzt — dies 'kann nicht' ist dasselbe wie 'ist nicht dazu imstande'. Wie das Leben im Blute wohnt, so wohnt das Leben wirklich in der Ehre: läßt man die Wunde offen, so daß die Ehre unaufhörlich zur Erde sickert, so folgt Ermattung, Dahinsiechen, eine Störung, die sich zu Angst, Verzweiflung, Atemnot, Todeskampf steigert.²

It is at this level that we are to understand the power of the *fili*'s satire.

Both the Welsh *bardd*³ and the Icelandic skald⁴ had the power to satirize to good effect. At the same time, it would be a mistake Schlacht von Mag Tured, und die keltische Götterlehre', *Anthropos*, xxvi (1931), 435 ff.

¹ According to the *Yellow Book of Lecan*, 16b, 28, Cairpre addressed the first panegyric composed in Ireland to Fiachna, son of Delbaeth.

² *Kultur und Religion der Germanen*, i. 114. As Thurneysen pointed out, *Heldensage*, i. 69, one object of satire was to deprive a man of his 'honour', which was conceived as something concrete: it had even a price (Ir. *enechlog*, W. *wynebwerth*). On Germ. 'Ehre' and Gk. 'timé' as tangible things see W. Grönbech, *op. cit.* i. 259; B. Snell, *Poetry and Society* (Indiana U.P., Bloomington, 1961), 14. There are frequent references to the 'reddening of faces' and the 'scorching of cheeks' as the effect of the songs of the poets in the medieval period: see, e.g., *The Book of O'Hara*, Poem 15, § 9, Poem 16, § 20, Poem 34, § 38, although there is obviously here some play on the idea of blushing.

³ The Welsh *pencerdd* was discouraged from satirizing: see G. J. Williams and E. J. Jones, *Gramadegau'r Penceirddiaid* (Caerdydd, 1934), 56-7, but there is a tradition that Rhys Meigen was satirized to death. See Thomas Parry, *Gwaith Dafydd ap Gwilym* (Caerdydd, 1952), lxix.

⁴ For the skald's satires and maledictions see Einarsson, *A History of Icelandic Literature*, 44 ff.; De Vries, *Kelten und Germanen*, 118 f.

to think that satirizing is confined to poets in the Indo-European tradition.¹

One of the most persistent traditions concerning the *filid* is that they made excessive demands on the kings and that no one dared to refuse them anything because of the harm they could do with their satires.² This is reflected in Spenser's words though they refer to a later age and betray an attempt to rationalize the fact, 'None dare displeaseth them [the Bardes] for feare to runne into reproch throughe their offence, and to be made infamous in the mouthes of all men.'³ There can be no doubt that the explanation must be sought in the original functions of the court poet. The fact that the giving and the taking of gifts were parts of a strict ritual in primitive societies⁴ makes it reasonable to assume that in the beginning the *filid* were given gifts as were the Vedic *sūtas* by kings anxious to prove that they could provide subsistence for their people, that later these gifts were regarded as dues and finally as exactions.

IV

We are assuming that the Irish poetic tradition is archaic and we believe that we are justified in doing so on the evidence already adduced in this series of lectures by Professor Myles Dillon⁵

¹ I. Goldziher, *Abhandlungen zur arabischen Philologie* (i. Leiden, 1896), *Über die Vorgeschichte der Higā'-Poésie*, 1-105, studies the Arabic satire which presents interesting parallels to the Irish tradition of satirizing discussed by F. N. Robinson, 'Satirists and Enchanters in early Irish Literature', *Studies in the History of Religions presented to Howell Toy* (New York, 1912), 95-130, and by Howard Meroney, 'Studies in Early Irish Satire', *The Journal of Celtic Studies*, i (1950), 199-226, ii (1953), 59-130.

² The story which best illustrates the excessive demands of the *filid* is *Imthecht na Tromdámne*: see Maud Joynt, *Tromdámh Guaire* (Dublin, 1931), and cf. O. Connellan, *Imtheacht na Tromdhaimhe*; or *The Proceedings of the Great Bardic Institution* (Ossianic Society, v, Dublin, 1860). It is interesting to note that the Arabian poet of the seventh century A.D., Jarwal ibn Aus, surnamed The Dwarf, exploited the fear of satire so much and extorted such large sums of money that Caliph 'Umar found it necessary to imprison him: see Clément Huart, *A History of Arabic Literature* (trans. Lady Mary Loyd, New York, 1903), 45.

³ Edmund Spenser, 'A View of the Present State of Ireland', *The Prose Works* (Baltimore, 1949), 124.

⁴ M. Mauss, *The Gift* (London, 1970). Cf. Binchy, *Celtic and Anglo-Saxon Kingship*, 31.

⁵ 'The Archaism of the Irish Tradition'. Cf. his 'Celt and Hindu', *Vishveshvaranand Indological Journal*, i. ii (September 1963), 1-21.

and Professor Daniel Binchy.¹ Professor Dillon believes that the extraordinary parallel survivals in Ireland and Vedic India are to be explained in the same way as some linguistic phenomena on the principle that 'in isolated or lateral areas of a given territory we find the survival of common archaisms and that innovations spread out from a cultural centre'.² No doubt there is some truth in this, but it should be noted that Ireland and India had something in common apart from their existence in the lateral areas of Indo-Europa, namely their priestly orders. Some of the survivals referred to occur in the language, literature, and institutions of Rome also, and this confirms the suggestion made by Professor Benveniste that the survival of certain Indo-European words and ideas in the sphere of religion and law are to be attributed to the existence of such orders as the Celtic druids, the Roman *fratres Arvales*, the Umbrian *fratres Atiedii*, and the Indian brahmana.³ The druids and brahmana had their organized schools; doubtless the *fratres Arvales* and the *fratres Atiedii* also had some sort of educational system.

Professor Tierney believes that 'it is possible that the statement [by Caesar] that the Druids spent twenty years learning a large number of verses is a transference to them of what was rather true of the Bards'.⁴ This is an interesting suggestion, although the objection to committing the sacred lore of priests to writing is easier to explain than the objection to committing the secular lore of poets,⁵ for it is paralleled by similar scruples regarding the writing of sacred lore among Jews, Moslems, and Hindus. Moreover, exact memorization of the kind demanded by religious traditions could very well take twenty years to accomplish. However, if as Professor Tierney suggests the training of the Celtic bards took the same number of years, we must conclude that they were very tenacious of their poetic lore, and this would explain the conservative character of the Irish *filid* schools before and after they had bifurcated into bardic and brehon schools.

¹ D. A. Binchy, 'The Linguistic and Historical Value of the Irish Law Tracts', Sir John Rhys Memorial Lecture, *Proceedings of the British Academy*, xxix (1943).

² 'Celt and Hindu', 1.

³ Benveniste, *Le Vocabulaire des institutions indo-européennes*, ii. 10.

⁴ Tierney, 'The Celtic Ethnography of Posidonius', 223-4.

⁵ On the interdiction of writing sacred lore see S. Gandz, *The Dawn of Literature, Osiris*, vii (Bruges, 1939), 261 ff., 440; M. Winternitz, *Geschichte der indischen Litteratur*, i. 31. On oral transmission in Ireland see Binchy, 'The Background to Early Irish Literature', *Studia Hibernica*, i (1961), 12.

Professor Binchy has emphasized the extreme conservatism of the Irish jurists and the part played in it by the schools conducted by the brehon families.

By this time [the thirteenth to the fifteenth century] the profession of law, which had always a tendency to become hereditary, was monopolized by certain famous legal families, branches of which were scattered all over the country. Some of these families conducted schools of law, e.g. the celebrated school of the O'Davorens in the Burren, Co. Clare, and from such schools have come all the legal manuscripts which have survived . . . [and] the fundamental convention on which all this written work was based: the fiction of immutability. In the official doctrine of the schools the old received text was like the law of the Medes and Persians, which 'changeth not'.¹

As Dr. J. F. Kenney² saw, one reason for the tendency of professions to become hereditary was their endowment with estates in land, but this was not the only reason. Traditional lore is easily transmitted from father to son, and the family is the prototype of the school, as H. S. Maine indicated in his description of the Hindu brahminic and Irish brehon schools.

Each school was either in its beginning an actual family, or, if originally it was a mere collection of voluntary pupils sitting at the feet of a teacher, it tended to shape itself upon the model of the family, as the only known form of permanent association.³

Thus the Brehon with his pupils constituted not a school in our sense but a true family.⁴

In considering the bardic as distinct from the brehon schools one should also remember that in some cultures it is a common belief that poems and songs of every kind are obtained by bards in their sleep from the spirits of the deceased, usually their relatives.⁵ One is reminded of this as well as of the widespread belief in poetic inspiration by the only full account which we have of an Irish bardic school, that in the *Memoirs of the Right Honourable the Marquis of Clanricarde* (London, 1722; Dublin,

¹ D. A. Binchy, 'Lawyers and Chroniclers', Brian Ó Cuív (ed.), *Seven Centuries of Irish Learning* (Dublin, 1961) 61-2.

² Kenney, *The Sources*, 20.

³ H. J. S. Maine, *Dissertations on Early Law and Custom* (London, 1883), 13.

⁴ H. J. S. Maine, *Lectures on the Early History of Institutions* (London, 1875), 243.

⁵ See A. W. Howitt, 'Notes on Songs and Songmakers of some Australian Tribes', *Journal of the Anthropological Institute*, xvi (1887), 329-34. See also S. Mac Giollarnáth, *Annála Beaga ó Iorrus Aithneach* (Baile Átha Cliath, 1941), 315, where it is said of a certain Irish woman that a voice used to come to her in her sleep and give her songs which she had never heard before.

1744).¹ In it we read that the pupils were required to work at their poems,

each by himself on his own Bed, the whole next Day in the Dark, till at a certain Hour in the Night, Lights being brought in, they committed it to writing.

Apparently this reflects the general custom in Ireland: when he wished to compose a poem, the fully trained poet withdrew to his bed and enclosed himself in darkness.² In Scotland he resorted to a still more complicated process, if we are to believe the rather hostile account in Martin's *Description of the Western Islands of Scotland* (London, 1703), 116.

They shut their Doors and Windows for a Days time, and lie on their Backs with a Stone upon their Belly, and Plads about their Heads, and their Eyes being cover'd they pump their Brains for Rhetorical Encomium or Panegyrick.

There can be no doubt that the ritual described in these accounts had been handed down from ancient times and that it implied a belief that the poet was seeking literal inspiration, perhaps by gods or spirits, perhaps even by the spirits of the dead. That such a belief existed in early times we have already demonstrated, and it could be further confirmed by a detailed examination of the use made of dreams, trances, and invocations of the dead as sources of literature within the Irish tradition.

We do not know to what extent the traditions of the later bardic schools have shaped and distorted our information regarding the earlier educational system of the *filid*, but the conservative character of those traditions makes it probable that there is a great deal of truth in the information we have regarding it. Whereas the *Clanricarde Memoirs* mention six or seven years as the normal period of bardic training, earlier accounts stipulate a longer period, although there is no consensus as to the precise number of years.³ One treatise tells us that the *bard* and *fili* shared the first seven years of training and that the *fili*

¹ The account of the school has been reprinted by O. J. Bergin, 'Bardic Poetry', 156-9, and Kenney, *The Sources*, 36-7. For the author of the account, Thomas O'Sulleavane, see Flower, *The Irish Tradition*, 95, *Catalogue of the Irish MSS. in the British Museum*, iii. 15ff.

² In one poem, Bergin's 'Unpublished Irish Poems', X [*Studies*, ix (1920), 261-3], Fear Flatha Ó Gnímh taunts Fearghal Óg Mac an Bhaird with composing his poems on horseback, not in the conventional way. See T. F. O'Rahilly, *Early Irish History and Mythology*, 325.

³ Thurneysen, 'Mittelirischen Verslehren', *Irische Texte*, iii. 29ff., 110ff.

was instructed for a further period. Apparently, it took twelve years to become a fully qualified ollav.¹ The course provided instruction on the sagas as well as in poetry: indeed, we are told how many tales every grade of pupil had to learn.² Theoretically there were special metres for the *fili* and he could claim greater rewards for poems in some metres than for poems in others. In the early period the *fili* tended to despise the *bairdne* metres as *nuachrutha* or *óig-recta*, but he made them his own at a later stage.³ Perhaps it was during his last years of training that he was introduced to those metres which were regarded as proper to his art, and to the arts of sorcery and magic, to such rites as *teinm laída*,⁴ *díchetal do chennaib*,⁵ *immus for-osnai*, *tairbfheis*,⁶ such curses as *gaire*,⁷ and such benedictions as *cétnad n-áise*.⁸

The fully trained *fili* or ollav in olden times had the outer emblems of his dignified office. He could wear a peculiar dress, partly or wholly made of feathers. He had a right to an escort of thirty men. Attached to a court, he could claim a special chair (*cathair ollaman*). He usually followed his father into the profession, sometimes after competition. Thus in *The Contention of the Two Sages* we are told how Néde, the son of the ollav Adna, went to claim his father's ollav-chair and had to compete with Ferchertne for it.⁹ Both resorted to their prophetic gifts, and in the end Néde had to concede that Ferchertne was superior to him. The language they used—and the *filid* specialized in an obscure language called *Bélre na Filed*¹⁰—was so

¹ See 'Leabhar Ollamhan' in *The Book of Ballymote*; E. O'Curry, *On the Manners and Customs of the Ancient Irish* (London, 1873), ii. 171 ff.

² Thurneysen, *Irische Texte*, iii. 31 ff., *Heldensage*, i. 67.

³ When a *bard* used one of the *bairdne* metres he could not claim a fixed price, but when the same metre was used *tar firdligud na h-ecsi* according to the true principle of science, i.e. by a *fili*, there was a fixed price. Cf. Thurneysen, *Irische Texte*, iii. 23, 109. Thurneysen points out that the metrical texts do not preserve the memory of a separate metrical system for *fili* and *bard*, *ibid.* 167.

⁴ T. F. O'Rahilly, *Early Irish History and Mythology*, 337-9; Bergin, 'Bardic Poetry', 162-3.

⁵ O'Rahilly, *op. cit.* 340.

⁶ O'Rahilly, *op. cit.* 323-4; Thurneysen, *Heldensage*, i. 421; O'Curry, *Manners and Customs*, ii. 199. Cf. also the druidic custom described by Keating, *Foras Feasa ar Éirinn*, ii (Irish Texts Society, VIII, 1905), 348-50.

⁷ E. O'Curry, *Manners and Customs*, ii. 217.

⁸ *Irische Texte*, iii. 53 f. Cf. K. Meyer, *Learning in Ireland in the Fifth Century* (Dublin, 1913), 16 ff.; R. I. Best, 'Some Irish Charms', *Ériu*, xxi (1952), 27-32.

⁹ 'Immacallam in dá thuarad', *RC* xxvi. 9, § 2; 51 §§ 272, 273.

¹⁰ For *Bélre na Filed* see *ŹCP* v. 482 ff., viii. 557. Cf. *ségantus briathar*, 'Erchoitmed Ingeine Gulidi', K. Meyer, *Hibernica Minora* (Oxford, 1894), 65-9.

difficult that from that day on, we are told, it was decided to separate the office of brehon from that of *fili*.¹

It is more than probable that the early *filid* schools were supported by the kings. According to the *Clanricarde Memoirs* the pupils at bardic schools were entertained 'every Saturday and on the Eves of Festival Days' by the gentlemen and the farmers of the locality who also furnished them with provisions during their stay at school 'so that the chief Poet was at little or no Charges, but, on the contrary, got very well by it'.² This tradition of hospitality was probably the remnant of another, of hospitality provided by the king of the district.³ Fear Feasa ón Cháinte describes how the students at the Ó Dálaigh bardic school called on Ó Caoimh and received presents from him at the beginning of the session.⁴ In another poem a teacher-poet, probably one of the Í Uiginn, describes a visit paid by him and his pupils to a castle and the welcome they received there from the lady.⁵

It is possible, as we have suggested, that the picture we have of the early *filid* and their schools is not a true one: the line between fact and fiction was not drawn very clearly by early Irish historians.⁶ For all that, there can be no doubt that the *filid* and the schools which produced them—they cannot be dissociated—played an important part in the cultural life of the country.

After St. Patrick had come to Ireland, we are told, public utterance was allowed to only three, to the historian to recount events and to tell stories, to the *fili* to eulogize and to satirize, and to the brehon to deliver judgement.⁷ In other words, these three public officials, if indeed they were three and not one, acting in three capacities, were able to retain their posts, and it is no doubt due to them in part that the native culture was not suppressed. The story of Cenn Faelad shows how they succeeded in taking advantage of some of the new techniques

¹ *RC* xxvi. 6.

² Bergin, 'Bardic Poetry', 157.

³ For a tradition connecting the bardic school with the king of the region see O'Curry, *Lectures on the Manuscript Materials of Ancient Irish History* (Dublin, 1861), 462, *Ancient Laws*, i. 43.

⁴ Fear Feasa ón Cháinte, 'Bean dá chumhadh críoch Ealla', L. McKenna, *Dioghluim Dána* (Baile Átha Cliath, 1938, 1969), Poem 73, §§ 15–17.

⁵ McKenna, *Aith-Dioghluim Dána*, i, Poem 1, § 33.

⁶ Brian Ó Cuiv, 'Literary Creation and Irish Historical Tradition', Sir John Rhŷs Memorial Lecture, *Proceedings of the British Academy*, xlix (1963).

⁷ *Ancient Laws*, i. 18.

introduced by the Church,¹ and the first Irish manuscript of which we know something, *Cín Dromma Snechtai*,² shows how they were able either to use those techniques themselves or to get others to use them on their behalf. They probably encountered more than a little opposition from some ecclesiastics, but there were others who supported them strongly. Some of these supporters had once been *filid* or pupils of *filid* themselves, like Colum Cille, or Fiacc who, when it was suggested to him that his old master Dubthach, 'chief poet of Ireland', might follow him and be ordained, exclaimed: 'That is folly, for there is not a poet in Ireland who is his equal.' ('Esbach sin', arse, 'ar ni fil in Herinn filid a lethet.')³

Later, in the Middle Ages, they enlarged their field of interest. Not only did they study their language to produce a prescriptive poetic grammar⁴ but they also succeeded in evolving a standard literary language which was used throughout Ireland and Gaelic Scotland for more than four centuries virtually unchanged.⁵ Not only were they authorities on all kinds of native learning, the legendary and historical as well as the poetic lore,⁶ but they also absorbed a great deal of the Latin culture of the period with the result that their poems are

¹ On Cern Faelad see E. Mac Neill, *Early Irish Laws and Institutions* (Dublin, n.d.), 84ff. Professor Binchy thinks that the legend about Cern Faelad 'like so many other legends, has a basis of fact'.—'The Background to Early Irish Literature', *Studia Hibernica*, i (1961), 17.

² Thurneysen, *Heldensage*, i. 15ff.; also, *Zu irischen Handschriften und Literaturdenkmälern* (Berlin), i. 23ff. Thurneysen believed that the manuscript was written by a *fili* in the first half of the eighth century and mostly from manuscript material.

³ 'Fiacc's Hymn', Stokes and Strachan, *Thesaurus Palaeohibernicus*, ii. 307. Cf. Kathleen Hughes, *Studia Celtica*, v. 48, where it is said: 'Some of the canons of the *Collectio Canonum Hibernensis* are closely related to rulings of the secular law, so that one wonders if the church canonists included men who had received a training in the legal schools.'

⁴ O. J. Bergin, 'The Native Irish Grammarian', Sir John Rhys Memorial Lecture, *Proceedings of the British Academy*, xxiv (1938), 205–35.

⁵ Bergin, 'The Native Irish Grammarian', 208 ff., 'Bardic Poetry', 203–4. Knott, *Tadhg Dall Ó Huiginn*, i, p. xxxviii; Quiggin, 'Prolegomena', 101, n. 7. I know of no better analogue to the successful conservatism of the Irish bardic schools than that of the Arabian poetic school described by I. Goldziher, *Abhandlungen zur arabischen Philologie*, 122 ff.

⁶ Keating, *Foras Feasa ar Éirinn* (Irish Texts Society, IV, 1901), i. 80, has a point, although he makes too much of it, when he says that 'the historical record of Ireland should be considered as authoritative, the rather that there were over two hundred professors of history, keeping the ancient record of Ireland . . .'.

studded with apologues drawn from continental as well as from native literature.¹ In addition they showed that they could absorb foreign influences into their traditional art: of this their religious and especially their love-poetry, their *Dánta Grádha*,² give ample testimony. It is no wonder that one of their great admirers, Dr. Robin Flower, said of them

They correspond in a way to the University men, but their fixed place in society was higher than any that his attainments alone have ever been able to secure for the University man in England. They were, indeed, until the fall of the old Irish order an intellectual aristocracy, with all the privileges and no doubt, many of the prejudices of a caste.³

A caste they certainly were, a caste of court poets.

V

The connection between the Irish court poet and the king goes back to the coming of the Celts to Ireland, indeed they must have been connected on the Continent before the Celts could be distinguished from the other Indo-Europeans,⁴ and from the beginning the poet must have enjoyed special privileges with regard to the sovereign. In Ireland, according to one text, he had the same honour-price as the tribal king (*rí tuaithe*), a fact which is as eloquent as any to his outstanding importance in early Irish society.⁵

¹ Quiggin, 'Prolegomena', 33 ff.; L. McKenna, *Aonghus Ó Dálaigh*, p. viii; Dillon, in Watt, Morrall, Martin (eds.), *Medieval Studies Presented to Aubrey Gwynn, S.J.* (Dublin, 1961), 186–202. In a way all the poems in the *Contention of the Bards* are a display of learning, but see especially vol. i, Poem XV, § 137, XVIII, §§ 20, 31. Cf. *Tadhg Dall Ó Huiginn*, i and ii, Poems 4, 9, 39.

² T. F. O'Rahilly, *Dánta Grádha* (Dublin, Cork, 1926). See also S. Ó Tuama, *An Grá in Amhráin na nDaoine* (Baile Átha Cliath, 1960).

³ Op. cit. xii.

⁴ J. Vendryes, *Choix d'études*, 210, 'La tradition poétique qui relie le celtique insulaire au celtique de Gaule est bien moins un fait de langue qu'un fait de civilisation. Elle s'est maintenue parce qu'elle représentait une institution sociale. Cette institution est celle des poètes de cour.' Cf. H. H. Schaeder, 'Auf den Spuren indogermanischer Dichtung', R. Schmitt (ed.), *Indogermanische Dichtersprache* (Darmstadt, 1968), 72–82, 75, 'Auch den Sänger und Dichter von Beruf, der als Rhapsode an den Adelshofen des homerischen Griechenlands, als brahmanischer Opferdichter in der Nähe des altindischen Fürsten, als Skop und Skalde an den Höfen Englands, Irlands und Norwegens erscheint, gab es schon im indogermanischen Altertum.'

⁵ *Ancient Laws*, v. 102, 112; Thurneysen, *Heldensage*, i. 69; Binchy, *Celtic and Anglo-Saxon Kingship*, 21 (but cf. 17).

Perhaps his functions were such that he could not help being the court historian as well as the court poet. As Duaid Mac Fírbis expresses it,

The historians of Erin in the ancient times will scarcely be distinguished from the *feinidh* [storytellers], and from those who are now called *aes-dána* [poets], for it was often at one school they were all educated.¹

As court poet and historian the *fili* would be required to know all the royal genealogies: a king succeeded to the throne partly by heredity. It was both as historian and as brehon that he was required to know the prerogatives and prohibitions of each king: indeed, he was expected, it appears, to be able to repeat the whole statement from memory, 'so that he will recount them all in every high assembly'.²

Perhaps the one occasion in the king's life on which the *fili* would take a very prominent, if not the most prominent, part in ancient times would be his inauguration to the kingship. Unfortunately, our information concerning inaugurations is scanty, and we know that they varied from region to region.

At the coronation ceremony of the last king of the direct Irish line in Scotland, Alexander III,

The ceremony was performed by the bishop of St. Andrews, who girded the king with a military belt. He then explained in Latin, and afterwards in Gaelic, the laws and oaths relating to the king. . . . After the ceremony was performed, a Highlander repeated on his knees before the throne, in his own language, the genealogy of Alexander and his ancestors, up to the first king of Scotland.³

This was in 1249. We should have liked to have an account of the inauguration of that first king of Scotland: we can be sure that the part played by the Highlander would have been much greater and would have given us an idea of the part played by the *fili* in inaugurations in earlier times. Even as it stands, the description suggests why the *fílid* wrote so many genealogical poems and why such poems were considered to be important.⁴

¹ Quoted in E. O'Curry, *MS. Materials*, 220. Note, however, that the 'historian' is described as the 'tanist' of the master of letters, i.e. as the second in rank to the master, *Ancient Laws*, v. 102. Cf. Derick S. Thomson, 'Gaelic Learned Orders and Literati in Medieval Scotland', *Scottish Studies*, xii (1968), 57 ff., 71.

² Dillon, *Lebor na Cert* (Irish Texts Society, XLVI [1962]), 123, cf. 43, 99, 115, 121.

³ Eoin Mac Neill, *Phases of Irish History* (Dublin, Sydney, 1968), 210.

⁴ On genealogical poetry see De Vries, *Altnordische Literaturgeschichte*, i. 15-16. For the genealogical poem by Thjodolf called *Ynglingatal* see *ibid.*

At the inauguration of the Ó Dubhda the poet Mac Firbis had an important part.

The privilege of the first drink (at all assemblies) was given to *O'Caomhain* by O'Dowda, and *O'Caomhain* was not to drink until he first presented it (the drink) to the poet, that is, to Mac Firbis; also the arms and battle steed of O'Dowda, after his proclamation, were given to *O'Caomhain*, and the arms and dress of *O'Caomhain* to Mac Firbis, and it is not competent ever to call him the O'Dowda until *O'Caomhain* and Mac Firbis have first called the name, and until Mac Firbis carries the body of the wand over O'Dowda; and every clergyman, and every representative of a church, and every bishop, and every chief of a territory present, all are to pronounce the name after *O'Caomhain* and Mac Firbis.¹

The wand referred to is the white rod of sovereignty given in token of sovereignty in the usual form of inauguration. Mac Firbis was obviously ollav to Ó Dubhda. However, we are not to assume that Mac Firbis was the only *fili* present. Inauguration was the occasion on which other *filid* would wish to press their claims for attention on the new chieftain, the occasion for the writing of an inauguration ode and for presenting it through a *reacaire* or a *bard* at the court.² Thus on the death of his father in 1432 Eoghan Ó Néill went to Tulach Óg 'and was crowned on the flag-stone of the kings there by the will of God and men, bishops and ollams'.³ We can be confident that after the feast that night Ó Néill's court rang with the chanting of many an ode to the accompaniment of the harp and that next morning care would be taken to have the odes inscribed in the family *duanaire* and, of course, to reward their composers.⁴

i. 96–101, A. Heusler, *Die altgermanische Dichtung*, 93–4. Genealogies and popular tales were the source of later historiography. With the genealogies of the Hebrew Patriarchs went, as usual, their histories and tales. Hence the term 'toledot' which originally denoted 'genealogies' assumed also the meaning of 'stories and accounts about the origin of a nation'. For an example of an Irish versified pedigree see *Tadhg Dall Ó Huiginn*, i and ii, Poem 32.

¹ O'Curry, *MS. Materials*, 126, 542; J. O'Donovan, *The Genealogies, Tribes, and Customs of Hy Fiachrach* (Dublin, 1844), 425.

² On the parts played by the reciter (*reacaire*) and the harpist (*cruitire*) see Thomas Smyth, *Information for Ireland*, printed in *The Ulster Journal of Archaeology*, vi. 165–7; Quiggin, 'Prolegomena', 108–9; J. F. Kenney, *The Sources*, 30–1.

³ *Annals of Ulster*, iii. 119.

⁴ See Gerard Murphy on Giolla Brighde Mac Con Midhe's inauguration ode to Domhnall Óg son of Domhnall Mór Ó Domhnaill in *Glimpses of Gaelic Ireland*, 37–48 (cf. O'Grady, *Cat.* i. 350–1) and Myles Dillon on 'The

It is probable that detailed descriptions of the early inauguration rites have been suppressed because of their heathen character. Giraldus Cambrensis describes an inauguration rite in Tyrconnell

He who is to be inaugurated, not as a chief, but as a beast, not as a king, but as an outlaw, embraces the animal (i.e. the white mare) before all, professing himself to be a beast also. The mare is then killed immediately, cut up in pieces, and boiled in water. A bath is prepared for the man afterwards in the same water. He sits in the bath surrounded by all his people, and all, he and they, eat of the meat of the mare which is brought to them.¹

It was thought that we owed this description to Giraldus's fertile imagination until Professor Schröder published an account of a similar rite among the Hindus.² It is, of course, a description of a fertility rite, an aspect of perhaps the one and only constant feature of the inauguration ceremonies, namely the symbolic marriage of the king to his land.³

All the great Irish festivals owe their origin to this ritual. Thus the Feast of Tara was originally a ritual marriage between the king of Tara and the goddess Medb.⁴ There were similar feasts at Emain and Cruachu. And as late an inauguration as that of Feidhlimidh Ó Conchobhair in 1310 is described as the 'marriage of Feidhlimidh . . . to the province of Connacht', with the comment that 'this was the most splendid kingship-marriage ever celebrated in Connacht down to that day'.⁵

Inauguration of O'Conor' in *Medieval Studies presented to Aubrey Gwynn*, 186–202. Dillon concludes that Torna Ó Maol Chonaire (*ob.* 1468) on the occasion of one Feidhlimidh assuming the title of O'Conor wrote an ode on the inauguration of an illustrious predecessor and namesake which took place in 1310.

¹ Giraldus Cambrensis, *Topographia Hibernica*, c. xxv, Rolls, ed. J. F. Dimock (London, 1867) p. 169. The English translation is taken from J. J. O'Meara, *The Topography of Ireland by Giraldus Cambrensis* (Dundalk, 1951), 94; the chapter is annotated on p. 117.

² F. R. Schröder, 'Ein altirischer Krönungsritus und das indogermanische Roßopfer', *ZCP* xvi. 310–12, cf. Pokorny, *ibid.* 123.

³ O'Rahilly, *Ériu*, xiv (1946), 14–21; Maartje Draak, 'Some Aspects of Kingship in Pagan Ireland', *The Sacral Kingship* (Leiden, 1959), 651–63; P. Mac Cana, 'Aspects of the Theme of King and Goddess in Irish Literature', *Études celtiques*, vii. 76–114, 356–413.

⁴ Binchy, 'The Fair of Tailtiu and the Feast of Tara', *Ériu*, xviii (1958), 113–38.

⁵ See Dillon, 'The Inauguration of O'Conor', 186. The Four Masters tell us that Ó Fearghail died in 1475 after his kingship wedding feast had

Royal succession was partly by kin-right, partly by election. When a new king was inaugurated, his successor (*tánaise*) was named, 'selected by agreement between the new king and all the *rigdomnai* who were themselves eligible for the office'¹ with the choice subsequently ratified by acclamation in the assembly of notables. At some point there was the rite which symbolized the marriage of the king to the local earth-goddess, and in the background the belief that only under the righteous rule of a rightful king would the land prosper, a belief originally implicit in the eulogies of the *filid*.

Presented with these facts one would dearly like to find in the promotion of a candidate to kingship in Ireland an analogue to the promotion of Pr̥thu to kingship in Vedic India—with the three acts, designation by the gods, recognition by the wise men, acceptance by the people, accompanied by the eulogies of the bards and the presentation of gifts. Unfortunately, but perhaps not unexpectedly, the analogue is not complete. However, there are a few common constituents, election to kingship, fertility springing from the marriage of the king to the local earth-goddess, the eulogies, and, of course, the gifts.

As long ago as 1947 Professor Myles Dillon drew the attention of scholars to the 'Act of Truth' in Irish tradition.² Although he himself was content to trace the Hindu 'Act of Truth' to the Hindu's belief that the 'truth was the highest power, the ultimate cause of all being', he gave Burlingame's definition of the Act as 'a formal declaration of fact accompanied by a command or resolution or prayer that the purpose of the agent shall be accomplished', and Brown's statement 'that in many instances the basis of the Act of Truth is the fulfilment of one's station in life. Someone recites the performance of a duty, and the true statement is potent: it is a blend of truth and justice.' Perhaps Brown's statement does not cover all cases of the invocation of the Act of Truth in Hindu and Irish tradition, but it should be borne in mind in any consideration of the *Sitz im Leben* of such texts as *Auraiccept Moraínd*,³ one, perhaps the oldest, of the Irish

been prepared *iar ndéanamh bainnsi a thaisighechta* but before he could participate of it, *AFM* s.a. See also *The Works of Edmund Spenser: The Prose Works* (Baltimore, 1949), 50–2, for a contemporary account.

¹ Binchy, *Celtic and Anglo-Saxon Kingship*, 29.

² Dillon, 'The Hindu Act of Truth in Celtic Tradition', *Modern Philology*, xlv (1947), 137–40.

³ Thurneysen, 'Morands Fürstenspiegel', *ZCP* xi (1917), 56–106. See also

collections of 'Instructions to a Prince', and it seems natural to believe that the words of the *Auraiccept* were not only composed by a *filí* in the service of a king but also recited by him on the appropriate occasion, perhaps on the most appropriate of all occasions, on the king's inauguration.

Let him magnify Truth, it will magnify him.
Let him strengthen Truth, it will strengthen him . . .

The text continues:

By the prince's truth (*fír flathemon*) fair weather comes in each fitting season, winter fine and frosty, spring dry and windy, summer warm with showers of rain, autumn with heavy dews and fruitful. For it is the prince's falsehood (*gó flatha*) that brings perverse weather upon wicked people, and dries up the fruit of the earth.

The *filid* may have been influenced by their learning, their knowledge of *fír flathemon* and *gáu flathemon*, but throughout the Middle Ages they do not cease to give expression to the belief that the righteous rule of the rightful sovereign increases the prosperity of the land and that his death diminishes it. Thus Lughaidh Ó Cléirigh in the seventeenth century declares of three kings,

These three had the most glorious reigns. Not far did they outstep the bonds of right. They preserved the rights of the ancients and their rights to rule in the place of their fathers. For them the land was most fruitful in riches of earth and waves. The corn and the fruit proved that it was by right they got their power.¹

And Tadhg Dall Ó Huiginn in the sixteenth century announces:

On the day he died he took with him the fish from the (water by the) bright warm strand. . . . When Ó hEadhra had died, corn ceased to spring from the land, rivers burst their banks, fruit vanished from the vine.²

Binchy, op. cit. 9-10, who says that the earliest recension is clearly 'pre-Christian'. Cf. *ibid.* 48 n. 18, 'the "B" Recension (pp. 91-8) which Thurneysen believed to be the later and left untranslated, is in reality the older: cf. *ibid.* (= *ZCP*) xiii. 43 ff., 298 ff. It contains more archaic forms than the "A" Recension, and its content shows no trace of Christian influence. See *Ériu*, xx (1966), 3 f.' I quote from Dillon's translation of Recension A, *Modern Philology*, xlv. 138-9.

¹ L. McKenna, *Iomarbhágh na bhFileadh* (Irish Texts Society, XX, XXI), Poem VI, §§ 179, 180, cf. §§ 67, 74.

² L. McKenna, *The Book of O'Hara*, Poem 29, §§ 42, 43.

We are reminded of Odysseus' description of the perfect king, ruling a populous and mighty state with the fear of god in his heart, and upholding the right, so that the dark soil yields its wheat and barley, the trees are laden with ripe fruit, the sheep never fail to bring forth their lambs, nor the sea to provide its fish—all as a result of his good government—and his people prosper under him.¹

Unfortunately, it was not Ireland's lot to experience such prosperity for any appreciable length of time in the Middle Ages. Indeed there seems to have been a consciousness that there were mysterious obstacles in the way of every chieftain, and several poems give praise to them for overcoming a monster, an *aitheach*, a *peist*, or a *bodhbh* which lives in a cave or under the sea. Thus in one poem the chieftain is told

wounded by your sword . . . shedding blood copiously, a monster flees, swiftly as a bird, leaping from a cave with a single opening.²

The monster is vanquished and the hero gains possession of its goblets. The contest with the monster, one presumes, stands for the other battles which the Irish chief had to win before he could achieve his goal.³

In many of the eulogies there are large sections dealing with the 'battle exploits', the *caithréim* of their subjects.⁴ It is true that some of these are somewhat vague in detail, but for the most part this was not because the battle exploits were unreal but because the poets were loath to mention victories over chieftains on whose goodwill they might later have to depend.

In many of the poems there is incitement to battle couched sometimes in covert, sometimes in overt terms.⁵ The hero is told not to rest on laurels which he has already won but to be bold and ambitious. The prize which is set before him is the elusive 'high-kingship' of Ireland and the glory of driving the foreigners out of the land.⁶

¹ *Odyssey*, xix. 110. Ammianus Marcellinus, xxviii. 5. 14, reports that the kings of Burgundy were deposed when there was famine in the land.

² Carney, *Poems on the O'Reillys*, Poem 1, § 28, cf. notes on p. 185, also Poem 22.

³ *Leabhar Branach*, 347 n. on line 733.

⁴ For examples of the *caithréim* see L. McKenna, *Aith-Dioghluim Dána*, i (Irish Texts Society, XXXVII [1935], 1939), Poems 37, §§ 35-6; 38, §§ 28-39; 39, §§ 27-42; 40, §§ 28-42, *Leabhar Branach*, Poems 7, 18.

⁵ For one of the best known poems of incitement, beginning 'Dia libh, a laochraidh Gaoidhiol', by Aonghus Mac Doighri Í Dálaigh, see *Leabhar Branach*, Poem 35.

⁶ *Aith-Dioghluim Dána*, i, Poems 16, 17 (the poet advises Enrí, son of Eoghan Ó Néill, to make sure of the complete submission of the North, i.e.

One must not think that these poets were never motivated by self interest. On the contrary, they knew that they were open to censure and at times they could be frankly cynical. They admitted that in poems for the English they promised that the Gael would be banished from Ireland, and in poems for the Gael they promised that the foreigners would be hunted across the sea.¹ But, as another poet said, the land of Ireland was ever sword-land,² land conquered by the sword, and this was possibly truer than he thought, for local warfare was endemic to the condition of the country.

One could adduce several reasons.

First, the mode of succession to the kingship. This was partly by kin-right, partly by election. As Professor Binchy has explained, there were always men within the *derbfine* and later the vaguer *sliocht* for whom the temptation to resort to force to assert their claim to the succession was always strong, and often too strong to resist.³

Secondly, the nature of the social bonds. The allegiance which the 'king' (*rí*) gave to the over-king (*ruirí*) and the allegiance which the 'over-king' gave to the 'king of over-kings' (*rí ruirech*) were purely personal, and once one of these was abrogated, the suzerain had no redress but to invade the territory of the abrogator and to take a *crech* 'a prey' of sufficient stock to compensate him for the loss of fealty.⁴

Thirdly, the invasions. The 'old order' passed away under the impact of the Norse invasions.⁵ The almost ritual pattern of previous wars, inter-tribal and inter-provincial alike, was succeeded by that of the invaders, the pattern of 'total war'. Brian Boru defeated the Norsemen but failed to establish a national monarchy. His legacy, the idea of 'high kingship', as we have seen, became an important factor in Irish politics. Later, the Anglo-Normans failed in their design of conquest with the result

of all the Í Néill, before he starts forth on his struggle for the High-Kingship), Poems 26, 28, 30.

¹ See the poem of Gofraidh Fionn Ó Dálaigh printed in *Irish Monthly*, September 1919, 513. (The English [*Gall*] here, of course, are Irish chieftains of English extraction.) Cf. Knott, *Tadhg Dall Ó Huiginn*, i, p. xlvii.

² 'Fearann cloidhimh críoch Bhanbha, | bíoth slán cháich fa chomhardha | go bhfuil d'oighreacht ar Fhiadh bhFáil | acht foirneart gliadh dá gabháil'. Knott, *Tadhg Dall Ó Huiginn*, i, Poem 17, § 1. On 'sword-land', see Binchy, *Celtic and Anglo-Saxon Kingship*, 36.

³ Binchy, *op. cit.* 25-6.

⁴ Binchy, *op. cit.* 31-2.

⁵ Binchy, 'The Passing of the Old Order', *Proceedings of the International Congress of Celtic Studies*, 1959 (Dublin, 1962), 119-32.

that there was stalemate between the old and the new chieftains. This was admitted by the Statutes of Kilkenny but it was admitted in such a way as to make the union of the two races impossible: from then on the Irish were always the 'King's Irish enemies', the English, however rebellious, the 'King's English lieges'.¹

There were, of course, other reasons why local warfare was chronic in medieval Ireland, and other reasons which made it necessary for the Irish king or chieftain to perform his traditional function of being leader in war and to assume personal responsibility for the well-being of his people long after other kings and chieftains had ceased to do so.

Every Iryshe captaine defendeyth all the subgetes and the comyn folke, wythin his rome (realm) fro ther enymyes asmuche as in hym is.² And they not only defended them but tried to provide for them.

To rob and spoile their enimies they deeme it none offense, nor seeke anie meanes to recover their losse but even to watch the like turne.³

That this is true is proved by the numerous references to reiving which are found. Thus when he died in 1458 the Four Masters report of Calbhach Ó Conchobhair, lord of Offaly and the husband of the Margaret who entertained so lavishly twice in 1433, that he was one 'who never refused the countenance of man, and who had won more wealth from his English and Irish enemies than any lord in Leinster'.⁴

There are frequent references, also, to the generous way in which the Irish chieftains distributed their booty. The court poets were among the beneficiaries. However, it must not be forgotten that they and their chieftains were also victims of counter-raids. Indeed, the court poets were too closely connected with their chieftains to escape sharing their fate, and as their companions and counsellors in peace and war,⁵ if not actually as their 'Prime Ministers', as Eochaidh Ó hEoghusa

¹ E. Curtius, *A History of Ireland* (London, 1960), 116.

² State Papers, Henry VIII, vol. ii, part iiiA. 17.

³ R. Holinshed, *Chronicles* (ed. 1583), p. 45. 2, quoted in S. H. O'Grady, *Silva Gadelica*, i (1892), xxiii. See *Leabhar Branach*, Poem IV, where the subject is praised for his hospitality and his success as a reiver. On the entertainment which followed such reivings see Knott, *Tadhg Dall Ó Huiginn*, i, Intro. p. xii.

⁴ *AFM* iv, s.a. 1458.

⁵ Tadhg Óg Ó hUiginn, *Aith-Dioghluim Dána*, i, Poem 7, describes how the poet accompanied his patron on a raid. Eoghaidh Ó hEoghusa regretted that he could not accompany his patron Cúchonnacht Óg on a campaign: see O'Grady, *Cat.* 453 on the poem in Egerton III, f. 108b, col. 1.

would claim, they were the special targets of punitive raids by the English authorities. Thus, in 1415 Lord Justice Talbot (Lord Furnivall) organized raids against Diarmaid Ó Dálaigh, Dubhthach Mac Eochaidh Eolaigh, and Muirgheas Ó Dálaigh.¹ Again, in 1579, Sir Henry Harrington was appointed 'seneschal' in charge of the O Byrne country and other districts. Among his duties it was ordered that:

He shall make proclamation that no idle person, vagabond or masterless man, *bard, rymor, or other notorious malefactor*, remain within the district on pain of whipping after eight days, and of *death* after twenty days.²

However, to return to the point we are making, the state of affairs which we have been describing was not confined to the land under the rule of the Irish chieftains. It was also the lot of the land ruled by the English chieftains.

Also, there is more than 30 greate captaines of thEnglyshe noble folke, that folowyth the same Iryshe ordre, and kepeith the same rule, and every of them makeith warre and pease for hymself, without any lycence of the King, or of such that maye subdue them by the swerde.³

It may be, as Miss Knott informs us, that 'down to the end of the 16th century, to go no further, there was always peace somewhere'⁴ in Ireland, but, surely, the state of the country was such that there is more than a little truth in Quiggin's observation that 'an archaic type of society lingered on over the greater part of the island until the beginning of the seventeenth century'.⁵ There were not many countries in western Europe in the sixteenth century where a court poet would eulogize his patron in these words,

Béim san mbéim is goin san ghoin
tugadh go fóill ré Fiachaidh;
beag do-chím d'iomarcaidh air
a ttír iongantaigh Fhionntain.

¹ *AFM* iv, s.a. 1415. Cf. s.a. 1572.

² Quoted by P. Walsh, *Gleanings from Irish Manuscripts*² (Dublin, 1933), 186. Cf. the account of the commission given to Gerald the Earl of Kildare and Piers fitz James of Ballysonnon, *ibid.* 186. The attitude of the English Government is succinctly put in the following note, 'Bards.—All their poetries tending to the furtherance of vice and the hurt of the English'—*Cal. S. P. Ireland* (1509–73), 101. For further information on the persecution of the Irish literati see T. F. O'Rahilly, 'Irish Poets, Historians, and Judges in English Documents, 1538–1615', *Proceedings Royal Irish Academy*, xxxvi (1922), C. 86–120, and for the effects of these persecutions on individuals see J. F. Kenney, *Sources*, i. 31–2.

³ S. P. Henry VIII, vol. ii, part iiiA, 6.

⁴ Knott, *Tadhg Dall Ó Huiginn*, i, Intro. p. xxxiii.

⁵ Quiggin, 'Prolegomena', 98.

Cath san chath is bó san mboin,
 creach san chreich a gcairt Fhiachaidh,
 giall san ghiall (ní fios falaigh)
 ó gach lios d'Fhiadh Fhearadhaigh.

Stroke for stroke and wound for wound have for a time now been returned by Fiach; in this respect I see but few arrears accumulated against him in the wondrous land of Fintan. Battle for battle, and cow for cow, and prey for prey stands in Fiach's record; with captive for captive ('tis no prejudiced assertion) from every liss in Feradach's domain.¹

Indeed when one considers that the conditions in which the Irish chieftain soldiered have been described as among the worst in Europe,² one can only add that he deserved his court poet as much if not more than Alcinous and Odysseus.

However, this state of affairs could not endure. The question to be decided was what was the fate in store for the country as a whole, the fate that would envelop all the petty domains and their chieftains.

The court poets had their own fears and hopes.

Somewhat complacently in the earlier poems, with a hint of urgency and poignancy in the later poems, the poets describe the little domains individually, and the country as a whole, sometimes as a young maiden seeking a suitable mate, at other times as a widow who has lost her spouse.³ Thus in a poem addressed to Tadhg Buidhe in the *Book of O'Hara* the poet begins 'Look, O Christ, on the Land of Luighne', and further on proceeds

This poor widow, this wondrous white land
 whose shore lies smooth and unstirred, has
 experienced misery beyond any land—the
 juster it therefore is to soothe her sorrow.⁴

The 'deliverer' is referred to as 'the Prophesied One'. Thus in one of the poems in *Leabhar Branach* Fiachaidh is first seen as a moon rising in the east which will release the O'Byrnes from a servitude resembling that imposed by Balar and then as the Prophesied One who is destined to rid Ireland of foreigners.⁵

¹ *Leabhar Branach*, Poem 23, §§ 33, 34; O'Grady, *Cat.*, 501. In *The Book of O'Hara*, Poem 24, § 15, we are told that the patron had spent his time feeding ravens and reddening weapons and battling in wet weather.

² O'Grady, *Cat.* 452 n. 1.

³ For 'Éire' as a spouse see the poem by Gófráidh Fionn Ó Dálaigh, 'Fuirigh go fóill, a Éire', L. McKenna, *Dioghluim Dána*, Poem 97.

⁴ *The Book of O'Hara*, Poem 1. See §§ 1, 12.

⁵ *Leabhar Branach*, Poem 32. In Poem 23 Fiachaidh is the 'Prophesied One' referred to by St. Brigid and Brógán.

Finally, when the Irish chieftains had had to flee Ireland, when the court poets and their schools had been scattered and no hope remained except the forlorn hope of a Jacobite king, there appears a new literary genre in new metres. It is called the *Aisling*, Vision—and it is a Vision of Éire as a Lady or Queen of radiant beauty in great distress awaiting deliverance at the hands of her true mate—the Old or Young Pretender, according to the date—in exile beyond the sea.¹ The poet promises salvation but he is no longer the poet of a prince; he is concerned not with his patron but with Ireland, with his people and his native land.

The deliverance promised did not come; indeed, it was not to come for many a generation, and when it did come, it did not come in the form in which the poets expected, but this does not mean that they and their forerunners had no part in it and, unless I am mistaken, they would have derived more than a little satisfaction from the description of that part written by a historian the year following the Easter Insurrection:

Sprung from the soul of a people they might assert that they in their turn had so trained and fortified that soul, and so furnished it with a literature and a historical memory that the national life could only be extinguished with the race.²

¹ D. Corkery, *The Hidden Ireland* (Dublin, Melbourne, 1967), 126–54.

² A. S. Green, *Irish National Tradition* (repr. from *History*, July 1917), 13.