

### *An Draighneán Donn*

'Gus síleann céad fear gur leo fhéin mé nuair a ólaim lionn;  
Téann dhá thrian síos dhíom nuair a smaoiním ar a gcomhrá  
liom;  
Sneachta séidte is é dhá shíor-chur thar shliabh Uí Fhlóinn,  
'S go bhfuil mo ghrása mar bhláth na n-áirní 'góil a' draighneán  
donn.

Is fuair me féirín lá aonaigh ó bhuachaill deas,  
Is céad póg an lá 'na dhiaidh sin ó phlúr na bhfear;  
Lá léin ar an té a déarfadh nach thú mo ghean,  
'S an lá 'na dhiaidh sin nach deas mar d'éalóinn faoi na coillte  
leat.

Is glaise a shúil ná an féar 's ná an drúcht 's ná duilliúr na  
gcrann,  
Is gile a thaobh ná an sneachta ar thobh cnoic 's é dhá  
chaitheamh go mall;  
Faraor géar gan mé 's mo chéad mhíle grá  
I ngleanntán sléibhe roimh éirí gréine 's an drúcht ar lár.

Ó is fear gan chéill a ghabhfadh a' dréim leis an gclaí a bheadh  
ard,  
Is claí beag íseal lena thaobh ar a leagfadh sé a lámh;  
Cé gur ard é an crann caorthainn, bíonn sé searbh ina bharr,  
'S go bhfásann sméara 'gus an bláth sú craobh ar an gcrann is  
íse bláth.

Tá a 'amsa féirín le mo chéad searc i mo phóca thíos,  
Is feara Éireann, ó ní leigheasódh an cumha seo, faraor;  
Tá mé réidh leat nó go ndéantar dhomsa cónra caol,  
'S go deo 'na dhiaidh sin go bhfásfaidh an féar glas thrína lár  
aníos.

### *The Blackthorn*

And a hundred men think I am their own when I drink beer;  
Two thirds (of it) goes down off me when I think of their  
conversation with me;  
Driven snow and it falling always on Flynn's Mountain,  
And my love is like the blossom of the sloe on the blackthorn.

And I got a present on a fair day from a nice boy,  
And a hundred kisses the day after from the flower of men;  
A day of woe on the one who would say that you are not my  
love,  
And the day after that isn't it nicely I would steal through the  
woods with you?

His eye is greener than the grass and the dew and the leaves of  
the trees,  
His side is brighter than the snow on a hillside and it falling  
slowly;  
My sharp grief that I and my hundred thousand loves are not  
In a little mountain valley before sunrise, and the dew on the  
ground.

Oh, it is a man without sense who would go climbing a wall  
that would be high,  
And a little low wall at his side on which he could lay his hand;  
Although the mountain ash is high, it is bitter at the top,  
And berries and raspberry blossoms grow on the tree of lowest  
flowers.

I have a present from my first love in my pocket below,  
And the men of Ireland, oh, they could not cure this loneliness,  
alas;  
I have finished with you until a narrow coffin is made for me,  
And forever after that the green grass will grow up through the  
middle of it.



Slán feasta leis an mbaile tá thall imeasc na gcrann,  
 Mar is ann a bhíodh mo tharraingt go luath 's go mall;  
 'S iomaí eanach fiuch salach agus bóithrín cam  
 Atá a' dhul eadar mé 'gus an baile a bhfuil mo stóirín ann.

'S a Mhuire dhílis, ó céard a dhéanfas mé má imíonn tú uaim?  
 Níl eolas chun do thí a' m, chun do thine ná do chlúid.  
 Tá mo dheaidí faoi leatrom 's tá mo mháithrín san uaigh;  
 Tá mo mhuintir ar fad i bhfeirg liom is mo ghrá i bhfad uaim.

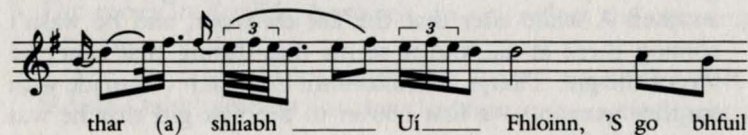
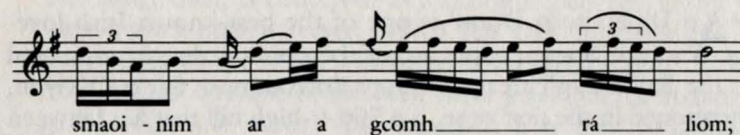
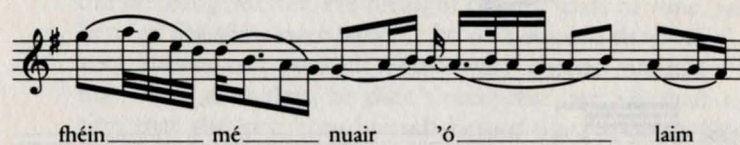
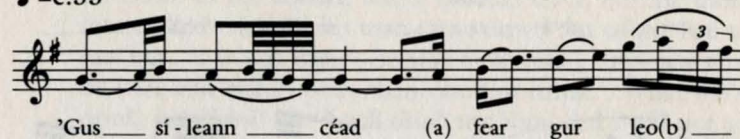
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Farewell from now on to that town that is over there among the  
 trees,  
 For it is there I used to go early and late;  
 It's many a wet and dirty swamp-pass and crooked lane  
 That's going between me and the town that my little treasure is  
 in.

And, dear Mary, oh, what will I do if you go away from me?  
 I don't know the way to your house, to your fireside or your  
 chimney-corner,  
 My daddy is distressed and my mother is in the grave;  
 And my people are all in anger with me and my love is far away  
 from me.

## An Draighneán Donn

♩ = c.55







‘An Draighneán Donn’ is one of the best-known Irish love-songs. Some people are of the opinion that it originated in the Ballinlough area of County Roscommon: Slieve O’Flynn, mentioned in the first verse, is a 500-ft-high hill that lies between that town and Castlerea. There is also an attractive folktale which purports to account for the song’s origin; the following is a fairly literal translation of the version given in the Ó Máille brothers’ *Amhráin Chlainne Gaedheal*:

A man used to be going to a fair far from home, and he used to be in lodging in a house near that place where the fair was. The young girl who was in the house, she was a very beautiful girl, but anyhow, herself and this man became great with one another. A while after that the fair died out, and he wasn’t coming there at all, and it seems that during that time, he forgot the girl. Things rested so until his match was made with another woman — a first cousin to the first girl that he was great with. He went then to marry this other woman — to her

house — and they had a big feast and celebration there. When the first girl heard that he was on the point of marrying, she put old woman’s clothes on herself, and she went before her till she came into the place where the feast was going on. She sat down in the corner, and if she did itself, no-one took any interest in her until this man came down out of the room and saw her. ‘It is not right’, he said to himself, ‘anybody at all to be here and not to offer them food or drink.’ ‘What will your drink, lady?’ said he. ‘I will drink nothing, and I will not accept a drink from anyone in the house, unless I get it out of you own hands’, said she. ‘An easy bargain’, said he, and devil a bit did he recognise her. He brought down a glass of wine, and he handed the glass over to her. ‘I won’t drink a drop of it’, said she, ‘unless you yourself drink every second mouthful with me.’ Even after that, he didn’t recognise her. She had a gold ring that she got from himself before that, and she threw it into the glass. He recognised the ring as soon as he saw it, and grief and remorse seized him and it was then that he said the first part of the Draighneán Donn. She answered him, and he knew then who was in it. They were talking and celebrating together, without anyone noticing them, so that the end of the story was that he eloped with her, and that he left the feast and the other woman behind him.

The song, then, is conceived as a dialogue between lovers. The version given here, however, (which Tess Uí Chonghaile got from the singing of her niece, Máirín Uí Chéidigh, of Leitir Móir) is obviously an example of the *chanson de jeune fille*, or abandoned girl’s song. And a very fine specimen it is too, combining a beautiful poetry based on exquisite nature-imagery with a pathos issuing from the unadorned exposé of the forsaken girl’s plight. The distinctive and haunting melody admirably suits the mood of the words; it has been claimed that it dates from around 1600 and shows traces of Spanish influence.

There exist English-language and macaronic versions of ‘An Draighneán Donn’; (see the Keane sisters’ L.P., ‘Once I Loved, CC4, and Diarmuid Ó Muirthe, *An t-Amhrán Macarónach*). The verses in English, however, do not reflect the meaning of the Irish.

The metre of ‘An Draighneán Donn’ resembles that of ‘Róisín Dubh’; in each line there are four stresses, with generally



a single unaccented syllable between the last two, and a variable number between the others. The vowels on which the first, second and fourth stress fall combine to build up the pattern of assonance, but there are many irregularities. The second, fifth and sixth verses show more consistency than the others, and the third has only one non-conforming line. Occasionally the third stress in the line also contributes to the assonance; this can be seen in the first three lines of verse 2 and the last two lines of verse 6.

In attempting to reflect this aspect of the original in my translation, I adopted a rigorous approach: as well as insisting on full rhyme at the end of all four lines of each verse, I aimed also at involving *all* the other stressed vowels in the assonantal pattern, with a view to making it completely consistent, both horizontally and vertically within each verse. Excepting three slight irregularities, where short vowel sounds are made to do duty for long ones, the results are as follows:

Verse 1: ó / ó / a / í  
 Verse 2: ó / ó / a / é  
 Verse 3: í / í / á / ú  
 Verse 4: au / au / é / á  
 Verse 5: é / é / a / ai  
 Verse 6: ú / ú / é / í  
 Verse 7: ai / ai / a / é

Observing the constraints imposed by adherence to such a scheme increases for the translator the risk of emphasising sound at the expense of sense and consequently of being 'forced' to introduce expressions whose nuances are alien to the spirit of the original. While leaving to others the identification of such flaws, I should like to comment on a couple of items which may appear a trifle obscure. The first two lines of the second stanza embody a balance analogous to that found in the original, but their meaning is less specific, and is metaphorically expressed. However, it was precisely an effort to deal literally with the 'kisses' that led to the balancing metaphor, for I remembered L.P. Hartley's description, in *The Hireling*, of the effect of the kiss inopportunely inflicted by the chauffeur on the titled lady: she 'had closed her eyes in rapture before she opened them in outrage.' The opening line of the fifth verse — in both original and translation — implies that the girl is pregnant.

### *The Blackthorn Tree*

A hundred yokels think they own me when I'm fast and free,  
 But I grow cold when I think over what they ask of me;  
 Drifting snowflakes ever blowing over Castlereau,  
 And oh, my love is like the sloe-flowers on the blackthorn tree.

My eyes were opened by a comely lad on market day,  
 And they were closed by one much older with more cards to play;  
 Oh, on my oath, 'tis you that stole my maiden's heart so gay,  
 And oh, I hope we'll soon elope, love, and go far away.

His eyes are greener than the leaves that make the forest new,  
 His shoulders gleam like snow on treetops when the dawn  
 peeps through;  
 It is my grief I cannot be with my love tall and true  
 Out in the fields when sunlight steals across the morning dew.

Only a clown would fool around upon a great high wall,  
 When he could lounge upon the ground and neither sway nor  
 fall;  
 Although the mountain ash is proud, its berries taste like gall,  
 And near the ground the fruit is found that's sweet and best of  
 all.

Oh, my apron hides a favour from my heart's delight,  
 And all the angels couldn't save me from a harlot's plight;  
 So I must break with you and take a long and last goodnight,  
 And soon the daisies on my grave will make the darkness bright.

And so adieu to that secluded town with shady trees;  
 'Tis there I used to go at noon in spite of rain or breeze;  
 There's many a moor where I could lose my way and faint or  
 freeze  
 Between my room and where my true love sits and takes his ease.

Oh God on high, I can't survive without your laugh so gay;  
 I'd never find your house or fireside, I'd go far astray;  
 My mother died last Eastertide, my father's heart is clay;  
 The family's pride keeps me inside, and you are far away.