Abstracts

Friday, October 12, 2001 - Harvard Faculty Club - Library

9:30-10:00 Amy Eichhorn-Mulligan
Prescient Birds and Prospective Kings: Further Discussion of Irish Elements in the Eddic Poem *Rígsthula*

*Rígsthula* is an Eddic poem in an Icelandic manuscript, yet it betrays a good deal of Celtic influence. Beginning with the title character, *Rígr*, whose name is formed from the oblique case of Irish *rí*, the poem demonstrates an integration of Irish elements. *Rígsthula*’s incredibly detailed descriptions are furthermore alien to a purely Norse tradition, yet very much at home in a Celtic setting. Another likely Irish connection is forged by a scene, identical to that in *Togail Bruidne Da Derga*, involving a prescient bird who exhorts the prospective king to claim a kingdom. In this paper I will examine the evidence and briefly discuss the historical feasibility for Irish influence in *Rígsthula*.

10:00-10:30 Brent Miles
*Breslech Mór Maige Muirthemne* and Irish Classicism

Scholars have long agreed that the episode from the *Táin* entitled *Breslech Mór Maige Muirthemne* belongs to an eleventh-century stratum of the epic. Discussions of the classical origin of the *Táin* have mostly excluded consideration of the *Breslech* because of its late date, yet the episode is contemporary with the eleventh-century vernacular adaptations of classical literature and owes to the same innovatory literary culture. In this paper I examine the classical motifs of *Breslech Mór Maige Muirthemne* in the context especially of *Togail Troí* the Irish version of Dares Phrygius’ *De excidio Troiae historia*, considering also further sources for Irish classicism, including the *Ilias Latina*.

10:30-10:45 Break

10:45-11:15 Katharine Olson
“What Man of Spirit Can Hesitate?”: Some Aspects of Welsh Participation in the Third Crusade

Past examinations of Wales in the context of the Third Crusade (1189-1192) have been mainly limited to the famed journey of Archbishop Baldwin and Gerald of Wales through Wales in 1188; regretably little attention has been paid to its broader implications. This paper will address select aspects of and problems regarding the evidence for Welsh involvement in the Third Crusade in a wider historical context; in particular, the military, political, economic, and religious components of this will be explored in greater depth.

11:15-11:45 Bronagh Ní Chonaill
The Younger Members of Medieval Welsh Society

This paper will examine the extent of our knowledge in relation to children/minors in medieval Welsh society. Do the legal tractates paint a detailed picture of childhood? What issues do medieval lawyers tackle, and what is not mentioned? Finally, the paper will ask whether our legal findings are reflected in medieval Welsh prose literature.
11:45-12:15 Laura Radiker "In Defiance of the Gospel and by Authority of the Devil”: Criticism of Welsh Marriage Law by the Anglo-Norman Ecclesiastical Establishment and its Socio-Political Context

During the course of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries Welsh marriage practices and the laws in which they were based ran contrary to the ecclesiastical reforms which had made a sacrament of marriage, as well as the related social reform the church was actively promulgating on the Continent and in England. Two prominent clergymen in the Anglo-Norman Church, Gerald of Wales and John Peckham, rebuked Welsh marital law and custom in writing. Their remarks reveal some familiarity with and practical understanding of the issues they raise, but expose the basic ideological opposition between canon law and secular Welsh law, as well as between the Anglo-Norman society which officially espoused the reforms and traditional Welsh society which had not yet assimilated them. This paper will present the complaints lodged by these two clergymen, explore the Welsh legal basis for them, and the socio-political context which further colored this contention.

12:15-1:30 Lunch

1:30-2:00 John Soderberg The Monastic Deer: Red Deer in the Religious Texts, Iconography, and Archaeology of Early Medieval Ireland

Humans frequently use animals as a means of creating and manipulating relationships with other human beings. This process occurs both through the use of animals for food or raw materials and through the use of animals as literary and artistic symbols. *Cervus elaphus* is Ireland’s only indigenous deer species. It is also unique in being the only native Irish wild animal to appear frequently in medieval texts, iconography, and archaeological deposits. This paper brings together diverse sources of information to illuminate how early medieval monasteries used red deer to establish an identity for themselves and to conceptualize socioeconomic relationships with others.

2:00-2:30 Diane Peters Auslander Gendering the *Vita Prima*: An Examination of St. Brigid’s Role as ‘Mary of the Gael’

The circumstances of Brigid’s birth, her virginity, and her sanctity conferred upon her the same liminality that the status of Virgin-Mother conferred upon Mary. Such liminal personages often function as mediators. Through an examination of the *Vita Prima*, in which Brigid is named Mary of the Gael, this paper explores the idea of Brigid/Mary as the mediator between opposing social forces, i.e. pagans and Christians or women and men, in early medieval Ireland. This clarifies the position of the female patron saint of Ireland: Patrick introduced Christianity to Ireland and Colum Cille legislated it, but Brigid acted to reconcile disparate elements of Irish society to the new religion.

2:30-3:00 Diana Luft *Achau’r Cwrw* and the Genealogy of Parody

*Achau’r Cwrw* is a sixteenth-century Welsh text belonging to the *araith* tradition. While ostensibly intended to condemn the evils of drink, the text was most likely also written for the delight of author and audience alike. What the text offers is a parody not just of an heroic tale, but of a specifically Celtic heroic tale. As such, its closest analogue is to *Culhwch ac Olwen*, a text which, despite its many parodic elements, many have claimed cannot possibly be called a parody since we have no surviving examples of the type of story it must be parodying. This paper will examine the place of parody in both texts, as well as the question of our fitness in the twenty-first century to judge what was considered parody to a twelfth- or sixteenth-century audience and what was not.

3:00-3:15 Break
3:15-3:45 Sharon Paice-MacLeod The Descent of the Gods: Origin, Attributes, and Function in the Lebor Gabála

In numerous cultures (including Indo-European examples), the divinities are sometimes divided into two classes or races. First are the primal deities, associated with the cosmos, creation and the elements. From these are descended a second order or gods involved with the world of men. Their province includes land, subsistence, war, magic, wisdom and skill, and social roles and functions. Can any trace of such a system be discerned amidst the tangle of pseudo-historical texts which profess to set forth the ancestry or genealogy of the Tuatha Dé Danann? This paper will consider such a possibility, exploring common divine archetypes, onomastics pertaining to cosmology and vocation, and themes of perception, relevance and consistency.

3:45-4:15 Gene Haley Last Exit to Tara: Reconstructing Early Ireland’s Five ‘Great Roads’

Slige Asail, Slige Midluachra, Slige Cualann, Slige Mór, Slige Dála: the five great roads found leading to Tara on the night Conn Cétchathach was born. This paper surveys literary and historical evidence, mapping the actual location of each of these routes. As results make it doubtful that a traveler could indeed reach Tara following any of them, concluding remarks focus on the likely intent behind the promulgation of such a legend.

4:15-4:45 Timothy Bridgman Apollonius of Rhodes’ Argonautica: A Mythology of Greek Expansion in Ancient Celtic Lands?

Apollonius of Rhodes, a classical author of the third century B.C., composed a version of the already ancient epic of Jason and the Argonauts called Argonautica. The story of Jason and the Argonauts sailing to the outer reaches of the world known to the Greeks in quest of the golden fleece is generally considered an eastern epic set mainly in the Bronze Age, when Greeks were beginning to penetrate into the Black Sea area. It is astonishing, therefore, to find a curious reference to the Celts in Apollonius’ work: he wrote that the Celts recounted that Apollo shed tears of amber into the Eridanus river after he had left shining heaven because of his father’s chiding and while he was in the land of the Hyperboreans (Apollonius Rhodius, Argonautica 4.592-626). No Celtic material which has come down to us mentions anything remotely like this story and raises the question as to where Apollonius got his information. This paper seeks to explore possible reasons why Apollonius Rhodius would have inserted the Celts into an essentially eastern epic and what his sources for this information were.

4:45-5:00 Break

5:00-5:30 Michael Newton In Our Own Image: Human Society as a Paradigm for Understanding Nature in Scottish Gaelic Tradition

How did Scottish Gaels perceive and conceptualize the natural world? There is ample evidence that their perceptions, and most especially the literary expression of their perceptions, were highly influenced by social roles and relations in their human community. In this paper, I will demonstrate how a number of concepts from human society (particularly hierarchy, leadership, and fosterage) were projected onto the natural world (flora, fauna, and features of the landscape) in Scottish Gaelic literature and tradition.

5:30-6:00 Emily McEwan-Fujita Negotiating Gaelic in the New Scottish Parliament

During 1999-2000, Gaelic took on a new public prominence in Scotland through its incorporation into a debate and two hearings of the new Scottish Parliament. I argue that events such as these involve the negotiation of notions of authority, authorship, and audience, and represent early attempts to work out in practice for Scotland the implications of a European Union-inspired model of multilingualism and translation, minority languages and the value of linguistic diversity.
Saturday, October 2001 - Faculty Club - Theatre Room

9:30-10:00 Sarah McKibben Laoiseach Mac an Bhaird and the Politics of Close Reading

My talk will consider the necessity and value of close reading in the early modern Irish corpus by examining *A fhír ghlacasa ghalléidacht* by Laoiseach Mac an Bhaird (fl. late sixteenth century). Such scrutiny poses a challenge to our scholarly conventions—in practice and in interpretation. Unlike conventional brief exegesis and exempla, close reading demands that we slow down to read word by word, to see nuance and resonance, treating the work not as illustration but as worthwhile subject in and of itself. Such attention illustrates a complex bardic response to contemporary events, at once brilliant and innovative.

10:00-10:30 Patricia Palmer Babel Is Come Again: Linguistic Colonisation and the Bardic Response in Early Modern Ireland

From *Auraicept na n-Éces* onwards, Irish writers’ linguistic assurance rested on a conviction that their language, uniquely, had triumphed over Babel. Elizabethan colonists sought to overturn that evaluation. By the early 1600s, Eóghan Ruadh mac an Bhaird could link the silence overtaking the Gaelic world to God’s punishment of the builders of ‘toir Neamhruaidh’.

Using the shifting signification of Babel as a framing device, I examine how far bardic poetry is alert to the linguistic threat posed by English linguistic colonisation, by analysing bards’ recourse to loanwords and their handling of the poetic topoi associated with voice and language.

My paper will draw on current research which develops ideas explored in my book, *Language and Conquest in Early Modern Ireland* (published by Cambridge University Press this autumn).

10:30-11:00 Break

11:00-11:30 Joseph Eska On the Prehistory of Old Irish *do*-, Middle Welsh *dy*-, etc.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the *communis opinio* was that the preverb attested as OIr. *do*- and MW *dy*- and the preposition attested as OIr. *do* and OW *di* are identical in origin. Holmer, *RC* 50.105-116, demonstrated that they are not: He concluded that the preposition was, in origin, prepositional-adverbial, but remained agnostic concerning the origin of the preverb. In *TPhS* 1947.23, Dillon argued that the preverb is to be compared to the Old Hittite sentential connective *ta*: his view quickly was adopted as the *communis opinio*, and it has remained so to this day. There are some contemporary sceptics, however. Schrijver, *Studies in British Celtic Historical Phonology*, 17 n. 2, now reconstructs the preverb as *ṭu*-; thus divorcing it from Dillon’s Anatolian comparandum, and Rieken, *MSS* 59.85-86, in a study of the Hittite connective, does so likewise on semantic grounds. This paper will introduce new data into the analysis of the matter, provide a critique of Schrijver’s and Rieken’s objections to Dillon’s comparison, and attempt a new synthesis which will conclude that Dillon was right, after all.

11:30-12:00 L. Brockman Early Irish *bréch*

The wolf as creature of folk tradition and lore has taken central cultural prominence throughout the ancient pagan Indo-European world, and, as such, has many designations, even within given cultures. Several of these in early Irish (e.g., *macc tíre*, *cú* (*allaids*, *fáel*) are prominent and frequent, while others are recorded but little.

Like some of these others, early Irish *bréch* is not readily analyzable from the point of view of comparative historical Indo-European linguistics. From the limited contexts of its attestation, it may perhaps be seen as a hunter’s specialized designation for the animal or as just plain archaism, since it must always be glossed for its audience.
Atchonnarc braichem 7 brú
7 baiglu eturru.
sochaide ro déch immach.
7 brech ica marbad |

‘I saw a stag and a doe and a fawn between them a multitude which looked outside, and a wolf killing them.’ (LL 27751-56; Stokes trans. (1893: 45))

The difficulty of historical-linguistic analysis proceeds from not only the limited contemporary attestation of \textit{bréch}, but also from the secondary nature and ambiguous sources of its core long \textipa{e} vowel and the heretofore underlying assumption of the monomorphic nature of its historical base form.

Of Stokes’s two etymological proposals (1893: direct equation of \textit{brech} and Sanskrit \textit{vṛk}a- ‘wolf’, apparently only shortly later rejected by him) and his proto-Celtic preform \textit{*brejku-s} (1897), only the latter has any possible scruitable validity. This presentation will scrutinize and test the latter and will include examination of other sources of OIr. \textit{<e>} for application to possible reconstructible proto-Celtic root shapes. With the aid of Russell (1990) on Celtic velar suffixes, suffixal shape will be proposed in a probe of the derivational semantics of this and what are believed to be derivationally related terms within Irish itself. A root- semantics test of whether an answer/solution may lie in examining hunt-related terminology from older Irish and other Celtic literature will be applied.

The hoped-for result will constitute a re-analysis of the Irish term as historically bi-morphemic base, with applicable root and velar suffix.

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\textbf{12:00-2:00} & \textit{Lunch} \\
\textbf{2:00-2:30} & Antony Carr \textbf{The Wealth of the Gentry: A List of the Debtors of Gwilym ap Gruffydd of Penrhyn, Caernarfonshire, 1406} \\
& Although the fourteenth-century saw the beginning of the emergence of that class of landed gentry which was to dominate Welsh political, social and cultural life for several centuries, we know very little about the sources of their wealth. The Penrhyn family owed much to judicious marriage strategies but successive heads acquired more land by purchase than by marriage. In 1983 the Penrhyn Castle archive at University of Wales Bangor was augmented by the discovery in the castle of a hitherto unknown accumulation of documents which included a list of those owing money to the then head of the family, Gwilym ap Gruffydd, in 1406. This document, so far unpublished, sheds an interesting light on Gwilym’s commercial activities which included dealing in wine, moneylending, tithe-broking, stock leasing and possibly some arms dealing at the beginning of the Glyn Dŵr revolt. The paper will look at the significance of these transactions in the context of the rise of the Penrhyn family and of the north Wales gentry generally. \\
\textbf{2:30-3:00} & John Rowlands \textbf{The Contemporary Welsh-Language Novel: A New Kind of Post-Modernism?} \\
& The last quarter of the twentieth-century in Wales saw a passionate debate about the relevance of post-modernism to minority literatures. Some saw it as a threat to the very existence of minority languages and cultures, and in many traditional critical circles in Wales there was a backlash against the surge of cultural globalising influences from Europe and the USA. Nevertheless, this did not deter young avant-garde novelists from breaking the restricting moulds of tradition. In fact the Welsh novel was revitalised by the daring use of carnivalesque techniques which seemed to be a kind of crossroads between Milan Kundera and García Márquez on the one hand, and the fantastical prose of medieval Wales such as the Mabinogion on the other hand. This paper will attempt to show how a new kind of post-modernism was forged in the Welsh-language novel of recent years. \\
\textbf{3:00-3:15} & \textit{Break} \\
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3:15-3:45  Lenora Timm  The Way We Were: Twentieth Century Brittany Through the Eyes of Breton Language Memorialists

Breton literature experienced a renaissance in the twentieth century. Devotional and agricultural tracts of the two prior centuries (spiced with occasional collections of nationalistic poetry) gave way to a more encompassing embrace of literary subjects and genres, including that of the memoir and autobiography-cum-ethnography. Pierre-Jakez Hélias (Marh al Lorh ['the Horse of Pride']) is doubtless the best known of Breton writers who have provided vivid and nostalgic accounts of early-to-mid-twentieth-century, largely rural, Brittany. However, there have been other writers of talent and wit who have shared their memories of life and community in the Brittany that was. Their absorbing accounts provide a window into Breton society and culture in the early decades of the past century. They also afford personal insights into the experience of ‘languacultural’ contact and change, as a previously marginalized people is increasingly drawn—sometimes resisting—into the social, economic, and linguistic fold of the French nation-state.

3:45-4:15  Jonathan Dembling  The Celtic Languages in the 1910 U.S. Census

The US Census asked a question on “mother tongue” for the first time in 1910, but it was only asked of the foreign-born. Furthermore, the results for the Celtic languages were never tabulated, because the census people decided that enough enumerators confused mother tongue with nationality so as to “greatly exaggerate” the numbers of speakers. This paper will examine the accuracy of the claim, using census data from Ireland, Scotland, Wales and Canada, as well as the Public Use Sample and selected original schedules from the 1910 census.

4:30-5:00  Peredur Lynch  Welsh Court Poetry and Dynastic Succession

Dynastic succession in medieval Wales was rarely an uncomplicated affair. The history of the kingdoms of Deheubarth, Gwynedd and Powys, clearly demonstrates that the death of a ruler inevitably led to inter-dynastic rifts and blood-letting. The court poets of medieval Wales were undoubtedly drawn into such crises, and this paper will investigate the manner in which poetry was used to fuel regnal ambitions and lend them an air of legitimacy.

5:00-5:30  Laurance Maney  “I Wonder What the King is Doing Tonight”—Looking for Arthur in All the Wrong Places

In 1991 Thomas Charles-Edwards concluded that if there had been a historical Arthur, the available evidence will not support his existence. The insurmountable roadblock encountered by Charles-Edwards, and by Thomas Jones in 1958, is that there is simply no rationale way to bridge the gap between Gildas’ manifest ignorance of Arthur in the early sixth century and the connection made between Arthur and Gildas’ Battle of Badon in the early ninth-century Historia Britonum. The following paper will not only offer an Arthur whose late sixth-century career fulfills all the criteria imposed by Historia Britonum, but will suggest an unbroken line of transmission by which traditions of this Arthur came to Wales in the early ninth-century.

7:00  Banquet
Sunday, October 14, 2001 - Faculty Club - Theatre Room

9:30-10:00 Timothy Correll Believers, Skeptics, and Charlatans: Traditions of Disbelief and the Fairies in Ireland

In this paper, I situate stories about 19th-century folk healers within a larger consideration of cultural practices engendered by the controversy surrounding the existence of the fairies. I briefly look at storytelling events as contexts in which propositions about the fairies and healers associated with them were appraised and contested. I then discuss various traditions of disbelief. These include narratives of negative evidence as well stories that depict individuals who believe they have had supernatural experiences as deluded, either by their own imaginations or through the chicanery of others. As will be seen throughout, traditions of belief and traditions of disbelief—supernaturalism and rationalism—were competing discourses. They were not mutually exclusive or self contained, however, but came into collision, interpenetrating and modifying each other in a dialectical relationship.

10:00-10:30 Susan Fry Digging Deeper: The Social History of Burial in Medieval Ireland and the Case for Interdisciplinary Scholarship

This paper presents some of the more unexpected information unearthed by a recent interdisciplinary study of burial in medieval Ireland. It questions previously held ideas including whether the sexes were separated at burial; the burial of kings and important clerics; and the criteria for defining Irish burials as “early Christian”. Based on this new information, the paper supports earlier calls by notable scholars for a more interdisciplinary approach to the study of the history of the British Isles.

10:30-11:00 Antone Minard More than MacDonald’s: Celtic Foodways

All over the world, locals can point to the nearest large city and be sure that there’s a Chinese restaurant, an Italian restaurant, and an American restaurant. From just one region or many, subsistence food or high-culture delicacies, most nations have an internationally recognizable cuisine. Though restaurants serving Irish/Welsh/Breton/Scottish food exist, they are few, and their menus do not differ markedly from those of neighboring countries. A culture’s foodways are a strong marker of ethnic identity, and often remain as such when other notable markers, such as language, have been lost. This paper examines the concept of Celtic foodways, with an eye toward historical continuity, the “national dishes” such as Scottish haggis (a Scots English word), and the role of “poor people’s food,” as potatoes in Ireland.

Abstract fun fact: The manager of the Yak & Yeti Hotel and Restaurant in Kathmandu, which specializes in delicious Nepali cuisine, is a Breton.

11:00-11:15 Break

11:15-11:45 Brían Ó Conchubhair The Gaelic Font

This paper will argue that the debate over the Gaelic font, the first major dispute during the Irish Revival represented a battle over the ideology of the Irish language organisations rather than a dispute over the aesthetics of different font types and printing costs. The choice between the ‘traditional’ Gaelic font and the ‘English’ Roman font led to a heated debate and raised some of the most interesting question during the revival. This paper will describe the chief arguments made by the main proponents and opponents of the Gaelic font and will locate this dispute within the wider context of a revival of old fonts throughout Europe and The USA.
Most readers of Irish literature are familiar with *An Béal Bocht*, Brian O Nuallain’s classic 1941 parody of the Gaeltacht autobiographies of his time. Few, however, may realize how widespread and often unquestioned was the apotheosis of a largely imagined Gaeltacht that was the real target of his satire. Nothing was more prized among cultural nationalists in the Irish Free State than was an ineffable “racial” essence called *Gaelachas*, the quality that made the native Irish different from—and better than—anyone else on earth. Nowhere was *Gaelachas* more universal and authentic than in the Gaeltacht, and therefore the residents of those charmed areas were different from—and better than—even their fellow Irish citizens condemned by historical contingency to speak English, at least in the short period, as well as on the so-called “Blasket” autobiographies, this paper will discuss in some detail the contemporary idealization of the Gaeltacht, an idealization that could transmute even the frinding poverty of the Irish-speaking West into an enviable source of virtue denied the merely comfortable. The paper will also discuss the opinions of those Gaelic writers and critics who dissented from movement orthodoxy about the Gaeltacht, including the young, pre-*Béal Bocht* “Myles na gCopaleen.”