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 Báiscone). It is preserved only in a gloss on the word rían 'sea' in the Middle Irish commentary on the late 6th century Amra Cholúm 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, 3\(\frac{3}{3}\)\(\frac{3}{3}\)\(\frac{3}{3}\)\(\frac{3}{3}\) (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 Rannaigechta 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 uaíim, 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:
Gáeth ard úar;
   ísel grian;
gair a rrith;
   ruirthech rían;
Rorúad rath;
   ro cleth cruth;
ro gab gnáth
   giugrann guth.
Ro gab úacht
   etti én;
aigre rè;
   é mo scél.

Here's my story;
   winter's come;
sad stag roars;
   summer's gone;
High cold wind;
   low cold sun;
swelling seas;
   strongly run;
Rust red fern;
   in disguise;
speckled goose
   croaks and cries;
Birds don't sing
   songs of glory;
Ice wrapped wings;
   That's my story.

'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 Caeilst or Oisin, 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 Cailt, having bid 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 Aedbrigiu (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 as 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-dubhuint an laid:

Then Caílte 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.

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Is úar geimred; at-racht gáeth;
éirgid dam díscir derbáeth;
nocha te in-nocht in sliabh slán,
ge beith dam dian ac dordán.

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

Mise Caílte, is Diarmait donn,
ocus Oscar áith étrom,
ro choistmis re ceeol cúaine
deirid àidche adeuaire.

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

In-diú isam senoir sen;
ní aithnín acht becán fer;
ro chraithinn coirrsleig co crúaid
i matain àigrd innúair.

A-tlochar do Ríg nime,
do Mac Maire ingine:
do-beirinn mòr socht ar slúag
gë ber in-nocht co hadúar.

(note 'ía' and 'úá')
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.scoilgaelge.org/literature/literature-toc-g.htm

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