

Summer Has Gone Máiréad Perron

The following poem is attributed to the legendary hero Finn mac Cumhaill, a.k.a. Finn uá Baíscni (descendant of Baíscne). It is preserved only in a gloss on the word rían 'sea' in the Middle Irish commentary on the late 6th century Amra Choluim Chille. This version is based on the almost identical texts to be found in two manuscripts transcribed in the first quarter of the 12th century: Lebor na hUidre and the Bodleian MS. The language of the poem and the fact that it is included in the oldest copies of the commentary on the Amra, point towards the 9th or 10th century as the date of composition. The meter, 3¹3¹3¹3¹ (which means that each line consists of 3 syllables, and the accent falls on the last syllable of each line), with rhyme between b and d, has several names, the most suitable of which seems to be Cethramtu Rannaigehta Móire quarter of Rannaigecht Mór. The absence of lenition in some of the words, dúib, sam etc., also indicate that the poem was written before the 12th century.

The poem itself is an excellent example of Early Irish Poetry. It is concise and vividly descriptive. The anonymous poet has achieved the perfect blend of form and content. It is a spare, bleak description of a spare, bleak season: especially when compared to the earlier paean to summer, Cétemain, which is more than 3 times as long with a 5 syllable meter, which can barely contain its lush, luxuriant descriptions.

The profusion of alliteration uaim, is also typical of Early Irish Poetry. My translation is an attempt to mimic the bleakness and brevity of the form, while maintaining the content.

Scél lem dúib; dordaid dam; snigid gaim: ro fáith sam:	<i>Here's my story; winter's come; sad stag roars; summer's gone;</i>
Gáeth ard úar; ísel grían; gair a rriith; ruirthech rían;	<i>High cold wind; low cold sun; swelling seas; strongly run;</i>
Rorúad rath; ro cleth cruth; ro gab gnáth giugrann guth.	<i>Rust red fern; in disguise; speckled goose croaks and cries;</i>
Ro gab úacht etti én; aigre ré; é mo scél.	<i>Birds don't sing songs of glory; Ice wrapped wings; That's my story.</i>

'Description of Winter and Memory of the Past' is from Acallam ne Senórach (The Colloquy of the Ancient Men), which is frame story consisting of more than 200 anecdotes supposed to have been related by Caeilte or Oisín, survivors of the third century Fiana, to St. Patrick and others in the fifth century. This poem dates back to at least the twelfth century

The Acallam tells us that Cailte, having bidden goodbye to the king of Ulaid, met St. Patrick in the Fews Mountains (Co. Armagh). There Cas Corach played fairy music to St. Patrick and was promised heaven for himself in return for it and blessings on all inheritors of the musical art. Éoghan Aedbriugu (Chief Hospitaller), a rich vassal of the King of Ireland, joined them. It was Samhain night. Heavy snow fell. After description of it the Acallam continues with Cailte's words.

The poem is in the form of Deibhí (7x + 7x+1) this was the meter preferred and used most by the old poets. There is Comhardach (rhyme) between the last accented vowel of line a, and the last unaccented vowel of line b; likewise for c and d. This is known a rinn (last word) agus ardrinn.

Is ann a-dubairt Cailte: Inam' ar sé, do dhamhaib allaidi & d'eilltibh dul a n-innib cnoc 7 carrac an-osa; & inam éighnedh do dhul i cúsaibh brúach.' & a-dubhuirt an laid:

Then Cailte spoke; It is time said he, for stags and does to withdraw to the inmost parts of hills and rocks; and it is time for salmon to retreat to hollows beneath banks. And he spoke this poem.

Is úar geimred; at-racht gáeth;
éirgid dam díscir derbáeth;
nocha te in-nocht in slíabh slán,
gé beith dam dían ac dordán.

*Winter is cold; the wind has risen; the fierce
stark-wild
stag arises; not warm tonight is the unbroken
mountain,
even though the swift stag be belling.*

Ní thabair a tháeb re lár
dam Sléibe Cairn na comdál;
nii luga at-chluin céol cúaine
dam cinn Echtge innúaire.

*The stag of Slieve Carran of the assemblies does
not lay
his side to the ground; the stag of the head of cold
Aughty listens likewise to wolf-music.*

Mise Cailte, is Díarmait donn,
ocus Oscar áith étrom,
ro choistmis re ceol cúaine
deirid aidche adeuaire.

*I Cailte, and brown-haired Díarmait, and keen
light
Oscar, used to listen to wolf-music at the end of a
very cold night.*

Is maith chotlas in dam donn
fuil is a chnes re Coronn
mar do beth fa Thuinn Túaige
deirid aidche innúair!

*Well, forsooth, sleeps the brown stag pressing his
hide to
Corran's earth as though he were beneath the
water of the Tuns
at the end of a truly cold night!*

In-díu isam senóir sen;
ní aithnim acht becán fer;
ro chraithinn coirrsleig co crúaid
i matain aigríd innúair.

*Today I am old and aged; few men do I recognize;
I used to brandish a
pointed spear hardily on a morning of truly
cold ice.*

A-tlochár do Ríg nime,
do Mac Maire ingine:
do-beirinn mór socht ar slúag
gé ber in-nocht co hadúar.

*I thank the King of Heaven, Son of the Virgin
Mary:
often used I to still armies, though I be
tonight very cold.*

(note 'ía' and 'úa')

My version

Winter is cold, the red-fierce stag
arises from his dwelling.
The cold wind blows through the mountain chain,
And yet the stag is belling.

The stag of the mountain where we used to meet
arises on his hooves.
The stag at the head of cold Aughty
hears the song of the wolves.

I, Cailte, and brown-haired Diarmait, my friend,
and Oscar keen and light.
We, too, once heard the music of wolves
at the end of a very cold night.

It is well that this old brown stag falls asleep,
pressing his side to the ground.
As though he already slept under the wave,
Where the waters of Tun can be found.

My friends are all gone, no one knows me at all,
For now I am aged and old.
Yet I used to brandish a pointed spear,
on a day that was icy cold.

I thank the Lord for the life I had,
and the friends in the days of old.
I was one of heroes of the land,
But tonight I am very cold.

Máiréad Perron

(My version isn't literal, or literate, for that matter, but I think it is what the poem is really about. The Fianna are literally the stags, and Finn is connected with the Salmon. The winter represents the coming of Christianity and the end of the old ways - I think it is as appropriate for Christmas as it is for Samhain)

source:

<http://www.scoilgaeilge.org/literature/literature-toc-g.htm>

We are grateful to Máiréad Perron for kind permission to host this work on aughty.org